



REF 2021



University
of Worcester

TOBIAS HICKEY

MIGRATIONS

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300-WORD STATEMENT

Migrations is a curatorial art project which aimed to facilitate the communication of an alternative to negative media bias around migrants and the concept and practice of migration (during the crisis 2015-present) through inclusive illustration practice. The project was crowdsourced from an international community of illustrators and artists (both professional and amateur) who were asked to interpret the words 'migrant' and 'migration' and to visually communicate their interpretations through bespoke postcard artworks.

The postcard was selected as the format for the project because it is a profoundly inclusive and itinerant object: it is cheap and easy to obtain and to send, thus maximizing participation. A postcard is also symbolic of travel and movement, from the stamps that reflect its origins, to the marks, wear and damage picked up during its journey, to the borders and bureaucracies that might hinder its passage. On the back of each postcard the artists provided context for their work, which took the form of a personal account of migration, a meaningful quote, or a positive comment that challenged negative views of migrants. The postcard collection was exhibited in such a way that gave access to both sides of the artifact and allowed an accessible, immersive experience.

Migrations resulted in exhibitions and intergenerational creative workshops in Europe, Africa and Asia, receiving thousands of visitors. A selection of 50 postcards were used to create a book *Migrations: Open Hearts, Open Borders*, published by Otter-Barry Books (2019), in collaboration with Amnesty International. Proceeds from the book are donated to Amnesty International and IBBY's (International Board on Books for Young Children) Lebanon Appeal to provide books and rebuild libraries in Beirut following the catastrophic explosion in August 2020. Illustrators in the book include Shaun Tan, Maya Stanic, Mohammad Barrangi, Petr Horacek, Axel Scheffler, Jane Ray, Isol, and Roger Mello.



The Little Chimp Society 'Mail Me Art' project (2015)



Migrations (2015)

RESEARCH AIMS AND PROCESSES

For an overview of the illustrative treatment of migration see the paper 'Contemporary Illustrative Responses to the European Migration Crisis' by Davies & McCannon (2019) which contextualises the *Migrations* project alongside other illustrative responses which 'position the illustrator as witness, translator, and activist in their representations of migrant stories'. Whereas depictions of refugees are often made by artists living and working in Britain and Europe, *Migrations* is original in its distillation and curation of individual responses from a multinational community of artists responding to a guided/suggested brief. This project represented the first attempt to both use postcard artwork to explore issues of migration and to encourage and curate a multi-national collaboration that would include migrants themselves.

The medium of the postal service was employed to mirror that of the bureaucracy of the migrant's passage through borders and red tape. Aligned to this, the guiding concept was developed of birds (postcards) migrating and joining as one (producing choral voices). The simplicity of the bird as a metaphor was incorporated into the methodology in order to encourage free dialogue that would speak across linguistic barriers, and to facilitate a flattening of the distinction between amateur and professional artists in order to encourage inclusivity. The official systems of postal services - as seen in franking/marketing of the postcards - confirmed geographic locations and articulated transit, thus becoming a key discursive part of the artistic process of the making the artefacts. *Migrations* developed and utilised both traditional (postal) and contemporary (internet) networks to facilitate the collection and curation of the artwork. Social media platforms such as Facebook/Instagram etc also activated the response of the artists.

Adapting the process of mail art curation as pioneered by Ray Johnson and his New York Correspondence School, circa 1970, as well as being inspired by The Little Chimp Society's 'Mail Me Art' series of international mail art projects originating from 2005.

