

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AVINOAM SHALEM APPOINTED 24th DIRECTOR OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME



Avinoam Shalem (Photo: © Boris Hars-Tschachotin)

ROME and NEW YORK, 13 February 2020 — The American Academy in Rome is pleased to announce the selection of historian and educator Avinoam Shalem (2016 Resident) to be its 24th Director. The appointment, which is based in Rome, was announced today by AAR President and CEO Mark Robbins, with a term beginning July 2020. Shalem succeeds John Ochsendorf, who will return to his faculty position as Class of 1942 Professor of Architecture and Civil and Environmental Engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) after his three-year term ends in June.

“The Academy is very fortunate to have a scholar of Avinoam Shalem’s caliber providing a fresh and varied perspective as director,” Robbins said. “His academic achievements, intellectual generosity, and global approach to scholarship make him an ideal choice.”

Dr. Shalem is currently the Riggio Professor for the Arts of Islam in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University. He studied at the University of Tel Aviv and the University of Munich before earning a PhD from the University of Edinburgh in 1995. Shalem specializes in the history of Islamic art, with a strong emphasis on Arab art in the Mediterranean Basin, the Near East, and the Levant, as well as in Spain, southern Italy, and Sicily. He also focuses on the art of the object, including secular and sacred aesthetics, as well as Jewish, Christian, and Islamic artistic interactions in the Mediterranean. No stranger to the Academy, Dr. Shalem was the 2016 Lester K. Little Scholar-in-Residence and worked with AAR as an advisor for the research seminar *Framing Medieval Mediterranean Art and Archaeology* (as part of the Getty Foundation’s *Connecting Art Histories* program). He was also a key participant in the recent AAR conference, *Islamic Art and Architecture in Italy: Between Tradition and Innovation*.

“I am extremely pleased and excited to work with the international community at the American Academy in Rome,” said Dr. Shalem. “I very much look forward to continuing the Academy’s long tradition of promoting innovative thinking by encouraging an interdisciplinary approach that examines in-between zones, such as those between art and art history, history and prose, music and philosophy, and architecture and archeology.”

Prior to his appointment at Columbia University, Dr. Shalem served as professor of the history of the arts of Islam at the University of Munich and taught at the universities of Tel Aviv, Edinburgh, Heidelberg (Hochschule für jüdische Studien), Bamberg, Luzern, and Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. In addition, he has served as Andrew Mellon Senior Fellow at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (2006), Guest Scholar at the Getty Research Center (2009 and 2019), Max-Planck Fellow at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence (2007–15), and Robert Sterling Clark Visiting Professor of Art History at Williams College (2016–17). Dr. Shalem was one of the directors of the international Getty-supported project *Art, Space, and Mobility in the Early Ages of Globalization: The Mediterranean, Central Asia, and the Indian Subcontinent 400–1650* and is currently directing the research project *When Nature Becomes Ideology: The Rural Landscape of Palestine after 1947*. He is the author of, among others, *Islam Christianized* (1998), *The Oliphant: Islamic Objects in Historical Context* (2004), *Facing the Wall: The Palestinian-Israeli Barriers* (2011, with Gerhard Wolf), and *The Chasuble of Thomas Becket: A Biography* (2017). He also edited *Facts and Artefacts: Art in the Islamic World* (2007), *After One Hundred Years: The 1910 Exhibition "Meisterwerke muhammedanischer Kunst" Reconsidered* (2010, with Andrea Lerner), *Constructing the Image of Muhammad in Europe* (2013), and *The Image of Muhammad between Ideal and Ideology* (2014), which introduced the readers to the complex conceptual and visual history of the Prophet Muhammad in the West and the lands of Islam from the early medieval times until the nineteenth century.

AMERICAN ACADEMY IN ROME / THE ROME PRIZE

Founded in 1894, the American Academy in Rome is a leading international center for independent study and advanced research in the arts and humanities. A not-for-profit, privately funded institution, AAR annually offers the Rome Prize Fellowship and Italian Fellowships to a select group of artists and scholars, after an application process that begins each fall. The winners, selected by independent juries through a national competition process, are invited to Rome the following year to pursue their work in an atmosphere conducive to intellectual and artistic experimentation and interdisciplinary exchange. Fellowships are offered in the following categories: literature, musical composition, visual arts, architecture, landscape architecture, design, and historic preservation and conservation, as well as ancient studies, medieval studies, Renaissance and early modern studies, and modern Italian studies. To date, AAR has fueled critical thinking, research, and work for over 1,700 artists and scholars who are leaders in their fields and whose rich and significant output continues to fill museums, concert halls, libraries, and universities across the United States and around the world.

In addition to the Rome Prize winners and Italian Fellows, AAR also invites a select group of Residents, Affiliated Fellows, and Visiting Artists and Scholars to work within this exceptional community in Rome.

To learn more about the Rome Prize, Italian Fellowship or programs at the American Academy in Rome, please visit www.aarome.org.

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