

## **Double Displacement: The Iranian Immigrant Experience**

### Author

Afshani, Hadieh

### Published

2017

### Thesis Type

Thesis (Masters)

### School

Queensland College of Art

### DOI

[10.25904/1912/647](https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/647)

### Rights statement

The author owns the copyright in this thesis, unless stated otherwise.

### Downloaded from

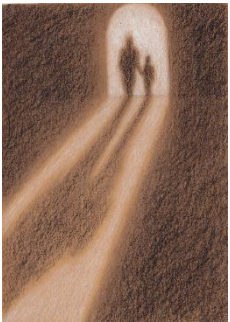
<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/368180>

### Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

# Double Displacement

## The Iranian Immigrant Experience



### MVA Thesis

Hadieh Afshani

Bachelor of Fine Arts, Master of Arts with Honours in Visual Arts (Fine Arts)

Queensland College of Art

Griffith University

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master in Visual Arts

October 2016

## **ABSTRACT**

In a TED talk given in 2010, Iranian visual artist Shirin Neshat articulated the two battles that the Iranian diaspora are engaged in—one is against their government, whose regime gives cause to flee, and the other is against the Western perceptions of Iranian identity that Iranians face after immigrating. My experience of emigrating from Iran to Australia is consistent with Neshat’s statement. I call the feeling of being a nomad or not belonging anywhere ‘double displacement’, an idea central to this Master of Visual Arts project. Through painting, I have considered the ways in which people maintain their identity and cultural vision after experiencing the disruption and displacement of immigration.

I am interested in what the experience of double displacement (from the birth country and the new destination country) means and how it feels, especially from a Middle Eastern perspective. The end result of this series of works is something like a visual diary recorded by a woman with a Persian-poetic view of experience. To describe double displacement, I have used metaphoric and metonymic visual elements that refer to transience, including doorways, corridors, or light coming from one space to another sited within intimate places and interiors.

The purpose of this research is to visually encapsulate the experience of doubly displaced immigrants. Through this research, I have attempted to find a more nuanced language with which to understand double displacement via the visual and material language of painting.

## FOREWORD

I began this research as a part-time student in 2013, while living in Australia. It has changed a lot since then. The resulting studio works have been produced in Australia, Iran (during a visit in 2014), and the US (where I have been based since 2015). Therefore, different parts of the studio research have been made in different parts of the world, and in different houses and apartments I have lived in during that time.

I would like to declare that English is my second language. I have done my best to express myself in this thesis, and I am grateful for the help of my supervisors, especially my principal supervisor, Dr Julie Fragar.

Since I have been working on this research for almost three years, there are some extraneous outcomes that I mention at the end of this document (Chapter 3). Several of the works included for examination have been acquired through national and international prizes or purchased by private collectors. Those works are, therefore, documented here, but do not appear in my exhibition at White Box, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, South Bank.

## **STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY**

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the research contains no material published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the research itself.

Signed:.....

Hadieh Afshani 2016

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	ii
FOREWORD .....	iii
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1. SITUATING CONCEPTS .....	5
1.1. Double Displacement .....	5
1.2. Space/Place .....	9
2. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH .....	12
2.1. Persian Miniatures and Architecture: Space and Light .....	12
2.2. Contemporary Artistic Context .....	20
Hossein Valamanesh .....	20
Mona Hatoum.....	22
Vilhelm Hammershøi .....	24
Ann Toebe.....	26
3. VISUAL ART OUTCOMES .....	27
3.1. VISUAL ART OUTCOMES OF THIS RESEARCH .....	27
3.2. OTHER OUTCOMES EMERGING FROM THIS RESEARCH.....	31
CONCLUSION .....	34
ARTWORKS .....	36
REFERENCES .....	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	54
Appendix .....	56
Curriculum Vitae .....	56

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. <i>Barbad Plays for Khusraw</i> .....	14
Figure 2. Behzād <i>Yusuf and Zulaikha (Joseph Chased by Potiphar's Wife)</i> .....	15
Figure 3. Mosque of Shayka Lutfallah, Isfahan.....	17
Figure 4. Miandasht caravanserai, on the Silk Road.....	18
Figure 5. Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan.....	19
Figure 6. Hossein Valamanesh <i>Longing, Belonging</i> .....	22
Figure 7. Mona Hatoum <i>Interior Landscape</i> .....	23
Figure 8. Mona Hatoum, <i>Light Sentence</i> .....	24
Figure 9. Vilhelm Hammershøi <i>Interior with Ida in a White Chair</i> .....	25
Figure 10. Ann Toebe, <i>The Doctor's Wife</i> .....	26
Figure 11. Hadieh Afshani <i>Looking for The Hope Tree</i> .....	31
Figure 12. Hadieh Afshani, cups from <i>The First Supper</i> installation art project.....	32
Figure 13. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Middle East</i> .....	33
Figure 14. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Hope Tree</i> .....	36
Figure 15. Hadieh Afshani <i>Motion of Light</i> .....	37
Figure 16. Hadieh Afshani <i>Float of Hope in Transit</i> .....	38
Figure 17. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Hope Tree</i> .....	39
Figure 18. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Dress</i> .....	40
Figure 19. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Bedroom</i> .....	41
Figure 20. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Endless Landscape of Living I</i> .....	42
Figure 21. Hadieh Afshani <i>Self-Space Universe II</i> .....	43
Figure 22. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Endless Landscape of Living II</i> .....	44
Figure 23. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Endless Landscape of Living I</i> .....	45
Figure 24. Hadieh Afshani <i>The Endless Landscape of Living II</i> .....	46
Figure 25. Hadieh Afshani <i>Self-Space Universe I</i> .....	47
Figure 26. Hadieh Afshani <i>Self-Space Universe II</i> .....	48
Figure 27. Hadieh Afshani <i>Self-Space Universe I</i> .....	49

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my principal supervisor Dr. Julie Fragar and my associate supervisor Dr. Laini Burton for their academic guidance and generosity in this process.

## INTRODUCTION

Reflection on the self is something I have always found valuable. In the context of my studio research, this interest has led to something akin to a visual diary in painting. The works visually record my story as a woman with an eastern/Persian view of all her experiences. This story is based on my immigration to Australia a decade ago, which was partly motivated by the political problems in Iran and its effect on people's lives, especially women. Indeed, the recent situation in Iran<sup>1</sup> has forced many of us to choose to immigrate to other countries. Since relocating to Australia, my art practice has focused on these experiences of immigration/transplantation and the subsequent absence/presence of people, places, and emotions in my life. This journey is not just from one place to another, but rather a journey of identity, of replacement, and the process of becoming familiar with, and finding of one's self in, a new and unknown place. Therefore, I have started to depict the places and spaces I have lived in to convey this experience.

Being a secular Iranian woman, I had to move away from my home country since I could not live the way I wanted to within the political climate of Iran. Consequently, I have felt displaced from the place that I was born and from its people. However, I have also felt another sense of displacement in my new home because of preconceptions held about Iran and Iranian (Middle Eastern) immigrants; these attitudes have made it difficult to feel like I belong. I refer to this experience as 'double displacement', and it is the focus of this Master of Visual Arts (MVA) project. This feeling of being a nomad is a significant issue for many Iranian immigrants I know, and is best described by Iranian artist and filmmaker Shirin Neshat in her 2010 TED Talk. She articulates how the Iranian diaspora are faced with a double challenge:

... people like myself, we're fighting two battles on different grounds. We're being critical of the West, the perception of the West about our identity—about the image that is constructed about us, about our women, about our politics, about our religion. We are there to take pride and insist on respect. And at the same time, we're fighting another battle. That is our regime, our government—our atrocious

---

<sup>1</sup> Iran and Iranian people have experienced social, political unrest since the Islamic revolution in 1979 partly because of the radical Islamic regime, its rules and regulations, and partly because of the increased Western sanctions against Iran and the eight year war between Iran and Iraq. This situation has been more severe for some minority groups and also women in Iran (Mousavian 2015).

government, [that] has done every crime in order to stay in power. (Neshat 2011)

This exegesis is structured in the following way. I will first outline the theoretical concepts around double displacement and space/place that are pertinent to the work. Secondly, I will outline the practical context of the research, referring to relevant historical and contemporary examples of other artists who have dealt with similar ideas. Thirdly, I will discuss the creative output that has resulted from the period of the candidature.

In this research, I have explored the main factors that effect this double displacement for Iranian immigrants. With regards to this area of research, I have mostly referred to Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) and "The Clash of Ignorance" (2001), Michel Foucault's *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (1980), several articles by Nikos Papastergiadis that examine various contemporary articulations of the migrant and immigration process (2006, 2010, 2012), and Edward Soja's *Third Space* (1996).

Saïd argues that scholarly language pertaining to ethnic groups is implicitly prejudiced and that the use of terms such as 'Oriental' or 'Occidental' limit and inform our understanding of the cultures to which they refer. Saïd's arguments have some inherent links with Foucault's ideas of the 'power' that is diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge, and 'regimes of truth'. For Foucault, power is what makes us what we are and it is often something we are not aware of. I will claim that these problems of implicit power structures in language and society are fundamental to the double displacement of Iranian or Middle Eastern immigrants.

Papastergiadis and Soja offer valuable insights on the changing dynamics of contemporary immigration. Papastergiadis stresses the importance of seeing immigration through the lens of globalisation. Soja argues for a more dynamic and creative thinking around architecture and urban spaces, achieved by the creation of a more just and new geography in cosmopolitan societies based on the needs of diverse citizens.

While double displacement is the central idea framing my studio practice, it is also necessary within that idea to directly address a second concept of space and place; particularly the space/place of painting, architecture and migration as it relates to my work. The theoretical framework for considering painterly, architectural, and migratory

space in this research is centred on Yi-Fu Tuan's *Space and Place* ([1977] 2001) and Mikhail Bakhtin's *Thinking Space* (2000). I draw from these theorists' ideas that refer to space, place, cultural geography and cultural ecology respectively and finally I discuss how some aspects of Soja's ideas in *Third Space* (1996) are parallel to this project.

It is important to note that I have chosen painting as the vehicle for exploring these ideas. My spatial experience of migration is reinterpreted through a series of paintings and drawings. The space of painting provides the opportunity to both concentrate and disorient the eye. To a significant extent, this parallels my experience of migration, where I am at once in a place but displaced within it. In particular, I have drawn from Persian architectural design in Persian miniature paintings since it evidences what is called "diffuse" composition (Rudrauf cited in Pérez González 2010).

The spaces I depict are intimate. I have examined the spaces my body has occupied and focused on the interiors of the spaces in which I have lived, with an emphasis on the liminal zones within those spaces: doorways, hallways, and windows. These liminal zones parallel the transition of migration and moving from one set of personal, cultural and political circumstances to another. This MVA project sees the development of a new chapter in these works, one that makes a more determined attempt to understand space as experiential rather than aesthetic. I have made these paintings partly as an intuitive response to my ever-changing circumstance, and also as a conscious engagement with our mind and body's reaction to familiar and unfamiliar spaces and places and the constant movement from one to another. By depicting rooms and doorways and the relation of spaces to each other in my paintings, I am exploring the human reaction to displacement. I am asking: How do we relate to a place? How do we adapt to that space and detach ourselves from it? How do we attach meaning to space and place? For instance, every piece of furniture or even a stain on a wall can tell a story to the resident of a particular place.

The purpose of this research is to help to visually encapsulate the experience of doubly displaced immigrants who have been forced to choose to move from their birth country and have difficulties growing roots in their new home countries. Considering that a diverse/hybrid society<sup>2</sup> is not only inevitable but also desirable (Papastergiadis 2010,

---

<sup>2</sup> Edward Soja and many other postmodern political geographers and urban theorists use this term to explain new societies with a goal of achieving equal or a just environment for all the residents of the city regardless of their race, gender and sexual orientation. Soja explains this "new space" in *Third Space*

2012),<sup>3</sup> investing on this area of research through art and social research is vital and valuable. Due to my own feelings of being a nomad, I have aimed to find a more nuanced language with which to understand painterly space that refers to double displacement.

---

(1996) and *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010), as one where all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity that displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives as the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.

<sup>3</sup> In *Cosmopolitanism and Culture* (2012) and *Understanding Hybrid Identities: From Mechanical Models to Complex Systems* (2010), Papastergiadis talks about how important and vital it is to accommodate and even celebrate cultural needs of different immigrant ethnic groups to create a stronger and more successful cosmopolitan city. He compares hybrid cities to the cosmopolitan cities of Ancient Greece and Rome (and I would add Persepolis in the Persian Empire), and states that this diversity was the reason for the advancement of the culture and country.

