



Iranian duo storm IDFA with twin top wins in Amsterdam

Arts & Culture Desk

Two Iranian titles lit up the 38th International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam on Thursday night, with Mehrdad Oskoueï's 'A Fox Under a Pink Moon' taking Best Film in the International Competition and Morteza Ahmadvand and Firouzeh Khosrovani's 'Past Future Continuous' winning Best Film in the Envision Competition. Oskoueï's win capped a commanding presence for Iranian non-fiction cinema at this year's IDFA. His 76-minute film, co-directed with Afghan artist Soraya Khalaqi, follows her self-shot chronicle of displacement, recorded over years on her mobile phone as she moves from Afghanistan to Iran and onwards in search of a foothold in

Europe.

The jury praised its "skillful" camerawork in dangerous situations and called Khalaqi's on-screen presence "luminous," noting the close creative partnership that allowed her, in their words, to "reclaim" herself amid exile and domestic violence.

Khalaqi wrote earlier in the week that bringing the seven-year project to the screen felt like "standing bare" before hundreds of viewers, describing the long haul of finishing the film as a cycle of "fear, injury, escape, fighting, building... and building again."

The film, a joint production spanning Iran, France, Britain, the United States and Denmark, drew an extended ovation in the Dutch capital. In the Envision section, Past Future



Winners of the 8th International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) pose for a group photo to celebrate their achievements on stage, November 20, 2025.

● IDFA

Continuous impressed jurors with its hybrid structure, described as an "unusual, ironic cinematic experience" that fuses suspended time and layered memory. The panel highlighted what it called an "extraordinary text," saying the form "lifts the subject to a higher plane" as the directors play with a reality that is both invented and emotionally exact.

Each film secured a €15,000 prize.



IDFA, founded in 1988 and held annually in Amsterdam, remains

the world's largest documentary festival and a key launchpad for

filmmakers heading into the winter awards season.

Nat'l library chief calls for regional cultural cooperation, digital overhaul

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Iran's national library chief Gholamreza Amirkhani opened the seventh Conference of National Library Directors of ECO member states in the Turkish capital on Thursday, calling for "real cultural synergy" across the region and urging libraries to embrace a decisive digital shift to safeguard their shared documentary heritage. Amirkhani anchored his remarks in the long-standing cultural ties binding Iran, Türkiye, Central Asia and the Caucasus, IRNA reported. He argued that national libraries hold a strategic responsibility to protect the region's "collective memory", broaden access to knowledge and support diverse social groups through inclusive cultural programs. "We cannot afford to drift apart when our written heritage has tied us together for centuries," he said, pushing delegates to

"move beyond polite cooperation".

He used the Ankara gathering to set out Tehran's current work on manuscript preservation and bibliographic modernization. The organization, he said, has spent the past year expanding pre-publication cataloguing, tightening legal deposit workflows and building a more coherent national collection.

New digital services for provincial centers and the updated Iran's national standard aim to pull scattered resources into a unified system that researchers can trust.

During a plenary session on digital transformation, Amirkhani pressed national libraries to overhaul legacy systems and adopt serious technological tools, from mass-digitization lines and intelligent environmental-control systems to advanced forensic imaging used in manuscript analysis.

These measures, he said, help institutions keep pace with rising user expecta-

tions and protect fragile archival material from environmental stress, uncontrolled handling and regional security risks. He also singled out Iran's recent bilateral projects with Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan and Russia, saying that practical, small-scale joint ventures, shared cataloguing, staff exchanges and cross-border training, "do far more than ceremonial agreements".

Such cooperation, he argued, helps countries pool specialized knowledge and spread the costs of preservation technologies that many institutions cannot shoulder alone.

Delegates from ECO states, including the director-general of Turkey's National Library and a representative from its Culture and Tourism Ministry, spent the first day working through national statements, thematic panels and proposals for new joint working groups. Members later voted for Kazakhstan to host the next round of meetings.

Change of mediator ...

At best, Saudi Arabia might be able to act as a limited facilitator, not a full-scale mediator. And even that seems unlikely to be effective given current US positions. In fact, the main problem between Iran and the US has nothing to do with who mediates, it stems from entrenched positions. Washington is not genuinely seeking negotiations, it is pushing for its set of demands and says talks would take place only if Tehran accepts them. Iran views that as imposition or dictation, an approach that cannot lead to meaningful results.

As long as the US maintains such a stance, switching mediators will not help. A mediator should not be mistaken for a savior; the core problem lies elsewhere. One more point is that in the past, Saudi Arabia may have opposed any US-Iran agreement, especially on the nuclear front. Today, Riyadh may believe it could benefit from a resolution and therefore shows willingness. Still, this is insufficient. The issues at stake are too complex, with too many variables, and mutual distrust is deeper than ever. So, while Riyadh's declared willingness is not unwelcome, it falls far short of creating conditions for a meaningful agreement, particularly as Washington has not altered its fundamental position.

Compared with traditional mediators such as Oman and Qatar, what advantages or challenges would Saudi Arabia face?

Traditional mediators like Oman and Qatar have

established records. Oman's long experience in mediation, combined with strong ties to both Iran and the United States, has enabled it to carve out a reputation for neutrality. Its close relations with Washington have never compromised its ties with Tehran, which is precisely why it has sometimes been effective.

