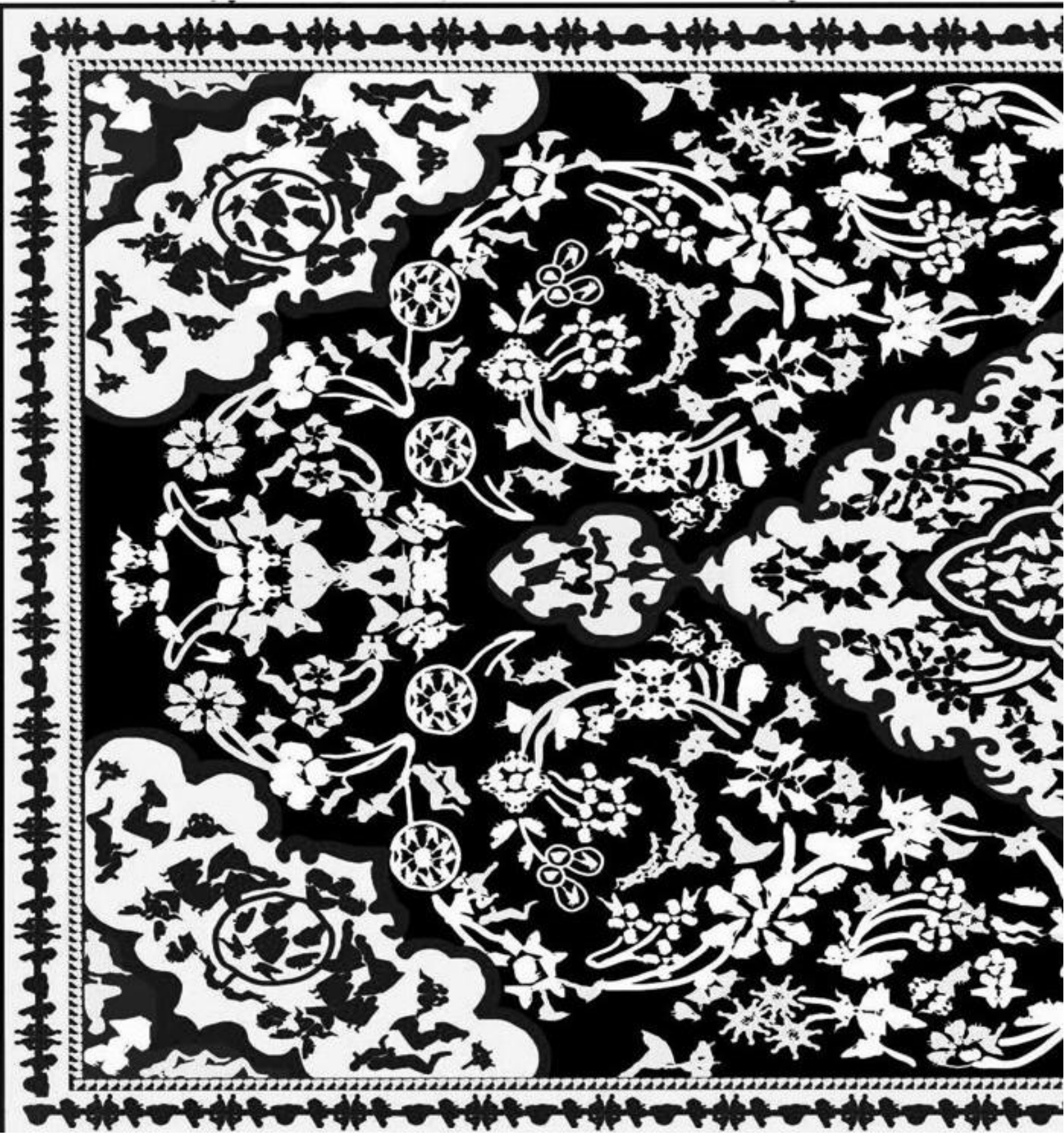


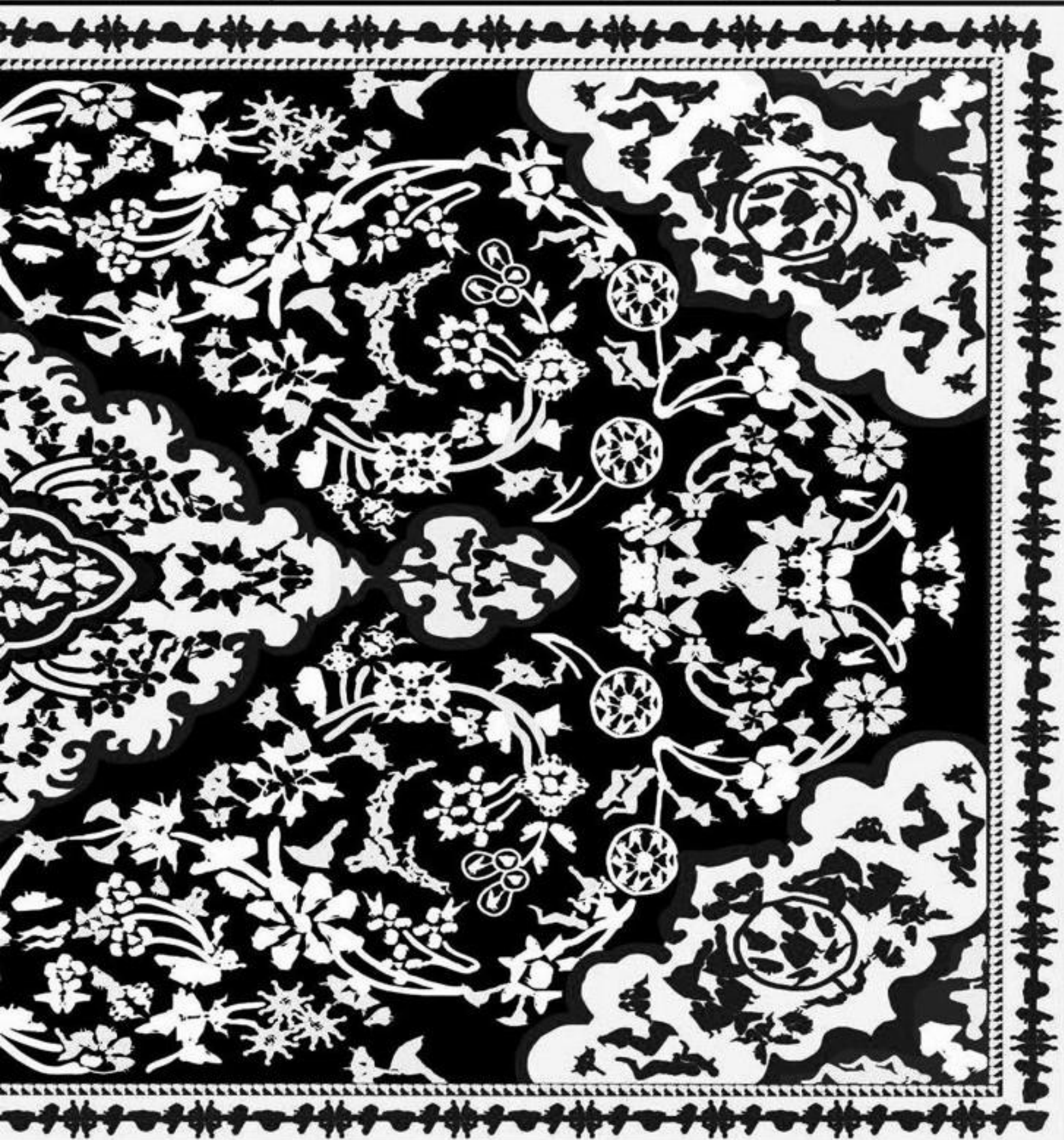
EMBODIMENT OF THE INTERTWINED

در فن جان ازیدن



BY
RAHA FARD

راه‌فرد



A Thesis Exhibition Presented to OCAD University
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Embodiment of the Intertwined

در رفتن جان از بدن

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Abstract

Consequential to the traumatic societal and political situation in my motherland, Iran, the number of Iranian diasporas has increased all over the world, and the Persian cultural, social, and political borders have been expanded much wider than their geographical ones. While this immigrant populace living in the receiver societies is still affected psychologically, and physically by the traumas coming from their land of origin. For this thesis, I as an Iranian female artist, living in exile, and as a cancer survivor, interrogating my body and my soul, about what I have experienced in my social-political time and place. The research applied a combination of studio-based exploration through video performance and sculptural installation, supported by library-based investigation which lies in the intersection of psychoanalysis, trauma's physical and psychological impacts, displacement, politics, and art. I use the idea of Jungian archetypes alongside Gabor Maté's work in *When the Body Says No* to argue that the social-political traumas from the homeland will never be erased from immigrants' bodies, minds, and souls. I examine how the chronic pain that runs through my body is interwoven with the trauma of people living in Iran through the sense of empathy, and how this situation could be explored through the lens of such Jungian archetypes as the Caregiver. My work visually explores reconstructing Iranian cultural elements, like the Persian rug, through/with my body. *The Routes of Blood* is a creation of Persian rug sand installation, which embodies my labor, physical presence, soul, and mind in the space, simultaneously. In *The Woven Bodies Series*, the image of my body through repetition forms the textile patterns of the Persian Rug. The act of performing with the rug and its documentation symbolically represents my memories of my motherland and the trauma that resonates through the afflictions of the chronic pain I have experienced. The thesis is a visualization of the trauma experienced in my Iranian body in the disassociated space of a diasporic context within Canada.

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My journey in art was not possible without the courage and wisdom that I received from God through the path, and of course, this MFA thesis and exhibition could not have happened independently of the help and support of the people around me.

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Also, I want to extend my gratitude to the School of Graduate Studies' Vice President, and Dean, Prof. Ashok Mathur, and IAMD Program Directors, Prof. Peter Morin and Prof. Jay Irizawa for their unconditional help and support during my master's program at OCAD U. In addition, I would like to express my appreciation to Prof. Natalie Waldburger, who introduced me to the books of Gabor Mate, and Bassel Van Der Kolk, which were vital to my research. My cohort's and friends' continual kindness, and their assistance when I was in need, were a source of blessing for me during the last two years. Many thanks to my dear friend Wenwei (Mew) Chen, who photographed the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*, that project could not have been done without her amazing work.

When I look back to the time since I started my BFA at OCAD University six years ago to the end of my MFA journey, one colorful and bold image sticks with me: my family. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my spouse, Sajjad, who I could not get to where I am now,

without his love and support. Although my long journey in art was deeply pleasing and satisfying, I can't ignore the many expected and unexpected troubles in my way during the last several years, but I was always blessed to have him by my side during all the difficult times. I remember when I was having my surgery for breast cancer, while Sajjad was waiting outside the hospital, he went to Home Depot to order, and buy the boards and lumber, which I needed for my BFA thesis's work installation. His physical, and spiritual support were always motivating and heartening for me during the past years that I pursued my passion in art, despite the many worries we had as new immigrants here in Canada for our life. Moreover, I want to thank Delara for being such a mature and wholehearted daughter to me, I know there were many times that she might have needed the whole of me, but I was too busy to be there for her. I love you, Delara, my eyes are always filled with your face no matter where I am.

Finally, I want to thank OCAD University, and all the members of the OCAD community, for their continuous patience and support over the last several years.

برای ملان

برای سجاد

برای دلارا

To My Mom

To Sajjad

To Delara

Content Warning:

This thesis includes discussions of sensitive material about violence, political trauma, intimate health concerns and artworks made from blood.

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Introduction

This paper is a support to my thesis exhibition, *Embodiment of the Intertwined* (در رفتن جان از بدن¹), which incorporates a series of multi-media artworks, including *The Routes of Blood* 2022, *The Evanescence Archival Performance Series* 2023, *The Evanescence Video Installation* 2023, *The Woven Bodies Digital and Woven Series* 2023-4, *The Trauma Traces* 2024, and *The Blood Traces* 2024. I use my visual projects as a vehicle for engaging in discourses of social-political experiences related to my homeland, Iran. I investigate how the two cultural, social, and political lives I experience as an Iranian woman in Canada, affect my body, mind, and soul. Recognizing the psychological and medical effects of my context, looking into the scholarly research on the body's responses to what we undergo during our life, and monitoring my own body, are some of the main aspects of my exploration. In the last 6 years, as an Iranian female artist and researcher, in Toronto-Tkaronto, Canada, I had a dual life in two different time zones. For me, the sun rises at the same time it sets, and my homeland nights are incorporated into my days in Canada. Witnessing my people being suppressed by the Islamic Republic extends my midnights to their mornings and distorts my psychological narratives by melancholizing my daily normal thoughts and disabling me from living a normal life. Situating my body in the position of people in Iran absorbs their trauma into my existence; their pain spreads through my body and unifies with its affliction as a breast cancer survivor.

Back in October 2021, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, without any genetic history. After all the tests were done, my physician's main concern was my lifestyle and the level of stress in my daily life, while they were admitting that no real cause had been found for cancer. In fact,

¹ A line from a Farsi poem by Saadi Shirazi, translates to “when the soul leaves the body.”

in our daily lives, we usually face different stressful situations regarding our family or our society, but certainly, the same circumstances can affect people in different ways based on their past history, and their personal characteristics. In my research, I explore how my mind, body, and soul get affected by pressures rooted in the social and political experience as a member of the Persian diaspora in Canada. My critical knowledge of some of the investigations I had presented in my areas of practice and research (such as psychoanalysis, medical research, and sociocultural studies) is rooted in my own lived experiences and my own cultural knowledge. Therefore, this thesis under no circumstances provides a scientific or psychological analysis of the notion of body and the traumatic experience, nor do I seek to depict a sociocultural theoretical framework of the subject matter; rather, I intend to visually express my ongoing personal suffering as an Iranian female artist living two different lives in Canada, I indicate how this situation influence health of my body and psyche.

I initiated my exploration by investigating the impact of our past and personality on the extent we are affected by stressful conditions, referring to Jungian archetypes, which Carol S Pearson and Hugh K Marr comprehensively discussed in their book *Awakening What story are you living? a workbook and guide to interpreting results from the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator instrument*. They highlight Jung's explanations of archetypes as inherent patterns affecting our thinking and behavior. Reflecting on this notion I wanted to explore why some people are affected more profoundly than others by the same events at the same time.