# 1. SITUATING CONCEPTS

## 1.1. Double Displacement

Economic and political changes as well as ease of travel mean that migration, both voluntary and involuntary, occurs more often now than at any other time in history.<sup>4</sup> Edward Said called the twentieth century the century of immigration and asylum seekers (Said 1978), and this trend has continued into the twenty-first century. The complex set of factors operating within the migratory experience—personal, political, social, and cultural—needs to be considered in more nuanced ways. Migrants are not one type of people having one type of experience; nor are the places they are moving to culturally fixed.

In “Mobility and the Nation Skins, Machines and Complex System” (2006), Papastergiadis argues that in the new cultural geography, the melding of individual identity, language, location, time, nature, and race radically shifts and alters the conception of postcolonial cultural studies and their foundational values. By this, Papastergiadis means that the recent acknowledgment of the social, cultural, and political factors active in the migration process have had a dramatic impact on the way we also understand the consequences and implications of migration as one of the defining features and driving forces of globalisation. If we recognise that the world operates as a whole system—pushing and pulling individuals around the globe—we can begin to weaken ideas of cultural hierarchy that work against the possibility of belonging.

Therefore, close investigation of the migration experience is important for two reasons. Firstly, to challenge the social sciences to adopt a more functional and dynamic view of culture whereby ways of living are not limited to specific geographic locations. Secondly, to contribute to a better understanding of the migration process that recognises

---

<sup>4</sup> Postcolonialism is an intellectual direction that has existed since the mid-twentieth century. It developed from and mainly refers to the time after colonialism. The postcolonial direction was created as colonial countries became independent. On the other hand, nowadays only some aspects of postcolonialism can be found in sciences concerning history, literature and politics, as well as the approach to culture and identity of both the countries that were colonised and the former colonial powers. Therefore, there is a question over whether or not we can still use this term.

the importance of belonging as well as material and physical wellbeing. This shift benefits both immigrants and the host society in many ways. For instance, it could be the case that in order to feel at home in a new land, the migrant needs also to tend to his/her cultural needs. This may include practicing the customs or traditions of his/her homeland, as well as for the host society to become educated about their customs, beliefs and the society they came from rather than applying a common prejudgment that has been produced and established by the mass media. The maintenance of these cultural values can in fact be a powerful catalyst for the revitalisation of hope in migrants who desire to belong.

As a secular Iranian woman, I chose to immigrate to another country in order to live the life I desired. When considering the future, I imagined some consequences of moving away from my homeland—such as feeling lonely and homesick, at least for a while—but I have experienced some other consequences that have surprised me. One of them is the way I have been treated in my new home/s because of the image that Western societies have about Middle Eastern society and people. Therefore, of significant interest to this project is the relationship between perception and propaganda that consequently causes people in my situation to feel or live like nomads. As Tuan says in *Place, Art, and Self*, “somehow a firm sense of self depends on being rooted” and, I would add, being accepted and understood somewhere (Tuan 2004, 4). I have sought this in my life since immigrating, and I seek to convey this in my project.

Negative perceptions about Iranian immigrants are of course a result of the political conflicts that have taken place during the last few decades between the Iranian and US governments. The strict religious regime in Iran, with its own diplomacies that are unaccommodating of international rules, seems out of control and maintains a non-negotiable arrogance toward international politics. This affects the image of the people coming from Iran and living in other countries, since they are perceived to have the same ideas as the Iranian government. Foucault argues in *Power/Knowledge* (1980) that such perceptions are shaped by what he calls the ‘power cube’ and the ‘games of power’. By the power cube, Foucault means different ideas supported by the sources of power in societies, which are like sides of a cube that cause one certain force against or toward one idea or group (Rabinow 1991). A key point about Foucault’s approach to power is that it transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialised, and embodied phenomenon. His ideas have been developed and repeated, informing many different

theories about the power of propaganda as a tool to control public opinion in a democratic society in order to validate certain political decisions and terms. One example of individual experience of such power hierarchies is what we are fed by the mass media as stereotypical representations of the Middle Eastern or Iranian culture in films. As an Iranian, I can say that they are rarely accurate and they often render Middle Eastern people as what Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek<sup>5</sup> calls 'Other' (Žižek 2006). One particularly 'othering' and false stereotype perpetuated by movies and news shows Iranian people and culture as harsh, disrespectful, and uneducated, which results in untrue images about Iranian culture, history, and thus immigrants.<sup>6</sup>

According to a statistic published by an American governmental website, Iranian immigrants are one of the highest educated ethnic groups in the US (McIntosh 2004). In Australia, the level of education is 12 percent higher in Iranian-born people than average Australians, yet their median income is less than average overseas-born citizens and Australian-born citizens (Australian Government Department of Social Services 2015). Similarly, despite holding the same or even higher qualifications, Iranian immigrants are less likely to be employed than other immigrants, let alone Australian-born citizens.<sup>7</sup>

Popular media sources here seem to be more focused on the few boat people who are coming from Iran and are placing a burden on our society. By sharing twisted information in society, the media feeds prejudices that lead to condescending attitudes toward Iranian immigrants. In turn, this limits opportunities for those immigrants who are more than capable of making significant contributions in their new homelands, as well as making

---

<sup>5</sup> Slavoj Žižek is a psychoanalytic philosopher, cultural critic, and Hegelian Marxist. His work is located at the intersection of a range of subjects, including continental philosophy, political theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, film criticism, and theology.

<sup>6</sup> The movie *300* director: Zack Snyder 2006 is a very controversial example, as it created a lot of noise and sensitivity about East versus West by the image it shows of Persian culture and history. Dr. Kaveh Farrokh in a paper entitled "The 300 Movie: Separating Fact from Fiction" notes that the film falsely portrays "the Greco-Persian Wars in binary terms: the democratic, good, rational 'Us' versus the tyrannical, evil and irrational, 'other' of the ever-nebulous (if not exotic) 'Persia'" (Farrokh 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The Australian Government Department of Social Services (2015) provides the following statistics:

Median Income: At the time of the 2011 Census, the median individual weekly income for the Iran-born in Australia aged 15 years and over was \$446, compared with \$538 for all overseas-born and \$597 for all Australia-born. The total Australian population had a median individual weekly income of \$577. [...] Qualifications: At the 2011 Census, 67.4 per cent of the Iran-born aged 15 years and over had some form of higher non-school qualifications compared to 55.9 per cent of the Australian population. Of the Iran-born aged 15 years and over, 10.5 per cent were still attending an educational institution. The corresponding rate for the total Australian population was 8.6 per cent. [...] Employment: Among Iran-born people aged 15 years and over, the participation rate in the labour force was 58.3 per cent and the unemployment rate was 12.6 per cent. The corresponding rates in the total Australian population were 65 per cent and 5.6 per cent respectively. Of the 16 123 Iran-born who were employed, 62 per cent were employed in either a skilled managerial, professional or trade occupation. The corresponding rate in the total Australian population was 48.4 per cent.

them feel less welcome, causing them to feel displaced. These issues are taken up by social critics and political activists such as Noam Chomsky,<sup>8</sup> Žižek, and others,<sup>9</sup> who reveal how mass media, public announcements, and news broadcasts form and direct public prejudices and create certain forces to benefit mainstream politics.

Such negative generalisations, however, are not new. In fact, it seems central to the language used in many of the media reports and shows when it comes to Middle Eastern and specifically Iranian culture and people. Following on from Foucault, Said emphasises the relationship between power and knowledge in scholarly and popular thinking; in particular, those regarding European views of the Islamic Arab world. Said argued that ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ work as oppositional terms, so that the ‘Orient’ has been constructed as a negative inversion of Western culture. He challenged the understanding of the pervasiveness of Orientalist constructs and representations in Western scholarship and reporting, and so their relation to the exercise of power over the ‘Orient’ (Cox 1983). He highlighted how, despite being so different from one another in terms of societies and cultures, Middle Eastern cultures have been generalised into one form by Western countries. That kind of propaganda is, I understand, one of the factors that makes the life of immigrants from this region more complex and seemingly doubly displaced in Western countries.

Seen through such a negative generalist lens, how can Iranian immigrants find a place of belonging in the West? This is a question pertinent to my experience and art practice. Since emigrating from Iran to Australia and more recently to the US, I have continued to search for a place of belonging. I decided that perhaps since the population of Iranian immigrants in the US—especially California—is larger than Australia, perhaps Americans might have a more complete image of us. Consequently, I thought it might be easier for Iranians such as myself to feel less like a stranger in the US. So far, this has been my experience.

Both Soja’s and Papastergiadis’s ideas on migration propose a way in which it might be possible to belong to a place as an immigrant. Soja proposes that humans can change the experience of migrants by creating a new spatial consciousness around lived spaces,

---

<sup>8</sup> Noam Chomsky is universally accepted as one of the preeminent public intellectuals of the modern era. He mentions in his book *Understanding Power* (2002) about the media and its role in controlling the public mind in legitimising the influence of power sources in democratic societies such as the US.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Michel Crozier and Samuel P. Huntington’s *The Crisis of Democracy* (1975) and Walter Lippmann’s *The Crisis of Public Opinion* (1922).

public spaces, and the meanings of our geography that are socially produced. By that, he means we can change not just the physical forms of our spaces but also the related economic and social justice/injustice regulations and rules surrounding them by educating ourselves about marginalised communities and groups. Thus, in *Seeking Spatial Justice (Globalisation and Community)* (2010), he argues that seeking spatial justice can become a unifying goal in hybrid societies by changing the public spaces and environments physically and functionally so they accommodate the needs of different cultures and connect them to one another more effectively.

Papastergiadis (2012) emphasises that the presence and expression of different ethnic groups within a culture is what creates a cosmopolitan society, one that is more open to varied ways of living. That is, the expression of cultural difference perpetuates and permits cultural difference and increases migrant belonging. He then recommends art and culture as effective ways of adopting and educating society to new possibilities and unknowns. This may encompass encouraging new perceptions about other groups or creating new perspective and images of what and how things could be different by denying or accepting these differences, and so on (Papastergiadis 2012).

## **1.2. Space/Place**

The main metaphor for migration in my research and practice is perpetual movement between spaces and places in search of belonging. By showing different doorways and corridors related to each other, my work creates a feeling of being tempted to choose one over another and so to take a risk for going through one path, perhaps changing our mind and trying another path, and so on. In doing so, I try to evoke the mindset and the emotional journey of an Iranian immigrant like myself experiencing the maze of seeking a place to belong.

For the purposes of this research, I borrow definitions of space and place as outlined by Yi-Fu Tuan in *Space and Place* ([1977] 2001). Tuan describes place as security, whereas space is freedom: we are attached to the one and long for the other. As Tuan explains, places are centres of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are established. Space is more abstract than place and it allows movement, whereas place is a pause in movement, although each pause makes it possible for a location to be transformed into place. The interiors depicted in my work are

therefore ‘places’ and the rooms behind the doors or corridors are ‘spaces’. In other words, the interiors are familiar places in which I have memories in every corner; I have lived in them at some point in my life. By contrast, the space behind the door that is tempting the viewer to go towards it is an unknown space. This is the dynamic of new adaptation and moving on that describes the process of immigration and double displacement.

Architectural places are the most meaningful forms human can make. These places are based on our bodily proportions, needs, and idiosyncrasies according to the particular climate and culture we are living in. They are often made based on our individual preferences or psychology; therefore, by using interiors in my works, I am describing the intimate experiences I have had in them as I review them again in my memory. On the other hand, I made each part possess its own power to accentuate the different emotional temperature for instance between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or different times of the day by showing different light in each space.

As Bakhtin continues, “Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh and becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history” (quoted in Holloway and Kneale 2000, 82).

It is important to me that these places and in-between spaces embody a sense of non-linear time—my whole migration history of spaces and places collapsing together. The spatial concept that most accurately describes the collapsing time space I want to convey is described by Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (2000) as “the chronotope” (literally, ‘time space’). For Bakhtin, the chronotope is a trope of literature that governs the representation of time and space in some novels. As he describes, “we can give the name chronotope to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature so that the spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole” (quoted in Holloway and Kneale 2000, 82).

Using places I have lived in as the subject in my works, I learnt from what Bakhtin explained in his book *Thinking Space* that I am showing a range of experience and knowledge as I remember some of the places and create them again (Holloway and Kneale 2000). Some of these experiences are direct and intimate, and some are indirect

and conceptual, mediated by symbols, which is how Bakhtin explains the experience of a space or a place.

