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## Your Turn, Doctor

Leyla Mozayen  
*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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YOUR TURN, DOCTOR

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

Leyla Mozayen

Director: Irvin Morazan  
Professor, Sculpture and Extended Media

Virginia Commonwealth University  
Richmond, Virginia  
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## **I. DECLARATION**

1. "Kayfabe" refers to the unwritten understanding between professional wrestlers and their fans, whereby staged events are treated as "real" or "genuine."
2. By rendering factual inaccuracy irrelevant, experiential understanding and emotional fidelity become paramount. Is this too generous?
3. Recent scientific study has indicated the language patterns in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* are almost indistinguishable from purely mathematical multifractals.
4. There is no way to picture the quantum world without the classical imagination.
5. Clearing is the disclosure of autonomy and clearing is the dismissal of preconceived notions of Otherness.
6. Islam Is a Religion of Peace & Marriage Equality is Our Goal. We want what everybody wants, have the same placid hopes.
7. Understand clearing as a complicated necessity, the prerequisite for a paradigm beyond stigmatization.
8. As The Qur'an is considered the verbatim word of Allah, a unique doctrine of abrogation was accepted, whereby earlier pronouncements of the Prophet are nullified by those that follow. It can be difficult however to determine order, as chapters are organized by length and not chronology. Abrogation casts an existing mode into oblivion to bring forth something better or identical to it.
9. Similarly, queerness abrogates the existing structure of reproductive heteronormativity upon whose terms society is ordered, by nullifying teleological models for deviant becoming. queerness as *jihad*, post-9/11 cable news *jihad*, seething.
10. How best to (re)narrate experience as resistance, with the probable destination of failure rendering the gesture towards a possible future no less earnest?
11. 'Understood' as I understand clearing the theory reads cleaning in praxis—the microcosm of the studio.
12. Something relevant about billionaire David Rockefeller's unwavering fixation upon, and resultant archive of, some hundred thousand beetles that feels relevant to this is masturbation a Class 1 misdemeanor, when is it a public good?]
13. Ready to begin the experiment, I stand at the top of the down escalator, waiting as he boards. When he gets about halfway the bottom, I call to him to start walking back up. We repeat this a few times. He asks to stop, laughing first, then resentful. I tell him we can, but note I am not tired.

14. Between Patient and presence: understand one kind of oppression in necessary sterility, and understand another in marginalization so profound blindness can result.
15. That is to ask, how long must one be told they do not see a thing until they do not, and transgressions become norm?
16. The hardest thing to establish between optometrist and patient is trust. There are not enough external metrics. Too much of vision is self reported and subjective.
17. The way a teen girl's bedroom looks in primetime versus the way my own looked growing up. Bad police procedurals anesthetizing violence. Who's good, who's bad, and who's expendable enough to kill off in the first act?
18. TV guide description of a show I watched once: dead baby leads to pedophile. The detective's chiseled good looks betrayed it as a fiction, but there was gratification in how he beat offenders.
19. Pause for commercial.

## II. CONTACT PRAYER

20. Physicist Seth Lloyd proposed quantum entanglement as an explanation for the dilemma of time's direction: *The arrow of time is an arrow of increasing correlations.*
21. Historical figures and references enacted—from the second wife of Peter Paul Rubens, Hélène Fourment, whose scoliosis, positive Trendelenburg sign and hyperextended fingers enabled her diagnosis, much as they enabled my own—
22. Ehlers Danlos Syndrome causes substantial deformation to the structure, processing, and production of collagen, the main component in connective tissue and the body's most abundant protein. While treatment is supportive, the disease has many co-morbidities and deterioration remains unpredictable.
23. Baudelaire on Rubens: *a pillow of blooming flesh where no one can make love.*
24. And Surus, or, "The Syrian," last surviving war elephant of Carthaginian general Hannibal Barca, crossing the alps—
25. Kerstin Fritzl spent the first nineteen years of her life in darkness. Kerstin was the first of seven children born of incestuous rape to Elizabeth Fritzl, whose father Josef imprisoned her as a sex slave for 24 years. When Kerstin was rendered unconscious by kidney failure she was, for the first time, allowed to leave his basement dungeon. Her doctors, alarmed by the girl's dire health and by Josef's implausible answers to their questions, notified police. Josef Fritzl will die in prison.

