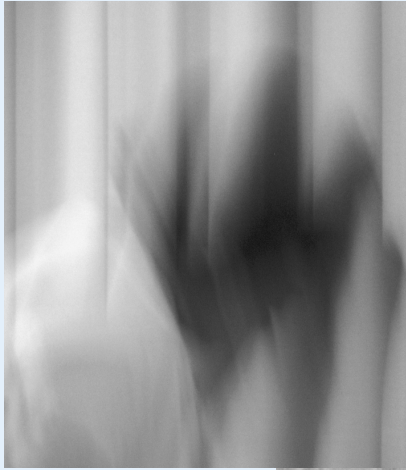


Liminal Migrant

An exploration of immigrant identity issues through digital photography and digital media



"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made."

This thesis is submitted to the AUT university in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts (Art and Design) in the year 2006

By:
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I would also like to acknowledge the staff of AUT university who have given their support to me throughout my research.

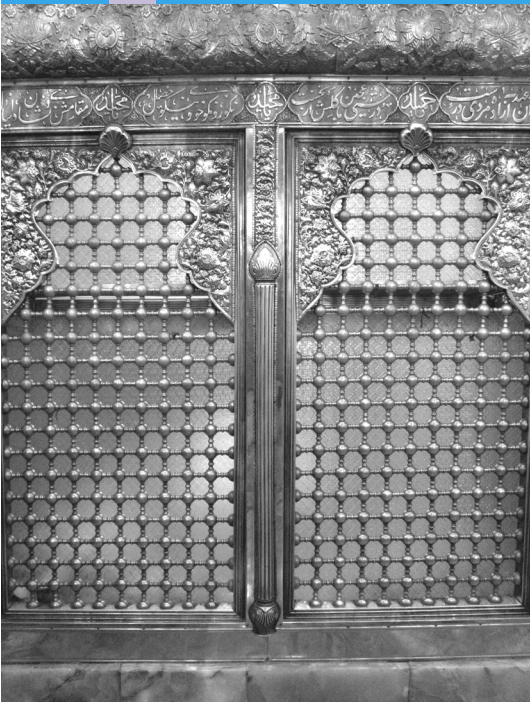
I sincerely thank my supportive wife who helped me immensely by giving me encouragement and friendship.

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Introduction



This thesis explores notions of changing identity through an engagement with the concept of liminal space. The space that I consider in my visual work is 'betwixt and between', the edge of self and other. Because it is complicated the best description I can offer is of the liminal as a space in which to build identity. Liminality comes from the Latin word "limen", meaning "a threshold", where limits and boundaries disappear and in which we prepare for change. Liminal spaces are ambiguous and ambivalent; they slowly move from one position to another, between past and present, between history and future, between consciousness and unconsciousness. In this threshold immigrants such as myself are in transition, always changing, we are always conscious of our being on the way to becoming. What we will become, however, is never certain.

Through adapting grounded methodology with art and design research, within the studio approach, I was able to reflect on my studio practice, with a view to learning how to improve it. This process has contributed to an enhancement of my personal and professional development and, I feel, to the enhancement of my practical work.

The concept of liminality as a quality of "in-between" space is important in describing some of the most interesting and highly specific social and cultural phenomena. It encompasses the transcultural space, the transidentical space and eventually border-crossing between spaces. My practice is an exploration, through digital photography of my experience of being in liminal space . This exploration has been grounded in the notion that identities are not irreducibly fixed by any social or cultural origins, association or traditions (Bhabha 1994).

As the title of my research suggests my project considers migrants in liminal space. I consider myself to be a liminal migrant. I arrived in a new country, but at an age old enough to have definite memories of my home in Iran. Because of this experience, I have taken on a kind of

liminal identity. I am betwixt and between, of one culture and of another at the same time. Issues of migration, identity, and liminality are thus of interest to me. So it is that my master's research focuses on the concept of what I refer to as the liminal migrant.

In contemporary research liminality has been a concern of the social sciences, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, political studies and media studies. Anthropologists represent the liminal as a space of initiation. Turner (1984) explains the concept of 'liminal space', as a space of changing, as an intermediate stage between disconnection and reunification. It is a state of transition and a period of ambiguity. For Said (1994) and especially for Bhabha (1994) liminality is important in relation to the concept of cultural hybridity. Bhabha (1994) attempts to clarify a concept of 'liminal' negotiation of cultural identity across the diversities within any race, class, gender or cultural tradition:

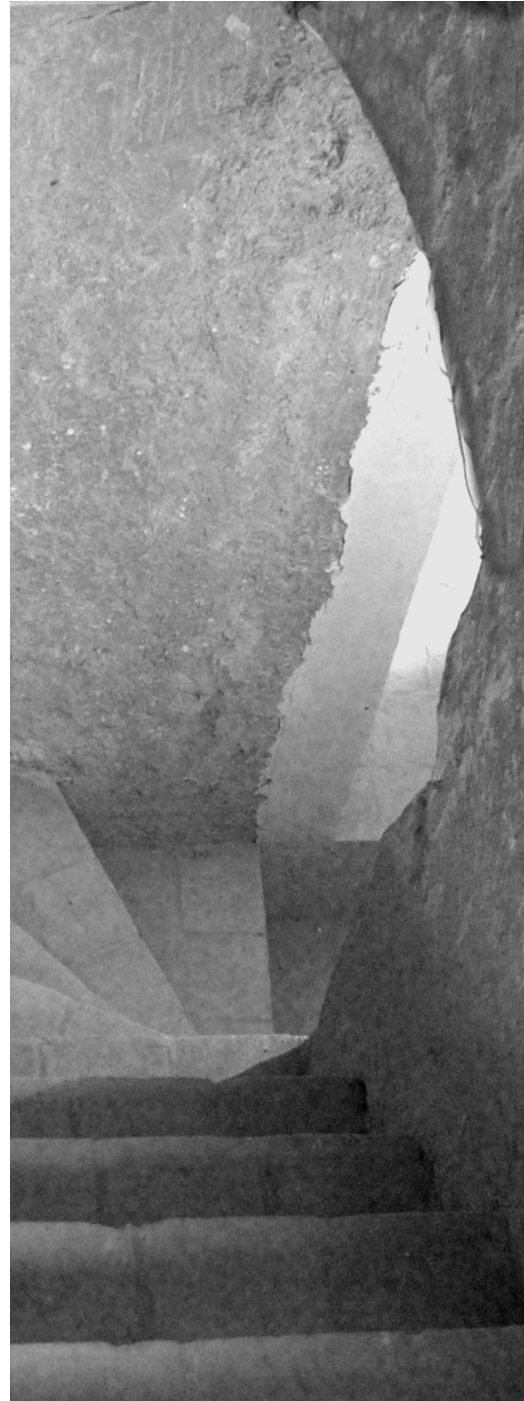
It is in the emergence of the interstices - the overlap and displacement of domains of difference - that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated. How are subjects formed 'in-between', or in excess of, the sum of the 'parts' of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender,etc.)? How do strategies of representation or empowerment come to be formulated in the competing claims of communities where, despite shared histories of deprivation and discrimination, the exchange of values, meanings and priorities may not always be collaborative and dialogical, but may be profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable?(p.2)

My research begins with questioning myself as an immigrant. Questions for example about what the notion of cultural identity might be, what it means to be in between cultures; about myself, not only being in the process of adapting to a new culture, but also, at the same time, being actively involved in my own culture. I have been studying from a perspective that takes into account the connections between cultures while focussing on my own situation as an immigrant and on the situation of other immigrants, who are influenced not only by a host culture, but also by their own culture.

