

WOVEN TOGETHER



WOVEN TOGETHER

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ABSTRACT

In elementary school, I recall sitting outside on an overcast day on the playground, observing the sheet of gray that blanketed the sky. Small pockets of light periodically pierced through the transient clouds, transforming the once moody landscape into a decoupage of rich values. Overcast days are a metaphor for the ebb and flow of life and the silver linings I pull from in my artwork.

My black and white charcoal drawings weave together the duality I've experienced along my healing and growth journey and the lessons I've learned along the way. Where I have experienced immense sadness in my life, I have also experienced beauty and compassion. The notion of duality seeps into my artwork, rearing its head as a consistent reminder to seek balance within myself. Anthropomorphic animals, plants, and human figures dance together on the wood panels to reveal my adoration of classic literature and fables. Through them, I unpack the underpinnings of my Mexican-Iranian identity that I once ignored. To unify my mixed culture and excavate my sense of self from years of purposeful neglect, I use my artwork as a melting pot, mixing the fragments of my past into an incalculable but illuminating brew.

The three-dimensional protrusions from my drawings mirror my desire to gain confidence in taking up space, literally and figuratively. Using my art to practice taking up space encourages me to inquire more about my Mexican-Iranian identity, find my voice, and reject the confines of assimilation. I also address the wealth of knowledge, culture, and practices that my ancestors before me have carried with them over the generations. My thesis is entitled *Woven Together*, which refers to the importance of community and friendship as I regain my footing in an ever-changing world.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank my mentor Thadius Taylor and advisor James Thistlewaite for believing in the strange and sometimes unclear visions I've had for my artwork. Their time, knowledge, and insight allowed me to revel in the magic of drawing and put forth a body of work I am truly proud of.

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Additionally, I want to thank and acknowledge my parents for supporting me throughout my artistic journey. I know my unwavering need to create artwork, despite not really knowing where I'm going with it, can be difficult to accept as parents, but I'm grateful for their willingness to entertain my passions.

And of course, my dogs Smoosh, Gaia, and Ranger, for leaving their fur wedged in the crevices of my artwork. I'd like to think they are artists themselves.

DEDICATION

To all the people struggling to come into their own, find their people, and believe in themselves.

EPIGRAPH

“To come to the end of a time of anxiety and fear! To feel the cloud that hung over us lift and disperse—the cloud that dulled the heart and made happiness no more than a memory! This at least is one joy that must have been known by almost every living creature.”

-Richard Adams, Watership Down

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WOVEN TOGETHER.....	1
DESCRIPTION.....	1
RESEARCH.....	8
METHODOLOGY	13
CONCLUSION.....	18
WORKS CITED.....	19
APPENDIX	21

TABLE OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1	<i>The Observer Part 1</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	2
FIGURE 2	<i>Resilience</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	3
FIGURE 3	<i>Courage</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	3
FIGURE 4	<i>Ancestral Knowledge</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	4
FIGURE 5	<i>In the Moment</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	5
FIGURE 6	<i>The Observer Part 2</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	6
FIGURE 7	<i>Dirty Laundry</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2023	7
FIGURE 8	Detail of <i>Courage</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2023	8
FIGURE 9	<i>Puss in Boots</i> , Gustave Doré, 1862	9
FIGURE 10	Detail 1 of <i>In the Moment</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2023	10
FIGURE 11	<i>Chimp with Whirlpool</i> , Adonna Khare, 2013	10
FIGURE 12	Detail of <i>Dirty Laundry</i> , Amanda Kazemi 2023	11
FIGURE 13	<i>Elephant Whirlpool</i> , Adonna Khare, 2014	12
FIGURE 14	<i>The Observer</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	13
FIGURE 15	<i>Ancestral Knowledge</i> Version 1, Amanda Kazemi, 2022	14
FIGURE 16	<i>Detail of Ancestral Knowledge</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	15
FIGURE 17	Detail 2 of <i>In the Moment</i> , Amanda Kazemi, 2022	16

TABLE OF PLATES

PLATE 1	The Observer, 2022	21
PLATE 2	Resilience, 2022	22
PLATE 3	Courage, 2022	23
PLATE 4	Ancestral Knowledge, 2022	24
PLATE 5	In the Moment, 2022	25
PLATE 6	Dirty Laundry, 2023	26
PLATE 7	The Great Escape, 2023	27
PLATE 8	Feel Your Feelings, 2022	28
PLATE 9	Split, 2022	29
PLATE 10	Growth, 2022	30
PLATE 11	Sunny Side Up, 2022	31
PLATE 12	A Sign from the Universe, 2021	32
PLATE 13	Three Graces, 2021	33
PLATE 14	Holey Places, 2021	34
PLATE 15	The Lovers, 2022	35

WOVEN TOGETHER

DESCRIPTION

As a Mexican and Iranian minority growing up in a predominantly white neighborhood, I began to negate any culture I was born into in hopes of fitting in. I refused to learn the languages my family spoke, align with folklore and ancestral stories I'd been told as a child, and even deterred friends from coming over for dinner because I was ashamed of the "weird" foods my parents made. I'd inadvertently bound my own roots into a shallow pot, ceasing to grow into a fuller version of myself. By the time I was legally an adult, I had no idea who I was and felt like I'd floated through my adolescent years with blinders on.

