

HOME MAKER

by

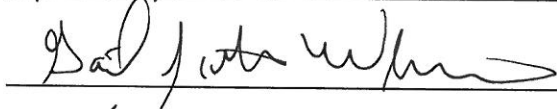
Asma Chaudhary

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Art and Visual Technology

Committee:



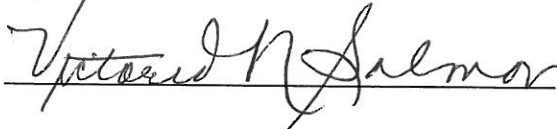
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Spring Semester 2013
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

by

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Bachelor of Fine Arts
George Mason University, 2008

Director: Thomas D. Ashcraft, Professor
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Spring Semester 2013
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my wonderful parents, who did their utmost to support our family during hard times and nurtured our growth.

To my mother, Azra Tasneem Chaudhary, thank you for being my best friend and for supporting me over the years. It makes my heart smile when you tell everyone about how much artmaking means to me. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

HOME MAKER

Asma Chaudhary, MFA

George Mason University, 2013

Thesis Director: Thomas D. Ashcraft

This thesis serves as a literary catalogue, which documents the artistic process and critical insight into studio practice from the perspective of Asma Chaudhary, a Pakistani-American artist. It follows her journey through her academic studies in journalism, graphic design, sculpture, and into the completion of her Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition. Following a one-year hiatus from artmaking, the artist realized her true passion for hands-on creativity instead of the restriction of a cubicle environment. She made the executive decision to take on the persona of a homemaker but with a twist. This character would be able to balance multiple demands at once—nurturing her family, maintaining a distinguished career as a businesswoman, and justifying her appetite for the fine arts. In her work, she takes a potentially derogatory word such as *homemaker* and then redefines it as something else to celebrate the ideas of home. Throughout her research, the artist conducted several social experiments, questioned gender roles and identities, and sampled a variety of materials and techniques to create engaging artworks.

CHAPTER ONE: REVELATIONS OF PERSONAL HISTORY

“Artists are born, not made. Though it is a tragic fate, it is a blessing in disguise.”

-Louise Bourgeois (French-American sculptor)

I developed the content for this thesis over the span of four years while studying in the George Mason University Master for the Fine Arts program. From fall 2009 through spring 2013, I also worked full-time as policy research analyst for the government. I believe it is important to note that although my passion was and has always been pursuing the arts, none of my academic and professional practices would have been possible without my career outside of the art field. Not only did this career allow me to finance my education and purchase supplies, it also professionalized me as a writer, researcher, and critical thinker. I am excited to say that many of my project ideas, sketches, and pages of this thesis were drawn up in some of the world’s most powerful locations such as the courtyard of the Pentagon.

For this thesis, I wanted to include some non-linear ideas about my artworks, which parallel my construction, craft, and stream of consciousness. These projects are not listed in chronological order, as it is more interesting to see how the artworks interplay with different concepts and my own personal research. Many times I would move back and forth from welding chairs to knitting my shopping cart rickshaw to drawing intimate contemplations and then sewing one of my sleeping bags. I am grateful for the

opportunity to dream up, coordinate, create, and share my works with the world. This reveals a more intimate, vulnerable side to my personality but I welcome the ability to challenge my ideas and make them stronger and more effective for my audience.

Pursuing the arts has been my method of free expression and also serves as a coping mechanism for difficult times in my life such as losing loved ones or dealing with moments of oppression, desperation, and abandonment.

Typically, artists create works as their own response to the world and various events. I believe I do this as well but I do take my audience into careful consideration. It is important for me to create responsible and considerate work. I realize that this may be due in part to my upbringing as a first generation Pakistani-American; however, it could be more so about my willingness to give back to the communities that have helped me thrive in the world. My ultimate goal is to be a practicing artist and educator who can create artworks that engage the community towards humanitarian efforts.

Sense of Identity

My interests in the arts began in late 2005. I was currently taking classes in other programs that I thought would be beneficial in my future corporate career—but not knowing yet what that would be. Someone like me is always prepared. I pre-plan events and obsessively make lists about project ideas or what I need to complete in the next few days. Although I believed I had my future mapped out in my mind, I realized that something was missing. There was something bothering me and it forced me to take several breaks to meditate and focus on the underlying issue.

Losing my father when I was only two months old has been troublesome for me. One would think that when you lose such a close relative or parent at a young age that there are no memories to miss or anything to hold you back. But for me, I always felt like half of myself was missing and it was hard to categorize where I fit in the world and what my identity entailed. It was something I kept hushed and the best way to move forward when I was younger was to keep going and not look back. Perhaps I was in denial about the situation but it was easier this way because my siblings all had their own memories and there was a much larger age difference between each of us. Many times I felt that I was on my own even though I had siblings and cousins around me.

To me, there was no real game plan or handbook to determine who or what I would be. I always wondered what my future career and life path would look like—specifically what my place in the world would be. How was I supposed to give back or contribute to society? Would I ever become a successful businesswoman, a housewife with children, or did I have to create a life path of my own?

Diving into the Art World

One day during my undergraduate studies, I was on campus going through the motions of going to my classes and I felt something was different. I was incredibly bored about the world around me even though I knew there was so much more to explore. I went into a moment of deep meditation and tried to focus on the important things of life such as my purpose. And when I look back in my artmaking processes, I understand more now about how much I consider an artwork's purpose and function to justify its placement in the world. Perhaps I am living vicariously through my furniture.

The Question

At the time, I was doing what I thought was the correct thing to do – taking microeconomics, advanced biology and calculus, IT programming, and communication courses. I asked myself, “Am I supposed to continue going forward without looking back?” And that was the question that stopped me dead in my tracks. I said to myself that I would find something that gives back to others. And hopefully it would turn into providing meaningful work.

But then I asked myself another question and this took my own thoughts a step further. I quietly said, “Does it honor your parents?” That is a strong question to ask anyone and for me, it was heavy and hit too close to home. I wondered why I asked myself this but it was for the best to be brutally honest. Even eight years later, I will always remember that day as very important to me. I knew at that moment in time that I wanted to do a creative project of some sort to honor my parents.

The Journey

I was 19 years old when I had this revelation. My next step involved walking over to the art building where I walked through classrooms and paid extra attention to the different projects placed on the walls. I spent time watching the students entering and leaving their classes. I was overwhelmed to see everything but I remember this was the time when I did not understand a single thing about art. At that moment, I realized that this would be new territory to explore and I appreciated the challenge.

I remember the first time I took an art class. It was one of the studio introduction courses to fine arts. On the first day, there were several business marketing majors in the class with me, however, at the second class meeting, I was the only non-art major left.

During my first one-on-one critique, my professor said I should never ignore my natural, artistic talent. At the moment, I somewhat brushed off the positive feedback but it still inspired me to take another art course at the end of the semester.

Chaand ki Tokree (Urdu for “Piece of the Moon”)

One of my final artworks for the thesis exhibition was a simple form that seemed to represent my identity as a Muslim and as a furniture maker, and more specifically as a resourceful person who would repurpose various items into art objects. Before this time, I did not know that I would be influenced by Marcel Duchamp’s style to select manufactured items and modify their appearance. In a manner similar yet different to Duchamp, I worked to change the visual language of common, every day objects into meaningful artworks.

This artwork titled, *Chaand ki Tokree (Urdu for “Piece of the Moon”)* (see Figures 1 and 2), is a modest yet interesting composition where I riveted a children’s nightlight lampshade to a paint bucket. I used a grey 5-gallon bucket from a hardware store and attached the yellow, crescent-shaped lampshade on top. Over the years, I have found out that I obsessively enjoy dome-shaped objects. When I created my first lamp, I used a dome-shaped garden planter, turned it over, and drilled out circular windows.

As a Muslim, I visit mosques for special prayers and the dome becomes a commonly recognized architectural piece to me. With this piece, I turned over the bucket and adorned with a crescent because Muslims believe in the lunar calendar. From far away, this simple compilation can be recognized by most as an Islamic piece without any religious connotations or additional adornments.

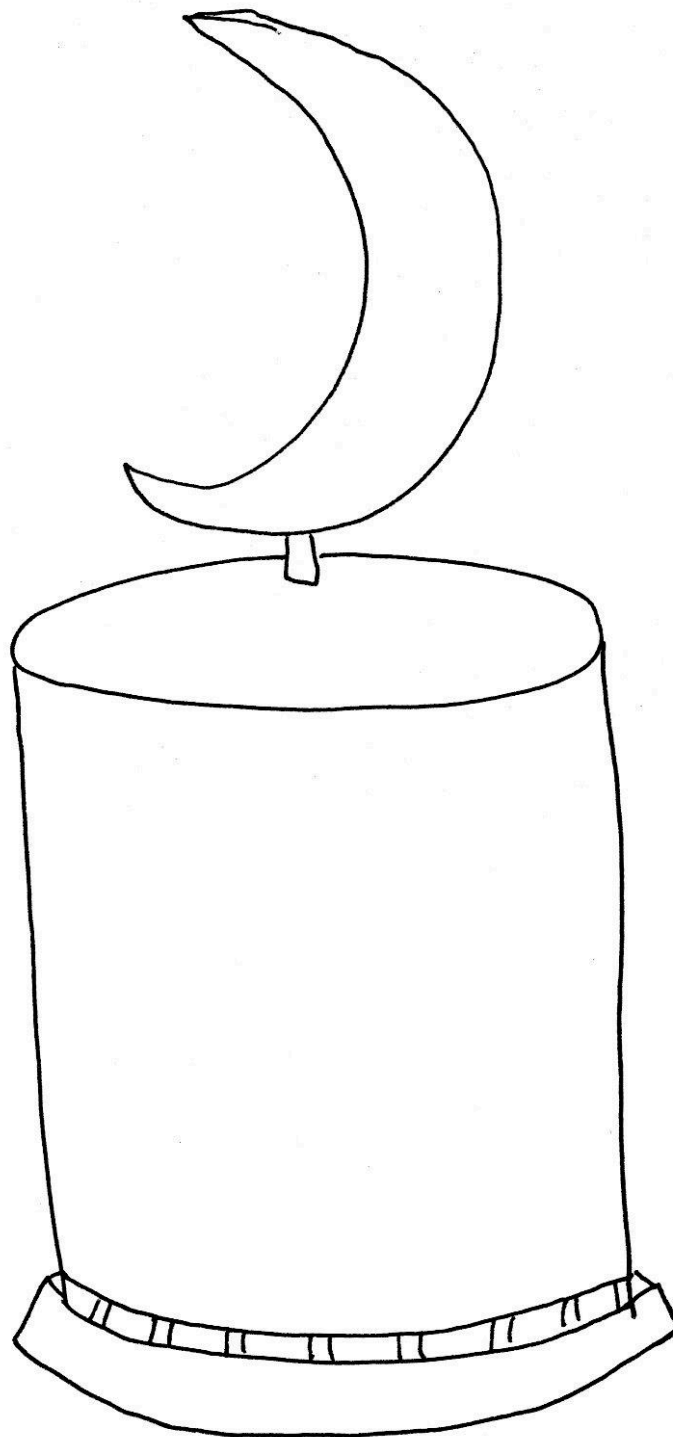


Figure 1 *Chaand ki Tokree* (Urdu for "Piece of the Moon"), ink on paper



Figure 2 *Chaand ki Tokree* (Urdu for "Piece of the Moon"), bucket and nightlight

The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures

The next piece that I consider to be a visual representation of my identity and culture as a South Asian is my own version of a bicycle rickshaw that I named, *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures* (see Figures 3 through 10). A rickshaw, whether it is a horse-drawn carriage, bicycle-driven, or a motorcycle with a larger sidecar to hold passengers, is commonly found throughout India and Pakistan.

According to Merriam-Webster.com, the word *rickshaw*¹ derives from a compilation of three Japanese words for “human,” “pulling force,” and “vehicle” because rickshaws first began as two-wheeled passenger carts, which were physically pulled by humans. These carriages began populating metropolitan areas filled with buildings and bazaars and are appreciated even while traveling through dirt roads among vegetable fields and lime trees in Pakistan.

My title for this piece came from a barcode that was still adhered to the bicycle since its selection and throughout the project execution. The barcode called the bicycle's style, “The Great Divide” and I felt this was an important piece of information. Although that visual text is covered up with embroidery yarn, I decided to keep that namesake as part of the title. I added the words, “Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures” and made the first sequence possessive as if the bicycle was a personified object. The concept was that throughout history, Pakistan is constantly dealing with episodes relating to the divide—whether it is institutionally or geographically.

¹ “Definition of Rickshaw.” *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary*. 01 April 2013. Web. 01 April 2013. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rickshaw>>.

The country itself experienced a nationalist divide after receiving independence from the British Indian Empire on August 14, 1947 and also officially splitting from India on that same date to separate the Muslim and Hindu nations. For more than 65 years, there has been an ongoing conflict with India over the mountainous land in the Kashmir region. Furthermore, Pakistan experiences a divide with other countries based on present-day corrupt activities and mixed stances on cultural norms all while attempting to portray a country defined on prosperous Islamic ideals.

Since my mother shares her birth date with the same day Pakistan received its independence, we were always told stories of our heritage and celebrated the holiday together as a family. I often tell my family and friends that when I look into my mother's eyes, I truly see Pakistan. She is the exact age of the country and represents the hard working ideals that I want to see in the country.

Over the years, many people have grown tired and have become accustomed to this divide. For most of them, instead of protesting in the streets, they believe it is safer to stay in their homes to avoid trouble and attempt to survive on basic provisions while their children must use candlelight (see Figure 5) to complete their homework assignments.



Figure 3 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, bicycle, cart, and yarn



Figure 4 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, close-up of cart

Basket of Provisions

Throughout its planning and execution, my bicycle rickshaw has become the capstone project in my studies because it embodies design, folk art-type handicraft, and critical selection of materials to represent a culture that is not always understood. My vision for the rickshaw has been to use the basket for carrying and donating food. The perishable items represented in the basket derive from another project titled, *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani* (see Figure 27). With influences from the flag project, I included the following basic survival items in the rickshaw basket (see Figure 5), such as candles and matches to represent electricity and warmth as well as rice bags, packages of whole wheat flour, fresh bananas, and large bottles of water to represent food, which are provisions that are frequently in short supply in Pakistan.

The villagers must pre-plan how much they will need to survive on instead of cooking all of their food at once. They may not even have the facilities to warm or refrigerate their food to avoid spoilage or to even bake the flour into flatbread *naans*. I have seen video documentation and photographs of women and children in Pakistan whose only option was to drink a thin flour and water mixture from their cupped hands.

In our middle class American society, many people are over privileged to have supermarket grocery stores filled with dozens of choices for each product. In impoverished societies, villagers consider themselves fortunate to receive a bag of rice to last them a few months instead of a couple of weeks.



Figure 5 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, close-up of perishables

Childhood Visit to Pakistan

When I was a five-year-old, I traveled with my mother and my 19-year-old sister to Pakistan because my sister was going to have a traditional Pakistani wedding. I was immediately immersed into the vibrant Pakistani culture. One thing that stood out was the emphasis the people around me placed on wedding ceremonies (see Figure 14). At such a young age, I understood this is truly what keeps the spirit of innocent Pakistani villagers going because they aspire to live a successful life and dream of something different than a dusty, dry landscape where they were born into poverty and will likely die into poverty.

During my visit, I went with my mom because my eldest sister was getting married. There were many festivities and traditions as part of the wedding. I still remember the event known as *Mehndi ki Raat* (Urdu for “Henna Night”) where both families bring traditional South Asian sweets called *mithai*, which are made from sugar and condensed milk, to the home. Our family also carried orange-brown henna in plates that were adorned with glittery designs and fringed streamers.

We formed a parade of people marching through pathways to the bride’s home. That night, the city of Sialkot was adorned with bright strings of lights and candles leading the way to the home while we sang traditional songs to greet the bride and groom and celebrate together. Traditionally, the bride’s wedding party will paint henna on their hands and feet while singing songs, clapping their hands, and creating beats with a drum known as a *dholki*.

Interconnectedness of the People

Although that was two decades ago, I remember playing underneath the bright green lime tree that filled the courtyard of the house. I believe both intrinsically and

practically now in my adult life that it was important to see Pakistan in its simple state from the perspective of an innocent child. I know it was much safer back then and I can only hope the country returns back to those respectable times.

Even during those times, my family members and the neighbors' children I played with often revered the fact that I was an American. I was offered more hospitality because I was not a local guest and they believed I was accustomed to a different style of life. I am still appreciative for this respect from the people who lived with only the basic necessities. We would sit in living rooms and drink tea and I still remember seeing a multi-leveled shelf on the wall where all of the "American toys" were placed.

My family told me that it was difficult to find a special toy brought from the United States and consequently, these items were not to be played with or damaged. Instead, they would remain on the wall's shelves. Still to this day, I felt like this was such an interesting concept because even children could not act as children in this environment. In our homes here, we were used to placing delicate, fine China plates and vases on display but in Pakistan, the colorful, plastic sheen of American toys prevailed as precious items.

One time while playing on the rooftop of our home, I remember looking over the ledge to witness a sudden gathering of people in the streets below. Many of them were crying and wailing and I could not understand what the crowd was saying. My grandmother lived in one of the rooms on the rooftop terrace of the home and she came outside to see what the noise was about from the streets below. She watched from above with me and began crying. I wondered what was wrong and asked her why she was so

upset. She said that someone, probably a homeless man, had died and the people in the street were carrying his body in a coffin through the crowds for a final prayer at the mosque. I asked if she knew the man personally and in Urdu she replied, “It does not matter. We are all humans and connected to each other like a family. We mourn for each other during these times.”

After that conversation with my grandmother, I understood at an early age how all of humanity has been woven together and it is up to everyone to better understand the relationships between each other. My visit to Pakistan gave me a clear representation of how important it is to live a humble lifestyle because at any moment, it can all be taken away in a matter of seconds. I played with children who may never receive an education whereas here in the United States, we are able to receive free public education up through high school.

I also remember how heartbroken I became when I learned that children who lived near us could not afford simple items such as clothing and shoes besides their school uniforms and they had to walk barefoot on the rocky pathways of the gullies. This stark reality hit too close to home for me. Many of these children were graded upon having their uniforms clean for school but most of them had no other clothing to use.

Even though we visited Pakistan to celebrate my sister’s wedding, I am grateful for the experience to learn about the impoverished reality around us. The trip made me more appreciative for the opportunities I have received over the years including the ability to express myself freely, receive an education, and witness my family enjoying the simple necessities of fresh air and clean water.



Figure 6 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, woven embroidery yarn

The Hustle and Bustle

We stayed for more than one month to complete all of the wedding events and I remember picking up words in Urdu fairly quickly and playing on the rooftop of our mud brick home. We sat there outside in the dry heat and then slept outside underneath the night sky on wooden and cloth-woven *charpais*. We listened to the call for prayer five times a day, as our home shared a wall with the nearby mosque. I even recollect riding on colorfully adorned Pakistani trucks and bicycle rickshaws to the marketplace or to a relative's house in a nearby town.

In busy cities, taking a rickshaw was the best way to maneuver through traffic unless we used one of our own bicycles or motorcycles. This is because in most Pakistani cities, there were no traffic lights. Even two decades later, I still recall the honking of multiple cars at once trying to drive through a packed, pedestrian-filled village and maneuvering through what we called *gullies* or alleyways between the mud-brick homes.

I remember our family would sometimes rent an automobile but these were expensive and difficult to maneuver in the gullies and there were no garages to keep them parked while traveling to each location. Luckily, in our home, we were fortunate enough to have a lobby type area where we parked our bicycles and motorcycles so they could not be vandalized or stolen.

The Bicycle Accident

Another memory that I believe is important to explain was one that actually came back into my mind after completing my bicycle rickshaw project. I remember towards the end of our trip in Pakistan, I was involved in a motorcycle and bicycle accident in one of the gullies. These areas are small where barely a vegetable cart can pass through but a

bicycle rider tried to pass by when I was riding a motorcycle scooter with my cousin. Somehow, the gear shaft from the bicycle caught onto my ankle and ripped the skin off. I remember more of the yelling arguments between my cousin and the stranger as I screamed for them to free my foot from between the gears. I was wearing sandals that day and my foot was profusely bleeding and they wrapped it with some cloth and carried me back home.

