

# **Mind Rain**

## **The Journey of Accessing**

By Shoora Majedian

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To my father who took with him half of me and since then I have been looking for that in my mind rain.  
To my mother and sister who supported me in every single step of this path.

تقدیم به پدرم که نیمی از وجودم را با خود برد و من تا به امروز در نقش ذهن به دنبال آن نیمه ام.  
تقدیم به مادر و خواهرم که لحظه لحظه این راه در کنارم بودند.

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## Abstract

*The MFA thesis writing reflects how accessing memories assists me in constructing a new visual language for my representational paintings. Through the process of collecting visual references of objects, space and figures, from auto-ethnographic sources to Persian miniatures, I had the opportunities to look at their historical and cultural backgrounds and compose images that reflect my socio-political state. Material experimentations with surface qualities, sizes, as well as paint applications, let me experience different visual characters to bring more sensibility to my image. These layers of visual meaning and narrative are also trying to construct a historical account from my particular generation's experiences. During an iterative studio process I was inspired to bring chaos to composition and appreciate uncertainty in mark-making. These methodologies also helped me to construct the unsettling expression that overlaps with the titles and small poems (translated from Farsi) that echoed my lived experiences.*

*“The past is far more real, more resilient than the present. The present slips and vanishes like sand between fingers. We are indeed islands of memory, our minds merge past and present into one plane of existence.”*

Andrei Tarkovsky

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## Introduction

Remembering is not nostalgia for me. It is a means to deconstruct the past and construct the present<sup>1</sup>. It is a way to depict the sensibility that I experienced, and through the process of painting, trigger new feelings. We long for what we cannot access, for the people we cannot see anymore, for the land and home we cannot step in. What I am trying to do with painting is access those moments and people to locate myself once again among them.

Nostalgia is when you long for good memories, however the memories that I recall are states of feelings that confuse the body and the brain. These moments carry excitement but might be sad or regretful. They simultaneously depict my private experiences and illuminate a social conflict.

Cultural theorist Joan Gibbons suggests “Memory is not an instrument for exploring the past but the medium through which that which has been known or experienced has to be processed – the soil that has to be dug and turned over. But, importantly, this act of digging not only reveals deeper hidden strata but also necessitates a re-seeing of the strata which had to be excavated. Again, memory is complexified by a conflation of past and present, in which that which is retrieved is contingent on what is felt or experienced in the present and becomes as much a feature of the present as of the past.”(15) Ironically my previous series of paintings depicted people who are digging the floor and searching for roots. Maybe that was subconsciously the starting point for autobiographical work. I look at those memories with a new lens of a woman who lost most of these people, lost the hope to change her country and carries the guilt feeling of migration<sup>2</sup>.

After experiencing migration from Iran to Canada ten years ago, the past seems to become more accessible and vital to me, trickling slowly into my consciousness over time and gives me the chance to revisit the moments that affect who I am now. My large scale paintings

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Bourgeois talks about memory: “They are my documents. I keep watch over them... To reminisce and woolgather is negative. You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they are coming to you. If you are going to them, you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you, they are seed for sculpture.”(Joan Gibbons, 17)

<sup>2</sup> Dalia Sofer (Iranian Writer) famous for her book *The September of Shiraz*, talks about this guilt of migration among Iranians in the radio podcast *Writer and Company from CBC radio*. She explains this guilt varies among different individuals but it is mainly because of not staying in their country to build its future.





(Figure 1) Shoora Majedian, *Association with Fire*, mixed media on synthetic paper, 20x26 inches

and the mass collection of small works, as well as my stop-motion animations are shouting the stories that have not been told or heard. It is an effort to represent the complexity of ordinary moments in one of the most ancient civilizations in the world, Iran. In a way, the journey of my thesis is a journey of finding my positionality and who I am.

This thesis is a combination of making, writing and poetry that represents the up and down challenges of accessing my past. In this paper, every painting discussed will be accompanied by two poems. Both poems mirror my methodology more clearly; one is reflecting my thinking process during the making and one is my reflection after the image is made. The combination of opposed feelings such as horror and comfort, disappointment and excitement fits into one space that has been part of my lived experience and comes to the surface of the painting. The ambivalence that comes from the moral complexity of binary religious schooling, idealism vs betrayal, perpetrator vs victim, the disparity of private and public lifestyles all sit together in my studio while making.

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## Memory; Private to public

In wandering amongst the memories, most of the moments I came across and was excited to paint were private intimate moments. I was not sure if I wanted to share them. In her book *Contemporary Art and Memory*, Joan Gibbons sees autobiography historically rooted in confession and psychoanalytic practices (19). It was also difficult for me to share personal stories, concerned that I might be underestimated or exoticized by the viewer.

In his essay, *Drawing is Discovery*, the British artist and writer John Berger sees drawing as an autobiographical record of one's discovery of an event – either seen, remembered or imagined. He writes: “it is the actual act of drawing that forces the artist to look at the object in front of him, to dissect it in his mind's eye and put it together again; or, if he is drawing from memory, that forces him to dredge his own mind, to discover the content of his own store of past observations”. I see the painting process similarly; the painting is the place of investigation of the past in relation to re-seeing the present. Through the process of making I learned a painting is always a memory of past observation. Every time I start to



(Figure 2) Shooraj Majedian, *Here on your shoulder*, mixed media on Synthetic paper, 11x9 inches

paint, I have a new feeling in comparison to the memory of that painting and that will change the work eventually and make a new memory.

Berger also notes that in drawing “following up its logic in order to check its accuracy, you find confirmation or denial in the object itself or in your memory of it. Each confirmation or denial brings you closer to the object, until finally you are, as it were, inside it: the contours you have drawn no longer marking the edge of what you have seen but the edge of what you have become”.





(Figure 3) Shoora Majedian, *Smoky Homework*, mixed media on synthetic paper, 9x11 inches

(Drawing as Discovery). The difficulties of reconstructing my memories while painting gives me the chance to witness a process of metamorphosis and of transformation. This is a transformation of existence, in other words the beginning of the end or the end of beginning all in one frame.

The people whom I paint in this series are the relatives that have passed away. I remember the first time I decided to paint my memories was 16 years ago when I lost my father and tried to paint the areas of home where he used to spend time. But that never fulfilled my need to remember him. Throughout painting other memories, I finally got the courage to bring him to my work (Figure 2). I painted him walking in the water while I am on his shoulders. He would always dream of running on the water.

My purpose is not a mere illustration of these people. It is to witness those moments once again, to narrate the sensation and my feelings towards them and myself. I also don't want

to address the limit of the memory but rather to stretch the boundaries and build a representable image that is at the edge of collapse formally. I want to bring the psyche of the event into the frame of the snapshots but fragment the visual aesthetic of the image either through composition and/or mark making.

