I am writing to apply for the Metropolitan Museum of Art Curatorial Research Fellowship. I am an art historian and archaeologist specialized in ancient and early colonial Andean art, currently a post-doctoral fellow at the program of *4A Laboratory: Art Histories, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Aesthetics*. As an art historian, I have conducted research on Andean iconography, Andean textiles, and Andean gender structures. As an archaeologist, I participated in several excavations and surveys under the auspices of the Israel Antiquities Authority, as well as in one project in Peru. However, beyond my research experience in the academic context, I have had the opportunity to work as a curator of a private collection.

Your distinguished institution, which contains the largest art collection in the United States, aspires to create a dialogue between the broader public and the piece of art that, in some cases, came from very different cultural contexts than those known to the viewer. This challenge is exactly what excites me about curatorial work. Especially now, after obtaining my Ph.D., I would like to share the knowledge I create in my academic studies with the non-academic public.

My Ph.D. thesis, “Beyond the Image: Femininity and Other Gender Expressions in the Ancient Art of the South-Central Andes (800 B.C-1532 A.D),” explores the ways that Andean gender mechanisms functioned, and reconstructs the roles, status and sexuality of women in these societies. For this research, I studied more than one thousand artifacts firsthand, including ceramics, textiles, shells, wood and metal objects. These artifacts form part of 30 museums in Europe and South America. This aspect of the research taught me a great deal about the characteristics of the curatorial work. As an outsider, I began to be able to evaluate the museums in which I worked and to appreciate different facets of museology, such as conservation, cataloging systems, and exhibitions.

In addition to my own research, as my CV shows, for several years I was the curator of the Maiman Collection, a private collection of ancient Andean artifacts. Unfortunately, in 2016 the collection was closed due to the owner’s financial difficulties. This experience enriched my knowledge, both of Andean material culture and the intricacies of curatorial work, such as artifact cataloguing, research, conservation, and how to evaluate the authenticity of objects. My work in this collection also included two types of public engagement: the first encompassed interaction with the general public by guided visits, and the second with university students and professors by workshops and academic events.

Throughout my work and research, I have developed a great ability to work as a team member. In my work at the excavations carried out by the Israel Antiquities Authority, I always maintained good collegial relations with the archeologists and the excavations workers. Furthermore, I have collaborated with colleagues in iconographical studies, such as when I joined forces with Amnon Nir and Javier Fonseca Santa Cruz in analyzing a unique ceramic piece that was found in the last Inca refuge at Vilcabamba. An article that summarizes our findings was recently published in the journal *Latin American Antiquity*. Likewise, I worked with Sabina Aguilera, an anthropologist who specializes in North-Mexican indigenous communities, on the connection between different parts of the American continent and the way in which ideas and symbols were diffused in ancient times. We present our findings in a workshop we organized as part of the Maiman Collection’s activities and in an academic congress.

Furthermore, due to the characteristics of my research, I developed sensibility toward a cultural diversity and relativity. This enables me to compare different societies to one another, not only in my research, but also in daily life, as an Israeli working in Latin America.

I am fluent in Spanish and, I wrote my M.A and Ph.D. dissertations in English. However, to date, the papers that I have presented and the articles I published so far have been written in Spanish. Additionally, as part of my M.A studies I gained knowledge of the Quechua language.

Given my experience, the MET’s department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas will benefit from my intimate acquaintance with Andean ancient and early colonial art and my experience with artifact research. I look forward specially to becoming involved with and learning about the educational aspects of museums and the curation of museum exhibition, which I truly aspire to develop.

It would be a great honor for me to take part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s mission. The Curatorial Research Fellowship would provide me with the opportunity to share my knowledge and to develop my curatorial work skills and my creativity.

My field of study is Andean art and material culture. In my research I focus on the material representation of ideas and notions mainly through iconography, but also by means of the artifact’s form, technology and material. I pursue this interest with an interdisciplinary approach, which combines the use of visual, archaeological, ethno-historical, and vocabulary sources, with tools and insights taken from the fields of art history and archaeology. A good example of this approach is my doctoral dissertation “Beyond the Image: Femininity and Other Gender Expressions in the Ancient Art of the South-Central Andes (800 B.C-1532 A.D)” that successfully reconstructs many aspects of the ancient Andean gender structures’ and their expressions in art, society, religion, and ideology. This research defines the roles and status of women and it reveals the ways in which women's fertility and sexuality were perceived by cultures, such as the Nasca, Wari, Tiwanaku and Inca, among other cultures. The study also shows that Andean gender structures contained at least five gender categories, three of which are neither totally feminine nor masculine. I was able to identify several anthropomorphic images that are classified under these categories.

