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*Reverse Orientalism: The Westerner as the Eroticized Other in Persian Arts since the 17th Century*

This dissertation focuses on a little-known body of material that survives in a group of private houses in Persia, mostly located in Isfahan, Iran, and dating from the seventeenth century onward. The wall paintings in these houses present idealistic images of European females as non-native but desirable “others.” *Zan-i-farangi*, which can be translated as “Frankish Woman” or “European woman,” became a pictorial theme in the late Safavid period, meaning that the exoticization of the European female in Persia occurred long before widespread Western colonial endeavors around the globe. In line with the authoritative critique of Edward Said against what he saw as the flaws of Orientalism, many scholars have demonstrated the inaccuracy of the cultural representation of the Oriental world in Western scholarship and academia. In the realm of the arts, more specifically in arts that address the human body and its erotic nature, those that follow Said’s approach have argued that Western artists’ depictions of Eastern nude and semi-nude women in private spaces such as Turkish baths and harems have aimed to fetishize and eroticize Eastern women as the “other” for the pleasure of the European male *voyeur*. In my paper, I argue that the same process occurs in the Islamic world, reversing the premises of Orientalism in which the East is invariably seen as a passive object of desirability and a submissive recipient of the Western male’s sexual fantasy. The representation of European women (*Zan-i-farangi*) in the seventeenth-century Safavid era can thus be viewed as a remarkable moment in the history of art.