

For immediate release: 4 Dec 2024

# barbican

**Barbican announces a season of ground-breaking Iranian New Wave films, continuing its year-round celebration of rarely seen global cinema.**

## **Masterpieces of the Iranian New Wave**

**Tue 4 Feb – Tue 25 Feb 2025**

### **Barbican Cinema**

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/whats-on/2025/series/masterpieces-of-the-iranian-new-wave>

**Masterpieces of the Iranian New Wave** (4–25 Feb) is a stunning showcase of nine ground-breaking films that emerged from Cinema-ye Motafavet, or Iranian New Wave, the grassroots movement in Iranian documentary and fiction filmmaking. Produced in the 1960s and 70s, these Iranian arthouse films - made by a small group of young, collaborative and mostly self-taught filmmakers - were set against the backdrop of the last Shah's reign, reflecting the era's complex and often contradictory emotions toward modernisation.

**Masterpieces of the Iranian New Wave** is curated by **Ehsan Khoshbakht** who will introduce the seasons' films, all of which take place in Barbican's Cinema 1.



*Brick and Mirror* (Khesht o ayeneh) directed Ebrahim Golestan

**Ehsan Khoshbakht, season curator**, says: “*The collaborative spirit of these Iranian filmmakers created a remarkable coherence unparalleled in Middle Eastern cinema. Almost always subversive, these films reveal the contradictions of Iranian life with haunting clarity. They not only capture the genesis of an Iranian cinematic revolution but also foreshadow the social and political upheavals that culminated in the 1979 revolution. Tragically, this same revolution would lead to the banning of many of these trailblazing films.*”

**Alex Davidson, Acting Head of Cinema**, Barbican, says: “*Seeing these remarkable films, almost all of which have been newly restored, has been a revelation – ‘masterpiece’ is an over-used word, but here it is entirely appropriate. From films by established creatives such as Forough Farrokhzad, Ebrahim Golestan and Abbas Kiarostami to lesser-known titles,*

including the earliest surviving Iranian full-length feature to be directed by a woman (*The Sealed Soil*), this fantastic season is one of the highlights of our spring programme”.

The opening double-bill event for **Masterpieces of the Iranian New Wave** on 4 February showcases the early collaborative experiences of New Wave masters **Abbas Kiarostami** and **Amir Naderi** with two autobiographical coming-of-age tales which radiate a euphoric view of life and cinema. Both films were produced by Kanoon, where the two filmmakers shared an office.

In Kiarostami's debut feature film ***Experience*** (Tajrobeh), he collaborated with Naderi (as co-writer) on a story reflecting Naderi's own early days in Tehran after moving from southern Iran. A year later, Naderi's dialogue-free ***Waiting*** (Entezar) marked a departure from the realism of his previous films, blending illusory images of his youth in the south with documentary moments.

Closing the season on 25 February is a double-bill of two trailblazing films that are among the very few feature and documentary films directed by women in Iran before the 1979 revolution and now claimed as some of the greatest films of their time. Bookending the beginning and final years of Iranian New Wave, ***The House Is Black*** (Khaneh siah ast) made in 1962 by the feminist poet **Forough Farrokhzad**, shows uncommon allyship towards people with leprosy that became one of the first international successes of the Iranian New Wave, and **Marva Nabili's** recently rediscovered ***The Sealed Soil*** (Khak-e sar bé mohr) made in 1977 is a measured and restrained rebellion against patriarchy shot in Iran but edited in New York shortly before the revolution.

