

**A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field:
Exploring Women's Freedom and Liberation through Immersive Painting-
Installation**

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Abstract

A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field: Exploring Women's Freedom and Liberation through Immersive Painting-Installation explores the intersection of women's freedom, resilience, and resistance through an immersive, mixed-media installation. Drawing from personal experiences of violence and displacement, the work employs abstract and figurative representation to challenge societal norms and amplify the voices of marginalized women.

The installation features a dynamic painting arrangement that engages physically and symbolically with the gallery space. Three paintings will hang loosely on the walls, creating a sense of fluidity and movement, while three others will drape like a curtain from the corners of the room, evoking a tension between confinement and release. In the centre of the gallery, four paintings will be suspended from the ceiling and anchored to the floor in a rhombus shape, a representation of the delicate balance between oppression and freedom. With its equal sides and tilted form, the rhombus suggests both tension and stability, reflecting the precarious conditions many women face in their pursuit of autonomy. Each painting employs a multi-point perspective, offering a visual and symbolic lens into the layered, fragmented experiences of diasporic women. This approach resists singular narratives, emphasizing complexity and inviting multiple interpretations.

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Introduction:

Context of Inquiry

How do trauma, displacement, and resilience shape our understanding of humanity, and what role does art play in expressing and transforming these lived experiences? These questions lie at the heart of my thesis, which explores the deep connection between personal experience and artistic creation. My work is grounded in feminist theory, particularly Helen Hester's Xenofeminism, which challenges traditional notions of gender, biology, and reproduction. Hester critiques the limitations of reproductive futurism and advocates for collective responsibility, technological agency, and the reimagining of care beyond heteronormative structures. Her work inspires my exploration of how art can resist roles imposed on women and envision alternative, liberatory futures. Rooted in personal narrative and collective struggle, my practice views art as a transformative space—a site for confronting oppression and generating new possibilities for freedom and solidarity.

Growing up in Iran, I was directly affected by state-sanctioned violence, gender-based discrimination, and systemic suppression. The 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War marked my formative years, exposing me to the profound control exerted over women's lives. During the war, women bore the burden of sustaining families amid constant fear and loss, while also being required to conform to the regime's restrictive gender roles. Many were forced into mourning, silence, and invisibility, their grief politicized and their autonomy further

constrained. These early experiences sparked my artistic inquiry, compelling me to confront the tension between personal freedom and societal repression.

Art has always served as my refuge—a space where I could exceed the limitations of language. Through my work, I strive to create a visual language that imagines freedom—one that transcends borders and embraces the resilience of women in the face of adversity. In the book *Xenofeminism, Xenofeminism Futures* chapter, Muñoz said, “The dominant mode of futurity is indeed ‘winning,’ but that is all the more reason to call on a utopian political imagination that will enable us to glimpse another time and place...” (Hester 2011, 54).

Immigrating to Canada in 2004 deepened my understanding of displacement as not only a physical separation, but also an emotional and psychological negotiation between identities, histories, and futures. The disconnection I felt—between language, culture, and place—highlighted the importance of art in reclaiming agency and rebuilding identity. By weaving my personal narrative into my art, I aim to bridge individual and collective struggles, emphasizing the worldwide interconnectedness of women’s experiences.

Tami Spry’s work on autoethnography profoundly influences my approach. In *Body, Paper, Stage: Writing and Performing Autoethnography*, she writes, “Embodiment is the theoretical and methodological care of autoethnography and performance, and as such is integral to the performative-I disposition” (Spry 2011, 53). This perspective underscores the necessity of grounding theoretical frameworks in lived realities. For me, this means that my experiences of

trauma, displacement, and resilience are not isolated events, but interconnected threads within a larger tapestry of systemic oppression and resistance.

Through Spry's methodology, I create work that is both deeply personal and universally resonant, offering a space for viewers to reflect on their own experiences while confronting broader social injustices.

In this way, my artistic practice becomes a form of autotheory—a space where personal narrative, theoretical inquiry, and artistic creation converge. This convergence is informed by visual and artistic models that resonate with my lived experience and feminist commitments. I draw inspiration from the visceral intensity of Francis Bacon's work, whose deformed and emotionally-charged figures reflect the trauma and violence embedded in the human condition. I also look to Doris Salcedo's sculptural installations, which transform everyday objects into sites of mourning and remembrance, embodying the aftermath of political violence. The raw materiality and spatial tension in their practices echo my own desire to create affective spaces where viewers are invited to engage physically and emotionally. These influences, alongside the politically-charged visual strategies of Shirin Neshat, guide my visual language as I seek to challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalized voices, and envision transformative possibilities. Neshat's use of calligraphy, photography, and film to explore the complexities of gender, exile, and identity within the Islamic regime in Iran deeply resonates with my own exploration of diaspora and womanhood. Her ability to weave poetic imagery with socio-

political critique informs my approach to creating work that speaks across cultural boundaries while remaining grounded in personal experience.

Thesis Statement

The central argument of my thesis is that materially-grounded, narrative-driven visual art, rooted in personal and collective memory, can serve as both testimony and intervention. Through installation and mixed-media, my work offers a space where the emotional weight of trauma, displacement, and resilience can be embodied, made visible, and shared. Rather than illustrating suffering, I aim to create affective encounters that invite viewers into a relational experience—one that foregrounds women's stories while resisting reductive or victimizing representations. This approach aligns with feminist aesthetics that emphasize vulnerability, interdependence, and the reconfiguration of power through presence. By channelling autobiography into visual form, my practice enacts art's unique capacity to both witness and transform the lived experiences of marginalized women into shared calls for justice.

Drawing from Laura Hoptman's essay in *The Forever Now* (2014), I incorporate the concept of atemporality into my work, recombining historical styles and motifs to construct layered visual narratives that transcend linear temporal constraints (Hoptman 2014, 11). Atemporality refers to the coexistence of multiple temporalities in a single moment, allowing for a fluid interplay between past, present, and future. Hoptman articulates this idea, stating, "The atemporal painting

contains elements of history but isn't historical; it is innovative but not novel, pertinent rather than prescient" (Hoptman 2014, 12).

