

soil, sand, salt

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Fine Arts

Graduate Program in Visual Arts
York University
Toronto, Ontario

September 2020

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Abstract

My practice focuses on exploring media, censorship, and communication through the mediums of painting and installation. Satellite dishes are one of the primary communication devices used to access mass media and as a result, have become part of urban design. These devices also play a dominant role in the infrastructure for surveillance and security systems. Many regions are still subject to restrictions in media infrastructure, and their inherent biases. Underground information networks thus emerge. Many secretly engineer homemade devices, such as satellite dishes, as a lifeline to outside media. Using the concept of cybernetic networks, this project seeks to examine the relationship that exists between the political body and the invisible networks demonstrated in unassuming infrastructures, through the use of an autobiographical methodology. Drawing together medium and message, the work explores the materiality of place and person, to demonstrate the complicated relationship that exists between technology and our socio-political climate.

Dedications

For my family whom I love deeply, Elaheh, Mohammad and Pedram.

For all their supports and love, even virtual, from 9,881 km distance and 8 time zones away.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the land on which this project has developed the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. I am grateful to live and work on this land.

I would like to thank my supervisory committee for their distinct viewpoints, and for challenging and encouraging me in the ways that I needed. I appreciate all that you do beyond measure.

My supervisor Janet Jones, if it wasn't for her help, I wouldn't be where I am now, thanks for believing in me. She has been like *soil*, helps me to stay steady in who I am, and remain true to my roots and background. Yam Lau who has pushed me to explore other mediums smoothly, flowing like *sand* to find the right way, coaxing me out of my comfort zone. Emelie Chhangur who with her bright and sharp insights, like *salt* crystals, has added deeper layers and thoughts to my art practice and to my critical thinking.

I am thankful to Nina Levitt for her support and advice, as well as to Tammer El-Sheikh, Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum, Barbara Balfour and Michel Daigneault.

Last but not least I am grateful for the professional support of my friends Caroline Bernard and Siamak Eskandari.

This project was made possible with support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the York University Graduate Fellowship.

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My story:

...It was censored!

Sometimes frustrating, sometimes laughably obvious. Most popular and mainstream cartoon series were broadcasted by the Iranian media on Fridays, which is our national weekend day. Often we gathered as a family; my parents, my cousins and I too eagerly watched cartoons together at lunchtime. TV has played an anchoring role in family gatherings. Back then, in the early 90s, we only had two national channels. Everybody knew the detailed schedule of the programs, as they were very limited; morning news, kids shows, cooking show, national geographic shows, afternoon kids show, evening news, and TV series time. Based on the TV shows being broadcast, we gathered in front of it, and spent our family time together, in the company of our screen. Fridays were the day we most looked forward to, as we watched our shows in a big group. Many of the cartoon series were productions coming out of Eastern Europe, with war themes and family dramas. Later this changed to Asian cartoon series, which were more exciting and pleasant in our youth. Usually after watching a few episodes, we found ourselves puzzled over some relationships between the main characters, and later we began noticing some missed scenes or the gap in the storylines. Girls and boys were all brothers and sisters, other men or women were uncles and aunts, and there were strictly no kissing or holding hands in scenes. For years, I was puzzled over the logistics of an Asian boy and a blond girl being legendary twins, or who Miss. Laura was, in the Serendipity the Pink Dragon animation. She was presented to us as a disembodied voice with a landscape background. Later, we discovered that those twins were in fact boyfriend and girlfriend, and that Miss. Laura was a mermaid with a bikini, meaning she couldn't be shown! There were so many examples that it eventually began to entertain us, once our initial confusion had passed. We

would guess the censored scenes, and discover the correct storyline ourselves with our own imagination and creativity.

The ‘video man’

Meanwhile, more privileged families, usually in bigger towns, had access to VHS and home video systems. There was always a ‘video man’ carrying a big black suitcase full of videotapes. He materialized late at night to exchange videotapes. It was illegal and required him to take care not to look suspicious on the streets. New clients were acquired based on personal referrals from trusted contacts. Eventually, being able to watch a full cartoon movie proved exciting, since they were usually different than the nationally broadcasted series in translation and included those censored scenes we now knew existed. Of course, we were not supposed to discuss these at school, treating these contraband scenes like a family secret.

Satellite dishes and a new world

Later, we got access to satellite dishes, which presented a huge technological leap for our underground network. It was like connecting to an endless sea of channels. Although the animations were in Japanese or Korean, we still managed to understand the storyline, even sometimes learning a few words. The most exciting part was as we watched the same series on our national channel, being able to compare the newly discovered scenes. What a feeling of triumph! As a kid, the censorship was relegated to ‘relationship statuses’ or intimate scenes. Kissing was not moral! Even when we watched a movie as a family that included a kissing scene, I would shy away, and block my view with my own hands to emphasize that I was not watching it.

Roof Top Camouflage

Having these satellite dishes was banned and so the devices had to be hidden. They were usually installed on rooftops, camouflaged between air conditioning units, or between hanging laundry or under tarps. The flat rooftop of our apartment building was my favourite spot to hang out after school until my parents came home from work. I would play around the block of cooler units and hang out around the precious satellite dishes. It wasn't until later that I realized I should have been more careful playing up there. The dish was angled just so, as to receive the signals. The few times it got disconnected, or lost the clarity, 'the wind' was blamed. I was too afraid to confess that I was the likely culprit, knocking the dish while I was playing. I remember my dad trying to adjust the dish on the roof following each small dislocation. We formed a human chain of family members, communicating from the rooftop to the sitting room. From the sitting room my Mom shouted the signal status of the TV, while my brother or I relayed the message from the bedroom window, while my father adjusted the dish on the roof at the end of the chain.

There was a small storage room on the rooftop, which I managed to climb on top of. From this vantage point I was offered the best view of the top of the surrounding buildings. I made it a game to figure out which apartments had satellite dishes, and how they had hidden them. For me, the buildings with dishes belonged to cool people, and the one without any devices were religious families.

Raids

Once in a while, there were raids to find the dishes, to collect or dismantle them. Sometimes there were investigations conducted on each building's roof, one by one, and sometimes there were simply raids on a few apartments. Following these, the rest of the neighbourhood would catch wind

of what was going on, and proceed to collect or disassemble their devices themselves. In this way they would avoid facing any penalty, while protecting their dishes from destruction or confiscation. There was a very good communication and support system among neighbours, letting each other know about compromising situations, thus preventing complications for the rest of the neighbourhood.

Once, on an early afternoon while walking home from school, I noticed soldiers at our neighbour's building, collecting their satellite dishes. As I wanted to protect ours, I suddenly started running towards our apartment. I believe my reaction was seen as suspicious, since one of them followed me home. He got into our front yard after me, but made it to our rooftop before me. I didn't know they were not allowed to come inside our building, so in a panic, I tried to save at least our receiver, by hiding it under a bed. In my alarmed state, I pulled it out too fast and broke the power cable. From the balcony, I saw the dish fly from the rooftop, landing on the front yard with a crash. It was such a surreal scene! Not wanting to carry the dish from the fourth floor, the soldier threw it over the edge of the roof.

On the nights following the raids, people began repairing their devices, and ordering replacement parts. The waitlists for parts and repairs were long and the 'Mr. Satellites' would be in high demand in the black market.

Domestic Censorship

My grandmother is a traditional and religious woman. She and my grandfather lived on the first floor of the apartment building where my family lived. Having always had knee problems, she couldn't climb the stairs often to visit our unit. When she found out we had a satellite dish on the roof, it made her upset. She preached morality and how foreigners could corrupt us. She was not a

political person, but was worried about the religious aspect of it. The potential for influencing sin amongst us was too great. After the first raid that cost us our dish, I believe my family kept it a secret from her. Some nights, my grandfather came up to our unit to watch some foreign series with my family, telling my grandma that they were watching sports! From this I learned the first level of self-censorship; I didn't talk about those channels and what we watched in front of her. She was disappointed with my parents that she couldn't sway them to become religious, so she shifted her attention to me. She told me not to follow their path, which I should wear hijab and pray so I would go to heaven. I would often hear the same advice from my school teachers too; they all wanted to get me into heaven.

Masjid and Chador

'Modern' people wouldn't go to mosques and modern women didn't wear the chador¹, and my grandmother did both, so I was curious about both. Despite the unsolicited advice, I enjoyed spending time with her, hearing fascinating stories, memories and most importantly the local news of the neighbourhood. She went to the neighbourhood mosque (masjid), regularly, which was where all her news and information came from. Usually, her analysis of the news and politics differed from what I heard from my family, or on satellite channels. She and her friends from masjid, of course, were all women and spent a long time every day together in the female section. They were a community with shared beliefs and values. At the age of 9, which is the age of taklif² for women, I acquired my first chador. It was actually mandated by our school, and felt fun and exciting. The whole class got new white chadors with a pink floral pattern matching our outerwear. We each had a headband with tiny flowers to stabilize our chadors, as most of us were wearing it for the first time and couldn't manage to keep it on. We marched to the neighbourhood masjid, my

¹ is an open cloak worn by some women in Iran, Iraq and some other predominantly Shia countries in outdoor or public spaces

² age of discernment

grandmother's preferred local, in a festive manner with our floral capes. We were entitled to the status of 'mature girls'.