“Haptic visuality” was the term that I learned while trying to trigger different senses through my visual language in painting. As new media philosopher Laura Marks explains, “Haptic visuality is a closer form of looking, which tends to move over the surface of its object rather than plunge into illusionist depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture” (162). Related to this, my first attempt was to paint the memories and subjects that were triggered in me by this sense of haptic visuality. Marks also describes this quality in Andre Tarkovsky and Kiarostami's films, as sensuous imagery that evokes memory of the senses (i.e. water, nature), the depiction of characters in acute states of sensory activity (smelling, sniffing, tasting, etc). I also perceived that the moments I remembered and they reoccurred to me were the ordinary moments when these feelings came to the most extreme level. They normally happened due to interactions with natural elements or objects around me.

Throughout this path I tried different ways to capture the traumatic memories from the eight-years Iran-Iraq war. The scenes were collected either from documentary photography or the moments when I witnessed the rockets in the sky or while hiding in the bunkers. I realized my painting was unable to represent the horror and traumatic aspect of war. Feeling distanced from some of the Iranian conceptual artists whose practice focus on the collective trauma and social pain, showed me how hard it is to depict a traumatic event and not exploit and aestheticize<sup>3</sup> its pain. After making a series of drawings from documentary photography of war in Khoramshahr<sup>4</sup> and soldiers, I discerned that I cannot depict the pain in a literal and direct documentation. Therefore my lived experiences with that of my family were a more sensible source to capture my feelings because they truthfully connected to me both emotionally and psychologically.

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<sup>3</sup> The aestheticization of politics was an idea first coined by Walter Benjamin as being a key ingredient to fascist regimes. Benjamin said that “fascism tends towards an aestheticization of politics”, in the sense of a spectacle in which it allows the masses to express themselves without seeing their rights recognized, and without affecting the relations of ownership which the proletarian masses aim to eliminate.

<sup>4</sup> Khoramshahr is the city on the border of Iran and Iraq. The Battle of Khorramshahr was a major engagement between Iraq and Iran in the Iran–Iraq War. The battle took place from 22 September to 10 November 1980. Widely known for its brutality and violent conditions, Khorramshahr came to be referred to by the Iranians as *Khuninshahr* (The city of blood).

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## Memory; Inaccessibility

When I draw with ink, the pattern and texture in the silhouetted bodies makes the image inaccessible, meaning the viewer comprehends the figures and the bodies, but not in the first glance, due to the strong texture inside the figures. This is what cultural theorist and painter Christian Mieves calls “collapse of homogeneity of the image” (1). In his article *It doesn't reveal itself*, he explains how processes of erosion, veiling and dissemblance are used to critique assumptions about the homogeneity of the image. He writes that strategies of collapse and distancing from the everyday never succumbs to abstraction, but rather offers a productive framework that brings attention to the instability of the visual sign.

In my work I try to reexamine the unsteadiness of being, the existence of the bodies in a moment when they are there and not there. Any potential unity is usually disrupted by the fragmentation of the paint mark in the painting. I revisit the areas that are deconstructed to find a moment of desirable aesthetic affect. The moments such as steam expanding from the pot, bread coming out of fire, heat blaring into the space, water splashing the window and the wave affecting the body reflection all bring a demolition to the form. Every time the challenges of making one of these experiences with paint makes me spend time with them, and through this form of research I become immersed in that event. The layers of paint and formal structures obscure the image and make a normal scene more complex so that the viewer might need more time to discover the composition.

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## Mark Making

### Fire and House



<https://ordinary-times.com/2020/04/12/sunday-morning-tarkovskys-the-sacrifice-1986/>

(Figure 4) Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice*, the final shot of the movie, 1986

The visual expression in fire flames implanted through mark-making came from a recurring motif in my paintings and gradually became part of my visual vocabulary. Fire was one of those elements that set up a mood and reason to find out what I want in the paint application. Painting the formal aesthetic of fire in the oven or in oil lamps (Figure 1 and 3) made me examine the open and free forms in brush marks. They are the forms that interact with the surrounding space and blur the border between positive and negative space; the area that is non-identifiable or in-between. They symbolize spectrum thinking that considers multiple options, alternatives, and possibilities that sit in the grey zone.

Fire was a major part of our everyday home life in Iran, being used in oil lamps and the oven during the 1980s. Fire, with its movement and energy, is also one of the elements that was praised and venerated by the ancient Persians. In the religion of Zoroastrianism, it is a

sign of purity and truth, and also has an important role in *Chaharshanbe Suri* <sup>5</sup>. What fascinates me about my culture is the respect for the fire element that can purify, but destroy at the same time. Therefore, the returning component of fire and heat to my paintings has a dual meaning for me. When I started composing scenes with fire, smoke, or steam I was not aware that it is the disorder from these elements that I like to bring to my images.

Andre Tarkovsky, the Russian filmmaker, writer, and film theorist has been an inspiration with his use of fire in films. The scene of a burning house in *The Sacrifice* particularly stayed in my mind. It was a symbol of a voluntary sacrifice to achieve salvation from the spectre of war. This scene (Figure 4) resonates with the memory of my grandfather who bequeathed the family estate as *Waqf* <sup>6</sup> to his mosque that could never be returned to the family. *Waqf* typically involves donating a building, plot of land, or other assets for Muslim religions with no intention of reclaiming the assets. The contribution of this territory to the mosque after my grandfather's demise for the sake of his beliefs was a shocking loss for the family. He turned his back to all the memories, the belongings, and his responsibility to his family for the sake of his redemption.

I am recollecting my childhood memories that are rooted in that house because it came to represent the dedication of my country to religious powers through the revolution in 1979. The story of my grandfather's house portrays the potential threat of disaster or loss in ordinary moments. This kind of experience parallels how religious fundamentalists slowly came to power and have been ruling the country with an autocratic and oppressive system for over 40 years. When the enemy takes over the house, the warning is in the intimate moments of life. When the fire is a voluntary choice by the household and brought to the house, it destroys the lives from inside with a big insidious smile.

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<sup>5</sup> *Chaharshanbe Suri*, Persian: چاهارشنبه سوری, is an Iranian festival celebrated on the eve of the last Wednesday before Nowruz (the Iranian New Year). At sunset, after making one or more bonfires, they jump over the flames, singing *sorxi-ye to az man, zardi-ye man az to*, literally meaning "[let] your redness [be] mine, my paleness yours", or a local equivalent of it. This is considered a purification practice.

<sup>6</sup> A charitable trust may hold the donated assets. The person making such dedication is known as a *waqif* (a donor). In Ottoman Turkish law, and later under the British Mandate of Palestine, a *waqf* was defined as usufruct state land (or property) from which the state revenues are assured to pious foundations. Although the *waqf* system depended on several hadiths and presented elements similar to practices from pre-Islamic cultures, it seems that the specific full-fledged Islamic legal form of endowment called *waqf* dates from the 9th century AD.



