

ARTIST: KATE DURHAM

“SIEV-X....AND SOME WERE SAVED”



Exhibition at The Studio, State Library of Queensland
15 – 23 October 2011

ARTISTS FROM REFUGEE COMMUNITIES WHO CAME BY BOAT “FLOATING”

Supporting Exhibition at The Studio,
State Library of Queensland

Commemorating the loss of life at sea of Refugees seeking Australian Protection
10th anniversary of the SIEV-X drownings
50th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness
60th anniversary of the United Nations Refugee Convention

KATE'S EXHIBITION MESSAGE "SIEV-X

.....AND SOME WERE SAVED"

The SIEV-X series was conceived as a memorial to the 353 asylum seekers who drowned attempting to reach Australia. Mostly, the wives and children of refugees living on temporary protection visas in Australia.

Kate was particularly involved with the refugees on Nauru, which led her to assist with a BBC film. She travelled there, when Australian journalists and most others were banned from visiting that remote island. She collected names and stories, and she and her husband, Julian Burnside, distributed the names of detainees - and a letter writing project began. Volunteers from all over Australia began to make friendships with the detainees, and consequently to advocate for their correspondents' freedom, protection and recognition of their refugee status.

Kate set up "Spare Rooms for Refugees" with her husband. They've had refugees living with them in their home ever since.

Kate returned to painting when she recognized, that in spite of all the advocacy and pleading, that she and so many others were engaged in, little would change.

"The paintings of the SIEV-X were intended to depict a tragic and historic event that no cameras could record.

We lack the ability to envisage or empathize with events that we merely hear about. Since the advent of photography we expect to see visual imagery. Without it we seem not to feel or to believe" Kate says.

Kate's painting attempts to provide "evidence".

The Shepparton Art Gallery invited Kate to do a project with the community of refugees that have settled in Shepparton. Her idea - "Sewing all the way to here" - was an embroidery project, the aim was to combine the skills of the CWA women and the women from Afghanistan. She asked them to sew small pillows, as symbols of care and domesticity.

Kate sewed too, and she painted the women at work. In this exhibition, "And Some Were Saved", we mark the 10 year anniversary of the Tampa incident, the installation of a camp in Nauru, and the sorrows of the SIEV-X tragedy.

It's been a tough 10 years. With these paintings Kate is introducing to the viewer, people who've become part of her life and our Australian life. Some of the people in the portraits have stayed with Kate and her husband in their home. The motif of the wallpaper signifies how integral to her world, they have become.

"Australia is now their home. If all Australians could know them, perhaps we would make them more welcome" Kate says.

Kate's mother, Jenny, was deeply involved with letter writing to Nauru detainees. She kept in touch with, and supported her special friends to the end, which was sadly June 11 this year.

This exhibition is dedicated to Jenny's love, her humour and her defiance.



KATE DURHAM

Melbourne-based and -trained artist, practising in painting, jewellery, sculpture and drawing.

Her work has been shown in Japan, England, the USA and Australia. She is represented in major collections, including the National Gallery of Victoria, The National Gallery, Canberra, the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the Sydney Powerhouse Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, the Victoria & Albert Museum, London and the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston.

She was a founding member, in 1984, of the Fashion Design Council of Australia, the throughout the 1980s her innovative costume jewellery was exhibited in Europe and the USA.

In the 1990s, Kate's whimsical stationery designs and illustrations were a hit in Japan, and in 2001 Hardie Grant published her book of illustrations about courtship and modern manners, *Trust, Lust, Chaos and Cruelty*.

Kate's involvement with refugees began a decade ago, when she established *Spare Rooms for Refugees*, to provide community accommodation for asylum seekers.

In 2002, Kate with a BBC correspondent, went undercover to Nauru. They were the first to film the detention camps, resulting in the *Pacific Solution* documentary, which was censored in Australia, although broadcast by the BBC worldwide.

Kate's refugee advocacy was later expressed in her artwork. She examined the experience of refugees in detainment camps and the sinking of the SIEV-X, carrying more than 400 asylum seekers, on 19 October 2001. Most of the 353 people who drowned, were women and children.

Building on her first SIEV-X exhibition, Kate exhibited "*And everyone was an optimist*" at Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery, Melbourne in 2005 and Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria in 2006, by which time she had painted 353 pictures 20 cm square - one for each of the 353 victims of the SIEV-X tragedy. Her exhibition came to Brisbane as the focus of World Refugee Day, 2006.

