



Minneapolis Institute of Art

**When Home Won't
Let You Stay**
Art and Migration
A Deep Dive into Six Artworks

MIA

When Home Won't Let You Stay

Art and Migration

February 23–May 24, 2020

This guide is designed to encourage you to look closely at and think deeply about six artworks featured in the special exhibition, “When Home Won't Let You Stay: Art and Migration.”

Feel free to use the guide on your own or in a group before, during, or even after your visit to the exhibition. To promote critical thinking about migration, immigration,

and the displacement of people today, as well as contemporary artists' responses to these global issues, each entry features a short narrative and a set of questions. These prompts begin with close looking and an invitation to describe the artwork. More complex questions follow.

When Home Won't Let You Stay: Art and Migration

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Cover: Aliza Nisenbaum, *Veronica, Marissa, and Gustavo (detail)*, 2013,
oil on linen, 51 x 33 inches (129.5 x 83.8 cm), Collection of Josh Lilley, London.
Courtesy the artist; Anton Kern Gallery, New York; and Mary Mary, Glasgow.
© Aliza Nisenbaum

Introduction

What do you think about when you hear the word migration? What does the word mean to you in the context of these divisive and politically uncertain times, especially in the United States?

Migration—the movement of people and cultures—is a story of who we are and how we got here over time. Millions of people move for many reasons, from fleeing war and religious persecution to seeking better education or economic security. The United Nations estimates that one out of every seven people in the world is an international or internal migrant who moves by choice or by force. In this era of mass migration, and amid ongoing debates about it, “When Home Won’t Let You Stay: Art and Migration” considers how contemporary artists are responding to the migration and displacement of people worldwide. Their artworks contribute to a larger conversation, as described by the educational organization

Re-imagining Migration, around understanding migration as a shared condition of our past, present, and future and also as a means to develop the knowledge and empathy that sustain inclusive, welcoming communities.

The exhibition borrows its title from a poem, *Home*, by Warsan Shire, a Somali-British poet who gives voice to the experiences of refugees. Through artworks made since 2000 by 20 artists born in more than a dozen countries, this exhibition offers diverse artistic responses to migration, ranging from personal accounts to poetic meditations. By considering place and movement together, “When Home Won’t Let You Stay: Art and Migration” defines migration as a world-transforming force that continues to shape our region, nation, and world.

Camilo Ontiveros, *Temporary Storage: The Belongings of Juan Manuel Montes*

Bed, television, books, chairs, suits, karate uniform, basketball, tennis racket. These and other items form a towering, tilting bundle of belongings. This is the stuff of a life left behind by a young man deported to Mexico.

Temporary Storage: The Belongings of Juan Manuel Montes refers to the February 2017 deportation of Juan Manuel Montes, believed to be the first DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) recipient to be removed from the United States under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Camilo Ontiveros collects materials of migrant experiences and repurposes them into sculptures, installations, and performances. He draws attention to issues of movement, value, and exchange, especially between the United States and Mexico. Ontiveros migrated to the United States from Mexico as a teenager; since 1993, he has lived in southern California. He recalls seeing himself in Montes's story. "I am not interested in migration as an abstract subject, but as a lived experience," he says, "whether it be in the actual belongings of someone who has been deported or in an engagement with the policies that determine what is and is not possible for immigrant life."

This sculpture presents the possessions left behind by Juan Manuel Montes in his bedroom. Ontiveros made the sculpture with the permission of Montes's mother, who lent him the possessions. He first explored the idea of binding possessions together to tell a story after a period of homelessness during which he tied together his own belongings.

Questions

Look closely at the sculpture. What do you see? What, if anything, does this collection of stuff bound together by ropes make you think about? Why? How? In what ways?

How do you feel when you look at this sculpture? What about it makes you feel this way?

The sculpture binds together all of the possessions of Juan Manuel Montes, who was sent back to Mexico despite laws to protect his status in the United States. How does this information change how you feel about this sculpture? How does this sculpture help to ensure that human lives remain central to the current DACA debate?

Why do you suppose the artist displayed Montes's belongings in this way? Imagine how the sculpture would look/read differently if Ontiveros had just piled the stuff on the floor. How would your experience change? How would its emotional content change?

Though stationary, how does this sculpture evoke the theme of transit? The concept of borders can mean more than just borders between countries. How do you think the act of gathering Montes's possessions and displaying them in an art museum addresses the theme of borders?



