

Road to the Oscars®: SSFF & ASIA 2026 Unveils Lineup Featuring Renée Zellweger's Directorial Debut and Special Screenings with Charlie Kaufman, Michelle Yeoh and Sean Baker

**Special Programs to Focus on "Culinary : Memory of Flavor" and "Art"
 Exploring Global Perspectives Through Human Senses**

TOKYO — The Committee for Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia (SSFF & ASIA), an Academy Award®-accredited international short film festival, has officially announced its 2026 lineup.

Under the theme "Cinema Engineering," approximately 250 films have been selected from over 5,000 global submissions.

While the competition segments offer a pathway to the Oscars®, this year's Special Programs are designed to connect diverse global values through universal lenses:

- **Culinary Program:** Memories of Flavor – Connecting the world through the sensory experience of "Culinary".
- **Art Program** – An immersive experience held in the traditional tatami rooms of MoN Takanawa, blending animation, music, and fashion.
- **Focus on Africa** – Highlighting unseen talents and rapidly growing creative industries from nations like Egypt, Algeria, and Senegal.

The Pathway to the Oscars®

As an Academy Award®-accredited festival, SSFF & ASIA offers a vital platform for short filmmakers to reach the global stage. The winners of the Best Short Award in five categories—Live-action (International, Asia International, and Japan), Non-fiction, and Animation—will be eligible for nomination in the short film categories of the following year's Academy Awards®. The festival's top honor, the George Lucas Award, will be selected from these winning films, marking a significant milestone for any creator on the road to the Oscars®.

2026 Competition & Special Screening Highlights

The 2026 lineup features a powerful mix of Hollywood icons, K-pop stars, and acclaimed Japanese creators across various programs.

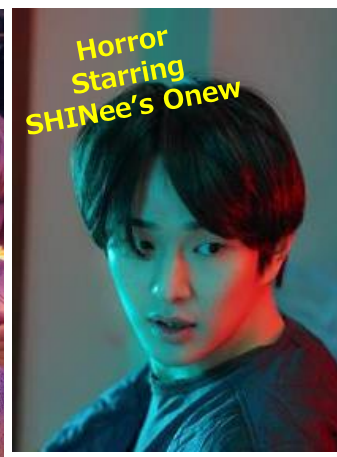
International & Asia International Highlights

- Renée Zellweger's Directorial Debut: The Oscar®-winning actress enters the Animation Competition with her short film *THEY*.
- Sean Baker & Michelle Yeoh (Special Screening): A highlight of the festival is the Japan premiere of *Sandiwara*, a comedy set in a Malaysian night market directed by Sean Baker (Anora) and starring Michelle Yeoh.
- Michelle Yeoh as Producer: The Academy Award® winner also produced *Nak Muay*, a poignant drama about a fallen Muay Thai star, featured in the Asia International Competition.
- Charlie Kaufman: The visionary director behind *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* presents the Japan premiere of his latest poetic short, *How to Shoot a Ghost*.
- K-Pop & Korean Wave: The lineup includes a horror short, *4:44*, starring Onew (leader of SHINee), and a high-tension suspense film, *Night Fishing*, produced by and starring Son Suk-ku.

Japan Competition: Innovation Meets Tradition

Joe Odagiri & Kasumi Arimura: These top-tier Japanese stars lead *mopim*, a groundbreaking short filmed entirely using virtual production technology. Naoki Matayoshi: The Akutagawa Prize-winning author wrote the screenplay for *Mortals at the Cliff*, a period drama starring Jun Totsuka.

Rising Talents: This year saw a significant increase in submissions from directors in their 20s, with many films addressing contemporary social issues.



Culinary Program: Memories of Flavor / Art Program: Immersive Narratives

At SSFF & ASIA 2026, we will showcase cutting-edge visual technology while reflecting on cinema and short films experienced through the uniquely human five senses. You are invited to experience "Culinary" dramas that capture human memories rooted in the essential act of eating, as well as "Artistic" short films designed to inspire not only sight, but also sound, touch, and even smell. These immersive works will be presented in the traditional TATAMI rooms of MoN TAKANAWA.

