

The 44th PIA Film Festival 2022

Grand Prize

“**J005311**” by KONO Hiroki (93min.)

Runner-up prize

“**Scary Friend**” by MINEO Takara, TAKAHASHI Naohiro (78min.)

Special Jury's Award

1. “**the Memory Lane**” by UJITA Shun (25 min.)
2. “**MAHOROBA**” (animation) by SUZUKI Ryuya (14min.)
3. “**Yurei no Iru Ie**” *House of Ghost (working title)* by MINAMI Kasumi (12 min.)

Entertainment Award (Horipro Prize)

“**Suiso**” *Water Tank (working title)* by NAKAZATO Yuuki (53 min.)

Nema Fan Award (Pia-Nist Prize)

“**Shaketsu**” *Bloodletting (working title)* by KANEKO Yuta (86 min.)

Audience Award

“**Scary Friend**” by MINEO Takara, TAKAHASHI Naohiro (78min.)

Feature-length films

Go, Ishikawa! by TAKASHINA Takumi (80 min.)

Act by TANAKA Yume (78 min.)

Poran *Polan Books (working title)* by NAKAMURA Kota (75 min.)

Fuchishisuko by KAMEI Fumioki (69 min.)

Short films

Kureru *Fading Light (working title)* by TAKEDA Yuya (52 min.)

Passive Aggressive by NAKADA Ere (40 min.)

Lock Up and Down by Minami (34 min.)

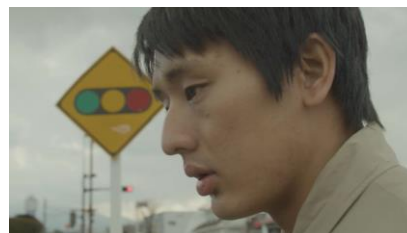
The Band by KAWAMURA Riku (28 min.)

Kawataredoki-Twilight Time by TANIMOTO Momoko (15 min.)

PFF Award Grand Prize

J005311

by KONO Hiroki (93 min.)



A troubled young salaryman offers a purse snatcher a bag of money to drive him out to the area of Mt. Fuji. The road trip turns into a soul-searching odyssey.

A Salaryman Kanzaki wakes up for his daily routine but it's evident that something is very wrong. He wanders out into the streets, being refused a taxi ride for reasons unknown. When he witnesses a young purse snatcher named Yamamoto pull a job, he tracks him down and inexplicably offers a million yen to drive him out of Tokyo to “meet a friend.” Yamamoto reacts violently to Kanzaki's odd request and behavior but comes around when he confirms the cash payoff is real. At a highway rest stop, Kanzaki tests the feeling of a noose around his neck – it's now clear what his mission is. At one point Yamamoto abandons Kanzaki yet returns to honor the job. Kanzaki ultimately reaches the famous “sea of trees,” but will Yamamoto allow him to go through with it?

The long takes create an oppressive, exhausting feel but eventually lend the film its power. Director KONO Hiroki, who effectively plays the role of Yamamoto, shows through his story that an unanticipated act of kindness can change the course of a person's life. The title is the name of a newly discovered star born from two dying white dwarf stars that miraculously collided. It serves as an apt metaphor for the characters.

Runner-up Prize&Audience Award

Scary Friend

by MINEO Takara, TAKAHASHI

Naohiro (76min.)



A young girl who lives an isolated existence with her band of talking stuffed animals ends up befriending a local, bicycle-riding serial killer. The pair have more in common than expected...

A strange figure with a cloth-covered head and red gloves runs down a jogger with his old “mamachari” bicycle and proceeds to drown him in the canal. Elsewhere in the neighborhood, a little girl named Nuiko comes home to her room full of living, speaking stuffed animals. Sewn by her own hand, they are Nuiko's sole companions. One of them encourages her to go out and make a human friend, and she reluctantly agrees. After being chased by the killer, known as “Yaba-chan,” Nuiko tracks him down to rescue one of her animals. They become friends and Yaba-chan explains that he's ridding the world of bullies to make it a better place. In a twist, Nuiko is not as innocent as she seems, and a violent showdown involving the animals leads to a different outlook on the world.

