

[Thousands of refugee life jackets attached to Mia pillars](#)

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Body

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) - The powerful messages in the new exhibit at the Minneapolis Institute of Art start while you're still a long walk from the museum doors. That's when you see thousands of life jackets attached to the massive columns on the north side of the building. They were worn by refugees making the dangerous sea journey from Turkey to Greece.

It's breathtaking and heartbreaking up close.

The 2,400 discarded life jackets on the pillars were found on the beach and donated to artist Ai Weiwei by the mayor of Lesbos, Greece, in 2016. Mia is the first U.S. museum to present Weiwei's "Safe Passage." The piece was previously installed on the classical columns of the Berlin Konzerthaus, Yokohama Museum of Art and the National Archives of Chile, the St. Paul Pioneer Press reported.

"Safe Passages" is part of a new exhibition, which opened Feb. 23 and runs through May 24, titled: "When Home Won't Let You Stay: Art and Migration." It has more than 40 works by 21 artists from around the world exploring how artists are responding to migration, immigration and forced displacement - people whose life at home, as they knew it, is irrevocably lost, said Gabriel Ritter, curator and head of the Department of Contemporary Art at Mia.

The exhibition was organized and debuted at the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston. The Weiwei life jacket piece is exclusive to Mia, along with two other large-scale installations - one from the interdisciplinary arts collective Postcommodity and one from CarryOn Homes, a team of five Twin Cities-based international artists dedicated to telling the stories of immigrants and refugees in the United States.

The exhibition fits the Minneapolis museum, Ritter said at a preview, adding that Minnesota has the highest number of refugees per capita nationwide.

The life jacket installation ("These each represent a life - an individual life," Ritter said.) can be visited anytime from the outside, but the door on that side of Mia is closed during cold weather months. It will reopen in April.

Because it's a "difficult and draining" ticketed exhibit, Mia will allow visitors to leave and return. With video, sculpture, paintings and installations, "you need time," with the exhibit, Ritter said.

Here are a few of the powerful pieces in the exhibition:

"Let Us Pray for the Water Between Us" (2020) - Mia commissioned this piece by the arts collective Postcommodity. It looks at the forced displacement of indigenous people and relationships bound by shared water. A 2,200-gallon chemical storage tank has been transformed into an automated drum and is suspended from the

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ceiling of the rotunda down the hall from the Target Galleries. The drum plays a native honor song. There's usually a classical Greek statue there and in the alcoves around the rotunda. Those have been "displaced," Ritter explains.

"Woven Chronicle" (2011-16) - The first piece inside the galleries was created by artist Reena Saner and traces routes and borders out of woven electrical wire, which has been formed to look like barbed wire in some places, wound up to look like balls of yarn on the floor below the installation. It's color-coded to show the most heavily industrialized areas, Ritter said, and the artist updates the routes and borders each time it's installed.

"Temporary Storage: The Belongings of Juan Manuel Montes" - Montes was the first DACA recipient deported under changes from the Trump administration, Ritter said. Artist **Camilo Ontiveros** created this piece in 2017 out of all of Montes' possessions that were in storage. At the back, there's a portrait of the young man.

"Zapatello" (2014) - Artist Guillermo Galindo created this piece out of items found along the U.S./Mexico border. The tire was used to smooth out the sand so border agents can track footprints, Ritter explained.

"CarryOn Homes, COH Living Room" (2020) - The Twin Cities-based art collective has created a place to reflect and relax at the end of the exhibition with handmade pillows and cushions.

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