



To whom it may concern,

I write in the capacity of Fahimeh Ghorbani's thesis supervisor at the Department of Art History and in strong support of her application. Fahimeh is an exceptional candidate with over a decade of experience in the field of Islamic art history and curatorial practice. She is also a student in excellent academic standing at the Department of Art History. Drawing on expertise from both the academy and museum sector and holding two graduate degrees, numerous awards, and scholarships as well as strong language skills, Fahimeh is well ahead of the curve for PhD students. Her academic and professional experience are highly relevant not only for her proposed project but for current trends within the field of Islamic art. Fahimeh's accomplishments are very impressive for a junior scholar in this field as evidenced by her selection as one of our Connaught Fellows.

Fahimeh holds two master's degrees (in Handicrafts from the Faculty of Art and Architecture as well as Art History from the University of Victoria, Canada) and speaks fluent English, Persian and Arabic. She has translated key texts related to her project as part of her previous graduate work. In her curatorial work she was involved with the planning and re-installation of exhibition spaces for the Islamic art holdings at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, experience which will prove invaluable for framing her research for the broader public. She has also presented at multiple international conferences and has completed several works for publication (single and co-authored).

Her PhD project, which builds on research completed at the MA level, explores the role of futuwwa (a chivalry code relevant to the Islamic practice of Sufism) in shaping Islamic art and architecture. The scope of the project is broad and extends from the medieval to early modern periods of the Persianate Islamic world. The early stages of this research were completed at the MA level, which was described by her advisor at the University of Victoria as one of the strongest he has supervised in the last decade. This project is the first of its kind to explore the relationship between craft guilds and the practice of futuwwa in relation to the development of craft practices and has implications for understanding the institution of futuwwa more broadly. This project is compelling as it engages issues as wide ranging as traditional craft practice, notions of masculinities in traditional and contemporary contexts as well as the morphology and evolution of the architecture of the various khanqahs (or convents) and zurkhanas (gymnasias) which were central to the practice of futuwwa culture. This has far-reaching implications, particularly relevant for traditional craft revitalization efforts which often privilege the tangible over the nontangible practices of craft. With extensive experience carrying out fieldwork in Iran and knowledge of Persian primary source material relevant to her project, she is particularly well-equipped for the doctoral project and can engage multiple audiences. Her background in curatorial and archival practice in particular dovetails with her methodological approach and her strong network in Iran has proven essential.

Since arriving at UofT in 2020 she has made significant progress towards achieving doctoral candidacy. In Fall 2020 she took my graduate seminar titled, "Building the Islamic

Empire: Architecture of the Umayyads” and achieved one of the highest scores in the class. She was one of the most engaged in class discussion and performed to an extremely high academic standard. She also completed an independent study reading course under my supervision in Winter 2021. For both these courses her projects focused on the historical underpinnings of futuwwa, an analysis of material, archival and primary source material, a survey of methodological approaches from analogous research projects and an overview of the state of current research. Over the years she has served as my teaching assistant on several courses at the 200 and 300 levels. Her in depth knowledge, maturity and commitment to student wellbeing were an asset to our students and I commend her highly on her teaching in this respect. This year she taught her first undergraduate seminar on the History of Iranian Cities. While she has struggled in the past with balancing teaching deadlines and her own academic deadlines, her and I have worked closely to define strategies and methods to overcome this. In communicating any concern, I find her extremely receptive, willing to adapt and learn, while also self-aware and dedicated to self-improvement.

Fahimeh has also been active in international conferences. She recently presented a conference paper at the 2nd Annual Islamic Art History Research Workshop, part of the Islamic Art History Research Network (IAHRN) at the University of York, on December 5-6, 2024. Her paper, titled *Crafting Virtue: The Fusion of Futuwwa and Material Culture in Safavid Iran with a Focus on Futuwwatnama-yi Chitsazan* forms part of her thesis dissertation at the Department of Art History at the University of Toronto and is titled, *Crafting Virtue: The Fusion of Futuwwa and Material Culture in Pre-Modern Persianate World (9th to 17th centuries)*.

As a mature and highly experienced candidate, Fahimeh brings a rare skill set. She shows great promise as a young scholar with extensive fieldwork experience, curatorial practice, fluency in multiple research languages, extensive networks with partner communities in Iran as well as over a decade of academic training which includes solid foundations in the historical, theoretical and practice aspects of her project. As the cities of Iran face mounting threats to their cultural heritage, the training of scholars able to inform, educate and mediate becomes ever-more pressing. Fahimeh’s networks in Iran and internationally enable her to contribute to these conversations even further, which include networks with artisans and craft communities, which also critically involves several key partners at academic institutions in Iran, including her ongoing involvement with the University of Kashan. She has demonstrated high resiliency in the face of shifting political forces which have greatly impacted her, including economic downturns in Iran which have impacted her personally.

Fahimeh has been engaged through service and graduate support with the Elahe Omidyar Centre for Iranian Studies as well as the Islamic Art and Material Cultural Collaborative at the Institute of Islamic Studies at the UofT. At the departmental level, she co-organized the 8th Annual Wollesen Memorial Graduate Symposium at the Department of Art History, and was involved in planning, programming, and on-site coordination. She has also been an active member of the Department of Art History Graduate Writing Initiative since 2020, of which I am a co-founder and co-convener. She also continues to support Iranian newcomers to Canada through writing support, mentorship and professional guidance, in addition to supporting graduate students in Iran through mentorship and sharing her experiences as a graduate student in Canada. In this sense she has been engaged in service and community outreach at the Canadian

and international grassroots level, as well as the university and department level, while carrying out her teaching and full-time research.

This grant will enable her to complete the final stages of this critical research, which touches on aspects of urban masculine identities related to cultural institutions still thriving in Iran today. As a committed member of the Department of Art History Graduate Writing Initiative and a regular attendee at our term time and summer writing retreats, she has the discipline, training, and community to make best use of the time afforded to her by this funding. She has completed drafts for two parts out of a three part thesis (pending my final review), with the final part (or chapter) to be completed in 2025-26 alongside the introduction and conclusion and final thesis submission.

This funding will support a young scholar who has proven herself to be dedicated, innovative, committed to self-improvement and focused on thesis completion. She has faced incredibly harsh conditions as an Iranian student, including financial hardship due to the deteriorating situation in Iran. This is in addition to multitude of disruptions to her life and research due to the serious personal implications of the geo-political situation which have impacted her family in Iran directly, and the uncertainty facing her as an Iranian student with limited access to North American job prospects due to travel restrictions. Nevertheless, she continues to persist and produce work of high quality, to support and nurture others, while caring for her own family. I have every confidence Fahimeh will become one of the rising stars in the field of Islamic art and architecture and I recommend her for this scholarship in the highest terms possible.

If you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

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Sincerely,



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