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Graphic Art Explores Islam

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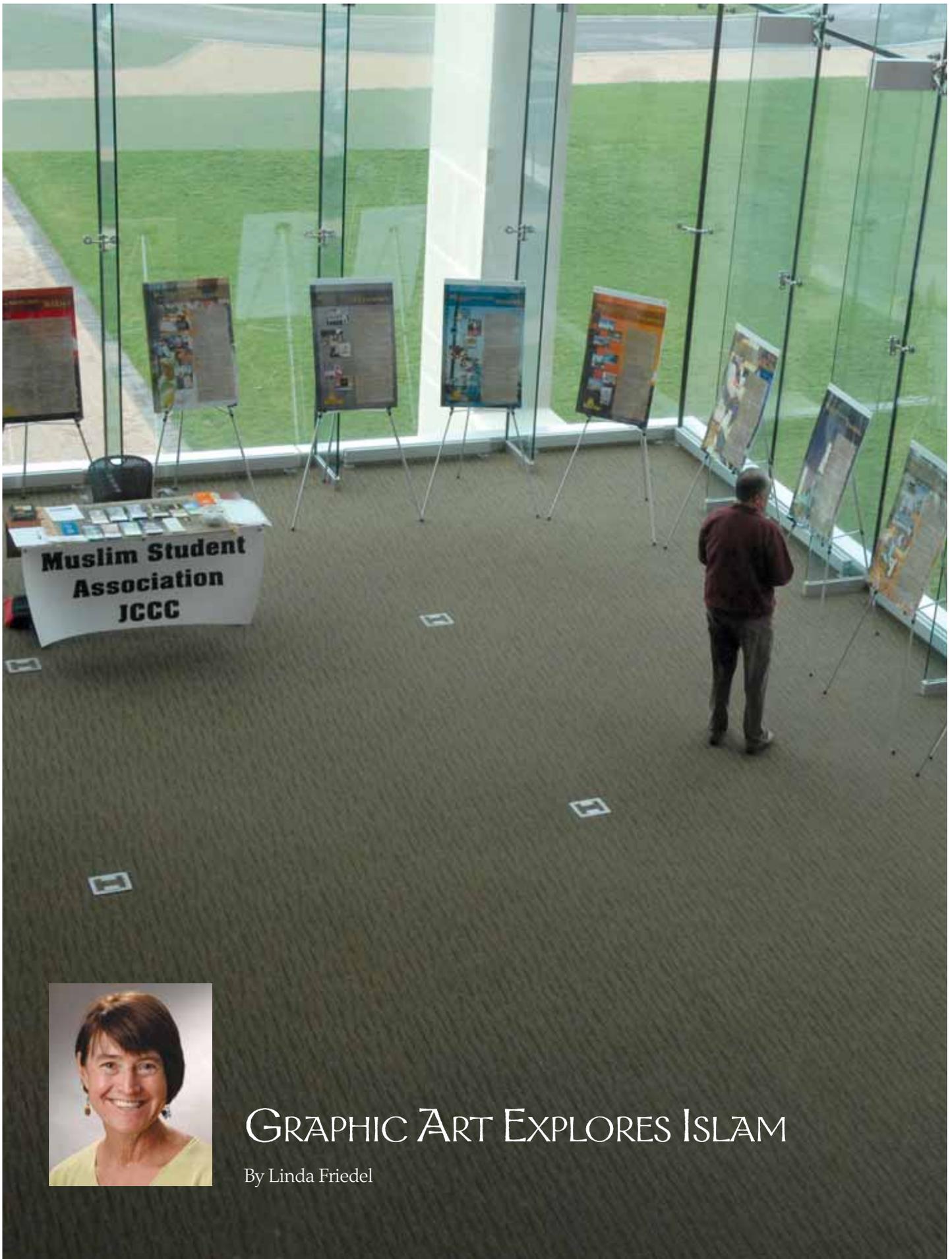
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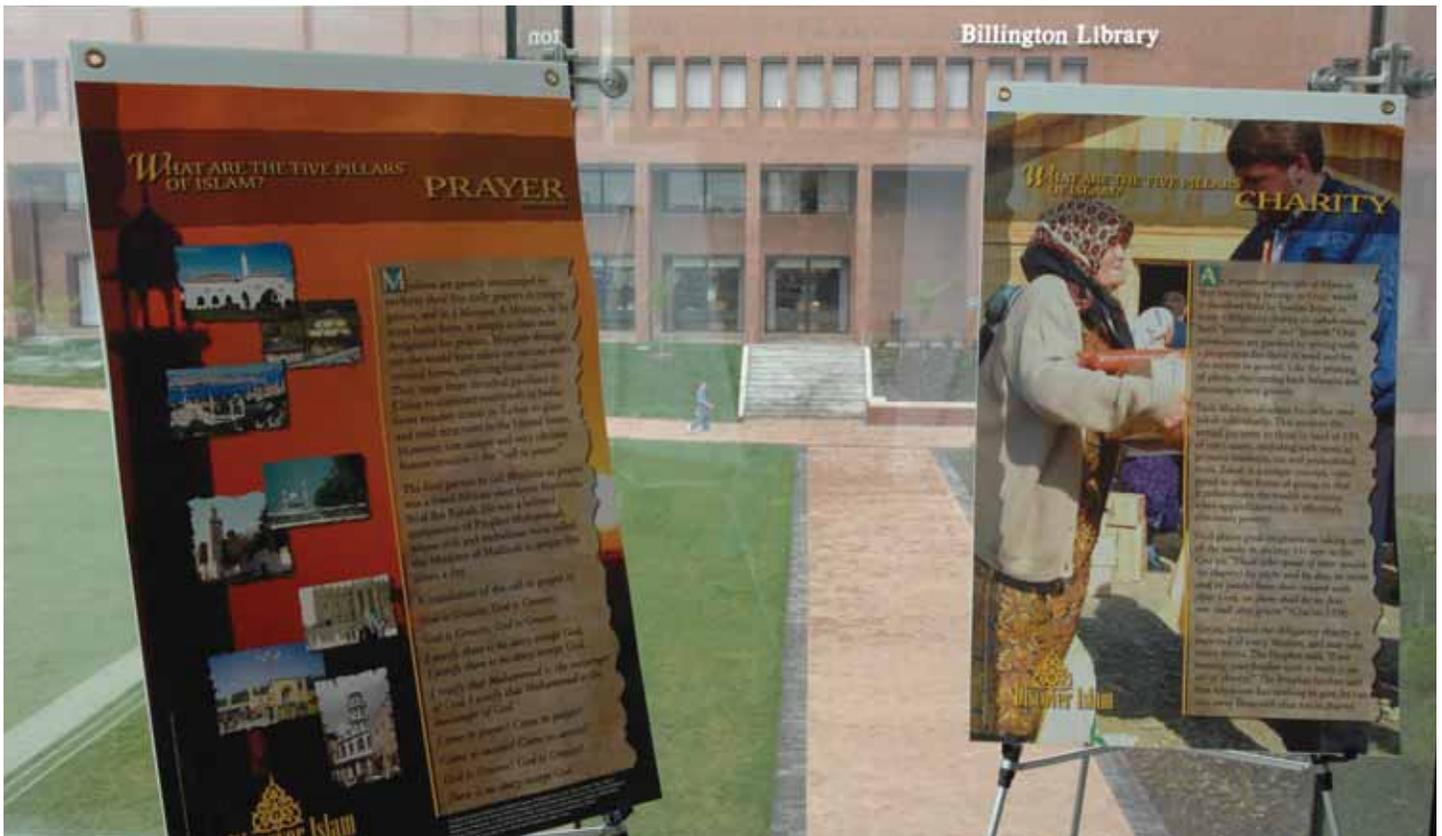
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GRAPHIC ART EXPLORES ISLAM