REFERENCES

Davies, A.R. & McCannon D. (2019) 'Contemporary Illustrative Responses to the European Migration Crisis', CONFIA Portugal, ISBN 978-989-54489-1-3



The Arrival (2006) by Shaun Tan



Migrations postcard, Tan 2015



Migrations postcard, Tan 2015

Shaun Tan, who's seminal graphic novel *The Arrival* (2006) is considered a key illustrated text on the subject of migration, was requested to endorse the Migrations project and provide a written context for the artist call out, and this provided the foreword for the Migrations book



(top to bottom)

Migrations, Bratislava 2017,

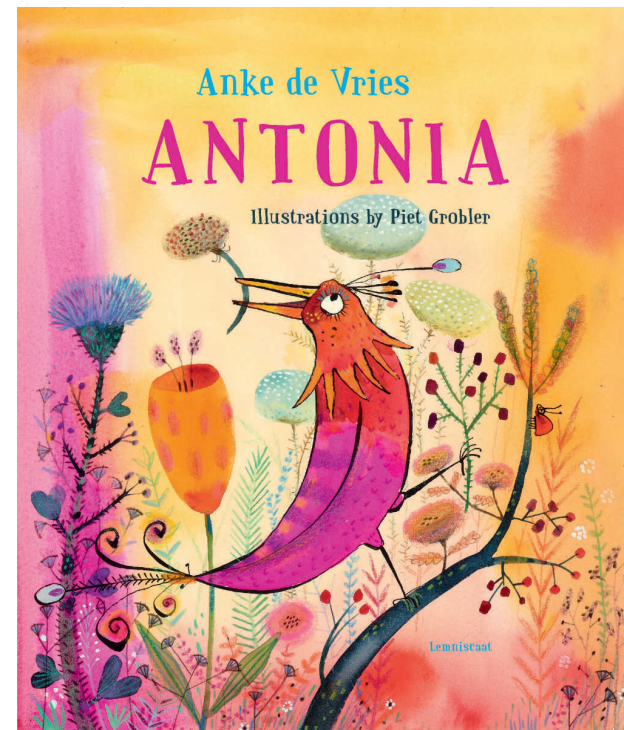
Migrations, The Art House, Worcester, 2020

Migrations, The Hive Library, Worcester, 2019

Wordfees, South Africa, 2018

A hanging system was devised to allow equal importance and prominence to both the illustrated and message (testimonial) sides of the postcards.

Displaying the *Migrations* collection to maximise audience interaction, accessibility and



*Migrations workshop
Hay Festival, May 2017*

Using Piet Grobler's picture book *Antonia* (Lemniscaat, 2017) as a prop to instigate using a bird as a metaphor to engage with the themes of migration and diversity for a young audience to respond to. Outcomes from the workshop were exhibited at the BIB (Biennale of Illustration Bratislava).

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The research outcomes were articulated through a series of public exhibitions, artist talks and inter-generational creative workshops held in Slovakia, South Africa, South Korea, Worcester, Hay-on-Wye and London, UK.

A book was published, both in the UK and US, which featured a selection of 50 postcards from the *Migrations* collection. The publication has subsequently been utilized as a teaching resource in schools and by charities and community support groups to assist and promote understanding on the subject of migration.



Migrations opening at BIB (Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava) in September 2017

When exhibited in gallery, the display of postcards allowed viewers access to both sides of the postcards. The tension and suspension of the postcards was interconnected by the installation of a wire network which rippled when a card was examined. This inter-connectedness was designed as a physical embodiment and re-construction of the virtual networks that had brought the works together, while also facilitating the interaction of the visitor experience.

The availability of an iPad loaded with a map in the exhibition showing the origins of the postcards as well as the artist details further enhanced audience interaction and made the migrations network available through digital navigation.





Migrations opening at BIB (Biennale of Illustration in Bratislava) in September 2017
Workshops were held at each venue where the work was exhibited, and participants were invited to add postcards to the collection in acts of inclusivity.

난민 어린이들을 위한
세계 일러스트레이터들의 아름다운 도전



MIGRATIONS

마이그레이션스 : 희망의 날갯짓, 더 나은 세상으로

MIGRATIONS: Flight to a Better Future
Original Illustrations Exhibition

2018. 4. 21 ~ 10. 28

주최 및 주관



협력



/BbY Cheil

후원



Migrations: Flight to a Better Future

Nami Island, South Korea, 21st April – 28th October 2018
(Exhibition)

25,000 visitors

Recognition from the following charities and organisations, who were represented at the opening: UNHCR Korea, Naveed Hussain ; Director of Amnesty International Korea Kyung-eun Lee; Korean Committee for UNICEF; Senior Fundraising Director Kang-don Oh; Director of Hyundai Museum of Kids' Books & Art Jeung-min Noe

Film of the exhibition

<https://youtu.be/u5VL-3mxUIA>

There was also a panel discussion and artist workshop

<https://youtu.be/K1BhskQwp0Y>



Migrations

The Hive Library, Worcester, 21st May 2019

(Exhibition)

Exhibition and artist presentations.