Soja describes experiences of space differently from Bakhtin. In *Third Space*, Soja describes how spaces can have three characteristics: the spatial, historical, and social. These define the dimension, meaning and the function of a space and so we act differently in different spaces based on them (Soja 1996).

According to Bakhtin, we cannot really know one space (or oneself) without comparing it to other spaces (Holloway and Kneale 2000). That is how the different spaces in my works can be understood. There are ways in which we can process a spatial dimension in terms of Self–Other relationships as relational position. Therefore, by using different spaces in relation with each other (from my past and present living places), I am attempting to know my situation and the process of this displacement as an immigrant. On the other hand, the white wall that is visible in many of these works is a representation of all possibilities that relate to the process of making decisions and trying different places/paths to live. It is a big plain white wall, which stops us for a moment and seems like an end but then another perspective starts from each side of it. I relate this to what Soja explains in *The Third Space*: “The process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Soja 1996, 211).

The composition of the works encourages the eye to move between spaces, following the lights and reflections from one place to another, returning to the white wall, and finally changing directions to a new destination. This movement and sense of unsettledness encapsulates the double displacement experience.

## 2. CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

The context of my research is divided into two broad categories of artists and architects who, I argue, have dealt with double displacement and space/place as outlined in the preceding chapter. These categories are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. The practitioners are noted here in no particular order as their work has contributed to my research in various ways.

### 2.1. Persian Miniatures and Architecture: Space and Light

My research has been heavily influenced by the use of space and light in Persian miniatures and architecture. Traces of Western Art historical influence can also be found in my work and are important in terms of noting my movement into Western spaces, places and artistic practices. I will mention them briefly here, but I want to focus more on the persistent ways in which my culture continues to be visible in my work.

Interiors have a long history in European art, from seventeenth-century Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer's intimate domestic scenes<sup>10</sup> to more contemporary works such as contemporary German painter Martin Kobe's free-flowing architectural paintings,<sup>11</sup> or American artist Ann Toebbe's flattened interiors.<sup>12</sup> I think my work falls somewhere between these intimate, disoriented and highly formalised interpretations of architectural space in painting.

In Western painting, interiors have arguably been used in a similar way that biography has been used in writing. What we see in Vermeer's paintings, for example, are familiar and believable places where we can sympathise with the people whose lives we are privy to for a brief moment. Tuan ([1977] 2001) articulates that the narrative, biographical element in such paintings helps us to sympathise with the space and relate to it as a whole. The coherence we see in Western interior paintings is also reflected in compositional strategies that employ a central focal point and singular perspectives. By contrast, interior paintings in the tradition of Eastern miniature paintings (Indian, Persian, Chinese, etc.)

---

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Vermeer was a Dutch painter who specialised in domestic interior scenes of middle-class life (Brown 1948).

<sup>11</sup> "Part of the New Leipzig School movement, painter Martin Kobe explores urban existence, and the anxieties and exhilarations it induces, in kaleidoscopic cityscapes devoid of people. Born in East Germany, Kobe incorporates the complex dynamics of the former socialist regime into compositions that reference utopian architecture. Kobe fragments and pieces back together elements of buildings, constructing topsy-turvy structural vortexes. Smooth gradients of glowing, acidic colors enhance a sense of fluctuation and introduce a futuristic, apocalyptic edge to his work" ("Martin Kobe: Behind True Symmetry" 2007).

<sup>12</sup> Ann Toebbe is an American artist who will be introduced in the Artistic Context section of this exegesis.

are composed differently, with less emphasis on coherence and centrality. Through this research, I have explored the relationship between these two often-divergent modes of interiors painting, borrowing from both approaches.

In her doctoral dissertation on Iranian art, Carmen González Pérez cites French art historian Lucien Rudrauf's theoretical framework for considering compositional patterns, through which he divides them into diffuse and scanned compositions.<sup>13</sup> According to Rudrauf, a diffuse composition does not follow any hierarchical principle in the distribution of its elements, whereas a scanned composition is based on scientific perspective. A Persian miniature painting (figure 1) would be an example of a diffuse composition and a Western interior painting would be an example of a scanned composition. I want to focus here on his idea of the diffuse composition. In Rudrauf's words, "compositions of this kind are often made of a great number of details, none of which is marked with a predominant accent" (cited in Pérez González 2010, 96). The eye is not guided to go from one object to another. Therefore, attention scatters itself without hindrance over all parts of the plane, with nothing to lead it imperiously back to the centre of radiation. Such pictures can be freely cut up into sections capable of having an independent life. Diffuse compositions ignore, intentionally or not, the effect of lighting that produces accents and contrasts incompatible with its nature. These kinds of compositions are often, if not always, freed from the laws of perspective (of linear or scanned perspective, as I emphasise).

The function of the interior in Persian traditional painting is greatly influenced by Iranian mystic culture, which is based heavily on storytelling (Nafisi 2007). The paintings serve an unfolding narrative across time as opposed to a single moment or space. Therefore, we see a different approach to the representation of interior spaces in Persian miniature than in Western paintings, since perspective plays a different role and spaces are broken according to the purpose of the narrative story (Nafisi 2007). The architectural space depicted in the work becomes a series of interior and exterior sections or chapters that although they serve a greater whole, also resist cohesion. Referring again to Tuan, the interior places and the exterior spaces maintain relative independence from one another such as a chapter of a book operates as one section of a greater whole.

---

<sup>13</sup> Although I do not agree with his idea that the scanned composition is more interesting (or developed) from an aesthetic point of view, his ideas are nonetheless useful for reflecting on the way I have structured my paintings.



**Figure 1.** *Barbad Plays for Khusraw*, 1539–43, British Library, London.

Source: [www.onartandaesthetics.com](http://www.onartandaesthetics.com)



**Figure 2.** Behzād Yusuf and Zulaikha (Joseph Chased by Potiphar's Wife) 1488, miniature.

Source: [www.persianpersia.com](http://www.persianpersia.com)

*Joseph Chased by Potiphar's Wife* (figure 2) is an example of a composition of interior spaces and exterior places that exist independently while also working together to direct the viewer to understand the narrative of the story. This is a painting of Joseph and Zulaykha (the Hebrew Joseph and Potiphar's wife), where the virtuous Joseph flees the amorous advances of Zulaykha, running through a labyrinthine space in which the viewer is given simultaneous interior and exterior views. Bricks, patterned tiles, Persian rugs, and steep stairwells are at once dazzling and disorienting, perhaps conveying Joseph's own feelings as he seeks to escape Zulaykha. The artist allows towers and balconies to again break out of the rectangular space while also weaving the text throughout the image in the most sophisticated manner. This is an aspect of composition that I have used in my studio works.

Even though my works use a form of diffuse composition that I borrow from Persian miniature painting, where all the sections sit alongside each other, I still use the scanned composition (scientific perspective) of European paintings in each section of these works. The outcome might be referred to as what American philosopher Marx W. Wartofsky describes as the "paradox of pictures", which is "the paradox that a visual array on a two-dimensional surface is seen as a depiction of three-dimensional objects or scenes. In other words, what is two-dimensional can appear three-dimensional" (Gould and Cohen 2012). This illusion of three-dimensional space "behind the surface" is one of the visual concepts that I am borrowing to describe some aspects of the experience of immigration and relate it to its paradoxes.

By showing broken three-dimensional spaces in relation to each other on a two-dimensional surface, I am creating an illusion of a tempting place that encourages viewers to imagine walking into each and every one of them and experience the illusion of real space through scientific perspective. At the same time, the spaces are related to each other in a non-real way or by using diffuse composition too. Therefore, by using two different perspective approaches in these works, I am emphasising the experience of the doubly displaced immigrant in my studio works, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

In this body of works, light is a metaphor for hope, temptation and future. It is used to direct the eye and lead the viewer on their own 'migration' between spaces. Light is a key factor in traditional Persian architecture and is a beautiful element that I am always in awe of when visiting historic places in Iran. Arthur Pope, who was known as a

pioneering American expert on Persian/Iranian art, described the light sources in Persian architectures as skillful hunters as it attracts the viewer and always utilised with regard to general principles of Iranian architecture (Figure 3, 4 and 5). He says:

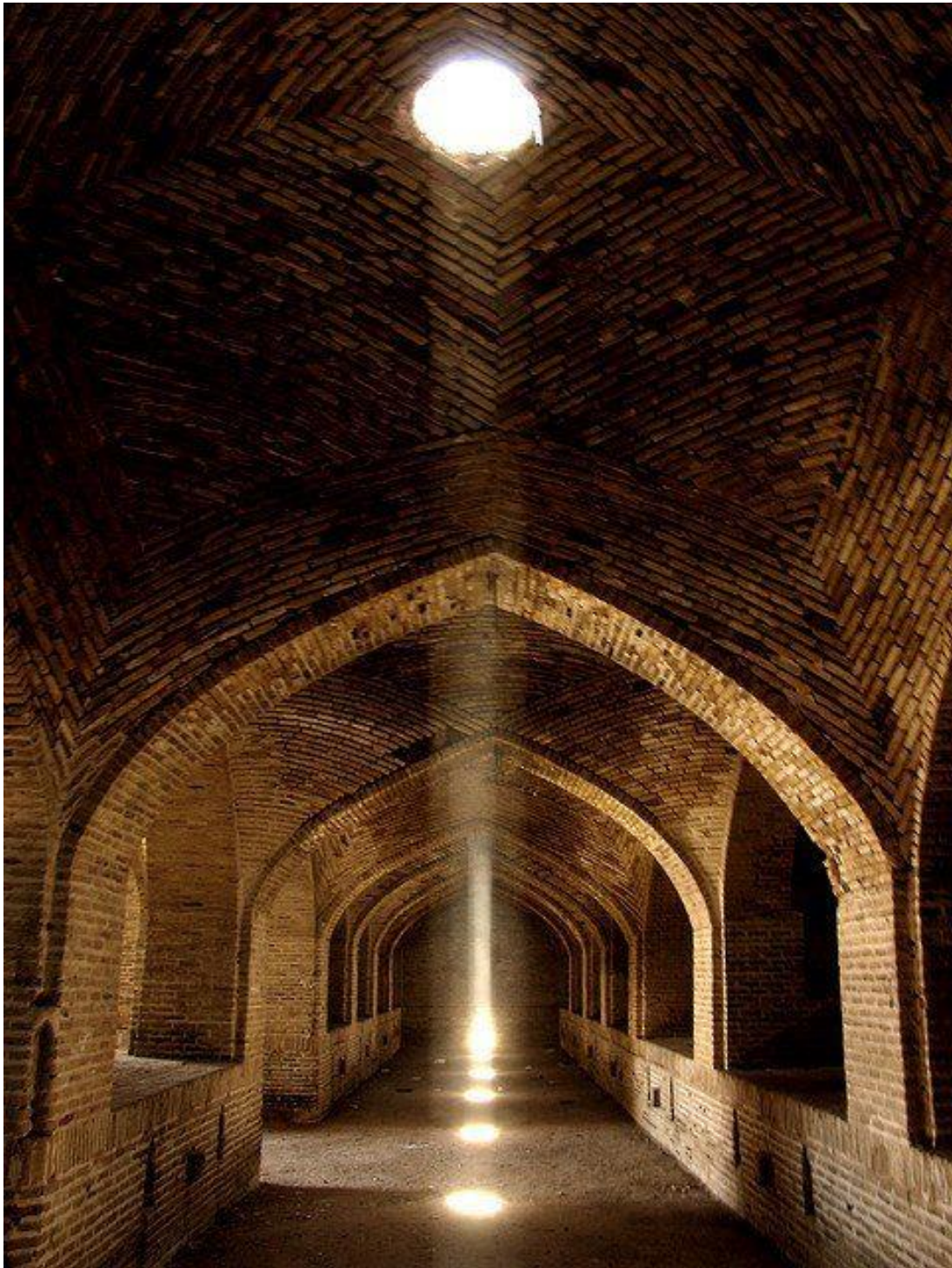
Notions such as hierarchy, centrality, balance, unity, ... are engendered by symbolic aspects of light as the most direct representative of sun, sky, heaven, truth and especially an omnipresent God. Consequently, one can observe several elements or structures like fire temples, light wells and many others in Iranian architecture which are created to interact with light. (Pope 1969, 25)

In “Gazing Geometries: Modes of Design Thinking in Pre-Modern Central Asia and Persian Architecture”, Hooman Koliji suggests that the vertical and horizontal lines of lights and shadows, their reflection, and the edge of the room walls in these buildings creates some geometrical grids that unifies the space and directs the eye (Koliji 2016). I used similar elements in the two-dimensional works I created for this project for the same purpose. I found it very helpful in relating to and building a more cohesive composition by using the vertical and horizontal lines of light, reflections and lines in the two-dimensional works created for this research.



