

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Carried by the wind : Films by Abbas Kiarostami</b>
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Cinematheque Ontario/a division of Toronto International Film Festival Group</i>
Date	2002 Spr
Type	program note
Language	English
Pagination	34-35
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Kiarostami, Abbas (1940), Teheran, Iran
Film Subjects	Ta'm e guilass (Taste of cherry), Kiarostami, Abbas, 1997 Ziré darâkhtân zeyton (Through the olive trees), Kiarostami, Abbas, 1994 Bad ma ra khahad bord (The wind will carry us), Kiarostami, Abbas, 1999 Namay-e nazdik (Close-up), Kiarostami, Abbas, 1990 Zendegi va digar hich (And life goes on...), Kiarostami, Abbas, 1992 ABC Africa, Kiarostami, Abbas, 2001





THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES

*"The most wondrous thing to happen in cinema in many years . . . . I'm more convinced than ever that he's one of the giants of contemporary world cinema."* – JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

*"Kiarostami le Magnifique . . . One of the great directors in the world."* – CAHIERS DU CINÉMA

# CARRIED BY THE WIND

FILMS BY  
**ABBAS KIAROSTAMI**



Abbas Kiarostami on location

**V**oted the Director of the Decade in our Best of the Nineties poll of film curators, with four films in the top six, Abbas Kiarostami has been the subject of several retrospectives, limited runs, and special screenings at Cinematheque Ontario. We are extremely pleased to welcome Kiarostami for his first personal appearance at the cinematheque, and to present the Toronto premiere of his acclaimed documentary ABC AFRICA, in conjunction with an exhibition of Kiarostami's marvellous still photographs, May 4 - 25, at Pari Nadimi Gallery, 80 Spadina Avenue, 4th Floor. (Phone (416) 591-6464 for details.)

Akira Kurosawa exclaimed in a rare homage: "The films of Abbas Kiarostami are extraordinary. Words cannot describe my feelings about them and I simply advise you to see his films. . . . When Satyajit Ray passed on, I was very depressed. But after seeing Kiarostami's films, I thanked God for giving us just the right person to take his place." Kiarostami's is a cinema of poetic humanism, of deceptive simplicity, one which searches for moments of grace in the midst of deprivation and devastation. As one critic remarked: "This is Kiarostami's art: to show that the world is (still) livably beautiful." If the bleak ambiguities and locked shots of TASTE OF CHERRY challenged this account of his cinema (at least until its much debated free-form video coda), the transporting allegory of THE WIND WILL CARRY US and the spontaneity and affirmation of ABC AFRICA renew this sense of optimism.

**K**iarostami studied painting, graphics, and design at Tehran University before embarking on a career in advertising. Like so many Iranian filmmakers, he joined the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, and, beginning in 1970, produced a series of internationally acclaimed short films and features, some fictional, some documentary, about children. (Various of these recall Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy in theme and approach. Kiarostami's script for Panahi's THE WHITE BALLOON also returns to this terrain.)

Like many Iranian filmmakers, Kiarostami was influenced by Italian neo-realism. His early films, such as THE TRAVELLER (1974) and THE REPORT (1977), summon the spirit of De Sica, and, though his aesthetic became increasingly sophisticated, Kiarostami continued to shoot on location with non-professional actors, attempting to capture what he calls "naked reality." But Kiarostami's recent work has moved away from classic neo-realism to something much more formalist and complex. His work once verged on Ernie Gehr-like structuralism, as in REGULAR OR IRREGULAR; and his unique combination of fiction and documentary, divorced from the strategies of "mockumentaries," "docu-dramas," "staged documentaries," and other hybrids of the two forms, could be characterized as Brechtian were it not so lyrical, idiosyncratic, and empathic. (One thinks of the work of Chris Marker, who admires Kiarostami, but that comparison, too, falls wide of the mark.)

In what many consider his best film, CLOSE-UP (1989), Kiarostami recreates a true story he read in a magazine, about an imposter who was exposed by one of his "victims" and charged with impersonation. (That the man was posing as Iran's other leading director, Mohsen Makhmalbaf, is just the first of the film's many house-of-mirrors ironies.) But Kiarostami is not content to explore the difference between cinema and reality; as CLOSE-UP proceeds, fiction and documentary become hopelessly intertwined, until, in the formalist coup that resolves the film, Kiarostami erases the line between captured and staged actuality. ("My ideal is to reach fiction through the documentary," he has said.)