Migrations Open Hearts Open Borders book launch and panel discussion.

Participating artists Mohammad Barrangi, Petr Horacek and Nicholas Stephenson gave talks on the themes of migration to a public audience.

<https://worcesterillustration.wordpress.com/2019/05/20/migrations-book-launch/>



Workshop by Mohammad Barrangi

The Art House, University of Worcester. May 21st 2019

Practice based research workshop delivered to staff and students at The Art House by Iranian Mohammad Barrangi, recipient of the Studio of Sanctuary residency programme, an initiative that supports artists who are refugee and asylum seekers to continue their artistic practice and gain an understanding of the cultural context of the UK.

The event included an artist talk on Iranian folk and mythology followed by a demonstration and printmaking workshop.

Studio of Sanctuary

<https://weareunlimited.org.uk/commission/the-art-house-studio-of-sanctuary/>

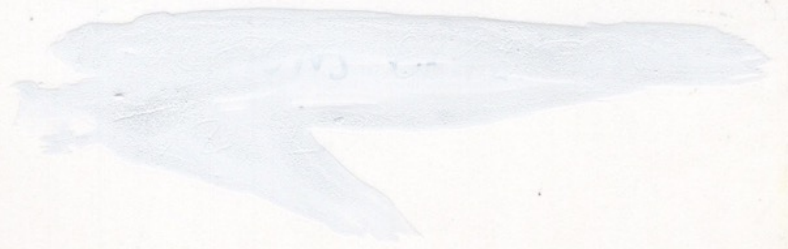




I came to UK as a refugee
in 1993 because of the war
in my country, Bosnia & Herz-
egovina.

In my suitcase I had eleven
paintbrushes. I thought
they would help me to
survive in my new life.

Now I am a glass artist,
have my safe nest (studio)
and am making little birds
out of melted glass... Maya



Maya Stanic (Bosnia & Herzegovina) 2015

'I came to UK as a refugee in 1993 because of
the war in my country, Bosnia & Herzegovina.

In my suitcase I had eleven paintbrushes.

I thought they would help me to survive in my new life.

Now I am a glass artist, have my safe nest (studio) and am making little
birds out of melted glass... Maya'

Contained within the Migrations collection are personal testimonies of
migration creating a polyphonic dialogue on the subject



Migrations: Open Hearts Open Borders

Otter-Barry Books, 2019

ISBN: 978-1-91095-980-0

Curated and edited by Tobias Hickey

The published book featured 50 of the postcards received, arranged into four sections-

Departures,

Long Journeys,

Arrivals

Hope For The Future.

A US edition of the book was published by Candlewick Press in October 2019



Migrations: Open Hearts Open Borders book launch and panel discussion
Migration Amnesty International UK headquarters London
13th June 2019

Exhibition and panel discussion.
Open Hearts Open Borders: Illustrators respond to Migration
Mohammad Barrangi, Jane Ray, Chris Riddell and Tobias Hickey

<https://theaoi.com/event/open-hearts-open-borders-illustrators-respond-to-migration/>



Migrations: Open Hearts Open Borders (2019-20)
selected by the CLPE (Centre for Literacy in Primary Education)
for their 'Power of Reading' program which seeks to raise engagement
and attainment in reading and writing for all children.

600 copies of the book have been distributed nationally.

