

**Fahimeh Ghorbani, PhD Candidate, University of Toronto**

**Cover Letter**

Dear Members of the Search Committee,

I am writing to express my enthusiastic interest in the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Dissertation Completion Fellowship for the 2025–2026 academic year. I am a fifth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto, currently in the final stages of my dissertation, *Crafting Virtue: Futuwwa, Moral Craftsmanship and Material Culture in the Early Islamic and Early Modern Iranian World*. My research explores the ethical and material dimensions of *futuwwa* (*javānmardī*) in the Persianate world, focusing on two key contexts: early Islamic Nishapur and early modern Isfahan.

With the majority of my primary research and reading completed, I am now focused on writing and revision, and I anticipate submitting the full dissertation by May 2026. A residency at the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute would provide an ideal scholarly setting in which to complete this work and engage with a dynamic community of scholars in Iranian studies. I would also like to note that my funding will be significantly reduced after the fifth year of my program, making this final stage financially challenging. The support of this fellowship would provide essential stability and enable me to complete the dissertation at the highest level of scholarly rigor. I am confident that, with the Institute's support, my project will offer a meaningful contribution to the study of Iranian material culture, craft ethics, and intellectual history.

Please find enclosed my dissertation synopsis, chapters breakdown, proposed completion timeline, and curriculum vitae. Thank you very much for considering my application. I would be deeply grateful for the opportunity to complete my dissertation in residence at the Institute and remain at your disposal for any further information.

Warm regards,

Fahimeh Ghorbani

## Dissertation Synopsis

### **Crafting Virtue: Futuwwa, Moral Craftsmanship and Material Culture in the Early Islamic and Early Modern Iranian World**

This dissertation investigates the relationship between *futuwwa* (Persian: *javānmardī*) and material culture in the Iranian world, with a focus on two geo-historical contexts: Samanid Nishapur and Safavid Isfahan. These two moments mark critical junctures in which rich textual and material evidence converge, enabling a sustained analysis of how *futuwwa* was materially embodied and ethically enacted within artisanal workshops and craft communities. Rather than treating *futuwwa* as a fixed or monolithic doctrine, this study approaches it as a dynamic ethical paradigm—one that encompasses virtues such as generosity, humility, loyalty, and self-sacrifice. Drawing on Qur’anic foundations and prophetic models, elaborated in Sufi metaphysics and codified in urban guild practices, *futuwwa* is shown to have structured both moral ideals and the everyday practices of craftsmen in the Iranian Islamic world.

The dissertation examines how these ethical ideals were articulated not only through textual discourse but also through the visual, material, procedural, and performative dimensions of artisanal production. The project is organized thematically across two parts and five chapters. Part One, titled *Conceptual Foundations and Historiographical Trajectories* and consisting of the first two chapters—both now complete—establishes the theoretical and historiographical foundation of the dissertation. The Introduction sets out the intellectual and methodological framework, introduces the primary sources and conceptual vocabulary, and situates *futuwwa* in relation to Islamic ethics, masculinity, and material culture. It also outlines the central research questions, theoretical interventions, and the overarching structure of the dissertation.

Chapter One, titled “*Futuwwa: Conceptual Foundations and Historiographical Trajectories*,” lays the theoretical groundwork by tracing the semantic range and evolving ethical dimensions of *futuwwa* from late antiquity through the early Islamic period. It situates *futuwwa* within Qur’anic discourse, prophetic exemplarity—especially ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib—and classical Islamic thought. Drawing on philosophical and Sufi texts, particularly Ibn ‘Arabī, the chapter examines *futuwwa*

as a flexible ethical paradigm that shaped ideals of masculine virtue across spiritual, political, and artisanal contexts. Chapter Two, “*Tracing the Evolution of Futuwwa: A Historiographical Inquiry with a Greater Focus on Craft Futuwwa*,” builds on this foundation with a cultural and historiographical analysis of *futuwwa* in Iranian contexts. It explores its roots in Sasanian ethics and literature, and its transformation through early Islamic militias, Sufi brotherhoods, and craft guilds. The institutionalization of *futuwwa* under al-Nāṣir li-Dīn Allāh and the emergence of *futuwwatnāmas* are examined as efforts to moralize labor and codify ethical conduct within urban artisanal life.

