

Chehrenama: Holding Time in Tehran’s Last Portrait Studio



TEHRAN -- In the shadowed veins of Tehran’s oldest quarter, where cobblestones remember the hush of carriages and call of merchants, there lives a place that has seen nearly a century pass — not as a witness, but as a storyteller.

Hidden in plain sight along the so-riated stretch of Naserkhosrow, Atelie Chehrenama — the city’s oldest living portrait studio — continues to exist, defiantly, like a frame resisting time’s blur.

Founded in 1928 by Seyyed Reza Tabatabai, Chehrenama is not just a photo studio — it’s a vault of emotion, identity, and memory. Long before selfies flooded timelines, photography was not pastime but ritual, and each portrait a kind of miracle. In those early years, clients would sit stiff in wonder, watching their like-ness slowly emerge like a ghost from chemistry and patience.

Today, inside a trio of small, dusty rooms, Ardeshir Fashami — a quiet man with kind eyes and the stillness of a darkroom — tends to this living museum. He’s the studio’s final custodian. He first walked into Cheh-renama in 1989 as an apprentice. In 2001, he bought the atelier from the Tabatabai family. He never left.

“Every image has a number,” he says softly, running his hand across drawers of large-format negatives. “If a grandchild comes looking, I can find their grandfather’s face. Even if it’s from the 1920s.”

The walls around him hold stories, and not just in frames. They whisper of times when lines snaked down the street — schoolchildren, soldiers, families in their Sunday best — all waiting for their turn in front of the lens. There was once a rhythm to the place: two photographers, two re-touchers, two printers, two assistants, and one owner. Nine people earned their daily bread from this studio. Now only Ardeshir remains.

Asked why he hasn’t taken on a student, he shrugs.

“There’s nothing left to teach,” he says. “ID photos are done by the government now. Schools have their own photographers. Even the army doesn’t send conscripts anymore. It’s all gone.”

What remains is a fierce love for a

fading craft. “If I turn this place into a café or a restaurant, I’d make ten times more,” he laughs, the sound edged with melancholy. “But I love it too much. I’ll stay as long as I can.”

He traces the beginning of the end to the early 2000s — the arrival of digital photography. Where once there was darkroom chemistry and a meditative pace, now there were pixels and instant gratification. Photographers like Ardeshir, raised in the shadows of enlargers and the slow dance of exposure, found themselves faced with Photoshop and memory cards. Many closed their shutters for good.

“Analog photography was an art of patience,” he says. “People understood the process. They came back the next day. If the shot didn’t work, we tried again. They waited five days for their pictures — and they were



grateful. Now? The first thing people ask is: can I have it in fifteen minutes?”

Chehrenama persists. A relic? Perhaps. But one that breathes.

There’s something deeply poetic — even defiant — in the way Ardeshir holds this place together. In an era where images vanish in seconds, he guards photographs that have lasted decades. In an alleyway of disappearing storefronts and shuttered history, Chehrenama glows like a filament bulb in a digital world.

Because sometimes, it’s not just about capturing a face. It’s about holding onto time.

‘Ostad’ Joins Prestigious Nebrodi Doc Lineup in Italy

TEHRAN -- The cinematic journey of “Ostad” (“The Master”), directed by Emad Hussein and produced by Behrouz Afkhami, continues to carve its path across the international festival circuit with a profound resonance.

The film has now been officially selected for the 9th Festival Internazionale Nebrodi Cinema Doc in Sicily, Italy—one of the country’s most respected platforms for showcasing independent cinema. This milestone not only underscores the film’s universal appeal but also affirms its relevance in today’s global dialogue on social realities.

From September 29 to October 5, the Nebrodi Festival will host a curated selection of outstanding films from across the world, offering audiences a chance to engage with voices that challenge, inspire, and reflect human complexity.

Ostad’s presence continues a recent string of international engagements, including its screenings at Bulgaria’s Sofia MENAR and Golden FEMI, India’s Ahmedabad International Film Festival, and the Kurdistan International Independent Film Festival in

the United States—each renowned for their dedication to independent, socially conscious filmmaking.

The film made its world premiere at the 41st Fajr International Film Festival, where Sajad Babaei’s nuanced portrayal earned him the Crystal Simorgh for Best Supporting Actor—a testament to the depth and sincerity that permeates the performances throughout the film. Alongside Babaei, actors such as Hassan Majouni, Hedyeh Husseininejad, Hoorieh Moghadam, and Mehdi Abuhamze deliver a layered exploration of idealism clashing with social realities, inviting viewers to contemplate the fragile human spirit amid societal challenges.

Ostad is a character-driven drama—intimate yet expansive—crafted with a humanistic lens that balances poetic storytelling with the harsh contours of reality. The film’s international distributor, the Sooreh International Center, continues to champion its journey, ensuring that this story finds audiences worldwide who seek cinema that is both socially engaged and deeply personal.

Back to School in Iran: New Academic Year Begins

TEHRAN — As schools across Iran reopened for the new academic year, President Masoud Pezeshkian delivered an impassioned message underscoring the importance of nurturing the talents of the nation’s youth, declaring that “students are more valuable than gold.”

Speaking at a girls’ elementary school in western Tehran on Tuesday, Pezeshkian emphasized the critical role of teachers in unlocking the latent potential within each student, calling on educators to act as catalysts in transforming raw talent into meaningful skills and knowledge.

