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Photo: Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop
Shirin Neshat's photographs at Art Plural Gallery

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"Games of Desire," a video and photographic installation by Iran-born, New York-based artist Shirin Neshat, explores the disappearance of a Laotian tradition: lam singing.

Sung at weddings or other celebrations, the lovebird lam songs are performed by men and women from opposite sides of a wall, with lyrics and gestures that are both romantic and full of sexual banter.

Here, Neshat has photographed individuals dressed in traditional costumes and standing in front of a decorated temple wall, but pairing the photos together in the installation, partnering one man with one woman, the elderly couples echo the lovebird aspect of the courtship songs.

And while rather different from her usual body of works, that has focused on the role of women in Islamic society, she once again uses overlaid Farsi calligraphy on the photographs, as she did in her famous "Women of Allah" series. Here she translated the Laotian songs into Farsi and then wrote the words on the temple wall in the photograph.

The poetic work takes on its full significance when viewed with the video installation with two screens facing each other with the men and women singing to each other and the viewer in essence taking the place of the wall. Unfortunately, the video has been located on a different floor to the photographs at Art Plural Gallery which slightly robs the viewer of the full experience but it is moving nonetheless.

Shirin Neshat: Games of Desire runs from through 15th December, 2012 at Art Plural Gallery, Singapore