

PLAYING FIELDS

Avisheh Mohsenin



Heidi Vaughan Fine Art
April - May 2021

Forewords by
Sabine Casparie
Constance Lewis

Constructed and collaged photography
Avisheh Mohsenin . 2021

Playing Fields
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April 2021

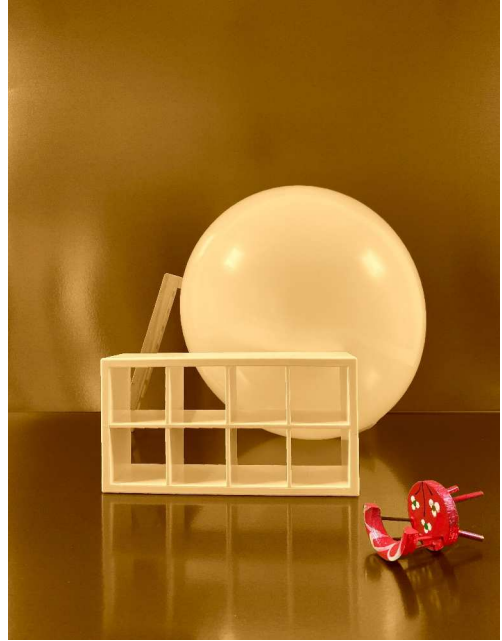
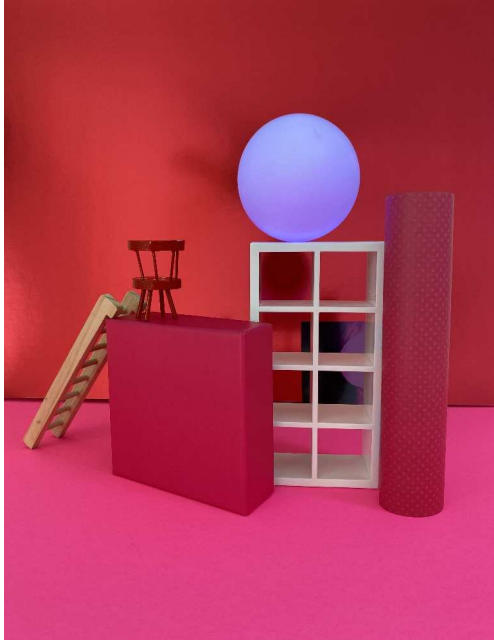
Walking down the lane, pushing a stroller, trying to put my 1.5 year-old daughter to sleep, the leaves and fallen petals of the magnolia trees suddenly looked different. It was Spring of 2020, during the pandemic lockdowns and we were a team of two with my husband on a tight schedule of tag-teaming. On these walks while worrying about the next task at hand, the natural elements in their changing colors and ephemerality became necessary companions to appease the uncertainty of the times. I naturally recorded them to make images that would perhaps be permanent reminders of the subtleties experienced in the mundane. Soon after, I created postcards of collaged images re-forming the raw images and sent them to everyone whose address I had. On the back of the cards I wrote: *This Too Is Temporary.*



Hilary Schuhmacher
Photography

in *Playing Fields*, debarking from the same place conceptually, I am motivated by the challenge of exploring light, color, and space in a more constricted scale reflecting on my recent experience with motherhood and children's world. Sourcing my artmaking material from surroundings where I spend most of my time with our toddler, I have used items such as a night lamp, stacking blocks, balloons, and dollhouse furniture to create intangible spaces and compositions that contain a depth of process and visuals. By appropriating these elements and further rendering them into works that are more than just dollhouse chairs or slides, I find a vessel to reduce the effects of the mundane and the redundancy of tasks embedded in parenting. By inserting myself into the complex equation of child-parent-time-exploration-growth, I become a player too, where the play functions for my child but also for me. The work in *Playing Fields* is twofold: constructed photography compositions with children items, and photocollages from images of playground slides. In one set, I work in a more cerebral and calculated way, while in the other I let loose and welcome accidents; a seesaw not dissimilar to the constant quest for balance in parenthood.

I dedicate *Playing Fields* to Saman Naraghi, who evidently is my muse for this work and I thank her for lending me her toys and balloons. **AM**





"Avisheh Mohsenin knows well how to turn adverse circumstances into art. Her previous series of photographs and photocollages was conceived during Houston's Harvey, when she turned her flooded family photos into new and original works, using the blended colours and chemicals as compositional tools.

And then last year, Covid hit and Mohsenin found herself confined to her home with her husband and her one-and-a-half year old daughter. Much has been written about the special burden that the pandemic put on mothers, who, after years of striving for equality, suddenly found themselves back at home again doing laundry and cooking and taking care of children. Mohsenin, who also has a job in economic consulting, equally found herself juggling motherhood and work and the restraints of the pandemic. So she decided to use the time with her daughter creatively, and incorporate it into her art."
(Sabine Casparie)



