EARLY KIAROSTAMI
Abbas Kiarostami’s films have always been welcomed by the British public, but his early works are only known by a few, and rarely screened. Yet, these early films offer a wealth of cinematic pleasure. Early Kiarostami perhaps captures best the meaning of cinema itself, while an openness to change and stylistic courage becomes the great filmmaker’s signature.

This selection by Ehsan Khoshbakht traces this unique character of Kiarostami’s cinema. The films hold a question: can cinema stay cinema while it’s been stripped down to its barest elements? As subtly shown in his first feature-length film, *The Traveller*, can a broken camera create the means for a journey to alter the impossibility of realising what is desired?

The selected 14 of Kiarostami’s early works (plus a portrait of the filmmaker and also his last short, completed on hospital bed) are instances proposing to rethink and revisit how we learn and understand social values, and also a chance for rediscovering the contingency of everyday actions against what has become enforced, whether from class or social order.

At the British Council Iran, it is a pleasure to pay tribute to a filmmaker who animates and mobilises such questions, through supporting this programme and the journey of some of its films to cinemas across the UK.

Aras Khatami
Arts Manager, British Council

Almost one year since Abbas Kiarostami’s untimely death, we celebrate the art of Iranian cinema’s greatest poet by screening some of his rarely seen early films. Organised according to different themes or simply by period of production, this programme spans almost 20 years of filmmaking. It aims to reflect a journey from childhood (*Bread and Alley*) through adolescence (*The Experience*), eventually arriving at manhood and married life (*The Report*) – all depicted in incredibly vivid detail.

Early Kiarostami shows us an artist reframing the world and the relationships between individuals, demonstrating a uniquely creative involvement with actors – often amateurs and children – and producing philosophical works that reinvigorated the genres of documentary and narrative fiction, frequently blurring the lines between the two.

The programme concludes with Seifollah Samadian’s moving documentary portrait, which captures Kiarostami both at work and in his daily life – and in which it becomes almost impossible to distinguish between them.

Enjoy the films!

Ehsan Khoshbakht
Curator
The filmmaker, artist and photographer Abbas Kiarostami, who has died following a series of operations for gastrointestinal cancer, singlehandedly put Iran on the map of world cinema.

Reframing the world and the relationships between individuals through both his creative involvement with actors – often amateurs, often children – and his eye for the beauty of landscapes, Kiarostami produced philosophical works that reinvigorated the genres of documentary and narrative fiction, often blurring the lines between the two, as best shown in *Close-up* (1990). He translated the traditions of oral storytelling and epic poetry, as well as the modesty of Persian architecture, into a distinctive screen vision, and from the 1990s onwards his model for creating substantial works on slender resources was recognised and embraced by filmmakers from Asia to South America.

Many Iranian critics, however, failed to see enough evidence of distinction to claim him as their own. In his home country he remained subject to dispute, controversy and even neglect. His reluctance to elucidate his filmmaking practice baffled those craving explanations.

Kiarostami was born in 1940 in Tehran. His first love was painting, which led him to enrol at Tehran University’s College of Fine Arts. He also worked part-time as a traffic police officer, aspects of which appear to have shaped his unique sense of mise-en-scène: not only his preference for having actors drive, but also his interest in the still figure who observes the movement around them and the nuances of social interaction.

During the 1960s, Kiarostami was involved in filmmaking as a director of television commercials and title designer for films. At the newly created Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (in Iran simply known as Kanoon), which provided funding and facilities for producing films for or about children amongst its other artistic activities, Kiarostami
made **Bread and Alley** (1970), a short film about a boy’s fear of a stray dog. He was soon hired by Kanoon on a full-time basis while leading a double life as a civil servant.

