

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 Over 70 Films, Including Rarely Seen Classics and Recently Rediscovered Works**

NEW YORK, NY, September 6, 2023 [Updated September 18, 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 Iran's history of 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 preservations 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 more than 70 features and shorts offers fresh consideration—and even a radical reappraisal—of Iranian cinema. It explores how filmmakers like Ebrahim Golestan, Forough Farrokhzad, Dariush Mehrjui, and Sohrab Shahid Saless employed allegory, elliptical narrative, musical counterpoint, provocative blurrings of fact and fiction, observational documentary, fanciful storytelling, and the use of nonprofessional actors and performers in their efforts to circumvent restrictions on artistic freedom under the Shah.

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, and will be one of several guest filmmakers and scholars who will appear during the course of the series.

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 National Iranian Television, Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (known as Kanoon), and the Ministry of Culture 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. This rich period of experimentation is represented with films by Farrokh Ghaffari, Kamran Shirdel, Nasser Taghvai, Abbas Kiarostami, and Parviz Sayyad, as well as even more militant and transgressive work by Masoud Kimiai.

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. It would be years before indigenously produced Iranian cinema would flourish once again, when names like Kiarostami, Mehrjui, Beyzaie, Jafar Panahi, Mohammad Rassoulof, Asghar Farhadi, and Rakhshan Bani-Etemad would become internationally known and admired.

From the blanket ban imposed on the majority of Iranian pre-revolutionary films after 1979 to a succession of sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, this survey traces a national cinema still largely unknown in the West for reasons both internal and external. Thanks to heroic efforts on the part of many international film archivists, foundations, individual filmmakers—many of them 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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