Based at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture (AKPIA) is dedicated to the study of Islamic art and architecture, urbanism, landscape design, and conservation – and the application of that knowledge to contemporary design projects. The goals of the program are to improve the teaching of Islamic art and architecture; to promote excellence in advanced research; to enhance the understanding of Islamic architecture, urbanism, and visual culture in light of contemporary theoretical, historical, critical, and developmental issues; and to promote knowledge of the Islamic cultural heritage. Established in 1979, AKPIA is supported by an endowment from His Highness the Aga Khan.

“I have selected two of America’s most distinguished architectural schools – Harvard and MIT – and established a program for Islamic architecture. This program will not only utilize their immense intellectual resources for the benefit of scholars seeking to understand Islamic architecture, but also circulate this expertise among students, teachers, and universities in Muslim and Western countries.”

His Highness the Aga Khan, 21 April 1980
During the late 1970s, a series of discussions took place between His Highness the Aga Khan and faculty members at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. These talks explored the feasibility of creating a permanent program, based on these two institutions, to study Islamic architecture, urbanism, and visual culture. These deliberations culminated in discussions between the Aga Khan and the presidents of the two sponsoring institutions that eventually led to the establishment of the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture in 1979.

Conceptualizing the program began in the mid-seventies. Those involved in the process came at it with a sense of humility in the face of issues that were sensed, but that had never been intellectualized or rationalized. We started with an immense process of inquiry. The industrialized world was dominating the process of change in the Third World, and, that domination resulted in an educational process in the Islamic world, which was First World driven. Therefore, we had to accept that an educational role was necessary. The question was how to design an educational resource that would have the maximum possible impact and, at the same time, have a legitimacy which would make it acceptable to much of the Islamic world, which were First World driven. Therefore, we had to accept that an educational role was necessary. The question was how to design an educational resource that would have the maximum possible impact and, at the same time, have a legitimacy which would make it acceptable to much of the Islamic world.

That became the basis for the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

His Highness the Aga Khan, 31 August 2001

My sense was that while there was a fairly good understanding of programmatic requirements, the contextualization of those programmatic requirements in our part of the world just didn’t exist.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

As a student of history, you learn about the cultural process of history. I was looking at the physical environment in the developing world, and I had to ask myself what we were doing, correctly, or incorrectly. My sense was that while there was a fairly good understanding of programmatic requirements, the contextualization of those programmatic requirements in our part of the world just didn’t exist.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

The program is led by a distinguished core of five faculty members specializing in Islamic art and architecture, and enhanced by affiliated and visiting professors in allied fields.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

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His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

Legitimacy • Art in the Wake of the Mongol Conquests • Critical Issues in Contemporary Design • Islamic Architecture and the Environment • Islamic Architecture and the Urban Environment • Islamic Architecture and the Urban Environment • Islamic Architecture and the Urban Environment

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

A Positive Force

In the ensuing years, AKPIA’s faculty, students, and alumni have played a significant role in advancing the analysis, understanding and practice of Islamic art and architecture. Among the program’s achievements:

1. The program is led by a distinguished core of five faculty members specializing in Islamic art and architecture, and enhanced by affiliated and visiting professors in allied fields.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

2. The continued research and publications of AKPIA faculty, fellows, and students have contributed to learning, and the repository of knowledge, relating to Islamic art and architecture, enabling and enriching critical debates.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

3. AKPIA alumni have assumed influential roles around the world as academics, curators, government officials, and practicing architects.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

4. Through the sponsorship of research, centres, workshops, and conferences, AKPIA has enabled a wide community of experts to interact with and communicate ideas to students.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

5. AKPIA library collections at Harvard and MIT are among the world’s most extensive; these resources are available to scholars, practitioners and students around the world, through offline and online publications, and libraries.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

6. AKPIA represents one of the most visible, pervasive, and enduring collaborations between Harvard and MIT.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

