



Deb Habib, owner of Seeds of Solidarity with her husband Ricky Baruc, stands in one of the greenhouses holding one of her photographs that will be featured in her family's exhibit, titled "Seeking the Sacred on the Farm," at the UMass Fine Arts Center.

# Sustenance for the soul

'Seeking Sacred on the Farm,' features photography, pottery, mandalas and woodwork by local family

By RICHIE DAVIS

Seeds of Solidarity Farm is known by anyone who's been there not only for vegetables and herbs, but for embracing art and being enveloped by a spiritual sense. Rows of vegetables, surrounding trees, greenhouses and other places around the land are enhanced by portraits of inspiring figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Thich Nhat Hanh, Wally and Juanita Nelson, Wendell Berry, Rachel Carson, and Angela Davis along with quotations from their teachings. The deep connection between growing food and growing sensibility that farmers Ricky Baruc and Deb Habib embrace becomes clearer a few miles away through a new exhibit at the Augusta Savage Gallery. "Seeking Sacred on the Farm," featuring works by Baruc, Habib and their son, Levi Baruch, will be on exhibit at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst campus from Feb. 9 through March 10. There will be a Feb. 9 reception from 5 to 7 p.m. The exhibit includes Baruc's woodwork — primarily meditation benches — as well as pottery and photographs by Habib and mandalas by Baruch. An interactive mandala centerpiece, which visitors can embellish with objects, demonstrates that like their organic farm, this artistic display is a family affair. Woven into the exhibit, in fact, along with photographs capturing views of the 30-acre farm, will be excerpts from a book the couple is writing, "Making Love While Farming: A Field Guide to a Life of Passion and Purpose."

"It's honoring the land, honoring those

SEE EXHIBIT C2



Levi Baruch holding one of his hand-drawn mandalas with his father Ricky Baruc and some of Baruc's wooden furniture in the workshop at their family's Seeds of Solidarity in Orange. Their pieces will be featured with photographs by Baruc's mother, Deb Habib, in "Seeking the Sacred on the Farm" at the UMass Fine Arts Center.



**FAR LEFT:** A detail of a corn inlay on a meditation bench made by Ricky Baruc in his workshop will be featured in "Seeking the Sacred on the Farm."  
**LEFT:** Some of Ricky Baruc's chairs, meditation benches and candle holders will be featured in the exhibit.

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PHOTOS/MATT BURKHARTT



# Brick Church Music Series continues

## Violinist Sirena Huang and pianist Pi-Hsun Shih will perform Feb. 12

By **ANDY CASTILLO**  
Recorder Staff

The First Church of Deerfield's Brick Church Music Series continues Sunday, Feb. 12, featuring violin and piano concertos.

According to Jean Pitman Turner, the concert series' artistic director, Taiwanese-American violinist Sirena Huang, 22, and pianist Pi-Hsun Shih will perform at 3 p.m. inside the historic brick church on Old Main Street.

Beginning at age 4, Huang studied violin at the Hartt School in Hartford, Conn. — the same music school Pi-Hsun Shih teaches at. Currently, she's a scholarship student studying at Juillard.

She has been a featured soloist with the Sao Paulo State Symphony, The Hartt Symphony, and the Mexico State Symphony Orchestra, for whom she served as the principal



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keyboardist.

Shih has also taught at other schools and universities, including Mount Holyoke.

"Both musicians are exceptionally talented and are seasoned performers in Europe, Asia, and the United States," Turner said, noting that "they will be playing music by Stravinsky, Paganini, He Zhan Hao and Chen Gang, Brahms, and Ravel."

The concert series is funded through donations. Following the concert, there will be refreshments held next door at Deerfield Academy's Caswell Library. A \$10 donation at the door is suggested.

For more information, contact Turner at 413-774-2657.

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The First Church of Deerfield in Old Deerfield, also known as the Old Brick Church.

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### EXHIBIT FROM C1

who inspire us who live this life and do this work," says Habib, whose work is primarily for the nonprofit Seeds of Solidarity Foundation. With a mission "to awaken the power among youth, schools and families to grow food everywhere to transform hunger to health and create resilient lives and communities," the foundation brings area teens together each summer as interns to learn about growing food, work in the community building greenhouses, raise bed gardens and teach people how to grow healthful produce themselves.

"Art becomes a way of being more attentive to these things and represent those relationships, those ways of being in the world in creative and ceremonial ways."

She points to the iconic personalities honored by images and writings around the farm as activists who "unite the activism, simplicity and spirited way of being in the world." It may seem hard to imagine that any farmer would have time or energy left to create works of art, but Habib — who has a doctorate from UMass in cultural and curriculum reform — says, "We have to keep doing things to re-nourish ourselves if we're in it for the long haul. Art and being creative definitely feeds the soul, which you need to keep doing other kinds of work. It's a challenge, but that kind of balance is essential if you're going to be in it for it for a long time and live life along the way. You have to make the time. I don't know that it's a choice."

