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LALLA ESSAYDI · LAFAYETTE ART GALLERIES · THE TROUT GALLERY



# Lalla Essaydi

Lalla Essaydi (b. 1956, Marrakesh) grew up in Morocco, raised her family in Saudi Arabia, and relocated to France and finally the United States. Her work opens perspectives into cross-cultural identity politics, creating views that draw together culturally embedded materials and practices—including the odalisque form, Arabic calligraphy, henna, textiles, and bullets—to critique the narratives that have been associated with Muslim women throughout time and across cultures. By placing Orientalist fantasies of Arab women and Western stereotypes in dialogue with lived realities, Essaydi presents identity as the culmination of these legacies, yet something that also expands beyond culture, iconography, and stereotypes.

Essaydi studied at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris before earning her BFA from Tufts University and MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, both in Boston. Her work has been exhibited around the world, including at the San Diego Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Bahrain National Museum; and Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial, United Arab Emirates. Essaydi's work is represented in the collections of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, CA; Art Institute of Chicago, IL; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX; National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Brooklyn Museum of Art, NY; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; and the Musée du Louvre, Paris, amongst many others.



# Laila Essaydi





# Lalla Essaydi

Essay by  
Valerie Behiery

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# The Terrains of Memory and Self

When I speak to you in your language, what happens to mine? Does my language continue to speak, but in silence?<sup>1</sup>

—Abdelkebir Khatibi

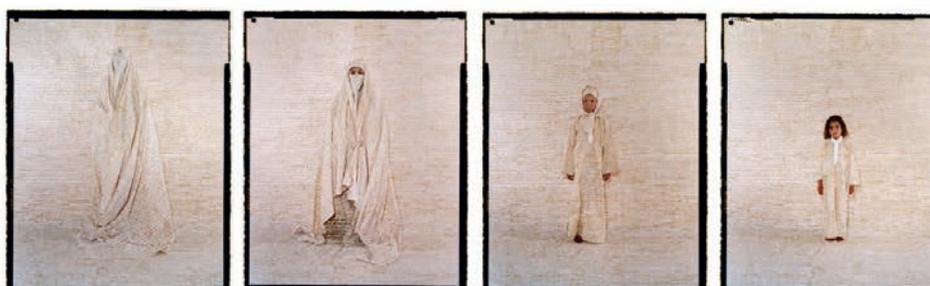
## Valerie Behiery

The faculty of memory is increasingly detached from academic learning and knowledge. The dependence on technology and artificial intelligence in both scholarship and daily life has redefined, however, rather than replaced memory. In an era hinged on simulacra and the selfie, memory has been transformed into a final, somewhat inviolable outpost of subjectivity and identity. It can enact terrains of resistance in a world where social, economic, and political systems increasingly make individuals feel powerless. As Andreas Huyssen writes, memory can “claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity, and information overload.”<sup>2</sup> Memory, both personal and cultural, forms the beating heart of Lalla Essaydi’s art. The artist’s photographic *mise-en-scènes* illustrate memory’s protean potency, particularly for subjects straddling multiple geographies and cultural imaginaries. They also plot its intersection with issues of gender, language, the history of representation, and cross-culturality.

Lalla Essaydi has produced multiple series of photographs—*Converging Territories* (2002–04), *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005–08), *Harem* (2009), *Harem Revisited* (2012–13), *Bullets* (2009–14), and *Bullets Revisited* (2012–13)—which trace the artist’s deployment of memory over time as well as highlight other central themes in the artist’s work, like female agency, plural identity, Orientalism, and Islamic aesthetics.<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of visibility, the artist is identified with large-scale, beautiful images of Middle Eastern women in clothing and spaces that simultaneously appropriate and challenge traditional Islamic cultures and Orientalist painting and tropes. Cultural critique imbues Lalla Essaydi’s work, yet it transcends either simplistic Neo-Orientalism or East-West binarism, a transcendence largely enabled by her plural identity.<sup>4</sup> Essaydi’s life, like her work, evinces polyculturalism: born and raised in Morocco, the artist has lived in Saudi Arabia, France, and the United States and now divides her time between Boston and Marrakesh.