I felt like the bird in *Are You my Mother?* by P. D. Eastman, searching for a part of me I had no recollection of. The problem was that I was seeking out some semblance of familiarity with people and things outside of myself, running into dead ends each way I turned. The years of being a flightless bird came to a grinding halt as I began to build my own life following a divorce. The life I had created finally collapsed through the fickle foundation I'd been hell-bent on establishing. Every reality and identity I had touted dissipated in an instant, and all I had was myself looking back in the mirror. I didn't really know her.

Welcoming in my identity as a Mexican and Iranian woman has been riddled with insecurity and self-doubt. To unify my mixed culture and excavate my sense of self from years of purposeful neglect, I use my artwork as a melting pot, mixing the fragments of my past into an incalculable but illuminating brew. The first symbolic manifestations of my identity came in the form of an African wild dog. In the first half of my diptych called *The Observer Part I* (Fig. 1), I depict a lone African wild dog, looking off into the distance. Its

look is pensive, full of curiosity and wonder. Cradling the dog's head are oversized tulips, symbolizing the hope I felt embarking on my healing and growth journey. The deeply saturated black charcoal background represents the unknown trials and tribulations that are yet to come.



Figure 1. Amanda Kazemi, *The Observer Part 1*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 2.5'x2.5'.

My thesis body of work tells the story of trying to find myself, the lessons I've learned along the way, and the glimmers of hope in between. Where I have felt alone, I am reminded of the abundance of love surrounding me. Where I have experienced immense sadness in my life, I have also experienced beauty and compassion. The continuous theme of duality seeps into my artwork, rearing its head as a consistent reminder to seek

balance within myself. I use nature—plants, animals, and humans—to visually describe an emotion or experience within my artwork. In my drawing *Resilience* (Fig. 2), I drew two asymmetrical images of my rescue dog, Gaia, to depict the past and present. Bursting flowers and gleeful rabbits are woven around Gaia to show her journey in overcoming abuse. I choose animals that fit my narrative through direct observation and extensive research on their symbolism. Rabbits, for example, symbolize good luck in Iranian folk tradition.

As a child, I remember lying on the itchy cat bed in my parent's bedroom, looking up at the ceiling and visualizing the fantastical stories my dad read aloud to me from *Aesop's*



Figure 2. Amanda Kazemi, *Resilience*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 30"x35".



Figure 3. Amanda Kazemi, *Courage*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 24"x30".

Fables. Periodically I'd glance at the words on the pages I couldn't yet read and imagine the characters coming out of the book, nestling on my shoulder or playing with my hair. The lessons within the stories have permeated my subconscious, paving the way for my ongoing quest for personal growth. It is no surprise that upon finding the work of Gustave Doré as an adult, memories from my childhood flooded in. The anthropomorphic animals and rich grayscale imagery in Doré's work sang to me like classic literature. In *Courage* (Fig. 3), I juxtapose a timid jaguar being led by brave mice to emulate Doré's approach to imagery. The jaguar, a typically powerful force within the central-American jungle is depicted with her head low to portray her unsettled nerves. The mice hold a modest

candlestick within their claws, helping to reveal the pathway through the thick palm leaves. The jaguar in *Courage* represents the outwardly strong exterior I'd embodied for much of my life. I had difficulty allowing others to help me, even if it meant pushing myself to exhaustion. The mice, while meager in stature, are symbolic of the small, kind gestures from loved ones that have granted me the ability to persevere through difficult times.

My drawings offer dream-like imagery, weaving together unexpected combinations of subject matter into one cohesive piece. Each object within my artwork bends in and out of highly rendered light. Using smooth pencil markings, I explore life's continuous push and pull by weaving together anthropomorphic creatures that transition from one to the next throughout the drawing. I garner inspiration from my Mexican culture, infusing regalia and mementos from my past. For example, in my artwork *Ancestral Knowledge* (Fig. 4), I dress

one buffalo in a sarape and another in a crown of marigolds. These items are reminiscent of offerings left on a familial altar for *Dia de Los Muertos*.

Referencing my own ancestry has allowed me to better understand my past, as well as who I am now.

Ancestral Knowledge also addresses the wealth of knowledge, culture, and practices that my ancestors before me have carried with them throughout

generations. Upon closer inspection of the drawing, the mother raccoon demonstrates to her



Figure 4. Amanda Kazemi, *Ancestral Knowledge*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 34"x48".

kits how to properly sit astride the bison as the cow nudges her calf forwards. In the center of the drawing is a Xoloitzcuintle, pulling at the reins connected to the trekking animals. This ancient breed of dog symbolizes humans' best friend and the spirit guide for the deceased into the underworld, according to the Aztecs and the Mayans (Romey).

