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All Are Immigrants

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ALL ARE IMMIGRANTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art

in

The School of Art

by
Seyedeh Ghazal Naghshband
B.F.A Azad University, 2005
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Abstract

I constantly migrate and among many places and always to and fro I do it alone, although many people act like me.

Agnes Heller

Three years ago, I left my home country of Iran for many reasons. I wanted something new in my life: new challenges and new experiences. This move expanded my world. I was not satisfied in Iran and, the United States was always the place I dreamed about being; I had an American dream and I decided my dream should become true. I became an immigrant. As my world expanded, I lost my comfort and security. I began to realize that what I thought America would be was different than the reality I found... I lost all the things I had. I chose to lose. When I came here, I had hard days, but I did not give up, and my thesis exhibition, *All Are Immigrants*, narrates my story as an immigrant with a Persian perspective. My work uses the multimedia forms of video art, sound installation and photography as a collaged reflection of my nostalgia for the past, and my transition adjusting to this new culture. The works explore more than my disappointment of the reality being different from my dream but they also extend to my status of trying to fill a void in my everyday life as an American immigrant.

I found myself with this huge metaphorical void in my body. I found this hole after my immigration, a lack of something. The image of the hole means many things to me, but it is mostly representative of the deep pain I encountered—pain from my previous life, memories and my Persian identity, transition time here and the disappointment of my American dream. My work is informed by artists such as Kim Sooja, Anna Diprospero, Alex Prager, Nooshin Rosatmi (Iranian-New York artist), and Gohar Dashti.

I believe that everyone has holes in their lives and feelings of loneliness; we can all relate to this aspect of the immigrant experience. I invite my audience to see my life after immigration and empathize, as I struggle to bridge my constructed fantasy of American life with the reality I faced me.

The exhibition's goal is to change the culture towards immigrants here and dispel the illusions about my country spread in the media. Some of these questions are painful and cause anxiety. In Iran, the America media shows false dreams to us about the U.S., while people here think wrongly about Iran based on the news and media.

Introduction

My autobiographical thesis work narrates my life after immigration and examines the pit that exists within me. I have been in America for three years. At first, everything seemed ideal and I longed for my American Dream since I had grown up with that dream in Iran—the dream of the land of opportunity, a perfect life, and a place where I can have success and follow my dreams. But soon after immigrating, I was left with a nagging question: why do I feel empty and unfulfilled? Why do I have a hole and feel emptiness? What is the meaning of this hole to me? Why do I feel I am missing something? When I left my homeland, pieces of my identity, emotions, and memories were left behind and there was little left of my previous existence.

My thesis work directly engages the audience so they too can feel this emptiness. Based on my experience, I am attempting to offer a new and real perspective about immigration to challenge existing assumptions about migrants. I want to change Western society's perspective by showing the reality of all the challenges and struggles I face—focusing on factors such as cultural identity, patterns of attachment and prolonged periods of separation, psychological and emotional displacement. I seek to create empathy in the audience. How can one make a new identity blending in a new culture and environment, not as victim but as a strong and brave character? My art shows this narrative and also shows its results. By showing that emptiness is a universal human experience, my audience, especially American viewers, can directly connect to me as person, not just as immigrant, and gain a better understanding of the immigration experience. I think all people are immigrants and can have this pit. I am not the only person that felt alien in this culture after immigration. My previous work in program was about my friend immigration experience “We Shipped Ourselves” helped me a lot understand different point of view from my friends. At some point, everybody feels empty and has a lack of something. As I work through my own fears and shortcomings in my art,

I've come to believe that all people are immigrants traveling across the oceans of Time and Change.

All are Immigrants depicts my void as a hole. When I felt a huge hole in my body, I was thinking how this hole appeared in my life after immigration. What's cause of this hole?

For me, the hole is caused by different reasons.

First, it is about my previous life, the life I had in Iran. I was born and raised in Iran and lived there for 30 years. My main identity belongs to that country and culture. I left my previous life, my identity, and all my memories when I left Iran. I chose to lose these things, to cause this hole within myself. This history is part of my identity. But I chose to be here and so I died in my past and came here to be reborn, but now I am mourning that. I was more comfortable there because everything was provided for me. I was taken care of, but I needed more challenges.

Second, when I arrived here and tried to adjust to a new culture and environment, it was a time of transition. While discovering this new life and new people, I noticed some part of this culture matches with me, some does not, and it was difficult to understand the new culture and people here. Accordingly, I had a hard time communicating with people here. I had many issues and misunderstandings because of the language barrier. I realize I am here, but it was difficult to transition, adjust and accept this culture and new life and environment. I just wanted to fit in. Some parts of my culture are so different that I felt like a machine that keeps saying "beep, beep, error," because the culture shock was such a surprise. Some parts of this new life were too different to comprehend. I felt mechanical, as if my mind is a logical machine that is continuously calculating and recalculating. An example of this culture shock deals with how Americans censor emotions and hold rigid boundaries for intimacy, while in Iran, we are far more open and welcome the communication of emotions. American emotions seem, to me, more calculated and isolated, and people prefer to be alone which I connect to their

drive for independence. This is the opposite from how family and friends believe they should act in Iran.