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Gülru Necipoğlu

Gülru Necipoğlu joined AKPIA as one of the program’s first graduate students in 1979, receiving a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1986. She joined the Harvard faculty in 1987 and was named Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art at Harvard in 1993. Her publications include: Architecture, Urban Planning, and Urbanism in Islamic Egypt (E. J. Brill, 1995), The Topkapi Palace: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture, Ceremony, and Power (Reaktion Books, 2004), and Architecture, Ceremony, and Power: The Topkapi Palace in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries (forthcoming, 2004). Professor Rabbat serves on the boards of various organizations concerned with Islamic cultures, lectures extensively in the US and abroad, contributes to a variety of newspapers and magazines, and maintains several websites focused on Islamic architecture.

Nasser Rabbat

Nasser Rabbat is the Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Architecture at MIT, where he has been teaching since producing his Ph.D. from MIT in 1995. His books include: The Cycle of Cairo: A New Interpretation of Oriental Architecture (E. J. Brill, 1995), Thaqafat al-Bina: A Model for the Modern Enlightenment (Khitat wa Bina, 2004), The Citadel of Cairo: A New Approach (2006), and Interpretation of Royal Mamluk Architecture (Arabe, 2004). He is the General Editor of the City of Knowledge and the City of the Sign: The Significance of Topkapi Project (2004). Professor Rabbat serves on the boards of various organizations concerned with Islamic cultures, lectures extensively in the US and abroad, contributes to a variety of newspapers and magazines, and maintains several websites focused on Islamic architecture.

“AKPIA offers both a solid academic setting for the exploration of the architectural culture of other cultures in changeless ‘types.’”

“I believe that the Islamic tradition is analogous to the American notion of the ‘melting pot,’ in which a pluralistic blending of cultures, traditions, and aesthetics has resulted in a rich mosaic.”

“AKPIA represents a mutually enriching collaboration between two of the world’s great universities. Harvard offers an interdisciplinary environment that offers virtually unlimited breadth of Islamic art and architecture, and exposes both students and the global architectural community to the many facets and dimensions of this burgeoning field.”

“The most profound achievement of AKPIA, in my opinion, is to argue for a critical reappraisal of the dominant paradigm of architectural history, which legitimizes a self-conscious and evolving Western architectural tradition while casting the architecture of other cultures in changeless ‘types.’”

“AKPIA faculty is composed of internationally respected professors. Through their teaching, research, and publications, they are making significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge about Islamic art and architecture.”

“With the wealth of knowledge that AKPIA faculty bring to MIT, the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture is one of the world’s leading centers for the study of Islamic architecture. Through the faculty’s teaching, research, and publications, they are making significant contributions to the advancement of knowledge about Islamic art and architecture.”

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“Thanks to the resources of the AKPIA program, we can study current conditions in the context of traditional and modern design approaches, and compare them with similar instances in other areas of the world, particularly in Latin America and Southeast Asia.”

A. Hashim Sarkis

Hashim Sarkis is the first Aga Khan Professor of Landscape Architecture and Urbanism at Harvard. He earned the Master of Science in Landscape Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania (1994) and received his Bachelor degrees in architecture and fine arts from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), and Master and Ph.D. degrees in architecture from the GSD, Harvard University. Professor Sarkis has taught at MIT, RISD, Yale, and the American University of Beirut, and is a practicing architect in Lebanon and the United States.

“My primary focus at the GSD is to examine the impact of development on the shaping of regional territories in the Muslim world, and to generate the means by which the design of the landscape can be improved. Since the end of the Second World War, development – whether guided by the capitalist world (as in North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia) or the planning models of the Soviet bloc (as in Eastern Europe and the Turkic territories) – has deeply affected the economic, political, and physical environments of Muslim societies. As a result, regional agricultural productive and population distributions have become skewed, reflecting a collective aspiration against agriculture, and the city against the country. Through research, we aim to understand the impact of such policies on the landscape of regional territories, focusing on the emerging environmental concerns, and land use. Thanks to the resources of the AKPIA program, we can study current conditions in the context of traditional and modern design approaches, and compare them with similar instances in other areas of the world, particularly in Latin America and Southeast Asia. Moving from research to practical application, the program operates on three fronts: academic, professional, and public outreach.”

