



**THIRDING**  
WITH  
NINE THOUSAND  
**MEMORIES**

COVER PHOTO BY NEGAR VAHEDI, 2021

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**THIRDING WITH NINE THOUSAND MEMORIES**

**MOQARNAS, SIAH CHADOR AND DISORIENTED SPATIAL MEMORIES**

A PERFORMANCE-INSTALLATION THAT VISUALIZES AN IMAGINARY SPACE TO EXPLORE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SPACE, MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL RELATIONS.

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## ABSTRACT

*Thirding with Nine Thousand Memories* is an exhibition, supported by this thesis paper, that aims to exemplify the correlation of space, memory, displacement, and identity. Through the lenses of immigration, art, and architecture, I revisit my memories to address how, as a woman, I move back and forth between the real space and the mind space to create an imaginary space, reconfiguring my situation in society and developing a sense of belonging. The exhibition features a performance installation that articulates three different spaces: the Firstspace or real space, the Secondspace or memory-attached unattainable space, and the Thirdspace or imaginary space that emerges from the first and the second spaces through the process of Thirding. Using the moqarnas as a metaphor to represent a memory-attached space that exists in my mind and the siah chador, both in the sense of a veil representing memories and of a tent representing a home or a shelter, I explore how displacement and memory shape identity and social relations, foregrounding my struggle to find a place to call home. The piece applies the moqarnas as a geometrical and spatial allegory for autobiographical and cultural stories and memories. It uses the moqarnas's facility for conversion and innovation to convey this central idea. It also defines the poetic, metaphoric, and political character of the siah chador in the sense of a black veil and a black tent.

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## I REMEMBER

*“To me the effort to speak about issues of “space and location” evoked pain. The questions raised compelled difficult explorations of “silences”—unaddressed places within my personal political and artistic evolution. Before I could consider answers I had to face ways these issues were intimately connected to intense personal emotional upheaval regarding place, identity, desire” (hooks, 16).*

I remember the days growing up in Iran, but I feel I am not Iranian anymore. I remember the day I became Canadian, but I feel I am not Canadian yet. They call me Iranian-Canadian. I consider myself neither Iranian nor Canadian. I feel no sense of strong association with either culture, yet I find an affinity with both. I am inside and outside, stateless yet relating to both. I live in Canada, but I move around with my memories from Iran. To connect myself to either culture, or both, I struggle to understand what is going on in Iran and, simultaneously, to fit myself into Canadian society. Homi Bhabha, in his book *The Location of Culture* writes:

*“Social Differences are not simply given to experience through an already authenticated cultural tradition; they are the signs of the emergence of community envisaged as project—at once a vision and a construction—that takes you “beyond” yourself in order to return, in a spirit of revision and reconstruction, to the political conditions of the present” (4).*

I don't ground myself in a spirit of identity arising from one culture or the other, or even from both. I go beyond, exploring how I might use their influence on me to return to a more authentic self through selection and rejection, revision and reconstruction. My initial investigation into the relationship between memory, space, and displacement arose from my constant awareness of a link between the real space I experience in a particular time and a comparable space I used to experience in the past.

I remember, I feel, my body reacts. Through this autobiographical process, in the context of revolution and war, of the suppression of political and social activists, religious minorities, and women, my mind takes me through the material and mental worlds to create an imaginary world in which I can reconfigure my situation in society.

I remember, and I compute moqarnases; I remember, and I draw triangles; I remember, and I cut diamonds; I remember, and I fuse nine thousand geometrical forms onto a mesh to represent my effort to build a place that I can call home. Each geometry carries a memory. Each memory depicts a broken voice. Each broken voice contains a pain. The American scholar and activist bell hooks, in her article "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," writes, "When you hear the broken voice, you also hear the pain contained within that brokenness" (16). When I remember my broken voice in moqarnas fragments, I also remember the pain enclosed within that brokenness.

I remember my pains; I revisit them on an everyday basis. I reconstruct them with care by fusing each fragment, which depicts a pain, in order onto a mesh, a process that resembles how the nomadic women of Lorestan—my ancestors—create shelter. The geometrical forms, the Nine Thousand Memories, wrap around my body. My body disorients them constantly with its movements. In doing so I question how the projection of my memories might intersect with my perception, identity, and social relations to push me beyond the margin, which is "not a 'safe' place." In the margin, "one is always at risk. One needs a community of resistance" (hooks, "Choosing" 19).

## I REMEMBER BOMBING

I was born in the summer of 1981 in Tehran, Iran. 1981—two years after Iran's Islamic revolution. 1981—a year after the beginning of eight years of war between Iran and Iraq.

I didn't see the revolution, but its texture (Figure 1) is projected on my body and my mind. In *The Production of Space*, the French sociologist Henri Lefebvre describes how the forces that shape a space become its texture:

*"At the same time the town seems to gather in everything which surrounds it, including the natural and the divine, and the earth's evil and good forces. . . . The town and its surroundings thus constitute a texture" (235).*



**Figure 1** An *athoubiographical collage*

By Sara Mozafari, 2017

A collage made by images of fragments of my father's letters to us from Evin with his address in Evin, my first day of school with maghnae and manteau, war and execution scenes from Etelaat and Keyhan newsletters, Khavarn, an unmarked cemetery located in southeast Tehran with buried bodies of victims of mass exe-

cution of 1988. All the images are sourced from family archive and collection.

The war was one of the revolution's textures on Iran's towns, and it is projected on my mind, on my body, on my childhood, on my life.

I remember the war. I remember bombing. Once I was alone at home with my aunt. It was dark out, and the radio was on. We heard the warning alarm on the radio. My aunt turned the lights off and took me under a large duvet in a corner. I still remember that corner of the room. I heard the loud bomb explosion and the cracking of the room's window. I still remember the crack of the window glass, its sound, its vibration, its depth, its texture. And I still wonder today, how could a duvet protect us, and yet I can remember all this? How could the staircase we hid beneath throughout the bombing save us, and yet I still feel shortness of breath in closed spaces? Eventually, my father sent us to Noor, a town in the north of Iran, to the home of one of his cellmates, for us to be safe. Today I question whether migration could protect us, and yet I still start shaking when I hear the sound of the war machines in the Toronto Air Show every August.

I remember the war and I reserve one black piece of moqarnas for each warning alarm that I still remember today, one for each bomb, one for each dark corner, one for each crack, one for each vibration, one for each sound, one for each stair, one for each moment of breathlessness, one for each fear.

## I REMEMBER EXECUTION

I was born in the summer of 1981 in Tehran, Iran. 1981—two years after Iran's Islamic revolution. 1981—a year before they arrested my father for his political and social activities. 1981—seven years before the mass execution of Iranian political prisoners.

Suppression was another texture of revolution. I can't remember anything from the mass execution of 1988 other than some names. But when I became a young woman, I got to know people who were later executed. I still remember their eyes. I remember our hours of conversation years before their executions. I remember the rooms we talked in, the chairs we sat on, and the shirt they had on the last time I saw them. I imagine they had that shirt on when they were executed. Although I have never witnessed an execution scene, I can't stop imagining the moment they were executed. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty points out in *Phenomenology of Perception*, "Everything is presented against a background" (24). I imagine everything based on what is in the background of my mind. Everything I remember and everything I have read and heard from a distance about political victims has created a background in my mind. When I imagine an execution scene, I imagine it against that background. I have seen Evin's wall from outside. I heard they execute victims using a chair and a rope. I heard they do it before sunrise, after azan. I imagine the executions of people I knew—my father's friends—happened outdoors in front of Evin's wall. I imagine a chair and a rope that



comes down from nowhere. I imagine the sky is dark, and I hear azan every time I imagine all this. And I believe even the heavenly sound of azan could not purify or hide all this sinfulness. Each time I hear news of executions in Iran, I keep imagining the same picture. I imagine those who were executed are the same people I knew, which makes me go through the same pain every time, again and again.

I remember execution, and I reserve one black piece of moqarnas for each one of the victims I have seen or about whom I've heard, one for each eye, one for each wall, one for each rope, one for each chair, one for each chant, one for each tear.

## I REMEMBER HIJAB

I was born in the summer of 1981 in Tehran, Iran. 1981—two years after Iran's Islamic revolution. I was born in 1981 in Tehran, Iran, a woman-to-be.

Women's suppression was the most profound texture of revolution on my body, and the boldest spaces that resonate across my memories are the ones attached to my memories of womanhood. I remember my mom making my first school uniform. I was six years old. It had one piece more than our neighbor's son's uniform, and

**Figure 2** A photo from family archive.

By Samaneh shams-e-Eshragh 2007

The image showing me in rousari, mantoau and black chador at Imam Reza Shrine, Mashhad, Iran.

that was a maghnaeh. I used to see my mother wearing rusari and manteau to go out. I thought it was her choice and I was happy to look like her. When I grew up, I realized wearing hijab is compulsory in Iran.

Women must wear hijab in public in Iran. No matter what their religion is, there is a minimum requirement. The government recognizes the chador as the greatest hijab. They force women to have it on in mosques, shrines, and some of the schools. The minimum hijab requirement for most constitutional and institutional spaces and all schools is a combination of maghnaeh and manteau. In all other public spaces, they force women to wear a mix of rusari and manteau. There are penalties for not obeying the rules. At mall entrances, on the streets, at schools, at mosques, at libraries, in parks—in almost every public space in Iran—the morality police patrols to control women's conformity with the law. The penalty for women without proper hijab in public depends on the space and the minimum hijab requirement. Penalties increase based on the visibility of skin, hair, and body curvature—anything from paying a fine, to going to jail, or even getting lashes (Islamic Penal Code of Iran, Code 638, 10). Morality policewomen in black chadors take the women with lousy hijab by force to detention centres for charges.

I remember my high school chadori principals checking our hijab, our hair colour, our eyebrows and skin to see if it was waxed, our sock colours, even the brand of our clothes, every morning. I

remember the stairs where I held my pants up, showing my shin and socks as I passed to be checked by them. I remember one of my classmates got a one-week suspension from school for wearing a Kappa jacket. And another one got suspended until her eyebrows grew back completely. One of my classmates never came back to school. I heard one of the principals had seen her with her boyfriend on the street. The next day, they warned her family that she could not go back to school unless she proved her virginity.

I remember universities in Iran. Men and women had separate entrances. There was a transitional room at the women's entrance, where at least two chadori women controlled the obedience of students' hijab. The room was around three by four metres. It had two entrances/exits, one to the school and one to the street. There was a desk in the corner of the room with papers and pens to collect the names and numbers of students who contravened the law. The charges varied from warnings to suspension from writing exams or expulsion from school.

