

The Space Between the Lands:
Migration in the Works of Iranian Canadian
Diasporic Artists

By

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ABSTRACT

Canada's 'multicultural' and 'diverse' identity has surely effected artists' lives and careers. Taking the Iranian artist as case study, this project aims to explore the ways in which migration has affected the work of the artist. The focus of this paper is to investigate how Iranian artists are navigating the Canadian artistic landscape. The process includes the analyzation of their works through three main lenses: politics of movement and space, issues of representation, as well as intersectional feminisms and the examination of the autonomy of the Iranian Canadian woman artist. Private interviews have been conducted to gain deeper insight on the experiences of migration as endured by the Iranian Canadian artists. This thesis seeks to investigate the spaces that diasporic artists occupy. Further, it can be realized that the artists analyzed are finding their voices while also standing in solidarity with other underrepresented artists.

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من با همه شما ایستاده ام
(I stand with you all).

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Fig. 95. Soroush Dabiri. “#12.” *Femininity*. Reproduced from www.soroushdabiri.com. Accessed on November 16th, 2021. <https://soroushdabiri.com/femininity-2014-15>

Fig. 96. Soroush Dabiri. “#13.” *Femininity*. Reproduced from www.soroushdabiri.com. Accessed on November 16th, 2021. <https://soroushdabiri.com/femininity-2014-15>

Fig. 97. Soroush Dabiri. “#214 Femininity. Reproduced from www.soroushdabiri.com. Accessed on November 16th, 2021. <https://soroushdabiri.com/femininity-2014-15>

Fig. 98. Soroush Dabiri. “#15.” *Femininity*. Reproduced from www.soroushdabiri.com. Accessed on November 16th, 2021. <https://soroushdabiri.com/femininity-2014-15>

Fig. 99. Soheyl Bastami. *Untitled*. Reproduced from www.soheylbastami.com, Accessed on November 23rd, 2021. <http://soheylbastami.com/works/clay-sculpture/>

Fig. 100. Carson Grove Elementary School. © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.

Fig. 101. Kiana Darvish-Mansoori. “Iran.” *Flags of the World*. © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.

Fig. 102. *Flags of the World*. © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.



Leily Derakhshani, *Ocean of Love* (Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery: 2020) Oil on Canvas 120x100 cm © photo by Darvish-Mansoori

CHAPTER ONE: BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

1.1 Personal Narratives

The movement of Iranians to Canada concurrently led to the arrival of artists and artwork. Iranians form one of the largest immigrant communities from the Muslim world in Canada.¹ With more voices and ideas escalating, the art world in Canada has surely seen a rise in Iranian art and artists. Therefore, it is important to open new conversations about these individual artists. This thesis will explore how the complexities caused by immigration and identity politics are reflected in the artworks of the Iranian artists residing in Canada, as can be traced also through the transformations in the artworld. The main questions to be posed are: What effects does immigration have on artists and their practice? How are Iranian artists navigating the artworld in Canada? The works and life of these Iranian Canadian artists will be analyzed through three main frameworks, which will embody the chapters in this thesis: the impact Canadian immigration policies and politics, as well as Iranian politics with a focus on movement and space in art; the issues related to representation and identity, with a focus on the ways in which Iranian artists are navigating their surroundings and institutions, and finally the topic of intersectional feminism and the issues of womanhood with respect to the women's bodies and diverse identities.

This thesis strives to problematize the discourses on Canada's "multicultural" identity within the scope of Iranian migration and art. It is often claimed that "the greater Toronto area is now the most diverse city on earth, with half its residents born outside the country; Vancouver, Calgary,

¹ Haideh Moghissi, Saeed Rahnema and Mark J Goodman (eds.), *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 26.

Ottawa and Montreal aren't far behind.”² Here, it's important, however, to highlight the keyword “diverse.” No matter the statistics and the numbers that one reads, physical experiences and emotional responses might dictate a different narrative on diversity in Canada. Therefore, understanding the statistics and logistics of migration is only important when placed alongside the lived experiences of the migrants. Many of the artists and migrants to be discussed reside in the “most diverse city on the planet:” Toronto. However, I am writing this thesis in Ottawa, as an immigrant myself, born in Tehran, Iran but raised in Ottawa, Ontario. Many issues to be discussed in these chapters relate to me both professionally and personally and they require further investigation considering that Canada’s diversity will continue to grow as stated in a report claiming: “ten years ago, two-thirds of population increase was courtesy of immigration [however] by 2030, it is projected to be 100%.”³ What does it mean for a country to have its full population growth rely on immigration? Justin Trudeau told the New York Times Magazine that “there is no core identity, no mainstream in Canada.”⁴ Thus, what does this tell us about the integration process for immigrants? Considering that the discourses and practices of diversity closely affect the cultural and social environment of Canada, what do these claims imply for the diaspora artists and the artworld that they engage with? Is there an integration process and what does it look like in the artworld? How do migrant artists, forming pieces, fit together in the overall puzzle that is Canada? Migrating at a young age includes a change in language and culture. Being born in Tehran then moving to Ottawa at the age of 6 created a gap in my cultural identity. My mother tongue and first language became two different dialects. Every day since April 24th, 2004, the day I landed in Ottawa, two distinct cultures and identities have been growing and sprouting in two different directions. Having

² Charles Foran, “The Canada experiment: is this the world’s first ‘post national’ country?” in *The Guardian* (Wednesday 4 January 2017), 1.

³ Foran, *The Canada Experiment*, 2.

⁴ Foran, *The Canada Experiment*, 2.

a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree, and being an artist myself, my involvement in the art community in Canada has aided in raising these questions. This thesis is an exploration of my own complex and dual identity-(ies), a place where they can finally meet.

This exploration requires a deeper inquiry into the world of Iranian artists who reside in Canada. I connected with the artists through various methods. I discovered artists' works in museum websites, social media accounts, as well as word of mouth within the Iranian communities in Ottawa and Toronto. Finding one of the first Iranian artist (which I have Carleton University's Art Gallery to thank for that as they commissioned RAH's work "SUPERNOVA" in 2019) created a web of finding others. I was introduced to Leily Derakhshani, an artist to be discussed in this thesis through personal contacts. Communities become key points of reference. The notion of community building as well as belonging within a community of people who share intersections becomes a major component of this thesis.

The process of developing a solid bank of artists is a process that could go on forever. I began by creating a list of as many Iranian Canadian artists as I could find. I acknowledge that it is impossible to find every Iranian Canadian artist. The long list of artists was filtered down when I could not get in touch with some artists to be interviewed, or others did not fit the scope of the thesis. The 18 artists included are chosen because they present the most relevant case studies in relation to the issues discussed in this thesis such as the themes on migration, identity and belonging. Upon having a core database of Iranian Canadian artists, interviews were conducted (refer to Appendix A for interview guide). One-hour interviews were managed over Zoom, which became a metaphor on its own; invisible internet allowing for people to connect across continents and lands. The questions that I asked circled around their experiences with migration, as well as the ways in which their art has been affected by their gender, politics, race, and travel. The questions I asked in the interviews

were general and very open-ended in their interpretations because it was crucial for me to offer a safe and transparent space for them to express their thoughts freely. I wanted the artists to answer the questions however they saw fit, and I allowed them to provide however much information they wanted to share. This is an art historical case study about Iranian art in migration by finding meeting points, intersections, where features of one's identity overlap with others and instill a sense of belonging, in the navigation of relocation.⁵

It is also important to note that many of the artists are emerging artists, or they are planting new roots in Canada, therefore there is little resources and publications on their works in a North American/English speaking context. I relied heavily on their social media accounts, websites, and the personal interviews. Another issue for those that did have publications was that the inaccessibility of some of the resources is significant, as many of the artists worked in the Emirates, Germany, France, Russia, and other countries where the catalogues and articles are difficult to access during the pandemic and in different languages.

Utilizing the information received through the interviews and from scholarship on similar research topics, the process of analyzing the artworks through the above-mentioned lenses was made possible. It is only through *beginning* conversations about race, cultures and underrepresented artists and their works that we can *end* art historical discourses relying on stereotypes, marginalization, and “othering.”

⁵ It is important to note that although many of the artists engage with early art historical movements, or recall certain historical events, they refuse to be categorized. They stay out of labels and labelling (which will also be discussed in a separate chapter). Although they may engage with early art historical movements, they do not wish for their work to be viewed and categorized by the movement, especially a Western/European one.

1.2 Literature Review

Politics, Multiculturalism, and Diaspora

What is “migration?” What government policies are in place that lend to the encouragement of migration, especially immigration to Canada (as the host country)? Canada is one of the first countries in the world to develop a multi-cultural policy.⁶ But what does a multi-cultural policy mean in regard to the artworld? These questions require deeper analysis through arts as they also relate to the intermingling of diverse ethnicities existing within the country. These intersections become frameworks of the analysis of Iranian artists’ works and lives. Will Kymlicka’s chapter “The Three Lives of Multiculturalism,” and Robert F. Harney’s “So Great a Heritage as Ours’ Immigration and the Survival of the Canadian Polity,” provide structures to analyze the beginnings of the multi-cultural policy to further our understanding of its impact on the artists’ lives.⁷ Harney’s essay provides a definition of multiculturalism by stating that this policy has been in place for the bettering of Canada’s population growth as well as the ethnocultural composition of the country.⁸ Kymlicka discusses the beginnings of the multicultural policy and analyzes whether it has been effective in its purpose or not. He states that only those who are Canadian citizens are a part of the multicultural identity of Canada, as you must be Canadian in order to be considered a part of Canada.⁹ Many of the artists I will be discussing are not yet Canadian citizens and have only just settled down in Canada within the last 5 or so years. The ways in which these artists are navigating

⁶ Foran, *The Canada Experiment*, 4.

⁷ Will Kymlicka, “The Three Lives of Multiculturalism” in *Revisiting Multiculturalism in Canada: Theories, Policies and Debates*. eds. Shibao Guo and Lloyd Wong (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers 2015), 17-36; Robert F. Harney, “So great a heritage as ours’ – immigration and the survival of the Canadian polity” in *Daedalus* vol. 117 issue 4 (International Bibliography of the Social Sciences, Oct 1998), 51-97.

⁸ Harney, *So Great a Heritage as Ours*, 52.

⁹ Kymlicka, *The Three Lives of Multiculturalism*, 23.

the Canadian landscape, within the context that they are not yet a part of it, become important conversations to have.

Chapter 2 entitled “Movement, Space and Art” will be using artists’ firsthand experiences along with the scholarship pertaining to diaspora and migration studies to examine the ways in which their identity is shaped through migration. The writings of Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier and Mimi Sheller inform my inquiries.¹⁰ Their book “Uprooting/Regrounding: Questions of Home and Migration,” in its analysis of migration and issues of belonging, aids in the dissection of these artworks as places for the exploration of the artists’ identities.¹¹ This book challenges the assumption that sees migration as an act of freedom, and deracinating roots. Iranian artists have been redefining migration as a solitary and emotional process, as demonstrated by Jamileh Salek, for example, who will be discussed in this chapter. Although Salek’s stance may be different to Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier and Sheller, they are both valid.

These various definitions/experiences of migration, whether it be personal, forced, or necessary in order to gain independence, as well as the lives of second-generation migrants is relatable to Ahmed’s book “The Promise of Happiness.”¹² Ahmed discusses a number of case studies and examples of second-generation migrants’ navigating their identities between a household and a public domain that are different in culture, religion, and language. “A Newcomer’s Introduction to Canada” as well as “An Introduction for Newcomers Settling in Ontario” become interesting case studies as they illustrate images of happy smiling people, representing migration merely as a joyful experience. Ahmed questions the roots of happiness through exploring the ethics of living a good life, migration as a source of joy, and the intertwined

¹⁰ Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, 2003).

¹¹ Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller, *Uprootings/Regroundings*.

¹² Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

conditions of happiness being dependent on external factors more than internal.¹³ Along with the re-definition of migration as a personal decision and a private negotiation with one's surroundings, it is important to uncover that many forced migrations have also taken place. Many migrants have had no option but to migrate due to political unrest, fundamentalist regimes, colonization, war, and other unsettling circumstances of the like. Yet, artists' works demonstrate that despite their diverse circumstances and backgrounds, once one has migrated, they are able to find one's voice and create a life of one's own against the challenges. The notion of home and belonging therefore becomes blurry for the migrant artist who finds another dwelling that shelters one's creative work.¹⁴ Therefore, whereas these newfound 'homes' are not equivalent to origins, preserve and manifest the link to what was left behind.

An important case study that dissects the lens of involuntary migration as a measure of survival, as well as the identities that are shaped from involuntary migration is "Can the Displaced Speak? Muslim Refugee Girls Negotiating Identity, Home and Belonging through Photovoice" by Neila Miled. Miled's project gives voice, authority, and importance to the identity of the young refugee girl in Canada. Ten Muslim girls are recruited in a local high school to participate in a photovoice project, which entails taking photos as responses to prompts that are given to them by Miled. The photos resonate with them and showcase their personal journeys and lived experiences in navigating their hybrid identities, which then will be exhibited once in the school, then at the university, then for a third time at a local church. This project provided a re-definition to "home" and "belonging" because one of the prompts for the students to photograph was what "home"

¹³ Sara Ahmed, "Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness," in *New Formations: A Journal of Culture, Theory Politics* (2007), 121-135.

¹⁴ For more on the diasporic artist experience within an art historical context, see Kobena Mercer, "Ethnicity and Internationally: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness," *Third Text*, volume 13, Issue 49, (Taylor&Francis Online, 1999), 51-62; and Kobena Mercer, "Art History and the Dialogics of Diaspora," *Small Axe a Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, volume 16, number 2, (Duke University Press: 2012), 213-227.

meant to them. This project indeed proved differently for each student, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.¹⁵ These intersections of the identity as plural, nonlinear, instable, sometimes impersonal, and incomplete, as revealed through such works are important to this thesis.

Many Iranian artists have been negotiating their Iranian-ness within the Canadian/American landscape. Neda Maghbouleh's "The Limits of Whiteness" discusses the many layers of the Iranian racial identity in America. For example, in legal systems, Iranians are often categorized as Caucasian/white, while being racially profiled and discriminated against in personal instances within schools or workspace.¹⁶ Second generation Iranian artists, or young Iranian immigrants, who were brought up in Canada, become exposed to the education and cultural systems of Canada without seeing a representation of themselves/their ethnicity that they can identify with, in the artworld. How does the lack of relatable representations in the artworld affect an artist in Canada? In an interview, Brandon Baghaee a young male bi-racial artist who will be discussed in this chapter, states "Everything influences [art]...everything around, the environment around you, the people that you are around, and that shaped who I am. Talking to my dad about stories of his background and my grandparents of their background ... that helps me understand who I am and the reason why I am the way I am. And you know when you look at art history, most of the old masters who are old white males, you don't see a representation of [black or Persian] people."¹⁷ Assessing their own plural identities, by comparing themselves to other minority or underrepresented groups, within the Canadian/American is crucial for these Iranian artists, as will

¹⁵ Neila Miled, "Can the Displaced Speak? Muslim Refugee Girls Negotiating Identity, Home and Belonging through Photovoice" in *Women's Studies International Forum 81* (University of British Columbia: Department of Educational Studies, 2020).

¹⁶ Neda Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian-Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2017).

¹⁷ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th 2021.

be underlined further in the thesis. This raises the question; how are these Iranian artists engaging with other minority groups and their concerns critically? Many issues, as will be seen in the following chapters, such as being underrepresented, sharing marginalized experiences as well as language or cultural barriers, is shared amongst many of the minority groups. All people who are “othered” or pushed to the peripheries share this similar experience.

Contemporary Iranian Art History and “Representation” in migration

There have been many studies on Iranian diasporic artists in recent decades. Talinn Grigor, one of the leading scholars of the subject, develops four categories to identify Iranian artists who live in Iran and abroad. The first category consists of avant-garde artists of Pahlavi.¹⁸ The second is called the “so-called revolutionary painters.”¹⁹ The third are the children of the 1360s (Hijri year)/1980s.²⁰ Finally, she mentions contemporary emerging artists today, which aligns with this thesis’ focus.²¹ She creates these categories in order to better organize and analyze their work and their lives while understanding the era they lived in, and the experiences they may have had, due to the revolution in 1979, war between Iraq and Iran in the 80s, and other changing political states.²² The artists that I analyze differ from Grigor’s topics because whereas she explores contemporary artists in Iran, I am concerned with the Iranian diasporic artists responding to the Canadian environment. I use her categories to locate the Iranian-born artists in relation to their experiences and reasoning for migration. Yet contrary to Grigor’s focus, this thesis is concerned with the Canadian context, which is often labelled as “diverse.” The effects of discourses on “diversity” and

¹⁸ Talinn Grigor, “Chapter 2: The Studio” in *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (London UK: Reaktion Books, 2014), 105.

¹⁹ Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 105.

²⁰ Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 105.

²¹ Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 105.

²² Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 100-106.

navigation of self in these so-called “multicultural” surroundings is critical for my thesis. It is important to outline that some artists migrated in their early adulthood, others migrated at an older age, and some are second-generation immigrants, either immigrating at a young age, or being born to Iranian parents in Canada. The inclusion of artists from diverse backgrounds is necessary to different migrant experiences in a “multicultural” city like Toronto.

The roster of artists in this thesis includes people who were born here in Canada, as well as others who were educated in Iran and traveled to Canada to begin their professional practice. I wanted to choose a range of artists from different generations to analyze how they differ in their engagement with the topics at hand, therefore, some are born before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, some are born during the war of Iraq-Iran in the early 1980s, and others are born well after the Revolution, in more contemporary Iran. This thesis also utilizes concepts and thoughts discussed by key authors such as Mehraneh Ebrahimi, author of “Women, Art and Literature in the Iranian Diaspora” suggests that Iranian artists, writers, and scholars in the diaspora have the power to disrupt and alter the boundaries of the “Other as an enemy” and thus create new narratives of the identity of the “Other”.²³ Fereshteh Daftari, another major figure in the Iranian Modern and Contemporary art history, insists for the re-evaluation of Iranian Modernity by suggesting that there is no one algorithm to judge Iranian Modern Artists by, because there are many algorithms as “it is the conditions each artist find himself in and the context, where he works, that affects the questions they ask and the pay they follow.”²⁴ In the context of this thesis, Iranian-ness does not necessarily relate

²³ Mehraneh Ebrahimi, *Women, Art, and Literature in the Iranian Diaspora* (Syracuse New York: Syracuse University Press, 2019.)

²⁴ Fereshteh Daftari, Talk titled “Promiscuous Modernism to Contemporary Art: Fragments of an Iranian Art History” in *I/RAN COLLOQUIUM* at Yale MacMillan Center Middle East Studies on Zoom, Youtube video posted Feb 19 2021 (Accessed Feb. 21st 2021),

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emG7LYJ_7NU&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR2gCez-QyfRtDlbE1_MVI8wOFGSkZ0pncJP8wW3RVjPbbhIbdXGK_NUrE&ab_channel=MiddleEastStudies%2FYaleMacMilla nCenter

to someone who is born in Iran. Iranian-ness derives from any cultural association or experiences of the Iranian tradition, culture, values, or art, as well as how people carry these influences with them in their everyday life. Daftari has written and co-edited “Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists” in which she discusses the positioning of diasporic contemporary art within Western worlds.²⁵ The contributors discuss the depictions and exoticizations of the Middle East, along with the issues of orientalism by asking questions such as “Middle of what? East of where?”²⁶ Daftari, who is also an experienced curator (curated shows such as “Between Word and Image: Modern Iranian Visual Culture” at the Grey Gallery of New York in 2002, “Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking” at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2006, and “Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians” at the Agha Khan Museum in Toronto in 2017), views Iranian art as an autonomous space where pluralism can flourish, rather than an environment of suppression and commodification. Hamid Keshmirshekan in his book “Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives.”²⁷ His book unravels the major pinnacles of Iranian Modern and Contemporary art. He provides six chapters, within which he outlines the highlights of important years in Iranian Art History (namely from the late sixties, seventies, eighties, nineties until now) and Iranian Diasporic Art. His discussion of artists in the diaspora and their negotiations with their ethnicities and personal histories is useful in my analyzations of diasporic artists in Canada. I use Grigor’s classifications to locate these artists on the timeline of Iranian art history while drawing on Keshmirshekan, Ebrahimi, and Daftari’s method of questioning,

²⁵ Fereshteh Daftari and Jill Baird eds, *Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists* (Vancouver Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre Inc., 2013).

²⁶ Derek Gregory, “Middle of What? East of Where?” in *Safar/Voyage: Contemporary Works by Arab, Iranian and Turkish Artists* eds. Fereshteh Daftari and Jill Baird (Vancouver BC Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia: Douglas & McIntyre Inc., 2013), 39-53.

²⁷ Hamid Keshmirshekan, *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives* (Great Britain: Saqi Books, 2013).

analyzing, and discussing Iranian art and autonomy in my explorations of Iranian Canadian art and artists.

Art historians and critics writing about Iranian art and culture in Canada are limited. However, I will locate my work in conversation with Andrea Fitzpatrick's studies on contemporary Iranian photography and video art. Fitzpatrick is an associate professor of art history at the University of Ottawa whose areas of research are "art and exhibitions that involve the photographic history and art of Iran [...] as are other centres of artistic creation in the Middle East, Africa, and the Global South."²⁸ Fitzpatrick has been a part of many discussions with RAH, an artist to be discussed in this thesis, one of which was at Carleton University Art Gallery on Wednesday November 27th, 2019, to discuss RAH's video installation "SuperNova". In her essay "Of Gesture, Erasure, and Exposure: Images of Text in Iranian Photographic Art", she discusses photographic works by artists in Iran and abroad who use the Farsi scripture and calligraphic texts to convey meaning and truths about subjects being at risk or confined, rather than freed as is usually the case in expressive gestures of Western art.²⁹ Fitzpatrick also is concerned with the female voice and autonomy in Iranian art, as can be seen in her essay "The Female Voice in the Art of Newsha Tavakolian, Shirin Neshat, and Parastou Ahadi."³⁰ This thesis examines issues pertaining to conditions of being an Iranian artist in Canada and also stems from my own experiences of being associated with Iranian identity, which indicates different ways of experiencing and adapting to various Iranian cultures and values. Recognizing Fitzpatrick's contributions to the discourse at hand,

²⁸ Andrea Fitzpatrick, "Home - info" www.andreadfitzpatrick.info, Accessed on November 21st 2021, <https://www.andreadfitzpatrick.info/>

²⁹ Andrea Fitzpatrick, "Of Gesture, Erasure, And Exposure: Images of Text in Iranian Photographic Art" in *ART TOMORROW contemporary art magazine* no. 5 (Summer 2011), 143.

³⁰ Andrea Fitzpatrick, "The Female Voice in the Art of Newsha Tavakolian, Shirin Neshat, and Parastou Ahadi" in *Contemporary Iranian Photography: Five Perspectives* ed. Abbas Daneshvari (Costa Mesa California: Mazda Publishers, 2017), 23-49.

I include private conversations and layers of personal experience along with migratory and intersectional studies while analysing artworks in order to contribute to a field that is underrepresented.

Other theses that concern with the Iranian identity and art in Canada include Andrew Gayed's "Queer Modernities and Diasporic Art of the Middle East;" Parisa Lisa Yazdi's "Citizenship, Belonging, Meaning and Identity: a Case Study of First Generation Iranian Immigrants in Vancouver;" and Samine Tabatabaei's "Chronopolitics of Contemporaneity in Iranian Art."³¹ Nilofar Shidmehr, an author and instructor at Simon Fraser University, is interested in poetry as well as short stories in literature studies. Though she is not concerned with visual art, in "Towards a New Politics of Recognition: Multiculturalism and Assemblage of Iranian-Canadian Identities" she discusses Charles Taylor's politics of recognition using the Iranian representation in Canada as case study.³² Her distinction between the terms "multiculturalism" and "multicultural" prove useful in my own exploration of the Canadian artistic landscape. She states that "multiculturalism" and "multicultural" define two different tasks in that the latter "is not built on notions such as nation-state and problematizes such notions."³³

Against this backdrop, Chapter 3 entitled "Issues of Representation" oversees issues of racial performance and racial drag, as well as representations of the intellectual by asking: who can speak on certain issues, and do you have to be a part of a specific group to voice your opinions? I draw on

³¹ Andrew Gayed, *Queer Modernities and Diasporic Art of the Middle East* (York University Department of Art History and Visual Culture: PhD dissertation, 2020); Parisa Lisa Yazdi, *Citizenship, Belonging, Meaning and Identity: a Case Study of First Generation Iranian Immigrants in Vancouver* (Simon Fraser University Department of Arts and Social Sciences, MA thesis dissertation, 2013); Samine Tabatabaei, *Chronopolitics of Contemporaneity in Iranian Art* (McGill University Department of Art History: PhD Dissertation, 2018).

³² Nilofar Shidmehr, "Chapter 5: Towards a New Politics of Recognition: Multiculturalism and Assemblage of Iranian-Canadian Identities" in *Precarious International Multicultural Education: Hegemony, Dissent and Rising Alternatives*, eds. Handel Kashope Wright, Michael Singh, and Richard Race (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2012), 83-102.

³³ Shidmehr, *Towards a New Politics of Recognition*, 83.

Edward Said's "Orientalism" as well as "Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures" to discuss Iranian Canadian artists who are navigating their Iranian identity in a Canadian art world and who are critical of dominant voices that erase theirs. The notion of race as a performance is discussed by RAH, an artist to be discussed in this chapter, who place themselves in conversation with Judith Butler's notion of gender as a performance.³⁴ Racial drag, as coined by RAH, takes Butler's theory of performativity, and applies it to the methods of representing one's race; therefore, race becomes an act, the same way that gender becomes an act.³⁵

While discussing the notion of "representation," it is important to outline the many layers of what it means to represent something. The representation of self, and identity is a key factor in this thesis, as well as the representation of race, and its constituents. However, another feature that will be discussed is the ways in which migrant artists are navigating their surroundings in a new environment while representing new sites and sights. Through depicting their own encounters with new surroundings, these artists reiterate migration as an individual and personal act. Hence, it becomes apparent that each artist's portrayals of their new life after migration are different. To understand these artists' bodily experiences during travels and their ways of seeing and reacting to their new surroundings, I rely on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological concept of the eye and body as a source of knowledge.³⁶

³⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory" in *Theatre Journal, Periodicals Archive Online* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Dec 1, 1988), 519-531.

³⁵ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*. : Fitzpatrick presented two conference papers on the works of RAH (titled "Queer Visuality and Race in the Art of Rah, Ike Ude, and Zaneli Muholi" at the Annual Conference for Black Feminisms in North and Latin American Art Panel held in Quebec on 2019 and "Stars are not always white: Queering Race, Temporality, and Iranian Identity in Rah's SupeNova" for Queer Visualities: African Perspectives, other Perspectives conference at North West University at Potchefstroom South Africa in 2019), and is in progress of publishing an article titled "Super-Queer: Costume Aesthetics in the Anti-Colonial Art of Rah, Ike Ude, and Zaneli Muholi."

³⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind (from the *Primacy of Perception*, pp. 159-90 in the 1964 translation)," *Ponty Basic Writings* eds. Thomas Baldwin. (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2004), 290-324.

Intersectionality and Feminisms

Along with diaspora and immigration studies, issues of representation and Iranian art historical references, it is crucial to examine studies on the intersections of gender, race, religion, and sexuality. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Leslie McCall who have coined and applied “intersectional studies” in frameworks of analysis, refer to intersectionality as a word to explain the interconnected nature of social categorizations and thus the multiple levels of social injustices.³⁷ This is a necessary framework to refer to while studying artists who are a minority in a country that implants policies regarding multiculturalism: despite these policies, minority groups and their race/culture are frequently marginalized. This lack of recognition recalls Maghbouleh’s description of the marginalization of the Iranian race in America.³⁸ Policies do not necessarily consider any aspects of culture and lifestyle, instead, they often create niches which become problematic in its forcing of some groups to be “othered” and others to be dominant. Edward Said explains the common denominator of the many aspects of Orientalism as the separation between Occident (read Canadian audiences) from Orient (read Iranian artists). Likewise, this “othering” which is shaped by such policies, give rise to the outlook on Iranian artists’ artworks as something belonging to the “oriental.”³⁹

Chapter 4 entitled “Intersectional Feminism and Iranian Canadian Women Artists” situates itself within these theoretical frameworks related to intersectionality, feminism, orientalism, and the female autonomy. As O'Reilly mentions, people and their bodies take up more space than the physical state that they occupy because the incorporeal realm that surrounds us (our thoughts and

³⁷ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis” in *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society: Intersectionality Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory* (University of Chicago Press, Summer 2013), 785-810.

³⁸ Maghbouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness*.

³⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* 25th anniversary edition (New York: Vintage Books A Division of Random House, October 1979).

interactions) is also an extension of the physical.⁴⁰ Another important discussion is that of the male artist and the female artist in representations of the female sexuality. Monica Juneja provides a case study in her essay “Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation’” that I use in analyzing the works of Souroush Dabiri and Anahita Akhavan.⁴¹ The case study looks at Amrita Sher-Gil’s self-portraits in contrast to Paul Gauguin’s portraits of the “exotic female” to uncover layers of sexism and fetishization in regards to the “oriental” woman and the western painter.⁴² Moreover, James Elkins’ “The End of the Theory of the Gaze” discusses the theory of the male gaze in art that inform my analysis.⁴³

It is with these frameworks that I explore the ways in which Iranian artists navigate migration and all that entails in Canada. How is art being shaped and changed through migration? How do artists come to terms with their migrant identity? Whereas many questions in this thesis are shaped by my own migrant identity, I analyze Iranian Canadian artworks through a multitude of lenses to open a discussion about diasporic art that remains undiscovered to many. This thesis, then is a journey to explore our relationships with one another, and to contemplate the spaces that we take up, as well as the spaces that exist between us (and far and near lands).

⁴⁰ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2009).

⁴¹ Monica Juneja, “Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation’” in *Global Studies, Mapping Contemporary Art and Culture*, eds. Hans Belting et al. (Ostfildern: Hatje Canz Verlag, 2011), 274-297.

⁴² Juneja, *Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation’*.

⁴³ James Elkins “The End of the Theory of the Gaze” in *The Visual: How it is Studies* (2010).