The third cause of the hole was the basis of the American dream I had in Iran and grew up with, the belief that excited and attracted me, was much different in reality. I had misinterpreted the American advertisements that shaped my dreams. My transition to America was abrupt; there was little time for transition as a new way of life surrounded me. I told myself, “This is it. This is what you wanted.” After living here, I realized my dream does not exist in reality, and I was disappointed. Part of me is Iranian and part of me is new and American. My point of view is Persian, and my new self is capable of both critiquing American life as well as choosing the things about it I like and want to accept.

These reasons made the hole for me. (Figure 1: Behind the scenes videography of *All Are Immigrants* Los Angeles Aug., 2015)



(Figure 1: Behind the scenes videography of *All Are Immigrants* Los Angeles Aug, 2015)

Video Art Concept and Process

I have recently started experimenting with performance, video making and editing and sound installation. In my videos, I stand in front of a camera with a huge hole at my center that reveals everything behind me. I am visually transcribing an absence that eats at me. I put the green circle paper attached to my dress when I recorded the video. I shot two different videos: one with me, one with just the background of the location. Then in Premiere editing software I made a hole. I removed the green circle part and used the background layer behind it, so it looks like I have an active hole and its empty. As a performing process, I took on a shocked coldness and disappointment on my face. The center void in my body means everything seems perfect in dreamland, yet I felt lack of something. I miss something, and this hole bothers me. It is always with me. Everywhere. I choose different locations in my video series. Each location I choose is meaningful and relates to my experience in the U.S. I was looking for a place to show American lifestyle. I chose Los Angeles first because Los Angeles is a place in the United States that has huge Iranian community. I have many friends and relatives there and for me LA is more meaningful based on my memories and experiences (Figure 2). I feel more comfortable in its Iranian community based on my background and culture; but because of the huge crowds while there, I also felt lonely, a stranger and a foreigner too. I chose four different locations in LA: the ocean, train, Venice Beach, and Walt Disney Opera House. Each location for me symbolizes something relevant to my concept and my experience in my new environment and trying to adjust to a new culture when I felt hole. (Figure 2: Train Video Art Los Angeles Aug, 2015)



(Figure 2: Train Video Art Los Angeles Aug., 2015)

I choose Angels Flight in Los Angeles because it was a tourist attraction. When I stand on the tracks, you see a train behind me on top. The gate is closed and the train is not moving anymore. This is how I felt when I first came here, that something was hovering behind me or following me. It seems like it is part of the American lifestyle, that there is something behind me all of the time. I have a feeling of danger all of the time. You expect the train would move and come to the foreground. It is scary. American life for me is like that train. Also train tracks remind me of my new life here after I came—all of the challenges and struggles I had. Sometimes I felt progress; sometimes I wanted to give up. I could not run. Lastly, the train steps remind me of exactly the feeling I have in my life here. I always feel anxious and worried, about to fail or give up. I performed on the train steps. In the video, I stop when I am walking up, think for a moment and ask myself, “Am I alright? Is this the life I was looking for? Was is the good decision to come here? I doubt should I go back this way? Should I continue? Is it worth it? Or not.” I showed myself performing with those questions in mind and edited the video to help with those interpretations too. The train is symbol of a time machine. It’s about my past—my nostalgia I left in Iran

but it is still with me. All the train steps are my life steps. I walked hard on them. I multiple myself in video effects to mean I still living in my past and it is hard to forget all my memory and my pervious identity. I think it's important that the train is a means of transportation. Sometimes I want to face the fear of “the train” that I have, and then sometimes I do not want to be faced with the fear, which is what I am trying to say by walking toward the train and then turning around and walking away from it. The video is about action and moving and transition and distance—starting in one place and your destination is somewhere else. My video-performance in front of the train is a record of action and transition; it tells of the distance between one stop to the next. (Figure 3: Ocean Video Art Los Angeles Aug, 2015)



(Figure 3: Ocean Video Art Los Angeles Aug., 2015)

Another location used in my thesis is the ocean. You can see the ocean in a hole in my belly and feel more emptiness. I liked when the hole is filled with ocean water as a visual. Water reminds me of emptiness and light. Oceans remind me of boundaries because they serve as a natural geographic boundary for so many countries. Oceans are also associated with distance, geographical movement, and immigration. The majority of American immigrants come from across the ocean. For me it is about immigration. If I am standing in front of the ocean with luggage it

creates questions like “is she leaving” or “did she land here?” Luggage represents travel and transition to new land. Even with these heavier significance, water is still fluid, light, and empty. My new life feels like an ocean; it is moveable, not settled down, not anchored to a fixed position and can carry me with it. In Iran, we have the idiom, “Like A Life Built on Water,” that expresses this condition. Nothing feels settled down, fixed, or secure. Like I am on a boat and always moving on top of the water. I don’t feel stable like I am standing on solid ground. The ocean is always moving.

