

OBITUARY

Dariush Mehrjui

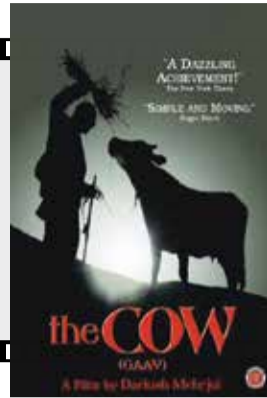
(1939–2023)



Dariush Mehrjui, the renowned Iranian auteur, was stabbed to death on October 14, 2023, at his home in Zibadasht, Alborz Province. The motive for the murder is not yet known. The prolific director has left behind a complex legacy in the world of Iranian cinema. With a career spanning more than five decades, Mehrjui was a visionary director who tried to depict humankind's existential questions on the silver screen. Born on December 9, 1939, in Tehran, Mehrjui's passion for the arts emerged during his teen years. His first artistic pursuit was music, but soon after, he took a liking to the art of cinema. After completing his preliminary education in Tehran, Mehrjui went to California at the age of 20 to pursue his education. First he aspired to major in cinema, but soon left it in favor of philosophy. He graduated from UCLA in philosophy in 1965. One year later, he returned to Tehran. Mehrjui's directorial debut came in 1967, with the expensive movie 'Diamond 33', which turned out a flop. However, this film marked the beginning of his prolific career and established him as a leading figure in the Iranian New Wave Cinema. Throughout his career, Mehrjui continued to experiment, never shying away from making the movies he felt like making. Occasionally, he was able to create cinematic masterpieces that explored complex themes such as social inequality, cultural identity, and the human condition. His films, including 'The Cow' (1969), 'The Cycle' (1977), and

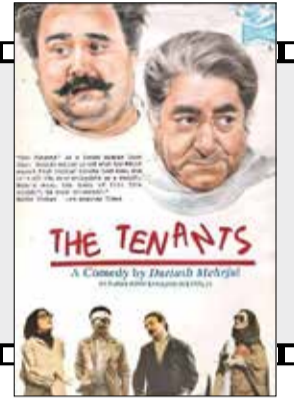
'Hamoun' (1989), embodied his unique storytelling abilities and his deep understanding of the human psyche. Mehrjui's films often reflected the socio-cultural realities of Iran, offering profound insights into the very fabric of Iranian culture. Although Mehrjui was a talented director, he wasn't as skillful in writing original screenplays. His best works are arguably the film adaptations of the stories he liked: 'The Cow', 'Hamoun', and 'Mum's Guest', among others. However, Mehrjui brought his distinctive voice and vision to the stories he told. His ability to craft compelling narratives with rich characters garnered him domestic and international recognition, and his films were screened at prestigious film festivals in Iran as well as around the world. His films have won numerous awards and accolades. Mehrjui's works are known for offering fresh insights into the Iranian psyche, serving as a catalyst for dialogue and reflection. More often than not, his films encourage audiences to question prevailing norms and engage in meaningful conversations. Dariush Mehrjui's impact on Iranian cinema is undeniable. His films will undoubtedly continue to inspire generations of filmmakers and cinephiles. They possess the ability to remind us of the power of storytelling and cinema's potential in transcending boundaries.

