held in place

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

HELD IN PLACE

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and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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DEDICATIONS

I dedicate this work to my family, who have offered me the solidarity, understanding and confidence I needed in making this work.

I would like to individually acknowledge and thank:

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ABSTRACT

This body of work examines socio-political confinement and immobility through visual and material experimentation in painting. These concerns are influenced by my ongoing experience of immigration and the social constructs of gender that control and limit my social and physical mobility. In my work, I take on the task of understanding space by painting and stitching inside and outside the picture plane. I reference physical and social barriers in architecture that simultaneously serve as entrances and escapes. Cut-outs, tears, frays, and threads of canvas unravel and spill outward from the fixed and bounded picture plane. There is a constant fight for motion in the stasis, impermanence in the permanence, and release from the containment.

This thesis does not discuss the issues within gender and migration separately, but instead fuses them into one conversation about spatial difference to show the ways they encourage, enforce, maintain, and/or reject one another. Looking at the relationship between place, space, gender and feminism through the lens of Feminist Geography provides a framework for understanding how social systems, place, space and mobility intersect. Contexts of race and gender are discussed through the histories and processes of Тоҷик (Tajik) Textiles, Immigration, and the art historical contexts of the mediums of painting and fibers.

These contexts are considered in the discussion of works from my MFA exhibition, “held in place”. Several works are analyzed through the repeated motifs of Doors and Dresses, the looooong black braid, Transparent Curtains and Veils, and the Victorian Walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) Homes. The analysis of works is

then expanded upon though the discussion of installation and the ways hanging speaks to the placement and mobility of works and their representations of issues of gendered mobility.

It should be specified, this thesis does not offer solutions in equalizing the access of place or its experience, but rather holds space where the discussion of its inequality and the complicated experience of social movements is of the utmost importance.

SPACE HOLDER

“Ман як занам, ман аввалин фарзанди падару модарам, ман хоҳарам, ман модарам,ман ҳамсарам ва ниҳоят зане ки тули солҳои зиёд дур аз ватанам, ман ғарибам!

Ғариби бисёр мушкилиҳо дорад. Аммо ҳамаашро паси сар кардам. Хушбахт будаму аз пешравиҳои фарзандонам, хоҳарам ва бародарам хушбахтар мешудам.

Аммо талхтарин дард, ки то кунун мисли чуби тар месузаму бесадо мегирям, рафтани падарам ва дар ғарибӣ рафтани модарам, рафтани бародарам ки натавонистам лаҳзаи охир наздашон бошам аст!

Ва аз ин роҳи дури ғариби гаронтарин лаҳза он аст ба хонаат меравию сахт мехоҳи модаратро оғуш куни аммо наметавонӣ… Бародари кучакатро паҳлавон барин гуселат кард наметавони оғуш кардан наметавонӣ… Сахт аст мазорашонро оғуш куни сахт… Ҳама хоҳару бародарро оғуш мекуниву чанд рузе меҳмони хонаи худат мегардиву боз бармегарди ба хонаи ғарибиат..Ва сахт мехоҳи ки боз маротибаи дигар ҳамаашонро оғуш кунӣ… Метарсӣ..

Хомушона дар ғариби зама зама мекунам

Ман занам.

Хамонеям, ки агар дилам бишиканад,

Фарёд намезанам.

Мушт ба девор намекунам,

Мерақсам назди азизонам, механдам месароям…

Факат гохе мумкин аст аз сари носозкори аз шаб то субх ашк мерезам

бесадо, то гули лабхандам барои субхи фардо шукуфта шавад...

Шукуфаму шоди кунам бо азизонам.”

- Дилором Тешаева[1]

[1] The writing here is in her own language of Тоҷики (Tajik), expressing the impact of immigration and gender on access to various significant parts of her life (locations, career, family members). This space holds the weight of her words, the connections between her various realities and her individuality within the large community of immigrants.

INTRO

This is all about spaces[2] and movements[3].

I yearn for spaces I have left: Bibim's tight hugs, my birth country, the sound of my name (spoken effortlessly the correct way), foods with cumin and cilantro, mountains in the back, and dry land.

I struggle to access and hold space: extending VISAs, paying to work, updated headshots, piles of anxieties, expiration deadlines, restricted travels, and lost homeland connections.

I reject spaces: tight silk atlas dresses, pouring tea with my hand over my chest, and carrying the weight of nationality, a looooooooong black braid.

I'm rooted and unrooted, static when mobile, more Tajik (Тоҷик) here and less Тоҷик (Tajik) there. Space has confused me, made and unmade me, led me on and kicked me out. Space has owned me more times than I've gotten to own it. And so I fight with space when I paint.

[2] Spaces with social rules, systems, and hierarchies.
[3] Physical, political, social, and economical movements .

A note on authorship and experience

To have my life experiences as the subject of my work is not merely a choice.

It comes from my inability to discuss issues of gender and race from a distance. When I research how eastern art functions in and is discussed by the powerful western art world, I am simultaneously researching how my identity is viewed and challenged. Therefore, my experiences also become research.

It comes from my belief that authorship is always biased and therefore flawed, so being transparent of my own experiences is vital as it is a bias that is hopefully less damaging and more considerate of its position. I center my identity in my work because I understand that it will always be in the work regardless of my efforts. How I view the world around me is influenced by how I have been moving through it. I gain my credibility to speak on issues of immigration, race and gender not only through research, but through the mere fact that I am bound inside these systems in my reality. I am in a position where I can voice how a body functions in a sexist and racist world, as that is the position I find myself living in.

I discuss here what is held in place, while I am being held in and away from it.

