

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA TO PRESENT THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE SURVEY OF PRE-REVOLUTIONARY IRANIAN CINEMA IN NORTH AMERICA

***Iranian Cinema before the Revolution, 1925–1979* Will Feature Nearly 70 Films, Including Rarely Seen Classics and Recently Rediscovered Works**

NEW YORK, NY, October 6, 2023—The Museum of Modern Art presents ***Iranian Cinema before the Revolution, 1925–1979***, the most comprehensive survey of Iranian pre-revolutionary cinema ever assembled in North America, with screenings in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theaters from October 13 through November 27, 2023. This six-week film series features rarely seen classics and rediscoveries of films made between 1925 and 1979, an immensely creative and tumultuous period in Iranian art, politics, and society. Many of the films included in MoMA's series have never been seen in New York; others are presented in new preservatons that restore missing or censored scenes. *Iranian Cinema before the Revolution, 1925–1979* is organized by guest curator Ehsan Khoshbakht, Codirector, Il Cinema Ritrovato, with Joshua Siegel, Curator, and La Frances Hui, Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

MoMA's series spans the 50-odd years between the rise and fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty, from 1925, when Reza Khan assumed the position of Shah, until 1979, when his son Mohammad Reza Shah was deposed in the Islamic Revolution. With a strong emphasis on the New Wave of the 1960s and '70s, this selection of close to 70 features and shorts offers a radical reappraisal of Iranian cinema, shedding light on the work of filmmakers like Ebrahim Golestan, Feroz Farrokhzad, Dariush Mehrjui, Sohrab Shahid Saless, and Masoud Kimiai. Their work, and that of many others, is distinguished by provocative blurrings of fact and fiction, observational documentary, fanciful storytelling, neorealist use of nonprofessional actors and performers, and inventive wielding of allegory, elliptical narratives, musical counterpoint, and other poetic strategies.

The retrospective presents the world premieres of new restorations of masterpieces including *Waiting* (Amir Naderi, 1974), and the US premieres of new restorations of such groundbreaking films as *The Ballad of Tara* (Bahram Beyzaie, 1979), *Wave, Coral and Rock* (Ebrahim Golestan, 1962), and *Harmonica* (Amir Naderi, 1973), among others. Naderi will introduce the premieres of *Waiting* and *Harmonica* during opening weekend. Among the other guest filmmakers and scholars appearing during the course of the series is the influential writer, director, and producer Bahman Farmanara, represented with *Prince Ehtejab* (1974) and *Tall Shadows of the Wind* (1979) and with his work with Abbas Kiarostami (*The Report*, 1977) and Bahram Beyzaie (*The Raven*, 1977).

Some filmmakers made original, even experimental work with the financial support of government agencies like the Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young

Adults (Kanoon), the Ministry of Culture, and National Iranian Television, while others worked outside such official institutions, often intending a sharp critique of society. Many of these films have never before been seen in New York, while others are presented in new preservations that restore missing or censored scenes. While much of the censorship took place after the revolution in 1979—some of these films haven't been screened in their original versions in years or even decades—a number of essential works were altered, banned, or confiscated before 1979, including two masterpieces from 1974, Dariush Mehrjui's *The Cycle* and Masoud Kimiai's *The Deer*. The latter is being presented for the first time in New York with its original and alternate endings.

The earliest films in the series, made during the silent and early sound periods, were shot by non-Iranians in the region, including the newly tinted restoration of Ernest Schoedsack and Merian C. Cooper's *Grass* (1925), drawn from material in MoMA's own collection. The postwar films in the program include rarely screened classics of Iranian popular cinema—the genre films known as *filmfarsi*—including thrillers, musicals, and melodramas by Samuel Khachikian, Hossein Daneshvar, and Shapour Gharib.

A rich selection of films by Golestan is presented, including his landmark *Brick and Mirror* (1964), as well as documentary films he produced through his independent studio, the Golestan Film Unit, including Farrokhzad's portrait of a leper colony, *The House Is Black* (1962). Work produced by government-sponsored agencies includes Mehrjui's *The Cow* (1969), a film whose international success helped give rise to the Iranian New Wave, or *Cinema-ye Motafavet* (literally meaning "alternative cinema"), in the 1960s and '70s.

MoMA's series also explores the artistic cross-pollination that flourished in the years leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, with filmmakers, artists, poets, dancers, musicians, writers, and other creators collaborating on projects, whether for stage or screen. Industrial growth, combined with the state's sponsoring of new forums such as the Shiraz Arts Festival and the Tehran International Film Festival, furthered these collaborations and enriched the cinema of the period. Filmmakers not only directed their own films but also wrote, edited, acted in, and supported their fellow filmmakers' work. *Iranian Cinema before the Revolution* includes such examples as Kimiai's *Gheysar* (1969), which features a title sequence designed by Kiarostami; Kiarostami's *Experience* (1973), cowritten with Naderi and based on Naderi's own life; and Naderi's *Harmonica* (1973), which Shahid Saless edited.

Regardless of their political beliefs and activities, Iranian filmmakers largely shared the same fate after the 1979 revolution: they were banned from making new work or were driven into exile. Some continued to make remarkable work abroad, while others would return home in the 1980s and '90s to replant the seeds of rebirth for Iranian cinema. It would be years before indigenously produced Iranian cinema would flourish once again. This survey of pre-revolutionary Iranian film begins to trace a national cinema still largely

unknown to global audiences. Thanks to heroic efforts on the part of many international film archivists, foundations, individual filmmakers—many living in exile—and family estates, a significant number of these pre-revolutionary films have been made available for this unique and unprecedented presentation.

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