

UNIVERSITY LECTURE SEASON 2026-2027

THE RAANA AKBAR MEMORIAL LECTURE ON ISLAM & CULTURE

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE

DOW VISITING SCHOLARS AND ARTISTS PROGRAM



THUR., NOV. 5, 2026 | 6:00 P.M.

OTT AUDITORIUM, GILBERTSON HALL

The Art of the Soul: Islamic Architecture, Beauty, and Spiritual Formation in Islamic Civilization

Feryal Salem, Ph.D.

*Associate Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies,
American Islamic College*

Reception Proceeding Lecture

This lecture highlights how Islamic aesthetics sought to cultivate spiritual refinement and the nourishment of the soul. Drawing on examples ranging from gardens, mosques and calligraphy to light symbolism, geometric design and sacred space, Feryal Salem examines how beauty was understood in Islamic civilization as a means of cultivating mindfulness, harmony and awareness of the divine.



Feryal Salem is associate professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at American Islamic College in Chicago, where she also directs the Master of Divinity in Islamic Studies and Muslim Chaplaincy programs. In 2018 she was named one of “25 Influential American Muslims” by CNN for her work in higher education. Her research interests include Islamic philosophy and theology in the post-classical period, interfaith dialogue and the development of Muslim thought in the contemporary era. She is the author of “The Emergence of Early Sufi Piety and Sunnī Scholasticism: ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak and the Formation of Sunni Identity in the Second Islamic Century” (2016) in Brill’s “Islamic History and Civilization” series. She also published “Isagoge: A Primer in Classical Logic” (2022), in which she translated and wrote a lengthy commentary on Athir al-Din al-Abhari’s foundational treatise. She received her Ph.D. in Islamic studies from the University of Chicago’s Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations.

The Raana Akbar Memorial Lecture on Islam and Culture was established in 2011 by Dr. Waheed Akbar in memory of his wife, Raana, a former member of the SVSU Board of Control, physician and community leader.

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