

# **ARCHIVES AND THE COLONIAL BODY**

## **PART 1: WHOSE BODY IS VALUED?**

The concept of 'othering' plays a very important role within the colonisation and Orientalisation of the black and brown body. 'Othering' means to alienate those that are intrinsically different from the idealistic human being and treat them in unjust ways (Said, 2003:40). 'Othering' is facilitated by a system of binaries which sees everything in society as polar opposites: *"The binary logic through which identities of differences are often constructed – black/white, self/other"* (Bhabha, 1994:3).

Activated by the dense and heavy history of colonialist occupation, oppositional binaries were applied to the construction of gender which saw society become dependent on the binaries of 'masculine/feminine' (Lugones, 2007:190). This is really important to how everything functions currently as the colonialists placed themselves in the masculine binary, and those colonised under the feminine binary. These genderised binaries then influenced not only 'white/black' within race, but the way that people from these races and communities in general were viewed and treated (Lugones, 2007:190). The masculine/feminine binaries came to represent:

- Human/unhuman
- Deserving/undeserving
- Civilised/ uncivilised
- Powerful/powerless

Therefore, 'othered' bodies under the feminine binary became 'unhuman', 'undeserving', 'uncivilized' and 'powerless' (Said, 2003:171), and the ideal human being came to be the cis-hetero white man who was deserving of life and had the most power - anybody who looks different is subjected to a colonialist gaze, stereotyping and marginalization (Lugones, 2007:190). Globally, we see women become the main subject of oppression and in Britain 'othering' applies largely to the lives of black and brown women.

Recognising the colonisation and Orientalisation of the black and brown body is absolutely integral in examining identity and place within institutional space. The identity of an individual determines not only whose labour, history and voice is valued, but also allows us to detect who can and cannot speak. Projections of otherness affects how institutions engage with the work and ability of black and brown people (Powell; Menendian, 2017). It is not a body that is valued, and thus their labour and history is not worthy of documentation, recording or preserving. The possession of space by the white masculine figure produces a censorship that lends itself as part of systemic abuse in institutions. The art world is an example of this.

The consequences of the colonial conquest by the British during their punitive expedition was the destruction and eradication of a large array of history (Horton, 2018). Archaeological looting, theft of stories and sacred knowledge, the selling of intricate and complex art, as well as the denunciation of who these things belonged to led to an epistemological violence (Horton, 2018) that has seeped into the contemporary arts and culture world. It continues to deny the preservation of heritage built by the colonised black and brown body.

In an article titled 'Whose Heritage?' for Third Text Journal by Professor Stuart Hall (Hall, 1999), he illustrates how labour, voice and presence is deemed worthy of preserving dependent on the person's identity. He points out the outcome of this colonial system: *"No proper archive, no regular exhibitions, no critical apparatus, no definitive histories, no reference books, no comparative materials, no developing scholarship, no passing-on of a tradition of work to younger practitioners and curators, no recognition of achievement amongst the relevant communities... Heritage-less."* (Hall, 1999:10). Hall recognises how the black and brown colonised body has been willfully ignored and systematically written out of history. The colonised body is thoroughly deprived of the preservation of their history and existence as artists, curators, archivists and researchers. Whiteness continues pervades the art world and its museums, galleries and archives today (Reading, 2015:401).

Hall explains that these dynamics are *"always inflicted by the power and authority of those who have colonised the past, whose versions of history matter. These*

*assumptions and co-ordinates of power are inhabited as natural — given, timeless, true and inevitable”* (Hall,1999:6). This is witnessed in the racially exclusive narratives that are presented in museums - art history is told as if it never existed anywhere else other than the West (Kee, 2004). When hints of inclusion or diversity are presented, they are either a subject victim to the white gaze or as an artist organised under an ‘ethnic’ theme that prioritises the artist’s ‘otherness’ or ‘identity’ rather than their artistic ability and work (Kee, 2004).

These wider systems of structures that influence the ideological eurocentricity (Bhabha, 1994:31) in institutional spaces create disparities in experience and attainment for artists and practitioners from non-white backgrounds. The long standing cycles of exclusion cause for an underrepresentation within archives especially.

## **PART 2: ARCHIVING THE WORK BY WEST ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN WOMEN ARTISTS**

A trait of colonial and Orientalist violence is the deliberate destruction and hiding of historical information by women, but especially the black and brown colonised woman. Due to laws and regulations (National Women's History Alliance, 2013) put in place by supremacist male counterparts, women as second class citizens were never granted accolades for their inventions and accomplishments. The institutionalisation of art and the role of archive has meant that gender operates the same way in the museum and archive sector - the same patriarchal gaze and act of ‘othering’ has meant that women practitioners and their work in the arts were never documented, recorded, preserved or rightfully credited.

In the 80s and 90s, many feminist activists and artists in the art world used their work explicitly as a political act, addressing the lack of representation of women artists in institutions, and more broadly, art history: *“Earlier work on representation in museum exhibits tended to focus on counting the gaps and silences relating to women and the dominance of representations of men. This, in turn, led to an emphasis on the development of special exhibitions featuring women to fill these absences.”*

(Reading, 2015:401). Groups formed such as the Guerrilla Girls who work anonymously (Tate, 2019) or the Women of Colour Index led by Rita Keegan began to draw out the disparities within art institutions (Goldsmiths, 2019). Spaces then formed that actively exhibited, collected and archived the work by women and women of colour: *“part of the impact of gendered heritage work has also involved feminist activists developing women’s museums, women’s collections and women’s memorial sites, as well as lobbying heritage charities, organisations and governmental bodies to fill the gaps of women’s history”* (Reading, 2015:404).

Of course, institutions reacted to this and began addressing the lack of diversity in their spaces. Exhibitions that approached the “issues relating to questions of representation” (Reading, 2015:401) seem to have done so to prove the West’s true democracy that actually only existed as a fantasy and idealized goal:

*“We see it reflected in different ways: in how the texts supporting art works and framing exhibits are written by museums; in the attempts to make explicit the ‘perspective’ which has governed the selection and the interpretative contextualisation (...), in the exposing of underlying assumptions of value, meaning and connection as part of a more dialogic relationship between the cultural institutions and their audiences; and in the tentative efforts to involve the ‘subjects’ themselves in the exhibiting process which objectifies them”* (Hall, 1999:8) The proof for the lack of success is the continuity of this discussion, as a new generation of artists continue to feel as “invaders of space” (Puwar, 2004:57-58) whose body does not reflect the white masculine figure, and does not belong within institutions related to arts and culture (Puwar, 2004:57-58).

It gets more problematic when observing the role of West Asian and North African women. The West’s theme is that they are deemed uncivilised and inferior to white women (Lugones, 2007:189). Not only have they also been structured as outsiders in terms of institutional and political power but the stereotypes of West Asian and North African women as ‘oppressed’ by their brown male counterparts (Spivak, 2010:5) has complicated the relationship between West Asian/North African women and arts or cultural practices.

It is important however to also observe the political environment of the 70s-90s in Britain. During this time, the anti-racist movement in non-white communities developed the idea that anyone affected by racism could identify as 'politically black' (Brinkhurst-Cuff, 2016): *"ethnic minority communities' from the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent, whose presence in large numbers since the 1950s have transformed Britain into a multicultural society"* (Hall, 1999: 9) The unity of specifically South Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities saw militancy against injustices in Britain affecting their living conditions, worker's rights and more. In addition to this, women's groups such as the Brixton Black Women's Group and Southall Black Sisters comprised of members of the South Asian and Afro Caribbean communities that worked together against inequalities affecting women of colour (Roper, 2014). The term 'politically black' itself came to gain extreme political weight: *"black is a political colour, not the colour of your skin... the colour of oppression today is black"* (Roper, 2014). 'Politically black' therefore represented the shared experiences of oppression between South Asian and Afro-Caribbean communities, and helped build a solidarity between the groups against the fascist and white supremacist racism that was occurring at the time (Brinkhurst-Cuff, 2016). Although the West Asian and North African community wasn't as involved in these movements, perhaps due to their later arrival and community growth in Britain, 'political blackness' did seep into the art world and influenced not just archives, but also the movement of many artists at the time: *"Everywhere, universalisms of every kind were being unmasked and historicised. No social category – gender, race, sexuality – seemed immune to re-thinking. The same was true of key concepts like resistance, domination, culture, agency, power and subjecthood"* (Mani, 2014:4).

As aforementioned, several feminist activists and artists began molding their own spaces to exhibit and preserve their own work. Hall explains in 'Whose Heritage?' for Third Text Journal that: *"these communities should now be culturally represented in mainstream British cultural and artistic institutions. Our picture of them is defined primarily by their 'otherness' — their minority relationship to something vaguely identified as 'the majority', their cultural difference from European norms, their non-whiteness, their 'marking' by ethnicity, religion and 'race'. This is a negative figuration, reductive and simplistic"* (Hall, 1999:9). The Woman of Colour Index archived specifically the work by Black women artists and spaces such as the

Woman's Art Library based at Goldsmiths University (also run by Keegan) actively set out to work with women from non-white backgrounds to collect their work into the archives (Goldsmiths, 2019). This saw a rise in South Asian and Afro-Caribbean representation in the art world, with women artists taking up the space they deserved.

However, due to the West's archaic ways of thinking, there was not only a natural assumption that 'modernism' and 'modernity' were simply Western inventions (Hall, 1999:5), but the Orientalisation of the brown woman from the 'Arab World' meant that stereotypes portrayed them as victims of oppressed societies (Spivak, 2010:5), with no space to become art practitioners. This excluded the work of several women from West Asia and North Africa, since the concept of West Asian/North African/Arab artist didn't exist in the 70s. Rasheed Araeen expands on this through Mona Hatoum: "*She positions herself as a black artist, understanding 'black' as a political stance and result of a shared history of colonial domination*" (Araeen, 1988:33) - her identifying as a 'black artist' was specifically in relation to the term 'black' representing oppression (in relation to being politically black). This contextually suited her work which focused on themes such as political conflict (Wafa, 2017). Hatoum came to be one of the very few to identify in this way, which explains why when looking at archived work by women artist in the 70s-90s, you will mostly find the work by a variety of Black women artists, South Asian women artists....and then Mona Hatoum.

The political environment of this time was also evident in the commercial sector of the art industry as the auctioneering of contemporary and modern Middle Eastern art only came about in the late 2000s – it was especially disregarded after 9/11 as the art world was impacted by the political context of the post 2001 setting (Said, 2003: xiii). The Orientalisation of the brown body heightened the stereotype of it being a threat to the West (Said, 2003: xiii). There was also no such thing as cataloguing or archiving Middle Eastern Art apart from homogenous categories such as 'Islamic art' (Wafa, 2017) until the establishment of economic free zones which saw the opening of "*Christie's in Dubai and hosted the first auction of modern and contemporary art in the Middle East in 2006*" (SMITHSONIAN.COM, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

Regardless of this slow development, today's art world continues to build barriers that prevent the preservation of work by West Asian and North African women artists, curators, researchers and other creative practitioners. Governmental structures are encouraging the closing of borders which is heightening Islamophobia and the racialisation of religious women. The art world's inconsistency in standing against "cultural displacement and social discrimination" (Bhabha, 1994:8) will see less articulation of cultural differences in a positive light, but also West Asian and North African women will continue to be unrepresentable in the museums.

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## **PRIMARY RESEARCH:**

### **THE WEST ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN WOMAN'S ART LIBRARY**

As a result of the representation that West Asian and North African (WANA) women have been starved of, and taking note from Araeen's idea of asserting yourself and your identity to "be located within the history or historical continuity of our struggles against colonial and neo-colonial domination" (Araeen, 1988:37) I have decided to build a West Asian and North African Women's Art Library (WANAWAL). Drawing from The Woman's Art Library situated at Goldsmiths University, I have generated research that consists of three parts, using a methodology which would write a history of the world that does not place Europe or the West at the centre of the narrative. There is now room for women of all aforementioned communities to create their own platforms under their own terms, absent from the patriarchal and white gaze. The two main parallel collections of the WANAWAL (physical and digital) go hand in hand in relocating, redefining and controlling the presentation of WANA women.

#### **PART 1**

For the first part of my research I looked up different libraries and institutions that archive the work by women or people of colour especially. I proceeded to contact Glasgow Women's Library, The Feminist Library, The Women's Library (LSE), The Woman's Art Library (Goldsmiths) and the African & Asian Visual Artists Archive. I emailed them all with an introduction into my research, the project I was building, and then attached a set of interview questions (see appendix) for them to answer. Only The Feminist Library got back to me with answers (see appendix), and not all questions were answered.

Due to the lack of information I had, I proceeded to email Althea Greenan again, the curator of The Woman's Art Library. She got back to me eventually and I arranged with her an appointment to spend the afternoon at The Woman's Art Library to interview her face to face about the way she runs the archive, the material she collects and to also observe the way the Woman's Art Library is structured and

organised. I had recorded the interview, however due to file corruption, could only transcript some parts (see appendix). Luckily I had also taken notes whilst speaking to her and took pictures of the material she had shown me.

Our conversation was very organic. I began by explaining to her what my idea was. I then proceeded to ask her about her role at the library and what The Women's Art Library consists of. Although I prepared a list of questions to ask her (the same questions I had sent to the other organisations), I only got to ask 3 of the intended questions due to the fluency of our conversation, as the trajectory took a different path. She was naturally giving me information without my asking; I was gaining the information I needed without influencing her thought pattern.

The questions I had arranged for all organisations to answer focused mostly on who is deemed worthy of belonging in the archive. The reason I went for this approach was because I wanted to find out whether there was room for WANA women artist to exist within these spaces, but also if these institutions were actively engaging in decolonisation. The Feminist Library admitted "Our collection is quite dated, and I feel as if material on intersectional and LGBTQIA+ discourse isn't well represented" (Evans-Hill, 2019). When I explained this to Althea, she stated that it was something she couldn't necessarily relate to: "I started off political but I ended up political too". Admittedly, it was refreshing to see a white woman utilise her privilege in a way that elevated the voices of not just women in general, but especially those from marginalised communities.

After our conversation, I had asked Althea to share with me the work by WANA women that existed in the archive. Although there was not a significant amount, she showed me a book made in 1999 by Siamee H. Keelan, a curator from the UAE titled 'Contemporary Arab Women's Art'. In the book existed a listing of several women artists from the 'Arab World' whose work was also in the slide collection that is archived in the library. Ideally, the work by these artists would eventually exist in the WANAWAL also.

## **PART 2**

The second part of my research is inspired by how Althea runs the Woman's Art Library and how the archives is structured/organised. At the Woman's Art Library, the work of an artist is placed into an archival boxes and then categorised alphabetically. I decided to purchase three boxes to archive the work by three women artists from the WANA region, but who are currently based in the West. The artists are Estabrak Al-Ansari, Iraqi artist based in London; Khadija Baker, Kurdish artist based in Montreal; Moza Almatrooshi, Emirati artist based in London.

The process of creating the boxes was lengthy but had to be done delicately. I did not want to take the work of an artist based on the fact that I personally wanted their work to be archived. I wanted them to be equally invested in the idea of WANAWAL and the archives. I did not want to conduct the process without their permission, approvals were also documented (see Figures 27-29). This is perhaps the reason proceedings took a little longer, but it was important for me to gain each artist's trust. The overarching goal was to not duplicate the actions of institutions who use material created by the black and brown colonised body to only further themselves.

Alongside building these separate boxes of each artist's work, I interviewed them. The form of interviewing was different with each artist. Due to the time difference between London and Montreal, I interviewed Khadija via email and communicated with her throughout the entire research process via email too. I also kept in contact with Moza via email throughout the research process however used Skype to interview her, which I recorded with her permission and later transcribed (see appendix). With Estabrak, I was able to gain information from her via a few means. We communicated via email and phone, the interview questions were sent to her via instant messaging services, which she then replied through a recording that I transcribed. All these methods used were to accommodate the artist, as I did not want to impose any particular method as comfort in their means was my paramount concern. I asked the same interview questions to all three artists. They began with an introduction into their own practice and how they work. The questions then moved into the topics of visibility and how they place themselves within institutions. The

interview was intended to be an insight into the artist themselves. What was interesting was how each artist naturally spoke on the essence of archiving and 'othering' without me having used that word necessarily.

The transcription of Moza and Estabrak's interviews was a very lengthy process. As it was my first time transcribing, I was unsure of how it should be structured and edited. I decided that I did not want to force Western academic standards on their voices, so I transcribed their recordings word for word, and did not edit any of the answers Khadija sent to me via email.

Following these interviews, I asked them to donate any material they would want to include in their box. I also began researching into each artist's exhibition history and began collecting any leaflets/posters/magazines/essays/articles that contained the artist's name or work. Some material was only found online or donated by the artist in digital form - depending on the quality, I printed out many items. I also added a pomegranate into Mazo's box, as her practice is performance and food based.

Lastly, I used the material they donated to me to create a catalogue about them. The catalogue consists of their bio, CV, the interviews I did with them, images of their work and lastly screenshots of their presence online. The catalogue is placed in each artist's archival box.

### **PART 3**

The political environment of today means there are different ways of creating platforms. Although the WANAWAL has the physical aspect to it, I wanted to make use of the digital age we live in, inspired by Reading's explanation of the relationship between feminist heritage and digitization.

Ideally (perhaps eventually) the WANAWAL will exist online as an archive itself for not only all curators/researchers/other artists to access information, but also the general public. I created a template of what the digital archive would look like, and what information institutions and the public would be able to see. The digital archive is divided into region; name (alphabetically) and then when you choose the name of

a specific artist, you will be able to see links to their bio, CV, images of their work, any articles of them online, their website/social media amongst any other material related to them. The amount of material would be different for each artist depending on how much there is.

It was important for me to create something digitally in order to make the WANAWAL as inclusive as possible. I am hopeful that this will give people the opportunity to contribute and donate names and material to the archive from across the globe. I am also hopeful that it will bring out the ability and achievements of WANA women artist that have purposely been hidden as a result of the epistemic violence that colonialism has generated.