I remember hijab, and I reserve one black piece of moqarnas for each time they stopped me, one piece for each time they scanned my body, one piece for each time they humiliated my personality. I reserve one black piece for each night my friends stayed in detention centers, one for each lash they got, one for each tear they had on their cheeks, one for each time they were made to feel ashamed of their gender. I reserve one piece for each slap each girl I know got from her dad, from her uncle, from

her brother, from her grandfather, one for each day they locked them in their rooms, one for each victim of honour killing I have read about in the news. I reserve one black piece for each child who was forced to get married, one for each child who attempted suicide after marriage, one for each girl who left school after marriage, one for each baby born from a child.

## **I REMEMBER MOSQUES; I REMEMBER MOQARNAS**

I remember the mosques' stunning moqarnases. I remember the clash of my body and the domes' curvatures, pigeons' flutters, geometrical forms, mosaics' colours, colourful glass, and mirrors' light and reflection. After pausing for minutes to take all their beauty in, I used to be reawakened by a duster moving on my face, and the angry voice of a man saying, "Make your hijab appropriate, my sister." I had maghnaeh, I had manteau, and I had a chador on (Figure 2), but it was not proper enough for them.

Their struggle was, and still is, to get control over our minds, to colonize us mentally, to push us into the margin, to suppress at least half of the society without realizing that the margin is a place for resistance, a "space of refusal, where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the down pressor" (hooks, "Choosing" 21).

To me, mosques are places of contradictions and conflicts. I picture them as battlefields of unity and division, humanity and inhumanity. The New Zealand religious scholar Christopher E. Lon-

ghurst, in "Theology of a Mosque," writes:

*"Islam teaches that God is one (ahad) and that His divine oneness is self-evident based on His infinity and omnipresence. Masājid seeks to capture this by projecting the principles of tawhīd God's Oneness, ahadiyya—his divine Unity, and wahdat al-wujūd—the unity of all creation, into their architectural designs and decoration." (4).*

Based on Longhurst's claim, unity is the essence of mosques; to me, even the moqarnas, the movement of its multiple geometrical forms toward the dome, the sphere, could resemble such a spirit. However, the ones who are in power make every effort to violate this fundamental nature of mosques and take control over them through systematic gender segregation under the pretext of defending the value of Islam and the blood of the martyrs. They do this by spatially marginalizing women at the mosques and by marking women's presence with invisibility (Nas).

I remember mosques, and I reserve one black piece for each square metre that I couldn't claim, one for each woman showing her resistance to being invisible by singing under each dome, one for each voice resonating under the moqarnas, disrupting their system, claiming the space.

## REMEMBERING; REMEMBERING

*“To remember is not to bring back before the gaze of consciousness a self-subsistent picture of the past, it is to plunge into the horizon of the past and gradually to unfold tightly packed perspectives until the experiences that it summarizes are as if lived anew in their own temporal place.” (Merleau-Ponty 23).*

My thesis project's initial idea came from my realization that there was a link between my body and my mind's reaction when confronting a space. When I get to school, my hand, unconsciously, goes over my head to check if my hijab is proper. As soon as I get to school, my body forgets that I am wearing a top and shorts, and my hair is flying freely in the air; it acts as if I am at a school in Iran.

I am driving on the streets of Toronto. Seeing a police car, my hand, unconsciously, goes toward the radio to bring the volume down. My body forgets that there is no such thing as illegal music in Canada; it acts as if I am driving on Tehran's streets and could get in trouble for listening to underground or illegal music. Just as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger states in *Being and Time*, “Dasein takes space in” (350). My body and my mind took all those spaces in Iran in, and I am carrying them around. As British-Australian theorist Sara Ahmed writes in *Queer Phenomenology*, “The horizon is not an object that I apprehend: I do not see it. The horizon is what gives objects their contours, and it even allows

such objects to be reached” (55). I did not see the revolution, but its contours marked my body, my mind, and my behaviours. The spaces that I used to be in still exist in my memories, and I move around with them everywhere I go. I walk around Toronto physically, but I live in Tehran mentally. Everywhere here reminds me of a space in Iran, the social and political character of which force my body to act as if I am still in that space though I am miles away from it. It feels like my body moves back and forth in time and space in a second. My body and mind have taken in past spaces and their pains.

I decided to focus on these connections as a starting point. I began to review and revisit my memories, this time with attention to all the spatial details I could remember. To better understand my body's unconscious behaviour, I began to pay attention to the political and social characters of different spaces my mind absorbed from the past and take notes, draw sketches of them. That involved much Remembering. Even the process of making was an opportunity for me to remember more and more. While working with my family on the project, every piece brought up a memory, which opened hours of discussion and conversation between us that carried other memories, other spatial and social characters. The memories provoked new memories. It was like we were caught in a trap of the past, unable to get free. And each memory carried a pain with itself, a tear, a mourning.



## REMEMBERING; HEARING; REMEMBERING

I follow the Iranian news on an everyday basis. Even if I don't want to follow it, it follows me. My family, all the time, talks about the latest news in Iran. The news channels are on all the time, and even if I want to, I can't stop hearing. As soon as I sit to have breakfast in the morning, a family member opens up a conversation about the latest news in Iran: "U.S. forces killed Qassim Suleimani," "Iran shot the Ukrainian flight," etc.

I open my Instagram to post an image, and its feed is full of information about Iran: "Child Marriage in Iran—Over 7,000 girls under-14 got married in 3 months" (NCRI); "Pouya Bakhtiari, 27, was killed by a gunshot to the head in Karaj on November 16, 2019 as he joined nationwide protests against the government's 50% increase in subsidized gas prices at the time" (Lipin and Haghjoo); "Navid Afkari: Iran executes young wrestler despite global outcry" (BBC, "Navid Afkari"). Everything I hear or read recalls a memory, a pain again. I hear the news about Navid Afkari and many more victims, and it reminds me of the other victims I knew. There is no duvet, no staircase under which to hide from the constant attack of the news. There is no space where I can close the door to the endless presence of brutality. There is no place to avoid hearing the sound of millions of broken hearts, humiliated minds. There is no time to forget Neda's eyes—Neda, who was shot in the chest in front of millions of eyes, her own wide in silent protest—in Iran, when the violence happens again and again. There is no corner

in which I can avoid hearing the lament of the mother of Sattar Beheshti, a blogger who was murdered after his arrest by Iranian police on charges of "action against national security on social networks and Facebook" (BBC, "Iranian blogger"), the lament of the mother of Behnam Mahjoubi, a religious minority who died tragically under torture after he was denied medical care (al-Arabiya). The number of bereaved families increases daily, and the sounds of mourning get louder and louder.

Every bit of news carries a pain; every bit of news evokes a memory. Every memory brings a pain, every pain brings a tear. And I reserve a black piece for each victim: one for each mother, one for each memory, one for each tear.

## REMEMBERING; THEORIZING

*"That all social relations become real and concrete, a part of our lived existence, only when they are spatially "inscribed"—that is concretely represented—in the social production of space. Social reality is not just coincidentally spatial, existing "in" space, it is presuppositionally and ontologically spatial. There is no unspatialized social reality. There are no aspatial social processes. Even in the realm of pure abstraction . . . there is a pervasive and pertinent, if often hidden, spatial dimension." (Lefebvre 46).*

After digging into the domain of my memories and imaginations, I noticed three different spaces that I have experienced. The

Firstspace, or real space, which I describe as a physical space, is where my body interacts with space in time. My senses feel it, see it, hear it, and smell it in the moment based on my orientation toward it. I borrowed the term Firstspace from the American geographer Edward Soja, whose ideas are in line with what Lefebvre describes as spatial practice or perceived space. Lefebvre's spatial practice, under neocapitalism, embodies a close association between daily routines and urban reality. It is not only a visible, measurable material—our way of reproducing it and our way of perceiving it also count. Our orientation toward objects, toward events, toward spaces, depicts our consciousness. As Ahmed describes:

*“Consciousness itself is directed or oriented toward objects, which is what gives consciousness its ‘worldly’ dimension. . . . I can perceive an object only insofar as my orientation allows me to see it” (27).*

). For instance, when I remember the night my father was released from Evin, I can only remember people's feet or the sofreh on the ground and sounds. I can't remember much about anywhere higher than my 90-centimetres height.

The Secondspace, or memory-attached, unattainable space, is a “non-thing” background space that used to be a “thing” (Merleau-Ponty 24), a space I used to be in, in the past. It is a space that I cannot reach now. It is a place that exists in my memories and moves around with me everywhere I go as long as those memories are alive, unfolding itself sporadically. I borrowed the term

Secondspace from Soja again. Soja connects his Secondspace to Lefebvre's conceived space. He defines Secondspaces as mental spaces that “are thus the representation of power and ideology, of control and surveillance” (67).

Although my Secondspace is also the representation of power and control, there is a difference between what Soja describes as a Secondspace and my use of the term. Soja's Secondspace is “the space of purely creative imagination of some artists and poets” (Thirdspace 67), whereas my Secondspace is the space of human beings' memory and mind that could be still under the colonizer's control. It creates a relationship between the past, present, and future. In the rush of the Secondspace, I find myself, in a moment, “between two horizons of absence, the past and future” (Merleau-Ponty 24).

My Thirdspace is comparable to Soja's Thirdspace:

*“[The space where] everything comes together . . . subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (Soja, Thirdspace 56-57).*

It is an imaginary space similar to Lefebvre's representational space, which emerges from the first and second spaces. It is a space that “seeks to change” (Lefebvre 39), that I create in my

mind based on “figure” and “background” (Merleau-Ponty 24), Firstspace and Secondspace, to redefine my identity and move “beyond.” I refer to my Thirdspace as what Bhabha calls “the realm of the beyond”:

*“the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the ‘beyond’” (2).*

To me, the Firstspace is where I try to measure, to understand, and to analyze the sociospatial characters of an event. The Secondspace is where feelings and emotions are attached to the Firstspace and are strongly associated with its political and social contexts. The Thirdspace, though, is a place for resistance, a battlefield for centre and periphery, where the colonized can claim their identity from the colonizer.

## REMEMBERING; RESEARCHING

I remember, and my memories become the inspiration for my thesis project. I start to research based on what I remember. I choose the moqarnas, an architectural element attached to my spatial memories, able to carry all my life’s conflicts in its forms and shapes. The moqarnas and the process Iranian artisans use to create it become the core object I will use to materialize my memories. Its facility for conversion and innovation will enable me



**Figure 3** process of creating moqarnas.

Photo by Alireza Sarvdalir, Moqarnas Workshop instructor, 2020

The image showing the process of creating moqarnas by Iranian artisans. They start by tracing the projection of the 3D forms on the ground using tiles and plaster. Eventually, they install the forms from the ceiling in layers to get the desired 3D composition.

to transmit the idea of Thirdspace.