During his three decades of work at Kanoon, Kiarostami built his style of film by film. If early projects were more in the tradition of Eastern Bloc children’s films, he gradually dispensed with all conventions hitherto thought to be necessary. Firstly, he got rid of theatrical contrivances. Quoting screenwriter Cesare Zavattini, Kiarostami claimed that the first ordinary person on the street walking into his frame could be his protagonist. While it would be inaccurate to label him a neorealist (as is often claimed), his work reflects a deep humanism. He proved there is nothing ‘ordinary’ about ‘ordinary people’.
Working with non-actors was not new in Iranian cinema, but Kiarostami interacted with performers in unconventional ways, as had Fellini before him. The actors in his films are realistically unreal, directed via conversation with the filmmaker rather than prior instruction on their words and gestures from him. These non-actors subconsciously perform naivety, innocence and the wisdom of everyday people.

The shorts made for Kanoon, such as the brilliant *Two Solutions for One Problem* (1975), were closer to philosophy for children than entertainment, and the simpler the premise, the more cogent the film. Typically, a boy wishes to get from A to B and must overcome obstacles. These didactic plots are underscored with a playfulness and display the compositional skill of an accomplished graphic artist.
Eventually, Kiarostami broadened his concerns with children to explore how they interact with adults, as crystallised in the story of a boy in search of his classmate’s house, *Where is the Friend’s Home?* (1987). This graceful film not only brought the director fame, but was also the beginning of his association with Koker, a village in north Iran.

Five years after the production, an earthquake hit the area, leaving 50,000 dead. Kiarostami took his crew in search of the boy from the first film, but at a certain point decided to take one of his famous detours to search for signs of life in the devastated area. For the first time, the theme of mortality subtly and maturely crept into his cinema, even where the focus was purportedly on life. In the second part of the trilogy, the majestic *And Life Goes On...* (1992), he encounters a man about to marry a girl despite the human disaster around them. Attracted by the idea of focusing on love in the face of loss, he paid a third visit to Koker for *Through the Olive Trees* (1994).

In the mid-1990s, from the Palm d’or winner *Taste of Cherry* (1997) to the U.N. commissioned documentary *ABC Africa* (2001), Kiarostami’s films became more sombre, their trips bumpier, and the point of focus shifted to death. Throughout this part of his career he revealed his deep connection with Persian art and poetry, the title of some of his films being taken from poems. The use of these conceits was not artificial as in some Iranian films with their pretty framing, romantic metaphors and glamorised modesty.

In the poems of Attar he found his ‘quest form’, the search by one person or a group for the ideal. In Attar’s story *The Conference of the Birds*, the birds of the world go in search of the mythical bird Simurgh, hoping to overcome their fears or fulfil what they lack in life, only to discover that they are 30 [si] birds [murgh], therefore they are Simurgh. For Kiarostami, this was the medieval origin of *The Wizard of Oz*, and in his films the yellow brick road is replaced with a muddy, zigzag path.
Omar Khayyam’s poetry, too, was a keystone of Kiarostami’s thought, in its focus on the fickleness of life; we, the phantom figures in a shadow play, are dissolving into soil (to which Kiarostami pays particular attention in Taste of Cherry and The Wind Will Carry Us). Following Khayyam in his poetry, Kiarostami is probably the only filmmaker whose essential, signature shot is that of Nothing: a black screen, adding to the darkness of movie theatre.

“Starless night:
black dog
barking
at the newcomer.”

— Walking with the Wind,
Abbas Kiarostami

At the end of Taste of Cherry, the central character Mr Badii, who throughout the film has given lifts to several people in the hope of finding someone who will bury him after he commits suicide, is lying in an open grave, gazing up at the moon which is hiding behind menacing clouds. Then comes the harrowing darkness, lasting for minutes of screen time. Dogs barking in the distance. The wind howls. The screening space becomes the grave itself.

