

FARHAD DELARAM - SAEED SHAHSAVARI
GALANGEDAN - BASIS BERLIN
UNITÉ - BARRIERI FILMPRODUKTION
Present

ACHILLES

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY FARHAD DELARAM

STARRING: MIRSAEED MOLAVIAN AND BEHDOKHT VALIAN

OFFICIAL SELECTION

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TORONTO INTERNATIONAL
FILM FESTIVAL 2023



SSIFF

NEW DIRECTORS

****World Premiere | Toronto International Film Festival | Discovery ****

European Premiere | San Sebastian Film Festival | New Directors

Iran | Germany | France | 2023 | 116 Minutes |
Language: Persian & Azerbaijani

**german
●●● films**

TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL PR:

TRACK SHOT

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SHORT SYNOPSIS:

Two fugitives in contemporary Iran encounter citizens across the country, all wounded by the same corrupt government and all united in their willingness to help the pair survive.

LONG SYNOPSIS:

Nicknamed Achilles, Farid (Mirsaeed Molavian), a former filmmaker, now works nights as an orthotist in Iran's capital. Broken by the only political system his generation has ever known, he is consumed by anger and sorrow. One night, after a colleague's devastating revelation of losing her son and additionally suffering 26 days before authorities permitted his body to be claimed, Achilles's apathy begins to crumble. Meanwhile, the administration is cracking down on his lack of rule-following, which leads him to a hospital's restricted psychiatric ward. There, he meets a sedated patient, handcuffed to her bed: Hedieh (Behdokht Valian), a political prisoner who has been institutionalized for years. Now, with the help of Achilles, she will again experience freedom — which, as those who have lived without it know, is regained at a cost. The duo's only option is to flee.

Shot on location, *ACHILLES* takes us from Tehran to the dried-up Lake Urmia in Iran's northwestern province of Shabestar, to the Caspian Sea, and, with authorities in hot pursuit, to Maku, near Turkey's border. Unbeknownst to Hedieh, who is estranged from her daughter, the journey is not entirely haphazard. Unbeknownst to Farid, his actions will ripple well beyond his own life. [SYNOPSIS COURTESY OF TIFF]

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT | FARHAD DELARAM

November 2019, one month before I started writing *ACHILLES*, marks the bloody crackdown of protests in Iran. The series of unrests was not the first but the most widespread ones since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. People stayed in the streets, families lost a member each day, but did not cringe since there seemed to be a shared pain. Meanwhile, it became evident that the government had adopted a new method to deal with political prisoners: punitive psychiatry. Even one of these prisoners, Behnam Mahjoubi perished in the hospital. On the personal level, although I was on track of success after years of passion for cinema, I felt disheartened about the role of cinema in society. Most of the artists were lagging behind and acted as mere observers of the plight.

This inspired me to create the two main characters in *ACHILLES*: A young filmmaker disappointed to follow his craft and a political prisoner labelled by the government as 'mentally ill'. *ACHILLES* tells the story of Farid, now working the night shift at a hospital who meets Hedieh, who thinks the walls talk to her. By running away with Hedieh, Farid rediscovers the hope to make a change and picks up his camera again. On their getaway journey, they meet people in different parts of Iran, all wounded by the same corrupt government and dictator, now united to bail Hedieh and Farid out.

I wrote *ACHILLES* because I am intimately familiar with the concept of the wall and confinement. I spent days in a small cell with nothing but concrete walls in front of me. Gradually, the walls were doing to me what interrogators do to a prisoner and I believe that Iranians can no longer tolerate the walls. The movement of 'Women, Life, Freedom', which started during the shooting, is a confirmation of that. The film's ending is sanguine about the prospect of a future without those walls. And I think that is the reason why such a wonderful group of people from Iran, Germany and France gathered together to make this idea come true. – Farhad Delaram

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

FARHAD DELARAM | DIRECTOR

Farhad Delaram is an award-winning writer and director who was born in Iran, in 1988. He graduated from the University of Tehran with a master's degree in cinema and has directed nine independent short films. His short, *TATTOO* won the Crystal Bear award at the 69th Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale) and screened in the Generation 14plus section. *TATTOO* has screened in over 90 film festivals across the globe picking up numerous awards along the way and is part of the Criterion Collection. *ACHILLES* is his Delaram's first feature length film and will have its World Premiere at the 2023 Toronto International Film Festival before screening at the 71st San Sebastian Film Festival.

Filmography

Writer and Director:

2023 "Achilles" - Feature Film

2022 "My Name Salma" - Short Fiction Film

2021 "Sillage: Portrait of an Onlooker" - Short Fiction Film

2020 "Expo Pandemic" - Experimental Short Film

2019 "Tattoo" - Short Fiction Film

2017 "Away from Home" - Short Fiction Film

2016 "Like the Last Day" - Short Fiction Film

2015 "IranMehr" - Documentary Short Film

2014 "Garbage Dance" - Documentary Short Film

2012 "Wax" - Short Fiction Film

BEHDOKHT VALIAN (HEDIEH)

Behdokht Valian, an innovative method actress based in Tehran, Iran, has left an indelible mark on the realm of experimental performance. Through her captivating roles in various plays, short films, and feature movies, she has significantly enriched the artistic landscape. Her focus on underrepresented minorities, including women, and individuals with disabilities, resonates powerfully, shedding light on their vulnerabilities amidst the counterculture of a patriarchal and masculine society, particularly in the Middle East.

One of her standout accomplishments includes her lead role in the short film *TATTOO*, directed by Farhad Delaram which won the Crystal Bear at the 2019 Berlin Film Festival. Moreover, her involvement in the play *TIMELOSS* propelled the production to global recognition, earning it the privilege of a world tour across numerous countries. Esteemed publications like *Le Monde*, *The Guardian*, and *The New York Times* lauded the play for its impact and creativity.

Valian's recent work, *ACHILLES*, directed by Farhad Delaram will world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) followed by the San Sebastián Film Festival (SSIFF).

MIRSAEED MOLAVIAN (ACHILLES)

Mirsaeed Molavian is a very well-known Iranian stage actor who was born in Tabriz, in 1989. As a film actor, he gained recognition after portraying Davood in Morteza Farshbaf's *TOOMAN* in 2020. Molavian earned a Crystal Simorgh nomination, a Hafez Award nomination, and an Iran's Film Critics and Writers Association Award nomination for his performance in this film.

After playing a role in the historical drama series *ONCE UPON A TIME IN IRAN* he gained popularity among the people of Iran too.

CREDITS

Director: Farhad Delaram

Writer: Farhad Delaram

Farid/Achilles: Mirsaeed Molavian

Hedieh: Behdokht Valian

Nurse: Roya Afshar

Sana: Neda Aghighi

Father: Firouz Agheli

Format: DCP

DOP: Mohammad Reza Jahanpanah

Editing: Sasan Khoshniat

Production designer: Pouria Akhavan

Sound: Rober Hefter / Jonas Lechenmayr / Kai Unger / Hadi Manavipour

Music: Mehrdad Jafari Raad