Place and Space

Places are shared spaces.[4] Prior to Feminist Geography, it was often believed that space is psychological and socially active, while place is a static location or point.[5] These beliefs have played a significant role in shaping the discussion, laws and views of immigration throughout societies of the world. In this work, place is a subject of context that reveals not just locations, but arrangements and systems that make up these locations. For example, (and as discussed further in Section II), to have Victorian printed walls inside a house in Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan) reveals the effects of race on economy, aesthetics, and trade, which in turn influences social structures and complicates the identity of place and people of a place. A pioneer in the field of feminist geography, Doreen Massey, defines place as articulations of 'natural' and social relations that are not fully contained within the place itself. Massey defines places that are not closed or bounded, always in an open-ended process and their identity that is always to be contested. [6] In a similar sense, the places I reference are not static in their representations as they are removed of their original materiality and locality. They depict events, while the paintings themselves are evidence of events. The static malleability of paint, the path of brushwork, the layering of thoughts and observations, the tearing of an edge, the removal of the center of a painting, the travel of thread from the font to the back of a stuffed painting and the moving

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[4] Massey, Doreen B. *Space, place, and gender.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009, 137.
[5] Sack, Robert D. “The Power of Place and Space.” Geographical Review 83, no. 3 (July 1993): 326. https://doi.org/10.2307/215735.
[6] Massey, *Space, place, and gender,* 168-169.

picture of an unstretched canvas floating inches away from the wall. The hanging methods and existence of works in a gallery space are also events. They are linked to a location, hung by hinges screwed flat into the wall[7], under changing contexts of place and time, always faced with a new person with their own set of contexts. The identity of the works are always contested. As they travel to different spaces, their physical body may remain the same, but their identity sheds, transforms, and gains new bodies. The paintings live various lives as they encounter many different worlds.

Movement

The world is made up of many worlds.[8] Some worlds we enter and leave, while some we are born into. I was born in the world of Тоҷикҳо (Tajiks), of women, of immigrants, of a US resident, and of unpatriotic people. Moving through and inside these various worlds, I noticed the difference in people's pathways. I noticed how the various worlds each person was a part of changed the speed, the force, and the rhythm of their movement. There are those people who move fastest, who usually owned the best shoes and had little time. There are the slowest, who usually didn't have any shoes and their day was so long. There are those who moved with force, who were more expressive and went to therapy. The ones with little force had great doubts and absent parents. And there were many rhythms! Those who moved forward, those who went

[7] Not all works are hung and exist the same, look further into the installation section for the expansion of these points.
[8] Quoted by the character Hirayama, from the movie Perfect Days (2023), describing the difference between his own life and that of his sisters. *Perfect Days.* Germany: Bitters End, 2023.

back and forth, those who couldn't seem to stop turning, and those who were always making U-terms.[9]

And then, there is how we speak about these movements; paintings, textiles, dresses, and braids. The speed and length of a brushstroke. The rhythm of a plaited pattern. The abrupt stop at the edge of a dress. An extended surface of a canvas, unraveled. The side-to-side movement of the fraying edge. The slow drips of loose paint. The stasis of the moment depicted. The switching lanes from the second to the third dimension. The connecting roads of each world (work).

My thesis covers these movements, through the pathways of an immigrant Тоҷик (Tajik) woman, where context dictates the movements within these pathways.

[9] This metaphor of movement points to the term *power geometry* of time-space compression. Massey uses this term to emphasize the relationship of power (which differs for every social group) to the flows and the movement of people. For more see Massey, *Space, place, and gender,* 149.

SECTION I: CONTEXT

During the period of making this work, 2021-2024, I was surrounded and consumed by very pressing socio-political events occurring around the world. First, the ongoing issues of racism in the US which temporarily heightened society's awareness following the murder of a black citizen, George Flloyd by white police officer, Derek Chauvin. Then, the death of Mahsa Amini under police custody, which provoked protests throughout the world calling for women's liberation and freedom over their own body. And now, the ongoing genocide of Palestinian people by the Israeli government, with the aid and funding of powerful governments throughout the world, US being the most loyal and prominent figure.

These are only some of the critical contexts to consider, with many more that are not mentioned here, and may have gone unnoticed, by me. How can so much injustice, inequality and oppression occur in our 'progressive' world? This question always leads me to the biggest social systems still dictating the socio-political movement of people and our world(s): race and gender.

Socio-Political Contexts

In my research and work, the social systems I am most concerned with are those of gender and race, which have influenced many (if not all) political decisions impacting the access of space and movement for women and immigrants. I consider these contexts as I engage with Тоҷик (Tajik) textiles,

such as atlas prints, while I remain under systems of immigration[10], constantly being absorbed by their patterns and functions. The function and process of immigration and Тоҷик (Tajik) atlas dresses parallel each other in the ways they create physical and social borders to regulate, order, define, reject and protect identity. Immigration laws, influenced by racism, and gender roles, influenced by sexism, align paths to limit the mobility of people. It becomes important to understand them as an interconnected issue, when discussing topics and works about mobility, spatial access and freedom.

Immigration

I grew up in a home where freedom was often discussed. My parents both had a lot of concerns regarding the freedom Тоҷик (Tajik) citizens lost to the government and therefore decided it was not the place they wanted their daughters to grow up in.

I was 8 years old when I came to the US for the first time. A different life began for me from then on. I was no longer under the same intensity of gender restrictions[11]. Here I could speak loud and sit how I'd like. I could wear what I wanted to at school and let my hair down. However, I still felt looked at similarly, or more specifically, looked down on. I felt undermined, ignored, excluded, targeted, and disrespected, similarly to how I feel for being a woman. But this

[10] Immigration is not materially present in my work in the same manner as textiles, as it is not the tactility of this system that I am interested in, but instead its process and the mental control it holds. Immigration becomes evident in the freedom and restriction of movements I experience through the use of painting and fibers materials. In my work, it is used as a system, not a subject.
[11] It should be stressed that sexism is a prominent issue in the US as well, even though it is not apparent in the same ways as Tajikistan's issue of sexism.

time, it was the result of me being an immigrant. There are certain restrictions I was never able to leave after all.

