

Contact: Julie Castellano  
(212) 750.7070  
julie@houkgallery.com

PRESS RELEASE

**Lalla Essaydi: New Works**

16 May – 22 June 2013

Reception for the artist on Thursday, 16 May, 6 – 8 pm



Edwynn Houk Gallery is pleased to announce an exhibition of large-scale photographs by Lalla Essaydi from the artist's most recent series, *Harem Revisited* and *Bullets Revisited*. The show will be on view from 16 May through 22 June 2013 with an opening reception for the artist on Thursday, 16 May from 6-8pm.

Lalla Essaydi was raised in Morocco and spent many years in Saudi Arabia, and although she was educated in Europe and the US and now lives in New York, this experience of traditional Islamic life was fundamental to her unique approach to the examination of the identity of the Muslim woman. Utilizing a unique working method and set of visual devices that she initiated in 2003 for the iconic series, "Converging Territories," Essaydi applies many layers of text written by hand with henna in Islamic calligraphy to the subject's faces, bodies, and environments. Then, she arranges her subjects in poses directly inspired by 19<sup>th</sup> Century French painters such as Ingres, Delacroix and Gérôme, whose Orientalist paintings featured the harem and the eroticized Arab female body. Using the perspective of an Arab woman living in the West, Lalla Essaydi reexamines and questions this representation of the Arab female identity.

"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 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe." Lalla Essaydi, 2010

While Essaydi's new work continues to explore this theme, the subjects of *Harem Revisited* are clothed in elaborate caftans and their environments are now covered with these richly adorned fabrics. The draperies are dense and have such rich embroidery and complex patterns that when seen altogether, the effect is dizzying, essentially turning the women themselves into objects of decoration, camouflaged within their environments. They become, in effect, a metaphor for the essence of Essaydi's exploration. These vintage textiles, which were created between the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for use in wedding ceremonies, to decorate palaces and the harem area, were all generously loaned to Essaydi from the Nour and Boubker Temli collection.

In the works from the *Bullets Revisited* series, a scene is set in the sort of room one finds in Orientalist painting. Each room – its tiles, woodwork, and other décor, as well as the women's clothing- is reproduced in faithful detail. But these scenes are created with bullet casings that turn the domestic space into a psychological one, charged with the violence within contemporary society.

Lalla Essaydi's work is represented in a number of collections including The Art Institute of Chicago; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond; The Columbus Museum Of Art, Ohio; SF MoMA, California; the Jordan National Museum; the North Carolina Museum of Art; the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; The Arab Museum of Modern Art, Qatar; The British National Museum, London; The Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, MA; the National Museum of African Art, Smithsonian; and Le Louvre Museum, Paris, France amongst many others.