Tokyo

Online



<Culinary Program: Memories of Flavor> (Pickup)

Takumi Saito Produced:
『Ramen Maro: Where Our Paths Crossed』

Providing a new way to watch called the "Film to Table Experience," where you can relive the story on the screen through your own sense of taste, inspired by a real-life ramen shop.

A story of Italian prisoners striving to become Michelin-starred chefs

『The garden of delights』

<Art Program> (Pickup)

Directed by Shishi Yamazaki, an artist renowned for her unique rotoscope animation and collaborations with global brands like CHANEL and PRADA.

『kuru kuru』

A dancer father and his rock climber daughter: Ashima Shiraishi's ritual of the soul

『TAMASHI』

AI-utilizing short film submissions more than double from last year to 368: Showcasing the latest in AI short films.

[Cinematic Frontier: AI Program]

Thu, May 28, 14:30–16:10 @ MoN TAKANAWA Park Terrace

Featuring a special collaboration between WAIFF and SSFF & ASIA, along with trending short films utilizing AI-generated music and scores

Tokyo

Online

SSFF & ASIA has announced a new partnership with the WORLD A.I. FILM FESTIVAL JAPAN Executive Committee (WAIFF JAPAN), the world's first and largest international film festival specialized in AI. As part of this collaboration, the festival's AI Program will feature special screenings of major award-winning works from WAIFF. In addition, the program will showcase trending short films from this year's submissions that highlight a unique 2026 creative shift: the integration of AI-generated music and scores in cinematic storytelling.



(Pickup from Lineups)

『This is Me』

Dir : Marika Hirata/Japan/Animation/2026/10:00

This short animated film explores the instability of gender identity and the disconnect from society's demand for "clarity," employing a unique visual language that seamlessly blends fantasy with realism. **WORLD AI FILM FESTIVAL 2026 in KYOTO Japan Best AI Film Award**



(Pickup from Lineups)

『Horizon』

Dir : Felix Roumagnac/France/Music Video/2026/4:02

"Sometimes I look at the horizon and it feels like something in me slips away. "Horizon is an AI-generated short film, the story of the Air Runner Girl, a girl who can fly through dreams."

Featuring a texture and unique visual style that feel as if captured by a real camera. The imperfections and distinct character of vintage lenses, expressed by a director who is also a photographer, transcend the artificial impression of AI generation, drawing viewers deep into the world.

Spotlight on Featured Works from Competitions and Special Programs!

This year's submissions commonly explored interpersonal conflict and social adaptation. The International Category highlighted shifting personal relationships and violence, while the Asia International Category focused on intergenerational value clashes. Notably, female directors exceeded 50% for the first time, with significant entries from regions like Iran, Kurdistan, and Azerbaijan. The Japan Category saw a surge in works by directors in their 20s and socially conscious films reflecting modern distortions. Additionally, the Animation and Non-fiction categories stood out for their exploration of inner worlds and complex global issues such as environmental change, aging societies, and the impact of technology.

Screening at Tokyo venues from May 26 / Screening at the Online Grand Theater from June 11

[International Category Special Screening] (Pickup)

Tokyo

Online



Works by Director Charlie Kaufman

『How to Shoot a Ghost』

Dir. Charlie Kaufman / USA / 27:36 / Drama / 2025

Two newly dead young people meet in the streets of Athens, amid the pulsing cityscape and the ghosts of history. One a translator, the other a photographer, they were outsiders in life; in death they struggle with the residue of their longings and mistakes. They wander the city together, finding consolation in the difficult beauty of existence and its aftermath.