To learn more about the history of the moqarnas and the process of creating it, I participated in a workshop held by Alireza Sarvdaliri, whose Master of Architecture thesis focuses on the moqarnas's history and structure.

I remember moqarnas and I ask questions about it based on my memories. I relate anything I learn to my memories when I can find a link. For instance, there is an element in Islamic geometrical plans called lachak. Lachak refers to a triangle in the corner of various design surfaces like carpets. However, as soon as I hear the term, it reminds me of my mother's red Channel rousari—in Farsi, lachak is another term for rousari, which is traditionally triangular, just like the lachak in architecture or carpet designs. I compare the position of lachaks in architecture and on Iranian women's heads. In architecture, the lachak is in the corner, while on the women's heads, it pushes them into the corner, into the margin.

Iranian artisans' process of creating a moqarnas (Figure 3) inspired me to take a similar approach to build my siah chador. To be able to have control over such a large piece, I sat on the ground to work, like they do. This action made my body even more engaged with space. Moving around the real space working on the past space, it felt like my body was interacting with both the material and mental spaces instantaneously (Figure 4).



**Figure 4** The process of fusing the pieces onto the mesh  
Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2021  
Thirthing Studio Gallery

## REMEMBERING; CONSTRUCTING

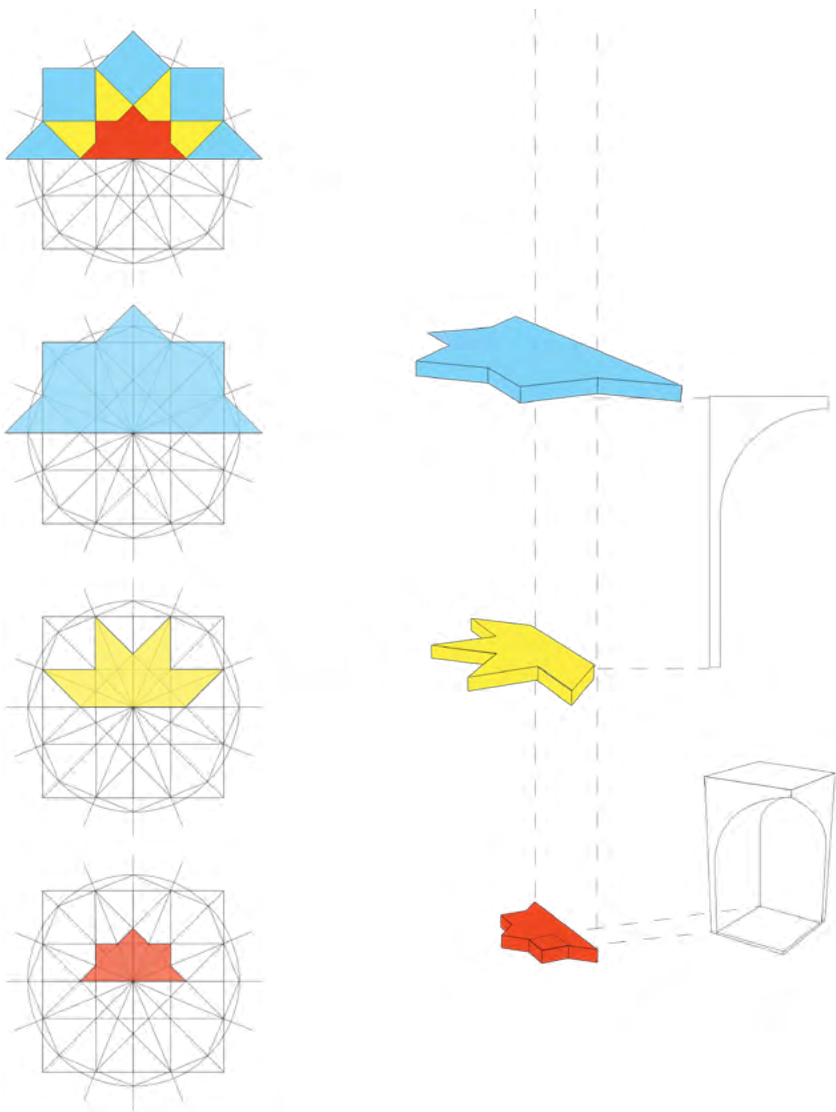
When there is a conversation about moqarnas, the boldest one that comes to my mind is the one at Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan. I can't remember how old I was when I saw it for the first time, but I was dazzled by the strength in its beauty. Each time I talk or think about moqarnas, that is the only moqarnas I imagine. I imagine it standing alone, separate from the architecture that is holding it up. I imagine it as an independent entity floating in air.

To better understand the parts and construction of moqarnas, I decided to create one unit of the Sheikh Fazlollah moqarnas pattern. By creating a moqarnas model using cardboard (Figure 5), I realized there are two main elements in a moqarnas: geometrical horizontal patterns that get elevated and expand through the whole system and vertical structures of various shapes and dimensions that hold the horizontal members (Figures 6 ). The relationship between the horizontal and vertical elements is what makes the moqarnas a complex composition.

After constructing a moqarnas unit and learning about the main components, I examined different ways of abstracting the geometries, just like the memories in my mind. The stable, rigid, and still character of the moqarnas could not express my idea on its own. However, I could see the capability for conversion and innovation in it.



**Figure 5** Constructing moqarnas using cardboard.  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2019



**Figure 6** First diagram showing the process of creating moqarnas using Illustrator.  
By Sara Mozafari, 2019

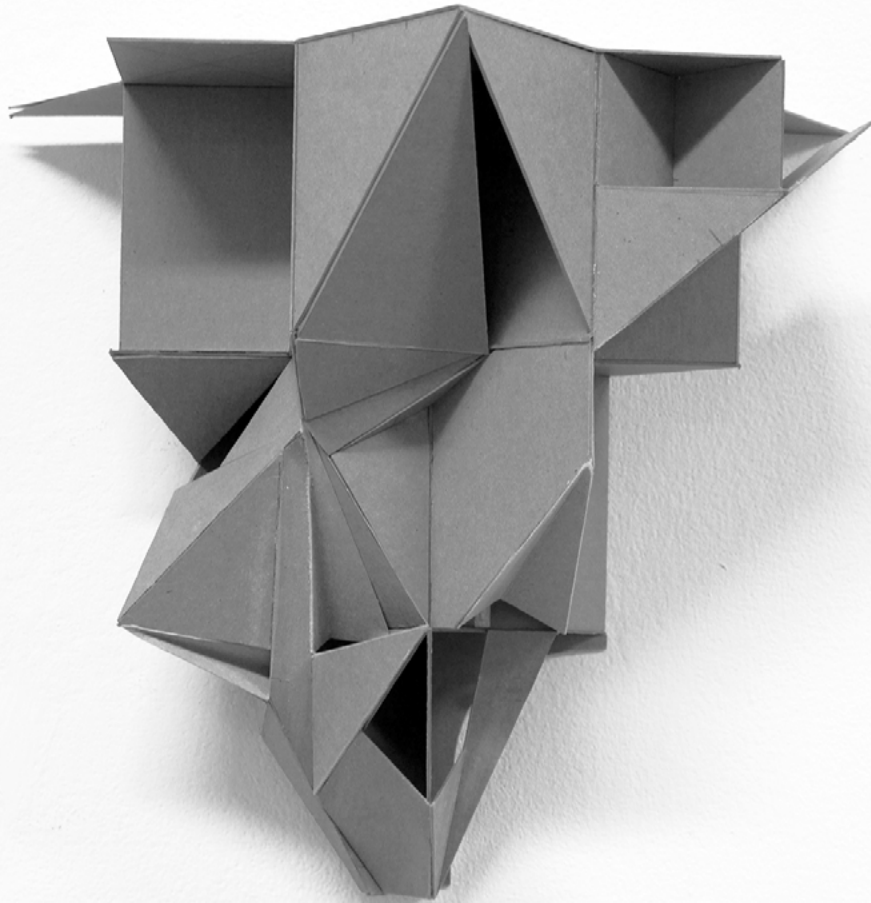
## REMEMBERING; DECONSTRUCTING

I needed a process that would transform the moqarnas's rigid, stable, and still forms into an abstraction that represented my memories' fragments. At the same time, my ambition was to retain the original form of the moqarnas to emphasize the historical and social dimensions of my identity. I saw connections and great potential in this form. I wanted to make the moqarnas abstract—recognizable and, simultaneously, unrecognizable. After realizing how I could convert the structure, I decided to keep the vertical elements and play with the structure arbitrarily. Using cardboard again, I created a prototype in which the moqarnas was recognizable but abstracted (Figure 7). However, the random path I took to get to this abstraction didn't convince me.

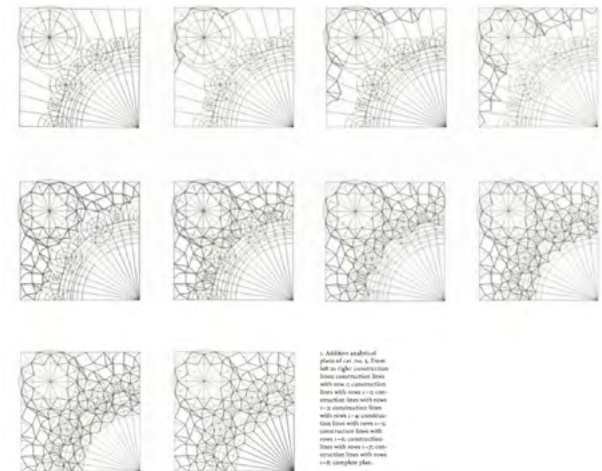
## REMEMBERING; ORIENTING

I started to research the roots and origins of the moqarnas to understand it as a design system and be better able to create abstract forms out of it. I reviewed many patterns (Figure 8). Through my workshops with Alireza Sarvdalir, I found out that what we call the moqarnas pattern is, in fact, the projection of the moqarnas on the ground. I began to understand the orders and geometries, which led me to draw a simple moqarnas pattern and comprehend the relationship between the parts.

I didn't feel it was necessary to go too far, as the root was in my gaze, the product of mathematics and geometry. The systematic geometrical and mathematical quality of the moqarnas guided me.



