



Shield and Symbol.  
From the Ancient Veil  
to the Hijab



Education and Culture DG

Culture Programme

Διοργάνωση



# The project “Reconciliation through Art: Perceptions of Hijab”

The exhibition “Shield and Symbol. From the Ancient Veil to the Hijab” is held in the context of the European project “Reconciliation through Art: Perceptions of Hijab” which is implemented by research institutes, theatre companies and other cultural operators in Greece, Italy and Bulgaria, with support from the European Commission, Framework Programme Culture 2000.

At a time when the Muslim custom of hijab (the headscarf worn by Muslim women) has caused considerable controversy in Europe and attracted much debate and media attention, ReconcArt attempts to explore the issues underlying the use of this symbolic garment as perceived by Muslim and non-Muslim women.

ReconcArt has employed creative expression techniques such as acting, dancing, painting, writing, singing and other forms of art, to encourage the expression and analysis of deep-rooted feelings and thoughts held by people on this subject, irrespective of origin or religion. Indeed, when held in a secure and non-judgmental environment, creative expression practices are very powerful in releasing people’s emotions and therefore reaching the desired result of true understanding. Moreover, ReconcArt has drawn on the collective effort of theatre writers, directors, actors, painters and other performing and visual artists, interested in working with ordinary people in order to develop creative expression approaches and reach a valid artistic result.

The project has used different routes to achieve its aims and has set in motion a variety of actions in the three participating countries. These include:

- Background research to identify the social, cultural and political aspects that underlie the use of hijab by women in Europe.
- A series of creative expression workshops, bringing together a group of women in each country, including Muslim and non-Muslim ones, those that wear the hijab and those that don’t, to express and debate their feelings and thoughts towards the practice of Hijab, using different art forms under the guidance of a facilitator.
- Production and public performance of a theatre play in each country, based on the material collected and themes identified during the workshops, and performed by the workshop participants.
- An international conference and cultural event including performances of the three different productions of the Greek, Italian and Bulgarian teams
- An exhibition showing the evolution of women’s head covering through the ages, including artworks inspired by the Hijab.

## Contributors to the exhibition

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Over the centuries, women’s head coverings have indicated their social and economic status, their religion, their faith or their place of residence. Depending on their form, various covering (calyptras) have been used as a symbol of chastity, mourning, faith, loyalty, modesty, economic prestige, elegance, tradition or cultural identity. Today, headdresses have either a protection function or serve as a religious symbol, as is the case with Islam. Ancient Greek women covered their body, and if necessary their head, with a veil, as shown in representations on ceramics and in sculptures. While the veil was most commonly worn by brides at weddings, it was also used as a sign of mourning at funerals, as a means of protection from the sun and as an elaborately decorated status symbol on official occasions.

In the Byzantine era, manuscripts and frescoes reveal that women’s headdresses were influenced initially by the luxury of the East and later by the West. Various types of head coverings appeared, such as fakioli (kerchief), mitres, blinds, nets, turban, bonnets and veils, which were worn with elaborate jewellery - lithokollitos, lithovlitos, porfyreon - depending on the manner in which they were decorated.

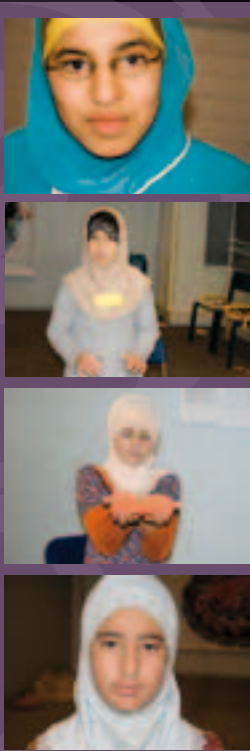
Ordinary women commonly wore a long cloth (akin to the veil of the ancients) called a screen, kridemnon or calyptra, which covered the head and part of the body and was identical to the maforio of the Virgin Mary.

The Christian religion originally advocated that women cover their heads every day. In his first letter to Corinthians, Apostle Paul stated that a woman «should pray to God with her head covered».

With time, the headscarf prevailed only in «women who had devoted themselves to God», such as nuns, while in certain cases it was used during church functions by women in Russia, Spain and some Balkan countries.

