

The 43rd PIA Film Festival 2021

Grand Prize

“BACHIRANUN” (61min.) by HIGASHIMORI Aika (23)

Runner-up prize

“Goodbye!” (31min.) by NAKATSUKA Fuka (20)

Special Jury's Award

“Maternal Awakening” (5min.) by OKADA Shiika (25)

“Volte-face” (*working title*) (14min.) by IWASAKI Kanshi (24)

“It's not that pig's problem” (22min.) by SU Yu Chun (26)

Entertainment Award (Horipro Prize)&Cinema Fan Award (Pia-Nist Prize)

“Lovely Little Ai” (88min.) by OHNO Candice Mana (22)

Audience Award

“Distance In Between” (78min.) by KATO Saki (31)

[Feature-length films]

“The Referendum” (92min.) by OHBA Takeo (38)

“Wrapped in the Curtain of Night” (70min.) by MATSUBAYASHI Yuui (23)

[Short films]

“Gorimuchu” *Wandering in the Dark (working title)* (40min.) by ZENG Zingming (26)

“Parallax” (34min.) by NOVE Hayato (49)

“Planet of the Giants” (25min.) by ISHIKAWA Taichi (25)

“Minami's Tomorrow” (*working title*) (22min.) by HAYASHIZAKI Masahiro (22)

“Routine” (21min.) by MIYAHARA Takuya (28)

“On the Way Home” (*working title*) (19min.) by TAKAHASHI Ibuki (18)

“Strawberry Jam and Margarine” (*working title*) (10min.) by MIYANAGA Sayaka (18)

“Up Against the Wall” (*working title*) (10min.) by INOUE Asahi (19)

“Cycle Race” (5min.) by KURASAWA Hiroki (21)

* “Title” (time) / director's name and age

PFF Award Grand Prize

“BACHIRANUN”

by HIGASHIMORI Aika (61min.)



An aesthetically striking work of docufiction that pays tribute to the unique island culture of Yonaguni.

Multi-talented filmmaker HIGASHIMORI Aika (writer, director, actress, DP, editor) crafts a tribute to her birthplace island of Yonaguni, located just over 100km from Taiwan as Japan's westernmost point. A cast of local characters, including a uniformed schoolgirl (Higashimori herself), a young man in a straw hat, and a young woman who wields a bone, appear in poetic vignettes fluidly interspersed with scenes of Yonaguni's artisanal traditions and cultural heritage. Fishing, music, weaving and other activities are all captured for their inherent beauty. Higashimori's own grandmother tells her vivid stories of how she and other villagers prayed to the gods for rain in her youth. As pristine as Yonaguni is, it hasn't completely escaped environmental issues. A woman tenderly picks up the carcass of a dead gull on the road, its innards enmeshed with plastic refuse. In another scene, a picturesque beach is littered with garbage, some of it from other countries.

Runner-up Prize

“Goodbye!” (documentary)

by NAKATSUKA Fuka (31min.)



A budding filmmaker leaving home for a new life in Tokyo documents her family and personal journey.

Young filmmaker NAKATSUKA Fuka lives in Shiga with her divorced mother. Fuka's on the verge of leaving the nest to make her own way in life. She visits her older sister, who mentions that their father has recently purchased a new house. Intrigued, Fuka pays him a visit. He nonchalantly admits he hasn't met his son and older daughter in years. There's no ill will among the scattered Nakatsukas, but a general drifting apart. The youngest child of a family will often attempt to bring everyone together, as Fuka does while documenting her interactions. Her sister reveals an unexpected pregnancy via LINE chat, while a job offer from Tokyo arrives by snail mail. Fuka makes the move to a tiny apartment in the big city, swearing "I'll never go back..."

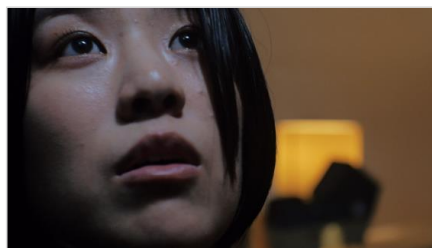
Special Jury's Award
"Maternal Awakening" (animation)
 by OKADA Shiika (5min.)



