

Autopsy of the remains

By

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

In partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Fine Art

School of Art

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

June 2023 ©

Abstract

This text discusses the concept of **interruption**. While the word ‘*interruption*’ has a general meaning as “an action, utterance, or period that interrupts someone or something.”¹, in this text, I will focus on a few specific aspects related to this definition. The content for this text is based on my studio practice and research, exploring topics such as being an outsider and questioning connections between Self and Others in social and psychological contexts.

It is important to note that, as an artist and individual, life itself has always been the primary source of inspiration for me, rather than the contents or works of others about life. This aspect makes the entire creative process highly personal to me. However, I have also endeavored to broaden my perspective and seek connections with the outside, drawing from my personal experiences.

In my studio, I create drawings using various materials. From inks for two-dimensional works to steel bars and wires for drawing in three-dimensional space, my preferred medium is primarily ballpoint pen on paper. For me, the act of mark-making serves as a means of exploring my feelings and thoughts about what is happening within and around me.

As mentioned, drawing forms the foundation of this artistic journey. This text aims to establish connections between titles such as “Unconscious”, “The Monster”, and the quality of “Unfinishedness”, with the concept of interruption and the notion of the other.

Keywords

Drawing, Other, Outsider, unconscious, unfinishedness, Monster

¹ Oxford Languages, accessed December 2022, <https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en>

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the University of Manitoba and the School of Art for providing a great opportunity for me to pursue my Master's degree in a well-occupied environment, amid a caring and supportive community.

I would also like to thank my advisor, Holger Kalberg. I learned many important things from him that no one else could teach me in the way that he did.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my committee: M.E Sparks and Mark Neufeld for their patience and guidance through the two years of my study.

I am also thankful to Derek Brueckner for all of his support and for giving me my first professional job experience in Canada.

Also, I am grateful for having the chance to work as a teaching assistant for Freya Olafson, Alana Macdougall, Derek Brueckner, and M.E Sparks during the past two years. Working for each of these wonderful teachers was a fruitful experience for me.

Grace Han and Honoure Black also, have had an important role in developing my artistic practice during the elective courses that I took with them, and I am thankful for it.

I am also grateful to Jila Ghomeshi, who accepted to be the external examiner of my thesis defense and provide me with very interesting and helpful suggestions.

In addition, I would like to appreciate the support that my parents have given me all of my life.

I certainly should mention my best friends, Shervin and Mujtaba, who helped me a lot during the process of immigration to Canada.

Finally, I want to finish this part by saying thank you to my partner, Elham Shokri, for all of her sacrifices and for always pushing me toward change.

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Introduction

I studied animation in high school, and for my bachelor's degree, I studied sculpture. As an art student, I have explored various art-related occupations since I was 18. I have worked on films, edited movies, created sculptures, and even had stints as an illustrator and graphic designer. However, there was one particular thing that remained constant regardless of what I was doing at that time: I always found myself drawing monsters.

These grotesque images of deformed creatures could be found everywhere around me. They filled my textbooks in school and adorned the back pages of my sketching pad during the realistic drawing course at the university. If there was a piece of paper nearby, I would likely start doodling on it with a ballpoint pen, only to realize soon after that I was drawing another monster. Surprisingly, this obsession with monsters became the starting point of my studio practice and research for my Master's degree.

What Monsters Are?

When I moved to Canada to start my master's degree, I knew that I wanted to do something with the deformed grotesque creatures that I had always been creating. However, I didn't know what I was going to do or how to begin. With the guidance of my advisor, I tried to find an answer to this very fundamental question: why do I like monsters? And more importantly, why have monsters been created all over history?

During my research, I stumbled upon some peculiar artworks by a historic Iranian artist who drew monsters approximately 500 years ago. At that time, mainstream Iranian artists were creating colorful miniatures with expanded space and perspective. In contrast, this artist,

Mohammad e Siah Qalam, omitted all the background details. Lines were emphasized over surfaces and colors, with the focus primarily on the body. It was through this historical context that the concept of being an outsider began to take shape in my mind.

Saih Qalam’s works possess a materialistic and earthy quality, standing in stark contrast to the common painting style of that era, which often sought to sanctify human actions. James White, provides a vivid description of Siah Qalam’s works in his book:

The paintings are executed in a restricted color palette, with highlights in gold, often on poor-quality paper, and depict two broad categories of subject matter: humans, generally in small groups, engaged in activities such as conversation, drinking, dancing, labor and the pasturing of their mounts; and demons, some of whom appear to ape the humans, but who also spirit them and their mounts away, and who in one notable instance dismember a horse. Many of these images bear attributions in a later hand to a single artist, “Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam” (Mohammad of the Black Pen).²



Figure 1: Demon and dragon, Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam³

² James white. “Satire in the Paintings of ‘Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam.’” *Iranian Studies*, 2018, 51.

³Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam, Demon and dragon, Wikipedia, accessed June 1st 2023

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Siyah_Qalem_Demon_Dragon.jpg#/media/پرونده:Siyah_Qalem_Demon_Dragon.jpg

It was incredibly exciting for me to discover an artist from many centuries ago who shared an interest in depicting monsters. This encounter broadened my perspective on the subject of monsters, and I came to realize that a monster is something more than just an exotic image. As a matter of fact, monsters represent a profound essence of the psychological, social, and political conditions of the people who created them and those who identified with them as individuals.

