



SHAHID SALESS, SOHRAB

SHAHID SALESS, SOHRAB (b. Tehran, 28 June 1944; d. Chicago, 2 July 1998), Iranian cinematographer and award-winning filmmaker.

Born in Tehran to a middle class family, Shahid Saless was a storyteller as a child, with a passion for visualizing his narrations. During his teenage years, he showed an imaginative talent, writing and acting in plays with friends. In 1963, Shahid Saless left Iran for Vienna, where he attended a film school and an acting school at the same time, but his studies were discontinued there in 1967 due to a sudden diagnosis of tuberculosis. In the midst of treatment, he left for Paris to continue his film studies at the prestigious Independent Conservatory of French Cinema, and shortly thereafter, in 1968, he returned to Iran. Upon his return to Tehran, Shahid Saless began work with the Iranian Ministry of Culture as a documentary filmmaker, where he produced multiple short films and documentaries, partly on the topic of traditional dance amongst different Iranian ethnic groups.

In the course of his stay in Iran (1968-74), he produced two major feature films, *Yek ettefāq-e sāda* (A simple event, 1973) and *Ṭabi'at-e bijān* (Still life, 1974), both of which won major international awards for their social realist depiction of life in Iran and for their innovative cinematographic and experimental style. In *Yek ettefāq-e sāda* Shahid Saless entered the film scene with a distinctive style, reporting on the daily life of a ten-year-old villager, showing his struggles to meet ends through smuggling fish. In *Ṭabi'at-e bijān* the life of a meagerly paid railroad guard worker who is forced to retire for a younger guard is portrayed. In the course of this film, the distressful life of



working class is depicted in a critical light. Shahid Saless also made several short films for the Ministry of Culture and Arts. He made many commissioned films on the local folkloric dances of various ethnic groups. He also started making short documentaries depicting the unnerving condition of life among the working class. Unsurprisingly, the political subversive message of these films was disliked by the government, and Shahid Saless was forced to leave the country.

Settled in Germany in 1974, Shahid Saless started producing documentaries for the German media. The movies he made gained him further international recognition, and he continued making documentary and feature films for major German television programs. At this time, Ramin Molai (1939-2009) worked as a cameraman for many of his German movies produced in Berlin. In Germany, his television productions always had a distinguishing artistic quality. He made his last movie, *Rosen für Afrika*, in 1991 for German television. In 1992, he left Germany for the United States to join his family. He died from a chronic illness related to his liver from which he suffered throughout his life.

Shahid Saless is known to be a pioneer of the new wave of Iranian cinema. In his own words, his cinema intends to document the “antagonism between man and society” (Shahid Saless et al.). In the course of his oeuvre, he viewed the role of cinema as “to make conscious of indignity and inhumanity of life” (ibid.).

Filmography:

Yek ettefāq-e sāda (A simple event), 1973.

Ṭabi'at-e bijān (Still life), 1974.

Dar ḡorbat (Far from home), 1975.

Reifezeit (Coming of age), 1976.

Tagebuch eines Liebenden (The diary of a lover), 1977.

Die Langen Ferien der Lotte H. Eisner (The long vacation of Lotte H. Eisner), 1979.

Grabbes Letzter Sommer (The last summer of Grabbes), 1980.



Ordnung (Order), 1980.

Anton P. Checkov: A life (1981).

Empfänger Unbekannt (Addressee unknown), 1983.

Utopia, 1983.

Der Weidenbaum (The willow tree), 1984.

Hans—Ein Junge in Deutschland (Hans: A young man in Germany), 1985.

Wechselbalg (Changeling), 1987.

Rosen fuer Afrika (Roses for Africa), 1992.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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