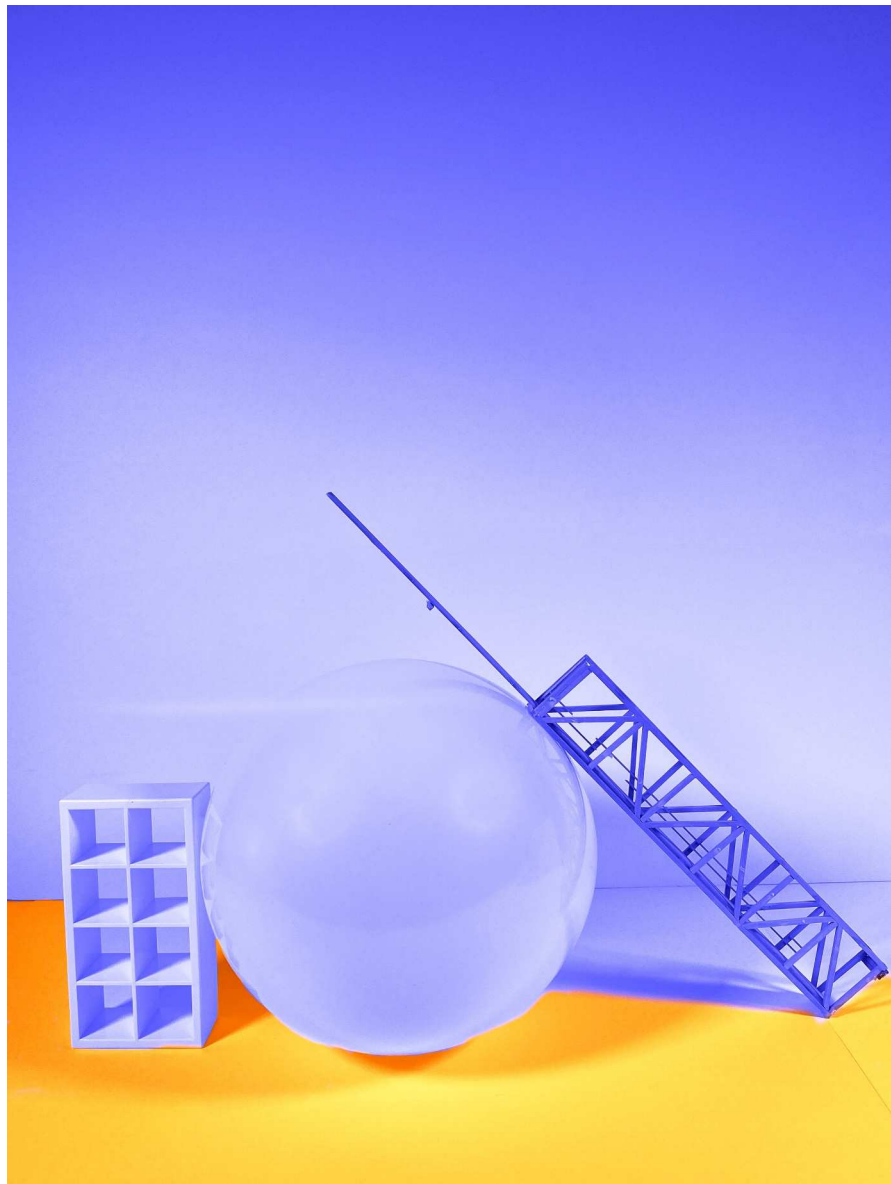


"The constructed photography part of *Playing Fields* is more geometric, using basic forms like the circle and triangle and squares. The photographs shown here in a grid, are derived from experiments with light, space and color in the studio. But they still take as a starting point the rich visual world of the child. Mohsenin used a set of small objects, sourcing her toddler's toy box for doll house furniture, a tiny red chair, a bookshelf and a ladder, adding balloons and a broken piece of a model house – a bridge-like form – that her husband, an architect, left in the garage. She combined the tiny objects with few objects such as stones – remnants of nature found by her daughter on their walks. The objects are staged in the studio, using different set-ups and lighting to create reflections and shadows, then photographed and sometimes digitally coloured by hand, like finger-painting on the screen.

These miniature worlds are playful, yet they also reference the history of staged photography by artists such as Thomas Demand, who photographs finely detailed maquettes of rooms where important historical events took place, and Laurie Simmons, who creates domestic scenes inhabited by tiny female toy figures. Mohsenin has always been interested in the physicality of photography. Are photographs just images, documentation, or are they physical objects in their own right? What is the value of objects and our material attachment to them? What is real and what is constructed?" (*Sabine Casparie*)

"Mohsenin was also inspired by the work of artist Siah Armajani, who, like Mohsenin, moved from Iran to the United States. Armajani uses the language of architecture to explore ideas that are political, philosophical and poetic, resulting in architectural models and realised structures that are often dysfunctional and absurd. The bridge-like object in *Playing Field* is reminiscent of Armajani's famous bridges – some in the form of models and some realised in public works. They are structures that do not connect things, but instead are an open invitation, an imaginary linking of minds.

During these strange times of Covid confinement, we all have to find inspiration closer to home. But it takes an artist to turn the everyday into something beautiful and lasting. Mohsenin's work reminds us that even when we are locked in our homes and our cities, our imagination can never be curtailed. And sometimes all it takes to see the world afresh is through the eyes of a child: full of wonder, curiosity, and joy." (*Sabine Casparie*)

