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IN AN IMMERSIVE SPACE, RAISING AWARENESS TO UNIVERSALIZE THE CONCEPT OF
RESISTANCE AND HOPE

by

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M.S. Shahed University, 2016
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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts
in the School of Visual Arts and Design
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ABSTRACT

Inspired by my Iranian heritage, I symbolize my narrative of the social injustice and suppression prevalent in Iran. Through this thesis, I universalize the concept of resistance and hope for equality by raising awareness and giving a voice to the voiceless despite their significant sacrifices. In my studio practice, I sought to achieve a visual density that would enhance the immersive experiences. I constructed this by overlapping transparent materials such as tulle, resin, silk, and transparent sheets, creating a disorienting atmosphere that invites viewers to grapple with visual metaphors. This overwhelming ambiance, mirroring the despondent nature of the emotions conveyed in my stories, encourages viewers to align with my thoughts and join me on my journey. As a creator, the narrator stands with the Iranian people, expressing empathy through various mediums. They capture Iranian anguish, echo their messages metaphorically, and highlight their values. Symbolically present in all works are elements of Iranian art, the narrator's appearance, and voice. Through multimedia, solidarity is shown, and the voices of the Iranian people are expressed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank you my mom, a strong Iranian woman who raised me single-handed. You always support me unconditionally in my journey and send me your love and support.

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INTRODUCTION

Forty-five years ago, Iranians embarked on an Islamic revolution fueled by the aspirations of attaining democracy and justice. However, in the present day, after more than four decades, the outcome has been the erosion of social justice and freedom. Frustrated by this reality, the Iranian people resolved to voice their dissent with courage against unjust laws of the state. Their fight entails a widespread public uprising across the nation, a collective protest against the current oppression. Despite enduring the burdens of sacrifice, imprisonment, torture, and the miserable loss of loved ones, they are hoping to achieve their social rights.

While sporadic protests have occurred for years, the last year has witnessed a notable escalation in their frequency and intensity. Over the past year, the nature of these protests has evolved beyond a mere expression of grievances to a deliberate effort not only to broadcast their demands to government entities but also to illuminate to the world unfair social treatment in Iran.

Within my works, I am a creator and a companion, extending empathy to the Iranian people. My engagement takes diverse forms—capturing the anguish of Iranians, metaphorically echoing their messages, and accentuating their values and aspirations. Symbolically, my outlook is present in all of my works, intertwined with signs of Iranian art, the hue of my hair, and the resonance of my voice. Through this multimedia approach, I show solidarity and attentive listening to the voices and plight my fellow Iranian people.

However, the primary objective of this art collection extends beyond merely attempting to state the aspirations of the Iranian people. Utilizing the narratives of Iranian lives and their experiences, the overarching and ultimate aim of my artwork is to provoke a global audience to action. This message embodies the spirit of "HOPE" in the face of sorrows, sufferings, and adversities.

IRANIAN REVOLUTION

Forty-five years ago, Iranian people began a revolution, hoping to realize their ideals for a better life. However, after more than four decades, their aspirations remain unfulfilled. Instead, they have witnessed the erosion of their freedom and prosperity. Now, the people of my land grieve for their lost loved ones.

The 1979 Iranian revolution started with the noble goal and promise of eliminating dictatorship, challenging the notion of one person reigning over the entire nation. Their rallying cry echoed with the ideals of “social justice, freedom, democracy, and independence”. However, within the initial years following the revolution, circumstances took a downturn. In the first year, the new government carried out the execution of hundreds of former top executive officers, resulting in a dearth of individuals with the expertise needed to effectively govern a nation. On the other hand, internal tensions shaped between the left and right wings of the organization which later led to the terror and murder of several key members from both sides. Ayatollah Khomeini and other religious leaders leaned towards the right wing, prompting the resignation of numerous left-wing and moderate members. This shift paved the way for the Islamic Republic party to emerge as the dominant political force. The Islamic Republic government then implemented stringent regulations, particularly impacting Iranian women. This resulted in escalating oppressive conditions, marked by a worsening economic and political environment. The Iranian government's hostility towards the West resulted in imposing extensive sanctions, further intensifying the economic challenges faced by Iran.

Just when people thought things couldn't get any worse, an even more challenging situation unfolded. In light of the turmoil caused by the revolution and in aim to take advantage of a weakened Iran, Iraq invaded the country, forcefully reclaiming certain oil-rich territories. This conflict persisted for eight long years. The war and severe economic sanctions, led to a scarcity of essential resources, including food. During my childhood, food was rationed, with families receiving coupons for groceries based on the number of members. These coupons were crucial for obtaining essentials at an affordable price; otherwise, the financial burden would have been overwhelming for us.

Over the past year, a wave of uprisings has swept through Iran as people voiced their discontent with the disorganized state of the country. Unfortunately, the response to their grievances has been far from positive. Rather than witnessing an improvement in the nation's situation, those who dared to protest found themselves met with imprisonment, torture, execution, and the heart-wrenching loss of their loved ones.

In recent years, Iran's worsening financial situation has presented challenges, particularly in accessing essential medicines for those with incurable diseases. My sister's husband, Khalil, a bank employee, faced heightened COVID-19 risks due to his in-person job. While many countries transitioned to online processes, Iran's insufficient infrastructure forced Khalil to work in-person, leading to his exposure to the virus. Inadequate measures at the workplace resulted in him and colleagues contracting COVID-19. Despite my sister's willingness to spare any expense for his treatment, shortages in medicines and facilities led to his untimely death on August 6th, 2020. Three years later, Khalil's children still grapple with emotional challenges, finding it difficult to visit their father's grave.

My close friend suffered the loss of his brother, who fell into a coma and never recovered consciousness due to the use of expired anesthetic during surgery. Another acquaintance, a former classmate battling MS, faced the harsh truth of her wealthy family struggling to acquire essential medicine. The scarcity of medicines has led to an escalation in smuggling, compelling individuals to buy from smugglers at a higher cost. Unfortunately, this poses substantial risks, as smugglers may mishandle medicines, jeopardizing their quality and effectiveness.

In Iran, women consistently face a secondary gender role, prioritizing service to their families over personal pursuits. This belief permeates family dynamics and broader social interactions, suppressing women who protest against societal restrictions. The Islamic Republic of Iran enforces strict laws on women, using Islamic pretexts to limit freedoms and subject them to harassment. A dress code mandates women to wear specific attire, dress codes are used to control women. (Atwood, 1998) In Iran, the dress code serves not only as a religious practice but as a tool to control and suppress women, making the hijab a symbol of protesting against social injustices and oppressive constraints imposed by the regime.

Choose Your Path: Remain Silent or Protest Against Injustice?

As an Iranian woman who has personally faced these challenges, I empathize with the untreated wounds and social injustices experienced by Iranian girls. I understand the lost aspects of their social lives and the profound regrets that pierce their souls. Standing in solidarity, I advocate for their lost days and pleasures, becoming their voice and mourning the price they paid to reclaim their social rights.

When people encounter social oppression, they confront a choice: to express their grievances or to maintain silence in the presence of injustices, enabling others to encroach upon their rights. My fellow Iranians chose the former, fully aware that this decision would demand significant sacrifices. However, driven by the pursuit of a just social laws, they courageously embraced this toll and moved forward.

The Iranians have endured social pressure for years and have sporadically protested against the chaotic social situation. In 2017, initial protests symbolically led by young girls, known as "The Girls of Revolution Street," centered around discarding scarves as a protest against compulsory hijab. Vida Movahed initiated this movement, inspiring many to follow suit.¹

Subsequently, the scarf protest evolved into a metaphor for broader women's social dissent, declaring autonomy in clothing and religion choices. Women in Iran face prohibitions, from sports events like swimming and gymnastics to compulsory body coverage. The hijab remains a primary cause in Iranian protests, consistently imposing limitations on women.

On September 16, 2022, protests peaked when self-proclaimed "Gasht Irshad" (Religious Police) government agents caused the death of 22-year-old Mehsa Amini. "Based on the evidence and patterns of violence by the morality police in the enforcement of the mandatory hijab on women, the mission is satisfied that Ms. Amini was subjected to physical violence that led to her death. On that basis, the State bears responsibility for her unlawful death," Fact

¹ Rana Rahimpour, "Iran's hijab protest: The Girls of Revolution Street," BBC, February 5, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-42954970>

finding mission said. However the government denied responsibility for Amini's death.² Instead, journalists Nilofar Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, who publicized the news, were arrested, imprisoned, and tortured.³

Post-September 16, Mehsa Amini's death sparked anger and protests among Iranians globally, attracting support from people, including non-Iranians, against social injustice. During the protest days, Iranians went to the streets in continuous demonstrations, facing arrests and fatal shootings by government agents wielding real or practice guns. This resulted in heartbreaking scenes of Iranians witnessing the deaths of their neighbors and family. Mothers mourned for their lost children, and some individuals suffered amputations due to direct gunshots. Tragically, Iranian girls and boys, including Nika Shakarami,⁴ Sarina Ismailzadeh,⁵ Hadis Najafi,⁶ Kian Pirfalak,⁷ and Mohammad Mahdi Karmi,⁸ were among the casualties. While their

² Dan De Luce, "Iran to blame for violence that killed Mahsa Amini, U.N. finds," NBC News, March 8, 2024, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/iran-blame-violence-killed-mahsa-amini-un-finds-rcna142504>

³ Artemis Moshtaghian, Adam Pourahmadi and Hande Atay Alam, "Iranian journalists who reported on Mahsa Amini's death released from prison on bail," CNN, January 14, 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/15/world/iran-niloofar-hamedi-elaheh-mohammadi-bail-intl/index.html>

⁴ Zar Amir Ebrahimi, "Iran protests: Mother of Nika Shakarami tells of anguish," BBC News, June 28, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-66042995>

⁵ Maryam Sinaiee, "Authorities Try To Cover Up Another Teen Protester's Death In Iran," October 7, 2022, <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202210074997>

⁶ Megan Harwood-Baynes, "We want everyone to know her name: TikToker Hadis Najafi, 23, shot dead in Iran protests, September 30, 2022, <https://news.sky.com/story/we-want-everyone-to-know-her-name-hadis-najafi-the-23-year-old-tiktoker-shot-dead-in-iran-protests-12706404>

⁷ Babak Dehghanpisheh, "The killing of a 9-year-old boy further ignites Iran's anti-government protests," The Washington Post News, November 18, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/11/18/iran-protests-izeh-kian-pirfalak/>

⁸ Maryam Afshang, "Iran Protests: 15 minutes to defend yourself against the death penalty," January 18, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64302726>

stories and passing are famous, the number of those killed is countless by government oppression and media silence, and the number of mourners equals the majority of the population of Iran.