This amazingly creative animated short bursting with color and striking visuals manages to tackle an impressive number of issues facing women in its short running time.

An unseen figure searches live streaming channels out of boredom, coming across a junior high school girl walking through her neighborhood. The girl suddenly senses her maternal instinct kicking in. We flash forward to different times in her future life. Vignettes play out in rapid succession, touching on sex before marriage, menstruation (complete with eye-popping imagery), loss of sexuality after childbirth, and the work-life balance for women. The girl is finally led into a surreal landscape where babies come from before reaching a state of rational self-awareness.

Special Jury's Award
"Volte-face" (working title)
 by IWASAKI Kanshi (14min.)



A young artist couple are forced to face uncomfortable truths about their relationship when a senior creator shows up to inspect their work.

Yuji and Kaede are a young artist couple ready to unveil Yuji's latest video installation piece. On a rainy night, a well-known figure in the arts community shows up to assess the work. The dynamic between the couple is immediately thrown out of whack by his presence. Yuji prefers not to be confronted about his art, while Kaede feels it's her duty to push his talent. Is there also an underlying sexual tension complicating matters? This night may define the next steps in Yuji's career and life. The actors in this three-hander all give mature performances.

Special Jury's Award
"It's not that pig's problem"
 by SU Yu Chun (22min.)



A coin laundry becomes a personal space for an upset woman and a man living in the neighborhood to discuss a relationship that has ended.

A young woman sits alone crying in a local coin laundry along a street in Taipei. A man who comes in to pick up his washing can't help but notice her emotional state. He guesses that she's distressed about a love relationship. She offers a fleeting smile at his perceptiveness. When the woman notices he owns a stuffed toy pig just like the ones she used to share with her ex-boyfriend, she lets her guard down and reveals that she's waiting for him to pass by. The man advises against showing up unannounced and encourages her to move on, but will she be able to?

Entertainment Award & Cinema Fan Award
"Lovely Little Ai"
 by OHNO Candice Mana (88min.)



A candy-colored tale of a girl who grew up without a mother but finds maternal affection in an unexpected place that's been nearby all along.

Friendless high school student Ai (spelled with the kanji for "love") spends every evening at home alone under her workaholic father's strict curfew. One day, she bumps into a blonde, vibrantly dressed transgender woman named Seiko and they quickly form a bond. Ai's mother died soon after she was born and Seiko provides the motherly warmth Ai has sorely missed. Seiko also inspires an incredibly cute sense of fashion and makeup in Ai, which turns her into a popular pupil at school. Ai turns her back on Seiko but the kaleidoscopic threads eventually lead to the poignant backstory of Ai's childhood.

Audience Award

“Distance in Between”

by KATO Saki (78min.)



A series of entertaining episodes in the lives of two female roommates sharing an old house

Aspiring photographer Ako and slovenly, self-satisfied freeter San are “left over” roommates after their mutual friends vacated. This series of idiosyncratic vignettes captures the comedic misunderstandings, friction, and downright bizarre happenings between platonic co-inhabitants. Noise complaints about San’s amateurish accordion practice lead to a surprising collaboration. An awkward dinner conversation shows that some people will never be in sync. When Ako is asked about a mistakenly delivered letter by a little girl, the distant past is brought to life. A missing crystal turns a roommate mountain excursion into a magical experience. Through these four episodes, polar opposites Ako and San grow to understand each other a little better.

“The Referendum” (documentary)

by OHBA Takeo (92min.)



A local association of residents in Tokaimura, Ibaraki, work to stage a prefectural referendum on restarting the Tokai Nuclear Power Plant.

This film documents the strenuous efforts of a local association to enact a prefectural vote on the issue of restarting the plant, which had been progressing without any consultation or notification to residents. The small group of tireless members work to secure 50,000 signatures from the voting public in order to get the bill passed in the prefectural assembly. The association are clear that their aim is not to sway residents toward anti-nuclear power sentiment, but rather to give them a voice in determining the future of their region. On the surface, many are against the plant resuming operations but the economic ties to local businesses and livelihoods in Tokai run deep as the site of Japan’s first ever commercial nuclear power facility. Images of numerous assemblymen nodding off as the bill is heard is a visual reminder of how entrenched the status quo is.