**Directed by Sean Baker × Starring Michelle Yeoh
A comedy short set in a Malaysian night market**

『Sandiwara』

Dir : Sean Baker / USA & Malaysia / 10:50 / Drama / 2026

Michelle Yeoh delivers a transformative performance, amid Penang's vibrant cityscape. In collaboration with Academy Award-winning director Sean Baker, Sandiwara delivers a bold, immersive celebration of womanhood, cultural identity, culinary heritage and the spirit of independent cinema.

[International Category Nominee] (Pickup)

**A warm, humane drama depicted
by a Palestinian director**



『Kentucky Gaza』

Dir : Omar Rammal / Jordan / 21:00 / Drama / 2025

In besieged Gaza, where the existence of Kentucky survives only as legend, Anwar transforms the masses' craving into a successful smuggling venture, while single-handedly deepening the emotional wound between himself and his father.

[Asia International Category Nominee] (Pickup)

Tokyo

Online



**Produced by Michelle Yeoh: A melancholic drama of a fallen
Muay Thai star**

『Nak Muay』

Dir : Tinge Krishnan / United Kingdom, Thailand / 20:08 / Drama / 2025

A falling Muay Thai (boxing) star, lost in fame and excess, teeters on the edge of self-destruction - until a brutal defeat offers him the one thing he's been chasing: peace with his past.



**A submission from Iran reflecting the life experiences of
Generation Z in modern Tehran**

『Collar』

Dir : Pouyan Ramezanzpour / Iran / 0:16:37 / Drama / 2025

Raha, a Gen-Z student in Tehran, lives independently with her dog, Melody. When her traditional mother suddenly announces a visit, Raha must hide her "child", forbidden by her family's beliefs. As tensions rise, she struggles to protect her secret while confronting the clash between her lifestyle and her family's expectations.

Starring Joe Odagiri & Kasumi Arimura

『mopim』

Dir : Yutaka Mizuochi/11:42/Japan/Drama/2025

As she approaches her 100th birthday, Setsu is visited in her hospital room by a man who has come to take her away. By God's grace, she is returned to her younger self and granted the chance to go wherever she wishes. Setsu chooses to travel back eighty years—to tell her husband what she never had the chance to say.

**Original Story by Naoki Matayoshi
and Starring Junki Totsuka**

『Mortals at the Cliff』

Director : Heso/0:12:40/Japan/Drama/2025

In 1822, a disgraced samurai arrives at a mountain pass to end his life. There, he encounters a mysterious ronin who speaks to him as if they were old acquaintances. Confused and irritated at first, the samurai gradually opens up about himself, ultimately confronting the meaning of life and death...

Starring Yuna Kuroshima, Atsuko Asano and Misa Shimizu

『You Cannot Be Serious!』

Dir : Satsuki Okawa/24:18/Japan/Comedy/2025

After returning from NY, single ad executive Natsumi discovers she's unexpectedly pregnant! She chooses motherhood despite career fears, but her life turns upside down after confessing the father is American. Navigating her mother's bizarre and overwhelming

【Japan Category Special Screening】

**Special Short Film by the award winner of
The 5th HOPPY HAPPY AWARD**

『The Green Man』

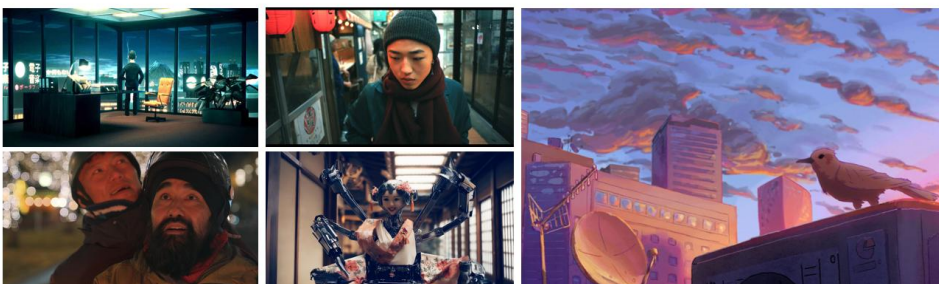
Dir : Saori Kouzuki/Japan/Drama/2026

Ichiro, an aspiring kimono dresser, is constantly teased by the voices of three girls in his head. One day, he becomes an apprentice to veteran dresser Yoneko, captivated by her skill. Accompanying her on house calls and occasionally causes trouble, Ichiro learns Yoneko's lesson that 'an obi is tied at the milestones of life,' witnessing people's pivotal moments and growing along the way. Eventually, a turning point ends their master-apprentice relationship, revealing why Ichiro chose the path of kimono dressing and the story that connects them.

