



U N I F I C A T I O N

Curated by: Roya Khadjavi

A solo exhibition by:

Z A H R A N A Z A R I



Date: May 1st - May 15th, 2021
Opening Reception: May 1st 5-8 pm
Opening Hours: 12 to 6 pm or by appointment
Closed on Sunday and Monday
Place: Highline Nine Gallery 9.1
507 West 27th St, New York, NY 10001
For Sales and Press Contact: roya.khadjavi@gmail.com
www.royakhadjaviprojects.com



Zahra Nazari was born and raised in Hamedan, Iran, a city of some 783,000 inhabitants 200 miles or so southwest of Tehran. One of the oldest Iranian cities, Hamedan, on the Silk Road, is also often said to be one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, dating to at least the 7th century BCE and the Median Empire, and possibly much earlier. As a youth, Nazari was uncommonly steeped in architecture, visiting renowned buildings and archaeological sites with her father, an architecture enthusiast; her brother is also a practicing architect in Iran. This sustained involvement with architecture, whether modern, historical, or ancient, secular or religious—with all its corresponding family ties and connections to her homeland—is of fundamental importance in Nazari’s acrylic paintings, sculptures, works on paper, and installations.

Nazari first came to the US in 2011 and subsequently pursued graduate studies in art at SUNY New Paltz with a focus on painting. After receiving her MFA in 2014, she made the big decision to immigrate and settle in New York. Since then, she has developed a distinctive vision that melds abstraction and representation, Western and Persian influences, history and modernity, New York and Iran in captivating artworks arising from her deeply felt experience of dislocation and simultaneity—living both in and between two very different cultures and histories, also between two countries often severely at odds with one another. Her exhibition *Unification*, occurring at a time of extraordinary division, xenophobia and upheaval, including the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic (which has hit both Iran and the US particularly hard), constitutes her compelling attempt to unify what could otherwise be polar opposites.

The vast and stately Ali Qapu Palace in Isfahan, Iran, dating to the 17th century CE and the Safavid Empire, is one of the most prominent examples of Safavid architecture in Iran. On the sixth floor is the famous Music Hall, with its spectacular ceiling made of ornamented vaulting (*muqarnas*). In Nazari’s *Ali Qapu Palace* (2020), this ceiling is still recognizable as such, but it is disjointed, convulsive, and in serious flux, with the exquisite symmetry and precision of the overhead *muqarnas* rendered as elastic, free-form, color and motion-filled areas, many outlined in light blue. While never self-referential, Nazari’s paintings are born of direct personal experience. Iran is in this painting, represented by one its most iconic buildings, but so too, however obliquely, is frenetic, eclectic, ever-changing New York. The acrylic on paper *Futuristic Cities* (2020) is a hybrid of historical and thoroughly contemporary structures, also one of many times when Nazari’s works loosely evoke the asymmetrical buildings and designs of Deconstructivist architects Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid (she cites both architects as important influences).

Working from both photographs and memory, while allowing for improvisation and invention, Nazari rarely renders whole buildings in her paintings. Instead, she paints excerpts especially significant for her—a section of ceiling with its elaborate details, a particular sequence of windows or vaults, floral patterning, part of a wall—which she combines with abstract gestures and shapes, other forms resembling jumbled architectural fragments, and intermingling colors. Architecture is never static in these works, but instead unstable, changeable, often vertiginous, and under duress (the Ali Qapu Palace, incidentally, ravaged by environmental and political forces, was at one point a ransacked ruin). Construction and deconstruction share close quarters in Nazari's work.

The Nasir al-Mulk Mosque in Shiraz, Iran (the Pink Mosque), built between 1876 and 1888, is renowned for its facade of stained glass windows and gorgeous interior colors, resulting from sunlight passing through the windows; awe-struck, camera-wielding tourists flock to this mosque for its sublime color display. In Nazari's *Nasir al-Mulk Mosque* (2020), a single aisle is suffused with abundant colors—primarily purples, pinks, and reds—cascading from on high and pooling on the floor in sweeping abstract shapes. These colors are aggressive, not sublime, unruly not contemplative and serene, charging the painting with tension and fractious energy.

