

## E. David Rabhan (1926–2024)

*Artist, Author, Veteran, Businessman*

### Prison Art

In September 1979, E. David Rabhan was imprisoned in Tehran under suspicion of espionage. He spent nearly 11 years confined to a small cell and occasionally tortured. Early in his captivity, Rabhan sketched a pen-and-ink portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini on a scrap of newspaper during a prison tour. When the warden saw the drawing, he ordered Rabhan to create a painting of the warden's son, who was killed in fighting.

This act set a precedent: other guards began making similar demands, bringing art supplies in exchange for finished works. Despite the harshness of his imprisonment, Rabhan saved leftover art materials to create works for himself. His main subjects were his fellow prisoners.

Most of the individuals depicted in the works displayed here were executed during Rabhan's internment. A particularly striking piece, just 5x7 inches in size, features 177 faces - Rabhan's visual record of the prisoners executed during his confinement.

Rabhan was released in August 1990, thanks in large part to the efforts of former President Jimmy Carter. Their personal friendship, ironically, was one of the factors that had led to Rabhan's arrest in Iran.

This exhibit serves as a compelling example of the human capacity to process profound and extreme experiences through art. Rabhan's works, created under unimaginable conditions, reflect not only the resilience of his spirit but also the universal need to document, understand, and endure the darkest moments of life. The Cherokee County Arts Council is proud to provide a home for this unique collection, ensuring that Rabhan's art and the story behind it continues to inspire all who encounter it.

