

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: Embrace the Wave

Hosna Shahramipoor
Master of Fine Art, 2023

Dissertation Directed by: Professor Justin Strom
The Fine Arts Department

Everything in the universe is made up of waves. "Embrace the Wave" is a journey of self-discovery, in which our own inner waves can resonate with and influence the world around us, dissipate, magnify, and transform.

Embrace the Wave

by

Hosna Shahramipoor

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park, in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2023

Advisory Committee:

Professor Justin Strom, Chair
Professor Shannon Leah Collis, Co-Advisor
Professor Brandon Morse, Co-Advisor

© Copyright by
Hosna Shahramipoor
2023

Dedication

For Maman, Wave and Ali, my inspirations!

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisors professors Justin Strom, Shannon Collis and Brandon Morse for their invaluable guidance and support throughout my thesis in the Master of Art program. Their insightful comments, constructive feedback, and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping and bringing it to creation of my artwork. I am grateful for their expertise, patience, and dedication to my success.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt thanks to my dear friends Asal and Saeid for their assistance in setting up my work at the Gallery of Art. Their tireless efforts and unwavering support have been critical in making the exhibition a success. I am grateful for their time, enthusiasm, and willingness to help me achieve my goals.

I feel incredibly fortunate to have had such amazing people in my life during this challenging journey, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart for their unwavering support and encouragement.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| Dedication | ii |
| Acknowledgements | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| List of Figures | v |
| Chapter 1: Introduction | 1 |
| 1.1 Studio Practices | 4 |
| Chapter 2: 40 weeks of Pregnancy | 7 |
| 2.1 Candle-Clock | 7 |
| 2.2 Week 36 | 9 |
| 2.3 Week 37 | 9 |
| 2.4 Counting down | 11 |
| 2.5 Contractions | 14 |
| Chapter 3: After birth | 17 |
| 3.1 Eyes cannot see you. You are the source of light [4] | 18 |
| 3.2 Life is not like before | 18 |
| Bibliography | 21 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|-----|---|----|
| 1.1 | Childhood photograph | 2 |
| 1.2 | The Lonely House on Adachi Moor in Northern Japan | 3 |
| 1.3 | The ice cube sculpture | 5 |
| 1.4 | I Am Not White | 6 |
| 2.1 | Candle-Clock | 8 |
| 2.2 | Wave Envelope | 10 |
| 2.3 | The world has not stopped | 12 |
| 2.4 | Manifestation of Wave Crest | 13 |
| 2.5 | Slowly Drifting, Wave After Wave: Video art installation | 15 |
| 2.6 | Feeling Her, Embracing the Wave | 16 |
| 3.1 | "Eyes cannot see you. You are the source of light" (Rumi) | 19 |
| 3.2 | Wrinkly belly | 20 |

Chapter 1: Introduction

Pregnancy proved to be the most challenging experience of my life, as it brought about a host of conflicting emotions - fear, anxiety, joy, and happiness. To help cope with these emotions, I turned to art and found that it served as a form of therapy for me. Through creating art about my pregnancy, I was able to explore my feelings and come to terms with the reasons behind my worries about having a baby.

Growing up, I experienced a traumatic event when my mother suffered a stroke at a young age. This left her disabled and caused me to carry a great deal of stress and worry throughout my childhood. As a result, when the time came for me to have my own baby, I was plagued by conflicting feelings of wanting a child but also being apprehensive about their future and how I would be able to support them.

Despite my worries, I knew that I wanted to have a baby and ultimately chose to live in the present and enjoy the experience. While I still carry some concern about the future, I have found that creating art has been a helpful outlet for me to explore my emotions and come to terms with my fears. By embracing the creative process, I have been able to find a sense of peace and clarity about my decision to have a child.

My thesis is a combination of video art installation, sculpture, and manipulated photographs, with the hope to engage viewers on many levels to the topic. In the video art, I intended to cap-



Figure 1.1: In my mom's hands. Kermanshah, Iran 1987. Photo taken by my dad.



Figure 1.2: The Lonely House on Adachi Moor in Northern Japan, Yoshitoshi, 1885.

[1]

ture the lived experience of pregnancy, while my sculpture reflects the physical changes that occur during this time. Manipulated photographs, on the other hand, subvert traditional notions of beauty and perfection, and to challenge the cultural narratives that surround pregnancy and motherhood.

