

2025 UCLA Celebration of Iranian Cinema presents thought-provoking stories

From June 14 through June 29 at the Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum



L-R, Row 1: Courtesy of "Celluloid Underground"; "Leila," courtesy Safa Mehrjui; Courtesy of "Opponent"; Row 2: Courtesy of "The Witness"; "Reading Lolita in Tehran," courtesy of Marie Gioanni; Courtesy of "The Old Bachelor"; Row 3: Courtesy of "The Siren," "Seven Days" and Hamoun"

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LOS ANGELES (April 15, 2025) –The UCLA Film & Television Archive and its supporting partner, Farhang Foundation, are pleased to present this year's compelling [UCLA Celebration of Iranian Cinema](#). Over nine screenings from June 14 to 29, the series features a diverse lineup that spotlights the best contemporary and classic feature-length films from Iran and the Iranian diaspora. The films illuminate identity, resistance, cultural heritage, pressing human rights issues and the quest for justice. There is also a tribute to writer-director Dariush Mehrjui, recognizing his enduring impact on cinema and the arts.

Offering a unique lens into the struggles and triumphs of individuals navigating complex cultural landscapes, the series kicks off June 14 with [Reading Lolita in Tehran](#) (Italy/Israel, 2024), based on Azar Nafisi's New York Times bestselling memoir. It's directed by Eran Riklis and stars Golshifteh Farahani, Zar Amir Ebrahimi and Mina Kavani. The screening will be preceded by the short film *A Move* (U.K./Iran, 2024), a documentary by Elahe Esmaili.

On June 15, the Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival first prize winner *Suitcase* (Iran, 2023) will screen at 3 p.m. followed by Milad Alami's [Opponent](#) (Sweden/Norway, 2023), starring Payman Maadi, Marall Nasiri and Amirali Abanzad. At 7 p.m., the day will conclude with the Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival third prize winner *The Dinner Party* (Iran, 2023), followed by Ali Samadi Ahadi's [Seven Days](#) (Germany, 2024) starring Vishka Asayesh, Majid Bakhtiari, Tanaz Molaei.

The series continues June 20 with the Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival second prize winner *Left Handed* (Iran, 2024), followed by [The Witness](#) (Germany/Austria, 2024), starring Maryam Boubani, Nader Naderpour and Abbas Imani, and co-written and directed by Nader Saeivar. On June 21, the

series will showcase films that delve into themes of tyranny, violence and the complexities of identity and exile, including *And How Miserable is the Home of Evil* (Switzerland/Iran, 2023) and [The Old Bachelor](#) (Iran, 2024), starring Leila Hatami, Hamed Behdad and Hassan Pourshirazi.

June 22, the series continues with [Celluloid Underground](#) (U.K./Iran, 2023), directed by London-based Ehsan Khoshbakht. This film is a captivating blend of cinema history, memoir and a meditation on place and identity. It will be preceded by *Razeh-del* (U.K., 2024), an award-winning film by Maryam Tafakory that pays homage to Zan, an Iranian women's newspaper published in the 1990s.

Audiences will be treated to [The Siren](#), on June 27, starring Mina Kavani, Hamidreza Djavdan and Parviz Sayyad, a visually striking 2D animated film directed by Sepideh Farsi. This poignant narrative follows 14-year-old Omid as he navigates the chaos of the Iran-Iraq War.

The series will conclude with a two-evening tribute on June 28-29 to the life and legacy of Iranian writer-director Mehrjui, whose influential work has shaped Iranian cinema for over five decades. The tribute will feature screenings of some of Mehrjui's most iconic films, including [Leila](#) (Iran, 1997), starring Leila Hatami, Ali Mosaffa and Jamileh Sheikh, [Hamoon](#) (Iran, 1990), starring Khosro Shakibai, Bita Farahi and Ezzatollah Entezami, and *The Pear Tree* (Iran, 1998), starring Homayoun Ershadi and Golshifteh Farahani; along with in-person appearances by two of the filmmaker's children—Maryam Mehrjui and Safa Mehrjui.

