



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

HIAA President, Emine Fetvacı, shares news about the organization as well as upcoming initiatives and events.

Dear Colleagues,

Today, perhaps more than ever before, it is important that we support each other as a community, as some of our colleagues in US universities, libraries, museums, and other cultural institutions, as well as our students, are being targeted for simply doing their work and sharing their expertise. Our institutions are facing funding cuts, our grants are being rescinded, and we are increasingly being placed in the middle of debates made more polarizing than they should be by those outside of our institutions. The realities on the ground in the areas that we study, and from which many of us come, are even harsher. We have colleagues, friends, and family facing continuous violence and repression, and wars seem to be ramping up rather than ending. I write my last "Letter from the President" as we face these very difficult realities, and am increasingly grateful for the sense of community HIAA provides for us. It has been (and still is, and will continue to be, until my term is finished in February 2026) a distinct honor and a privilege to serve as the HIAA President.

It has been a particular pleasure to work alongside friends old and new on the HIAA Board, for whose hard work and good humor I am immensely grateful. I would like to thank the HIAA Board Members who finished their terms in February 2025 for their hard work: Murad Khan Mumtaz, Gül Kale, Zohreh Soltani, and Srinanda Ganguly; and our new Board Members for joining us: Sana Mirza, Abbey Stockstill, Farshid Emami, and Bermet Nishanova. I cannot thank Jennifer Pruitt, HIAA Treasurer, enough, for running for reelection and continuing in her position. (*continues on page 2*).

### About HIAA

The Historians of Islamic Art Association (HIAA) is a non-profit scholarly organization dedicated to the study and teaching of the art, architecture, and archaeology of Islamic cultures. We facilitate communication and cooperation among scholars, students, and other professionals in these fields.

### HIAA Membership Benefits

Members have access to the **Member Directory** and **virtual HIAA events**, as well as the opportunity to participate in symposia and workshops sponsored by HIAA, and to compete for travel and research grants. Your generous support helps fund the latter, which have proven essential for junior scholars doing exciting new research in the field.

Join or renew your membership [here](#).

### Current HIAA Board

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Nancy Um, President-Elect

Kishwar Rizvi, Past President

Jennifer Pruitt, Treasurer

Emily Neumeier, Secretary

Sana Mirza, Webmaster and News Editor

Farshid Emami, H-ISLAMART Editor

Heba Mahmoud Saad Abdelnaby, International Representative

Abbey Stockstill, Social Media Manager

Bermet Nishanova, Graduate Student Representative

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*(continued from page 1)* Jennifer's continuing service means that HIAA's finances and operations are in steady hands as we transition into a nonprofit corporation. Many thanks go out to Nancy Micklewright (Committee Chair), Fatima Quraishi, and Sinem Casale for serving on the Nominations Committee last summer, and coming up with a fantastic line-up of colleagues who agreed to stand for election. I would also like to thank all of our colleagues who were on the ballot for your willingness to serve.

The newly adopted HIAA bylaws (more on that below) allow the Board to take any transitional measures as we move from a nonprofit association to a nonprofit corporation. In order to comply with the election rotation that we have set up in the bylaws in which the executive positions of President/President Elect, Secretary, and Treasurer are up for election on different years, the Board has asked (and voted on) that HIAA Secretary Emily Neumeier continue her term for one more year until February 2027, and she has graciously, generously accepted. The position of secretary comes with significant responsibilities and Emily is doing an outstanding job. I could not be more thankful to her. HIAA President-Elect Nancy Um, who will be taking over in February 2026, will thus have an experienced and capable Board with whom to hit the ground running. Nancy has already been helping with our most crucial activities and has been an admirable advisor and sounding board to me. I could not have performed my duties half as well without her support. HIAA will be in excellent hands with the new leadership. In the fall, we will be holding elections for a new President Elect and a new International Representative to serve alongside this stellar team, so please consider running for these positions!

## INCORPORATION MATTERS

The HIAA Board held a Zoom town hall meeting in early March to answer questions from our members about the new bylaws, after which we asked the membership to vote to adopt this document. The bylaws were adopted on April 11, 2025 by majority vote. We are now in the process of hiring a firm to serve as our registered agents in New York state where we will incorporate, and to help us with filing the paperwork. I am hopeful we will be done with this process before the end of the calendar year, and that in my annual report I can say that we have successfully completed this important task.



*Roundtable on provenance at the 9th Biennial HIAA Symposium*

## HIAA SYMPOSIUM

It was a particular privilege to host, together with my colleague Laura Weinstein (Amanda Coomaraswamy Curator of South Asian and Islamic Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), the Ninth Biennial Symposium of the Historians of Islamic Art Association: "Art Speaks (Back)," on April 3-5 in Boston, on the Boston College campus and the Museum of Fine Arts. Laura brought on board Nadirah Mansour (Assistant Curator of Islamic Art at the MFA, Boston), and the three of us worked together on the early stages of planning. Rami Alafandi (MIT), Alexander Brey (Wellesley College), Gwendolyn Collaço (MIT then and now Brown), Huma Gupta (MIT), Lydia Harrington, Nasser Rabbat (MIT), Matt Saba (MIT), Dana Sajdi (Boston College), Amanda Hannoush Steinberg (Harvard University), and Aysin Yoltar Yildirim (Harvard Art Museums) answered our call to form a planning committee. Together we decided on the theme on a difficult day in November 2023, wrote a call for papers, discussed ideas for the symposium, and started the planning process. We felt strongly that "Art Speaks (Back)" was the appropriate theme for the moment in which we were living then, and it has proven to still be appropriate today. The theme inspired an impressively large number of paper and panel submissions. A sub-committee read through and evaluated the proposals and carefully put the program together, while HIAA President Elect Nancy Um took over the job of planning lunchtime discussions. Laura Weinstein and Nadirah Mansour organized the object viewing sessions at the MFA, also calling on their new colleague Betsy Williams (Penny Vinik Chair of Fashion, Textiles and Jewelry). Gwendolyn Collaço and Betsy



*Attendees at the 9th Biennial HIAA Symposium*

Dospél Williams pulled together the roundtable on provenance. Matt Saba, Michael Toler, and Rami Alafandi at the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT hosted a pre-symposium viewing and lunch at their institution. And during the last months of planning, BC History graduate student Khalil Sawan helped me with every aspect of the preparations and planning. Khalil and Deniz Korkusuz Nişanyan were indispensable during the symposium itself. So the symposium was a community affair through and through. I am grateful to each and every one of my colleagues who helped to put the fantastic program together.

At the symposium, we hosted almost 40 speakers, had six panels, a roundtable on provenance and Islamic art, two art viewing sessions, two lunchtime discussions, and had about 100 people in the audience in different combinations. Prof. Nasser Rabbat of MIT was our keynote speaker and started us off with his invigorating talk “Writing (Art) History in the Time of War.” Both our speakers and participants came from a vast geography, from Istanbul to London, from Toronto to California. I am grateful to all our participants for a fantastic two and a half days of intellectual engagement, but especially to all of our speakers for sharing their work with us.

The HIAA Symposium is partially funded by the HIAA operating funds that consist entirely of your membership fees. So please keep your membership current, and pay your nominal membership fees, so that we can continue to bring you such excellent programming. I am also extremely grateful to my institution, Boston College, for the generous Norma Jean Calderwood Professorship funds that closed the financial gap and made this year's large gathering possible, and for hosting us on the BC campus.

## CAA 2025

In February 2025, we also had another extraordinary occasion: HIAA members who were attending CAA in New York City were hosted by Prof. Avinoam Shalem and his colleagues at Columbia University's Rare Books and Manuscripts Library, Kaoukab Chebaro and Courtney Chartier for an object viewing session and reception. We are grateful to Prof. Shalem, his colleagues, and his students for this artistic, intellectual, and culinary feast. The HIAA-Sponsored Panel at CAA “Everyday and the Expression of Modernity: 19th-Century Architecture and Urbanism in the Islamic World,” took place on February 13, organized by Samira Fathi and Maryam Heydarkhani, and with excellent papers by Zeinab Tamassoki, Alexandra Schultz, Stéphanie Hornstein, and Fatemeh Tashakori.