BARAYE (BECAUSE OF ...)

During that period, as news of the protests and tragedies reached me, I could only follow the events from afar and express support for the demonstrations. Like many Iranians worldwide, I felt deeply impacted. Unable to physically join the street protests from outside Iran, my only means of contribution was to convey my feelings and thoughts in any possible way. I posted on social media, circulated photographs, and joined the protests in Orlando. I shed light on the reality faced by the Iranian people and act as a spokesperson for those outside Iran, given the severe repression by Iranian government agents hindering the transmission of accurate information.

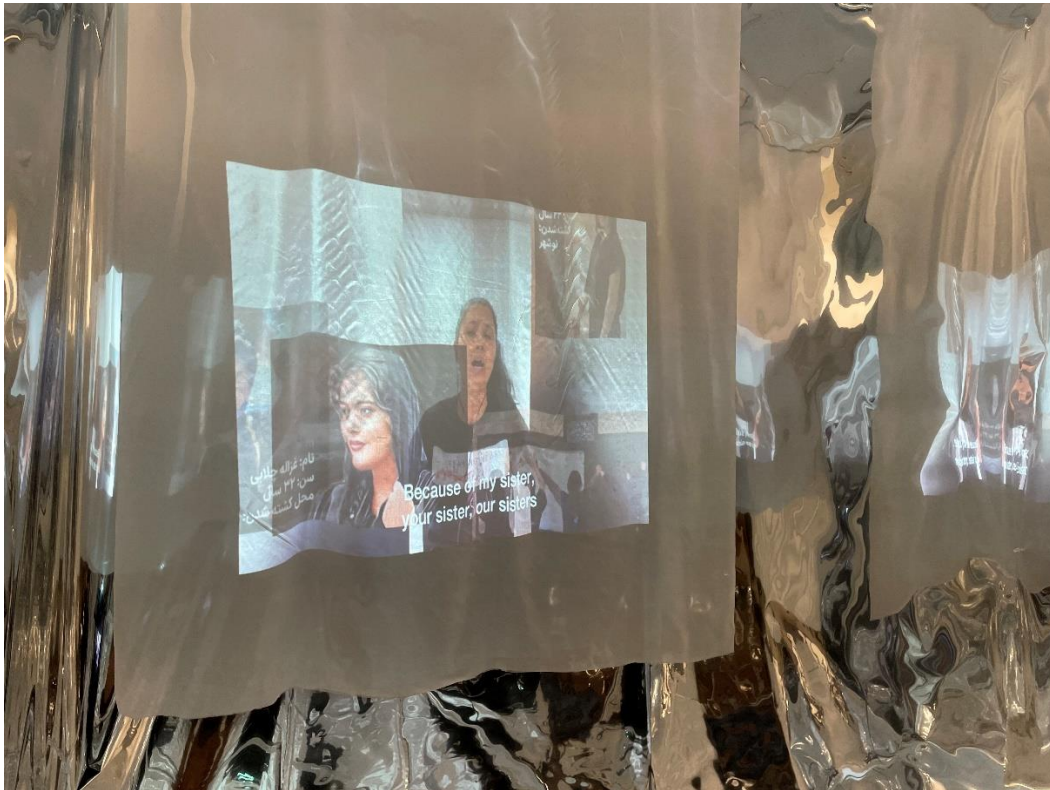


Figure 1: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Baraye (Because of)*. silk, Mylar, video, 8x 6x 9 ft.

As an artist, I felt compelled to make art about what made my mind frantic. I initiated my work on the Iranian protesters and human rights by creating a video. The first piece featured me re-singing the song "Baraye" (Figure 1). A song that enumerates all hardships Iranians faced for the last forty years. Despite the swift arrest of the original singer of the song, it gained immense popularity worldwide immediately. My video depicted me tearfully re-singing "Baraye" while displaying images of some of those who lost their lives due to the Iranian government's incompetence and oppression.

An integral aspect of my work is creating an immersive and overwhelming atmosphere for viewers. Through this, I aim for them to grasp my message and comprehend the struggling situations I often encounter. Kusama's installations inspired me to achieve my goal. Her artwork, "Infinity Mirrored Room" shows the evolution of her immersive, multi-reflective installations, in which she invites people to share in her unique vision.⁹

⁹ "Yoyoi Kusama: Infinity Mirrors," exhibition overview, Ago, March 3- May 27, 2018, <https://ago.ca/exhibitions/kusama>

RAINBOW



Figure 2: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Rainbow*. video, printed images, braided scarves. 8x 6x 9 ft.

My subsequent project, titled "*Rainbow*" was an installation capturing the atmosphere of the streets of Iran during the protest days (Figure 2). The installation featured a room with walls covered with printed images of Persian graffiti. The graffiti, inscribed by the people of Iran in the initial days of protests, had been documented and shared around the world in social media. In this room, three simultaneous channel videos are projected onto the walls. The first video, sourced from Iranian government networks, portrays a narrative suggesting widespread satisfaction among the people of Iran with the existing conditions. The footage features interviews with both women and men expressing contentment with everything happening in Iran, thanking God for the current conditions. On the second wall to the right, video showcases

images of people protesting in the streets, chanting slogans against the government. This stands in contrast to the narrative presented in the first video. The third wall displays a video of Iranians' pictures who lost their lives in the recent protests while the fourth wall covered by printed images.

The intentional overlap of sound between the first and second videos generates a confusing atmosphere for the viewers. The objective is to create a space where the audience is immersed in the simultaneous and contrasting narratives of satisfaction presented by the government's footage and the dissent expressed in the protesters images. Meanwhile, the third wall serves as a haunting backdrop, images of those who lost their lives during the recent protests, adding a poignant layer to the overall experience.

MY CHAMPIONS

While my previous artworks delved into Iranians' stories, they were perceived as very violent and painful, occasionally proving challenging for non-Iranian viewers. My goal in creating art illuminating human rights is to amplify the voice of the Iranian people globally, fostering awareness among both Iranian and non-Iranian audiences inside and outside of Iran to encourage individuals to rally around the pursuit of justice. Therefore, using a global visual language is vital in my arts.

Raised by Iranian culture, my identity and artistic taste naturally incorporate elements rooted in this cultural background. When addressing events in Iran, it becomes inevitable to utilize Iranian symbols and elements. However, I recognize the importance of employing a universal language in my future artistic endeavors. This means incorporating elements that resonate with a broad audience. While the heavy concepts I explore remain central, I strive to moderate the degree of violence in my works by infusing them with aesthetic beauty. This approach ensures that the content remains accessible and understandable to audiences unfamiliar with the specific events outside of Iran.

These aspirations guided the creation of the "*My Champions*" project. With this endeavor, I aim to clarify my artistic vision of my work to the universal goal of upholding the fundamental "concepts of human rights".



Figure 3: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *My Champions*. video, tulle, braided scarves. 8x 6x 9 ft.

The "*My Champions*" installation is set in a dark room, where the darkness serves a dual purpose. It enhances the visual impact of the projected image, and by immersing the audience in this dark space, the installation conveys the sense of darkness and suffocation inherent in the difficulties of our times (Figure 3).

The resonated voice of a middle age man's voice over speakers pleads emotionally. As he speaks, his words appear as a digital projection of glowing white writing in English on layers of blood-red tulle suspended in the middle of the room. The audience listens to the father engaged in a desperate conversation over the phone, seemingly with someone connected to his son's trial. He earnestly implores the man not to execute his son, underscoring the profound attachment his mother has for her son. The father discloses, "My son, Mehdi, called me and

said that they gave us the letters, but please do not tell Mom anything." The phrase "Do not tell Mom" carries the sadness that the son knows the mom will not see her son again.

Throughout the conversation, the father enumerates his son's honors, emphasizing how Mehdi has brought pride to the country. He mentions in his conversation: "In 2018, my son was the fourth member of the national karate team of the Islamic Republic of Iran. He was the national champion several times." Mehdi emerges as a metaphor for all Iranian youths aspiring for success and national pride. However, their collective pursuit of national pride confronts brutal suppression, extracting a toll measured in lives lost and families forever marked by mourning, longing, and solitude.