My approach to simultaneity diverges from the Cubist tradition, which sought to depict an object from multiple viewpoints at once to represent the totality of perception. In contrast, my sense of simultaneity is rooted in emotional and spatial experiences across geographies and timelines. While Cubists fragmented and reassembled physical forms, I juxtapose architectural impressions from cities in Iran and Canada—gleaned through walking, photographing, and observing everyday structures—to evoke layered cultural memories and social conditions. Rather than analyzing a single subject from multiple angles, I engage multiple environments through different points of perspective to reflect diasporic dislocation and cultural hybridity. This perspective informs my exploration of simultaneity, wherein historical and contemporary experiences intersect to challenge dominant narratives and envision transformative possibilities for justice and equality. By embracing atemporality, my work becomes a site for reimagining time and space, empowering viewers to engage with both personal and collective stories as interconnected and timeless struggles for freedom and resilience.

Research-Creation Process



Figure 1 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", Mixed-Media, 64x84 inches, 2023



Figure 2 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", Mixed-Media, 64x84 inches, 2023



Figure 3 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", Mixed-Media, 64x84 inches, 2024



Figure 4 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", Mixed-Media, 64x84 inches, 2024

In my research-creation process, women are both the subject and the object of my thesis. My personal dress serves as a central motif, representing my identity and experiences while also functioning as a recurring visual element throughout the ten large paintings that form the body of my work. This dress, fluidly integrated into each painting, embodies a dual role: it anchors the narrative while symbolizing resilience, memory, and the complexities of diasporic identity.

The dress's pattern draws inspiration from the traditional mosaic art of Iranian cities Isfahan and Tabriz, known for their intricate geometry, vibrant colours, and symbolic repetition. The blue and turquoise colours used in these mosaics echo the palette I've chosen, linking my visual language to my cultural heritage. Beyond the aesthetic, the repetition of motifs in the mosaics reinforces themes of continuity, memory, and identity. By incorporating these elements into the dress, I reflect on the complexity of diasporic identity, where heritage is both carried and reinterpreted. While Islamic art has shaped many of these traditions, I intentionally foreground their broader cultural resonance, emphasizing their historical continuity beyond religious frameworks. As I continued painting, I became more aware that my perspective was inherently shaped by this displacement, prompting me to incorporate both metaphorical and literal "different views" into my work. This multi-perspectival approach allows my pieces to embody the intersection of personal memory and collective cultural experience.

Each canvas in my project is meticulously sewn along its edges, a gesture that conveys the care and preservation of something valuable. This act of sewing and repair reinforces themes of

endurance and survival. The addition of grommets allows the paintings to transcend traditional boundaries, moving beyond the conventions of stretched and framed art. This structural innovation positions the paintings as dynamic objects that engage with their surroundings.

Painting the backs of the canvases white introduces another layer of dialogue, engaging with the white walls and empty space around the installation. This interplay between the visible and the hidden underscores themes of presence, absence, and the relationship between form and void.

During my first year in the MFA program, I installed four paintings at the SPG gallery, connecting them with ropes in a rhombus formation. The resulting configuration resembled figures holding hands, advocating for each other's freedom. This rhombus structure became a powerful symbol in my work, representing unity, solidarity, and the collective struggle for women's liberation.



Figure 5 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", Installation, Special Project Gallery, 2024

My artistic process evolved further in my second year as I delved deeper into the relationships between form, colour, abstraction, and representation. Inspired by Julie Mehretu's use of screen printing and Denyse Thomasos's abstract forms, I began incorporating architectural imagery and urban landscapes into my work through screen printing. The imagery is largely drawn from my daily life in Toronto—views from my balcony facing east, the York University subway station, and specific architectural spaces, like the stairwell at Koerner Hall, where I attended a concert by Laurie Anderson. These everyday perspectives hold symbolic weight; for instance, standing on my balcony and gazing east has become a ritual of longing—a way of imagining Iran from afar, despite the impossible distance. This emotional geography informs my shift from the sculptural enclave of suspended canvases in earlier work to more two-dimensional representations of architectural space. While the forms may evoke futuristic cities—utopias or dystopias—they are grounded in the spatial reality of my adopted city. Still, the layered visual language, influenced by memory and diasporic longing, allows echoes of Iranian architectural aesthetics to surface in abstracted ways, blending geographies of origin and arrival.



Figure 6 & 7 Detail from Figure 13, York University Subway Station and Stairwell of Korner Hall, Screen Print, Grommet, Sewn Canvas, 2024



Figure 8 & 9 A detail from Figure 14, Screen Print, Grommet, Sewn Canvas, 2025



Figure 10 Photography from York University Subway Station

Mehretu, an Ethiopian-American contemporary visual artist born on November 28, 1970, explores the cumulative effects of urban sociopolitical changes. Her pieces are comprised of layers of painting, drawing, and printmaking, creating dynamic compositions that reflect the complexity of modern life. Denyse Thomasos (October 10, 1964 – July 19, 2012), a Trinidadian-Canadian painter, is known for addressing themes of slavery, confinement, and the histories of the African and Asian diasporas. Her most notable work, *Hybrid Nations* (2005), exemplifies her ability to express spatial narratives of power and displacement through dense, abstract structures.



Figure 11 "*Hybrid Nations*", Denyse Thomasos, 2005

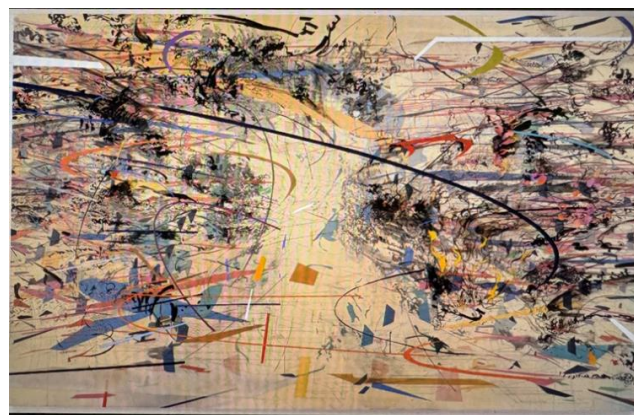


Figure 12 "*Dispersion*", Julie Mehretu, 2002

While the visual language of machines and dresses may evoke traditional gender associations—machines often coded as masculine and dresses as feminine—my intention is not to reinforce these binaries, but to expose, critique, and ultimately subvert them. The inclusion of heavy machinery in my paintings symbolizes the pervasive and destructive forces of patriarchy, not because machines are inherently male, but because they reflect the systemic structures that have historically worked to dismantle, reshape, and control women’s identities and spaces. In contrast, the recurring motif of the dress operates as a symbol of embodied memory and resistance, reclaiming femininity as a source of power rather than submission. By juxtaposing these elements—destruction and softness, industrial force and intimate craft—I seek to create a space where the rigidity of gender norms is unsettled. The tension between these forms reveals the complexities of women’s experiences under patriarchal systems, emphasizing resilience, autonomy, and the ongoing process of reclaiming agency.