## ONLINE WORKSHOPS

As in previous years, we organized two excellent online workshops in 2024-25. On November 21, 2024, Theodore Van Loan led a workshop on “Addressing Fraught Proximities between the Historical and the Contemporary in the Teaching of Islamic Art and Architecture,” with the panelists Alessandra Amin (Johns Hopkins University), Stephennie Mulder (UT Austin), Kirsten Scheid (American University Beirut), Mohammed Mourtaja (Washington and Lee University), and Saima Akhtar (Barnard College), which was a huge success with over 60 participants. On April 25, 2025, contemporary South Asian artists Hamra Abbas (w. Lahore, Pakistan) and Varunika Saraf (w. Hyderabad, India) discussed their recent work, their relationship to the history of Islamic art, and the urgency of beauty and care in their turbulent present in a conversation moderated by Sylvia W. Houghteling and Meghaa Parvathy Ballakrishnen, in another successful, well-attended workshop. We are grateful to the organizers, speakers, and participants, and especially to the HIAA Secretary Emily Neumeier and Student Representatives Srinanda Ganguly and Bermet Nishanova for their help in hosting the workshops.

## AWARDS

The Grabar Committee, consisting of Alex Dika Seggerman (Committee Chair, Rutgers University), Sahar Hosseini (University of Pittsburgh) and Abbey Stockstill (Southern Methodist University) awarded the August 2024 Grabar Travel Award to Zeinab Vessal to present her paper “Verses on ‘Alam: Qur’ānic Inscriptions on Shī’a Metal Finials” at the 113th CAA Annual Conference in New York, which, again, took place in February 2025. The

December 2024 Grabar Travel Award was awarded to Bermet Nishanova to also attend the CAA Annual Conference in New York to present her paper "Making Threads: Medieval Fibers from Islamic Central Asia, Iran, and India (c. 9th- mid-13th Centuries)."

The December 2024 Grabar Postdoctoral Award was awarded to Ashley Dimmig, to travel to Istanbul to conduct research in order to revise her dissertation, "Making Modernity in Fabric Architecture: Imperial Tents in the Late Ottoman Empire," for future publication as a book.

The 2024 Margaret B. Ševčenko Award was given to Edward Shawe Taylor (MPhil Candidate, Khalili Research Center, University of Oxford), for the paper "The Ambrosiana Kitāb al-Ḥayawān and the Baptistère de Saint Louis: Manuscripts, Metalwork and the Mamluk Court." The committee consisted of Emily Neumeier (Committee Chair, Temple University), Amanda Phillips (UVA), and Elizabeth Williams (Dumbarton Oaks).

I am truly grateful to our colleagues who served on these important committees, and congratulate once again the recipients of the awards.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

In an effort to streamline our processes, increase participation, and boost our members' visibility among colleagues beyond HIAA, the HIAA Board has decided to dedicate the HIAA-Sponsored Panel at the 2026 CAA Annual Conference to the HIAA Majlis. The Majlis committee, consisting of Ashley Dimmig (Committee Chair, Crossman Gallery, U Wisconsin Whitewater), Farshid Emami (Rice), and Sascha Crasnow (Drake) has selected the following papers for presentation at the 2026 Majlis: Tuğrul Acar, "Suburban Landscape and Mural Paintings of the Shrine of Jalal al-Din Rumi and Other Mevlevi Lodges in the Fifteenth Century; Selin Aran, "Photographing Antiquity, Capturing Identity: The 1890 Nile Voyage of Khedive Tewfik"; Xinyu Liang, "Historical Perception and Artistic Agency in the Jāmi' al-Tawārikh: A Transcultural Perspective"; and Sanja Savić, "Talismanic Shirts as a Text, Textile, and Technology: Recovering Tactile Eloquence of the Early Modern Islamic World." We are grateful to all the committee members for their work, and look forward to hearing these papers!

Please do not forget to apply for the next round of Grabar Grants (upcoming deadlines of August 15 and December 15) and Ševčenko Awards (December 15 deadline).

Our members will have seen the call for online workshop proposals that HIAA Secretary Emily Neumeier emailed to all our members. The online workshops regularly attract a large audience and result in invigorated debates and conversations, and have become an important part of our annual programming. As they provide us with a way to get together as a community around issues that matter to many of us and have been very productive spaces, we sincerely urge you to take advantage of these opportunities to think collectively about issues that are important to so many of us.

And finally, please take a look at the Members' News section at the end of this newsletter to get a sense of the impressive accomplishments of our members. Browsing the Members' news, and reviewing the symposia, the online workshops, the Majlis, the Grabar and Ševčenko Awards gives an excellent sense of our vibrant and active community, and is truly inspiring.

As always, I thank you for all the ways in which you support HIAA and send my very best wishes,

With my best wishes,

**Emine Fetvacı**

*President, Historians of Islamic Art Association*

*Norma Jean Calderwood University Professor of Islamic and Asian Art, Art History and Film Department, Boston College*

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## NEW BOOKS IN ISLAMIC ART

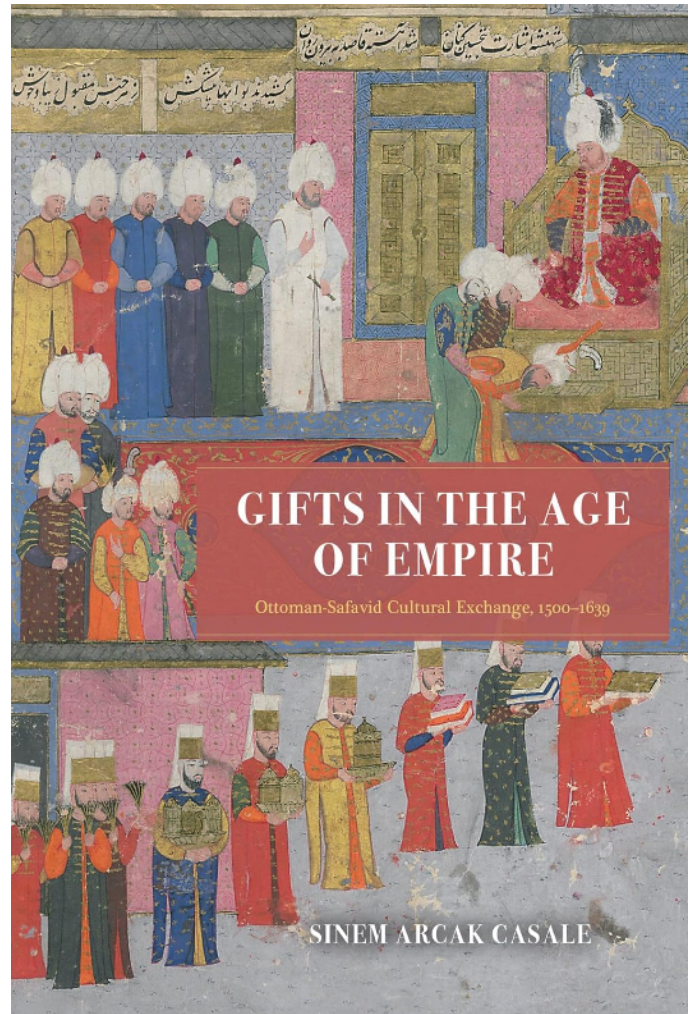
### GIFTS IN THE AGE OF EMPIRE: OTTOMAN-SAFAVID CULTURAL EXCHANGE, 1500-1639

A conversation between Farshid Emami (Rice University) and Bermet Nishanova (University of California-Irvine) & author Sinem Arcak Casale (University of Minnesota).