The American Dream I grew up with was California. It’s part of the icon—I watched Bay Watch when I was 14. I thought everyone looked like that in America. I felt connected with the ocean and with California. (Figure 4: Venice Beach Video Art Los Angeles Aug., 2015)



(Figure 4: Venice Beach Video Art Los Angeles Aug., 2015)

Another location is Venice Beach, a tourist destination in Los Angeles. I am looking for a place that showing diversity in the United States. In Venice beach, one can see a wide range of different people—nationality, race, age, and class. I tried to

show myself in a crowded place with attractions and people this time. Very busy public places show the contrast between the people and me when I am walking in the crowd. I am walking with my suitcase like an alien in that busy place and you can see the crowd at busy place feel settled. I feel more alone in crowds of people than when I am actually alone. There is a contrast between the public and me. I appear out of place. In crowds, I often feel more alone. I watch others have a sense of direction and destination, I envy their sense of security. For this video, I was more focused on the editing process. I juxtaposed the fast pace of American life, constantly rushing, with my use of slow motion to give time to viewer to think for a few second. I used an overlapping technique to make the scenes more crowded I also duplicated myself using editing techniques to suggest I am not the only person that feels lonely. Everybody can empathize with being lonely in a crowd, so I am hoping that they then begin to identify with me emotionally and begin to reflect upon the things that feel like are or lacking or causing holes in their lives. According to USCIS, an immigrant is “any person—not a citizen of the United States—who is residing in the U.S. under legally recognized and lawfully recorded permanent residence, also known as ‘Permanent Resident Alien’.

Another location is the architecture of the Walt Disney Concert Hall. I am continually interested in comparing human scale with the scale of architecture. This place allows me to compare human scale with architecture. The American culture and society is immense, and there are so many facets of it that I have yet to understand. Knowing that my understanding of America is limited makes me feel small and vulnerable. The materials of the architecture are also important. I like architecture and comparing human scale with them. Steel silver is tough and cold, like its frizzed reminding me of emptiness. The shape of architecture in the alleyway reminded of all the challenges and difficulties I had here. The alleyway is reminiscent of my isolated path. I selected the loneliness of this alleyway and like I choose to be in this country. I isolated myself in loneliness to solidify who I am and who I want to be in this new world. Architecture and this building is strong and tough for me. The coldness and

strength of the steel reflects my understand of American culture, and how it seems unwilling to change for me — instead, I need to be flexible in order to find my way.

(Figure 5: Opera house Los Angeles Aug 2015)



(Figure 5: Opera house Los Angeles Aug 2015)

Target

I have three years in Baton Rouge and it is the first place I came to in the United States. I was looking for an ordinary place like Target where I go shopping and Interact with people, but this time is an indoor location. I shopping like ordinary American daily lifestyle. I love to be in crowd with people. Think it can be different experience and unique attraction. I tried make a video in indoor place like target.

(Figures 6-9: video process in Baton Rouge June 2015)



(Figure 6: Target process video in Baton Rouge June 2015)



(Figure 7: Levee Line downtown Baton Rouge June 2015)



(Figure 8: Farmers market Baton Rouge June 2015)



(Figure 9: Lake Baton Rouge June 2015)

Bridge in Spanish Town

Spanish Town is a neighborhood in downtown Baton Rouge. The bungalow style homes are bright and vibrant. In contrast to this lively neighborhood, the interstate runs through town not far from this location. The dirty concrete expanse seems devoid of vitality. In the video, I stand under a bridge, the noise of cars rushing overhead. This location is representative of the disconnect I feel in contrast to the natural-born citizens going about their daily routine. I am unequal to most of those around me; I am beneath them. (Figure 10: Spanish Town Baton Rouge 2016)



(Figure 10: Spanish Town Baton Rouge 2016)

Bus Station Baton Rouge

In continuation of my exploration of travel in Los Angeles, I wanted to explore a space of transportation near me. In Baton Rouge, a bus is my main source of transportation. In the video, it is a dark, cloudy day as I stand in front of a bus station. With the camera on the other side of street, cars pass in front of me over and over again. This repetitive disruption prevents me from crossing to the other side; I feel trapped by cultural boundaries. In the video, it seems I want to cross the street

and break the boundary but I can't because I can't change my culture. I have to be patient and flexible. In this video I tried not make it visual elegant like before location not following beautiful shot and elements. This helps to my audience connect with my pain more. (Figure 11: Bus station Baton Rouge 2016)



