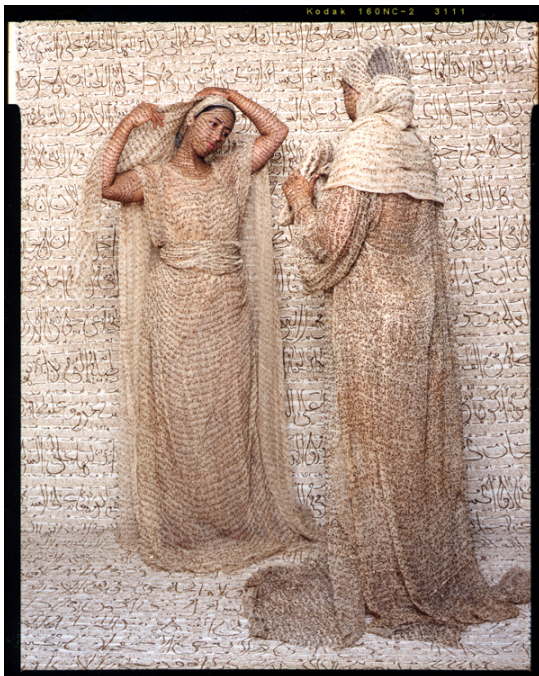


Contacts: John Corso  
248-320-1922  
[corso@oakland.edu](mailto:corso@oakland.edu)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**OAKLAND UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY TO PRESENT MAJOR EXHIBITION OF  
MOROCCAN PHOTOGRAPHER LALLA ESSAYDI**



**Lalla Essaydi: Writing Femininity,  
Writing Pleasure**

September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013 – October 13<sup>th</sup>, 2013

Curated by John J. Corso

**ROCHESTER, MI (July 15, 2013)**--The

Oakland University Art Gallery is proud to announce its newest exhibition, a collection of 20 color photographs by the acclaimed artist Lalla Essaydi. Running from September 6<sup>th</sup> to October 13<sup>th</sup>, “Lalla Essaydi: Writing Femininity, Writing Pleasure” features work from recent

series, namely: *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2008), *Converging Territories* (2003-2004), and *Harem* (2009).

Born in Morocco, Lalla Essaydi works to examine the role of the Muslim woman in today’s society. Through the use of hand-applied Arabic calligraphy and the re-appropriation of poses inspired by Orientalist paintings, Essaydi explores the relationship between writing, femininity, and pleasure. Writing upon the faces and skin of her models with henna, Essaydi actively defies the traditional use of calligraphy, an art form customarily reserved for men.

Lalla Essaydi lives in New York and Morocco, her country of origin and the setting for her fantastic interior tableaux of Moroccan women. She is well aware that Western art history has crafted its own fantasy of the East, and especially of Islamic women. Today we recognize that those fantasies, which we describe as “Orientalist,” are problematic. Artists like Ingres, Delacroix, and others focused on exotic, often fictionalized subjects, as a way to subordinate the “wild” cultures of the East while promoting the “civilization” of the West. Essaydi understands this tradition; she was educated in Paris and Boston and is exceedingly familiar with the Romantic Masters. But she stages her critique in subtle, multivalent ways. Essaydi knows that these traditions have produced beautiful if prejudiced masterpieces. Moreover, she knows that the relationship between beauty and subjugation is itself a multifaceted one, a connection that involves power, knowledge of the other, and desire. Essaydi doesn't shy away from these difficult conversations on the nature of beauty and desire, but rather she brings all of their intricacy into her performative photographs of women.

This exhibition brings together 20 large-scale photographic works, made from 2003 to 2012 and spanning five major bodies of work. In the earliest series, *Converging Territories*, Essaydi establishes the primary conditions of her aesthetic investigations: she photographs women elaborately adorned in henna script within exquisitely ornamented interiors. These works highlight the importance of writing in the creation of the self and of femininity. In her later series *Harem* and *Harem Revisited*, Essaydi examines the relationship of women, writing, and the fantastic architecture of the harem. Finally, in *Bullets* and *Bullets Revisited*, Essaydi crafts heavenly interiors from shining gold bullet casings. The women in these interiors sparkle; occasionally they wear bullets themselves, and they appear larger than life and otherworldly. In all of these series, Essaydi establishes the relationship of writing to beauty and pleasure and its role in the creation and expression of femininity.

## **Events**

- **Preview Panel Discussion with Lalla Essaydi, Allan Doyle, and John Corso Saturday, September 7, 5PM in Wilson Hall Room 124**
- **Opening, Saturday, September 7, 6-8PM in the OU Art Gallery**
- **Keynote Address, Lalla Essaydi, Sunday, September 8, 2PM in the OU Art Gallery**
- **Curator's Talk, Saturday, October 12, 2PM in the OU Art Gallery**

## **Exhibition Catalog**

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated exhibition catalog, with an introduction and essays by curator John Corso and scholar Allan Doyle.

The two catalog essays that accompany this exhibition aim to expand the critical literature through psychoanalytic perspectives. In his essay, John Corso focuses on the psychoanalytic concept of feminine writing. Corso argues that Essaydi's photographs and the performances she uses to generate them engage a sense of pleasure in writing that serves to disrupt the Orientalist fantasies with which her work engages.

The essay by Allan Doyle augments the existing literature by looking at the way Essaydi depicts the harem. Doyle argues that by reiterating the harem in numerous ways, the photographs "simultaneously solicit and subvert the fantasy, exposing its paradoxical, fetishistic kernel." Both essays aim to expand the approaches to Essaydi's work by looking at the role of the feminine, of desire, and of pleasure within her dynamic, breathtaking oeuvre.

## **Press Images**

High-resolution jpeg images from the exhibition are available via email. For more information, please contact John Corso: [corso@oakland.edu](mailto:corso@oakland.edu).

**Page 1 image full caption information:**

## LES FEMMES DU MAROC: LIGHT OF THE HAREM, 2008



Chromogenic print mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 40 x 30 inches (101.6 x 76.2 cm). Print number 1 from an edition of 15. Illustrated: *Lalla Essaydi: Les Femmes du Maroc* (New York, Powerhouse Books and Edwynn Houk Gallery, 2009), p. 23. [LE.LFMlight.3040.1]

### **About the Oakland University Art Gallery**

*For more than 40 years, the Oakland University Art Gallery (OUAG) has delivered diverse, museum-quality art to metro Detroit audiences. From September to May, the OUAG presents six different exhibitions – from cutting-edge contemporary art to projects exploring historical and global themes. The gallery also presents lectures, performances, tours, special events and more.*

*Sustaining a program focusing on the contextualization of contemporary art in Detroit is at the heart of our mission. Over the last decade we have produced over 50 publications, extending the range of our programming beyond the temporal run of each exhibition; this has created a prominent niche for the gallery. Exhibiting artists have gone on to participate in world-renowned invitationals such as the Whitney and Venice Biennials and have been represented at major art fairs in association with many other prestigious projects.*

*Oakland University Art Gallery is part of the Department of Art and Art History, College of Arts and Sciences, and our mission is aligned with the academic identity of the department: emphasizing excellence, Oakland University Art Gallery is dedicated to the enrichment of the individual through the intellectual and emotional enjoyment of the visual arts.*

*Gallery exhibitions have been reviewed in national journals such as Art in America and Sculpture magazine. Programming, catalogues and academic events have secured a special place for the gallery within the Detroit art community.*

*The Oakland University Art Gallery is open every day except Mondays from noon to 5pm; open evenings during theatre performances. All events are free. The gallery is next to Meadow Brook Theatre, on the Oakland University campus.*