

ARTBeat

ART HISTORY & VISUAL STUDIES GRADUATE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Get in Touch

Do you have an idea or suggestion for the editors of ARTBeat?

Perhaps you'd like to share a story about your current research, professional interests or review an artwork or exhibition?

We are always keen to hear from our community of graduates and alumni and welcome creative contributions.

Please get in touch with the AHVSGA via ahvsga@uvic.ca

Untrodden Pathways

A WORD FROM THE AHVS CHAIR, Dr. MARCUS MILWRIGHT



Shadow Puppet Man Carrying Jugs (Back), Leather and Coloured Textile, 14th-17th century, Egypt, Linden Museum, Stuttgart.

The arrival of a new issue of ARTBeat is always a heartening event. Filled with interesting interviews and reviews, this issue is no exception! You will find inside a discussion with Professor Erin Campbell about changes she has seen in the discipline of Art History, and the ways in which these inform her current approaches to teaching, research, and curatorial practice. There is a focus on the work of Zahra Kazani who is now in Harvard University pursuing her work on the meanings communicated by formal Arabic scripts. You will also find a perceptive account of the mixed media creations of MFA student, Kosar Movahedi, and a review of *Piers*, an exhibition at the Legacy. Many congratulations to the editorial team of ARTBeat for creating this engaging issue, which covers so many different aspects of our department and the Faculty of Fine Arts.

In closing, I'd like to reflect on having served as Chair of the department since 2018. It has been a privilege to undertake this role in Art History and Visual Studies and to find ways of contributing to its vibrant environment of teaching and research. We are indeed fortunate to have students, staff, faculty, adjuncts, and community members who feel so passionately about the value of visual culture, both historical and contemporary. One of the greatest pleasures has been to work with the graduate students, who represent the next generation of scholars in the field. It has been constantly enriching to witness the diversity of the graduate research culture, and to see the ways in which MA and PhD students are bringing new methodologies to their work. This demonstrates how the study of art and visual culture can contribute to questions of cultural heritage, sustainability, and social justice. I look forward to the presentations in the upcoming Visual Impetus conference, and reading about all of your achievements in the coming years!

Dr. Marcus Milwright, Chair | email: mmilwrig@uvic.ca

Department Spotlight: Dr. Erin Campbell

MA, PHD UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

By Vithoria Konzen Dill | MA Candidate



Dr. Campbell, *Life Stories*, Legacy Gallery, 2020. (Curated by Erin Campbell)
Photography by John Threlfall.

I would love to know how you feel regarding the different roles you work across. You research, teach and curate.

How does it differ, working with art in all those different ways?

I like how you put it at the end, 'working with art in all those different ways', because that's essentially what it is. It is being really passionate about studying something, in this case art, and then having discussions through different filters. [So] I actually see all those things as completely interrelated and I integrate my research into my teaching.

My teaching helps me formulate better research questions, and then curating is like a big thought experiment, bringing research ideas into a new medium.

Curation is this interesting combo of teaching and research materialized in a set of objects. So, I see them all as interconnected.

In your classes, you're clearly very concerned about decolonizing art history and expanding your students' approaches. How have you found applying that within your own research? How can we study Europe, without being Eurocentric?

I think I'm still working that through. I feel that because I work on the home it is already a subject that is to the side of mainstream canonical art history. Using the home as a sort of interdisciplinary site, I can bring different questions to that – like gender and sexuality, violence, masculinity – that help me to branch out and diversify the discussion in really interesting ways. The family is interesting as a sociological and historical study combined. It allows you to form multiple points of departure.

Although, yes, I'm still working in Europe, I bring the questions that we're asking in our world art history class. Asking better questions of that material; how can we realise the diversity that Europe exists within, and acknowledge the diversity within Europe? Always remember that there are multiple stories, there are multiple positions of power. Be very transparent about what you're looking at, and very conscious of the privilege too. [Also] Conscious of your own position.

When I curated I had to keep coming to the fact that I was a white, privileged, middle class, settler woman, working in a privileged space at UVic. Talking about objects that make people think about their life stories, whose life stories was I privileging? Was there a diversity there? Was it accessible to a wide range of people in different roles and different stages in their lives? I am perpetually learning, I don't have a formula, but I think it's about being open to the discussions.

Do you notice a difference in the field: from when you first started studying Art History, in Toronto, to now, working here at UVic?

A complete difference. In part, because teaching is more privileged here and we really value dialogue with our students. There's the UVic strategic goals, which differ from what they were at the University of Toronto. So, the real dedication here to Indigenization, to decolonization and close connections to the land here – are much more so than I ever felt in Toronto, in a big city. Just the increase of Indigenous folks on campus – that completely changes the vibe.

