

EDWYNN HOUK GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

Lalla Essaydi: Harem

4 November 2010 – 15 January 2011

Reception for the artist on Thursday, 4 November, 6 – 8 PM



Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of fifteen large-scale photographs by Lalla Essaydi from the artist's most recent series, *Harem*. The show will take place from 4 November 2010 through 15 January 2011 with an opening reception for the artist on Thursday, 4 November from 6-8 PM.

Born in Morocco, Lalla Essaydi has been examining the role of the Muslim woman by incorporating layers of Islamic calligraphy applied by hand with henna, in tandem with poses directly inspired by 19th Century Orientalist painting. By appropriating this imagery, the works reflect the “complex female identities” found in Morocco and throughout the Muslim world.

While she continues to explore many of the themes and visual devices characteristic of her earlier work, Lalla Essaydi's newest body of work, *Harem*, is a striking departure from her two previous series: *Converging Territories* (2003-2004) and *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2008). Perhaps the most marked difference in the *Harem* series is the highly-colored, elaborate, architectural setting of the Moroccan palace Dar al Basha. The artist created fabric for the models that mimics 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 models are at once camouflaged with the decoration that surrounds them and emerging from the traditional spaces they once occupied. Essaydi's photographs provide the opportunity for the artist and her subjects to engage in the emerging “culture of Islamic feminism.”

“The physical harem is the dangerous frontier where sacred law and pleasure collide. This is not the harem of the Western Orientalist imagination, an anxiety-free place of euphoria and the absence of constraints, where the word “harem” has lost its dangerous edge. My harem is based on the historical reality; rather than the artistic images of the West – an idyllic, lustful dream of sexually available women, uninhibited by the moral constraints of 19th Century Europe.” Lalla Essaydi, 2010

Lalla Essaydi's work is represented in a number of collections including the Williams College Museum of Art; The Art Institute of Chicago; the Fries Museum, The Netherlands; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Kodak Museum of Art, Rochester, New York; The Columbus Museum Of Art, Ohio; The Kresge Art Museum, Michigan; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Santa Barbara Museum of Art, California; The Colorado Museum of Art, Colorado; The Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis; the Jordan National Museum; the North Carolina Museum of Art; the Neuberger Museum; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; and The Louvre Museum, Paris, France.