



Iran, Tajikistan strengthen tourism ties with visa-free travel: *Minister*

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran and Tajikistan have taken a major step towards enhancing their tourism and cultural ties by mutually agreeing to abolish visa requirements for air travel between their capitals, Tehran and Dushanbe. Iranian Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts, Reza Salehi Amiri, expressed optimism about the impact of this decision, stating, "The previous agreement only covered visa-free travel between Tehran and Dushanbe, but now, with the new agreement, citizens of both countries can travel from any region in Iran to any region in Tajikistan and vice versa without a visa."

The minister highlighted the potential for increased tourism, noting the current figures of around 8,600 Iranian tourists visiting Tajikistan and 1,500 Tajiks traveling to Iran annually. He aims to bump these numbers up to 100,000 with the visa-free travel arrangement, IRNA reported. The new policy, approved by Iran's Cabinet, will take effect on February 3, 2025. It allows citizens of both countries holding ordinary passports to travel freely between Tehran and Dushanbe, with a maximum stay of 30 days within a 90-day period. Furthermore, addressing concerns about foreign tourists visiting Iran during the upcoming Nowruz celebrations, which



coincide with the holy month of Ramadan, the minister assured that Islamic customs and traditions will be respected, and guidelines will be issued to tourist destinations, hotels, and other relevant establishments to facilitate this.



Cinematographers: From camera lens to canvas

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EXCLUSIVE

Cinema, with all its glamour, the red carpet, the continuous flashlights, the press conferences, the smiles in front of the cameras, the colorful and glamorous costumes, the fame, the money, and the popularity, has another side to it. A side where cinematographers seek refuge in the white canvas, in the sketchbook, in the sculpture mold. This is the other side of the cinematographers. Cinematographers who are known by the film industry as directors, actors, or designers, but their other artistic experiences in other media are unknown. Artistic experiences that do not allow depression, work pressure, unemployment, or censorship to stop them from creating. An exhibition of visual arts by cinematographers, titled 'The Other Side,' is being held at the Contemporary Soo Collection, featuring the works of cinematographers who also create art outside of the film industry. The exhibition is curated by Omid Bonakdar and dedicated to the memory of Nosrat Karimi, Jamshid Mashayekhi, Dariush Mehrjui, Abbas

Kiarostami, Shahrokh Ghiasi, Atilla Pesyani, Nader Torkaman, and Vahid Nasirian. The show showcases the works of Mehdi Ahmadi, Roya Afshar, Reza Babak, Parviz Parastui, Amir Shahab Razavian, Mohammad Ali Sajjadi, Mehrab Ghasemkhani, Siroos Moghaddam, Shahrokh Foroutanian, Anahita Dargahi, and others.

Falling in love with cinema through painting

Omid Bonakdar, the exhibition's curator, is an Iranian director, screenwriter, editor, and painter who also has non-cinematic artistic activities spoke to Persian Iran Newspaper about the exhibition's inception. He said, "I'm primarily a cinematographer, but my artistic journey began with painting. Seeking collaborative visual arts, I studied set design with Iraj Raminfar, where I discovered my passion for cinema and shifted my focus to filmmaking."

New opportunity for avant-gardes

Bonakdar added, "For years, I balanced painting and cinema until I stepped away from the film industry a while ago, returning to visual arts. After group exhibitions, I held my solo show, 'Zoroaster's Legacy.' I realized many

cinematographer friends were also visual artists, inspiring me to curate 'The Other Side,' which took eight months of preparation."

Regarding the curation of 'The Other Side' exhibition, Bonakdar explained, "There were two criteria: selection and gallery space arrangement. In terms of selection, my primary concern was to ensure that the presented works had good quality and were aesthetically defensible, maintaining the dignity of the cinematographers. He continued, "The Soo Contemporary Art Gallery has two floors, both dedicated to this exhibition. For the first time, gallery visitors in Iran can view a drawing by Jamshid Mashayekhi, a pencil portrait of his friend and colleague Davood Rashidi. Mashayekhi drew this portrait and gifted it to Rashidi's wife, Ehteram Boroumand. There is also a pen drawing by Amir Naderi, who has been working in the film industry outside of Iran for many years.