**Figure 3.** Mosque of Shayka Lutfallah, Isfahan. 1603–19. Interior view.

Source: [www.studyblue.com](http://www.studyblue.com)



**Figure 4.** Miandasht caravanserai, on the Silk Road, 17th century.

Source: [www.studyblue.com](http://www.studyblue.com)



**Figure 5.** Mosque of Shaykh Lutfallah, Isfahan, 1603–19. Interior view.

Source: [www.studyblue.com](http://www.studyblue.com)

## 2.2. Contemporary Artistic Context

In this section, I will discuss different artists whose works are either conceptually, theoretically, or methodologically aligned to the works I have produced for this research. I have been using space and place as metaphors to describe the experience of displacement for Iranian immigrants. Therefore, I am drawn to artists who make work about the experience of displacement and immigration for Middle Eastern people as well as those who use elements of space or interiors. I elaborate here on the work of the four key artists whose work best relates to the preceding discussion: Hossein Valamanesh (1949–), Mona Hatoum (1952–), Vilhelm Hammershøi (1864–1916), and Ann Toebe (1974–).

Valamanesh and Hatoum are both Middle Eastern artists whose works deal with the experience of displacement. They both use space and interior elements in their work, which are mostly sculptural and installation-based, to depict their experience. I am also drawn to artists who use painterly space in depicting interior spaces. There have been many such artists throughout history, but I am particularly drawn to Hammershøi and Toebe from a stylistic perspective. The work of these painters has had a considerable influence on my own and demonstrates the use of divided interior spaces I discussed in Chapter 1.

### **Hossein Valamanesh**

Persian artist Valamanesh has been living in Australia since 1973, and his works relate to memory, cultural dislocation, loss, and the progression of time, which he displays through a gentle and poetic language that he borrows from Persian literature and culture (Carroll 1997).

For instance, in *Longing, Belonging* (1997, figure 6), a photograph of a Persian carpet burning in the Australian mallee scrub is presented behind the burnt carpet itself. As a Persian artist, Valamanesh is well versed with Persian poetic symbolism and knows that flames are seen as cleansing elements to create a void and so an open space for new

possibilities (Gellatly and Smith 2006). This void space of new possibilities and immigration plays a similar role to the middle white wall in my recent works.

Valamanesh's works embody a sense of trying to locate cultures and the inherent violence or hardness of this displacement, of substituting one way of living for another, and of the need to give up part of oneself in order to adapt to a new life (Gellatly and Smith 2006). Meeting Valamanesh in person and talking to him in 2010 in Brisbane made me realise that this search for belonging in the new land of Australia and visualising it through using Persian poetic symbolism<sup>14</sup> in art is similar to the maze I depicted in my studio works through spaces and doorways. Therefore, his play with natural elements such as soil, leaves, trees and combining them with cultural symbolic concepts (or cultural phenomenological contexts) that are introduced over and over again in Persian literature and poems is similar to what I have done in this series of works by using everyday life spaces and interiors and introducing a search for belonging and regrowth after being doubly displaced.

---

14 Persian literature is one of the world's oldest literatures, described as one of the great literatures of humanity, including Goethe's assessment of it as one of the four main bodies of world literature (Levinson and Christensen 2002). Also strong is the Persian aptitude for versifying everyday expressions that one can encounter poetry in almost every classical work, whether from Persian literature, science, or metaphysics which created a certain symbolism and layers of metaphoric context.



**Figure 6.** Hossein Valamanesh *Longing, Belonging* 1997.

Source: <http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au>

### **Mona Hatoum**

Hatoum is a Palestinian immigrant who examines and describes the experience of displaced people of Palestine. To do that, she transforms familiar, everyday, domestic objects such as chairs, cots and kitchen utensils into things foreign, threatening and dangerous. One of her works, *Interior Landscape* (2009, figure 7) is a haunting installation of bedroom furniture and domestic elements that imagines the conflict between the dreams and aspirations of a Palestinian individual juxtaposed with the harsh political reality of displacement they have to face (Hatoum 2009).

In many ways, Hatoum's experience of immigration is similar to the experience of people of my generation from Iran; the experience of not having a place in your home country and not being really welcomed in the destination too. She describes that when she went to London in 1975 for what was meant to be a brief visit, she became stranded there because the war broke out in Lebanon, and she was not allowed to return to her home country. This feeling of dislocation manifests itself in Hatoum's work as a sense of disjunction. For instance, she describes that "in a work like *Light Sentence* [figure 8], the movement of the light bulb causes the shadows of the wire mesh lockers to be in perpetual motion, which creates a very unsettling feeling. When you enter the space you have the impression that the whole room is swaying and you have the disturbing feeling that the ground is shifting under your feet" (cited in Archer 1997, 1). This is an environment in constant flux—no single point of view, no solid frame of reference, only a sense of instability.



**Figure 7.** Mona Hatoum *Interior Landscape* 2009, Exhibition parallel to the 53rd Venice Biennale 2009. Steel bed, pillow, human hair, table, cardboard tray, cut-up map, wire hanger, Dimensions variable.

Source: <http://universes-in-universe.org>



**Figure 8.** Mona Hatoum, *Light Sentence* 1992, galvanised wire mesh lockers, electric motor and light bulb, 198 x 185 x 490cm

Source: [www.artsy.net](http://www.artsy.net)

### **Vilhelm Hammershøi**

Hammershøi was a Danish painter who used a specific representational approach; by employing layers of glazing, he captured the mood of a room and also the attachment between a place people live in and its resident/s. I have long been drawn to Hammershøi's works of interiors, doorways, and light coming from one corner to another. His works speak of the power of intimate places, with an atmosphere of stillness and absence underpinned by a restrained, almost monochromatic palette and a sense of form that reduces elements to their essentials. His style is currently being reviewed and used by many contemporary artists in design and also in painting (Johnson 2015).

Another element in Hammershøi's works that is pertinent to my work is how he came to intimately know the light of the rooms he depicted and the way the light fell by identifying and capturing even the slightest variations in atmosphere and mood (Scales

2003, 473). I have found it instructive to study Hammershøi's works and to find out how he made careful decisions about whether to add or subtract details, or to include or exclude furnishings, objects or a solitary figure, in order to finally create poetic spaces. Fobert (2008) explains that Hammershøi managed to reduce elements to their essential form, which is something that I am also trying to attain in my works, as I will elaborate in the following chapter.

Looking at a work such as *Interior with Ida in a White Chair* (figure 9), it is ambiguous if the subject of the work is the woman depicted (Hammershøi's wife Ida) or the room and furniture or even the atmosphere and space in between (Fobert 2008). This kind of ambiguity is found in many of Hammershøi's works. When viewing his works, I decided that this feeling of stillness, silence and absence suits the concept of my works too, as they are what I have sought to develop in my own work.



**Figure 9.** Vilhelm Hammershøi *Interior with Ida in a White Chair*, 1899, oil on canvas, 57 x 49cm.

Source: <http://www.artnet.com>

## Ann Toebbe

Finally, the work of American female artist Ann Toebbe tells us the intimate stories of the people living in those interiors that are often her own living places, past or present. Looking at Toebbe's work, you are positioned inside someone's home; the room does not have a scientific perspective as she uses a diffuse perspective in her works. Unlike Hammershøi, Toebbe uses collage and gouache in her work, so the edges of cut papers are visible.

Toebbe's works convey space from five different orientations (Smith 2015). This gives the work a multidimensional feeling, despite being overtly flat. Most striking is the artist's rendering of the surfaces: the tiles, flooring, area rugs, curtain and upholstery fabrics, and the observation and rendering in miniature of each setting (Smith 2015). The latest works I created for this project provide a similar quality; as viewers walk around the work and look at it from different angles, so different elements, objects and places will show and become clear.

Toebbe's successful exhibition *Remarried* in 2014 tells us how the house is haunted or effected by the ex-wife and how some new things are being introduced by the new marriage and the wife (Fraleigh 2015).



**Figure 10.** Ann Toebbe, *The Doctor's Wife* 2011, cut paper, paint, and glue on paper, 190.5 x 323cm.

Source: <http://stevenzevitasgallery.com>

### 3. VISUAL ART OUTCOMES

#### 3.1. Visual Art Outcomes of This Research

Arthur Schopenhauer, a German philosopher known for his work *The World as Will and Representation* (1818), said, “human desiring, ‘willing’, and craving cause severe suffering or pain. A temporary way to escape this pain is through aesthetic contemplation. Aesthetic contemplation allows one to escape this pain—albeit temporarily—because it stops one perceiving the world as mere presentation” (quoted in Janaway 1998, 109). This explains the motivations toward art as a way to give meaning to our life for so many of us as artists and it is certainly for me. Working about spaces and double displacement for a while has become a “virtual place” for me, very similar to what Tuan describes how a place can be a centre of meaning for us, a primarily positive meaning, the same can be said of art.

My works are figurative, their motifs taken from life. They can be seen as representing a state of claustrophobia inasmuch as they speak to the closed hermetic spaces of the displaced person/migrant. I try to show how space becomes place and how for the immigrant every new space is haunted by a prior place.

In my practice, I have focused on establishing a visual language to describe the central questions raised earlier; how through the disruption and displacement of the immigration experience and the search for a better future, people maintain their vision to hold them together, with special reference to person from a Middle Eastern/Iranian cultural background.

Since my research is about replacement and displacement or the temptation of one place in relation to another, I explore the relation of spaces through doorways, corridors or light coming from one space to another by depicting domestic interiors. I also use some elements of a presentation of trees in some of the works as a metaphor; a living thing which has roots in this land and is a source of life and hope, and arguably a metaphor for the transplantation and growth of individuals from one point of origin to another.

I have always been drawn to studying and working from living places. The interiors I worked from contain my immigrants stories as observing the places I have lived in since

I immigrated to Australia 10 years ago. These are the intimate places that I work from. Elusive and personal, they are etched into the deep recesses of my memory and yield intense satisfaction with each recall, as some humble events can in time build up a strong sentiment for place.

When I began this research, I started to make sketches and drawings of different interiors in search of the relationship of the spaces to each other, to the outdoor space and the light coming through the spaces and only focused on that. I then tried to relate the experience of immigration to the spaces I was observing in my drawings and to focus only on the vital elements in the design, removing any extra things from the composition.

Drawing in-situ gave me time to feel the place and gradually realise what is in fact motivating for me and how and what is the main focused or the most interesting thing that I need to show in the work. I aimed to show what visually and conceptually amazes me and developed the phenomenological concept that I was dealing with. This development of the concept sometimes seemed to be suggested by the spaces and places I was working from in the observation section and sometimes as I was working on the pieces in the studio. It is a very creative and unpredictable process; I cannot tell how the image will be look until the end of the process. This is how I develop the concept or discover the mood I am after, as Borzello (2006, 23) mentioned in *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art*, “Perhaps mood is a defining characteristic in distinguishing an interior from other categories of art.”

I also made some small in-situ paintings in different lighting and some digital paintings using an iPad as well as taking photographs. Often, the works I do from life, including drawings and small paintings or even the digital paintings, are the best resources I use for the final works I produce in studio later.

Being aware of the general theme and idea that I am looking for helps me to simplify and emphasise the right characteristics in the works. In these works, it is about the relation of the spaces to each other, the play of light coming from one corner or a door into a dark corridor or a room and the tree outside which leads our eyes toward it and is in the brightest place of the whole composition. It is about the risk/temptation/fear of moving from one place to another place or moving from inside (a closed place) toward the tree or outside. It encourages us to take the risk and go from a familiar empty/sad/nostalgic/dark/silent place toward an unknown but bright leafy/green

place/light source/freedom by following the light, which I remind myself while I am observing the place.

Once I have all the information I need, I return to the studio where I begin experimenting with compositional and conceptual ideas, such as the placement of a light, tree, doorway, the vastness of empty space, the few furnishings or the shadow of a person. I have created a body of works with this method, which is more like a poetic representation of the places I have lived in since I arrived in Australia and recently the US.

Following my confirmation seminar in 2014, I started to use all of the visual information and ideas of all the works I had made in the past to create a new series of works, which are those that I am presenting here in this project. To do that, I started this time to sketch out all the places I had ever lived in since being born in Iran. I lived in three different houses in Iran, and twelve different houses in Australia (including a house that I bought and built myself in Brisbane). Since moving to the US, I have lived in five different places in California, Arizona, New Jersey and recently New York. Therefore, I had a large number of visual references to sketch and then use.

