How does freedom dress?

Cloth is a video art piece intended to contribute to an inter/intracultural conversation about women, identity, oppression, agency and freedom, as well as common (mis)representations thereof. The directors and performing artists, Samira Mahboub and Ania Catherine, both current postgraduate students at the LSE Gender Institute, envisioned film as a medium through which they could carry academic discourse to a wider audience via performance art – cloth is the result. As gender scholars with diverse backgrounds – Samira is a Muslim of German and Moroccan heritage, and Ania is a non-religious Hispanic American – they are interested in channeling their performance experience into projects that not only stimulate critical reflection, but also encompass a meaningful combination of art, academia, and politics.

Cloth plays on stereotypes of the veiled Muslim woman as the ‘oppressed’ Other in binary opposition to the ‘liberated’ Western women. In doing so, it takes up academic scholarship that challenges the homogeneous (and negative) portrayal of veiled women, and the assumed mutual exclusivity of veiling and empowerment.

Veiling – to Western eyes, the most visible marker of the differentness and inferiority of Islamic societies— became the symbol now of both the oppression of women (…) and the backwardness of Islam (Ahmed 1992)

Cloth playfully translates such critiques into a medium that invites a wider public into the conversation. In exploring how freedom dresses, all too easy assumptions around oppression and empowerment are complicated.

Enjoy!

Directors: Ania Catherine and Samira Mahboub
Director of Photography: Jacqui J Sze
Editor: Jacqui J Sze
Performance Artists: Ania Catherine and Samira Mahboub
Engenderings – How does freedom dress?

Production & Set Assistant: Eman al-Maadeed
Music: “Easy Muffin” by Amon Tobin

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