



# BEING HOME

AN INSTALLATION BY FARHEEN HAQ

## BEING HOME BY FARHEEN HAQ

A SITE RESPONSIVE INSTALLATION  
AT THE COMOX VALLEY ART GALLERY

SEPTEMBER 19 – NOVEMBER 6, 2015

list of installation works:

*Oscillate*, 2015

wood chairs, tablet

*Fold*, 2015

wood dresser, LED monitor, HD player

*Feast*, 2015

wood table, projector, HD player

*The Table*, 2015

video diptych, HD projector, HD player

*Being Home*, 2015

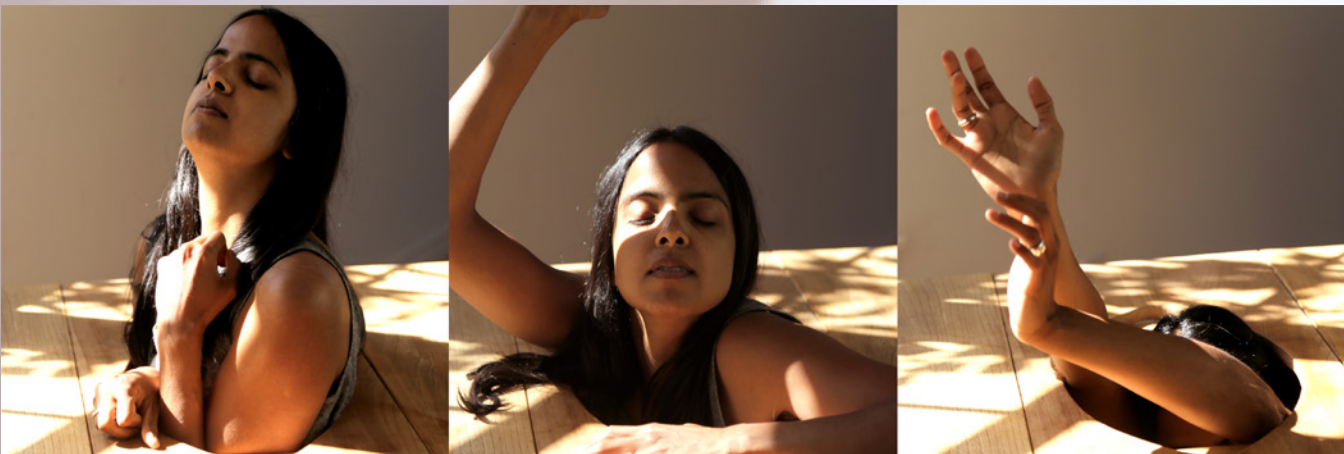
series of 10 digital prints on aluminum dibond,  
7 bedside tables, wood stands



## AT THE THRESHOLD

Over the past nine months I have been working with Farheen HaQ on the development of her new site responsive installation *Being Home*. We have just finished setting the work in place and the show is not yet open to the public. In this liminal space – in the interval between doing and receiving – I observe the installation elements, noticing how they take up residence in the space.

Farheen is an interdisciplinary artist with an inventive practice that spans photography, video, sculpture and site-responsive installation. Although this is a familiar repertoire for Farheen, it is captivating to watch as she embraces the uncertainty of how the different elements of the work might read as a whole when assembled together for the first time as an installation. With installation art, as with children when they are encountering new situations, you can never really know how things will go.





