



The Home

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts in Painting

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Artist Statement

Before I proceed with my statement, I would like to acknowledge that I am currently residing and pursuing my MFA in Edmonton, which is located on Treaty 6 territory, traditional lands of the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibwe, Saulteaux, and other First Nations peoples. I am grateful for the opportunity to live, work, and study on this land.

For most of us, the borders of home mean security and a sense of belonging. The home can have a very wide and borderless concept or an architectural structure made of physical and cultural walls. In The Home series, I seek to explore those borders. To find a quintessential structure that best aligns with my concept. As an immigrant, my work seeks to navigate “The Third Space”¹ as experienced by diasporic populations.

Composing my structures in pictorial space permits more mystery and illusion. It is a fluid space where distortions like to dwell. These distortions are unique to each of us, defined by our individual and group experiences. Whether from cultural and geographical migrations, or globalization and the technological revolution; these filters affect us all.

Creating artwork is an opportunity for me to embark on an endless journey, where I explore the interplay between my chosen subject and the boundless possibilities offered by painting as a versatile medium with a rich historical background. To me, it is essential to break away from conventional techniques, allowing room for spontaneity and unforeseen events to influence the semiotic and aesthetic essence of the form, all while adhering to the fundamental principles of form and color.

With each series of works in the exhibition, I select simple shapes or images, like houses, boats, or cubic shapes, as a starting point. These objects provide a foundational path upon which I can unleash a flurry of changes, deconstructions, and reconstructions within the image. These shapes or images often have some initial connection to my experiences as a Middle Eastern immigrant. I consistently blend the semiotic and aesthetic meanings of the form in an accidental manner, aiming to strike a delicate balance between subject matter and content. My studio practices, which I undertake frequently and extensively alongside my theoretical studies, hold tremendous significance for me. The process of creating art is as important as the final product since they both provide new insights about the image.

Narcissus, a painting by Caravaggio² is an artwork that shows Narcissus staring at himself in water.³ This painting evokes the magical motifs of the “image”. The image in the mirror is two-dimensional, however, this fact seems to escape a lot of people, as the image in mirror appears to be three-dimensional. It is very likely that the first two-dimensional images that humans saw of themselves was in still water. This goes to illustrate that one of the reasons why we, as observers of images, are able to see them in three-dimensions is based on Monocular stereopsis. We create the illusion of depth and space in the image due to the experiences that we have of intersection of shapes, in other words, 3D perception is not merely caused by Binocular Vision.⁴ This reinforced in my mind the use of a two-dimensional image as a starting point for painting.

I always start my process of painting from the initial image or a basic visual plan, instead of a written topic or idea. My “Road map” in this process is the structure of drawing for me that takes me from

image to painting. This transformation, due to the special capacity of a painting when it interacts with the materials used in the painting and the freedom of expression in painting, leads me to a new awareness of the image. In my opinion, the third dimension of a painting is mystery and illusion. This is a kind of lie that helps me present the distortions and uncertainties that I want to narrate in my Home Series to the audience in an imaginary way.

In creating the many of backgrounds, I used technical improvisations to be able to create forms and textures outside of my own will. This method of execution helped me make the destruction and reconstruction less deliberate and helped me manage the events instead of drawing a form.

When I first started to develop this process, I studied Gerhard Richter's ⁵ painting method and investigated his artworks using a different technique by employing a thin plastic sheet instead of a big spatula. I experimented by adding the structures of home to this background in an area of which made the most sense as it related to the composition I had in mind (Picture 1). The encounter of accidental and organic textures with the geometric structures of home was very inspiring to me.



Abbasi_001 the Home 2021 Acrylic and airbrush and scratching on cardboard 38×28 cm

I continued this method repeatedly in dozens of small works. Next, I tried to apply the method in which I improvised the background, to the bars of the home. The fire-like forms obtained from scratching the papers was an attempt in re-creating the method that I used to paint the background (picture 2) and

also the layers of the walls appeared that have a transparent feeling and an accidental glossiness (picture 3).