Many of the SIEV-X paintings are in the Fryer Library Durham and Burnside Refugee Collection, University of Queensland, along with associated letters and correspondence of those detained on Nauru and their Australian friends who assisted in achieving their protracted claims for Australia's protection.

Links: www.katedurham.com

www.spareroomsforrefugees.com

www.hopedocumentary.com.au





Hassan Ghulam

“FLOATING”

an exhibition by artists from Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran communities

- many who came by sea seeking refuge.

Hassan Ghulam, who conceived the “Floating” exhibition has this message:-

A refugee’s life is adrift, out of control, floating at the mercy of the elements and strangers. When refugees start their journey to seek asylum, their lives become afloat in the storm, always at risk - in the dust of the desert, in the vastness of the ocean, in an unknown and unwelcoming land.

They are adrift, cut off from family and familiar people and places. In hiding, they suffer untold deprivation and sadness. The inevitable result is floating into depression, even madness.

On the boat journey, the refugees are in the control of the “smuggler” and the boat’s captain. The war and persecution might now be far behind, but the risk to life goes on, facing death is constant. On the boat there is another ‘enemy’ - it is the stormy sea, the cyclones and tsunamis.

Refugees on board the “boats to freedom” are in the hands of the seamen, their lives depend on the seamen’s skill to make the sea voyage.....and yet the seamen are at

risk too from the power of the sea and the storm.

Many refugees are from countries that are land-locked, such as Afghanistan. They have no knowledge, not even a concept of the vast oceans. Being afloat in a tiny wooden vessel is an extremely traumatizing and terrifying experience. They turn to God for protection, begging to be saved from the sea.

“Floating” is about a spiritual, mental and physical passage.....the fear of persecution and death, traveling into the fearful unknown, rising, floating about the waves of fear in the journey to freedom.

Hassan Ghulam came (by plane) to Australia in 1986. On explaining the danger he was in to the Australian Ambassador (who was in Vietnam at the fall of Saigon in 1975 and understood well the need to seek refuge) in Pakistan, he was given clearance to come to Australia, via Europe.

Since 1971, Hassan has mostly lived outside his Hazara homeland, working with refugees. Prior to coming to Australia, he worked with the Austrian Relief Committee for Afghani refugees in Pakistan. In Australia, his refugee work continues, having dedicated the past decade to advocacy and settlement for refugees, especially those who came by boat and have suffered in detention centres. Hassan works in many voluntary capacities in community organizations and through the Romero Centre. He has a great love of Hazara culture, especially its poetry.

“I thank that Ambassador, for saving me from the danger, trauma and hardship of a journey into the unknown, not knowing if protection of another country would be granted, not knowing if I would survive the journey.”
Hassan says.

“FROM ACROSS THE SEA”

**By Frederika Steen, refugee advocate,
former Romero Centre volunteer worker,
former immigration officer.**

Precarious canoe journeys, island hopping and long disappeared land bridges brought the first Australians to this large island continent. Europeans who “discovered” and mapped the coastline, visited in small wooden ships from 400 years ago, and sailed away again.

Not until 1788 did a British Government settle Terra Australis with prisoners and their jailers. The First Fleet of small timber ships made the 36 week long dangerous voyage, to the other side of the world to established the colony of New South Wales.

In a massive post World War II immigration program, conceived to “build the nation”, and defend it from any future invasion from the Asian north, hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees came in big steel ocean liners, disembarked in the major ports and mostly settled along the shoreline.

All Australian people are descended from those who came across the sea; most of them by choice to start a new life; some of them dispatched involuntarily, as punishment; and some of them desperately seeking protection from persecution.

Within living memory of several generations, is the unheralded return home of career and conscripted soldiers after the 1975 fall of Saigon, and the horrific images of desperate Vietnamese asylum seekers in small boats, escaping the victorious communists - frequently attacked by pirates who stole, raped, murdered or left them for dead. Only a few boats actually landed in Australia. The lucky survivors were speedily registered and assessed to be refugees, and flown to major cities.

Labelled “boat people”, we understood Vietnamese asylum seekers to be refugees from the very moment they left their homeland. Hailed for their courage, their enterprise and skill, by and large, we accepted them. But more than that, our Government agreed to generously share with other first world resettlement countries, the task of resettling tens of thousands who fled to, or landed in, neighbouring countries. **Vietnamese refugees were selected for resettlement from the transit camps of S E Asia. Those accepted by Australia – 20,000 in one year, were spared the final dangerous sea journey and were flown here.**

Why then, in denial of our shared history as a nation founded by those who came from across the sea through the ages, do we have the ugly and unjust rejection and vilification of the latest maritime arrivals, about 4,000 asylum seekers a year? They come in small boats, less seaworthy than those of the First Fleet, carrying desperate escapees from war zones, dictatorships and ethnic cleansing. Why are these “boat people” seeking permanent protection from persecution, as is their right, treated as a risk to national security and punished with mandatory indefinite detention?

