

MAPPING PARADISE

Nazafarin Lotfi: A Garden to Build

This artmaking activity is inspired by Nazafarin Lotfi's *Counter-Landscape series*. Referencing [Persian Gardens](#)—symbols of hope and paradise—Lotfi combines architectural outlines, plant rubbings, and geometric patterns in shades of green observed in her Arizona garden. While imagining a world that fosters life, growth, and hope for the future, Lotfi also critically examines oppressive power structures and imposed boundaries.

Explore Lotfi's exhibition [A Garden to Build](#), looking closely at her [Counter-Landscape series](#).

- What shapes and colors do you see in these works? What do they remind you of?
- Can you find any references to maps—such as topographic, road, climate, or political?
- Many maps include an informational key. What clues has Lotfi provided for how to “read” these works?
- Closely analyze this series for references to both influence and resistance to confines.



Nazafarin Lotfi. *Counter-Landscape (House/Garden/Nation)*, 2022. Colored pencil on paper and archival pigment print on watercolor paper. 20 x 35 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Regards, Chicago.

Inspired by Lotfi's *Counter-Landscape series*, create a map of your ideal place or an imagined paradise on earth.

Step 1: Select a color of construction paper to use for your background. Consider how this color relates to your idea.

Step 2: In her *Counter-Landscape series*, Lotfi references the home, garden, and nation as spaces that define our identities and our understanding of the world. Consider locations where you feel the greatest sense of freedom and belonging.

- Cut out shapes from paper or fabric that resemble these places.

Step 3: Glue or tape the shapes to your construction paper. Consider how their placement and scale relates to the meaning behind your design.

Step 4: Geometric or mathematical patterns are significant to Persian art and architecture. They symbolize universal elements and spiritual concepts. What patterns do you associate with your ideal place or paradise?

- Either draw or use stencils to add patterns to the surface of your map.
- Shade areas of your pattern using colored pencils or markers.

Step 5: Like Lotfi's plant rubbings that border her *Counter-Landscape drawings*, consider additional information you would like to include in or around your map. Will you add a key? If so, what will it say, show, or signify?

***Optional:** Following Lotfi's *Counter-Landscape drawings*, create texture rubbings to include in or around your design.

- Place a piece of paper over the top of a surface such as a leaf or a patterned stencil.
- While holding your paper in place, rub over the surface with the flat side of a pencil, crayon, or pastel to reveal the texture below.

Step 6: Photograph your work and share it with us on Instagram by tagging us at [#universitygalleriesisu](#).

SELECTIONS FROM THE PRESS RELEASE

A Garden to Build presents new drawings, sculptures, photographs, and prints by Tucson-based artist [Nazafarin Lotfi](#). The artist's practice is rooted in her experiences of growing up in post-Revolutionary Iran and continuing her education and artistic career as an immigrant in the United States. Lotfi cites the body, the house, the garden, and the nation as “some of the enclosures that define the self and other, inclusion and exclusion, access and belonging.” In her newest works, the artist explores her current location through the lens of garden-making, which, she points out, has a 5,000-year history in her culture.

Lotfi's *Counter-Landscapes*—drawings based on the floor plans of historical Iranian gardens—index each shade of green found during close examination of her Arizona yard. Through these and other works, Lotfi addresses boundaries and world-making. She asks, “What does it mean to make art in the brink of collapse. How do we imagine new worlds?”