A few days later, the doctor examined my foot and gave me a painful tetanus booster into the wound. Afterwards, I was required by the doctor to wear tightened tennis shoes even though I was in unbearable pain and this caused me to walk with discomfort. To this day, I still have a light scar on my ankle from the accident. Although it was painful at the time, this memory now makes me laugh when I think about it again as an adult. Artmaking definitely provides an outlet for these memories to come back again in a new light.

Indian Sari-Inspired Colors

The rickshaw project took about six months for completion—from the moment it was welded together to wrapping yarn around each rung and nook of the bicycle and shopping cart. It is estimated that between three to five miles of yarn are attached through multiple layers of wrapping and weaving. Furthermore, the colors chosen were to resemble vibrant colors of Indian and Pakistani traditional clothing. This particular artwork is made from a 26-inch women's mountain bicycle attached to a shopping cart and then adorned with vibrant, multi-colored embroidery yarn and metallic jingle and golden liberty bells.

For my bicycle rickshaw, I imagined a series of bright colors that resembled Indian sari fabrics as well as the glitter of decorations used during wedding ceremonies such as magenta and gold as well as royal purple and turquoise. I began collecting different types of yarn and sequenced them in a certain pattern to offset the different colors. I did take into consideration the artistic understanding of complementary colors when arranging the colors together and did my best to continue this sequence throughout the bicycle.

I believe this allowed each color to become more pronounced and visually stimulating. This type of work is reminiscent of graffiti and street art as well as the concept of “yarn-bombing,” which numerous artists have done in different cities by wrapping trees, statues, and street signs. By knitting and weaving yarn onto ordinary objects, it transforms an urban landscape into a giant psychedelic sweater.

The most satisfying part was to add the bells (see Figure 7) to the rickshaw, which included the basket up through the handlebars of the bicycle. When selecting bells, I wanted it to include multi-colored jingle bells as well as golden liberty bells. Over 200 bells were added to the rickshaw and they reference the Pakistani and Indian jingle trucks commonly found along dirt roads with passengers traveling from city to city. I believe that by adding the bells, the rickshaw project was enhanced and it reminded the viewer of the decorative and functional aspects of the work.



Figure 7 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, jingle and liberty bells

Night and Day Ruminations

When I first created the rickshaw in its raw, welded form, I knew that it required additional material to enhance the aura of the piece. Although it was attached to a bicycle, shopping cart basket required more of an emphasis and I was playing around with the idea of adding decorations or possibly adding a tarp cover as a sunshade. One day, I was exploring the use of blue embroidery yarn to match the bicycle's original light blue color but also to see if it would wrap around the shopping cart basket. Once I had tied a certain section, I continued wrapping in the cyclical motion and realized that this would be a long-term project that would take months to complete the vision.

Each round of the bicycle rickshaw took several hours – and even a few days for each section. My best estimation is that this project took about six months for completion but truly thousands of hours. On most days, I would spend about 12 to 14 hours in the studio wrapping the rickshaw so it became comparable to my full-time office job because I had taken over a month of leave in preparation for the thesis exhibition. I remember at times there was frustration with certain sections and because of the repetitive wrapping; it became tedious and therapeutic at the same time. It became critical to me to challenge myself and finish the other projects that were still pending in my studio. I wanted to present my best work and ensured that I made the right sacrifices to my time, sleep, and money to ensure the work could be presented with due respect.

By completing a project with an intensive timeline, I realized how much artmaking has become an every day necessity for me to dwell and thrive, almost like consuming a natural supplement each morning. This concept definitely came into play when arranging the gallery for my thesis exhibition as I chose to present two lampshades stacked together

and titled the piece, *Lamp Shade Vitamin Pill* (see Figure 13).

There are about 80 vertical sections on the basket and maybe about 30 or so longer horizontal sections, which continue down with multiple intersections for the yarn to cover. The hardest part was to wrap the sections underneath the basket to complete the colorful grid pattern. I did not want to neglect the bottom portion of the basket or only cover one side of the rickshaw. It was important for me to have the viewer move around the piece and look at every angle covered in bright, glittery yarn to complete my overall vision as something that was almost knitted from scratch without the aid of the metal components of a shopping cart.



Figure 8 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, close-up of bottom rack

Weaving like a Spider

I wanted to stay continuous with each strand of color and this became difficult for certain sections where my hands or needles could not fit between the spaces. Some areas required a single strand, piece by piece, and tons of patience to finish a tiny section where my fingers could not fit. Even a moment of exhaustion or lack of focus caused the strand to unravel and then I would have to begin the section again. I almost felt like I was becoming a spider who used embroidery yarn instead of silk to weave night and day on this project.

Overall, I am surprised that the basket has a great quilted texture (see Figure 5) and photographs well. After completing the basket, I made sure to start on different sections underneath the shopping cart where the bottom rack and wheels are located. When reaching this point, I realized that parts of the shopping cart had to be taken apart in order to reach each section and wrap them successfully with yarn (see Figure 7). For the most part, the only time when hot glue was introduced was towards the bottom of the shopping cart where the yarn could not tie to itself and required adhesion. After completing the bottom sections of the cart, I decided to moved on to the welded part to the bicycle, and then onto to the bicycle itself.

It was new territory to begin weaving the bicycle wheel spokes with embroidery yarn. I wanted to test a few sections to see how they enhanced the overall aesthetic although I knew this would add more work to my plate by having more surface area to cover with yarn. There are 36 spokes per wheel, which equals a total of 72 spokes for the entire bicycle. This was a difficult endeavor because it was hard to reach certain sections of the spokes around the gear shafts and inner mechanisms of the bicycle in order to wrap

the yarn around it (see Figure 8). One helpful technique was to use a flame either from a butane torch or matchstick as a method to melt and burn off any extraneous threads. This helped with making the basket and yarn sections look tighter and more composed because the yarn altered from a fuzzy texture to a cord-like material.

Ornamental Transportation

I did my best to cover all sections of the bicycle with yarn except for the functional parts that required a lot of movement and could not be wrapped with yarn. By completing this project, it transformed the original concept of the rickshaw into a fascinating piece of transportation with decoration. It pays homage to Indian jingle trucks, which are heavily adorned with bells, painted figures, and poetry. I also added strings of beads and miniature elephants (see Figure 9) to add more flair as these decorative symbols are commonly found throughout examples of South Asian art.



Figure 9 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, close-up of wheel

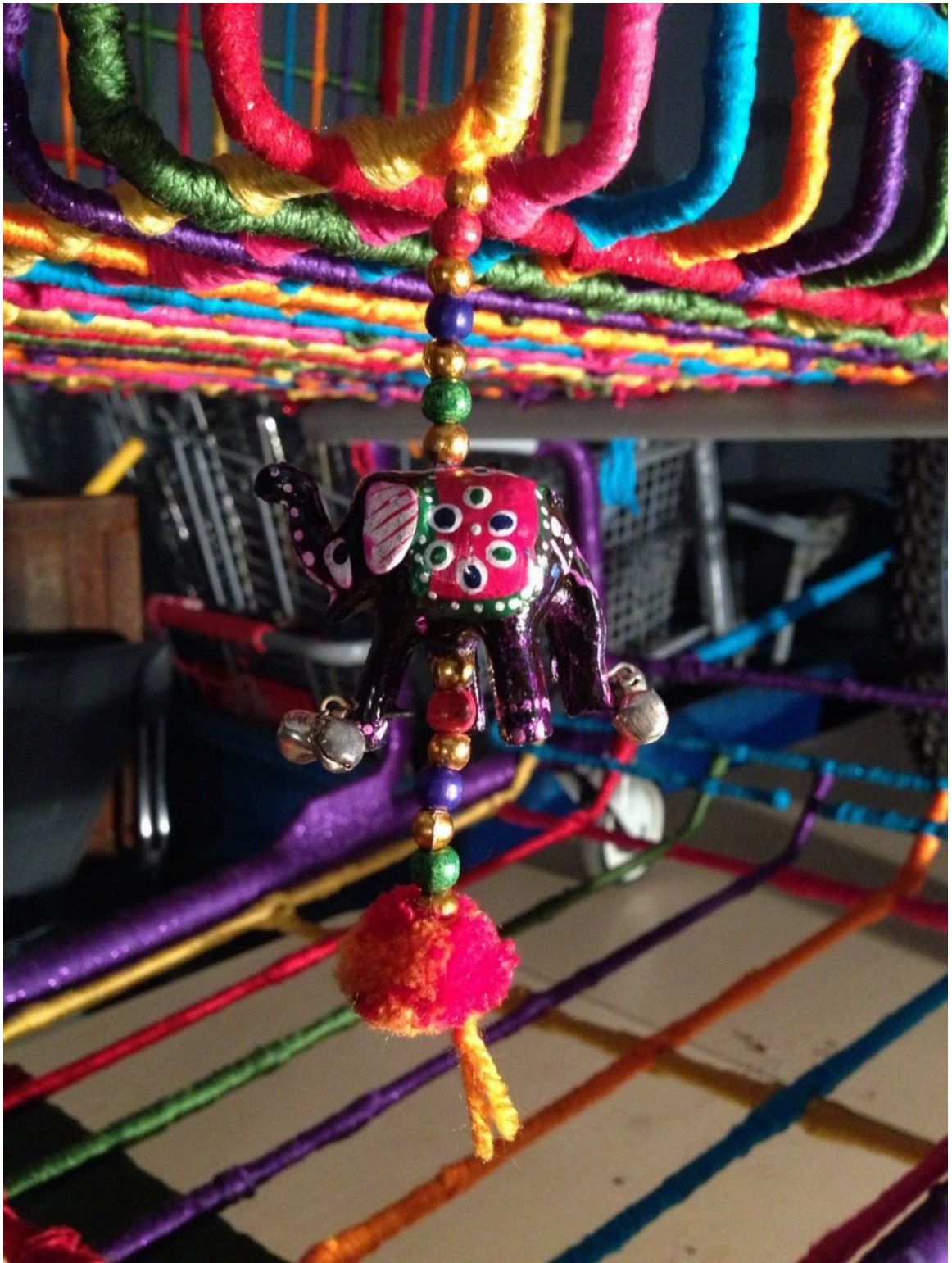


Figure 10 *The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures*, close-up of elephant

Dwell and Thrive

As I mentioned earlier, artmaking has become a required process for me—one that sustains me like a mineral supplement. It creatively balances out my daily life when commuting and responding to never-ending deadlines at work. It gives me purpose and the ability to express myself freely when I felt for so many years that I did not have a voice or that no one was listening. I believe it is a blessing to have the opportunity to be an artist and continuously making work that serves the greater good. I will discuss the next two artworks as items of welcoming my audience into a gallery or studio space and how I have nurtured myself to continue artmaking even when work, life, school, and other forms of stress become burdensome.

Concept of Khush Aam Deed (Urdu for “Welcome”)

In traditional Indian and Pakistani stores and bazaars, it is commonplace to see a peculiar yet bright arrangement waiting at the door hanging from the ceiling—a strand of green limes and red and green hot chili peppers (see Figures 11 and 12). I am fascinated about this sequence of spicy and tangy perishable goods because to me, it serves as a good omen and blessing towards those who enter beneath it. Even during my visit to Pakistan, I remember playing underneath a lime tree. During my first graduate critique class here at George Mason University, I placed a similar strand of limes and peppers above my studio door and watched how the green chili peppers turned red over time.

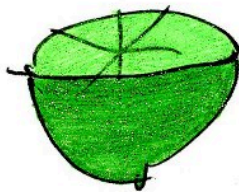
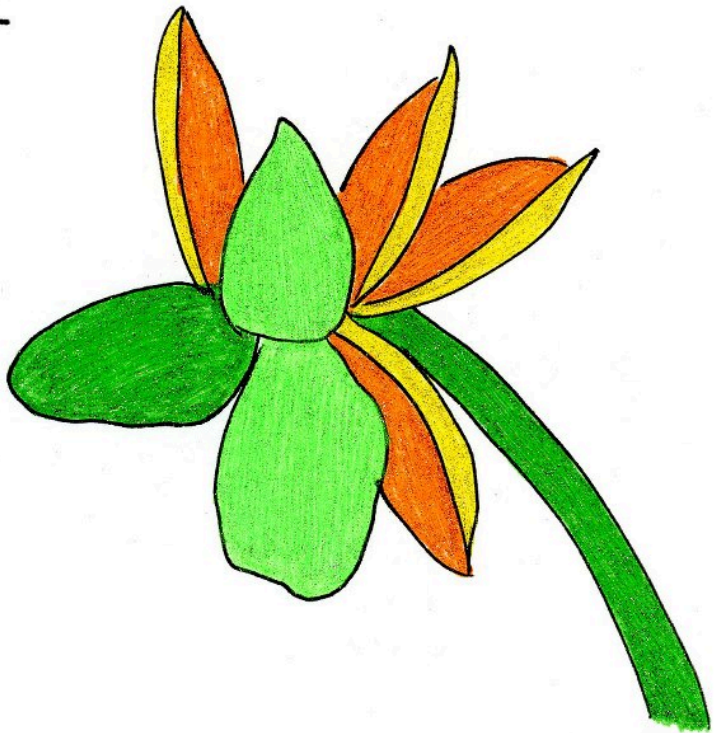
In this final chapter with my thesis exhibition, I added this strand above the main gallery’s large doors. In doing so, the strand of limes and chili peppers served as a simple reminder of completing this life cycle and also it extended a blessing to all those who visited my artworks throughout the exhibition’s viewing and during the closing reception.



Figure 11 *Khush Aam Deed*, strand of hot chili peppers and limes

lemon
lime tree

grow in
clusters



prints
lime slices?

Figure 12 *Lime Flower Drawing*, metallic ink on paper

Throughout the week, I made sure to thank each visitor in person. If I was not physically present in the gallery, I hoped the gallery viewers understood my gratefulness for this opportunity share my work. Over time, it was great to witness viewers enter the gallery and look up towards the ceiling as I felt it represented the prosperous mantra of *Khush Aam Deed* quite well. As a result, I have been using those words almost like a welcoming tagline towards my artmaking practice because it embraces the vulnerability of risk taking with open arms.

Lamp Shade Vitamin Pill

When I became obsessed with creating lamps, I thought of depressing times when I felt like everything was going wrong. Although my lamps are colorful, fun, and playful with their shadows, they are souvenirs of perseverance through tough times. Each drilled out hole represents each moment of unsolicited negative criticism (see Figure 25).

As a Pakistani-American woman, I received lots of pressure from family members over the years. These individuals wanted me to focus my time and energy on learning the practical skills of a housewife and to get married. They believed I was wasting my time pursuing the arts and it did not help that I was misunderstood for working with heavy machinery and tools. For my family, this was unacceptable behavior for a female and this negative criticism turned into personal attacks on my physical appearance and to them, artmaking became the problem. I began to feel like an outsider in my own family.

Truthfully, I was simply overwhelmed with the conflict between the responsibilities I was assigned by my family members and by my own desire to become an artist. I finally came to a breakthrough where I no longer cared for pretentious social

gatherings and obsessing over my own physical appearance, (which my peers and family members felt they were supposed to be my top priorities in order to settle down, get married, and raise children), I decided to use as much time and energy into my artmaking.

While these thoughts were in my mind, I remembered how important these lampshades were to my own growth as a person and how therapeutic it was to drill each of the hundreds of holes on the lamps' surface material. Therefore, I decided to place two polyurethane garden planters stacked on top of each other (see Figure 13) to complete my train of thought of clusters or grouped objects together.

By stacking these two lampshades together, the form takes on a pill-like shape and it reminds me of a two-toned vitamin tablet. For me, creating these lamps was therapeutic through these times. Now I smile when I look at my lamps as I see the light beams pouring through and filling an entire room. At one point, I considered filling the entire gallery with only lamps to cast shadows throughout the room as it was reminiscent of the times of when I felt abandoned but still evoked light during those dark times.



Figure 13 *Lamp Shade Vitamin Pill*, two polyurethane garden planters

CHAPTER TWO: EARLY ARTISTIC EXPLORATIONS

“Talents are best nurtured in solitude but character is formed in the stormy billows of the world.”

-Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (German writer and diplomat)

Hundreds of artists from different categories inspire me. My list includes street artists, graphic designers, landscape artists, furniture and chair designers, abstract and Pop Art painters, fashion designers, and ceramic and metal sculptors. I try to incorporate their expressionism for vivid colors and incorporating dry humor into my own artworks. I remember studying painters such as Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and Pablo Picasso in my Spanish language course in high school. This was my first exposure to fine arts, and I was drawn to the powerful images of day laborers, impoverished villagers, and those affected by war.

“The Gates” in Central Park, New York City

Years later, I went on to experience the exhilaration of Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s project with *The Gates* in New York City and this was one of those moments where I knew I wanted to be an artist. Although I did not fully understand the work at the time, I enjoyed the experience and felt connected to the work and wanted to study the history of the project when I got home. While there, I made a 20-second movie clip on my flip-phone camera and cherished the moments of watching the orange curtains flutter in the wind and my hand reaching up to grab it for a second.

I knew it was one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments because my professors had said that this might be my only chance to see a work by Christo and Jeanne-Claude as it takes many years to plan, commission, and seek approval for installation of their public works. I have also enjoyed landscape artworks by Richard Serra, Andy Goldsworthy, and Anish Kapoor and how they redefine space and time. These artists influenced my work to alter a landscape, remain resourceful, and to address questions with utility and design.

Over the years, I have built an extensive library collection of art volumes, magazines, and books, primarily those that discuss furniture and chair making. One of the most influential chair designers and architects for me is Charles Eames who paired up with his wife to develop strong yet simple chair designs still revered today. I also enjoy the works of Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol for their inclusion of questions about consumerism, celebrities, and pop culture embedded into their works.

Finding a Voice

Over the years, I have worked hard to consolidate my ideas into one main concept that can still branch out and help me create more artworks after my graduate studies. In doing so, I realized that as a Pakistani-American artist, I was most fascinated with fusing together concepts of furniture design and survival from the perspective of a domesticated homemaker. I felt that using a connection to my own personal narrative would be most effective and incorporate artmaking more so into my life.

With influences from my South Asian heritage and the pressure to get married and establish an idealized family, I wanted to expand this concept further by literally recreating a habitat where we dwell and thrive. We learn so much about ourselves when

we investigate ideas of provisions, shelter, warmth, sustenance, and intellectual growth in our daily lives. For me, this was the most honest response to all the events in the world, personal narratives, and thoughts in my head that I had experienced.

I knew that I became obsessed with making a series of lamps made out of polyurethane garden planters and chairs made out of shopping carts to play on ideas of form, function, and commodity. These objects in themselves derive from repurposed materials and hint towards the resourcefulness and craftsmanship of Pakistani village artisans such as a charpai maker (Urdu for “woven bed”) or to display the charisma of a bicycle rickshaw driver.

Shaadi ki Doli (Urdu for “Wedding Palanquin”)

One of the staples for my thesis exhibition was to create a drawing of a doli. As part of Punjabi wedding traditions, a bride is often carried in and out of a wedding hall to greet her guests and family. A doli, which is also known as a “palanquin” or “palkhi” in mostly Indian and French royal wedding rituals, is typically created out of carved wood, has ornate patterns and four corners that are suspended by bamboo rods so that the bride can be carried on the shoulders of others. The bride sits inside with embroidered pillow cushions and a curtain can also provide some privacy to the public’s view.

In my own representation, I created a preliminary metallic pen and ink drawing (see Figure 14) of a traditional wood carriage and hoped to create this physical object in the future. I imagine this work to be made out of large pieces of wood and to be painted in similarly vibrant colors but still functional to sit inside to resemble how it is used in Punjabi wedding ceremonies.

This was an image that came to me one day while making a vivid series of drawings with metallic ink. I was thinking about symbols of cultural identity and one item that stood out was a vessel for transportation and decorative display during wedding ceremonies. In fact, this image was the first drawing out of that series to be colored in fully and it took about two days to select the colors and patiently fill in the sections. I felt an impulse to draw a girl dressed in a green, glittery shawl. Truthfully, this image is supposed to resemble me because my favorite color is green and my hair is highlighted red and brown just like in the drawing.



Figure 14 *Shaadi ki Doli* (Urdu for "Wedding Palanquin"), metallic ink on Bristol

Free (Burqah) Hugs

As an artist, I believe it is important to be as daring as possible. I recognize that I will have inherent restraints when pushed out of my comfort zone. I found this is a great way to achieve intellectual growth and provide an example to others but it is easier said than done. Embracing the arts requires an open mind and resilience.

Diving into the unknown is tricky territory but I wanted to incorporate it into my studies as a method to expand my practice beyond the sculptural realm where most people thought I only made furniture and heavy objects that sat on the floor.

