

Everything About the Animated Documentary “Where the Winds Die”

Exclusive Interview with Pejman Alipour, Writer and Director

By Iran Zehn Team

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Q1. Please introduce yourself and tell us about your professional background in this field.

I am Pejman Alipour, holding a Master's degree in Animation Directing from the University of Art in Tehran. I became familiar with cartoons and caricature in 1990 and began working professionally in cartoons and caricature in 1996, without the guidance of a mentor. In 1999, I entered the field of animation and joined IRIB. I was employed as the head of the Animation Unit at IRIB Mahabad. I began with short works, and my first animated film, "Cold War", was completed that same year (1999). Later, we produced several short films and animated series for IRIB. Some of these works won awards at domestic festivals, such as "Little Heart", which won awards at the Isfahan International Children's Film Festival, the "Ruyesh and Roshd" festivals in Tehran, and the "Film Shahr" festival. It was also screened at the Tehran Short Film Festival and the Tehran Animation Festival. Most of my professional experience comes from commissioned work for IRIB. Years later, I joined the Program Planning Council of provincial TV channels across Iran. I later became a quality supervisor and script consultant for animated series produced in various provinces, a role I still hold. In addition to that, I also create short films as a personal passion, which I deeply enjoy. My primary background has been in cartoon and caricature, and later animation, which I began in 1999.

Q2. What is the story of the animation “Where the Winds Die”?

This animated documentary lies somewhere between docudrama and non-fiction documentary. It may even be considered an essay film, though not exactly. It addresses a real historical event, while also portraying a romantic relationship between a young man and woman. The story spans three time periods: before the chemical bombing, the moment of the bombing, and many years after the bombing. The young couple serves as the narrative thread connecting these three periods. Before the bombing, we see the simple daily life of the people. The bombing occurs, the catastrophe unfolds, and throughout this timeline, we follow the love story that connects past and present. In the end, we see that the

effects of war never disappear, and no water can ever wash them away. Here, water—which is normally a symbol of purification—acts inversely; it cannot cleanse the scars of war.

Q3. Is your interest in the subject of the Sardasht chemical bombing rooted in personal experience?

I did not personally witness the Sardasht chemical attack, but since my father served as a military officer there, I was born in Sardasht. We moved away when I was less than forty days old, so I neither grew up nor studied there. But the fact that it is my birthplace kept Sardasht alive in my memory. When the bombing happened, I was around eleven or twelve years old. I also wondered why, even inside Iran, more attention was always given to the Halabja chemical attack, which was indeed a deeper tragedy. But in Sardasht, over a hundred people were killed and many more injured—people who still struggle with the consequences. Little had been said about Sardasht until the past ten years, when it started receiving more attention. For seventeen or eighteen years, I wanted to create an animation about this event, but I could not find a powerful idea worthy of the subject—until 2016, when I proposed the concept, it was accepted, and we began production.

Q4. How did the screenplay for this animation take shape?

Before submitting the project to the Documentary and Experimental Film Center (DEFC), I created several drafts, though I was not fully satisfied. Even though the early drafts were approved by the center, the script was rewritten four times, taking a year and a half to complete. About seventy to eighty percent of the final film reflects the story I initially wanted to tell. The script is documentary-based, covering three periods—before the bombing, the bombing event, and its aftermath—held together through the romantic relationship between the young couple.

Q5. Why was the title “Where the Winds Die” chosen for the animation?

I consider the title a very important part of a film. Even before submitting the script to DEFC, I had chosen this title. In the story, the element of wind plays a major symbolic role—it is the force that carries the chemical agents. Many narrative elements were chosen to connect with the concept of wind. Later drafts added other elements such as water, fire, and earth. The title is also a metaphor for the people who were killed or injured—“Where do these winds die?” Wind is both a carrier of destruction and a symbol of those who escaped

or perished. This duality gives the title deeper meaning, and I also found it aesthetically beautiful.

Q6. How did the idea of narrating the story through reflections on water come to your mind?

The idea came from a photograph I encountered while working on early versions of the script. I decided to adopt a reflective visual form as the narrative structure, and it fit beautifully. Water became both a narrative tool and a symbolic element supporting the film's themes. The story incorporates the four classical elements—wind, earth, water, fire. Wind is the most prominent. I had a thematic concept and needed a visual form that would strengthen it. The water-reflection approach served the story exceptionally well, though I had also developed alternative narrative forms during rewrites that could be used in other projects.

Q7. How long did it take to produce the animation?

The script took a year and a half to complete, and production took two years. Sound and music were created during the COVID-19 pandemic through remote work. In total, the project took three and a half years to complete.

Q8. How many people were involved in the project?

The team was large. We had over fifty actors for the filmed reference performances. Across various departments—pre-production, animation, coloring, effects, cleanup, sound, music—close to one hundred people were involved.

Q9. Where was the animation produced, and was the team personally connected to the project or simply drawn to the script?