Produced on a micro budget in a few locations, this idiosyncratic feature is bursting with creative energy and conveys a strong message about the power of friendship. Director MINEO Takara takes on numerous roles in front of and behind the camera, with his little sister Sakura in the lead role of Nuiko. The ingenious use of stop-motion animation, puppetry, and cleverly staged action proves that there's no limit on imagination.

**Special Jury's Award
the Memory Lane**
by UJITA Shun (25min.)



A band of young skateboarders pay energetic tribute to the closed down university campus grounds where they spent a significant portion of their youth sharpening their street skating skills.

As they've done countless mornings in the past, three friends wake up, grab their skateboards and glide into trio formation on the way to their campus. When they arrive, they realize that the first day of class this year is at the new campus and that the old grounds are history. Bummed out at losing a place filled with so many skating memories, the friends brainstorm a creative idea — dig out old snapshots of their adventures, paste them up around the campus, and go wild. Each character gets his own vignette, complete with raucous soundtrack, as they pull off tailslides, railslides, kickflips, and of course take air. In one inspired sequence, the guys ditch their boards altogether and skate across rain soaked tiles with nothing more than their sneakers.

Director UJITA Shun probes the boundaries between fiction, documentary, and kinetic skate videos to express something universally felt during the pandemic — the loss of place. He employs English inter-titles featuring street poetry and rad sketches. An unexpected visual effect at the climax embodies the larger theme.

**Special Jury's Award
MAHOROBA (animation)**
by SUZUKI Ryuya (14min.)



A salaryman suffering severe abuse at the hands of his tyrannical boss finally escapes to the deserted island of his dreams, but where is his true paradise?

At the Hudsucker corporate headquarters, a salaryman (“Me”) is the constant target of his hulking, bald, perverted boss’ violent retribution. Bittersweet childhood memories of Me’s late grandmother keep him going, but his brutal work life pushes him to the breaking point. Me gets sweet revenge and hightails it out of Tokyo, only to have his airplane violently hijacked. He’s dumped into the Pacific Ocean and onto the shores of remote island Mahoroba (an ancient Japanese word describing a far-off utopia). Me manages to survive and thrive, but his needy boss eventually locates him and hauls Me and his beloved tortoise companion back to Japan. Fingments of blissful romance and a nuclear family play out in Me’s mind as the country is ripped apart by suicide virus “Suicid-20.” Has ever really left Mahoroba?

SUZUKI Ryuya’s wild, monochromatic animated tour de force imagines what Japan would look like to someone who had been on a deserted island and missed the pandemic altogether. Anti-Olympic sentiment, raging disease, and toxic workplaces are just some of the flash points in this clever and irreverent sensory assault. Incredibly, Suzuki taught himself how to animate after being out of a job during the pandemic. The brilliantly curated soundtrack further boosts the entertainment level.

**Special Jury's Award
Yurei ga Iruie**
House of Ghost (working Title)
by MINAMI Kasumi (12min.)



A pair of actors drift in and out of character, their set becoming a real location, and switching back again. The line between fiction and reality is blurred – the ghostly illusion of cinema itself.

A young woman sits alone at a table in a traditional Japanese house. A young man enters through the sliding doors and apologizes for being late. They somberly discuss the last time they met, one year ago. They look toward the camera and perform the scene again, this time with a more cheerful tone. We see cameras and lights in frame. As their dialogue progresses, they seem to reveal their own feelings for each other, but what is scripted and what is real? And who’s giving them direction? Ultimately their interplay embodies the very nature of cinema itself.

In this striking, thoughtfully composed short, director MINAMI Kasumi effortlessly transitions between the actual mise-en-scene of a film and the workings of a film set. It’s not a new technique, but the masterstroke is rendering the crew unseen and unheard – only represented by their gear and documents – leaving the actors to shift between film dialogue and real conversation without missing a beat. Kasumi aimed to shoot a romantic comedy yet also wanted to create something offbeat. The conflicting desires gave birth to House of Ghosts.

**Entertainment (HoriPro) Award
Suiso**
Water Tank (working title)
by NAKAZATO Yuuki (53min.)



A female high school student struggles with her tumultuous feelings of love for a boy at school in this poetically charged two-hander.