The digital archive is shaped very broadly. I have also given myself a parameter around collecting by focusing the archive on a specific identity and pursuing the idea that WANA women never get represented in full. I am giving WANAWAL the opportunity to have material added to it constantly. I have faith it can be a starting point that what feels and presents like a vacuum for these communities.

# **INSTALLATION MAP:**

## **PART 1:**

West Asian and North African presence at the Woman's Art Library:  
Figures 1-26

## **PART 2:**

Documented emails that show permission:  
Figures 27-29

Catalogues created of archived artists (+ in archival boxes):  
Figures 30-36

Archival Boxes for the West Asian and North African Women's Art Library:  
Figures 37- 43: Moza Almathrooshi  
Figures 44 - 49: Khadija Baker  
Figures 50 - 54: Estabrak Al-Ansari

## **PART 3:**

Template of West Asian and North African Women's Art Library

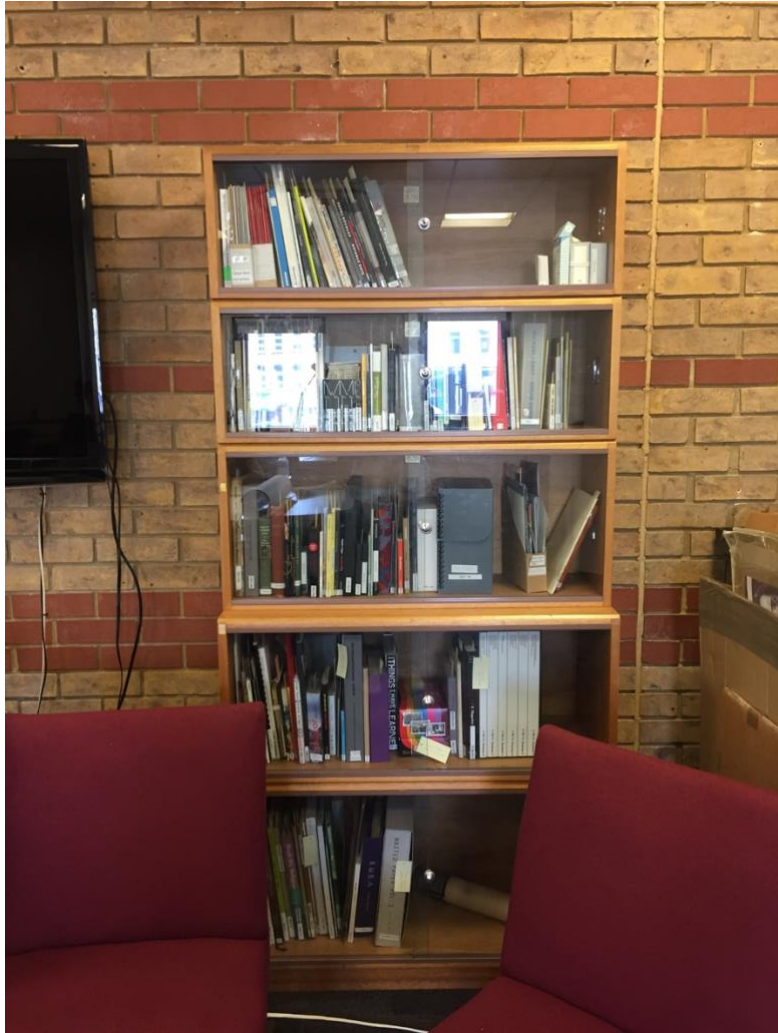


Figure 1



Figure 2

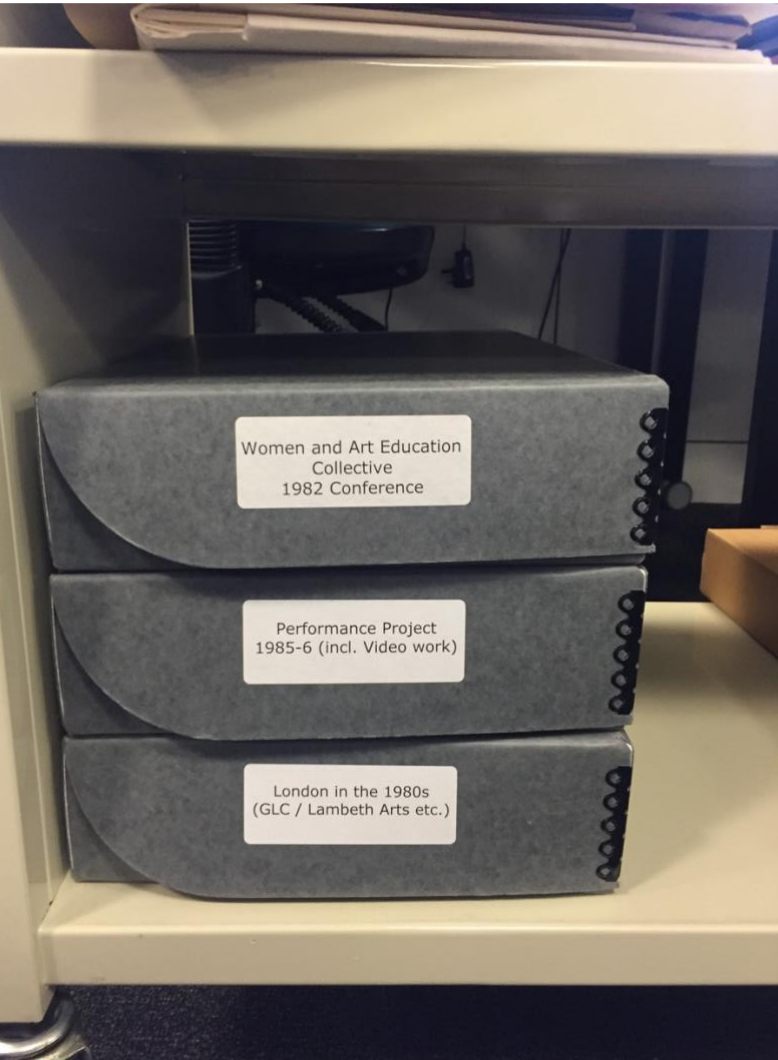


Figure 3



Figure 4 & 5



Figure 6

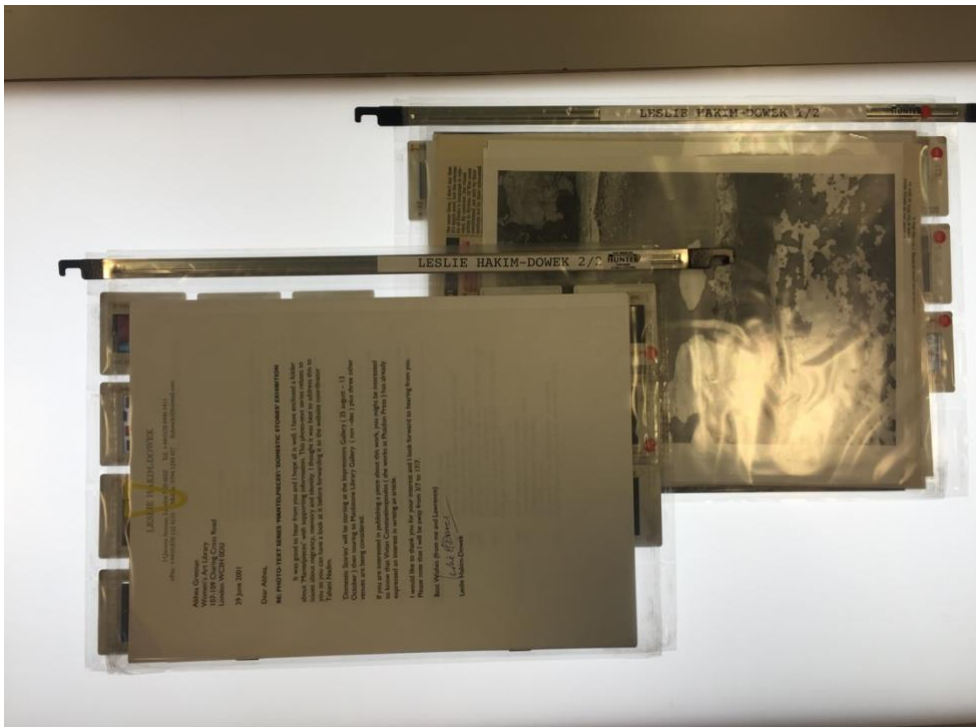


Figure 7

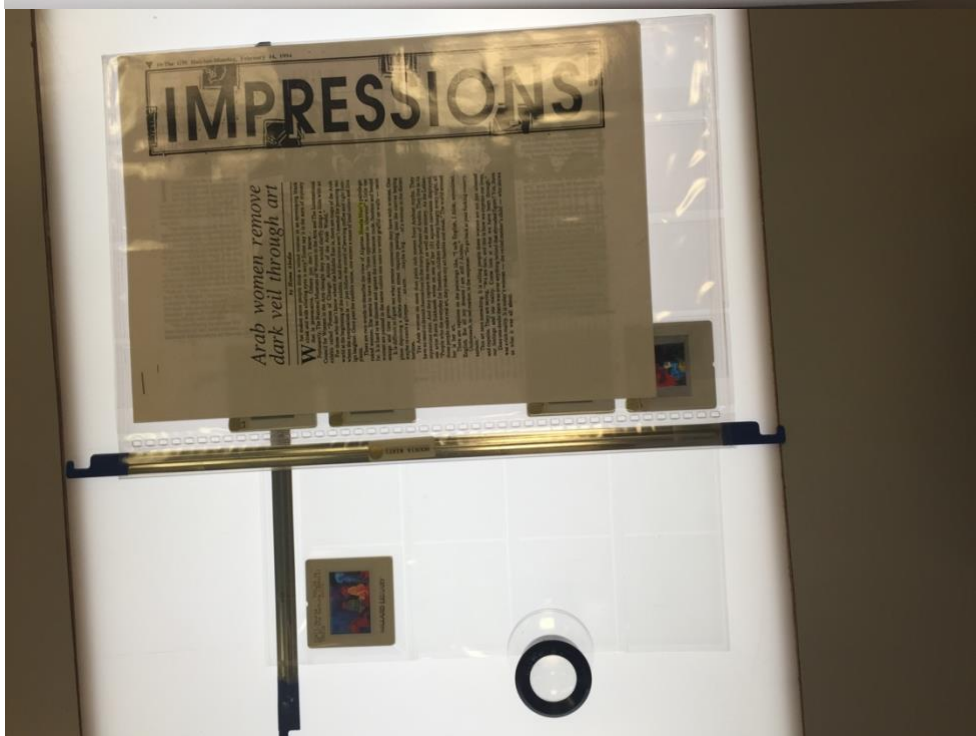


Figure 8

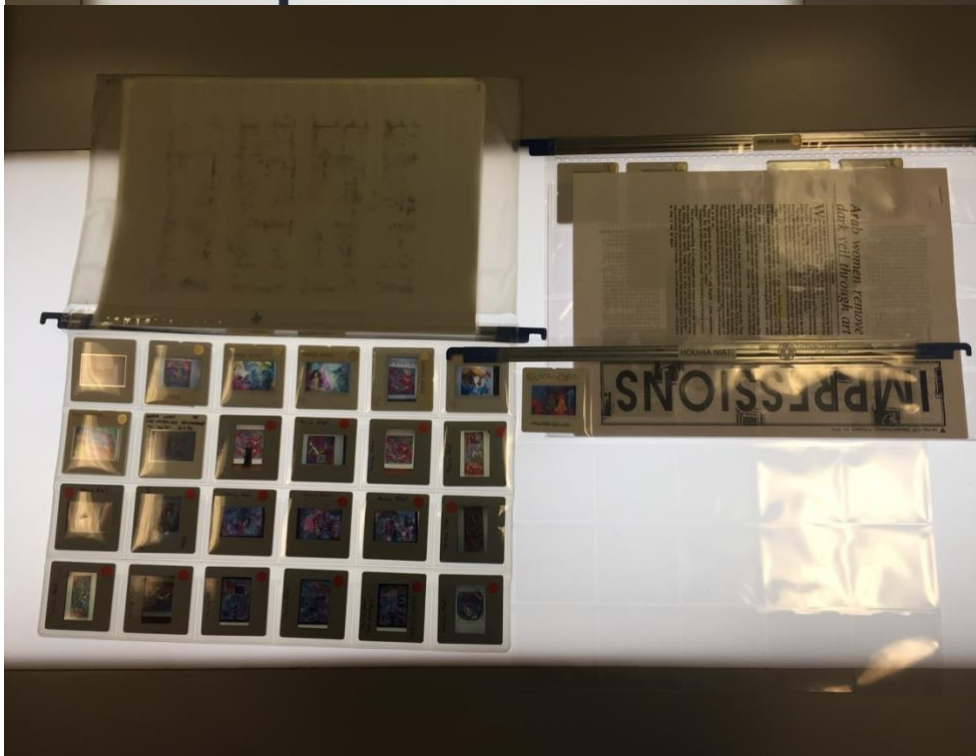




Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11





oil on burlap, 26 by

Bill Jensen's painting and spanned the years was a healthy landmark imagery—retract yet derived from ated by virtue of their pping, and intensely of paint.

nting, with its acknowl- o such early American n Hartley and Arthur bolists on both sides of on in France and, most am Ryder in America) is phase is *Yellow and* (1988), a landscape cum forms evoke Hartley aint handling and plays epper juxtaposed with y—infuse the image

ntings remain discreet. shifted toward a more still highly energized he remarkable *Veil* ize (26 by 18 inches). st in. Its monumental, mountainlike shape se sky. Unlike earlier has been scraped and slucient, atmospheric

steps toward in space, taking on the scabrous surface of the mountain it recedes into. *Veil* alludes to landscape, yet it is a purely invented pictorial space. It signals a shift in Jensen's imagery from the world of objects to the ambience of place.

—Nancy Stapen

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

### Artists of the Arab World

#### NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WOMEN IN THE ARTS

**F**orces of Change: Artists of the Arab World" was a remarkably complete overview. It comprised 160 paintings and sculptures by 70 women artists from 15 countries. At first, it seemed divided between the naive or pattern-obsessed East and the self-conscious or trend-driven West. Even so, the viewer discovered hybrids: an Arab letter given a Brancusi-like treatment in limestone, the chasms of Petra (an ancient city in southern Jordan) abstracted to veils of color, and elements of ancient geometry imposed on photographs of Gaza Strip graffiti. Many of these works seduce the viewer.

These artists, whose birth dates range from 1908 to '67, reject so-called feminine art in favor of assertions of radical individual will. Even a silk caftan by Huguette Caland, a Lebanese who has designed for Pierre Cardin, mocks its original function with an embroidered cartoon that features frontal female nudity.

The multipanel installation *No to Torture* by Algerian Houria Niati evokes the romanticized harem figures of Delacroix's *Women of Algiers*, yet renders them as nude victims, their bodies slashes of paint, their heads missing or obscured by cages. Surrealism inspires the show's oldest living artist, Madiha Umar of Iraq, whose images derive from arabesque designs, as well as the show's youngest, Lina Ghaibeh of Syria, who generates her narrative photographs by computer.

This show, sponsored by the International Council for Women in the Arts, set the record straight. It reminded us that abstraction comes naturally to cultures in which depicting the sacred in figurative terms could result in the charge of blasphemy. It convinced viewers that Arab art is not synonymous with Islam and that Arab women—from Baya Mahieddine, an illiterate Al-

Janine Antoni, *Lick and Lather*, 1993, soap and chocolate, 24 by 16 by 13 inches (each). Miami-Dade Community College, Wolfson Campus.



Madiha Umar, *At the Concert*, 1948, ink on white scratchboard, 9½ by 13 inches. National Museum of Women in the Arts.

gerian who at 16 wowed Surrealist author André Breton and Picasso, to Iraqi Wasma'a K. Chorbachi, a Harvard Ph.D. who fires plates with Arabic sermons written on them—break the rules in their confrontation with contemporary politics and art.

—Jean Lawlor Cohen

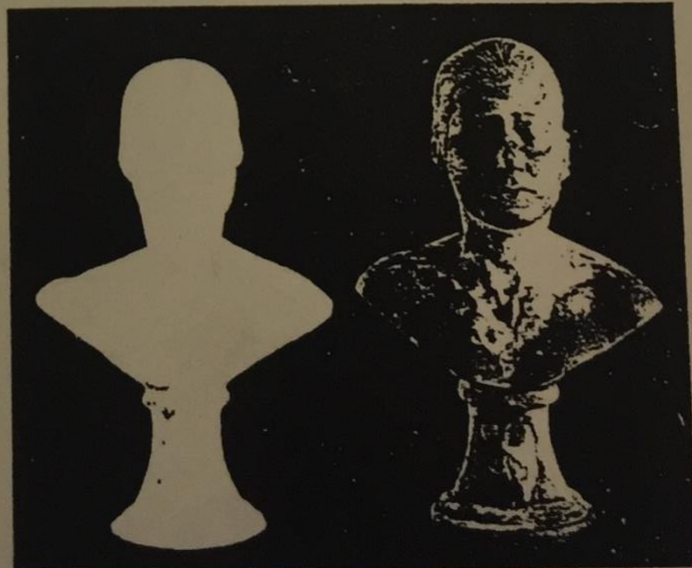
## MIAMI

### The Art of Seduction

#### MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, WOLFSON CAMPUS

**M**aking bold statements with lipstick and glass slippers, chocolate and rhinestones, and sugar and poison. "The Art of Seduction" was a show to tantalize the eye and mind. It brought together works by eight women, most in their 30s, who are intrigued with conventional and unconventional emblems of power. They are particularly interested in the volatile ways such emblems intersect with objects and materials associated with female sexuality.