“The future of Iran rests in the hands of these young people,” he said. “If you are willing to learn, and if the government creates the right conditions, you will become more precious than all the gold in the world.”

Highlighting the necessity of lifelong learning, Pezeshkian encouraged students to pursue knowledge and skills continuously, both inside and outside the classroom. “Science and skill are the tools to serve your families, your communities, and your country,” he said, urg-



ing young Iranians to use what they learn to address social challenges and contribute to na-

Rekindling Fires of Lost Wordsmiths Beyond Hafez and Saadi

TEHRAN -- Shiraz, the fabled cradle of Persian literature, a city eternally bound to the names of Hafez and Saadi, is much more than a mausoleum for these towering figures.

Beneath the weight of their monumental legacies lies a constellation of lesser-known poets—wordsmiths whose verses have shaped, softened, and sustained the cultural fabric of Iran’s literary capital but remain curiously absent from its collective memory.

In the bustling heart of Shiraz, where the scent of orange blossoms mingles with the dusty pages of poetry, the city’s literary pulse continues to beat—not only through the immortal couplets of Hafez’s ghazals or Saadi’s timeless wisdom, but also through the work of scores of gifted poets whose names rarely cross the lips of everyday Iranians. As recent efforts to honor these figures suggest, the city’s poetic heritage is far richer, and more complex, than the canon of two greats might imply.

A large mural installed in Imam Hussein Square, unveiled on the occasion of Persian Literature and Poetry Day, offers a striking visual testament to this overlooked legacy. Modeled as an Eastern homage to Raphael’s Renaissance masterpiece The School of Athens, the mural reimagines a gathering of Shiraz’s literary greats: alongside Hafez and Saadi, figures such as Jahan-Malek Khatun, Baba Faghani, Orfi Shirazi, and Shah Da’i-Allah occupy the space. It is a vibrant, poetic conclave—a call to remember those whose voices have been silenced by time.

Yet the challenges of preservation and recognition run deeper than a single mural. Muhammad Moradi, a Persian literature professor at Shiraz University, emphasizes the urgency of not only naming these poets but also reintroducing their works to the public consciousness.

“These poets and writers form an inseparable part of Iran’s historical and civilizational identity,” he told IRNA.

Moradi advocates for creative revitalizations—through art, theater, and new literary forms—to ensure these voices are not mere footnotes in cultural textbooks but active contributors to modern Iranian identity.

This vision is shared by literary historian Gholamreza Khosh-Eghbal, who laments the underutilization of modern digital platforms to showcase Shiraz’s extensive poetic heritage. Khosh-Eghbal enumerates a roll call of neglected masters—Pour-Fereydoun, Ruh-e Attar, Mansour Shirazi, Maktabi Shirazi,

to name but a few—poets whose influence resonates with the historical grandeur of the region but whose names remain obscure to many.

Such neglect, critics argue, does a disservice not only to Shiraz but to Iranian culture at large. Poetry here is not a static relic; it is a living, breathing force, a means of imparting hope, ethical values, and cultural pride. By neglecting the broader tapestry of Shiraz’s poets, society forfeits a vital source of spiritual and intellectual nourishment.

Mehdi Famouri, a literary researcher at Yasuj University, highlights the absence of recognition for certain figures whose contributions are no less important than those of Saadi and Hafez. He notes, for example, the omission of Homa Shirazi—whom he regards as one of the finest poets of the Qajar era—and Daavari Shirazi, whose works stand among the crowning achievements of 19th-century Persian poetry.

Famouri advocates for a simple but powerful intervention: select verses from these poets be reimagined in artistic forms that resonate with today’s audiences. “Just a single line or couplet, transformed through visual art or performance, can reconnect people with their heritage in a meaningful way.”

The need for more immersive and authentic engagement extends beyond Shiraz’s borders. Saeed Hes-



ampour, head of the Hafez Studies Center, underscores how poetry and intellectual heritage shape national identity and social cohesion. But he also warns that mere name-dropping is insufficient.

“These figures must be presented with context, with engaging narratives about their work and worldview, so that the public can grasp their relevance.”

Hesampour points to a troubling paradox: despite Shiraz’s rich cultural capital, many public spaces—street signs, shop names, public buildings—fail to reflect the city’s literary identity. This disconnect diminishes the city’s cultural atmosphere and weakens its symbolic power.

The larger implication, articulat-

tional development.

In addition to praising educators, Pezeshkian called for modernizing schools with multimedia centers, skill-based laboratories, and innovative teaching methods that combine auditory, visual, and hands-on learning experiences. “These methods deepen understanding and create synergy that makes education more effective,” he explained.

He also advocated for programs that would connect students with real-world work environments aligned with their interests and career goals. Such initiatives, he said, would enrich learning by exposing students to practical realities beyond the classroom walls.

Pezeshkian’s visit concluded with the ceremonial ringing of the school bell to mark the start of the academic year, followed by a meeting with teachers and school administrators. He reiterated his commitment to supporting educators in their “heavy responsibility” of preparing the next generation.

“Pray for your success, and we will do everything we can to help you succeed,” he said.

Picture of the Day



Pardis, tucked in mountainous terrain like a Martian colony, emerges as a hub of rapid urban growth, with new towers and infrastructure rising amid a youthful population.

Photo by Mizan Online