David Roxburgh

An associate faculty member of the Aga Khan Program, David Roxburgh is a full professor in the Department of History of Art and Architecture at Harvard. His publications include The Persian Album, 1530–1600: From Garden to Collected (Yale University Press, 2004) and Painting the Image. The Writing of Art History from 18th-Century Iran (Yale, 2011). He completed a Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in 1996, and has received numerous fellowships and conducted extensive research in North America, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. His research focuses on the visual arts, principally the arts of the book, painting, and calligraphy.

“Islamic art and architecture are hugely significant fields that have reached a critical turning point. In the past, much of the academic work related to these areas was conducted from an “Orientalist” perspective. Thanks to AKPIA and other programs, this focus is shifting toward a more informed approach to the complexities of Islamic societys, and the links that exist between architectural spaces and human experience. Basing the program at Harvard and MIT provides students with access to exceptional, world-class academic resources – from immense libraries to lecture series, fellowships, and conferences. The success of AKPIA graduates in obtaining prestigious positions at academic and cultural institutions offers compelling evidence of the program’s importance and long-term stability.”

Heghnar Watenpaugh

Heghnar Watenpaugh is an assistant professor of the history of architecture and the Aga Khan Eastern Development Professor at MIT. She received a Ph.D. in art history from University of California, Los Angeles. Prior to joining AKPIA, she served as an assistant professor of art history at Rice University. Her research addresses issues of urban and architectural history; early modern and modern Islamic societies. She teaches courses on theories of preservation as well as architecture and gender, and she is currently completing a book entitled The Image of an Urban City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Practice in Aleppo in the Seventh and Twelfth Centuries.

“Growing up in Beirut, I lived in an environment where the architecture had been both profoundly enriched and deeply traumatized by the forces of modernity, colonialism, and nationalism. One of the courses I teach at MIT, “Heritage as a Battleground,” focuses on how these forces affect the study and preservation of architectural forms, particularly within the Islamic world. More than any other program, AKPIA gives students and faculty members a forum where vital issues facing architectural culture are vigorously debated, making it a most exciting, creative, and intellectual environment.”
AKPIA students benefit not only from their participation in the basic components of the program, but also from numerous opportunities offered at Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology:

- **Special library collections**
The Aga Khan Documentation Center at the Harvard Fine Arts Library and the AKPIA Collections at MIT’s Rotch Library comprise a unique resource: thousands of books, more than 200,000 images, and other materials that provide literary and visual information on a vast range of historically important Islamic art, architecture, and ethnography. In addition, a wide range of specialized periodicals and monographs, museum and exhibition catalogues, documents of preservation and planning authorities, and of anthropological excavations strengthen the collections. Supported by program funds, these collections complement the library holdings maintained by the two sponsoring institutions. Both historical and contemporary, they provide unparalleled aids to study and research.

- **Architect**
Created through a partnership between MIT, Harvard, and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, Architect (http://archnet.org) is a comprehensive online architectural library combining visual and textual sources. Architect brings together a growing global community of scholars, students, and professionals concerned with architecture, planning, and landscape design. Members gain access to comprehensive architectural resources, new perspectives on the built environment, and insights into Islamic design and culture.

- **Publications**

- **Conferences and seminars**
AKPIA funds bring leading scholars from around the world to Cambridge for conferences and seminars that disseminate new ideas and promote critical debate. Past events include "Surveying Surveys of Islamic Art and Architecture" (May 2013, Harvard), "Global Geographies" (April 2015, Harvard), and "Exploring the Frontiers of Islamic Art and Architecture" (May 2003, MIT).

- **Harvard University Art Museums**
The Harvard University Art Museums are renowned for the quality of their extensive collections, including European and North American paintings, prints, and photographs (Fogg Museum), ancient, Islamic, and Indian arts (Sackler Museum); and German Expressionist painting (Busch-Reisinger Museum).