A female student discreetly tears passages out of various literary works at the school library. With the torn fragments in her grip, she spies on a fidgety boy named Haru. She follows him to the science room and witnesses him dissecting a goldfish. That night she makes a call to her mother from a payphone, asking what it was like when she was young and in love, but we soon realize her mother is no longer alive. “If I die, please dissect me,” she demands of Haru. “I’ll die before you do,” is his dark reply. When Haru burns a page out of Baudelaire’s “The Flowers of Evil,” in front of her, it sets them on the course of escaping their dead-end surroundings together.

Director NAKAZATO Yuki effectively employs the wintry landscapes in her native Yamagata to stage this portrait of the irrepressible emotions of first love. Nakazato has stated that the aquarium motif serves as a metaphor for the transparent barriers we all place ourselves in, which must be shattered to truly connect with others.

**Cinema Fan Award (Pia-nist Award)
Shaketsu**

Bloodletting (working title)
by KANEKO Yuta (86 min.)



A high school student's burgeoning friendship with a classmate is negatively affected by his increasingly stressful home life, leading to a shocking finale.

Yusei lives with his controlling mother and violent older brother Masanobu. Yusei strikes up a friendship with well-to-do, handsome cram school classmate Mizuse. As Yusei's home life becomes more turbulent, he confesses to Mizuse that he fears inheriting his father's bad characteristics. Yusei mimics Mizuse's appearance, wearing contact lenses and the same clothing in an effort to absorb his appealing persona but it only pushes Mizuse further away. Masanobu returns home after a temporary restraining order, and his mother praises his efforts to reform while castigating Yusei. Ultimately, Yusei believes his fate is a matter of blood and stages a twisted gambit that will destroy his previous existence and pump new life into his veins.

20-year old KANEKO Yuta writes, directs and stars in this oddly compelling depiction of a young man's gradual meltdown. Shot in high contrast black and white, film references run the gamut from Polanski, to the silent *The Birth of a Nation* (watched by Yusei to his quell his brother's anger over noise in a comedic moment) to Teshigahara's *The Face of Another*. When Yusei's character breaks the fourth wall and declares the narrative as his own, it's a bold moment. Kaneko has called the film a form of self-therapy for his own past traumas.

"Let's Go, Ishikawa!!"

by TAKASHINA Takumi (80 min.)



A directionless salaryman is convinced to return to the filmmaking roots of his youth and direct a movie for a backwoods town. He and his team inadvertently uncover a long-held local secret in comedic fashion.

Apathetic Tokyo office worker Ishikawa is suddenly approached by a small town government rep to direct an independent feature film to promote the tiny town of Nikaido-cho. Ishikawa is adamant that he's given up filmmaking for good, but he's eventually persuaded to take on the project. He reluctantly teams up with a local producer and assistant, but when the main sponsor pulls their budget the team is forced to repurpose the production as a no-budget PR video instead. Ishikawa's mind drifts back to his younger days and the episodes that led him to quit making movies. As the crew gathers footage, they uncover the nefarious, laughter-inducing reason the town's lush forest area is closed to the public. Kidnappings, an evil foreign crime boss, and a bullet-proof robotic town mascot are part of the goofy proceedings.

Director TAKASHINA Takumi employs a lighthearted, entertaining approach with enough twists and turns to keep audiences engaged. The town depicted in the film may be fictional, but it's indicative of countless communities across modern Japan that are gradually vanishing.

"Act"

by TANAKA Yume (78min.)



An aspiring stage actress now in her 30s takes stock of her demanding balance of motherhood, education, and a lifelong dream in this feature documentary.

After dropping out of high school to work, Yume eventually completed her credits and entered university at the age of 30. Due to the birth of her first child, she took two years off and has now returned to earn her degree. She spends hours commuting on the train every day and has no trace of a social life. Her younger brother, who's on leave of absence due to stress, occasionally visits her apartment. Amidst all of these pressures, Yume is unwavering in her pursuit of becoming a theatre actress. She struggles to find rehearsal time and memorize lines in a mind that's at full capacity. Initially, Yume appears to be a single mother but she in fact has a professor husband with his own punishing schedule. When their son gets sick during his two week business trip, the couple is forced to re-examine how they will move forward if Yume is determined not to abandon her dream.

Director TANAKA Yume's original intention was to interview other women juggling careers and child-rearing (some of the footage is part of the film) but ultimately turned the camera on herself. Other people struggling to strike the right work-life balance, regardless of occupation or gender, are sure to find common ground and gain valuable insights from the film.