CHAPTER TWO: MOVEMENT, SPACE AND ART

It makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, disappearance.⁴⁴

Diversity and migration are an important discussion to partake in when mentioning Canada, particularly the province of Ontario. With migration, the tendency for racism and sometimes more extreme, hate crimes, are heightened. Most recently, on Tuesday, June the 7th 2021, in a city south of Toronto, London Ontario, a family of Muslim-Canadians were terrorized on a walk in their neighbourhood as a truck struck them on the sidewalk. After this hate crime took place, police stated that they “believe the victims were targeted because of their Islamic faith.”⁴⁵ The BBC News reports, “A 2016 census found that London – a city about 200km (125 miles) south-west of Toronto – is growing increasingly diverse. One in five people was born outside of Canada, with Arabs being the area’s largest minority group, and South Asians coming in a close second.” Diversity and multiculturalism policies prove to be problematic solutions to an increasingly migrant-populated country. Doug Ford, current premier of Ontario, took to twitter to write “Hate and Islamophobia have NO place in Ontario. Justice must be served for the horrific act of hatred that took place in London, Ontario yesterday.”⁴⁶ Justin Trudeau, prime minister of Canada, whose father was the prime minister shaping the multicultural policy in 1971, also tweeted: “I’m horrified by the news from London, Ontario. To the loved ones of those who were terrorized by yesterday’s act of hatred, we are here for you. We are also here for the child who remains in hospital – our

⁴⁴ Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (New York: Vintage Books a division of Random House inc., 2000).

⁴⁵ “Muslim Family in Canada Killed in ‘Premeditated’ Truck Attack” *BBC News* (published on June 8, 2021) Accessed September 1st 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57390398>

⁴⁶ Doug Ford, www.Twitter.com/fordnation, (published Jun 7 2021) Accessed on June 8th 2021. <https://twitter.com/fordnation/status/1401987218504364038>

hearts go out to you, and you will be in our thoughts as you recover.” Phrases such as “I am so sorry that you aren’t safe here. This is your home too,”⁴⁷ as mentioned by many Instagram users and social media followers, often appear only after a terror attack. Why are such actions and initiatives taken only after a certain issue or conflict arises? And more importantly, are social media interactions benefiting or detrimental to such injustices? There are certain questions that arise when voices of allyship are heard only after injustices occur.

To understand the landscape of diversity in the Canadian artworld, we must inquire about the backstory of the “multiculturalism” policy of Canada first. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, on 8 October 1971, announced for the first time that multiculturalism would be an official Canadian government policy.⁴⁸ The policy was first instated to unite the French and the English citizens of Canada, which is still evident today as the two official Canadian languages are French and English.⁴⁹ The continued support for the coexistence of two major nationalities and languages, however, created objections, protests, and other disagreements amongst non-francophone and non-anglophone communities in Canada, resulting in the creation of the Multicultural government policy. Hence, “a policy of multiculturalism was implemented to promote respect for cultural diversity and grant ethnic groups the right to preserve and develop their own cultures within Canadian society.”⁵⁰ How can a policy aim to “promote respect for cultural diversity”⁵¹ when it was specifically placed to

⁴⁷ Innerworks London, www.instagram.com/innerworks_london, (published on June 7th, 2021) Accessed September 1st 2021, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CP1UxSUHepn/>

⁴⁸ Pierre Elliott Trudeau, “Announcement of Implementation of Multiculturalism Within Bilingual Framework” in *Library and Archives Canada. Parliament. House of Commons. Debates, 28th Parliament, 3rd Session, Volume 8* (October 8th, 1971), 8545-8548.

⁴⁹ The Liberal party hoped to win votes from ethnic communities in Ontario and help appease the opposition to official bilingualism in Western Canada, as stated in documents set forth by Pierre Elliot Trudeau, “Announcement of Implementation of Multiculturalism Within Bilingual Framework.” See Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*, (University of Toronto Press: May 2007). I thank Carmen Robertson for bringing this source to my attention.

⁵⁰ Trudeau, “Announcement.”

⁵¹ Trudeau, “Announcement.”

unite and recognize only two linguistic categories, the French, and the English? These questions offer important social and cultural context to understand the politics of diversity and multiculturalism in Canada, as experienced by these artists.

Whereas the difficulties that the Canadian “multicultural” landscape creates for the migrant artists, with the lack of representation and space, are explored in this chapter, they will be considered along with Iran’s fundamentalist regime that poses political problems for migrant artists by hindering their bond to their homelands through restricting their art production and exhibition there. Many Iranian Canadian artists continue to experience such political dilemmas while moving from one country (Iran) to another (Canada). Hence, they begin navigating their space and their own autonomy within these intersectional landscapes.

2.1 The Canadian Art Scene

When I came here, I realized that it is not too hard to integrate in Canadian art... In Toronto, The Art Fair [Toronto Outdoor Art Fair] is to sell the work which is good as an artist must sell to earn money.⁵²

Jamileh Salek, an Iranian multidisciplinary artist currently residing in Toronto, aims to create a space that relies on silence and minimal use of materials to create the energy and atmosphere in her paintings by using black, white, and grey colour schemes.⁵³ Born in Tabriz, in 1973, later moving to Tehran, and finally settling down in Toronto Canada in 2016, she is heavily influenced by the process of migration and transitions.⁵⁴ First, finding her website from social media site Instagram, I became immediately intrigued in the ways in which Salek’s artworks reflect her experiences of transitions and migration. This is a major point of departure for my overarching

⁵² Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

⁵³ Jamileh Salek, “Artist Statement” www.jamilehsalekpainting.com, accessed on September 13th 2021
<https://www.jamilehsalekpainting.com/artiststatement>

⁵⁴ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

questions. In her work titled “The Lovers in the Court Yard” 2020-21 (fig. 1), Salek strays from the dark and grey colour palette by combining/collaging different cloth materials in the method of stitching and sewing to create an image that refers to the history of Iranian painting. She creates collages of recycled cloths by sewing them together to create an image that becomes intimate through its small scale. The found materials she has gathered come from separate histories but are joined together by Salek in this work to create a brand-new piece. This is interesting because it parallels with the concept of migration that she is interested in: the separate cloths evoke memories and experiences that become stitched together as one. In an interview, Salek mentioned “the interesting thing is that in the [exhibition at the Toronto Outdoor Art Fair] that I had, the people from Arabian countries or the Middle-East understood my work better and related to them. To others, it was dismal.”⁵⁵ However, Salek later goes on to state that she lives in Canada, and there is no point to only work with Iranians, or the nationality and ethnicity from which you immigrated.⁵⁶ Her place has enabled her to experience various cultures to integrate into her work. This access allows for communication. Artists can connect and communicate with each other and with diverse audiences globally. For Salek, this is communicative dimension of art becomes an important tool to utilize one’s own “difference” could create multiple layers of identities for the artists, who navigate Canadian art scene.

Salek, often referencing her Iranian roots in her work, believes that much of contemporary Iranian art is founded upon and gives references to its traditional, pre-revolution past.⁵⁷ In an interview with the artist, she states, “In Iran, they wanted pure and sublime art which did not matter if it sold or not. They didn’t want to lower the level of art to sell. They wanted the art to be pure

⁵⁵ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

⁵⁶ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

⁵⁷ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th 2020.

and no one thought about the artists' pocket. ... I always think that Western art depended on the museums and on the sales they had, and the Eastern art leaned towards purity, traditionalism and beauty and not for money and fame.”⁵⁸ Fredric Jameson suggests that “Third World” cultural forms always engage with politics and larger social dilemmas as they are in touch with the reality of labor and materiality, whereas First World literature remain private, idealistic, as they have lost that sociopolitical character.⁵⁹ It is important to note that Jameson makes this distinction solely on the fact that “Third World” countries are more heavily impacted by their governmental, political, and social burdens. Whereas Jameson’s claim carry orientalist overtones associating individualism with the West, Salek is suggesting a different narrative about Iran labelled as a “Third World” country. She suggests that individualism is not based on state as artists in Iran have been voicing their artistic ideas and creating art. According to Salek, she feels “Iran because of its ancient background, which existed before the Revolution, has very good libraries and very knowledgeable professors... We have artists like Sohrab Sepehri, Parviz Tanavoli, Abulghasem Saeedi, Mr. Roohbakhsh... Those were the fruits of the trees planted before Revolution.”⁶⁰ With reference to the dualistic discussion on arts in the “Third versus First World” countries, she takes Iran out of this binary program. Rather, she suggests that any assessment of art based on the distinction between “East” and “West” reproducing “Third versus First World” discourses are inaccurate and instead, artists should be accounted for by their contributions to the global art world.⁶¹

It is important to examine the Iranian artists’ level and perception of integration in Canada, by also considering their previous lives in Iran. According to “Freedom House” a website that rates

⁵⁸ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th 2020.

⁵⁹ Frederic Jameson, “Third World Literature in the Era of the Multinational Capitalism” in *Social Text 15* (Duke University Press, Autumn 1986), 85.

⁶⁰ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th 2020.

⁶¹ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th 2020.

the citizens' global freedom, political rights, and civil liberties through annual reports and collected data, Canada scores a 98/100, "FREE", with a score of 40/40 for Political Rights, and 58/60 for Civil Liberties.⁶² Iran scores a 16/100, "NOT FREE", with 6/40 Political Rights, and 10/60 Civil Liberties.⁶³ The methodology of this site's data and numbers is based on "the assumption that freedom for all people is best achieved in liberal democratic societies."⁶⁴ There are several analysts, advisers, and researchers who work on providing the most accurate scores. They actively use resources such as news articles, scholarly analyses, reports from nongovernmental organizations, individual professional contacts, and on-site research. The scores that are derived from this research is then analyzed further and discussed by Freedom House staff and other expert advisers.⁶⁵ This research and data for the year 2021, shows that Iran is in fact much more unstable and volatile than Canada. Whereas these differences in the quality of the life for residents in Iran and Canada are obvious, does it also mean that Iranian immigrants residing in Canada are immediately benefitting from and particularly in on all the types of activities including arts? Moreover, is the immigrant or diasporic artist evaluated merely according to their link to one's homeland and associated with a "Third World Country" by the Canadian artworld, or can they now be considered a member of the "First World Country" that they live in? Iftikhar Dadi provides some insight to these questions, suggesting that artists in Canada, for example, are assimilating and creating work for Canadian art markets.⁶⁶ He uses the example of Salman Rushdie, a South

⁶² "Canada" www.freedomhouse.org, accessed on September 28th 2021.
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/canada/freedom-world/2021>

⁶³ "Iran" www.freedomhouse.org, accessed on September 28th 2021.
<https://freedomhouse.org/country/iran/freedom-world/2021>

⁶⁴ "Freedom in the World Research Methodology," www.freedomhouse.org, accessed on September 28th 2021,
<https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>.

⁶⁵ "Freedom in the World Research Methodology," <https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology>.

⁶⁶ Iftikhar Dadi, "Shirin Neshat's Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories" in *Signs* vol. 34 no. 1 (The University of Chicago Press, Autumn 2008), 125-150.

Asian writer, and states that many of the cultural works are indeed produced in and for the West. Therefore, as a migrant, does being a part of the Canadian art scene become about representing one's traditional customs and culture? This debate then raises the question discussed by Kobena Mercer in relation to "burden of representation."⁶⁷ As Mercer states that "the double meaning of 'representation' as both a practice of depiction and a practice of delegation" illustrates a double-edged sword.⁶⁸ Likewise, Salek's representation of Iran's historical themes in art is also a representation of herself, as well as her role as an artist.

Salek's work indicates that the significance of a work and meanings ascribed to it should not solely be read according to a specific country's politics such as the fundamentalist regimes in Iran. Furthermore, the Canadian art scene has allowed the progress of her inspirations, not solely because of the higher quality of life, but because she was able to interact with other cultures and people that enriched her work. For artists like Salek, then works produced by Iranian Canadian artists are no longer about a fixed identity, ethnic origin, or closed community. Rather they join with other minorities in creating a new Canadian art world that represents not singular but multiple identities.

2.2 A New Definition of Migration as More than Displacement of Bodies

*Water finds its way and flows till it reaches the ocean.*⁶⁹

Another aspect of Salek's work that needs to be discussed is the familial and historical features that provide a new definition to migration through her art. In her series "My New Life and

⁶⁷ Kobena Mercer, "Black Art and the Burden of Representation" in *Third Text* vol. 4 issue 10 (Taylor & Francis online, 1990), 61-78.

⁶⁸ Kobena Mercer, "Introduction" in *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, ed. Kobena Mercer, 6-23.

⁶⁹ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

Migration” (fig. 2 and fig. 3) Salek re-imagines the representation of immigration. Whereas the dictionary definition merely indicates “the permanent change of residence by an individual or group,” Salek takes issues with this understanding and illustrates migration not only as a spatial relocation, but also as an internal and emotional process of adjusting to one’s surroundings.⁷⁰ Her paintings are riddles with metaphors and imagery such as the migrating birds. She portrays herself in each painting, showing different iterations of her personal migration. In this way, Salek’s artworks picture immigration as a personal decision and journey. The leaves protruding from her fingertips, in the “My New Life and Migration #1” (fig. 2), can be read as a direct signal to the long discourse of rerouting/regrounding in migration theory.⁷¹ I will argue that these leaves both refer to emerging from her roots, and signify the planting of new roots and branching out to a new space. Salek’s roots protrude upwards from the fingertips, rather than downwards into the ground, presenting migration as a promising and adventurous event against a new horizon.

Whereas immigration as this rerouting is important to Salek, however, another topic that is important in her identity is that of her links to family. She states that “before immigrating to Canada, the subject of my works was family portraits. I tried to show several generations in only one frame [...] I was born in East Azerbaijan in Iran. [My grandparents’] generation were from the country Azerbaijan which was part of Iran at that time. As a result, ... even before my migration to Tehran and Canada, the subject of immigration existed in the background of my works.”⁷² In her series, “Family Portrait” (fig. 4 and fig. 5) Salek uses a painting technique that overlaps her subjects through layers of paint while creating darkness and light by applying minimal colours. In “Family Portrait #1,” the family of four is set against a dark background, with a picture frame of

⁷⁰ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Human Migration” www.britannica.com, Accessed on November 21st 2012, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-migration>

⁷¹ Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller, *Uprootings/Regroundings*.

⁷² Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

an older couple hanging just over their shoulders. The couple in the back seem to recall the “grandparents’ generation [who were] from the country Azerbaijan,” therefore suggesting the family represented to be her own. Indeed she states, “I tried to use the oldest photo in my family and the knowledge I had from the previous immigration of my predecessors, to utilize the events in a modern life of people, and the loneliness that a lot of people confront.”⁷³ Subsequently, in “Family Portrait #2”, the first painting of the series is illustrated within a frame hanging on the bright white wall behind the lonesome central figure. This is a great juxtaposition to the first painting because, as opposed to the first, where the faces were not painted with detail, this figure is very meticulous. Her face is solemn with her head tilted sadly to the side. The woman’s hands are drawn larger than life, which draws the viewers’ attention and makes us see the flower in her hand. The one lonely flower is held to replace the memories of her family standing before her. The image immediately communicates to the viewer the lonely process of migration.

Maryam Izadifard, an Iranian artist based in Montreal, Canada, in her series titled “Envelopes” 2016 (fig.6) evokes the theme of distance and isolation. The action of writing, mailing, opening letters is called upon suggesting a form of an ambiguous long-distance relationship. Being an immigrant, mailing letters as a form of communication with loved ones is crucial. Jamileh Salek’s first painting in the series “Between Correspondence” “#1” (fig. 7) illustrates a woman standing in front of a world map with her cellphone and computer, similarly, signaling the attempt to communicate with someone or something in a more digital age. This distance can be related to diaspora and migration, as well as its impact that could alienate people from their homeland. Griselda Pollock explains the distance created by “othering” and the notion of “elsewhere” in relation to feminism and female autonomy within a center/male-oriented

⁷³ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

discourse of painting.⁷⁴ This positioning of “elsewhere” and “others” is crucial for evoking the distance in the works of Izadifard and Salek. Salek’s painting depicts herself within the “elsewhere” as she is pictured with a phone in her hand trying to form a connection with something/somewhere that is not shown to us, but we can assume that Salek may be referencing global networks (depicted by the world map), whereas Izadifard’s point of departure is more ambiguous. On one of the envelopes, if looked at closely, we read “IZADIFAR” which is the name of the artist. The paint covering the entire envelope but deliberately and intentionally not touching the name allows the viewer to directly connect this envelope to the artist. It is evident that someone/something has been trying to connect with Izadifard, placing her on the opposite spectrum of Salek, who was trying to connect with the world around. Here, Izadifard is the focus of attention with which someone/something is trying to communicate through Canada post mail. This new understanding of migration as a personal act creating the sense of loneliness and distance, brings forth other emotions such as nostalgia or longing for a lost or older space.

2.3 Nostalgia after Migration

I see myself as an immigrant in a Western world ... when I come here, I want to find my place with them.⁷⁵

Simin Keramati, born just before the age of the Revolution, is a multidisciplinary artist residing in Toronto after immigrating to Canada in 2012.⁷⁶ Her works consist of personal references, along

⁷⁴ Griselda Pollock, “The ‘View from Elsewhere’: Extracts from a semi-public correspondence about the politics of feminist spectatorship” in *Feminist Subjects, Multimedia: Cultural Methodologies*, eds. Penny Florence and Dee Reynolds. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 3-38.

⁷⁵ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

⁷⁶ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

with political and social reflections.⁷⁷ In an interview with Tulika Bahadur, Keramati states “being a woman and working as an artist is political enough. To be honest I believe every artist in Iran is performing a political act when creating a new artwork.”⁷⁸ In her series titled “The Edge of the Blade” (2011-12), Keramati uses blades as a metaphor of memory. In “Throwing up the Blades #1” (fig. 9) her gaze meets the viewer’s eyes as she re-enacts the action of razor blades being regurgitated out through the mouth. For something to be thrown out, it needs to be digested first. Keramati forces the audience to mainly imagine the digestion of these razor blades. In the artist statement for this work, she writes:

For other simpler reasons, you might find yourself reviewing every moment of your life like you are playing on the slide of memories and swallowing them all and at once. Other than the joy, you will also find all the terrifying experiences that might have turned all these beautiful moments into a disaster. Those of you whose childhood, like mine, has been elapsed with the experience of war know exactly what I am talking about. You know that the beauty of all those moments was never expected to last. You know what I mean, you remember that the sound of the ‘red alert’ meant that you have to turn off the lamp on your book at your bed in a glance and make sure that no other lamp is on while the red alert penetrates deep into your ears, then you see the frightened faces of your mom and dad trying to keep you safe and sound smiling at you and whispering nice words into your ears. You could never be sure that all the stars that you are counting in the dark sky are the stars and are not bombing aircrafts. Those days are all gone now. [...] This feeling will never let you be. This feeling, with a taste of bitterness is hidden beneath every moment of your life, cutting you repeatedly, as sharp as a razor blade. This feeling is hidden with its sharp edge somewhere in the air around you. You are feeling the edge of the blade on your skin, in your inside.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Tulika Bahadur, “‘Being a woman and working as an artist is political enough’: Simin Keramati” in *On Art and Aesthetics* (published April 29, 2018) Accessed on September 28th 2021

<https://onartandaesthetics.com/2018/04/29/being-a-woman-and-working-as-an-artist-is-political-enough-simin-keramati/>

⁷⁸ Bahadur, <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2018/04/29/being-a-woman-and-working-as-an-artist-is-political-enough-simin-keramati/>

⁷⁹ Simin Keramati, “The Edge of the Blade” www. Siminkeramati.com, accessed on September 29th, 2021.
<https://siminkeramati.com/portfolio-posts/the-edge-of-the-blade/>

I will argue that the razor blades represent moments of Keramati's life that may have been painful to endure, making this work personal and psychologically stimulating not only for the artist but also for the viewers. It becomes evident through her artist statement that the razor blades are in fact meant to symbolize the painful and traumatic events of Keramati's life.⁸⁰ Even in the happy moments, seen in the works titled "The Splash Park #1" and "The Splash Park #2" (fig. 12 and fig. 13), the razor blades are present. However, Keramati proposes a different, and hopeful ending to these painful memories. The work can be thus divided into a narrative of overcoming and becoming stronger than the troublesome moments in one's life, owning that strength and becoming the "Saint of the Blades" (fig.17). She begins by focusing on the razor blades' sharpness against the fragility of the "Butterflies" (fig.10 and fig. 11). Then by illustrating the razor blades next to happy moments such as the playing at the splash park and getting married, Keramati demonstrates that the pain, stays in even the happiest moments. The last portion is the process of regurgitation of the blades, which leads to the final illustration of the strength captured in "the artist is posing for you" (fig.16) and "Saint of the Blades." This series illustrates the immortalization of a personal and internal process of enduring painful events, which, despite being unknown to the viewer, still can be related to a past and read as the source of one's strength. In an interview with Keramati she states, "I first came here in 2010 but officially I moved here to Toronto from Tehran directly in 2012. For some personal reasons. It was after the massive events after the election in 2009. It had consequences. The protests and killings. I wanted to be far from it."⁸¹ Being far from the killings

⁸⁰ On the theme of trauma within the Iranian Canadian context, see Haleh Mir Miri, "Invisible Walls: How Iranian women's traumatic memories shape their identities and behaviour here," *CBC News Saskatoon*, (Jan. 16 2021), accessed on January 19th 2022, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatoon/immigrant-trauma-memories-body-boundaries-iran-pov-1.5869112> I thank Rakhee Balaram for bringing this important dimension of artwork regarding trauma and sources to my attention. This topic is beyond the scope of my thesis but requires further studies in relation to artistic production in the Canadian art world.

⁸¹ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

and protests, she attempts to construct a space for herself that is no longer directly affected by the government of the country in which she lives, thus able to work at a safe as well as critical distance.⁸² The series “The Edge of the Blade” was created around the time of her migration, which suggests that after enduring the pain and suffering (razor blades) of living in a state of restrictions and war, she has found some form of solace in migration. “The Saint of the Blades” also underscores the strength and endurance that Keramati had to show to stand the pain. By migrating to a place far from the razor blades, which became metaphors for her mental and physical pain, she’s able to build a space to create work from the innerworkings of her memories.

Turning toward a different outcome of the distance created by migration, Keramati’s painting series “The Blue Backgrounds” (2014-present) present her navigation of migration. These works show the artist placing herself in conjunction with figures of the art history world. Some figures include Marina Abramovic, Andy Warhol, John Lennon, Caravaggio, Michael Jackson, Picasso, and Velasquez. Keramati uses extremely bright colours in an almost holographic method of painting in this series. There is a visible shift in her paintings. She produced four paintings in 2014 (figs.18-21), 2015 (fig. 22), 2017 (fig. 23) and two in 2020 (figs. 24-25). The paintings prior 2020 all include non-Iranian figures of art history. However, in her two most recent paintings from 2020 entitled “A Window to the Blue Room (Sohrab, Forough, and me in the blue room)” 2020, and “Nasser Taghvai, Saedi, Ghasemi, me and Tranquility in the Presence of Others,” the figures are all well-known characters from Iranian contemporary art and literature. Her use of the term “Others” is interesting because, while she painted this in Canada, the figures are Iranian artists, writers, and poets. This shift, I argue, is caused by critical distance. Now living in Canada, she is

⁸² Bahadur, <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2018/04/29/being-a-woman-and-working-as-an-artist-is-political-enough-simin-keramati/>

able to contemplate her connection with her Iranian roots.⁸³ The blue, seen as the background of each painting, represents Keramati's perceived colour of nostalgia.⁸⁴ It is also important to note that blue has a long history of being associated with the air and water signifying “divine contemplation” and gloom.⁸⁵ Each painting, placed next to the other by creating a long timeline, represent the artist's internal mapping of her own position in the art world during migration from one place to another one. While communicating with diverse figures ranging from popular artists to key names in Iranian art and cultural history, Keramati, thus, finds and defines her own place.

Against a similar conceptual background, Jamileh Salek illustrates her own migration. Her paintings are black and white, void of colour. They often project her inner dialogues with her past while narrating her self-discovery going through migration. The only people painted in colour are the elderly couple framed on the wall in her first painting from the “Family Portrait” series “#1” (fig. 4). In an interview with the artist she claims, “Life in the past had more colour.”⁸⁶ In Salek’s perspective, imbued with a sense of nostalgia, families were happier in the past. Salek’s attempt to capture this nostalgic feeling towards the past becomes a way for her to connect and communicate with it. Just as a painter carries her body, Salek relies on her past experiences to move forward.⁸⁷ Salek and Keramati’s engagement with their bodies in motion and shifting memories while seeing the world around according to changing viewpoints recall Merleau-Ponty’s statement that wherever one’s mind and body travel, the eyes follow. Yet, whereas Keramati’s

⁸³ For more on affect theory, and politics of emotion and relationship to feeling as shared perception, see Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Routledge: 2014). I thank Carmen Robertson for bringing this to my attention.

⁸⁴ For more on nostalgia and the ways in which it is used to engage with the past and its use as a critical tool, see Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, “The Modalities of Nostalgia” in *Current Sociology* vol. 54 issue 6 (Loughborough University: Sage Journals, November 2006), 919-941.

⁸⁵ Vivian Jacobs and Wilhelmina Jacobs, “The Color Blue: Its Use as Metaphor and Symbol” in *American Speech* vol. 33 no. 1 (1958), 29–46.

⁸⁶ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 123.

nostalgic relations and melancholic negotiations derive from specific art historical references she encountered in Canada, Salek mostly works from her own personal and familial past. Hence, they represent different ways of engaging with their emotions stemming from migration.

2.4 Race, Space, and Migration in Art

From an early age I had to establish that I was Jamaican and Persian to let people know and I took pride in it...I wanted to incorporate both of those [cultures]. I want that to be the next chapter of art ... I want to be creating that work for kids to see. The world is going to mixed kids, multicultural kids, and you want kids to be able to go into art galleries and see representations of themselves.⁸⁸

Brandon Baghaee, a young bi-racial, 18-year-old student in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program at OCAD university in Toronto is tackling issues of history and identity through contemporary illustrations and demonstrations. With a Jamaican and Persian background, he creates narratives that portray traditional histories of his ethnicities, and personal sentiments where he may have felt racialized. For that end, he not only uses historical Iranian symbols and Canadian landscapes, but also heroic characters that relate to him personally. Painting from his immediate surroundings, he finds inspiration in his memories from his childhood. Objects that surround him in his everyday life become significant reference points, ranging from spider man plushies, to basketballs, and from Persian rugs to Persian souvenirs representing ancient Persian civilization (figs. 27-29).⁸⁹ Race is an important theme in Baghaee's works. Being a second-generation immigrant, he recalls instances where he was called "light-skinned" or "half black and half white," and states how he always feels "like I wasn't Persian enough, or I wasn't white enough, or I wasn't Black enough. It was always like I was in the middle."⁹⁰ This links to Neda Maghbouleh's argument on the

⁸⁸ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th 2021.

⁸⁹ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th 2021.

⁹⁰ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th, 2021.

discrepancies caused by the legal classification of Iranian race as ‘white’ while young Iranian born in America face racialized experiences.⁹¹ Her discourse enables to examine the work of Baghaee, who went through similar confrontations, just as other non-American/European artists who were born or raised in the Americas. Orientalist phrases like “why does your lunch smell like that?” “Your language is so weird,” “your name is so weird,” or “your tan is so nice, I want to be that tan” are relatable to many Iranians who may feel “uncool,” an outsider, or “othered” because of their cultural indicators.⁹² His art responds to such stereotypes encountered in daily life.

Baghaee’s paintings have bold, striking colours. It is evident that he uses thick paint to emphasize his shapes and forms. Even though he is very much interested in depicting a realistic scene, his figures become caricaturized. The basketball jersey, the playground, and a vague CN tower (in the background of “At the Park”) refer to a child’s recollections. The Spiderman figure which is presented in each painting becomes a symbol. Is Spiderman a representation of Baghaee himself? Baghaee’s works can be read against the backdrop of Michele Byers’ essay entitled “Race In/Out of the Classroom: Degrassi (Junior) High as Multicultural Context.” Degrassi is in its truest form, argues Byers, portraying the issues of multiculturalism and diversity in the contemporary education system, not for profits or views, but to represent the Canadian racial landscape the best they can. Byers suggests that Degrassi is an example of a television show where its premise can move into a more critical direction, so that its characters start to resemble real-life people who deal with several complexities and “intersections.”⁹³ Like Baghaee’s “At the Park,” for example, the

⁹¹ Neda Maghboleh, “Chapter 1: Being White” in *The Limits of Whiteness: Iranian-Americans and the Everyday Politics of Race* (Stanford California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 1-6

⁹² Maghouleh, *The Limits of Whiteness*, 80-108; Personal recollections: phrases I heard in my first day of gym class at my high school.

⁹³ Michele Byers, “Chapter 16: Race In/Out of the Classroom: Degrassi (Junior) High as Multicultural Context” in *Racism, Eh? A Critical Inter-Disciplinary Anthology of Race and Racism in Canada* eds. Camille A. Nelson and Charmaine A. Nelson (Canada: Captus Press Inc.: 2004), 298-315.

race of the characters are no longer the only characteristic they have because they are no longer one-dimensional figures. I will make the connection that Spiderman, becoming an extension of himself, provides comfort for Baghaee. A hero to save the day, Baghaee hopes he can accomplish the same power as Spiderman to save injustices that may occur every day. He creates the painting “At the Park” (fig. 26), that illustrates a Canadian racial landscape like Degrassi, in its representation of children of different ethnicities playing together. In this manner, he questions his own identity, place, and intersections. One can read his “Shadows of the Past” (fig. 27), as a self-portrait because it illustrates a solitary cartoon-like figure holding a basketball on the basketball court. He wears a jersey that has an illustration of spiderman on it. Baghaee mentions in an interview that he, as a kid, would regularly play basketball, and his favourite toy was always a spiderman plushie. If Spiderman is a symbol for his own identity, Baghaee’s self-portrait, showing him standing tall with the image of Spiderman on his jersey, can be read as a declaration of his pride for his individuality in all its intersections. He states in an interview “I took pride in [my race] because it’s such a unique mix” which solidifies his jersey (as an emblem of his identity) as a badge of honour.⁹⁴

Sara Ahmed’s article offers a theoretical background to read the position of a second-generation immigrant, a coloured child within the American/European education system.⁹⁵ It uses the movie “Bend it Like Beckham” to show the ways in which migrant populations need to conform to find “happiness,” i.e., the only way to become “happy” as a part of a nation is by assimilation.⁹⁶ In mixed race or second-generation immigrant families, the conflicts that arise within the household is a concept that Ahmed is interested in. Children, being raised in a different

⁹⁴ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th 2021.

