A photograph showing a person's hands reaching into a dense, tangled mass of dry, brown branches. The person is wearing a dark green jacket. The hands are positioned as if they are about to grasp or are already holding a branch. The background is a clear blue sky.

TO OWN BOTH NOTHING AND THE WHOLE WORLD

BY HENNA ASIKAINEN AND ROUA HORANIEH

To Own Both Nothing And The Whole World

A line by Snufkin, a character created by Tove Jansson in the Moomin stories.

Henna Asikainen is a Finnish visual artist with a participatory practice that looks at humans' intimate relationship with nature and its intersections with migration, climate, heritage, and belonging.

Henna is dedicated to developing projects that step out of the studio and the gallery to engage directly with those excluded, with people with lived experience of forced displacement, exploring ecological and social issues and examining the importance of access to nature.

Radical hospitality is at the heart of these projects where humanity is an interdependent part of a larger planetary web in which all can flourish. Henna's work and its relationship with the natural world, its poetry and subtlety, deeply resonated with **Roua Horanieh**, a Syrian British overseas qualified architect and writer. In her practice, Roua explores the changes that occur when one leaves one world for another, and therefore leaves one self to build another.

To Own Both Nothing And The Whole World is an installation at Baltic that was developed with a working group that consisted of people with experience of forced displacement who now live in Gateshead and Newcastle where they seek to make a new meaningful and rooted life.



The installation explores ideas of home, belonging and the impact of displacement on both the human and more than human worlds. The materials used for the work were foraged from the surrounding landscapes, each carrying its own enchanting story, bringing communities together in unexpected and meaningful ways.

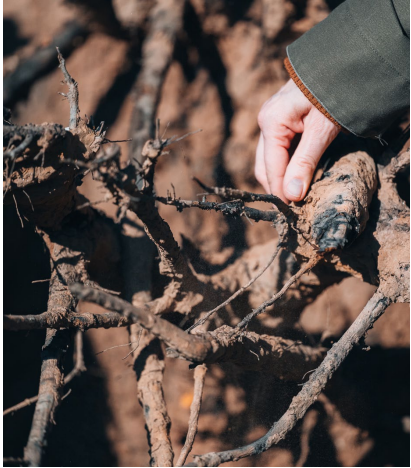


The installation invites us to reflect on the interconnected journeys of people, plants and place, foregrounding the invaluable contribution migrants bring to this country, and the power and beauty of nature and community shaping our shared world.

The project also consists of a series of nature walks and workshops with the working group. It aims to raise awareness around displacement and climate, to create the opportunity for dialogue around the perceptions of migration, to start conversations around what it takes to welcome a migrant community and the many different elements that need to come together to create a solid and nurturing place.

By creating a story that lives on in people's memories and thoughts, there is the potential to change minds and behaviours.

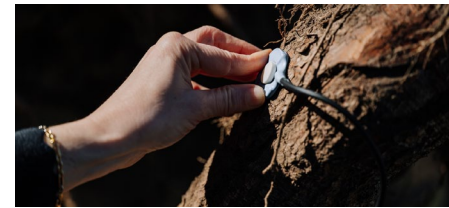
Oak roots unearthed by recent storms stand as witnesses of time on Baltic Square. They lost the soil that once nourished them and held their trees upright, yet they are shaped by their stories and speak of time and resilience.



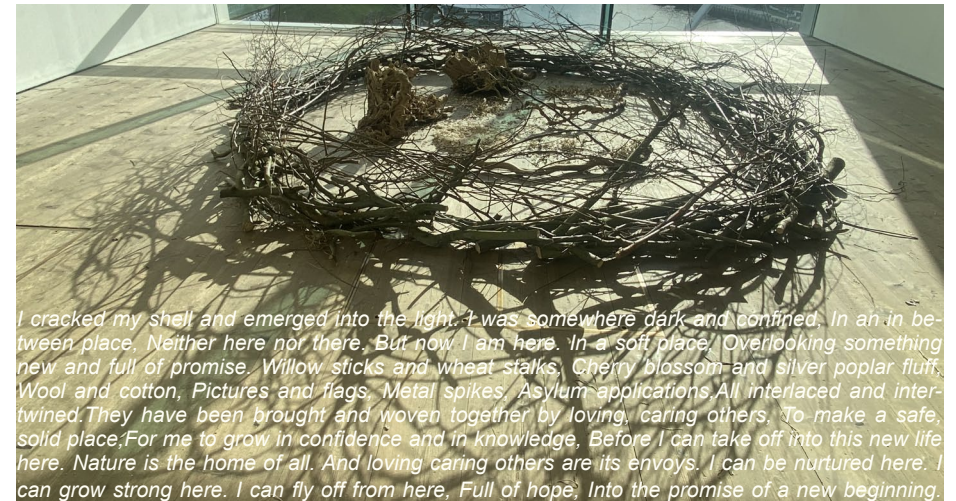
A lightbox in Baltic's hall shows a picture of the project's working group on a nature walk, feeling grounded and energised by the sea, the streams, the trees, the sand and soil they experienced together.