In the medieval Western world, married upper-class women generally covered their hair with veils, scarves, nets and bonnets called kaperounia. Single women, on the other hand, mostly left their hair uncovered. The same trends, with different permutations, prevailed in the regions of Europe according to their economic welfare and social class for many centuries. The main purpose of these trends was to convey social differences; this often resulted in excessive displays, such as impressively tall hats. In the Renaissance period, women used a simpler, almost homogeneous head covering. Conversely, in subsequent centuries, laces, bonnets, hats and veils adorned or covered complicated hairdos (as in the case of the impressive fontaz) according to the fashion trends followed by local communities.

The rise of Protestantism brought substantial changes in women’s head coverings, since this religion advocated a simple appearance and advocated that women wear a simple cap, as opposed to the ornate styles preferred by Catholic women. In Greece, many elements of head coverings date back to ancient times and the Byzantine era. In Crete, for example, head coverings appear in 14th- and 15th-century religious paintings, in which women wear turbans or tambourines, caps, fakiolia or nets according to the customs of the era. Later, similar types were used only in bridal dress, while the traditional Cretan costume mostly retained a headdress which was made of gossamer cloth



and throw it on the shoulders. «Synaxario for Noble women», a 17th-century text by an anonymous author, called the head covering skepi, while it was referred to as magnia in «Erotokritos» and as bolia in «Fortounato». The same object that traveller Tournefort describes as a «women’s head coverings worn as veils, and falling on the shoulders with grace», is described by Thomas Santhouith as featuring «lace on the seams». In earlier times, depending on the region they lived, women wore similar headdresses, such as krousates, gazes, chrysobolies, and argyrobolies, as well as the everyday bolia for agricultural chores.

In traditional Greek society, women’s head coverings varied according to their place of residence, their social status, their activities, their appearance and their station in life. Thus, a single woman’s head covering was different from that of a married, in confinement, elderly or widowed woman. Of particular note is the wedding headdress which symbolised the transition to a new situation and was prepared according to a specific ritual. The infinite types of head covering combinations include kerchiefs, scarves, and bolies - monochrome or multicoloured, light or dark, printed or embroidered with plant, animal, or geometric patterns, featuring simple finishes or lace and bibiles, festive or for everyday use. Hence the couplet:

*Forty armlengths your bolia and sixty your hair ...*

*One bolia, one golden bolia is sold in the bazaar  
and has the weft of gold and warp of silver.*

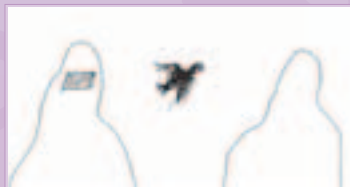
*The little kerchief you are wearing is ripping my heart,  
when you dance, vlacha, you look like a butterfly.*

Greek literature often bears references to head coverings, either as a symbol of mourning: “Nerantzi knitted... Her dark face, tense in the black scarf, was melting of heartache... Zina’s mourning outpouring from her heart... She took the shells of pomegranates, boiled a caldron and dyed them black... Her clothes... headscarves...” writes Stratis Myrivilis in «Panayia (Madonna) the Mermaid»,

or as mementoes: “She would have drowned. I saved her. I took her into my arms and saved her. I would rather have died at a stroke at that time. She called me names. But she left me the red scarf. Now, I will lay it on the pillow every night and sleep.»

The great social and economic changes, such as the industrial revolution and urbanisation that occurred in the Western world in the 20th century, gave women financial independence, along with new roles, a new lifestyle and a new pace, with the result that their dress habits also underwent a fundamental change. Following the requirements of their new life, women began to adopt modern fashion instead of continuing to use local costumes. Traditional dress, which was time consuming and costly to make and particularly unsuited to women’s new daily obligations, was given up. In parallel, women uncovered or covered their heads with more modern accoutrements according to specific aesthetic rules. With fashion dictating that women adorn their head with elongated scarves, turbans, feathers, hats and ribbons, traditional head coverings began to disappear. Hats, caps and scarves remained the necessary accessories of feminine beauty and elegance until the middle of the century.