Reflecting on the upcoming presentation, Paul Malcolm, senior public programmer at the Archive, said: "Some of the most engaged and engaging cinema in the world right now is being made by Iranian filmmakers, whether working in Iran or abroad as part of the Iranian diaspora, many of whom are putting their lives and freedoms at risk to add their voices to the cause of resistance. It is an honor to once again highlight their work at the Billy Wilder Theater with the generous support of our partners at the Farhang Foundation."

Alireza Ardekani, chief executive officer of Farhang Foundation, added: "Farhang Foundation is honored to continue our incredible partnership with the UCLA Film & Television Archive in presenting the UCLA Celebration of Iranian Cinema — one of the longest-running showcases of Iranian film in the world. This important series provides a vital platform for Iranian filmmakers and storytellers to share their diverse voices, creative visions and cultural perspectives with a broader audience. We are proud to support this program and its role in fostering greater understanding, appreciation and dialogue through the art of cinema."

The series is generously funded by the Farhang Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting Iranian art and culture.

In-person screenings are held at the Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum. All programs are free through June 2026, thanks to a gift from an anonymous donor. For more information, including program and admission details, please visit cinema.ucla.edu. Schedules and guest speakers are subject to change.

Below is each program summary with brief film notes.

- June 14, 7:30 p.m.
Reading Lolita in Tehran (Italy/Israel, 2024)

Based on Azar Nafisi's New York Times Best Seller memoir, this sweeping story of perseverance and resistance follows a literature professor (Golshifteh Farahani) from her return to Tehran with her husband in 1979 to her eventual exile again in 1997. In between, Nafisi began a book salon as a refuge for like-minded women watching their rights, professions and freedoms stripped away.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 108 min. Director: Eran Riklis. Screenwriter: Marjorie David. With: Golshifteh Farahani, Zar Amir Ebrahimi, Mina Kavani.

Preceded by

A Move (U.K./Iran, 2024)

Filmmaker Elahe Esmaili documents the reactions of family and friends to her decision to stop wearing a hijab and so captures the multigenerational clash of tradition and change felt by families across Iran.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 27 min. Director: Elahe Esmaili.

- June 15, 3 p.m.

Opponent (Sweden/Norway, 2023)

Payman Maadi delivers a surprising and deeply affecting performance as Iman, an Iranian exile newly arrived in Sweden with his wife and two young children where they anxiously await word on their application for political asylum. A professional wrestler in Iran, Iman joins a local wrestling club in the hopes it will improve their chances to stay. As Iman begins to find renewed purpose, Maryam (Marall Nasiri), his wife, feels hers slipping away.

DCP, color, in Swedish and Persian with English subtitles, 119 min. Director: Milad Alami. Screenwriter: Milad Alami. With: Payman Maadi, Marall Nasiri, Amirali Abanzad.

Preceded by

Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival-1st Prize Winner

Suitcase (Iran, 2023)

A man finds himself confronted by painful memories as he scours the city for a stolen red suitcase in this by turns surreal and deeply poignant representation of the refugee experience in Iran.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 15 min. Directors: Saman Hosseinpuor, Ako Zandkarimi. Screenwriters: Saman Hosseinpuor, Ako Zandkarimi.

- June 15, 7 p.m.

Seven Days (Germany, 2024)

An Iranian human rights activist (Vishka Asayesh) granted a seven-day medical leave from prison is faced with a choice: Escape the country and rejoin her family abroad or return to jail in solidarity with her fellow political prisoners. Directed by Ali Samadi Ahadi and written by Mohammad Rasoulof, *Seven Days* is a raw, intense exploration of the cost of resistance and freedom.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 113 min. Director: Ali Samadi Ahadi. Screenwriter: Mohammad Rasoulof. With: Vishka Asayesh, Majid Bakhtiari, Tanaz Molaei.