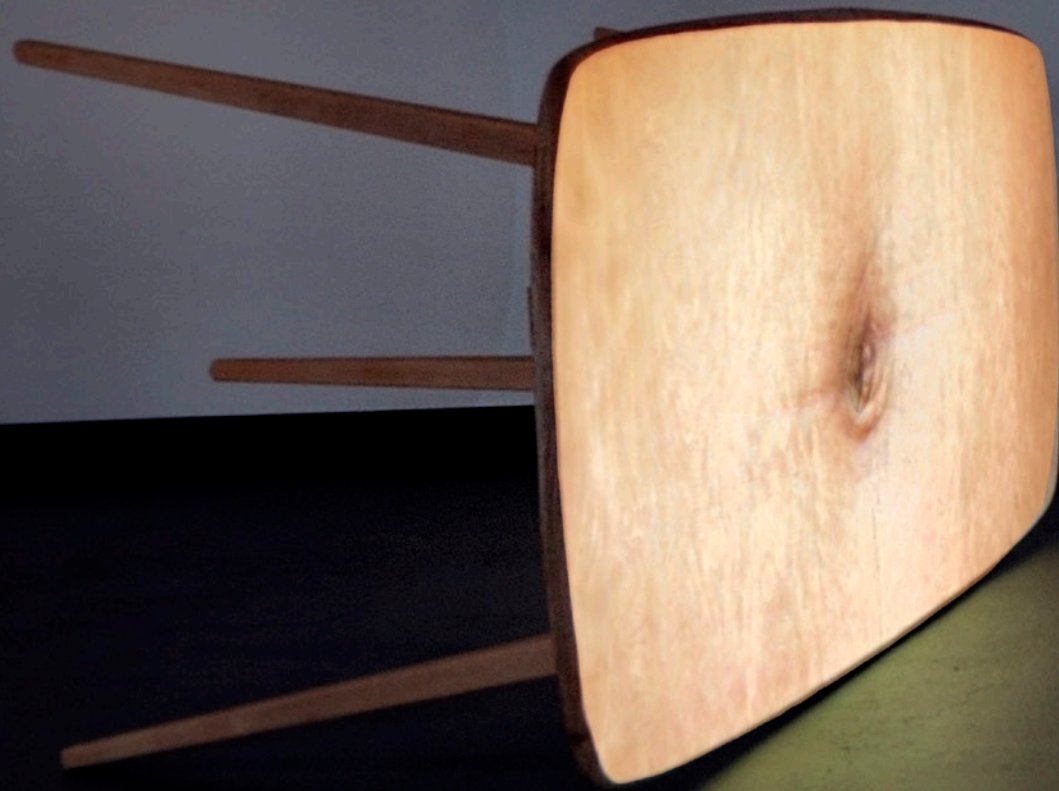
At first it seems that the objects and images are behaving like self-possessed characters, eager to express their presence. Near the entrance there is an installation component entitled "Oscillate", comprises of an assorted collection of white painted wooden chairs with an embedded video in the bottom of one of the upturned chairs. The looped video depicts a playful image of a grown woman sitting on a table swinging her legs – an excerpted gesture enacting and recalling a childhood memory. The other chairs are clustered around and support this one in someway, 'bearing witness' says Farheen, as she carefully arranged this configuration.





Further into the room I encounter "Feast" – an installation component comprised of a sanded wood grain table lying on its side. For a moment the gesture conjures images of children playing behind fortresses. Stiff horizontal legs pushing out behind – I wonder if it is resting or if it has fallen? In this side lying state, the table yields to the image projected onto its surface – that of a belly landscape rising and falling at various intervals. As I continue to explore the relationship between the projector and the table, I have a sense that the table is also embodying a form of resistance, shielding itself from the bright video image that imposes image onto its skin.

On the facing wall there is a large horizontal video diptych, "The Table", in which the artist proposes ways of being in and out of service in the home. by placing herself above and below the surface of things – in this scene the kitchen table serves as the line that marks these choices. In the next scene I find myself pondering a bird's eye view of running water washing down a drain. The video blooms to white in the transitions between this and that – between the saturated sequences of daily life.





As I explore further, I am intrigued by an ambient light coming from around a corner. I pass by BEING HOME, presented as a shimmering silver phrase pressed onto the gallery wall. The title serves as a welcoming to viewers and as a reminder of the artist's deep interest in how it is to embody shifting identities and different ways of knowing.

Next I encounter a white dresser paired with a carefully framed video monitor, "Fold", seemingly hovering just above the top surface. I watch the image on the screen, as the artist gathers, swaddles, compresses, releases...endless yardage of white fabric. Near the dresser there is another painted white chair, patiently watching this unfolding.





I retrace my steps and find myself outside the gallery looking in three large street front windows at a series of cream coloured night tables with carefully placed images set atop them, "Being Home". Conscious of my hands and face pressing against the glass, I am curious to see what someone else has placed on their bedside table and in the drawers that have been left slightly open.

