

GALERIE EDWYNN HOUK

ZUR STOCKEREGG

PRESS RELEASE



LALLA ESSAYDI

Les Femmes du Maroc

10 March – 14 May 2011

Vernissage: Thursday 10 March, 6 – 8 pm
the artist will be present

Galerie Edwynn Houk zur Stockeregg is delighted to present an exhibition of photographs by Moroccan-born artist, Lalla Essaydi. The show will include work from two recent series: *Les Femmes du Maroc (2005-2008)* and *Les Femmes du Maroc Revisited (2010)*. This will be Essaydi's first solo exhibition in Zürich.

Lalla Essaydi incorporates 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 changing and “complex female identities” found in Morocco and throughout the Muslim world.

During the 19th Century, French painters such as Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme indulged their audiences with the trend for painting images of the middle-eastern harem and the eroticized Arab female body. Utilizing her perspective as an Arab woman living in a Western world, Lalla Essaydi, attempts to reexamine Arab female identity.

Set within an unoccupied house, owned by the artist's family, a place to which Essaydi was sent as a form of punishment when she disobeyed, *Les Femmes du Maroc* represents an exploration of the imaginary boundaries and “permissible space” codified by traditional Muslim society. Essaydi writes, “the presence of men defines public space, the streets, the meeting places. Women are confined to private spaces, the architecture of the homes.”

“I am writing. I am writing on me, I am writing on her. The story began to be written the moment the present began.” Translated from the original Arabic, Essaydi's personal writing subverts traditional Muslim gender stereotypes through the presence of the written word. The sacred Islamic art form of calligraphy, traditionally reserved exclusively for men, is employed by Essaydi as a small act of defiance against a culture in which women are relegated to the private sphere. Crossing a prohibited cultural threshold through the act of writing, *Les Femmes du Maroc* enables the artist and her subjects to engage in a simple act of self-expression.

Lalla Essaydi was born in 1956, outside of Marrakech. Her 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.

For additional information or images, please contact Mariska Nietzman or Daniel Blochwitz on +41 (0)44 202 69 25 or zuerich@houkgallery.com

Stockerstrasse 33, CH-8002 Zürich Tel 41 44 202 69 25 zuerich@houkgallery.com