

FINDING HOME  
by  
S A M I R A H E M M A T

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Committee Members:

Alvin P Gregorio  
Marina Kassianidou  
Melanie Walker  
Melanie Yazzie

Samira Hemmat, M.F.A, Art Practice, Department of Art and Art History

Thesis Directed by Professor Alvin Gregorio

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*[I am] sapling planted,  
far away from my parent tree  
forever waiting still,  
to reunite with my family.*



## A B S T R A C T

*Finding Home* expresses my personal experiences and impressions in my memories and everyday life. It narrates not only my own story but also reflects the shared journey of countless immigrants who left their homelands in search of a better life or a sense of belonging—a deeply introspective series that delve into my personal experiences and recollections, capturing the essence of my memories and the emotions that permeate my daily life. This collection encapsulates the profound sense of displacement I have experienced, as it focuses on the unsettling process of being uprooted from my origins and the subsequent search for belonging.

In this series, I employ abstraction to convey these complex emotions, utilizing a palette of monochrome colors and geometric compositions to dismantle the familiar structures that defined my sense of home. In doing so, I embark on a transformative journey to find solace and sanctuary in the very act of creation itself.

By incorporating rhythm and repetition as key elements in my work, I forge a meditative space where I confront and process the feelings of dislocation. These repetitive patterns become a metaphor for my search for stability amid the chaos of my uprooted existence. I aim to provide an insightful reflection on the human experience of seeking comfort, connection, and a place to call home.

## PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

From colorful paintings, I departed to black and white drawings and landed on color-free embossed paper. I am worn by pain; I could not find any colors to express this feeling. It seems like there is a vacuum in my heart. As I grapple with this inner darkness, I am compelled to confront and unravel the nightmares and fears that have been haunting me, seeking a cathartic release through my art. This transformation provides an avenue for personal healing and self-discovery.

As an Iranian woman who has been deeply hurt by the oppressive regime, I yearn to shout my story. In my homeland, I was voiceless, unable to express my thoughts and emotions openly. But now, through my art and poetry, I can finally raise my voice and illustrate the profound impact of leaving home.

Forced migration tore me away from my belongings and loved ones, leaving me with nothing but a glimmer of hope for a better future and the *freedom* I desperately sought. In my practice, I grapple with this past by concealing my words behind abstraction forms, echoing the self-censorship I had to adopt in Iran. There, speaking my mind would have inevitably led to punishment, necessitating my silence.

Haunted by the weight of prohibitions and the daily news from Iran and the world, I seek to purge the pain, the burdensome thoughts, and the oppressive experiences I have endured. Throughout my life, I have struggled to express myself and connect with others on a social level. Yet, in my studio, I find solace in repetition and silent communication as I channel my anger and frustration in the abstract forms that veil my true feelings.

In this way, my art becomes a conduit for the voice I once denied, allowing me to share my story and the profound impact of being uprooted from where I once called *home*.

I choose images and photos that I have a specific memory of. I have found trees representing me and my perception of life as a human, metaphors for the absence of people in my life. I am obsessed with architectural elements from my hometown, Ekbātān, such as windows, floors, blocks, walls, and concrete buildings—in minimal compositions to evoke a sense of dislocation, sometimes by drawing and printmaking and sometimes by making a relief, which enables me to carve and dig into my memory throughout the process.

In my practice, I employ the technique of embossing paper to explore the tactile and sensory dimensions of communication, drawing inspiration from Braille writing and “Night writing.”<sup>1</sup> This form of expression allows me to engage with my work in a highly visual and abstract manner. As I work with embossed paper, I carefully apply pressure to manipulate the medium, creating distinct forms that merge from the subtle interplay between light and shadow. This intricate dance of light is essential to the revelation of each shape, as they remain concealed in darkness without it.

The hidden shapes of homes serve as a foundation and create a dynamic interplay between the seen and the unseen, the spoken and the unspoken, to have and not to have—ultimately revealing a tapestry of meaning and emotion that lies hidden within the abstraction.

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<sup>1</sup> Braille was based on a tactile code developed by Charles Barbier. This code was later named “night writing.” This was because it became a means for soldiers to communicate silently at night. “Braille,” Wikipedia, last accessed May 24, 2023, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Braille>

When the papers are displayed on a wall, illuminating the embossed paper from behind accentuates the concept of distance and separation. This intentional interplay of light and shadow lends depth and dimension to my work and acts as a metaphor for the transient and floating sensations experienced during the migration process.

I seek to examine the connection between tactile communication and expression through the process of unraveling fabric, drawing, and embossing paper which enables me to highlight the visual and sensory experiences that can be achieved in different mediums. I endeavor to create a thought-provoking and engaging body of work that transcends traditional artistic boundaries and offers a compelling exploration of the interplay between touch, sight, and abstraction.

## INDEX OF FORMS & SYMBOL

*Tree: immobility, passage of time, core of being, self-portrait*

*Threads: roots, essence*

*Roots: connection, origin, uprooting, identity, belonging*

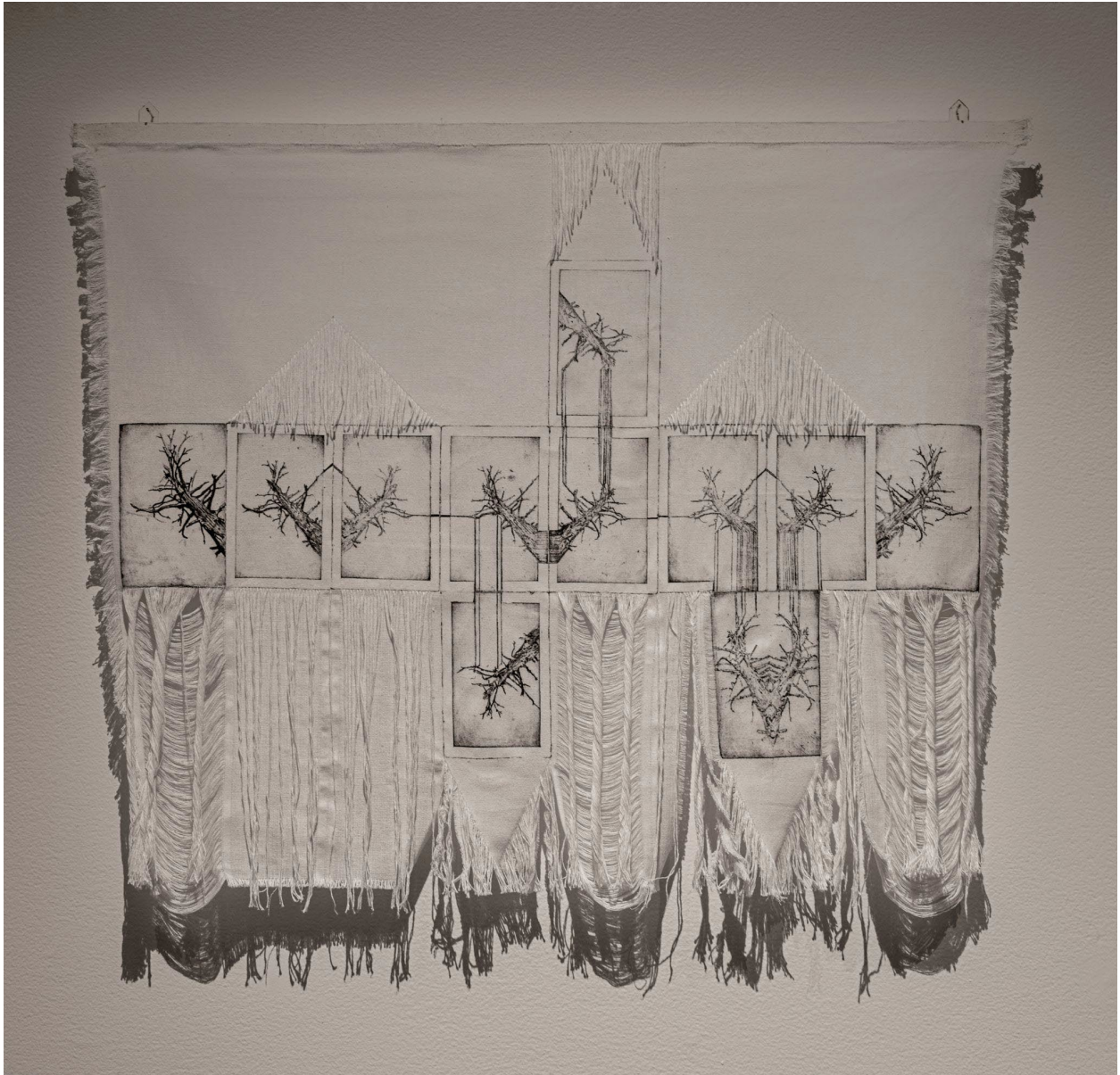
*Home: heart, family, homeland, where is home?*

