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## 'Sisters on Top': Art professionals talk Islam, immigration and ingenuity at Anderson Ranch

What do three female art professionals from Pakistan, Syria and Iran have in common?

For one, they each hail from predominately Muslim countries, sociologist Sarah Thorton pointed out.

"That's the thing that unifies these three countries," Thorton explained, noting they are otherwise "incredibly different."

All three women also will be at Anderson Ranch on Thursday as part of the art center's summer series, "Sisters on Top: Art-world professionals talk about Islam, Immigration and Ingenuity" with Diana Al-Hadid, Huma Bhabha and Leila Heller in conversation with Sarah Thornton.

"We're in a really interesting moment right now, where a year ago people might have thought that the feminist revolution had been won and there were no barriers to women in an American society." -Sarah Thorton, sociologist

Thorton, charged with leading the talk, said attendees may expect a "general discussion of the impact of Islam on these artists' work and the impact of gender on their work."

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Combining these three ideas — art, Islam and feminism — leads to a "really interesting intersection" that hasn't been explored much, Thorton said.

Recognizing it is "an ambitious subject" to tackle, she said, "It's also an important, timely" one.

This means the conversation will address the current political climate in the U.S., Thorton said, as well as the Muslim travel ban.

The artists will discuss "how that's affected their life, work, studio practice and their opportunities to exhibit," she said. "The current (President Donald) Trump government is so actively hostile, it can affect people in all sort of unexpected ways, especially when they're in creative professions."

In contemplating the relationship between Islam and art, another aspect to consider are the cultural taboos the religion poses.

For instance, Islam's iconoclastic nature means that its followers, with no exception to artists, are not to depict figures from the Quran, Thorton explained.

"(Muslims) must be very careful about any reference to Allah," she said, noting it is "highly dangerous" to misrepresent the God of Islam.

Further, Islam forbids depictions of the human body, Thorton said, adding, "The human form becomes a much more politicized thing within the Muslim tradition."

While Thorton credited the concept behind the talk to Anderson Ranch board member Sue Hostetler, the title was Thorton's idea.

"We're in a really interesting moment right now, where a year ago, people might have thought that the feminist revolution had been won, and there were no barriers to women in an American society," Thorton explained. "Since the election, and in particular since the Women's March in January, that perception has shifted dramatically."

"Sisters on top" is a somewhat of a "lighthearted way of saying, you know, there will be women on the podium and they'll get to have the first word and the last word."

Not to mention, Thorton quipped, "I'm a big fan of the word 'sisters'."