

Are We Home Yet?

Imagining Persian Carpet as a Movable Home

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Abstract

Are We Home Yet: Imagining Persian Carpet as a movable home is an interactive installation that aims to embody the interconnection between body, memories, identity, and home. Through this thesis project, I portray the struggles of myself, as an Iranian immigrant, to preserve my identity and to make a new home for myself after having left the previous, by regularly revisiting my memories of it. In search of developing a sense of belonging to my new home by seeking a displacement for the one that I lost, I converse with the carpets that I have lived on. Persian carpets have prolonged importance in Iranian households as suppliers of warmth, respect, and tranquility, and the tactile bond that is established with the people living on them is exquisite. I explore the possibility of ever finding a new place that I can call home, by exploring the probability of introducing the Persian carpet as a symbol for home, a movable home, benefiting from its many unique characteristics.

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To Introduce

As you set out for Ithaka
hope the voyage is a long one,
full of adventure, full of discovery.
Laistrygonians and Cyclops,
angry Poseidon—don't be afraid of them:
you'll never find things like that on your way
as long as you keep your thoughts raised high,
as long as a rare excitement
stirs your spirit and your body.

C. P. CAVAFY

I was born and raised in Iran, a country blessed with one of the oldest and richest cultures in the world, unique natural attractions, and diverse traditions. The relationship that is established between us, as Iranians, and these cultural elements and emerges in objects, rituals, language, and spaces is one that stays with us in our lives for good, regardless of the place(s) that we live in.

One of these relationships is the one with rituals. In the first chapter: To Perform, in conversation with a Persian new year ritual, I try to recreate it using violets as a symbol of a migrant, moving in small boxes - their movable homes - instead of the original materials. After that, I decide to change the nature of my practice and turn to Persian carpets as another form of cultural identifiers.

Another important relationship is the one formed between Persian carpets in Iranian households and the people that live *on* them. Here, I use the word *on*, because the interaction of a person with a carpet is only created by walking, sitting, standing, or lying down *on* it. We trust our bodies with the carpet and embrace the pleasant tactile experiences with it. Connecting with the patterns that are sometimes telling a story or just have the power to mesmerize people, especially children, is a form of connection that will forever be remembered as our first experiences in living with cultural arts. This connection is incomparable with any other forms of connection that are established between objects and people.

In the second chapter: To Prototype, I try to do a few small experiments to see if I can reach the outcome that I am aiming for. Learning from those experiments and finding their insufficiencies, I move on to the third chapter: To Retrieve.

Persian carpets are among the oldest Iranian works of art and are treated in a respectful manner in a household. They are cleaned and washed regularly - especially before the new year ceremonies - and we are only allowed to walk on them barefoot, putting emphasis on its respect. They are the fount of warmth and tranquility and can add to the sense of belonging to the household. It can be said that the carpet is a part of the home, thus the home itself.

In the third and last chapter I, as an Iranian Immigrant, return to the carpets in my memories that I have lived on, as the only pieces of my home that I could carry with me to create a new home for myself, after leaving the previous. I explore the feasibility of building a new home in a new country with a different culture and lifestyle, using my own homeland's cultural elements, and the capability of Persian carpets, to act as these cultural elements. On

this path, I am very much relying on the power of art to help me convey these ideas to people who have never had experiences similar to mine, regardless of our differences in language and cultural arts.

To do so, I am retrieving family archives of old recorded sounds and photographs and using them as indicators of my identity, to explain how they help me to situate myself within a new environment, reassuring me constantly that I, contrary to my surroundings, am not a fresh being, and that I have a past to look up to in my memories while finding a new place I can call home.

To Feel

Unreal: On May 3rd, 2021, after an incredibly long flight, with my hopes, memories, and the rest of my life put into the 3 bags I had with me, I entered Canada. It was the farthest I had ever been from home. It was hard for me to believe that after living for years in an apartment that was all for me with its contents, those 3 bags were all I had. As soon as I left the plane, I automatically put my hand on my head to check if I still had my scarf on - otherwise, I could get into trouble - But my hand directly touched my hair and nothing else.

Unsafe: I spent the first couple of months dazed and empty-headed. There was so much to perceive. I realized I stuttered when I wanted to talk to people. I, who learned English grammar before Farsi's, stuttered. People were loud and the sun was too bright. the streets were too wide, and the buildings were too far from each other. And the sky: the sky was empty! Where were the mountains? I felt unsafe not being surrounded by mountains.

Alone: But most importantly, I was alone. This new land was offering whatever it had to offer, but still, I was alone. I had managed to find 5 friends in the first 25 years of my life, whom I had left. I knew I was going to have a challenging time and it scared me. I mean yes, Canada, you let me in; but did you do it because you cared for me? Did you want me for me, or did you just think I could be useful to you? Did you even know me? How well? We never even talked. It was all letters and documents between us. However, I know I can't blame you for anything. You didn't invite me. I invited myself and you merely accepted.

Different: Slowly, I started to notice the differences. There weren't any cats in the streets. No brooks on the sides of the streets. Not as many pine trees as we had in Tehran and no ravens. The sky was clean and clear, and the humidity was unbelievable. Although I was born Moslem,

I never considered myself one; but I had gotten used to hearing Azan during the day – especially on middays and afternoons. I realized I didn't know before That I liked the sound of it. The pleasant smell of Tehran's trees was gone and with it, the irritating smell of smoke. The subways were not half as full, and the public transportation system was actually working perfectly on time.

Free: But most of all, I felt free. I was free to walk hand in hand with my partner in the city. I could laugh as loudly as I wanted, and nobody looked at me as if I was crazy. When summer came and I walked in the streets in casual clothes, I felt angry for not having had this opportunity in the past 25 years of my life and the Rolling Stones was singing silently in my head all day: "I see the girls walk by dressed in their summer clothes, I have to turn my head until my darkness goes...", But I had to admit I was grateful to finally have it.

Ashamed: From the first moment I moved to Canada, I felt ashamed. My people were living in an oppressive situation, and I felt like I had left them in rough times. The presidential election was close and whenever I shared my opinions on social media, I received messages reminding me that I had run away and that I should leave the decision to the people who had actually stayed and chosen to fight back. A couple of months after I left Iran, there was a severe water shortage in my hometown. People were protesting in the streets and as always, anti-riot forces were shooting them, many people were arrested and never heard of afterward, until now. I felt ashamed that I wasn't there. Even though I moved to Tehran from my hometown years ago, still I was feeling ashamed that I had enough water, clean water, every day.

Homesick: Surprisingly, homesickness had struck me even before I left Iran. And naturally, it continued after. I was searching for familiar senses every day and of course, I couldn't find

much. I didn't know how to clean a tub, washrooms with no water made me uncomfortable and I couldn't stand people entering my apartment with shoes on. People's humor seemed nonsense to me, and I didn't know what to talk to people about. Back at home, there were mostly sad or angry conversations, but here none of those problems existed. I realized I had forgotten that I have the right to actually be happy. I started cooking foods that I normally never cooked, just because I wanted to feel at home. I watched Iranian movies and listened to Iranian music. I bought candles for the living room, just like how my mom always did, and I bought a carpet. I couldn't afford to buy a handwoven Persian carpet, so I just bought a machine-woven small one. It was just after spreading the carpet that I felt my apartment as a space, turned into a place. I stepped on the carpet and felt its texture beneath my feet.

Decided: Once one of my professors asked me if I was planning to stay in Canada after I graduated, and I didn't know how to answer. I didn't know how to explain to them that the concept of immigration is different for us. We don't immigrate, we run away. The same goes for any other Iranian when they immigrate. The Iranian government treats you in a way to show you not only they don't care about you leaving, but they also encourage it. They want people to move out and to leave whatever there is to consume, to them. And they even went out of their way to show everyone how little they care about immigrants, by shooting the Ukrainian airplane that was leaving Iran, full of Iranian and Canadian people. Full of students, parents, and children, all leaving, hoping for a better life. I remember how anxious I was when my partner was coming to Canada a few months before me, and I remember how my friends and family were anxious when I was leaving Iran. All of this entails that when you leave Iran, there is no going back. I knew I had to make myself at home and leave the last one behind. But it was easier said than done; but as Imogen Racz, British writer and researcher on design and domesticity puts it, "The home both contains us and is within us." (Racz, 2) and I knew it. I

knew my new home here didn't have to be so different from the one I had. And that I had all of my powerful memories to go to. After all, what is a human made of, if not of memories? So as soon as I could collect myself, I started the journey.

