

For Those Who Couldn't Cross the Sea



FOR THOSE WHO COULDN'T CROSS THE SEA

For Those Who Couldn't Cross the Sea is a multidisciplinary group exhibition that features the works of five Middle Eastern artists. The exhibition reflects on the experiences of refugees and migrants, as well as the challenges they face in their search for a new home. The aim of the exhibition is to build empathy and highlight patterns of trauma, erasure, identities, belonging, and home.

Adel Abidin (IQ/FI)

Immigration Services (2023)

Multidisciplinary installation

(Commissioned by the Nordic House in Reykjavik, Iceland)

Ahmed Umar (SD/NO)

If you no longer have a family, make your own in clay (2013)

Installation/performance

Ibi Ibrahim (YE/US)

Arrival (2019) duration: 6'30''

What is the first thing you will do when the war ends? (2020) duration:13'29''

Video works

Thana Faroq (YE/NL)

I don't recognize me in the shadows (2020)

How shall we greet the sun (2022)

Photographic / text works

Pinar Öğrenci (TR/DE)

Only dead fish go with the flow (2017) duration:7'08''

The nameless and the homeless stand side by side here (2022) duration:6'58''

Site-specific multi-channel video installation

CURATOR

Elham Fakouri

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Janosch Bela Kratz



ADEL ABIDIN (IQ/FI)

IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Immigration Services, a multidisciplinary art installation, is a statement on the challenges faced by asylum seekers in Finland. Through a series of illustrated drawings and practical tips, Abidin provides a window into the struggles these new arrivals face in obtaining legal permits to stay in the country.

The artwork goes beyond the visual. With the valuable contributions of journalist and activist Outi Popp, the real-life experiences of refugees in Finland are brought to the forefront. These experiences are based on responses extracted from official documents formulated by the personnel of the Finnish Immigration Service, providing an unflinching glimpse into the bureaucracy and complexities of the system.

With Immigration Services, Abidin invites viewers to engage with this urgent issue and to confront the harsh realities facing those seeking refuge in a foreign land. Immigration Services is more than just an art installation; it is a powerful campaign that seeks to raise awareness, spark conversation, and advocate for change.

Through a unique combination of 18 A0 size prints and one-channel animation video installation, viewers are invited to engage with the struggles and challenges facing Iraqi asylum seekers in Finland.



The posters are a visual feast, featuring practical tips and silhouette illustrations in both Arabic and English. Each poster is carefully crafted to offer guidance and support for newcomers, helping them navigate the complex process of obtaining legal permits to stay in the country.

The animation video installation, on the other hand, takes viewers on a journey through the airport-style announcement, where an animated figure recites the tips in both Arabic and English. This immersive experience is designed to engage and inspire viewers, and to encourage them to take action in support of the refugee community.

By blending art and advocacy, Immigration Services is a testament to the transformative power of creativity. It invites viewers to be part of a movement for change, to raise their voices and demand justice and equality for all. This installation is a call to action, a powerful reminder that art can make a difference in the world.

Credits:

Outi Popp

- Providing facts of real refugee cases.

Catrina Gregory - English copyeditor.

Mazin Al-Taai - Arabic copyeditor.

Sam Shingler - Video & post-production.

Commissioned by The Nordic House in Reykjavík



AHMED UMAR (SD/NO)

IF YOU NO LONGER HAVE A FAMILY, MAKE YOUR OWN IN CLAY



This participatory performance is inspired by a local saying from Sudan (where the artist Ahmed Umar grew up), which was used to express the disappointment and frustration that relatives can cause.

Essentially, it could be translated as:
"Sometimes it is better to have relatives
in clay than in flesh."

Ahmed created this performance after losing contact with members of his family and friends following the announcement of his sexuality in 2013. Homosexuality is forbidden in Sudan, and individuals who identify as homosexual are subject to violence and death according to the law. As a result, Ahmed had to leave his home for another country where he could live in safety.

At that time, Ahmed accounted for everyone who boycotted or bullied him for his sexuality throughout his life and turned them all into clay. In this performance, Ahmed echoes this action by inviting the audience to also mold their feelings as they wish using clay.



IBI IBRAHIM (YE/US)

ARRIVAL

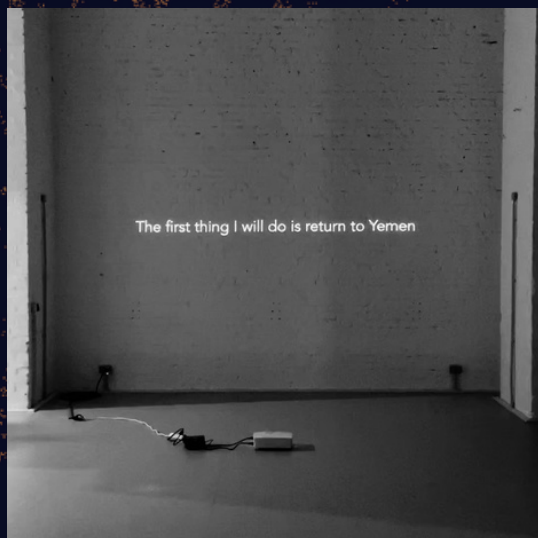
In Arrival, four Yemeni women living in the diaspora are asked: what does it mean to come home?