I tried to remember what those places looked like and how different rooms were related to each other. I then started to produce some rough sketches that were of the compositions of the different interiors (places) I have ever lived in. The process took me to the past and all the memories I had in each and every corner of those places. Mentally rebuilding, drawing and then painting every single one of the houses and units that I have lived in since I was born on the same page next to each other, combined with the ensuing rush of memories coming to my mind that happened in every corner of those places, was truly a phenomenal experience. It made me think about the concept of time in relation to places and memories for an immigrant. This is when I realised that my works are imbued with the spatial concept that Bakhtin calls “the chronotope” as I explained before (Bakhtin 2000, 84).

I think abstractly when it comes to composition. Even though I am aiming to use realistic perspective for each section, I know I should not sacrifice the composition in general for the sake of the draftsmanship or realistic perspective. As I believe the general composition of the works are the main visual language that I always need to get back to until the end of the process of making the art work. This is similar to what Friedenwald

(1955) says in his article “Knowledge of Space”, that sometimes, the better the draftsmanship, the worse the spatial composition.

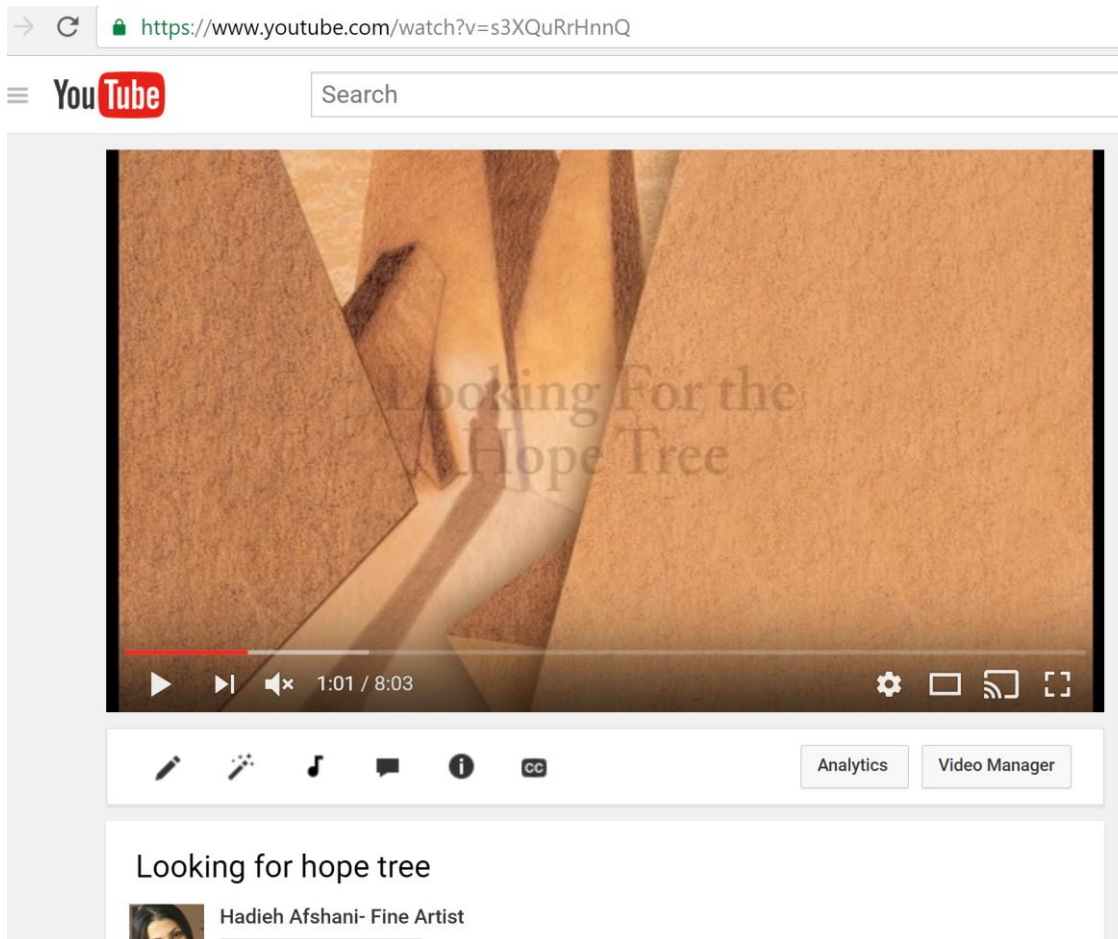
I use oil paints on wooden panels that I brace and prime rather than canvas since it works well for my approach as it gives me a stronger surface to do as much scratching, digging, rubbing and even using paint stripper or lacquer thinners as I need to create the right texture and aesthetic and work on it over and over again.

I build up my paintings using an oil technique that involves glazing and repainting. I apply layers of transparent and opaque paint to create a rich and varied patina to achieve the desired result. This technique is partly similar to what was used in the Baroque period to apply multiple layers of paint and medium to achieve visual effects (Wittkower, Montagu, and Connors 1999). I developed my technique of using oil paint, mixing it with coloured chalk or pencil, and sometimes drawing on it by scratching lines or lifting the layers by using paint stripper on plywood panels. Over the years of using different techniques of paintings, I think this is the best technique for my purpose since it allows the painting to evolve slowly to show glowing light, which is one of the most important elements of my works and it lets me adjust the work by again and again applying layers of paint and glazing and lifting.

I work from the general to the particular and at the beginning of my painting, it is similar to a fight between me and the painting as I rub and destroy it with a palette knife, rag, sculpting tools and even paint stripper, until it feels closer to something I am happy with, then I start the gentler process of glazing. Indeed, it makes me organise my thoughts and plan in advance, allowing me to come closer and closer to the result I am searching for and get the composition of the works resolved. This extended time also facilitates concentration, giving me an opportunity to reflect more on my subject, to understand deeply and be honest about the main point of the painting and to be intimately connected with my work. It is true that applying layers of glazes over relates and helps to indicate the main concept that I am searching for; that is, the process of getting to know or discover a new place/home.

### 3.2. Other Outcomes Emerging From This Research

While I was working on this research, I was involved with different projects that were related to the themes dealt with here. Among them was a collaborative project I did with MDA (Multicultural Development Association) called *Reflection* in 2013 that involved a photographer, a film maker, a music composer, an animator and myself (as a visual artist) to create artworks based on the unique story of some of the immigrants that MDA paired us with, exhibiting and showing them in a few related events hosted by MDA. I produced a graphic novel based on the story of an Eritrean fighter woman, Saba Abraham, and her daughter who came to Australia. A short video of the process of creation and a short animation was made too. I worked on this project at the beginning of my candidature period and I believe it helped a lot in understanding and seeing the experience of displacement from another culture's perspective.

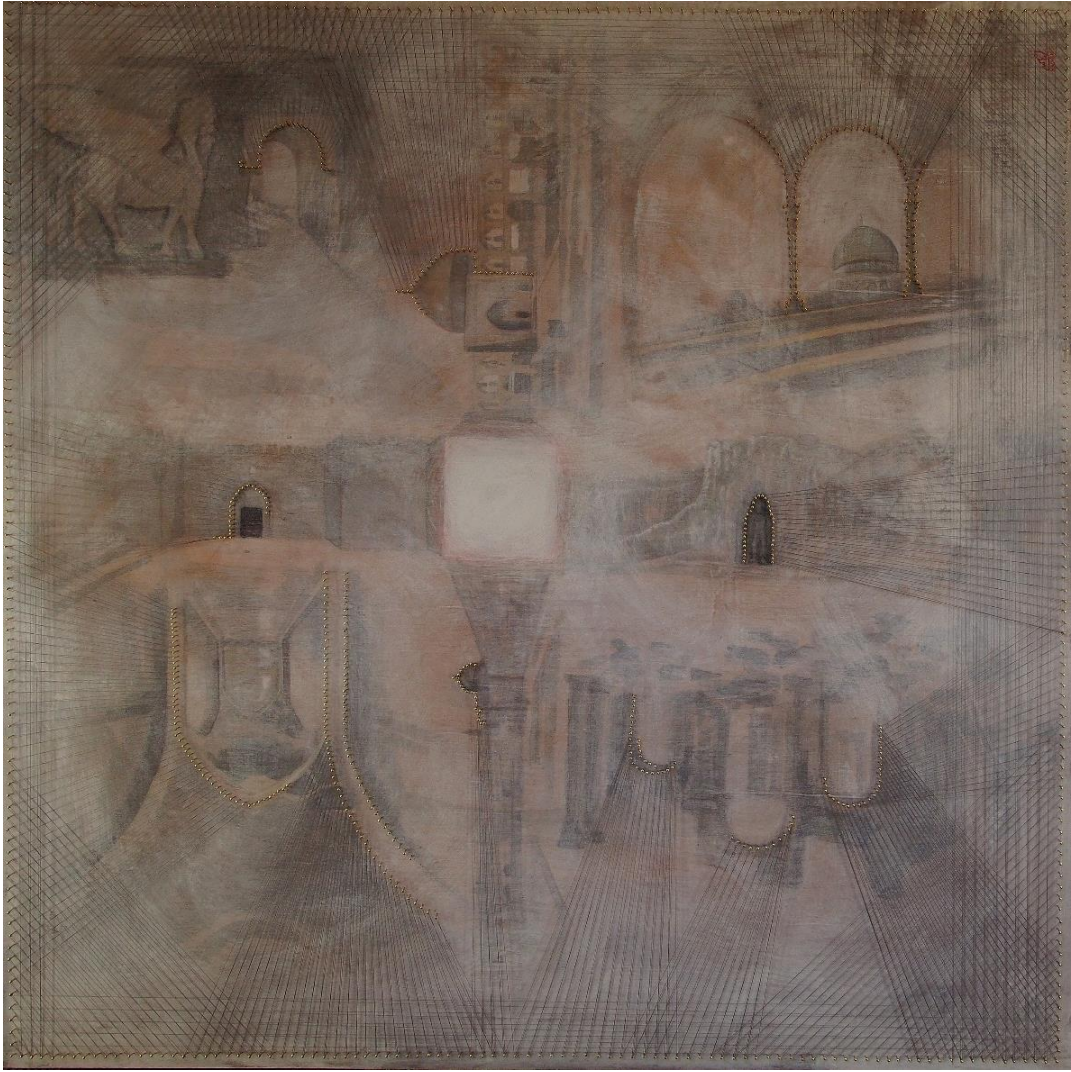


**Figure 11.** Hadieh Afshani *Looking for The Hope Tree* (part of the *Reflection* project) 2014, video based on graphic novel, mixed media on paper.

Another project that I am involved with as a result of this research is a collaborative installation art project called *The First Supper* supported by an international art organisation in New York, RE:ARTISTE. It will be exhibited in Manhattan at MC gallery in November 2016 and then travel to the Jewish Museum in Oslo in December 2016. It will be shown in Feminist Art Conference in Toronto in January 2017 and then Museum for Islamic Art in Jerusalem, Israel and some other museum and galleries in Europe (Amsterdam and London) and some cities in Middle East too. The project is in the form of an installation combined with performance art. The *First Supper* project emphasises that women of the Middle East, with their particular mind-sets, sympathies, lateral thinking and sense of justice, can transcend enduring enmities in order to move toward peaceful coexistence in the Middle East. The installation is a dinner table that is set for seven people. All the objects are painted with portraits of inspiring women of Middle East by me and the other women artist from Israel. I used the same composition of iconic places in the Middle East as that used for the works created for this research, as seen in Figure 12. To me, this project is the continuation or the next step of the double displacement project.



**Figure 12.** Hadieh Afshani, cups from *The First Supper* installation art project 2016, mixed media on ceramic, 7 x 5 x 5cm.



**Figure 13.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Middle East* (part of *The First Supper* installation art project)  
2016, mixed media on plywood, 122 x 122cm

Finally, in November 2015, I presented a paper titled “The Contemporary Art of the Middle East and How It Is Different from Western Countries’ Contemporary Art” in the Representational Art Conference at Ventura, California. My research about the use of different composition in Eastern art, compared to what we see in the West traditionally (i.e., scanned and diffuse compositions) and some other similar factors, resulted in the establishment of the core concept of this papers.

## CONCLUSION

In his lecture “Home as Elsewhere” (2011), Tuan says that all other species only leave their home if they are in a kind of danger and are forced to move. Humans are the only creatures that move in search of a better place and ultimately a better future.