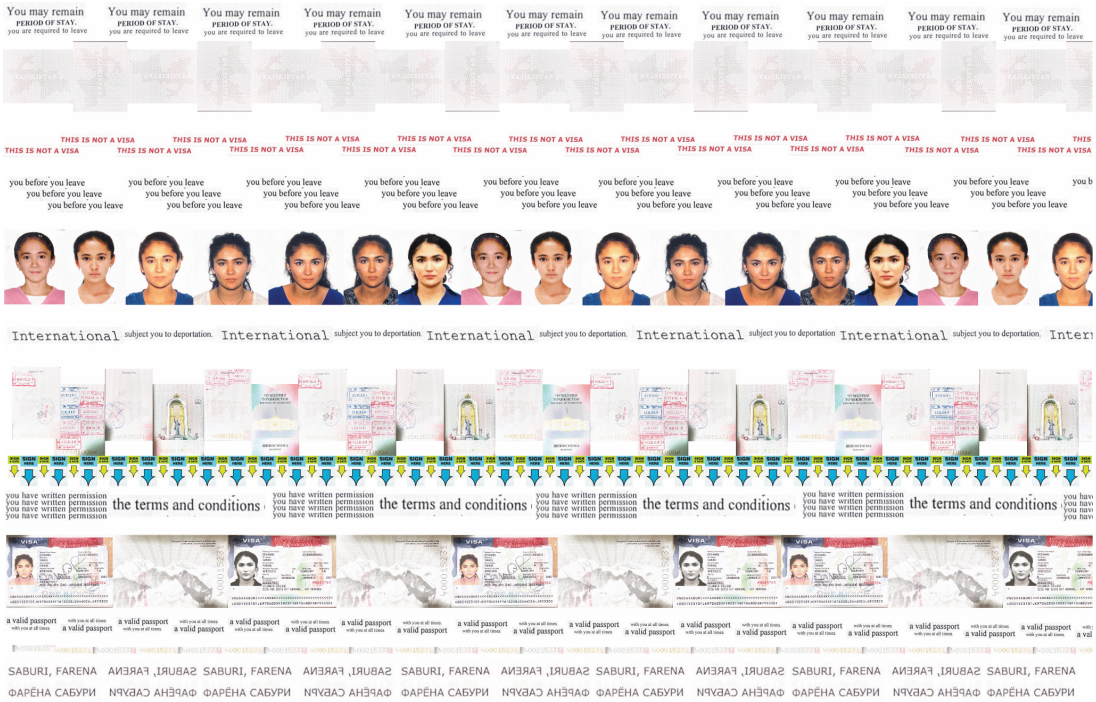

Figure 1: Farëna Saburi, VISA Pattern, a collection of personal immigration documents, 2022.

Immigration became a system that always kept me on the outside. I refused to let my body make a home with this country, as I am always reminded that I ***legally*** cannot. I exist here as an ***alien resident***; an ***F-1 student***, who used to be a ***J-1's dependent***, a ***J-2.*** As an ***F-1 student***, I must always update my ***VISA*** after graduation either through a ***school or job***, where I am ***allowed to work*** for ***exactly one year*** only. Every closing chapter becomes the opening of stress and anxiety for the future, an endless pile of research on ***VISAs*** and ***travel regulations***, and ***job/school*** interviews that feel like ***embassy interviews***. As an ***F-1 student***, you are always reminded your stay is ***temporary***, ***recorded***, and ***restricted***. My ***F-1 VISA*** welcomes me into the ***United States*** to ***study***,

research and ***work*** (strictly in my ***field of study***). It does not grant me residence when I am not occupied with either one of these tasks.

This restrictive migration process parallels that of the mid-nineteenth century Chinese migration flows. In the mid-nineteenth century, male Chinese laborers were a favored migrant pool, sought after to fill labor shortages in the North American railroad construction. However, Chinese women were largely excluded from this migration flow as they "were viewed with suspicion because nervous whites assumed that women would ensure that the Chinese presence would become permanent."[12] It becomes evident here that racism and sexism play a prominent role in controlling the mobility of immigrant workers. Today, the reasoning for border control, migration flows and immigration laws may differ, however, their continued existence and function still point towards a thinking influenced by the same systems of racism and sexism. The racism may be more apparent when considering how students, researchers and laborers are granted VISAs that allows them to give back to the country's advancement in academics, technology, and economy to name a few, but restricts their freedom in simply residing and having periods of rest[13] and recreation. This becomes the phenomenon of **foreign immigrants** being viewed are **US laborers** and pushing

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[12] Domosh, Mona, and Joni Seager. *Putting women in place: Feminist geographers make sense of the world.* New York: Guilford Press, 2001, 130.

[13] US immigration processes make use of grace periods following a graduation or a one year job appointment, which are periods ranging from two to three months that are to be used to secure a new, authorized employment or a new course of study. If one cannot secure this within this period, they are to leave the country.

the selective restrictions in migration flows[14], ultimately shaping society's views and treatment of foreign bodies.

Gender, as discussed previously, is also a key player in restrictive mobility of migration. As argued by Massey, "the need for the security of boundaries, the requirement for such a defensive and counter positional definition of identity, is culturally masculine."[15] I can attest to this argument, as these immigration restrictions that open so many opportunities but make their access deliberately difficult mirror the restrictive liberation of Тоҷик (Tajik) women who have an endless selection of textile patterns to place their bodies inside of, but the spaces and the amount of spaces they can take up is never in their control.

Тоҷик (Tajik) Textiles

Textile is political—when it has the role of representing a nation, culture or gender.

Textile is sneakily forceful—when it squeezes into your skin with powerfully tensioned, thin, silk threads.

Textile is personal—when it touches your skin, catches your eye, and sits in your сандуқ[16].

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[14] Johnson, Isadore. "Immigration and 'Brain Drain.'" Econlib, June 6, 2022. https://www.econlib.org/immigration-and-brain-drain/.
[15] Massey, *Space, place, and gender,* 7.
[16] A dowry chest, usually made of wood or metal, to store clothes, textiles, jewelry and other precious items. The collection of such items starts at girlhood, and once married, a woman can bring her сандуқ to her husband's house.

Textile is communal—when it is taught by your mother, who learned from her mother, who learned from her father, who learned from the factory, who learned from the villagers, who learned from their mothers.

Textile is mobile—it is an entry to, a navigation of, and an escape from space.

