

2021 FILM COMPETITION WINNERS

Grand Prize



Sponsored by Doña Paula | \$4,000

The Rescue

(USA, 2021, 110 mins)

Director: Jimmy Chin, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi

Producer: John Battsek, Jimmy Chin, Elizabeth Chai Vasarhelyi, P.J. van Sandwijk

When 12 young soccer players and their coach were trapped by monsoon floods inside a cave in Thailand, the world watched for 16 days as reporters gave updates from outside the rescue zone. Now we gain a perspective that no reporter could ever capture, through the eyes of the Thai and international rescue divers and never-before-seen footage from their cameras.

“This real-life Mission Impossible, played out on television screens at the time of the 2018 FIFA World Cup, sets out to save the twelve young Thai footballers and their coach from almost certain death, as they become trapped in a deep cave deluged by a downpour in Northern Thailand. An assorted team is tasked with this mission, made up of the Thai Navy Seals, US Air Force Special and volunteer cave divers, whose cave-diving know-how as well as their courage and self-deprecation is notably striking. The live footage of weeks of the rescue mission in dark subterranean caves, against a ticking clock before the onset of the next rains, knitted together with archival footage, enactments, and interviews, make for documentary as gripping cinema..” — *Kesang Tseten, jury member*

Award for Creative Excellence



\$2,000

The Magnitude of All things

(Canada, 2020, 86 mins)

Director: Jennifer Abbott

Producer: Jennifer Abbott, Henrik Meyer, Shirley Vercruysse, Andrew Williamson

The *Magnitude of All Things* draws intimate parallels between the experiences of grief—both personal and planetary. Stories from the frontlines of climate change merge with recollections from the filmmaker’s childhood on Ontario’s Georgian Bay. What do these stories have in common? The answer, surprisingly, is everything.

"In this extraordinary approach to the Earth and human grief, Jennifer Abbott follows determined activists on a mesmerizing journey around the planet, exploring the emotional and psychological dimensions of climate change. Remarkable storytelling, memorable cinematography, and a seamless melding of reality and fiction make this tale of personal and planetary grief a must watch film."

— *Bachar Khattar, jury member*

Best Film: Exploration and Adventure



Sponsored by Monod Sports | \$2,000

Exit the North Pole

(Norway, 2021, 57 mins)

Director: Ole-André Lagmandokk

Producer: Svein Haaland

Børge Ousland is one of the world's most experienced polar explorers. He has been to the North Pole several times, solo and with others. On this journey he is joined by South African Mike Horn for an insane 1500km skiing journey across the polar ice cap in temperatures below -30C and mostly travelling in darkness. Not surprisingly, not everything goes as planned.

“In *Exit the North Pole* (Exit Nordpolen), Norwegian director Ole André Lagmandokk traces one of the most incredible polar expeditions of modern times – Borge Ousland and Mike Horn’s 3000km traverse from Nome, Alaska to the ice edge of the Arctic Ocean, mostly in complete darkness in temperatures down to 40 minus. Ousland and Horn’s epic journey is an incredible accomplishment of exploration, and *Exit the North Pole* is a worthy portrait of that adventure and of a landscape quickly changing due to climate change.”

— *Devyani Saltzman, jury member*

Best Film: Mountain Culture



Sponsored by Helly Hansen | \$2,000

Horse Tamer

(France, 2019, 85 mins)

Director: Hamid Sardar

Producer: Vivien Lemaignan

In the Darhat valley in northern Mongolia, the horses of nomadic tribes are disappearing. Bandits steal horses from their owners, and sell them for a few rubles in Russian slaughterhouses. But Shukhert, a vigilante Darhat horseman, pursues them relentlessly, all the way to the edge of Mongolian taiga, on the border with Siberia.

"The notion that men and horses share a deep and unfathomable bond is perhaps best exemplified by the Mongols, who conquered much of the world, ably supported by their steed. In this warm, engaging 'Western' set in the Central Asian grasslands, men and horses cavort with and contest against each other, as master horse tamer Shukhert, who is as skilled a wrestler, another Mongolian passion, doggedly pursues horse thieves. Yet, in assigning no absolute wrong to horse thievery, as long as the grassland's tacit code of honour is observed, the tale sounds a poignant, if wistful, note to the winds of inevitable change."

