

Winners of SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL 2020 announced!!

“Hope” dir. Maria Sødahl: Grand Prize

“The Pencil” dir. Natalya Nazarova: Best Director & Special Jury Prize
For the first time, one film receives two of main prizes by the Jury

“Woman of the Photographs” dir. Takeshi Kushida:
SKIP CITY AWARD selected from all Japanese films

Launched in 2004 in Kawaguchi City of Saitama Prefecture as a film festival to discover and nurture new talent, the 17th edition of SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL has been held from Saturday virtually for the first time, and wrapped at the Closing Ceremony yesterday, Sunday October 4. Jury and Audience award winners were announced at the Ceremony.

Hope (Norway=Sweden) directed by Maria Sødahl, received the Grand Prize in the International Competition. Anja, who lives with her common-marriage partner and six children, is in agony when receiving a terminal cancer diagnosis before Xmas for 11 days. Director Maria Sødahl wrote based on her own experiences the film is her comeback film and only her second directorial work in nine years. Masa Sawada, the President of the Jury, commented, **“I thought that the director herself is asking the question of “living” by snuggling up with the protagonist”. It was unanimously awarded the Grand Prize.**

In addition, **The Pencil** (Russia) directed by Natalya Nazarova, won the Best Director and Special Jury Prize. This is the first time that one film receives more than one for main awards by Jury in the history of Festival! In this work, Antonina, who has come to a remote countryside location after her husband is imprisoned for a political crime there, explained the power of “art” as a way to confront violence while working as an art teacher, creating ripples in a closed village society. Yukiko Mishima, a juror, said, **“In response to the feeling of ‘I don’t see what I don’t want to see’ that is widespread all over the world, ‘I’m going to see what I have to see properly’ and ‘I’m going to live in this society’, the director’s message has delivered really powerfully”.**

In the Japanese Film Competition, **Kontora** directed by Anshul Chauhan, in the feature film category and **Stay** directed by Naoya Fujita, in the short film category, won the Best Picture in each category. SKIP CITY AWARD, which is given to a Japanese filmmaker, whose next feature project is highly anticipated, out of all Japanese films in the international and Japanese Film competitions. Kyoko Heya, the President of the Jury, awarded to **Woman of the Photographs** directed by Takeshi Kushida, and commented, **“the film has a very unique perspective”.**

The Audience Awards, which are decided by viewers’ votes, include **Hearts and Bones** directed by Ben Lawrence and starring in Hugo Weaving for the International Competition, and **Cornflakes** directed by Teppei Isobe for the Japanese Film Competition in the Feature category, **Muito Prazer** directed by Park Jengil won the award in the short film category. Director Teppei Isobe has been nominated for the third consecutive year and won the award for the third consecutive year as well. It is the first achievement of the festival!

Award winners are as follows. Please kindly introduce the award winners to your readers.



International Competition Winners

Grand Prize

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 1,000,000 yen are given.



Hope

<2019 / Norway, Sweden / 125min.>

Director: Maria Sødahl

©Manuel Claro

Best Director

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 500,000 yen are given.

Special Jury Prize

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 300,000 yen are given.



The Pencil

<2019 / Russia / 93min.>

Director: Natalya Nazarova

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Audience Award

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



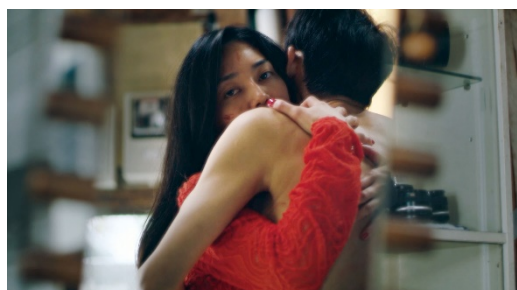
Hearts and Bones

<2019 / Australia / 111min.>

Director: Ben Lawrence

©2019 Hearts and Bones Films Pty Ltd, Spectrum Films Pty Ltd, Lemac Films (Australia) Pty Ltd, Create NSW and Screen Australia

SKIP CITY AWARD Winner



Woman of the Photographs

<2020 / Japan / 89min.>

Director: Takeshi Kushida

©ピラミッドフィルム

*Given to a Japanese filmmaker, whose next feature project is highly anticipated.

*Certificate and trophy are given. The SKIP CITY AWARD grants the recipient free access to the audio and video facilities at Sai-no-Kuni Visual Plaza for a limited time.

Japanese Film Competition Winners

Best Picture (Japanese Feature category)

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 300,000 yen are given.



Kontora

<2019 / Japan / 144min.>

Director: Anshul Chauhan

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Best Picture (Japanese Short category)

Certificate, trophy and cash prize of 200,000 yen are given.



Stay

<2019 / Japan / 38min.>

Director: Naoya Fujita

©東京藝術大学大学院映像研究科

Audience Award (Japanese Feature category)

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



Cornflakes

<2020 / Japan / 95min.>

Director: Teppei Isobe

©belly roll film

Audience Award (Japanese Short category)

*Determined by the votes received during the festival.

