'Beyond the Veil' uncovers mysteries of Arabic feminine identities

By Nancye Tuttle, The Lowell Sun

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Arab women frequently hide behind burkhas when they go out in public.
The attire -- head-to-toe outer garments with only slits for their eyes
and often required by Islamic law -- lends an air of mystery to these women.

Lalla Essaydi, an internationally known Arabic artist/photographer, lifts that
veil in the new exhibition Lalla Essaydi: Beyond the Veil at UMass Lowell's
University Gallery.

Her dramatic photos, exploring the complexities of Arab female identity,
are on view Feb. 25-March 20.

Kristen Gresh, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston assistant curator of
photographs, talks on “She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World” on Thursday, Feb. 26, at 3 p.m. in the
O’Leary Library Room 222. A reception follows from 4:15-6 p.m. in the University Gallery in Mahoney Hall, 870 Broadway St., Lowell. Events are free and open to all.

Essaydi’s work is based on the experiences of her Moroccan childhood coupled with the perspective of a Western trained artist. (She received her MFA from the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in
Boston in 2003.)

She created her large format prints as part of a collaborative performance project she designed in her
childhood home with female friends and family members as partners. Along with Essayi, the women
used calligraphy, bullets casings, henna, their bodies and their gaze to undermine traditional and/or
imposed ideas of gender, ethnicity and identity.

Her work, she says, helps explore the “complexity of Arab female identity, as I have known it, and the
tension between hierarchy and fluidity at the heart of Arab culture,” she says.
The works offer images of a richly layered, multi-faceted world that is often misunderstood by Westerners. She hopes her work helps to lift that veil of misunderstanding.

All work exhibited is on display courtesy of the Miller Yezerski Gallery in Boston.

For information, visit http://www.uml.edu/dept/art/galleries_university.htm.

Art picks

- **PHOTO FINISH:** Photographer Alysha Elliard showcases her work in March in the Community Room at Rodgers Memorial Library, 194 Derry Road, in Hudson, N.H. Works by Nate Williams are also featured. A reception will be held on Tuesday, March 3, 6:30-8:30 p.m. The library also presents a traditional rug hooking workshop on Sunday, March 1, 1:15-4:15 p.m. $30 materials fee. Register at rmlnh.org/events or call 603-886-6030.

- **MARCH MADNESS:** Concord’s Umbrella Community Arts Center hosts its annual open studios show -- dubbed MAR(T)CH MADNESS -- from Feb. 25-March 30. The exhibit, showcasing artwork created by artists at the 40 Stow St. location, ranges from pottery to paintings to photography and beyond. A reception will be held on Thursday, March 5, 6-8 p.m. and includes refreshments and the chance to visit several artist studios. Visit www.theumbrelaarts.org or call 978-371-0820 for info.

- **CALL FOR ARTISTS:** Brush Art Gallery & Studios has issued a call for artists to participate in the Massachusetts Artists 2015 Exhibition of Contemporary Art, open to all artists who live in the Commonwealth. The deadline to apply is March 21. Joanna Fink, director of Boston’s Alpha Gallery, is the juror. The exhibition is on April 18-June 6 at the Brush, 256 Market St., Lowell. Visit www.lowellartshows.com for prospectus and on-line application.

- **SIGN OF SPRING:** Minute Man National Historical Park officially reopens on Tuesday, March 3, when the North Bridge Visitor Center, 174 Liberty St., Concord, begins its springtime hours. During March, it will be open Tuesdays-Saturdays, 11 a.m.-3 p.m. From April 1-Oct. 31, the Visitor Center is open 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. The Visitor Center features exhibits, the video "Treason or Liberty?" and a museum store. The Minute Man Visitor Center, 250 Great Road, Lincoln, near the eastern entrance to the park, reopens on April 1, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily, through Oct. 31. Call 978-396-6993 or visit www.nps.gov/MIMA for info.
Nancye Tuttle's email address is nancyedt@verizon.net.

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