## EXHIBITION DESCRIPTION



I began installing my artwork in the museum by starting with the four tapestries on the west wall. From there, the exhibition continues along the north wall, featuring four sculptural embossed paper pieces. The display concludes on the east wall, showcasing three distinct works that follow the narrative, effectively creating a cohesive and engaging journey through the exhibition space.

## ARTWORK DESCRIPTION & POEM



*Family Tree, Intaglio Print on Unravel Fabric, 33"x28", Spring 2021*

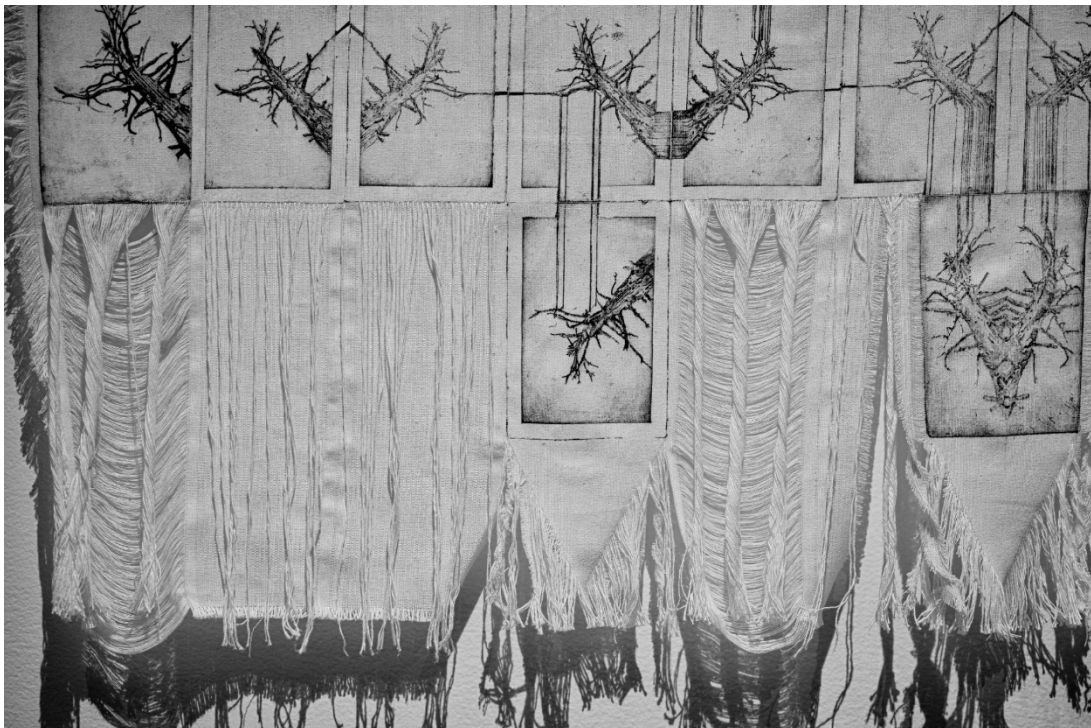
### *Family Tree*

The first artwork on the exhibition's left side is titled "*Family Tree*". Created in Spring 2021, this piece features an intaglio print on unraveled fabric, depicting two separate homes and a specific tree from which I have a cherished memory. To create this piece, I carefully

unraveled the fabric to break down its original structure, subsequently reconstructing it to form a representation of my own home and family members who inhabit it.

As I unraveled the fabric, I intended to convey the sensation of uprooted trees floating in space, illustrating the transient nature of our lives and connections. These trees stand as symbols of my family members, with our interconnected limbs signifying the strong bonds that unite us. I tried to capture the essence of my family and me, illustrating how I perceive my loved ones and myself through the form of trees. Despite the physical distance that separates us, our hearts and roots remain closely entwined, a testament to the enduring love and care we share as an immediate family.

Through this medium of unraveled fabric, the family tree narrates a story of resilience, connection, and the unwavering support system that defines our familial relationships, even when faced with the challenges of uprooting and migration.







*Family Tree (detail)*





*The Night I Thought I Would Lose You, Intaglio and Brush Pen on Unraveled Fabric, 33"x29", Spring 2023*

*The Night I Thought I Would Lose You*

*The night I thought I'd lose you,  
The night with a silent witness  
The night through the window, the moon cast a glow.  
As your heart echoed woe*

