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## TOURING *iamuslima*

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### Concept of Exhibition

Organized by Participant Inc. (an independent gallery in New York, NY), this exhibition presents works by artist Baseera Khan that complicate common notions of Muslim women through the artist's self-exploration of personal history and current geopolitical circumstances. Khan underscores intersectional themes through the combination of secular, religious, and private imagery.

As you tour this exhibition, take into account your audience's and your own comfort level with discussing the topics.

### With Visitors:

- **Look around the exhibition. What colors, images and materials are repeated?**
  - As visitors mention what they see, ask them for associations with those repeated aspects:
    - Gold - associations could include: wealth, jewelry, femininity
    - Black/brown – skin tones, hair, clothing; associations could include: people of color, fashion, secrecy, darkness of mood, night
    - Hair -- femininity, beauty,
    - Blankets - warmth, safety
  - As we look at each part of this exhibition, keep these associations in mind so we can explore how they are all connected. (references to these repetitions are in purple in the information below).

Say: **A major theme of this exhibition is Identity**

Preface the following questions by saying: **"These next questions you do not need to answer out-loud, but I want you to think about your own identity."**

- How would you characterize your own **identity**?
  - By gender? By nationality? By class? By work? By sexual orientation?
- What **roles** do you find yourself playing based on:
  - Your family? Career? Religion? Culture?
- What conflicts do any of the intersections of these identities bring up for you?
  - Baseera Kahn explores the intersectionality of her own identity throughout. For example:
    - "In [the print] *Oneness (belief in monotheism)* which corresponds to faith, Kahn layers photos of herself in profile such that she appears as a goddesslike figure with multiple legs and faces. This image suggests a multitude of identities coalesced into one." (quote taken from <https://www.artinamericamagazine.com/reviews/baseera-khan/>) Kahn alludes to the multiple selves that she manages based on her own aspirations and those from her cultural, social and family life. Here the **blanket** unifies and conceals the multiplicity of competing demands.

The title *iamuslima* reflects the artist's identification as a "queer femme Muslim" with queer referring to being marginalized from society, not in reference to sexuality. (See section on *Reading Room, On Purpose* below for more information on the title *iamuslima*)

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## IF VISITORS WANT MORE INFORMATION

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### Exhibition Components

#### Introduction

Overall the art work in the exhibition is characterized as minimalist. Khan connects her work to the contemporary art world through careful choice of materials and thoughtful integration of themes drawn from her own life as well as readings from post-colonial and critical race theory.

Throughout the exhibition we see connections between artworks through her use of imagery, materials, color and autobiographical references. Khan also reflects on how popular culture is taken up by marginalized people, such as herself, as a means of self-empowerment. Books and music are prominent in her life, and included in her works *Reading Room on Purpose* and *Karaoke Spiritual Center of Love* (video). Overall, Khan presents an optimistic view for a world where love is possible in the midst of violent oppression.

Three of the works in the exhibition are conceived of as installation sculptures: *Braidrage*, *Reading Room On Purpose*, and *Acoustic Sound Blankets*. Visitors should be encouraged to walk around the works to see them from different angles. Let them know not to touch the art.

#### ***Braidrage* (installation)**

##### *99 Holds* (2017)

Body edge shapes made of poured dyed resin casts with embedded gold chains, hair, and fragments of hypothermia blankets. Each cast is uniquely dyed; tones vary from blacks to browns.



***Braidrage*** is a wall installation that consists of 99 holds (unique poured dyed resin casts with embedded **gold** chains, **hair**, fragments of **gold hypothermia blankets**), climbing ropes, chain jewelry, and a 16-foot braid of real and synthetic hair suspended from the ceiling. The **hair** used in this piece references the commodified hair acquired from Indian women; hair also signifies issues of femininity, and social and familial expectations of women—many that are not met. The holds are cast from a mold of the artist's body. They are dyed various shades of **black** and brown to signify women of color from various ethnicities and national origins. Khan also injects the piece with humor, saying that she has to elbow her way into uninviting spaces, like the art world—her elbows and other corners of her body protrude from the wall and floor.

This installation resembles a rock-climbing wall. Khan will perform *Braidrage* on this wall on May 11 (See Related Events for more info). In the performance, she is in fact climbing her own body. The physical activity of

training for the performance is a decolonizing act for the artist. The climbing regiment of the training process alleviates anxiety of her daily life brought on by the largely anti-Muslim world. The performance references the struggle and ascent of herself as an artist, and her family who immigrated to the United States before she was born.