Up to this point, the world Kiarostami had depicted was that of boys and men, partly owing to the films’ autobiographical touches, and partly to the fact that he raised two sons (Bahman and Ahmad are both filmmakers). His “girl script”, The White Balloon (1995), would go on to be a breakthrough for his protégé, Jafar Panahi. Yet, a shift was on the way. Women, long absent in Kiarostami’s cinema, were eventually given an unprecedented freedom that their male counterparts lacked.
For 10 (2002), Kiarostami entrusted then artist, now filmmaker Mania Akbari with driving the car and filming conversations without his presence. (In his earlier car movies, the individuals onscreen talk to the director directly and not to the actor who plays the driver in the reverse shot.) He also, maybe unwittingly, found an innovative way of bypassing censorship in Iran, which requires of any representation of women that they be veiled at all times – even in the privacy of their own bed. When the hijab became mandatory in Iran, films would frequently show women covered even in the home, something essentially unrealistic, if not silly. Kiarostami sought refuge in his car and in so doing turned public space into private space, while justifying the use of veil.

With their fixed interior cameras, the cars of Kiarostami create a complex *mise-en-scène*. The car becomes a space of cultural diversity, with passengers of various ethnicities and dialects. In this way Kiarostami’s films are microcosms of Iran, reflecting the way in which the country’s various cultures form one national identity, while acknowledging the underlying tensions. The director also foregrounds the act of looking above the looked-at person or object, an invitation to the viewer’s capacity to imagine the environment through which the car travels.

Kiarostami continued to challenge his own ideas about the relationships between men and women in *Certified Copy* (2010). Returning to a theme that he had unsuccessfully tackled in the autobiographical *The Report* (which was made in 1977 as a reaction his own failing marriage), *Certified Copy* film avoided certainties in its sensitive response to the shifting identities of a couple, played by Juliette Binoche and opera singer William Shimell. The sense of incompleteness (in both the story and the identities of the characters) is borrowed from *Close-up*.

A moving and richly layered masterpiece, *Close-up* is also a demonstration of the futility of any attempt to draw a clear separating line between docu-
mentary and fiction. It tells the story of Hossein Sabzian, an idler and cinephile who claims to be the renowned Iranian director Mohsen Makhmalbaf in order to inveigle himself into the home of a family. He is eventually exposed by a blunt journalist and put on trial for fraud. However, his actions bring him face to face with another renowned filmmaker, Kiarostami, who makes a film about him. Eventually he meets Makhmalbaf in the flesh. A lie becomes reality, but just how much of this reality remains a lie is unknowable.

Kiarostami’s growing recognition also saw him expanding the geographical terrain of his productions. Although based in north Tehran, he made films in Uganda, Italy, Japan and China. Paradoxically, a generation of Iranian filmmakers who wished for a taste of Kiarostami’s international success amounted to
little more than copyists, ‘doing Kiarostami’. As Paul Oliver once described the problem of the blues, that it attracts performers who can neither play nor sing, so Kiarostami’s deceptively simple approach to filmmaking was like quicksand, towards which many casually ventured but out of which few would come out alive artistically.

Kiarostami always stood outside the crowd, returning to his solitude by venturing into photography, poetry and installation. Yet even these temporary departures from cinema contained clear marks of cinematic thinking and were further practices in the art of reduction and contemplation of mechanisms of looking which he had demonstrated since his early films.

As with many filmmakers with experience of living and working through political upheavals and personal tragedies, Kiarostami found a balance between pure cynicism and deep humanism in his work, as it continually questioned life and cinema. The signature moments of darkness in his films always resolve into light. In this regard, Taste of Cherry’s is the most innovative: in an epilogue, shot in low-quality video, Mr Badii is alive and well. The soldiers seen in the film are roaming around, as if choreographed to Louis Armstrong’s St. James Infirmary, which plays on the soundtrack.

The last shot of the film updates some iconic endings of cinema: Kiarostami’s Land Rover vanishes around the bend of a dusty zigzagging road, echoing Chaplin’s tramp exiting down a street, or the Man with No Name riding his horse towards the horizon. In a split-second there’s no trace of the man but a big, lonely heap of brown earth, evoking Khayyam’s remark that there is no resting place but in the heart of the soil. A director here showing us how he took the cinema on such an exhilarating detour, while also offering the poetic image of his own departure.