I started to like the masjid, as my experience evolved from my only previous one at my cousin's grandmother's memorial service. Then, everybody had been wearing black chadors, crying and grieving. Some traditional or religious women would wear plain black chadors in public, as a hijab, and this, I didn't like. I was however attracted to the praying chadors, which were usually light colours with floral patterns or designs. They were also called 'home chador', insinuating that those wishing to sport a hijab indoors could opt for this style. When I saw my grandma folding her praying chador to put it in her bag, it meant she was going to the masjid. If she was taking the nicer one, it meant that there would be an event or she might be going to her friends'. She had chadors in different colours and patterns. Sometimes we used old and ripped ones to cover the satellite dish on the rooftop or we staged hanging laundry to conceal it.

Each area in town has at least one local masjid, which creates its own community. This becomes the source of one's information and beliefs. They each have their own networks, shared ideas, even their own selected candidates for elections. Every Friday the Imam would preach publicly about political and moral discourses. While some masjids have simple architecture, some of the bigger or more important ones are excellent examples of Islamic architecture. They are often ornamented with geometric blue tiles of floral patterns and a dome that creates an impressive symmetrical interior design.

I knew my grandma's moral objections for using the satellite's dishes and watching foreign channels came from her the talks which took place in the masjid. I have also heard from my school friends that the local masjid organized the raids to collect the dishes. This created some mixed feelings toward that mysterious place of blue tiles.

Radio Jamming

Eventually, using satellite dishes became more common, and was no longer limited to specific neighbourhoods. The government's strategy to counter this was to use radio jamming devices to block the reception of signals. They were often turned on for a few hours during peak times, generally in the early evening. Leaving those complex devices on all day long was impossible, as they affected other radio waves and transmissions. Besides, the heavy radio jamming signals could cause health complications for some people, specifically pregnant women. Once in a while we would hear stories, that were perhaps rumours, of effects on newborns. At this time I had graduated from watching cartoons to watching soap operas and music videos, when the government's satellite jamming activities were expanded. I could now understand the political reasons, and could see the grownup's frustrations during important news events when the audio or the images got stuck or pixelated. For well-educated and intellectual people, having satellite dishes was an intentional method of bypassing the censored national media, and accessing 'unbiased' global news. At the same time, many families just wanted to use satellite dishes to avoid the moral censorship of local media, and watch music videos, TV series and movies. By the late 90's, some aspects of globalization were expanding from TV rooms, in families' domestic areas to society and public places.

Media and Globalization

By the late 90's, globalization was beginning to take hold in the domestic sphere, merging family, society and the public realm. Students openly discussed foreign channels they watched, previously a taboo and secretive topic. They were learning about other cultures, and developing language skills in English, Turkish, and Arabic, depending on which satellite channels they watched or had access to most often. In school, students talked about the New Year's celebrations of the new

millennium, expressing excitement about the year 2000, despite it diverging from the traditional Iranian calendar. Accessing channels from other countries was very exciting, as it had educational and cultural aspects, beyond evading the moral and political censors. Younger generation started celebrating Christmas or Valentine's Day. Getting 'westernized' was cool and was perceived as intellectual amongst youths. Tastes in fashion, music, and food all had been affected in this transition. Still, in public places such as school, we had to be careful to not show off our Westernized tastes, or talk about foreign channels, let alone political ideas that could cause issues.



Figure 1: my childhood painting, a praying room. Marked by the teacher, 19/20, Dated 6.11.1994

Islamic and Persian Architecture

The grandness of Islamic architecture seeps into Persian the structures I have grown up around.

Marvels such as the technical prowess of the advanced domes and the delightfully complex structures of mosques call back to the style of ancient Islam. This highly aesthetic, geometric and mechanically inclined sophistication is the historical backdrop of the region. The Golden Proportion is a guiding principle, applied throughout design of the region.

Domes also reign supreme, the sphere having deep mythological ties as an earthly manifestation of the heaven

. The etymology of the word indicates a deliberate rapport between heaven and earth. The term *dome* is taken from Latin *domus* (house). The word is close to the Italian *duomo* (house, house of God, cathedral). In ancient traditions, a house was a *sacratum* itself, which symbolised the universe (Hejazi 53). These ethereal domes rest on substructures of circular, dodecagonal, octagonal or square plans (Hejazi, fig.2). The geometric superimposition of these forms represent transition from square substructure to circular shape.

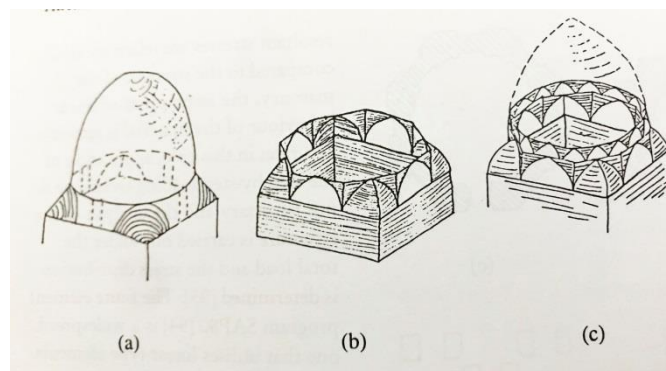


Figure 2: Methods of transition from square substructure to circular dome. *Historical Buildings of Iran: their Architecture and Structure*, M.M. Hejazi, 1998. P.58

Mosques and Public sphere

The term ‘mosque’, in a narrow definition, designates the building that is devoted to prayer. The literal definition is drawn from the Arabic word for place of worship. However, the history of mosques also designates them as cultural and social spaces as well, broadening their function outside a simply religious purpose. Mosques are public spaces, where communities have historically gathered, creating a core role in public life. This adds another dimension to the term that is not captured in its strictest definition. As put forth by Khaghani, “Practical, social and political elements , as well as architectural tradition of the context in which the mosque was built, all give particular direction to the concept and image of the mosques.”(Khaghani44)

The concept of the division of the public and private sphere comes into question in the context of the mosque. These divisions cannot be seen as universal, indicating a certain degree of fluidity to the idea of person and space (Khaghani94). For example, a common Roundel Pattern in Persian art and illuminations, ‘Shamseh’, symbolizes diversity in unity, and unity in plurality. Forms radiating from a single centre illustrate the dichotomy of homogeneity and individuality.

The elegance of this architecture and its perseverance through ugly times serves as an important reminder. Our roots as a people are deep, and they prevail in our culture. As the landscape shifts politically, the physicality of spaces reminds us of the need to endure within our environment, both manufactured and natural. All the while, in stark contrast is the truth of its ephemerality. Buildings are destroyed in war, satellites plummet from roofs, sand blow away engravings. This also brings into question the use and function of these spaces, and the notion of unity. Community is contrasted with divisiveness, the public with the private spheres, and their relationship to surveillance, community and politicization.

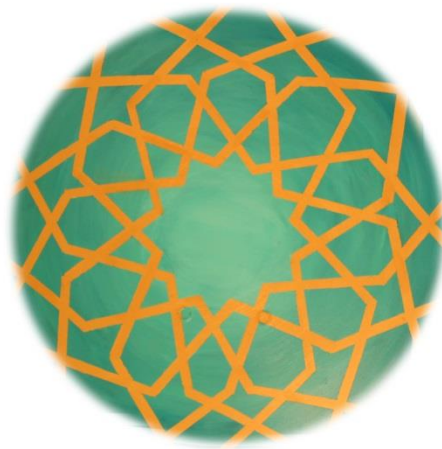


Figure 3: Fatapour, E. *Shamseh Design*, Acrylic on a satellite dish, 2019

“The notion of a public has been deeply allied with the concept of a public sphere, which is defined ideally as a space—a physical place, social setting, or a media arena—in which citizens come together to debate and discuss the pressing issues of their society.

In the 1920’s, social commentator Walter Lippmann postulated that the public sphere was nothing more than a “phantom”—that it was possible for average citizens to keep abreast of political issues and events and give them due consideration given the chaotic pace of industrial society. Definitions of the public sphere have been enormously influenced by the ideas of German theorist Jurgen Habermas. He sees the public sphere as a group of “private” persons who can assemble to discuss matters of common “public” interest in ways that mediate state power” (Sturken, Cartwright, 241).

The concept of the public sphere is also supported by theories from Michael Warner’s ideas on the flow of information and discourse through space. This is central to my work, and frames my practice. An important theme in my work is that of the merging the private and public spheres, and how this ties in to the sociopolitical attachments of the body-politic.