1.1 Studio Practices

For the first few years after my mother passed away, I found it difficult to talk about her. However, with the passage of time, things became smoother, though the more thought of her still evokes deep emotions. The experience of moving to a new country and starting school again added to the pressure I felt. Being alone, without family and friends, intensified my reflections on my mother and the past. During my first year as a student, I began to create a series of works inspired by my mother. Titled AFTER HER, this series was based on my memories, emotions, and the connection between my mother and me. Unfortunately, I do not have many photos of her, as she did not like to be photographed due to her illness. This made the process of creating art as a photographer challenging, but I persisted to create from her belongings, and materialize my imaginations (i.e. the ice cube sculpture as shown in Fig. [1.3](#)).

As I worked on my thesis, I discovered similarities between my mother and my son, especially in the eyes and eyebrows. This realization opened up a new window in my artistic work. Instead of relying solely on photographs, I began experimenting with different materials and techniques, which added a new dimension of interest to my art.

As an immigrant, I had to start from scratch when I moved to a new country. This transition prompted me to reflect more deeply on my identity - my roots, my skin color, my gender - and



Figure 1.3: The Ice Cube Sculpture, Hosna Shahramipoor, from the series *"After Her"*, 2021.

the hardships and difficulties I left behind, as well as the new challenges I faced in my new home. Living in America has been a blessing, but I know that I will always be seen as an immigrant in this country. One of my self-portraits, titled "I AM NOT WHITE," explores these themes (Fig. 1.4). I used needles as a tool to better understand the concept of photography and to create a striking visual representation of the pain and struggles that come with being a non-white immigrant.



Figure 1.4: *I Am Not White*, 2 Dimensional, from the series "*Distinct Chatter*", Digital print on archival paper with physical manipulation, [28" × 22"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022.

Chapter 2: 40 weeks of Pregnancy

2.1 Candle-Clock

As an artist, I chose to incorporate the concept of time and the instability of pregnancy into my work. The candle-clock, with its historical significance as a time indicator [2], serves as a metaphor for the passage of time during pregnancy. By placing 40 needles in the candle, I represent the 40 weeks of pregnancy, highlighting the significance of this journey and the transformation of the body.

In addition to the candle-clock, I also modeled my feet standing on a ball, representing the unstable condition of pregnancy. This serves as a visual representation of the need to maintain balance during pregnancy as the center of gravity shifts on a daily basis (Fig. 2.1).

As an expecting mother, my thoughts are consumed by the baby growing inside me, and my sense of identity has been reduced to my physical appearance. Through my art, I hope to reclaim my sense of self and communicate the complexity of emotions and experiences that come with pregnancy and motherhood (Fig. 2.2).