The season also has many rare highlights, including Iranian's cinema's first true modern masterpiece ***Brick and Mirror*** (Khesht o ayeneh) directed by **Ebrahim Golestan** which explores fear and responsibility in the wake of the 1953 coup orchestrated by the CIA and MI6. Impossible to see for decades, **Bahram Beyzaie's** dazzling ***The Stranger and the Fog*** (Gharibeh va meh) is an endlessly symbolic tale that pays tribute to the cinema of Akira Kurosawa in the most unexpected ways. **Sohrab Shahid Saless'** meditation on social isolation depicts the painful repetitiveness of an immigrant's day-to-day existence in ***Far From Home*** (Dar ghorbat); and **Ebrahim Golestan's** subversive and once-banned short documentary ***The Crown Jewels of Iran*** (Ganjineha-ye gohar) and **Mohammad Reza Aslani's** debut feature, ***Chess of the Wind*** (Shatranj-e baad) are two suppressed masterpieces, now restored to their true glory, that not only showcase the use of colour in Iranian cinema but despite their visual splendour delve into the roots of decadence.

## PROGRAMME

***Experience*** (Tajrobeh) + ***Waiting*** (Entezar) (12A\*) + **ScreenTalk**  
**Tue 4 Nov, 6.10pm**  
**Cinema 1**

Abbas Kiarostami and Amir Naderi shared an office at Kanoon, the Iranian institution responsible for producing cultural goods, including films, for children and young adults. In Kiarostami's first transition from short subjects to longer films, he collaborated with Amir Naderi (as co-writer) on ***Experience***, a story reflecting Naderi's own early days in Tehran after moving from southern Iran. A year later, Naderi's directorial work ***Waiting*** marked a departure from the realism of his previous genre films, blending illusory images of his youth in the south with documentary moments. Both films radiate a euphoric view of life and cinema, fixating on light and movement, and dazzling viewers with their heightened sensory sensitivity.

***Experience*** (Tajrobeh)

1973 Iran, dir Abbas Kiarostami, 53 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

The story of a photography shop errand boy who falls in love with a client's daughter showcases Kiarostami's minimalist and distanced style in full form. It stands out as one of his significant works exploring themes of desire and rejection.

***Waiting*** (Entezar)

1974 Iran, dir Amir Naderi, 46 mins, No dialogue

No dialogue-free meditation on puberty and desire, this semi-autobiographical film shows Naderi at the peak of his purely visual storytelling. Shot in the old city of Bushehr in southern Iran, it follows an orphaned boy who fetches ice daily for his elderly guardians. He becomes infatuated with a girl, though he has only seen her hands.

***Brick and Mirror*** (Khesht o ayeneh) (15\*) + **Introduction by Ehsan Khoshbakht**

1964 Iran, dir Ebrahim Golestan, 130 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

**Sat 8 Nov, 3pm**

**Cinema 1**

A Dostoyevskian tale of a Tehran cab driver's search for the mother of an abandoned baby, it presents a harrowing image of a society rife with corrupted morals and widespread alienation. While rooted in a specific social context, its message resonates universally.

The godfather of the Iranian New Wave, Ebrahim Golestan, weaves this world together not only with his remarkable writing and direction but also with his own voice: first heard reciting a poem on the radio, warning of the dangers of the night, and later speaking the words of God from the Qur'an. Divinity and poetry meet in unlikely places—a smoky café, an empty bazaar, an orphanage. The film also marks the first creative use of direct sound in Iranian cinema (a detail heightened by the absence of a musical score), which complements the claustrophobic use of widescreen.

***The Stranger and the Fog*** (Gharibeh va meh) (15\*) + **Introduction by Ehsan Khoshbakht**

1974 Iran, dir Bahram Beyzaie, 146 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

**Sun 9 Feb, 2.30pm**

**Cinema 1**

A mysterious stranger arrives in a drifting boat at a coastal village and falls for a woman. But in this unnamed place, which exists outside of time, ghosts of the past, narrow-minded villagers, and forces beyond the characters' control draw the viewer into a dizzying labyrinth of rituals. Through the film's meticulously structured circular narrative, characters, times, and spaces echo and mirror each other, turning filmmaking into an act of dreaming. By placing a woman of will at the centre of both attention and control, the film transcends the confines of the victimized female archetypes prevalent in 1970s Iranian cinema.