The series *Converging Territories* (1–4) that launched Lalla Essaydi’s international career is rooted in child-

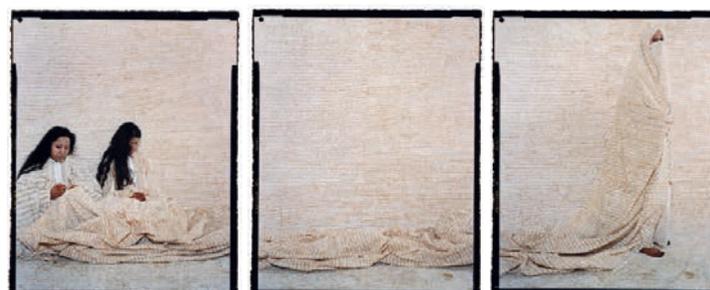
hood memory. The chromatically-restrained images display women and children in the house where Essaydi grew up. Returning to the physical space of her childhood inaugurates an act of self-healing and understanding, but it equally allows the artist to address the wider theme of traditional Islam's relegation of women to the private sphere. *Converging Territories #21* and *Converging Territories #30* (1/3), showing four females at different stages of life, convey the development from childhood to adulthood not only through physical growth, but also through an increased degree of veiling from uncovered hair to full facial covering. Unfolding from right to left, like Arabic script, the progression from female visibility to invisibility denotes an unease with women's bodies and, by extension, sexuality. However, the two works subtly subvert female erasure through a series of conceptual and artistic strategies that recur throughout Lalla Essaydi's work, in addition to the ploy of memory whose claim to selfhood possesses, as stated above, an intrinsic resistance to oppression.



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Most significant is the feminist strategy of performance, allowing women the possibility of self-representation.<sup>5</sup> The women in Essaydi's compositions are neither passive nor paid odalisques who acquiesce to external directives. They are instead friends and relatives of the artist who met and discussed the project before the photoshoots. The actors thus consciously perform and convey self-representation through physical presence, gestures, actions, and especially the gaze, all rendered more salient by the pictures' almost monochromatic palette. *Converging Territories #24* (4) incarnates the power of subjectivity expressed through bodily performance; by looking back and meeting the onlooker's gaze, the woman posits her agency, thereby thwarting her depersonalization on sexual, racial, or religious grounds. Bill Ashcroft and his coauthors describe the resistance to oppression operated through the reversal of the gaze as "the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed."<sup>6</sup> However, the fact that fully facially-veiled women or women seen only from the

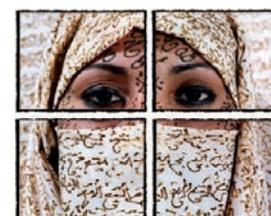
LALLA ESSAYDI

1 *CONVERGING TERRITORIES #21A-D*, 20032 *CONVERGING TERRITORIES #22*, 20043 *CONVERGING TERRITORIES #30*, 20044 *CONVERGING TERRITORIES #24*, 2004

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LALLA ESSAYDI

5 *LES FEMMES DU MAROC: HAREM WOMEN WRITING*, 2008

6 *LES FEMMES DU MAROC: MOORISH WOMAN*, 2008

7 *LES FEMMES DU MAROC: LA GRANDE ODALISQUE*, 2008

back nonetheless exude, in Essaydi's work, a sense of their individuality perhaps best epitomizes the uncanny, almost mysterious ability of conscious embodiment to communicate selfhood.

Essaydi's signature act of obsessively covering objects, backdrops, and women's clothing and bodies in handwritten Arabic script denotes a behind-the-scenes performance whose resulting layer of language and use of the womanly medium of henna also assert female agency.<sup>7</sup> *Harem Women Writing* (5) from *Les Femmes du Maroc* series (5–7), representing two seated women writing on boundless cloth, makes the claim for Arab women's voices even more explicit for the viewer. Largely illegible, text in Essaydi's work equally functions as a screen, disrupting spectator identification with the portrayed women, thereby contesting the long history of representation in which women were objects, rather than subjects of the gaze. In sum, Essaydi is overwriting women's bodies literally to prevent them from being further overwritten discursively.

The title "Converging Territories" refers to both the Western and Middle Eastern aspects of the artist's self-identity. Having studied, lived, and worked for many years in Europe and North America, Lalla Essaydi had left her Moroccan homeland behind physically, but not psychologically. She felt compelled to re-explore her cultural roots in order to evolve as both a woman and artist. The plural vision procured by bicultural experience underscores not only *Converging Territories*, but Essaydi's whole corpus.<sup>8</sup>

Encompassing different worldviews in constant negotiation, it affords the artist's capacity to inhabit them while succumbing to the stereotypes and assumptions of none. The varied cultural references of Essaydi's work make it readable across cultures; its aesthetic evoking both Western Orientalist and Islamic collective imaginaries draws in spectators only to then address the restrictive definitions and representations of Muslim Arab women found therein. Discussing this aspect of her work, Essaydi says, "I suggest how both traditional Orientalism and today's withdrawal into the false security of a simplified, repressive past, distort the lives of women and deprive these lives of value."<sup>9</sup>

*Les Femmes du Maroc* establishes more overt references to Orientalism than *Converging Territories*. Displaying the same subdued palette, focus on veiling and women, and metatextual calligraphy, its images exhibit a more painterly composition and the favorite Orientalist fantasies of the odalisque and the harem.<sup>10</sup> The series probes, in Essaydi's nuanced manner, the West's problematic exoticization and reductive sexualization of Muslim women. *Les Femmes du Maroc* unpacks the fiction surrounding life in the harem; its