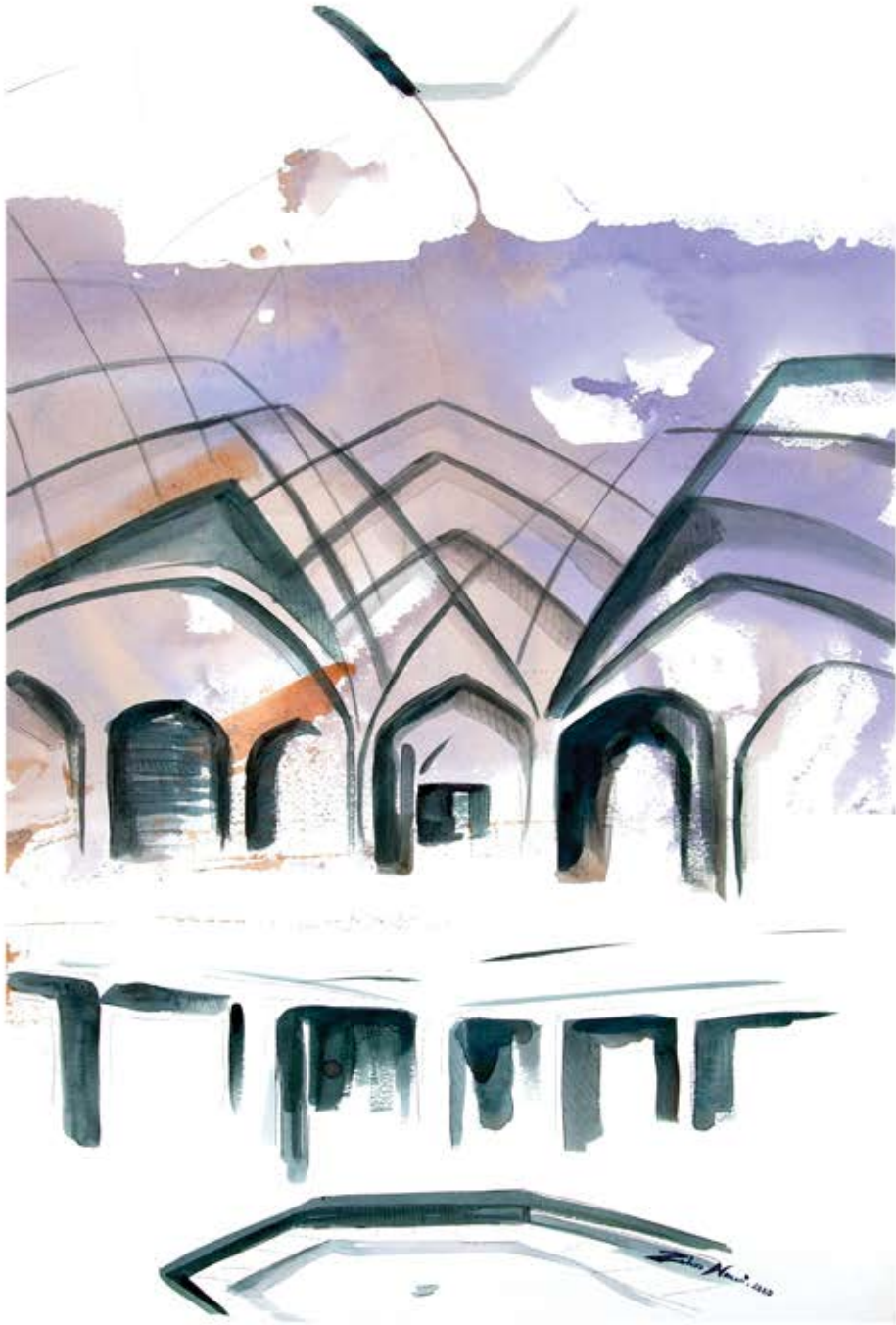
Many of Nazari's abstract forms, or what Western viewers might normally think of as abstract forms, including prominent angles, jutting bands, arcs, cross-hatching, rudimentary geometric shapes and irregular color blocks, derive more from Persian architecture than Western abstract painting. Domes, vaults, honeycombed muqarnas, arabesques, eight-pointed stars, latices and minarets—all of these, however transformed, are recurring motifs. Also fascinating to note is that the colors in Nazari's distinctive palate, including various purples, soft reds, golds, tawny browns, oranges, and rich blues, are especially important and meaningful in Persian architecture, and have been for centuries.


Nazari often combines multiple views of the same building, or a portion of that building, in a single painting, in a way that scrambles and shifts the viewer's perspective; very often one is not at all sure whether one is looking up or down, at something distant or close—visual manifestations of cultural and personal disorientation. The Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, also in Isfahan (Isfahan, by the way, is about 280 miles from Hamedan), is another masterpiece of Safavid architecture, for which construction commenced in 1603 CE and was completed in 1619 CE. In Nazari's *Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque* (2020), you look at this structure, or portions of it, from afar, but simultaneously from within it; at parts of its façade from a distance but also from inside at sections of its interior ceiling(s). With rich blue, gold, red, and purple tones, this vivid, composite scene is also curiously vaporous, like a slippery memory or a receding dream—an effect augmented by how Nazari has left large portions of the painting bright white.

During her 2020 residency at Sculpture Space in Utica, New York, Nazari, who has long experimented with shaped paintings and paintings arranged as three-dimensional installations, extended her practice into stainless steel sculptures, in the process learning hands-on techniques, including welding. These sculptures again thoroughly fuse abstraction and representation while referencing Persian architecture and ornamentation. Other reference points are the abstract stainless steel sculptures of Anthony Caro and Robert Morris, as well as Gehry and Hadid. Using the relatively recent invention of stainless steel to address centuries-old architecture in Iran is exactly the kind of border-traversing, category-defying unification that Nazari seeks.


With its bows and curves, partial lattices and twisting geometric shapes, Nazari's Unification Sculpture (2020) fuses elements of Persian architecture and Modernist abstraction into an idiosyncratic whole. Patterns of Persia (2020), with largely four-sided geometric shapes excised from a stainless steel sheet, specifically evokes, but also substantially transforms, the latticework so prominent in Persian architecture. This metal sculpture is also curiously supple and sensitive, turning a basic lattice form into a portal of sorts, or actually multiple portals. As one moves around the sculpture, taking it in from different perspectives, shadows cast on the walls and floor, and light glinting off the metallic surface—both changing with the viewer's movement—are frankly enthralling. These nonmaterial things are essential components of an otherwise heavily material work.

Gregory Volk is a New York-based art writer, freelance curator, and a former associate professor at Virginia Commonwealth University. He writes regularly for Hyperallergic and Art in America, where is also contributing editor, and his articles and reviews have also appeared in many other publications. His book-length essay on German artist Katharina Grosse appears in the monograph Katharina Grosse, published in September 2021 by Lund Humphries as part of their Contemporary Painters Series. Among his contributions to exhibition catalogues and books are essays on Joan Jonas (Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2007); Vito Acconci, in Vito Acconci: Diary of a Body, 1969-1973 (Charta, 2007); Turkish artist Ayse Erkmen (Venice Biennale, 2011), and Icelandic artist Ragna Róbertsdóttir, in Ragna Róbertsdóttir Works 1984-2017 (Distanz Verlag, Berlin, 2018).




 The Complexity of Looking, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020




 The Complexity of Looking #2, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020



