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IRANIAN FILM FESTIVAL RETURNS TO THE HIGH FOR 13th YEAR

Iranian Film Today
January 7–22, 2011

ATLANTA, December 6, 2010 – The High Museum of Art will host the 13th annual Iranian Film Today film festival in January 2011. Featuring six films, this year’s festival includes both seasoned, award-winning filmmakers Bahman Motamedian (“Sex My Life”) and Ramtin Lavafipour (“Be Calm and Count to Seven”) and the feature debuts of several filmmakers including Shalizeh Arefpour (“Heiran”) and Shirin Neshat (“Women Without Men”).

“Despite the repression of dissenting voices in Iran, its filmmakers continue to produce cinema that holds its own on the world’s screens,” said Linda Dubler, curator of media arts at the High. “The 13th annual Iranian Film Today presents diverse views of Iranian society, from the edgiest documentary to the most elegant art film. Ranging from the exploration of the role of women in an Islamic theocracy to the marginalization of gays and lesbians and the fate of refugees, this year’s festival is full of revelations and new discoveries.”

Iranian Film Today begins on Friday, January 7, with “Payback” from noted feminist director Tamineh Milani. Inspired by a 2001 stint in prison, the film is a pointed dramatic comedy about a paroled female ex-con who convinces three other women—all of whom have spent time behind bars—to join her in a get-rich-quick scheme: they will pose as prostitutes and fleece gullible married men who are looking for a little outside action. As Barbara Scharres wrote in the Gene Siskell Film Center’s calendar, “While director Milani doesn’t shun the darker implications of the plot, she infuses the caper with some nasty fun and a dominatrix vibe when these four young women deftly turn the tables on their would-be male predators.”

In his feature debut, director Shalizeh Arefpour presents a revealing look at the complex and troubled relationship between Iranian society and Afghan immigrants and refugees as well as a poignant love story in “Heiran,” on Saturday, January 8. The story unfolds as Mahi, an Iranian high school student, falls in love with Heiran, an illegal Afghan immigrant, and the two go to Tehran to be married, despite the vehement opposition of their families. There Mahi’s innocence and Heiran’s vulnerability combine to make their life far less idyllic than they imagined.

On Friday, January 14, director Bahman Motamedian’s “Sex My Life” explores the lives of seven transsexuals who confront the prejudices of a homophobic society and the alienation that comes from being shunned and misunderstood daily. A blend of documentary and scripted, reality-based fiction cast with non-professional, transsexual actors, this daring and telling work was banned in Iran, a country where homosexual acts are punishable by death yet transexuality is allowed.

An award-winning film from cinematographer-turned-director Ramtin Lavafipour, “Be Calm and Count to Seven” will be screened on Saturday, January 15. Set in the beautiful, isolated islands of the Persian Gulf,

the film revolves around a boy named Motu, who dreams of becoming rich and famous like his hero, Brazilian soccer god Ronaldinho. But his father's recent disappearance while transporting illegal human cargo is a pressing reality, as is Motu's involvement with a smuggling gang. Now responsible for his family, Motu must deal with the ever-vigilant police, the thrill and monetary rewards of evading the law and the changing face of life in what was once a traditional fishing village.

Described in The Lincoln Center's "New Directors / New Films" program as "[a film that] marks a new chapter in the fascinating evolution of Iranian cinema," "Tehroun," on Friday, January 21, is the debut feature of Nader Homayoun. The film captures a caustic portrait of modern Iran as three young men try to make it in the city, where they find that high hopes and the willingness to work hard are not enough. Ibrahim, who has left his pregnant wife behind in their village, slides into a life of crime through what looks like a relatively harmless con and soon finds himself heavily in debt to a very dangerous boss. Ibrahim's pals conspire to help him out, but their solution is as dark as the no-exit situation that confronts him at every turn.

"Women Without Men" marks the end of the film series on Saturday, January 22. It is the first film from Shirin Neshat, an acclaimed visual artist known for her still photography and video installations that deal with gender issues in Islamic society. Set in 1953, just after a CIA-backed coup overthrew a democratically elected government and installed the Shah to power, the film traces the intersecting lives of Zarin, a prostitute who has fled the brothel in which she works; Munis, who is essentially held prisoner in her own home by her deeply religious brother; Munis's friend Faezeh, who shares the brother's faith and dreams of marrying him; and Fakhri, a wealthy woman stuck in a unhappy marriage to a bullying military man. *New York Times* writer Stephen Holden described the film as "visually transfixing."

Film Series Schedule

All films are screened at 8 p.m. (unless otherwise noted) in the Richard H. Rich Theatre, located in the Memorial Arts Building, adjacent to the High at Peachtree and 15th Streets in midtown Atlanta. All films are in Persian with subtitles.

"Payback"
Friday, January 7

"Be Calm and Count to Seven"
Saturday, January 15

"Heiran"
Saturday, January 8

"Tehroun"
Friday, January 21

"Sex My Life"
Friday, January 14

"Women Without Men"
Saturday, January 22

Support

The 13th annual Iranian Film Today is co-organized by Linda Dubler, curator of media arts at the High Museum of Art, and Iranian cinema specialist Reza Sohrabi, who generously donated his time and expertise to this program. 35mm projection facilities in the Rich Auditorium were provided by a gift from George Lefont. Generous support of the High's international film series is provided by the Woodruff Arts Center Celebrates Diversity Initiative through the generous support of Turner Broadcasting System, Inc.



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Tickets

Tickets can be purchased in advance by visiting the Woodruff Arts Center Box Office, calling 404-733-5000 or going online to www.High.org. Admission prices are \$7 for the public and \$6 for Museum members, students and seniors. Patron-level members enter free. Tickets may also be purchased at the door on the night of the screening.

Film Information

The public may call the High's film hotline at 404-733-4570 for up-to-the-minute information about visiting directors, receptions, changes or cancellations and for a free subscription to the quarterly film calendar. The Museum's website is www.High.org.

High Museum of Art

The High Museum of Art, founded in 1905 as the Atlanta Art Association, is the leading art museum in the southeastern United States. With more than 12,000 works of art in its permanent collection, the High Museum of Art has an extensive anthology of 19th- and 20th-century American and decorative art; significant holdings of European paintings; a growing collection of African American art; and burgeoning collections of modern and contemporary art, photography and African art. The High is also dedicated to supporting and collecting works by Southern artists and is distinguished as the only major museum in North America to have a curatorial department specifically devoted to the field of folk and self-taught art. The High's media arts department produces acclaimed annual film series and festivals of foreign, independent and classic cinema. In November 2005, the High opened three new buildings by architect Renzo Piano that more than doubled the Museum's size, creating a vibrant "village for the arts" at the Woodruff Arts Center in Midtown Atlanta. *For more information about the High, please visit www.High.org.*

The Woodruff Arts Center

The Woodruff Arts Center is ranked among the top four arts centers in the nation. The Woodruff is unique in that it combines four visual and performing arts divisions on one campus as one not-for-profit organization. Opened in 1968, the Woodruff Arts Center is home to the Alliance Theatre, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art and Young Audiences. *To learn more about the Woodruff Arts Center, please visit www.woodruffcenter.org.*

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DIGITAL IMAGES FOR THE FILMS ARE AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST**Media Contact:**

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