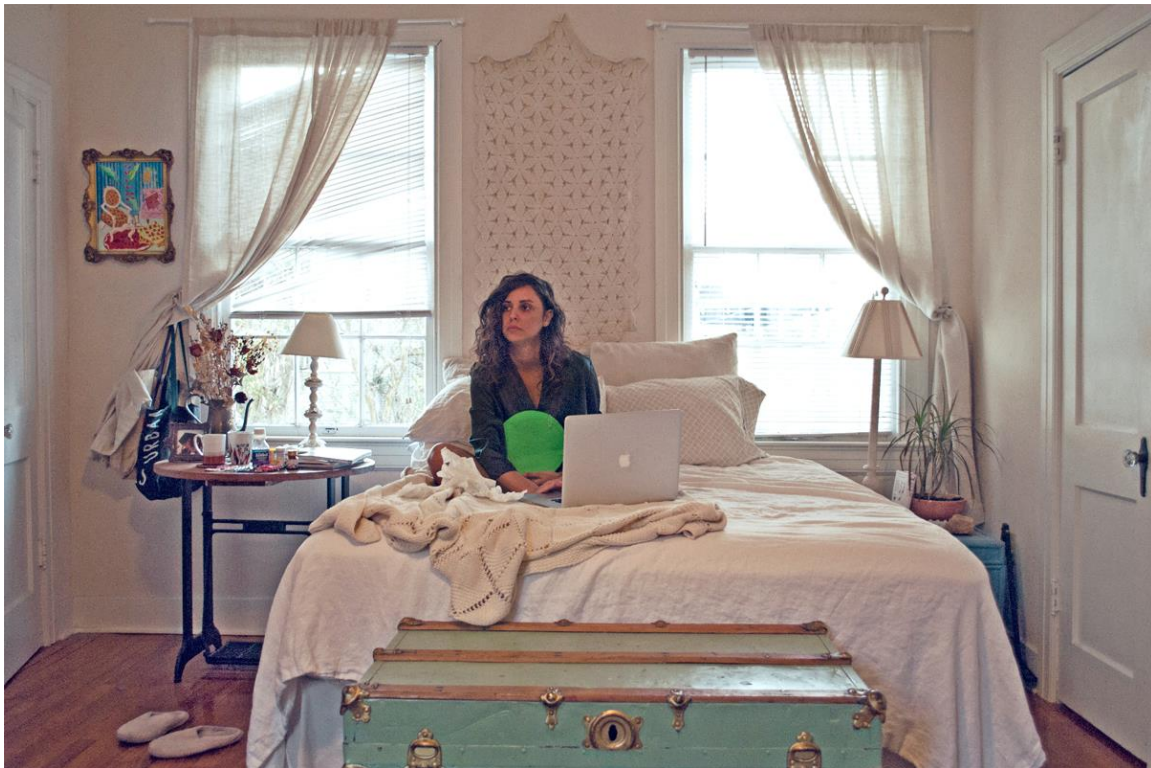
(Figure 11: Bus station Baton Rouge 2016)

Sound Installation

During my thesis exhibition, I projected five different videos on three gallery walls at the same time. I want to invite audience to second room of Foster Gallery and have them experience with three different walls at the same time like a box surrounding my viewers. I kept the ocean location's sound and projected with speakers. The ocean sound plays for 1 minute before a 30 second gap of silence. After the silence, the speaker play a dialogue which consist of questions that often people ask me. My performance in the videos is like I am responding to the dialogue, Americans are curious and constantly posing questions about my country, my culture and my immigration status. These questions haunt me. As an immigrant, concerns for my future plan is a nightmare that reveals my struggles. These questions are always in my mind and I over-think them. I felt anxiety when faced with such voices and in this installation they become directed to the audience, making people share my anxiousness because I do not get to stop thinking those questions; sometimes I try to ignore this repetitive dialogue but I could not stop my mind from always reviewing them and making me more anxious because I do not know the answers. I understand they did not want to hurt me, but those questions become painful and reveal my weakness—especially when you do not have any plan for the future and do not know what is going to happen in the future. Since I not provide the answers to the people who remind me with their barrage of question I decided to hold up a mirror to answer them: *What are you planning after your visa getting expire? Do you want to stay here or do you want to go back to your own country? How can you stay? Do you have a permanent visa? Are you legal to be here? Can you go back to your country? Are you a refugee? Are you home sick? Do you miss your family? Do you have more freedom here? Are you happy wearing nice clothes here?* My videos are my response to these questions. Despite my hole, I stand firm, secure, and gaze steadily forward. I face my fear. Through my work, I am able to better understand and cope with my situation.

Photo Series

(Figure 12: Photo series 2015-2016) Finally, I will include 15 photographic pieces. The images are self-portraits that are documentary in my private life. They are representative of how I feel the hole when I am alone. I cut hole as a circle in my photo paper as a physical. I am not looking to the camera directly. Some of them I posed natural. I try to show my mind always traveling. I was doing something but I am thinking about something else. The Hole is always was with me.



(Figure 12: Photo series 2015-2016)

American Dream Video

In my video piece “My American Dream” video, I showing in huge TV screen reveal what my American dream was on one wall in the first room of Foster Gallery. The imagery appropriated from American TV shows in media. It’s about government, commerce, industry, food, politics, history, etc. I edited all the videos I downloaded, turning them into a fake commercial ad. These clips are about the non-existing dreamland, that I as an Iranian dreamed about. This is my opinion based off my experience; I think every person has a different American dream. My American dreams is a Persian version. I was not born here. I was not raised here. My American dream is based on my understanding of the U.S when I was in different part of the world. But after three years living here, I realized how much the reality was different from that dream I had. Now I have matured and want to live in the American reality.