*I listened close, your breath in the air.*

*A fragile lifeline*

*A whispered prayer of my mother*

*The window's frame, a cold iron I clung to it.*

*The night of dancing of tree's shadows on the concrete blocks*

*A race against time!*

*A plea to the stars.*

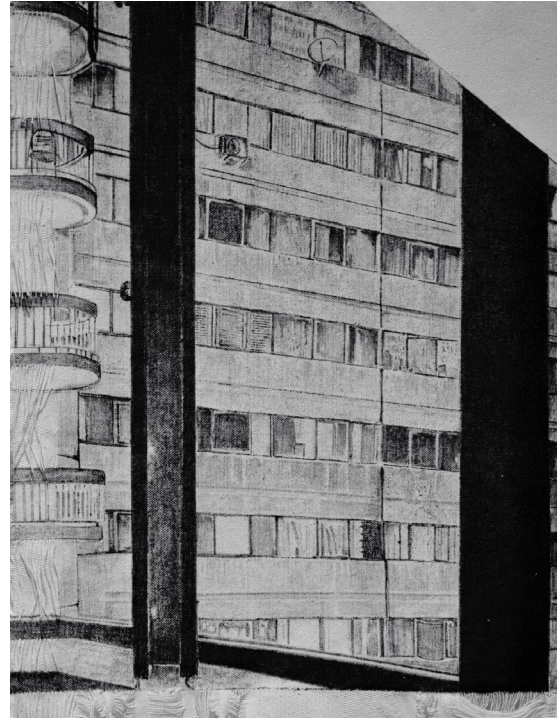
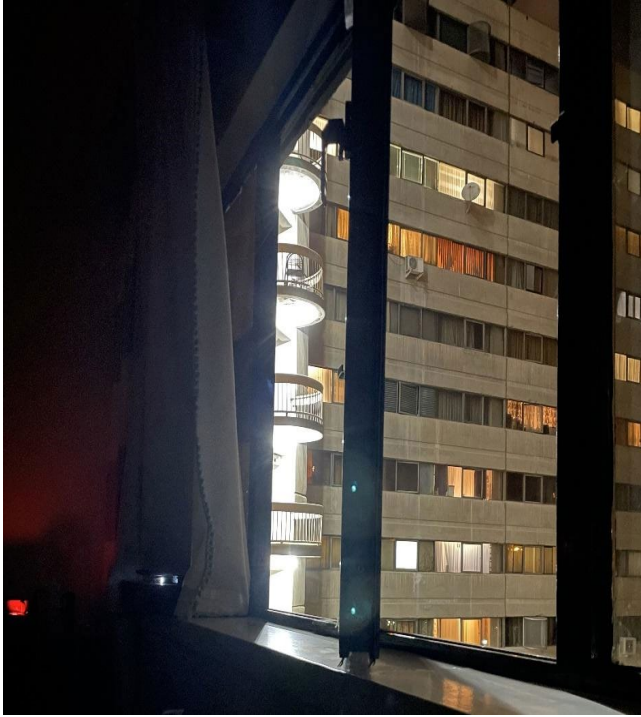
*The night I feared I'd let you go.*

"The Night I Thought I Would Lose You" is an intaglio and brush pen drawing on unraveled fabric, capturing an unforgettable night etched in my memory. It depicts a view of my bedroom in my hometown during a night when I feared I would lose my father as he battled with COVID-19. At that time, the world had received two, even three vaccine doses, while vaccinations had yet to be available in Iran. Hospitals were overcrowded, and we were turned away.

I created this piece to immortalize the emotional intensity of that night, ensuring that the memory of how my family and I endured those days would never fade. I spent the entire night near the window, listening intently to the sound of my father's breathing as he lay isolated in the adjacent bedroom—his breath serving as the only reassurance that he was still with us. Gripping the cold iron handle of the window, I found myself pleading with an unknown to save my father's life.

This artwork serves as a reminder of the love, fear, and vulnerability experienced during that harrowing night.

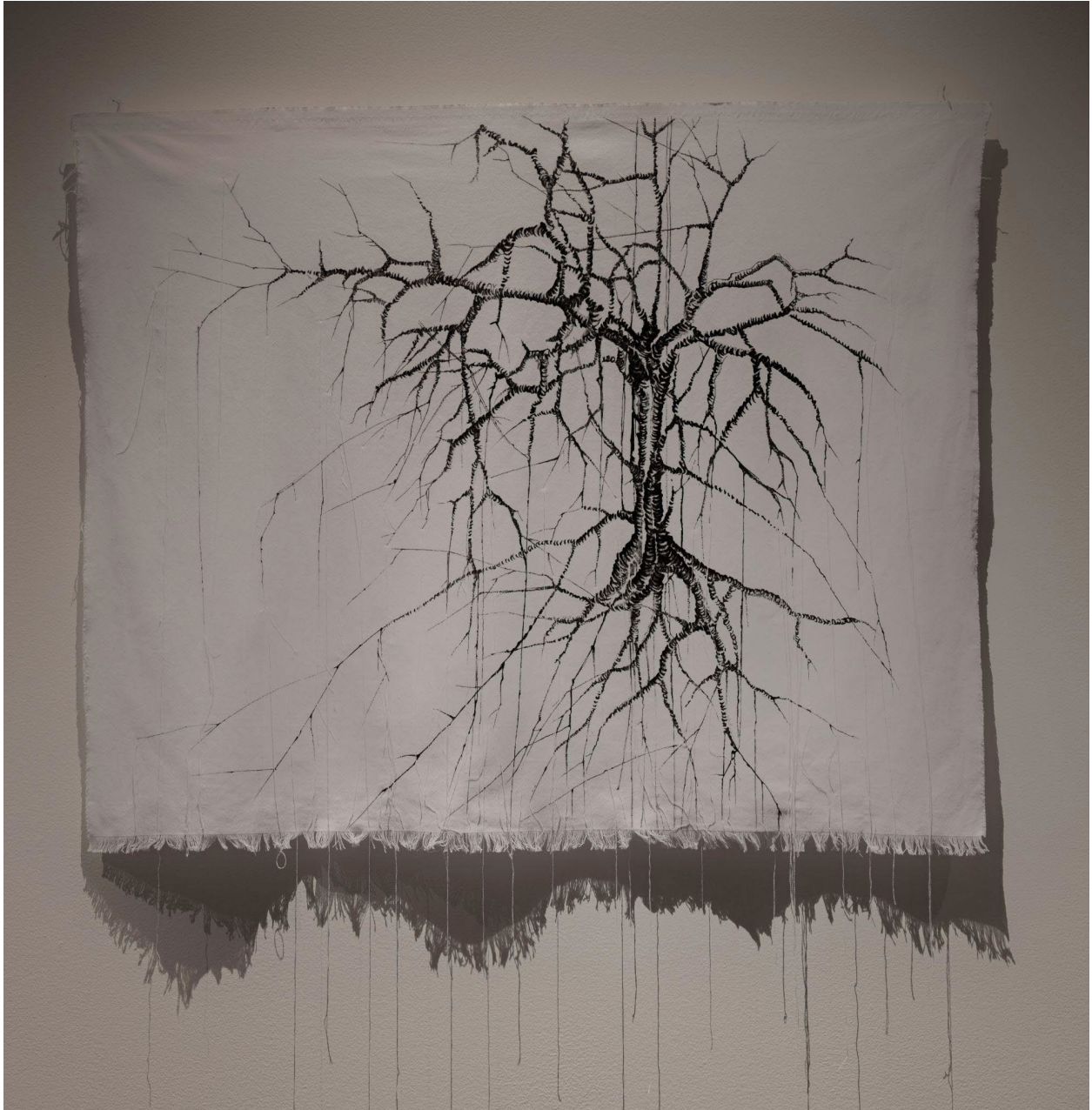




*Photo of my bedroom and window view, July 2021*







*Coalescence, Brush Pen on Unraveled Fabric, 47"x36" Spring 2023*

### *Coalescence*

"*Coalescence*" depicts two trees symbolizing two individuals, their lives intricately intertwined and knotted together. The trees, born from my imagination, represent the

deep connections and bonds shared by two individuals as they merge their lives and experiences, forming a unique and powerful union.

