75th IFFMH: The 2026 award-winners – Top honour goes to the Australian-Filipino drama ›First Light‹

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›First Light‹ by James J. Robinson has earned the International Newcomer Award, worth 30,000 euros, for the best film in competition. +++ The Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award for best screenplay, worth 15,000 euros, has gone to Mads Mengel and co-writer Christian Bengtson for **›The Guest‹**. +++ **Pinea Matoshi** has received the 10,000-euro Young Actors Award for her role in ›Dua‹. +++ The Young Jury has honoured **›A Day in the Life of Jo: Chapter Phaedra‹** by Jacqueline Lentzou with the 5,000-euro Student Award. +++ **›The Riverbank‹** by the directing team Enock Carvalho and Matheus Farias has received the Ecumenical Award, worth 2,500 euros. +++ The FIPRESCI Prize of the film critics has also gone to **›The Guest‹**. +++ The Audience Award, worth 5,000 euros, has gone to **›Body of Glass‹** by Naëmi Ada.



›First Light‹ © Majella Otherworldly Productions Pty Ltd

This evening, the winning films of the 75th International Film Festival Mannheim-Heidelberg were honoured at the gala award ceremony at the Karlstorbahnhof in Heidelberg. Dr Andrea Edel, director of Heidelberg's Cultural Affairs Office, welcomed the numerous guests. During the award ceremony, speeches were given by the award sponsor Lars Kehrel, head of solution management at the Heidelberg-based consultancy cbs, and – on the occasion of the German Documentary Film Award once again being presented at the IFFMH – Clemens Bratzler, programming director Information at SWR; Wiebke Wiesner, managing director of MFG; Eric Friedler, director of the Haus des Dokumentarfilms – Europäisches Medienforum Stuttgart e.V.; and Dr Wolfgang Kreißig, president of the LFK – Landesanstalt für Kommunikation Baden-Württemberg.

The IFFMH's top honour, the **International Newcomer Award**, worth 30,000 euros, went to **›First Light‹** by the Australian-Filipino writer-director James J. Robinson, who accepted the award in person. His debut film uses striking imagery to tell the story of a Christian nun in the Philippines who witnesses a crime, sees how the Church covers it up, and subsequently finds herself in a crisis of faith.

The **Young Actors Award**, for which films in all sections are eligible and which is also presented by the international jury, went to the young actress **Pinea Matoshi** for her acting debut in ›Dua‹ from the FILMSCAPES section. This coming-of-age drama, the second film by Kosovar director and screenwriter Blerta Basholli, is set in Priština in the late 1990s, shortly before the outbreak of the Kosovo War. Pinea Matoshi plays the eponymous teenager, Dua – a young woman of immense resilience who manages to hold her own despite the harshness and uncertainty of her living conditions and her own traumatic experiences.

Once again, a total of 16 first and second films by talented up-and-coming international directors competed for six awards in the ON THE RISE competition. Five of the awards are presented by four juries. In addition, there is the Audience Award, the recipient of which is determined by the audience. All the winning films will be screened again in the festival cinemas between now and 15 November.

For the second time, the **German Documentary Film Award** was presented during the IFFMH award ceremony in collaboration with SWR. The prize is awarded in three categories by separate juries and award sponsors. The main prize (20,000 euros) goes to **›Circusboy‹** by Julia Lemke and Anna Koch, the music prize (5,000 euros) to Luzia Schmid for **›I Want It All‹** and the sponsorship award (3,000 euros) to Jana Stallein for **›Where the Waves Took Her‹**. The film that took the main prize will be screened on 13 November at 6:00 pm as part of the IFFMH programme at the Gloria cinema in Heidelberg.

The IFFMH team extends its warmest congratulations to the award-winners. Festival director Dr Sascha Keilholz thanked the juries for their great dedication to the art of film and expressed his immense satisfaction with how this year's anniversary edition of the festival had gone, given the many sold-out screenings and the outstanding response from the audience.

The juries' statements are as follows:

International Jury

Jury members: Bettina Brokemper, Carson Lund, Asaf Saban

International Newcomer Award - Best Director (30,000 euros)

›First Light‹
Directed by: James J. Robinson (Australia, Philippines)

The jury stated: “We were surprised and moved by this beautiful, richly detailed tale of what grace looks like in an increasingly compromised world. This film doesn’t preach compassion, but instead embodies it through its subtle storytelling and delicate way of subverting emotional expectations. The director invites us to observe the world through the main character’s perspective, which heightens our senses and recalibrates our judgment. Learn from Yolanda!
And the award goes to ›First Light‹, directed by James J. Robinson.”

The International Newcomer Award, the IFFMH’s top honour, is sponsored by the Manfred Lautenschläger-Stiftung.

Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award – Best Screenplay (15,000 euros)

›The Guest‹
Written and directed by: Mads Mengel (Denmark)
Co-author: Christian Bengtson

The jury stated: “This film sheds a new light on the well-explored family drama, unravelling the complexities of family ties and embracing the contradictions of human nature. The skilfully structured script refuses simple solutions and freely shifts points of view as it chronicles the thorny dynamic between a mother and her two children. As the film builds towards an explosive climax, the screenwriting plays with our perceptions and gives space to the audience to reflect on the thin line between sanity and insanity.
And the award goes to writer/director Mads Mengel and co-writer Christian Bengtson for ›The Guest‹.”

