

[To attend in Cairo: Two Lectures by Christiane Gruber](#)

Discussion published by Amina Elbendary on Monday, February 6, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

The Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations at the American University in Cairo is looking forward to welcoming our **Bayard Dodge Distinguished Visiting Professor for this year, Professor Christiane Gruber**, in late February.

As part of this program, Professor Gruber will be delivering two public lectures. Professor Gruber is one of the leading scholars in Islamic Art today. Her scholarship and publications are among the most cutting edge in the field. For our graduate students, this will be an important opportunity to be exposed to and benefit from new topics and research methodologies, even if they are not part of your specializations. It is also an opportunity to get advice on other matters closer to your research topics and future plans. **Please mark your calendars and plan to attend the following events:**

Public Lecture 1 (Open to the General Public and AUC Campus Community):

Title: "**In Defense and Devotion: Affective Practices in Early Modern Islamic Manuscript Paintings** " (in English)

Date: Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Time: 1:00 p.m. Cairo Local Time

Place: Waleed P071, HUSS Building, AUC New Cairo campus

Abstract: While a number of studies have tackled the question of iconoclasm in Islam, extant paintings reveal that the practice of viewing and responding to images in Muslim lands are much more varied than previously thought. Pre-modern pictorial evidence instead suggests that there existed a range of motivations behind viewers' engagement with and manipulation of pictorial images. Such interactions highlight the complex confluences between emotive and visual expressions during both the

inception and afterlife of a painted image. From inserted iconographic motifs to the performance of symbolic destruction in premodern Islamic manuscript paintings, it becomes clear that affective engagements that eventually resulted in pigment damage could act as pictorially articulated responses in both defense of and devotion to figural representations. As a result, altered images invite us to radically rethink received scholarly paradigms so that evidence that is most frequently interpreted as a form of Islamic iconoclasm may, at least in some cases, provide clues to Islamic iconophilic practices instead.

Public Lecture 2 (Open to the General Public and AUC Campus Community):

Title: "**Hima in the House: Avian Architecture across the Islamic World**" (in English)

Date: Saturday, February 25, 2023

Time: 6:00 p.m. Cairo Local Time

Place: Oriental Hall, AUC Tahrir Square Campus

Simultaneous Translation to Arabic will be provided.

Abstract: Through its recent ecological turn, the scholarly study of "Islamic" architecture has expanded to take into greater account both the animal and vegetal worlds. As nature's most accomplished architects, birds have long contributed to the biomorphic landscape and built environment of the greater Middle East. Stretching from Morocco to India, houses made for birds, and made by birds, attest to the thriving of avian architecture across the centuries. Bird houses, whether impromptu or purpose-built, provide a type of sanctuary and refuge—or *hima* as conceptualized within Islamic philosophical and ecological traditions—dedicated to protecting avifauna and their related regions, the latter used as agricultural lands for human sustenance and/or as biodiversity reserves for non-human survival. Fluttering from nest and nook to tower and palace, this talk examines various types of bird houses, their architectonic language and creative forms, their intersections with vulnerable places and peoples, and their bio-material contributions to an integrated creaturely world.

Short biography:

[Christiane Gruber](#) is a Professor of Islamic Art and former Chair of the History of Art Department at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, as well as Founding Director of [Khamseen: Islamic Art History Online](#). Her scholarly work, available [here](#), explores medieval to contemporary Islamic art, especially figural representation, depictions of the Prophet Muhammad, manuscripts and book arts, architecture, and modern visual and material cultures. Her two most recent publications include [The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images](#) and [The Image Debate: Figural Representation in Islam and Across the World](#), and her public-facing essays have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The Conversation*, and *Prospect Magazine*, among others. She is currently on sabbatical in Turkey, undertaking field research and writing her next book entitled *Elements of the Middle East: Art, Faith, and Ecology*.

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