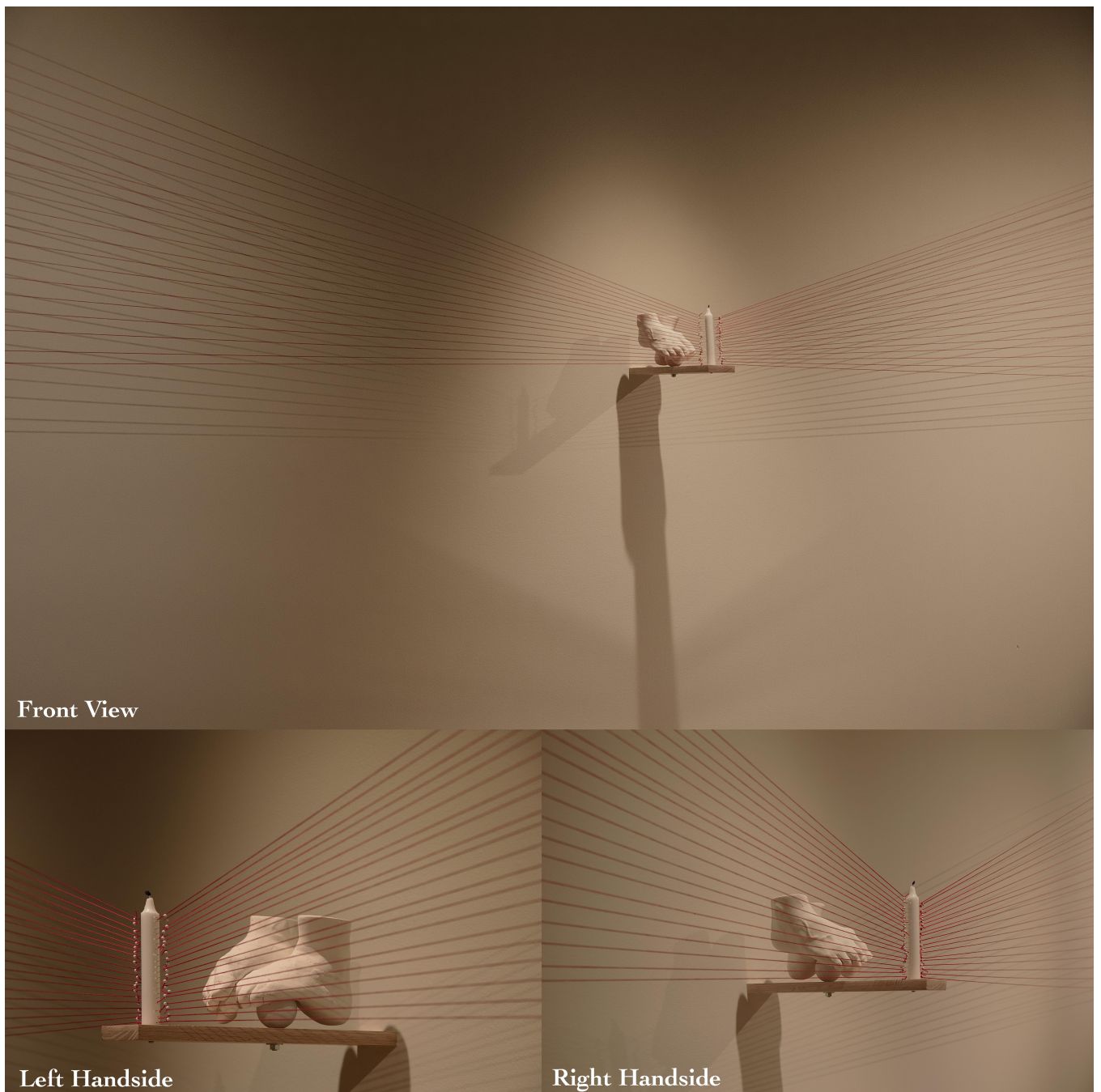


Figure 2.1: *Candle-Clock*, 3 Dimensional, Installation (plaster, thread, needles), [384" × 70" × 17"], 2022-2023, Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022-2023.

2.2 Week 36

My upcoming labor also brings to mind memories of my own mother, who sacrificed so much for her children. I am filled with both admiration and anxiety, as I strive to be a good mother like her. The fear of not loving my son or loving him too much like my mother creates a sense of uncertainty that I hope to explore through my work.

2.3 Week 37

Today, I am 37 weeks pregnant and feeling weighed down both physically and emotionally. Lately, there have been inspiring protests in Iran led by brave women fighting against dictatorship. Although I don't agree with the idea of cutting hair as a form of protest, I understand that Iranian women taking off their hijabs is a powerful statement of opposition to the oppressive regime, and they may face serious consequences for doing so.

Many artists are using their talents to shed light on the situation in Iran, but I feel guilty that I am not doing more to help, as an Iranian woman myself. Creating art solely for my own satisfaction feels immoral in the face of my people's struggles.

The piece, shown in Fig. 2.3, is related to the topic and a reminder of the times I was arrested by the morality police in Iran. Non-Iranians may not comprehend the absurdity of some of the rules we live under, but they are very real and enforced. Unfortunately, the protests are beginning to fade, and the people of Iran are suffering from a recession. I am worried about my family and friends, including one who had to become a peddler after losing his job as a writer and editor due to the economic collapse.