"Polan"

Polan Books (working title)
By NAKAMURA Kota (75 min.)



A vintage Tokyo bookshop is forced to close down during the pandemic. The owners reflect on the occupation they've devoted their lives to as the axis of their existence vanishes.

In western Tokyo, an old man stands in the gutted shell of a retail tenant space, looking lost. Two months earlier, we're inside vibrant vintage book dealer Polan Books, lovingly curated by Ishida Kyosuke and his wife Chiyoko for decades (14 years at the current location). Polan's ad copy is to offer customers "the fun of searching, and the joy of discovery." Indeed, it not only houses thousands of tomes but serves as a space for Ohizumi locals to stage art and community events. Sadly, the fiscal blow dealt by the pandemic forces them to close in February 2021. The Ishidas look back on their lives in the used book trade as an ideal alternative to the post-university rat race. The treasured interactions with customers will end, replaced by online sales to support their twilight years. The dismantling begins. Mountains of books are shipped out to different locations or discarded. Longtime (and new) customers drop in. A year after Polan Books has disappeared, a sad irony remains...

In suddenly losing a place frequented since his childhood, director NAKAMURA Kota set about documenting Polan Books' final days through the eyes of its owners. Kota's delicately balanced, thoughtfully constructed film uncovers moments of melancholic beauty in the harsh economic wake of the pandemic.

“Fuchishisuko”
by KAMEI Fumioki (69min.)



The youngest adult son in a family living separate lives impulsively decides to make a film based on his older brother's childhood drawings. He realizes there's a limit to recreating the feeling of days that no longer exist.

A 30-something man living a frugal existence sits at his table jotting down notes for a screenplay accompanied by surreal doodles. He rings his father, whom he obviously hasn't seen in some time, and asks him to look for the illustrated stories his older brother made back in the day. The stories, entitled “Fuchishisuko,” will serve as the basis for a self-funded movie. Kamei calls on an acquaintance to create an animated sequence based on his fond memories of his brother's hand-drawn characters. Not surprisingly, the results are underwhelming. Kamei recounts the rush he felt while his brother would dream up stories on the spot, and the frustration at being saddled with memories you can never truly relive. When a box arrives from his hometown, it's not the items Kamei expected but he gains a more important truth.

Director KAMEI Fumioki stars in this autobiographical narrative, playing out his own real life desire to re-experience the creative enjoyment of his youth. Long takes are employed throughout, capturing a range of emotions without cutting away. Rather than showing us his friend's animation efforts, we watch as Kamei's face shifts from anticipation to utter disappointment.

Kureru Fading Light (working title)
By TAKEDA Yuya (52 min.)



Yuji is a young NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) who lives quietly with his grandmother. While searching for his lost dog, Yuji encounters a solo camper. Their conversation extends into the night, leading to life altering self-realizations.

22-year-old NEET Yuji lives with his frail grandmother and their dog Takehiko. His days always play out the same way — eating meals, strumming his guitar, and napping. While taking Takehiko for his daily walk, Yuji doubles over in agony and Takehiko takes off into the forest. After searching in vain, Yuji comes across a man named Atsushi, who's camping by himself. Atsushi lets Yuji use his tent to rest up, but when Yuji awakens it's already dark and too late to walk home safely. Around a small campfire and modest supper, the pair bond over their difficulty of fitting into accepted models of society and their love same singer-songwriter. It's perhaps the first time Yuji has verbalized his station in life and considered the source of his periodic abdominal pains. When morning arrives, Yuji is a changed man...

Director TAKEDA Yuya's writing and direction exhibits an impressively mature simplicity. Viewers are gradually drawn in as the characters reveal layers of themselves, and we wonder where they are heading long after the campfire embers have cooled.

Passive Aggressive
by NAKADA Ere (40 min.)



After a chance meeting by the river, teenagers Kaho and Nina develop a bond during Kaho's visit to the countryside with her emotionally fragile mother and estranged father.

