

Watertown exhibition 'Across Cultures' breaks down borders

Lebanese-born Boston photographer Rania Matar selected these works exploring 'Invisible Ties and Journeys of Hope'

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated May 24, 2022, 12:13 p.m.



Marsha Nouritza Odabashian, "Blossoms and Bones," onionskin dye, acrylic paint, graphite on canvas. WILL HOWCROFT

WATERTOWN — “Across Cultures: Invisible Ties and Journeys of Hope” at the Dorothy and Charles Mosesian Center for the Arts, is about displacement and migration — themes fraught with emotion on every level, individual to national — at a time when nationalist fervor is rising.

Boston photographer Rania Matar, who was born in Lebanon, was the juror for this sumptuous exhibition. Her own show, “She,” is upstairs. In “Across Cultures,” artists explore the challenges of navigating two or more cultures with abstraction and metaphor.

Painters Mark Richards and Marsha Nouritza Odabashian expertly use color, gesture, and atmospherics along with figuration. In “Landing,” Richards paints a delicate orange lattice across a yellow-streaked canvas to suggest a border approached by tiny figures in dribbling blue. Their scale makes the journey epic; the tones make it searing.

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Mark J. Richards, "Landing," oil on linen. MARK J. RICHARDS

Odabashian, one of several artists who draws on family experience, paints in onion-skin dye, a medium traditional to her grandparents, who fled the [Armenian Genocide](#) of 1915. The murky brown stains in “Blossoms and

Bones” are both choking and generative, as protean images coalesce: dancing girls, cloaked and huddled figures, a skull, flowers. Past collides with present, and danger with possibility.

Some works decry the Trump administration’s policy of [separating children](#) from their families at the Mexican border. In “Detention,” a painting with collage that could be a fairy tale illustration, Leslie Sills portrays children asleep or fretting amid a sea of Red Cross blankets. Garry D. Harley’s “Port of Entry” digital print on canvas obscures a girl’s blurry face behind vertical bars, suggesting a child in a holding cell.



Leslie Sills, "Detention," oil, gouache, charcoal, cotton thread on paper on panel. WILL HOWCROFT

Sammy Chong paints migrants as heroes. In “Food of the Earth” a farm worker toting a bin of red peppers through a field has the head of [Tláloc](#), the Aztec rain god, a supreme deity in an agricultural society. A background

collage of snapshots of families in native dress and gatherings at [Mesoamerican pyramids](#) situates Chong's subject as an heir to cultural riches.

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“Across Cultures” soulfully captures “invisible ties and journeys of hope,” as the title puts it, but it doesn’t flinch at the brutality that drives some migrants from home, and meets some upon arrival.

ACROSS CULTURES: INVISIBLE TIES AND JOURNEYS OF HOPE

At Dorothy and Charles Mosesian Center for the Arts, 321 Arsenal St., Watertown, through June 30. 617-923-0100, www.mosesianarts.org

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