The answer lies partly in the tragedy of September 11, 2001 and the populist politics of fear and xenophobia that followed; partly in the residual and deep rooted prejudices of the formally-abolished, but surviving attitudes of the White Australia policy. It is poignant that fear of asylum seekers, particularly Muslim asylum seekers who come by boat, confuses the victims with the perpetrators of war and international terrorism. A decade of ASIO security checks has identified no terrorist threat among the Afghan, Iranian or Iraqi asylum seekers who came by boat, via Indonesia.

Sailing for freedom country

For mountain people from land-locked Afghanistan and others from the barren desert interior of the Middle East and Central Asia, an ocean journey by small boat is incomprehensible and when it becomes reality, it's a most terrifying experience. A refugee escape may commence with a clandestine journey across a mountain path or in the boot of a car or hidden among the goods on a truck, followed by the first ever frightening plane trip to Kuala Lumpur or Jakarta organised in secret by travel agents, the men with the passports and tickets, the know how, and the instructions. Asylum seekers are willing buyers of a ticket to "a freedom country", whatever the sacrifice made by family to raise the money, because there was no safe life, no future back home.

In Indonesia, totally dependant on travel organizers, and after waiting for weeks, even months in transit, and the expiry of their visa, travel to the embarkation place takes place under cover of darkness, the relevant palms of officials having been greased. Fear rises as a fishing boat with primitive facilities is identified as their costly 36 hour ride to Christmas Island, Australia. Anxiety increases as more - too many- passengers crowd on board. Teenagers crammed together, sit with their legs outside the railings, no room to move.

A well founded fear among refugee passengers is informed by survivors' tales of engine failures, returns to shore, incompetent navigators, journeys of 20 days to Ashmore Reef, hunger and thirst, shipwreck on a barren waterless island, and friends and relatives who never arrived at journey's end. The risk is known. A 50:50 chance of getting to a freedom country is the word among Hazaras. Some second and third time passengers purchased a life jacket, rope, and food for the dangerous trip. All know there is no going back home.

The stench of the battered old fishing boat is matched by the smell of humans filled with fear – crammed like sardines in a tin, terrified, seasick, unwashed, a huddled misery of men, women and children, who had never before been to sea. No privacy, no schedule, no guarantee. In the hands of God, and the Indonesian crew.

A promised journey of a few days becomes a disaster. Lost and off course. Then a storm at sea in the pitch dark, not a star to be seen. The creaking boat rises and plunges down from gigantic waves and begins to take on water. Bailing proves useless. Men tie themselves to the railings so they will drown quickly when the boat sinks. A mother ties her children to her and to each other, and prays. Everyone weeps and prays - "*God help us*".

On land, long after the trauma ends, the nightmares recur and the full horror is relived. Will it ever cease? The sea is cold and black and endless. A dark, nothing place. "*We could have drowned. God spared us. The water was up to my chest. We held our children up. We lost our hope. We thought we would all die. The sea is a place of danger, but our freedom was across the sea. They rescued us. Thanks God*".

Our Australian Government declared them "unauthorised entrants" because they had no valid visa in an official passport, to enter Australia, even though as asylum seekers they have an over arching, internationally recognized, legal right to seek our protection. Australia signed the UN Refugees Convention in 1954. These "unauthorised entrants" fled violence, ethnic cleansing, and persecution and were met here with hostility, immigration imprisonment, discrimination, years of separation from family, and a life floating in limbo on a temporary visa. The disappointment was intensely anguishing. Twelve years ago, when the number of maritime asylum seekers began to increase in response to the destruction, chaos and

persecution in Iraq, Afghanistan and Iran, the dishonest mythology grew unchecked around their identity, their numbers, their reasons, their motivations, and their impact on Australian society. Government by its silence, and politicians and the media for their own self-serving purposes, have distorted and withheld the facts and have perpetrated a great injustice on desperate people, who came asking for the protection they undoubtedly deserved, and which our Government finally confirmed by granting nearly all of them, permanent protection and a new life.

