



76. Internationale
Filmfestspiele
Berlin

Berlinale Panorama

ROYA

A film by Mahnaz Mohammadi





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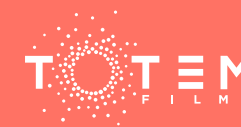
Berlinale Panorama

ROYA

A film by Mahnaz Mohammadi

2026 | Color | Drama | 92' | Germany, Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Iran | 4k | 5.1

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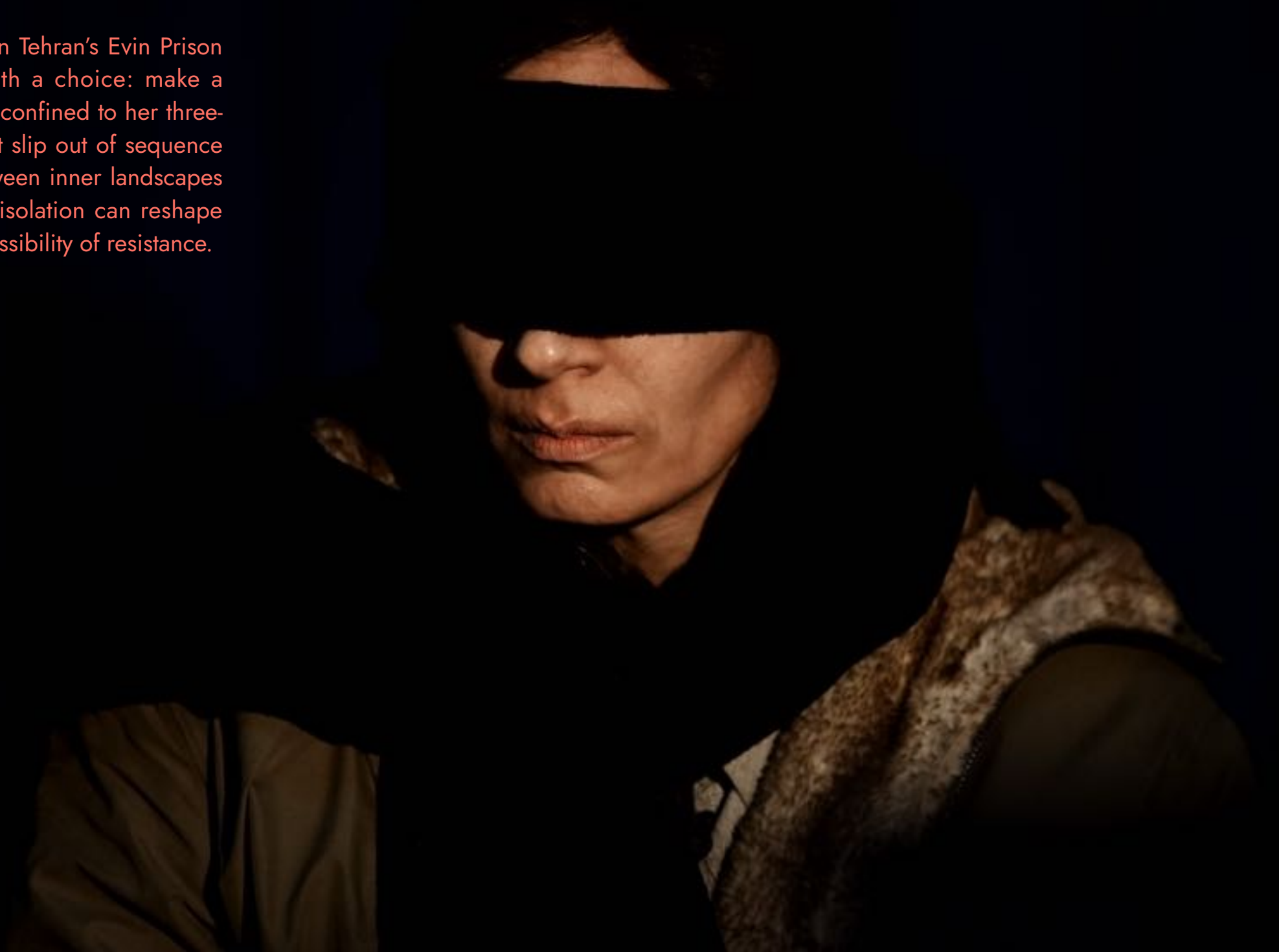


LOGLINE

Roya, an Iranian teacher imprisoned for her political beliefs, is faced with a choice: make a forced televised confession, or remain confined to her 3-square-metre cell.

SYNOPSIS

Roya, an Iranian teacher imprisoned in Tehran's Evin Prison for her political beliefs, is faced with a choice: make a forced televised confession or remain confined to her three-square-metre cell. As past and present slip out of sequence and exchange places, she moves between inner landscapes and lived experience, revealing how isolation can reshape perception, identity, and the fragile possibility of resistance.



DIRECTOR INTERVIEW

How was it to return to a narrative format with such a powerful personal feature, and why did you choose this format?