Through this process, I created four large-scale paintings, each blending abstract and representational styles, screen prints, grommets, and sewing. Together, they carry the overarching concept of women’s freedom, weaving personal perspectives with collective struggles.

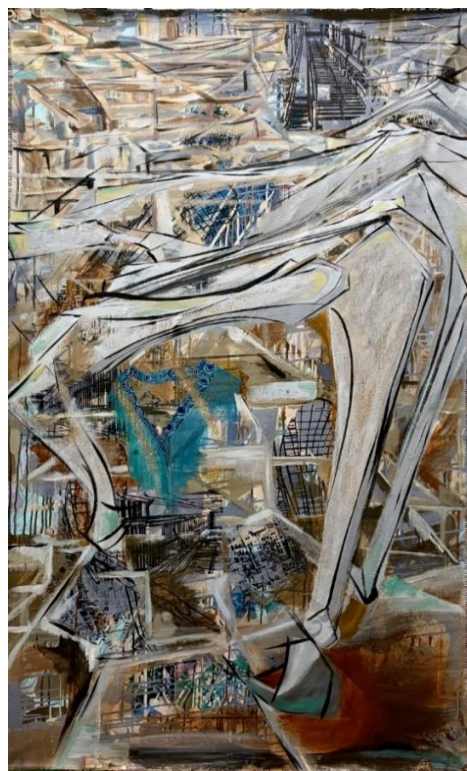


Figure 13 "Suppression", Mixed-Media, 42x64 inches, 2025



Figure 14 "Suppression", Mixed-Media, 84x64 inches, 2025



Figure15&16 Photography of Construction Machinery

Nelson and Autotheory

Maggie Nelson’s concept of autotheory, particularly as articulated in *The Argonauts* (2015), profoundly influences my research-creation process. She writes, “Babies do not remember being held well – what they remember is the traumatic experience of not being held well enough” (Nelson 2015, 142), a principle that resonates deeply with my work. My paintings draw from personal experiences of trauma, migration, and cultural displacement, while also situating these narratives within broader feminist frameworks. While I do not align myself with a single wave or school of feminist thought, I engage with the ongoing evolution of feminist movements and their intersections with social change. My perspective as an Iranian woman in the diaspora compels me to critically reflect on the limitations of Western (white) feminism and instead draw from a

more expansive, global feminist standpoint that emerged in the 1980s and continues to inform transnational and decolonial dialogues today. Rather than referencing specific thinkers, I am attentive to the shifts, tensions, and solidarities within feminist discourse, using them as a dynamic context within which to position my own lived experience and creative practice. This interplay between the personal and theoretical is at the heart of my work, enabling me to transcend individual stories and address universal themes of freedom and justice.

Nelson's approach to blending the personal and theoretical inspires me to embrace the ambiguity and multiplicity inherent in my work. Her writing encourages a fluid exchange between disciplines, much like the interplay between abstraction and representation in my paintings. By embedding my experiences into the visual and conceptual layers of my work, I create pieces that invite reflection and dialogue, challenge dominant narratives, and advocate for transformation. This integration of autotheory enriches my research-creation process, allowing me to bridge personal history with collective challenges. My paintings become both a site of inquiry and a space for imagining alternative possibilities, underscoring the perseverance and agency of women in the face of systemic oppression.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my thesis asserts that art serves as a powerful medium for cultivating empathy, bridging societal divides, and envisioning alternative futures. By integrating personal narratives, feminist theory, and social justice themes, my work seeks to foster transformative engagement

and dialogue. My installations embody this ethos by addressing the resilience of women and amplifying their voices. Through this approach, I aim to provoke critical reflection, inspire collective action, and contribute to pursuing a more equitable and inclusive world. My art is not merely an expression of individual experience, but a call to solidarity, emphasizing the profound potential of artistic practice to challenge oppression and envision possibilities for collective liberation. As Helen Hester writes, “Its proposed strategies seek to address the network of power relations underpinning this fusion of issues, and recognize reproductive justice as ‘an opportunity and a call to come together as one movement with the power to win freedom for all oppressed people’” (Hester 2018, 125). This call echoes at the core of my practice, underscoring the urgent need for intersectional unity and radical change.

Personal Narrative and Early Influences:

Life in Iran

Growing up in Tehran, Iran’s bustling capital, my early life was shaped by the seismic upheavals of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the ensuing Iran-Iraq War. These defining events had a profound impact on the sociopolitical landscape, particularly for women, and laid the foundation for my artistic and personal journey.

As a teenager, I witnessed the immediate and devastating erosion of women’s rights, as freedoms once taken for granted were systematically stripped away. The rights we had once enjoyed were

replaced by oppressive policies that relegated women to the status of second-class citizens. We were denied basic autonomy—no longer allowed to divorce, retain custody of our children, or travel and work without male permission. The mandatory hijab, enforced by law, became an omnipresent reminder of the control imposed on our bodies and our lives. While I acknowledge that veiling holds varied meanings across different Muslim contexts—sometimes chosen as an expression of faith or identity—in my experience, it was not a matter of personal belief or cultural tradition. It was a state-imposed obligation, where women were stripped of choice, and was enforced through surveillance, punishment, and fear. In this context, the hijab became a symbol of systemic repression rather than spiritual or personal expression, a complexity also explored in the work of Shirin Neshat, who powerfully navigates the tension between imposed veiling and women's inner strength.

At the same time, the Iran-Iraq War cast a long shadow over my adolescence. The sound of rockets shattering the silence, nights spent in bomb shelters, and the constant fear of death and destruction became the harsh reality we lived with. The visceral horrors of war deeply shaped my understanding of power, survival, and resistance. Despite the overwhelming violence, I worked as an operator at *Keyhan*, a prominent Iranian newspaper, where I saw firsthand the dissonance between the ongoing violence and the daily demands of life.

During this tumultuous period, art emerged as my refuge and means of survival. When I married and had my first child, my husband pressured me to leave my job and assume the role of a

homemaker. This transition marked a pivotal turning point in my life. Art became more than just an outlet—it became a vital form of resistance against depression and a way to reclaim some measure of control over my circumstances. The tragic loss of my beloved brother, another victim of Iran’s brutal regime, was the defining event that solidified my disillusionment with the state and fueled my desire for freedom.

