

MEDIA RELEASE: SUNDAY 18 JUNE 2023

SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL AWARD WINNERS ANNOUNCED AT THE CLOSING NIGHT GALA

The 70th Sydney Film Festival tonight awarded the prestigious Sydney Film Prize to Moroccan filmmaker Asmae El Moudir for her film *The Mother of All Lies*, an audacious feature that melds fact, fiction and captivating figurines to reveal a hidden history of Morocco's 1981 Bread Riots.

The winner of the \$60,000 cash prize for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was selected by a prestigious international jury headed by acclaimed director Anurag Kashyap.

The announcement was made at the State Theatre ahead of the Australian Premiere screening of *Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny*.

Addressing the crowd at the packed closing night ceremony, Moudir said "I didn't expect this. I just want to call my grandmother now, who made the film with me, and my neighbours, and all the people in Morocco. It's 10am there now, and I want to tell them we have just won the prize of Sydney Film Festival. You are the warmest public I have met in my life. I was flying 23 hours, fighting with the jetlag, but I will sleep well now with this prize."

The awarding of the largest prize pool in Sydney Film Festival history also included Australian filmmakers **Derik Lynch** and **Matthew Thorne** being awarded the [Documentary Australia Award's](#) \$20,000 cash prize for *Marungka Tjalatjuna (Dipped in Black)*, which follows Lynch, a Yankunytjatjara artist, on a road trip back to Country (Aputula), as memories from his childhood return.

The 2022 recipient of the \$40,000 [Sustainable Future Award](#), the largest environmental film prize in the world, is Indian director **Sarvnik Kaur**, for her film *Against the Tide*, an intimate documentary where two fishermen from Mumbai's Indigenous Koli community confront the impact of the changing environment.

Five short film prizes were awarded for [The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films](#). The AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner (a \$7,000 cash prize) went to **Kalu Oji, Faro Musodza** and **Makwaya Masudi**, screenwriters for *What's In a Name?* The inaugural Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award, with a cash prize of \$7,000 was awarded to **Robyn Liu**, lead actor in *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man*.

The \$5,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award was awarded to *Teacups*, directed by **Alec Green** and **Finbar Watson**. The \$7,000 Dendy Live Action Short Award was awarded to *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man*, directed by **David Ma**. The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director was presented to **Sophie Somerville**, director of *Linda 4 Eva*.

Minister for the Arts John Graham said, "As a film fan, thank you to the Sydney Film Festival for seventy years of magic."

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“Congratulations to all the award winners and thank you to every talented filmmaker, artist, crew member, agent, producer, distributor and all involved, who shared their creativity and craft in the art of storytelling with the people of NSW at the 70th Sydney Film Festival.

“We look forward to bringing the best of this year’s anniversary program to seven NSW locations, including Newcastle, Orange, Port Macquarie and Sawtell, as part of the Travelling Film Festival through to October 2023,” he said.

Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore AO said, “Sydney is the cultural heart of our country and it’s great to see theatres packed with people enjoying the stunning selection of local and international films throughout the Sydney Film Festival.

“For 70 years this festival has been delivering stellar shorts, features and documentaries that have inspired viewers and allowed movie buffs to get close to some of the industry’s leading men and women with some engaging talks.

“I congratulate all the winners this year and look forward to our continued partnership with the Sydney Film Festival and all that it brings to our fine city.”

Sydney Film Festival CEO Frances Wallace said, “This year’s Festival was a huge success with a great number of film fans returning to the cinemas in 2023 attending over 400 film screenings, special events and talks. This year we presented 242 incredible films from across the globe and audiences were eager to take part in the festivities with over 100 sold out sessions across the Festival.”

Sydney Film Festival Director Nashen Moodley said, “This year, we’ve been honoured to spotlight exceptional films from all corners of the globe, with filmmaking styles as varied as the many countries that they came from this year, like the fantastically singular Sydney Film Prize winner *The Mother of All Lies*.”

“Over these last 12 days we have borne witness to the fervent love Sydney audiences have for films and the talented people who create them. From spirited standing ovations to earnest participation in filmmaker Q&As and requests for a selfie, their passion reaffirms our belief that cinema truly is a universal language, bridging borders and bringing people together.”

THE SYDNEY FILM PRIZE

On awarding the Sydney Film Prize to Moroccan filmmaker **Asmae El Moudir’s *The Mother of All Lies***, the Jury said in a joint statement:

“Commending the courage of choosing a theme perhaps wilfully obliterated from public memory; appreciating the storytelling methods of playful, yet calculated visual narration, the jury hails the winning film of SFF which fictionalises the interplay between facts and memories.

