

Her incursion into film began in 1997, the year in which she made her first movie - until then Neshat had focussed on photography as an artistic medium; thanks to the resources the cinematographic medium provides, Neshat strengthens the narrative factor even further and makes an in-depth study of the divergences between genders, and the differences between cultures, as is reflected by her video installations *Turbulent* (1998), *Rapture* (1999) and *Fervor* (2000).

However, she continues to use the fixed image, as is reflected by the work from the Es Baluard collection, a large-format triptych that includes the beginning of the video-installation *Fervor*. On this occasion, Neshat proposes a more intimate vision of the divergence between genders; the scene is not played out by two groups this time, but by one man and one woman, the individual - thus reminding one of the negation of individuality in contemporary Iranian society. The two meet by chance in an open, solitary setting, on a crossroads where they halt for a moment and exchange a brief glance as they continue along their path, each one alone.

Subtle attraction, in which no contact other than visual is made, is not permitted in Iranian society either, subjected as it is to religious and social control. The triptych ends with the image of the action of the male character, who stops and turns round to follow her with his gaze, another reference to the submissive, passive role of the woman in Islamic society.

¹“In conversation with Shirin Neshat”. Text included in the catalogue of the exhibition “Shirin Neshat”, Vienna/London: Kunsthalle Wien / Serpentine Gallery, 2000, p. 27

²Text translated into English by Salar Abdoh. Catalogue, exhibition Shirin Neshat: Two installations. Columbus, Ohio: Wexner Center for the Arts / The Ohio State University, 2000, p. 37

Exhibition dates: 10/03/2017-29/10/2017

Museum Opening Hours:

Tuesday to Saturday: 10 - 20 h

Sundays: 10 -15 h

Mondays closed

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Fundació d'Art Serra

Gabinet. Shirin Neshat

Iranian by birth, Shirin Neshat lives and works in New York. At the age of 17, she left her native country and moved to the United States, where she studied and graduated in Fine Arts at the University of California, Berkeley. After returning to Iran in 1990, Neshat felt the need to reconnect with her culture, reflect on the profound transformation that had taken place in the country and find out about the Islamic revolution and its effects, proposing a philosophical debate in her work whilst maintaining a clear, critical undertone. In this way, her own personal experience runs through her work, the forced exile, what it means to be a woman and an artist in the country of her birth, and at the same time she poses universal questions such as memory, loss, freedom...

Photography became her main medium for expression, and with it she managed to transmit the forceful realism necessary for her work. *Women of Allah*, (1993-1997) was her first series; for this work she enjoyed the collaboration of different photographers who captured the artist, or fragments of her body, on which she inscribed references by Iranian writers or poets confronted with the harsh presence of weapons. In 1997 she turned to the moving image, film and video, making films in 16 and 35 mm created to be screened in video-installation format, continuing later with feature films. *Women without Men* (2009) was the first. Of her influences, Neshat stresses present-day Iranian film, and in particular Abbas Kiarostami. In view of the difficulties of filming in her own country, Neshat has chosen to shoot in diverse locations such as Morocco, Turkey or even Mexico, places she travels to in order to recreate Iran.

Through subtle readings related to Iranian poetry, literature and music, Neshat emphasises the position of women in Islamic society, as expressed in *Turbulent* (1998) for example, where the male singer sings a love song in front of an audience - of his own gender - and when he finishes, he hears a female voice singing a piece without words, alone. Or in *The Last Word* (2004), one of her most politically explicit works, an artist who is being interrogated and subjected to moral judgement whose only way of defending herself is a poem - culture as an instrument in the face of governmental control. Her collaborators include the photographer Larry Barns, composers Sussan Deyhim and Phillip Glass, and photography director Ghassem Ebrahimian.

Neshat sets forth new interpretations of the revolution through a play on opposites or dualities on both a conceptual and a formal level - man-woman, public-private, rebellion-conformity, community-individual, home-exile... for the most part work made in black and white, a resource Neshat uses to symbolise the transformation of Iran after the revolution.

WORKS

Shirin Neshat

Fervor, 2000

Two-channel video, black and white, sound

Duration: 10'

Courtesy of the artist & Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

Fervor -commissioned by the Wexner Center through its residency programme-completes the film trilogy initiated with *Turbulent* in 1998, followed by *Rapture* in 1999.

Sexuality and desire, taboo subjects in Islamic societies - especially in the public space - converge in this narrative shot in Marrakech, Morocco, one of the places Neshat films in to recreate Iran. The video begins on the outskirts of the city, centring on the romantic attraction of the two main characters, a man and a woman, who meet at a crossroads and exchange a brief glance as they continue on their way.

Two simultaneous screen set side by side bring this black-and-white videographic work to life, a dual narration expressed based on complementarity. Whilst maintaining the distinction and separation of genders in Iranian society, the artist avoids confrontation - unlike in *Turbulent* and *Rapture*, where the genders oppose one another - as both men and women shared the sexual taboo.

Long sequences without dialogue, except for female voices singing, alternating with the imam's voice, the characteristic simplicity of S. Neshat through which she transmits to us the heavily-charged symbolic burden of both actors, the difference between genders. This issue materialises evidently on the compositional level, with the recourse to the dual projection, as in the other works in the trilogy, and by showing the action of the male character in more detail, at the expense of the female one.

The women dressed in chadors, eliminating any trace of their body, enter the meeting room separated from the men by a black curtain that divides the interior space.

The reason for the meeting is not defined; as Neshat says, "The purpose of this ceremony remains ambiguous: while having something of a political event on the one hand, the occasion resembles a theater performance on the other - there is a bearded man standing on a platform addressing the public. This charismatic character is delivering a speech, a moral lesson about the "sin" implied by "desires". He tells the story of Youssef and Zolikhha from the Koran - a story as famous as Romeo and Juliet... As the speech becomes more and more intense and aggressive in tone, the man's and the woman's initial excitement, and modest on-screen flirtation, turn into a deep sense of anxiety, confusion and guilt,

eventually leading to the woman's hurried exit. The narrative ends without the protagonists having made direct verbal or physical contact."¹

Text excerpt of the Speaker's monologue²:

Of sin we shall speak of this day
And of the twin natures of mankind.
Speak of this transient world
Unto which we are born and tested.

We shall speak of how the divine breath
Was passed unto him
And the angels, all, made to bow before him
Save for one -Satan-
Whose envy refused him submission.

And the story of Yusef and Zuleikha bore
Witness to this duality;
For Satan had so occupied her soul
That Zuleikha was made delirious
And played at every ruse
To possess the flesh of Yusef.

Woe unto you
Woe unto the sinful
Woe unto you
Woe unto the deceitful
Woe unto the seekers of the flesh
Woe unto those who follow the path of Satan

Dread and beware!
Beware of the Day of Judgement
Beware of the wrath of Allah
Curse be upon Satan
Curse be upon Satan.

Shirin Neshat

«Fervor» Series (Couple at Intersection), 2000

Silver Gelatine Print

119,5 x 152,5 cm each one (triptych)

Edition: 5/5

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Private collection deposit