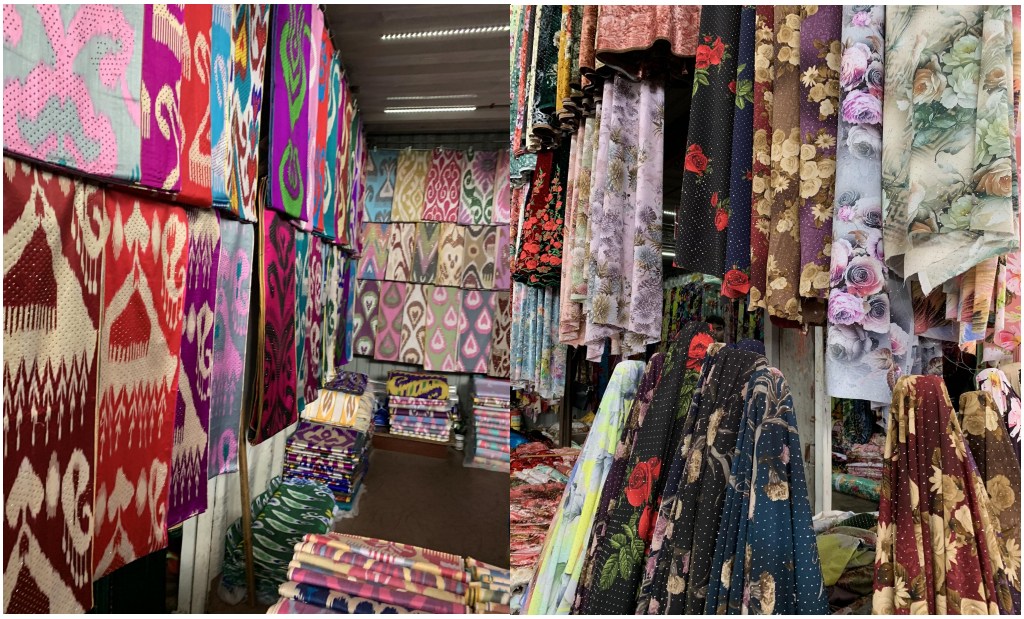

Figure 2: Images of textile stand in a bazaar in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, 2019.

The atlas textiles of Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan) are deeply personal while also consistently used as a tool by the Тоҷик (Tajik) government to enforce a strict national identity. Traditionally, its materiality is of a delicate and soft silk, that in function doesn't allow for stretch and instead thrives on tension. Visually, it is an attractive print that is visible from afar with its bright colors and jagged

striped patterns.[17] It is an active piece of cloth that impacts the mobility of its wearers and also lives through a similar struggle of mobility itself.[18]

Figure 3: Illustration page with atlas dress examples, from the Guidebook of Recommended Dress, published by Tajikistan's Ministry of Culture, page number unknown, 2018.

In 2018, Tajikistan's Ministry of Culture released a 367 page guidebook of suggested dress codes for women. While initially the book was advertised as an attempt to encourage a national identity that is independent of influence from the Soviet Union[19] or the western world, it quickly became evident that it was also an

[17] Gibbon, Kate Fitz, and Andrew Hale. *Ikat: Silks of Central Asia: The Guido Goldman Collectio. London*: Laurence King in association with Alan Marcuson, 1997.
[18] Historically, the atlas pattern, also called ikat, was increasingly traded throughout the Silk Road trade and more recently, it has been widely appropriated by popular fashion brands, such as Gucci, Ralph Lauren and Valentino.
[19] Tajikistan was under the Soviet Union from 1929 to 1991. The impact of the Soviet Union is still present in the country as well as the socio-economic conflict between Russia and Tajikistan.

attempt at targeting and policing women's bodies. The book only addresses the clothing of women and girls, suggesting outfits based on age, place (home, school, work), activity (leisure, professional) and even day of the week[20]. Dresses, referred to as *либоси милли*[21], which are made of traditional textiles, especially atlas fabrics, are strongly encouraged, with specifications of the length these dresses should be, "15-20 centimeters below the knee, but also at most 20 centimeters above the ankle".[22] It is also important to pay close attention to the posing of the models showcasing the recommended clothing, as it highlights the view of Tajikistan's government on the performative role of women. There is no equivalent publication made for men.

The atlas textile is also rooted in systems of gender through its traditional and cultural uses. Socially, it is more common and accepted for the vibrant silk print to be used for women's dresses, *курта ва эзор.*[23] A girl, woman or her mother would visit the *бозор*[24] to choose from a large selection of textiles, which would then be either sent to a seamstress to make a fitted dress or sewn at home. In many ways, the dresses are so unique to each individual, from the chosen fabrics to the fit. However, as the book of dress codes suggest, there are certain expectations to the patterns, lengths and fabrics one should always be

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[20] Наврӯзшоҳ, Зарангез. "Аз Мини-Юбка То Либоси Сиёҳ. Занони Тоҷик Чӣ Пӯшанд? Чӣ Напӯшанд?" Радиои Озодӣ, April 13, 2018. http://www.ozodi.org/a/29166294.html.
[21] Pronounced (lee-bo-see me-lee). Translates to national dress.
[22] Najibullah, Farangis. "What to Wear: A Style Guideline for Tajik Women." RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty, April 28, 2018. https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-what-to- wear-a-style-guideline-for-women/29197855.html.
[23] Pronounced (koorta va ez-zor). Traditional dress (usually knee length) with matching loose trousers.
[24] Bazaar, a free market where you can bargain prices and make trades or exchanges with independent merchants.

aware of. It still remains a fitted dress a woman is expected to step into. The dress would carry the identity of a nation and culture, while diffusing the individual identity of the woman that wears it. However, as mentioned previously, the wearer has great choice in selecting the fabric and the sewing pattern. And yet, following this liberating process, they are still bound and restricted inside this liberated role.

Intersection of Migration, Textiles, Race, and Gender and Space

The largest contexts of my work, immigration and Тоҷик (Tajik) textiles, reveal the intersection of gender and race in processes of physical migration, socio-political mobility and accessibility of spaces. As mentioned in the section discussing immigration processes, these movements become unequal as social systems of gender and race become involved. This connection is also made by feminist architects concerned with how social systems of gender create a world catered towards the socio-political mobility of men, and lack of it for women. There are assumptions made of the difference women and men carry, and these assumptions often become active in societies. Cultural theorist, Luce Irigaray, asserts that “the characteristics and attributes of the maternal-feminine in Western culture–passive, neutral, fluid, formless, lacking, empty or void; a receptacle requiring filling, containment, measure— are precisely those also attributed to space”. She clarifies that this is “not because woman in any way resembles space, but rather because the treatment of the maternal-feminine is

the condition for the template of the ways in which space is conceptualized."[25] The social systems Western culture uses to conceptualize women and their spaces, are the same systems then utilized to create and maintain systems of migration of non-Western (immigrant) bodies. These systems encourage a view of women (their bodies and roles) as a public space that is to be protected, used, and rearranged in accordance with the needs of external bodies (society, family members, nation). Regarding migration, the public space becomes immigrants, being moved about in specific speeds and directions depending on their need and value.

