

Biography

Rouzbeh Rashidi was born in Tehran in 1980, the year in which the Iran–Iraq War began: a war that lasted eight years and entered consciousness not simply as an historical event, but as atmosphere, pressure, vibration, and wound. It did not become a subject in his films in any conventional sense; rather, it became an underground weather system, a traumatic sediment beneath the visible surface of the image. The political dimension of his work has never depended upon topical declaration, ideological address, or representational commentary. Every film he has desired to make has been political in the most fundamental sense: not because it speaks about politics, but because it contests the organisation of perception itself — the prior and far less visible order that decides what may appear, to whom, and under what conditions. What remains of history in his cinema is not explanation, but pressure; not discourse, but a disturbance in the field of seeing.

A critic once located the origin of cinephilia in absence: the void left where the father should have stood, the orphan seeking consolation in the darkness of the cinema. The diagnosis is exact, yet incomplete. To that primordial absence must be added other losses: country, nation, culture, continuity. When these coordinates fail, cinema ceases to be merely an art form and becomes a metaphysical shelter, a psychic architecture, a second birthplace. Deprived of stable belonging, one is compelled to construct an alternative cosmos in which survival becomes possible. Rashidi constructed his through cinema. Exile and film became indivisible: a citizenship of shadows, a homeland made of duration, flicker, grain, voices, faces, ruins, and apparitions — a dwelling founded not upon ground, but upon time.

He founded the Experimental Film Society in Tehran in 2000, the same year he began making films, and moved to Dublin in 2004; the Society moved with him, not as an institution transported intact, but as a living organism capable of mutation. From that continuity emerged the feature films and the Homo Sapiens Project: an open, durational, and potentially interminable sequence of works begun in 2000, never designed to culminate in closure. The films were made outside industrial systems, through an insistence upon retaining the means of production in his own hands: initially self-financed, and later, in certain cases, supported by the Arts Council of Ireland. They have circulated internationally across festivals, cinematheques, museums, galleries, and alternative exhibition spaces, while remaining fundamentally resistant to the economies of legibility by which cinema is usually classified. In this practice, filmmaking and living do not stand apart. Cinema is not a profession added to a life; it is a parallel life, conducted at the same time and at the same cost.

Rashidi understands cinema as a laboratory and the film as an experiment in perception, in which his own interiority — memory, anxiety, melancholy, sensory instability — functions as a reagent. The work begins not with thesis, plot, or message, but with the encounter between sound and image, and from there moves intuitively towards thought. It is exploration rather than illustration. Its direction is a sustained subtraction: narrative psychology, causality, and characterological certainty are withdrawn until what remains is rhythm, vibration, texture, light, shadow, noise, silence, repetition, and duration — a ground zero of drama approached but never quite arrived at. The films aspire to think musically, architecturally, and oneirically. They proceed less like stories than like symphonies, séances, or occult diagrams in which images are arranged according to intensities rather than events.

Time, in this cinema, is not a line progressing from past to future. It is closer to Bergsonian duration: a thickness in which memory and perception interpenetrate, where the past does not disappear but persists, contaminated and reactivated within the present. The image is therefore never merely present. It is already haunted. In this the work is indebted to the philosophical problem Deleuze named the time-image: the moment at which action no longer commands perception, and seeing becomes autonomous, suspended, uncertain, abyssal. What concerns Rashidi is not narrative time, but temporal pressure; not what happens next, but the strange density of what refuses to pass — the interval in which an image is left alone long enough to become unreadable.

Horror and classic science fiction have always nourished this practice, though he does not “make” genre films in the ordinary sense. He dissects genres as one might dissect fossils or dream-fragments. Their atmospheres remain: the abandoned corridor, the cosmic silence, the nocturnal landscape, the untrustworthy face, the intimation that the human is only a temporary arrangement of matter. From horror the work inherits the metaphysics of dread; from science fiction, the estrangement of the present; from experimental cinema, the liberation of the image from narrative servitude. The result is a cinema of thresholds, in which the ordinary world appears already invaded by the unknown.

