

P R E S S R E L E A S E

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 9, 2006

**Williams College Museum of Art Presents
TRANSGRESSIONS: Lalla Essaydi
Confronts Jean-Léon Gérôme**

January 14-May 14, 2006

Williamstown, MA— this week the Williams College Museum of Art (WCMA) unveils bold new work by contemporary artist Lalla Essaydi in which she challenges the worldview of 19th-century French painter, Jean-Léon Gérôme. The exhibition juxtaposes Gérôme's iconic painting *The Slave Market*, generously loaned by the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, with four paintings by Essaydi. Together, the works in this installation form a dialogue across space, time, and cultures.

All of the paintings in the exhibition depict classically rendered figures and evocative architectural settings; while the French picture invites voyeurism and stereotypes the so-called 'Orient,' Essaydi's paintings will not allow it. All her figures gaze right back at us and command respect, be they male, female, or hermaphrodite. Complementing the monumental photographs of women, for which she is already well known, these paintings challenge our assumptions of North Africa to foster cross-cultural awareness.

Lalla Essaydi received a B.F.A. from Tufts University in 1999 and an M.F.A. from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston and Tufts

University in 2003. Essaydi works in a variety of media, including analog photography, oil on canvas, mixed media, and video. Her photographs have been the subject of the exhibition **Converging Territories**, and she has been included in numerous group exhibitions including the critically acclaimed **Nazar: Photographs from the Arab World**.

Artist Statement:

In a sense, I am a Western artist, making art in a style I was unable to use in my home country, Morocco. But I am also the slave girl of that painting, in that I am a woman from an Arab culture. And, to go a step further, I am Gérôme, painting nude subjects. I want in my paintings to combine all these elements, in order to engage the whole problem of myself as “other”...

In my paintings, I am hoping not only to expose the Orientalist gaze, and the facile assumptions it has engendered, but also to present my own culture as honestly as I can. Above all, I try to present myself in something like my true complexity—as a woman, as an Arab woman living in the West, mediating between worlds, as an artist. It is not a fixed identity, but one that is changing as the world changes and as my life changes...

–Lalla Essaydi

Related Events:

Artist Lecture: Lalla Essaydi

Thursday, February 9, 2006

4:00 pm

A reception will follow from 5:00–6:30 pm

Season Premiere Party

Thursday, February 16, 2006

5:00–7:00 pm

Come celebrate the opening of our newest exhibitions! Refreshments will be served.

Gallery Talk @ 12:10

TRANSGRESSIONS: Lalla Essaydi confronts Jean-Léon Gérôme

Wednesday, March 15, 2006

12:10–12:50 pm

Holly Edwards, Lecturer in Art, and Richard Rand, Senior Curator at The Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute

The Williams College Museum of Art is open Tuesday through Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and on Sunday from 1 to 5 p.m. Admission is free and the museum is wheelchair accessible. Contact: Suzanne Augugliaro, Public Relations Coordinator

413.597.3178; WCMA@williams.edu; www.wcma.org.