

# Bridging *our* DIFFERENCES



Yasser Rostom.



Marie Boralevi. FIRST DAWN

It is difficult to believe that the catalyst for the terrorist attacks that recently stained the City of Lights with blood was a series of lampooning cartoons. Aside from blasting the issue of freedom of speech to the forefront, these tragic events also underscore two other important facts: The first being Art's capacity to unleash enormously powerful passions and the second being the ever widening rift between East and West and their respective religions and cultures.

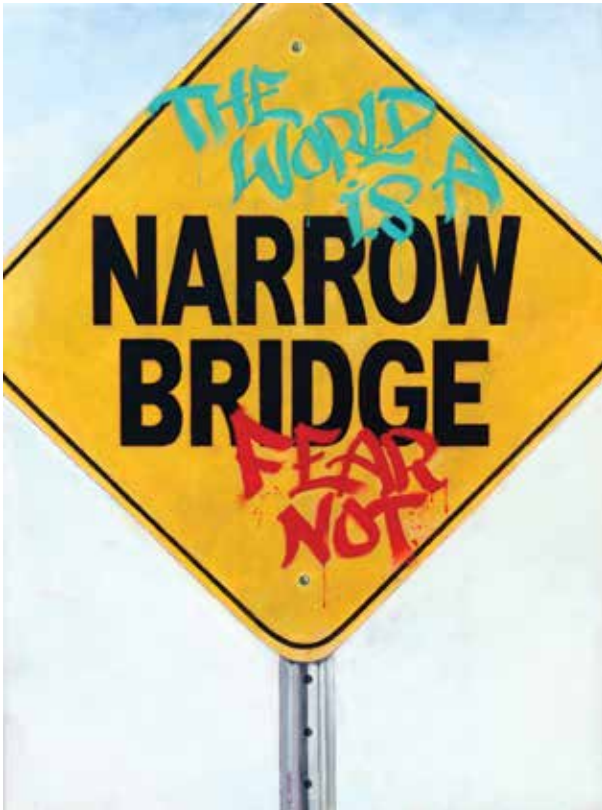
In the wake of the recent events in Paris, the exhibition that opened at Paris' historic Church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés could not have come at a more timely moment in the city's post-traumatic healing process. Entitled *The Bridge (Le Pont)*, this interfaith exhibition gathered together 47 premier visual artists of Middle Eastern Arab, Persian and Jewish artists whose paintings convey their individual and unique interpretation of what 'bridges' us together and how we can forge a future of understanding and mutual respect.

The Bridge is organized by CARAVAN, an international peace-building arts NGO that originated in Cairo and is now based in Chicago. This is the seventh exhibition launched by CARAVAN. By using the Arts to spread the message of amity between faiths and cultures it is the hope of CARAVAN's founder, the Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler, that dialogue will ensue and unexpected friendships will blossom. Past exhibitions organized by the foundation have shown that the Arts can serve as an effective medium for fostering tolerance and building bridges of trust and understanding.

I am honored to have co-curated this stunning exhibition of truly unique visionary works together with Paul-Gordon Chandler. Following its Paris debut, the show will travel for eighteen months throughout Europe as well as Cairo and the United States. In order to reach as large an audience as possible, CARAVAN has chosen a variety of venues ranging from cathedrals and government buildings to museums and interfaith centers.

I believe that during these difficult times we must fight the urge to alienate ourselves even further from others of different faiths and creeds. By bringing together forty-seven outstanding artists of Muslim, Christian and Jewish backgrounds, *The Bridge* acts as an encounter point for diverse communities. The exhibition is a metaphor for the myriad and infinite ways in which peace and co-existence can be imagined and ultimately, realized. It matters not that these paths differ one from the other - it matters only that each of us be prepared to cross that bridge towards the other.

Iranian video artist Shirin Neshat has been quoted as describing greatness in art as "art that transcends all differences, despite where an artist is from." By definition, therefore, one could describe *The Bridge* as one of the greatest collections of art ever exhibited! The works in this exhibition fill me with hope. They are a reminder that although we may not always be marching in step, we are still capable of taking a step at a time together towards a brighter future.



LILIANNE MILGROM: ARTIST STATEMENT ON 'NARROW BRIDGE'

*"The whole world is a narrow bridge.  
The main thing to remember is not to be afraid."  
Rabbi Nachman of Bratislav (1772-1810)*

Within minutes of being invited to participate in The Bridge exhibition, the words of a popular Hebrew song began playing in mind: Kol ha'olam kulo gesher tzar me'od, v'haikar lo lefached. (The whole world is a narrow bridge. The main thing to remember is not to be afraid). I was surprised to learn that these words are attributed to the rabbinical sage, Rabbi Nachman of Bratislav, born in Ukraine in the 18th century and the great-grandson of the founder of Hassidism, a mystical branch of Orthodox Judaism.

These few words have survived intact over the centuries yet they capture the essence of this exhibition. If ever there has been a time to reach across cultures, religions, borders and peoples in order to pull the world back from the brink, it is NOW. My painting 'Narrow Bridge' is a crude reminder that in order to bridge our differences we must conquer our fears and reach a hand across that narrow bridge without looking down.



Marc Goldstein.



Lina Mowafy.



Guirguis Lofi.