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presents

THE HUNTER

(Shekarchi)

a film by Rafi Pitts

Running Time: 92 min.

Color

Original Film Language: Farsi

Subtitles: English

Screening ratio: 1:1,85

Sound: Dolby Digital SR-D

Countries of Production: Iran – Germany

Year of Production: 2010

Press contact:

Frank Tarzi

(630) 336-5481

FrankTarzi@OliveFilms.com

Please download photos from our website Pressroom @

www.olivefilms.com

Synopsis

Recently released from prison, Ali makes the most of his return, amidst much talk of the upcoming elections and promises of change. Despite working nights, he tries to spend the most time possible with his beautiful wife and young daughter. To escape the stress of urban living, Ali retreats to his favorite pastime of hunting in the secluded forest north of town. Tragedy strikes and Ali's wife Sara is accidentally killed in a police shoot-out with demonstrators. After a long and frustrating experience at the police station, Ali's own search for his missing six-year-old daughter ends in horror and pushes him over the edge. In broad daylight, overlooking the busy city's surrounding highways, Ali randomly shoots and kills two policemen. After a high-speed car chase outside of town, Ali flees into the northern forest where he is captured by two police officers. Ali is resigned to his fate and watches quietly as the arguing policemen lose their way in the woods. Situations complicate and the line between hunter and hunted becomes difficult to define...

RAFI PITTS Writer and Director

Rafi Pitts' films have attained acclaim and awards around the globe. His first feature, SEASON FIVE (1997), was the first Franco-Iranian coproduction since the Iranian Revolution in 1979, and premiered in Venice. SANAM (2000) was hailed by French critics as "the Iranian 400 Blows". In 2003, Pitts presented his controversial feature documentary, ABEL FERRARA: NOT GUILTY in Locarno. IT'S WINTER (2006) premiered in Berlin in Competition, and one year later, the Seattle International Film Festival honored Pitts with the Emerging Masters Award for his work. Born 1967 in Iran, Pitts spent his childhood in Tehran, where he lived in a basement flat underneath a post-production studio. During the war between Iran and Iraq, in 1981, he fled the country and moved to Britain. He graduated in 1991 from Harrow College – Polytechnic of Central London with a BA (Hons.) Degree in Film and Photography. His first short, IN EXILE (1991), was presented the same year at the London International Film Festival. In the 90's, Pitts moved to Paris and worked on films by Leos Carax, Jacques Doillon and Jean-Luc Godard.

2010 THE HUNTER (Shekarchi) | 2006 IT'S WINTER (Zemestan) | 2003
ABEL FERRARA: NOT GUILTY (documentary, from the series "Cinéma de
Notre Temps") | 2000 SANAM | 1997 SEASON FIVE (Fasl-e Panjom)

COMMENTS FROM WRITER-DIRECTOR RAFI PITTS

A REFLECTION OF THE TENSION

The photograph used in the opening credit sequence was taken in 1980 by Manoocher Deghati. That photo shows a group of men on motorbikes – "pasdaran" or the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. They are celebrating the first anniversary of the Revolution. It's a very aggressive image commemorating a violent event. I've held on to that photo since I was 14. My generation grew up with that image. That photo frames the tense situation representative of the main character Ali and his generation. It's all a reflection of the tension in what is happening in Iran today. The pasdaran are back, only this time they are attacking civilians, who are only trying to

exercise freedom of speech. Thirty years have gone by since the Revolution. The big question today in Iran is if the Revolution was stolen from us.

THE HUNTER

The film concentrates on hunting down to explore the pressure of a time bomb society. The “hunter” could obviously be seen as the leading character Ali, but there can also be other interpretations. Keeping things open to interpretation is an important element of my filmmaking. As a director, I try to give as many meanings as possible. In Iran, when we invite someone to dinner, we offer our guests as many dishes as possible. But at the dinner, we don’t tell them what to eat, they are free to choose themselves. I have this same attitude about the ideas I present in my films. I respect the audience by allowing them the choice to think as they would like.

TIME BOMB

Just released from prison, Ali is now thrown back into society but without much encouragement. It’s never revealed why Ali was in prison. It could have been political, he may have been a student from the 1999 riots. Who a person is will decide why he or she thinks Ali was in prison. What’s important is that Ali is now put in a situation where working nights doesn’t allow him enough time to spend with his wife and young daughter. Add that to his environment and Ali becomes a time bomb. He could end up harming himself or someone else.