My own project contains a series of digitally manipulated photographs that attempt to explore the issues that emerge from this focus. My studio practice has been focused thus on an initial concept of liminality and on myself and others who experience a liminal position. This exegesis

is designed to contextualize my images and aims to clarify the key concerns I have surrounding immigration, identity, hybridity and cultural ambivalence.

The purpose of the first section of this exegesis is to provide a brief theoretical review of the main social issues I attempt to address in my practical work. This is followed by an outline of the research methodology I have employed. The third section provides annotations on my images and discusses issues related to them. This is followed by a summary of the key concerns of the exegesis and my work.





Theoretical considerations



In the following section I wish to address the theoretical discourse most relevant to my study. In doing so I will consider only the main theories that underpinned my research. Originating in my experience of a strong desire for equitable socio-cultural positioning, my response to this matter as an immigrant was to attempt to somehow articulate my ontological values. For example those values I hold about the possibility for peaceful coexistence and productive dialogue between diverse ethnic groups. The following is thus a consideration of some of the theoretical concepts that have served as a scaffold for my own work.

Increasing global migrations have led to increased diversity within societies. This diversity often results in a tense co-existence of difference in behavior, traditions and customs, in short, a diversity of competing cultural practices and attitudes. This cultural diversity often presents a potential source of difficult or even unresolvable conflicts, but it also holds the potential for a richness of learning opportunities that, in themselves, may provide for a resolution of the main misunderstandings and conflicts that often result as cultures collide. Immigrants have contributed to host countries by modifying and developing a country that reflects, both directly and indirectly, the worldviews of those who refer to the host country as their home. The cultural landscape of New Zealand signifies the mixing of immigrants and natives, who reside in New Zealand from almost every country in the world. In societies, where each cultural group retains its identity, interculturalism may be able to alleviate cultural conflict. Interculturalism may emerge where diverse cultures accept and embrace each other's differences while pursuing a set of common goals. Almost directly contrary to this, multiculturalism most often manifests in a situation in which diverse cultures do not pursue a common interest or goal and may not cooperate in the same activities. In the former there is the possibility of a form of cultural integration and interaction that accepts, draws on and develops from the base of a diverse range of ethnic identities and ideas. In the latter, multiculturalism, there is most often simply a number of cultural and ethnic identities sharing only geographical location whilst living in culturally parallel universes.

In both concepts of interculturalism and multiculturalism there is the possibility of the creation of a hybridized space. Bhabha (1994) argues that society is in a "moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (p.2). He argues thus that people in multicultural societies most often live in a kind of "third space". In addition he assumes that these in-between spaces are established by "those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural difference" (Bhabha 1994, p.2). My reflection on these ideas and on a concept of hybridity raised questions for me as to the nature of my own identity and the process of change. Hall (1996) suggests that a "...concept of identity does not initiate a certain fixed core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the unpredictable changes of history without change" (p.3).

Mindful of Hall's suggestion, I thus assume that identity is fluid and at some level I would have awareness of the processes of change that influence my perception of my own identity. These ideas are highly relevant to the reflection on, and analysis of, my studio works. What is relevant, therefore, to my practical works is that as I started to analyse and categorise the photos that I took, I became aware of contradictory emotive responses to the images I had taken and began to understand that I was encountering an altered perspective. I had begun the process from the perspective of my Iranian identity, but began to realize that this analysis and categorisation was inconsistent with my developing identity and my emerging understanding of the concept of hybrid identity. Similarly as I reflected on my second series of practical works I found myself attempting an analysis and categorization from a more Westernised point of view. During this process, I realized that, rather than always being in an in between space, I was in fact making border crossings and, rather than being hybrid, I was occupying two different cultural positions. It was thus a constant struggle to try to maintain my Iranian Identity while trying to accommodate a Western position. This all led me to ask; was I located between cultures while no longer fully belonging to any culture? Was hybridity really possible? My own response to this difficult question was a subconscious feeling that I inhabit a space that connects between cultures rather than a space that somehow exists between them. Further discussion of some of the literature surrounding identity may be helpful in producing another view of this question. Grossberg (1996), for example, explains the concept of hybridity and elaborates on Bhabha's concept of the "third space":

Images of a 'third space' (as in Bhabha) see subaltern identities as unique third terms literally defining an 'in-between' place inhabited by the subaltern. Images of liminality collapse the geography of the third space into the border itself; the subaltern lives, as it were, on the border. In both of these variants of hybridity, the subaltern is neither one nor the other but is defined by its location in a unique spatial condition which constitutes it as different from either alternative. (p. 91)

Although Grossberg (1996) describes hybridity as occupying a space that is "neither one nor the other" and that the subaltern lives on cultural borders, I do not distinguish that space as a place on the border. A border place indicates the probability of disconnection between a range of cultural poles. This does not adequately describe my position, which I would see as a possible point of connection between a range of cultural locations. I conceive my liminal space as a position that provides an ability to move backwards and forwards between cultures, rather than a border space. I say "between cultures", since in my situation in New Zealand, it is not always a navigation solely between Iranian and the dominant Western culture, but it is also often a navigation in a complex multicultural space. There are more than just two sets of cultural poles to engage with. Grossberg (1996) suggests a concept of border crossings that I feel clarifies my idea. He suggests that, closely related to the two main characteristics of hybridity that he is concerned with, is the concept of the border crossing. This marks an image of between-ness which does not create a place or situation of its own other than the mobility, uncertainty and multiplicity of the fact of the constant border crossing itself. Border crossing is thus causative to the formation of identity and has implications for discourses of self and other. Bhabha (1994) put forward that subjectivities can be created in liminality:

Liminality provides the terrain for developing the strategies of selfhood that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (pp.1-2)

This image of the border crosser as not restricted by time or space, neither static nor limited by boundaries, fits the position that I hold. I would suggest this concept of identity as a basis for an intercultural ethos and eventually for the immigrant integration with in host society. It is these very complex sets of issues that I am attempting to deal with in my practical visual work and in explicating the philosophical position that underpins that work.