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Kiarostami’s emergence onto the filmmaking scene in 1970 coincided with the formation of the “New Wave” of Iranian cinema. His links to the movement notwithstanding, Kiarostami’s career took a different route as he put his efforts into making pedagogic films for the state-funded Kanoon, an institute with the mission of producing cultural products for young audiences. Compared to some contributions to this institute, which were steeped in allegorical language or nostalgic sentiments, Kiarostami’s films stay comparatively truer to the agenda of their sponsoring body. Without putting up a pretence of carrying deeper meanings, these films plainly address their intended audience and show no attempt on the director’s part to conceal an educative function which mandated a simplified form.

Often Kiarostami’s earlier films are expressly built around a problem-solving formula, some based on a comparison between two situations. It’s not for nothing that the term “solution” itself shows up in the titles of two of his films. It would be easy to get side-tracked by the straightforward form and approach of these films and reduce them to their end function, losing sight of the intricate ways in which the director has gone beyond this limiting format. For one thing, Kiarostami’s films are anything but tedious sermons, owing to a sense of subtle and cerebral levity that informs them. One can refer to the closing scene of *Orderly or Disorderly* which obliquely casts doubts over the usefulness of the very educational function of the film by hinting at how well-rooted its subject problem is in society at large. Similarly, it is not difficult to detect some humour at work in *Two Solutions for One Problem*, fundamentally a tit-for-tat comedy with a moral, simplified for a young audience. The director’s striving for simplicity in this film even reveals itself in a voice-over akin to the lessons of first-grade text books, which chimes perfectly with the rhythm of the film and probably has an added humorous effect for grown-ups. A few years later Kiarostami repurposes the same two-choice structure and strips it of its edifying tone, in order to register different shades of the political spectrum in contemporary society. The result – the documen-
tary First Case, Second Case – remains a unique document of its time (just after 1979 revolution) thanks to its simple yet astute strategy of operating under the ingenious guise of an educational film.

More ambiguous in its educational message and richer in its understated humour is Kiarostami’s less seen and criminally underappreciated Solution No.1. The film features a grown-up protagonist who is as unflagging in his task of rolling a tyre along the road as Kiarostami’s child characters are in their undertakings. The muffled exchanges which precede this action give an enigmatic quality to the man’s travail, which is uncharacteristically dramatised by music. Seen in the context of the politics of its time, the man’s action can even lend itself to an allegorical reading. However the last shot of the film, acting in the manner of a punchline, frustrates such interpretations. This film also qualifies as Kiarostami’s first road movie.

Kiarostami’s longer, fiction films from this period fulfil their didactic mission
in a subliminal fashion. What The Experience and The Traveller have in common is the failure of their young protagonists in achieving their dreams. Far from Kiarostami’s widely-known style, The Experience is the more lyrical of the two and stands as one of few remarkable portrayals of adolescent love in the entire history of Iranian cinema. Visually potent and using dialogue sparingly, it communicates with fluency the loneliness of its laconic protagonist and his quest for love as a way to break into the realm of adulthood. At first blush, the protagonist of The Traveller does not strike us as being the best candidate for a typical pedagogic film. Guilty of all wrongdoings from pilfering the household money to fleecing smaller children of their money by pretending to take their photos, he would inevitably accept his punishment, without the appearance of remorse or reform. This scapegrace still comes across as relatable and his misconduct doesn’t detract from his charm, thanks in no small amount to his unflinching character and the fact that his action is motivated by a resolute, undivided passion for football.

In common with The Experience, The Traveller ends with its protagonist waking up – this time literally – to see his dream crumble, without the scene being pushed further to make a profound moralistic point. In both films the abrupt ending creates a slap-in-the-face effect. As such, the films do not show failure in a depressing light and one way or another acknowledge the protagonists’ tenacity in their eye-opening experiences. Equivocal and distanced, these abrupt endings befit films which resist being contained within a pedagogic purview. A similar type of ending is used for A Suit for the Wedding but to create an anti-climactic effect consonant with the film’s realistic style, even though here a brief melody underscores a sense of relief.