In addition to a woman's body being viewed as a public space, the movement and application of that body is also made static through the same systems that define it. This becomes apparent in the previous section of Тоҷик (Tajik) Textiles highlighting the conflicting roles of women having the pride and baggage of nationality and culture. However, this is not a single nation's view of women as stated by geographers, Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, "in most cultures, the assumption (and reality) of the rootedness of women bestows upon them a distinctive role in the maintenance of the culture—a role that can be both a burden and an honor, that can be both trivialized and valorized."[26] There is an understanding in the field of feminist geography that women are often viewed to be more rooted in their localities and therefore are more representative of where

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[25] Irigaray, Luce. *An Ethics of Sexual Difference.* Trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, 52 as quaoted in Grosz, Elisabeth A., and Peter Eisenman. *Architecture from the outside: Essays on virtual and real space.* Cambridge, Ma: The MIT Press, 2006, 161.

[26] Domosh and Seager, *Putting women in place: Feminist geographers make sense of the world*, 121.

they come from: the home (domestic), a community (family), a nation (atlas dresses and the looooong black braid). This rootedness often leads to social ideas of women being more static in space and lacking the same abilities of men regarding adaptability to various movements, creating gendered differences in mobility.

Figure 4: Image of billboard advertisement in Tajikistan, date unknown. The advertisement reads and translates to, "If your family is pure, stormy weather in not a problem".

It is crucial to keep in mind this intersection of gender and race in the sections coming up, when encountering the representative, physical and metaphorical depictions of mobility in my work.

ART HISTORICAL CONTEXT

To contextualize my work in art history, as an immigrant woman who is connected by the East and West, is a complicated task for me and may take me my whole lifetime to explore and understand. And so, in my work, it isn't necessarily the history of art I am interested in, but rather how that history is told differently based on the author, and oftentimes their demographics, as well as *how* that history is told, spoken of, and understood socially. I often wonder if the mediums I use—painting and fibers—go through similar socio-political movements. Do they have gender and race that dictate their placement in society? Do they become stolen land? Who speaks for them? What is their voice? I have my theories.[27]

I believe painting is a woman, aged 40,000 years old.[28]

Women began painting before men. Looking at world art history, I note how embroidered art was figurative, it depicted scenes and carried compositions similar, very similar, to how paintings are known to speak.[29] The embroidered paintings just weren't considered or called paintings-all praise was given to the men that took over the language, in paint.

Now, I wonder if paint is a man?

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[27] I am not an art historian, nor do I have the credibility or authority to credit a medium to a specific location, time, or people. It is not an origin or an author I am searching for, but instead the movements to and from those origins.

[28] Approximate age of embroidery. Earliest discoveries of needlework date back to 30,000 BC.

[29] Parker, Rozsika. *The subversive stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine.* London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2019.

And textile is the Eastern world, aged 8,000 years old.[30]

Textiles come from the east, The Silk Road—going straight through the *бозор* located a 3 minute walk away from my house in Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan). The trade spread textiles and paper all throughout the world, not realizing this Eastern language, practiced by men and women, would be taken by the Western world, and coined as women's voice.[31]

It seems these mediums live through the same hell of gender and race like we do— making these mediums most fitting for the conversations in my work.

[30] Woolen textiles are found in Southern Turkey dating back to 6000 B.C. Textile Heritage Museum. “A Timeline of Textile History.” Textile Heritage Museum, November 27,2022. https://textileheritagemuseum.org/textiles-ancient-times-to-modern-day/.

[31] There is a common social understanding in the art world to speak of fibers materials as those connected to women. While this is true, I question if this connection, as a stand-alone, takes away the Eastern identity of fibers materials, such as textiles.

SECTION II: WORKS

Doors and Dresses

Figure 5: Farёna Saburi, хона биё (come home), acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, wood panel, door hinges, wall paint, 2023.

To be at the doorstep of a place you couldn't visit in 6 years– the level and range of emotion in that moment is immense and many. It is a place of both resistance and ultimate acceptance. It's a place that welcomes you in like home, but then accuses you of being an imposter. A place that invites you inside but sees you as the outside. A place that you can melt into but still stand out. It is a

place forever changed for you, simply because you have left, and don't know when you can come back (home).[32]

This doorstep is of a home in Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan). The shoes indicate everyone is inside: children, men, and women. However, there is someone who walks in and out of this doorway more frequently: the woman in charge of the household, the wife. Her shoes rarely stay by the doorstep for too long, as she moves about to ensure the meal is prepared, served, repeated, and cleaned up. Her mobility is at an accelerated speed and force, at the sacrifice of her access to a space of rest and comfort–inside the room where she has built comfort for all.

Painting language here is parallel to the attention she is expected to have. The vision in this painting is clear and direct. It is not blurry here; everything is sharp and in focus. The colors and brushwork are highly considered to produce accuracy of how everything was in that captured moment. Every detail of every shoe considered. The door, the handle, the flip flops, the roofing–all in focus at once.

Materially, this door is a painting. It is made up of layers of paint strokes, attached at the surface of canvas, filling the gaps of woven threads. This door is bound by paint onto a surface that cuts and opens itself to a place. It becomes an escape from its space and an entrance in a layer of spaces it resides in physically. This door is open and closed simultaneously, and access is granted only to be taken away. If the shoes inside the painting sit outside the door that

[32] An important issue to discuss here is how restrictive immigration laws and processes impact one's connection to their personal lives and identities.

opens outside of the painting, where do the occupants reside? The door is an entry and an escape at once.

Figure 6: Farëna Saburi, сандуқ (dowry chest), acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, door hinges, wall paint, 2023.

Тоҷик (Tajik) dresses are doors too— an architecture for the woman's body. Tight, with no stretch, colorful satins and silks to fit into. Barely enough space to hold all of you, but sufficient in not letting you escape. This dress, *сандуқ (dowry chest)*, references the style and type of dresses worn by newlywed women in Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan). It is traditionally accepted that a married woman lives in her husband's house, which is his parents' house, with whom the newlywed woman must also live with. For the first couple of months

after marriage, the newlywed woman steps out to greet the occupants of her new household every morning in beautiful attire, with makeup and hair done, usually with a transparent veil to hold over her head, as she bows her head down repeatedly while holding her right hand over her chest. She is to carry out her daily responsibilities (usually house chores), tending to the occupants of the house, all while making sure she looks beautiful throughout it. The loud, glamorous, striking, red dress here becomes performative, so aware she has a role. Much like how an atlas dress defines a nationality and culture, this dress defines its occupant. The loud red of the dress swallows the hands into its color and form. The hand is pressed tightly on the chest, while the dress is anchored down aggressively into the wall. There is a heightened metaphorical flatness at every dimensionally rendered surface faced: the hand, the dress, the braided frame, the painted wall, and the anchored door hinges. This loud, screaming body (of work) holds the space with great command, all while it itself is being held in place.