Research method



Choosing an appropriate methodology was important to the focus of my project. I adapted and used “grounded” methodology as the main research tool. Grounded theory is constructed from questions that are based in the data collected. Mead (1934) describes how beliefs are connected to actions and how people build their reality by attaching meanings to situations. According to Patton (1997) research methods need to flow rationally from the questions one asks. Thus the purpose behind many research methods is to find ways to become a part of that which one studies. In using more active methods of data collection, it is the obligation of the researcher to comprise their own understandings and experiences in the data analyses and in any representations of findings. My own research is about the exploration of myself as a migrant, my data collection has therefore been a process of self-exploration. I have gained a deeper understanding about how I think, who I am and what I may be as a liminal migrant. This exploration was like a cycle of thinking and taking steps such as developing an idea, researching in the field, applying that research to my studio practice, and reflecting back on the idea. Employing this method I had an opportunity to gain a closer look at what I was studying and practicing. By using the kind of grounded method described above I was able to not only quickly review my studies, my images for example, but also I found that it offered the flexibility of approach needed to allow for exploration of new findings /new ideas.

Alder & Alder (1987) explain the concept of yourself as the research instrument and promote a subject methodology. Visual data has been of central concern to my creative process, not only as a medium but also as a method of exploration: for looking into (or revisiting) my past; experiencing the present moments of reconnection and making sense of the different perspectives I discovered. Thus my project began with the use of digital photography for data collection, with me as the immigrant/subject/photographer/researcher of my own worlds. Collier and Collier (1986) identify data as can openers of society, the researcher is the photographer who decides which can is to be opened and what becomes visible or eligible to be recorded. In data collection I did not attempt to photograph a specific aspect and so I did

▶ This exploration was like a cycle of thinking and taking steps such as developing an idea, researching in the field, applying that research to my studio practice, and reflecting back on the idea.



not employ step-by-step rules to examine and represent any context or image of reality. In this research, for me, the concept of reality was essentially subjective and improvisational.

It was clear from the beginning that, given the nature of my focus, I was dealing with a set of very complex phenomenon and it was for this reason that I selected photography as my primary method for data collection. Photography has real benefits in attempting to address such complex concepts. Rose for example (2000) remarks that Photographs are: "...cultural documents offering evidence of historically, culturally and socially specific ways of seeing the world" (p. 556). Goin (2001) suggests that images are expressions of the idea themselves. Taking into account of course, and always being cognizant of, the subjective nature of individual readings.

I have collected visual data from two places, New Zealand and Iran. I used a digital camera and took approximately 1000 pictures during my research. While I gathered a large number of photos, ultimately not all of them were appropriate to my final visual concept and so I categorized the more relevant of them under several subject headings; such as identity, threshold, reflection, nostalgia, religion, ritual and realist. The meanings I attribute to my photos are often dependent on their being a part of a specific category. When my photos are placed into a category, they are organized thus to explore the ideas that emerge from within

the parameters of any chosen category.

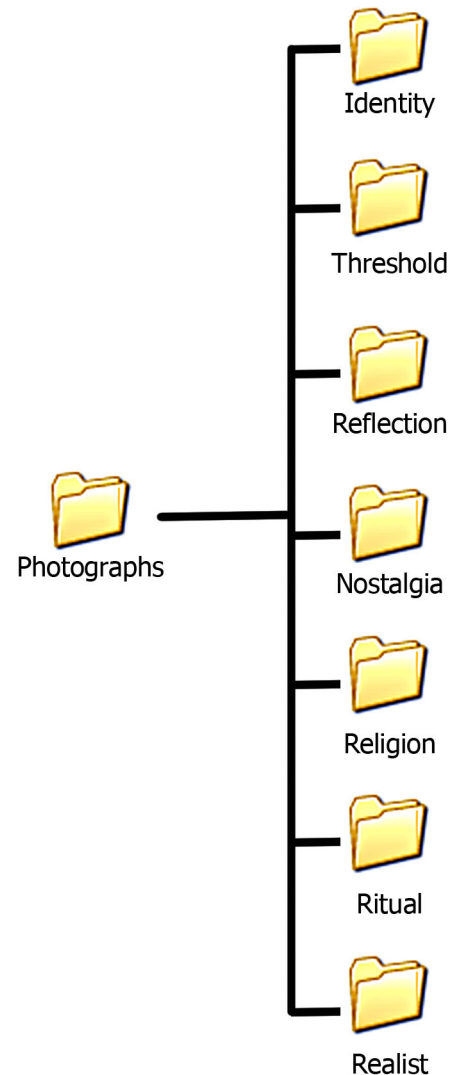
As the work progressed, I discovered that this grounded approach was also quite dynamic, allowing me the ability to quickly adapt to new findings. I do not argue that my categorizing of photos is complete, comprehensive, or permanent. However, in the context of this project, it offered me the best tool for reflection and analysis of what I was studying. I was trying to project my understanding of being in liminality based on my studies. Two important insights from my visual research have had an impact on this project and are factors that will continue to have importance in my further creative work and analysis. They are as follows:

- Photographs may have multiple meanings. They could have both general and personal meanings.
- Meanings are created by the photographer, the viewer and often by the subject itself.

A major factor in my photographic process has been the activity of looking and recording, a process of evoking personal memory and confronting the way in which these memories informed my changing identity. My photographs were thus particularly powerful in informing my analysis and the development of my practical works.

I found that architecture, especially in my photographs taken in Iran, was a frequent subject of my work. In some way these

When my photos are placed into a category, they are organized thus to explore the ideas that emerge from within the parameters of any chosen category.



photos of historically significant Iranian buildings seemed to capture something of the embodied sense of what it is to be Iranian. This was particularly interesting as I compared these photographs with photographs I had taken of New Zealand architecture and the very different sense of space these evoked for me.

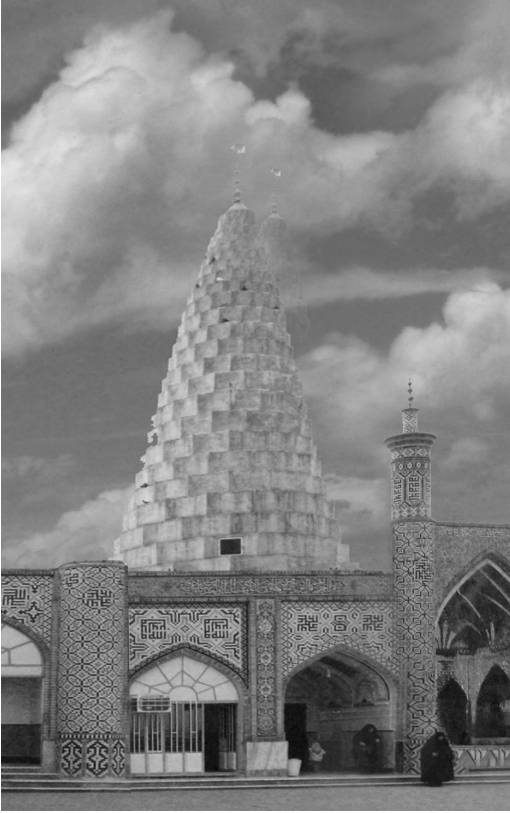
Islamic religion, it's rituals, it's customs and Islamic society as a whole are other major themes of my photographs. My reflections on Islam also have a significant role to play in the development of my practical work and on the kinds of images I produce. In addition to architecture and my photos taken from within Iranian culture, landscapes have also had a role to play in developing a sense of what it is like for me to inhabit a liminal identity. The Iranian and New Zealand landscapes connect me with land and home, the process of taking photos of these landscapes and reflecting on them has led me to question my notion of land and home. In fact there is very little to distinguish much Iranian landscape from much of the landscape in New Zealand. I look at these photos and get the sense that I am at home and yet somehow not at home in either of these landscapes. I was not consciously aware of this when I took the photographs. This has only come during my later analysis.