Instead of understanding and compassionate treatment, future Australians were and still are, stereotyped and vilified as “criminal, law breaker, queue jumper, terrorist, and undesirable” Muslims, unlikely to integrate. The loss of their freedom and the right to work was and is unwarranted punishment and deprivation. Men were and are denied the right to work and provide for their dependants - disempowered. Detained, often for years in remote, prison-like immigration detention centres, far from community and social support, many were and will be irretrievably damaged by the loss of freedom, and the guilt and grief of separation from loved ones.

An estimated 2,000 Hazaras are still in immigration detention, some of them for periods exceeding two years, out of public sight, out of mind. They beg for freedom and security. About 22,000 people have arrived from across the sea by boat to seek asylum in Australia since 1998. At least 450 are known to have drowned. Anecdotal estimates say over 2,000 are missing having departed Indonesia with no known arrival.



“The Journey I” Artist: Ghulam Sahki Hazara

“VIETNAMESE BOAT REFUGEES”

By Phuong Nu Thien Nguyen,
for The Vietnamese Community In
Australia – QLD Chapter

Parramatta August 1975

Peering over the kitchen bench Amanda's big blue eyes fixed on the thick chocolate batter her mother was mixing. She was squirming in anticipation, waiting to be given the spoon to lick clean.

From the TV in the living room drifted the familiar whistling of the M*A*S*H TV show theme. The helicopters flying in during the credits always frightened her, reminding her of the scenes on the news months earlier from the war. Families terrified, frightened faces on her TV screen, desperately trying to get to the helicopters. She didn't understand any of it, but even a 5 year old, could tell they were so scared, that something horrible was happening.

“Daddy is going to miss M.A.S.H” she remarked to her mother.

“Mmm” was the only response.

“Mum, what's a conference?” she asked her mother.

Her Mum smiled down at her “It's where Daddy goes to learn new things, how to do his job better, don't worry he'll be home the day after tomorrow.”

Saigon, August 1975

Peering over the wooden table Hien's big brown eyes were fixed on her mother as she prepared the broth for the beef noodle soup (Ph^a), she was squirming in anticipation to try the soup her mother had so lovingly fussed over for hours.

The kitchen was the centre of Hien's house, the smell of fish sauce constant. Her mother dropped a few star annise into the broth, the smell immediately triggering memories in Hien. Whenever they had (Ph^a) her father would say how much he

loved that smell.

“Ba would love this dinner” she remarked to her mother.

“Mmm” was the only response.

“Má, what's a Re-Education camp?” she asked her mother.

A sad look had come over her mother's face “It's where Ba had to go to learn new things”.

“How long will he be gone for Má?”

Her mother's eyes grew misty “I don't know...”. Images of her husband thin frail body digging, starving, beaten, choked her up.

Parramatta February 1979

Cold water splashed Amanda's face. She spun around to see Teresa at the edge of the pool splashing at her. “Come in” cried Teresa, the birthday girl.

“Pass the parcel time!” Teresa's mother called to the children.

All the kids ran to the group of chairs arranged in a circle. There was excitement in the air, noisy chatter and giggling. As she sat, Amanda could smell party pies coming out of the oven, cake and lollies. Then the music started and she forgot the food, her eyes were glued to the parcel as it passed from hand to hand making its way towards her.

“Stop stop stop” she willed the music as the parcel arrived in her hands. She held it as long as she dare before passing it on. Until finally, several layers hungrily torn by each child, the music stopped with the parcel in Teresa's hands. She tore open the paper to find a silver princess tiara that she wore for the rest of the party.

South China Sea February 1979

Cold salty water splashed Hien's face. She looked over as the bow of the boat broke through another wave, splashing water over the deck, the rise and fall making her stomach heave. The timber groaned,

the noise alarming, sounding like the boat might come apart anytime.

“Make it stop, stop, stop” Hien’s mind repeated silently.

Everyone sat huddled in fear, sadness and silence. A young girl trembling, sobbing her face bruised, clothes torn shielded by her young brother as he embraced her. The group was silent, dejected, salvation had appeared as a boat coming to their aid but their joy was short lived, when salvation turned out to be Thai pirates who took everything even the only set of clean clothes people brought with them.

The smell was overwhelming, sweat, sick, excrement and wet rotting timber. Hien’s mother, a doctor, attended to a man whose throat was slit as he fought the pirates. Her father took the small amount of rainwater they managed to catch, now their only supply and gave some to each of the group along with a small handful of rice.

Hien tried to make the food and drink last as long as possible but her little empty stomach won, and she ate and drank it all in a moment.

Surfers Paradise December 1979

“Daddy look” yelled Amanda. She pointed proudly to the two hermit crabs she had found and put in her own little rock pool.