One visitor to my thesis exhibition said that as an artist, I have represented multiple capabilities of a woman as a fashion designer creating a dress out of gloves, a seamstress with my sleeping bags, a furniture designer, a photographer, as well as a social activist by taking on the *Free (Burqah) Hugs* project (see Figures 15 and 16).

With a response like this, I am motivated to create more work because it justifies my vision for the thesis exhibition as something that is well presented and cohesive. Therefore, the concept of a homemaker is redefined as an umbrella term to represent the many roles and creative skills of an artist existing in this environment.

Embracing Epiphany

Back in 2007, I completed a social experiment outdoors on the campus of George Mason University where I held a sign that said, “Free Hugs.” After some hesitation, I was able to hug almost 75 students within one hour. However, I noticed that the Muslim women wearing *hijabs*, or scarves around their heads, kept walking by and refused to embrace me. It was that day that I decided to return to this very place almost five years later and dress like my target audience.



Figure 15 *Free (Burqah) Hugs*, portfolio of photographs and hand-sewn lampshade

Although I felt like I was a stranger in my own hometown, I was overjoyed with the response when strangers came running from afar to embrace me. Yes, this raises questions about gender roles and whether Muslim women should embrace those of the opposite gender, however, I believe that if one's intent is purely to hug someone out of respect, the world can thrive as a better place.

Throughout the implementation of this project, I was nervous to the point of trembling while putting the burqah on my body. Even though I knew about rejection experienced from the first time of completing the project in 2007, I realized how much anxiety I have developed over the years while getting older. Perhaps I was more bold and carefree when I was younger. For this event, I first started on the plaza with a simple t-shirt and black pants and held my sign. There were political campaigns and a speaker's event going on nearby on the grass areas and I was worried if anyone would assume I was affiliated to these other projects on campus.

Change for the Better

After gathering a few hugs, I decided to walk over to a bench where my burqah and headscarf were placed in a bag. I quickly put on the burqah almost like a jacket and buttoned the front. Even the selection of the burqah was important. I chose something solid in color but adorned with golden thread and strands of beads.

At one point, I decided to make myself laugh during the intensity and said that I must be dressed for a rodeo. After walking back to the plaza, I stood there and keep turning around so that people walking through the area could read my sign from far away.

I was overwhelmed by the response. At moments, I felt like I was a security threat for wearing this ominous outfit covering my body. I wondered if anyone was scared to embrace me but at the same time, I felt more secure of myself because my skin, hair, and body's curvature were no longer exposed. Here I was, vulnerable on the plaza but over time, I received more attention as students wanted to talk to me one-on-one, taking my photographs, and asking interview questions.

This counteracted the negative criticism I received from students who questioned if hugging was part of my religion. And to me, when I first imagined this experiment, it was more about the formal composition of wearing a full burqah than associating whether I was the right role model to stimulate this social experiment.

I learned many things about myself that day and how others perceive me, whether they are Muslim or not and whether they believe in gender roles or embracing each other without discrimination. I also wanted to specially thank Kayse Kosar for serving as the photographer to document this project.



Figure 16 *Free (Burqah) Hugs*, close-up of photographs

I See America and America Sees Me

Another piece that embodies cultural implications and identity is one that I thought of at the midway point of my graduate studies. One day, I was drawing up some ideas of future projects. I thought about the formal features of my face and how different it is to see me wearing a headscarf even though I am the same person. During these personal reflections, I came up with the concept of *I See America and America Sees Me* (see Figure 17, 18, and 19).

I also wondered about the derogatory term I heard one time at a doctor's office a few years ago. I was waiting with other patients in the main room and watching a television news report possibly about a violent event. A man waiting next to me almost confided in me without knowing my identity. He said something along the lines of killing all the ragheads causing problems in the world.

Ragheads and Patriotism

Although it has been over a decade since September 11, 2001—a very haunting day for me personally—this was the first time I heard the word “raghead.” I stopped to think about what it could possibly mean as the person who said it was directing towards Muslims or those who wrap their heads with scarves. It was that day that I realized how that people could not correctly identify my ethnicity due to my Western clothing and proficiency in English. I wondered if I sat in that same waiting room today, whether that stranger would have the nerve to say what he did if I were to wear a headscarf and mention that I worked at the Pentagon.



Figure 17 *I See America and America Sees Me*, two mannequin heads and fabric



Figure 18 *I See America and America Sees Me*, close-up of "American"



Figure 19 *I See America and America Sees Me*, close-up of "terrorist"

To me, ignorance is a terrible condition. American patriotism is defined as the freedom to accept each other without discrimination and to practice personal beliefs without fear of oppression. Each culture and religious organization has its extremist members, but a blanket statement that terrorism should be blamed on one specific culture is senseless.

Many years later, I realized that I often think about identity and how as a Muslim who was born here in Virginia, I have so much patriotism as an American. Sometimes I wonder whether people's attitudes towards me will change once they find out I am a Muslim, if it does not come up during initial conversations. By playing with headscarf designs, which today have become almost like advertisements for designer labels, I wanted to present two identical faces as an experiment.

I decided to present two mannequin heads facing each other about four feet apart on a shelf (see Figure 17). These mannequin heads are situated to my own height. The distance in between them allows the viewer to enter their gaze and look at their faces closer. Although the mannequin heads are identical except for their headscarves, one is viewed as nefarious and the other is viewed as patriotic based on our cultural perceptions.

Racial and Facial Features

I became worried in presenting this project as I wondered if it would address my concept correctly. From far away, only seeing two decapitated heads on a bookshelf can be daunting and ominous but I believe it brought the viewer in closer to see what was truly going on. I searched for several months for the correct and most realistic mannequin head to use, as I wanted them to have carved and decorated facial features of a woman's

soft face and not an androgynous blank face. It was important that the mannequins had silky brown hair, which would be covered underneath the headscarf but still allow strands of it to be visible above the forehead. Furthermore, I tried to find mannequins closer to my own facial features and skin tone.

Fabric Selection and Execution

Regarding the fabric material, I purchased these two types of fabrics at different times of the year and before purchasing the mannequin heads. I walked through aisles of fabric stores to find the right types of fabric for my project. I first purchased the red silky fabric with the black skull and crossbones design (see Figure 19) as I felt it was subtle yet pronounced for my concept of something that is nefarious but could also be welcomed as a new designer brand.

For the red, white, and blue fabric, I wanted to purchase something that was not outright and stereotypical of Fourth of July patriotism but something that embodied what it truly means to be an American. It was not about the stars and stripes or the flag but more so about where we live and thrive (see Figure 18). We often wear t-shirts denoting our pride in states like New York and California as well as our favorite sports teams and state's universities. Since the other fabric was heavily reliant on imagery, I wanted to balance the composition with the second fabric selection to be focused on text. Fortunately, I found a stylized fabric with names of all 50 states in different typefaces.

I believe both fabric choices were critical for the execution of this project. I decided to hem the edges of both fabric samples to resemble a headscarf as much as possible. When placing the fabric over the mannequins, I tied a knot below the chin and

draped the fabric down below and covered as much of the skin as possible. This was done in accordance with customs of wearing a headscarf as well as to cover the neck of the mannequin head to make it appear like the rest of the body is below the shelf. This also allows both heads to be covered in fabric like spherical forms that contain themselves as opposed to a mannequin stand that becomes a pedestal or decorative piece.

In the future, I am interested in the idea of having my own face molded in resin so that the mannequin heads truly replicate my facial features. In addition, I would try different screen-printing techniques for the text and imagery to create my styles of headscarf designs. One more addition could be to create an audio track to have the two heads whispering certain words to each other as if they are engaged into their own dialogue.

CHAPTER THREE: IDEA TO PAPER TO PHYSICAL OBJECT

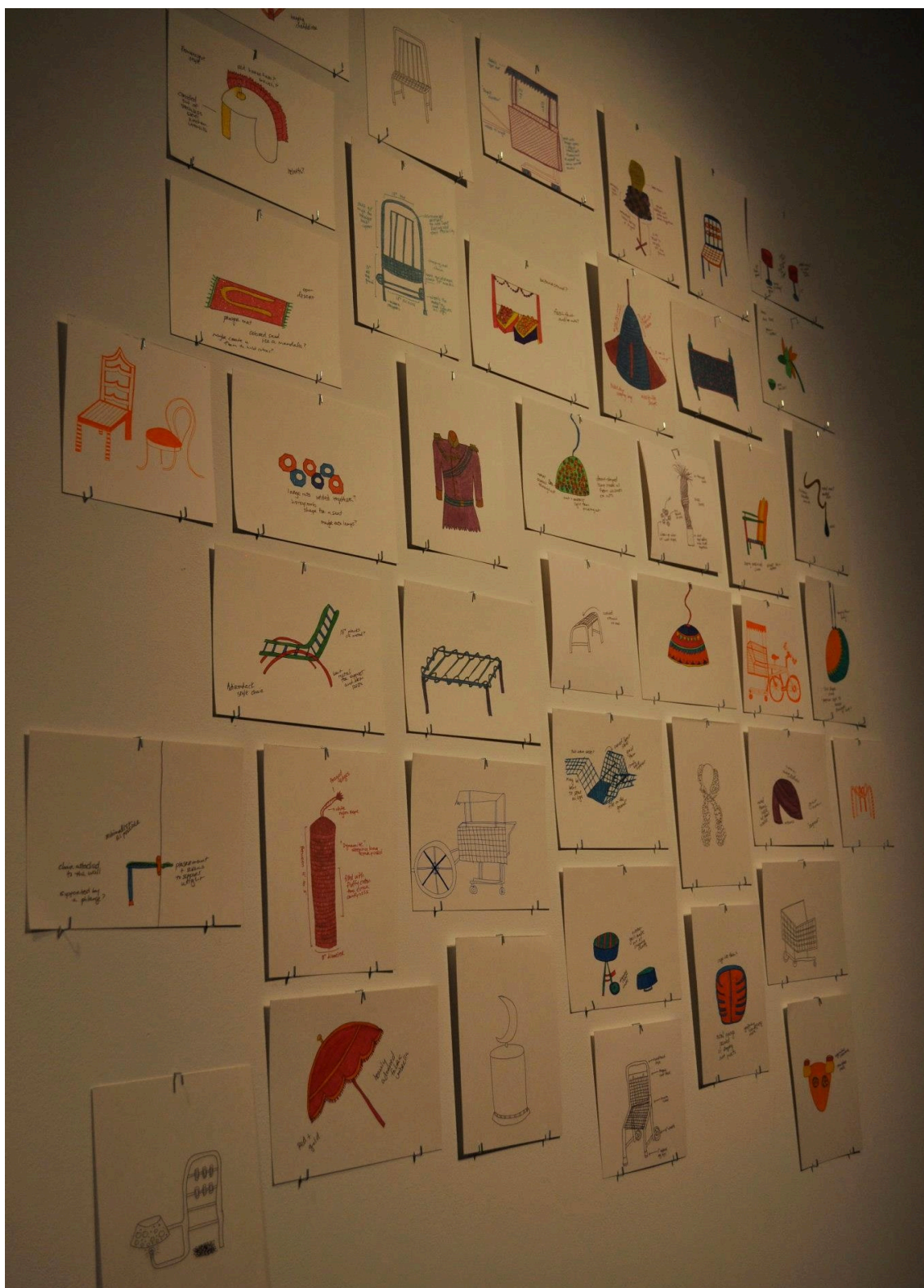
“Choose your corner, pick away at it carefully, intensely, and to the best of your ability.

[And in that way], you might end up changing the world.”

-Charles Eames (American chair designer)

The moment I knew I wanted to enter the art building was driven by the aura of someone welding outside. I had watched the green and orange sparks flying around and it called me closer to see what was happening. Luckily, I did not walk too close or I could have damaged my vision from looking directly at the sparks – this was something only a welder would know. But when I saw that person dressed in heavy gear and welding, I knew it was a scary and fun process that I wanted to try at least once in my life. And I recognized that smell of burning metal and machinery from when I was five years old and visiting Pakistan with my family. On multiple occasions, I learned that smell is one of our strongest forms of memory. A simple smell can take us decades back in time.

For me, it was an amazing concept to draft something based on ideas in my mind and to actually create the form through bending, cutting, and welding metal. When I first started welding, I would typically use a piece of soapstone or chalk to draw out the dimensions on the metal table or a chalkboard surface. It has been fascinating to transform my own blueprints and notes into physical pieces and then finished artworks.



Statistical Research

When I began making chairs, I measured over 100 chairs and stools to determine the average height from the ground needed to be between 17 to 18 inches. And most people prefer a seat with a 18-inch depth but will often sit on a smaller seat when propped up higher like on a bar stool. I created a mock-up measuring stool from a piece of 2x4 wood with the dimensions of 17 inches all around to help me determine the amount of space a body requires to feel comfortable on a seat. These measurements allow someone to rest comfortably without causing strain on the legs or knees. When creating functional furniture, the chair needs to support people of different weights and sizes as much as possible.

Conceptual Drawings

My style of drawing is similar to how architects and technicians create blueprints (see Figure 20). I create flat, two-dimensional drawings on small sheets of paper, using pen and ink on Bristol paper or metallic ink on mixed-media paper. As a result, these intimate drawings are reflective of my own thought processes and aesthetic choices with each of my works. Each furniture item, sculptural installation, and performance activity has been mapped out and drawn on paper, sometimes before and sometimes after the work has been created, in an effort to further define or reflect upon each work.

Although I am typically hesitant about sharing my drawings, I understand they are necessary to the whole process. Many art objects and environments started with a concept drawing. I realize that most of my drawings were of little parts with in a larger whole, and often were neglected during most drawings of the completed project. I made sure to emphasize details such as observations of a cut stainless steel wire rope (see Figure 21).

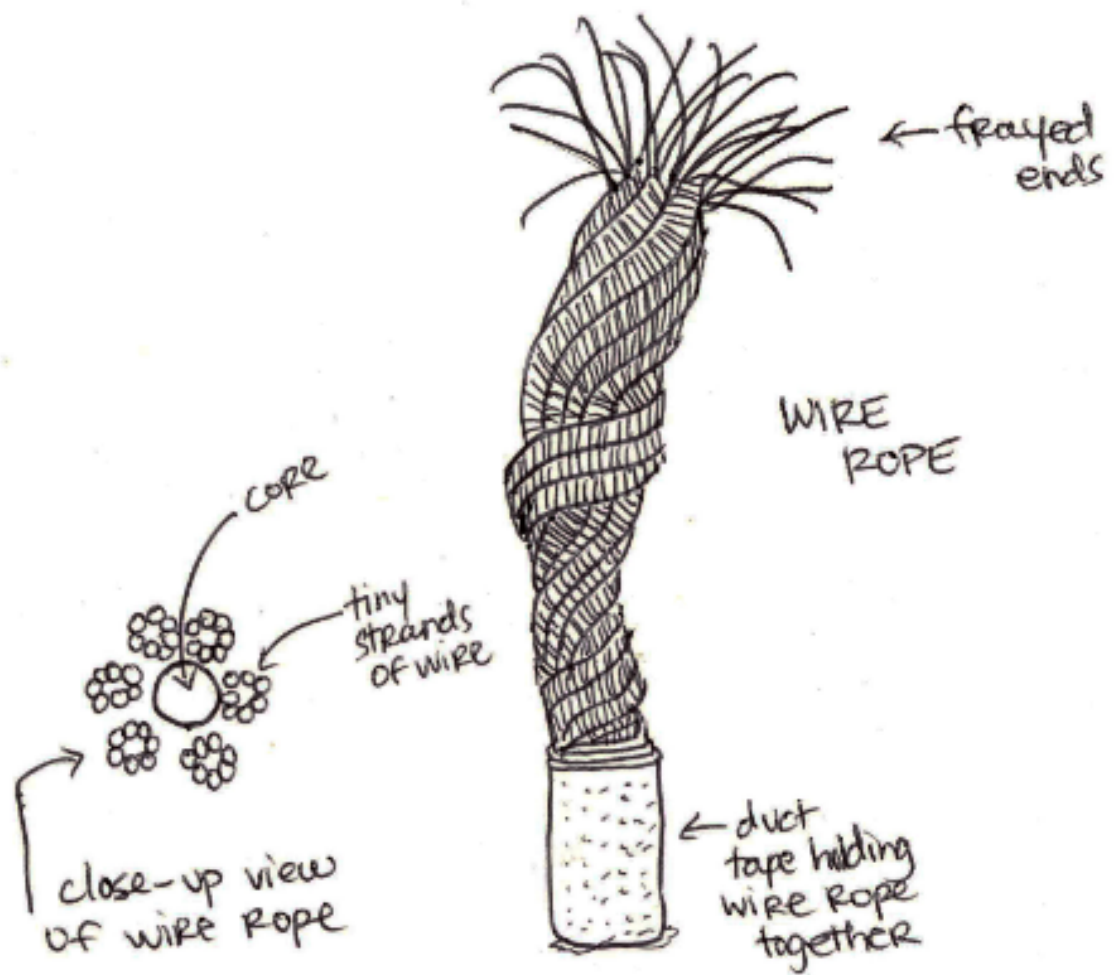


Figure 21 *Wire Rope Creature*, pen and ink drawing

I first began with creating pen and ink drawings on Bristol paper. I felt the most comfortable with making drawings on a smaller sheet of paper such as a 6-inch by 6-inch square. I typically create these intimate drawings for myself to map out how to weld joints together and to add notes as to what materials I will need to repurpose from my environment or obtain from the hardware store.

Since my drawings are flat and straightforward, they became great outlines for coloring in with colorful, metallic pen and ink (see Figures 22 and 26). When I decided to use metallic colors, this inspired me to create more vibrant drawings of different objects associated with South Asian culture and my own art practice. This glittery application also led to me choosing a specific style of embroidery yarn to use on my bicycle rickshaw because there were strands of glitter embedded into the threads of the yarn.

The Overall Design

For my works, I asked about 50 different people try out my chairs so I could observe and learn from their reactions. The chairs are constantly evolving in their process and instead of changing substantially with each different opinion, they give opportunities for other ideas to develop. Additionally, the seat must be comfortable because no one will want to sit in the chair for extended period of time. Typically, people enjoy rocking back and forth or else some form of movement is needed to adjust oneself while sitting in a chair. The chair must be safe for adults and children in order to prevent any injury.

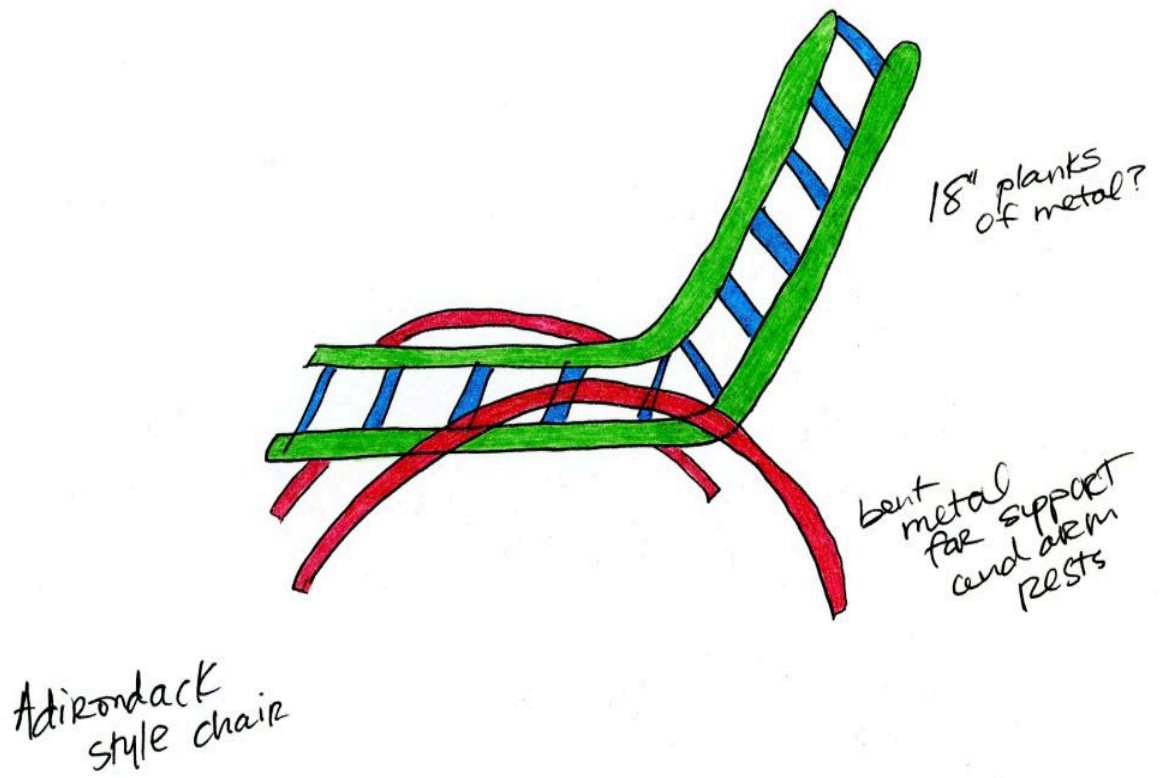


Figure 22 Adirondack Chair Drawing, metallic ink

When I first began making chairs towards the end of my undergraduate studies, the initial materials used were repurposed steel and rebar because they were easily accessible and are often used for construction work. These materials can be used for furniture that can simultaneously be used in indoor and outdoor environments. The metal chairs are capable for outdoor use as long as they are painted with an external layer of rust-resistant paint or chemical to offer a protective coating. Rust occurs as a result of oxidation to the air, which happens because rainwater sits on the metal causing it to break down the chemical compounds and create rust. Also, rust can also be removed later on with various solvents found at the local hardware store.

