

Beauty in biology

Nashua woman highlights viruses in her art

By Kelly Sennott
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The Marburg virus is beautiful. So is influenza.

At least they are through the eyes of Alhan Irwin, a Nashua resident whose virus and Middle Eastern-inspired work is on display at the Nashua Public Library for the next two months.

The tapestries and prints she created through repeating the organism shape are so intricate and vibrant that when she hung the work last week, onlookers didn't recognize the art's origin.

"They thought they were mere tapestries," Irwin said. "They had no idea that they were looking at viruses."

Indeed, the framed prints look most like magnificent Persian rugs. "Marburg Tapestry" is rich in vibrant pinks and royal purples, lined with a glowing orange, alternating checkered pattern. Only if you look closely can you detect that this orange trim is actually the virus's long proteins and ring-like particles. "Polio Tapestry" is a collision of orange and red; when the pattern is repeated here, the tapestry looks like a series of glowing torches facing one another.

Staff, too, were struck at the beauty of the work created from the sometimes-deadly viruses that Irwin showed.

"I think that a lot of the staff were surprised by them and by how beautiful they were, considering their inspiration," said Carol Eyeman, outreach and community services coordinator at Nashua

Public Library.

It's plausible that viewers didn't recognize the diseases because of the manipulation; Irwin, an expert at Adobe Photoshop Illustrator, became inspired to create the work after having worked as a freelance artist for stock agencies for the past eight years, creating art for science textbooks. The stock agencies would send her a virus image, black and white, and she would add the color to the organism, to be featured in books and magazines.

She says the art on display is a tribute honoring the tiny microbes. With her framed tapestry prints, she brings to light what's normally undetectable by the naked eye.

"After a while, I started to recognize what each virus looked like," Irwin said. But she was captivated by the patterns she could make with the microscopic views of influenza and polio, of syphilis and Ebola. Viewers can see the process in a small poster that accompanies each tapestry design, which displays both a bland and white outline of the virus, not repeated, as well as the colored version she created.

While the germ nature of the design may be the draw for science nuts, the exhibition she shares at the library is a potpourri of her work, also created through Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. On the opposite wall hangs work inspired purely by her heritage, featuring musicians, dancers, parents and children, each created through digital imaging.

Her recently published book,



Alhan Irwin, a Nashua resident whose Middle Eastern and virus-inspired art will be on display at the Nashua Public Library. Courtesy photo.

Viral art

Where: Nashua Public Library, 2 Court St., Nashua

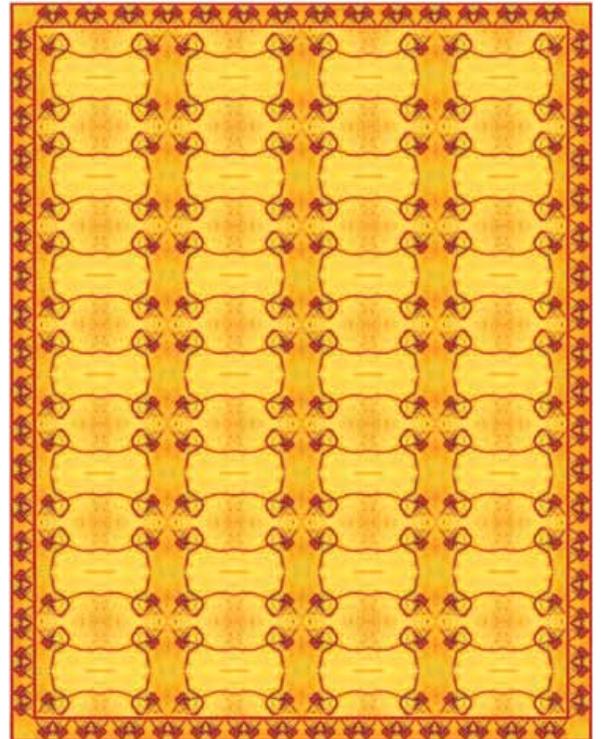
When: On display through December

See more at microbioart.com or purchase the book at bahaibooks.com

Around the World We Pray, is on display as well. It encompasses a collection of Baha'i prayers, which she illustrated with digital media. An art teacher at Nashua High School North, she took this project on three years ago because of how visual aides can help in children's understanding.

The pictures that accompany the prayers, "Departure from Home," "Spiritual Growth," "Night" and "Healing," are like three-dimensional cartoons designed to help explain the prayers of Baha'i, a religion that emphasizes oneness in humanity.

Irwin grew up in Iraq and was trained at the High Institute of Technology, where she majored



This tapestry was inspired from the Ebola virus. Courtesy photo.

in technical drawing. "But I was always interested in art, was always an artist," she said, so when she moved to the United States at 21, she moved toward a new medium in digital art. "I love that there are no limits in digital art. If you want to change something or if you make a mistake, you can fix it easily," she said. She completed a certificate program in visual art at Rivier University, focusing on illustration, digital image manipulation, multimedia and animation.

"My hope is for people to view my art with the inner eyes of their spirits, and with their phys-

ical eyes, to get them inspired and stimulated by their curiosity," she said.