TEHRAN-LA

In *THE HUNTER*, Ali lives in an urban environment of concrete and highways. I’m fascinated by today’s Tehran. The city ironically has a strong resemblance to Los Angeles as Tehran was structured with highways after the Revolution. Today Iranians abroad have even nicknamed Los Angeles, Tehrangeles! The result is a modern society spending their lives in automobiles, going back and forth to work, creating a sort of economic monopole. It fascinates me how two cities can be so much alike yet coming from countries that do not see eye to eye politically. Such an urban environment combined with technological progress promotes isolation, which can eventually bring about a kind of madness.

LOST IN A LANDSCAPE

The city of Tehran, a concrete jungle. The landscape in the north, is a dead one, very much the way Ali feels towards the environment, a desolate landscape, he is living in. Whether it be the city or the forest, there is no difference for him. He is alone, lost in a landscape that doesn’t want to give him reason to be alive. The structure of the cement pillars under the bridge where he lives, or under the highway, where his mother lives, are representative of that concrete jungle. The forest is located in the north of Tehran, near the Caspian Sea. A four-hour drive. I chose to shoot it in winter. I didn’t want any leaves on the trees. The choice of the green color for the car stems from that idea. I wanted the car to be like a green leaf. A symbol that is alive in contrast with the dead landscape.

ELECTION ENERGY

As a filmmaker, I think it’s important to let the energy of what’s happening around be integrated into the film. We were shooting the film during the Presidential election campaign. I also believe in living fully in the time you’re in. But I was very surprised to see later that the film was

actually ahead of us. We finished shooting just before the June 2009 elections results in Iran. But the similarities between the tension in *THE HUNTER* and what ended up happening in Iran after the elections is uncanny. The choice of green for Ali's car was made before the post-election Green Movement actions and could be considered coincidental. But I look at it as the pre-election energy was integrated naturally into the film.

CHANGE

Driving around alone in his old green car, Ali hears Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, on the radio speaking about change. It's an ironic response to Obama's change campaign. There's also a certain irony to his words when you look back at his actions during the elections, as well as the resulting demonstrations. Not all mankind's issues can be discussed in a 90-minute film. Irony is my way to help the audience to understand the broader landscape. I would also like to tell people who say certain things to listen carefully to what they have said. As a filmmaker, my job is to question. I don't believe in trying to give answers. Although currently in Iran, questions seem to have become a criminal offence!

NO MORE TIME TO WASTE

In any part of the world, bureaucracy can be frustrating. We forget the amount of dead time that we spend in this Kafkaesque world of ours. We are sometimes forced to spend so much time simply trying to obtain information. For a time bomb like Ali in *THE HUNTER*, this is a big mistake. While searching for his missing wife and daughter, Ali must spend hours waiting in the police station. This adds pressure to an already ticking time bomb. Ali represents a modern society who has no more time to waste, people who want answers now. In Iran, for example, 70 percent of the population is under 30. These young people aren't patient. They're a no-future generation, economically in dire straits. Ali's wife can be considered as still part of that generation. Despite their problems, she has the courage, as many Iranian women in Iran today, to take to the streets and demonstrate. A generation that is prepared to die as it has nothing to lose.

SYMBOL OF A GOVERNING BODY

Even before losing his wife and daughter, Ali feels pressure from society and authority. Police everywhere are the symbol of a governing body. Ali hates that symbol. When he takes his sniper's position over the highway, he seems to be aiming randomly. Is he a time bomb who has lost his mind? Or is he taking calculated revenge on the police? What takes us into the second half of *THE HUNTER* is a constant questioning if Ali had the right to kill, even out of vengeance for the loss of his wife and daughter. Killing is horrible under any circumstances. I wanted to stress this with silence when Ali's victim hits the ground.

LIKE A MAZE We tend to forget that people are individuals. Society is constantly grouping and labeling people. The individual is often lost. So when we meet the policemen who capture Ali, I try to show the individuals behind the uniform. They are small figures in the broad landscape of humanity, but they each have a role to play. Each of them believes that they are doing the right thing. One chose to be a policeman, another is forced through military service, and there's Ali who has lost everything. In the absurdity of it all, they're all three lost in a maze that will take them to their destiny. The film itself is constructed like a maze. My central character is caught in a maze, only the route of his maze moves straight ahead. That's the most

violent form. His maze is without twists and turns. There's no escape for him.