When I studied at University of Toronto, it was back really before... it seems crazy to say this, before feminism was really a big thing. That's just the first wave of deconstructing art history. We fought to get the theory on the curriculum, and I don't think it even got there before I left. It was a very white, male-dominated, privileged department.

I learned a lot, but it was quite Eurocentric. The Renaissance was the centre of the world in that department – there were six or seven Renaissance and Baroque specialists.

When I came [to UVic], there was a world art history department. I learned this new word, Eurocentric, which I'd never heard before. I'd never heard the word settler before. The student-centered nature of this campus was so refreshing, coming from the University of Toronto. I still revere [UofT], you know, I really loved my time there, but, man, *it's so different!*



Portrait of a Widow, Ludovico Carracci c.1585, Dayton Art Institute, Oil on Canvas.

DR. CAMPBELL IS A SCHOLAR AND PROFESSOR, WHOSE EXPERTISE INCLUDES THE EARLY MODERN RENAISSANCE PERIOD AND DOMESTIC INTERIORS.

Recent publications include: A Cultural History of Furniture. General Editor, Christina Anderson, vol. II, *The Middle Ages and Renaissance 500-1500*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022. Co-editor.

The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400-1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities. Editor and contributing author. Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2013.

She is the recipient of a SSHRC Insight Grant. (2014-2021).

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Alumni Spotlight: Zahra Kazani

PHD UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA, MA UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, MA AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

By Pascale Sabine Ricard | MA Candidate.

What was the focus of your PhD at UVic?

I am interested in how societies engage with material and visual culture, particularly in the realm of magic. By magic, I mean any interaction in which supernatural forces are harnessed for material gain, such as curing bodily diseases, sparking romantic love, or the bringing of good luck. My focus is on the medieval period from 1100–1250 AD in the Islamic world, where the concept of magic was intertwined with the domain of medicine as well as piety and religion.

In my doctoral dissertation, I examined a particular visual phenomenon: Arabic script arranged in geometric patterns. I argued that the combination of shape and script contributed to the magical processes. Interestingly, I discovered that this visual phenomenon was prevalent across linguistic boundaries (Greek; Aramaic; and Hebrew script) and temporal periods (Late Antiquity and Medieval).

Why did you choose the University of Victoria to complete your PhD?

When I was completing my MA at SOAS, University of London, I attended a talk delivered by Dr. Marcus Milwright and was fascinated by his research on the Dome of the Rock. Dr. Milwright's expertise in the field of Islamic art and his exceptional kindness drew me to UVic. The supportive environment at AHVS, especially of the faculty and staff members (and my fellow graduate students!), allowed me to successfully complete this degree.

Is there anything you wish you knew at the start of your PhD?

While doing an MA or a PhD, you should write out your findings at regular intervals. Writing helps you refine your thinking and is usually where your ideas will come to life. Be prepared to rewrite and rewrite!

Who is your mentor or role model and how have they inspired your academic journey?

I am grateful to have met many brilliant and inspiring people during my time at UVic. I am indebted to my supervisor, Dr. Milwright. His generosity with his time and knowledge, and patient guidance of my research has been instrumental in my professional and academic development. He inspires me by continuing to push traditional boundaries and ways of thinking in the field of Islamic art history.

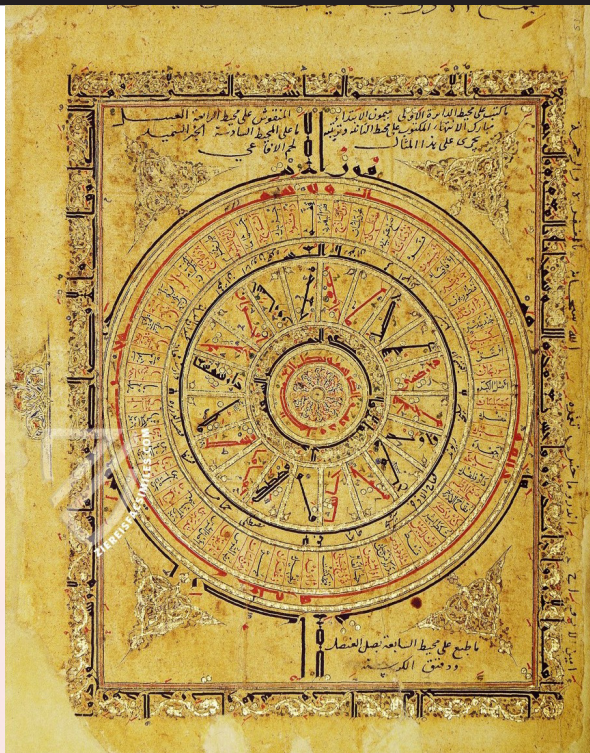
How did you find yourself at Harvard, and did you anticipate this when you were in your undergrad?