"By definition, the word "homeland" has two meanings—one meaning refers to one's native land, and the other to the land where one's home is at present." (Jin, 65)

This quote belongs to the book "Writer as Migrant" by Ha Jin, the Chinese American poet and novelist. In this book, he talks about language, literature, and migration and presents numerous examples of written pieces to support his ideas. His use of the word "homeland" stands for both a mental and a physical home. At that point, I was constantly shifting between my "homelands" during the day.

To Perform

"For me language is impossible to lose,
after everything else has been lost.

The last, essential home."

HILDE DOMIN



Figure 1.1: My recreated version of Sofreh Haft Seen, 2021

As I mentioned earlier, homesickness kicked in even when I was still living in the comfort of my home. I didn't know what was going to happen to me and how I would perceive them. Above all of it, all I had was one concern "How to communicate?". The Persian and Canadian Cultures are obviously far away from each other, and I knew this. But could art act as a universal language, connecting cultures that cannot communicate clearly? Could I express myself through my art and rely on its clarity to convey my thoughts? Perhaps this quote of Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani could describe these sorts of concerns vividly:

"The immigrant, at the beginning of entering the host country, due to leaving the identity and familiar elements of the motherland and dealing with different and unfamiliar elements of the host country, sinks into a kind of ambiguity and confusion." (Tirehbol, 2005)

The loss of identity, culture, and language, and whether we are able to ever reclaim them, were the notions that initiated my research. How will we respond when we are exposed to diverse cultures and languages? Are we able to recreate "home" on the new land? Will the outcome ever really feel like "home"? One thought led to another and together they eventually led to this question "What if I leave my home and never be able to find another ever again?"

I started navigating my way through the poem "Migration of the Violets" by Mohammad-Reza Shafiei Kadkani. Kadkani is an Iranian writer, poet, literary critic, editor, translator, and scholar. He is currently a professor of Persian literature at Tehran University. Shafiei-Kadkani is known for his works on literary criticism and contemporary Persian poetry. Migration of the violets is a poem from his book "In the Language of the Leaves" published in 1978. The poem directly points out the homesickness and envy of an immigrant, by describing the nomadic state of violets in the year-end bazaars and comparing them to how an immigrant wants to feel, but cannot.

I knew some of the original meaning of the poem would be lost in translation, because of the nuances of my own language. So, I began to look for an alternative that could demonstrate its story. With this in mind, my winter term project was initiated as a performance. In that performance, I recreated the Persian new year ritual, "Sofreh Haft Seen", narrated by an immigrant, in conversation with the poem "Migration of the violets".

Why did I choose performance?

1. Performances contain bodies, and I wanted my body to be a part of my work.

Because I was concentrating on my body's displacement, and it was the carrier of the memories.

2. The poem is explaining the state of migrating violets, through the last days of winter, when spring is near, and a change is being made. This migration, similar to changing seasons, is not demonstrated as a sudden movement, but as a process. I believed that performance could also be a sensible way of explaining a process.

Having lived in Iran, a country with a long history and a rich culture with lots of rituals, not having people around to practice them with, is perhaps the best demonstration of endangered identity. These rituals are usually meant to be practiced among family members or friends.

"Homes are places of habits, rituals, and movements, and when experiences are translated into installation and sculpture, these also require the audience to move around and measure the work against its own bodily and mental memories." (Racz, 7)

One of the most beautiful Iranian customs which has been celebrated for over 3000 years now is Nowruz. Nowruz literally means "New Day" and is the start of the Iranian new year, which is celebrated on the very first day of spring, around March 21st, the day of the vernal equinox, marking the beginning of spring in the Northern Hemisphere. To honor such a great day, Iranian people follow many different customs and traditions, the most important of which is "Haft Seen".

"Haft Seen" is in fact the tradition of putting 7 symbolic objects together whose names commence with S, pronounced as "seen" the 15th letter in the Persian alphabet; and haft in

Persian means seven. Other symbolic items accompany these 7 objects and together, they create a Haft seen. In the past, people used to put all of these items on a mantel or a designed fabric similar to a tablecloth, which they call "Sofreh". That's the reason why Haft Seen is generally referred to as "Sofreh Haft Seen".

Each item in Haft Seen symbolizes a concept in Persian culture:

- Sabzeh stands for any kind of greens' sprouts that we usually grow for ourselves out of wheat, barley, and lentil seeds. It is a symbol of rebirth, renewal of nature, and growth.
- Samanu which is a kind of wheat germ sweet pudding represents power and strength.
- Senjed, also known as the sweet dry fruit of the lotus tree is a symbol of love and affection.
- Serkeh means vinegar in Farsi. It symbolizes submission and acceptance.
- Seeb or apple is a symbol of health and beauty.
- Seer or garlic is put on haft seen as a protection of the family against the evil eye.
- Somaq or sumac, a seasoning made of dried and ground seeds, symbolizes patience and tolerance.

My performance portrays an immigrant, who is trying to reconstruct her lost identity using "violets" instead of the original Haft Seen items, each in their own forms, as a symbol of and in hope of creating a "moveable home". The outfit I was wearing and most of the objects that I used in the performance were the ones that I was going to bring with me to Canada.



Figure 1.2: Separating flowers from the stems, preparing the materials to add to the Sofreh, 2021

In the video, there are two separate windows. The window on the left shows the Sofreh Haft Seen set of bowls that are being filled one by one, the objects being gathered one by one. The window on the right shows my hands, preparing each piece of it. Each prepared piece would then be transferred to the window on the left. The one on the left is what other people perceive. It is my world without. Me trying to make myself at home, doing it in the only way I know - the way I did it at my previous home. There is no apparent struggle. The one on the right is the world within, that only I can see. It represents my attempts to rebuild the home that I had lost, with whatever material that is available to me. By doing so, I wanted to show the two worlds I was shifting between constantly. That there is a struggle going on inside. A struggle that is not evident to anyone but myself.



Figure 1.3: The end of my performance, 2021

I myself had somewhat different feelings towards my own video. In the process of making, I was under the impression that my hands were the only means for the objects communicating with the viewers. I could see each of the objects, becoming, as an independent individual, dealing with immigration on their own. Some break, some lose their flowers, some need to be boiled, and some ground. But finally, after spending the time they need according to their way of adjustment, they fit in the community that they need to be in – in that case, the community of Haft Seen objects.

After presenting the video, I recognized a few major errors.

"Many homes are structurally similar to one another, but the chosen objects that fill the spaces act, and are acted upon, in ways that are intimately linked with our individual psyches. Memories of rituals, both every day and celebratory, together with the repeated actions of cleaning and holding, bind us to our possessions. Some have special perceived values projected onto them and are displayed and brought out for special occasions. Others are mundane, inexpensive, and functional, but nonetheless, through frequent use, form an important part of the landscape of being." (Racz, 156)

The first and the most evident error was that I had forgotten that I was not among my own people. Whether I accepted it or not, I had migrated to another part of the world. One that is far from my previous home. One where people speak, dress, eat and celebrate

differently. One where people look at the world differently, the arts differently. What caught the attention of most of my peers was the "looks" of the video, which was also very important to me; but perhaps I was too used to seeing those mesmerizing combinations of textures, colors, and patterns on carpets, dishes, and table fabrics that I didn't even know how beautiful the scene would look like from other people's views.



Figure 1.4: The textures and patterns on the carpet, the dishes, and the tablecloth are shown in this picture without the rest of the materials, 2021

The second error was my body's lack of engagement in the project. To me, the absence of the rest of my body and only showing the hands felt like I was refusing to be fully engaged. As if I was unintentionally hiding, or trying to remain anonymous. But my body was all that I

was referring to when thinking about my displacement. I needed my whole body to be involved.



Figure 1.5: My hand enters the scene to put the last filled bowl on Sofreh, 2021

The third error - the fateful error - was with the nature of my performance. the new year ritual had a start and an end, But I needed something that was continuous because I was alluding to an ongoing process. So, at that time, I knew I had to make fundamental changes.

To Prototype

"The desert beyond the city belongs to me.

A place of beauty,

for it reminds me of the friend.

And wherever he is, there is a place of beauty."