It was produced in Mahabad, West Azerbaijan Province. Because my budget was low, part of the team came from Mahabad to reduce costs, and some of them were personally passionate about the project and worked without payment. Some key members were from Tehran, such as background designer Mr. Morteza Karimi. Parts of the animation were created by Ms. Marzieh Mishmi Azad, and some sections were animated by me. The music was

composed by Pejman Khalili, and the sound design and mixing were done by Mehrshad Malakouti, one of Iran's respected sound designers. Those main team members were from outside Mahabad; the rest were local. Some participated out of personal commitment; others received modest payment.

Q10. How were screening and distribution determined?

The project belongs to the Documentary and Experimental Film Center, and any official screening depends on them. For festival submissions, I handle most of the work myself, with some support from the center's international department.

Q11. What techniques were used to produce this animation?

It was a hybrid technique, completely new for me, and each stage presented new challenges. I had no clear mental image of the final output, so I had to develop solutions along the way. I used 2.5D digital cel animation, rotoscoping, digital painting, visual effects, and a combination of these techniques formed the final style.

Q12. Which software did you use?

Photoshop was heavily used. Many viewers assumed the compositing was done in After Effects, but I actually composited and edited everything in Adobe Premiere—which was extremely difficult. TVPaint was used for parts animated by Ms. Mishmi Azad.

Q13. Tell us about projects you are currently working on.

I currently have a series in production for IRIB. I also have several compelling ideas for short films, and I hope conditions improve so I can produce them.

List of Festivals – Official Selections and Awards for “Where the Winds Die” – by Pejman Alipour:

1. Tehran Short Film International Festival (Iran, 2021) – Official Selection

2. Tehran Animation International Festival (Iran, 2022) – Official Selection
3. Timeless Awards (Poland, 2021) – Award Winner: Best of Memory
4. Flatness Awards (Turkey, 2021) – Award Winner: Best Long Short Animation
5. Cannes World Film Festival (France, 2021) – Best Human Rights Film
6. Lift-Off Global Network (UK, 2022) – Official Selection
7. Impact Docs Awards (USA, 2022) – Award of Excellence (Short Documentary)
8. VLZ Film Fest (Bulgaria, 2022) – Best Short Animation
9. Short Film Slam – The Madlab Post (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
10. Kalakari Film Festival (India, 2022) – Official Selection
11. New Jersey Film Awards (USA, 2022) – Official Selection + Best Experimental Animation
12. Ashland Independent Film Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
13. Blackboard International Film Festival (India, 2022) – Best Animated Film
14. The Filmmakers Space Film Festival (India, 2022) – Best Animated Film
15. Accolade Global Film Competition (USA, 2022) – Award of Excellence – Special Mention
16. Papa International Historical Film Festival (Hungary, 2022) – Best Animation
17. Animafest Zagreb (Croatia, 2022) – Official Selection
18. Athens Animafest (Greece, 2022) – Official Selection
19. Capital City Film Festival – Lansing, Michigan (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
20. Animate Australia Animation Film Festival (Australia, 2022) – Quarterfinalist
21. Heart International Italian Film Festival (Italy, 2021) – Finalist
22. The Fine Arts Film Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
23. Happy Valley Animation Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
24. Monstra Lisbon Animation Festival – Official Selection
25. Barnes Film Festival (UK, 2022) – Official Selection + Finalist
26. FICII – The Inca Imperial International Film Festival (Peru, 2022) – Official Selection
27. Metropolis Film Festival (Italy, 2022) – Official Selection

28. Only The Best Film Awards (USA, 2022) – Official Selection + Award for Best Animation
29. Mediawave (Hungary, 2022) – Official Selection
30. Paradise Film Festival (Hungary, 2022) – Official Selection
31. Austin Asian American Film Festival (USA, 2021) – Official Selection
32. Next Generation Indie Film Awards (USA, 2022) – Finalist
33. Gralha International Monthly Film Awards (Brazil, 2022) – Best Screenplay Animation
34. Deep in the Heart Film Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection + Award Nominee
35. Festival Internacional de Cine Independiente de Madrid (Spain, 2022) – Best Animated Film
36. Cartoon Dub International Festival of Animation Cinema (Italy, 2022) – Official Selection
37. Vidlings and Tapeheads Film Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
38. Insomnia International Animation Film Festival (Russia, 2022) – Official Selection
39. Xth Fantastic and Terror Film Festival GALACTICAT (Spain, 2022) – Best Animation
40. Bang Awards Festival (Portugal, 2022) – Official Selection
41. Visioni Corte International Film Festival (Italy, 2022) – Official Selection
42. Diritti a Baschi Human Rights International Film Festival (Italy, 2022) – Official Selection + People's Jury Award
43. Jammu Film Festival (India, 2022) – Official Selection
44. Oklahoma City Documentary Film Festival (USA, 2022) – Official Selection
45. Animafilm Festival (Azerbaijan, 2022) – Official Selection
46. Animadoc Film Festival of Lusitania (Poland, 2022)
47. The Sixth Chaniartoon International Comic and Animation Festival (Greece, 2022)
48. Canlandiranlar Animation Film Festival (Turkey, 2022)
49. Kaohsiung Film Festival (Taiwan, 2022) – Official Selection
50. The Animattikon Project (Cyprus, 2022) – Official Selection