### **Acoustic Sound Blankets**



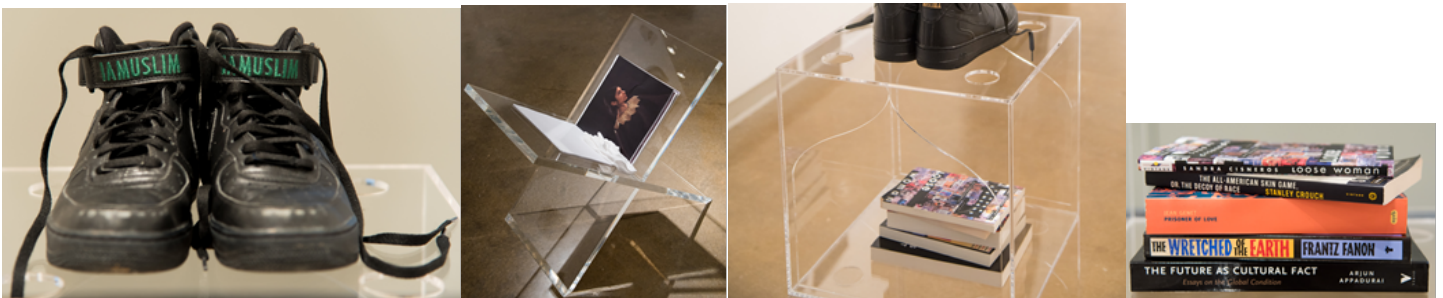
*Acoustic Sound Blankets, (2017)*  
Silk, felt, industrial sound insulation,  
embroidery thread



Openings in the center of the blankets are embellished with gold embroidery patterns that have been in Khan's family for generations.

**Acoustic Sound Blankets** is a wall installation that consists of ten **black** quilted textiles that are embroidered with **gold** silk thread in patterns derived from Khan's family's heirlooms. Five of the textiles rest on the floor as if they are figures crouched together as if for comfort. Khan has worn the **blankets** as a cloak and interacted with them as forms of shelter for intimate interaction with others. She is seen photographed in these throughout the exhibition, in the screen prints interpreting the five pillars of Islam, in the video, and the book *Core-On* (pronounced core-dash-on). The **blanket** as robe is a direct reference to the use of sound-dampening blankets being used by activists to protect themselves against the soundwaves produced by shock bombs that military use to disperse crowds.

### **The Reading Room, On Purpose (installation)**



**Left:** *iamuslima*, (2017) NikeID-customized Air Force One mid-top shoes

**Center left:** Book: *Core-On* (pronounced "core dash on")

**Center right and right:** Books (5): *Prisoner of Love*, *Wretched of the Earth*, *Loose Woman*, *The All-American Skin Game*, *Or, The Decoy of Race*, *The Future as Cultural Fact*

**Reading Room, On Purpose** was conceived of as an interactive space. However, we are not inviting visitors to handle the components of the installation. Central to the *Reading Room* are a unique pair of **black** Nike Air Force mid-tops that are embroidered with the word (and title of the exhibition) “IAMUSLIMA.” The miss-spelled phrase came about as a means of Kahn’s undermining the Nike company’s prohibition of the words “Islam” and “Muslim” as policy within their ID tag project, where customers could create unique footwear with their own word selection. The shoes are placed in a pristine acrylic display that mimics high-end fashion store furnishings. The five books on the shelving are personally significant to Khan’s understanding of the history of colonization and resistance. Reading informs Khan’s own semiotic reading of objects and images, and ultimately the formation of her own lexicon.

### ***Psychedelic Prayer Rugs (2017)***



**Left:** *Purple Heart*

**Center:** *Act Up*

**Right:** *Lunar Count Down*

Khan designed her ***Psychedelic Prayer Rugs*** with personally significant images, as well as motifs typical to Islamic art. They are installed in the museum directionally pointing toward The Qibla (Mecca) to adhere to the reverence of practicing prayer. Khan also worked in collaboration with rug makers in Kashmir, India, who interpreted the artist’s designs in their weaving process. However, Khan made these rugs as portals of meditation to activate a different personal consciousness—being woke (see Terms below).

*Act Up* (shown above at center) features an Islamic poem that translates into the following:

“talking is an instinct  
and through that living is possible,  
but with silence it is not”

## Prints

Five large-format screen prints are based on Khan's personal vision of the five pillars of Islam.