SA'ADI

As I was thinking about how to enhance my performance practice and find solutions to its errors, something else was happening in my mind. My body was reacting to immigration in its own way. Random flashbacks of my childhood memories that I had long forgotten would suddenly appear before my eyes to take me away, far from where my body was; as if it was telling me "I know all of this is new and scary, but you are not new. You have a past. You have memories. You existed even before this. Look! These are all you!" I saw my parents' young faces, reading to me before bedtime. I saw my little sister lying in my lap looking at me. I saw the huge palm trees in my aunt's house, bent, full of warm and sweet dates. I could taste the dates' sweetness and feel the warm breeze on my skin. I saw my lost grandfather sitting on the floor in his house, smoking and talking about his friends whom he had lost in the war. I could see the smoke rising from the cigarette between his fingers in the midday light that was coming from the skylight. A few years ago, when I was practicing lucid dreaming, my therapist asked me to find a repeating element in my dreams and find out what it meant for me. I tried to apply the same technique to my flashbacks and found my repeating element: Persian carpet.

"Objects that relate to the lives of the inhabitants or are inherited help to anchor memories of events and people... By including these ingredients, and gradually working on the dwelling place, overtime it becomes a site where one is literally "at home"." (Racz, 11)

I had already done a small research on the role of Persian carpets in Persian culture and I was aware of its importance in the homes of the Iranian diaspora. I knew most Iranians still value the presence of Persian carpets in their homes all around the world. I also knew people who had migrated and taken their carpets with them, as they were sometimes a part of their family heritage. I realized that the act of keeping Persian carpets in Iranians' homes could form a strong connection between them and their identity. In many ways, Persian carpets are culturally important to us because of the characteristics that they have.

"Those who love this ancient art form claim that it is best to remove one's shoes and to dig one's toes into the carpet to appreciate its luxuriant beauty--better still, lie down. Only through their interaction with countless human beings will these works of art develop their beautiful patina, growing ever more elegant under the feet of many generations." (Woven Perfection: The New Persian Carpets, 2)

In some ways, a carpet and a painting are treated equally in a house. Carpets are usually bordered and are meant to be viewed as a whole. In Iranian architecture, the sparseness of furniture points out the importance of the carpet(s) in that space and contrary to how we treat it today, tables and chairs were not allowed to cover its surface. The carpet itself was in fact the most important part of the house and the sole sitting area. However, there is an essential difference between a carpet and a painting: the viewer of a carpet can never see it in its entirety because they are always standing, sitting, or walking on it. They can lie down on the carpet and get as close as they want to it, but they can never go farther than their own height, and also by forbidding walking on carpets with shoes, a close and intimate relationship is established which emphasizes its reverence. These characteristics, along with many others, allow us to conclude that the carpet is in fact a part of our home. In other words,

the carpet is the home. Relying on that fact, I decided to use the Persian carpet as a symbol for home - a movable home.



Figure 2.1: The illustration of the turquoise dome in “Haft Paykar” Poem by Nizami Ganjavi, 1197.

A demonstration of how a carpet is determining the sitting area.

Source: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8427193s/f331.item>

At this point, I knew I wanted to do something with a carpet, but I didn't exactly know what. I knew I wanted my project to be interactive because by doing so, I could ask other people to interact with my work and see how my memories affect my everyday life from their own points of view. They are the source of all of my actions, reactions, decisions, and ideas. They can form, change, or eliminate them. They act as a lens, through which I see the world around me. I wanted to put this lens before other people's eyes to show them what I see.

چند چیز به رو مغیولم نتوان بدم؟ مغیولم نتوان بدم که هر ثانیه‌ی هر دقیقه‌ی هر روز، بن دنیای در
رفت و اُخرم. رفت و آمد بن دنیای یعنی چی؟ یعنی تعجیبات ساکن یک جانیستم. هستی در حال حرکت
بدون استراحت، بدون ایستادن، بدون تسخیر بدم و احوال ساکن کجا هستم؟ من ساکن میسریم. من ساکن
میسریم. میسریم که منوب انجیا بر میگردونم و چند دقیقه یا بعد دوباره به خون منورسم. در حال حرکت مداوم
و همی فراموشی کنم. حرکت حرکت. به سمت خون منورم، خون من که در درونم، بعد دوباره بازشت به سمت
که بدین گونه. جایی را باهام لمس کردن. جایی که بدین استراحت جانیتم و نفس جانیتم.
من به حرکت دائمی به سمت دنیای درون و بیرون خلاصم. من به حرکت کنم.

I had a vague vision of how I was going to plan the interaction, but I didn't know how feasible it was. I wanted to only have a moving projection of a pattern on the floor at first. The moving pattern would somehow relate to myself as an Immigrant. After the visitor(s) enters the projection borders, the pattern would disappear and an image of a carpet would project on the floor, having been distorted by it. Then the visitor(s) would have to move the lines to distort the image, while actually converting it into its real form. The act of "fixing the carpet" would metaphorically stand for unrolling and fixing a real carpet on a real floor after moving to a new home. To do so, my first step was to create the patterns.

First, I started learning TouchDesigner as I believed I was going to need it for the interactive part of my project. Then I tried to make patterns in a way to reflect my mental status after migrating, still going back and forth between my past and present.

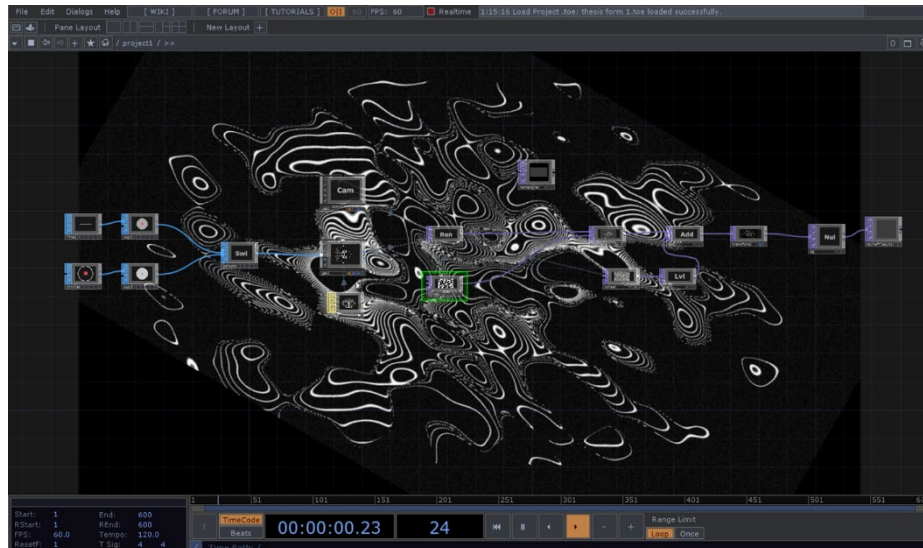


Figure 2.2: Patterns created in TouchDesigner, 2021

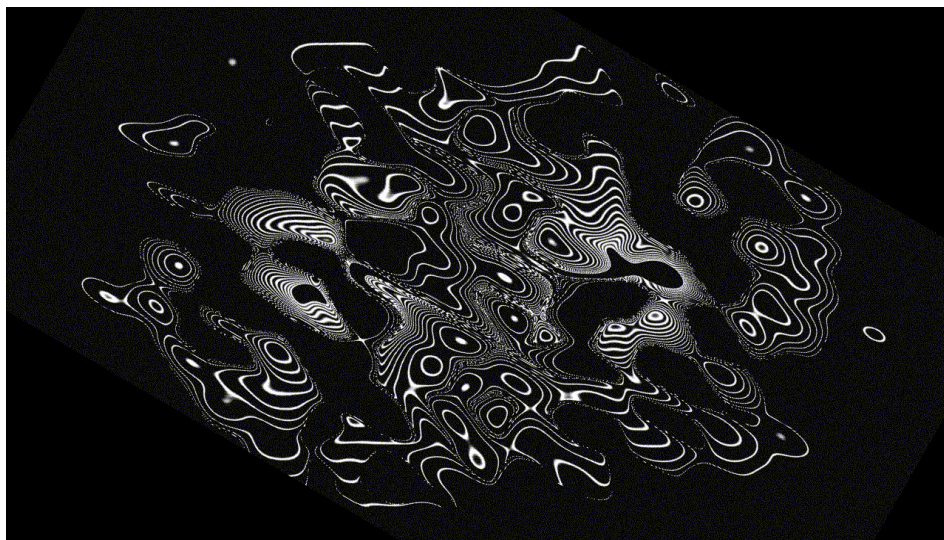


Figure 2.3: The movement in the patterns created in TouchDesigner, 2021

To try the carpet distortion part, I captured an image of the GIF that I had and tried to create the distorted image of a carpet using Neural Style Transfer.



Figure 2.4: The distorted image of a carpet by the pattern by Neural Style Transfer, 2021

I realized the distorted image was not easy to fix and even if it was, the visitor(s) needed to see the original image beforehand, because the pattern of each carpet is unique to itself while being almost impossible to predict. Above that, the nature of interactivity is to be endless, which this case could not offer. After fixing the carpet there would be no more interaction needed.