The compelling range of unorthodox media they have chosen is also a reaction to materials sanctioned by a patriarchal art





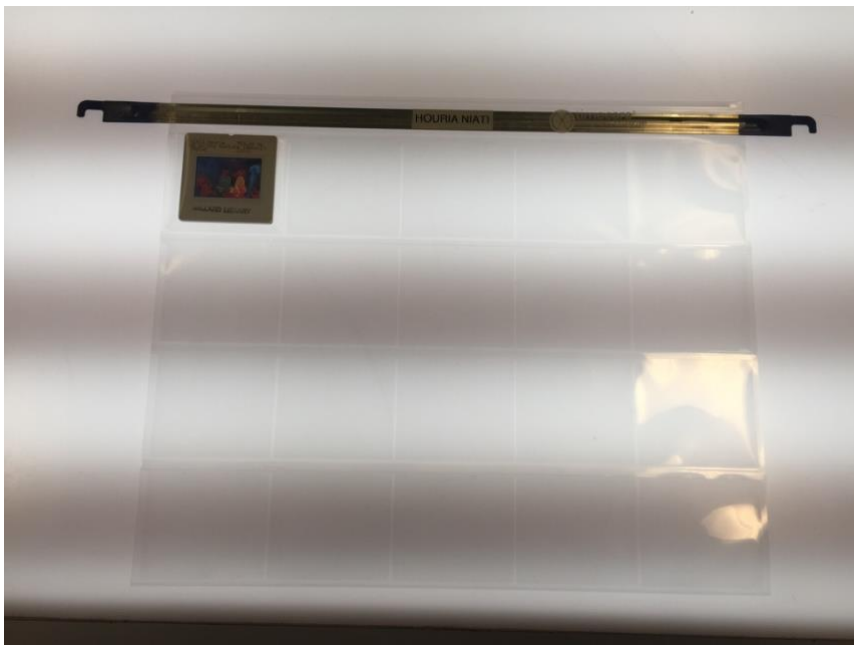


Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16





Figure 17

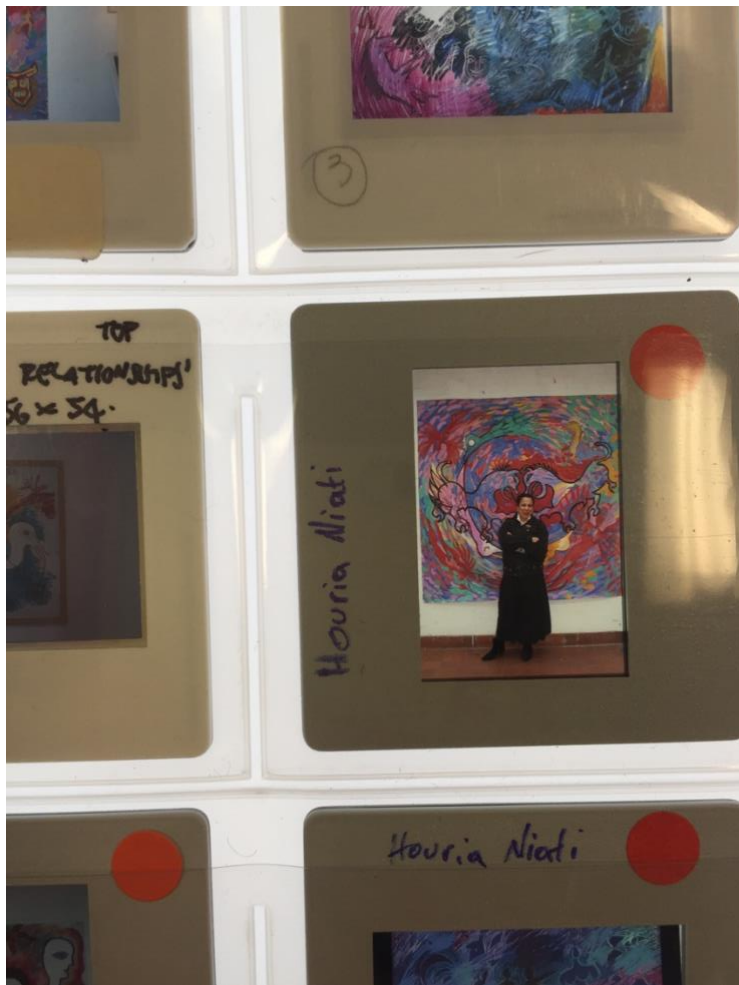


Figure 18



Figure 19





Figure 20



Figure 21

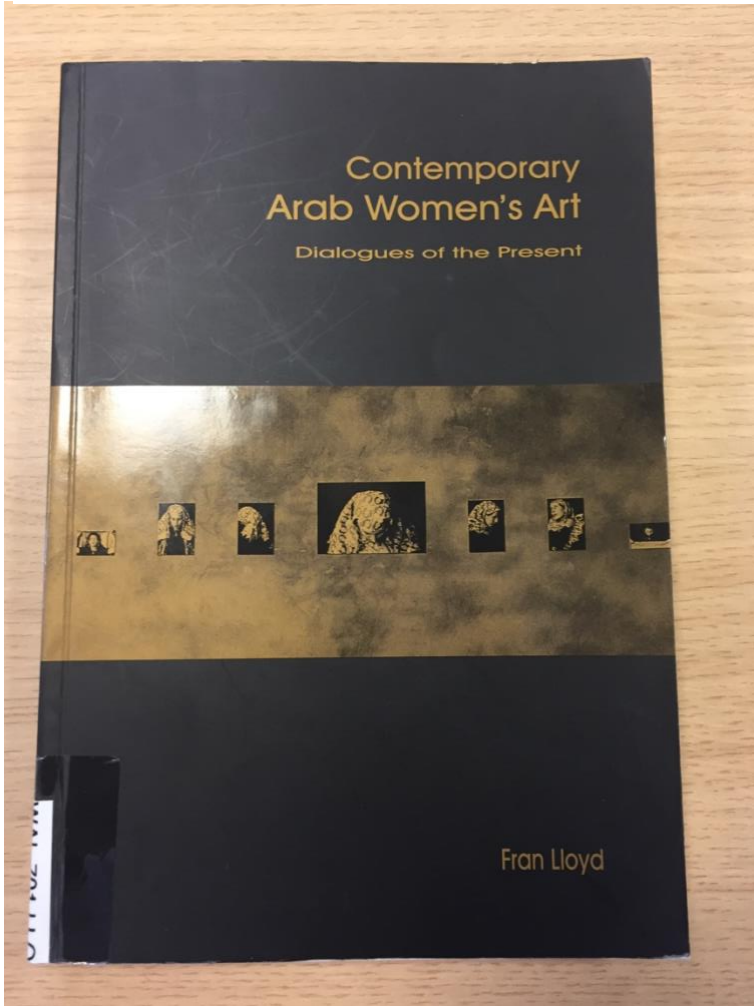


Figure 22

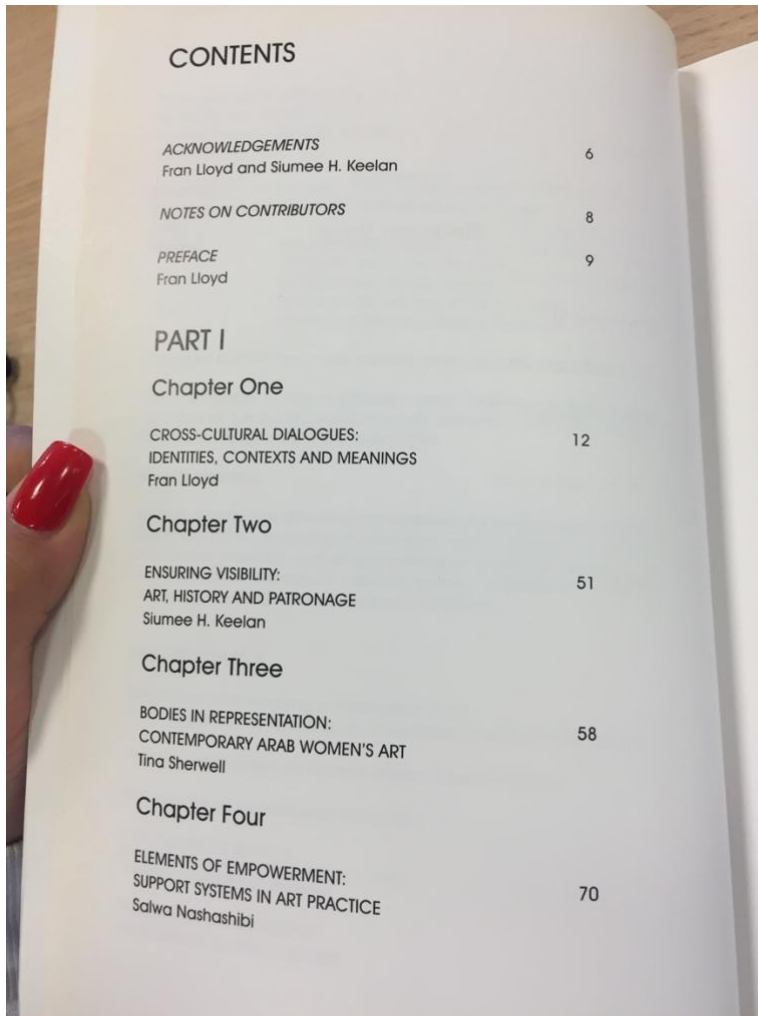
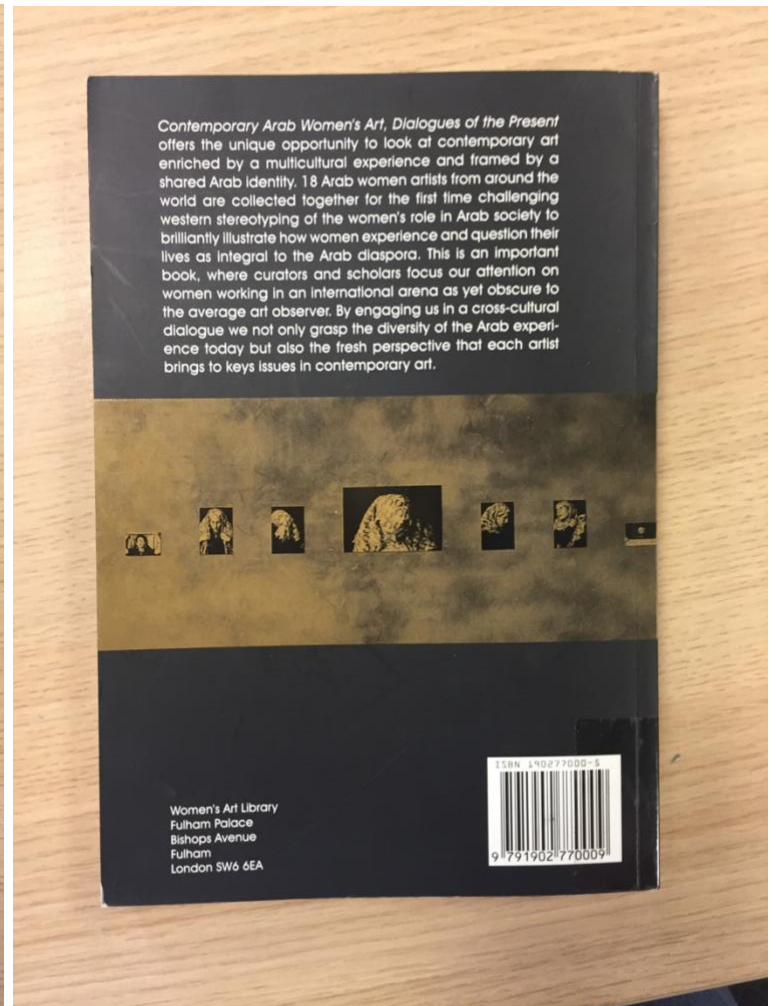


Figure 23

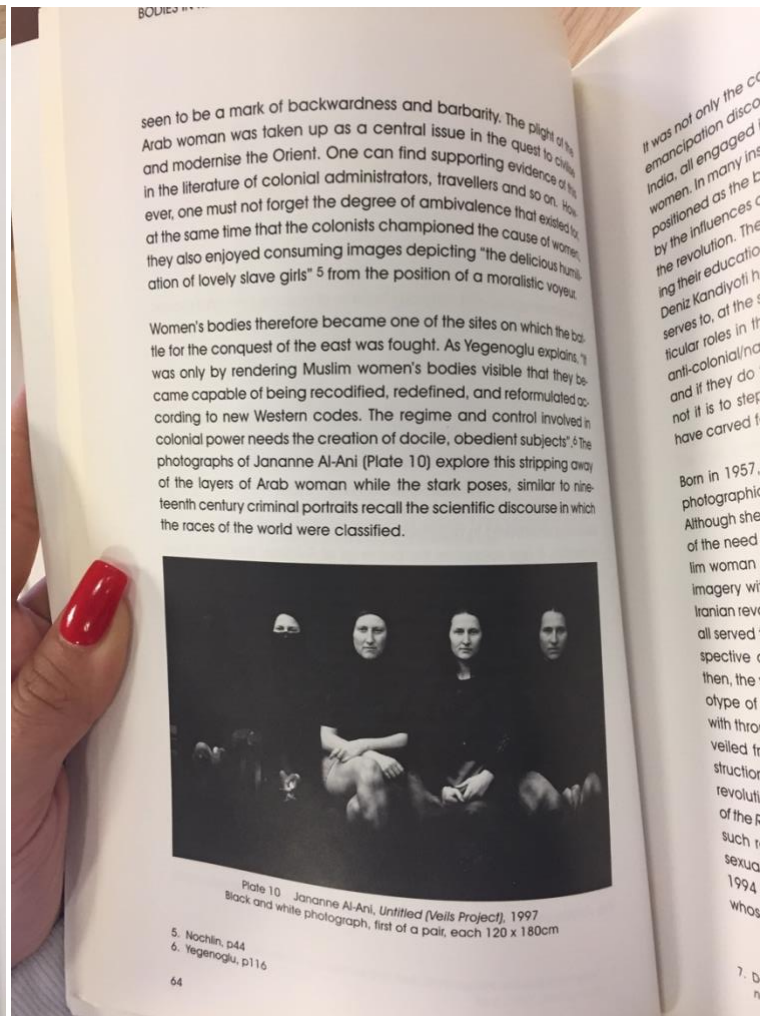


Figure 24

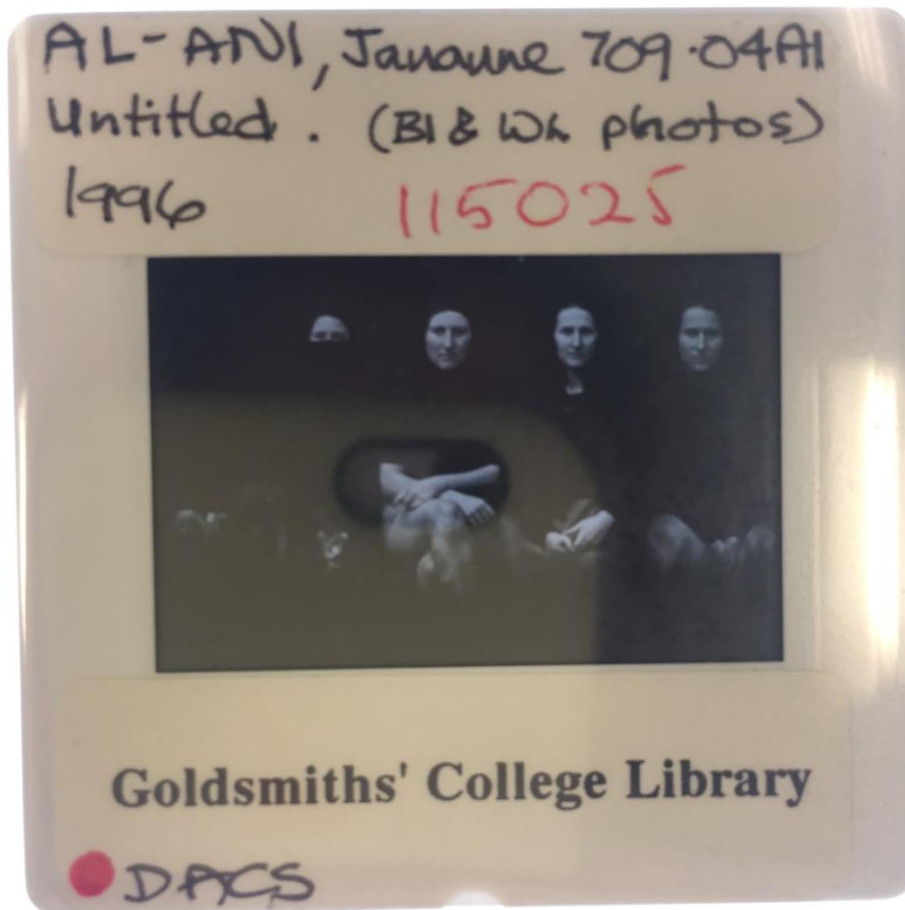


Figure 25



Figure 26



3:56 PM (53 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Moza,

I hope you are well and thank you so much for all your contribution and time so far.

As this project is part of a primary research project for my studies, I have to make sure I receive your full consent to use your interview, the material you have donated and any material I find online as part of my research, for my assignment, for the West Asian and North African Womens Art Library and to possibly be donated to the Womans Art Library at Goldsmiths.

Do reply to this email and state whether I have your permission or not,

All my best,

...

☆ ↶ ⋮

Hello Evar!

I give my consent for you to use anything and everything! Thank you for double checking with me!

Sending you love,

Moza xx

...

Figure 27

3:57 PM (52 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Estabrak,

I hope you are well and thank you so much for all your contribution and time so far.

As this project is part of a primary research project for my studies, I have to make sure I receive your full consent to use your interview, the material you have donated and any material I find online as part of my research, for my assignment, for the West Asian and North African Womens Art Library and to possibly be donated to the Womans Art Library at Goldsmiths.