My academic trajectory is a little unconventional. I went to business school for my undergraduate studies at the University of Texas at Austin, majoring in finance and accounting. Intellectually, I was captivated by my elective courses in the humanities and decided to pursue a second BA in Islamic Studies.

After my first MA degree in Cultural Studies, I worked in museums for several years before choosing to go back to graduate school. I wanted to dive deeper into the history and lives of art objects, completing an MA and a PhD in art history.

Dr. Zahra Kazani has extensive international museum curatorial experience. After the completion of two MA degrees, she graduated in 2022 with a PhD in Art History and Visual Studies from the University of Victoria. Dr. Kazani is now a Postdoctoral Fellow with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University.

“The way to move forward is to find what sparks your curiosity and your passion”



Kitāb al-diryāq, Muhammad ibn Abī I-Fath, Illustrated Manuscript, Parchment. Iraq, c.1199. Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris.

What is it like at Harvard in the History of Art and Architecture Department? Are your postdoctoral studies connected to your PhD?

My fellowship project stems from my doctoral dissertation. I look closely at a large stucco panel from the Mosque of Nur al-Din Zangi, built in the twelfth century in the city of Mosul, Iraq. Much of Mosuli architecture has recently been destroyed by the ISIS invasions in the city. The Fine Arts Library at Harvard has a robust collection of photographs taken during the early twentieth century, from Mosul and the surrounding regions. I am closely examining these photographs to shed light on the city of Mosul.

I am also working with the photographic archive of Iraqi architects, Rifat Chadirji (1926–2020) and Mohamed Makiya (1914–2015), held at the Aga Khan Documentation Center at MIT. Through study of these materials, I am tracing another visual device: the knotting or interlacing of Arabic script and interpreting its likely function as an apotropaic device.

What is next for the development of your academic career?

I am working towards a book project based on my doctoral dissertation. The research I am conducting during my current fellowship will also contribute substantially towards this project.

Finally, what piece of advice or encouragement would you give current MA and PhD students?

Be proactive and explore opportunities both within and outside the university. You are very lucky to be part of a supportive academic environment that wants to see you shine, so keep pushing forwards!

Congratulations

Dr. Marcus Milwright!

We would like to extend our congratulations to Dr. Marcus Milwright on his recent award of the British Academy’s Global Professorship. This incredibly prestigious award, a fellowship of \$1.4 million, will begin in February 2023, at the University of York. The four-year research project will see Dr. Milwright continue his award-winning research. He will be conducting his proposed project, “Making Meaning: Craft Practises and the Process of Change in Islamic Art,” through 2023-27. This is a testament to the internationally renowned and boundary-pushing research Dr. Milwright continues to produce in the academic field.

Dr. Milwright has been a valued part of the AHVS department since 2002 and served as Chair since 2018. As a specialist in traditional craft practises and cultural interfaces between the Middle East and the Mediterranean, he has guided numerous graduate students as an advisor and inspiring scholar. An always engaging, empathetic and gifted teacher, he always impelled graduate students to approach their research with enthusiasm, object-centred practises and encouraged academic rigor and pride in their work from the very beginning. He also demonstrated the value of integrating technology into research approaches in our ever-changing discipline, developing the digital platform and podcast *Gateway to Art* and research websites *Crafts of Syria* and *Crafts of Iraq*. We bid him a very fond farewell as he departs for the UK and will be eagerly watching as the results of his project evolve.

MFA: Kosar Movahedi

MFA FINE ARTS, BSC COMPUTER SCIENCE, VISUAL ARTS ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE

By Sarah Roberts | MA Candidate.

Kosar Movahedi's mixed media art exhibition invites viewers to do things in an "around the head" way: playing with process, resisting linearity, and trusting tangential thoughts. Movahedi decided on her title, an idiomatic phrase in Farsi, to encapsulate her artistic practice as she began her MFA. "It's a way of doing something that makes no sense, but it's still a solution. When I would go to explain what I was doing, I kept wanting to use the explanation in Farsi. That's how the title solidified itself."

Whereas, previously her work was based in photography, she has begun experimenting with three-dimensional works, plaster sculpture, video, textiles, and installation, negotiating our bodies' relationship with the outer world. "I started seeing the body as space. [As a photographer] I saw walls as the "skin" around rooms, and around space, now I was seeing the body as this. The skin is outlining the space our body holds."

