



FROM THE PRESIDENT

HIAA President, Nancy Um, shares news about the organization as well as upcoming initiatives and events.

Dear Colleagues,

It is a great pleasure to present the Summer 2026 Newsletter, a collaborative publication compiled by the HIAA board to memorialize our activities and to celebrate member achievements over the past year. These tangible acknowledgements are particularly meaningful during an uncertain time for our community, as we navigate a rapidly changing landscape in higher education and cultural institutions and cope with the rippling effects of global conflict and unrest. By highlighting these milestones and achievements, we signal our enduring commitment to the study of Islamic art, architecture, and cultural heritage and rally behind the spirit of rigorous scholarly exchange. I see this newsletter as a vivid demonstration of our resilience as knowledge producers, dedicated interpreters of visual and built culture, and stewards of material history.

I am very fortunate to take on this role following the productive term of our past HIAA President Emine Fetvacı, who worked tirelessly to put the organization on a solid footing. During her term, she was devoted to the complex and demanding work of securing HIAA's future through incorporating the organization, which was achieved in 2025 with the approval of our membership. Incorporation involved considerable efforts, much of it carried out behind the scenes, as well as external consultation. In particular, Jeffrey Cunard generously offered his legal expertise as we worked to reshape HIAA's charters, bylaws, and organizational protocols. The membership of HIAA can now have confidence in the organization's longevity, durability, and fiscal security into the future. Thank you Emine for your service, vision, and leadership! ([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.

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Emine Fetvacı, Past President

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(continued from page 1) HIAA is working to support the needs of our members, and particularly those of emerging scholars. At the HIAA Business Meeting in February 2026, we announced the good news that we will be increasing the stipend amounts for the Grabar Postdoctoral Fellowship and Travel Awards. This decision was taken after consultation with our financial advisors and with the keen awareness of the challenges of today's job market and the rising costs of travel. We look forward to announcing the new slate of awardees for both the Grabar Awards and the Ševčenko Prize later in the year. As a new offering, Bermet Nishanova, HIAA's graduate student representative, has organized a Writing Group, which will meet regularly online. This new program, which was proposed by our members, was kicked off with an inspiring online workshop, "Building Healthy Writing Habits," organized by Heba Mostafa and Bermet, with support from HIAA secretary, Emily Neumeier, and held on June 2, 2026.

On the organizational front, HIAA has made a change to its membership categories. In particular, the long-held category of institutional membership has dwindled over the years. Additionally, the category posed certain problems in regard to communications and voting, due to the fact that institutional activities must be channeled through a single representative. Ultimately, this category has had the unintended effect of obscuring the full extent of our community, as many colleagues are not represented on HIAA's member roster and listserv. After much deliberation during board meetings and an open discussion held at the business meeting in February 2026, we have decided to discontinue the institutional member category, with the remaining memberships in that category ending in 2027. We hope that those who have participated in HIAA under the institutional rubric will join as individual members and that, ultimately, this modification will better serve our community.

At its core, HIAA aims to offer sites of gathering, convening, and connection. Looking ahead to February 2027, we invite you to attend the HIAA-sponsored session at CAA in New York, which focuses on Islamic art in libraries. Additionally, the next HIAA Symposium will take place in March 2027 in Los Angeles. Thanks to all who submitted proposals. Stay tuned for the details, coming soon!

Finally, I would like to thank the members of the HIAA board and those who have served on HIAA committees, volunteering their time and energy to keep the organization running, amidst other commitments and busy

schedules. If you are interested in becoming more involved in HIAA, please see the roster of open positions below. The Nominations Committee welcomes both nominations and self-nominations for these elected roles.

For those of you whom I have not yet met, I look forward to meeting you at the next HIAA event, whether in person or online. I also invite discussion about the role of HIAA, now and into the future. If you have suggestions, please feel free to reach out to me by email. Thank you for your engagement with our community.

Warmly,
Nancy

Nancy Um
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CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2025 GRANT AND PRIZE AWARDEES!

Grabar Postdoctoral Award

- Margaret Squires
- İkbāl Zeynep Dursunoğlu

Grabar Travel Award

- Isabella Inskip
- Miranda Luo
- Claire Dillon

Ševčenko Prize

- Xinyu Liang, "Historical Consciousness and Artistic Agency in the Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh: A Transcultural Perspective"
- Honorable Mention to Chaeri Lee, "Between 'Aks and Āsār: Mystical Metaphors in Technical Manuals of Photography in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran"

HIAA BOARD ROLES THAT ARE OPEN TO ELECTION IN FALL 2026

- Secretary
- H-ISLAMART Editor
- Graduate Representative

If you are interested in submitting a nomination or self-nomination, please contact Betsy Williams, ewilliams@mfa.org.

NEW BOOKS IN ISLAMIC ART

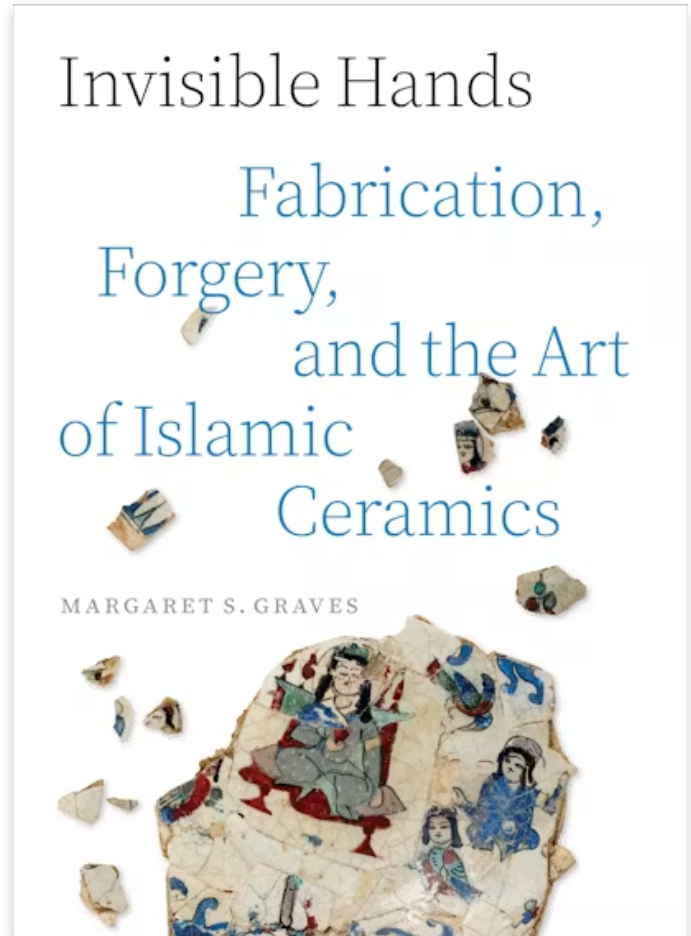
INVISIBLE HANDS: FABRICATION, FORGERY, AND THE ART OF ISLAMIC CERAMICS

A conversation between Elizabeth Dospěl Williams (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) and Farshid Emami (Rice University) & author Margaret S. Graves (Brown University)

In *Invisible Hands: Fabrication, Forgery, and the Art of Islamic Ceramics*, you trace the parallel development of the instruments of modern finance and the antiquities market. Networks of dealers for example, were deeply entrenched in the same financial networks that connected America, Europe, North Africa, and the Ottoman Empire. Why are these developments important for understanding collections of Islamic (and other) art in museums today?