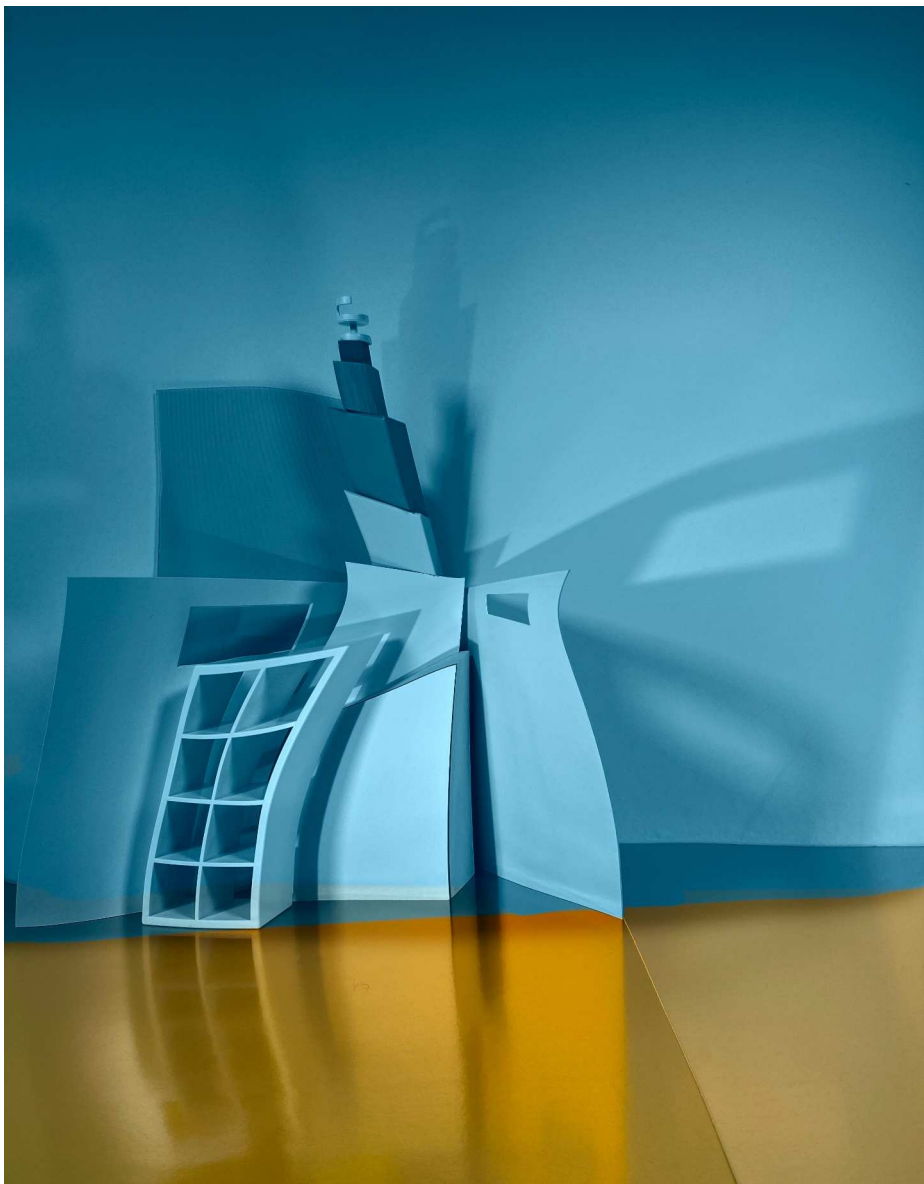


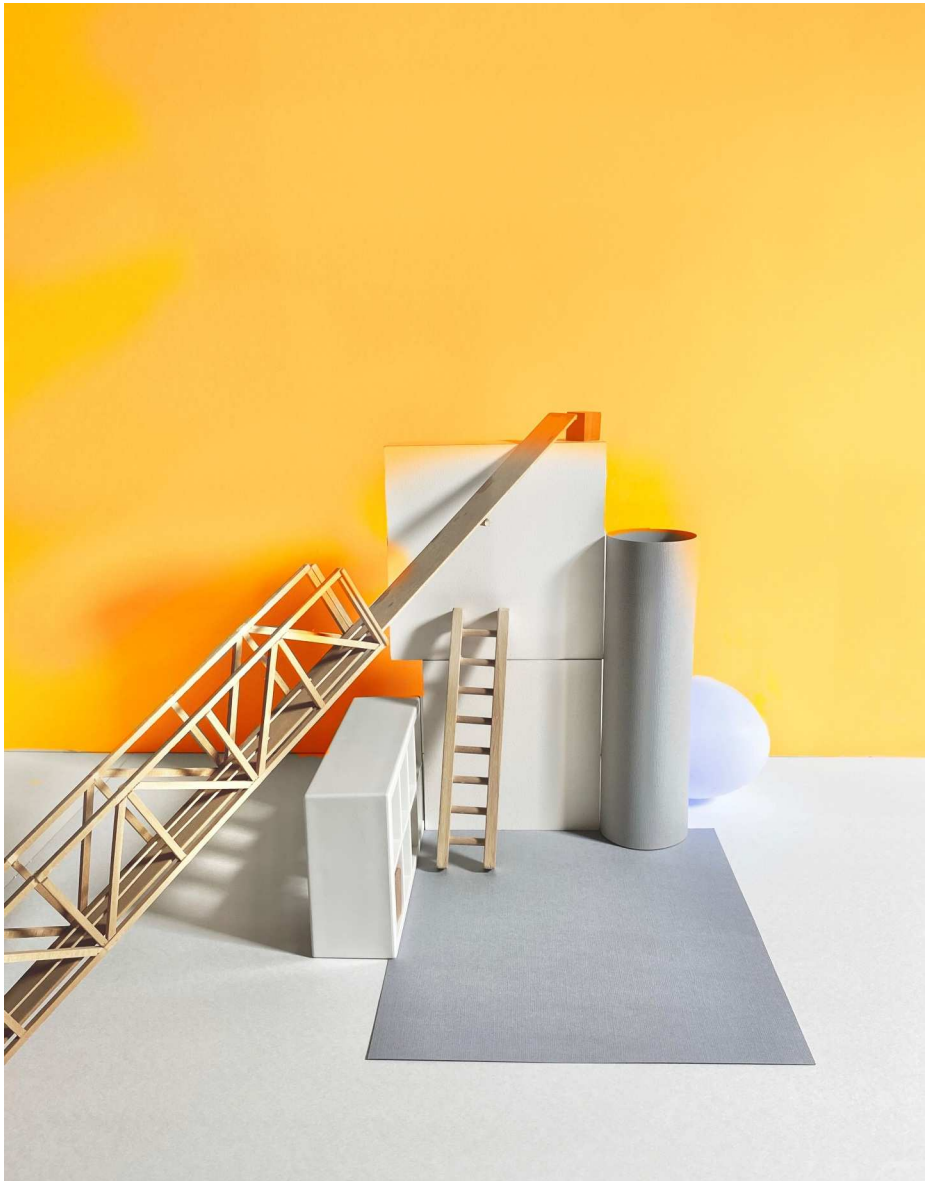


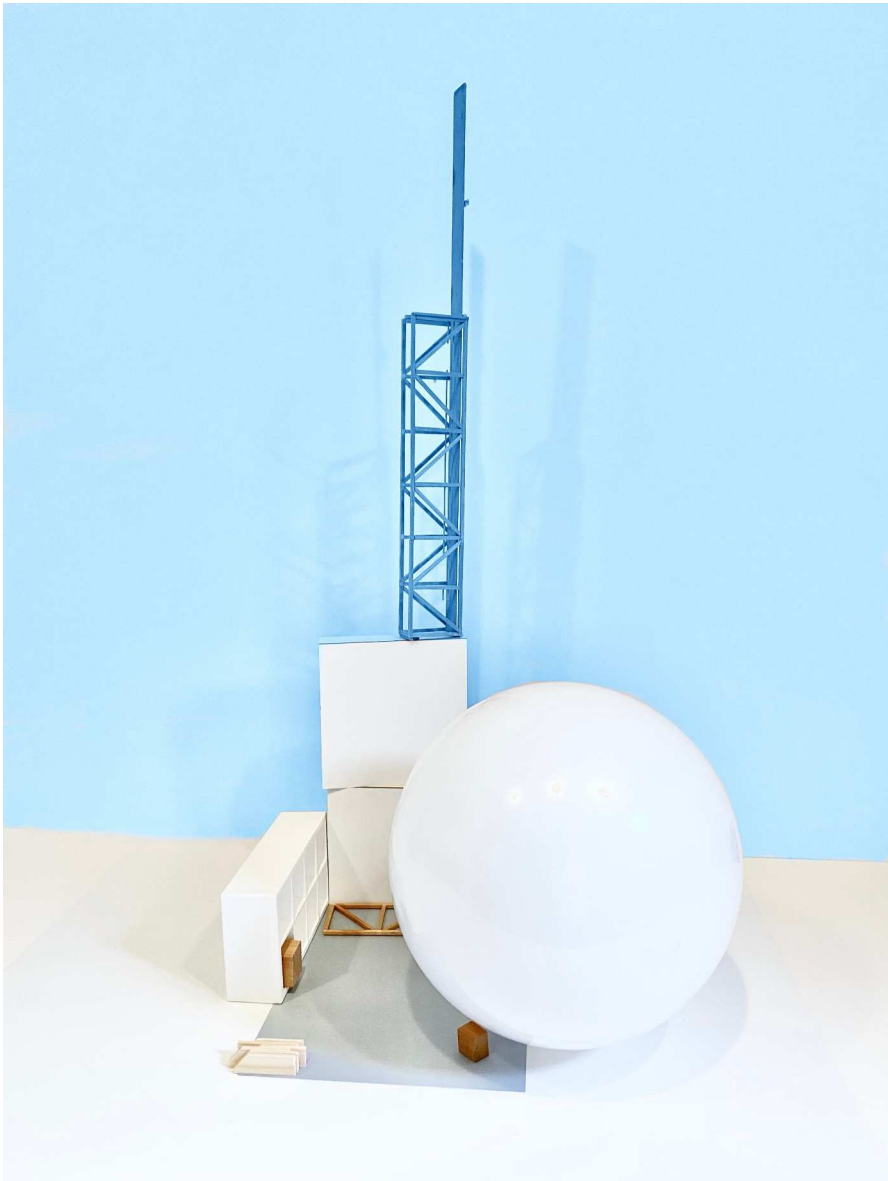
"If you have ever observed children at play, you will notice that they are quite serious at it. Some early childhood educators champion imaginative play as an essential for them to "invent and re-invent themselves as thinking people, before the world tells them what to think." A child at play will create her own intricate set of structures and rules guided solely by her imagination. What we observe from the outside is evidence of that pursuit.

