

Press Release

Frankfurt/Main, 04.04.2019

Contemporary Muslim Fashions
5 April to 1 September 2019

Contemporary Muslim Fashions is the first major museum exhibition to explore the complex and diverse nature of current Muslim clothing styles. The concept of the exhibition was developed at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco and was initiated there by Max Hollein. The Museum Angewandte Kunst in Frankfurt/M is its first venue in Europe.

“There are those who believe that there is no fashion at all among Muslim women, but the opposite is true, with modern, vibrant, and extraordinary fashion scenes, particularly in many Muslim-majority countries,” says Max Hollein, former Director and CEO of the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. “*Contemporary Muslim Fashions* is an overdue, much-needed exploration of a multifaceted topic as yet largely unexplored by museums.”

In selecting designers, the curators focused particularly on the Middle East, Malaysia and Indonesia as well as Europe and the USA. *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* takes a close look at the diverse interpretations of Muslim clothing traditions in these different countries and not only shows regional differences, but also makes the similarities visible. It presents itself as a snapshot of this fashion phenomenon, which carries social, religious, social and political implications. The exhibition shows on the one hand how Muslim women implement their own fashion interpretations of “Modest Fashion” and on the other hand how international fashion companies react with their own creations to the increasing demand for “discreet” less body-oriented and at the same time fashionable styles by Muslim and Non-Muslim women worldwide.

“Fashion is at its best when it both adapts to the needs of society and reflects its social and political undercurrents,” says Jill D’Alessandro, Curator in Charge of Costume and Textile Arts. “It is in this transformative moment where we now find modest fashion.”

In addition to approximately 80 ensembles drawn from established and emerging designers in high-end fashion, street wear, sportswear, and couture, the exhibition includes a wide range of documentary and fashion photographs as well as art works that contextualize the garments on view. Using social media as primary source material, *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* credits much of the recent, popular awareness of this sector to bloggers and influencers who took to social media when they could not find accurate representations of

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themselves in traditional print media.

Contemporary Muslim Fashions is organized by Jill D'Alessandro, Curator in Charge of Costume and Textile Arts, and Laura L. Camerlengo, Associate Curator of Costume and Textiles at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Reina Lewis, Professor of Cultural Studies at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, serves as consulting curator. The exhibition in Frankfurt is coordinated by director Prof. Matthias Wagner K and Dr. Mahret Ifeoma Kupka, Curator for Fashion, Body and Performativity. After closing at the Museum Angewandte Kunst, the exhibition will travel to other venues, including the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum in New York.

IN DETAIL

In recent years, there has been increased awareness of Muslim consumers as an important segment of the global fashion industry. With more than 1.8 billion practicing Muslims worldwide the diversity of clothing styles is highly nuanced. In the West, however, the image of Muslim women is often monochromatic. San Francisco and Frankfurt are particularly suitable locations to present the topic of this exhibition. Both cities are characterized by great cultural and ethnic diversity. Around 250,000 Muslim men and women live in the Bay Area today. The Fine Arts Museums are thus located in a region with one of the largest Muslim communities in the USA. As a central trade hub in Europe, Frankfurt is one of the most international cities in Germany with a population consisting of 53 percent foreigners and Germans with a so-called migrant background. Visible Muslims have been an integral part of the cityscape in both San Francisco and Frankfurt for decades.

At the beginning of the exhibition, a selection of ensembles will immerse the visitor in the world of Modest Fashion. The combination of stylish designs and different degrees of covering has left an impressive mark on the western fashion world in recent years. On the market for fashion, both up-and-coming and established Muslim and non-Muslim fashion designers today meet internationally active Western fashion companies that have recognized the significance of the market for themselves and produce corresponding fashion collections. This market has an annual turnover of around 44 billion dollars. In addition, Modest Fashion Weeks take place worldwide, offering designers stages for their collections, while at the same time more and more Muslim Modest Fashion designers are making their way into the world of Western mainstream fashion. The rise of this fashion sector is often seen in connection with the purchasing power of Muslim women, but is also attributed to a generation of self-determined young Muslim women who are active as fashion bloggers and social media influencers while shaping new narratives of Muslim women identity.

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Throughout the exhibition space *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* explores different forms of covering, looking specifically at headscarves, perhaps the most recognizable element of a Muslim woman's dress. It is important to note that not all Muslim women wear a hijab (headscarf), and even fewer a niqab (face veil). In fact, the number of Muslim women who consistently wear a headscarf in the United States has remained at about 40% for the past decade. The garment is worn for various reasons including personal piety, community conventions, or a variety of political positions.

The exhibition's regional explorations begin in the Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East, with the work of designers such as Faiza Bouguessa, Mashael Alrajhi, and Wadha Al Hajri, who are taking regional garments and making them uniquely their own. The traditional abaya—a simple, loose black garment designed to cover the body from neck to feet—has received contemporary updates by designers whose experiences are informed by their own transcontinental lifestyles and fashion educations. With a centuries-old history, today's abayas reveal the infusion of regional textile traditions and global fashion trends to form new garments that appeal to both local and global audiences.