8 JEAN AUGUSTE DOMINIQUE INGRES, *TURKISH BATH*, 1862, OIL ON CANVAS ON WOOD. PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE · PHOTO: ERICH LESSING/ART RESOURCE, NY



9 JEAN AUGUSTE DOMINIQUE INGRES, *LA GRANDE ODALISQUE*, 1814,  
OIL ON CANVAS. PARIS, MUSÉE DU LOUVRE · PHOTO: SCALA/ART RESOURCE, NY

women, clothed and engaged in domestic activities, radically contrast with the lustful universe conjured up, for example, by the octogenarian Ingres in his famous Orientalist painting, *The Turkish Bath* (8).<sup>11</sup> Essaydi's counterview emanates from the artist's own recollections of living in the female quarters of a traditional Muslim home: "My home life was domestic, full of children running through the halls, and moms attending to housework."<sup>12</sup>

Some works in *Les Femmes du Maroc* reenact and thus reinterpret Orientalist "masterpieces" like *La Grande Odalisque* (7), which revisits Ingres' revered *La Grande Odalisque* (9). By appropriating Orientalist iconography, Lalla Essaydi lays bare its voyeuristic nature. However, the appropriation also reclaims it as part of her own cultural memory, not only because minoritized subjects internalize stereotypes as W. E. B. Du Bois rightly recognized over a hundred years ago in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903),<sup>13</sup> but also because Orientalist painting captured authentic facets of Islamic culture such as the ornamental artistry of its architecture, ceramics, and textiles. Orientalist art therefore constitutes a double signifier for Essaydi. Mirroring her own bicultural vision, it allows her to comment, as both insider and outsider, on Middle Eastern and Western cultures and traditions.

The *Harem* series (10–12) further illustrates the possibility of a visual tradition to speak multiple languages. The women's poses as well as the sumptuous polychrome architecture and decoration echo Orientalist tropes. The setting equally references Islamic culture, the use of photography associated with reality rather

than fiction further reinforcing the notion of cultural authenticity. *Harem* is set in the Dar al Basha palace in Marrakesh. Place holds a central role in Lalla Essaydi's art, and yet until the *Harem* series, her mise-en-scènes appear to unfold in the undefined spaces of memory and pure image, devoid of precise references to context. *Harem's* images explore the interaction between women and architecture in traditional Moroccan culture by foregrounding an actual, physical space reminiscent of the home in which Lalla Essaydi herself grew up. Interestingly, after choosing the site, she discovered that the lavish Dar al Basha was connected to her family history as her father had been raised there. Because *Harem* is hinged on personal memory and history, its representation of women emerges not so much from Western stereotypes as from Essaydi's knowledge of harem life and, by extension, of the real joy and also pain of a harem's inhabitants. Women are soldered to the palace, their plotted separation from the world communicated through the patterned textiles swathing them. The artist purposefully designed the fabrics to emulate the geometric ornamentation adorning the Dar al Basha and thus visually meld person and place.

While the *Harem* series casts Muslim women as somewhat sequestered, it obviates the memes of veiling and victimization used in mainstream media to claim Islam's alleged misogyny and incompatibility with



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LALLA ESSAYDI

10 *HAREM* #2, 2009

11 *HAREM* #10, 2009

12 *HAREM* #14C, 2009

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13 HAREM REVISITED #34, 2012

14 HAREM REVISITED #51, 2013

15 BULLETS #3, 2009

16 BULLETS REVISITED #8, 2012

17 BULLETS REVISITED #31, 2014

Western norms and modernity.<sup>14</sup> *Harem* refuses to be co-opted by the historically-entrenched cultural competition between East and West. The series moves beyond binarism, conceptually, through its anchoring in personal experience and, visually, through cross-cultural aesthetics. The bicultural nature of the Orientalist-style figuration is evident. Less so is that, in addition to quoting European artistic traditions, Lalla Essaydi has recourse to an aesthetic strategy central to traditional Islamic art. The all-over geometric pattern or series of patterns that compose *Harem's* images function, as they do in Islamic art, to dematerialize the physical world and its representation and transport spectators beyond the image into the universal, albeit also subjective, realm of mediation. In earlier works, text and textile carry this role of visually enacting the spaces of reception. The visual attractiveness of Lalla Essaydi's compositions also translates across cultures. It dissipates cultural borders despite myriad reservations towards beauty in contemporary art and art theory. The proclivity for rich, lush visuality underwrites all of Essaydi's art.