26. From a Kohl's parking lot in Paramus, New Jersey, the sky looked like a Turner painting, and there was nothing sacred, nothing funny. The divine providence of perpetual tardy—I did not find the body. I did not go to the wake. The last memories were petulant, but alive. From Google Earth, I found the grave.
27. Flies ate my hymen. I'd close my eyes and first only the words themselves, *flies ate my hymen*, would appear, anesthetized by the clarity of an imagined typeface: Arial, Helvetica, Copperplate Gothic bold. Then I'd feel it in my palms, the writhing motion of several hundred members of the family Drosophilidae feeding and breeding in the blood-soaked rags my first love had presented so triumphantly three months prior with the declaration I saved this for you, for your art.
28. The things he did for me, for my art.
29. There is no such thing as a beautiful suicide. Artists lie about so many things, but nothing more than that. There is no such thing as Ophelia in the water; there are no rivers' brides. There are only corpses with shit in their pants, and sad stories for fewer and fewer people to tell, about some sad person they knew, some sad person who died.
30. He was sad because his friend committed suicide, tired of being dope sick. He was sad because he was too poor to move from where they'd found the body, having also been too poor to hire the professionals better suited for cleaning up those kinds of messes. But when he talked about Trump, he wasn't poor, at all, and he wasn't sad. He was a man who might one day be rich, and it was towards that glimmer of potential future he voted-- #makeamericagreatagain, as if there was something for him to return to—as if it, like his candidate's suitability for leadership, had ever really existed—couldn't that escalator have opened directly into the sun?
31. But what if i am a #snowflake, here after years of deregulation to poison your children?
32. Forget the master's tools. Like the tools of all masters, they work too well.
33. The maxillofacial surgeon looks at the CT scan for a moment before asking the nurse to close the door. I could still taste her gloves. "Have you ever been sexually assaulted?" I wasn't expecting the question, I couldn't reply. The doctor went on: "Sometimes we see these types of injuries in people who have been sexually assaulted."
34. I ask him why he did it and he says, *because it felt good* with such an unequivocalness, with so triumphant a period at that end of that sentence, in the weeks that followed I questioned nothing deeper than my urge to forgive and forgive still with that instant. To still miss him—
35. The promise there, open-eyed official portrait saying I am not my father I am dictatorship's consolation prize, have me. In every storefront, every classroom, and in the foyer of my family's home Bashar was had. held. hung up so long before the dead protestors, the torture, the chemical weapon and the rape, that civil war no one will win—

36. Do Bashar Al Assad's former patients in London think their mild-mannered optometrist capable of such horror? He looked so kind.
37. IG Farben invented polyurethane adhesives. A recurring material choice about convenience, redemption, or the fires at Auschwitz?
38. Albert Speer, handsome architect turned Minister of Armaments for the Third Reich, was particularly contrite. Of the twenty-two high-ranking Nazi defendants prosecuted at Nuremberg, only Speer acknowledged his personal culpability in Germany's war of aggression. Steadfastly maintaining his ignorance of the Holocaust, the Fuhrer's closest personal friend served twenty years in prison for war crimes. Upon his release the "Nazi Who Said Sorry" became a best-selling author and international celebrity. When asked for career advice by a young man, Speer paused momentarily before giving his reply—work on your charisma.
39. The little boy could have been a shampoo model. A luxurious swoosh of shiny chestnut brown framed a singularly focused, symmetrical face. "What's that?," he demanded, eyes set at my midriff. I looked down at the complicated sewn object I often wore around the front of my body. "Oh, it's just something I'm working on." I paused, hearing my voice shift into my mother's, conversing with strangers or friendly dogs: "I'm like an artist so it's just kind of a weird bag I--" "No." His gaze never wavered. "Inside. Your hand. What's wrong with it?" You shouldn't hate children.

