

SHIRIN NESHAT

Tooba

Shirin Neshat
Tooba, 2002

Two-channel video/
sound installation:
Color, 35 mm Film
transferred to DVD
Duration: 12 minutes,
43 seconds
Courtesy Gladstone
Gallery, New York
and Brussels

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in Qazvin, Iran, Shirin Neshat (1957) left Iran to study art in 1979 in Los Angeles when she was seventeen years old. Exiled during the Islamic Revolution, she was not allowed to return to Iran until 1990. Neshat attended the University of California Berkeley where she received her BA, MA, and, finally, her MFA in 1983.

Neshat's work has been shown at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, MN; Wexner Center for the Arts, Columbus, OH; the Serpentine Gallery, London, UK; *Prospect.1*, New Orleans, LA; *documenta XI*, Kassel, Germany, and the *48th Venice Biennale*. A major retrospective of her work will open at the Detroit Institute of Art in 2013.

In 2009, Neshat received the Silver Lion Award for Best Director at the 66th Venice Film Festival for her feature film, *Women Without Men*. She was named "Artist of the Decade" in 2010 by critic G. Roger Denson of the *Huffington Post* for "reflecting the ideological war being waged between Islam and the secular world over matters of gender, religion, and democracy."

Shirin Neshat lives and works in New York City, and is represented by Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels.

Organized as an associated event of the **2012 Wooster Forum: The Middle East**, The College of Wooster Art Museum (CWAM) is pleased to present Shirin Neshat's *Tooba, 2002*, (duration 12:43) an epic, two-screen video installation by this internationally-renowned Iranian artist.

Since 1996, Neshat has worked in photography, video and film; all covering difficult topics such as gender relations, Eastern and Western boundaries, the sacred and profane, and exile and belonging. Although she uses the specifics of her personal background as context, her work transcends geo-cultural borders.

As with much of Neshat's work, *Tooba* was inspired by literature; in this case, *Women without Men: A Novel of Modern Iran, 1989*, by Shahrnush Parsipur, whose writing draws on elements of Islamic mysticism and recent Iranian history. Parsipur's story follows the interwoven destinies of five women who escape the narrow confines of family and society and arrive by different paths to live together in an abundant garden on the outskirts of Tehran.

The title for and genesis of *Tooba* derive from the name of a mythical female character from the Qur'an that suggests a type of sacred or promised tree. *Tooba, 2002*, was filmed with spare elegance in Oaxaca, Mexico, in what appears to be a traditional Sufi garden with a tree in the center of the walled enclosure. Although conflict and opposites are central to Neshat's work, in *Tooba* hell and heaven literally stand side-by-side in both the corporeal and psychological realms. Propelled by the promise of heaven, violence, and aggression are unleashed in both authoritarian and shamanistic ritual forms setting in motion the iconic "collective" who run toward the garden, a place of both exile and refuge.

In an interview with Scott MacDonald in 2004, Neshat said about *Tooba*; "After September 11, I started thinking about a piece that focuses on the idea of a garden—a heaven. In the Islamic and Persian tradition, the garden is a very important symbol both in mystical and political terms. As in many other cultures, in our mystical and poetic tradition a garden becomes a space for spiritual transcendence, a paradise. And within our political language the garden is a place for freedom and independence. I found all those subjects very relevant at the time."¹

Tooba is presented courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels. The 2010 Neshat interview by Catherine Camille Cushman in the CWAM lobby is presented courtesy of FLY16x9.com. *Tooba* was the first of Neshat's works to be exhibited in Iran and is in the collection of the Seattle Art Museum where it is currently on view.

Notes

1. Scott MacDonald, "Between Two Worlds: An Interview with Shirin Neshat," *Feminist Studies* 30, no 3 (Fall 2004) 645.