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**PORTRAIT OF A LADY ON FIRE AND VITALINA VARELA  
WIN TOP AWARDS AT THE  
55<sup>TH</sup> CHICAGO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL**

Films from France, Brazil, Colombia and More Among Major Award Recipients Across the Festival's Many Competitions

CHICAGO – The **55<sup>th</sup> Chicago International Film Festival** tonight announced during a ceremony at **Chez**, 247 E Ontario St., the winners of the Festival's diverse competitions. 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 in the International Feature Film Competition is ***Portrait of a Lady on Fire*** (France) by director **Céline Sciamma**, hailed by the jury as a portrayal of the all-consuming nature of love and the beauty of women's solidarity. The Silver Hugo Jury Award was presented to ***Vitalina Varela*** (Portugal) directed by **Pedro Costa**, while the Silver Hugo for Best Director was awarded to **Maya Da-Rin** for her film ***The Fever*** (Brazil/France/Germany).

Director **Franco Lolli** took home top honors in the New Directors Competition with a Gold Hugo for ***Litigante*** (France/Colombia) and the Silver Hugo in this competition was shared by **Gitanjali Rao** for ***Bombay Rose*** (India/UK/Qatar/France) and director **César Díaz** for ***Our Mothers*** (Guatemala/Belgium/France). The Roger Ebert Award, presented to an emerging filmmaker with an innovative and forward-looking perspective, went to director **Maryam Touzani** for ***Adam*** (Morocco/France/Belgium).

In the Documentary Competition, the Gold Hugo was awarded to director **Eva Mulvad's *Love Child*** (Denmark) for its intimate look at the global refugee crisis, and the Silver Hugo was presented to **André Hörmann's *Ringside*** (Germany/U.S.), with an honorable mention to ***Waiting for the Carnival*** (Brazil), directed by **Marcelo Gomes**.

The Founder's Award, selected by Chicago International Film Festival founder Michael Kutza and 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 **Martin Scorsese's *The Irishman***, marking Scorsese's first award from the Festival, which launched his career with the premiere of 1967's *I Call First*, later retitled to *Who's That Knocking at My Door?* The Chicago Award, presented to a film from the Festival's City/State section, went to **Ed Flynn** for his short film ***Tour Manager***.

For images of the films, [click here](#).

"It is our honor and pleasure to present a lineup of films that surprise, move and inspire our audiences at the Festival," said Artistic Director **Mimi Plauché**. "The diverse, dynamic group of award recipients from the 55<sup>th</sup> edition of the Festival serves as a celebration of excellence in filmmaking and the power of cinema to bring people together, introduce us to new worlds and cultures, and remind us of our shared human experience."

The International Competition Jury was comprised of **Gabor Greiner, Tatiana Leite, Tetsuya Mariko, Cosmina Stratan** and **Jennifer Reeder**. For a press release listing all competition jury members, click [here](#).

Select award-winning films will be screened during the Festival's Best of the Fest program on Sunday, October 27. The complete list of honorees is as follows:

### **International Feature Film Competition**

#### **Gold Hugo**

*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Dir. Céline Sciamma

France

The Gold Hugo for Best Film goes to ***Portrait of a Lady on Fire*** by Céline Sciamma. The film portrays not only the exuberance of falling in love and the all-consuming nature that is love, but also the beauty of women's solidarity and the attempt to fit in a world that rarely seems to be made for them. The strength of the filmmaking combined with amazing acting, photography, and music set the jury on fire.

#### **Silver Hugo: Jury Award**

*Vitalina Varela*

Dir. Pedro Costa

Portugal

The Silver Hugo Jury Award goes to Pedro Costa's ***Vitalina Varela***, for a ravishing and masterful vision between horror and melodrama, spirituality and desperation that blew the jury all away.

#### **Silver Hugo: Best Director**

Maya Da-Rin

*The Fever*

Brazil/France/Germany

The Silver Hugo for Best Director goes to **Maya Da-Rin** for her debut fiction feature *The Fever*. The film drifts between dream and reality, portraying with both tenderness and precision the world of an indigenous father and daughter in the north of Brazil. It takes us into the family and their hearts, but never forgets the importance of the political context.