He thinks of himself less as an author than as a medium. Filmmaking is a séance in which images are summoned, trapped, damaged, and allowed to speak in languages not entirely human. Cinema is an art of ghosts and shadows: the filmed moment dies at the instant of capture, yet continues to behave as though alive. This is not metaphor, but the ontological condition of the apparatus. Every film is an encounter with a paradox: presence produced through absence, life preserved as death, visibility structured by disappearance. The camera does not merely record the world; it transforms the world into a spectral residue, and returns something that was never entirely there. Melancholy and fatalism are therefore not moods in the work. They are methods of perception. Iranian culture, in which mourning, poetry, metaphysics, and eschatological imagination have never been strangers, gave him the disposition; philosophy gave it discipline; cinema gave it form. What concerns him is perception before it hardens into recognition: the untutored eye for which

a shadow is an event, a face is a landscape, and light is not illumination but decision. Recognition is already an interpretation, and interpretation arrives too late. A film that merely depicts human beings does not interest him. He is drawn instead to the film that itself acquires the qualities of being human: vulnerability, opacity, memory, decay, desire, contradiction, and mortality.

Above all, a film should not mean, but be. Its value resides not in subject matter, message, or representation, but in the hidden intensity by which its images become charged. Meaning is often the consolation offered after the event; cinema, at its highest, precedes meaning. It is impact, essence, force, and apparition. In an ideal and impossible world, films would be devoid of words, images, and sound. Such a film cannot exist. Yet the attempt to approach that impossible zero, renewed with each work, is the work itself — an asymptote that yields everything precisely by never being reached.

He restricts himself to no format, device, technology, or hierarchy of production. He works with anything that sees: obsolete video, digital cameras, domestic equipment, damaged optics, antique lenses, accidental textures, crude apparatuses, and refined instruments alike. No format is sacred, and none is beneath use. Each device bears its own metaphysics; each lens brings with it a philosophy of distance; each image-making technology produces not only an image, but a world — so that the choice of instrument is already a choice of ontology.

Since 2019, teaching has become an organic extension of this practice: at the Universität der Künste Berlin, at the Berlin Art Institute, and through EFS Film School, which he founded as a space for poetic, personal, and experimental filmmaking. Teaching, for him, is not the transmission of a reproducible method — a method that can be reproduced is precisely what this work refuses. It is an accompaniment towards singularity: a way of helping others move closer to the films that only they, from the irreducible pressure of their own lives, can make.

The path of this work has never resembled a straight line. It is elliptical, spiral, recursive: a movement of return without repetition. The linear belongs to geometry, not to the truth of a life. Often even the maker remains uncertain of the visions he has brought into being. That uncertainty is not a failure of the work; it is its condition of existence, for a cinema that knew itself completely would already have stopped. The films remain where he remains: between clarity and mystery, exile and home, mourning and invention, everything and nothing.

The Record

BORN	Tehran, 1980; based in Europe since 2004
PRACTICE	Homo Sapiens Project, 2000–ongoing • Feature films, 2009–ongoing
WRITING	Essays and criticism, since 2010 • Founding editor, EFS Publications • Co-editor, Luminous Void (two volumes)
FOUNDER	Experimental Film Society, 2000 • EFS Film School, 2019

TEACHING	Universität der Künste Berlin · Berlin Art Institute (2021–2024) · Hochschule für Gestaltung Offenbach · filmArche, Berlin · University College Cork · among others
SUPPORT	The Arts Council of Ireland · Culture Ireland · Dublin City Council · Fingal County Council Arts Office · Temple Bar Gallery + Studios
RECOGNITION	Berlinale Talents, 70th Berlin International Film Festival (2020) · Best Feature-Length Experimental Film, Istanbul International Experimental Film Festival (2018) · Oberhausen Seminar (2023) · Student Jury special mention, Mostra Internazionale del Cinema di Genova (2023)
RESEARCH	Subject of academic study, including the first history of the Remodernist film movement (Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Paris)
DISTRIBUTION	All films available directly — pay what you wish · rouzbehrashidi.com/editions/
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