## Battle of Resistance

During the MFA program I was introduced to James Elkins' book "What painting is". This gave me the allowance for experimentation and failure in my studio practice, and thus new possibilities. In his book he compares a painter with an alchemist in a constant revelation and metamorphosis in relation to the ingredients. Starting with tests with synthetic paper, I noticed that placing ink onto a glossy surface created a battle of materials because the paper resists the water, ink or any water based medium, so it runs rapidly and is hard to control. But when the water evaporates two things happen; the borders of the shapes have a fine line and the surface builds a texture like a stone or galaxy (Figure 5).



(Figure 5) Shoora Majedian, *Drag the Knowledge*, mixed media on synthetic paper, 11x14inches

I started pushing this quality and added many layers after each mark dried so the body and figures consisted of different forms and fragments. The acrylic paint on top of oil fights with the layer beneath and when it dries it creates separate small marks like cut milk or a blood clot that feels highly tensioned (Figure 5). This result can happen with any lean medium on



an oily or plastic surface, but the durability of the painting is affected. For me the conflict between different mediums triggered the battle of opposite feelings and became part of my studio practice.

I noticed how different mark-making, as well as the reaction between the surface and the paint, would affect my visual language and construct an unsettling feeling. I am not trying to make a grotesque painting that elevates the sense of spectacle or exotification. I only believe these chemical reactions and techniques increase the expression of the work in order to represent my lived experience.

The strategies for painting political and social dilemmas vary and I strongly differentiate my work from painters who rely on illustrative visualization such as in the work of Iranian painter Nicky Nodjumi<sup>7</sup>, who juxtaposes political characters and animals as metaphors in a fragmented puzzle. I believe in referring to the small scale politics that starts from our home, where the dynamics can be seen as metaphor and mirror of a society. If I merely illustrate the conflict I will miss the potential sensibility that the materiality of painting can carry, and thus narrow down the possible interpretations.

## Crowd

The over-saturation of the imagery and chaotic composition, such as the smoke and steam in figures 1 and 3, also reflect the tradition of the Miniature<sup>8</sup> or the carpet in Iran that overflow with abstract forms and plant elements. After investigating British painter Cecily Brown's overcrowded images, with bodies and open shapes in mark-making, I realized I could build the tension and destruction, similar to how I expressed heat in my paintings through a particular process of mark making. Brown's style transitions between abstraction and figuration. She believes her recent expressionist paintings display the influence of a variety of painters, from Francisco de Goya, to Willem de Kooning, Francis Bacon and Joan Mitchell.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.artsy.net/artist/nicky-nodjumi>

<sup>8</sup> The miniature is a small Persian painting on paper, whether a book illustration or a separate work of art intended to be kept in an album of such works called a *muraqqa*. The techniques are broadly comparable to the Western Medieval and Byzantine traditions of miniatures in illuminated manuscripts. It is difficult to trace the origins of the art of Persian miniature, as it reached its peak mainly during the Mongol and Timurid periods (13th - 16th Century). Mongolian rulers of Iran instilled the cult of Chinese painting and brought with them a great number of Chinese artisans.

<https://www.artforum.com/print/reviews/201903/cecily-brown-78742>

(Figure 6) Cecily Brown, *Where, When, How Often and with, with Whom?*, 2017, oil on canvas

Similar to Brown, I am interested in the clusters of diverse and gestural crowding in the scene, either with marks, colours or figures. However, my subjective references are not from art history, but from my society and lived experience in Iran. What fascinates me about Brown's work is that the base of the painting is composed of the many bodies that are buried beneath the singular form, which builds confrontational energies of the groups. Surprisingly among all the chaos, there is a beautiful sense of colour harmony that keeps the viewer engaged with the image. For example, in her painting *Where, When, How Often and with Whom?* (Figure 6) which is divided across three panels, there is a whirl of peaches, egg-yolk yellows, and greys, yet the overall look of the painting resembles a simple composition of grey and yellow.

<https://www.art.co.za/williamkentridge/johannesburg-2nd-greatest-city-after-paris-1989.php>

While Brown's work fragments an image to the extent of complete abstraction, my work expresses the pose and

(Figure 7) William Kentridge  
*Johannesburg*, 1989, charcoal on paper, Single screen shot from 16mm movie

the clarity of bodies and faces, which is the key to maintaining a figurative approach. At the same time, using gestural brush marks, my goal is to depict a tension in the image and to disrupt the composition. The uncovering/scrubbing during painting gives a visual sense of provisionality and possibly failure for the visual to come together. I want an atmosphere that not only verges on disarray of constructed forms, but also shows the process of turmoil in the space.

## The Uncertain

The uncertainty and energy of Cecily Brown's paintings reminds me of a quote by William Kentridge, the South African artist best known for his prints, large scale drawings, and animated films. He says, "In the physical activities, ideas and possibilities emerge" (2:49, TateShot). With regards to my artistic process, I similarly see the studio space as a chance to revisit and reconstruct my experiences. I was captivated by Kentridge's process of repeatedly erasing and reworking charcoal drawings in a series that explores political unrest, (Figure 7) in addition to the labour of his method and his artistic style. Art21's documentary about his work discusses, "Having witnessed first-hand one of the twentieth century's most contentious struggles—the dissolution of apartheid— Kentridge brings the ambiguity and subtlety of personal experience to public subjects that are most often framed in narrowly defined terms." (Art21). Adding and erasing marks generates a sense of transformation or an imperfect structure in his stop-motion animations that I also incline to build into my painted works.

Kentridge's care for drawing out intimate moments is a tool for expanding his work into a social and political context. He also brings a sense of poetry that is embedded in magical realism, related to South African stories, through giving life to still elements in stop motion (Figure 7 and 8). This magical sense can flavor the seriousness of the political theme and bring more layered interpretations. His approach inspires and proves to me that it is possible to touch upon sensitive traumatic histories and dilemmas without exploiting them. The "poetry of imperfection"<sup>9</sup> doesn't reduce the seriousness of the event but humanizes the survival intuition of being.

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<sup>9</sup> Art historian Simon Schama, *Rembrandt's Eyes*, 1999

<https://www.mariangoodman.com/content/feature/968/detail/45783-william-kentridge-refugees-you-will-find-no-other-seas-2018/>

(Figure 8) William Kentridge  
*Refugees (You Will Find No Other Seas)*, 2018, lift ground aquatint  
etching on handmade paper,  
mounted on raw cotton cloth 64  
1/2 x 93 3/4 inches

My lived experience in Iran is impacted by a totalitarian regime and a binary ideology that is based on rigid belief structures. Therefore, Kentridge's critical notion of certainty in authoritarian politics is motivating and helps me to figure out how to include them in my work. After watching *Johannesburg*, his short animation film from large-scale drawings, I experimented with the stop motion process using oil paint on glass (Figure 7). I learned how failure in the process can become a starting-point that refreshes the work and brings it to a new direction. In my stop motion experimentation (Figure 9), I realized how every single shot brings the idea for the next one. If one image is erased by mistake or the solvent drips on the glass, this changes the direction of the work. Similarly every new experience in each painting inspires the next one or solves a problem in a previous canvas.