Qatar also maintains very close relations with the US, but after its dispute with Saudi Arabia in recent years, Doha's relations with Tehran shifted in quality, enabling it to step in at certain moments in a limited capacity. Qatar has also tried to present itself as a mediator in cases unrelated to Iran, and this broader portfolio has occasionally had spill-over effects on Iran-US issues. The nature of Saudi Arabia's relations with Tehran, however, is qualitatively different. Even if Riyadh's leadership currently enjoys warm ties with the US president, that alone is not enough. And more importantly, mediation is not the real issue here. The actual obstacle lies in the positions held by the parties, positions Iran did not change even after the recent military strike. It is unrealistic to expect that shifting the mediator would somehow turn the page.

Given the regional rivalry and history of tensions, how far is Iran willing to trust Saudi Arabia?

The matter is not one of Iran trusting Saudi Arabia. The core negotiation and the core balance must ultimately be established between Iran and the United States. Dialogue between those two has always been defined by mutual

distrust. Whether Iran and Saudi Arabia trust one another is beside the point, because it does not address the main issue.

Even if Tehran and Riyadh were to reach an understanding, the primary party Iran must talk to remains the United States. Saudi Arabia cannot be the party that determines the future path of Iran-US diplomacy.

On the international stage, how do major powers such as China and Russia view Saudi Arabia's potential attempt to play a role in this file, and would they support it?

This is ultimately a question Beijing and Moscow can answer more definitively. It also seems too early to speak with certainty. But if the question is whether they will obstruct such a role or support it, it appears likely that both capitals would prefer to see the issue resolved. Any initiative that could push the process forward would presumably be welcomed.

But the situation has not reached that stage yet. What exists so far is merely a unilateral statement by Trump in front of cameras about a supposed negotiating track, one that in reality does not exist. The US and Iran are not engaged in any meaningful or serious negotiation at present. No process has been launched. That makes Trump's announcement somewhat puzzling, and it leaves the topic far from any phase where serious discussion about great-power reactions would make sense. This question, therefore, belongs to a later stage, one that has not yet materialized.

Iranian painters bring 'Flowers' to life in Paris

Arts & Culture Desk

Five Iranian artists to open a three-day group exhibition titled 'Flowers' on November 27 in Paris, bringing their individual takes on the long-standing floral motif into dialogue with European painting traditions. Simine Paris, a small curatorial platform run by Paris-based art manager Leila Varasteh, set up the show until November 30, ILNA reported.

The exhibition anchors itself in the dense neighborhood of commercial galleries and boutique project spaces that circle the Champs-Élysées, a district that often draws collectors who track Middle Eastern art pockets emerging across Europe.

The line-up, Fereydoun Ave, Farhad Ostovani, Raana Farnoud, Mina Ghaziani and Shadi Mahsa, folds five distinct vocabularies into a single, tight space.

Each artist returns to the "apparently simple" but culturally loaded flow-

er form, a device woven through centuries of Persian poetry and miniature painting. In Iranian verse, the flower carries beauty, transience and "a sudden spark of insight", as one curator's note puts it. In European still-life painting, it rings with echoes of abundance, decay and the study of light.

The pieces range from canvases and paper works to painted boards and mixed-media surfaces. Some works push saturated pigments across the picture plane; others hold back, letting muted tones hover on sparse grounds.

The artists tap into different registers, Ave's graphic discipline, Ostovani's textured layers, Farnoud's looser rhythms, Ghaziani's studied calm and Mahsa's contemplative marks, yet the works "speak across the Mediterranean", as the organizers describe it, leaning east for their imagery while relying on the formal clarity of Western modernism.

The curatorial text frames

the flower as a shifting mask. At times it summons the imagined gardens of Persian literature; elsewhere it summons the strict compositional habits of European still-lives. The motif slips between birth and decline, abundance and withering, without settling in one place.

Each piece stands as a self-contained vignette, but together they build what the organizers call "a collective meditation" on time, remembrance and the urge to hold on to fleeting experiences. The painters move along the thin borderline between the pleasure of looking and the quiet acknowledgement that the moment will not last, a tension that the flower, in Iranian culture, has long embodied.

By setting these works side by side for only three days, Varasteh aims to keep the exhibition nimble, almost like a pop-up conversation between Iranian visual heritage and Europe's painterly past.

Fire raging in Hyrcanian Elit forest despite massive aerial response

Social Desk

A wildfire continues to burn across the steep, rocky slopes of the Elit region in the Hyrcanian forest of Marzanabad, Chalus, despite deployment of five helicopters and a 40-ton Il-76 water-bomber.

Thick smoke, high winds and rugged terrain have hampered sustained aerial firefighting, officials said.

The blaze first ignited on November 15 near a mountainous area roughly six kilometers from the village of Elit. Firefighters initially contained the fire within 24 hours, but strong winds and dry undergrowth reignited it on November 15, spreading it far beyond the original perimeter.

By November 16, flames advanced south and east, while November 17 saw the fire shrink to two eastern pockets. After appearing extinguished on November 18, the blaze flared again on November 20 and has since continued in two separate zones.

Hossein-Ali Mohammadi, head of Mazandaran's crisis management department, said

the Il-76 aircraft, dispatched from Tehran, dropped its first load of 40 tons of water directly onto the fire's core.

"In case of need, the aircraft will return to Tehran for refilling and redeployment," he added. Helicopter crews have struggled to maintain water drops due to dense smoke and the steep, rocky terrain, which officials describe as among the most difficult in recent years.

Local authorities have mobilized around 400 personnel, including forest rangers, volunteer nature-guardians, mountain rescuers and local council teams. Narrow rock faces, dense vegetation and sudden wind gusts have slowed ground efforts.

Mehdi Younesi-Rostami, governor general of Mazandaran, said 20 volunteers have been injured over the past six days while fighting the fire.

Authorities stressed that the fire is human-caused, but local residents should not attempt to enter the area, as conditions remain hazardous and all necessary firefighting resources are in place.