**Figure 7** Deconstructing the moqarnas's structure using cardboard.  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2019



**Figure 8** Studying a moqarnas pattern  
(Necipoglu 352)

## REMEMBERING; SOFTENING ARCHITECTURE; DISORIENTING

I remember all the dresses my mom made for me. I remember her passion for dressmaking. I remember her sewing room in our home in Iran. It was a tiny, two-by-three-metre room, which could only hold her sewing machine and her. The room didn't have any windows or doors. It only had an opening. There was a sewing machine and a chair in it, and it was full of colour from all the textiles it held. Creating my piece using textile connects me to all these memories and experiences. Through the process of learning the geometries of the moqarnas and the folding technique I used to play with its forms, I began to disorient the orientation. To get a better result, I decided to use the foldable material I know best: textile.

For the first prototype, I used my mother's leftover materials (Figure 9). Each piece of fabric recalled an event, brought up a memory. Using fabric to create moqarnas made it capable of conversion and disorientation (Figure 10). I was able to create a playful form that yielded various shapes. It became an interactive structure that could go back and forth from order to disorder, from 2D to 3D, from inside to outside (Figure 11).

By softening the architecture (Figure 12), I was able to get various results, and each time a completely different shape. Everything about these prototypes paralleled my inner emotions, and I decided to continue applying this technique for the entire project.

## REMEMBERING; WEARING ARCHITECTURE

Softening architecture encouraged me to imagine wearing it. I started to create a wearable prototype with the softened patterns. Inspired by the colours of moqarnas mosaics, I made a gown with different blue shades (Figure 12). The result was impressive; however, there were two main issues.

The first issue was related to the material. The gown looked too soft—its architectural quality disappeared when I wore it. I wanted it to be soft enough to wear and, at the same time, hard enough to demonstrate the architectural and spatial story behind it. I began to research ways of hardening the fabric enough to be able to wear it while keeping its forms unbending.

The second issue was the concept. The idea of wearing the architecture was appealing to me; however, I could not form a deep connection with the gown. I couldn't associate it with my life and my pains. I revisited my memories to see what I should wear. The most recognizable clothing that I could relate to my past was hijab. The shape and the character of the chador made it the best option for my project. Thus, I chose the chador as a symbol of my pains and memories and hijab as an object that still suppresses me.





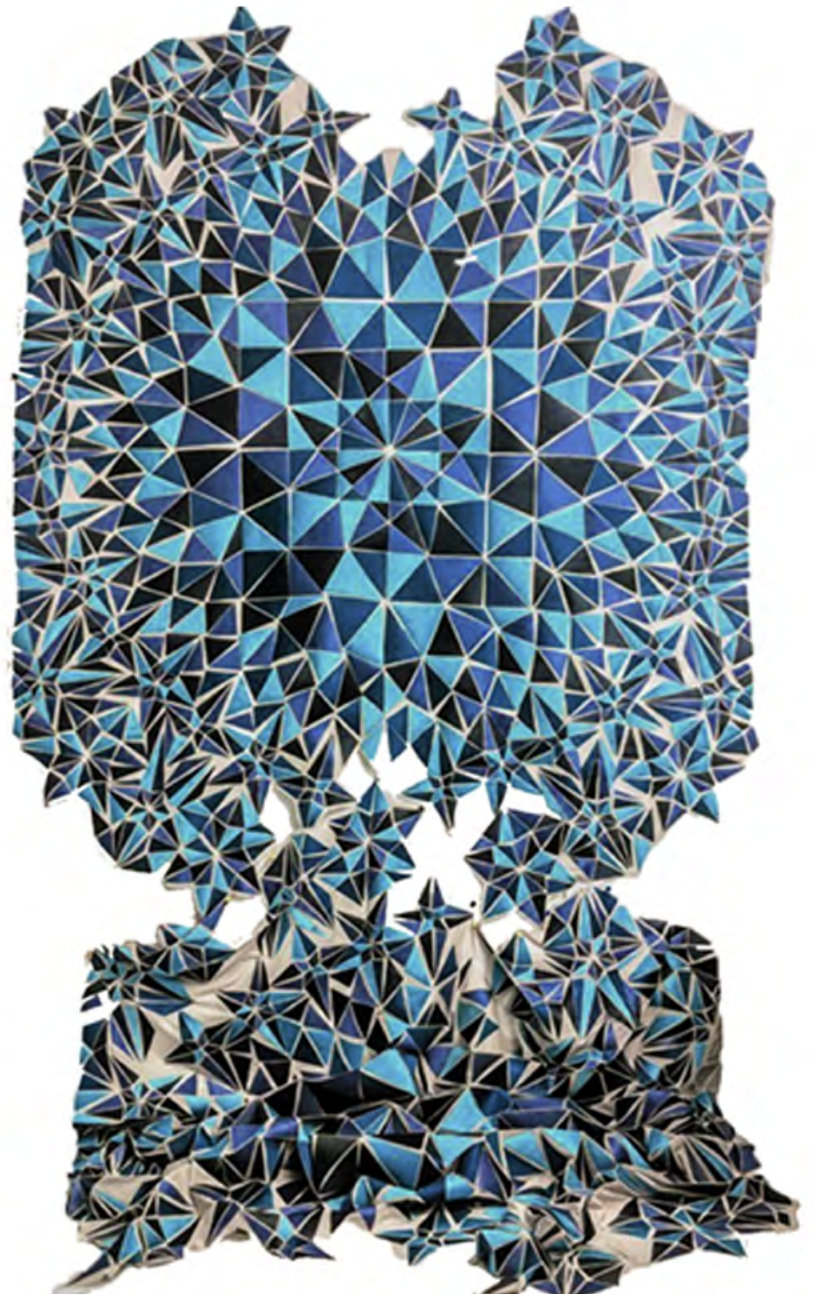
**Figure 9** First prototype using moqarnas pattern and textile.  
Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2020  
28 inches by 28 inches.



**Figure 10** First prototype using moqarnas pattern and textile in 3D.  
Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2020  
Variable dimensions.



**Figure 11** *Playing with a single pattern and getting various forms.*  
Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2020  
*Variable dimensions.*



**Figure 12** Softening architecture.

Left image Source: *Top historical mosques in Isfahan that Amaze You!* (2020, August 23). Retrieved April 28, 2021, from <https://blog.apochi.com/top-historical-mosques-in-isfahan-that-amaze-you/>

Right image: Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2020  
55 inches by 110 inches.

## REMEMBERING; HARDENING

To harden enough fabric to keep it rigid when needed and to get more playful with the geometrical forms, I applied different materials and stiffening techniques. I first tried traditional methods I remembered from watching my mother making crafts. These included gelatine and corn starch. Although they stiffened the fabric on a small scale, none of them worked for the large scale. I finally started using industrial stiffeners. The spray didn't work well enough, so I decided to soak the existing pieces of fabric in diluted stiffener and water. The result was an exceedingly stiff fabric that was fascinating on its own and made me consider using it for other projects (Figure 14); however, it was not soft enough to make a wearable piece (Figure 15).

After several attempts, it became clear that I should avoid stiffening the mesh. What worried me was that the satin fabrics I used for the geometries couldn't get stiff enough, and I had to find a solution. After discussing the issue with my mother, I noticed using natural materials like cotton yielded better results with the stiffener. To add a harder quality to the finished pieces, my mother suggested adding an interface layer to the fabric. I purchased black, cotton fabric, soaked pieces of it in the mixture of water and stiffener (Figure 16), ironed them (Figure 17), layered them with an interface, added an iron-on adhesive (Figure 18), and finally fused everything together onto the mesh (Figure 19). The result was appealing, and I decided to follow the same direction for the entire

project.



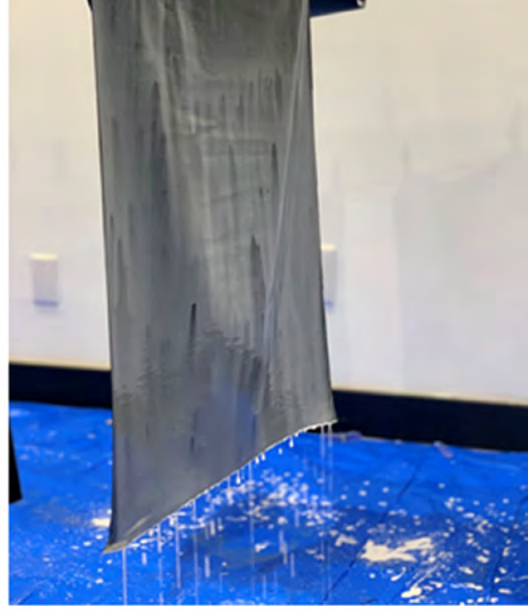
**Figure 13** *Wearable architecture.*  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2020



**Figure 14** *Hardening the architecture through the process of soaking.*  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2020