(Figure 9) Shoora Majedian, *Persistent #1*, oil on glass, Six frames of 30 second stop motion



(Figure 10) Shoora Majedian, *The Mind Cloud*, 52 pieces, mixed media on Yupo and Mylar

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## Ground

### Provisionality from Brush to Surface

The revisiting of memories at first started for me with small paintings, like miniature paintings in book size on synthetic paper. Each memory triggered another one from a different age of my life, but the main focus turned out to be my childhood at five to ten years old when I spent most of my time with my grandparents. The use of a slippery surface and the fast gesture of paint application resulted in the fast pace of remembering involuntary memories<sup>10</sup>. This process consequently ended in the large number of paintings that I grouped as one large piece and installed as if emerging out of a corner between two massive walls during the MFA interim show (Figure 10).

The provisional imprint of ink on a synthetic surface gave me the courage to produce images without using any photographic or observational references. The high intensity of the texture in marks made me see the emerging, imperfect figures as shapes and forms rather than discrete bodies and helped me to study the compositions more easily.

The interactions of opposing materials led me to meaning-making through the particular choice of material surfaces. Corrugated cardboard has one of the roughest textures and the most absorbent surfaces among papers. Compelling enough, this was in complete variance with plastic and long lasting Yupo<sup>11</sup> paper. The contrasting quality of these two surfaces triggered a relationship between my past shocking experiences and their lasting impression (Figure 12 and 13).

During my first MFA semester before all of these experimentations, I came across the work of Kenyan artist, Michael Armitage. His paintings weave multiple narratives that are drawn from historical and current news media, internet gossip, and his ongoing recollections of

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<sup>10</sup> In searching for 'lost time', Proust ponders on two types of memory: the voluntary and the involuntary. As philosopher Mary Warnock has noted, Proust tends to characterize voluntary memory in terms of the production of images which convey the outer appearance of things, events or experiences. Far more meaningful, on the other hand, is the sort of unsolicited recall sprung by the involuntary memory, as produced, for example, by the randomly encountered taste of a *petite madeleine*, which, uninvited, calls up an assemblage of sensation and emotion that is beyond the reach of the intellect and voluntary memory.

<sup>11</sup>Yupo is a slick, smooth, non-absorbent synthetic (polypropylene) substrate.

Kenya. In *The Fourth Estate*, he depicts a scene of Nairobi in a park that is famous for the mass political events (Figure 11). This scene occurred during the presidential election in 2017, but Armitage takes this even further and makes an enigmatic image that is not an exact historical illustration, but carries the sensation of the experience. Living and working between London and Nairobi, Armitage paints with oil on Lubugo, a traditional bark cloth from Uganda, which is beaten over a period of days to create a natural material, that when stretched tightly, has occasional holes and coarse indents.

<https://post.moma.org/michael-armitage-and-the-ghosts-of-past-picturing/>

(Figure 11) Michael Armitage, *The Fourth Estate*, 2017, oil on Lubugo

His approach to the surface made me see that surface experimentation was conceptually needed in my own practice. I realized the important contrasting materials I used in the studio, long-lasting and perishable ground, also reflected two contrasting experiences that let me choose to make the memory last long or fade away (Figure 13 and 14).





(Figure 12) Shoora Majedian, *The iteration of darkness*, mixed media on synthetic paper, 11x14 inches



(Figure 13) Shoora Majedian, *The iteration of darkness*, oil on cardboard, 20x26 inches





(Figure 14) Shoora Majedian, *The iteration of darkness*, oil on cardboard, 48x121inches

## The Scale as Voice

The ambitious scale in Cecily Brown's painting has always intrigued me and was one of the reasons that made me scale up my paintings. The large scale causes body flow for the artist and affects the mark-making and paint application. The energy of the body and how the excitement transfers to the hand and then the brush creates forms that could not be achieved in any other scale. The movement<sup>12</sup> and labour in the studio is a reflection of my unsettled lived experience, carrying worry and distrust.

After changing the scale on heavy duty paper, my intuition wanted a more extensive ground surface as a commentary to contrast the quiet and dependent imagery of the miniature. Working from imagination and memory helped me to appreciate the traditional Persian miniatures and the energy and excitement of their colors and composition.

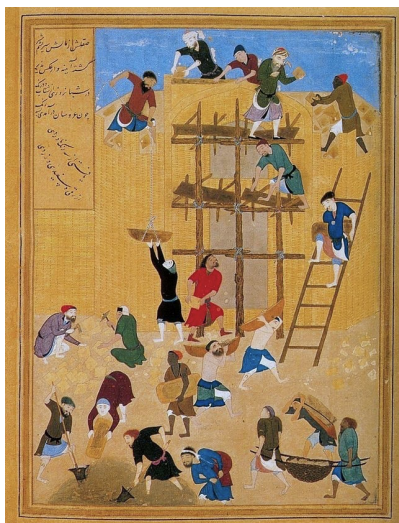
<sup>12</sup> Challenged by the mechanical apparatus of photography, and by the mass-produced, painting had to redefine its status, to reclaim a specific domain (much in the way this was done during the Renaissance, when painting was posited as one of the "liberal arts" as opposed to the "mechanical arts"). The beginnings of agonistic struggle have been well described by Meyer Schapiro: the emphasis on the touch, on texture, and on gesture in modern painting is a consequence of the division of labour inherent in industrial production. Industrial capitalism banished the hand from the process of production; the work of art alone, as craft, still implied manual handling and therefore artists were compelled, by reaction, to demonstrate the exceptional nature of their mode of production. (Painting: The Task of Mourning, essay by Yve-Alain Bois, 1986. Republished in his book *Painting as Model*, 1990)

This encounter with two opposing methods of visualization and story telling - oil paint on large canvas and book-sized Persian miniatures that illustrate poetry has impacted the way I construct my imagery. The visibility and significance of the banal stories, such as a bakery or the kitchen in Iran on large scale canvases represent the unseen narratives of daily life. The ordinary moments that have always been depicted with significance in European and American history, in this series describes the routine of a West Asian country during their consistent crises in life. These linear representational stories explore the unrevealed aspects that have rarely been addressed by the media. The psychological aspect of double-sided moments exists in the survival of ordinary life.