I believed the failure of my first prototype was caused by two obstacles. One because I had a misinterpretation of the concept of interactivity, and two because I did not have enough knowledge about the affordances and the constraints of tools that I needed. So, in

Fall 2021 I enrolled in a course focused on small interactive projects on different platforms which was extremely helpful to me in two significant ways. First to better understand how interactivity works in major projects, and second to learn how to use uncomplicated and artist-friendly tools to achieve an acceptable outcome.

To Retrieve

"However, we should also bear in mind that, no matter where we go, we cannot shed our past completely—so we must strive to use parts of our past to facilitate our journeys. As we travel along, we should also imagine how to rearrange the landscapes of our envisioned homelands." (Jin, 85)

In my next prototype, I decided to use the carpets in my old family photos. I knew those very carpets were the source of my imaginations and no matter how I could not recreate them on my own. Because I could not remember all of the carpets. There were patterns and colors here and there in my mind, but never a whole carpet. So, I decided to gather as many photos as I could to see if I have bits and pieces to put together. But there were all of them in my memories, not one. So then the odyssey of gathering carpets in old photos began.

It took me almost two weeks to gather my collection. I told my parents to take out the huge piles of old photos from the closet and wait for me to call them every day. During those two weeks, I would video call my parents and they would show me the photos one by one in front of the camera to see if they were useful to me. And in almost all of the photos, there was a story. Every time they took out a new photo, a new story began. That one time when I painted all of my father's bank documents orange. That one time when my sister threw up on my father's head when they were dancing together. That one time when I fell from the stairs and broke my head, running after my aunt. That one time when my mom went to the bathroom, and I threw all of the fruits that she was going to cut for us out of the window. That one time when my sister put red pepper on her birthday cake because she didn't want to share it with anybody. And the list went on. We would talk and laugh for hours,

remembering all of that. And although I didn't know beforehand, the process of photo gathering became a very important part of my project. Connecting to my past and memories through my parents' stories was something that helped me better understand what I was doing and why. At that point, they had no idea what I was doing and why I needed the photos. I deliberately didn't tell them anything about the project to see what they would naturally talk about when they saw the photos. After checking out all of the photos one by one, almost 70 different images with carpets on them were put aside. My mother scanned them one by one and sent them to me.

این مجبور از خورشید ها حقیقتاً؟ مجبور از ارض طراپا که در شب لایق رصوم می‌کنم. خدا، در حال راه رفتن
 روی خورشید، در این لایق طراپا، هر زمان هستم. ولی هر کلام به شعله خورشید. این قضا و قدر
 می‌کنم، قضا و قدر که می‌کنم. روی این زمین راه حروم، زمین لایق می‌کنم. به یاد آورم،
 تنها کاری که در حال رفتن، در شب در حال انجام دادم. به یاد آورم این که قضا و قدر بودم،
 الان قضا و قدر هستم و قضا و قدر باید باشم. باید در شب به خودم یاد آورم که الان دارم حال لایق رفتن
 می‌کنم، زبان اولم صبر و تدبیر و هیچ کلام از لایق که حتماً می‌دانم زنده می‌کنم.

The next stage of the project was removing the rest of each photo and keeping only the parts where there was a carpet. I started erasing. I erased faces, objects, family members, dolls, foods, cats, and homes. And with them, I felt myself losing memories, colors, laughter, discussions, tastes, smells, hugs, and feelings. As I was doing that, I was thinking. "When we were taking this photo in a warm spring afternoon, did my father think that 15 years later I would be erasing his face from the photo, pixel by pixel? When my friends and family were gathering to take happy, birthday pictures together, did they think that someday I would be erasing their hands around me, their smiles and presents, pixel by pixel? Did my grandmother know that day when she was cooking rice and lentils for me, that one day I would be erasing

the lights in her house, her loving hands cooking for me and her joy of doing so, pixel by pixel? What if they did? What if all of those people knew that someday I was leaving them to live across the globe, just to be homesick? Would they stop being happy? Would they stop loving me and making memories with me? How would they feel if they knew I was erasing them intentionally? Did they think about me leaving someday, and not being able to take them all away with me? Were they mad at me? How did I feel? Was I sad that I had none of them anymore? Did I feel like I was betraying people and homes and memories? Was I proud that I was doing this project in their honor? Did erasing all of those pixels mean that I did not need them anymore? Or was I keeping the carpets because the carpets contained all of them?" The erasing stage was a manifestation for me of my migration. I could see what had happened, slowly in front of me.

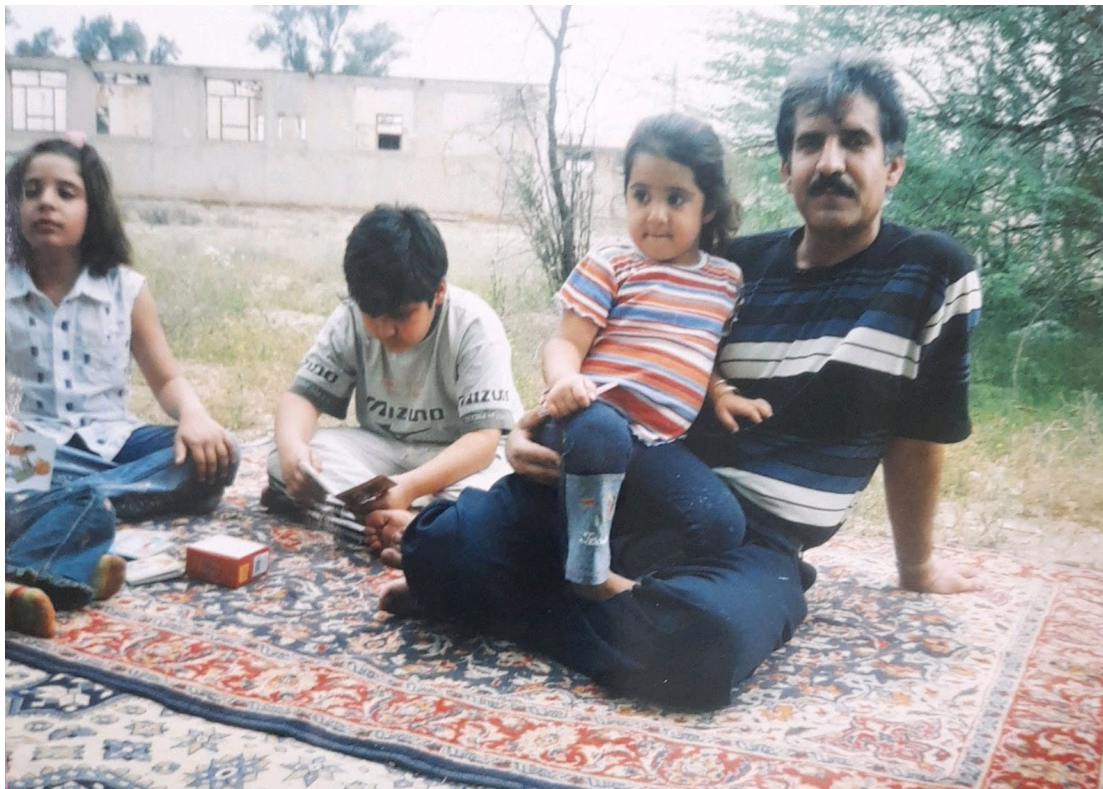


Figure 3.1: A photo from my family archive, by Zhila Koushfar, 2003.

In this photo, I am sitting on a carpet with my cousin, sister, and father in the backyard of a family friend's house, Ahvaz, Iran.



Figure 3.2: The carpet with bodies and objects on it is kept and the rest of the image is deleted in Photoshop, 2022

On the carpets, there were sometimes bodies, sometimes foods, and sometimes objects, but I did not erase them. By keeping them, I wanted to also offer the memories attached to them. To me, the carpets were a means to remembering them, a physical demonstration of how objects can contain memories and how they define me as a person. Carpets were all I could carry with me, when in fact I was carrying much more than I thought I would be.

گاهم اینجا هستم ، گاهم آنجا . ولی این به این معنا نیست که در هیچ کدم از این دو وطن
نخاستم . طبعاً بودم این طور .

When my collection was finally ready, I chose 9 photos to work with. I made sure my family members were in those photos. Then I made a collage with them in a way that it would fully cover the area that I was going to project on. By doing so, I wanted to claim that area for myself, declaring that part of the foreign land would belong only to me. Because I spread my carpets over it, and with them, all of the past that I brought with me. I spread the bodies and the memories, and the home that I carried all the way in those carpets.