Using Michael Warner’s definition of the public sphere as a space of discourse drawn from the relation between strangers, my work is based on the idea put forth by Warner that public speech is at once personal and impersonal. Thus, public spaces become social spaces via the ‘reflexive circulation of discourse’. (Sturken, Cartwright)

My work looks to contextualize the collision of the public and private sphere of discourse, where the public sphere moves inwards, breaching the doors of the private home, while the private sphere moves outwards, thrust into the public domain. This is seen by the dialogue in my work of domestic textile, and female oriented craftwork, and its superimposition on the surveillance mechanisms of the public sphere.

Visual Autobiography

As lines blur between these spheres, bodies serve as mediums of messages. There is an important narrative that emerges through the displaced bodies of diaspora. Drawing on Sara Brophy and Janice Hladki's *Embodiment of Politics in Visual Autobiography*, bodies become vessels of lived experiences and events, manifesting biographies that are often rooted in trauma, oppression, violence and harsh moments. "...Visual autobiographers are engaged in reinvigorating public spheres, articulation multiple embodiments, and fostering new forms of analysis and coalition" (5)

The media we consume is rife with autobiographies, which Patrick Zimmerman describes as "radical media democracies that animate contentious public spheres" (Brophy and Hladki). Julie Rak emphasizes that the terminology of 'auto/biography' demonstrates the ways that 'self and life' can be articulated in cultural production. (Rak16)

"Globalization and cultural studies critics tend to cast the proliferation of autobiography in contemporary culture as a symptom – and a mechanism- of neoliberal privatization. Zygmunt Bauman for example, sees the new prominence of "individual life politics" as signalling the evacuation of the public sphere of collective, democratic potential "(Brophy and Hladki14).

I seek to use my own body visually in a statement that is autobiographical in nature. My body and the space it occupies is politicized, therefore I embody cultural practice, as per Brophy and Hladki. Visual autobiographies, they explain, push to re-frame conventional means of the transmission of stories, in a manner that transcends materiality. The focus is on interaction and relation, thus imagining a co-existence with an environment, in a manner that meditatively emphasises visual engagement. My video artworks, *soil, sand, salt*, are informed by this practice, representing a rhythmic repetition of motifs, both physical and intracorporeal.

Past works

I think of my practice as a vessel for memories of past traumas. I use imagery, colour and technique to charge my paintings with empathy and present them in mixed media installations that encompass the viewer. In order to convey both personal narratives and connect with a larger context, I depict my body in foreign spaces. I often paint figurative work, at life scale. The installation of this work immerses the viewer and in doing so, opens a dialogue about the survivorship of displaced peoples and the power of the state over its people. My work strives to be charged with empathetic visions, reified into mixed media installations often involving painting and performance

My practice references Michel Foucault's "biopolitics", the strategies of governing bodies to control, restrict, and manage society's knowledge, power, and people. As much as Foucault's notion of the culturally constructed body (waiting for historical inscription) informs my practice, so too does Judith Butler's paradoxical response that questions the body as a site of constructed identity. Butler offers the idea of a pre-cultured body untouched by history. Through the combination of Butler's theories in my own painting and site specific installations, I investigate how specific historical events from war-torn communities have a paralyzing effect over bodies.

My initial artworks began as studies of Persian miniatures and oriental design. This style is very composed and expertly detailed, and its narration of history and literature are inherently intertextual and so remain contemporary. I employ traditional carpet design and aged fragments of handmade carpets to symbolize the historical significance and cultural importance of these objects. The patterns and colours use symbols to propose non-normative ways of understanding history, as each work meshes together with human bodies to create a larger homogenized being that involves all people.



Figure 4, *Quilted*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 87x47", 2016



Figure 5, *Dual Realities*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 65x98", 2016



Figure 6, *On the Edge*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 65x60", 2016



Figure 7, *Hibernation*, Mixed Media on Canvas, 66x87", 2016

Due to the lack of connectivity between a social structure and a body, I have found myself developing my art through a new medium of performance. Performance has allowed me to further my painterly skills; hence I have started hybrid paintings, a creation between an eastern flattened style and western painting, as evidenced in the photographs of my performances.

Mirage was my first attempt at still performance and the inclusion of my own body into my art pieces (figure 8 and 9). This series was based on my personal experience of emigration from Iran. The works attempt to represent the difficulty of living between cultures and feeling a sense of “home”. The work also deals with my own personal, emotional struggle in adopting my new home while still living with the lingering thoughts of my traumatic past. The work is created using a combination of painting techniques on the glass that are then projected on the artist, to create an environment that opens itself up to performance, installation, and painting. Blending these media together to create a single work of art expresses the sense of illusion and a longing for home in a land that is foreign.



Figure 8, *Mirage* Series, Still Performance, York University, 2017



Figure 9, *Mirage Series*, Still Performance, York University, 2017



Figure 10, *My Story*, Installation Shot, Solo Exhibition by North York Arts, 918 Bathurst Centre for Arts and Culture, September 2019



Figure 11, De-installation shot, *My Story*, Solo Exhibition by North York Arts, 918 Bathurst Centre for Arts and Culture, September 2019

MFA practice

We live hungry for the truth, and connections to the outside world. The Iranian diaspora has flung us all over the world; however ties to home are lifelines that flow both ways. I was born during the Iraqi-Iranian war in the mid 1980's. Communication systems during this time were heavily censored. I remember excruciatingly long lines for the international phone booths, communications being throttled through the funnel-effect of human bodies. John Durham Peters encapsulates an important nuance illustrated through international family calls. His humorous recounting of an absurd cyclical phone call routine consisting of the briefest of hellos, immediately succeeded by scheduling the time and date for the next phone call. Conversations that are over as soon as they begin are less about sharing news and more about fostering a physical connection to those far away (Peters 37).

I decided to create a series of satellite dishes built with unexpected materials such as copper and clay.

These materials are chosen to relate to ideas of concealment and dysfunction. Copper is an indispensable conducting metal used in most telecommunication devices, while clay alludes to drought and war, realities that plague the Middle East. These pieces reference the grassroots strategies used in response to the oppression of restricted media outlets and the ban on satellite dishes in some regions (figure 12).

Despite being illegal, satellite dishes are embedded in Iranian society, much like a mycelium network, forever blooming, dying and reappearing somewhere else thanks to an invisible, biopolitical infrastructure.

For the copper piece, I obtained a large copper sheet, cut out a circle with and sanded it all around it to smooth the sharp edges (figure13). Then I applied layers of mineral salts to oxidize it and extract the natural variety of colours from it, making it look like an abstract painting. Later I hammered the back of it, using the same method as in the production of copper handicrafts, a common Iranian souvenir (figure14).



Figure 12, Experimenting clay on satellite dish, York University, 2018

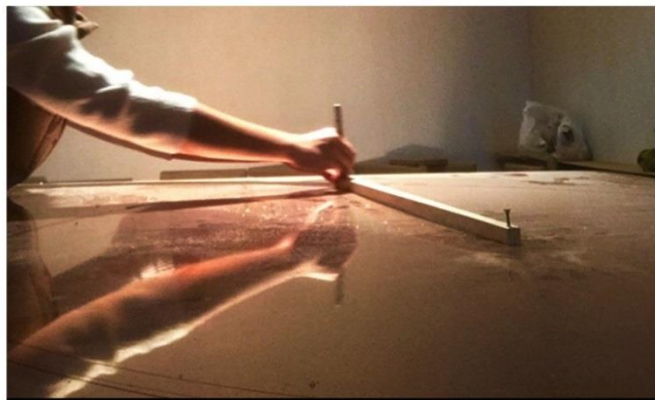
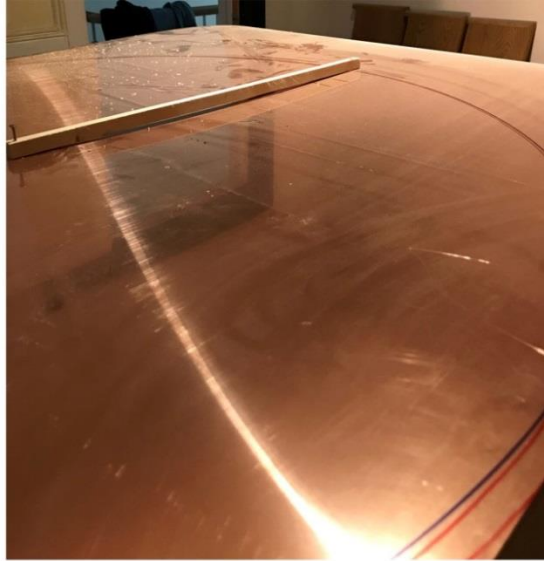


