

Statement

Sara Madandar 2021

My work is about the relationship of humans to their bodies and body coverings, such as clothes and hair, and how the body relates to notions of the home, place, belonging, and the public and private spheres. Like those relationships, my work changes and evolves every day. I use the images I create to tell stories of my life—about joy and pain, oppression and resistance—finding a common thread within those stories to connect myself to the life stories of others. Having grown up in Iran, and later having moved to the United States, the tension of living in between cultures has been an ever-evolving inspiration for these themes. In my artwork, I often use the dimensions of my own body as a template and starting point for telling these stories, and as a way to express my critique of the forced veiling and erasure of female bodies in my native Iran.

In my process, I first develop a concept and then think of a medium and techniques that best express my ideas. In most of my collections, I use or create new materials, media, or techniques, combining them with painting to rethink the boundaries between media and disciplines. This involves methods and media that go far beyond canvas and paint: incorporating techniques such as sewing, a “feminine” domestic art I grew up seeing in the home which both upsets and revitalizes my creative process through the visceral, mechanical, novel-yet-familiar experience of the machine; or materials such as human hair, an object of both desire and disgust depending on its context and a deeply politicized element of human corporality in Iran. Deeply inspired by the immediacy and physicality of performance art, I have worked to integrate materials and designs that interact with the viewer and the environment, such as LED lights that respond to the presence of a human body or ambient light levels to alter the appearance of my works. Working through the making and remaking of self that is inherent to the experience of migration, I have sought to tell this story in my work through methods that deconstruct the artwork and its primary medium, the canvas, whether through burning, cutting, or unravelling the canvas, or destabilizing the viewer’s understanding of its spatiality and orientation by creating hidden images on the reverse that can only be revealed through special lighting techniques. All of these methods work to manipulate the viewer’s understanding of the human body and the body of the artwork—the canvas—in relation to its coverings, adornments, and shelters, navigating notions of the public and private, home and belonging, covered and exposed, throughout the experience of migration between cultures.