How monsters have been created over the centuries is much more indicative of the moral and existential challenges faced by societies than the realities that they have encountered. The etymology of monstrosity suggests the complex roles that monsters play within society. By excising them, through fantasies of execution or simply professional exclusion, we rid ourselves of the undesirable attributes they are perceived to carry.⁴

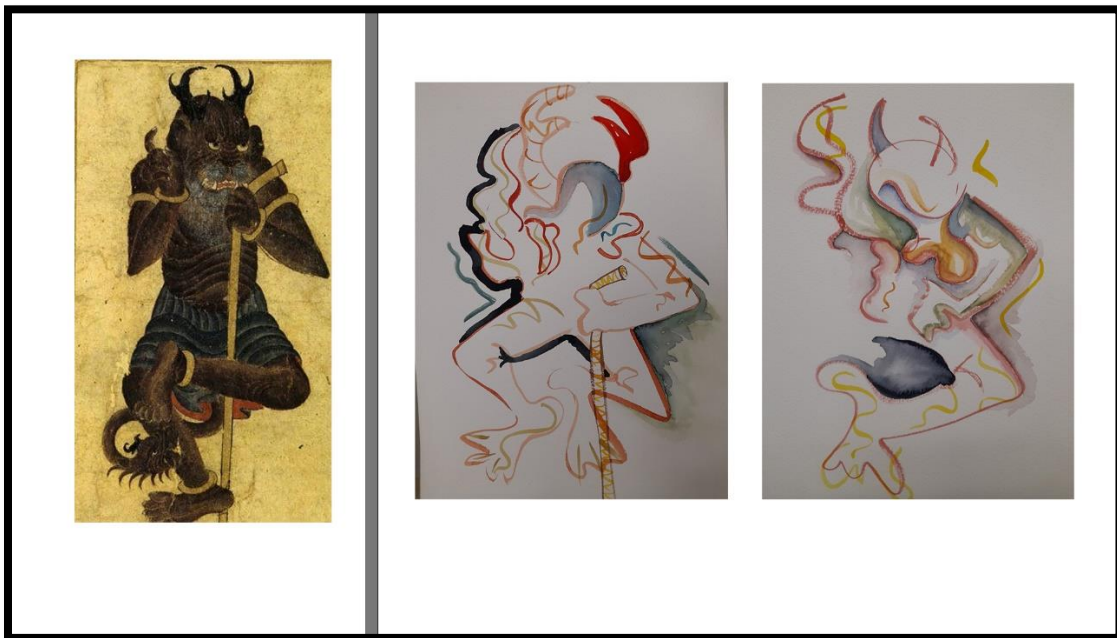


Figure 2: Imitation from Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam’s work, Watercolor on paper, 20x30 CM, 2021

⁴ Natalie Lawrence. What is a monster?. University of Cambridge. 2022, 26.

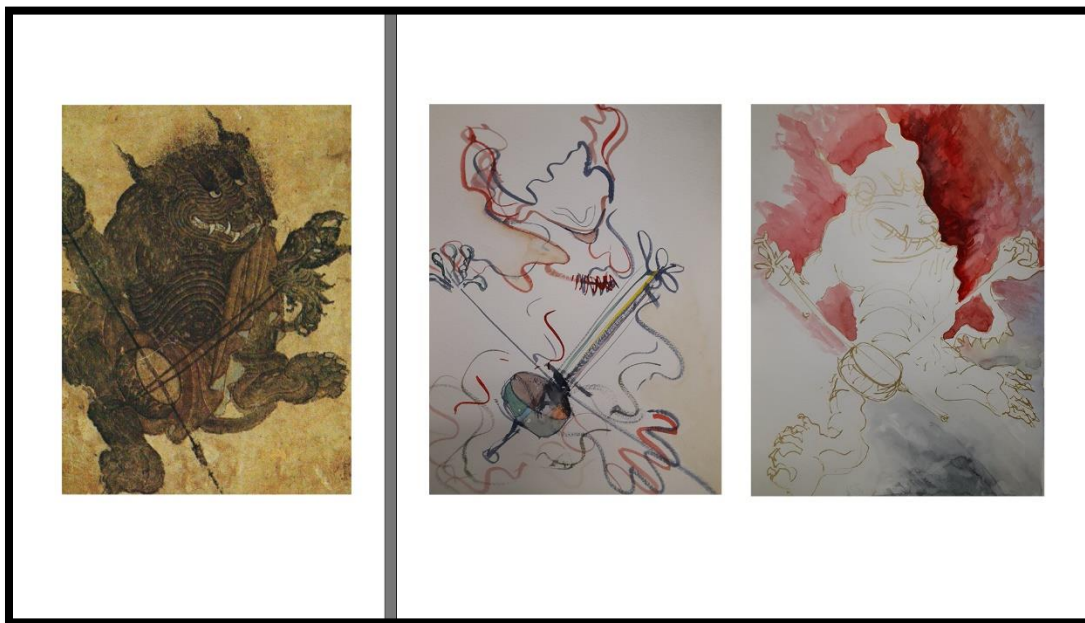


Figure 3: Imitation from Mohammad-e Siāh Qalam's work, Watercolor on paper, 20x30 CM, 2021

Monsters have always possessed a composite nature. However, in the modern era and beyond, monsters have evolved into creatures with a more collage-like quality. Mary Shelley's masterpiece, 'Frankenstein' is often regarded as the starting point of this transformation. Frankenstein is constructed from **amputated** body parts of deceased individuals and is not an inherently evil force, unlike its predecessors in classic literature.

I often find myself pondering, what does Frankenstein tell us about the new world?

It challenges the concept and responsibility of the creator, expressing the fears and doubts associated with modern Science⁵ and the anxiety of confronting the odds and the unforeseen

⁵ Even today, we are facing this doubt and fear about new technologies. For instance, the new generation of A.I (artificial intelligence) seems to be the new-age Frankenstein.

challenges and encounters between ‘the Other’ and ‘the Self’. Frankenstein is composed of deformed parts taken from what was previously considered normal—The human body. Similar to amputated parts of different cultures or social levels which might end in deformed subcultures.

