By Kristen Gresh

The images in *She Who Tells a Story* not only are made by women with roots in Iran and the Arab world, but are about the people, landscapes, and cultures of the region. Many of the photographers here explore questions of identity through an evolving and shifting set of narratives that must be understood as a response to Orientalism. Historically, "Orientalism" has referred to artistic or literary depictions by European or American artists and writers of the East, including Middle Eastern, North African, and Eastern cultures. In his pioneering study *Orientalism* (1978), the Palestinian-born scholar Edward Said argued that Orientalism aligns Western romanticized visions of the region with the goals of European and American colonialism and imperialism; it is a discourse of power, presenting the "Orient" as culturally inferior. Since the appearance of Said's provocative study, questions surrounding imagery of Middle Eastern, North African, and Asian cultures have been vigorously reconsidered and debated. Regardless of the opinions expressed in these sometimes contentious conversations, Orientalism, and, more specifically, Orientalist painting, is indisputably fundamental to the region's historical visual representation.[1]

Rania Matar, Christilla, Rabieh, Lebanon, 2010. Courtesy of the artist and Carroll and Sons Gallery, Boston.