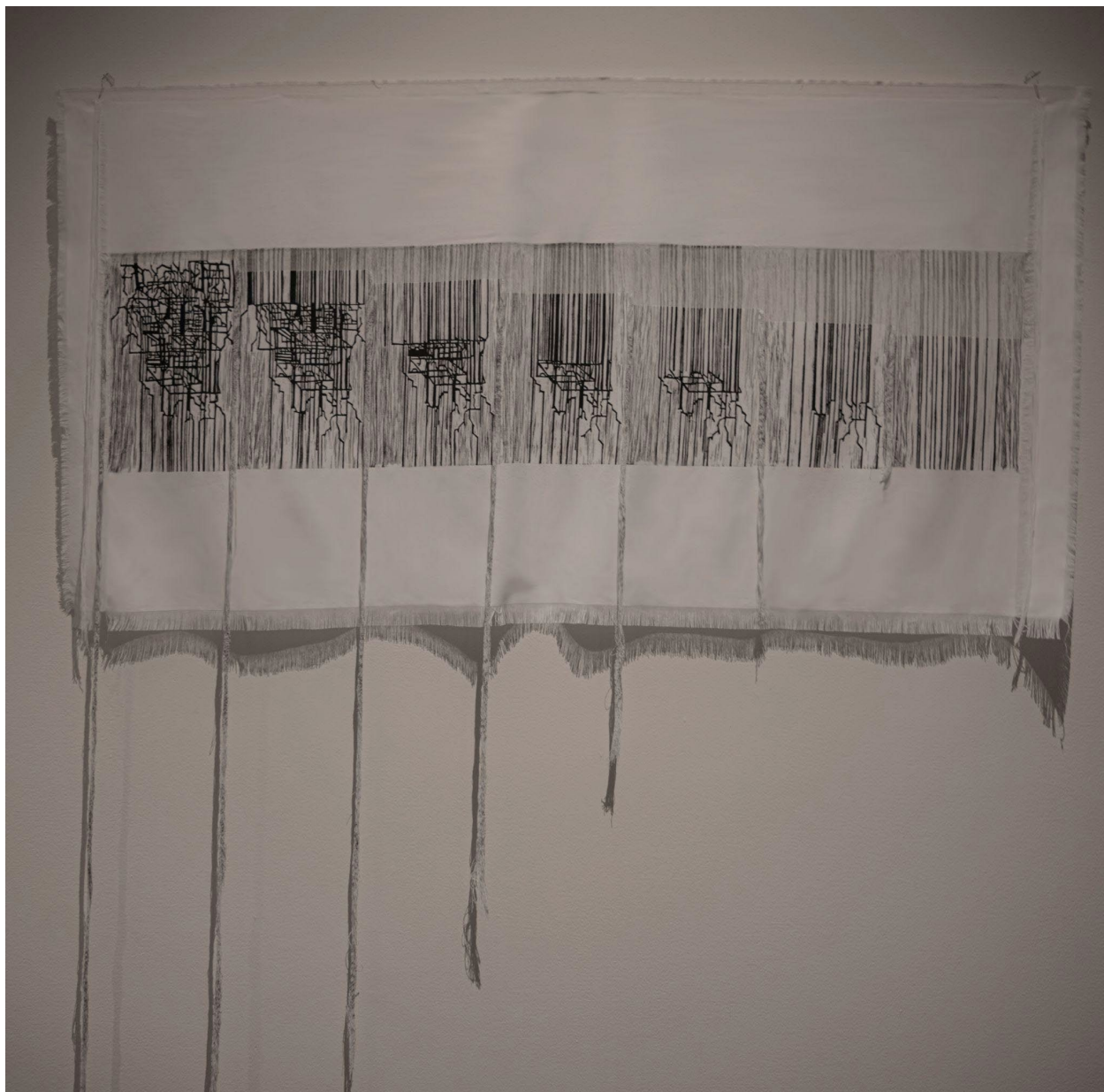
The trees in “*Coalescence*” signify the beauty of love and partnership and the harmonious blending of two distinct entities into one. As they grow and evolve, their branches and roots intertwine, forming a complex network that symbolizes the relationship between two individuals.

Threads that emerge from branches, knotted at the tips and hanging loose at the other end, serve as the roots of the trees. These threads extend beyond the trees’ physical boundaries, anchoring them to their surroundings and representing the depth of their connection.

“*Coalescence*” invites viewers to reflect on the intricate web of relationships, particularly the deep transformative bonds of love.



*Coalescence (detail)*



*Dementia, Linoleum Print on unravel fabric, 60"x 29", Spring 2023*

### *Dementia*

*I closed the doors behind me, bid farewell to kin,  
To blocks, houses, windows, walls, and streets that held memories within.*

*Goodbye to trees with which I shared a thousand tales,*



*I yearn to touch, to feel, to smell, but nothing and nothing!*

*Memory is nothing but pain.*

*No scent remains on my sister's shirt,  
Memory's just a pain, unyielding hurt.*

*Hiding memories, dreams extinguished in a trice,  
Without them, all is gray, encased in ice.*

*No colors left to see,  
Dreams dissolve in a fog, the fog of dementia*

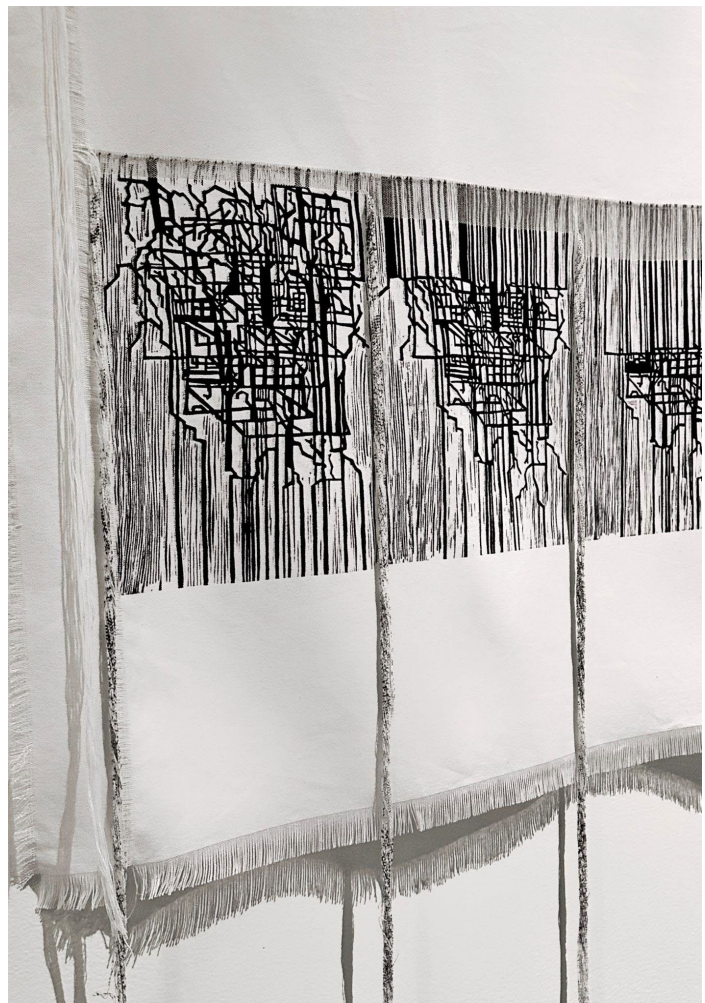
*No wishes, gods, nor hues of green, red, blue, or gold,  
In fog, There's emptiness, a void that is stark and cold.*

