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Laila Kazmi, "Shirin Neshat, the Nomadic Artist: The artist and filmmaker discusses her film *Looking for Oum Kulthum*," *KCTS9*, June 12, 2018



SIFF

Shirin Neshat, the Nomadic Artist

The artist and filmmaker discusses her film *Looking for Oum Kulthum*.

BY LAILA KAZMI

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<https://kcts9.org/programs/siff/shirin-neshat-nomadic-artist>

Shirin Neshat is one of the most prominent contemporary Muslim women artists. Her poignant explorations and questioning of women's roles in Iran and the rise of fundamentalism after the 1979 Iranian Revolution got her banned from the country of her birth. Since 1996, she has lived in exile outside of Iran.

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Neshat started out as a still photographer and began working in video early on. She made numerous short experimental films and video installations — in addition to her striking photography series. *Looking for Oum Kulthum*, based on the life of the legendary Egyptian singer, is Neshat's second feature film.



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"I take a great pride [in] that the single most important artist of the 20th century in the Middle East happened to be a woman — a woman who was not traditional," she says.

Instead of following a prescribed role limited to the confines of a domestic life, Oum Kulthum dedicated her life to her profession.

Seeping in layers of introspection, *Looking for Oum Kulthum* explores the singer's life through the story of a Iranian

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filmmaker Mitra (played by Neda Rahmanian), who, like Neshat, is living in exile outside of Iran and equally devoted to making a film about Kulthum (played by Yasmin Raeis). In her attempt to tell a story that goes beyond the legend and the myth of the iconic Kulthum, Mitra comes face to face with her own struggles with eschewing societal norms.

In Seattle for the screening of her film at the 44th Seattle International Film Festival, Neshat shares how the project progressed into a 'film within a film' and how she reconciles her life as an artist with being exiled from native Iran.

View Shirin Neshat's photography at [Gladstone Gallery >>](#)