

## FURSCA End of Summer Report

My name is Rana Huwais, and I was given the opportunity this summer to create a soft sculpture installation. I arrived with the intention to create an installation that would evoke comfort, nostalgia, and create a space for people who come to participate/view it to feel a togetherness often lacking in today's lonely individualist world. I was doing so on the basis of the histories of soft sculpture, a discipline taking the rigidity of sculpture and imbuing whimsy and approachability, and the feminist connotations of textile work as labor. The plan was to create a carpet big enough for around two people to lay snugly, and panels of transparent fabric, with doodles and words bringing a sense of childlike wonder and comfort, that would hang overlapping from clear fisher's line, making it seem that they were floating freely above it. This would create an almost otherworldly aspect to the piece, fitting with the purpose of providing people a space of respite, almost in their dreams.

In actually completing the piece, a great many things changed. The carpet became much bigger, about ten by six feet, which in turn led the canopy to be bigger to fit even larger over it. The many independent pieces of clear fabric in the canopy became one large tarp, sewed together for both ease of installation but also to evoke a tent-like structure, further creating that atmosphere of nostalgia, like a fort a child made in their bedroom. The concept also went through many

changes. Through reading Susan Stewart's *On Longing*, I had been thinking about the concept of self portraiture through an object, and I quickly began to see this piece as a self portrait. No longer

was I a participant/viewer in this project happening upon this installation like everyone else, but instead *I* was the installation being happened upon. The space thus became one where people can still come to feel the comfort and peace I hoped they would, but now it is me who is facilitating

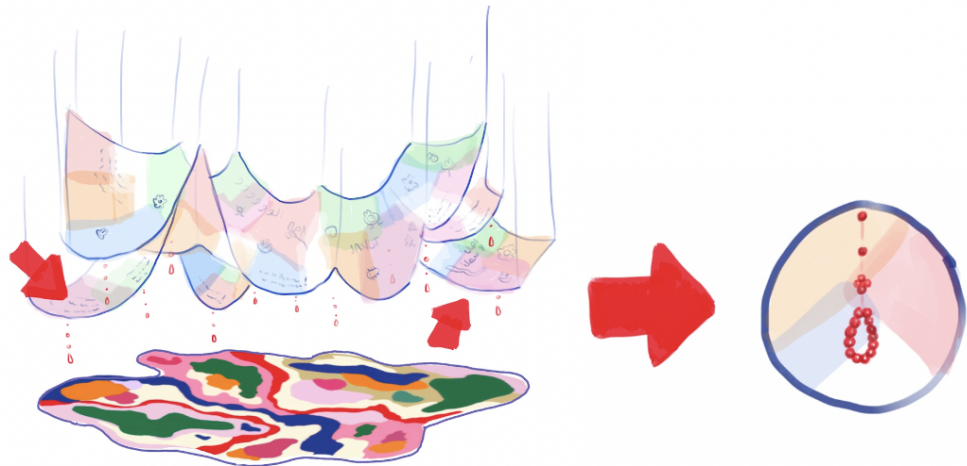


Fig 1. Sketch of Installation, detail of beads

that vulnerability as the carpet they lie upon and the words they read in the canopy. Human connection, what I sought in this piece, makes it mandatory that both sides are vulnerable, seeing oneself in another.

There was then the realization I had that this very connection, vulnerability itself, was a lot like being consumed. There is no greater intimacy than consumption, for that is being known. It occurred to me that I had created a mouth, even if I didn't intend so. The carpet being the tongue, the canopy being the roof, and small drops of blood made from twinkling beads (an addition that came during my work) representing the inherent violence of humanity, and of being perceived, the other darker side of the coin of being known. Here, I wanted to explore the tension that exists between comfort and discomfort, which is a concept central to almost all of my work. I titled the piece *Venus Fly Trap*, fascinated by the beauty of the flora and the slow closing mouth, the gentleness of the action.

*If you were all flies in my venus fly trap but if I was a venus fly trap who loved flies so, so, so much that I hugged you to death and then we died together.*

That was the idea.



Fig 2. Finished carpet

Going into this project, I was aware the schedule and time frame were tight, and I was right. In the eight weeks of working I was able to only fully finish the carpet. This isn't to say that it wasn't plenty of work; carpet tufting, especially one of that size, takes a lot of time and effort, not to mention physical labor. Cuts, bruises, and a tufting gun malfunction aside, I am proud of what I was able to accomplish. Making the carpet in the studio space was also an incredible opportunity since I would not have the space

to do so in my home, where a lot of my summer work takes place.

Through working with this grant, I was also given irreplaceable time to sketch, read, and develop the concepts of the piece, which made it one that I am eternally happy with. This piece feels like

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the one that captured everything I had been trying to say for years, and I'm so grateful I was given the space to explore it.

This project was huge, literally and figuratively. It has allowed me to explore concepts and mediums I once found unapproachable, and has left me with a piece that is incredibly important for my artistic practice, and one that I could apply with to exhibitions or graduate school. It has also provided me the opportunity to take part in a duo exhibition with my co-FURSCA recipient and art major Dany Martinez next spring around the time I will present my work at the Elkin Isaac Research Symposium, a great honor for an undergraduate student. Most importantly, it has given me the steadfast assurance that I could do something like this. I am able to come up with a concept worthy of a grant, execute that idea, be comfortable with welcoming the inevitable changes that come along with it, and presenting my ideas to others. It allowed me the space to rehearse an artist residency, something I hope to have plenty of in my future. This was invaluable to me, and I will forever be grateful to the FURSCA foundation for this opportunity and time. I owe a massive thanks to my advisor Emmeline Solomon, whose expertise and wisdom had saved me over and over again, and an even more massive thank you to the Vernon and Gladys B. Lawson Endowed Research Fellowship, who made this entire project possible!

With the Warmest of Regards,

Rana Huwais

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rana Huwais', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.