In *In the Moment* (Fig. 5), two Folkloric dancers corral around each other, arching

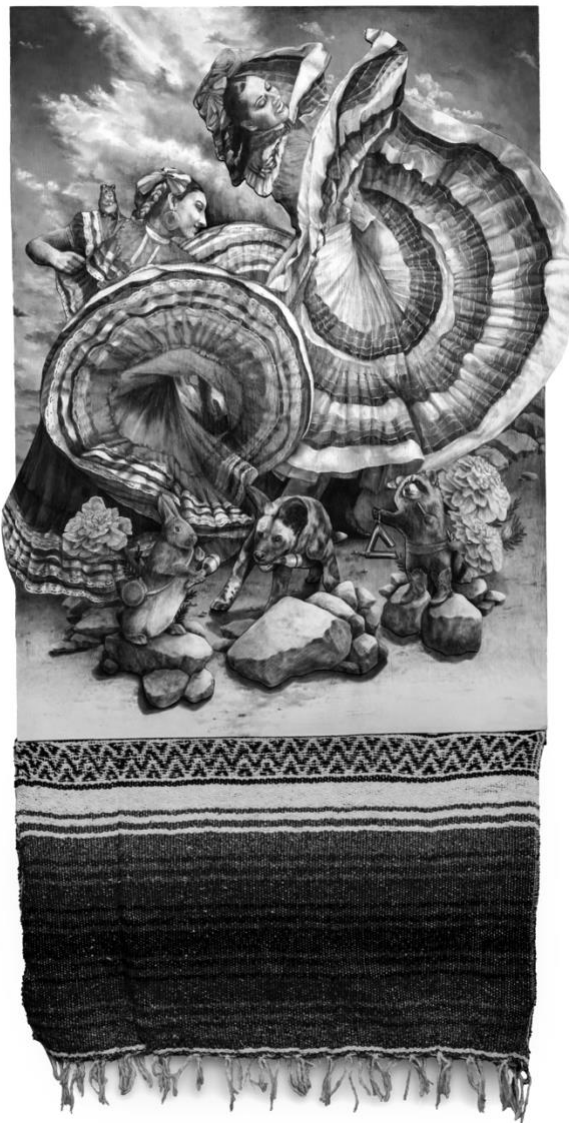


Figure 5. Amanda Kazemi, *In the Moment*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 36"x48".

their bodies like rainbows in unison with the flow of their skirts. A motley crew of animals, which recur in my thesis body of work, are situated below the dancers, partaking in tomfoolery. Despite the looming monsoon clouds in the background, the characters' alliance serves as a barrier to any impending doom. *In the Moment* is a reminder to embrace the magic of the moment, taking in the joy that comes with being present and attending to each other. Additionally, it addresses the necessity to foster joy every day, regardless of any unforeseen circumstances.

In the second half of my diptych *The Observer Part 2* (Fig. 6), three young wild dogs are seen playing in

large tulip leaves. The three dogs are an ode to the mystical number three commonly seen in folktales, such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* and *Three Little Pigs*. According to Justyna Matwiejczyk, writer for Cambridge.org, “A plot based on “threes” also creates suspense more effectively than events occurring in twos or fours.” Furthermore, the three wild dogs



Figure 6. Amanda Kazemi, *The Observer Part 2*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 2.5'x2.5'.

reference ancient Greek philosopher Pythagoras' belief that three symbolized harmony, wisdom, and understanding (Stewart). Four large legs descend from above the playful pups, belonging to the solo wild dog seen in the first half of the diptych. The second half of *The Observer* exists as a benchmark of my healing and growth journey. The wild dogs playing together reveal the

positive impact my family, friendships, and community have afforded me. As in the first half of the diptych, a black background surrounds the main subjects; however, the leaves, wild dogs, and overarching legs fragment the negative space, making the unknown future feel less daunting. The full diptych of *The Observer* appears in Plate 1. The two circular panels sit slightly off-kilter when placed together, with the left panel situated diagonally above the

right. This orientation draws the connection between the larger wild dog in the left panel and its cradling body above the smaller wild dogs.

Within each of my drawings, portions of the image escape the edges of the wood panel. By blending two and three-dimensional elements, I create a relief-like sculpture. The three-dimensional protrusions from my drawings mirror my desire to gain confidence in



Figure 7. Amanda Kazemi, *Dirty Laundry*, 2023, Charcoal on wood panel, 3'x3'.

taking up space, literally and figuratively. Using my art to practice taking up space encourages me to inquire more about my Mexican-Iranian identity, find my voice, and reject the confines of assimilation. Organizing and stacking pieces of cut-out wood feels like a puzzle that merges to create one harmonious image where I can actively choose how much attention I bring to a personal experience. In my piece

Dirty Laundry (Fig. 7), I kept the cut-outs of the recurring raccoon, rabbit, and wild dog encapsulated within a round, voyeuristic frame. While this piece is a general commentary on family secrets or “dirty laundry,” I wanted to keep the image confined without protrusions to reflect the obligation I have felt to uphold social norms and remain silent regarding domestic issues.

The development of my drawings has become a ritual for me to tame conflicting dualities within myself—do I stay guarded, or do I break out?—to regain my balance. The lessons from classic fables mirror my own real-life decision-making conundrums. In that sense, my artwork is a visual fable, offering anecdotal perspectives. What are the takeaways from my lived experiences? And how do those lessons remedy my search for identity?