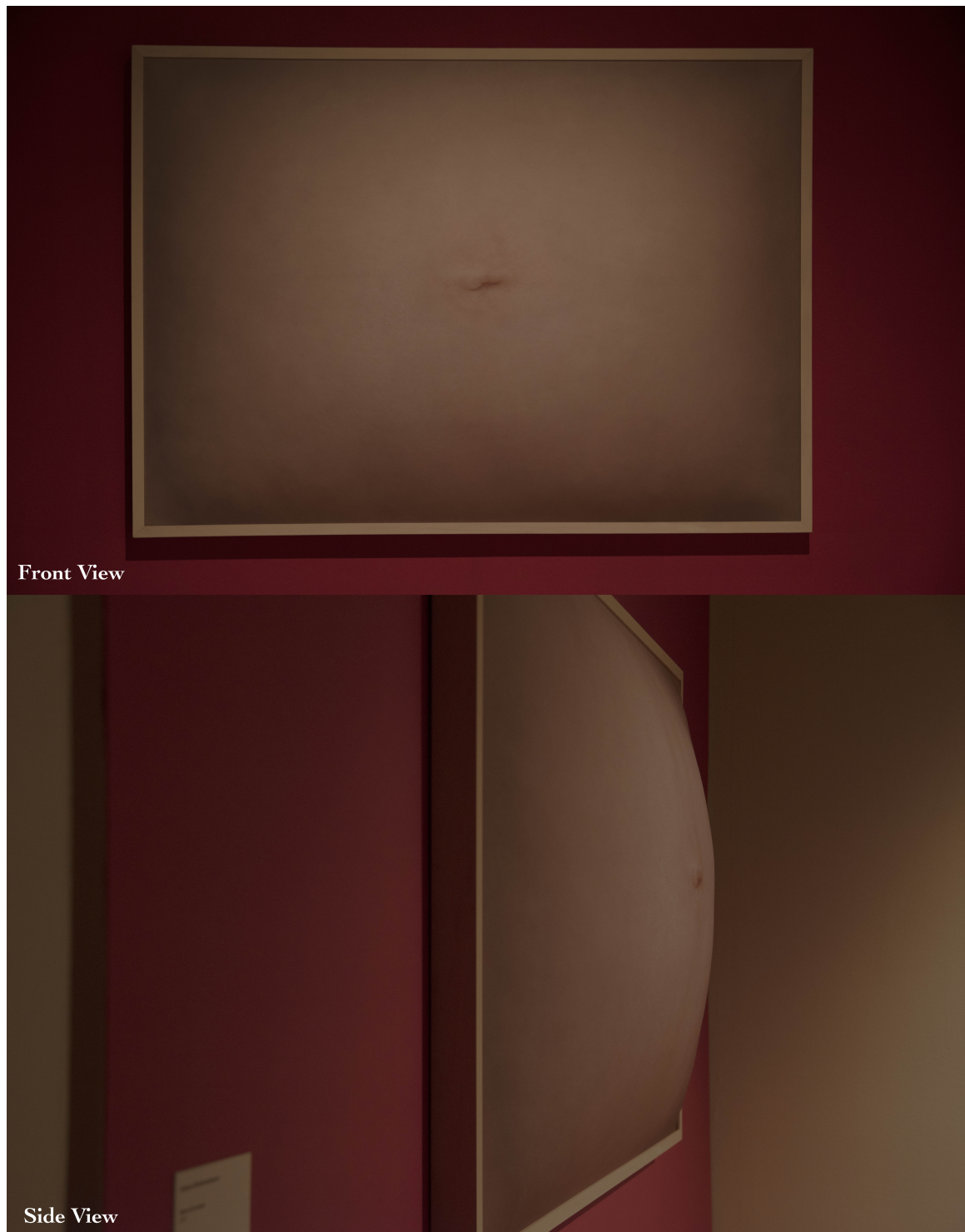


Figure 2.2: *Wave Envelope*, Digital print on fabric, 3 Dimensional, Digital print on Fabric, [48" × 34" × 7"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022.

Being pregnant and hearing news from Iran puts extra pressure on me. I want to protect my unborn child from the negativity, but I know that this is impossible. It's unfair that my friends tell me how lucky my child is to not be born in Iran. Life is not fair, and justice feels like a myth, at least in the Middle East.

My baby boy, you will be born in America, but your roots are in the Middle East. I want to tell you about your heritage and help you understand the struggles of your people.

2.4 Counting down

Only four days left until my baby's arrival, and I've almost finished preparing his room. This marks the end of my pregnancy journey and the start of a new chapter in my life. I'm not sure how I will feel in the coming days, but I hope everything goes smoothly. This is my choice to have a baby. Pregnancy is a miracle and an unforgettable memory in many good ways. However, it comes with lots of restrictions such as backache, cramping, and mental problems. I don't want to speak on behalf of all women. But according to my personal experience, talking about the tough part of pregnancy is not easy and is against the mainstream. I believe we should normalize talking about pregnancy hardships (Fig. 2.4).

