



The 30th Annual Whitaker St. Louis International Film Festival Announces Award Winners And Attendance Results

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ST. LOUIS - The 30th Annual Whitaker St. Louis International Film Festival (SLIFF) was held both in-person and online from Nov. 4-21, 2021. The fest had a total estimated viewership of 21,646, including 11,564 St. Louis-area students who participated in our free Cinema for Students program. There were 5,740 in-person attendees and 4,342 online viewers. A note on methodology: Because most virtual programs were watched at home by more than a single person, online viewership was estimated by multiplying the number of total programs purchased (2,481) by 1.75.

Because of the hybrid nature of this year's fest, viewers from outside the St. Louis area also participated in many programs, with 44 states and 16 countries represented.

SLIFF screened 412 films: 61 documentary features, 84 narrative features, 94 documentary shorts, and 173 narrative shorts. There were an additional two film

programs exclusive to Cinema for Students. The fest also featured six livestreamed special events — four seminars/master classes, a New Filmmakers Forum roundtable, and the closing-night awards presentation — and six in-person special events, including a screening of “American Underdog” with Kurt and Brenda Warner in attendance.

A total of 31 programs were offered for free, and 31 virtual programs were offered at a discounted price of \$5.

This year’s festival featured films from 78 countries in 37 languages.

The festival kicked off with a free opening-night special event featuring the documentary “Procession,” with director Robert Greene — who was honored with SLIFF’s Contemporary Cinema Award — and the subjects of the film in attendance.

On the festival’s final day, SLIFF offered a Tribute to Mary Strauss and presented her with a Lifetime Achievement Award for her many contributions to Cinema St. Louis.

Two other filmmakers were also honored: Documentarian and native St. Louisan Nina Gilden Seavey, who presented a free special-event program called “My Fugitive” at the fest, received the Charles Guggenheim Cinema St. Louis Award; and documentarian Deborah Riley Draper, whose film “Twenty Pearls: The Story of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority” screened at SLIFF, received the Women in Film Award.

The following juried-competition and audience-choice awards were presented:

Shorts Awards

Juries choose the winners of six awards from among the shorts in competition. The SLIFF shorts competition is officially sanctioned by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences, making the winners in the Best of Fest, Best Animated, Best Live Action, and Best Documentary categories eligible to submit for Oscar consideration.

- Best Documentary Short: **E14**, directed by Peiman Zekavat
- Best Short Short: **Autumn Leaves**, directed by Wojciech Ostrycharz
- Best International Short: **The Danger in Front**, directed by Alexis Chartrand
- Best Animated Short: **Mila**, directed by Cinzia Angelini
- Best Live Action Short: **Dana**, directed by Lucía Forner Segarra
- Best of Fest Short: **The Letter Room**, directed by Elvira Lind

Interfaith Awards

Juries give Interfaith Awards to both a documentary and a narrative, choosing from among 16 competition films (eight in each category), which were selected for their artistic merit; contribution to the understanding of the human condition; and recognition of ethical, social, and spiritual values.

- Best Documentary Feature: **Berrigans: Devout and Dangerous**, directed by Susan Hagedorn
- Best Narrative Feature: **200 Meters**, directed by Ameen Nayfeh

St. Louis Film Critics Association Joe Pollack and Joe Williams Awards

In conjunction with the St. Louis Film Critics organization, SLIFF holds juried competitions for documentary and narrative features. The awards are named in honor of the late St. Louis Post-Dispatch critics Joe Pollack (narrative) and Joe Williams (documentary). The winners are picked by two juries composed of St. Louis film critics. SLIFF chose eight films to compete in each category.

- Best Documentary Feature: **We Are the Thousand**, directed by Anita Rivaroli
- Best Narrative Feature: **Luzzu**, directed by Alex Camilleri

Essy Award for Best St. Louis Film

Sponsored by the Chellappa-Vedavalli Foundation

The Essy Award honors a work either made in St. Louis or by a filmmaker with ties to the area. The award is accompanied by a \$500 prize.

- **Try Harder!**, directed by Debbie Lum

New Filmmakers Forum Emerging Director Award (The Bobbie)

Sponsored by Barry & Jackie Albrecht and Pat Scallet

The New Filmmakers Forum (NFF) annually presents the Emerging Director Award. Since its inception, NFF was co-curated by Bobbie Lautenschlager. Bobbie died in the summer of 2012, and SLIFF honors her memory by nicknaming the NFF Emerging Director Award as the Bobbie. Five works by first-time feature filmmakers competed for the prize, which includes a \$500 cash award.

- **Shellfish**, directed by Hunter Hopewell

Spotlight on Inspiration Documentary Award

Sponsored by the Albrecht Family

This juried competition awards a \$5,000 prize to a feature documentary that focuses on people working to make the world a better place and that inspires audience members and leaves them with a sense of hope for the future.

- **A Once and Future Peace**, directed by Eric Daniel Metzgar

Best of Fest Audience Choice Awards

Online and in-person audience voting determined the winner of seven awards from among the films in competition.

Online (for films offered virtually):

- Best Documentary Short: **Hammond's Books**, directed by Joshua Mullins
- Best Narrative Short: **Mila**, directed by Cinzia Angelini
- Best Documentary Feature: **And So I Stayed**, directed by Natalie Pattillo & Daniel A. Nelson
- Best Narrative Feature: **Gossamer Folds**, directed by Lisa Donato

In-Person (for films offered at in-person screenings):

- Leon Award for Best Documentary Feature: **Twenty Pearls: The Story of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority**, directed by Deborah Riley Draper
- TV5MONDE Award for Best International Feature: **Belfast**, directed by Kenneth Branagh
- Best Narrative Feature: **After We're Over**, directed by Nate Myers