Following the above analysis, I wanted to consider how the intensity and the amount of stress we carry as a burden daily will act on our bodies, and the way that some severe illnesses could be related to it. Gabor Mate, the Canadian physician, and author specializing in addiction, trauma, and mind-body health in his book, *When the Body Says No: The Cost of Hidden Stress*,

argues how the repressed anger and stress could cause various medical and physical disorder, without us being aware of the connection. I examined this idea by monitoring my body when watching or reading Iran's news, during the Woman-Life-Freedom revolution, realizing how this has caused my temporary medical and psychological conditions.

Furthermore, Bessel Van Der Kolk emphasizes that being traumatized is a kind of continuing to arrange one's life as if the trauma still exists, without any change, and any new event is debased by the past. This theory guided me to recognize my body's reactions and the psychological narratives in my daily life, while there were no obvious triggers around me. Der Kolk is a psychiatrist, author, and researcher who researches the societies after the Second World War and the people whose lives ceased in 1944. Der Kolk explains that "The survivor's energy now becomes focused on suppressing inner chaos, at the expense of spontaneous involvement in their life". This shows that the trauma and its effects will never disappear. Even when the traumatic situation is over, people's traumatized bodies and minds will still encounter distress and its impacts even in their normal daily life (53). *The Trauma Traces*² project visually illustrates the trauma's permanent traces on my soul, mind, and body.

To indicate how visual language could be used to express personalizing social-political traumas, body disorders, and political bodies, I brought examples from some contemporary artists such as Mona Hatoum, and Shirin Neshat in this document. In my artworks, I intend to raise questions regarding the traumatized diasporic bodies, and their undeniable connection to their motherland, despite the distance. Through this thesis, I aim to motivate people living in diaspora communities and their receiving countries' societies to think about how the members of diasporas

² See page 78.

might experience trauma in their physical self and space, which are rooted in the social-political tragedies, happening in the lands they are coming from.

In my art, materials, and their symbolic or specific use, are raised as a metaphor, and a connection to what I intend to convey. Experiencing my stricken body woven in pains coming from my homeland, and bringing its feelings into my art practice, I meld cultural elements which are connected to the people of my homeland. To define culture, I refer to Maghsoodi and Nadalian's article "The Interaction of "Globalization" and Persian "Handicrafts": An Analytical Investigation" in which they write from Sharifi and Fazeli's point of view that describes culture as the recognizable lifestyles, values, and beliefs of "an ethnically or geographically integrated group of people," that passes on through generations. In addition, Maghsoodi and Nadalian bring up Bocoock's definition that culture situates a symbolic world of concepts in which a cultural group lives (qtd. in Maghsoodi and Nadalian 126).

Among all different cultural elements, handicrafts are known as tangible, and rooted in traditional art coming from the beliefs, thoughts, and culture of a society (Maghsoodi and Nadalian 126). The Persian rug is one of the most popular Iranian handicrafts, that not only is deeply connected to all the people with Persian culture but is also known worldwide due to its many practical uses. Therefore, for me, the Persian Rug is the main image and symbolic material, which is found in all the works of this thesis, such as *The Routes of Blood* which is a sand installation inspired by Persian rugs, *The Evanescence Archival Performance Series* that is a series of self-portrait photographs taken while I was covering myself with a Persian rug, and *The Woven Bodies Series* which are inspired by Persian Rugs, and I used my body's silhouette to make their floral pattern. The last one is *The Blood Traces*, which are blood paintings (using my own drawn blood), from the same series of photographs, *The Evanescence Archival Performance Series*.

Memory Trauma

Political Trauma and Sense of Empathy

Every individual has their own lived experience, in which they may encounter different types of traumas coming from personal, or social-political life, and these two categories mutually affect one another during one's lifetime. For this paper, I refer to "political trauma" as the psychosocial annihilation of the individual and the destruction of the social and political structures of society, which would impact both people and the whole community simultaneously. With this perception, political trauma is associated with a close, continuing circular interaction between one's psychological state and his or her social environment. It is defined as the result of obvious human rights violations and state brutality against individuals or groups (Donoso 420).

As an important reminder I note that in this paper, the investigation is focused on my situation, as a Persian immigrant, and I refer to my own lived experience in Canada, during the current traumatic social-political experience of people in Iran. Therefore, this exploration could only be expanded to the Iranians who are living overseas, and witnessing back what is going on in their homeland from far away.

When two years ago, I was diagnosed with breast cancer, and the physicians noted the stressful life, as a potential cause for it, I decided to look into the situations that caused me more stress in those several years, and I intended to consider the social and political pressures that I had burdened as a member of the Persian diaspora living in Canada. The latest, and harshest tough

events in those years were the 2019's November³ massacre in Iran, and the PS752⁴ Ukrainian flight shot down by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). These were two disasters that profoundly affected me emotionally. For example, after the PS752 shot down, I could not laugh with my family anymore, and every funny situation turned into a dramatic scene for me. The families who were killed in that plane, their eyes, their smiles were in front of my eyes every second. So, I decided to closely investigate how I have been impacted psychologically and medically by those events, and this was at the same time as the Woman-Life-Freedom revolution⁵ occurred in Iran.

During Woman-Life-Freedom revolution the Iranian diaspora community was experiencing one of the most stressful times in their lifetime because they were watching the bravest Iranians being beaten, blinded, and killed in the streets in different cities in Iran. I, as one of the Iranians, was also overburdened by tensions, and stresses. To explore how this situation affects my body, and my psyche, I designed a score practice, in which I monitored my body's

³ According to Amnesty International, and Reuters, in November 2019's uprising in Iran, the Islamic Republic massacred at least 1,500 protesters on the streets. Thousands were also arrested and injured at the protests, which broke out in hundreds of Iranian cities (*Center for Human Rights in Iran*).

⁴ Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 was a scheduled international civilian passenger flight from Tehran to Kyiv, operated by Ukraine International Airlines. On 8 January 2020, the Boeing 737-800 flying the route was shot down by IRGC shortly after takeoff, killing all 176 occupants on board.

⁵ The Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran is a protest movement that started in September 2022 after the death of Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a young Kurdish woman who was arrested by the morality police for not wearing hijab correctly. The movement demands the end of compulsory hijab laws and other forms of discrimination and oppression against women in Iran. The movement has been met with brutal repression by the Iranian authorities, who have killed hundreds of protesters and arrested thousands more. The movement has also gained international support and recognition and has been awarded the 2023 Freedom Award by Freedom House.

reactions while I was reading or watching Iran's news during the Woman-Life-Freedom revolution. I scanned the news for 10 minutes every day for 15 days while observing my body, and taking notes about its physical and psychological feelings, and reactions. At the end, the results depicted many temporary medical and psychological disorders, like digestive problems, high heart beating, breath shortness, and pain in my surgical areas like underarms, and left breast. I also noticed some of these feelings were directly linked to the stress and anger I felt while witnessing unarmed people's brutal suppression in the streets. During the same days, I decided to create *The Routes of Blood* sand installation⁶, to relieve my body's pain and stress through physical labor. I believed while people were being killed in the streets, I couldn't sit in my studio and create an elegant and passive work of art, I had to do something physically demanding and bold with my body.

To expand my observation, I had conversations with some of my Iranian friends, close to my age, and living in the Greater Toronto Area (I wanted their environmental situations to be the same as mine), I discussed their physical and psychological experiences during the same timeframe of Woman-Life-Freedom revolution. I talked to 11 people, 9 of them had suffered from anxiety and depression, and 7 people had experienced physical health issues. Therefore, a direct relationship was observed between experiencing political trauma, and medical and psychological health issues in more than half of the people I had conversation with.

To me, the above observations' outcomes are defined by "empathy", through which, we can emotionally perceive others' predicaments; and understand other people's experiences, feelings, and perspectives (Ferrieri 00:00:02-15). Empathy generates a connection with the one

⁶ See page 47.

who feels something that you do not feel. (Lanao 00:01:35-55). Andrew Odgers elucidates empathy in three following levels:

The first level of empathy is emotional contagion, in which the body resonates with others' feelings, and responds to their body language. This level of empathy activates some areas of the brain which produce the same behaviors as others and the person receives a rough and ready sense of what they are feeling. I experienced this level of empathy when I witnessed the Woman-Life-Freedom revolution on the news. While I was watching people get shot on the video feeds from citizen journalists, I unconsciously felt like being shot in the same places in my body, or when I saw people being beaten, I felt the pain without even thinking about it.

The second level is defined as affecting attunement, which is an automatic and unconscious response to the other's state with a nonverbal element. In other words, the attunement would be visible in some automated gestural way. To explain this level, Odgers brought up an example of his reaction if he had a client whose gestures convey her sadness "My voice might automatically adjust to a gentle, low tone. This lets the client know that I have empathically recognized her inner state." He says that by imitating her heavy movements (first level of empathy), she would find out that he has paid attention to her behavior but not necessarily is aware of her sadness.

Odgers calls his final level empathy proper, which is when somebody consciously draws on their self-awareness, and thinks back to their own past emotional experiences to imagine what someone else is feeling, "you also normally suspend your own goals, and give priority to feeling with the other person while remaining aware of your feelings— which might be very different" (12). This level could be explained as ethically spectating the other people's traumas, and desire to resolve the others' issues, which could be called a kind of active empathy.

However, People are different in feeling empathy in specific situations such as political traumas. While some people might not care about the other's traumas, some others might experience emotional contagion or affecting attunement (the two first levels of empathy). Correspondingly, few people encounter that same traumatic situation as a responsive spectator and endeavor to help the afflicted bodies to be relieved, and if they are unable to do that, they will feel helpless. But the question is why? Why does empathy differ among people? To explore this inquiry, I want to refer to Jungian archetypal theory which is briefly expounded in the following section.

Life Journeys and Archetypes

Referring to my personal experience of being diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago, to root out what has happened in my body, I got some therapy sessions, with a Jungian psychoanalyst. Through deepening my archetypal knowledge, these therapy sessions made me more conscious about my psychological narratives, and what I had gone through in my life journey. Archetypes describe unconscious patterns through the manners we perceive, organize, and interpret the events in our lives. Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, and some other psychologists have defined archetypes as stories, themes, and symbols that impact our lives while we are not aware of them.

Carol S. Pearson and Hugh K. Marr in their book: *What Story Are You Living? A Workbook and Guide to Interpreting Results from the Pearson-Marr Archetype Indicator* introduced a model of measurement that assists people in recognizing the archetypal stories they live in, called “The Pearson Marr Measurement Archetype Indicator (PMAI).” They used this tool to work with various individuals, couples, and groups, who were experiencing challenges in aspects of their lives such as marriage, job, or social life. The book was intended to be a short guide to understanding PMAI, but it became more than that. The latest version of the book reverberates the

knowledge and perspectives rooted in working with PMAI model over many years. It uncovers the archetypal patterns that influence our daily lives, which could be discovered in the stories that we live in.

We all live many minor stories through one major narrative, which is our life story. Pearson and Marr defined life story as “the tale that you repeatedly tell yourself about who you are, what you want, what you can and cannot do” (1). Although each person’s story is defined individually, in a broader context, the characters and their situations are universal all over the world. This universality was first brought up by Carl Jung. This is the reason why dramas from past centuries, and other continents resonate with us: we have experienced that drama before in our own lives.

In our life journey, we live archetypal stories continuously. Through this individuation process path, we find our hidden potential in different stages. The more active archetypes in our lives assist us in reaching the beneficial qualities of that archetype. Most of us live one or two archetypal patterns throughout our lives, but when we learn to consciously live several of them simultaneously, we will achieve their concealed gifts. Jung introduced 12 archetypal stories, which are named based on the main character in each story: Innocent, Orphan, Warrior, Caregiver, Seeker, Lover, Destroyer, Ruler, Magician, Sage, and Jester (Pearson and Marr 3). When we live a specific archetypal story, we are inclined to see the world from its standpoint. How we perceive the world, and what makes more sense for us to do in different situations, comes from that archetype. In this context Pearson and Marr brought an example of a student encountering a challenging situation with her peer in the school: “If a student who is living a Warrior story is having a difficult time with another student, she may react in a strong and challenging way, defending her position. However, if this student were living a Caregiver story, she might instead show concern for what was causing the other person to be difficult, seeking to understand and

reassure”. As we see, the archetype which we are living unconsciously defines our acts, and behaviors in facing different situations. Noticing our life, we find out that in certain stages we have faced new situations, new scenery, and new people, which took us into new archetypal stories to be lived out (11).

Additionally, to achieve a deeper understanding of the archetypes, and the way they act, we should consider their shadows as well. The shadows are “the negative sides of an archetype which can limit the one's perception...” Pearson and Marr explain. They emphasize that if an archetype is highly active or repressed, it will drive the person into negative patterns, behaviors, and ways of thinking (24). If we recognize which story of an archetype we are living in, and how that archetype is acting on us, we will be able to predict the endings and avoid the negative sides of that archetype. Living a "Developed" archetype refers to living its positive aspects, and harnessing its negative sides, and shadows.

For this thesis, I will discuss the two archetypes that are more related to the sense of “empathy”, to realize why do people have different senses of empathy about other’s traumas. The most relevant archetypes in this context are Orphan and Caregiver.

Orphan⁷ is one of the typical childhood stage archetypes. When somebody recognizes that bad things might happen and has a realistic vision of the world, they perceive the Orphan narrative. The developed Orphans can access their inner gifts and improve their lives through the level of resilience, and interdependence while feeling empathy for others at the same time.

⁷ Orphan and Innocent are the two sides of our inner child. The first archetype we face in our journeys is Innocent. It appears in the form of a childlike naivete and trust. It represents a basic trust in others and the world as a safe place (Pearson and Marr 16). It is the stage in which we develop the trust, confidence, and optimism to take the journey (Pearson and Marr 83).

Nevertheless, if the Orphan archetype is highly active or repressed, a person could be stuck in its negative side since his childhood. The Orphan's negative sides could be specified as cynicism, tending to be a victim or victimizer, and complaining chronically. In fact, an Orphan turns into a survivor after encountering difficulties, and failures. They are hypervigilant and able to predict troubles before they happen. Life has taught them that they could be resilient enough to cope with whatever happens. Thus, since they dared to face their fears, they can be there for others too. Consequently, a full-fledged Orphan might incorporate any of the three levels of empathy, unconsciously or consciously. While the highly active, or repressed Orphans might resist the sense of empathy for others and think themselves as victims (Pearson and Marr 93).