I would highlight here that my findings are coloured by my historical attachment to



A major factor in my photographic process has been the activity of looking and recording, a process of evoking personal memory and confronting the way in which these memories informed my changing identity.





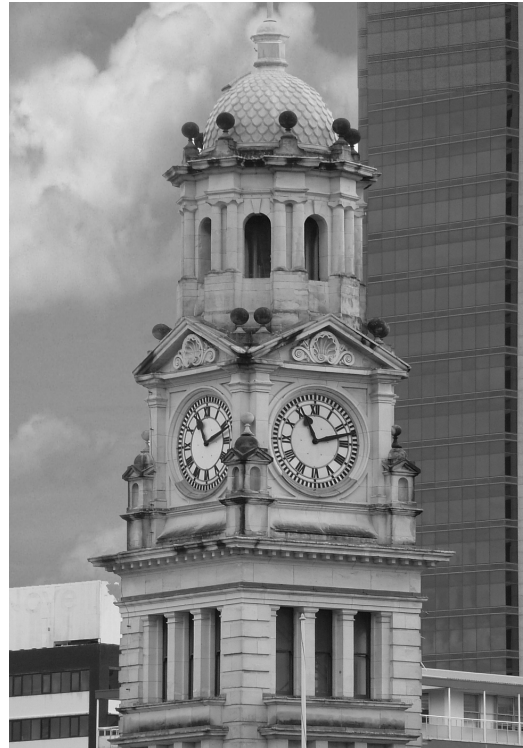
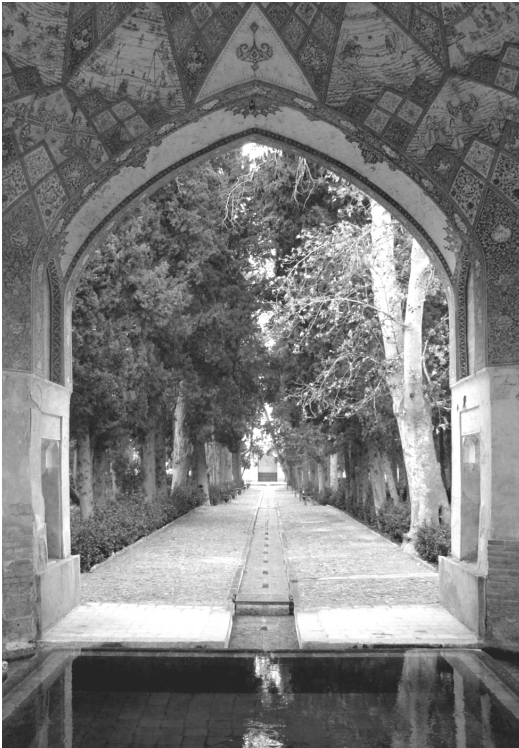
an Iranian aesthetic and an Iranian belief system. The categorization and analysis of photographs might be seen as an effect of my Iranian cultural identity. This is understandable when I consider myself as an Iranian immigrant with a need to save and project my identity. This has been a particularly significant factor in the analysis and final selection of images for development.

Self-expression and self-presentation are two related yet different activities. While self-expression is about giving voice to one's unique view of the world (Sontag 2001) self-presentation is about influencing others' views of oneself (Goffman 1955). Some photos taken by me in Iran, for example, attempt a deliberate and forceful representation of Iranian cultural identity in order for me to give voice to my own view, as an Iranian immigrant, of different worlds. My view of what it is to be betwixt and between my own Iranian culture and a diversity of cultures that exists in my new Pacific home. Less directly however, through exhibiting my photographs,



I found that architecture, especially in my photographs taken in Iran, was a frequent subject of my work.

I am trying also to convey something about my own personality. As someone moulded



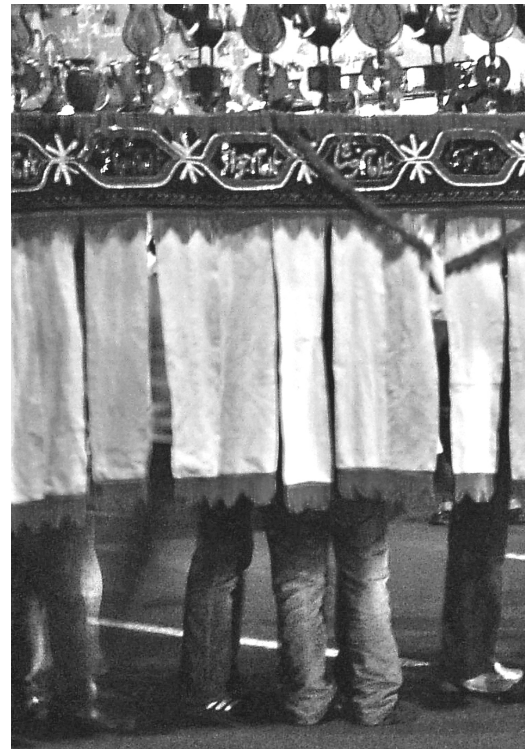
and informed by a particular culture and someone who has this kind of belief and that kind of aesthetic sense. I realized that, in fact, through my photographs I have ultimately tried to represent myself using images of Iranian architecture, society and so that in some way my photos are a kind of self-portrait. Self-expression has more to do with the aesthetic of myself than with its content or its reflection on me as photographer/artist.

In summary, the methodological approach and structure of my research is based on the focus of this project; liminality. It offers me access to a range of critical perspectives on photographic practice from within sociological, colonial and post colonial, cultural studies and visual arts theory. Photography helps me to look at the world more carefully and so see it differently, and to express my perspectives. This analysis and categorization was useful for selecting and developing my practical works. I chose photos for my practical works and for my self-expression and my self-presentation. The grounded approach provided a framework for



Islamic religion, its rituals, its customs and Islamic society as a whole are other major themes of my photographs.

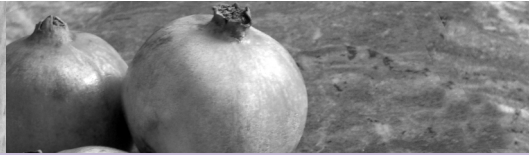
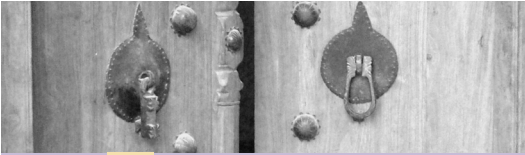
my practical works that allowed me to better explore my ideas.





I look at these photos and get the sense that I am at home and yet somehow not at home in either of these landscapes.





Studio practice



The purpose of this section is to discuss my studio practice. It aims to explain the process of my practical works. I will discuss my progress and outcomes to date and the evolution of my work. I will discuss this in relation to other artists working in this area. My studio practice also is a reflection on my research into the use of digital photography.