SELECT FILMOGRAPHY



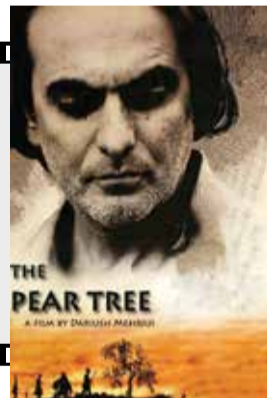
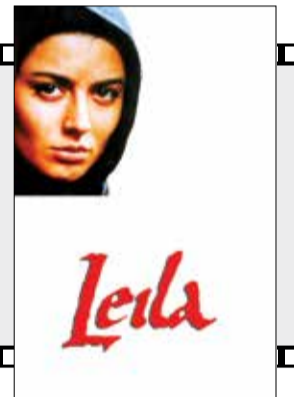
Based on the novella of the same name by Gholam-Hossein Saedi, 'The Cow' stands as a timeless cinematic masterpiece that depicts the profound bond between Masht Hassan, a middle-aged Iranian villager, and his cherished cow. This poignant film opens with a vivid portrayal of the deep connection between the villager and his bovine companion, illustrating the centrality of the cow in his life. In a community where children are scarce and the land is arid, the cow represents not only a source of sustenance, but also a symbol of hope and stability for Masht Hassan. As his sole valued possession, the cow's demise brings about unfathomable tragedy for an alienated Masht Hassan.

In the outskirts of Tehran in the late 1980s, a rundown building stands as witness to the struggles faced by its tenants. With no legal heir to claim ownership, these residents find themselves entangled in a web of housing problems that threaten their very livelihoods. Major repairs loom overhead, while the pending threat of eviction hangs like a dark cloud, fueled by the greed of a building manager who aspires to own the property. With an ensemble cast, the comedy has been widely acclaimed as the best Iranian comedy of the 1980s.



Hamid Hamoun, an executive at a leading import-export firm, lives with his wife Mahshid, a budding artist of abstract paintings. Coming from a well-to-do family, Mahshid has married the middle class Hamoun after falling for his intellectual tastes and progressive views. However, after seven years of marriage, Mahshid's love has begun to fade, and she views Hamoun as a blocking force against her desire to become what she wants to be. Hamoun, who aspires to become a writer, occasionally takes his frustration with a mundane life out on his wife. Filled with major existential themes, Hamoun is arguably Mehrjui's most sophisticated film.

Leila and Reza, an Iranian couple who are espousing somewhat modern ideas, are happily married. Unfortunately, Leila finds out that she is unable to conceive. It becomes a source of concern for the family, as Reza's mother, adhering to traditional beliefs that everything should be passed down to the son, insists that Reza must have children. Despite Reza's firm stance against wanting children, his mother suggests that he take a second wife. Resolutely, Reza refuses the idea, while his mother continues to advocate for it. Mehrjui's social drama remains to this day one of the best critics of a society stuck in the crossing between tradition and modernity.



In this widely acclaimed movie of the late 1990s, Mehrjui narrates the story of Mahmoud, a writer suffering from writer's block. As he is unable to work on the book at hand, he decides to take a break from his routine life. He plans to visit his family's rural estate in northern Tehran, where he also intends to complete his book. While at the estate, an old pear tree, planted by the old gardener, catches Mahmoud's attention. Seeing the tree brings out in Mahmoud nostalgic feelings he harbored towards then 14-year-old cousin, known only as M, and the rest of the film chronicles his thoughts about his past.

Mrs. Effat, a mother of two, receives news that her nephew and his wife will be coming to visit. Despite living a hand-to-mouth life, she endeavors to host a respectable dinner party with the assistance of her cinema-loving husband, Mr. Effat, and their two children, Amir and Bahareh. Their drug-addicted neighbor, Yusef, as well as another neighbor, an eccentric old lady responsible for tending to her chicken, help her throw a feast in a light-hearted, feel-good comedy that has become one of Mehrjui's most beloved movies.



One of Mehrjui's more controversial films, 'Santouri' revolves around the life of Ali Bolourchi, a santour (dulcimer) player, who narrates his journey after his wife Hanieh leaves him. Ali's livelihood now depends on playing music with his band at weddings and house parties, where instead of receiving monetary support, he often receives a substance to fuel his heroin addiction. Tragedy strikes when a mob opposed to a wedding violently interrupts the party, causing chaos, destruction, and leaving Ali with a broken arm. The story then takes us back to happier times, showcasing Ali and Hanieh crafting the lyrics of a song he is to perform at a wedding.