

Blood Washing

The Maslow Study Gallery for Contemporary Art/ Marywood University

Video Art Performance / Installation Art

Video 1#: 6 Minutes- Video 2#: 3:28 Seconds

installation: Oil colors on Latex and Polyethylene Plastic

Installation Size: 154 x 48 inches _ 18 frames of 17 x 14 inches

By the time I graduated from my undergraduate studies in Erbil, I had been in an on and off relationship with my neighbor for 5 years. It is a major risk in Kurdistan region of Iraq to have any kind of romantic relationship outside of marriage context. In our little village on the outskirts of Duhok city, life was quite simple. People knew everything about each other, and it was hard to hide anything. Our houses were side by side, located on top of a hill in between mountains. My neighbor would sit on her porch with her textbook, and I would sit on the other side pretending to study. We would sneak behind our houses or in the field across from our house to see each other for a brief moment and exchange nervous kisses, trying to avoid being seen. We had mastered the skill of hiding our love, even from our closest friends. Terrified of being found together, we had developed gestures to communicate.

We were too young and naive to challenge our society's norms and conservative traditions.

We thought it was an ordinary day until her brother found us together. I could tell that he was full of anger and rage, looking for the sharpest object around, but not finding one, he grabbed an iron bar and violently hit my head and called to his father to join the beating. Shocked and confused the father fainted on the ground. While I was trying to help him to wake up, the son brought the boiled water kettle that had been prepared for some evening tea and poured it on my back. It was only then that I felt the pain, and barely remember how I got out. I was limping, running and investigating my wounds. Blood was pouring down my swollen face and into my burgundy shirt. Night had fallen when I reached the first hill behind the village. That was the last time I saw my then girlfriend. She called me later that night, when I was in a taxi with my friend going to a nurse's office, telling me that she could not see in her left eye as a result of the beating.

Somehow, both she and I survived, but images of this night are engraved into our consciousness, as we brought disgrace to our families. My last two years living in Kurdistan were hell on Earth. I was constantly anxious that I could be stabbed any minute. Even though I live on the other side of the world, I still see nightmares. This event was a pivotal point in my life that drove me to create a work of art which continues to resonate with me.

“Blood Washing” is an installation of a dark room contains two different mediums, one side printmaking on light boxes and on opposite side two video art pieces. Sketches of a uterus in various shapes and forms are printed on latex, a symbol of female virginity or sexuality, and seen through light boxes. The videos are two different paces of me performing fingerprinting, stimulating, pouring...etc. The camera angles in the videos are shot from the ground up through

a pane of glass where the performance is taking place. The idea was to place the audience between physical and mental experiences. This conceptual piece was developed as a result of an experiment during a monoprint class which I took during my graduate studies, through which I discovered that I could recreate the texture of veins by pressing glass on paper and peeling it.

The title, “Blood Washing”, is a direct translation from the Kurdish language phrase for honor killing. The piece is a reflection of my internal dialogue of living with my fear, shame and guilt. It is the result of complex images from my childhood memories of a groom showing proudly the proof of his bride’s virginity on a piece of cloth, memories of periodically hearing about people getting killed as a result of fornication, and images of the blood streaming down my face that night when I was running for my life.

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