Movahedi references the work of Austrian performance and installation artist Erwin Wurm, whose One Minute Sculptures provides the audience with instructions and invites them to articulate shapes or interact with banal, inanimate objects. Though the works seem somewhat whimsical; they form a commentary surrounding the social treatment of the human form as a material object.

Movahedi's work "riffs" off Wurm, reframing it from a gendered lens. "My response became a more feminine specific experience. It discusses resting, taking a rest from being seen as a "sexualized" being, and maybe resting our boobs or butts. I was thinking about space as socially negotiated."

Movahedi actively encourages viewers to become part of the work's significance. The show is lively and invites you to approach the objects with curiosity. For instance, Movahedi's drawings play with scale, inviting visitors to lean in and observe tiny sketches on a giant sheet of paper. Elsewhere there are blankets to lift, fabrics to feel. On the floor is a pair of low-heeled shoes: the viewer can imagine slipping them on and trotting around the gallery floor.

Referencing the shoes, Movahedi explains the tensions we negotiate between inner and outer selves. In using the "around the head" motif, she wanted to find a different solution. "I wanted to create heels that are "backwards". We are often told that heels will make our "butt" look bigger, so I asked, what about heels that make your butt look smaller?"

It is a playful reversal of bodies and social manipulation. Her work plays with double entendre and humorously comments upon gendered binaries in our society. A zipper device she created, can be placed around audiences' heads, with the invitation to "unzip": a commentary on consent.

Discussing the sense of playfulness and puns in her work, Movahedi describes, "It's rooted in a semantic way of thinking, thinking about language and subverting those structures.

"The test of first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

F Scott Fitzgerald.

Sometimes you can turn something on its head. Sometimes a title can become something, so in this show, that was a big entry-way."

Quite different from her photography-based works, which portrayed formalist and austere architectural spaces, these works seem intimately connected to the human presence. However, this is a continuation of thought. Movahedi says, "really, I saw it as the same exploration of space. My photography was doing that, exploring a tension between depth and flatness, and then clothes did that. Fabric does that. So that became the same exploration but in a different language."

Kosar uses her body as a consistent reference in the work, marking each piece with her corporeal being, even when she is not physically present. There are tiny drawings that intrigue the viewer, scaled on the artist's body. The fabrics, clothing and devices are also built from her size as a reference point.

Gendered binaries, diasporic, and bi-racial identities all come to the fore as Movahedi negotiates her own experience as an Iranian Canadian. "This duality has always been part of my identity, and not belonging in each of these settings. Being in Iran and not feeling totally the same, and then being in Canada and not quite fitting here. I'm very interested in the realm of bilingualism and growing up with both languages. [English and Farsi] You have to learn how to have those things together, holding multiple things at once."

There's a phrase from the Great Gatsby that Movahedi shares with me, which encapsulates this complexity: unbinding ourselves from static meanings. Around the Head tells us it's possible for us to be multiple, fluid, bilingual, holding on to numerous cultural, gender and social identities. A challenging and curious show, this description rings true, but it finds this truth" the "Around the Head" way.



Low-Heeled Shoes, Kosar Movahedi, 2022. Mixed Media Sculpture. Photograph courtesy of the artist.

Legacy Downtown Review: PIERS

By Jessica Ziakin-Cook | MA Candidate.

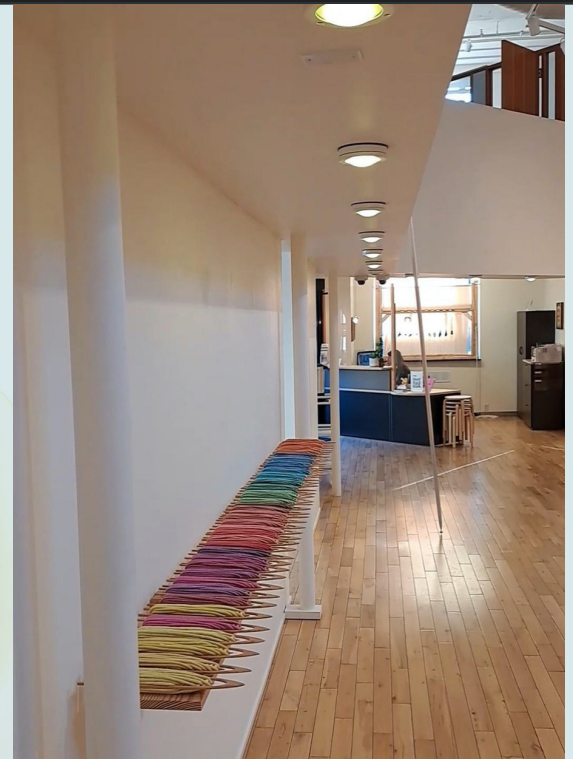
The Legacy Gallery's current show, Piers, demolishes the hierarchies that define art departments. Nine artists from the University's department of Visual Arts, including technicians, students, sessional instructors, and faculty (both present and retired), show alongside one another in one unifying show. Each artist responds to the same concept: nominating a student or mentor that influenced their work. The show insists on the value of the artists' work, regardless of position in the institution.