Inspired by the diverse charms of Tokyo :Cinematic Tokyo Program

In collaboration with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, SSFF & ASIA established the "Cinematic Tokyo Program" in 2016. This project aims to showcase the diverse charms of Tokyo and inspire people from Japan and abroad to visit the city by inviting short films themed around "Tokyo" from all over the world. This year, five films expressing various facets of Tokyo will be screened and streamed within this program, and the Best Short Award (Governor of Tokyo Award) will be announced.

From Left: 『DOUBLE OR NOTHING』 / 『Tears Burn to Ash』 / 『Tokyo Submarine』 / 『Tokyo Tourism Paradox -Cinematic Visualizer-』 / 『Shibuya Meltdown』





**Digital Hollywood Digital Frontier
Grand-Prix 2026 Best Animation Award Winner**

『EMOLI』

Dir : Ryo Hatano / Japan / 13:45 / Sci-Fi / 2024

his is a story about the encounter between the protagonist Mio and the fugitive heroine Ten.

[Animation Competition Nominee (Pickup)]



**Renée Zellweger, star of "Bridget Jones's Diary,"
takes on a directorial challenge!**

『THEY』

Dir : Renée Zellweger / United Kingdom / 8:23 / Animation / 2025

As townsfolk rage in their fog of negativity, our hero and his dog aim to encourage a return to better days! The opposite effect leads to an unexpected calamity which galvanizes the masses.

[Non-Fiction Competition (Pickup)]



**The world of Pier Paolo Pasolini's films brought to life
by Tilda Swinton**

『Embodying Pasolini: Law of Attraction』

Dir : Jack Hsu / Taiwan / 9:48 / Non-Fiction / 2025

During the creation of the performance Embodying Pasolini in Taipei, curator Olivier Saillard and actress Tilda Swinton revisit the legacy of Pier Paolo Pasolini. Through rehearsal, memory, and costume, cinema is reawakened in the living body.



**Me and Grand-ma. Questioning the values surrounding
death with dignity**

『Please Do Not Resuscitate』

Dir : Leah Finegold / United Kingdom / 23:23 / Non-Fiction / 2025

Barbara is a loving, glamorous grandmother to ten grandchildren. When her granddaughter Leah discovers she plans to end her life before her 86th birthday, she begins interviewing her to understand why. Weeks later, a terminal diagnosis changes everything, leaving Leah questioning her grandmother's long fascination with death and trying to decipher who she really was.

Short films under 5 minutes created by Japanese directors aged 25 and under

[U-25 Project Nominee (Pickup)]



**Exploring the possibilities of the split screen
Featuring a powerful performance by rising actress
Sumire Hanaoka**

『Double Fantasy』

Dir : Tazu Ishikawa / Japan / 4:15 / Drama / 2025

"She" is pointing a gun from the passenger seat of the police car toward the driver's seat. "He" is sitting in the driver's seat of a stolen car after escaping the hospital.

As the clock strikes midnight, she fires the gun, and he speeds off. The two head toward their meeting place...

Presented by Shibuya City and SSFF & ASIA:
A collection of short films exploring the themes of diversity and inclusion

[Shibuya Diversity Program (Pickup)]

Tokyo Online



A comedy produced by Cate Blanchett
The only wish of a 16-year-old girl was to become white.