Abbas_002 The Home 2022 Acrylic and scratching on cardboard 55×71 cm



Abbas_003 The Home 2021 Acrylic on canvas 61×91 cm

For the interior of the home in my painting, I was looking for forms that would make my personal narrative clearer, as a result, I went to work on two subjects, one was lying down human faces (death

masks) and the other one was chandeliers. Empty homes, that I started my work with, were not satisfying me anymore. A lot had changed for me because of the effects of migrating to Canada and as days passed by, these changes became even more evident to me. My world was becoming busier, such as my own mind, which was traveling between two cultural geographies. The chandeliers were similar to my mind because they branched out and reminded me of the multiple paths that my imagination was traveling on. I was looking for a way to place the chandeliers in the home in picture number 4. Using a balloon and some strings, I connected the home structure with a chandelier-like form based on my mental space.



Abbasi_004 Short celebration 2022 Acrylic and airbrush and scratching on cardboard 55×71 cm

A great number of artists were introduced to me and I gradually changed my view by studying their paintings and reading their interviews and essays. The curved forms of the chandeliers were a start for me to trust my hand a little more and I finally found a way to do it. I was looking for a way not to draw the lines based on a habit in drawing. The habit was instilled in me due to repetitive academic drawing that I practiced for a very long time. In my opinion, they were too formulaic and predetermined. I tried many ways, such as switching hands and holding the brush loosely, or creating an intermediate tool to reduce my mastery of the brush. Interesting results were obtained, but finally, I came to the conclusion that there is a better way. I found that the shapes and forms that I am trying to create, are in the artwork itself and I just have to find them under the color and surface and emphasize them. The spirit of

the forms floats between my subjectivity and the two-dimensional surface and does not need to be drawn, it needs to be found and "emphasized" on a bed of random events. For this purpose, I simplified the parts that needed to be drawn so that the complex patterns would not prevent them from being seen. This process was a way of finding a form from my subconscious.

The later paintings of this collection (picture 5 to 9) are the result of these changes in my mind and methodology. The environments and figures of humans in my painting started to get closer to Biomorphic Surreal space ⁶and the backgrounds were similar to the abstract space⁷. Over time, transparent and crystalline forms appeared in my works. Such as a balloon but asymmetrical. A bloated, fragile and a vulnerable form. Also, the methods I had studied from Francis Bacon's representation of humans was reinforced in my work. (picture 7, 8)



Abbasi_005 Neighbors 2023 Acrylic on canvas 120×156 cm



Abbasi_006 Untitled 2023 Acrylic on canvas 109×122 cm



Abbasi_007 Confrontation 2023 Acrylic on canvas 183×164 cm



Abbasi_008 Strangers 2023 Plaster powder and glue and acrylic on upholstery fabric 122×209 cm

In picture 9, I was looking for a more defined and pronounced form of portrait, a form that would speak more deeply about my consciousness and my mind. Maybe this work was the continuation of the death mask process, but with new experiences in the way of execution. In my mind, the "hook-like" forms on the top of the jaw were forms that sought to cling to a definite cultural reality.



Abbasi_009 Untitled 2023 Acrylic on canvas 121×61 cm

There were many books inspired me throughout this process, the most important book that I reviewed was the book about Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting.⁸ Also, an interview between David Sylvester and Francis Bacon about the way human figures are represented in Bacon's paintings was an important learning moment for me.⁹ A study of the paintings of Giorgio de Chirico, written by Ara H. Merjian, gave me ideas for composing architectural structures and figures.¹⁰

Among the of contemporary artists, I studied Matthias Weischer, Three large pictures of his works were printed in the book "Painting Today" ¹¹, which he had used to represent interior spaces with incredible elegance and definition. The simple and technical textures along with the smooth surfaces of oil paint in his paintings showed the continuous back and forth to reach a mental interior space that the painter had.

In the Home Series, there is a painting of a boat in a stormy sea, which is different in terms of atmosphere and execution. (Picture 8) I used this painting in this show as a connecting point between social and political aspects of diaspora's historical narrative and my studio practice on painting/image. The structures of the boat and home have many similarities for me. It was difficult for me to separate,

on the one hand, the social references and multicultural conditions that I experienced and on the other, the studio and technical practices about painting. As a result, I tried to advance them both in parallel.