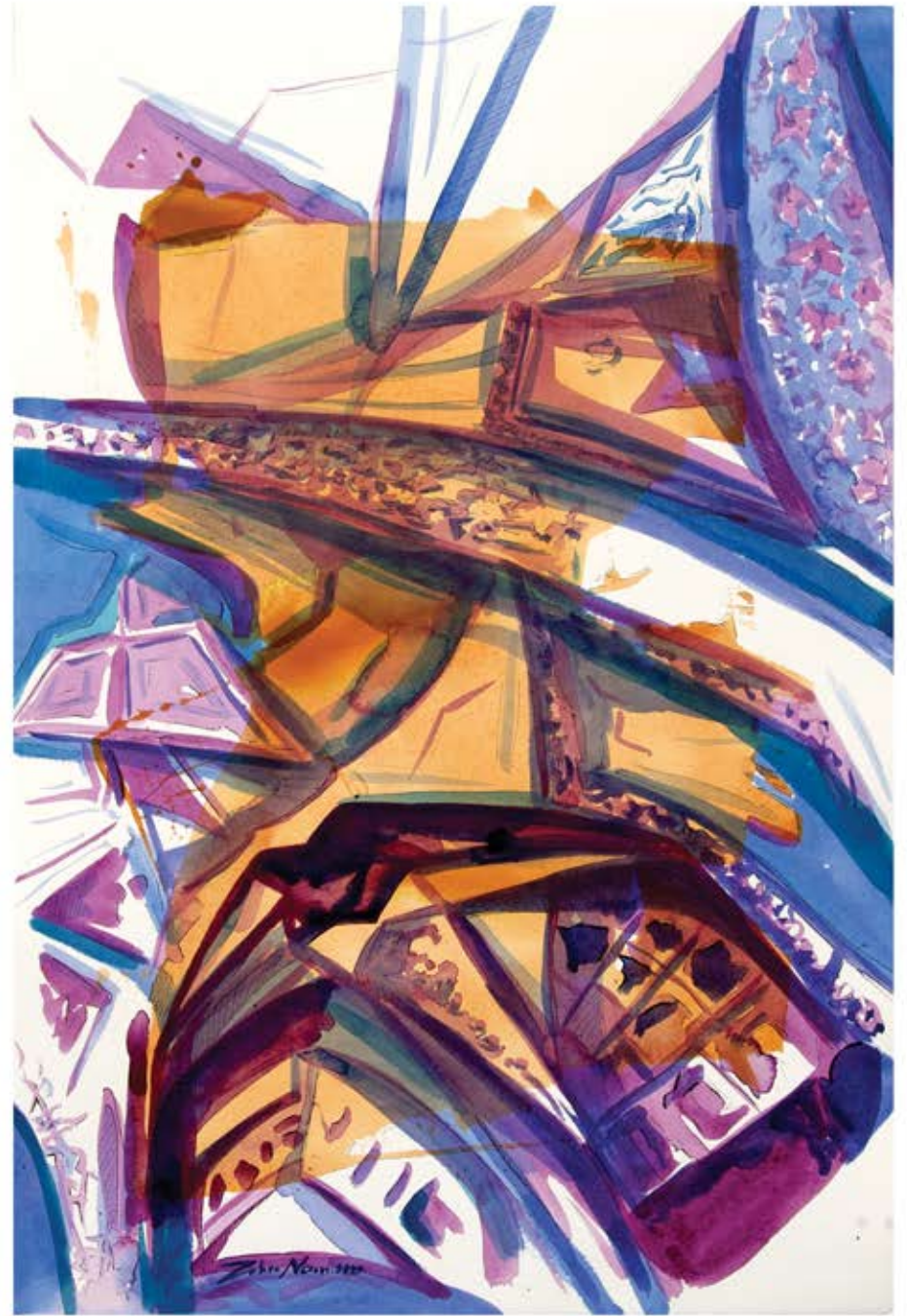
 Persian Garden, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020



 Persian Bazaar, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020



Elements of Design, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020



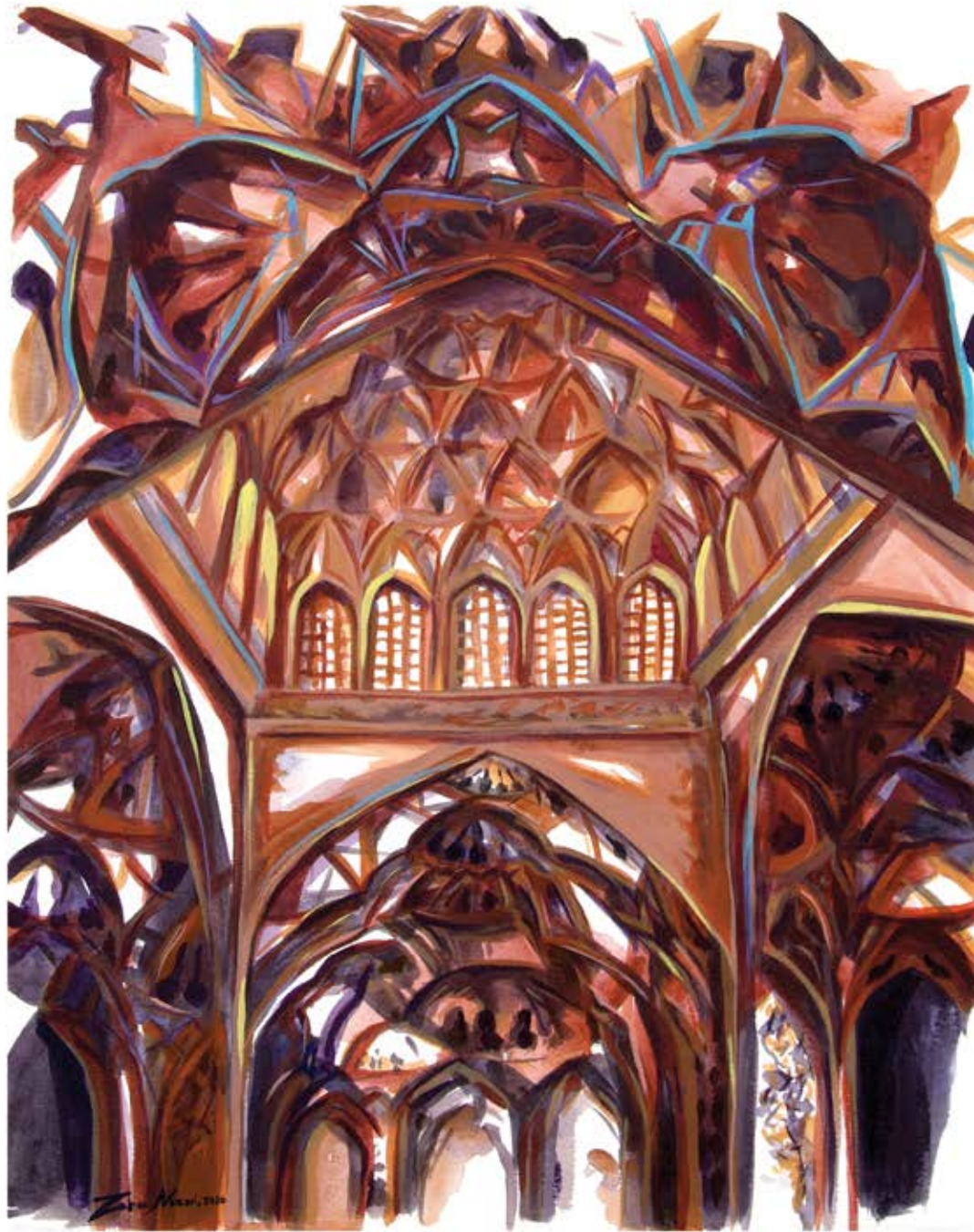
Elements of Design #2, acrylic on paper, 22x15 inches, 2020