“Wrapped in the Curtain of Night”

by MATSUBAYASHI Yuui (70min.)



A jobless young man comes across an abused kid who reminds him of himself when he was young. The pair embark on a road trip.

Yuya is a young man that has trouble holding down regular jobs and gets fired once again. Upon escaping from a street scuffle one night, he takes refuge in a parked car and discovers a small boy named Kaito, whom he suspects has been neglected and abused. Kaito reminds Yuya of himself when he was young so he decides to take him on a road trip to see the ocean. “I used to spend all day there to forget my troubles,” he tells Kaito. As they drive deeper into the countryside, Yuya has unexpected encounters with a friend’s mother and a kind girl of Yuya’s age that helps them when Kaito becomes sick. The “kidnapping” also makes the national news. Yuya is about to give up, but Kaito demands he keeps his promise to take him to the ocean and visit Yuya’s estranged mother. Perhaps the journey benefits Yuya more than anyone else.

“Wandering in the Dark”

(working title)

by ZENG Zingming (40min.)



A young man living in the provinces of China wastes his days at an internet café and running scams until he comes to some realizations about his aimless life.

University dropout Fang Jian rides his scooter through his neighborhood district of abandoned buildings and rubble, on the way to his daily destination — the local internet café. While his buddies play games professionally (mostly losing), Fang watches movie after movie. Not because he’s a cinephile, but to shut his brain off from real world concerns. While his more resourceful girlfriend is away on job training, Fang is torturously directionless. Even when he earns some decent money by selling a method to cheat on university entrance exams to a local high school student, Fang gains no satisfaction. In a poignant scene on a lonely highway at night, a gamer friend says goodbye as he departs for bigger things in Shanghai. When Fang’s girlfriend returns to see his pitiful state, will he be able to confront his reality?

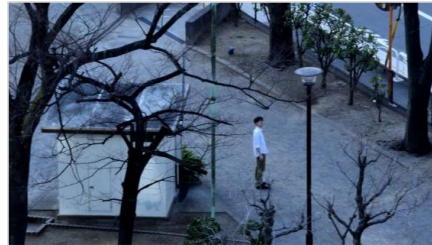
“Parallax” (animation)
by NOVE Hayato (34min.)



Continuing in the vein of veteran illustrator-turned-animator NOVE Hayato's 2016 work *affordance*, this mesmerizing animation depicts the cycle of life in a beautifully idiosyncratic way.

The anthropomorphic characters in this world look something like beluga whales walking upright. What appears to be a guardian and child wait outside in the rain before being ushered into a space filled with beings subtly different than they are. There are unintelligible verbal assessments, curious blood tests, buttons pushed, and much poking and prodding. When success is achieved, a polka-dot dress drops from above onto the “winner” and they're greeted with applause. When they fail, they sink into liquid and rejoin the back of the line. Things grow more serious, setting in motion visually stunning depictions of death and rebirth.

“Planet of the Giants”
by ISHIKAWA Taichi (25min.)



A hikikomori's ravings about giants walking among the buildings of Tokyo at night might not be as crazy as they sound.

A young man finds a stack of discarded manga along the sidewalk and brings them to a nearby apartment. The man living there (KUNIMOTO Taishu) had borrowed them several years ago, which was the last time they met. The lender demands to know why they were thrown away but soon notices his ex-pal is living as a hikikomori, harboring a bizarre theory about giant humans walking the city at night. The young man scoffs at the claim and encourages his former friend to become a normal member of society like he is. When he discovers the bathroom has been converted into a grisly shelter and tries to escape, he's tied up and forced to remain in the apartment. His captor pontificates on human history and megalophobia. Their talk reveals some ironic truths about each of them. The walls begin to rumble and shake and the power cuts out. Could it be?

“Minami's Tomorrow”
(working title)
by HAYASHIZAKI Masahiro (22min.)



One regular evening in the lives of a pair of girls and guys the day before a national tragedy.

