



Shirin Neshat, *Land of Dreams*, 2019. Video Still. Copyright Shirin Neshat. Courtesy the artist, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Courtesy Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, Cape Town and London

# Educator Resource

Recommended Age: Grade 9 and up

Shirin Neshat,  
*Land of Dreams*

March 10, 2022—July 31, 2022

Museum  
Of  
**Contemporary  
Art**

Toronto Canada



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## Overview

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian-born, New York-based artist. As a young adult Neshat moved to the U.S.A for school and upon her return to Iran following the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s she was deeply impacted by the cultural and religious changes it ushered in. This exhibition brings together four major works by Neshat that are connected by her characteristic use of black and white photography and video and the presence of strong female protagonists.

*Roja* (2016), the first work in the exhibition, was inspired by Neshat's own dreams and explores her sense of uprootedness as an Iranian immigrant having lived most her life in the U.S but not feeling entirely at home in either country. *Land of Dreams* (2019) follows this exploration into dreams and is her most recent work combining photography and film in an immersive experience. For the 111 photos in the installation, Neshat travelled through New Mexico knocking on citizens' doors to take their portraits and document their last dream. They capture a diverse range of American experiences and a number of the portraits are inscribed with handwritten Farsi calligraphy, which annotates the subjects' dreams or their name, place and date of birth. The film paired with the photographs takes Neshat's process as a point of departure and is a surreal and satirical narrative that explores dreams and the perpetual antagonism between the U.S and Iran.

## Ontario Curriculum Connections

### **American History, Grade 11**

E. The United States Since 1945

### **World History since the Fifteenth Century, Grade 12**

A2. Developing Transferable Skill

E. The World since 1900

### **English, Grade 9 – 12**

Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, Media Literacy

### **Media Studies, Grade 11**

A. Understanding and Interpreting Media Texts

B. Media and Society

D. Producing and Reflecting on Media Texts

### **Media Arts, Grade 10-12**

A. Creating and Presenting

B. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

C. Foundations

### **Visual Arts, Grade 9 – 12**

A. Creating and Presenting

B. Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing

C. Foundations



Shirin Neshat, *Land of Dreams*, 2019, installation MOCA Toronto. Photographer: Toni Hafkenscheid.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS

**What is your initial impression of Neshat's photo portraits in her installation *Land of Dreams*? Are there certain portraits that draw you in more than others?**

Neshat described her project *Land of Dreams* as presenting a portrait of contemporary America. **Why might that be so and what does this portrait look like? Who are the dreamers?**

**If you had to describe the exhibition with a single colour what would it be? What do you think this might tell you about the mood of the work?**

The dreams play a central role in many of the works in *Land of Dreams* and Neshat has included illustrations as a backdrop in certain portraits that come from a rare book from Iran that is an old text used to interpret dreams. **Looking at the illustrations what dreams are being portrayed?**

## Key Ideas

Identity, Place, Dreams, Memory, Surrealism, Satire, Dualities, Belonging

## Glossary

**Binaries/Dualities:** a system that juxtaposes the relationship between two opposing ideas, cultures, and images

**Satire:** a genre of the arts that uses humour, irony, and exaggeration to criticize political, social, and cultural issues

**Surrealism:** an artistic movement that explores subconscious, focusing on the irrational, the dreamscape, and the poetic



Shirin Neshat, *Roja*, 2016. Video Still. Copyright Shirin Neshat. Courtesy Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels

## Discussion | Grade 9 – 12

Shirin Neshat has often talked about the importance of playing with binaries and dualities in her work as a way to contrast contradictions in the world: east and west, the personal and the universal, the beautiful and the painful, reality and dream. One prevalent visual duality across much of her work is its visual contrast through her use of black and white photography and video.

**How does the use of black and white in the portraits affect how you see them as opposed to if they were all in color?**

**How would you describe the overall mood or feeling of the portraits?**

**What might the contrast of black and white tell you about their dreams?**

**Can you think of other dualities in the exhibition? How does Neshat present them?**

## Activity | Grade 9 – 12

Discussing *Land of Dreams* Neshat states that [dreams are very powerful, they cross cultural boundaries. Our anxieties as human beings are very common. We are completely naked and truthful in our dreams]. Through this writing exercise students will reflect on their own dreams in relation to their own community contexts using Neshat's prompt as a point of departure.

Materials: pencils and paper

**Can you think of your last dream?** Take some time to write out what you can remember or if you can't remember try to reflect on a dream that has stuck with you. How do you feel your dreams might connect to the close relationships and/or communities you are a part of?

Extension: Using your reflections as a starting point: **can you think of some common threads amongst these dreamers? What might the land of dreams show us about the dreamscape of the United States and what can we infer from this about the Canadian context as well?**