The last few months of my pregnancy have been challenging, as I have experienced persistent backaches and limitations on my activities compared to before. However, I have found that rocking helps me feel calm and reduces my pain - a habit I've had for as long as I can remember. In my artwork, I incorporated triangles to symbolize the physical limitations of my pregnancy. Despite the difficulties, I feel empowered during this time because I am involved in the miracle of bringing a new life into the world (Fig. 2.5). To enhance the video, I combined two sounds and



Figure 2.3: *The world has not stopped: in support of Women, Life, Freedom movement*, 2 Dimensional, Digital print on fabric (zip and fabric), [31" × 40"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022.



Figure 2.4: *Manifestation of Wave Crest*, 2 Dimensional, Digital print on canvas, [30" × 39"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022.

added them as background noise. Newborns are known to respond well to white noise, which can stimulate the mother's womb for them. Incorporating this sound was a meaningful and intentional choice for me as I prepare to welcome my child into the world.

2.5 Contractions

As I wait for my baby's arrival, I can't help but wish my mother was here with me. The complexities of pregnancy hormones make me feel a little nervous, but I won't edit these words even after my baby is born.

This moment is both exciting and nerve-wracking. I'm eagerly anticipating the arrival of my little one. In a way, it feels like I'm waiting for a masterpiece to be unveiled, one that I've had a hand in creating.

My dominant feeling these days is that I have lost my personality. People see me and recognize me as a pregnant woman. they just look at my bump, not my face (Fig. [2.6](#)).



Figure 2.5: *Slowly Drifting, Wave After Wave*, 3 Dimensional, Video art installation (Net, sound), [74" × 74" × 100"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2022.



Figure 2.6: *Feeling Her, Embracing the Wave*; Three generations in one scene: The collage of the artist and her late mother's faces on the back wall and baby bump, hidden behind the front wall., 2 Dimensional, Digital print on Canvas [52" × 39"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2023

Chapter 3: After birth

Today, my little Wave is two weeks old, and I am officially a mother. These past two weeks have been challenging for me, as I have never experienced anything quite like this before. I'm constantly tired, but my heart is full of love. The physical pain I feel doesn't matter when I can sit and watch him for hours on end. It's hard not to worry about him every second, but the dream of hearing him call me "Maman" in Farsi is such a joy.

I often talk to my son and tell him that I am his mother, just as my own mother spoke to me. Sometimes, I dream about my mother holding my son, hugging and kissing him. She tells him that his eyes look like mine and plays with him, making him laugh. I find comfort in these dreams, as they help me feel close to my mother even though she's no longer with me.

These days, I've been listening to Kurdish lullabies [3], "Sleep well, my sweet baby, for the night will not remain dark. The morning light will soon rise, and the horizon will be clear and bright, just like the sun". The lyrics remind me of my home country and the city where I grew up, which sadly holds few happy memories. Despite this, the song brings me a sense of peace and reassurance. It's repeated over and over again, as if to reassure everything will be alright.

Although heavy sadness sometimes occupies my mind, being with my baby and dreaming of my mother brings me a sense of pleasure and comfort. I am doing the most ordinary thing in the world - taking care of my son - but it feels like the most extraordinary thing I've ever done.

At this moment, I am at peace with myself.

3.1 Eyes cannot see you. You are the source of light [4]

Today marks forty days since Wave was born. It's hard to believe how quickly time has flown by, especially considering how stressful it has been. I've kept a watchful eye on him every hour of every day, studying his face, his eyes, his lips, even his tiny toes (Fig. 3.1).

Ten years ago on this very day, my mother passed away. I often dream about what it would be like if she were still here with me and how she would react to my precious baby. Sometimes, I imagine her flying over from Iran to lend me a hand with raising him. I can almost picture myself picking her up from the airport, and I can feel the emotion building up inside me as she lays eyes on my baby for the very first time.

3.2 Life is not like before

The first few months were especially stressful, as I adjusted to the demands of round-the-clock care. The constant cycle of feeding him every 2 hours, burping him, changing his diaper, and then putting him to sleep can feel monotonous and never-ending. There are times when I question the purpose and meaning behind this repetition. Life and myself are not like before anymore (Fig. 3.2).

