

# SHAHLA ARBABI

Iranian American, b. 1945, Shiraz, Iran  
Lives and works in Washington, DC

## WEBSITE

Shahla Arbabi has had a long career as an abstract painter, studying and teaching in Iran (her country of birth), Italy, and the United States. Arbabi's abstractions are suffused with subtly toned color, light, and shadow that elicit emotions and evoke the hues and shapes of architecture and landscape. Over the last two decades, her work has become more representational in response to the crises of war, human rights abuses, population displacement, and environmental precarity that weigh heavily on the early twenty-first-century.

Bringing forward atmospheric passages from her earlier abstractions, Arbabi creates roiling seas, cloudy skies, and blazing firestorms against which silhouettes, fighter planes, and small, unstable ships suggest human struggles and vulnerabilities. Forces of destruction and decay also appear to be at work in small sculptures of crumbling architecture. In other more purely abstract paintings (such as *Black Sea*, 2023), made over a number of years and completed in 2022 and 2023, Arbabi offers an elegiac vision of the sea in moments of calm pierced by light, perhaps drawing upon memories of her youth in the Middle East.



Shahla Arbabi, *Separation*, 2023, mixed media on paper.

Shahla Arbabi studied at Tehran's School of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Higher Education from 1961 to 1965, and then spent four years at the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. After a period teaching art at the University of Tehran in the late 1960s and early 1970s, she moved to the United States, where she received a Master's degree in painting in 1978, and another in print-making in 1982, at the American University in Washington, D.C.

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 can be found in more than two dozen private and public collections, including the permanent holdings of the National Museum of Asian Art formerly (Arthur M. Sackler Gallery) at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC, University of Maryland Art Gallery, the United States Mission to the United Nations, The Washington Post, and The Carnegie Institute.



Shahla Arbabi, *Takeoff*, 2023, mixed media on paper.