*I long to roar, to scream, but screaming is banned in this land,  
I yearn to shout; I exist, but surely not!  
Not in this land,  
Where speech is just a word in this land!*

Memories gradually unravel as neural connections weaken and deteriorate. "Dementia" is a work of art that captures the view from the window of my childhood home, depicting trees and concrete buildings skillfully carved onto seven linoleum blocks. This piece portrays the seven stages of dementia: from no cognitive decline to very severe cognitive decline. It is an attempt to represent the fading of memories, inspired by the firsthand experience of witnessing my grandmother's battle with the disease.

As our thoughts and memories fade, what do we become to ourselves and those around us? Is the underlying fear anchored in the sense of loss? Conversely, a newborn, possessing no knowledge or recollection of anyone, is unconditionally loved and embraced. So why then, is my grandmother abandoned in her time of vulnerability?

This piece delves into these questions, exploring the complex emotions and challenges surrounding dementia and the loss of identity.



*Dementia (detail)*





*Hidden Harvest (Migration Story), Embossing paper, (each paper 30"x 44"), Spring 2023*

### *Hidden Harvest*

*"Hidden Harvest"* is a visual narrative that explores the complex realities of migration, shedding light and revealing the hardship endured by those who embark on this life-altering journey. As approximately a billion people worldwide are forced to leave their homes behind, I sought to create a piece that bears witness to the human experience of displacement. By employing the embossed shapes of thousands of houses, I aimed to symbolize the multitude of individuals who undertake this arduous passage, capturing the essence of their struggles and resilience.

The home depicted on the east side represents the point of departure, while the home on the west side signifies the destination of arrival. The empty houses on the east home

convey the sense of loss and abandonment experienced by those who are forced to leave their homes behind. In contrast, the filled houses on the west home encapsulate the newfound sense of belonging and hope that awaits them in their new surroundings.

The experience of immigrants as they navigate the process of migration, loss, and search for a new home is a profound journey that can resonate deeply with the themes explored in my thesis. This transition often involves many challenges and emotions as immigrants grapple with feelings of displacement, dislocation, and the longing for a sense of belonging.

For me, *"Hidden Harvest"* is an exploration of my complex emotions and experiences inherent to migration, capturing both the heartache of leaving and the promise of a new beginning.

Through my conversations with immigrant friends, as well as my research, I had a conversation with two refugee friends who had made their journey to London precariously and dangerously, crossing the sea in an inflatable tube to carry 25 people. They shared the harrowing stories and challenges they faced during their asylum journey. They provided a firsthand account of the risks and sacrifices many immigrants and refugees must endure to pursue safety and better life. This story made me question why people leave their homes, even knowing the potential consequences.

I'll never forget the words of one of them, who shared this heart-wrenching story: *"The night I left home, I knew it was the last time I would see my father! I still feel guilty, asking myself why I did it."* He left Iran, fully aware that he could not go back home for many years

after seeking asylum, and later his father passed away. This experience illustrates how people can be uprooted from everything they have, even their parents, and end up living lonely lives in foreign lands. This loss can be overwhelming and evoke deep grief and nostalgia. The decision to leave one's homeland is often driven by a desperate search for *safety, freedom, and a better future*, despite the painful sacrifices it entails.

As I continue to grapple with the question of why people migrate, knowing the potential losses, I recognize that the answer lies in the complex interplay of personal, social, political, and economic factors that push individuals to take such life-altering risks. It seems that we are all puppets in the global political game.

This ongoing exploration of the reasons behind migration remains a central theme in my work and reflections. Through my art, I seek to understand and convey the profound impact of these experiences on the lives of those who undertake such a journey, capturing the emotional and psychological nuances of the migration process.