Figure 13, Process of cutting the copper piece, 2019

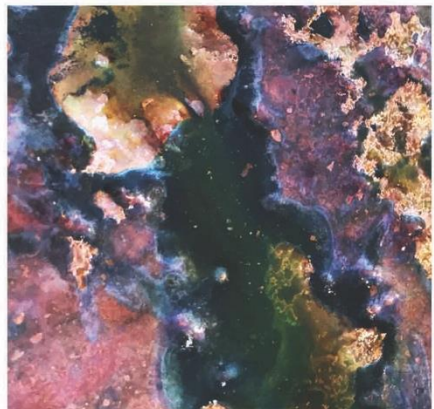
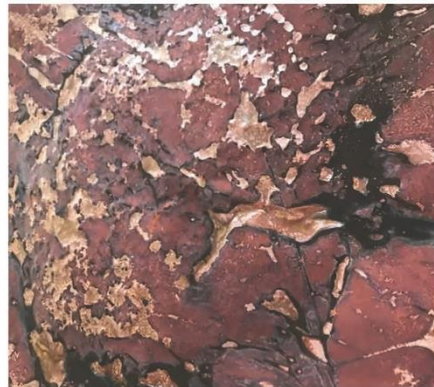
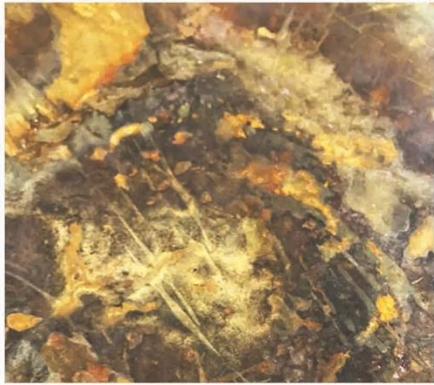


Figure 14, Process of oxidizing the copper piece, 2019

Artist Statement

My practice focuses on exploring the topic of media, censorship, and communication through the mediums of painting, installation and video art. Satellite dishes are one of the primary communication devices used to access mass media and as a result, have become part of urban design. These devices also play a dominant role in the infrastructure for surveillance and security systems. The networks that support media transmission are structured to maintain existing systems of power. Subsequently, ideologies and priorities are built into media, and the system of their transmission isn't neutral. Many regions are still subject to restrictions in media infrastructure. Efforts to maintain the status quo result in means that directly control the knowledge citizens have access to. Underground information networks thus emerge such as the secretly engineered homemade devices, such as satellite dishes, as a lifeline to outside media. The raids to unearth these devices became so frequent during my youth, that it became imperative to camouflage them. They were often hidden in plain sight, camouflaged as air conditioning units, concealed under tarps or between hanging laundry. As found in nature or the military, a range of strategies to blend in and create invisibility can be found.

This practice has culminated in my current interests as an artist. My exploration of growing up in a surveillance state, my status as a product of a diaspora and my trajectory as a vessel for story telling have led me to this most recent project. My work now reflects on the current state of censorship affairs, informed by the evolution of the socio-political sphere, which I have witnessed in my lifetime. Adding the dimensions of time and space to my practice through the inclusion of video and performance, offers an opportunity for reflection. I am witnessing an erosion of the spaces that have been defined as 'public' and 'private'. This concept is by no means new to me, as previous works have thrust female domesticity into the scrutiny of the public. Now, I feel my new

work requires subtle contemplation. My exploration of censorship, and the idea of hiding in plain sight, invites those around me to read between the lines.

Incorporating the concept of visual autobiographical artwork and storytelling, my practice becomes complete, incorporating all aspects of my lived experience. This exploration delves into the connections between embodied knowledge, cultural pedagogy and visual autobiography.

This stems as an almost literal embodiment of Foucault's body-politic, one of my fundamental guiding theories informing my work. In a way, it presents a rebuttal to the biopolitical gaze of surveillance, of the oppression of governments' restriction of society.

My work looks to blend the deep traditions of Iran with the race for progress. Dealing with Iran's rich and ancient history, and yanking it into the now, led to a series of works that deal with superimposition.

My satellite dish project has branched off in a few different directions. I sought to create my own vessels to represent the invisible cybernetic networks around us; combining the natural, earthen material with the physicality of new technology, creating biological computers of sorts. Physically manifesting the reach of an invisible network, this project led me to tour satellites in Iran, identifying sites for possible 'communication'. The vernacular of materials is a cornerstone of my work, I seek to allow them to speak their own messages. The physicality of the materials, the landscape and the process symbolize a synthesis of medium and message.

Framing Pieces in Cybernetic, Invisible Infrastructure and “Biopolitics” Theory

The art pieces I am creating will combine media theory and organic matter. I will be merging technology, social practices and symbolic materiality. The copper satellite is an explicit reference to the conductive material that is a key to telecommunications. This material also represents a tie to the land, as Iran is an important mineral rich area that holds significant reserves of copper. Copper is also a material that oxidizes over time. This temporal and environmental sensitivity of copper is symbolic in a few ways. The oxidation of the copper morphs the metal from a shiny, orange-brown shade, into a teal patina with the passing of time and exposure to its environment. This patina serves as a means of preservation preventing further degradation of underlying layers.

This colour also emulates turquoise, a stone named ‘firoozeh’ in Farsi, a culturally significant emblem. Turquoise is used extensively in Iranian and Islamic architecture, as well as handicrafts, due to its prevalence as a natural resource in Iran. This shade also holds spiritual significance, as it recalls the celestial sky, implying a heavenly connection. Satellites are inherently bound to the sky, through the way in which they function. This creates a conversation between technology, and the physical character of the satellites through this connection.

The transformative nature of the copper refers to Pickering’s description of Beer’s biological computers, which he characterizes as ‘adaptive systems, capable of reconfiguring themselves in the face of environmental transformations’ (Pickering 477-479). Thus, the copper behaves in much the same way as a biological computer, striving to achieve equilibrium, and achieving so through adaptation. I carry this idea through to the desire for equilibrium in Iranian society, and how the satellites themselves serve as organic ‘regulators’ that allow for a sense of balance.

Using clay ties back to the land as well, however its principal use in this piece is to mimic the practice of camouflaging satellites. This demonstrates how it is possible to be hidden in plain sight, using materials taken directly from the environment, applied in the simplest ways. Similarly to its complement, the clay satellite refers to Beer's equilibrium in its ecosystem, where 'the immediate technological problem lay in achieving a coupling between naturally adaptive systems and the systems they were intended to control' (Pickering 479).

Symbolically, using clay that is cracked and dry refers to a lack, both a lack of water (a symbol of life), and the lack of a critical element for life. In this analogy, what is missing is that of free-flowing media.

The copper satellite stands with its earthen counterpart based on what they represent within Iranian society. Both pieces are created from the earth, the land and the surrounding nature of these people. In a sense, copper represents industry and modernity, bringing light to the interior workings of this technology, proudly demonstrating its functionality and the beauty of this. The oxidation of the metal over time exemplifies how these perceptions can fade over time, and how we can wind up with an entirely different version of what one had hoped for, sometimes resulting in desperate acts of self-preservation. The realization, however, is that this is a sham that is idealist in its formulation but falling short of being usable in reality, much like a satellite built entirely from copper. Clay and earth also tie back to the land, but in a way that recalls the ancestral and unprocessed. It also can represent aridness and a want for something critical.

I would like to present these satellites as cybernetic models, which would be an example of biological computers, as outlined by Pickering in 'Beyond design: cybernetics, biological computers and hylozoism'. Norbert Wiener famously defined cybernetics in 1948 as the scientific study of control and communication in the animal and the machine. Pickering's paper traces the

fascinating and complicated history of British cybernetics, studying curious cases of attempts to create biological and chemical computers. Detailing Ashby's homeostasis machine, Pickering explains how the machine managed to become homeostatic itself, becoming actually performative (Pickering 473). Pickering then moves to Beer's systems, which are adaptive in the face of environmental transformation. These cybernetic models respond to changes in homeostasis that threaten viability by reconfiguring themselves to re-establish equilibrium (Pickering 479). They emerge as a means to redress the balance lost. In this line of cybernetic theory, Pickering also introduces Hertz's strategy of entraining the agency of nature. In a manner similar to his, I look to incorporate the act of oxygen being harnessed in the oxidization of copper. With the clay satellite, I demonstrate a lack of balance, resulting in a failure in a sense, as the satellite experiences degradation through cracking.

The physical manifestation of these devices by the Iranian population could be argued as a blending of medium and message. The term, coined by the trailblazing Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan, is a theme I address in these pieces. These satellites serve to represent the biological network that exists in human media, combining technology and humans to create a cybernetic network. In the most literal of senses, the medium do become messages through the choice of materials: copper for conductivity, and clay for dissimulation.

Peters makes a link between the media and unassuming infrastructure. He looks to nineteenth century thinkers, obsessive about determining infrastructures into understandable concepts and argues that this has translated into a deep infrastructural ethic in modern thought. Infrastructure, argues Peters, is by nature indiscernible to our eyes. Citing Lisa Park's terminology of 'infrastructural concealment', he explains that most infrastructures, such as cable lines and water pipes, by design are meant to blend in with scenery around it (Peters 35-36).

