

2016

# Rick Shaefer: The Refugee Trilogy Intro Panel

Fairfield University Art Museum

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# RICK SHAEFER

## The Refugee Trilogy

Art and events both have a galvanizing agency—the power to inspire witnesses to contemplation or action. Conversely, momentous events, triumphs and tragedies alike, have long been commemorated in art, from the ancient reliefs on the Arch of Titus in Rome to the French Romantic painter Théodore Géricault’s iconic *Raft of the Medusa*. These strands from two ends of a common arc converge in the extraordinary *Refugee Trilogy* series by Rick Shaefer, which represents the Connecticut-based artist’s passionate and cerebral response to the current Syrian refugee crisis, the seismic effects of which continue to resonate around the globe. In reacting to this crisis through the language of the visual, Shaefer joins a varied company, from larger-than-life personalities like Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, who has used refugees’ life vests in installations in Munich and Vienna and is currently completing a documentary film about the migrant crisis based on his visits to refugee camps on the Greek-Macedonian border, to Francesco Tuccio, a humble carpenter from the tiny island of Lampedusa between the coast of Tunisia and Sicily, who collected scraps of driftwood from the wreckage of ships carrying migrants from the Middle East and fashioned them into rough crosses symbolizing both the plight and the hope of desperate refugees. (One of these is now in the collection of the British Museum in London.) Employing monochromatic drawing as his medium, Shaefer creates powerful compositions abounding with figures and motifs inspired by Rubens and Géricault among other artists in the art historical pantheon, harnessing the lexicon of old master painting as he plumbs the expressive capacity of art to address the timeless human tragedy of exile, migration and dislocation.

It is a privilege for the Fairfield University Art Museum to present these recently completed powerful and compelling monumental works to the public for the first time, and to offer during the run of the exhibition an exceptionally rich roster of programs dealing with myriad aspects of the convulsive refugee crisis, from the plight of the migrants themselves to the devastating spoliation and destruction of cultural heritage in the afflicted regions of Iraq and Syria in particular. All events are open to the public and free of charge. Information is available on the museum’s website ([fairfield.edu/museum](http://fairfield.edu/museum)).

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