

Into the Realm of Social Impact

Fayetteville, AR, April 10, 2008 | *Fayetteville Morning News*

In 2002, Maryland artist Tom Block set out to "take my art out of the gallery and into the realm of real social impact." His Human Rights Painting Project has been exhibited 25 times in the ensuing six years, and 24 of the portraits - which he says "capture the range of emotions experienced in this battle" - will be on show beginning Monday at the Anne Kittrell Gallery on the University of Arkansas campus in Fayetteville.

The exhibition, which continues through May 2, is part of Human Rights Awareness Week on campus. Block says his art is often shown in that context, because it "helps coalesce and represent those energies in a very real way."

"My Human Rights Painting Project highlights the struggle for human rights the world over - and the important work that Amnesty International does in working toward this goal," Block says in his artist's statement. "Using a contemporary artistic voice, I interpret different aspects of the struggle for human rights, emphasizing the stories that bring it to life. Biographies of each person featured accompany the paintings.

"Ultimately, the paintings bring together man's best and worst impulses - the heroes of the images are a counterpoint to the regimes and authorities that forced them into that role," Block says. "We are left with the uncomfortable question of which group is more typical of our human race - and which the exception."

Among the images coming to the Anne Kittrell Gallery are portraits of Irma Flaquer, a Guatemalan journalist whose outspoken columns led to her disappearance in 1980; Vanessa Lorena Ledesma, a transvestite who died in police custody in Buenos Aires, Argentina; and Jacqueline Moudeina, one of Chad's most prominent human rights lawyers.

Becca Bacon Martin, Fayetteville, AR, April 10, 2008