***Far From Home*** (Dar ghorbat) (15\*) + **Introduction by Ehsan Khoshbakht**

1975 Iran/Germany, dir Sohrab Shahid Saless, 91 mins, in Turkish and German with English subtitles

**Wed 12 Feb, 6.30pm**

**Cinema 1**

A transitional work bridging Sohrab Shahid Saless' Iranian period and his extended stay in Germany, ***Far From Home*** offers a glimpse into a few days in the life of Husseyin (played by popular actor/director and the film's co-producer Parviz Sayyad), a Turkish 'guest worker' in

West Berlin. The film features many elements characteristic of Shahid Saless' oeuvre: trains, letters written and read, and the despairing sight of empty, unmade beds. The vanity of life is captured in dead moments, when even after a character has walked out the frame the camera lingers, staring into the vacuum and revealing a bleak vision of the world of the exploited and the rootless.

***The Crown Jewels of Iran*** (Ganjineha-ye gohar) + ***Chess of the Wind*** (Shatranj-e baad) (15\*) + Introduction by Ehsan Khoshbakht  
Mon 24 Feb, 6.10pm  
Cinema 1

***The Crown Jewels of Iran*** and ***Chess of the Wind*** explore the betrayal of the ruling class while foreshadowing the changes to come. In Ebrahim Golestan's subversive and once-banned short documentary, ***The Crown Jewels of Iran***, the narration sharply contrasts with sumptuous shots of precious jewels, condemning the decadence of past rulers.

Conversely, Mohammad Reza Aslani's debut feature, ***Chess of the Wind***, which vanished after its 1976 premiere at the Tehran Film Festival, plunges viewers into a labyrinth of corruption and decay within a household. Subtly foreshadowing the revolution, the film masterfully portrays the hidden inner struggles of Iranian society.

***The Crown Jewels of Iran*** (Ganjineha-ye gohar)  
1965 Iran, dir Ebrahim Golestan, 15 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

Ebrahim Golestan's most visually dazzling documentary ostensibly showcases the precious jewels housed in the treasury of the Central Bank of Iran. However, it is, in reality, a bold critique of the treachery of Persian kings.

***Chess of the Wind*** (Shatranj-e baad)  
1976 Iran, dir Mohammad Reza Aslani, 100 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

A mesmerizing exploration of Usher-like themes, the film is set in a decaying feudal mansion where the death of a noble family's matriarch sparks a power struggle. Featuring a hauntingly eerie score by Sheyda Gharachedaghi—one of the most prolific female film composers of the 1960s and 1970s—it remains one of the major rediscovered gems of Iranian cinema in recent years.

***The Sealed Soil*** (Khak-e sar bé mohr) + ***The House is Black*** (Khaneh siah ast) (15\*) + Introduction by Ehsan Khoshbakht  
Tue 25 Feb, 6.20pm  
Cinema 1

Among the very few feature and documentary films directed by women in Iran before the 1979 revolution, the only two that exist in complete form are poet Forough Farrokhzad's ***The House Is Black***—a short documentary about fighting leprosy that became one of the first international successes of the Iranian New Wave—and Marva Nabili's recently rediscovered ***The Sealed Soil***, a measured and restrained rebellion against patriarchy shot in Iran but edited in New York shortly before the revolution. Tragically, both filmmakers' careers were interrupted: Farrokhzad died prematurely in 1967, at the age of 32, and Nabili permanently moved to the United States. If ***The House Is Black*** merges poetry and cinema like no other film, ***The Sealed Soil*** employs long shots and a static camera, with Nabili citing Persian miniature art and Robert Bresson as influences. In both cases, the results are astonishing.

***The Sealed Soil*** (Khak-e sar bé mohr)

1977 Iran, dir Marva Nabili, 90 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

Chronicling the repetitive and repressed life of Roo-Bekheir, a young woman in a poor village in southwest Iran, ***The Sealed Soil*** portrays her quiet resistance to a forced marriage. A formally rigorous, if emotionally distanced, critique of patriarchy and the superficial reforms of Iranian agricultural life, the film captures the tensions that contributed to the 1979 revolution.