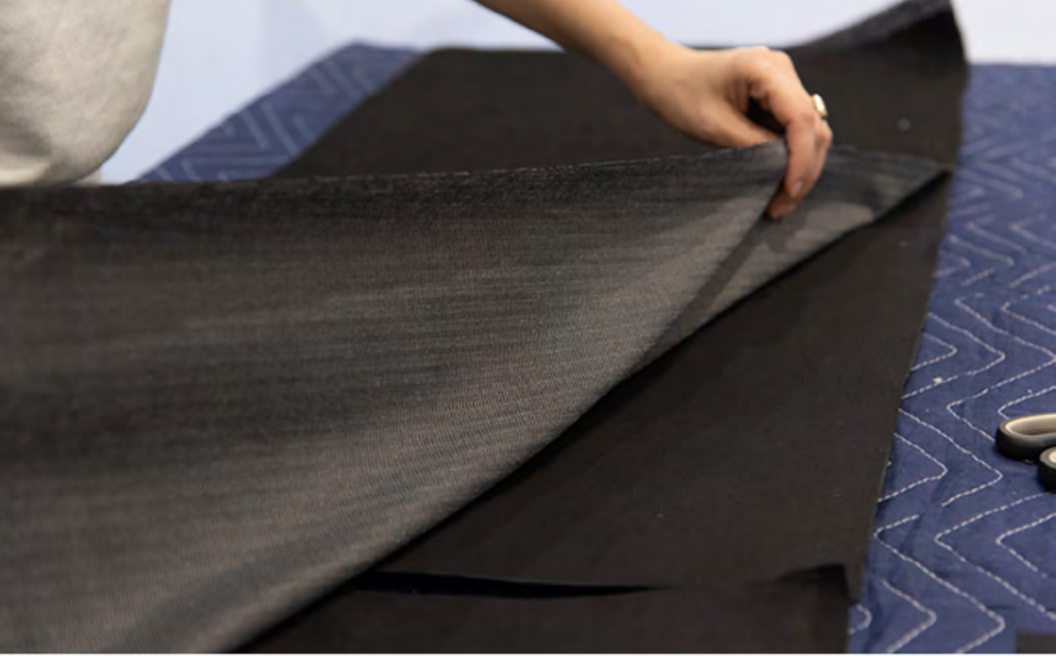


**Figure 15** *Moqarnas pattern hardened by soaking.*  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2020



**Figure 16** Stiffening the cotton fabric.  
*Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021*

**Figure 17** Ironing the stiffened cotton fabric.  
*Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021*

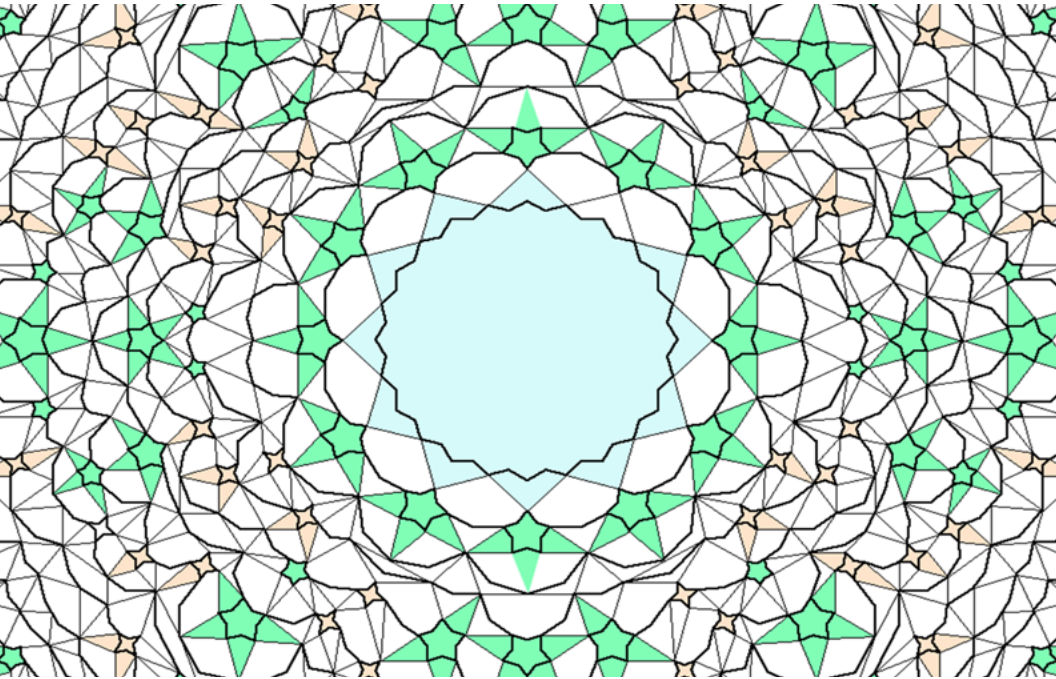


**Figure 18** *Gluing the interface and fusing paper to the cotton fabric.*  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021

**Figure 19** *Fusing the stiffened cotton fabric to the mesh.*  
Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2021

## REMEMBERING; TRACING MEMORIES

I decided to create an enormous black veil to represent my memories and my pains. I wanted something large that would show the way my memories, which are related to discrimination and injustice I experienced, push me down and slow my movement toward the future. In order to be able to create my large-scale chador, I first had to computerize it. I started by tracing Sheikh Lottollah's moqarnas pattern (Figure 20) using Illustrator, repeating the moqarnas pattern to make the chador pattern (Figure 21).



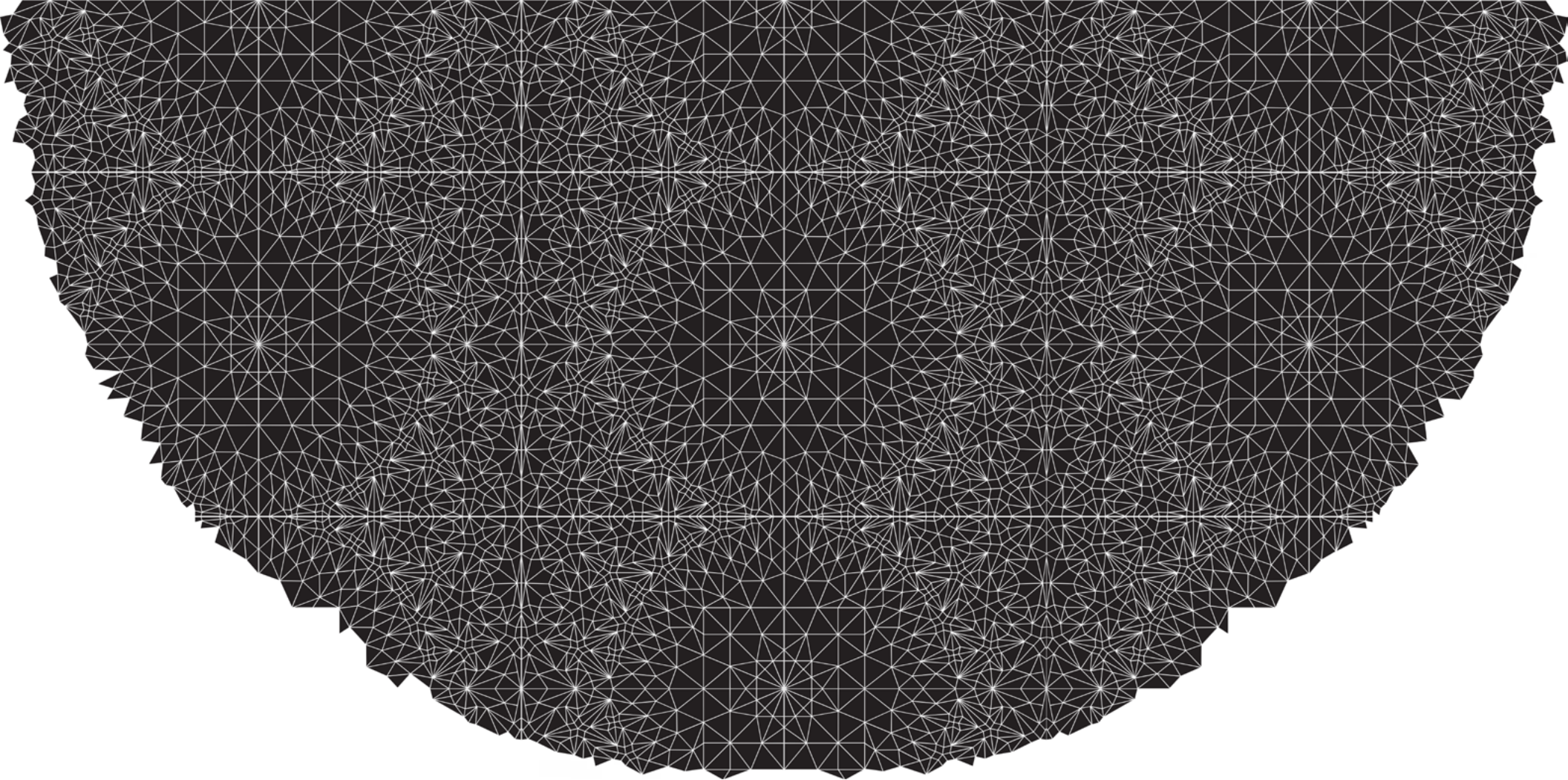
**Figure 20** Sheikh Lottollah mosque moqarnas pattern. (Takahashi)

As I traced the forms that would become the piece, I repeated the words "siah chador" over and over again, out loud. I noticed a conflict in my mind created by this repetition. I started imagining the piece as a tent and a veil at the same time. A tent that I hadn't ever seen, but that I had heard about from my father. Almost every night, I spend at least an hour talking with him, either about his childhood and life in general or about philosophers and different theories in the history of philosophy. My father is a dentist, but he decided to study philosophy when he was 55, going back to school to pursue his BA in philosophy. I love spending hours and hours talking with him, and I record his voice when he talks about his childhood or about the culture in Lorestan, where his roots are. Among these recordings, I found one in which he talks about siah chador, the black tent (Figure 22).



**Figure 22** A Siah Chador by Tribe No.6. Bahlooli [7] (Hassas and Bardzinska-Bonenberg 167)





**Figure 21** Chador created by tracing a moqarnas pattern in Illustrator.  
*Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2020*

The siah chador is a type of shelter made by Iranian nomadic women. My grandfather was Khan of one of the nomadic tribes of Lorestan, a province in Iran. My father has told me many stories about the siah chador. Every single siah chador contains several long strips of woven goat wool called lat. To make each lat, the nomadic women of Lorestan weave goat wool into pieces of cloth about sixty centimetres by fifteen metres. They stitch the lats together to create a ceiling large enough to drape over the simple wooden structure and the bamboo walls (chopogh) of their tents. They choose material locally, and the size of the tent is based on the class and size of the family that makes and inhabits it. Nomads fold and pack up their tents when they migrate and unfold them again when they arrive at a new destination. According to Nasser Ranjbar and Mehnoush Mahmoudi in their case study “The Morphology of Black Tent in Nomads of Southwestern Iran”:

*“[The] black tent is a four-season residence, slightly adjusting to the changing seasons and climates of the region; In addition to considering the living conditions, it also focuses on cultural and artistic aspects of life, and presents some form of realistic original technology” (17).*

The tent's mobile quality, its black colour, its dual meaning in Farsi, and its connection to my ancestors made it the perfect choice for my project, helping me finalize my decision to turn a Black Veil into a Black Tent through a performance.

## REMEMBERING, DRAWING MEMORIES

At this point, I had established my idea for the thesis exhibition. I wanted to do a performance installation that would transform a Black Veil into a Black Tent. Now the issue was how to execute it. My initial plan was to use OCAD University's laser cutter machines. However, COVID-19 made that impossible. I had to do everything by hand, but how? The piece contained around 9,000 pieces. I had to draw, cut, and fuse everything by hand in about five months. I could not do it without involving mathematics and algorithms, so my brother helped me plan the process. Taking inspiration from the black tents, I decided to divide the chador's mesh into lats. The concept behind this method, resembling the nomadic women of Lorestan's process of making shelter, helped me control the creation of my extremely large, semicircular chador with a radius of 3.5 metres.