Pathway, acrylic on paper, 15x10.5 inches, 2020



Floral Patterns, acrylic on paper, 14.5x11 inches, 2020



 Beyond the Visible World, acrylic on paper, 20x16 inches, 2020



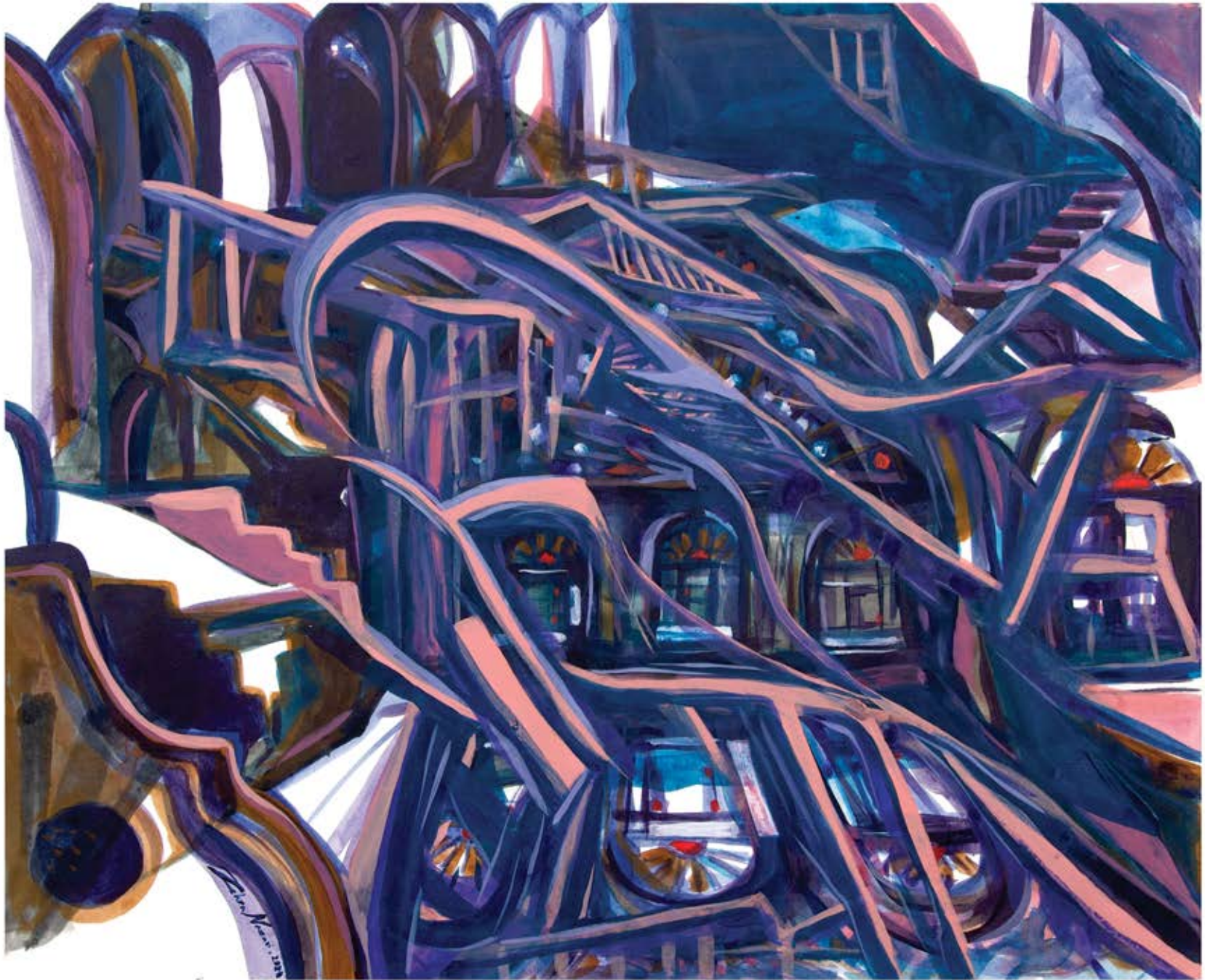
Blue Interior, acrylic on paper, 15 x 20.5 inches, 2020




Studies of 17th Century Persian Architecture, acrylic on paper, 13.5x11 inches, 2020