Eventually, I emigrated to Canada with my two children, severing ties with a homeland marked by systemic violence and oppression. This decision, though painful, allowed me to reclaim my identity as a woman, mother, and artist. The experiences of loss, resilience, and the pursuit of freedom continue to shape my artistic practice, informing my exploration of themes such as survival, resistance, and the enduring strength of women.

In many ways, my narrative aligns with the intellectual underpinnings of Denyse Thomasos’s work, which has been described as possessing a “visceral painterly power” and as embodying Michel Foucault’s ideas about power and knowledge as tools for social and institutional control (Denyse Thomasos: Just Beyond, Jost, Burns, & Lundh 2022, 9). Like Thomasos, I use my art to interrogate the structures of power and control that govern women’s lives. My work is deeply rooted in personal experience, but it also draws from broader feminist and sociopolitical frameworks. This synthesis of lived experience and intellectual engagement shapes my artistic approach, which seeks to amplify marginalized voices and imagine new possibilities for liberation.

Through this lens, my art extends beyond personal narrative—it becomes a testament to the enduring strength of women and a call to action against systemic oppression. These early experiences in Iran continue to guide my creative vision, shaping my commitment to fostering empathy, solidarity, and transformative change through art.

Emigration to Canada



Figure 17 "Immigration", Acrylic on Canvas, 24x24 inches, 2006

Emigrating to Canada led to a profound sense of disorientation and cultural shock, mirroring my internal sense of displacement. Separated from my family and the familiar surroundings of my homeland, I found myself in a liminal space—suspended between two worlds. I was neither fully connected to the country I had left behind nor entirely settled in the new one I had chosen. My identity felt fragmented, caught between the longing for what was lost and the struggle to adapt to an unfamiliar environment. It took nearly a decade before I began to feel grounded, no longer suspended between sky and earth.

During this period of transition, painting and drawing became my lifeline. These acts of creativity offered a refuge where I could process the complexities of my journey—my experiences of systemic violence against Iranian women, the trauma of war, and the pain of displacement. My first body of work in Canada was a direct response to these themes, exploring migration, alienation, and psychological suspension. This series reflected my attempt to navigate my disoriented state while also bearing witness to the enduring impacts of loss and trauma.



Figure 18 "Immigration", Mixed-Media on Plywood, 48x24 inches, 2012

As my artistic practice evolved, I produced two additional series that delved deeper into the lingering spectre of war. These works became a testament not only to the personal history I carried with me, but also to broader narratives of violence, loss, and survival. While rooted in autobiographical experience, the figures in these series often inhabit stark, suspended environments—echoing the war-induced existential isolation seen in works by artists like Giacometti. This radical solitude is not only a reflection of trauma but a philosophical inquiry into the human condition. Through this visual language, I aim to bridge the gap between individual struggle and collective experience. My work becomes a vessel for shared reflection, transforming personal grief into a communal space for dialogue, empathy, and healing, where the personal becomes a pathway to the universal.

Julie Mehretu's reflection on how art extends beyond itself to engage with broader systems and histories deeply resonates with my own artistic journey. Her large-scale mural, *Mural* (2009), commissioned by Goldman Sachs for their New York headquarters, incorporates elements such as maps, trade routes, and architectural drawings to depict the layered history of capitalism. Similarly, my own practice—through layers of painting, screen printing, and architectural forms—constructs complex visual fields that weave together personal memory and structural violence. In the process of creating, I sought to uncover the intersections between individual trauma and broader sociopolitical narratives, addressing not just the personal experience of displacement but also the systemic forces that perpetuate such dislocation.

In Canada, I redefined my identity through art, transforming the pain of separation and dislocation into a powerful narrative that bridges personal history with collective experience. My journey of migration and artistic expression reflects a commitment to resilience, a desire to connect with others, and a determination to challenge boundaries and inspire conversations about identity, belonging, and the enduring impact of systemic violence.

Literary Influence

Literature has played an essential role in shaping my artistic vision and theoretical framework, offering critical lenses through which I explore themes of resilience, systemic violence, and the suppression of women. Influential works like Helen Hester's book, *Xenofeminism* (2018), and Lauren Fournier's book, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (2021) have provided profound inspiration, anchoring my practice in feminist theory and deepening my understanding of art as a tool for transformation.

Hester's call to dismantle oppressive structures—whether technological, political, or social—resonates with my commitment to challenging dominant narratives (Hester 2018). Her vision of feminism as a project of shared liberation aligns with my desire to use immersive, community-driven art to confront systems of control and envision alternative futures. Through Hester's work, I have come to see how the intersection of technology, gender, and social structures can be reimagined as tools of empowerment rather than oppression. This perspective informs my

approach to artmaking, which seeks not only to critique but also to reimagine the possibilities for freedom and justice.

Fournier's exploration of autotheory as a feminist practice has also been a critical influence on my methodology. By advocating for the fusion of personal narrative with theoretical critique, Fournier highlights the power of embodied experience as a site of knowledge production and resistance. This approach mirrors my artistic process, in which lived realities serve as the foundation for critical engagement. Autotheory, with its insistence on centering marginalized voices, provides a framework for transforming personal histories into acts of resistance. In my work, this dynamic interplay between personal experience and theoretical exploration allows me to bridge individual stories with broader sociopolitical narratives.

These literary frameworks not only guide my theoretical understanding but also shape the very fabric of my art. Hester and Fournier's insights reinforce my commitment to using art as a tool of resistance and empowerment, reminding me that storytelling—whether through literature, theory, or visual art—is a powerful means of transformation. Through these influences, I strive to create art that challenges systems of power and amplifies the voices of women across borders, histories, and struggles.

Theoretical Framework: Feminism, Social Justice, and Art:

Defining Humanity

Humanity transcends the confines of biological existence, encompassing a profound sense of ethical responsibility, empathy, and interconnectedness. It is a dynamic and evolving concept, shaped by our collective capacity to care for one another, challenge injustice, and imagine alternative ways of being. For women, especially those subjected to systemic violence and suppression, humanity is intricately linked to the pursuit of dignity, autonomy, and freedom. These struggles, though deeply personal, are emblematic of broader societal structures that perpetuate inequality and exclusion.

Through feminist and social justice frameworks, the condition of being human emerges as a fluid and contested terrain, continuously renegotiated through the interplay of power, agency, and identity. It is not a static condition bestowed upon individuals, but rather a collective endeavor, shaped through acts of resistance, survival, and resilience. The histories of marginalized communities—particularly women, refugees, and other disenfranchised groups—underscore the necessity of reclaiming and redefining the human experience in the face of dehumanizing forces. Their stories of survival and transformation challenge dominant narratives, offering alternative visions of what it means to live with dignity, agency, and relational depth.