Returning to a narrative form didn't mean going back to a classical or linear structure for me. **ROYA** follows the inner logic of the mind and memory, where storytelling doesn't unfold through explanation or clear causality, but through repetition, rupture, displacement, and silence. After many years working with documentary forms, I needed a structure that could carry this kind of experience. Narrative cinema gave me a framework that doesn't



Narrative cinema gave me a framework that doesn't try to reproduce reality but works closer to how perception and memory really function.

try to reproduce reality but works closer to how perception and memory really function. Meaning is not spelled out; it emerges through gaps, slippages, and fractures. In **ROYA**, form is not just a container for content, the narrative structure itself becomes the space where experience takes shape.

Your artistic decisions are striking, for example the overlapping layers and notions of dreams and reality. Why did you decide to blur these lines?

In **ROYA**, the boundaries between dream and reality, past and present, are intentionally left open. This wasn't a stylistic choice for its own sake, but a reflection of how experience is really lived and remembered. Trauma, memory don't move in a straight line; they surface, fade, overlap, and interrupt one another.

By layering images, sounds, and different temporalities, I wanted the film to follow this internal logic instead of imposing clarity from



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the outside. Dreams and reality are not treated as opposites, but as connected states through which the character moves. Blurring these lines allows the film to stay close to a subjective experience where meaning is always shifting, incomplete, and often revealed indirectly. Rather than asking the viewer to decode the film as a puzzle with fixed answers, the film invites them into its rhythm and density, to experience how perception itself becomes fractured under pressure, and how coherence is slowly rebuilt through fragments rather than resolution.

Are dreams more precise and truthful in terms of understanding your feelings and maybe reality? Is reality distracting from the truth or are dreams a rejection of reality?

For me, dreams aren't more accurate than reality, but they can be more truthful. Not because they replace reality, but because they're less filtered by fear, control, or social expectations. In waking life, reality is often censored, fragmented, or shaped by what cannot be said or faced directly. Dreams are spaces where things can appear without needing to make immediate sense. In **ROYA**, dreams are not an escape from reality, nor a rejection of it.

They are another way of encountering it, one where suppressed emotions, memories, and conflicts can surface without being organized or explained. Rather than offering clarity, dreams open a space where truth appears in unstable, unfinished forms. That uncertainty is essential to the film, because it reflects a reality that cannot be fully grasped or resolved, only approached through fragments and traces.

With regard to the current situation in Iran, in what way are dreams a way to escape imprisonment, physical but also emotional?

In the current situation in Iran, I don't see dreams as a form of escape. In **ROYA**, dreams function more as a space of survival, a way for the mind to remain active when the body is restricted, controlled, or confined. Under conditions of physical and emotional imprisonment, what is really at stake is not freedom in an abstract sense, but the ability to stay connected to oneself. Dreams create a fragile but vital continuity when reality is constantly interrupted by violence, fear, and uncertainty. They allow inner life to continue when external life is narrowed, monitored, or silenced. In this sense, dreams don't



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offer relief or illusion; they prevent total collapse. What the film is interested in is not dreaming as hope, but dreaming as endurance, as a minimal space where meaning, memory, and agency are not completely erased, even when everything else is under pressure.

Are dreams a metaphor for resistance?

What is happening in Iran today feels to me like a kind of collective dream, not in the sense of illusion, but as a shared condition where familiar structures collapse and certainty disappears. Reality becomes unstable, time fractures, and meaning must be reassembled from what remains. In this sense, dreams in ROYA are not symbols of resistance in a heroic or declarative way. They are closer to the point where resistance begins: when what once felt solid breaks down, and new ways of perceiving, connecting, and enduring start to emerge. Dreams mark the moment when control fails to fully capture inner life. They hold fragments of memory, fear, and desire that survive collapse. Resistance here is not an act of opposition, but a refusal to disappear, a way of staying present when the ground beneath us is no longer stable.



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DIRECTOR BIOGRAPHY

Mahnaz Mohammadi



Mahnaz Mohammadi is an Iranian filmmaker and women's rights activist. With a strong background in documentary cinema, her work has long captured the struggles and resilience of women in Iran. She has faced repeated persecution for her films and activism, including multiple arrests and a seven-year prison sentence on charges of "endangering national security" and "propaganda against the regime." She spent several months in detention in Evin prison, and although the sentence was later overturned, she has continued to live under severe restrictions. Her passport was confiscated for ten years, and after her first fiction feature, *SON-MOTHER* (2019), she has not been permitted to make films. Made underground, without official permission, *ROYA* marks her return to narrative cinema and her second fiction feature.

