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Mast-Del

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Mast-Del

Abstract

This is a film review of *Mast-Del* (2023), directed by Maryam Tafakory.

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Author Notes

Sherry Coman is the Director of the Centre for Spirituality and Media at Martin Luther University College in Waterloo, Ontario, where she also teaches courses in film, media and spirituality and also in gender justice. An ordained deacon in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, she is also a writer, educator and story editor with more than thirty years experience in theatre and film. She works privately as a development consultant with writers and artists in film, fiction and digital media and is the curator and creator of online devotional projects.



***Mast-Del* (2023), dir. Maryam Tafakory**
Trailer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fflDWz0kcE>

Sometimes a short film demands longer attention, reflection, and ultimately praise than its size and position in a festival would normally offer. Maryam Tafakory's experimental short *Mast-del* stood out among the collection of shorts in TIFF's first Wavelengths program. This experimental exploration of narrative and image uses internegative and color to show how the everyday can become unwittingly subversive in the climate of contemporary Iran. Set up as a simple early morning bedtime encounter among two people, it offers a poetic and enduring witness to the impossibility of forming close connections under a censorial government and society.

In her own notes to the film, Tafakory writes, "*Mast-del* is about forbidden bodies and desires inside and outside post-revolution Iranian cinema." The story is offered to us in language: it is told through text on screen in both Farsi and English. These textual shifts achieve their own rhythm, even as the background shifting of colors and form offers us another. The brief story being told by one person to another follows a couple as they try to go out together, only to run afoul of

morality police. Though offered as a non-political exercise in memory, the film helps to broaden what we have come to hear in public debate over the past year, flowing from resistance within Iran to moral imperatives imposed on women.

A single trail of cigarette smoke and the pushing of fingertips along bedding are some of the fragmented images that appear and feel both lush and restrained. Textures are like characters in this film. The limited original footage becomes juxtaposed with other images from Iranian cinema, adding a deeper layer to the interior story of the date. Even the unfolding text on screen has an aesthetic role to play in the frame. It is the gateway to our understanding, offering a linear flow in contrast to the non-linear interplay of images.

Much of the film's first context is a bedroom in which a curtain flows gently inward and outward, moved by an unseen breeze at a window. Wind is the framing device of the story: both the storytelling and the interior story take place in a context of a windy season. The characters are surprised by wind when they wake up to it in the night. The soundtrack is heavy with wind sounds, so that even though there is no spoken dialogue in the film, the wind speaks volumes.

Nominated for two different awards at Cannes in the shorts category, *Mast-del* is a love letter to film, and an expression of love, one that not even censorship can suppress.