

ONCE
UPON A
THROU
PAST

MARYAM
EISLER



TUROUNCE TUROUNCE PACT

MARYAM
EISLER



THE EPHEMERAL

FOREWORD

DAVID LINLEY

I have known Maryam for many years and have admired her photography all along.

I am honoured and delighted to show Maryam's new series 'Once Upon a Turquoise Past' in my shop in Belgravia; the series was shot by Maryam at Leighton House, a museum and a sanctuary I hold very dear to my heart.

I hope you will enjoy discovering the works and the exhibition as much as I have.

David Linley, Founder LINLEY
Ambassador, Leighton House and Sambourne House
Great grandson of Edward Linley Sambourne

Friday the 24th of September, 2021

PRESENT PAST CARRIE SCOTT

In Maryam Eisler's latest series, which makes its debut at LINLEY London, we see a voyage into the past, propitiously centred on the present. Images captured in the early-winter light at Leighton House – the iconic Victorian Kensington home of Orientalist Lord Leighton – and inspired by the character of 1980s New York; picture an incongruous fairytale set in the heart of Isfahan.

Eisler's images beckon. Patterns merge. Colours collide. The impossible gives us pause from reality. Taken just as restrictions were easing after the height of the pandemic, these images burrow into temporal and psychological rabbit-holes, like a modern day Alice in Wonderland. Intimate in scale and framed ornately, Eisler's images skilfully draw us into the fairytale she creates, one where references collide and overlap.

The magic in these images is conjured precisely thanks to this merging of cultural references. Eisler's homeland is Iran, where turquoise-tiled domes are mere extensions of nature itself, but she spent many formative years in Europe, steered by the likes of Baudelaire and European tunes of the erotic, and the exotic, and then also in New York where colour and gloss dominated for

so much of the 1980s and 1990s. This unusual perspective combines place, colour, history, beauty and meaning in Leighton House, transporting the viewer into another world, one that belongs distinctly to the photographer's own past.

It is, however, her portraits of women that transport the most, colliding head-on with our constructed understanding of The Feminine. Epicly intimate amid the expansive references and merging cultures, each image creates a portrait of "woman" that is beyond singular definition. With focused close-ups of detailed costuming and tattooed patterns superimposed on skin set against these ornate backdrops, this is woman as complex, fleeting, impossible to formalise or define. And this is precisely what Eisler creates: compositions that represent "woman". Not as a shared fantasy of sexual identity, but in a way that contests any notion of essence – feminine or otherwise – and one that ultimately pictures women in control of their own escape and their own fairytales. This is the sublime feminine, made up of before, during and after. Because we are all of those things.

ONCE UPON A TURQUOISE PAST MARYAM EISLER

This new series represents for me a voyage into my past, propitiously centred on my neighbourhood present. Images captured in the light of early-winter at Leighton House (the iconic Victorian Kensington home of Orientalist Lord Leighton). Inspired by some of the colour, gloss and character reflected in Henry Clarke's 1969 photographs of Marisa Berenson and Lauren Hutton for a US Vogue feature – an incongruous fashion shoot set in the heart of Isfahan.

My homeland, Iran, where turquoise-tiled domes of unparalleled beauty are mere extensions of nature itself. Earthly outcrops, fashioned from the memory-palettes of my childhood's 'Persian Sky'. The magic of the Land of the Sophy, where great poet-philosophers like Rumi, Khayyam, Saadi and Hafez roam the mystic sphere, whistling their wisdom far and wide, carried on the wind.

Two particular poets, one Persian, the other European, steered my hand and eye in controlling the shutter: Attar of Nishapur and Baudelaire. The first, for the magic he evoked through his twelfth century allegorical parables of self-realisation, lifted by avian wings of colour. The other, for his earthy tunes of the erotic, and the exotic.

Attar's *Conference of the Birds* is particularly germane to my present work. Combining place, colour, history, beauty and meaning, in settings that transport the viewer into another world:

"The home we seek is in eternity; The truth we seek is like

a shoreless sea, Of which your paradise is but a drop."
Baudelaire, too, has steered my thoughts. His 'Invitation au Voyage', a magic carpet enabling travel into fantasy; a befitting mood-booster in these most challenging of times.