- *Kesang Tseten, jury member*

Best Film: Climbing



Sponsored by Arc'teryx | \$2,000

They/Them

(USA, 2021, 70 mins)

Director: Blake McCord

Producer: Justin Clifton

For Lor Sabourin, climbing is more than a sport; it's a way of exploring identity and building resilience in the face of adversity. *They/Them* follows Lor, a trans climber, into the sandstone canyons of northern Arizona, on a journey to piece together one of the hardest and most inspiring routes of their life. By embracing the strength in vulnerability, Lor has found the space to thrive and build a climbing community that others like themselves can call home.

"At this moment in time everyone seems to have a view on pronouns, even though they have been referred to by the pronouns given at birth their whole lives. *They/Them* offers any gendered person, who might be having trouble understanding, a clear insight into a non-binary experience. This timely film forces us to recognize gender diversity and the importance of being an ally in the climbing community. In doing so, *They/Them* makes a significant contribution to climbing in the early 21st century." — Paul Pritchard, jury member

Mountain Sports



\$2,000

The River Runner

(USA, 2021, 86 mins)

Director: Rush Sturges

Producer: Rush Sturges, Thayer Walker, Aidan Haley

The River Runner follows legendary expedition kayaker Scott Lindgren's 20-year quest to be the first person to paddle the four great rivers that originate from Tibet's sacred Mount Kailash. The film is not simply a jaw-dropping adventure, but also an intimate portrait of Lindgren as he navigates the terrifying terrain of trauma, addiction, and a life-threatening brain tumor.

"It is a rare sports genre film that is able to elevate beyond pure adventure and adrenaline to delicately layer in issues such as illness, addiction, mental health, and recovery. In Rush Sturges's stunning film, *The River Runner*, we are passengers on wild, untamed rivers, both actual and metaphorical, as we journey with legendary kayaker Scott Lindgren. The director's keen attention is given not only to Scott's strengths and achievements, but his vulnerabilities and weaknesses, making for a stronger and more genuine experience."

— Suzan Beraza, jury member

Best Film: Snow Sports



Jess Kimura © image from the film Learning to Drown

Sponsored by Park Distillery Restaurant and Bar | \$2,000

Learning to Drown

(USA, 2021, 40 mins)

Director: Ben Knight

Producer: Travis Rummel

Jess Kimura, considered one of the most influential female snowboarders in the world was at the top of her career when she lost the love of her life in a tragic accident. Her grief led her in a direction she could have never anticipated.

"Jess Kimura is not afraid of falling. This beautiful film showcases her long journey of persistence and determination as she takes on one challenge after the other to become one of the most influential snowboarders of her time. Jess openly shares her deepest fear and suffering and reminds us of the importance of being our best selves, in this inspiring lifetime story of a hero."

— *Bachar Khattar, jury member*

Best Film: Mountain Environment & Natural History



Sponsored by Bow Valley Power | \$2,000

Tigre Gente

(USA, 2021, 93 mins)

Director: Elizabeth Unger

Producer: Elizabeth Unger, Joanna Natasegara

A Bolivian park ranger and a young Hong Kongese journalist risk their lives to go undercover and investigate a new, deadly jaguar trade that's sweeping South America. Along the way, they grapple with questions of empathy, responsibility, and bridging a cultural gap to prevent the jaguar trade from spiraling out of control.

"In a gripping story of intrigue befitting a thriller, a Bolivian park ranger uncovers illicit poaching that is greatly impacting jaguars being trafficked to Asia. In Elizabeth Unger's Tigre Gente, we are brought full force into the ensuing investigation as a young Hong Kongese journalist grapples with issues of cultural identity and responsibility. With Unger's clear direction, she masterfully drives the audience to experience the clash between environmental sustainability and centuries-old beliefs and customs, bringing debate into an issue without easy answers."