That which was once considered normal now interrupts the normalcy. As Chloe Carroll eloquently describes, “Society creates its own monsters and embeds them with meaning such as what constitutes ‘good’ and ‘bad’ behaviour, making monsters the ‘Other’. By saying we’re not that, we’re saying what we are.”⁶

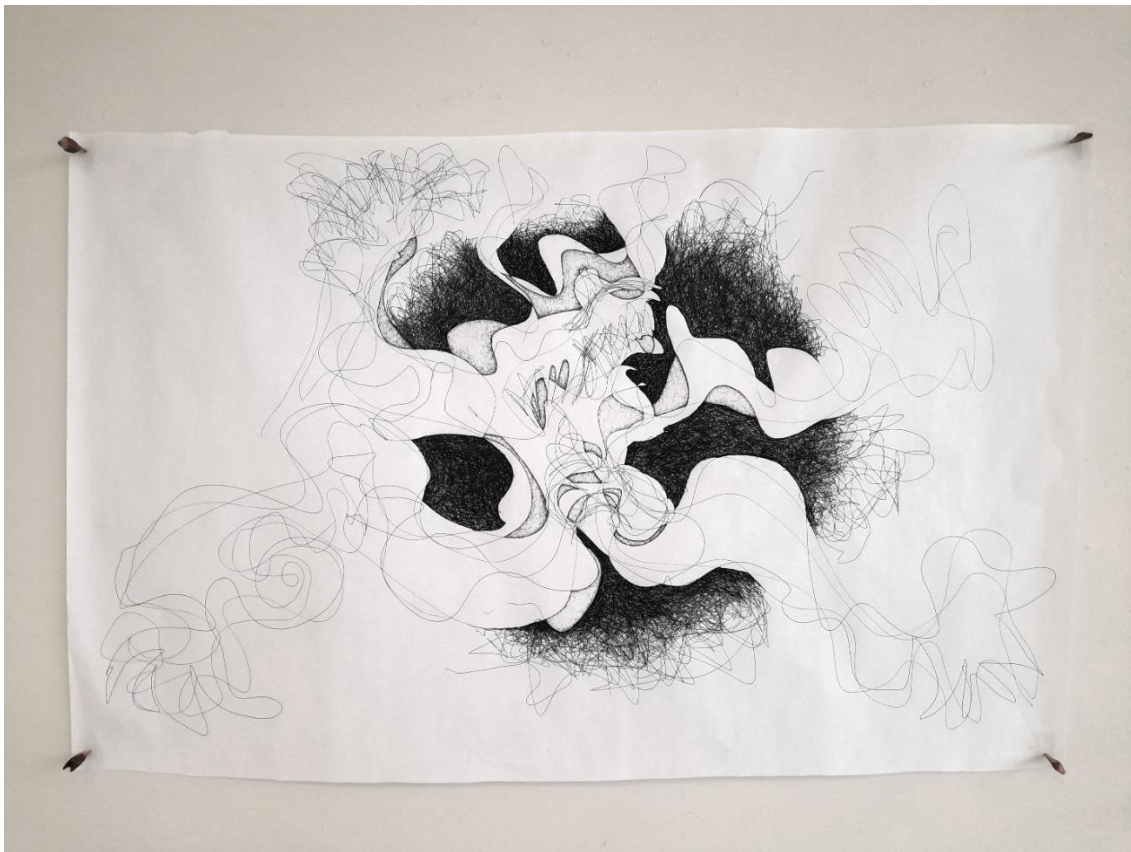


Figure 4: Monster with a circle, ballpoint pen on paper mounted by wood spikes, 124*78 CM, 2022

⁶ Chloe Carroll. *What Monsters tell us about the modern world*. RTE, May 25 2021, <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2021/0525/1223784-monster-theory-monsters-society-culture-othering/>

On Drawing

Mesmerized by the works of Mohammad e Siah Qalam and looking back to all of my feelings about what I was doing (*unintentionally*) during all the past years, I became certain that drawing would be the ideal medium for my studio practice. Drawing is the first visual appearance of the idea. It is also a simple and accessible way of expression. I create drawing using a ballpoint pen on regular paper. By foregoing the complexities of advanced materials, I am able to capture the thoughts and emotions of the moment without any barriers hindering my focus. In his book, *Drawing*, Philip Rawson explains the core event of straight-forward drawing:

Where the marking tool touches the surface, a mark is formed. That mark, thereby, represents an encounter between the shaping hand and a given surface.⁷ As psychoanalyst Serge Tisseron argues, drawing is a way of enacting subjectivity and relationships between self and other, that is, a way of constructing and reflecting on who we are and how we interact with others and our surroundings⁸. After a few lines, he declares, Ultimately, I propose approaching drawing through the mark/surface, and, thus, self/other, relationship.⁹

From this point of view, drawing has a narrative quality when created without conscious thought, because it shows the result of the impact between the environment and us. A good example showing the significance of drawing as a tool for understanding the mind is children's drawings. It is common and essential for therapists and crime investigators to attempt to access unreachable points of a child's mind by examining their drawings.

⁷ P. Rawson. (1987). *Drawing*, 2e. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 59.

⁸ Rebecca Fortnum, and Kelly Chorpening. *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*. First edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020, 239.

⁹ Rebecca Fortnum, and Kelly Chorpening. *A Companion to Contemporary Drawing*. First edition. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020, 239.