Photographs by artists including Alessia Gammarota, Rania Matar, and Tanya Habjouqa illustrate the high degree of diversity in head coverings (and lack thereof) across regions, generations, and individuals. The topic is critically explored by the documentary photographs of Hengameh Golestan. As the Islamic revolution deposed the last Persian monarch and brought about a new Islamic government in Iran in 1979, she started documenting the country's unrest. On International Women's Day, March 8, 1979, she captured these images "as documents of demonstrations of women against the legislative changes that were introduced shortly after the establishment of the Islamic republic. One of these related to the compulsory veiling of women . . . in all public spaces." These protests continued for several days and attracted hundreds of thousands of women. As reminders of this event, the images have achieved recent new significance in the wake of renewed protests against the mandatory covering of women in Iran. The images are complimented by a twitter video showing Vida Movahedi protesting against the mandatory covering of women in Iran.

In the next part of the exhibition a selection of garments made by Muslims now living in the United States and the United Kingdom, such as Brooklyn-based Céline Semaan Vernon of Slow Factory and Saiqa Majeed of Saiqa London, will show how migration and relocation have also shaped social and religious practices and dress codes. For example, Slow Factory recently partnered with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to create a collection in direct response to President Trump's "Muslim ban." To explore the rise of Muslim consumer culture, a section of the exhibition will showcase affordable luxury, fast fashion, and

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sportswear that cater to a modest clientele, including designs by Sarah Elenany and Barjis Chohan as well as Nike's Pro Hijab and burkinis by Shereen Sabet and Aheda Zanetti.

Continuing to Indonesia, *Contemporary Muslim Fashions* explores the rich textile and costume traditions of a country that is the largest Muslim-majority country in the world, and whose designers, such as Itang Yunasz, Khanaan Luqman Shamlan, and NurZahra, employ luxurious fabrics in vibrant colors and complex patterns in their modest-wear designs. Similar trends are found in neighboring Malaysia, where an explosion of social media platforms and e-commerce has produced a rapidly growing market for halal (referring to something permissible by Islamic law) beauty, technology, food, and fashion, such as Blancheur, as well as a high demand for bespoke looks catering to a Muslim elite represented by leading designers Melinda Looi, Bernard Chandran, and FIZIWO.

"The transnational reach of modest Muslim fashion is astounding," says consulting curator Reina Lewis, Professor of Cultural Studies at London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London. "In Muslim-majority countries and diasporic minority contexts, Muslim modest fashionistas draw on a mood board of global Muslim fashion inspiration from past and present to create new forms of fusion fashion that travel the world through social media and community and family connections."

Muslim fashion is supported by a dynamic online community. Like many modest fashion bloggers, Muslim modest fashion influencers began their engagement with blogging and social media due to the perceived lack of diversity in mainstream media and retail outlets. Showcasing leaders such as Hoda Katebi, Leah Vernon, and Dian Pelangi via Instagram, the exhibition will look at how personal style can serve as a launch pad for larger conversations that draw attention to issues of sustainability and gender, racial, and religious inequalities.

"Muslim women have been early adopters of each new social media application as it has arrived," says Laura L. Camerlengo, Associate Curator of Costume and Textile Arts. "For many modest dressers, fashion serves not only as a medium to share their personal style, but also for discussions about contemporary religious concerns and social injustices and as a tool for positive social change."

Throughout the exhibition a selection of works by artists including Wesaam Al-Badry and Shirin Neshat critically explore questions regarding clothing regulations, patriarchal structures, foreign determination and attribution. The three photographs in Wesaam Al-Badry's (*1984) series *Al-Kouture* (2017) show women wearing a Niqab (face veil), each made of silk scarves from the iconic high-end brands Chanel, Valentino, and Gucci. For the Iraq-born artist, who relocated in the Midwest of the United States in the 1990s, the series reveals

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a tension between occidental and Arab-Islamic ideology that is shaped by Western consumer culture that influences traditional Muslim culture. Al-Badry uses his works to explore the dissonance between his experiences in the Middle East and those in Central America by addressing common notions of identity, war, and Islamophobia.

The work *Turbulent* (1998) is part of a video trilogy by Iranian artist Shirin Neshat, in which she traces the tensions between female and male experience as well as between individual identity and group identity. The artist worked with Iranian artists and musicians in exile. While the singer Shoja Azari performs a song about eroticism and spiritual longing in front of a large audience, the singer Sussan Deyhim, dressed in a black chador, stands in an empty theatre hall and sings a self-composed melody with a throaty voice, which manages without words. With this, the artist refers to a ban imposed in the course of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979, after which women were no longer allowed to sing in public.

The exhibition's final section explores high-end fashion designs that have been customized to accommodate Muslim women's diverse modesty considerations. Since the second half of the twentieth century, elite Muslim clients have been important patrons for the couture houses of Paris, where designs were often adapted for regional and religious sensibilities. True to the spirit of couture, this industry has long shown a willingness to modify its creations to suit the needs of clients who wish to dress modestly. Today, this tradition continues among the Western fashion design houses that offer special collections for Ramadan and Eid, such as Oscar de la Renta, as well as retailers that collaborate with international brands to form modest capsule collections, such as *The Modist*.

