

# INTRODUCTION.

## ZAHRA HOOSHYAR

My college life has not been the most conventional, and neither was my upbringing. I am a first generation Iranian- American born in the predominantly white town of Morgantown, West Virginia. My mother, Farzaneh, is a medical doctor and my father, Daryoush, is civil engineer; my entire family lineage is comprised of medical, scientific, law or business professionals, even my younger sister is going to school for law. I on the other hand decided to take the artistic path towards life, constantly finding myself working on some self-driven project or piece since I was a young girl.

When it was time for me to go to college, I studied sculpture at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC), for about two years. Being an extremely prestigious school that holds a long history in the art world, it was a very pricey education. I was given financial aid and a small scholarship because I was a brown kid born and raised in a very white world, but the funds were sadly not enough to pay for my entire education there. I had to leave for personal reasons as well as the grossly large price of an Art school education. While being there had its ups and downs (mostly downs) the most meaningful and important outcome was adopting my first ever dog, Sayeh a Jack Russell and Beagle mutt. She helped me keep my head above the water when things became very hard toward my last year in Chicago due to several unhealthy connections I had made.

After leaving the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, I moved back to West Virginia for a short time to recover from the events that caused me to leave Chicago. I stumbled upon an amazing opportunity to work on a small family owned, organic, community supported agriculture (CSA) farm in the rolling hills of Cranestown, West Virginia, just one-hour north of my home in Morgantown. The small but mighty eighty-acre farm was owned and operated by Sunshine and Steve Vortigern, their three children, Steve's mother and four other employees as well as two live in interns. Working on the farm was the most rewarding experience and job I had ever had and probably ever will have. The Vortigerns taught me so much more than just harvesting and cleaning various vegetables and farming practices. They gave me a completely new outlook on life and erased most, if not all of the cynical attitude I had developed at the School of the Arts Institute of Chicago.

Sadly, I couldn't live my entire life as a farmhand simply because the pay was not enough and due to the harsh winters of West Virginia, the farming and harvesting seasons were cut short about four months. So after about a year at Round Right Farm, I moved to California to return to school but this time I would major in Art at a public, four-year institution. I didn't stay in West Virginia partly because of the same personal reasons I could not stay in Chicago but also because, as much as I love my hometown, it is one of those small towns that suck you up and spit you out if you don't get out while you're young. I moved in with a longtime family friend in San Marcos and began classes at Palomar College. I got a job at a small, independently owned, paint your own pottery business as a kiln manager and art teacher for young kids.

Although I was enjoying this fresh start and was extremely grateful and lucky to be given a chance to start over, I felt myself feeling empty and somber, longing for something that I felt was missing. I missed my job at the farm and the lifestyle and bonds I had while working there. I longed for the feeling of working with the earth, feeling her soft soil underneath my hands. I began applying to permaculture and farming schools throughout Northern California region, hoping to be able to have a chance to once again work with the earth but this time I wanted to gain a deeper knowledge of sustainable practices and regenerative agriculture. I was accepted into the Occidental Arts and Ecology program in Occidental, California a small town near Sebastopol. It was at this school that my love for farming turned into more than just a job, but became a way of life I wanted to pursue and hold.

I returned back with a vision to focus my life and education to finding out how I could merge together the two passions I had. To find a way to bring art together with a sustainable and respectful relationship with the earth, in a form that is educational and available for anyone to explore became my goal. I have been accepted into San Francisco State University for the fall 2018 semester as an art major and with the education I gained from other institutions, I hope to open a center or institution much like The Occidental Arts and Ecology Center. For now I am finishing my last semester at Palomar and work as an art teacher and freelance artist.