— *Suzan Beraza, jury member*

Best Short Film



Sponsored by Backcountry Lodges of BC Association | \$2,000

From my Window

(United States, 2020, 11 mins)

Director: Dana Frankoff

Producer: Eric Ebner

From her bedroom window, Melissa Simpson looks out at the highest peaks in Colorado. Despite being so close, the mountains have always been worlds away for Melissa, who was born with cerebral palsy. With the help of her friend and mentor, blind adventurer Erik Weihenmayer, Melissa sets out to conquer something far greater than a summit.

"In its portrayal of struggle, From My Window reminds us that no-one has it easy. No-one lives in a vacuum and no-one succeeds alone. In doing so this film steps away from that familiar trope of people with disabilities succeeding against all odds. As a physically challenged person myself, I believe this can only be a good thing, as this view is so often damaging to the lives of the very people these films seek to aggrandize.

— Paul Pritchard, jury member

Best Feature Film



\$2,000

Torn

(USA, 2020, 91 mins)

Director: Max Lowe

Producer: Jonathan Chinn, Simon Chinn, Max Lowe, Chris Murphy

On Oct. 5, 1999, legendary climber Alex Lowe was tragically lost in a deadly avalanche on Shishapangma. Miraculously surviving the avalanche was Alex's best friend and climbing partner, Conrad Anker, who went on to marry Alex's widow and help raise his three sons. Now, Alex's son, filmmaker and National Geographic Explorer Max Lowe, turns the lens on his own family as the body of his father is uncovered 17 years after his death.

"In Torn, Max Lowe, succeeds at balancing the incredible narrative of his father, legendary climber Alex Lowe's, drive and passion for adventure, with the deep impact it had on his wife and three sons, especially upon the loss of Alex's life in a deadly avalanche in the Himalayas. Torn is a poignant, and powerful, portrait of the tensions between one man's passion and his commitment to family. Lowe's directing masterfully blends archival footage, interviews, and a contemporary return journey to create a powerful film that will move you deeply."

— Devyani Saltzman, jury member

Audience Choice Award



Sponsored by BUFF® | \$2,000

Running the Roof

(Canada, 2021, 46 mins)

Director: Cassie De Colling

Producer: Hayley Morin, Mack Stannard

Hailing from the remote village of Alert Bay, British Columbia snowboarder Spencer O'Brien dedicated her life to becoming a world champion. But, being driven to win came at a cost. Snowboarding at the elite level was taking Spencer further from her Indigenous heritage than she realized. Precious Leader Woman tells Spencer's story from childhood to the world stage, to coming full circle to embrace her identity as she pushes forward bringing her heart and soul to her next challenge, the backcountry.

Special Jury Mention



Sonder

(Canada, 2020, 34 mins)

Director: Jay Macmillan

Producer: Jay Macmillan

During Nepal's 2015 earthquake, Canadians Kathy and Bruce Macmillan perished in a landslide that devastated a small village in the remote Langtang Valley. Three years later, their son Jay Macmillan travels to Langtang to reconcile his trauma, by retracing his parents' footsteps, their relationship and by exploring the land where they passed.

“With stunning use of archival footage and photography chronicling a rich family history, director Jay MacMillan retraces the steps of his parents who perished in a remote valley of Nepal during the country’s devastating 2015 earthquake. In his skillfully edited film, *Sonder*, Jay reconciles his pain along his parent’s final journey, discovering the universal power of shared love and loss.”

— *Susan Beraza, jury member*

Special Jury Mention



Reel Rock 15: Black Ice

(USA, 2020, 44 mins)

Director: Zachary Barr, Peter Mortimer

Producer: Chris Dean, Zachary Barr

A crew of aspiring ice climbers from the Memphis Rox gym travels to the frozen wilds of Montana, where mentors Manoah Ainuu, Conrad Anker and Fred Campbell share their love of winter adventure in the mountains.

“Black Ice breaks new ground in sensitively and humorously exposing the lack of diversity in climbing. The film makers go to great lengths to highlight the differences between Memphis and Montana and what actually constitutes community. By underscoring the hardships of South Memphis’s African American community this important film affects a powerful emotional response.”

— *Paul Pritchard, jury member*