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photos Langston Hues

MIXING FASHION



WITH FAITH

Examining the
Mipster movement
with the help of
three Stockholm
hijabistas.



The notion of the Mipster movement had been germinating for a couple of years before that notorious three-minute video that made it spring to life with a bang, leaving a flutter of controversy and passionate debate all over the internet.

In *Somewhere in America*, a group of seriously hip girls frolic around New York City clad in bright colours and stylish garments, partaking in activities like skateboarding in stilettos, running on fences and doing handstands against graffiti-covered walls, dancing to a boom box in their sunglasses and chunky jewellery, eating ice cream and taking selfies, and embodying coolness while posing on fire escapes and industrial barrels.

But what was it then that made the internet explode in its wake? Just the fact that all girls are sporting a hijab. Enter the Muslim hipsters, aka Mipsterz, who have quickly become a global network connecting Muslim women, united by the ideology that you can fuse fashion with faith and be a hipster while wearing a hijab.

To quote the opening of the Mipster manifesto, a Mipster is “someone at the forefront of the latest music, fashion, art, critical thought, food, imagination, creativity, and all forms of obscure everything,” and yet “seeks inspiration from the Islamic tradition of divine scriptures, volumes of knowledge, mystical poets, bold prophets, inspirational politicians, esoteric imams, and our fellow human beings searching for transcendental states of consciousness.”

Sparked by a mutual sense of confidence and empowerment, the movement grew organically and was further spurred by social media, an important component of the scene. The purpose of the video was to demonstrate the diversity of Muslim women and to break the stereotype of the hijab as a symbol of oppression that they hide behind. In fact, Mipsterz insist that the hijab should be treated like any other piece of clothing.

And *Stockholm naturally* has its own Mipster representatives. Imane, Setareh, and Maryam met a few months ago through a photo shoot with Detroit-based photographer Langston Hues, who was working on a recently-published book focusing on modest street fashion around the world.

“I think the acceptance towards the Muslim community is growing and people are starting to demolish the prejudice about Muslim girls not knowing much about fashion,” says Imane, a 20-year-old university student who works part-time with clothing retail and shares her love for fashion and photography through her prominent blog, *Fashion with Faith*. A browse through Imane’s picture collection shows a taste for minimalism: A beige hijab, black leather jacket, long white shirt, a pair of grey New Balance



MODEST STREET FASHION

Modest Street Fashion is a book of photographs that documents the emerging culture of modest street style which has erupted around the world. It is the first book to visually capture this growing international trend that has exploded from the streets of Kuala Lumpur to the alleys of New York City.

With a background in anthropology, Detroit-based photographer Langston Hues cites his travels as akin to a contemporary ethnography. He states the manifestation of modest fashion is based on women’s expression of identity through their dress, saying “my book is not just about Muslim fashion, but about modest fashion trends.”

In capturing these images, Hues says his book “will include faith-driven fashion designers, bloggers and a large number of their followers who dress modestly but are stylish at the same time”.

Women opting to dress modestly are increasingly exploring unconventional dimensions of conservative or traditional dress, whilst still maintaining an adherence to their spiritual values. “Women who chose to cover themselves were an anomaly a few years back and, in some cases, criticized,” says Hues. “Today, they are

reaching out to like-minded people and have a massive following throughout the world.”

Commencing this journey from his hometown of Detroit, Hues’ has photographed in excess of 400 style-conscious candidates across the United States, Europe, Australia, Asia and the Middle East, encompassing over 20 countries and 25 cities to date.

Hues maintains his objective is not to regulate what modest fashion is, but to create a book documenting the global trend it represents.

In keeping with the international pace of his journey, his highly-anticipated photo book is printed and due for release here in early 2015, and will be launched around the world in various countries that were included in his photo tour.



For more, see:
modeststreetfashion.com
langstonsues.com
fb.com/ModestStreetFashion

MY HIJAB DOESN'T ONLY SYMBOLIZE MY FAITH, BUT IT'S ALSO A SYMBOL OF STRENGTH AND INDEPENDENCE.

– MARYAM



sneakers. The simplicity of the subtle colours makes her strong red lipstick pop even more.

“My favourite store is Weekday and my favourite item must be the long coat. It covers up the parts of my body I don’t want exposed and it adds the minimalistic yet modest touch I like. I started wearing the hijab almost three years ago and it must be the most valuable decision I have ever made. One of the many thoughts that were circling in my head was ‘why worry about how society tells you to dress when you should be worried about how you should dress for God.’ It was a way for me to get closer to God. Wearing it, I’m constantly reminded of God and I have him in my thoughts everywhere I go. The hijab is my freedom of choice and it is something that makes me feel peaceful and happy. I have never felt so content before in my life, and it is something that has strengthened me as an individual.”