My project began with extensive field work exploring in many different locations and settings in both New Zealand and Iran. During the initial collection of visual data I took 1000 images. Since the 1990's, with the introduction of new digital technologies, photography has been radically changed. Lipkin (2005) illustrates how the use of digital images and computer manipulation brings photography closer to painting. He points out (2005) that digital photography is a genuinely new medium which can manipulate and construct new meanings for experience and reality. It may produce a newly imagined reality. With digital technology the photographer is enabled to change the resolution, contrast, focus, combine and montage the image in far more complex and subtle ways than was ever possible with older analogue technologies, allowing almost unlimited manipulation.

During the process of experimentation I created black and white and monochrome images for some specific reasons. Firstly this takes the photographic process one-step further. Black and white focuses the attention on form, tone, pattern, and other visual and aesthetic concerns. By removing color and its associations with the world of reality and allowing for more concentration on the graphic elements the photos becomes rather abstracted. It gives an aesthetic that I feel cannot be reproduced in colour. Black, white and the color tone such as sepia tone holds with it all those traditions of the photographic genre that effect viewer perceptions it also enhances certain other aesthetic qualities that I am interested in. Spaulding (1995) describes how Ansel Adams preferred "the more abstract attributes of black and white, which, he felt, stress the photographer's illustrative vision (p.275)." In Enyeart (1993), Adams remarks that black and

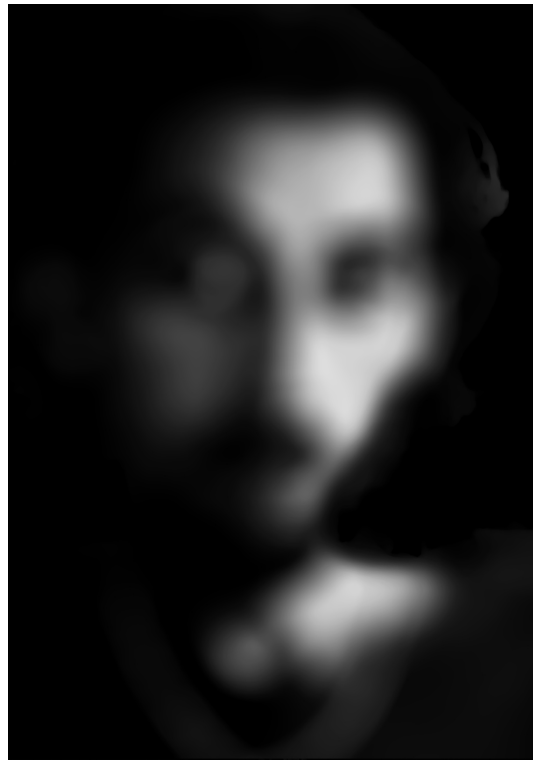
white photography is “an almost complete abstraction (p.28).” Significantly for me and for the central focus of my work, black and white photographs often produce stark visual contrasts denoting boundaries between positive and negative forms. Without colour, photos reveal a classic simplicity of form and evoke a sense of history and timelessness.

Acknowledging the aspects of the black, white and color tone already discussed, I need to point out that I always shoot the initial images in color and convert to black and white or color tone later. For converting color to black and white (grayscale) and color tone (monotone) digital technology offers a range of techniques which allow me to control the process and I feel this provides the kind of aesthetic result that I am interested in than if I shot and developed the work in a solely black and white process from beginning to end.



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Having outlined the important technical aspects that are central to my work I would now like to discuss how my practical work



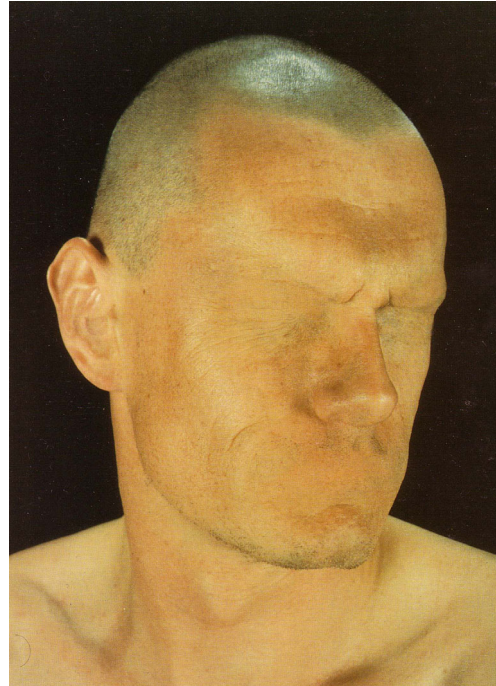
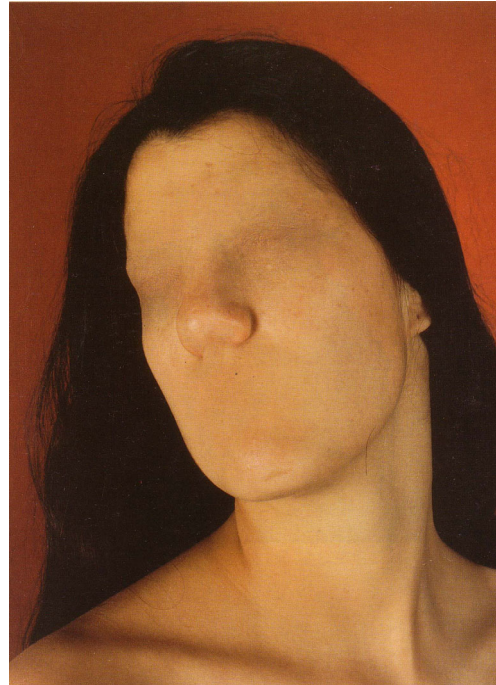
evolved through a series of cycles and stages in a systematic engagement with my conception of the liminal migrant.

My initial interest was in exploring liminality as it relates to a concept of identity and that led me to look at various photographers that engage with issues of identity similar to my own concerns. These have included John Hilliard, Bill Jacobson, Tatyana Liberman, David Levinthal, Andre Kertesz and Aziz + Cucher. Aziz and Cucher's series "Dystopia" (1994-95), Aziz + Cucher (1996 p36) consists of heavily manipulated portraits in which skin seems to have grown over the subjects' eyes, ears, nose and mouth, rendering them senseless, incommunicado and, importantly, in a way in which identity is deliberately erased. Aziz + Cucher (1996) comment that they were attempting to create "... a number of digitally altered portraits representing a society in which personal identity is lost (p.36)."

