

ASYLUM SEEKER ART EXHIBITION IN CANBERRA EXPLORES THE MEANING OF HOME



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This story by Penny McLintock was originally published on ABC News on 18 February 2016. The picture is a painting by Damon, an Irianian asylum seeker, called Solitary Confinement.

A collection of works by artists seeking asylum in Australia is offering insight into what home means to those displaced by conflict.

The exhibition — Home: Between Here And There — explores the experience of asylum seekers forced to leave their homeland and the journey to a new place to call home.

Carolina Triana from Settlement Services International said it was important for asylum seekers to be able to tell their story.

"They want their work to be seen and they want to share their story, their journey — what it means to be here as someone who is waiting for their refugee status to be assessed, and also for someone who is new to a country and settling into their new home," she said.

Ms Triana said each artist had approached their work from a different perspective.

"Home is a very familiar concept for everyone, but when you're in this particular system it can become a very challenging and confronting element — what's home at the end of the day?" she said.

"Many of the artists wanted to convey that they've found a new home within the Australian community."

One of the artists, Damon (last name withheld), is from Iran where he worked as a photographer for an advertising firm.

He said his abstract work Solitary Confinement represented artists who were imprisoned in Iran.

"Better to share this story with the world," he said.

"Most people get their information from news and don't know exactly what is happening in the world in so many countries.

"They don't know how people are suffering ... they only know what they hear in the media."

Damon has been in Australia for more than two years. His claim for asylum is still being assessed and he hopes to one day work as a visual artist here.

The artworks are the result of a skills development program and most of the contributions are by professional artists who see art as a way of making a living.

Ms Triana said the exhibition was a way of engaging these artists with the broader arts community.

"It's already hard to be an artist and practice art in any part of the world," she said.

"It's a difficult field, requires a lot of commitment and support from members of the public, so for these artists, those challenges are even bigger.

"Not only are they facing those barriers artists usually face, they're also facing issues of social cohesion, language barriers."

Home: Between Here And There will be on show at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture in Canberra until March 4.