

## Air Force receiving OIF artwork

by Staff Sgt. Melanie Streeter  
Air Force Print News

10/21/2004 - **WASHINGTON** -- About 150 artists from around the country will donate more than 200 paintings to the Air Force during a ceremony Oct. 29 at Andrews Air Force Base, Md.

The artwork features works by artists who traveled to Iraq and Afghanistan to cover the Air Force mission during operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, said Russell Kirk, Air Force Art Program director.

"Even with the latest technology -- real-time digital photography -- artists are still important," Mr. Kirk said. "They can paint something which may evoke different emotions than would a photograph."

Those emotions can run high for artists who bridge the civilian and military worlds to tell a story, one many civilians usually do not see. One artist said the experience made him realize just how much servicemembers sacrifice to accomplish their mission.

"We were flying in a C-130 ... to Kirkuk (AB, Iraq), taking in lockers and light equipment to the troops deployed at Kirkuk," said Rick Herter, one of 12 artists to travel to Iraq documenting OIF. "We also took about eight or nine cases of fresh fruit and about 12 cases of soda with us. When the plane shut down and the cargo door opened, a bunch of guys and gals came out to unload.

"They were all asking 'what did you bring us?'" he said. "It was like little kids waiting by the mailbox for a package from grandma and grandpa."

When they saw the fresh fruit and soda, Mr. Herter said their faces looked like those same children on Christmas morning.

"It shamed me, because it reminded me of how much we take for granted," he said.

Besides communicating through his art, Mr. Herter has spoken at a number of service organizations around his home in Michigan, telling others about his experiences with the Air Force.

"It always breaks me up when I talk about it," he said.

Those strong feelings come out in the artists' interpretation of the mission, and their artwork is part of a long tradition.

Before war correspondents and the camera, military artists provided the only source of illustration of battles and countries at war, according to the art program Web site. American artists have documented every war since the Revolution, beginning with Archibald Willard's "The Spirit of '76" and Emmanuel Leutze's "Washington Crossing the Delaware."

The Air Force Art Program began in 1950, when the Army transferred a collection of about 800 pieces of aviation-related art documenting the early days of the Army Air Corps.

Over the years, the collection continued to grow, thanks to the cooperation of the Air Force and a pool of artists from around the country.

"We work through (the Societies of Illustrators) for names of people to cover events," Mr. Kirk said. "Then the Air Force organizes an officially sponsored trip for the artists."



WASHINGTON -- "Iraqi FOD" is a 34-by-48 inch oil painting. It depicts the wreckage of an Iraqi MiG 23 and engine at Tallil Air Base, Iraq, in April 2003 during Operation Iraqi Freedom. The artwork is among 200 pieces being donated to the Air Force. (U.S. Air Force painting by Harley Copic)

The artists then donate the artwork produced during these trips to the government, he said. These most recent works will bring the total collection to more than 9,000 paintings.