‘Infrastructures tend to change incrementally, and have the inertia of previous innovation to build upon. They are improved upon modularly, and clearly illustrate the principle of path-dependence. They demand labour and upkeep. There are infrastructure only to the degree that they are normalized into taken for granted; they have social as well as technical components’ (Peters 33).

He posits that infrastructuralism overlaps with media theory in the call to make environments visible. We can therefore see how the idea of a cybernetic network could be structured through infrastructuralism. Peters argues that infrastructure tends to be thought of as new, flashy technology and historically, we are apt to label media technologies as those that are explicitly innovative. However, Peters looks to draw attention to the unremarkable media infrastructures that surround us, that have become ordinary and are therefore overlooked (Peters 36). The idea of invisible infrastructures, such as the trees, daylight and dirt expands the possibility of mediums for messages and supersedes those we would normally identify (Ibid). My satellites use the literal land of Iran as a medium, ideologically aligning with the symbolism of this democratized societal network of satellites. The mediums used serve to make this invisible network visible, through the use of common materials. Peters also cites the importance of knowing nature only through our artifacts (Peters 50). I am emphasizing this relationship by using natural materials in an explicit manner to create these artifacts of infrastructure. I imagine a paradigm for the creation of these satellites where harnessing Peters theory of organic evolution between human and non-humans these satellites have ‘evolved’ to adapt their purpose and needs such as to emulate human networks.

Censorship is a game of controlling what is real. Peters touches on this, discussing the expression ‘quod non est in actis, non est in mundo’; what is not in the documents is not in the world. Peters explains how using media technology as a means of funneling power to the elite, presents a

‘systematic favouring of paterial over material powers’ (Peters 20). This illustrates the critical value of holding power over media, as ideological domination poses ever more total means of control.

The Iranian return to a theocratic authoritarian model is in a sense a reversal of Foucault’s theory of the scientific state apparatus. He attributes this to the advent of the “anatomy-politics” of the human body, through the removal of monocratic practices. The emergence of home-made, underground satellites amongst the Iranian population, however, could be argued as an effort to democratize and decentralize this monopoly on knowledge and power. The new network emerges as a conscious undercurrent to the tightly regulated and repressive state apparatus, using technology as a means to foster a ‘scientific’ state apparatus of sorts. Using Peters’ argument outlined above citing Innis’ principle of leverage, this push from the bottom for media access demonstrates a movement rooted in a desire to harness power in a democratic fashion.

Foucault traces the development of technology and the role it will come to play within biopolitics: “To say that power took possession of life in the nineteenth century, or to say that power at least takes life under its care in the nineteenth century, is to say that it has, thanks to the play of technologies of discipline on the one hand and technologies of regulation on the other, succeeded in covering the whole surface that lies between the organic and the biological, between body and population. We are, then, in a power that has taken control of both the body and life or that has, if you like, taken control of life in general – with the body as one pole and the population as the other. What we are dealing with in this new technology of power is not exactly society (or at least not the social body, as defined by the jurists), nor is it the individual body. It is a new body, a multiple body, a body with so many heads that, while they might not be infinite in number, cannot necessarily be counted. Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political

problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as power's problem I would like in fact like to trace the transformation not at the level of political theory, but rather at the level of the mechanisms, techniques, and technologies of power. We saw the emergence of techniques of power that were essentially centered on the body, on the individual body. They included all devices that were used to ensure the spatial distribution of individuals bodies (their separation, their alignment, their serialization, and their surveillance) and the organization, around those individuals, of a whole field of visibility'' (Foucault 252-253).

Although these satellites are fundamentally symbols of resistance and ingenuity in the face of adversity, they also serve as important reminders of just how dysfunctional and threatening some countries have become for the freedom of rights even with the arrival of internet access. As Sereghy, Bunk and Preiss cover in their work on the role of new media in the context of recent Arab revolutions, there are many difficulties still being faced despite access to technologies. There are examples that the government used the internet to track down those rallying and organizing protests, to then carry out a brutal police crackdown. Following this, control remained in government hands as they simply shut down social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter. (Sereghy et al 13) As always, ways to circumvent this censorship emerged, through the installation of Virtual Private Networks on cellular devices to remain one step ahead by creating new versions once older ones are blocked by the government. This again demonstrates a desire for homeostasis within society like in nature.

With satellites, similar tactics were used. This recalls Foucault's biopolitics, as it involved strategies of governing bodies to achieve control, restriction and management of society's knowledge, power and people. By using radio jammers, the government sought to manage illicit satellite networks using another manifestation of an invisible infrastructure to control the

biopolitic. Once again, Pickering's modern paradigm can be applied, where much like Beer's automatic factory where output and inputs are programmed and controlled by the designer (Pickering 485).

The role media plays in democratic societies is critical in a system of checks and balances by government. The media becomes essentially a watchdog. The democratization of the communication of information has been the basis of revolutions, a pattern dating back to the invention of the printing press during the European Reformation. The ability to communicate ideas, theories, critiques and news gives individuals collective bargaining power with governments. Informed people are powerful ones. Hyper propagandist regimes, such as North Korea, serve as a jarring reminder of the importance of the free flow of media. The alternative results in nearly comically dysfunctional and diabolic means of control.



