

SHIRIN NESHAT

DREAMERS

ARTWORK LABELS

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Shirin Neshat is an Iranian-born artist and filmmaker living in New York. Since the early 1990s, her work has examined the complex relationships between femininity and Islam, poetic and evocative representations of the Muslim faith, and the ways that social, political, religious and cultural codes shape us as individuals.

Dreamers is a trilogy of video installations exploring the world of dreams from the perspective of three female subjects. In making these works, Neshat returned to the filmic and open-ended aspects of her early career. In many ways, the characters and their surreal narratives are projections of the artist herself, through which she reflects on some of her personal nightmares and dreamscapes. In *Illusions & mirrors*, 2013, *Roja*, 2016, and *Sarah*, 2016, Neshat re-creates the unstable and mesmerising atmosphere of the dream space, inviting audiences to travel with her as she explores the inner lives of the women depicted.

‘Dreams are incredibly powerful. I think only in dreams are we free and naked. In dreams we search in the deepest regions of our soul, where we see who we are, what we are afraid of, and everything we want to use to avoid reality.’

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Shirin Neshat

Iran born 1957, lives and works in New York

Sarah

2016

black-and-white digital video, sound,
12 minutes 55 seconds

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

In *Sarah*, a forest environment becomes a site of haunting: mysterious and unknowable. The protagonist, Sarah, plays the role of observer as she explores a space inhabited by processions of religious and military figures whose purpose is unclear: are they mourning lives lost or seeking to enact death? The non-linear narrative and changes in camera perspective create the disorienting feeling of a dream, making it impossible to distinguish between reality and Sarah's imagination or memories.

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Illusions & mirrors

2013

black-and-white digital video, sound,
13 minutes 22 seconds

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

Illusions & mirrors features actor Natalie Portman as a protagonist led by a blurry figure away from the dream archetype of the seashore – with its crashing waves and sand dunes – to a stately home in ruin. In tribute to the silent black-and-white films of Surrealist filmmakers like Man Ray and Maya Deren, Neshat forgoes dialogue and creates a dream-like atmosphere by placing a layer of glass in front of the camera lens. This atmosphere quickly descends into a nightmare as the protagonist enters the house.

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Roja

2016

black-and-white digital video, sound,
15 minutes 20 seconds

Courtesy the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York

Roja is drawn from Neshat's own recurring dreams, memories and desires. The work traces a young woman's disquieting attempts to connect with American culture while reconciling her identification with her home country of Iran. The opening scene depicts an Iranian-American woman, like Neshat, watching a shirtless man perform the song 'The Carnival Is Over' by The Seekers on a theatre stage. The song's lyrics were adapted from a Russian folk song about a seventeenth-century Cossack rebellion leader who ends his love affair with a Persian princess by throwing her into the sea in an apparent sacrifice to his motherland.