“I named them Mork and Mindi.” The two crabs crawled around the bottom of the pool oblivious to the audience.

“Do you think I can find them again when we come back next year,” she asked her dad, sitting on his shoulders as they headed back over the dunes to their holiday house where Mum was cooking them lunch.

“I am not sure....” he answered absently.

KuKu Island Indonesia December 1979

“Ba, Ba look!” yelled Hien

She pointed at her basket filled with 20 or so small soldier crabs that she had collected along the beach. “Mum can cook

them with dinner for us” she beamed up proudly at her father.

“Do you think we will still be here next year” she asked her Dad, sitting on his shoulders as they headed back over the dunes to the small shack they lived in at the Refugee camp.

“I am not sure....” he answered absently.

Parramatta State Primary School 1981

“Class, this our new student, Hien Ngo” Mrs Sullivan said, standing next to the thin nervous looking girl with long dark hair and big brown eyes that shone with hope despite the darkness that she has seen.

“Hien is from Vietnam but she left there because her family was afraid of the communists” Mrs Sullivan continued “and now she lives in Australia”

Hien made her way across the room and sat down at an empty chair and smiled to the girl sharing the desk with her. Amanda smiled back.

Today

Hien and Amanda’s story is a simple story to illustrate the different worlds that the girls grew up in, on their journey to become class mates in Parramatta. The story of Hien’s journey to Australia is just one of 2 million stories of the estimated Vietnamese who fled after the communist dictatorship took control of their homeland. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimated the number of dead and missing at sea to be up to 500,000 people. Anecdotally, the estimates are that more than half that might have set out, have not been heard of again. People died of thirst, hunger, because of storms, pirates. They died in fear, in frustration. They died without a decent burial, they just disappeared, and the ocean was their hallowed graves.

What were they fleeing? Why face such danger and unimaginable horror.

After the fall of Saigon many former soldiers, intellectuals, politicians and others were interned into labour camps, euphemistically known as re-education camps. These were brutal prisons where people were forced into hard labour. Estimates suggest that over 165,000 Vietnamese died in these camps from starvation, brutality, execution or sickness.

Records indicate that as many as 65,000 Vietnamese were summarily executed by the Communist Regime after the fall of Saigon. This number does not include the murders of government sympathisers in other parts of the country, captured before the fall of Saigon on 30th April 1975.

The Vietnamese people witnessed and survived many atrocities during the long years of war but whilst there was hope there was never thought of leaving. That all changed in April 1975 when Saigon fell and hope was lost. They decided to risk everything for freedom, because they knew under the communist regime, they would have no freedom at all. No freedom of speech, no freedom of religion, not even the freedom to raise their children according to Vietnamese traditional values. Estimates say 70% of the “boat people” were attacked by Thai pirates who would steal refugees’ gold and valuables. Horrifically, they routinely raped and kidnapped the women, then sold them into slavery.

After surviving the oceans, the refugees spent years in refugee camps around Asia, supplementing the meagre rations they received with vegetables grown and what little wild food could be gathered, such as soldier crabs from the beach.

“We leave our loved ones behind in Sri Lanka, not to die”

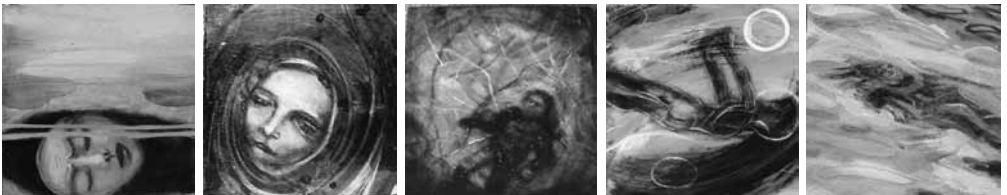
By Fr. Pan Jordan OP

Although the civil war in Sri Lanka has ended, there have been few meaningful efforts on the part of the Sri Lankan government to redress the legitimate grievances of the Tamils. Nor has there been any effort to curb and come to terms with the excesses committed by the Sri Lankan military forces.

Without change and reconciliation, it is likely that Tamils will continue to seek refuge, and more boats carrying desperate people will arrive on our shores. Most of these arrivals will be legitimate refugees with a well-founded fear of persecution, who are fleeing a repressive regime that engages in torture and disappearances, and does not respect human rights, UN treaties or international law.

On 1 November 2009, 12 Sri Lankan Tamils drowned in their attempt to sail across the Indian Ocean to seek asylum in Australia. These commemorative events bring us together to remember each young man who died, and to ponder how many we do not know have died.

