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Women Without Men Directed by Shiran Neshat and Shoja Azari






By Robert Bell

Loosely adapted from polemicist Shahrnush Parsipur's novel of the same name, *Women Without Men* — an optimistic misnomer — charts the course of four women dealing with different modes of oppression in 1953 Iran: a time when the CIA overthrew a Democratic Iranian government, putting the Shah in power, helping mainly the American petroleum industry. This duplicity concerns fledgling political activist Munis (Shabnam Toloui), whose suicide and voiceover about freedom from pain and constraints opens the film in a breathtaking shot of landscape, air and a slow descent to the ground after she jumps off a building. Nearly 30 and still a virgin, her brother threatens and scolds her for not marrying, while her devout friend, Faezeh (Pegah Ferydoni), dreams only of marriage, until a shocking act of violence alerts her to some unsavoury realities. Representing an older generation of married and defeated Iranian women, Farrokhlagha (Arita Shahrzad) rebels against her patronizing, militaristic husband when a cultured man from her past reignites an old flirtation. As the title implies, these women are considered nothing without men, much like the dangerously thin Zarin (Orsolya Toth), who flees the brothel that employs her, scrubbing her skin bloody in an attempt to clean off the filth of being little more than a tool for male pleasure. While their struggles and the prosaic, pedagogical dialogue in tow are overly banal, Neshat's imagery and the intensity of the actresses compensate, making the majority of the sequences pop through sheer emotional resonance. Even the triteness of the repeated garden motif — a place of life and birth for earthly feminine connections — is ameliorated by the depth of visual scope and colour. Unfortunately, a flawless and astounding aesthetic isn't quite enough to make this any more than an inspiring work of potential. Should Neshat find herself with a fully realized script, however, who knows what kind of film she could make. No special features are included with this DVD, which is unfortunate, as it would be great to learn more about Neshat's approach to shot composition. (Mongrel Media)

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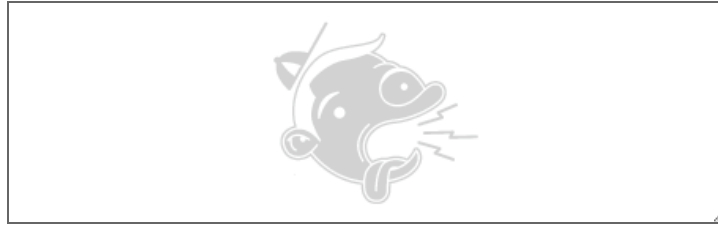
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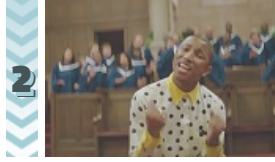


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