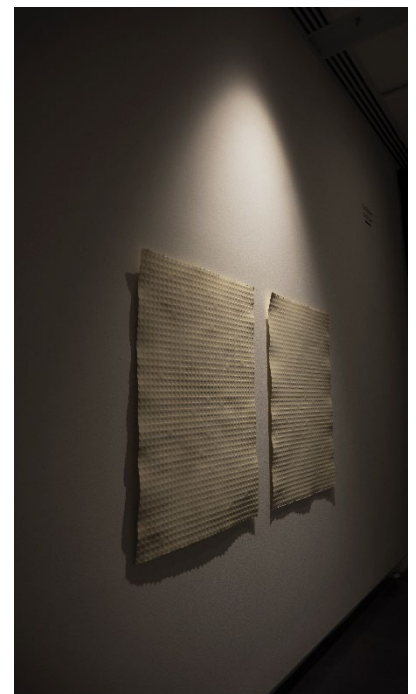
*I exist, I'm alive, but I can't live!*

*I exist and breathe, but my heart is filled with pain.*

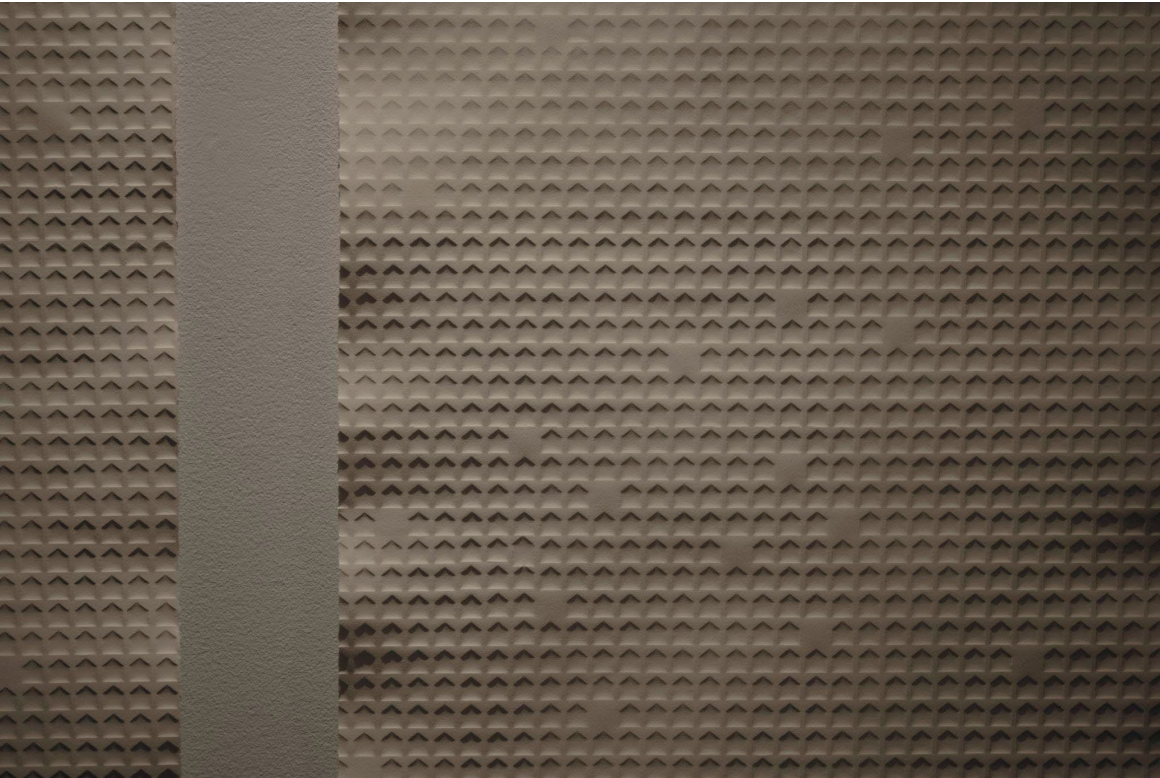
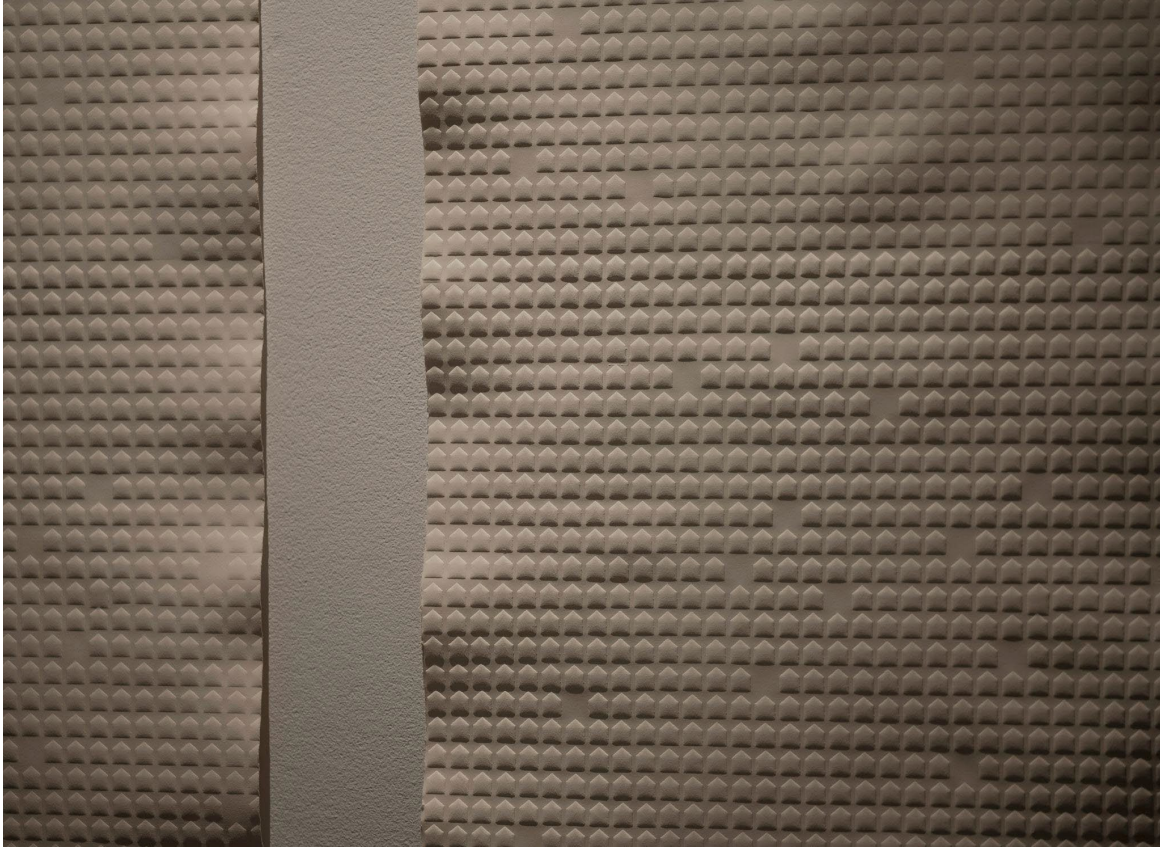
*I exist, but I'm imprisoned!*