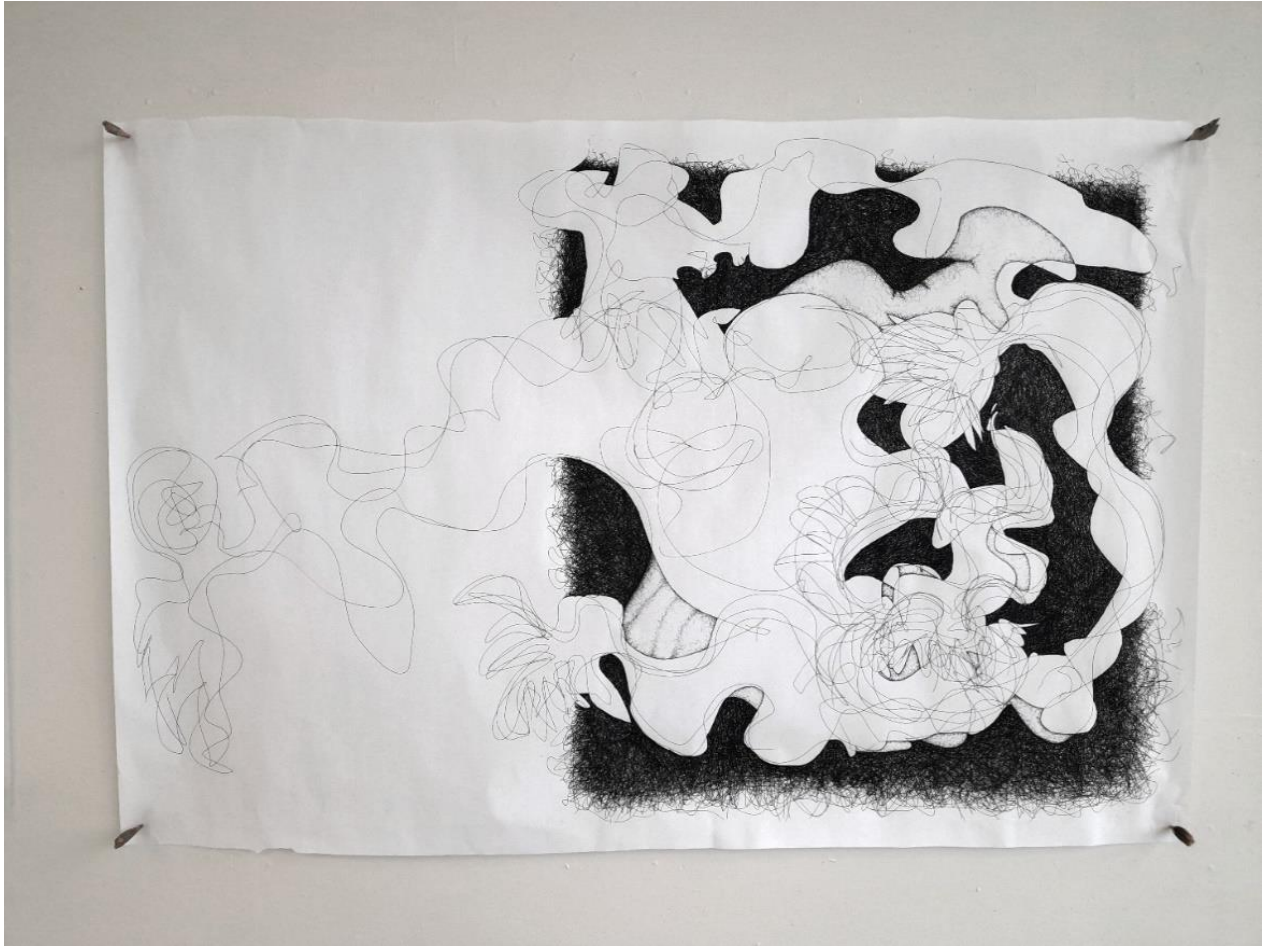


Figure 5: Monster with a rectangle, ballpoint pen on paper mounted by wood spikes, 124*78 CM, 2022

When I grasped the concept of drawing as a fundamental method of mark-making, I realized that I had been unconsciously documenting my environment and my emotions all along. Throughout their lives, people leave marks on one another, both physically and mentally, and drawing is a way to record those marks and translate them into another language. Drawing can be a reflection of life itself.