After creating a metal artwork, it goes through multiple levels of review. The first concept drawing is a great indicator and during the welding process, it is helpful to stand back and see if the pieces are working together successfully for the design. Additionally, if this piece is meant to be functional, there is an added challenge for it to support human weight. However, if it will be an aesthetic piece without any requirement to support weight, it becomes more open ended with the design, but it must be responsibly made. Multiple decisions are questioned, as there is plenty of previous work to consider as well as the ultimate goal for the piece.

Arc Welding and Metalworking

Whenever I see a metal sculpture or something that has been welded, I stand in awe in its presence. It is amazing for something to be joined together through this process where metals are melted and formed together again. A technique like welding requires full, undivided attention. Not only for the safety aspect but also to understand how

precision affects the overall finished product. Prior to welding or using any heavy machinery in the studio, one should be specially trained and thoroughly understand the safety guidelines prior to attempting anything.

The equipment required for welding includes: an electric arc welder, polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic film curtain to shield others from sparks and flames as well as vision injury, and personal protective equipment. Typically, we use heavy leather coats to protect our chest, neck, and arms from the sparks and flames. I was lucky enough to find a flame-resistant coat that is not as heavy but equal in its protective layer. I personally try to avoid using leather materials or animal-based products, however, with welding it is difficult to find protective gear that is strong enough such as my welding gloves.

These still required a small leather area for the fingers to be fully protected. Furthermore, a self-darkening arc welding mask is required. I have learned through experience that our eyes are sensitive to the high amounts of ultraviolet light produced and looking directly at the sparks can seriously damage the eyesight of the welder or anyone watching. Therefore, a self-darkening mask will notify the welder when it is safe to take the mask off and correctly see what is going on while welding up close to a metal object. A larger mask helps protect the skin and hair from any stray sparks bouncing around.



Figure 23 *Shopping Cart Basket Drawing, ink on paper*

Material Selection

The electric arc welder is an amazing tool for making metal sculptures. Unless the metal pieces are galvanized, it is possible to weld it together. Galvanization is a when a thick layer is applied to the metal in order to prevent corrosion. In order to weld, this layer must be removed; therefore it is better to find metal parts suitable for welding prior to beginning a metal sculpture or else it will require several trips to the hardware store, junkyard, or metal warehouse to gather supplies.

Being a sculptor has made me a resourceful person. I am not afraid to collect old, discarded items from a curbside or dig around in a pile of metal scraps to find the piece I need. I tried to be resourceful to signify how much waste we produce as humans and how it can be transformed into a work of art or a functional piece of furniture. This mantra led to me collecting shopping carts. I saw them everywhere—in the middle of the road, at the bottom of a ditch, tipped over in a patch of woods, or smashed in a back alley.

When I first started to use a shopping cart for its material parts, I realized how much metal it contained. This was a welder's dream because there were larger, hollow tubes of metal, stationary and rotational wheels, as well as thin pieces for more intricate welds. Cutting down a shopping cart is by no means easy but once the parts are disassembled, there is a lot of surface texture to work with and I learned that each shopping cart contains different parts (see Figures 23 and 24).

Connecting the Joints

Arc welding allows a variety of joints to be made including a lap joint, corner joint, edge joint, T-joint, butt joint or multi-pass joint. Rebar, or reinforcement bar, is commonly used for practice because they are metal rods that come in different sizes and

lengths. A lap joint is when two pieces of metal are placed on top of each other and the horizontal gap in between is welded together. A corner joint is often a perpendicular bond, which works best when the angle is 90 degrees. For each joint, it is important to look at how the joint will be used in the overall work, because the strength will vary.

Welding joints can handle hundreds of pounds of weight when done correctly. However, angles affect pressure so consistent measurement is key. To assist with this sort of connection, vice grips, bear clamps, and heavy-duty magnets are highly recommended to hold these metal pieces together. An edge joint is when the ends of two pieces of rebar are attached. This may be an interesting joint, but it is not one of the strongest. A T-joint is a perpendicular joint where one piece of rebar is midway the length of the other piece. A butt joint is two pieces set together and bonded whereas a multi-pass joint is an intersection for other joints.

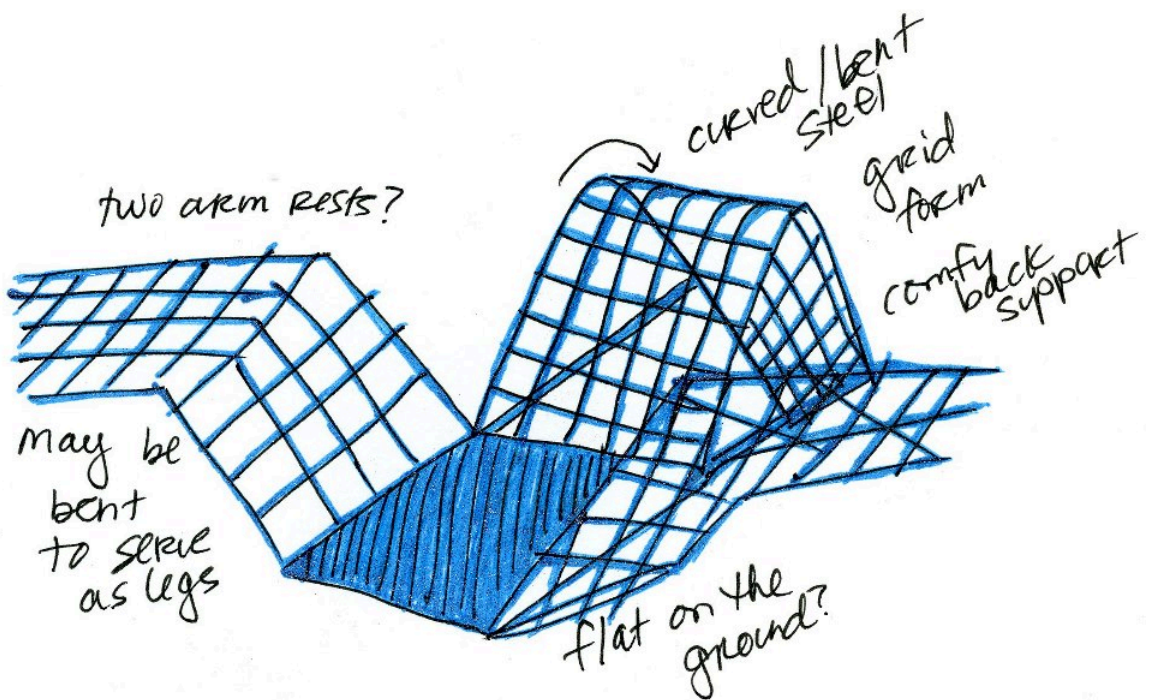


Figure 24 *Bat Wing Drawing*, metallic ink on paper

Physical Fabrication

Once all of the metal pieces are together and the welding apparatus is correctly attached, this allows an electrical circuit to run through the pieces. First, I make sure to measure the pieces a few times for accuracy and then mark them with soapstone or permanent marker where the piece should be cut. Next, I prefer to cut the pieces with a pneumatic air grinder or a Sawzall reciprocating-type jigsaw with a special blade for metal cutting. With the metal grinder, I enjoy using the tool to make sure to sand down any surface paints, soapstone, marker ink or textures that may hinder the performance of the weld.

When welding the joints, I will line-up the pieces as to how the joint will be made—and the best technique is to use vice grips and heavy-duty magnets to adjust the item and keep it in place. Afterwards, I will put on all the safety gear required and mark off an area of the studio with a PVC curtain to protect anyone who is working in the same area with me. It is critical to pay attention of what is happening inside and outside of the PVC curtain for safety purposes.

The next steps include clamping the pieces down to each other as well as to a metal table or base because this grounds the circuit and reduces electrocution. Next, I will place the trigger right above the joint and allow the copper-colored, steel wire to get as close as possible to the gap in the joint. I will test the trigger by first pressing in short increments and watching the sparks. Then I will increase the pressure to get a more full pour of steel from the wire. It is important to watch that there is enough of a joint and not excessive spillover. After welding, allow the piece to fully cool for several minutes and up to an hour if there are several points that have been welded.

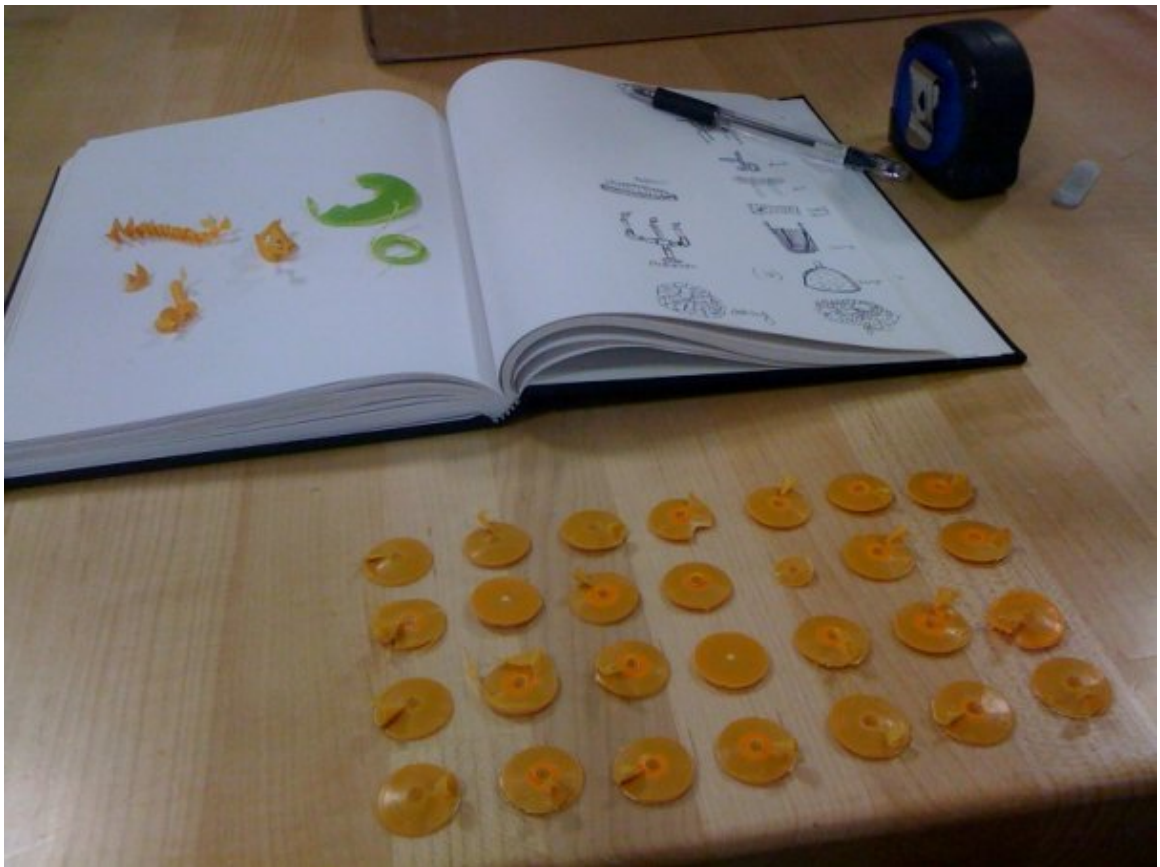


Figure 25 *Drilled Out Lamp Shade Circles, polyurethane and sketchbook*

Assessment and Critique

Upon completing an artwork, multiple levels of critique need to occur. For me personally, I will take a step back a few times and attempt to place “fresh eyes” onto the work in order to remain objective. I work with the goal of creating a strong visual aesthetic, and I also question how an audience member might engage with the work.

I have learned to seek additional opinions from professors, students, and other students who may not be familiar with artmaking. This open feedback is critical to making better work and this has improved my own understanding and inspired new artworks. The best method of critique is to see how the work responds to questions about its process and implications to the world when addressing societal issues.

I learned a lot about the critiquing process through my undergraduate graphic design courses because we looked at the formal composition, use of color and text, as well as the unknown client we were serving. These ideas are important and are factored in when creating my furniture pieces, lamps, and my bicycle rickshaw project. If necessary, I believe a work can be revisited to modify a certain part of it to improve the design or to inspire a new work such as with my cushion and dress made of gloves.

Furthermore, I have embraced new methods of presentation for each of my works. I enjoyed presenting my lampshades in different formats and at different heights. I took risks by plugging a few lamps together into one circuit and keeping their extension cords exposed. This was a new territory to explore and the idea came in response to the gallery’s space and how I could activate the ground as a presentation area. This allowed the clusters of lamps to carry the viewer’s eyes towards the sleeping bags and throughout the room.



Figure 26 *Lamp Shade Drawing*, metallic ink on paper

CHAPTER FOUR: DOMESTICATION OF THE SELF

“They are so damn intellectual and rotten that I cannot stand them. I would rather sit on the floor of a Toluca market and sell tortillas than have anything to do with those artistic [snobs] of Paris.”

-Frida Kahlo (Mexican painter)

When I think of the concept of domestication, it applies to multiple situations that can occur anywhere in and outside of the home environment and can apply to both males and females. For me, domestication of the self occurs to those who restrain and conform themselves to work in another established environment—sort of like how a wild animal is sent into captivity for research and to be viewed at the local zoo.

I believe that humans often have to professionalize themselves as a method to conform to working in a corporate environment. It is an interesting concept to make sacrifices for each other and the greater good. Being professional and domesticating ourselves in the workplace allows us to grow our careers and essentially take on even more responsibilities, which is the life cycle predestined for most of us by our corporate bosses and their bosses. For this exhibition, I focused on a domesticated homemaker's daily activities such as knitting and sewing clothing and bedding, cooking and serving meals with provisions, decorating a home with furniture arrangements, as well as nurturing others to become comfortable in a space whether they are spouses, children or strangers.

Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani (Urdu for “Our Hearts are Still Pakistani”)

After a recent study of impoverished areas in Pakistan, I began to reflect upon the concept of freedom and patriotism. I had overheard my mother speaking on the phone to an aunt of mine who lives in an impoverished area of Pakistan. Whenever any of our relatives call our house, they are usually requesting money to be sent over because they barely have enough to survive (see Figures 27 and 28). Over the years, my mother has been so helpful and charitable that she will help others as much as she can because she understands that charity begins at home.

Each day, we realize how fortunate we are to live in a clean, safe place with shelter, good health, and many other blessings. This is what makes me proud to be an American. We live as prosperous Muslims who positively contribute to society with relatively little fear of oppression. By comparison, I cannot guarantee that I would still be alive to this day if I had been born and raised in Pakistan under the rule of corrupt leaders.

Provisions of Electricity, Food, and Water

That same afternoon, I asked my mother about that particular rhyming couplet that my aunt had come up with and asked her to write it down for me. The rhyming couplet is written in Urdu, which is the main language of Pakistan and is read from right to the left (see Figure 27). The text states, “Na bijli, na atta, na paani; Phir bhi dil hai Pakistani” and this translates to “Despite living without electricity, food (flour), or water; our hearts still remain as Pakistani.”



Figure 27 *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani*, hand-sewn flag made of green and white fabric

By using green and white text to represent land and purity, this version of the Pakistani flag serves as a banner of free expression, which can either flutter in the wind or wrap one's body as a shawl. From my own understanding, I feel that many times society defines an individual's self worth from what material objects they possess rather than understand who they are, their actions, or the adversity they overcome. As a young country, Pakistan faces so much political and economic turmoil, that even those who work hard to feed their families are often unable to do so. Older women and young children are dying in the streets fighting over a burlap sack of rice or a small bag of flour. Neighbors are turning against themselves, which is only fueling the fire.

When I read about the daily news articles about Pakistan, I think to myself that humanity does not exist in this desolate climate where corruption dictates whether citizens will receive enough electricity to run fans, refrigerate food to avoid spoilage, make a phone call, or even to read a book at night. In these dire situations, individuals turn to crime and comply terrorist agendas in order to feed their children and parents.

Completing the Vision with Imagery

This flag project serves as a gentle reminder of the street children who still wave tattered Pakistani flags while their parents protest in the streets crying for a better future. The series of large photographs (see Figure 28) depict a Pakistani Muslim woman running with the flag, wearing it as a full body shawl or *hijab*, and finally as a traditional Pakistani scarf or *daputta*. She displays emotions of freedom, national pride, and somber reflections. I wanted to especially thank model Farina Zeb for running in the hills and allowing me to capture her image for this project.



Figure 28 *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani*, 6-ft photograph series of a hand-sewn flag

Sonaay ko Jughayo (Urdu for “Wake Up the Sleepers”)

For a series to speak about moments of desperation and solitude, I wanted to use a material familiar to most societies—the soft and silky fabric used for sleeping bags (see Figure 29). I am interested in methods of survival both emotionally and physically in regards to dealing with catastrophic events and creating a sense of safety for the future. What if we find ourselves sleeping among the enemy or those things that destroy us? Some children sleep in war-torn environments and it becomes the new normal for them. I have repurposed and hand-sewn sleeping bags to resemble the shapes of a firecracker, hand grenade, and rocket ship. The materials used were a polyester shell from the sleeping bags, which were then stuffed with more cotton material and polyester thread.

Damaka (Urdu for “Explosion”)

For *Damaka*, this piece began as a drawing when I started to select objects that were on my mind that dealt with the idea of comfort and security. I drew out the image of a flat grenade (see Figure 30) as a simplified form with only green ink coloring in the sections to create a puffy texture on the page. After I completed the drawing, I knew that I wanted to create this object as a life-size, possibly functioning piece.

I searched for the right color to represent the grenade’s deep green color and noticed that the polyester shell fabric was made to be flame-resistant. When cutting and reshaping the material, I added a separate piece to serve as a pillow cushion to represent the top of the grenade and another longer piece to represent the handle as well as a cushion to cuddle with when sleeping. It was important for me to create a fully functional piece with adjustable zippers as I envision this to be a piece that children can enjoy without understanding the nefarious themes behind the object.