RESEARCH

Visual and literary storytelling has historically influenced how we construct the world around us (Puchner). Much of my fascination with animals, plants, and personal growth stems from the stories and artwork I was exposed to in my formative years. These influences have seeped into my work through anthropomorphic animals and surreal imagery.

One of my first encounters with storytelling was *Aesop's Fables* (Santore). The Greek storyteller demonstrated moral lessons using animals in a series of short stories in the mid to late 6th century BCE. My father used to read to me the 1988 edition of *Aesop's Fables*, which he had initially purchased for my sister, who was born that year. The anthropomorphic animals in the stories nurtured my love of vivacious animal characters and my ongoing quest for growth within myself. I fabricate whimsical animals within my artwork to allude to an underlying lesson I had to learn, specifically introspection. The animals help describe emotions in a playful, less confrontational manner. Aesop reveals a plethora of different morals within each of the fables, mirroring the many lessons humans will learn in their



Figure 8. Amanda Kazemi, Detail of *Courage*, 2022

lifetime, such as being slow and steady can win the race, as told in *The Tortoise and the Hare*. The fables illustrate mutual dependence—something prevalent in the story arc of my body of work. In my piece *Courage* (Fig. 3), I depict a nighttime scene to allude to the uncharted territories I’ve traversed over the last few years. Large wild cats are often seen as the dominant force within the jungle; however, the jaguar I drew appears wary, with her head low as she cautiously walks through the thick foliage. The jaguar in *Courage* mirrors my desire to allow others through the barricades I erected to protect me from getting hurt. Like my loved ones, the mice surrounding the jaguar are kind and non-threatening, serving as reliable allies I could comfortably allow into my inner world (Fig. 8). The small gesture of



Figure 9. Gustave Doré, *Puss in Boots*, 1862, Engraving, *Les Contes de Perrault*, Charles Perrault, 1862, J. Hetzel et Compagnie, Paris

the mice illuminating the pathway with their candlesticks brought ease and safety to the jaguar. The lesson within this piece is like that of Aesop’s tale of *The Lion and the Mouse*. Author Charles Santore sets the scene for the heroic mouse: “Without more ado, it set to work to gnaw the ropes with its teeth and succeeded before long in setting the Lion free” (12). A moral tale of predator and prey beating the odds and becoming allies reveals the value of kindness and friendship.

While the morals of the stories I was read as a child significantly influence my artwork, I am equally enthralled by the whimsical characters within them. As an adult, Doré propelled me to explore anthropomorphic animals in-depth. A prolific engraver who initially rose in popularity after recognition for his caricatures in the

French journal *Le journal pour rire*, Doré illustrated fairytales with mythological creatures as seen in his work *Puss in Boots* (Fig. 9) printed in *Les Contes de Perrault* by French author Charles Perrault. The illustration depicts Puss in Boots with his arms raised and mouth agape,



Figure 10. Amanda Kazemi, Detail 1 of *In the Moment*, 2022

impishly signaling his alarm to the king's carriage for the garmentless character in the background who was swindled of his clothing. Puss in Boots is dressed in chic thigh-high boots, a utility belt strung with mousy prey, a billowing cape, and a cavalier hat. In my drawing *In the Moment* (Fig. 10), a raccoon is shown in the bottom right quadrant wearing tattered cowboy boots, a utility belt to hold his triangle beaters, and a

triangle in hand. I tried to

make the raccoon's expression anticipatory as he waited for his cue to chime in. While the raccoon is not the central figure as Puss in Boots is in Doré's illustration, the raccoon's human-like qualities and clothing echo the exuberant spectacle winding throughout my drawing.

Doré's use of rich contrasting values and detail inculcated my love of grayscale. Similarly to Doré, contemporary artist Adonna Khare primarily uses grayscale in her illustrations. Khare creates fantastical, large-scale scenes

of anthropomorphic animal antics. Unexpected combinations of animals tether around each other, capturing the absurdity of life. According to Khare's biography, "The result is a group



Figure 11. Adonna Khar, *Chimp with Whirlpool*, 2013, Carbon pencil, 60"x42". Private collection.

of drawings where the animals coexist in a world beyond ours, and are inexplicably tied together, often not by choice” (Visions West Contemporary). Khare explains that animals are sometimes stand-ins for humans. In her piece *Chimp with Whirlpool* (Fig. 11), Khare illustrates a larger-than-life chimpanzee wading through a spinning whirlpool, serving as a life raft for several other wild creatures. The chimpanzee cradles a young infant, possibly alluding to the weight of parenthood. Khare’s affinity for graphite and use of animals as placeholders for humans mirrors the approaches I take in my own artwork. In *Dirty Laundry*

(Fig. 7), a raccoon, rabbit, and wild dog rifle through a pile of laundry. A lone mouse quietly keeps watch on the top of the clothesline. Each character represents the different dispositions I’ve embodied throughout my life. The raccoon, for



Figure 12. Amanda Kazemi, Detail of *Dirty Laundry*, 2023

example, signifies leading a life with blinders on. The rabbit is trapped in a fight, flight, or freeze state, while the wild dog works to pull out the “laundry” that is stuffed beneath the surface of the basket (Fig. 12). Furthermore, in *Ancestral Knowledge* (Fig. 4), a Xoloitzcuintle quietly leads the group of traveling animals with reins, implying that the knowledge of my ancestors traverses time and space and permeates the present day. The animals in *Ancestral Knowledge* pay homage to my family. Similarly, Khare shares that the gorilla in *Elephant Whirlpool* (Fig. 13) represents her deceased father and that the lion represents her daughter Kinsey. (Grand Rapids Art Museum).