In terms of style, Kiarostami’s films from this period exhibit an eclectic approach. One can trace a trajectory towards simplicity in execution, in order to give the impression of a slice-of-life. The condensed editing of The Experience and the montage sequence of The Traveller find no place in A Suit
for the Wedding and The Report. The former employs long winded dialogue which in the manner of real life conversation quite digresses before getting to the germane narrative point. Of course in the last scene, such digression builds suspense – in Kiarostami’s vein – and acquires a dramatic function, as it buys enough time for the protagonist to put things back in order and save his face. Featuring an ordinary civil servant protagonist, who is facing a crisis both at work and in his daily life, The Report presents melodramatic potential within its overall plot. However, Kiarostami opts for an observational style that deflates the tension and avoids dramatic accentuation. Instead he infuses the film with a sense of real life in its all unglamorous spontaneity and insignificance, without going so far as to blur the boundaries of fiction and documentary (as he would later). With this trajectory in mind, Solution No. 1, bracketed in his filmography between films with an austere style, assumes a peculiar place. Editing is central to its major sequence and the film uses wide-angle lenses and even canted angles, elements habitually imagined as foreign to Kiarostami’s signature style. It is also worth noting that the self-reflexive trademark of Kiarostami’s later films finds its earliest manifestation only in the later films from this period.

With the target audience and didactic function of Kiarostami’s early films in mind, it’s not unexpected to find school as a common setting. The films abound with scenes within classrooms and school premises and the attendant noises are a dominant component of their soundscape. This location is however not represented in an idealised light, as might be expected from educational films. Teachers and headmasters are often shown administering corporal punishment (Traveller, Breaktime) or are simply too bound up with the concerns of their daily lives to be sensitive to the troubles of their students. Exemplifying this lack of concern is the scene in The Traveller when both the mischievous boy and the teacher are shown to be distracted by their respective budgeting issues.
In *First Case, Second Case* Kiarostami goes one step further to clearly establish the image of the school as a small-scale model of the wider society, fraught with dynamics of power. The young protagonists of these films are often gripped with fear or trepidation. It falls on them to explore the world in a trial and error fashion and with no support – or in the case of *A Suit for the Wedding* sort out matters on their own and keep the whole affair hidden from grown-ups.

It would seem that it is with his first foray in filmmaking for the commercial sector – *The Report* – that Kiarostami decided to turn his camera on grown-ups, even though the target of the films’ didactic messages might still be young spectators. Interesting in this sense is *The Chorus*, a charming little film organised around an auditory dyad of noise and silence and bearing on the surface a message of unity. This time, however, the director seems to have visited the other side of the troubled children/grown-ups relationship by sharing with us the subjective experience of an old man who is hard of hearing and who finds peace by blocking his ears to the maddening din of the outside world. The old man’s retreat into the solace of deafness is only temporary and he hearkens to the chorus of children in the outside world, reminding us that no pause is allowed by this incessant flow called life – one which has to be experienced in all its workaday ups and downs in Kiarostami’s cinema.
The Report, Abbas Kiarostami’s second feature-length film following The Traveller, is the result of an engagement and experimentation with a unique cinematic form, elements of which had been put to the test in his earlier short films for Kanoon (The Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). This personal vision of filmmaking which Kiarostami pursued from the beginning of his career was, however, a decade away from worldwide appreciation and international recognition. As a consequence, The Report did not fully reach its audience either at the time of its initial release or even later when Kiarostami was at the peak of his fame.

