



Simon McBurney (English playwright)

Theater is the art form of the present: It exists only in the present, and then it's gone.

'Mirrored Reflections' to show Iran's transformations in contemporary art

Arts & Culture Desk

An art exhibition titled, 'Mirrored Reflections,' will open Tuesday with the focus on Iran's transformations in contemporary art.

The exhibition will feature 90 artworks including paintings, photographs, posters and calligraphies from 1974 to 1984, IRNA reported.

Ayoub Emdadian, Hannibal Alkhas, Niloofar Qaderinejad, Kazem Chalipa, Bahman Mohasses, Habibollah Sadeqi, Siroos Moqaddam are among the artists whose works will be exhibited.



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The show will be held on the sidelines of the 14th Fajr Visual Arts Festival at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art.

During a press conference of the exhibition on January 11, director of the museum, Ehsan Aqaee, said it took two years to prepare for this exhibition, which concentrates on protests and revolutionary art in different decades.

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Publishers from 15 countries to participate in Tehran Virtual Book Fair

Arts & Culture Desk

A total of 20,000 books, from publishers of 15 countries, will be presented at the International Section of the Second Tehran Virtual Book Fair, said the head of the fair.

Ali Ramezani made the statement at a press conference on Sunday, adding that this virtual exhibition brings cultural justice, for equal access to books brings cultural justice.

Last year, the exhibition hosted 15,000 book titles, IRNA reported.

Publishers from Spain, Italy, India, Sweden, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Bahrain will present their products at the fair, Ramezani added.

During the first edition of the virtual book fair, people in 3,000 rural areas and 1,000 urban areas purchased books online and received them at home.

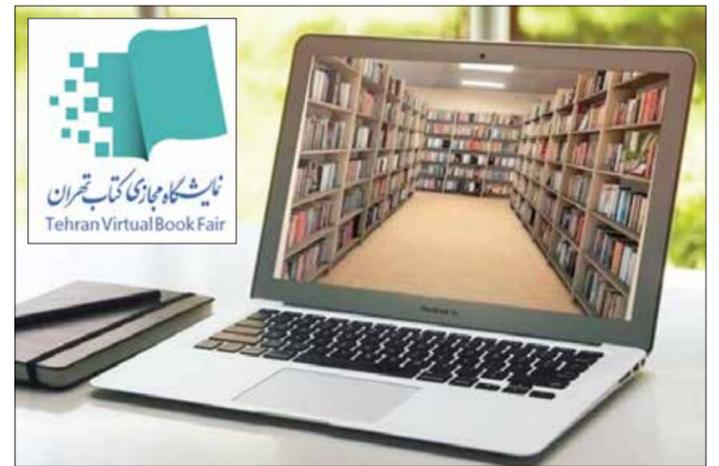
The book fair created equal opportunity for publishers to present their books, Ramezani noted.

An easier registration process for publishers, better infrastructure, and support for underprivileged areas are among the arrangements made to hold a better fair, compared to the first edition.

Thus far, 2,014 publishers have registered to participate in the exhibition, said Ramezani, noting that the figure is a 15 percent increase compared to the previous edition.

Speaking about the easier process of shopping online, Ramezani said that the book fair's website will be accessible four days ahead of the exhibition (on January 19) to give more time to book lovers to select their books.

The event will open on January 23 and will run through January 30.



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Fajr Film Festival announces documentary lineup

Arts & Culture Desk

The Fajr Film Festival (FFF) announced the lineup of eight documentaries to participate in the 40th edition of the event.

The members of the selection committee including Ahmad

Zabeti-Jahromi, Mohammad Tahaminejad, Mohammad-Ali Farsi, Mohammadreza Abbasian, and Morteza Shabani picked the following documentaries, ISNA wrote.

'That Man Came by Bus,' directed by Nima Mahdian; 'Dying' by Hojjat Taheri; 'My Brother's Gun' by Kamran



fajrfilmfestival.com

Jahedi; and 'Parsi Elementary School' by Hassan Naqqashi will be screened at the festival.

Mohammad Salimi-Rad's 'Soldier Number Zero'; Ashkan Nejadi and Mehran Nematollahi's 'Tonight's Homework' are also among the contenders.

'No One Is Waiting for You,' by Mohsen Eslamzadeh and 'One of My Dreams,' by Mohsen Hadi are the last but not least competitors of the event.

Presided over by Masoud Naqqashzadeh, the 40th Fajr Film Festival will take place in Tehran from February 1 to 11 in two Cultural and Competitive sections.

By Ali Amiri*

Because of the global pandemic, it has taken Babak Hajari and his group two years to bring this little play to the stage, and this has added to the total cost of its production which is roughly \$1,000. The play ran from December 10, 2021 until January 7, 2022, with four young, talented actors bringing the characters to life. This report is based on the performance of January 6, 2022.

More than a dozen people sit waiting in the lobby of Hilaj Film School for the play to begin. It's a black box theater dedicated to small plays produced by the institute's students or any other group willing to rent it out. Inside the room, the cast is working hurriedly in order to prepare the set. Actors are walking about the stage with their make-up on, greeting the newcomers. They are a small, intimate group of people who sound very excited to be back on stage performing their art. The director seems a bit anxious since they're running late for the night. Little by little, pieces fall together and eventually the audience comes in to fill the hall. They take up half the seats and the rest remains empty. There's no excitement in the air as the lights fade and the play begins.