⁹⁵ Ahmed, *Multiculturalism, and the Promise of Happiness*.

⁹⁶ Ahmed, *Multiculturalism, and the Promise of Happiness*, 121-122

atmosphere than their parents, want different things and have different goals for themselves, and the families come to realize that there must be a compromise to be happy (culture of origin and the culture of destination become conflicting for the child).⁹⁷ In light of Ahmed's concept of culture of origin and destination, social differences between residents and within households and families become crucial to understand the framework of race and multiculturalism in Canada. Ahmed uses this film to demonstrate potential contradictions between children and their families: the protagonist, Jess, an Indian Sikh girl wants to play soccer/football instead of following what her parents want for her which is to attend her sister's traditional wedding and stick by her family's customs. This creates two worlds between which she is forced to choose. Nevertheless, the movie ends with the compromise of her parents by letting her play soccer/football so that she can be happy. According to Ahmed, "the happiness of this film is partly that it imagines that multiculturalism can deliver its social promise by extending freedom to migrants on the condition that they embrace its game."⁹⁸ Whereas, migrant success is associated with the migrant assimilating with the culture of destination, migrants claim their autonomy by being able to make their choices. Baghaee, states in an interview that "I just try to be grateful because I have the opportunity and privilege to pursue art. My dad and grandparents didn't have that. It's off their sacrifice and labour that I'm reaping the benefit and the fruit to pursue what I want."⁹⁹ Thus, being of a mixed race, he not only acknowledges these points of difference between his parents' multi-cultures, but also embraces them. Whereas this action is the opposite of Jess from "Bend it like Beckham," they share similarities due to their mutual reliance on their own autonomies to make decisions. Baghaee's painting "For Better or Worse" illustrates three objects, one being a

⁹⁷ Sara Ahmed, "Chapter 4: Melancholic Migrants" in *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 149-150.

⁹⁸ Ahmed, *Multiculturalism and the Promise of Happiness*, 131.

⁹⁹ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada. July 20th, 2021.

sculpture representing ancient Iran, a Spiderman plushie on the back of the sculpture, and a tag with a rope that hangs around the two sculptures, tying them together, that reads “You’re an Angel.” While this work originates from traditions that he was exposed to, he combines them with popular images from a child’s life in Canada. Baghaee’s interest in his own race and identity, as well as curiosity towards other kids’ experiences (as represented in “At the Park”) prove to be a theme that he circles around regularly.

Being of a mixed race, or being an immigrant, or even a second-generation immigrant, in a country that is not where you were born can make the notion of home, identity and belonging quite blurry. Therefore, for Shirin Neshat, an Iranian American artist, “Making art was a way of maintaining a connection with [her] country.”¹⁰⁰ For Neshat however, Iran is a land that she knew, because she was born there, however, Baghaee’s case is different. The notion of home and belonging become surreal and invisible. No longer a sense associated with a specific location, home and belonging become an act, a habit, or a memory which we associate ourselves with. Neshat explores issues of displacement in her new work “Land of Dreams” (fig. 29). This work is a turning point in that for a long time, Neshat was coming to terms with her identity as an Iranian woman, being so far away from Iran, and has been questioning the contemporary statues of ‘women’ in Iran. Now, with this new series, she dives into the depths of being an Iranian in America, i.e., inner, and human pains of displacement, belonging, and “othering.”¹⁰¹ This derives from her experiences “as an immigrant” which made her feel “there is always this great space between [her] and America.”¹⁰² Space becomes a major element in an immigrant’s life. So often immigrants are told that they are taking up too much space in the host landscape, yet, as immigrants

¹⁰⁰ Tate, “Shirin Neshat – ‘Dreams are Where Our Fear Live’” Youtube Video, 8':02” July 2 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M43QgkbOEv8&ab_channel=Tate

¹⁰¹ Tate, *Shirin Neshat*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M43QgkbOEv8&ab_channel=Tate

¹⁰² Tate, *Shirin Neshat*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M43QgkbOEv8&ab_channel=Tate

they are always at an arm's length distance from the sense of home and belonging in the host land. This space and notion of belonging are of interest to Baghaee as his paintings are always riddled with empty spaces. In "At the Park," the space between the children become points of interest. None of the subjects address each other, or the viewer. The young child on the slide has her hands up, calling out to someone. Her distant gaze goes just past the viewer. The empty slide, the built sandcastle, and the forgotten ball in the corner seem to call out to the past; a time when they were played with and now left alone. His self-portrait, in "Shadows of the Past," illustrates a moment in time; holding the ball getting ready to shoot into the net. Both paintings show a small version of the CN Tower (on the jersey, as well as in the skyline behind the playground), locating the scene within a Toronto landscape. Baghaee thus differentiates the space around him as Toronto, a place where he grew up and sources most of his memories from there. But he questions his identity and the space he takes up as a biracial young adult through the subjects and landscapes that he purposefully orchestrated. Nevertheless, home does not define a specific location for Baghaee because he tells that, "Two years ago, I went to Jamaica for the first time. And it felt like I had been there before. It felt like home. And I wasn't on a resort or anywhere, I was in the city, I was in Kingston."¹⁰³ Home and belonging are not a location, a specific destination, or an address. Rather, for Baghaee, they are personal and internal feelings of being connected to a culture of origin.

2.5 Iranian Gallery in Toronto: Case Study

To understand how Iranian artists work in Canada, it is important to consider how artists enter the art market. An exploration of the challenges faced by the Iranian artist in Canada show that these

¹⁰³ Brandon Baghaee. Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, July 20th 2021.

artists find comfort in their minority group members. As most of my personal interviews made clear, public galleries, and the public realm of art, have not been accessible to Iranian artists. Thus, in the Canadian art world, established private galleries frequently fill that gap. In Toronto, many private galleries owned by Iranians to support minority artists have sprouted. Some examples include Arta Gallery in the Distillery District of Toronto, Pars Art Gallery in North York, Queen Gallery on Queen Street in Toronto, Eran Art Gallery in North York, and Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery in Toronto, established in 2020. Iranian artists depend on these galleries who represent them to be successful. Thus, the connection between galleries and artists is integral to the Iranian artists' career in Canada. I will take one gallery as a case study to discuss the role of similar galleries in the artist's lives to disseminate their art.

Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery located at 160 Davenport Road in Toronto Ontario (fig. 30) is a prestigious art gallery run by Sahar Khanboluki, a gallery director, curator, and contemporary art specialist. It is the only gallery in Toronto with a majority Iranian Canadian roster of artists.¹⁰⁴ This gallery presents a relevant case to trace cultural transmission and re-routing of these cultural roots accomplished through migration as reflected in the art world. Khanboluki was born into an artistic family in Tehran, Iran; her father was a painter and had many artist friends who would frequent their house, enabling Khanboluki's creative passions and connections at an early age.¹⁰⁵ Utilizing her expansive connections with the art world in Tehran, as well as a number of famous Iranian artists, she calls Toronto home and has launched her own gallery where she curates as well as sells original works by internationally acclaimed Iranian contemporary artists.¹⁰⁶ The focus of the gallery is to provide a space for Iranian-born and Iranian-trained/educated artists

¹⁰⁴ Sahar KhanBoluki, "About" www.saharkboluki.art, Accessed on September 14th 2021, <https://www.saharkboluki.art/about-1>

¹⁰⁵ Sahar KhanBoluki, "About" www.bysahar.ca, Accessed on September 14th 2021, <https://www.bysahar.ca/about>

¹⁰⁶ KhanBoluki, [https://www.bysahar.ca/about](http://www.bysahar.ca/about)

to show their work to Canadian audiences. Her website states: “The artists on the current roster reflect this mission, and while most of them are originally from Iran, the paths they have taken to Canada and to their individual art practices reflect a range of experiences, from political exile to family migrations, to peripatetic professional journeys through many different countries. Collected under one roof, their work offers insight into how the local and international mingle across media, subject matter, style and form.”¹⁰⁷ Khanboluki believes that in order to create a unified art market and art world in Canada, barriers need to be removed. She suggests that this can be achieved by creating the space to make connections with diverse artists and their artworks. Hence, she hosts events and exhibition openings where the artists are present in addition to managing many social media accounts where she engages with the public regularly.¹⁰⁸ Khanboluki’s intermediary role is noteworthy because she becomes a prominent Iranian figure in the Toronto art scene concerned with providing a platform for established Iranian artists to continue their works in Canada. The international Iranian artists she represents and continuously works with are: Bahram Dabiri, Jila Kamyab, Mahmoud Meraji, Nastaran MirSadegh, Reza Derakhshani, Sara Abri, Hossein Maher, Mehraban Mehrabani, Sirak Melkonian, Fereydoun Ave, Keyvan Mahjoor, Gholamhossein Nami, Shahla A. Moghadam, Kamelia Pezeshki, and Farshid Shafiey.¹⁰⁹ A few of the artists in this thesis are from the generation that experienced Iranian modernism, the revolution, and war; they are not new and emerging artists in Canada per se, rather they are already established Iranian artists who have planted new roots in Canada. Her experiences suggest that in order to introduce Iranian art into the Canadian art market, the agency of privately owned and operated infrastructures with a supportive and well-connected social network is necessary. Khanboluki, by creating her own

¹⁰⁷ KhanBoluki, <https://www.saharkboluki.art/about-1>

¹⁰⁸ Khanboluki, <https://www.saharkboluki.art/about-1>

¹⁰⁹ Khanboluki, <https://www.saharkboluki.art/about-1>

gallery to exhibit Iranian Canadian artists' works, thus opens a safe and supportive space for minority artists to be seen in the Canadian art sphere.

2.6 Politics of Iranian Artists After the Revolution

One thing is ... we are an ethnicity of separations ... We have been separated for 40 years.¹¹⁰

Politics and issues of governmental ruling have taken a toll on the people of Iran. Kajeh, an Iranian photographer and animation artist living in Toronto immigrated to Canada with his family as a kid 22 years ago. Working heavily with the Iranian art and culture community, he had a lot to say about the ways in which Iranians interact with each other and its deep roots in the politics of living in Iran during the past 40 years. Kajeh considers trust and camaraderie in citizens from similar backgrounds an important factor, especially in diasporic living. He states that the “the worst thing that has happened to us [is that] we don’t have trust in each other.”¹¹¹ Kajeh believes that most of the Iranian population tries to separate themselves from the government by using the term “Persian” instead of “Iranian.” In this way they try to show their pride of their 2000 years old rich history, which has been surpassed during the past 40 years under the Islamic Regime.¹¹² Kajeh runs an animation and design studio with his partner, Taravat, named “Kajart” who has collaborated with musicians in the Iranian diaspora. Their latest project is a video for the new album of the rock band “KIOSK” entitled “Sweet Destiny” (fig. 31).¹¹³ The film is a combination

¹¹⁰ Kajeh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 15th 2020.

¹¹¹ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

¹¹² Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

¹¹³ KIOSK, “Sweet Destiny Movie” www.kiosktheband.com, accessed on September 23rd 2021

<https://www.kiosktheband.com/> and for more insight on the band’s political and cultural ideologies see an interview with the band organizer, Ahmad Rafat “Exclusive: The Sweet Destiny of Arash Sobhani, the Kiosk Band Leader Speaks to Kayhan Life” in *KayhanLife Spotlight on a Global Iranian Community* (published on August 20 2021) Accessed on September 23rd 2021, <https://kayhanlife.com/authors/exclusive-kiosk-band-founder-arash-sobhani-speaks-to-kayhan-life/>

of 2D animation and live action, with a QR code shown at the beginning of the movie for viewers to donate to Iran Human Rights in support of the EnoughExecutions campaign.¹¹⁴ KIOSK, along with many other musicians in the Iranian diaspora, confront governmental injustices, such as the “fight against the death penalty” in Iran which took numerous lives.¹¹⁵

Another artist dealing with Iranian politics, less forwardly, Rouzbeh Akhbari, born 1992 in Tehran, states that “I left Iran when I was 17 and the main reason was that I wanted to avoid being conscripted into military … I felt suffocated in Iran.”¹¹⁶ Akhbari, an artist working in video installation and film, believes in migration as a personal endeavor, recalling Salek’s collective and artistic interpretation.¹¹⁷ Akhbari, finds solitude and freedom in traveling as he mentions in an interview: “I’m very cosmopolitan. I’m not bound to any specific region or specific concept of identity… I have to move in order to find meaning in my life.”¹¹⁸ He lived through sanctions and had first-hand experiences of its effects on the economy that raised prices for food, amenities, and resources for life.¹¹⁹ But most importantly, he observed the enforcing and politicizing of a religion on the citizens of a country, which was suffocating many.¹²⁰ In our interview, Kajeh too exclaimed that travelling is an important part of his artistic process. For Kajeh, movement becomes a form of breaking the borders of your comfort zone and for artists, it is crucial to step outside of anything

¹¹⁴ Kajart, “Sweet Destiny | KIOSK” www.kajart.com, accessed on September 23rd 2021
<https://www.kajart.com/portfolio/sweet-destiny/>

¹¹⁵ For more on the changes in the death penalty, and the leading nations that actively practice the death penalty see, Sandra Babcock “The Global Debate on the Death Penalty” in *Human Rights* vol. 34 issue 2 (Spring 2007), 17-20. And Michael L. Radelet and Marian J. Borg “The Changing Nature of Death Penalty Debates” in *Annual Review of Sociology* issue 26 (2000), 43-61.

¹¹⁶ Rouzbeh Akhbari, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 21 2020.

¹¹⁷ Rouzbeh Akhbari, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 21 2020.

¹¹⁸ Rouzbeh Akhbari, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 21 2020.

¹¹⁹ Anoush Ehteshami, “Ouch! Tehran is Hurting” in *The World Today*, vol. 70 issue 6 (Royal Institute of International Affairs, December 2014), 32.

¹²⁰ For more on the politicization of a culture or religion, see Susan Wright “The Politization of ‘culture’” in *Anthropology Today* vol. 14 issue 1 (Feb 1998), 7-15. And for more on Iran’s Islamic Government and its effects on a country, see Mehdi Khalaji “Iran’s Regime of Religion” in *Journal of International Affairs* vol. 65 issue 1 (2011), 131-147.

that may hinder or entrap one.¹²¹ Traveling and crossing borders allow one to get to know other cultures and entities, and like Shirin Neshat's statement, it allows us to connect on a human level, get to know other people's problems and step away from our own. hence, the question is whether one can create art when surrounded by political barriers? According to Akhbari, the artistic production might only be possible through migration and travel.

I realized it's almost impossible to work properly there because there's so many barriers in front of you. Everything you need a permit for. Having a camera out is illegal. And then it hit me like a wall that there's absolutely no way I want to work in Iran again and of course that was last year when I was working on this project and literally after, at the peak of my production when I was about to go shooting for a film, the revolutionary guard shot down the Ukrainian plane. And that was really the moment where I decided I had no interest in going back to Iran. That feeling of alienation I had as a teenager came back, and I have almost zero interest in engaging with that geography for at least a few decades.¹²²

Rouzbeh Akhbari's work "Prizes from Fairyland" 2018 (fig. 32) shown in University of Toronto's Art Museum, explores the politics of oil and gas extraction and colonial interactions between Britain and Iran. The video begins by showing pipelines in a seemingly deserted landscape (fig. 33) and militarized smoke-generators; the tower with a hypnotizing ball of fire at the top produces smoke that fills the entire screen (fig. 34). Then the viewers are instantly transported to excavation sites (fig. 35) where a truck with a crane is lifting several flags with the black and white Bakhtiari symbols.¹²³ Workers organize the flags and lay them flat on the ground, all the while, the fire is continuously burning, producing endless smoke in the background. The flags are then lowered again on the ground and instead two cranes holding two Persian carpets are portrayed. Workers

¹²¹ Kajeh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 15th 2020.

¹²² Rouzbeh Akhbari, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 21, 2020.

¹²³ For more information on the Bakhtiari people and the historical aspects of the tribe, see Mehrdad Afshoon "The Baktiyari Tribe: A Historical Perspective" in *Global Journal on Advances in Pure & Applied Sciences* vol. 4 (2014), 228–234.

are shown painting over the carpets in white and leave a cross on them (fig. 36). A stencil of two lions, recalling the ancient national emblem of Persia, and sun, are spray-painted in black in the centre (fig. 37).¹²⁴ The landscape is dreary, foggy, smoky, hazy, filled with rubbles, clearly an industrial site. The painted carpets are then lowered as well, and we return to the oil pipes as the last scene before the screen goes black. In a brief description of the work, Akhbari writes, “This video brings attention to the visual modes of rebranding associated with the moment of post-colonial oil nationalization in Iran, by re-enacting the historic image of swapping the oil company’s name tag on the British and Iranian headquarters, in addition to reworking Bakhtiari carpets into historic oil tanker flags before and after nationalization.”¹²⁵ For Akhbari, Britain’s growing interest in the oil fields of Southern Iran are important as they threaten the indigenous Bakhtiari lands and impend the segregation of urban landscapes¹²⁶. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that the fire and smoke represent this impending doom of militarism and industrialization of indigenous landscapes, with the motifs of the lion, the sun, and Bakhtiari carpets recalling the indigeneity of the land.

2.7 Opening/Closing Doors

*I searched the problems in me and never thought the environment might have flaws.*¹²⁷

¹²⁴ For more on the motif of the lion and the sun and its connection to ancient Persia, see C.J. Wills M.D. *Land of the Lion and Sun or Modern Persia* (London: MacMillan and Co. 1883).

¹²⁵ Rouzbeh Akhbari, *Prizes from Fairyland*, www.rouzbehakhbari.com, accessed on November 15th 2020, <https://www.rouzbehakhbari.com/prizesfromfairyland>

¹²⁶ For more on the tensions between the British Petroleum company and the Iranian government, see Rouzbeh Akhbari’ “Petro-Violence: Merging Militarism and Corporate Secrecy” in *Society and Space: Energy and Extraction*, (published October 10th 2017) Accessed on September 17th 2021 <https://www.societyandspace.org/articles/petro-violence-merging-militarism-and-corporate-secrecy>

¹²⁷ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

In order to examine closely some of the exhibitions that have taken place in Canada, displaying Iranian talent, it is noteworthy to look at Abbas Kiarostami's "Doors Without Keys" exhibited at the Aga Khan Museum from November 21st 2015 until March 28th, 2016. Sara Ahmed's book "Complaint!" offers a relevant theoretical framework to understand this work.¹²⁸ A YouTube video posted by Vivienne Gan shows Kiarostami's exhibition from the perspective of a viewer walking through it (fig. 38).¹²⁹ The exhibition space is filled with make-shift dark walls forming a maze with deep corners and niche spaces. As you walk through the maze of walls, you encounter old ancient doors protruding from the wall. They are photographs and not actual objects, however, they are lit up with spotlights, creating great contrast against the maze of darkness. This cast spotlight creates the sense of hope and purpose for these doors because they are represented as a beam of light between the dark maze. The description of the exhibition reads "Walls and doors are both boundaries and barriers. Yet doors offer us hope of entry or of escape – hope for connection, for finding another world, for finding freedom."¹³⁰ However, I argue that that the feeling of hope is soon replaced with the feeling of suffocation and entrapment, similar to Akhbari's sensations of living in Iran, for these doors are weathered and locked. They are not real objects that serve the purpose of opening and entering. Like Ahmed's book on the closed doors that appear upon complaint, Kiarostami's doors serve a purpose of false hope.¹³¹ Kiarostami's complaint of locked doors reminds one of the fact that "you are much more likely to notice doors when you hit them

¹²⁸ "Abbas Kiarostami: Doors without Keys" *Aga Khan Museum Exhibitions* www.agakhanmuseum.org (exhibition Nov. 21 2015 – Mar. 28 2016) Accessed on November 2nd 2021, <https://agakhanmuseum.org/exhibitions/abbas-kiarostami-doors-without-keys>; Sara Ahmed, *Complaint!* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹²⁹ Vivienne Gan, "Abbas Kiarostami: Doors Without Keys Exhibition." (Nov. 26th 2015) YouTube Video, 0'36", Accessed on September 29th 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OhjH-FHJSzA&ab_channel=VivienneGan

¹³⁰ "Abbas Kiarostami: Doors without Keys," <https://www.agakhanmuseum.org/exhibitions/abbas-kiarostami-doors-without-keys>

¹³¹ Ahmed, *Complaint!*

rather than when you go through them.”¹³² Kiarostami creates this display space, forcing every viewer to hit these doors on a journey through the exhibition, as a reminder of invisible boundaries.

Is it possible that the doors placed in front of you are not necessarily blockades placed by institutions, rather, mental hindrances that one places for themselves? In Jamileh Salek’s work “Women #1” (fig. 39) a woman with a cat by her side is illustrated with her back turned, her hand reaching out into a dark oblivion. In an interview with the artist, she stated that in attempts to enter the art market after her migration in 2016, she faced closed doors and missed opportunities, but she placed the blame on herself.¹³³ The subject in “Women #1” can be read as Salek herself, reaching to open a door, but entering darkness. Salek files this complaint within her own psyche aligning with Ahmed’s statement “the doors of consciousness, how we shut violence out, can be the same doors shut by institutions to keep violence in, to keep the data of complaint, our data, our truths, under lock and key.”¹³⁴ The way we react to a situation is important. Sometimes by reacting to a situation, you learn about the situation as Ahmed states; “To complain is to learn how spaces are occupied.”¹³⁵ By speaking out, you learn about the environment from the reactions that are handed to you. This is why it’s important to acknowledge that the doors will always exist, they may be revolving doors that as soon as you enter you are tossed back out, or they may be doors that are locked or even left open, however, in order to come as close to an institution serving justice, there needs to be someone who has been through those experiences, who comes from that background, who has been hit by those doors, to have a say. Therefore, just as Ahmed underlines that an institution attempting to drown racial, gender, sexual, religious inequities, needs to include

¹³² Sara Ahmed “Knocking on the Door: Complaints and Other Stories about Institutions” *The Glasgow School of Art* (Zoom conference, February 16th 2021).

¹³³ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

¹³⁴ Ahmed, *Knocking on the Door* (Zoom conference, February 16th 2021).

¹³⁵ Ahmed, *Knocking on the Door* (Zoom conference, February 16th 2021).

people who have experienced those racial, gender, sexual, religious inequities, Salek points at the doors she encountered in various contexts.

In the meantime, where I worked [in Iran], every year we had to go through screening which included interviews and religious questions. The day I went to get the result, I tried to close the door of the room where there were employees, and they immediately yelled at me to leave it open as I could not stay alone with them in the room. It was an insult to me because it looked as if I wanted to have sex with the man who worked there, and they said it to me and no other person!¹³⁶

In Iran, the doors may function in different ways. Ahmed's example of the office door being kept open is for the safety of the student because "when the violence comes in, the complaint goes out."¹³⁷ Closing the door, in this situation, would be a contradiction because it hinders the autonomy of the person, but empowers the violence that might occur. This statement by Ahmed, juxtaposed with Salek's experience illustrates that the person who is doing the closing matters. When Salek closes the door, she is shamed. When the authoritative figure in the office closes the door, a potential violence is enabled.

Azadeh Elmizadeh's works can also be viewed as metaphors of doors, however, in contrast to Abbas Kiarostami's "Doors Without Keys," they are open and translucent, allowing the viewer to feel as if they can go deeper into the build space of the work. Elmizadeh recently graduated from her Master of Fine Arts program at the University of Guelph, and exhibited her works titled "Subtle Bodies" (fig. 40-48) at the Franz Kaka gallery between October 16th and November 14th, 2020, in Toronto Ontario. "Subtle Bodies" consists of 10 large scale oil on linen paintings which illustrate concepts of movement and change. Elmizadeh uses titles along with the verbs "hovering, circling, diving, falling, flaming, offering, and passing" which demonstrate motion and to some extent, fluidity. This is on par with her use of materials. Linen is an incredibly soft and tactile

¹³⁶ Jamileh Salek, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, November 20th, 2020.

¹³⁷ Ahmed, *Knocking on the Door* (Zoom conference, February 16th 2021).

material, which can be a painter's dream to paint on as it absorbs paint rather quickly. It holds its natural oils along with the oils from the paint and does not alter in shape or quality with the absorption of moisture. Elmizadeh's paintings are blurry, watered-down colors that bend and flow into one another, creating a landscape, that sometimes seems to incorporate figures, of dreams and metaphors of imagination. The paintings become screens, openings, and even portals to other dimensions, while they "resist gravity by mirroring the weightless, flickering image of the imagination."¹³⁸ As opposed to Kiarostami's locked doors, Elmizadeh's doors become entry ways like portals to a different dimension. They offer many points of entries, and generously expand the limits of doors as borders/barriers. Instead, they create a door into a space that is limitless in terms of pensive reflection and existence. Elmizadeh can be placed alongside Khanboluki and Baghaee, who explore the spaces that they occupy and the extensive opportunities that may be available for them. Offering hopefulness, Elmizadeh's paintings are colorful and evoke the sentiments of calmness and relaxation. Departing from politics and social commentary, her portals provide new galaxies and places for people of any race, gender, sexuality, or other intersections to enter, rest, and create while finally getting comfortable with their own spaces and bodies.

¹³⁸ Mel Mikhail, "Subtle Bodies" www.franzkaka.com, (exhibition October 16th – November 14th 2020) Accessed on October 4th 2021, <https://franzkaka.com/Subtle-Bodies>

CHAPTER THREE: ISSUES OF REPRESENTATION

*The story of an arrival is a story of our encounters.*¹³⁹

It is impossible to think about the communicative potential of art without narratives. Immigration entails an action of leaving something behind and moving somewhere new, somewhere unfamiliar to the migrant. It is imperative to analyze diasporic artists within the lens of migration as well as the framework of representations. This chapter explores the ways in which artists engage and acquaint themselves with their surroundings, their families, and their immediate vicinities. It will examine how Iranian Canadian artists represent their surroundings, interact with the world around, and raise their level of self-awareness. Hence, the representation of the different images of the migrant, the different representations of migration as a whole, whether it be a personal decision to leave the host country, a politically driven movement for refuge, or simply for freedom, are key themes to explore these issues.

3.1 Eye, Site, and Art

*The more I kept gazing at my surroundings, the more I felt they are gazing back at me!*¹⁴⁰

A major result of immigration is the interaction between people and their new surroundings. Relocation entails the change of scenery and setting. Many artists have been adjusting to migration by reacting to their new environments and representing their everyday lives through their personal lenses. As previously mentioned, Neila Miled's research titled "Can the Displaced Speak? Muslim

¹³⁹ Sara Ahmed, *On being included: Racism and diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 6.

¹⁴⁰ Elsa Hashemi, "Quarantine Series" www.elsahasemi.com, Accessed September 5th, 2021, <https://www.elsahasemi.net/quarantine-series>

refugee girls negotiating identity, home and belonging through Photovoice” reflects these challenges faced particularly by immigrant girls¹⁴¹. Miled conducted a photovoice project over the span of 8 months with 10 Muslim refugee students in a Canadian high school.¹⁴² The students were asked to take photographs and write short descriptive captions to navigate their lives and identities. With the prompts they were given as starting points for their explorations, the students photographed different subjects that were of importance to them with regards to migration, race, and racism, belonging, dual identities, and religious affiliations. The artists to be discussed in this chapter are performing the same acts as the students in Neila Miled’s research project, navigating their lived experiences. The artists will be criticizing, interacting with politics, and taking definite stances with or against paramount issues in the world.

Reza Doust, born in Esfahan Iran in 1960, has been living and working in Vancouver, British Columbia since 1997.¹⁴³ Doust displays the interactions between people and sites by using his familial traditions, Persian roots, and interest in the materiality of paints as well as surfaces. In the artist statement for his series “Get Tested” (fig. 49-52), he states, “I feel them calling to me, testing me, to present my own version of events, in the present time and space, and compare it with theirs and this relieves me. Daily people in their lives are the subject and sometimes the subject is me.”¹⁴⁴ “Get Tested” was held at the Sultan Gallery in Kuwait, 2013. The painting illustrates a solitary man seated drinking a cup of tea. The head is disfigured, and the eyes are scratched away. The seated position recalls traditions of drinking and eating at the Persian “sofreh.”¹⁴⁵ *Sofreh* is

¹⁴¹ Miled, *Can the Displaced Speak?*

¹⁴² Miled, *Can the Displaced Speak?*

¹⁴³ Reza Doust, “Bio | Reza Doust”, www.rezadoust.net, accessed September 6th 2021, <https://www.rezadoust.net/about>

¹⁴⁴ Reza Doust, <https://www.rezadoust.net/about>

¹⁴⁵ Faegheh Shirazi, “The Sofreh: Comfort and Community Among Women in Iran” in *Iranian Studies* vol. 38 no. 2 (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), 293-309.

referred to the cloth on which food is served and people gather around to eat a meal. In more traditional households, the *sofreh* is placed on the ground, and everyone sits around it starting with the elders of the household. Within the collaged backgrounds, there are recognizable traces of traditional paintings of Iran, as well as Iranian Farsi script. In “Self Portrait”, these references to traditional Iranian art and scripture as well as cultures are made clearer: Doust seems to be seated at a *sofreh* against the backdrop of a calligraphy. Another one of Doust’s paintings, titled “Persian Family” 2014 held at the FA Gallery in Kuwait, illustrates the family seated around a *sofreh* having a meal and tea. The method of Doust’s creation is sketchy and gestural. His paint marks are easily distinguishable and purposeful. In every painting of this series, there is an area of black paint that seems to mimic and mirror the body represented. He tells in his artist statement that, “Sipping my bitter tea with a sugar cube in my mouth, I look at these bits and pieces for a long time, gathered from the works of Old Persian masters, curious about their accounts of life events in different time and space, is it the same as mine? [...] I think about routine life, tradition and modernity, being alive, loving, justice; and again, I force myself to live simply so that others can simply live.”¹⁴⁶ Using the collaged resources gathered from different eras of Iranian history, his own personal photos, and figures that are familiar to him, Doust’s paintings become direct collages of Iranian folklore, traditions, and histories.