A felled tree in Baltic's atrium speaks of places of departure, places of arrival and places of transit. What we carry when we move, how displacement can leave us battered but no less beautiful, if one looks closely, and listens. Surrounding the tree are sound recordings of tree sap travelling through blossoming trees, of the dawn chorus in their canopies, and of the working group's procession with the tree to Baltic.



A big nest in Baltic's Viewing Box is made from locally foraged materials. Birds build their nests with ingenuity and patience. They are places of nurture and care, of new beginnings, hope and promise.



I cracked my shell and emerged into the light. I was somewhere dark and confined. In an in-between place. Neither here nor there. But now I am here. In a soft place. Overlooking something new and full of promise. Willow sticks and wheat stalks. Cherry blossom and silver poplar fluff. Wool and cotton. Pictures and flags. Metal spikes. Asylum applications. All interlaced and intertwined. They have been brought and woven together by loving, caring others. To make a safe, solid place. For me to grow in confidence and in knowledge. Before I can take off into this new life here. Nature is the home of all. And loving caring others are its envoys. I can be nurtured here. I can grow strong here. I can fly off from here. Full of hope. Into the promise of a new beginning.

Working Group Nests in display cases on Baltic's Level 5 Mezzanine speak of homes we once had and new homes we make.



Bahman Azizi - Iran Kurdish

I feel peaceful and proud, like I shaped a whole world out of silence and thread, small enough to hold in my hands, but big enough to carry hope.

Grace Mbende - Namibia

A colourful home for the small willow warbler, a tiny song bird that migrates from Namibia to Europe, a round trip of 18,000 miles. The Ovaherero people are nomadic people and I, like the bird, yearn for freedom and a sense of belonging and safety for me and my two children.



Zilan Kuzu - Turkey Kurdish

This nest was made using a coconut shell as a base, with help from my family. It's inspired by how birds build homes from whatever they can find, just like many migrants create new lives in unfamiliar places. I used wildflowers, leaves, and twigs from my garden, reflecting on the idea of resourcefulness.

Sunmaya Magar - Nepal

My migration journey from Nepal to the UK is woven into my nests. Each layer reflects emotions through natural items from my surroundings.



Hesam Moshfegh - Iran

The nest of the Simorgh and the Nest of Light mirror my life: the symbol of motherly affection and the purpose of the soul's journey, holding the beauty of art, myth and the homeland through the painful valleys of life.

Korey Kegan Bonnett - Trinidad

As a child in a rural fishing village in Trinidad & Tobago, my father was the source of my protection. He would take me fishing, forging unbreakable bonds. The seashells, debris, nets, vines, and creatures transports me to a time and place when I felt truly safe.



Reza Shojaei - Iran

The sound of birds make me happy and reminds me of my home country garden. Migratory birds connect the world of humans. Close your eyes and imagine the sound of birds that soothe your soul.

Man Ouyang - China

Stems of flowers from a bouquet, tiny branches from the exhibited tree during its journey to Baltic, and a touch of my motherland with the Chinese knot. This nest is a remembrance of my own origin and journey, and the journey through this project.



Tai-Haku Cherry trees

The Tai-Haku is a Japanese cherry tree that was almost extinct until a lone migrant tree found in Essex helped revive the species all over the world.

The project's working group visited Alnwick Garden while over 300 of these Tai-Hakus were in bloom.



Sound artist Dr Usue Ruiz Arana recorded the inner sounds of the trees as they were blossoming.

The group, the artists and the gardening team at Alnwick Garden collected the blossoms as they fell. Those were then included in the big nest in the Viewing Box at Baltic.