Poetic lines which set us on fire: "*Luxury and voluptuousness, In that amber scented calm*"... "*Ceilings richly wrought, Mirrors deep as thought, Walls with eastern splendour hung*" – all of which have their fingerprints framing each one of my prints.

Why now? you may ask.

Why not? is the easy answer, apart from the fact that we're facing one of modern humanity's rare examples of plague and challenge. Both natural and spiritual. Natural, taking refuge in Attar's simulacrum. Spiritual, by testing ourselves on a journey called life, through Baudelaire's evoking lines.

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, luxe, calme et volupté. There all is order and beauty, luxury, peace, and pleasure.

For myself, the creation of this series has been a refuge of sorts. Concentrating on art by escaping to visions of worldly beauties that may colour-tint our present grim perspectives on life. At a time when hope has been challenged, ideas polluted and inspiration taxed.

What has come out of these photographs has been a revelation for me, as much as the words of the poets may have been to themselves. I hope at the very least that these voyages in paint and blush help titillate and inspire.

This has also been an opportunity to further explore the Sublime Feminine through pictorial representations.

Visions of a Femme Fatale locked away in a citadel of splendours. Best let Attar lead the way: *Rise up and play those liquid notes that steal men's hearts away...*

Maryam Eisler

London, November 2020

THE HOME WE SEEK
IS IN ETERNITY;

THE TRUTH WE SEEK
IS LIKE A SHORELESS SEA,

OF WHICH YOUR PARADISE
IS BUT A DROP.

Attar of Nishapur



MANY MOONS AGO IN NEW YORK



CLOSE YOUR EYES. FALL IN LOVE. STAY THERE
(Rumi)



INHALE THE FUTURE. EXHALE THE PAST



CEILINGS RICHLY WROUGHT,
MIRRORS DEEP AS THOUGHT,
WALLS WITH EASTERN SPLENDOUR HUNG

Charles Baudelaire



BIRDS OF A FEATHER FLOCK TOGETHER



IF A LITTLE DREAMING IS DANGEROUS,
THE CURE FOR IT
IS NOT TO DREAM LESS BUT
TO DREAM MORE,
TO DREAM ALL
THE TIME.

Marcel Proust

NOTHING CAN BRING BACK THE HOUR OF SPLENDOUR IN THE GRASS
(William Wordsworth)



