



The Pretender: Young filmmaker's portrait of Attar of Nishapur

I am making my new film with Oscars in mind: *Hosseinpour*

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INTERVIEW

Ramin Hosseinpour, an Iranian filmmaker, composer and architect, has been working since 2014 with an approach that brings cinema, architecture and music together. After making the experimental short films *Ghanimat* and *Eshtiagh*, he has in recent years gained a stronger presence at international festivals with *Sculpture*, a short documentary centered on Rumi and Shams Tabrizi, for which he has received several awards. Hosseinpour is



now working on *The Pretender*, a short documentary about the life of Attar of Nishapur during the Mongol invasion. The film seeks to portray the historical figure not simply through a biographical lens, but through a conceptual and mystical language. In addition to directing and writing the screenplay, Hosseinpour is composing the film's music. The international success of *Sculpture* and its run on the festival circuit have turned Hosseinpour's attention towards bigger horizons. He hopes *The Pretender* will make its way through major festivals, including Cannes, and enter the race for the Oscars. He does not consider reaching the main stages of the Academy Awards in the United States beyond the film's reach. In the following interview, Hosseinpour talks about his filmmaking journey, his experience making his earlier films, the narrative and visual characteristics of *The Pretender*, and his ambitions for the film on the international festival circuit and its path towards the Oscars.

IRAN DAILY: First, could you tell us a little about your background in short filmmaking and the path you have taken from your early

works to *The Pretender*?

HOSSEINPOUR: In 2014, I made a film called *Ghanimat*, which was an experimental short. I then made *Eshtiagh*, which was also an experimental short. That film was screened at international festivals and even made it to the final stage.

After *Eshtiagh*, I moved on to a project that took from 2020 to 2022 to complete. It was a film called *Sculpture*, which explored Rumi and his relationship with Shams Tabrizi. The film was screened at various festivals and went on to receive several international awards.

One of the most important achievements for the film was taking third place at an international film festival in Rhode Island, USA, which is considered one of the important pathways linked to the Oscars. The film later won the Special Jury Prize and Best Short Documentary at the Toronto International Nollywood Film Festival (TINFF).

What story did *Sculpture* specifically tell about Rumi and Shams Tabrizi, and from what perspective did you approach their relationship?

The story begins when Shams goes to Rumi's home. Rumi has a book in his hands containing his poems. Shams engages him in conversation and eventually takes the book from Rumi and throws it into a pool.

Rumi becomes worried, but contrary to expectations, the book remains on the surface of the water and comes back completely unharmed. I incorporated this story into the film as a conceptual adaptation. In the film, there is a sculptor sitting at his desk who hears Rumi's poetry and recreates it in his surroundings in the form of figures and sculptures. In fact, the figure that takes shape is a kind of representation of that book and of the relationship between Rumi and Shams.

The film also has the quality of a reading, with the text itself becoming part of the work, while poetry serves as one of the main elements of the narrative.

What challenges are involved in bringing profound mystical and historical concepts into the format of a short film?

When you tell a big story in a short amount of time, you must be able to bring the sequence of events and concepts together with the mise-en-scène, découpage, architecture and musical harmony, without allowing any of these elements to stick out from the overall structure of the film. Since 2014, I have been pur-

suing this approach in my mind — bringing cinema, architecture and music together. I don't see cinema as being limited simply to dialogue, actors and sets. For me, color, rhythm, space, music and concept are also languages of cinema.

Sometimes I use musical rhythm to create excitement, sometimes color, and sometimes architectural space. Ultimately, all these elements should come together in the service of a single structure.

Let's turn to your new work, *The Pretender*. How did the idea for the film and the choice of Attar of Nishapur as its central figure come about?

The Pretender is about the Mongol invasion of Iran and the city of Nishapur, as well as the life of Attar of Nishapur. The film begins in Attar's youth, when he is working in his father's apothecary and has not yet embarked on the deeper stages of his mystical journey.

Our story begins with a dervish entering Attar's shop. The dervish asks him for help, but Attar initially refuses. The dervish asks him whether he can let go of the world, but at that moment Attar is not yet ready to confront such a question.

Eventually, the dervish lays his head on the ground and dies. Witnessing this becomes the turning point that brings about an inner transformation in Attar and marks the beginning of his spiritual and mystical journey.

From there, the film follows Attar's life and thought, exploring his achievements, books and mystical path, eventually reaching the turning point of his life: his capture and death during the Mongol invasion.