Figure 29 *Sonaay ko Jughayo* (Urdu for "Wake Up the Sleepers"), sleeping bags



Figure 30 *Damaka* (Urdu for "Explosion"), close-up of grenade sleeping bag

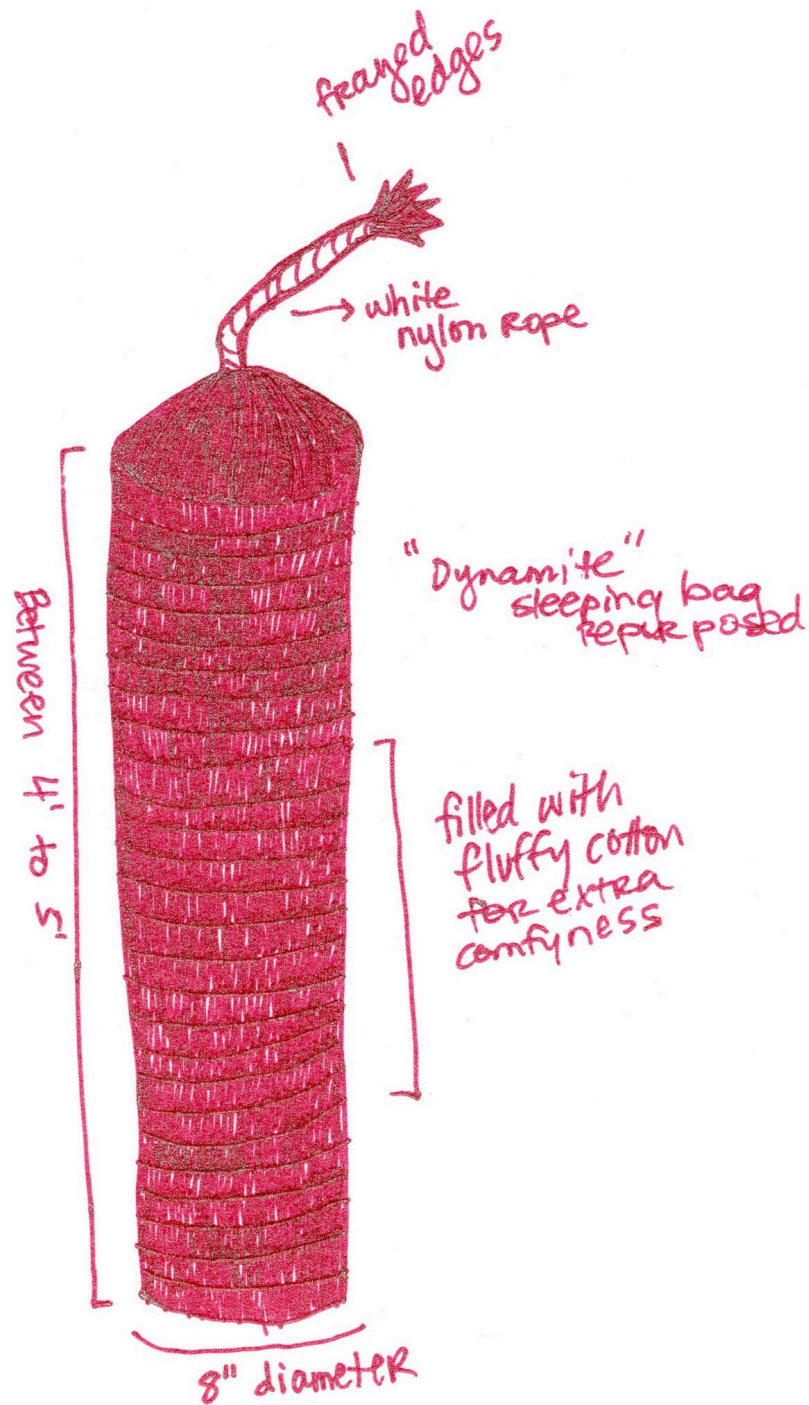


Figure 31 *Julnaa Drawing*, metallic ink on paper



Figure 32 *Steel Town Charpai and Julnaa*, steel, wire rope, and hand-sewn firecracker



Figure 33 *Sitaroon ki Taraf Saffar* (Urdu for "Journey to the Stars"), close-up

Julnaa (Urdu for “Burning”)

Julnaa is the second piece in my sleeping bag series and it is a simplified form of a firecracker with a large, nylon white rope (see Figures 31 and 32) to represent the wick that can be lit on fire. The outdoor fabric shell was created from a preexisting sleeping bag that was cut down and re-sewn by hand. The difficult part was to sew the tube-like form of the firecracker while filling it with cotton stuffing to ensure it stood upright and completed the form.

Sitaroon ki Taraf Saffar (Urdu for “Journey to the Stars”)

The last item in the sleeping bag series is called *Sitaroon ki Taraf Saffar*, which translates from Urdu into English as “Journey to the Stars.” This piece is a simplified form of a red and blue rocket ship (see Figure 33). For me, it was important to create an object that was not as nefarious as others and for it to be functional as a sleeping bag. While the other two sleeping bag forms are dangerous weapons, this rocket ship is welcoming in nature because it is a form that portrays a playful and imaginative adventure.

Personification of Objects and Gender Roles

Throughout my work, I have thought about conversations I have with others about world events involving the objectivity of women and I wondered to myself whether women would always be viewed in a certain way no matter what they are wearing. This was an interesting territory to pursue because I knew that I wanted to expand my creative abilities and try sewing some soft sculptures to balance the rigidness of my metal pieces.

I began drawing round forms of fabric and imagined stuffing them with cotton filling (see Figures 34, 35, and 36). This led to me thinking about repurposing workman’s

gloves and stuffing the finger digits to create miniature pillow cushions. I began thinking about parts of the female body that are most objectified and how these areas could be covered or almost felt with stuffed gloves. Although these sewing projects were tedious because of the time it took to stuff the gloves with cotton and then sew them together by hand, the overall vision was successful. Through these repetitive motions, I was able to create a cushion and full-on wearable dress from gloves.

Gloves Cushion and She's Got Way Too Many Feelings

To continue with the idea of wearable objects or items that are personified to display emotions like a human being, I wanted to expand the idea of my cushion made out of gloves (see Figure 52). I used black and dark brown workman cotton gloves (see Figures 35 and 36) and stuffed them with cotton filling and then attached them to satin fabric and used black polyester thread throughout the piece. While sewing these by hand, I used to dance around my studio wearing the strand of gloves like a scarf or around my hip like a skirt. By sewing the gloves together in spiral patterns, I was able to create a multi-layered skirt that still has some movement and flow to it.

I also attached a series of gloves to form a collar and the neckpiece can close up together with the fingers intertwining—similar to how a Venus flytrap plant opens and closes. I realize women are constantly objectified no matter what they are wearing. In the same moment, this dress also makes a comment about how women in the workplace are often judged as emotional versus being ambitious like their male counterparts.

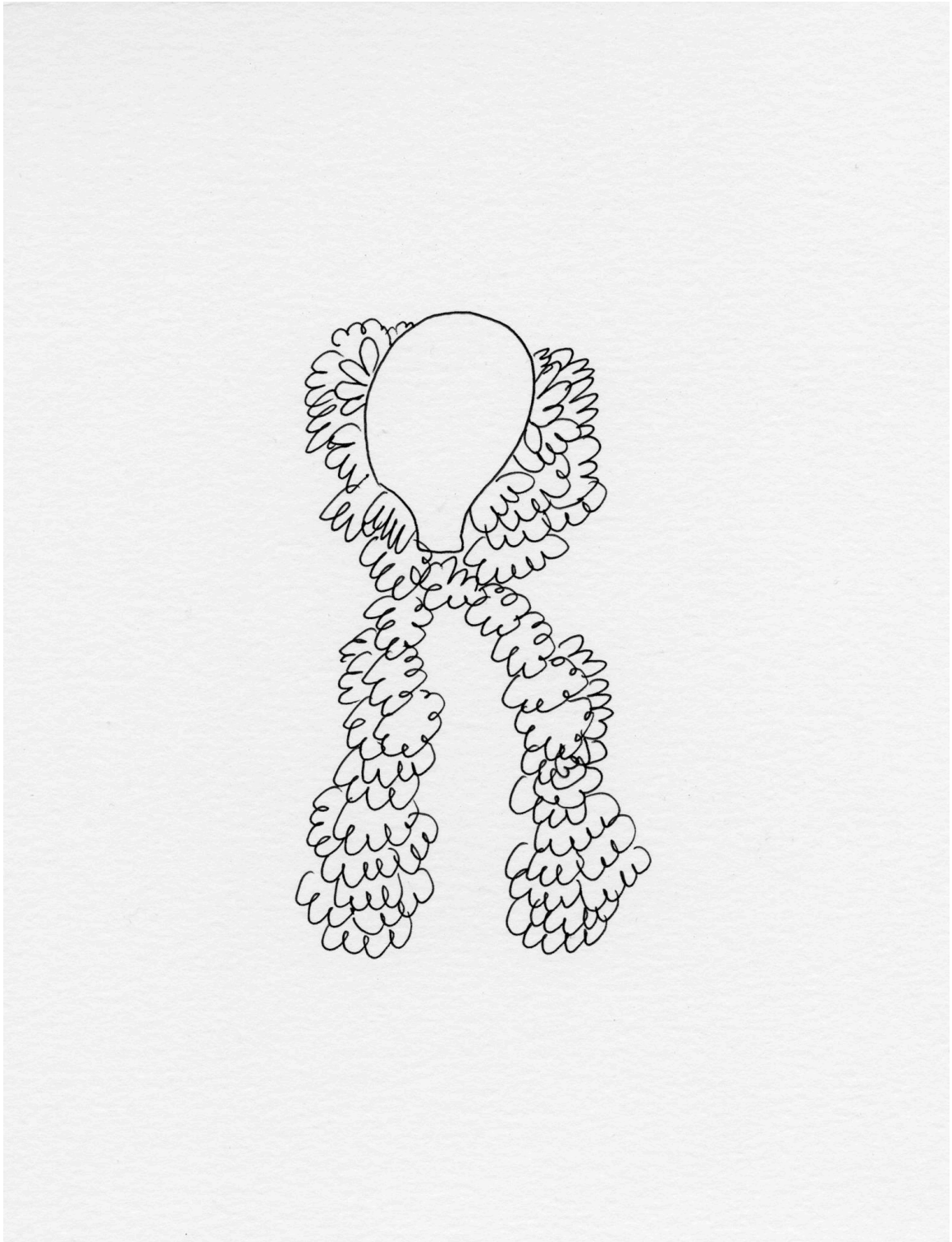


Figure 34 *Gloves Scarf Drawing*, pen and ink on Bristol



Figure 35 *She's Got Way Too Many Feelings*, cotton glove dress and cotton filling



Figure 36 *She's Got Way Too Many Feelings*, closed version of cotton glove dress

Chaaval ki Bori (Urdu for “Rice Bags”)

A common household food item for a South Asian family is a rice bag. We tend to eat rice with each meal or substitute it with flatbread *naans*. Rice bags come in many colors but often maintain a similar style—a brown burlap sack adorned with colorful lettering to advertise the special taste of aged rice. As far as I know, rice is a critical provision for sustenance (see Figures 37, 38, and 39).

Villages can survive with just a few ounces of rice a day. I have incorporated rice bag threads and burlap in previous artist-made books as well as included them in my bicycle rickshaw to display how a simple grain can become a commodity and source of survival. I used an assortment of burlap rice bag brands and different sizes and filled them with cotton to create these pillow cushions.

When installing works throughout the gallery space, I walked over to a blank wall and decided that the *Mouthpiece* piece (see Figures 37 and 38) should be featured above the rice bags resting on the ground. I knew I wanted the lampshade’s open mouth to face towards the viewers so they could move in closer to the object and observe its transition from dark red to black. I decided to install the lampshade at my eye level and height.

Furthermore, the dome shape casts a great shadow in between the lampshade and the rice bags on the floor. I wanted the vessel to resemble a mouth screaming for attention similar to a loudspeaker and to prelude to commentary of rice bags that have been repurposed as pillows. An empty rice bag may not provide comfort to someone who is starving and living in an impoverished situation but it could serve as a place to rest and reflect upon the situation until help arrives from above.



Figure 37 Mouthpiece and Chaaval ki Bori, lampshade and rice bag pillows



Figure 38 *Mouthpiece*, close-up of lampshade



Figure 39 *Chaaval ki Bori*, close-up of burlap rice bag pillows

Mehndi Laga ke Rakhna, Doli Saja ke Rakhna (Urdu for “Decorate Yourself with Henna and Get the Wedding Palanquin Ready”)

I created a handmade or artist-made book out of Davey board covered with silkscreened metallic paper and interior pages made of Arches 88 paper folded in an accordion-style format (see Figure 40). The title for the book derives from a popular Bollywood song about the traditional wedding ceremonies such as the Henna Night. I decided to use images of gloves and hands as the main outlines for text to wrap around the pages and draw the reader into the curvilinear artworks I have created in the past.

This book project has been a new endeavor because I am still learning about bookmaking and the pages feature images of my own artmaking process, my hands, and my visage. The images within the book pages are superimposed with text running through along the outlines of my hand images. The first sequence of images display my workman’s gloves for bending metal and some of the two-dimensional drawings in one of my sketchbooks.

The next sequence displays an outdoor seating arrangement of a pair of ottoman I created out of a plastic drum used for detergent as well as a set of hands with henna on them. The final composition includes an arrangement of some of my miniature furniture models as well as an image of myself wearing traditional clothing.

I used bright colors from my own artworks such as orange to denote the shopping cart pieces while contrasting them on a green, outdoor landscape in the background where most of my furniture pieces are used. In future applications, I would also include using real henna and paint layers on top of the pages to experiment with textures and continue the idea of traditional wedding customs.



Figure 40 *Mehndi Laga ke Rakhna, Doli Saja ke Rakhna* (Urdu for "Decorate Yourself with Henna and Get the Wedding Palanquin Ready"), artist-made book

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDIO PRACTICE

“You have to take all of those things into consideration, the paths, the roadways, how much cloud cover there is, how much foliage cover there is, whether there are streams; all of that comes into play .”

-Richard Serra (American sculptor)

Refining my studio practice came from a diligent work ethic to complete works and to remain flexible with the trial-and-error process and critique sessions. At the end of the day, I realized that I had to embrace my abilities and setbacks in order to push forward as an artist. For any of those setbacks, I needed to confront them and work to solve each problem and address each controversy. I understood that if completing each artwork required me to learn new skills, this was something I had to embrace. For example, I needed to teach myself how to use technical camera equipment and to sew objects by hand because I was dealing with cultural issues that were more effective when documented and made accessible to the viewer.

I enjoyed being part of the critical artistic practices program because its emphasis on inter-arts gave me free reign to produce artworks that were open-ended and completed in any media. When I created my flag project, I believed it would be complete after shooting a series of 400 images while running in the hills of a park’s green field filled with buttercups and thorns (see Figures 27 and 28). That completion of a thought is

important because an artist like me enjoys displaying and using a variety of techniques to convey an idea.

The next works I will describe are focused on repetitive motions, dedication of time, and the ability to remain flexible in any situation. In this section, I go more into detail about my artworks that discuss transportation and seating as well as lighting from modified lampshades as a form of enlightenment and intellectual growth. I also discuss how some artists have influenced my work and inspired me to take risks with my artmaking practice.

Time Management

Time is a critical component to creating artworks. It is general knowledge that sculptors require materials, tools, and space for their work. I would also like to add that time is an important factor to include in this list. Often, a work will be in planning stage for many years until it receives approval for commission. I understand that the trial-and-error process takes time. If the scale of the work is large or exceedingly technical, it will require different mechanisms and assistance to begin building the artwork.

Throughout my graduate studies, I worked between 40-50 hours per week at a corporate job. As a result, it took commitment, organization, hard work, and sacrifice to attend my classes, complete my school assignments, and to develop my own artwork. This was a difficult endeavor because my sculptural works do take months for execution as there are several edits along the way. It may take a few days to cut down the metal from a shopping cart and then to decide how to weld the material together. There are

plenty of planning and editing stages in between the creation of the artworks. Many times, the design will be modified between the first drawing and the finished product.

My advice to students, whether they are pursuing undergraduate or graduate studies, is to truly focus your time on your artmaking. Create a schedule for working in the studio. Search out non-traditional materials to work with by digging through alternative places such as junkyards, yard sales, dumpsters, and to see what you find in nature to use. Great writers frequently read great works and it is important to get out of the studio and explore other artists at galleries and museums.

The best method for me has been to work on multiple projects concurrently rather than completing one project at a time. I mostly have welding projects so I will do these first, because these forms are filled with grime and remain raw until finished and painted, and this can be tiring to move heavy pieces of steel up and down the elevators. Afterwards, I can wash my hands and begin sewing my sleeping bags or stuffing cotton into my glove forms.

Steel Town Charpai (Urdu for “Woven Bed”)

A *charpai* is typically created with a solid, wood frame and outfitted with woven rags or rope to support the human body. Sometimes charpais can serve as seats during the day and used as beds at night. Their lightweight frame makes it easier for mobility and storage (see Figures 41, 42, and 43). I remember when I was five years old during a visit to Pakistan where we slept on our own wooden charpais on the rooftop of our family’s home. This is the best way to view the stars above in the open night sky.

By using steel, I pay homage to one of Pakistan's main exports—stainless steel often used in beauty supplies like scissors and tweezers. There are also industrial areas in Pakistan known as “steel towns” where mineworkers and factory laborers often live and create home goods.

I purchased a long strand of at least 50 feet of stainless steel wire rope from a steel warehouse. On that same afternoon, I realized that a single strand of wire rope actually contains miniature clusters of about 7 to 8 wires each and ultimately about seven of those clusters were contained within a strand – for total of 56 tiny wires strung together to create a solid piece.

In my first experiments with the piece, I was sampling different ferrule hardware and drop clamps that are crimped together to hold the wire ropes in place. However I noticed later on, that these drop clamps were not creating a tight enough loop for my woven bed. I intended the charpai to be functional and support human weight. This challenge became more difficult as the clamps and crimps were still shifting instead of remaining firm on the bed frame.

I realized that in order to solve the utility problem, I needed the wire rope to remain fixed and decided to weld it directly to the rectangular bed frame. In doing so, I realized this method added to the piece because I realized I enjoyed the raw welds and exposed surface material. I decided to not cover the steel parts that were burned with sparks and this piece became the only piece of furniture without a finished paint layer when introduced in the gallery. I believe the process actually worked well for the piece because the charpai now resembles an electrocution device with exposed wire and sharp edges.

“The Iron Glows Red” by Faiz Ahmed Faiz

While conducting research and welding, a certain poem came to mind. “Speak” is a poem written by Pakistani artist and curator Salima Hashmi’s father, Faiz Ahmed Faiz. According to RadioOpenSource.com, Faiz Ahmed Faiz² was known as Pakistan’s greatest poet and his legacy continued after he died. He wrote this poem, which was translated from Urdu into English by writer Azfar Hussain:

“Speak” by Faiz Ahmed Faiz:

*Speak, your lips are free.
Speak, it is your own tongue.
Speak, it is your own body.
Speak, your life is still yours.*

*See how in the blacksmith’s shop
The flame burns wild, the iron glows red;
The locks open their jaws,
And every chain begins to break.*

*Speak, this brief hour is long enough
Before the death of body and tongue:
Speak, ‘cause the truth is not dead yet,
Speak, speak, whatever you must speak.*

² Lydon, Christopher. “Radio Open Source – Arts, Ideas, and Politics – Another Pakistan.” 07 Sept. 2011. Web. 01 April 2013. <<http://www.radioopensource.org/salima-hashmi-in-the-worst-of-times-the-alchemy-of-art/>>