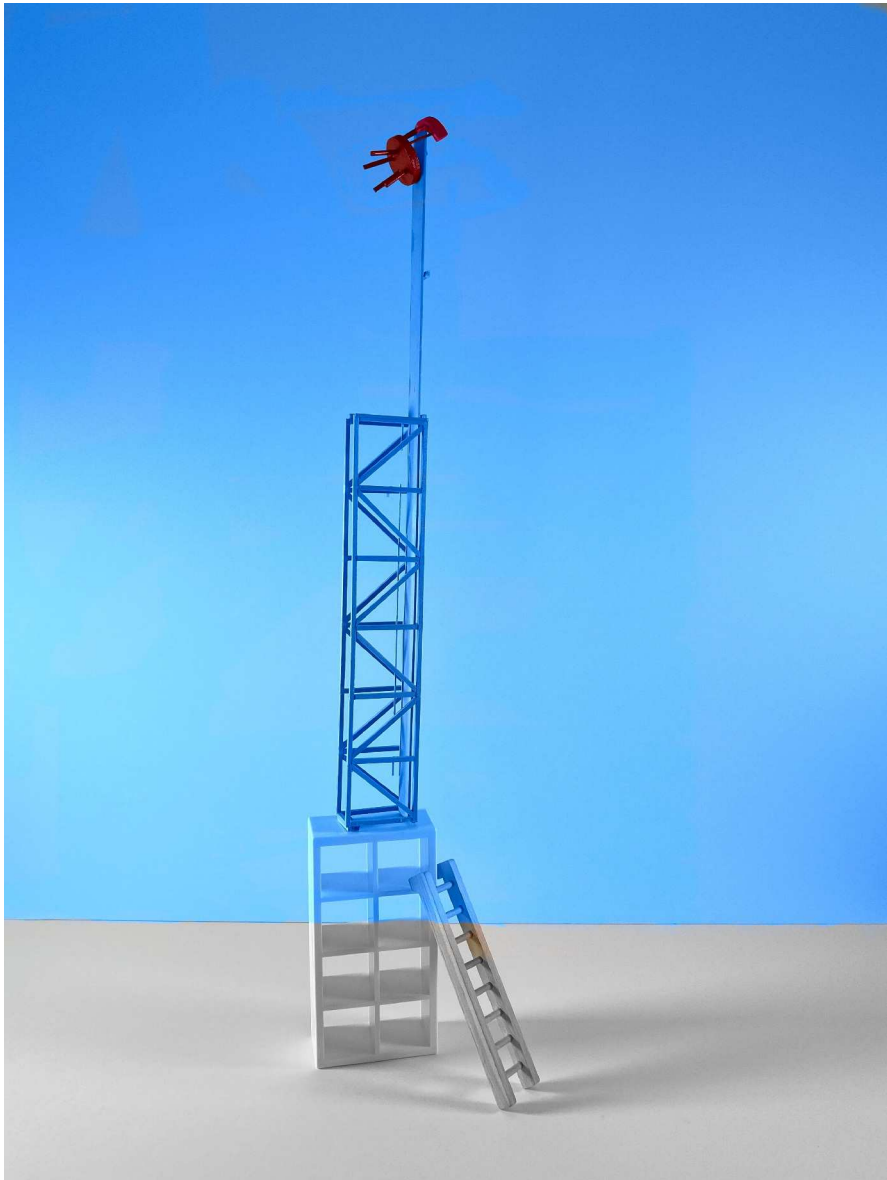
That is the strange and unlikely metamorphosis of survival and transcendence that Avisheh Mohsenin creates for us in her dreamy works that are at once melancholic and playful. Armed with building blocks and a camera, Mohsenin allows her own impulses and instincts to guide her. She maps her way through the beauty and uncertainty of motherhood, as a photographer would -- with her camera.

