

Rosellina Avoscan's *Dreaming I, II, III, IV* (clockwise from upper left)

by [John Kohan](#)

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Rosellina Avoscan knows from experience what she calls “the loneliness of not belonging to anybody or anywhere.” At 14, she ran away from an abusive home in Como, Italy, to live on the streets. She joined a commune of Italian social activists, harvested melons in Crete, waited on tables in Berlin, and finally settled in London, where, as a single mother, she supported her daughter as a cleaner. She was able to enroll at the Chelsea College of Arts and work as an art instructor. Avoscan is now back in Italy and considers concern for the homeless an integral part of her art.

The *Dreaming I, II, III, IV* series of panel paintings was inspired by photos of refugees sleeping in safety after being rescued while trying to cross from Libya to Italy by boat in 2016. Avoscan challenges us to look beyond the striking color compositions of the crowd scenes to the weeping woman in the plastic rain hood or the young man in red with his arms crossed across his chest. Failing to recognize the humanity of the figures objectifies them into the shrouded shapes of the final painting in the cycle, as disposable as plastic trash bags.

Avoscan is involved in advocacy work. She displayed her work at Italy's refugee center on the isle of Lampedusa, and she did interpretation work at commemorative meetings of international students and survivors of a tragic sea crossing. "I have known hunger, filth, and the bone-chilling cold of body and soul, when you feel unnoticed and unwanted," she told the century. "I know what it means to quietly dream of the better life you think you deserve. I'm thankful to those people who helped me and showed me love. I want to be like them."