



THE DIVINE IMAGE: FOR MERCY HAS A HUMAN HEART

Hannah Rose Thomas portraits and artwork from refugee camps in Jordan and Calais



9 – 20 JANUARY 2017

MONDAY – FRIDAY, 10.00AM – 4.00PM (WEDNESDAYS, 11.00AM – 3.00PM)

ST STEPHEN WALBROOK, 39 WALBROOK, LONDON EC4N 8BN

PRIVATE VIEW – MONDAY 9 JANUARY, 6.30PM

THE DIVINE IMAGE

Hannah Rose Thomas

Hannah Rose Thomas is a twenty-four year-old British artist and recent Durham graduate in Arabic and History. Hannah has sold her paintings and received commissions since she was eighteen years-old to fund her humanitarian work in Mozambique, Sudan, Madagascar, and, more recently, in Jordan and Calais.

This special exhibition collects portrait works undertaken during Hannah's time in refugee camps in Jordan, where she partnered with UNHCR and Relief International to organise art projects for children in the camps. Her most recent portraits are of refugees she has met while volunteering in the Calais 'Jungle.'

Hannah's intimate portraits seek to humanise the individuals forced to flee their homes, whose personal stories are otherwise shrouded by statistics. She draws inspiration from Islamic art and Arabic poetry, to celebrate the rich heritage of the Middle East, so often forgotten and overshadowed by war.

The title of the exhibition is inspired by a verse from William Blake's poem *The Divine Image*:

*For Mercy has a human heart
Pity, a human face:
And Love, the human form divine,
And Peace, the human dress.*

Hannah is currently studying an MA at the Prince's School of Traditional Art in London. Her next art project will be in Kurdistan, to assist with the rehabilitation of abducted young women from the Yazidi community.

Painting in Refugee Camps in Jordan

In April 2015, Hannah returned to Jordan to organise an art project for Syrian children living in the refugee camps, with the support of Relief International.

The first canvas painted in Za'atari camp was an expression of the children's experience of war. After a number of groups of boys and girls had painted on it, the canvas had become an abstract chaos of splashes of red paint, dark colours and layers of the children's drawings of tanks, soldiers, dead bodies, planes and destroyed homes. It is a small glimpse of all that the children witnessed in war-torn Syria.

However, many of the children confessed to Hannah that they did not want to think about or paint the war any more. Therefore the second canvas painted with the children was a vibrant expression of their memories of Syria. It was inspired by Islamic art and arabesque design, to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of the Middle East, so often forgotten and overshadowed by war.

After a couple of days at Za'atari, the art project moved to Azraq refugee camp, in the midst of a desolate desert wasteland on the Saudi and Iraqi border. The two canvases painted in Azraq are a reflection of the children's daily life in the refugee camp. Hannah also painted a mural on one of the new school caravans.

The Dairy of a Girl Away From Home

This is a tapestry created from paintings by Syrian girls living in Za'atari Camp this April. The most common image they painted was home, highlighting their longing for the war to end so that they can return to Syria. The Arabic poem is by a Syrian girl named Fatimah about her beloved home:

*Take care of my house,
I left in it feelings of safety and security.
Don't mess with my closet,
It has my clothes drenched with the smell of memories that no one else knows
And pieces of paper that have no value except to myself.
Don't lift my pillow,
I hid under it my tears in times of sadness
And creatively created many dreams.
Don't change the order of the books on my bookshelf,
On their pages notes I have written that no one will understand like I do.
As for my desk, don't touch it,
But leave it with the mess I make while I study.
Please keep my traces in my beloved home,
I will be reunited with it soon.*