

Persia to Greece: Clash of Cultures on Display



LONDON (Dispatches) -- An exhibition opens with the two cultures facing each other, a Persian facing off against a Greek, but rather than rivals as is usually portrayed in the history books, both statues come from Cyprus, where they were jointly worshipped.

That sets the tone for this new exhibition at the British Museum which looks occasionally at the wars between the two dominant Mediterranean cultures, the Persians and the Greeks, but mainly looks at how they influenced each other and shared ideas, if not always ideals.

If you're here for the wars and battles you learned at school, then this is not the exhibition for you. Alexander the Great makes a brief appearance, but in a corner that's easy to miss.

As an exhibition, it's more interesting, looking at how the two cultures' similar and yet in places widely divergent social opinions differed. It's as if a future museum puts on a display comparing the guns and god version of America to a secularist social democratic Europe. Similar, but oh so very different.

One example on show is a typical set of Persian riding clothes, with trousers — but the Greeks considered wearing trousers to be the defining characteristic of the foreigner. There's also the difference in political systems, with the somewhat democratic Greeks vying with the monarchist Persia.

One of the defining differences highlighted by the exhibition though is the attitude to wealth. The Greeks were rich, but it was considered the height of bad manners to look rich. Any display of personal wealth was seen as decadent and putting yourself above others, in contrast to the Persians reveling in personal appearance.

Considering the people's disapproval of displays of wealth by the aristocratic members of society, what's fascinating is that there's

still a strong element of "Keeping Up with the Joneses" amongst the middle classes, and often using cheaper metals to imitate their richer neighbors. Examples in the exhibition range from fake purple dyes to simple pottery in the same design as silver vessels to bronze bowls being coated in tin to look like they're actually made of silver. That must have taken a lot of polishing.

For all their disapproval of ostentatious displays of wealth, it's not to say this is an exhibition of middle-class mundanity, as it ends with the Panagyrishte treasure — a stunning collection of ornately decorated goldware.

It helps that Athens disapproved of displays of wealth by men, for men held the political power, but women, who were powerless, were free to bling up as much as they wanted. So there's a lot of bling on display for the ladies, from small delicate jewels to marvelous goldwork such as a remarkable small model of a Persian chariot with horses.

There is a dark undertone in this exhibition in how people responded to the merging of cultures that sadly still echoes down the ages to the modern day, a concern that our native purity is being polluted by foreign influences.

"It was filthy money that first imported foreign ways, and effete wealth that corrupted our era with its disgusting decadence" — Juvenal, Roman satirical poet.

It's a reminder that millennia of development and human biases aren't really that different from our ancient cousins.

This is an exhibition that will shine a fresh light on the social and political attitudes of two rival cultures and will leave you with a better understanding of why their much better-known wars were so robustly fought — as much over treasure and land as to suppress the wrong way of thinking.

The exhibition, *Luxury and Power: Persia to Greece* is at the British Museum until August 13, 2023.

Abyar Joins Australian Festival Jury Board

TEHRAN -- Iranian director Narges Abyar has judged at the 7th edition of the Women Media Arts and Film Festival (WMAFF) in Australia.

The jury also included Australian actress and writer Kate Fitzpatrick and the New Zealand-born Australian-based filmmaker Margot Nash.

The WMAFF is a new screen culture and audience development initiative by Cinewest in partnership with Sydney Olympic Park Authority.

Three Iranian films, 'Kal Fateh' by Mehdi Zamanpour-Kiasari, 'Lady of the City' by Maryam Bahroloumi, and 'The Sun of that Moon' by Setareh Eskandari, took part in different sections of the festival.

Abyar is director of some acclaimed movies, including 'Track 143', 'Breath' and 'When the

Moon Was Full'.

She served on several jury panels at different events, including the 18th Kazan International Muslim Film Festival in Russia, the 25th Religion Today Film Festival in Italy, and the 8th Mercy to the Universe International Short Film Festival in Turkey.

She has been honored at several international festivals and cultural centers.

Earlier in March, she was honored with the Director Achievement Award at the International Women Filmmakers Festival 2022 in Izmir, Turkey.

In 2020, she received the HUM Women Leaders Award at the Governor's House in the Pakistani city of Karachi.

Her 2019 drama 'When the Moon Was Full' received the audience award at the 23rd Tallinn Black Nights Film Festival in Estonia.