Certificate, trophy and gift product in Saitama are given.



Muito Prazer

<2020 / Japan / 31min.>

Director: Park Jengil

Comment from the prize winners and jurors

■Grand Prize, International Competition [Cash award: 1 million Yen]

“Hope” Director: Maria Sødahl

When I woke up at the cabin in a mountain in Norway, I received an email from Japan stating that the jurors selected my work for the Grand Prix. It was unexpected and I am very honored to receive this wonderful news. This award is special to me, because this story is the most autobiographical of my work to date. It was very challenging to translate my own experience to be on screen. The award means, the story, both emotionally and culturally, crossed borders. At least I believe so. It was very encouraging. I think everyone involved in the work is proud of this award.

Masa Sawada, Producer, President of the Jury (International Competition)

“Hope” was unanimously selected by all the jury members for the Grand Prize. This is a wonderful and very favorite work. The protagonist who was informed of cancer never accepted mercy, and while sometimes showing an attitude that made the audience look away, the fear of dying and the responsibility as a mother to the children left behind is transmitted to you. You can see a living woman and a mother right there. It seems that the director herself is asking the question of "living" by snuggling up with this protagonist. I highly anticipate what she will make next.

■Best Director & Special Jury Prize [Cash award: 500,000 Yen and 300,000 Yen respectively]

“The Pencil” Director: Natalya Nazarova

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the people involved in the festival, the audience, and the jury members. I didn't expect that I would win the Best Director, and I am surprised with this big thing. Thank you very much for highly appreciating my film. I love all the traditional Japanese culture, including Japanese poetry, so this award is a big thing to me. I would like to visit Japan someday, meet you, and share my feelings about Japanese culture. I love you all.

Yukiko Mishima, Film Director, Juror (International Competition) for Best Director

I think the most wonderful thing about "The Pencil" is that it incorporates the social structure of Russia and the feeling of "not seeing what you don't want to see" that is prevalent all over the world into the story as a parable. Director Natalya Nazarova gave a really powerful message that "we must see". I think it is necessary to make a movie even if it is not demanded. I would like her to keep making it, remembering that we are looking forward to her work if she faces difficulties in the future.

Julian Ross, Programmer of Locarno and Rotterdam, Juror (International Competition) for Special Jury Prize

In a world where social pressure makes it difficult to move forward, I feel that “The Pencil” focuses on the problems Russia and many places in the world are facing. I am looking forward to the films that Director Natalya Nazarova will make in the future.

■Audience Award for International Competition

“Hearts and Bones” Director: Ben Lawrence

"Hearts and Bones" received the Audience Award, and I thank the film festival and the audience. I was very surprised to hear this news at the airport in the early morning just before leaving London where I was staying. I'm really thankful to you. I wanted to participate in the festival if possible, but I hope to be there someday.

Comment from the prize winners and jurors

■SKIP CITY AWARD (out of all Japanese films of International and Japanese Film competitions)

“Woman of the Photographs” Director: Takeshi Kushida

Thank you very much. I heard that the SKIP City Award is an award that can get support for production, so I would definitely like to make the next film. I enjoyed the online festival myself, but it was an opportunity to reaffirm the greatness of the movie. Nowadays, the influence of COVID-19 and the difference in political position are spreading the division all over the world, but the cinematic joy brings the divided people together regardless of nationality, culture, gender and race. I think it can be done. For my next film, I want to make something that brings the joy of the movie to everyone.

Kyoko Heya, Production Designer, President of the Jury (Japanese Film Competition)

“Woman of the Photographs” is a very unique film with a specific perspective, and I was able to concentrate on the film for 89 minutes. The man who doesn't talk keeps taking and retouching photos coolly, but with the appearance of a woman, it actually looks like he is a little excited. While dealing the problems of SNS, the story of a man and a woman progresses as if a female mantis eats up a male. There are many things to see technically, and the ending is superb with effectively utilizing the shutter sound as well as the beautiful and attractive screen. I definitely want to see the next film directed by Takeshi Kushida. I have great expectations to his future films.

■Best Picture, Japanese Film Competition (Feature Length) [Cash award: 300,000 Yen]

“Kontora” Director: Anshul Chauhan

I am glad that I got out of the bedroom and stood in front of you in this way while refraining from doing so. Today, I couldn't bring everyone on the team to the ceremony due to the influence of COVID-19, but producer Mina Moteki and actress Wan Marui came. Thank you for believing in me and participating. This movie is an expression of an important part of me. It's a movie that points out the sensitive parts of Japanese society, and I'm glad that it was conveyed to everyone. Like it is said at the end of the movie, this movie is dedicated to Japanese soldiers, so this award is dedicated to those who died at that time. Thank you everyone.