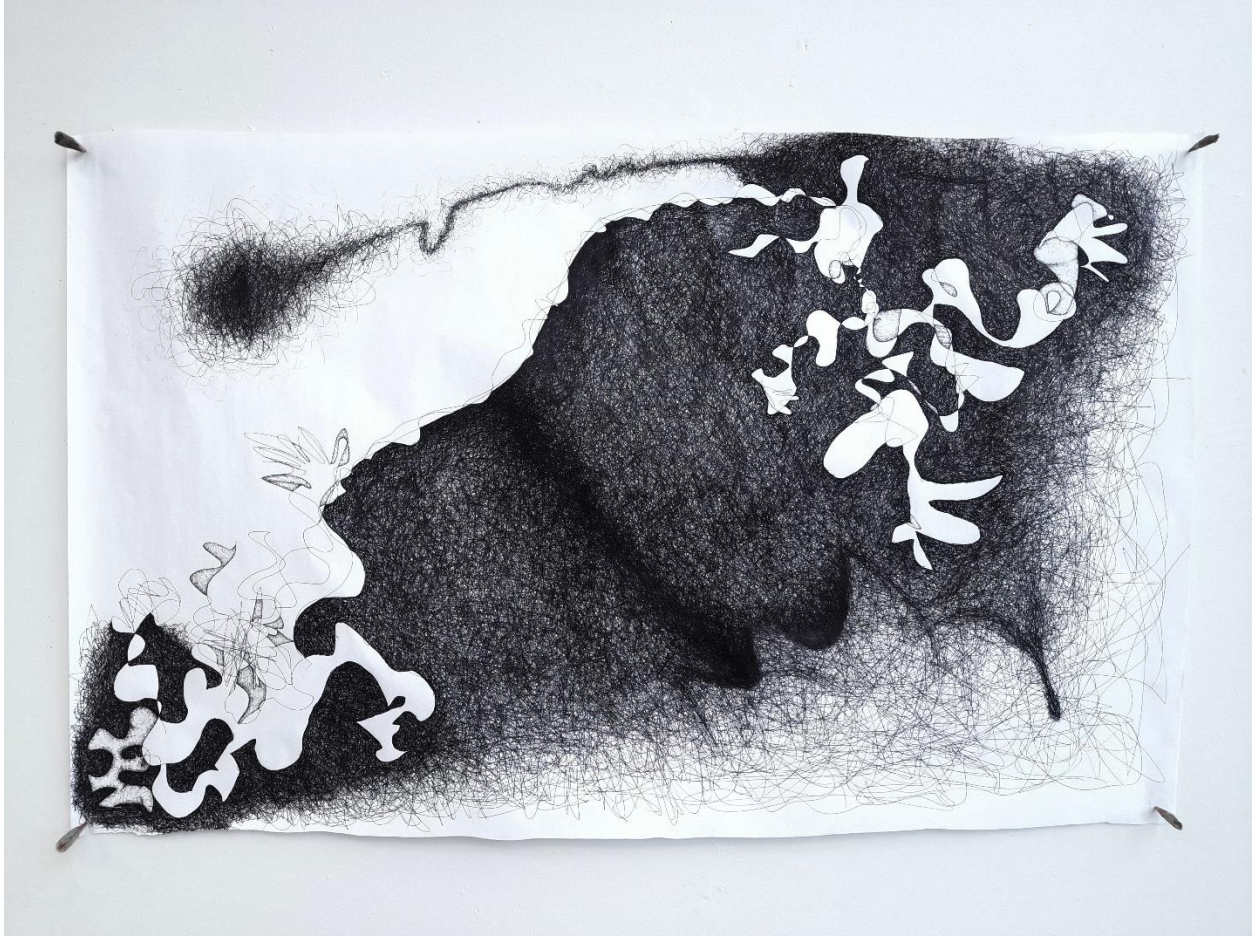


Figure 6: Here and there, ballpoint pen on paper mounted by wood spikes, 124*78 CM, 2022

When I was nine or ten years old, I witnessed a fight scene on my way back home from school. There were two men, their faces were covered in blood while most of their clothes were ripped off which means at the moment that I arrived they had been struggling for a while. What made me lose my sense of mobility though was that I saw one of the individuals attempting to stab the other person with a screwdriver, and two or three bleeding shallow holes on the second person's body were telling me that the attacker was perilously close to achieving success.

One of the onlookers of the scene pushed me back, warning me to leave before I got hurt. When I arrived home, I created a drawing depicting what I had witnessed. I drew two cars, two

men, and the screwdriver. What is interesting for me now is that I somehow reduced the level of violence in my portrayal. Instead of painting their face entirely red, I only added a few red lines on their faces and bodies. The shallow holes in the second person's body were translated into a few dots that I made with the sharp point of the red color pencil.

The most intriguing aspect of that drawing, when I saw it again many years later, was the fact that the faces of the two men weren't as angry as I could remember. The figures were even a little bit funny, probably because I had learned to draw like the cartoons that I was watching all the time.

In My mind, I reflect on the entire event in the following manner: someone was trying to put a mark on another person's body (*due to a disagreement on a certain matter*), and the entire incident left a mark on my mind, prompting me to create marks on paper to release the pressure of the whole experience, documenting it, and perhaps make it less violent. The desire to change and improve is an important part of any drawing, I believe.

Additionally, there occurs a form of translation from the moment of observation to the end of the process of drawing, simply because an input (observation of an event, object, etc.) traverses through the system of the observer/artist and reacts with their life experiences and emotions and the resulting output (the marks) would be a combinational product of outside reality and inside truth.

I believe this state is accurate not only in abstract or "straightforward drawing", but even when the artist aims to depict the realistic aspect of a phenomenon. For instance, the trees that Paul Cezanne created are entirely distinct from his friend Camille Pissarro.

The whole event of the fight scene I mentioned earlier remained unfinished in my mind since I departed before its conclusion. Due to this, I had the power to change its ending in any way that I desired. As a matter of fact, I was very good at making endings for unfinished stories. As a child in the early 2000s in Iran, I grew up watching Disney cartoons on VHS tape and the problem with VHS tapes was that it was very common and easy to record a new movie or cartoon on the previous content.

I had some unfinished tapes too, because distributors were duplicating these tapes illegally in numbers, as fast as they could and sometimes, they simply were recording different content on the same tape by mistake.

For instance, I never watched the ending of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) until my early 20s. The version I had on a tape was containing some random cartoons of the character Goofy in the original language which was English instead of the last final 20 or 30 minutes of the movie.

Drawing also has an unfinished quality. Whether a drawing has been made as a sketch to show the main idea for a project or it is going to be the final work, there is a quality of abandonment in them. One can continue a drawing using their imagination. You can add color to it or change its form in your mind. The space is also unfinished and infinite. Lines can be drawn in any direction to eternity. Also, unfinished lines seem to be amputated. Monsters are made of amputated parts too. Like Frankenstein who was assembled from amputated body parts of dead people.