Simin Keramati, like Doust uses painting as a method of engaging with traditions and histories. Born in Tehran, she moved to Toronto in 2012. She is a multi-disciplinary artist, working with photography, painting, as well as video and installation art. Through her use of striking colours, and bold subjects, she places herself at the centre of socio-political conflicts by utilizing personal commentary. In her series “Blue Backgrounds,” (figs. 18-25) Keramati paints large scale

¹⁴⁶ Reza Doust, <https://www.rezadoust.net/about>

portraits of herself alongside contemporary western artists to navigate the borders and crossings of her immigration from an Islamic-Iranian culture to a Western-European one. “John Lennon, Me, New York City and Heech by Parviz Tanavoli” is a direct portrayal of the history of Iranian contemporary art that precedes her, a representation of where she is from, through using the image of the famous Heech sculptures by Parviz Tanavoli (on Keramati’s shirt). Keramati places herself directly face to face to John Lennon, who is also wearing a shirt that portrays his own historical lineage, being a citizen of New York City. “Blue Backgrounds” as an entire series, portrays Keramati’s own individuality and history alongside other artists from the Western canon of art. Keramati uses her body to communicate with the Western artists, by literally and physically placing herself into these discourses. Her body gestures are indicating her insertion of herself into the artworld. This is Keramati’s socio-political commentary, suggesting that her method of finding a place for herself in the European-American artworld is by creating a world in which she can communicate with these artists, and by placing herself in their vicinity. This can be seen in her painting “Andy Warhol, Me and Caravaggio” where Keramati is leaning over Andy Warhol’s body to examine him. In “Michael Jackson’s bad, Me and Parajanov’s Pomegranate” she is seated in front of Michael Jackson as he is shown performing on stage. Another interesting reference is seen in her joining Marina Abramovic’s table, at her performance of “The Artist is Present,” and serving her Vermeer’s Glass of Wine, in “Marina Abramovic’s, Me and Vermeer’s Glass of Wine.” This reference is somewhat different because she is no longer in opposition, face to face, or examining the fame and reception of the artist. On the contrary, she is serving the artist while the artist does not even acknowledge Keramati’s presence. What makes Marina Abramovic

different than the other artists presented? It can be drawn that Keramati looks up to Abramovic for being a successful woman artist, for she is the founding figure of the performance art movement.¹⁴⁷

The series “The Blue Backgrounds” can be read as Keramati’s contemplation on key terms such as “multiculturalism” and “diversity.” To place yourself in a landscape that is foreign to you, is to question your own identity, your role within a society, and what makes a space diverse. But questioning diversity is not the adequate method of combatting issues of race and migration, rather, we must question what we are doing with diversity to better societies and social political agendas.¹⁴⁸ Thus diversity becomes a tool, a vehicle, with which we can arrive at a destination. This questioning that Keramati does provides a deeper analysis on the concept of diversity, as well as European/Western art historical hierarchies. Such experiences of diversity, and art historical hierarchies, are at once intimate and personal and these acts of questioning are done at one’s own pace and authority. Are these Western art historical references meant to represent the dominance of patriarchal hierarchy in art history as a whole? And is Keramati attempting to insert herself, as well as her fellow artists into the art historical narrative? I argue that Keramati is inserting herself within narratives and histories that precede her as an attempt to navigate her own identity, as an Iranian woman artist, within a greater art world. Yet she does not suggest that all emerging Iranian artists are or should be posing the same questions, rather for her these are personal navigations of the art world based on unique experiences and expectations. She critically engages with these hierarchies by literally examining and opposing popular figures in the contemporary art history.

Getting to know a place by engaging directly with one’s surroundings is a method that artist Elsa Hashemi takes literally. Based in Toronto, she is a professional event photographer and

¹⁴⁷ For more on her contributions to the performance art movement, see Mary Richards *Marina Abramovic* (London: Routledge, October 2018).

¹⁴⁸ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 17.

visual artist who utilizes her technical knowledge along with her practical experience to create photographic projects for herself, as well as to document other artists' works and events.¹⁴⁹ In her series titled "I Gaze, Therefore I am," (fig. 53) she photographs the objects that are in her immediate surrounding. The objects range from a pile of books to a single red pepper, a couple of clothing hangers, a roll of paper towel, a bowl and a plate, and her laptop in multiple frames showing different things on the screen, etc. As an extension to this work, she later created "A Relationship in Quarantine" (fig. 54) during the COVID19 pandemic, which consists of a series of double photographs in a single frame, each frame showing the object that Hashemi is gazing at, and another frame showing Hashemi being gazed at by the objects, an example can be seen in the double frame showing Hashemi on her bed and an alarm clock.¹⁵⁰ These double photographs are shown as a 2:19 minute video. The method of showing the photos as a video no longer necessitates audience's bodily movements to view the photographs because the viewer is not required to scroll through the photos or click "next" at their own pace on a screen or in an exhibition context. The moving images in the video mimics the concept of time passing whereas the surroundings and space remain the same. The choice of video within the context of the pandemic is ironic, as most people had to stay indoors while finding solitude in watching movies and TV shows. The feelings evoked by the passage of time is a personal experience; whereas for some people time may have felt short and speedy, for others, it is long and painful. The objects and different spaces that we occupy in our homes is an intimate process, and Hashemi's choice to have her bed as the focal point is tied to this intimacy that she seems to be interested in sharing. In that matter, she explores

¹⁴⁹ Elsa Hashemi, "About Me" www.elsahashemi.com, Accessed September 5th, 2021,
<https://www.elsahashemi.net/photographer>

¹⁵⁰ Elsa Hashemi, "Quarantine Series" www.elsahashemi.com, Accessed September 5th, 2021,
<https://www.elsahashemi.net/quarantine-series>

the intimacy of being in quarantine with other people, contrary to being alone surrounded by private items.

It's important to note that these works were created in a time when the pandemic confined people in their houses. Therefore, the pandemic's relation to self-representation is shown in her work. Her art aims to disclose the levels of one's intimacy at home, which also recalls the ways in which one's emotions regarding feeling at home could change during migration. Hashemi's work, by creating a direct and immediate experience while gazing at one's surroundings in order to know a place and oneself can be compared to Azadeh Pirazimian's "They are Around" (fig. 55) and Shoora Majedian's "What I See," (fig. 56). Azadeh Pirazimian writes in her artist statement for "They Are Around:"

When you immigrate many things are taken away from you. Your society, your culture, your language. The things that have been deeply rooted in your being for your entire life. I should confess that dealing with this separation needs tremendous power and strength. So in the first year of immigration, my emotions went up and down constantly. Therefore, I needed to figure it out and fix these unstable and chaotic feelings. I needed to find my rhythm first. So, the series, 'They Are Around' came out as part of this solution. So I grabbed a pen and a small notebook on my days off (as I was lucky enough to have some little jobs during that period) and got out of my tiny apartment to any parks or green spaces nearby, sitting and trying to see and draw anything around me, a tree, a leaf, a moving shade, a little squirrel wondering on the grass, any teeny-tiny existence around could bring engagement and consequently connection.¹⁵¹

Pirazimian's drawings are small and personal. They are abstract and open to different interpretations by the viewers; they don't necessarily depict one exact location or object. Her drawings illustrate images of surrounding landscapes, resembling logos. The drawings are done with black ink, in gestural small, scratch-marks. The empty spaces are left as the original blank

¹⁵¹ Azadeh Pirazimian, "They are Around" www.azadehpirazimian.com Accessed on September 12th 2021, <https://www.azadehpirazimian.com/ww#0>

paper, demonstrating the layers that Pirazimian has added on to it. These works can be read as topological maps, the high points are the darkest, showing they were the points that Pirazimian spent the most time and effort filling out. This thickness of lines and spending more time in one section of the drawing, directly relates to spending more time in one location. The points of the drawings that have the most intricacy and details, correlate to her experience within that specific location. Pirazimian's work links to Dan Graham's critique of Bruce Nauman's latex rubber work, because it uses found objects as models to illustrate a two-dimensional rendering as a method of examining an area and space.¹⁵² Therefore the geometric shapes and patterns become important signifiers in illustrating transformation. The white lines on Pirazimian's work that are created by the negative spaces symbolize internal pathways created by the artist herself, as the work becomes a means for representing Pirazimian's surroundings. This connection between Pirazimian's drawings and map-making becomes important because just as topological maps were used to encode spatial qualities and experiences, so did Pirazimian use of images as tools to understand and communicate with her surroundings.¹⁵³ This process of artmaking is comparable to Ethiopian-born American Julie Mehretu as well, who constructs maps of emotional and imaginary relationships with the territory they are representing.¹⁵⁴ One work in particular, "Conjured Parts (heart) Aleppo" 2016 (fig. 57) which can be seen at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, is directly comparable to Pirazimian's drawings due to their similar method of mark-making, topological influences and dark colour scheme. Another aspect of this form of drawing is the conscious methods used to represent these spatial journeys, such as purposefully left blank spaces

¹⁵² Eric DeBruyn, "Topological Pathways of Post-Minimalism" in *Grey Room* (The MIT Press, 2006), 35.

¹⁵³ Lynn S. Liben, "The Road to Understanding Maps." in *Current Directions in Psychological Science* (Association for Psychological Science, Sage Publications, Inc., 2009), 10–15.

¹⁵⁴ Kathryn Brown, "The Artist as Urban Geographer Mark Bradford and Julie Mehretu." In *American Art* (The University of Chicago Press, The Smithsonian Institution, 2010), 101.

and intentional mark making. Creating a work by critically using techniques places the artist more openly within the artwork while leaving traces of artistic making. In this manner, the viewer witnesses the process of drawing and the hand of the artist.

In a private interview, an Iranian Canadian artist, Bahar Taheri born in 1980 in Tehran, stated that “Everyone moulds into a special character depending on his/her understanding of the surroundings.”¹⁵⁵ The effect of surroundings changes along with newly emerging perceptions of the world around. Likewise, Pirazimian, places herself by her intentional mark-making, into a black and white landscape, illustrating that her surroundings are potentially menacing to her, resembling scenes from Slenderman.¹⁵⁶ Hence, the same surrounding would look different based on your mood or viewpoint, such as the sea in Leily Derakhshani’s “Ocean of Love” (fig. 90) that brings fear to one, particularly in a precarious journey, while giving peace to another.

The site-specificity and intimacy of homey spaces and objects are equally important for another Toronto based artist, Shoora Majedian. She is interested in moments of one’s life, hence paints images that depict aspects of being and dwelling that often seem indescribable.¹⁵⁷ Majedian is interested in internal and personal experiences that evoke emotion, so she depicts moments that may entrance the viewer, or arrest them in one’s tracks. It is important to consider her attention to emotional journeys while looking at her series of paintings titled “What I See.” Henri Bergson’s poem also accompanies her works:

Here I am in the presence of images, in the
Vaguest sense of the word, images perceived
When my senses are open to them,

¹⁵⁵ Bahar Taheri, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 14th 2020.

¹⁵⁶ John Biggs, “The Story of Slenderman, The Internet’s Own Monster” in *Techcrunch*, Accessed on September 15th 2021 <https://techcrunch.com/2014/06/30/the-story-of-slenderman-the-internets-own-monster/>

¹⁵⁷ Shoora Majedian, “Bio” www.shoorsmajedian.com, Accessed on September 13th 2021, <https://www.shooramajedian.com/bio>

Unperceived when they are closed.¹⁵⁸

Similar to Elsa Hashemi's photographs, Majedian's paintings depict objects in her immediate surrounding. Hashemi's photographs are staged and presented against a white backdrop, taking them out of their intended environment and position in the home. Hashemi treats her objects as real-life subjects, creating portraits of them. However, Majedian's objects are in their element, showing their use and the exact spaces they occupy within the home. They depict moments in time; apples half eaten left on the table; cups of tea that are half drank and left on the tray; keys dropped on the floor in a moment of frenzy and forgotten only to be remembered when needed once more; empty chairs and sofas that illustrate a potential to sit and put your feet up and relax, or maybe they demonstrate an empty space where groups of people used to sit and talk for hours on end; lamps with the light still on, dim against the darkness of the room; and crumpled pieces of paper that depict a history of a blank piece of paper that once was, but is no longer. Majedian's paintings are momentary depictions that allow the viewer to create their own narrative of what happened before this setting. Objects depicted candidly in the moment, for exactly what they are, placed opposite the 'perfect' portrait of objects, illustrate the differences in seeing one's settings. Whereas the first painting examines objects within the moments that they are used in familiar spaces, the latter depicts objects outside of their natural setting, as if being looked at under a magnifying glass in a scientific laboratory.

¹⁵⁸ Shoora Majedian, "What I see" www.shooramajedian.com, Accessed on September 13th 2021, <https://www.shooramajedian.com/what-i-see>

3.2 Objects as the Representation of Identities

*This teapot is a small part of our tradition that we brought all the way from the Middle East to Canada to remind us of our home. And also, to remind us of a family time where we gather, talk, chat and laugh. It is part of what home means to us.*¹⁵⁹

An examination of the interaction between people and their surroundings raises the question on the significance of the objects that are in their vicinities. Artists in the diaspora have often found themselves negotiating their identities through their material purchases in their new homelands. Hence, this section explores objects that become similar to the bodily extensions that one picks to decorate oneself. The representation of the unique individual, or the ways in which we can get to know each other solely on the presentation of ourselves will be deliberated.

The works of Shirin Aliabadi, a contemporary Iranian artist, demonstrates how she navigates the social norms of a nation through the self-expression of women. In her work “Miss Hybrid” (fig. 58-62) created between 2008 and 2010 and exhibited at Thaddaeus Ropac, she used the portrait of a woman to underscore the social codes and conducts practiced in Tehran, Iran. Each portrait in this series displays a woman against a black backdrop, with platinum blonde hair showing from under a loose headscarf, a small bandage over the nose, and blue eyes. Aliabadi shows the female figure in contemporary Tehran and suggests that they perform the white race by idealizing the European ancestry that Iranians have embraced based on the Aryan race myth. Reza Ebrahimi criticizes Iranians’ preference to be linked with European ancestry rather than Middle Eastern societies.¹⁶⁰ He explains that the first linkage between Iran and Europe relied on the similarities in the roots of the Greek, Latin, Sanskrit and Persian languages.¹⁶¹ Yet he further notes that due to its nationalistic and racist overtones, Iran should not be associated with the “Land of

¹⁵⁹ Miled, *Can the Displaced Speak?* 5.

¹⁶⁰ Reza Zia Ebrahimi, “Self-Orientalization and Dislocation: The Uses and Abuses of the Aryan Discourse in Iran,” in *Iranian Studies* vol. 44 no. 4 (UK: Routledge Taylor & Francis, June 24 2011), 471-472.

¹⁶¹ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 448.

the Arya.”¹⁶² This Aryan race theory became the source of Iranian nationalism, in search of a pre-Islamic tradition, which continued from the Pahlavi period to today.¹⁶³ Ebrahimi suggests that the Aryan race theory plays a strong role in Iranian identity politics through two distinct methods, which he refers to as *self-orientalization* and *dislocation*.¹⁶⁴ This critical view of the notion of self-orientalization can be traced in the contemporary Iranian Canadian artist RAH’s “SuperNova” through the character of *Fatimeh*, as will be discussed further. Self-orientalization takes root in a pre-Islamic Iranian nationalist ideal that rejects an Arabic or Islamic Iran and refutes being a part of the Middle East region, and therefore separating Iran from the “oriental” identity.¹⁶⁵ Fatimeh’s representation and exploitation of pre-Islamic Iranian tradition and culture appeals to the orientalist perspective set out by the West. The method of dislocation, however, functions a little differently. Ebrahimi describes it as the desire and actions of Iranians to portray themselves as progressive to prove that they are not a lesser people, which manifests itself as the mimicking of European ways. Aliabadi’s work can be linked to the method of dislocation discussed by Ebrahimi, because it illustrates the ways in which Iranian women are interacting with Western/European ideals in a post-revolutionary Iran. As a female artist herself, she utilizes her own outlook to empower herself. Her method of critically illustrating the social norms, such as the loose hijab over coloured hair and contemporary *manteau* or thin coat, performed by Iranian women are noteworthy. Photographs lack any indicator of time or space. Rather, they are portraits that communicate and navigate identities solely by using accessories and bodily extension, as will be discussed below. As this chapter argues, individuality is a key component of an artist’s exploration of their own identities, surroundings, and the interactions that take place between the two.

¹⁶² Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 462.

¹⁶³ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 466.

¹⁶⁴ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 468.

¹⁶⁵ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 469.

In 2004, Aliabadi was traveling back to Iran, from Paris, to survey the transformations that had happened during the governmental change through Mohammad Khatami's presidency.¹⁶⁶ In 2005, she created a work titled "Girls in Cars" (fig. 63-64), which is a series of four very candid photographs showing a group of girls in a car wearing makeup, loosely thrown on hijabs exposing most of their coloured hair. It is evident that the photographs were taken at the nighttime with a flash. The journalistic photographs display young womanhood in Tehran, who are restricted in their interactions with the opposite sex in the public sphere. Thus, they would use their cars to meet each other in undisclosed locations mostly at night.¹⁶⁷ This interest in the identity and autonomy of Iranian women is also apparent in her series "Miss Hybrid" as mentioned above. The series consists of numerous portraits of Iranian women displaying the ways in which Iranian women are interacting with the Aryan race theory as well as Western/European standards. These photographs show a group of modernized early-2000s trend-following Iranians, attempting to navigate their identities and adapt to a changing culture between an Islamic state and the 'progressive' female figure. The hijab references the place they live, Tehran, Iran. They have dyed hair, heavy makeup, early-2000s inspired outfits and accessories. In their freedom of expression, however, they seem to be still controlled and regulated. Hamid Keshmirshekan argues that Aliabadi's work, by displaying women rebelling against cultural and traditional forms with cosmetic intervention is an act of "healthy exercise in cultural rebellion and global integration."¹⁶⁸ According to Keshmirshekan, this rebellion turns into a flight to seek refuge in a different culture which turns into a trap of consumerism and capitalism.¹⁶⁹ In the press release for Aliabadi's

¹⁶⁶ Haleh Anvari, "Remembrances" in *Aperture*, published November 2 2018, Accessed on September 17th 2021
<https://aperture.org/editorial/shirin-alibadi/>

¹⁶⁷ Anvari, <https://aperture.org/editorial/shirin-alibadi/>

¹⁶⁸ Hamid Keshmirshekan, "The Question of Identity vis-à-vis Exoticism in Contemporary Iranian Art" in *Iranian Studies* vol. 43 no. 4 (Routledge Taylor & Francis, August 2010), 510.

¹⁶⁹ Anvari, "<https://aperture.org/editorial/shirin-alibadi/>

exhibition at the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, it is stated: “Attracted by the diversity of modern consumerism, these in-your-face beauties display their desire to get away from tradition and move towards the Western system of expression and representation. Young people in Tehran today are mixing up traditional popular culture and Americanised behaviour, composing a lifestyle that mashes Iranian pop and MTV.”¹⁷⁰ This method of being ‘boxed in’ through media is also resonant with the art form and settings that the artist has chosen to convey her subjects. The photographs, essentially box the women into a rectangular limited form. The nature of photographs, being flatly shown on a wall, serve as windows, or boxes, indicating an image that is carefully orchestrated by the artist. These borders and walls further push the reading of entrapment, like a movie on a TV screen, trapped between four corners and walls. However, I argue that Aliabadi is combatting these stereotypes and renditions of the modern Iranian woman. Rather, her staged and exaggerated photographs become a mockery of the stereotypes. Being a female artist, which is already a political act, she gives space to women to express themselves and adapt to whichever culture they see fit. These photographs become posters for other Iranian women to relate to and look up to.

Bahar Taheri, on the other hand, questions individuality in a different way through her series “There is No Way to Communicate” (fig. 65) which explores the theme of identity and communication.¹⁷¹ She paints portraits of people whose identities are hidden behind every-day objects. These every-day objects, I will argue, become indicators of identity and self-expression. She creates a distance between the viewer and the subject. Even though they are painted with proximity to the viewer, the viewer is kept at a safe distance with the use of the many accessories that are presented, accessories that we as viewers utilize and possess also (such as hats, sunglasses, masks, computers, magazines, etc.). The accessories become identifying agents because, even

¹⁷⁰ Paris Debelleyme, “Miss Hybrid, City Girl” in *Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac* (08 Wednesday – 23 Thursday).

¹⁷¹ Rouzbeh Hosseiniabadi, *Bahar Taheri*, 128-129. Thanks to Bahar Taheri for sharing this material with me.

though we cannot see the faces of the people represented, we are able to access their psychology and their characteristic traits through them. The title of her work, “There is No Way to Communicate,” becomes witty because even though at first glance, one might assume that there really is no way to communicate with these figures because they are tucked away behind their laptops and glasses, in fact, Taheri presents a different method to identify and communicate with people. Contrary to Shirin Aliabadi’s approach in her photographs, Taheri does not use uniform accessories for her subjects. The only similarities that are present between the figures are the eyeglasses or masks that are used to cover the faces. In the artist’s statement for this work, Taheri writes:

We wear sunglasses, hats, masks, ... to keep safe from people’s eyes and their judgements. We have worn out these covers; so they don’t protect us any more, since these masks they have become symbols. Brands are only to place emphasis on our hiding masks. So that we would be able to conceal our real selves with glory, rapture and ease, and show off fake faces. We are looking for more personal space and privacy in public life, while we share our personal details on the social networks. Living in a virtual world somehow disconnect us from the real world.¹⁷²

Her characters sit with their earphones, heads in their laptops. Only two males reference a direct connection to the cyber space. The other two characters, one male and the other female, mask their faces with magazines, such as the fashion journal Elle. Taheri is illustrating the twenty first century, life on the social networking sites that create trends for people to follow. The brands that are shown, and the clothing that the figures wear, seem to reference this culture of living on the web. The notion of keeping a safe distance with people are implemented by such measures as glasses, masks, headphones, hats, books, and laptops placed between the viewer and the subject. Yet these objects and their respective brands ascribe an identity to these characters in the eyes of

¹⁷² Bahar Taheri, “There is No Way to Communicate” www.bahartaheri.com, accessed on September 15th 2021, <https://bahartaheri.com/artworks/there-is-no-way-to-communicate/>

the viewers, enabling them to nonverbally engage with others, which I argue is the key interpretation that can be deduced from the series. In her artist statement, Taheri suggests that by following such fashion and lifestyle trends while living *in* a virtual world behind phones and computers, people become disconnected from reality. However, she addresses another issue: the brands and objects become key identifiers to decipher who these people are, what trends they follow, and what they believe in. These portraits illustrate the global connectedness of people across all lands. Similar to Aliabadi's portraits, Taheri's paintings become a freedom of expression for people by enabling them to dress and decorate their bodies however they like despite real world limitations.

The use of painting as the medium is also notable because it is an intimate process. The proximity that Taheri must maintain with the canvas for illustrating details is extremely close. The artist brings herself in the personal space of paintings and identifies with the painted subjects, while creating the work. One can imagine an artist hunched over, working away at the canvas, paint brush in hand, eyes always on the subject. This is a gruelling process, especially for a painting to be as realistic as Taheri's. These meticulous details suggest the many hours she spent observing strangers, and later, recollecting them as she creates them on the canvas. It is not certain if Taheri had seen these people first, then photographed them, and painted them, or if she personally imagined and staged these situations. Yet, they give the impression of being staged in front of a screen in a studio because there is nothing other than colorful or textured backgrounds. They recall Aliabadi's studio settings placed against plain backgrounds. Taheri's staging, however, suggests that she places herself on the outside of this representation while being the choreographer for bringing these people together in a series. The "strangers" become a part of a collective solely

because they are gathered by the artist.¹⁷³ Within this classification of a collective group of ‘strangers’ it is also important to note that human beings are social beings and cannot escape the fact that they rely on groups and collectives.¹⁷⁴ Therefore, our sense of liberty and freedom of expression is inherently tied to the other people that surround us. If one is constantly inspired by trends on social networks, they are not only responding to the outer world but are also shaping it through one’s reactions in the social media.¹⁷⁵ This argument can be tied to Aliabadi’s photographs as well, for in constructing our own identities we draw on our surroundings, our social networks, and our society.¹⁷⁶ But, these transformations are projected back to the world by reshaping it as well, hence making this interaction a reciprocal one.

Communication through objects and works of art is a key concept in Neila Miled’s photovoice project at the University of British Columbia that was a part of her PhD work. As previously discussed, this project allowed refugee girls to navigate their sense of belonging and home through photographs. In addition to this project’s interaction between people, spaces, and their surroundings, it is important to evaluate them in relation to the process of artistic creation in the diaspora along with the objects chosen by these participants-turned-artists to *represent* their identities. Miled’s students are not “artists” per se but they formulate a starting point in the discussion of migration and identity formation through specific objects. Photovoice serves as a photograph documentary, allowing the students to answer certain prompts and questions by taking photographs as communication.¹⁷⁷ In one of the assignments, a student answered to the concept of

¹⁷³ For more on individuality, grouping of people based on social forms, see Georg Simmel, “Stranger,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).

¹⁷⁴ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Liberalism, Individuality and Identity” in *Critical Inquiry* (The University of Chicago Press, Winter 2001).

¹⁷⁵ Appiah, *Liberalism, Individuality and Identity*, 326.

¹⁷⁶ Appiah, *Liberalism, Individuality and Identity*, 326.

¹⁷⁷ Miled, *Can the Displaced Speak?*, 2.

“home,” by photographing a teapot. The teapot is an object this student brought with her from the Middle East, representing a family gathering that would occur around the teapot, suggesting that it is a crucial part of her sense of “home.” The teapot becomes an object of transition, or transitional object, that demonstrates an attachment with an object that was brought and carried through a transitory state of one’s life, which in this case is migration.¹⁷⁸ Carole J. Litt examines “Transitional Object” theories.¹⁷⁹ She analyzes psychological attachments that occur in children from when they are born. Although the psychological development of young babies discussed by Litt is not the concern here, the idea of transitional objects enables to understand better the process and impact of transitions in life through material culture. Litt writes that a person may develop a sense of belonging with the object by instilling in it a sense of life and human characteristics, which are internalized.¹⁸⁰ She goes on to state that the *child* views the object as a part of herself or as a part of the nurturing and safe “mother” figure, which helps to describe the relation between the migrant and the “homeland.”¹⁸¹ Miled’s student associated the teapot with her personal sense of ‘home’ which was rooted in her family. Likewise, Taheri’s representation of personal objects used by strangers derives from their own memories and relationships with these objects that are also illustrating the global connectedness of Iranians. For example, the laptops that are illustrated in the paintings shows that they are connected no matter where they are in the world. The use of sunglasses in a number of the paintings also becomes effective in showing the balance of revealing

¹⁷⁸ For more on the term *Transitional Object* and its evaluation especially seen in children’s psychology see, D.W. Winnicott “Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena” in *Essential Papers on Object Relations*, ed. Peter Buckley, M.D. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1986), 254-272.

¹⁷⁹ Carole J. Litt, “Theories of Transitional Object Attachment: An Overview” in *International Journal of Behavioural Development* 9 (North-Holland, USA: Sage Journals, 1986).

¹⁸⁰ Litt, *Theories of Transitional Object Attachment*, 387.

¹⁸¹ Litt, *Theories of Transitional Object Attachment*, 392.

and hiding as a means to navigate between their personal relationships, histories, and private lives in Canada.

3.3 Displacement and Movement

Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached.¹⁸²

Bahar Taheri, in her series titled “Displacement” (fig. 66-70) creates detailed renderings of structures suspended in space.¹⁸³ The images of the Eshrat Abad palace, a historical mansion housing a garden built during the Qajar dynasty (1800s of Iran) under the rule of Naseredin Shah, and the Tehran City Theatre built in the 1960s by AmirAli Sardar Afkhami represent Taheri’s homeland.¹⁸⁴ The Notre Dame de Bonsecours Chapel located in Montreal, however, represents her re-rooting and new home in Montreal, Quebec. Here, Taheri is illustrating her two lives through the architecture of these cities from different time periods. The depicted buildings are famous, nevertheless, they are not national emblems of these countries per se. Therefore, they can be related to the artist’s memories of these places. Taheri draws on her memory of walking down streets, or potentially attending events, gatherings, at these buildings, or admiring them as an artist. The buildings look as if they are floating on water, because one notices a reflection directly underneath each structure. There is a desire to ‘accurately’ draw the real building as much as possible through meticulous details. Hence, one can detect the artist’s efforts to display every architectural element

¹⁸² Ahmed, Castañeda, Fortier, and Sheller, *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 1.

¹⁸³ Laure Raffy, “(RE)INTERPRETATIONS (INTER)SECTIONS/CONFRONTATIONS,” text commissioned by Skol for the exhibition *Construction, Rupture, Re-emergence*. Kindly shared with me by Bahar Taheri, compares Taheri’s work “Displacement” with the works of Marie-Douce St-Jacques.

¹⁸⁴ For more information on the preservation and politics of preservation of historical gardens like the Eshrat Abad, see Sara Mahdizadeh and Lakshmi Priya Rajendran, “A Renewed Approach to Conversation Policy of Historical Gardens in Iran” in *Landscape Research* (Jan 9 2018). ; “Tehran City Theatre” *Contemporary Architecture of Iran* caoi.ir, Accessed on September 20th 2021, <http://www.caoi.ir/en/projects/item/52-tehran-city-theater-amirali-sardar-afkhami.html>

flawlessly. This method of hyper-real drawing recalls the endurance, and patience required from an artist, intersecting with the hardships experienced while adapting to a new place. In this regard, the title of the work is telling because it directly evokes the concepts of migration and one's memories attached to this journey. Displacement, and thus movement, references the bodily experience, specific sites, and emotions/lives associated with them. Migration becomes a feeling that is evoked when bodies move between spaces and the body, site and emotions intersect.¹⁸⁵ Therefore, it is understood that the emotion evoked by having migrated from one place to the other relies on the repositioning of the body, and Taheri does exactly that: she readjusts her sight (and site) according to her new surroundings during urban wanderings, such as her visit to the Notre dame de Bonsecours Chapel. In our interview, Taheri states:

When you go to a new city, everything that is new draws your attention to itself. So, I was interested in architecture. I started with Iranian buildings [...] and deconstructed them and painted a new form of the buildings that were suspended. [...] When you immigrate, you are excited, at the same time, you realize how hard it is to start all over from zero. You find out it is not utopia you had in mind. [...] This was the best thing that happened to me both as a human being and as an artist: immigration. My view was suddenly widened. When life changes all your beliefs, you reach here.¹⁸⁶

Taheri's paintings and words on the complexity of emotions evoked by migration relate to the idea that "being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached."¹⁸⁷ The very characteristic of buildings are the fact that they are immobile, strong structures meant to withstand any force. Yet Taheri provides a re-definition of buildings, as constructs that are no longer heavy, giant, or rooted in the ground: the foundations become fragile

¹⁸⁵ Gannit Ankori, "'Dis-Orientalisms': Displaced Bodies/Embodied Displacements in Contemporary Palestinian Art" in *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, eds. Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, Mimi Sheller (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2003), 61.

