

Women of Algiers in their Apartment: Delacroix, Picasso, and Essaydi



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Fig 1. Eugene Delacroix, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*, 1834



Fig. 2. Pablo Picasso, *Women of Algiers (Version O)*, 1955



Fig. 3. Lalla Essaydi, *Les femmes du Maroc #1*, 2006

Background

Orientalism is a cultural phenomenon starting in the 18th century that is still present in today's society. The paintings deemed Orientalist usually contain stereotypically and negative images of non-European cultures. By using *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* and its various reproductions, cultural and societal influences of Orientalism can be traced and defined.

Research Questions

- What are the social and cultural contexts of each painting?
- How does Orientalism portray race and gender?
- What role does the gender and ethnicity of the artist have in the portrayal of the *Women of Algiers*?
- What is the intent of the artist by creating or re-creating this scene?

Methods

- The main method used for analyzing these paintings is psychoanalysis. By applying psychoanalytical themes, the intent of the artist can be hypothesized.
- Formal analysis of the paintings is also crucial, as that is how each artist physically differentiates their own rendition of the scene.
- Feminist and postcolonial theories also helped to deconstruct these paintings.

Conclusion

Delacroix, Picasso, and Essaydi all bring different elements and meanings to their own *Women of Algiers*. Delacroix's piece is the epitome of Orientalism with the fantasy harem it portrays. The Picasso reproductions are harder to pin down, considering his turbulent relationships with women, but other critics, including Algerian women, herald his pieces as positive representations. The contemporary reproduction done by Essaydi provides the most critical response to Delacroix's original, as she is an Algerian women directly affected by French colonialism.

Orientalism

Orientalism is a European construct to differentiate between the West and the East. It is the systematic othering of people who they consider less intelligent, more sinful, and of lower class than themselves. This inaccurate and hurtful portrayal is seen not only in art, but also literature, human geography, and cultural studies.

References

- Fig. 1. Delacroix, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment*. 1834. Oil on canvas, 180 x 229 cm. The Louvre, Paris. From: The Louvre, <http://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/women-algiers-their-apartment> (accessed April 8, 2015).
- Fig. 2. Picasso, *Women of Algiers (Version O)*. 1955. Oil on canvas. Christie's. From: Christie's, <http://www.christies.com/features/Picasso-5829-1.aspx> (accessed April 8, 2015).
- Fig. 3. Essaydi, *Les femmes du Maroc #1*. 2006. Chromogenic Print, 71.37 x 89.41 cm. Source Artnet Auctions. From: Artnet Auctions, <https://www.artnet.com/auctions/artists/lalla-essaydi/les-femmes-du-maroc-1-3> (accessed April 8, 2015).