

13/20

## From Tehran with Love: The Cinema of Mania Akbari

Season includes the director onstage at  
BFI Southbank on Wednesday 17 July



**4 June 2013, London.** In July BFI Southbank will present a short season dedicated to the work of Iranian director and actress **Mania Akbari**. The highlight of the season will be a **Q&A with the director** following a screening of her debut fiction film **20 Fingers** (2004) on **Wednesday 17 July**. Akbari is perhaps best known for her leading role in **Abbas Kiarostami's** *Palme d'Or* nominated **Ten** (2002), an innovative mix of fiction and documentary partly inspired by her own experiences. Since then, Akbari has become one of Iran's boldest and most relevant filmmakers. Her concerns with oppression, gender politics and the body as a hive of suffering and constant cosmetic attention echo those of filmmakers as radical and diverse as Todd Haynes, Jane Campion, David Cronenberg and Pedro Almodóvar. Titles screening in the season will include **One. Two. One.** (2007), **30 Minutes to 6AM** (2011) and **From Tehran to London** (2012). This season offers audiences a rare chance to hear from a filmmaker with a distinctive voice, and explore the early stages of a career which has surely only just begun to flourish.

After a career as a painter for a number of years **Akbari's** career took a different turn – in 2002 she took the lead role in Kiarostami's **10**. A year later, she co-directed her first documentary, **Crystal** (2002), and soon after that made her first fiction feature, **20 Fingers** (2004). The latter demonstrates Akbari's fearlessness to engage directly with the politics of male-female relationships in Iran, highlighting differing attitudes towards such issues as virginity, fidelity, pregnancy and abortion. Her approach to filmmaking has meant that she found herself, like many other Iranian filmmakers such as Jafar Panahi and Mohammad Rasoulof, at odds with the Iranian authorities:

*"I always faced plenty of restrictions and obstacles, and of course, my gender was a significant contributing factor too. As time went by, making films in Iran just kept becoming more and more difficult, and as evidence shows, many film-makers were threatened, and some were even thrown in jail...to escape this state of contamination, I left Iran, with grief and sorrow, despite all my love and fascination for that geographical expanse" – Mania Akbari, June 2013.*

After having diagnosed with cancer, Akbari made **10+4** (2007), which is in some degree, a belated sequel to *10*. Interspersing astute observations on gender politics, bodies, attitudes towards illness and other related topics with moments of dark humour and (very touchingly) song, the film impresses for its courage and honesty. Also screening will be her latest film **From Tehran to London** (2012), which tells the story of a bickering couple who find tensions within their marriage mounting. Akbari began producing the film clandestinely in Iran, but eventually 'completed' the film in London after her departure from her homeland.

**Mania Akbari will be available for interview, please make any requests to Liz Parkinson, Assistant Press Officer, BFI Southbank.**

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### **Screenings taking place in the season:**

#### **10**

*Iran 2001. Dir Abbas Kiarostami. With Akbari, Amin Maher. 92min. EST. 12A*

Kiarostami's groundbreaking digital movie comprises ten conversations in a car filmed with two cameras fixed to the dashboard, one trained on the divorcee driver (Akbari), the other on her various passengers, including her memorably argumentative ten-year-old son. It was partly – but only partly – inspired by Akbari's own experiences, and the distinctive mix of minimalist style and emotional, political and philosophical depth in its evocative account of the lives of women in modern Tehran was to influence her own later work.

**Sun 14 July 18:20 NFT2**

**Sat 27 July 20:40 NFT2**

#### **20 Fingers**

*Iran 2004. With Akbari, Bijan Daneshmand. 72min. Video. EST*

Dedicated to Kiarostami, and consisting of seven variously fraught conversations between a woman (Akbari) and a man (Daneshmand, who also produced) which take place mostly in moving vehicles, Akbari's first feature proper is indebted to *10*. That said, it engages more directly with the politics of male-female relationships in Iran, highlighting differing attitudes towards such issues as virginity, flirtation and fidelity, pregnancy and abortion, freedom and sexuality. Simultaneously bold and subtle, daring but discreet, it makes effective use of place and pace.

**\* Q&A with Mania Akbari**

**Wed 17 July 18:20 NFT2\***

**Tue 23 July 20:40 Studio**

#### **Crystal**

*Iran 2002. Dir Akbari, Mahmood Ayden. 54min. Video. EST*

Akbari's first film as (co-)director is on one level a fascinating documentary about Ayshe, a 19-year-old from a village in Kurdistan who has for some years been suffering a mysterious condition whereby she has been producing crystals that emerge painfully from different parts of her body. But at the same time it's also, characteristically, an exploration of the clash of modernity and traditional values, of science and superstition, and of the status of women in certain societies.

**+ 10+4 Dah be alaveh chahar**

*Iran 2007. With Akbari, Amin Maher, Roya Akbari. 77min. Video. EST*

To some degree this is a belated sequel to 10, made after Akbari had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Again, the film initially makes fruitful use of conversations in cars (with son Amin, among others), though Akbari proceeds to range more widely than Kiarostami in her use of camera angles and locations. Interspersing astute observations on gender politics, bodies, attitudes towards illness and other related topics with moments of dark humour and (very touchingly) song, the film impresses for its courage and honesty.

**Tue 16 July 18:00 NFT2**

**Wed 24 July 18:00 Studio**

**One. Two. One** Yek. Do. Yek.

*Iran 2007. With Neda Amiri, Payam Dehkordi. 79min. Video. EST*

Combining meticulously timed lateral tracking movements and static shots that make inventive use of off-screen characters and sound, Akbari assembles a series of extended scenes in key locations – a beauty parlour, a psychiatrist's, a prison, a restaurant, a funicular, etc – to trace a woman's changing attitudes towards the variously violent, shallow and cowardly men in her life. A film about wounding and healing, trust and betrayal, dependency and growth, which leaves sufficient narrative space for imaginative engagement and reflection.

**Wed 17 July 20:40 NFT2**

**Thu 25 July 18:40 Studio**

**30 Minutes to 6AM**

*Iran 2011. 56min. Video. EST*

The title alludes to the hour set for the execution of a 17-year-old boy who stabbed and killed a friend in a fight; according to the law of the Islamic Republic, a murder victim's family must either forgive the culprit or opt for the death penalty. Akbari solicits different opinions from a wide range of interviewees, punctuating their comments with scenes from popular Iranian films to demonstrate how machismo, traditional concerns with honour and reputation, and religious lore have propagated a culture in which notions of retribution are rife.

**+ From Tehran to London**

*Iran 2012. With Neda Amiri, Bijan Daneshmand, Akbari. 45min. Video. EST*

Already given to bickering with each other, a well-off publisher and a poet find the tensions within their marriage mounting when the live-in maid at their country house is no longer around and the wife's sister (Akbari) comes to visit. An illuminating, incisive look at different attitudes to traditional gender roles that resonates with unspoken emotions and secret desires, the film was 'completed' in London for reasons made painfully clear during the opening and closing sequences.

**Thu 18 July 18:10 NFT2**

**Sun 28 July 16:20 Studio**

## **NOTES TO EDITORS:**

### **About the BFI**

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- Connecting audiences to the widest choice of British and World cinema
- Preserving and restoring the most significant film collection in the world for today and future generations
- Championing emerging and world class film makers in the UK
- Investing in creative, distinctive and entertaining work
- Promoting British film and talent to the world
- Growing the next generation of film makers and audiences

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**Tickets for FREE screenings and events must be booked in advance by calling the Box Office to avoid disappointment**

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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