



# Ali Eslami to receive Wendy Gutman Award for VR innovation at IDFA

## Arts & Culture Desk

Iranian-Dutch filmmaker and digital artist Ali Eslami is to receive the first Wendy Gutman Award at the 38th International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA), organizers announced. The €40,000 award honors creators working in documentary or immersive media who offer “innovative, connective, and imaginative” perspectives, IRNA reported.

The award was established by the Dutch Education and Culture Foundation in memory of its late director, Wendela Scheltema, and is named after her nickname, Wendy Gutman. It celebrates artistic visionaries who push the limits of digital storytelling and documentary form.

Born in Mashhad in 1991, Eslami has built a reputation as one of the most

inventive voices in virtual reality and new media art. His projects span VR environments, interactive simulations, and physical installations, all designed to blur the boundary between the tangible and the virtual.

He describes his creative method as “poetic engineering” — an exploration of how memory, perception, and emotion take shape in the digital realm.

One of his most recognized works, ‘False Mirror,’ presents a self-contained virtual world where time and space become palpable. Drawing inspiration from video games and architecture, Eslami has forged what critics call a “new language of experience,” showing how gaming technology can evolve into an independent and deeply personal art form.

The IDFA jury called his approach “idiosyncratic, exciting, and autonomous,”

praising his ability to “redefine how we perceive experience and reality.”

Eslami previously won the DocLab Award for Best Immersive Non-Fiction at IDFA in 2016 and the Gouden Kalf Award in 2020 for another experimental project.

The award ceremony took place at Het Documentaire Paviljoen in Amsterdam ahead of the 38th edition of IDFA, which runs from November 13 to 23.

This year’s festival will also screen several Iranian documentaries, including ‘As I Lay Dying’ by Mohammad Reza Farzad and Pegah Ahangarani; ‘Uzak Yollar’ by Sara Khaki and Mohammad Reza Aini; ‘The Vanishing Point’ by Bani Khoshnoudi; and ‘Fellow Citizen’ by the late Abbas Kiarostami — marking a strong Iranian presence in one of Europe’s most prestigious documentary showcases.



● ISNA

## Iranian Calligraphers Association marks 75 years



● IRNA

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Iranian Calligraphers Association celebrated its 75th anniversary on Saturday with a ceremony at Tehran’s Art Bureau, honoring masters, emerging artists, and its nationwide branches.

Gholamhossein Amirkhani, chair of the Association’s Supreme Council, and Mirheydar Moosavi, managing director, joined senior officials from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Tehran municipal authorities, and members of the visual arts community, IRNA reported.

In a recorded message, Amirkhani highlighted the Association’s growth to “over 400 branches” inside and out-

side Iran and underscored its civil-society role. “History means knowing the past so as not to repeat mistakes,” he said, urging members to read “between the lines” of history. Mousavi traced the association’s origins to 1950, noting its official registration in 1967. From three initial branches, it has expanded to more than 360 nationwide. He emphasized the association’s seven simultaneous national exams, which are evaluated through a centralized, democratic process, and its ongoing commitment to fostering justice and transparency in judging artistic work.

Awards were presented to Abolfazl Nazmparvar, Alireza Hasheminejad and Reza

Yassavoli, with Nazmparvar’s posthumous honor received by his daughter. Certificates of mastery were conferred on Fatemeh Asgari Jazi, Firuz Amini, and Kobra Yadegari, among others.

Special recognition was given to the oldest examinee, Javad Yousof Kiaei, and to Mina Taghipour and Aref Gholami, who received multiple “superior” distinctions.

Representing the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, Reza Zedvar highlighted calligraphy as a vital component of Iran’s cultural heritage and national identity.

Tehran City Council head Mehdi Chamran described Persian calligraphy as “a national identity through which Iran is recognized,” urging continued support for its transmission to younger generations.

The event concluded with the unveiling of Adab Khoshnevisi, a new calligraphy manual by Amirkhani, and the opening of ‘Iran-e Man,’ (My Iran) a national exhibition of 106 works spanning two galleries. Featured artists included Amirkhani, Keikhosro Koroush, Amir Ahmad Falsafi, and Ali Shirazi.

## Shiraz celebrates Hafez with nationwide cultural week

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Iran launched a nationwide cultural initiative to commemorate the 14th-century poet Hafez, with events spanning from October 10 to 17. The week-long celebration, coinciding with National Hafez Day on October 12, is centered in Shiraz, Hafez’s birthplace, and extends across the country and to Iranian cultural centers abroad.

At the heart of the festivities, the National Library and Archives of Fars (NLAF) unveiled the exhibition ‘Hafez Through Time’ at its southern branch in Shiraz, IRNA reported.

The display, inaugurated on October 11, showcases archival materials dating from the Qajar era to the present, highlighting the poet’s enduring legacy.

Marjan Yazdanpanahi, director of the NLAF’s southern center, noted that the exhibition comprises two main



sections: Documents detailing the restoration of Hafez’s tomb and related ceremonies, and a selection of rare handwritten manuscripts of his Divan, sourced from the National Library and the Malek Museum.

The exhibition is open daily and will remain accessible to the public until October 16. It coincides with a series of

cultural events throughout the week, including puppet opera performances, theatrical productions, and scholarly workshops.

Morteza Ranjbar, head of the Fars Culture and Islamic Guidance Department, emphasized that these activities aim to present Hafez not only as a Shirazi icon but as a shared cultural treasure of Iran.

## ‘She Is Not Here’, yet her story strikes a triumphant chord in Canada

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Iranian director Saeed Seiri’s short film ‘She Is Not Here’ has been awarded Best Film at the 6th Human Environment Care (HECare) Film Festival, held in Toronto from October 3 to 5. The festival, dedicated to themes of human rights and environmental care, recognized the film for its powerful storytelling and emotional depth.

The 15-minute drama follows the journey of Kiana, a nine-year-old girl traumatized after being separated from her mother in a



tragic accident. The film features themes of loss and resilience, res-

onating deeply with audiences and jurors alike.

Premiered by Premiere Film, ‘She Is Not Here’ features performances by Sara Mayeli and Alireza Gilouri. The film’s international distribution is managed by Premiere Film.

The HECare Film Festival, now in its sixth year, serves as a platform for filmmakers addressing pressing global issues. This year’s event attracted over 3,000 submissions, with ‘She Is Not Here’ standing out for its impactful narrative and cinematic excellence.



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Iranian director Hadi Moghaghghi’s film ‘Derno’ was honored with the Special Jury Prize for Cinematography at the third edition of the Province of Buenos Aires International Film Festival (FICPBA), held from October 1 to 10.

The award recognizes the exceptional work of cinematographer Mansour Abd-Rezaei in capturing the film’s poetic narrative, Mehr News Agency reported.

‘Derno,’ also known internation-

ally as ‘Vortex,’ is a 2024 production that explores themes of life and death through a surreal journey in the Iranian wilderness.

The story follows a driver who encounters a boy by the roadside, leading to a series of events that blur the lines between reality and imagination.

The film features performances by Moghaghghi, Mohammad Zarei, Razieh Taheri, Rouhollah Barzegar, and Anoush Homayouni.

The film’s international distribution is managed by DreamLab Films in France, under the guidance of Nasrin Mirshab.

‘Derno’ has previously been showcased at the Beijing Film Festival and the Cannes Film Festival, marking its third international appearance with the Buenos Aires recognition.