Figure15, Clay Dish, York University, 2019

Current Time

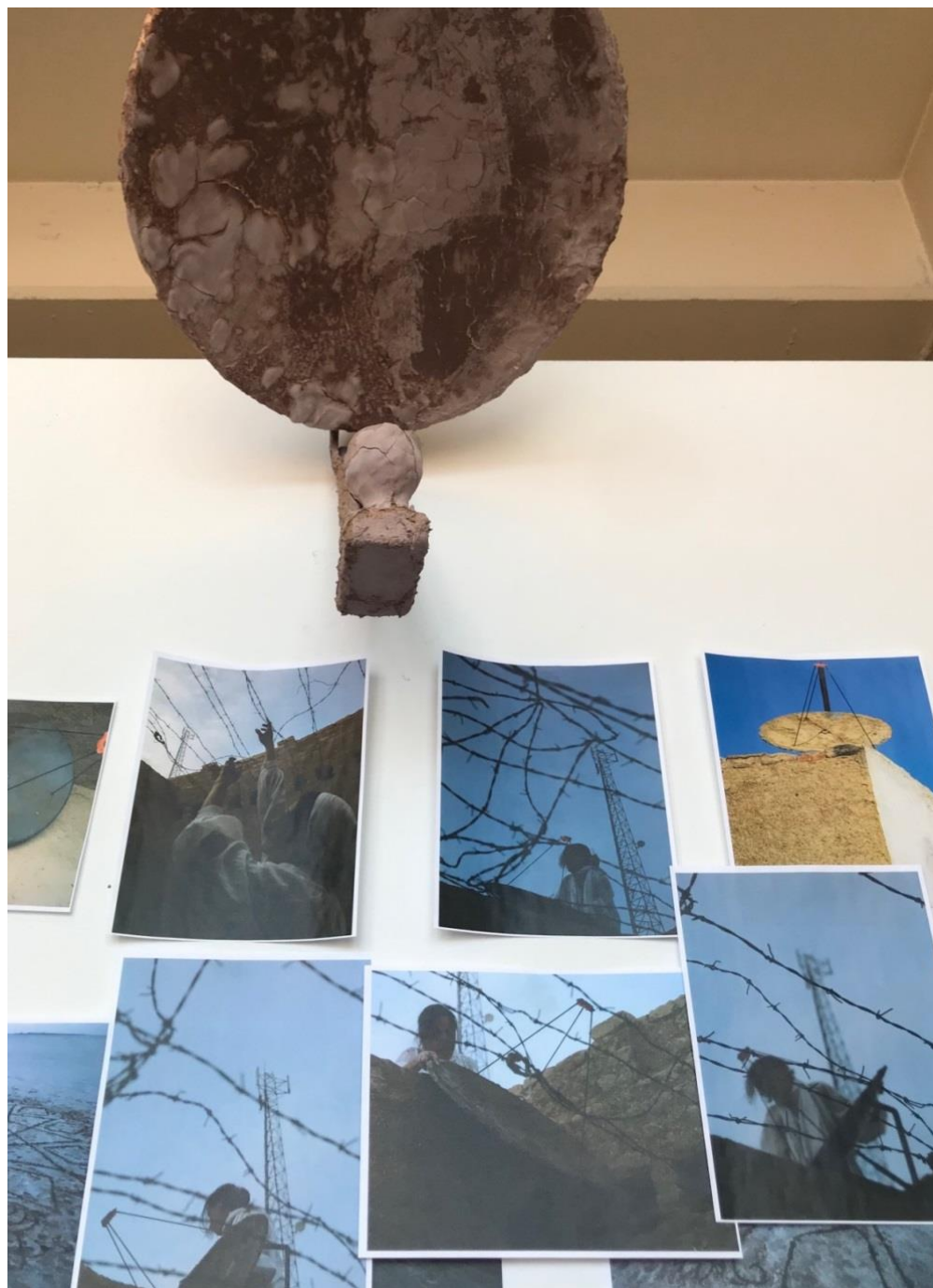


Figure16, Studio Wall, York University, 2019

An ironic situation took place in November 2019. While reading Marshal McLuhan's theories about communication and Canadian journal of communications, and the treatment of media as a natural resource, Iran's entire internet network was blacked out, in response to the nationwide protests regarding fuel price increases. I constantly checked my phone and woke at all hours of the night to see whether my family had received or responded to my messages. Propaganda and fake news peaked during this time, with no reliable news broadcasts accessible to those within the country. With the internet shut down, citizen journalism which had been used to ensure more reliable news sources, went down along with it. International news agencies, with a broad spectrum of ideologies, allegiances and biases broadcast contradictory reports of what was happening in Iran, behind the now closed doors of a country of 80 million. Another frustration was that during this period, which seemed like it was about to lead to civil war, I was hard pressed to find any coverage of the news on Canadian outlets, even those labeling themselves as international. In fact, the only time I encountered Canadian coverage was in a fleeting midnight report on CBC. I found myself questioning what was considered 'newsworthy', as I watched coverage of a train accident in Asia with several injuries make the news, instead of the nationwide protests of an entire country being strong-armed by their government. This lapse in coverage meant that as nasty rumors of violence back home made it to us, those cut off from friends and family, felt even more despair and anguish. For the first time since my immigration to Canada, I felt torn in half. My body was in Canada, but my mind and soul were wandering in Iran. I rely entirely on communication apps to communicate with my family and relatives, using them daily, sometimes hourly. Those blackout days made me think about how easily I had become disconnected from my source.

I felt like a floating satellite dish wandering around in the sky, disconnected from its provenance. I kept staring at my studio wall, where I hung screenshots of my videos and thought about this disconnection and media censorship. The images of a sky crossed by barb wires became an image

of myself, trying to go through obstacles to install my dish and connect to the sky. Above those images, a satellite dish had been installed covered with clay, pointing towards the stills, trying to make conversation.

The whole situation made me think about the Loon LLC project, which is an Alphabet Inc. subsidiary working on providing Internet access to rural and remote areas. Billions of people around the world are still without internet access, and Loon is a network of balloons traveling on the edge of space, delivering connectivity to people in unserved and underserved communities around the world. Loon partners with mobile network operators globally to expand the reach of their LTE service. One example project was delivering emergency connectivity in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017.

As a response, I created this piece using a dysfunctional found satellite dish, which I covered with clay. It looks like a fragment of dry land, perhaps in the desert. It becomes a part of land, resting heavily on ground, while a blue helium balloon tries to hold it afloat. It yearns to be released, connecting to the sky, but it can't.



Figure17, Untitled, Inspired by Loon LLC Project, Special Project Gallery, York University, 2019

Satellite dishes have always been interesting objects for me. I have seen them carrying many different meanings, almost developing personalities based on their context. Having a few of them installed together creates a feeling of a military zone or under surveillance. When a group of them is installed on a building, it generally reveals the building to be a news agency or a governmental office as these need a higher degree of communicative power. Wherever I go, I look for them.

(Figure18-20)



Figure18, Roof top view, Tehran, Iran, 2019

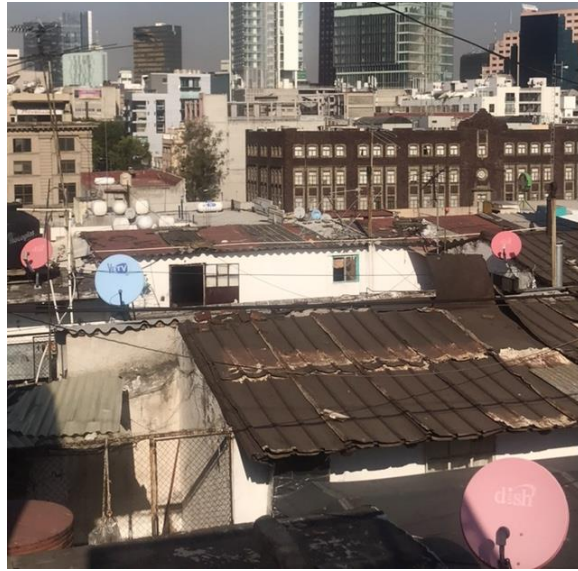


Figure 19, Roof top view, Mexico City, 2019



Figure20, Hiking trip in Alps, France, 2019

Camouflage

At its most general, camouflage is taken to mean strategic concealment within physical, social and political contexts as it pertains to surveillance, aesthetics, communities and, of course, nature. The concept of camouflage goes beyond simple strategies of mimicry, beyond the politics of appearance or beyond the art of disappearance. In a digitally networked age of surveillance and counter-surveillance and under specific cultural conditions, pervasive networks have transformed the logic of camouflage. Because of new technologies and digital networks, the physical camouflage of dishes is not always necessary anymore. Subsequently, the perception of camouflage in the visual field may not play the same ontological role as it has in past. My work attempts to understand how camouflage works in society and culture. It can be a vital conceptual tool for analysing today's sensory world. This sensory world starts from ourselves outward to our domestic environment and to complicated social and political affairs. Self-censorship becomes more frequent, starting at a small scale in our daily interactions with others, or how we alter our images of ourselves for social media. Eventually it expands to involve other people and to the scale of society.

Satellite dishes are often installed using camouflage to conceal their presence in public space, thus avoiding confiscation. They have become a part of urban designs and in my practice I link them to vernacular architecture.

I use colour and pattern to “disguise” each dish. In one instance, I recreated a brick pattern making the object blend into the wall behind it. I used a functional international channel satellite. The dimension of local channels satellites are about 18-22” and the dishes which are above 32” have the ability to receive international broadcasted channels. This satellite with the low-noise block (LNB) could receive several Iranian channels if it was installed facing the correct direction.



Figure21, *The Brick Wall*, Next|Wave Exhibition, Varley gallery, Toronto, 2020

In Iran, people who live close to the country's borders have always fascinated me because of their diverse culture, bilingualism and their sense of belonging, or perhaps not belonging, to two countries. As a child, I envied the border areas as they had the privilege of accessing the neighbouring country's media with regular antenna. As the residents are mostly bilingual, they could watch foreign cartoons without censorship and understand them.

In one of my recent trips, I stayed in a Turkman tribal village close to the border of Iran and Turkmenistan to discover more about their culture and traditions and to learn how to weave carpets. The scarves used in my installation, *homemade satellite dishes*, are obtained from that region. Apart from Turkmenistan, Turkmen also live in Iran, Afghanistan and other parts of the former Soviet Union. Turkmen women wear different clothing depending upon their age. For example, young girls wear traditional dress made from dark fabric richly embroidered with bright

spring flowers that convey beauty, health and fertility. The clothing of middle-aged women is adorned with bright colours such as yellow, the color of autumn and symbolic of the sun warming the land and the woman's entire family with its rays. Gowns worn by a woman over 63, the prophet age, are white and their embroidery brings to mind desert plants. More space is left between embroideries representing "the space of life" intended for new generations. Women's clothing is also divided into several categories: working clothes, city clothes, ceremonial and home clothes. When going out or having visitors, a woman covers her hairs with a large shawl designed by floral pattern with a long macramé fringe.

homemade satellite dishes

This installation examines the subjective experience of censorship through the lens of self-censorship, media, gender and textiles using satellite dishes used to receive local channels. With paint, I have mimicked the colour and the patterns of Turkman scarves to relate strategies of camouflage to a domestic, and female dominated, environment. These pieces were initially installed in the AGYU vitrines (figure 20). The colour of each vitrine was modified to match the colours of the scarves so that the dish blends into its background. Through these means, I hope to evoke a sense of personal insecurity and open a more general discussion on concealment ranging from that used by animals to the military or from gender to aesthetics (figure 19).



Figure 22, *homemade satellite dishes*, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, 2020



Figure23, Installation Shot, *homemade satellite dishes*, Art Gallery of York University, Toronto, 2020

I have started to create more pieces mining the connection between satellite dishes, concealment, textiles, gender and domestic spaces. Through the use of small scale, local channel satellites on tripods, I opened a new conversation about their connection to the body.

Colour and pattern is used to “disguise” each dish and then they are enveloped by the fabric of the *Chador*, an open cloak worn by some women in Islamic countries. This extends the ideas into the domestic and religious realm. The colour of each dish is modified to match the hue and pattern of the veil that covers it, so that the dish blends into the fabric. Pixelated elements painted on the dishes’ surface hint at its original electronic function. Through these means, I seek to evoke a sense of personal insecurity and open a general discussion on concealment.