For my current and future research I have three directions that I am developing in parallel. The first one is the project titled “A Queer Reading of Northern Andean Coast Material Culture and Practice in Ancient and Early Colonial Societies,” which continues my interest in the representation of these gender categories which were neither entirely feminine nor masculine. This research focus on different societies in comparison to the ones I covered in my doctorate. In light of my deeply interest in Andean gender structures, I believe I can contribute substantively from my knowledge and experience to the MET reorganization of the galleries displaying Andean art, while taking into consideration my findings on Andean gender mechanisms as well as the archaeological discoveries related to gender topics that were found in the las two decades. In addition, this knowledge can serve well the cataloging of artifacts with anthropomorphic images that form part of the MET’s collection.

The second research I am starting to carry out in these days is in the framework of the *4A Laboratory: Art Histories, Archaeologies, Anthropologies, Aesthetics* fellowship. My study “Mutual Growth: The Agency of Plants as reflected in Inca and Chimú Visual Culture”, explores the meaning and agency of the represented plants in these two artistic styles. Furthermore, the study aims to examine whether these representations echo animism ontologies regarding plants and crops. The research also places crosswise the social role of a represented plant and the artifact’s function, form and agency. This study will broaden my perspective on non-anthropomorphic representation in Andean art and on the interaction between meaning and form.

Another research interest I have focuses on the way Andean societies conceived the European invasion. The third study I am conducting revolves around a unique ceramic piece that was found in the Inca last refuge in Vicabamba, which describes a complex scene of confrontation between the Spaniards and the indigenous population. Together with two of my colleagues I analyzed this exceptional iconography. Now after interpreting this complex scene, my intension is to focus on the historical context of this piece and to connect the historical data on the Early Colonial Period with the scene painted on this ceramic.

Beyond my research, I have had the opportunity to work in a diverse array of curatorial capacities. For nine years I served as the curator of the Maiman Collection of ancient Andean artifacts. My responsibilities entailed cataloguing, research, and conserving the artifacts, as well as evaluating the authenticity of the collection's objects. My work in this collection also included two types of public engagement: the first involved interaction with the general public, and the second with university students and professors. Each visitor in the collection had a private tour, which took her/him on a journey of different ancient Andean cultures. For the academic public, I created eight workshops where we explored together a specific theme or a culture through related artifacts. Five of the workshops focused on a specific style including: Chavin, Nasca, Moche, Wari-Tiwanaku and Lambayeuqe. Three other workshops centered on Inca textiles, Andean ethnomusicology and the contacts between America's ancient societies.

Additionally, I have curatorial professional experience that I gained out of the Maiman Collection. I categorized the Andean collection of the Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University and I also served as a curator assistance for the exhibition “Chimu: Imperial Riches from the Desert of Peru” that took place in The Israel Museum. Due to these experiences and my working in the Maiman Collection, I became aware of the importance of the collection management in order to create virtual and physical access to the artifacts for researchers, artists and the wide public.

Moreover, since I obtained my Ph.D., I seek a way to bridge the knowledge I created in my research and the non-academic public. While my work in the Maiman Collection was partially directed to this end, I would now like to broaden the component of public engagement in my work to a larger scale and to reach a wide variety of audiences by curating exhibitions and creating other types of activities such as interactive museum tours, public talks and workshops.

To conclude, considering my curatorial and academic experiences as well as my interests, I find the MET’s Curatorial Research Fellowship, a fascinating opportunity to broaden my perspective on Andean art. Furthermore, this opportunity will enable me to engage with exposition curation, an expertise that I truly aspire to develop. If chosen to this position, the MET will benefit from my intimate acquaintance with Andean ancient art and my experience with artifact research. I will be thrilled to get to know from very close the most notable ancient Andean collection in the U.S, without a doubt it will open my horizon to new interpretations of ancient Andean art that I will be delighted to share with my colleagues and with the wide public.

In these days of speed technological development and images flooding, we should ask ourselves what the museum can offers its visitants. Since the image of almost every artwork can be access by a push of a button, the museum should offer an experience that goes beyond the superficial acquaintance with the artwork. One way the museum can cope with this challenge is by creating an infrastructure that will enable the visitor delving into all symbolical levels of few pieces per visit.

