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The Farhang Foundation 9th Annual Short Film Festival

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One of the perks of living in Los Angeles is the bottomless pit of cultural exploits and opportunities just an Uber ride away. At the forefront of some of those events is Farhang Foundation, the leading purveyor of Iranian cultural celebrations. Since 2008, the non-profit foundation has been championing Persian artists from all over the world and welcoming the community to indulge in the festivities.

The Farhang Foundation Short Film Festival has featured some of the most provocative Iranian storytellers who have utilized film to reveal aspects of the deeply rooted Iranian identity, the complicated political history, the people's current struggles, and the all too familiar ethereal quest for love. As a result of their unique efforts, these artists have



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extraordinary collection of shorts, including drama pieces, animation, and music videos.

*The red carpet soiree takes place September 30th in the heart of Tehrangeles at UCLA's Schoenberg Hall and is hosted by Iranian-American actress and comedian, Melissa Shoshahi. "My goal is to bring peace through laughter and one day win a Nobel Peace Prize and have my parents brag about me at a family gathering. That's the dream," says Shoshahi, who has disappointed her Persian parents to heal the nation with laughter instead a valid medical degree. Tickets are \$45 and available online via [Ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com) and in person at the **UCLA Central Office** September 30, 6 p.m.*

This screening is followed by a cocktail reception in honor of the filmmakers, whose availability is subject to change due to travel bans. Stay put for an after party with the groundbreaking Trip Hop Iranian DJ Omid Walizadeh. And like all Farhang events, the Short Film Festival is a never-ending experience in all things Persian from beginning to end.

The titles featured this year are available to view on Farhang Foundation's website and include Halva (director Vandad Fallah), Shedding Skin (director Sam Javadi), Leaving and Passing (director Aliyar Rasti), Nemidani (director Payam Ghorbani), The Orangish Tree (director Amir Houshang Moein) and Strappa (director, husband and wife Sepideh Salehi and Kamran Taherimoghaddam).

Shot in black and white, Strappa – meaning rip or tear in Italian – features a somber group of men playing the traditional musical instrument Tombak with their female counterparts contributing to the music by perpetually tearing pieces of black cloth. "We feel that this film speaks to a general audience and reminds them that women are working to free themselves from their restraints in all cultures," says Sepideh Salehi.



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Is the Farhang Foundation Film Festival the first Los Angeles screening of your film?

Sepideh Salehi: We had a great opportunity to show *Strappa* last year for its LA debut at Art Brief III, Advocatsy's third public initiative. The program highlighted Iranian contemporary art and received a lot of great attention. It was really exciting to be part of it and wonderful to witness how many people this film has resonated with. We heard about the **Farhang Foundation** Film Festival competition and felt it was the perfect platform to show *Strappa* to a new audience since it is solely a platform for film. We are honored to have made it to the top six finalists in such a competitive festival.

As immigrants, how does your view of gender shape your film?

SS: Although our cultural background is Iranian and that aspect of ourselves comes out strongly in our art, as a husband and wife art team we feel that gender equality is universal. In all societies the dialogue on gender is at the forefront, including and especially in the United States of America.

Is your film based on relationships in general, or in the US, or in Iran?

Kamran Taherimoghaddam: The concept of this film brings up the tearing of fabric to signify women empowering themselves from the legal obligation of being forced to cover themselves up, for example with the hijab. Socially in the US and other countries, there are other obligations and rules that women have to face. One example of this would be the societal issues with breastfeeding in public.



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men and women. It's not just the men who get the first word in, but it's also not the woman who has the last. So in other words, feminism is not just about empowering women's rights, it's about the equality and equal say of both genders.

You have a painting background. Why did you choose film to tell this story?

KT: While living in Italy in early 2000's we started experimenting with film and video. We found that it was a medium that had the whole package. We have sound, we have movement. While we continue to work with our mediums, for this particular project we felt that video was the best medium to show subtle dialogue. But we also kept the same ideals from our painting subjects. There is intensity in the faces and actions of our subjects one usually sees and feels in still and painted images.

One of the reasons we also prefer to use video/film as our medium of choice is because it is the time that we both work together. Our other forms of visual art are always created separately. But with video/film we get to work together, as man and woman, wife and husband. This helps us create more discussions and helps us not only with our art, but also our relationship.

Farhang Foundation is also sponsoring the cinematic shadow-play production of *Feathers of Fire: A Persian Epic* at the Bram Goldsmith Theater October 20 – October 29. *Feathers of Fire* is a live animation show presented by the Wallis Foundation in collaboration with Mark Amin. This unique theater experience is inspired by *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings) and tells the classic story of star-crossed lovers Zaul and



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