



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

## TEACHING INSTRUCTIONS: Shirin Neshat

### THEMES:

- Representations of Islamic women
- Poetry (text) and art
- Photography and video work
- Victimization and power

### FEATURED WORKS:

*Women of Allah* series (1995), stills from *Rapture* (1999), stills from *Soliloquy* (1999), stills from *Turbulent* (1998).

### RESOURCES:

#### *Links to images*

- [http://www.artnet.com/Artists/ArtistHomePage.aspx?artist\\_id=12480&page\\_tab=Artworks\\_for\\_sale](http://www.artnet.com/Artists/ArtistHomePage.aspx?artist_id=12480&page_tab=Artworks_for_sale)
- <http://www.iranian.com/Arts/Dec97/Neshat/>
- [http://www.artspeak.ca/exhibitions/event\\_detail.html?event\\_id=67](http://www.artspeak.ca/exhibitions/event_detail.html?event_id=67)
- [http://www.newyorker.com/online/2007/10/22/slideshow\\_071022\\_neshat?slide=1 - showHeader](http://www.newyorker.com/online/2007/10/22/slideshow_071022_neshat?slide=1 - showHeader)
- <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/museo/6/neshat/index.html>

#### *Books*

- *Shirin Neshat: Two Installations* by Bill Horrigan and Sherri Geldin (2000): Wexner Center for the Arts
- *Shirin Neshat: The Last Word* edited by Octavio Zaya (2006): Charta

### DISCUSSION POINTS AND QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS:

- Generate questions regarding the relationship between men and women in Neshat's work. Prompt students to examine how they are positioned in the images and what activities they are engaged in.
- Ask students to describe how the hands and eyes of the women in Neshat's photographs and film stills communicate emotion.

## **MATERIALS FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT: Shirin Neshat**

### ***The Power of My Gaze***

- Thin point permanent markers in red and black ink
- 8x11" sheets of write-on transparencies (overhead projector type)
- Camera
- Tripod
- Black eye-liner pencils
- Facial wipes
- Hand mirrors
- Pencils
- Paper
- Copies of spiral and arabesque designs
- Hinged mat board frames (preferably black)
- Tape or other adhesive

### **PROCEDURE FOR HANDS-ON PROJECT:**

The hands-on component of the Shirin Neshat project is based on her *Women of Allah* series. Students will photograph each other's eyes and use text from their "Power of My Gaze" writing exercise to apply to the image.

- Instructor will create copies (8x11") of templates of spirals and arabesque designs
- Students will apply black eyeliner (optional)
- Students will form groups of 2
- Instructor will demonstrate how to use the camera and tripod to capture close-up images of student's eyes
- Students will take turns photographing each other
- Students will lay a piece of write-on transparency over the template shape of their choice
- Using a thin-point permanent marker, students will write their "Power of My Gaze" poem along the design visible on the transparency
- Students will remove the template from under the transparency to see their text
- When the black-and-white 8x10" photographs are returned to students they will lay the transparency with the poem over the image, insert both into the mat board frame, and seal the frame with an adhesive (glue or tape)

### **APPLICABLE NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS (GRADES 5 -12):**

- NA—VA.5-8.1 (9-12.1): Understanding and Applying Media, Techniques, and Processes
- NA—VA.5-8.3 (9-12.3): Choosing and Evaluating A Range of Subject Matter, Symbols, and Ideas
- NA—VA.5-8.4 (9-12.4): Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures



WOMEN ON THE RISE!

## STUDENT HAND OUT: Shirin Neshat

### Shirin Neshat (b. 1957—Qazvin, Iran)

Shirin Neshat was born in Iran but her family eventually moved out of the country in the 1970s because of the instability of the Islamic Revolution. When Neshat returned to Iran many years later she found that things had drastically changed. Although many women used them before the revolution, *all* the women that she saw in the streets were covered from head to toe in black **chadors**. This change was due to the new leadership of the revolution, which enforced religious tradition. Her art took the direction of raising questions about the role of women in Islamic culture after this trip. Neshat often describes the tension between her life in New York and her Iranian culture. For example, when she visits Iran, she wears the traditional chador that she does not wear in New York.

The artist explores the lack of freedom that Islamic women experience. In her film *Turbulent* (1998) she focuses on how they are forbidden to perform or record music. Although women in Iran live in a society that restricts their ability to communicate, Neshat emphasizes their ability to do so through their eyes, the only part of their bodies not covered by the chador. In her photographic work she also uses text from poetry by Islamic women to add an expressive quality to the work that allows the women she represents to “speak”. Neshat also challenges the **stereotype** of Islamic women portrayed as **submissive** victims. She feels that although they live in a society that places limits on their actions, these women find ways to exercise power.

#### Vocabulary

**Chador**—**Chadors are traditional garments worn by Muslim women in Iran that cover the head and body.**

**Stereotype**—**A category applied to a group of people that is generally negative.**

**Submissive**—Willing to obey the orders of others.

## CREATIVE WRITING EXERCISE: Shirin Neshat

### The Power of My Gaze

We will create a poem to use as text in our artworks to reflect the manner in which Neshat uses words in her photographs. This exercise is inspired by Neshat's focus on the eyes of the women in her work.

What do you think your eyes communicate to the world? What do they say about you? If your eyes had a "voice" what would they say?

Respond to these questions in a few paragraphs. It does not have to rhyme. You can begin your poem with a phrase like:

*If my eyes could speak....*

*The power of my gaze is...*

*Look into my eyes...*

Student Example:

The power of my gaze is something not always sane  
It is something my eyes can only have in a dream  
In my world they are trapped, trapped

### Just like me

Waiting for someone to come unlock them with a key  
Unlock them from the emptiness  
To let out the innocence  
Hoping that with this God can bliss  
Wishing my eyes didn't show "worthlessness"  
But through them is a gate way  
That doesn't listen to what people say  
A message that always seems gray

--P. (Gladstone Center for Girls)

---

---

---

---

---

