



Shirin Neshat: *Guardians of the Revolution* from the *Women of Allah* series 1994, Ink on gelatin silver print, 127 × 102 cm (detail)

Beginning and End of “Diversity”

What are we thinking today, what should we be thinking? In the museums, the “Diversity” initiative is more than fifteen years old. As early as 2006, Lars Nittve asked his government and private sponsors for \$7.5 million to compensate for the acquisition of work by female artists. Since then, the *Moderna Museet* in Stockholm has been a pioneer in terms of “matching.” Under Nittve’s direction, the Museum *M+* in Hong Kong continued an acquisition policy aimed at equalization and openness long before it was finally built. Suhanya Raffel, the director who has been in office at *M+* for five years, is now having greater problems coming to terms with the government in China. **A notably large number of people engaged in Western culture today are calling for “diversity.” They are intent on an increase of tolerance. They expose privileges indicative of inequality. They register grievances and expose abuses. In addition, they organize *Cancel Culture*.** “Oh friends, there is no friend,” is an adage attributed to Aristotle that sounds perfidious at first, revealing as it does the selectivity of all our decisions. “Enemies, there is no enemy!” Friedrich Nietzsche cheekily added in his 1886 essay “Human, All Too Human.” Fundamentally, what he wanted to say was that “there are no eternal facts: just as there are no absolute truths.” Which takes us to the core of the theme of “diversity,” namely the distinction between “friend” and “enemy.” In the art business, it is preferable to make friends than to attract enemies. When I turn to friends for guidance, which I need in order to come to terms with my fate and gain insight into my identity, I develop certainty. **I absolutely need to know what is good and what is bad, though the source of certainty and its subtle structure may be difficult to ascertain. “At the origin there is a rumor,” Jacques Derrida once wrote in his essay “The Politics of Friendship.” That was provocative.** His essay was devoted to Michel de Montaigne, a philosopher born in 1533 who emphatically advocated a *convenance des volontés*, a forging of deep, unbreakable friendships founded in love and fidelity. Whomever I identify as my “friend,” possibly my best friend, I regard as so akin to my own soul that I would share with him or her a place, a territory, that we both choose as our spiritual home. I am very close to the friend, both spiritually and locally. As for the enemy: he or she is a person who should under no circumstances dwell with me beneath the same roof or sit at my table.

In a nutshell, the enemy is the epitome of a world that is alien to me. The friend is the epitome of my own world. And now? What shall we do about “diversity”? Hardly anyone is opposed to heightening awareness of our ways of treating each other. Minorities — this, too, we take for granted — should not be disadvantaged. Hostilities are as a rule bad. Inclusion is better than exclusion. But who is physically able to have no “enemies” at all and only “friends” instead? Contemporary *Woke Culture*, which came into the art market quite a while ago, is still far removed from discussions of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s “Master and Servant” or Jacques Derrida’s “Friend” and “Enemy.” Hegel was concerned with a fundamental, complex, intricate dependence of the master on the servant, a dependence not only socially determined. For Derrida, the issue is a “principle of unrest” that is logically implied by the idea of friendship, because it is unthinkable that “one heart and one soul” can actually live in two bodies. It is illusory, grammatically and logically absurd, to believe that I can assume another person’s identity simply because I am “friends” with him or her. Such an idea of friendship, says Derrida — and this is a harsh critique of benevolence — is “uncanny”, also “placeless”, “alienating.” “We are”, wrote Nietzsche, “from the outset illogical and thus unjust beings and can recognize this: this is one of the greatest and most insoluble disharmonies of existence.” Now, we are sending out a newsletter about art, not philosophy. **The utopian idea of friendship in the sense of an ultimate brother- and sisterhood, like the ideal of “diversity” as a dogma, leads to an impossibility, an aporia, indeed to death, because logically, despite possibly heartfelt commitments, it results in an ultimate impasse.** Everything either ends up in one house, as in radical friendship, or appears paratactically side by side, like small pillars, since nobody should be privileged as long as social differences have not leveled out. The ideal of indivisible societies continues to provoke frowns and laughs in Western art today. Martin Kippenberger’s painting “I can’t find a swastika with the best will” exposed the fatal error of good intentions through irony. Anne Imhof’s statement, “for an instant, capitalism seemed fragile. But it’s like a cockroach, you try to kill one, it just spreads its eggs”, evinces a clear-sighted pessimism that is currently reaching Amsterdam and London through her new exhibitions. **Shirin Neshat’s quote from the Iranian poet Forough Farrokhzad (1935–1967), “Dreams always fall from the height of their innocence, and die”, makes it clear that though we can wake up with the best dreams, they rarely become real.** Art is perhaps too often concerned with taking a partisan position. Partisanship, however, even in politics, is not art. Our view, after fifteen years, is that art more than ever involves recognition of the immense “diversity” within ourselves.

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