Do reply to this email and state whether I have your permission or not,

All my best,

...

☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Evar,

Thank you for your email.  
Yes you have my consent and permission.  
I am excited to see the outcome.

Best,

Estabrak Al-Ansari

...

Figure 28

3:57 PM (52 minutes ago) ☆ ↶ ⋮

Dear Khadija,

I hope you are well and thank you so much for all your contribution and time so far.

As this project is part of a primary research project for my studies, I have to make sure I receive your full consent to use your interview, the material you have donated and any material I find online as part of my research, for my assignment, for the West Asian and North African Womens Art Library and to possibly be donated to the Womans Art Library at Goldsmiths.

Do reply to this email and state whether I have your permission or not,

All my best,

...

☆ ↶ ⋮

Hi

Yes, I give my consent to use all of the above in your research

Good luck ,

Khadija

...

Figure 29

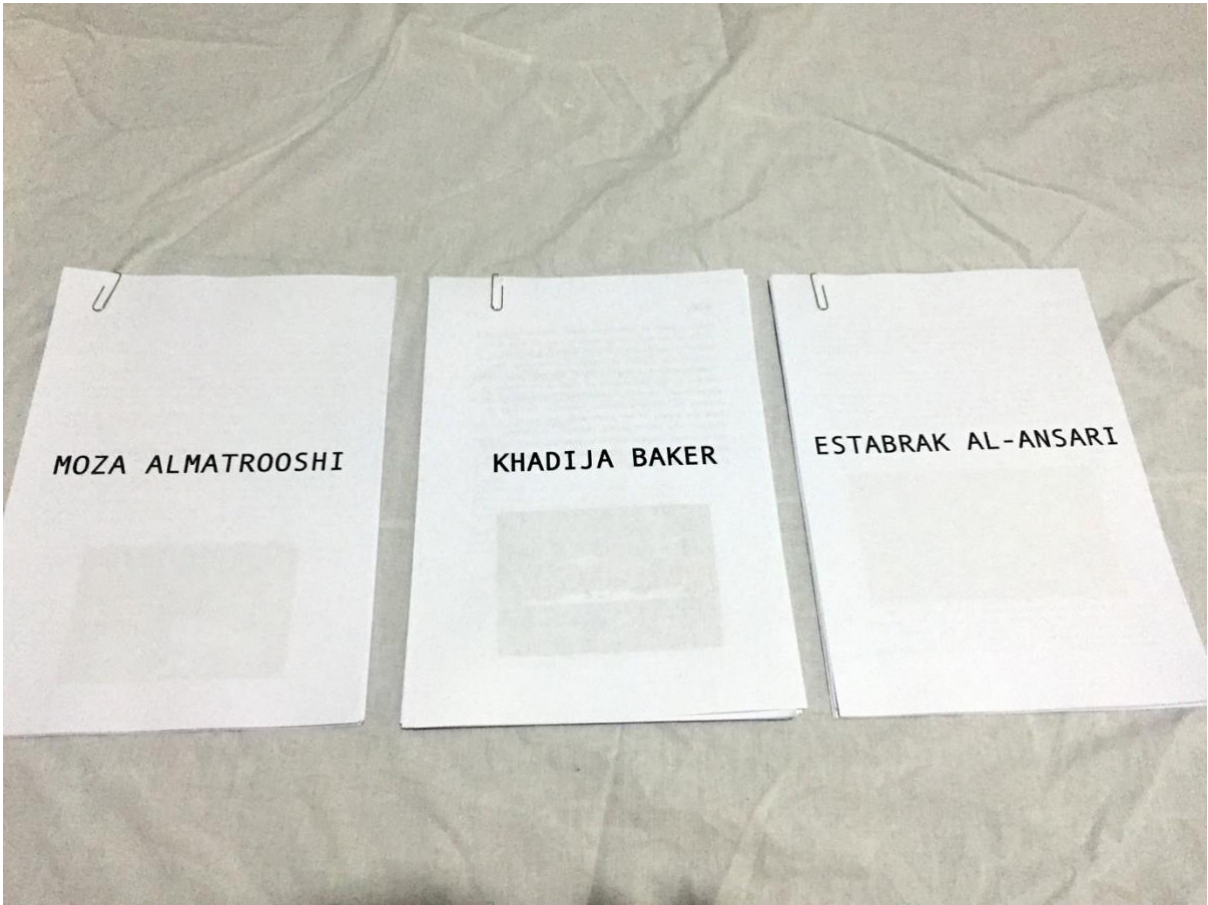


Figure 30

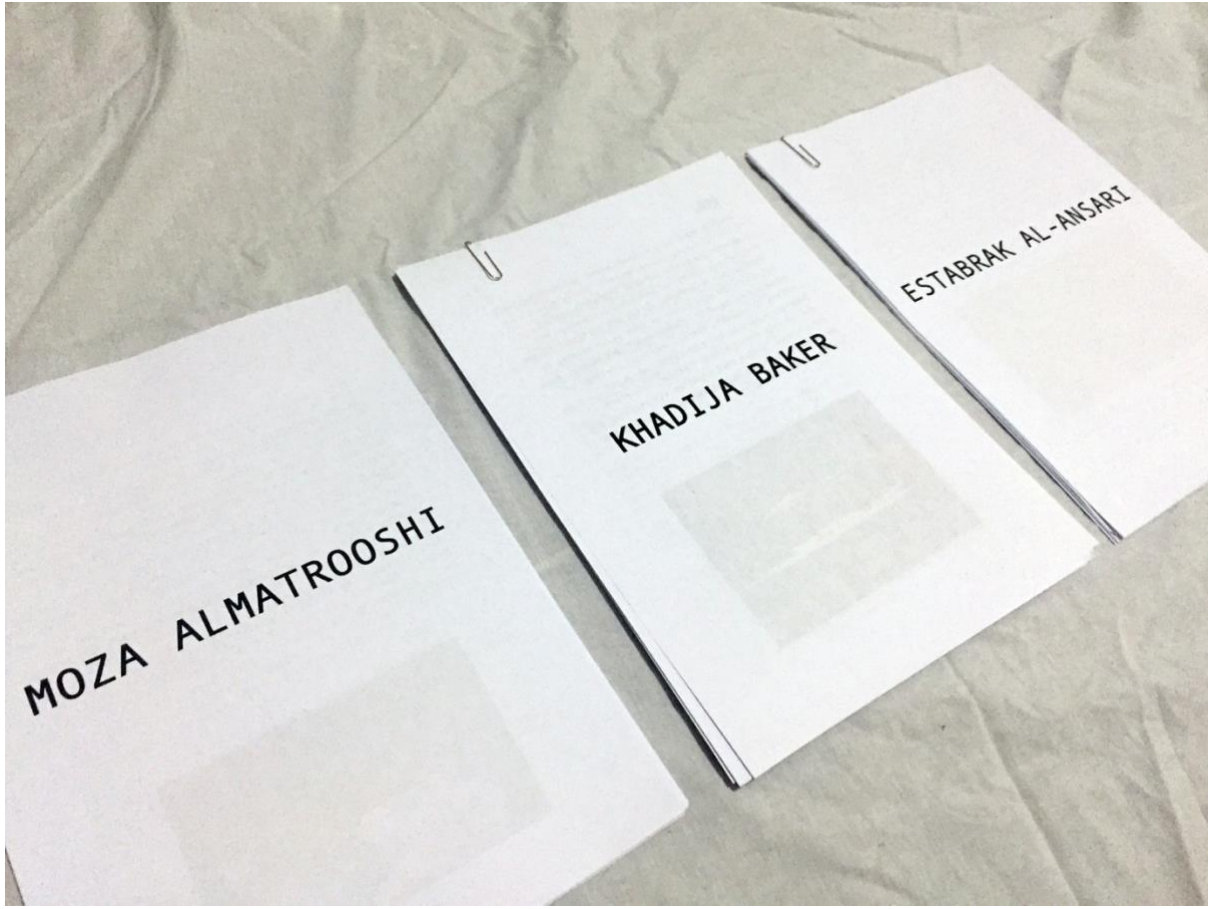


Figure 31

Figure 32



Figure 33





Figure 34



Figure 35



Figure 36





Figure 37



Figure 38





Figure 39

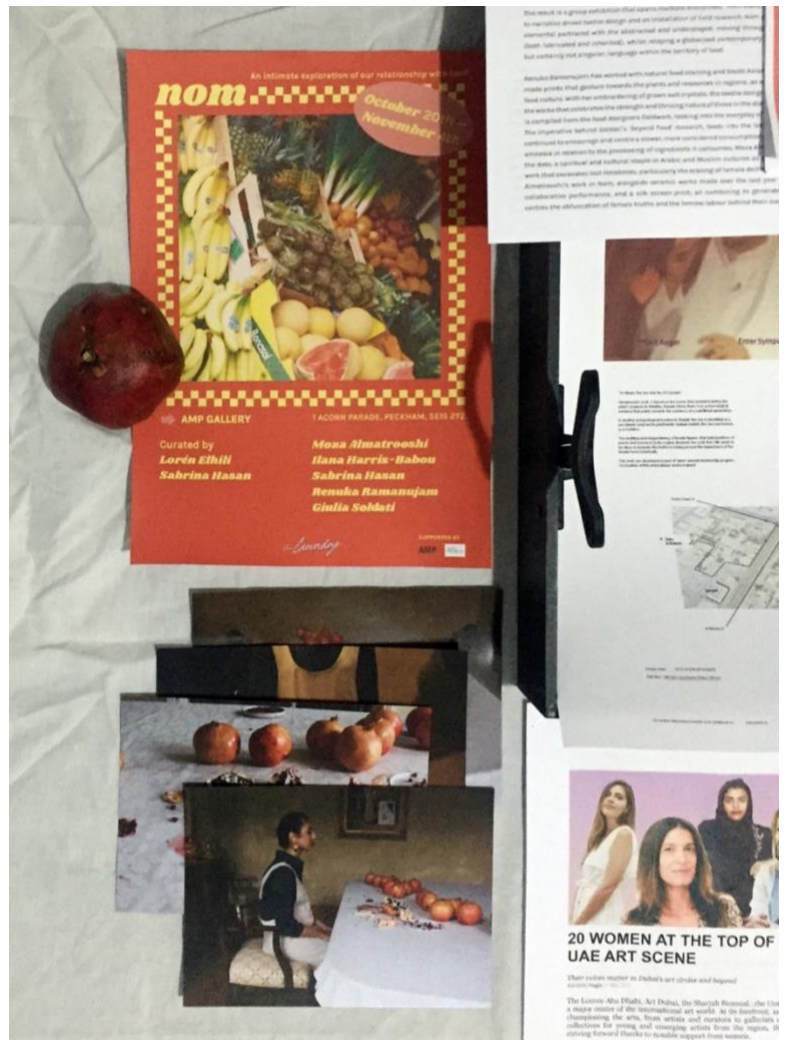


Figure 40



Figure 41



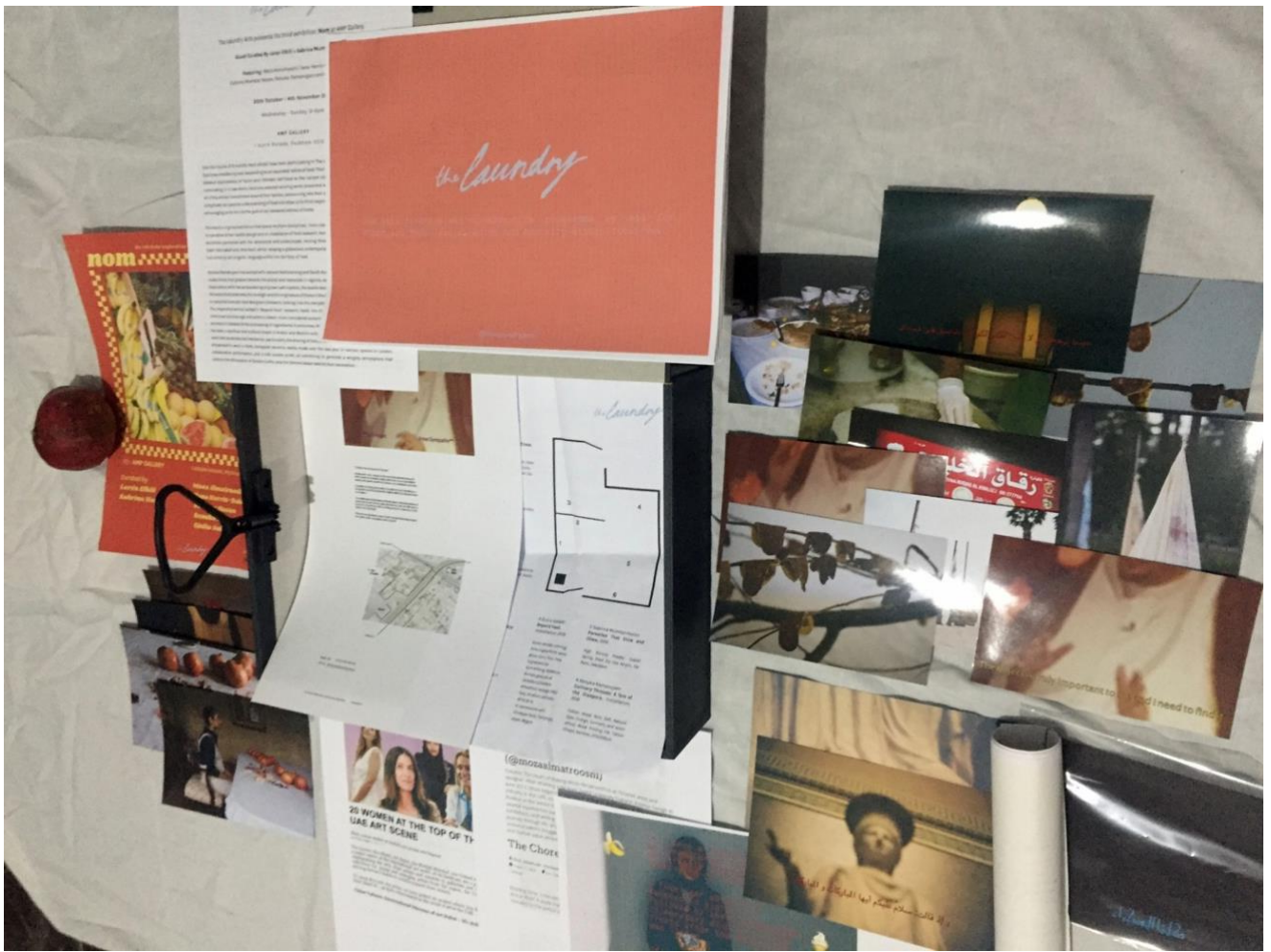


Figure 42



Figure 43



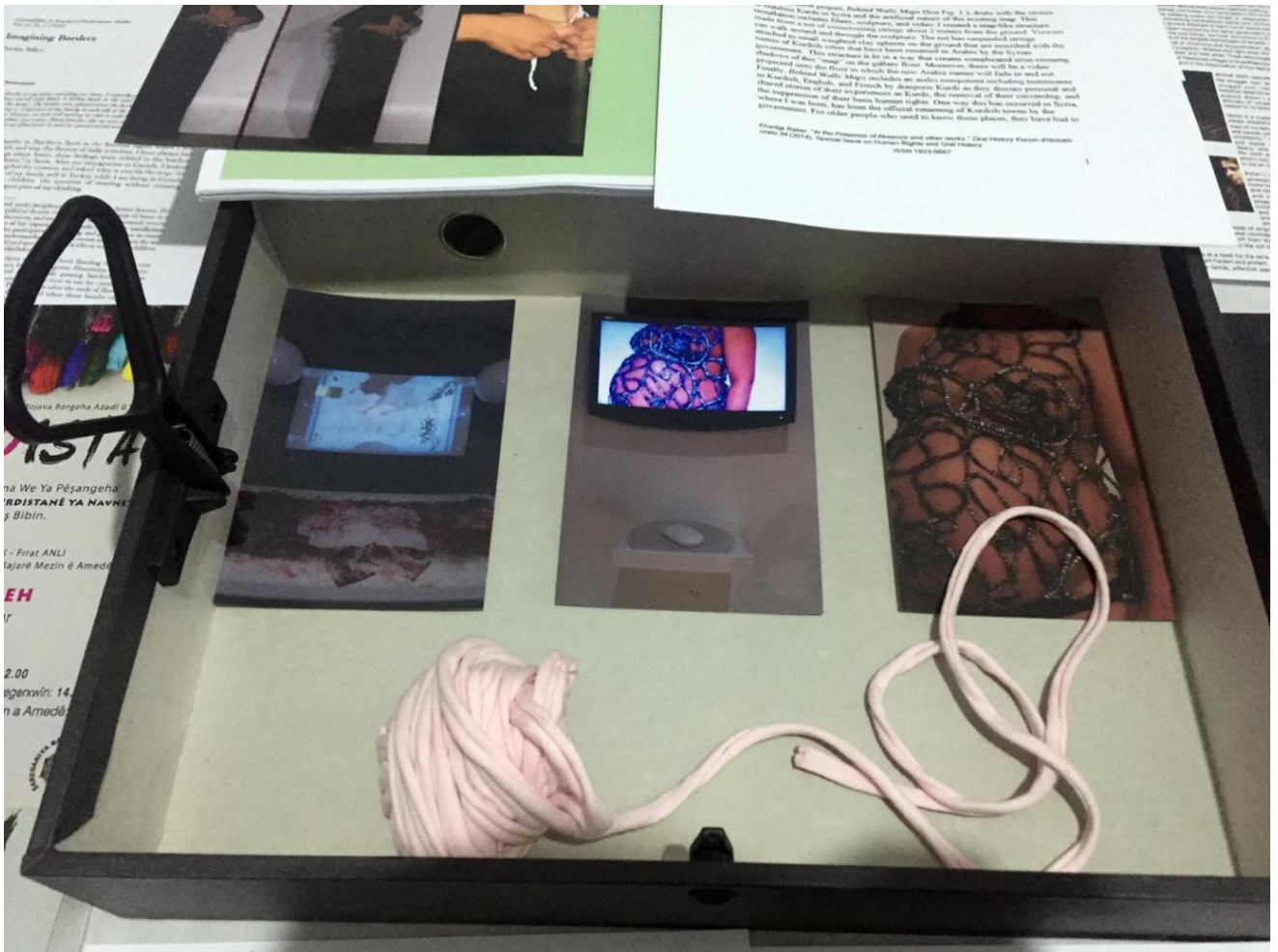


Figure 44



Figure 45





Figure 46

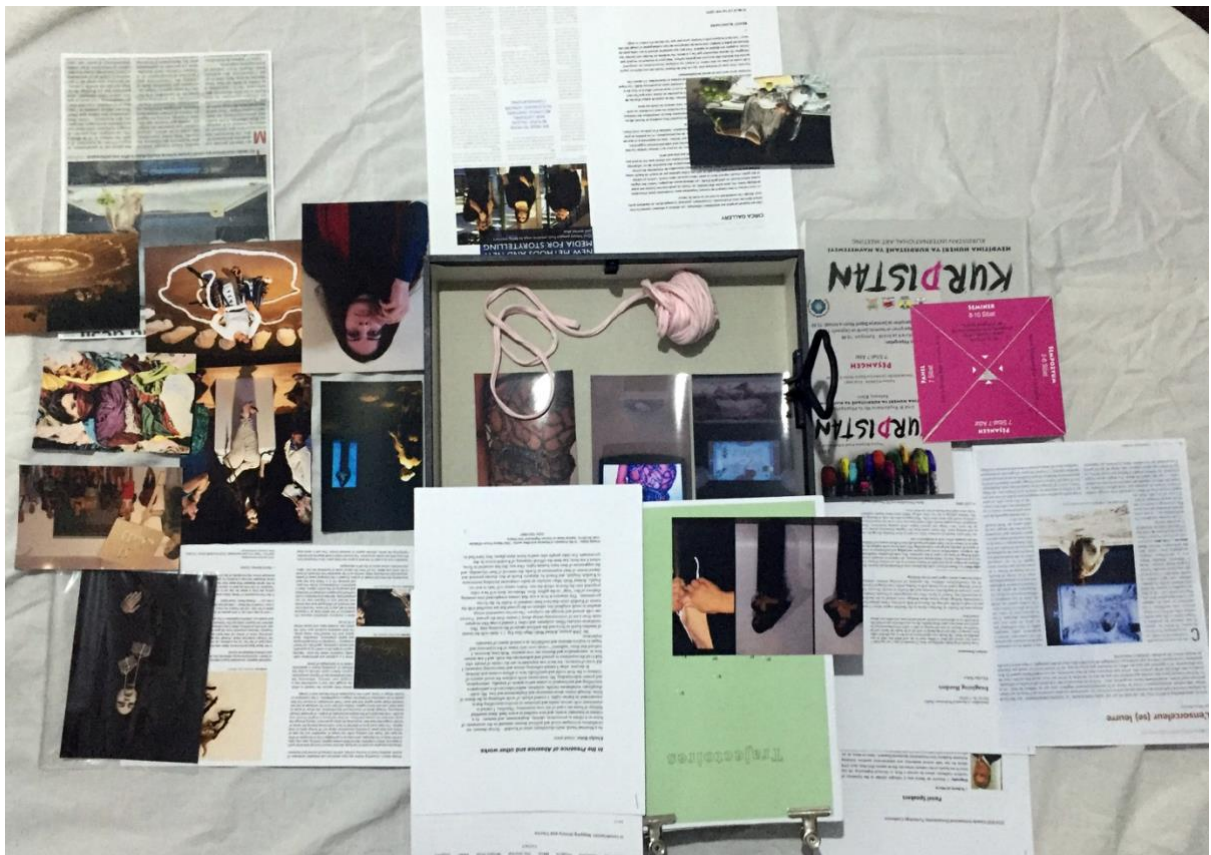


Figure 47





Figure 48



Figure 49



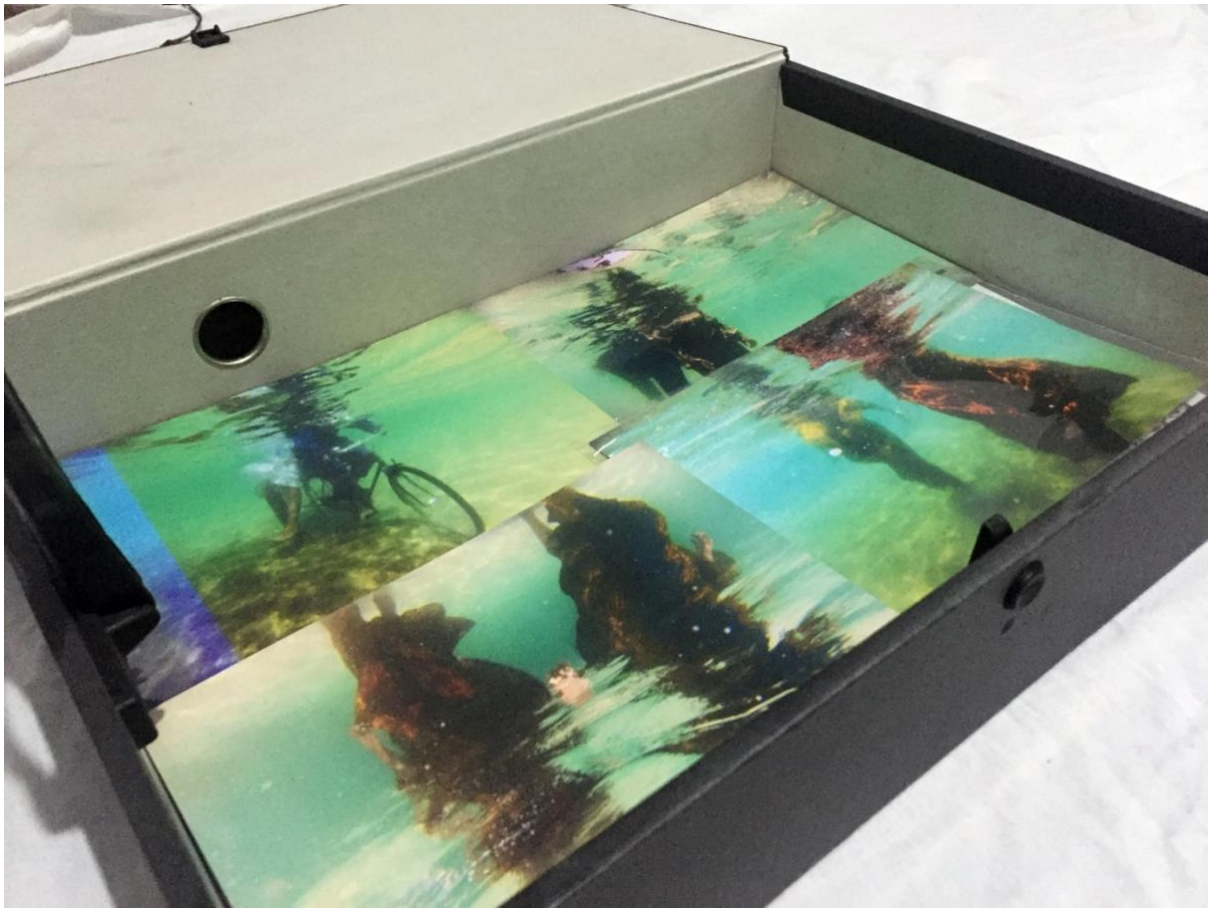


Figure 50



Figure 51



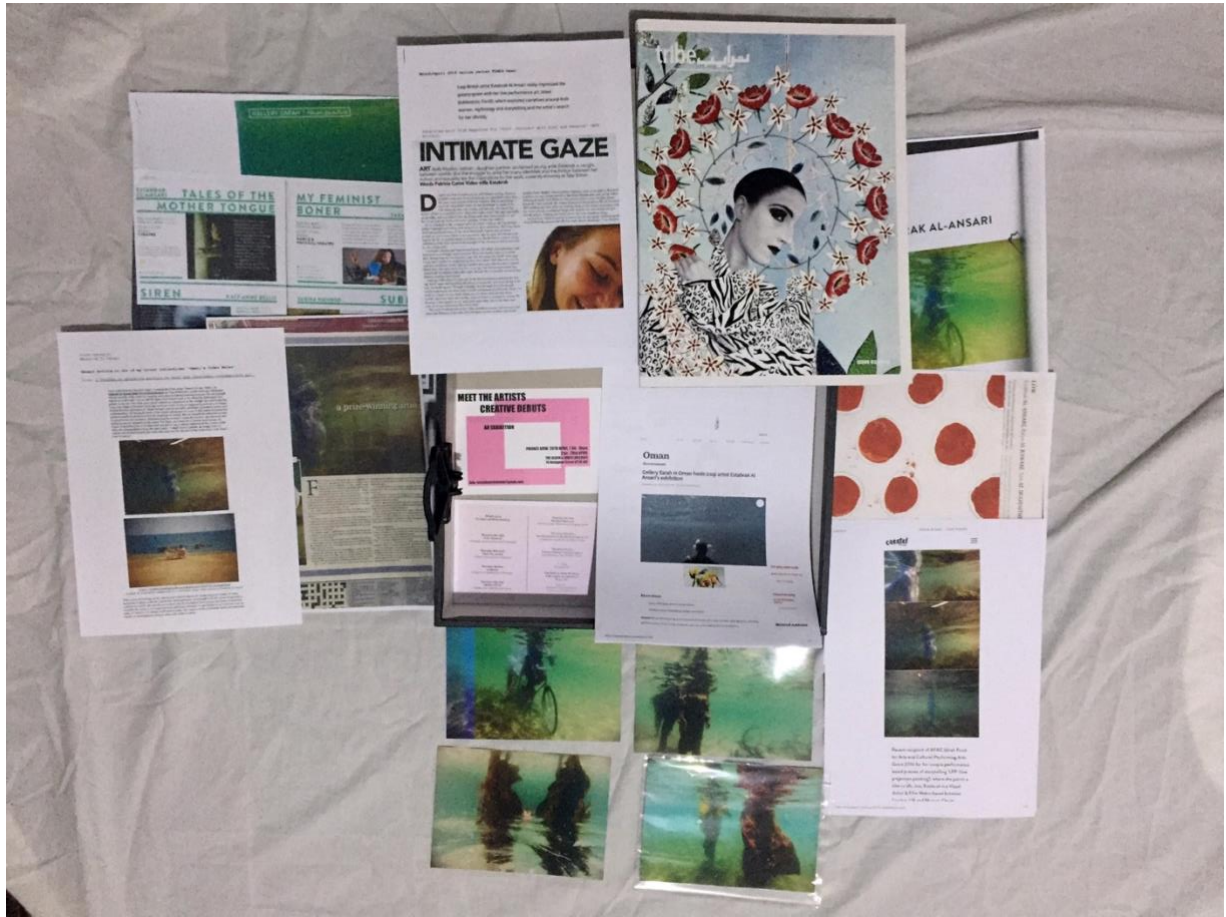


Figure 52

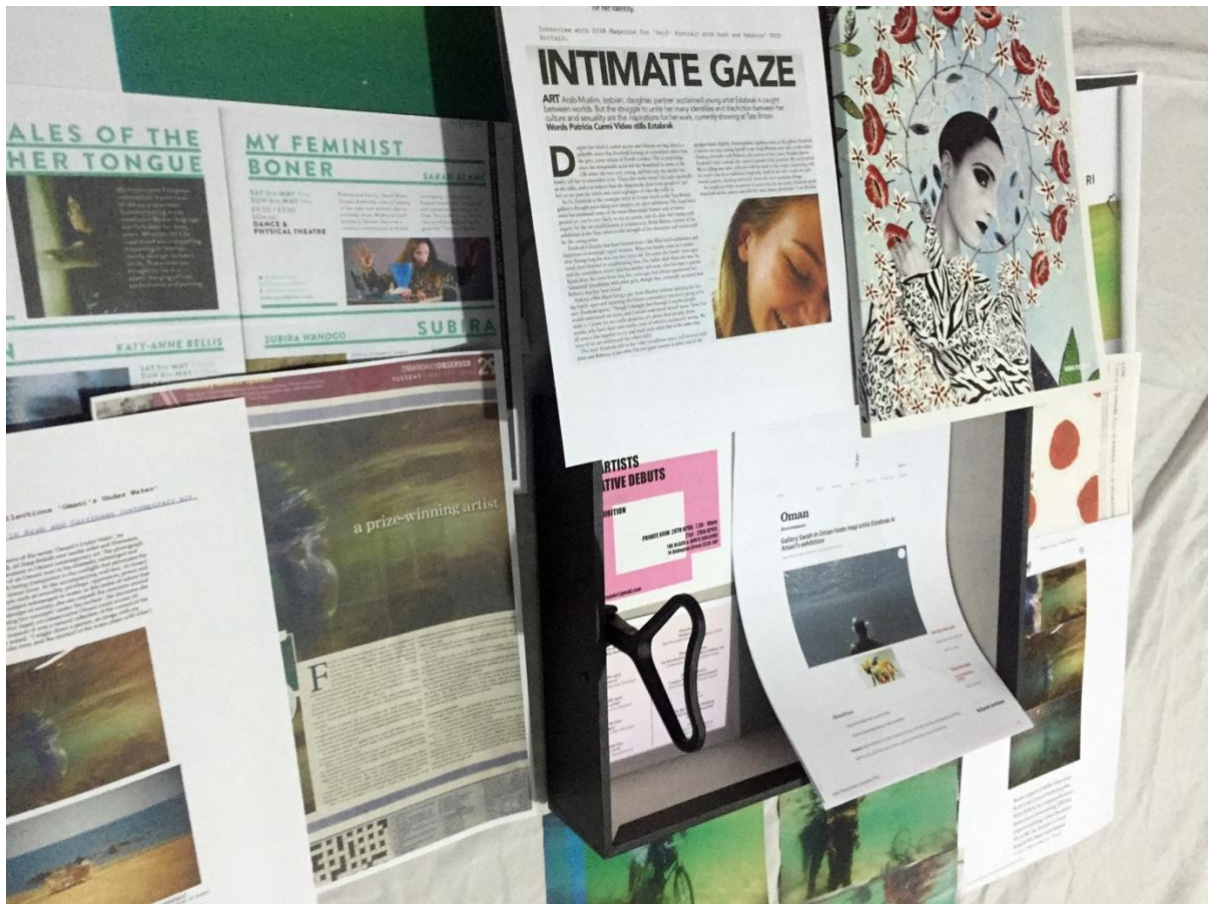


Figure 53



Figure 54



# THE WEST ASIAN AND NORTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S ART LIBRARY

[ENTER ARCHIVE](#)

[ABOUT](#) [SUBMIT](#) [CONTACT](#)

## WEST ASIA:

Abkhazia  
Armenia  
Artsakh  
Azerbaijan  
Bahrain  
Cyprus  
Georgia  
Iran  
Iraq  
Jordan  
Kurdistan  
Kuwait  
Lebanon  
Oman  
Palestine  
Qatar  
Saudi Arabia  
South Ossetia  
Syria  
UAE  
Yemen

## NORTH AFRICA:

Algeria  
Egypt  
Libya  
Mauritania  
Morocco  
South Sudan  
Sudan  
Tunisia  
Western Sahara

## IRAN:

**A**  
Shirin Abedinirad  
Golnar Adili  
Shahla Aghapour  
Dalar Alahverdi  
Shirin Aliabadi  
Samira Alikhanzadeh  