Now, I am designing my own fabric patterns, pixelating them like a TV was affected by a jamming device. These patterns are transferred to the satellite dish which is then covered by that fabric, thus blending the object into the domestic sphere.



Figure24, Pixelating fabric design, 2020

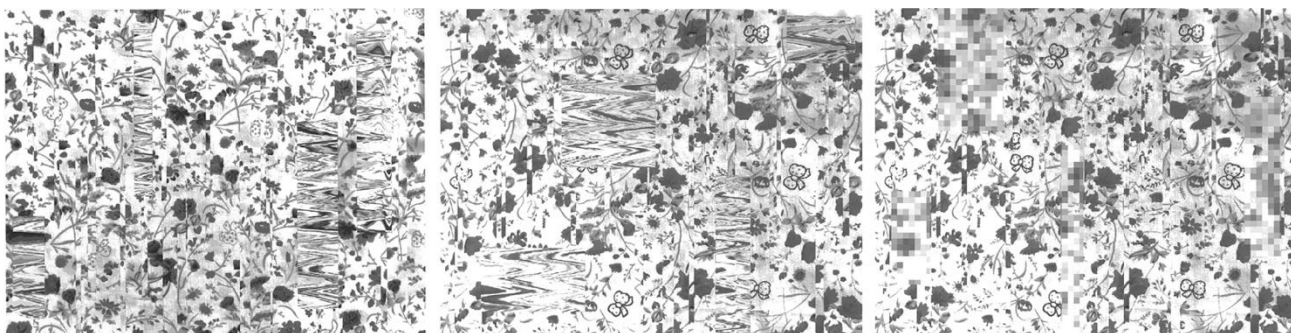


Figure25, Transforming fabric designs ‘effected by TV jamming device’, 2020



Figure 26, *homemade satellite dishes Series*, Next|Wave Exhibition, Varley gallery, Toronto, 2020

Soil, Sand, Salt



Figure 27, image from *soil* video art, Iran, 2019
Videography and Photo by S. Eskandari

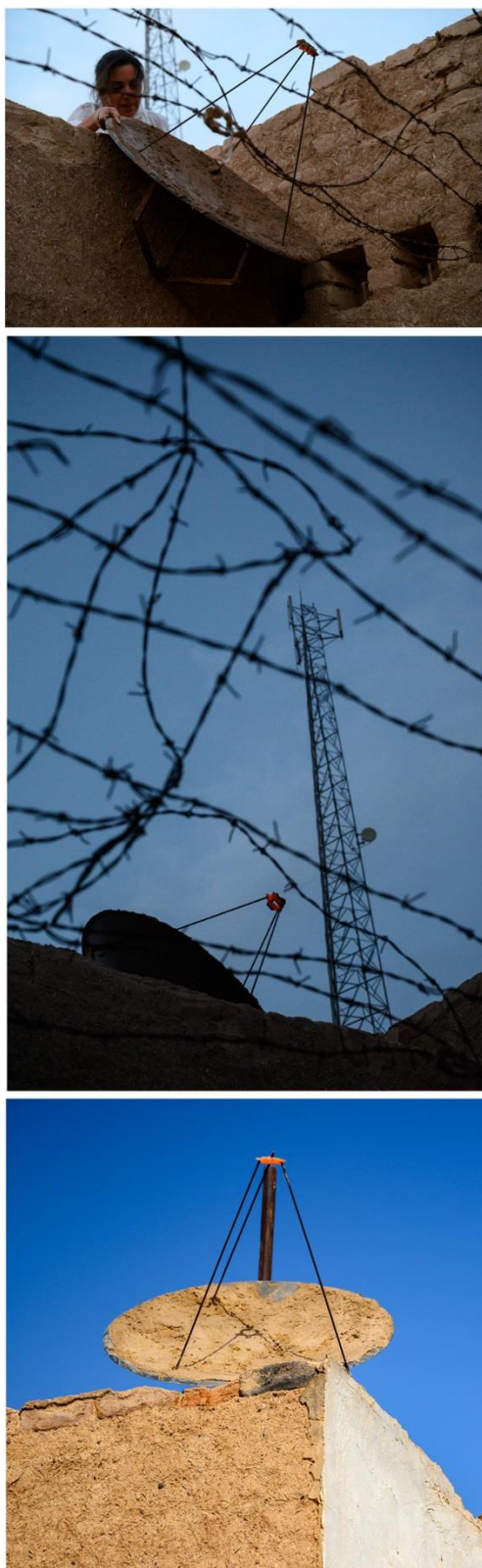


Figure 28, images from *soil* video art, Iran, 2019
Videography and Photo by S. Eskandari

I captured three videos on my last visit to Iran, in June of 2019. These videos are an exploration of my solitary relationship with the land. I aimed to convey the nexus of a place and the feelings it evokes through a visual autobiography. As a product of diaspora, my pilgrimage back to these ancient and barren landscapes allows for a deep focus on this connection.

The desert I travelled through was covered by water, millions of years ago. Once a part of the Tethys Ocean, you can still find fossils of marine plants or shells in the desert. *Soil* is a journey, documenting my search for a site to install my 'communication' device. I fashioned a satellite dish, which I wore on my back like a desert nomad carrying their essential belongings.

I eventually found what I was searching for, the remains of a small room with a destroyed ceiling, to work on my installation. The sky looked over me as I worked, ripping the mud and clay from the wall and mixing it with water to create mud. This method is tied to desert architecture, as the buildings here are fashioned from the land itself. Walls, ceilings and windows are created from the marriage of land and water. The process emulated feminine household labour, mixing mud much like a house-wife would make bread. This delicate action is in contrast with the roughness of the construction materials used.

I covered the whole dish with a layer of clay, explicitly merging my dish with its domestic sphere, covering it in local construction materials. This act of camouflage in the domestic sphere recalls self-censorship.

Removing the dish from the domestic sphere, I thrust it in the outside world, placing it on the roof. The absent ceiling, adorned by barbed wires, created a space that felt like a prison. The sky itself

became the prisoner, slashed by the barbed wires. The surrealness of the space was perfect for this project.

Barefoot, I climbed the wall to situate my dish in a camouflaged position that looked as though it was conversing with the nearby radio tower and left the dish there. Maybe in a year, when I return, it will still be there. Perhaps, someone will have taken it down, treating it as a suspicious device.



Figure 29, image from *sand* video art, Iran, 2019

Sand is a performative action, drawing on a surface that will soon erode. Like a child drawing on the seashore, I work knowing that at any moment a wave of wind might sweep my efforts away. Here, in a place without water, the wind leaves tracks on the dunes that look like rippling waves. I see this project as again exploring the connection between the body and the land, perhaps in terms of reclamation. I, reclaiming my land and my connection to it, while the land itself reclaims it all, swallowing my act once it is over. The overarching feeling is that of impermanence and transition. The shifts and changes in the land are contrasted by its durability and dominance over time.

Salt was captured on Salt Lake (Qom salt lake), in Iran's desert.

A material of preservation, salt has produced phenomenon in this area, such as acting as a preservative to desiccate human bodies in salt lakes and mines. Naturally aged over thousands of years, these human remains were mummified, fabric and hairs on them no longer recognizable. I've used salt minerals in my satellite project, as the sole medium used to oxidize copper in an effort to coax colours out of my terroir in the metal's patina.

My drawing on the salt lake served as an act that nature would reclaim shortly. Crystals covered my drawing days later, and returned the ground to its natural homeostasis. The pattern I drew evolved organically and incorporated elements of Islamic architecture; meditative stylizations and a dome, perhaps from a mosque. Islamic architecture is rooted in symmetry, with geometric design being a dominating paradigm. Often intently complex and rife with minute details, these designs always begin with a circle. I found myself contemplating this shape, reminiscent of my satellites, a shape that grows, repeats and becomes a sign of infinite repetition.



Figure 30, image from *salt* video art, Iran, 2019

I borrowed an ancient artisanal technique to do this drawing, using a nail and a piece of rope to fabricate a simple compass. Architects and builders employed this technique to create domes. Drawing the design on the ground, they replicated the exact ratio and proportions above to guide the fabrication of the dome. Here, I drew a dome structural pattern, the gate to the sky and window to heaven, down on the land.

Once the drawings were completed, I felt I had created my own space of isolation, perhaps creating my own place of worship that connects my land, my history and my culture. I sat as though I were doing my prayers, in my self made mosque in the desert. Nighttime came over me, bringing forth that special relationship between the land and the stars that exists amongst nomads and desert travellers. There is a surreal connection in this land, where the stars provide direction to those passing through. That night, something unusual happened; a thunderstorm rumbled on the horizon. The universe seemed to connect to the land in a bigger way, as lightening hit the flat desert ground.