- **The Boston-Cambridge area**
In addition to Harvard and MIT, the Boston area boasts more than 70 institutions of higher learning, including the Museum of Fine Arts, which features a rich collection of Islamic art. Boston and Cambridge also offer extensive cultural and recreational resources, as well as a rich tradition of academic excellence and intellectual freedom.

- **Lecture series**
Each year, the three AKPIA units sponsor lecture series that provide participants with exposure to the latest research from leading experts in the field. Recent topics include: "When Literature and Architecture Meet: Intersection of Poems and Monuments in Sixteenth-Century Istanbul," "Kerman, the "Miraculous" Insular: A Study in Urban History," "My Suita: My Self The Tale of Sultan and Turks in Renaissance Domestic Painting," "MTP: The Middle East and Mediterranean Media," "Sultans: The Alphabet Outcomes of Millenia of Mayhem," and "Grazing Heritage or the End of Tradition: The Aga Khan Program has a long tradition of emphasizing travel as an important part of education. AKPIA emphasizes the value of the first-hand experience of architecture as living culture. AKPIA provides grants each year on a competitive basis for summer research, including language study and travel-related reconsideration of these topics. Current examples of field-based research projects sponsored through the program include:

- **Architect and Domains – The Construction of Otorian Aleppo**
- **Architect and Domains – Assessment of the Impact of Summer Olympics on the Host City**
- **Caris, Harlaxton, London, and Paris – Wonder and Its Images in Late Medieval Islam**
- **Harvard University Art Museums**
- **The Boston-Cambridge area**

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Hana Alamuddin

Hana Alamuddin is the principal of Al-Mimariya, an architectural and design firm in Beirut. She received an MSc in architectural studies from MIT in 1987. As a civic активист, she has served on the Beirut Ministry of Culture’s Technical Committee for the Preservation of the Architectural Heritage of Beirut. She has received numerous scholarships and awards, including a grants to study the 마드리드 city of تونس and Casablanca in Morocco. “I went to AKPIA hoping to find answers to questions related to our environment; there are no real enemies: we’re all involved in studying the built environment. The program served as an anchor, a home base for my professional and intellectual development.”

Mohammad al-Asad

Mohammad al-Asad is an architect and architectural historian, and the founding director of the Center for the Study of the Built Environment in Amman, Jordan. He received his architecture degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and received a Ph.D. in architectural history from Harvard University in 1989. He has held professorial research positions at Harvard University and the Instituto de Investigación de Arquitectura at Princeton University, and has taught at institutions around the world. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Royal Society for Fine Arts. “As a graduate student at Harvard, I was among the first group of students to participate in AKPIA and I was motivated by a fascination with Islamic art and a desire to study with Oleg Grabar, the first Arab specialist in Islamic art. AKPIA played an integral role in my formation as a scholar, and helped keep my mind open to the fact that all art-making is international. In my current position, I remain focused on how artists from the Islamic world have continuously grappled with the idea of modernity. I’ve ended up doing much more than that. I learned that initially seem to restrict our aspirations to always look beyond the immediate boundaries of our discipline and to blend with the rest of the world.”

Elizabeth Dean Hermann

Elizabeth Dean Hermann is Associate Professor of Landscape Architecture and Architectural History and former Head of the Department of Landscape Architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design. She received a Ph.D. in landscape and architectural history from Harvard University as 2019 for her dissertation, “Urban Environments and Landscape Symbolic Use of Ancient Landscapes for Social, Political, and Environmental Change in Fourteenth-Century Nishapur.” “I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at Harvard in order to obtain the opportunity to carry on in-depth exploration of my cultural heritage. I entered the program with the conviction that all art-making is international. In my current position, I remain focused on how artists from the Islamic world have continuously grappled with the idea of modernity. I’ve ended up doing much more than that. I learned that initially seem to restrict our aspirations to always look beyond the immediate boundaries of our discipline and to blend with the rest of the world.”