#### Could you share what inspired you to embark on this project?

Thank you so much, Bermet and Farshid, for this invitation and for featuring my book in the HIAA newsletter— it's a true honor for me. As with all books, this was a long time coming and has a long history of its own. The book began as my dissertation, which I originally planned to write on the architectural patronage of Ottoman royal women. In my first year of graduate school at Minnesota, I won a small fellowship that allowed me to visit the State Archives in Venice, looking for unpublished material on female members of the court. I learned a lot on that trip, but failed to find the correspondence I was hoping to find. But on one of my last days, while going through the *bailo* reports, I came across a dispatch on a Safavid embassy that had arrived at the Ottoman court in 1568. The report was long, giving in all manner of detail the progress of the ambassador and his retinue through Ottoman territories, stopping first in Istanbul, and then moving on to Edirne, where Selim II was wintering. At the end of the report was attached a list labeled as the gifts that Shah Tahmasp had sent to the sultan. I was immediately hooked! As I mention in the conclusion of the book as well, I was very excited to read about things that I could recognize from my coursework, such as manuscripts, carpets, and textiles. I naively could not wait to go out and find all those gifts. So, instead of starting from the object—the advice that I got from my own professors, and I also repeat in many of my own classes—I started from a document on gifts that I was never going to be able to locate and see, individually or collectively.

**Would you mind sharing more about the methods and frameworks used in your study? Given the challenges posed by the limited historical materials available, how much do you think scholars rely on these “argument handles”?**



*Sinem Arcak Casale, Gifts in the Age of Empire: Ottoman-Safavid Cultural Exchange, 1500-1639 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2023).*

To answer this question, I'll go back to the document that I came across in Venice. I was doubly lucky to find that initially, instead of one of the many others I later located, because one of the gifts mentioned in that list is a well-known object that all art historians are (or should be) familiar with: the *Shahnama* of Shah Tahmasp. This manuscript is a superstar in our field. It appears in many surveys of global art history, and I cannot imagine an introductory course on Islamic art without a lengthy discussion of this illustrated manuscript. Although the book is now dispersed, many major collections of Islamic art own one or more of its folios, and it has been studied from a range of angles, for instance by Martin Dickson, Cary Welch, Robert Hillenbrand, David Roxburgh, and Christiane Gruber, among others. So even though I could not study that gift through direct observation, I relied on these existing studies and the book's surviving pages I could access to ask questions about its agency. What did it



*"Firdausi's Parable of the Ship of Shi'ism", Folio 18v from the Shahnameh (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp. Painting attributed to Mirza 'Ali, c. 1530-35. Tabriz, Iran. Opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper. Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970.301.1*

mean for Tahmasp to give away a book that many of us today see as one of the greatest, technically and stylistically most sophisticated objects ever produced?

Pondering whether Selim saw the book as an object that his own team of artists would not be able to match, I asked what messages the book carried, considering both its place within a history of bookmaking and painting, artistic patronage, and considering religion, contemporary politics and balance of power between the two courts. That was one method I used in what later became the second chapter of the book. I could not do that with all the gifts because, as I realized quickly, Ottoman-Safavid gift exchange was not at all a balanced one. Between the early 1500s and towards the middle of the seventeenth century,

I found that with few exceptions, it was the Ottoman sultans who received gifts and the Safavid shahs who sent them, without getting anything comparable in return. During that long period in the sixteenth century, Safavid gifts kept becoming more plentiful in range and number. We encounter among those dispatches of gifts many items that do not surprise us—such as copies of the Qur'an, illustrated manuscripts, collections of poems, jewels, and large tents. But others also appear that had never been discussed in any of the art history courses I had taken in Turkey and the US, such as bezoar stones and bird feathers.

By their very nature, these gifts called for a broad range of materials to be included in the book and required a flexible, adaptable methodological approach. I've had to expand my vocabulary of what constitutes "art," following Carolyn Dean ("The Trouble with (the Term) Art") and others. I have found past work on gifts in general and on various types of objects, such as metalwork and carpets, to be illuminating, but I also tried to study each gift as part of a carefully curated collection. In this regard, anthropological theories of art and exchange—from Mauss to Weiner and Gell—were extremely useful. At the same time, as an art historian, I track in this book the visual and material properties and identities of these collections of gifts. The result is what I called rhythms of gifts that comment on and in some cases shape cultural, religious and political relations between the two courts.

**Your book addresses a significant number of lost materials (lacunae), and you effectively historicize these "objects" within the context of Safavid and Ottoman gift exchange. How would this be different if you could reverse this process— historicize a collection of objects without clear provenance, particularly textiles, which you discuss in Chapter 5? It seems that there are a number of such ambiguous "Islamic objects," and which challenge scholars to effectively historicize them.**

All the many gifts I could not locate with certainty frustrated me at first. Whenever I mentioned the topic I was working on, many scholars I've talked to over the years told me: "Surely the Topkapı Palace still has many of the Safavid gifts!" This is entirely reasonable, and I completely agree with it. Nevertheless, most of them are not identifiable with certainty to individual episodes of exchange. Accepting and coming to terms with the fact that I was not going to be able to find these gifts was hard but liberating. At the research stage, a senior colleague had told me that what I am trying to do is not art history



precisely because of the lost materials.

What I saw in sources, nevertheless, was that all the gifts I was trying to identify and understand, from shahnamas to hunting animals and antidotes, formed parts of a whole. So, it is a sort of a disciplinary problem if we prioritize certain types of objects and neglect others, not typically associating them with "Islamic art." As for objects without clear provenance, there seems to be a push towards pointedly studying them, and looking at them with fresh eyes, as demonstrated, for instance, by Beate Fricke and Barry Flood's recent book, *Tales Things Tell*.

There are indeed plenty of objects without clear provenance related to the research I've done. A group known as "Salting carpets," for instance, is known for their small size, lively colors, various stylistic and material features, and especially calligraphic inscriptions on their borders that are distinctly Shi'i in content. Partly because the Topkapı collection has many of them, it is widely assumed that these must have arrived at the Ottoman court as diplomatic gifts from Safavid Iran. This is possible, but I haven't seen any records of carpets as gifts that match this description. Carpets are most often marked in records by their size and place of production, without any other indication that would match that description. Different and more careful connections need to be made, therefore, in such cases.

**Could you describe how you decided to organize your book? Was there anything you omitted that you would have liked to include or do differently? What, in your view, are the ensuing questions future scholars should consider?**

The book is roughly chronological, but its different sections are also thematic. I wanted to convey the richness and plurality of these gifts in different ways with each chapter. The first chapter identifies a period of truly balanced exchanges that were interrupted by open hostilities that led to war. The following chapters look at the increasing quantity and evolving nature of Safavid gifts by focusing on individual embassies and gifts; Ottoman representations of Safavid gifts displayed at court; the example of gifts given to a child prince; and finally, the reign of Shah 'Abbas, during which I identify a new era in which gifts change shape and become commodified. There are more gifts and episodes of exchange than I could discuss. I would have liked to cover the mid and later seventeenth century as well, but there is so much a single book can do. In the end, I am happy that the material allowed me to approach these countless gifts from

different angles, and at the same time, highlight lost gifts.

**Is there anything else you would like to share?**

It is really difficult to write a book. This is especially true in our field, when we often need to master several languages and navigate through multiple collections and archives around the world. I hope that we stress these challenges more in our work and find more ways to support each other in these journeys.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Farshid Emami** (Ph.D., Harvard University, 2017) is an associate professor in the Department of Art History at Rice University. He specializes in the history of architecture, urbanism, and the arts in the Islamic lands, with a focus on the early modern period and Safavid Iran. He is the author of *Isfahan: Architecture and Urban Experience in Early Modern Iran* (Penn State University Press, 2024). His scholarly interests include transregional histories of early modernity, social experiences of architecture and urban spaces, and the intersections of architecture and literature. In addition to his publications on Safavid art and architecture, he has written on topics such as lithography in nineteenth-century Iran and modernist architecture and urbanism in the Middle East.

**Bermet Nishanova** is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Irvine. She is currently writing her dissertation, which is titled, "Entangled Materialities: Medieval Textiles of Central Asia and Iran (c. 9th–mid-13th centuries)," which explores the materialities and methods of production of textiles and other soft structures within the context of the medieval Islamic world. Her research foregrounds the eco-geographies of fiber cultivation, dyeing, and textile manufacturing, drawing on object-based study and museum collections to trace entanglements between labor, technology, trade, and embodied knowledge. Regarding textiles as materials, she is especially interested in their sensory and structural dimensions and their roles in shaping intermedial spaces.