In my artistic practice, this nuanced understanding of humanity forms a foundational principle. By engaging with the cyclical struggles women endure, I aim to illuminate their strength, hope, and capacity for transformation. My work is grounded in the belief that art serves as a critical site for addressing the intersections of power and identity, where the personal becomes political and the historical is reframed through a contemporary lens. In particular, I explore how power is experienced both within the domestic sphere and in the diaspora, tracing its impact from the Iranian Revolution to the present, and how these layered histories continue to shape identity and resistance across generations.

The concept of radical imagination—a central tenet of feminist and social justice thought—pervades my approach, encouraging a rethinking of existing power structures and envisioning futures rooted in equity and collective liberation. Feminist theorist bell hooks emphasizes that reclaiming humanity requires centering the voices of those who have been silenced, a principle that resonates deeply within my work. What makes Black feminist thought unique is its insistence on an intersectional analysis of race, gender, and class, foregrounding lived experience as a site of knowledge and resistance often neglected in mainstream feminist discourse.

Referencing the work of activist Celerestine Ware, hooks writes in *Feminist Theory*: “Radical feminism... postulates that the domination of one human being by another is the basic evil in society. Dominance in human relationships is the target of their opposition.” (hooks 2014, 84). This articulation of power—as something to be dismantled rather than wielded—deeply informs my practice. By engaging with these frameworks, I aim to amplify the narratives of marginalized

women, creating a space where their resilience and agency are celebrated, and their stories are redefined as powerful acts of defiance. Ultimately, my theoretical framework positions art as a transformative force, one capable of interrogating entrenched hierarchies and fostering empathy. Through this lens, I approach the concept of humanity—not as an abstraction, but as a lived and evolving reality, shaped by ongoing struggles for justice, equality, and liberation.

Art as a Tool for Social Change

Art has long been a powerful vehicle for social critique, offering a means to expose injustice, disrupt dominant narratives, and envision alternative futures. In shaping my thesis, I chose to engage with *Xenofeminism* by Helen Hester and *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* by Lauren Fournier, both of which provide critical frameworks that resonate with my exploration of women's experiences under systemic violence and suppression. These texts challenge traditional boundaries—whether between gender and technology or between art, life, and theory—offering tools to rethink autonomy, resilience, and collective transformation.

Xenofeminism advocates for the dismantling of oppressive structures and the reimagining of technological and social possibilities, while Autotheory emphasizes merging personal narratives with theoretical critique to disrupt dominant cultural frameworks. Together, these works inspire my artistic practice, which draws on embodied experiences and radical imagination to envision alternative futures for women and amplify their strength and agency.

In developing my thesis, the principles outlined in Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism* significantly shaped my approach to themes of reproduction, autonomy, and systemic transformation. The Xenofeminist emphasis on dismantling oppressive structures—whether technological, political, or social—resonates deeply with my exploration of women's experiences under violence and suppression. Specifically, the book's critique of naturalized gender norms and its advocacy for transformative technological repurposing reflect my artistic goal of challenging dominant narratives through immersive installations. I am aware of the concern that my work might unintentionally reinforce traditional gender roles, particularly through the use of textiles or gendered representations of machines. However, I intend to critically repurpose these materials and aesthetics to subvert rather than affirm binary associations. Highlighting collectives like GynePunk, the project "*Our Bodies, Ourselves* updated for a digitalized and globalized world" (Hester 2018, 142), which reimagine bodily autonomy through open-source healthcare tools, Xenofeminism underscores the importance of grassroots, community-driven resistance. Their practice, which merges technical and artistic components, informs the lineage of my own work and will be acknowledged in a footnote¹. This aligns with my desire to depict women's resilience and envision alternative futures that transcend coercive societal frameworks. The notion of "xeno-hospitality," privileging intersectional solidarity over rigid, exclusionary identities, further inspires my focus on shared struggles and collective empowerment.

¹ GynePunk is a transhackfeminist collective that designs open-source gynecological tools and DIY healthcare labs, combining technical innovation with artistic activism. Their work challenges institutional control over bodies and inspires alternative, autonomous care systems.

On the other hand, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* by Lauren Fournier (2021) explores how feminist artists and writers merge autobiography with theory to create new forms of critical engagement. By focusing on embodied experience, this book highlights how autotheory troubles traditional boundaries between art, life, and theory. Drawing from personal narratives, relationships, and lived realities, autotheory challenges dominant philosophical and cultural frameworks, often transforming theoretical discourse through intimate, subjective lenses. This practice has become a powerful tool for marginalized voices—women, queer individuals, Indigenous, and POC artists—who use their work to critique systems of power while affirming resilience, agency, and interconnectedness. By historicizing autotheory’s antecedents and examining its contemporary resurgence, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* reveals how it creates space for complexity, vulnerability, and resistance within artistic and intellectual practices. As Fournier notes, “autotheory is theory and performance, autobiography and philosophy, research and creation, knowledge that emerges from lived experience and material, conceptual experiments in the studio and the classroom” (Fournier 2022, 29). While Fournier does not focus specifically on visual art, her framing of research-creation includes practices rooted in material and embodied processes. My work generates autotheory by translating lived experience into visual forms, using installation as a site for conceptual and affective inquiry that merges personal narrative with critical theory.²

² According to Lorentzen, “autotheory” does not refer to a “theory of the self” so much as to theory that emerges from the self. The autotheorist shuttles between self and theory – political theory, linguistics, poststructuralism, affect theory, performance theory, aesthetics, gender – using firsthand experience as a person living in the world as the ground for developing and honing theoretical arguments and theses. (Fournier 2022, 35)

In my solo thesis exhibition, *A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field: Exploring Women's Freedom and Liberation through Immersive Painting-Installation*, I delve into themes of violence, suppression, and the enduring strength of women through an engaging installation. The central rhombus-shaped structure fosters a dialectical interplay, reflecting the interconnected and often cyclical nature of women's struggles and resilience. Encircling the rhombus, six loosely hung paintings evoke the fragility and strength of women's experiences, highlighting the dynamic between softness and resistance.