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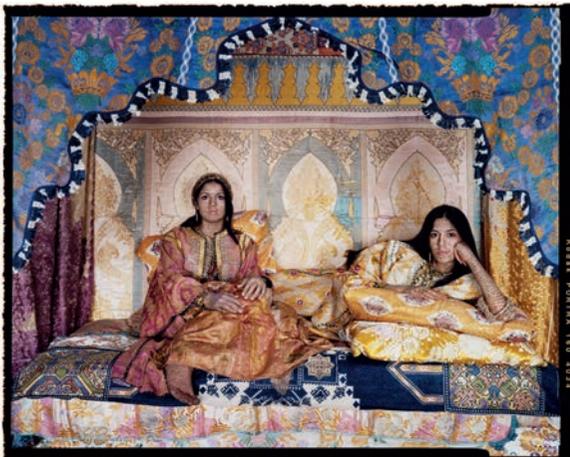
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*Harem Revisited* (13–14) continues the colorful recasting of harem scenes. The images harbor a mosaic-like aesthetic produced by the dizzying juxtaposition of ornate textiles bearing contrasting color schemes, motifs, textures, and decorative details. The wall hangings, covers, caftans, and belts, lent to the artist by Nour and Boubker Temli, date from between the seventeenth and early twentieth centuries. Their predominance in the photographs underline the role of cultural memory and material culture in Essaydi's work. *Harem Revisited* results, however, in a more modern aesthetic than previous series. The overabundance of textiles confers a lived-in look and creates a theatrical effect that admits to its staged artifice. The confident postures and physiognomies of the young women posing also come across as contemporary, their forthcoming gazes contravening any attempt of erasure.

Works in the series *Bullets* (15) and *Bullets Revisited* (16–17) pursue the same subject matter. However, here the women, modeling a taut balance between agency and display, often more readily adopt the poses of eroticized odalisques, amplified by the semi-sheerness and shimmer of their dress. In these two



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series, gold and silver constitute the color, code, and content. The artist has painstakingly assembled small metal elements to construct backdrops, floors, clothes, and any other displayed objects. *Bullets Revisited #8* (16) which appears entirely produced by these interwoven metal units, exemplifies their pixel-like, constitutive nature as well as their transformation into dazzling textiles. Walking a fine line between Arab women's domestic scenes and Orientalist fictions, the scene depicts two women who have pulled golden necklaces out of an equally golden treasure chest placed on the floor.

As in the other images of *Bullets* and *Bullets Revisited*, the contemporary chain mail serves as the pictorial and physical architecture of the photograph. However, it takes on a whole new meaning when viewers discover that it consists of cut bullet casings of different sizes and shapes. Positing the relationship among beauty, representation, women, and violence, the decorative metal textiles act as metaphor for the harm perpetrated against women, whether through patriarchal norms, political and social exclusion, or physical assault. *Bullets* and *Bullets Revisited* nonetheless refuse female disempowerment. Essaydi has patiently reworked the bullet casings into artifacts of extraordinary beauty as well as protective armour that testifies to female resilience. The more abstract *Bullets #3* (15) further corroborates how all-over patterning forms an aesthetic strategy in Essaydi's work that functions as a signifier for the unseen, not for spiritual realities as in Islamic art, but for minoritized subjectivities. The work shows a single figure from the back whose face remains invisible; the opticality of pattern disallows the eyes to rest on the picture and opens a new plane bespeaking the individuality of the partially-hidden woman.

Lalla Essaydi's meticulously planned photographs leave nothing to happenstance. Often requiring months of preparation, they deliberately foster multi-layeredness and ambiguity of form and meaning. By reflecting the uncertain location of polycultural subjects, they create new spaces that defy present-day categorizations of and in East and West. Essaydi's

work embodies the late Moroccan intellectual Abdelkeber Khatibi's theory of a *pensée-autre* or "thinking differently" that invited Arab societies to challenge not only the cultural and ideological hegemony of the West, but also monolithic Islamic discourses on identity and difference.<sup>15</sup> If Lalla Essaydi's photographs touch upon such larger, vital issues, their rootedness in self and memory equally encompasses the political in its courageous claim to individual power.

