

For Immediate Release  
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## **Exhibition showcases works by painter Shahla Arbabi**

**March 27, 2012 – April 28, 2012**

Conflict takes flight at The Art Gallery

COLLEGE PARK, Md. – University of Maryland's The Art Gallery, in collaboration with the Roshan Center for Persian Studies, presents Shahla Arbabi's *FLY ZONE*. Arbabi channels her personal experiences by illustrating the bittersweet dualities of the horrific and the nostalgic aspects of war and conflict.

Shahla Arbabi's *FLY ZONE* series offers an unflinching look into conflict. Large figures of soldiers with rifles and plumes of detonated bombs cover the canvas. In *FLY ZONE*, Arbabi successfully avoids any softness and ambiguity usually seen in abstract works and faces the atrocities of combat head on. The chaos and uncertainty of war roar through Arbabi's work as machine guns are juxtaposed into towers, and a photo of a young child running naked is manipulated to look as if the deadly mushroom cloud behind her is only moments away from consuming her.

However, the conflict that is born from war can also cultivate peace. *Pigeon Houses*, one series of the many that comprise *FLY ZONE*, underscores the anticipation for peace while recognizing that as long as war continues, true peace is but a hope. There is a tension between harmony and violence in *Pigeon Houses* that is enacted by Arbabi's ability to transform doves into warplanes. Still, the pieces reach further by conjuring the yearning for peace that plagues the survivors of warzones. Professor at the School of Art and Design at George Mason University and *FLY ZONE* exhibition catalog contributor, Helen Frederick states that "The metaphor she [Arbabi] portrays in her paintings and constructions of the missing pigeons and doves stand in for peace that also is missing. In placing fighter jets over the pigeon houses, Arbabi creates a tense juxtaposition of something truly longed for but no longer possible." Upon viewing *Pigeon Houses*, Arbabi's nostalgic yearning for the peacefulness of safe refuge, much like the houses, becomes a shared yearning between artist and active viewer. A place that is free of bombs, warplanes, and pain.

Arbabi's mixed media works and small works on paper continue to explore how youthful memories of peace and horrific scenes of violence can exist simultaneously where content meets allegory. In the *Oil Wreck* series, ink, paper, and various types of paint are converted into collages to symbolize the bloody conflict over oil, allowing the viewer to see multiple hidden and revealed images each time a work is viewed.

*FLY ZONE* strives to express the voice of the civilian during conflict. Each image is powerful and, at times, painful to consider. Here the silent witness of war is considered, and as viewers we are forced to consider their defenselessness and fragility. It is in that reflection that we begin to empathize and acknowledge our own vulnerability and theirs. Shahla Arbabi is a painter and mixed media artist whose work has been featured in over thirty solo and over forty group exhibitions. She has exhibited widely in Europe and the United States, both in private galleries and in such prestigious venues as the U.S. National Academy of Sciences. Her work has been the subject of numerous studies of contemporary painting and can be found in more than two dozen private and public collections, including the permanent holdings of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, of the Friends of Art and Preservation in Embassies, as well as The Washington Post and of the Carnegie Institute.

The public opening reception for the exhibition will be held on Tuesday, March 27, from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The exhibition will remain open to the public through Saturday, April 28, 2012. An exhibition catalog featuring an essay on Arbabi's work by Professor at the School of Art and Design at George Mason University Helen Frederick will be available to purchase. Please join The Art Gallery as we celebrate Maryland Day and *FLY ZONE* with a special reading from candidates from the University of Maryland's English Department's Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing on April 28, 2012 from 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. The Art Gallery is located at 2202 Art-Sociology Building on the University of Maryland College Park campus. Please visit [www.artgallery.umd.edu](http://www.artgallery.umd.edu) or call 301-405-2763 for more information.

The Art Gallery is supported by a grant from the Maryland State Arts Council, an agency dedicated to cultivating a vibrant cultural community where the arts thrive. Funding for the Maryland State Arts Council is also provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, which believes that a great nation deserves great art. The gallery is also supported in part by the College of Arts and Humanities, the University, as well as national, state and local arts agencies, foundations, corporations, and private donors.