Figure 3.3: A collage with the selected extracted pieces of carpets from the family photo archives made in Photoshop, 2022

I didn't want to show all of the pieces all together. In fact, I planned it in a way that at first, nothing would show. When the visitor(s) entered the space, their location would be detected, then the carpet underneath their feet would show. When they walked away, that carpet would slowly disappear and a new one would show where they were standing. Through this form of interaction, I mean to express the way I am experiencing this new transition in my life. Every aspect of my new life is affected by the previous. Every fraction of the new home that I am building for myself is influenced by the previous. I experience and perceive through my memories and without them to define me, I could not possess an identity.

"Even when we relate ourselves to those things that are not in our immediate reach, we are staying with the things themselves. We do not represent distant things merely in our mind so that only mental representations of distant things run through our minds and heads as substitutes for the things." (Heidegger, 154)

In his book *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Martin Heidegger, the German philosopher best known for his work on phenomenology and existentialism talks about what art and its role in people's life and culture is, and how it relates to our way of thinking. In this quote from the chapter *Building Dwelling Thinking* of the book, he explains how we as humans do not necessarily need to be physically present in a space to actually be there. In fact, simply by thinking toward that location, we are there. "Thinking persists through the distance of that location" (Heidegger, 154) and actually, in that state, we might be even closer to it than somebody else who is habitually present in the space physically or uses it in an indifferent way. This quote perfectly sums up my idea of being in my previous home in my memories. My body is not present in that space, in fact, it is the farthest it can be from it, but I think about it so many times during the day that I might feel much closer to it than my family members that are living there. Or anybody else that enters the space as a guest or for other reasons.

One of the challenges that I faced in this piece was that I didn't exactly know how to put this idea into practice when writing the codes in Processing. At first, I started testing with my mouse cursor instead of sensors. When my first few attempts didn't work, I finally decided to create a collage with the same shapes and placements as the ones in the original one, with one difference. I drew the shapes in Illustrator as stains of colors. Then I wrote down each color's RGB codes and added them to my code, one code for each image. I loaded the color collage in Processing but didn't show it. Then I asked it to show each image based on the location of the mouse cursor on its specified colored shape. Then I added the sensor's settings to the code and tried to run it this time with people's locations. To do this, I used a RPLidar A3 sensor and the "Lidar interaction" tools for processing, which is an open source tool written by my primary advisor Nick Puckett, to sense the position of the people in the space.

Then the Lidar interaction tools sends the position data to another Processing file, which controls the images and sounds.

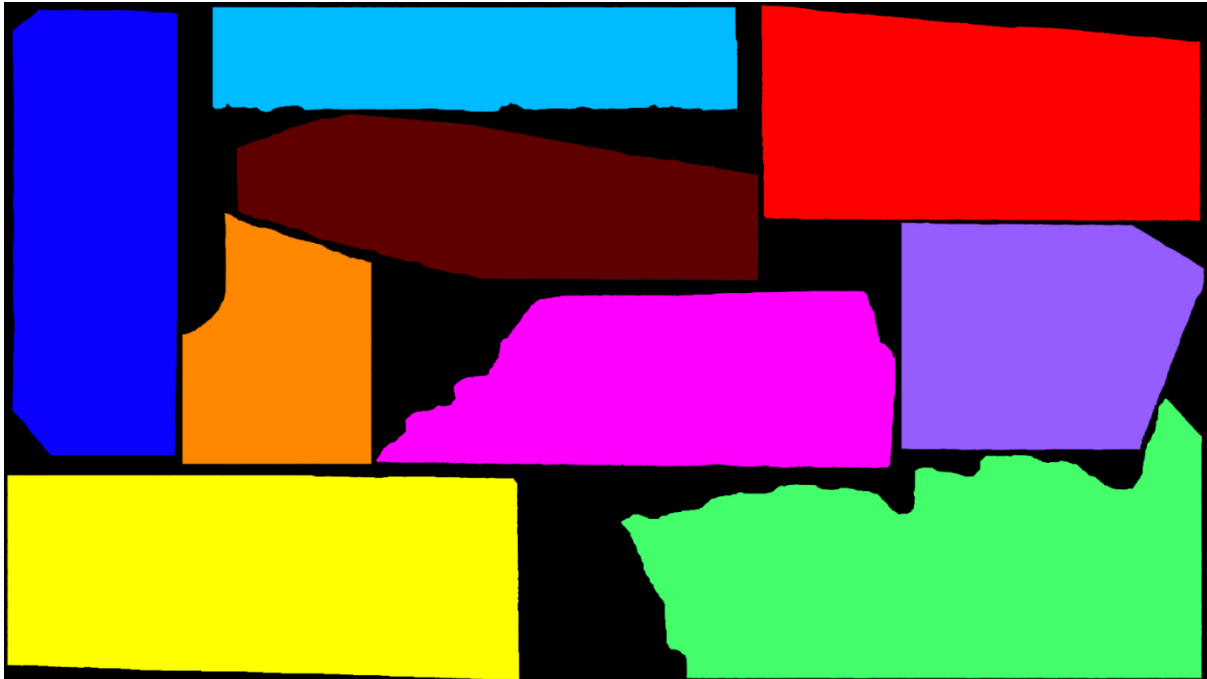


Figure 3.4: The Color Collage created in Illustrator, 2022

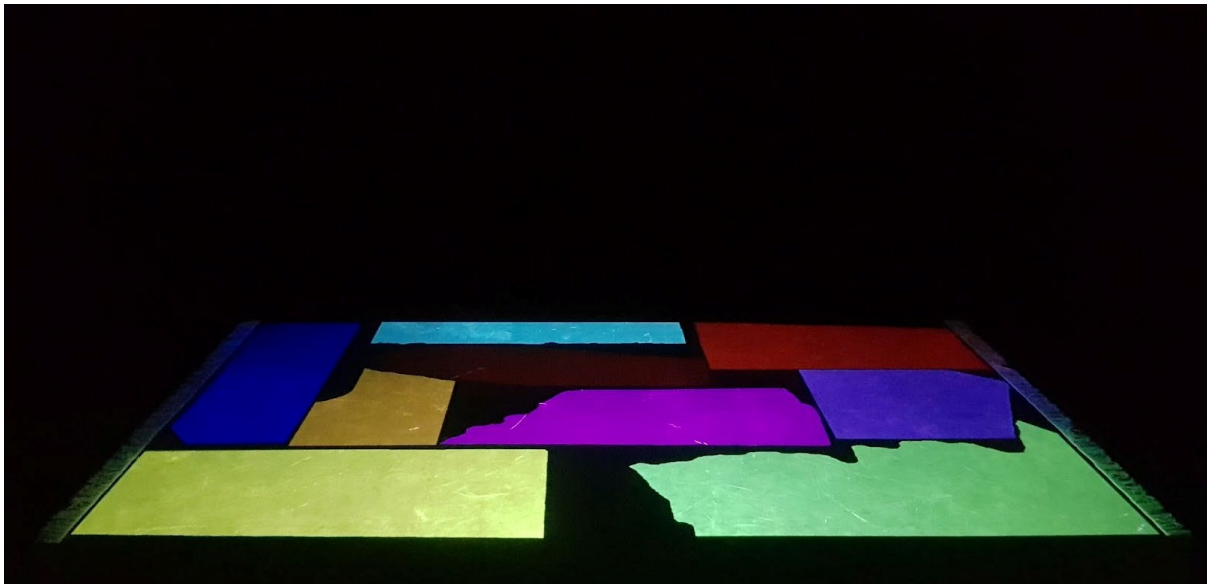


Figure 3.5: The color Collage projected on the floor, The Black Box, 2022

To add sound, I had a few options. I wanted the sound pieces to be from the past, in the same manner as the photos. I knew I could always record a new sound, but it would be

contradictory to the nature of my thesis. Looking for a relevant pre-recorded sound piece, I started exploring my collection of recordings. To remember my most pleasant memories, I tend to record sound, instead of filming them. Going through my recordings of conversations, musical practice, coffee shop gatherings, and the sounds of nature, I found the last file that I had recorded a couple of days before leaving Iran. A few days before leaving, as I was searching my bedroom for memorials, I found a bag full of old cassette tapes. Most of them were vintage storytelling cassettes from many years ago. Among them, I found one that was labeled "Parnian". I played it and it was the recordings of my parents' conversations with me from the time I could barely talk. I spent the next day looking for someone to help convert the clean part of the cassette tape to mp3 files, but I could not. I knew I absolutely wanted to take that cassette tape with me, so on the last day, I played it again from the beginning and recorded what was left of it on my cellphone. I knew that piece would be relevant and could definitely add to the experience of my installation. So, I attached the sound file to the photos. When a photo - or multiple photos - was projected, the sound would play and when it disappeared, so would the sound. This way I wanted to explain how the connection between sound and visuals works. I saw a carpet, I heard voices, I remembered.