Children's picture book artists tell migrants' stories through postcards

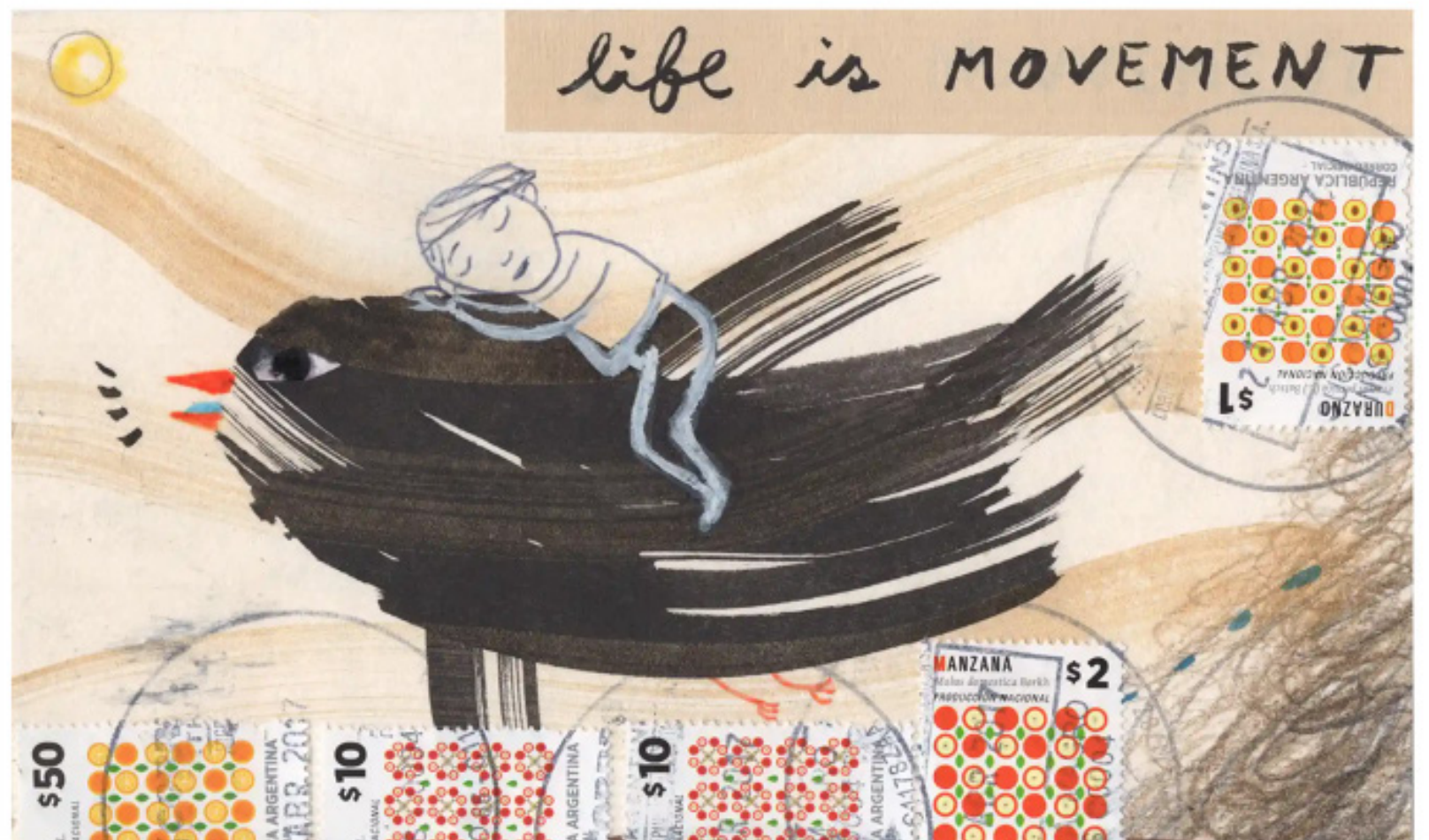


Kate Kellaway

Sat 4 May 2019 15.00 BST



2,829



BOOK REVIEW: The Observer 4th May 2019

Children's picture book artists tell migrants' stories through postcards, by Kate Kellaway

"The result was overwhelming and moving: 300 postcards flew in and were exhibited at the Bratislava Biennale (and later in South Africa and Nami Island in South Korea). Postcards were hung on vertical wires, the organisers' intention to "replicate the precarious nature of flight". If you touched a card, the others would swivel and move, the entire structure would tremble – a silent communications network. This immersive show was inspired by what it is to flee on a wing and a prayer. And now there is a stunning postcard-size book, *Migrations: Open Hearts, Open Borders* (published by Otter-Barry Books), which includes a selection of 50 of these images and other, more recently received illustrations."

