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### Games of Desire to be exhibited at Art Plural Gallery



©Shirin Neshat. Courtesy Galerie Jérôme de Noirmont, Paris.

This is Shirin Neshat's inaugural solo exhibition, which will run 26 October to 15 December.

In a release, Art Plural Gallery announced the inaugural solo exhibition of New York-based artist of Iranian descent, Shirin Neshat in Southeast Asia. The exhibition titled Shirin Neshat: Games of Desire runs from 26th October to 15th December, 2012 and features photography and video works from her Games of Desire series.

"Poetically speaking, I thought it could be beautiful to connect the plight of the women with the plight of the country. They are looking for the same thing: democracy, change, freedom. So it is an allegorical story," Shirin Neshat said.

Shirin Neshat visited Luang Prabang in Laos in 2005 and 2008 to participate in a project entitled The Quiet in the Land, an invitation to conceive a project that somehow examined an aspect of the Laotian culture.

This has led to the conception of the Games of Desire series. Having had mostly engaged in Islamic topics, she found it difficult at first to approach a concept that felt familiar and authentic to her own artistic language. One issue however that became immediately interesting to her was the similarity between Laos and Iran, in their recent cultural and political history.

If the Islamic revolution overthrew the monarchy in Iran in 1979, and strictly Islamised the country to the degree of eliminating much of Persian rituals and ancient culture, force of communism also arrived to Laos in 1975, and by eliminating the monarchy attempted to eradicate most of its traditional culture.

Featuring screen projections of an interaction between elderly Laotian women and men: the women on one side of the wall; the men on the opposite wall, the group is portrayed to be reciting songs of courtship and gesticulating through animated upper-body movements, taking turns to enthrall the opposite sex.

These songs were sung traditionally during weddings or other celebratory occasions in the manner of playful verbal sparring between women and men. The lyrics involve notions of the simple life, injected with unexpected sexual undertones that at times, even border on risqué. There, both women and men are free to engage in singsong banter beyond strict predefined gender roles and social expectations.

The irony is that the elderly women and men who have been portrayed are brimmed with vitality and passion, defying the stereotypical norm and belief that these characteristics are intrinsic only to the young. Neshat's works indicate an apparent social transformation in Laos, wherein a commonplace from the elderlies' youth is becoming less of a routine for young Laotians today. These days, the lively ritual still exists, but only as staged performance. The artist's expression and her use of space puts the audience right in the heart of the couple's interaction, compelling one to examine his own perceptions of Love, Sexuality and Age.

"Shirin Neshat's works convey a strong message in a poetic way. We are pleased to show *Games of Desire* and to share her eloquence in expression with Singapore," comments Frédéric de Senarclens, Director of Art Plural Gallery.

