

Statement by Abbas Kiarostami

There appears to be some confusion regarding my decision not to come to London for the opening of the exhibition my photographic works at Purdy Hicks and the inauguration of my production of *Così fan Tutte* at the English National Opera.

I want to be absolutely clear that my decision was based solely on the disgraceful treatment to which I was subjected by the officials from the British Embassy in Tehran. I travel regularly to France and Italy and am no stranger to the bureaucratic dances we Iranians need to perform to obtain visas for travel to Europe. However, the actions of the British Embassy were of a wholly different order. It would be tempting to brand them Kafkaesque yet to do so would be to imbue them with rather too much intelligence. Indeed for most of the process I felt trapped in the very circles of Hell itself. To be clear. I applied for a Visa. My paperwork was deemed correct. I was then asked to deposit to submit my fingerprints. I did this and a Visa was duly granted. Then a few hours later it was withdrawn and I was asked to resubmit my application. I did so immediately and was asked for a second set of fingerprints. When I pointed out that my fingerprints were unlikely to have changed in the extremely short period of time that had elapsed since my first application I was told that this method had been used to catch over 5,000 criminals worldwide. I am many things - film director, photographer, poet - and indeed I think I have achieved some international notoriety for such pursuits - but I am decidedly not a criminal and I deeply resented that implication and at that point withdrew from the Visa application process.

I have enormous respect for both Purdy Hicks Gallery and for the English National Opera and I am delighted to have had the opportunity to work with them both. It is a matter of great personal sadness that owing to the actions of the British Embassy in Tehran I have been effectively prevented from travelling to London for both the exhibition and the Opera.

Abbas Kiarostami
7 May 2009