Although my influences can be traced back to core memories from my childhood and my ancestral lineage, I have often struggled to communicate the inherent message I want to

put forth. To nullify that internal blockage, I start with a surrealist practice called automatic writing, originally developed by the founder of the surrealist movement, André Breton. Breton used automatic writing to quiet the conscious mind and stimulate thought without moral or aesthetic concern (Breton 26). Before starting my diptych, *The Observer* (Fig. 14), I wanted to shed light on my healing and growth journey. I wasn't sure how to visually communicate this theme, so I started by using automatic writing. The sentences flowed onto the page of my sketchbook, "There's something about healing that's often not discussed. It's not beautiful or linear. Quite

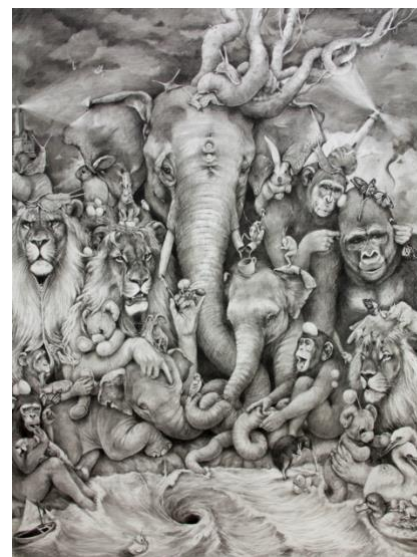


Figure 13. Adonna Khar, *Elephant Whirlpool*, 2014, carbon pencil on paper, 96"x72". Grand Rapids Art Museum.

the opposite. It's lonely, it's heartbreaking. Maybe I'll find my way." The words I wrote while I practiced automatic writing exposed the underlying feelings I wanted to portray in my artwork. The automatic writing session prompted me to research pack animals, where I stumbled across African wild dogs. When a wild dog is in the final stages of her pregnancy, she will isolate herself in a burrow away from the pack (Klein). Because the wild dog cannot hunt during this period, the pack continues to bring her food before she goes into labor. They also supply food for the pups once they are born and help with rearing. The beautiful communal nature of the wild dogs inspired the dogs in *The Observer*. Like the mother wild dog that self-isolated, I had to turn my focus away from the world around me and look within myself to start on my healing journey. I was also extremely fortunate to have a solid family and friends support system who were integral to my survival.

I often pull additional inspiration from fiction that speaks to the overarching concepts I communicate in my work. In the novel *Watership Down*, author Richard Adams describes the palpable fear the rabbits feel while embarking on their migration to find a new burrow.

“To rabbits, everything unknown is dangerous. The first reaction is to startle, the second to bolt. Again and again they startled, until they were close to exhaustion. But what did these sounds mean and where, in this wilderness, could they bolt to?” (23).

The rabbits realize that they no longer have the safety of their former homes and must face the unknown of the

wilderness to seek a new burrow. The story of *Watership Down* illustrates the difficulty of leaving everyday comforts in hopes of creating a better future. It also depicts life’s arduous, persistent, and sometimes humorous lessons. In *The Observer*, the isolated wild dog represents my journey into a seemingly terrifying world. I had to learn to face my fears and resist regressing into former, unhealed versions of myself. I knew the only way to find safety and reprieve from the unknown was to embark on a journey to seek self-love, even if it meant credulously holding onto hope.

METHODOLOGY

I’m often presented with fragmented images from my past when I mentally sift through childhood memories. These remembered experiences are relayed in muted colors. I



Figure 14. Amanda Kazemi, *The Observer*, 2022, Charcoal on wood, 6'x7'.

can recall the intensity of the full moon peering down at me as I dozed off to sleep in the backseat of my parent's car when I was a toddler or the day my grandma tried to teach me how to sew despite the language barrier. The amalgamation of my memories has helped me identify where I've been and who I am now. They have also informed the methods I use in my artwork, clarifying my behavior patterns and easing internal conflict.

When beginning a new piece, the blank panels serve as a clean slate for me to rectify past mistakes and resurrect parts of myself I'd ignored. I arrange the anthropomorphic animals, movement, and value to excavate the underpinnings of my identity and draw out the blueprint of my figurative construction.