After the war, the classic square silk scarf known as the «travel



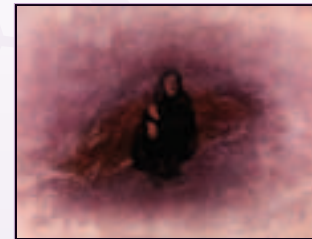
carre” scarf, made its appearance as a symbol of prestige and style. All famous modern women, including Grace Kelly and Jackie Onassis, took care to be seen and photographed wearing the scarf, which they saw as a symbol of the modern era - an era of simplicity and practical dress. The most famous scarf maker of the time, Hermès, stated in advertisements: «you can wear it as you wish» and noted «a square (Hermès scarf) always tells a story; it is bequeathed from mother to daughter and from grandmother to granddaughter». This classic type of square scarf is timeless, used from generation to generation for aesthetic and practical purposes.

During the 1960s, in Greece, head coverings inspired by traditional costumes came back into fashion, along with a trend advocating a return to the roots. After several decades of disuse, headscarves, kerchiefs, bolies, yiazmas, yemeni, and fakiolia - whether festive or for everyday use, painted, printed or embroidered - reappeared in modern women’s wardrobes, where they remained for approximately two decades. Short or long scarves in silk or cotton, tied into skilful knots, covered women’s hair and drew attention to their face. Along with this trend came a release of women’s hair from the hairdos of the period, such as buns, bananas and plaits, among others.

In the 21st century, fashion begins to rebel and break all rules, often recycling itself. Yet designers do not abandon the elaborate headscarves which modern women wear in various ways according to their specific needs and desires. Women decide when and how to use them - to show reverence, to protect themselves from the sun and cold, to highlight their wardrobe, to mourn, to express something, because they’re useful, because they like it, because it is their choice.

For Muslim women the headscarf is a symbol of religious devotion, and has at the same time social, cultural and political meanings. For their majority, wearing the hijab - a cloth covering the hair, ears and neck - is a matter of faith and tradition, and sometimes even a political statement. Most non-Muslims, however, perceive the hijab - and even more the burqa, chador or niqab (a headscarf that also covers the face) as the ultimate symbol of discrimination against women in Muslim societies. In the past few years, the hijab has become increasingly popular among Muslim women, sparking a debate on human rights, law and social values. Young, educated women have taken to wearing the hijab, thus protesting against the « oppression » of Western image models. For such women, wearing the traditional headscarf represents faith, heritage, honour, femininity, and sometimes even comfort; hence, many of them have strongly opposed decrees banning the hijab. The feminist movement is divided upon this point: on the one hand it is accepted that Muslim women have the right to dress as they wish and define their social and cultural identity; on the other hand, it is recognised that the primary function of hijab is that of a medium of oppression and subjugation of women, undermining their professional, social or political role outside the family.

In the confrontation between Islam and the West, the hijab has gained a new meaning as a medium of resistance to the West and a return to Islamic roots. Fundamentalist Islamic groups, even