The ordinary scene with its symbolic and extraordinary characters reminds me of the work of Kamaledin Behzad, who was one of the innovative Persian painters over 500 years ago. He was born in Herat, Late Timurid and early Safavid<sup>13</sup>, and lived most of his life in Herat/Afghanistan. In the history of Persian miniatures, he brought a new sense of naturalism in the portrayal of ordinary people in everyday life to the school of that era which was mainly dominated by sovereign subject matter. His uniqueness was also due to his selection of subjects from rural scenes and narration that goes beyond the text accompanying the image. This additional layer in his painting brings more attention to the expression of the figures and intimacy to the characters. In *The Construction of Castle Khavarnaq in Alhira*, Behzad (Figure 15) portrayed a rare snapshot of how workers are building a palace and carrying tools with details. The text attached to this image is a small part of poetry called *Haft Peikar*<sup>14</sup>. Behzad was inspired by some areas in the text that are related to the construction, labour and description of colour. This visual poetry is competing with the poetry of the text and sometimes goes beyond that to make the poems seem more contemporary.

<sup>13</sup> Timurid dynasty, (fl. 15th–16th century ce), dynasty of Turkic-Mongol origin descended from the conqueror Timur (Tamerlane). The period of Timurid rule was renowned for its brilliant revival of artistic and intellectual life in Iran and Central Asia. Gur-e Amir (mausoleum of Timur), Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Safavid dynasty (1501-1736) had its origin in the Safavid order of Sufism, which was established in the city of Ardabil in the Azerbaijan region. It was an Iranian dynasty of Kurdish origin but during their rule they intermarried with Turkoman, Georgian, Circassian, and Pontic Greek dignitaries.

<sup>14</sup> (Persian: *Haft Peykar* هفت پیکر) also known as *Bahramnameh* (بهرامنامه), *The Book of Bahram*, referring to the Sasanian king Bahram Gur) is a romantic epic by Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi written in 1197. This poem forms one part of his *Panj Ganj* (Persian: Five Treasures) پنج گنج. The original title in Persian *Haft Peykar* هفت پیکر can be translated literally as “seven portraits” with the figurative meaning of “seven beauties.”



(Figure 15) Kamaledin Behzad, *The construction of castle Khavarnaq in Alhira* c., gouache on paper, 1494 – 14

## Titles as Poetry

I started writing poems in Farsi two years ago by opening a Twitter page and writing short texts. The word limit constraint was helpful for my process and it became a journal and memoir. Later on, I realized lots of those texts were the starting point of my paintings. My writing is visual and my paintings are narrative, hence it seemed the right combination. However, I never considered writing to be part of my artistic methodology since I found visual language more powerful.

When I chose titles for my paintings, the feedback was positive. I was told that they sounded very poetic and gave a new meaning to my paintings. I am also aware that in the translation, much meaning and sense of poetry is lost, but here for the first time, I am trying the method of writing all my thoughts out in the form of poems before and after making a painting, and include them in Farsi next to it.

In my practice neither the truthfulness or accuracy of the moment, nor the ambiguity of the memory is the point. It is a way to construct the ordinary moment and manipulate that concept based on how I observe the experience now. In that sense I find myself negotiating a path through revealing my intimate memories, which also entails a reconstruction, while protecting a privacy.

Related to this poetic strategy, the painting of my grandfather in the bakery is titled “Association with Fire”(Figure 1 and 17 ), linked to the burnt bread and dark figures depicted in the painting. This title is a metaphor for my generation in Iran who faced so much trauma since our childhood, including eight years of war with Iraq. In my case, the titles that I chose for my paintings not only describe the image, but they are also meant to construct a new layer of meaning and poetry in the work. In the doctoral research by Abbey MacDonald, titled “Painting research practice: How exploration of a 'painting as research' metaphor can be used to refine approaches to conducting research”, she explain show through writing and note taking in her studio practice, she is able to identify and explore synergetic identities. What I found inspiring was the way she used bold fonts for some of her thinking processes or used a poetry format for studio material investigation. This encouraged me to try the same method in this thesis support paper and to include poetry that narrates my thinking process of making.

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## **Colour as Detachment**

Tehran has 8.7 million inhabitants, making it one of the most populous cities in Iran, as well as the whole of West Asia. This city and some other major metropolises across Iran have become irrespirable, and the pollution most of the time is on a hazardous level with smoke and dust covering the city like a fog. This adds a muted layer to the whole city. Furthermore, we are only allowed to wear dark colours in most of the social or official public places such as schools due to religious government laws. In my paintings, I am trying to detach myself from those colour regimens, and detach the mood of my paintings from the gloom and the dejection. This does not mean that I intend to bring happiness with my colour palette, but rather my effort is to bring alertness and liberty, something beyond black and white and not as grey as grey. If there is a contrast, I want it to be in colour, like the contrast in the Persian carpet.

Working from memory gave me the freedom to try different unmixed pigments, contrasting saturated pigment with muted colours. As American painter Amy Sillman says;

“Colour as a subject is overarching problems from religious symbology to philosophical problems, from phenomena to noumena. To deal with colour as a painter is to render these problems as physical propositions, as sensuous experiences synthetically merged under the sign of the hand.”<sup>15</sup> Relying on memories also gives me the chance to exaggerate through colour choices and bring extremes to my paintings to show the complexity of an experience. Colour combinations make a new narration possible that is sometimes beyond what I expect.

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## Large Paintings, Small Poems

### The Caldron of History

*The caldron of history* (Figure 16) originated from a cloud of smoke in another painting that I made during my first MFA semester. It was about how trauma is leaking into ordinary and domestic life. That smoke linked me to the moment when my grandmother would open the rice pot in the kitchen and her face and grey hair merged with the steam.

The bottom centre of the painting includes a big caldron of rice<sup>16</sup> on three-wick lights that work with petroleum, and was used in older times in Iran. I still remember the smell of the oil that was lit and the taste of the rice that was blended with the smoke - a combination that was distinctive for my grandmother's recipe in her house. I decided to rescale the image because I wanted the steam to be massive like an explosion. I wanted to signify the steam overshadowing my grandmother's body that was painted life-size. The ephemeral nature of the steam happened in many layers and through different techniques including

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<sup>15</sup> Painting Beyond Itself. Essay: On Colour by Amy Sillman, 2019 <https://www.palinagurinovich.com/post/painting-beyond-itself-book>

<sup>16</sup> The rice itself has a big role in Persian food. A large pot of rice is in most old houses and during the ceremonies is being used to feed large families. There is no exact information about the precise era in which rice was introduced along the Caspian shore and into Iranian cuisine, but there is a doubt if it was widely grown in the country before the Islamic period (637–651). One evidence of rice not being native to the region comes from the fact that there is no word for rice in Avesta. It is thought that the farming of rice reached Iran from southeast Asia and India. More important than rice is the bread as affordable nutrition.

scumbling<sup>17</sup> and sanding different white tones and temperatures, and was much more challenging than the layers of black luminosity in the painting of the bakery (figure 17).

