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Muslim/American Dual Identity



"Anne," 2014. © Claire Beckett



Claire Beckett's series "Converts," on view at [Carroll and Sons](#) in Boston until May 28, pictures people in the U.S. who converted to Islam. In their diversity, Beckett's portraits challenge the idea that there is any single Muslim identity in this country—Beckett's subjects, who include recent converts and those who have practiced for years, come from a range of backgrounds and interpret Islam's call for modest dress in variety of ways.

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In addition to portraits, Beckett recorded religious spaces and objects—the women’s section of a prayer hall, a photo album of snapshots from a trip to a spouse’s homeland, a printed list tacked to a wall showing “the ninety-nine names of God.” Shot in natural light, the images share a sense of stillness and quiet, imparted by Beckett’s serene use of color. As the gallery writes, “The expressions of the subjects radiate dignity, resolution and a hard fought inner peace set within Beckett’s muted, painterly palette.”

As Muslims in America have increasingly found themselves the subject of mistrust and hostility, Beckett’s images take a measured, curious look at how these two identities intersect. Writes Beckett in a statement, “This project stems from ideas that have interested me in my work for years: what does it mean to be an American? Who are we as a people, and how do we define ourselves? How do we understand our country in relation to other nations and cultures? In a society that, however falsely, often constructs “American” and “Muslim” as diametrical opposites, what is the experience of people who have traversed this imagined line? In this project I explore how converts understand themselves, as well as the relationship that they have with their birth and adopted religions, families and cultures.”

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