



The Absurdist Hijabs and Instagram Wizardry of One Millennial Artist  
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Two playful designs, "Pocket Funjab" (left) and "Tennis Funjab," from the artist Meriem Bennani's "Fardaous Funjab Catalogue, Avant-Garde Funjabs by Avant-Garde Designer for Avant-Garde Women." Courtesy of the artist

By Kat Herriman

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When the New York-based artist Meriem Bennani took off this past August for a two-month stint of surfing, filming and researching in her native Rabat, Morocco, the 27-year-old commemorated the occasion by posting a quick [Instagram video](#) of herself whizzing between New York and Morocco with a single swing of the camera. Two weeks later, Bennani posted from a shoot in Barcelona: [stills](#) from the latest episode of "Fardaous Funjab," her fake reality TV show centered on a fictitious hijab designer and her absurdist headpieces. Playing on the idioms of post-Internet culture, the young video artist's Instagram acts as an alternative outlet for her impressive skills as an animator and filmmaker, and for her outlandish sense of humor. "Reality TV and Instagram have their own languages," says the Cooper Union graduate. "I like toying with the familiar and then making it into something else."

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Thanks to her cheeky sensibility, Bennani's work is catching on this fall. It's been picked up by the Jewish Museum curators for its "[Unorthodox](#)" exhibition opening next month; it will also travel to London for the [Nour Festival](#), where two episodes of "Fardaous Funjab" will be screened at Saatchi gallery. But Bennani's main focus this November will be a solo show at [Signal](#) in Brooklyn, where the artist will stage her largest exhibition to date on Nov. 13. Shot during her Moroccan hiatus, the video installation will involve a sculptural component that the artist will erect out of sand in the cavernous gallery. Her show, "Gradual Kingdom," responds in part to the global sand crisis, which has arisen from the construction of fake islands in places like Dubai, and the fortification of eroding, high-value beach properties. "The idea of this show comes from a simple concept: work versus play. A lot of my work is very pop and digestible on the surface and it comes from a place of pleasure, but it's actually labor-intensive in a way that is almost pathological," Bennani says. "I look at this idea in relation to Morocco as a developing country. It is one of the best economies in Africa, yet there is a lot of work to be done. And this development feels almost counterintuitive to the quality of life. It's an impossible struggle between enjoyment and progress. Sand became a perfect symbol for both leisure and construction."

When she is not in her studio, Bennani moonlights as a designer for [JNOUN](#), a creative studio she founded with her sister, Zahra Bennani. For their debut in 2014, the sisters launched a clothing capsule printed with desert and oasis landscapes. In October, JNOUN announced its second iteration — a series of projects inspired by the *Joteya*, an area of the Moroccan souk where shoppers can find the latest tech products alongside pirated DVDs and fake smartphones. As a teaser for the project, Meriem and Zahra created a futuristic short film. "It's fashion, so I want it to be lighthearted and fun," says Bennani. "With my videos, there is something sharper, I am trying to say something; I'm just doing it through humor."