

THE 73rd SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL CLOSES, AWARDING TOP PRIZE TO ANDREY ZVYAGINTSEV

After the second year in a row - a record-breaking box office achievement, the 73rd Sydney Film Festival came to a spectacular conclusion tonight.

SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA, June 14, 2026

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After 12 days, with more than 100 filmmaker guests and - for the second year in a row - a record-breaking box office achievement, the 73rd Sydney

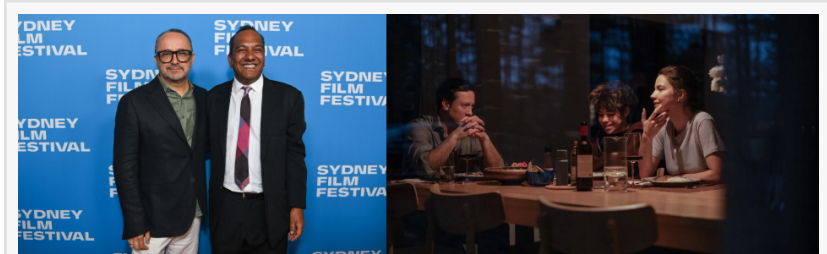
Film Festival came to a spectacular conclusion at the State Theatre tonight. At the official closing night ceremony, the prestigious Sydney Film Prize was awarded in person to acclaimed Russian filmmaker Andrey Zvyagintsev for his explosive thriller, *Minotaur*.

The winner of the \$60,000 cash prize for 'audacious, cutting-edge and courageous' film was selected by a prestigious international jury headed by Brazilian Oscar-nominated-film director, Kleber Mendonça Filho.

The announcement was made at the State Theatre ahead of the Australian Premiere screening of James Gray's Family-Thriller *Paper Tiger*, concluding the highest selling Festival in Sydney Film Festival's history.

Known for his engrossing and provocative portraits of contemporary Russian society, Andrey Zvyagintsev has been a powerful force in international cinema, since his Venice Gold Lion winning debut *The Return* in 2003. As well as screening *Minotaur* in competition, the 73rd Sydney Film Festival hosted a Masterclass with Zvyagintsev prior to his win.

After more than a decade since his last visit to Australia, Zvyagintsev was in Sydney to accept the



Director of *Minotaur*, Andrey Zvyagintsev with SFF festival director, Nashen Moodley

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award in person, and on stage said, "I would like to thank the jury for this decision, because this film means a lot to people who are struggling at the moment in Russia. The Russian language is struggling. This film is very important to them."

"Thank you to the audience. Thank you to the wonderful State Theatre and thank you to the organisers of the Sydney Film Festival."

As part of Sydney Film Festival's prestigious awards program, New Zealand and Australian filmmakers Mataslia Freshwater and Lachlan McLeod were awarded the Sustainable Future Award \$40,000 cash prize, the largest environmental film prize in the world, for *Sukundimi Walks Before Me*, a powerful doc following an Indigenous PNG community's campaign to preserve their future.

The 2026 recipient of the \$20,000 Documentary Australia Award was announced as Australian filmmaker Vee Shi, for *Time and Tide*, a compelling, hybrid docu-drama on a multigenerational family navigating the pressures of familial obligation.

The recipient of the largest cash prize for First Nations filmmaking, the \$35,000 First Nations Award proudly supported by Truant Pictures, is Banchi Hanuse for *Ceremony*, a hybrid film that traces memory, ceremony, and the ripples of colonialism.

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Screen NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to writer/director Fadia Abboud.

Also acknowledged at the ceremony were the five short film prizes awarded for The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films, at a ceremony held on Saturday night. The \$7,000 Dendy Live Action Short Award was awarded to *Manjutji (Catching Eyes)*, directed by Siena Mayutu Wumarri Stubbs. The \$7,000 Yoram Gross Animation Award was awarded to *Our Choir Has Always Been Travelling*, directed by Judith Pungarta Inkamala, Marjorie 'Nunga' Williams and Nelson Armstrong, who were also awarded The Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award for Screenwriting as co-writers on the film, with an additional cash prize of \$7,000.