Morehshin Allahyari  
Akram Monfared Arya

**B**  
Hanieh Mohammad Bagher  
Nairy Baghramian

**D**  
Iran Darroudi  
Gohar Dashti

**E**  
Fatemeh Emdadian

**F**  
Golnaz Fathi  
Bita Fayyazi  
Parastou Forouhar  
Soraya French

**G**  
Mokarrameh Ghanbari  
Bita Ghezelayagh

**H**  
Nahid Hagigat  
Gita Hashemi  
Maryam Hashemi  
Taraneh Hemami  
Sooreh Hera  
Mansooreh Hosseini  
Shirazeh Houshiari

**J**  
Taraneh Javanbakht  
Pouran Jinchi

**K**  
Shokufeh Kavani  
Zhaleh Kazemi  
Sanam Khatibi

**M**  
Tala Madani  
Saba Masoumian  
Leyly Matine-Defary  
Sanaz Mazinani  
Mandana Moghaddam  
Neda Moridpour  
Noreen Motamed  
Nurieh Mozaffari

**N**  
Malekeh Nayiny  
Lilian Nejatpour  
Shirin Neshat  
Mina Nouri  
Guity Novin

**R**  
Sara Rahbar  
Pantea Rahmani  
Pari Ravan

**S**  
Behjat Sadr  
Hadieh Shafie  
Shirana Shahbazi  
Monir Shahroudy Famanfarmaian  
Sara Shamsavari

**T**  
Taravat Talepasand

**V**  
Parya Vatankhah

**Z**  
Maryam Zandi  
Niloofer Ziae

# Lilian Nejatpour

- Bio Publications
- Work Residency
- Articles Exhibitions
- Images Website
- Video Interviews



## WORK:

### PERFORMANCE

Foreign Sleep  
Choreophobia

### INSTALLATION

Hope Machine  
Dumbphone

### SCULPTURE

Untitled  
The Worship of a Woman  
Saffron Trouser  
Hologram  
Inertia: She's the fastest moving object  
LAT3XX (Various)  
Choreophobia (Work in Progress)

### COMPOSITION

Saint (the empty pose)  
Foreign Sleep

### FILM

The Feminist Library

## IMAGES:



"The Worship of a Woman"



"Inertia- She's the fastest moving object"



"Choreographia"



## PUBLICATIONS:

### 2018

D&AD: Making a mark in an ever-shifting landscape; The Future of Creativity  
Dazed: Art shows to leave the house for this month  
Skin Deep Magazine: Skin Deep meets Lilian Nejatpour  
HyperAllergic Magazine: Wrestling with Iran's Strict Gender Roles Through Dance  
Resonance 104.4FM: Six Pillars 'Choreophobia': Interview with Fari Bradley  
Art Licks Magazine: 'Issue 22: GORSEDD'

### 2017

Another Mag: A Poignant Short Film About Race, Religion & the Avant-Garde  
ID Magazine: Expressions of Feminism from The Arab & Muslim Diaspora  
Dazed Digital: POCC  
Gal-dem: POCC Interview

### 2016

NODE Forum: TADAEX 2016



## RESIDENCY:

November 2018-April 2019: Somerset House Studios

Dice Festival, Edinburgh Fringe, August 2018.