The transformative powers of banking and finance capitalism were a big part of the book, and there were two things I was trying to do that I think are important for the field. First, in the most straightforward way, I was trying to make it clearer that we should think of art objects as assets rather than as disaggregated aesthetic specimens. I wanted to pan back to show how thoroughly they are embedded in the systems of finance: they move through banking systems, often through the hands of financiers, and they accumulate value through circulation and promotion. By taking a financial lens, it becomes a little easier to see what they were before they came to rest in the museum.

This leads to the deeper dimension of the financial framework, which is its capacity for transforming the objects that pass through it. I was trying to build a model where we could think about the fictionalization of these objects during their movements through the market, as commodities with narratives attached to them. Most of us are aware that art objects have been heavily mediated, but we tend to think of this in terms of the scholarly historiography of these objects and maybe a bit of their pedigree, i.e. which collections they have been in. I wanted to point to this other part, which is the financial dimension of that mediation, and the way that it is completely inextricable from the scholarship itself. Antiquities are an



Margaret S. Graves, *Invisible Hands: Fabrication, Forgery, and the Art of Islamic Ceramics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2026)

asset class and an investment vehicle, and they have been for a long time.

One concept that recurs through your book is the idea of the “zombie attribution.” Could you talk about this concept a bit here? How can art historians identify such “zombies” – what are some telltale signs?

The attribution of an object on a database or in a caption often seems very clear, especially if it names a single site, as often happens with ceramics. It sounds very authoritative, it sounds very tidy, it presents a neat taxonomy, it's very good for the market. Public audiences and students assume these attributions represent a secure truth. But along the road of conducting research, you often discover that an awful lot of these materials moved through the market without any verifiable documentation to say where they were actually found (to say nothing of the tendency for our taxonomies to conflate findspot

with site of production). Often there is no secure basis for these attributions, and they were made on stylistic grounds after the piece first appeared on the market. Yet they circulate as if they are archaeologically verified and pass into received wisdom without being questioned as they should. I called them “zombie attributions” in the hope that giving this phenomenon a name might make it easier for us to start figuring out what to do with it. With ceramics, for example, you might look in a museum’s object files and find cards with one site crossed out in favor of another. After doing that enough, you start to realize how much of the basis of our knowledge is based on what the dealer said or on the stylistic attributions recorded on those cards, not on verifiable certainties. Zombie attributions like these mask the reality of how limited our knowledge is and muddy the work of scholarship, too. They make everything look clean and tidy and less like what it really is, which is a big, chaotic churned mess of stuff that was pulled out in the colonial program under questionable circumstances.

We enjoyed thinking about the range of archives you considered to tease out the hidden histories of objects’ circulation on the art market and through collections. Was there a particularly memorable discovery or experience working in archives over the course of your research that stands out to you?

This was the biggest archival project that I’ve done in my career, so I learned a lot in the decade I spent on the book. I learned that archival work is often non-linear, and it can be quite emotionally affecting at times. It is also a long game, where you have to triangulate between multiple institutional archives to see what happened behind the scenes.

For example, I read the V&A’s file on Dikran Kelekian many years before I read what was in files at the Cincinnati Museum of Art. I knew from the V&A side that there had been a legal dispute about the ceramics that he had on loan to the V&A at the time of his death. In the files at the V&A is the pileup of the legal case, with letters about whether they were going to be able to keep hold



Dikran Kelekian, ca. 1938. Photography by Alfredo Valente. Alfredo Valente papers, 1941-1978. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

of these pieces or buy the whole lot at a reasonable sum, etc. It didn’t work—the American lawyers found legal reasons why they couldn’t. Then several years later, I went to Cincinnati—where many of Kelekian’s ceramics ended up—and found the other side of the story in the archives there, a deal set up between Charles Kelekian (Dikran Kelekian’s son) and the director of the Cincinnati Museum where they figured out a price for the group between them, after the V&A had put in their offer, but without letting the V&A know there was another buyer in the frame. All this came down to basically two handwritten pieces of paper with notes from a phone conversation, which were only comprehensible to me because I had read the V&A end of it and I knew the sums involved.

Reading across multiple archives revealed a more complicated and involved set of transactions, alliances, and rivalries behind the scenes than would have been legible from any single archive.

There's an emotional component to this too, sometimes. As you work in the archives, you read a huge number of people's letters and you develop a certain degree of empathy for some of those individuals. Yet all the time that you read, you are in the strange position of knowing how things will turn out and what will happen to these people, because you are reading from the future. I felt an almost electric shock when I looked at the date of the last of Dikran Kelekian's letters, because one was written the day before he died by suicide. Reading the letters he wrote in the three weeks running up to that point was painful and hard; I thought I could see signs of mental decline, perhaps paranoia, of an old man struggling with his health. However we feel about the individual players in these histories and the things they did professionally, the archive can often surprise us with the glimpses that it offers into their human lives, including ill health and impending death.

*Interview conducted over Zoom on Thursday, June 18, 2026.
Transcribed with WhisperNotes and edited for length.*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Margaret Graves (Ph.D, University of Edinburgh, 2010) is Adrienne Minassian Associate Chair of Islamic Art and Architecture in Honor of Marilyn Jenkins-Madina at Brown University. She taught at Indiana University before joining Brown in 2023. Her published work has focused particularly on museum objects, the plastic arts of ceramics, metalwork, stonecarving, and the acts and contexts of making in the medieval and modern eras. Her first monograph, *Arts of Allusion: Object, Ornament, and Architecture in Medieval Islam* (Oxford University Press, 2018), won the 2019 book prize of the International Center of Medieval Studies and the 2021 Karen Gould prize from the Medieval Academy of America.

Elizabeth Dospěl Williams (Ph.D, Institute of Fine Arts, NYU, 2015) is Penny Vinik Chair of Fashion, Textiles and Jewelry at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Her research, publications, and exhibitions focus on late antique, Byzantine, and early Islamic wearable arts, interior design, provenance, and comparative art historical approaches. Before coming to the MFA, she was Curator of the Byzantine Collection at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection in Washington, D.C. Her recent special exhibitions include *Framing Nature: Gardens and Imagination* (2026), *Rich in Blessings: Women, Wealth, and the Late Antique Household* (2023) and *Woven Interiors: Furnishing Early Medieval Egypt* (2019).