In this exegesis, I have described the main factors that lead to the experience of what I have termed the ‘double displacement’ of Iranian (Middle Eastern) immigrants. The first displacement is that which they experience within their society, which causes them to choose to emigrate, and the second displacement is that which they experience in Western host countries, whereby they experience difficulty in feeling a sense of belonging because of the inaccurate perceptions about Middle Eastern people that prevail in such societies. Drawing upon the work of Said (1976) and Foucault (1980), I argued how false ideas and propaganda about Iranians creates an implicit forced power that limits both Iranian immigrants and other people to have a first-hand experience about people we meet and work with every day.

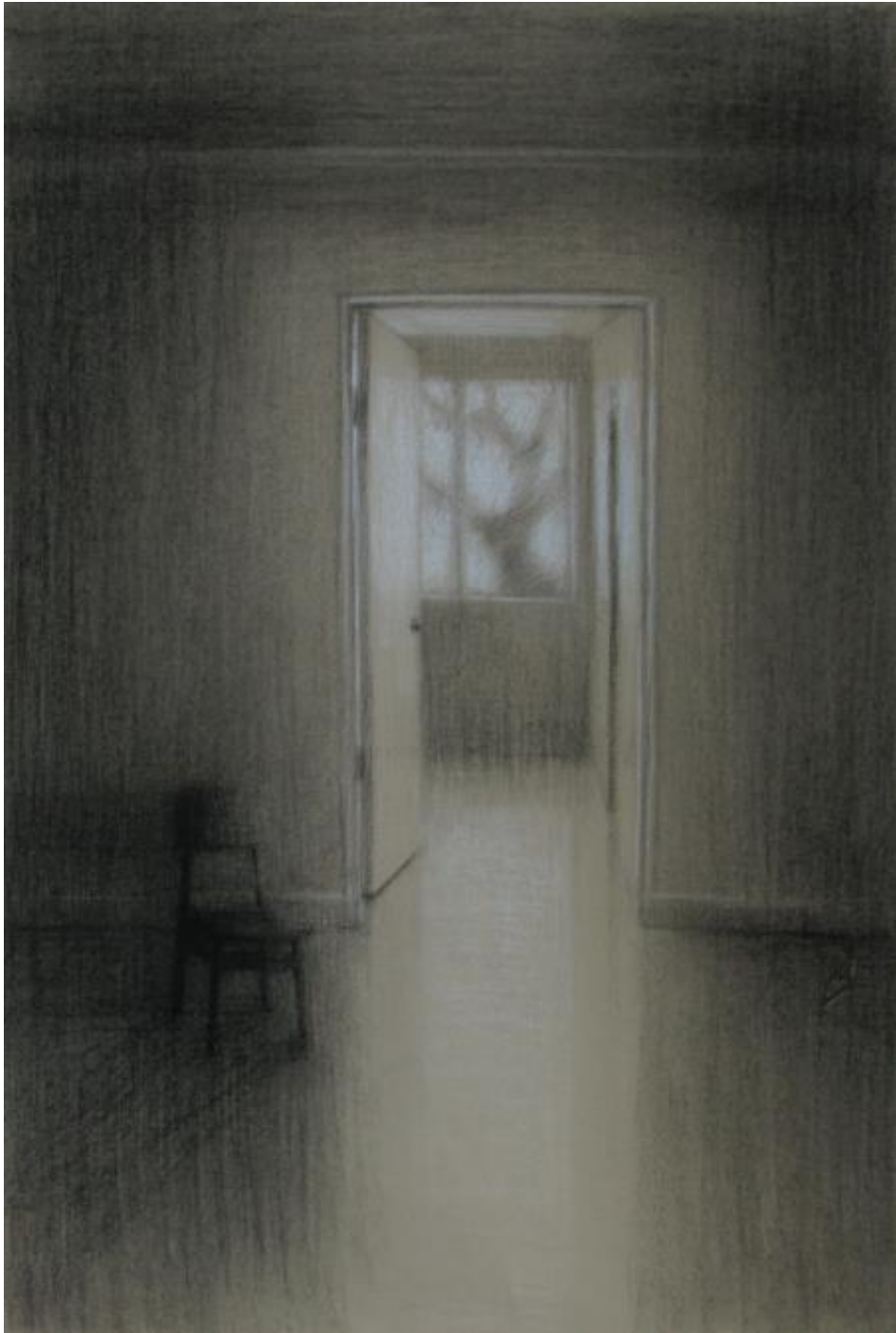
I then discussed the different elements that I am using in my studio works to depict the experience of double displacement. I showed how I borrow the use of diffuse composition and formatting from Persian miniature in my works and then talked about important elements of my works, such as intimate place, architectural space, and light. I also contextualised my works with those by others working in similar areas.

The project is based on my experience of intimate places and the process of going from a familiar place to an unknown space in search of a better future, trying to feel a sense of belonging in a new country, and considering how this experience is also common to other Iranian immigrants.

Immigration is one of the central challenges of our era, not least for Australia. Understanding these challenges on many different levels is vital, as theorists such as Papastergiadis (2006, 2010, 2012) and Soja (1996) have outlined. On the other hand, we can say home is our focal point of cosmic structure, so to abandon or emigrate from it would be a hard experience. Using them in the form of art helps me to record and to savour experiences that would otherwise have faded beyond recall to me. Therefore, even though those experiences are distanced and in some way have become destroyed with no immediacy of direct experience, I am showing a reflection that the elusive moments of

the past draw near to us in present reality and gain a measure of permanence. Finally, I created a body of paintings and drawings based on the feeling that the journey of immigration takes for Iranian immigrants, that is not just from one place to another, but a journey of identity, involving emotions about one's sense of place in the world.

## ARTWORKS



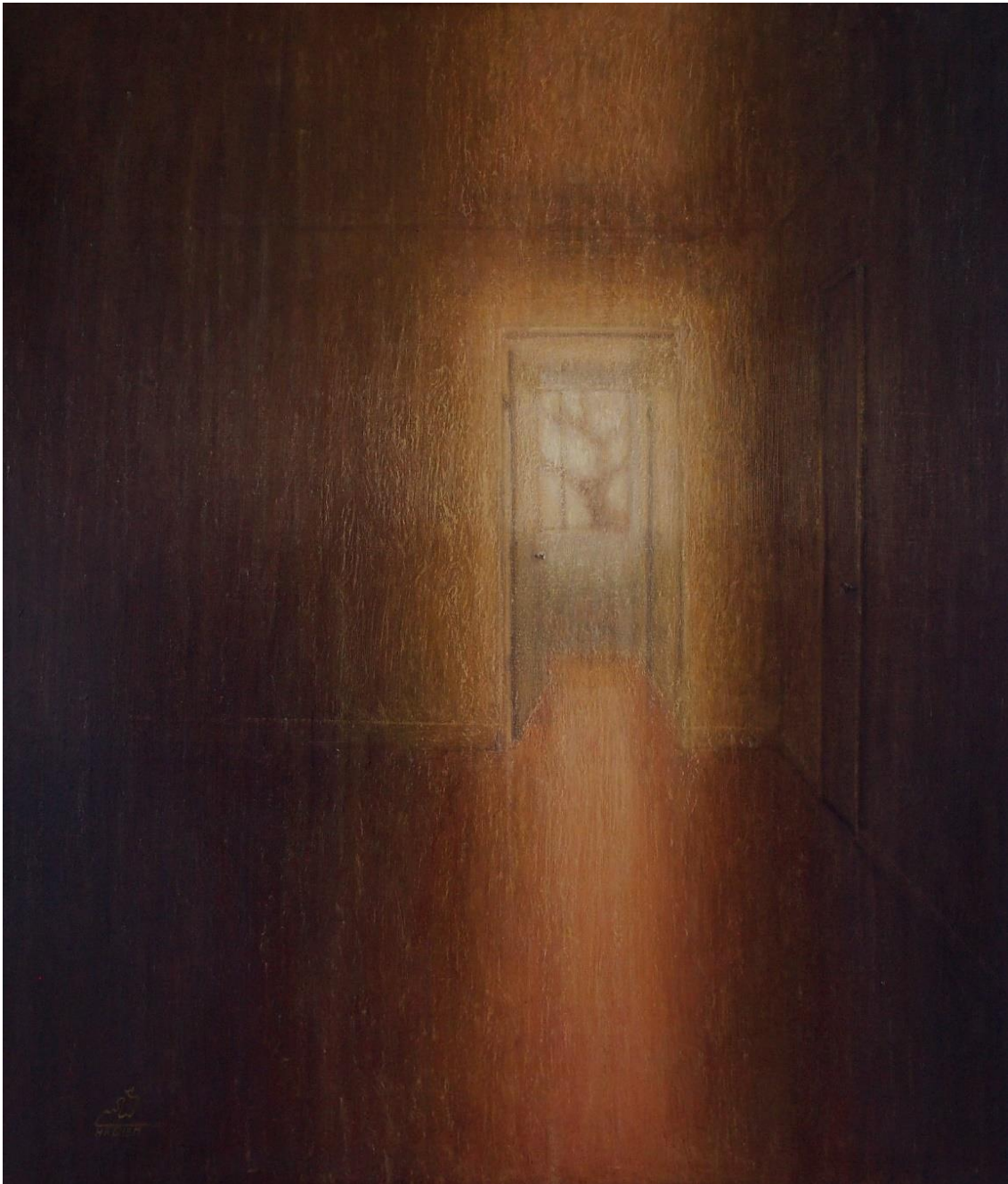
**Figure 14.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Hope Tree* 2014, charcoal and chalk on paper, 52 x 37cm



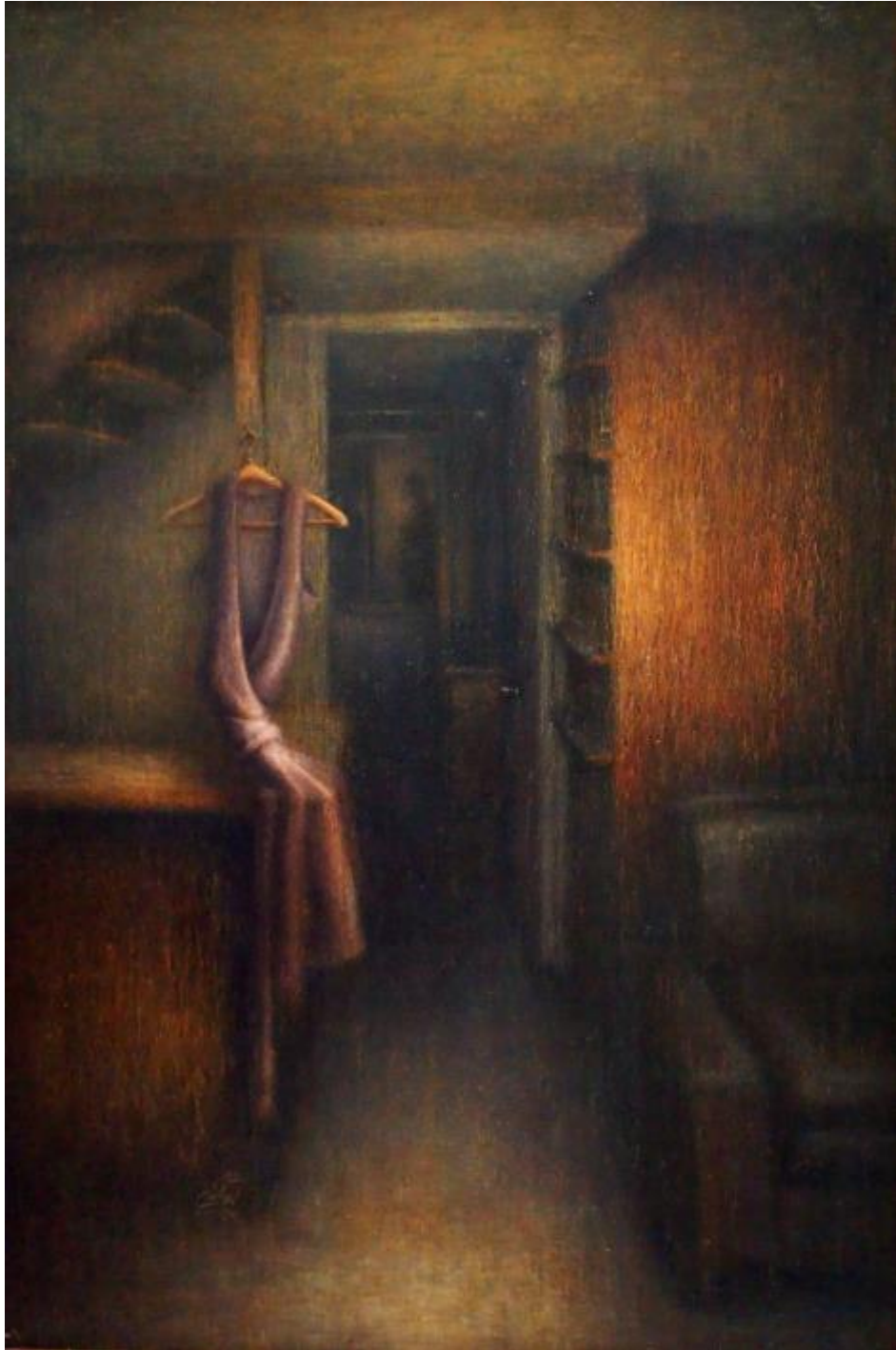
**Figure 15.** Hadieh Afshani *Motion of Light* 2014, oil on plywood, 62 x 92cm



