Giving thanks for our freedom: Religion, press and assembly

By Douglas Kindschi

GRAND RAPIDS

I walked by a large oil painting in the lobby of the Amway Grand Plaza and suddenly stopped. I knew that person in the painting.

Then I recognized a second. And then a third. They were our forefathers, a rabbi and a Catholic priest with whom we have worked in our interfaith efforts here in West Michigan.

This was Sharon Lange, and the painting was titled, “FREEDOM — Liberty Lighting our Way.” Based on the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, it portrays freedom of religion, as well as the freedom of speech, a free press and the right to free assembly.

The painting will be on display until Dec. 13 at Gallery of Frames Unlimited, 2964 28th St. SE, in Grand Rapids. For more information, go online at rmmameow.com.

IF YOU GO

LIGHTING OUR WAY

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ARTIST STATEMENT

SHARON LANGE

Sharon Lange discusses her painting, “FREEDOM — Liberty Lighting our Way” in Spring Lake.

In this allegorical scene, we see Lady Liberty, personified, her torch ablaze, lighting our way. Through the darkness and the eternal quality of her symbolic typography, she is an “ideal” that we all look up to and hold dear. Liberty, standing strong and proud, charging forward, while draped in an American flag, has an American soldier poised at her feet. He is looking intently into the distance illuminated by her light, ready to protect all of the freedoms we enjoy. As she leads, we see her surrounded by all of us, representing the diverse fabric of our nation. With each brushstroke, you can see a full range of emotion: some bright and shining, some dark and secured in the sanctuary they have come to know here; they fill with relief having found a refuge in the outside world; some tired and weary, longing to feel the safe blanket of freedom.

The composition speaks to the strengths of us as a collective, and diversely the secret to our strength. Just as cotton and synthetic fabric have their individual advantages and disadvantages, a blend creates a stronger, more resilient garment that will, without a doubt, hold together better over time. So, too, in the fabric of our nation, made stronger by our diverse nature, woven together with our collective strengths. These philosophies, interwoven into the fabric of who we are, not without our loneliness, but stronger than any other country on earth.

With our diversity and determination growing ever stronger, we are firm in our conviction that we will prevail, united in our belief that liberty is our most precious, invaluable right and one we will always fight our way.

— Sharon Lange, mattersmost.com

PURPOSE STATEMENT

FREEDOM

That precious intangible that we so often crave for granted. The treasure beyond compare that so many have paid the ultimate price for, so that we may enjoy it forever. Yet, night after night, media coverage small or large as before we see a country riled by conflict and division. They portray a picture of discord, division and racial tension. They neglect all that is wrong with our country rather than that which is right.

It is time to remember. Remember that our country was built by different people coming together to build a phenomenal dream. The American dream. Remember that our nation’s foundation has built the greatest country on earth and that it is our responsibility to keep it that way.

Remember that our lives are interconnected by the fabric of our faith and that our country is made stronger by the exchange of ideas that spring forth from those relationships.

And remember that we are responsible for fostering those meritorious relationships and teach our children that our foundational belief must be love for all people, it’s time to challenge the status quo. We will no longer let this long-standing germ of hate and the longing we hear on every news station.

Today, stop. Stop the conversation, reject the voice preaching fear and hatred, and stand up for what the country was built upon. Defend the belief all men and women are created equal and that freedom and the pledge of a future of happiness are guaranteed to all of us.

Let us create a legacy of love and paint a new picture of America, bathed in the warmth of Liberty’s light.

— Sharon Lange, mattersmost.com

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 26, 2015 • THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

Sharon Lange’s FREEDOM — Liberty Lighting our Way was shown at the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel in Grand Rapids during ArtPrize 2015.

BY DOUGLAS KINDSCHI