The Rainer Werner Fassbinder Award for best screenplay is sponsored by the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation. The names “Fassbinder”, “Rainer Werner Fassbinder” and “RWF” (as a word and figurative mark) are registered trademarks of the Rainer Werner Fassbinder Foundation, Berlin.

Young Actors Award – Best Acting Performance (10,000 euros)

Pinea Matoshi
›Dua‹ (directed by: Blerta Basholli, Kosovo, Switzerland, France)

The jury stated: “It’s not often that a young performer steals every frame in the way this remarkable actor does. As we see the encroaching threat of a violent reality, her soulful and extremely alert eyes express a wisdom and conviction beyond her years, guiding us through a battleground of adult violence while offering the emotional nuance of a teenager. From the judo mat to the bedroom karaoke stage, her powerful expressions of joy lighten up the screen.
And the award goes to Pinea Matoshi, from ›Dua‹.”

The Young Actors Award is sponsored by the Heidelberg-based consulting firm cbs.

Young Jury

Jury members: Ada Albayrak, Anna Jaeschke, Soo Jeon

Student Award (5,000 euros)

›A Day in the Life of Jo: Chapter Phaedra‹
Directed by: Jacqueline Lentzou (Greece, Germany, France)

The jury stated: “Among the films we watched during this competition, one stood out for its fresh and distinctive vision. Through its remarkable visual language, the camera draws us into a world of overwhelming beauty and emotional truth. The film opens up an immersive exploration of human existence and its spiritual dimensions, offering an experience that transcends the boundaries of ordinary perception. Its delicate yet daring narrative approach moved us deeply, presenting a unique and deeply resonant interpretation of life and death and everything in between. And yet the film never loses its sense of humour – it made us laugh just as often as it made us think. As the young jury, we feel that it represents the experiences of young people in a convincing and narratively interesting way, which is why we are honoured to present our award to: ›A Day in the Life of Jo: Chapter Phaedra‹ by Jacqueline Lentzou.”

The Student Award, presented by the Young Jury, is sponsored by Mannheim’s municipal housing association, GBG.

Ecumenical Jury

Jury members: Andreas Engelschalk, Florence de Tienda, Magali Van Reeth

Ecumenical Award (2,500 euros)

›The Riverbank‹
Directed by: Enock Carvalho and Matheus Farias (Brazil, Germany)

The jury stated: “In Recife, Brazil, a young gay man named Ezekiel works as a cleaner in an evangelical church, where the pastor fuels a climate of intolerance that leads to the worst. In this film, which is steeped in magical realism, Jeremias appears in the mangroves – a fisherman of supernatural beauty who completely turns the young man’s life upside down. While the directors denounce the entanglements between church and power, they restore dignity to the marginalized through the poetry and sensuality of the imagery. A deeply political film. The Ecumenical Award goes to the film ›The Riverbank‹ by Enock Carvalho and Matheus Farias.”

The Ecumenical Jury is comprised of members of the interfaith film networks INTERFILM and SIGNIS. The award is sponsored by the German Bishops’ Conference (DBK) and the Lutheran Church in Germany (EDK).

FIPRESCI Jury

Jury members: Beat Glur, Yael Shuv, Rudolf Worschech

FIPRESCI Award

›The Guest‹
Directed by: Mads Mengel (Denmark)

The jury stated: “What initially appears to be a pleasant family reunion gradually unfolds into a rich and intricate drama with the unexpected arrival of a family member who was not invited. The family dynamics feel authentic and compelling, brought vividly to life through a finely crafted screenplay and precise handheld camerawork. The subject of mental instability and its impact on those gathered is explored with sensitivity and kindness. The FIPRESCI jury particularly admired the outstanding performance of actress Trine Dyrholm. Our award goes to the Danish film ›Gæsten‹ (›The Guest‹), by first-time writer-director Mads Mengel.”

The audience

Audience Award (5.000 euros)

›Body of Glass‹
Directed by: Naëmi Ada (Germany, France)

This year’s Audience Award went to ›Body of Glass‹ by German director Naëmi Ada. This film was developed in 2024 within the IFFMH’s own programme for emerging talent, the Cutting Edge Talent Camp. This psychological drama is about a young dancer in Marseille who breaks free of a toxic relationship and, in search of a supportive environment, inserts herself into the lives of a family of strangers – only to find herself at risk of losing her own sense of self in the process. A remarkable and captivating debut that stages interpersonal relationships like a choreography, in which action and reaction are inextricably linked.

The 75th IFFMH is taking place from 5 to 15 November 2026.
The complete schedule is available online at iffmh.de/programme

Images
You can download images via the “press material” section of our website:
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About the IFFMH
With “New Film Experience” as its credo, the IFFMH has been venturing new, interdisciplinary perspectives on and through the art of film since 1952. This

makes it the longest-running film festival in Germany after the Berlinale, and it continues to be a major platform for cultural, social and political dialogue. With each subsequent edition, the IFFMH, as a festival for the public in cinemas, invites festivalgoers to discover the rising stars of the international film scene as well as to follow the careers of established filmmakers and to become more familiar with film in the context of other art forms.

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The festival wishes to thank its sponsors and partners.

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