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.



© Carine Juvin 2025, "Connected Sultanate" section

NEW EXHIBITIONS IN ISLAMIC ART

MAMLUKS 1250–1517

A conversation between Melis Taner (Özyeğin University) and Bermet Nishanova (University of California, Irvine) with curators Carine Juvin (Scientific Curator) and Souraiya Noujaim (Institutional Curator)

What was your guiding vision in shaping the narrative of the exhibition, and how did you balance historical scholarship with public accessibility?

The initial idea was to move beyond the focus on the military elite and to refresh the perspective on the Mamluk Sultanate by reflecting the vitality of the recent historical research over the past twenty years. It was also a matter of reaffirming the significant role — often neglected — played by the additional Middle kingdom (China) in the global exchanges of the medieval period, and of focusing on international trade and cultural connections. Finally, it was an opportunity to showcase the

rich culture of the medieval Arab world within a context and discipline that has traditionally privileged Eurocentric narratives.

Were there any pieces you felt were indispensable to telling the Mamluk story?

It is the precise assembly of the works in all their diversity that makes it possible to tell this story. Naturally, it was important to bring together impressive pieces emblematic of Mamluk aesthetics—such as the monumental Quran from the John Rylands Library in Manchester; the "Bird Vase" from the Gulbenkian Museum, the incense burner from the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha, the Baptistry of Saint Louis, and the large medallion carpet from the Louvre Abu Dhabi. Yet, it was equally important to include lesser-known pieces that bear witness to the Sultanate's cultural complexity and its exchanges with other regions, such as a bilingual Arabic-Turkish dictionary with sophisticated calligraphy (Paris, BnF), a Sino-Mongol-influenced ceramic bowl found in Hama, a Danish chasuble reusing a Mamluk lampas fabric (both from the National Museum in Copenhagen), or a copper-alloy basin made in Ghana inspired by a Mamluk model (British Museum).

How did you highlight the global connections of the Mamluks in the exhibition's design and catalogue?

As previously emphasized, this is one of the exhibition's key themes, and one of the five sections was entirely dedicated to it, featuring a wide range of objects that illustrate the multiplicity of these diplomatic, commercial, and cultural connections with neighboring empires, such as the Mongols and Ottomans, as well as with farther regions of India, Africa, and Europe. A large map of trade routes underscored the intensity and diversity of these relationships—a presentation that was further developed in Abu Dhabi through an interactive display featuring an animated map. In the catalogue, several essays address these different connections.

What were the greatest challenges in curating this exhibition—whether logistical, scholarly, or interpretive—and how did you overcome them?

Curating a large international exhibition with multiple lenders and such a topic with a wide scope is always challenging and requires a lengthy and intense involvement. But it was also the result of a long companionship with the Mamluks and the Mamlukists!

Obviously, obtaining major loans of pieces that could be highlights in museum collections or were particularly fragile was a particular challenge. And we had, of course, to face some refusals. But generally speaking, colleagues from Western museums and notably libraries have been very supportive of this exhibition, which they felt was a rare opportunity. We also had generous and interesting loans from the Arabian Peninsula.

The exhibition managed to gather a rich and diverse range of pieces, some of which were shown or published for the first time.

Making accessible this largely unknown and complex history to a Western public was also challenging. The prologue (entitled "The Legend of the Mamluks") aimed to emphasize the legacy and the fascination created by the Mamluks in the modern period. Then, the display path was organized through historical and societal introductions to more cultural and geo-political aspects, concluding with the artistic achievements and a rich visual culture. There was a sense of logical progression, and particular attention was brought to the accessibility of texts and labels with the interpretation team. Personal histories were told beyond the main historical time line/frame, so that the public could engage with different individuals from that period - a sultan, an amir, a woman, a Sufi, a calligrapher... This took the shape of text panels, illustrated with a "portrait" (taken from Mamluk or Venetian paintings), in

which the individual told his own story using the first person. There was also a specific children's path to visit the exhibition through the eyes of a young Mamluk recruit. At the end, we were much rewarded with very positive feedback on these aspects.

How does the exhibition differ between Louvre Paris and Louvre Abu Dhabi?

The two venues were conceived together from the start within the frame of a co-production. But as is usually the case, some loans accepted for the first venue didn't go through for the second, notably some manuscripts and textiles. So, they were partly replaced by other loans, notably local loans from the Gulf region. The Benaki Museum was also especially generous for the Abu Dhabi venue. There were also scenography adaptations for the two different spaces, and greater emphasis on mediation tools in Abu Dhabi. But the individual sections, their storytelling and their texts, were the same.

A significant difference concerns the catalogues. The Paris version (only in French) is more comprehensive, with 32 essays and 23 short focus texts. While the Abu Dhabi version (trilingual English/Arabic/French) is more abstract and different in its content, mixing 7 main essays and 37 entries on selected artworks.

Have any current events affected your curatorial decisions in any way?

With deep regret, due to the international context and other restrictions, despite contacts and discussions that have been initiated, we had to do without loans from the Near East, the lands that had been under Mamluk control in the past.

How do you see this exhibition contributing to ongoing debates about the definition and scope of Islamic art, and what future projects might build on its legacy?

The exhibition adopts a perspective of interacting spaces, illustrating how the material and cultural output of the Mamluk Sultanate emerged from complex exchanges and dynamics both internal and external. At the same time, it focuses on a region viewed as the "historic center" of the Islamic world—an area somewhat neglected in recent art historical research in favor of the "peripheries". Yet, its position as an intermediary between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean placed the Mamluk Sultanate at the crossroads of numerous trade routes linking Africa, Europe, and Asia. The exhibition thus invites us to examine the relationships between centers and peripheries and to take a fresh look at this "historic center". It also embraces

the complexity of medieval Islamic societies, highlighting—among others—the significant Christian communities of the Near East, civil elites, and women, and the roles they played in the Sultanate's cultural and artistic productions. Spanning a long period, the Mamluk Sultanate has left a vast legacy of objects, manuscripts, and documents. Following on this panoramic exhibition, many specific aspects warrant further exploration, driven by highly dynamic research. For instance, an exhibition on Mediterranean diplomacy during the Mamluk era—spearheaded by the DiplomatCon research project (UAntwerp and ULiège) and involving the Louvre Museum—is set to open at the Barcelona museum in November 2027.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Carine Juvin received her Ph. D. in “Arab studies and Islamic world civilization” from the École Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris, and a Licence in Arabic language and civilization from Paris-Sorbonne. After a first position at the Institute of the Arab World (Paris), as an Exhibitions and collection manager, she has been working at the Louvre Museum, Islamic Art Department (DAI), since 2005, where she is presently curator for the Medieval Near East collections. There, she took part in the creation of the new galleries of Islamic Art opened in 2012 and was the project director of the new introduction space inaugurated in 2018. She also directed the “Inscribed Objects in the DAI” and the “Gaston Wiet's archives” projects.