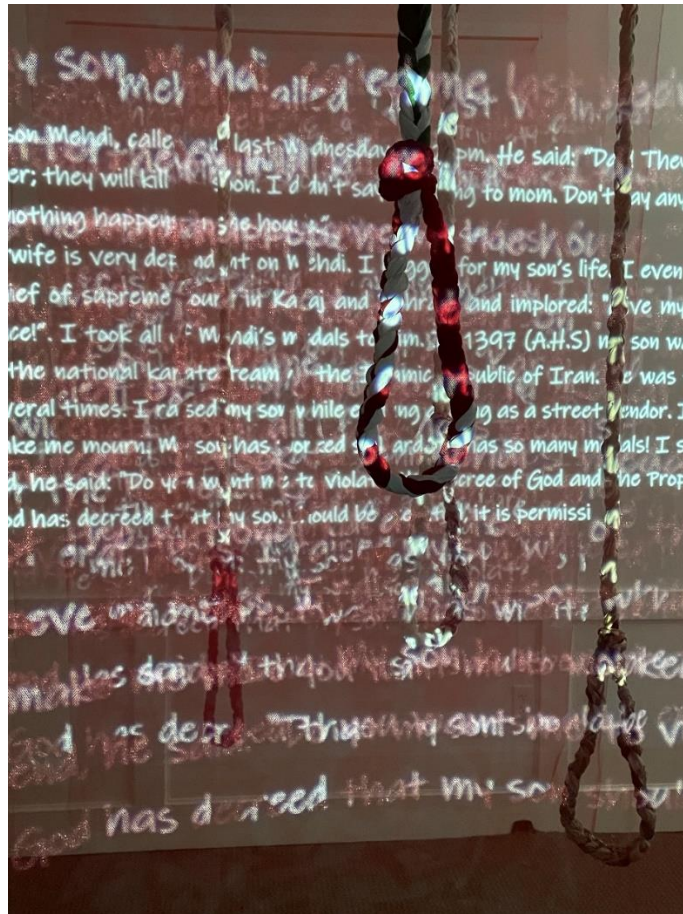


Figure 4: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *My Champions*. video, tulle, braided scarves, 8x 6x 9 ft.

The writing appears to be floating in the middle of the room. The decision to project the English words onto the seven layers of tulle serves to multiply them, creating a complex illusion for viewers (Figure 4). The multiplied words, overlapping on the layers, contribute to a visual density that renders them challenging to read. This intentional design choice enhances the immersive experience, inviting viewers to grapple with the visual impact, mirroring the despondent nature of the emotions conveyed in Mehdi's father's words.

The audio file of Mehdi's father, who is never named, is broadcast through speakers spread across the room. This distributed sound and powerful emotions disorientates and immerses the audience to the point of being overwhelmed.

Visually, the artwork is structured on seven layers of blood-red tulles suspended in front of each other. Scattered among seven layers of tulle are seven nooses. I am symbolized in this work with seven layers of my life that are dedicated to this perpetual sympathy with those who lost their loved ones, as I experienced it myself. Adorning the layers with some patterns draw inspiration from my traditional art, Tazhib, symbolizing both myself and my country.

Within this work, the essence of Iranian youth courses through the seven layers of my existence. Layers are hung next to each other, inviting viewers to walk through and interact with them. As in Pia Männikkö's art, the bodily connection between a viewer and an artwork is substantial, and she aspires to create immersive situations and spaces for the viewer to enter.¹⁰ When the people walking through "*My Champions*" see the floating words and the nooses around themselves, they feel my message and join my journey. Seven years ago, I started a journey to the United States to pursue my graduate studies, a decision that led me to spend subsequent years away from my homeland. Despite my profound love for my country, social, economic, and political injustices pushed me to part ways with my motherland.

In expressing the tremulous hearts of mothers, the lives lost, and the bloodshed, I sought symbolic elements or potent colors to convey my emotions. Shiota's use of red in her

¹⁰ Pia Männikkö, artist's website, <https://piamannikko.com/about/>

artwork served as significant inspiration, leading me to adopt it as the dominant hue in my recent works.

Formally, I am inspired by Berlin-based international artist Chiharu Shiota who is known for performances and installations that express the intangible: memories, anxiety, dreams, silence and more. Often arising out of personal experience, her works have captivated people all over the world by questioning universal concepts such as identity, boundaries, and existence. While for her, use of warm red color signifies faith¹¹, care, and connection between humans¹², the color red in my recent artworks carries profound symbolism, referencing the third of the Iranian flag, signifying the lives lost during the 1979 revolution, also visually representing the dominance of unjust laws, silencing individuals and highlighting the oppressive tactics of a government resorting to violence.

I am also inspired by Shirin Neshat's use of Iranian patterns to symbolize the silenced voices of women. Her work explores her Iranian roots, expressing personal and communal conflicts, especially the tension between Persian cultural identity and the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime¹³. I turned to my traditional art, Tazhib. Adorning the tulles with these patterns

¹¹ Rachel Wu, "Talking Arts: Tale telling Yarn at Shenzhen Art Museum," The Soul Trembles | A contemporary Art Exhibition by Chiharu Shiota, *That's*, January 2, 2024, <https://www.thatsmags.com/china/post/36896/talking-arts-tale-telling-yarns>

¹² Inga Nelli, Chiharu Shiota Conversations, interview by Chiharu Shiota, *Coeur et Art*, March 22-June 16, 2019, <https://coeuretart.com/conversations-chiharu-shiota/>

¹³ Rebeca Gross, "Shirin Neshat, A Mystical, Spiritual Quality," Telling All our Stories: Arts and Diversity, interview by Shirin Neshat, *National Endowment for the Art*, No. 1, 2016, <https://www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2016/1/telling-all-our-stories-arts-and-diversity/shirin-neshat>

not only represents myself but also my motherland, weaving my identity with my cultural heritage.

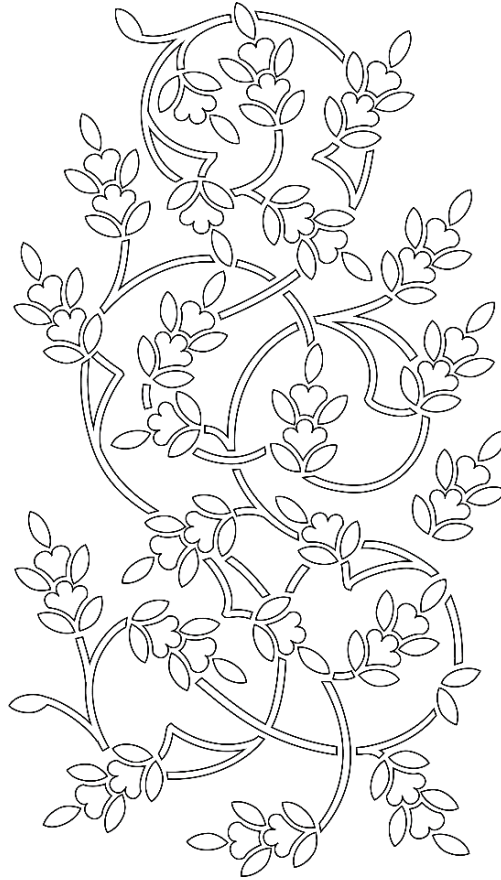


Figure 5: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *My Champions*. Persian patterns to be printed on tulle. 6x 9 ft.

The patterns adorned on the layers of blood-red tulles draw inspiration from my traditional art, Tazhib, symbolizing both myself and my country (Figure 5). My personality is intricately woven with the culture and homeland to which I belong. I cannot deny that Iranian culture profoundly influences my behavior, making discussions about my country's culture an exploration of my routines. Every expression of my life story appears to reflect the prevailing culture in Iranian society.

The patterns imprinted on the blood-red layers of tulles represent my personality, screams, words, country, and Iranian people, all interwoven with the essence of youth. The white color in the Iranian flag means peace and companionship, while in my artwork the white color on the blood-red tulles symbolizes the purity and legitimacy of pleading words, stifled cries, and repressed culture. In this intricate pattern, each flower symbolizes a person who silently screams. The flowers are connected and entwined with spirals, making it challenging to discern the path of spirals so that the nature of their unity.



Figure 6: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *My Champions*. video, tulle, braided scarves. 8x 6x 9 ft.

Seven braided nooses are spread throughout the layers of tulle, with two of them intricately braided to reflect the colors of the Iranian flag. The nooses made from braided

scarves are integral to my artistic creation as a symbol of female protestors (Figure 6). The quantity of nooses corresponds to the collected used scarves from Iranian women. As I accumulate more scarves, I plan to augment the number of nooses. These braided scarves serve as a symbol, deliberating the girls weaving their hair—a gesture transformed into a potent symbol of social protest. Sometimes the braided green, white red scarves look like a twisted Iranian flag. Through this symbolic representation, I intend to underscore the harsh reality prevailing in Iran, where any manifestation of social protest is brutally met with death.

The layers of my life intricately intertwine with patterns, rich symbols of Iranian culture and its people, conveying that every Iranian person embraces Mehdi's father's words, standing united in mourning for his son. Symbolically, I resonate profoundly with Mehdi's father, extending my wholehearted support and empathy to him and all grieving parents. I hope that my people can break free from the suffocating constraints imposed by the Islamic Republic. I envision a future where they raise their voices, not only for those willing to listen but also for those unwilling to acknowledge their voices.