Glenn Lowry

In 1995, Glenn D. Lowry became the first director of The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. He has held postdoctoral research positions at Harvard University and the Instituto de Investigación de Arquitectura at Princeton University, and has taught at institutions around the world. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Royal Society for Fine Arts. “As a graduate student at Harvard, I was among the first group of students to participate in AKPIA and I was motivated by a fascination with Islamic art and a desire to study with Oleg Grabar, the first Arab specialist in Islamic art. AKPIA played an integral role in my formation as a scholar, and helped keep my mind open to the fact that all art-making is international. In my current position, I remain focused on how artists from the Islamic world have continuously grappled with the idea of modernity. I’ve ended up doing much more than that. I learned that initially seem to restrict our aspirations to always look beyond the immediate boundaries of our discipline and to blend with the rest of the world.”

Since completing their studies at AKPIA, the following alumni have distinguished themselves through their work, research, and leadership. In their own words, they describe the impact of the AKPIA program on their careers.
Embracing the Future

While the Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture has accomplished a great deal in the effort to advance the study and practice of Islamic art and architecture in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries, its work has only begun. It is the aim of the program that the pluralistic traditions of the Islamic world—and their implications for modern built environments—will continue to play an increasingly important role in academia and in architectural practice throughout the world.

APfIA continues to be an important locus of both theory and practice and a leading academic influence in the discipline. For those with an interest in pursuing studies of Islamic art and architecture at the graduate level, APfIA offers a broad array of intellectual resources within a dynamic and diverse learning community.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology Information Services

For more information

To learn more about APfIA and its programs and initiatives, please visit our websites.

Website: http://web.mit.edu/akpia/www/AKPsite/index.html
Email: akpiaarch@mit.edu
Tel: 617.253.1400 | Fax: 617.258.8172
United States of America

For applications

To apply, please visit our websites.

Website: http://web.mit.edu/akpia/www/AKPsite/index.html
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Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture at MIT

General program information

Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture

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AKPIA continues to be an important locus of both theory and practice and a leading academic influence in the discipline. For those with an interest in pursuing studies of Islamic art and architecture at the graduate level, AKPIA offers a broad array of intellectual resources within a dynamic and diverse learning community.

Embracing the Future

Each year, AKPIA welcomes postdoctoral scholars from overseas who come to MIT and Harvard in support of their historical research in architectural history, and archaeology. Visiting professors deliver guest lectures in conjunction with their research and publish the results in Muqarnas. The international perspectives of these scholars play a critical role in enriching the discourse at AKPIA. Past fellows and their project titles include:

• Samer Akkach, University of Adelaide, Journeys & Geo-Poetic Desires: A Critical Reading of Architecture and Landscape in al-Nablusi’s Travel Memoirs
• Marianne Barrucand, University of Paris, Sorbonne, Forms and Functions of Ornament in Fatimid Architecture
• Sibel Bozdog˘an, University of California, Berkeley, Reframing the Ottoman Legacy: Nationalism, Modernism and Architectural Historiography in Republican Turkey
• Maurizio Mario Cerpa, University of Genoa, Language, Culture, and Typological Concepts in the Genesis of Housing Types in the Ottoman Regions
• Elke Koch, Institute for Art History, University of Vienna, Gardens and Palaces of Shah Jahan
• Julie Scott Meisami, University of Oxford, Relationships Between Medieval Islamic Literature and the Visual Arts
• Kenzo Yamazaki, Kyoto University, Mosque during the Dynasty of Mamluk, Seljuk, Byzath and Early Ottoman Period

We are trustees of God’s creation, and we should seek to leave the world a better place than it was when we came into it. Creating that ‘better place’ in physical terms means trying to bring values into environments, buildings, and contexts that make the quality of life better for future generations than it is today.

His Highness the Aga Khan, Architectural Record, August 2001

International Perspectives