She curated the exhibitions *Roads of Arabia* (Louvre, Paris 2010; Abu Dhabi 2018), *Furusiyya: The Art of Chevalry between East and West* (Abu Dhabi 2020), and *Mamlouks 1250-1517* (Musée du Louvre/ Louvre Abu Dhabi 2025-26), and organized the international conferences *History and Archaeology of Saudi Arabia Kingdom* (2010), *The Islamicate World facing its Past* (2017) and *Inscribed Objects in the Islamic World: aesthetics, adab, societies* (2017). She also taught Islamic Art at the École du Louvre, at Paris VII-Diderot University, and Strasbourg University, and published numerous publications in the field of Islamic art with a focus on material culture, epigraphy and calligraphy in the Medieval Near East.

Souraya Noujaim is the Director of the Islamic Arts Department at Musée du Louvre, Paris, where she oversees the curatorial strategy and the development of its collection and narrative, ensuring it caters to the wider community and contributing to building a relevant and sustainable institution. She sits on the advisory board of the Louvre Lens Museum.

Prior to this role, Dr. Noujaim was the first appointed Scientific, Curatorial and Collections Management Director at Louvre Abu Dhabi. In this capacity, she oversaw and led the curatorial strategy of Louvre Abu Dhabi, the new developments of its narrative, the development of the museum's collection as well as the exhibition programming.

In addition, she has been instrumentally involved in the launching of the prestigious Louvre Abu Dhabi Art Here - Richard Mille Art Prize.

She has also been a key figure in driving the scientific aspects of international partnership programs and has defined its research program along with supervising the creation of the museum's scientific analysis laboratory. She led the implementation of comprehensive training policies and procedures for museum professionals.

Noujaim began her career at Musée du Louvre, as part of the “Grand Louvre” project she took part in opening of the first Islamic Art Department rooms of the Musée du Louvre. She has since worked for major cultural institutions such as the Arab World Institute (IMA), the British Museum and French Museums Agency (AFM), developing and implementing international multidisciplinary scientific programs on Islamic Art, from research to museum exhibitions. Throughout her career, Noujaim has been committed to engaging diverse audiences in exceptional and meaningful art and display. She oversaw and curated a number of landmark exhibitions and was a senior lecturer at École du Louvre, Chair of Islamic Arts. Dr. Noujaim holds a Ph.D. from University Paris - Nanterre, in Islamic Art History and Archaeology, postgraduate research diplomas from École du Louvre in epigraphy and a degree in Museum Studies. She also studied Arabic Islamic civilization at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO).

Melis Taner is Assistant Professor of Islamic and Medieval Art at Özyeğin University. She received her Ph.D. from Harvard University's Department of History of Art and Architecture in 2016, and her M.A. in History from Sabancı University and an M.A. in Medieval History from Central European University. Her research centers on early modern Ottoman and Safavid painting, with a focus on illustrated manuscripts, albums, and the visual cultures that circulated across Ottoman-Safavid and broader Persianate networks. Her book, *Caught in a Whirlwind: A Cultural History of Ottoman Baghdad as Reflected in Its Illustrated Manuscripts* (Brill, 2020), focuses on artistic activity and manuscript production in the regions between the Ottoman and Safavid empires, as well as on the vibrant late sixteenth-century and late seventeenth-century Baghdad art market.

Bermet Nishanova is a Ph.D. candidate at the University of California, Irvine. She is currently writing her dissertation, which is titled “Converging 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 and draws on object-based studies and museum collections to trace entanglements among 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.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

DISCOVERING THE BUILT LEGACIES OF BRITISH IMPERIAL OCCUPATION IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

Maggie Freeman, a Ph.D. candidate in History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT, explores British colonial-era buildings and interviews nomadic pastoralist Bedouin communities in southern Iraq.

In January 2026, I spent two weeks conducting research in southern Iraq.¹ The purpose of the trip was two-fold: one, to visit and document a group of British colonial-era buildings in Iraq's southern desert; two, more ethnographic in nature, to interview members of nomadic pastoralist Bedouin communities living in the southern desert.

These two research focuses may seem disparate but are in fact closely linked. The British buildings I visited belong to the “desert outposts,” a building typology constructed by the British Mandatory administrations in the southern deserts of Iraq, Palestine, and Transjordan between 1925 and the 1948 termination of Britain's Mandatory agreements with Middle Eastern countries. The “desert outposts” were constructed under the auspices of a sweeping program known as the “principles for desert control,” under which Britain sought to transform the majority-Bedouin inhabitants of the southern deserts into legible citizens in the eyes of the state. The primary stated goal of the “principles for desert control” was to eliminate Bedouin practices of intertribal raiding, a practice that had been criminalized by the British administration. Further, the British sought to ease the performance of state-legitimizing functions towards its citizens. Very much along the lines of James C. Scott's model, Britain needed to “see like a state”—to be able to enforce military conscription, centralize administrative and legal systems, maintain census records, and collect taxes. Historically, such functions have been particularly difficult for states to perform towards nomadic peoples, one of the main reasons that states historically have also sought to enforce sedentarization.²

However, notably, Britain's “desert control” project in its Middle Eastern Mandatory territories eschewed sedentarization entirely. Rather, Mandatory Britain relied on another type of building, the so-called “desert outposts.” These were police stations constructed at key



Figure 1. One of the outer defensive walls of the British desert outpost at Busaiyah, southern Iraq. Photographed January 2026 by the author.

watering places—wells, reservoirs, wadis—used by Bedouin communities. The outposts enabled the government to surveil, track, collect information from, and, often, punitively withhold water from migrating Bedouin tribes. In the words of John Bagot Glubb, Mandatory administrator and officer and the author of the “principles for desert control!” “The desert of course depends on wells, most of the year... so we built a fort on every well, with eight or ten men in it. The result was the tribes couldn't get water unless they came in under the control of the forts.”³

In my dissertation, “The Principle of Desert Control: Imperial Architecture and the Bedouin in the British Mandatory Middle East (1920-1948),” which I am currently completing at MIT, I investigate the architectural history of Britain's “principles for desert control,” analyzing their form, spatiality, materials and construction, and how the Bedouin responded to and shaped imperial building projects. The first desert outposts were built in Iraq between 1925 and 1930, towards the end of Britain's



Figure 2. The British desert outpost at Salman, southern Iraq, as of January 2026 in use by a Hashd al-Shabi militia group. Photographed by the author.

formal occupation of the country. From 1930 onwards, the desert outpost building program was exported to Transjordan, where eventually 15 such outposts were built along the country's southern border. The policy was similarly implemented across Palestine's southern Naqab desert from 1928 onward, intensifying during and after the widespread revolts in Palestine from 1936-39.