Despite Orphan, Caregiver is a typical archetype of adulthood. The Caregivers show care, concern, and compassion for others, and feature a helping personality. The developed Caregivers will fulfill their lives through community, nurturance, and generosity. (Pearson and Marr 22) In short, we can conclude that they naturally have a sense of conscious empathy, and they are ready to help others. The desire to resolve the other's issues in a Caregiver's personality categorizes their empathy to the third level⁸. The Caregivers feel responsible for others and acquire satisfaction through caring for them. Pearson and Marr clearly define how does Caregiver thinks and acts: "Caregivers believe in the Golden Rule but are often better at "doing unto others" than letting others "do unto them." This type of personality has a powerful potential to become hyperactive, as their beliefs are supported by society and religion's moral rules. At their best, and balanced status, they bring altruism to the world not only by helping others but also by seeing them with compassionate and forgiving eyes. Therefore, Caregivers seek people who need their help and

⁸ See page 21, for the information about the three levels of empathy.

have the potential empathy for all people who are in trouble and misery (102). However, if this archetype is at the extravagance level, the person could unconsciously experience martyrdom, enabling others, co-dependence, and guilt-tripping (Pearson and Marr 25). They might sacrifice themselves to fulfill others' needs, hence one useful advice for them is to make sure that their own physical and emotional requirements are met and have the same quality of care as they have for others (Pearson and Marr 105).

Referring to my own story, during the therapy sessions I had with the Jungian psychoanalyst, I became aware of my own experience with archetypes. When I talked about what I had gone through since my childhood to that date, the psychoanalyst's first comment was: "You should have a highly active Caregiver inside you!", then she defined the role of a Caregiver, and how a strenuous childhood, could result in an exaggerated Caregiver in adulthood. An exaggerated Caregiver feels responsibility for easing the situation for the whole world and enduring all their anxieties. Our conversation reminded me of how I felt during the last 5 years, regarding what was happening in Iran. I remembered that I wanted to scratch my face with a knife, during the 2019 November massacre in Iran, because I felt I should have the trace of those days on my face. I remember I felt guilt-tripping, because I was alive here, far from them who were being killed in silence while the internet was shot down by the Islamic Republic. I remembered that I was not able to pray for myself and my family, for a long time after PS752, was shot down by IRGC. I thought why would God take care of me and my family, while those many families were disintegrated by IRGC missiles? Why do we deserve to be taken care of? Pearson and Marr discussed the above feelings in their book: "Caregiver willing to sacrifice even his own body for health and succor of others ..." which shows how the self is not as valued as the others for a Caregiver (102).

All things considered, I conclude that a highly active Caregiver-type personality could face stress and anxiety in spectating the other's traumas, and this would be harsher when they feel helpless in relieving the traumatized bodies. This was what I had encountered since I had lived in Canada as a member of the Iranian diaspora. Therefore, to deepen my investigation, in the next chapter, I explore stress and trauma's impacts on the body through some scholars' books, such as *When the Body Says No, The Cost of Hidden Stress*, by Gabor Mate.

Stress Costs

Stress Impacts on the Body's System

In rooting the possible causes of the cancer occurrence in my body, besides the psychoanalysis consultancy I had, and the books I read, I started to expand my investigation into the stress impacts on the body, and I came to a wide area of research done by different scholars. The real, and scientific relationship between our psychological situation and our medical status was enormously surprising for me. I understood about many facts that I had heard in the world of mouth for many years, such as this common sentence that as a patient many of us have heard from our physician: “We have not found any medical disorder in your body, the illness you are complaining about is rooted in the stress and anxiety.” In this chapter, I am going to bring up some interesting parts of my exploration in this area. As I mentioned earlier, Dr. Gabor Mate, the Hungarian- Canadian physician and author, who scrutinizes trauma and its effects, and Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, the founder and medical director of the Trauma Center in Brookline, Massachusetts, are two primary scholars that I am referring to for this purpose.

Regarding the ways stress acts on our body, I found Van Der Kolk's research on the effects of emotional situations on brain functionality very practical. In his book, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Der Kolk writes that the Neuroimaging studies of human beings in highly emotional situations reveal that intense fear, sadness, and anger (stress-inducing states) raise the activity of the subcortical brain areas⁹ that are involved in

⁹ “Subcortical structures are a group of diverse neural formations deep within the brain...They are involved in complex activities such as memory, emotion, pleasure, and hormone production. They act as information hubs of the nervous system, as they relay and modulate information passing to different areas of the brain” (Vaskovik).

emotions and notably decrease the activity in various regions in the frontal lobe¹⁰. When that happens the inhibitory capabilities of the frontal lobe break down, and people “take leave of their senses” (63). His scrutinization reminded me of how I used to become motionless while watching the protest and suppression videos on my cellphone on social media while my heart was splitting out of my chest. I was able to move after a while, but my body was still profoundly impacted by what it had experienced. I brought all those feelings of my unsettled body into *The Evanescence Archival Performance Series*¹¹ which embodies the stress, chaos, and loneliness I specifically felt during the protest time in Iran.

Correspondingly, Gabor Mate’s research demonstrates the durability of the above connection, by mentioning the relation between the body and psyche. He argues that biological and psychological activity are not independent. Each appears as an operating super-system, which is not operating individually and cannot be assumed as autonomous mechanisms. Therefore, I think the mutual connection between both the biological and psychological allows us to control both by acting on either. So, by my body’s labor in creating *The Routes of Blood* sand Installation¹², I endeavored to relieve my frozen body from the stress which helped me psychologically as well.

In his research on the scientific aspect of the link between body and psyche, Gabor Mate raises psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology, as a discipline that researches the interdependent functions of the organs and glands that control our behavior and psychological equilibrium. The

¹⁰ “Your brain’s frontal lobe is home to areas that manage thinking, emotions, personality, judgment, self-control, muscle control and movements, memory storage and more. Just as its name indicates, it’s the forward-most area of your brain. Your frontal lobe is a key area of study for both brain-related and mental health-related fields of medicine” (Cleveland Clinic).

¹¹ See Page 57.

¹² See page 47.

psychoneuroimmunoendocrine (PNI) system is responsible for ensuring the development, survival, and reproduction of each organism. Its components' interconnections qualify it to identify potential threats from outside or inside sources and respond to them with behaviors and biochemical conversions to preserve and maximize safety at a minimal cost (Mate 87).¹³ The above functions are done through the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis which Mate defines as the hub of the PNI system. The activation of the HPA axis enables the psychological and physical stimuli to move the body to respond to threats (89). The most powerful psychic triggers for the HPA axis are the influences that are known as the most emotionally stressful ones, such as uncertainty, conflict, lack of control, lack of information, or lack of anything that we consider essential. So, any act that reduces the sense of lack and compensates for the deficiencies could prevent the HPA axis from activation (Mate 90), which means these acts of management, do not let the psychological and physical triggers move the body by the stress impacts.

Stress and Critical Disease

My body as a tool for mark making becomes the example of the non-existence of genetic history in my breast cancer occurrence. The first sentence that my surgeon told me after seeing my negative results of genetic lab tests, was “We do not know the exact causes for cancer yet, but I think your lifestyle, and the amount of stress you have are some important factors in this causation.” In the same context, Mate explains that the link between our body and our emotional status could lead to some diseases like cancer; he clarifies that psychological influences through

¹³ Mate explains the PNI system as a giant switchboard that “always alights with coordinated messages coming in from all directions and going to all directions at the same time.” Mate emphasizes that the PNI system follows any short-term or chronic stimulus that acts on one of its parts, thus this stimulus can impact the other parts of the PNI system as well.

the body's interconnections¹⁴ could make a critical biological contribution in starting the malignant disease (87). He writes that “In cancer causation, disturbed hormonal activity and impaired immune defenses both play a role.” For instance, although in breast cancer genetic variation is considered as a cause; for most people, heredity does not play a role (Mate 90).

Mate’s explanations about the development of any malignancy progress deepened my understanding of the above connections. He defines the initiation of the process by transforming a normal cell into an abnormal one, and he emphasizes that cancer could be considered a cell replication disease that subverts the normal process of cell division and cell death. Since we have millions of cells dying or being formed in our bodies every day, natural accidents could cause a great number of unsolicited abnormal transformations. But the question is how this usual abnormal transformation could turn into cancer. Mate brings up lung cancer and its connection to smoking. He writes that tobacco smoke has a damaging effect on the genetic material of lung cells, while for cancer occurrence there have to be as many as ten distinct lesions or points of damage on the lung cells' DNA. Most of the lesions are transient and eliminated by DNA repair process or cell death, and in fact, cancer arises when DNA repair or the cell death process fails to act. Referring to research done on the psychological effects of lung cancer, at Ohio State University College of Medicine, Mate states that faulty DNA repair highly increases the risk of cancer, and stress may affect these DNA repair processes (91). In other words, a disease is not a direct and simple outcome of an external attack, but it spreads in a vulnerable host whose internal environment is disordered (Mate 92).

¹⁴through the interconnections linking the components of the body’s stress apparatus: the nerves, the hormonal glands the immune system, and brain centers where emotions are perceived and processed. (87)

The above description deeply affected me, reminding me of my experience at the hospital having a biopsy. When I told the radiologist my biopsy bled a lot, last time, she said “It is the nature of the beast”. I was not sure about what she said, I asked her if it was because of cancer, and she said “Yes”. In that moment everything changed for me. I realized at the previous biopsy appointment, the doctor probably knew it was cancer... and the blood, that warm blood was from those beasts in my body... the warm blood that had faulty repaired DNA. In *The Blood Traces Series*,¹⁵ I depict this connection between my blood, and what I have experienced emotionally, and physiologically through painting my silhouettes with my own drawn blood.

“Cancer Personality”

Through his scientific research, case histories, and his own insights and experiences, Mate introduces “Cancer Personality”, which also resulted from the interviews he had with his patients and their families. He discusses that although we cannot assume a specific personality causes cancer, certain personality features raise the risk of occurrence since they are more likely to generate physiological stress. Some of these characteristics, such as anger repression, the inability to say no, and a lack of awareness of one’s anger, could cause the situation of having unexpressed emotions and feeling that one's needs are ignored and their gentleness is exploited. This situation is stress-inducing, even if the person is not aware of being stressed. Reoccurring and multiplying this stressful situation over the years, in the long term, harms homeostasis and the immune system. In short, it is stress rather than personality that threatens the body’s physiological balance and immune defenses and makes the body predispose to disease by reducing its resistance to illness.

¹⁵ See Page 81.

Mate simply explains: “Physiological stress, then is the link between personality traits and disease” This is what he saw in his patients throughout the years (127).

Mate expresses an example about one of his previous patients who had died of ovarian cancer. He explains the first time that he informed the patient about her cancer, the first sentence she uttered was “My poor husband and my poor mother. I am a pillar of strength for them. I felt sorry for them because they would lose that support” (129). This sentence guides us to find out about her personality: Being worried about others instead of being worried about her own body and disease. This is the point that Mate's research resonates with Jungian archetype psychoanalysis; her words suggest a highly active Caregiver personality, who according to Pearson and Mar never values the self as highly as others. In addition, we know that having a highly active Caregiver inside could lead to repressing anger to care for others, also the one is not able or doesn't want to say no and reject people's requests. As we saw, Mate mentions these kinds of characteristics in explaining “Cancer Personality.”

The above example reminded me of the day I went for my biopsy (they found out about the cancer on that day) at North York General Hospital. I was lying on the bed and waiting for the doctor to come and do the biopsy, and I was thinking, if it takes longer than we expected, my husband should go to Richmond Hill, to pick up my daughter from school, and come back all this way. I was worried about them both, and continuously asked the registered nurse “How long it will take?” and explained to her what I was worried about. She stared at me, and said: “Be worried about yourself, and your body, not the others.” But I resisted: “No, they are my family, I have to be worried about them!”

Considering the above explanations, I found out about the highly active Caregiver inside me, which had heavily involved my body, mind, and soul. They were intertwined with each other

and their inside and outside traumas while living in a third space between my physical and my mind space. Since the only access point to all the above is my body, and I can monitor the distortions in my mind, psyche, and soul through it, thus in my visual projects, my body is one of the fundamental materials. I incorporate it in various ways for the creation of the work. I use my body's labor work, its movement, or its image in creating my art. I will thoroughly describe the projects' embodiment and process in the next chapter.

Material, Process and Engagement

My Body

My immigrant body, my feminine body, and my cancer-survived body keeps a trace of traumas in each second. My body profoundly recalls the past in the present and lives in the traces of social and political time and place. My body deeply remembers the tension it felt while passing by Gashte Ershad¹⁶, during the past years. It remembers the stress and anxiety I had while going to night parties in my teenage years. It remembers the horror and apprehension while reading about acid attacks on women due to their insufficient hijab. My body continuously recalls the nights when the shooting was the only sound heard in our neighborhood, Shahrak-e-Gharb in Tehran. It recalls the cloudy nights in Toronto-Tkaronto, that were tied to the sunny mornings of my motherland, the midnights that I used to check the news on my phone every hour. My body constantly relives being whipped, while watching the people's traumatized and whipped bodies on the news. It relives the feelings of being raped while reading about the boys and girls arrested by IRGC. I perceive the pain in my own eyes while I watch people being shot in the eyes by IRGC in the street protests. My body has been consistently shot and burned on the PS752 flight since 2019¹⁷.

My body embraces the traces of the traumas, which are not only caused by the societal-political situation through the years but also, came from my own mind, body, and soul, which are linked to my own sensitivities, lived experience, and psychanalysis characteristics. They are rooted

¹⁶ The Guidance Patrol (Persian: گشت ارشاد) or morality police is an Islamic religious police force and vice squad in the Law Enforcement Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Guidance Patrol enforces Islamic law in Iran; this is most often the enforcement of the Islamic dress code, such as ensuring women in the country wear hijabs.

¹⁷ The feelings I wrote in this paragraph could be defined by the first level of empathy. See page 21.

in my past, and my present at the same time. This trauma is specific to my Iranian experience but may be interchangeable for every individual member of the Iranian diaspora, which can define their personality and psychological narratives as well.

My thesis exhibition excavates the intersection of body, psychoanalysis, politics, and visual expression. By the presence and absence of the “body” as the medium through repetition, textile patterns, and indexical print, I bring my embodiment into my visual narratives. My body acts as one of the main materials through my process and engagement.