(Figures 13-14: My American Dream Video 2016)



(Figure 13: My American Dream Video 2016)



(Figure 14: My American Dream Video 2016)

Persian Dream Photography Series

For this project, I focused on my understanding of the United States based on my beliefs about the American dream before, by showing the real American daily life people from my point of view and the emotional challenges and some struggles I had to adjust to function in this new environment and culture. My visage becomes a dramatic narrator of identity, which for is now a combination of half my Persian identity and half my American identity. (Figures 15-17: 50 piece 11x8.5 inch size presentation in class Grad Review spring 2014)



(Figure 15: 50 piece 11x8.5 inch size presentation in class Grad Review spring 2014)



(Figure 16: Persian Dream photo series spring 2014)



(Figure 17: Persian Dream photo series spring 2014)

Artists Influences

My research explores how other artists have responded to exile or immigration in their artwork. Most of these influences are Iranian artists and other immigrant artists.

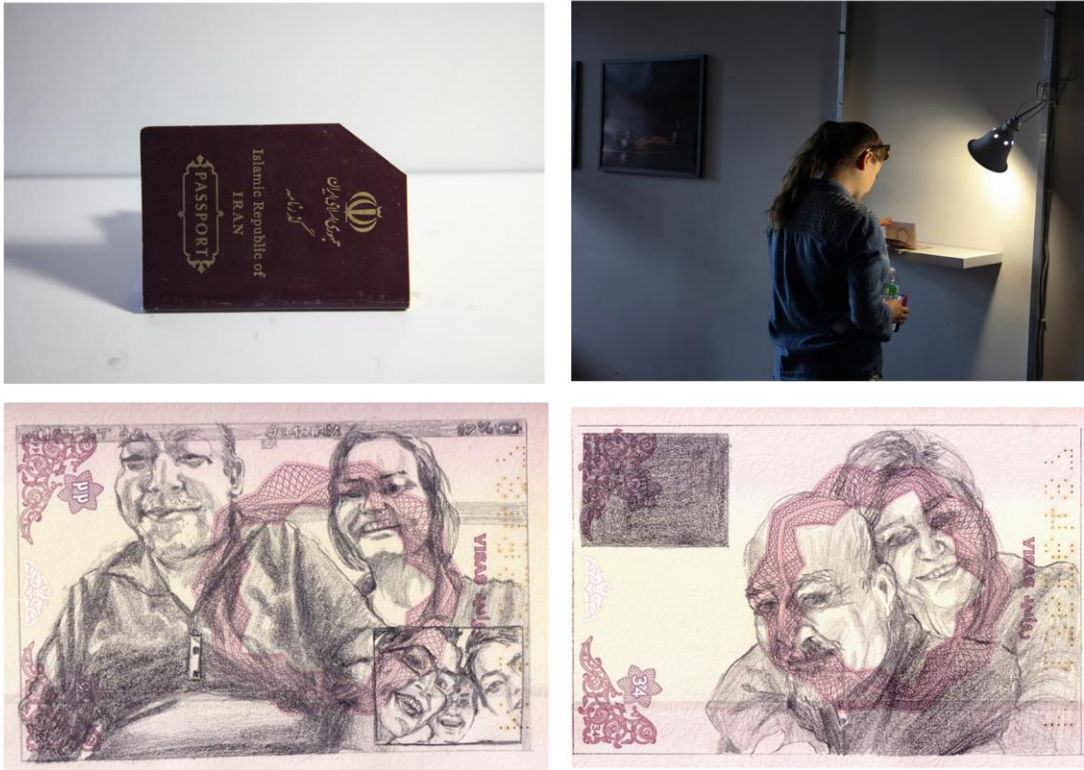
Nooshin Rosatmi

I look to Nooshin Rosatmi as inspiration. Nooshin Rostami is a New York-based artist and educator based in Brooklyn. She was born in 1986 in Tehran, Iran and later immigrated to the United States for school. Nooshin graduated with a M.F.A from Brooklyn College (CUNY) in 2011. We are from the same place, and she is the same age as me. Part of her work focuses on immigration or exile as a subject matter. She is often inspired by personal narratives. She believes the immigration process has become more important than outcome. Rosatmi's work also displays passion about humanity and technology, femininity, and geometry versus fluidity.¹ (Figures 18-19: "Pending" Nooshin Rostami)



(Figure 18: "Pending" Nooshin Rostami)

¹ Rostami, Nooshin. Accessed March 9, 2016. <http://www.nooshinrostami.com>.