¹⁸⁶ Bahar Taheri, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 14th 2020.

¹⁸⁷ Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller (eds.), *Uprootings/Regroundings*, 1.

and flexible. Therefore, Taheri's work relies on the notion that being grounded in a nation is not about being fixed or even living in that nation, just as being mobile and malleable (floating) in space is not about being completely detached from a nation. Rather, it is a personal connection through the memories that you collect in your lifetime, like little postcards from a vacation (which these paintings can represent as well).

Another artist interested in the concept of displacement regarding different renditions of their surroundings throughout migration and personal histories, is Nima Arabi, born in the 1980s post-revolution. A multidisciplinary artist currently based in Toronto, after migrating in 2013, originating from the town of Babul in Northern Iran, he is interested in unity and 'oneness' by utilizing drawing and sculpture in installations that engulf viewers.¹⁸⁸ In a private interview with the artist, he stated:

I was born and raised in Babul where there are a lot of bitter orange (*narenj*) trees and in April, they blossom and fill the city with their fragrance. As I had always been in Babul, I didn't have any idea what other cities were like. I found that out when I moved to Tehran to continue my studies. Same thing applies to identity. Before I came here, I had no idea of the differences, and who I am and what identity was. [In Canada] I noticed what was in my background which had made my identity.¹⁸⁹

It can be deduced from Arabi's quote that knowledge derives from direct experience, and on-site interaction. Displacement and movement aid in gaining knowledge of places, and yourself; your own identity. In his work titled "So Close; So Far" 2020 (fig.71), an installation that took place at the Varley Art Gallery in Markham, Ontario, the significance of experience and movement is highlighted. Arabi fills the entire room, utilizing every wall as well as the ceiling to hang a large "ornamental" sculpture in the centre along with large-scale drawings on the walls. This installation

¹⁸⁸ Nima Arabi, "About Statement" www.nimaarabi.net, Accessed on September 19th 2021,
<https://www.nimaarabi.net/index.php/about/statement>

¹⁸⁹ Nima Arabi, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, April 1st 2021.

guides the viewer to move through the entire room. In that manner, the viewer becomes a part of the installation as they move from one element to the other, following the hanging sculpture while looking at the drawings on the walls. None of the pieces within this installation specify a certain location, or a certain time. They are floating, like Taheri's drawings, in this imaginative limbo. Arabi states that he views the gallery space as a blank paper as he tries to place all his thoughts and experiences on it.¹⁹⁰ The muqarnas structure hanging in the centre of the room, states Arabi, is an important element for him as he continuously strives to include the presence of Persian/Iranian elements in Canadian spaces, he states in our private interview, “The detailed miniature paintings are different architectural elements. They have figures showing interior and exterior spaces. However, in fact, they are all one piece, just one paper. I wanted to talk about the same thing in this installation, about how they all relate to each other. What was important to me was the presence of Persian/Iranian elements in Canadian space.”¹⁹¹ The self-portraits and distorted faces that fill the walls are Arabi’s representation of the psyche. He states in an interview that he gets inspired by the spaces around him, the experiences he has had, and he draws on these external influences to create work that is innately personal.¹⁹² The muqarnas structure in the centre of the room becomes the centre of the circle; the point where the sharp end of the compass is placed, and the pencil rotates around it to draw a perfect circle, like a journey. The muqarnas structure referencing a historical building in Iran evokes displacement. Yet it also embodies the “emancipation of the body” or ‘one’s freeing from restrictions,’ because it is hanging on an invisible thread, suspended in mid-air like in the middle of nowhere. The honey-comb structure is not a part of anything, rather, it seems to be detached from a building, displaced, and transported

¹⁹⁰ Nima Arabi, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, April 1st 2021.

¹⁹¹ Nima Arabi, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, April 1st 2021.

¹⁹² Nima Arabi, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, April 1st 2021.

to a different location. Could the structure therefore, be referencing migration itself? Or is the structure, rather, a representation of Arabi's own migration? Whereas there can be no one answer to these questions, I suggest that, like Taheri, Arabi's personal experiences of migration and his reception of his new surroundings along with the recollection of old ones are the starting point to his work. They both are interested in collective memories. Hence, their works speak to each other through their mutual reliance on architectural elements, displacement, and cultural influences. Arabi's installation can be read as a navigation of one's identity while negotiating the impacts of migration, just as Taheri mapped places and memories. The title of the exhibition references distance and site. Therefore, the title "So Close; So Far," becomes a response to the question of whether he has arrived at a definite and clear identity within the framework of migration.

3.4 Performance/Representation of Race and Racial Drag

*If we are able to understand inequality in Canada, both race and ethnicity must be addressed. Although some argue that race and racism must be given priority to fully appreciate inequality, the approach taken here is that class, age, gender, ethnicity, and race must all be given equal weight. Some will be critical of such an approach and will question the right of a white woman to make such claims. Though I empathize with such views, I agree with Daiva Stasiulis who says, 'no one gender, race, or class should have the monopoly on intersectional theorizing.'*¹⁹³

RAH, born during the war in 1985, is an Iranian born, Canadian raised artist questioning the performativity of race and gender in her work "SuperNova" (fig.72) shown in Carleton University Art Gallery in 2019-2020. The work filled a whole gallery space as it combined an installation with a video. The installation space consisted of a giant man-made structure that resembled a futuristic photo booth for two or three people to sit inside and watch a screen. The screen showed

¹⁹³ Julie McMullin, "Chapter 4: Race, Ethnicity, and Inequality" in *Understanding Social Inequality: Intersections of Class, Age, Gender, Ethnicity and Race in Canada* (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2004), 77.

the parody talent show called “SuperNova” (fig. 76). The show was made up of an audience of aliens, 3 bizarre talent judges, and 3 characters performing 3 different identities. These characters from the galaxy *Messier 82* relate to the “issues of race and ethnic performance; Oreo (fig. 75) performs a magic trick in whiteface, Fatimeh (fig. 74) sings and performs a neo-orientalist ethnic identity and Coco (fig. 73) performs a dance as a diasporic and hybrid subject.”¹⁹⁴ They perform in front of the judges, Sirius, Mira, and Bellatrix. First, it is noteworthy to examine the choices for the name of the characters. The name Coco can remind one of the French fashion designer, Coco Chanel. One would expect that this name would be used for a character who represents “whiteness” because Chanel has become a household name for privileged white women for many years to come. However, Coco is the nonbinary, progressive, ambiguous final character in the show. This critical juxtaposition of names is also seen in RAH’s use of the name Oreo, which is the derogatory terms used to describe second or third generation African American persons. In the late ‘50s to ‘60s, *Oreo* was an offensive term used to refer to black people who were associated with a “white” mentality.¹⁹⁵ RAH’s critical representation of this character illustrates the complexities experienced by a second or third generation immigrant, or by someone who faces multiple intersections.¹⁹⁶ Oreo is represented as someone trying hard to fit in, thus implying that she, as her dark-featured self, cannot fit in. Through mimicry, she attempts to assimilate and perform whiteness, yet struggles to pass as white.¹⁹⁷ Oreo as a character who is in “whiteface” and is presenting herself as “white” directly links to the derogatory term and thus, raises political questions about performativity and race. Her representation also demonstrates the art world’s (one

¹⁹⁴ Raheleh Saneie, *SuperNova: Performing Race, Hybridity and Expanding the Geographical Imagination* (The University of Western Ontario, MFA Thesis dissertation, 2018), 1.

¹⁹⁵ Rotha M. Perkins, “An Oreo ain’t nothing but a cookie: An analysis of Identity Struggles of African Americans in Desegregated Public Schools from 1950 to 1968” in *Journal of Interdisciplinary Research* (2008), 111.

¹⁹⁶ Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall, *Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies*.

¹⁹⁷ Saneie, *SuperNova*, 10.

is not made aware of exactly which art world, whether it be Canadian, American, European, or anything specific) conservative nature as she is quickly turned down by the judges. RAH states that “We need to change policy; we need to make museums more accessible spaces. [...] I have been told by key curators [...] to leave because they don’t think that the Canadian art scene is progressive enough for my kind of work. [...] I think there is lack of accountability there and [...] they just don’t want to deal with possible consequences of having art that is so blatantly political. [...] They aren’t quite ready for Oreo.”¹⁹⁸ Hence, the character is a direct critique of the art world’s hierarchy that labels the artist as “too progressive” only when performing Oreo, as an Iranian Canadian, whereas it applauds the artist for performing her “traditional self” as Fatimeh. Fatimeh seems to be “more authentic” according to the judges because “the name *Fatimeh* references *Fatima*, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammed from the Quran” which makes her “the ideal representation of “womanhood” and upholding a religion as a woman.”¹⁹⁹ RAH’s character Fatimeh recalls *Fatima*, the ideal Islamic woman, to reveal the orientalist gaze which is fascinated with the “exotic” Middle East.

These performances of race, and especially the creation of Oreo as a character performing whiteness, an identity that is different than her own, is referred to as *racial drag* by RAH.²⁰⁰ However, it is noteworthy that Oreo’s racial drag is different than the popularized form of drag that performs a gender. Oreo is challenging racial hierarchies and challenging Iranian nationalists (who utilized the Aryan myth of Persian descent²⁰¹) as well as European/Western imperialists.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Rah-Eleh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 17th, 2020.

¹⁹⁹ For more on Fatima as the representation of womanhood and the ideal woman in Islam, see Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet “Who is Fatima? Gender, Culture and Representation in Islam” in *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* (Spring 2005).

²⁰⁰ Saneie, *SuperNova*, 12.

²⁰¹ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*.

²⁰² Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 13.

RAH problematizes racial hierarchies in 3 different ways through her characters. As Oreo attempts to pass as “white,” Fatimeh is performing an ancient and historic identity of Iranian society and culture. In SuperNova, she is dressed in a traditional outfit, and sings in a language that is no longer spoken today in Iran. This representation directly calls on Iranian nationalists who insist on returning to an Iran that is free of Arabic and other colonial roots. As she sings, flowers start to bloom from her face and mouth as they envelope her. This performance of an ancient Iranian tradition as well as the ultra-and almost-too beautiful representation of the flowers blooming from her body act as a self-exoticization.²⁰³ She is exploiting her own race and ancestral history by performing in a manner that dismisses any contemporary recollection of the state of her “homeland” and instead objectifies a stereotypical Iranian tradition by performing it at a talent contest.

Butler states that “Social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a re-enactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimization.”²⁰⁴ Taking this definition of gender as an act allows us to open the conversation to race, religious affiliations, and other such communal and societal attachments, which are also performances as they require re-enactments and repetitions as well. RAH aligns herself with the Butlerian theorization of *performativity*, however she also adds to Butler’s theory by suggesting that *race* is a performance as well. She states in our private interview, “[Butler] looks at repetition and reiteration … and these are what create a performance of race. She doesn’t feel like that can be transposed on to race, that it kind of disservices. But I think that they work together and that’s why you need an intersectional conversation because race

²⁰³ Ebrahimi, *Self-Orientalization and Dislocation*, 25.

²⁰⁴ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*, 526.

is performed in many ways in which gender is performed and nationalism is performed.”²⁰⁵ Coco becomes an interesting character to analyze with these theories in mind. Coco is genderless, raceless, and lacks any indication of spatial and temporal affiliations. This timelessness of Coco can be placed alongside Iftikhar Dadi’s critique using the concept of *transaesthetism* in Shirin Neshat’s portraits in her series “Women of Allah” (fig. 77-78) where “her photographs emphasize flatness, affectlessness, contemporality, and veiled threats, enacting a mode of spatial allegory. By deploying a minimalist aesthetic, Neshat removes temporality from her photographic frames and avoids possible references to a stagist and developmental judgment regarding modernization, one in which the West is seen as temporally ahead of Islam.”²⁰⁶ RAH’s representation of Coco can be linked to minimalistic aesthetic because RAH removes any references to temporality in Coco who does not have any direct connection to a specific identity or culture/tradition. Coco’s performance is a dance which incorporates waacking (a dance which was popular amongst the LGBTQ+ community in Los Angeles and was mainly performed by Black and Latinx), traditional Iranian dancing, and other abstract gestures.²⁰⁷ During *their* performance, the atoms of their body disperse and reappears as if traveling through dimensions, in a dark yet eclectic, vast, galaxy like background that lacks any borders or definitions, suggesting Coco’s ability to travel and move through spaces, politics, and other global narratives.²⁰⁸ This is a necessary character to be represented alongside Fatimeh and Oreo, both of which belong to two completely different political and social elements of the diasporic figure; one rooting themselves in tradition to exploit its cultural features for the orientalist gaze, and the other completely assimilating with the “European” hierarchies of race and performance to be included. Coco is the third migrant, who

²⁰⁵ Rah-Eleh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 17th, 2020.

²⁰⁶ Dadi, *Shirin Neshat’s Photographs as Postcolonial Allegories*, 125-150.

²⁰⁷ Saneie, *SuperNova*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Saneie, *SuperNova*, 34.

does not belong to either discussions, narratives, or frameworks, because they travel between different galaxies and belongs to more than one concept or intersections.²⁰⁹

RAH's "SuperNova" therefore becomes a commentary on Butler's *performativity*; her identities are established through the repetitions of mundane acts such as bodily gestures, movements, and enactments. At the same time, they present an ongoing critique of orientalism, gender roles, self-exotification, nationalism, and European empirical paradigms. Finally, RAH provides us with three different representations of the diasporic figure with the utilization of racial drag and the performance of a race or ethnicity.

3.5 Representation of the Intellectual and the Institution; Who can speak?

*That's true, some stories are not for you to tell but you have to ask yourself why you want to tell those stories.*²¹⁰

RAH's words relate to Edward Said's critique of the representation of the intellectual as the highest form of reference. Who has the authority to tell a certain story or narrative? What makes someone an intellectual to comment on a topic? Said believes that the intellectual is not the one who is the most educated on a topic. Instead, the intellectual is the amateur who asks questions, who raises issues even to those professionals, whose motive and intent derives from interest and care about a topic rather than profit and fame.²¹¹ Therefore, considering Said's words as a framework of RAH's "SuperNova," RAH is taking the role of the intellectual in asking questions about the socio-political realm and representation of race and gender as well as the multi-faceted representation of the migratory figure.

²⁰⁹ Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall, *Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies*.

²¹⁰ Rah-Eleh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 17th, 2020.

²¹¹ Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), 82.

I argue that there is a connection between galaxy *Messier 82* and institutions, which can be educational, or artist communities and galleries. They refer to spaces diversity work is actualized, as defined by Sara Ahmed.²¹² The judges in “SuperNova” the talent show, represent the key figures making decisions in an institution which is defined through shared goals and achievements.²¹³ The judges all agree on dismissing Oreo, yet they also all agree on the “oriental beauty” that Fatimeh represents. It is also important to highlight that the audience is represented in a unified, unison, array of identical aliens. This unity of characters within the institution is resonant with Sara Ahmed’s description of the institution as a place of familiarity, and thus becoming a part of the institution requires agreement with the goals and ambitions of that institution²¹⁴. Everyone is moved to tears during Fatimeh’s performance, yet Oreo is booed off stage. Fatimeh’s performance is in line with the institution’s mandate and representation of orientalism, self-orientalization and the oriental gaze.²¹⁵ Diversity efforts aims to create an institution that is ‘equal’ and ‘diverse’ in its occupants, but how is such a work accomplished when everyone is meant to be identical? Therefore, Ahmed describes diversity work as a brick wall, “the feeling of doing diversity work is the feeling of coming up against something that does not move, something solid and tangible.”²¹⁶ Thus, this suggests an immobility for the workers to accomplish the set goals, creating a job description with no real purpose. The presentation of an institution as being open, is the presentation of such an immobile job description.²¹⁷ And further, this brick wall is placed only in front of those who are trying to do the moving, making them invisible to those who are not. This is an important discussion with relation to the character Coco, an unrestricted and mobile character.

²¹² Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 19.

²¹³ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 24.

²¹⁴ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 25.

²¹⁵ Said, *Orientalism*.

²¹⁶ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 26.

²¹⁷ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 26.

This character is not understood by the audience, nor the judges, nor the institution, *because* they are boundless and do not belong to a unilateral or individual issue or discussion. Oreo hits this brick wall because she is adamantly trying to push boundaries with her identity. Here, her attempts can be linked to the efforts of all minority populations trying to integrate with the named institutions. She stands in solidarity with all underrepresented communities dismissed from white spaces because she represents Oreo as a figure locked inside her body by the institutions. RAH makes a clear attempt to mock Iranians who associate themselves with the Aryan race and align themselves with the belief that they are the ultimate white race through the depiction of Oreo.²¹⁸ However, Oreo also becomes a depiction or a questioning of the institutions' mandate on the extents to which they would be willing to welcome political discourses of race; not much indeed. It is also important to underline that no matter how much applause and cheers Fatimeh receives, she is not welcomed *as a part* of the institution; rather she is only welcomed as a work of art to be looked at and admired as an exotic thing. She is marveled at and placed on a wall to be the poster child of the “diversity work” in place. As Ahmed writes, “If diversity becomes something that is added to organizations, like color, then it confirms the white-ness of what is already in place.”²¹⁹ This reach and demand to incorporate people who “look and sound different” reveals what is already in place. RAH’s multi-faceted critique is a constant questioning of a society already in place, unwilling to change. She questions, on behalf of all minority groups, whether the Canadian art realm will ever see them as more than just a diasporic artist residing in Canada *originally* from a foreign country. She seems to repeat Frantz Fanon’s final outcry in “Black Skin White Masks,”

²¹⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 200. ; Saneie, *SuperNova*.

²¹⁹ Ahmed, *On Being Included*, 33.

modified to fit with her gender; “My final prayer: O my body, always make me a [woman] who questions!”²²⁰

²²⁰ Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 206.

CHAPTER FOUR: INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM AND IRANIAN CANADIAN WOMEN ARTISTS

*So where were the women? As usual, they didn't fit the stereotypes, but they were there, working away.*²²¹

*Why do we always have to be called 'women artists?' They don't call Rembrandt and Van Gogh 'male artists.'*²²²

This chapter explores the various dimensions of asserting a presence and a voice in a society that has prevented minorities from having agency. Minorities have been facing many injustices, however there are also different layers and intersections within minority communities, as discussed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Sumi Cho and Leslie McCall in their book “Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis.”²²³ An example of a person facing intersections in their identity, is a woman (first minority feature) of color (second minority feature).²²⁴ The artists that I will discuss in this chapter have plural minority features; they may be identifying as either women, colored, and members of the LGBTQ+ community.²²⁵ Hence, it is crucial to demonstrate how they navigated the Canadian artworld while possessing multiple identities as minority groups. In this chapter, I will particularly focus on artists who are navigating and exploring the role of women in Iranian and Canadian communities. As Simin Keramati says in an interview, “Being a woman and working as a single mom in the place I come from is a political act.”²²⁶

²²¹ Guerilla Girls, *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion to the History of Western Art* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1998), 59.

²²² Guerilla Girls, *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion*, 7.

²²³ Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall, *Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies*, 785-810.

²²⁴ Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall, *Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies*, 786.

²²⁵ Other features of Intersectional identifiable features are not available. All artists are able bodied, for context, however to which class they may belong to is unknown.

²²⁶ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

During my personal interviews, I asked the artists to what extent their audiences placed labels on them or categorized them or their art based on perceived identities? Following, the categorization of artists based on some stereotypes emerged as an important issue both during the interviews as well as the reception of their art. Possessing multiple features of minority culture, these artists are often put into categories based on their gender, race, and/or sexuality. Although, these are not new concepts, they are still recurring problems that many artists mentioned in this thesis. This chapter will analyze the ways in which these categorizations were created. Who is doing the labeling? And why are these labels being reproduced in the art market?

4.1 Labelling of Artists

*I am an exotic thing now misplaced in somewhere else...I am a woman from the Middle East, I have this history, and this comes before my artwork. It should be vice versa.*²²⁷

*Labels such as ‘women’, ‘women of color’ and ‘black lesbians’, despite their increasing particularity, can never be a catchall for the infinite differences within each group.*²²⁸

In her video installation, “I Am Not a Female Artist from the Middle East in Exile, I Am an Artist” 2014 (fig. 79), Simin Keramati is shown in portrait mode, against a white backdrop, shoulders bare, hair pulled back, the face is viewed in full detail, eyes locked on the viewer, as blood slowly trickles from the nose and covers the lower half of the face. The saturation of the video/photographs are high; therefore, a stark contrast is created between her dark hair, eyebrows, and eyes, against her yellow-tan skin. This method of high saturation is especially effective in showcasing and highlighting the intensity of the bright red blood that is smeared across her face in the last few frames.

²²⁷ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

²²⁸ O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art*, 79.

Keramati is looking directly in the eyes of the viewer while proclaiming that she desires to be acknowledged not upon her gender or her race, but as an artist. In this manner, she criticizes how not only her identity, but also her art is being labeled and exoticized in the art market. According to Keramati, her artwork should be placed above and not overshadowed, by her ethnicity and personal history, although they are obviously fundamental for shaping her individual and artistic choices and identity. Glen Harcourt suggested that “the slowly accumulating trickle of blood can be read as the artists’ own view of an ongoing commentary about her own work, with its attempts to pin down her psychological and existential experience using a succession of categories: female, exile, Middle East. Only in the final image, when the flow of blood has stopped and the artist enjoys a casual cigarette, can we watch the sound of her own self-identification I am an artist.”²²⁹ As will be discussed below, the blood here, thus signifies the impact of the art market that labels her as a “Middle Eastern artist in exile,” overshadowing her artistic presence, hence agency by becoming the cause of her distress and anxiety. Its influence on the artist’s psyche gradually grows as represented by the blood finally covering her full mouth, preventing her from raising her voice or speaking up. Her act of smoking a cigarette in the last frame shows her relaxation and surrender to the labels that once enveloped her, signifying that when the labeling has stopped, she is able to lean into her identity as an artist.

Keramati’s criticism of her own forcefully placed and labeled identity is an important case to understand the tensions and negotiations caused by such labelling in the art market. I suggest that the labeler can be read as an abuser of power, remaining invisible, while imposing its power on her that led her nose to bleed. The blood then becomes a product of the abuse. At the same time, the artist plays with this imposition by creating her art out of this enforcement enabling her to reclaim

²²⁹ Glenn Harcourt, *The Artist, The Censor and the Nude* (Los Angeles: Doppelhouse Press, 2017), 128.

her agency. She looks to be confined in this mugshot image, but through creating her art that leads to her self-proclamation, she is also freed from these impositions on her persona. Are the people who forcefully label her, staring at her outside the video shot? Is she staring back at them with a higher level of confidence due to being able to occupy this space through her art? I will argue that the viewer looking at the artwork also becomes the labeller along with the art market. In that manner, viewers, who participate in this act of looking to interpret the work, based on set categories frequently used in art exhibitions, also become the abusers of power. Such oscillating power dynamics create a tension between the artist, her artwork, and the audience, which can fill up the space beyond the canvas.

The body is an important tool in her practice. She is photographed in the position of a headshot/mugshot, like photographs used to profile criminals or suspects of a crime. She seems to be arrested by an unknown force because of who she is. Keramati becomes incriminated for her identity, rather than being judged for her artwork. She is pictured without clothes on her shoulders, a suggestion that she may be naked, stripped bare. Her hair is pulled back into a bun which places the focus on to her face and eyes. The gaze is a crucial element in her work, especially the outlining in black of her eyes which is comparable to the Iranian diasporic artist; Shirin Neshat. Shirin Neshat often presents herself with the heavy eyeliner, especially under the eyes. This use of thick eyeliner recalls the traditional use of Kohl in Middle-Eastern cultures.²³⁰ Keramati may be referencing Shirin Neshat through this facial expression, because Neshat has often been associated with the title of “Iranian artist in Exile.” Yet, her powerful presence in these images’ places Keramati as an individual artist in the art world and escapes the victimizing narratives on Iranian women both in their homeland and in exile.

²³⁰ See Ali Al-Kaff, Ali Al-Rajhi, Khalid Tabbara, and Adnan El-Yazigi, “Kohl – The Traditional Eyeliner: Use and Analysis,” *Annals of Saudi Medicine*, Volume 13, Number 1, (1993), 26-30.

The ways in which specific groups are created by labeling is also telling. To be a part of a group, an artist requires certain qualities. Here, Keramati is criticizing such fixed qualities imposed on artists to fit in established stereotypes. In an interview with the artist, she stated “if I have to say where I am from, what kind of origin I have, I say Iranian. [But] I’d rather not say this. I rather just to say that I am an artist [here] in one place and I am working.”²³¹ Her conscious attempt to separate her ethnicity from her artwork is obvious. Later in the interview she continued, “my race and my past and what I come from affects what I am doing. As well as the place that I am living in because the environment is directly … I am using what I see during the day in the society, as well as what I used to have, and I can’t just put that away … that exists.”²³² She suggests that the way that she is treated as an artist in Canada is different than in Iran, although not worse or better precisely. She utilizes her experiences in both countries to create her work. “At first when I came here it was very white, and it’s starting, it’s been a couple of years that they are going to have a more diverse look in this art world, but not that much. So, I don’t feel that comfortable here, but I am working. It’s not unbearable, but it’s not easy.”²³³ Keramati explains the difficulties of being an Iranian artist in the diaspora, paralleling Stuart Hall’s reference of living in the black diaspora in England as “being in the belly of the beast.”²³⁴ *Being in the belly of the beast* insinuates the same challenges that Keramati speaks about regarding migration as being “othered” and placed on the peripheries. However, those who are in the belly of the beast, or living in the diaspora are also united because they are sharing this same identity together. Susan Friedman in her essay “Why Not Compare?” suggests that with

²³¹ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

²³² Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

²³³ Simin Keramati, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, December 1, 2020.

²³⁴ Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation” in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (Wayne State University, 1989), 69.

grouping, there is always going to be one cluster that is dominant/superior to the other.²³⁵ One group becomes superior, which is usually the group that is also doing the grouping, as if pointing finger to the other which becomes the “*other*”²³⁶. Using Keramati’s experiences, as outlined above, this “othering” and/or “orientalising” of her identity directly affects the content of her work.²³⁷

Another artist interested in the concepts of identity and grouping is RAH. In her video installation titled “SuperNova” (fig. 72) she criticizes the act of categorizing based on the identity of artists. In the initial video, she presents three characters, each with their own unique distinctions; first character, Oreo who is a representation of the modern immigrant in white face to refer to her assimilation or passing as a white woman; second character is called Fatimeh who is an illustration of the so-called traditional Middle Eastern woman representing orientalist stereotypes; and finally, Coco is a character who lacks any indication of a specific gender, race, or identity. RAH’s characters recall Judith Butler’s description of gender as performance because they are mockingly on stage *performing* their genders.²³⁸ Yet RAH takes Butler’s theory even further by including race as a performance as well, as previously mentioned, which, here, I argue, demonstrates RAH’s critiques on the representation of race. In my interview with RAH, she states:

The same way as I think race is a performance, gender is a performance. [Butler] doesn’t feel like that can be transposed on to race that it kind of disservices. But I think that they work together and that’s why you need like an intersectional conversation because race is performed in many ways in which gender is performed and nationalism is performed. Nationalism usually involves putting down other people. There is a common rhetoric, vocabulary. It’s the same argument they all have, whether they are Canadian, Iranian, German, nationalists...there is always this fear of the other. So, I think that definitely gender is

²³⁵ Susan Friedman, “Why Not Compare?” in *PMLA/Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 126, no. 3 (Cambridge University Press: 2011), 753-762.

²³⁶ Friedman, *Why Not Compare?*

²³⁷ Said, *Orientalism*.

²³⁸ Butler, *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution*.

something I perform and then when you bring in the fact that I am totally queer that becomes another layer of performance as well.²³⁹

Along with criticizing the western gaze, I argue that RAH criticizes the notion of race as being singular, nationalistic, biological, which mainly serves to group people/artists easily allowing total control. Oreo as a singular representation of all Iranian women in the diaspora is rejected. The three characters, as has already been discussed in the previous Chapter 3, are representations of the vast, infinite, and multi-dimensional identity of the migrant. Therefore, RAH demonstrates the complexities of grouping and merging diasporic identities together under one image. Migration is a personal journey and can be different for each person despite being linked to prevailing social and cultural currents and relations within a certain immigrant community. Likewise, RAH deals with the difficulties of being an Iranian-born yet Canadian-raised person, as she states that: "I have taken on this identity as a liminal hybrid person. I have been trying to make it clear that my parents are Iranian. I think I've been made to feel like I don't really belong for so many years that I've taken a more resistant position and now I'm like I don't want to belong. I don't want to identify with nationalism or national identity in any way, whether that be Canadian or Iranian."²⁴⁰ RAH suggests that nationalism entails a sense of belonging with the nation, that there is an act of grouping that is involved with belonging to a nation. Belonging to one group or another, Canadian or Iranian, is grouping after all. Rogers Brubaker suggests that nationalism and nations should not be considered as categories that one belongs to, rather as a political language that one uses.²⁴¹ When stating that you belong to a certain nationality, you are placing yourself within a certain set of borders and within a specific box. "In other contexts, the category 'nation' is used in a very

²³⁹ Rah-Eleh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 17th, 2020.

²⁴⁰ Rah-Eleh, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 17th, 2020.