Camilo Ontiveros, *Temporary Storage: The Belongings of Juan Manuel Montes*, 2009, 2017
Installation view, *Home—So Different, So Appealing*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017
Courtesy Los Angeles County Museum of Art
© Camilo Ontiveros, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Do Ho Suh, *Hub-2, Breakfast Corner*, 260-7, Sungbook-Dong, Sungbo-Ku, Seoul, Korea

Do Ho Suh, a Korean-born artist who now splits his time between Europe and the United States, creates sculptures that invite participants to experience spaces he has called home. In the series to which this sculpture belongs, Suh recreates from memory the rooms, corridors, and thresholds from places he has lived. The artworks explore the concept of home and how memories attach to physical space.

Suh's exploration of home and memory led him to recreate these spaces on a 1-to-1 scale from fabric. They are hand stitched using a traditional Korean sewing method and supported by thin metal rods. Suh uses translucent, delicate fabric to echo the fragility of memories themselves.

The transparency also evokes the layered notions of home. Over time, many people inhabit a single place, leaving behind some traces of their life. Home, then, is a changing condition. The sculptures give material form to this idea and to the sensation of longing for home as a second skin.

Suh says:

At some point in your life, you have to leave your home. And whenever you go back, it's just not the same home anymore. . . . I didn't want to sit down and cry for home. I wanted to more actively deal with these issues of longing. I decided not to be sad about it. I just want to go with it. I just want to carry that with me, you know, all the time.

Questions

Look closely at this life-sized sculpture constructed by Do Ho Suh using only polyester fabric supported by stainless-steel poles. Describe it. What details do you notice? What does it remind you of? Why or how? What do you wonder about it?

The sculpture is part of a series the artist made of places he has lived. Why do you think he might have chosen to make it out of transparent fabric? How would you choose to represent the idea of memories? Why?

After you have looked closely, imagine the experience of walking inside the structure, modeled after the corner room of one of Do Ho Suh's homes in South Korea. (At the museum you can actually walk into it and others.) Imagine looking through the colorful fabric. How might it feel to experience this? Why? What are you thinking about as you imagine this? How do the scale and materials help to reinforce that this structure refers to an individual's lived experience?

Imagine recreating some aspect of a place you call or once called home, or another place where you have spent time. What memories does that space evoke? What aspects of that space would you create? Why?

The concept of home is complex. Many people are forced to leave their physical homes or homelands because of war, violence, intolerance, environmental disasters, and other causes. If you have migrated, how has migration changed or informed your ideas about home? What does home mean to you today? If you have not migrated, how does thinking about home in the context of migration challenge your notions about the meaning of home? What questions do you have?



Do Ho Suh, *Hub-2, Breakfast Corner, 260-7, Sungbook-Dong, Sungbo-Ku, Seoul, Korea, 2018*
Polyester fabric and stainless steel
8 feet 10⁵/₁₆ inches × 11 feet 8⁷/₁₆ inches × 10 feet 8⁷/₁₆ inches (270.8 × 357 × 326.3 cm)
Courtesy the artist and Lehmann Maupin, New York, Hong Kong, and Seoul
© Do Ho Suh

Mona Hatoum, *Exodus II*

Throughout her career, Mona Hatoum has viewed identity as a moving, dynamic process of becoming, rather than as a fixed quality. A British Palestinian born in Lebanon, she was stranded in London when Lebanon's civil war of 1975–90 broke out. Unable to return home, she became doubly exiled in the United Kingdom.

Hatoum's art often refers to the sense of dislocation that comes from her family's history. She incorporates everyday or found objects to invite and inspire unusual, and sometimes uncomfortable, experiences. It is important to her that people experience her artworks physically; indeed, she often chooses materials for their ability to repulse viewers.

In *Exodus II*, two leather suitcases sit side by side, linked by a mass of human hair emerging from holes. For Hatoum, hair is an intimate symbol of the body that can refer to waste, decay, life, and rituals of presentation. The strands of hair, which appear tangled and uncontrollable, establish a bodily link between the suitcases. Suitcases suggest departure, whether imminent or historical. Together, the suitcases and hair deliberately evoke a state of unease.

Hatoum intentionally layers her works with multiple meanings. She believes that "each person is free to understand what I do in the light of who they are and where they stand." *Exodus II* offers several possible interpretations, including those involving exile, refugee or forced migration, deportation, and human trafficking.

We are left to wonder about the contents of the suitcases. What decisions went into their selection, and what had to be left behind? The anxiety Hatoum suggests is heightened by unanswered questions for the unseen travelers—about the conditions of the journey ahead and their state upon arrival.

Questions

Describe this sculpture. What do you see? How do you feel when looking at this? What about the sculpture, your personal experiences, or both, make you feel this way?