Wrangling with the visual components to support my narrative has been an ongoing refinement process. In my initial mockup of



Figure 15. Amanda Kazemi, *Ancestral Knowledge* Version 1, Sketch, 2022

Ancestral Knowledge (Fig. 15), I included various characters that were not directly aligned with my thesis work but held personal meaning. Each of the characters was meant to symbolize some aspect of myself. In *Ancestral Knowledge*, originally titled *Into the Storm*, I wanted to communicate how I have accumulated knowledge, or tools, to assist me throughout my life. While I might not access each tool daily, I can readily pull them from my figurative tool belt. I felt passionate about the concept but wasn't satisfied with how the

characters in the piece interacted. To mediate this, I focused on the sources I'd acquired knowledge from and how that related to my upbringing. I was reminded of how stories, experiences, and histories are passed down through generations and shape our experiences. In the final drawing of *Ancestral Knowledge* (Fig. 4), I included young animals such as the calf and the kits. The youthful creatures represent the new generations of children who carry on their family's lineage. The parental animals, such as the bison and the raccoon, represent the caretakers who impart their knowledge to their young. I chose a Xoloitzcuintle dog (Fig. 16) to guide the other animals because it was one of the “earliest dogs to be domesticated by human populations and has existed in Mexico for more than 3,000 years” (Geier), thus signifying the span of my ancestry. I placed the dog in the center of *Ancestral Knowledge* with reins connected to the bison, linking the past, present, and future. Additionally, I included a sarape and marigolds in the drawing to echo repeated symbolism throughout my thesis work. The evolution of *Ancestral Knowledge* from its conception to its finalized form displays the importance of letting go of what doesn't serve me and embracing change.

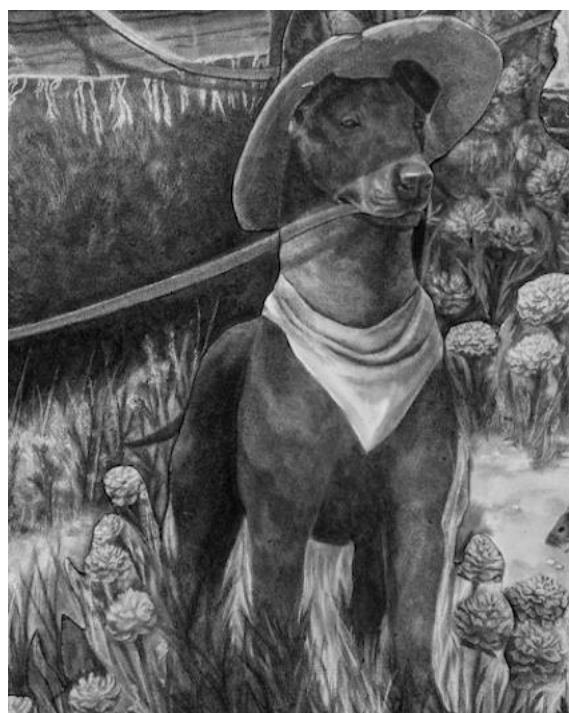


Figure 16. Amanda Kazemi, Detail of *Ancestral Knowledge*, 2022

Similar to the ebb and flow of life, my grayscale drawings that dip in and out of light reflect the transitional periods throughout my healing and growth journey. Working in grayscale has created a unique opportunity for me to highlight my experiences by amplifying

contrast and movement in my artwork. With heavy swatches of black charcoal and meticulously placed highlights throughout the surface, I try to illuminate the narrative. For example, in *In the Moment* (Fig. 5), I used medium-to-light values within the clouds and starkly contrasted them with the rich, dark hair of the two *Folklorico* dancers. The contrast between the women and the background was used to suggest how they transcended the obstacles of Mother Nature. The layered cutout of the women on top of the background further implies this narrative. They command the space physically, craning over the boundaries of my drawings as I, too, work to step outside of my comfort zone. Below the dancers are three exuberant creatures—a rabbit, an African wild dog, and a raccoon, depicting stoicism, waggishness, and patience.

In the Moment has a lot of detailed information competing for attention (See the closeup view in Fig.



Figure 17. Amanda Kazemi, Detail 2 of *In the Moment*, 2022

17). Compounding this issue is the importance each subject plays in the narrative. To mediate this, I mimicked the pattern of the sarape attached to the bottom of the drawing, creating tonal zones of gray, white, and black. To suggest movement in this drawing, I used implied lines to transition from one subject to the next. For example, I diagonally oriented the clouds

to guide the viewer's attention down toward the heads of the dancers. The intricate ribbons sewn into the women's dresses spin downward towards the animals below. I use contrasting black and white ribbons to create more dimension within the dresses and to serve as a visual pathway toward the remainder of the drawing. To direct attention to each animal, I placed them on a slope, with the raccoon at its peak. To further imply the slope, I slant the rocks beneath the animals to the right.

When I initially thought I was finished with *In the Moment*, I left the ground below the animals entirely white. I felt that it provided a mental break from the densely packed drawing. Additionally, I wanted the white area to echo the stripes on the sarape. However, after sitting with the drawing for some time, the abrupt transition to white felt counterintuitive. For this reason, I applied a gradient on the ground and a light sand texture between the rabbit and the wild dog to gently lead viewers out of the image and towards the sarape below.