Ironically, The Report was released in cinemas during the last months of the second Pahlavi’s reign, when the Iranian film industry was on the brink of bankruptcy and had already lost the box office to foreign films. A good portion of that year’s productions (eight films, which was one-tenth the average output of the preceding five years) were directed by renowned ‘Iranian New Wave’ filmmakers: Dariush Mehrjui (The Cycle, made three years earlier, but remaining under ban until 1977), Ali Hatami (Desiderium), Amir Naderi (Requiem), Bahram Beyzai (The Crow) and Masoud Kimiai (The Journey of the Stone). The realistic tendencies of at least three of these eight titles (Requiem, The Cycle and The Report) and their awareness of socio-political conditions within the country led to a sharp depiction of the crisis, chaos and the bitter realities which were gripping Iran. In that respect, The Report goes even further and stands among the most significant documents of the life of the Iranian middle-class in the second half of the 1970s. One can even trace and identify in this film some of the despair and angst which led to the Islamic Revolution.

The Report is Kiarostami’s cinematic take on indolence, baseless grandeur and wanton modernisation in the context of a traditional society – a conflict which has always been the key theme in Iranian cinema and art. The characters of the film are torn between a desire to revolt on one hand and cowardice and social inaction on the other. This conflict plunges them into dissatisfaction and fills them
with hatred for both themselves and the repetitious cycle of life they live. By making the film in a period of turmoil, Kiarostami demonstrated his acute sociological awareness and deep understanding of the frustration of a certain social class, to which he belonged.

That said, understanding and enjoying *The Report* does not require a knowledge of the socio-political conditions of Iran at the time, or the course of historical events; although such contextual information would help viewers to grasp underlying aspects and complexities of the film. In addition to its sociological implications, *The Report*, owing to Kiarostami’s constant investigation of humanity’s existential condition, captures in a bitter and nihilistic mood the ennui and futility of daily life, marriage and human relationships. Interestingly, in Kiarostami’s post-revolutionary films, that bitterness is substituted for a kind of optimism, an attitude which seeks out simple and ordinary pleasures in life, amidst darkness and devastation – similar to that complex hedonistic cynicism.
which informs Omar Khayyam's philosophy, which had reportedly influenced Kiarostami.

A comparison of Kiarostami's approach to the theme of suicide in The Report and Taste of Cherry could serve as a good example to illustrate this change in outlook. In The Report, the director managed to depict the boredom of life analogous to an impending earthquake which could tear down human and social relations. Yet, years later, in documenting the aftermath of a real earthquake, he is on a search for things that can affirm hope and the continuation of life (Life and Nothing More, Through the Olive Trees). Another comparison, this time between The Report and Certified Copy, also shows a shift in their creator's view, of the relation between men and women – a theme that Kiarostami came to explore in only two films over a period of 30 years.

The visual form of The Report boasts a precise mise en scène hinging on a moving camera which aims to register, in an almost documentary style, characters' mundane lives. The film allows us to accompany characters as an impartial observer, giving us a moment-by-moment depiction of a futile and repetitious process that culminates in disorder. In order to achieve these realist effects, Kiarostami turns his back on both Iranian New Wave and Iranian mainstream trends by, for instance, cleverly selecting a cast of non-actors, amateur actors and professionals. Additionally, the director uses real and familiar locations to represent urban spaces. Moreover, in a conscious decision, he totally avoids using music and instead opts for direct sound which was totally against the norms of a film industry in which all films were dubbed and synced during post-production.

The Report can also be seen as the forerunner of what is termed Iranian Social Cinema, a popular style among post-revolutionary Iranian filmmakers (especially after the 'reform era', staring from 1997) and which gained worldwide reputation through Asghar Farhadi. It should come as no surprise that Farhadi
has repeatedly talked about the influence of The Report on his own work and mentioned that during the writing of the script for *Fireworks Wednesday* he’d watched Kiarostami’s film many times.