#### **IV. ABSTENTION**

40. I read once about human cannibals. Not the serial-killing-body-in-the-basement-types, but the cannibals of desperation, the ones that do it when food has become too scarce—from the lifeboat, frantic, Stalingrad during the war—
41. Apparently, there's a pattern that manifests in the victims of such people, wherein the body parts which are most distinctly human—the head, the feet, the hands—are often found untouched, buried apart, while other more indistinct areas have been stripped clean, bones boiled smooth. The context of a thing changes it. So too does its form.
42. You shouldn't hate children. I slowly extract a twisted right claw and present it to my tiny captor. Ring and pinky fingers warped at different angles into my palm, thumb all right angles at stiff attention. A peeling, painful grime coated its exterior. With Polyurethane adhesive and play sand, with disgust and fascination: "What's wrong with it?" He grew quiet. Paused. "Why is it like that?" I have a genetic disease. I have a connective tissue disorder. "I have a disease. A genetic disease. A connective tissue disorder." He instinctively glances down at his own right hand, confirming it still intact. He raises it to demonstrate. "I don't." He laughs.
43. How far is Trump parataxis from the parataxis of trauma?

44. In the photo we look very close, but I distrusted photography implicitly. As the smallest child I found it unsettling in a metaphorical relation drawn too early, too thoroughly, to taxidermy—idealized forms of a more-perfect nature prefigured by deadening, prefigured by flattening. the artificial liveliness of extreme stillness, of a human involvement as undeniable as it was ostensibly hidden—
45. When interviewed by Playboy magazine in 1966, Speer spoke of a photograph he'd seen during his trial at Nuremberg. In it, a Jewish family was being led to the gas chambers: "I couldn't rid my mind of it. I would see it in my cell at night. I see it still. It has made a desert of my life."
46. "The US thinks about power in increments of four years." He spits. "But the Russian people understand power happens in timeframes of emperor. Four years to a Tsar." He spits. "Four years." He spits. "Four years." He Spits. "Four years." He spits. He keeps spitting. He must have spit the executive branch through to the twenty-second century.
47. I collected my body weight in dust, about absence, about detritus, about how to confound forensic science or, something else, something amalgamated, something left— how much empowerment in disintegration?
48. The year Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein had no summer, dust from a volcanic eruption blocked the sun for weeks, lowering temperatures across the globe. How much dust will it take to save the world now?
49. Modifying the atmosphere to reflect more sun and other such radical Geo-engineering feels distinctly possible in our Brave New World: shiny dust as deus ex machina or shimmering apocalypse? Such trust issues, always—
50. I grew up believing dust was 70 or 80 % human skin. For years this felt like a believable number, but the most cursory examination made clear that number had to be exaggerated. The real figures proved a far less compelling statistic. Two thirds of household dust is dirt tracked in on floors and particulates from the air. The rest is basically carpet fiber.
51. the anticipation of blindness. some nightmares are only dark. Braille pages of the book of Numbers and Deuteronomy line the walls. Certainly darkness would become more toothsome as Balaam's donkey spoke— and this time the animal an interlocutor for God—
52. A long, long time ago, there was a bear who lived in these woods, and nearby, there lived a cow. Everyone told the cow, "What a lovely pasture you have," but the cow looked only to the woods. So the cow was told, if you go into the woods, it will be bad. The bear will eat you, and you will die. But the cow was bored with green grass and bright skies, so one lovely spring day, the cow went into those woods. After a few minutes, her short legs hurt, and she realized how much she preferred her pasture. The woods were dark and wet and she did not know them. Yet she really thought she wanted to, before, so she kept going deeper. And deeper. And eventually the bear found her, and he ate her and she died. And everyone asked, who is at fault for this tragedy? And do you know what he told me, with his kind heart and his scared eyes? That it was both the bear's fault and the cow's. "How is that," I asked him, "the bear can say the temptation was too great, but he got a meal and the cow got

dead?" He squeezed my leg as he stood up, saying, "I don't have all the answers, kid." And you know what? He didn't.

