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# Emerging Filmmakers Honored at Emerson Film Fests



**Chiara Hollender's *Women of the Earth*, *Twila* screens at It's All True. The film took home the Excellence in Storytelling Award. Photo/Allison Armijo '24**

Emerson College faculty, students, alumni, family, and friends gathered to celebrate the work Emerson filmmakers at It's All True, the ninth annual Emerson College Documentary Film Festival sponsored by the Department of Visual and Media Arts and School of the Arts.

Held April 5 and 6 in the Bright Family Screening Room, the showcase was hosted by acclaimed filmmaker and documentarian Sonia Kennebeck, whose first feature-length film *National Bird* received a 2018 Emmy-nomination for Outstanding Current Affairs Documentary.

The festival began on April 5 with a showing of Kennebeck's recent work, *Enemies of the State*, about Matt DeHart, a former member of the Anonymous hacktivist collective, a Wikileaks associate, and an Air National Guard intelligence analyst who was prosecuted by the FBI on child pornography charges. The screening was followed by a Q&A with Kennebeck.

The following night featured a screening of nine documentary shorts produced by a mix of undergraduate and graduate students and alumni/staff. Three awards—Excellence in Storytelling, from Women in Film & Video New England/Talamas; The Virgin Unite Award for Social Impact Documentary; and The DocYard Award for Creative Producing —were presented by Kennebeck.

The award for Excellence in Storytelling went to **Chiara Hollender**, current graduate student, for her short *Women of the Earth, Twila*. The film follows forager and educator Twila Cassadore on the San Carlos Apache reservation as she reclaims her tribe's traditional

**Wyatt Cunningham's *Sounds of the City*. Photo/Allison Armijo '24**

land practices by mentoring others and sharing her knowledge and history. The award included a membership to Women in Film & Video New England and a \$300 certificate from Talamus.

The Virgin Unite Award for Social Impact Documentary was presented to undergraduate student **Gaby Gonzalez** for *Women of Providence*, an episodic documentary exploring the struggles and strengths of various empowered women of color from Rhode Island.

Graduate student **MacPherson Christopher** won The DocYard Award for Creative Producing for, for *Grandma and Her Silent Generation*, which explored stories of grief and resilience in the setting of a grandmother's home. Christopher was awarded a \$500 check for future projects. The college maintains a relationship with Virgin Unite in the Virgin Unite Social Impact Films Fund, which assists Emerson students in making documentaries that highlight social issues. The fund awards three to five Emerson students a total of \$10,000 annually.

Participating students included graduate students **Aynsley Floyd** (*The Mountain Dogs*) and **Carlo Ang** and **Xulong Liu** (*Next Trick*), **Thura Myo Min '24** (*Myanmar 2021 Coup*), **Wyatt Cunningham '24** (*Sounds of the City*), **Eoin Varden '23** (*Word on the Street*), and **Pierre Huberson, MFA '17** (*Karukera Blues*) with cinematography by **Hannah Engelson, MFA '16**.

The previous week, the Department of Visual and Media Arts presented the 21st Annual Emerson Film Festival. The night included a screening of ten student films, followed by an awards ceremony, a Q&A with the filmmakers, and a later reception at Democracy Brewing. The students presenting their work included **Wyatt Cunningham '24** (*Take Care of Yourself* and *Sounds of the City*), **Ning Chen'25** (*This Video Will Trans Your Gender*), **Mae Hoffman, MFA '21** (*No Historical Precedent*), **Tong Mao, MFA '20** (*Shimmer Summer*), graduate student **Amber Yang** (*Fly*), **Graysen Winchester '23** (*Prophecy: The Stories We Tell Ourselves*), **Miranda Yung, MFA '21** (*Ever Since We Met*), **Saroush Waheed '23** (*I Am Muzlim*), and **William Rowley '22** with **Zachary Earnest '22** (*The Lost Son*).

The audience award winners went to **Mao** for *Shimmer Summer*, a film about the relationship between Ou and Xu as they attempt to watch a once-in-a-decade solar eclipse, and **Winchester** for *Prophecy: Stories We Tell Ourselves*, a meditation on the life of a filmmaker and how her fate as an artist has affected her perspective of her mother, a “failed” dancer.

The Marcia Robbins Women in Film Awards went to **Mao** and **Hoffman** for *No Historical Precedent*, which explores the life of a woman who refused to be known as a transgender icon.

The program was followed by an announcement of the winner of the Evelyn Horowitz Video Poetry Prize, which tasked students with creating a film based on a contemporary poem. The contest was judged by Cristina Kotz Cornejo, chair of the Department of Visual and Media Arts, and Roy Kamada, chair of the Department of Writing, Literature, and Publishing. The winner of the contest was **MacPherson Christopher** for *Grandma and Her Silent Generation*.

“Mac’s film showed a deep and nuanced visual interpretation of Verandah Porche’s poem, “Filling in Daddy.”” While not a literal representation of the poem, Mac’s creatively inspired film carried the emotional weight and the texture of the poem. The choice of audio design, framing, and camera placement echoed the way the poem invested particular objects with personal significance in mourning the loss of a husband and father,” shared Cornejo, reflecting on Christopher’s film.

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#### CONTACT

120 Boylston Street, Boston, MA 02116  
617-824-8500

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