

PRESS RELEASE

SHIRIN NESHAT

3 April 2000, 7.30 p.m. Galleria Lia Rumma, Via Solferino, 44

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The gallery is open to the public from Tuesday to Saturday from 11.30 a.m. to 1.30 p.m. and from 3.30 to 7.30 p.m.

Shirin Neshat was born in 1957 in Qazvin, Iran. She has lived and worked in New York since 1975 but has always maintained a strong bond with her native country. Her work, which is almost exclusively photographic and video-oriented, tackles the issue of cultural and social complexity in a society founded upon the separation of genre and gender. She examines the political and psychological implications of women's role in Islamic culture through her art, whose broad focus takes on a universal meaning.

A series of hitherto unpublished photographs, for the first time in colour, will be exhibited at the Lia Rumma Gallery in Milan; the photographs were taken by the artist while shooting her recent film "Rapture" in Essaouira, Morocco. Neshat has always considered photography as an autonomous enterprise and video as simply an extension of it. The use of colour is restricted to the azure of the sky, the gold of the sand and the black of the chador, corresponding to the stark simplicity of the images and heightening the emotional impact of the photos which reach an almost epic quality. Using a poetic narrative whose outcome is destined to remain mysterious and unresolved, eluding any specific anecdote, Neshat displays a rigour which excludes both polemic and the nostalgia and lure of the exotic; she achieves this by juxtaposing photographs of groups of men and women to recount the paradoxical situation of women in Iran; not only are women trampled upon by the principle of the harem but are forced, in exactly the same way as men, to carry weapons during wartime. Behind the veils of these women hides a femininity made invulnerable by a primordial force; this femininity combines the pain of segregation, pride in one's own cultural origins, silent dignity and determination in a way that enables these women, as is clear in these photographs, to abandon the shore unhesitatingly on a wooden boat bound for unknown destinations in a kind of silent rebellion.

Thanks to her perspective, which lies midway between her native Islamic origins and the western culture she has encountered, Shirin Neshat feels the need to overcome the stereotypes and simplifications inherent in the limited western interpretation of Muslim culture and its social and religious codes. Shirin Neshat received the ... prize at the 1999 Venice Biennale. She has had personal exhibitions at the Serpentine Gallery, London (2000), the Kunsthalle, Vienna (2000), the Art Institute of Chicago (1999). Her work has been displayed at The Carnegie International Show, Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh (1999) and at the Site Santa Fe, Santa Fe, Mexico (1999). Her video "Rapture" (1999) is currently on show at the P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Center as part of the exhibition "Greater New York", organised in collaboration with MoMa and she is preparing a new film for the Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2000).

The artist will be present at the inauguration.