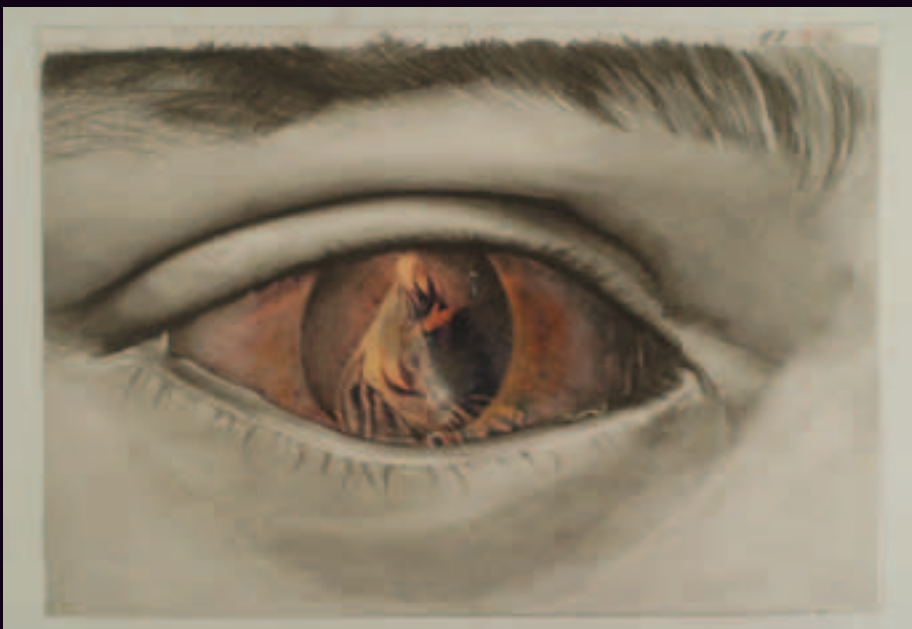


governments of Islamic countries, regard the shunning of the hijab by Muslim women as an affiliation to Western values and a betrayal of Islamic traditions. Thus, the issue of wearing the hijab is entangled within a cultural and political controversy, whose victims are Muslim women - regardless of their desire to wear the hijab or not.

The exhibition "Shield and Symbol. From the Ancient Veil to the Hijab" attempts to highlight, through the eyes of the artists, the two issues that have been discussed above: on the one hand the continuity over time, the universality, the symbolisms and the messages that pervade head coverings through the ages in Europe and in the Hellenic culture; and on the other hand the controversy and conflict that permeate the perceptions of hijab both in western societies and in Islamic countries. Moreover, through the eyes of the artists we are confronted with images of the hijab as a symbol of the political and cultural debate surrounding it; and as evidence of the inner psyche, tradition, honour, devotion, faith, but also alienation, imprisonment of mind and body, isolation, subjugation of women



Irene Gonou / Ειρήνη Γκόνου  
"hijab II", 2009  
arabic calligraphy gouache  
on wasli paper, 15x21 cm



Konstantina Katrakazou /  
Κωνσταντίνα Κατρακάζου  
"truth non-truth  
assimilated evolve into  
smoke", 2006, mixed  
media, pencil, pastel,  
photograph, 70x100 cm

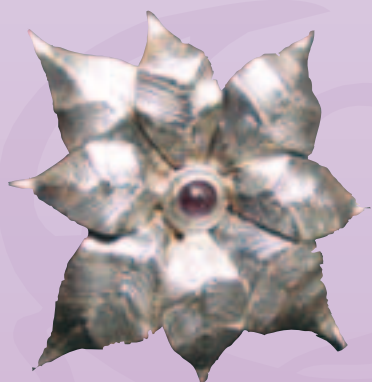


Akis Pirounidis / Άκης Πειρουνίδης  
"Something's eating away at us",  
acrylic on canvas, 2008  
200 x150 cm

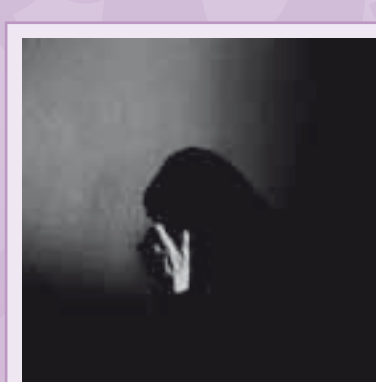
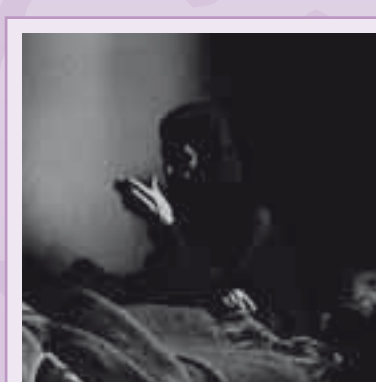
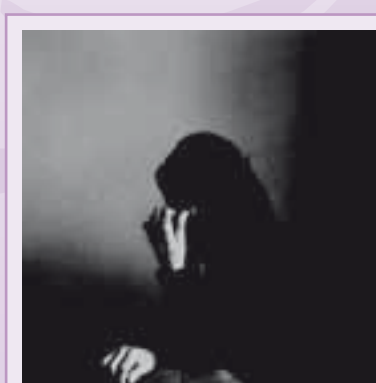
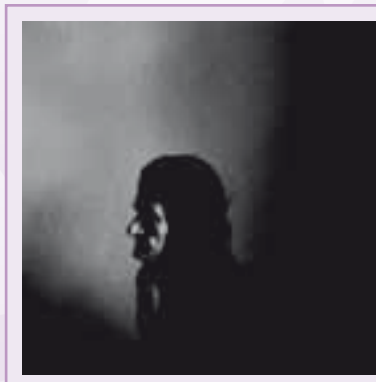