Influenced by the ideas presented in *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, this exhibition uses my own lived experience to bridge personal and collective histories, much like autotheory itself, which transforms subjective, embodied narratives into a critical engagement with larger philosophical and political discourses. This reflective movement between self, theory, and artistic practice informs my approach, as I position art as a transformative space for processing trauma, critiquing systems of oppression, and imagining freedom. By merging materiality and metaphor—paintings as curtains, reflections as infinite echoes—the work troubles boundaries between art, life, and theory, resonating with autotheoretical practices that embrace vulnerability, embodiment, and radical agency. Together, *Xenofeminism* and *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* have profoundly shaped the theoretical foundation of my thesis by offering complementary lenses

through which to examine women's experiences, agency, and resistance. While *Xenofeminism* provides strategies for systemic critique and collective transformation, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* highlights the power of merging lived experience with theoretical engagement. My exhibition reflects this interplay by combining personal narratives with broader political and cultural critiques, situating art as a medium for reimagining freedom and resilience. Through the installation's material and conceptual choices—its infinite reflections, curtain-like forms, and spatial configurations—I invite viewers to engage with women's struggles as sites of both fragility and strength, embodying the transformative³ potential of art to bridge theory, practice, and life.

My Artistic Role

As an artist, I perceive my role as multifaceted: a storyteller who gives voice to silenced narratives, a mediator who bridges the personal and collective, and a catalyst for dialogue and change. My work navigates the intersections of trauma, resilience, and empowerment, using the visual language of art to evoke the complexities of women's lived experiences under systemic violence and oppression. By combining abstraction with realism and integrating diverse

³ My work aims to catalyze change by fostering emotional and intellectual engagement with issues of gendered violence and resistance. The installation invites viewers to inhabit the affective space of women's struggles, prompting reflection on patriarchal systems. In past exhibitions, audiences have expressed a deeper understanding of the feminist struggle in Iran. I also take part in activist initiatives—including public demonstrations (Women, Life, Freedom) and collaborative art events—that support women's agency and contribute to building awareness and solidarity within the community.

mediums, I strive to construct immersive environments that encourage viewers to transition from passive spectatorship to active engagement and introspection.

Feminist methodologies deeply inform my approach, positioning art as a tool to critique entrenched power structures and highlight voices relegated to the margins. I see my practice as a form of critical activism—one that not only confronts injustice but also envisions possibilities for transformation and healing. Through blending autobiographical elements with theoretical frameworks such as *Xenofeminism* and *Autotheory*, I aim to situate individual stories within broader sociopolitical contexts, revealing the interconnectedness of personal struggles and collective histories⁴.

Art, to me, is a medium of solidarity—a space where boundaries dissolve and empathy thrives. By amplifying women's voices and portraying their capacity for resistance and change, I seek to foster a reimagining of freedom as a shared, collective journey. This freedom is not constrained by geography or time but extends across borders and histories, connecting the struggles of the past with the possibilities of the future. My installations are designed to disrupt conventional narratives, inviting viewers to confront uncomfortable truths while discovering shared humanity. *Figure #24* is an example of this approach. It features a woman's body entangled in ropes, an

⁴ Many of my friends and family members in Iran have shared their stories with me over the years. Although I did not formally record them, these conversations deeply inform my work. Additionally, numerous testimonies from the *Women, Life, Freedom* movement have been publicly shared on platforms like YouTube. I aim to situate these individual stories—both personal and publicly available—within broader sociopolitical contexts, revealing the interconnectedness of personal struggles and collective histories.

image that draws on both personal memory and collective testimony. This piece represents the silencing of women in Iran, particularly during the *Women, Life, Freedom* protests, and symbolizes the physical and psychological constraints imposed by patriarchal control. Through this visual truth, I aim to capture the resistance and the suppressed voices of women, translating lived experiences into a powerful act of protest. Each piece functions as both a mirror and a window, reflecting the viewer's own experiences while offering a glimpse into the lives of others. Through this interplay, my work aspires to spark dialogue, inspire action, and cultivate a vision of a world where justice and equity are not ideals but realities.

Ultimately, I see my role as an artist not only as a creator of objects, but as a weaver of connections, a challenger of norms, and an advocate for change. My art is a testament to the enduring strength of those who resist and an invitation to imagine a future defined by solidarity, hope, and liberation.

Artistic Practice: Mixed Media and Installation:

Personal Methodology

My artistic practice merges mixed-media and installation, creating immersive environments that challenge traditional boundaries of painting, space, and viewer engagement. Situated at the intersection of abstraction and representation, my work delves into complex themes such as women's resilience, systemic violence, and societal suppression. By employing a variety of

materials and techniques—including screen printing, sewing, grommeting, and layered textures—I push beyond the confines of conventional painting, embracing a multidisciplinary approach that expands the scope of storytelling, blending intimacy with expansiveness.

A key motif in my work is the recurring image of my personal dress, a deliberate symbol of women's identities and struggles. This motif, drawn from Iranian mosaic art, links my personal narrative to a broader cultural heritage, creating a layered dialogue between the individual and the collective, the personal and the political. The addition of architectural perspectives to my paintings further enriches this conversation, introducing a diasporic lens that reflects the complexities of identity in exile. These fragmented perspectives metaphorically mirror the disjointed yet interconnected experiences of displacement and the ongoing process of reconstruction. Nostalgia plays a significant role in this, as both the dress and architecture serve as poignant markers of home, memory, and self-fashioning in the diaspora. For many, these elements evoke longing for a past that can never fully be recaptured, but remains integral to their identity. Architectural features, in particular, evoke a sense of belonging and connection to a now distant place, while the way one dresses—whether as a form of cultural continuity or personal reinvention—becomes a means of navigating the tension between past and present. These nostalgic elements are imbued with the complex emotions of longing, loss, and the desire to preserve cultural roots, even while reconstructing one's self within a new context.

During my research and creative process, I became acutely aware of the pervasive presence of heavy machinery⁵ in urban and rural landscapes. These imposing mechanical structures—characterized by their large, articulated arms—evoked associations with masculinity, destruction, and construction. In the context of a patriarchal society, they became potent metaphors for the systematic dismantling of women's lives and the imposition of oppressive rules that dictate how women should live under suppression. This imagery profoundly influenced my work, leading me to incorporate mechanical forms in the final layers of my seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth paintings. Rendered as elongated hands, these industrial shapes dominate the canvas, creating a visual language that speaks to the pervasive forces of control and dehumanization.

The inclusion of these forms marked a pivotal shift in my artistic process. By painting mechanical shapes over earlier layers, I introduced a dialogue between organic fluidity and industrial rigidity—not as oppositional binaries, but as entangled forces shaping lived experience. This interplay exposes the tensions between constraint and transformation, echoing the complex negotiations of identity under patriarchal systems. Rather than reinforcing fixed gender roles, the machinery-like forms are reimagined and repurposed as part of a new visual language—one that speaks to resilience, adaptability, and the subversive potential of reclaiming structures historically associated with control and domination.

