



**External
Space**



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Sophie Sabet,
Though I am Silent, I Shake
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White linens on a clothesline, calmly flowing in the soft breeze: a soothing image of purity and peace. If you listen closely, you begin to hear a conversation between the past and the present, between two generations, between a mother and a daughter. The artist's mother is talking about her upbringing and the challenges she faced in her youth. She speaks of the history of the Islamic Revolution of 1978, a monumental uprising in Iran during which an upsurge of opposition was expressed. She then describes the theme of a group exhibition presented at the Seyhoon Gallery, in Tehran, in the 1990's in which she showcased her paintings. It was a show centered on womanhood and she showcased her musings about motherhood and its role as, "the base of the family." The mother's reminiscence of the past leads to a deeper excavation, remembering her grandmother and other women hanging sheets from a clothesline. This thought was accompanied by sadness, as it acted as a gateway to souvenirs of a harder time, of societal turmoil, loss, and hatred. Sophie Sabet's, *Though I Am Silent, I Shake*, explores notions of collectivity and relationships, tapping into the vivid cord that binds the present with the past. In essence, the dialogue examines generational gaps, and the ways in which they manifest conversationally, in the pauses, the silence, and ultimately, an unanswered question. It also reflects on Iranian cultural perspective relating the interconnectedness of womanhood and motherhood, juxtaposed with a modern-day Western ideology surrounding human connections and familial bonds.

The video begins by depicting a small breeze, on a warm spring or summer afternoon. The grass is of a saturated green, overlaid with the shadows of fresh laundry hung on a line. Sabet's mother is lying on a lawn chair in the backyard of her home. She has her arms crossed and rested on her stomach, in a relaxed position. The white sheets hanging from the clothesline drape gracefully with an uncluttered flow. The video transitions to the next scene, inside the home, showing paintings and sculptural works - all created by Sabet's mother. Her mother is shown lying on a couch and the frame is focused on her bare neck, showing her pulse. This camera slowly shifts its angle to display her bare arms, as she speaks about relationships, and the restrictions imposed on women during the Revolution. Sabet interrupts her mother's train of thought by saying: "Okay, we're not talking about that right now. What are your paintings about?"

When you ask a person a question and their answer differs from what you want to hear, what are they really telling you? The subtle passive aggression in the narrative provides an asymmetrical balance of emotion and contextualization of what is being narrated and what is being seen. Both the imagery and dialogue attends equally to each character, although differently portrayed. There is a fragile balance between what could be said and what should be said. The palpable tension between the interlocutors creates an unease that highlights their diverging needs. The frame returns to the white linens hung on the clothesline. This time, we are drawn towards the shadow created by the human silhouette behind the sheets; the artist's mother is tending to them. The play of shadows appears like forgotten memories, or haunting thoughts, memories that she may be trying to forget. This soft imagery creates a resonance. While standing behind the sheets, she verbally recalls how women would 'hide' behind these fabrics, which she also refers to as 'obstructions.' Interestingly, as Sophie's mother stands behind them, her shadow becomes invisible as she describes the memory of the women hiding behind the fabrics. There is a contrasting effect that becomes apparent – something about the fact of being invisible versus being visible can resonate with the viewer. Sometimes, the

notion of being hidden is more impactful than being seen. This suggests a source of inspiration for Sabet's mother, the conflict of stressing to be visible.

Perhaps the shadows between the white sheets have encouraged Sabet's mother to create art and generate a space for resistance. As the camera returns to the artworks, it focuses on specific pieces such as white relief sculptures and delicate drawings layered over with text. The consistent imagery of Sabet's mother's work invokes the memories from her past and the tensions related to the depictions of the woman's figure during the late 1970s. Is this what Sophie was trying to understand? The dialogue during the video suggests the emotional strain of her mother's interrupted artistic career, which perhaps has left an imprint on Sabet's artistic language, as she is part of the next generation of artists. The Iranian Revolution of 1978 developed a creative power for Sabet's mother's work but did not come directly in the way of her artistic production it was rather relocation. The works featured in the video were made 10 years after the Revolution and now reside at her home in Canada.

The frame changes, and we see Sabet lying on the couch in place of her mother, borrowing the same cinematographic angle: focusing on her pulse on the side of her bare neck. This scene gives the impression of a *déjà vu*. This visual dialogue suggests an embodied emotional anxiety that is transferred from one generation to the next, while opening a space for further investigations.

While Sabet is constantly attempting to pull her mother back to her point of interest--the content in her paintings--there is an irritation hinted at by the mother's tone of voice, but that is steadily buried beneath the calmness of the breeze caressing the hung white sheets. The exposure of the mother's bare neck and arms suggests vulnerability and intimacy, and the captions focusing on her breath, are perhaps just enough to translate what is left unsaid, boiling under the surface. Soon after Sabet's affirmation of discontent regarding their exchange, her mother replies "This is how I feel, you asked me to speak, I'm speaking." *Though I Am Silent, I Shake* is an example of undivided attention equally expressed through image and dialogue, in this case

manifests through nostalgic musings and a cultural attitude that pinpoint a generational tension. It highlights themes related to the definitions of femininity with a recurring exploration of womanhood that includes an intersectional lens, while revisiting an important historical event. This re-visit demonstrates a longing of a better now between the windy events of the past. It is a symbolic offering that reveals a poetic movement, expressing the inner truths of the subjective reality. There is certainly a shake in the silence.

- Hibah Mian