Καλλιρρόη Μαρούδα  
*Θεία με λευκό μαντήλι*  
*Μολύβι σε χαρτί*

Kallirroi Marouda  
*"the aunt with the white  
 head covering",  
 pencil in paper.*



Savvas Dimos,  
*"pin for head covering,  
 silver, 2009*



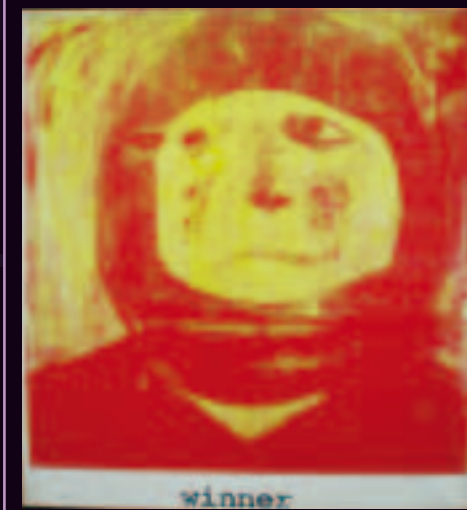
Apostolis Zolotakis,  
*Untitled, 1982,  
 photographs*



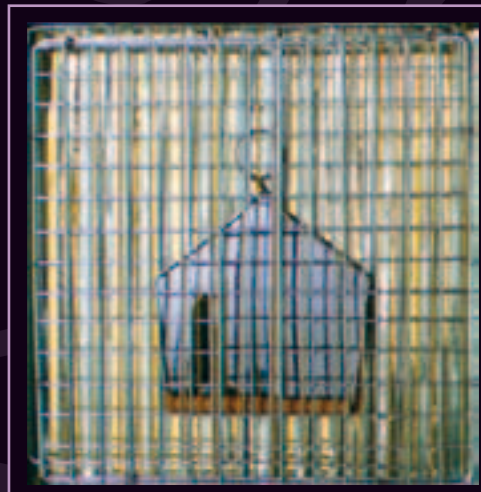


Nefeli Kontarini /  
Νεφέλη Κονταρίνη  
*photography of the exhibition*

*Νεφέλη Κονταρίνη, φωτογραφία  
από την έκθεση "ΔΥΟ ΜΑΤΙΑ  
ΜΟΝΟ..." , Μουσείο Μπενάκη  
- Ισλαμικής Τέχνης (5/11 -  
5/12/2008).*



Iris Zoric  
*Fighter, Winner*  
*silkscreen on canvas*  
*50x50*

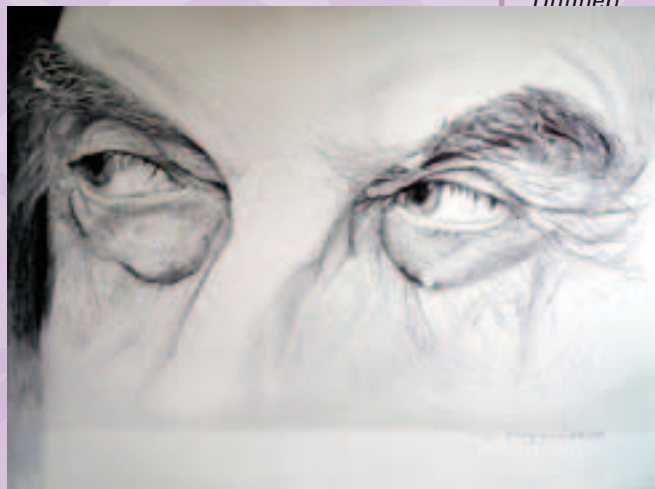


Panos Mitsopoulos,  
*burqua, mixed media, 2007*  
*25x25*





Io Angeli,  
*Untitled*  
ia



Χάρης Κοντοσφύρης  
*Ο φερετζές του δεσποτισμού*, 2009,  
χαρτί, μαύρα στυλό διαρκείας,  
41 x 50 cm