『11:11』

Dir : Mahnoor Euceph/United States/15:27/ Comedy/2025

When 16-year-old Pakistani-American Noori's wish at 11:11 to be her crush's type goes awry, she's magically transformed into a white, blonde, blue-eyed girl — and must undo the wish before losing herself completely.

Focusing on the perspectives of women filmmakers worldwide
who are championing gender equality

[Women in Cinema Project (Pickup)]

Tokyo Online



A dance of the soul where love and anger resonate in
their own distinct "rhythms."

『That's My Sister』

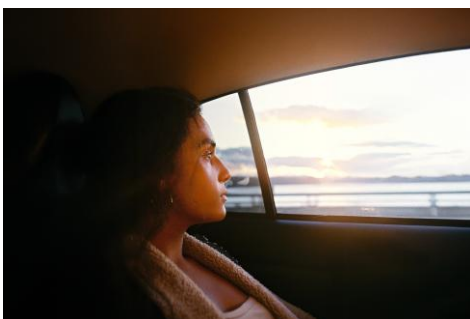
Dir : Zoé Pelchat /Canada/14:35/Comedy/2026

Camille, a teenager with Down syndrome, dreams of dancing in a semi-professional dance troupe. On the day of the audition, her sister Agathe witnesses how the world still stumbles over difference. Love and rage find their own choreography.

A powerful collection of works that captivate with LGBTQ+ lives,
vibrant colors, and fresh perspectives.

Tokyo Online

[Rainbow Program (Pickup)]



The raw beauty of the city, depicted through the
perspective of a newcomer takatāpui (Māori queer)

『Ata Pūao』

Dir : Allie Howell/Aotearoa/13:50/Drama/2025

Amid the nightlife of a new city, a young Māori trans woman reckons with safety, isolation, and the fragile bonds of old friendships outgrown — as the promise of belonging rises just beyond the horizon.

From popular idols to acclaimed actors,
the energy radiating from the Korean creative scene

Tokyo Online

[Focus on Korea Program (Pickup)]



A horror short starring Onew, the leader of SHINee,
the "Prince of K-POP."

『4:44: Time of Fear』

Dir : Jong-gyun Park /South Korea/43:58/Horror/2024

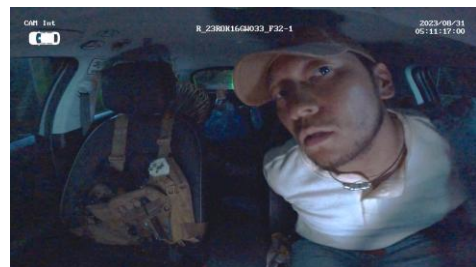
An omnibus horror where supernatural phenomena occur at 4:44. Originally released as an OTT series consisting of eight episodes, each running 4 minutes and 4 seconds, it quickly became a hot topic. Later re-edited into a 44-minute feature film for theatrical release.

Produced by Son Suk-ku of the drama My Liberation Notes
A suspenseful thriller filled with tension, consisting almost
entirely of a one-man performance

『Night Fishing』

Dir : Byoung-gon Moon/South Korea/13:04/ Thriller/2024

A human thriller about a mysterious incident that takes place at an electric vehicle charging station on a dark night.



A film festival staple: fast-paced and high-impact "Very Short" films under 5 minutes

[Very Short Program (Pickup)]



From Kazakhstan: Five minutes depicting the quiet and slow destruction of the Earth beneath our feet.

『Plastic Sun』

Dir : Inkar Maxut /Kazakhstan/2:11/Fantasy/2025

A shackled man crawls in search of water through a dead limbo desert created to redeem his sins.

Online Cinema Market at Creators Platform : LIFE LOG BOX

The online platform "LIFE LOG BOX," which enables the registration, management, and sharing of video content with a focus on short films, is currently hosting the year-round "SHORTSHORTS ONLINE CINEMA MARKET."

"This market is accessible to short film buyers, TV channels, and distribution companies from around the globe, creating tangible business opportunities for cinematic works.