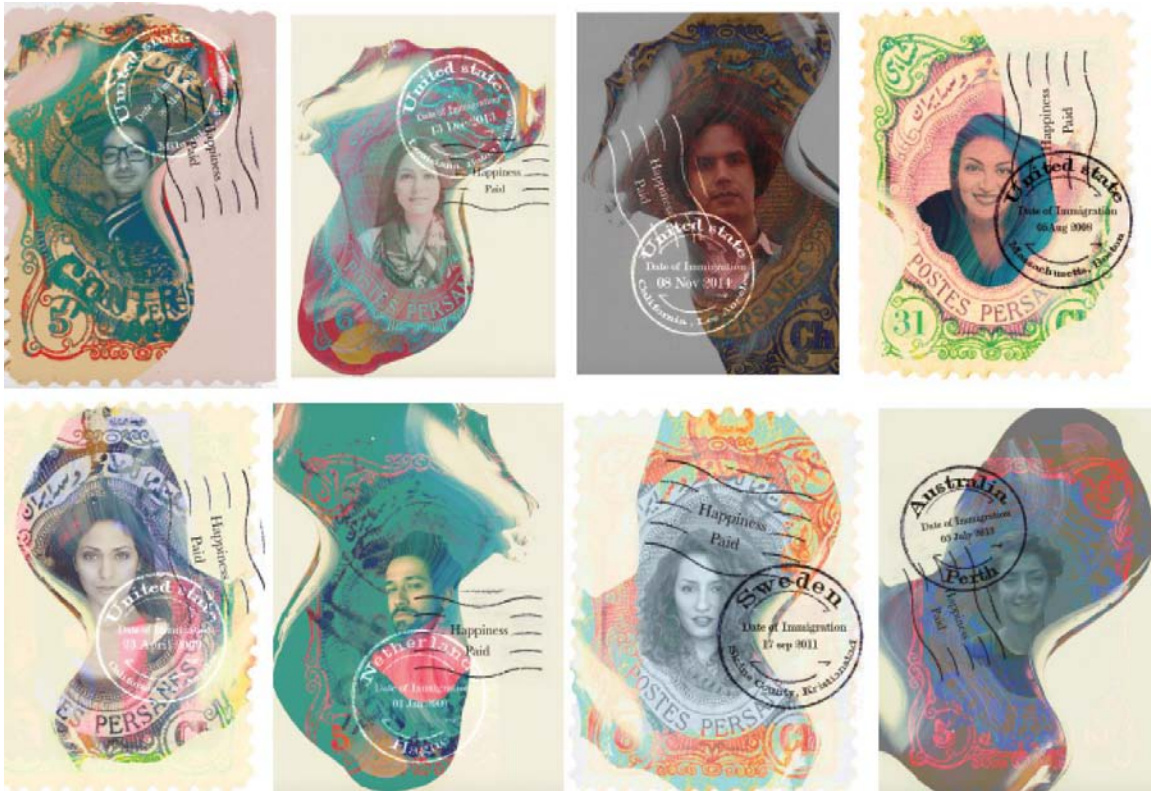


(Figure 19: “Pending” Nooshin Rostami)

One of her projects, “Pending” (2013) is a pencil drawing on a recently expired Iranian passport. She used her passport and her visa as a student. She depicted some of her family moments over the past few years of her life living far away. Her drawings “explore the inseparable politics of family and exile, the bureaucratic visa processes, administrative endeavor, and financial hardship.”²

This is similar to a piece I worked on last year, “We Shipped Ourselves.” My friend and I are part of Iran’s “Brain Drain” and we are living new lives around the world. I tried to distance my imagery from the typical image of immigrants as victims or being miserable. I show a positive point in their new life. I’m proud of them. They are brave. It’s a big deal. We shipped ourselves here, but we don’t know if it’s worth it or not. (Figure 20: “We Shipped Ourselves” stamp project spring 2015 by Gazelle Naghshbandi)

² Rostami, Nooshin. Accessed March 9, 2016. <http://www.nooshinrostami.com>.



(Figure 20: “We Shipped Ourselves” stamp project spring 2015 by Gazelle Naghshbandi)

Another of her works is the “Paper Work” performance of 2015. “Paperwork is the performative embodiment of her journey as an expatriate artist, exploring the inseparable politics of family, career, immigration and exile. Pursuing American citizenship, regardless of its uncertain, cumbersome and frustrating bureaucratic process became her top priority and concern to overcome the immigration obstacle. In “Paperwork”, she constructs a personal narrative of a morphing home, a glimpse into an interwoven past, and a future in the making. The projected video during the performance consists of a footage she recorded from every corner of her home the night before she left Iran, my parent’s video recordings of home after her sisters and

she left the nest , and some videos of all of us in the 90's"³ (Figure 21: Paper work performance Nooshin Rostami)



(Figure 21: Paper work performance Nooshin Rostami)

Gohar Dashti

Gohar Dashti is an Iranian visual artist who was born in 1970. She had received her B.A and M.A in Photography from the Fine Art University of Tehran in 2005. She taught at the Tehran University for a while before she moved to Berlin. She has developed a practice concerning social issues with particular references to history and culture in the modern society. She creates artwork using different tools, such as photography and video.