I have previously visited many of the desert outposts in today's occupied Palestine and Jordan (while many of the outposts still exist in some form, several in Palestine were destroyed during and after the 1948 Nakba). However, given the logistical difficulties associated with conducting research in Iraq, I had assumed that I would not be able to visit the Iraqi desert outposts. However, after visiting Iraqi Kurdistan in December and January 2025 with a colleague at MIT, I found that visiting and traveling within Iraq was easier than I had anticipated. On this trip to federal Iraq in January 2026, I planned to visit three of Britain's earliest desert outposts. These three outposts – at Abu Ghar, Salman, and Busaiyah – are all located relatively close to each other in the southern desert, approximately equidistant between the Euphrates river (and the nearest cities, Samawah and Nasiriyah) and the Iraq-Saudi border.

Given the challenges associated with visiting and researching in Iraq over the past decades, these three sites have been poorly documented, if at all, by foreign researchers. With one site, Abu Ghar, my goal was to ascertain whether the building even still exists – information I had found online and in Arabic sources was inconsistent as to whether the Ottoman-era fort was still extant. Occupied in 1925, Abu Ghar was one of the

earliest sites used as a desert outpost by the British administration; however, its construction dated to the late 1800s, when it was built under the patronage of Sadoun ibn Sadoun, a sheikh of the Muntafiq Bedouin tribal confederation. Ostensibly, the fort, which was also used as a marketplace for local Bedouin tribes, was built by Sadoun as a show of power in opposition to growing Ottoman imperial presence in southern Iraq.⁴ Unfortunately, however, it was clear from my visit that the fort had been destroyed, although I have been unable to find out when or by whom. While I encountered few other people on the drive (Abu Ghar is about 60 miles south of Nasiriyah, and another desert outpost, Busaiyah, is a further 25 miles south of Abu Ghar on the same road), I stopped to ask passing

shepherds or other drivers if they knew anything about a fort or castle at Abu Ghar. A younger man said he had heard there used to be a fort; an older man recalled having seen the fort but that it had been long destroyed.

Having confirmed the disappearance of the fort at Abu Ghar, I continued driving south to Busaiyah. The outpost at Busaiyah is perhaps the best documented desert outpost, as its construction was the flashpoint of a major diplomatic incident between British-occupied Iraq and the neighboring Kingdom of Nejd, ruled by Abdulaziz ibn Saud. While the outpost was under construction in 1927, it was attacked by a group of Akhwan militants loyal to Abdulaziz. The under-construction outpost was destroyed and several construction workers and policemen killed. While the attack seemed to have occurred without Abdulaziz's knowledge or approval (and in fact represented one of the first signs of rebellion by the Akhwan against the Saudi ruler), it unsurprisingly generated vociferous recriminations between the British and Saudi governments. Per the British, the attack was an illegal military incursion by a foreign country; per Abdulaziz, the outpost itself was illegal. The terms of the 1925 Bahra Agreement signed between Iraq and the Kingdom of Nejd forbade the construction of fortifications in the vicinity of either border, although the definitions of both "fortifications" and "vicinity" were, perhaps deliberately, kept vague. Abdulaziz argued that the Busaiyah outpost violated the agreement. Nonetheless, the Busaiyah outpost was eventually rebuilt and occupied as a police station. It is one of the more architecturally unique desert outposts, a square internal layout with central courtyard, protected on all sides by a defensive outer layer



Figure 3. The caved-in roof of one of the towers of Saddam's prison at Salman in southern Iraq, viewed from the outside. Photographed January 2026 by the author.

of triangular walls (Fig. 1). Viewed from above, the building resembles a star. In its current state, it is clearly long disused and its walls are beginning to crumble, but is otherwise generally in good condition. The contemporary police station of the town of Busaiyah is directly adjacent to the desert outpost; the officers there were eager to show me to the outpost and share with me everything they knew about it. They pointed out to me a detail I was otherwise not aware of, namely that one of the major wells at Busaiyah was actually surrounded by the walls of the fort itself; ostensibly to protect the water resources in the event of future attacks, but also likely in service of Britain's project to control the Bedouin through the annexation and restriction of water.

On a separate day, I visited the desert outpost at Salman, about 150 miles west of Busaiyah and 120 miles south of Diwaniyah. I knew very little about the post-independence fate of the Salman outpost, which was built in 1928. Salman has gained notoriety in recent years as the site of a prison built by Saddam Hussein, one of the main sites in the Anfal campaign of Kurdish genocide. An unknown number of Kurdish men, women, and children, likely numbering in the tens of thousands, were incarcerated and murdered in Salman prison in the 1980s. Some sources misrepresent Saddam's prison as having originally

been the British desert outpost, but these are in fact two distinct buildings. The British desert outpost is located in the center of the contemporary village of Salman; the contemporary police station is, like at Busaiyah, directly adjacent to the desert outpost (Fig. 2). However, when I arrived at Salman I discovered that the outpost had been recently occupied by a local Hashd al-Shabi militia group, and hence was extremely off-limits. I was therefore only able to view and photograph the building from the outside, and very discreetly at that. Nonetheless, the building appeared to be in good condition – it has clearly been used more or less continuously since its construction, and while that necessarily entails some modifications to its original form, it appeared to be well-maintained. Despite not being able to enter, I was satisfied just to see that the building is still extant, as some sources give the impression that the outpost had been built over by Saddam's prison.

Instead, Saddam's prison is located on a hill about 1,500 feet from the outpost. Despite being the same reddish sandstone color as the hill itself, it dominates the landscape visually, a perpetually hulking mass in the corner of one's eye. With some cajoling, the security guard granted me entrance (the prison is otherwise only visited by Kurds, who have recently begun making an annual

Figure 4. Eagle and lion imagery, propagandistic symbols frequently utilized by Saddam Hussein, on a wall of the prison at Salman. Photographed January 2026 by the author.



pilgrimage to Salman in memory of the Anfal victims). Salman is very similar to other Saddam-era prisons, such as that at Duhok in Kurdistan, which I visited on my earlier trip to the region. Massive, multi-story, steel-reinforced concrete, round corner towers; the prison projects an impression of indestructibility and inescapability that is compounded by its desert surroundings (the remote location and extreme weather of Salman being major reasons for the placement of the prison there). Unlike Duhok or other former Saddam-era prisons that are accessible to visitors, Salman is entirely unmanicured and unmaintained. Its roof is collapsed in several places and heaps of rubble – the result of American bombing in 2003, per the security guard who let me in – are strewn about (Fig. 3). Ba'athist slogans still cover its walls, an eerie and unexpected remnant of an era that has otherwise been entirely exorcised from Iraqi spaces (Fig. 4).

