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NEWS

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HIGHEST STANDARDS OF FILMMAKING CELEBRATED AT THE 50TH CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL'S AWARDS NIGHT

Films from Georgia, Argentina, Sweden, Mexico, Germany, Israel and the United States, Among Other Countries, Receive the Gold and Silver Hugo in the Festival's Competitions

Michael Keaton Receives the Founder's Award for His Electrifying Performance in "Birdman"; **Jorge Pérez Solano's "La Tirisia"** wins the Festival's First Roger Ebert Award

CHICAGO, IL (October 17, 2014) – Michael Kutza, Founder and Artistic Director, **Mimi Plauché**, Programming Director, and Programmers **Penny Bartlett**, **Alex Kopecky** and **Evan Morehouse** proudly announce the winners of the 50th Chicago International Film Festival Competitions.

Hosted by *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist and Fox News Chicago entertainment reporter and film critic **Bill Zwecker**, the awards ceremony was held Friday, October 17 at 9 pm and hosted by The Sofitel Chicago Water Tower (20 E. Chestnut St.). Awards were presented in the following competitive categories: International Feature Film Competition, New Directors Competition, Roger Ebert Award, Chicago Award, Q-Hugo Award, DocuFest, and Shorts. Award Nights was sponsored by Michigan Avenue Magazine and Wintrust Community Banks.

Filmmakers from around the world were on hand to receive the awards including Chicago producer **Patricia Cox** ("Rudderless") and Israel writer and director **Shlomi Elkabetz** ("Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem"). Others, such as acclaimed Iranian filmmaker **Mohsen Mahkmalbaf** whose film "The President" received the Gold Hugo for Best Film (the Festival's highest honor) and legendary actress **Geraldine Chaplin** who won the Silver Hugo for Best Actress for "Sand Dollars," accepted their awards with pre-recorded video messages from their home countries.

Past award winners have gone on to win Oscars® and Golden Globe® awards, among other notable recognitions. Awards Night is a night for the 50th Chicago International Film Festival juries, filmmakers and guests to come together and celebrate each other's achievements.

International Feature Film Competition

Representing a wide variety of styles and genres, these works compete for the Festival's highest honor, the Gold Hugo, a symbol of discovery.

Gold Hugo, Best Film: "The President" (Georgia, France, UK, Germany) Director: Mohsen Mahkmalbaf

Silver Hugo, Special Jury Prize: "Refugiado" (Argentina, Colombia, France, Poland, Germany) Director: Diego Lerman

Silver Hugo, Best Director: "Timbuktu" (France, Mauritania) **Director:** Abderrahmane Sissako

Silver Hugo, Best Actor: Anton Yelchin, **"Rudderless"** (USA)

Silver Hugo, Best Actress: Geraldine Chaplin, **"Sand Dollars"** (Dominican Republic, Mexico)

Silver Hugo, Best Cinematography: John Christian Rosenlund, **"1001 Grams"** (Norway)

Silver Hugo for Best Screenplay: Ronit Elkabetz and Shlomi Elkabetz (co-writer and co-directors), **"Gett: The Trial of Viviane Amsalem"** (Israel, France, Germany)

Gold Plaque for Best Art Direction: Mauro Radaelli, **"Human Capital"** (Italy)

Gold Plaque for Best Costume Design: Pia Myrdal and Anne-Dorthe Eskildsen, **"Speed Walking"** (Denmark)

Gold Plaque Special Mention for Originality: "The Owners" (Kazakhstan) Director: Adilkhan Yerzhanov

The International Feature Film Competition Jury includes Kathleen Turner (USA), Margarethe von Trotta (Germany); Ferzan Ozpetek (Italy); Giora Bejach (Israel); and Parviz Shahbazi (Iran). The International Feature Competition is sponsored by The John and Jacolyn Bucksbaum Family Foundation.

New Directors Competition

This selection of first and second feature films receiving their U.S. premieres in Chicago celebrates the spirit of discovery and innovation upon which the Festival was founded.