In a local park toilet, boyish Kaho cuts and stitches her high school uniform skirt into a pair of shorts. A loner, Kaho likes to spend her time taking photos and making fanzines. Kaho arrives at a countryside cottage with her mother for what's supposed to be a restful stay, but things seem a little off. Kaho's self-medicating mom frets over her husband's lack of replies to her texts, and Kaho guesses he's having an affair. When he does eventually arrive, he's derisive about Kaho's masculine fashion and has awkward exchanges with his wife. Escaping the leaden atmosphere, Kaho goes out to snap some photos and runs into a literally sparkling young woman named Nina. Nina's persona entrances Kaho and the pair become fast friends, but as the situation grows darker and Kaho grows up, she must make a choice...

NAKADA Ere's thoughtful writing and confident staging of drama shows striking maturity for a young filmmaker. In one expertly staged sequence, an idyllic photo shoot next to the river is pastoral yet with disturbing undercurrents. Themes of fragile teenage sexuality and fractured family relations are deftly handled. Considering the film's 40-minute running time, *Passive Aggressive* offers the layered richness of a feature.

Lock Up and Down
By Minami (34 min.)



A couple in Hanoi self-quarantines in their apartment overlooking the city. As the days drag on they can't help but see things in a new way.

Japanese national Minami and her Vietnamese partner reside in a condominium in central Hanoi. Amidst the pandemic, the city has ordered residents to quarantine at home. The couple speak a mix of Japanese, English and Vietnamese as they ponder the situation. The high floor of their apartment offers a birds-eye-view of residents on their rooftop terraces and balconies. Some garden or exercise to stay fit, while others seem at a loss. The loudspeaker announcements echo continuously, at one point ordering the residents to receive PCR tests. A tense visit from local authorities has nothing to do with the pandemic but is a check on foreign resident Minami's work permit status and whether they are hiding anyone. As days turn into weeks, things become more surreal...

Shot over a period of two months, director MINAMI constructed this documentary completely from footage filmed from inside her apartment. When she and her partner are not in front of the lens, the shots from the window are at a very long focal length, creating the feeling of a surveillance video. Later, the movements of nature and micro details of their own bodies become points of fascination. The film proves Minami's thesis that if you focus, many things become visible.

The Band

by KAWAMURA Riku (28 min.)



The lead singer of a university rock band reveals he wants to break up the group just before their graduation gig. The decision affects his fellow band members in different ways. The situation comes to a head on stage.

After years of jamming together in their extracurricular university rock band, lead singer Ishida impulsively sets his sights on boxing instead. Ishida unilaterally decides to break up the group as they're about to play their graduation gig. Bassist Komine resents Ishida's lack of communication and consideration, while female drummer Kanae finds herself mediating between the two. While Ishida is victorious in his sparring match he can't deny boxing's mental burden, which exacerbates his handling of the tension among the band. An interloping guitarist doesn't help matters, and everyone's pent up emotions burst forth at what's meant to be their final gig.

KAWAMURA Riku breathes new life into the well-worn trope of fretting university seniors on the verge of entering adult society. Kawamura's unique sense of framing and blocking, combined with uncomfortably pregnant silences, creates tense anticipation of how things will resolve. An imagined flash forward to post-university life is another of Kawamura's clever techniques. Fans of KITANO Takeshi, in particular the classic *Kids Return*, may appreciate the film's poker-faced style and unexpected bursts of violence.

Kawataredoki-Twilight Time

by TANIMOTO Momoko (15 min.)



Six years after the sudden passing of her father, a young woman investigates her family's history through home videos shot during different periods of her life.

2015. A man walks through the precinct of a shrine in a home video shot by his wife on a family trip with their teenaged daughter, Momoko. Three weeks later, he collapsed during a business trip and passed away. The footage is the last visual memory Momoko has of her father, Gentoku. On the 7th anniversary of his death, Momoko digs further back in the archives of family videos and photographs to better understand the man he was. He dotes on Momoko as a little girl, playing games and cherishing videos of her choir performances. In counterpoint, her mother's voiceover recounts her husband's strict side but she admits he mellowed significantly after Momoko's older brother moved away for college. In the present day, a local Aomori summer festival the family once enjoyed has been cancelled due to the pandemic, and the town streets and parks are subdued. But it's the unchanging scenery of Shiogama Shrine, with its famously steep stairway, that truly ties the family together.

Director TANIMOTO Momoko employs modest but effective techniques such as intercutting and superimposition to dig deeper into who her father was and what he meant to the family. She discovers that the simple act of retracing a loved one's footsteps can bring them back in spirit.