In the second part of my trip, I returned to the desert regions around Salman and Busaiyah, this time to conduct research among the living Bedouin inhabitants of this region. Some 50,000 people continue to practice nomadic pastoralism in Iraq, the majority of whom live in the southern and western desert regions. Many also migrate seasonally between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and might hold citizenship in either, both, or neither country. Given the time of year of my visit, it was unusual, and not a good sign, that I was actually able to meet with many Bedouin families relatively far north in their migratory areas. Typically, the Bedouin will migrate further south, near or into Saudi Arabia, in the winter, and migrate northwards for the summer, spending the hotter and drier months

around the comparatively cooler Euphrates region. Many of the people I met said that they had been forced to remain in the north because of the lack of rain in the south; as soon as it rained, they said, they would begin moving southward.

In general, the topic of water and environment dominated my conversations. This portion of my trip was relatively open-ended and unfocused; my goal was to make use of the opportunity to meet and speak with people whose lifestyle I research and write about from a historical perspective. While I did not necessarily expect that information gleaned from these conversations will make their way into my dissertation or future publications, these conversations were nonetheless revealing of the lingering ramifications of British actions and policies towards the Bedouin. In general, a lack of agency over water was frequently expressed, and water described as a resource that my Bedouin interlocutors were dependent on external forces, whether it be God or nature or the government, to provide to them. The onset of this phenomenon can be traced back to the British colonial period, when management and distribution of water resources, once organized internally among the Bedouin, newly fell solely under state purview.

I also did not necessarily expect to be able to resuscitate any historical memory of the British occupation or its architecture among my 21st-century interviewees. Generally, the topic proved to be a conversational dead end. One exception was among a Bedouin family I met outside of Salman, where I had already been just a few days prior. The British desert outpost, and Saddam's prison just beyond that, were visible from their encampment. When I asked about their proximity to the town and their relationship with it and its inhabitants, one woman brought up, unprompted, that Salman had been established by the British to have a place to meet and communicate with the Bedouin tribes in the area; a good choice on their part, she said, given that Bedouin were still visiting Salman a century later.

Finally, I was interested in observing and documenting contemporary building and dwelling practices among the Bedouin this region. Generally, I did not find anything that has not already been noted by scholars. The knowledge and practice of hand-weaving is largely extinct; no one I spoke with made their own tent panels, for example, or knew how to, and the textiles for tents are mass-produced synthetics imported from Syria and occasionally Pakistan or India. Only one family I met had a Singer sewing machine for mending clothes and other textiles. However, I was struck by what appeared to me as a newly



Figure 5. A professional-grade camping tent in a Bedouin encampment in southern Iraq. Photographed January 2026 by the author.

emerging marker of class distinction among Bedouin communities, expressed through tents and other materials. Namely, I noticed that some Bedouin families who seemed to be particularly well-off (subtly but noticeably apparent through the size of camel herds, the dishes and drinks I was offered, the quantity and quality of electronic devices wielded) also have begun to eschew the typical and traditional black tent associated with the Bedouin in favor of mass-market camping gear, the sort of recreational equipment any hiker or camper would own (Fig. 5). They lived in zip-front weather-resistant tents, slept on roll-up down sleeping bags, and prepared food and tea on camping stoves. Further and more organized research would be necessary to trace this phenomenon, its causes and significances, but it nonetheless represents points to the continuing evolution of Bedouin architectures in response to changing political, economic, and cultural conditions.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Catherine McNally for her companionship on this trip, Haval Kahraman for facilitating driving and logistics, and Drs. Salah Hatem and Jafar Jotheri for their hospitality and assistance.
2. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale University Press, 1998).
3. Glubb, John Bagot (Oral History), with Conrad Wood and John Bagot Glubb, March 26, 1979, 170 minutes, 4410, Imperial War Museums, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/80004370>.
4. John Bagot Glubb, *War in the Desert: An R.A.F. Frontier Campaign* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1960), 72.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Maggie Freeman is a PhD candidate in History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture and the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT. Maggie researches nomad-state interactions through the lens of architecture, with a focus on the modern Middle East. Her dissertation *The Principle of Desert Control: Imperial Architecture and the Bedouin during the British Mandate (1920-1948)* examines how the built environment was mobilized and manipulated to control Bedouin nomadic pastoralists under British Mandatory authority in Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine, and how members of the Bedouin responded to and influenced building projects intended to control or surveil them.

REVERSE GLASS PAINTING IN TUNISIA

Ava Katarina Tabatabai Hess, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History at UCLA, examines glass paintings in Tunisia.

The Centre des Arts et Traditions Populaires (CATP) opened in Tunis in 1965 and operated until 1993. Though short-lived, it played a defining role in shaping what “popular” culture would mean within Tunisia’s national framework after independence by preserving, exhibiting, and producing scholarship on understudied and at-risk material and visual practices, and by opening ethnographic museums across the country. Among its central interests was reverse glass painting, a technique in which paint is applied to the side of the glass opposite the one the viewer eventually sees, so that both image and paint layers must be executed in reverse. These paintings are largely figural and narrative, drawing on Islamic belief and history. Most examples, historical and contemporary alike, remain undated and unsigned. Production flourished in urban Tunisia during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, yet despite their material abundance, the paintings attracted no scholarly attention until CATP’s activities in the late 1960s.

I was based in Tunisia from October 2023 to April 2025—supported by two U.S. Department of Education fellowships (Foreign Language and Area Studies, followed by Fulbright-Hays)—and conducted related fieldwork in Algeria, Morocco, and France as part of a broader dissertation project tracing figurative Islamic imagery across the Maghrib through the linked mediums of reverse glass painting and chromolithography. In Tunisia, I visited private collections, conducted interviews, and examined the CATP’s institutional history in depth. Much of my research centered on reconstituting the former collections of the CATP, dispersed across government agencies since its closure under Ben Ali in the 1990s (Fig. 1). These holdings are uniquely documented—part of the thousands of objects acquired for the state by Mohamed Masmoudi, the CATP’s founding director. During the 1960s–70s, Masmoudi authored the only monograph on the subject of Tunisian reverse glass painting to date, organized exhibitions, published articles and object studies, and even learned to practice the medium himself.¹

Today, the former CATP collections fall under Tunisia’s Institut National du Patrimoine (INP). In Tunis, roughly 250 reverse glass paintings and related chromolithographic prints were recently moved from the beylical palace-



Figure 1. Former CATP signage in the Tunis medina. Photograph by author.

museum of Ksar Saïd to a new climate-controlled depot near the National Library, intended to improve researcher access. In Sfax, I worked with the regional INP collection at the Dar Jellouli Museum, assembled under Masmoudi’s supervision. Like many of Tunisia’s ethnographic museums, it has been closed to the public for years while under renovation and its holdings are fragile; broken glass panes, insect damage, and above all, flaking paint left me with the uneasy sense that moving works for study was itself hastening their decay. Compounding these conservation issues is institutional instability across Tunisia’s heritage sector. Despite the integrity and generosity of the collections staff and heritage officials who assisted me, I was unable to locate the CATP’s own institutional archive—leaving many of these objects severed from their original correspondence, accession records, and object files.



