

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **New Exhibition Explores Immigration and Identity through the Art of Place**

***Artists without Borders: Reflections on Art and Place* opens April 24 at the Museum of Wisconsin Art**



**WEST BEND, WISCONSIN** – The Museum of Wisconsin Art announces the opening of its newest exhibition *Artists without Borders: Reflections on Art and Place* featuring nine Wisconsin artists with ties abroad. The multidisciplinary works address the allure and challenges of immigration including issues of identity and the meaning of home and place. Spanning both museum locations, the exhibition

opens April 24 at the museum’s main venue in West Bend and May 12 at its downtown Milwaukee gallery, MOWA | DTN, located inside Saint Kate—The Arts Hotel.

Seven of the exhibiting artists are first-generation immigrants who draw artistic influence from their home countries. The two remaining artists were born in the Midwest, but their work represents attempts to understand the worlds from which their families originate. Exhibiting artists include: Faisal Abdu’Allah, Nina Ghanbarzadeh, David Najib Kasir, Francisco X. Mora, Nirmal Raja, Gabrielle Tesfaye, Jason Yi, Rina Yoon, and Xiaohong Zhang.

“Time and time again, art has proven to be an effective means for opening minds and generating new perspectives,” said Director of Exhibitions Graeme Reid. “In our current climate, exhibitions that explore difficult subjects such as immigration help drive conversations, foster new understandings, and diminish differences. That’s what we want viewers to take away from this exhibition.”

In tandem with *Artists without Borders*, twenty-four teen artists from twelve regional high schools have been asked to create art that addresses the theme of identity. The ancillary exhibition *Myself When I Am Real: A Teen Perspective on Identity* on view May 15 – June 6 highlights their unique take on the relationship between art, place, and character as a teen in today’s complex world.

The teen exhibition features twenty-four works—two representatives each from the following twelve high schools selected by their respective art educators: Cedarburg High School, Étude High School, Hartford High School, Kohler High School, Menomonee Falls High School, Nicolet High School, Ozaukee High School, Pius High School, Veritas High School, University School of Milwaukee, West Bend East High School, and West Bend West High School.

MOWA in West Bend, Wisconsin is open Wednesday through Sunday, 9:30–4:00. Admission as low as \$15 provides unlimited visits for one full year. MOWA | DTN located within Saint Kate–The Arts Hotel in downtown Milwaukee is free and open to the public during lobby hours.



## ABOUT THE EXHIBITING ARTISTS

**Faisal Abdu’Allah**—British-born Abdu’Allah began his career focusing his attention on issues of race, diversity, and cultural representation that were surfacing in art in London during the 1980s. He brought this same focus to his life in the United States: his subjects remain his Muslim identity, working-class life, and now the émigré experience.

**Nina Ghanbarzadeh**—Ghanbarzadeh finds inspiration by navigating between her native Farsi language and English. She emigrated from Iran to the United States in 2001.

Ghanbarzadeh is keenly aware of both the limitations of language as well as the inherent power and universality of letters as symbols. She finds repetitive mark-making to be a meditative process, and she invites the viewer to experience the marks as a bridge to shared human experience.

**David Najib Kasir**—Kasir was born in Chicago, but his work is deeply rooted in his Arab ancestry: his mother is Syrian and his father Iraqi. He experienced his family’s aesthetic and cultural roots during a trip to Syria in 1999, then subsequently was horrified by that nation’s ensuing civil war and its many victims of chaos and destruction. Using a traditional Arab mosaic design, Kasir poignantly balances the human tragedy with the subtle beauty of tradition.

**Francisco X. Mora**—Mora was an artist from childhood. His years in his native Mexico studying textiles, printmaking, and painting translated well to his life and career in the United States after he arrived in 1980. In his current paintings and drawings, which draw upon Mexican surrealist tradition, he seeks to reconcile past and current events related to his personal experience.

**Nirmal Raja**— An interdisciplinary artist with a global perspective, Indian-born Raja lived in South Korea and Hong Kong before immigrating to the United States in 1991. In her work, she addresses historical narratives of colonialism and migration and the orientalist representation of cultures in the media and in art and culture. To assert that adaptability and mutability are key to an immigrant’s survival, Raja uses mutable materials like fabric, wax, and plaster.

**Gabrielle Tesfaye**—A first-generation American of Ethiopian and Jamaican heritage, Tesfaye works in painting, animation, film, puppetry, and interactive installation. She blends these media to explore issues rooted in the African diaspora, Afro-futurism, ancient art practices, and cultural storytelling.

**Jason Yi**—Born and raised in Seoul until the age of eleven, Yi has a bi-cultural orientation that finds expression in conceptually driven sculpture and site-specific installation. Using unorthodox utilitarian materials such as foam insulation, Styrofoam, and PVC tubing, Yi transforms traditional notions of landscape while underscoring the precarious co-existence of human beings and the natural world.

**Rina Yoon**—When Yoon left Korea at seventeen for the United States, she also left behind a collective mindset and discovered instead the freedom to flourish as an individual. Yoon’s practice melds twenty years of experience as a printmaker with traditional Korean handmade paper techniques and Buddhist teachings. Through a subtle manipulation of shaped paper coils and sculptural forms, Yoon explores Buddhist ideas of universal connectedness and transformation.

**Xiaohong Zhang**—Chinese-born artist Zhang explores social and political issues that would likely be discouraged in her native country. After completing graduate studies in 2002, Zhang remained in the United States. She applies Western digital techniques to traditional Chinese art forms, motifs, and symbols. Subjects include the contrast between the rich and poor in China, pollution and environmental issues, and the tense political relationship between China and America.

