

GALERIE EDWYNN HOUK

PRESS RELEASE



LALLA ESSAYDI

22 January – 14 March 2015

Galerie Edwynn Houk is pleased to present an exhibition of photographs by Moroccan-born artist, Lalla Essaydi. The exhibition will include work from two of her ongoing series: *Harem* (2009-2014) and *Bullets* (2009-2014).

Lalla Essaydi was born in Morocco, lived in Saudi Arabia for many years, was educated in Europe and the United States and now lives in New York. Essaydi's photographs provide the opportunity to engage in the emerging "culture of Islamic feminism."

In her first major series, *Converging Territories* (2002-2004), Essaydi developed a unique working method and set of visual devices that include applying many layers of text written by hand with henna in Islamic calligraphy to her subject's faces, bodies, and environments. In the series that followed, *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2007), Essaydi began arranging her subjects in poses directly inspired by 19th Century Orientalist imagery reminiscent of paintings by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme. Utilizing the perspective of an Arab woman living in a Western world, Essaydi reexamines the Arab female identity.

In the *Harem* series (2009) Essaydi continues to explore many of the themes characteristic of her earlier work but in an entirely new setting, Dar al Basha, a vibrant architectural Moroccan palace. The artist designed fabric for the subjects that mimic the patterns within the palace, which is decorated in painstaking detail with mosaic, stucco, stained glass and carved wood. Having navigated the labyrinthine corridors to reach the actual harem quarters, the subjects are at once camouflaged with the decoration that surrounds them and emerge from the traditional spaces they once occupied. In *Harem Revisited* (2012-2013), Essaydi's subjects are clothed in elaborate caftans and their environments are now covered with richly adorned fabrics. These vintage textiles, which were created between the 17th century to the early 20th century for use in wedding ceremonies, to decorate palaces and the harem area, were all generously loaned to Essaydi from the Nour and Boukter Temli collection.

Coinciding with the *Harem* series, Essaydi began *Bullets* and *Bullets Revisited* (2009-2014). In these series, seen by many as Essaydi's most controversial to date, she has meticulously sewn thousands of bullet casings together creating a sea of gold that is draped from ceiling to floor, imparting physical and psychological weight on her subjects. Essaydi writes that "Throughout the photographs, women's clothing contain real bullet casings. The clothes, in other words, will form empty shells, depicting women as they can only exist in the minds of others, women without selves or identities of their own. In this way, 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." Lalla Essaydi, 2014

Essaydi has had solo exhibitions at The Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington DC (2012-13) and The Baku Museum of Modern Art in Azerbaijan (2014). Her work has been included in group exhibitions at The World Art Bank Program, Washington DC; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Bronx Museum, New York; the Tampere Art Museum, Finland; and the Bahrain Museum/Ministry of Culture. She is represented in a number of collections including the Art Institute of Chicago; the Fries Museum, The Netherlands; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; the Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis; the Jordan National Museum; the North Carolina Museum of Art; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; The Louvre Museum, Paris and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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