



Iran

Prominent Iranian film-maker Dariush Mehrjui and his wife stabbed to death

Iran's minister of culture hailed Mehrjui as 'one of the pioneers of Iranian cinema'

Agence France-Presse

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One of Iran's most prominent film-makers, Dariush Mehrjui, was stabbed to death on Saturday evening alongside his wife, Vahideh Mohammadifar, at their home near Tehran, authorities have said.

A provincial chief justice said Mehrjui and Mohammadifar "were killed by multiple stab wounds to the neck", according to the judiciary's Mizan online website.

According to Hossein Fazeli-Harikandi, chief justice of Alborz province near Tehran, Mehrjui sent a text message to his daughter, Mona, at about 9pm local time inviting her for dinner at their home in Karaj, west of Tehran. But upon her arrival an hour and a half later, she found the bodies of her dead parents with fatal wounds to their necks.

Later in the day, police said "no signs of forced entry can be seen at the crime scene", adding that "no damage has been done to the doors" of their home. However, they said "traces have been found" at the scene they believe to be "related to the murderer".

On Sunday, the Etemad newspaper featured an interview with the film-maker's wife saying she had been threatened and that their home had been burgled.

"The investigation revealed that no complaints had been filed regarding the illegal entry into the Mehrjui's family villa and the theft of their belongings", said Fazeli-Harikandi.

In a statement, Iran's minister of culture, Mohammad-Mehdi Esmaili, hailed Mehrjui as "one of the pioneers of Iranian cinema" and "the creator of eternal works".

Born in 1939 in Tehran, Mehrjui studied philosophy in the United States before his return to Iran where he launched a literary magazine and released his first film in 1967, *Diamond 33*, a parody of the James Bond series.

The 83-year-old was indelibly associated with the Iranian new wave of cinema, with his 1969 film *The Cow* one of the movement's first pictures. He then directed a string of well-regarded films including *Mr Gullible* and *The Cycle* before leaving Iran in the wake of the 1979 Islamic revolution.

Between 1980 and 1985, he lived in France where he worked on the documentary *Journey to the Land of Rimbaud*. On returning to Iran, he received at the box office success with *The Tenants* in 1987.

In 1990, he directed *Hamoun*, a dark comedy showing 24 hours in the life of an intellectual tormented by divorce and psychological anxieties in an Iran overwhelmed by the technology companies Sony and Toshiba.

Throughout the 1990s, Mehrjui also depicted the lives of women in *Sara*, *Pari* and *Leila*, a melodrama about an infertile woman who encourages her husband to marry a second woman.

In interviews with the Iranian media, Mehrjui said he was "greatly influenced" by Swedish film-maker Ingmar Bergman and Italian Michelangelo Antonioni.

"I don't make directly political films to promote a particular ideology or point of view. But everything is political," he once said.

To Mehrjui, cinema was like "poetry, which cannot take sides with anyone" and he remained adamant that "art must not become a propaganda tool".

In addition to his cinema career, he translated works by the Romanian-French playwright Eugene Ionesco and the German Marxist philosopher Herbert Marcuse into Persian.

The headline of this article was amended on 16 October 2023 to make clear that both Dariush Mehrjui and Vahideh Mohammadifar were stabbed to death. Also, in an earlier version Eugene Ionesco was described as a French playwright.

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