

# The Temple News

TUESDAY, JANUARY 30, 2007

## Alumna captures Darfur with art

*The Qbix Gallery in Old City will feature portraits of the genocide in Darfur, Sudan, by Debra Kapnek, a 1974 grad.*

**CAROLYN STEEVES**

*The Temple News*

Debra Kapnek wants people to act.

Inspired by stories and photographs taken by Brian Steidle, a former U.S. Marine stationed in Darfur, Sudan, the Temple alumna created "Out of Africa," a collection of paintings of the Darfur region in the East African nation, where more than 400,000 people have been killed and 2 million more have been displaced, according to United Nations officials.

Her collection will open here at the Qbix Art Gallery in Old City Feb. 1 and run through Feb. 28.

After hearing Steidle speak about his time in Darfur at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Kapnek was inspired to create the collection of portraits based on Steidle's photographs.

"He challenged the audience to do whatever they thought they could do," Kapnek said.

"After all, how could you know that a genocide is taking place and not do anything?"

A 1974 graduate, Kapnek came to Temple



as an English major. It was not until she took a watercolor painting class in her third year that she thought about an art degree.

Her professor was impressed by the progress she made in one semester and encouraged her to switch majors.

"Temple really fashioned my life in a way that I didn't expect when I started out," Kapnek said.

Later, Kapnek attended George Washington University where she received her master's degree in fine arts.

"I was disappointed not to find teachers that were as good as the ones at Temple," Kapnek said.

Kapnek said she especially enjoys paint-

ing the faces of people whose stories need to be told. It is an "enormous challenge" to paint a portrait of someone who has a story that needs to be told, she said.

"You have to look into someone's eyes and try to figure out what they're feeling and transmit that feeling through paint on canvas."

In "Out of Africa," Kapnek raised awareness by conveying the message of people who

**See GALLERY, page 3**

**From GALLERY, page 1**

are struggling for their lives.

"These are things that warrant our attention and I think any way that we can bring attention is good," Kapnek said.

Kapnek said she believes that portraits personalize a tragedy for the viewer.

"You hear about millions of people being killed, but when you look into someone's eyes who's been right in the middle of it, that personalizes the experience.

"At Temple I learned that learning to paint is learning to see and at some point a painter has to ask herself what it is she wants to focus on," Kapnek said.

"I think what guides you is your gut. You have to figure out what it is you want to say."

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