WHAT DEFINES ME

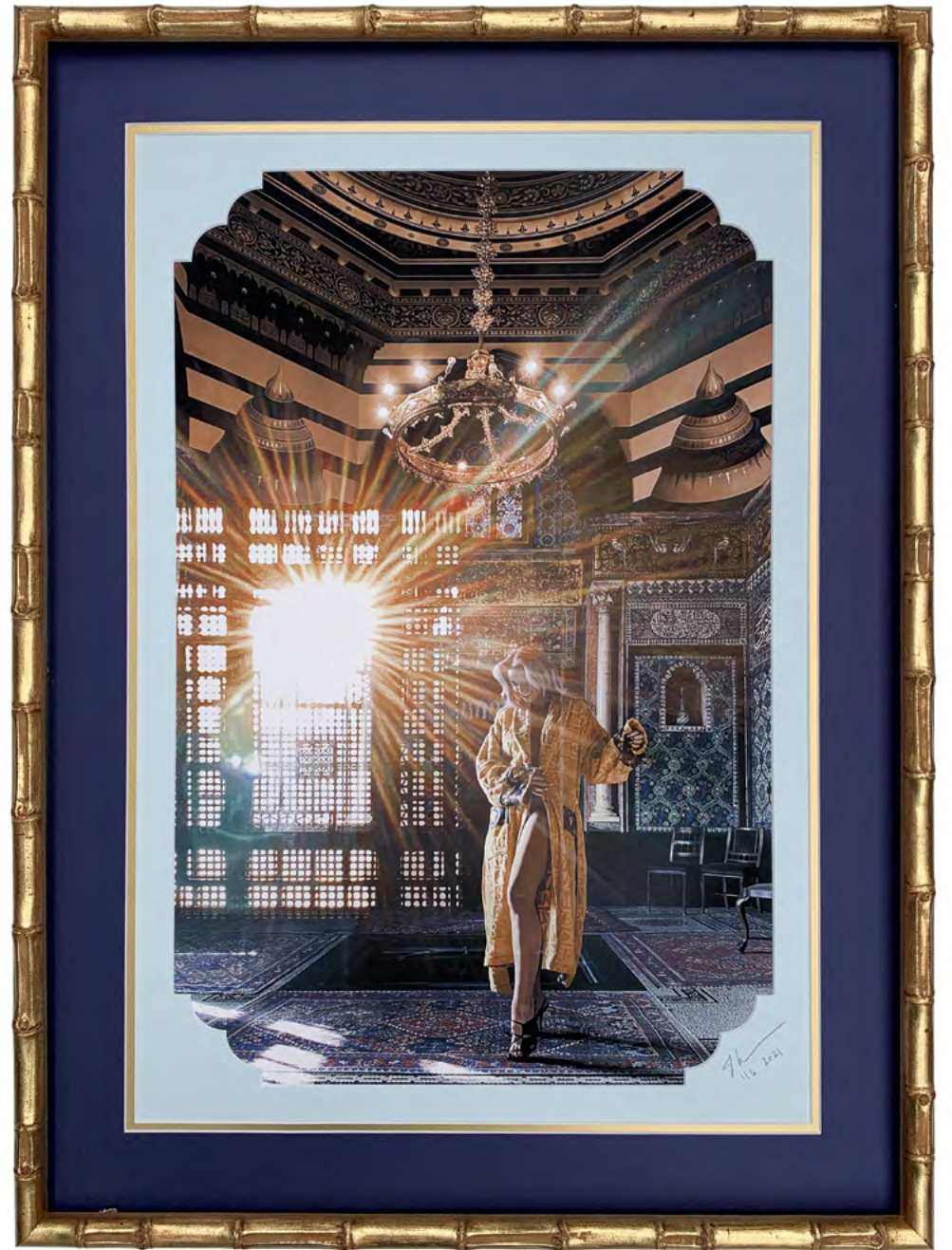


RISE UP AND PLAY
THOSE LIQUID NOTES
THAT STEAL MEN'S HEARTS AWAY...

Attar of Nishapur



INVITATION AU VOYAGE
(Baudelaire)



RISE UP AND PLAY



IN YOUR LIGHT I LEARN HOW TO LOVE.
IN YOUR BEAUTY,
HOW TO MAKE POEMS

Rumi



SET ME FREE



“IF YOU KNEW
TIME AS WELL
AS I DO,”
SAID THE HATTER,
“YOU WOULDN’T
TALK ABOUT
WASTING IT.”

Lewis Carroll



BLURRING THE LINES



WE'RE ALL MAD HERE
(Lewis Carroll)



THE BEAUTY YOU SEE IN ME
IS A REFLECTION OF YOU

Rumi

THERE... ALL IS BEAUTY



THE HOME WE SEEK IS IN ETERNITY
(Attar)



LÀ TOUT N'EST QU'ORDRE ET BEAUTÉ,
LUXE, CALME ET VOLUPTÉ

Charles Baudelaire

THERE'S A CRACK IN EVERYTHING. THAT'S HOW THE LIGHT GETS IN
(Leonard Cohen)