*Oneness (belief in monotheism), (2017)*

Screen print on paper  
(See "With visitors" for a touring suggestion)



*Zakat (donating 2.5% of your monetary value every year), (2017)*

Screen print on paper



*Fasting (a 30-day fast by the lunar calendar), (2017)*

Screen print on paper



*Pilgrimage (visiting the Kaaba, which is adorned in black cloth as are so many practicing women), (2017)*

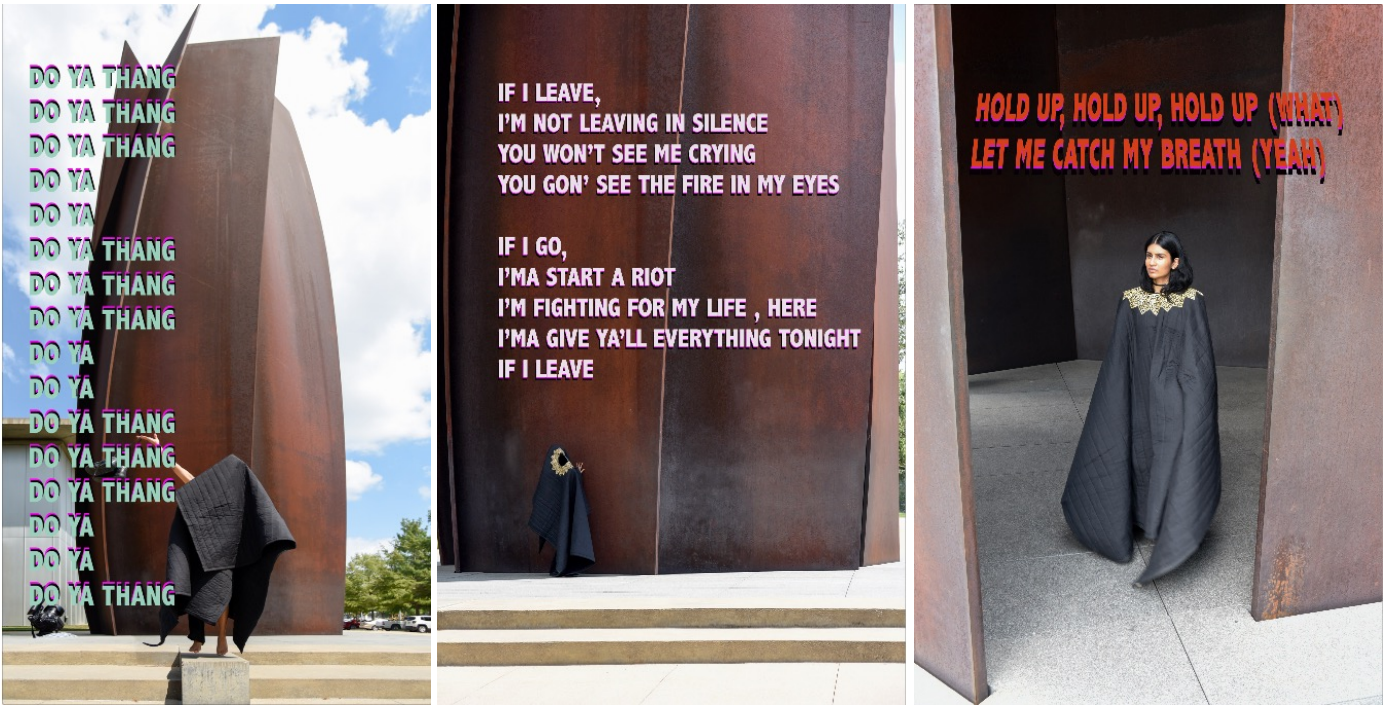
Screen print on paper



*Prayer (prostrating in submission five times a day to an entity outside of your body), (2017)*

Screen print on BKF Rives paper

## Video Produced for Karaoke Spiritual Center of Love (2018)



Stills from video produced for *Karaoke Spiritual Center of Love* (2018)

There are fourteen individual videos that play on a 45-minute long loop. The artist is referencing the activity of karaoke, so the viewer sees the song as if it is a karaoke prompt. The videos she uses are primarily of herself performing in the one of the *Acoustic Blankets*. She also uses personal video archive and samples Bollywood films.