Cultural Elements; Persian Rug

Living in a self-imposed exile, like many immigrants, I seek to reconstruct my lost homeland in my new home here in Canada, to feel it as a home that belongs to me, to my past, and my roots; as Theodor Adorno explains the concept of “Dwelling” (38). The cultural symbols and elements, that were one of the routine aspects of everyday life in Iran, turned out to become a rare tight rope connecting me to that land, and incorporating them in my everyday life which links me back home. This is not only about me: you will never find this much of Persian traditional elements in the homes of people living inside Iran, that you see in the homes of Iranian diaspora around the world. The things come to be multilayered and achieve emotional depth in their meanings, and their usage in immigrant’s homes. Immigrants based on their interests, and background, recreate a little version of their homeland in their homes in new countries. For me, Persian rugs are one of the strongest connections to my homeland, and I gradually brought all my home’s Persian rugs to Canada during the past 6 years. Covering my rooms with the rugs, walking on them, touching them, and looking at their colorful patterns, brings the home feeling to me. I never have deeply stared at the floral patterns of them and paid attention to their designs, and colors, before my immigration, despite walking on them every day, and night.

The logic that supports choosing the Persian rug, as one of my main symbolic, and realistic materials, in this visual art thesis, goes beyond my connection to this material. Persian rugs are connected to all the people of my motherland. They are woven in different regions, and communities. People use their bodies, and their hands to weave Persian rugs, and each community brings its cultural elements, its daily life, and its environmental conditions into the rugs (see fig.1).



Figure 1. Menati, Farzad. Carpet weaving workshop in Iran 1, Tasnim News, Tasnimnews.com, 10 Jun. 2018, Farzad Menati.

There is no difference in where the people are coming from, and what is their economic, and social level situation, every family has at least one Persian rug in their home. It could be from any region, it could be a cheap one or an expensive one, but there is at least one Persian rug in every home in Iran. Also, in some cities, people cover their loved ones' dead bodies in Persian rugs before burying them. In the everyday news, you see Persian rugs in the homes of people who have lost their loved ones and their children. They sit on the rugs¹⁸(see fig.2). They mourn on the rugs (see fig.3, and fig.4).



Figure 2. Shahriyar Mohammadi sitting next to his friend's body, Mohammad Hasanzadeh. *VOA*, ir.voanews.com, 6 Apr. 2023.

<https://ir.voanews.com/a/iran-protests-mohammad-hassanzadeh-shahriar-mohammadi/7039567.html>

¹⁸ I never forgot the following tragedy that happened in Bukan, a city with a Kurdish population, located in West Azerbaijan province in Iran: Mohammad Hassanzadeh, a citizen protester, was killed by government forces on November 25. Shahriar Mohammadi, his close friend, brought his body home and sat next to it for hours to not allow the security forces to steal Mohammad's body, and bury him in an unknown place (as they do to the other bodies). Shahriyar joined his friend again on the next day, he was killed by government forces while coming back from Mohammad's funeral.

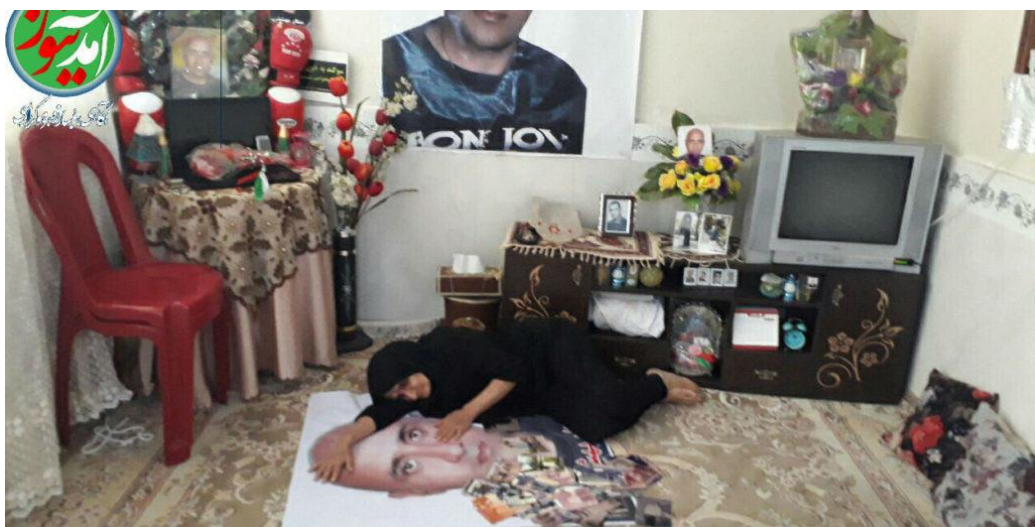


Figure 3. Gohar Eshghi at her home, mourning for her son, Sattar Beheshti on his photo. *MelliunIran*, 4 Nov. 2017.

melliun.org/iran/143129.



Figure 4. Gohar Eshghi on Sattar Beheshti's grave, *Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty*, Golnaz Esfandiari, 5 Nov. 2021

<https://www.rferl.org/a/31548142.html>

I would also address how the Persian Rugs are appropriated as exoticized objects of decoration for many Western and Eurocentric dwellings and owners. These acts of “othering” (Said 00:00:06-09) also create an elusive narrative of objectification of the object and culture simultaneously, while removing any essence, soul, and cultural lived experiences from the materials that had been created. These are not just mere objects but there are stories and lives behind these objects. We can also argue how similar treatment to human lives is executed, removed from their soul, and splayed as decorative objects which is reflected in the use of my bodies seen as patterns on the rug.

The Inspiring Artists

Among the artists who assimilate the woman body into the political context, I was deeply influenced by Mona Hatoum, the British-Palestinian multimedia and installation artist based in London. In *The Negotiating Table*, she changes the political conflicts to be seen as moral issues, by bringing together the international soundtrack and her Palestinian body on the stage (see fig.5). In the same context, the Lebanese poet and artist Etel Adnan writes in her book, *Of Cities & Women* (1993) that the woman who speaks becomes a weapon and continues, “I tell myself that we are terrorists, not terrorists in the political and ordinary sense of the word, but because we carry inside of our bodies—like explosives—all the deep troubles that befall our countries” (Dango 1).

Furthermore, in the notion of women's bodies, and politics, I considered Shirin Neshat, the Iranian-born American artist, in my research process. Neshat incorporates self-portraits to explore the women's identity in relation to society. She investigates how women fight back and break rules in religious repressive countries, like Iran. In her earlier works, such as *Women of Allah* she intends to bring up the woman's body considering it as a kind of battleground for many rhetorical and political ideologies historically. Neshat utters that she identifies the paradoxical realities that a

Muslim woman could project and amplifies the contradictions in creating each image (qtd. in Sheybani 2). For instance, she depicts a woman's elegance and beauty along with the violence dictated by religion to her; illustrating a veiled woman with a gun conveys the woman's tendency to kill people whom she knows as enemies of God (see fig.6).



Figure 5. Hatoum, Mona. *The Negotiating Table*, Installation, 1983, “Fought Through Women’s Bodies: Mona Hatoum’s Early Performances”, *MOMUS*, Momus.ca; Nov.9, 2023.

momus.ca/fought-through-womens-bodies-mona-hatoums-early-performances/.

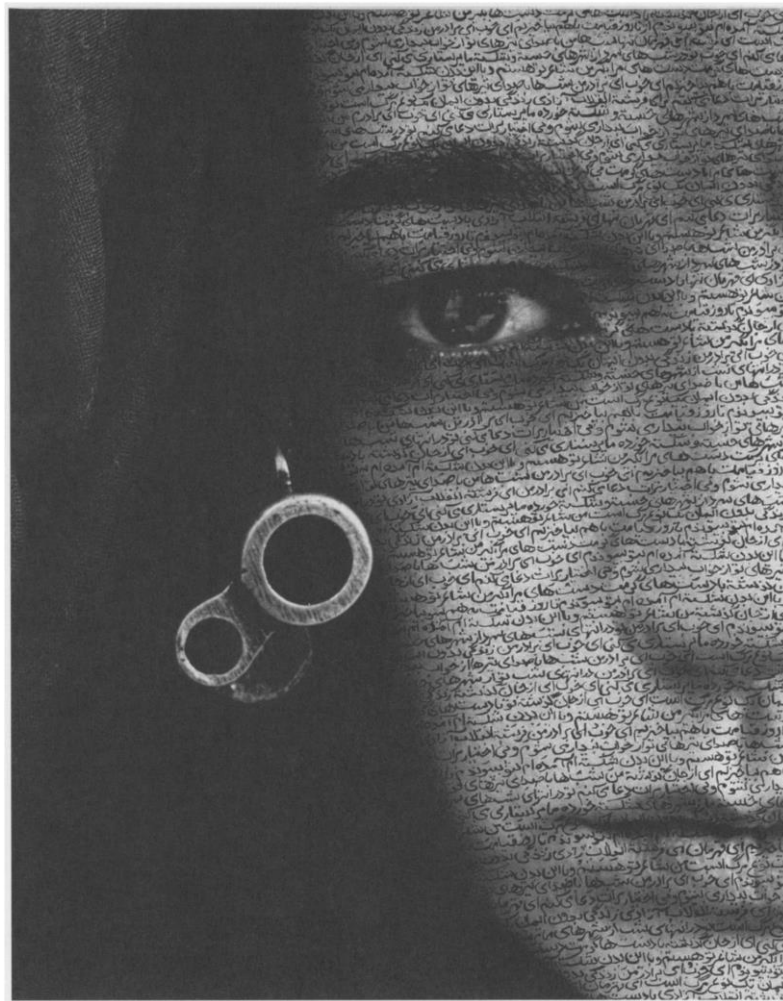


Figure 6. Neshat, Shirin. *Speechless*, from the series *Women of Allah*, RC Print, 1996, Printed Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York City. Photo by Larry Barns

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/20458988?origin=crossref>

Parastou Forouhar has a very significant place in my thoughts and my works, among the artists who bring political traumas into their work. For her, political trauma is tied with family and personal trauma...something that I think she never could be relieved of its harsh impacts. Forouhar, the well-known Iranian Installation artist, is the daughter of political activist Parvaneh Forouhar (Eskandari) and politician Dariush Forouhar, who both were murdered during the chain murders in Iran in November 1998. The chain murders are generally believed to have been done by the Islamic Republic's intelligence services. Therefore, Forouhar is one of the thousands of victims of religious dictatorship in Iran. In the past years since 1998, she has maintained a culture of remembrance and insisted on justice by holding the anniversary of the death of her parents in Iran, which could be read as an act of resistance. She knows herself as a politically interested artist who continuously explores social-political criticism in her art practice. Forouhar usually represents criticism of the Islamic Republic and highlights the government's violence against citizens in her art, over the past 44 years. Women and their place in the Islamic republic, and the savage repression against them are one of the undivorceable aspects of her art. In some of her visual two-dimensional works, such as *Thousand and One Days*, she incorporates repression in a way that at first glance, could be seen as ornamentally beautiful and spiritually harmonized images (see fig.7). However, at a closer look, the audience will notice the stylized scenes of torture, and the beauty of the images will be undermined (see fig.8). Forouhar brings the coexistence of beauty and harm into the viewer's eyes (Kane 326).

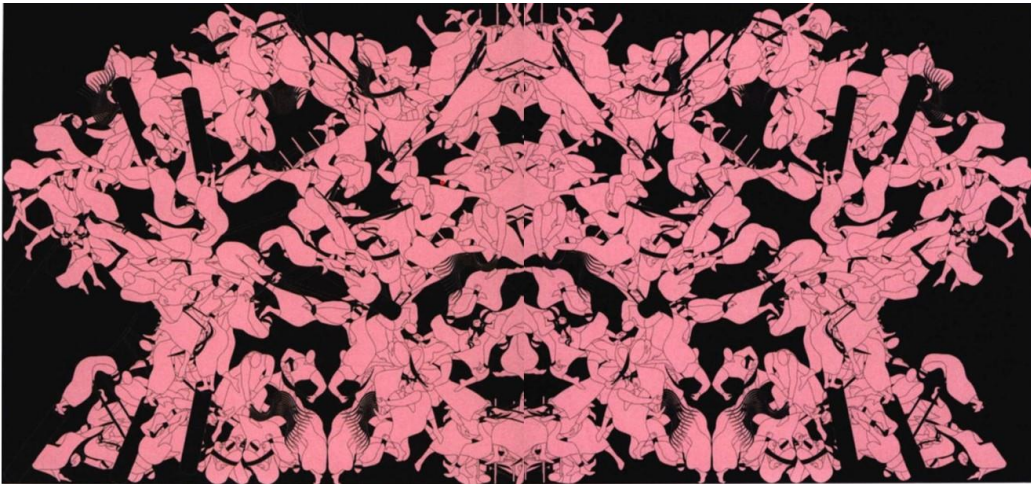


Figure 7. Forouhar, Parastou. *Thousand and One Days*, Panorama, Digital Print on Paper, 2006, 145 cm*326 cm, Kane, Jane. "Parastou Forouhar's Domestic Sublime", *Feminist Studies* 44, no.2. Feminist Studies, Inc, 2018.



Figure 8. Forouhar, Parastou. *Thousand and One Days*, Details, 2006, 145 cm*326 cm, Kane, Jane. "Parastou Forouhar's Domestic Sublime", *Feminist Studies* 44, no.2. Feminist Studies, Inc, 2018

In terms of incorporating traditional Persian rugs into my artistic exploration, I was inspired by the works of Faig Ahmed, the Azerbaijani contemporary visual artist. Ahmed's surreal sculptures incorporate Azerbaijani ancient carpet-weaving techniques, into hyper-contemporary forms (see fig.9). Ahmed's *PIR* collection, and its melting, distorting carpets resonates with the ephemerality of my sand rug installation (*The Routes of Blood*), while evoking acts of erasure through its accidental and intentional smudges, and its destruction while people pass through it (see fig.18 and fig.19). This impermanence reverberates my transient emotional status as an Iranian immigrant in Canada while engaging with society. I am not able to carry the emotions and feelings for a long time in my heart. In my daily life, any small sign takes me to my motherland and its traumatized bodies. For instance, seeing a group of motorcyclists in the streets here, in Toronto-Tkaronto, reminds me of the Yegan-e-Vijeh¹⁹ beating, and shooting people in the streets in Iran, or when I notice an airplane in the sky, the burned bodies in PS752 flight comes to my mind. Thus, I cannot have a stable emotional status even in my routine life. As an Iranian immigrant, I am experiencing many psychological ups and downs every second of my daily life.

¹⁹ An official group that suppresses the population violently, during the protests, while riding motorcycles.