***The House is Black*** (Khaneh siah ast)

1962 Iran dir Forough Farrokhzad 20 mins, in Persian with English subtitles

Set in an enclosed community for people affected by leprosy in northwest Iran, this film is a dialogue between the passions of the poet (Farrokhzad) and the voice of reason (Ebrahim Golestan, also the film's producer). It opens with a blank screen, gradually drawing viewers into an unsettling world that transforms, through the miracle of poetry, into the sublime.

**Tickets on sale to Barbican Members on 4 December**

**Tickets on sale to general public including Young Barbican on 5 December**

**Box office:** [www.barbican.org.uk](http://www.barbican.org.uk)

Standard: £13

Members: £10.40

Concessions: £11

Under 18s: £6

Young Barbican: £5

There is £1.50 booking fee for purchases made online

# Certificate to be confirmed

\* This film has been locally classified by the City of London Corporation

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors**

**Download images for *Masterpieces of Iranian New Wave* from [here](#)**

**About the curator**

Ehsan Khosbakht is a film curator and filmmaker. He serves as the co-director of Il Cinema Ritrovato in Bologna and curates the retrospective section of the Locarno Film Festival 2025. Most recently, he programmed a major season of Iranian pre-revolutionary films for the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York. His latest film, *Celluloid Underground*, premiered at the London Film Festival 2023, and his newly edited volume, *The Lady with the Torch: Columbia Pictures, 1929-1959*, was published in August 2024 by Les Éditions de l'Œil in Paris.

Ehsan Khosbakht and Alex Davidson are available for interviews.

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## **Barbican press room**

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communications team's contact details are listed on our website at [www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room](http://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room)

## **About the Barbican**

The Barbican is a catalyst for creativity, sparking possibilities for artists, audiences, and communities. We showcase the most exciting art from around the world, pushing traditional artistic boundaries to entertain and inspire millions of people, create connections, provoke debate, and reflect the world we live in.

We are an international arts and events centre rooted firmly in our own neighbourhood, collaborating with local communities and putting the City of London on the map as a destination for everybody. Central to our purpose is supporting emerging talent and shaping opportunities that will accelerate the next generation of creatives.

As a not-for-profit, we rely on the generosity of individuals and organisations, including our principal funder the City of London Corporation. Every ticket purchased, donation made, and pound earned supports our arts and learning programme and enables the widest possible range of people to experience the joy of the arts.

Opened in 1982, the Barbican is a unique and audacious building, recognised globally as an architectural icon. As well as our theatres, galleries, concert halls and cinemas, we have a large conservatory with over 1,500 species of plants and trees, a library, conference facilities, public and community spaces, restaurants, bars, and a picturesque lakeside oasis.

We're proud to be the home of the [London Symphony Orchestra](#), and a London base of the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#). We regularly co-commission, produce and showcase the work of our other associates and partners including the [Academy of Ancient Music](#), [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#), [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), [Darbar Festival](#), [Doc'n Roll Film Festival](#), [Drum Works](#), [EFG London Jazz Festival](#), [London Palestine Film Festival](#), [Serious](#), and [Trafalgar Theatre Productions](#).

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## **About Barbican Cinema**

We connect audiences with a curated programme of international cinema; from celebrated filmmakers to ground-breaking and under-heard voices from past and present.

Our programmes are presented in Cinemas 1 in the main centre and Cinemas 2&3 on Beech Street. Our programme ranges from thematic seasons that respond to today's world, to new releases, ScreenTalks, cross-artform collaborations, family events, access screenings and event cinema that presents the performing arts on screen.

We showcase the work of emerging filmmakers, as well as less familiar work of exceptional filmmakers from the UK and around the world.

We champion the work of Barbican Young Programmers and give stage to emerging musicians in our ongoing film & live music series which includes our flagship collaboration with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama.

As part of a cross-arts centre, our cinemas are a cultural space for people to share the viewing experience. We strive to be inclusive in everything we do; providing platforms for the widest possible range of filmmakers and ensuring we are an open, welcoming and accessible venue for all our audiences.