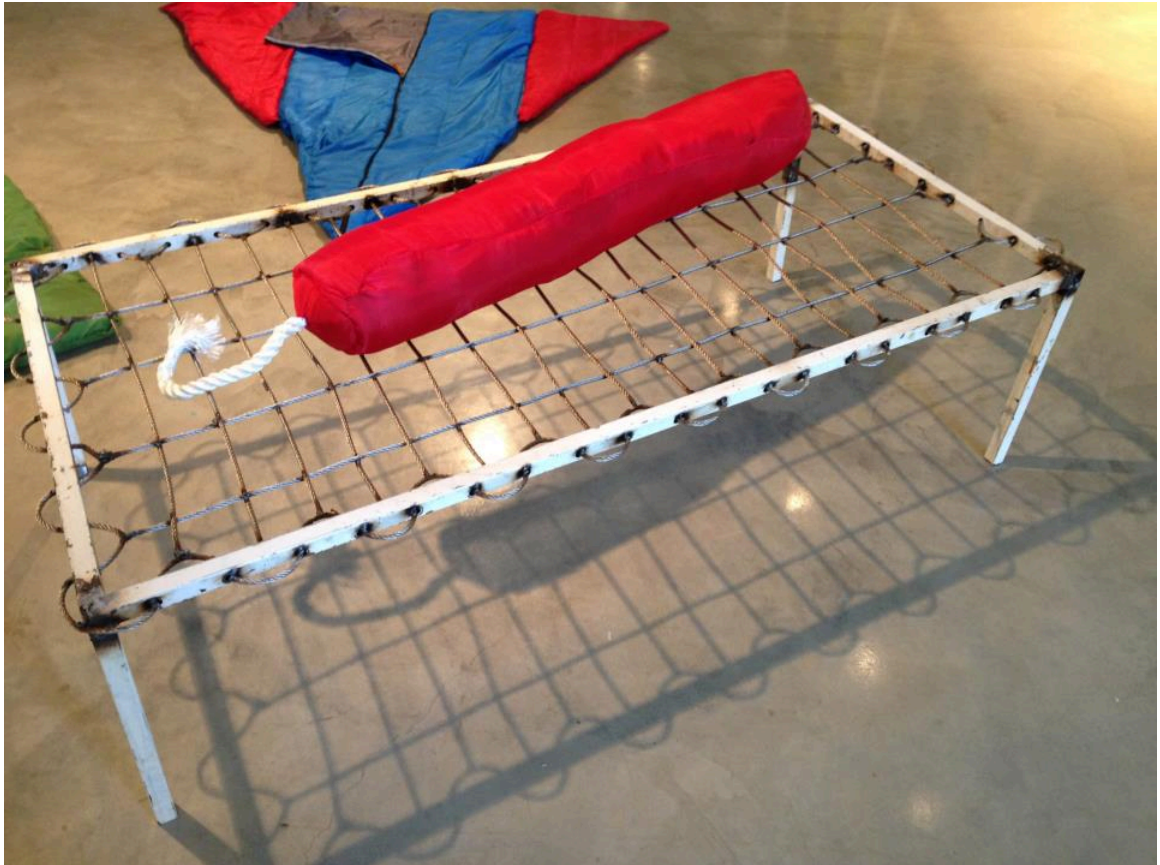


Figure 41 *Steel Town Charpai*, steel and wire rope

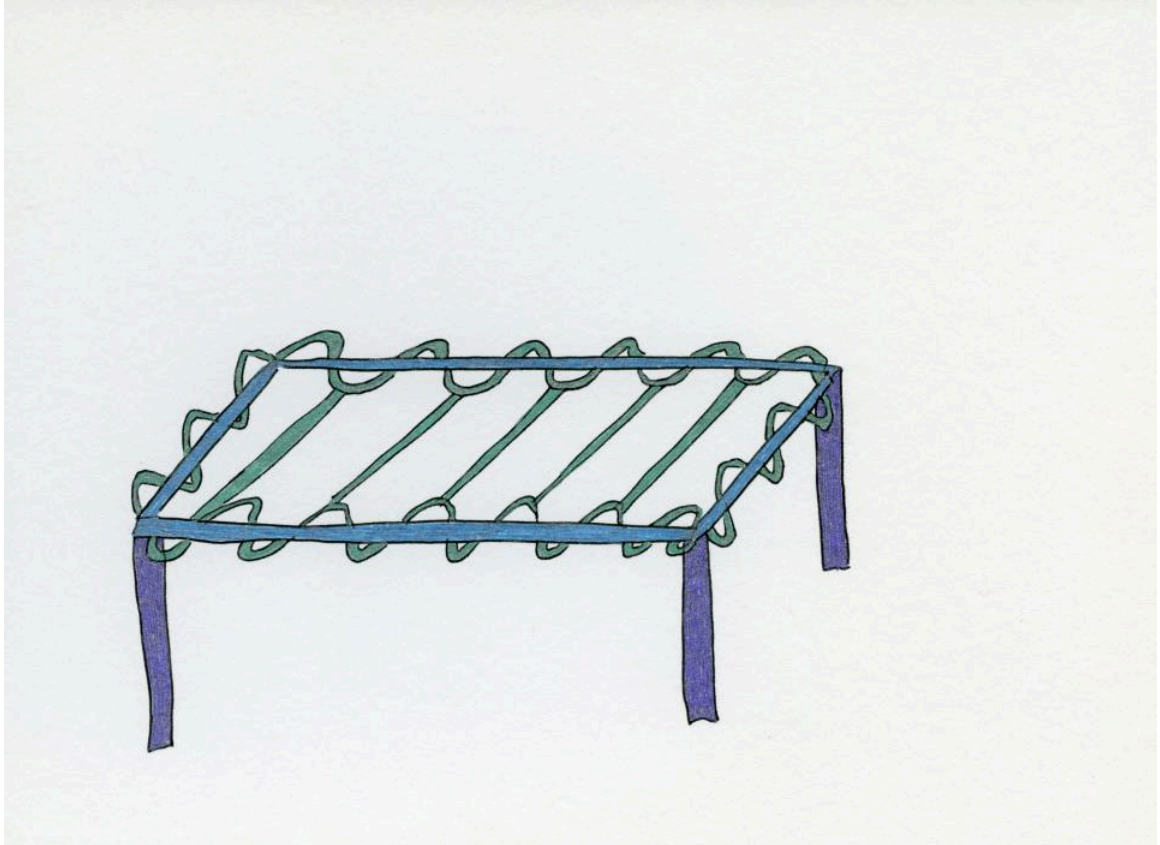


Figure 42 *Charpai Drawing*, metallic ink on paper

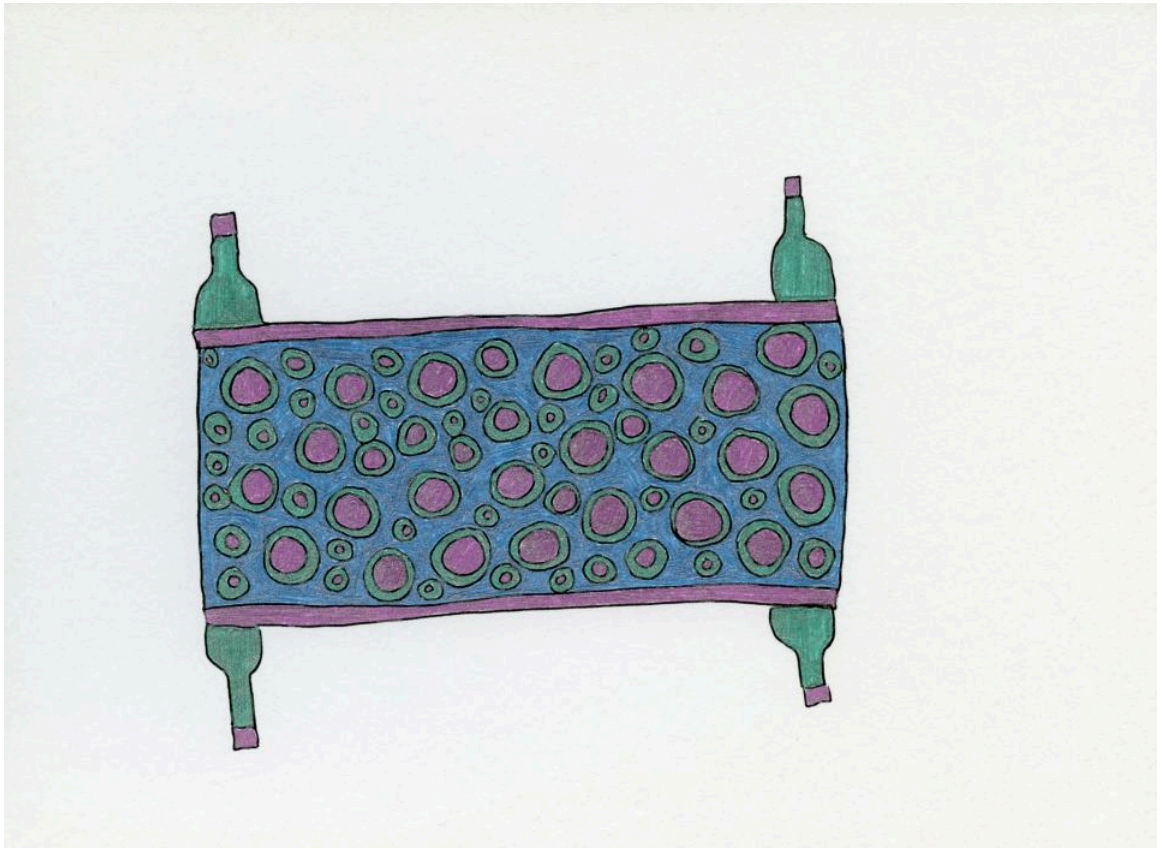


Figure 43 *Charpai Dreams*, metallic ink on paper

Nomad

This arrangement of stacked items represents how much I travel back and forth from location to location (see Figure 44). I work full-time and most of the objects in this exhibition have been created during the night hours and through the morning while the world is asleep. I used one of my blue shopping cart chairs to hold two functional swings as well as the garden hose and spray paint I needed for future projects.

I often see myself as a nomad using shopping carts to hold all of my worldly belongings for quick transportation. I look for and I collect items from the hardware store that resemble seating, such as these coiled layers of garden hose, which will make great seats for stools because the compacted spiral can easily support human weight. The spray paint cans are the colors I have used for my other chair pieces. My method is to use one solid color in an effort to make the chairs look like they were dipped in paint and produced from a factory's production line.



Figure 44 *Nomad*, shopping cart chair and swings, garden hose, and paint cans

Honeycomb and Hive Mind

Outside of the gallery, I decided to use the white pedestals already sitting outside of the space as a way to greet the visitors who were walking up to view my thesis exhibition. I decided to place two of my drilled lamp forms on the pedestals in an effort to highlight their formal compositions. These two polyurethane garden planters are originally intended to be objects or vessels that can be filled with dirt and to grow plants in. Throughout my studies, repurposing dome-shaped objects into functional lamps was a constant activity for me. It was only fitting to drill out circles into the surface material and to assign these hollow forms to sit outside of the gallery.

Based on their particular manufactured style, both *Honeycomb* and *Hive Mind* (see Figures 45 and 46) have linear grooves, ridges, and bends to add to their design as polyurethane garden planters. To me, the formal qualities in the material almost resembled a beehive or a wasp's nest. I placed the orange beehive planter upside down on the shorter pedestal to the left of the gallery's main doors (see Figure 45). On the right side of the doors, I placed the beige planter that resembled a wasp's nest, right side up on the pedestal (see Figure 46). This would be easier for the viewer to understand that these forms are hollow and a majority of the surface material has been subtracted by drilling away circles.

I also chose this arrangement to experiment with the idea of revered work that resembles Grecian vases from a delicate, formal perspective. However, these objects in themselves were originally created to be functional forms to serve as lampshades and because of this, they are durable pieces. Throughout my studies, it has been interesting to work in a studio space when fabricating my own artworks and spending every day with

each piece stacked in the corner. After I completed each project, it changed the dynamic of each piece when they had more space to breathe and exist in a gallery space. Almost immediately, these pieces became “untouchables” and revered forms that were admired from a distance. For me, this created a great dialogue between the viewer and object as they entered the gallery and realized that these forms were assembled to be functional, hanging lamps.



Figure 45 *Honeycomb*, polyurethane garden planter



Figure 46 *Hive Mind*, polyurethane garden planter

Constellation Lamp Field

While drilling out holes in my lamp forms, I realized that of the interior light spills out of the vessel onto the ground, against the wall, or up towards the ceiling. I personally created a mechanism for a light switch piece to carry an outlet to support another item and continue the circuit. I decided to use a series of six polyurethane garden planters (see Figures 47 through 51) and affixed some of them with matching light bulbs and extension cords to present a glowing light from each lampshade.

In one circuit, four lamps are supporting each other, almost like a family (see Figure 47). However, there is one lamp that is the proverbial black sheep and treated like an outcast. The lamp on the outside still faces the others and its open-faced shape resembles a mouthpiece or megaphone but it looks like no one is listening (see Figure 51).

Even though this occurs, it is still vital for the outcast lamp to speak its mind freely for perhaps there are greater, more important tasks to accomplish despite feeling isolated and forgotten. This is what the yellow-orange lamp signifies while hanging from above the lamps on the ground (see Figure 48).



Figure 47 *Constellation Lamp Field*, lampshades, bulbs, and cords



Figure 48 *Constellation Lamp Field*, close-up of yellow lamp from ceiling



Figure 49 *Constellation Lamp Field*, close-up of green lamp



Figure 50 *Constellation Lamp Field*, close-up of orange lamp



Figure 51 *Constellation Lamp Field*, close-up of black lamp

Contemporary South Asian Artists

I am drawn to South Asian artists such as Rashad Rana's mirrored outdoor installations and Talha Rathore's collages of maps, subway routes, and cities. I was fortunate to visit the Aicon Gallery in New York a few times to view their rotating collection of Indian and Pakistani artworks. Adeela Suleman's large, carved metal curtains and helmets created out of found objects and kitchen utensils inspired me. A couple years ago, it was inspiring to see the collective artworks at the Asia Society featuring Hamra Abbas's winged horse and Huma Mulji's taxidermic camel in a suitcase.

I also did some research into different galleries in India and Pakistan and came across more artists with interesting applications and subject matter such as Tazeen Qayyum's lipstick paintings, Sherbano Qizilbash's use of the scarf to cover the body, as well as Nusra Latif Qureshi's resemblance to Kara Walker's cut-out shadow figures. Recently, I learned about the constructed forms from sculptor Huma Bhabha who had her first solo exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art's PS1 location.

Bourgeois, Abramovic, Kruger, and Ukeles

I am drawn to the darkness and spider forms of Louise Bourgeois's work, which is somewhat reflected with the creation of my *Spider Stool* (see Figure 52). I am also intrigued by the performance activities of Marina Abramovic who dedicates herself to the craft. Furthermore, my references to conceptual work and consumerism are reminiscent of Barbara Kruger's text series including *I Shop, Therefore I Am*. My inspiration for the multiple rounds of free hugs came from the individual named Juan Mann who started the Free Hugs Campaign as well as Mierle Laderman Ukeles's social experiment to shake hands with sanitation workers in New York City. Both of these performers influenced my

own interpretations of *Free Hugs* in 2007 and *Free (Burqah) Hugs* in 2012 (see Figures 15 and 16).

Lastly, runway fashion designers, specifically those who design outerwear and dresses, inspire me. These designers often display wearable art forms of free expression that can have outlandish appeal. While lots of planning and sewing goes into the apparel, it relies on concepts of commodity and sustaining an elite status. This ultimately led to my design of the gloves dress for *She's Got Way Too Many Feelings* (see Figures 34, 35, 36).

Spider Stool

When I discovered and salvaged some old chairs made out of a wrought iron-like material, I became interested in the curvy leg forms. Although I have a phobia with spiders of any size, I found humor with creating a stool with lots of legs like a spider. I realized that creating a form with only six legs invited the viewer to come closer to the piece and called them to action by sitting down on the piece. In doing so, the viewer became an integral part of the piece because their two human legs completed the set with the eight legs of a spider (see Figure 52).

I decided to cut down the metal from these old chairs and weld them back together into a new formal arrangement. The material in itself was difficult to work with because it was hollow but thicker, cylindrical metal that had rusted together. It took several cuts with an orbital jigsaw and pneumatic air grinder to get the pieces cut down to the right size and then to fit them back together.

Previously, I had presented this work on its own where the viewer can sit directly on the metal form, which is still fairly comfortable. For my thesis exhibition, I decided to group more objects together as a form of interactivity and activating other pieces. I placed my *Gloves Cushion* on the *Spider Stool* (see Figure 52) and it enhanced both pieces together as a combined whole work, which was greater than its separate parts.

This seat becomes more activated when paired with a cushion made entirely from cotton gloves hand-sewn together. After filling the gloves with cotton filling, I decide which direction the hands will be sewn together. The idea for the cushion came to me when thinking of how comfortable a seat or chair is for a person and whether an object can also be personified and have a sense of “feelings” of their own or finger-like digits. When placed together, the softness of the black gloves paired with the rigid metal texture of the seat frame balance each other well.



Figure 52 *Spider Stool and Gloves Cushion*, wrought iron and cotton gloves

CHAPTER SIX: CHAIRS AND SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

“To whom does design address itself: to the greatest number, to the specialist of an enlightened matter, to a privileged social class? Design addresses itself to the need.”

-Charles Eames (American chair designer)

My fascination with furniture and chair making began towards the end of my undergraduate studies. I realized how important this type of design was to me personally and wanted to explore more techniques. Prior to using metal derived from shopping carts into my artworks, I began welding with extruded steel fencing and rebar. These two materials were easily accessible at the hardware store and pliable for using different bending and cutting techniques.

However, because of the size of the extruded steel, it was harder to manage its size and not only bend it into 90 degree, perpendicular angles. Over time, I was able to bend the metal pieces into more curvilinear forms but I often had a desire to find a new material that could be salvaged from the trash without having to purchasing it from the hardware store. It was important to remain cost-effective and to challenge myself to find and repurpose materials to promote environmentally friendly efforts.

Shopping Carts and Consumerism

When I mentioned using shopping carts as material in my work, I was most interested in the amount of metal available. The parts of a typical shopping cart contain a

large grid pattern for the basket, which can be converted into seats for chairs or a base for swings, the bottom rack contains larger, cylindrical tubes and there are a set of stationary wheels that go back and forth and a set of rotational wheels that can freely move.

Throughout my studies, I researched the history of shopping carts and discovered that the first iterations of shopping carts began in the late 1930s. According to AmericanProfile.com and IdeaFinder.com, Sylvan Goldman³ and Orla Watson⁴ were the first designers to create prototypes that resemble our shopping cart designs today. It first began in 1937 as a mechanism of a folding chair and a basket that would collapse but the design that caught on today was introduced in 1948. It took years for it to become popular because men had felt this new type of cart was too feminine like pushing a infant's stroller.

Grids and Believer

The first two chairs I created during my graduate studies were *Grids* and *Believer* (see Figures 53 and 54). Both of these chairs were created from shopping carts that were cut down and welded together in different forms. My first chair was experimental because it contained the grid form for the seat, which almost resembled a basket and then I placed two rods of rebar underneath for the legs. I wanted to ensure that these chairs could carry human weight and the basket for *Grids* was bent by hand, using only vice

³ "Sylvan Goldman," *The Great Idea Finder*. 24 Apr. 2007. Web. 01 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.ideafinder.com/history/investors/goldman.htm>>

⁴ "Orla Watson Invented the Grocery Cart with a Basket," *American Profile*. 16 Nov. 2003. Web. 01 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.americanprofile.com/articles/orla-watson-invented-basket/>>

grips and plywood boards to clamp down the solid piece while I bent the material by hand. The seat provides a spring-like back support and the chair features flat armrests.

Believer is a chair that is very special to me. It is the second one I had created in this series (see Figure 54) and I had to name it as an adjective that described my current emotion and one to drive me forward whenever I encountered doubt in my own artmaking abilities. No matter what, just having one ounce of belief is enough to survive through any situation. There were times where I was scared that I did not have the strength to pull through. When I made this chair, this hushed all the negativity in my heart and mind. I am hypercritical of myself but this chair reminds me of the magic of art. I never realized that an art object could evoke an emotional response for me.

These two chairs were covered in orange paint because they were created out of the large shopping carts from Home Depot and I wanted to pay homage to its place of origin. It was interesting to use the grid-like forms of the shopping cart and paint these chairs like they were construction zone cones. My first chair had four points or four legs that touched the ground whereas the second chair only had two rungs that touched the ground, similar to those used for rocking chairs.

Each chair creation is a way to challenge my abilities as a designer and artist. As I went further into my studies, I began to question the role of functionality in furniture and this led me to experiment with non-functional forms such as *Nomad* and *Massage Wheels* (see Figures 44 and 63), which add a sense of humor to my collection of furniture items.



Figure 53 *Grids*, close-up of shopping cart chair



Figure 54 *Believer*, chair made of shopping cart pieces

Centurion and Perplexity

With my chair titled, *Centurion*, I knew it described the dynamic between mobility and taking time to rest and recover. The legs are adorned with a shopping cart's wheels on the back for ease with moving around and rubber stoppers for the front legs to securely stop or park the chair (see Figure 56). This chair memorializes my grandfather's walker, which we outfitted with tennis balls so that he could easily slide his walker without much pressure. However, I understand this can be exerting for the elderly who need to travel around the home but still want to enjoy a place to sit and rest for a moment.

One of my favorite things to do is to weld metal pieces together. I still remember the first day I saw someone welding outside and it drew me in. I was terrified of the sparks and the heavy-duty gear needed to protect my body and eyes but it was amazing. The smell of the burnt metal and smoke reminds me of the industrial areas of Pakistan. When I decided to start using shopping carts in my furniture pieces, I first recognized the metal parts as welding material and then started thinking of consumerism and waste.

I created *Perplexity* almost a year later. This piece had similar characteristics to *Centurion* but its subtleties add to the piece because it does not have any wheels or rubber stoppers like the other chair. I decided to place these two chairs next to each other in the gallery but I chose to have them facing in opposite directions as if they were having an argument (see Figures 55 through 59). All of my shopping carts were either found in abandoned situations far away from their original geographic location or were donated from retailers getting rid of the broken carts. The name *Perplexity* came from my research when I learned that a cart can cost almost a thousand dollars for each store even though these objects become rusted, broken, smashed, and misplaced almost daily.



