

FAITH AND THE ARTS

Peace-building art exhibition seeks to unite East and West

By *Episcopal Journal*

A contemporary art exhibition built on the theme of the ancient Egyptian symbol of the ankh opened in New York on Sept. 21, the United Nations International Day of Peace.

The exhibition, titled “The Key,” showcases the work of 40 Egyptian, Middle-Eastern and Western contemporary artists using a modern 3D fiberglass portrayal of the ankh, the hieroglyph known as the “key of life,” as a means of engendering unity among people of different cultural heritages and faith backgrounds.

“It’s the canvas for a contemporary message of hope for a harmonious, peaceful and tolerant world,” said the Rev. Paul-Gordon Chandler, an Episcopal priest who is founder and president of CARAVAN, an organization that employs the arts as a peacebuilder among the creeds and cultures of East and West. “The Key,” already seen by thousands in Cairo and most recently in London at St. James, Piccadilly, will remain at New York’s historic Riverside Church, a stronghold of peace activism over the decades, until Nov. 6.

“The world we live in today is fast-paced and one where stereotypes and

media hype can overshadow fundamental truths that stand regardless of background or faith,” said Chandler. “For generations the Middle East has been a place of turmoil, and now more than ever it is vital that the growing Western misconceptions and apprehensions about the region be addressed.”

“In the ever-widening divide that exists between the Middle East and West, we have found that art is a vehicle for understanding and imagination,” he said. It enables people of different cultural backgrounds the opportunity to gain an insight into the world and values of “the other,” he said.

The blending of the old with the new — an ancient symbol created in fiberglass and painted by contemporary artists — stimulates contemplation of values over time, how peaceful coexistence once was possible and, despite current misunderstandings, can be again, he said. “This cultural endeavor with the ankh at its heart is a powerful means to unite people of different backgrounds.”

The unpainted 3-foot 9-inch fiberglass sculpture of the “key” that was used by each artist was designed and sculpted by the Egyptian artist Reda Abdel Rahman.

The exhibition is augmented with

additional programs that include music, workshops, talks and panel discussion. An educational component offers tours for students and downloadable resources for teachers.

Riverside Church’s senior minister, the Rev. Amy Butler said: “As a community committed to peace and reconciliation, we are delighted to host CARAVAN, an inspiring art installation promoting the dream of peace for the world. This installation calls us to embrace the dream of peace for all people.”

Co-partnering with CARAVAN, Ambassador Ahmed Farouk, consul general in New York of the Arab Republic of Egypt, called the arts one of the most powerful languages of peacemaking among peoples of different religions. “This exhibition speaks this language eloquently,” he said.

Past exhibitions sponsored by CARAVAN have included “Amen: A Prayer for the World” at Washington National Cathedral in 2014 and “In Peace and with Compassion,” featuring 50 life-size painted fiberglass donkeys, at New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 2013. ■



Images/ courtesy of CARAVAN

The contemporary art exhibit “The Key,” on display in New York until Nov. 6, showcases the work of 40 Egyptian, Middle Eastern and Western artists.

To read more about the artists and the exhibition organizers, visit www.oncaravan.org.