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# AFI Conservatory Artist-in-Residence Asghar Farhadi on THE SALESMAN, Inspired by Hitchcock and Kiarostami

## Description

Iranian auteur Asghar Farhadi â?? this yearâ??s Artist-in-Residence at the AFI Conservatory â?? returns to his neorealist roots with THE SALESMAN, the suspenseful tale of married couple of theater actors, Emad (Shahab Hosseini) and Rana (Taraneh Alidoosti), starring in a performance of Arthur Millerâ??s â??Death of a Salesman.â?• Their lives are thrown into turmoil after Rana is attacked in their Tehran apartment â?? during the playâ??s opening weekend â?? and Emad becomes increasingly obsessed with exacting vengeance.

Like Farhadiâ??s previous films ABOUT ELLY (2009), the OscarÂ® winner A SEPARATION (2011) and THE PAST (2013), THE SALESMAN dwells in the domestic discord struck by class conflict in Iran, and the moral ambivalence of the filmâ??s protagonists. Farhadi re-teams with his longtime collaborators, editor Hayedeh Safiyari and cinematographer Hossein Jafarian, to craft a dramatic â??whodunitâ?• that leaves the audience gripped, and with more questions than answers.

On the AFI Campus recently, Farhadi â?? who taught a workshop for Directing Fellows this September â?? fielded questions from AFI Conservatory Dean Jan Schuette and from Fellows about THE SALESMAN for the Conservatoryâ??s Harold Lloyd Master Seminar series.

**How did you begin to develop and approach this story, which begins and ends on a theater stage?**

I always have an image in my head and the story starts from the image all the time. From the period that I was in student theater, I had this image in my head that I knew that I would have to use someday. I could see a house in the theater stage and different parts of the home would light up, and then all of the lights would go dark and then all of them would come on so you could see the whole house. I gradually thought of my themes like this as well â?? dropping light on different parts of the family and at the end, you feel like you know the whole family. So, the story started with this image and this image was like a magnet, it went over my brain and grabbed all of the things that were related to the story.



**How do you collaborate with your editor and your cinematographer?**

The biggest quality of both the cinematographer and that editor is that they hide behind their work and donâ??t show themselves â?? this is something that comes from Eastern art. In some periods of Eastern art, artists wouldnâ??t sign their pieces. They were thinking that when the audience sees the piece, they shouldnâ??t think about the artist but [instead] think about the piece itself. In Western art, when you see, for example, the statue of Michelangelo, you applaud Michelangelo rather than the statue itself. It means that the artist, or the shadow of the artist, is in between the relationship of the audience and the piece. I did my best to hide myself behind the work so nobody can see me behind the scenes, behind the film. So they can feel like no one wrote the dialogue and itâ??s just actors, the characters, who are really saying these things. This is the most important thing that I have in mind when making a film.

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**How did you craft the audience experience of the mystery and thriller elements of THE SALESMAN, which blend realism and fantasy?**

There are so many movies made that have suspense and drama. Some of the best ones are Alfred Hitchcock. Part of Billy Wilderâ??s work is like that as well. On the other side, there are so many films that have the feeling of everyday life, a documentary feeling. I think the best example is [Iranian director] Abbas Kiarostami. But, we havenâ??t seen that much of this combination, both drama and documentary. By that I mean, you see a drama and you feel like that is real life. By watching Hitchcock films, you get very excited and applaud Hitchcockâ??s craft, but donâ??t get anything about the people who are living at that time in those conditions. I really tried to make my film go in that direction, mixing drama and real life.

**What is the process after youâ??ve finished your films? To whom do you show them first?**

The whole thing is a torture. And the whole process is very enjoyable as well. Itâ??s like giving birth. Full of pain, but itâ??s the best thing that can happen to the person in the end. But the hardest part for

me is when the movie is done, when the movie starts to have its distance from me.

I feel like that part is not really my job. You go to the festivals, and then you have to just talk about something where you were hired on purpose. When the movie is over, I donâ??t show it to actors because they just look at themselves. Their opinion wouldnâ??t help you. I show it to some people who have nothing to do with cinema; same with the script. I passed my script [of THE SALESMAN] to the French teacher of my daughter. When normal people see the film, they canâ??t tell you what they feel right away. But while they are watching the film, you can sit with them and see at which parts they are getting bored and at which parts theyâ??re excited. The most important thing for me to understand at the end of the film is if itâ??s boring or not. I donâ??t like anyone to go out of my films, even if they have to pee. My film has to do something where you have to finish it, and then leave.

*THE SALESMAN is Iranâ??s 2016 entry for the Best Foreign Language Film OscarÂ®. The film opens stateside on December 9, 2016.*




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1. #AFI
2. Feature Film

**Tags**

1. A SEPARATION
2. Abbas Kiarostami
3. AFI Conservatory
4. Alfred Hitchcock
5. Arthur Miller
6. Asghar Farhadi
7. â??Death of a Salesman.â?•
8. Best Foreign Language Film Oscar

9. Billy Wilder
10. Cinematographer
11. collaborate
12. Eastern Art
13. Film
14. Film Festival
15. Filmmaking
16. Harold Lloyd Master Seminar
17. Hayedeh Safiyari
18. Iranian auteur
19. Michaelangelo
20. Shahab Hosseini
21. Taraneh Alidoosti
22. The Salesman
23. theater
24. Western Art

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