

## **ARTISTS AND WORKERS FORM ONE WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS**

by Mike Alewitz

Assistance by Fatin Musa and Volunteer Iraqi Artists  
Baghdad/ 1998/ Approx 12' x 18'

*In 1998, I travelled to Iraq with a North American delegation carrying badly needed medical supplies. Our mission was to challenge the US economic embargo that had killed tens of thousands of Iraqis, mostly the children of working class families. While there, I spent two days painting a mural with students at the School of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad.*

*The central imagery of the mural consists of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers transformed into two figures: A North American worker clasping hands with Layla Al-Attar, a prominent Iraqi artist murdered in a 1993 US bombing raid. Al-Attar was a beloved Iraqi artist, activist and Director of the Iraqi National Art Museum. She, her husband and housekeeper were killed in a US missile attack on Baghdad, on June 26, 1993. Her child was left blind.*

The following day, President Bill Clinton, commenting on the bombing, the following day said: *"I feel quite good about what has transpired, and I think the American people should feel good about it."*

*In the mural, American bombers fly overhead - but as the bombs reach the clasped hands, they turn into bread and roses, symbol of the working class aspiration for economic justice and a life of beauty. A box of medical supplies is bonking Uncle Sam on the head.*

*An Arabic inscription across the top reads: "Artists and Workers Form One World without Borders!"*

*A follow-up letter to supporters gives a small sense of this project:*

July 3, 1998

Dear Friends,

A bright new mural symbolizing international solidarity now stands at the entrance to the Academy of Fine Arts, Baghdad University.

The mural was painted in May, as part of the Iraq Sanctions Challenge led by Ramsey Clark and Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton of Detroit. In the course of a ten-day trip to Iraq, we were able to help deliver millions of dollars worth of medical supplies, enough to save the lives of thousands of children victimized by the U.S. economic sanctions.

Due to travel restrictions, we were forced to land in Jordan and drive across the desert.

We were able to go to the University the day after our arrival. That night a sketch was prepared. The mural was painted and completed over the course of two very long hot days, with the help of numerous volunteers from the art school. It stands in a courtyard at the entryway to the university.

From the time I arrived for work, we were constantly surrounded by crowds of onlookers, at times numbering into the hundreds. Students were anxious to discuss wide-ranging topics of art and politics. On my second day we held a slideshow to a room packed with students and faculty. I was able to show slides of murals created as part of numerous LAMP projects, the P-9 and Pittston strikes, mural brigades to Nicaragua, cross-border organizing campaigns and similar projects. Students were highly animated and interested in political developments in the U.S., the labor and women's movement and socialism.

As the delegation was leaving the next morning, the buses stopped to attend a special ceremony, where we presented the mural to the people of Iraq. The ceremony coincided with graduation festivities. Hundreds attended the festivities which included music and dancing as well as brief remarks from the Director of the School. In my presentation I explained that this was an act of solidarity by working people for the workers of Iraq and their families...

*Mike Alewitz*  
Labor Art & Mural Project