It’s a Wrap: Columbia Film Festival Winners Announced

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The student-run festival, presented by the Film Division of the School of the Arts, included original short films and screenplay readings. It took place from May 1-7 in New York City and then headed west to Los Angeles June 2-3.

Student filmmaker Joyce Draganosky, whose film Extreme Mom swept many of the festival’s awards May 7, based her work on growing up in a household where her mother raised her while also caring for her elderly grandmother.

“It’s a movie about the circle of life, and a woman stuck in the middle of trying to care for both ends of that spectrum,” Draganosky said. “The situation is such that the child is learning activities and the grandmother is losing activities.”

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Among the leading 2004 festival winners, another big festival winner was Patricia Riggen’s documentary Family Portrait, which received the New Line Cinema Award for Outstanding Achievement in Filmmaking. In this moving and insightful documentary, Richard Fontanelle and Diana Nash—the only surviving members of the family originally photographed in 1968 by Gordon Parks—render their own family portrait as they recount the challenges the family faced. Riggen, Parks and Fontanelle, who now work as a supermarket clerk for Columbia University, recently were featured on NPR’s Tavis Smiley Show.

Riggen spoke about the sadness surrounding the tale of the Fontanelle family, and the purpose of her documentary: “Right now, there are a million black kids that live in extreme poverty in this country. So what I’m hoping is to call some attention to that because what happened [in 1968] is still happening right now.”

While film screenings comprised the majority of the festival, screenplay readings were the focus on May 6, with students reading excerpts from their feature-length scripts. Rachel Vines won the Comedy Central Award for Best Comedy Screenplay for “Miranda Duran.” Jennifer Monn won the Ezri Litvak Award for Distinction in Screenwriting for “Hanged on Stars.”

After the readings, SOA alumnus Sabrina Dhowan, ’02, received the Andrew Sarris Award. Dhowan wrote Monsoon Wedding, one of the top 10 highest-grossing foreign films of all time in the United States and the winner of the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival. At the Los Angeles screenings, SOA alumni Albert Berger, ’03, received the Andrew Sarris Award. Berger is affiliated with Bona Fide Productions, where he has produced critical and box-office successes, including Cold Mountain, Election and King of the Hill.

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