So, the film is not simply a historical biography of Attar; it also has a mystical and conceptual dimension? Exactly. The film begins in a dreamlike atmosphere. One autumn evening, a dervish enters Attar's apothecary. We initially start in a real-world setting, but the camera gradually enters Attar's mind and

inner world.

Through his eyes and his gaze, we enter his mystical journey. From there, we follow his path until he reaches the point of encountering the Simurgh and the mystical concepts associated with The Conference of the Birds.

Why did you choose the title *The Pretender* for the film?

The title is taken from a work associated with Attar, and it has a specific conceptual meaning for me. The idea behind the title is connected to Attar himself and the path he takes.

On his mystical journey, unlike some other great poets, Attar does not have a constant companion or spiritual guide. Rumi had Shams Tabrizi; Khayyam, too, was connected with various people within the intellectual and scientific circles of his time. But Attar is largely alone.

Many people claim to be his companions during his life, but ultimately, what remains for Attar is solitude. That idea of *The Pretender* became important to me.

One of the film's key scenes takes place when Attar is captured by the Mongols. A Mongol soldier asks passers-by who will buy this man. A paradox emerges here: the people who claimed to stand by Attar are not there when he genuinely needs their help. That scene is very important to me. Attar has been captured, and others could do something to secure his freedom, but no one does.

I believe this injustice towards Attar has, to some extent, continued into the present day. When we talk about the great



Persian poets, names such as Hafez and Khayyam are usually mentioned far more often. Yet despite Attar's very important place, he has received much less attention in contemporary cinema and the arts.

I even feel this difference when I look at his mausoleum and its surroundings. While distinctive memorial buildings and architectural spaces have been created for some other cultural figures, there has been far less attention to Attar.

Historical films are usually very expensive to make, from recreating the period and designing sets to creating the settings for the Mongol invasion. How have you dealt with this challenge?

I am an architect and I also work in this field, so I handle an important part of the project's design and execution

myself.

At the same time, rather than going down the conventional and expensive route of historical reconstruction, I have tried to make use of animation and create a conceptual environment.

I design the scenes and concepts myself. Storyboards are then drawn up and handed over to the 3D team. The environment, characters and other three-dimensional elements are built step by step. The entire process, from designing the environments and characters through to the final production, is done manually and in real terms, without using artificial intelligence.

What stage of production is the film currently at? And do you have plans to take *The Pretender* to major festivals? Do you think it has a chance of winning?

The project is currently in

production, and I hope to finish it by the end of this year. But because it is a demanding project, I cannot rush it. We are trying to maintain the quality of the work.

If the conditions allow, we hope to make it to Cannes. For next year, my main goal is to enter the Oscar race. With *Sculpture*, I managed to reach one of the important gateways linked to the Oscars and win a Special Jury Prize. Now I will put even more effort into *The Pretender* so that we can take another step forward and make it into the main Oscar pathway in the United States. I don't think success for the film is out of the question. After my previous films gave me experience on the festival circuit and brought me close to 70 international awards, it is natural for me to have greater expectations for this new work and for a subject like Attar.



TENDER NO.: 08-38-0240005

second Announcement

The National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) is seeking to procure the specified goods listed in the table below through a Qualitative Evaluation Call for conducting a public tender via the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD). All stages of the tender process including the receipt of tender documents, submission of bidders' proposals, and the opening of bid envelopes, shall be carried out exclusively through the Government Electronic Procurement System (SETAD) portal at www.setadiran.ir. Bidders who have not previously registered must complete the registration process on the aforementioned portal and obtain an Electronic Signature certificate to participate in the tender.

Item	Material Description	Quantity
1	PARTS FOR "HYDRA RIG" COILED TUBING IN MODEL: HR660, SER. NO. J13471, JOB#302197 REF. HYDRA RIG INJECTOR CHAIN ASSEMBLY, CD316387C GRIPPER 1.25 IN. (OPTIONAL) FIRST 7_DIGIT_OF_IRANCODE:6222260,NAFT_CODE:62222605555530 P/N:CD366723	60NO
2	GRIPPER 1.75 IN. (OPTIONAL) FIRST 7_DIGIT_OF_IRANCODE:6222260,NAFT_CODE:62222605555530P/N:CD365722	60NO

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.setadiran.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 3,609,02 EURO or 6,146,945,095 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

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