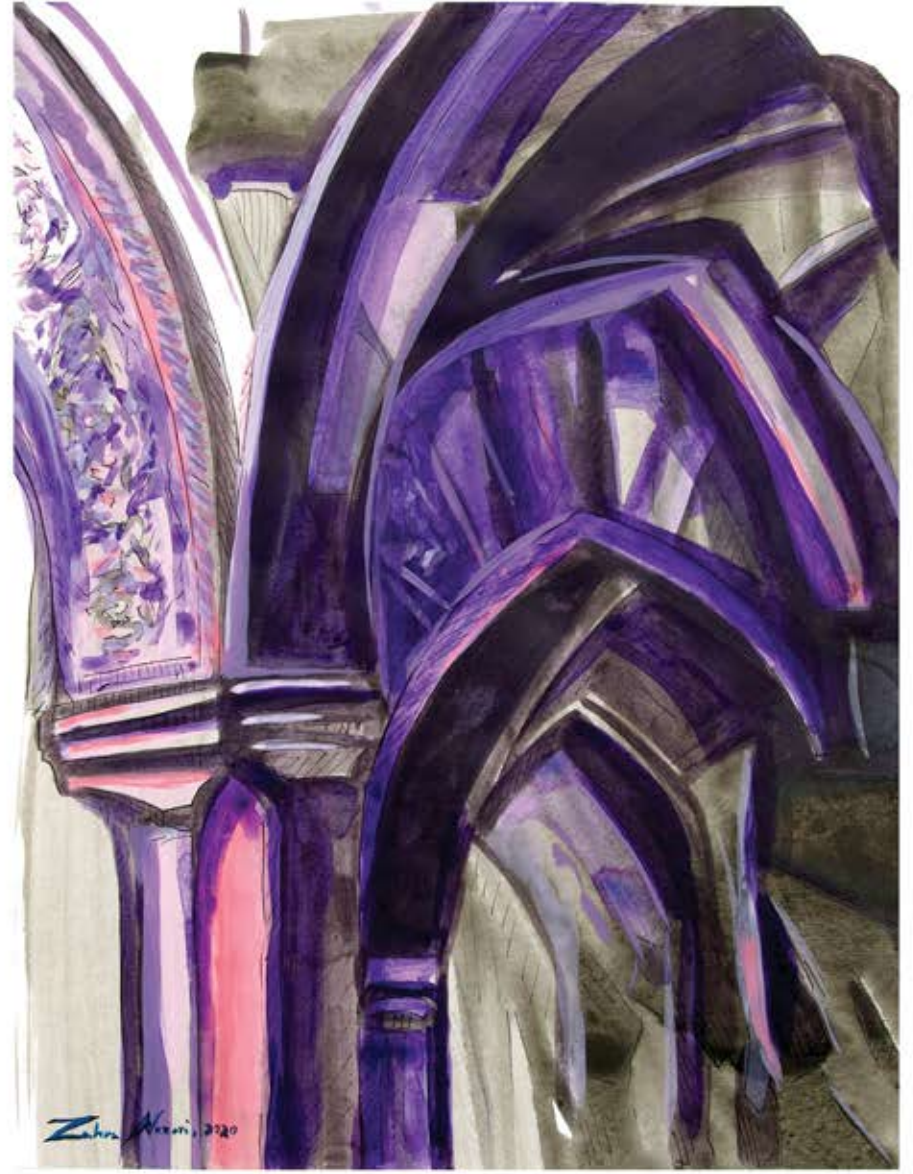
Studies of 17th Century Persian Architecture #2, acrylic on paper, 13.5x11 inches, 2020



 Night View of Persian Homes with Stained Glass Windows, acrylic on paper, 18x22 inches, 2020




Interiors of 17th century #2, acrylic on paper, 14x11 inches, 2020



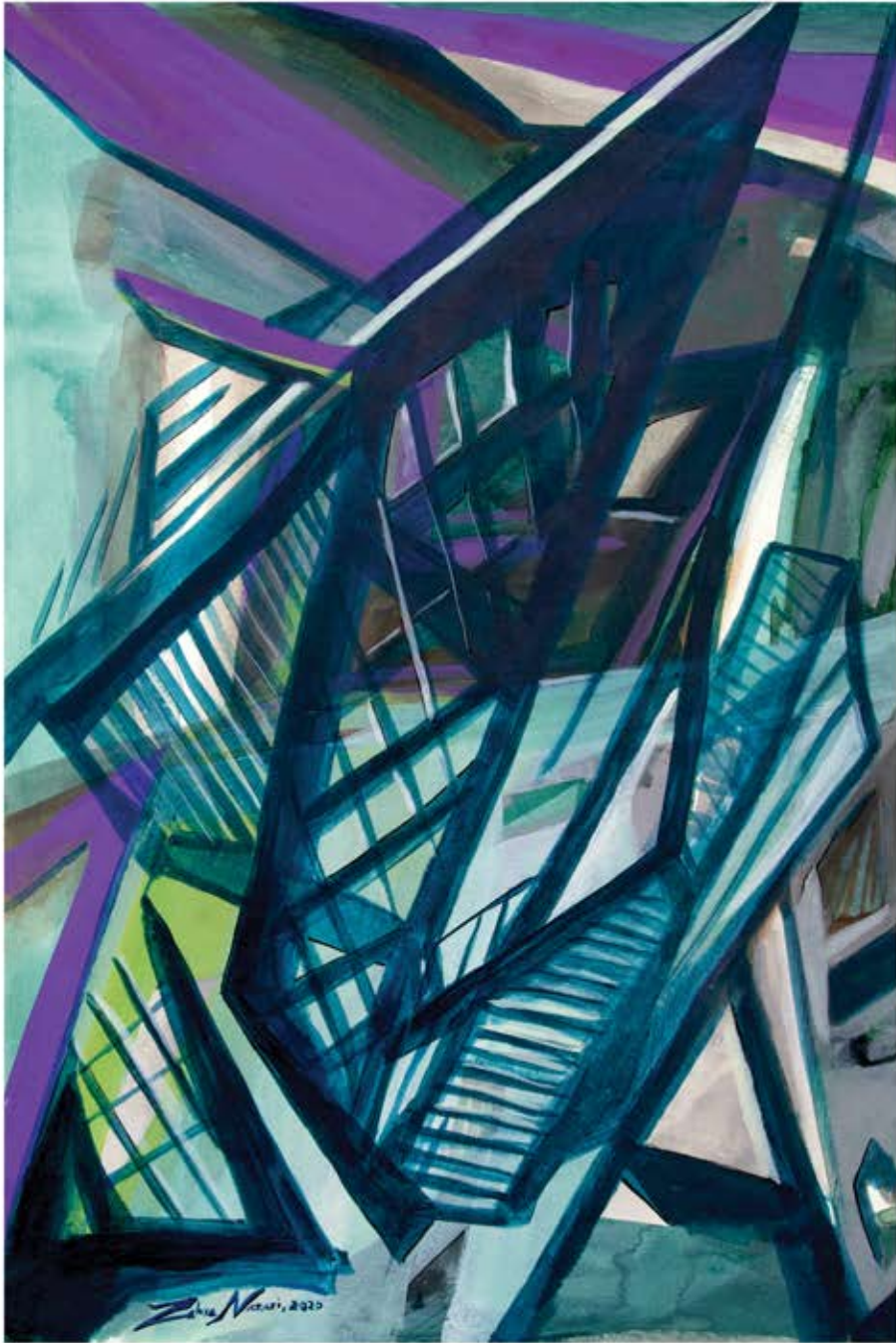
Interiors of 17th century, acrylic on paper, 14x11 inches, 2020