Director Filmography

2003

WOMENT WITHOUT SHADOW – Documentary

2008

TRAVELOGUE – Documentary

2016

MR. VALI – Documentary

2019

SON-MOTHER – Debut Feature – Toronto International Film Festival

2025

BEYOND THE LIES – Documentary

PRODUCERS BIOGRAPHY

PakFilm^{GmbH}

PakFilm

PakFilm is a film production company based in Hamburg, Germany, founded by the award-winning Iranian film producer Farzad Pak. The company's films have premiered at major international festivals and received numerous awards, including Golden Bear winner **THERE IS NO EVIL** (2020), Berlinale Encounters Special Mention winner **DISTRICT TERMINAL** (2021), Rotterdam Big Screen Award winner **ENDLESS BORDERS** (2023), Generation 14plus Crystal Bear winner **AND ME, I'M DANCING TOO** (2023), Berlinale Panorama Audience Award winner **MY STOLEN PLANET** (2024), and **MARYAM, THE CHILDREN AND 26 OTHERS**, winner of the Ingmar Bergman International Debut Award at Göteborg Film Festival (2024). PakFilm is committed to supporting emerging filmmakers from diverse backgrounds and developing films that engage with political, cultural, and social realities.

**MEDIA
NEST**

Europe MediaNest

Europe MediaNest is a Czech-based film production company founded in 2015 by the Iranian producer Kaveh Farnam. Since its inception, this production house has been instrumental in helping European talents collaborate with their Iranian counterparts. Latest productions of Europe MediaNest include Un Certain Regard Winner **A MAN OF INTEGRITY** by Mohammad Rasoulof (2017), **SON-MOTHER** by Mahnaz Mohammadi (2019), Golden Bear Winner **THERE IS NO EVIL** by Mohammad Rasoulof (2020), Rotterdam Big Screen Award Winner **ENDLESS BORDERS** by Abbas Amini (2023).

AMOUR FOU luxembourg

AMOUR FOU Luxembourg

Founded in Luxembourg in 1995, AMOUR FOU realises artistically exceptional feature, documentary and short films. The associate partners of AMOUR FOU Vienna and AMOUR FOU Luxembourg are Bady Minck and Alexander Dumreicher-Ivanceanu. Throughout the process AMOUR FOU stands for vision and pushing the envelope, whether in regard to aesthetics, production or distribution strategies. Latest production includes **STRUGGLE** by Ruth Mader (Un Certain Regard, 2003), **NO REST FOR THE BRAVE** by Alain Guiraudie (Cannes Director's Fortnight, 2003), **AMOUR FOU** by Jessica Hausner (Un Certain Regard, 2014), **YALDA** by Massoud Bakhshi (Sundance Grand Jury Prize, 2020).



MAIN CAST

Roya

Melisa Sözen

(Winter Sleep, Le Bureau des Légendes)

Samira

Maryam Palizban

Father

Hamidreza Djavdan

Doctor

Bacho Meburishvili

CREW

Screenplay

Mahnaz Mohammadi

Direction of photography

Ashkan Ashkani

Editor

Esmaeel Monsef

Sound Design & Mix

Ensieh Leyla Maleki

Production & Costume Design

Alborz Malekpour

Music

Andrius Arutiunian

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Totem

is a Paris-based international sales and production company launched in 2019. We seek out talents that bring new perspectives. Films lead to emotions and emotions lead to reflection. We want films to travel and people to travel in film.

Totem Atelier

develops and produces early stage projects with a strong international potential.

Totem Films

sells Totem Atelier productions worldwide and acquires handpicked feature films and documentaries for international distribution.

Selected filmography

TOTEM FILMS selected filmography includes among many others **COTTON QUEEN** by Suzannah Mirghani (Venice Settimana 2025), **DONKEY DAYS** by Rosanne Pel (Locarno Competition), **KIKA** by Alexe Poukine (Cannes Critics Week, 2025), **MEASURES FOR A FUNERAL** by Sofia Bohdanowicz (Toronto Centrepiece program 2024), **SUDAN, REMEMBER US** by Hind Meddeb (Venice – Giornate degli Autori 2024), **THE VILLAGE NEXT TO PARADISE** by Mo Harawe (Cannes Un Certain Regard 2024), **MY FAVOURITE CAKE** by Maryam Moghaddam & Behtash Sanaeeha (Berlinale Competition 2024), **CROSSING** by Levan Akin (Berlinale Panorama 2024), **BLACKBIRD**, **BLACKBIRD BLACKBERRY** by Elene Naveriani (Cannes Directors Fortnight 2023), **THE HYPNOSIS** by Ernst de Geer (Karlovy Vary 2023), **SLOW** by Marija Kavtaradze (Sundance 2023), Juho Kuosmanen's **COMPARTMENT N°6** (Cannes 2021 Competition – Grand Prix) **WE** by Alice Diop (Berlinale Documentary Award 2021).

TOTEM ATELIER filmography includes **SHORT SUMMER** by Nastia Korkia (Venice 2025, Lion of the Future Award), **THE HYPNOSIS** by Ernst de Geer (Karlovy Vary 2023 - Best Actor, Fipresci Jury Award, and Europa Cinemas Label), **DEAD GIRLS DANCING** by Anna Roller (Tribeca 2023), **MARCEL!** by Jasmine Trinca (Cannes Official Selection 2022).



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