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idfa
Best Film Award
International Competition
2025

A Fox Under A Pink Moon

a film by Mehrdad Oskouei and Soraya Akhlaghi



Iran, France, United Kingdom, United States, Denmark | 2025 | 76 min

WINNER
Best Film | IDFA 2025
Grand Jury Award | Full Frame Documentary Film Festival 2026
Big Stamp Award | Zagreb DOX 2026
FIPRESCI Award | Millennium Docs Against Gravity 2026

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SYNOPSIS

At just 16 years old, strong-willed Afghan sculptor and illustrator Soraya Akhlaghi has spent five years trying to find a way out of Iran and join her mother in Europe. Trapped in a marriage to a violent man, Soraya escapes the brutality and isolation of her daily life through art, channeling all her worries, joys, and fears into stunning drawings and sculptures. Many of her creations feature recurring figures: a clown who never laughs, a pink moon that always watches over her, and a fox who is her loyal travel companion. Crafted from years of Soraya's own cell phone footage and video calls with co-director Mehrdad Oskouei, this textured self-portrait interweaves Soraya's artwork with riveting scenes of her escape attempts, political news from Afghanistan, and videos where she sings, dances, or defiantly shows her bruises. A diary, a survival story, and an artistic manifesto, *A Fox Under a Pink Moon* is an unforgettable testament to the creative resilience of a 16-year-old girl who refuses to be reduced to her circumstances.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT | MEHRDAD OSKOUEI

In the past 19 years, working with the center for rehabilitation, I have made four films about young delinquents and murderers. In my first film, *It's Always Late for Freedom*, I felt that my characters wanted a larger part in forming the narration of the film, and this thought stayed with me until my last film *Sunless Shadows* where I succeeded in obtaining this result in parts of the film when I separated the character and a camera in a room by themselves and used this footage, even though neither I nor my crew was present during the filming. Later, when I looked through the footage in the editing room, I was amazed by the atmosphere I felt through this material. When I decided to make this happen in this newest film, I did away with my entire filming crew on set. After Soraya's first trip to Turkey, when the filming continued upon her return to Tehran, she increased her knowledge of filmmaking by enrolling in classes on how to use a cell phone for making films. I spoke to her each night about the scenes she had taken and planned to take, and in this way, we coordinated a joint directorship. In those days, Soraya was a 16-year old artist who was in the middle of much destruction and was dreaming of a better future for herself. When I was her age and I attempted suicide, I had a mother and father, and I lived in a country that was mine, but Soraya had no support, and even her beauty caused her difficulty. She had no country, identity, or a stable job and no support. The only thing she could hold on to was her art, and we believed she had an important story for the world. Each day in the news, we see thousands of asylum seekers who are headed toward Europe by land and sea where many of them drown. Our story is about one of the millions of people displaced by war over the last few decades. The world as a whole feels sorry for them from a distance and see them as powerless to better their lives and therefore weigh on our resources. But each one of them, in their own world, has a story to tell, full of strength. We want one of them to tell their story by themselves. The narrative, on the surface, is a story of emigration, but deep down, we enter the world of an artist. One of them, on her own, records the adventure of leaving.

– Mehrdad Oskouei

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT | SORAYA AKHLAGHI

When I first turned the camera towards myself, I did not feel ready. Life in those days was full of fear, suppressed anger, and a search for a way to continue living and surviving. The very moment I filmed my first images, it was as if a piece of reality awoke within me, a reality I had tried to hide for years.

From 2018 until today, this film was not just a filmmaking project for me; it was a journey from not only watching myself but to knowing and building myself. At first, the camera was like a cold witness to me, but gradually it became a friend. A friend I truly needed to confide in.

When I first met Mehrdad Oskouei (who has become 'Uncle Mehrdad' to me), something broke inside me. He said honestly, "Who you are right now is not your real self." Then he gave me paper and colored pencils and asked me to draw. So I drew clowns; only clowns. Clowns that never laughed. Those clowns were my inner pains. They were my unseen wounds.

From that point, I began to draw my pains, one by one. It was as if Uncle Mehrdad knew that by drawing those pictures, I would gradually become calmer and freer. Making this film was like a school of life for me. I learned that what an artist sees is not just about beauty, but beyond that, it is about truth.

Making this film brought back trust for me; trust in others, and more importantly, trust in myself. For Uncle Mehrdad, saving my life was important. And I felt this with my entire being.

Today, looking back on this seven-year journey, I understand that I was not only taught how to film myself, but how to survive and how to live. And that is the miracle of cinema and documentary film. And now, after all these years, I stand here — not as the teenage girl who narrowly escaped death many times, but as a woman who found belief in herself.

— Soraya Akhlaghi

PRODUCER'S STATEMENT | SIAVASH JAMALI

We call them “illegal immigrants,” but what should really be considered illegal?

In our eyes, war, injustice, and the act of forcing people to abandon their homeland should be illegal. A Fox Under a Pink Moon explores what happens to people once we label them as trespassers — as if their search for safety were a crime.

