

**The Boston ICA Exhibit, a Tour Through the Migration Crisis**

By Carlos Lopez

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“Aww, that’s cute. They connected all the countries through yarn.” “…Oh, it’s barbed wire.”

These were my first thoughts as I saw the introductory work of art in the exhibition *When Home Won’t Let You Stay* in the ICA in Boston. When most of us think of home, we think of a welcoming place, a safe haven, to which you can always retreat, and this exhibit did an amazing job demonstrating that this is far from the norm.

The specific art piece to which I reacted was titled “Woven Chronicle” and it serves as the thesis for the whole exhibition since it presents us to the conflicting ideas that are interlaced throughout. For example, the entire map of the world is connected by cables, but rather than connecting, these cables serve as borders between these nations. They are depicted as barbed wires since despite us becoming more globalized than ever before, we are also becoming more and more divided and hostile to outsiders to the point where some of us don’t even see them as people anymore. This is emphasized and re-emphasized within certain art pieces such as in Richard Mosse’s film “Incoming” which was filmed with a thermal camera, the same one the military uses to detect the heat signals of the enemy. The immigrants, the people running for their lives, are the enemies here. They’re the invading outsiders to the viewer and to the people who own the land. However, at the same time, you see the immigrants through desperate imagery such as in overcrowded boats carrying thousands of them, children wandering alone without adult supervision, and people in body bags. All of this imagery is prevalent throughout the exhibition, and for this specific piece, it is all displayed in a completely dark room with surround sound and three screens to simultaneously parallel a military debriefing and to not let you miss a single detail of all the hardship this “enemy” is going through. The juxtaposition of these perspectives really drives in the point to the extent that it stabs you through the heart.

However, the exhibit does not limit itself by only showing us the current situation of migration. At several points throughout the exhibit, you can see the past stories of individuals being told through the art pieces and the viewer is then encouraged to fill in the blanks. Take into account Kader Attia’s “La Mer Morte.” Unlike many other art pieces, this specific piece does not limit itself to a traditional method of art. Although you might consider it a sculpture, the reality is that it is just a bunch of clothing thrown about which might disarm viewers at first glance. However, the true impact and artistic sense of the piece comes from the implication that the clothing conveys. Men, women, mothers, fathers, children, dead, and all that remains from them are the clothing they left behind. There’s not even a memory left of them, for they belonged nowhere. However, each of them had a story to tell, their own set of experiences, their own personal journey. Rather than considering the struggles of migrants in their journey, and the alienation we can feel towards them, this piece considers something else the end result of our constant animosity towards these people and the past tragedies that have already happened.

The point of an art exhibition is to make us think and reflect on the message it is trying to convey, and I can guarantee you that this exhibit accomplishes that. As a matter of fact, I think it goes beyond and through all this art, guides us to the conclusion that if we understand that these migrants that have no home are people just like you and me, trying to survive and are just looking for a place to belong to, then we can break down these walls and borders that we put up and really help our fellow man when he is in need.