Threads Salon, Turner Contemporary, April 2018.

TADAEX 2016 & NODE 2017 Exchange Programme, Tehran | Frankfurt.

Shortlisted for the Zealous Graduate Art Prize 2016



## EXHIBITIONS:

### ONGOING

Choreophobia film in collaboration with Rebecca Salvadori.  
The Feminist Library film in collaboration with Lucy Sandersen.

### 2019

**March 2019**  
'Foreign Sleep' at Strange Love Festival 2019, The Brewery Tap, Folkestone.  
This is not a Funeral', Group show at Regents Place, London.

**February 2019**  
'One Night Only', Sculpture Show at Lewisham Art House, London.

'Transition to Foreign Sleep', performed with Q&A at Bath Spa University x Dance Spa Theatre Bristol, Bath.

### 2018

**September 2018**  
'Choreophobia' (Final Iteration) at Somerset House, Lancaster Rooms, London.

**August 2018**  
'Choreophobia' at Summerhall, Edinburgh Fringe Festival 2018, Dice Festival, Edinburgh.

'Choreophobia', Performance featuring Eva Escribá Gonzalez & Lauren Stewart. Panel Discussion with Loren Ehlil and Nora Almes (To Whom This May Concern), Chisenhale Studios, London.

### June 2018

'EAST: Eating At The Same Table', Group Show, Willesden Gallery, London.

### May 2018

'Cairotronica, Festival of Electronic and New Media Art', Palace of Arts, Cairo Opera House Complex, Cairo, Egypt.

### April 2018

'Threads Salon'- Turner Contemporary, Margate.

### March 2018

'We Are Here, British BME Women'- LSE Library, London.

'GORSEDD'- Tenderbooks, London.

### January 2018

'Feelings x CYAN'- CYAN Gallery, Oslo, Norway.

### 2017

#### October 2017

'Saint (The Empty Pose)'- Film Score in collaboration with Georgina Johnson, Studio 3, Photographers Gallery, London.

#### September 2017

'Deptford X Festival', Deptford, London.

#### August 2017

'Feminism(s) x The Arab and Muslim Diaspora', Protein Studios, London.

#### June 2017

'BME Women', Alev Lenz Studio, London.

### June 2017

'Designing Hope', NODE Festival, Naxoshalle, Frankfurt.

### April 2017

'SLAB', APT Gallery, Deptford, London.

### March 2017

'POCC', 47 Gallery, Camberwell, London.

### 2016-15

#### November 2016

'Has Moving Parts', Octavius Street, Deptford, London.

#### September 2016

'TADAEX 2016': Tehran Annual Digital Arts Festival Mchsen Gallery, Tehran, Iran.

#### June 2016

'Goldsmith's Fine Art & History of Art Undergraduate Degree Show' New Cross, London.

#### November 2015

'Volume X', Professor Stuart Hall Building, Goldsmiths College New Cross, London.

#### March 2015

'Disorientation', Mile End Ecology Pavilion, Mile End, London.



## **APPENDIX**

### **TRANSCRIBED AND EMAILED INTERVIEWS:**

#### **PART 1:**

*List of interview questions intended for institution:*

1. Glasgow Women's Library
2. The Women's Library at LSE
3. The Feminist Library
4. The Woman's Art Library
5. African and Asian Visual Artists Archive

*Interview answers from institution:*

1. Lily Evans-Hill from The Feminist Library
2. Althea Greenan from The Woman's Art Library

#### **PART 2:**

*Interview questions intended for artist:*

1. Moza Almathrooshi
2. Estabrak Al-Ansari
3. Khadija Baker

*Interview answers from artist:*

1. Moza Almathrooshi
2. Estabrak Al-Ansari
3. Khadija Baker

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS INTENDED FOR INSTITUTION:**

- Your name (anonymous welcome) and role at the organization:
- What are archives for?
- What is stored in your archive/library?
- Who gets into the archives and who does the archiving? Is there a correlation?
- What material is considered worthy of preserving and archiving?
- How does gender operate in your archives/library?
- Who is mostly visible within archives?
- Who is invisible? Who doesn't get archived?
- What are the current issues within the archiving world? Especially looking at gender and race?
- Is there a need for a reform of archiving and preservation?
- How has colonisation and definitions from colonised mentality affected how we engage with archiving?
- Some bodies are deemed the natural body belonging to a specific space, other bodies are considered invaders of that space, how do you feel this works within archiving?
- What are the ways of interrupting narratives of coloniality and orientalism in the archiving world?
- How do you make a body visible without denying them their agency within archiving?
- Is there a way for archives to become a space with accessibility and opportunity? How so?

**THE FEMINIST LIBRARY:**  
**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2019**  
**(received 3.41pm via email)**

**Your name (anonymous welcome) and role at the organization:**

Lily Evans-Hill, Collections Coordinator, The Feminist Library

**What are archives for?**

Preserving women's liberation/feminist histories, with material mostly from its founding context (c.1975, the U.K)

**What is stored in your archive/library?**

Periodicals, zines, pamphlets, posters, badges, ephemera, non fiction and fiction titles from the women's liberation movement to the present.

**Who gets into the archives and who does the archiving? Is there a correlation?**

We get a huge variety of visitors, from curious teens to academics. Our volunteers are from all different backgrounds and professions, so I would say they are somewhat similar to the visitors. Those specifically doing the archiving or collections work mostly have experience in libraries and sometimes degrees in both humanities and library/archive sciences, which is not uncommon in our visitors.

**What material is considered worthy of preserving and archiving?**

Absolutely everything has meaning and value. We archive most things we are sent, including the library's own activities.

**How does gender operate in your archives/library?**

Gender is obviously of greatest importance, but brings up questions of essentialist feminism vs. Trans-inclusive feminism.

□ **Who is mostly visible within archives?**

Our archive is quite local, so manages to host and represent the largely multicultural and diverse population of London. Due to our collection being exclusively donated collections, we do have gaps in many countries, so I would say mostly British and North American women are the most visible in the collection itself.

□ **Who is invisible? Who doesn't get archived?**

Our collection is quite dated, and I feel as if material on intersectional and LGBTQIA+ discourse isn't well represented in the collection because we haven't had much donated.

□ **What are the current issues within the archiving world? Especially looking at gender and race?**

There is a focus on Rapid collecting and collecting papers of under known people in these areas

□ **Is there a need for a reform of archiving and preservation?**

Generally, it is a very antiquated and regimented system that is restrictive. Yet DIY archives, such as the Feminist Library, use and subvert it's system to make it work for us. Many DIY librarians/archivists are taking up archival space and introducing counter narratives to archives, and by doing this complicate our relationship to empirical and renowned archives. A good example of this is the Fales Library, NYU.

□ **How has colonisation and definitions from colonised mentality affected how we engage with archiving?**

An archive asserts a narrative that is an abstract coloniser, this has been highlighted recently and notions of archiving have been rethought, hence the focus on rapid collection (which values an artefact in the significance of It's moment, rather than it's collected/temporal significance) and collecting more everyday items and 'common' people. History

- **What are the ways of interrupting narratives of coloniality and orientalism in the archiving world?**

Adding your own history to it. Archiving your own life to disprove and counter the colonial archive. Nazmia Jamal is a wonderful person to speak to about this.

- **Is there a way for archives to become a space with accessibility and opportunity? How so?**

Archives can be more accessible by showing people they have a space in it. DIY archiving, creating your own archive of your life or something that you love is a great way for people to think about the nature of collecting and how what narrative it can tell. Archivists also have a duty to show that archives are fun, accessible and generative spaces for everyone.

**ALTHEA GREENAN OF THE WOMAN'S ART LIBRARY:**

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019 between 1pm and 5pm**

**(what was resurrected from corrupted recordings from a face to face interview)**

- “I mean I suppose it's really interesting, the answers that you're getting from other archives - the representation seems so mono-cultural.”
- “Going back to when I started with the Women’s Art Library, I was a volunteer and one of the people who was being paid to do the job, somebody I aspired to be, was Rita Keegan. Of course Rita Keegan was at that point coordinating the Women Of Colour Index with our library in collaboration with Eddy Chambers who was doing what doesn't seem to have been done for the West Asian and North African artist - he was going out and actively documenting exhibitions and also gathering the catalogues and just making sure that there was one place to go to where you could find out more I suppose (ref: AAVAA)”
- “But I think what Rita was doing in addition to collecting material was being in contact with a lot of artists. Maybe including artists that she knew - she was working from the position of being a black American artist in the UK. And I'm sure she would describe it as finding your own community, so that the process of archiving was very much about building something up - was something that gave a context. You can describe it as just a job or you could be in this position and just say ‘well I just take whatever gets donated’ but if this work is part of you consolidating your own art practice then it takes on a completely different dimension and it is much more of the work of an activist. It is activism. I think the important thing that I do here that's not like other people with responsibilities for special collections that I've known in other institutions - what I'm interested in is the artists who are practicing and who were creating a kind of cultural knowledge. They're doing things that is very well thought through, it's innovative. It's the range of perspectives that students need to have.”

- “So again, it kind of boils down to being in direct contact with practitioners. That's a very good distinction to make - I didn't understand why I felt different. I mean I'm not. I started off political, but I ended up political too”
- “And I think with Rita, because there's so much interest now 20 years later in her work, at first she was a little surprised...not that surprised... but not wanting to take too much credit. It was the way the work needed to be done.”
- “Another interesting thing about the Woman's Art Library is that as a project it started off with slides. That was the accepted way of administering your own practice and documenting it. All the other random stuff that was going - it is very individual to the particular artists who see their marriage to art. You have to assume the future use of the archives - the future motivations or reasons for referencing this material could be anything and it might be that that person has a heap of material whereas another has nothing yet.”
- “I mean I suppose with groups like X Marks the Spot they followed Joe Spence. I mean it just grew out of all that identity-based work from the 80s and I just follow its lead.”
- “I feel a bit shy of these different kinds of collections that seem to be rooted in those politics that kind of almost predated the identity politics of the 80s. You need to have an openness to development. But for me people like X Marks the Spot - it wasn't just the fact that they were a black gay group and coming out of Lambeth. The approach to our time for me was completely innovative so that brought it on.”
- “Something else I wanted to say about this idea of the archive. This thing about the mechanics of display or the importance of exhibition which always feels in some way... you put it out ...you make this big effort ....and then you take it down. So, what happens then? It's not a book or it's not in the curriculum... I don't know how people ascertain the impact. I mean the Arts

Council goes by how many bodies they imagine visited the exhibition. But I think beyond our archives is this kind of identity collection. If you're showing this well, you're working with it. It becomes a different and an interesting collection that's come back to you."

- "It's a luxury to have a space here and maybe glass cases."
- "It was instead of ordinary photographic film slide. So, when you took your photograph of your artwork, or anything, you got that positive image. Then you sent off the film to be processed. You would get it back from the processor and the images become fixed. It's still on that piece of polyester and you could cut them up the little fragments out and then put it in a plastic shell."
- "There's a difference between the artist's photographs of their own work and the photographs produced for teaching which would be a librarian actually taking pictures of books"



## **INTERVIEW QUESTION INTENDED FOR ARTISTS:**

- What is your background?
- What is your practice?
- How do you work?
- Why do you do what you do?
- In regard to the art world, how do you make yourself visible?
- Do you feel your identity affects your place within institutional space?
- Who or what gets remembered?
- When marginalised people speak up they are met with distrust- why is this and who do you feel is heard or seen?
- What about your womanhood and specifically as a Middle Eastern woman (from the lgbt+ community)? Does this affect how you are seen within institutional space?
- Do you reject the orientalist role and stereotype of Middle Eastern women just by being an artist?

**MOZA ALMATHROOSHI**  
**Tuesday 16<sup>th</sup> April 2019 7pm**  
**(duration of Skype interview: 2 hours)**

(In order to avoid Western academic standards, recordings were transcribed word for word.)

**EVAR:**

My idea was to build my own archive and to build a directory online. I want to collect material from 3 artist and place them in archival boxes and possibly donate them to the Women's Art Library, so Althea Greenan has three more artists from this region. This interview will just be asking you about your practice, how you work, your opinion on how you feel as a woman from the Middle East in the Art world... then later more in depth about gender, identity and place within institutional spaces.

**MOZA:**

I think what you are embarking on is something really huge and so important. Something that might take us a long time, but I think what is good is having some sort of focus as well because for example saying like Middle East or North Africa, even within that there is so much! I don't really identify as Middle Eastern because the Gulf States operate differently than say Lebanon and Syria, so when I think about that I am always trying to be conscious about where I put myself but without falling into the trap of having to categorise myself because some people can afford to go by artist without that label of 'female' or 'Emirati' artist. In the beginning of my practice I used be really allergic to that. Being presented or introduced as female or Emirati artist – but that is how I move around in the world, so I don't really have the answer to that...

**EVAR:**

No, I completely understand because it is so simple for so many artists who don't have our accents and don't look like us and don't speak about the same things as us. They can just exist as an artist on its own without having to pour their entire identity into their artistry, whereas for so many others you have to almost prove yourself. ....and be like "I am Kurdish, I am an Artist, I can be both! Look I exist!". It's unheard of....

**MOZA:**

I am still in this really superfluous transformative period, when I was back home all I could react to were things that were going on back home. But when I came here it was like stepping out of a bubble and reacting to things in an outward way but at the same time finding space to fit in here – and within that there were questions of yes I am a brown Muslim woman but I don't consider myself marginalised such as people who can't go back home. Or people who always have to answer that they \*are\* from here. There are oppressive systems that exist back home, but we don't identify with things like colour - its tribal. It became a question of "how do I not take up too much space" whilst here and I always say I am temporary here. It's a privilege that I have a home to go back to.

**EVAR:**

But it's really interesting how you recognise that from the start. So many students especially integrate so well into British ways of living, that it's like because they automatically fit into non-white communities here, they soak in everything that comes with that community including the oppressive ways that are felt and the unjust systems against them.

**MOZA:**

Yeah exactly! So for me all these things I have to think about when I answer what my practice is about... there is always this reaction but before it was always a more timid reaction towards a type of change or loss, type of impermanence, and then I used to say things like "my work is not political". But when I came here, I realised that I was saying my work is not political out of fear, and I really believed it. I have an instillation which is literally flags and I showed this work and would say "I am not a political person" and someone would say "but your work is a bunch of flags!" (laughs). It really hit me that I was choosing certain words and ways of thinking out of fear so I started to explore that: what does it mean to move around in a system that is filled with propaganda and brainwashing that you start to believe your own lies? My work then transformed in a way where I think how can I express myself in a place that doesn't have freedom of speech but still be able to express myself and still use the idea of censorship and silence in interesting ways that can get my message across but at the same time not put me in danger. So the most recent work is a film that I done, it started as a fable that I wrote, it was very specific to an audience back home, because it had these phrases that are used in propaganda material (so shown here in UK it wouldn't make as much sense).

In this film, what was interesting was the fable of magical realism, which is always what fables do: "the moral of the story..." and it was based on research that I had done in Sharjah (UAE). The story was a bee that goes into a desert, and she finds a coin. With the help of other animals, she goes to put this coin back to this imaginary queen. It is based on research where in Sharjah they actually found and excavated a settlement that existed between the iron age and the pre-Islamic period. They found this coin that had Aramaic inscription that read "long live the queen". So, they have some reason to believe that not only one queen ruled the settlement but that there was a queendom basically, it was a matriarchy. When I went back to do more research, I couldn't find the coin and the guides in the archaeological center weren't trained to know this information, so they just know about the settlement, they just know about some kind of rulership, the gender was not important. Through a back and forth with the center I was able to get a response from them and they said, "no we do have the coin!" ... and we do have this theory, but it remains a theory and my

argument is that anything that has been excavated is a theory. We cannot believe those things 100 % but we also cannot brush them to the side. You choose to say this theory was most probable than others but why is it that the gender is suddenly not important when it is a woman? This inspired the performance and the film. And this is where I am at right now; trying out more things such as food and storytelling and things like silence versus sound, to pick at those tension points, not only history but present time and what is believed.

### **EVAR:**

Why do you feel, especially in regard to gender, that there are bodies that are chosen to be remembered, and others chosen to be forgotten?

### **MOZA:**

This is what I'm trying to work out right now- the idea that we (and I say we as in Emiratis) have been on this wave of "women empowerment" – we closed the wage gap last year for example and a lot of people were like "oh we didn't even know there was one" but obviously there was. There's no investigation into these things, you're constantly living in a state where you feel like everything is being provided to you and everything is being given a fair chance and then we announce these things to appease to a global audience that we have women empowerment but then for example the youth minister- who is probably 25 years old –she just had a child and then went on to give a speech or be part of a conference or something – basically got back to work – and the response to this was for example the president of Dubai came forward and said: "this is an example of a hard working woman"... it's likening us to men – it's like how much can we be like men? Yes, we want equality but at the same time – a man cannot have a child and so there needs to be a celebration of the woman's body's recovery and motherhood and all those things. These types of practices then diminish everyone to push forward decisions of for example maternity leave options. I see these things as flaws that exist because we have such a weak

base historically of when we talk about polytheism in Arabia: how people used to worship more than one deities for example but we would know more about the deities that were male, it just becomes too much to bare to talk about the deity's that were female or even hermaphroditic. Even going through the very little resources that were not destroyed with the rise of Islam, you find much more information about the male figures. The sun was worshipped as a goddess but in Sharjah (Archeology Centre) the sun was described as a god that people used to worship... it's like you can't bring yourself to admit that it is a historical fact that women had power. These are the things I'm trying to peel off and dissect and see how they are tied to the present day and how they are packaged. The celebration of women empowerment is really just a push for women to be more like men, even socially when you want to say how strong a woman is you say things like "you are like ten men" and socially we would really take that as a compliment! I'm trying to complicate these notions basically.

