

FROM

IDENTITY

TO BELONGING

THE GALLERY OF  
HUMAN MIGRATION

"Whenever I return to the place of my birth, the *paesani* consider me 'Americano'; the many times I have visited London, Paris, Amsterdam, Cairo and Boston, I have been pegged as Italian; in Canada, where I have lived almost all of my life, I am identified either as Italian or Italian-Canadian." Architect Rocco Maragna describes one of the realities of multiple identities in a global world and one very familiar to readers of *ANOKHI VIBE*. For some, the possibility of having plural identities is liberating – we have the freedom to choose what and who we are at any give time and place. Yet, for many of us, this choice is a source of confusion, of endless questions like: Where do I belong? What country do I call home? What is my culture?

For Maragna, the search for his identity led him to conceive a radical new way of thinking about global cultures and national identities – based on the extremely personal experience of migration. As he sees it, migration isn't just the movement of peoples from one country to another. It's more than that. It's about people moving within their country, from rural to urban areas, from the working class to the middle class, and for women, from homemaking to creating their own careers.

Canada, like its neighbour to the south, has long understood itself as a nation of migrants. Americans seem to know who they are and their place in the world; Canadians, on the other hand, have struggled. As a child of mixed British-French parentage and with a strong-willed cousin in the United States, Canadians have tried on a variety of hats looking for what fits. These include the old rhetoric of two founding peoples, captured in Hugh MacLennan's famous novel, *Two Solitudes*, and the twin official policies of multiculturalism at home and peacekeeping abroad. Yet, as Canada enters the twenty-first century as one

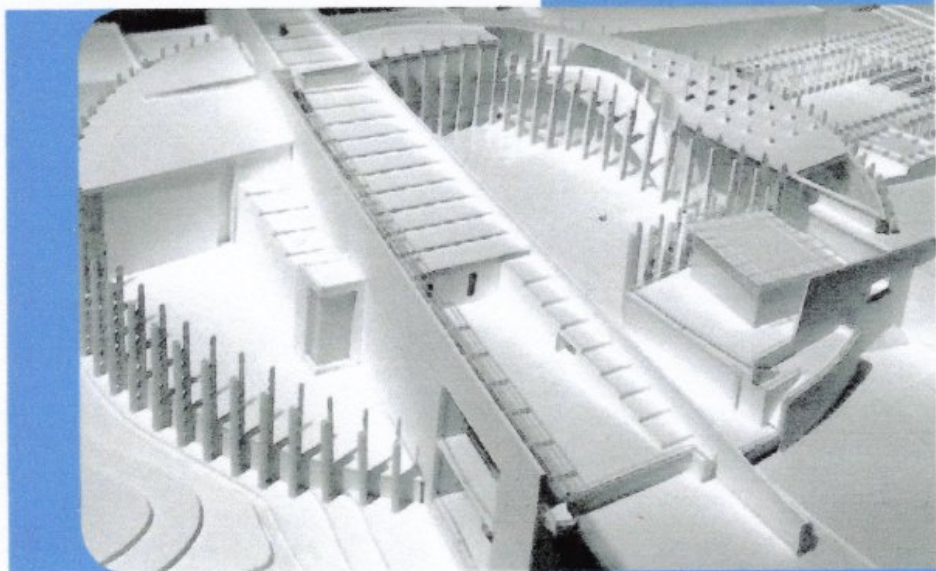
child in a global family, where the flows of money, goods, ideas and people are ever more footloose, she still lacks a clear sense of who and what she is.

But Maragna is spearheading a project that seeks to change that: the Gallery of Human Migration, which will showcase Canadian identity as resting solidly on the premise that not only is Canada a nation of migrants, but also, as Maragna emphasizes, that "migration is inextricable from Canadian society." Rather than focusing solely on the migration histories of the diverse peoples that populate Canada, the Gallery deploys a more experiential notion of migration. It will "explore the forces that measure and structure our society - forces that are ethnic in origin and Canadian in outcome." As such, the Gallery is planning to be interactive, seeking to communicate through multimedia materials the subjective and collective experience of migration and the medning of becoming Canadian.

To do this, the Gallery is embarking on a three-year research plan of recording, analyzing and studying migration experiences, coupled with a series of cross-country programs and mobile exhibits, before a more permanent home is established. The goal is to generate "institutionalized memories": to connect personal and familial experiences of migrations with that of groups and communities that have settled and moved across the country, and to find common strands that can speak to us all. Of course, migration is not an altogether happy or positive experience. It is rife with oppression, obstacles and prejudices. "We could see migration as a series of prejudices, be it the head tax on the Chinese, the internment of the Japanese, and so on. But over time, these prejudices are worked out," Maragna says, and in Canada, these have been done so peacefully.

Peace is at the cornerstone of the Gallery of Human Migration's impetus and one of its larger goals. While many nations have experienced and continue to experience migration both within and into its borders - other largely migrant nations such as Australia and the United States come to my mind - none, according to Maragna, have done with the relative peace, as has

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Canada. It is this sense of relative peaceful co-existence of diverse peoples that makes Canada's migration experience a model for other countries to emulate and a beacon of hope in a world all too ridden with violent ethnic, racial, and religious conflict and the persecution and dispossession of minorities.

Already, Maragna's project is receiving the support of a number of high profile Canadians, including Sergio Marchi, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Canada; Chief Justice of Ontario, Roy McMurtry; Dr. Rasik Morzaria, of the Board of Directors at York University; and, Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women), Jean Augustine. They have been touched by Maragna's passion and the power of his idea.

"People tell stories about their immigration and their problems, and it's just a fable," Morzaria offers. However, "a gallery that validates your stories, makes it...part of history" is hugely significant. As he continues, smiling, "I told Rocco that Americans have apple pie and motherhood; we will soon have the gallery and it will be better." As Hon. Jean Augustine remarks, it will "facilitate cross-cultural understanding and shared citizenship." Adds Ambassador Marchi: The gallery "helps define modern Canada, while offering other societies a glimpse into nation-building - without lecturing or posturing."

They support Maragna's idea that migration "is the search for a new life, a new way of looking at the world." It is thus, in essence, about home, about the loss of one's home, either by choice, circumstance or by force, and the effort to find and make a new one. As an architect, this making of home is more

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than just a physical structure, or size, or numbers of rooms. We all know this intuitively when we say a place feels like "home". Home is about our intimate moments, our hopes and dreams, where we are truly ourselves. It is about "security, memory, and passion," Maragna says powerfully. He describes an experience he had visiting the Parliament building in Ottawa. "No one was inside, except the security guard. Yet, it felt like home. It felt like Canada." As he continues, "We need to feel this about our own country. How our country is indeed home for us."

In the past, Canada saw herself as a multicultural mosaic, where people from 'diverse' places, from East Asia, South Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America and Europe, brought their 'cultures' intact. Yet, what multiculturalism doesn't take into account is what happens after these cultures arrive: how they mix, borrow, appropriate, hybridize; the essence of our contemporary fusion culture and lifestyle. Waves of migration, over decades and centuries, have made fusion culture what it is and what it is becoming. And for this reason, Maragna believes that Canadian identity needs to evolve from an "identity of origin to an identity of belonging."

"I prefer the image of the tapestry rather than the mosaic," he says. "The pieces of mosaic are distinct and separate. In a tapestry, the weave comes in at different times, is never ending, with the original threads always showing through and continuing." A tapestry not only exists because of diversity, but also is strengthened by the twisting together of diverse colours and textures of yarn and made more beautiful. How's that for new national identity? AV

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