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# BLOUIN ART AUCTION

THE INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE FOR ART COLLECTORS

FEBRUARY 2015

**1990s REDUX**

**SHAKE-UP AT CHRISTIE'S AND SOTHEBY'S**

SURREALISM AT LONDON SALES

**METAL MAESTRO MELVIN EDWARDS**

**DAVID LEPPAN AT HOME WITH OLD MASTERS**

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'90s  
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# LIVE THROUGH THIS

As art of the  
**1990s**  
recedes in  
the rear view,  
the sustained  
impact of the  
decade's artists  
comes into  
sharper focus

Essay by  
Ann Wiens

IT WAS A POWERFUL RUN. But as the wave of the go-go 1980s crashed on the shore of a new decade, we knew something was up. Something was shifting. It had to do with the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the standoff in Tiananmen Square and Nelson Mandela walking out of prison. It had to do with failing savings and loans and dissatisfaction with social inequity and a new thing called the World Wide Web. It was confusing and unprecedented and coming from unexpected places. And it felt transformative.

I emerged from grad school in 1990 as the Gulf War erupted and the American economy was in a recession. My cohorts and I were artists, writers, and curators who had cut our teeth on postmodernism but could clearly see that the art world we'd expected to enter with our shiny new MFAs and Ph.D.s—with its grand gestures, big personalities, swank spaces, and voracious collectors—was on the wane.

The party was over, the money was gone. The center—of power, of influence, of stylistic and ideological dominance—was flickering. But as that center dimmed, the edges brightened. Everything was in flux. We still made and discussed and wrote about painting and sculpture and

photography. But increasingly, artists who had kept—or been kept—to the periphery began to claim the center. People whose work addressed aspects of being female, gay, black, Latino, or otherwise “other” were, more and more, initiating the conversations. People opened galleries in uncomfortable or temporary spaces, and they weren't all in New York. As the decade commenced, no one thought too much about making money because there was, for the moment, little to be made.

Following on a handful of recent reexaminations, an exhibition opening at the Montclair Art Museum in New Jersey February 8 and running through May 17 offers a reflection on the art and artists that defined this shift. “Come As You Are: Art of the 1990s” is billed as “the first major museum survey to examine the art of this pivotal decade in its historical context,” and it includes works by 45 artists whose practice involved installation, photography, painting, printmaking, sculpture, video, and a range of new media that accompanied the rise of the Internet. Organized by the museum's founding curator of contemporary art, Alexandra Schwartz, the show views the work

*(continued on page 59)*



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## Shirin Neshat | b. 1957, Iran

Few art viewers failed to be mesmerized by Neshat's "Women of Allah" series, 1993–97, with its lush photographs of veiled Iranian women—some wielding firearms, others in prayer—on whose skin the artist had inscribed verses of feminist poetry. The images seemed in stark contrast to the Western modern vernacular at the time, but dovetailed perfectly with the conceptual rigor of its contemporary forms. Although the series sprang from the artist's personal history and investigated her experience as a female in an oppressive culture (which she left in 1974, before the revolution, to attend UCLA, later electing to live in self-imposed exile), the political nature of the images and their prescience regarding the powder keg that the region has

become cannot be ignored. "She has addressed and reinterpreted moments of Iranian history throughout her career, so you can really examine the history of the country through the prism of her art, from the military coup of 1953, which gave rise to the rule of the Shah, to the present," says Melissa Ho, assistant curator of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., which will host "Shirin Neshat: Facing History" from May 18 to September 20. "She's an incredibly ambitious artist who moves from still photography to cinema," says Ho of the artist's series and projects, which have addressed cultural power and patriarchy within a theocratic regime. Although Neshat first came to prominence in the West, her auction highs have been earned at Sotheby's Doha and Christie's Dubai—the most recent for *Passage*, 2001, an editioned film that earned \$269,000 at Sotheby's Doha last October, suggesting expanding demand.



From top: A still from the film *Passage*, 2001, an edition of which sold at Sotheby's Doha for \$269,000, is among works by Neshat that have found a market in the Middle East; a 1993 photo and ink work from her "Offered Eyes" series; the artist, at right.

FROM TOP: TWO IMAGES, SHIRIN NESHAT AND GLADSTONE GALLERY, NEW YORK AND BRUSSELS; LINA BERTUCCI

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