ORIENTAL SPLENDOUR



SHADOWPLAY

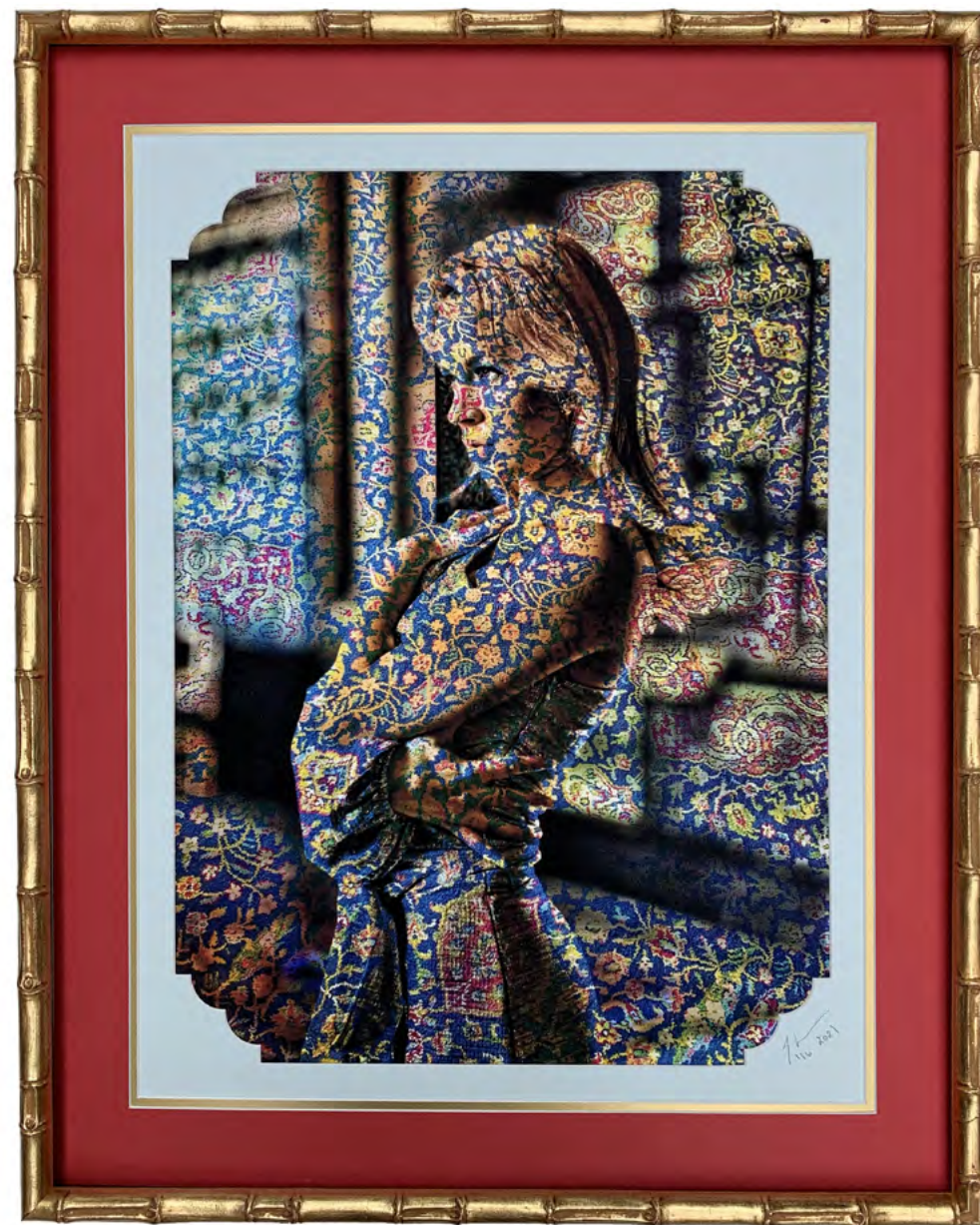


THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL



THE PAST IS NEVER DEAD
IT'S NOT EVEN THE PAST

William Faulkner



STAMPED MEMORIES

I would like to take this opportunity and thank:

**My immediate team with whom
we created pure 'lockdown magic':**

Beautiful Sarah Elizabeth Lovegrove for acting as muse

Jessica Cheetham for her creative makeup

Anne Sophie Cochevelou for her beautiful styling,
clothing and accessory designs

Oliver Fatyol for his patience!