I ended up cutting five lats out of the mesh. The lats' sizes varied and became smaller as they got closer to the chador's arc. I numbered all the individual geometrical pieces in Illustrator, printed the numbered drawings, and attached them to the mesh lats. This allowed me to use the printed patterns as a guide (Figures 23 and 24). Now I had to draw 24 iterations of each individual geometrical form, which I would later cut out. To do so, I printed each form with its number and used it as a stencil to draw the forms on the stiffened cotton fabric. I did this with the help of my family members: my brother, Kaveh Mozafari, and my mother, Shamsi Rahdan. We



**Figure 23** Printed, numbered lats on paper.  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2021

sat for hours drawing the forms and talking. We talked about our memories, and these memories brought up more memories. It felt like each geometrical space had a memory attached to it. We drew and we remembered. We remembered, and we drew. We drew the memories. The memories became drawings (Figure 25).



**Figure 24** Mesh on the numbered guide lat.  
Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2021



**Figure 25** Drawing and cutting moqarnas patterns.

Photo by Sara Mozafari, 2020

For the whole process my family members: Kaveh Mozafari, Shamsi Rahdan, Nazanin Ghilichi, helped to be able to finish the work.

## REMEMBERING, CUTTING MEMORIES

After drawing, we had to cut. The drawings had numbers attached to them, and there were 391 numbers. We cut 24 of each to make 9,384 pieces. We didn't use all of them, but we cut 9,384 memories. The process was full of laughter and pain at the same time. After cutting each set of 24, we packed them in a plastic bag to keep them safe and ordered. I had 391 bags of memories in order, ready to be fused onto the mesh, to become a Black Veil, to become a Black Tent.

## REMEMBERING, FUSING MEMORIES

The process of fusing was more like excavating my mind—finding a memory, or a source of a pain, treating it, putting it back, this time in order. It was like ordering my mind and bringing all the pains in front of my eyes to see and to treat them. I fused Nine Thousand Memories in order onto a mesh to cure them. After completing the fusing process, I glued each corner of each shape with hot, black glue. The result resembled small black beads, which reminded me of my grandmother (Figure 26). She always wore black. She loved going with me to shop for new clothes. And she loved black beads. The more black beads a dress had, the more elegant, to her, that dress became. I glued around 30,000 bead-like drops of hot glue in memory of my grandmother. Each bead representing a story she never got a chance to tell me.



**Figure 26** Hot gluing the shapes.  
*Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2021*

## REMEMBERING, THIRDING

*“As another aspect of defining a Thirdspace perspective, I described the critical method used by Lefebvre and Foucault as “thricing”, a deconstruction of a prevailing binary logic (e.g., the two modes of thinking about space) and the creation of a third, an alternative, a significantly different logic or perspective. In this sense, Thirdspace includes both material and mental spaces, the real and the imagined, what I described as Firstspace and Secondspace; but also contains something more, something else that we can begin to understand only by widening the scope of our geographical imagination” (Soja, “Interview” 113).*

I remember and I perform. I describe my performance as Thricing. My performance starts with my buried body, which represents my lost identity under the collapse of memories (Figures 27). My movements give it life and transform its shapes. I slowly begin to move and appear (Figures 28 and 29). I struggle to leave my past behind and move forward, but the veil's weight prevents me from moving (Figure 30). As I stand up, the soft sculpture transforms into a black veil (Figure 31 and 32). There are ropes coming from the walls passing through the veil. I crawl toward the ropes, which are tied to hooks on the walls. I untie the ropes and pull them to lift the weight of the veil from my body. I move around the space at different points of the performance, pulling the veil (Figure 33). The veil moves around with me. Finally, it leaves my body and takes the shape of a tent where I can rest (Figure 34). At the end of the

performance, I rest in a corner, under the lights and shadow of my pains and memories, until it's time to pack my tent up again. The performance is a way to visualize how the simultaneous existence of material and mental spaces, the real and the imagined world, can create a constant shift from order to disorder, from centre to periphery, from a live world to an unattainable world, and vice versa.



**Figure 27** My buried body under the weight of my memories and my pains.

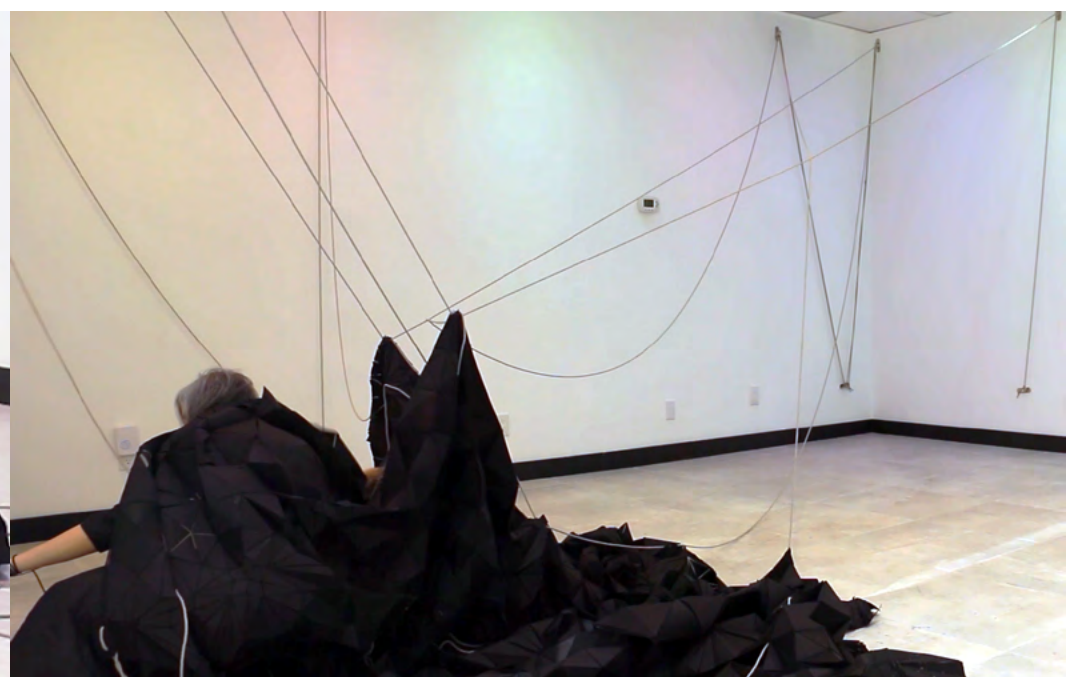
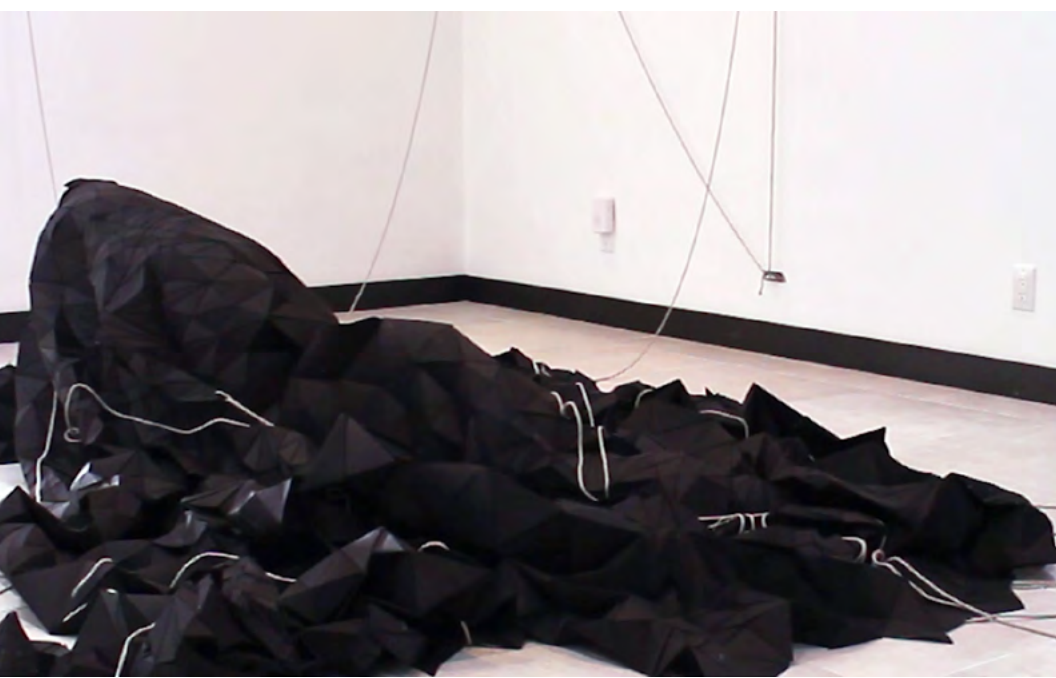
Top image: by Niaz Farrahi, 2021

Top image: by Sara Mozafari, 2021

Top image showing my body buried under the chador from outside while the bottom image showing a view from the inside at the same time.