The images on top of the night tables contain fragments of representations, depicting the artist immersed in home life. At times she seems to be on the verge – I am particularly struck by a photograph that captures the range of experiences and emotions embedded in the act of parenting. In this particular image the artist has photographed herself in a gesture of despair, head folded forward, concave front body, and legs immersed in a top-load washing machine. As I linger at the window, I sense a yielding of meaning-making at the edge of the images and objects that comprise this body of work. And this slippage, this uncertainty, points to a kind of resilience that is deeply embedded in the role of artist/woman/mother/feminist, as she leans into her life with a tender curiosity for what might happen next. While standing at the threshold of the gallery one more time before returning home, Farheen expresses her sense of what *Being Home* has revealed to her:

*It has become evident that part of what has transpired while making this body of work is that I have modified and distilled references to familiar furnishings and gestures as a means of marking and remembering the end of an early mothering phase of my life. Having painted all the surfaces of these familiar objects white, they have become ghostly beings in the rooms.*

*The table, dresser and chairs are intimate parts of my home that contain and bear witness to the unfolding life of my family and the stories that carry these experiences. These objects, set in relation to the images and video elements, remind me of the places I have occupied within the landscape of early motherhood. I am holding, waiting folding, kneading, washing, giving, wrapping, embracing, releasing.*








*Being Home* is part of CVAG's exhibition series *In This Body: Journeys in Places of Meeting*, residing at the intersection of art and the everyday. The participating artists share affinities for creating and activating occurrences of being in this body, as they confront and negotiate the complex experiential terrain of family life, making space for death, and interspecies collaborations. *In This Body* invites conversation about the myriad ways in which the artists encounter and deal with interpersonal dynamics, history, culture, behaviors, architecture, landscape and politics, and how these influences inform our changing sense of self.

The performative characteristics of each of these new works connect the artists' vision directly with the real and present body and this informs their research, presentation and interactions with participants/audience. CVAG values the opportunity to support new site-responsive, collaborative and interactive projects by established contemporary artists engaged in taking risks and extending their practice into new territory.

– Angela Somerset, Comox Valley Art Gallery Curator





WHAT  
IS  
MY  
BODY'S  
RELATIONSHIP  
TO  
THIS  
SITE?  
HOW  
DOES  
HOME  
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IN  
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WHEN  
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HOME?  
HOW  
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**BEING HOME** explores the psychic, spiritual and emotional territories within domestic spaces. Drawing on a history of feminist art practice that claims and makes space, I record myself in relation to the kitchen table and domestic objects, to create a vocabulary of gestures with which to negotiate the overlapping identities of motherhood, feminism, gender and ethnicity. I render visible the interior and subconscious world I occupy in my home.

My practice is one of retrieval and remembrance. Artmaking provides opportunities to mine body memories that I then re-enact in the context of my unfolding life. I am interested in how culture and memory live in our bodies. I re-enact gestures in order to reconsider them. In making this work, my interactions with the kitchen table took me back to my own childhood while investigating my current experience of motherhood. My gestures at the table emerge from my subconscious where I tap into a lineage of women who have come before: those who washed by hand, made rotis, ground up spices, swaddled, wrapped and comforted. By wrapping myself in the long tablecloth, I am the baby, the young child and also the grandmother wrapped in a white sari.

Positing the dinner table, the laundry and the kitchen sink as significant sites where the diversity of daily life intersect, I investigate the processes, dynamics, tensions and elevation that occur through assertion, take over and embodied occupation of home spaces.

– FARHEEN HAQ



**R: "Being Home" is an exploration of the expressions and experiences of motherhood, and how becoming a mother has impacted your relationship to yourself, your body and your home. What inspired you to work with this theme?**

F: My art has always stemmed from my own personal questions and lived realities, which have revolved primarily around issues of identity. I'm endlessly curious about how culture, religion and gender shape and impact who we are and how we occupy our bodies and express ourselves in the world. This project is similar: it explores identity but this time it focuses on the myriad of ways motherhood alters and informs how we relate to ourselves and move through our lives, how we move through our homes, and interact with ourselves and others. For me this project was specifically centred on the early years of mothering and the ways in which I inhabited that relationship with myself and my children and our environment.