#### **EVAR:**

Do you feel that when women speak up, they are not heard or when women go against these theories, that they are met with distrust? As if because she is a woman it means it is mythical or untrue?

#### **MOZA:**

These things are all like fun and games until it starts to get implicated in our livelihood and safety, it's really dangerous regardless. We don't know the situation with this minister, but she could have had such a difficult and precarious birth, to come out like that it's just... it's like...what's her name...Kate Middleton! It's like having to come out constantly after having a baby but realistically all these things don't happen in the first few days of giving birth! Women will be leaking and bleeding and tearing. It is so harmful. It becomes like "oh she can do it so I could do it too" – but you don't even have that strength with just having the flu! Let alone after giving

birth. Even when I talk to you it seems like a very universal thing but then me going through this type of research and arriving at these points took so much out of me here because of where I am at the Slade. Somehow things become much more muddy if I try to bring up these points at the Slade because there is this pre-conceived notion that because I come from the Middle East we must be oppressed so anything that is a bit more, anything that feeds into that narrative gets really exaggerated and it doesn't become about the thing itself it becomes about the context.

**EVAR:**

What is the Slade like?

**MOZA:**

Mostly white. Very small. It's not like RCA where RCA has a lot of people. For example, their sculpture department has 150 people, so that's all of the Master's programme students at the Slade. And it is international but even with it being international, its mostly white and privileged people. No matter where they are from. It becomes this experience of having to unpack my culture and where I come from and everything becomes a question of "is this traditional to you back home" and I'm like that's not the point?! It pushed me to think of how I get to communicate. I started to think about why I am even speaking in English in my work. Whereas that question would not have been raised too readily back home because I speak English back home because we are such a diverse country. But here it becomes the type of English that's very rational, it doesn't have room for superstition and magic and emotion – English for me back home is not divorced from the way I speak Arabic – it still has this kind of tone, but here it is like you have to police the way you are thinking, through speech. And that's what I found really difficult and alienating and it presented a challenge to me which is why I thought, well food is something that can break barriers. Performing with food can give so much tension but also can provide so much clarity. Although I have worked with food before I feel like it really came into fruition here in the UK, it just fell into place, also the use of translation; so I write

short stories - I mean I've written just a couple and it's not really published but I've been circulating them in different ways - and I started translating one of them through google translate; and this idea that Google translate is this really disrespectful, horrible tool to translate any language and the power that Google has to be in our lives the way it is and the compromise of security that it brings with it but the need that we have for it. So, this idea of being translatable. And what does that mean and how everything you do can be misconstrued as well. I became really interested in the idea of translation, not in the sense of like language to language but how can poetics be translated and gestures and silence. Silence for me is becoming a bigger thing for example expressing something through speech but filling that silence with sound or with action that is just as loud.

**EVAR:**

So, what about your identity – as someone who feels temporary and still being at a space such as the Slade, do you feel visible?

**MOZA:**

At first, I didn't feel visible, but also, I had a lot of rules...

**EVAR:**

Rules that you had given yourself?

**MOZA:**



Yeah! For example, I couldn't assimilate so quickly. So out of respect my peers stopped inviting me to things. Because I just felt awkward in those situations. And at first, I placed a lot of blame on them for that but then I realised it is because I really was just taking time to feel like it's okay. So now, I wouldn't say that I feel invisible but...I mean...it became this really funny thing where someone... one of my course mates said she observes how people often seek validation from tutors and I thought "What a horrible thing that you're doing...", it just makes everyone feel weird...but then I feel like the thing about validation is sometimes it becomes really important when you're in a place where you are constantly questioning whether you are there based on quota or merit. To have one of my tutors come up to me and say "I always remember your portfolio from when you applied" ... to me it removed all those doubts in my mind – and that's really important. But also, it makes me think about like "why do I need the validation?" – I should've always felt so secure. But these systems that are constantly trying to prove something by having diversity... they constantly make you question your worth.

**EVAR:**

I completely understand what you mean. For me it was always a battle of trying to get in the teacher's good books so that even if they don't like my work, I will get a good grade. Like the thought myself, as a brown girl in an all-white class, and failing...?? That just couldn't happen.

**MOZA:**

Exactly! Last year, when all of this was happening in school, it was really important for me to have that group of Arab Artists who were studying here as well. We turned to each other and even though we didn't really look at each other's work to critique them, we did a lot of things together and I think that community aspect is really important. It is also really important in my work, I always have to talk to someone about my work, I can't just make work out of a vacuum.

**EVAR:**

You mentioned how you didn't feel safe in this white space and especially around your peers, but what about as an institutional place...the way the Slade works, do you feel it's just a typical white space or does it act as some sort of progression towards decolonising?

**MOZA:**

I don't know what my expectations were coming into this. The Slade is divided so you either do an MA or an MFA and if you do an MA it is much more theoretical, and an MFA is more practical so you feel like you're almost at this really long residency, where you just have to check in from time to time and do crits and stuff like that. I think my encounter with people's confusion at first was lots of translation but also my determination to not waste my time having to explain myself. But then I realised it is a much more bigger problem: when people who are British but are not white were saying the same things as I am, that's when I began to see that it is this systematic thing where if you are not middle class white then you are going to have to do so much work whether you are from somewhere they don't understand completely or you're British but you just don't fit into that mould. I became really disappointed.

Zeinab from Muslim Sisterhood wrote a letter to the director of the school and titled it "Why Are all My Teachers White". This letter basically prompted the school to create an equality, diversity and inclusivity board, a committee and I was surprised that there wasn't one to begin with. They are doing work on widening participation and tackling issues that are beyond race and class such as ability and queerness. But it is this really slow and painful thing - I was put on the board as part of the committee. I get to see what moves and what doesn't. Sometimes things that should be so quick

and easy to make are so difficult for them for example hiring more people of colour! I don't believe it is as complicated as they make it sound. It all seems like bullshit to me. I was able to see these things outside of my educational experience in the school and how things work. In the first year of being part of the committee I remember having very little to say because I didn't know how things worked – and that's another thing - I don't think I should've been on that committee, I think someone who knows how things should've been would've made much more of an impact whereas I basically took up space for a year just learning how things work just to come back the next year and try to have much more of a voice.

**EVAR:**

Why do you think you was put on that board?

**MOZA:**

Because our international student rep came up to me for very obvious reasons. She said she felt like I should be put on the board and I said they could put my name and I'll see what it's about. I thought she was going to get more names, but she literally just put my name and I got sucked into it basically. I was really aware of why I was there. But I couldn't think of how to go about it and the idea of taking up space was this thing that I need to work through because all these things are new to my vocabulary. We have one more meeting and that will be my last as I am graduating, but they asked me to provide them with a reading list – a more diverse reading list and I was thinking well I'm an MFA student I'm not an MA student and I don't have access to reading lists. I would have to go collect them from my friends.... It's just this labor I have to partake in, but that they should already be equipped with these things! I can't believe that they wouldn't have names of essayists or authors or writers or theorists or artists that they haven't included...why is this taking so long and why has it become the responsibility of a student? And a student just by who they are and not by the work they do. What if my work is really problematic? Not



every person of colour is a saint or believes the same thing as their community does. It has been really challenging to move around.

**EVAR:**

How is it different in the Emirates? And also, what are the differences in terms of...here in the UK you are considered a brown girl but back home that concept wouldn't even exist, you are just Moza.

**MOZA:**

That's the thing when you step away from your background. You get to see all the flaws that were happening. I went to a public university back home, that had an arts college. I did the basic art history, art foundation...and I didn't go straight from my BA to my MFA, I took some time to work and I did an academic fellowship before coming here and I realised we are just as Eurocentric back home. All this stuff I had to learn I learnt outside of university. It is the typical narrative of a western canon art history that starts with the Paleolithic age until where we are today. That is a huge problem, and this is why I want to go back to teach... but then I realised that because I've done my degree in Europe (back home they are basically running on an American curriculum) I might not even be qualified to teach. It's a new rule and the people we have in power back home are Emirati, but I think we have this inferiority complex because we weren't colonised, but we did have imperialism from the British and before that a very long time ago the Portuguese and the Dutch. But much more recently in our history it was the British. So, we place a lot of trust in the European man. And they hold a lot of positions in culture and arts, oil and architecture.

For me realising the extent of our inferiority complex to them, it is not something that hits you in the face there, it's disguised in so many things there and then it permeated in education. The reason I am here is because we don't have a post-

graduate programme for arts. But then they have a say on who gets to teach and whether an MA or MFA from Europe is at a qualified level – things like this are really infuriating because I think...who made these rules and who gave you this information? A lot of us came here on scholarships so why did you send us here? If it is not us, then who is it going to be? Are you just going to perpetuate the same narrative and same problems? Which is really funny because it's not supposed to happen there! You wouldn't think that it happens that way there, but it does!

**EVAR:**

What about the art world there? Is it the same? Does it perpetuate the same Eurocentric norms, values and hierarchies?

**MOZA:**

Well, I had to make a decision a few years ago, to never be part of an all Emirati show because what that does is it becomes this zoo, like “oh look! The Emiratis can make work!” and it becomes about who we are and not what our work is actually saying. I was part of one show that was all Emirati, but I had this wishful thinking that it would be different. Each emerging artist was paired with an established artist to respond to their work. There was a group of five very prolific artists from the 70s back home who made a lot of amazing work but then there was this gap between their generation and our generation. So, the exhibition was about responding to their work which to me was amazing. It succeeded and failed in a lot of ways, but I carry this shame for agreeing to be in it because I'm aware that it can also come across as this show of “Look we do have culture”. Then you see where budgets go, who gets paid the most, and us getting told to provide work for free as this duty that we should have to the country... so we should exhibit our work abroad for example, there was this show that toured around different UAE embassies in a few countries...I wasn't part of it but it was a show that people took part in for free – but no one would ever

approach a Western person and ask if they could exhibit this for free, but for us it's like this arm-twisty thing.

Also, they have introduced compulsory military that's mandatory for men because we're in a war in Yemen with Saudi Arabia. My husband went and it's a case of if you don't go you get sent to jail. A lot of people died in Yemen. Our population is less than 1 million and for us to have for example fifty men die in an explosion, that's already half the population. A lot of monuments went up for martyrs and the people who design these monuments and who build them are all Westerners. We die and Westerners basically benefit from it. But it's not seen as this problem that we can't even be trusted to make work. It's a real struggle. This is why it's increasingly important for me to really just go back home.

**EVAR:**

So, then I guess going back to this idea of visibility, how do you make yourself visible in the art world in the Emirates where you are actually from?

**MOZA:**

What has started to happen which is amazing is, because we got pushed out of institutions back home as well, because we don't follow their agendas, people started to carve out their own spaces. I think more of us are doing that, to create our own space. Someone literally got a house and turned it into a shared studio space in Abu Dhabi called Bait 15 - the person who started it also teaches. Her name is Afra Al Dhaheri. We were part of the same fellowship, but she was in the year before me.

So, there's Bait 15, there's also Banat Collective. It's this amazing thing of like people just you know going on their own initiative and doing something. Once that happens, institutions want to get a piece of that cake. But we all have homes, we can

all congregate in our own spaces and we don't need them in the end. At the same time, we can't deny that these established spaces no matter how problematic can give us a type of visibility that we would otherwise have to work extra hard to achieve. It's getting to this point where people are just building their own table instead of trying to get a seat at that table over there that you know is really crowded at this point and doesn't want us there yet anyways.

**EVAR:**

It's true, this idea of building your own community. It happens here in Britain too, every year there's a new platform emerging because there's another voice that has not been heard and that platform gives it that space where they just feel safe and they can create, and they don't need approval.

**MOZA:**

Yeah! And sometimes these lines get blurred. Another thing that happens here is the Western gaze that we apply on ourselves. We look at our communities with a Western gaze and I find it really dangerous. Your measure of success becomes...how much you can perpetuate their gaze into your work because you can't separate the two anymore. Unfortunately, I've seen that a lot, coming out here it comes at a price and sometimes these traps can be easy to fall into. I'm hopeful that with more community spaces that people can gain self-awareness. We are all prone to making mistakes.

**EVAR:**

In terms of gender do you feel that being an artist, building community and going against the unjustness, does that reject your role as a woman? Or do you feel that it's ingrained in your womanhood?



**MOZA:**

I feel like whatever I do I bring my own embodied experience, but I don't think I can separate my embodied experience from being a female. I think I rejected that before because I felt like it's just how I move in the world but also, I really can't separate it anymore. We don't want to fall into this trap of this Orientalist gaze that the West has of the East, at the same time there is still so much shit that women have to face that an internal problem that the West shouldn't play a role in. Specifically, for back home, me going to art school is like this thing of like "oh it's OK. She's a woman and she can go into the arts". I think this is where people misunderstand feminism where if we were to implement feminism more assertively then men going into art wouldn't be such a problem. The idea of like what role art plays back home, it is very archaic but it's not the same as here for example and it's not looked at as this academic thing, the role that art plays back home is very old fashioned in terms of thinking and it's looked at more as a hobby. Women are looked at as people who can afford to be hobbyists and artists. But at the same time, it comes with this really condescending patronizing belittling tone - you feel like your existence is just very frivolous to a lot of people. So, it's like yes you can get into it with this freedom but also you know it comes at a price. It's like it's another challenge of giving art this currency where it's not just this thing that's an investment or a product, it's something that invites new ways of thinking and it can be part of people's lives.

**EVAR:**

How do you feel it could become accessible?

**MOZA:**

First of all, education first and foremost. Some art centers back home are doing really well in that aspect of like involving a lot of schools and in their workshops and educational programs and outreach. For majority of my life I went to an American curriculum school and art was 'arts and crafts' and then for two years my parents

moved us to British curriculum school just for those two years. And art was Art history and learning about different artists and trying to draw like those artists. And it was something! But when people graduate, only few of them become practicing artists that can actually take their practice forward. Then there is no post graduate program. And not everyone can travel and can get a scholarship and can get off this mountain of hurdles and further themselves educationally. Those of us that got these opportunities and were able to get out and we're able to get access to things that other people couldn't, go back and change things. I don't see how things can happen and if we don't do that.

**EVAR:**

Thank you so much! It has been really insightful. Just hearing about yourself as an international student and your position here in the UK, and then how it is back home as well - the similarities, the differences between these two worlds – not worlds as in like the regions but the art world and art schools. I feel like there are many similarities systemically, these different annoyances. Sometimes I feel like I lose hope but it's nice to hear when artists speak about their work and how they engage with these different unjust ways, how they aim to tackle it, not necessarily “I'm going to save the whole world” but their work... it brings about conversations that are important and need to be heard. I guess that's what archiving is all about - it's making sure that this work and these conversations are heard and seen. Even if someone doesn't turn into like the most established artist, their presence in the art community holds equally as much gravity. It can bring about so much change socially, politically and culturally... towards betterment.

**ESTABRAK AL ANSARI**

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2019**

**(questions sent via WhatsApp, answers via recording)**

1. Professionally I am kind of educated in the arts kind of not, I say that because I had a one-year foundation at Central Saint Martins and then after that I continued doing my own thing. I then ended up being offered an MA in Film and Media production so I got trained in editing and directing mainly, and used that as a platform to help my story, so I am a mildly trained visual artists by institutions and mainly trained through life and experience basically. Central Saint Martins was a nice introduction into a little bit of the industry to see what the people were about, and also into practise. After that I ended up just working solo. I was involved in a major project at the time called “Imaged Art After” which ended up offering me an incredible opportunity to create a two-channel video installation – the first of its kind in regard to its context and subject matter – called “Self-portrait with Aunt and Rebecca”. That ended up showing at Tate Britain for three months and that project changed my life on multiple levels: it was brutally honest; it was so hard, and it was candid.

What that did is that project opened up a branch to me that I didn't have access to before and it invited me through it to part take in the Masters in Film and Media production and Sheffield Hallam University which I took so I've gone from having a foundation to having an MA without studying a BA in Art and Design. There's pros and cons to this. Entering the film making world really did open up doors to basically telling stories in visual ways and during the period of doing the MA, having come from Central Saint Martins before and being part of some small and large projects at a time, I realised one of the things that I really wanted to achieve was to help bridge a gap between things like cinema and the arts because everybody would love to go to the cinema – if people had access to watching a film they would do it, there's a lot of property in the world that doesn't allow that kind of experience. If people could they would love to and would enjoy the

cinema, but not everyone enjoys the arts, and that's because it's not as inclusive – and I've known since doing that MA...and actually helping create my project called Live Projection Painting.... I've known that that is really what I want to do to help bridge that gap. To really dig deeper in conversations and to highlight hidden stories that don't usually see the light of day.

