



Leyla Aliyeva views Lalla Essaydi's Beyond Time and Beauty exhibition (PHOTO)

15 November 2013, 00:16 (GMT+04:00)

Baku, Azerbaijan, Nov. 15

Trend:

The Baku Museum of Modern Art has opened its doors to Lalla Essaydi's Beyond Time and Beauty exhibition. Vice President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Leyla Aliyeva and Arzu Aliyeva viewed the exhibition.

Aida Mahmudova, the founder of YARAT! Contemporary Art Space, said "we are honoured to present Lalla Essaydi's exhibition Beyond Time and Beauty, in collaboration with YARAT." "We anticipate this work will greatly interest the public of Baku, who live with many visual traditions, resulting from our long and storied history."

Beyond Time and Beauty is Essaydi's first exhibition in Azerbaijan and follows her retrospective at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in 2012-13. Bringing together works from across her career, the show features the series Harem, Bullets, Converging Territories and Les Femmes du Maroc.

The exhibition is part of a growing programme of international contemporary art exhibitions at the Baku Museum of Modern Art, facilitated by YARAT. YARAT is a not-for-profit contemporary art organisation dedicated to nurturing an understanding of contemporary art in Azerbaijan.

Essaydi came to prominence over the past decade for her re-examination of Orientalist motifs, Islamic iconography and the perception of Middle Eastern women, using photography, mixed-media and installation. Essaydi's formative years were spent in Morocco and Saudi Arabia and she was educated in Europe and the United States. The multiple perspectives created from this mixed experience are integral to her work and its interrogative line: "In my art," Essaydi says, "I wish to present myself through multiple lenses - as artist, as Moroccan, as Saudi, as traditionalist, as Liberal, as Muslim. In short, I invite the viewer to resist stereotypes."

As the curator, Dina Nasser-Khadivi, describes "Essaydi is a remarkable international artist; she navigates pervasive cultural and aesthetic dichotomies to make something wholly original - East and West, Tradition and Modernity and the changing perceptions of women."

Calling upon visual traditions that range from Moroccan harem architecture, to Arabic calligraphy and figures from the Orientalist painting tradition, Essaydi layers the iconography that has shaped her. Her figures in Les Femmes du Maroc are entirely enveloped in Islamic calligraphy - writing, applied in henna, adorns their skin, their robes, and the interiors that surround them. The text seems to entrap the women, and yet it is simultaneously a form of decoration which marks some of the most significant moments of an Islamic woman's life.

A fully illustrated colour catalogue will accompany the exhibition and include an essay by Dr Olga Nefedova, the founding director at the Orientalist Museum, Qatar.

Essaydi was raised in Morocco and spent many years in Saudi Arabia, and although she was educated in Europe and the United States, this experience of traditional Islamic life was fundamental in shaping her. Essaydi's photography provides a contemporary reflection on an iconography that stretches as far back as the Orientalist imagery of nineteenth century artists such as Ingres, Delacroix, and Gérôme. More recently Essaydi has produced a series of pictures in a former harem in Morocco, often swathing her subjects in robes which closely echo the decorative tiles that wall the complex.

Lalla Essaydi lives in New York. Selections from her series Les Femmes du Maroc were published by powerHouse Books in 2009. Recent exhibitions of her work have been staged at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Williams College Museum, Williamstown, Mass.; and the Columbus Museum of Art, Ohio. Her work is represented in the collections of the Louvre, Paris; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles; Art Institute of Chicago; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and many others.