**Figure 16.** Hadieh Afshani *Float of Hope in Transit* 2014, oil on plywood, 57 x 90cm



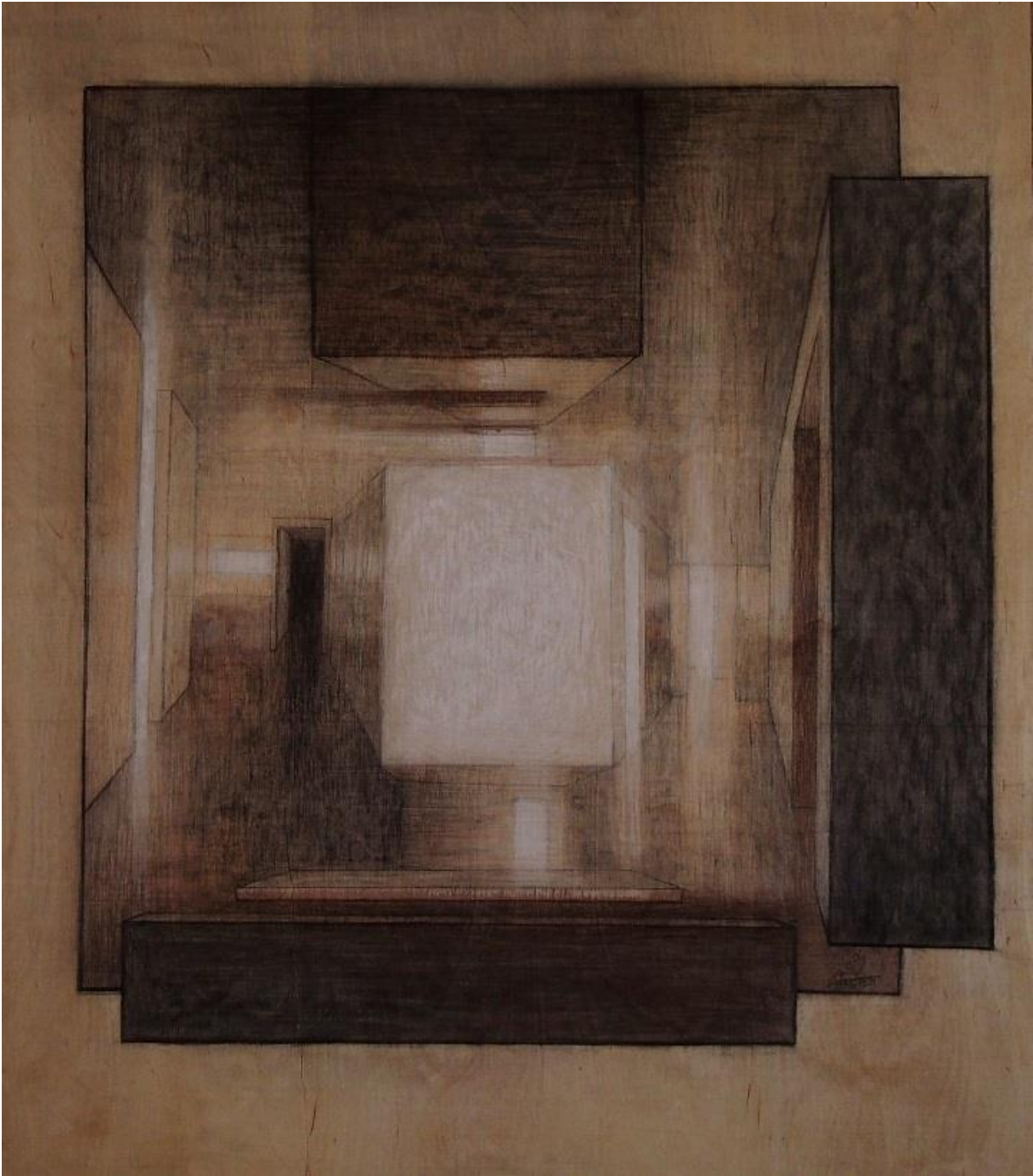
**Figure 17.** Hadiéh Afshani, *The Hope Tree* 2015, oil on plywood, 83 x 70cm



**Figure 18.** Hadiéh Afshani, *The Dress* 2014, oil on plywood, 92 x 62cm



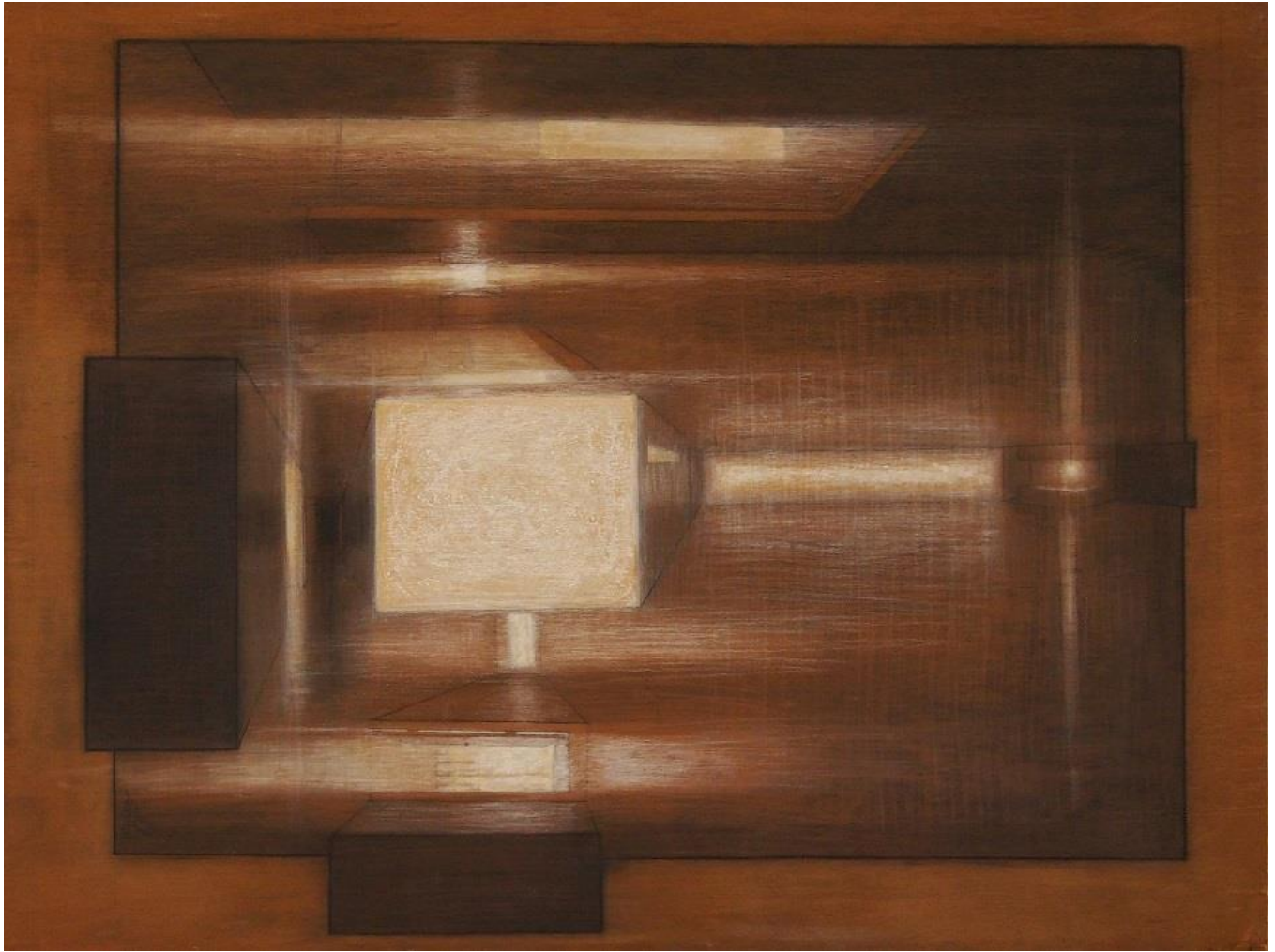
**Figure 19.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Bedroom* 2015, oil on plywood, 61 x 87cm



**Figure 20.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Endless Landscape of Living I* 2016, mixed media on plywood, 81 x 61cm



**Figure 21.** Hadieh Afshani *Self-Space Universe II* 2016, mixed media on plywood, 81 x 61cm



**Figure 22.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Endless Landscape of Living II* 2016, mixed media on plywood, 61 x 81cm



**Figure 23.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Endless Landscape of Living I* 2016, oil on plywood, 81 x 61cm



**Figure 24.** Hadieh Afshani, *The Endless Landscape of Living II* 2016, oil on plywood, 81 x 61cm



**Figure 25.** Hadieh Afshani, *Self-Space Universe I* 2016, mixed media on plywood, 61 x 81cm



**Figure 26.** Hadiéh Afshani, *Self-Space Universe II* 2016, oil on plywood, 61 x 81cm



**Figure 27.** Hadiéh Afshani, *Self-Space Universe I* 2016, oil on plywood, 81 x 61cm

## REFERENCES

- Archer, Michael. 1997. *Mona Hatoum*. London: Phaidon Press.
- Australian Government Department of Social Services. 2015. "The Iran-Born Community." <https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/settlement-and-multicultural-affairs/programs-policy/a-multicultural-australia/programs-and-publications/community-information-summaries/the-iran-born-community>.
- Bahari, Ebadollah. 2007. *Bihzad, Master of Persian Painting*. Michigan: The University of Michigan.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 2000. *Thinking Space*. New York: Questia Media America.
- Borzello, Frances. 2006. *At Home: The Domestic Interior in Art*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Brown, Christopher. 1948. *Dutch Paintings*. London: National Gallery in association with W. Collins.
- Carroll, Alison. 1997. *Other Stories*. Melbourne: Asialink centre.
- Chomsky, Noam. 2002. *Understanding Power*. New York: The New York Press.
- Cox, Robert. 1983. "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method." *Journal of International Studies* 12 (2): 162–78.
- Crozier, Michel, and Samuel Huntington. 1975. *The Crisis of Democracy*. New York: New York University Press.
- Farrokh, Kaveh. n.d. "The 300 Movie: Separating Fact from Fiction." *Kaveh Farrokh* (blog). <http://www.ghandchi.com/iranscope/Anthology/KavehFarrokh/300/>.
- Fobert, Jamie. 2008. "The Great Indoor." *The Architectural Review* 229 (1339): 48–49.
- Foucault, Michel. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Fraleigh, Angela. 2015. "5 Questions with Ann Toebbe." *Angela Fraleigh* (blog), 20 February. Accessed 29 September. <http://www.angelafraleigh.com/blog/2015/2/20/5-questions-with-ann-toebbe>.
- Friedenwald, J. S. 1955. "Knowledge of Space Perception and the Portrayal of Depth in Painting." *College Art Association* 15 (2): 96–112.
- Gellatly, Kelly, and John Smith. 2006. *2006 Clemenger Contemporary Art Award*. Melbourne: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria.