"Today's life and war" a 2008 series, is a powerful project about war. It was based on the Iran-Iraq 1980s war, which was giving form to the invisible but pervasive anxieties that linger in the minds of the civilians, even decades after it ended in 1988. In these staged narrative images, the artist explores the complex and contradictory

³Rostami, Nooshin. Accessed March 9, 2016. <http://www.nooshinrostami.com/selectedprojects/#/paperwork/>

impulses that govern a couple routine tasks. Dashti says that fear becomes ordinary as the couple goes about their daily activities without seeming to acknowledge the violent backdrop that cruelly controls their domestic lives. (Figures 22-23: “Today's life and war” by Gohar Dashti 2008)



(Figure 22: “Today's life and war” by Gohar Dashti 2008)



(Figure 23: “Today's life and war” by Gohar Dashti 2008)

This is related to my work in which I photographed myself in my home and private space I felt emptiness in those locations when I was alone. Its daily life and seems I do something but thinking something else and my mind travel. (Figures 24-25: “Iran Untitled” by Gohar Dashti Figure 26: Video series Los Angeles Summer 2015)



(Figure 24: “Iran Untitled” by Gohar Dashti)



(Figure 25: “Iran Untitled” by Gohar Dashti)



(Figure 26: Video series Los Angeles Summer 2015)

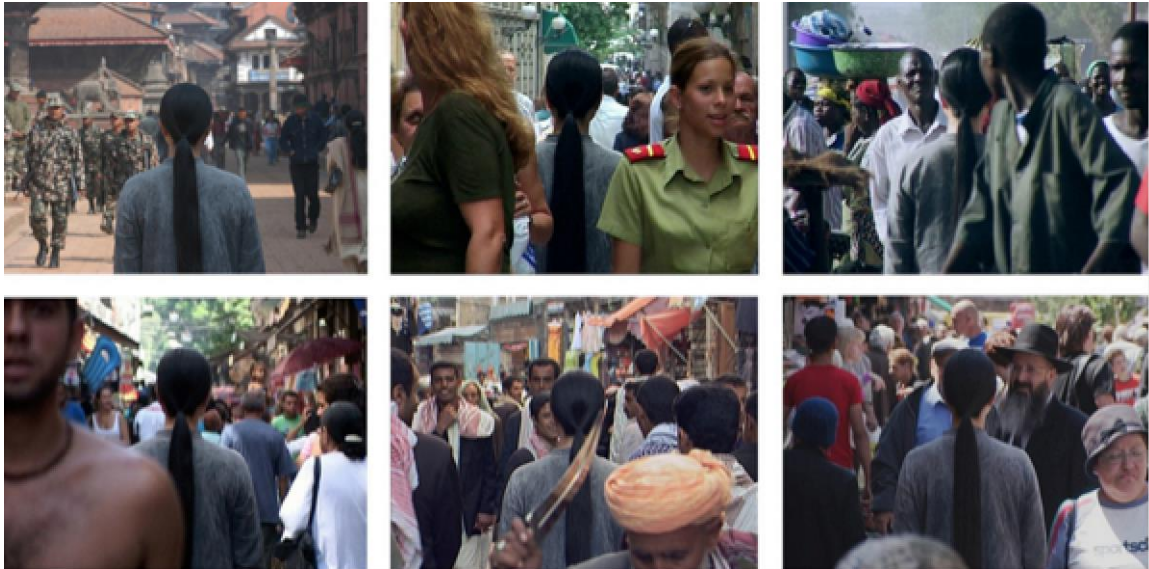
Kim Sooja

Kim Sooja is a South Korean multi-disciplinary conceptual artist based in New York. Her work focuses on current issues of identity, migration, ideological and physical divide across people and borders. She tries to find expression in a visual poetry and a live performance resting beyond material conditions and the act of making.⁴

I was particularly inspired by her large-scale works. In *A Needle Woman* (2001) and *A Mirror Woman* video installation in Tokyo 2008, she eagerly works sound and light into her installation. Sometimes her work includes meditation sounds that match with her space. She makes space in a minimal style, similar to how I tried to use a minimal style in my videos. For example, when I decided to scale up the size of my projection on the wall and to use all four walls at the same time. Sooja's work relates to the public experience of being in crowd with people participating and

⁴ Sooja, Kim. Web. 10 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.kimsooja.com>>.

reacting to the artist in outdoor locations as well, such as in *Experiments with Truth: Gandhi and Images of Nonviolence*. (Figure 27: *Experiments with Truth: Gandhi and Images of Nonviolence*. Figure 28: “A Mirror Woman”)



(Figure 27: *Experiments with Truth: Gandhi and Images of Nonviolence*)



(Figure 28: “A Mirror Woman”)

For my thesis process work, I started my first video test over the summer when I went to farmers' market in Baton Rouge and had different reaction of people. (Figure 29: Video in farmers market Baton Rouge June 2015)



(Figure 29: Video in farmers market Baton Rouge June 2015)

Alex Prager

Photographer and filmmaker, Alex Prager was born in Los Angeles, CA, and she has lived and worked there since 1979. Prager makes staged photographs that resemble cinematic style seen in films. She is inspired by Andy Warhol, Cindy Sherman, and Jeff Walls. Her work is about relationships between fine art, people, and popular culture. These photos especially stress loneliness or peril of crowded public spaces. Prager's images are actually created in real places—Washington Square Park in New York or an airport in Burbank, California.⁵ (Figure 30: Face in the crowd video. Figure 31: "Face in the Crowd" video in gallery)

⁵ Prager, Alex. Web. 10 Mar. 2016. <<http://www.alexprager.com>>.