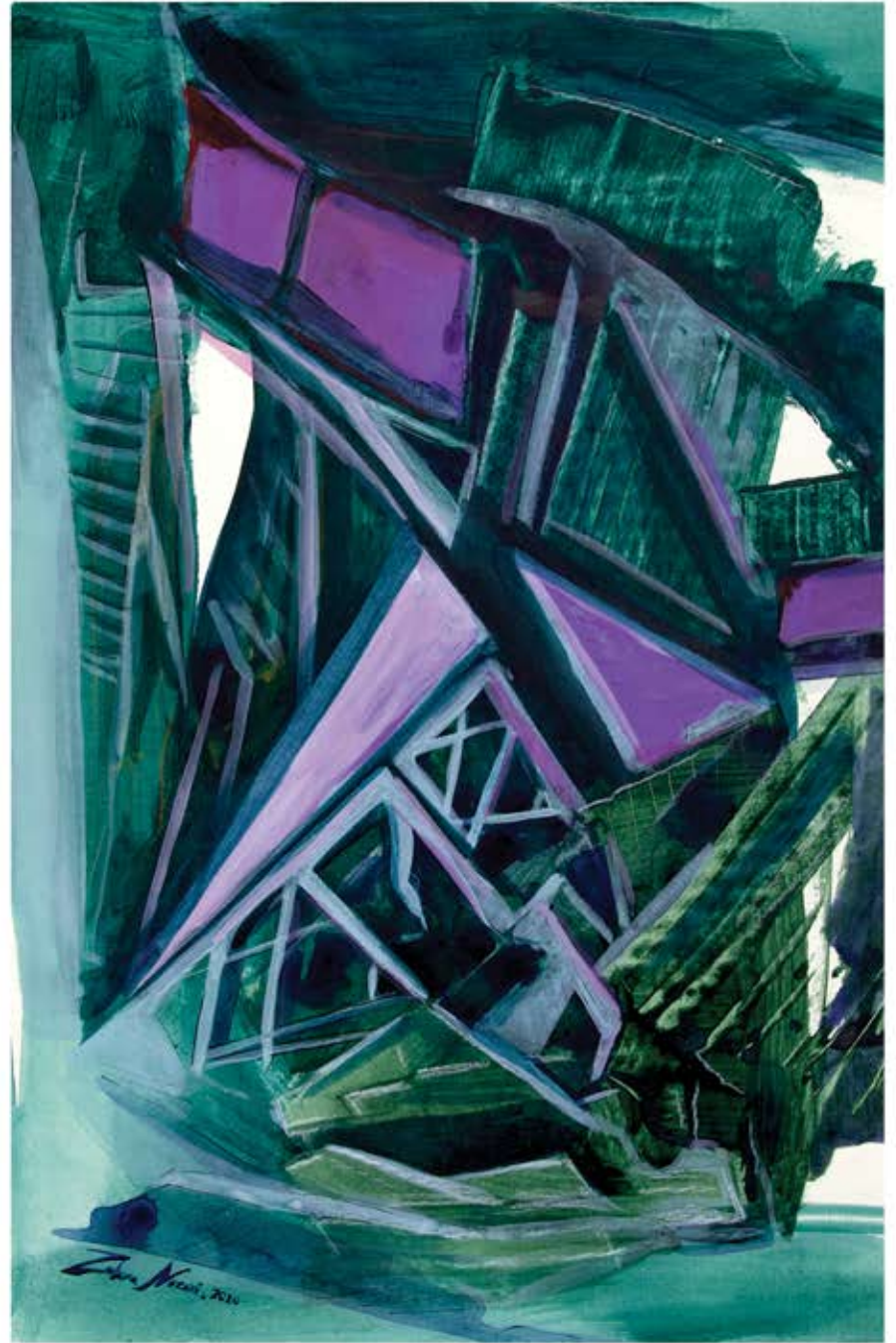
 Futuristic Cities, acrylic on paper, 22x14 inches, 2020