Within the gallery, pieces invoke haptic sensations, and linger with the viewer. Works by Christopher Lindsay (*many nets to mend*, 2022), and his nominated artist Lauren Brinson (*The Fortune Teller*, 2022) have a strong tactile relationship. Netting, a material cross-over point, references social histories of fisher-folk. It reminds viewers of the kinship networks of those who live on and near piers. The works conjure the idea of a pier reaching out into the sea, as both launch and landing pad; enabling further exploration and harvesting of the deep.

Elsewhere, Megan Dickie (*the only*, 2020) and nominee Hollis Roberts' works visually connect via their colorful palettes and large-scale imposition in the gallery space. Both work with mixed media, process-based sculpture; they represent an intimate connection through grief and the therapeutic value of repetitive and tedious processes of making. Their established presence in the gallery finds a counterpoint in the artists' biographies that root their making in their experiences of loss. The pieces stand on their own, complete in themselves, yet readily in dialogue with the rest of the show.

The show's displays invite and engage dialogues and conversations that exercise an exciting leveling of conventional hierarchies between student, staff, and faculty. However, the relationship between the artists and their inspiring mentor or student is not revealed. Instead, it's made accessible only through an online PDF. Object labels may be difficult to find, with one panel covering the four or five works in each room of the gallery. As a result, the connections between the works often become Easter eggs, only discovered with research.

It's possible that the show's organizers refrained from mapping the mentor-mentee relationships, preferring not to compromise the works' rights to stand on their own. Yet, this goes against the show's wonderful premise: artists do not stand alone, their work is embedded in relationships. For a pier to work, for users to benefit from its reach, its constituent parts must be connected.



Christopher Lindsay's 2022 *many nets to mend*, hand-dyed cotton rope, wooden shuttles. Photograph by Jessica Ziakin-Cook

Piers was displayed at the Legacy
Downtown Gallery | 630 Yates St. Victoria, BC.
from September 28 to December 22, 2022.

Find out more and access the
Exhibition Booklet:

<https://legacy.uvic.ca/gallery/blog/>



Visual Impetus 2023

Patterns of Resistance: Art as Revelation

January 20th 4 pm-7 pm

January 21st 9:30 am-4:30 pm

With Special Guest: India Young, Curator of Art and Images, RBCM

This year we invite all graduate students and early career researchers to submit their abstracts responding to the theme:

Art as Resistance and Revelation.

Visit our website for more information

<https://finearts.uvic.ca/historyinart/graduateassociation/vi2023/>

email: visualimpetus@uvic.ca

Poster by Pascale Sabine Ricard, On Behalf of VI Organizing Committee.



What's on:

Gule Wamkulu: Dancing Indigenous Governance.

Legacy Gallery, 630 Yates Street. January 14th-April 8th, 2023.

Free Admission. Opening Event, January 28th 2023, 3-5pm.

Heart of the House: Art and the West Coast Modern Home.

January 28th - May 14th 2023. Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Open Tues-Sun. Admission fees and hours: www.aggv.ca

Heart of the House opening reception with curator, Steven McNeil.

Art Gallery of Greater Victoria. Friday January 27th, 5pm-7pm.

Dress code 1960s Cocktail Attire. Free Admission.



Jack Shadbolt, 1986, *Choice (Altered Poster of Metropolitan Life Tapestry)*, Painting. DIDO Image Library. (Shadbolt's works, will be on display for Heart of the House at the AGGV).

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www.finearts.uvic.ca/historyinart/graduateassociation

About ARTbeat

ARTbeat is created by the Art History & Visual Studies Graduate Association twice annually to share news and updates from our academic community.

Many thanks to our team of editors and contributors:

Rashana Youtzy, Lewis Nicholson, Jessica Ziakin-Cook, Pascale S. Ricard, Vithoria Konzen Dill, Miranda Carroll, Sarah Roberts