The \$7,000 Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Director was presented to Cristabel Sved, director of *Date 3*. The AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner (a \$7,000 cash prize) went to Angelina Kovacs and Sophie Ravant, production designers of *Flesh Fruit*.

Sydney Film Festival CEO, Frances Wallace said, "SFF73 was such a buzz from Opening to Closing and again for the second year in a row, making history by becoming the highest selling box office in the Festival's 73 years. SFF73 has increased its audience by a projected 10% to 170,000 attendees (157,000 in 2025). We also saw a 30%+ increase in Youth Pass sales - seeing the cinemas fill with these new young generations of film lovers was such a delight. SFF plans to continue to build the calibre of the Festival - and create a Festival for all, that continues to garner national and global attention."

Sydney Film Festival Director, Nashen Moodley said, "It has been a terrific edition of Sydney Film Festival and such a delight to see cinemas full every day and all around the city. We welcomed over 100 filmmakers from around the world who presented their films to very enthusiastic and engaged audiences. It really feels that cinema as a collective experience is thriving. Congratulations to all the winners of awards and all filmmakers with films at the festival and our thanks to the juries who made the difficult choices."

Executive Director for Screen NSW, Kylie Munnich said, "it is exciting to see that after 73 years, the Sydney Film Festival continues to go from strength to strength with this year seeing the highest selling Festival to date. I extend my congratulations to all the winners and nominees across the awards programs, and congratulations to the Sydney Film Festival team, volunteers and of course audiences who turned out in droves to celebrate the best cinema on offer and made this a year for the history books."

Minister for Jobs and Tourism, Steve Kamper said, "Sydney Film Festival just keeps getting better. This year's program was bold, diverse, and genuinely world-class, exactly the kind of storytelling that puts Sydney on the global cultural map. Beyond the cinema, the city has been alive throughout the festival. People out at bars, restaurants, and venues before and after screenings, that's what great events do. They don't just fill seats; they energise the whole city. Congratulations to the organisers and every winner tonight. You've made Sydney proud."

Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore AO said, "each year, Sydney Film Festival invites us to see the world through fresh eyes. From powerful local stories to remarkable films from across the globe, this year's program showcased the imagination, talent and diversity that make cinema such a powerful art form. Congratulations to this year's award winners, filmmakers and organisers for another exceptional festival. Their work not only entertains and inspires, but strengthens Sydney's standing as a city that celebrates creativity, welcomes new ideas and embraces cultural exchange."

THE SYDNEY FILM PRIZE

On awarding the Sydney Film Prize to prolific Russian filmmaker Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Minotaur*, the Jury said in a joint statement:

"This is a film about something which unfortunately never goes out of style, which is power used to crush people. And it's all done in a way that feels strongly Hitchcockian, strongly cinematic. The Sydney Film Prize goes to this chronicle of contemporary Russia which is *Minotaur* by Andrew Zvyagintsev."

The Festival Jury was comprised of acclaimed Brazilian director, writer and producer Kleber Mendonça Filho (*The Secret Agent*) as Jury President, joined by Hungarian filmmaker Ildikó Enyedi (*Silent Friend*), Singaporean filmmaker Boo Junfeng (*Apprentice*), Australian cinematographer Ari Wegner (*The Power of the Dog*), and Australian First Nations producer and

director Sally Riley (Mystery Road).

Previous winners include: It Was Just an Accident (2025), There's Still Tomorrow (2024), The Mother of All Lies (2023), Close (2022), There Is No Evil (2021), Parasite (2019), The Heiresses (2018), On Body and Soul (2017), Aquarius (2016), Arabian Nights (2015), Two Days, One Night (2014), Only God Forgives (2013), Alps (2012), A Separation (2011), Heartbeats (2010), Bronson (2009), and Hunger (2008).