**Figure 28** *Begining of moving and appearing.*  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021



**Figure 29** *Beginning of moving and appearing.*  
Video stills by Sara Mozafai, 2021





**Figure 30** *Struggle to leave my past behind and move forward*  
Video stills by Sara Mozafai, 2021



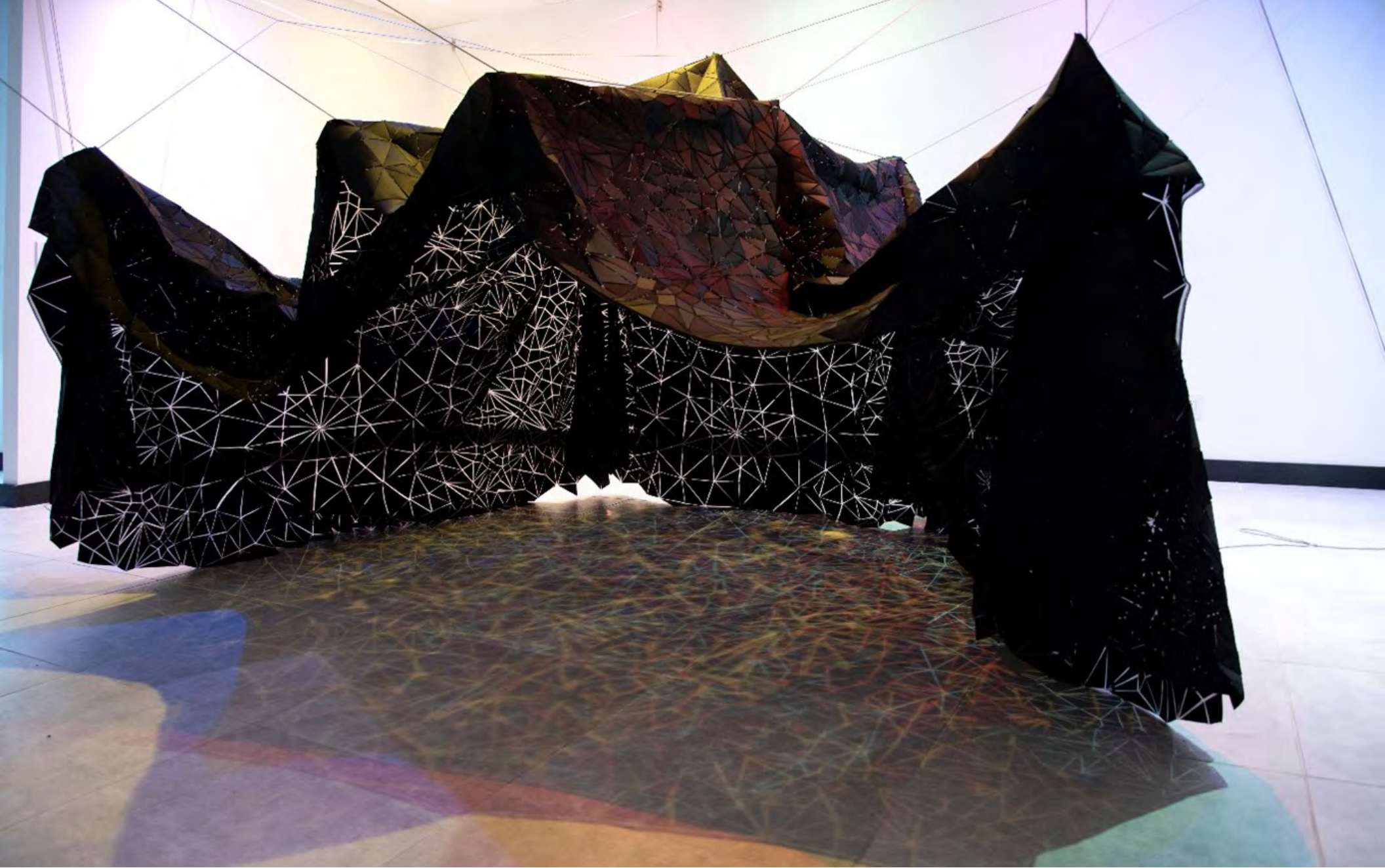
**Figure 31** Transformation of the soft sculpture into a black veil.  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021



**Figure 32** Transformation of the soft sculpture into a black veil.  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021



**Figure 33** Pulling the veil.  
*Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021*



**Figure 34** *Thirdspace.*

*Photo by Sara Mozafai, 2021*

The black veil takes the shape of a tent which I call Thirdspace.

## CONCLUSION: REMEMBERING, THIRDSPACE

*"I use Thirdspace to refer to a particular way of thinking about and interpreting socially produced space. It is a way of thinking that sees the spatiality of our lives, the human geographies in which we live, as having the same scope and critical significance as the historical and social dimensions of our lives." (Soja, "Interview" 113).*

In his book, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Soja argues there is a socio-spatial dialectic in which spatial and social forms, relations, and processes are equally constitutive. Thirthing with *Nine Thousand Memories* is an attempt to visualize this cumulative dialectic.

As Ahmed discusses in *Queer Phenomenology*, my body becomes the space by taking it up while moving around in it. My body is an extension of the spaces that I have experienced. But what I take from those spaces is determined by my orientation toward them, which is determined both by my memories and by the continued existence of those spaces without me, the news that tells me what's happening in places I no longer am. In *Thirthing with Nine Thousand Memories* I use the moqarnas's facility for conversion to represent both my displacement and my continued orientation toward the spaces of my past. I have created a *siah chador* using a moqarnas pattern. It contains around nine thousand geometrical forms fused onto a mesh. Each form represents

a memory, and each memory represents a pain. My performance starts with my body buried under the weight of these memories and pains. I struggle to leave my pains behind and move forward; however, the memories and pains do not leave me alone, and they move around with me. Finally, I lift all the pains up from my body and build a shelter with them where I can find comfort. After installation, the light, as an element existing in real space, passing through my memories, plays a significant role, "thirthing the space" by projecting and overlapping the margins of my memories on the ground and creating a playful abstract effect (Figures 35).

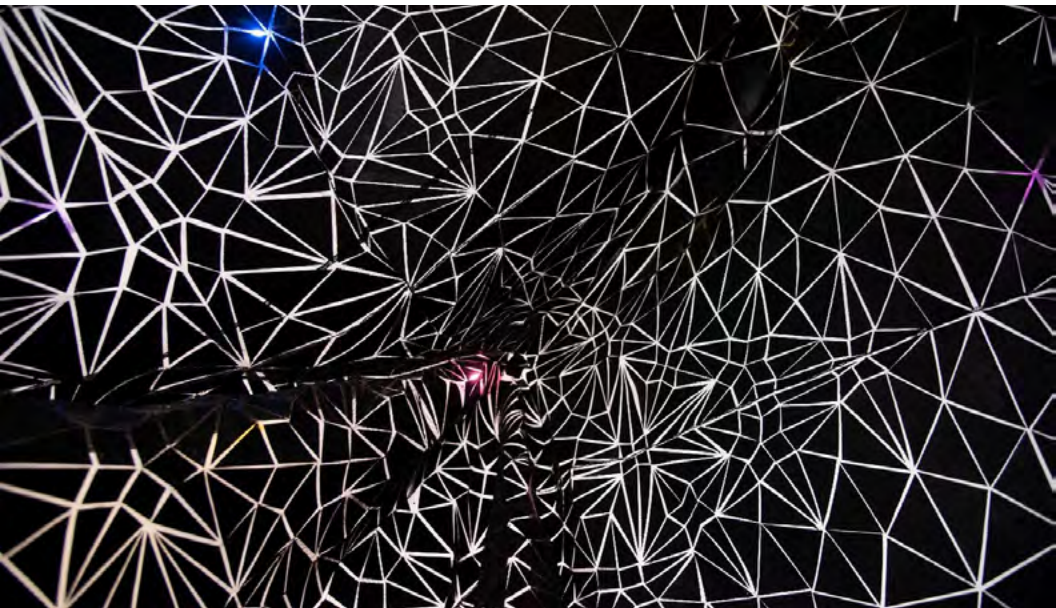


**Figure 35** *Thirdspace-Lighting*

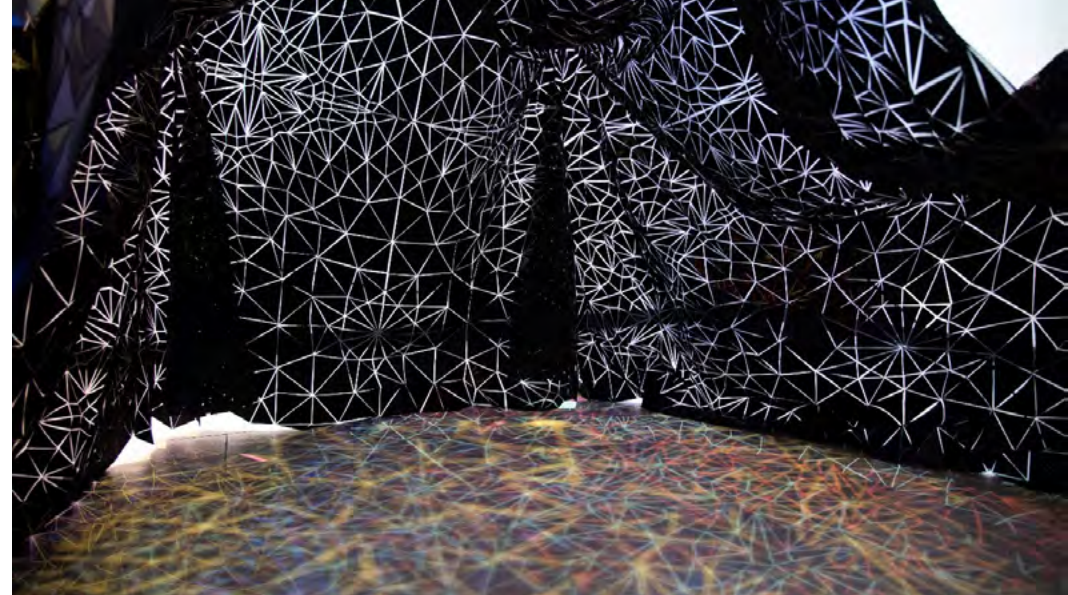
*Photo by Kaveh Mozafai, 2021*

The image showing the light reflection and projection of the form on the ground.

My source of inspiration for installing the tent was the nomadic tents of Lorestan. The nomads use ropes to anchor their tents to the ground. I also use ropes to anchor my tent, but attached to the studio's walls, not the floor (Figure 37). In doing so I question my authority over the land, suggesting that there is no land that I can claim, and my home is hovering in the air. Transforming the veil made of a moqarnas pattern, which represents my spatial memories, into the tent conveys the idea of creating a temporary home with my pains and memories. A home which I can wear and carry around with myself, reinstalling it again wherever I get permission to do so.