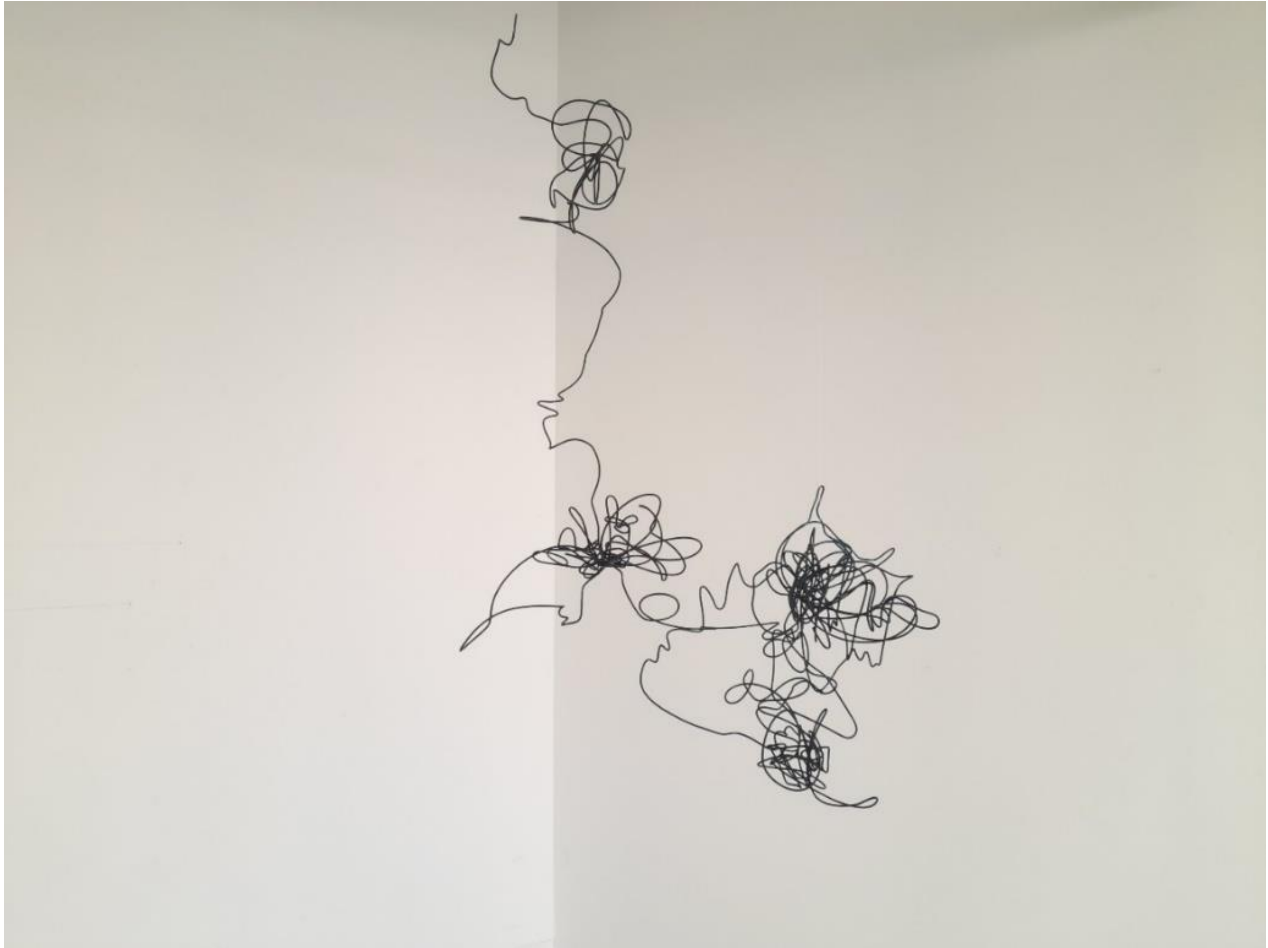


Figure 7: Untitled, painted wire, 100x100x140 CM, 2021

The concept of unfinishedness has been a focal point of my research and studio practice from the very beginning. The book *Unfinished: thoughts left visible* suggests four elements for the unfinishedness in contemporary art; The provisional, the participatory, the entropy, and the infinity.

While exploring the idea of three-dimensional drawing, I found the concept of infinity very helpful and relevant to my practice. There are infinite possibilities for the lines in the way that they move through the space and each time that I set them up in different spaces they form

in a new fashion. Kelly Baum provides a compelling out-look of the relevancy of the concept of infinity to human life and art around and after the mid-20th century:

The concept of infinity, whether implied or enacted, informs a great deal of art made after 1960. It was at this very moment, of course, that space travel and an expanding highway system, not to mention ongoing developments in astronomy, mathematics, quantum mechanics, and both computer and communications technology, threw into doubt our conventional understanding of space and time.¹⁰

Entropy is another aspect of unfinishedness that is relevant to my work. Entropy is the second law of thermodynamics and “is also a measure of the molecular disorder, or randomness, of a system.”¹¹

Everything in this world is continuously moving towards disorder. When you pour a glass of water on the ground, the way that the water spreads is entropy; our aging is a consequence of the entropy of our molecules, and time itself, is the result of the entropy of particles starting from the moment of the Big Bang.

The way that I draw lines on paper or in space can be seen as an expression of entropy. It is about the exhaust of the material. Moving a pen on a piece of paper will destroy both of them at the end and trying to manipulate the shape of wires and steel bars with my hands requires energy from my muscles and results in changing the ordered shape of the material.

¹⁰ Kelly Baum. *“Unfinished : Thoughts left visible.”* New York : The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016, 109.

¹¹ Drake, G. W.F.. "entropy." Encyclopedia Britannica, April 28, 2023.
<https://www.britannica.com/science/entropy-physics>.



Figure 8: Unfinished attempt, mixed media (still bar, wire, ink, clear acrylic, wood, spray paint), 100x130x180 CM, 2023

Incorporating pieces of wood, either as a spike to hold my drawings on the wall or as a part of my sculptures accompanying wires, clear plastics, and ink is a part of that too. The found pieces of wood that I am using in my works have had a living existence once, as a part of a plant. Wood is an incredible material that shows how entropy can alter the state, potential, and capabilities of a phenomenon.

The Role of Unconscious

The unknown realm of the unconscious is full of uncertainty and surprises. The upside-down land where one can never get used to its functions and rules. “Like conscious discourse, the formation of the unconscious (dreams, etc.) is saying something quite different from what they appear to say. These formations are governed by the same mechanisms as language, namely metaphor and metonymy.”¹²

Finding the reason why I was so attracted to monsters during all these years made me very curious about the unconscious and how the dark side of our mind works. I realized the monster is a metaphor and a response to a social, political, and psychological condition. A state which freely formed far away from censorship of the conscious mind, as “Lacan asserts: I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.”¹³

¹² Madan Sarup. *An introduction to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. Georgia: University of Georgia press, 1989, 11.