<https://market.shortshorts.org/>



【Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia 2026 Overview】

■ Festival Period :

Monday, May 25th : Opening Ceremony

Tuesday, May 26th to Tuesday, June 9th : Screening at Tokyo

Wednesday, June 10th : Award Ceremony

※Online Venue: Monday, May 25th to Tuesday, June 30th

■ Screening Venues : MoN Takanawa: The Museum of Narratives
(Box1000、Tatami、Park Terrace)

Akasaka Intercity Conference, Euro Live,
WITH HARAJUKU HALL, LIFORK HARAJUKU

※Dates and programs vary by venue

■ Official Website:

<https://www.shortshorts.org/2026/en/index.html>

※Full Lineup Announcement: Scheduled for April 23, 2026.

■ Ticket Sales:

[Advance Tickets]

General: 1,500 yen, University Students/ U29/ Seniors / Persons with Elementary School · Junior High School · High School Students: 1,000
Preschool Children (under elementary school age): Free

[Same-Day Tickets]

General: 1,800yen, University Students /U29 / Seniors / Persons with Disabilities: 1,500 yen
Elementary School · Junior High School · High School Students: 1,200 yen
Preschool Children (under elementary school age): Free

[Passports]

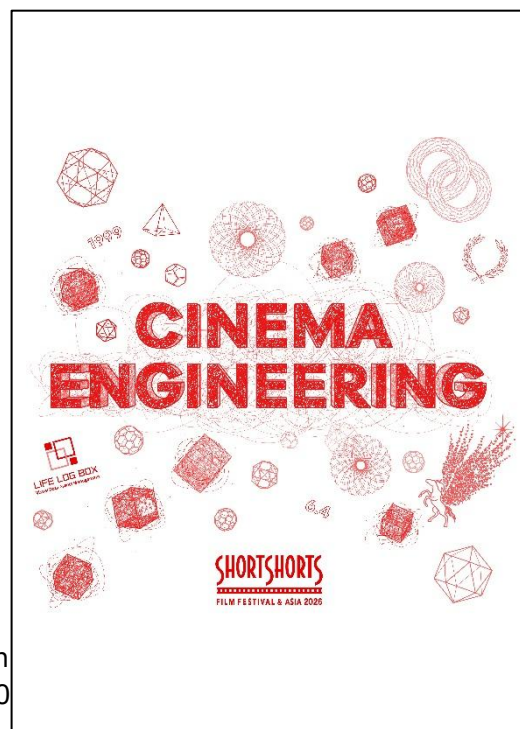
General: 7,000 yen, Students / Seniors / Persons with Disabilities: 5,500 yen

[Online Venue] 2,500 yen (Within Japan) / 15 USD (Outside Japan)

*passport for the Online Venue will be on sale from May 25th.

■ General Inquiry : info@shortshorts.org

■ Host : Committee for Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia



[SSFF & ASIA 2026 Competition · Awards]

[Competition]

●Academy Awards accredited Official Competition

The Official Competition comprises the Live Action (International Category, Asia International Category, Japan Category) ,Non-Fiction Competition and Animation Competition and the best films from each will be eligible for the following year's Academy Award Best Short Film nomination.

●**Cinematic Tokyo Competition** Established in 2016, short films depicting various Tokyo are selected

●**U-25 Project** Established in 2019, for encouraging promising filmmakers to pursue their global career, the festival invites short films of 5 minutes or less, produced by domestic directors up to the age of 25

●**Horror & Suspense Competition supported by CRG** Established in 2025. This category invites public submissions on social media for short films under 3 minutes that emphasize originality, addictiveness, and strangeness, alongside storytelling, a visual sense that resonates in the SNS era, and artistic individuality.

In addition, the **BOOK SHORTS project** called for short stories from Japan. The respective prizes will be announced at SSFF & ASIA 2026.

An awards ceremony will be held on Monday, June 11 to announce the winners of the Live Action (International, Asia International and Japan), Animation and Non-Fiction competitions, with the George Lucas Award (Grand Prix) .