*I exist.*

*A lump in my throat, something claws my heart, it chokes my mind.*





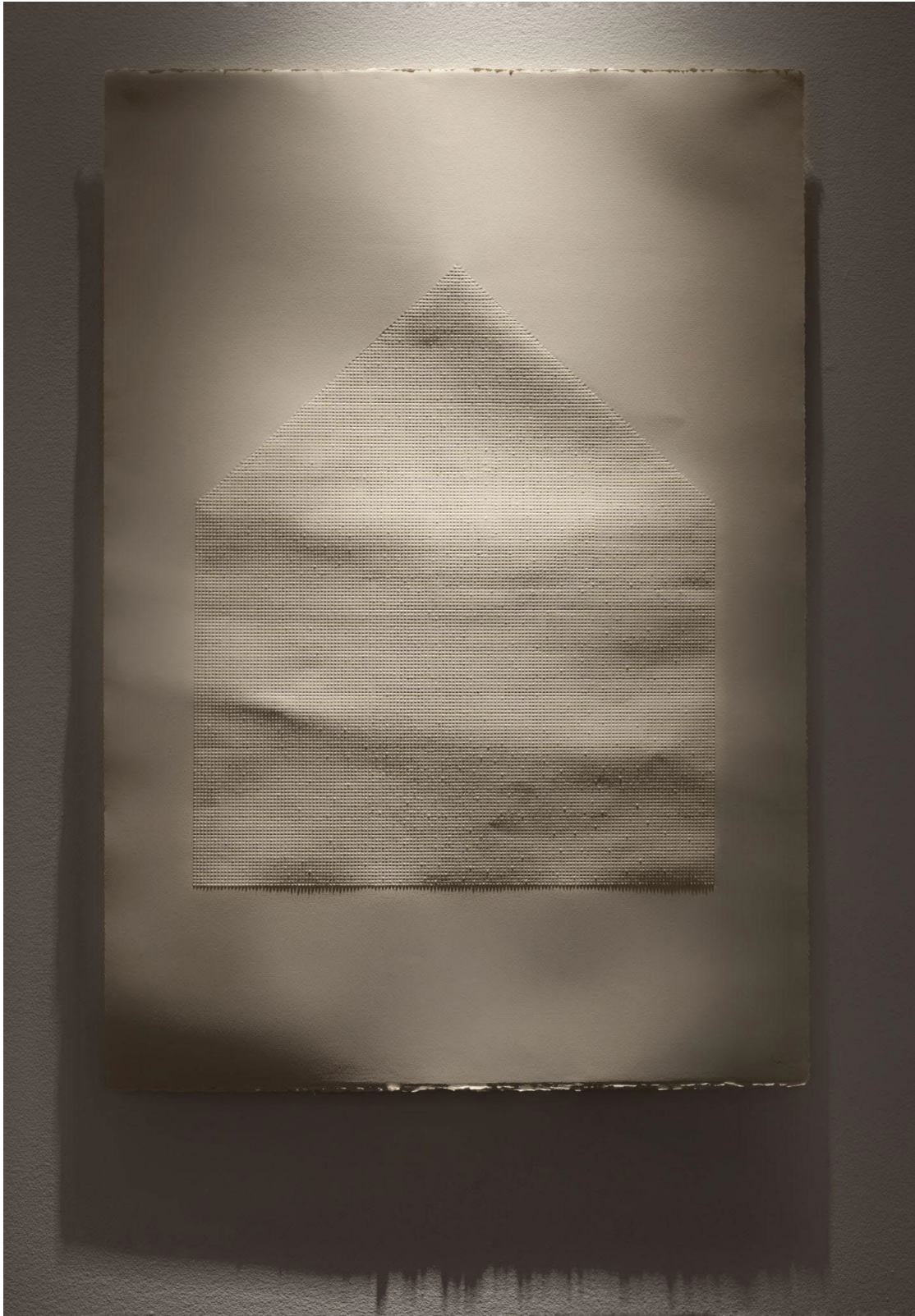


*Hidden Harvest (details)*





*Hidden Harvest (detail)*



*Adrift, Hand Embossing paper, 30"x44", Spring 2023*



## *Adrift*

“Adrift” is constructed by countless dots, seeking to deconstruct the paper structure. Dealing with displacement when the light treats the embossed paper with shadow effects on the dots and pure surface of paper casting a reflection from rectangular home shape—represents the uprooted home from its land and being a floater in my dream world. As I emboss the dots, I am building a home that transcends borders and differences, a home without foundation, with walls crafted from memories and dreams, counting every second, minute, and hour. Through *Adrift*, I illustrated my home free from this real-world, free from the world that separated people from each other by the border, a world that separated people because of their nation.

“Home is where one starts from. As we grow older, the world becomes stranger, the pattern more complicated. Of dead and living. ... In my end is my beginning.”<sup>2</sup>

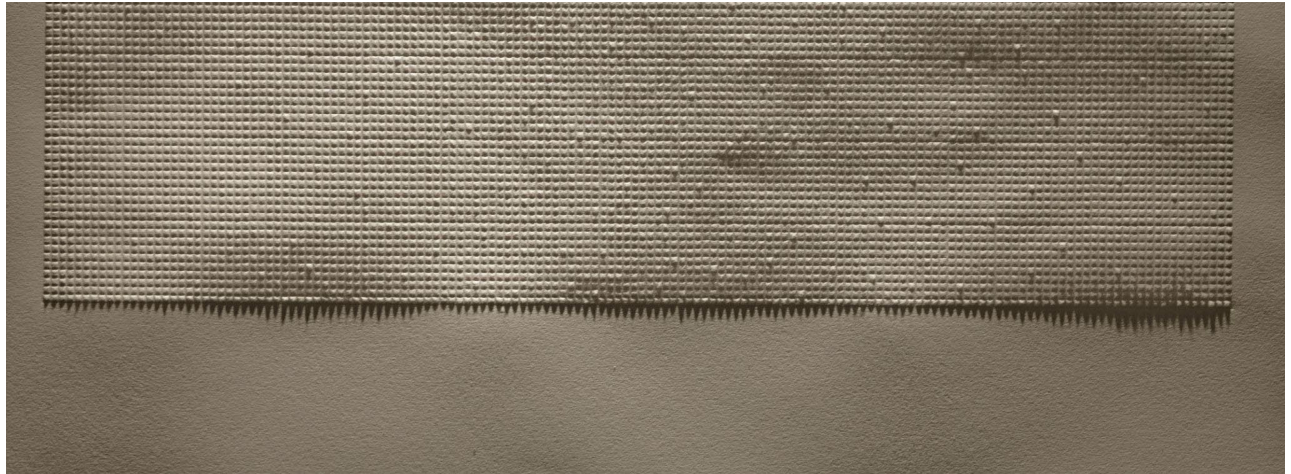
Home is where I left my heart, in my dog’s eyes, my father’s hand, my mother’s kiss, my brother’s hug. Home is laughter, tears, memories, and time spent crafting with my sister in the smallest bedroom of our house. It is where all my stories originate, and the moment I leave, my nightmares begin.

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<sup>2</sup> Wright, Robert S. G. *In My Father’s House, C.G Jung’s “Memories, Dream, Reflections:” A son in search of father*. Doctoral Dissertation, University of Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, 1999.

I was uprooted from the land where I grew up and belonged and driven to a new environment. Since then, every breath I take is a reminder of the distance between me and my family. For seven years, I have dreamt of my home every night, even when I returned there. This longing chokes my mind.

*My home is not found within any border or country; my home is nowhere on the map; my home lies within the heart of whom I love.*



*Adrift (detail)*





*Unloom, Conte pencil on Paper, 30"x44", Spring 2023*

### *Unloom*

Unloom portrays a torn, shredded, and unraveled fabric, symbolizing the internal turmoil and chaos I often experience. The frayed edge of the paper and exposed thread embody vulnerability, reflecting the feeling of being torn apart, shattered, and dismantled.

