

Art exhibition linking passenger pigeon, Jewish heritage comes to Ryerson Woods May 4

By Posted By Sheryl DeVore, Community Contributor

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LAKE COUNTY, IL - Artists and friends Steffi Domike and Ann T. Rosenthal often focus on environmental issues in their work, sometimes weaving bird imagery into their pieces. Both also have traced the history of their Jewish ancestors from Ukraine.

Now the artists have created a unique exhibition that links their heritage and environmental ethics. Moving Targets will open May 4 at Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods. A free reception will be held from 1 to 3 p.m.

Using digital media, painting and layering techniques, the artists will install collages, wood box paintings, maps and photos to tell the story of migration, loss and survival.

The exhibition will weave the story of their ancestors' migration from Ukraine to Canada with the migration of the now extinct passenger pigeons in the United States.

With help from historian Ruth Fichman, the artists learned about their ancestors who left the Ukraine circa 1910 to escape anti-Semitism and pogroms,¹ the violent riots that persecuted Jews.

"As part of Moving Targets, Steffi and I are each creating a visual journal that will interpret the story of our mothers' families, along with the migration of passenger pigeons in the United States," said Rosenthal.

This year marks the centenary of the extinction of the passenger pigeon, once the most abundant bird in North America. The species was hunted to extinction within 40 years.

"Both the birds and the people made tremendous voyages to survive," Domike said. "On the one hand, our families obviously did survive. Yet the birds did not ultimately make it. Some of our interest is in the commonalities of this flight to survival. Some of it is about differences." Rosenthal said they are using maps as backdrops, with mixed media pieces hung on the maps. "There are two maps. One represents the pigeon. One represents our family." The maps will be presented in sections, each telling a part of the story.

In addition to exhibiting their own work, the artists have invited 14 artists from states where the passenger pigeon formerly lived to create a portrait gallery in the library at Brushwood. Each artist is using wooden birch boxes upon which they will create their work whether it be through collage, photography or painting.

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"One of our submissions is the ghost of the passenger pigeon, another is a formal portrait, another one is a half dozen birds flying madly as though in a large flock," Domike said. "They are absolutely beautiful."

They said their inspiration for creating the exhibition came from Joel Greenberg, author of "A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction." Greenberg will receive a conservation award at the Smith Nature Symposium to be held May 17 at Ryerson Woods.

Symposium attendees will be able to browse the Moving Targets exhibition during the Symposium. The Smith Nature Symposium is an annual benefit event for Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods. This year will mark the Symposium's 31st year of bringing luminaries in the fields of science and conservation to the citizens of Lake County. The 2014 Symposium is part of a year-long exploration of the theme extinction | survival. Key sponsors are Abbott and Bartlett Tree Experts. For more information on the Symposium, visit www.brushwoodcenter.org/smith-nature-symposium.html.

Greenberg's book and Rosenthal and Domike's exhibition are part of an international effort to familiarize as many people as possible with the history of the passenger pigeon and its extinction as well as to raise awareness of how the issue of extinction is ecologically, culturally, and morally relevant to the 21st Century.

Domike and Rosenthal have been collaborating on environmentally themed artworks for more than a decade, exhibiting throughout the U.S., Japan and Germany. The exhibition runs through July 3, 2014. For more information, call 847.968.3344 or visit www.brushwoodcenter.org.

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