



JANUS FILMS

24 FRAMES



The final film from
Abbas Kiarostami

“Kiarostami represents the highest level of artistry in the cinema.”

—Martin Scorsese

For what would prove to be his final film, Iranian director Abbas Kiarostami gave himself a challenge: to create a dialogue between his work as a filmmaker and his work as a photographer, bridging the two art forms to which he had dedicated his life. Setting out to reconstruct the moments immediately before and after a photograph is taken, Kiarostami selected twenty-four still images—

most of them stark landscapes inhabited only by foraging birds and other wildlife—and digitally animated each one into its own subtly evolving four-and-a-half-minute vignette, creating a series of poignant studies in movement, perception, and time. A sustained meditation on the process of image making, *24 Frames* is a graceful and elegiac farewell from one of the giants of world cinema.

Iran/France | 2017 | 114 minutes | Color | Stereo | 1.85:1 aspect ratio | Screening format: DCP

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THE MAKING OF *24 FRAMES*

Abbas Kiarostami worked intensively on *24 Frames* in the three years prior to his death in 2016. Before his hospitalization in March of that year, the director did so in his office in the basement of his home in north Tehran. His main collaborator on the project, Ali Kamali, was responsible for digitally creating the multilayered images derived from Kiarostami's photographs (and one old-master painting). The film's soundtrack was also created in Tehran. When Kiarostami died, the film was near completion but not finished. The remaining work was eventually undertaken in Toronto, supervised by the filmmaker's son, Ahmad Kiarostami.

According to Ahmad, the image manipulation we see in *24 Frames* had its roots in his father's love of photography and his discovery, some two decades ago, that when he had his negatives scanned, he could make changes to the images. At first, he altered basic things like composition and contrast. From there, his interest in further digital changes "developed organically," says Ahmad.

The initial idea for *24 Frames*, which essentially consists of twenty-four short films of roughly four and a half minutes each, came from Abbas Kiarostami's observation that, in looking at a painting of a scene from the world, the viewer sees only a split second in time and is left to wonder what came before and after, and what the artist added or removed. Kiarostami started out the project by digitally extending the time frames of several paintings (only one of these, Pieter Brueghel the Elder's *The Hunters in the Snow*, is seen in

the final film) before turning to his own photographs for source material.

In making such extensive use of computer-generated imagery, *24 Frames* represented yet another creative leap for an artist whose career was full of them. And it was one that could not have been easily predicted by those familiar with his previous work or his habits.

"My father didn't know anything about technology. He barely knew how to use a cell phone," Ahmad Kiarostami says. "For *24 Frames*, he worked with Ali Kamali, who used a video program similar to Photoshop to make layers of images taken from Abbas's photos. One day I watched them at work. At one point, the image of a cow crossing the screen wasn't clean. My father suggested they put in a bird to distract attention. Each little detail came from my father, but he didn't know how to execute it, so Ali took care of it. For years, when my father was at home and he wasn't busy with other projects, they worked ten to fourteen hours a day."

More than forty "frames" were eventually created. When Kiarostami was in the hospital and felt up to it, Kamali came to his bedside with a laptop to work toward the project's completion. Kiarostami had determined that the film would be called *24 Frames*, and by the time of his death, he had narrowed down the field to thirty scenes. The final selection was made by Ahmad Kiarostami, and the film was completed in Toronto under the postproduction creative direction of Sam Javanrouh.



ABBAS KIAROSTAMI BIOGRAPHY

The most acclaimed and influential of Iran's major filmmakers, Abbas Kiarostami was born in Tehran on June 22, 1940. Raised in a middle-class household, he was interested in art and literature from an early age. During and after university, where he majored in painting and graphic design, he illustrated children's books, designed credit sequences for films, and made numerous television commercials. In 1969, he was invited to start a filmmaking division for the government-run Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (an organization Iranians call Kanoon). The ten-minute *Bread and Alley* (1970) was the first of several short films, most centered on children, that he directed over the next two decades, a period during which he also made documentaries, including the feature-length *First Graders* (1984) and *Homework* (1989), both of which take up the subject of education. His first narrative feature, *The Traveler* (1974), about a provincial boy scheming to reach Tehran to see a soccer match, was made under Kanoon's auspices, while his second, *The Report* (1977), an autobiographically tinged story of a collapsing marriage, was made independently.