Creating *In the Moment* was a testament to its underlying concept of acceptance. Although I had a plan for approaching the drawing, I had to be mentally present with the piece to breathe life into it. Many of my drawings are born from challenging experiences I attempt to work through at the easel. I create a loose sketch with personally meaningful symbolism, then further refine the imagery by focusing on how the figures and objects speak to one another and embody the narrative I want to portray. Although I have a general mental map of the values I will place throughout the drawing, I allow the contrast and details to emerge slowly, like when Polaroid film develops. The initial application of charcoal is subtle as if to test the waters before I commit to massaging in rich contrasting values. This process

also speaks to my own approach to life in that I try to find my footing before jumping in headfirst. I seek to tackle drawing with curiosity and allow room for change.

CONCLUSION

My thesis body of work has been a labor of love as I tried to weave together my fragmented past and create a new narrative surrounding my identity. It all started with a figurative journey I knew I needed to take to understand and get to know the person staring back at me in the mirror. I discovered that regardless of my experiences, having a support system helped me safely address where I've been and who I'd like to be in the next chapter of my life. Now that I've spent many months mulling over my thesis and reflecting on my work over the past two years, I can see glimmers of my identity come to the surface. The lessons that I address in my artwork reveal the things that are important to me and that I value, like community and healing. The three-dimensional elements of my artwork also affirm my desire to release myself from the confines of my lived experiences and carve out something beautiful piece by piece. Reconnecting with my Mexican-Iranian identity has brought about immense curiosity that will only continue to spark my creativity in the future. I don't claim to have it all figured out, nor do I aspire to reach a specific outcome. But I do hope that telling my story will slowly free my pot-bound roots. I also hope my artwork can speak to others ready to take up space and embrace the unknown.

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APPENDIX



Plate 1. *The Observer*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 6 ft. x 6 ft.



Plate 2. *Resilience*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 30 in. x35 in.



Plate 3. *Courage*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 24 in. x 30 in.

