

UCLA's Celebration of Iranian Cinema centers moving stories about searching for identity

Screenings are free at the Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum,



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LOS ANGELES (May 30, 2024) – The UCLA Film & Television Archive will showcase the best of Iranian and Iranian diaspora filmmaking with its [2024 Celebration of Iranian Cinema](#) series, which runs over three weekends, from June 14 to 30. With a diverse selection of feature-length and short films that bridge cultural divides and shed light on the human experience, the series champions the work of new and emerging directors while honoring the rich history of Iranian cinema and the resilience, creativity and artistic vision of Iranian filmmakers.

The series kicks off June 14 with the documentary [Joonam](#) (U.S., 2023), directed by Sierra Urich, which poignantly traces her family's history through three generations of Iranian women; Urich and the film's executive producers — filmmaker Liam LoPinto and filmmaker and actor Arian Moayed — will attend in person. The world premiere of the Archive's restoration of [The Sealed Soil](#) (Iran, 1977), the earliest complete surviving feature film directed by an Iranian woman, takes place June 15, accompanied by an in-person conversation with director Marva Nabili. This groundbreaking film, long thought to have been lost, explores themes of female resistance and remains a significant contribution to Iranian cinema and culture.

The following weekend features writer-director Ali Zarnegar's high-tension thriller [Cause of Death: Unknown](#) (Iran, 2023) on June 21, which follows a passenger van carrying a diverse group of travelers on a cross-country journey to Tehran. Writer-director Parviz Shahbazi's [Roxana](#) (Iran, 2023), about young Iranians struggling to find their way in a world where one misstep can have dire

consequences, screens June 22, followed on June 23 by writer-director Behrooz Karamizade's gripping feature debut [Empty Nets](#) (Germany/Iran 2023), which explores the rough-and-tumble world of caviar smuggling.

The final weekend features [Achilles](#) (Iran/Germany/France, 2023), directed by Farhad Delaram, on June 28; this story of perseverance and resistance follows a man finding a path back to life through his shared experiences with a political prisoner. Director Karim Lakzadeh's independent film [Dark Matter](#) (Iran, 2023), screening June 29, combines elements of the French New Wave and Jim Jarmusch's style with wildly unexpected, and welcome, results. The series concludes June 30 with the Sundance award-winning [In the Land of Brothers](#) (France/Iran/Netherlands, 2024), directed by Alireza Ghasemi and Raha Amirfazli, which presents three interconnected episodes of an Afghan refugee family's generational struggle to make a home in Iran.

"The resilience of Iranian filmmakers — indeed, of every Iranian fighting for freedom and freedom of expression in the face of ever-mounting repression since the advent of the Women, Life, Freedom movement in 2022 — has been awe-inspiring," said Paul Malcolm, senior public programmer at the UCLA Film & Television Archive. "We are once again honored to be able to share their voices with our audience at the Billy Wilder Theater with this year's selections."

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

"Farhang Foundation is honored to be the sole sponsor of the UCLA Celebration of Iranian Cinema film series, a remarkable event that highlights the richness and diversity of Iranian cinema," said Alireza Ardekani, the foundation's executive director. "This long partnership reflects our commitment to promoting Iranian art and culture and providing a platform for voices from our community. We're thrilled to support a program that continues to inspire, enlighten and connect audiences with the vibrant world of Iranian filmmaking."

Films in Persian will include English subtitles.

In-person screenings are held at the Billy Wilder Theater at the Hammer Museum. All programs are free through June 2024, 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 are program summaries with brief film synopsis notes.

- June 14, 7:30 p.m.
In-person: filmmaker Sierra Urich, filmmaker Liam LoPinto, filmmaker/actor Arian Moayed.

[Joonam](#) (U.S., 2023)

Director Sierra Urich's *Joonam* weaves a beautiful and beguiling portrait of three generations of Iranian women living in the diaspora. In documenting her family's history through conversations with her mother and grandmother, Urich uncovers memories both poignant and painful that force her to reflect on her own identity as a second generation immigrant raised in rural Vermont.

Preceded by

The Old Young Crow (Japan/U.S., 2023)

A captivating mix of live-action and animation brings to vibrant life the story of a young Iranian boy and a mysterious but inspiring encounter he had in a Tokyo cemetery.

- June 15, 7:30 p.m.
In-person: Marva Nabili, filmmaker.