'Good Night and Day' is written and directed by Babak Hajari. It's an adaptation of the 1962 novel 'Aura' by Mexican novelist Carlos Fuentes, which turned into a hit in Iran after Abdollah Kosari's translation was published. It tells the story of Felipe Montero, a young historian with a knowledge of French who enters a house to be employed by an aged widow to edit the memoirs of her deceased husband, the general. There Felipe falls in love with the ethereal, green-eyed Aura who is the widow's niece. What follows is a chilling



YASAMAN POOLADIHA

Please tell us a short account of your play, from its conception to performance.

It might seem like a trivial answer, but whenever I read a play or a novel, I unconsciously fantasize it on stage. Naturally, when we read a story, we picture it in our minds, but I fantasize it on stage. Especially on stages I have access to, namely the black box theaters. And when I'm reading, I somehow get the feeling that I

whirlwind of confusion and dismay. The story is narrated from the second person point of view and is regarded as a great achievement in magic realism. Since the publication of 'One Hundred Years of Solitude' in Farsi, Iranian readers have shown an unsurprising thirst for this literary genre.

The performance gets a standing ovation; though in the last decade this has become the norm rather than the exception. So, despite my belief that so much of the performance could've been better, I stand up to join the crowd. Then I wait for everybody else to leave so I can get down to my interview with the director.

Theater reaches parts of our unconscious Instagram and TikTok cannot

EXCLUSIVE

want to perform this special scene myself. So, when I was reading this novel a long time ago, I knew I wanted to perform it one day. I thought about it for a long time, then I wrote the play and finally we prepared it with the group and now we're performing it.

Can you tell me why 'Aura'? What spoke to you specifically in this story?

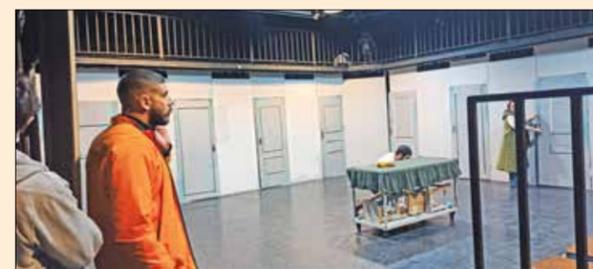
Let me tell you that my subjective world isn't a very realistic one. And of course, Latin American literature, or magic realism, appeals to me a great deal. Perhaps this specific characteristic of the novel spoke to me in such a personal way. And it must have happened unconsciously, too, because when I decided to adapt it, I didn't search for elements that tempted me to do it. But the main factors were magic realism and its interpretability.

How did you try to overcome the challenges of turning such an ambiguous story into a play?

I use a notion in my directing, in this play and the previous one, which I attribute and owe to [Ahmad] Shamlou, who is my favorite poet. There are bits and pieces in his poetry that are absolutely untranslatable, because they make no sense. But we understand them because those combinations give us a general idea. I really like to use this in my directing. To put some elements together, such as an image, a color, a voice, an action; combined they create for the audience a special atmosphere but provide them with no meaning. I want the audience to know what's going on but not to be able to explain it. I think in turning this novel to a series of images, this notion has helped me a lot.

Very interesting. How was the reception?

Taking our situation into account, I can say



YASAMAN POOLADIHA

it was a success. This theater hall is not really well-known and it's not located where theatergoers usually hang around. Also, our performance lacks those popular elements that are present in the box office hits. So, in light of all this, it was a good reception. Especially the fact that we didn't lose money and therefore can perform our next play satisfies me. But I must thank the cast and crew because they were all very accommodating and didn't ask for much money. Without them I couldn't have done this.

What do you think about small, low-budget plays in general? What are the challenges and rewards here?

These sorts of small, low-budget plays which are done usually by students and lesser-known artists are really my taste. I adore them and I wish I can do this kind of theater forever. Personally, I don't like it when productions get big, even as big as Broadway which I was able to watch on the internet during the pandemic. Those big productions turn to work. You wake up, go to the set, do your job, then come back home and sleep and it starts all over the next day. But in the world of small plays,

we see passion. People like us enjoy working alongside each other. It's very pleasing for me. I hope I can always do this.

How are the financial aspects handled?

This is indeed our biggest challenge. If we want to see some cash return, we have to follow some rules; rules that I might dislike. Still, I don't know how much longer we can keep working like this. Recently I have been grappling with some questions regarding this matter. I don't know if the cast and crew will work with me again on another project for no or little money; or else, am I selfish enough to ask them to? Does the joy of being a part of this overrule the poor financial aspect? The truth is I have no answer for them.

What do you think small groups like you can do to appeal to a generation of Instagrammers and TikTokers whose mental states are essentially far from this primitive art form?

I'm not sure if I understand your question here; but I believe that there are things in our unconscious mind, in what we call our collective unconscious, which I don't think would be accessible through Instagram or TikTok. But theater, because of its history, and because it has developed alongside humanity, has this ability to reach that part of our unconscious. Although it's true that people today are impatient, and they like to work with those applications you mentioned, so they can scroll and skip even short videos. Perhaps episodic works would appeal to them, but in general I think theater still has the ability to speak to humanity on another level.

*Ali Amiri is a staff writer at Iran Daily.