**R: Would you say that motherhood is its own culture, in some ways?**

F: Absolutely. And in my case the culture of motherhood is inevitably filtered through my own early upbringing - with South Asian Muslim norms - combined with all the ways in which I have evolved, as well as being influenced by the specifics of my current culture here in Vitoria. So it's definitely a combination of layers that all work together to inform my particular experience of motherhood.

**R: And do you rely primarily on this personalized experience from which to create your work, or do you supplement that with research? How does your process work exactly, when you begin a new project?**

F: I would say both actually. With this project, I definitely reviewed current research and ideas about modern motherhood, but I also drew on the early feminist works of the 60s and 70s. The seminal work of Martha Rosler's "Semiotics of the Kitchen" for instance, although decades old still speaks to me. So I definitely spent time gathering new information, as well as reminding myself of earlier works; but once I step into the studio, I don't actively draw on any of that information. I trust that it is there, informing me, but I drop my intellectualizing and start improvising...

**R: Was that always your approach, to improvise, even at the beginning of your career or did you have to learn to trust that process?**

F: Actually, I had to learn to trust that, and in fact I now KNOW that although I may start with an idea (because you have to start somewhere), it is actually the outtakes, the mistakes or the unintended moments, that really move the work forward. So my process now is very much about improvising and seeing what emerges. Once I have the images, things may build in a whole new direction, a direction I may not have anticipated, but one that is full of vitality and is visually interesting. I am far more confident now about letting that process unfold naturally without trying to control the outcome, than I was earlier in my career.

**R: Was there anything that surprised you as the work for this project unfolded?**

F: Yes. I knew going into this that I was going to be exploring the tension that I feel, the constant pull that I've experienced, between being a mother and being a practicing artist and how to show up for both. I am very familiar with that struggle, so I expected to be exploring the emotional landscape of that dynamic, but what I didn't expect and what was a surprise, was the sadness and nostalgia in saying goodbye to those early years of motherhood. Through doing some of the work, I reconnected with the tender gestures of caring for babies and small children, and there was definitely sadness as I realized that those gestures are no longer a part of my vocabulary. I didn't realize this work would be about saying goodbye to that stage in my life. I now have more independent children who want to run around or disappear and do their own thing. And I realized that I'm sad that those sweet early years are over. I was especially aware of this while I was exploring the piece titled "Fold", where I am slowly gathering fabric into my arms, eventually cradling large swaths of linens in my arms like a baby.

**R: Fabric is a theme for you from your earlier work as well. What does working with fabric mean to you?**

F: Fabric has definitely played a prominent role in a lot of my work. I think it's because it lends itself so easily to exploring the various metaphors of





identity and the different layers of the self, plus it's visually interesting. But also, fabric and saris and hijabs - these all played significant roles in my life growing up. My mother wears the hijab as does one of my sisters. I have such strong memories as a little girl, of watching my mother dress herself, wrapping her body in a sari, and holding the fabric in her teeth as she arranged the pleats just so, asking me to hold this or that. I was keenly aware of how women arranged and rearranged the dupatta worn over their chest or on their head. And I can remember playing with the dupatta as a child covering my own head and pretending it was my long hair. There was definitely lots of fabric around me and in my culture, so it's a natural entry point into visually exploring the themes of the covering or uncovering of the self.

**R: It seems like this tension of holding two identities is a recurring theme that runs through all of your work. Why do you think that is?**

F: I am sure it comes from the fact that I have always had to negotiate this tension, this push-pull, since I was born, straddling two cultures. I am always aware of the pull of my eastern Muslim heritage and the push of my modern western liberal education, and have had to work to find my footing as I constantly move between these two places. Motherhood is another experience of this dynamic both in general terms but also in personal terms: being a mother and an artist; a mother and a partner; a mother living in this culture but coming from a different one. I am always moving between multiple identities. And in some ways I think I keep coming back to gesture or movement in my work to express this tension because I am in my head about it so much. The body is far more economical and beautiful at expressing complex stories than thoughts sometimes. It holds these deep experiences and then expresses them with such visual profundity - sometimes with a single gesture.