The growing desire for modest and stylish fashions by Muslim women has given rise to a market that serves diverse needs beyond Muslim communities. At the same time, there is a growing number of non-Muslim women who prefer clothing labelled as "modest" by relevant fashion houses because they appreciate the more discreet emphasis on the body and/or see this as an emancipatory act in relation to a more Western, body-focused ideal image of women. "Modest Fashion" is not synonymous with wearing a headscarf, a burka or a Nikab. It is also not necessarily associated with religiousness - no matter what kind - but corresponds to a certain idea of revealing or concealing physicality. In regards to the exhibition, Max Hollein sums this up when he says: "Fashion is the extroverted form of expression of a cultural state. The rest is a question of perspective".

As the first museum in Europe and the only station in Germany, the team of the Museum Angewandte Kunst has developed an extension of the exhibition that explicitly deals with the phenomenon of contemporary Muslim fashion in German-speaking countries. On show are ensembles of the designers Naomi Afia (Vienna), Feyza Baycelebi (Berlin/Istanbul), Imen Bousnina (Vienna) and Mizaan (Mannheim). In addition to the English-language catalogue,

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which will also be available at the Museum Angewandte Kunst, a German-language publication will be published with translations of selected texts from the English catalogue as well as new contributions that relate the theme of the exhibition more precisely to the German-language context.

The exhibition is supported by the Ernst Max von Grunelius Foundation, Bankhaus Metzler and BONAVERI.

The full list of designers participating in *Contemporary Muslim Fashions*:

Nora Afia (AT), Nora Aldamer (SA), Wadha Al Hajri (QA), Mashael Alrajhi (SA), Mariam Al Remailhi (QA), Renni Andriani (ID), Raşit Bağzıbağlı (TR), Alaa Balkhy (US/SA), Feyza Baycelebi (DE), Faiza Bouguessa (AE), Imen Bousnina (AT), Bernard Chandran (MY), Georgina Chapman for Marchesa (US), Barjis Chohan (GB), Windri Widiesta Dhari (ID), Sarah Elenany (GB), Jean Paul Gaultier (FR), Bill Gaytten (GB) for Christian Dior (FR), Kuaybe Gider (TR), Izree Kai Haffiz (MY), Anandia Harahap (ID), Rani Hatta (ID), Shakeel Karachi (PK), Mary Katrantzou (GR), Rebecca Kellett (GB), Nzinga Knight, (US), Melinda Looi (MY), Mariam Bin Mahfouz (SA), Saiqa Majeed (GB), Carmen W. Muhammad (US), Naima Muhammad (US), Sanaz Nataj (IR), Nike (US), Hanan Ozair (AE), Dian Pelangi (ID), Pierpaolo Piccioli (IT) for Valentino (IT), Peter Pilotto (GB), Datin Haslinda Abdul Rahim (MY), Maha Abdul Rasheed (AE), Mizaan (DE), Oscar de la Renta (US), Shereen Sabet (US), Yves Saint Laurent (FR), Khanaan Luqman Shamlan (ID), Céline Semaan Vernon (US), Zara Shiri (IR), Fahad Signature (QA), Yasmin Sobeih (GB), Shirin Vaqar (IR), Mohd Hafizi Radzi Woo (MY), Itang Yunasz (ID), Aheda Zanetti (AU), Rabia Zargarpur (AE)

Works by artists, photographers and influencers

Ridwan Adhami (US), Wesaam Al-Badry (US), Boushra Almutawakel (FR), Lalla Essaydi (US), Shepard Fairey (US), Alessia Gammarota (GB), Shadi Ghadirian (IR), Tanya Habjouqa (PS), Hassan Hajjaj (MA), Mona Haydar (US), Langston Hues (ID), Viktoria Kämpfe (US/DE), Hoda Katebi (US), Shirin Neshat (US), Rania Matar (US), Tunde Olaniran (US), Abbas Rattani (US), Habib Yazdi (US)

Catalogue

Contemporary Muslim Fashions, Prestel, 55 Euro (hardcover, English, 320 pages, 25,5 x 33,0 cm, ISBN: 978-3-7913-5782-9

Exhibition Appendix

Contemporary Muslim Fashions, Museum Angewandte Kunst (German, 5 Euro)

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Accompanying events

Contemporary Muslim Fashions Forum (Friday, April 12 to Sunday, April 14)
at Museum Angewandte Kunst

Keynotes and panel discussions with Reina Lewis, Majida Khattari, Naomi Afia, María do Mar Castro Varela and many more. German and English. Coordinated by Nabila Bushra and Mahret Ifeoma Kupka. Prior registration at rhea.dehn@stadt-frankfurt.de necessary. 30 Euro / 15 Euro reduced.

Please visit the event calendar of our website for further information.

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Director

Prof. Matthias Wagner K

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Opening hours

Tue, Thu-Sun 10 am – 6 pm, Wed 10am – 8 pm

Admission

12 Euro, reduced 6 Euro

The reduced admission price applies school and university students, persons with disabilities and their escorts and unemployed persons. Valid identification required.

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Press downloads

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