The young men left Sri Lanka because they knew they could no longer live there safely. They had been told they would be transferred to a larger vessel after a few days sailing, but after 10 days they realised they had been deceived. After 27 days at sea, their vessel developed a leak and despite all their efforts to stop the water, they could not keep the boat afloat, and it started to sink.



One of the passengers, Paheertharan Pararasasingam, spoke English and was able to radio for help. Nine hours later a fishing boat appeared.

"We waved towards it, it came near us, we explained our situation, then the boat captain said 'We informed the Australian government, and they have sent a ship'."

Most of the asylum seekers on board the boat were unable to swim. Paheer emptied two oil canisters, tied them together and hung on in big waves, 350 nautical miles northwest of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. After eight hours in the water, they saw a ship,

"Around 6.30pm we saw a ship coming towards us -- unfortunately before the ship came near us our vessel sank. I saw that some of us were swimming towards the ship, others shouting here and there, in front of me I saw three people sink into the ocean. We never forget it, every day and night we see our people, who are shouting 'please help us' from the ocean."

As a priest with a long history of working with many displaced people both in Australia and in Sri Lanka, I am dismayed at the lack of basic humanitarian spirit amongst our politicians. It is our fundamental obligation as a signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to open our 'doors' to these vulnerable people who have fled their homeland, not by choice, but due to unimaginable circumstances. These refugees who have been trapped in a terrible limbo, floating, drifting; unsafe at home and unwanted anywhere else!

My prayer is that through commemorations like this, we may keep alive the hopes of these displaced and dispossessed people, that one day they may be united with their families and be able to live freely. Let us as Australians living in this blessed land of the "Southern Cross" embrace and welcome all who come to our shores in need of our

protection. In doing so, we can truly say we are a nation of a 'fair go'.

ARTISTS FROM REFUGEE COMMUNITIES

Forough Yavari has a Bachelor of Arts in Painting from the Art University of Tehran. She has exhibited in many group and solo exhibitions in Iran, Dubai and the UK. Her current work combines painting and photography in portraits of women, focusing on themes of gender equity to be harmonized with traditional culture.

Farnaz Dadfar has a Bachelor of Fine Art in Painting and advanced training in Painting and Art History from Tehran Art University. She has participated in multiple group and individual exhibitions with honours. Farnaz has received prestigious commissions, specializing in decorative design, and had some of her painting published.

"353" installation by Forough Yavari and Farnaz Dadfar

There is an old tradition in Iran - when people set out on a journey, their loved ones pour water from a pot on the ground behind them, as they turn their backs to leave. The water settling the dust is symbolic of protecting the traveler's life from all the dangers of the journey, and securing a safe passage.

In "353", the faces of the travelers are under water in the pots. These travelers, forced to flee persecution, did not have the benefit of the symbolic pouring of the protective water. Rather, they have been captured by the water - their journey never safely completed.

Fereshteh (Ferie) Sadeghi, has a bachelor's degree in Interior Architecture from Iran. In Australia, she studied and practiced Graphic Design for several years, prior to becoming a full time painter, favoring water colours. She illustrated "Evolution's

Edge”, an award-winning book, and has participated, with honours and awards, in many art competitions. Ferie says,

“As a migrant who left my country, family and career because of political conditions and social injustice, I empathise with people, with no choice but escape, forced to leave everything behind and seek refuge in a foreign country. I understand the hardship, heartbreak and feeling of being torn in heart and mind. Refugees hope to find justice and freedom. They survive with the kindness and humanity of strangers. Let’s look into refugees’ hearts and see and feel their pain at leaving their loved ones and precious homeland behind, and understand that leaving is because their life is in danger and their soul can’t bear the injustice any longer.

My paintings reflect the SIEV-X tragedy. “Escape to nowhere” shows lifeless bodies reaching our beaches. “No hope” shows hundreds drowning, but no bronzed Aussie life saver to save them.”

Other contributing artists:

Juma Khan Jafery – Peace Series

Mohammad Zaki – Home; The Boat; Refugee (Mother and Child); God Bless You

Razia Ghazal – Looking Back. Razia is a young Hazara women. Like many of her contemporaries, she paints women in the traditions of her homeland.