“Juxtaposing evidence from barely existent public materials with private family memory, this film reconstructs the history of the state, the family and the individual, in three distinct levels.

“The winning film is *The Mother of All Lies*.”



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Coming to Sydney Film Festival direct from its Cannes Un Certain Regard premiere, *The Mother of All Lies* sees Asmae El Moudir recreate the events around an atrocity, Morocco's 1981 Bread Riots, using doll-like figures.

The Festival Jury was comprised of acclaimed director **Anurag Kashyap** (India), actor **Mia Wasikowska** (Australia), film curator and journalist **Dorothee Wenner** (Germany), writer and director **Larissa Behrendt** (Australia) and filmmaker **Visakesa Chandrasekaram** (Australia/Sri Lanka).

Previous winners include: *Close* (2022); *There Is No Evil* (2021); *Parasite* (2019); *The Heiresses* (2018); *On Body and Soul* (2017); *Aquarius* (2016); *Arabian Nights* (2015); *Two Days, One Night* (2014); *Only God Forgives* (2013); *Alps* (2012); *A Separation* (2011); *Heartbeats* (2010); *Bronson* (2009); and *Hunger* (2008).

The competition is endorsed by FIAPF, the regulating body for international film festivals, and is judged by a jury of five international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals.

The 12 films in Competition for the 2023 Sydney Film Prize are listed [HERE](#)

THE DOCUMENTARY AUSTRALIA AWARD

The **Documentary Australia Award** was awarded to **Derik Lynch** and **Matthew Thorne** for *Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black)*. The Jury comprising director Christoffer Guldbrandsen (Denmark) and, from Australia, director Sascha Ettinger Epstein and producer Laurie Brannigan-Onato said in a joint statement:

"Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black) is an incredibly evocative, precise, and raw film. Exploratory and playful in its form, the film tests the line of fact and fiction, and in turn unearths something that sits at the root of the human experience. The film has a highly accomplished and distinct aesthetic that allows for a powerful contemplation of culture, Country, identity and belonging. Derik Lynch is utterly mesmerising in the way he shares his life experiences, on his country, and in his Yankunytjara language. This is a film that is both deeply affecting and matter of fact in its approach, and although it is short in its duration, the film is so concisely exacted, it only leaves you wanting more.

"The jurors would also like to provide an honourable mention to the filmmakers of Kindred."

2023 marks the tenth year the prize has been supported by Documentary Australia, with the cash prize doubling to \$20,000 for the first time.

Previous winners include: *Keep Stepping* (2022); *I'm Wanita* (2021); *Descent* (2020); *She Who Must Be Obeyed* (2019); *Ghosthunter* (2018); *The Pink House* (2017); *In the Shadow of the Hill* (2016); *Only the Dead* (2015); *35 Letters* (2014); *Buckskin* (2013); *Killing Anna* (2012); *Life in Movement* (2011); and *The Snowman* (2010). In 2009 the inaugural prize was shared between *Contact* and *A Good Man*, and each film received a \$10,000 cash prize.

The 12 finalists for the 2023 Documentary Australia Award are listed [HERE](#).



SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AWARD

The 2023 recipient of the Sustainable Future Award was presented to the ***Against the Tide*** directed by Indian filmmaker **Sarvnik Kaur**. The jury also Highly Commended *Rachel's Farm* (director Rachel Ward) and *Power to Country* (director Josef Jakamarra Egger).

The Award is presented to a film that explores the social, economic, political, and environmental consequences of climate change and highlights the urgent need for action to mitigate its effects.

Against the Tide follows two fishermen from Mumbai's Indigenous Koli community as they confront the impact of the changing environment – and the toll it has on their friendship.

This year the Sustainable Future Award increased from \$10,000 to \$40,000, leading the world in offering the largest cash prize for a film tackling climate change and sustainability.

The Jury comprising of actor and producer Amanda Maple-Brown, filmmaker Steven McGregor and *War on Waste* presenter Craig Reucassel said in a joint statement:

“Savnik Kaur’s beautiful film *Against the Tide* is an audacious documentary that spans six years. A thoughtful, nuanced documentary in which the director has clearly earned the deep trust of the subjects as they navigate a rapidly changing world. We appreciated the dedicated undertaking of showing the difficulties of traditional fishing practices in these communities as they are overrun by more modern, unsustainable, and illegal fishing practices, all in an effort to feed their own families and look forward to future films by this director.”