Similarly, in the trilogy of films that made his international reputation – WHERE IS THE FRIEND'S HOME?, AND LIFE GOES ON, and THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES – Kiarostami toys with the correlations between actuality and fiction, often having his non-professional actors play roles identical to their real-life characters. (He saves this rupture until the coda in TASTE OF CHERRY.) But these strategies, and others, such as his use of extended takes (heart-stoppingly deployed at the end of AND LIFE GOES ON) and repeated sequences, are used to a profoundly humanist, not merely formalist, end. "Adults, like children, have this problem of not understanding each other," Kiarostami says in explaining his purpose. "I like dealing with such subjects, to show the misunderstanding from all sides and to create relationships."

– JAMES QUANDT



## TORONTO PREMIERE! ABC AFRICA

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran/France 2001 83 minutes • With: Abbas Kiarostami, Seifollah Samadian

"One of the five best films of 2001" (Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Chicago Reader*), ABC AFRICA was a major critical hit at the Cannes Film Festival, and receives its Toronto premiere here. In many ways a departure for Kiarostami — a full-length documentary shot outside of Iran on digital video — it also marks a return for the director to the subject of his earliest works: the resilience of children in the face of adversity, even horror. Commissioned by the United Nations to make a documentary about a group of Ugandan women organizing to save the many children orphaned by AIDS, Kiarostami set out with his assistant and shot very spontaneously amidst a landscape of great beauty transformed by AIDS into a terrain of calamity. (The setting of Kiarostami's Koker Trilogy is, of course, similarly transformed by natural disaster.) By turns funny, shocking, and beautiful, ABC AFRICA has a kind of lovely artlessness that belies its typically Kiarostami plenitude of "privileged moments" and poetry. A long, thrilling take capturing a power outage at night, for instance, "is one of the greatest sequences in all his work" (*Variety*).

Friday, May 3 6:30 p.m.



ABC AFRICA

## THE WIND WILL CARRY US

(LE VENT NOUS EMPORTERA)

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran/France 1999 118 minutes • Cast: Behzad Dourani

"The greatest film by Iranian master Abbas Kiarostami" (Jim Hoberman, *The Village Voice*), THE WIND WILL CARRY US is a work of transporting beauty, with its serried landscape and molten light, its carefully managed mysteries and sneaky epiphanies. A young intellectual engineer (Behzad Dourani, the only professional actor in the film) travels from Tehran to a remote Kurdish village in the hills with some assistants. (The latter are never seen, left out of the frame entirely, and their number has been variously reported.) His mission is unstated, but seems to centre on a dying old woman, and becomes increasingly desperate and opportunistic. Built from repetitions and reversals, absences and ellipses, the film belies its formal and narrative intricacy with Kiarostami's characteristic humility and wry humour — a lecture on the burden of women delivered by a café owner is stern, funny stuff, and the motorbike driven by a philosophical doctor offers the best transport for the road to redemption since Bresson's DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST. The film's seeming inversion of the cosmology of earth and heaven — ascent associated with duplicity and death, descent with authenticity and life — bravely extends the existentialist themes of TASTE OF CHERRY. Chosen by many critics as one of the best films of the year, WIND seems more mysterious with each viewing. "\*\*\*\* Abbas Kiarostami's reputation as one of the decade's most essential directors is reinforced with his latest film" (Liam Lacey, *The Globe and Mail*).

Friday, May 3 8:45 p.m.