- Gould, Carol C., and Robert S. Cohen. 2012. *Artifacts, Representations and Social Practice*. Boston: Springer Science & Business Media.
- Hatoum, Mona, Reda Bensaïa, and Chiara Bertola. 2009. *Mona Hatoum: Interior Landscape*. Milan: Charta.
- Holloway, Julian, and James Kneale. 2000. *Mikhail Bakhtin, Thinking Space*. London: Routledge.
- Janaway, Christopher. 1998. *Willing and Nothingness: Schopenhauer as Nietzsche's Educator*. New York: Clarendon Press.
- Johnson, Ken. 2015. "Vilhelm Hammershoi's Paintings at Scandinavia House" *The New York Times*, 19 November. Accessed 12 April 2016.  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/20/arts/design/vilhelm-hammershois-paintings-at-scandinavia-house.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/20/arts/design/vilhelm-hammershois-paintings-at-scandinavia-house.html?_r=0).
- Koliji, Hooman. 2016. "Gazing Geometries: Modes of Design Thinking in Pre-Modern Central Asia and Persian Architecture." *Nexus Network Journal* 18 (1): 105–32.
- Liedtke, Walter. 2008. *Vermeer: The Complete Paintings*. New York: Ludion Press.
- Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *The Crisis of Public Opinion*. United States: Green Book Publication.
- "Martin Kobe: Behind True Symmetry." White Cube (website).  
[http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/martin\\_kobe\\_behind\\_true\\_symmetry\\_hoxton\\_square\\_2007](http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/martin_kobe_behind_true_symmetry_hoxton_square_2007).
- McIntosh, Phyllis. 2004. "Iranian-Americans Reported among Most Highly Educated in U.S. and Also Contribute Substantially to the U.S. Economy." *IIP Digital*, 13 January. Accessed 14 July 2016.  
<http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2004/01/20040113191603atarukp0.6147425.html#axzz3YICKQIYH>.
- Mousavian, Hossein. 2015. "Thirty-Six Years after the Revolution, Where Is Iran Now?" Media release, 11 February. Accessed 19 August 2016.  
<http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2015/02/11/thirty-six-years-after-the-revolution-where-is-iran-now>.
- Nafisi, Nahal. 2007. "Persian Miniature Writing: An Ethnography of Iranian Organizations in Washington, D.C." PhD Thesis, Rice University, Houston, Texas. Accessed 16 September 2015. <https://scholarship.rice.edu/handle/1911/20633>.
- Neshat, Shirin. 2010. "Art in Exile." TED video, 10:44, December. Posted December.  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/shirin\\_neshat\\_art\\_in\\_exile](http://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile).
- . 2011. "Art in Exile." TED Talk Subtitles and Transcript. Posted May 2011.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/shirin\\_neshat\\_art\\_in\\_exile/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile/transcript?language=en).

- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 2006. "Mobility and the Nation Skins, Machines and Complex System." *Static* (2). [http://static.londonconsortium.com/issue02/papastergiadis\\_mobility.pdf](http://static.londonconsortium.com/issue02/papastergiadis_mobility.pdf)
- . 2010. "Understanding Hybrid Identities: From Mechanical Models to Complex Systems." *World Futures* 66 (3–4): 243–65.
- . 2012. *Cosmopolitanism and Culture*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Pérez González, Carmen. 2010. "A Comparative Visual Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Iranian Portrait Photography and Persian Painting." PhD thesis, Department of Art History, Faculty of Humanities, Leiden University. Accessed 20 January 2016. <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/handle/1887/14653>.
- Pope, Arthur. 1969. *Introducing Persian Architecture*. Iran: The Asia Institute of Pahlavi University.
- Rabinow, Paul. 1991. *The Foucault Reader*. London: Penguin Books.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New pref. ed. United States: Pantheon Books.
- . 2001. "The Clash of Ignorance." *The Nation*, 4 October. Accessed March 2014. <https://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance/>.
- Scales, Alette Rye. 2003. "Vilhelm Hammershøi." [Exhibition review] *Burlington Magazine* 145 (1203): 473.
- Smith, Roberta. 2015. "Ann Toebe: 'Remarried'." *The New York Times*, 22 January. Accessed 27 April. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/23/arts/design/ann-toebbe-remarried.html>.
- Soja, Edward. 1996. *Third Space: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 2010. *Seeking Spatial Justice*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. (1977) 2001. *Space and Place*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2004. *Place, Art, and Self*. Santa Fe, New Mexico: University of Virginia Press.
- . 2011. "Home as Elsewhere." Lecture recorded at University of California, Santa Barbara, 9 March. YouTube video, 59:41, posted by University of California Television, 5 May <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jhyJeV1RAA>.
- Von Levinson, David, and Karen Christensen. 2002. *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia*, Vol. 4. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- Wittkower, Rudolf, Jennifer Montagu, and Joseph Connors. 1999. *Art and Architecture in Italy, 1600-1750*. New York: Yale University Press.

Wood, Michael. 2006. "Edward Said, 1 November 1935–25 September 2003." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 150 (1): 197–200.

Žižek, Slavoj. 2006. *The Parallax View*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aidani, Mohammad. 2010. "Existential Accounts of Iranian Displacement and the Cultural Meanings of Categories." *Journal of International Studies* 31 (2): 121–43.
- . 2011. "Iranian Poetic Testimonies of Revolution, Trauma and Displacement." *Australian Feminist Studies*, Pages 335-347. Accessed 20 August 2014.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2011.606606>.
- Ayatollahi, Habibollah. 2003. *The Book of Iran: The History of Iranian Art*. London: Alhoda.
- Bachelard, Gaston. 1964. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press. Caballero, Germán Rubiano. 2001. *Art of Latin America*. Washington, DC: Beacon Press.
- Carter, Robert. 2004. *Racial-Cultural Psychology and Counseling, Training and Practice*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Coulthart, John. 2007. "Doris Salcedo's Shibboleth." *Feuilleton*, 10 October. Accessed 29 August 2014. <http://www.johncoulthart.com/feuilleton/2007/10/10/doris-salcedos-shibboleth/>.
- "The Cyrus Cylinder." The British Museum Collection online. Accessed 4 April 2014.  
[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=327188&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=327188&partId=1).
- Jacobson, Roman. 2002. "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles." *De Gruyter Mouton* 1: 90–96.
- Lockman, Zachary. 2009. *Contending Visions of the Middle East*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- "Longing, Belonging, Hossein Valamanesh." Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection (website). Accessed 12 February 2015.  
<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/work/207.2002.a-b/>.
- Moreno, L. G. 2010. "Troubled Materiality: The Installations of Doris Salcedo." *Mosaic* 43 (2): Accessed 3 February 2015. <https://www.questia.com/read/1G1-228249632/troubled-materiality-the-installations-of-doris>.
- "Open Book, Hossein Valamanesh." 2006. Art Gallery of New South Wales Contemporary Collection (website). Accessed 16 September 2013.  
<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/273.2002/>.
- Oster, Samantha. 2001. *Cardinal Points: Mapping Adelaide's Diversity People, Places, Points of View*. London: Wakefield Press.
- Pamuk, Orhan. 2001. *My Name Is Red*. Turkey: Alfred A. Knopf.

- Papastergiadis, Nikos. 2009. "Wog Zombie: The De- and Re-Humanisation of Migrants, from Mad Dogs to Cyborgs." *Cultural Studies Review* 15 (2): 147–78.
- Phrigian 2012, Noam Chomsky on the Propagandized Media, viewed 16 September 2013, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=48Om0DFbR0w>>.
- Rodwell, Jenny. 1989. *Painting Interiors*. New York: Waston-Guptill.
- Saphinaz-Amal, Naguib. 2007. "Mariana Giovino: The Assyrian Sacred Tree. A History of Interpretations." [Book review] *Acta Orientalia* 69: 303–5.
- Shafak, Elif. 2010. "The Politics of Fiction." TED video, 19:45, July. [http://www.ted.com/talks/elif\\_shafak\\_the\\_politics\\_of\\_fiction](http://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_politics_of_fiction).
- Shathaya, Ghassan Hannah. 1999. "Who Are the Chaldeans?" Chaldeans Online. Retrieved 7 August 2014. <http://www.chaldeansonline.org/chald.html>.
- Simmel, George. 1976. *The Stranger*. New York: New York Free Press.
- Wells, David. 2003. "Modern Humanities Research Association: A Brief History." *Diogenes* 98 (3): 130–35.
- Wentworth, Nigel. 1964. *The Phenomenology of Painting*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Woolf, Virginia. 1928. *A Room of One's Own*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Yahaghi, Mohammad. 1988. فرهنگ اساطیر ایران [Encyclopedia of Persian Mythology]. Tehran, Iran: فرهنگ معاصر [Contemporary Culture].

# Appendix

## Curriculum Vitae

### AWARDS

- 2015 Honorable Mention at Drawing competition, Art-Competition.net
- 2015 Awarded in Chelsea International, Art Competition, Agora Gallery, New York
- 2015 Winner of International Online Art Gallery, Focus Point Shape Competition 2015
- 2014 Winner of St George Art Awards, Hurstville City Library Museum & Gallery, NSW
- 2013 Winner of Drawing & Graphics Award of Aspects Art Prize, QLD
- 2013 Winner of the first and the second prizes of Insight Nude Award of Aspects Art Prize, QLD
- 2013 Highly Commended, Real Life Human Form of Aspects Art Prize, QLD
- 2012 Highly Commended, Harold and Agnes Richardson Memorial Drawing Prize, QLD

### SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 “Self-Space Universe”, Redland Regional Art Gallery, Redland, Queensland
- 2014 “Hope Tree”, Project Gallery of QCA South Bank, Brisbane
- 2011 “Absence and Presence”, Project Gallery of QCA South Bank, Brisbane

### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2016 “Show Your World” International Art Competition, New York
- 2015 “The Moist”, Orange County Center for Contemporary Art, California
- 2015 9th Arte Laguna Prize, Venice
- 2014 Young International Contest of Contemporary Art, Florence
- 2012–14 A.M.E. Bale Travelling Scholarship and Art Prize, Gallery of Glen Eira City Council, Melbourne
- 2014 Queensland Regional Art Awards, Queensland Regional Galleries
- 2010–14 Redland Art Awards, Redland Art Gallery, QLD
- 2014 Kenilworth painting prize, Kenilworth Arts Council
- 2014 Queensland Figurative painting prize, Petrie Terrace Gallery, Brisbane
- 2013 Shadow of a Mouse, Griffith Film School, Petrie Terrace Gallery
- 2012–13 Full Circle, Royal Queensland Art Society, Brisbane
- 2010/11/12 Lethbridge 10000 Small-Scale Art Award

2006 International Islamic Biennial, Honar Art Centre, Tehran

## COLLECTIONS

Library Museum Gallery, Hurstville City Council, Sydney, NSW, Australia  
Petrie Terrace Art Gallery, Royal Queensland Art Society, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

## LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

- 2016 Drawing and Design, Gallery MC, New York, NY, U.S.A.  
2015 Conference paper presentation, The Representational Art Conference 2015, Ventura, CA, U.S.A.  
2015 Tonal Value in Life Drawing, Artists Society of Canberra, Canberra, ACT, Australia  
2014 Hands on water colour workshop, Queensland Art Gallery- QAGOMA, Brisbane, Australia  
2014–15 Life Drawing for Animation courses Lectures, Queensland Film School-Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD Australia  
2009–15 Fine Arts courses Lectures, Queensland College of Art- Griffith University, Gold Coast, QLD Australia

## MEDIA PUBLICATIONS

- June 2016 Artist Talk: "What is Feminist Art?", Tribeca Tribe, Lower Manhattan, NY  
Apr 2016 Peace, coexistence, and women empowerment, Yedioth Tel Aviv, Page 42, Israel  
May 2016 The Identity of Space and Place, Australian Artists Magazine, Pages 14-19, Australia  
Feb 2016 Art Celebrates Women, Redland Bulletin, Queensland, Australia  
March 2016 Collaborate for #ICareFor, Light Space and Time Online Art Gallery,  
[www.lightspacetime.com](http://www.lightspacetime.com)  
Feb 2015 The Plays of Lights, Australian Artists Magazine, Pages 14-18, Australia  
Feb 2015 Hadieh Afshani, Art Katalyst Magazine, Toronto, Canada  
Jan 2015 Filed: Artist on Immigration, [soundcloud.com/hamrahradio](https://soundcloud.com/hamrahradio)  
Oct 2014 Fine Art Masters student wins St George Art Award 2014, Casey Stewart, Griffith University  
Webpage  
Nov 2014 Hadieh Afshani transformed the Motion of Light won St George Art award, Leader Newspaper,  
By Maria Galinovic, NSW, Australia  
Nov 2014 Friday for Life-Hadieh Afshani, [Iranwire.com](http://iranwire.com)  
May 2014 Hadieh's Journey put on Canvas, Southern Stars News Paper, QLD, Australia

- May 2014      Light and shadows in Iran and Australia: artist Hadieh Afshani,  
whereareyoufromau.wordpress.com
- Jan 2014      Life Drawing 2 Review, keelee88.wordpress.com

## **EDUCATION**

- 2008–12      Master of Arts with Honours in Visual Arts (in Fine Arts), Queensland College of Art- Griffith  
University, Brisbane
- 2000–2005    Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting, Alzahra University, Tehran, Iran