*An Epic of Kings: The Great Mongol Shahnama. Photo © Colleen J. Dugan/National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution*

## NEW EXHIBITIONS IN ISLAMIC ART

### AN EPIC OF KINGS: THE GREAT MONGOL SHAHNAME

A conversation between Chaeri Lee (Indiana University) and curator Simon Rettig (National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution)

**I know this exhibition was a long time in the making. Would you please speak about the initial impetus behind the show and the different stages in planning it?**

In 2016, the museum decided to co-publish Professor Robert Hillenbrand's magnum opus on the *Great Mongol*

*Shahnama*. It made sense because the NMAA has the largest number of illustrated folios in the world—14 out of 57 in total. At the time, the plan was also to have the exhibition coincide with the book's publication, originally scheduled for 2020. With the pandemic, the idea of the show was abandoned but revived in 2022. However, it no longer aligned with Hillenbrand's book which came out the following year.

The time gap gave me a lot of time to rethink the scope of the exhibition. If I retained the initial theme of gathering illustrated folios from the "historical" cycles in the *Shahnama*, I also decided to further develop a second one, which was this idea of placing the *Great Mongol Shahnama* "between East and West"; I started thinking about how to visually convey this idea to visitors in a compelling way. I found key works for Chinese examples in the NMAA holdings. There were also Armenian and Byzantine manuscripts and folios in the collections which fit perfectly into the exhibition. As for the objects from the Latin West,



I had to look elsewhere. That's how I approached the J. Paul Getty Museum which, after conversations with curator Elizabeth Morrison, lent major pieces which proved critical in the introduction of the idea of the artistic relationships between Europe and Iran around 1300.

**How did you balance this multi-layered narrative with the presentation of the *Great Mongol Shahnama* itself, in *An Epic of Kings*?**

As I've just mentioned, the narrative was two-fold. On one hand, the *Great Mongol Shahnama* could be approached as 'pictorial ideology,' with its clear emphasis on the depiction of historical figures—especially Alexander the Great and the Sasanian kings—which doubled as illustrations of episodes of the Ilkhanid royal house. This was the main narrative thread, which aligned with Hillenbrand's research, and the seminal 1996 essay by Abolala Soudavar, who recently turned it into a book in Persian.

The second theme was about how the *Great Mongol Shahnama* put Iran at the center of global artistic exchanges. It's primarily about what people traveling to

Iran were carrying with them—and mainly objects to practice their faith, like bibles and missals for Europeans—objects to which Persian painters may have been exposed to. That's why I juxtaposed the folio of *Sindukht reprimanding Rudaba* with a reproduction of The Getty's *Annunciation* by Paolo Veneziano, from a portable triptych. Even though this work didn't travel to Iran, similar objects surely did and they served as visual sources of inspiration for Persian artists. However, those individuals were not passive in the reception of foreign artistic ideas and forms. There is a careful selection of elements of composition, color schemes, patterns, etc. The real challenge was to make that perceptible to the visitors. Multiple juxtapositions throughout the exhibition reinforced this idea that form rather than content in foreign objects had real impact on Persian painters.

This was presented on multiple occasions. For instance, in *Bahram Gur killing the dragon*, the evil beast adopts the shape of the benevolent Chinese creature featured on a contemporaneous Yuan scroll. In *Shah Zav enthroned*, we see how depictions of a Buddhist deity and Christ in majesty coalesce. Again here, to understand the creation of the paintings in the *Great Mongol Shahnama*, you must look at multifarious visual sources together.



*An Epic of Kings:  
The Great Mongol  
Shahnama.*  
Photo © Colleen  
J. Dugan/National  
Museum of Asian  
Art, Smithsonian  
Institution.



*An Epic of Kings: The Great Mongol Shahnama.*  
Photo © Colleen J. Dugan/National Museum of Asian Art,  
Smithsonian Institution

### How did you present the legacy of the *Great Mongol Shahnama* in the exhibition?

Scholars have demonstrated that the *Great Mongol Shahnama* had limited impact on later illustrated copies. It was important to emphasize in the exhibition that the manuscript was a unicum and nothing like it existed before and after. Due to space limitation and because there is that much that a visitor can absorb, I decided to focus on the manuscript's late history. Its mid-nineteenth-century refurbishment at the Qajar court and its subsequent dismemberment by art dealer Georges Demotte in the 1910's had to be introduced. The original creation and later interventions were presented in a video about the physical analysis the NMAA conducted on its folios. I was also very happy to display the museum's glass plate negative of the photograph taken by Antoin Sevruguin showing the *Great Mongol Shahnama* when it was still intact around 1900. Its juxtaposition with the folio appearing on the picture, now at the Harvard Art Museums, helped showing which areas were overpainted by Demotte.

Finally, although its detached folios are now hung on the wall, I wanted to highlight the fact that the *Great Mongol Shahnama* was once a physical book. To that end, I

commissioned a bookbinder in DC to produce a volume with 150 leaves of thick creamy paper and a brown leather binding. I placed the manuscript's first painting of *Zahhak enthroned* on one side and a reproduction of its verso on the other to give the illusion of the manuscript's original appearance. A sound shower above with the recitation of the episode reinforced the idea that the *Great Mongol Shahnama* was first and foremost an object of performance and of multisensory experience, a massive book that was looked at and listened from for the enjoyment of the sultan and a privileged few.

**I think that's a perfect place to end—at the beginning, with the first object in *An Epic of Kings*. What's next, in terms of your engagement with the *Great Mongol Shahnama*?**

The physical analysis of the NMAA folios conducted by conservation scientist Matthew Clarke will be published next year. I'll provide an art historical interpretation of the findings and there is quite a number! As the exhibition didn't have an accompanying catalogue, I'm also writing a couple of essays that will elaborate on the exhibition's core ideas, as well as on the text-image relationship within the manuscript, a topic that I couldn't address in the show. So, my work with this extraordinary copy of the *Shahnama* is far from being over!

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Chaeri Lee** is a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University, Bloomington and a graduate of the Master of Arts program in Global History at Freie Universität Berlin. She is a specialist of the visual and material cultural history of Qajar Iran. Her dissertation project on the nineteenth-century Iranian engagement with the ancient past has been supported by a pre-doctoral fellowship at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts (National Gallery of Art, 2023–25). In addition, Chaeri has held curatorial internships at the National Museum of Asian Art, Washington, DC and the Shangri La Museum of Islamic Art, Honolulu.



*"Wonders of Creation: Art, Science, and Innovation in the Islamic World" at the San Diego Museum of Art. Photo © Mai Kolkailah.*

## WONDERS OF CREATION: ART, SCIENCE, AND INNOVATION IN THE ISLAMIC WORLD

A conversation between Jennifer Pruitt (University of Wisconsin - Madison) and curator Ladan Akbarnia (Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge)

**Wonders of Creation: Art, Science, and Innovation in the Islamic World** took place at the San Diego Museum of Art (SDMA) September 7, 2024 and toured in a slightly smaller format at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College from February 9-June 1, 2025. I was delighted to catch it in Boston at our last HIAA symposium. Can you tell us a little bit about how wonder as a concept ran through the show?

The focus on wonder and its connection to art and science is rooted in the text inspiring and framing the exhibition, called *Ajaib al-makhlūqat wa ghara'ib al-mawjūdāt* (The Wonders of Creation and the Rarities of Existence). The text was originally written in both Arabic and Persian by the Islamic judge and professor Zakariyya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini. The author defines wonder as the perplexity we feel when we don't know the cause of something; it makes us pause and reflect, encourages us to

look closely, letting new knowledge sink in as we consider the world around us. Qazwini's wonder allows us to appreciate not only what appears extraordinary to the human eye, but also to see the extraordinary in the most ordinary or familiar phenomena. Art and science are ultimately also about knowledge and practice, so this exhibition asked visitors to approach the diverse works and cultures represented in it through this lens of wonder. Through this exercise, they would hopefully also see how boundaries between art, science, and even wonder are really blurred.

