

LALLA ESSAYDI

Moroccan, born 1956



Having been brought up in Morocco and then Saudi Arabia, Essaydi now lives and works between New York, Boston and Morocco. Utilising the perspective of an Arab woman living in a Western world, the artist examines Arab female identity.

Essaydi is both a photographer and a painter. Although her painting technique is extraordinarily accomplished, it is through her photography that she has achieved enormous success throughout the Western and Middle Eastern art worlds. Her work is both visually beautiful and significant in content.

She applies layers of calligraphy, drawn by hand with henna onto all visible surfaces - walls, fabric and bodies. This process reflects her training as a painter, which is evident in the way she constructs her carefully arranged figurative compositions. The poses are directly inspired by 19th Century Orientalist painting, and Essaydi reaches beyond Islamic culture to include the Western fascination with the odalisque, veil and harem. .

Converging Territories is set in a large house the artist's family owns in Morocco, to which a young woman was sent for a month if she was deemed to have transgressed. The second series, *Les Femmes du Maroc* is set in the artist's studio in Boston. The preparation for each series was about six months, and both were conceived as if they were books, in which the women have become pages and chapters. The segmentation of some images into triptychs, might show the three stages of a woman's life or to elongate a reclining figure, or to create a dramatic visual effect as in *Converging Territories #22abc*.

Because the preparation and writing of the calligraphy takes so long, creating the photographs is in many ways performance based. It is not widely known in the West, but the sacred Islamic art form of calligraphy is traditionally reserved exclusively for men, and so Essaydi's usage is more radical than many would imagine. Essaydi's work is highly autobiographical, expressing her thoughts as a woman and as an artist.

Brief Biography

Essaydi grew up in Morocco, and lived in Saudi Arabia for a number of years before she moved to the United States and settled in Boston. She now lives in New York and Marrakech. In 1994, Essaydi studied painting at L'Ecole Des Beaux Arts in Paris, France. She has a Diploma in photography and installation from School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, MA. In 1999, Essaydi received a B.F.A from Tufts University, Medford and M.A and M.F.A from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Tufts University in 2003.

Essaydi's work has been exhibited in many major cities in the United States, Europe and the Middle East and Waterhouse & Dodd held her first ever UK solo exhibition, titled *Crossroads*, last year. Her works have entered into some very prestigious royal collections and can be found in numerous private and public collections across the world including The British Museum, London; The Fries Museum, the Netherlands; The Museum of Fine arts, Boston and the Chicago Art Institute to name but a few.