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HAPPY AS LAZZARO AND ASH IS PUREST WHITE
ARE TOP WINNERS AT THE
54TH CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

Alice Rohrwacher’s Happy as Lazzaro wins the Gold Hugo for its poetic cinematic language
while Jia Zhangke’s latest masterpiece takes home the Silver Hugo for Best Director
and Best Actress

Films from Vietnam, Australia, Peru, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Mexico and United
States are among the major winners across the Festival’s other competitions

CHICAGO – The 54th Chicago International Film Festival tonight hosted its Awards Ceremony at AMC
River East 21, 322 E. Illinois St., celebrating the films chosen as the award winners by the Festival juries.
Prizes were awarded to films in the following categories: International Feature Film Competition; New
Directors Competition; International Documentary Competition; Out-Look Competition; and Short Film
Competition. The Chicago Award and the Founder’s Award were also presented.

Taking home the top prize, the Gold Hugo for Best Film, in the International Feature Film Competition, is
director Alice Rohrwacher’s Happy as Lazzaro (Italy/Switzerland/Germany/France), a film the jury
recognized for its poetic cinematic language and formal rigor. The Silver Hugo for Best Director was
awarded to Jia Zhangke for Ash Is Purest White (China/FRance) and the Silver Hugo Special Jury Prize
was awarded to Joy (Austria), directed by Sudabeh Mortezai. Director Ash Mayfair took home top
honors in the New Directors Competition with a Gold Hugo for The Third Wife (Vietnam) and the Silver
Hugo was awarded to Joël Karekezi for The Mercy of the Jungle (Belgium/FRance/Rwanda). The Roger
Ebert Award, presented to an emerging filmmaker with a fresh and uncompromising vision, was awarded
to directors Andréa Bescond and Eric Métayer for Little Tickles (France), and the Chicago Award was
presented to Michael Paulucci for Hashtag Perfect Life. The Founder’s Award, given to one film 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, was presented to Felix van Groeningen’s Beautiful
Boy.
For images of the films, click here.

“Each year, the films presented in our competitions represent the excellence and diversity of filmmaking from around the world, and this year was no exception,” said Festival Artistic Director Mimi Plauché. “We are proud to honor these extraordinary films from around the world and here at home, saluting a diverse lineup of singular filmmakers and their work.”

Select award-winning films will be screened during the Festival’s Best of the Fest program on Sunday, October 21. The complete list of honorees is as follows:

**International Feature Film Competition**

**Gold Hugo: Best Film**

*Happy as Lazzaro*

Italy/Switzerland/France/Germany

Dir. Alice Rohrwacher

The Gold Hugo for Best Film goes to *Happy as Lazzaro* (dir. Alice Rohrwacher, Italy). For profoundly enchanting, surprising, and moving us through a poetic cinematic language that is both genuine and rigorous, while intertwining past and present into a highly original, engrossing, layered, and uncanny viewing experience that invites us to face our own humanity with mystery, grace, and lyricism.

**Silver Hugo: Special Jury Prize**

*Joy*

Austria

Dir. Sudabeh Mortezai

The Silver Hugo Special Jury Award goes to *Joy* (dir. Sudabeh Mortezai, Austria). This film shows in an honest and raw way the conflicts of two sex workers of Nigeria in Europe, showing in a truthful and consistent style the cycle of exploitation. Moral dilemmas and guilt are exposed carefully in this sincere social drama.

**Silver Hugo: Best Director**

Jia Zhangke, *Ash Is Purest White*

China/France

The Silver Hugo for Best Director goes to Jia Zhangke (China) for *Ash Is Purest White*, which was shot with masterfully crafted mise en scene that allows us to observe the complexity of its characters and the evolution of a country.

**Silver Hugo: Best Actor**

Jesper Christensen, *Before the Frost*

Denmark

The Silver Hugo for Best Actor goes to Jesper Christensen (*Before the Frost*, dir. Michael Noer, Denmark), whose face shifts like the world around him. He leads us through the crevices of his soul as he tries to catch hold of his desires and dreams that keep slipping from his grasp.

**Silver Hugo: Best Actress**

Zhao Tao, *Ash is Purest White*

China/France

The Silver Hugo for Best Actress goes to Zhao Tao (*Ash Is Purest White*, dir. Jia Zhangke, China), who plays the role of Quio, who takes us on a 20-year journey through the fast changing landscape and morays of her country. Tao burns with brilliance, wit, and ferociousness as a woman whose steps are haunted by her history and what may come next.
Silver Plaque: Best Screenplay
Stéphane Brizé and Olivier Gorce, At War
France
The Silver Hugo for Best Screenplay goes to Stéphane Brizé and Olivier Gorce (At War, dir. Stéphane Brizé, France) for articulating and bringing light to an important political issue which reflects the anxiety of our contemporary society and the precariousness of our livelihood.

