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Sarah Hakani: Artist Reflection for American Muslim Futures

FULL TRANSCRIPT (without timecode)

Salaams and Ya Ali Madad, thank you so much for spending time with my work. I am deeply grateful to you for your time and energy. I'm Sara Zarina Hakani from Atlanta, Georgia and currently living and working as an artist educator and technologist in Brooklyn, New York.

A just future is one where we have a deep care for the collective and our movements, decisions, systems, and structures are set up in a way that equipped the most marginalized with the tools to live safe, comfortable, and healthy lives. That is until we eventually work towards a world where there is no marginalized. But rather, all people who have had their needs met and are seen as full individuals who contain and have lived full histories that translate to full futures uninterrupted by race, class, ability, gender, sexuality, caste, and more.

This just future is evident to me and my mother. Someone who has provided me with all the tools to care for myself and for the collective. Someone who has perpetually learned and grown in order to broaden her ideas of community and self. Has investigated her past in order to seek out a just future for herself and those around her. Through constant unlearning and re-education about herself and the communities that she exists within. This work envisions a just future through delving into the past.

This artwork is a result of years and years of creation and recreation, a deep excavation of self and process. Within this piece are the layers of myself and what I've made throughout the last decade and their evolutions leading to their own cohesive work here. Some elements of this work were created in 2013. Remixed and reimagined for the moment both in order to trace my own growth but also to re-root and something familiar and sturdy.

To me, there is no American Muslim future without an American Muslim past. I really wanted to sit with that in my creation. When I found this call for submissions I was rereading in *The Presence of Absence* by Mohammad Darwish. After rereading in order to reimagine meaning once again, as I was attempting to do in parallel through my own self discovery, evolutions, and creations, in this book Darwish writes, "Do not regret the war that ripened to you. Just as August ripens pomegranates on the slopes of stolen mountains."

Each and every encounter with this phrase and its reimagined meanings has deeply resonated. In this moment I feel we are fighting a much more collective war than we have experienced in our lifetimes. One that I hope is ripening us.

I took this line and I run it through a broken neural network which takes these combinations of words as the input and outputs randomly generated other worldly images that are a result of what the machine has learned to associate with those words.

After I ran this line back many times and many combinations I received about 20 eerie and nonsensical images back from this neural network to play with. From here I really began to look for the patterns in the abstract and start collaging pieces together. After building several flowers out of these images I decided I

wanted to create an Islamic miniature. An ode to the past that held new explorations and iterations of my own work and journey reimagined for the future through the lens of Darwish's is quote.

Lastly, I excavated my old work documentations of the wars that have ripened me and began to think through how they have evolved over the years. I created the middle portion of the miniature through digitally manipulating two works. One from my series Deconstructed Femininity and one from Radical Mysticism. In order to create a new emblem, a new interpretation of the war that ripens, a new evolution, a new merging of the individual anatomical with the collective, a new future that recognizes the past.

As an abstract piece this artwork may raise different themes and questions for different viewers. As I hope most works do. Here the core themes are reimaginings, recreations, and reinterpretations. All of the other reads that take us into our pasts and into our futures as we process something individual, and turn it into something collective. The core themes evident here are indeed questions both about process and content.

So I will share them here:

How do our histories directly impact the ways that we dream up our futures? What does it mean to ever be done with something? Are you ever really done with an event when it could be repurposed or given new life in the future? As we grow does our reimagining of our past change our past? Can we really change what has happened through us, through the ways that we transform, and subsequently transform our relationships with the past? How have your identities merge together over time?

In this piece the two women on the bottom left whose faces are covered by the triangles merge into the spinal column made from the skirts of whirling dervishes as they fade to the top. While these are works from different series put in conversations with one another, the essence becomes what parts of yourself remain anonymous? How does that allow for broader feelings of collectivism, and an irrelevance about the individual as we think about the war that is ripening us? What does it mean to engage with old work that you have created during a time of transition?

How does this specific moment in history, where many of our connections to community are digital, just like this exhibit, impact the way our archives evolve? With time, how have your histories and memories shifted from individual to collective? If they have taken this journey in what ways has that been liberatory?

This piece embodies my vision for a future by returning agency to you, the viewer. Just as there are as many Islams, as there are Muslims, there are as many answers to these questions as there are viewers of this work. I hope that through exploring these themes you reimagine the ways in which your past makes way for your ever evolving just futures.

The American Muslim futures exhibit is important because it creates a space in which people with proximity to Islam can dream across modalities, mediums, space, and time. While thinking about the future can be painful and difficult in general, the current state of the world makes it even more difficult and even more uncertain in a way many of us could have never imagined.

When I first read this call for submissions, I truly had no idea what I would create. To me that feels like a very rare and very beautiful part of art making. Allowing something to really unfold as it goes without expectation or desire. This process of imagining a future during a very blurry and uncertain time allowed me to tap into my past as a means of creating the future. In some ways, co-creating a future with my past

self, a past Sarah. Through doing so I feel as though this piece not only archives many years of my own work, it also evolved as it was being made and the themes I wanted to highlight became more and more apparent as I continued to spend time with this piece.

I hope the impact of this exhibit will be to empower folks to really do the same. To meet themselves where they are in order to dream up a future regardless of how scary that feels. And to remember that the future can be one that is just in which you feel whole.

And all of the pieces of you that make you, you, are upheld, celebrated, loved, and nourished regardless of how amorphous and uncertain that future may feel now.

Thank you.