¹³ Madan Sarup. *An introduction to post-structuralism and postmodernism*. Georgia: University of Georgia press, 1989, 11.

For the first time, “Freud discovered that what actually happens is that the mind somehow boxes off the unwanted thoughts, impulses, and memories, by using one of a variety of methods, so that they are no longer available for access by the conscious mind. It feels as though we’ve got rid of them, but in fact, we’re just holding them somewhere else. This process is what Freud refers to as ‘repression’.”¹⁴



Figure 9: Autopsy of the remains, ballpoint pen, mounted by wood spikes, Polyptych, 100x200 CM (each part), 2022

And here comes the method of *Surrealistic Automatism*, where I suppress conscious control over the creative process and allow the dark side of the moon, the unknown part of my

¹⁴ Sarah Tomley, introduction to *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud, Croydon: Capstone publication, 2020, xii, xiv.

mind, do the job for me. Surrealism automatism started with Dadaists in the early 20th century and many artists applied it in fine arts and literature.

When I start to make my drawings, I don't prepare any plans. I just start making marks on the surface of the paper, based on the need that I feel to do so. I let my hand find its way to the paper and I let my mind find its way to my hand. This process has a form of contemplation and obsession at the same time. I continue until I find a pattern or a clue of what am I drawing and then I can stop, go back and think about the rest of the process.

Using found and easy-to-use materials also is related to the state of the unconscious. We put away unwanted thoughts, but they continue to motivate our choices and actions indirectly. In my studio, I am making decisions all the time. When I am drawing a line, I will decide to move my hand straight or suddenly change the direction to left or right. I make the decision to attach a piece of wood to a piece of clear acrylic sheet or change the shape of a bar without an obvious reason. Only when I continue the process, I gradually find the motive behind my choices.

In this section, I also would like to talk about abstraction and its connection to my work. When I started to work on the subject of monsters for my MFA practice, most of my works still had a sense of figurative posture. Then I realized that I need to expand the context and form of my work.

The necessity of depiction of the body was a barrier to my mind that wouldn't let me connect myself and the process of my practice to my unconscious. I needed to collapse the form of the body to unlock that part. I wanted to know what else I can find there. As a consequence, I started to draw looser, and when I could break my rules, I found new forms and meanings.

I would say I took distance from the imagery of the body, and when my work gained abstract quality, again I could find organic and body-related forms in them. At this point, I realized I still have the concept of body and at the same time I can go further than that and let the unconscious part of my mind lead me into the unknown. If you cut a close shot of a phenomenon, it will become abstract. Abstraction has the quality of amputation and unfinishedness in it and for me, it is perfectly matched with the concept of the monster and unconscious.

The Other

Although it seems that the concept of being an outsider and the interaction between self and other relates to immigration issues perfectly, it is not the only field of use for these terms. The word “outsider” defines the meaning of “not belonging”; not belonging to a certain group of identification, and I had this feeling all of my life.

Growing up in a non-religion family taught me as a child to hide my personal life in school and in general outside of the home. I learned when someone asks me if my parents and I pray, the safe answer is “Yes, of course!”. I lied about praying all of my life until I got accepted to study animation at the national television university (دانشکده ی صدا و سیما) as the first person on their list that year.

The lie of my life was revealed when the political and religion examiner of the university, as the final examination of being accepted to that university asked me to pray in front of him, and obviously I didn’t know how I should do it and they simply put me away. I didn’t belong to that system, no matter how passionate I was about getting into that university.



Figure 10: Immersion I, mixed media (wire, ink, clear acrylic, wood, spray paint), 65x45x40
CM, 2022

I had a similar situation as a young boy who tries to be a “man”. I grew up in a working-class neighborhood that had a crime and violence background and there have been living a few old gang groups even before I was born. Some of my friends and classmates in primary school ended up being gang members in their twenties and gained respect from peers.

In my quest for a sense of belonging as a youth, I was doing things to rank myself up among my friends. I was playing the role of tough guy all the time when I was outside of my home, even though deep down, I wasn’t really tough at all. Always my preference was to be alone and to entertain myself with drawings or movies.



Figure 11: Immersion II, mixed media (wire, ink, clear acrylic, wood, spray paint), 55x60x60

CM, 2022

In the community where I grew up, going to art school and studying fine art was the worst thing that a man can do with his life. A total waste of time. I was frequently receiving this comment: when you are going to stop this nonsense, be a man and find a “real” job?