Adam Torel, Managing Director of Third Window Films, Juror (Japanese Film Competition)

Big congratulations to Director Anshul Chauhan, and the staff and cast of “Kontora”! I think it's a really great movie. It was long but I felt it short. The camera and sound were all good in the technical part. The acting of the cast members is also excellent. Although it is an experimental movie, it is also an entertainment. Whether you're a movie lover or not, you'll probably love “Kontora”. I hope many people will watch the film.

■Best Picture, Japanese Film Competition (Short Length) [Cash award: 200,000 Yen]

“Stay” Director: Naoya Fujita

Thank you very much for holding the film festival, even if it is online. Because it was online, I felt that many people could see it. I think the location of this film could impress the audience, but the film was made by renting a friend's house. I'm glad to win this award for working with the scriptwriter, producer, crew members, who are friends for many years from my college. Thank you very much.

Shuichi Okita, Film Director, Juror (Japanese Film Competition)

I thought "Stay" has a particular advantage of short films that feature films do not have. I think the ironic story that a person who tries to kick people out is staying and the people who were staying there suddenly disappear is very good.

Comment from the prize winners and jurors

■Audience Award for Japanese Film Competition (Feature Length)

“Cornflakes” Director: Teppei Isobe

I attended SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL with a short film ("Who Knows about My Life" won Best Picture for the 2018 Japanese Short Film Competition) for the first year, and then with a feature film ("F is for Future" won SKIP CITY AWARD for the Japanese Feature Film Competition) for the second year, and this year I made a movie with hoping that I would return to SKIP CITY for the third consecutive year, and I came back this year again. I am very happy with the Audience Award because it is the award that the audience choose. I've been working with GON, who starred in this film, and we had been talking to make a feature film together, so congratulations GON! Thank you very much.

■Audience Award for Japanese Film Competition (Short Length)

“Muito Prazer” Director: Park Jengil

When I did egosearching, some people said that they watched my film a couple of times, and I thought I would watch "TENET" instead, but I think I got this award because those people exist. As anyone who has seen this film knows, it's probably the smallest budget film among this year's nominated films. I took it with a small camera I borrowed without any backup from anywhere. The staff and cast members were paid almost nothing. I made this film only with my passion. However, I think that the film won the Audience Award because that that passion reached many people. Thank you to all the staff and cast members for saving me. And to all the Brazilians of Japanese descent who accepted my request to make this film, you are all talented and wonderful people. From now on, please go out and use your talents for your second home, Japan. Some people may say bullshit to you, but we, your friends, are supporting you. Thank you very much.

Evaluations from the President of the Jury

■President of the Jury, International Competition Masa Sawada, Producer

Recently, I often hear the opinion that women's directorial films should be more promoted at film festivals as well as in the industry. However, what I realized at this film festival is that the sexist idea of women and men is gradually becoming old, because the films of female directors have already taken root. In the near future, I think that the time has come when the wording of a female director's movie and a male director's movie feels old. The two films that won the awards (Grand Prize "Hope", Best Director & Special Jury Prize "The Pencil") are both so-called female directors' films. However, no one has consciously watched them as female directors' films. Those movies showed that there is no gender in film and that various people are confronting the world using the expression method of film.

I also thought about war. How should we deal with the war that is happening now, and what should we be toward the war that happened in the past? It is very interesting and meaningful to make people think about such things through films.

And I think that "now" is always reflected in any genre, not only documentary but also comedy and horror. It was very interesting for me to see how people from each country are confronting with "now".

There are no big or small films in movies, and there is essentially no distinction between entertainment and auteur films. We are now finding it difficult to release “non-event” type of films. In such a situation, I think that the film festival keeps the possibility of simply showing the film as a film from another perspective of value. I hope this festival will continue to be a place to find new talents for many years.

SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL 2020

■President of the Jury, Japanese Film Competition Kyoko Heya, Production Designer

Five feature films and nine short films in the domestic division were all wonderful films. The feature film "Kontora" is the second film directed by Anshul Chauhan, and the idea of a man walking backwards was interesting, and I was overwhelmed by the monochrome image and watched it until the end with excitement. The short film "Stay" was directed by Naoya Fujita, and the speedy storytelling which is unique to the short story is excellent. It is a great conclusion that everyone who originally lived disappear.

I think one of the characteristics of this year's films is the "era of diversity." In various situations, there are relationships that do not go as planned, but that is why humans are interesting and living is even more interesting. I hope that you will continue to observe human beings relentlessly and depict this era of diversity with creativity. I am also looking forward to the next film from everyone who did not win this time. I hope you will continue your filmmaking in the future. Let's meet again on the set!

SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL 2020 Outline <The 17th>

Date: Saturday, September 26 - Sunday, October 4, 2020 (9 days)

Venue: Streaming website "CINEMA DISCOVERIES"

Organizers: Saitama Prefecture, Kawaguchi City, SKIP CITY INTERNATIONAL D-Cinema FESTIVAL Committee, Saitama Audio-Visual Volunteers

Website: www.skipcity-dcf.jp

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