Press Release

Ayşin Yoltar-Yıldırım Appointed Curator of Islamic and Later Indian Art at the Harvard Art Museums

Cambridge, MA
September 8, 2022

Martha Tedeschi, the Elizabeth and John Moors Cabot Director of the Harvard Art Museums, announced today the appointment of Ayşin Yoltar-Yıldırım as the new Norma Jean Calderwood Curator of Islamic and Later Indian Art at the Harvard Art Museums, effective October 3, 2022.

Currently the Hagop Kevorkian Associate Curator of Islamic Art at the Brooklyn Museum, in New York, Yoltar-Yıldırım has worked since August 2017 to organize the extensive reinstallation of the Brooklyn Museum’s Arts of the Islamic World galleries, which after being closed for a decade are slated to reopen on September 30, 2022. She also curated the 2018–19 exhibition Syria, Then and Now: Stories from Refugees a Century Apart.

Earlier in her career, Yoltar-Yıldırım held curatorial, research, and teaching positions as well as fellowships at several institutions in her native Turkey and the United States, including with the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University, The Barakat Trust, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She has presented at multiple conferences and taught courses on Islamic...
art throughout the United States and in Turkey. She is the author of the handbook *Ottoman Decorative Arts*, as well as several articles on Islamic arts of the book and the history of Islamic collections.

Yoltar-Yıldırım received a B.A. in art history and archaeology at Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey, in 1991 and an M.A. and Ph.D. in art history at the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University in 1994 and 2002, respectively.

Yoltar-Yıldırım returns to the Harvard Art Museums after having served as the Assistant Curator for Islamic and Later Indian Art from 2013 to 2017, and prior to that, the 2011–13 Norma Jean Calderwood Curatorial Fellow. During her time as a fellow, she assisted in the planning and installation of the 2013 exhibition *In Harmony: The Norma Jean Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art* and contributed entries to the accompanying catalogue. As an assistant curator she took part in the preparation and installation of the new Islamic and Later Indian art galleries, which opened as part of the renovated and expanded Harvard Art Museums facility in Fall 2014. She also organized the 2017 exhibition *A New Light on Bernard Berenson: Persian Paintings from Villa I Tatti*, after which she edited and contributed to the 2021 publication *Persian Manuscripts & Paintings from the Berenson Collection*.

In her new role at the Harvard Art Museums, Yoltar-Yıldırım will join the Division of Asian and Mediterranean Art and oversee the museums’ collection of Islamic and South Asian art. She will participate in a museum-wide rethinking and reframing of the museums’ permanent collections galleries and will develop future special exhibitions dedicated to the art of the Islamic regions and South Asia. She will collaborate with colleagues across the museums and campus to acquire new objects to diversify the holdings. She will also work closely with students and faculty to expand use of the collection in undergraduate and graduate teaching across disciplines; she will mentor students and curatorial fellows, training and nurturing the next generation in her field.

“We could not be more excited to welcome Ayşin back to the Harvard Art Museums, and we look forward to working with her on shaping an institutional vision that promotes a more inclusive and expansive cultural space,” said director Martha Tedeschi.

“I am thrilled to be coming back to the Harvard Art Museums and look forward to activating the Islamic and South Asian collection in new ways,” said Yoltar-Yıldırım.

The Harvard Art Museums’ collection of Islamic and South Asian art comprises devotional and secular works in a wide range of media made primarily by peoples living in Western, Central, and South Asia and around the Mediterranean from the early seventh century to the present day. Objects from Turkey, Iran, and India are especially well represented. Persian paintings, drawings, and calligraphy are a particular strength, as is Rajasthani painting. Ceramics, textiles, metalwork, and objects of other materials demonstrate a strong command of artistry and technique as well as rich cross-cultural exchanges. The majority of these objects are ceramic tiles and vessels from Islamic regions, but there are notable holdings of lacquer from Iran, pile carpets and Ottoman luxury silks, medieval and early modern metalwork, and coins. A cross-divisional initiative has added photographs from South Asia.

**About the Harvard Art Museums**

The Harvard Art Museums house one of the largest and most renowned art collections in the United States, comprising three museums (the Fogg, Busch-Reisinger, and Arthur M. Sackler Museums) and four research centers (the Straus Center for Conservation and Technical Studies, the Center for the Technical Study of Modern Art, the Harvard Art Museums Archives, and the Archaeological Exploration of Sardis). The Fogg Museum includes Western art from the Middle Ages to the present; the Busch-Reisinger Museum, unique among North American museums, is dedicated to the study of all modes and periods of art from central and northern Europe, with an emphasis on German-speaking countries; and the Arthur M. Sackler Museum is focused on art from Asia, the Middle East, and the
Mediterranean. Together, the collections include over 255,000 objects in all media. The Harvard Art Museums are distinguished by the range and depth of their collections, their groundbreaking exhibitions, and the original research of their staff. Integral to Harvard University and the wider community, the museums and research centers serve as resources for students, scholars, and the public. For more than a century they have been the nation’s premier training ground for museum professionals and are renowned for their seminal role in developing the discipline of art history in the United States. The Harvard Art Museums have a rich tradition of considering the history of objects as an integral part of the teaching and study of art history, focusing on conservation and preservation concerns as well as technical studies. harvardartmuseums.org

The Harvard Art Museums receive support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

**Hours and Admission**

Open Tuesday–Sunday, 10am–5pm; closed Mondays and major holidays. Admission: $20 adults, $18 seniors (65+). Free to all visitors on Sundays (all day) and the last Thursday of every month (5–9pm); on other days, free to: members, all students (with valid ID), youth under 18, Cambridge residents (proof of residency required), Harvard ID holders (plus one guest), active duty military personnel (NEA Blue Star Museums), and individuals with SNAP benefits or an EBT card. On Saturdays, 10am–noon, Massachusetts residents receive free admission (proof of residency required). For further information about visiting, including important COVID-19 policies, see harvardartmuseums.org/visit.

**For more information, please contact**

Jennifer Aubin
Public Relations Manager
Harvard Art Museums
617-496-5331
jennifer_aubin@harvard.edu