Going through my recordings, I also found another piece of sound that was recorded a few years before, almost at the same time of year as it was when I was gathering the materials for my exhibition, which was sometime between the end of winter and beginning of spring. It was the sound of a random afternoon in my hometown, Ahvaz, where I was lying down on my bed and just listening. In that recording, there is the sound of birds migrating back to the city, which reminded me of my own migration, moving between homes, and the sound of the azan, which is a call to prayer in Muslim countries. I was never happy with hearing that sound because I don't practice any religion and I always felt like it was invading

my privacy, forcing me to listen to something I did not need in my life, but after moving to Canada I realized that it is actually calming and something I enjoy hearing because it reminds me of the place I grew up in. I decided to play that sound in the background, even when nothing was showing, to create an atmosphere that resembles my safe home.



Figure 3.6: Interaction testing, The Black Box, 2022

At last, when everything else was taken care of, I decided to purchase fringes that looked like the ones that every carpet has, and glue them to the ground, treating the whole area of projection as one whole carpet. I did that for three reasons:

1. To define the area of projection. I wanted the visitors to understand that the interaction was happening within those borders, and to give them a clue about where they should walk, after entering the room.

2. To imply that there is something missing. By adding the fringes to a space where there was nothing else between them, I wanted to point out to the fact that there should be something physically visible between these two borders of the carpet, but isn't.
3. To frame the images. The same way we frame an image that is precious to us and we want to keep for a long time, I was framing my carpet. Simultaneously framing my whole past, hoping to keep it safe and secure.

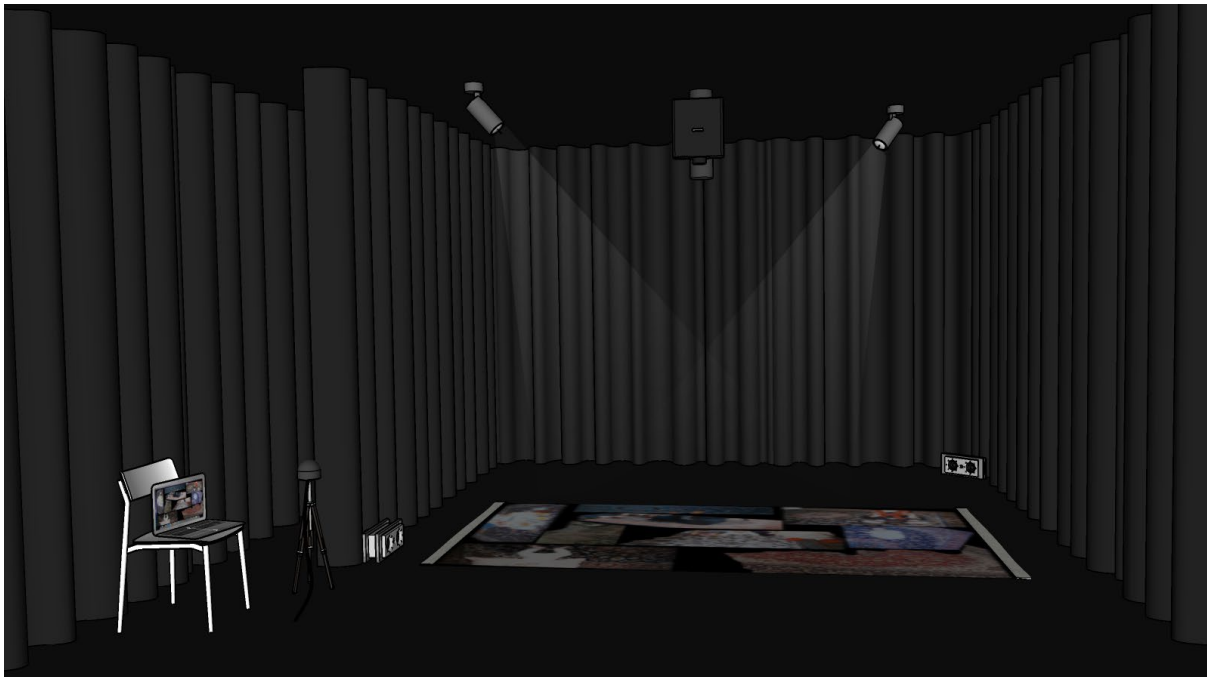


Figure 3.7: Render of the setup, The Black Box, 2022

Conclusion

"If home is found on both sides of the globe,
home is of course here—and always a missed land."

AGHA SHAHID ALI



Figure 4.1: Myself, sitting on the carpet collage, The Black Box, 2022

To look for a lost place in another place, far far away is irrational. But to look for places that don't exist anymore but in their images in my memories, that are within my grasp, but never touchable, is impossible.

Through this project, I practiced acceptance and gratitude in my own way. After many attempts to bring my former home into the current, in search of a new home that would resemble the previous one, I learned that home is not necessarily a place. It might not be the

place that I am now living in, but the meals that I cook in it, the poems that I read, and the objects that I decorate it with. As an autistic person, I have a close relationship with the objects that I own and the tactile bond that is formed between us is important to me. My senses and visual memory help me navigate my feelings toward places. I know now that to me, the sight of two cups of black tea in a tray with steam rising from their surfaces, on a Persian carpet, while the afternoon light is shining through the cups, is home. I know that the smell of a carpet's thread makes me feel safe and protected. I know that sitting on a carpet to talk, eat, or play games with my friends makes me feel so much closer to them than when we sit on chairs and sofas. I know the carpet alone is not my home, it is the experiences that emerge due to its presence that make me feel at home.

In some ways, the space I was in did feel like a simulation of my home. There were elements that resembled my previous home and there were some that kept reminding me that I am not there anymore. The space itself helped me a lot because when I was inside, I could not really tell where I was. There were no windows and no connections to the real world as if the whole room was nowhere, and because of that, it could be anywhere - and I could easily try to imagine myself traveling back in time. The background sound was an important part of that experience, making the space feel like I was sitting in my apartment, listening to the sound of the cars and birds coming from a window that is open somewhere. After a day or two, I realized that every day before my exhibition was starting, I would carefully fix the fringes in the same way that we do whenever we have guests in real life. On the last day before the exhibition, I mopped the floor three times and then asked everyone to take off their shoes and walk barefoot on the floor. I initially did this to respect the carpets, similar to the way we take our shoes off at home. I think this attempt to trust the floor my feet, also helped strengthen my relationship that was established with the space. However, there were

other elements that kept reminding me that I am not at home. For example, I had to set up the exhibition every day before starting and pack everything after the day was over. The steps that I had to take every day before and after the exhibition, reminded me every day that it was just something that was not permanent and could easily break down if it was not appropriately taken care of. But the thoughts that I had regarding the setup were not happening constantly. The fact that I was physically feeling exposed was a much stronger reminder. I was not wearing hijab and I was speaking English with people. Sometimes my feelings were mixed when I was hearing the background sound and talking in English at the same time.



Figure 4.2: An important part of my interaction with the carpets was their projection on my body, The Black Box, 2022

The feedback that I received were all amazingly interesting. I felt blessed to have had the opportunity to hear different people's stories that were related to the presence of carpets in their lives. Taking the shoes off was something nearly everyone found helpful in terms of relating to the experience. Once I forgot to ask someone to take off their shoes, and when the first image was projected on the floor, he immediately took a step back.

When I asked what had happened, he replied that he automatically did that, as he didn't want to walk on the carpets with shoes on. Some people even told me that they felt closer to me walking barefoot on the floor, feeling they were invited to my own house, and they felt free to talk to me more easily and freely about their own homes. One of my classmates told me the story of an Iranian family that she knew, who were running away from Iran, shortly after the Islamic revolution, but somehow managed to bring all of their carpets with them, since they were their grandmother's, and very precious to them. One of my friends who too has recently left Iran sat down on the floor as soon as she entered the room, not even interacting with the work, just listening to the background sound. She closed her eyes and told me how she had only heard that sound of birds in Iran and nowhere else. We talked about the mundane daily experiences that we had in Iran and how much we missed all of them.

