

The New York Times

Soon You Can Hail an Artist as You Hail a Cab

By CAROL VOGEL

Those moving advertisements atop taxis generally deliver not-so-subtle messages, like which airlines to fly or movies to see, who makes the sexiest blue jeans or the coolest sunglasses.

High art they most certainly are not.

But for the month of January, Show Media, a Las Vegas company that owns about half the cones

adorning New York City's taxis, has decided to give commerce a rest. Instead, roughly 500 cabs will display a different kind of message: artworks by Shirin Neshat, Alex Katz and Yoko Ono.

The project is costing Show Media about \$100,000 in lost revenue, but John Amato, one of Show's owners and a contemporary-art fan, said: "I thought it was time to take a step back. January's a slow month. I could have

cut my rates but instead I decided to hit the mute button and give something back to the city."

He contacted the Art Production Fund, a nonprofit New York organization that presents art around the city, and asked its co-founders, Yvonne Force Villareal and Doreen Remen, to select artists. They in turn sought out Ms. Neshat, Mr. Katz and Ms. Ono, three New Yorkers known for work that can read both concep-

tually and physically in a confined space. (The ads measure just 14 by 48 inches.)

The project is called "Art Adds," not just as a play on its advertising origins but also, Ms. Villareal said, because "art adds to the public's vision."

Each artist's work will appear on approximately 160 cabs, and each responded to the challenge

Continued on Page 6



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION COURTESY OF SHOW MEDIA AND ART PRODUCTION FUND

An artwork by Shirin Neshat in a rendering of the type of art-topped taxis that will hit the streets of New York in January.



PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS COURTESY OF SHOW MEDIA AND ART PRODUCTION FUND

Renderings show how hundreds of New York taxis will become mobile public art next month when their rooftop ad boards display works by, from left, Shirin Neshat, Alex Katz and Yoko Ono.

In January in New York, You'll Be Hailing an Artist When You Hail a Cab

From First Arts Page

in very different ways.

Mr. Katz has taken two of his recent portraits, both of models who frequently pose for him, and put them together. One is a frontal portrait, the other the back of a woman's head. They are set

against a black background. "You can't go wrong with black and yellow," the artist said of the posterlike quality of the design.

Ms. Neshat, an Iranian-born artist known for her social, political and psychological commentary on women in contemporary Islamic societies, said that when

she was approached about the project, her first thought was of the Pakistani- and Senegalese-born taxi drivers.

"I felt I could make work that was truly non-Western, because it's an extension of what New York is about," Ms. Neshat said.

She used the two sides of the

so-called cones in different ways. On one there is an illustration of a handshake, the artist's symbol of unity and solidarity. The other shows an eye decorated with a poem titled "I Feel Sorry for the Garden," by Forough Farukhzad, a celebrated female Iranian poet. The poem itself is in Persian and

written out in calligraphy in the white of the eye. "It suggests that someone is speaking to you in a language that no one can understand," Ms. Neshat explained. "And although the poem is from the 1960s, it still resonates today."

Ms. Ono has also drawn on a vintage idea. She used the theme

"The War Is Over," a slogan she and John Lennon used when they took their message of peace around the world in 1969-70, in this case displaying it in English and in sign language.

"It's almost like a dance," she said, "the way the message is always in motion."

