

Iranian patriarchal society censors female independence – restricting what women can do, where they can go and what they can express. Because of these rules, women must cover their bodies with a *hijab*. Nonetheless, many women are conflicted – overtly following the rules of their families/society and covertly fighting these limitations by pushing the boundaries and breaking the rules. Those who ascribe to cultural religious prescription, believe that women’s hair attracts men, and that a woman’s body spawns temptation and guilt. My own awareness of the effects of these social values is also personal: one of my friends was a victim of an acid attack because she was not wearing an “appropriate” hijab, a heinous act that limited her mobility and resulted in social isolation.

To counter this severe censorship, I am inspired to channel Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopic space and create spaces where women can exist freely. Foucault writes, “The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to unite four separate parts within its rectangle, representing the four parts of the world, as well as one space still more sacred than the others, a space that was like the navel, the center of the world brought into the garden...” (*Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*). The versatility of heterotopic spaces allows me to construct an ideal world outside of convention—a special and secret space, which exists in stark contrast with Iranian reality. My paintings express my personal story, but they also reflect the life of Iranians and of all suppressed women. I address the complexity of Iranian female identity in the imagined space that departs from reality, creating a special, supportive, heterotopic representation.