The **Gold Hugo** goes to **"Underdog"** (Sweden), a modern take on class conflict that keeps its focus on its believable characters instead of highlighting the melodrama inherent in its narrative. When a young Swedish woman named Dino begins working for a successful Norwegian man named Steffen, the consistently genuine performances and Ronnie Sandahl's mature handling of difficult themes allow the film to resonate. It is a film that both addresses specific cultural issues and yet feels simultaneously universal through its honesty. Director: Ronnie Sandahl.

The **Silver Hugo** goes to **"Next to Her"** (Israel), an accomplished portrait of sisterhood with striking performances conveying a difficult subject matter. Liron Ben-Shlush anchors the film with her stunning turn as Chelli, intimately capturing how responsibility can turn into codependency. Asaf Korman subtly portrays that the victims are not always who we think they are. Director: Asaf Korman.

The New Directors Competition Jury includes Anna Croneman (Sweden); Izza Génini (Morocco); Wieland Speck (Germany); and Brian Tallerico (USA). The New Directors Competition is sponsored by Columbia College Chicago.

The Roger Ebert Award

*The Roger Ebert Award will be presented annually to an emerging filmmaker whose film presents a fresh and uncompromising vision. Films competing in the Festival's **New Directors Competition** are eligible for this award.*

The **Roger Ebert Award** goes to “**La Tirisia**” (Mexico), which instills empathy through its director’s strong sense of visual composition and handling of difficult themes. Setting his film in a surreal, sensual landscape in Oaxaca, Mexico, this subtle drama of two pregnant women transports viewers to a unique part of the world, but deals with universal human emotion at the same time. It’s the kind of unforgettable journey that only film can replicate. Director: Jorge Pérez Solano.

Docufest Competition

This selection of international documentaries competing for the Gold Hugo go beyond the headlines in telling those true stories that surprise, entertain and challenge us.

The **Gold Hugo** goes to “**Echo of the Mountain**” (Mexico). Through extremely intricate artistic works, a Huichol artist conveys the symbols and meanings of his own native culture—a traditional culture kept alive for thousands of years in the deep mountains of Mexico. Director Nicolás Echevarría follows artist Santos de la Torre for one year, as he elaborates his next mural. Rich aural and visual textures provide an intimate view of Santos and his world. Echevarría’s documentary conveys the hybrid complexity of the exchange between modern and traditional cultures still coexisting in our globalized present. Director: Nicolás Echevarría.

The Docufest Competition Jury includes Luisela Alvaray (USA), Peter Berggren (USA) and Clayton Brown (USA). The Docufest Competition is sponsored by Columbia College Chicago

OUT-Look Program/Q Hugo Award

Chosen from the Festival’s OUT-Look program, the winners of this award exhibit new artistic perspectives on sexuality and identity.

The **Gold Q Hugo Film Award** goes to “**Xenia**” (Greece) for confronting an unfriendly world with defiant gaiety. Director: Panos H. Koutras.

The **Silver Q Hugo Film Award** goes to “**Something Must Break**” (Sweden), for telling a brave, modern story about characters whose relations to gender and sexuality are hard to categorize but are lived with passion and guts. The jury looks forward to the unfolding career of this exciting filmmaker who presented this tale in such an uncompromising way. Director: Ester Martin Bergsmark.

The Q Hugo Film Award jury includes Mihai Chirilov (Romania), Nick Davis (USA), David Robinson (UK), and Brenda Webb (USA).

The Founder’s Award

The Founder’s Award is given to that one film or performance across all categories that captures the spirit of the Chicago International Film Festival for its unique and innovative approach to the art of the moving image. The 50th Chicago International Film Festival presented

actor Michael Keaton with the **Founder's Award** for his electrifying performance as an actor who hopes to revive his moribund career in Alejandro G. Iñárritu's daring comedy "**Birdman.**" "To pick a single film or performance from this year's incredibly strong lineup of more than 150 films was difficult, but an eagerly anticipated challenge - they all exemplify the Festival's spirit of innovation and discovery. And yet, Michael Keaton's performance in 'Birdman' moved me deeply; it confirmed that Keaton is not only one of our greatest American actors, but one whose work will soon be reevaluated and further appreciated," said Festival Founder and Artistic Director **Michael Kutza**.