Now let's also consider the contradictions of freedom and containment in my own actions. While a *сандық*, a dowry chest, holds the baggage of gendered roles and expectations, the painting, this red dress, holds the baggage of my thoughts, opinions, and artistic decisions. The painting becomes a record of my freedom, but not free as a body in it of itself. My freedom becomes contained in the painting, followed by my attempts to release it from a wall, from its own surface and even from myself. I am performing my freedom by painting, while my painting is performing an identity I have given it.

The looooong Black Braid

As the margin of the body, hair comes out to interact with the world and can serve as a communicator of gender, class, status, age, generation, marital status, religion, politics and much more. It is a highly visible cultural artifact that is extremely malleable and for that reason, vulnerable and powerful. It is simultaneously a tool used to create and uphold social constructs of gender, sexuality, race, and religion, as well as a weapon or shield in resisting the same categories. Due to its inside and outside relationship with the body, hair enters a social dialogue on issues of privacy and the public.

The “classic Тоҷик (Tajik) woman” identifier—the looooong, black braid—is at the center of this distinction between private and public space. The long black braid is referenced in Тоҷик (Tajik) music, art and poetry, oftentimes as a symbol of modesty, fertility and nationality. Alongside atlas dresses, the long black braid is encouraged by the Тоҷик (Tajik) society as a symbol of pride in nationality and culture. However, these symbols come at a cost to many women, as they are expected to wear an identity over their own for the sake of a nation. Is there power being gained or lost from this?

There is also a physical weight to the long black braid. It requires great care and maintenance and creates restrictions to certain activities. Its length being at the focus creates a sense of identity, one that is ultimately tied to values set by culture and society. In dance, the braid appears as a weapon. Its weight flung into space with every spin and turn. It becomes a dance of liberation and restraint. It becomes a dance that allows a woman to hold more space.

Figure 7: Still shots from a dance video of traditional Tajik/Uzbek dance, Sirdaryo Navolari - Jayron Raqsi (Barno Halikova Sahnalashtirgan), YouTube, 2022.

In my paintings, the long, black braid is cut off, operating as a nomad, paradoxically existing inside, between, and outside of the painted spaces. The braid experiences and tests the boundaries of place and space, occupying imagined and remembered rooms, depicted and physical walls, domestic and public spaces. The braid aggravates the line of material and social separation.

Figure 8: Farëna Saburi, public privates (хонаи ман), acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, canvas threads, wall paint, 2022.

In the scene of *public privates (хонаи ман)*, the braid is depicted hiding and sneaking around the living room space. Stretching through the room, it avoids the window, stuck behind the transparent curtain. It appears so private, in the most public sense of the word. It appears quite secretive yet is the most apparent aspect of the depicted space, like the reclining nude body of women repeatedly exposed throughout the history of Western painting. The long black braid and the reclining nude, both representations aimed at defining women, experience an intense publicity of their most private possession– their body. A

woman's body is simultaneously a public and private space, as it is veiled[33] and exposed[34]. This intimate site is subject to outside forces every day and, as such, "provokes a constant negotiation between the two spheres" of public and private spaces.[35]

Transparent Curtains and Veils

Figure 9: Farёna Saburi, behind closed curtains (пасu парда), oil on canvas, white chiffon fabric, кокул (braid extensions), black yarn, 2024.

Much like a woman's body, transparent curtains and veils are the in-between spaces of private and public. They are surfaces that reciprocate our

[33] Tajikistan continuously encourages head dresses and 'modest' clothing for women, enforcing these suggestions through government, religion and culture/tradition.
[34] Domestic violence is a severe, unresolved issue in Tajikistan. As reported in The Borgen Project, data from 2017-2018 reveals that 26.4% of Tajik women experience "lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence". This is the most recent credible statistic of the issue, as the Tajik government makes no efforts to give this issue the attention it needs. Thelwell, Kim. "Examining Women's Rights in Tajikistan." The Borgen Project, April 8, 2022. https://borgenproject.org/womens-rights-in-tajikistan/.
[35] England, Marcia R. *Public privates: Feminist geographies of mediated spaces*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018, 112.

facing.[36] In *behind closed curtains,* this transparent surface holds a depiction of a veiled[37] woman. Together, they become barriers that repel and attract at once. Aimed at covering, they instead uncover a system of beliefs and actions. Visually, they attempt to separate two places while physically, they are in fact an in-between and connection of these places. The in-between space in this work is the transparent curtain and the long, braided rod holding the weight of the veiled body. They become spaces without boundaries of their own, whose forms are the outside of the identity.[38] The long black braid takes up a great length of space, suggesting it creates boundaries, and, yet it physically holds the empty space of the wall, pointing to the physical boundaries it emphasizes. Does the long black braid have a boundary of its own, if what it marks is an empty wall? Or perhaps, the empty wall is open space reserved merely by the weighted presence of the braid.

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[36] Summers, David. *Real spaces: World art history and the rise of Western Modernism*. London: Phaidon, 2003, 433.

[37] Clothing veils are not being discussed through the lens of religion or culture, but instead as socio-political architectural systems of the body. To veil one's head or body should always be a personal choice and my critique of veils is when it is enforced by a system or institution—in this case, the Culture Ministry of Tajikistan.

[38] Grosz and Eisenman, *Architecture from the outside: Essays on virtual and real space*, 90.

Figure 10: Detail shots of behind closed curtains (пасу парда), from Farëna Saburi's MFA exhibition "held in place", 2024.

The in-between space of the transparent curtain is a less effective boundary between the wall and the space of the viewer. This position of the in-between lacks a fundamental identity, yet it "facilitates, allows into being, all identities, all matters, all substance." [39] What does it mean to have your body in this in-between space?

While there is great awareness of the veil itself, its function is to emphasize the boundaries it creates. The transparent curtain aims to cover the wall and braids behind it, but in action it attracts attention to these very things, by creating awareness to the layering of events. In this way, the transparent veiling of places and bodies can be seen as a performative act of collaboration of occupants on either sides of the veil. While there is a feeling of being outside of

[39] Ibid.

something, there is also an attraction of what is catching your attention from the inside. The transparent curtain unveils the system it fails to perform in.