SECRET BEAUTY

Iran, my homeland, boasts a timeless beauty and a profound artistic legacy. Rich in history, it encompasses numerous ancient sites, among them Ecbatana, the capital of Media in western Iran. Over time, it evolved into a city in the Persian, Seleucid, and Persian empires. Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. The echoes of ancient creativity reverberate through the millennia, with Teimareh showcasing the earliest known petroglyphs dating back 7000 years, and Yafteh cave revealing pictographs from 40,000 years ago in Lorestan Province. Iranian scientists such as Ibn Sina, Abu Rayhan Biruni, and Razi, have left an indelible mark on human history through their scientific innovations. And the poetic realm flourished with literary giants like Rumi, Hafez, and Saadi, further enriching Iran's culture.

These verses from Sa'adi's "Bani Adam" decorate a wall of the United Nations building in New York, and the poem was quoted by US President Barack Obama in his videotaped New Year (Nowrouz) message to Iran in March 2009 to open up a new chapter in Iranian relations with the US. It says:

بنی آدم اعضای یکدیگرند/ که در آفرینش ز یک گوهرند
چو عضوی به درد آورد روزگار/ دگر عضوها را نماند قرار
تو کز محنت دیگران بی غمی/ نشاید که نامت نهند آدمی

Translation: Human beings are interconnected members of a unified whole, sharing a collective essence and soul. The affliction of pain upon one individual resonates throughout the

entirety, causing unease among the other members. The essence of humanity lies in the ability to empathize and share in the suffering of others.

Recently, the allure of Iranian culture manifested through its art is contaminated by the injustices and violence. These unjust practices have become defining elements of Iran's current societal framework.

In this nation, every heart carries the weight of grief, encompassing loss, profound sacrifice, deprivation, suppression, oppression, and denial. However, these sorrows do not serve to defeat us; instead, they fuel our determination to reclaim what we have lost. The losses have been immense, leaving us with nothing to spare except HOPE. Despite relentless acts of violence, the blood spilled fortifies our unity, like a somber energy source propelling us to voice our grievances loudly.



Figure 7: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Secret Beauty*. Transparencies, printed Persian calligraphy, shadow. 8x 6x 9 ft.

To express my ideals of beauty of "unity" I started creating an installation that is called "*Secret Beauty*". In this artwork, the initial visual appeal of the aesthetic beauty of Iranian art captivates viewers at first glance. However, delving into the narratives behind it unravels a tale of profound mourning derived from injustice and prompt a sense of empathy among the audience. This empathetic response serves as the inaugural step in compelling them to align with and support my perspectives, transforming artistic admiration into a catalyst for social awareness and change (Figure 7).

Shahzia Sikander is one of my favorite artists who revitalizes and transforms classical Central and South-Asian miniature painting, creating the neo-miniature form. Her work interrogates colonial archives, exploring language, empire, migration, and gender through imperial and feminist lenses, addressing orientalist narratives in Western art history and examining cultural identity, race, and postcolonial histories.¹⁴ Delving into the concept of her artworks inspired me to add the Iranian culture and transform the beauty of my heritage through my contemporary artworks. The shape of Shah Abbasi flower¹⁵ a significant motif in Iranian illumination art, is divided into seven layers. The overlapping multiple layers of transparent sheets adorned with the shape of layers of Shah Abbasi flower serve as a powerful visual metaphor, accentuating the theme of unity. Analogous to a flower's gradual growth and blooming from bud to full blossom, I stacked the Shah Abbasi layers to create a flower that not

¹⁴ Shahzia Sikander, B. 1969, *Seankelly*, accessed May 1, 2024, <https://www.skny.com/artists/shahzia-sikander>

¹⁵ Sara Naeemi Hir, Fatemeh Dehghany, "The origin of the motifs and the four-thousand-year old historical background of the Persian carpet," *Cibtech*, Vol. 5, January, 2015, Abstract, Pages 1838-1856, ISSN: 2231– 6345 (Online), [https://www.cibtech.org/sp.ed/jls/2015/01/205-JLS-S1-223-0%20\(136\).pdf](https://www.cibtech.org/sp.ed/jls/2015/01/205-JLS-S1-223-0%20(136).pdf)

only captivates the eye but also stands as a symbol of unity and strength. Intense empathy and companionship characterize this unity, as each layer of individuals contributes a distinct voice. However, this collective voice compels even those who may resist hearing it.

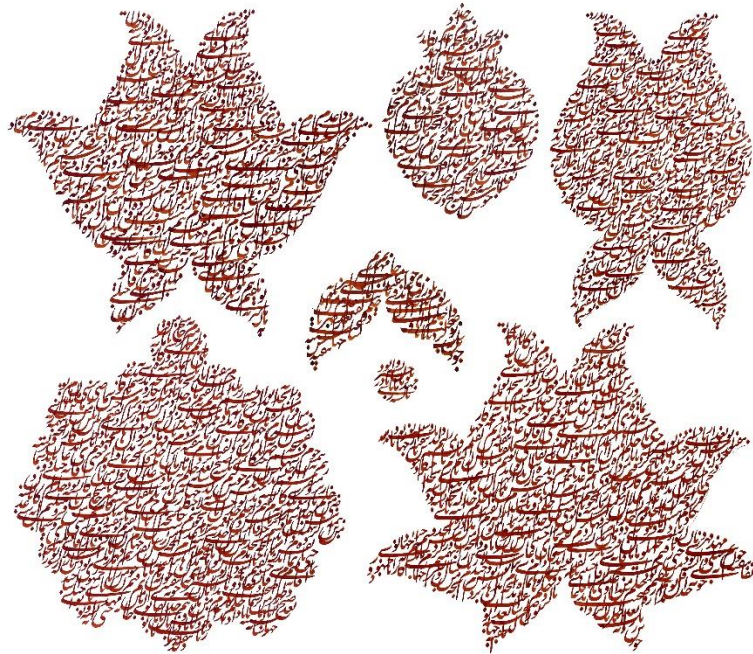


Figure 8: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Secret Beauty*. Seven layers of Shah Abbasi flower filled with Persian calligraphy. 8x 6x 9 ft.

The notion of beauty in unity resonates with the aesthetic appeal of the Shah Abbasi flower. I filled out each layer with Iranian calligraphy by hand, and after photography and editing, I printed them on transparent sheets (Figure 8).

In "*Secret Beauty*", the words unfold the narrative Mehdi's father conversing with someone over the phone. The red color in the words mirrors the grim realities of these times – tales of bloodshed, murder, sorrow, and mourning. Each letter and word represents individuals who share the weight of Mehdi's father's grief. This collective serves as companions,

empathizing with the father's pain and mourning. The broader context reveals a shared experience of sorrow, isolation, unheard voices, and unjust condemnation to death.

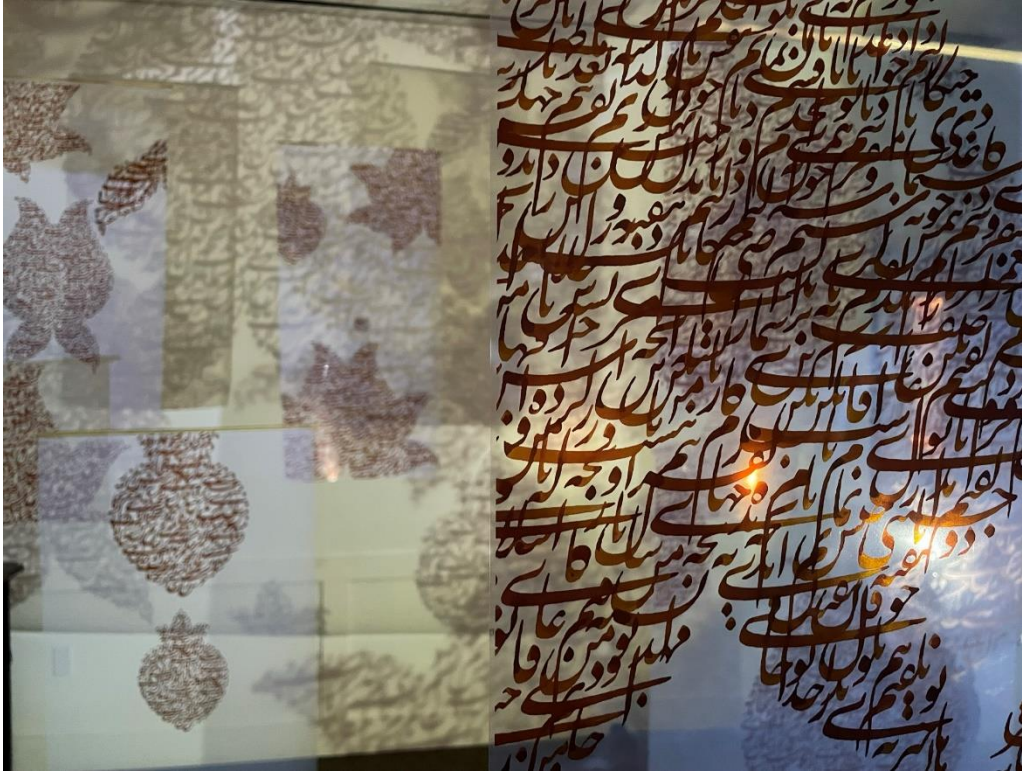


Figure 9: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Secret Beauty*. Transparencies, printed Persian calligraphy, shadow. 8x 6x 9 ft.