⁵ Machinery serves as a metaphor for patriarchal society, imposing control, dominance, and a mechanized sense of order over the lives and bodies of women.

My approach to materiality further reinforces these themes. By allowing my paintings to hang loosely, like curtains, I evoke fragility, movement, and impermanence. This intentional deviation from rigid artistic conventions suggests freedom and adaptability, symbolically opposing the constraints of patriarchal structures. Techniques such as sewing the edges of the paintings, incorporating reflective surfaces, and layering textures are symbolic gestures of care, repair, and transformation. These physical processes parallel the psychological and emotional labour involved in reclaiming agency and reconstructing fragmented identities. The use of drapery and textile-like elements also resonates with historical associations of fabric as both shelter and storytelling device, deepening the work's engagement with memory and resistance.

The engaging nature of my installations is designed to connect with viewers on a visceral level. By inviting them to physically move through and within the space, I aim to foster an embodied interaction with the work. The paintings become active sites of reflection and meaning-making, encouraging viewers to confront the interplay of fragility and strength, oppression and liberation, history and hope.

This evolving methodology transforms my practice into a critical inquiry that not only examines societal structures, but also provides a space for reflection and dialectic. By integrating heavy machinery motifs with personal and cultural symbols, I create a visual narrative that critiques patriarchal systems while celebrating women's resilience. Through a blend of abstraction,

representation, and material experimentation, I challenge traditional art forms and encourage new ways of seeing and understanding.

Ultimately, my work seeks to amplify women's voices, celebrate their enduring strength, and inspire transformative engagement. Through the fusion of personal experience, cultural heritage, and innovative artistic practices, I aim to create immersive spaces that not only reflect women's struggles under systemic violence but also envision pathways for empowerment, solidarity, and change.

Example of Recent Work

For my thesis exhibition, *A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field: Exploring Women's Freedom and Liberation through Immersive Painting-Installation*, I have created an immersive installation that reimagines the gallery as both a contemplative sanctuary and a dynamic site of engagement. This work challenges traditional art display methods while offering a space for viewers to reflect on the complexities of women's lived experiences and resilience.

The installation features six large-scale paintings that break from conventional wall-bound display. Three vertical paintings, each measuring 42" x 64", are suspended in three corners of the gallery, appearing to float within the space. These vertical works, with their elongated forms, evoke a sense of upward movement, symbolizing strength and the enduring pursuit of freedom. In contrast, three horizontally-oriented pieces—measuring 84" x 64", 118" x 64", and

78" x 64"—are loosely hung on the walls. Their curtain-like presentation allows them to sway gently with the movement of air, embodying both the fragility and resilience inherent in women's stories.

At the center of the installation lies a rhombus-shaped structure composed of four interconnected paintings, each measuring 84" x 64". Suspended from the ceiling and anchored to the floor with ropes, this formation invites viewers to step physically into the central space through three-foot openings at the corners. The rhombus not only symbolizes unity and solidarity but also offers an immersive experience where viewers can observe the interplay of light, reflection, and texture from within the structure. This reflective quality symbolizes the cyclical nature of women's struggles and their capacity for transformation and regeneration.

The paintings themselves are a fusion of abstract, representational, and experimental styles, interwoven through meticulous material choices such as sewn edges, grommets, and ropes. These elements serve as metaphors for care, connection, and strength, reinforcing the themes of interconnection and solidarity that permeate the work. The representational elements draw from personal and cultural motifs, such as the recurring imagery of a dress that references individual identity and Iranian heritage, while the abstract elements invite broader interpretations of movement, emotion, and resilience.

Through this installation, I seek to dissolve the boundaries between painting, sculpture, and space. The work is not confined to a singular perspective but instead encourages viewers to

engage with it from multiple angles, physically moving through and around the paintings. This spatial engagement transforms the paintings from static objects into dynamic, active sites of reflection and dialogue. *A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field* exemplifies my personal artistic methodology, where painting, materiality, and spatial interaction converge to amplify women's voices and their enduring struggles. By blending abstraction and representation, I create a layered narrative that challenges traditional art forms and invites viewers into a transformative encounter with the work, urging them to reflect on themes of freedom, resilience, and the power of collective strength.

Contributions to Art and Social Justice:

Impact on Art

My artistic practice contributes to the crucial intersection of art and social justice, utilizing installation and mixed-media painting as powerful tools to critique systemic violence and amplify the experiences of women marked by resilience and transformation. Through immersive environments and carefully selected material metaphors, I challenge dominant cultural and political narratives that marginalize or silence the voices of women, particularly those impacted by systemic oppression. The work I create invites viewers to reconsider these narratives and engage with the lived realities of individuals often excluded from mainstream discourse.

Central to my practice is the use of space as a vehicle for enacting social change. The installations I create deliberately disrupt the conventional frame of reference in art, encouraging engagement from multiple perspectives. These immersive environments invite the viewer to physically enter the space, activating their body in a way that passive viewing cannot. This shift in interaction mirrors the nature of activism itself, which calls for active engagement, empathy, and commitment to transformative social change. The 2023 *Women, Life, Freedom* movement in Iran further informs my work's urgency and relevance. Art, in this context, becomes more than just a visual experience—it is an invitation for deeper interaction, challenging the boundaries of traditional artistic practices. Instead of displaying paintings stretched and framed on a wall, my work is suspended and inhabits the entire space, corners, centre, and walls—inviting viewers to move through and around it.

Informed by feminist ideologies and social justice movements, my work is influenced by thinkers such as Helen Hester, whose contributions to *Xenofeminism* advocate for dismantling oppressive structures and reimagining social and technological possibilities. Hester's statement "For xenofeminism, gender should be granted no extraordinary explanatory power. We must look for more nimble and inclusive vectors of solidarity." (Hester 2018, 32) aligns with my own artistic vision, where the strength and autonomy of women are not only acknowledged but celebrated. By integrating this call for collective transformation, my art contributes to broader

feminist discourse, seeking to disrupt power structures, challenge patriarchal norms, and reimagine alternative futures for marginalized communities.

Themes of autonomy, repair, and solidarity lie at the heart of my practice. These themes offer a framework for critically rethinking systems of power and control, particularly as they relate to women's bodies and lives. Materials such as grommets, ropes, and sewn edges are not merely aesthetic choices, but metaphors for care, mending, and the act of reimagining freedom from oppression. In this sense, my work functions as a form of resistance to the idea that women are passive victims of their circumstances. Rather, I aim to highlight the agency women exhibit in the face of systemic violence and cultural suppression, portraying them not only as survivors but as active agents of change.