Qom Holds Conference on Islam and Christianity

TEHRAN -- The 6th pre-session of the Conference on Comparative Studies of Ethics in Islam and Christianity was held at the Research Institute of Islamic Philosophy and Theology in Qom on Tuesday.

The event was held in collaboration with instructors in seminaries and universities across the country, was attended by Hojat ol-Eslam Yahya Jahangiri, the head of Qom's Islamic Culture and Communication Organization, as well as Australian author and university professor Dave Smith who is also a social justice activist.

The conference was held on the subject "Ethical relationship between humans and animals in Islam and Christianity".

Meanwhile, international students from across the globe studying at various Iranian universities donned their caps and gowns to attend their convocation ceremony in Qom.

The event is a symbol of global unity and academic achievement.



Tehran Hosts China Film Week



TEHRAN -- The 3rd edition of the China Film Week is currently underway at the Abbas Kiarostami Hall of the Farabi Cinema Foundation (FCF) in Tehran.

Five movies by the new generation of Chinese filmmakers have been selected to be screened at the event

The opening ceremony of the event was attended by Chang Hua, the Chinese ambassador to Iran, Muhammad Khazaei, the head of the Cinema Organization, and a number of Iranian filmmakers and Chinese film students.

The film festival opened with

a screening of 'The Captain' by Andrew Lau.

The organizers will also showcase 'Ala Changso' by Gyal Sonthar, 'The Climber' by Daniel Lee, 'The Wandering Earth' by Frant Gwo and 'Ash Is the Purest White' by Jia Zhangke.

According to China Film Archive director Sun Xianghui who sent a video message to the film festival, the China Film Archive has organized Chinese film festivals in 16 countries since 2022.

The China Film Week will showcase a restored edition of the film for the Iranian audience to celebrate its 100th anniversary, Sun said.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Chinese Ambassador Chang Hua also thanked the Farabi Cinema Foundation for its contribution to the film

week.

He praised the foundation for selecting the Abbas Kiarostami Hall to host the film festival and called Kiarostami a great filmmaker who visited China four times during the two final years of his life.

He said that Iranian filmmakers are frequent visitors to the Shanghai and Beijing international film festivals and have won awards at the events.

The ambassador said that works by Iranian and Chinese filmmakers have entered homes and this development can help improve cooperation between Iran and China on the film industry.

The event, which opened on Saturday, is an opportunity for movie-goers to get to know the Chinese cinema industry. It will run until May 10.

'Left-Handed' Makes It to U.S. Festival

TEHRAN -- Iranian short film 'Left-Handed' has made it to the deadCENTER Film Festival (dCFF) in the U.S.

The film directed by Nasrin Mohammadpour will represent Iran at this year's edition of the Oscars-qualifying event.

The 15-minute film is about Maryam, a woman who has made a big decision and plans to make something and is preparing herself for that act.

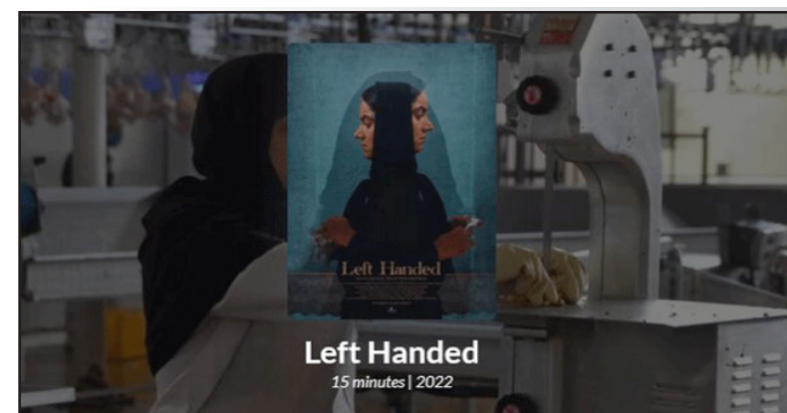
The film was previously premiered at the Seoul International Women's Film Festival (SIWFF) in South Korea.

Chosen Image Company has the international distribution rights of the film.

The deadCENTER Film Festival, hailed as one of the Top 20 Coolest Film Festivals in the World by MovieMaker Magazine, is an annual independent

film showcase that highlights over 100 indie films from across the country.

The 23rd edition of the festival is scheduled for June 8-11, 2023.



Picture of the Day



Beynabad village in Birjand, northeast Iran is tucked at the foothills of mountains. The village is rimmed by gardens of roses, which the residents harvest and use in traditional ways in May.

Photo by IRNA