Figure 55 *Perplexity* and *Centurion*, chairs made from shopping carts



Figure 56 *Centurion*, close-up of shopping cart chair

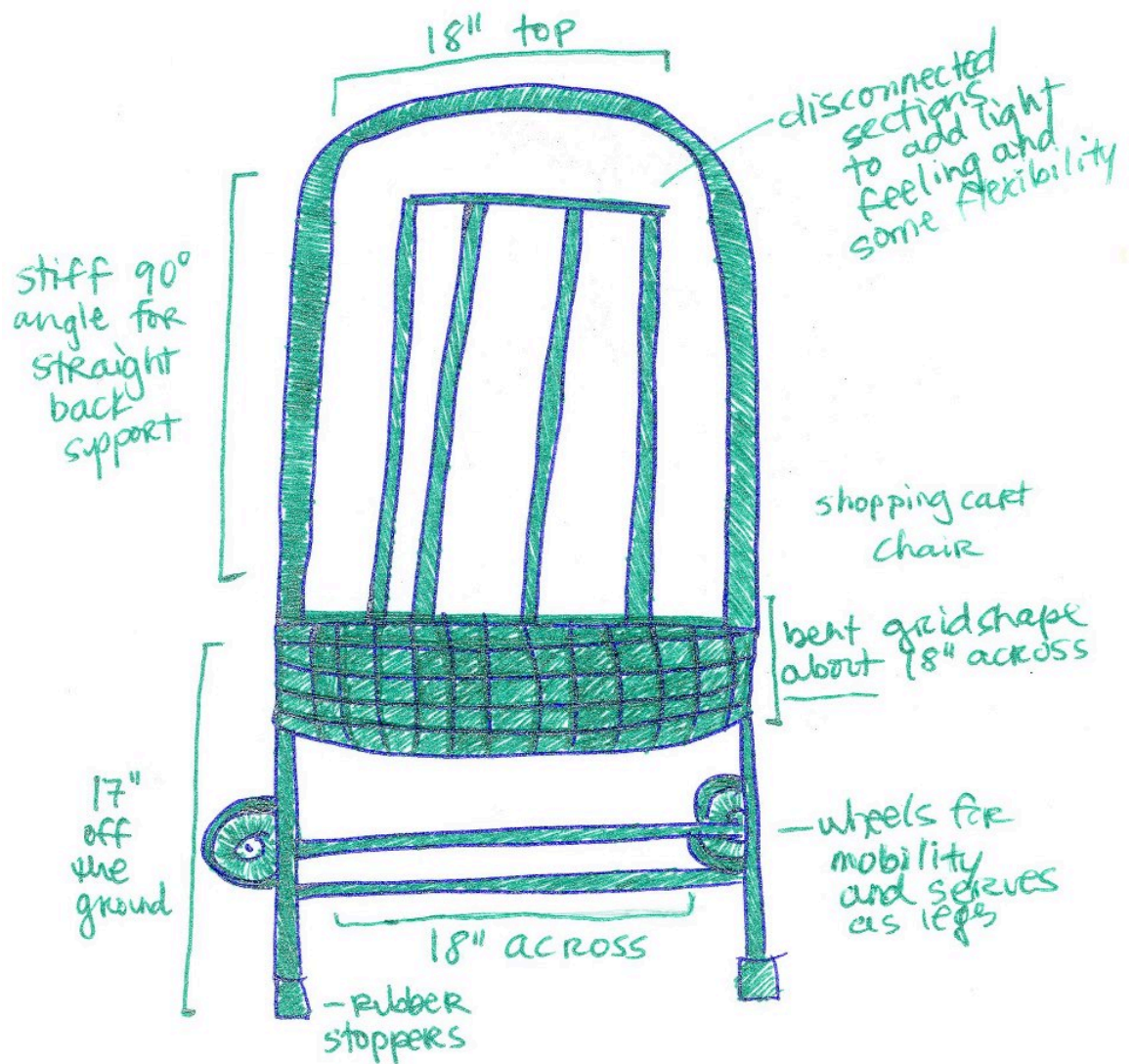


Figure 57 *Centurion Drawing*, metallic ink on paper

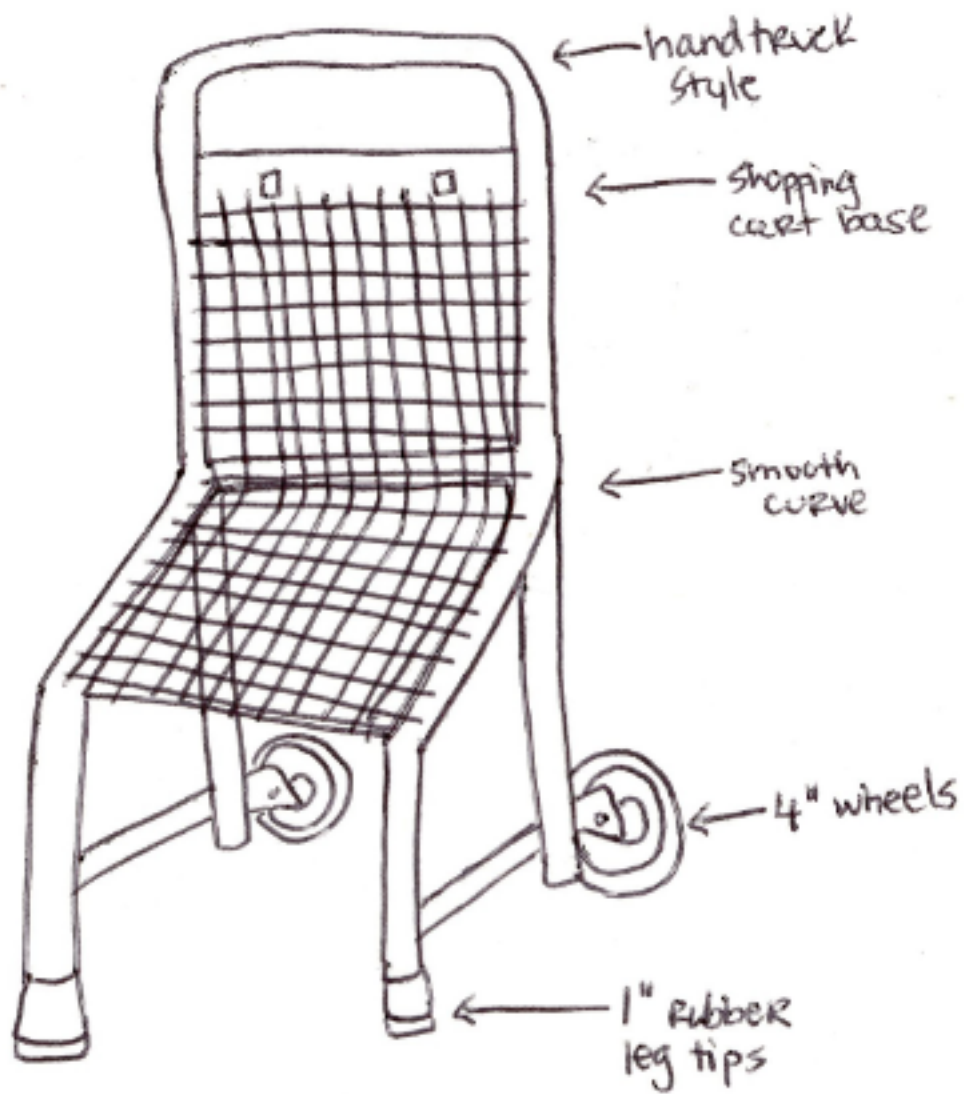


Figure 58 *Centurion Blueprint*, pen and ink on paper



Figure 59 *Perplexity Drawing*, pen and ink on paper

Kal Ho Naa Ho (Urdu for “Tomorrow May Not Be”)

This collection of three chairs created out of shopping cart pieces along with a flower-like stool made from various sizes of metal washers, crowd around a lampshade like they are all together at a campsite (see Figure 60). By placing a lampshade in the center of the cluster of chairs, the lampshade resembled a fire pit where audience members can sit around and share stories. With a simple light bulb fixture at the center of this arrangement, I am surprised by the amount of light and warmth exuded through this pairing.

Bat Wing

I felt I overcame a challenge when I created this work because it shows the heavily technical side of artmaking as it intersects with architectural design (see Figures 24 and 61). The artwork was painted in a light blue because I envisioned it sitting on a hilltop far away. I wanted to blend into the background and the viewer would not be able to distinguish its form or functionality until they approached to it. This piece is made from one solid piece of a shopping cart this is bent upon itself. I bent the entire piece of a shopping cart's basket into itself and clipped off sections to create wings or armrests.

All of the bending and curvature has occurred by using my own hands, a few plywood boards and vice grips, and my body weight. I had clamped the basket down and pushed for a few minutes at a time to bend the shape enough where I could quickly weld it while sitting on top. The hollow space in between makes it seem like this piece cannot support human weight when in fact it can. It is one of the pieces that I most proud of because although it was difficult to make, it was the most rewarding upon completion.



Figure 60 *Kal Ho Naa Ho* (Urdu for "Tomorrow May Never Be"), series of chairs



Figure 61 *Bat Wing*, *Centurion*, and *Grids*, shopping cart chairs

Massage Wheels

The sculptural arrangement for *Massage Wheels* was originally intended to be a fully functional chair with a place to sit and massage a person's back against the two rows of stationary shopping cartwheels, which can roll up and down (see Figures 62 and 63). When I design my chairs, I often seek a perpendicular or 90 degree angle to ease my back pain. I feel more comfortable with a rigid form supporting my body. I added the dusting mop head and bowl with drilled circles to enhance the work's quirkiness as an empty shell with a living organism underneath.

Lotus Flower Stool

I created stool named *Lotus Flower Stool* out of repurposed steel and welded metal washers (see Figure 64). During this time, I was interested in the concept of exploring the strength of one small object. I was curious to see how a small washer, about one-inch in length, could support the weight of a human body that could be about 200 pounds of pressure. This was to signify the power of one individual could be stronger with the help of others. A single twig can easily snap but when it is bundled together with other twigs, the collective becomes stronger.

After thinking about this concept, I went to the steel warehouse to explore their collection of washers and because they typically have customers that deal with larger, industrial projects, the smallest washer I could find was the one-inch size.

I decided to get about 20 of each size that I wanted and brought them back into the sculpture studio. Afterwards, I needed to find a large, bowl-shaped object that I could place the washers on without igniting that object into flames or losing the design I made with the washers resting near each other while I welded.

I was able to arrange the pieces together by size and weld them carefully enough that there was enough material to hold the pieces together but not too much that it would be distracting for the eye. After welding the form, I became interested in grinding off the excess welds and noticed that using a small, pneumatic air grinder was great for removing the previous surface and creating a shiny texture underneath. However, this material would have needed more treatment in order to preserve the shine. When preparing items for the thesis exhibition, I decided to paint over this surface and use colors similar to my other chair series and this caused the piece to resemble a lotus flower made with circles.

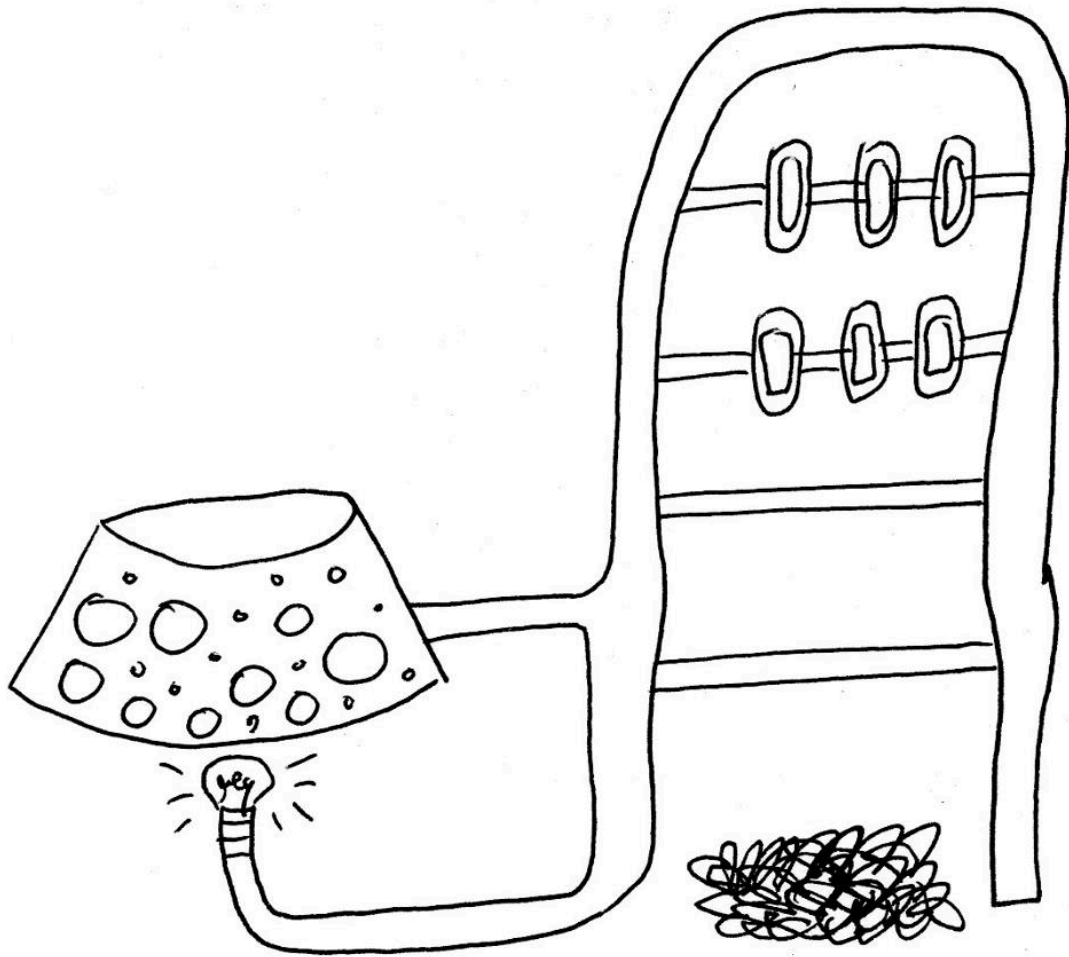


Figure 62 *Massage Wheels Drawing*, pen and ink on paper



Figure 63 *Massage Wheels*, shopping cart frame, salad bowl, and dust mop



Figure 64 *Lotus Flower Stool*, steel and welded washers

Tetanus Booster

Many of furniture pieces are considered finished when dipped in fresh coats of paint. I wondered about the idea of taking clean slabs of metal and creating a simple four-legged square table. I was intrigued to find long pieces of metal that were twisted upon itself, almost like someone had been wringing water out of a cloth. I created this table during a somber time when I felt abandoned and misunderstood (see Figure 65).

I left this metal table outside in the elements without any protective coating and it rained nearly for a month to create this rough, gritty texture on the surface. Upon the layers of rust, I wrote the words that came to mind, "I just want to be loved." A piece of soapstone remains to edit or add more comments to the piece like a chalkboard forum for free expression.



Figure 65 *Tetanus Booster*, rusted steel rods and soapstone

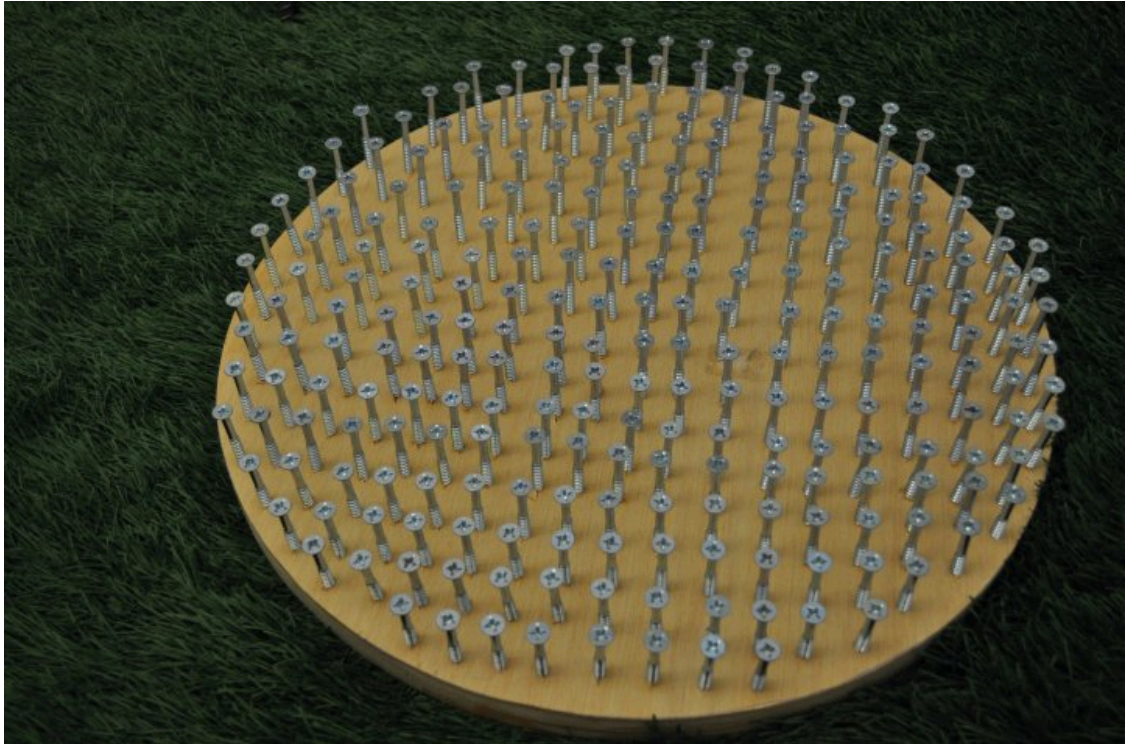


Figure 66 *Screwed*, close-up of wooden boards with over 150 screws

Inner Connotations

At one point during my graduate career, I had even played around with the idea of having only my lamps featured in the show. During that time, I was going through moments of depression and over exhaustion. One of my phobias is dealing with failure and it is difficult for me to not help someone or take on additional responsibilities. This emotion comes from feeling inadequate if I cannot complete something like my peers. I never want to feel like I am falling behind and sometimes this makes me wonder if I am responding to society's preconditioned notions such as the role of a Stepford wife.

With my situation, I was being pulled into multiple directions with a demanding job that required more time and energy than I was paid for, a tough family situation where I was responsible to care for sick loved ones, and because I was overextended, my overall health deteriorated. I could not find the time to properly sleep or eat. I became iron deficient and anemic, which increased my fatigue and caused dizziness, migraines, insomnia, and overall back and leg pain. One Sunday afternoon, I was so disappointed in myself when I could not even lift a shopping cart while working in the studio.

Since I was constantly transporting myself from work to school to work again and possibly home at night, I felt like I was living out of my car and I only went home to shower. Ultimately, this underlying issue came to light when others misunderstood what was going on in my life and thought I was placing external responsibilities above my artmaking priorities. I admit I was overwhelmed at the time and it was a healthy step to withdraw from everyone to reassess what I needed to do to get back on track.

While going through all of this, I felt that a gallery filled with only one of my miniature chair models (see Figures 67 and 68) or a series of lamps was enough. The

lamps and chairs represented my core beliefs in life, love, and resilience. This work was not about pleasing anyone except myself. By then, I had made almost two-dozen lamps and I was hoping to have them cast shadows all over the room. Although it was a radical idea and an idea that I would hope someday will come to fruition, the purpose of my thesis exhibition was to display a variety of techniques and materials to showcase my work over the years. I believed the exhibition required a broader scope and to embrace the challenge of formulating work under a theme such as homemaker.