Malia Mohomedi – teenage student artist; Hazara Girl in traditional dress





Artist: Kate Durham "Too Many Books For Juma"



Artist and Poet: Sha Hassani

Towfiq Al Qady is a self-taught artist from Iraq. He has illustrated and painted for theatre, newspapers and print media, and is also a cartoonist. He was politically active and opposed to the regime of Iraq, using his visual images as a voice of protest. This ultimately led to his being displaced to Syria and Jordan where he continued as an activist for regime change. In 2000, he fled to Indonesia and came to Australia by boat. He paints prolifically on the themes of freedom, peace, refugees and human rights. In the past decade he has participated in more than 20 exhibitions.

Towfiq works in the community in support of refugees, and continues this work through his painting. He draws on many different styles, often mixed together, to express the myriad of issues that face refugees, the chaotic and fractured world that they find themselves in, and the many cultural references of their homelands and journeys.

His selected works for the "Floating" exhibition:- The Beginning of the End; You; Through the Water; Dialogue; Dreams of Peace I and II

Sha Hassani is of the Hazara community, a persecuted and dispossessed ethnic group in Afghanistan. Sha fled Afghanistan in 1999 and endured the dangerous and often life-threatening journey overland and by boat to Australia. Sha holds a diploma in Graphic Design and is a graduate student of Fine Arts at Queensland College of Arts Griffith University.

Inspired by his cultural heritage, Sha's paintings draw a multi-layered narrative of the Hazara nation's plight. Sha uses historical and religious iconography to convey the message that it is the ethnic identity and religious belief of Hazara nation, that is and has been the main reason of their persecution.



Artist: Sahki Hazara Self portrait

GHULAM SAHKI HAZARA was born in Mogur, in Ghanzi Province of Afghanistan in 1976. With the Soviet invasion, 3 years later, he and his family could no longer live safely in the predominantly Pashtun area, and moved to Kabul. They were further displaced to Quetta, Pakistan when he was only 5 years old. He had no opportunity to study and his extraordinary artistic talent is self-developed.

Sahki established and operated a successful graphic arts business in Pakistan for several years before the rising danger and persecution of Hazaras, forced him to flee in 1999. He reached Kupang in West Timor (then on a war footing), and with 9 other refugees, set out for Ashmore Reef in a tiny coastal fishing boat - a journey that took 36 terrifying hours for people who had never seen the sea before. After 24 hours on that tiny speck of Australia, the navy brought Sahki to Darwin and his 1st interview to claim asylum. He was flown to Port Hedland and imprisoned for 15 months - and there he started to paint again.

At first he painted only beautiful images, mostly of nature, to block out the traumatizing memories. Even when asked by the detention centre officers to paint about his journey, he could not bring

himself to give “visibility” to the horror that he and those detained with him had experienced. Once released into the community in Brisbane, Sahki began to share his experiences and feelings through his paintings of the circumstances that forced him to flee and seek protection and of the perilous journey. “The Journey” (2001) and “The Nightmare” (2011) are part of this exhibition.

In Brisbane, Sahki had the opportunity to study art at TAFE College. His teachers looked at his art portfolio and told him that they had nothing to teach him, that all of them together could not produce a fraction of his work. Sahki thought this was an example of Australians’ sardonic humour, but his teachers convinced him that his highly gifted, natural talent needed no training that they could provide, rather he should exhibit his art and establish in that way, the credentials that no college course could provide. Since then, Sahki has painted a substantial body of work and developed his photo-realistic style and another style he likes to call “Hazaraism”. First the viewer sees dry, leafless trees and then images, symbolism and messages become apparent within stark forms.

In 2008, Sahki returned to Pakistan to run an art school and graphic art business and to marry Saida. Sakhi and Saida and their 19 month old son Ayaan Misvah (meaning a bride’s light) now live in Brisbane.

Sahki views art as being of two parts: technique and skill; and the ability to communicate and share feelings, emotions and understanding of others’ experiences. As a refugee artist he feels it is his duty to translate, through his artistic images, his stories and the stories and experiences of other refugees, so that all people can come to a shared understanding. Every day we are learning through what we see. We learn more readily if we also feel.

WIDE OPEN SEAS

lyrics by David Peetz, based on personal
Refugee accounts during the inquiry that
followed the SIEV-X tragedy

Wide open seas, Freedom their goal,
Crowded on an old fishing boat, Four
hundred souls.

Why did they perish? Who can tell us?
Mothers and children, young and old?

Why did they perish? Who can tell us?
Fathers and children, young and old?

---~---

We had to flee our home in Iraq, Too many
dangers had arisen -
Saddam Hussein had turned our country, Into
a dreadful deadly prison.

One night we fled across the border, One
night we fled into Iran.

But we were not made welcome there, No we
were oppressed there, woman and man.