Preceded by

Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival-3rd Prize Winner

The Dinner Party (Iran, 2023)

Neda Jebelli makes her directorial debut with this penetrating short film about an engagement party that goes off the rails as the sound of political protests outside grow louder.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 13 min. Director: Neda Jebelli. Screenwriter: Neda Jebelli.

- June 20, 7:30 p.m.

The Witness (Germany/Austria, 2024)

In this riveting portrait of a woman driven to seek her own justice, Maryam Boubani delivers a compelling performance as a retired teacher who suspects her son-in-law, a powerful government official, of murdering her adoptive daughter. Winner of the audience award in the Orizzonti Extra section of last year's Venice Film Festival, *The Witness* was co-written by director Nader Saeivar and Jafar Panahi.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 100 min. Director: Nader Saeivar. Screenwriters: Nader Saeivar, Jafar Panahi. With: Maryam Boubani, Nader Naderpour, Abbas Imani.

Preceded by

Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival-2nd Prize Winner

Left Handed (Iran, 2024)

The economic plight of struggling factory workers and the dire lengths they'll go for relief is dramatized with poignancy and power in this short film.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 15 min. Director: Nasrin Mohammadpour. Screenwriter: Nasrin Mohammadpour.

- June 21, 7:30

The Old Bachelor (Iran, 2024)

Writer-director Oktay Baraheni taps into global anxieties with this monumental domestic drama that doubles as an acute study of tyranny and violence. The lives of two half brothers have reached a dead end in the expansive, decaying mansion they share with their domineering father. When he sets his lascivious sights on a younger woman, her presence disrupts the trio's long-suffered equilibrium.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 192 min. Director: Oktay Baraheni. Screenwriter: Oktay Baraheni. With: Leila Hatami, Hamed Behdad, Hassan Pourshirazi.

Preceded by

And How Miserable is the Home of Evil (Switzerland/Iran, 2023)

Exiled Iranian filmmaker Saleh Kashefi manipulates official state media of sermons delivered by Ali Khamenei, Iran's supreme leader, to enact his overthrow at the hands of an off-screen uprising.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles. Director: Saleh Kashefi.

- June 22, 7:00pm

Celluloid Underground (UK/Iran, 2023)

Part cinema history, part memoir, part mediation on place, identity and the passions that can sustain one through exile, London-based director Ehsan Khoshbakht weaves multiple intersecting lines of inquiry in this always fascinating film essay.

DCP, color, in English and Persian with English subtitles, 80 min. Director: Ehsan Khoshbakht.

Preceded by

Razeh-del (UK, 2024)

Award-winning filmmaker Maryam Tafakory constructs a spellbinding homage to Zan, an Iranian women's newspaper published in the 1990s, through reader letters, scenes from classic Iranian films and the reveries of two school girls inspired by its pages to seize the power of their own representations.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 27 min. Director: Maryam Tafakory.

- June 27, 7:30pm

The Siren (France/Germany/Luxembourg/Belgium, 2023)

For 14-year-old Omid, the Iran-Iraq War begins with rockets tearing over a soccer game he's playing with his friends in the Iranian port of Abadan. As others evacuate, he stays behind to help a disparate group of eccentrics struggling to survive the chaos. Director Sepideh Farsi deployed a visually striking 2D animation style to confront the horrors of war and illuminate the humanity besieged by it.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 100 min. Director: Sepideh Farsi. Screenwriter: Javad Djavahery. With: Mina Kavani, Hamidreza Djavdan, Parviz Sayyad.

- June 28 7:30pm

In person: Maryam Mehrjui, Safa Mehrjui.

Tribute to Dariush Mehrjui

The Archive is honored to present a two-evening tribute (June 28 and 29) to the life and legacy of Iranian writer-director Dariush Mehrjui whose second feature, *The Cow*, is credited with launching the Iranian New Wave. A giant of Iran cinema for over five decades until his untimely, tragic death in 2023, Mehrjui explored the psychological toll of fear, ignorance and oppression on the lives of individuals with grace, insight and poetry.