33 artists' works on show

Bonakdar also spoke about the various techniques seen in the works, "The works presented in this exhibition showcase different techniques. We have drawings, paintings, ceramics, and sculptures. For example, Ahoo Kheradmand's works are in gouache, Parviz Parastui's paintings are in pastel and acrylic, and Anahita Dargahi's works are in acrylic. The media of the works vary, and we have tried to showcase the other side of the visual arts of cinema artists, excluding photography and video, which are closely related to cinema itself. Parviz Parastui's works, which are being exhibited to the public for the first time, include both paintings and sculptures. My dear late friend Atilla Pesyani has two wall sculptures in the exhibition, made from wood, rope, wire, and recycled materials. The works of several other artists, such as Nazanin Farahani, who has four ceramic pieces, are also

being exhibited for the first time. In total, 33 artists are featured in this exhibition, and I have made every effort to ensure it is a comprehensive show."

Harmony between visual arts and cinema

Amir Shahab Razavian, a director and screenwriter, is one of the cinematographers who also engages in visual arts and has exhibited his works in 'The Other Side' exhibition.

Regarding his works, Razavian explained, "My works are inspired by traditional painting, combining miniature, coffee-house painting, storytelling, and nast'aliq calligraphy." He considered his paintings to be more illustrative and added, "I wrote the stories myself, drawing from my personal experiences during the revolution and the war between 1978 and 1988. After writing the stories, I created characters based on them, and each work has a narrative, like a storytelling performance, where the stories begin and end." Regarding his non-cinematic artistic activities, Razavian said, "In the field of visual arts, I have designed posters and held several painting exhibitions in Iran, the United States, Canada, and Germany. My previous works in painting are in black and white, but the works displayed in this exhibition are in color."

Each work has its own world

Mohammad Ali Sajjadi, a director, screenwriter, producer, editor, painter, and writer, whose works are on display at the exhibition said "I became seriously interested in calligraphy and painting from the second grade of elementary school and practiced calligraphy for a long time. Later, I became interested in animated painting, and at the age of 13, I made my first film, 'Who's the Smartest?' using animation techniques." He expressed his happiness with painting, saying, "Over the last



12 years, painting has been integral to my life. My style blends surrealism, expressionism, and occasionally ex-surrealism, varying across my portfolio. Many of my pieces draw inspiration from the painting 'Woman with Pomegranate.'"

Influence of filmmaking thought on painting

This director and writer, when asked about the influence of his filmmaking thinking on his visual arts work, said, "Naturally, I am one person who uses various styles, methods, and tools in filmmaking, and in painting, I use different tools. However, both have aspects that share a common essence." Sajjadi, when asked about the similarities and differences between painting and cinema, said, "Cinema and painting differ in many ways, but they share the element of painting. In cinema, you collaborate with a team and equipment, while painting is a solitary pursuit with a brush and canvas. I find more freedom in painting, which is why I paint more."

Cinematographers are not limited to seventh art

Amir Hossein Sedigh, who has three works at the exhibition, explained about his passion in sculpture, saying, "I have been working with sculptures for over twenty years and have participated in four group exhibitions, but I haven't had a solo exhibition yet. My first group exhibition was thanks to a dear sculptor friend

named Ilkhan, who always insisted that I display my sculptures to be seen. Once, he took one of my newly completed works from my hands and submitted it to an exhibition! Now, after a few years, I've realized that it's good for the energy of these sculptures to be spread to other people's homes, and not just fill my own house. The sculptures I've created use various materials: Stone, bronze, wood, plaster, and papier-mâché, and I've used almost all sculpture materials." Unfortunately, in recent years, there have been many controversies surrounding exhibitions by cinematographers, who have often faced harsh criticism. My approach in this exhibition, along with Bonakdar's idea, was to show that artists working in cinema and television can have personal approaches and defensible works in the visual arts, and they are not always concerned with holding exhibitions. I believe that those who work professionally in the seventh art, whether as actors, directors, or other crew members, should have sufficient knowledge of the other six arts, from painting and literature to other forms, to present the seventh art in the best way and with the highest quality." Sedigh added in cinema, a collaborative art form, even with all the effort, the results may not be reasonable, but in sculpture, as a solitary art, with the right choice, creativity, execution, and presentation, one can claim that the work is a part of the artist's body and soul, manifested in that form.

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