53. "Really? I already had it when I was your age, I just didn't know yet. It can hide for years and years. But not forever." The crossing light changed, and with my left hand waved goodbye, precisely wiggling each finger. From the opposite side of the street the boy looked pitifully smaller, his hair totally unremarkable, frantically testing one finger at a time, repeating and repeating to himself the gesture so swiftly he was casting spells almost. You shouldn't hate children.
54. I lied to everyone. It wasn't because of my polycystic ovaries, and I didn't trip and fall. I was working from the top of a ladder in my studio, years before they'd diagnose the cuts to black as postural orthostatic tachycardia. J begged me not to work on ladders alone before, but I was nineteen and invincible— even then, on my back, wet, waking as petal-pink house paint pooled around me on the floor. I was at first thrilled by the wild thrust of color gravity traced as I'd lost consciousness—but by the following afternoon, it was clear I was miscarrying, and that that silly, elegant flourish was irrelevant. Thick blood clots and stringy chunks of dead grey tissue weren't mourned like a loss but I was done with painting, I was done with the second dimension and all of its feeble promises.
55. I was not ennobled by the suffering of all those sad-eyed North Carolinians, who had—from my earliest memory—existed only as mothers strapped by circumstance, and baby buntings to their divine providence— and I was not touched
56. How sad would she have been to discover that her baby hated everything she stood for? Almost as much as that baby hated the word, *baby*. Yes, her baby hated babies from the earliest moment, with their crying and their shitting and their joints that don't seem to fit right. I would physically tense at the word, baby. Except of course when a man called me that, which is when I should have been tensing all along.
57. Extraordinary men are so tempted by the most ordinary pleasures. To be considered as such, extraordinary women must learn to be tempted by everything else—
58. call me ishmael  
's first wife
59. Safety pins organized by size is pure wonderment is pure heresy, or— chaos as domestic memory, it is halved it is halving it is the process of disassembling and understanding, before gaping chest, the autopsy will change nothing



#### IV. OBLIGATORY CHARITY

60. Where are the cyberbullies Taken Too Soon, martyrs for our lesser parts
61. Four people with locked-in syndrome are interviewed: they are content, morale is good. a different man uses his functional vocal cords, says "quality of life is state of mind, and has little to do with bodily sensation."
62. But St. Augustine understood original sin in an infant paling with envy at the sight of another, fed first---
63. The USSR's 1987 search for the world's first (and only) Syrian cosmonaut existed somewhere between Soviet Mideast pragmatism and public relations. Despite the strenuous objections of Syria's powerful Alawite ruling class, Moscow ensured the most qualified candidate, Muhammad Faris, would be accepted regardless of his Sunni religion. Post-orbit Faris returned to a hero's welcome, championing the causes of scientific research and education. Did he use the airports and highways bearing his name to flee the war—
64. After losing one eye to infection, Hannibal Barca had great difficulty overlooking the battlefield. For a time, a red howdah carried upon the elephant Surus's back served as an effective observation platform.
65. Battles were won in this fashion, but Carthage lost the second Punic war.
66. Steve Jobs is half-Syrian.
67. Steve Jobs is dead.
68. a special kind of privilege seeks tragedy, scavenges for incomplete, loss worn as High Art transcending postmodern. Not nostalgia for reality vague but aching for something someone held before. Was the specificity of past desired the romance. No mothers no matter, already too many dead children to mourn.
69. was it five throats all slit or that they were Christian or that the people who thought that mattered called it a miracle, the youngest child found alive, shrieking. no. red herrings to the punchline. make Art because it was all one big misunderstanding, Kafka's Ba'ath party at it again, the wrong address, meant to murder an entirely different family a few houses to the left.
70. More bad news from Syria.
71. Less than four months after a resolute Ronald Reagan declared his continued commitment to keeping US troops in the Lebanon, all forces were withdrawn from the region. Secretary of State George P. Schultz on the matter: we became paralyzed by the complexity that we faced.