#### **Silver Hugo: Best Actress**

Debbie Honeywood

*Sorry We Missed You*

UK/France/Belgium

The Silver Hugo for Best Actress Award goes to Debbie Honeywood in ***Sorry We Missed You***. The jury was struck by the courage and splendid tone of her performance. The style in which she portrays mother, wife, and home-care nurse shows immaculate taste and dedication.

#### **Silver Hugo: Best Actor**

Bartosz Bielenia

*Corpus Christi*

Poland/France

The Silver Hugo for Best Actor goes to Bartosz Bielenia in ***Corpus Christi***. The jury found impressive force and unanticipated choices in his performance; he charmingly builds Daniel, a character whose embrace of dishonesty becomes a kind of integrity.

#### **Best Screenplay**

Pema Tsenden

*Balloon*

China

The Award for Best Screenplay goes to ***Balloon*** by Pema Tsenden. The film is a gorgeously intimate family drama mixed with humor and sorrow which surprised and moved the jury while bringing us closer to one of the most rural areas in the world.

#### **Best Cinematography**

Vladimir Smutny

*The Painted Bird*

Czech Republic/Ukraine/Slovak Republic

The Award for Best Cinematography goes to Vladimir Smutny for ***The Painted Bird***. The film elicited much discussion among the jury for its portrayal of ghastly events that the young protagonist endures throughout the film, evoking a strong sense of sadness and helplessness without hope for resolution. However, the black and white photography and framing was so strong that it made it impossible to look away.

#### **Best Sound Design**

*Fire Will Come*

Spain/France/Luxembourg

The Award for Best Sound Design goes to ***Fire Will Come*** by director Oliver Laxe. The sound design, which employs music with natural and man-made sounds, sometimes indistinguishably, is at once sensitive and dynamic, ennuie-filled and dignified, reminding the viewer of the complex and contradictory relationship that humans have to the natural environment.

Selected by International Feature Film Competition jurors Gabor Greiner, Tatiana Leite, Tetsuya Mariko, Cosmina Stratan and Jennifer Reeder.

#### **New Directors Competition**

##### **Gold Hugo**

*Litigante*

Dir. Franco Lolli

France/Colombia

The Gold Hugo goes to ***Litigante*** directed by Franco Lolli. This second feature from the Colombian director is a searing portrait of family ties and multi-generational motherhood. The jury was moved by the film's emotional complexity, nuance, and authenticity, as the movie pulled us all through the turbulent and tender push and pull of the family life, work life, and love life of the film's central character. We award this film the top prize of the New Directors category also for its mastery of craft in writing, acting, camera, and editing, but ultimately for its eloquent balance of hope and loss, and for its unmistakable bravery.

##### **Silver Hugo, Ex Aequo**

*Bombay Rose*

Dir. Gitanjali Rao  
India/UK/Qatar/France

The Silver Hugo, ex aequo, goes to ***Bombay Rose***, the directorial debut of Gitanjali Rao. A dreamy, lush animated film with a rich aesthetic palette, this captivated the jury with its multigenerational story of longing, hope, love, belief, and family. The film's striking hand-painted visuals alternately juxtapose Bollywood spectacle with Hindu symbolism and Islamic heroic iconography; we found its haunting soundtrack of traditional and contemporary Hindi, Persian and Urdu songs equally complex and affecting. The result is a formally and narratively ambitious tapestry that centers on star-crossed lovers, yet lingers poignantly amidst multiple intersecting stories and perspectives with finely textured details that are as exquisite as the whole.

### **Silver Hugo, Ex Aequo**

*Our Mothers*

Dir. César Díaz  
Guatemala/Belgium/France

The Silver Hugo, ex aequo, goes to ***Our Mothers***. The film's quasi-documentary style maps a young man's intense confrontation with Guatemala's post-civil war national reckoning and its implications for his life, his livelihood, his family, and his very identity. The jury was moved by the stakes of the storytelling and the film's sense of urgency, as well as by director Cesar Diaz's delicate and empathetic engagement with the meanings and boundaries of personal agency, trauma, and family.