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Carrie Scott who saw the possibility of an exhibition
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Linley:

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Catalogue Design:

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Exhibition Prints:

Ted Chau at Chau Digital
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Exhibition Framing:

Lucy Shapland at Canford Framers

Last but not least and importantly:

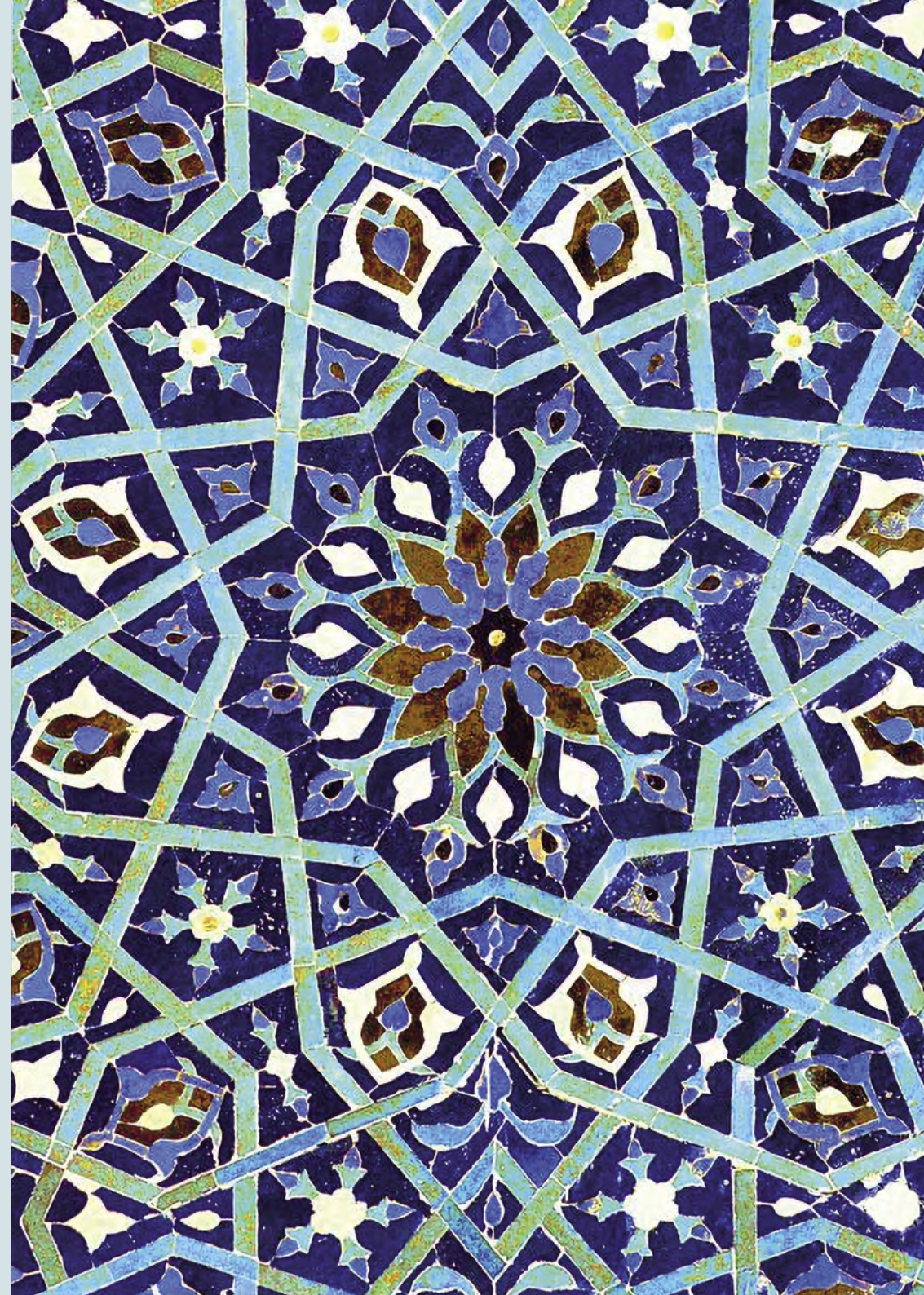
Leighton House Museum and the museum team for the beautiful
and inspiring premise

Janet Rady for helping me secure the location

Melissa Odabash for her beautiful designs

Isabelle de la Bruyere, Brandei Estes, Helen Ho, Darius Sanai,
and Katy Wickremesinghe for always believing in and
supporting my work.

LINLEY



The background of the entire page is a teal-colored geometric pattern. It consists of a complex, repeating lattice of lines that form various polygons, primarily hexagons and octagons. Within these shapes, there are smaller, stylized floral or leaf-like motifs, creating a dense and intricate design.

LINLEY

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