Abbasi_010 The boat 2023 Acrylic on canvas 106×134 cm

For someone like me who has embarked on a journey that entails a great deal of change including geographical and cultural change, upon entering this project, there were several hurdles to pass. The book "Location of Culture" by Homi Bhabha helped me a lot by providing me insight on the diaspora identity and broke some deadlocks in my mind and answered some critical questions. Instead of focusing on fixed identities, this book defines cultural identities as fluid and dynamic because of displacement, migration, and colonial encounters. Bhabha introduces the concept of "third space" or "hybridity" as a site of cultural negotiation and resistance.¹²

I have tried to find references for this dynamism of culture as a form in my paintings. These references started consciously by way of changing the ceiling or floors in homes, but I made it more internal and it seems to me that the multi-color and fragility of the color layers in my paintings at the end was the manifestation of this statement in my mind. The fluid identity was a point of contention for me as I have been living in a new society, where specifically I do not have an infrastructure for it in my mind yet. Thinking about the third and imaginary dimension of the paintings that I mentioned in the beginning, for me, evokes Edward Said's thoughts on the imaginary world that immigrants create for themselves. He examined the role of imagination in the construction of diaspora culture and identity. He argued that diasporic communities often create "imagined communities".¹³

I also made an effort to distance myself from certain stereotypes that heavily influence the prevailing approaches in migration art and diaspora art. I emphasized on simplicity and refrained from bringing famous cultural elements in a way that is inconsistent and exotic. Studying the narrative of the colonial history of this land made the meaning of home more complicated for me, but instead of finding a

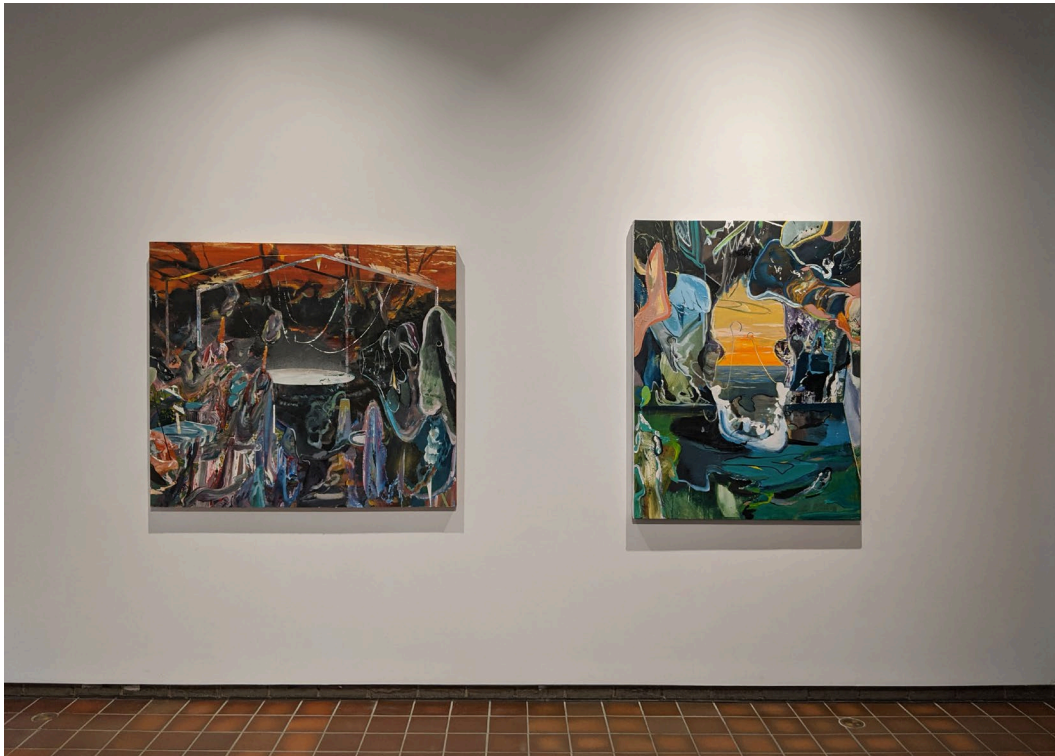
solution, I decided to simply describe it and share it with others. Concepts such as lack of belonging, identity crisis, trans-local conditions and post-colonial view¹⁴ of immigrant identity have been with me constantly during the execution of the Home Series.

