A $500,000 grant from Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute to the University of Washington establishes the Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Professor of Persian and Iranian Studies, named in honor of Dr. Mir-Djalali, the scholar and philanthropist who founded the Institute in 2000. This is the first endowed professorship in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) and its first holder will be Professor Aria Fani. The endowment supports research, teaching and outreach in NELC and its successful Persian and Iranian Studies Program.

Thanks to a previous generous endowment from Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute in 2003, NELC has supported graduate students in the field of Persian and Iranian Studies with its Roshan Institute Fellowship for Excellence in Persian Studies. The new endowed position will foster the creation of new courses in Persian and Iranian Studies, support interdepartmental projects and develop regional, national and international appreciation of Persian and Iranian cultural legacies.

“We are delighted to partner again with the University of Washington and establish the first endowed professorship in support of NELC and its excellent Persian and Iranian Studies Program. I personally am inspired for the positive impact this new endowment will have on generations of students and scholars in the UW and beyond for years to come,” says Mir-Djalali, “and I wish to congratulate Professor Fani on his new appointment.”

Aria Fani, the first Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Professor of Persian and Iranian Studies, joined the University of Washington in 2019 as an Assistant Professor. During his first year, Fani taught topical courses in Persian literature and popular courses on Near Eastern travelogues and cinematic cultures. Fani has a PhD degree from the University of California, Berkeley with his dissertation titled, “Becoming Literature: The Formation of Adabiyat as a Discipline in Iran and Afghanistan (1895-1945).” His research focuses on the Persian language and cultural heritage as shared medium for modern literary cultures of Iran and Afghanistan, and he has published a textbook for the teaching of Persian as a heritage language. Fani also translates Persian poetry into English and is currently working on a poetry collection by Bizhan Jalali titled Shades of Silence.

Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute is a private foundation dedicated to promoting the preservation, transmission and instruction of Persian language and culture around the world. Thanks to the leadership and vision of Mir-Djalali, the Institute has awarded several millions in grants to establish or strengthen academic Persian programs at some of the most prestigious universities in the US and
abroad. Mir-Djalali is an expert in language education, cross-cultural communication and Persian studies; and is widely recognized for her pioneering efforts in nurturing the next generation of Persian studies specialists. Born in Iran, she received a doctorate in linguistics from Paris-Sorbonne University and was a faculty member at Georgetown University and the University of California at Berkeley. In 2018, Mir-Djalali was honored by the French Ministry of Culture with the title of Chevalier de l’ordre des Arts et des Lettres – one of France’s most prestigious awards – in recognition of her lifelong and significant contributions to Persian arts and culture in France and around the world.

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