**The exhibition used Qazwini's text as a framework, but I loved that it did not limit itself to material from his time or strictly from the manuscript tradition. What are some ways you integrated diverse art forms into the show?**

Human crafts or skills come up in an expanded Persian edition of Qazwini's text, a topic explored in one of the four major parts of the exhibition, but innovations in both scientific theory and craft practices were really represented throughout the entire show. Within that discussion, the exhibition included medicine, adornment, weaving, writing, carpentry, and ironmongery. Writing, for example, was represented through works like a talismanic shirt containing all 114 chapters of the Qur'an in *ghubari* (Persian "dust-like") script, pen boxes, manuscripts, and





*"Wonders of Creation: Art, Science, and Innovation in the Islamic World" at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College. Photo © McMullen Museum of Art.*

illuminated album folios with poetic verses cut from paper—or on a contemporary work by a Japanese calligrapher featuring Qur'anic verses in mirror-image.

The array of crafts in *Wonders* also showed how matter was transformed through innovations such as luster technology. Weaving was featured for its ability to elicit wonder in the meticulous planning it entails, the tools invented for it, and the contemporary reinterpretations of its artistic traditions. The exhibition also emphasized two

unique Islamic architectural innovations: woodwork joinery and *muqarnas*.

**In addition to showcasing historic material, you commissioned original works by contemporary artists for exhibition. What did you ask the artists to create and how do they relate to Qazwini's text?**

We sought three contemporary commissions, all of which became part of SDMA's collection.

The first was a double commission for two astrolabe replicas, made by the scholar Dr. Taha Yasin Arslan in collaboration with Dr. Silke Ackermann at the History of Science Museum, University of Oxford. With the exception of a contemporary signature, one is an exact replica displayed as a work of contemporary craft. The slightly larger second replica was designed as a teaching tool and "handling piece," allowing visitors to touch and appreciate its weight, materiality, and functions. Both were modeled after a 1682 example made by an Iranian astronomer, now in the History of Science Museum.

Qazwini writes the text as a cosmography or a description of the universe. The text has a popular character to it, containing stories from oral tradition or folklore, bringing in verses from the Qur'an, and citing developments made by Islamic scientists and philosophers



*"Wonders of Creation: Art, Science, and Innovation in the Islamic World" at San Diego Museum of Art. Photo © San Diego Museum of Art*

in addition to the established scholars translated from the Greek or classical world. The exhibition follows the order of Qazwini's book, which covers nearly every topic from the heavens to earth's natural phenomena. Astrolabes play a big role in astronomy and astrology, part of the celestial realm, so they were key to include in the show.

I also sought out two California-based artists whose work I knew well, informing them about the exhibition's framework, but I also wanted them to interpret and *create* the work they contributed in a way that really held meaning for them. Each was moved by different aspects of Qazwini's text and took a unique approach. Hayv Kahraman was drawn to Qazwini's description of the *gharib*, the strange or foreign creatures that come up at the very end of the cosmography. She wanted to bring out the sense of the foreign as experienced in the present, of being at the periphery or an outcast, so she produced a portrait of a *gharib* as her commissioned work. Yet she also incorporated other elements that encompassed the entire text, including the Persian discussion of crafts. Her incorporation of natural elements and scientific innovations, such as a flax-based substrate she wove together and marbled, made *Ghuraba* (2024) a real exploration of science, texture, and craft through Qazwini's lens.

Ala Ebtekar decided to build upon his longtime interest in Islamic philosophy and Persian and Arabic literature, especially the writings of medieval philosophers focusing on light and science. He had worked with the cyanotype process for other projects and produced a series called *Thirty-Six Views of the Moon*, where he used a photographic negative of the moon from different books, treating each book page with Potassium ferricyanide and Ammonium ferric citrate (cyanotype) to make the surface of the page light-sensitive, and then exposing the pages overnight to moonlight from dusk till dawn. For *Wonders*, Ala adjusted this concept to views of the sun, with elements exposed to sunlight. The result was *One Thousand Years of Light*, an awe-inducing portrait of the sun, a composite image taken in 2024 from a negative at the Mount Wilson Observatory in Pasadena, superimposed across fifteen copper plates bearing prints of pages from the work of Qazwini or other writers relating to astronomy or the sun. Entitled *A Thousand Years of Light* (2024), Ebtekar's work appeared in the SDMA exhibition, where it created a dramatic entrance to the celestial realm.

**What, do you think, is the exhibition's significance for scholars of Islamic art?**

I think the significance of *Wonders* lies in (1) its framing of that material through the perspective of an Islamic text; (2) the showcasing of Islamic living traditions and cultural preservation through projects led by people based in Islamic countries through the exhibition of work by contemporary craftspeople from an Islamic country (e.g., presented through an architectural panel that replicates part of a fifteenth-century minbar from the mosque of Mamluk sultan Qaytbay, made by Hassan Abou Zeid for the Egyptian Heritage Rescue Foundation in 2018); and (3) significant representation by collections within Islamic countries, especially the al-Sabah Collection, Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah, in Kuwait (60 works), and the Islamic Art Museum Malaysia (34 works + 1 gift). I am grateful to Sheikha Hussa al-Sabah and Syed Mohamad Albukhary for their generous support.

This exhibition would also not have come to fruition without the critical support of research assistants and fellow Islamicists, Dr. Hannah Kemal-Hyden and Mai Kolkailah; the SDMA team; Director Nancy Netzer and Professor Emine Fetvacı at the McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College; and substantial grants from the Getty, NEH, and NEA. More about the exhibition's content and framework appears in the publication, *Wonders of Creation: Art, Science, and Innovation in the Islamic World* (2025), ed. Ladan Akbaria.

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Eland Latifpour, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jennifer Pruitt** is the Howard and Ellen Louise Schwartz Professor of Islamic Art and Architecture and department chair at the University of Wisconsin – Madison. Her research focuses on architecture in the Arabic-speaking world. Her first book, *Building the Caliphate: Construction, Destruction, and Sectarian Identity in Early Fatimid Architecture* (Yale, 2020), investigates the early architecture of the Fatimids, an Ismaili Shi'i Muslim dynasty that dominated the Mediterranean world from the 10th to the 12th centuries. She is working currently on a new book project, entitled *Inheriting an Islamic Golden Age: Globalism, National Identity, and Invented Histories in the Architecture of the Arabian Gulf*. In it, Pruitt investigates the integration of classical forms of Islamic art in the contemporary architecture of the Arabian Gulf, with a focus on the UAE and Qatar.



*Elnaz Latifpour and Walter B. Denny, at the "Understanding Carpets and Rug Weaving" workshop, held from October 21 through October 24, 2024, at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum. Photograph by Amid Farahi.*

and Architectural History at the University of Virginia,, examines Qashqai wool weavings from southern Iran.

In the summers of 2023 and 2024, I conducted research visits to five museum collections across the United States, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harvard Art Museums, de Young Museum, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Textile Museum in Washington, DC, to study a largely overlooked corpus of wool weavings attributed to the Qashqai tribal confederation of southern Iran. These visits allowed me to examine nearly one hundred nineteenth- and early twentieth-century carpets, kilims, and other wool textiles in close collaboration with conservators and curators.<sup>1</sup> I conducted material analyses through microscopic photography, fiber inspection, and structural documentation to explore questions of technique, materiality, and historical change in Qashqai weaving practices during a period of transformation in Iran. I recorded these observations systematically using a detailed worksheet prepared for each object, allowing me to capture both qualitative and quantitative data for later comparison.