Figure 67 *Insomnia's Lullaby (Model)*, miniature rocking chair

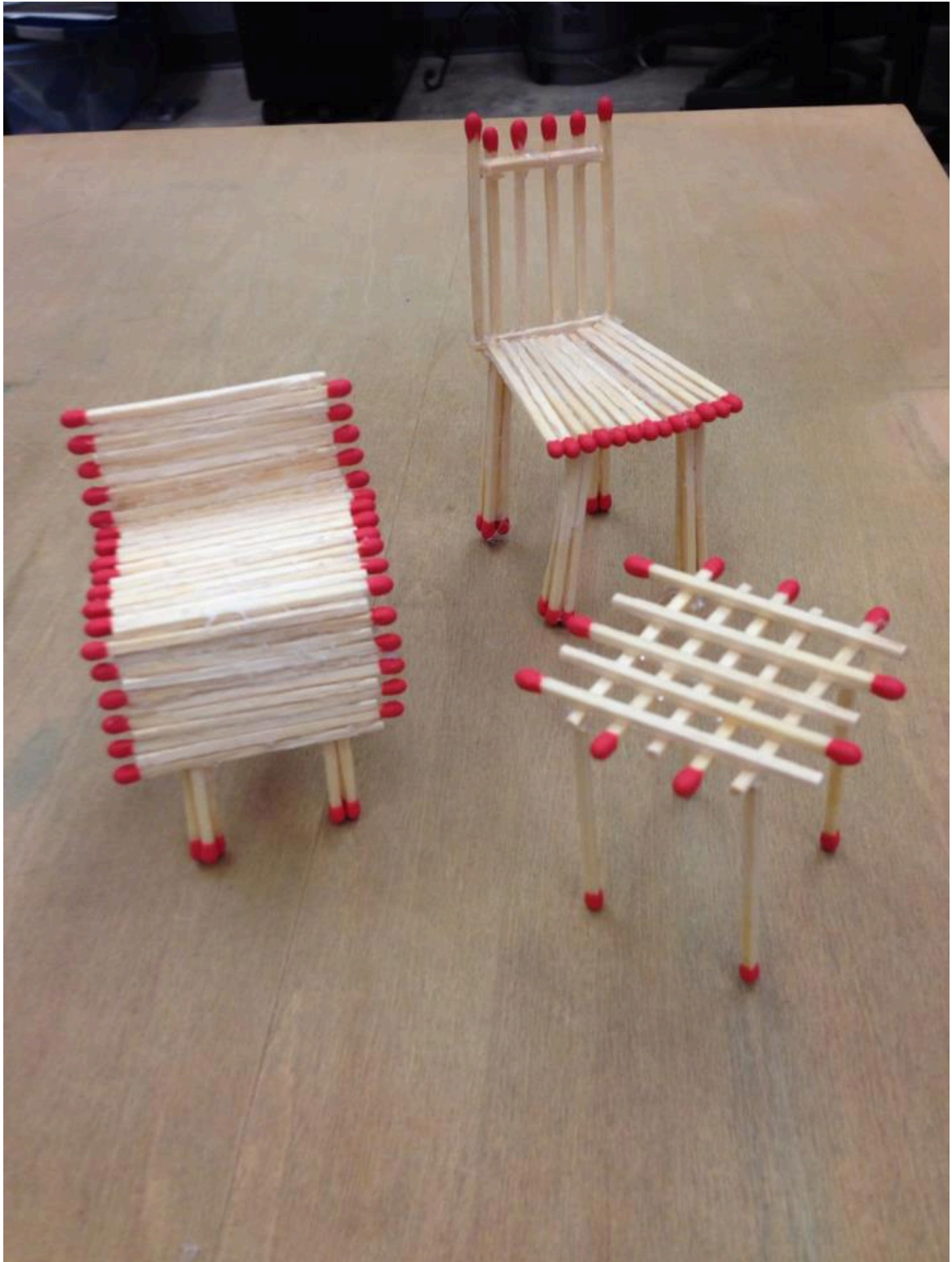


Figure 68 *Matchstick Models*, wooden matchsticks and glue

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOME MAKER

“[It is strange how] women exercising free will and independent decisionmaking are portrayed as an alien species in Pakistani television programs and throughout the media.”

-Salima Hashmi (Pakistani artist and curator)

For my Master of fine arts thesis exhibition, I had envisioned a wide, open gallery space – without any walls or obstructing viewpoints, as I hoped to create the interior space as welcoming as possible for the viewer. This went along with my theme as a homemaker because all the details were critical to expand the concept. I worked to create a warm, inviting atmosphere that a viewer would want to enter the gallery much like a comfortable home environment.

During the reception, I took on the persona as the “hostess with the mostess” to encourage my guests to enjoy and interact with the artworks along while consuming lavish South Asian food and drink and enjoying traditional Punjabi wedding serenades.

Preliminary Thoughts

I always envisioned multiple types of work to highlight different techniques, whether it was hard rigid welding or soft sculptures that were hand-sewn. I wanted to the use of vibrant color and clusters of objects as a means to visually and physically navigate through the gallery space. I felt as though color is an important aspect to South Asian cultural customs, traditions, and history.

Whenever I use colors in my work, I am paying homage to where those objects came from and also to the audience they represent. For example, my shopping cart chairs began with the color orange because they were from the hardware store, Home Depot. As we know, orange is a common color among construction zones so it was a great fit to kick-start a line of fresh, spring-like colors for my works.

I decided to continue with this trend and use lighter colors for the rest of my chair series. Although these colors were pastel-like, I made sure they were covered with high-gloss paint to highlight all the welds on the surface. All but one of my chairs are covered in one solid color. This was to give the effect of my chairs being dipped in paint and then placed on conveyor belts as part of a factory production line. Doing so gave each piece a fresh shiny coat and a personality to match.

Prior to moving items into the gallery, I played with the objects and with grouping them together. I had already decided that I wanted to have two chairs face opposite from each other in an effort to create a dialogue as to personify them as fighting like humans do. I knew while painting *Centurion* and *Perplexity* next to each other that I wanted them to be the two pieces to be facing opposite directions.

When I created the stacked, packed, and ready-to-go *Nomad* piece, I knew it embodied everything about my journey and struggle to balance multiple responsibilities at once. The *Nomad* piece was completed when I unpacked my car and stacked items together outside of the art building. It was necessary for the viewer to see something behind-the-scenes about my work and how I live with moving these heavy objects around from place to place.

Installation

I tried my utmost to present a professional look to the gallery to ensure the eye was properly guided throughout the space. The first piece I moved into the gallery around 10 p.m. on Friday night was the dress made out of hand-sewn gloves known as *She's Got Way Too Many Feelings*. This piece was kept secret up through the gallery's opening because I felt that leaving some works as a surprise added to their appeal. My method has been to keep some of my projects hidden away in trash bags and wait for the reveal time at critique because then I believe the work can truly get fresh eyes and opinions on it.

The next pieces to enter the gallery were my freshly painted furniture and chairs. I took extra caution to ensure these were fully dried outside for a few days in the sculpture yard and then moved them separately on a trolley cart with bubble wrap and trash bags to protect the chairs and stools from scuffing any of the paint off the surface. I quickly moved over one dozen metal pieces from the ground floor up to the first floor's gallery room.

Next, I installed the more delicate items such as my sleeping bags, which were all still contained in trash bags until they were opened on Saturday morning. I kept everything protected in case I had to do some more painting or drill anything on the walls. Having worked in my studio spaces over the years, I realized that some artworks can easily collect dust or attract lint from the floors. I brought an iron to use on the sleeping bags to remove their wrinkles as well as for the flag to be hung on the wall.

On Saturday morning, we moved in the large photographs still wrapped in brown paper. These were hung rather quickly due to their lightweight material and with tremendous help from the other graduate students. I knew the first official item to be

installed in this exhibition would be the photographs because then I could determine the placement of the other objects. Using a gallery space that is 72 feet wide and 32 feet wide is daunting but also very stimulating. There is more real estate to use but it must be executed well or else the overall vibe of the show will not be successful.

Making Edits

The first decision in the gallery I made was to remove the artificial wall covering the gallery's corner window. It was important for me to view the outside world from inside the gallery and again, to work with the breathing space of the gallery. Once we dismantled the wall, we also removed the large, black paper covering the windows and this allowed the natural sunlight to pour into the gallery.

Otherwise, it was important for me to spend time alone in the gallery to collect my thoughts. I made sure to bring items in and out and to shut the main gallery doors to focus on everything on my own. Personally, I enjoy bringing in a lot of content and then cherry-pick and edit what works will stay in the gallery. I moved objects numerous times throughout the gallery to figure out how they interacted and encroached onto other pieces. I remained open and flexible towards the experience and took numerous risks with how I presented objects such as lamps dangling from their extension cords on the floor or a simple shelf filled with two mannequin heads to create an ominous, eerie feeling for an entire wall space.

Lighting and Display

One item of concern was the lighting because during the weekend of my installation, we learned the integrated lighting system had burned out. Thus, not allowing

us to light my artworks with gallery spotlights from above. I was able to situate each piece and cluster based on the fluorescent house lights and in the dark with only my lamps glowing. Luckily, on Monday morning, which was when the gallery would officially be open to the public, we were able to replace the system's computer and get the spotlights to work again.

However, it was a great learning experience to understand how the lighting system in the gallery works and to remain prepared for any situation. Any artist should test out the system and try to get it fixed as soon as possible. If necessary, I was prepared to open the gallery doors with the lights completely off and only have my lamps glowing – I guess this is a positive situation for someone who creates lamps.

Show Walkthrough

Approximately 45 separate pieces were placed in the exhibition, which I understand to be a lot of content at once. However, I realized that it was effective and efficient to place the objects into clusters or self-curated zones. I did not want the gallery to feel chaotic or haphazard but I knew I wanted my chairs and I wanted these to have a central prominence in the room.

Upon walking towards the gallery, the viewer is greeted by two lampshades made from polyurethane garden planters on each side of the main doors. These are the only objects I decided to place on white pedestals to provide a commentary that these lampshades could almost resemble revered, delicate Grecian vases. To the left of the gallery, there is a large window about 20 feet long and I used the space to contain a few

furniture forms, including *Tetanus Booster*, *Massage Wheels*, *Screwed*, and *Grids* (see Figures 53, 63, 65, and 66).

Otherwise for my exhibition, it was important for me to not use pedestals or photograph frames inside the gallery because I wanted the work to remain accessible to the audience. Over the years, I have come to believe that art placed on pedestals or items contained within frames can create an invisible barrier to protect the work and this also affects the accessibility of the viewer to that object.

When entering the gallery space, the viewer is greeted by the *Khush Aam Deed* installation above their head and to their left, they are able to walk over to the wall and read my artist statement (see Figure 69), which was printed on a large sheet of paper to resemble a doctrine or scrolled contract. Underneath, I placed seven bundles of embroidery yarn (see Figure 70) as a quiet reminder of the repetitive dedication required for the bicycle rickshaw piece.

To the immediate right of the artist's statement, there is a large cluster of approximately 40 small drawings on Bristol and mixed media paper. The viewer will notice one drawing is singled out from the others and this is the *Shaadi ki Doli* image. Although I have found drawing to be a strenuous process from time to time, this image resonated with me for its style, and after the colors were filled in, I knew it would become my brand identity for the exhibition.

The navigation through the gallery continues from left to right but the viewer's eyes are drawn to the wooden table affixed with a knitted, working lampshade and a large portfolio to thumb through images as part of the *Free (Burqah) Hugs* work. Afterwards,

there is one ominous piece on the wall that draws the viewer in, which is *I See America and America Sees Me*. On the main wall opposite from the entrance, there are a series of seven large photographs as part of *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani* with dimensions of 3.5-feet high and 6-feet across that encapsulate the entire gallery. The dark green and white of the flag images are emphasized as the large photographs are almost floating on the white gallery wall without any frames or obstructions for the viewer.

Furthermore, there are about three zones where works are situated, including the *Constellation Lamp Field*, which visually draws anyone to come closer to get a better look at the lamps lying on the floor and the one orange-yellow lamp hanging above close to the wall. The next zone to its left is entitled, *Sonaay ko Jughayo*, which features two functional sleeping bags pointing towards a firecracker object resting on a woven, metal wire bed known as the *Steel Town Charpai*. The last zone is the collection of chairs and stools circling a lampshade situated to resemble a fire pit called the *Kal Ho Naa Ho* series. This eventually leads the viewer to look at the last area where a pile of assorted rice bag pillows known as *Chaaval ki Bori* are sitting below a red and black lampshade, *Mouthpiece*.

Reception Tunes

For the reception, I decided to include music because I felt it was important to make this event a celebration as opposed to a sad and somber occasion. Throughout my life, most holidays and achievements have been bittersweet. Even during festive moments, I always felt something or someone was missing and over time, this has been a gloomy reminder of real life. As far as music selection, I wanted upbeat tunes but I felt

that traditional Punjabi music was more fitting—the kind with extra loud drum sounds for *bhangra* dancing.

At the artist reception prior to my speech, I felt my heart pounding in my chest from anxiety so I felt the music was very fitting. It was great to see people dancing and having an enjoyable time. Music has always created a calming effect for me and I typically listen to music while creating my artworks and prior to falling asleep at night.

Public Reaction

After an exhausting weekend to install the thesis exhibition, I was pleasantly surprised by the reaction I received from the students and faculty. I made sure to broadcast my work to different media outlets and advertise anywhere on and around campus to get as many visitors to the gallery as possible.

It is not commonplace to find Pakistani artists, and based on conversations I had with students and the community, this was one of the main reasons they decided to visit the School of Art Gallery. They had heard about my thesis exhibition and were interested to see my artworks from the perspective of a Pakistani-American artist. Throughout the week, I came to the gallery to document the work with photographs and to replenish postcards and business cards at the main podium.

I was surprised when people recognized me when I walked into the gallery space. Some of visitors addressed me as the “shopping cart girl” or the “burqah hugs girl,” which was rewarding. To me it was an interesting concept to be recognized or associated with my work because I am accustomed to creating the work and walking away. I was

fortunate to meet and hear feedback from gallery viewers and watch them interact with the pieces in the gallery.

I understand that over 100 people attended the artist's reception and I am in awe as to how many people visited throughout the week. I am humbled by the experience of sharing my work with the world, and I am still processing the positive feedback I received. For me, I know I have expanded my intellectual growth as an artist because I was creating these works for myself to reflect upon and cope with life's twists and turns. To see that my midnight musings garnered an emotional response from the viewers is incredible and this motivates me to create more work.

Truthfully, I created these works without considering them to be presented in a gallery space so it was a new challenge to combine all the works together into one room. I have been inspired by this opportunity to exhibit my work, and I look forward to making more work. The comments I received from the students, faculty, and community have solidified my desire to pursue artmaking and to serve as an educator for others. For this, I am truly grateful.

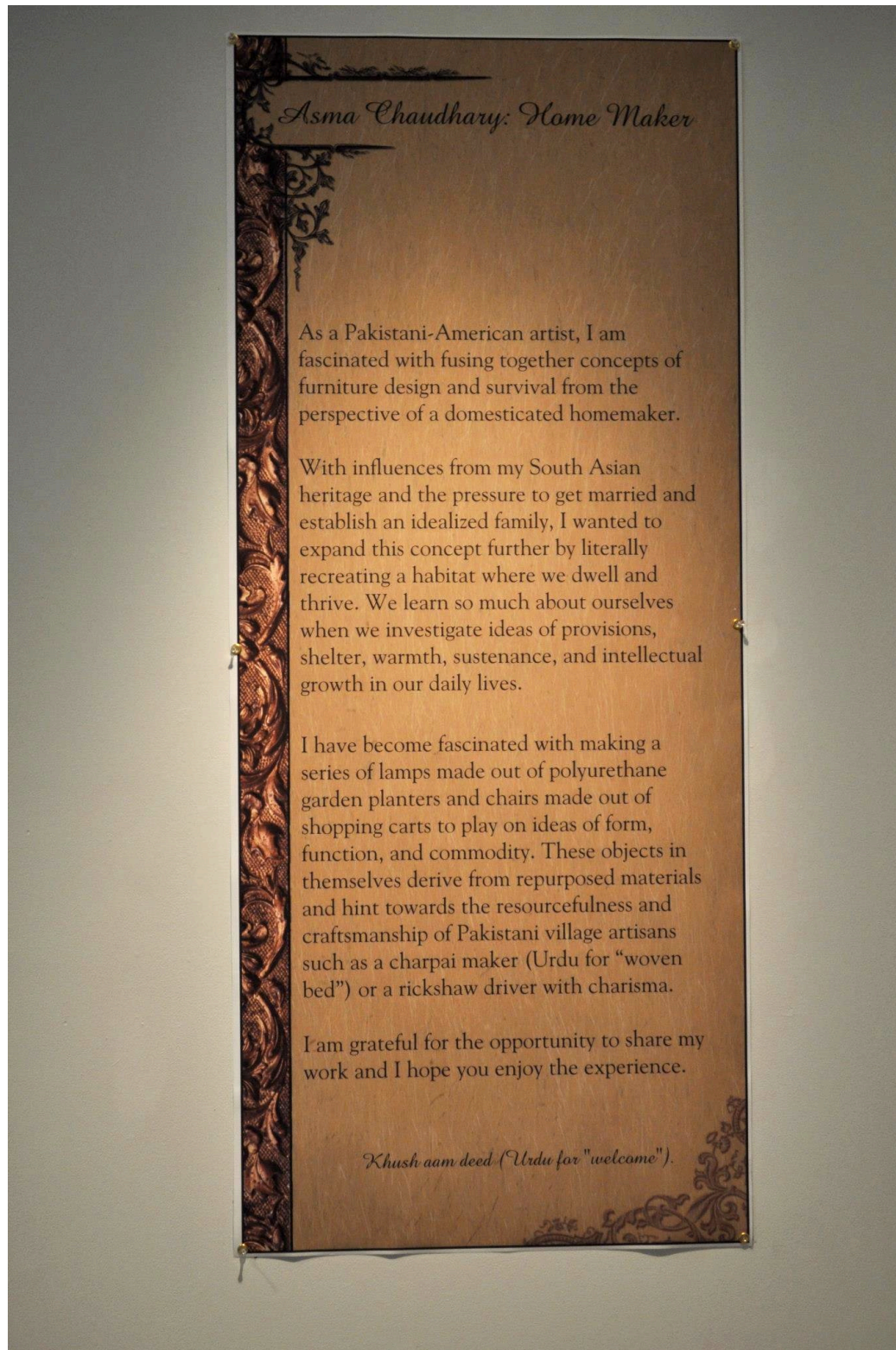


Figure 69 *Welcome*, artist statement for Home Maker thesis exhibition



Figure 70 *Bundles*, embroidery yarn placed underneath artist's statement

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BIOGRAPHY

Asma Chaudhary is a Pakistani-American artist who received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Graphic Information Design and Electronic Journalism from George Mason University in 2008. For the past five years, she has been employed as a graphic designer and policy research analyst in the Washington, D.C. area. She will be completing her Master of Fine Arts in Art and Visual Technology from George Mason University in 2013 with an emphasis in mixed media sculpture and critical studio art practices.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Exhibitions and Performance Artworks:

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 2013 | <i>Home Maker</i> , MFA Thesis Exhibition, Fairfax, VA
<i>Exchanged 2</i> , artWORKS Gallery, Harrisonburg, VA
<i>The Great Divide's Bicycle Rickshaw Adventures</i> , Washington, D.C. |
| 2012 | <i>Free (Burqah) Hugs</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2011 | <i>Juncture Show</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Phir Bhi Dil Hai Pakistani</i> , Falls Church, VA
<i>Sketchy 13: Collaborative Screenprints</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2010 | <i>Chair Expo</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Current Works</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2009 | <i>Graduate Design Show</i> , Gallery 123, Fairfax, VA |
| 2008 | <i>Design du Jour</i> , BFA Thesis Exhibition, Mason Hall Atrium, Fairfax, VA
<i>The S. Carbonneau Beaver Case Show</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Exchanged</i> , artWORKS Gallery, Harrisonburg, VA |
| 2007 | <i>The Sustainability Project</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>The Free Hugs Campaign</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Arts, by George!</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Container and Contained</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Honors Seminar: Recent Work</i> , Gallery 123, Fairfax, VA
<i>Hanging Gates</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Time Constraints</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2006 | <i>Escape</i> , Fairfax, VA |

Volunteer Work:

- | | |
|------------------|--|
| 2012-2013 | <i>Artifex: Graduate Student Organization</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2010-2012 | <i>Teaching Assistant</i> , Sculpture and Studio Foundations, Fairfax, VA |
| 2012 | <i>School of Art Advisory Council</i> , Fairfax, VA
<i>Arts, by George!</i> , Artwork Sales and Gallery Docent, Fairfax, VA
<i>Assisted local artists with project completion</i> , Washington, D.C. |
| 2011-2013 | <i>ITFDC Board of Directors</i> , Fairfax, VA |
| 2008 | <i>Green Festival</i> , Washington, D.C. |
| 2007 | <i>Always Becoming</i> , permanent outdoor installation in front of Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. |
| 2006-2009 | <i>Assisted with installation and demolition of various artists' shows</i> |