

NAZAFARIN LOTFI

A Garden to Build

Educator Handout: Grades K-6

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

[*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.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Nazafarin Lotfi was born in Mashhad, Iran, and is based in Tucson, Arizona. She is currently the Matakhev Research Fellow at the Center for Imagination in the Borderlands at Arizona State University. Lotfi has been awarded artist residencies by the Arts + Public Life and Center for the Study of Race, Politics, & Culture at the University of Chicago, and Artpace International. She received both her MFA and her Post-Baccalaureate certificate from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and her BA from University of Tehran. Her work is represented by Regards, Chicago.

VOCABULARY

- **Abstract:** imagery that is distorted or unrecognizable
- **Emboss:** to create a raised pattern or design by pressing into the surface of paper or other material
- **Forms:** three-dimensional enclosed areas that have height, length, and depth. Forms can be *organic* or *geometric*. *Organic forms* are irregular and often seen in nature—such as the outline of animals and clouds. *Geometric forms* are based on mathematical principles—such as circles, squares, and triangles.
- **Identity:** our understanding of who we are and where we belong. Our identities are shaped by our experiences and can change over time.
- **Papier-mâché:** paper bonded with glue, paste, or starch
- **Mediums:** artmaking materials such as colored pencil, photography, and papier-mâché
- **Representational:** imagery that looks like things that exist in the world
- **Shapes:** two-dimensional enclosed areas that have height and length, but not depth. Shapes can be *organic* or *geometric*. *Organic shapes* are irregular and often seen in nature—such as the outline of animals and clouds. *Geometric shapes* are based on mathematical principles—such as circles, squares, and triangles.
- **Subject matter:** what is portrayed or suggested in an artwork—such as a person, place, or thing



Nazafarin Lotfi, *Maps of No Return (Space Domestication Series)*, 2021. Colored pencil, graphite, and collage on paper. 25 1/2 x 19 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Regards, Chicago.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

RESPOND - VA:Re8

As a class, explore and discuss Nazafarin Lotfi's exhibition *A Garden to Build*. Write students' responses on the board as they share their observations.

- Describe the qualities of the **shapes** and **forms**—such as angular, square, smooth, or round—that you see in Lotfi's work.
- What colors and textures do you notice?
- Can you identify the **mediums** and **subject matter** in Lotfi's work?

After analyzing works in the exhibition, prompt students to share what they think Lotfi's work is about based on their observations. Consider how artworks in the exhibition work together to convey meaning or tell a story.

CONNECT - VA:Cn10

Nazafarin Lotfi's experiences growing up in Iran and now living in the desert in Tucson, Arizona, heavily influence her work. She is interested in the ways our surroundings impact our **identities** and our sense of belonging. This exhibition was inspired by regional plants, geography, and the colors of the landscape. Her use of **abstract** and **representational shapes** and **forms** communicate ideas about human relationships with the landscape and reference Persian Garden designs, particularly their centrally located fountains, waterways, and **geometric patterns**.

- Prompt students to consider a place—a neighborhood, town, park, building, or an imaginary location—where they feel a sense of belonging and freedom to be themselves.
 - What shapes, forms, colors, textures, and imagery do they associate with this place?
 - How is this place arranged? If it were mapped out, what would it look like? Consider using [Google Earth](#) to explore the details of physical locations.
 - Who has access to this place? Is it for everyone or only some people?

Guide students to create a series of works based on their responses to their chosen place. Consider having students use a variety of **mediums** like Lotfi does. They could make **papier-mâché** sculptures, texture rubbings, drawings, **embossed** prints, maps, or photographs that represent different aspects of their chosen place.

CREATE - VA:Cr3.1

Guide students in discussion and reflection with peers about the choices they have made while creating their artwork.

- Provide a structure for students' peer feedback, such as TAG:
 - Tell something you like about the artwork.
 - Ask a question.
 - Give a suggestion.

PRESENT - VA:Pr4.1

Invite students to select artworks from their series that they feel best represent their relationship with their chosen place. Ask them to explain in writing, discussion, or video recording, why they selected these artworks and how they collectively convey information about their chosen place.

- Educator resources are available on the exhibition [webpage](#).

You can find [University Galleries](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Vimeo](#) and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](#). Please contact galler@illinoisstate.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to this exhibition.



Installation view of Nazafarin Lotfi: *A Garden to Build*, 2022. Courtesy of the artist and Regards, Chicago. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.



Enclosed Landscapes, 2021. Relief prints on Rives BFK White 250 gsm paper. Courtesy of the artist and Regards, Chicago. Photo credit: Jade Nguyen.