Those women were outside of Yemen when the war erupted. Five years later, they remain unable to return; each for her own reason.

The footage of a drive through Sana'a in a busy afternoon was made in winter 2018 by the artist himself who at the time has managed to return home after four years of being away.



WHAT IS THE FIRST THING YOU WILL DO WHEN THE WAR ENDS?



One question is directed to 100 Yemeni citizens. The responses offer a glimpse into what everyday Yemenis want and hope for. The questioned one hundred persons represent different aspect of today's Yemeni society; keeping in mind those living in the diaspora as a result of the ongoing war and conflict.

What is the first thing you will do when the war ends?
Installation Shot, Soma Art Space, Berlin, October 2021



THANA FAROQ (YE/NL)

I DON'T RECOGNIZE ME IN THE SHADOWS

HOW SHALL WE GREET THE SUN

This project explores Thana's journey leaving war-torn Yemen and experiencing the asylum in the Netherlands. She made this work to figure out how everything happened – to figure out the war, the escape, the transition, and the unfamiliar.

It's not easy to talk about trauma while you're living in it because you can't recognize it.

Creating this work enabled her to tackle the trauma and to confront it her own terms. The images and the words serve as a record, a healing method to register and validate her emotions and experiences during the transition into the unknown.

No body leaves home
unless home is a mouth of
a shark

From the photo series: "I Don't Recognize Me In the Shadows"
Statement written by Hellen, one of the participants that shared their stories with Thana Farooq

"I wanted to offer my own version of the story, one that is infused with my resilient spirit_unbroken, unfailing and devoid of self-pity. I wanted to climb the fences, and I did"

Throughout this journey, Thana took on many roles – She is the storyteller, the photographer, and the person who has gone through these experiences of displacement and asylum. It is empowering to tell your own story to the world. It is liberating. She was not alone and so she hoped to visually articulate people's struggles to leave countries where conditions of violence, war, and aggression are prevalent. She focused on reflections of personal moments including handwritten testimonies that capture the hopes, fears, dreams, and struggles.



PINAR ÖĞRENCİ (TR/DE)

THE NAMELESS AND THE HOMELESS STAND SIDE BY SIDE HERE

The video installation is about those who cannot be mourned while living or after their death, or those whose lives are not deemed worthy of mourning by any other definition. The focus is on the 'Cemetery of the Nameless' in the city of Van where the artist was born and grew up, and the 'Earthquake Houses' next to it.

It questions an equal and mournable life for both refugees and migrants. While the lifeless bodies of refugees, mostly Afghan, who froze to death on the roads, are swept to the lake shore with the snow melting in the spring, some of them who were able to cross the mountains and reach the city, disappear when they try to cross Van Lake by boat.

Refugees, whose forensic medicine registration number is written on their gravestones instead of their names are left without graves and visitors, so to speak.

Earthquake survivors living in stuffy shelters without infrastructure just across the cemetery are roughly the only visitors to the graves.

After escaping from the armed conflict environment of the 90s and settling in Van, the earthquake survivor women of Ağrı and Hakkari, who became homeless once again in the 2011 earthquake, create a projection screen by sewing tissue papers together, which turns into a canvas on which the fragile lives of the homeless and the destitute are reflected.

While the definition of 'deceased' in the sound of 'selâ' accompanying the video refers to the names of the disappeared refugees, the paper tissues tied together with rough stitches symbolize the lives that cannot be mourned and the bonds broken by violence.



ONLY DEAD FISH GO WITH THE FLOW



In the video installation titled 'only dead fish go with the flow', Öğrenci depicts the migration of 'pearl mullet' who leave Lake Van for freshwaters every year in spring time to lay eggs, because they can't reproduce in alkaline water of the lake.

Every year, around mid-April when waters start warming up, the mullets start migrating towards river mouths and try to adjust their body temperatures to the fresh water. From May on, they start their difficult journey into the streams and swimming upstream, develop skills such as flying in order to overcome obstacles till end of June.

Öğrenci attempts to approach notions of sustaining one's species, survival struggle, resistance, migration and forced migration through a nature metaphor.

"Only Dead Fish Go With the Flow"
installation image from Agah Uğur Collection part of Last
Acquisitions exhibition, Istanbul, 2019



I want to go home, but home is the mouth of a shark.
Home is the barrel of the gun and no one would leave home unless home
chased you to the shore.
Unless home told you to quicken your legs, leave your clothes behind, crawl through the
desert, wade through the oceans,
drown
save
be hungry
beg
forget pride.
your survival is more important. No one leaves home until home is a sweaty
voice in your ear- saying leave.
(Warsan Shire)