Chicago Award

The **Chicago Award**, presented to a Chicago or Illinois artist for the best feature or short film, goes to "**The Alley Cat**," directed by Marie Ullrich, an exceptionally innovative and refreshing first feature representing the auspicious and exciting start of a promising filmmaking career. Bold, gritty, and full of energy, Ullrich's film is a prime example of first-rate low-budget filmmaking, serving as an intriguing announcement of a new voice.

The Chicago Award jury includes Monica Long Ross (USA), Julian Antos (USA), and Malik Bader (USA).

Short Film Competition: Live Action

The **Gold Hugo for Best Short Film** goes to "**Amazon**" (Norway). Marianne O. Ulrichsen's "Amazon" finds its power in contrasting the small heartbreaks of childhood against the vast beauty of the Norwegian landscape. This coming of age story, involving shifting vulnerabilities and eventual connection between two young girls, pulses with life, buoyed by the human performances of its two young actors and the breathtaking cinematography of Annika Summerson. The lyrical short film captures and celebrates the undefined possibilities inherent in liminal spaces: those unscheduled afternoons, new meetings and open landscapes that lead to self-discovery. Director: Marianne O. Ulrichsen.

The **Silver Hugo for Live Action Short** is awarded to "**In August**" (USA). Through its beautiful cinematography and sincere performances, "In August" exquisitely captures the moment between a little girl realizing her world is changing forever and the change itself—the sublime before the storm. Director: Jenna Hasse.

The **Gold Plaque for Best Student Short** is awarded to "**Skunk**" (USA). Demonstrating instincts similar to early David Gordon Green or Debra Granik, "Skunk" masterfully teases the audience with the promise of a lazy summer day and the nightmare that other teens induce upon each other. The young actors' nuanced performances wonderfully illustrate youthful humiliations via the conflicts of puberty—the bravado of boys who can't yet control their bodies, and the retribution of a girl not interested in taking things lightly. Director: Annie Silverstein.

The **Gold Plaque for Narrative/Live Action Short** goes to "**Artun**" (Iceland/Denmark), a pale yellow, Black Metal ode to that age when you feel like the dirtiest thing in the world because you're still so clean. Director: Guðmundur Arnar Guðmundsson

The **Silver Plaque for Narrative/Live Action Short** goes to "**The Immaculates**" (France). In this affecting document of tragedy, director Ronny Trocker weaves a quilt of 3D imagery, leading viewers through a disorienting landscape of retelling and remembrance. Director: Ronny Trocker.

The **Gold Plaque for Best Experimental Short** goes to **“Prehistoric Cabaret” (France)**. In this colonoscopic reverie, courtesy of the world's most dangerous camera, we penetrate the cosmic mystery shrouded in secrets within the enigma at the very center of being (or at least through the center of our lovely hostess). Life IS a cabaret. Director: Bertrand Mandico.

A **Special Mention** goes to **“Washingtonia” (Greece)**. With humor and heart, “Washingtonia” exists in the space between narrative and free association, offering an absurdist urban myth that is somehow recognizable, even as it eludes definition. Director: Konstantina Kotzamani.

The Live Action Short Film Competition Jury includes Lindsay Bosch (USA), Susan Kerns (USA), and Spencer Parsons (USA).

Short Film Competition: Documentary

The **Silver Hugo** is awarded to **“Love.Love.Love.” (Russia)**. Sandhya Daisy Sundaram’s “Love.Love.Love.” is a rotating treatise on the forms love takes in the lives of Russian women. In a beguiling series of deceptively compact tableaux, it evokes a universal hunt for romance and companionship from the dawn of birth to the twilight of old age. We award “Love.Love.Love.” Best Documentary Short because, in rare form, it lives up to its title, and reflects invisible truths found in the combination of everyday moments. Director: Sandhya Daisy Sundaram.