## RELATED EXHIBITION ACTIVITIES

The exhibition invites viewers to deepen their engagement with the works and the themes through an array of programs, including a talk by *New York Times* best-selling author Jacob Soboroff.

### ***Virtual Artist Panel | The Art of Place***

Thursday, April 29 | 7:00

Join artists Nina Ghanbarzadeh, David Najib Kasir, Francisco Mora, and Xiaohong Zhang as they discuss their artwork and life experiences through lenses of identity, geography, and viewer reception. Hosted by Director of Exhibitions Graeme Reid. Q&A to follow.



### ***A Virtual Talk with John Gurda | Neighbors and Strangers: The Challenges of Diversity in the Milwaukee Area***

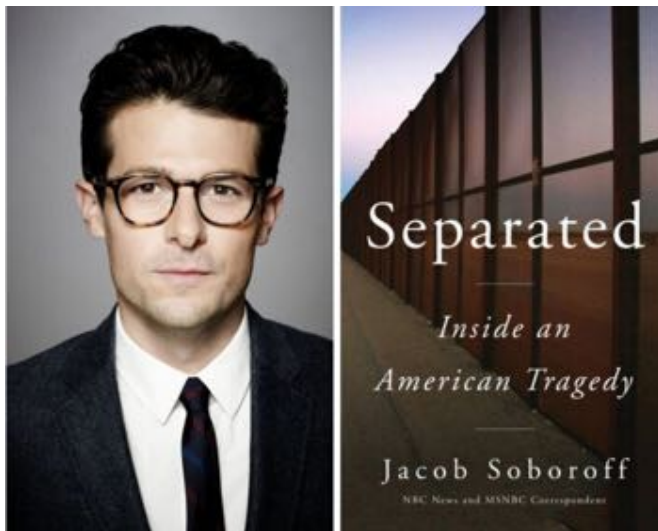
Thursday, May 13 | 7:00

Tune in live with historian John Gurda as he discusses the history of immigration in Milwaukee. Each ethnic group has played a formative role in the making of Milwaukee, but harmony has not been the dominant theme in their complex coexistence. A pecking order developed early and changed often and differences became divisions. That pattern persists to the present, as Milwaukee, with the rest of America, works to reconcile the creative power of diversity with its equally abundant challenges. Q&A to follow.

**Virtual Panel Discussion | Immigration, Community, and Understanding**

Thursday, May 27 | 7:00

Join communication and immigration experts as they discuss methods promoting intercultural communication and understanding as well as contemporary issues concerning immigration after the Trump administration. Panel includes Rachel Buff (Professor of History and Director of the Cultures and Communities Program at UW–Milwaukee), R. Timothy Muth (Staff Attorney at the ACLU of Wisconsin), and Iuscely Flores (Milwaukee-based artist and advocate). Hosted by Director of Collections, Education, and Research J Tyler Friedman. Q&A to follow.



**Author Talk with Jacob Soboroff | *Separated: Inside an American Tragedy***

Date and Time To Be Determined

Jacob Soboroff, author of *Separated: Inside and American Tragedy*, talks about his New York Times best-selling book and being a journalist at the border wall. The talk will be moderated by long-time Milwaukee newsman Mike Gousha, who traveled to Central America in the 1980s to report on refugees fleeing violence. Details on this event can be found at [wisconsinart.org](http://wisconsinart.org).

**IMAGE CREDITS**

Image 1: Gabrielle Tesfaye, *The Water Will Carry Us Home*, 2018 (video still). Hybrid Film & Animation

Image 2: Xiaohong Zhang, *China & U.S.* (1 of 10 in the series), 2019. Digital print on canvas

Image 3: John Gurda

Image 3: Jacob Soboroff, *Separated: Inside an American Tragedy* (Custom House Publishing, 2020)

**EXHIBITION SPONSORS**

This exhibition is generously supported by



Additional support for 2021 exhibitions is provided by James and Karen Hyde, Pick Heaters, and the Wisconsin Arts Board.

## **MEDIA RESOURCES**

High-resolution images are available through this link: [Exhibition Images](#)

Images of MOWA's campus: [Museum Images](#)

Website: [www.wisconsinart.org](http://www.wisconsinart.org)

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/museumofwiart](https://www.facebook.com/museumofwiart)

Instagram: [www.instagram.com/museumofwiart](https://www.instagram.com/museumofwiart)

Twitter: [www.twitter.com/museumofwisconsinart](https://www.twitter.com/museumofwisconsinart)

YouTube: [www.youtube.com/user/MuseumofWisconsinArt](https://www.youtube.com/user/MuseumofWisconsinArt)

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## **ABOUT THE MUSEUM OF WISCONSIN ART**

The Museum of Wisconsin Art celebrates 60 years of exploring the art and culture of Wisconsin. Founded in 1961, MOWA is one of the top museums of regional art in the United States with over 5,000 works of contemporary and historic art by more than 350 artists.

The building's modern wedge shape is a striking sight on the west bend of the Milwaukee River and is the centerpiece of the museum's four-acre campus. With 18 rotating exhibitions and over 175 programs—from talks and tours to making art and meeting artists—MOWA attracts nearly 200,000 visitors annually. There is always something new to explore at MOWA. Visit [wisconsinart.org](http://wisconsinart.org) to learn more.