**R: Is there any piece in this show that illustrates that for you in particular?**

F: In some ways they all do! But if I had to choose, I might say the piece "Oscillate". It's a good example of a few things actually, since it is one of the pieces that came out of my improvisational approach. I saw it and said "That movement, that rhythm: yeah. That's right - that's it", and I went from there.

**R: What was right about it?**

F: Well, it's an image of my legs dangling from a sitting position, almost childlike, in this back and forth rhythm. The image was within a series of visual experiments - and it stood out as immediately interesting to me. The swinging of the legs is like the passing of time, the endless waiting of motherhood, the constant motion of motherhood, but it was also the moving back and forth, the moving between, the push-pull. It captured for me how your time is not your own anymore, and the patience required in waiting for small children - a toddler tying their shoe for instance. And then of course there is the waiting of my own life: How much do I put on hold and wait to get back to? As an artist that has been one of the big challenges. I have felt that my practice was on hold and I've wanted to get back to it.

**R: And where do you see yourself going next with your work?**

F: There is always more to say! Actually, most of my projects are somehow inspired from the one prior. With this particular project, household objects as sculptural pieces were integrated into my work and the display of my work - the upturned chair for instance. And that was new for me. I've found it really inspiring and different, so I think I may be exploring more of that in the future...





**FARHEEN HAQ** was born and raised in the Niagara Region of Ontario. She now makes her home in Victoria BC, where she has lived and worked for the past 17 years. Farheen's media based works explore cultural inscriptions of the body, ritual and gesture. She received her BA in International Development (1998) from the University of Toronto, her BEd (2000) from the University of Ottawa and her MFA in Visual Arts (2005) from York University. Farheen has exhibited her work in galleries and festivals throughout Canada and internationally including New York, Paris, Buenos Aires, Lahore, Hungary, and Romania. Recent exhibitions include Fashionality at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection in 2012, Collected Resonance at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 2011, Pulse Interval at Open Space (Victoria, BC) in 2010, The Emperor's New Clothes at the Talwar Gallery (New York City) in June 2009, and Pulse Contemporary Art Fair (Miami, FL) in December 2008. In 2014 HaQ was nominated for the Sobey Art Award. Farheen is actively involved in her community serving as a programming committee member for Open Space artist run centre, and having served previously as a board member. In 2014 she was Artist in Residence at Artemis Place Secondary, an alternative school for girls. HaQ taught at the Vancouver Island School of Art (2005 to 2006). She also works as an art educator delivering professional development workshops for adults and educators. [www.farheenhaq.com](http://www.farheenhaq.com)

**RACHEL MACLAREN** is a psychotherapist in private practice, working in Victoria B.C. She specializes in maternal mental health and expressive arts therapy. [www.rachelmaclaren.com](http://www.rachelmaclaren.com)



**BEING HOME**  
SITE RESPONSIVE INSTALLATION  
BY FARHEEN HAQ

**SEPTEMBER 19 – NOVEMBER 6, 2015**

**opening** Friday, September 18, 7 – 9 pm

**artist talk** Friday, September 18, 6pm

**workshop by Farheen HaQ + Rachel Maclaren**

Saturday, October 3rd from 2 – 5pm

Documentation courtesy of Alun Macanulty, Sarah Bergeron + Farheen HaQ

Without the help of the following people and organizations, this exhibition would not have been possible. My deep gratitude to all listed below.

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Kirk Schwartz: camera work, lighting design

Mary Lloyd: production assistant, movement coach

Darren Bertuccio: furniture modification

Gail Boulger: linen supply, tablet & painting

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Thank you to all staff and volunteers who helped with installation and many details, especially: Sarah, Lukas, Scott, Kevin, Tom & Iris.

To my village of friends & family who have supported me throughout my creative process. Especially Gillian Booth, Stephanie Gabel and Rachel Maclaren for their listening ears and insightful questions.

Finally to my partner Chris for being there for every part of this project and our children Aisha and Cairo who are the wellspring for this work.

– Farheen HaQ



580 DUNCAN AVE. COURTENAY BC V9N 2M7  
250.338.6211 COMOXVALLEYARTGALLERY.COM

**GALLERY**

TUESDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5

**SHOP**

MONDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5

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