The variations among letters highlight the community's diversity, including ideological, racial, regional, and social differences (Figure 9). Despite these distinctions, unity emerges as they convey a shared message, driven by a common goal – advocating for individuals' social rights. The significance lies in the collective strength of individuals, as each letter and word, though seemingly diminutive, plays a vital role. Their combined force is crucial; the blank space is visible if any element is removed. As Ai Weiwei explains the concept of creating figures with LEGOs, he mentions the concept of one voice standing for something larger also applies to the effectiveness of LEGO bricks as the medium for this installation. A single LEGO brick symbolizes,

in part, Wiwi's emphasis on the power of the individual, building upon each other to create a movement.¹⁶

All the words and letters are meticulously rendered in Persian Nastaliq, a calligraphy style deeply embedded in Iran's history, dating back centuries to the advent of Islam. As Islam took root in Iran, artists were commissioned to honor the Quran, leading to a flourishing of arts centered around book design, particularly calligraphy and illumination. Calligraphy played a vital role in Quran publication during this era, with revered artists like Mir Ali Tabrizi, Sultan Ali Mashhadhi, Mir Ali Heravi, and Mir Imad Al-Hasani significantly contributing to its refinement. Consequently, calligraphy remains a cornerstone of authentic Iranian art.¹⁷

In my adolescence, I started learning calligraphy, which demanded considerable time and dedication to attain expertise. Currently, calligraphy is central to my artistic repertoire, serving a dual purpose. On one hand, it becomes a powerful medium through which I represent and celebrate the rich Iranian culture. On the other hand, calligraphy symbolically shows my presence in my artwork and signifies my identity as an Iranian artist, intricately woven into the fabric of my artwork.

¹⁶ Emily Karcher Schmitt, In LEGO language, Chinese artist Ai Weiwei makes powerful statement, Smithsonian Insider. Bringing you everything under the sun, In art, History and Culture, 2 October 2017, <https://insider.si.edu/2017/10/lego-language-chinese-artist-ai-weiwei-uses-makes-powerful-statement-hirshhorn/>

¹⁷ "Nasta'liq: The Genius of Persian Calligraphy," National Museum of Asian Art, accessed June 12, 2024, <https://asia.si.edu/whats-on/exhibitions/nastaliq-the-genius-of-persian-calligraphy/>

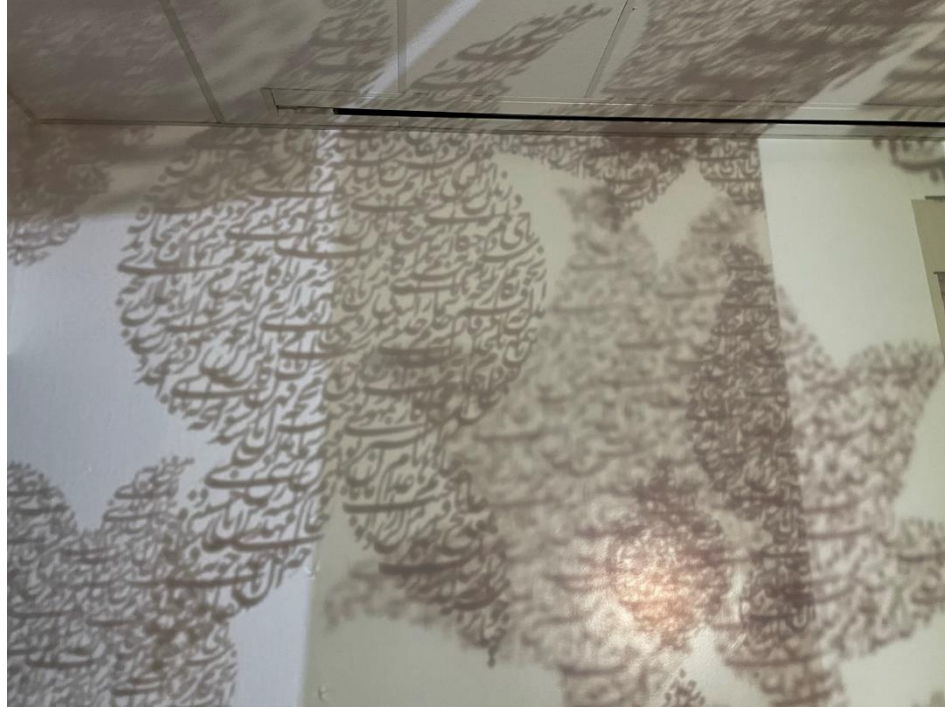


Figure 10: Elaheh Jazemi. 2022. *Secret Beauty*. Transparencies, printed Persian calligraphy, shadow. 8x 6x 9 ft.

To enhance the quality of the immersive atmosphere, I added the shadow displaying behind the transparencies. Anila Quayyum Agha, an American-Pakistani artist, uses the spotlight to project flourishing forms in light and shadow into the viewer's space, enabling her to address the multifaceted experiences of womanhood, immigration, and cultural multiplicity.¹⁸ The culmination of this union takes shape as I cast a spotlight through the transparencies, giving rise to immense shadows that envelop both the walls and the bodies within their reach (Figure 10). The colossal and enchanting shadows wield a compelling presence that defies any opposing force. Viewers find themselves captivated by the greatness and compactness of these shadows,

¹⁸ Anila Quayyum Agha, "Anila Quayyum Agha: Flourishing Patterns", solo exhibition at Mennello Museum of American Art, June 23-September 24, 2023, <https://www.mennellomuseum.org/Collections-Exhibitions/Exhibitions/Anila-Quayyum-Agha-Flourishing-Patterns>

and they inevitably move through them. Now extending over every individual, the shadows become both beautiful and commanding, echoing the screams embedded in each person's story. The words, created in blood-red, intensify the impact as the shadows blanket entire bodies. Faced with this immersive experience, individuals have little choice but to yield to the overwhelming chorus of cries unified under the alliance's umbrella. In this moment of acceptance, the first nudge prompts a crucial question: "Will they choose to align with this decision or resist?"

MEMORIAL

In the current somber atmosphere, all Iranians share in collective mourning. In every city, solemn graves stand as poignant memorials to those who embodied bravery and lived by values that gave them the strength to confront loss. The nation's hearts bear a tangible sorrow for the departed, however this grief is intertwined with pride for the cherished departed ideals.

We believe in the inherent freedom of all humans, irrespective of race, gender, or nationality. This right, unjustly denied to us for years under the pretext of Islam, now faces a moment of heightened awareness. We resolutely fight for our beliefs, willing to bear the associated costs. We firmly believe our goals are worth the significant risks, and no one can dissuade us from our convictions.

In these trying days, Iranian mothers serenade their children's graves with songs of yearning. Birthdays and weddings are commemorated on these hallowed grounds, where they celebrate, mourn, and share joys and sorrows with their departed loved ones. Despite the physical absence, these mothers refuse to perceive their children as truly gone; instead, they live on through cherished memories. Laden with the melancholy of longing, their hearts resonate with profound pride as they articulate the beliefs and goals of their dearly departed.

With their loved ones gone, these mothers now bear the responsibility of advancing the unfinished mission, a duty fulfilled by keeping the memories and ideals that defined their cherished ones alive.¹⁹

¹⁹ Zar Amir Ebrahimi, "Iran protests: Mother of Nika Shakarami tells of anguish," BBC News, June 28, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-66042995>

The "*Memorial*" project started when the mothers of my land began to grieve their lost loved ones by singing a lullaby on the graves of them. These mothers still consider their children alive and sing lullabies on their graves according to their lingering habit.

This whole work shows a crib mobile. A crib mobile is a device that is installed on children's beds so that children fall asleep to music. By creating this installation, I want to accompany Iranian mothers and sing a lullaby for their lost loved ones.

With this work, I want to invite my audience of any race, age and language to my experience and ask them to feel and experience what I have experienced in these days and months.

In this audio installation, a sad and peaceful lullaby sung by a woman. This is an original lullaby in the Kurdish language. Even I who know Persian language, do not understand the meaning of its words, but I can still receive the peace and pleasantness of this song. Knowing that this tune may be reminiscent of religious songs for some Christian people, I still believe that this lullaby can be related to any audience in any language. The lullaby song is used to further emphasize and complete the crib mobile concept. It is as if a Kurdish mother joins us to sing a lullaby on the grave of her child to sing the hymn of unity to achieve freedom. She reflects the sadness of her lost loved one in her songs and becomes the leader of the group of allies with her voice.



Figure 11: Elaheh Jazemi. 2023. *Memorial*. Audio, bell, cut hair, hair supplies. 8x 6x 9 ft.

In this work, the multitude of elements has meaning (Figure 11). This is a symbol of the huge number of people killed and their voice for freedom. In "*Memorial*", it is also used to create an immersive atmosphere for viewers because another important aspect of my works is creating an interactive work. The audience can walk in this space and find themselves immersed in the suspended cubes, the sound of bells and the sound of lullaby.



Figure 12: Elaheh Jazemi. 2023. *Memorial*. Audio, bell, cut hair, hair supplies. 8x 6x 9 ft.

I chose the cube to cast the resin, because it does not have a specific direction (Figure 12). These cubes carry DNA and for that reason they represent individuals from the smallest cube as the youngest child to the largest cube as the oldest person. This installation is a movable art piece. Bells attached to the end of each cube encourages the viewer to ring them. At the same time as the bells move, the cubes also move and a simultaneous movement is formed in the whole installation. This movement is a symbol of the rise of all people. It is as if our loved ones have joined me to carry out a great movement. When the bells all ring together, the voice of the people unites and the singing mother becomes the leader of the group of allies with her lullaby.

