

Drawing Paradise



on the "Axis of Evil"

"Pre-War Art"

by

Emily Johns

January 16th & 17th, 2-9pm
& by appointment only.

At the Missing Peace Art Space, 234 S. Dutoit St., Dayton, OH 45402

www.MissingPeaceArt.org, 937-241-4353

Drawing Paradise on the "Axis of Evil"

The Persian word (pairidaeza), from which our word paradise comes, means a walled garden.

In May 2006 I travelled to Iran on a Fellowship of Reconciliation peace delegation during a period of international tension over Iran's nuclear programme. Since then I have been producing a body of images dealing with the complex relationships between Iran, oil and Britain. The work weaves together the larger international dynamics, the mutual cultural influences, and the more intimate personal connections of Iranian-British relations.

The delegation itinerary was very intense, meeting with NGOs, community groups, academics, politicians, young people, and clerics, and also travelling through the country to visit antiquities and cultural sites. My drawings were, by necessity, as speedy as our travelling.

In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks the "War on Terror" was declared by the US and Britain and with the announcement of which countries were on the "Axis of Evil" it was apparent that foreign policy would involve attacks or aggressive diplomacy against Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Syria, North Korea.

I felt that since we have been given so much advance notice of the atrocities that our government was willing to commit we have a duty to be well prepared to prevent these wars.

This is a powerful
& very timely exhibition.
Please come see Iran
from a different
perspective.

It seemed that I, as a visual artist, could contribute to deflecting the propaganda preparation that is necessary to turn a people and a country into enemies and "legitimate targets".

The "war artist" documents the process of war, and comments on the aftermath of war.

This project is "pre-war art" - an equivalent process for a conflict that I hope may never take place. It deals with the themes that a war artist might deal with, but in a period of tension rather than after the outbreak of hostilities. My approach has been from the perspective of British relations with Persia and the intertwining of histories.

Culturally, "Persia" has been a potent influence on the British imagination - on poetry, on theatre, on story-telling, and on ceramics. Economically and politically, Iran has played an increasingly important role in British and Western imaginations as an oil producer, a militant Islamic state, and a suspected potential nuclear proliferator.

Drawing Paradise on the "Axis of Evil" is an attempt to use imaginative engagement to provoke a more rounded debate, by transcending labels such as "the axis of evil" and to ground public debate in human realities.

The Iran that is so widely feared is also a land that has produced, and continues to produce, gardens of paradise and poetry.



Emily Johns
Great Britain