I researched and compared many images of steam and how painters included the element of smoke in their works, such as in paintings by Monet, Turner and Michael Armitage. Consequently, I decided to paint something that had both the transparency of the steam and the strength of the smoke. The last thing I did after looking at Monet's *The Gare Saint Lazare*, was to make the steam look like smoke, cloudy shaped through *Alla prima* technique, using ultramarine blue, cadmium orange and burnt sienna, mixed with titanium white. I consider my grandmother as powerful as that steam, she was the column of the family. She radiated the energy and life in that house in contrast to my quiet grandfather. Every single weekend she was excited and happy to welcome us to her house.

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<sup>17</sup> Scumbling refers to a painting technique which involves applying a thin layer of paint with a dry brush and a loose hand over an existing layer.



*The white scent  
Runs through her white hair,  
the kitchen is all hers now.  
She is lost in the cloud  
The patterns on her dress crying out  
Welcome to my house!*

بوی سفید در موهای سفیدش دوید  
آشپزخانه را از آن خود کرد  
وجودش در ابر گم شد  
گل‌های روی پیراهنش فریاد زدند  
به خانه ام خوش آمدی!



(Figure 16) Shoora Majedian, *The Caldron of History*, oil on Canvas, 84x79inches

*The time s in the rice caldron  
The room is full of pride  
The steam is  
As big as the kitchen  
The fish is swimming  
Is sipping the steam of forgetfulness*

زمان در ظرف برنج است  
اتاق، لبریز از افتخار گذشته  
بخار مهیب گسترده در فضا  
ماهی شناور، در حجم سفید  
توهم گم میشود و بخار  
فراموشی را جرعه جرعه  
سر میکشد.

## Association with Fire

*Association with fire* (Figure 17) is based on the memory of me waiting for my baker grandfather at the bakery and staring at him while he was baking *Taftan*<sup>18</sup>. I was always waiting for him to come and escort me past the highway on the way to school. I remember the bakery so well; the rhythm of his body movement, the heat and the smell of the bread which was sometimes burnt.

I made some sketches of this image using different mediums and paper, including ink and mixed media. In the process of rescaling this study, I experienced a smooth process similar to my grandfather's simple and calm character. I started with black ink on canvas laid onto the floor so it bled on the surface, which tremendously affected and loosened my mark-making. The rest of the painting was done on the canvas hanging on the wall vertically.

The large-scale paintings of my grandparents represent the roots of my culture and history. My grandfather was a religious working-class baker, kind and quiet. My grandmother was lively, loud and funny with lots of drama. Most of my childhood was spent with these two people who contrasted each other. One had her energetic sense of humour and one had his slow pace and introverted character. One was a questioner of religion and one was a true believer. My childhood memories are full of moments that carry the rhythm and repetition of religious ritual in my grandfather's lifestyle and the chaos and disorientation of my grandmother with her dissatisfaction. Both everyday scenes in these two paintings are accompanied by a threat that doesn't come from outside but from unexpected moments in normal interactions. In the painting of the bakery, the warning is embedded in the black layers of body and smoke as well as the burnt bread next to the fire, and in the painting of my grandmother the chaos of the white steam eclipses the main area of the image. These works, one with the dominant geometric closed shapes and one with the open free forms are the depiction of two different beings in uneasy but ordinary situations.

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<sup>18</sup> The flatbread is a big part of Iranian meals, mainly amongst the working-class. It is fairly cheaper than rice or any other starchy food. This kind of bread is called Taftan and is a Balochi word meaning "The Place of Heat".



*The flames merged with the hair, The  
smell of the burnt bread blended with  
every drop of sweat  
I am talking about him, my grandpa,  
Who was always searching for God  
through the fire  
Only if he knew that God was the reflection  
of the fire on his face  
and his heart donated in pieces!*

شعله های آتش با موهای دستش یکی شد  
دود نان سوخته با چکه های عرق  
پدربزرگم را میگویم از لابلای نور،  
عشق به خدایش را بیرون میکشید  
دریغ که ندانست خدا، صورت پر نور از آتشش  
بود و قلبی که نان ها را به مردم مجانی میداد



(Figure 17) Shoora Majedian, *Association with Fire*, oil and ink on canvas, 58x79inches

*This bread is burnt  
the ashes will merge with the flame  
and will fade away.  
This bread is our fertility,  
is our infancy, our generation.  
It is burning slowly from inside  
And the next bread is yet to come*

این نان سوخته است  
و ذغال سوخته اش  
با شعله ها یکی میشود  
این نطفه، این  
کودکی و این همه از درون  
میسوزد  
و نان بعدی در راه است!

## Weaving the Red

When I was working on *The Caldron of History*, I remembered how my grandmother told me the story of her childhood and the memory of weaving the carpet as a child. In the preliminary drawing of the composition of girls sitting and weaving, I drew the bodies with black ink and painted the colorful yarns on the top of the half woven red carpet. The repetition of the children reminded me of the repeated history for all women in Iran and what most of my generation have been through. I decided to bring the red color of the carpet to their bodies as well. The labour of the work was also embedded in the repetition of the warp. I positioned the canvas on the floor to paint the figures red, similar to the carpet angle on the floor. My body mimicked the figures and I had to stretch my arm similar to their pose. In considering the use of child labour in the carpet making industry, each body in the painting has its own character but they look like one person after all. The bodies moving left to right become more structured with paint, but also lose their colour, becoming overlain with grey. The hands also undergo transformation from gestural to more anatomical. “In art theoretical terms, then, ruin becomes a site which manages to transform itself and its relationship with time, mutating into something different from itself, side-lining or troubling traditional categorizations.”(218)<sup>19</sup> The shadows of bodies behind the warp happened during the painting. I wasn’t sure if I wanted to keep them but I realized they increase the depth of the painting.

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<sup>19</sup> Christian Mieves, *It doesn’t reveal itself: erosion and collapse of the image in contemporary visual practice*, 2018



*I see your childhood behind the warp  
The song of your small fingers  
tightens the weft to the warp  
You memorized the pattern of life  
and wove the red carpet that slowly turns to grey*

میتوانم از لابه لای دار قالی، چهره ات را ببینم  
وقتی که نوای کودکانه آوازت را  
با ضربه های شانه، لابه لای پود محکم میکردی  
میبینم انگشتهای کوچکت را وقتی  
تلاش میکرد نقش زندگی را از برکند  
میخواند داستان قالی زندگی را که برایت سیاه و سفید شد



(Figure 18) Shoora Majedian, *Weaving the Red*, oil on canvas, 60x78inches

*We have been weaving this  
carpet, me and you  
We have been counting the  
knots, days and years  
The warps replicate the bodies  
The bodies replicate the red  
The red that is woven to us  
The red that we are weaving*

این قالی را بافته ایم، تو و من  
ما، گره هایش را روزها و سالها شمرده ایم  
دار قالی بدن را تکرار میکند  
و بدن، قرمز را  
قرمزی که در ما بافته شده است  
یا ما، قرمز را بافته ای

## Wiping the Delusion

I started a series of Ashura<sup>20</sup> works, while remembering my grandparents' house. Every year during the month of *Muharram*, the rhythm of the loud sound of singing and self-beating is what I remember the most. The group of steps, black cloths, strings or hands move in front of my eyes. This repetition had double feelings, one of excitement but also of fear and grief. It felt like there was an excitement driving people to the street but sadness was part of the mourning ritual so it had to be there. The collective emotions and activity made everyone feel united. There is another narrative overlaying the mourning. The meat that is cooked after the sheep are sacrificed would be distributed to commemorate the martyrdom for the sake of redemption. This food is called *Nazri*<sup>21</sup> which to me is one of the most delicious foods no matter what kind it is or where it is cooked. When it comes to the free food distribution in big pots, those pots are either inside homes, mosques or even at corners of the streets.

