



**BORDERLINES
FILM FESTIVAL**

POURING WATER ON TROUBLED OIL (12A)

Director: Nariman Massoumi

With the voices of: Michael Sheen, Payam Hosseinian

UK, 2023, 26 minutes, English/Farsi

This fascinating short film covers a little-known episode in Dylan Thomas's life when he was recruited in 1951 to write the script for an ambitious Technicolor propaganda film for Anglo-Iranian Oil, later BP, and journeyed to Iran, notably to the oil city of Abadan in the south of the country, to research it. Thomas arrived at a time of political upheaval for oil nationalisation and remarked later that his assignment was to "pour water on troubled oil". Unsurprisingly, Thomas left the project before the film was completed but the film that was eventually put together, [Persian Story](#), premiered to an audience of 11,000 people in Leicester Square in 1952, is available to watch on the BP archive, while Thomas did do a broadcast for the BBC Home Service called *Persian Oil*.

Put together entirely from archive photographs, with voiceover from Michael Sheen who narrates from Dylan Thomas's frank and sardonic letters home, and from Payam Hosseinian (also responsible for the striking sound design of the film) as an Iranian oil worker, Massoumi's documentary is a sharp and subversive indictment of post-imperial colonialism and exploitation.

+ A FIRE (YEK ATASH)

Director: Ebrahim Golestan

Iran, 1961, 25 minutes, Farsi + English subtitles

Ebrahim Golestan's lifelong cinematic fascination with earth, water and fire found its earliest expression in the simply titled *A Fire*, which became his first major international success. In April 1958, an oil well located in southwest Iran caught fire. Golestan, who also worked as a producer, sent director Abolghassem Rezaie to make a documentary about the disaster. When Golestan saw the black-and-white footage, he saw that the story held even greater potential and decided to produce his own version of the events – this time in colour.

Golestan's brother Shahrokh filmed the process of putting out the conflagration, while the poet Forough Farrokhzad (soon to direct her debut *The House Is Black*) edited the film – which combined her poetic sensibilities with Golestan's more symbolic approach. The result stands in sharp contrast with other notable films that treat the same subject matter; for instance, Werner Herzog's *Lessons of Darkness*. Instead of an operatic tale of individualism, Golestan develops a folkloric narrative; a celebration of collective work by ordinary people. He offers an anecdotal, poetic depiction of the lives interwoven with the disaster. As powerfully as the film shows the destructive side of fire, the element also has a sacred place in Persian culture. After all, when Abraham [Ebrahim] was thrown into the fire, it was God who said "O fire! Be coolness and safety for Ebrahim." The blaze transformed into a garden, which in Persian is known as *golestan*.

Ehsan Khoshbakht, **II Cinema Ritrovato database**

Notes compiled by Jo Comino

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