Figure 9. Ahmed, Faig. *Yahya Bakuvi*, Handmade wool carpet, 2021. "Faig Ahhmed: A Contemporary Artist's Take on Classical Carpet", *Baku*, Baku-Magazine.com, 14 Dec. 2021

baku-magazine.com/home-page-latest/faig-ahmed/

Embodiment as Material

Rebuilding Persian Rug with my Body, Through my Body

The indexical imprints of my body recollect my memories of my homeland and the trauma that resonates through the afflictions of the chronic pain I had experienced. This creates an unsettled ambivalence between the trauma state in my homeland and the longing for my cultural comforts of lost family kinships while existing between two spaces of Iran as a memory and Toronto-Tkaronto, Canada as a physical space. My mind is in one space and my body is in another space while my soul lingers in the space in between. The Persian rug acts like a memory with impressions of my body both visible and invisible, at the same time it creates a transitional state between culture and the personal.

The Routes of Blood Sand Installation. The work speaks of a land experiencing a deep melancholy taking hold of people's feelings. The land in which the strong bodies of men lose their strength under the pain and mothers become mourners as the sun rises. *The Routes of Blood* sand installation's creation embodies my body's physical presence, soul, and mind in the space, at the same time. It internalizes the sense of empathy through the physical and mental struggle and my unsettling position in reconstructing the Persian rug as a link to my motherland. My sitting position at the work while making it (see fig.12, and fig.14), evokes the labor work, and some of the rug weavers' sitting positions in Iran (see fig.11). The Sand speaks to my interconnection to the tactility of the soil of my homeland, and its running through my hands, while creating the work, resonates with the time for me. In every single second, I live here, a governmental murder might happen in Iran. Time runs through my hands like sand, which evokes the passage of time from an hourglass.

One of the most famous Iranian carpet patterns is Lachak-Toranj. It comes from the old Iranian gardens' designs, which featured several basins connected by water channels. The Lachak-

Toranj pattern symbolizes the parts of a garden located in the center of the carpet, which includes one or more water basins, with four triangles surrounding the carpet: a central water basin (toranj) surrounded by four gardens (see fig.10) (*Let's go Persian*).



Figure 10. Lachak and Toranj in Persian Rug, *5th Avenue Auctioneers*, 5thaveauctions.co.za.

5thaveauctions.co.za/auction-lot/a-persian-hand-knotted-mashad-carpet-290-x-208_C8F45718E4

In *The Routes of Blood*, the middle Toranj of Persian Rugs, is embodied in a big blood-like stain (blood basin) that gradually grows into red bloody floral patterns (see fig.16, and fig.17) The black background mourns for the victims of the Islamic Republic, which is increasing in the homes, streets, and prisons, each second (see fig.13, and fig.15).



Figure 11. Carpet weaving workshop in Iran 2, “What are the types of rugs’ frames and what are their characteristics?” *Chelsi Carpet Cleaning*, chehel30.com,

<https://chehel30.com/what-are-the-types-of-carpets-and-what-are-their-characteristics/>



Figure 12. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* creation at Great Hall, still image of the time-lapse video, OCAD University, 2022, video by Raha Fard



Figure 13. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Great Hall, Sand Installation, ,1.2 m *2 m , OCAD University, 2022, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 14. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* creation at Ignite Gallery, still image of the performance video, OCAD University, 2024, video by Tong Li



Figure 15. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Ignite Gallery, Sand Installation, 1.2 m *2 m, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 16. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Great Hall, Details, OCAD University, 2022, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 17. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Ignite Gallery, Details, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 18. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood, Smudged and Destroyed*, Ignite Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 19. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood, Smudged and Destroyed, Details*, Ignite Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Routes of Blood, Inspired by Kheshti-Bakhtiyari Persian Rug. By bringing my body's silhouette into *The Routes of Blood* sand installation I add the sand images of my body created with my hands, to the work, (see fig.22, and fig.23) which creates another layer embodying my physical presence, soul, and mind (see fig.21). Also, the vulnerability and ephemeral nature of the sand installation resonates with the fragility of my body and soul. This design is inspired by Kheshti-Bakhtiyari Persian rug, shown in fig.20. The pattern of this carpet involves fifteen separate squares with six different floral patterns, which are created from my body's silhouette in the sand piece.



Figure 20. Kheshti-Bakhtiyari Persian Rug,
Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 21. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* creation at Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Atefeh Esnaashari.



Figure 22. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Graduate Gallery, Details, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 23. Fard, Raha. *The Routes of Blood* at Graduate Gallery, Sand Installation ,1.2 m *2 m, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Evanescence Archival Performance Series. My body responds, my body feels what I see, and what I read every second. My body responds to the trauma in their body, the pain resonates in my body when they are beaten, and with each bullet shot.

The Evanescence Archival Performance Series is a photograph series conveying kinship through land and identity. Around 700 photos were taken while I was moving unconsciously with a Persian carpet covering my body. 80 photos were selected for the next steps of the project to make modifications in Photoshop (see fig.24). This archival performance series depicts my isolation, and loneliness in the white diminished space, and the unsettling presence, which has surrounded me. The blurry figures and the movement bring my distorted body into the work through its ghostly presence and disappearance, while my body and soul seek to be enlivened by the kinship that is recaptured through the Persian rug. The performance is my body, with the suffering it holds.

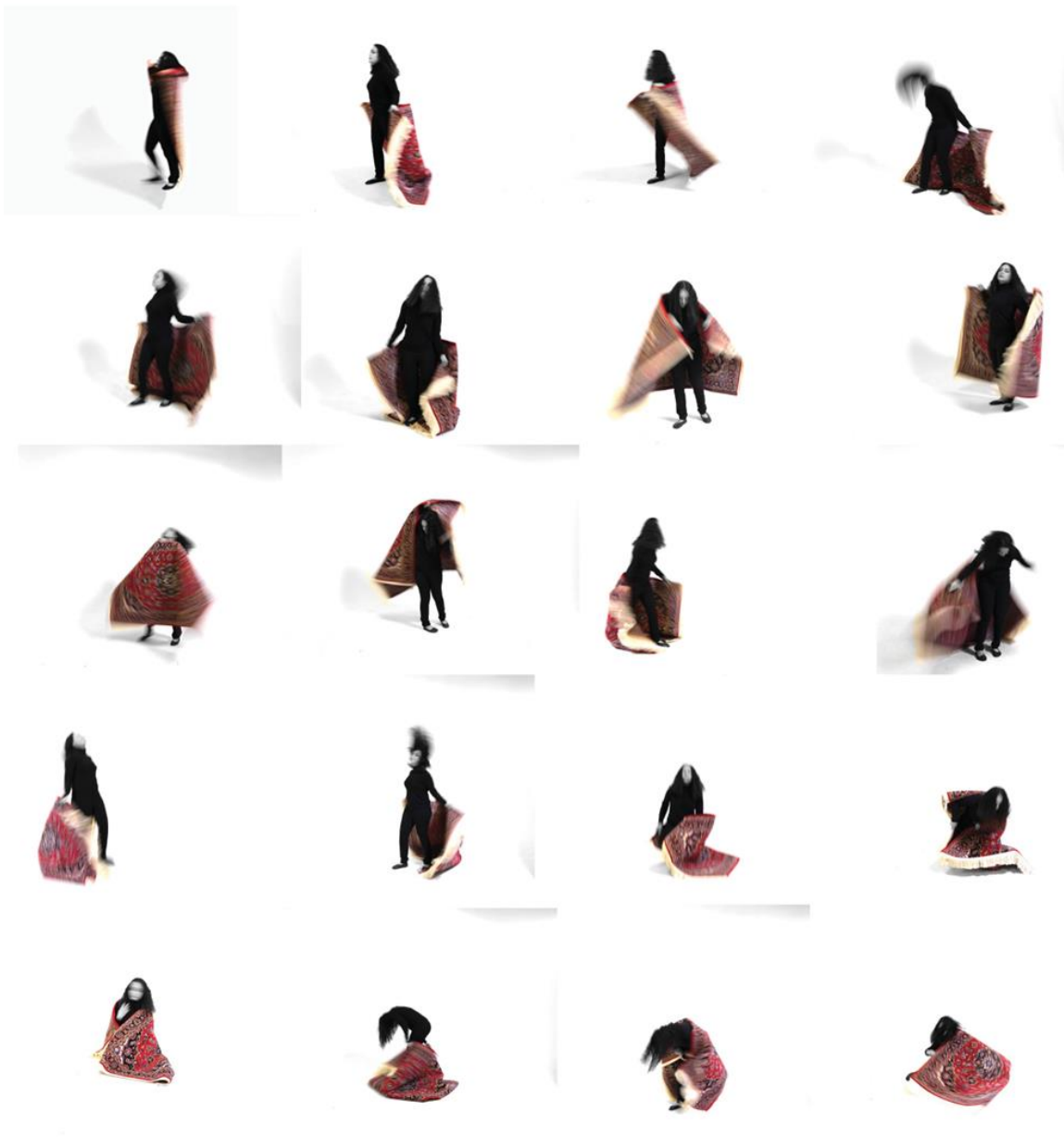


Figure 24. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*, selected shots, 2023, Photo by Mew Chen

The Evanescence Video Installation. *The Evanescence Video Installation* is created from the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*, conveying the interconnection between my soul, my body, and the land which I am coming from. Each body dissolves into the next one, and the traces of the previous body, what it has perceived, and how it responded to the trauma will continue to exist in the next body. The video depicts my body's integration of what it has gone through to that point in time and place in every single second (see fig. 25).

The audio for the video is the documentary sounds of the streets in Iran's different cities, during the Woman-Life-Freedom Revolution, while the security forces are shooting unarmed people. My body gets shot, with each single shooting, and the pain spreads through my body until it is profoundly annihilated.

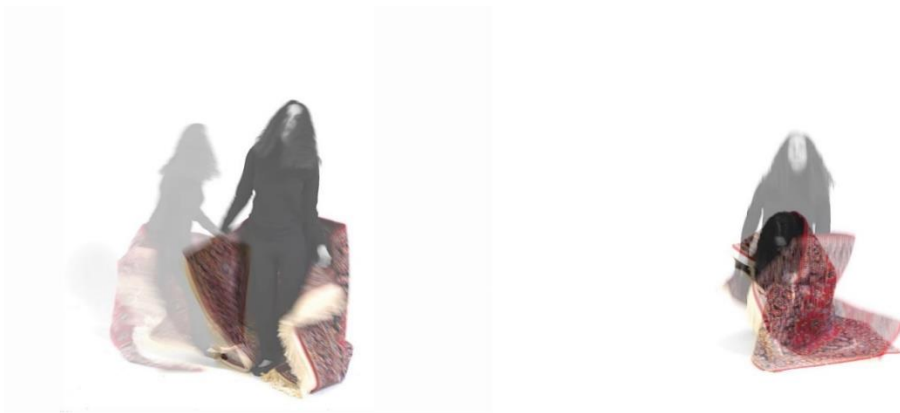


Figure 25. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Video Installation*, Still Image, 2023, Photo by Mew Chen

The Woven Bodies Series. I am floating in blood. Innocent people are being executed each dawn. Their eyes will not leave me, their enthusiastic eyes, that are filled with hope. My body is woven in the pains and suffering I perceive from their traumatized bodies. I feel smothered by my sympathies. I repress the anger inside my body, the anger that comes from the sense of being helpless in my existence.

For *The Woven Bodies Series*, I incorporated my body's silhouette from the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series* (see fig.26), to make the floral patterns of Persian rugs' various designs, by digital collage in Photoshop. My body is repeated between the textile patterns of the Persian Rug and the photo-documented performance act of being covered by the rug itself. The photography series brings the unsettlement, isolation, and suffering of my body into the work.



Figure 26. Fard, Raha. Silhouettes created from the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*.

There are many different patterns, designs, and colors for Persian rugs based on the regions and cities in which they are produced. Iran has many different communities, such as Fars, Kurd, Turk, Arab, and Balouch. They all have their own culture and language but are all known as Iranians. For *The Woven Bodies Series*, I chose one regular design of Persian rug which is known worldwide, and three other designs from different regions in Iran. In terms of colors, apart from the actual colors of the rugs in each specific area, I used only the two colors of black and red which symbolize mourning and the blood of the victims of the Islamic Republic. The above two colors are representative of the whole country, because there is no singular area or community in Iran, that has not encountered the brutality of the Islamic Republic. However, some border regions' communities, such as Kurds, Balouch, and Arabs, have experienced much harsher suppression and have been kept in poverty for the past 45 years, because they have been accused of being separatist. In *The Woven Bodies Series*, I embodied Kurd and Baloch tribulations by incorporating their designed rugs in creating two works of the series.

The Woven Bodies 1, Inspired by Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug. The most worldwide well-known design element of Persian carpets is Lachak-Toranj. Toranj or Medallion, is a symmetrical pattern placed at the center of the rug. Some parts of its patterns are repeated at the four corners of the field called Lachak²⁰ (see fig.27) This design does not belong to a specific area, all the cities in Iran, have a special type of Lachak-Toranj. In the following, further Kurdish, Balouch, and Heris designs, you can find their types of Lachak-Toranj as well.

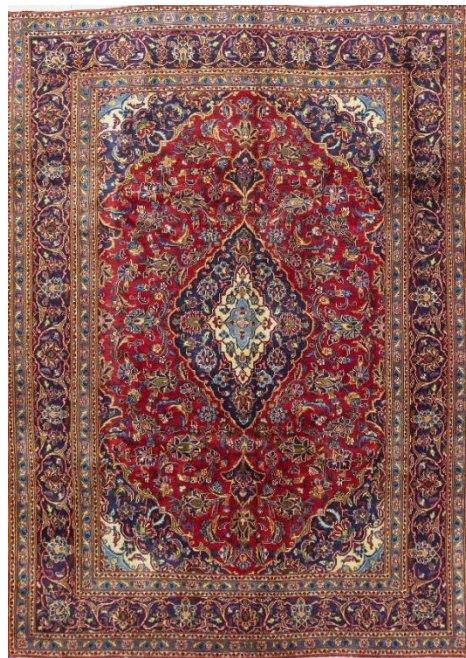


Figure 27. Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug, *5th Avenue Auctioneers*, 5thaveauctions.co.za.

5thaveauctions.co.za/auction-lot/a-persian-hand-knotted-mashad-carpet-290-x-208_C8F45718E4

²⁰ See page 48 for more information about Lachak-Toranj design.

The Woven Bodies 1, created by digital collage in Photoshop, is inspired by Lachak-Toranj design of Persian Rug (see fig.28), and my body's silhouettes forms its floral patterns (see fig.29).



