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A Moment of Innocence

One of the best features by the prolific and unpredictable Iranian filmmaker Mohsen Makhmalbaf, this 1996 film also happens to be one of his most seminal and accessible—a reconstruction of a pivotal incident during his teens that landed him in prison for several years during the shah's regime. A fundamentalist and activist at the time, Makhmalbaf stabbed a policeman; as a consequence he was shot and arrested. Two decades later his politics were quite different, but while he was auditioning people to appear in his film *Salaam Cinema*, he encountered the same policeman, now unemployed, and the two wound up collaborating on this film

about the incident involving them, trying (with separate cameras) to reconcile their versions of what happened. Though no doubt prompted in part by Abbas Kiarostami's remarkable *Close-up* (1990)—another eclectic documentary reconstructing past events with two cameras, in that case a hoax involving Makhmalbaf himself—this is no mere imitation but a fascinating humanist experiment and investigation in its own right, full of warmth and humor as well as mystery. The original Persian title, incidentally, translates as *Bread and Flower*. Music Box, Friday through Thursday, February 18 through 24.

—Jonathan Rosenbaum