Part Two, titled *Futuwwa, Craft Practices, and Artisanal Communities in the Early Islamic and Early Modern Period*, forms the core of the dissertation and comprises Chapters Three through Five. These chapters explore the material, procedural, and communal dimensions through which *futuwwa* shaped craft ethics and artisanal life in Samanid Nishapur and Safavid Isfahan.

Chapter Three, *Crafting Authority: Futuwwa and the Aesthetic Ethos of Nishapur Pottery*, examines the relationship between *futuwwa* and the finished craft object, with a particular emphasis on epigraphic pottery. While engaging with a wider spectrum of Iranian material culture—including architecture and other crafted forms—the chapter’s primary focus is on the epigraphic pottery corpus from early Islamic Nishapur. Through close visual and textual analysis of vessel inscriptions, it explores how *futuwwa* values were embedded in artisans’ aesthetic and linguistic choices. These inscriptions are treated as cultural texts that illuminate both the moral world of craftsmen and the broader socio-ethical environment in which such objects were produced, circulated, and received. This chapter investigates how *futuwwa* ethics were materially inscribed in the form, function, and textual programs of ceramic vessels, interpreting them as instruments of moral pedagogy that disseminated ethical ideals through everyday use.

Chapter Four, *Ethics in Action: Futuwwa and the Processes of Craft-Making*, turns to the practices and processes of making within the workshops of Safavid Isfahan. Focusing on *craft futuwwat-nāmas*—especially the *Futuwwat-nāma-yi Chītsazān* (Manual of the Block Printers)—this chapter examines how ritual, and spiritual discipline were conceptualized and codified within artisanal pedagogy. It analyzes how *futuwwa* ideals informed the rhythms, techniques, and ethical foundations of craft practice, reconstructing a *futuwwa*-inflected epistemology of making

rooted in moral intentionality and the sanctification of manual labor.

Chapter Five, *Fellowship and Formation: Futuwwa and the Social Life of Craftsmen*, examines the communal and institutional dimensions of *futuwwa* within the Safavid-era bazaar system of Isfahan. Focusing on a selection of *futuwwatnāmas* composed for Safavid weaving communities, the chapter investigates how *futuwwa* principles informed the organization of guild structures, the regulation of professional ethics, and the shaping of the city's moral geography. Through close analysis of the internal logic and ritual framework of craft-based *futuwwa* orders, the chapter reveals how they articulated artisanal identity, structured hierarchies of knowledge and authority, and fostered networks of solidarity, mutual care, and ethical discipline within the moral and spatial economy of the Safavid bazaar.

The Conclusion discusses that *futuwwa* must be understood as both an ethical system and a material practice—one that forged enduring links between moral subjectivity and collective space, between inward discipline and the outward world of craft and commerce. By placing the ethics of *futuwwa* at the center of two richly documented and geographically distinct contexts, the dissertation contributes to Iranian-Islamic art history, ethics of craftsmanship, and the intellectual history of practical virtue, while proposing a new approach to material culture grounded in ethical formation and artisanal lifeworlds.