 Futuristic Cities #2, acrylic on paper, 22x14 inches, 2020



Deconstructivism, acrylic on paper, 19x12.5 inches, 2020



Deconstructivism, acrylic on paper, 19x12.5 inches, 2020



Deconstructed Cities #1, acrylic on mylar, 18x12 inches, 2020




Deconstructed Cities #2, acrylic on mylar, 18x12 inches, 2020





Unification, 12 gauge stainless steel, 65" x 90" x 60" inches, 2020

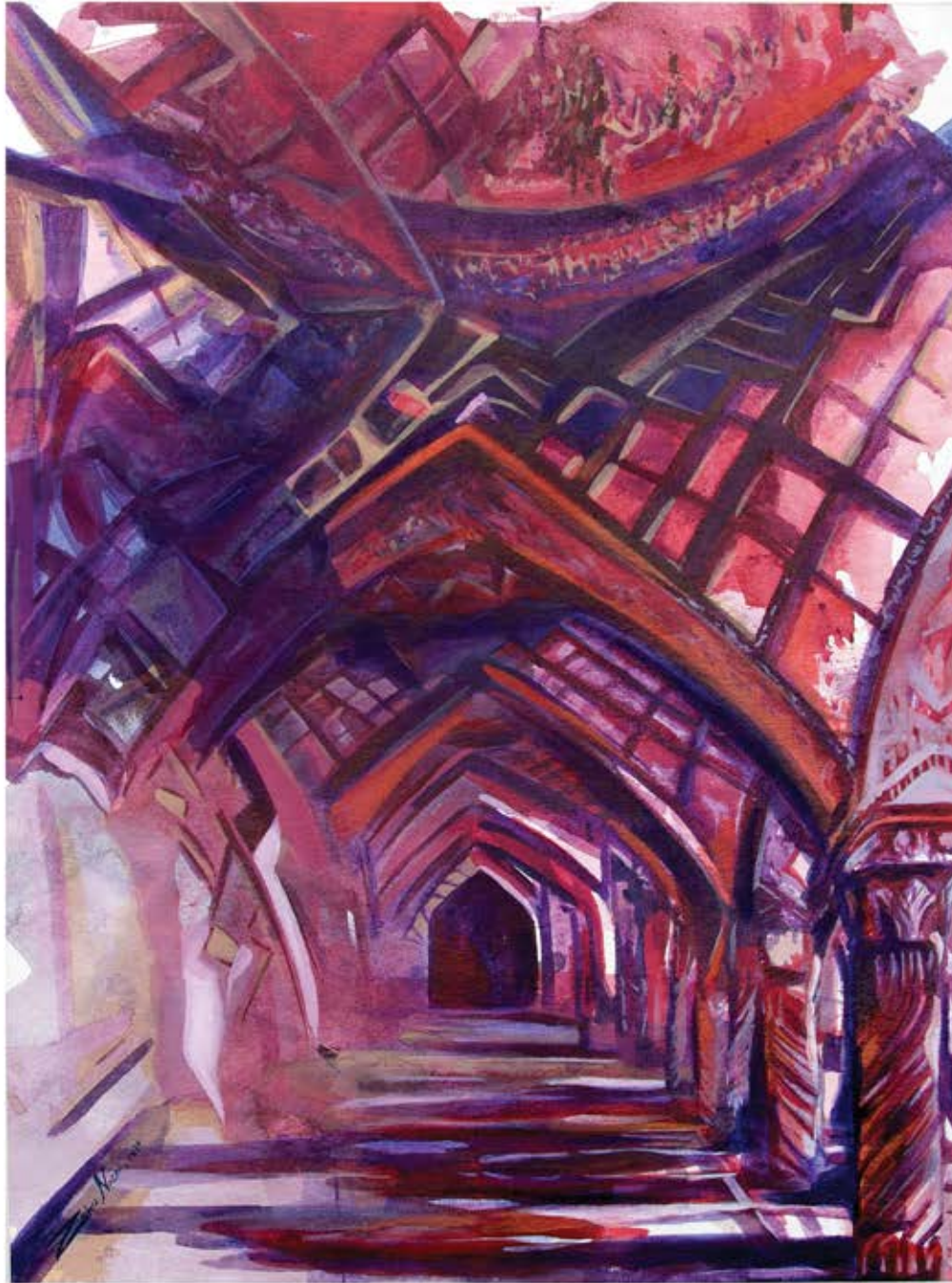


 Patterns of Persia, 12 gauge stainless steel, 25x48x11 inches, 2020





Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, acrylic on canvas, 40x40 inches, 2020



 Nasir al-Mulk Mosque, acrylic on canvas, 40x30 inches, 2020



 Fin Garden, acrylic on canvas, 76x48 inches, 2021

I n t r o d u c t i o n P r e v i o u s W o r k s



 Cuba to Spain, acrylic on canvas, 56x43 inches, 2019



 520 West 28th Condo, acrylic on canvas, 68x56 inches, 2018



 The House by the Water, acrylic on canvas, 56x36 inches, 2019

Zahra Nazari is a New York based painter, sculptor, and installation artist working with architectural themes. She was born in Hamedan, Iran to a family of architecture enthusiasts. Her brother is an architect and her father frequently brought her to architectural dig sites to admire ancient history and artifacts. Throughout her entire life, she has pursued a career as a visual artist on the foundation of this inspiration from her youth. She left Iran in 2011 in order to pursue her master's studies in art in the US.

Nazari has given artist talks and participated as a panelist at institutions including NYU, Columbia University, Cooper Union, and Pratt Institute in New York City. She has been interviewed by and published in Hamptons Art Hub, Hyperallergic, Whitehot Magazine, ZH Magazine, and more. Her works are included in private and public collections worldwide.

Nazari has exhibited both nationally and internationally in galleries and museums including: The Bronx Museum of the Arts - NY, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art - NY, MANA Contemporary - NJ, Spartanburg Art Museum - SC, Masur Museum of Art - LA, New York Academy of Art - NY, Denise Bibro Fine Art - NY, Illinois Institute of Art - IL, China Millennium Monument, Beijing - China, Lite-Haus Galerie, Berlin - Germany, Saba Institution, and Baran Gallery in Tehran, Iran.

Nazari has been a recipient of the Creative Engagement Grant from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, and visiting artist fellowships from MASS MoCA and Cooper Union. She has been an artist in residence at Sculpture Space in Utica - NY, and Vermont Studio Center - VT, as well as several others.

Nazari received her BFA from the School of Art & Architecture in Tabriz, Iran and her MFA from the State University of New York in New Paltz in 2014.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

- 2020 Works on Paper, Chashama, New York, NY
- 2019-2020 Zahra Nazari Studios' Selected Work, ABS Engineering, PLLC, New York, NY
- 2019 Uprooted, Chashama, Queens, NY (funded by the QCA and the Puffin Foundation)
- 2017 Remnants, Five Points Gallery, Torrington, CT
Transformation, Pennsylvania College of Technology, Williamsport, PA
- 2016 Vanishing Point, Gallery Aferro, Newark, NJ
Transformations, Betsy Meyer Memorial Exhibition, Main Line Art Center, Haverford, PA
- 2015 Metamorphosis, Mooney Center Gallery, The College of New Rochelle, NY
- 2014 Inside Out, Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation Arts Center, Silver Spring, MD
Deconstructing Scapes, Hartnett Gallery, University of Rochester, NY
- 2013 Selected Work, Gallery I, Vermont Studio Center, Johnson, VT
- 2008 Zahra Nazari's Selected Work, Baran Gallery, Tehran, Iran

