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## Abbas Kiarostami

Abbas Kiarostami, (born June 22, 1940, Tehrān, Iran—died July 4, 2016, France), Iranian filmmaker who was known for experimenting with the boundaries between reality and fiction throughout a four-decade career.

Kiarostami studied painting and graphic arts at the University of Tehrān and spent a period designing posters, illustrating children's books, and directing advertisements and film credit sequences. He was hired in 1969 by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults to establish its film division. The institute produced his first film as a director, the lyrical short *Nān va kūcheh* (1970; *Bread and Alley*), which featured elements that would define his later work: improvised performances, documentary textures, and real-life rhythms. His first feature, *Mosāfer* (1974; *The Traveler*), about a rebellious village boy determined to go to Tehrān and watch a football (soccer) match, is an indelible portrait of a troubled adolescent. In the 1980s Kiarostami's documentaries *Avalihā* (1984; *First Graders*) and *Mashq-e shab* (1989; *Homework*) offered further insight into the lives of Iranian schoolchildren.

In the *Koker* trilogy, named for the village where much of the trilogy takes place, Kiarostami moved from his traditional subject matter of the moral lives of children to explore the overlap between films and reality. In *Khāneh-ye dūst kojāst?* (1987; *Where Is the Friend's Home?*), an eight-year-old

boy must return his friend's notebook, but he does not know where his friend lives. The second film, *Zendegī va dīgar hich* (1992; *And Life Goes On...*, or *Life and Nothing More*), follows the journey of the director (played by an actor) of *Where Is the Friend's Home?* to Koker, damaged by a severe earthquake since the first film, to find the young boy who starred in that movie. *And Life Goes On...* was also the first of Kiarostami's films centred around a car trip, a motif he would return to often in his career. The final film in the trilogy, *Zīr-e darakhtān-e eyton* (1994; *Through the Olive Trees*), is about an actor's difficult romantic pursuit of a fellow actress during the filming of *And Life Goes On...* During this period Kiarostami also made *Namay-e nazdīk* (1990; *Close-Up*), which tells the true story of a film buff who swindled an upper-class Tehrān family by pretending to be noted director Mohsen Makhmalbaf. The film buff, the family, and Makhmalbaf all played themselves. The Koker trilogy and *Close-Up* brought Kiarostami international acclaim. His screenplay for Jafar Panahi's *Bādkonak-e sefid* (1995; *The White Balloon*), a look at life through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl, further increased his reputation.

In *Ta'm-e gīlās* (1997; *Taste of Cherry*), a man drives around the hills outside Tehrān trying to find someone who will bury him after he commits suicide. (The movie was banned in Iran for supposedly encouraging suicide.) Much of the film's action unfolds in long scenes of conversation set in the protagonist's car. *Taste of Cherry* shared the *Palme d'Or* with Imamura Shōhei's *Unagi* (*The Eel*) at the 1997 Cannes film festival. *Bād*

mā rā khāhad bord (1999; The Wind Will Carry Us) tells the story of an engineer who travels with a film crew to a remote mountain village to document a funeral ceremony. The film is told in an elliptical style, with many characters remaining offscreen entirely.

## Mohsen Makhmalbaf

Few movies are more eventful and exciting than the career and life of Iranian Mohsen Makhmalbaf (born in 1957). As the son of a single mother, he started working already at the age of 8 to support his family, and was sent to prison at the age of 17 for being a member in an underground movement opposing the Shah of Iran. He was released after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and moved from politics to art and published the first of his 30 books in 1981.

Makhmalbaf 's varied production often coloured by humour consists of over 30 movies, including short films and documentaries. Five of them will be seen in Sodankylä: One of the key works of Iranian cinema, comically documentary Hello Cinema (1995), A Moment of Innocence (1996), that fascinatingly touches Makhmalbaf 's experiences of imprisonment and moves between reality and fiction in typical Iranian style, the colourfully beautiful depiction of carpet-weaving nomads, Gabbeh (1996), possibly the most famous depiction of

the horror and fear of the situation in Afghanistan, *Kandahar* (2001), which was made there due to the high political and religious tensions in Iran, and a dictator recital made in Georgia, *The President* (2014). It follows up Makhmalbaf's persistent interest in social analyses, even though he and his movies have been blacklisted in Iran and due to his political activism he and his family have since had to live over ten years in exile in Western Europe.