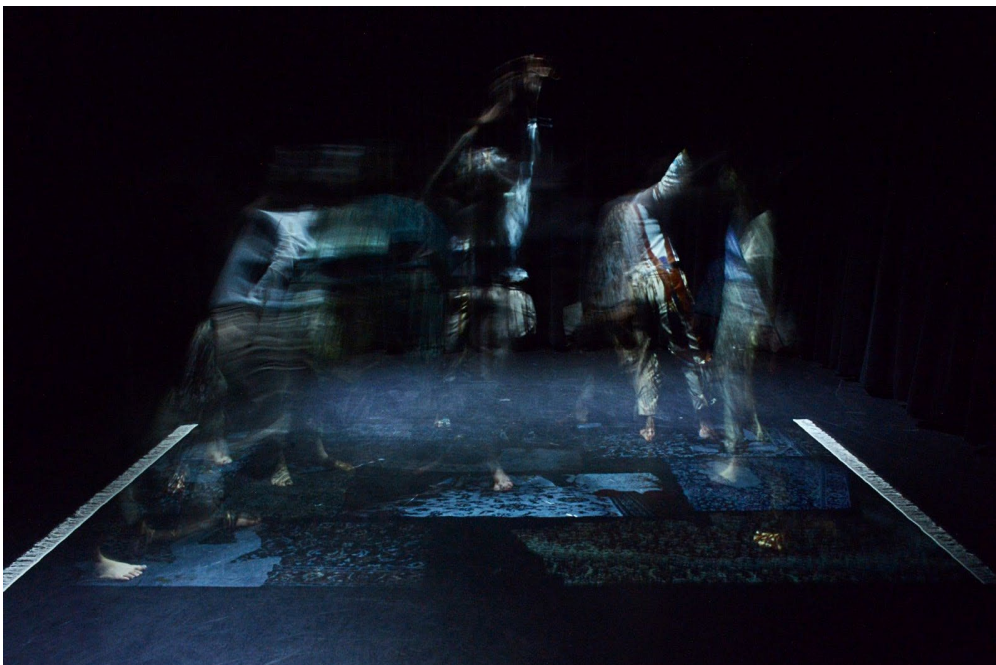


Figure 4.3: Me, dancing on the floor with images, The Black Box, 2022

To be able to discuss how I feel about this work confidently, I need to go back to my research questions. After the exhibition was over, I had plenty of time to review everything

that had happened in that short amount of time. What I think now is that home is not necessarily the one I had. It was one of them, but not the only one. I do not belong to the new land I am living on yet, but certainly don't feel as strange as I did a year ago anymore. I now believe that until then, I can find comfort in random conversations with other people about our homes. For instance, talking with my friend about how difficult it was in Iran to practice art, rather than studying to be a doctor or an engineer. I could talk to another about how we missed all the street cats of Tehran and how they helped build a character for the city. A friend and I spent an hour, sitting on the floor, just talking about how difficult it is to say what you mean in another language in the exact same way you want it to, and how nearly impossible it is to be as literate as we are in our own language. As a matter of fact, I realized that talking about missing home, actually makes me feel closer to it. I know that I definitely have a long road ahead of me, making a home for myself, but I believe that until then, the things that I do to feel at home, temporarily bring me back and for me, that is enough.

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Appendix A

Migration of the Violets

کوچ بنفشه‌ها

In winter's last days,
the migration of violets is beautiful.

در روزهای آخر اسفند
کوچ بنفشه‌های مهاجر
زیباست

On grey middays of Winter,
When violets are moved in small wooden boxes
—their mobile homes—

در نیم‌روز روشن اسفند
وقتی بنفشه‌ها را از سایه‌های سرد
در اطلس شمیم بهاران
با خاک و ریشه
- میهن سیارشان -

With their roots, leaves, grafts, and soil,
Saved from cold shadows and wrapped in Spring's satin scent.
A thousand laments spring from my chest and flow down my cheeks

در جعبه‌های کوچک چوبی
در گوشه‌ی خیابان می‌آورند
جوی هزار زمزمه در من
می‌جوشد:

I wish humans could take their home too

ای کاش...

ای کاش آدمی وطنش را
مثل بنفشه‌ها

—roots, leaves, grafts, and soil—

(در جعبه‌های خاک)
یک روز می‌توانست

Wherever they move,
Away from cold winds,
And into bright sunlight.

همراه خویشتن ببرد هرکجا که خواست
در روشنای باران
در آفتاب پاک

Appendix B

The photos below are all of the family photos that I used in my project, before being distorted.



Figure B.1: Image 1, Iran, 1998



Figure B.2: Image 2, Iran, 1999



Figure B.3: Image 3, Iran, 1997

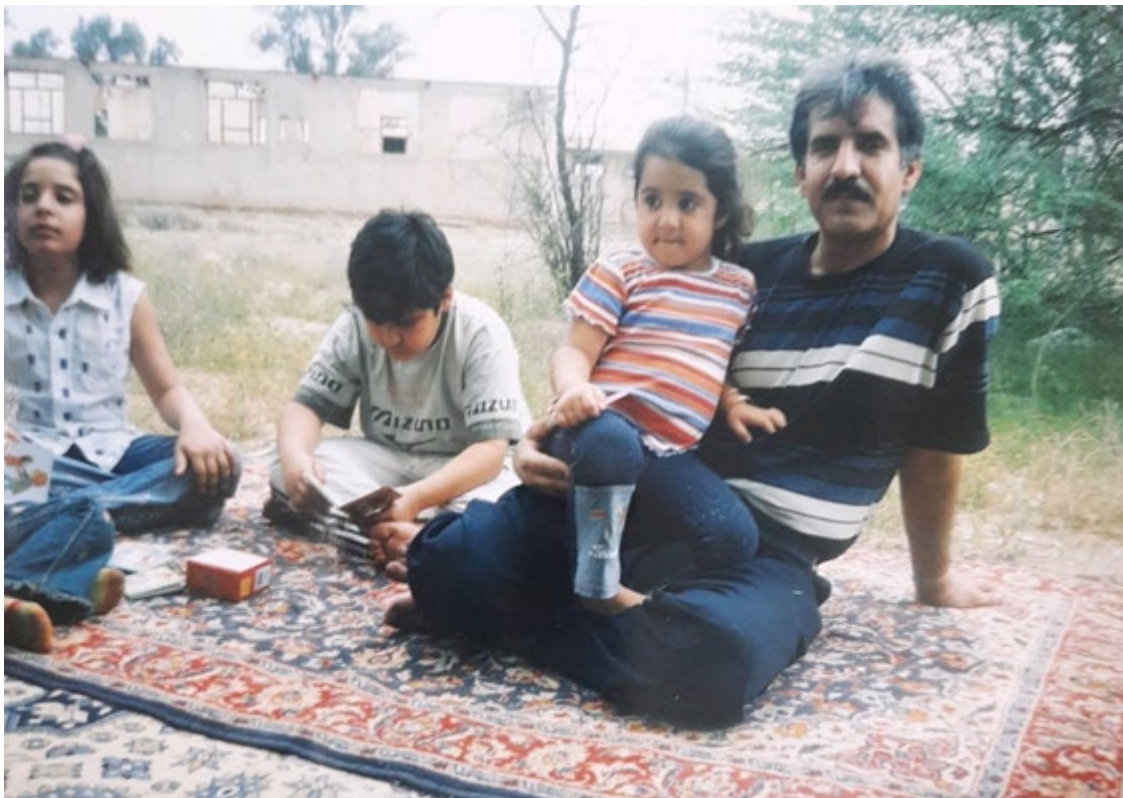


Figure B.4: Image 4, Iran, 2003



Figure B.5: Image 5, Iran, 2002



Figure B.6: Image 6, Iran, 1995



Figure B.7: Image 7, Iran, 2005



Figure B.8: Image 8, Iran, 2019



Figure B.9: Image 9, Iran, 2018

Appendix C

The Floor Collage is a piece that I made to practice combining spaces together. First, I made two separate collages with some of the carpets that I had, by dividing them into two groups of blue and red carpets - which were the dominant colors of my collection pieces. Then I made two more by flipping those two collages. Overall, I had four of them. Then I masked each of those four collages on the patterns of my apartment's flooring. This pattern is also a metaphor for the way a carpet is woven with warps that run vertically around the horizontal frame bars on the loom, while the wefts run horizontally, and together they make the same composition as the pattern that I used.

By doing so, I wanted to allude to the way I see the floor beneath my feet whenever I am walking in my present home. I walk on one, and I see the other.



