

Lara Fučik z Gimnazije Slovenj Gradec v svojem prispevku predstavlja likovne umetnike, ki so tematizirali svojo migrantsko izkušnjo v umetniških delih.

THE IMMIGRANT ART

by Lara Fučik

People have always moved around the world. Early humans were nomadic, traveling in search of food, shelter, and safety. Today, people move for many different reasons, including economic, political, cultural, religious, and environmental. Sometimes, events beyond people's control, like war or natural disaster, leave them displaced and forced to migrate. Other times, people migrate voluntarily, perhaps in search of better work opportunities or a different lifestyle. For many artists, their own migrations and those of their ancestors shape their identities and the art they produce.

As people move, they bring their traditions, knowledge, and beliefs with them. Often, as much as they absorb the culture of their new home, they influence it with their own traditions.

Jackob Lawrence

African American artist Jacob Armstead Lawrence was an inspiration to many. He became famous with his portrayal of African American historical subjects and contemporary life.

He was born in New Jersey in 1917 to immigrant parents. The discovery of his love for art came at a very young age when he got really inspired by the cultural visionaries of the Harlem Renaissance.

In 1940, he received a grant from the Rosenwald Foundation to create a 60-panel epic, *The Migration of the Negro* (now known as *The Migration Series*); when the series was exhibited at Edith Halpert's Downtown Gallery the following year, the then 23-year-old artist catapulted to national acclaim.

Lawrence conceived of the series as a single work rather than individual paintings and worked on all the paintings at the same time, to give them a unified feel and to keep the colours uniform between panels. He wrote sentence-long captions for each of the sixty paintings explaining aspects of the event. Viewed in its entirety,

the series creates a narrative, in images and words that tell the story of the Great Migration.



1: World War I migration north by southern African Americans

The Great Migration began to gain attention during the 1940's due to a surge of jobs in manufacturing arms and munitions industries. Opportunities North were progressively increasing in addition to African American populations. By 1940, an estimated 1.5 million African Americans had left the south to build new lives in the north. World War II led to a second wave of migration: a migration Lawrence was alive to witness; therefore, leading to the incorporation and merging of events, both past and present in the series as evident in this panel.

Lawrence found a way to tell his own story through the power and vibrancy of the painted image, weaving together 60 same-sized panels into one grand epic statement. Before painting the series, Lawrence researched the subject and wrote captions to accompany each panel. Like the storyboards of a film, he saw the panels as one unit, painting all 60 simultaneously, colour by colour, to ensure their overall visual unity. The poetry of Lawrence's epic statement emerges from its staccato-like rhythms and repetitive symbols of movement: the train, the station, ladders, stairs, windows, and the surge of people on the move carrying bags and luggage.

Following the example of the West African storyteller or griot, who spins tales of the past that have meaning for the present and the future, Lawrence tells a story that reminds us of our shared history and at the same time invites us to reflect on the universal theme of struggle in the world today: “To me, migration means movement. There was conflict and struggle. But out of the struggle came a kind of power and even beauty. 'And the migrants kept coming' is a refrain of triumph over adversity. If it rings true for you today, then it must still strike a chord in our American experience.”

Lubaina Himid

Lubaina Himid CBE (born 1954) is a British artist and curator. She is a professor of contemporary art at the University of Central Lancashire. Her art focuses on themes of cultural history and reclaiming identities.

Himid was born in Zanzibar in Tanzania but moved to England shortly after her birth, and her paintings, woodcuts, installations, works on paper and curatorial projects have often emphasised the contribution of African migrants to the development of European culture. The African-style clothing worn by the women travelling in the boat in this painting suggests a connection with journeys from Africa and the complex cultural politics that are the result of such voyages.

She was one of the first artists involved in the UK's Black Art movement in the 1980s and continues to create activist art which is shown in galleries in Britain, as well as worldwide. She was appointed MBE in June 2010 for "services to Black Women's Art" and won the Turner Prize in 2017 and was made a CBE in the 2018 Queen's Birthday Honours "for services to art."

Throughout the 1980s—in a political climate that finds eerie resonance with post-Brexit, anti-immigration sentiments in Britain today—Himid worked tirelessly to promote black culture not only in her work, but also through exhibitions, research, and teaching.

Not all black, Asian, and minority ethnic artists are concerned with the politics of race in their work, but Himid is. From early on, she identified the importance of revising history through paintings that convey a rich tapestry of immigrant cultures and exuberantly assert the contributions of black people in Britain. “I’m absolutely concerned with expressing how we’ve shaped British culture, either by bringing in wealth via slavery, for instance, or how we’ve changed it by our very existence.”



2: *Between the Two My Heart is Balanced* 1991

Between the Two My Heart is Balanced is a large painting depicting two women at sea in a small grey boat and one of her most known works. According to the artist, the pile of colored objects that stands between the two women in this work, which occupies the position taken by the male figure in Tissot's etching, represent maps. That the women appear to be tearing these maps into pieces might be seen as a rejection of forms of knowledge and navigation traditionally controlled by white men. Himid has described the painting along these lines, stating in 2001 that it is 'a musing on what would happen if black women got together and started to try to destroy maps and charts – to undo what has been done.'

Anish Kapoor

Anish Kapoor is an Indian-born British sculptor known for his abstract works. one of the most influential sculptors of his generation. He maneuvers between vastly different scales, across numerous series of work.

Coming from a migrant background has always been a core element to his art. “Throughout my journey as an artist, I have strongly realized that our background not only makes us who we are, but it is an ever-present part of our identity as artists.” he said in an interview about one of his works, dedicated to bringing awareness to migration and its struggles.

The work he dedicated to this cause is called *Ishi's Light*. It is a three-meter tall sculpture shaped as an eggshell and speaks so much to the viewer, yet immediately does not reveal its full glory. Instead, the viewer reflects on the inside reflection and builds an intimate relationship with it. Kapoor has explained: ‘As you’re entering the work, the column of light is like a virtual object, it’s a physical object. It isn’t simply on the surface. I think something is occurring there with the reflections, which is what is important to me.’ (Quoted in Nayeri and Ramirez.)

Anish dedicated this work to his son, Ishan. It reflects the warmth and safety a parent wishes for their child. The inside of the shell slightly resembles a mother’s womb, representing safety and love. That is what immigrant parents wish for their children the most. To live a good life.

Ishi's Light is a notable work, inspired by Barnett Newman’s work *Anna's light* (1968). Both use highly saturated reds, but their tones are very different. Kapoor’s dark and enveloping blood red in the interior of *Ishi's Light* nevertheless seems to echo the effect of the brilliant and suffusing red pigment of *Anna's Light*. Both are overall brilliant works with a bigger meaning behind them.



3: *Ishi's Light*(2003)

As we all know, art can represent anything we want. Through art, many people represent problems in our modern society, that should be taken more seriously, one of them being immigration.

Immigration is an important topic that should be addressed a lot more. These artists show us the reality of what it's like to leave your home in search of a better life. Their artwork is also a good representation of African or Asian culture, which is mostly neglected by the predominant white society. This art is made in hopes to make people more aware about the troubles mostly people of color and immigrants go through, just to live a fulfilling life. It has a great meaning in the world of art and its purpose is to educate people, who might be able to help.

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