Figure 2. Private residence in Sfax, built in the late 18th century. Photograph by author.

What makes Maghribi reverse glass painting both compelling and elusive as a research topic is this archival silence and scholarly neglect. One chapter of my dissertation traces how the CATP first institutionalized the study of Tunisian reverse glass painting, even as the discourse of the “popular” that has surrounded it since—tied in many ways to Bourguiba-era nation-building²—threatens to obscure the medium’s more complex history of elite patronage and transregional origins.

Over the course of my fieldwork, I came to understand how Sfax emerged as a historical epicenter of the reverse glass painting tradition in Tunisia. From at least the 17th century, its port placed the city on trade routes spanning Egypt, the Levant, and Europe, through which Venetian and Bohemian glass arrived alongside other imported crafts and luxury goods.³ Sfax’s elite merchant families appear to have been the medium’s earliest patrons, commissioning custom wooden cabinetry that, by the late 18th or early 19th century, often included panels of reverse glass painting (Fig. 2). Over time, the paintings became less integrated into interior architecture, purchased instead as

autonomous works and growing in scale as industrial glass became available.

Toward the turn of the 20th century, my research shows how the subjects of these paintings ranged widely—from symmetrical calligraphic compositions to figural scenes showing al-Burāq, ‘Antar ibn Shaddād, ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, and mythico-historical figures from Futūḥ Ifrīqiya, Sīrat Banī Hilāl, or other oral epic literature, and eventually modern Ottoman figures and the Ḥusaynid beys. Historical conquests of North Africa were recast through images of romance and heroism, an appetite perhaps sharpened by Sfax’s own history as a center of anticolonial resistance during the French conquest of 1881. A striking example survives in Tunis in the personal collection of the 20th-century painter Ali Bellagha, who acquired some of the finest historical examples during the 1960s–70s. It is a large, cinematic scene signed by Maḥmūd al-Firyānī of Sfax where the sun, moon, stars, humans, and the whole animal world are wrapped up in a cosmic battle for the glory of Islam (Fig. 3). The painting’s main subjects are Sīdī ‘Abdallāh and Amīna, figures drawn from legends of the 7th-century Arab-Islamic conquest of Tunis in which the daughter of the Byzantine governor is abducted, yet consistently rendered in Maghribi prints and paintings as a triumphant love story.⁴ Little is known of this 19th-century painter from Sfax but his surviving work shows extraordinary technical precision, vivid colors, and emotive range.

Reverse glass paintings are still sold in Tunisian souqs today, though their smaller scale and new iconographies mark a clear departure from historical trends, often reflecting



Figure 3. Studying a reverse glass painting by Maḥmūd al-Firyānī at the Ali Bellagha Museum in Tunis. Photograph by Louis Weiss.

tourist market demand. Many Tunisians nonetheless recognize older examples from their grandparents' homes, house-museums around the country, or the films of directors like Férid Boughedir, where such paintings evoke the working-class Muslim interiors of Tunisia's past. Alongside this nostalgia, I also encountered a casual distancing—paintings dismissed as foreign or “not really Tunisian,” attributed instead to external Shi'a, Turkish, or European influence, despite four centuries of continuous practice here.

These cycles of disavowal and reclamation have helped shape my dissertation's theoretical approach and focus. Rather than search for singular origins, I approach reverse glass painting as one node within a larger visual ecosystem across northern Africa that spans works in many mediums, including puppet theatre, calligraphy, tattoo design panels, cosmological diagrams, murals, and miniature painting. Above all, the dissertation traces the relationship between Maghribi reverse glass paintings and chromolithographic prints, which share not only the same subjects and compositions but the same manual and conceptual maneuvers of reversal in their production. I argue that the meaning of these works was never fixed as they were reused, adapted, and reinvented across contexts, and that their mobility and mutability was key to their survival over generations. The CATP was one of several 20th century efforts towards recuperating these artistic practices, in this case recasting regional and transregional traditions into a national one and helping constitute the very category of the “popular” it claimed only to describe. Other dissertation chapters look comparatively to specific historical episodes in Algeria and Morocco to analyze whether similar cycles of neglect, recuperation, and debate have shaped the circulation of these print and painting traditions elsewhere in the region.

Since beginning this fieldwork in October 2023, I have struggled to reconcile the time I spent searching for fragile, half-forgotten objects while the mass destruction of human life was unfolding in Gaza, across the same sea visible from my Tunis apartment. I don't have a settled answer for what makes art history a worthwhile pursuit amid genocide, or what role art historians might play in the violence threatening the worlds we study. But fieldwork has also reminded me how much our research depends on people and on genuine human connection—on the generosity of archivists, shopkeepers, colleagues, friends, and even strangers, and on the brief encounters that make the work possible at all. These objects carry stories precisely because the people who made, used, and kept them did too; to tell the story of one is, in some way, to keep the other from being forgotten.

Notes

1. Mohamed Masmoudi, *La Peinture sous verre en Tunisie* (Tunis: Éditions Cérès, 1972).
2. Virginie Rey, *Mediating Museums: Exhibiting Material Culture in Tunisia, 1881–2016* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
3. Ali Zouari, *Les Relations commerciales entre Sfax et le Levant aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Sfax: Institut National d'Archéologie et d'Art, 1990).
4. Ava Katarina Tabatabai Hess, “Five Algerian Postcards: A Brief History of ‘Images Populaires’ in Maghribi Chromolithography,” *Journal of North African Studies* (2024), DOI 10.1080/13629387.2024.2376555.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ava Katarina Tabatabai Hess is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History at UCLA. Her dissertation examines vernacular Islamic art circulating as reverse glass paintings and color prints across Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco during the 19th and 20th centuries, as well as their post-independence recuperations. Beginning next year, she will join the Art Institute of Chicago as the Rice Curatorial Fellow focused on the Islamic arts of Africa, and participate as a fellow with Khamseen's Getty-funded project *The Futures of Islamic Art History: Remapping the Field*.

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

Alison Terndrup has accepted a continuing-track appointment as Assistant Professor in the Department of Art History, in the College of Arts and Sciences, at the University of Delaware.

Boshra Moossavi received the Beinecke Fellowship Award for Graduate Research (Summer 2025) and the Barakat Trust Graduate Research Award (Summer 2026).

