

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences testimony

Faith Fashion Fusion: Muslim women's style in Australia touring exhibition

- The Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia in Kuala Lumpur: 3 November 2017 — 28 January 2018.
- The Jakarta History Museum (JHM): 1—18 March 2018

Summary and outcomes

Faith Fashion Fusion is a ground-breaking exhibition exploring the emerging modest fashion industry in Australia and the work of a new generation of local designer's creating and retailing stylish clothing for Muslim women; meeting their desire to dress fashionably and creatively while observing the requirements of their faith.

Supported by a Visions of Australia grant from the Federal Government the exhibition toured extensively 2014—2016 to nine museums and galleries across Australia including regional NSW, Western Australia and the ACT. The innovative content and its potential for building diplomatic and economic relationships opened discussions with DFAT resulting in their support for an international tour of the exhibition to Malaysia and Indonesia in 2017—2018.

The international tour was made possible by support from the Australian Government through the Australian High Commission Malaysia, the Australia ASEAN Council, the Australian Embassy Jakarta, the Australia Indonesia Institute and corporate partner, Lend Lease Projects (M) Sdn Bhd.

The exhibition provided an opportunity for the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) to develop a more inclusive, collaborative model for exhibitions and engagement with Australia's diverse communities. The International tour enabled MAAS staff to deepen the relationship with fashion designers and women from the

Australian Muslim community. It helped build local capacities and skills through showcasing their work, engaging them in content changes and updates and involvement in the presentation of public programs and media in Malaysia and Jakarta. Burqini designer Aheda Zanetti took part in the opening event, media and public programs in Kuala Lumpur. Blogger and designer Delina Darusman-Gala was engaged to co-ordinate and style the updated streetstyle montage and exhibition images. She also presented a fashion parade at the opening event at Jakarta History Museum and took part in media and public programs.

The exhibition tour provided staff at MAAS and the host institutions with the opportunity to develop their professional skills and networks. Exhibitions, curatorial, registration and conservation staff worked together on project co-ordination, installation and dismantle and the development and presentation of associated programs and tours.

It fostered knowledge and skills exchange between the MAAS exhibition team and IAMM team with opportunities to engage with the experiences and expertise of staff at the IAMM and other local museums. In turn MAAS staff were able to provide workshops with training on aspects of curatorial and conservation work.

The MAAS exhibition provided IAMM with an opportunity to complement the content with a display of textiles and dress drawn from their own collection reflecting on the diversity, creativity and long history of Muslim dress.

Faith Fashion Fusion provided the host museums with an opportunity to display contemporary content they had not previously considered for their own exhibitions as well as more informal methods of display.

The exhibition tour attracted substantial visitor numbers (30,114 Malaysia and 33,059 in Jakarta) increasing and diversifying the MAAS audience.

Intent of the project or initiative

The national tour had focussed on building regional museums and galleries engagement with local Muslim communities, countering negative perceptions of Muslim women's dress and the Muslim community in Australia, celebrating the creativity, diversity and entrepreneurship of Australian Muslim women and opening a broader discourse on fashion and style.

The international tour offered an additional diplomatic and economic focus. It fostered community pride among Australian Muslim's, reflecting their achievements in the context of innovation in Australia's creative industries and their significant contribution to the economy. It showcased Australia's modest fashion industry and connected our designer's to booming modest fashion markets in Malaysia and Indonesia.

The exhibitions international tour and programs built engagement between the Australian, Malaysian and Indonesian Muslim community, promoting greater understanding of Australia's diverse Muslim communities - their faith and lifestyle.

Background

The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS) first presented *Faith Fashion Fusion: Muslim women's style in Australia* at the Powerhouse Museum in 2012. It was the first major exhibition to explore the emerging Muslim fashion industry with a focus on the Australian experience.

The exhibition and accompanying publication explored an innovative new sector in the local fashion industry, one where faith and fashion have formed a new relationship in the emerging modest fashion market.

Presented in two sections, the first, *The Business of Modest Fashion* showcased the work of a new generation of Australian clothing brands designing stylish clothing for Muslim women. Through garments, fashion footage and photography, streetstyle montages and personal narratives the exhibition looked the way Australian Muslim

designers are rethinking the model for designing, retailing and marketing modest fashion to a local and global market.

The exhibition was developed in consultation with a wide range of individuals from Australian Muslim communities and organisations who actively shaped the content through their advice and guidance, by lending objects for the display and involvement in filmed interviews and fashion shoots. Key non-Muslim organisations including the Community Relations Commission (now Multicultural NSW) were also an important source of contacts and ongoing advice and support.

The *Muslim Women in Profile* section was added in response to this community consultation, opening a space where faith, fashion and Muslim identity were further explored. Through photographs, treasured objects and interviews, nine Australian Muslim women from diverse communities and occupations shared their opinions, challenges and achievements.

A key aspect of the exhibition is the primacy of Muslim women's voices. Label text was drawn predominantly from interviews and discussions with the people featured in the exhibition. Filmed interviews with all the people featured in the exhibition provide a first voice experience rather than a curatorial interpretation.

The streetstyle montage also allowed us to highlight the diversity and creativity of Australian Muslim women's style as well as the multicultural makeup of the local Muslim community.