Silver Plaque: Best Cinematography
David Gallego, Birds of Passage
Colombia/Mexico/Denmark/France
The Silver Plaque for Best Cinematography goes to David Gallego for Birds of Passage (Colombia). Its stunning compositions and expressive use of color reflects the deep emotions and conflicts the characters experience.

Silver Plaque: Best Art Direction
Angélica Parea, Birds of Passage
Colombia/Mexico/Denmark/France
The Silver Plaque for Best Art Direction goes to Angélica Parea for Birds of Passage (Colombia) for its exquisite and poetic use of the spectacular locations of the desert of Guajira to tell the rise and fall of an indigenous family ravaged by the drug trade.

New Directors Competition
Gold Hugo
The Third Wife
Vietnam
Dir. Ash Mayfair
The Gold Hugo goes to The Third Wife. Ash Mayfair’s lush, assured debut feature follows a 14-year-old girl as she enters a wealthy household. Mayfair’s unshakeable vision grants the women of this world an individuality their society rejects, treating them as creations as wondrous as the natural world that surrounds them, as the film builds to a staggering climax that devastates and thrills in equal measure.

Silver Hugo
The Mercy of the Jungle
Belgium/France/Rwanda
Dir. Joël Karekezi
The Silver Hugo goes to The Mercy of the Jungle, an intimate two-hander set at the outbreak of the Second Congo War. Separated from their unit, a Sergeant and a Private take to the jungle as their only means of survival, a setting that swallows the camera and the audience as completely as the war itself envelopes the lives of these two young men, countless innocent civilians, and the land itself.

Roger Ebert Award
Little Tickles
France
Dirs. Andréa Bescond, Eric Métayer
The Roger Ebert Award goes to Little Tickles, a visceral, personal, and endlessly inventive portrait of a woman whose memories and present actions are continuously and irrevocably shaped by horrific childhood sexual abuse. Writer/directors Andréa Bescond and Eric Métayer dive unflinchingly into the mind of dancer Odette (played with staggering vigor by Bescond), using the mutability of memory and the expressions of the body to steer the audience and protagonist alike toward healing, reconciliation, and something like peace.

Documentary Competition
Gold Hugo
[Censored]
Australia
Dir. Sari Braithwaite
The Gold Hugo goes to [Censored] a film that stitches together decades-old archival fragments of male violence into something shockingly contemporary, a film that distills the essence of a cinematic patriarchy through tightly woven montage that is unflinching and difficult to watch, yet essential.

Silver Hugo
Ex-Shaman
Brazil
Dir. Luiz Bolognesi
The Silver Hugo goes to Ex-Shaman for its hauntingly lyrical and deeply cinematic variations of the themes of colonialism, oppression, alienation, dignity and rebellion. This film, a collaboration with the Amazônia tribe ‘Paiter Surui’, achieves a powerful and mysterious lucidity. This work is even more important because the highly corrupt racist Jair Bolsonaro is likely to become the next president of Brazil, which could deal a deathblow to indigenous people’s desire for autonomy and access to ancestral lands.

Silver Hugo
The Raft
Sweden
Dir. Marcus Lindeen
For the expertly crafted, visually inventive and absorbing retelling of one long strange trip across international waters and into the depths of human nature – the jury awards the Silver Hugo to Marcus Lindeen’s riveting film, The Raft.

Out-Look Competition
Gold Q-Hugo
Retablo
Peru/Germany/Norway
Dir. Alvaro Delgado Aparicio
Through a discreetly powerful mise en scène, Retablo is a delicately crafted story of art, transmission, and voyeurism. Using magnificent cinematography, creative direction of already nuanced actors, and a stunning attention to detail, this film delivers a precious, striking portrait of a land, a community, a family, and a man-to-be.

Silver Q-Hugo
Rafiki
Kenya/South Africa/Germany/Netherlands/France/Norway/Lebanon
Dir. Wanuri Kahiu
A marvelously vivid film filled with color and hope, Rafiki was initially banned in its native Kenya for its sensitive, gripping portrayal of two young women falling in love across boundaries of class, politics, and mobility. Its undying heart, however, cements its narrative vitality in a period of global human rights retrenchment.

Special Mention
Hard Paint
Brazil
Dirs. Filipe Matzembacher, Marcio Reolon
For its courageous invention and for situating queer identity within carefully observed intersectional economic and political concerns, we give Hard Paint an honorable mention.

Documentary Short Film Competition
**Silver Hugo:**
*Circle*
U.K./Canada/India
Dir. Jayisha Patel
A cinematic masterpiece, *Circle* is made with a raw intimacy that is uncomfortable, personal, painful, and necessary. Patel articulates the universal cycle of abuse that women endure and, through this story, the pain of women across the globe.