²⁴¹ Rogers Brubaker, "In the Name of the Nation: Reflections on Nationalism and Patriotism" in *citizenship studies* vol. 8 issue 2 (Taylor and Francis, 2004), 116.

different way. It is used not to challenge the existing territorial and political order, but to create a sense of national unity for a given polity. This is the sort of work that is often called nation-building, of which we have heard much of late. It is this sort of work that was evoked by the Italian statesman Massimo D’Azeglio, when he famously said, ‘we have made Italy, now we have to make Italians.’”²⁴² Here, Brubaker is suggesting that nation-building now must include all intersections and identities within the borders of a country, and he uses Iraq as an example with the divisions between Shi’ites and Sunnis, Kurds and Arabs, etc.²⁴³ Brubaker’s work is also directly related to Benedict Anderson’s “Imagined Communities” which uncovers the ways in which “nationalism” as a key term has changed globally to adapt to changes in the world.²⁴⁴ Anderson uses the term *imagined* because he believes that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”²⁴⁵ These understandings therefore beg the question, at what point does one become a member of a nation? Does it entail acquiring a citizenship as the entry into a group? Does it entail being born within specific borders? RAH is asking these exact questions by creating these 3 characters who are so visibly different. But in their differences, they are the same because they are different representations of the same identity, the diasporic character. We can’t ignore the fact that RAH performs these characters by herself. She is a single entity enacting multiple identities, which relates to the intricacies and layers that one person encapsulates. Personal experiences are bound to “how we inhabit others” indicating the importance of one’s capacity to show empathy even though the person does not belong to that specific group, which recalls RAH’s personifications of these three different

²⁴² Brubaker, *In the Name of the Nation*, 117.

²⁴³ Brubaker, *In the Name of the Nation*, 117.

²⁴⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso of New Left Books, 2006).

²⁴⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

characters.²⁴⁶ Moving from questioning race, gender and politics, to the representation of the fluidity and plurality of a single identity, RAH as a woman of multiple intersections herself, uses Butler's philosophy as a starting points to paint a picture of a reality that we will always be boxed within borders. According to RAH, in the end belonging to a specific group means that you don't belong to another, and it is exactly this type of restriction that makes a liminal hybrid identity isolating.

4.2 Womanhood and Iranian Women in Art

*But our house has been nothing but a playroom. Here I have been your doll wife, just as at home I used to be papa's doll child.*²⁴⁷

*It was love, that quivering feeling which, in the darkness of a corridor,
Suddenly
Would surround us
And we would be enraptured with the burning quickness of our breaths and our beating hearts
and stolen smiles
Those days have passed
Those days like plants which decay in the sun
Decayed with the rays of the sun
And lost are those streets giddy with the perfume of locust trees
In the noisy crowds of the one-way streets
And the girl who used to color her cheeks
With geranium petals, alas,
Now is a lonely woman,
Now is a lonely woman.*²⁴⁸

Bahar Taheri, based in Montreal Canada, creates a series of portraits titled “Women of my Homeland” (fig. 80) showcasing women draped in long scarves, hijabs, clothing that cover their entire bodies. Each painting is cropped to leave out the identity of the women illustrated. There

²⁴⁶ Ahmed, *On being included*, 14.

²⁴⁷ Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* transl. William Archer (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 26 Paternoster square), 114.

²⁴⁸ Forough Farrokhzad and Anita Spertus, “Those Days / آه زور / ۱۹۶۸” in *Iranian Studies* vol. 1 no. 2 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., International Society of Iranian Studies, 1968), 62.

are ornamental patterns, such as flowers, plants, and decorative tile patterns, on their clothes and in the backgrounds, which can be related to Iranian cultural traditions. But, Taheri's work is critical of the way Iranian women are represented to non-Iranian audiences. She consciously chooses to illustrate women as exotic creatures, a connection made by the pairing of each woman with exotic animals represented next to them. She uses different types of fish, peacocks, butterflies, and flowery and feathery ornaments on walls to evoke this association in people's imagination, which stems from orientalist stereotypes as discussed by Edward Said.²⁴⁹

The colours in her paintings, even the brightest ones are in the darkest shades. The flowers are not colourful and do not bring life into the paintings. The figures are not painted in the same level of reality as the animals or flowery ornaments next to them. The predominant focus in these paintings is not on the subjects themselves, but what surrounds them, and what represents them. The draped clothing and the ornamental flowers on the clothing are painted meticulously. This indicates a time-consuming and pain-staking process to paint each leaf, each colour of the petals, and every scale on the fish. Taheri states:

The emphasis on women's clothing and its patterns illustrates feminine identities in modern Iranian society. The absence of head and feet is expressive of a continuing perception of the female gender as a second, inferior sex. As a result, any effort to illustrate female identity individually cannot rely on looking directly at her facial expressions and is only possible indirectly by studying a figure's gestures. The presence of traditional Iranian tiles on clothing demonstrates the inescapable provenance of a modern woman's cultural background as she prepares to move forward. The pregnant woman illustrates a stage of female life in which the body itself becomes an obvious expression of her identity.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Edward Said, "Chapter 1 The scope of Orientalism" in *Orientalism* (Toronto: Random House of Canada: 1978), 31-92.

²⁵⁰ Bahar Taheri, "A Narration on the Women of my Homeland" www.bahartaheri.com, Accessed on September 20th 2021, <https://bahartaheri.com/artworks/women-of-my-homeland/>

Taheri's interest in patriarchal hierarchies that are illustrated in the paintings and expressed in her artist statement are underscored by the representation of each woman within a domestic space. The women stand by walls, or in dark corners, which reiterates the patriarchal viewpoint of the woman staying home, *taking care of the family* (embodied in the painting of the pregnant woman), and hiding her body. In a private interview, Taheri claims that "As an artist, [...] You can show an ugly concept like injustice in a beautiful package! To me, art always has beauty and hope which is a major element."²⁵¹ This explains why despite the darkness of her subjects' lives, she uses intricate details on her surfaces. By doing so, she simultaneously brings forth the agency of these women to prevent them from being seen solely as victims of patriarchal or racist discourses.

It's interesting that in each painting of Taheri's "Women of my Homeland" series, the subject hides their hands and feet. Hands and feet have been a source of fetishization, parts of the female body that were sexualized. In art history, this theme has been discussed in relation to Edouard Manet's "A Bar at the Folies Bergère" (1881-82) (fig. 81). Griselda Pollock writes that "Hands thus acquired a symbolic significance in the sexual geography of the female body totally unfamiliar to us today. To go about ungloved was akin to leaving your body naked."²⁵² In Manet's 19th-century painting, the barmaid is ungloved, and her hands are shown bare. According to Pollock, the barmaid's bare hands represent the woman's ownership of her own body: she resists being objectified like the drinks and bottles around her on the countertop.²⁵³ Even though these works are from two different time periods and spatial locations, their engagement with the topic at hand, which concerns the expression of women's autonomy in a patriarchal society through their bodies and gestures, as discussed by Pollock, is noteworthy. Taheri's painting in a different

²⁵¹ Bahar Taheri, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording. Canada, November 14th 2020.

²⁵² Pollock, *The 'View from Elsewhere,'* 27.

²⁵³ Pollock, *The 'View from Elsewhere,'* 27.

manner, completely erasing the hands, feet, face, hair, or contour of the body disclosing the erasure of women in the society. Yet, I will argue that she simultaneously empowers them by resisting to subject them to the male gaze as well as by preventing them from being associated with manual labor. Women in Taheri's work have their hands crossed or placed behind them, leaning on one leg, as if they are weak or lack ownership. Taheri refuses to emphasize their presence by representing or using the body as an object. Rather, Taheri's work pertains to the social unconscious, which is not always easily recognizable.²⁵⁴ Here, the social unconscious pertains to the underlying concerns of the Iranian society regarding the erasure of their presence. Taheri exposes them by showing this as a reality. The erasure of women's hands and body becomes a metaphor for womanhood that is surpassed in the society.²⁵⁵

Anahita Akhavan, an artist currently based in Toronto after living and working in 3 other major Canadian cities (Saskatoon, Vancouver, and Montreal), painted "Hands of a Visitor" (fig. 82), "Insomnia" (fig. 83), and "Insomnia II" (fig. 84) in 2018 after painting "Ambiguity" in 2014 (fig. 85), and "Self Portrait" dated 2016 (fig. 86). These paintings were created during her Master of Fine Arts education at the University of Saskatchewan.²⁵⁶ They can be compared to Taheri's multiple renditions of women as they illustrate two sides of the same issue regarding the women's identity (as seen through Akhavan's own experiences). Akhavan makes it evident that her paintings are self-portraits, and they are a navigation of her own personal identity, whereas Taheri

²⁵⁴ Debbie Nuno, "Sexism in Art: from the Fundamentals to Art Critiques" in *Art 525 Conference Papers* (San Bernardino: California State University, 2017), 3.

²⁵⁵ Another example pertaining to feminist representations that is closer to Canada and includes a more contemporary perspective of intersectional feminism is the "Global Feminisms" exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, held from March 23 – July 1st 2007, co-curated by Maura Reilly, Linda Nochlin, and Lila Acheson Wallace, Accessed January 19th 2022, <https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/exhibitions/632> I thank Rakhee Balaram for bringing this exhibition to my attention.

²⁵⁶ Anahita Akhavan, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, April 16th 2021.

is attempting to navigate the general feminine presence in an Iranian society.²⁵⁷ Akhavan's paintings are bright and filled with immense contrast and brush strokes that are powerful and thick. The colour red is important to her, as it is constantly repeated throughout her work, and stands out in her paintings. The red covers the body and the skin, making the viewer connect it with blood, by also pointing at its biological importance for existence. The connection can also be made that the face in "Insomnia" and "Insomnia II," which are both tinged with a bright pink/red, are blushing, or rather warm in temperature, implying a higher emotional status. Akhavan, thus, illustrates different levels of emotions on a two-dimensional surface. This is, again, a complete opposite to Taheri's illustration of womanhood from a distance as an observer, whereas Akhavan is illustrating an internal and personal response by reclaiming and protecting her femininity. In a private interview with the artist, Akhavan states:

But previously when I was doing self-portraits, when I was doing my master's a lot of my works were nude self-portraits which, at that time it didn't have any political statements, but I remember when I was sitting down at my artist talk and we were having conversation, a lot of people pointed out to the fact that I born and raised in Iran, and women have to wear hijabs and they have to protect their body through a veil, and am I creating this as a some kind of political statement against that? [...] it's not my intention of poking to that. But I think it does exist in my work, and I'm not fully aware of it because it is coming naturally from what I have observed and felt and discovered. [...] When I came here, meeting other people and being in discussions, being in that environment means women are oppressed and I saw that oppression and I remembered that oppression. That was the differentiation that I felt that, yes, I have been treated differently and I want to protect that now.²⁵⁸

Akhavan speaks about her paintings as vessels of emotional and subconscious bursts of self-exploration. She paints from a place unknown to her, a place of pure artistry, intuitive and

²⁵⁷ Anahita Akhavan, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, April 16th 2021.

²⁵⁸ Anahita Akhavan, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, April 16th 2021.

unconscious thought, which is an important layer to uncover in her work. Distance becomes a key factor. It was only when she immigrated to Canada that she could begin to understand her state in Iran. But, more importantly, this distance gave her the critical look that was necessary for her artistic expressions enabling her to take part in discourses concerning women's status, not only in Iran but also in Canada, which despite its progressive outlook still has ongoing discriminations against women, particularly in the workspace. This natural flow of inspiration for Akhavan, is met with the same criticism as Keramati was outlining in her work "I am not a female artist in exile from the Middle East, I am an artist." Akhavan's work is ultimately deemed political and about the female autonomy in Iran, by her Canadian fellow artists. According to Marylyn Hall Mitchell, the way that male critics and artists have looked at women artists and their work have been about their female autonomy, more so than their work.²⁵⁹ Akhavan's coworkers' reading her nude self-portraits as a political statement against her deprivations living in Iran proves to be more about their presumptions of an Iranian identity rather than Akhavan's identity. In a similar vein, but by using a different method, Taheri hides hands or faces to criticize the policing of women's bodies both in Iran and in Canada rather than to talk over women to tell them how to *be*.

4.3 The Body Beyond the Physical

*Compassion without action is like going into a small white room that is a person's individual hell, feeling a person's pain, feeling a desire to get a person out of hell – but never finding the door to get the person out.*²⁶⁰

*You won't believe it; I have stars in my fists.
When I squeeze them, patterns of light
Seep out from every crevice,
And in my glass-like bones quicksilver glows green.*²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Marylyn Hall Mitchell, "Sexist Art Criticism: Georgia O'Keeffe: A Case Study" in *Signs Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol. 3 number 3, (The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 4.

²⁶⁰ Marsha M. Linehan, *Building a Life Worth Living: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 2021), 41.

²⁶¹ Simin Behbahani, "Eight Poems by Simin Behbahani" in *Iranian Studies* vol. 41, no. 1 (Taylor & Francis, Ltd., International Society of Iranian Studies, 2008), 92.

The spirituality and psychological space that a body takes is a concept seen in the Iranian Canadian women artist, Leily Derakhshani. Born in 1961 in Sang-e-sar, Semnan, Iran, she grew up in an artistic family, with brothers who are world-renowned painters and musicians. Majid Derakhshani, born 1957, currently residing in Germany, is one of the best tar players in Iran, deeming him the title ‘ostad’ or ‘ustad’, indicating his mastery of his instrument.²⁶² He has collaborated numerously with the famous Mohammad Reza Shajarian, Iranian singer. Reza Derakhshani, born in 1952, currently residing between Turkey, USA, and St. Petersburg Russia, is one of the most acclaimed painters and artists coming from the Middle East. He, like his brother, is a musician as well, and he very much incorporates his musical talents in his paintings while also performing in opening exhibitions.²⁶³ His paintings reflect his childhood in the mountainous region of Sang-e-sar, Iran. They have been compared to Richter’s modernist paintings and are a favourite in auctions and galleries.²⁶⁴ Leily Derakhshani, who grew up in this artistic environment that deeply influenced her art, however, is the focus of this section rather than her brothers. Whereas women artists have often faded in the shadows of their brothers, fathers, and husbands, Leily Derakhshani stood out through her art making a name for herself. Derakhshani is a permanent member of the Association of Iranian painters and has a long list of musical credits in performances and collaborations as she studied music as well as painting and sculpture.²⁶⁵ She currently resides in Toronto and is working

²⁶² “Performance: Majid Derakhshani & the Andalib Women’s Ensemble”, www.agakhanmuseum.org, Accessed on October 18th 2021, <https://www.agakhanmuseum.org/programs/majid-derakhshani-the-andalib-women-s-ensemble>

²⁶³ Reza Derakhshani, “About” www.rezaderakshani.com, Accessed on October 18th 2021, <http://www.rezaderakshani.com/read-me>

²⁶⁴ Roxane Zand, “Sneak Peak: Art Dubai and the Rising Star of Reza Derakhshani” in *Cultural Crossroads; Sotheby’s*, (Dec. 10, 2012).

²⁶⁵ Leily Derakhshani, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, July 25th, 2020.

on expanding her art into the realms of videography in conjunction with painting.²⁶⁶ Derakhshani has a long on-going series titled “Bound.” I will focus on one of the paintings in this series (fig. 87). This painting alongside one (fig. 88) from her “Women’s Voice” series, are important in highlighting the issues of womanhood in relation to the space that it takes up. Considering her background in music, the painting depicted in her series “Women’s Voice,” directly calls on the female musician, and more importantly the female singer. Wendy S. Debano writes, “For instance, with regard to music, the post-revolutionary ban on solo female singing in front of mixed-gender audiences is challenged repeatedly by performers.”²⁶⁷ Although women have been banned to perform in front of male audiences, women are creating their own spaces, such as women-only music festivals.²⁶⁸ Nevertheless, even though women are finding their way to perform, these obstacles remain due to the fundamentalists’ attempt to ban any bodily pleasure. Therefore, this hindrance of the woman’s voice, along with her hands and feet, as previously mentioned in relation to Taheri’s art, become intertwined. The woman becomes limited, *bound*, in several ways, deemed “too sexual” when she becomes present through her body or sound. In order to provoke her audience, Derakhshani questions whether certain emotions, such as arousal, is dependent on the perspective of the viewer. Why are men’s voices and bodies not deemed “too sexual,” or a cause of arousal? Along with other artists such as Taheri, RAH, Salek and Akhavan, she explores these assumptions. Therefore, I will argue that Derakhshani’s paintings are not political in their questioning of the governmental laws of Iran, rather, they are sites of exploration to understand

²⁶⁶ “Leily Derakhshani” www.artscoops.com, Accessed on October 19th, 2021, <https://artscoops.com/artist-details/derakhshani-leily>

²⁶⁷ Wendy S. Debano, “Enveloping Music in Gender, Nation, and Islam: Women’s Music Festivals in Post-Revolutionary Iran” in *Iranian Studies* vol. 38 no. 3 (September 2005), 442.

²⁶⁸ Debano, *Enveloping Music in Gender*, 443.

what it means to be a woman, a wife, a daughter, and a sister in specific contexts such as the ones that surpass women through political ideologies and religious misconceptions.

The boundary between the human body and the world at large is blurred and shifting, and often difficult to identify. It is not simply the physical barrier of the skin, since this would overlook both the psychological sphere that exists beyond our basic corporeal boundaries and the reciprocal relationship between self and context. The lines that demarcate the individual must be established with reference to social circumstance as well as to non-human factors.²⁶⁹

The human body becoming more than a capsule, more than the physical space it takes up, is a concept that can be seen in Derakhshani's work. Her paintings are very much concerned with the emotional and psychological realms that humans occupy. In her later works, titled "Inversion," this extended psychological and emotional space is explored further on a canvas that no longer even bears the human figure on it, rather it is completely abstract and non-figurative.

A brief description of the method of painting and of the paints used as material traces is important in reading her images within the conceptual framework of the body as beyond the physical. Because Derakhshani's subject matter and method of painting are spontaneous and abstract, it can be read as a personal statement. Similar to Akhavan's fragmentation, they can relate to scattered memories, emotions or thoughts. The predominant colours that the artist uses are blues, pinks, yellows, and reds. It is worth mentioning that Derakhshani works in oil paint, and her paintings are large-scale. Looking at her works, it can be deduced that she paints in layers, starting with a background, and applying different layers on top. Even though, her paintings are half figurative and half abstract, very much playing on the two dimensionality of the surface, this method of layering allows for great depth. The blocks of colours that Derakhshani paints become topographical. They almost begin to resemble maps. The spaces that remain empty between the

²⁶⁹ O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art*, 8.

large opaque blocks of colour, become the main focal point while viewing her art. In the painting “Untitled” from “Women’s Voice” (fig. 88), even though a singing woman is placed in the centre, with lava-like red colors surrounding her image, which makes them appear like they will swallow her body. The planes in yellow ochre, on the other hand, seem to be constantly shifting, like tectonic plates under the earth. This association between the natural earth like substance and the psychology of women, is a common imagery in Derakhshani’s works.

Between October 1st and October 16th, 2021, Derakhshani had an exhibition, titled “Discover the Colourful World of Leily Derakhshani” at Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery in Toronto Ontario, which is an Iranian-owned and operated fine art gallery as mentioned in Chapter 2. The exhibition showcased recent work completed during the pandemic. In “Ocean of Love” 2020 (fig. 90), one can take the context and theme of psychology even further. The painting draws upon the visual representation techniques used in map-making and topographical studies. The “land” in the painting is etched away, with short brush strokes that are repeated obsessively. One is drawn toward the ocean, the space between the lands. Within the ocean there are short stops and small lands that gently pause the wondering eye, a place to rest and breathe while looking over the entire painting. The title of the painting itself refers to the notion of movement associated with migration by crossing oceans, and lands. The first thing that comes to mind while looking at the painting in the gallery is the common phrase “it feels like there is an ocean between us.” Derakhshani attempts to find love and beauty in the lingering space and distance between people, that may be caused by migration or other movements.

To take the concept of distance and space further, I want to make the connection between the islands in Derakhshani’s “Ocean of Love” and people. The land represented in the painting, I will argue, can be conceptualized as people. The comparison between land and people leads to the

notion of colonization, and in this case, primarily the colonization of women's bodies. Just as a land is colonized "women's bodies have suffered colonialist intrusions, and both colonialist and imperial agendas have capitalized on exploiting women's bodies and the land."²⁷⁰ Art history has proved to have interest in utilizing the female body as a site of sexualization and fetishization. In an American context, the Guerilla Girls raised these questions of female sovereignty in their works by asking "do women have to be naked to get into the Met Museum? ... When racism and sex are no longer fashionable, what will your art collection be worth?"²⁷¹ Is Derakhshani concerned with these same issues of authority and control over the female body? In an interview, Derakhshani states, "My preoccupation as a woman exists in my work, not in a political way, but as a daughter and a wife. It is always on my mind. When I work for myself, my being a woman is my concern."²⁷² Therefore, it can be deduced that Derakhshani's work does not directly engage with the question of the political agency of women's bodies. Rather it seeks to reveal autonomy in everyday spaces that women occupy in the world. While her work does not specifically refer to the colonization of her homeland, her mapping of territories can be read in conjunction with Canadian Indigenous peoples and their artworks on their native land. Carmen Robertson examines the art of five woman indigenous artists in the exhibition entitled "Beadspeak" at Slate Gallery in Regina, Saskatchewan.²⁷³ The flatlands of Regina are important for these female beaders because it allows them to connect to their culture and ancestral past, through the local smells, sounds, and natural scenery.²⁷⁴ The sensorial connection that these artists have with their land, as argued by Robertson,

²⁷⁰ Susan Hawthorne, "Land, Bodies and Knowledge: Biocolonialism of Plants, Indigenous Peoples, Women, and People with Disabilities" in *Signs*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (The University of Chicago Press: Winter 2007), 314.

²⁷¹ Guerilla Girls, *The Guerilla Girls' Bedside Companion*.

²⁷² Leily Derakhshani, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, July 25th, 2020.

²⁷³ Carmen Robertson, "Land and Beaded Identity: Shaping Art Histories of Indigenous Women of the Flatland" in *RACAR: Revue d'art Canadienne/ Canadian Art Review* vol. 42 no. 2 (University Art Association of Canada, 2017).

²⁷⁴ Robertson, *Land and Beaded Identity*, 14.

is shown through their use of beads which also serves as a way to reclaim the land and illustrate how the land shapes identities.²⁷⁵ These spiritual connections between the land, nature, and memories that shape identities accomplished through the act of art making is of importance to the Indigenous artists of Canada. Despite the differences in context, Derakhshani's work also tries to establish connections with the sea and land without relying on "realistic" mapping techniques. I argue that in her painting "Ocean of Love," the illustrated "lands" become bodies. In the same way that the indigenous peoples of Canada use art to understand the impact of their land on their identity, Derakhshani uses art as a way to negotiate the connectedness of human beings with the land and spaces they occupy.²⁷⁶

In her series "Inversion" 2020 (fig. 89), she paints, what seems, to be flowers or nature-inspired shapes. In an interview, she mentioned that she created these paintings during the pandemic, which was a time she did not go out much.²⁷⁷ She later stated that because she was confined inside the house, she began exploring themes and concepts from her own imagination. Therefore, she envisions these flowery shapes and colours. This notion of illustrating on a canvas the depths of one's imagination relates to the understanding that human body's take up more space than just the physicality, and what is visible.²⁷⁸ Derakhshani's paintings use her psychology, her inventiveness and intuitive knowledge, to create a land and nature that is new. Painting as an action becomes a spiritual practice for her. According to Derakhshani, "Art comes from within and is real, and there is no lie in it. One cannot create art from outside one's feelings or beliefs. [...] I want to open my heart and my feelings. This is so important to me both as an artist and an individual who lives here. [...] I try to open my mind and heart to get freedom, not physically, but

²⁷⁵ Robertson, *Land and Beaded Identity*, 28.

²⁷⁶ Robertson, *Land and Beaded Identity*, 28.

²⁷⁷ Leily Derakhshani, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, July 25th, 2020

²⁷⁸ O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art*, 8-9.

mentally. I have never been mentally free. If I find my own self, I will definitely succeed.”²⁷⁹ By inventing new forms of nature, new plants and living species, Derakhshani illustrates her quest for spiritual freedom. During migration, in a distance, between unsaid words and lands occupied, she creates her own world on a canvas. In homing in on her creative imagination, she finds freedom; of movement beyond the physical realms; and in this metaphysical journey, she finds herself.

4.4 The Male Artist, the Female Artist, and the Nude

*The body is symbolic of this intersection: it is the constituency of the individual as well as the unit of that makes up a crowd; it is the masses, between the self and categories of otherness can be explored, debated, and protested.*²⁸⁰

It is noteworthy to conclude this chapter by comparing some male and female contemporary Iranian artists living in Canada. Soroush Dabiri and Anahita Akhavan’s represent women in different ways in their paintings. Soroush Dabiri, for example, examines the female body in his series titled “Femininity” 2014-15 (fig. 91-98). These are small, personal, post-card-like paintings of nude women reclining, sleeping, placed alongside flowers, next to knives, coffee cups and other decorative tools. The focus is always on the torso, whereas the hands, feet, and the head are never illustrated. Although his most recent works are no longer concerned with the female body per se and rather take issue with themes of nature and environmental matters, his numerous paintings, from a few years ago, of the body recall the sexualization of the female torso through the male gaze.²⁸¹ For long and to this day, women dread the gaze of a strange man they might encounter on the street, which triggers the feelings of objectification and control.²⁸² Dabiri’s paintings illustrate

²⁷⁹ Leily Derakhshani, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom Recording, Canada, July 25th, 2020.

²⁸⁰ O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art*, 79.

²⁸¹ Elkins, *The End of the Theory of the Gaze*.

²⁸² Elkins, *The End of the Theory of the Gaze*, 8.

the “perfect” and “ideal” woman body; a flat stomach, perfectly shaped breasts, smoothly colored skin, which imply that they are not coloured women, but rather they are white tanned women. Although it is unclear whether he painted from a live model, or a photograph, in two of the paintings (titled “#5” and “#6”), the women have their hands behind them, which brings the viewer to question if the subject is tied up. This action of the subject’s hands being pushed to her back, forcing her breasts and torso to be on full display and easily accessible can illustrate a fantasy or the projection of the ‘male’ fantasy regarding a desire for total control over women’s bodies. They can be associated with the works of male avant-garde artists who reflected their own desires on the body of a woman while trying to look like they are emancipating it.²⁸³

Akhavan uses her own body as references to paint and illustrate the female identity/autonomy. The action of painting herself gives her agency over her own body and existence. The comparison between Dabiri’s and Akhavan’s portraits of nudes is resonant with Monica Juneja’s linkage between Amrita Sher-Gil’s nude self-portraits and Paul Gauguin’s infamous portraits of the nude women in Tahiti.²⁸⁴ Sher-Gil was aware of her sexuality and her being of the “exotic feminine other,” as reflected in her illustration of herself while using oriental references in her self-portraits of the 1930s. Sher-Gil is an interesting case study to mention here because she was of mixed heritage, her father a Sikh-Indian and her mother a Hungarian. Her race and gender intersected at her works, constantly pushing her to the peripheries of the art world while “othering” her.²⁸⁵ She was aware of her complex identity, as reflected in her paintings; Sher-Gil looks at the viewer directly, owning herself, whereas Gauguin’s figures avert the gaze.²⁸⁶ Even

²⁸³ Patricia Mathews, “Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon” in *The Art Bulletin* vol. 73 issue 3 (Taylor & Francis, 1991), 418-419.

²⁸⁴ Juneja, *Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation,’* 288.

²⁸⁵ Juneja, *Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation,’* 287.

²⁸⁶ Juneja, *Global Art History and the ‘Burden of Representation,’* 287.

though one is an artist from the 1930s Paris and the other is a contemporary Iranian artist in Canada, they engage with similar issues. Both Sher-Gil and Akhavan use their own sexuality and “exoticized” body to assert their power within a realm that continues to objectify and sexualize the female body. Despite being from different backgrounds and periods, both artists were aware of the ways in which their bodies, and their identities were “othered” by art critics and the art world at hand. The act of representing themselves and the desire to speak for themselves in order to occupy a space in the contemporary art world imbued with patriarchal sentiments created a sense of power and authority for these artists.

The comparison between Dabiri’s “Feminity” and Taheri’s “Women of my Homeland” provide further opportunity to reveal the difference in renderings of the women made by a male and female artist. In both set of paintings, the female torso is the focus. Dabiri’s “Feminity” series continuously illustrate a naked female torso, whereas Taheri’s images are draped with dark coloured clothing. This difference in depiction demonstrates the contrast in their perception of the female presence; Dabiri’s painting sexualizes the body. The representation of flowers by Dabiri in comparison to Taheri, especially for indoor settings, may link to the notions of femininity, sexuality, and fertility.²⁸⁷ Taheri, however, explores the role of women in an Iranian household. In “#14” (fig. 92), the female body is painted with flowers framing the image. There is a phallic image that is painted directly next to the female, almost resembling a mirror reflection of the female form. Dabiri is signalling the sexualization of the female physique by using phallic forms and flowers that signal woman’s fertility. Taheri, however, critically explores the role of women in an Iranian household, which can be deduced from the flowers that are painted directly on the clothing or on the walls. Taheri incorporates everyday images like flowers into the scene, whereas

²⁸⁷ Rakhee Balaram, “A Savage Garden: The Paris Photographs of Umrao Singh Sher-Gil” in *Marg-A Magazine of the Arts* vol. 69 no. 1 (2017), 48-57.

Dabiri's flowers create a stylized and sexualized fantasy. Rakhee Balaram discusses how Umrao Singh Sher-Gil's photographs relate to their family apartment in 1930s Paris.²⁸⁸ Balaram makes striking connections between the photographs of Amrita and Indira Sher-Gil (Umrao Singh Sher Gil's daughters) and flowers, stating that Sher-Gil is capturing moments within the household to hold as memories and encapsulate the growth of his daughters, similar to flowers blooming.²⁸⁹ Balaram connects the drapery around Amrita in one of the photographs to flower petals.²⁹⁰ Likewise, the drapery that covers the women in Taheri's subjects can also be associated with flower petals. However, instead of petals being comparable to the female subject, Taheri's flower petals cover the bodies. Therefore, Taheri's paintings become an argument against the fantasized representation of a woman as a sexualized object. Additionally, however, they illustrate the role of flowers as carriers of memories, and life in bloom which can be seen in "#3" (fig. 80), where Taheri painted a pregnant woman.