The transparency of the resin creates suitable conditions for light reflection and overlapping of the cubes.

The resin material was chosen for three reasons:

1. **Transparency:** resin is a transparent material and it allows me to make cubes that display symbolic objects inside. The cubes carry my cut hair. When the Iranian movement started, women's hair was recognized as a symbol of this protest, that's why women who wanted to express their protest cut their hair. As a protesting Iranian woman, I also cut my hair, the same hair that has now become a part of my work in transparent cubes. With these pieces of hair, I am also present in this work. These cubes also have other hair supplies, including ties, clips, and ribbons. These items are a symbol of the killed girls, but their hair supplies remain a memory for us. The objects inside the cubes are embedded so that viewers overlook their details at first glance, but when they see the hair protruding from the cubes, they are eager to see more details inside and start to discover their meanings. All the cubes are filled with red glitter. Acknowledging that in American culture, the glitter is a sign of party, but in this work, my goal was to use a red material, which symbolizes blood, that would glow under the light, and the best choice was the glitter.
2. **Playing with light:** using the effects of light reflection is a part of my work because I believe that light reflection adds a new dimension to my work and leads me to my goal, which is to create an immersive environment. Therefore, I chose resin to make these pendants, so that the reflection of light adds a new aspect to my work.

3. **Overlapping of cubes:** Another method I use to create an immersive space is to overlap different components in my work. The transparency quality of the resin made it possible for me to achieve this goal.

Motherland, where everything is familiar where you know all the ways, not just the way home, but even the seemingly unfamiliar ones.

When the pressure and suffocation within a country become unbearable, it compels its inhabitants to emigrate, leaving behind their motherland. I found myself in the position of having to emigrate due to the unjust laws that diminish hope for a promising future in Iran.

Upon immigrating to America, despite being an artist with numerous skills, I experienced a phenomenon known as culture shock,²⁰ which cornered me for an extended period. In response to the overwhelming challenges, I decided to create a video animation as a means to represent the issues constricting my life.

This video animation of "650" serves as an expression of my struggles during the immigration process. It highlights the reasons necessitating the acceptance of these challenges and explores the inception of this transformative journey. Ultimately, it delves into the concealed aspirations within my life, emphasizing that, at times, a compulsion urges me to persist even when hope seems elusive.

Similar to Kentridge's inspiring animations, I chose to convey my message through a simplified 2D animation. With his video "History of the Main Complaint" serving as a backdrop,

²⁰ L D Worthy, T Lavigne and F Romero, "Culture and Psychology," Culture Shock, access June 12, 2024, <https://open.maricopa.edu/culturepsychology/chapter/culture-shock/>

William Kentridge discusses how artists draw upon tragedy as subject matter for their work and how drawing itself can be a compassionate act.²¹

This narrative embodies a shift in the story of life and migration. During such moments, the essence of my existence transcends personal desires. Instead, my hope for life stems from my love for others, and their happiness causes my determination to endure. Their existence relies on my hope and accomplishments, intertwining our lives in a shared pursuit of survival.

This animation starts with a Persian sentence: "مامان من دارم میرم، کاری نداری؟" It means: "Mom! I am about to leave. Anything to do?"

When I was younger and single, each time I left the house, I asked my mother if there was anything to do. In September 6th, 2019, the last time I left home, I was not just leaving my mother's house; I was leaving my ancestral home, Iran. Again, I asked my mother if there was anything for me to do. "No, my girl, go safe," she responded as always. I wondered what was going on in her heart, whether she had other unspoken words, perhaps wanting to say, "Do not go!" This time, I bid farewell to my mother's house, city, country, land, and happiness. With all I built in my thirty years – the hardships, love, happiness, and hope – I had to leave everything behind and go. As I said my goodbyes, I packed all my joys into two suitcases and headed to a place I hoped would feel like home. Packing was not easy; meeting the airline's weight limit was a challenge those days.

²¹ Susan Sollins, Interview by William Kentridge, Producer: Wesley Miller & Nick Ravich, Editor: Paulo Padilha, Art21, Filmed April 2, 2010, Video, 2:53, <https://art21.org/watch/extended-play/william-kentridge-pain-sympathy-short/>

This video narrating my life story, consists of seven parts, each corresponding to the seven years of my life spent in immigration. As my voice narrates my life story symbolically, all the poems featured are original compositions by me. My narration, filled with sadness and fatigue, carries an Iranian accent in English, deliberately peppered with grammatical and pronunciation mistakes that are integral to my migration narrative.

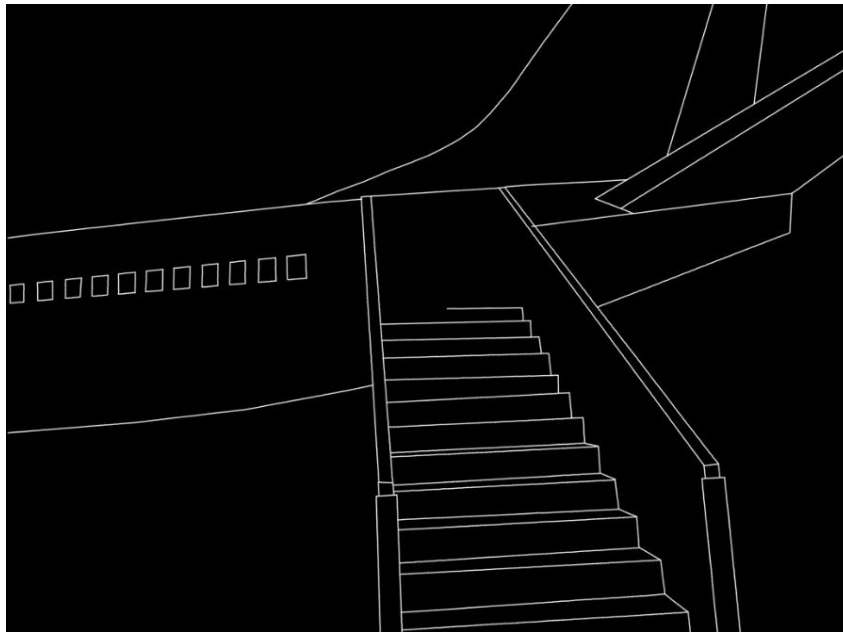


Figure 13: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

In each chapter of this video, the formation of white lines depicts the airplane, symbolizing the decision to immigrate—an iron giant seemingly engulfing all immigrants and transporting them to Na-Koja (nowhere) (Figure 13). However, an inhibiting factor disrupts each build, causing the collapse of everything constructed. Despite setbacks, each subsequent episode marks a fresh start, with the airplane lines rejoining to recount the ongoing story of migration.

Throughout the video, green images symbolize significant memories, with the color representing my presence narrating these stories. This fusion of visual and auditory elements captures the essence of my migration journey, showcasing the interconnected challenges of language, art, and the resilience required to rebuild.

During each part, I start, fail, get hopeless, but do not despair, and start again.

Chapter #1:

The first chapter begins with this poem, as the white lines move to make the airplane and the green lines in the background shape my memories:

**" No Distance means to be aimless, but to go
To be hopeless, but to go
Not to like, but to go
More reason to stay, but to go
Not to want to leave, but to go
Not to able to leave, but to leave
Not to able to leave your love, but to leave
More reason to stay, but to leave
More hands to hug, but to leave all"**

Emigration entails leaving behind attachments, acquaintances, and secure spaces, venturing into the unknown, a place known as "Na-Koja." This undefined space raises uncertainty about its suitability as a lasting home, lacking the familiarity of my homeland's places. Despite its worldly beauty, my heart yearns for the motherland, its irreplaceable essence.

No distance, regardless of its apparent familiarity, can replace the allure of my homeland. In this foreign space, I lose connection with my desires, happiness, and contentment, always felt a void—a lack of "belonging."

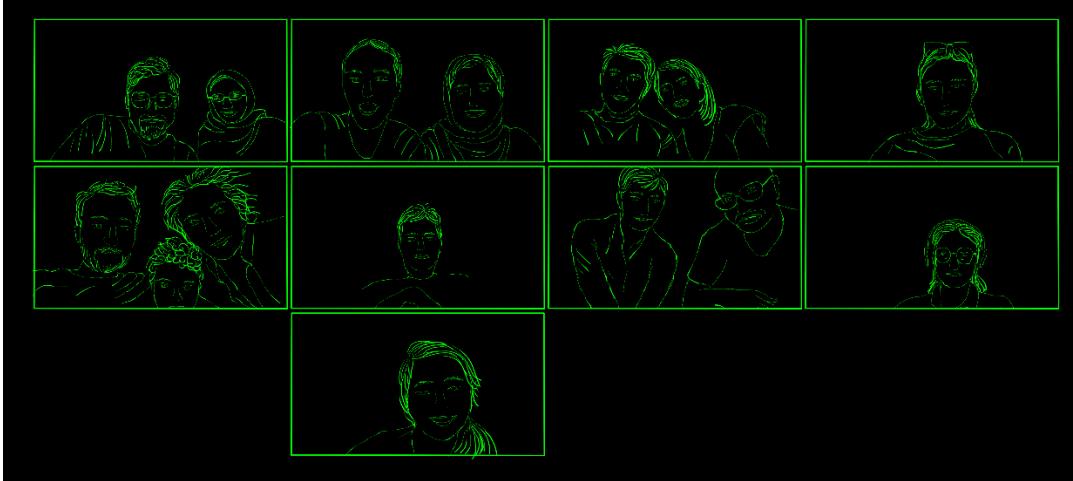


Figure 14: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

The green image in the background represents my last video call with friends from a once vibrant group in Iran (Figure 14). Now, all of us, find ourselves scattered as immigrants, clinging to our homeland from afar. Despite our shared love for our country and dreams of contributing to its growth, our aspirations have crumbled, leaving us with only regret and the reality of emigration. We had envisioned shining like stars in our country's sky and serving its people like the sun. Nevertheless, today, we are exiles, holding onto the memories of a time when our dreams were vibrant and full of promise.