Mona Hatoum chooses materials that elicit a physical reaction from viewers. What materials do you see in this sculpture? Imagine how they might feel—the leather surface of the suitcases, the metal locks, the hair. Imagine what they might smell like. Why do you suppose she might seek a visceral reaction? Think about the sensations you experience when confronted by things that make you uncomfortable.

Hatoum's artwork is called *Exodus II*, suggestive of a departure. How does this title inform your experience of the sculpture? What does the word *exodus* mean to you? If the word is new to you, look it up and consider the ways it might contribute to your understanding of this sculpture. What might the number *II* mean?

The discomfort of Hatoum's sculpture derives in part from a lack of contextual information for the suitcases and the hair. Imagine a human story of departure related to these suitcases. Who is departing? What is in the suitcases? Why these things? What is the journey like? Where are they heading? Do they arrive there? If yes, what is their experience like at the destination? What stories (news, social media, fiction, or other) have influenced or inspired your story?



Mona Hatoum, *Exodus II*, 2002
Compressed card, leather, metal, and human hair
19¾ × 26 × 26 inches (50 × 66 × 66 cm)
Private collection
Courtesy Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin
Photo: Sofia Bertilsson © Mona Hatoum

Xaviera Simmons, *Sundown* (Number Twelve)

Xaviera Simmons's art confronts the complexities of anti-Black racism in the United States today and the many ways racism permeates ideas of race, whiteness, and the myths of the nation. By addressing experiences and memories related to the African diaspora, she reminds viewers not only of the history of forced migration and the enslavement of Africans, but also of the legacies of slavery, colonialism, segregation, and migration.

Simmons explains, "Black people, especially those who descend from American chattel slavery, have been in a constant state of migration since the country's formation." Her series *Sundown* (2018–present) connects the forced international kidnapping of Africans to the domestic migrations of individuals who descended from enslaved people in the United States. The series refers to "sundown towns," places known to be unsafe for Black Americans after dark for fear of white terrorism.

In this photograph, the main character poses with an archival photograph of Black U.S. migrants taken during the Great Migration (1890–1930), when 1.8 million Black people moved first from the rural to the urban South, and later to the North and Midwest. Her patterned floral dress and the botanical backdrop reference "colonial" fashion as reimagined in the early 1980s and popularized again today. A blonde wig and a West African mask obscure her identity; for Simmons, the mask conveys the idea of Africa as a commodity and the role of some Africans as traders of enslaved people.

Questions

Look closely at this photograph. Describe what you see. Try to avoid interpretation while you make your initial description. Focus on what you see.

Next, consider how you felt as you examined the image and named what you noticed. How did you feel? What about the picture made you feel this way? What, if anything, does it remind you of. What about it reminds you of this? What did you wonder about?

The photograph shows a character in a floral dress against a decorative backdrop. She hides her face behind a West African mask, a type the artist associates with the idea of Africa as a commodity. The photo she holds shows Black U.S. migrants during the Great Migration (1890–1930). Overall, the picture alludes to the legacies of colonialism and American slavery. How does this knowledge confirm or change how you originally saw and thought about the artwork?

Why do you think it is important to include the forced migration of enslaved Africans in the U.S. conversation around migration today?



Xaviera Simmons, *Sundown (Number Twelve)*, 2018
Chromogenic color print
60 × 45 inches (152.4 × 114.3 cm)
The Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. Jeanne L. Wasserman
Art Acquisition Fund and Anonymous Acquisition Fund
Courtesy the artist and David Castillo Gallery, Miami Beach
© Xaviera Simmons

Carlos Motta, *The Crossing*

Carlos Motta's installation, *The Crossing*, presents video portraits of LGBTQI+ refugees who describe their experiences before, during, and after the exodus from their respective homelands to the Netherlands. His subjects—Anwar, Behnam, Butterfly, Faysal, Zizi, and Raneen—narrate their stories, which demonstrate the hardships they have endured in the face of homophobia and transphobia, especially in cultures where the expression of non-normative genders and sexualities is nearly impossible. Even in refugee camps, they experienced discrimination by other refugees.

This reality is significant to Motta, who identifies as a queer Colombian migrant. Motta himself says he has often “been made to feel as an undesired and threatening and foreign other. I am interested in engaging with these politics to demonstrate the intersectional issues that are at stake.” His subjects’ agency over the content of their stories is an important aspect. In the videos, they relate harrowing moments of struggle and survival and complicated relationships to home and family.

Questions

This discussion will work best in the exhibition at Mia.