Leila (Iran, 1997)

Soon after meeting at a joyful gathering of family and friends, Leila (Leila Hatami) and Reza (Ali Mosaffa) are happily married. When Leila learns she can't have children, however, that supportive network of relations becomes an unrelenting force of social pressure that threatens to drive them apart. Leila Hatami delivers a devastating performance in this unforgettable portrait of a woman under emotional siege.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 102 min. Director: Dariush Mehrjui. Screenwriters: Mahnaz Ansarian, Dariush Mehrjui. With: Leila Hatami, Ali Mosaffa, Jamileh Sheikhi.

- June 29, 7 p.m.

In person: Maryam Mehrjui, Safa Mehrjui.

Tribute to Dariush Mehrjui (continues)

Hamoon (Iran, 1990)

“Why did it go wrong? How did it start?” So ruminates a bitter Hamoon (Khosro Shakibai) after his wife (Bita Farahi) demands a divorce, but the questions about his marriage take on ever stronger existential consequences. Director and co-writer Dariush Mehrjui shakes up his acute study of a marriage and a life on the rocks with unreliable flashbacks and surreal dream sequences that draw us inexorably deeper in Hamoon’s collapsing psychology.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 120 min. Director: Dariush Mehrjui. Screenwriters: Dariush Mehrjui, Haroon Yashayayi. With: Khosro Shakibai, Bita Farahi, Ezzatollah Entezami.

The Pear Tree (Iran, 1998)

An intellectual author struggling with writer’s block, Mahmoud (Homayoun Ershadi) retreats to the country villa where instead of peace, he’s confronted by a prized pear tree that refuses to bear fruit and aching memories of his first love. In Dariush Mehrjui’s masterpiece of middle-aged doubt, the personal and the political steep in longing and regret while almost every shot comes suffused in golden, autumnal light captured through the lens of cinematographer Mahmoud Kalari.

DCP, color, in Persian with English subtitles, 95 min. Director: Dariush Mehrjui. Screenwriters: Dariush Mehrjui, Goli Taraghi. With: Homayoun Ershadi, Golshifteh Farahani.

[About Farhang Foundation](#)

Farhang Foundation is a member supported nonpolitical, nonreligious, and not-for-profit organization dedicated to celebrating and promoting the richness of Iranian art and culture for the betterment of society as a whole. With a singular mission at its core, the Foundation strives to preserve, nurture, and share the diverse heritage of Iran with the global community. Through steadfast commitment, the Foundation supports a wide array of academic, artistic, and cultural programs and initiatives, fostering collaborative partnerships with esteemed universities, renowned museums, and the vibrant world of performing arts. These partnerships enable the Foundation to cultivate a deeper understanding and appreciation of the multifaceted aspects of Iranian culture and promote cross-cultural dialogue.

[About the UCLA Film & Television Archive—EST. 1965](#)

A division of UCLA Library, the Archive is internationally renowned for rescuing, preserving and showcasing moving image media and is dedicated to ensuring that the visual achievements of our time are available for information, education and enjoyment. The Archive has over 500,000 film and television holdings conserved in a state-of-the-art facility at the Packard Humanities Institute Stoa in Santa Clarita, CA, that is designed to hold materials ranging from nitrate film to digital video at all preservation standards. Many of the Archive’s projects are screened at prestigious film events around the globe.

The Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum is the home of the UCLA Film & Television Archives public programs. The theater is among a handful of venues nationwide able to exhibit an entire century's worth of moving images in their original formats. From the earliest silent films requiring variable speed projection all the way up to cutting-edge digital cinema, the Wilder can accommodate an array of screen technologies.

For more information, please contact Marisa Soto at (310) 206-8588 or msoto@cinema.ucla.edu.