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For Immediate Media Release:

***“From One Village to Another”* Exhibition at the Southampton Art Gallery & Shop**

*"I do not want **art** for a few any more than **education** for a few, or **freedom** for a few." William Morris*

From November 6 to December 3, 2009, the Southampton Art School, Gallery & Shop are opening their doors and their hearts to host *“From One Village to Another”* - a locally curated exhibit with an international focus. Southampton Art Gallery featured artist Akke (Aggie) Stretch and Gallery Director Aly Boltman have worked together to shape this moving exhibit inspired by Akke’s unforgettable journeys to the remote villages of the Volta region of Ghana, Africa.

Akke and her husband Dr. Neal Stretch were first compelled to visit Ghana after hearing Walter Pimpong, Ghanian leader of International Needs Network (INN), speak of the active slavery in his country. He described the thousands of women, known as “Trokosi”, who had been offered as children to fetish priests as payment for resolving conflicts. The women and their children lived as slaves to the priests in their compounds, were forced to wear long raffia leashes around their necks and were subjected to horrifying sexual, financial and domestic abuse. International Needs Network offered payment for the women, initially in the form of livestock and currency; later in trade for resources such as schools and wells for Ghanian villages. This unusual arrangement has freed thousands of women and children from slavery.

INN set up a ground-breaking school for the freed women in the Volta region, a place where they learn a trade such as baking, hairdressing, batik, beadwork, soap making and sewing, so that they can support their families. It is a beautiful place of spiritual, social, physical rebirth.

In March of 2009, Akke brought paints and canvases to a children’s school in this region. Eva Nilsson, a Swedish photographer, drama instructor and composer, caught the art lesson with her camera. This artistic duo encouraged the Ghanian students to capture the essence of their lives in their village in a new way. A series of canvases and photographs created from this experiment encapsulates the children’s perception of community, resourcefulness, and hope.

“From One Village To Another” is the unveiling of these unique student artworks and Nilsson’s photography. It is complemented by Danny Stretch’s videography which features unforgettable images of life in distant African villages and expresses the team’s pure love of Africa. The exhibit also showcases excerpts from diaries of the local Bruce and Grey County resource teams who give so much of themselves to improve the lives of others. African textiles and artifacts from the region will also be featured, providing both colour and context to this most remarkable exhibit.

In recognition of the world beyond our back door, The Southampton Art School, Gallery & Shop are proud to host this unique show. This rare international collaborative effort is of universal importance. We welcome the public to peek through a local window that offers a unique perspective of a foreign world.

Gala opening Saturday, November 7, 2009 from 2-4 pm. Refreshments will be served! Admission for this exhibition is free. An exquisite hand-dyed batik textile made by one of the freed women of Ghana will be raffled at the end of the exhibit, with all proceeds going towards the INN. Additional donations to the INN during the exhibit are also welcome.

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