

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Career-Spanning Exhibition Explores Work of Zarina

Exhibition is first to present Zarina’s work along with examples by other artists and artisans—from Dürer, Malevich, and Hiroshige, to a Mughal architectural fragment—that have informed both the process and contents of her art.

Zarina: Atlas of Her World opens Sep 6, 2019; Pulitzer is only venue



Zarina, *Veil*, 2011

ST. LOUIS, MO, JUN 5, 2019— The Pulitzer Arts Foundation presents a career-spanning exhibition devoted to Indian-born American artist Zarina (b. 1937). With some thirty prints, sculptures, and collages dating from the 1960s to the present, as well as a select group of works by other artists—spanning cultures and centuries—*Zarina: Atlas of Her World* is the first exhibition to highlight the art and objects that have inspired the artist throughout her career. In the process, it will show how Zarina has created a body of work that brings abstraction and minimalism together with an ongoing exploration of separation, distance, and place.

On view from September 6, 2019, through February 16, 2020, the exhibition has been curated by Pulitzer Arts Foundation Curator Tamara H. Schenkenberg. The Pulitzer is the show’s only venue.

Pulitzer Director Cara Starke says, “With this exhibition, the Pulitzer continues its efforts to bring new perspectives to the work of artists both widely known and under-recognized. It is our hope that by looking not only at Zarina’s work, but also at some of the diverse works and traditions that inspired her, *Zarina: Atlas of Her World* will enrich our understanding of an oeuvre that is at once technically masterful and deeply poignant. And to see this moving work, much of which explores space and light, in the Pulitzer’s celebrated building, itself known for Tadao Ando’s sensitive

deployment of those elements, should add still another dimension to our appreciation of her practice.”

Schenkenberg adds, “From the beginning of her career, Zarina has been inspired by her early study of mathematics and a longstanding interest in the history of art and architecture. Yet her work has also been shaped by a lifetime of travel and displacement, from her childhood experience of the Partition, which led to her family’s forced removal from their home, to her many years as an adult spent wayfaring across Asia, Europe, and the United States. *Zarina: Atlas of her World* will explore not only the enduring interest in place and memory that these travels have provoked, but also, importantly, the diverse set of artistic traditions and influences that she has synthesized into her practice over the course of five decades.”

Born into a Muslim family in Aligarh, India, Zarina Hashmi (who prefers to be identified by her first name only) and her family were among the 15 million people uprooted by the 1947 Partition, which divided British India into India and Pakistan. Later, married to a diplomat, she led a life of travel that brought her to Thailand, France, Germany, and Japan before settling in the United States, where she has lived, worked, and exhibited her art since the mid-1970s. These journeys would have a profound impact on her art.

Exhibition

Zarina: Atlas of her World, which will be installed throughout the museum, focuses on three themes: **printmaking**, which Zarina has explored continuously throughout her career, producing truly virtuoso works; **light** as a physical, abstract, and spiritual entity; and **space** through her explorations of geometry and architecture.



Zarina, *Delhi*, 2000

The exhibition opens with an installation of 17 prints. These include a three-part work titled *Delhi* (2000), which shows how she exploits the woodcut technique to convey emotional power, carving and gouging the block to achieve deeply expressive, rough-hewn effects. In this work, she renders the city of Delhi—a place that is part of her personal history—in an unusual overhead perspective, enlivened by lines that brim with movement and energy. Unfolding across three sheets of paper, the work evokes both the passage of time and the impossibility of representing and capturing space according to any single perspective or point of view.

Another important series of prints on view here is the five-part portfolio *Santa Cruz* (1996) a tour de force of etching and another representation of a place with personal resonance (Zarina taught at the University of California, Santa Cruz, for five years). Four of the five prints in this work are inspired by sunset and twilight, each bisected by a line suggestive of a horizon. The fifth work in the portfolio features a single line of text in Urdu, Zarina's mother tongue, by twentieth-century Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz —*But the heart cannot let go of its loneliness*—which is emblematic of Zarina's ongoing interest in calligraphy and poetry.

The prints in this section will be complemented by two historic works from Zarina's personal collection, Dürer's *Knight, Death, and Devil* (1513) and Hiroshige's woodcut *Sudden Shower over Shin-Ōhashi Bridge and Atake* (1857), attesting to the great range of artworks, from diverse time periods and places, that have stimulated the artist's vision.

Zarina: Atlas of her World moves on to look at the artist's exploration of the divine through the metaphor of light. A key work in this section is *Veil* (2011), a 12-foot-tall screen created by the application of gold leaf onto bamboo blinds. The title refers to the separation of the sacred and profane worlds, while the material evokes the concept of "noor," meaning divine light, which is referenced in many Islamic traditions.

