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# Alien Encounters

Photographer captures exiles in their homes away from home

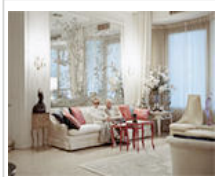
By Niamh Wallace

Published on April 09, 2008 at 4:00am

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Eliza Gregory's amazing portraits of recently resettled refugees in the Phoenix area illustrate an experience that most of us complacent Americans would find nearly impossible to imagine: suddenly fleeing your home, leaving behind not only political unrest and/or violence, but friends, family, and most of your worldly possessions.



On one of her visits with a refugee family, Gregory took along her curious boyfriend, who, while enjoying the hospitality (in this case, a plate of homemade baklava), couldn't help but notice something sweetly awkward about the whole interaction. But to Gregory, this is

the point. "There's something beautiful about that awkwardness," she says. "It has to do with a mutual openness, where nobody knows really what's going to happen, either myself or the families, but everyone's excited about it."

Gregory's work in the new "FUSE: Portraits of Refugee Households in Metropolitan Phoenix" exhibit led her to contemplate the nature of home, as well. Gregory explains, "Every house is a country unto itself. And that's true not just in the houses of refugees, but of everyone. In the sacred space of the home, with its own rituals and traditions, you're always the stranger."

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