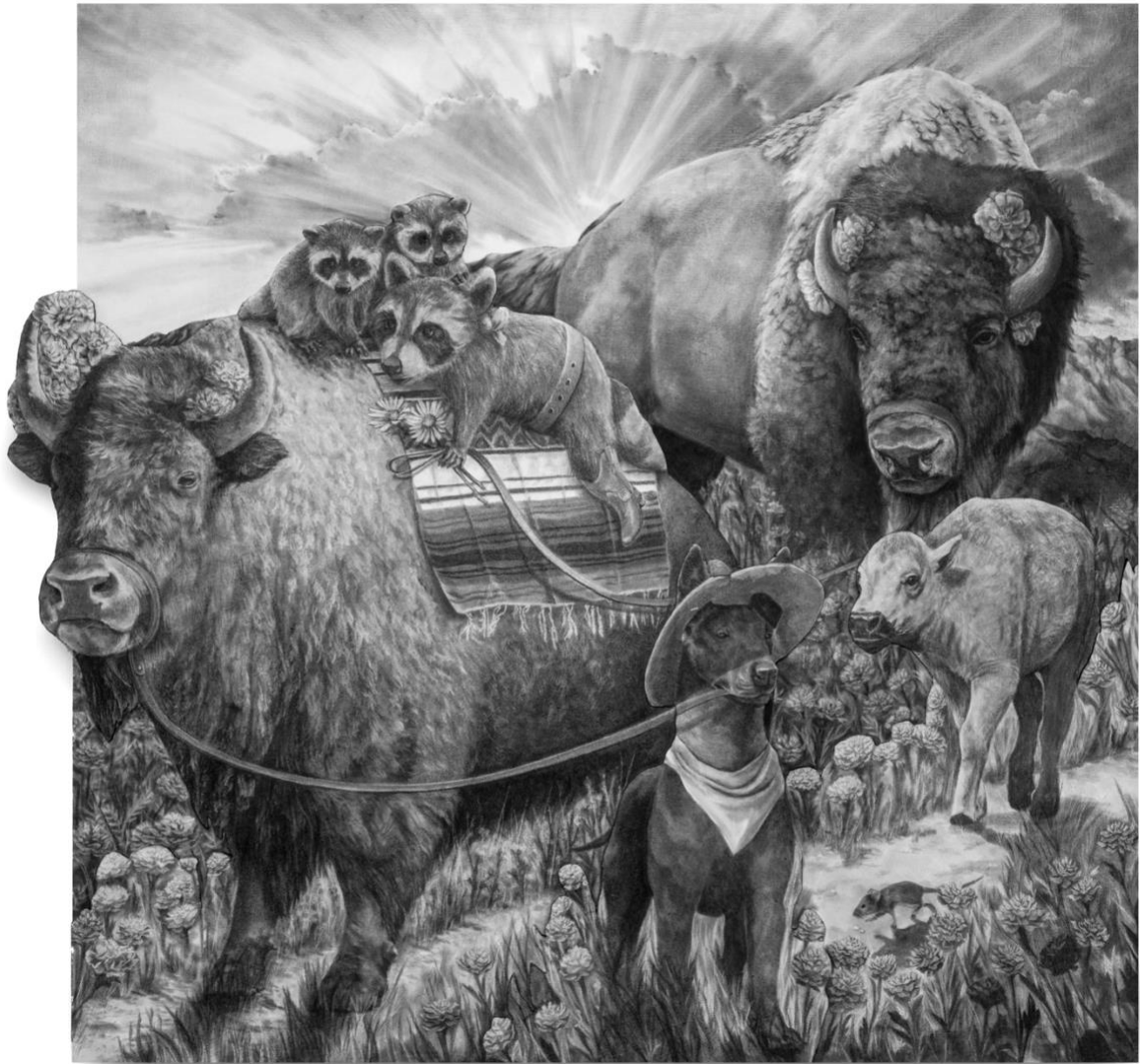


Plate 4. *Ancestral Knowledge*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 36 in. x39 in.



Plate 5. *In the Moment*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 36 in. x 58 in.



Plate 6. *Dirty Laundry*, 2023, Charcoal on wood panel, 36 in. x 36 in.



Plate 7. *The Great Escape*, 2023, Charcoal on wood panel, 9 in. x 20 in.



Plate 8. *Feel Your Feelings*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 30 in. x 40 in.

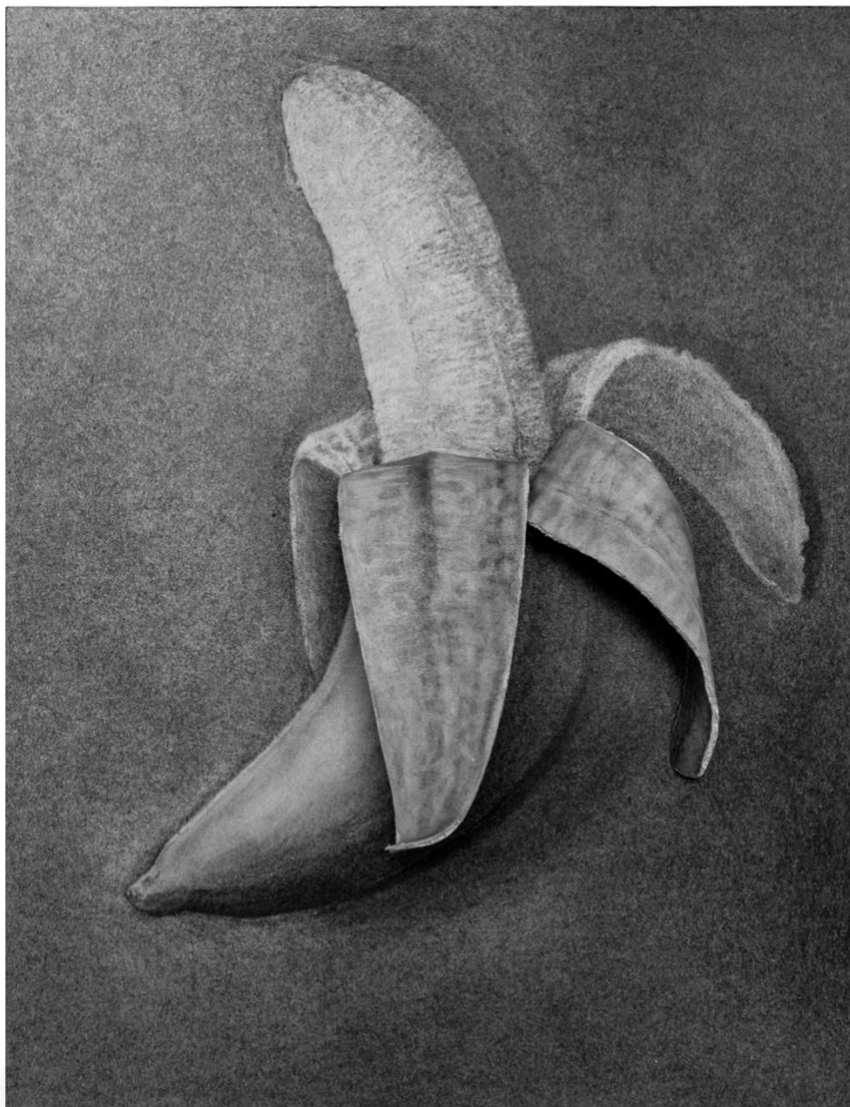


Plate 9. *Split*, 2022, Charcoal on Worbla, 6 in. x 9 in.



Plate 10. *Growth*, 2022, Charcoal on wood panel, 3 in. x 4 in.



Plate 11. *Sunny Side Up*, 2022, Charcoal on paper panel, 22 in. x 30 in.



Plate 12. *A Sign from the Universe*, 2021, Graphite on cut paper, 16 in. x 20 in.



Plate 13. *Three Graces*, 2021, Graphite on cut paper, 24 in. x 36 in.



Plate 14. *Holey Places*, 2021, Graphite on cut paper, 2.5 ft. x 3.5 ft.



Plate 15. *The Lovers*, 2021, Graphite on Worbla, 16 in. x 12 in. x 4 in.