Figure C.1:

The flooring pattern

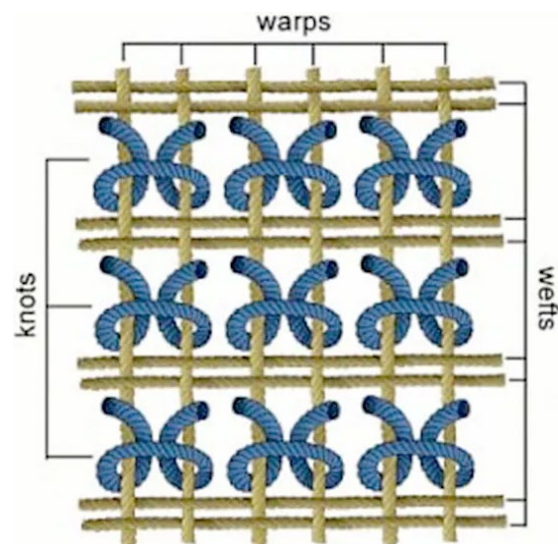


Figure C.2:

The warps, wefts, and knots in a carpet. Source:

<https://rugchick.com/rug-white-knots-what-you-need-to-know/>



Figure C.3:

The Blue Collage, Parnian Parvin, 2022



Figure C.4:

The Red Collage, Parnian Parvin, 2022

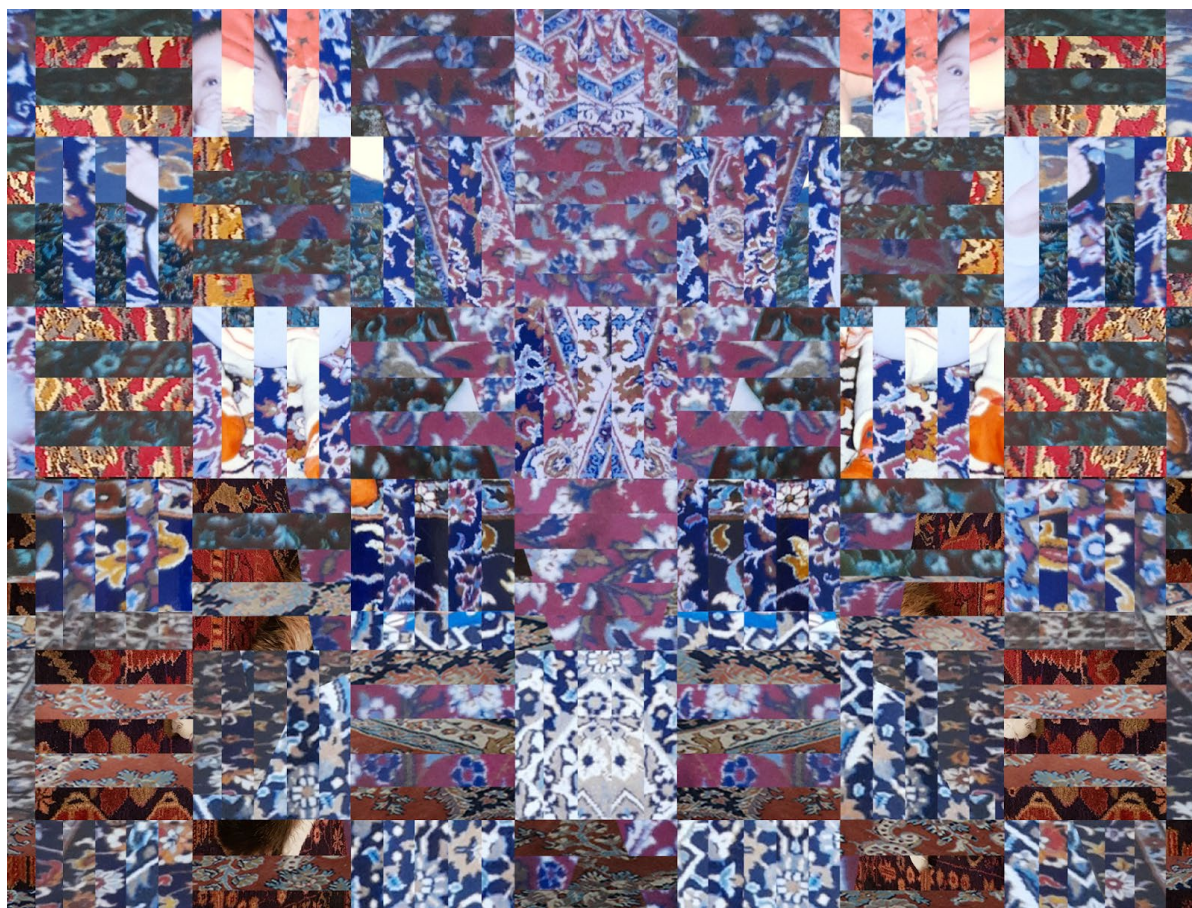


Figure C.5: The Floor Collage, Parnian Parvin, 2022

Appendix D

Below is a summary of a few of the artworks and artists that inspired me throughout this project:

1. **Zahra Nazari.** Zahra Nazari is an Iranian painter, sculptor, and installation artist who grew up in Hamedan, Iran, and now lives and works in New York City. Through an architectural lens, she explores such issues as the built environment, immigration, and the liminal identity of being pulled between two cultures. She uses both photographs and her memory to paint architectural elements from her homeland. Her paintings and installations were powerful inspirations for me in terms of using cultural elements to address issues around displacement and cultural differences. By painting different views of the same buildings, she portrays images in a slippery memory or receding dreams, similar to what I did with the composition of the carpet collage, to address how I remember images and scenes in my own memory.



Figure D.1: ALI QAPU PALACE, Zahra Nazari, 2020

Source: <https://zahranazari.com/2020/06/26/ali-qapu-palace/>

1. **Goli Jalali.** Goli Jalali is an Architectural Designer and a Structural Engineer currently working at James Cheng Architects in Vancouver, Canada. She received her Master of Architecture from Harvard University Graduate School of Design in 2020. In her thesis project “The Magic Carpet”, she investigates the idea of a contemporary image of paradise in the Iranian imagination by using carpets and miniature paintings as a tool for designing architecture. Her illustrations and reimaginings of the “Seven Domes” in Nizami Ganjavi’s “Haft Paykar poem are clear indications of how carpets can define and affect spaces, and how manipulating them can suggest different reinterpretations of a space.



Figure D.2: The Combination of the Seven Domes, Goli Jalali, 2021

Source: <https://golijalali.com/The-Magic-Carpet>

1. **The Museum of Innocence.** The Museum of Innocence is a novel published in 2008 by Orhan Pamuk, the Turkish novelist, and recipient of the 2006 Nobel Prize in Literature. The novel tells the story of an unsuccessful love story between a wealthy businessman and one of his poorer relatives. Throughout the story every time they meet in private, and later he goes to visit her family, he carries away objects related to her or touched by her, or tries to find comfort by visiting the places related to her. When she is lost in an accident just before their marriage, to portray the moments of happiness and joy that he had experienced in the years of knowing her, he converts her house into “A Museum of Innocence” with all of the objects and the other keepsakes that he had managed to gather during those years. The act of gathering, cherishing, and paying additional attention to objects that belong to a certain period of time when one experienced joy and tranquility, was a valuably helpful practice that I learned and tried to apply in my work from its early stages of formation.

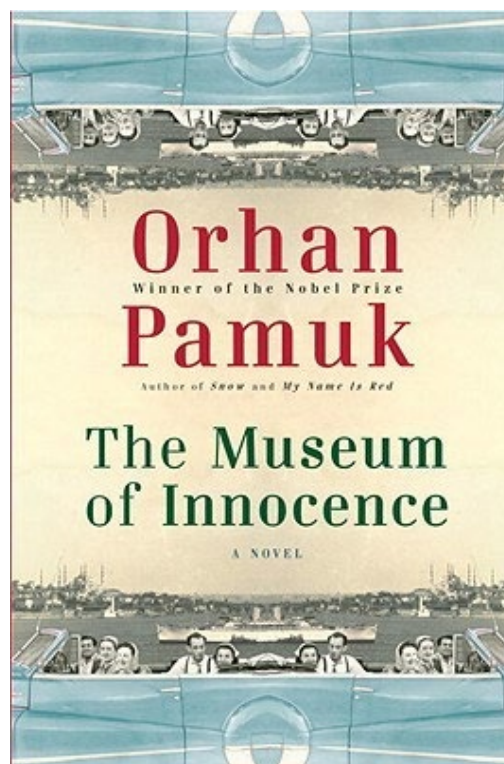


Figure D.3: The Museum of Innocence, Orhan Pamuk, 2008