

Art Exhibit: 'Driven From Their Homes' reflects empathy for Syrian refugees

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Harriet Diamond spent two years sculpting her work that's now on display at Imago Gallery, "Driven From Their Homes." She said that thoughts of her own experience as a mother were a great part of what motivated her.

WARREN — Styrofoam towers shaped into concrete ruins stand on top of the stained-wood gallery floors, lights illuminating ceramic figures preparing their dead in the aftermath of an air attack, pictured in the background.

To the right, a long precipice sticks out, extending toward the entrance, a sea of refugees standing on the surface of a sea of uncertainty.

"I don't think any of us navigates our lives except through empathy, really," said Harriet Diamond, a sculptor from Northampton, Massachusetts. "What are our choices? Our choices are, you're faced with something that's really difficult to look at that moves you to act.

Diamond was inspired to start on the project in 2017 after seeing on the news images of the Syrian Civil War and its resulting refugee crisis.

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"One of the main impetuses for that is having children; you just can't stand to see

that stuff,” she said. “You see [images] on the internet. You see people running and mothers and fathers and you say to yourself: ‘Am I really going to spend myself working on things that aren’t connected to the things I’m worried about?’”

She said that through sculpture, she hoped to keep the image in the public’s mind.

“Journalists are out there getting killed bringing this imagery back,” she said. “It flashes on the news and then it’s gone.

“When it really comes down to it, I’m hoping that when I translate this imagery into sculpture and put it back out there, it gives it another play.”

Diamond said that the work was displayed twice before, and that reactions on all exhibitions, including the current one, have been positive.

“People were really honestly moved by it, ... which was sad and rewarding,” she said.

Imago said that those who have seen the sprawling piece appear to be exhibiting the emotion Diamond most wants — empathy.

“A lot of people who have come by have thought that these were the Central American migrants,” said Linda Megathlim, a board member for the Imago Foundation for the Arts. “There was one guy from Turkey the other day who said that when he was a child, ‘I was one of them.’”

The exhibit will be on display until April 21 at Imago Gallery, 36 Market St.

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