2. So I would say I am a socially engaged multi-disciplinary artist with interdisciplinary practice. Recently I've started to see by looking back at my work how much of these attempts at having conversations are really self-portraits of my own dialogues that I've needed to express or be a part of or understand further. I don't see myself too similar to other people and really genuinely I use art to open up dialogue through that. I love to unite stories of everyday people and unite all of us. I like the concept of unity than division. I know we are all different and there is no doubt about that – culturally, historically, even men and women are very different – I think it's foolish to think otherwise. However, I think there is far more that unifies us and connects us than divides us and I believe that a lot of my work has to do with this concept, to do with the need to create safe spaces or aesthetically inviting and engaging work that allow the viewer to be involved in the conversation rather than pointing fingers and in way refusing dialogue. Because sometimes when you're accusing ...often a lot of heavy socially politically work is...what it does is it invites radicals and it doesn't invite many others, and I've learnt that being who I am in my whole body of fat, of lesbian, of Arab, of hairy, of woman, I know that struggle. So, I think my practice has a lot to do with being an invitation for dialogue. Why I do what I do is simple. I understand as someone who has continuously been othered and continuously not had a platform to speak about things that I have wanted and need to speak about over the years whether it is about growing up Muslim and in a way without an identity, to then be British, to be gay, to not associate with Islam anymore....there are so many voices that are left unheard and I have also felt that my voice has been one of them. So, the commitment I made in the arts is to myself and to the environment in the world that I want to be in and see which is more



of a platform to hear hidden stories and the ignored truths and realities -  
And also as a bridge between myself and other connections into this world  
and into multiple lives and experiences.

3. I work on multiple levels, but I'll give you an example of the underwater work I was working on for three years. I love to engage with people, it comes from personal experiences or relationships first hand that have been built, and through that the doors to conversations open – so it's very much improvisation and I am focusing heavily on the practice of listening. I think for far too long I've tried to have a conversation where in actual fact we are speaking and wishing to be heard rather than engaging in a dialogue and my work has really especially through the experience of living in Oman, moved away from something that is more accusatory to something more expressive and inviting, to engage in critical conversations that have space for experience and space for understanding. I think many of us think we listen when in actual fact we don't and this project, my underwater project in particular has really allowed for a space of listening to be experienced and we see how that will continue.
  
4. That's an interesting question because I personally go through the emotion of wanting to be visible and then wanting not to be. The part of wanting to be visible is because I know it's so vital and so important. If we want to see a difference in the kind of stories, her stories, histories that we read and see on TV and understand the conversation, we need to be more visible, we need to make these stories, our stories, more accessible. So, for that reason I want to be visible. How I make myself visible is through connection, is through social media, through conversation, is through application - I constantly apply to opportunities. I'm now getting into and involved in more residencies because I really believe that it is a beautiful experience of cultural exchange. The difficulty with a lot of residencies I've seen is that there's still that division between rich and poor. So really a lot of residences offer free spaces or unpaid spaces for you to come and work in but many of us aren't able because we just cannot afford to go and not

be paid for our time. There is still a problematic approach to residencies. But there's also residency where you'll find they do pay. I think residencies are definitely a way forward. And I think they can really help alter a state of change for existence. I know that sounds a lot but really if we think about it when you're able to have cultural exchanges, honest cultural exchanges with people in safe spaces, then it is one of the most enriching and beautiful things when we have accessibility.

5. Yes. I personally don't think that I belong in an institution. I am a large bodied, lesbian, Arab, Muslim upbringing, former refugee woman, all of which when you think of academia and when you think of art institutions my body and what it represents and who I represent... I'm not the first point of call that most people would think of when you think of the word academia or institution. I feel like sometimes it can be a gift to be different because there's that inquisitive space of inquiry into you but then there's a much larger reality which is institutionally, unless you know your shit, and that shit is in accordance to mainly Western white knowledge, dynamics and education then you're not necessarily welcome in these institutions. For myself, the things that influenced me the most, the things that I engage with the most is everyday people and everyday stories and oral histories and reality is that these are not necessarily recorded in books... maybe on occasion they could be in regards to the statistics of numbers of the people I'm talking about... but in regards to really engaging with the realities of these people, I don't think that is a reality of the institutions.
  
6. I told you a story about one of my projects "Tales of The Mother Tongue" which looks at Amazigh Warriors, female warriors of Amazigh past who cannot be found in any history books or mythological books but are only found in oral histories and through myths told through oral histories. Basically, amongst communities. Now the thing that I found out about that which is so fascinating, which is also something I mentioned to you but I'm just adding this as a reminder ... maybe you want to quote me on it or put it in your research. In regard to who gets remembered is that none of Amazigh culture and this heritage in particular is archived in a way that

something of the same time, like the ancient Greeks and Romans... that they've been in existence at the same time as a Amazigh culture and heritage. It doesn't get archived the same. Ask anyone what Amazigh is and I would probably guarantee you 85 percent of people don't know what it is. If you say Berber maybe they'll understand because once the Europeans came and the Arabs came, they became more known as barbarians. That's why they changed came. But that culture, the Amazigh culture is not necessarily archived, definitely not the female warriors I'm talking about, and definitely the queens are not. Their dress, their clothes, their way of being, everything, is not necessarily archived, in the way that is more accessible in the way that Roman history and Greek history and mythologies is archived and remembered... books written about the history and things like that.

But yet in the villages and in Morocco the culture is alive and well. They're still eating the same things, they're still in the same fabrics and materials and still have accessibility to tattoos. Whereas if you're looking at ancient Roman or Greek history, we know what they wore we know what they ate. We know the kind of lifestyle that they had because it's all archived but it no longer exists. You know any one person that still lives like an ancient Greek because I don't and that's what I find fascinating. So, the people that are remembered institutionally are not people that still exist. They are myths. They are a dream. They are something worth archiving.

Immortalized through words, paper, images. They're the people that get remembered because they're worth it. But other people – “barbarians” - they're not worth it. But yet they exist. And so, it's just looking at value systems, what we value more and institutionally they value whiteness. They value power. They value things that will elevate the concept of whiteness more than anything else.

7. I think the people that are heard or seen will change depending on what the flavor of the month is. For example, if the hot topic for the next six months is going to be mental health then the people that are female from whatever marginalized group or not, if their subject matter is about that then they are more likely to be seen or heard. And that's something that's

very trivial within the arts. Some would say it's a benefit because it highlights certain things but then I think sometimes what it does is that it influences artists instead of to focus on the things that their work focuses on and the importance of that direction. They are forced into spaces where we have to create work that tick boxes more than anything. So, the people that are heard the most are the people that can tick more boxes basically that's within marginalized communities. As an artist I can genuinely say I don't work to other people's criteria. I know the work that I do is urgent, is critical, is important, but I don't feel it's my job to make institutions change their boxes to realize that. But in general, who is heard the most and who is seen the most... let's be honest it's white men and after that it's white women. And after that it gets complicated because it depends what avenue and where you're coming from. If it's an Indian institution, then Indian artist obviously. Arab institution, Arab artists, and then within Arab institution there's such a broad concept of Arab. Therefore, you know it really depends what institution is looking at to know who they're going to highlight. But in the region of the Middle East, there are lots of propaganda or there's a lot of people that have intentions with their money. So, they may highlight stories that are beneficial to them socially or politically.

8. I think the main reason why the distrust comes up is because of what I mentioned in regard to ticking boxes. White people no matter how far we've come, in regard to this conversation of engaging in opening up the floor, white people or white supremacy still expects us to do the work for them. Us to provide them with the platform, to let them know this is what we need to talk about, this is what we need to look at. The problem with that is that they're not doing their homework the majority of the time. We are still expected to put in that labor. Now the reason why a lot of distrust comes in when let's say someone like yourself or I might bring something up is because we're not fitting the parameters in which have been offered to us. We're asking to look outside it. Were just not fitting those boxes. If I've got all the rights to the land in front of me, and I basically said to you "you can have this one acre, I have one hundred million thousand acres but you can have this one acre do what you need within it" and then you



respond with “hey actually I need a good three four five twenty five one hundred blah blah blah “ - I will undercut you because I feel like you're attacking me simply because I've never been raised on the concept of sharing. White history has been about domination, has been about taking and not giving. That's why most of the museums in the UK are not necessarily about local histories but about history that have been stolen. So, the distrust comes from the fact that I believe, within institutions, they believe, or they see our worth as othered people is 'X' amount but when we're asking for any other letter from the alphabet they just don't understand. And so therefore they get scared because we might take over, we might do to them what they did to us. We might add a completely different philosophy and if I know anything I know the fact that white people love to showcase how much they've educated the world rather than admitting to the fact that their philosophies come from other people's languages, their mathematics come from other people's formulas, their structures come from education that has been built by others.

9. I don't know whether it's the fact that I'm a lesbian or whether it's the fact that I'm a child as a product of war or the fact that my whole life history, family history and current reality, is so complicated because of the politics that has been put on myself and my family and the relationships we have with one another. The dynamics between men and women, the dynamics between women and women, the dynamics within families, the lack of respect varies on multiple levels. The lack of understanding there is on multiple levels too. I think all of those things have helped me get to a point in my life where I am very unlikely to give up or want to give up.

**KHADIJA BAKER**

**Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2019**

**(interview received at 03.02 GMT time via email)**

(In order to avoid Western academic standards, no edits were made to her answers.)

***What is your background?***

I am a multi-disciplinary artist of Kurdish-Syrian descent. I was born and educated in the town of Amoude, Syria. I live in Canada since 2001 and work in Montreal, Canada. I had my MFA in Studio Arts/open media from Concordia University. I have 2 kids, 7 and 8.

***What is your practice?***

In my work I explore social themes, which directly reflects the political aspect of major issues related to the lived experiences. My work is related to persecution, displacement and memory. My research creation combines sound, performance, textile, installation and video/moving images, practices to create intimate site-specific sculptural installation environments that engage the senses (sight, sound, and touch.) In my work I breach the divide between artist, art and public, creating an active space of participation, exchange, understanding and storytelling. I wish to provoke changes through my art. I wish we change through what is dividing us and what leads to hatred and racism - these are places that can offer a space where real connection can happen without conflict.

For example, in one of my past work, "When Spirits Awaken", it is important that women of my generation use our voices to reverse the cycle of past generations who were raised to believe that this sacrifice was positive. Moreover, we have to take our proper place in the world and stand up against war. Using communication, travel, stories and various media, I am working to make sure that future children will have better human rights, while raising awareness about the dangers of war especially for

traditional or uneducated women. As artists, we can raise awareness by asking questions about the political situation and showing past and present histories that previously may not have been discussed.

The effects of immigration and war have influenced who I am, and they therefore play an essential role within my art practice.

### ***How do you work?***

If you ask me as an artist, I don't choose my themes, mostly it is a need that leads my creation theme and inhabit my mind till the creation happens and continue its life. The need through remembering and daily life, and the present problems we face. For example, during my pregnancy and leaving my past home there was an urgent sense of dealing with the idea of home and belonging. I have created two pieces, "Home Songs" and "Home Skin" with each pregnancy.

If you ask about the technical part, I work with many forms and my final work is usually interdisciplinary. I usually let my instinct guide me, I like organic and spontaneous process. I am attached to the idea of letting the art come and be born while I search, and imagination comes to life. sometimes I have plans, but most of the time they change while working. The work must have its own force as well that makes it alive and stand for itself.

### ***Why do you do what you do?***

I don't wish to pass this world silently, with my art and along with other artists like me I wish to make a difference and change in our thinking starting with social change. Artists take important part in observing and predicting coming danger to reflect is part of the process of my work. I see the suffering we are exposed to; it is much more obvious than ever with the social media and all open resources, the silent war we lived as Kurds, and even through the recent war there are so many things to highlight. we need to work and stop the extremist monsters as they grow. I believe that art offers a safe place for difficult issues to be discussed and shared. The art with its soft power of the aesthetic it offers a place to focus on connection on human level and focus on the positive outcome.

For example, in *Behind Walls*, using oral history for me at the beginning of my career there was a real need. I used stories of Stateless Kurds to tell their stories and daily challenges; it was urgent to talk about these people who never had a chance to talk. I didn't want to tell the stories only through my voice I had to have the power of their suffering to come to the public directly. They didn't need my voice; I offered a creation that was the environment to thread the rest of the related parts of the lived experiences and I offered a reflection on the fragile nature of the map related to daily life and memories. When I showed this project for the first time, my thinking was only around these Kurds' stories, but after showing the work second and third time I had developed the theory not only around the idea of maps, but also the use of oral history in visual arts. In addition, I connected the project to many other tales of people around the world, or even to the stories of aboriginal people and changing the demographical, culture and even the names of places on the map, here in Canada, or Australia and many other places similar to the place that my work highlighted, to ears memory of places and how the map might fail in relation to daily life. When we offer one example in art it is not specific most of the time, it is a starting point to the universal related stories. History repeats itself everywhere, art offers what we learnt from it.

***in regards to the art world, how do you make yourself visible?***

It is a challenge and very stressful process to be visible in the art world; I work much more than my colleague artists as an immigrant and as a mother similar to other artists we need time to understand the place, in term of languages, build related experience to the place, connection, even to find resources and how to do it. It took a long journey and passed difficult time to be able to continue. But the hard work was a way to be visible and only what I want to do made it more challenging but at the end somehow you have to be seen as we exist, and our art is real. As visible minority especially at the first few years of my career and the theme we chose to work with were somehow excluding us from the rest of the art community. In Montreal, there was only one intercultural gallery that will welcome issues similar to my work. I keep looking for places to show the work I do, it takes a lot of time that I wish to put in actual art making, but it is a part of the system here. In the past few years I received



funding that offered me the freedom to work and leave the side job, I become a full-time artist and was able to continue exploring creation with communities. I do receive invitations, which is good, but sometimes the curators put labels on categories that might be my interest in certain project, I feel like we need to give audiences and artwork the chance to relate and find their own meaning.

***do you feel your identity affects your place within institutional space?***

Yes, at the beginning of my study in the art school it was rare to find a place for a Middle-eastern people, they were mostly white and mostly female, if there was a colour in the room usually it was Iranian or Asian, you could smell the political affect within the institution. Don't forget as well the economic fact related to art and difficulty to make a living keep many away from art, especially middle eastern culture.

The obvious part was through people who run and teach, you could see main leading figures in the institutions are white too, professors, or professionals and so on. Very typical image of the past; however, now there is a desire for change here and inclusion is a part of the act, they started to bring aboriginal people, and this is the first step, maybe one day we all will have equal chances.

***Who or what gets remembered?***

I always say mothers remember their far away children and focus on the sick ones, as a displaced mother and artist, I think of my past home and remember the injustice I witnessed. Many issues are not solved, and the violence is extreme now. I collect memories of the past and of the present. My remembering is not nostalgic it is this memory that serves the present and the future, about what is that we missed what brought us here, what we have learnt. We remember our loss, their values and ideas, the way they imagined the world as a peaceful place and equal for all; witnessing the harsh reality I try not to forget the utopian ideas that carries the abilities to reimagine a better future.

***WHEN MARGINALISED people speak up they are met with distrust- why is this and who do you feel is heard or seen?***

Part of my recent research creation is breaking stereotypes; I know what politicians do to create the images/stereotype to stay in power using medias or use internal fears of human to create the distance from the marginalized. But I don't claim it is the only way, we need a real education here, we need to create an understanding, to reveal the knowledge that exist in many forms to help us live in more harmony. We need to rebuild the identity based on our connection and our own values not based on a place or the trips, or simply ones' culture. We need to tell more stories, decolonize the culture, we need a proper place for female in our society the way we deserve without threat or looked at as objects. We have to work collectively, catch each other's hands, find the ones who support us get them closers to the core of issues like racism or to face their own fears, help them understand each other and build together. No one lives isolated, if a war is in Syria, it will echo the disaster everywhere. War travels like food; if you eat Syrian food here you have to know about the war.

***What about womanhood and specifically as a WEST ASIAN woman? does this affect how you are seen within institutional space?***

I will just add that the women space for female artist is still growing and needs to be changed. For a marginalized woman of colour who all the privilege of her colleague have not we have very limited access; we are excluded.

***Do you reject the natural and possibly orientalist role and stereotype of West Asian women just by being an artist?***

Yes, I also have to say we don't have to credit the feminist academic movement for all changes and our thinking. They have done great, but where we lived in rural places in the middle-east each woman had a daily straggle that made their own revolution in many ways and still do. When they chose to work, to study, or even chose their own partners breaking the cultural or religious roles in order to have their own freedom and dignity; a lot to be done in relation to the body of the female and her own way to deal with as it is still conservative culture. When I came here my past

knowledge of feminism was only through the way how the Syrian regime used it as propaganda and very typical, women work, and union to do home craft.

The past idea of feminism and how media present it was creating a rigid image that is far from what real feminists are; only certain people had the privilege to the real movement either through education or being in the capital cities. I was surprised many times from the image here how we were seen, getting closer to some French friends who had no knowledge about where we came from; they usually know only what the media offers. Now, it is even worse, the female body, behind refugee camp bars, or bleeding body, a woman that carries a dead child, easy to access body, a victim body and so on... well this is part of the reality unfortunately. But what they miss the great power many of these women have, to be able to cross these many borders to save themselves or their kids, or to survive under siege. Or to take a part in activism they did risking their lives, being tortured, or buried alive; there are many images that media don't offer. I feel that my art tries to enlighten these powerful images of survivors, what these powerful people can offer to the hosting society. What is needed to reveal this power? I will give 2 examples: I met one Syrian woman who spent 1.5 year in the Syrian's regime prison and witnessed her 4 years old daughter get tortured, and herself as well, she had much more complex story, but she survived and still getting treatment here in Canada. At the same time, she is eager with her limited education and health capacity to learn the language and work. She insists to show her 3 kids a good example in their new life here. The other example is the Yazidi women who have witnessed the genocide and lost their families and homes, they were captured and humiliated and severely abused and raped. Many of these women tried to escape that injustice if they fail, they tried again and again many of them finally escaped. These women created the most powerful image of the desire to live and not accepting the injustice they show us a real deal of resistance, so as an artist, woman, Kurdish or Syrian, Canadian immigrant whatever title I have the daily experience of my life, my children's, my past home, and present one is the highlight of my work. I refuse the ready-made to identify or to be framed with one single still identity, I am a person who learn and feel everyday change and react to it and my identity does so, there is a lot on my plate with many others who

share similar value to not pass this live as passenger we have a choice to make and a work to be done, for and with our kids