



By Susan Noyes PLATT

Migration! What an ongoing catastrophe today. People drowning by the hundreds in the Mediterranean trying to get to Europe, people stranded in Calais trying to reach the UK; refugees stuck on the Island of Lesbos or in Northern Greece for years. And in the UK, there is Brexit

The Migration Museum Project introduces ‘No Turning Back’

The Migration Museum Project, based in Lambeth until next May, offers a dramatically new way to think about migration. Its current exhibition, ‘No Turning Back’ chooses ‘seven migration moments that changed Britain’.

Although the exhibition is deliberately non-chronological, I will put them in historical order. The earliest event, the expulsion of the Jews in 1209 followed years of discrimination. In 1607 the East India Company first went to India and the exhibition includes the stories of individuals and families including Anglo Indians, Gurkhas, and Las-cars. A huge immigration of Hugu-enots came to Britain in 1685 to seek refuge when they were expelled from France. The Alien Act of 1905 limited immigration with intense xenophobia campaigns, mainly also targeting Jews who were coming from Eastern Europe to escape pogroms. In 1952, the first passenger jet flight profoundly altered migration from the tradition of slow journeys on ships (although today we have a sad return to sea travel, and even the most ancient migration, by foot).

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by Andrew Barter both celebrate the diversity of contemporary Britain. What makes the Migration Museum Project exciting though is not only their dynamic and multi-dimensional perspective on migration as a process, but their embrace of community. They invited contemporary artists to create work pertinent to each turning point as well as organising workshops, public lectures, and other events.

Banners on the ceiling with potent quotations pair with migration stories from the public on small cards against one wall. The 1209 Expulsion of the Jews, placed provocatively at the end of the exhibition, includes both a replica of an amazing historical manuscript from 1555 that depicts Jews wearing yellow stars, and a contemporary work by Hormazd Narielwalla in which he included photos from his own Jewish friends framed in

a blue pattern that celebrates the blue city of Chefchaouen, Morocco, painted blue by Jewish settlers.

The first moment in the installation, the 1609 founding of the East India Company seems to sail into the gallery with actual sails hanging from the ceiling by Nick Ellwood and Kamal Kaan’s, ‘And after we’d sailed a thousand skies’. On each sail, handwritten poetry by Kamal Kaan invokes the omnipotence of tea.

In the same section, and underscoring the complexities of the British Empire’s colonial enterprise with respect to migration, ‘All that I am’, by the famous Singh Twins features a portrait of their father with their family history of migration in vignettes surrounding him in both traditional and contemporary styles.

The Migration Museum Project has created several exhibitions in

temporary venues including ‘100 images of Migration’, chosen from hundreds of photos submitted by the community, ‘Germans in Britain’, emphasising an ‘invisible minority’ and ‘Keepsakes’ that invited the community to tell stories about one object that spoke to them of their personal experience of migration. These three exhibitions all took place in community settings, and each venue reached a new audience. Another pioneering exhibition about the Calais refugee camps entitled ‘Call Me By Myname -Stories from Calais and Beyond’ in June 2016, held in Spitalfields, closed the day before the Brexit vote.

The current location in the workshop building on Lambeth High Street, is itself temporary, as a developer now owns the area and is awaiting permits to construct another giant building there. But the Migration Museum Project hopes for a permanent museum in London.

Given the Brexit vote, driven partly by anti-immigrant fervour, the work of the Migration Museum Project is crucial. Make time for a visit.

‘No Turning Back’ Migration Museum Project 26 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7AG Open Weds–Sun 11am–5pm (late opening last Thurs of each month) Free admission





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