

Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute for Iranian Studies  
Faculty of Arts and Science, University of Toronto  
100 St. George Street, Toronto, ON M5S 3G3

## **Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for 2025-2026**

### **Cover Letter**

Dear members of the search committee,

I am writing to apply for the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Postdoctoral Fellowship in Iranian Studies for 2025-2026. My main research areas are Middle Eastern fashions and diasporic and postcolonial studies focusing on modernization as a key element in Iranian fashion's history and its contemporary debates, as well as Iranian fashion's relationship to local and transnational events. The project I will propose is revising and completing my dissertation (2023) to be published as a monograph by Bloomsbury Publishing. I consider myself a good fit for your fellowship due to the novelty of my project and my skills in working with historical sources and material culture from the period 1940s-1980s in Iran.

My book, "Oil Fashion and Modernization: A History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979," examines the Mohammad-Reza Shah Pahlavi era, focusing on development of Iranian fashion and urban dress cultures impacted by the modernizing agenda of Iranian political, economic, and creative actors. Each chapter discusses in tandem aspects of the Pahlavi modernization and fashion development, each featuring a different approach to fashion definition and theory. Regarding methodology, it benefits from comprehensive data collection and analysis, mainly from fashion and ethnographic studies, including oral histories, qualitative interviews, magazine analysis (e.g. *Zan-e Rouz* and *Ettelaat-e Banovan*), visual culture analysis, and social media observations. In addition, the Iranian Studies literature informs my work, specifically its empirical-analytical and interpretative methods of approaching historical sources. As a first treatment of Pahlavi fashion, this dissertation introduces local histories and concepts of Iranian fashion and dress, demonstrating a methodological model for interdisciplinary study of Global South fashions, in particular Near Eastern cultures.

I believe that this fellowship could have a long-term impact on my professional and personal development. Participating in your fellowship in the Department for Near Eastern Studies will widen my intellectual and methodological approaches to modern Iran's history through intellectual exchange with experts and peers in Iranian studies. Furthermore, this is an excellent opportunity to start a dialogue between two fields to which I am intellectually connected—fashion studies and Iranian studies. During

my doctoral studies, I was fascinated by the references to fashion themes in the works of Iranian scholars like Afasaneh Najmabadi, Michael C. Amin, and Faegheh Shirazi, though taken as a whole, fashion seems to be a deserted subject area for Iranian academia. The realization of my book project, in the framework of the Omidyar fellowship, will help develop the potential of Iranian studies literature and its unique sources toward a framework of global fashion discourse, from which Iranian scholars are often absent. Finally, the novelty of my project, in empowering Iranian women's voices through fashion history, will hopefully benefit this fellowship program in expanding its thematic and emancipatory trajectories of diversity within Iranian studies and beyond.

I greatly appreciate your time for considering my application. Attached to my application are a monograph synopsis, my CV, a contract confirmation, and letters of recommendation by my PhD advisors Professor Elke Gaugele and Professor Gabriele Mentges. Of course, I will be happy to provide you with more references or further information upon request.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nargess Khodabakhshi', with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

Nargess Khodabakhshi, Vienna, 1 July 2025

## Monograph Synopsis

### **Oil Fashion and Modernization: History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979**

History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [Jetztzeit]. ... The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome reincarnate. It cited ancient Rome exactly the way fashion cites a by-gone mode of dress. Fashion has a nose for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is the tiger's leap into the past. Such a leap, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands.

Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings* Vol.4, 1938-1940

Fashion histories are political. For the 1979 Iranian revolutionaries, fashion embodied the West's Trojan horse threatening their dream of reconstructing Iran's political system based on religious teachings, Marxist solidarity, and a constitutionalist vision. To emphasize their anti-fashion positions, they voted for inhibiting dress practices as well as representations and theoretical debates about fashion, while arguing for the Islamization of dress, including mandatory veiling. Whether due to censorship or ideological preferences, Iranian and international academics gradually lost interest in discussing the professional, educational, cultural and economic developments of fashion in pre-revolutionary Iran. Aiming at this gap, the proposed monograph historicizes fashion in Iran, exploring the impacts of modernization and the oil-based economy on fashion development during Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's reign (1941-1979). It argues that in this period, called "Oil-Fashion and Modernization," the modernization agenda, pushed by the state's policies and increasing oil revenues, contributed to comprehensive economic, social and cultural changes that boosted fashion development in Iran.