## CLOSE-UP

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran 1990 100 minutes  
Cast: Ali Sabzian, Hassan Frazmand

A favourite of many film directors, including Chris Marker and Kiarostami himself — "I think of all my films CLOSE-UP is the best" — as well as of Iranian cinema authority Godfrey Cheshire (who has selected it as his film of the decade), and Chicago critic Jonathan Rosenbaum (who recently placed it among the ten greatest films of the century), CLOSE-UP is complex, funny, moving, provocative, profoundly humane. Kiarostami turned a true story he read in a magazine into an intricate meditation on identity, voyeurism, the desperate need for self esteem, and the difference between film and reality. An unemployed man presents himself to a wealthy woman on a bus as Mohsen Makhmalbaf, one of Iran's best known directors. She believes him, but a member of her family exposes him as an imposter and has him charged. At this point, Kiarostami and his crew enter CLOSE-UP, and, in a formal coup unequalled since the finale of Imamura's A MAN VANISHES, the director shoots the real trial of the actual impersonator, staging an ending that ingeniously juxtaposes and blurs fiction and documentary. "One of Kiarostami's most endearing, as well as cleverest, works. . . . It brought tears to my eyes" (Derek Malcolm, *Manchester Guardian*).

Saturday, May 4 6:30 p.m.



## TASTE OF CHERRY

(TA'M E GILASS)

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran 1997 95 minutes • Cast: Homa Youn Ershadi, Abdolrahman Bagheri

Every Kiarostami film honours its audience with myriad mysteries and earned affirmations, but this, the co-winner of the *Palme d'or* at the Cannes Film Festival, is that rare thing, a private, immensely moving inquest into the value of life and the entreaty of death. If any nineties film could be said to "tower," this was it. Kiarostami frames his summa with simple rigour. Badii, a middle-aged man deep in grief, drives around the outskirts of Tehran, looking for someone who will accept money to bury him if he succeeds in committing suicide. "Road movie" as philosophical inquiry, TASTE OF CHERRY chronicles Badii's encounters with three candidates — a young Kurdish soldier, an Afghan seminarian, and an aged Turkish taxidermist — to whom he gives rides only to propose this unhappy job. (The ethnic origins of the three lend the film both allegorical and political import.) Badii's long day's voyage into night reaches an ambiguous ending, capped by a controversial coda, both of which can and have been endlessly debated. An exemplary case of simple truth told with elusive art, it is a work of existentialist grandeur, whose meanings are both ordinary and ineffable. "\*\*\*\* A masterpiece" (Jonathan Rosenbaum).

Saturday, May 4 8:45 p.m.

## AND LIFE GOES ON

(ZENDEGI VA DIGAR HICH)

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran 1992 91 minutes  
Cast: Farhad Kheradmand, Pooya Pievar

"A masterpiece. . . . In many ways the most beautiful and powerful Iranian film I've seen" (Jonathan Rosenbaum). Part fiction, part documentary, part road movie, AND LIFE GOES ON is the middle panel of Kiarostami's extraordinary triptych (but, one hastens to add, stands on its own). In the aftermath of the earthquake which killed over 50,000 in northern Iran in 1990, a father and his young son set out to learn the fate of the two young boys who starred as Ahmad and Mohammed in WHERE IS THE FRIEND'S HOME? As they travel through the devastated landscape, they interview several survivors of the earthquake, interviews that coalesce into a moving portrait of human resilience. The extended final shot can only be called heart stopping in its riskiness and humour. "A jewel. . . . [The] splendid closing sequence deserves its place in film history" (*Variety*).

Tuesday, May 7 6:30 p.m.



## THROUGH THE OLIVE TREES

(ZIR-E DARAKHTAN-E ZITUN)

Director: Abbas Kiarostami  
Iran 1994 102 minutes  
Cast: Mohammad-Ali Keshavarz, Hossein Rezaei

A film crew arrives in an isolated village in northern Iran's Koker region, which was devastated by the earthquake of 1992, to shoot the film AND LIFE GOES ON. Hossein, a young bricklayer, is offered a small role and is delighted to find that the young woman he has been pursuing, Farkhonde, will play the role of his wife in the film. Hossein, who has been rejected by Farkhonde's family as a suitor because he is homeless and illiterate, seizes the chance to persist in his courting of the uninterested young woman. Kiarostami exploits the complications that arise from the tension between the actors' real-life roles and their fictional ones with a bittersweet mixture of farce and formalism. "As with the ending of AND LIFE GOES ON, the film's last shot is a stunning *tour de force*, merging landscape, title, and plot in one braided whole" (Phillip Lopate, *Film Comment*).

Tuesday, May 7 8:45 p.m.



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