However, as time has passed, I have learned so much and gained valuable experience. Now, my son is three months old, and I cannot imagine my life without him. Despite the difficulties, I have found that my priorities have shifted dramatically since becoming a parent. I love my son more than anything in the world, and I have even come to love him more than myself. His

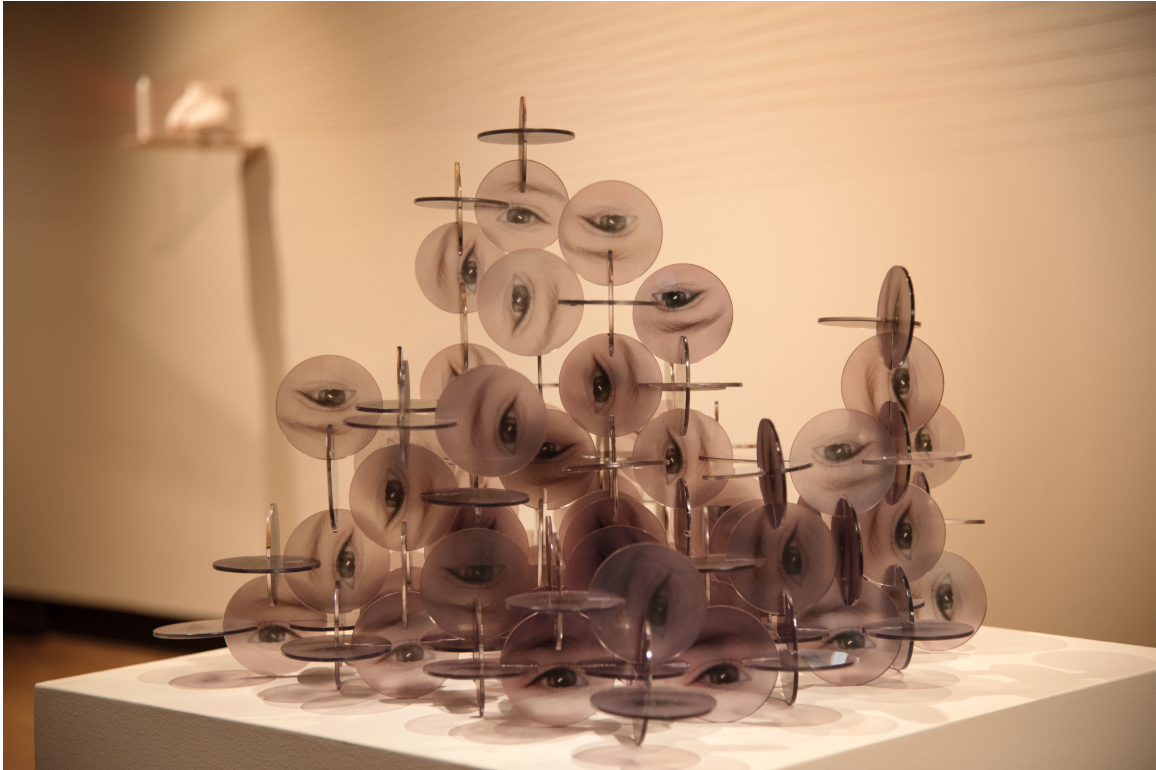


Figure 3.1: *"Eyes Cannot See You. You Are the Source of Light" (Rumi)*, 3 Dimensional, Digital print on acrylic discs, [24" \times 24" \times 20"], Hosna Shahramipoor, 2023.



Figure 3.2: *Untitled*, Digital print on archival paper, Hosna Shahramipoor, 2023.

well-being is my top priority, and I am grateful for the opportunity to care for him and watch him grow.

Bibliography

- [1] Tsukioka Yoshitoshi (1885), *Picture of the Lonely House at Adachigahara in Ōshū*, Japan, Publisher: Matsui Eikichi; Carver: Takimoto Chokuzan, [link](#).
- [2] Rodgers, Leo (2017), *A Brief History of Time Measurement*. NRICH. Retrieved 4 November 2017.
- [3] Mazhar Khaleghi & Mojtaba Mirzadeh (1978), *Kurdish lullaby*, [link](#)
- [4] Rumi, Jalaluddin (2001), *Divan-e Shams-e Tabriz*, Trans. Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, California: The University of California.