The constructed photographs in *Playing Fields* reveal a very personal visual language. Representations of how an urgent desire to make sense of one's place in the world comes smack up against its fundamental unknowability. It was in the pursuit to render her sense of the strangeness of a particular time in creative limbo that the artist began using layered composition; an assemblage of small elements, to create a new kind of experiential art, with toys and found playground items transformed, into photographic objects. Objects that reveal the creative and mundane push-pull of an artist/mother experiencing this dual role." (*Constance Lewis*)





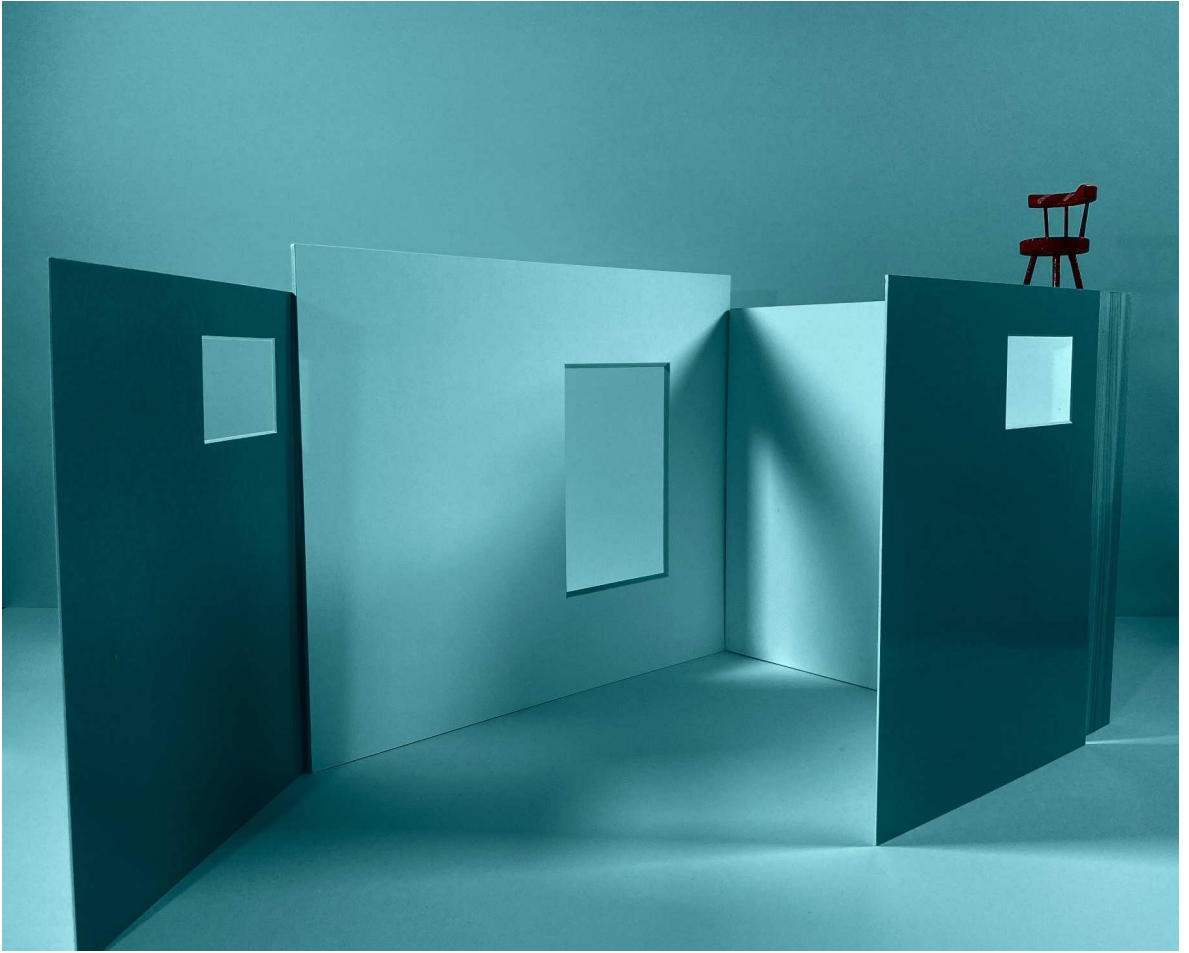




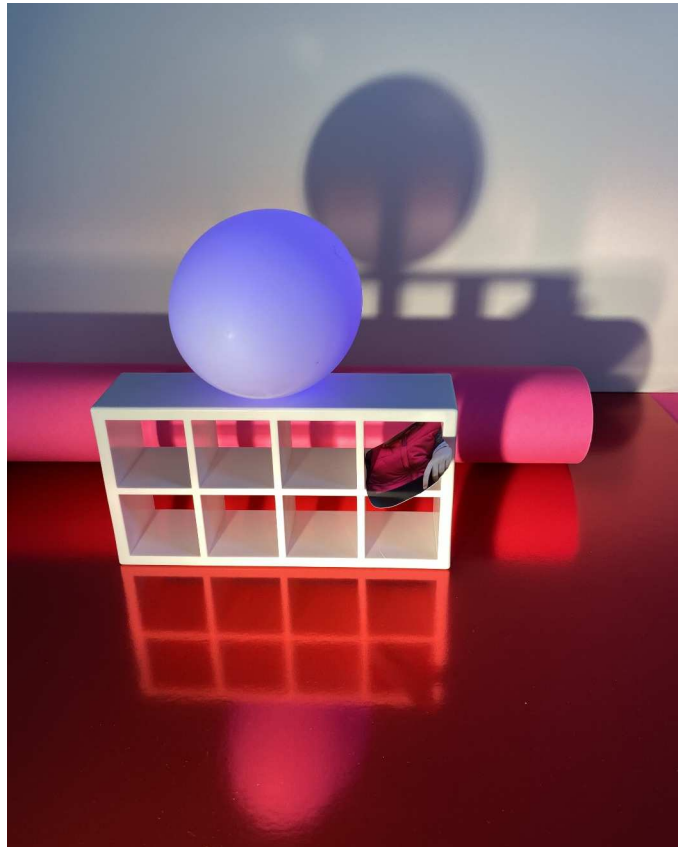




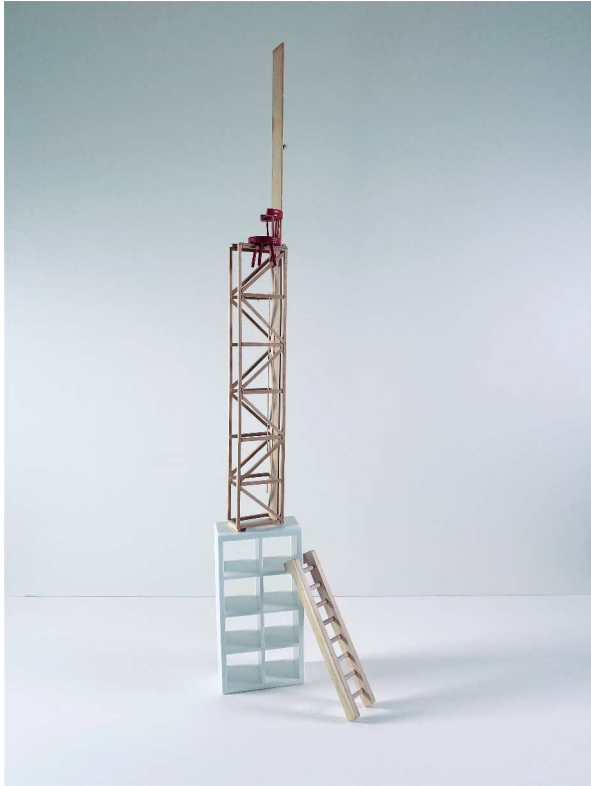
