The first chapter explores narratives of dress conversion, fashion creation, and clothing culture, arguing that fashion practitioners, researchers, and consumers all simultaneously impacted the local fashion system's evolution. The second chapter elaborates on discussions of the Pahlavis that suggested militaristic, revivalist, and partly controversial approaches to "national fashion and dress," often targeting women's fashion. The next chapter discusses fashion actors' deployment of historical and visual references by relating local fashion's creation, mediation, and promotion with its 1960s-1970s international contexts. The last chapter interrogates how Iranian digital communities with different gender and generational interests remember pre-revolutionary fashion, reflecting on

historical, cultural, and ideological discussions of gendered fashion and modern bodies.

After almost half a century, *Oil Fashion and Modernization* offers a historiography of Pahlavi fashion and dress, aiming toward the project of decolonizing fashion by bringing in perspectives from the Iranian diaspora. Its significance, for both specialist and general readerships, relates to the entangling narratives of dress, fashion, and body control (1940s-1970s) with concepts of Iranian modernity, religious patriarchy, and ideological elitism from the late 19th century onward. With an intricate design, like a Persian carpet, *Oil Fashion and Modernization* represents the nature of relations between dress, culture, economy, and politics. As a metapicture, it presents a continuity of the history of Pahlavi modernization, 1960-1970 fashion development, 1980s anti-fashion movements, internet users' fashion nostalgia since the 2000s, and current *Woman-Life-Freedom* movement in Iran.

### Future Research Agenda

In addition to my book, I am currently working on *An Iranian Fashion Archive*, which emerged from my dissertation journey to find reliable fashion sources. As an ongoing, two-fold project, the *Fashion Archive* is a multimedia collection of primary and secondary sources of fashion-related material focusing on the 1940s-1980s in Iran. With a practical approach, it aims to structure the convoluted material pool of my dissertation into an accessible format, which eases searching and working with data for my future projects. The existing body of those materials includes interview recordings, 500 pages of interview transcripts, vintage magazines and books, digitized magazines, photos I took personally as well as photos, from my interview albums, internet photos, social media content, and pairs of collected objects and accessories. The following steps are planned:

- Choose a digital archive platform e.g., DSpace or Omeka that accommodates multimedia and set up needed technical infrastructure
- Create comprehensive metadata records for each item to enhance searchability and discoverability.
- Add content to the archive, categorize items into collections, and maintain a consistent organizational structure.
- Clarify legal and ethical issues in order to make parts of this archive accessible to other researchers or the public- a similar existing project with collective objectives is The Fashion and Race Database.

Next, the *Fashion Archive* will contribute to a theoretical awareness about the significance of archiving

for Iranian fashion studies that I marginally discussed in my dissertation. With this study, I will elaborate on the reasons for lack of fashion archives, its results, and the status of the existing physical and digital Iranian archives for studying fashion and dress. This study discusses the Iranian archives with examples from the elite families' private collections, the Pahlavi ethnographic museums, the 1960s-1970s royal collections, the revivalism of Iranian textiles, and fashion exhibitions. Arguing for archives fundamental to the development of fashion, this examination proposes clarifying the current situation, collaborative fashion exhibitions, and interdisciplinary curatorships and digital archiving as possible strategies to overcome the current limitations on archives in Iranian fashion studies.

Another early-stage project I am working on is *The Material Culture of Iranian Childhood*. My interest in this subject matter has emerged through my current archival work, and teaching activities on design, material culture, and childhood studies. This study examines how childhood, childcare, and material culture evolved through three periods of political and economic changes in contemporary Iran. Inspired by the existing works on *Archeology of Childhood* (i.e. Paula S. Fass, 2013; Jane Eva Baxter, 2022; Jamal J. Elias, 2018), it explores Iranian childhood concepts in the epochs of **Modernization, Industrialization, and Consumerism (the 1960s-1970s), Islamization, Self-sufficiency, and Reform (1980s-1990s), and Sanctions, Militarism and The Web 2.0 Revolution (2000s-2020)**. This study benefits from object histories, qualitative interviews, oral histories, diasporic autobiographies (i.e. Hamid Dabashi, 2023), magazines and visual culture, and social media analysis. I also plan to conduct a 6-12 month field research in Iran, and among immigrant Iranians with different ethnic, ideological and economic affiliations. Besides conference papers and articles, this research can be disseminated through an exhibition, project website or a new publication, depending on the funds or collaboration possibilities in the future.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

