



500 College Avenue • Swarthmore, PA 19081

**FRIENDS, PEACE AND SANCTUARY: A NEW CONVERSATION ABOUT
IMMIGRATION AND REFUGE**

Art's Power to Connect Highlighted in Regional Exhibitions and Events

February 1, 2019 (Swarthmore, PA) — Friends, Peace & Sanctuary, an innovative project that creates fellowship and dialogue between recent immigrants to Philadelphia and their extended community, launches a series of exhibitions and events starting March 28, 2019 at Swarthmore College. Bringing together the stories of displaced people past and present through art, the exhibition brings work by resettled people and nationally known artists to Swarthmore, Philadelphia, and New York City, March through October 2019.

A program of Swarthmore College Libraries and Swarthmore's Lang Center for Civic & Social Responsibility, Friends, Peace & Sanctuary explores art as a tool to build empathy and create a deeper sense of belonging. The exhibitions will introduce arts created by resettled Syrian and Iraqi individuals, as well as by commissioned artists, to open up conversations about displacement and refuge, history and experience, art and life.

Too often, refugees are portrayed as a monolithic group. Friends, Peace, & Sanctuary seeks to change that perception through artwork that extends individual people's stories beyond the label of refugee, as well as bringing current stories into conversation with archival materials. Project collaborators—Syrians and Iraqis who have resettled in the United States—learned book-arts skills such as bookbinding, paper cutting, silk screening, paper making, and photography, through workshops with professional book artists who also created works based on their interactions with collaborators.

The exhibition will include commissioned works by:

- [Maureen Cummins](#), book artist
- [Islam Aly](#), MFA, PhD, book artist, teacher and researcher

Major support for this project has been provided by:



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- [Erik Ruin](#), printmaker, shadow puppeteer, and cut-paper artist
- Courtney Bowles and Mark Strandquist, co-directors of [The People's Paper Co-op](#)

“Art is an extension of human connection,” states book artist Maureen Cummins. “It’s the closest thing to getting to know a person, short of actually meeting someone. Art can cut through that process of demonizing this person who’s different from me.”



Left: Poet, Philadelphia Peace Ambassador and FPS collaborator Layla Sidiq, displaying a work she and other collaborators co-created. *Right:* A portrait of Layla created by printmaker Erik Ruin, one of the FPS commissioned artists.

“I haven’t derived much enjoyment since I was forced to leave my work in Iraq and realized that returning is a dream and not reality,” says project participant Mohamed, who sold books on Al Mutanabbi Street in Baghdad, Iraq, before fleeing to the U.S. “Now, through the FPS project, I have been able to return to my beloved world of books.”

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The project began when Swarthmore College Librarian Peggy Ann Seiden encountered, in Swarthmore's archives, the story of a Jewish family who fled the Nazis. She and co-director Katie Price described the project's beginnings: "We are almost entirely a nation of people who came to the United States from other countries, yet each successive generation of new immigrants faces antipathy. We wondered: in what ways could the Swarthmore community combine its collective resources and knowledge with those of local refugees to create meaningful change?" The exhibitions are the culminating phase of a project which, in addition to art-making, has included courses and engaged scholarship programs at Swarthmore College, community dinners, and more.

The first exhibition — enhanced by workshops, gallery talks, and community events — opens at Swarthmore College March 29 and continues through April 2019. In June, the exhibition moves to three locations in Philadelphia, each location encompassing a distinct theme.

The exhibition moves to Brooklyn in October of this year:

March 29–April 26, 2019

- [Swarthmore College](#), McCabe Library (Swarthmore, PA)

June 7–July 26

- [Philadelphia City Hall](#) (Philadelphia, PA)

June 7–August 15, 2019

- [Twelve Gates Arts](#) (Philadelphia, PA)

June 7–August 2, 2019

- [Free Library](#) Parkway Central (Philadelphia, PA)

October 2019

- [Brooklyn](#) (Brooklyn, NY)

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