The Qashqai, a Turkic-speaking confederation of tribes based in the Zagros mountains near Shiraz, maintained a nomadic lifestyle until the early twentieth century, herding sheep and goats whose wool served as the primary



*Elnaz Latifpour documenting a Qashqai bag using a digital microscope at the Cotsen Textile Traces Study Center, George Washington University, Summer 2023. Photograph by Karthika Audinet.*

material for their weavings. My research is centered on how these textiles changed in response to shifting social, political, and economic contexts between 1850 and 1950, particularly under Reza Shah's sedentarization policies of the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> These policies disrupted Qashqai mobility and autonomy, pressing the tribe into new relationships with land, labor, and the state. My fieldwork seeks to uncover how such societal changes are reflected or could be understood materially in the fibers, forms, and motifs of their woven objects.

While tribal carpets have often been regarded as static, timeless forms within museum contexts, my project treats them as historically embedded artifacts. In conservation labs and study rooms, I closely observed spinning irregularities, knot density, dye variations, and fiber combinations; such as the introduction of cotton warps instead of the traditionally used wool, which likely began appearing in the early twentieth century. I also noted synthetic purple dyes, which replaced natural dyes made from plants and insects and became common after the



1930s; a change that suggests shifts in both material availability and aesthetic priorities. These differences can help date the objects more precisely and situate them within broader market and design trends.

My preliminary typology builds on this close looking, combining standard art historical formal analysis, focused on motifs, composition, and style, with conservation methods that provide material insights regarding fiber structure, dye composition, and knot density and often rely on specialized instruments that are only available in laboratory facilities. Some objects in these collections appear to have been made for domestic, utilitarian use within Qashqai households, while others were likely commissioned or sold for external markets.<sup>3</sup> The distinction is visible not only in the quality and durability of the materials used, but also in design complexity and motif scale, with more complex and finely made pieces likely intended for sale or external commissions. One notable object, a small prayer rug with unusually elaborate figural imagery, may reflect the tastes of external patrons or signal a shift from traditional abstract and geometric designs toward more representational forms within Qashqai weaving.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to close looking through formal art historical analysis, focused on design, motifs, and composition, I carried out technical analysis, which involved documenting structural and material features such as knot density, fiber composition, and dye types. I then compared the Qashqai objects with weavings attributed to neighboring groups, particularly the Luri, to better understand stylistic distinctions and cultural overlap. As a confederation that absorbed Persian, Kurdish, and Luri groups, Qashqai weavers produced textiles that both reflected shared regional aesthetics and articulated distinct identities. I also drew from the photographic archive of Henry René d'Allemagne, housed at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles, which documents weaving scenes and processes in Iran between 1898 and 1907.<sup>5</sup> I use, as well, textual accounts by George Nathaniel Curzon and Jane Dieulafoy, whose records reveal how European travelers perceived and described nomadic weaving practices. Curzon provides details on weaving tools, major centers, and European trade in Iran, though his role in British colonial rule calls for a cautious reading.<sup>6</sup> Dieulafoy documents 19th-century nomadic weaving and offers useful categories and methods specific to nomadic weavers.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the objects themselves, I investigated how Qashqai weavings entered the collections I visited. Many were acquired in the mid-twentieth century, often through donations by private collectors who valued them as art

objects. However, the meanings these weavings held for their original makers and users were often lost or flattened in the process of collection and display. Museum labels typically offer little context about Qashqai culture or the historical circumstances under which the objects were produced. As a result, the agency of the weavers, many of them women whose names are unrecorded, is often erased.

This disconnect between the lived histories and intentions of individual Qashqai weavers and the generalized, timeless image presented by museums is one of the central concerns of my dissertation, which integrates object-based study with historical research and oral histories. My interviews with elderly Qashqai weavers, conducted in parallel to my museum work, reveal an alternative framework of meaning: one that emphasizes the weavers' creativity, adaptability, and responsiveness to change. For example, despite the sedentarization policies that aimed to dismantle their way of life, Qashqai weavers continued to produce vibrant, intricate works. Their choice to invest in colorful, complex designs, rather than expedient, monochrome textiles, signals the aesthetic and symbolic importance of weaving as a form of cultural continuity or resistance to those policies.

The fieldwork stage of this project revealed the richness and variation of Qashqai textiles, and pointed to the need for more inclusive narratives within carpet studies. Existing literature in the field has largely focused on court carpets and workshop production, overlooking the contributions of tribal and nomadic weavers.<sup>8</sup> By documenting these under-studied objects and analyzing their materials, forms, and circulation, my project contributes to an expanded understanding of Persian textile history that takes seriously the role of non-elite producers.

In doing so, I draw and build upon the work of scholars such as Lisa Golombek, who emphasized the spatial and social roles of textiles in Islamic contexts, Brian Spooner and Pennina Barnett, who critiqued Orientalist notions of authenticity, and Kassiani Kagouridi, whose recent work examines how tribal weavings were displayed in ethnographic modes in European museums.<sup>9</sup> My research aligns with these efforts to reframe textile history as a dynamic and politically inflected field.

As a member of the Qashqai community, I approach this work with both scholarly rigor and cultural familiarity. This positionality enables a reflexive methodology that remains attentive to insider perspectives while engaging critically with the variety of methodologies offered by the fields of

art history, conservation, and museum practice, acknowledging their distinct yet overlapping approaches to interpreting, preserving, and presenting Qashqai weavings. The next phases of my dissertation will expand this fieldwork to include archival research, market studies, and interviews in Iran. But it is the material intimacy afforded by this initial research; the touch of the wool, the hue of the dyes, the uneven spin of the yarn; that will continue to ground my study. Much of this work took place alongside conservators in museum labs, where I used magnification tools to examine fibers, counted warps and wefts, identified knot types, and recorded variations in dye saturation. These sessions involved both visual observation and hands-on analysis, allowing me to document structural details—such as spin direction, fiber composition, and weave density—that would not be accessible through visual analysis alone. This close engagement with the physical qualities of each object was essential to developing both my typology and my historical questions.

By tracing how Qashqai weavings were made, used, traded, and collected, this project reconstructs the trajectories of the objects themselves, and also foregrounds the weavers' historical agency. In doing so, it asks how art history might better account for mobility, marginality, and material resilience in the study of Islamic art.

## Notes

1. I am grateful to Sumru Belger Krody, Karthika Audinet, Shelley Burian, Lee Talbot, Kailey Dunmire, and Ella Jones (Cotsen Textile Traces Study Center and Avenir Center, GWU); John Henry Rice (VMFA); Talia Spielholz (de Young Museum); Eva DeAngelis-Glasser, Deniz Beyazit, and Navina Najat Haidar (Met Museum); Ben Peters and Mary (Harvard Art Museums); and my advisor Amanda Phillips for their generous support and insights throughout my research. This work was made possible through funding from The Barakat Trust, the University of Virginia, and the UVA Department of Art.
2. D.T. Potts, *Nomadism in Iran: From Antiquity to the Modern Era* (Oxford University Press, 2014).
3. Lois Beck, "Iran and the Qashqai Tribal Confederacy," in *Tribe and State in Iran and Afghanistan* (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 1983), 30.
4. For example, an example in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA).
5. Henry René d'Allemagne, *Du Khorassan au pays des Backhtiaris: trois mois de voyage en Perse* (Generic, 2022).
6. George Nathaniel Curzon, *Persia and the Persian Question* (Cambridge University Press, 2016).
7. Mme Jane Dieulafoy, *La Perse, la Chaldée Et la Susiane* (Forgotten Books, 2020).

8. Walter B. Denny, *How to Read Islamic Carpets* (New York: New Haven: The Metropolitan Museum of Art; Yale University Press, 2014); Jon Thompson, "Early Safavid Carpets and Textiles," in *Hunt for Paradise* (Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-1576), ed. Sheila R. Canby (Milan: Skira, 2003).
9. Lisa Golombek, "The Draped Universe of Islam," in *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World*, ed. P. Soucek (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 25-49; Pennina Barnett, "Rugs R Us (And Them): The Oriental Carpet as Sign and Text," *Third Text* 30 (1995): 13-28; Brian Spooner, "Weavers and Dealers: The Authenticity of an Oriental Carpet," in *The Social Life of Things*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 195-235; Kassiani Kagouridi, "Musealisation and Ethno-Cultural Stereotypes in Persian Art: The Case of Baluch Carpets ca. 1870s-1930s," *Journal of Art Historiography* 28 (2023): 1-18.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Elnaz Latifpour** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art and Architectural History at the University of Virginia. Her research focuses on Qashqai wool weavings produced in southwestern Iran between 1850 and 1950, examining their characteristics, historical context, and global reception. Her dissertation investigates how these weavings responded to socio-political changes, including Reza Shah's sedentarization policies, and how they were later collected and interpreted in Western museums. Latifpour's work bridges art history, anthropology, and museum studies to reassess the cultural and historical significance of tribal weavings.