By Linda Friedel



Something colorful in the Cube caught a professor's eye. She noticed it from her office window in the library.

"It looked like some kind of poster presentation," said Kathryn Byrne, assistant professor in the Writing Center. "I had no idea."

Curiosity motivated Byrne and student Bethany Weida, Shawnee, to visit the mysterious display one afternoon in April.

What Byrne and Weida found in 270 RC brought them closer to an understanding of another faith and culture.

From 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. April 22 through 24, 2008, the Muslim Student Association sponsored a gallery of Islamic graphic art. Scores of colorful posters with text answering questions about Islam filled the glass room.

Weida said she was born and raised Catholic.

"It's a lot more similar to my faith than I ever thought," Weida said. "It was a lot of background and a lot of faith."

Bilal Alnahass, president of the Muslim Student Association, helped to create the exhibit, saying he first saw the posters in the New York subway in 2003.

"I was very impressed," he said. "It's the amount of work put into them."

Each poster featured collages of Islam life and culture, posing questions and answers about Islam. The texts explained Islamic dress codes, women's rights, family values, history, educational influences in sciences and math, virtues and much more.

"You would hope to educate people about what Islam is," said Alnahass. "It's very well presented. It's not offensive to any religion."

The Muslim Student Association hosted an informational table in the Commons building weekly last year, educating students, faculty and staff on Islam. The Islamic graphic art display was another effort in a series of speakers and programs the organization sponsored.

"We wanted to try a new thing," said Mudassar Muhammad, vice president of the association. "We just want to remove the misconceptions about Islam."

Muhammad said Islam is not portrayed fairly in the media.

"That's not who we are," he said.

He said the organization wants to educate the public about Islam. The posters fused art with educational text.

"Most people don't know that algebra came from the Muslim world," Muhammad said.

Byrne said most anyone would benefit from experiencing the graphic exhibit.

"It breaks down barriers," she said. "It erases some of the social myths that are propagated through the press and around the halls."

With 8.5 million Muslims in the United States today, Alnahass said Americans need to understand not only Islam, but many cultures.

"We [Muslims] are part of it, the American culture, whether people like it or not," Alnahass said. "We're here to stay."