March 10th 2011. University student Minami calls her senior schoolmate Yaeko to ask if she can drop by to get some advice on her date the next day. At Yaeko's apartment, Minami writes down the time every half hour in anticipation of tomorrow's meet. Is Tokyo Tower the place to go, she wonders? Meanwhile, Yaeko's boyfriend is hanging out with his buddy, who's reviewing Minami's potential likes before taking her out. They end up heading over to Yaeko's place, producing an awkward precursor to Minami's official appointment on March 11th. By staging these normal events the night before such a fateful day in modern Japanese history, writer-director HAYASHIZAKI Masahiro creates a simple work which reminds us that we all have moment-to-moment experiences that are worth remembering.

“Routine”
by MIYAHARA Takuya (21min.)



When an obsessive juggler is kicked out of the house by his girlfriend, he gets a job as a cleaner at the local park and develops an odd connection with his female boss.

All Tetsu wants to do is juggle. He lives his craft 24 hours a day, tossing colorful balls and other objects in the air everywhere he goes in public, in the shower, even in bed. His girlfriend has enough and boots him out of their apartment. While lying on a park bench wondering what to do, a flyer blows past advertising a job position on the public park cleaning crew. Tetsu's new boss is a middle-aged woman named Midori (played by comedian Uwotomo), afflicted with a gammy leg and an eternally grumpy attitude after two decades tidying up the public's mess. But gradually, Tetsu's incredible juggling cleanup skills win her over and she finds him indispensable. When budget cuts threaten their routine, Midori makes a decision.

“On the Way Home”

(working title)

by TAKAHASHI Ibuki (19min.)



A high schooler sneaks away from class early, but he's in no hurry to go home.

In one's youth, the gap of time between leaving school and getting home is often a period of wandering. The film's protagonist is a uniformed male high school student who is at that age between boy and young man. It wasn't that long ago that he slid down slides, hung from jungle gyms, or played happily in sand pits, but soon he won't be able to do it anymore without looking odd. Erratically inserted clips of dramatic music give the impression of an accompanying "soundtrack" playing out in a young person's overactive yet idle mind. Teenaged director TAKAHASHI Ibuki shows us that taking the long, aimless route home is part of growing up.

“Strawberry Jam and Margarine”

(working title)

by MIYANAGA Sayaka (10min.)



A favorite snack takes on special meaning in the context of high school students.

That most uncomfortable period of life — high school. Students at this age struggle to find the means to express themselves and reveal their feelings toward others. Fortunately, the small group of young people depicted in this film have outlets such as photography, painting, and playwriting. Perhaps they're on the road to emotional maturity. They also break the fourth wall and speak directly to the camera on their inner beliefs on when and in what manner to reveal something of themselves. But exactly how does that cheap and popular Japanese convenience store snack of soft white bread slathered in strawberry jam and margarine figure into things?

“Up Against the Wall”

(working title)

by INOUE Asahi (10min.)



A high school baseball player who always practices alone is eventually forced to confront his rival.

A member of the high school baseball team spends hours every evening maintaining his glove and pitching his ball against a cement wall under a highway to practice his fielding. Each day, he passes another player from his school on the street and at the station. They don't speak or even make eye contact, but the first boy seems as though he wants to interact. When they both show up at the same wall to practice, the two devoted athletes have no choice but to open the lines of communications. Director INOUE Asahi utilizes the repetitive crack of the baseball on cement to create a rhythm for the film itself.

“Cycle Race” (animation)

by KURASAWA Hiroki (5min.)



Join this surreal, animated bike race where time and space lose meaning. The cute character designs belie the work's unsettling atmosphere.

The Tour de France has nothing on this hypnotic uphill cycling competition that takes place on a seemingly infinite spiral track ascending in space (be careful of the open sides). KURASAWA Hiroki's character design for the riders is a marvel, with their headlight heads, bulbous bodies, and duck-like feet. As they ride past, they're watched over and illuminated by their big brothers lining the course. OMORI Juichi's effective sound design employs whirring gears, clicks, and random percussion against an unsettling electronic drone. The idiom "until the wheels fall off" plays out here like a commentary on our pointless lives.