

In Search of Conversation

As she smears, drizzles, and spreads paint onto surfaces, Mary Crenshaw's visions of migrants — with slumped shoulders and outstretched hands — begin to take shape. Her abstract style captures the figures of political refugees flooding street corners, panhandling for spare change. The government provides them with housing and food, but Italian law has prevented these refugees from seeking employment.

When she sees them, Crenshaw can't help but think of her early days in Italy, and her current pursuit of dual citizenship. She recently had a criminal background check and submitted her fingerprints to the FBI. Now she waits. It may be two years before her dual citizenship is confirmed.

But Crenshaw knows she stands in stark contrast to the refugees she passes on the street. "When I was getting my fingerprints done, I was in the room with people from Eritrea, and they were terrified," she says. "One man didn't know how to sign his name; he just did an 'X.' I'm this white person, privileged, and these people have been through who knows what to get here."

The scene stuck with her. She magnified her own fingerprints and created a series of etchings as a way to process what she saw. Even though she paints from a place of observation more than interaction, she still feels a connection, an unspoken conversation about the feelings of immigrating and finding home in an unfamiliar place.

"It's like two worlds clashing," she says. "I think a lot of European artists are looking at [the migrant situation], and feeling like we need to say something about it."



Mary Crenshaw '73 at work at an artist residency in France this past summer.



Mary Crenshaw's painting entitled "Blaz" oil and charcoal on canvas, 30 x 35cm 21