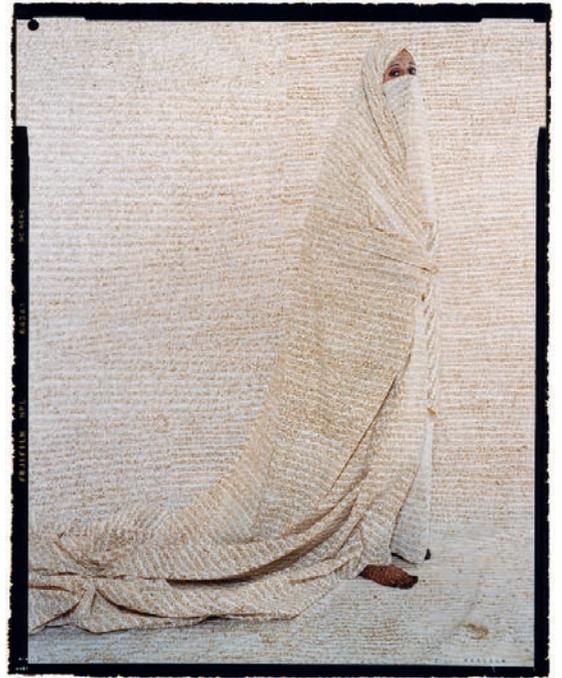
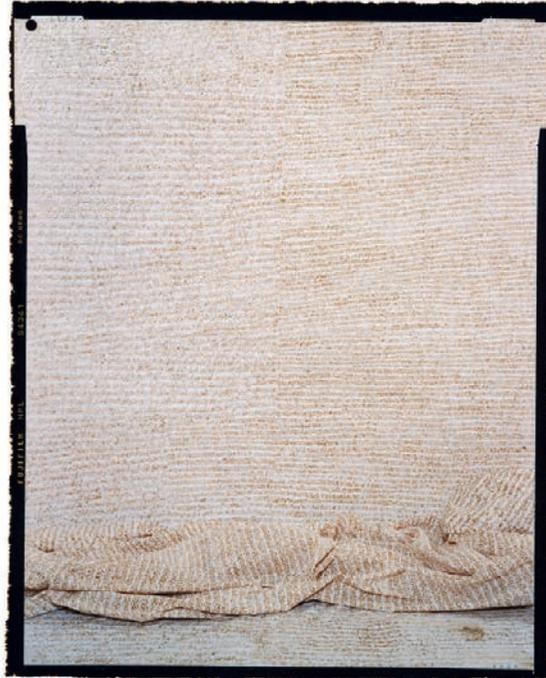
- 1 Abdelkebir Khatibi, *Love in Two Languages*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 41.
- 2 Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 7. For another pivotal text on memory, see Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, trans. Lawrence D. Krizman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), and for the role of memory in contemporary art, see Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory: Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007).
- 3 The sets of terms “Islamic art” and “Islamic aesthetics” have provoked debate. Some art historians question the accuracy of the epithet “Islamic” to describe art produced in Muslim lands from the seventh up until the nineteenth—and sometimes the twenty-first—centuries. They argue that, besides masking regional diversity and historical developments, it wrongly implies that all Islamic art was religious or made by or for Muslims, which was, of course, not the case as the Muslim world has always been multi-denominational. See Sheila Blair and Jonathan M. Bloom, “The Mirage of Islamic Art: Reflections on the Study of an Unwieldy Field,” *The Art Bulletin* 85, no. 1 (2003): 152–184. The same applies to Islamic aesthetics, a concept whose very existence certain scholars dispute. See, Oliver Leaman, *Islamic Aesthetics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004). These debates are interesting and complex, but cannot be sufficiently broached here for reasons of length. My own view differs from the authors cited above in that I weigh words according to their communicability and consider that which is called Islamic art and architecture, displays, in addition to diversity, a set of unifying visual and conceptual elements across space and time. For the richest work on Islamic aesthetics in diametrical opposition to Leaman’s thesis, see Valerie Gonzalez, *Beauty in Islam: Aesthetics in Islamic Art and Architecture* (London: I. B. Tauris; Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2001).
- 4 On hybridity and plural identity, see Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), in which the postcolonial critic articulates his oft-cited concept of the “third space.”
- 5 Regarding feminism and performance art, see Jayne Wark, *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006) and Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).
- 6 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 187.

