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Anya Tish Gallery

4411 Montrose Boulevard

Houston, Texas 77006

(713) 524-2299

CONTACT: Anya Tish



LALLA ESSAYDI
Les Femmes du Maroc

On view March 7 - April 5

Reception for the Artist, Friday, March 14, 2008, 6:00 - 8:30 pm

Anya Tish Gallery is pleased to announce a new solo exhibition of photographs by the provocative, Moroccan-born and New York-based artist, Lalla Essaydi. Essaydi's images, which combine Islamic calligraphy with representations of the female body, address the complex reality of the modern Arab female identity, as witnessed through the unique perspective of personal experience. In her images, Essaydi has painstakingly applied layers of Islamic calligraphy, through the medium of henna, directly onto female bodies, as well as objects that are symbolic of Arab femininity. By synthesizing the practices of calligraphy, an Islamic art form traditionally reserved

for men, and henna, an adornment worn and applied only by women, Essaydi creates an exciting and subversive interweaving of traditional Arab cultural identities.

In her new series, Essaydi incorporates poses directly inspired by Orientalist traditions in Western painting. Nineteenth century Orientalist painting, as typified by Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Léon Gérôme, indulged the Western appetite for images of the exotic Middle Eastern harem and the eroticized female body. Essaydi draws on these distorted idealizations in conjunction with her own attitudes as a modern Arab woman living in the West. “Les Femmes du Maroc” represents an exploration of the imaginary boundaries and ‘permissible space’ codified by traditional Muslim society, and idealized by Orientalist painters of the nineteenth century.

Lalla Essaydi grew up in Morocco, lived for many years in Saudi Arabia, and presently works and resides in New York. She received her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts/TUFTS University Boston in 2003. She has exhibited throughout the United States and Europe, and her work is found in a number of public collections, including the Williams College Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Kodak Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts Houston, the Fries Museum Netherlands, and the De Cordova Museum.