Figure 31, image from *sand* video art, Iran, 2019

Thesis Exhibition Layout (proposal)

The selected venue for my solo exhibition is Gales Gallery, at York University.

The layout of the gallery lends itself well to the sonic component of my exhibition, thanks to the large expanse of hard, flat surfaces that will bounce an echo well.

Upon entering the space, visitors would be asked to remove their footwear, leaving them at the doors of the gallery. This act prepares them to interact with the gallery as though it were a holy place. The act is also somewhat liberating, imitating the desire to be barefoot when walking through sand. Caution should be taken, however, to avoid the sharp crystals of salt, which can be irritating underfoot.

I will be drawing the structural lay out of a dome as a performative act, similar to *Salt* video on the gallery floor, using salt as a medium.

The dome-like pattern on the floor brings together the earthly and the heavenly, explicitly connecting the ground to the sky. Much like the *Shamseh* designs, this piece will serve as a window or gateway to the sky. The audience will be encouraged to engage with this piece as they move through the gallery, requiring them to be conscious of where their feet land, so as to leave the drawings in place. There is an ephemeral component of this, as inevitably the grains of salt are carried through the space, swept by wind or carried by steps. This motif calls to the dynamism of the earth, and the drawing that occupied that salt flat for what seems like the blink of an eye, to that ancient land. It also pushes those interacting with the exhibition to engage with the nature of the passing structure, creating shifting lines and paths that evolve as time elapses.

The three main walls of the gallery will house a display of three video pieces; *Soil*, *Sand* and *Salt*. Each video will be projected on each wall, in sequence. The order of the pieces, combined with the

large scale projection encourage the viewer to root themselves in the gallery, finding a centre point from which they must rotate slightly to view each episode unfolding on the three different walls; viewing first *Soil*, *Sand*, and finally *Salt* on the third screen. What is prompted is a dynamic viewing of these moving images, as viewers stand, sit, sway and pace as they watch the films, perhaps allowing deeper parts of their conscience to engage with the material. The mobile viewer will thus emulate migration and human passage, like pilgrims through the desert. The projections are intended to be immersive, enveloping the viewer and transporting them to the heart of this manifestation of personhood and place, colliding.

The ‘End’ of this story

My practice and this thesis project have been a small look into the perpetuation of censorship and how it seems to be evolving at an alarming pace.

I felt the peak of this issue recently, thanks to the recent geopolitical tensions between Iran and the United States in January. I observed two countries’ versions of censorship, and the biases they held against each other bleed into their news. On the night of January 8th 2020, an airstrike from Iran hit American troops in Iraq, in retaliation for the assassination of a high ranking Iranian general. The footage of the rocket attacks that I saw on this side of the world made me shake and panic, despite the fact that I was far removed from the immediate danger. To me, those felt like the drums of war. I could only hope that those videos were fake.

In the last few days of finalizing my thesis in March 2020, the COVID-19 virus pandemic has flooded our news outlets. Once again, a pattern of unreliable media has generated a murky environment, where during this global crisis countries are censoring critical figures such as mortality rates.

During this time, I question the censorship I see in international news outlets. Even simple addition seems to have become contrived, the reliability of official statistics coming in to question. When the numbers are lies, who can you believe?

Around me, people censor themselves; the domestic censorship effect has never been so apparent, as two meter radiuses feel more like a void. Monitoring ourselves, and others is the key to halting the spread of the virus. And yet, we see how rapidly we fall in to automation and disengagement with societal norms, as performative acts creep in to the main stage. The public and the private have never seemed to far apart, as self-censorship pervades our discourse.

Self-isolation has cut me off from my two worlds; the one near, and the one much further. As I wrote about the vital networks and channels of communication between us, I could never in my

wildest dreams have imagined this future where they are more important than ever. I can only hope this leads to a brighter future.

Exhibition Description

September 2020

I began installing my projection and performative drawing as the proposed plan, with the only difference I faced being the lack of visitors. In light of the pandemic, at the time of installation no visitors would be allowed in the gallery. This became an exhibition for myself, in my own isolation, to bring my virtual homeland landscape to the gallery walls in 9800 km away.

The gallery floor was around 30x30 feet, allowing me to draw my architectural design up to 20 feet on the ground. The main foundation of the dome design or any geometrical structure is the symmetrical geometry, which can be calculated with a simple compass tool.

In my first drawing on the salt lake, salt, I borrowed an ancient artisanal technique to execute this drawing. This process entailed using a nail and a piece of rope, the domestic objects I found there, to fabricate a compass.

I decided to the same strategy here in the gallery and looked for some objects in the gallery storage section to create my compass. Found a rope and a nail, however as the gallery floor is concrete, I couldn't exactly replicate the same method as I did on the soft salt lake. Trying to figure out how to make this work, I found a sand bag sitting in a corner of the small busy storage. Sand! My other sentimental material. I filled a found bowl with the sand and used it as the centre of my compass, attaching my nail and the rope to calculate the ratios and with an assistance of a found piece of wood draw my pattern on the floor. I always look forward to spontaneous alternations in my project which could expand my creativity.

Drawing on the gallery floor with salt was more difficult than curving the same pattern on the salt surface. I replicated the same dome pattern which I initially drew on the salt lake in a desert which rarely sees rain, this time with a salt which is used here to melt snow. There is certainly an irony to be found in this situation. While I was drawing, I could see the salt crystals slowly melting and

creating a salt pasted drawing. I was happy that I could find the blueish salt which would be creating the reflection of my imagery blue sky above.

While working on the drawing, the three video clips were unfolding on each wall, as large as the galley walls would allow. I created the immersive projection and been performing in the centre, where I was communicating with my videos, feeling I am there again and responding the scenes back here in the gallery by the performative actions of drawing. The surreal immersive projection and my own shadow and reflection on the wall created the illusion of the presence, being there while I am here....

I would have been looking forward to engaging my visitors in this created space, capturing the reflection of the projections on them, while their reflection would become a part of my projected videos, creating the illusions of they were there.

Anyhow, I created this imagery environment for myself to create a virtual exhibition from this virtual installation. It reminds me of when there is a mirror in front of another mirror, which results in infinite reflections.

On the next day, after the hours spent executing a full intense drawing, while my body still hurt, I swept away my ephemeral drawing, as the salt had been turning to a semi solid paste. It was so hard to clean it out.



Figure 32, *soil sand salt* exhibition installation, The Gales Gallery, September 2020



Figure 33, *soil sand salt* exhibition installation, The Gales Gallery, September 2020

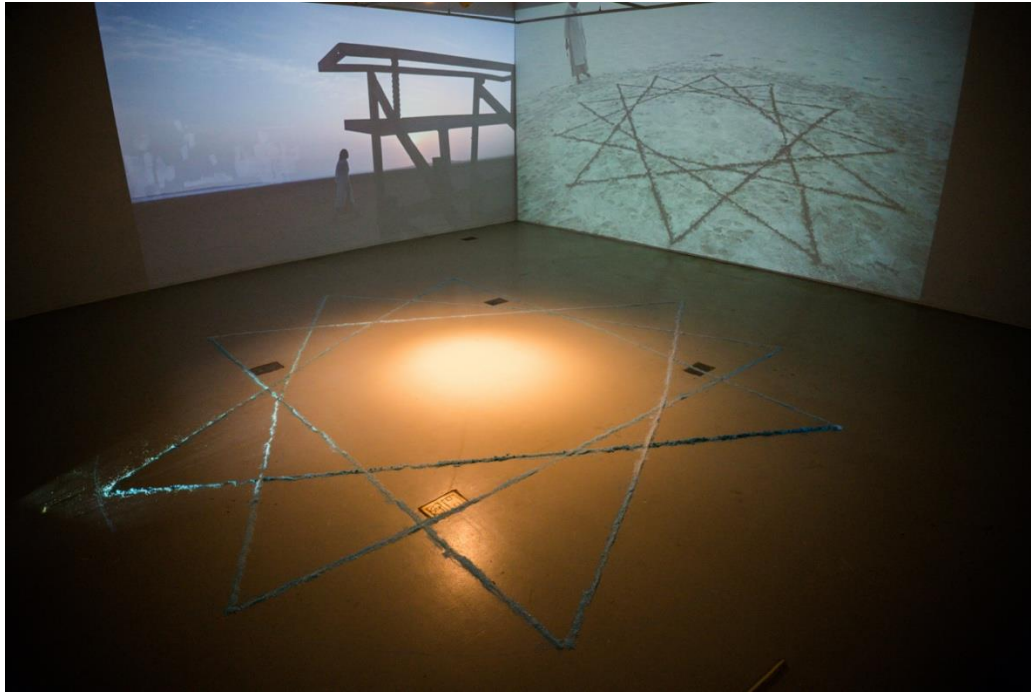


Figure 34, *soil sand salt* exhibition installation, The Gales Gallery, September 2020



Figure 35, *soil sand salt* exhibition installation, The Gales Gallery, September 2020

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