A **Gold Plaque - Special Jury Prize** goes to **“Ghost Train” (Australia)**. “Ghost Train” paints a vivid portrait of a man who is drawn to a cabaret dancer at a local haunted house. As he deals with his wife with Alzheimer's and faces his own death, he finds solace in her vivacity and energy in a house dedicated to death. Through found footage, stunning black and white cinematography and borrowing the style of bygone horror films, “Ghost Train” leads the audience on an exploration of life, death and legacy. Directors: James Fleming and Kelly Hucker.

Special Mention to **“A Paradise” (Cuba)**, a brief but compelling observation of a poor family in rural Cuba, and a discreet look into complex issues surrounding children living in poverty. Director: Jayisha Patel.

The Documentary Short Film Competition Jury includes Jack C. Newell (USA), Brian Ashby (USA), Mehrnaz Saeed-Vafa (USA).

Short Film Competition: Animation

The **Silver Hugo** for **Best Animated Short Film** goes to **“Coda” (Ireland)**. “Coda”'s elegantly simple visuals, minimal lines and solid patches of color, describe an urban nighttime world of disconnection and insularity. Here, the moment of dying is seen as a chance for re-evaluating the individual's relationship to humanity and life itself. The jury recognizes this film for the challenging depth of its themes, and for the spare but powerful aesthetic which presents those themes with lyrical complexity. Director: Alan Holly.

The **Gold Plaque-Special Jury Prize** goes to **“Symphony No. 42” (Hungary)**. The jury was hypnotized by the associative links between the domestic and the natural, and by the portrayal of animal exploitation as a farce. These nihilistic allegories functioned both as a dystopia and as an indictment of contemporary human activity. Director: Réka Bucsi.

The **Silver Plaque** is awarded to “**Drifting**” (USA), for its strange manipulation of time, and the notion of capturing the uncapturable, for no witness. A documented life critique. Director: Joel Benjamin.

A **Special Mention** goes to “**Man on the Chair**” (South Korea), for its poetic pastel beauty and its willingness to be calm and powerful at the same time. Director: Jeong Dahee.

The Animation Short Film Competition Jury includes Eric Patrick (USA), Timothy Brayton (USA), Chris Sullivan (USA).

INTERCOM Competition

One of the longest-running international competitions of its kind, INTERCOM honors a wide range of corporate-sponsored, educational and branded films.

The **Gold Hugo** goes to “**The Art of the Pit Stop**” (Germany) from Kemper Kommunikation GmbH. Truly living up to the spirit of INTERCOM and appropriately titled, "The Art of the Pit Stop" is a simple, poetic film that addresses the branded video with the highest level of cinematic achievement.

The INTERCOM Competition jury includes Dan Sutherland (USA), Susan Kerns (USA), and Ron Falzone (USA)

Special Awards

The **50th Chicago International Film Festival** honored director **Gina Prince-Bythewood** with an **Artistic Achievement Award** and actress **Gugu Mbatha-Raw** with an **Emerging Artist Award** during the Festival's **18th Annual Black Perspectives Tribute** on October 10.

AWARDS NIGHT SPONSORS

Evening Hosts: Michigan Avenue Magazine and Sofitel; Lead Partner: Wintrust Community Banks; Evening Partners: Stella Artois, Casale del Giglio and Effen Vodka.

FESTIVAL SPONSORS

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ABOUT CINEMA/CHICAGO

Cinema/Chicago, the presenting organization of the Chicago International Film Festival, is a not-for-profit arts and education organization dedicated to encouraging better understanding between cultures and to making a positive contribution to the art form of the moving image.

The 50th Chicago International Film Festival runs October 9-23, 2014.

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