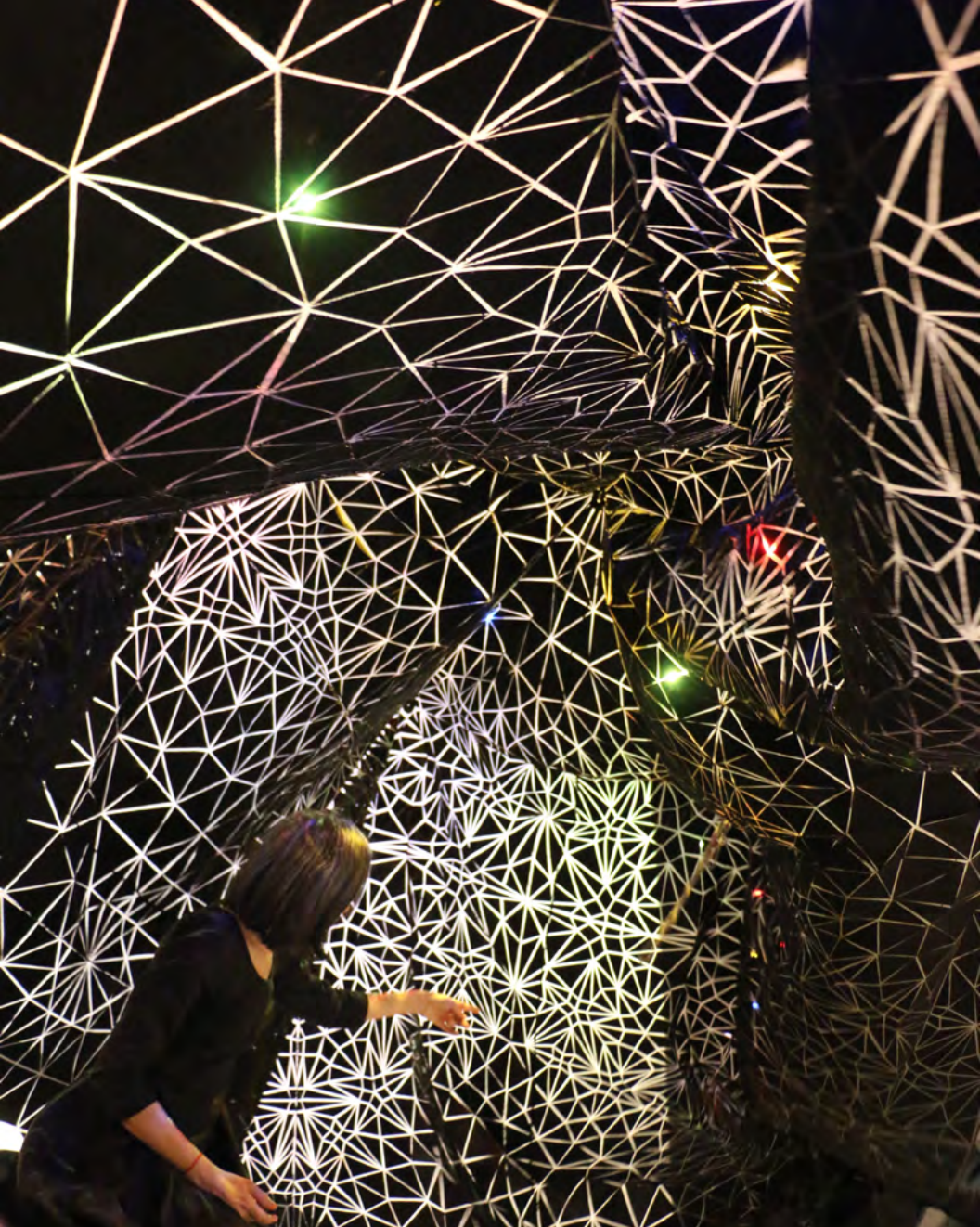


**Figure 36** *Thirdspace-Detail*  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021  
The image showing the the abstraction of the forms after installation.



After creating the Thirdspace through Thirthing, I began thinking of adding an extra, social layer to the piece. For my future research in a similar context, I intend to examine the possibility of making the piece sensitive to the human gaze, movement, temperature, or touch. I plan to explore how confrontations and interactions with society affect the Thirdspace I have created, allowing the conditions of the present to alter the shape of the home I have created. I anticipate tracking and recording my body's reactions in various situations and defining various models to visualize these reactions. I aim to show how social and historical memories could affect present spatial behaviours, questioning how the behaviour of others in relation to the space we share could have different effects on my body's perception and reaction.

**Figure 37** *Thirdspace-Interior*  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021  
The image showing the light reflection and projection of the form on the ground.



**Figure 38 Experiencing Thirdspace**  
*Photo by Kaveh Mozafari, 2021*

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### AZAN

The Islamic call to prayer.

### CHADOR

1. A type of veil worn by women from a more traditional background. It is a semicircular, full-body-length fabric that is open down the front. It is tossed over the woman's head and she holds it closed in the front. A chador may be either black or light colored—mostly floral. Black chadors are mostly used outside and floral, light-coloured chadors are used indoors and during prayers. The black chador is recognized as the greatest hijab by Iranian authorities.

2. A tent.

### CHADORI

A woman who wears a black chador.

### EVIN

Evin Prison is located in the Evin neighbourhood of Tehran, Iran. The prison has been the primary site for the housing of Iran's political prisoners since 1972, before and after the Islamic Revolution, in a purpose-built wing nicknamed "Evin University" due to the number of intellectuals housed there. Evin Prison has been accused of committing "serious human rights abuses" against the political dissidents and critics of the government held within it (Wikipedia).

## **LIVED SPACE**

As described by Henri Lefebvre, lived space is a simple combination or mixture of “real” and “imagined” space in varying doses (Soja, Thirdspace 10).

## **MAGHNAEH AND MANTEAU**

A maghnaeh is a cone-shaped headcover worn by Iranian women that covers down to the shoulders and over the chest with an opening for the face. It comes in a variety of colors. It is worn in combination with the manteau, a long jacket that is mandatory in institutions and most offices in Iran.

## **MOQARNAS (MUQARNAS IN ARABIC)**

Moqarnas or muqarnas is a vaulting system based on the replication of units arranged in tiers, each of which supports another one corbeled on top of it. The final result is a stair-like arrangement that is sometimes referred to as honeycomb or stalactite vaulting. The units are made of wood, brick, plaster, or stone and can be painted or, as in the case of moqarnases made of brick or plaster, covered with glazed tiles. Compositions can be located in different parts of a building, articulating a column capital, supporting a minaret's balcony, or vaulting over an entry portal, niche, or hall. Moqarnas vaults are usually part of a double-shell arrangement and are therefore visible only from the inside of a building. In some cases, as in the mausoleums of Nur al-Din in Damascus (1172) and Imam Dur in Samarra (circa 1085), the moqarnas is also reflected

on the outside (Necipoglu, 349).

## **RUSARI AND MANTEAU**

Rusari is the most common headscarf worn in combination with the manteau used by Iranian women.

## **SIAH**

Black, in Farsi. For this project, the colour black also represents my continued mourning for those who died in the past decades for their resistance against discrimination.

## **SIAH CHADOR (TENT)**

A type of shelter made by Iranian nomadic women.

## **SIAH CHADOR (VEIL)**

A black veil that is recognized as the greatest hijab by Iranian authorities.

## **SOFREH**

In Iranian culture, sofreh is a generic term for a clean tablecloth placed in the middle of the room on the floor on which food is served following traditional Iranian dining etiquette (Shirazi).





**Figure 39 Experiencing Thirdspace**  
Photo by Negar Vahedi, 2021

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## APPENDIX A

In October 2020, I received an offer from Dr. Angela Andersen to present my paper “Muqarnas and Disoriented Spatial Memories” as part of the panel Site, Setting, Structure: Architectural Identities in the Local Global Landscape at the Universities Art Association of Canada (UAAC) Conference. The panel examined three architectural factors—site, setting, and structure—as social records of self-identification and community praxis. It explored matters of the local-global architectural landscape and questioned the relationship between identity, design, and the occupation of space.

I presented my work in progress as part of the panel, defining a method by which relationships between space, memory, displacement, and identity can be visualized. Through the lenses of immigration, art, and architecture, I showed how individuals can move back and forth between the lived world and the mind world. In doing so, they create an imaginary world, reconfiguring their situation in society to develop a sense of belonging. I examined the potential of an art exhibition featuring an installation based on the Islamic architectural element of moqarnas to express notions of how displacement and memory affect identity and social relations. I contextualized the installation within an understanding of the moqarnas as a geometrical and spatial object that can carry autobiographical and cultural stories and memories. The paper outlined how the moqarnas is significantly capable of conversion, innovation, and transformation while retaining its original forms.

Referring to Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I discussed how humans' consciousness is entangled in and shaped by the world around them, arguing that it is impossible for one to distinguish self-being from his/her place in time, history, and geographical location outside of the material and embodied world. Inspired by Edward Soja, Henri Lefebvre, and my self-experience, I defined three different spaces: the Firstspace, the real space that a person lives in it at present; the Secondspace, the memory-attached unattainable space where one used to reside that travels with the individual everywhere they go as long as the associated memories exist; and the Thirdspace, an imaginary space based on the Firstspace and Secondspace that we create in our mind to understand our position in society.

I received a wealth of constructive feedback. One of the participants was impressed by the idea of presenting inside and outside of the architectural space simultaneously, noting the mobile quality of the moquarnas and its ability to transform from inside to outside.

I received and accepted an offer from Dr. Andersen to include the paper in a journal, which is forthcoming. Also, I was invited by Dijia Chen from the University of Virginia to present my work as a guest speaker in one of their discussion series.

## APPENDIX B

In March 2021 I was invited by CE+, the student organization of the University of Virginia School of Architecture's PhD Program in the Constructed Environment, to be a guest speaker in their Spring 2021 discussion series.

The series, Meanings, Methods, and the Future of the Constructed Environment, brings together scholars, designers, practitioners, and students to explore the needs and capacities of interdisciplinarity in the study of the constructed environment.

Their March event, "Exhibitionary Orders: Visual Cultural as World View," in which I participated, brought together a cohort of cross-disciplinary scholars with hands-on curatorial and exhibiting experience to actively engage with and critically examine the mechanism of contemporary exhibitions in shaping modern and contemporary visual culture.

I presented my final performance installation piece, *Thirthing with Nine Thousand Memories*, discussing how I transformed my memories and pains, the black veil, into a home, the black tent, through a performance. My objective was to exemplify the correlation of space, memory, displacement, and identity. I revisited my memories to address how I move back and forth between the real space and the mind space to create an imaginary space and to reconfigure my situation in society and develop a sense of belonging. I described in detail how if, as Edward Soja describes, the

Thirdspace includes both material and mental spaces, and thirding is the process of merging these two spaces, my performance could be considered an act of “thirthing,” the result of which would be a Thirdspace.

Dr. Michael Kubo discussed his practice across the domains of history and theory, exhibitions, and publications as intertwined ways of making history public.

Dr. Alec Stewart used the marketplace and its materiality as a lens for interpreting a confluence of factors that reshaped American cities in the 1980s. He examined the material legacies of immigrant-owned businesses and provided a new understanding of what happens when small-scale immigrant investors and vendors devise solutions to pressing urban problems. He explored these questions with images of swap-meet exteriors and interiors. Focusing on connections between objects depicted in these images and the larger stories to which they are connected, he explored how we can use everyday landscapes and objects to make more nuanced meaning out of social conflicts and movements such as the Rodney King unrest of 1992 to define a resonance between the past and our contemporary moment of increasing racial violence.

The panel identified overlaps and resonances between our respective areas of work, and we decided to prepare and formulate a panel for the Social Justice thread of the 2022 CAA conference that would further expand our discussion.