The Sealed Soil (Iran, 1977), *world restoration premiere*

As her family and neighbors prepare to relocate due to a government-mandated construction project, a young woman refuses all suitors and cultivates a private inner world, acts of rebellion her family interprets as demonic possession. A subtle, powerful exploration of female resistance, the earliest complete surviving feature film directed by an Iranian woman, writer-director Marva Nabili's *The Sealed Soil* returns to the big screen after almost 50 years in this world restoration premiere.

- June 21, 7:30 p.m.
Cause of Death: Unknown (Iran, 2023)
A passenger van carrying a disparate group of travelers cross-country to Tehran becomes a microcosm of a society on the edge in writer-director Ali Zarnegar's high-tension thriller. When one of them dies suddenly in the night with a relative fortune in U.S. currency, the others fear unwelcome entanglement with the authorities until fear turns to scheming and they each try to turn the situation to their advantage.

Preceded by

Born Again Virgin (U.S./Iran, 2022)

On the eve of her wedding a young woman faces intense pressure to undergo a surgical procedure intended to "restore" her virginity.

- June 22, 7:30 p.m.
Roxana (Iran, 2023)
A young man drifts through life until a chance encounter with a young woman after a break-in focuses his energies on helping her get back on her feet. Her troubles quickly become his and soon they're both over their heads. Writer-director Parviz Shahbazi builds an arresting take on the experience of young Iranians struggling to find their way and start their lives in a world where one misstep can have the direst of consequences.

Preceded by

Titanic, Suitable Version for Iranian Families (Iran/France, 2023)

A team of Iranian television censors debate the finer points of on-screen propriety while outside their office window more consequential forces are beginning to stir.

- June 23, 7:00 p.m.

[Empty Nets](#) (Germany/Iran, 2023)

The rarefied but rough-and-tumble world of caviar smuggling is the milieu for writer-director Behrooz Karamizade's tense feature debut, a suspenseful critique of opportunity and tradition in Iran. Amir and Narges are young and in love but from different worlds which only means complications. Before they can marry he must prove himself to her strict father, leading him to take ever greater chances as a fisherman on the Caspian Sea.

- June 28, 7:30pm

[Achilles](#) (Iran/Germany/France, 2023)

Unable to pursue his chosen career, Farid (Mirsaeed Molavian) resigns himself to working as a caregiver at a hospital in Tehran. Demoted and dejected, Farid finds a path back to life through a political prisoner isolated in the high security psychiatric ward. A riveting story of perseverance and resistance, writer-director Farhad Delaram's feature film debut made its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival.

Preceded by

Lioness — A Freedom Project for Iran (U.S., 2023)

A clarion call in support of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and to honor the "tenacity and fearlessness" of Iranian women in their "unyielding pursuit ... towards their emancipation."

- June 29, 7:30 p.m.

[Dark Matter](#) (Iran, 2023)

Director Karim Lakzadeh channels the French New Wave by way of Jim Jarmusch into this wildly unexpected and entirely welcome independent Iranian production. A trio of aspiring, young filmmakers throw caution — and the hijab (literally) — to the wind when they rob a local gangster to fund their DIY movie. Shot largely in black and white, *Dark Matter* exudes a playful cool and an infectious love of cinema. A boy, a girl and a gun Iranian-style.

- June 30, 7:00 p.m.

[In the Land of Brothers](#) (France/Iran/Netherlands, 2024)

Directors Alireza Ghasemi and Raha Amirfazli tell a powerful story across three interconnected episodes of an Afghan refugee family's generational struggle to make a home in Iran. Nuanced and affecting performances from the largely non-professional cast and a piercing sense of injustice that never slips into the melodramatic contributed to Amirfazli and Ghasemi's win for Best Directing in the World Cinema category at Sundance.

Preceded by

Lost Swan (Iran, 2022)

The haunting story of a rural school teacher who becomes a surrogate mother to raise funds for her gender transition surgery only to learn the prospective mother can't pay.

Program generously funded by the Farhang Foundation.

For all program details and admission information, please visit cinema.ucla.edu. *Schedules and guest speakers subject to change.*

About Farhang Foundation

Farhang Foundation is a member supported nonreligious, nonpolitical, and not-for-profit foundation with the sole mission to celebrate and promote Iranian art and culture for the benefit of the community-at-large. For more information please visit Farhang.org.

About the UCLA Film & Television Archive

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 450,000 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 Archive's 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.