### **Roger Ebert Award**

*Adam*

Dir. Maryam Touzani  
Morocco/France/Belgium

The Roger Ebert award goes to ***Adam*** (Morocco/France/Belgium), directed by first-time Moroccan director Maryam Touzani. This beautifully constructed film, set in modern day Casablanca, celebrates sisterhood and motherhood, grief and redemption through the story of a homeless pregnant woman taken in by a stoically grieving widow, herself the mother of an 8-year-old girl. The film is well-crafted and sensitively paced. The director gives space for both leads to have equally strong performances, and they don't disappoint. We select this film for **The Roger Ebert Award** and commend the director's ability to create an exceptionally intimate film with palpable empathy and brilliant uses of space, lighting, casting and writing.

Selected by New Directors Competition jurors Melika Bass, Miriam J. Petty, and Sonia Smith-Evans.

### **Documentary Competition**

#### **Gold Hugo**

*Love Child*

Dir. Eva Mulvad  
Denmark

***Love Child*** is a film that intimately explores the global refugee crisis through the story of an Iranian family waiting in Turkey for news of their asylum status. Spanning events over seven years, Eva Mulvad constructs a seamless dramatic narrative out of unforeseen circumstances. ***Love Child*** champions a family everyone would fight for, ultimately connecting the dots from sensational headlines to the human toll of contemporary immigration policies.

#### **Silver Hugo**

*Ringside*

Dir. André Hörmann  
Germany/U.S.

The Silver Hugo goes to ***Ringside***, a coming of age drama about two Chicago boxing hopefuls whose paths diverge. Filmmaker Andre Hörmann's creative approach to weaving accomplished cinematography,

elevated sound design and the use of archival footage creates a compelling portrait of two father son relationships rooted in love rather than winning.

### **Special Mention**

*Waiting for the Carnival*

Dir. Marcelo Gomes

Brazil

The Honorable Mention goes to *Waiting for the Carnival*, an expertly crafted tale about the city of Toritama and neo-liberal capitalist approach. Gomez pushes the bounds of traditional filmmaking tools to create visual poetry out of nonstop labor. We want to give this film an Honorable Mention because we believe that all storytellers should be utilizing filmmaking tools to their fullest extent.

Selected by Documentary Competition jurors Abby Lynn Kang Davis, Christy LeMaster, and Martina Melilli.

### **Out-Look Competition**

#### **Gold Q-Hugo**

*And Then We Danced*

Dir. Levan Akin

Georgia/Sweden/France

A tender and warm film that expertly depicts the great heights of ecstasy and the dark depths of first love and desire set in a place we have rarely seen on film. Masterful direction and surprising first performances from the lead actors take you on a journey into the stiff competition of the traditional Georgian dance world and into the lives of the beautiful dancers who inhabit it. Against the abrasive backdrop of a conservative society, this gorgeously lensed film explores themes of fragile masculinity and sexuality in a way that is refreshing, organic and powerful.

#### **Silver Q-Hugo**

*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*

Céline Sciamma

France

*Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is a beautiful and elegant period film that unfolds from its first frame in a warm yet suffocatingly cold fashion. Subtle yet powerful performances surround the lead who is a force to be reckoned with. We are all trapped in her gaze as each scene slowly builds towards the ultimate and inevitable climax that yearns towards a feminism yet to come.

### **Special Mention**

*Knives and Skin*

Dir. Jennifer Reeder

U.S.

With a uniquely dry and campy sense of humor, this film drops you right into a weird world whose wild rules and dark, yet color-blasted, aesthetics are striking but never questioned. Beautiful cinematography, lighting, production design and solid performances help this film create an idiosyncratic, distinctive tone that is comparable to many cult films before it, yet truly all its own. The final result of all of these ingredients is a welcome voice in cinema that is at once both vintage and the future, and we hope that there are many more films to come from writer and director Jennifer Reeder.

Selected by Q-Hugo jurors Matthieu Dupas, Morgan Jon Fox, and Kara Keeling.

### **Live Action Short Film Competition**

#### **Gold Hugo**

*Liberty*

Dir. Faren Humes

USA

The Gold Hugo is awarded to **Liberty** (USA), directed by Faren Humes. As a halcyon meditation on coping, this film brings us into the world of its two young protagonists in the aftermath of a tragic incident. Its use of ruminative compositions and deliberate pacing provide distinct insights into the deeply personal experience of grief.