“A couple of years ago if a girl was wearing a hijab she wasn’t following fashion, but now mixing fashion with it is very fresh and new,” says Setareh, a 24-year-old economy student who runs a cake-baking operation on the side and does a lot of volunteering in her spare time.

The blue room at Blå Lotus feels very fitting when Setareh walks in wearing a bright blue hijab with a matching turquoise necklace. She looks exquisite, with her striking eye-make up, rings on almost every finger, and a Marc Jacobs gold watch – a gift from her brother.

“I’ve always been a person who wears unique clothes, like I was the one who would wear pink pants in the middle of winter. I basically wear the clothes I want to wear. I was wearing more different colours and patterns before, but as I’ve become older I’ve changed my style and prefer more subtle colours. I would say my favourite item is a pair of black pants; it really matches with everything. And I shop in all the usual stores: H&M, Zara, Mango. It’s really all about how you combine items yourself to create outfits.”

“A few years ago you wouldn’t see scarfs at normal stores and it was really hard to find them. But a couple of years ago I read an article in Metro where they had asked big stores in Sweden if they would start selling more scarfs, but they said they didn’t want to define themselves as selling clothes related to religion. But about a year later there were a lot of scarfs in stores, like big ones that you could wear as a hijab.”

“I’ve been wearing hijabs since I was nine and it means everything to me. My whole life is about the hijab, because it defines my faith and I’m very proud to show what religion I belong to. I’ve seen some girls being unsure about it and having to struggle with wearing it, but it has never been that way for me, and I’m very happy for that.”

Born and raised in Iran, Setareh moved to Sweden when she was ten. “There’s a lot of Mipsterz in Iran who are combining restrictions with their own personal styles, which is very interesting to see. Things are very different there from ten years ago, and are becoming much freer in some ways and there have been noticeable improvements lately.”

Back in Iran, Setareh’s mother was a reputable carpet weaver – one of the best in the country, according to her daughter – and



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her father was an accomplished writer who has written several books about Islam, with themes ranging from how misunderstood the Islamic population has been in history to women's rights in the Middle East.

"My parents think it's really cool that hijabi women are taking more place in society. They're very proud of me and my style and are always pushing me to be myself. My friends are not that religious, and most of my friends aren't even Muslims, so in my daily life I don't hang out that much with Muslims. I rarely go to the mosque but I pray and follow all the customs. My religion is more something I do at home with my family. It's about us being together and creating a family tradition."

"I've always been very interested in fashion, therefore I've tried to experiment with my clothing and push myself out of my comfort zone for as long as I can remember," says Maryam, a 20-year-old kindergarten teacher who's going into psychology this fall and has a passion for art and photography. "I don't really follow trends, I just wear whatever I feel like and makes me feel good. I started sewing when I was six, and I wanted to be a designer for a pretty long while. The Mipster movement has worked as a source of inspiration and given me different ideas for outfits."

Maryam is away on a month-long visit in her home country of Iran at the time of the interview so I have to settle with a browse through her Instagram in order to get an idea of her. I spot several pics of her wearing her favourite item: a camel coat she claims to having lived in since she bought it on ASOS last year.

"I love masculine clothes; rough boots, oversized tees, hoodies, bomber jackets, and so on. I hate looking girly and I always try to add masculine touches to all my outfits. And I love contrasts; mixing hard and soft is so fun and unexpected. As for stores, I'm in love with Monki and Weekday. If I could choose two stores to shop from for the rest of my life it would be those."

"I've seen a lot of hijabis wear long cardigans/kimonos during the summer, so I'm assuming it's becoming quite a signature item for Mipsterz. And by far my favourite one because they can make any outfit look so casual yet edgy and sophisticated. And obviously it's the perfect cover-up."

"My hijab doesn't only symbolize my faith, but it's also a symbol of strength and independence. For me it's liberating; I refuse to conform to the norms and societal moulds of a 'typical' woman. A woman can cover up as much as she wants and still be just as free as a woman who chooses not to cover up at all."

"I think a lot of people have this strict idea of what a typical Muslim woman should dress like, and although it can be true to some degree it doesn't mean you have to restrict your creativity. There are so many ways you can experiment with your clothing and still not overstep your own modesty-guidelines. You are your own artwork."