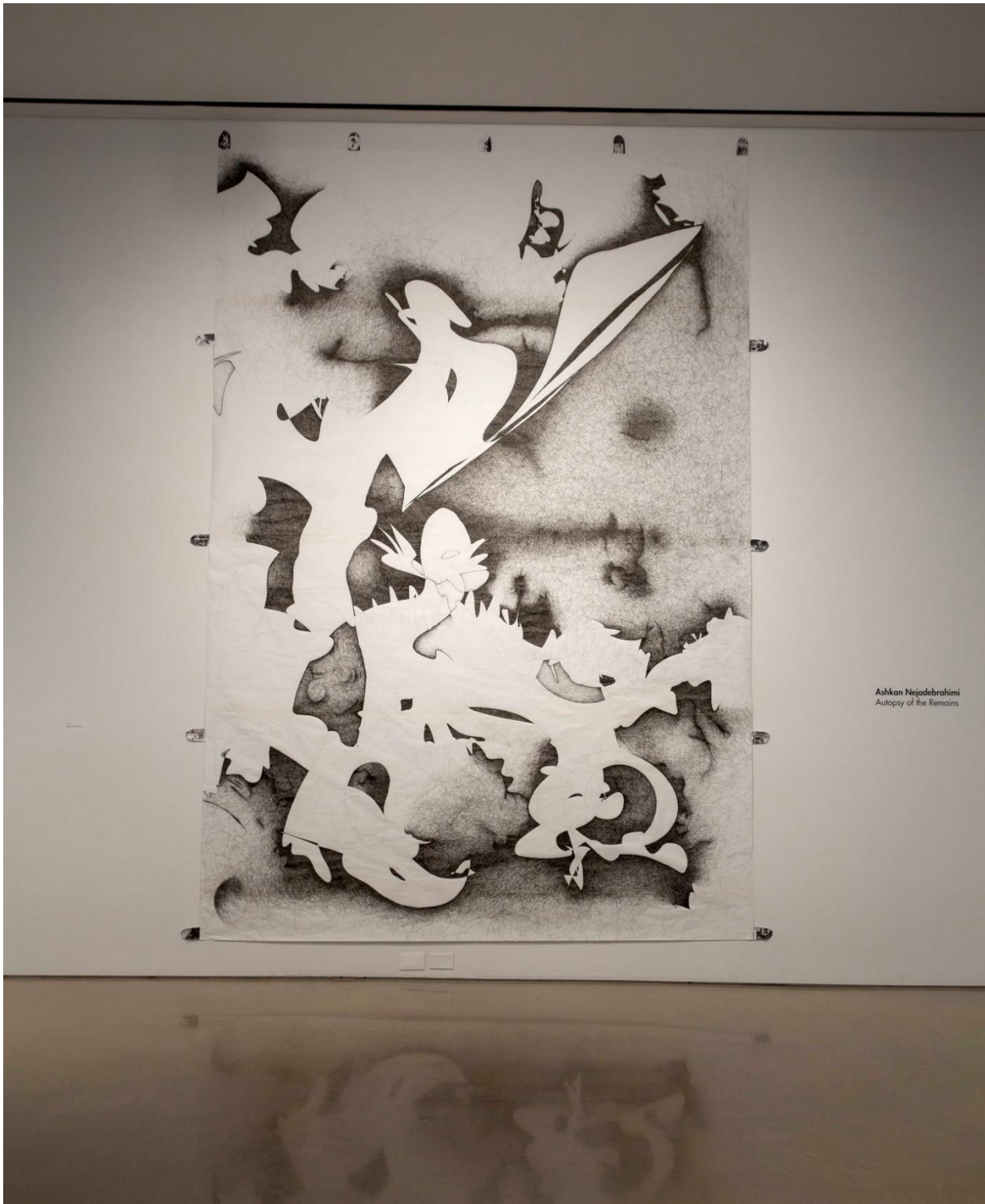
Struggling with the purpose of my life, I ended up to have two characteristics to find a sense of belonging to either street or university and the tragedy is that I lost both. I couldn't get along with my friends in the neighborhood, nor my classmates at the university anymore. For both sides, I was ‘the weirdo’. My choices and attitude made me someone who was caught in-between, an outsider, and an amateur. What a boy should do when he is not ‘Man’ enough to find his place outside of the home and not ‘Good’ enough to find his place inside the classroom?

The term Othering describes the reductive action of labelling and defining a person as a subaltern native, as someone who belongs to the socially subordinate category of the Other. The practice of Othering excludes persons who do not fit the norm of the social group, which is a version of the Self.”¹⁵ ” Likewise, in human geography, the practice of othering persons means to exclude and displace them from the social group to the margins of society, where mainstream social norms do not apply to them, for being the Other.¹⁶

People with disabilities, people who are identified as non-binary genders, immigrants, neurodiverse individuals, and in general, some social minorities usually experience a sense of otherness at different levels of strength based on the social space they live in. The Other interrupts the routine process of specification.

¹⁵ “Othering”, The new Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought, Third Edition (1999), 620.

¹⁶ Allison Mountz. “The Other”. Key Concepts in Human Geography (2009). 328.



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Figure 12: Twirl, Ballpoint pen on paper, mounted by wood spikes, 300x420 CM, 2023

For me, the connection between self and other defines all the connections between monsters, drawings, the unconscious, and the quality of unfinishedness. The role of an alien in society is like a foreign body. The body tries to repulse the external object by making an allergic reaction to it. Surround it and reject it. The pieces of wood That I use in my sculptures and drawings have the same role. They are a metaphor for the foreign body, representing the sense of otherness.

The body itself is very important subject to my works. The body in general is the first appearance of our personality; It is the primary definition of Self. Our choices and the way that we live our life affects the shape of our bodies, and People identify us with the flesh that they are looking at and we do the same.

Indeed, our body is the only true possession that we have in this world. We can lose anything. We can lose any object or any person and we are still here, alive. The only belonging that losing it is equal to not being existed anymore is our body. Our body is our only weapon through **struggle for existence** as Charles Darwin says, and it is our sanctuary to receive pleasure and pain, and experience joy and grief.

And when it comes to drawing, the connection to the body is undeniable. The act of drawing involves both the movements of our body and the sensations we experience. The way that energy flows from the body to the marking tool and then to the marking surface shapes the marks, and everything is about the marks, marks that we make, and marks we receive during our lives.



Figure 13: a view of my studio while I'm working, 2023

Conclusion

The Other, interrupts the Normal continuously and facing it, is inevitable. It comes either as an unwanted thought to make us uncomfortable or as a person who doesn't match with our preconceptions. While we can divide this issue to social and psychological (even political) aspects, it is a fact that they are merged in each other when it comes to experiencing otherness.

During my MFA studio practice and research, I found the importance and meaning of the material that I am using and I have become sensitive to the connection between my choices and what I define as my ‘true-self’ through my studio work.

I realized, the monster, unconscious, and the quality of unfinishedness have an intersection. All of them are interrupting the preset orientation, and for me, all of these meet at the ground of Drawing. Drawing is my language. It is my way of interacting with what is outside of the borders of my body and it is an act of autopsy to search for the anomaly and exploring the depths of the unknown.