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FAMILY STYLE

Beyond The Bend

A new group show at the Ford Foundation in New York examines the physical and emotional toll of migration, underscored by the artists' personal paths.

Words by Meka Boyle

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Migration is not a straight line, but a path of twists and turns that, when things go according to plan, continue onward toward a new horizon. A group show at the Ford Foundation presents this movement as a river, with artists whose own pathways wind from Cuba to Miami; Vietnam to London by way of Canada; and Kenya to Chicago. Together, these different origins, journeys, and destinations chart what it means to move through the world today.

Curator [Dexter Wimberly](#) drew inspiration from ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus who wrote that "No man ever steps in the same river twice." This sense that nothing is fixed guided Wimberly as he sought out to make sense of the world around him. "We're currently at a moment when millions of people are forcibly displaced, and when border enforcement, asylum restrictions, and climate-driven migration

dominate political debate across nearly every continent,” he says. So, he acted with a sense of urgency and honed in on the personal: the artists who have experienced displacement firsthand, who carry their memories and stories and traditions—and the way it all materializes in their work.

It’s a show of varied histories united by a shared desire to make sense of borders, often by deconstructing them. London-based [KV Duong](#)’s *Family Portrait*, 2026, serves as the entry point. At the [Ford Foundation](#)’s gallery, the 46-year-old artist, who is ethnically Chinese, was born in Vietnam, and raised in Canada, presents a dreamlike congregation of his extended family from their final year together before leaving his motherland in 1987. Set against a multi-panel latex surface, the painting’s sheen recalls traditional Vietnamese lacquer technique while a grid of red lines nods to the country’s communist flag colors. His family’s faces are transmuted in black on a yellow patina: blurred and layered like a memory or a piece of personal history left behind or rendered invisible by Western culture. It was Duong’s use of latex that struck Wimberly: its duality of representing Vietnam’s colonial history and its tangible sensuality: “It’s a material that carries fetishistic and sensual associations tied to queer identity while also referencing the rubber industry and the exploitative plantations of French colonial Vietnam,” he explains.

Wimberly cites a similar desire to work in contrasts in the work of first-generation Cuban American artist duo [Elliot & Erick Jiménez](#), twins who were born and raised in Miami and are now based in New York. Their large-scale polyptych, *Where Fertile Land Grows*, 2026—their largest work to date and made especially for the exhibition—sets gothic, mystical photography against an ornate wooden 19th-century church bench, surrounded by custom frames. Here they fuse Lucumí, an Afro-Caribbean religion derived from West African Yoruba spirituality, with Catholicism and art historical motifs. In the top left panel, a pale, bald woman in a silver neck plate, translucent long-sleeve dress, and silver boots stands, eyes peacefully closed, against a dark forested backdrop, holding a sword. On the bottom right, a similar figure in a sheer cloak hangs upside down amidst branches. While in the top middle image, a reference to the Catholic notion of drinking the blood of Christ, a hand reaches out to prick a haloed lamb (the image taken from the Ghent Altarpiece painted by the Van Eyck brothers) with a pen-sized sword, while another gloved hand holds out a chalice. The resulting work when seen as whole holds a mythology that is both personal and divinely inspired.

Throughout the exhibition, bodily autonomy and migration are presented as inseparable. “Both come down to who gets to define our right to move,” says Wimberly. For the latter, he mentions Ecuador-born, Miami-based [Edison Peñafiel](#)’s film *Mare Magnum*, 2021, which features masked figures on boats holding found wood, oil drums, and tires, set against a cut-out set of rising waters. In contrast, the curator focuses on artists that challenge the forces that control how one should move (and present) in the world, such as the figurative works of India-born San Francisco-based [Anoushka Mirchandani](#) and Brooklyn-born and -based [Adama Delphine Fawundu](#), who is of Mende, Bubi, and Krim descent. A chair by [Brendan Fernandes](#)—who is of Goan heritage, was born in Kenya, immigrated to Canada as a child, and is currently based in Chicago—gives these concerns a three-dimensional heft, with a chair that is both functional and a refusal of form. “What connects all of it is storytelling as a form of resistance,” says Wimberly.

The curator was most surprised by how his conceptual theme of water appeared in a literal sense in so many of the works. He lists Fawundu’s video, which moves from Africa to South America to North America, and Peñafiel’s monochromatic sea. “These artists were already thinking in currents,” he adds, “already understanding migration and selfhood as things that flow rather than settle.” After all, the sea is what makes borders tangible, what isolates as much as what connects, and water, it’s inside of us, we must move with it or get swept away. And upon arrival on a new shore, it’s the far away horizon that remains, a reminder.