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

- 2020 Forget What You Know, curated by Kourosh Mahboubian, Art of Our Century, New York, NY
Spring Flash, Equity Gallery, New York, NY
Art Virus 2020, Traveling Exhibit, Gyeongmin Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea
- 2019 Boccara Art Open Call, Boccara Art, Brooklyn, NY
Space 776 Auction, Brooklyn, NY
69th Aone, curated by Bill Carroll, Silvermine Galleries, New Canaan, CT
New York Academy of Art, New York, NY
- 2018-2019 Art from the Boros VI, Denise Bibro Fine Art, New York, NY
The 2019 Flat file: Year Six, Tiger Strikes Asteroid, New York, NY
- 2018 Governors Island Art Fair, Governors Island, NY
CMYK, Carrie Able Gallery, Brooklyn, NY
- 2017 AIM 2017 Biennale, The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY
International Artist's Creation, Xuancheng Museum, Anhui, China
Press: Pause, curated by Shannon Stratton, Williamsburg Art & Historical Center, Brooklyn, NY
Small Works, National Association of Women Artists, New York, NY
- 2016 Borderless: In Perspective, curated by David C. Terry, Lite-Haus Galerie, Berlin, Germany
(Un)Common Space(s), Spartanburg Art Museum, Spartanburg, SC
- 2015 Metamorphosis, The Cooper Union School of Art, New York, NY
Silk Journey to Art, World Tour Exhibition, The China Millennium Monument, Beijing, China
Spatial Planes & Timeless Dimensions, 555 West 25 St, New York, NY
- 2014 3rd Annual Juried International Exhibition of Contemporary Islamic Art, LuminArte Gallery, Dallas, TX
Emergence 2014: International Artists to Watch, Galerie Myrtis, Baltimore, MD
Points of Departure, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, New Paltz, NY
51st Annual Juried Competition, curated by Kelly Shindler, Masur Museum of Art, Monroe, LA
- 2013 Working it out, Painting Center, New York, NY
I am Tahmineh, Palace of Fine Arts, San Francisco, CA
- 2012 Worldview, curated by Chuck Gniech, Gallery 180, Illinois Institute of Art, Chicago, IL
Summer Show, Galleria ISA, Umbria, Italy
6th Annual Master Pieces, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH
Twenty in Their Twenties, curated by Betsy Odom, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, IL
- 2009 Color of Kindness, Iranian Center for International Conferences, Tehran, Iran
- 2008 Youth Art, 4th Visual Arts Festival, Tehran, Iran
- 2006 Islamic World, 4th International Painting Biennial, Saba Institution, Tehran, Iran

SELECTED FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS & RESIDENCES:


- 2020 Creative Engagement Grant, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (LMCC), New York, NY
Artist Residency, Sculpture Space, Utica, NY
- 2019 Artist Grant, The Puffin Foundation, Teaneck, NJ
New Work Grant, Queens Council on the Arts (QCA), Queens, NY
Bethea Scott Owen Fellowship & Artist Residency, VCCA, Amherst, VA
- 2018 Scholarship Award, Manhattan Graphic Center, New York, NY
Emerging Artist Award, Elevision Digital Media Broadcast, Dubai, UAE
- 2017 Artist Residency, Tao Hua Tan Artist Retreat & Painting Residency, Anhui, China
- 2016 Visiting Artist Fellowship, MASS MoCA, North Adams, MA
Artist in the Marketplace (AIM), The Bronx Museum of the Arts, Bronx, NY
Meyer Family Award for Contemporary Art, Main Line Art Center, Haverford, PA
- 2015 Teaching Artist Residency Fellowship, Cooper Union School of Art, New York, NY
- 2014 Visiting Artist in Residence, Montgomery College, (AIR) Fall Semester, Silver Spring, MD
Best in Show Winner, Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, FL
- 2013 Exhibition Award ViewPoints 2013, Aljira, A Center for Contemporary Art, Newark, NJ
- 2012 Artist Residency Fellowship, Relevant 2012, Kimball Art Center, Park City, UT
Artist Residency, The International School of Painting, & Sculpture, Umbria, Italy

SELECTED LECTURES / PANELS:

- 2020 Panel Discussion, Filo Sofi Arts & Kourosh Mahboubian, New York, NY
- 2018 Guest Artist, Graduate Committee Panel, City College of New York, NY
- 2017 Visiting Artist Lecture, Eastern Connecticut University, Willimantic, CT
- 2016 Panel Discussion, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, NY
Guest Speaker, "Women artists from the "Islamic World", St. John's University, NY
- 2015 Guest Critic, Final Juries of Design/Architecture, Pratt Institute, Higgins Hall, Brooklyn, NY
Artist Lecture, The Cooper Union, Rose Auditorium, New York, NY
- 2013 Artist Lecture, Asian/Pacific/American Institute at NYU, New York, NY

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY & PRESS:

- 2020 "Heightened Perceptions", Exhibition Review, Ante Magazine (November, 2020)
"Forget What You Know" Whitehot Magazine, (September, 2020)
- 2019 "Zahra Nazari: Metamorphosing Gestures" Art Spiel (September, 2019)
"Zahra Nazari Explores Identity with Architectonic Paintings" Artqol magazine (March, 2019)
- 2018 "Exploring Identity in Abstractions inspired by Architecture" Hamptons Art Hub
"SUNY New Paltz Alumna Dazzles Art World" The New Paltz Oracle (Feb, 2018)
- 2017 "Bronx Calling", exhibition catalog, Bronx Museum of the Arts (June 2017)
ZH Magazine (September 2017)
"Passing Through Portal, an Unpretentious Art Fair in Soho." Hyperallergic (May 2, 2017)
- 2016 Paint Pulse Magazine, Issue 6, (Juror: Schultz, Suzanne)
Art Reveal Magazine, Issue 19 (August 2016)
- 2015 Brown, A. Will. "An International Publication for Contemporary Art." Fan Mail: Daily Serving
"Summer 2015 Issue." Ruminant Magazine
- 2014 "The 3rd Annual International Exhibition of Contemporary Islamic Art", CNN iReport
Lonardi, Matteo. "Artistic Spring: Zahra Nazari." Citizen Brooklyn (May 2014)
International Painting Annual 3 Exhibition in Print, Cincinnati, OH: Manifest Gallery
James, Damien. "Twenty in their twenties." Art Voice Magazine (April 2012)
"National Wet Paint Exhibition 2012", Chicago Art Magazine in Chicago Art News (Jan 2012)

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a black top and a blue patterned skirt, stands in a hallway. She is positioned to the right of a glass wall. The glass wall features a large white logo consisting of a stylized 'R' and 'K' and the text 'Roya Khadjavi Projects' below it. The hallway has a modern, clean aesthetic with recessed lighting.

Roya Khadjavi is an independent curator and cultural producer based in New York. She has largely focused on the work of young Iranian artists working both in Iran and beyond its borders, seeking not only to support their artistic endeavors but to also facilitate awareness and cultural dialogue between artistic communities.

Since 2008, she has actively led exhibition committee efforts around the art of the Middle East for institutions including the Guggenheim Museum and the Asia Society, where she sat on the steering committee of the critically acclaimed exhibit *Iran Modern* (2013).

Khadjavi co-founded the Institute of International Education's Iran Opportunities Fund and served as president of the board of New York based non-profit Art in General.

For her pioneering efforts to advance, support, and promote international education, she has been honored with the Women's Global Leadership Award by the Institute of International Education and an Order of Academic Palms (Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Palmes Académiques) by the French Minister of Education.



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