Harris Kondosphyris



Μαρία Ντεβερίκου  
*Εμμονή*, 2006,  
μεικτή τεχνική  
120x80

Maria Deverikou  
*mixed media*

Maria Schina, video







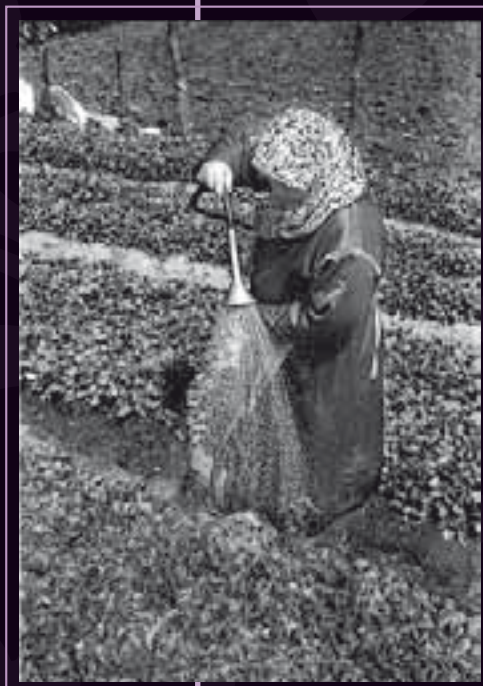
Σωτήρης Δανέζης,  
*Μουσουλμάνες, φωτογραφία*

Sotiris Danezis



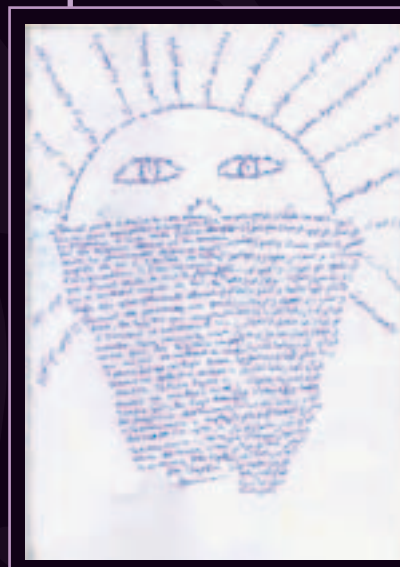
Βελισάριος Βουτσάς,  
*Μουσουλμάνες της Θράκης, φωτογραφία*

Velissarios Voutsas



Βασίλης Βρεττός,  
*Μουσουλμάνες της Θράκης, φωτογραφικό αρχείο Μουσείου Μπενάκη*

Vassilis Vrettos





## The partners of ReconcArt

- PRISMA-Centre for Development Studies (GR) – Project promoter  
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- Academy of Balkan Civilisation (BG)  
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- Fondazione AIDA (Ιταλία)  
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- Alekton Cultural Society (GR)  
[alekton@otenet.gr](mailto:alekton@otenet.gr)

The 18 artists who offered their works to be exhibited in the context of the ReconcArt Cultural Event are:

Io Angeli, Velissarios Voutsas, Vassilis Vrettos, Irini Gonou, Sotiris Danezis, Savvas Dimos, Apostolis Zolotakis, Iris Zoric, Evi Kazakou, Konstantina Katrakazou, Nefeli Kontarini, Harris Kondosphyris, Kalliroi Marouda, Panos Mitsopoulos, Maria Deverikou, Akis Peirounidis, Maria Schina, Eleni Tzantzos



Η ΕΚΔΗΛΩΣΗ ΣΥΓΧΡΗΜΑΤΟΔΟΤΕΙΤΑΙ ΑΠΟ ΤΗ ΕΥΡΩΠΑΪΚΗ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΗ, ΓΕΝΙΚΗ ΔΙΕΥΘΥΝΣΗ ΕΚΠΑΙΔΕΥΣΗ ΚΑΙ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ, ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑ ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ 2000