MITRA HAJJAR

Mitra Hajjar was the only professional actor in the film. The perfect choice to play Sara, Ali's loving wife, in *THE HUNTER*. Sara unashamedly stands by her husband throughout his prison time. Mitra's personality represents a very strong independent woman. Her presence gives the feeling of a survivor. She also starred in my film *IT'S WINTER*. She is perfect for my films because my characters are often survivors. You can see on her face that she's a very strong Iranian woman. Mitra is a very popular star in Iran and she has had leading roles in over 20 films. She has given some acclaimed performances in films like *BORN UNDER LIBRA* (dir. Ahmad Reza Darvish), *SAGKOSHI* (dir. Bahram Beyzai).

DEDICATED TO BOZORG ALAVI

I dedicated *THE HUNTER* to the celebrated Iranian writer and political intellectual Bozorg Alavi. Alavi was forced into political exile and remained in East Berlin after the 1953 coup d'état in Iran which resulted in massive imprisonments. He taught Persian Literature at Humboldt University and lectured widely in Europe and North America. Alavi remained in exile until his death in 1997 in Berlin, visiting Iran only briefly after the Revolution in 1979 and 1980. I don't believe in word for word adaptations of books into films, but impressions of a book can inspire a film. A feeling that isn't dictated by traditional narrative. In this way, *THE HUNTER* is inspired by Alavi's 1952 short story "Gileh Mard" (The Man from Gilan).

PLAYING ALI

On the first shooting day, the actor that I had originally cast for the role of Ali proved to be unreliable and unpredictable. He showed up 6 hours late! I decided to play Ali myself in order to save the film. If we had continued with the original actor, the shoot would have surely come to a halt eventually. So suddenly on my first shooting day, I was also playing the leading role. What I'm wearing in the film is what I happened to be wearing on that day. So in a way *THE HUNTER* also became a film about a director who has his hands tied because he's not allowed to say everything that he wants to say in the film that he's making. The hunter of the title could actually be the filmmaker himself, armed with his camera. Acting and directing at the same time was very "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde". Playing Ali brought me to a very dark place. It was painful and not easy to snap out of. I also realized that what I love about being a director is filming other people.

SENTIMENT OF OPPRESSION

THE HUNTER was interesting to make because I tried to mix neo-realism with formalism. A neo-realist Western. I tried to give several layers to the film, politics only one of them. Moral order also fascinates me, whether it concerns religion, social structure or values. Independently or simultaneously. I feel it strongly within me. Within my country, Iran, that through its severe borders of religion and auto-censorship, imposes on each individual the need to search for understanding from within, constantly forcing us to deal with our sentiment of oppression. I hope that *THE HUNTER* will be released in Iran, but that might be difficult considering the current political climate.

Main Cast

Rafi Pitts Ali Alavi
Mitra Hajjar Sara | Ali's Wife
Ali Nicksaulat Policeman | Commander
Hassan Ghalenoi Policeman | Soldier
Manoochehr Rahimi Inspector
Ismail Amini Young Man in Warehouse
Nasser Madahi Old Night Guard
Ali Mazinani Young Night Guard
Ossta Shah-Tir Ali's Father
Malak Khazai Ali's Mother
Saba Yaghoobi Ali's Daughter

Main Crew

Rafi Pitts Writer-Director
Thanassis Karathanos Producer | Germany
Mohammad Reza Takhtkeshian Producer | Iran
Mohammad Davudi Director of Photography
Malak Khazai Art Director
Hassan Hassandoost Editor
Lars Ginzal Sound Mixer
Noemi Hampel Sound Designer
Hossein Bashash Sound

TWENTY TWENTY VISION IN CO-PRODUCTION WITH AFTAB NEGARAN FILM PRODUCTIONS PRESENTS A RAFI PITTS FILM "THE HUNTER" WITH RAFI PITTS, MITRA HAJJAR, ALI NICKSAULAT, HASSAN GHALENOI SOUND RECORDER HOSSEIN BASHASH SOUND DESIGNER NOEMI HAMPEL RE-RECORDING MIXER LARS GINZEL EDITOR HASSAN HASSANDOOST PRODUCTION DESIGNER MALAK KHAZAI DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MOHAMMAD DAVUDI CO-PRODUCER MOHAMMAD REZA TAKHTKESHIAN PRODUCED BY THANASSIS KARATHANOS WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY RAFI PITTS IN COPRODUCTION WITH ZDF/ARTE & PALLAS FILM AND THE SUPPORT OF MEDIENBOARD BERLIN-BRANDENBURG, FILMFÖRDERUNGSANSTALT, WORLD CINEMA FUND