72. Paralysis is a way for the body to cope, but it is not the same thing as healing.
73. *Alaqa* in Arabic can mean anything that clings: a lump of mud, a leech, a clot of blood coagulating, an embryo as described in the Quran, centuries before they were understood anatomically.
74. I ask him have you ever felt ugly, I mean real ugly, the kind of ugly children could never ignore. He says never with such crushing certainty I never again believe him when he calls the affection between us love.
75. Believe in living metaphor. Believe in the contumacy of tactile pleasure: shameful, curbside, nobody's fault.
76. Wartime reports disclosed in 2005 confirmed the existence of the "Prof. Speer Special Programme." The report, on which Speer made copious handwritten notes, refers to the fact that Auschwitz's role as a work camp had "recently been expanded to include the solution to the Jewish question." Shortly thereafter Speer approved the shipment of a thousand tons of steel to enable this expansion.
77. The objective totality of capitalism: hysterical and incapable! Material excess exalted to parody. Syrian-American dreaming or—
78. How instead to think of a dream to need waking. I mean I never dream about particular sculptures. Such a notion seems impossible, small, as desperately romantic as it is hard to ignore. Is my proposition that tenuous, that incapable, of holding subconscious form?
79. Glass half full: could dreams constrained by the limitations of the gallery ever really console?

## **V. EXPEDITION**

80. Sculptures the way rabbits scream: born prey articulating itself the only way it knows how. Exothermic. Teengirl. A cannibal of desperation seeing failure in everything else.
81. Between autoethnography and automatic weaponry I've found my terrorism. half a joke from half an A-rab, alone from my studio I declare myself Caliph. hijack identity before airplanes. why and by what authority, the most disempowering question always.
82. The Hazda people, among the last hunter-gatherers in the world, move camp because of conflict or when someone falls ill, as that place is forever associated with illness.
83. As a refugee in Turkey the former cosmonaut Muhammad Faris rejected help from his former Russian colleagues. Theirs was no longer the shared view from space. Had that poor boy from Aleppo finally learned his place?

84. A parasang, with length determined walking away from the National Mall for the duration of Donald Trump's inaugural address, ended in an unremarkable alley in DC. From that location, I delivered portions of the address Abu-Bakr Baghdadi used to inaugurate himself Caliph of the so-called Islamic State in July 2015.
85. To quote: "I have been afflicted by this great affair, I have been afflicted by this trust, a heavy trust. I was appointed in charge of you, though I am not the best or better than you. So if you see me in the right, then help me, and if you see me in the wrong, advise me and put me right."
86. Can objects function as a political demand, necessitating changes in the way the world is ordered?
87. can a tool speak to speculative work, ideal work, what a thing performs when use does not resemble performance,
88. Scarlet-lettering the biological imperative for biological imperatives. Venerate hard work done by people who never had a choice.
89. Because extant modes of self-expression fed the consumer capitalism they tried to overthrow.
90. Because a teenager's graffiti -*YOUR TURN DOCTOR*- was intended to irritate a high school principal and instead started the Syrian Civil War.
91. Because now that teenager wants to go home.
92. And there is only one joke you need to know about Syria, to understand why he won't
93. A Syrian man is killed. Enraged, heartbroken and out for blood, the man's brother goes after the killer. A wild chase ensues. Steps apart, the two men race out of town. After a few days the brother comes back, says he never managed to catch up, and gets back to work. Forty years pass and some of the people from town go to the man and say how surprised they were that he never avenged his brother's murder. What do you mean the man replied, It's only been forty years.
94. Kerstin Fritzl, who spent much of her early life tearing out her own hair and shredding her dresses in the toilet, is doing quite well. She has a very loving boyfriend.
95. Everything the human eye can perceive is already in the past, that is just the nature of light.