The competition is endorsed by FIAPF, the regulating body for international film festivals, and is judged by a jury of five international and Australian filmmakers and industry professionals.

The 13 films in Competition for the 2026 Sydney Film Prize are listed [HERE](#)

THE DOCUMENTARY AUSTRALIA AWARD

The \$20,000 Documentary Australia Award, proudly supported by Documentary Australia was awarded to Vee Shi for Time and Tide. The Jury comprising of Ben Lawrence, Hannah Buck, and Kiki Fung, said in a joint statement:

“This year's award goes to a film that challenged our ideas of what documentary can be and what it can do. This transcendent work delivered raw and authentic emotion, demonstrating the capacity of filmmaking not only to capture a process of healing, but also to create the conditions for it.”

Previous winners: Songs Inside (2025), Welcome to Babel (2024), Marungka Tjalatjunu (Dipped in Black) (2023); Keep Stepping (2022); I'm Wanita (2021); Descent (2020); She Who Must Be Loved (2019); Ghosthunter (2018); The Pink House (2017); In the Shadow of the Hill (2016); Only the Dead (2015); 35 Letters (2014); Buckskin (2013); Killing Anna (2012); Life in Movement (2011); and The Snowman (2010). In 2009 the inaugural prize was shared between Contact and A Good Man, and each film received a \$10,000 cash prize.

The 10 finalists for the 2026 Documentary Australia Award are listed [HERE](#).

FIRST NATIONS AWARD PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY TRUANT PICTURES

The First Nations Award, proudly supported by Truant Pictures, is the world's largest cash prize in global Indigenous filmmaking, rewarding \$35,000 to the winning First Nations filmmaker.

The winner of the First Nations Award is Banchi Hanuse's hybrid documentary Ceremony, which flows through Nuxalk lands, lives and rivers where the ooligan fish no longer swim – tracing memory, ceremony, and the ripples of colonialism.

The Jury comprising of Beck Cole, Mark Coles Smith, and Shozo Ichiyama, said in a joint statement:

“Filmed across ten years, and utilising a range of immersive storytelling techniques, Ceremony is a deeply layered, complex and intimate journey into the history and landscape of the Nuxalk people. A moving declaration of sovereignty that leaves you championing for the hearts and homeland of her community.”

The 16 films shortlisted for the 2026 First Nations Award are listed [HERE](#).

SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AWARD

The 2026 recipient of the \$40,000 Sustainable Future Award, the world’s largest environmental film prize, was presented to the documentary *Sukundimi Walks Before Me* directed by Mataslia Freshwater and Lachlan McLeod.

The Award is presented to a film that explores the social, economic, political, and environmental consequences of climate change and highlights the urgent need for action to mitigate its effects.

The Guardian is the Official Media Partner of the Sustainable Future Award films.

The powerful documentary *Sukundimi Walks Before Me*, follows an Indigenous PNG community’s campaign to preserve their future, when the Sepik River, ‘the Amazon of the Asia-Pacific’, is threatened by mining.

The Jury was comprised of Amanda Maple Brown, Emma Camp, and Jordon Giusti, and together said in a joint statement:

“*Sukundimi Walks Before Me* is an incredibly important and timely documentary depicting the immense power of grassroots resistance in a world deeply impacted by colonialism and corporate greed. Masterfully told with reverence and respect for the majestic Sepik River flowing throughout the film, it follows the individuals and communities fighting to save the river, and their livelihoods, from destruction by the proposed Frieda River Project by PanAust, a Brisbane-based, Chinese owned mining company.”

The five films shortlisted for the 2026 Sustainable Future Award are listed [HERE](#).

