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NEWS

Impact of refugee crisis on display at UNB



This one of the images captured in Greece by former St. Thomas University professor Raluca Bejan, who photographed the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe. Her work is part of a major exhibit coming to the University of New Brunswick Arts Centre in Fredericton later this month.

Photo: Submitted/Raluca Bejan



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A former St. Thomas University professor who photographed the aftermath of the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe says she was overwhelmed by what she saw.

"The first time [seeing it] was quite shocking," Raluca Bejan says. "I couldn't take any photos. I ended up crying for several hours because it was very, very impactful."

Now her work is part of a major exhibit coming to the University of New Brunswick Arts Centre in Fredericton later this month.

TRACE: Tracing the Space of the Refugee Crisis is set to run from Jan. 17 through to Feb. 14. The exhibit features 14 large format digital prints taken in Greece and a documentary film that examines the crisis.

Bejan, now an assistant professor in social work at Dalhousie University, worked on the project with Ioan Cocan, a media arts and graphic design expert.

Bejan says as time progressed, she was able to better deal with what she was seeing.

"I hope that people will not just gain familiarity with the issue but get politicized about it," she says. "All of these [refugees] were coming because they wanted to escape wars."

Upheaval in Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Nigeria resulted in more than a million migrants and refugees crossing into Europe in 2015. According to the World Economic Forum, it was the largest movement of people the continent has seen since

the end of the Second World War. Syrians, seeking to escape the civil war in their country, made up around 40 per cent of that number.

UNB Art centre director Marie Maltais says the gallery is exciting to host the exhibit.

"The photographs are really quite stunning," Maltais says. "The artists are looking at the refugee crisis in Europe and, rather than focusing on the drama of the event that occupies space for a period of time in our collective consciousness, this focuses on the aftermath – the spaces that are left over – what things look like after the fact."

The images leave viewers with a sense of emptiness and space, she says.

"It's that kind of silence that occurs after a huge event or activity has happened and then, all of a sudden, there is nothing," Maltais says. "There is a real sense of absence."

The accompanying film, *Trace*, was awarded best feature documentary at the Santorini International Film Festival in 2019.

A panel discussion, set to accompany the exhibit, will be held Feb. 5 at 7 p.m. at the Memorial Hall auditorium.

A complementary exhibit of the UNB showing will be held at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery in the Bruno Bobak Artist-in-Residence studio from Jan 14 to Feb. 7.