In the case of ancient Andean art, there is an important advantage of observing the piece of art itself and not its photo, this is due to the importance of the tree-dimensional component of the pieces. Even in case of seemingly two-dimension artefact, such as textile, we should remember that it is a tree-dimensional object when it posed on the human body. The two-dimensional image of an artefact seen on a screen does not transmit the whole possible art experience. Furthermore, Andean artworks contain several levels of meanings that can be explored more easily when we have a firsthand experience with it. In my research on Andean artefact, I was exposed to multiple layers of the artwork's meanings, which are inherent within different components of the piece. In this way a Russian doll of significant is created:

The artist's society

The artist

Aesthetic

Iconography

Function

Form

Technology

Material

I believe that this multiple layers of significant can be transmit to the museum visitors by technological means, such as an application that the visitor can use on a tablet provided by the museum or download it on his/her cellphone. This app will serve as an explanatory device and not as medium to represent the artwork, in other word, it will leave the piece of art as the focal point. The app will include an interactive presentation focusing on several pieces, which represent basics Andean notions. After, exploring these pieces with this app, the visitant will have food for thought while exploring other pieces.

The app will advance in relation to the visitant movement around the artwork or in relation to the visitant's visual interaction with it. By using audio and audio-visual material the app presentation will refer to different layers of meaning, depending on the artifact's characteristics. For example, in case of piece 1979.206.1096 (fig. 1), the function and the iconography of this ceramic alludes to the reciprocal relations that in Andean present and past societies is established by mutual consumption of the maize beer in Andean ritual cups. In order to illustrate the way this cup is used, the app will present a short video of ritual in Andean contemporary community where a couple of *queros* is used. Another possibility that the app will create, is to illustrate a more complex iconography that includes several figures (see for example fig. 2). In these cases, an animation video will explain the iconography, however in order not to flatten the scene to a rollout, the animation video will move the figures on the image of the piece itself.

It is a pleasure to write this recommendation letter for Dr. Artzi's application for the Metropolitan Museum of Art Curatorial Research Fellowship. I first met Bat-ami Artzi at a congress on Amerindians textiles in 2010 and since then we met several times in Peru and Paris, we stay constantly in touch regarding common interests we share in the fields of Andean and gender archaeology.

The doctoral thesis of Bat-ami Artzi, “Beyond the Image: Femininity and Other Gender Expressions in the Ancient Art of the South-Central Andes (800 B.C-1532 A.D),” is a monumental and extremely original iconographic analysis based on a very extensive database that was collected in many museums and was deeply studied by the candidate. Given the revelation, in this thesis, of different facets of gender mechanisms in Andean societies, it became a veritable landmark in the history of the study of gender structures and roles in the ancient Andean societies.

Furthermore, I read two of Dr. Artzi's articles: “… y son yndios por conquistar”: las alegorías femeninas de los cuatro suyus en el testimonio etnohistórico y arqueológico” (2015) and “La participación de las mujeres en el culto: un estudio iconográfico de la cerámica inca” (2016). They are very original and well-argued articles that offer totally new interpretations to materials previously studied.

Bat-ami Artzi's research sticks out for its interdisciplinary approach to the study ancient Andean art, it uses methods and sources taken from art history, archaeology, anthropology, ethno-history and linguistics. As Artzi's findings clearly demonstrate this methodological approach has proven to be highly effective. In light of that, I sure that the candidate can contribute significantly to the interpretation and presentation of the MET's Andean collection.

It is important to take into account that Dr. Artzi was able to conduct an engaging and thorough research projects without the benefit of being in close proximity to the main centers of investigation into Andean archaeology. Her dedication and creativity with no doubt help her to overcome this gap.

I have to admit that I myself would be delighted to collaborate with Dr. Artzi in further research on the issues and interests we have in common. For time to time I consult her regarding Andean art and Andean gender representation. Her commentaries are very original, and they always help me to consider new directions in my interpretations.

Bat-ami Artzi's articles and doctoral thesis clearly demonstrate that she is a very high-level researcher. Her interdisciplinary work opens new possibilities to study art and material culture of ancient and colonial societies of the Andean region. If she will be chosen for Curatorial Research Fellowship, The Metropolitan Museum of Art will gain an extremely professional assistance and at the same time I am certain that this opportunity will move forward Dr. Artzi's curatorial capacities.

For all these reasons, I wholeheartedly recommend Bat-Ami Artzi for the Curatorial Research Fellowship, which will be an unparalleled opportunity for professional advancement in her promising scholarly career.