### **Silver Hugo**

*Aziza*

Dir. Soudade Kaadan

Syria/Lebanon

The Silver Hugo is awarded to **Aziza** (Syria/Lebanon), directed by Soudade Kaadan. Playful yet poignant, this compact work follows a husband and wife, presumed to be Syrian refugees now living in Lebanon, as he teaches her how to drive in his beloved red Volkswagen Bug, named Aziza. What seems like a simple driving lesson becomes an imaginative—albeit fraught— journey toward acceptance.

Selected by Live Action Short Film Competition jurors James Choi, Christopher Rejano, and Kathleen Sachs.

### **Documentary Short Film Competition**

#### **Gold Hugo**

*Easter Snap*

Dir. RaMell Ross

U.S.

**Easter Snap** masterfully discusses nuanced socio-political and economic realities in the southern United States through the lens of community ritual. Letting his edit lead the story as opposed to relying on traditional documentary tropes or narrative, Ross creates an innovative style as mystical as it is hyper-real.

#### **Silver Hugo**

*The Furniture Maker*

Dir. David Avilés

Cuba

Simultaneously heartfelt and conceptually innovative, **The Furniture Maker** combines styles of video diary and observational documentary to create a one of a kind story of familial love. Following his father with the camera, and in turn, his father following him, Avilés crafts an intimacy that translates through the video texture itself.

Selected by Documentary Short Film Competition jurors Emily Eddy, Kevin Shaw, and Jake Zalutsky.

### **Animated Short Film Competition**

#### **Gold Hugo**

*And Then the Bear*

Dir. Agnès Patron

France

A young boy conjures a fierce bear to cope with his defiance and familial jealousy. Combining phantasmagoric imagery with an unusual Freudian narrative, director Agnes Patron expertly blends narrative and experimental techniques to convey a cohesive, nightmarish manifestation of inner turmoil.

#### **Silver Hugo**

*I Bleed*

Dir. Tiago Minamisawa, Bruno H Castro, Guto BR

Brazil

Beautifully poetic in narration and style, *I Bleed* utilizes a powerful collage of mixed media to tell the intimate personal journey of one man's experience living with HIV. The film is a tragic-yet-hopeful meditation on the healing power of art.

Selected by Animated Short Film Competition jurors Shelley Lynn Dodson, Ozge Samanci, and Jim Vendiola.

### **Chicago Award**

#### **Chicago Award**

*Tour Manager*

Dir. Ed Flynn

U.S.

The award goes to *Tour Manager* directed by Edmund Flynn. Nothing says youth like a band on a couch tour and nothing says adulthood like having a child. That juxtaposition is not lost on the title character as she navigates both. This masterful illustration of the choices the manager has made and how she navigates what culture and society want from a mom is what makes this deceptively simple, yet poignant, story ring loudly with truth.

Selected by Chicago Award jurors McKenzie Chinn, Mike Paulucci, and Risé Sanders-Weir.

### **Founder's Award**

#### **Founder's Award**

Director **Martin Scorsese** and his film *The Irishman*.

This award marks the first presented to Martin Scorsese from the Chicago International Film Festival. The Festival, which launched Scorsese's film career in 1967, was also where the late Roger Ebert first saw his film – a pivotal moment for them both.

*The Irishman* brings many of the familiar Scorsese themes full circle. His mastery of the cinema is fully visible in this film through stellar performances from Joe Pesci, Robert De Niro and Al Pacino. *The Irishman* and Martin Scorsese truly capture the spirit of why the Chicago International Film Festival was founded 55 years ago.

Selected by Chicago International Film Festival founder Michael Kutza.

### **Festival Information**

The 55<sup>th</sup> Chicago International Film Festival runs until 27, 2019 at the AMC River East, 322 E. Illinois St., and features more than 150 films, with a vast diversity of offerings, including numerous competitive categories and several highlight programs such as Black Perspectives, Cinemas of the Americas, International Comedy, Women in Cinema, Out-Look, After Dark and the City & State program (showcasing films made in Chicago and throughout Illinois.)

### **Festival Sponsors and Partners**

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### **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, Summer Screenings Program, CineYouth Festival, and year-round Education Program. Celebrating its 55<sup>th</sup> edition October 16-27, 2019, the Chicago International Film Festival is North America's longest-running competitive film festival. For more information, please visit [www.chicagofilmfestival.com](http://www.chicagofilmfestival.com) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [Twitter](#).

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