My initial work mostly dealt with issues of identity and change. This first work was influenced



by readings in colonial, post-colonial and social issues about immigrants, liminality and identity, as well as the impact of my emerging desire to explore changing identity through representations of reality and fantasy. I completed a series called "Figurative" in which I photographed fellow Iranians who had also immigrated to New Zealand. I have been interested in the idea that photographs can produce a kind of fiction. I would say that photography while appearing to depict objects rooted in realism, actually works within the borders between the reality of the object and of the photographer's subjectivity. In this context I attempted to make the objects "the reality" yet the reality that I present is completely non-existent. I continued to work with Iranian immigrant portraiture and I was particularly interested in the doubling of the subject inherent in identity construction, which Bhabha (1990) describes as a space to "speak of and as the margin, the exilic, the minority," the nation as "DissemiNation"(p.148)



"Dystopia" series (1994-95)
From top to bottom: Ken, 1995 - Chris, 1995



Figurative series





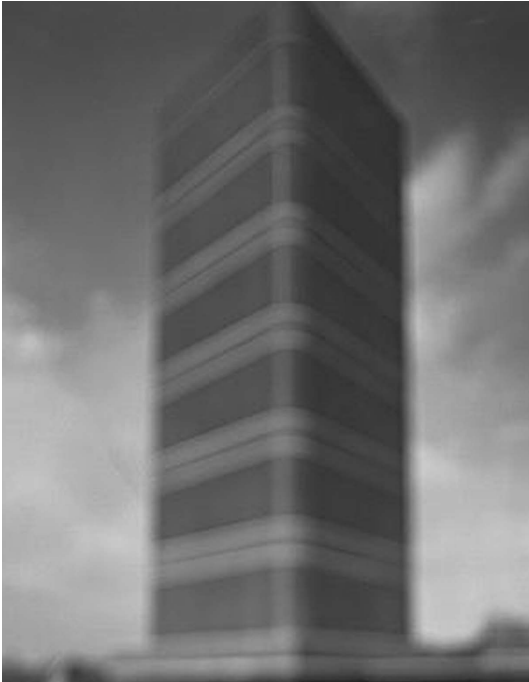


After the Figurative series I continued by exploring the idea that subjectivities can be constructed in the in-between spaces of liminality "... innovative sites of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha 1994, pp. 1-2). I engaged with a refusal of boundaries of specific interpretation and instead I attempted to make images that might be read for their multiple meanings. When the scene becomes subjective sometimes the boundaries between reality and subjectivity can be blurred. In this series I focused on a particular object as the subject of an image. In this work I was looking for interactions between objects, tones and shapes. I searched around the photographic contexts of photographer's societies, like landscapes, situations and actions. Presently, there are many photographers, who are working in these contexts such artists as Gaylen Gerber, Ann Veronica Janssens, Siobhan Liddell, Gerwald Rockenschaub, Karin Sander and Remy Zaugg and many more. I was particularly interested in the work of Hiroshi Sugimoto (2005).

His multiple series of black and white photographs that explore the themes of time, memory, dreams and the history of representation influenced my series nonfigurative works. His images are profound moments of artistic and philosophical clarity that explicate time and reality. Gopnik (2006) explains "The world of Hiroshi Sugimoto's photographs is a world of contradictions ... In Sugimoto's eerily precise diorama photographs, for instance, it's ideas of truth and fiction that keep trading places." (p.C01)



Hiroshi Sugimoto (architectural series)
From top to bottom and left to right: 961 S.C.
Johnson Building, 2001 - Chrysler Building,
William Van Alen, 1997 - Kunsthau Bregenz,
2001 - WorldTrade Towers, 1997











Non-figurative series

In my most recent works I take an interest in what Homi Bhabha (1994) describes “moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures” (p.2). This is work in which I try to visually represent this complexity of identity, time, memory and a concept of hybridity. Among other artist that works in this context are Zainab Sabira, Mona Hatoum, Michal Rovner, Walid Ra'ad and Shirin Neshat.

Cultural issues raised in the work of Shirin Neshat are closely linked to my own concerns regarding Iranian identity. The artist is informative in the way she deals with being Iranian through her art by neither glorifying nor condemning Islam, but challenging Westerners to rethink their view of it. Under the reign of the Shah, there was a give and take with the West. According to Horsburgh (2000) Neshat calls it a “type of dilution”. The two cultures, although very different, had begun to take from one another. Neshat says now in Iran there is very little colour, that the shift from a Persian identity to a prevailing Islamic one has created a kind of crisis that has drained people of colour. For this reason she photographs solely in black and white. In her photographs, Persian calligraphic script is transcribed over black and white depictions of the exposed faces, hands, and feet of Iranian women. Goldberg & Verzotti (2002) describes Neshat's work as ambiguous, never settling on a simple or singular meaning, never offering social commentary within prescribed limits, though focused on the particulars of sex segregation and the suppression of women in contemporary Iran.

In my practical work I attempt to challenge and thus highlight viewer subjectivity. This is done in two ways: 1) through an



Women of Allah series

From left to right:

- Untitled- 1996 Photo: Larry Burns
- Speechless - 1996 Photo: Larry Burns
- Untitled- 1996 Photo: Kyong Park

integration of photograph and text and 2) through an unusual juxtaposition of visual elements that would not go together in the real world, in an attempt to create a surreal effect. I stayed with color tone in all of these images because I attempted to evoke a kind of dream world. Let me say, however, that I am not promoting a single point of view. Instead, I am looking for a rich and complex expression of a theme that leaves the viewer with questions rather than answers. What I want to do through this series is to make an emotional vehicle to raise audience questions about what Bhabha (1994, p.2) refers to as the "moment of transit". I want to juxtapose the past and present reality, a visual dive into the disparate impulses through which history and memory are formed. I am most interested in the transfer and translation of ideas across national and cultural borders, between individuals, and between eras.