Akhavan's "Hands of a Visitor" 2018 (fig. 82) illustrates hands becoming a sexual and fetishized part of the body. The painting is fragmented, with many different shapes and forms of mark-making. There are two main focal points in the painting. The first are the two sets of hands, with the prominent and detailed renditions of veins. The second is the pubic area, which in fact is directly in the centre of the painting. Soheyl Bastami, a Toronto based sculptor creates the work "Untitled" (fig. 99), which is comparable to Anahita Akhavan's "Hands of a Visitor". In his clay piece, Bastami illustrates two abstracted female torsos, like Akhavan's deliberate cropping of her body. Bastami's subjects are showing a general representation of two different female body types, one curvier than the other. While Bastami's iterations of the female body are very general and

²⁸⁸ Balaram, *A Savage Garden*, 49.

²⁸⁹ Balaram, *A Savage Garden*, 51.

²⁹⁰ Balaram, *A Savage Garden*, 52.

symbolic (they can be anyone) Akhavan's are personal, in that this is clearly her own body. In Bastami's works, the surfaces of the bodies change as you traverse from the thighs upwards, from a three-dimensional rendering of the stomach, butt and thighs to a flat almost two-dimensional chest and upper body. This transformation from a three dimensional, realistic, subject to a two-dimensional, more abstract one, can be compared to the ways in which female bodies are painted, and transformed into art. Therefore, the sculptures seem to demonstrate the exact process of an artist's creation; a realistic subject being turned into art. Bastami's sculptures seem to relate to the desires of the male gaze for a perfect female image that can be captured in art making, whereas Akhavan's is naturally messy and complex, just as a woman who carries the marks of struggles or memories. Furthermore, sculpting from clay allows the artist to leave their mark. The presence of the artist remains in the tracks that he leaves behind. This is visible throughout the entire sculpture, which can be compared to the marks that may remain on Akhavan being touched by a visitor.

The sexualized female body is illustrated in two different ways by Bastami and Akhavan: the former showing the male artist's handling of a female body, and the latter critically engaging with the exoticized female body to reclaim its ownership and memories. Akhavan's painting displays her authoritative body, yet there are hands that seem to wrap around trying to envelop her from behind, which explains the title "Hands of a Visitor." Her use of the term "visitor" suggests that this person is unknown to her, paying a visit as a stranger. Who could Akhavan be referencing with the hands trying to grab at the most vulnerable and private parts on her body? In an interview with the artist, she states "I had relationships with white men, and they saw me as somebody who escaped from Iran and that was a part of me that I needed to fix, and I tell them no, I grew up in an amazing beautiful country, in a great family, and I really love my identity, and the reason I'm

here is just because I followed my personal passions.”²⁹¹ This statement ties back to the earlier chapter about personal and political reasons for migration. The connection can thus be made that Akhavan tries to reference the white man, or rather the European-Western white-dominant discourse, that was also discussed by RAH.

Akhavan uses oil to paint her portraits, which is an incredibly malleable and smooth paint to work with due to its slow-drying qualities. The number of colours is notable, which is emphasized by the brushstrokes that illustrate the hand and the energy of the artist. It can be deduced by information given during the private interview as well as analyzing her work that Akhavan spent a lot of time in conveying her emotions and getting to know herself in relation to the greater-Canadian art world. The number of layers, also, demonstrates depth, further displaying the gravity of the issue at hand. In an interview with Bahar Taheri, an artist that was previously mentioned, she states: “You have to fight for it, nobody gives you freedom and equality.”²⁹² Akhavan fights for her freedom and equality, in fighting the hands that try to envelop her. She is on the quest for her identity that is void of other discourses trying to change her, for her right to self-expression, and for the ownership of her body and mind.

²⁹¹ Anahita Akhavan, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, April 16th 2021.

²⁹² Bahar Taheri, Interview by Kiana Darvish. Zoom recording, Canada, November 14th 2020.

CONCLUSION: ENDINGS ARE BEGINNINGS

It took me almost two decades to realize that I will always remain the Iranian and the Muslim, even though I am a non-believing person who has turned her back on the Iranian patriarchal culture ... I now see myself going back to my own culture for a sense of belonging, reclaiming my relations with old acquaintances and friends [because] sadly, cultural gaps, language barriers – and by this I don't mean language skills, but differences in emotional meanings – will always separate me from Canadian friends and colleagues.²⁹³

This project has been an identity I carried with me since I migrated to Canada as a 6-year-old child. In discussing the works and lives of these Iranian Canadian artists, I have been able to navigate and better understand my own identity and re-tell my own biography. April 2004, near the end of the school year, my family and I landed in Ottawa, Ontario from Tehran Iran. Upon my arrival, I was immediately placed in the first grade at Carson Grove Elementary School (fig. 100). Already late to the year, not speaking any English, I was a lost kid. This confusion, this hazy and blurred identity, I thought was due to my being a kid and finding my way. Which in part was true, but in completing this research, I see that the confusion had been with me all along. This foggy identity had always been there, like a vignette filter on images, blurring the edges of my sight. In concluding this project, and in interviewing these artists who share the same blurry vision as me, I have realized that it is a symptom of migration.

According to CBC News, Carson Grove Elementary School, out of 288 students, has 110 Syrian-born children.²⁹⁴ They actively welcome immigrant children and works to accommodate children from all ethnicities. In 2007, just before graduating from elementary school, I had the pleasure of painting the Iranian flag as a part of the school's initiative to represent the different cultures and ethnicities of the students (fig. 101). Paintings were created of the flags of Canada,

²⁹³ Moghissi, Rahnema and Goodman, *Diaspora by Design*, 171

²⁹⁴ Steve Fischer, "Syrian Children Find Comfort in Numbers at Ottawa Elementary School" in *CBC News* www.cbc.ca (Published December 15 2016) Accessed November 26th 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/syrian-refugee-carson-grove-school-elementary-1.3895806>

Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Afghanistan, United States of America, India, England, Jamaica, Lebanon, Germany, and many more countries (fig. 102). Although it is a difficult task to portray all the flags of every country, the action itself created a sense of unity amongst the students who took part in creating them. As children, we did not have real political understanding, no actual grasp of race and cultural differences; there were no such barriers between us in that classroom that day. Therefore, creating these paintings illustrated the notion of one-ness, rather than separation. Meaning that this project did not elevate one nation over the other, rather, united them all in a global perspective. We all felt united when creating those paintings. By being in the same room, working on the same goal, a space was opened for everyone.

The act of migration, whether as an adult, a child, or being born to immigrant parents, bears no differences in the general experience of finding your voice and autonomy. Assimilation is always difficult due to many barriers whether language, cultural, familial, personal, or political. However, in connecting with people who share the same experiences, one can build relationships to make these transitions of migration more bearable. Artists have utilized the ability to connect with other minority groups and cultures as sources of inspiration in creating new artworks. Therefore, for these Iranian artists, struggles of adaptation or marginalization that other minority groups may face become theirs too. Artists such as RAH, Salek, Keramati, Akhavan, Akhbari, utilize their personal experiences and ethnic backgrounds to speak on the impacts of being a diaspora artist. They represent the confusion that a migrant faces, as discussed with Akhavan's reclaiming of her identity. They rebel against stereotypes caused by orientalist outlooks on their artwork, as discussed with Keramati's reclamation and outcry to be perceived as an artist, just as any other Canadian artist. They demonstrate that the diasporic identity

becomes indistinct and filled with intersections due to the institutional restraints placed on them, as seen in RAH's portrayal of the migrant as a nonbinary subject and the questioning of her Iranian identity in a Canadian artistic landscape through the character Oreo. They bring to life the various interpretations of migration and movement, as seen in the works of Arabi and Taheri's dialogue of displacement, as well as Salek's symbolic rendering of migration as a melancholic and personal endeavor. Art in migration is distorted and altered in production as the artist begins to react to their changing surroundings.

These separations of living spaces, as well as intersections of identities, caused by migration manifest themselves in artists' works. Through personal observation and experience, extended literature resources, as well as artist interviews, this thesis explored the works Iranian artists residing in Canada. The artists were selected through gallery sites, social media rosters, as well as word of mouth from other creators. A large selection of these artists reside in Toronto, for the city has been consistently referenced to as the most multicultural city in the world. "Multiculturalism," "diversity," and "race" become interesting starting points and theoretical frameworks when it comes to discussing diasporic art in Canada. Artists' conversation with such issues become key factors particularly in the second chapter on "Movement, Space and Art."

The different representations of the migrant individual become an important discussion in Chapter 3 "Issues of Representation." The ways in which artists navigate their surroundings through observations and lived experiences and react to their *site*, form the major part of the third chapter. The different representations of displacement, movement, and belonging are also discussed. These issues are carried on to the fourth chapter, "Intersectional Feminism and Iranian Canadian Women Artists" where the female autonomy and the space that Iranian women take up in the Canadian art world is analyzed through the art of Iranian Canadian women artists. Artists

traverse different routes, communicate with diverse issues, such as distinctive closed doors that each person faces, to find their voice and consult their own independence.

This thesis, using private interviews, personal experiences, and previous literature, finds and explores Iranian art that has been shaped and affected by migration to Canada. A space was created for me in that room in Carson Grove while creating the flag of my country. Through the investigation of these Iranian artists and artworks, I create a space that welcomes every minority group member. Creating that flag was the end of my elementary school experience, and I assess now, that endings are also beginnings. In beginning this thesis, I explored the space between us, the inhabitants, and the space between the lands.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Jamileh Salek, *The Lovers in the Courtyard* (2020-21), patch work/fiber art with cloth, hand sewn textiles and sewing machine. © Courtesy of artist, Private collection.



Fig. 2. Jamileh Salek, “#1,” from *My New Life and Migration*, Public Domain.



Fig. 3. Jamileh Salek, “#2,” from *My New Life and Migration*, Public Domain.



Fig. 4. Jamileh Salek, "#1," from *Family Portrait*, Public Domain.



Fig. 5. Jamileh Salek, "#2," from *Family Portrait*, Public Domain.

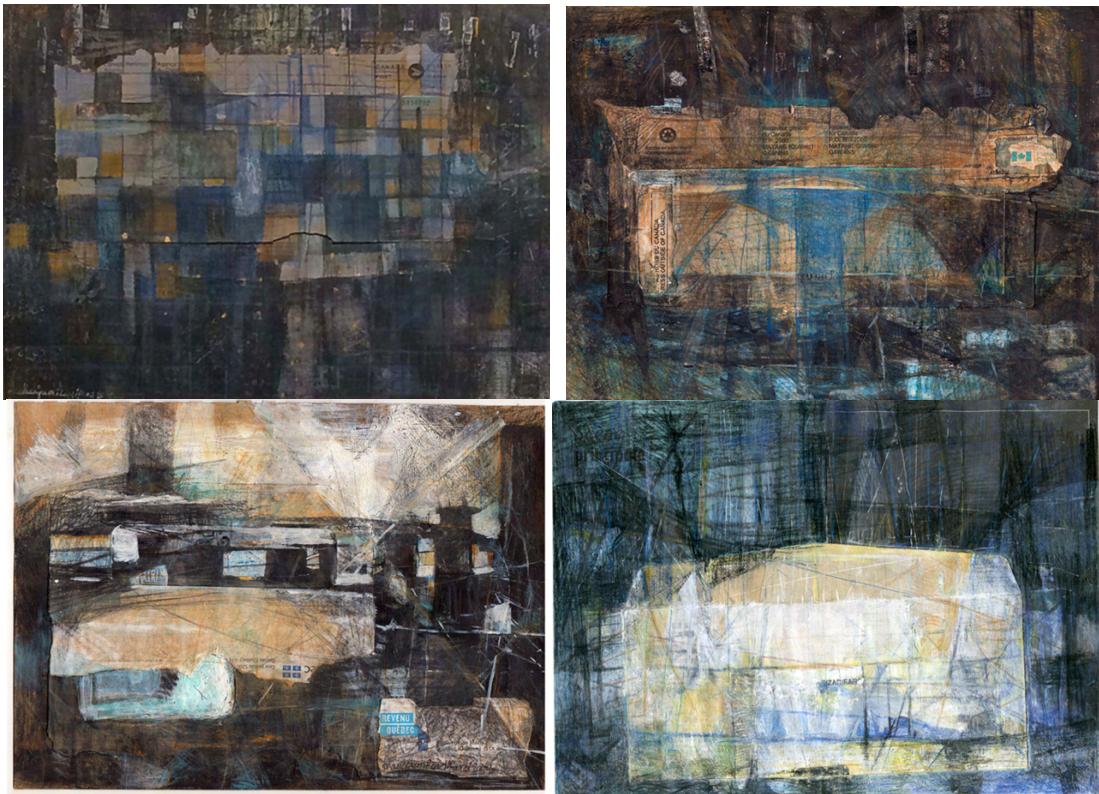


Fig. 6. Maryam Izadifard, all untitled from *Envelopes* (2016). Public Domain.



Fig. 7 Jamileh Salek "#1," from *Between Correspondence*, Public Domain.



Fig. 8. Jamileh Salek “#2,” from *Between Correspondence*, Public Domain.



Fig. 9. Simin Keramati, “Throwing up the Blades #1,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 50x70cm, photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades, Public Domain.



Fig. 10. Simin Keramati, “Butterfly #1,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2011), 50x70, photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades and golden leaves, Public Domain.



Fig. 11. Simin Keramati, “Butterfly #2,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2011), 50x70, photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades and silver leaves, Public Domain.



Fig. 12. Simin Keramati, “Splash Park #1,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 21x30 photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades and golden leaves, Public Domain.



Fig. 13. Simin Keramati, "Splash Park #2," from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 21x30 photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades and golden leaves, Public Domain.



Fig. 14. Simin Keramati, "The Bride of the Blade # 1," from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 150x150 acrylic, spangles, and golden leaf on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 15. Simin Keramati, "The Bride of the Blade #2," from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 21x30, photo printed on lustre paper and collage of blades and silver leaves, Public Domain.



Fig. 16. Simin Keramati, “The Artist is Posing for You,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 150x150, acrylic and golden leaves on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 17. Simin Keramati, “The Saint of the Blades,” from *The Edge of the Blade* (2012), 50x70, photo printed on coated paper and collage of blades and spangle, Public Domain.



Fig. 18. Simin Keramati, “Andy Warhol, Me and Caravaggio,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2014), 152 x 114, acrylic and spangles on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 19. Simin Keramati, “Me, Myself and a Memory,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2014), 81 x 114, acrylic and spangles on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 20. Simin Keramati, “John Lennon, Me, New York and Heech by Parviz Tanavoli,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2014), 81 x 114, acrylic and spangles on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 21. Simin Keramati, “Michael Jackson’s Bad, me and Parajanov’s Pomegranate,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2014), 152 x 114, acrylic and spangles on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 22. Simin Keramati, “Marina Abramovic, Me and Vermeer’s Glass of Wine,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2015), 142 x 172, acrylic and spangles on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 23. Simin Keramati, “Velazquez, Picasso, me and Nasseeruddin Shah’s Wives,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2017), 137 x 101, acrylic on canvas, Public Domain.

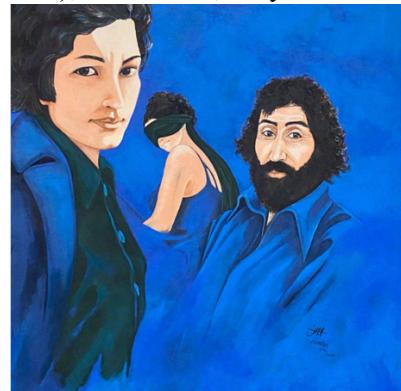


Fig. 24. Simin Keramati, “A Window to the Blue Room (Sohrab, Forough, and Me in the Blue Room),” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2020), 91 x 91 acrylic on Canvas, Public Domain.

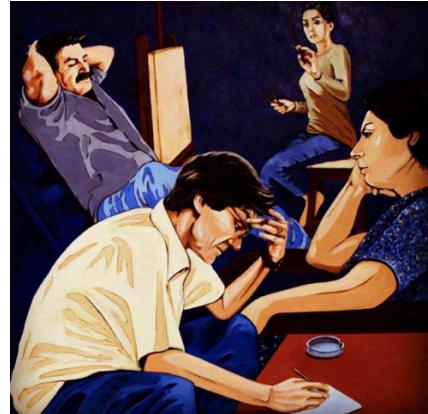


Fig. 25. Simin Keramati, “Nasser Taghvai, Saedi, Ghasemi, me and Tranquility in the Presence of the Others,” from *the Blue Backgrounds* (2020), 75 x 75, acrylic on canvas, Public Domain.

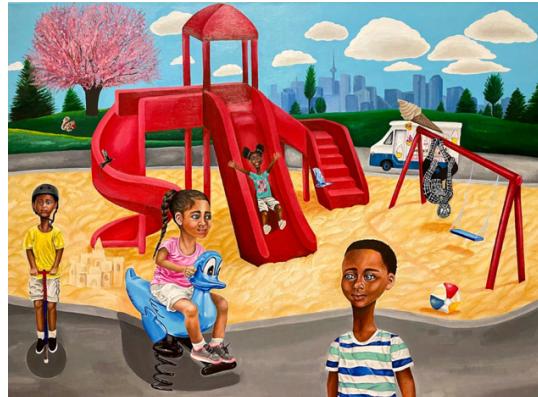


Fig. 26. Brandon Baghaee, *At the Park* (2021), Acrylic on Canvas, [Public Domain](#).



Fig. 27. Brandon Baghaee, *Shadows of the Past* (2021), Acrylic on Canvas, [Public Domain](#).



Fig. 28. Brandon Baghaee, *For Better for Worse* (2021), Acrylic on Canvas, [Public Domain](#).



Fig. 29. Shirin Neshat, installation view of *Land of Dreams*, (Gladstone Gallery, New York: January 19–February 27, 2021), Photography and video art, Public Domain.



Fig. 30. Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery, 160 Davenport Road, Toronto ON, Canada. © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.



Fig. 31. KAJART Studios, still from *KIOSK – Sweet Destiny movie* (2021), Reproduced from movie on vimeo, 55'40," Public Domain.



Fig. 32. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland* (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.



Fig. 33. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland*, (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.



Fig. 34. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland*, (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.



Fig. 35. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland*, (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.



Fig. 36. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland*, (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.



Fig. 37. Rouzbeh Akhbari, still from *Prizes from Fairyland*, (University of Toronto Art Museum: 2018), Reproduced from video on vimeo 7'26," Public Domain.

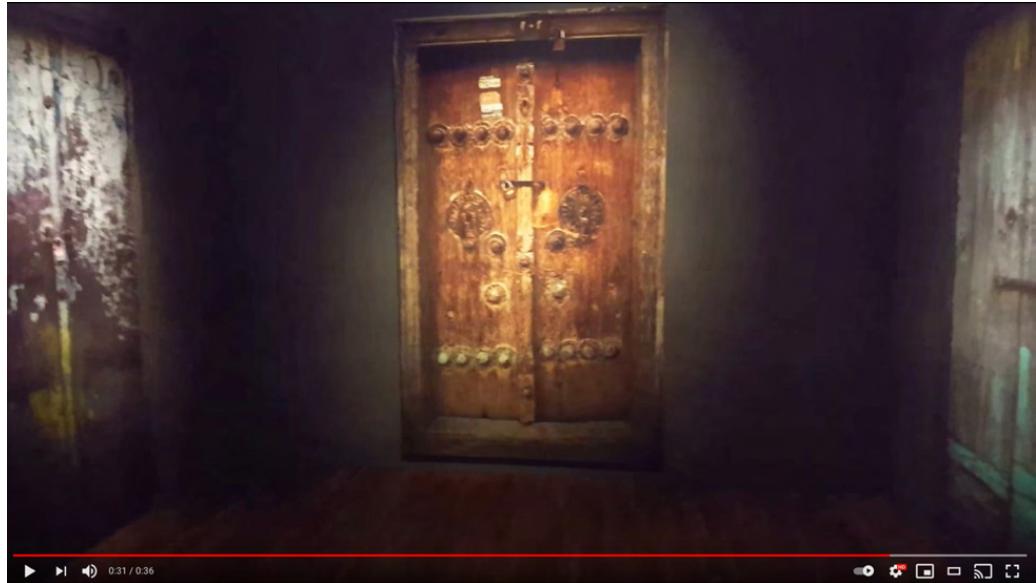


Fig. 38. Vivienne Gan, still from *Abbas Kiarostami: Doors without Keys* Exhibition, (Published Nov. 26th, 2015), Reproduced from YouTube Video, 0'36," Public Domain.

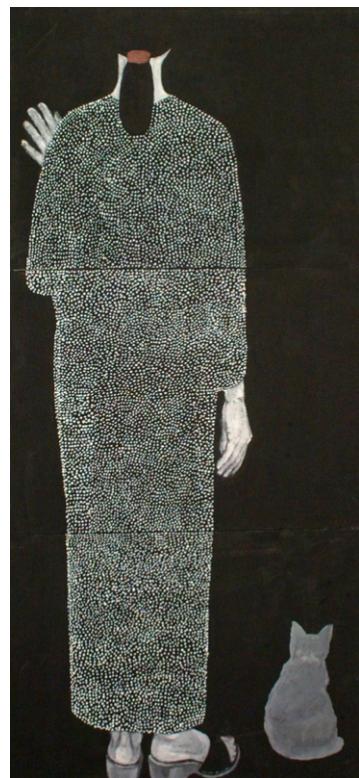


Fig. 39. Jamileh Salek, "Women #1," from *Women*, Public Domain.



Fig. 40. Azadeh Elmizadeh, “Circling Around,” from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 52x72, oil on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 41. Azadeh Elmizadeh, “Diving Messenger,” from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 52x72 oil on linen, Public Domain.



Fig. 42. Azadeh Elmizadeh, "Falling Red," from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 11x14, oil on linen, Public Domain.



Fig. 43. Azadeh Elmizadeh, "Hovering Garden," from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 52x72, oil on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 44. Azadeh Elmizadeh, "If You Were Water, You Would Not Get Wet," from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 30x40 oil on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 45. Azadeh Elmizadeh, "Offering," from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 11x14 oil on linen, Public Domain.



Fig. 46. Azadeh Elmizadeh, “Passing through,” from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 11x14 oil on linen, Public Domain.

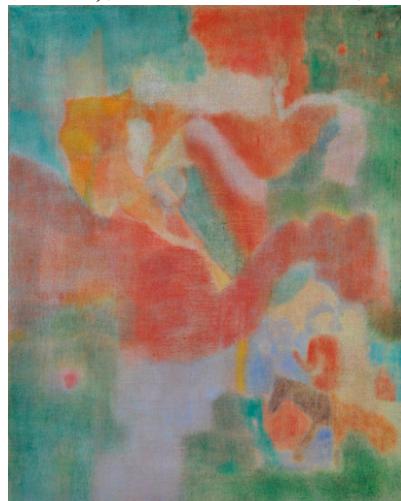


Fig. 47. Azadeh Elmizadeh, “Voyager,” from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 11x14 oil on linen, Public Domain.



Fig. 48. Azadeh Elmizadeh, “Flaming,” from *Subtle Bodies*, (Franz Kaka Gallery, Toronto: 2019-2020), 48x56 oil on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 49. Reza Doust, “Untitled,” from *Get Tested*, (FA Gallery Kuwait: 2012-2016), Mixed Media Collage on Canvas, Public Domain.



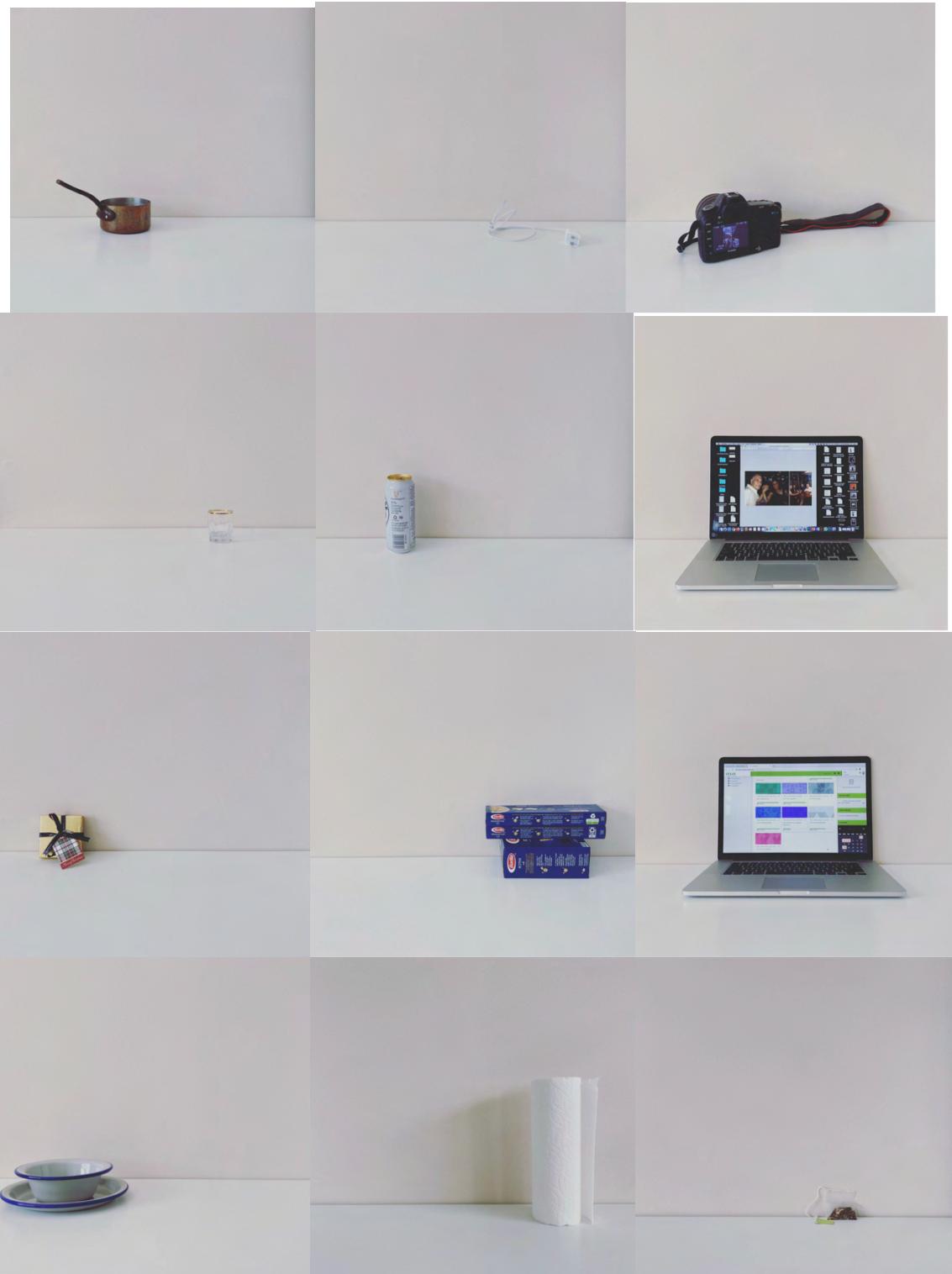
Fig. 50. Reza Doust, “My Mom Portrait,” from *Get Tested*, (FA Gallery Kuwait: 2012-2016), Mixed Media Collage on Canvas, Public Domain.

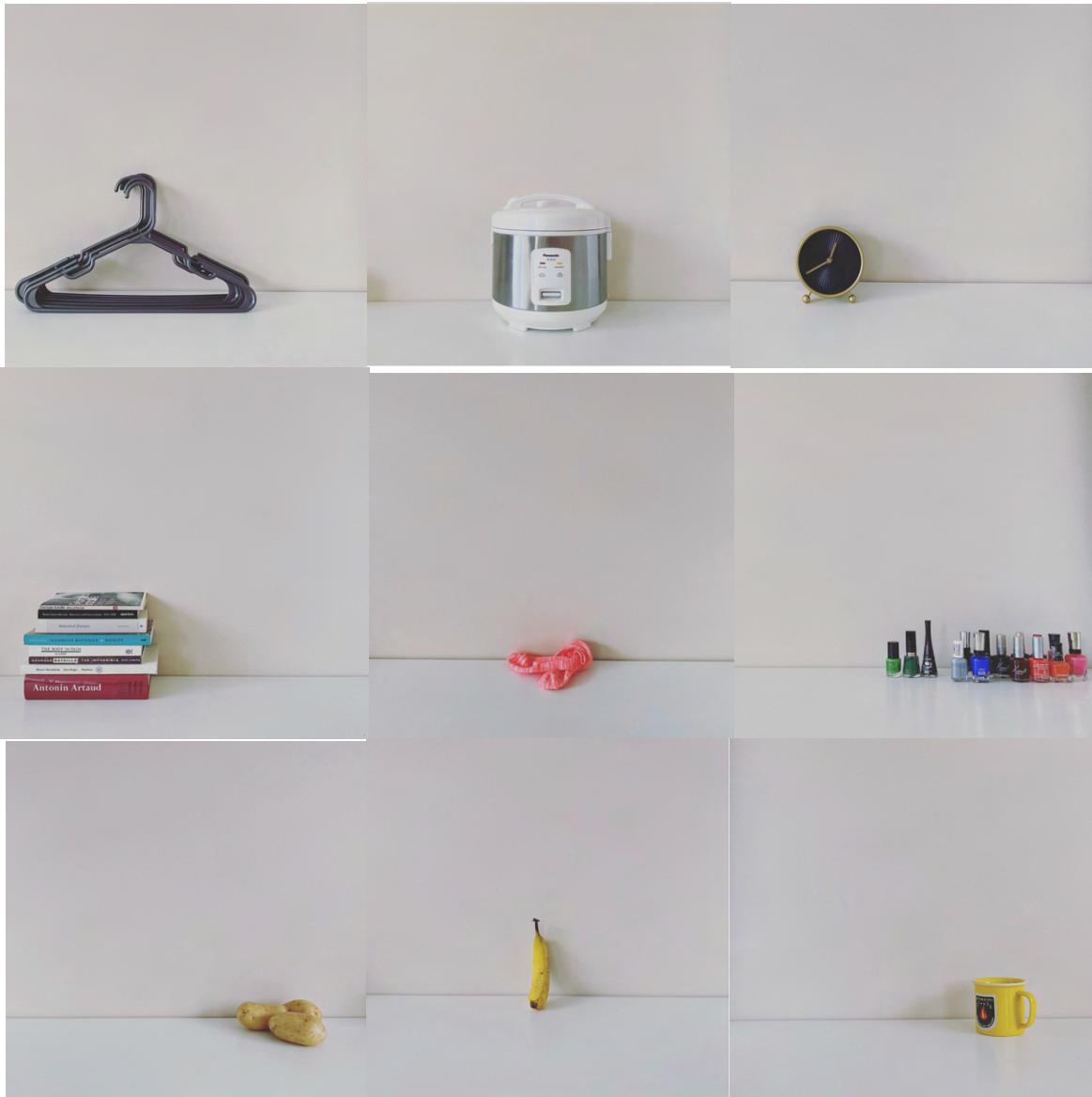


Fig. 51. Reza Doust, “Self Portrait,” from *Get Tested*, (FA Gallery Kuwait: 2012-2016), Mixed Media Collage on Canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 52. Reza Doust, “Persian Family,” from *Get Tested*, (FA Gallery Kuwait: 2012-2016), 200 x 380 cm, Mixed Media Collage on Canvas, Public Domain.