It was after Iran's 1979 revolution that Kiarostami began his rapid ascent to international renown. *Where Is My Friend's House?* (1987), about a rural boy's effort to return a pal's notebook, won the Bronze Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival. *Close-up* (1990), about the trial of a man accused of impersonating a famous filmmaker, was the director's first film to focus on cinema itself, and to blur the lines between documentary and fiction; it has been voted the best Iranian film ever made by Iranian and international critics. In *And Life Goes On* (a.k.a. *Life and Nothing More . . .*, 1992), he dramatized a journey he made into an earthquake's devastation zone to discover if the child actors of *Where Is My Friend's House?* had survived. Those two films and *Through the Olive Trees* (1994), which dramatizes the making of *And Life Goes On*, have been

dubbed the "Koker" trilogy by critics after the name of the village where much of their action was filmed.

After *And Life Goes On* and *Through the Olive Trees* earned Kiarostami wide acclaim at the Cannes Film Festival, his next film, *Taste of Cherry* (1997), became the first—and so far, only—Iranian film to win the festival's top prize, the Palme d'Or. Telling of a man's attempt to gain assistance in committing suicide, a taboo under Islam, the film was one of several by Kiarostami to be banned in Iran while enjoying international success. His final film of this remarkable period, *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999), which concerns a camera crew on an enigmatic assignment in Kurdistan, won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival.

In the new century, Kiarostami broadened his creative focus, devoting more time to forms including photography, installation art, poetry, and teaching. In cinema, he embraced low-budget digital filmmaking for the feature *Ten* (2002), the documentaries *ABC Africa* (2001) and *10 on Ten* (2004), the experimental films *Five* (2003) and *Shirin* (2008), and several shorts. Beginning at the decade's end, he went abroad to make two dramatic features, both centering on male-female relations: *Certified Copy* (2010), starring Juliette Binoche, in Italy, and *Like Someone in Love* (2012) in Japan. At the time of his death, he was preparing a movie to be made in China.

In March 2016, while he was in the midst of working on *24 Frames*, Kiarostami was hospitalized and underwent two operations. He was transferred to Paris in late June of the same year, and died there on July 4. Charges have been made that his death was caused by medical malpractice by doctors in Iran. He is buried in Tehran. Posthumously completed, *24 Frames* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2017.

A PROTEAN CREATOR

Although Abbas Kiarostami did not intend *24 Frames* to be his final film, it serves as a fitting final testament by bringing together so many of the interests and creative avenues he explored over the course of his long and multifaceted career. Several of these themes and forms are highlighted below.

PAINTING AND ILLUSTRATION

The son of a decorative housepainter, Kiarostami won a painting competition at age eighteen and majored in painting and graphic design at the University of Tehran School of Fine Arts, going on to work for a time as an illustrator and designer. He

maintained a lifelong interest in the visual arts and counted a number of prominent artists among his friends. In a sense, the digital tools used for *24 Frames* allowed him to combine his skills as a filmmaker with his passion for drawing and illustration.

ART AND MUSEUMS

Kiarostami was interested in the ways art is presented publicly and the creative possibilities afforded by the museum setting. In the latter part of his career, he created a number of installations for museums and galleries around the world. Some of these explored subjects—such as doors, mirrors, frames, and trees—

taken up elsewhere in his work. Though Kiarostami considered *24 Frames* to be a film, he considered it a companion piece to his installations and photography exhibitions and felt it could work in a gallery or museum setting.

CHILDREN

Kids were at the center of many Kiarostami films. Early shorts such as *Bread and Alley*, *Breaktime*, and *A Wedding Suit*, as well as the feature *The Traveler*, centered on youthful conundrums and subjectivities, and featured the striking performances by young actors for which Kiarostami became known. The director's

films during this period, including the education documentaries *First Graders* and *Homework*, also reflected his experiences and concerns in raising his young sons Ahmad and Bahman. Kiarostami said that he and other directors chose to focus on children after the Iranian Revolution to avoid the obstacles that the Islamic republic's censorship laws put in front of filmmakers wanting to offer realistic depictions of grown men and women. In making *24 Frames*, he had young viewers in mind, saying he thought they might enjoy the film's visual playfulness.

