

ART

## Shirin Neshat's Curated Show Gathers 13 Female Iranian Artists on the 40th Anniversary of Revolution

"Every artist in this show, I believe, is coping or dealing with a form of contrast," Neshat said. "Being on the threshold of two cultures, [which] are not just different, but in conflict from one another."

BY GRACE EDQUIST

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Left, portrait of Shirin Neshat; right, Ala Dehghan's *Oh, this sun is so lazy, and it is still cold*, 2010. LEFT, BY LYLE ASHTON HARRIS/COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND CRG GALLERY, NY; RIGHT, COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN.

**T**here's a scene at the beginning of *Women Without Men*, the 2009 magical realist film by the Iranian artist **Shirin Neshat**, in which a character named Munis leaps off a roof to her figurative death, making way for her political rebirth. She floats, feather-like, toward the stone streets of Tehran below, her dark hair flapping behind her serene face.

Before her jump, Munis's brother had forbade her from leaving the house. Her leap was her defiant reach toward freedom, representing all the Iranian women before and after who have fought to have their rights recognized, their voices heard.

"We"—meaning Iranian women—"have always functioned in the world of allegory," Neshat said after a recent screening of the film.

Allegory shows up again and again in a new art show curated by Neshat. Called *A Bridge Between You and Everything*, the show features nearly 100 works from 13 Iranian women artists, handpicked by Neshat. Running through November 23 at the High Line Nine gallery in New York, the show—presented in partnership with the Center for Human Rights in Iran—marks the 40th anniversary of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, when the country became an Islamic republic and the rights of women were restricted. All of the show's artists have been creating artwork in the aftermath of the revolution.



Sepideh Salehi's *Roosari* from *School* series, 2016. COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN.

There is no singular theme within the show. Instead, it's a mix in every sense, highlighted by Neshat's decision to hang the work in tight groupings, salon-style, from floor to ceiling. The artists themselves range in age and geography, living in New York, California, London, Germany, and "one brave artist," said Neshat, who still lives in Iran. The artistic mediums also vary, comprising painting, drawing, mixed media, sculpture, photography, and film. It is the differences, Neshat said, that tell the story.

"I'm not a curator in a conventional sense," she said. "I thought to just create this tapestry of artwork by a group of very, very distinct artists from different generations and see: What kind of art can you predict from people whose lives have been subjected to different destinies? What do they have to say?"

It's an intriguing concept, to bring a group of people who all have something in common but relate to that common thing differently. Some of the artists were raised in Iran and feel nostalgia for the country of their youth. Others have been in the United States since they were children and have almost no recollection of Iran, and very little emotional longing. A good portion of the displayed works contains overt references to Persian culture, with Farsi lettering or religious iconography, while other pieces are more subtle in their influences.



Left, Bahar Sabzevari's *The Witness*, 2019; right, Laleh Khorramian's *Orb-Water*, 2019. COURTESY OF THE CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN IRAN.

“Every artist in this show, I believe, is coping or dealing with a form of contrast,” Neshat says. “I think [of] the contrast in terms of these artists being on the threshold of two cultures, [which] are not just different, but in conflict from one another, and how their work mediates the two worlds visually and conceptually.”

Neshat left Iran in 1975 to study in the U.S. and has been living in the States ever since. Throughout her decades-long career as an artist in exile—“I cannot go back,” she said—Neshat has shown her films, photography, and video installations at MoMA, the Tate, the Art Institute of Chicago, Sundance, and Cannes, among many others. She won the Golden Lion at the 1999 Venice Biennale, the festival’s highest film prize. A new retrospective of her work, *I Will Greet the Sun Again*, is currently on view at the Broad in Los Angeles, and she just opened *Looking for Oum Kulthum*, with film clips and stills, as part of **Paris Photo**.

Her vast body of work examines the inextricable link between culture, politics, and art—something Neshat **speaks about** often. “The artist and the artwork is one thing. You cannot separate the two,” she says.

*A Bridge Between You and Everything* curated by Shirin Neshat. BY DAVID N REGEN.

That bond between an artist's work and her lived experience comes through in *A Bridge Between You and Everything*. "My sense of identity, and the way it sort of percolates into my artwork is like a constantly shifting landscape," said **Afroz Amighi**, one of the featured artists who contributed one sculpture and two drawings. Amighi left Iran as a child, and said her earlier work was heavily influenced by Middle Eastern culture, especially architecture, though her life in the U.S. has come to be a greater influence, especially since the 2016 election. "I think that you can't really escape being political, whether you intend to be or not," Amighi said. "It's part of the air we breathe."

*Works from A Bridge Between You and Everything are available through a **benefit auction** on Artsy, with part of the proceeds going toward the Center for Human Rights in Iran's arts and culture and disability rights programs.*

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