As an immigrant, I have faced numerous challenges, building my life from scratch, only to see everything crumble due to forces beyond my control. Disheartened and weary, I lost hope and found it difficult to muster the strength to rebuild. However, in my darkest moment, a ray of encouragement emerged from the people who mattered most to me—friends who urged me not to give up.

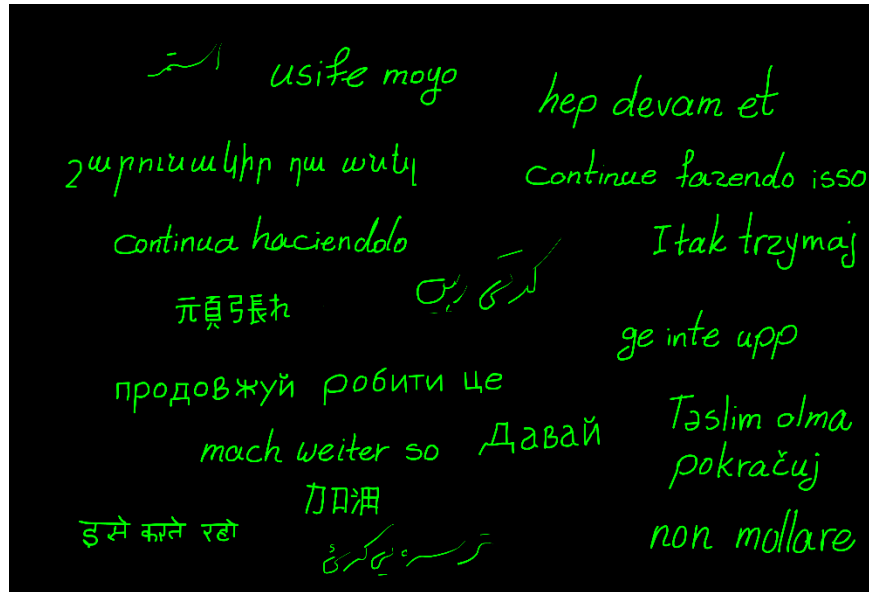


Figure 15: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. 650. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

At the end of the first chapter, in the page, sentences emerged, echoing the translation of "Do not give up" in 21 different languages (Figure 15). These languages were chosen to reflect the diverse nationalities of my non-Iranian friends and fellow immigrants who, like me, left their cities and homelands to pursue dreams in a foreign land—America. Each friend has a unique migration story, leaving behind their established lives to start anew. Despite struggles, failures, and disappointments, they have found the strength to persevere and begin again.

Chapter #2:

Second chapter unfolds as I navigate different emotions through this journey, each of which taught me a lesson and influenced my journey.

The voice resonates:

**"Everything is in my head
Sometimes fear
Sometimes blessing**

**Sometimes love
Sometimes laugh
Sometimes lost
Loneness
Wanting
Desiring
Wishing
Ordering
Fighting to catch
Fighting to arrive
Fight to get
Get ready
Get aware
Get happy
Get excited
Get sad
Get hopeless
Get alone..."**

I confronted challenges along the way, tackling problems solo in my relentless pursuit of success. My determination was unwavering, forcing every obstacle to yield before my will. Though the path was fraught with fear and despair, the migrant Elaheh proved stronger than her challenges. With resilience, I overcame struggles, achieving a sense of happiness, pride, and hope.



Figure 16: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

While the white lines move to make airplane, the green-tinted backdrop captures a group photo featuring my friends, a group of seven individuals who successfully secured admission to an American university (Figure 16). To apply for an American visa, we embarked on a journey to an American embassy outside of Iran, as diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States had long been severed. We navigated the challenges of the pandemic to reach the American Embassy in Pakistan.

Despite concerns about Pakistan's safety during the pandemic, it was our only option as other embassies were closed. The stringent COVID-19 protocols required us to stay in a third country for 15 days before entering Pakistan, adding to our hardships and expenses. After overcoming various obstacles, we finally reached the American Embassy in Pakistan.

Each friend in the photo had a unique immigration story. Mohammad Reza, an intelligent individual, studied architecture. Mansour, Soran, and Rezvan hailed from Kurdish backgrounds,

each with distinct qualities. Zaynab, the youngest in the group, exuded charm. Ghazaleh, the last member, was a calm and productive individual. Our shared experiences entering Pakistan brought us together, and we ended up sharing a two-bedroom suite for a week.

The nights of the embassy interview were marked by conflicting emotions—sadness, longing, stress, and excitement. These challenges strengthened our bond. While beauty and happiness can bring people closer, shared sorrows create an unbreakable connection. The group photo, taken after our embassy visit on the way back to Iran, serves as a memory of intertwined sadness, stresses, happiness and joys. At that moment, our hearts were filled with tears, worries, and longing for an uncertain future. Today, each friend resides in a different part of the world, outside of Iran.

As the second part concludes, with problems once again dismantling my creations, the phrase "Do not give up" emerges in various languages, injecting hope into my aspirations and motivating me to rise, persevere, and start anew.

Chapter #3:



Figure 17: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

In the third part, beautiful memories of laughter with my family—my mother, sister, and my sister's children—take shape. In this chapter, while the white lines move quicker to create an airline and the green image shapes the picture of my niece and nephew, a force beyond my personal goals propels me forward (Figure 17). The joy and encouragement from my family, celebrating my success, inspire me to persist and nurture hope. We share moments of happiness, often accompanied by a joyful and uplifting song.

Amidst this chapter's exuberance, as excitement builds, and I start singing, expressing my happiness and strength, the police siren interrupts, shattering the delightful moments I had created. This sudden interruption serves as a stark reminder of my identity as an Iranian

woman. In Iran, women are forbidden to sing, their beautiful voices silenced, unable to harmonize with men. At the pinnacle of joy and optimism, the weight of restrictions on Iranian women hits me like a sledgehammer, abruptly halting my building of dreams and aspirations.

Chapter #4:

Everything was destroyed, and I found myself having to rebuild all that I had painstakingly created. Once again, I powered down, felt the frustration, and came to a halt. This time, restarting proved much more challenging than before, as the recollection of how restrictions constricted my efforts weighed heavily on me. Beginning anew was no longer a simple task. However, in this part, the same encouraging sentences, made the background green picture and emerged stronger on me, compelling me to attempt once more.

Learning to carry my sorrows in a metaphorical backpack and coexist with them took considerable time. It was a journey to understand how a resilient woman should bear her sorrows like a dagger in her heart, living with it, and yet finding the strength to laugh at life.

Gradually, I rekindled my interest in persisting. I reassured myself that even in moments of weariness and disappointment, I still possessed the capability to start afresh.

While the chapter #4 starts, I start to sing again to comfort myself:

**"That's okay!
You just don't know
You just can't know
You like to know but you can't know
You just can't do
You love to be able to do, but you just can't do
That's okay!
This is for you
I'm for you**

**Till everything gets fine
You'll alright
You'll the one you like
You'll be the one you always wish
You'll be where you always wish
You'll be with all the ones you wish
With all of your dreams
With all of your dreams
You can get your safe zone
You can get your hope soon
That's okay!**

Reassuring myself, I acknowledged, "It's okay to have shortcomings, to be different, to lack extensive knowledge, or to struggle to display strength. Effort matters. Do not be disheartened. You can achieve what you deserve—living with those you love, surrounded by reciprocated affection. A secure place will come, even in uncertainty. The day may seem distant, but hold onto hope."

This time, I was imposed carrying more wounds on my spirit. In one hand, I found strength to console myself, accepting that "it's OK." On the other hand, I felt a sense of hopelessness, uncertain about what lies ahead in this journey without distance.

Chapter #5:

In the fifth part, I express my emotions by singing a poetic lament, using it as a metaphor to convey the challenges I endure alone.

**"No distance means
To be aimless, but to go
To be hopeless, but to go
Not to hope but to go
Not to want, but to go
Not to be able, but to go
No enough reason, but to go**

**No enough safety
No identity
But to go
Yes!
Just go
Go!
You can't stop
Just go
Don't stop
Just go
Go!
Go!
To no distance
To no identity
No safety
No safing
Confusing
Hopeless
Aloneness
Shocking
Embarrassing
Confusing
Crying alone
Trying alone
Celebrating alone
Sleeping alone
Awaking alone
Shocking alone
Shocking alone
Shocking alone
Screaming alone
Even, laughing alone
But...
You have to leave"**

At times, my heart constricts, urging me to abandon everything and embark on a journey into the unknown. While it might appear that I have a destination, the truth is, I do not. The depth of loneliness, the burden of homesickness, the longing for siblings' birthday hugs, and the isolation of celebrating birthdays alone resist quantification.



Figure 18: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

This time, I will board the white departure plane with all my tears. The green photo of my cart captures the moment at the airport when I packed my memories, joys, and longings into two suitcases and left. This time, the travel luggage is genuinely prepared; I accepted the inevitability of departure and embarked on my journey. However, another force compelled me to stop (Figure 18).