## **Thesis Outline and Chapter Breakdown**

**Introduction** (approx. 5,000 words)

*Writing 50% complete*

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### **Part One: Conceptual Foundations and Historiographical Trajectories (approx. 22,000 words total)**

**Chapter One: *One Ethos, Many Faces: Futuwwa as Moral Authority and Masculine Identity***  
(approx. 9,800 words)

*95% complete – pending final revisions*

**Chapter Two: *Tracing the Evolution of Futuwwa: A Historiographical Inquiry with Emphasis on Craft-Futuwwa*** (approx. 12,200 words)

*95% complete – pending final revisions*

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### **Part Two: Futuwwa, Craft Practices, and Artisanal Communities in the Early Islamic & Early Modern Period (approx. 22,000 words total)**

**Chapter Three: *Crafting Authority: Futuwwa and the Aesthetic Ethos of Nishapur Pottery***  
(approx. 15,000 words)

*Reading 75% complete – Writing 50% complete*

**Chapter Four: *Ethics in Action: Futuwwa and the Processes of Craft-Making*** (approx. 11,000 words)

*Reading 90% complete – Writing 70% complete*

**Chapter Five: *Fellowship and Formation: Futuwwa and the Social Life of Craftsmen***  
(approx. 11,000 words)

*Reading 90% complete – Writing 60% complete*

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### **Conclusion (approx. 3,000 words)**

*Writing 30% complete*

## Dissertation Completion Timeline

- **June 2025**  
Finalize all edits and revisions for Chapter One and Chapter Two  
Submit fully revised versions of both chapters
  - **July–August 2025**  
Complete writing and revisions for Chapter Four and Chapter Five  
Finalize both chapters by end of August
  - **September–October 2025**  
Research, write, and revise Chapter Three  
Focus on integrating visual and textual analyses
  - **November 2025**  
Draft and complete the Introduction and Conclusion chapters  
Refine overarching arguments and narrative structure
  - **December 2025**  
Finalize all supporting materials, including maps, tables, timelines, appendices, and  
formatting adjustments  
Carry out final proofreading and consistency checks across chapters
- April 2026**  
Final revisions and submit thesis
- End of May 2026**  
Thesis Defence
- June 2026**  
Final Thesis Submission

# Fahimeh Ghorbani

## CV

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### Education

2020 – 2026 Doctor of Philosophy

History of Art and Architecture. Department of Art History, University of Toronto, Canada.

2016 Master of Art

Art History. Department of Art History and Visual Studies, University of Victoria, Canada.

2011 Master of Art

Traditional Arts and Crafts. Department of Applied Arts, Tehran University of Art, Iran.

2004 Bachelor of Art

Iranian Arts and Crafts. Department of Art and Architecture, University of Kashan. Kashan, Iran.

### Research Published & Accepted for Publication

Ghorbani, Fahimeh, and Sarah Ameri. “Academic Journeys and Passport Privileges: The Inequities of Global Mobility.” *Global Past*, 2024. <https://globalpast.org/academic-journeys-and-passport-privileges-the-inequities-of-global-mobility/>

Ghorbani, Fahimeh. “Highlights of Iranian Objects in the Minneapolis Institute of Art Collection.” *Honarhā-yi Šanāyi* ‘, no. 6 (Tehran University of Art), 2023.

Ghorbani, Fahimeh. “Matrix of Mobility: Networks of Objects and Exchange; About the Eighth Annual Wollesen Symposium.” *Wollesen Proceedings*, vol. 9, *University of Toronto Art Journal*, 2022.

Ghorbani, Fahimeh. “Naghshdouzi, the Extinguished Suzanis of Poum’s Women.” In *Iranian Forgotten Arts Treasures*, Tehran: Academy of Arts, 2016.

### Teaching Experience

May 2025 – June 2025

Teaching Assistant. Monuments of Art History. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

January 2025 – April 2025

Course Instructor. Medieval Urbanism; History of Medieval and Early Modern Isfahan. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

January 2025 – April 2025

Teaching Assistant. Ten Key World in Art History. Department of Visual Culture. University of Toronto, Canada.

May 2024 – June 2024

Teaching Assistant. Monuments of Islamic World. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

September 2023 – December 2023

Teaching Assistant. Monuments of Islamic World. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

January 2023 – May 2023

Teaching Assistant. Monuments of Islamic World. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

January 2022 – May 2022

Teaching Assistant. Monuments of Islamic World. Department of Art History. University of Toronto, Canada.

