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Fan Mail

- July 10, 2015 Written by [A. Will Brown](#)

Fan Mail: Zahra Nazari

Follow the white line back into the middle ground; it outlines a blue-gray pathway that comes to the front of the picture plane. The pathway entreats viewers to step into the architecture of [Zahra Nazari](#)'s surreal composition *Landscape #14* (2013). Along the way, columns and a house abut the path, and as the line winds backward and diminishes, the horizontal pathway merges with a wall. Beyond the house, the picture plane rapidly becomes refracted and angular, with planes of white, gray, and brown that are juxtaposed to create an imaginary space, one that is perhaps still forming.



Zahra Nazari. *Landscape #14*, 2013; acrylic on canvas; 190 x 83 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Nazari's paintings blend contemporary architecture and ancient archaeological sites and artifacts into

rhythmic compositions that bend the eye; the compositions are sites beyond definition. In *Landscape #14* and *Cityscape Remix* (2012), Nazari creates spaces that are absorbing in a way akin to the experience of looking at a mountain or a hill out over a valley—the object in the distance always appears closer, more detailed, and somehow flatter than it actually is. Nazari merges the fore-, middle, and background of her paintings with a mixture of abstract and identifiable motifs in swirling colors, planes, and lines—the same way the human eye does when flattening large objects and landscapes.



Zahra Nazari. *Cityscape Remix*, 2012; acrylic on canvas; 83 x 141 in. Courtesy of the Artist.

In her artist statement, Nazari notes how the paintings address her experience of growing up in Iran and moving to America: “These paintings merged my feelings for ancient and modern architectural forms with floating, collapsing, and shifting environments. The results were fictitious structures situated within imaginary landscapes.” In *Mapping* (2012), Nazari takes her flattening of architectural cues to another level of abstraction. The painting presents a bird’s-eye view of colored fields or city blocks, and a green patch of forest or a body of water are outlined by what one assumes are roads or streets. The focus and precision of these small patches and plots fades as the eye works toward the edges of the canvas, akin to what the human eye does when focusing on one area of landscape: The edges blur and become mere suggestions of forms.



Zahra Nazari. *Mapping*, 2012; acrylic on canvas; 48 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the Artist.

Nazari also works in installations, which take shape as abstract, three-dimensional wooden structures that serve as canvases for her imaginative and spatially provocative paintings. With *Inside Out Installation* (2014), the artist pushes her painting to a logical, yet markedly surreal and fantastic, next stage—from creating imaginary compositions on a two-dimensional plane to creating space-transforming three-dimensional painting sculptures.



Zahra Nazari. *Inside Out Installation*, 2014; acrylic on wood panel; 100 x 110 and 48 x 30 in.
Courtesy of the Artist.

These structures literally push the paintings into defined but abstract shapes, much the same way the motifs in her paintings function. The lines that define the wood forms blend impeccably with the lines of the paintings, as the two work together to create seamless and internally consistent planes and shapes. The *Inside Out Installation* series is a logical evolution of Nazari's practice—creating her own visual and spatial logic governed by the evocative juxtaposition of the real and the imaginary, the remembered and the yet-to-take-shape.



Zahra Nazari. *Inside Out Installation*, 2014; acrylic on wood panel; 100 x 110 and 48 x 30 in. Courtesy of the Artist.

What will Nazari do next to further her paintings and installations? What planes of visual existence can she blend to move her aesthetic and painterly concerns forward? One can imagine myriad possibilities—a film perhaps, in which these objects become props and sets, or an imaginary cityscape populated with a set of mystical functions. Zahra Nazari paints with a contagious energy that collapses and opens space through an idiosyncratic logic.

Zahra Nazari received her BFA from the School of Art & Architecture in Tabriz, Iran, and her MFA in Painting & Drawing at the State University of New York, New Paltz. She has been a resident at the Cooper Union School of Art; Vermont Studio Center; the University of Rochester, New York; and Montgomery College in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her work has been shown in solo and group exhibitions at the Masur

Museum of Art, Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art, the Painting Center, Spartanburg Art Museum, and Los Gatos Museum.



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