Figure 28. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Digital Series, Inspired by Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug, 1.5 m* 2 m, 2023.



Figure 29. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Digital Series, Details.

The Woven Bodies installation, woven by the industrial Jacquard loom, (see fig.30) not only evokes the carpet's embodiment for the audience, but also resonates with the interwoven pain in my body. See the details of the woven floral patterns in fig.31, and fig.32.



Figure 30. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Woven Series, Inspired by Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug, 1.12 m*1.73 m, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 31. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Woven Series, Details 1, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 32. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Woven Series, Details 2, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Woven Bodies 2, Inspired by Mahi Bijar Persian Rug. Bijar rugs are woven in the city of Bijar, and its surroundings, in Kurdistan province in Iran. Around 27 colors are mostly used in these rugs, but red, white, and indigo are the ones that are used more than others. The Mahi design is one of the many designs of Bijar rugs (see fig.33).



Figure 33. Mahi Bijar Persian Rug, / فرش رحیمی imcarpet.com

<https://www.imcarpet.com/?s=%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%AD+%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%87%DB%8>

The discontinuous and detailed floral pattern of Mahi Bijar's design resonates in the indexical imprints of my body in *The Woven Bodies 2* (see fig.35). You can find a different design of Toranj in the middle of the rug, surrounded by a nested design. The nested blood basins, which I feel, I am drowning in (see fig.34).



Figure 34. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Digital Series, Inspired by Mahi Bijar Persian Rug, 1.5 m* 2 m, 2023.



Figure 35. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Digital Series, Details.

The Woven Bodies 2, woven series, is illustrated in fig.36 and the textile details are seen in fig.37, and 38.



Figure 36. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Woven Series, Inspired by Mahi Bijar Persian Rug, 1.12 m*1.7 m, 2023, Photo by Raha Fard.

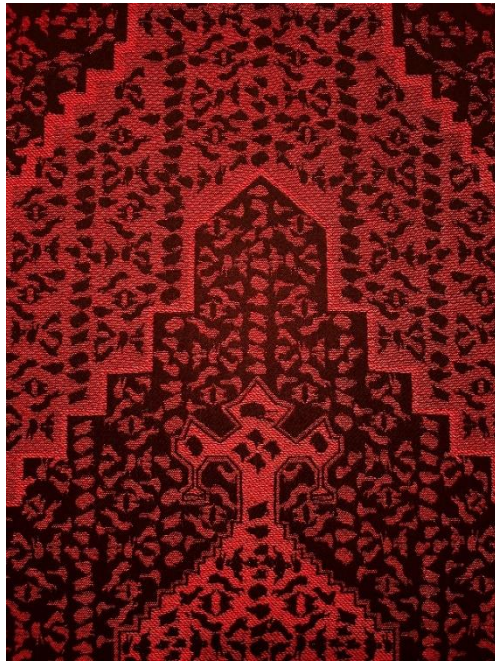


Figure 37. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Woven Series, Details 1, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 38. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Woven Series, Details 2, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Woven Bodies 3, Inspired by Balouch Persian Rug. Balouch rugs are woven in Baluchistan province in Iran. The shapes in these carpets are inspired by the people's life and their environment. For example, the separated and reclusion floral patterns in some of the Balouch designs evoke the desert environment and vegetation of Baluchistan province. Dark colors, simple shapes and broken lines, are some of the specifications for these rugs (Midimodi). The following figure shows a Lachak-Toranj Balouch rug, featuring three Toranjes in the middle. (see fig.39)



Figure 39. Balouch Persian Rug, *Midimodi*, Midimodi.com

<https://midimodi.com/carpet-rug-handmade/carpet-manufacturer-cities/baluch-carpet/>

The Woven Bodies 3 references the Balouch Persian rug (see fig 40, and fig.41). This is the only work from *The Woven Bodies Series* that features the same colors as the actual rug it was inspired by; Balouch rugs mostly come in black and red.

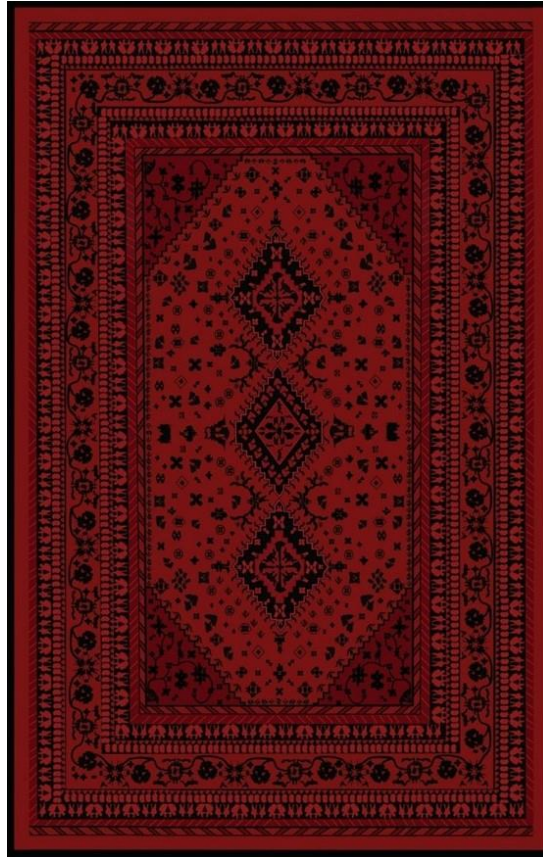


Figure 40. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Digital Series, Inspired by Balouch Persian Rug, 1.5 m* 2 m, 2023.



Figure 41. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Digital Series, Details.

The following figure, fig.42, depicts *The Woven Bodies 3*, woven on jacquard loom, and the textile details are shown in fig.43, and 44.



Figure 42. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Woven Series, Inspired by Balouch Persian Rug, 1.12 m*1.73 m, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 43. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Woven Series, Details 1, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 44. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Woven Series, Details 2, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Woven Bodies 4, Inspired by Heris Persian Rug. These rugs are woven in the city of Heris in Azarbaijan Sharghi Province, northwestern Iran. The geometric shapes, the large diamond in the center (Toranj), and the smooth and broken lines with no curves are the main characteristics of the design in Heris rugs. They feature a combination of rural, and urban plans. Older rugs were colored red and indigo, but today, red, cream, black, and copper are more commonly used in these rugs (see fig.45).



Figure 45. Heris Persian Rug, *5th Avenue Auctioneers*, 5thaveauctions.co.za.

5thaveauctions.co.za/auction-lot/a-persian-hand-knotted-Heris-carpet-308-x-217_5B142CA9EF

The Woven Bodies 4, inspired by Heris Persian Rug (see fig.46), and its geometric floral patterns are constructed through my body's repetition (see fig.47).



Figure 46. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Digital Series, Inspired by Heris Persian Rug, 1.5 m*2 m, 2023.



Figure 47. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Digital Series, Details.

Fig.48. illustrates *The Woven Bodies 4* installation, woven series. My body's silhouette figures could be seen in the detail's images (see fig.49 and fig.50).



Figure 48. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Woven Series. Inspired by Heris Persian Rug, 1.12 m*1.7 m, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 49. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Woven Series, Details 1,
Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 50. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Woven Series, Details 2, Photo by Raha Fard.

The Trauma Traces. This work is an exploration into my body through the time when there will not be any Islamic Republic, and people are living in a free Iran. Whether my body is going to be relieved from the pain and chaos? I investigate trauma, and how it leaves traces on my mind, body, and soul, which will continue beyond this moment, and into the future.

The work has the same process as *The Woven Bodies Series*, however, differs in two elements of form, and colors. It is inspired by a square Persian rug featuring Lachak-Toranj's design (see fig 51). Since most Persian rugs are rectangular, and a square one is rare, choosing a square Persian rug conveys my inner frustration of taking down the Islamic Republic and the little chance of putting an end to all the chaos in our bodies. *Trauma Traces* depicts the time when there will not be any blood or mourning, and all the reds, and blacks will disappear. The white-on-white traces, and the absence of the image, illustrate the struggle to disappear traumas and the erasure of chaos. The work evokes the idea of forgetting, and the endeavor to resolve the repeated chronic pain in my body.



Figure 51. Kashan Square Persian Rug, ترو ب، torob.com.

<https://image.torob.com/base/images/TC/XO/TCXOgTBi-w2Ug2me.jpg>

Although *Trauma Traces* feature the erasure of the past, the traces of traumas will remain on the bodies permanently (see fig.52, and fig.53). In the same context, Van Der Kolk writes that traumatized people are not able to perceive new experiences in their lives, so they will be stuck and stopped in their growth (53).

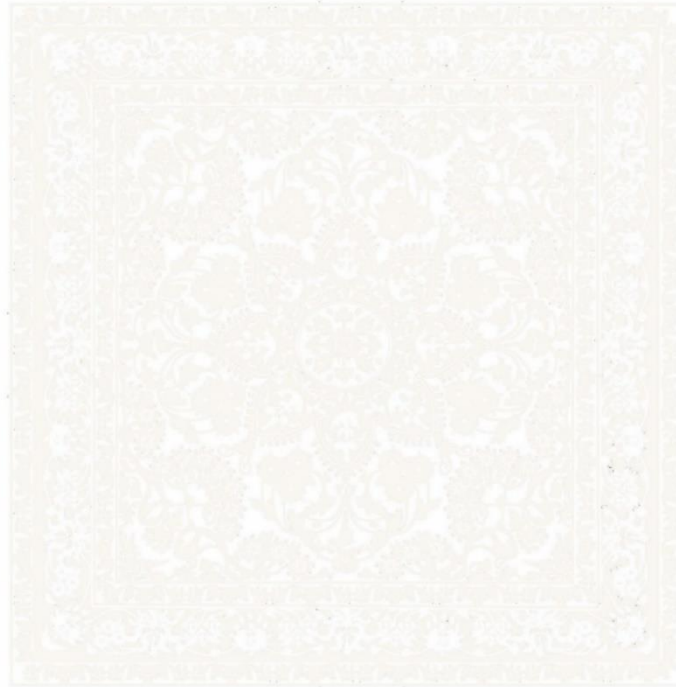


Figure 52. Fard, Raha. *Trauma Traces*, Digital Collage, Inspired by square Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug, 1.5 m*1.5m, 2023.



Figure 53. Fard, Raha. *Trauma Traces*, Details.

The Blood Traces Series. *The Blood Traces* is a series of six blood paintings, which were done with my own blood (see fig.54). The paintings are from six selected photos of the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series* which integrate my discomfort, loneliness, and traumatized body into the work. The blood carries me, and what I have gone through in my life, it carries the history of my inside and outside.²¹ This series of works addresses the pain in my body that is intertwined with the affliction derived from many traumatized bodies in Iran. The silhouette portraits are extracted from my blood and applied with a brush crafted out of my hair (see fig.55), on my white T-shirts (see fig.56, and fig.57). *The Blood Traces Series* not only resonates with my medical and psychological history but also evokes the blood stains on the killed and injured people's clothes.

²¹ See page 32.



Figure 54. Blood Painting Materials, My own blood, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 55. Blood Painting Material, the brushes crafted out of my hair, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 56. Fard, Raha. *The Blood Traces Series*, Blood Painting on my old white clothes, each work is 32 cm*32 cm, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 57. Fard, Raha. *The Blood Traces Series*, Details, Photo by Raha Fard.

Conclusion

Sara Ahmed in her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* discusses that the body forms through space, and through what it has experienced as a norm repeatedly. For me, space is defined in two different contexts: The current geographical space in which I live, Toronto-Tkaronto, Canada; and the one that I live in my mind and memory, which follows my social-political time, and place: Iran. In the geographical space, my body experiences the materiality and tangible environmental elements, while the mind space mostly creates stressful and frustrating emotional situations for me as a member of the Iranian diaspora. My soul lingers in between these two spaces and perceives a third space within, that shapes my body, and my soul mutually.

To visualize my impression of the situation I have lived in, I chose my body as symbolic, and at the same time literal material for my work. My body brings materiality along with physical and emotional experiences to my art. Through medical and psychological experiences, my body expresses the connection between the traumas of my past and present. Since my body has been shaped by the space it has lived in, it contains the traces of this time and place within. In my thesis exhibition, I have embodied the history of my internal and external life through my body, so the work benefits from this process aesthetically and conceptually.

In my thesis, besides my body as a defining element, some other significant components resonated with my context. Using my blood as material for *The Blood Traces Series* profoundly interconnects with my body and my soul. The blood feeds my cells and connects with every partial element of my existence. In addition, weaving as an embodiment process metaphorically illustrates the pains rooted in my body intertwined with the pains coming from traumatized bodies in Iran. The weaving process also interconnects with the weaving elements of Persian rugs in my works.

Embodiment of the Intertwined (در رفتن جان از بدن) exhibition, is an embodiment of my struggles in relieving the pain interwoven into my body and soul. While I convey my physical and psychological discomfort in witnessing the disturbing scenes in my homeland, the works do not depict any aggressiveness. Instead, they make the audience feel unsettled while remaining ambiguous in their interpretation. For instance, although the colors in *The Woven Bodies Series*, and *The Routes of Blood* are black and red, which reference violence, the works convey the feeling of home, and warmth through their form which is carpet. Also, the floral patterns of the rugs in both works bring beauty and harmony to the audience's eyes. Furthermore, *The Evanescence Archival Performance Series* drives the audience into the photos, while they are not sure whether the figure is dancing or performing an act of physical and mental suffering. In other words, the viewer at their first glance responds viscerally and bypasses their intellect and cerebral reaction when they encounter the works in the exhibition.

As an artist, I believe that pushing the boundaries and breaking taboos in art could make it more influential in many contexts. Additionally, I think incorporating my body into my work as an Iranian woman artist opens a wide horizon of possibilities in pushing the boundaries and breaking taboos, in Iranian society which is still rooted in many traditional beliefs. In looking at women's bodies, people mostly tend to see the erotic aspects of it. Considering this, for extending my work in the future projects, I intend to incorporate my body into my art in a manner that desexualizes the image, so people ignore the erotic aspect, and pay attention to the humanitarian issues I convey in my art. This could be through performance, such as creating large floral patterns of Persian rugs with my body, using sand or paint on the floor; or could be conveyed through some large or small figurative drawings and paintings of my body intertwined into the Persian rug floral patterns created with the silhouettes of my body.

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Appendix A

Documentation of the Thesis Exhibition in the Graduate Gallery, OCAD University.

