

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

"At LA Museum, A Powerful And Provocative Look At 'Islamic Art Now'." *NPR*. (May 5, 2015).



At LA Museum, A Powerful And Provocative Look At 'Islamic Art Now'

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In her 2008 work *Reclining Odalisque*, Moroccan photographer Lalla Essaydi shows a woman covered in calligraphy.
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

Art galleries are generally quiet, hushed spaces, but at the Los Angeles County Museum a show called [Islamic Art Now](#) is sparking some heated discussions as visitors ponder the photographs, paintings and neon sculptures on display.

Moroccan photographer Lalla Essaydi has covered every inch of a reclining odalisque with graceful Arabic calligraphy. The woman is staring right at us, and viewers wonder: Is the writing protection? A shield? Imprisonment?

Translating the calligraphy, curator Linda Komaroff



doesn't see it that way. "I see it more as: This is who I am. See me for who I am. Read me if you like, but this is me," she says.

Egyptian-German artist Susan Hefuna's *Woman Behind Mashrabiya I* is a black and white image of a shrouded woman looking out from behind a pierced screen. We can't really see her, but she can see us. Is she protected? Trapped?



Curator Linda Komaroff says the woman in Susan Hefuna's *Woman Behind Mashrabiya I* is "very mysterious — and deliberately so."

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

"It's very mysterious — and deliberately so," Komaroff says. "It's this notion about: Do we really understand? ... To me, a lot of these images are a challenge to an American audience to maybe rethink what their perceptions are of women in the Middle East, women in the Islamic world. Maybe they're not that different from us after all."



[Click here](#) to see a larger version of Mitra Tabrizian's *Tehran 2006*.

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

The women go to college, hold political office, drive, yet still wear chadors.

"A lot of the artists that you see in this gallery, they have double consciousness," Behdad explains. "Many of them are caught between a certain tradition ... and that tradition for the most part is Islamic — Islamic culture — on the other hand, they are secular and they are very much Westernized."

These artists are from Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Israel. According to the show's catalog, they are Muslim, Christian and Jewish. Many are ex-pats. In fact, Behdad questions the title of the show — *Islamic Art Now*.