Carlos Motta's art installation explores migration narratives of LGBTQI+ refugees. What do you see? What do the words and images suggest to you about Motta's point of view? Do you read this installation as more positive or more negative? Or neutral? What do you see that informs your opinion? What other factors or experiences inform your perspective?

What do you notice about the connection between the words and image on each screen? Why do you think interviewees might have chosen to be depicted in the way they are?

Think about the migration stories you see and hear on the news and social media. What images do you see? What messages do you hear? How do you respond? How often do you see or hear the migration stories of LGBTQI+ refugees? Why do you suppose these stories remain largely untold or neglected by the media? How might sharing more migration stories of global LGBTQI+ people contribute to the conversation?

Some people in these videos experienced discrimination not only in their home countries, but also in refugee camps. Think about your own experiences. When, if ever, have you been afraid to express yourself? Did you ever have to leave one place in the hopes of finding safety or acceptance in another? Did you find it? Or have you wished you could leave? What prevented you?

We often talk about borders in terms of land barriers between nations or populations. In what ways do the people in these videos live on other, invisible kinds of borders? What about you? Within your culture, do you exist on any borders?



Carlos Motta, *The Crossing*, 2017
 Installation view, Carlos Motta: *The Crossing*, Stedelijk Museum,
 Amsterdam, 2017-18
 Courtesy the artist; Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon; Galeria Vermelho,
 São Paulo; mor charpentier, Paris; and P•P•O•W Gallery, New York
 © Carlos Motta

Aliza Nisenbaum, *Veronica, Marissa, and Gustavo*

For Aliza Nisenbaum, who was born in Mexico City, paying attention can be a political act. Since 2012, she has focused her painting practice on individuals and communities who are frequently left out of art history and its institutions. “I’m interested in the politics of visibility—who and why someone is depicted,” she writes.

The artist’s commitment to recognizing the humanity of individuals through intensive, face-to-face interactions is evident in this painting. It is part of an evolving family portrait of Veronica and Gustavo, who immigrated from Mexico in the 1990s and settled in Queens, where they had their daughter Marissa. Nisenbaum connected with them in 2012, while teaching an English language class at Immigrant Movement International, a community space in Queens, New York.

Nisenbaum emphasizes the everyday life, tenderness, and repose of her sitters, with a focus on the patterns and textures of their interior surroundings. The paintings are at once representational and highly subjective. In this portrait, Marissa and Veronica relax on Gustavo. Their comfort level—with one another and with the artist—is expressed in the way their bodies intertwine.

Nisenbaum builds trust and comfort with the sitters over time, striving toward a heightened sense of self-awareness for her and her subjects. She also engages in fair economic exchanges, including compensating the subjects for their time. To this day, the earliest portraits Nisenbaum made of Veronica and Gustavo hang in their apartment in Queens.

Questions

Look closely at this family portrait of Veronica, Marissa, and Gustavo. Describe the painting. What do you see? How would you describe the relationship between the father, mother, and teenage daughter? What do you see that makes you say that?

Painter Aliza Nisenbaum gets to know her subjects deeply through conversation and time spent with them. She aims to include aspects of their everyday lives. With this in mind, what do you think she wants to convey about them through this portrait? What do you see that makes you say so?

Nisenbaum has said that paying attention to someone can be a political act. What do you suppose she means by this? Why might this be important, especially within larger conversations around migration today? Consider that she chooses to get to know and represent subjects who are generally underrepresented in art and often overlooked in general. She also compensates her subjects for the time spent painting their portraits. Why is this important?



Aliza Nisenbaum, *Veronica, Marissa, and Gustavo*, 2013
Oil on linen
51 x 33 inches (129.5 x 83.8 cm)
Collection of Josh Lilley, London
Courtesy the artist; Anton Kern Gallery, New York; and
Mary Mary, Glasgow.
© Aliza Nisenbaum

Conclusion

“When Home Won’t Let You Stay: Art and Migration” grapples with core questions related to historic and current events. As you facilitate discussions about these artworks in the classroom or at the museum, we invite you to consider:

What role does art play in today’s evolving understanding of migration?

What can this project add to the current conversation?

What does contemporary art offer that other forms of information and illustration cannot?

Who does this exhibition serve?

What is the role of art institutions in confronting immigration issues?

For additional teaching and learning resources from Mia partners, visit:

[Advocates for Human Rights Curriculum—Energy of a Nation: Immigrants in America](#)

[Re-imagining Migration](#)

[Your Story, Our Story](#), a storytelling project of the Tenement Museum, New York