(Figure 30: Face in the crowd video)



(Figure 31: “Face in the Crowd” video in gallery)

I am inspired by Prager because of her staged photography and the fact that she is a video maker. She is from California and most of my videos I made was in Los Angeles. California has always been a symbolic part of my American Dream. Her work is important to my work because of the video process, production, and the idea of

showing a narrative story. As a graphic designer, I am interesting in advertising and bright colors, and her work contains elements of both. The best example is her “Face in the Crowd” video. I like the way she tries to show reality while creating a fake world—a fantasy, which is how I am portraying my American Dream. In her “Face in the Crowd” video, the people in station are real but they look fake.

Anna Diprospero

Born in Rome in 1987, Anna Diprospero studied photography at the Institute Europeo di Design in Rome and at the School of Visual Arts in New York.⁶ She is inspired by the photography of Gregory Crewdson, Stephen Shore and Philip-Lorca diCorcia, but she has been more and more inspired by painting and cinema. I find her interesting because she focused on the self-portrait. In an interview Diprospero stated, “I think self-portraits are a good way to examine yourself and your relationships with others. A self-portrait forces you to make questions about who you are and admit things to yourself”⁷ The self-portrait has enabled me to both document my transition between cultures as I adjust and try to understand my new identity as an Iranian-American; the location also becomes important because it documents the new environment.

Diprospero’s work also presents her figure with architecture. I like comparing human scale with architecture and showing the space between. I walked in the alleyway of the Walt Disney concert hall alone and separate from street and society. The large scale buildings also seem representative of the mass and barrier of culture an immigrant is trying to enter, by immersion and assimilation. (Figure 32-35: Diprospero’s urban self portrait Photography. Figure 36: Opera House Los Angeles Video)

⁶ Diprospero, Anna. Web. 10 Mar. 2016.
<<http://www.annadiprospero.com/urban.htm>>.

⁷ <http://fotografiamagazine.com/young-talent-anna-di-prospero/>



(Figure 32: “I’m Here”, Diprospero’s urban self portrait Photography)



(Figure 33: Diprospero’s “I’m Here,” Urban self portrait Photography)



(Figure 34: Diprospero's Marseille (artist residency), 2014)



(Figure 35: Anna di Prospero 'Latina' , Andrew Wyeth 'Christina's World')



(Figure 36: Opera House Los Angeles Video)

Conclusion

All Are Immigrants is a project about my perspective about my immigration. In working with this topic, I had to face all my fears—all the difficulties and challenges I have had over the past three years. During the analysis of my pain — a gap, a hole — I sought to understand where it came from. This work has helped me to better understand my identity: where I come from, who I am now, and who I want to be in future.

The work allowed me to use my creative practice to reveal the anxiety I had. It counteracts me obsessively overthinking all the worries that make my mind sick. It was catharsis process for me—like a release and purging of emotions. I am leaving this hole in my third year of grad school, ready for the next chapter. I still believe that the hole can be back again in my life but it can have a different meaning and context. Also in my show, I have considered that the majority of my audience will be non-immigrants. The questions mirrored in my sound installation are meant to make American viewers more aware of their own assumptions about immigrants. Through this exhibition, my audience can better empathize with me as an immigrant and understand my life story. I wish to bridge the gap between and provide some of the information which may prevent Americans from being sensitive to my situation. By exploring my identity in this new culture and life experiences during Graduate School, I have become progressively more concerned with changing immigration culture and the culture towards immigrants in the South and Baton Rouge.

By working with myself as the subject matter and showing my real life story, I hope to explore the meaning of holes across human experience—inviting the people after seeing my show to reflect on the holes in their lives and how they can deal with them and fill them. I will continue my goal of working as an Iranian and Middle Eastern artist in the U.S for the future and follow my artistic pursuits as an Iranian that chose to live and create in America.

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Vita

Gazelle Naghshbandi was born in 1983 Tehran, Iran. She remained there and attended college at the Art and Architecture Azad University, graduating in 2006. Naghshbandi has worked in advertising agencies in Iran where she designed commercial works, brand identity, print design, package design, publication design, group works, and individual works. She now resides in Louisiana, US and is involved with the Iranian Graphic Designers Society (IGDS) and is also a member of Icograda and New Orleans AIGA. Naghshbandi attends Louisiana State University where she is a candidate to graduate with her MFA focusing in Graphic Design in August 2016. Upon graduation she plans to stay in the US and continue her journey of her American dream.