Bibliography:

- 1- "The Third Space" in social science typically refers to a theoretical concept developed by the sociologist Homi K. Bhabha
- 2- Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571-1610), was an Italian Baroque artist and one of the most influential painters of his time
- 3- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_\(Caravaggio\)#/media/File:Narcissus-Caravaggio_\(1594-96\)_edited.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(Caravaggio)#/media/File:Narcissus-Caravaggio_(1594-96)_edited.jpg)
- 4- "Seeing in 3-D With Just One Eye: Stereopsis Without Binocular Vision - Dhanraj Vishwanath, Paul B. Hibbard, 2013," accessed July 25, 2023, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956797613477867>.
- 5- Gerhard Richter is a renowned German visual artist widely regarded as one of the most important contemporary painters. He was born on February 9, 1932, in Dresden, Germany
- 6- Abstraction, born from early 20th-century artistic exploration, involves distilling reality into non-representational forms. Its varied types include geometric abstraction, where shapes and lines dominate; lyrical abstraction, evoking emotions through spontaneous gestures; color field abstraction, emphasizing expansive color planes; and abstract expressionism, fusing emotion and abstraction.
- 7- Surrealism, originating in early 20th-century Paris under André Breton's guidance, emerged as a response to post-World War I disillusionment. This movement delved into the subconscious, dreams, and the irrational, giving rise to various artistic types like automatism, veristic surrealism, abstract surrealism, biomorphic surrealism, fantastic realism, and psychological surrealism. Biomorphc Surrealism: This style explored organic and biological shapes, merging living organisms with abstract forms.
- 8- Dietmar Elger, Gerhard Richter: A Life in Painting (University of Chicago Press, 2009).
- 9- David Sylvester, "Interviews with Francis Bacon 1962-1979," (No Title), accessed July 3, 2023, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000794513708928>.
- 10- Ara H. Merjian, Giorgio de Chirico and the Metaphysical City : Nietzsche, Modernism, Paris (Yale University Press, 2014).
- 11- Tony Godfrey, Painting Today (Phaidon Press, 2009).
- 12- Bhabha Homi K. 2004. The Location of Culture. London: Routledge.
- 13- Edward W. Said, Reflections on Exile and Other Essays; Convergences: Inventories of the Present (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 14- The postcolonial view critiques the impact of colonialism on displaced communities, focusing on cultural, social, and political implications. It highlights the power dynamics, hybrid identities, and resistance within diasporic experiences.



Abbas_011 Installation shot



Abbas_012 Installation shot



Abbasi_013 Short celebration 2023 Acrylic on canvas 165×226 cm , Installation shot