This is true for her tapestry art, as well. "I actually used to be afraid of germs!" she said with a laugh. Not so much anymore. Now she wants everybody to see the beauty of the unseen.

"Don't look at it as art. Think of those tiny individual organisms, and how they can affect life. ... I think that man is spiritual in nature, and must look at everything in life with a spiritual eye, in order to fulfill his purpose in life." 🌱

18, at 11:30 a.m., at the Seacoast Repertory Theatre, 125 Bow St., Portsmouth, 433-4472.

• **DORKS IN DUNGEONS PLAYING DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS LIVE** will return to the Players' Ring once a month for the rest of the main stage season at the Players' Ring (105 Marcy St., Portsmouth, playersring.org, 436-8123). Sun., Dec. 30, at 8 p.m. Tickets \$12.

• **BLITHE SPIRIT** comic play on Wed., Nov. 14, at 3 p.m., Thurs., Nov. 15, at 7 p.m.; Fri., Nov. 16, at 7 p.m.; and Sat., Nov. 17, at 7 p.m., at Robert Baines Auditorium, 9 Notre Dame Ave., Manchester, theateknights.com.

• **GIRLS NIGHT: THE MUSI-**

CAL on Thurs., Nov. 15, at 7:30 p.m., at the Capitol Center of the Arts, 44 S. Main St., Concord, 225-1111, ccanh.com. Tickets are \$40-\$52.

• **THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES** shows at the Dana Center (100 St. Anselm Drive, Manchester), Saint Anselm College, on Fri., Nov. 16, at 7 p.m. Featuring Edinburgh, Scotland's Puppet State Theatre. Visit anselm.edu/dana or call 641-7700. Tickets \$28.50.

• **THE PAJAMA GAME** shows at Concord Auditorium (2 Prince St., Concord) on Fri., Nov. 16, at 8 p.m.; Sat., Nov. 17, at 8 p.m.; and Sun., Nov. 18, at 2 p.m., by Concord Community Players.

Tickets \$17, \$14 for students/seniors. Visit communityplayer-sofconcord.org. Call 224-4905.

• **STAGE ONE PRODUCTION DINNER THEATRE: TWICE AROUND THE PARK** on Fri., Nov. 16, at 7:30 p.m.; Sat., Nov. 17, at 7 p.m.; and Sun., Nov. 18, at 11:30 a.m., at Chateau Restaurant and Event Center, 201 Hanover St., Manchester. Call 669-5511 for ticket prices.

• **SING-ALONG SOUND OF MUSIC** shows on Fri., Nov. 16, at 7 p.m., at the Stockbridge Theatre, 44 N. Main St., Derry, stockbridgetheatre.com. Tickets \$15. Call 437-5210.

• **THE NUTCRACKER** presented by the New England Dance

Ensemble on Sat., Nov. 24, at 7 p.m., and Sun., Nov. 25, at 2 p.m., at Windham High School Theatre, 64 London Bridge Road, Windham. Visit NEDE.org, tix.com or call 1-800-595-4TIX.

• **THE NUTCRACKER** at the Palace Theatre, 80 Hanover St., Manchester, on Fri., Nov. 23, at 7:30 p.m.; Sat., Nov. 24, at 11 a.m., 4 p.m., and 7:30 p.m.; and Sun., Nov. 25, at 1 p.m. and 4:30 p.m. Tickets range in price, \$15-\$45.

• **GERALD CHARLES DICKENS** returns to Nashua for the fourth consecutive year to perform his great-great-grandfather's classic, *A Christmas Carol*, at the Crowne Plaza (2

Somerset Parkway, Nashua) on Wed., Nov. 28, at 7 p.m., and Thurs., Nov. 29, at 7 p.m. Diner performance scheduled for Nov. 28; Tickets are \$90 for Nov. 28, \$20 for Nov. 29. Call 882-3371 or 800-583-4583 or visit fortingage.com.

• **THE IMPROVISED SHAKESPEARE COMPANY** takes the stage on Wed., Nov. 28, at 7:30 p.m., at the Capitol Center for the Arts' Spotlight Cafe (44 S. Main St., Concord). Tickets are \$25. Call 225-1111 or visit ccanh.com.

• **HALF 'N HALF 'N HALF** comedy at through Merrimack Repertory Theatre, at the Nancy Donahue Theatre (50 E. Mer-

rimack St., Lowell, 978-654-4678, mrt.org) Nov. 29-Dec. 23. Shows are on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Visit mrt.org for showtimes. Tickets start at \$20.

• **THE BEST CHRISTMAS PAGEANT EVER** on Fri., Nov. 30, at 7 p.m., and Sat., Dec. 1, at 1 p.m., at the Derryfield School, 2108 River Road, Manchester. Reserved seats \$12 for adults, \$10 for students. Purchase at door or call 472-3894. Performed by Bedford Youth Performing Co..

• **THE EIGHT: REINDEER MONOLOGUES** by Jeff Goode comedy at through Merrimack Repertory Theatre, at the Nancy Donahue Theatre (50 E. Mer-