The immersive nature of my installations also allows for a reimagining of public space. These spaces invite reflection, solidarity, and communal transformation. Through collective engagement with the art, boundaries between the personal and political, the individual and collective, and trauma and healing begin to dissolve. My practice creates an environment where women can be seen and heard, transcending traditional narratives that reduce their lives to statistics or one-dimensional portrayals of suffering. Instead, I present women's resilience as multifaceted, manifesting through creativity, community, and collective action.

In this context, my artistic practice extends beyond creation—it becomes a political and social intervention. It challenges dominant narratives surrounding women's experiences, particularly

those shaped by cultural, political, and religious oppression. Simultaneously, it provides a platform for imagining new futures—futures where women’s voices are not only heard but are central to the ongoing dialogue surrounding social justice, freedom, and equality. My work is not confined to gallery spaces; it forms part of a broader cultural conversation that calls for a re-evaluation of the systems that govern our lives, and an urgent commitment to a just and equitable future for all. I also share my work in community centres, public discussions, and academic settings, where it sparks dialogue around women’s rights, resistance, and solidarity. For example: My Live Painting, National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence Against Women, at Borgia, York University in 2022.

Through this approach, I seek to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the role of art in social justice, especially concerning feminist and anti-oppressive movements. By integrating personal, political, and theoretical elements into my practice, I aim to create spaces that foster both healing and activism—where art becomes a catalyst for change, a site for critical reflection, and a platform for imagining inclusive, abundant, and unpredictable futures.

Conclusion:

Vision for the Future

Looking ahead, my vision is to continue exploring and expanding how art can serve as a transformative medium for collective action and social change. Art, for me, is more than an aesthetic practice; it is a powerful tool for reimagining societal structures and advocating for a more just and equitable world. As I move forward in my practice, I am committed to deepening

the connection between personal narrative and collective histories, using art as both a critique of injustice and a vehicle for envisioning alternative futures.

One key influence on my future trajectory is Lauren Fournier's *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*, which highlights the transformative potential of merging personal narratives with theoretical critique. Fournier describes autotheory as a practice that blurs the lines between life, art, and theory—opening up space for vulnerability, complexity, and acts of resistance. This concept resonates deeply with my artistic process, where the personal is inseparable from the collective. By centering my own lived experiences—particularly as a woman shaped by systemic violence and displacement—I challenge the boundaries between individual and collective struggles and expand the possibilities of resistance and empowerment within art itself.

In my future work, I aim to discard conventional distinctions between life and art, using vulnerability and complexity as powerful forms of resistance. This approach allows me to explore the multifaceted nature of women's experiences, particularly those shaped by trauma, displacement, and oppression. By blending personal narrative with theoretical inquiry, I hope to create spaces where viewers can engage with the art on a deeper level, catalyzing dialogue, reflection, and, ultimately, transformation.

I envision continuing to create installations that invite reflection, dialogue, and active participation. These immersive environments will confront audiences with the realities of

oppression while also offering opportunities for empathy, solidarity, and collective action. By designing spaces that encourage engagement, I hope to foster environments that honour women's experiences, while inspiring audiences to reflect critically on the ongoing struggles for justice, equality, and freedom.

Looking further into the future, I also aspire to collaborate with other artists, activists, and communities to amplify the impact of my work. I see potential for interdisciplinary projects that combine art, activism, and community engagement to address pressing issues such as gender equality, human rights, and the environmental crises disproportionately affecting women, particularly in marginalized communities. By working alongside those most affected by systemic violence and oppression, I hope to amplify their voices and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive, empowered, and just world.

Additionally, I plan to explore the intersectionality of my practice, particularly with global feminist movements and the struggles of women across various cultural, political, and social contexts. This includes engaging with the abundant body of feminist scholarship and artistic production that has emerged in post-revolutionary Iran since 1979, which critically examines gendered oppression under the Islamic Republic. Artists like Marjane Satrapi and Sedigheh Vasmaghi have offered powerful visual and narrative responses, and their work, alongside that of feminist scholars from the region, forms an important context for situating my own efforts. By considering how systemic violence, suppression, and resistance manifest in different parts of the

world, I aim to create art that resonates on a global scale, transcending national boundaries and fostering a collective vision for liberation.

In conclusion, my vision for the future is rooted in a commitment to utilizing art as a transformative tool for social change. I am determined to continue creating immersive, participatory installations that challenge dominant narratives, amplify marginalized voices, and inspire collective action. Through my practice, I hope to contribute to the ongoing conversation about women's rights, justice, and equality, offering new ways to envision a world where these ideals are not only aspirational but achievable. As my work evolves, I look forward to exploring how art can shape a future that is inclusive, just, and free from the cycles of violence and oppression that have long defined women's histories.

In my thesis, *A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field*, I present a deeply personal and politically-charged exploration of women's resilience in the face of systemic violence and oppression.

Central to this work is my commitment to amplifying women's voices—voices that have been historically marginalized or silenced. bell hooks powerfully reminds us that feminism speaks to and includes everyone—it's a movement meant for all of us, a sentiment that underscores the inclusivity I strive to achieve through my art.

Throughout my Master of Fine Arts program, from 2023 to 2025, I immersed myself in reading, research, and creating paintings. Each endeavour contributed to my growth, culminating in this

research-creation project. The availability of a 24-hour studio and exceptional facilities, such as the printing area, enabled me to integrate printmaking techniques into my painting process.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the faculty and professors in the Department of Visual Art and Art History for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout my MFA journey. I am especially thankful to my committee members—knowledgeable, supportive, and accomplished artists—who guided me step by step, addressing every question and sharing in the challenges and triumphs that led to this achievement.

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Figure 19 Installation, Special Project Gallery, 2023

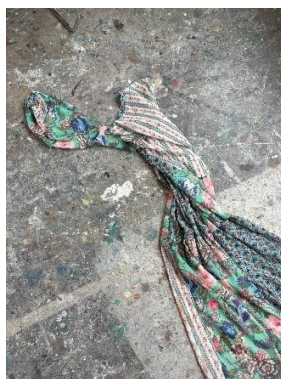


Figure 20 My dress as a model



Figure 21,22&23 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", MFA Thesis Show at the Gales Gallery, 2025



Figure 24 "A Truck Goes Through the Tulip Field", MFA Thesis Show at the Gales Gallery, 2025