Chapter #6:

I weave a poem of becoming the source of others' hope, where their expectations serve as the driving force propelling me forward:

**"You have to leave
Maybe, something in no distance is waiting for you
Maybe, if you leave, you shorten the distance
Maybe not soon, but can catch hope
Maybe no time, but you can be hopeful
You should be hopeful even in the super hopeless time
Maybe you lost your dears
Your loves**

**Before you could make distance shorter
Even maybe you cannot hug your dear to say how sad you are that she cannot see her
husband anymore
But...
You should continue
You should keep doing
Not giving up
Not desist
Just doing
Just going
Cause your loved expect you to continue
Cause you have been other people's hope
Other people's happiness reason
Step one
Step two
Step three
Step four
Step five
Step six
Stop
Stop
Stop
Stop"**

Humans endure through hope, even in the bleakest moments, as an internal force in our hearts keeps us alive. I departed, nurturing the hope that something in the distance would bring me happiness, and one day, I could affirm that leaving was worthwhile. Despite losing a vital family member, I could not attend the funeral due to the distance. When my sister lost her husband, I could not be there to support her through difficult times. The uncertainty of having a chance to make up for those missed days weighs heavy on my heart.

This time, a force beyond myself and the joy within me compels me forward. The expectant eyes of my loved ones push me to progress; it is not solely my decision but their expectations propelling me. It is as if their reliance on my success turns me into their beacon of hope, finding meaning in my achievements and happiness. This responsibility becomes an

unstoppable force, no longer about living for myself but for the hope and happiness of my loved ones. Giving up would mean disappointing them profoundly. I am bound to move forward, carrying my wounds, creating daily calls for success for them. They are my life's hope, and ensuring their happiness remains my sole driving force in the exile I endure.

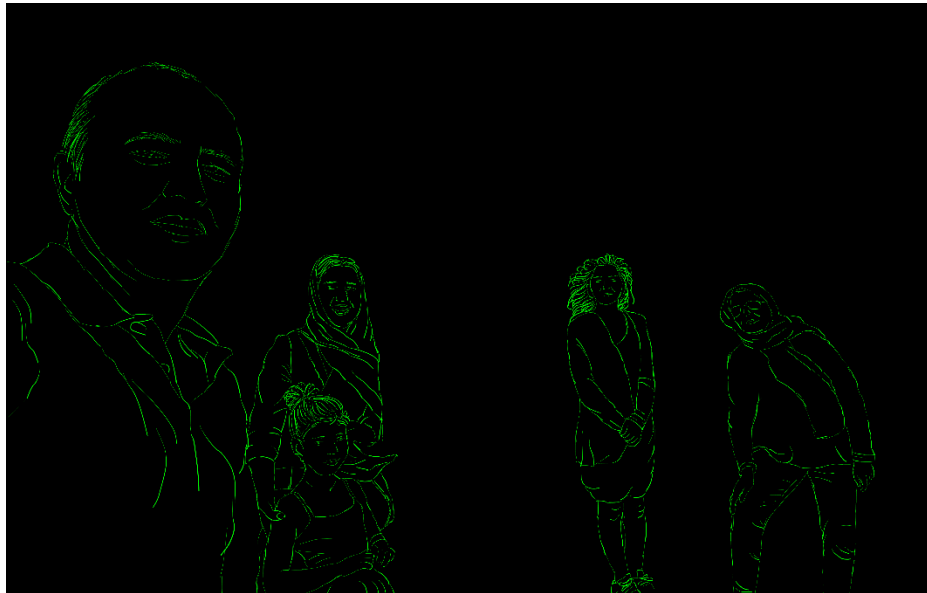


Figure 19: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

As the white lines advance to form the plane, their intricate movement reflects the complexity of my current life. The backdrop features a green family photo with my mom, brother, and his family, while my sister and her family are absent (Figure 19). Creating a complete family photo has become challenging, given our scattered locations across the globe. It seems nearly impossible for all of us to gather in one place simultaneously. The significance of this photo lies in my mother's first trip outside of Iran. Limited opportunities and financial constraints had prevented her from traveling abroad before. Her constant refrain echoes, "Your success and happiness are my travel and joy."

As this chapter ends, the force that initially forced me forward eventually transforms from a motivator into a factor that encourages surrender, ceasing my progress once again.

Chapter #7:

In the last chapter, immediately after the end of the 6th part, the 7th part begins.

**"I try to know who I am
I try to know what I'm gonna do
I try to know how I'm gonna do
I try to like where I am
How I am
Who I am
Who I'm gonna be
Who I like to be
Why I like to be
Why I like to exist
Why I like to resist
Why I like not to desist
Why I cannot desist
Don't desist
Don't
Don't desist
Don't give up"**

I am challenging myself to understand my life's purpose. Questions arise: "Is my current path the one I truly desire?" and "Have my past choices and opinions been right?" I seek clarity on my journey's goal and endeavor to cultivate love for myself, my path, and my present destination. Through self-exploration and challenges, I strive to comprehend the life I have built.

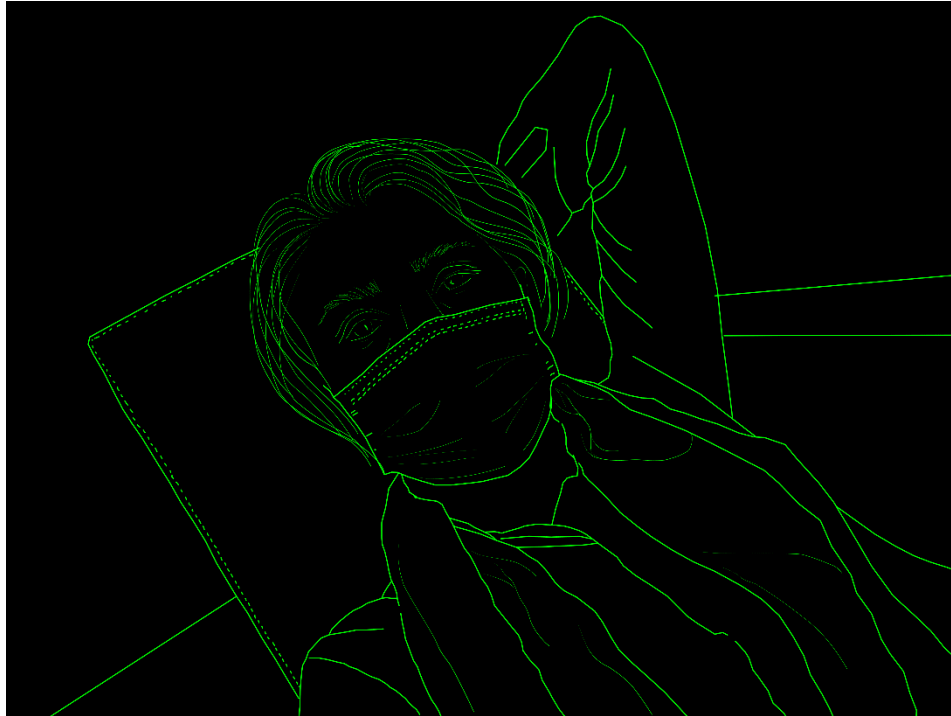


Figure 20: Elaheh Jazemi. 2021. *650*. Video animation, sound. 10 minutes 22 seconds.

The green photo in the background captures a significant moment—my first picture without a hijab, taken at Al Hamad Airport in Qatar (Figure 20). For years, I held steadfast beliefs in Islam and embraced everything that the Islamic Republic of Iran presented to me as part of the Islamic faith.

In Iran, the pervasive focus on teaching Islam and the Quran deeply influenced my beliefs over thirty-three years. Wearing a headscarf, seen as a core value, became an integral part of my identity. The pivotal moment came when I removed my hijab at Al Hamad Airport in Qatar, marking the beginning of questioning and rebuilding my beliefs. Proudly emerging from Iran's Islamic norms, I undertook the challenging task of reconstructing my character. The influence of Islamic teachings persisted even during my initial two years in America, but I eventually confronted myself, questioning if this aligned with my true desires.

The mask on my face, a result of pandemic restrictions, also symbolizes the internal ambiguity I am grappling. Revealing this mask signifies that the Elaheh I once knew has become a stranger to me. Now, I am on a journey to rediscover her, redefining her desires, pleasures, and values. Today, my perspective on the beauty of life has shifted. Happiness, bringing joy to others, and mutual respect now top my list of values.

The hardships I faced have strengthened my resolve on the path I chose. I persist in challenging myself, for it fosters personal growth. I encourage everyone hearing my voice to embark on this journey and join me in this challenge.

CONCLUSION

My art thesis reflects the indomitable spirit of the Iranian people who persist in their fight for fundamental rights and freedoms despite severe oppression and suffering. Over the past forty-five years, the promise of democracy and justice has largely been unfulfilled, leading to a heightened sense of urgency and passion in the recent protests. My artistic endeavor mirrors Iranians' pain and aspirations to call on the global community to acknowledge and act upon their plight.

My work takes a unique approach, intertwining Iranian artistic symbols with personal expressions in multisensory installation to evoke empathy and incite action. The resonance of my art lies in its ability to turn narratives of suffering into a universal call for justice and hope. Through these visual narratives, I amplify the voices of those who have been silenced and ensure that their sacrifices resonate far beyond the borders of Iran.

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