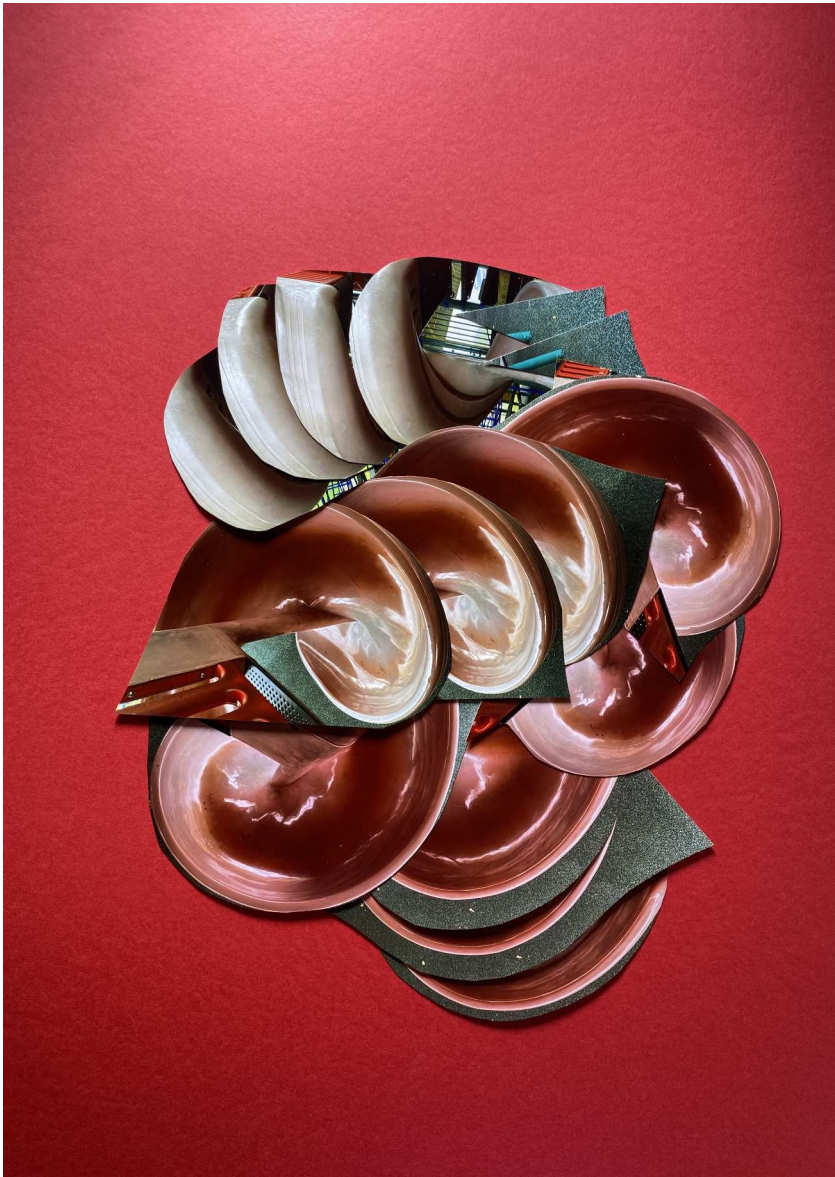
"Going to playgrounds, once they were open again, was one of the few things Mohsenin could do with her daughter outside the house. Sitting there, watching her daughter happily discover the colorful worlds of slides and swings and climbing racks, Mohsenin started to see these 'playing fields' as a starting point for a new series of work. She especially noticed the formal properties of the various slides: their bright colors and interesting shapes, the way the light fell onto them at different times of the day. The slides became a research project: Mohsenin would search online for the best ones, then visit the playground and photograph them, sometimes travelling far distances to catch the most unusual ones.