Kiarostami’s signature style and its familiar elements can also be identified in *The Report*. The outstanding use of car interiors for shooting scenes; off-screen sounds and action; the avoidance of sentimentality and the maintenance of a deliberate distance from characters – all make Kiarostami’s films approximate, in their tone, what is suggested by the simple and broad title of this film: a report. In fact, an attention to the influence of the social environment on characters’ lives underscores the report-like function. Nonetheless, “realism” or “a report-like” tone cannot sum up the complexities of this masterpiece. *The Report*, like most of Kiarostami’s post-revolutionary films, is a multi-layered and formally complex contemplation of the human condition and seeing it is essential not only to understanding the cinema of Kiarostami, but also Iranian cinema in general.
THE PROGRAMME

1 BEGINNINGS AND JOURNEYS

ña THE TRAVELLER [MOSAFER]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1974 | 74 MIN | B/W
“Kiarostami’s first feature film, and arguably one of his best, The Traveller was made for Kanoon (The Centre for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults). A suspenseful, witty story of a young boy’s determination to travel from his small town to Tehran to attend a national football match, it combines realism with the economy and precision of a visual artist (the director’s first occupation before turning filmmaker). Featuring brilliant performances by a cast of non-actors, the film has one of the most gripping, unforgettable endings in film history.” – Ehsan Khoshbakht

ña BREAD AND ALLEY [NAAN VA KOOCHEH]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1970 | 10 MIN | B/W
“Based on a real-life incident experienced by Kiarostami’s brother, Taghi, the director’s first film sets the template for his cinema until the late 1980s. It concerns a young boy who is unable to return home with the bread he has bought, due to his fear of a stray dog in an alley. The film’s jazzy soundtrack, which pretty much dictates the editing, is based on the Beatles’ Ob-La-Di, Ob-La-Da.” – EK

ña BREAKTIME [ZANG-E TAFRIH]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1972 | 14 MIN | B/W
“Famous for its non-narrative approach and its open ending, this story of a schoolboy who is dismissed from the classroom after breaking a window presages not only The Traveller, but also Mohammad-Ali Talebi’s film Willow and Wind, scripted by Kiarostami” – EK
2 REPORT

→ **THE REPORT** [GOZARESH]
ABBAS Kiarostami
1977 | 109 min | Colour

“Produced by Iranian New Wave cinema director and producer Bahman Farmanara (making this Kiarostami’s first break with Kanoon), The Report centres on an unhappy marriage and offers viewers a time-capsule of middle class life in Tehran in the 70s. Starring Oscar nominee Shohreh Aghdashloo, and a major influence on many Iranian directors of the post-revolutionary era (including the two-time Oscar winner Asghar Farhadi), this deftly crafted, semi-autobiographical domestic drama was Kiarostami’s first work to feature professional actors. All copies of the film are believed to be lost or destroyed, with the digital copy presented being the sole surviving film element.” – EK

3 ADOLESCENCE AND POVERTY

→ **THE EXPERIENCE** [TAJROBEH]
ABBAS Kiarostami
1973 | 53 min | B/W

Drawn from personal experiences and written by a key director of Iranian new cinema, Amir Naderi, this was Kiarostami’s first mid-length film. “This story of a working-class adolescent, orphaned and impoverished, who works as an errand-boy in a photographer’s studio and who falls in love with an older girl from a better-off family, becomes in Kiarostami’s hands a real subversion of the ‘rules’ of a popular sub-genre of Iranian commercial cinema (poor girl loves rich girl). A world away from melodrama, The Experience is constructed using a series of dead times, which are the very devices that give the films its meaning and its poetry.” – Alberto Elena
A SUIT FOR THE WEDDING [LEBASI BARAYE AROOSI]
ABNAS KIAROSTAMI
1976 | 56 MIN | COLOUR
Two young boys ask a friend who works in a tailor’s shop to let them wear a new suit especially tailored for a rich man’s son, while the shop owner’s away. Alberto Elena calls the film a “daring in its treatment of poverty and the breakdown between social classes, more than any other Kiarostami film with the possible exception of The Experience.” – Jonathan Rosenbaum

SCHOOL FILMS

HOMEWORK [MASSHGH-E SHAB]
ABNAS KIAROSTAMI
1989 | 70 MIN | COLOUR
“A major film by the greatest of all Iranian filmmakers, Abbas Kiarostami, this is an idiosyncratic though mainly straightforward 16-millimeter documentary about the homework done by boys in primary school, with the interviews carried out by Kiarostami himself. For all the simplicity of its approach, this film has a great deal to impart about Iran during its war with Iraq, and some of the unorthodox formal procedures carried out by Kiarostami are as provocative as in his subsequent documentary masterpiece, Close-Up; moreover, the director seems every bit as adept as Truffaut at handling children with respect.” – Jonathan Rosenbaum