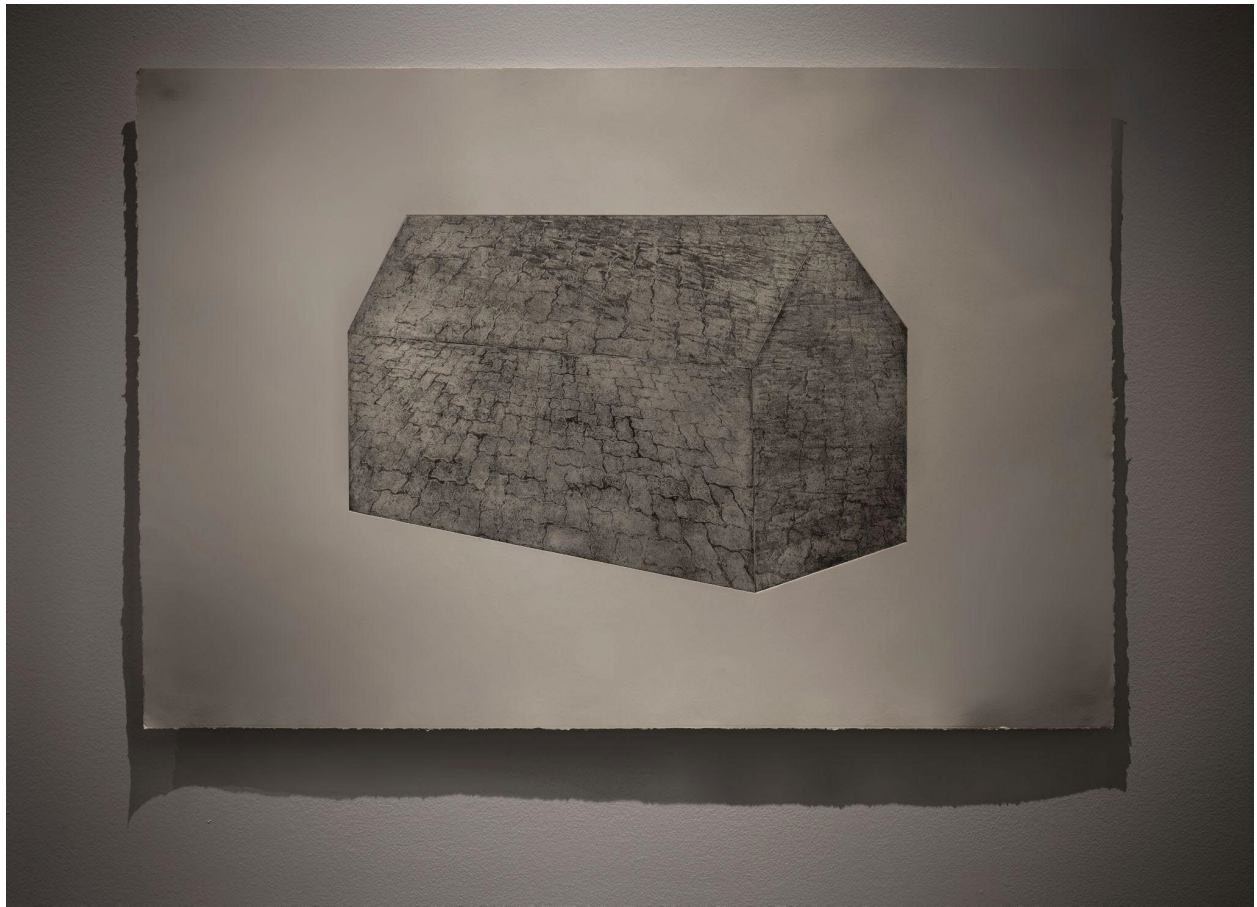
The monochromatic palette and the gradual transition from order to disorder in “Unloom” mirror the progression of emotion that I undergo. The piece captures the duality of our existence, where a seemingly strong and unbreakable exterior often hides the fragile and vulnerable.

Through this piece, I invite the viewer to delve into the depth of their own emotions, confront their hidden feelings, and embrace the inherent vulnerability that defines our humanity.

By acknowledging and accepting these emotions, we can begin to heal, reconstruct, and ultimately weave the threads of our lives back together into a resilient tapestry of self-acceptance and inner strength.



*Unloom Detail*



Ekbātān (اڪباتان)

“Ekbātān” depicts a home constructed from the concrete cobblestone of the streets in my hometown. It juxtaposes strength and weightlessness, embodying the duality of human experience.

The home, made from heavy concrete, signifies my mother's unyielding strength and unwavering support, akin to a mountain standing behind us in times of need. Yet, the floating aspect of the home conveys her innate sensitivity and the delicate balance of her emotions, demonstrating that even the most robust foundations can harbor a gentle spirit.

The choice of cobblestones to create the home serves as a reminder of the streets we walked together, forever intertwining our memories and experiences with the very



essence of our homeland. This piece serves as a homage to my mother, who shaped my life, and represents my deep connection with her.



Ekbātān Walkway



Ekbātān (اکباتان) (detail)





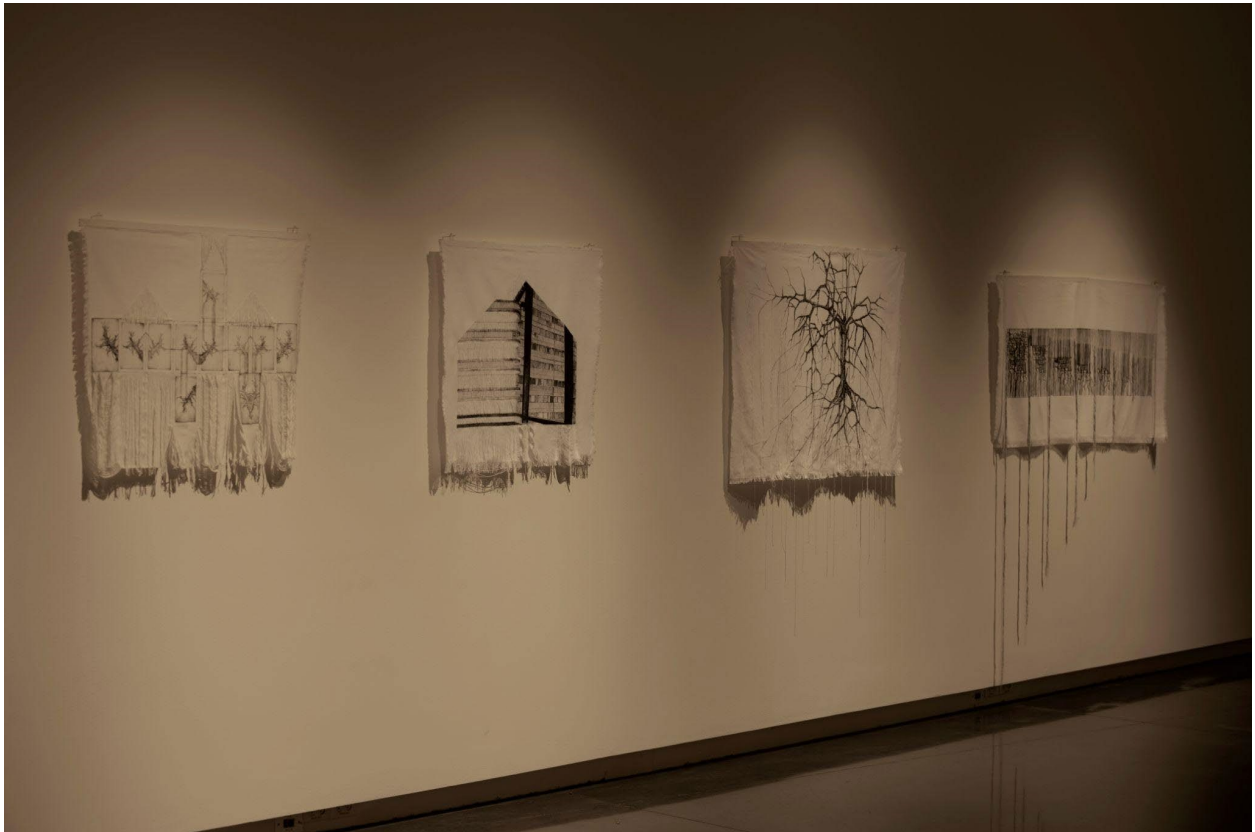
*Ekbātān (اکیاتان) (detail)*

*Home isn't found by choosing between freedom and one's homeland.*

*Home is where I left my heart.*

*Home is where my mother is.*

## INSTALLATION SPACE







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