January 2021 –

Visiting Lecturer. Department of Islamic Arts. University of Kashan, Iran.

January 2017 – May 2019

Visiting Lecturer of Art History. Interior Design Department. Century College. Minneapolis, MN, USA.

January 2015 – May 2015

Teaching Assistant. Art History and Visual Studies Department, University of Victoria. Victoria, Canada.

September 2011 - August 2013

Lecturer. History of Islamic/Persian Art. *Heram* College of Art. Tehran, Iran.

September 2010 - August 2011

Lecturer. Islamic Artistic and Cultural Heritage. *Mehregan* College of Art. Tehran, Iran.

## **Research, Museum & Design Experience**

September 2022 – August 2024

Research Assistant, Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies. University of Toronto, Ca.

September 2021 – August 2024

Project Managerial Team Member, Global Past Initiative. University of Toronto, Ca.

January 2021 – December 2023

Reviewer. University of Toronto Art Journals. University of Toronto, Ca.

December 2021 – August 2023

Research Associate, Islamic Art and Material Culture Collaborative (IAMCC), Institute of Islamic Studies, University of Toronto, Ca.



May 2021 – December 2021

Curatorial Consultant. Minneapolis Institute of Art. US.

September 2018 – April 2021

Audience Development Officer & Curatorial Assistant. Minneapolis Institute of Art. US.

November 2018 – August 2020

Interior Designer, Rug and Textile Expert. Gabbert's Furniture & Design Studio. Minneapolis. US.

April 2015 – December 2015

Event Organizer. Open Space Art Gallery. Victoria, Canada.

January 2018 – December 2018

Researcher. American Craft Council, Minneapolis, USA.

May 2016 – December 2016

Curatorial Intern. National Carpet Museum. Tehran, Iran.

May 2015 – August 2015

Intern. Manuscripts Studies and Conservation Department, Malek National Museum of Art, Tehran, Iran.

September 2014 – August 2015

Research Fellow. Center for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Canada.

January 2015 – December 2015

Guest Curator and Collection Manager. *Mar'ashi* Museum and Manuscripts Collection. Qom, Iran.

September 2010 – August 2013

Research Fellow. Institute for Islamic Art Studies. Tehran, Iran.

October 2020 – March 2021

Co-organizer. Eighth Annual Wollesen Memorial Symposium. University of Toronto. Canada.

September 2011 – August 2012

Co-Editor. Journal of Islamic Art, Institute for Islamic Art Studies. Tehran, Iran.

## Conference Papers Presented

September 2025 (Accepted, forthcoming)

"Music in Safavid and Timurid Manuscripts" Islamic Manuscript Association, SOAS, London.

August 2025 (Accepted, forthcoming)

"Crafting Virtues: The Role of *Futuwwa* in Islamic Artisanal and Architectural Practices" In 10th Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Persianate Societies.

March 2025

“The Intellectual, Ritual, and Social Dimensions of *Futuwws* in Iranian Artisanal Practices.” In New Perspective on Persian Art Symposium, Elaheh Omidyar Center for Iranian Studies, University of Toronto, Canada.

November 2024

“Crafting Virtue: The Fusion of *Futuwwa* and Material Culture in Safavid Iran, with a Focus on *Futuwwatnama-yi Chitsazan*” In Islamic Art workshop, University of York, York, UK.

September 2023

“Furnishing Fabrics: The *Qalamkar* Textiles in the Domestic Interiors of the Qajar, Iran” Interiors Reconfigured – Changing Materiality and Craftsmanship in the Decorative Arts of the Middle East and North Africa, 18th–20th Centuries,” Vitrocentre Romont, Switzerland.

March 2021

“*Futuwwa* tradition and Material Culture of Islamic World” In: 8th Annual Wollesen Memorial Symposium, University of Toronto, March 2021.