Abbasi_014 Short Untitled 2023 Acrylic on canvas 165×127 cm, Installation shot



Abbasi_015 the home 2022 Acrylic and scratching on cardboard 91x69 cm



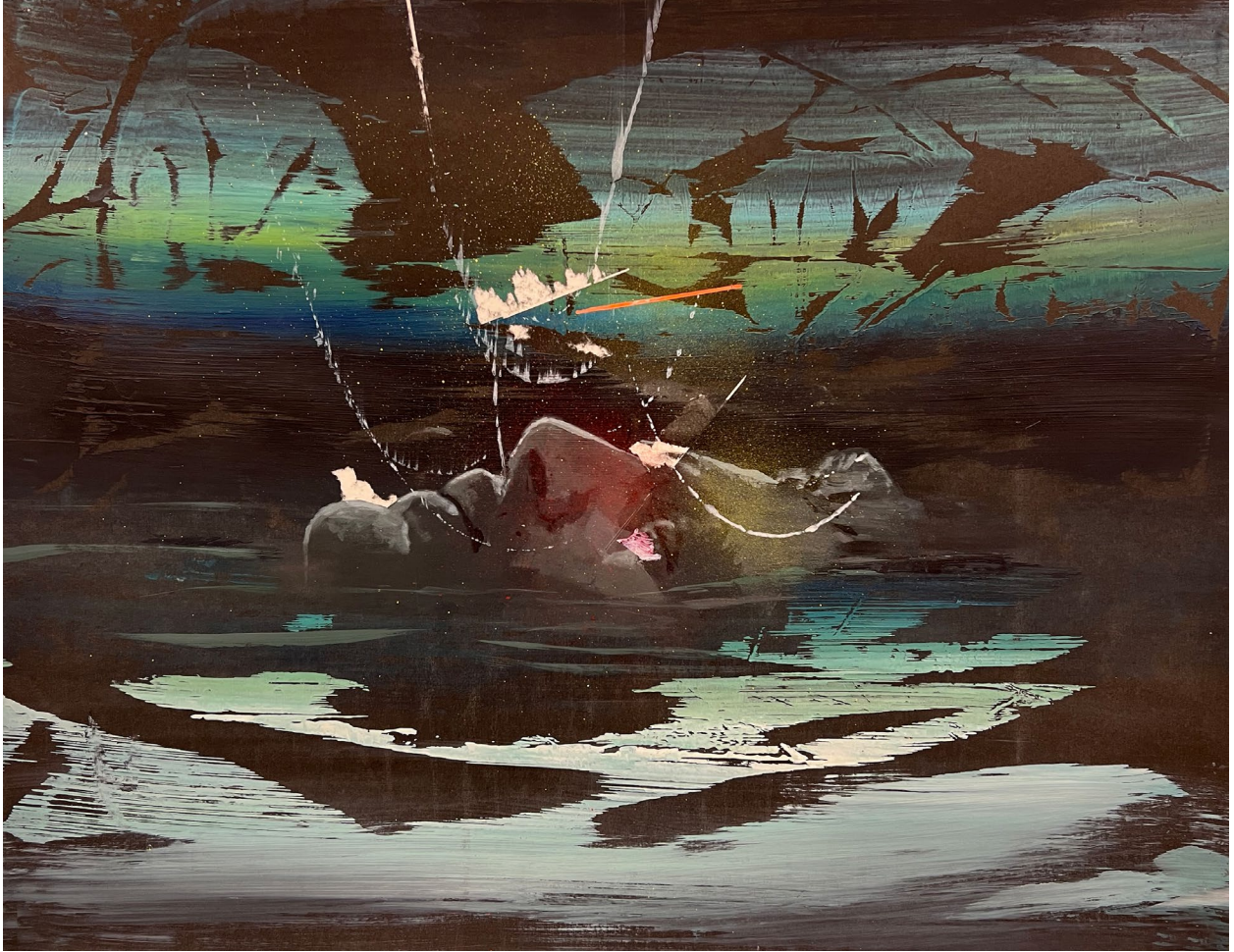
Abbasi_016 the home 2022 Acrylic and scratching on cardboard 46x27 cm