NATURE AND PHOTOGRAPHY

Throughout his adult life, Kiarostami devoted considerable energy to his love of photography, and his photographs were displayed in galleries around the world as well as published in a number of books. Nature was his favorite and most frequent subject. While he took pictures in many of the countries he visited, his best-known photographs are of the landscapes and roads of his native

Iran, images that resemble some of the scenes in films such as *And Life Goes On*, *Through the Olive Trees*, and *The Wind Will Carry Us*. And nature offered Kiarostami more than just subjects for his photos. Ahmad Kiarostami has said his father “cleaned his eyes with nature”—he used that expression. He had to go into nature. His ideal trip was to go alone, or with one friend, just driving in the mountains and taking pictures.” All but one of the “frames” in *24 Frames* derive directly from one or more Kiarostami photographs of the natural world.

POETRY

Kiarostami not only read and memorized vast quantities of verse, Iranian and international, classical and modern; he also wrote it voluminously. (*In the Shadow of Trees: The Collected Poetry of Abbas Kiarostami*, a nearly seven-hundred-page volume of English translations by Iman Tavassoly and Paul Cronin, was recently published in the U.S.) In cinema, poetry served Kiarostami in two

ways. It gave him ideas and words, including the titles of *Where Is My Friend's House?* and *The Wind Will Carry Us*, both of them phrases borrowed from modern Iranian poets. Additionally, poetry gave Kiarostami models for formal strategies in his films right up until *24 Frames*, including the use of visual “rhymes” and ellipses.

IMAGINATION

In his celebrated feature *Close-up*, Kiarostami told the story of a man who attempted to escape his constricted life by posing as a famous film director. Kiarostami said the tale illustrated that art and imagination can release people from the difficulties that the world imposes. In cinema, Kiarostami often indicated that he felt limited by the budgets, technology, and need for crews that came with moviemaking. In making use of digital imagery for *24 Frames*, he freed himself—and the viewer—to travel to places bounded only by the limits of imagination itself.



IN KIAROSTAMI'S OWN WORDS

"I've often noticed that we are not able to look at what we have in front of us, unless it's inside a frame."

"From my very first movie, what was my concentration, my inspiration, was that I didn't want to narrate something. I didn't want to tell a story. I wanted to show something; I wanted for them to make their own story from what they were seeing."

"My films have been progressing toward a certain kind of minimalism, even though it was never intended. Elements that can be eliminated have been eliminated. This was pointed out to me by somebody who referred to the paintings of Rembrandt and his use of light: some elements are highlighted while others are obscured or even pushed back into the dark. And it's something that we do—we bring out elements that we want to emphasize. I'm not claiming or denying that I have done such a thing, but I do believe in Bresson's method of creation through omission, not through addition."

"A work of art doesn't exist outside the perception of the audience."

"I never really learned photography."

KIAROSTAMI FILMOGRAPHY

- Bread and Alley* (1970) (short)
Recess (1972) (short)
The Experience (1973) (midlength film)
The Traveler (1974)
So Can I (1975) (short)
Two Solutions for One Problem (1975) (short)
The Colors (1976) (short)
A Wedding Suit (1976) (midlength film)
The Report (1977)
Tribute to the Teachers (1977) (short)
How to Make Use of Leisure Time: Painting (1977) (short)
Jahan-Nama Palace (1977) (short)
Solution (1978) (short)
First Case, Second Case (1979) (midlength documentary)
Toothache (1980) (short)
Orderly or Disorderly (1981) (short)
The Chorus (1982) (short)
Fellow Citizen (1983) (midlength documentary)
First Graders (1984) (documentary)
Where Is My Friend's House? (1987)
Homework (1989) (documentary)
Close-up (1990)
And Life Goes On (1992)
Through the Olive Trees (1994)
Repérages (1995) (segment of *À propos de Nice, la suite*, codirected with Parvis Kimiavi)
Dinner for One (1995) (segment of *Lumière and Company*)
The Birth of Light (1997) (short)
Taste of Cherry (1997)
The Wind Will Carry Us (1999)
ABC Africa (2001) (documentary)
Ten (2002)
Five (2003)
10 on Ten (2004) (documentary)
Tickets (2005) (codirected with Ken Loach and Ermanno Olmi)
Roads of Kiarostami (2006) (documentary short)
Rug (2006) (short)
Where Is My Romeo? (2007) (segment of *To Each His Own Cinema*)
Kojast jaye residan (2007) (documentary short)
Shirin (2008)
Certified Copy (2010)
No (2010) (short)
Like Someone in Love (2012)
Segment of Venice 70: Future Reloaded (2013)
Take Me Home (2016) (short)
24 Frames (2017)