**Gold Plaque:**
*Edgecombe*
U.S.
Crystal Kayiza
Beautiful imagery and discreetly powerful sound design gracefully reveal the immeasurable strength and hope that spans well past the three generations shared by the protagonists.

**Special Mention:**
*Black 14*
U.S.
Dir. Darius Clark Monroe
Black 14 earns this honorable mention for its masterful mining of the past, showing us the present, and shaping the future with a film that is beautifully edited and executed with a sharp storytelling eye.

**Animated Short Film Competition**
**Silver Hugo:**
*Bloeistraat 11*
The Netherlands
Nienke Deutz
For its innovative blend of animation techniques and careful use of material, the film creates an embodied awareness of its coming-of-age topic. It visually expresses the awkwardness of growing up with confidence and clarity.

**Gold Plaque:**
*Weekends*
U.S.
Trevor Jimenez
This film is honored for its exacting grasp of the medium that carries a human warmth of narrative.

**Special Mention:**
*Opening Night*
U.S.
Margaret Bialis
The film is a humorous and succinct grasp of human psychology through relationships and song.

**Live Action Short Film Competition**
**Gold Hugo**
*Mamartuille*
Mexico
Dir. Alejandro Saevich
Recognized for stylistic distinction in direction, cinematograph, social relevance, satirical commentary, and performance quality, the film is a timely, subtle, and poignant accusation of the limitations of government told through a smart, humanistic examination of the leaders behind the decisions that shape our world. Such a portrayal is becoming increasingly relatable globally; the film is an exemplary use of the medium.
Silver Hugo

*Hair Wolf*

U.S.
Dir. Mariama Diallo

The film is honored for its lush, eye-popping production design and its confident and sharp writing and performances. *Hair Wolf* is a simmering and wicked commentary on cultural appropriation, power, and love in the soul-sucking age of social media.

Special Mention

*Nyi ma lay*

Singapore
Dir. Wei Liang Chiang

In one single continuous shot, *Nyi Ma Lay* captures both the fragility and the mystery of the human condition. This short film provides an enormous amount of tension and pathos and is engaging across all cultures and languages.

Chicago Award

*Hashtag Perfect Life*

U.S.
Dir. Michael Paulucci

This year's Chicago Award goes to *Hashtag Perfect Life*, a darkly comic, brilliantly acted, formally bold short film that tackles, with startling incisiveness, the grinding, soul-numbing superficiality of the digital age. Underneath its hilarious and queasy surface, Michael Paulucci's satirical fable is a profoundly sad requiem for a kind and thoughtful world.

Founder's Award

*Beautiful Boy*

U.S.
Dir. Felix van Groeningen

The Founder's Award is personally presented by Festival Founder Michael Kutza to the single film across all categories he feels best embodies the spirit of curiosity, optimism and love of film that led to his starting the Chicago International Film Festival 55 years ago. "*Beautiful Boy* is an emotional drama which remains full of hope and humanity with two of the most stunning performances of the year," remarked Kutza.

For a press release listing jury members, click [here](#).

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Festival and Ticket Information

The 54th Chicago International Film Festival runs Oct. 10-21, 2018 at the AMC River East, 322 E. Illinois St., and features more than 150 films, with a vast diversity of offerings, with numerous competitive categories and several highlight programs such as Black Perspectives, Cinemas of the Americas, International Comedy, Spotlight: Italy, Women in Cinema, Out-Look, After Dark and the City & State program (showcasing films made in Chicago and throughout Illinois.)

Individual tickets ($8 to $20) and Gala Presentation tickets ($20 to $150) are now on sale. Discounted parking is available at AMC River East 21 (322 E. Illinois Street). For more information, visit [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com) or call 312-332-3456.
Festival and Ticket Information
The 54th Chicago International Film Festival's sponsors include Premiere Sponsors: Bloomberg Philanthropies, Wintrust Community Banks; Official Wine Sponsor: Chloe Wine Collection; Education Sponsor: HBO; Participating Sponsor: British International School of Chicago; Airline Partner: LOT Polish Airlines; Headquarters Hotel: St. Jane Hotel; Event Partners: AMC Theaters, The Gwen Hotel, Little Goat Diner; Platinum Media Partner: NCM; This program is supported in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency. Additional support provided by the Illinois Film Office, Chicago Film Office, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE), and Lagunitas Brewing Company.

About Cinema/Chicago
Cinema/Chicago, the presenting organization of the Chicago International Film Festival, is a year-round nonprofit arts and education organization dedicated to fostering better communication between people of diverse cultures through the art of film and the moving image. Cinema/Chicago's programs include the Chicago International Film Festival, International Screenings Program, Chicago International Television Festival, CineYouth Festival, and year-round Education Program. Celebrating its 54th edition October 10-21, 2018, the Chicago International Film Festival is North America's longest-running competitive film festival. For more information, please visit www.chicagofilmfestival.com or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo and Twitter.

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