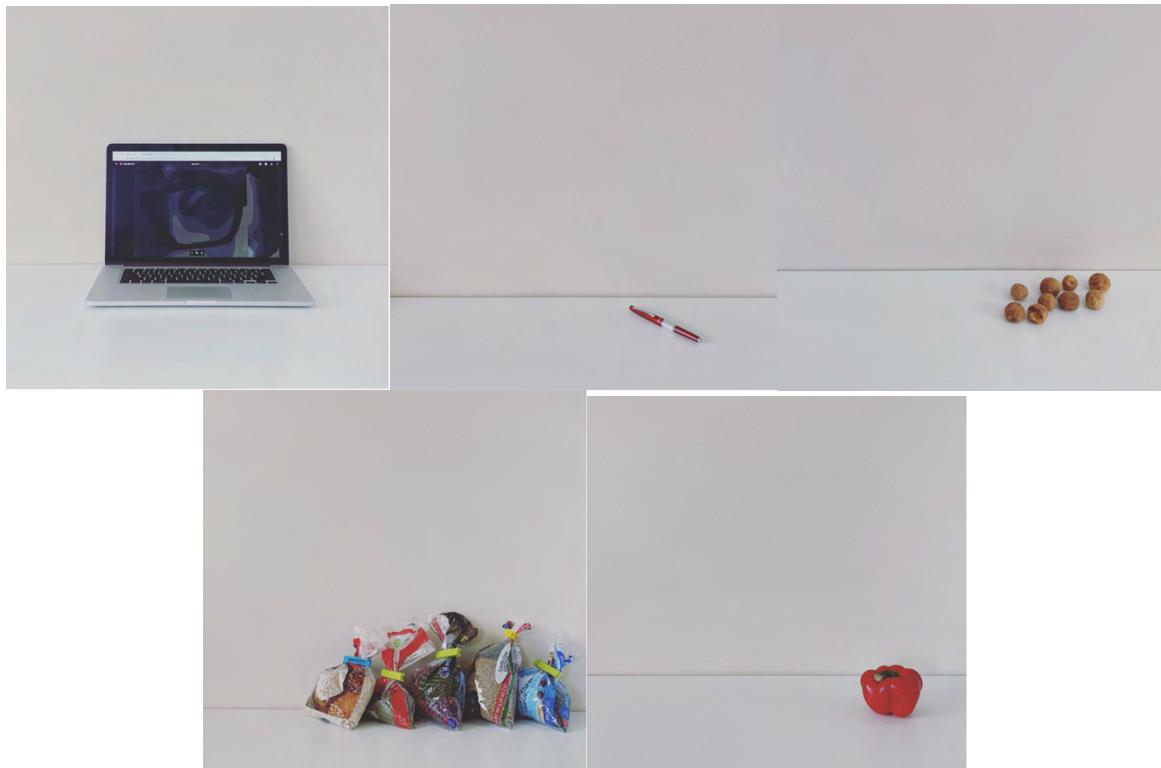


Fig. 53. Elsa Hashemi, all untitled, from *I Gaze Therefore I am*, Photography, Public Domain.

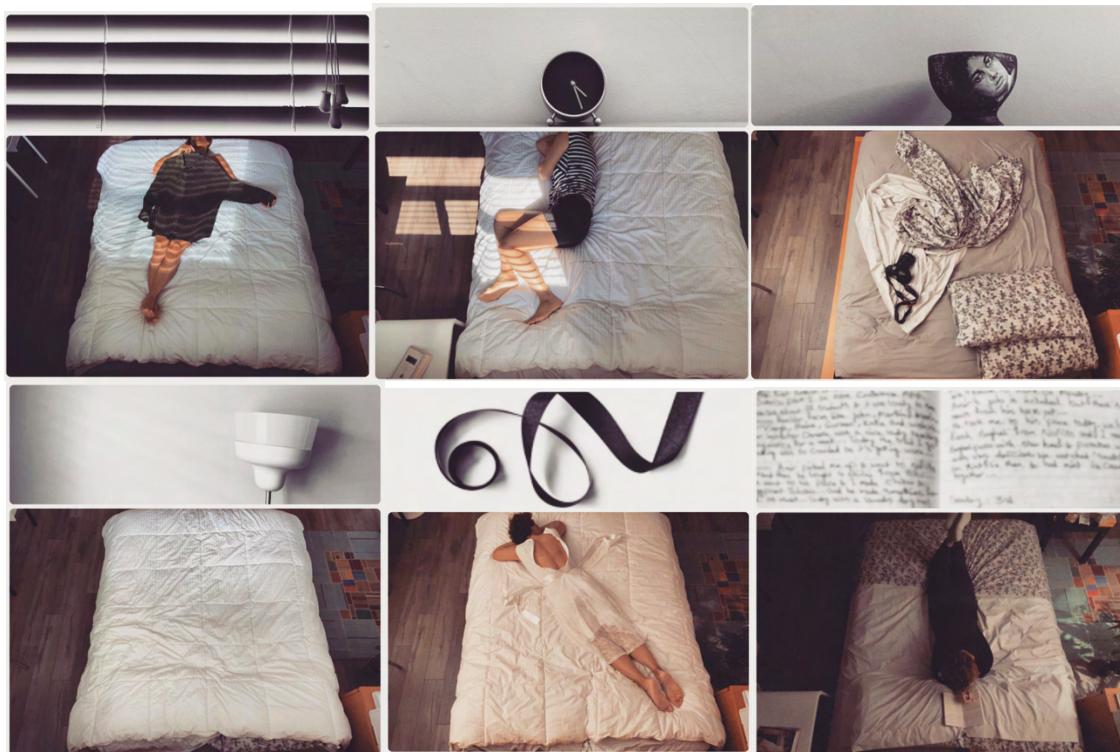


Fig. 54. Elsa Hashemi, all untitled, from *A Relationship in Quarantine*, (2020), Photography and YouTube video, 2'19," Public Domain.



Fig. 55. Azadeh Pirazimian, all untitled, from *They are Around*, (2018), Pen on Paper, Public Domain.





Fig. 56. Shoora Majedian, all untitled, from *What I See*, Public Domain.



Fig. 57. Julie Mehretu, *Conjured Parts (Heart)*, Aleppo (Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada: 2016), Ink and acrylic on Canvas, 183 x 213.6 x 5.3 cm, Public Domain.



Fig. 58. Shirin Aliabadi, “Hybrid Girl 6,” from *Miss Hybrid*, (Third Line Dubai: 2008-2010), Photograph, Public Domain.

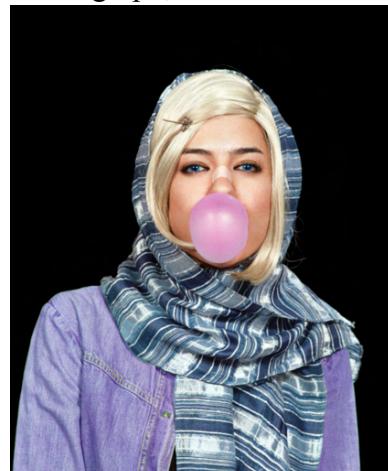


Fig. 59. Shirin Aliabadi, “Hybrid Girl 3,” from *Miss Hybrid*, (Third Line Dubai: 2008-2010), Photograph, Public Domain.



Fig. 60. Shirin Aliabadi, “City Girl,” from *Miss Hybrid*, (Third Line Dubai: 2008-2010), Photograph, Public Domain.



Fig. 61. Shirin Aliabadi, “Hybrid Girl 1,” from *Miss Hybrid*, (Third Line Dubai: 2008-2010), Photograph, Public Domain.



Fig. 62. Shirin Aliabadi, “City Girl 3,” from *Miss Hybrid*, (Third Line Dubai: 2008-2010), Photograph, Public Domain.



Fig. 63. Shirin Aliabadi, “Girls in Car 2,” from *Girls in Cars*, (Third Line Dubai: 2005), Public Domain.



Fig. 64. Shirin Aliabadi, "Girls in Car 4," from *Girls in Cars*, (Third Line Dubai: 2005), Public Domain.





Fig. 65. Bahar Taheri, all untitled, from *There is No Way to Communicate*, Public Domain.

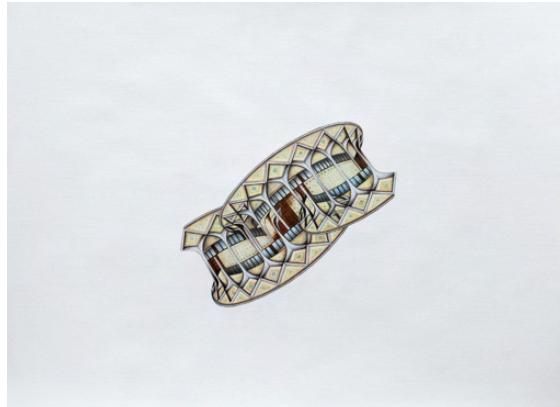


Fig. 66. Bahar Taheri, "Tehran City Theatre," from *Displacement*, Public Domain.



Fig. 67. Bahar Taheri, "Eshrat Abad Palace" from *Displacement*, Public Domain.

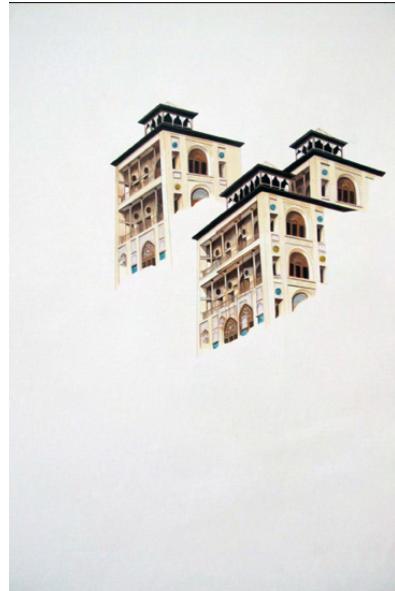


Fig. 68. Bahar Taheri, "Shams ol Emareh Palace," from *Displacement*, Public Domain.



Fig. 69. Bahar Taheri, "Notre Dame de Bonsecours Chapel," from *Displacement*, Public Domain.

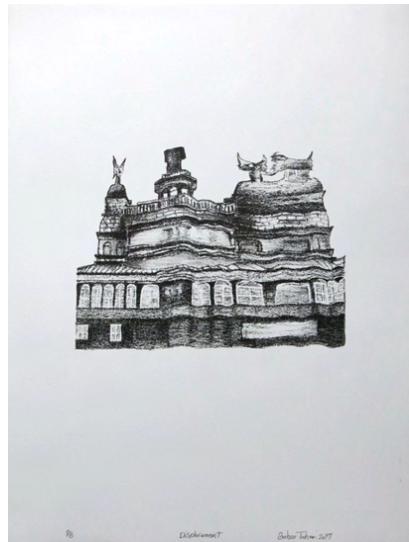
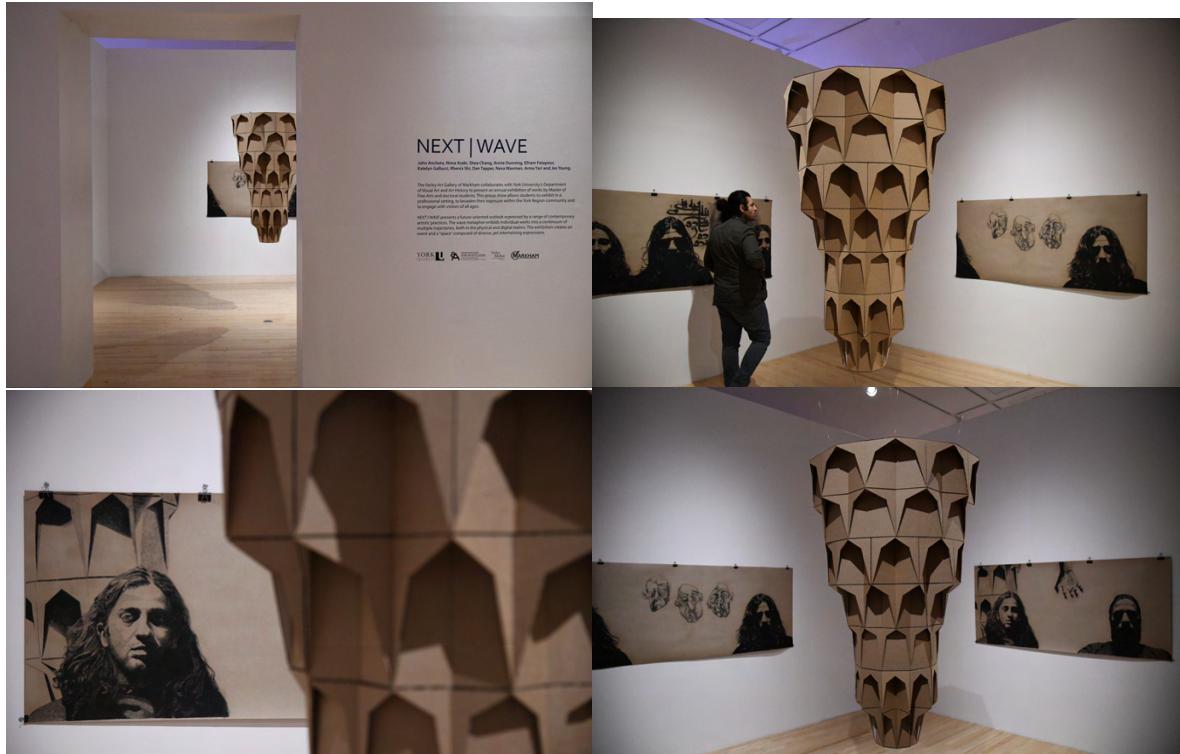


Fig. 70. Bahar Taheri, "Notre Dame de Bonsecours Chapel 1," from *Displacement, Public Domain*.



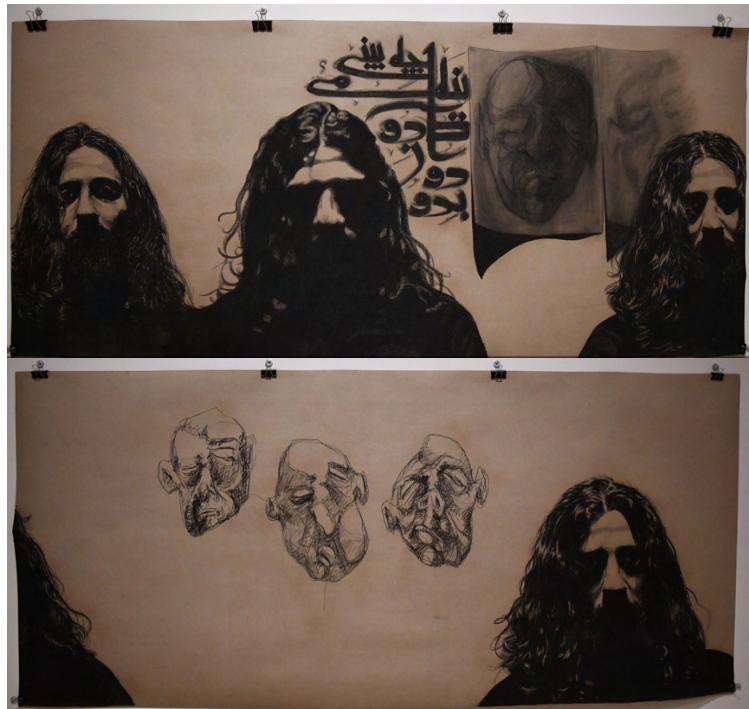


Fig. 71. Nima Arabi, installation views of, *So Close; So Far*, (Varley Art Gallery Markham Ontario: 2020), Paper-based materials, Public Domain.



Fig. 72. RAH, installation views of, *SuperNova*, (Carleton University Art Gallery Ottawa Ontario: 2019), Installation and video on vimeo, 10 x 10 x 15 ft. structure, Public Domain.



Fig. 73. RAH, "Coco," from *SuperNova*, (Carleton University Art Gallery Ottawa Ontario: 2019), Installation and video on vimeo, Public Domain.



Fig. 74. RAH, "Fatimeh," from *SuperNova*, (Carleton University Art Gallery Ottawa Ontario: 2019), Installation and video on vimeo, Public Domain.



Fig. 75. RAH, "Oreo," from *SuperNova*, (Carleton University Art Gallery Ottawa Ontario: 2019), Installation and video on vimeo, Public Domain.



Fig. 76. RAH, Opening Screen of, *SuperNova*, (Carleton University Art Gallery Ottawa Ontario: 2019), Installation and video on vimeo, Public Domain.



Fig. 77. Shirin Neshat, "In Rebellious Silence," (1994), from *Women of Allah*, (1993-1997), Public Domain.

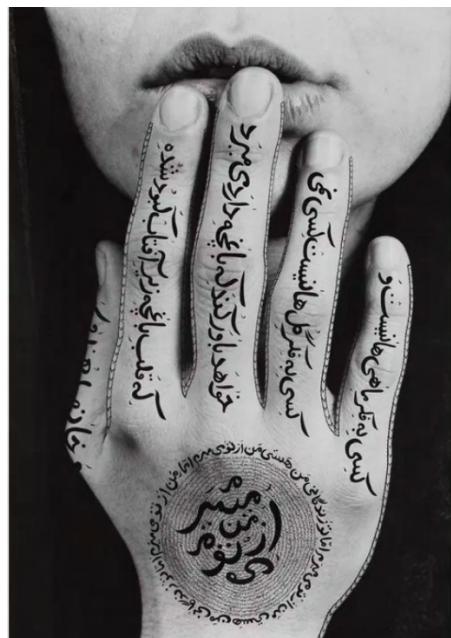


Fig. 78. Shirin Neshat, "Untitled," (1996), from *Women of Allah*, (1993-1997), Public Domain.



Fig. 79. Simin Keramati, stills from, *I am not a Female Artist from the Middle East in Exile, I am an Artist*, (2014), video, 15'57," Public Domain.

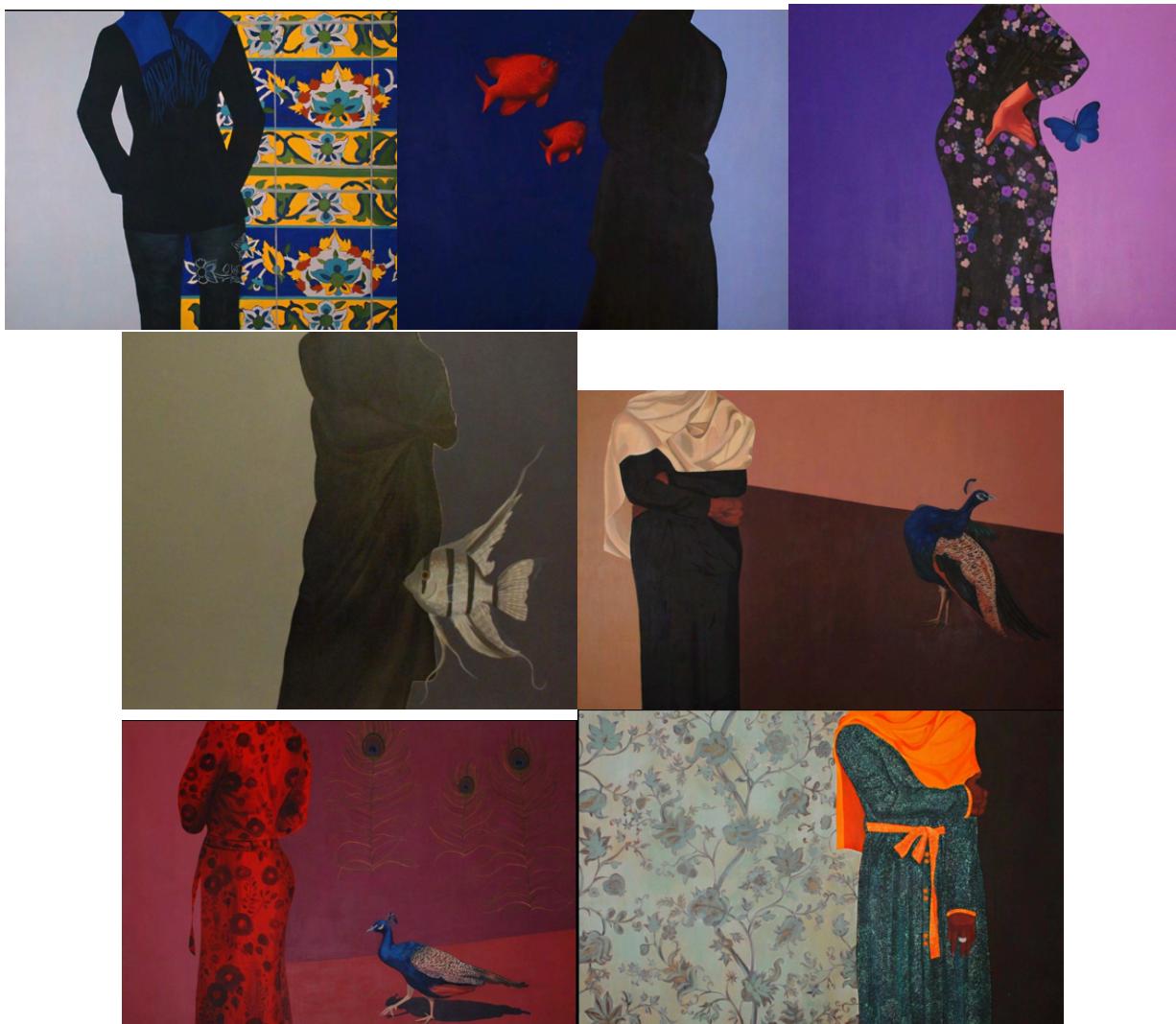


Fig. 80. Bahar Taheri, all untitled, from *Women of my Homeland*, oil and acrylic on canvas, Public Domain.



Fig. 81, Édouard Manet, *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, (Courtauld Gallery London: 1832-1883), Public Domain.



Fig. 82. Anahita Akhavan, *Hands of a Visitor*, (2018), acrylic and oil on canvas, 42" x 30,"
Public Domain.



Fig. 83. Anahita Akhavan, *Insomnia*, (2018), acrylic and oil on birch wood panel, 20" x 18,"
Public Domain.



Fig. 84. Anahita Akhavan, *Insomnia II*, (2018), acrylic and oil on birch wood panel, 42" x 30,"
Public Domain.



Fig. 85. Anahita Akhavan, *Ambiguity*, (2014), acrylic on canvas, 40" x 24," Public Domain.



Fig. 86. Anahita Akhavan, *Self Portrait*, (2016), oil on canvas, 72" x 95," Public Domain.



Fig. 87. Leily Derakhshani, Untitled, from *Bound*, oil on canvas 90 x 160 cm, © Courtesy of artist, Private collection.



Fig. 88. Leily Derakhshani, Untitled from *Women's Voice*, (2015), oil on canvas, © Courtesy of artist, Private collection.

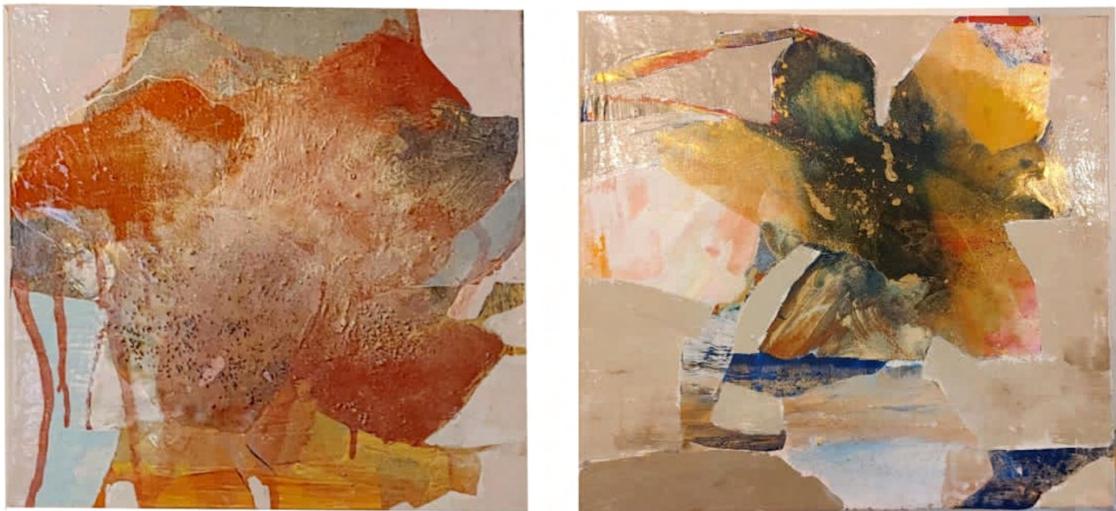


Fig. 89. Leily Derakhshani, both Untitled, from *Inversion* (Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery: 2020), oil on canvas 35 x 35 cm, © Courtesy of artist, Private collection.



Fig. 90, Leily Derakhshani, *Ocean of Love*, (Sahar K. Boluki Fine Art Gallery: 2020), Oil on Canvas 120x100 cm, © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.



Fig. 91. Soroush Dabiri, "#2," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil on Canvas 14" x 18," Public Domain.



Fig. 92. Soroush Dabiri, "#4," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil and Acrylics on Canvas, 14" x 14," Public Domain.



Fig. 93. Soroush Dabiri, "#5," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil and Acrylics on Canvas, 14" x 14," Public Domain.



Fig. 94. Soroush Dabiri, "#6," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil and Acrylics on Canvas, 14" x 14," Public Domain.



Fig. 95. Soroush Dabiri, "#12," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil, Acrylics, and graphite on Canvas, 11" x 17," Public Domain.



Fig. 96. Soroush Dabiri, "#13," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil, Acrylics, and graphite on Canvas, 11" x 17," Public Domain.



Fig. 97. Soroush Dabiri, "#14," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil, Acrylics, and graphite on Canvas, 8.5" x 11," Public Domain.



Fig. 98. Soroush Dabiri, "#15," from *Feminity*, (2014-2015), Oil, Acrylics, marker, pen, and graphite on Canvas, 8.5" x 11," Public Domain.



Fig. 99. Soheyl Bastami, *Untitled*, Clay sculpture, Public Domain.



Fig. 100. Carson Elementary School, 1401 Matheson Rd. Gloucester, ON, Canada. © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.



Fig. 101. Kiana Darvish-Mansoori, "Iran" from *Flags of the World*, Carson Grove Elementary School (2007), acrylic on canvas, © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.



Fig. 102. Flags of the World, Carson Grove Elementary School (2007), acrylic on canvas, © photo by Darvish-Mansoori.

APPENDIX I: LETTER OF INVITATION



Canada's Capital University

Email Invitation

Subject: Invitation to participate in a research project on Iranian Artists of Canada.

Hello,

My name is Kiana Darvish and I am a master's student in the Art History program in the School for Studies in Art and Culture. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Prof. Güл Kale.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled "Iranian Diasporic Artists of Canada." This study aims to explore the interconnectedness of the Iranian artist identity.

This study involves one 60-minute interview that will take place over a Zoom/Skype or another online format. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Although recording is not required, once it has been transcribed by me, the audio recording will be destroyed. Additionally, if for any reason after the interview is completed you would like to withdraw from the study, you will have until two weeks after the interview to do so. All data attributed to you will be deleted.

While this project does not involve emotional risks that exceed everyday life, if any questions are upsetting for you, you do not have to answer them, and you may end the interview.

I will use your name and attribute comments and quotes to you. However, you may ask that certain responses not to be included in the final project. Therefore, identifiability is a condition of participation.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed.

All research data, including audio recordings, transcriptions and any notes will be stored on a password-protected personal computer. Recordings will be deleted as soon as the transcription is completed and verified. The Transcription will be kept indefinitely. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

This research has been cleared by Carleton University Research Ethics Board A Clearance # 114500.

Should you have any **ethical concerns** with the study, please contact the REB Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone: 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or by email: ethics@carleton.ca). For all other questions about the study, please contact the researcher.

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions about the research, please contact me at kiana.darvishmansoori@carleton.ca

Sincerely,
Kiana Darvish-Mansoori

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Title of study: Iranian Diasporic Artists of Canada

Name of Researcher: Kiana Darvish-Mansoori, kianadarvishmansoori@cmail.carleton.ca

Name of Supervisor: GÜL KALE, gul.kale@carleton.ca

Research Ethics Clearance: # 114500

Research Instruments (Questions asked in Interview) (Varies with each artist)

A brief introduction of myself and the research to be conducted.

(Video and audio recording begins)

- 1) What is the name you go by professionally as an artist, for me to include in my thesis?
- 2) When did you move here and why?
- 3) How do you view yourself? Do you identify as Iranian? Canadian? Both? Neither?
- 4) How does your race affect your identity and your practice? How does your gender affect your identity and your practice?
- 5) How does politics affect your practice/identity?
- 6) How do you view the artworld in Canada? Are you a part of it? How do you view yourself in relation to the artworld in Canada?
- 7) What is the message or common theme that you find yourself returning to or circling around?
- 8) How do you choose the subjects you draw and sculpt? Where does your inspiration come from? Why is the medium you work in the most important form of art to you for conveying your message?
- 9) How do Iranians and Canadians react to your work? Who, really, is your audience?
- 10) Is your race/gender important to your audience?
- 11) How did you enter the artworld in Canada, after immigration?

(Video and audio recording ends)

Thank you for participating and answering these questions. If you have further comments, questions, or concerns, please feel free to email me.

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