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/may/04/childrens-picture-book-artists-tell-migrants-stories-through-postcards>



▲ A detail from the postcard 'Beyond the clouds, rain and mountains...' by Yuval Zommer. Photograph: Courtesy the artist / Otter-Barry Books

Illustrated postcards on the theme of migration – in pictures

An invitation to illustrators from all around the world - from Axel Scheffler to Shaun Tan - to create bird postcards depicting the precarious life of the refugee resulted in a remarkable exhibition. The results have now been transformed into a book of drawings and poetry published by Otter-Barry books.

● [Read more about the Migrations project](#)

Kate Kellaway

Sat 4 May 2019 15.00 BST



T10

BOOK REVIEW : *The Observer* 4th May 2019

Illustrated postcards on the theme of migration – in pictures, by Kate Kellaway

Gallery feature showing a selection of postcards from Migrations Open Hearts Open Borders publication. An invitation to illustrators from all around the world – from Axel Scheffler to Shaun Tan – to create bird postcards depicting the precarious life of the refugee resulted in a remarkable exhibition. The results have now been transformed into a book of drawings and poetry published by Otter-Barry books.

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2019/may/04/illustrated-postcards-on-the-theme-of-migration-in-pictures>



Times Higher Educational Awards 2019
Migrations project was nominated for International Collaboration of the Year

<https://www.the-awards.co.uk/2020/en/page/archive-2019>



Books Are My Bag Readers Awards 2019

Migrations was nominated for Most Beautiful Book award for Books Are My Bag Readers Awards, sponsored by National Book Tokens

<https://www.nationalbooktokens.com/readers-awards>

Flights of Imagination: the Migrations exhibition

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Article Author: Pam Dix

In an article for *Books for Keeps* in September 2017, Pam Dix described a special exhibition launched by the team at the *International Centre for the Picture Book in Society* at Worcester University. Illustrators were asked to contribute a postcard with an image of a bird and a message for refugees on the back and she recorded that over 300 arrived from all over the world.



The *Migrations* exhibition was an ambitious project from the outset but it has achieved a reach and impact far greater than ever anticipated. A book of the exhibition has just been published by Otter-Barry Books and is a fitting testimony to this ambition and the quality of the project. Pam Dix interviewed Piet Grobler and Tobias Hickey from Worcester University last month to find out how their ideas took flight.



ENDORSEMENT

Books for Keeps edition 236, May 2019

Flights of Imagination: the *Migrations* exhibition, by Pam Dix

"Many of the contributors themselves are migrants. Maja Stanic from Bosnia & Herzegovina, now based in the UK, describes arriving as refugee from war in 1933 and writes: 'In my suitcase I had eleven paintbrushes. I thought they would help me survive in my new life'. Axel Scheffler from the UK makes a more contemporary comment 'Borders – not what they used to be'.

The book is full of so many individual items of beauty, of beauty in words and images, that it is impossible to single out favourites. It is organized into four sections: Departures, Long Journeys, Arrivals, Hope for the Future. Each is an exploration that provokes an emotional response."

<http://booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/236/childrens-books/articles/flights-of-imagination-the-migrations-exhibition>



RESEARCH PAPER

Davies, A., McCannon D. (2019) Contemporary Illustrative Responses to the European Migration Crisis, conference proceedings CONFIA, Portugal ISBN 978-989-54489-1-3

Migrations was used as a case study for a paper delivered at CONFIA 2019, the 7th International Conference of Illustration and Animation. 14-16 June 2019 and published in the proceedings

<https://confia.ipca.pt/2019/>

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