Alternatively, the veiled body over the curtain is much denser and blocks the world behind it. While it moves in similar motions of the curtain, it creates deeper folds and indentations, accelerating and emphasizing movement. Its body holds visual weight and hierarchy. As it overlays the space of the in-between (the curtain space), it positions its location between the wall and the viewer, held (hung) by the boundary of the long, black braid (rod). Yes, it is apparent that this veiled body is anchored– but it also anchors down the weight of the transparent curtain veil. What holds more weight; her body, her veil, or her braid?

Victorian Walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) Homes

The Victorian walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) Homes also have an in-between relationship to the locations they occupy. Before they reached the walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) homes, these Victorian walls have moved through a complex navigation of space and place. The Victorian print wallpaper originates from the twelfth-thirteenth century damask silk textiles of North Asia, as seen in the practices of tirāz, pseudo-inscripted robes.[40]

[40] Shea, Eiren. “Textile as Traveller: The Transmission of Inscribed Robes across Asia in the Twelfth through Fourteenth Centuries.” *Arts asiatiques* 73, no. 1 (2018): 25–40. https://doi.org/10.3406/arasi.2018.1991.

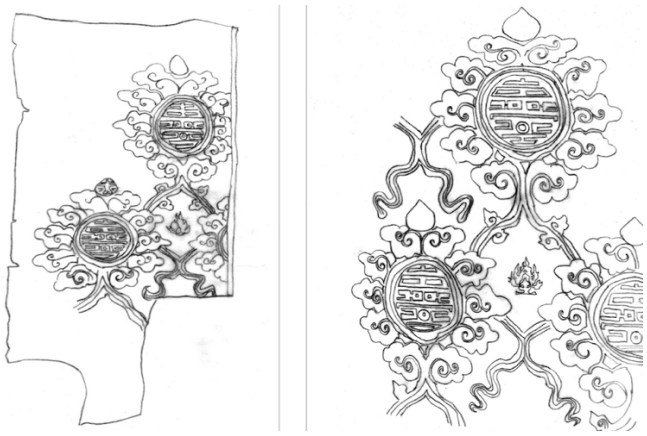

Figure 11: Drawing detail of textile fragments with early iterations of damask patterns. In the permanent collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Through the influence of global trade, damask silks had reached the European world by 1600, where Scots who could afford damasks "were content to use stock-patterned fabrics", while a few nobles commissioned custom damasks. The popularity and demand of damasks peaked in 1822, to the extent that George IV of Great Britain appointed a personal weaver as "Damask-Weaver to His Majesty" and by 1840, America also began to import damask silks.[41] Initially, the damask silks were used for dress, furniture and interior decor. Embossed leathers, tapestries and woven damasks were used as "exotic wall coverings" to decorate the homes of the wealthy in Europe. These wall coverings eventually inspired the earliest floral Victorian embossed wallpaper designs in London.[42] However, when compared to the "colorfully painted with endlessly varied scenes" of the "light, soft, flexible and smooth" Chinese wallpapers of its

[41] Cavallo, Adolph S. "To Set a Smart Board: Fashion as the Decisive Factor in the Development of the Scottish Linen Damask Industry." *Business History Review* 37, no. 1–2 (1963): 49–58. https://doi.org/10.2307/3112092.
[42] Entwisle, E. A. "WALLPAPER AND ITS HISTORY." *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts 109*, no. 5058 (1961): 450–67. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41366905.

time, “the heavy weight, rough surface, crude and repetitive printing and limited palette of the early European wallpaper formed a rather drab contrast”[43], and thus was replaced and exported out instead.

Figure 12: Benjamin Moore, Gold embossed and stenciled paper, Newgate Street, London. In the permanent collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 13: Detail of Chinese wallpaper at Felbrigg, Norfolk supplied by the architect James Paine (1717–89) in 1751, as part of the 1749–61 refurbishment carried out by the owner William Windham II (1717–61). Printed and painted on paper. © National Trust.

[43] Clifford, Helen. “Chinese Wallpaper:” *East India Company at Home, 1757-1857*, February 15, 2018, 39–67. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21c4tfn.9.

Following this racially active movement through time and space, the outdated, “exotic” damask inspired, Victorian wallpapers found their place inside the Тоҷик (Tajik) houses I grew up in. My grandparents' homes, my aunties and uncles houses, my neighbors, and my own childhood home, were lined with these stick and peel, embossed, iridescent wallpaper prints. They were usually in monochrome color palettes and varied in price depending on their thickness and level of shine and pattern.

Figure 14: Cropped images of the walls of my relative’s houses in Tajikistan, 2019.

I grew up seeing these luxurious walls clash with the brightly and busied patterns of Тоҷик (Tajik) textiles. How ironic must it be to have these boundaries, our walls, bound by this history of a print (damask) leaving the east to the west and returning back as a foreigner, the now called Victorian printed wall? How does this foreign body, stripped of its color[44] and original pattern contextualize the space it holds? What does it aim to hide and expose?

[44] Damask silks are believed to have originally been made in rich, vibrant colors, with gold accents.

Figure 15: Farëna Saburi, Victorian walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) homes (деворҳои хонаи ман), acrylic and oil on unstretched canvas, plaster, house paint, 2024.

Victorian walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) homes (деворҳои хонаи ман) explores these questions through the multiplication of walls and the layering of boundaries. A plastered braided pattern peaks through the damask inspired Victorian printed wall. However, this wall is thin and flowing, while the braid is dense with a rough body. This depiction of a thin slice of a wall from Тоҷикистон (Tajikistan), hangs in almost perfect unison against the white wall of the gallery. It holds a presence—a shadow of a wall on a wall. It becomes lost which space is most active and what identity is being exposed. There were Victorian printed walls, holding the bodies of occupants in *Тоҷик (Tajik) homes* and a white gallery wall, holding the *Victorian walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) homes (деворҳои хонаи ман).*

SECTION III: INSTALLATION

The process of installation can be so binding when it comes to two dimensional (and to an extent, three-dimensional) works. There is a contract between a work and a wall, a floor, a ceiling, a room.[45] The works must take into consideration the spaces they are placed into: the clean, artificial, 'neutral', white cube gallery. Context is supposedly removed here, but this removal unlocks and highlights a new context. The gallery space "offers the thought that while eyes and minds are welcome, space occupying bodies are not".[46] The work that lives inside this 'neutral' context heightens in its color as it clashes with the lack of color in the white cube gallery space. I cannot speak of Тоҷик (Tajik) women without the use of bright, satin, patterned atlas fabrics. For this reason, my works must grapple with the possibility of reading as an 'other', starkly foreign in style and color from the gallery space. A solution to acknowledge this possibility, is to subvert the unnatural neutrality with the complicated contextual histories present in my own work–by painting the walls over with the damask/Victorian print.

