

Fashion exhibition explores Muslim dress codes and haute couture

By Hannah J. Davies, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 09.12.18

Word Count **819**

Level **1230L**



Image 1. Fashion model Halima Aden wears Melinda Looi clothes. Melinda Looi was established in 2012 in Malaysia. Photo: Sebastian Kim

A major exhibition exploring the different dress codes of Muslims is set to open in San Francisco this month. The show is the first of its kind dedicated to displaying Islamic culture within a fashion context.

Islamic style has become a growing and profitable global market in recent years. Vogue magazine launched its own Vogue Arabia, and clothing companies such as Uniqlo and Dolce & Gabbana are branching into modest fashion lines. Business experts believe that fashion spending by Muslims will reach \$373 billion around the world by 2022.

The exhibition is focused but not limited to clothing aimed at Muslim women. The exhibit, called Contemporary Muslim Fashions, will take over San Francisco's de Young Museum on September 22. It aims to shine a light on the evolution of Islamic style through Nike hijabs, online influencers, and high-fashion gowns.

Modesty Explored

The show opens with an exploration of modesty. The term has become a fashion buzzword of recent years due to the increased interest of Western retailers and designers. The exhibition will explore the role of head coverings and sportswear, including Aheda Zanetti's controversial burkini. Zanetti's modest swimming garment was temporarily banned from some French beaches in 2016.

The show will also have custom designs from high-fashion designers including Oscar de la Renta and Yves Saint Laurent, made to accommodate religious considerations. These include pieces that ensure that heads, sleeves and cleavages are covered.

"We researched and interviewed designers in different areas of the globe, from the Middle East to Malaysia to Indonesia, and understood that there was this emergent outburst of energy and creativity coming from a lot of Muslim majority countries," said Laura Camerlengo. She is the associate curator of costume and textiles for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. Camerlengo served as one of the organizers of the exhibition. "As such, a lot of the focus of the exhibition is on designers from these countries, and emerging designers."

Exhibit's Wide-Ranging Fashion Statements

The show also touches on communities in the United States and Europe. It will feature contributions from up-and-coming British designers, such as athleisure businesswoman Yasmin Sobeih.

"The exhibition shows both regional differences, but also the commonality across the globe," added Jill D'Alessandro, a fellow organizer and curator of costume and textile arts. "In some areas we've done that through photographic representation and film. We also have a section on social media and art photography."

Among the artists featured is Morocco-born, London-based pop-artist Hassan Hajjaj, who in showcasing printed and non-black hijabs has become known for subverting typical images of the headwear through his work. Curators have been cautious to avoid a homogenous approach to Muslim millennials in relation to social media. Among the influencers featured are Leah Vernon, a plus-sized, African-American blogger, and Hoda Katebi, an Iranian-American who runs a politically charged fashion site.



The organizers are hopeful that the showcase will replicate the success of some of the more recent fashion exhibitions. The Victoria and Albert Museum's show, Balenciaga: Shaping Fashion, was critically acclaimed, while earlier in 2018 the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Heavenly Bodies exhibition became the most popular fashion display of all time, attracting a million customers in three months.

The Role Of Fashion In Change

The exhibition space aims to act as a visual metaphor. Created by Iranian-American architecture firm Hariri and Hariri, its curved lines mimic the act of covering oneself, with a space that Camerlengo says "surrounds" visitors. Gisue and Mojgan Hariri are sisters and founders of the company. They said that they hoped the exhibition would "allow a positive review and examination of a community that's often talked about but rarely given the chance to speak and present itself."



Indeed, this seems to be a key consideration for many involved with the show, which will run until January 9, 2019. A selection of diasporic fashion includes designs by U.S. label Slow Factory. The company was founded by Lebanese-born Celine Semaan. She partnered with the American Civil Liberties Union, or ACLU, to create a collection opposing President Donald Trump's "Muslim ban," creating silk scarves embellished with the word "banned," and a bomber jacket with the U.S. First Amendment written in English and Arabic. The ban limits the number of people who are allowed to come to the United States from several Muslim-majority countries.

"We decided to mount the exhibition prior to our current president, but it is an important time for us to do it," Camerlengo adds. "So many of the artists and designers we have worked with have talked about the role of fashion as an agent for positive change."

Quiz

1 Read the paragraph from the section "Modesty Explored."

The show opens with an exploration of modesty. The term has become a fashion buzzword of recent years due to the increased interest of Western retailers and designers. The exhibition will explore the role of head coverings and sportswear, including Aheda Zanetti's controversial burkini. Zanetti's modest swimming garment was temporarily banned from some French beaches in 2016.

Which idea is BEST supported by this paragraph?

- (A) The show aims to get the ban on Aheda Zanetti's burkini lifted in beaches in France and other parts of the Western world.
- (B) The show aims to make head coverings and sportswear more accepted and popular among mainstream retailers.
- (C) The show's exploration of the hijab and the burkini will be the most popular and widely viewed portion of the exhibit.
- (D) The show's exploration of modesty addresses the West's contradictory reactions of fascination and opposition to Muslim fashion.

2 Read the statement below.

Items featured in the exhibit aim to defy traditional or clichéd representations of Muslim fashion.

Which sentence from the article BEST supports this inference?

- (A) The show will also have custom designs from high-fashion designers including Oscar de la Renta and Yves Saint Laurent, made to accommodate religious considerations.
- (B) Among the artists featured is Morocco-born, London-based pop-artist Hassan Hajjaj, who in showcasing printed and non-black hijabs has become known for subverting typical images of the headwear through his work.
- (C) Among the influencers featured are Leah Vernon, a plus-sized, African-American blogger, and Hoda Katebi, an Iranian-American who runs a politically charged fashion site.
- (D) They said that they hoped the exhibition would "allow a positive review and examination of a community that's often talked about but rarely given the chance to speak and present itself."

3 Which sentence from the introduction [paragraphs 1-3] BEST develops a CENTRAL idea of the article?

- (A) A major exhibition exploring the different dress codes of Muslims is set to open in San Francisco this month.
- (B) Business experts believe that fashion spending by Muslims will reach \$373 billion around the world by 2022.
- (C) The exhibit, called Contemporary Muslim Fashions, will take over San Francisco's de Young Museum on September 22.
- (D) It aims to shine a light on the evolution of Islamic style through Nike hijabs, online influencers and high-fashion gowns.

Which option is an accurate and objective summary of the article?

- (A) A new art exhibit is the first of its kind to focus on the diversity and growth of Muslim fashion around the world. The show features emerging energy and creativity of designers in Muslim-majority countries as well as communities around the globe. Organizers and artists hope the show will prompt positive change in the way people view Muslim culture.
- (B) A new art exhibit is opening in September that will explore Muslim dress codes as well as high fashion. Exhibit organizers hope to profit from the growing global market for Muslim style and to encourage greater fashion spending by Muslims. The most interesting parts of the exhibit are going to be art photography and social media.
- (C) A new art exhibit focuses on the beauty and obvious importance of Muslim dress codes. It follows on the heels of other successful exhibits featuring religious clothing, such as the surprisingly successful one at the Metropolitan Museum last year. Anyone who is interested in worldwide fashion or Muslim culture should be sure to see it.
- (D) A new art exhibit will run at the de Young Museum in San Francisco until 2019. The exhibit will focus primarily on artists who provide new and beautiful perspectives on Muslim fashion, in addition to political and social media influencers. The show was planned as a response to the current ban limiting the number of people from Muslim-majority countries in the U.S.