Alnwick Garden also donated two trees. One of them will be planted in the garden being designed for Baltic Square.

The other will be in the gardens of Newcastle's Civic Centre, planted during the Sanctuary Forum on June 18, 2025.

The trees will honour the contributions of the human and more than human migrants to Newcastle and Gateshead.

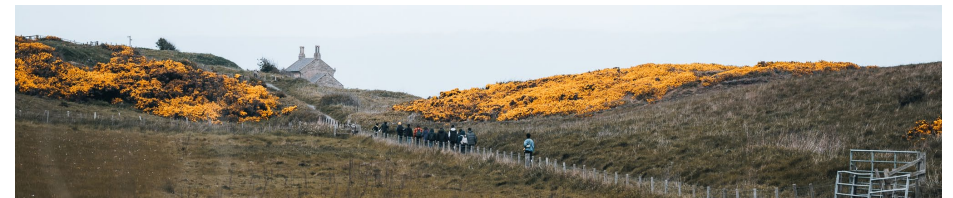


A United Nation of Trees

Howick Hall Gardens and Arboretum has trees from all over the world.

The project's working group walked through the trees together and felt soothed and grounded in the wonders of this place. They reached the sea and walked along the coast, flew kites, built stone forts, shared food, stories and laughter.

The tenderness and joy of the day was palpable and will remain with all those who spent this day together.



Access to nature is often difficult when we are displaced, despite the fact that there is nothing like nature to remind us that we all belong everywhere, with trees rooted for hundreds of years, and oceans lapping at their feet, under immense skies that wrap all around the world.

The oak roots that went to Baltic Square for Refugee Week 2025 were planted two hundred years ago on this land. The superpower of its community helped bring them to Baltic Square, for all to admire their all at once humbling and empowering presence.



A Tree Procession through Newcastle



A tree was blown away by a storm in Fenham where a group of men coming out of their Friday prayers helped retrieve it so it could be kept safe until it went to Baltic. The working group carried it together in a procession across Newcastle and to Baltic on May 3, 2025. Along the way, it was met by the May Day march and a pro-Palestine rally.



Carrying it as a community was an act of care, for a life that was uprooted by climate. It made us think of the worries we carry and how they become more bearable when we hold them together. In between places of departure and places of arrival are the transitional places; these can be challenging yet full of possibilities for unusual things to happen and friendly people to come our way. The tree now lies horizontal in Baltic's atrium, as if it were resting, hovering slightly above the ground to let its branches out. In its battered and fragile state, it is still a delicate beauty, almost playful in its humility.



A refugee, A survivor. A fighter, But for life.

Left war, destruction, persecution, Looking for life, peace and a place to flourish; A place for children to grow in laughter and light. I come with many stories, Of places you have never seen, Poems you have never heard, Music and birds and trees and rivers and landscapes you've never known.

I am all hope and faith. Brave, beautiful and bold. Often quiet, patient and humble. Because leaving, And risking everything, For an unknown that just might be better; Leaving with children and loved ones, Leaving home and career and a world that knows me and that I know; My kitchen and my desk, My paintings and my bed, My streets and my mountains, My flowers on my window sill and my friends down the road, My sunshine and my rain falls, The particular smell of both, The light and the colours and the fruits and the dishes, My language and my things, My clothes, my books, My pots and my pans. My elders and my neighbours.

Leaving all of it, And going on hope, It changed me. It humbled me. It handed me grace and strength despite myself.

I am inspiring if nothing else, To love life, to do everything possible to thrive in peace, To meet others and hear their stories, their poems, their music, To let them show me their birds, their trees, their rivers and landscapes. To let them see in me, Hope, And faith, In people, In trees and birds and rivers, In the one sky that wraps around all the land anyone will ever leave or find.

To Own Both Nothing And The Whole World

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Refugee Week is the world's largest arts and culture festival celebrating the contributions, resilience and creativity of refugees. The theme for Refugee Week 2025 is Community As A Superpower

Counterpoints Arts are a leading national organisation in the field of arts, migration and social change.

Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art creates and produces exhibitions, activities and opportunities that explore understanding of the world, through diverse contemporary art by artists across the world.

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Photos Credit **Saya Rose Naruse**

Text by Henna Asikainen and Roua Horanieh