## NEWS

Read about new appointments, awards, and other achievements by some of our members, as well as their recent exhibitions, publications, and dissertations on Islamic Art and Architecture.

## MEMBER NEWS

**Abbey Stockstill** started a new position as Associate Professor and Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation Chair of Architectural History at the University of Virginia.

**Alex Dika Seggerman** was a visiting Scholar, Photothek at Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz during Fall 2024 and received the Stevens and Bordin/Gillette Fellowship from Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan for Summer/Fall 2025.

**Bihter Esener** was appointed Assistant Professor of Islamic Art and Medieval Mediterranean at Northwestern University starting September 2025.

**Dalal Almughyri** was appointed Director of the Saudi Women's Museum, which is the first museum of its kind at Princess Nourah University that was recently inaugurated.

**Elnaz Latifpour** received the Barakat Trust Grant for Islamic Art to support in-person textile analysis at the de Young Museum in San Francisco during summer 2024 and was awarded the Laura Bassi Scholarship in Fall 2024. Moreover, she started the Ruffin Gallery Co-Curatorial Fellowship at the University of Virginia in February 2025 and received the W. Nathaniel Howell Research Grant from the University of Virginia in February 2025.

**Haris Dervišević** was appointed Head of the Chair of Art History at the University of Sarajevo in October 2024, and in February 2025 he became a member of the Board of Directors at the Museum of Islamic Culture and Art in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**Heba M. Saad Abdelnaby** was appointed Cultural Attaché and Director of the Egyptian Cultural Center in Rabat, Kingdom of Morocco.

**Hossein Nakhaei** received the Mellon/ACLS Dissertation Innovation Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies.

**Jaimee Comstock-Skipp** received Flexible Seed Funding- to organize a workshop- from Oxford University's Gardens, Libraries and Museums (GLAM) and Berlin's Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK, Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation). She also received New College Ludwig Fund for Humanities research support.

**Jake Benson** received the Juynboll Stichting Dissertation Completion Grant in Summer 2024 and in September the same year he was awarded the Soudavar Memorial Foundation's grant to support his continued work as Soudavar Fellow for Persian Collections at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library at the University of Manchester, as part-time for three years. In March 2025, he was hired as a half-time freelance postdoctoral researcher for two years for the GlobalDecoPaper Project at Ludwig Maximilian University, Munich.

**Fatima Quraishi** was appointed Assistant Professor of South Asian Art (pre-1850) in the Department of Art & Archaeology at Princeton University (Starting in September 2025).

**Özlem Yıldız** received the ANAMED (Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations) 2025-2026 PhD Fellowship.

**Rachel Winter**, in collaboration with Salah Hassan, co-convened the major international convening "Aesthetics of Solidarity by Arab American and Arab/SWANA Diaspora Artists in the US, 1948–Present" in April 2025 which was the 2025 conference of the Association for Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World, Iran and Turkey (AMCA) and the 18th Annual Michigan State University Muslim Studies Program Faculty Symposium. She also received the National Endowment for the Humanities Collaborative Research Grant, co-pi with Dr. Salah Hassan (MSU) for the international convening "Aesthetics of Solidarity" in April 2025.

**Ryan Mitchell** received the Tyler School of Art and Architecture Department of Art History Rome Fellowship, Society of Architectural Historians and the Athenaeum of Philadelphia Charles E. Peterson Fellowship, and Temple University Summer Research Grant.

**Tayyebah Babaei** was appointed Assistant Curator of Islamic Arts at the IRC Enterprise Partnership Scheme, Chester Beatty.

**Xinyu Liang** received the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship from the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



**Yasemin Gencer** was appointed Assistant Professor of Islamic Art at Wayne State University in Detroit.

## EXHIBITIONS CURATED

**Alex Dika Seggerman** curated "Powers of the Unseen" at Paul Robeson Gallery, Express Newark, Rutgers University-Newark (Feb 27-July 31, 2025).

**Elnaz Latifpour** curated "Echoes of the Shadows" at the Ruffin Gallery, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA (April 2025). More information can be found at: <https://art.as.virginia.edu/echoes-shadows-closes>

**Haris Dervišević** was a member of the curatorial team for "Under the Sky of Bright Faith – Islam and Europe in the Bosnian Experience" at the French Pavilion, Zagreb, Croatia (November 2024). He also participated in the curatorial team for "Under the Sky of Bright Faith – Islam and Europe in the Bosnian Experience" at the Palace of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France (November 2024- April 2025).

**Mina Moraitou** curated the exhibition: "A thousand and one designs, drawings and shapes" at Santirvan, a venue in Drama, Greece (21 June- 23 November 2025). The exhibition is organized by the Benaki Museum and Raycap. More information can be found at: [https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com\\_events&view=event&type=&id=1047525&Itemid=559&lang=en](https://www.benaki.org/index.php?option=com_events&view=event&type=&id=1047525&Itemid=559&lang=en)

**Rachel Winter** curated three exhibitions at the MSU Broad Art Museum; the first was "Samia Halaby: Eyewitness" (June 29–December 15, 2024), the second "Nabil Kanso: Echoes of War" (February 15–June 29, 2025) and the third "unbecoming, a survey of work by Diana Al-Hadid" (June 7–December 21, 2025).

**Rami Alafandi and Gwendolyn Collaço** curated "Refracted Histories through Stained Glass: 19th c. Islamic Windows as a Prism into MIT's Past, Present, and Future" at the Maihaugen Gallery, Distinctive Collections, MIT Libraries (26 February- 1 September 2025)

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

**Akef, Walid.** "Architecture of Triumph, Jihad, and Mediterranean dialogue in the Alhambra. An Analytical Study of the House of Paintings and its Mural. Part I," *Muqarnas* 40 (2023): 69–102.

**Almughyiri, Dalal.** "Art and Education: What Do We Need to Do?" In *Contemporary Kingdom*, 106-109. Dubai: Canvans Central, 2025.

**Benson, Jake.** "Polier's Posterior Album: Rylands Persian MS 10," in *Eighteenth-century Persianate Albums Made in India: Audiences, Artists, Patrons, and Collectors*. Edited by Friederike Weis, 263–286. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

"Decorated Papers in Islamic Manuscripts," in *Prophets, Poets and Scholars: the Collections of the Middle Eastern Library of Leiden University*. Edited by Arnoud Vrolijk, Karin Scheper, Timon Bardaa, 89–97. Leiden: Leiden University Library, 2024.

**Benson, Jake and Malini Roy.** "A Newly Identified Muraqqa' Assembled for Antoine-Louis-Henri Polier in the British Museum: List of Contents in the Polier Album," in *Eighteenth-century Persianate Albums Made in India: Audiences, Artists, Patrons, and Collectors*. Edited by Friederike Weis, 263–286. Leiden: Brill, 2024.

**Bush, Olga.** "Plasterwork in the Alhambra: Materiality, Design and Practice," in *Stucco in the Islamic World: Studies of Architectural Ornament from Spain to India*, Richard Piran McClary (ed.), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025, 441-468.

**Comstock-Skipp, Jaimee.** "Design Transfers and Working Methods (design process, kitabkhana)." In *Exchanges along the Silk Roads – Architecture, Monuments, and Urbanism. UNESCO Thematic Collection of Cultural Exchanges along the Silk Roads Volume 2* (Paris: UNESCO, 2025): 237-254.