**Mag. Dr. Nargess Khodabakhshi**

Email: n.khodabakhsh@gmail.com

Tel. +43-69919364003

## ACADEMIC WORK

- **Post-doctoral Fellow, University of Applied Arts Vienna, 2022-2025**  
**Role:**
  - Senior Scientist, Department of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna
  - Administrator, Viktor Papanek Foundation, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria
- **Adjunct Lecturer, 2016-2023**
  - At the Department of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria
  - At the Department of Teacher Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria
  - At the Department of Cultural Studies, University of Arts Linz, Austria
  - At the Department of Fashion and Technology, University of Arts Linz, Austria
  - At the Department of Arts and Design, University of Arts Bremen, Germany

## EDUCATION

- **Academy of Fine Arts Vienna**, The Institute for Education in the Arts,  
Doctorate of Philosophy (in the Cultural Studies), Dr.Phil. (distinction), April 2023.  
Dissertation: "Oil Fashion and Modernization: A History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979."  
Examiners: Prof. Elke Gaugele, Prof. emerit. Gabriele Mentges, Dr. Babak Elahi
- **Academy of Fine Arts Vienna**, The Institute for Fine Arts, MFA  
Fine and Studio Arts, June 2012.  
Graduation Project "Inside & Outside Installation: Artworks in Interaction with their Audience"  
Supervisor: Prof. Gunter Damisch
- **The University of Tehran**, Faculty of Fine Arts, BA.  
Communication Design, June 2006.  
Thesis "From Book Illumination to Book Design: Analysis of Illustrated Scientific Manuscripts in Iran, 13th-18th Centuries."  
Artistic Project "Book Design based on a Persian Manuscript from 11 AD."  
Advisor: Prof. Reza Abedini

## PAPER PRESENTATIONS AND TALKS

- "Chances and Boundaries: Studying Iranian Fashion in the Era of Digitalization," The First European Digital Thesis Seminar, RIG-Acorso, Virtual Event, November 2021.
- "The Tale of a City: Politics and Economy of Fashion in Tehran," Conference Fashion Tales 2020+21, Milan, Italy, June 2021.
- "Dressing Iranian Women: An Introduction to Women's Magazines Analysis for Studying Fashion in Iran, 1957-1979," Conference Iranian Studies Association, Virtual Event, August 2020.
- "Methods of Doing Research in Iranian Fashion and Clothing," Institute for Art and Material Culture, TU Dortmund University, Dortmund, Germany, February 2019.
- "Oil-fashion and Modernization: Magazine Production and Urban Clothing in Iran 1941-1979," Annual Conference of Dress Historians, London, England, October 2017.

- "Women's Magazines and Fashion Policies of Pahlavi II, 1956-1979," nmt-Spring School for doctoral candidates, University of Applied Science, Berlin, Germany, May 2017.
- "Fashion Promotion in Mainstream Magazines in Iran, 1941-1979," Symposium The past, present, and future of politics in fashion and textiles, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, January 2017.
- "Modernization and Oil-fashion: History of Urban Clothing in Iran 1941-1979," Fourth Non-Western Fashion Conference, Antwerp, Belgium, October 2016.
- "Doing Research in Iranian Fashion: Debates, Methods, and Obstacles," IUAV University of Venice, Italy, May 2015.
- "History of Urban Clothing in Pre-revolutionary Iran," Institute for the Education in Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Austria, December 2014.

## RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

- Fashion Studies
- Design Studies
- Cultural Management
- Postcolonial Histories
- Childhood Studies
- Design Pedagogy

## WRITING

- "Zwischen Konsum und Underground: Modebeziehungen von Dubai über Teheran bis Istanbul" in *Lauf der Mode iz3w*, March-April 2020, pp.35-36.
- "The Fashion Cities of the Middle East," *Research Collective for Decolonizing Fashion*, Open Access, October 2020, [https://rcdfashion.wordpress.com/2020/10/27/the-fashion-cities-of-the-middle-east/?fbclid=IwAR1vVAY4JINH79Ho\\_0XZekOzhYzPoX1g4pb8OjAY8hzSJvYOPIJo9x8uzxs](https://rcdfashion.wordpress.com/2020/10/27/the-fashion-cities-of-the-middle-east/?fbclid=IwAR1vVAY4JINH79Ho_0XZekOzhYzPoX1g4pb8OjAY8hzSJvYOPIJo9x8uzxs)
- (Contract phase) Book, *Oil Fashion and Modernization: A History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979*
- (Under publication) Journal of Design History, Exhibition Review HERE WE ARE: WOMEN IN DESIGN 1900-TODAY, FURNITURE MUSEUM VIENNA, 1 MARCH-30 JUNE 2024
- Monograph "Oil Fashion and Iranian Modernization: History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941-1979," (Bloomsbury New York, expected in October 2027)

## COURSE DESIGN & TEACHING EXPERIENCES

- **S04975- MA seminar** "Material Culture 2: Exploring the History, Theory, and Practice of Graphic Design," The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Spring 2024
- **S04974- MA seminar** "Material Culture I: Modern Childhood within the Design World," The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Fall 2023
- **S02855- MA seminar** "Material Culture II: Designing the Child," The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Spring 2023
- **060.401- BA seminar** "Fashion/Styles/Identities," The Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Spring 2023
- **S04009- MA seminar** "Design and Diversity II," The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Fall 2022
- **S02856- MA seminar** "Material Culture I, Matter Out of Place: Design & Discard Studies," (Course design by Michelle Jackson-Beckett), The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Fall 2022
- **235.008- BA Seminar** "Preparation BA Thesis and Public Presentation," Department of Cultural Studies, University of Arts Linz, Spring 2022

- **060.401- BA seminar** "Fashion/Styles/Identities in Era of Digitalization, The Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Fall 2021
- **S04009- MA seminar** "Design and Diversity: The Dilemma of Creativity and Cultural Appropriation," The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna, Fall 2021
- **170.039- BA seminar** "Fashion History I: Fashion and Femininity, the 1900s-1970s", The Institute of Space and Design, University of Arts Linz, Spring 2021
- **MA seminar** "AWi Praktiken und Theorien: Decolonising Perspectives by Mapping Design Histories," (Course design and teaching with Bianca Koczan), The Institute of Arts and Design, University of the Arts Bremen, Spring 2021
- **060.483- BA seminar** "Fashion/ Styles/Identities in Era of Digitalization," The Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Spring 2021
- **060.404- MA seminar** "Thousand and One Fashion Story: Introduction to Concepts, History, Theories and Images of Fashions from the Middle East and North Africa," The Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Spring 2017
- **060.273- MA seminar** "Fashion Theory II," (Course design by Elke Gaugele), The Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Fall 2016

## SOCIAL & ARTISTIC COLLABORATIONS

- **Educator in Fine Arts**, on Behalf of The Vienna City Administration, Weekly Seminars in Fine Arts, Since April 2014
- **Speaker**, "Artist Profile Talk," The Vienna Art School, November 2021
- **Instructor** for Workshop Series "School of Public Food Design," The Vienna Art School, Summer 2021
- **Lecturer** for "Art and language: Insights into Viennese art life," on Behalf of The Vienna City Administration, Summer 2019
- **Translator & Interpreter** for Health and Medical Affairs and Help Organizations such as the Austrian Red Cross, InterprAID Ltd, and Project Integrationshaus from 2015-2017.
- **Exhibition** "Sowohl als auch," Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Vienna, January 2017.
- **Volunteer Instructor** for Language Work with the Adult Refugees, The Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), Fall 2015
- **Contributor** to "Mailetti: A Collective Art Project," Berlin, Summer 2015.
- **Exhibition** "Inside & Outside," Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, June 2012.
- **Exhibition** "BücherInnen," Salon for Art Books, Vienna, January 2012.
- **Exhibition** "Dis-Play: Posters as Political Medium," Installation in Public Space, Vienna, October 2011.
- **Exhibition** "Citation," Werk Art Space, Vienna, July 2011.
- **Exhibition** "Wem die Stunde schlägt," St. Pölten March 2011

## ORGANISATIONAL EXPERIENCES & PROFESSIONAL CONNECTIONS

- **Co-organizer & Coordinator** of Papanek Symposium 2023 "Design Anthropology. Critical Speculations," 16-17 March 2023, The Institute of History and Theory of Design, University of Applied Arts Vienna.
- **Co-organizer & Coordinator** of the Doctoral Winter School "Practice-based fashion theory" 4-6 October 2018, Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.
- **Assistant** of The Austrian Center for Fashion Research, June-October 2018, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.
- **Co-organizer** of the Symposium and Exhibition "The past, present, and future of politics in fashion and textiles" 19-21 January 2016, Institute for Education in the Arts, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.