One part of the series *Playing Fields* consists of colorful photocollages on paper or board, using the same technique of her previous works, cutting out and putting together parts of the photographed slides into new combinations that betray their original source. The resulting designs are bright and intricate and highly detailed; the individual parts of the slides, no longer recognisable, appear like hyper-real brushstrokes. These hybrid structures look organic and artificial all at once, like futuristic flowers. You can almost sense the buzz and excitement of the little toddler legs that have whizzed through the slides, the rush of energy contained in the otherworldly forms." (*Sabine Casparie*)

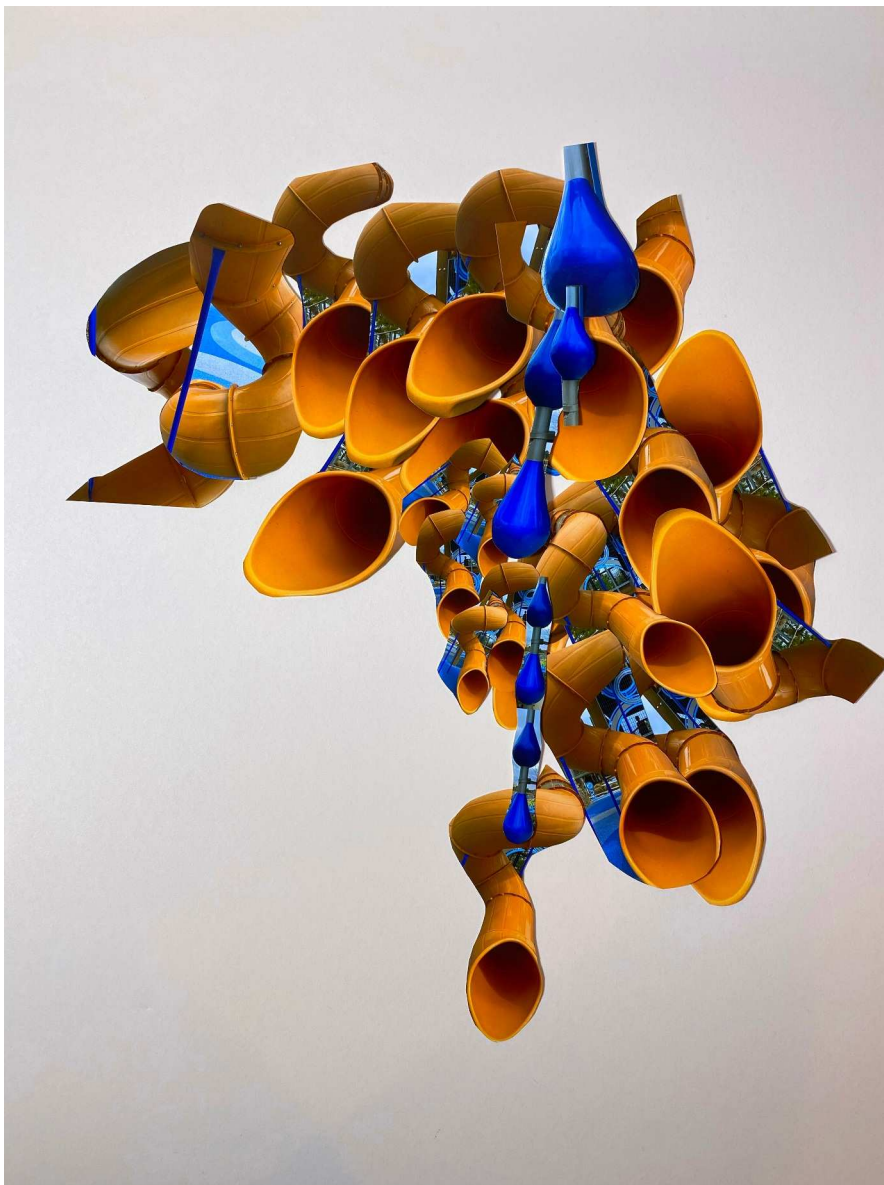
SABINE CASPARIE is a Dutch art historian who lived in Houston between 2016 and 2019 and is now based in London. Sabine leads art tours in London and teaches monthly classes on Zoom for adults and children. She also writes a blog on contemporary art. www.sabinecasparie.com

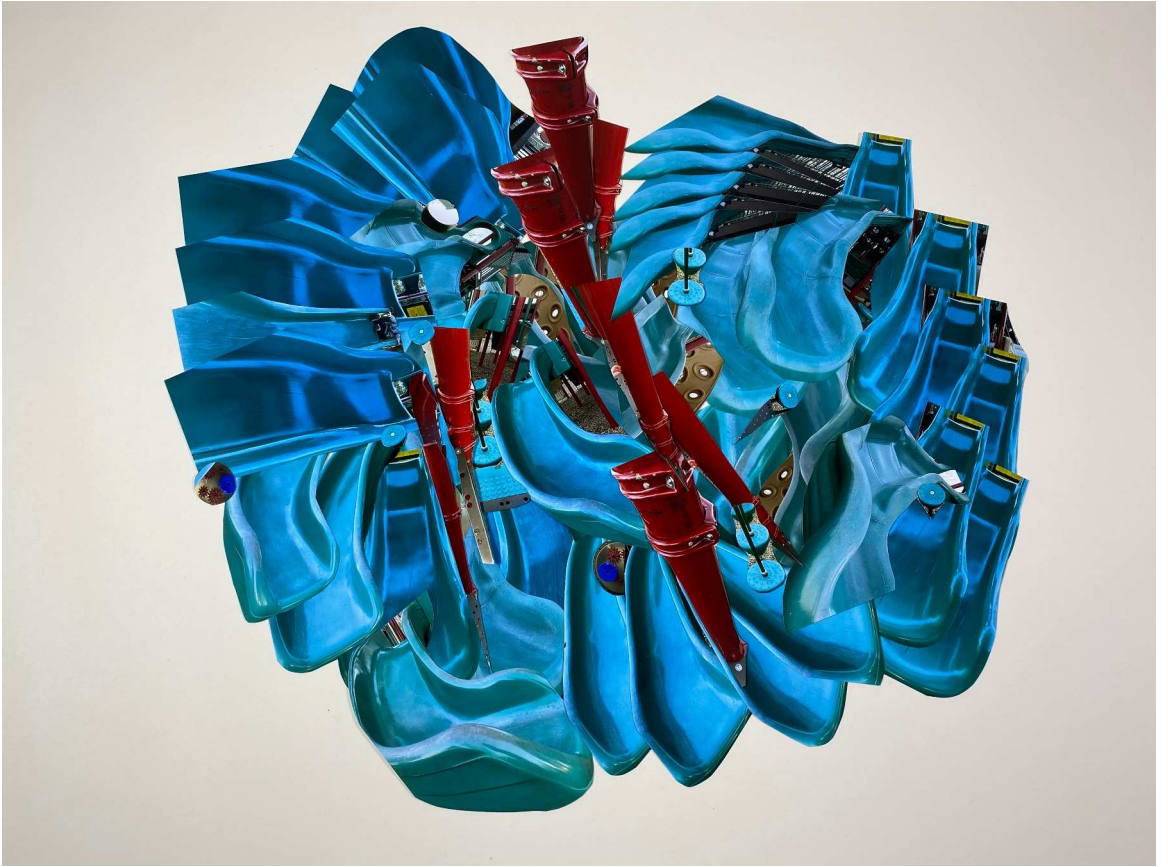
Collaged photography on board
18 x 18 inches