Some of the awards will be announced at Opening Ceremony held on May 28 . An outline of the ceremony will be sent separately to press .



Grand-Prix is selected from winners of the Academy Awards Accredited 5 Competitions: Live Action Competition (International, Asia International, Japan), Non-Fiction Competition and Animation Competition. Each winner will be eligible to the Oscar of the short film category next year.

<Awards & Competition>



<Other Competitions>



※In addition to the competitions, the following awards will be given to the best shorts out of all the submissions.

●●**Tom Yoda Next Frame Award**···**[Newly Established]** This award targets young Japanese creators among the 2026 nominees who are students or have yet to launch their professional careers. It aims to support their film education driven by a global "ambition" and empower their journey toward the next stage of their careers..

●**DCP Award**···**[Newly Established]** Selected through mutual voting among creators, utilizing a proof-of-concept system for a value-circulation community (DAO) targeting past film festival submissions.

●**TAKANAWA GATEWAY CITY AWARD** ··· Awarded to individuals, works, and projects that pioneer the future of visual storytelling and creatively connect Japan with the world.

●**Cyber Agent Vertical Award**···An award presented to works or projects that have demonstrated "high impact and expressive power" in vertical short film content.

●**Save the Earth ! Minister's Award, Ministry of Environment**··· Worldwide environmental issues

●**J-WAVE Sound of Cinema Award**··· Awarded to the film where 'sound' plays a unique and effective role and elected by a jury of J-Wave listeners

●**Shibuya Diversity Award**··· Gender, ethnicity, human rights, diversity themes

●**HOPPY HAPPY AWARD**···「Be HAPPY with HOPPY」Shorts that convey this theme

●**Audience Award**···Audience members will vote to give the award to one winner from the each of the main competition categories listed.

●**Best Actor Award**···Winners will be selected from each of the three official competitions (International, Asia International & Japan Competition).

●**Global Spotlight Award**···Given to the creator or artist of a short film that inspires a broad audience and receives widespread, global attention.

●**Most Viewed Award**···Award for the most viewed film online at the Festival from the competition films screened online from June 1.

●**BRANDED SHORTS**, which invites submissions of branded movies from corporations and organizations, will expand into an expo-style project called 'VISUAL VOICE EXPO by BRANDED SHORTS' in September 2026, building on its 10-year legacy

[Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia]



In 1999, Tetsuya Bessho, an actor and member of the Screen Actors Guild (SAG), founded the American Short Shorts Film Festival. His mission was to introduce "short films"—a genre he first encountered in the United States—to audiences in Japan as a new form of visual entertainment. The festival was renamed Short Shorts Film Festival (SSFF) in 2001 and received official accreditation from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences® in 2004. In the same year, Short Shorts Film Festival Asia (SSFF ASIA) was established in co-organization with the Tokyo Metropolitan Government. Its goal was to promote new visual culture from Asia and nurture emerging young filmmakers. Today, these two festivals are collectively held under the name "SSFF & ASIA". To commemorate the festival's 20th anniversary in 2018, the Grand Prix was renamed the "George Lucas Award" in honor of director George Lucas. In January 2019, the festival marked this milestone with the "Short Shorts Film Festival in Hollywood". Furthermore, the festival's influence has expanded significantly: winners of the four categories in the Live Action Competition (International, Asia International, Japan) and the Non-Fiction Competition since 2019, as well as the Animation Competition since 2022, earn eligibility for nomination at the following year's Academy Awards®. SSFF & ASIA remains dedicated to supporting young creators through the power of short film.

【Official Website】 <https://www.shortshorts.org>

[PRESS INQUIRY]

Committee for Short Shorts Film Festival & Asia : PR Fuyumi Tanaka
press@shortshorts.org

【Stills are available here:】

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/19JmW6ZVg74coTE4im7jN-hISuBYPH71g?usp=sharing>