"From the Khan to the Sultan: the Abū'l-Khairid Shāhnāma in the Topkapı (H.1488) and manuscript production and presentation under 'Abdullāh bin Iskandar Khan." *Muqarnas* 40 (2024): 273-314.

"The Samarqand Shāhnāma in Cambridge's Ancient India and Iran Trust: Echoes from Khurasan and Whispers of Bukhara." In *The Central Asian Manuscript Heritage in Cambridge University's Collections, Part Two. The Cultural*

*Legacy of Uzbekistan* series vol. LXXIII (Tashkent: Silk Road Media, 2024).

**Dervišević, Haris.** "Chapter 5 Sarajevo Paintings of Mecca and Medina." In *Gazing at Mecca and Medina*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2025: 119–133.

**Dervišević, Haris. and Meliha Teparić.** "Diving Deep into the Word of God: A Sufi Approach to Religious and Trans-Religious Images." *Religions* 15, no. 12 (2024): 1–18.

**Ivkovska, Velika, Stela Tasheva, i Haris Dervišević.** *Architectural Heritage of the Ottoman Balkans: Public Buildings and Urban Spaces*. London: Routledge, 2025.

**Emparán Fernández, María Antonieta.** "Using Geometric Analysis to Challenge Colonial Perspectives: Understanding Maṭnīd Zillj Patterns through Multidisciplinary Insights," *Artefacto visual, Revista de Estudios Visuales Latinoamericanos* 8, no. 15 (2024): 259–281.

**Fetvacı, Emine.** "Visual Culture and Architecture," In *The Cambridge Companion to Ottoman History*, Alexis Norman Wick (ed.), Cambridge University Press, March 2025.

"Paper as Artistic Medium at the Ottoman Court," *Art History*, vol. 47, no. 4 (September 2024): 702–725.

"Chapter 9: Art of the Islamic World before 1400," Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, *Art History*, 7th Edition. Pearson, 2025.

"Chapter 25: Art of the Islamic World after 1400," Marilyn Stokstad and Michael Cothren, *Art History*, 7th Edition. Pearson, 2025.

**Laviola, Valentina.** "Islamic Arms and Armour from the Odescalchi Collection at Palazzo Venezia in Rome". *Eurasian Studies* 22, (2024): 228–44. <https://doi.org/10.1163/24685623-20240168>

"Mourning the Dead: The Iconography of Wailers in Islamic Illuminated Manuscripts". In *Sepulture medievali (IV-XV secolo). Spazi, opere, scritture/Medieval burials (4th-15th centuries). Spaces, Artworks, Writings*, edited by F. Coden. Silvana Editoriale, 2024.

**Allegranzi, V. and Valentina Laviola.** "Stucco in the Architectural Decoration of the Ghaznavid Palace in Ghazni (Afghanistan, 11th-12th Century)". In *Stucco in the Islamic World: Studies of Architectural Ornament from Spain*

*to India*, edited by R.P. McClary. Edinburgh University Press, 2025.

**Neumeier, Emily.** *Architectural Revolution on the Ottoman Frontier: Greece and Albania in the Age of Ali Pasha*, University Park: Penn State University Press, 2025.

**O'Kane, Bernard.** "Stucco in Cairo: Indigenous Development and Imported Ideas," in *Stucco in the Islamic World: Studies of Architectural Ornament from Spain to India*, Richard McClary (ed.), Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2025, 311–37.

"Geometry, Art and Ideology in Fatimid, Zangid and Ayyubid Egypt and Syria," *Hadeeth ad-Dar, the Journal of the Dar al-Athar al-Islamiyyah* 53 (2024): 18–23.

**Quraishi, Fatima.** "Contact and Continuity: The Arts of Sindh," In *The Oxford Handbook of the Mughal World*, edited by Richard M. Eaton and Ramya Sreenivasan. Oxford University Press, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190222642.013.36>

**Seggerman, Alex Dika.** "Possessed: The Mystical Post-Surrealism of Wifredo Lam, Abdel Hadi El-Gazzar, and Ibrahim El-Salahi." In *Decolonizing Islamic Art in Africa*. Intellect, 2024, 181–202.

**Shatanawi, Mirjam.** *Legacies of Colonialism in Museum Collections: The (Un)Making of Indonesian Islam in the Netherlands*, Leiden: Brill, 2025. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004688421>

**Simpson, Marianna Shreve.** "Dioscorides Disordered: Some Notes on the University of Pennsylvania's Fragmentary 'Kitab-i Hashayish,'" *Manuscript Studies* 9.2 (fall 2024): 354–94.

**Stockstill, Abbey.** "Mediterranean Convergence: Trade, Craft, and Notions of Influence in the Kutubiyya Minbar," *Art Bulletin* 107, no. 1 (2025): 42–63.

**Winter, Rachel.** "Larissa Sansour: Remembering and Re-membering Past, Present, and Future." In *Entire Nations Are Built on Fairy Tales: Larissa Sansour and Søren Lind*, edited by Leonie Bradbury. Emerson College, 2025.

**Wu, Sylvia.** "Displaced yet Distinct: Hangzhou's Relocated Congregational Mosque on the Urban Periphery." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 53, no. 1 (June 2025): 101–30. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jcr.2025.a960754>.

## DISSERTATIONS COMPLETED

**Benson, Jake**, "The Advent of Abī: The First Wave of Paper Marbling in the Long 16th Century" (Leiden University, Prof. Dr. Petra Sijpestijn and Persianist Prof Dr Gabrielle van den Berg) 2024.

**Goldberg, Roxanne**, "Persian Lessons: Islamic Art in America, circa 1876–1925" (MIT, Kristel Smentek), 2025.

**Squires, Margaret**, "Woven Ground: The Safavid Carpet in Architectural Context, 1501–1722," (The Courtauld Institute of Art, Professor Sussan Babaie), 2025.

**Winter, Rachel**, "A Spectacle of Inclusion: The Rise of Contemporary Art from the Arab World, Iran, and Turkey in the United States and England, 1970-2020" (University of California, Santa Barbara, E. Bruce Robertson), 2024.

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## In Memoriam: Sheila Canby

The HIAA Board is extremely sad to announce that Sheila Canby, former HIAA President 2014-2016, has passed away. Our thoughts are with her friends, family, and loved ones. The following obituary was provided by her colleagues:

The Department of Islamic Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art mourns the loss of Sheila Canby, Curator Emerita and former Curator in Charge of the Department from 2009 to 2019. She was a scholar in the field of Persian art and culture, with a vibrant career as a museum professional. She received her BA from Vassar College and her MA and PhD from Harvard University.

Before joining The Met, Sheila Canby was Curator of Islamic Art and Antiquities at the British Museum and held curatorial and research positions at the Brooklyn Museum, Los Angeles County Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Fogg Art Museum and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

Her research and contributions to the field of Safavid art have left an enduring legacy. Throughout the course of her career Dr. Canby organized dozens of exhibitions and installations and authored numerous articles, encyclopedia entries, reviews and books. Her exhibitions and publications include: *Princes, Poets and Paladins: Islamic and Indian Paintings from Collection of Prince and Princess Sadruddin Aga Khan* (1998); *Rebellious Reformer: The Paintings and Drawings of Riza-yi Abbasi of Isfahan* (1999); *The Golden Age of Persian Art* (1999); *Islamic Art in Detail* (2005), *Shah Abbas: The Remaking of Iran* (2009); *The Shahnama of Shah Tahmasp: The Persian Book of Kings* (2011); *Hunt for Paradise: Court Arts of Safavid Iran, 1501-1576* (2003), *Court and Cosmos: The Great Age of the Seljuqs* (2016) and *Masterpieces of Islamic Art from the Farjam Collection* (2024).

In 2012 Sheila Canby won the Farabi book award for *The Golden Age of Persian Art*. She served on the Board of the American Institute of Iranian Studies, on the Cultural Committee of Asia House in London, on the Council of the British Institute of Persian Studies, the Society for Iranian Studies, as well as on the Advisory Council of the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University, and she was also a fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society.