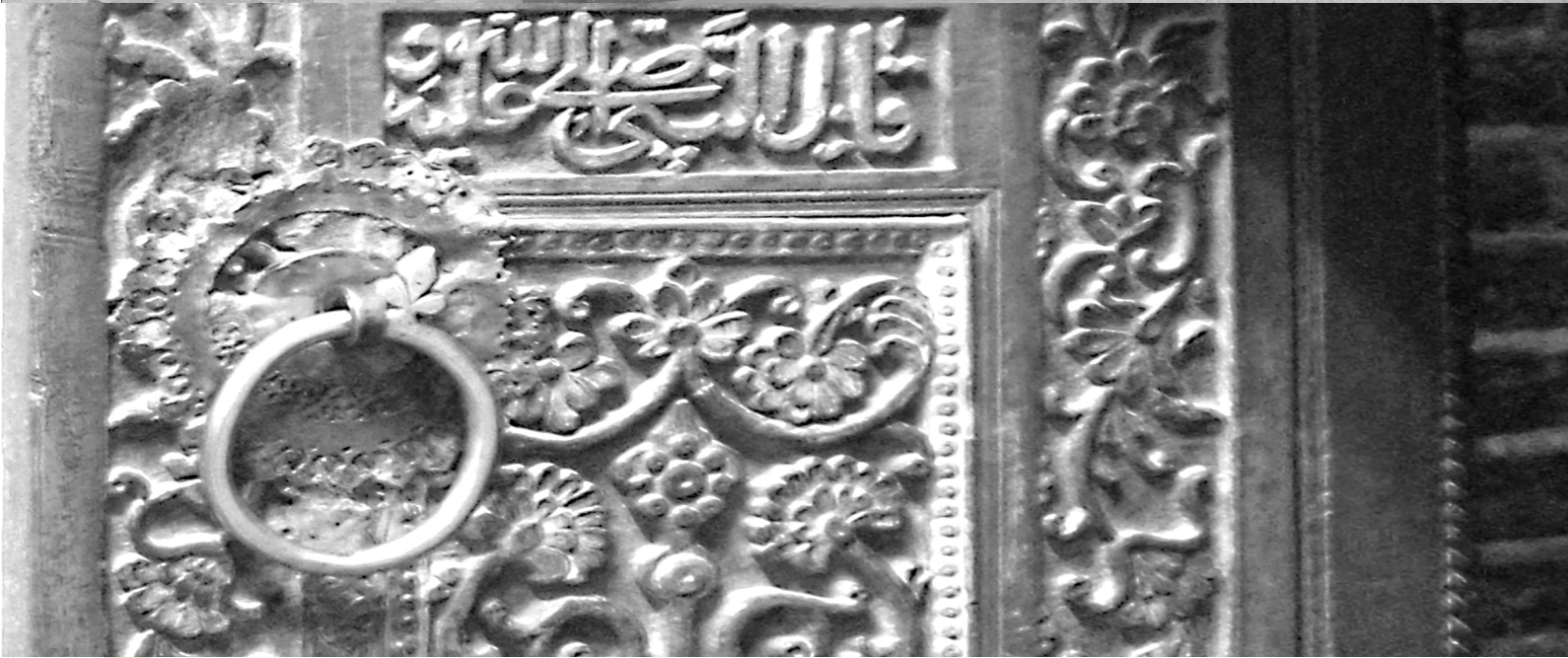
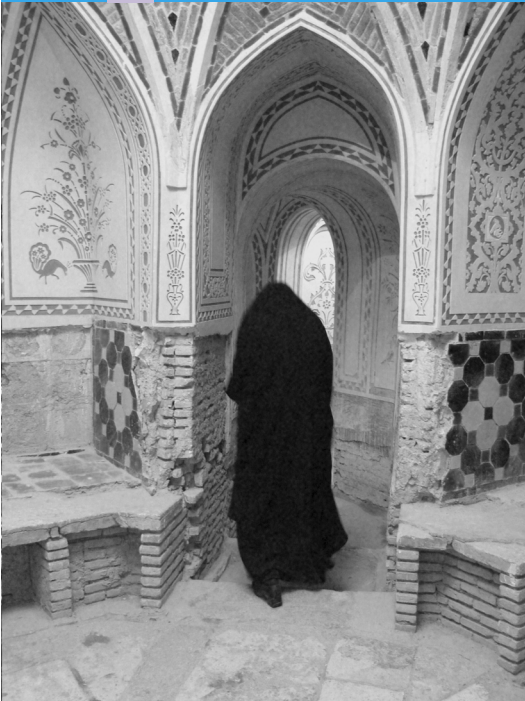








Summary/Conclusion



The central concern of my research is the liminal migrant. The photographs engage with concepts such as identity, change, culture, monoculturalism, multiculturalism, intercultural exchange and notions of hybrid identity. Liminality as a place where boundaries dissolve a little and we stand there, on the threshold, getting ourselves ready to move the limits of what we were into what we are to be.

I used a grounded approach throughout the working process which involved three major components. These included firstly fieldwork, for example taking photographs, documentation etc., secondly reflection on, and analysis of, visual material and documentation and, finally, studio practice/development and integration of ideas. This approach allowed me the freedom to look around in my environment, both in New Zealand and in Iran without presupposing what I would find interesting or moving. It allowed me to immerse myself in the process of taking photographs and visually recording my response to the environment. Later I would search for meaning in the results of that intuitive and spontaneous photographic response by selecting and categorising the images I made.

I have been using photography and digital media to visually explore the sense of liminality in my practical research. Photography is of crucial importance, both as a tool in my methodology of collecting images as data and also as the main medium of my practical work. During the whole creative process, including selection, digital manipulation and photomontage, I have tried to be sensitive to the emergence of meaning beyond my personal control. It has been important to allow the work to develop in a way which opens opportunities for the interpretation of viewers who bring their own histories, narratives and sensitivities.

For political, economical or religious reasons, exceptional numbers of artists from the Middle East have immigrated to Western countries in recent years. With their special language of

expression, their exchange of visual cultures, their hybrid cultural backgrounds and experiences of immigration they surpass limitations and address issues involving tyranny, surveillance, mysticism, mythology, history, identity, memory and bring this address to their new domiciles. As Edward Said (2001) explains:

"But if true exile is a situation of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture? ... Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees." (p.173)

Immigrants artists with their identities and arts have contributed to the formation of their host society, but they continue to be unrecognized or misunderstood. This is partly ascribed to their displacement and the "immigrant experience" and partly of "non-recognition", which Charles Taylor (1994) describes as an unwillingness on the part of the host culture to accept and embrace the 'difference' of others and cultures.

It is a necessity that we understand how immigrant artists make changes and affecting cultural outlines. Bhabha (1994) explanation might help unsophisticated readings of their work:

"It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation ... it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present." (p.7)

We are living in a country where ethnic diversity is on the rise. Successfully understanding intercultural exchanges depends on the ability to deal effectively with differences in a positive manner. Through my investigation of the notion of cultural identity, I came to a realisation of the significance of intercultural exchange to the outcomes of my research. What I wished to achieve was a concept that expressed, in a positive manner, the qualities of human valuing that I felt need to be the experiences of immigrants within the host culture.

In my current series of work I have attempted to create a space in which I am able to practice as an Iranian immigrant artist with an Iranian aesthetic, exploring my feelings about liminal space and where I can engage creatively with aspects of my core concerns, in particular, concepts of intercultural dialogue and border crossings. The process of engaging in my research and

analysing the outcomes has proved to be a learning experience for me. I have progressed from an initial position of being in between cultures, to what I feel is a more personally positive situation from which to consider my relationship to other cultures. In this context I realised the importance of accepting and validating the cultural experiences that immigrants bring with them from their own country to the host country. I interrogated my practical works and found it necessary to change and to develop them to reflect my acceptance of my culture, as well as my acceptance of other cultures and their differences. I came to the realisation that, as an immigrant I needed to create work that provided points of entry for Iranian viewers in an attempt to provide an opportunity for reflection on their own experiences as immigrants.

Often, Immigrant artists are marginalized. This happens for example through the imposition of institutional curriculums based on dominant cultural values. This has been my own experience. It has led me to reflect on ways of addressing dominant cultural practices. Through trying to represent my self from my own culture and background I took the opportunity to become involved with other immigrant artists. I encourage them to continue to celebrate and represent the validity their own cultures and to do so in a way that opens rather than closes dialogue between the dominant and the marginalised.

It is important to indicate that the area of intercultural exchanges continues to offer fertile ground for further research and analysis. It would be perhaps useful, for example, to identify the characteristics of successful intercultural art production. Further investigation is required into the question of how an artist can augment the intercultural learning experience. Finally, more exhaustive research is required into how notions of cultural identity are addressed by intercultural art practices.