They would not even let our children Go to
schools, what could they learn?

They wouldn't let us have somewhere to live,
Nor get employment, what could we earn?

We could not go back to Iraq, We could not
stay there in Iran.

One night we fled across the ocean, We paid
Khaled, we paid Maysam.

They took all of our money from us - They
took the jewellery from my wife!

They took us into Indonesia, We trusted them
with all our lives.

We said 'please take us to Australia, They
will treat us with humanity.

My wife, my daughters, want a life, We'll find
it there with dignity.'

They put us on a fishing boat. It was not big
enough for us.

We said 'we cannot go on that'. We said 'no,
it's too dangerous!'

They said this little boat would take us To a
big boat - that was a lie.

Uniformed men pointed guns right at us, Said
'get on board or you will die.'

---~---

'There's something wrong the nails are
coming Loose - the planks are coming out!'

'The hull is filling up with water - Help me
pump this water out!'

'I'll try to get the engine running, Can't you
stop the water rising?'

'The boat is rocking, the hull is breaking!'
'Help us Allah, the boat's capsizing!'

My first daughter, I tried to reach her, But I
was too late and she drowned first.

My second daughter clung on my back, But
an hour ago she died of thirst.

What are those lights? They shine right at us!
Why do they come and then go away?

There were three lights! Twelve hours ago!
But now there is nothing in the light of day -
Just fuel and oil and planks and waves, And
the bodies of our children and wives,

And the fish that keep on biting me. How
much longer now until I die?

Why are we perishing - who can tell me?
Mothers and our children, the young and old?

Why are we perishing? Did someone arrange
this? Tell me will the truth ever be told?

---~---

Why did they perish? Who can tell us?
Mothers and children, young and old?

Why did they perish? Who can tell us?
Fathers and children, young and old?

Wide open seas Freedom their goal
Crowded on an old fishing boat Four hundred
souls

---~---

COMMEMORATION OF ALL REFUGEES WHO DIED AT SEA A TRIBUTE TO THE COURAGE RESILIENCE AND ENDURANCE OF REFUGEES WHO REACHED AUSTRALIA BY SEA

This exhibition and this time is one of remembering and reflecting - not the place for party politics. Yet it can't be ignored that ten years after the tragedy of the SIEV-X sinking, political and public debate about "boat people" still dominates - with much more focus on "boats" than on the "people".

The SIEV-X sank during the 2001 federal election campaign. It occurred in the midst of ongoing repercussions of other compelling events, - the takeover of the MV Tampa by Australian military, the horror of the September 11 attacks on the Twin Towers in New York, the controversy over the false allegations that refugees were throwing their children overboard, the rushed setting up of detention centres on Nauru, the "Pacific Solution".

The SIEV-X sinking has been marked by resolutions passed by the Australian Senate; by memorials on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin in our nation's capital, by films and exhibitions. Many unanswered questions and suspicions remain about the SIEV-X tragedy. Many committed people have selflessly continued to pursue the truth. It is understandable that people try to apportion blame when terrible events such as this occur.

To me, one truth is clear. When we as a nation put a greater priority on stopping boats, than we do on being concerned about the safety of those whose desperate circumstances make them take the gamble to get on those boats, the more likely it is that tragedies such as the SIEV-X will occur.

The sinking of the SIEV-X has an unavoidably personal connection for me, as the day it sank was the day my own beautiful daughter was born. At the time I was holding her gently in my arms for the very first time, 142 children were stricken with terror as their "boat to safety" foundered. Every time I see my daughter, even ten years on, I can't help but be struck by the warmth she effortlessly brings to my heart - a special sort of magic to me that I never thought was possible. Each year, as I mark the unique and incomparable wonder she gifts me, I think also of those other children who were leaving this world at the same time my child was entering it. I think of the unthinkable anguish of the mothers and fathers of those 146 children who drowned on the SIEV-X, their despair in not being able to protect their children from danger and death - the very reasons that had led them to take the dangerous journeys from their homes.

This exhibition is a compelling reminder of the 353 individual tragedies involved in the SIEV-X sinking. It is a reminder of how gifted and fortunate we are in not having to face such terrors, nor be forced to make such terrible choices and risks. And about the preciousness and potential wonder within every human life. While we cannot help every person or child at risk or in danger, we can at least ensure we help those we can, those who reach Australia asking for our protection, and not add further to their suffering or the dangers they face.

ANDREW BARTLETT, SENATOR FOR QLD,
1997-2008, advocate for refugees, especially those detained under the so-called "Pacific Solution".