Through the eyes of Soraya, a free-spirited 16-year-old Afghan artist living in Iran, the film offers an intimate, self-portrait-like reflection on displacement, belonging, and the human cost of borders. Her drawings and sculptures become silent witnesses to her fears, dreams, and resilience.

As producers, we were drawn to Soraya’s strength and her poetic way of documenting life through her phone. Her art became not just an act of resistance but a form of survival — a reminder that identity can not be confined by walls or legal definitions.

This film is both a portrait and a protest — a journey through one young woman’s imagination as she dares to create beauty in a world that denies her freedom.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

Mehrdad Oskouei | Director, Producer
Mehrdad Oskouei (b. 1969, Tehran) is a celebrated Iranian independent documentary filmmaker, producer, and photographer known for his deeply humanistic and critically acclaimed work. His films often explore sensitive and challenging social issues within Iranian society, particularly focusing on marginalized groups, youth, and women.

Oskouei has directed, produced, and written over 25 documentaries and short films, many of which have been screened at prestigious international festivals, garnering over 220 awards. He gained significant recognition for his tetralogy focusing on the lives of incarcerated youth: *It's Always Late for Freedom* (2007), *The Last Days of Winter* (2011), multi-award-winning *Starless Dreams* (2016), which captured the lives of teenage girls in a correctional facility, and *Sunless Shadows* (2019), Opening Film of IDFA, Winner of the Best Directing Award, which offered intimate portraits of women in a youth detention center who were imprisoned for the murder of a male family member.

His achievements have been recognized globally; he is a recipient of the 2010 Prince Claus Award from the Netherlands for his commitment to accurately representing the concerns of his subjects and generating social justice. He also received the True Vision Award at the True/False Film Fest in 2016. Oskouei is a founding member of the Institute of Anthropology and Culture in Iran and serves as a film educator, actively shaping the next generation of Iranian documentary filmmakers. His latest film, *A Fox Under a Pink Moon*, had its World Premiere in the International Competition at IDFA 2025. This powerful and unique film was made entirely remotely, alongside its 16-year-old subject and director, Soraya Akhlaghi, an Afghan artist in Iran, filming her own footage over five years on her mobile phone.

Soraya Akhlaghi | Director, Cameraperson
Soraya Akhlaghi (b. 2003, Tehran) is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist working in the fields of sculpture, painting, and film. She began sculpting in 2016 and, by 2025, had created over 200 papier-mâché sculptures. In 2017, she expanded her practice to painting. From 2019 to 2025, she worked as cinematographer and director of the film *A Fox Under A Pink Moon*, in which she is the protagonist and main character of the film.

Siavash Jamali | Producer
Siavash Jamali (born 1984) is an independent filmmaker and producer working in documentary and fiction. His credits include *Sunless Shadows*, for which he served as executive producer and which opened IDFA in 2019, winning the festival's Award for Best Directing. He is also a producer of *A Fox Under a Pink Moon*, directed by Mehrdad Oskouei and Soraya Akhlaghi, which premiered at IDFA in 2025 and won the festival's Award for Best Film in the International Competition.

Amir Adibparvar | Editor
Amir Adibparvar is an exceptionally accomplished film editor, born in 1981, who holds a BS degree in Cinema.
He has built an extensive and internationally recognized career, having edited more than 13 feature films, 10 documentaries, 10 TV series, and numerous short films. The majority of these

works have been screened at prestigious international film festivals and have received numerous awards.

Adibparvar is particularly noted for his editing on major award-winning documentaries, which include:
Starless Dreams (2016), directed by Mehrdad Oskouei (Berlinale Generation 2016).
Sunless Shadows (2019), directed by Mehrdad Oskouei (Opening Film of IDFA 2019).
As I Lay Dying (2025), directed by Mohammad Reza Farzad & Pegah Ahangarani (Opening Film of IDFA 2025).
Paikar (2025), directed by Dawood Hilmandi (Premier Luminous at IDFA 2025).

Through his prolific work across both documentary and fiction, Amir Adibparvar has established himself as one of the leading editors in contemporary Iranian cinema, consistently working on critically acclaimed films showcased on the world stage.

Afshin Azizi | Music Composer
Afshin Azizi was born in 1986 in Iran, he started learning music by playing Setar(Iranian traditional instrument) at the age of 7, then he changed his instrument to Tar(Iranian traditional instrument) and he was a trainee in master Farhad Fakhreddini's classes in harmony, counterpoint and orchestration for a duration of 3 years, after a period of time he became interested in playing guitar so he started to learn Flamenco Guitar in 2007 he was chosen as one of the winners of flamenco guitar festival that was organized by Spanish embassy in Iran, when he was 19 he started composing music for movies and at the same time he established his own recording studio, He is also the only composer who has participated in three editions of the IDFA (International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam) with two different documentary films. Notably, Afshin Azizi is the composer of the short-animated film “In the Shadow of the Cypress”, which won the Oscar for Best Animated Short Film in 2025.