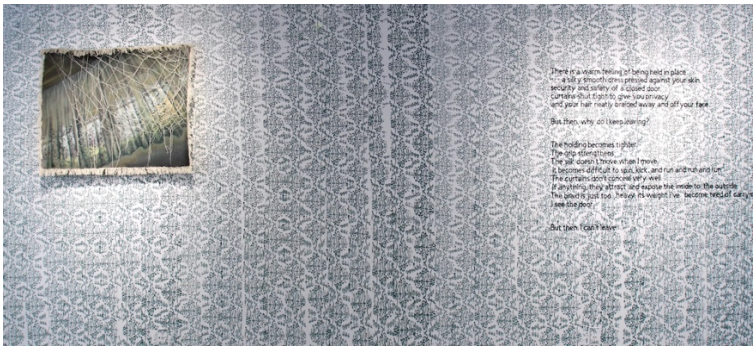

Figure 16: Installation shot from Farëna Saburi's MFA exhibition, "held in place". Pictured is thin space (парда), wall painting, and vinyl text, 2024.

[45] There are connections to be made between these contracts and that of residencies controlled by immigration laws and social systems.
[46] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The ideology of the gallery space*. Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Pr., 1986, 15.

These ‘Victorian’ painted walls appear as a highlighted context behind my works and words. The print blends smoothly into the patterning of *сандуқ (dowry chest),* both elaborate, detailed and aimed with precision. The color of paint is always adjusted by the internal contexts of the paintings–it becomes red to emphasize the volume and performance of the *сандуқ (dowry chest)*, a pale, muted blue to emphasize the boundaries of curtains and walls in *public privates (хонаи ман),* and the red again inside the open door of *хона биё (come home)* to acknowledge the complication of exterior contexts inside the public privacy of a home and a woman’s body.

Figure 17: Detail shot of сандуқ (dowry chest), from Farëna Saburi’s MFA exhibition “held in place”, 2024.

Hanging is yet another layer of context, viewed as placement, and specifically as the placement of bodies in my work. Some paintings appear to float up and away from the wall, casting their own shadows and existing independent of the wall spaces, but yet anchored to them. This speaks to the

constant back and forth of liberation in being a woman immigrant—a tightly woven dress the government tells you to wear and traveling outside borders to be trapped into another set of borders once again.

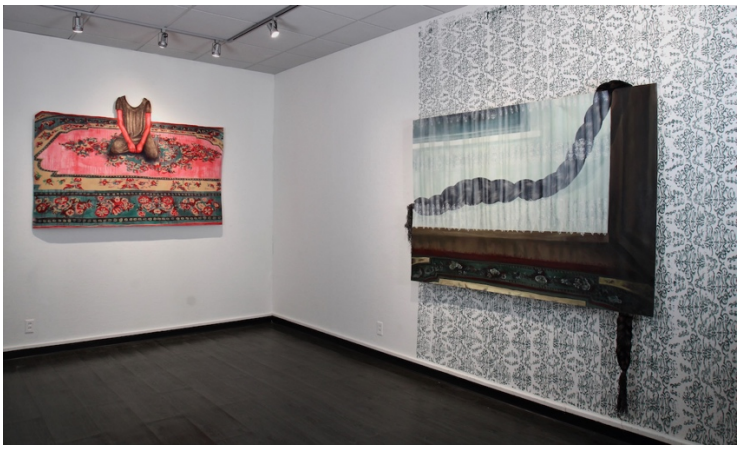

Figure 18: Installation shot from Farëna Saburi's MFA exhibition "held in place". Pictured is heaviest surface (қолин), public privates (хонаи ман), кокул (beaded yarn braid extensions), 2024.

Some of the hung works appear one with the wall—door hinges made inactive of their ability to swing, the cornered painting abiding by the physical boundaries of walls, and the very thin space behind the body of a painting. How

much space can these bodies (works) take up if they must move and bend by the rules of the boundaries they are placed in?

Figure 19: Detail shot of хона биё (come home), from Farëna Saburi's MFA exhibition "held in place", 2024.

Other works are anchored multiple times, once on a panel extended away from the wall but also anchored to it. There is a pretentious notion of independence from a space, that is then made apparent by the multitude of anchoring points. The work, *хона биё* (come home), is allowed to breathe, but it must stay anchored to a panel, which gives it distance from a wall, that is then made active through the view-finder cutout in its center.

The body (work) cannot escape containment while it frees itself from the wall. The body is aware of the wall as it removes itself from it. It highlights the spaces it leaves, creates, and steps into. The body (work) becomes a space of its own, contained, occupied, and contextualized by the outside world. The body is held in place, as it holds (depicts) the many ways a body is held by the places and spaces it enters, leaves, and navigates.

CONCLUSION

To conclude this work and research I must come into terms with what I have understood about freedom through the making of this work.

I gave into the movements painting has allowed me—walking around, moving my body, stepping back, coming in, leaving the painting abruptly in frustration. I visited the places I have limited access to—the doorstep to my aunties house, the carpet from my childhood home, the mountains of my grandmother's house, and the beautiful, yet confusing walls of Тоҷик (Tajik) homes.

I regained my connection to Тоҷик (Tajik) textiles under my own terms—ripping, cutting, fraying, sewing and gluing them alongside my own thoughts. I participated in the ritual of wearing my nationality—designing my own dresses with paint, and not having to wear them, but instead, critique the ways the traditional Тоҷик (Tajik) dress contains a woman in its restrictive space.

It was a freeing practice, and it was necessary as I was being restricted within my own immigration process. And yet, when the work was done, it too became static like me. I realized I have made many more versions of a struggle of mobility and immobility. I became responsible for a containment I wanted to escape.

But now I must remind myself of the difference I have noticed in these contained paintings—they are alive and moving constantly. In this paper, they speak through my words, but in every other space, they re-define their bodies. They may be influenced by the locations they now will go to next, but they will

have a voice—independent from me and this research. They will talk to every new viewer that encounters them; with a language they create of their own. The paintings have an unbreakable mobility of thought and identity—they are one and many all at once—a body that moves, bends, folds and extends. A body that fights stasis.

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