Two black-hued versions of the work titled *Dark Night of the Soul*, from 2010 and 2011, are also here. In the earlier of the two works, Zarina has dyed her paper with sumi ink and pierced it throughout with a needle, letting light pass through the surface. In the second iteration, the paper is again dyed with sumi ink and also covered with shimmering obsidian, a volcanic glass whose luminous properties Zarina deploys to evoke the idea of the cosmic and eternal forces.

These and other works in this space will be accompanied by a number of objects from different artistic traditions that Zarina has cited as integral to the development of her practice. These will include etchings by Rembrandt that are characterized by dramatic chiaroscuro and representations of Christian subjects, as well as illuminated Islamic manuscripts, including a lavish 18th-century Mughal-era Qu'ran, which relies on gold as both a metaphor of the divine and a symbol of radiating knowledge.

The museum's lower gallery is devoted to an examination of Zarina's enduring interest in space through her explorations of geometry and architecture, beginning with one of the artist's most iconic works, a woodcut titled *Dividing Line* (2001). The title refers to the line that partitioned British India into two different countries, uprooting Zarina's family. In the woodcut Zarina delineates the border not by carving the line into the woodblock, but, rather, gouging out the surrounding space. Traces of her chisel are evident in the rough areas to the left and right of the line, evidence of the effort it took to cut and remove the layer of woodblock and, perhaps, a sign that creating borders should be more complicated than simply drawing a line on a map, as was done to create the 1947 partition.



Zarina, *Pool II*, 1980

This section also includes seven examples of Zarina's cast-paper sculptures, which she began producing in the early 1980s, continuing a longstanding interest in the properties of paper not only as a surface on which to work, but also as a material with its own formal properties. Extending her work with paper into the third dimension, Zarina created these by pouring and pressing paper pulp into deep-relief molds. These works mark one of Zarina's rare forays into color, using natural pigments including terra rosa, burnt umber, and raw sienna. Many of the cast-paper works reference architecture, with forms reminiscent of courtyards or stairwells, evoking a memory of the architecture of her homeland while also remaining abstract and open-ended.

One of Zarina's most distinguished and eloquent works, a portfolio of thirty-six woodcuts known as *Home Is a Foreign Place* (1999), is also in this section. Marked by structural clarity and sensitivity to geometry and space, this series is a meditation on the memory of home and lost homeland. She began it by writing thirty-six words that embodied the idea of home for her. She then paired the text, written in Urdu, with black-and-white abstractions of the terms, evoking architectural spaces (*Threshold, Door, or Courtyard*), atmospheric conditions (*Hot Breeze, Rain, Dust*), and emotional states (such as *Despair*, represented by gouged lines that imply scratches clawed off by fingernails). By dispersing the idea of home into dozens of fragmented impressions, Zarina poignantly memorializes both the physical and immaterial characteristics of the space that sheltered her for many years.

Other works in this gallery will include a *jali*—an intricately carved sandstone screen found in South Asian architecture, which may be deployed as a window, a railing, or a room divider; a drawing by Kazimir Malevich, and 19th-century photographs of architectural sites in India that have been foundational for Zarina. Together, these works will make visible Zarina's longstanding engagement with architecture and the language of abstraction, while also affording critical insight into the multiplicity of global and historical contexts that have informed her practice.

About the Pulitzer Arts Foundation

The Pulitzer Arts Foundation is a museum that provides dynamic experiences with contemporary and historic art presented in dialogue with its celebrated Tadao Ando building. Since its founding in 2001, the museum has organized a range of exhibitions featuring art from around the world, exploring a diverse array of ideas and inspiring new perspectives. Highlights have included the exhibitions *Ruth Asawa: Life's Work* (2018-19); *Blue Black*, curated by artist Glenn Ligon (2017); *Medardo Rosso: Experiments in Light and Form* (2016-17); *raumlaborberlin: 4562 Enright Avenue* (2016); *Reflections of the Buddha* (2011-12); *Urban Alchemy / Gordon Matta-Clark* (2009-10); and *Brancusi and Serra in Dialogue* (2005). These exhibitions are complemented by programs that bring together leading figures from the fields of art, architecture, design, urban planning, and others. The Pulitzer is a place for contemplation and exchange that brings art and people together.

Located in the Grand Center Arts District of St. Louis, Missouri, the museum is open Thursday through Sunday between 10am–5pm, with evening hours until 8pm on Friday.

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Image Captions:

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Zarina

Veil, 2011

22-karat gold leaf on bamboo blinds

142 x 48 inches (360.7 x 121.9 cm)

© Zarina; Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

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Zarina

Delhi, 2000

Portfolio of 3 woodcuts printed in black on handmade Nepalese paper, mounted on Arches Cover white paper

Edition of 25

Image size: 17 x 13 inches (43.2 x 33 cm)

Sheet size: 25 1/2 x 19 1/2 inches (64.8 x 49.5 cm)

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Zarina

Pool II, 1980

Cast paper with burnt umber pigment and surface sizing with copper powder

Edition of 3

22 1/4 x 21 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches (56.5 x 54.6 x 8.9 cm)

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