DENDY AWARDS FOR AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILMS

A jury composed of Emilie Lesclaux, David Ma, and Leela Varghese judged the Festival’s short film awards, and said in a joint statement:

“Australia is a vast country. Sometimes we forget that there are communities and lives incomprehensibly different from our own. In these films, we see that life can be unsettling, painful, wacky, sensual, and tender. We want to give a special mention to all the actors who embodied these feelings. In each film, the performances were wonderful. It is a generous act to share your little plot of life, and we want to express our gratitude to all the filmmakers for doing

so. In the end, we were moved by the films driven by love. A love for their home, their community, and their people.”

The Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films were awarded to Manutji (Catching Eyes), directed by Siena Mayutu Wumarri Stubbs (Best Live Action Short), Our Choir Has Always Been Travelling, directed by Judith Pungarta Inkamala, Marjorie 'Nunga' Williams and Nelson Armstrong (Yoram Gross Animation Award), Cristabel Sved, director of Date 3 (Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Australian Director), Angelina Kovacs and Sophie Ravant, production designers of Flesh Fruit (AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner), and Judith Pungarta Inkamala, Marjorie 'Nunga' Williams and Nelson Armstrong, the co-writers of Our Choir Has Always Been Travelling (Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award).

A list of the Dendy winners are:

The Dendy Live Action Short.

Winner: Manutji (Catching Eyes)

The Yoram Gross Animation Award for Best Australian Animation.

Winner: Our Choir Has Always Been Travelling

The Rouben Mamoulian Award for Best Australian Director.

Winner: Cristabel Sved for Date 3

AFTRS Craft Award for Best Practitioner.

Winner: Angelina Kovacs and Sophie Ravant, production designers of Flesh Fruit

The Event Cinemas Rising Talent Award.

Winner: Judith Pungarta Inkamala, Marjorie 'Nunga' Williams and Nelson Armstrong, co-writers of Our Choir Has Always Been Travelling

The competition for the Australian Short Films was established by the Festival in 1970. Winners of the Best Live Action Short Film Award and the Yoram Gross Animation Award (sponsored by Sandra and Guy Gross in memory of the late Yoram Gross) are Academy Award-eligible, opening new pathways for many Australian filmmakers.

The 10 films shortlisted for the Dendy Awards for Australian Short Films are listed [HERE](#).

THE UNESCO SYDNEY CITY OF FILM AWARD

The \$10,000 Sydney-UNESCO City of Film Award, bestowed by Screen NSW to a trail-blazing NSW-based screen practitioner, went to writer/director Fadia Abboud.

SFF Official Competition filmmaker nominees in attendance: Andrey Zvyagintsev (Minotaur), Marie-Clementine Dusabejambo (Ben'Imana)

SFF Filmmaker VIP Guests attending included: Kleber Mendonça Filho (Sydney Film Prize Jury Present), Ildikó Enyedi (Jury Member and Film Director), Boo Junfeng (Jury Member and Film Director), Ari Wegner (Jury Member and Cinematographer), Sally Riley (Jury Member and Film Director/Producer)

Additional VIP Guests attending included: Ash Magic, Claudia Karvan, Conrad Coleby, Craig Hall, Grace Chow, Holly White, Jeremy Sims, Krew Boylan, Lincoln Younes, Luke Arnold, Matt Day, Nova Onas, Tess Haubrich, Tom Ryan and Will McDonald.

The full Sydney Film Festival 2026 program can be found online at sff.org.au.

Sydney Film Festival runs from 3-14 June 2026. Tickets and Flexipasses to Sydney Film Festival 2026 are on sale now. Please call 1300 733 733 or visit sff.org.au for more information or to book.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

ABOUT SYDNEY FILM FESTIVAL

The Sydney Film Festival is one of the world's longest running and most prestigious film festivals. The 73rd edition, taking place from 3 to 14 June 2026, will showcase the very best in contemporary cinema and offer audiences the chance to experience premieres, red carpet events, and exciting special programs across Sydney.

The Festival is supported by the NSW Government through Screen NSW and Destination NSW, the Federal Government through Screen Australia, and the City of Sydney.

Stay up to date with Sydney Film Festival: eNews, Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. For more information, visit sff.org.au.

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