- The authors are here discussing Homi Bhabha's conception of mimicry. For more on feminism and the gaze, see Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: MacMillan, 1989) and E. Ann Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 7** Historically, calligraphy was considered the highest art form in the Muslim world because of its relatedness to the Qur'an. From the beginning, it played an iconic as much as a textual role in Islamic art and architecture. Interestingly, calligraphy informed early modern art movements in the Arab world and Iran. See Venetia Porter, *Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East* (London: The British Museum, 2006); Iftikhar Dadi, "Rethinking Calligraphic Modernism," in *Discrepant Abstraction*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006), 94–114; and Saeb Eigner, Isabelle Caussé, and Christopher Masters, *Art of the Middle East: Modern and Contemporary Art of the Arab World and Iran* (New York: Merrell Publishers, 2010). Calligraphy continues to constitute an important element of contemporary art produced by artists of Muslim descent; while the most relevant example here is Shirin Neshat, there are myriad others like Shirazeh Houshiari, Parviz Tanavoli, Salar Ahmadian, and el Seed. It is also important to note that, contrary to general opinion, Muslim women throughout Islamic history became calligraphers and sometimes earned their living as scribes. For more on this, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Calligraphy and Islamic Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1984) and Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, "Women's Roles in the Arts of Arabic Calligraphy," in *The Book in the Islamic World*, ed. George N. Atiyeh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 141–148.
- 8** The artist's identity is polycultural rather than strictly bicultural, especially as both the West and the Middle East are themselves heteropathic categories. However, the focus here on biculturalism is due to the fact that a 'clash of civilizations' worldview plotting the Western world as antithetical to the Muslim world still often underwrites public and media discourses, cultural production, and the the production of knowledge, more generally. Lalla Essaydi's work is critical because it complexifies this worldview, reveals its problematic nature and seeks to move beyond it.
- 9** Lalla Essaydi, quoted in the press release of her show at the Houk Gallery, Zurich (January 22–March 14, 2016). See [houkgallery.com/exhibitions/lalla-essaydi5/selected-works?view=thumbnails](http://houkgallery.com/exhibitions/lalla-essaydi5/selected-works?view=thumbnails).
- 10** For feminist and postcolonial deconstructions of the Orientalist harem and odalisque, see Lynne Thornton, *Women as Portrayed in Orientalist Painting* (Paris: ARC Edition, 1985); Leila Ahmed, "Western Ethnocentrism and Perceptions of the Harem," *Feminist Studies* 8, no. 3 (1982): 521–534; and Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
- 11** Although technically, Ingres, who had never visited North Africa or the Middle East, more broadly, is depicting a public bath, the famous painting is associated with similarly lascivious harem scenes in Western art.
- 12** Personal communication with the artist, December 21, 2017.
- 13** W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Chicago: A. C. McClung & Co., 1903).
- 14** Scholarship unpacking the Western construction of the veil sign now abounds; see Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (Herndon, VA: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002); Joan W. Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); and Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- 15** Abdelkeber Khatibi, *Maghreb pluriel* (Paris: Denoël, 1983).

# Exhibition

































- 1 **Converging Territories #21A–D, 2003**  
Four chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 60 x 48 in. each (152.4 x 121.9 cm); edition 2/10, signed, titled, dated, and editioned on label, verso.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
- 2 **Converging Territories #22, 2004**  
Three chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 40 x 30 in. each (101.6 x 76.2 cm); edition 9/15; signed, titled, dated, and editioned on label, verso.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College
- 3 **Converging Territories #24, 2004**  
Four chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 20 x 24 in. each (50.8 x 61 cm); edition 3/5.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College  
Four chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 8 x 10 in. each (20.3 x 25.4 cm); edition 2/15; signed, titled, dated, and editioned on label, verso.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
- 4 **Converging Territories #30, 2004**  
Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 71 x 88 in. (180.4 x 223.5 cm); printed 2012.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College
- 5 **Les Femmes du Maroc: Harem Women Writing, 2008**  
Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 20 x 24 in. (50.8 x 61 cm); printed 2011; edition 3/15; signed by the artist, titled, dated, and editioned on label, verso.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College
- 6 **Les Femmes du Maroc: Moorish Woman, 2008**  
Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 60 x 48 in. (152.4 x 121.9 cm); edition 2/10; signed, titled, dated, and editioned on label, verso.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College
- 7 **Harem #2, 2009**  
Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm), exhibition print.  
Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College

**8 Harem #10, 2009**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate,  
30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm); edition 1/15; signed, titled, dated,  
and editioned on label, verso.

Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College

**9 Bullets #3, 2009**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate,  
60 x 48 in. (152.4 x 121.9 cm).

Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College

**10 Harem #14C, 2009**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate,  
30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm); edition 11/15, signed, titled, dated,  
and editioned on label verso.

The Trout Gallery, museum purchase with funds from the Friends of  
The Trout Gallery

**11 Harem Revisited #34, 2012**

Three chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective  
laminate, 40 x 30 in. each (101.6 x 76.2 cm); edition 1/15; signed  
on an artist's label verso.

Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College

**12 Bullets Revisited #31, 2014**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate,  
30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm); exhibition print.

Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College

**13 Harem Revisited #51, 2013**

Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate,  
30 x 40 in. (76.2 x 101.6 cm); edition 1/15; signed, titled, dated,  
and editioned on label, verso.

Edwynn Houk Gallery on loan to The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College

Lalla Essaydi's (b. 1956, Marrakesh, Morocco) art champions women. Central to the artist's vision is a synthesis of personal and historical catalysts. As a Muslim woman who grew up in Morocco, raised her family in Saudi Arabia, and relocated to France and finally the United States, the artist has profound firsthand perspectives into cross-cultural identity politics. Essaydi weaves together a rich roster of culturally embedded materials and practices—including the odalisque form, Arabic calligraphy, henna, textiles, and bullets—to illuminate the narratives that have been associated with Muslim women throughout time and across cultures. By placing Orientalist fantasies of Arab women and Western stereotypes in dialogue with lived realities, Essaydi presents identity as the culmination of these legacies, yet something that also expands beyond culture, iconography, and stereotypes.

