

THE PLIGHT OF REFUGEES

National Hellenic Museum exhibit explores impact of world refugee crisis via Greece

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Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution or natural disaster.

"A refugee's story is different than a migrant's story. Migrants make a choice to move from one place to another. Refugees don't have such a choice," said Laura Calamos, president of the National Hellenic Museum.

She and photographer Tasos Markou were guiding a reporter through a preview Tuesday of a new exhibit that will open Thursday, "Lives Afloat: The Greek Refugee Crisis through the Lens of Tasos Markou 2015-2017."

"It's cold. It's rocky on the ocean, pitch black. One of those rocks slices the dinghy, and now you're leaking. Everyone takes their shoes off and begins desperately scooping. You still have two hours to shore. If you end up in the water, have you ever tried to swim wearing blue jeans? Jeans soak and sink," she said.

She was standing before a photo of petrified-looking families unloading from one such dinghy onto a rocky shore in the dead of night. Markou had been there to capture it.

By the end of 2014, the world was facing the largest number of forcibly displaced people globally since World War II — more than 60 million.

By early 2015, the crisis slammed Europe — via Greece, a nation itself facing economic collapse amid a debt crisis.

The tens of thousands who a year ago had been pouring into the tiny country about the size of Rhode Island had skyrocketed to hundreds of thousands — more than a third of all of those refugees fleeing Syria's civil war.

Photographer Markou, 35, of Larissas, Greece, traveled to the border island of Lesbos, a port of entry that saw the greatest refugee influx, to cover the crisis, and was forever changed.

World Refugee Day is recognized annually on June 20.

The exhibit is particularly timely, as the world watches with horror as the Trump administration pursues a policy of forced separation, wrenching children from immigrant families arriving at the nation's borders.

"In the background of this photo is Turkey. They cross the Aegean Sea in any kind



"Lives Afloat: The Greek Refugee Crisis through the Lens of Tasos Markou 2015-2017" is a new exhibit opening Thursday at the National Hellenic Museum. Depicting the global refugee crisis through powerful photographs, the exhibit is particularly timely, as World Refugee Day is recognized annually on June 20. PHOTO BY TASOS MARKOU

of boat they can find," said Markou, pointing to one of the largest photos: an expansive blue and black sea with a lone drifting shipwreck. And one orange speck, someone's life preserver.



Tasos Markou

In another frame, a woman and her two sons who have made it across sit on the rocky shore, their faces registering terror instead of relief.

"Often, families are not in the same boat, so it is bittersweet. Who is missing in this picture: the father. You feel happy because you have run aground, but you feel anxiety, waiting, wondering, for the rest of your family," Markou said.

Another expansive, jolting photo is a frame filled with life preservers that rim the Greece seashore, a sea of orange, hundreds of thousands of them, chucked as the wearers scrambled onto land and began a treacherous trek toward asylum in the various countries of Europe.

"In this picture, there are about 800,000 life jackets. That's only in this one spot. And if we understand that every life jacket is con-

nected and related to a human story, then it's like looking at nearly 1 million people," said Markou, whose photographs move from sea crossings through refugee camp conditions, and poignant moments of families trying to adapt to a life of scarcity and waiting.

The exhibit's three sections, Arrivals, Waiting and Borders, depict a humanitarian crisis through powerful photographs, particularly of refugees stuck at Greece's northern borders — where fencing and barbed wire were hastily erected as Europe wrestled with the crisis.

Running through Spring 2019, the exhibit is augmented by speakers and programming to raise awareness of one of the most critical issues of our time.

On June 23, Markou, who found himself at times working more to provide aid as a volunteer than as a photojournalist, will present a program from 2 to 4 p.m. about his journey and his own philanthropic efforts to aid in the crisis.

"I decided it wasn't enough to just be a good person. You have to act. Lesbos changed me. It would change anyone who comes here," said Markou.

Death of WTTW's Elizabeth Brackett ruled an accident, spinal injuries the cause

BY LUKE WILUSZ, STAFF REPORTER
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The death of veteran Chicago television journalist Elizabeth Brackett after a bicycle crash last week has been ruled accidental.

An autopsy Tuesday found Brackett, 76, died of cervical spine injuries in the fall from her bicycle, according to the Cook County medical examiner's office.

Brackett died Sunday at Stroger Hospital, four days after the June 13 crash along the lakefront near 39th Street.

No witnesses to the crash have been identified, but GPS data from an activity tracker Brackett was wearing showed she ended up 10 feet from the path with a broken vertebra and damaged helmet, according to WTTW, where Brackett had worked most recently as a correspondent for "Chicago Tonight."

The tracker showed Brackett's heart stopped, leaving her without oxygen for as long as nine minutes, WTTW reported. Her daughter Ilsa Wallich told the station her mother, a world-champion triathlete, routinely biked between 30 and 40 mph.

Brackett worked at four TV stations over five award-winning decades on Chicago airwaves, earning renown for her cut-to-the-chase on-air demeanor.

In addition to her daughter, Brackett is survived by her husband Peter Martinez, son Jon Brackett; stepchildren Lisa Nuzzo, Stephanie Martinez, Jonathan Martinez and Matthew Martinez; sisters Ellen Rieger and Jill Swisher; and 10 grandchildren.

A funeral is planned for 1 p.m. Wednesday at Kenilworth Union Church in Kenilworth.



Elizabeth Brackett on "Chicago Tonight" in 2012.