February 2016

“Words as Guardians; Talismanic Shirts of Safavid Iran.” In: Global Magic: Sorcery and Spirituality in the Sacred and Profane. Interdisciplinary Student Conference. University of Victoria. Victoria, BC, Canada.

2016

“*Kabnama-yi Bafandegi*, Doctrine of *Jawanmardi* and Artisanal Culture in Safavid Iran,” In: Visual Impetus. Annual Graduate Symposium. Art History and Visual Studies Department, University of Victoria. Victoria, BC, Canada.

January 2015

“Theory and Practice of craft-making in Safavid Iran,” In: Visual Impetus. Annual Graduate Symposium. Art History and Visual Studies Department, University of Victoria. Victoria, BC, Canada.

November 2013

“*Naghshdoui*, the Extinguished Embroideries of *Poum*’s Women.” In: Iranian International Conference on Forgotten Arts Treasures. Academy of Arts, Tehran, Iran.

June 2013

“The Impacts of Marketing Activities on Growth and Development of Iran’s Handicrafts.” In: The First Professional Workshop on Marketing of Iran’s Handicrafts. The Cultural Heritages Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Iran. Arak, Iran.

May 2012

“The Qajar Metal Crafts.” In: The Conference on Art and Architecture of Qajar in Tabriz. Tabriz Islamic Art University. Tabriz, Iran.

December 2011

“*Naghshdouzi*, the Extinguished Art of *Poum*’s Women.” In: The Second Congress on the Iranian Forgotten Arts Treasures. Academy of Arts. Tehran, Iran.

## **Awards & Fellowships**

September 2020 to August 2025

Connaught International Scholarships for Doctoral Students. University of Toronto, Canada.

April 2025

Conference Grant (Accepted) Department of Art History, University of Toronto, Canada.

November 2024

SGS Conference Grant, University of Toronto, Canada.

September 2023

Conference Grant, Department of Art History, University of Toronto, Canada.

Summer 2023

SGS Research Travel Grant. University of Toronto, Canada.

Summer 2022

Barakat Post Graduate Student & Early Career Award. Barakat Trust, United Kingdom.

Academic years of 2020 to August 2025

Department of Art History Graduate Program Awards, 5 Years, University of Toronto, Canada.

Leonore V. Kinghorn Scholarship, 5 Years, University of Toronto, Canada.

Faculty of Arts and Science Fellowship, 5 Years, University of Toronto, Canada.

Tuition Fellowship, 5 Years, University of Toronto, Canada.

Summer 2015

Research Travel Grant. Art History and Visual Studies Department, University of Victoria, Canada.

Summer 2015

Research Travel Grant. Faculty of Graduate Studies. University of Victoria. Canada.

September 2014 – August 2015

Research Fellowship. Centre for Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria, Canada.

September 2014 – August 2015

Second Year Graduate Students Fellowship. Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Victoria, Canada.

Summer 2014

Research Travel Grant. Art History and Visual Studies Department, University of Victoria. Canada.

Summer 2014

Research Travel Grant. Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Victoria, Canada.

Summer 2014

Research Travel Grant. Medieval Studies Program, University of Victoria, Canada.

September 2013 – August 2014

First Year Graduate Students Fellowship. Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Victoria, Canada.

Summers of 2011 & 2012

Two Research Travel Grants. Academy of Arts. Tehran, Iran.

Fall 2008

Graduate Students Research Award for MA Thesis. Tehran University of Art, Iran.

## **Languages**

Persian, English, Arabic (advanced in reading and comprehending, intermediate in writing), French (intermediate in reading)

## **Professional Associations**

Historians of Islamic Art Association

Association for Iranian Studies

American Craft Council

American Society of Interior Designers

## **Other Creative Experience**

2000 – 2025

Several Solo and Group Performances. *Setar* player and Vocalist.

Tehran, Victoria, Vancouver

2004 - 2007

Founder and Director. *Nikart* Craft Studio (multimedia arts and crafts). Tehran, Iran.