

Shirin NESHAT

(born 1957)
artist

Two black-and-white videos play on opposite walls. Each screen features a singer—one male, the other female.

As the first video begins, a male singer, Shoja Azari, faces the viewer. Behind him sits an auditorium full of men, all dressed just like him in white business shirts and black pants. String instruments play as Azari lip-synchs a soulful rendition of a poem by the renowned Persian poet Rumi. Azari is in command, his gestures sweeping and confident, and the audience responds to his performance with enthusiastic applause. But soon Azari's gaze shifts elsewhere. He hears a murmur in the distance.

On the opposite screen, the figure of a black-veiled female singer, Sussan Deyhim, stands before an empty auditorium. (In post-revolutionary Iran, women are not allowed to sing in public.) Her face is slowly revealed as she careens through a range of otherworldly vocalizations, breathy and guttural. Her voice reverberates in the emptiness, forming a cacophony of primal sounds—all emerging, remarkably, from this lone singer. Deyhim's facial expressions and gestures make it clear that she is a woman seized by acute pain and urgency. Azari watches her in awe—and rightfully so. Her powerful, wordless performance transfixes the viewer. This gripping dual channel video installation—called *Turbulent*—is the creation of Shirin Neshat, the acclaimed Iranian contemporary artist; the presentation earned her first prize at the Venice Biennale in 1999 and catapulted her onto the international art scene.

For the past two decades, Neshat has fashioned a rich, interconnected body of video, photography, and film that addresses some of the most pertinent