The performative act of inscribing women's bodies and spaces with calligraphy is a vital part of Essaydi's approach, emphasizing the ongoing, active, and collaborative process of becoming and creating. Since her first major series *Converging Territories* (2002–4), Essaydi has used henna to envelope the women in her photographs in Arabic calligraphy. Henna is a form of decoration that marks some of the happiest and most significant moments of a Muslim woman's life, and Essaydi elevates this tradition—conventionally regarded as a “woman's craft”—into a radical act of visual and linguistic artistry. The stream-of-consciousness, poetic script includes biographical details relating to the artist's and models' experiences as women. Essaydi's series *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005–7) continued to engage with these approaches while expanding to also question the historical representation of Arab women in the Western art canon, referencing the Orientalist imagery of nineteenth-century artists such as Ingres, Delacroix, and Gérôme. Her reinterpretation is a strong statement of the power of artistic representation to influence identity. In her *Harem* series (2009), set in a lavish yet isolating harem in Morocco, Essaydi addresses the complex social and physical confines of Muslim womanhood. Her most recent

series *Bullets* (2009–14) and *Bullets Reconsidered* (2012–14) introduces a new material for the artist—silver and gold bullet casings—which she has woven together to create glittering gowns of armor.

Essaydi’s work deliberately incorporates and invites perspectives from many angles. “In my art,” Essaydi explains, “I wish to present myself through multiple lenses—as artist, as Moroccan, as traditionalist, as Liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite the viewer to resist stereotypes.”

Essaydi spent her most foundational years living in traditional Muslim society in Morocco and Saudi Arabia. She attended École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris before earning her BFA from Tufts University and MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, both in Boston. Her work has been exhibited around the world, including at the San Diego Museum of Art, CA; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA; Bahrain National Museum; and Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial, United Arab Emirates. The artist currently lives in Boston and Marrakesh.

## SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
 Asian Civilizations Museum, Singapore  
 Bank Al-Maghrib Collection, Rabat, Morocco  
 Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Seattle, WA  
 British Museum, London, United Kingdom  
 Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, NY  
 DeCordova Sculpture Park and Museum, Lincoln, MA  
 Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum, Michigan State University,  
 East Lansing, MI  
 Foundation Carmignac Gestion, Paris, France  
 George Eastman Museum, Rochester, NY  
 Hearst Corporation  
 Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, Amman, Jordan  
 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA  
 Maramotti Collection of Contemporary Art, Via Fratelli,  
 Emilia, Italy  
 Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar  
 Musée du Louvre, Paris, France  
 Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, IL  
 Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX  
 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA  
 The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC  
 National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian Institute,  
 Washington, DC  
 National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC  
 Le Musée Nationale de Rabat, Morocco  
 Private collection of HM Mohammed VI of Morocco  
 Private collection of HRH Sheikha Samsa Bint Hamdan Al Nahyan  
 Private collection of HRH Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan  
 Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI  
 Santa Barbara Museum of Art, Santa Barbara, CA  
 Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH  
 The Trout Gallery, The Art Museum of Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA

## SELECTED BOOKS

- Lalla Essaydi, Dina Nasser-Khadivi, A. Chaouki Fafif, and Adam Biles, in conjunction with Edwynn Houk Gallery, *Lalla Essaydi: Crossing Boundaries, Bridging Cultures* (Paris: ACR Edition, 2015).
- Lalla Essaydi, Sarah T. Brooks, Danielle Widmann Abraham, Maureen G. Shanahan, with Darrin McHorne Gallery, *The Photography of Lalla Essaydi: Critiquing and Contextualizing Orientalism* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sawhill Gallery, James Madison University, 2014).
- Lalla Essaydi: Beyond Time and Beauty* (Azerbaijan: MoMO Baku, 2013).
- Lalla Essaydi, John J. Corso, and Allan Doyle, *Lalla Essaydi: Writing Femininity, Writing Pleasure* (Rochester, MI: University Art Gallery, Oakland University, 2013).
- Lalla Essaydi: Pouvoir de l'écriture* (Rabat: Ministère de la Culture, 2011).
- Lalla Essaydi, with essay by Fatema Mernissi, *Les Femmes du Maroc* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2009).
- Lalla Essaydi and Amanda Carlson, *Lalla Essaydi: Converging Territories* (New York: powerHouse Books, 2005).

## SELECTED ARTICLES, REVIEWS, AND INTERVIEWS

- Charlotte Jansen, *Girl on Girl: Art and Photography in the Age of the Female Gaze* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2017).
- Claire Raymond, *Women Photographers and Feminist Aesthetics* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2017).
- Carol Solomon, review of "Lalla Essaydi: Crossing Boundaries, Bridging Cultures," edited by Dina Nasser Khadivi and Amed-Chaouki Rafif, in *Woman's Art Journal* 37 (1/2016): 48–49.
- Donna Gustafson, "Writing on the Visual: Lalla Essaydi's Photographic Tableaux," chapter 7 in *Writing through the Visual and Virtual: Inscribing Language, Literature, and Culture in Francophone Africa and the Caribbean*, from the series *After the Empire: The Francophone World and Postcolonial France* (London: Lexington Books, 2015).

