

**SPEECH on Friday, September 26, 2025
at the Opening of the 3rd Oriental Women's Film Festival
in Koblenz**

“Art is not a luxury, but a necessity of life.”

**Max Reinhardt, co-founder of the famous Salzburg
Festival, already knew that.**

**And indeed: the latest studies prove what engagement
with art and culture, even grappling with them —
or simply encountering them — does to people;
above all, it fosters — no surprise— the ability to change
perspective and to tolerate ambiguity!**

**(see the evaluation of the Cultural Association of German
Business)**

**Good evening,
ladies and gentlemen, friends, supporters —
in the best sense of the word — cinema lovers.
Please forgive me if I greet you *in toto*!**

**When Firouzeh Görden-Ossouli asked me to give a
welcome address, I agreed spontaneously,
but honestly did not yet realize what I was getting into!
Actually, you should now be hearing from the Cultural
Commissioner of the City of Koblenz, Ingo Schneider;
unfortunately, he is prevented from attending at short
notice.**

**I can by no means replace him ...,
but this gives me the “comfort” of a little more speaking
time!**

However, I know how much this event means to him. Why? On May 6, 2025, I took part in a panel discussion at Koblenz City Hall with him as moderator.

The theme was “intercultural dialogue,” in other words, art as a bridge toward a better understanding among cultures.

That’s why I can say this topic is very important to him.

And now, thanks to the initiative of Firouzeh Görden-Ossouli and her supporters—especially managing director Heinz Theis and curator Farah Ossouli—we are opening the Oriental Women’s Film Festival here for the third time, right here in Koblenz!

So one might ask: how is it that such an “exotic”-sounding, exclusive film festival takes place in a medium-sized city which, admittedly—and unfortunately much too little noticed—offers a quantitatively and qualitatively rich cultural program? In my opinion it is not sufficiently appreciated because it is not in the “spotlight,” presumably because we are considered only a regional center, dismissed as provincial between the Rhine-Main-Neckar and Rhine-Ruhr metropolitan regions.

But that is certainly not the case!

This festival itself, with its high artistic standards and top-quality program, proves it.

And it fits ... in times like these, when a new kind of mass migration is underway, caused by man-made catastrophes, multiple crises, and (partly hybrid) wars.

Migration is further encouraged by the ubiquity of worldwide information in the digital age — though this, through oversimplified “messages” on social media, often enough leads rather to disinformation — in other words: fake news instead of facts.

And ultimately, unlimited mobility (encouraged, even desired) promotes the mixing of peoples — in the sense of a “melting pot of nations.” But adopting the right attitude — that diversity - means enrichment, in other words wealth— something that still requires a massive amount of work!

In this context, fostering international understanding as a countermeasure to xenophobia as well as integration — which, let it be noted, can never be a one-way street — is urgently necessary, indeed more necessary than ever, to soften the so-called “cultural clash” and to halt the frighteningly advancing division within democratic societies ... while it is still possible.

This festival also serves that very purpose: it turns toward another, to us foreign, culture — the Oriental culture, a cultural region that goes back to the “cradle of civilizations” and encompasses three great world religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Added to this is a special focus: women.

It is about engaging — always with full seriousness — with extraordinary destinies within a differently shaped cultural sphere. The dramatic force of the stories told will certainly affect us intensely (- especially in the darkened space ! -), and in these personal dramas, the role of women is at the center.

Question: Do we not all have our own ingrained perspectives and prejudices?

Can we, here in the so-called Western world, in an allegedly “enlightened” democracy, really dare to judge another, seemingly “backward” position of women in the Oriental world? Where we ourselves must acknowledge — speaking here as a woman— that despite our pride in past achievements, we seem to be in the midst of a “roll-back process”!?

It is precisely cinema—and particularly Iranian film art—that has been and continues to be honored for the way it reveals the visible and the unspeakable, more or less openly, and conveys many hidden in-between images and lines, making it tangible!

It is worth realizing that films like those - we are about to see in the following days - tell dramatically life-like true stories, bringing them to us — on screen — so vividly that they almost touch us under our skin. For us, who spend far too much time in digital media, these films demand the utmost concentration.

Why?

Among other reasons, because these films are not dubbed into German, since that would not correspond to international festival standards, where only English subtitles are normal. That requires our full attention, forcing us not only to watch carefully but also to listen — even without understanding the language or subtitles — in order to decipher body language, interpret tones of voice, and hopefully understand correctly.

That is a learning effect that, due to the increasing lack of “1:1 live encounters” and the resulting kind of “cocooning”— a form of loneliness that is no new phenomenon -, but begins already in childhood — we risk never even learning in the first place.

I mean the so-called social skills, above all the ability to empathize.

These emotional competencies are strongly (indirectly) addressed when the films deal with existential conflicts, moral dilemmas, or taboos — extraordinarily difficult situations that often demand unusual decisions in everyday life.

To get to know the “other,” the different, the people who feel differently in a foreign context — that is precisely what makes the encounter with the unknown and the new so fascinating! It is about opening up, exposing your soul, and grappling ... with such cinematic works.

Because:

It is about making visible — and thus, ideally, comprehensible — role models and clichés, by presenting problems (and solutions?!) in the field of tension between traditions and taboos. It means showing attempts to break free, possible or impossible escapes from “un-freedom,” the path to self-discovery!

All of this seems symptomatic of the needs of “modern” people, especially women, of (supposed or real) minorities, the oppressed and disadvantaged.

Yet: let us not form an image of people unless we openly and seriously engage with them!

So: let us engage, let us take the time to put ourselves into other people’s lives and other worlds!

That means showing *interest*, which means humanity!

In the end, it is not only about individual destinies that one should learn to understand.

These destinies unfold within a larger whole, within the given social framework.

So one must see the everyday world of the individual (with their specific cultural background and individual imprint), with their worldview, their understanding (—or lack thereof —) of humanity (with all senses!), to possibly learn to value them.

**Only in this way, I believe, will we have a chance
— collectively, as human beings —
on the basis of tolerance, to live well together,
because we understand one another.
Only then can we, as peoples, coexist —
because we resolve our differences
through communication ...
and thus live together in peace,
instead of waging wars for power.**