COLOURS [RANGHA]
ABNAS KIAROSTAMI
1975 | 14 MIN | COLOUR
“Colours recalls the abstract montages of Hollis Frampton’s Zorn’s Lemma in terms of its colour coding, but it also indulges violent fantasies involving cars, guns, little boys and paint.” – JR
First Graders is best considered as a companion film to Homework. Both deal in the most explicit way with issues of primary school education, with deviations for the sake of meta-poetic or political commentary. This film serves less as a critique of the educational system, instead focusing on the role of the school headmaster, who resembles the judge in Close-Up. He is a patient, spiritual figure who restores order and with this portrait Kiarostami provides a subtle and somehow sympathetic image of a totalitarian leader, in which there is both ambiguity and irony.” – EK

5 POLITICAL ALLEGORIES
SO CAN I [MANAM MITOONAM]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1976 | 4 MIN | COLOUR
“Structured around two opposing scenarios, like several other films Kiarostami made for Kanoon, this short film invited primary school children to look at the way animals move, and then to think about those movements in comparison with their own.” – AE

ORDERLY OR DISORDERLY [BE TARTIB YA BEDUN-E TARTIB]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1981 | 16 MIN | COLOUR
“The most remarkable of the shorts, Orderly or Disorderly, shows boys leaving a classroom, heading for a water fountain and getting on a bus, then offers a cosmic overview of adults driving through a busy section of Tehran. Each action is shown twice, with the boys or adults behaving in an orderly or disorderly fashion, though the degree to which this is being staged or documented is teasingly imprecise – a kind of ambiguity that continues in Kiarostami’s work all the way up to Ten.” – JR

SOLUTION NO.1 [RAH-E HAL-E YEK]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1978 | 11 MIN | COLOUR
“After having his tyre repaired at the top of Alborz Mountain, a man tries to hitch a ride back to his car, but is ignored by all passersby. He therefore decides to roll the tyre to his destination. The idea of rejection leading to self-determination makes this another allegorical film, which along with Masoud Kimiai’s influential The Journey of the Stone sees resilience and movement intertwined, alluding to a revolution already in full force.” – EK
Æ THE CHORUS [HAMSARAYAN]
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
1982 | 16 MIN | COLOUR
“In a small town in northern Iran, an old man who is aggravated by the noise of his surroundings switches off his hearing aid. But when his granddaughter returns home from school, he is unable to hear the doorbell. Possibly inspired by the post-revolutionary protests and uprisings, this is one of Kiarostami’s very few political allegories: the elderly, patriarchal figure does not hear the call of the young, unless they group together and deliver their message as a chorus.” – EK

6 SECONDS

Æ 76 MINUTES AND 15 SECONDS WITH ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
SEIFOLLAH SAMADIAN
2016 | 76 MIN | COLOUR & B/W
This is a portrait of an artist, whose exceptional approach to Art and life, defined him as one of the most ardent admirers of life itself. The leading aim of this documentary is to share 76 minutes and 15 seconds of undiscovered moments of Abbas Kiarostami’s life and work, in commemoration of his 76 years and 15 days of creative journey. The shots of this documentary are selected out of hundreds of hours of footage, filmed during 25 years of friendship, inside and outside Iran in various occasions: film festivals, photo exhibitions, photography sessions, artistic events, workshops and some unique moments of his daily life.

Æ TAKE ME HOME
ABBAS KIAROSTAMI
2016 | 16 MIN | B/W
Abbas Kiarostami takes his camera to south of Italy and shows us a beautiful and playful video of alleys and stairs.
Close-Up Film Centre
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Curator:
Ehsan Khoshbakht

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