- Andrés Mario Zervigón, "Toward an Itinerant History of Photography: The Case of Lalla Essaydi," in *Photography, History, Difference*, edited by Tanya Sheehan, a volume in *Interfaces: Studies in Visual Culture* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 85–103.
- Kristen Gresh and Michket Krifa, *She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2014).
- Anna Rocca, "In Search of Beauty in Space: Interview with Lalla Essaydi," *Dalhousie French Studies* 103 (2014): 119–128.
- Wendy Watriss, Karin Adrian von Roques, Samer Mohdad, Claude W. Sui, and Mona Khazindar, *View from Inside: Contemporary Arab Photography, Video and Mixed Media Art* (Houston: FotoFest; Amsterdam: Schilt Publishing, 2014).
- Lalla Essaydi, "Disrupting the Odalisque," *World Literature Today* 87 (2/2013): 62.
- Erin Farrell, review of "Lalla Essaydi: Revisions," Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, DC: May 9, 2012–February 24, 2013, in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 33 (2013): 116–119.
- Naïma Hachad, "Borders and Bridges: Configuring the Feminine in Lalla Essaydi's Photography," *Francosphères* 2 (1/2013): 87–103.
- Ahmed Achrafi, *Voice: The Feminine in Contemporary Islamic Art* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2011).
- Rose Issa, Michket Krifa, and Marta Rachel Weiss, *Arab Photography Now* (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2011).
- Sandford Biggers, Elizabeth Catlett, and Isolde Brielmaier, *Stargazers: Elizabeth Catlett in conversation with Sanford Biggers, Iona Rozeal Brown, Patty Chang, Patricia Coffie, Renee Cox, Sam Durant, Lalla Essaydi, Ellen Gallagher and Edgar Cleijne, Kalup Linzy, Kerry James Marshall, Wardel Milan, Wangechi Mutu, Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Robert Pruitt, Xaviera Simmons, Shinique Smith, Hank Willis Thomas, Mickalene Thomas, Roberto Visani, Carrie Mae Weems* (Bronx, NY: Bronx Museum of the Arts, 2010).
- "Lalla Essaydi: an Interview," *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art* 24 (2009): 144–149.
- Paul Sloman, *Contemporary Art in the Middle East* (London: Black Dog, 2009).
- Isolde Brielmaier, "Profile: Re-inventing the Spaces Within: the Images of Lalla Essaydi," *Aperture* 178 (2005).
- Susan Denker, review of "Lalla Essaydi: Converging Territories," Howard Yezerski Gallery, Boston, MA, September 4–30, 2003, in *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Arts* 19 (2004): 86–87.



## Acknowledgments

It is a privilege to host Lalla Essaydi and exhibit her photographs at our respective campuses and communities. Essaydi's photographs have attracted international acclaim for their incisive and powerful approach to cross-cultural identity politics, particularly the critique of Orientalizing narratives associated with Muslim women. Her work recasts traditional power relationships and raises fundamental issues regarding culture and stereotypes.

This project represents an orchestrated effort on the part of the artist, Edwynn Houk Gallery, New York, the Lafayette Art Galleries, Lafayette College, and The Trout Gallery, Dickinson College. The Edwynn Houk Gallery has been an enthusiastic partner of the project and helped to integrate what had initially began as a constellation of independent initiatives led by two academic museums and several academic departments, that included an acquisition, two exhibitions, two artist lectures, and an exhibition catalogue. We thank Julie Castellano, Veronica Houk, Kristin North, Alexis Dean, Dana Schmerzler, Paul DeCarlie, and Tess Vinnedge for coordinating our various efforts smoothly and professionally.

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and cultivate a sense of global identity. Tapestries is made possible in part by a grant from the Association of Performing Arts Professionals (APAP), Building Bridges: Arts, Culture, and Identity, a component of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art. Lalla Essaydi's residency is supported in part by the Tapestries grant; the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, college programs and departments including Anthropology and Sociology, History, Women and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, and by the Department of Art's Grossman Visiting Artist series and the Lafayette Art Galleries. We thank President Alison Byerly and Provost Abu Rizvi; Maurice S. Luker III; Hollis Ashby; Jennifer Kelly and Alexandra Hendrickson, who oversee the Tapestries grant; students Kamini Masood and Talia Baddour; Jennifer Philburn; the Department of Art, in particular Karina Skvirsky, Robert S. Mattison, and Ingrid Furniss; Rachel Goshgarian and Neha B. Vora; Wendy Wilson-Fall; David Burnhauser; student gallery receptionists; and Cynthia Becker of Boston University.

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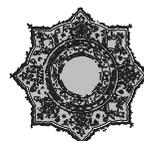
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