

Franco-Moroccan visual artist Majida Khattari unveils her burqas



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Franco-Moroccan artist Majida Khattari presented her vision of Islamic veils at a Parisian university student residence on April 10, in a performance art runway show that examined how people perceive the much-debated burqa.

Closer to performance art than to a classic runway show, Majida Khattari's presentation of clothing and live sculpture art at a Parisian university residence on Saturday was her contribution to the debate raging about the head-to-toe Islamic veil in France.

The Franco-Moroccan artist turned burqas, niqabs, hijabs, and sefsaris -all types of Islamic veil - into a sort of artistic battle flag, allowing her to merge visual expression with her interest in - and convictions about - matters of politics and religion.

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As she walks, the model takes off the clothes she is wearing underneath her transparent veil.



Artist Majida Khattari creates a paradox by openly displaying person hidden underneath it.



The first piece was a burqa made of thick, dark-coloured wool. Another burqa resembled a patchwork of clothing. Later in the show, a model's naked silhouette was discernible beneath a thin black veil. The final piece was strikingly paradoxical; a burqa displaying a printed identity portrait of the woman wearing it. Far from the fast-paced strut of Paris Fashion Week, Khattari's burqas - presented as sculptures of moving fabric - tackle pre-conceived notions about her subject.

'Every time there is a crisis, the female body comes under fire'

Born in 1966 in Erfoud, Morocco, Khattari studied fine arts in Casablanca, before moving to Paris to continue her studies. She is now based in Paris. Since 1996, Khattari has been organising performance art runway shows based around the theme of women in Islam today, as well as current issues of politics and religion in general.

The idea of a show dedicated to the burqa emerged from the French debate about the wearing of Islamic headscarfs in state schools. Without directly giving her opinion on the matter, Khattari is trying above all to incite dialogue.

"I find that every time there is a crisis, the female body comes under fire, and I can't help wondering about this phenomenon," Khattari explained.

The artist was careful to point out that religion is not the only source of oppression of women. "The reality of the imprisonment of women's bodies is not only related to the headscarf," she said.

"In the fashion world, for example, models all have the same body and the same look. I think it's the same kind of imprisonment as the burqa. It was interesting for me to examine, side-by-side, these two types of imprisonment, one of which is condemned and one of which is accepted as something natural". That reasoning helps explain why Khattari chose to have one model walk out almost totally naked, surrounded by others draped in burqas.

In addition to the performance art runway shows, Khattari has had photography, video installations and short films exhibited at Quebec's National Fine Arts Museum, London's Essor Gallery, New York's Guggenheim Museum and the Delacroix Museum in Paris.

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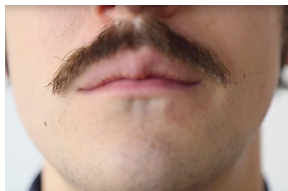
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