Habib — whose role is in preparing and serving the food for the family, for SOL (Seeds of Leadership) Garden interns — contributes her pottery to the exhibit, which add meaning to the connection with food. She began working with clay as a child, and says, "I always felt that was the place I was drawn."

Baruc's pieces in the exhibit include meditation benches, altars, candle holders and chairs crafted from laurel and birch around the Orange farm and cedar from Montague. His woodworking, using native wood, features inlaid symbols of ground native corn and plants as an expression of his multi-dimensional spiritual practices.

Baruc dropped out of studying marine-biology in college when he had an epiphany — he didn't know how to work with his hands — and turned his focus for the next 30 years to working as a carpenter, woodworker and farmer. "In the forest, I cut cedar trees by hand and then mill them into boards. In the fields, I grow ancient heirloom corn, wheat, sage and tobacco and use these to inlay sacred symbols on meditation benches, altars and furniture. I work with the natural curves that the forest creates to make furniture and art," Baruc said.

The farmer-artist added, "I inlay all my work with crops from the land — the sacred corns we grow, sacred tobacco, sacred sage. They're all really powerful pieces of the farm, mixed with an epoxy."

His benches are designed with various sacred designs such as the Hindu "om" and the lotus along with the use of hot peppers, sage and ancient heirloom Naragansett, Massasoit, Hopi blue or Glass Gem corn kernels ground with tobacco, peppers and more. The merging of these elements combine the two



Ricky Baruc, owner of Seeds of Solidarity with his wife Deb Habib, in his workshop with some of his wooden candle holders as well as other pieces that will be featured in his family's exhibit.

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Some of Ricky Baruc's candle holders in his workshop will be featured with other pieces in his family's exhibit at UMass Fine Art Center.

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worlds of farm and forest.

Baruc, who meditates regularly, just as Habib practices yoga, notes that the physical work of farming is in itself a form of meditation and creativity. He notes that while he didn't grow up doing woodworking or other crafts, "it's really important for my sanity. It balances things out. I love the 'physicalness' of farming, and I love the art process — creating in the head — so the mind has some creativity going on."

In fact, he — like Habib — sees the necessity of fostering that balance between physical work and artwork as a release if farming is going to endure.

"If we talk about the need for more people to be growing food, which is critical. How do we farm in balance, in a way that we're not killing ourselves?" he asks. "In this country, we have a way taking something we love and turning it into a business. In other cultures, in Bali, in Vietnam, there are altars in the fields. It's all artistic. If we're not having time to meditate or time to make art, we'll end up in same place conventional agriculture has taken us."

A 17-year-old Mahar Regional School student, Baruch — whose name has an added H, partially to reclaim the original family spelling

and partially to honor his mother's name — will have several of his pen-and-ink mandalas on display in the exhibit.

One particularly striking wheel, suggested by his father, has a corn theme depicting kernels, leaves and native symbols.

"All the mandalas take on their own form," said Baruch, who has been creating them for the past couple of years. "It's like a meditative process," he says of the both laboring in the fields and creating the intricate spiritual, ritual symbols.

"A lot of shapes I work with, the shapes used in mandalas, are obviously inspired by nature," Baruch

says. "It's a pretty organic process. I rarely have any preconceived concept about what a piece is going to look like."

The organic nature of the work forms another intricate connection with sustainable farming practices.

"I see my work as a connection with what Ricky and Debbie are doing. It all kind of intertwines," he said. His interactive exhibit centerpiece combined with the rest will allow their "pieces (to) radiate out."

Baruch, who visited native reservations in Arizona with his parents and has studied various cultures, says he took an interest in Indian rituals surrounding mandala creation and destruction. "The women take corn meal and white stone, creating pretty intricate designs in front of their home, and throughout the day, it will be destroyed: People step on them, birds pick at corn meal, so by the end of day, it's destroyed. They sweep them away, and the next day, they create more. Creating something and allowing it to be destroyed is definitely interesting to me, and I will try to bring that to the show," Baruch said.

Habib and Baruc see the exhibit as a way of sharing their way of combining sustainable farming and self-nourishing art with rituals that also provide sustenance for the soul.

"It became a great thing to do together," says Habib of sharing the fullness of their lives like the ritual of sharing a meal. The mandala at the center of the exhibit will itself be symbolic of the kind of open circles they use in opening and closing rituals with its SOL Garden interns, and symbolic of the balance they feel is central in life.

"It's reflective of our way of being," Habib adds. "That's part of why we do art, bringing the elements of daily ceremony into our daily lives, and into our work."