“Rachel Ward’s wonderfully entertaining, uplifting and informative film, *Rachel's Farm*, left us all keen to spread the word on Regenerative Farming. It was a close second, after much deliberation, as we were all very impressed by the beautifully crafted and humanistic portrayal of Rachel’s own journey returning to sustainable, regenerative farming practices. We hope this film has wide support and is seen by many as its impact is palpable once eyes get to see it!”

“The short film *Power to Country*, directed by Josef Jakamarra Egger, was a beautifully shot, gently crafted and simply told film that left us all understanding the problem and the heartache that goes with it.”

The 15 films shortlisted for the 2023 Sustainable Future Award are listed [HERE](#).

Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films

A jury composed of writer Michael Sun, actor and filmmaker Darlene Johnson and director Selcen Ergun judged the Festival’s short film awards.

The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films were awarded to **Kalu Oji, Faro Musodza** and **Makwaya Masudi**, screenwriters for *What's In a Name?* (AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner), **Robyn Liu**, lead actor in *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man* (Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award), *Teacups*, directed by **Alec Green** and **Finbar Watson** (Yoram Gross Animation Award), *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man*, directed by **David Ma** (Dendy Live Action Short Award) and **Sophie Somerville**, director of *Linda 4 Eva* (Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director).

The Jury provided the following statements for each prize:

The Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award.

Winner: Robyn Liu, lead actor in *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man*.

“Robyn Liu, as a softly-spoken dim sum shop assistant, embodies her character with a graceful precision. This is a mercurial role: Liu’s demeanour, coy and subtle, belies a certain spikiness resting just beneath the surface. Each of her glances is charged with nuance, each delicate gesture signalling the desire for something greater. Liu moves between the naturalistic and the profound with the ease of — well, a dancer. A star in the making.”

AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner.

Winner: Kalu Oji, Faro Musodza, Makwaya Masudi, screenwriters of *What's In a Name?*.

“This is a poignant study of the fragility of a relationship — its infatuation and its jealousies. As a character study, *What's In a Name?* is rhythmically mesmerising. In the space of a few frames, it shifts from the poetic to the pulverising: a perfectly executed magic trick of screenwriting.”

Highly commended: Ryo Ridley, cinematographer of *To Fly a Kite*.

“A painterly portrait of a day in suburbia that veers towards fairytale. The images in *To Fly a Kite* are light and effusive — particularly the soaring denouement in the dunes.”

Yoram Gross Animation Award for Best Australian Animation.

Winner: *Teacups*.

“The familiar folklore of Don Ritchie — the man who prevented innumerable suicide attempts at The Gap — is given new life by *Teacups*. The artistry is striking, intricate and expertly rendered, spinning a heartfelt — though never cloying — tale of a local hero.”

Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films for Best Australian Live Action.

Winner: *The Dancing Girl and the Balloon Man*.

“Robyn Liu and Johnathan Lo form an unlikely duo in this gently absurdist romance about a street performer and a dim sum shop assistant. This is a charming film punctuated by raucous interjections into the profane, and forays into unexpected territory. A lovelorn painter, a boisterous aunt, and a Dance Dance Revolution machine all glimmer in the lives of our central duo, who don’t so much move as they drift through the world, floating through a thick soup of ennui to find companionship in each other — on a rainy night, inside a giant balloon.”

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Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Australian Director.

Winner: Sophie Somerville, director of *Linda 4 Eva*.

“You know what you’re in for with *Linda 4 Eva*: an opening title card warns us of the ramblings of an “insane girl”. True to form, it explodes the interiority of a teenage girl in kaleidoscopic, surreal fashion. A day at the beach becomes a mad descent into body anxieties, social insecurities, and acned admirers — and the most memorable cameo from a piece of devon set to film. The directorial voice is a shriek: loud and clear in each frame, with a hefty injection of comedy and a DIY ethos that expands the boundaries of cinema into new, experimental territory.”

The competition for the Australian Short Films was established by the Festival in 1970. Winners of the Best Live Action Short Film Award and the Yoram Gross Animation Award (sponsored by Sandra and Guy Gross in memory of the late Yoram Gross) are Academy Award-eligible, opening new pathways for many Australian filmmakers.

The 10 films shortlisted for the Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films are listed [HERE](#).

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****Images are available to download [here](#).**

EDITOR’S NOTES:

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

Sydney Film Festival will celebrate its 70th edition from Wednesday 7 June to Sunday 18 June 2023, offering Sydneysiders another exciting season of cinema amidst a whirlwind of premieres, red-carpet openings, in-depth discussions, film guests and more.

Sydney Film Festival is a major event on the New South Wales cultural calendar and is one of the world’s longest-running film festivals. For more information, visit sff.org.au.

The 70th Sydney Film Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia and the City of Sydney.

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