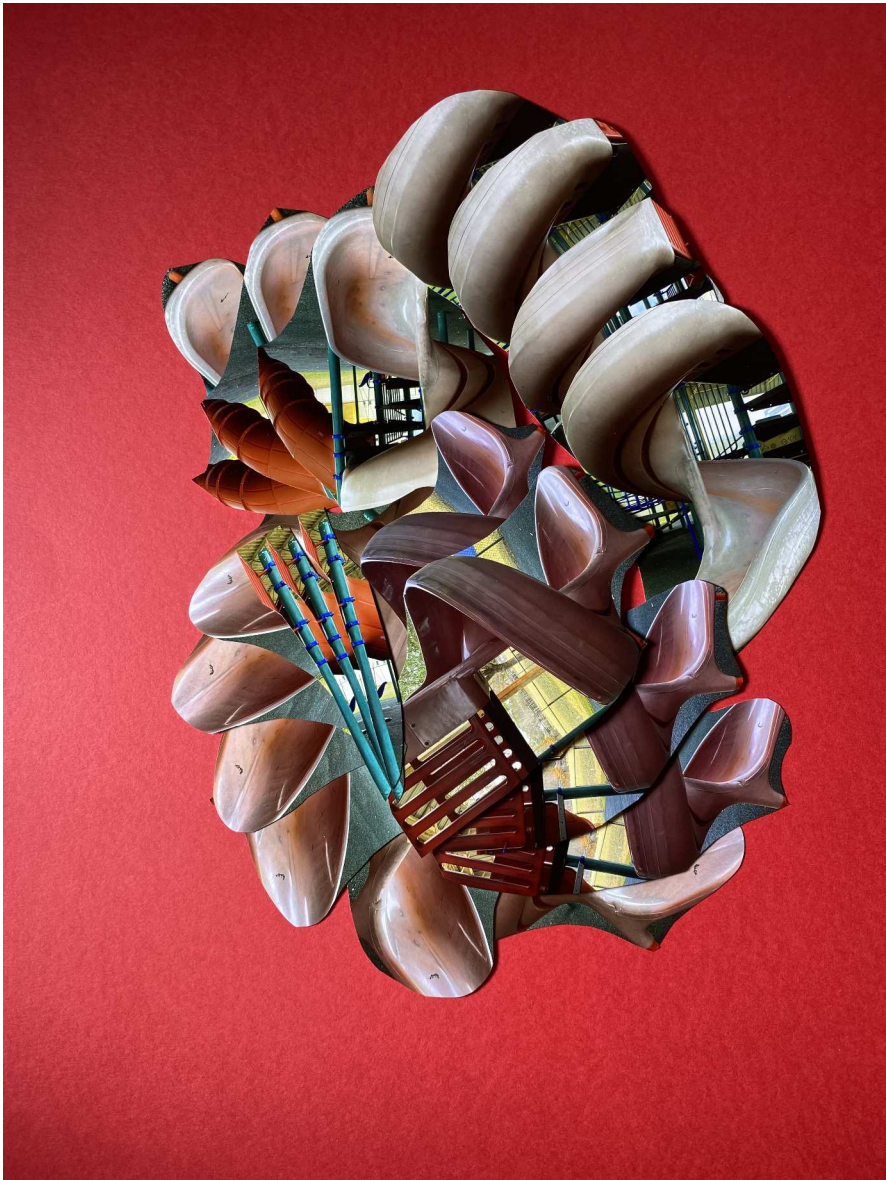




Collaged
photography
24 x 30 inches

"Avisheh Mohsenin revisits the most primal place of creativity through this visually compelling body of work; embracing an activity considered traditionally for children, and creating a filtered experience, in much the way emotions and personal history shape everyday perception. What is given to the viewer is evidence of how the curiosity and need for experiment and play may linger in the psyche, long into adulthood, stirring a creative urge to find a response, if not an answer, to a world in flux." (*Constance Lewis*)

CONSTANCE LEWIS is a curator, photography specialist and advisor. She received her MFA in Photography from the San Francisco Art Institute, where she studied under noted California photographer Henry Wessel. She studied photographic conservation at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and honed her curatorial skills working with multiple exhibitions and collections including André Kertész; Lee Friedlander: At Work; La Guerre d'Algerie. Soon after earning her degree in Photography from San Francisco Art Institute, she founded Opal Gallery, an artist collective that exhibited an international selection of artists. Soon after returning to the United States, Lewis moved to Atlanta and founded Opal Gallery, an artist collective that exhibited an international selection of artists. She published *Oraien Catledg: Photographs* (University Press of Mississippi) with Richard Ford in 2010. She is the Principal of Opal Art Management. In addition to her work in photography, Lewis holds a Masters degree in Education with an emphasis on Visual Literacy from Rice University. She currently resides in New Orleans and Houston.



AVISHEH MOHSEIN is an Iranian-American artist based in Houston whose mixed-media photo-based collage work is centered on themes of memory and loss. She has exhibited at MIIT Museum (Turin, Italy); Aldo Castillo (Chicago); FotoFest (Houston); WhiteWall Space Gallery (NYC); Heidi Vaughan Fine Art (represented, Houston); Golestan Gallery (Tehran, Iran). She is published in Art Houston and the Houston Chronicle among others and catalogued at the Houston Flood Museum. CGTN TV produced a documentary on her *Resurface* series which was inspired by the Hurricane Harvey damage of her studio. Avisheh holds an MS in Economics and is a board member of the *Houston Arts Foundation*. www.avishehmohseninart.com

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