- **Linked** with The Association of Dress Historians (ADH), The Association for Iranian Studies (AIS) and The Research Collective for Decolonizing Fashion (RCDF)

#### AWARDED BY THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS VIENNA

- Prize of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna for scientific work 2022/23
- Graduation Scholarship of the Centre of Doctoral Studies, 2019
- Learning on the Job Scholarship of the Centre of Doctoral Studies, 2018
- Research Grant of the Vice Rectorate for Art|Research, 2017
- Research Grant of the Vice Rectorate for Art|Research, 2016

#### FURTHER EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATIONS

- MOOC (FASH01x) Circular Fashion: Design, Science and Value in a Sustainable Clothing Industry, Wageningen University & Research, September 2020.
- MOOC (FETO101x) Foundations for Excellence in Teaching Online, Arizona State University, August 2020.
- MOOC (DH101) Introduction to Digital Humanities: Skills in Digital Research and Visualization Techniques Across Subjects and Fields within the Humanities, Harvard University, July 2020.
- Workshop "Academic Writing in English," The Centre of Doctoral Studies, Institute for Education in the Arts, November 2017
- Teaching Certificate "Lectureship Program for Doctoral Candidates 2016-17," The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, July 2017.
- Workshop "Free Writing Methods for Scientific Writing," Institute for Education in the Arts, March 2017.
- Workshop "Advising Bachelor Thesis", Institute for Education in the Arts, December 2016.
- Workshop "The Art of Constructive Feedback in Teaching," Institute for Education in the Arts, December 2016.
- Workshop "Scientific Writing and Rhetoric," The Centre of Doctoral Studies, November 2015.
- Seminar series "Presentation and Public Relations," Institute for Arts- and Cultural Studies, October 2014-January 2015.

#### LANGUAGES

- |  |   |                                   |
|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| • Farsi (Native speaker)                 | • English (Full professional proficiency) | • French (Elementary proficiency) |
| • German (Full professional proficiency) | • Arabic (Elementary proficiency)         |                                   |

#### COMPUTER AND TECHNICAL SKILLS

- |                           |                                    |                                 |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| • Windows, Mac, MS Office | • Adobe Creative Suite             | • WordPress, Social Networks    |
| • Digital Photography     | • Digital Drawing and Illustration | • Textile and Crafts Techniques |
| • Online Teaching Tools   | • Printing Techniques              |                                 |

To whom it may concern,

I am pleased to confirm that I am working with Dr. Nargess Khodabakhshi as the editor for her book 'Oil Fashion and Iranian Modernization: History of Fashion and Dress in Iran, 1941–1979', which we plan to publish in October 2027.

The book's proposal and an accompanying sample chapter received positive feedback from peer reviewers and we agreed and signed a contract in May 2025.

Although the two proposal reviewers need to remain anonymous, I'm pleased to share extracts from their feedback:

*'[The proposed book] presents a unique view of how fashion played a role in the identity of modern Iran. The author's analysis of the Persepolis celebration, presented in the sample chapter, is very thorough and considers the reasons why this topic has not been covered more adequately in other analyses of 20th c. Pahlavi rule, making the case for the importance of her contribution.'*

*'From my experiences in teaching, the content of this book is unique and very specific to Iran, it would be a good selection for advanced level courses in social/cultural /anthropology studies in combination of other texts depending on the focus of the course. It is valuable due to its focus on almost 40 years of an era in Iranian social and cultural history.'*

Please do get in touch if there is any other information that would be helpful.

Yours faithfully,

*Georgia Kennedy*

Georgia Kennedy,  
Senior Publisher, Fashion & Textiles  
[georgia.kennedy@bloomsbury.com](mailto:georgia.kennedy@bloomsbury.com)