This (Figure 20) is the moment when there is no signal of sadness or mourning and all excitement and happiness for having these foods that are "originally" meant to be for homeless starving people is overlooked. The lineup for the food is the excuse to socialize with neighbours and friends. In the evening we used to play in the backyard in my grandfather's house and laugh to wash away all those sadnesses, as if nothing had ever happened. I was used to seeing the extreme thrill in that ritual, and gradually indifference took the place of that rush of emotions. In *Wiping the delusion* I chose to paint a moment where all that melancholy is being wiped at the end of the day through washing the big pot of rice and food. The event of self-beating that is happening by all the men is ended by

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<sup>20</sup> The root of the word *Ashura* has the meaning of *tenth* in Semitic languages; hence the name of the remembrance, literally translated, means "the tenth day", is the tenth day of Muharram, the first month in the Islamic calendar. The World Sunni Movement celebrates this day as National Martyrs' Day of Muslim nation. For Shia and Sufi Muslims (and recognized by all Muslims), it marks the day that Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, was martyred in the Battle of Karbala. Shia mourn and focus on the messages that can be derived from the martyrdom of Hussain. They wear black and parade through the streets chanting, lamenting, and grieving to the tune of beating drums or self-beating or in some cases self-laceration.

<sup>21</sup> In Iran, the sacred rituals are complemented by a modern twist, as residents race around this city to take advantage of copious supplies of free food. Known as *Nazri*, the food is considered holy for anyone who eats it or makes it. It is given free by individuals and private groups as a way of completing an offering made to God in honor of Hussein's martyrdom. Known as *Nazri*, the food is considered holy for anyone who eats it or makes it. It is given free by individuals and private groups as a way of completing an offering made to God in honor of Hussein's martyrdom.

women washing all the dishes. To my eyes all these aspects reflect extreme expressions. Further to this, I painted the signs of the mourning ceremony called *Alam*<sup>22</sup>. Alams were always strange objects to me and I was fascinated by their giant and tall scale, their colors and patterns. Some look like peacocks and some have bird figurines on them. When they encounter each other on people's shoulders they look scary and alive. It feels like they talk to each other or dance together. The young men who carry them become well known in the neighbourhood for being decent, religious and trustworthy. I remember seeing their effort to prove their strength and manhood and that to me was pretty performative and questionable. In the painting, the yellow of the ground was inspired by the sunlight of the summer noon time that was unbearably hot. I painted the pot blue-green to break the sad impression of the black mourning uniforms and question the ritual green color of that event with a different green.

Through imagining one single event, one of my major challenges was the composition. Seeing the event from my point of view or being a witness of myself there, is the view point from the top or the bottom, behind a figure or facing the figures. I ended up merging western and eastern perspectives.

Using black ink in my drawings with washy paint reminded me of Iranian painters such as Siah Ghalam<sup>23</sup> (Figure 19) with his melancholic elements that were emphasized by the unusual compositions during his time. Following that, the Japanese block prints specifically from the genre of *Ukiyo-e*<sup>24</sup>(floating world) helped me find a way to express an instability in my composition. In Japanese wood blocks and compositions the sense of space consists mainly but not exclusively in vision. “The other four senses, particularly the sense of touch,

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<sup>22</sup> One of the most important and symbolic objects used at mourning rituals is the Alam. It is the ensign of Husayn ibn Ali in the Battle of Karbala and a sign of truth and bravery. Alams all vary in size but usually consist of a wood pole base, with a metal finial and cross-bar that is fixed at the top of the pole.

<sup>23</sup> There is almost no information about Haji Mohammad Heravi (Siah Ghalam). His miniatures were independent drawings on paper roles to tell stories of Shahnameh (book of the king). His style was influenced by Chinese and Mongolians during the Teymurid dynasty.

<sup>24</sup> *Ukiyo-e* is a genre of Japanese art which flourished from the 17th through 19th centuries. Its artists produced woodblock prints and paintings of such subjects as female beauties or scenes from history and folk tales; travel scenes and landscapes, and erotica. The term *ukiyo-e* also translates as "picture[s] of the floating world. A common feature of most ukiyo-e prints is a well-defined, bold, flatline. In ukiyo-e composition forms are arranged in flat spaces with figures typically in a single plane of depth. Attention was drawn to vertical and horizontal relationships, as well as details such as lines, shapes, and patterns such as those on clothing. Compositions were often asymmetrical, and the viewpoint was often from unusual angles, such as from above. Elements of images were often cropped, giving the composition a spontaneous feel. This also makes the readership a bit slower since needs more time to navigate the orders and structure of the image. The aesthetic of flat areas of colour contrasts with the modulated colours expected in Western tradition.



or more exactly the bodily sense belonging to the whole body, play an important role, for the space is felt rather than seen. As far as human sensibility is concerned, even the sense organs do not work without intellect, and we know that our feeling becomes more mature with the growth of our intellect. A painting or a drawing looks like a simple visual plane, but when we look at it as a painting or drawing, our sensibility as a synthesizing perceptual faculty is at work.” (Perspectives East and West by Ken-ichi Sasaki, 2013)



(Figure 19) Siyah Qalam ca. 1480 Iran, possibly Herat, Ink and transparent watercolor on paper

*The fingers blended with the strings  
The eyes merged with the fingers  
The verticals of hands  
threw the voices to the sky  
The circular wave of scratching the pot, by  
the dark hands of the woman  
twisted the yellow sun around my gaze in a  
glance,  
And it turned the verticals to a horizon.*

انگشتها با زنجیریکی شدند  
چشمها با زنجیردر آمیختند  
خطوط عمودی دستها،  
صدا را به آسمان برد  
دایره ساییش روی ظرف  
با دستهای سیاه زن  
زردی آفتاب را دور تا دور نگاه من چرخاند  
و با سرعتی مهیب،  
تمام عمود سیاه را به خطی از افق بدل کرد.



