

## LALLA ESSAYDI



*Les Femmes du Maroc: Reclining Odalisque*, 2008, chromogenic prints mounted to aluminum with a UV protective laminate, 60 x 144 inches/152.4 x 365.8 cm

Lalla Essaydi (b. 1956) is noted for her seductive color images exploring issues of gender, cross-cultural identity and the prevalent myths of Orientalism. Working across multiple disciplines—including painting, video, installation and photography—Essaydi challenges the social norms and hierarchies that shaped her life as a young girl in Morocco.

Born and raised in a traditional Muslim household, which included designated areas just for women, Essaydi is intimately familiar with how Arab women's personal histories are interlinked with segregated spaces. In her work, she explores spaces both real and symbolic, sometimes appropriating Orientalist imagery from historical Western paintings, placing models in classical odalisque positions, similar to Ingres' *Grande Odalisque*, which depicts a reclining nude harem slave in an imagined Orient. In other work, she considers the importance of art and architecture in Islamic culture. The decorative treatment of the models and their surroundings reflects a long tradition in Islamic art in which entire surfaces are covered with dazzling calligraphic, geometric or botanical patterns. By focusing exclusively on women, Essaydi skillfully critiques established views of Arab women in Western art, and by extension, in contemporary culture.

Essaydi completed a Master of Fine Arts degree from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts at Tufts University in Massachusetts. She has exhibited her work across the globe, including at the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore and the National Museum of Singapore; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The San Diego Museum of Art, California; The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Smithsonian National Museum of African Art and National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, D.C.

Her work is in numerous permanent collections, including the Asian Civilisations Museum, Singapore; Louvre, Paris; The British Museum, London; Smithsonian National Museum of African Art, Washington, D.C.; Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha. She divides her time between New York, Boston and Marrakesh.