## ABOUT THE ARTIST



**Baseera Khan** is a New York-based artist whose work shares experiences of exile and kinship shaped by economic, pop cultural, and political situations. She mixes consumerism with spirituality and treats decolonial histories, practices, and archives as geographies of the future. Khan is currently exhibiting her work at Sculpture Center's *In Practice: Another Echo* exhibition (2018). Her first solo exhibition, *iamuslima*, was exhibited at Participant Inc (2017), and is currently on tour to Moudy Gallery at Texas Christian University (2017), and Colorado Springs FAC (2018). She has performed at Whitney Museum of Art, Queens Museum, and ArtPop Montreal International Music Festival (2017). Khan will be an artist in residence at Pioneer Works for fall 2018-19. She completed an artist-in-residence program at Abrons Art Center (2016-17), was an

International Travel Fellow to Jerusalem/Ramallah through Apexart, and a Process Space artist-in-residence for Lower Manhattan Cultural Council (2015). Khan attended Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture (2014). She is published in Artforum Magazine, Art in America, Bomb Magazine, OSMOS Magazine, Unbag, TDR Drama Review. She received an M.F.A. at Cornell University (2012) and B.F.A. from the University of North Texas (2005).

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## RELATED EVENTS

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### Braidrage: A Performance by Baseera Khan

**May 11, 5:30-6:30 p.m.**

Central to the exhibition *iamuslima* is a rock-climbing wall mounted with *99 Holds* (2017); each hold is a unique resin cast from the corners of the artist's body. Dyed in various shades of black and brown, the holds are embedded with fragments of gold chain jewelry, hypothermia blankets, and commodified Indian hair containing mitochondrial DNA. In this performance, Baseera Khan will activate the installation by a careful choreography, scaling this wall, leaving a trace of her movements behind.

Reservations required - details to come

### Member's Talk:

A Conversation with Curator Polly Nordstrand and Colorado College History Professor Jane Murphy

**May 5, 12:00 p.m.**

Members only event. More details to follow.

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## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

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***iamuslima***: "I am Muss-li-ma" (no "z" sound)

**Baseera Khan**: "Ba-sear-ah Con"

**Core-On**: "core dash on"

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## TERMS

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**"Being Woke"**: Urban Dictionary defines as: "being aware," or "knowing what's going (on in the community)." It also has specific ties to racism and social injustice. But it's not quite that simple, like most slang terms, the meaning of "woke" changes depending on who is saying it, and to whom.

**Decolonizing the mind**: a critical practice that comes from post-colonial theory, specially addressing breaking away from the colonizer's language and culture as a dominant social structure.

**Postcolonialism**: a generalized term used to describe the variety of events that have arisen in the aftermath of European decolonization since the nineteenth century. Among the events included under the rubric are social change, cultural redefinition, and political upheaval on both the small and large scale. The term implies a breaking free or a breaking away from a colonizing force, but essentially the study of postcolonialism addresses issues of power, subordination, race, gender inequity, and class— and examines

how these issues linger far after the colonizer has exited. It is sometimes understood that colonialism ended in the early to mid-twentieth century, but the vestiges of colonial power and influence remain in many parts of the once colonized world. These vestiges can be seen in the unequal sharing of power in government, especially when Western interests are at stake, as well as in inequities in military control, resource allocation, and economic benefits when more powerful governments and entities participate in economic exchanges with postcolonial nations. (Taken from the Gale Virtual Reference Library.)

**Post-colonial theory:** Postcolonial theory, often said to begin with the work of Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, looks at literature and society from two broad angles: how the writer, artist, cultural worker, and his or her context reflects a colonial past, and how they survive and carve out a new way of creating and understanding the world. (Taken from the Gale Virtual Reference Library.)

**Queer:** One definition of queer is abnormal or strange. Historically, queer has been used as an epithet/slur against people whose gender, gender expression and/or sexuality do not conform to dominant expectations. Some people have reclaimed the word queer and self identify as such. For some, this reclamation is a celebration of not fitting into norms/being “abnormal.” Manifestations of oppression within gay and lesbian movements such as racism, sizeism, ableism, cissexism, transmisogyny as well as assimilation politics, resulted in many people being marginalized, thus, for some, queer is a radical and anti-assimilationist stance that captures multiple aspects of identities. (<https://lgbtqia.ucdavis.edu/educated/glossary.html>)

**Intersectionality:** refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power...

The premise of intersectionality theory, first articulated by feminists of color, is that social differentiation is achieved through complex interactions between markers of difference such as gender, race, and class. In order to comprehend how an individual’s access to social, political, and economic institutions is differentially experienced, it is necessary to analyze how markers of difference intersect and interact. (Taken from the Gale Virtual Reference Library.)

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Regarding Sandra Cisneros’ book *Loose Woman* that is included in the *Reading Room, On Purpose*. Another avenue into the women of color and feminist themes of the show:

<https://dwwproject2012.weebly.com/loose-woman.html>

Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Page on Islam Basics: <http://cair.com/publications/about-islam>