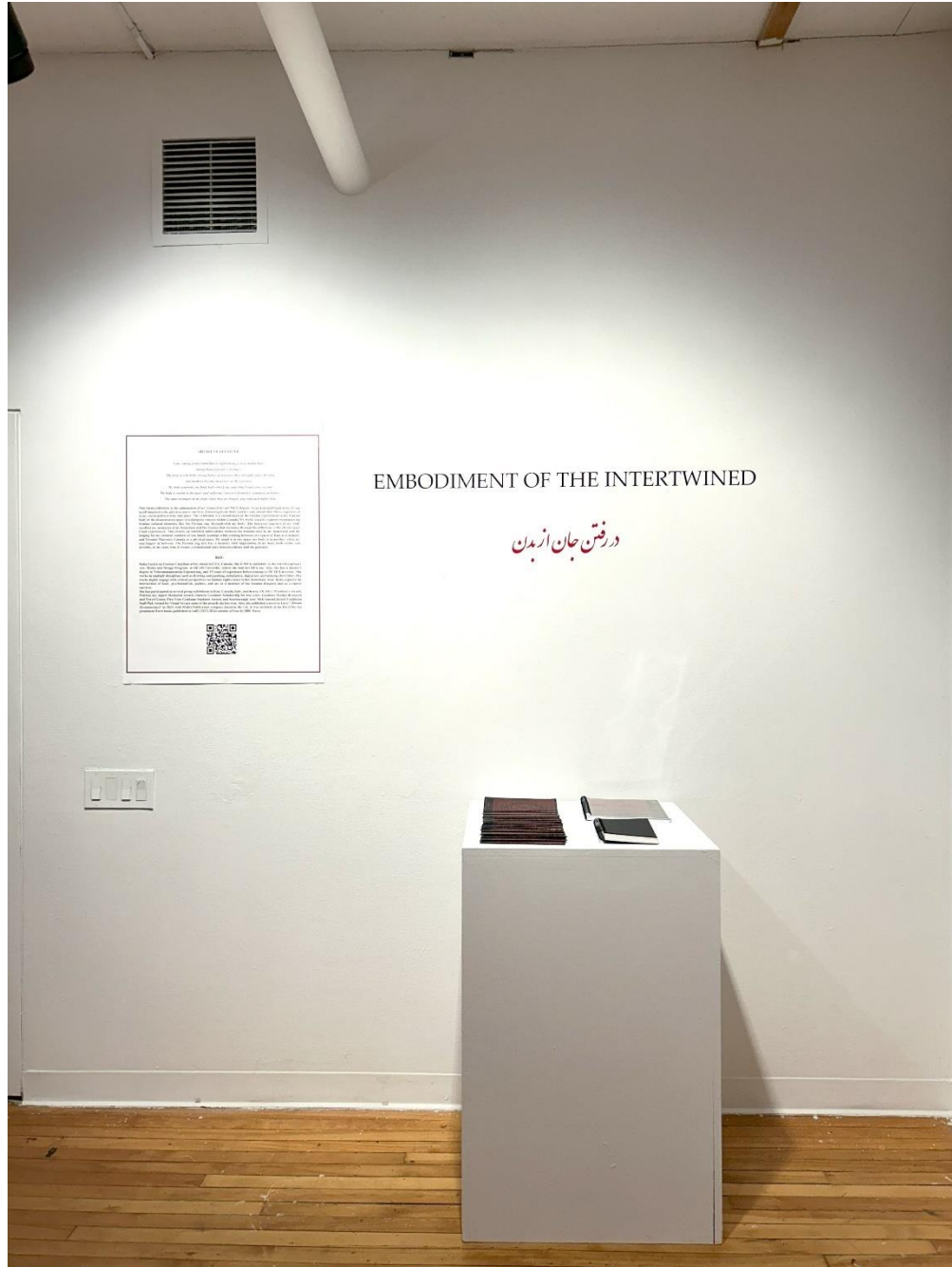


Figure 58. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, title and statement, Photo by Raha Fard



Figure 59. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 1*, Woven Series, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 60. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies I*, Details, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Wrynn Geswin.



Figure 61. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Woven Series, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, Photo by Raha Fard.

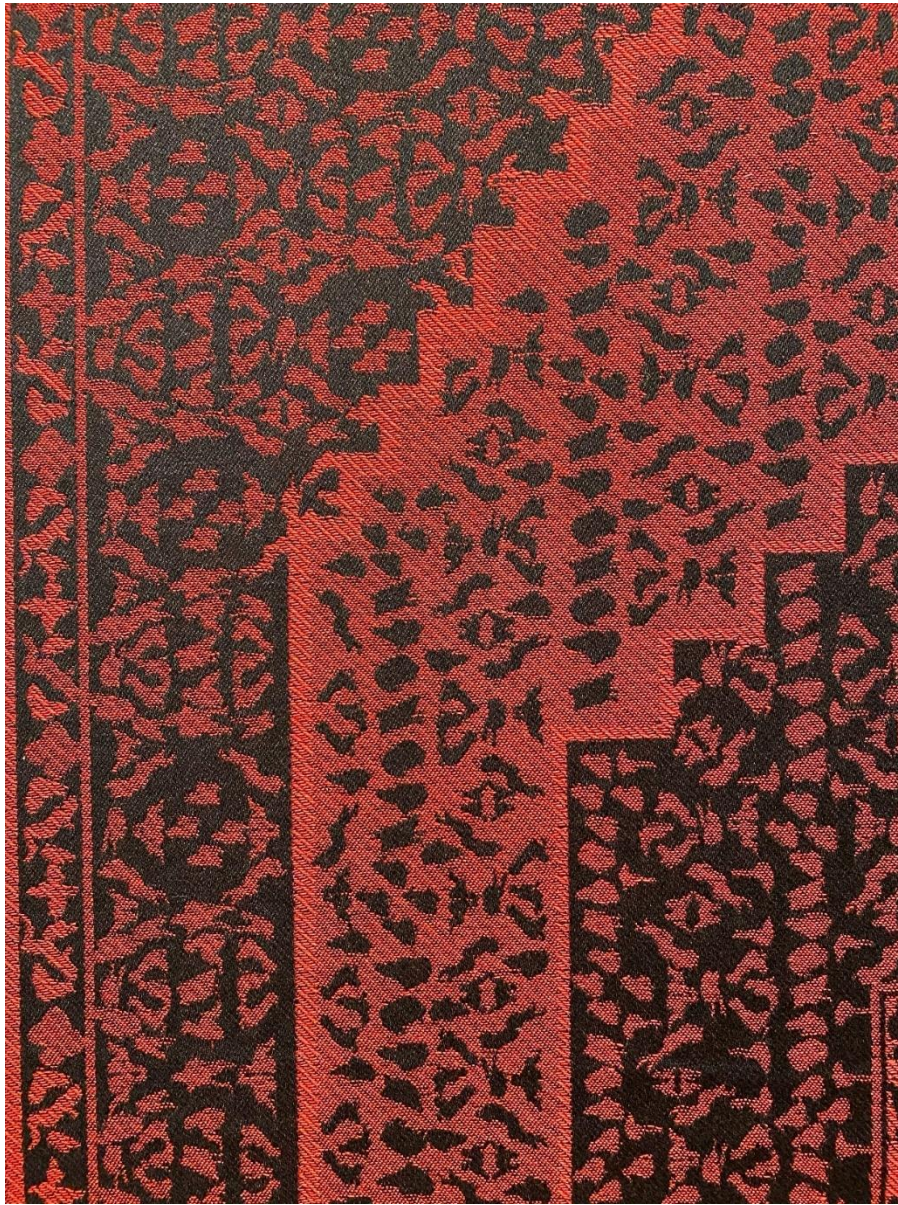


Figure 62. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 2*, Details, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, Photo by Julius Manapul.

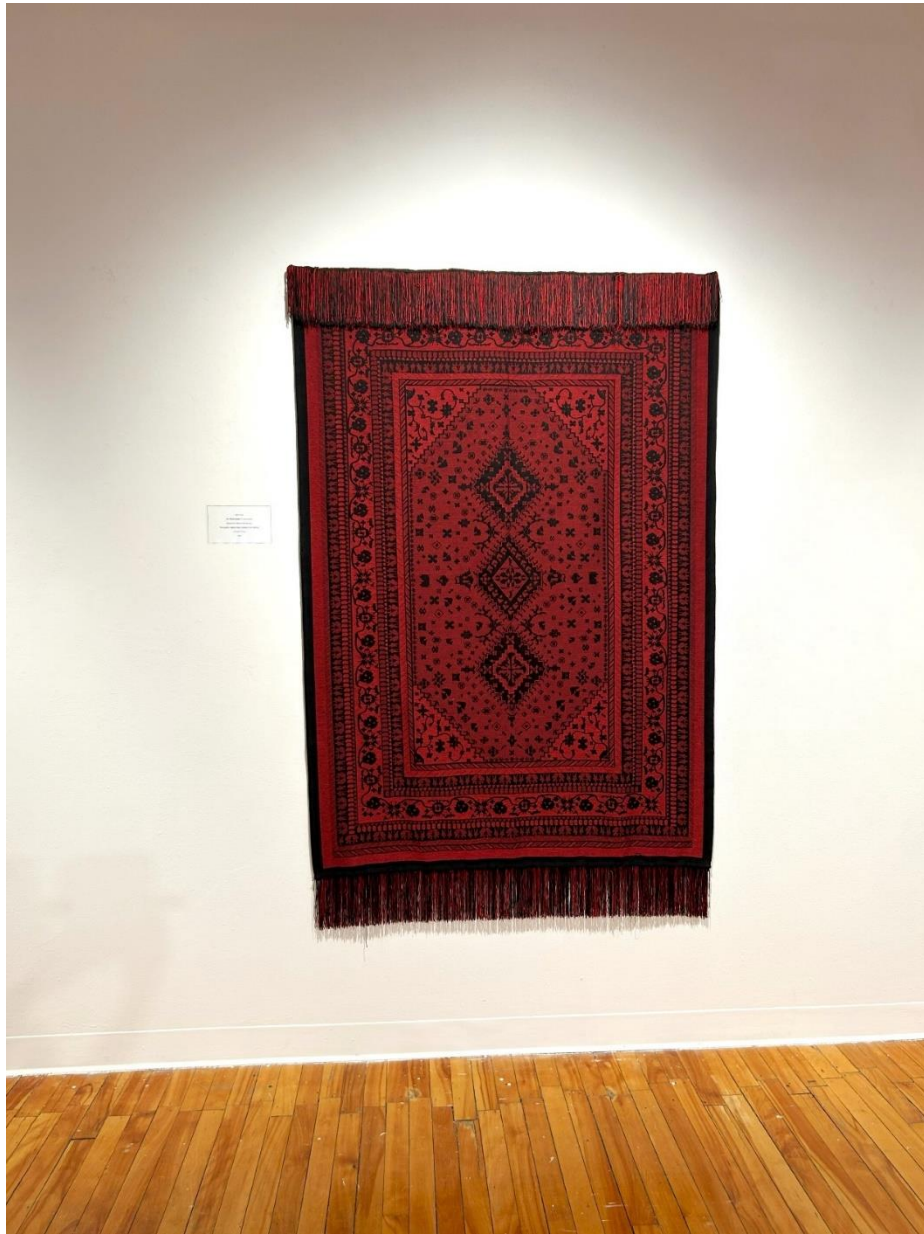


Figure 63. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Woven Series, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 64. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 3*, Details, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 65. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Woven Series, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 66. Fard, Raha. *The Woven Bodies 4*, Details, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 67. Fard, Raha, *The Routes of Blood*, Opening Night, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard



Figure 68. Fard, Raha, *The Routes of Blood*, Details, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 69. Fard, Raha, *The Routes of Blood*, Closing Night, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.

The link to *The Routes of Blood Uninstallation Performance* is added to Appendix B.

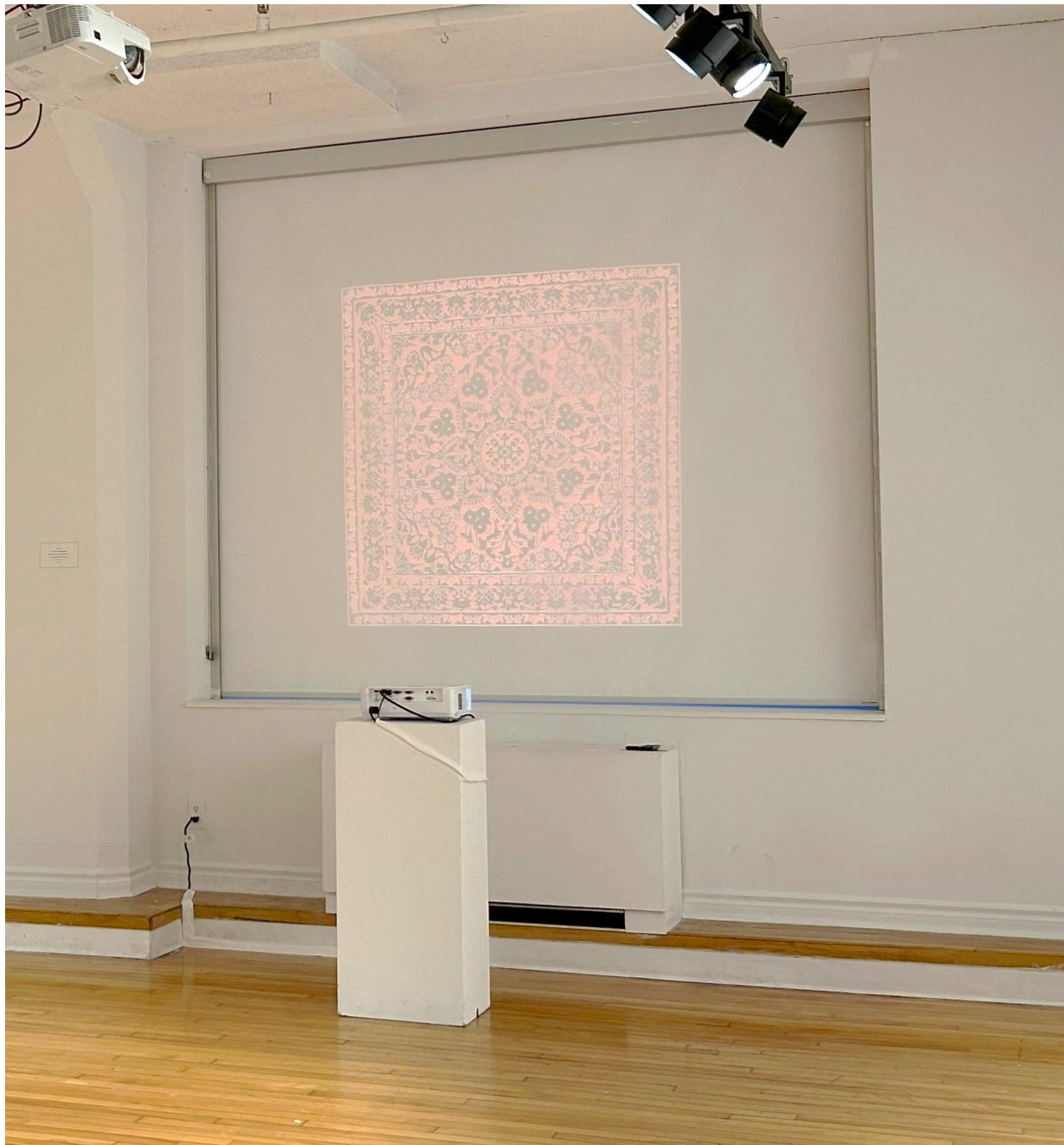


Figure 70. Fard, Raha, *The Trauma Traces Video Installation*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.