Carol Bier was appointed Affiliate Professor in the Core Doctoral Faculty, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA.

Claire Dillon received the Grabar Travel Award from the Historians of Islamic Art Association and the Venetian Research Program Grant from the Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation.

Dina Turkieh has been advising on development, curatorial research, and interpretation for international cultural heritage projects at the Museum With No Frontiers (MWNF) and working as Senior Museum Educator, Louvre Abu Dhabi, where she leads the design and development of innovative museum experiences that connect the collection with diverse audiences.

Emily Neumeier has been promoted to Associate Professor at Temple University.

Hannah Kemal-Hyden started a new position as Curator for Art of the Islamic World at The David Collection, Copenhagen.

Hossein Nakhaei was a Smithsonian Institution Fellow at the National Museum of Asian Art (2025–2026).

Lydia Harrington started a position as Project Archivist and Cataloger at MIT's Aga Khan Documentation Center in November 2025.

Mahsa Nouri Soula began doctoral studies in Art History at the Tyler School of Art and Architecture, Temple University (Fall 2025) and received the Temple University Summer Research Grant (2026), the Marcia Hall Research Award from the Tyler School of Art and Architecture (2026), the Temple University Graduate School Travel Grant (2026), and the Shabahang Scholarship Award (2026).

Margaret Squires received the May Beattie Visiting Fellowship, Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford (2026).

María Antonieta Emparán Fernández began a new position as Lehrbeauftragte (Adjunct Lecturer) at Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg – Faculty of Theology, Lehrstuhl für Christliche Religionsphilosophie. She is responsible for the Islamic philosophy component within the interreligious dialogue curriculum.

Michele Lampracos will be Visiting Associate Professor in the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT in Fall 2026.

Nisa Ari started a new position as Associate Professor of Arts of the Islamic World at Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) in September 2025.

Rachel Winter completed a residency at the SeaPort Art Center for Curatorial Research, Athens, Greece (January 2026).

Sarah Slingluff began a position as Postdoctoral Associate in Medieval Islamic Art, Art History and Archaeology, at the University of Maryland.

Sharon Mizbani is currently the Ittleson Fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts, National Gallery of Art (2025–2027).

Sumru Belger Krody was appointed Chief Curator/Avenir Foundation Curator at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum in 2025.

Sylvia Wu received the Luce/ACLS Early Career Fellowship in China Studies – Long-Term; and the Postdoctoral/Post-professional Fellowship for Research in Islamic Art, Architecture, Urbanism, Design, and Preservation, at the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT.

Wafa Ghnaim is currently the Mellon Foundation Senior Research Fellow at the Museum of the Palestinian People (Washington, DC).

Walid Akef will begin a position as Assistant Professor at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in September 2026.

Xinyu Liang received the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture Postdoctoral Fellowship, Harvard University.

Yasemin Gencer is starting a new role as Field Editor for Islamic Art at caa.reviews (July 2026–2029).

EXHIBITIONS CURATED

Dina Turkieh curated the online exhibition “Water in Islam” for Museum With No Frontiers (March 2026): https://exhibitions.museumwnf.org/water_in_islam/

Lydia Harrington curated “Reclaiming History: A Journey Through Three Neighborhoods,” a City of Boston-funded exhibition on long-term display at the Josiah Quincy Upper School in Boston's Chinatown, focusing on urban renewal and the Chinatown, Little Syria, and New York Streets neighborhoods. She also conducted research for the Arab American National Museum's “Arab Massachusetts: Building Community in the Commonwealth” exhibition, traveling across Massachusetts from 2025 to 2027.

Melanie Gibson curated “The Arab Hall—Past and Present” at Leighton House Museum, London (26 March–4 October 2026).

Rachel Winter curated “unbecoming” at Georgetown University Art Galleries, Washington, DC, 23 January–12 April 2026.

Simon Rettig, Massumeh Farhad, and Sana Mirza co-curated the online exhibition “Beyond Rumi: Sufi Art and Practice” (<https://beyondrumi.asia.si.edu/>), which introduces the complexity of Sufi Islam through sites associated with Sufism from Morocco to Indonesia, as well as recordings of music, performances, and presentations by scholars.

Sumru Belger Krody co-curated “Adorning the Horse: Equestrian Textiles for Power and Prestige” (21 February–20 June 2026) and “Enduring Traditions: Celebrating the

World of Textiles” (16 August–20 December 2025) at The George Washington University Museum and The Textile Museum, Washington, DC.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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DISSERTATIONS COMPLETED

Acar, Tuğrul, "The Shrine of Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) and Early Mevlevi Architecture in Anatolia (ca. 1273–1520): Architectural Networks and Patronage" (Harvard University, Gülru Necipoğlu), 2026.

Akef, Walid, "Royal and Aristocratic Estates in Nasrid Granada: Landscape, Architecture, and Use" (Harvard University, Gülru Necipoğlu), 2026.

Alban, Rachel, "Miniaturisation in Persian Painting, 1396–1556" (The Courtauld Institute of Art, Sussan Babaie), 2026.

Daftarian, Reza, "Inside a Diamond of Fire: The Sensorial Apparatus of Ayeneh-Kari in Iranian Palaces and Shrines (1612–1896)" (The Courtauld Institute of Art, Sussan Babaie), 2026.

Ganguly, Srinanda, "Commemoration, Gender and Lineage at the Tombs of Khusrau Bagh, Allahabad" (University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, D. Fairchild Ruggles), 2026.

Lee, Chaeri, "Āsār: Visualizing Vestiges of Time in Late Nineteenth-Century Iran" (Indiana University, Margaret S. Graves), 2025.

Liang, Xinyu, "Framing Time and Space in Transcultural Dialogue: The Jāmi' al-Tawārikh and the 'Pictorial Turn' in Ilkhanid Mongol Book Art" (Rice University, Farshid Emami), 2025.

Malas, Khaled, "The Kaaba in a Bowl: For All Ailments and Afflictions" (New York University, Finbarr Barry Flood), 2026.

Molina, Sarah, "The Poetics of Space: How Carpets Shaped the Safavid World" (Harvard University, David Roxburgh and Gülru Necipoğlu), 2026.

Özakay, Damla, "Centralizing the Local: The Architecture of Death, Hospitality, Devotion, and Water in Amasya, c. 1209–1510" (Harvard University, Gülru Necipoğlu), 2026.

Xie, Yue, "Registan: The Rise of Madrasa-Anchored Urban Squares in Central Asia, 15th–17th Centuries" (Harvard University, Gülru Necipoğlu), 2026.

Yıldız, Özlem, "Illustrating the Lives of the Prophets in Sixteenth-Century Islamic Manuscripts" (Temple University, Emily Neumeier), 2026.

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