(Figure 20) Shoora Majedian, *Wiping the Delusion*, oil on canvas, 50x70inches

*They were crying,  
they were shaking the house  
But through their sad fingers  
The cheerful voices of salvation peeping  
The strong men were dragging  
the heavy chains of identity  
And women and children  
were praising their idiocy  
This was the story of martyrdom!*

می گریستند،  
اما از پشت انگشتان  
محزونشان صدای  
شادی رسیدن به  
خدایشان هیزی میکرد  
مردان قدرتمند، زنجیر  
بزرگ هویت را پدک  
می کشیدند و زنان کودکان،  
تقدیر حماقت را در کنار هم هلهله می کردند  
این بود قصه نمایش شهادت



## Smoky Homework

The Persian carpet came back to this painting in a different form and position. It was the time of black outs during the Iran-Iraq war when we used to write our homework under the light of the *oil lamp*<sup>25</sup>. It is not long ago, but it sounds like a different era, maybe because war has become normal in East Asia. It was only thirty years ago in 1979 when the Iran-Iraq war started. I was born in the beginning and remember so many details.

The scene (Figure 21) in this painting happened in my grandparents' house which was close to the airport. I remember seeing all the anti-aircraft lights whenever there was an air raid. The carpet is under me and my sister, and we are doing our homework under the light of the oil lamp. I painted the carpet deteriorating where it is supposed to be soft and safe, and the lamp is made larger than the actual size to look much bigger than the children and leaking the black smoke while it is meant to heat up the space. The carpet symbolizes the history that is decayed and forgotten. The frame hanging at the back wall is full of pride and glory but empty of any image. My foot is painted in the fire and refers to the heat that is meant to be warm but it's not, the fire has lost its power. I don't expect my audience to understand all these similes but I believe they enhance the level of expression in the imagery.

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<sup>25</sup> This oil lamp which is called Aladdin(the brands name) was the replacement of a British product that was imported to Iran. But in the 40s after nationalization of the Iranian oil industry, by Mosaddegh they stopped their economic relationship. So this product was made by the companies inside the country. It's interesting that these oil lamps were only popular in our early childhood and then they disappeared suddenly!

*I work fast*

*I work in dark,*

*Homework is necessary, Homework is duty It  
is to forget the carpet, it is to forget*

*Home is work*

*Work is home*

*Home is dark, work is smoke*

مشق شب را باید تند نوشت

مشق شب را باید سخت نوشت

مشق را شب نوشت

شب را مشق نوشت

مشق شب شد

مشق سیاه است

مشق دود شد



(Figure 21) Shoora Majedian, *Smoky Homework*, oil on canvas, 50x70inches

*The lamp is lit by oil  
The lamp is giant  
feet are cold  
Oil is worthy  
Empty frame is hung  
Lamp is heavy  
Oil is worthy  
Lamp is leaking  
Hands are cold  
Oil is worthy*

اجاق سنگین است  
آتش خراب است  
نفت با ارزش است  
اجاق بزرگ است  
دستمان سرد است  
نفت با ارزش است  
قاب پر از خالی است  
پایمان سرد است  
نفت با ارزش است

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## Conclusion

There is a tradition in Iran about Bazaar, that if you get lost in its involute alleys you would find a spot or store that you could not find normally and if you even try later you could not locate it anymore. Similarly, I wanted to get lost in the past. I wanted to get lost among the flashes that are not locatable anymore to access those people in my family and experience those feelings once again.

The achievement of this journey is the connection between writing and painting, as well as the discovery of the role of poetry in my practice. This voyage includes trusting the studio decisions that involve failure and transformation. At the beginning of my painting research, I tried to achieve a concrete image for constructing my memories.

I learned that, instead of struggling with the challenge of reaching inaccessible memories, I could use a material engagement to reconstruct my perceptions and my visual language. The inaccessibility of memory creates an incomplete figure and an eroded body. It showed me how incompleteness and erosion can bring an openness around depiction. This openness of the form and space that is sometimes achieved by scale and erasure of marks can evoke a poetic experience that is similar to the memory both unachievable and uncertain. For example, the use of specific cultural events as a lens to view the part of history that is not being seen has become more exciting in its state of ambiguous suggestion of that incident. This process-based approach is intended to allow a socio- political meaning that is at the same time auto-ethnographic.

In the challenge between frustration and fascination of accessing, I could find the in-between moments of doubt and assurance. This immersion was not only in the formal investigation of color choices and mark-making but also in the cultural tradition and religious beliefs. Also, the excitement in childhood's vision juxtaposes my current critical lens to construct the sensibility of those conflict moments.



The pessimism in response to witnessing the destruction and loss, as well as the constant optimism of hopeful change is part of the routine of my lived experience. This cycle between positivity and negativity leaked into the structure of my painting and affected my visual language. Through the juxtaposition of these feelings I want to bring a balance to mirror that which is in my lived experience. The reality doesn't lie in the sublime miniature painting nor in the complete aggression within expressionism. It is a complex juxtaposition of both.

In the poetry of these narrative images, I could paint the story of the land that is occupied and the culture that is being destroyed. So I got lost in the steam, in the heat, and at last in the water to feel the demolition. In the process of searching, I noticed sitting in these moments let me hold on to whom I lost. The painting "On your shoulder" (Figure 22) depicts a familiar/stranger whom I lost 17 years ago. It portrays a moment that seems to be fun and playful but at the same time is menacing and shocking. A disaster that could always be there so close to us just around the corner. In the painting, "The floating belief" (Figure 23), a house and its glass garden are seeded on a floating space. The overflow of the water to the room from watering the plants depicts the destruction of a house, while the owners are either sleeping or praying for a saviour with the promise of nourishment.

All the experimentation and writing throughout this program has helped me to use gestural crowding of figures, trauma, movement and failure as a medium in my studio research practice, and helped to carve my path forward as a figurative painter. The recollection of my subjectivity within socio-political events made me investigate my cultural history, (eg. food, objects, rituals, etc.) depicting elements of that heritage with the new lens.

My goal in telling these stories is not about sadness, it is not blaming the past or losing hope, but rather is alertness and urgency of awareness and change. I am trying to open up the convoluted way of describing a complex experience. There is no use in lethargy, that would never help. The forty years of existing brutality of the government in Iran showed that there cannot and should not be any hope for help. The expressionism in my painting is the opposite of a quiet and luxurious art which was desirable in old miniature paintings.

My aim is to construct a battle of contrasts in order to examine what happens if these entwined, multifarious battles sit together. This research will be continued on a more collective scale with the social experiences from MENA's politics (Middle East and North Africa) to bring the collective signs to my practice from that region. The interest in visual allegory as well as the metaphoric language that I choose for the titles, motivates me to investigate more about the Persian poetry of *Shahnamah*, one of the worlds longest epic poems that carries Persian mythology and history.



(Figure 22) Shoora Majedian, *On your Shoulders*, oil on canvas, 72x66inches



(Figure 23) Shooraj Majedian, *The Floating Belief*, oil on canvas, 90x120inches



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