The link to *The Trauma Traces Video Installation* is added to Appendix B.



Figure 71. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, The series is photographed by Mew Chen, *Photo by Raha Fard*.



Figure 72. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Archival Performance Series, Details 1*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, Photo by Julius Manapul.



Figure 73. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Archival Performance Series, Details 2*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, Photo by Julius Manapul.

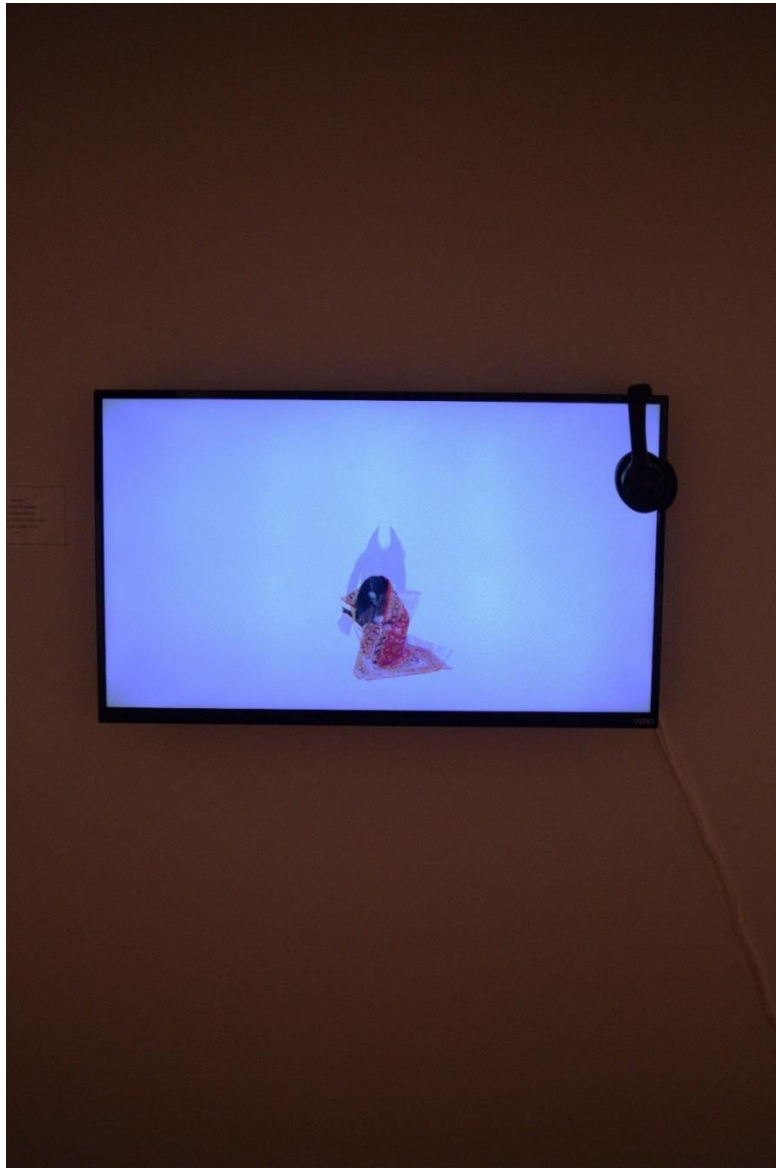


Figure 74. Fard, Raha. *Evanescence Video Installation*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2023, Photo by Wrynn Geswin.

The link to *The Evanescence Video Installation* is added to Appendix B.

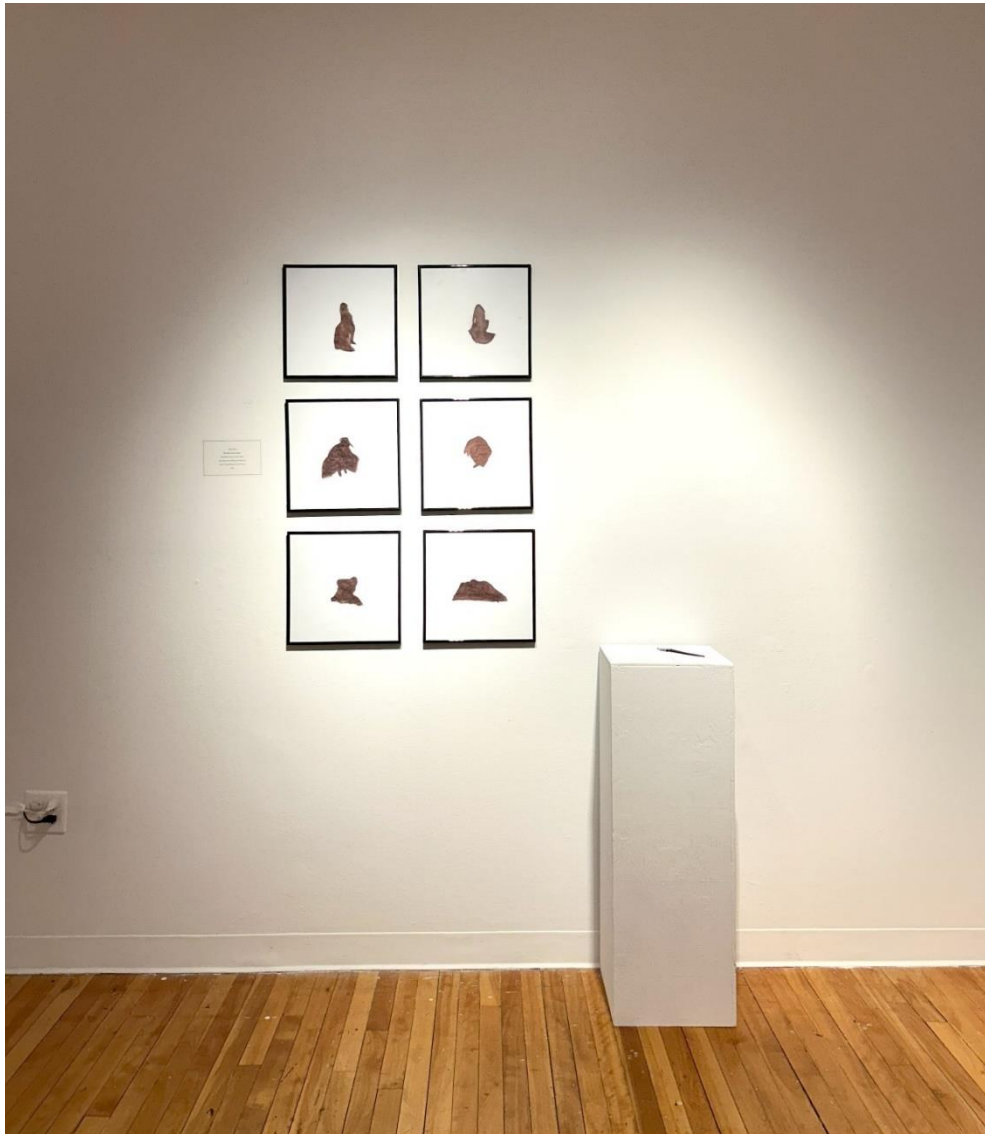


Figure 75. Fard, Raha. *The Blood Traces Series*, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 76. Fard, Raha. *The Blood Traces Series*, Details 1, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Julius Manapul.



Figure 77. Fard, Raha. Blood Painting Material, the brushes crafted out of artist's hair, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Wrynn Geswin.



Figure 78. Farsh-e-Kashan, An original handwoven Lachak-Toranj Persian Rug, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 79. Fard, Raha, *The Woven Bodies*, Woven Series, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 80. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 1, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 81. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 2, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.

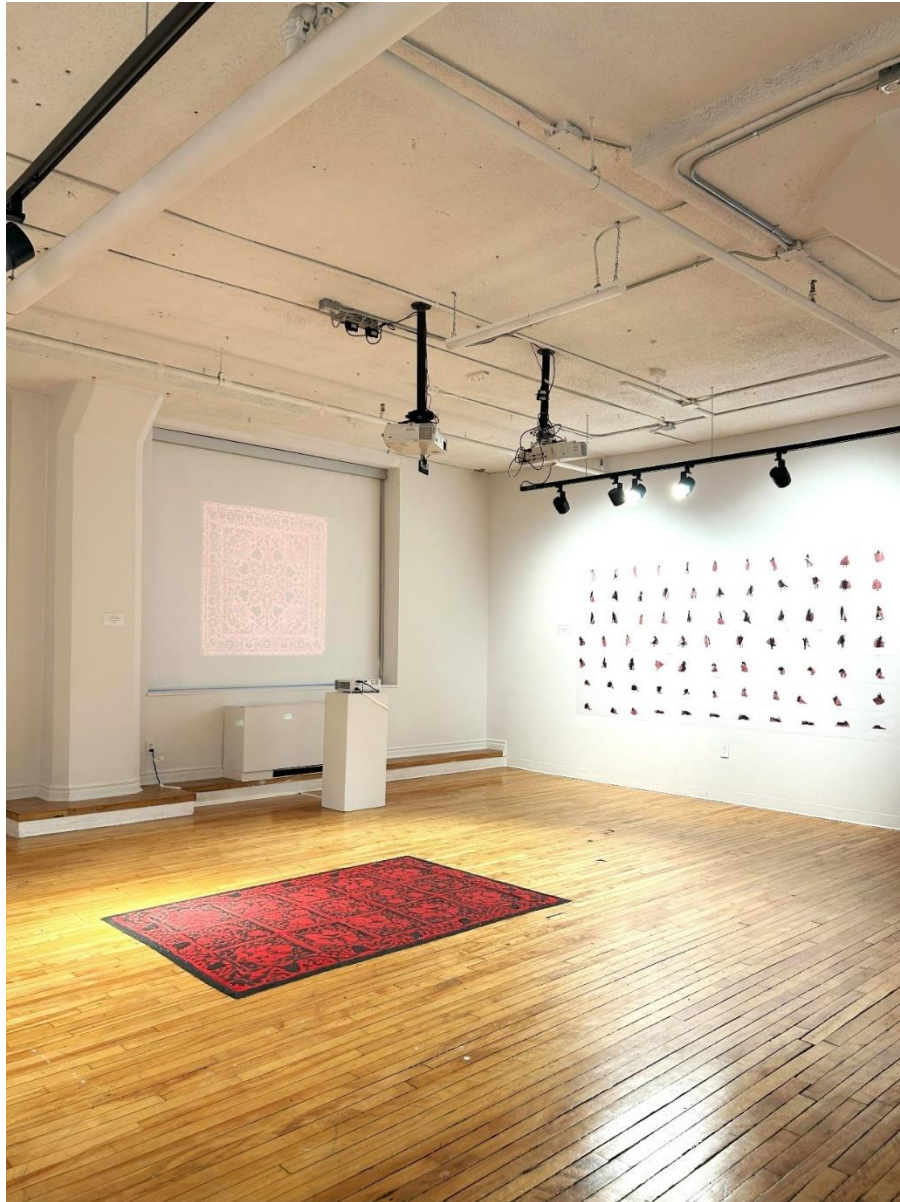


Figure 82. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 3, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 83. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 4, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 84. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 5, Opening Night, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 85. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 6, Closing Night, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 86. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 7, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 87. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 8, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 88. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, overall view 9, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Raha Fard.



Figure 89. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, Panorama view 1, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Julius Manapul.



Figure 90. Fard, Raha, *Embodiment of the Intertwined*, Panorama view 2, Graduate Gallery, OCAD University, 2024, Photo by Julius Manapul.

Appendix B

Links to the Videos

The Routes of Blood Uninstallation Performance I erase my body's image on the sand, through its movement, to evoke the impermanent nature of the sand installation and intertwine my ephemeral existence into the work. This resonates with the fragile emotional state of my daily life while perceiving a third space between my geographical space, and my mental space. It felt meaningless to smear the sand with anything other than my body. *The Routes of Blood* sand installation brings the warmth of my homeland as a Persian rug but disappears in a second when I touch the sand; like a dream that disappears with a sudden move.

Link to the video: <https://vimeo.com/941393495?share=copy>

The Trauma Traces Video Installation The square Persian rug created in black and red, is a continuation of *The Woven Bodies Series* which resonates with the victims' blood and represents the mourning of the survivors. The black and red image gradually changes to white on white, to anticipate the end of the Islamic Republic in Iran, while we can still sense the trauma traced on the bodies, and souls. The trauma will never disappear, we will experience its impacts forever in our physical, and psychological life.

Link to the video: <https://vimeo.com/941397813?share=copy>

The Evanescence Video Installation See page 59 from the thesis document for *The Evanescence Video Installation* statement. (*The Evanescence video installation* is created from the *Evanescence Archival Performance Series*, conveying the interconnection between my soul, my body, and the land which I am coming from. Each body dissolves into the next one, and the traces of the previous body, what it has perceived, and how it responded to the trauma will continue to exist in the next body. The video depicts my body's integration of what it has gone through to that point in time and place in every single second.

The audio for the video is the documentary sounds of the streets in Iran's different cities, during the Woman-Life-Freedom Revolution, while the security forces are shooting unarmed people. My body gets shot, with each single shooting, and the pain spreads through my body until it is profoundly annihilated.)

Link to the video: <https://vimeo.com/859953375?share=copy>