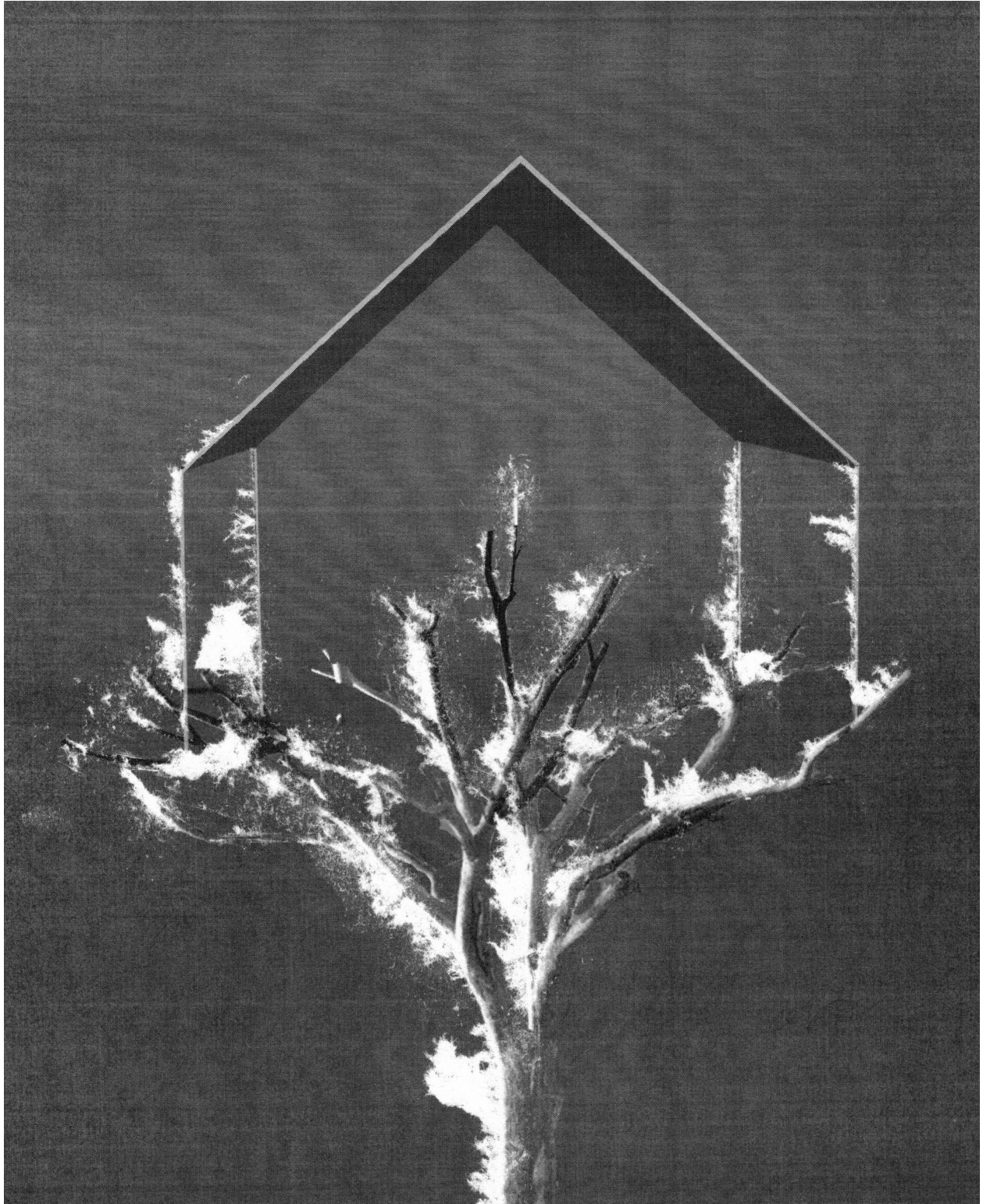
Abbasi_017 the home 2022 Acrylic and scratching on cardboard 26 x 27 cm



Abbasi_018 Installation shot



Abbasi_019 Untitled 2022 Acrylic and airbrush and scratching on cardboard 55x71 cm



Abbasi_020 hope, 2022, scratch on black laser-printed paper, 20 x 23 cm



Abbasi_021 Installation shot



Abbasi_022 Installation shot

Acknowledgments:

I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors, Jesse Thomas and Allen Ball, for their continuous support and guidance.

A heartfelt thank you to my wife, Zar Shirazi, for standing by my side through the challenges of immigration. Your unwavering support means the world to me.

To the members of my defense committee, Marilène Oliver, Zohreh Bayatrizi, Tim Antoniuk, and the individuals from the midterm critic's committee, Sean Caulfield, Natalie Loveless, Tanya Harnett – I appreciate your feedback and engaging discussions.

Joan Greer, your teachings have been invaluable, and I am thankful for the knowledge you've shared.

Dawn Hunter, your guidance and support have been of immeasurable value, and I deeply appreciate your help.

I'd like to extend a special appreciation to Scott Cumberland for his tremendous help and support.

A big thank you to the instructors who visited my studio, Daryl Rydman, Kim Sala, Tammy Salzl and Matthew Lapierre for their valuable guidance.

"I dedicate this exhibition to G and M, and to the people of my country, Iran."