

Artspace

The Best Artworks at Untitled Art, Miami Beach 2018

by Loney Abrams
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Wesaam Al-Badry, *Valentino #X*, 2018, archival pigment print, 20 x 16 inches

Currently based in San Francisco, Wesaam Al-Badry was born in Nasiriyah, Iraq in 1984. At the age of seven, at the outset of the Gulf War, he, his mother, and his four siblings (including his three-day-old sister) fled on foot, hiking all night until they found refuge at a camp in Saudi Arabia. They remained at the refugee camp for four-and-a-half years, when they relocated to Nebraska. "As a young man growing up in middle America, Al-Badry fiercely felt the disconnect between his experiences in Iraq and the refugee camps and his new American reality," says the gallery. But now, the relationship between Western ideals and traditional Muslim culture forms the bases of his work. In his artist statement he asks, "Would the Western World accept the niqab if it were on the racks of luxury fashion designers? What happens for the Islamic World by putting seasonal designer patterns/brands on millennia-old cultural traditions?" Al-Badry's process begins by collecting vintage and contemporary scarves from couture houses like Hermes and Gucci, which he then turns into niqabs, the traditional clothes that some Muslim women wear to cover their faces in public. Staging portraits featuring women wearing these custom luxury niqabs, the artist displays Western consumerism's influence on Muslim culture, revealing the tension between Occidental and Arab-Islamic ideologies. The artist currently has work at the "Contemporary Muslim

Fashion" exhibition at the DeYoung Museum in San Francisco.