As I move on from the current body of work, I am looking toward a new series of visual explorations that will attempt to address and challenge aspects of the dominant culture in which I live with my immigrant identity. I anticipate having the confidence to work with a more overtly political situation as I engage with my adopted environment and build on the confidence that has come out of my personal working process.

Final works



Korosh Darvishzadeh





Final work













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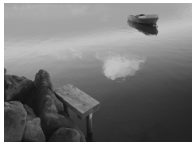
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Photographs

Page 1



Figurative series, Iranian migrant,
New Zealand, 2004



Non-figurative series, Mangawhai,
New Zealand, 2004



Work in progress, 2006

Page 2



My mother
Tehran, Iran, 2005



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Figurative series, Iranian migrant,
New Zealand, 2004



Khoram Abad,
Iran, 2005

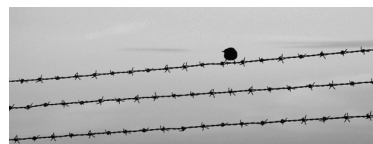
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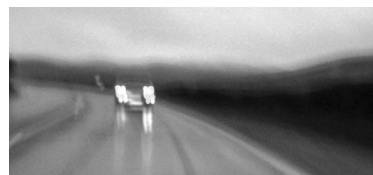
Kashan, Iran,
2005



Rug workshop,
Varamin, Iran,
2005



Auckland, New
Zealand, 2004



The road
between
Khoram Abad
and Shush,
Iran, 2005



Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004



Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004



Non-figurative series,
Mangawhai, New Zealand, 2004

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Self-portrait,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2005

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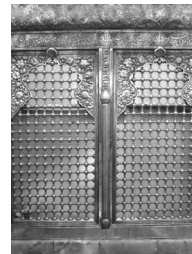
Tomb of
Daniel, Susa,
Iran, 2005



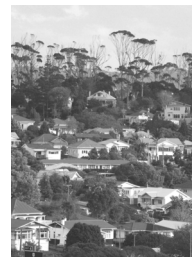
Tehran
subway,
Tehran, Iran,
2005



Varamin, Iran,
2005



Inside the tomb of Daniel,
Susa, Iran, 2005



Auckland,
New Zealand, 2006



Abyaneh , Iran, 2005



Ameri-Ha
(Amerian)
Mansion,
Kashan, Iran,
2005

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Borujerdi ha mansion,
Kashan, Iran, 2005

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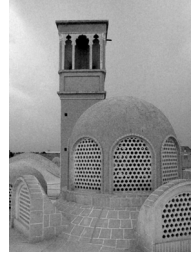
santa pride
event,
Auckland,
New Zealand,
2004



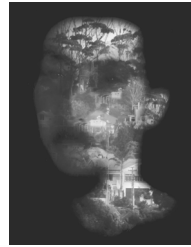
Moharam event,
Tehran, Iran,
2005



Maori Haka ,
KeriKeri,
NewZealand,
2004



Borujerdi ha Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Non-figurative series , 2004



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Old Persian
inscription on a
clay tablet,
Susa museum,
Susa, Iran,
2005

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Tehran Bazar (the greatest of the
Iranian markets),
Tehran, Iran, 2005



Tehran Bazar (the greatest of the Iranian markets),
Tehran, Iran, 2005



Moharam
event, Tehran,
Iran, 2005



Santa pride
event,
Auckland,
New Zealand,
2004



Moharam
event, Tehran,
Iran, 2005



Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004



Self-portrait,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2006



Tabatabaie mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Still
photography ,
Tehran, Iran,
2005



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Tabatabaie Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Tomb of Daniel,
Susa, Iran, 2005



Khoram Abad city,
Khoram Abad, Iran, 2005



Unemployed Tehran citizen,
Tehran, Iran, 2005



Tehran Bazar (Imam Khomeini
Mosque),
Tehran, Iran, 2005

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Fin garden,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Clock tower in Queen Street,
Auckland, 2006

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Moharam event,
Tehran, Iran, 2005



Moharam event,
Tehran, Iran, 2005

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Lorestan,
Iran, 2005



Motupipi,
North land
New Zealand,
2004



Waipu,
North land,
New Zealand,
2004



Khoram Abad,
Iran, 2005

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Ameri-Ha
(Amerian)
Mansion,
Kashan, Iran,
2005



Still
photography ,
Tehran, Iran,
2005



Abyaneh ,
Iran, 2005



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005



Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005

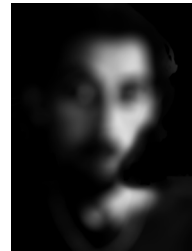


Rug workshop,
Varamin, Iran,
2005

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Figurative series, Iranian migrant,
New Zealand, 2004



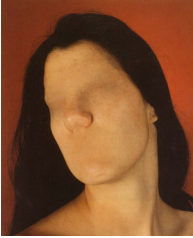
Figurative series, Iranian migrant,
New Zealand, 2004

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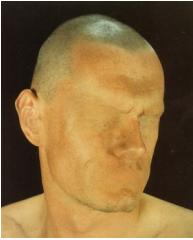


Iranian migrant Portraiture,
New Zealand, 2004

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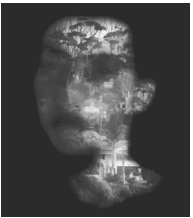


Aziz + Cucher
"Dystopia" series (1994-95)
Ken, 1995



Aziz + Cucher
"Dystopia" series (1994-95)
Chris, 1995

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Non-figurative series , 2004

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Figurative series, New Zealand, 2004

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Figurative series, New Zealand, 2004

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Hiroshi Sugimoto (architectural series)
961 S.C. Johnson Building, 2001



Hiroshi Sugimoto (architectural series)
Chrysler Building, William Van Alen, 1997

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Hiroshi Sugimoto (architectural series)
Kunsthhaus Bregenz, 2001



Hiroshi Sugimoto (architectural series)
WorldTrade Towers, 1997

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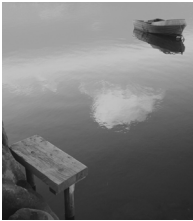
Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004

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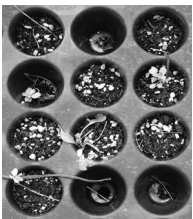
Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004

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Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004

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Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004

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Shirin Neshat, Women of Allah series
Untitled- 1996 Photo: Larry Burns



Shirin Neshat, Women of Allah series
Speechless - 1996 Photo: Larry Burns

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Shirin Neshat, Women of Allah series
Untitled- 1996 Photo: Kyong Park

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Work in progress, 2006

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Work in progress, 2006

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Work in progress, 2006

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Work in progress, 2006

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Work in progress, 2006

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Work in progress, 2006

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Varamin, Iran,
2005Auckland,
New Zealand,
2004Moharam event,
Tehran, Iran,
2005Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion,
Kashan, Iran, 2005Non-figurative series,
Auckland, New Zealand, 2004Ameri-Ha (Amerian) Mansion ,
Kashan, Iran, 2005Ditale of
mosque door
in Abyaneh ,
Iran, 2005