Mohammad Lotfali | Director of Animation
Mohammad Lotfali is an Iranian animator and visual effects artist known for his collaborations on acclaimed films such as There Is No Evil by Mohammad Rasoulof (Golden Bear, Berlinale) and the animated title sequence for the TV series Soovashoon (including over 50 minutes of original animation created for different parts of the series). His viral short animation Father gained wide recognition online. He has been nominated twice for the Crystal Simorgh Award for Best Visual Effects at the Fajr Film Festival and has received multiple international awards for his short animated films. Lotfali also explores immersive storytelling through animation in virtual and augmented reality environments. His recent collaboration with filmmakers Mehrdad Oskouei and Soraya Akhlaghi marks his first experience directing animation for a documentary-animation film.

Hossein Ghorchian | Sound Designer and Mix
Hossein Ghorchian is a renowned sound designer, mixer, and re-recording artist in Iranian cinema. He has received fourteen international awards for sound design in both feature and short films from prestigious international film festivals, as well as numerous national awards within Iran. Among his recent honors is the Best Sound Design Award at the 43rd Fajr Film

Festival for the feature film The Deer. Over the years, Hossein Ghorchian has worked on hundreds of films, short films, animations, and TV series.

Some of his recent internationally acclaimed projects include:
In the Shadow of the Cypress, an animated film that won the Best Animated Short Award at the Academy Awards.
My Favorite Cake, which competed in the official selection of the Berlin International Film Festival (Berlinale).

Masoud Shokrnia | Assistant Director and Production Design
Masoud Shokrnia (b.1984) is a multifaceted Iranian artist renowned for his unique fusion of fine art, graphic design, and cinema. His visually impactful work explores human narratives and emotion through captivating imagery.

Collaborating with acclaimed director Mehrdad Oskouei, Shokrnia contributed his talents as an assistant director, photographer, and title designer for the 2019 IDFA-featured film "Sunless Shadows." He also worked on the project "Nosrat Karimi: Being an Artist in Iran" as cinematographer and assistant director.

Continuing his creative partnership with Oskouei, Shokrnia serves as assistant director and production manager for "A Fox Under a Pink Moon".

Alongside his film achievements, Shokrnia's photography has garnered international acclaim and been showcased in numerous exhibitions around the world.

CREDITS

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Mehrdad Oskouei
Soraya Akhlaghi

Produced By
Mehrdad Oskouei
Siavash Jamali

Executive Produced By
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Rebecca Lichtenfeld for InMaat
Jenny Warburg
Tony Tabatznik
David Borenstein
Radovan Síbrt
Robin Hessman
James Costa for Bird Street Productions
Trevor Burgess for Bird Street Productions
Gary Hess for Bird Street Productions
In Association With
Catapult Film Fund

Camerawoman & Sound Recordist
Soraya Akhlaghi
Filmed #Withgalaxy

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Amir Adibparvar
Siavash Jamali

Editor
Amir Adibparvar

Director Of Animation
Mohammad Lotfali

Music By
Afshin Azizi

Sound Designer & Mix
Hossein Ghoorchian

Color Grading
Hamidreza Fatourehchian

Production Manager
Masoud Shokrnia

With The Support Of
IMS Fund
Rasmus Steen
Ims Head Of Documentary
Serge Borenstein
For Nbdy Intl
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3d Modeler
Omid Ameri
Rigger
Mahsa Haratizade
Animator
Mahan Khoshnavaz
Editor / Compositor / Rendering
Sina Pourjalal
Mahdi Khomarian
Texture / Shading Artist
Mohammad Lotfali

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Assistants /Mix & Master
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Afra Azari
Cello
Mehrdad Alemi
Violin & Alto
Milad Alemi
Ney
Mohammad Yousefi
Flute
Ali Ghobadi
Rubab
Arash Azizi
Percussion
Mehrzad Hoveyda
Synthesizer
Afra Azari
Setar & Guitar

Afshin Azizi
Technical Support
Technicav (Mojtaba Ghaemi)

Music (Licensed Track)
Song Title
“On Fire”
Written By
Aki Numb, Arez, And Sora
Performed And Produced By Séquence
Used With Permission

Color Grading Team
Color Grading Consultant
Mohamad Hadadi
Assistant
Keule Crew

Soraya's Trainers
Masoud Shokrnia
Farhad Soleimani
Farhad Motaei
Farhad Talebinejad
Kiavash Abtahi

Artunity
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Farinaz Rashed Marandi
Sara Seyed Medghalchi

Samsung
Sungwook Choi
Bita Fathali
Gilla Solati
Alireza Tavassoli
Mohamad Hossein Ansari

Special Thanks
Hassan Oskouei
Nosrat Karimi
Mohamad Rashed Marandi
Farinaz Rashed Marandi
Mohamad Kazem Taraghi
Mandana Karimi
Babak Karimi
Reza Emami
Laura Horwitz
Sarah Terrazas

Pearlie Joubert
Tia Lessin

Thanks
Ahmad Alasti
Arne Bro
Nasrin Mirshab
Ali Dehbashi
Maryam Osloobi
Saeed Askarzadeh
Marmar Kabir
Mohammad Reza Farzad
Amir Shams
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