We will also see Makhmalbaf as an actor, when he portrays himself in late Iranian *Sodankylä* visitor (2007) Abbas Kiarostami's unusual documentary (or mockumentary) *Close-Up* (1990). Based on a true story, it tells a story about a poor man that is put on trial for pretending to be Makhmalbaf, and then deceiving the family of an old woman by extorting money ostensibly for acting in a movie.

Founded by the director in 1996, the film production complex Makhmalbaf Film House and its school are unique as the whole family, including the children, is dedicated to making movies (Samira Makhmalbaf, who got to the top at a sensationally young age, visited *Sodankylä* in 2009), achieving total international success. The life story of Mohsen Makhmalbaf and his family is certainly one of the most interesting ones we will ever get to hear in the morning discussions of the festival

## Jafar Panahi

Jafar Panahi, (born July 11, 1960, Mīāneh, Iran), Iranian director whose films were critical depictions of Iranian society.

As a teenager, Panahi studied film at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults in Tehrān, where he first met Abbas Kiarostami, who taught there. Panahi served in the military during the Iran-Iraq War, and in the early 1990s he made several documentary shorts for Iranian television. He was the assistant director on the final film of Kiarostami's Koker trilogy, Zīr-e darakhtān-e zeyton (1994; Through the Olive Trees).

Panahi's first feature film was Bādkonak-e sefīd (1995; The White Balloon), about a young girl who wants to buy a goldfish but loses her money down a sewer drain. The drama—which was written by Kiarostami—earned Panahi the Caméra d'Or, the prize for first-time directors, at the Cannes film festival. In Ayneh (1997; The Mirror) a young girl decides to make her own way home after her mother does not pick her up at the end of the school day despite the fact that she does not know her address. The story makes an abrupt turn when the actress playing the main character announces that she is tired of playing a role and wants to go home. Panahi also wrote the screenplay for The Mirror, and he penned the scripts for several subsequent movies.

Panahi's films took a more overtly political turn

with *Dayereh* (2000; *The Circle*), about women in contemporary Iran. Two of the central characters are convicts escaping from prison, which allowed Panahi to point out the irony that they had exchanged their small jail for what some would consider the larger jail that is being a woman in Iran. In 2003 he directed *Talā-ye sorkh* (*Crimson Gold*), which begins with a robbery at a jewelry store. The rest of the film is a flashback that follows the robber, a poor pizza deliveryman, as he encounters inequities and injustice. *Offside* (2006) centres on six young female soccer fans who try to sneak into a qualifying match for the World Cup between Iran and Bahrain on June 8, 2005. Women are prohibited from attending sporting events in Iran, so the fans disguise themselves as men. Some of *Offside* was filmed clandestinely on the day of the actual match.

Panahi backed opposition candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi in the presidential election of June 2009 and later during the Green Movement protests that followed the Iranian government's declaration of Pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as the winner. In July Panahi was arrested at the funeral of Neda Agha-Soltan, a protester who had been killed by government police; he was later released. While making a movie that was set during the Green Movement protests, he was arrested again in March 2010. In December 2010 Panahi was sentenced to 6 years in prison and banned from filmmaking, traveling abroad, and giving interviews for 20 years. He remained free, however, while appealing his sentence.

Despite the harsh sentence, Panahi entered the most active phase of his career. He and Mojtaba Mirtahmasb directed *Īn Fīlm Nīst* (2011; *This Is Not a Film*), which depicts a day in his life while he awaited the result of his appeal, denied in October 2011. The film was made clandestinely in Panahi's Tehrān apartment and was smuggled out of Iran inside a USB stick hidden in a cake.

Panahi was placed under house arrest but nevertheless made *Pardah* (2013; *Closed Curtain*), codirected with Kambuzia Partovi. A screenwriter (Partovi) goes into seclusion at his seaside home, but his solitude is disturbed by a young woman fleeing the police. As in *The Mirror*, the story is broken by real life, when Panahi appears as himself, and the characters try to get him to finish their story. Panahi secretly filmed *Closed Curtain* at his own seaside home with a small crew.

In *Taxi* (2015), Panahi has been reduced to driving a cab, with his sole contact with filmmaking being the dashboard camera that is supposed to protect him from robbery. The film is reminiscent of Kiarostami's "car films" like *10* (2002), but in a more comic vein, and culminates in a long conversation about cinema with his niece, Hana Saeidi, who must make a "distributable" short film for school. *Taxi* won the top prize at the 2015 Berlin International Film Festival. In *Se rokh* (2018; *3 Faces*), Panahi and actress Behnaz Jafari undertake a road trip to find a young girl whose family bars her from pursuing an acting career.