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REEL ASIAN ANNOUNCES 2015 AWARD WINNERS

Toronto, November 16, 2015 – The 19th annual edition of the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival, presented by National Bank came to a close after 11 days in downtown Toronto, North York and Richmond Hill and announces the award winners of its juried feature and short film prizes including this year's So You Think You Can Pitch? competition.

As Canada's largest pan-Asian film festival, Reel Asian continues to fuel growing appreciation for Asian cinema in Toronto and presented 72 dynamic titles from over 10 regions this year including Afghanistan, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, USA and Canada.

Highlights include:

- Full house for Opening Gala **DRIVING WITH SELVI** with Canadian director Elisa Paloschi and documentary subject Selvi in attendance
- Sold-out screening of the North American Premiere of Centrepiece Gala and Taiwanese hit **OUR TIMES** with first-time director and veteran TV producer Frankie Chen in attendance
- International Premiere of the festival's first Tamil screening of **KIRUMI**, from first feature filmmaker Anucharan Murugaiyan
- A return to the stunning Aga Khan Museum featuring award-winning **MINA WALKING**, a feature from Afghan-Canadian filmmaker Yosef Baraki
- Standing ovation at Toronto Closing Gala **SEOUL SEARCHING** with Canadian-born director Benson Lee and actress Rosalina Leigh in attendance
- International guests including director LEE Won-Suk (**THE ROYAL TAILOR, South Korea**), director Anucharan Murugaiyan (**KIRUMI, India**), director Philip Yung (**PORT OF CALL, Hong Kong**), actress Susan Shaw (**FULL STRIKE, Hong Kong)**, and director Lau Ho Leung (**TWO THUMBS UP, Hong Kong**).

The annual **SO YOU THINK YOU CAN PITCH? LIVE COMPETITION** featured 7 teams competing for cash and industry prizes in front of a live audience. As Reel Asian becomes the hub for Asian filmmakers to make connections and exchange ideas, the festival will continue to provide essential industry opportunities both at the festival and year-round.

Menkes Developments returns for the second year in a row to sponsor the Menkes Audience Award. "This festival showcases the best in Asian cinema and the award itself is a direct result of audience participation and feedback, which means a lot to not only the winning film but to all who submitted films for the festival," says Jared Menkes, Vice President, High-Rise Residential at Menkes Developments. "We look forward to the continued success of all the filmmakers in this year's festival."

This year's Menkes Audience Choice Award goes to **MINA WALKING** by Yosef Baraki.

2015 Reel Asian Award Winners:

Menkes Audience Award
MINA WALKING (Director Yosef Baraki, Canada/Afghanistan 2015)
All feature films at the festival are eligible for this prize. The favourite feature film is selected by the audience and includes a $2,000 cash prize.

CHCH Best Canadian Film or Video Award:
SEOUL SEARCHING (Director Benson Lee, Korea/USA 2015)
All Canadian works are eligible for this prize. $500 cash prize
Jury statement: We found this film to be truly exemplary of the experiences faced by those growing up with two different cultures, with two different worlds that can sometimes clash within, but told with both compassion and humour.

Fasken Martineau Best Feature Film or Video Award:
MINA WALKING (Director Yosef Baraki, Afghanistan/Canada 2015)
All feature films are eligible for this prize. $2,000 cash prize
Jury statement: Not only did Baraki manage to craft an extremely compelling story, he shot a wholly immersive film in Kabul, Afghanistan – a huge accomplishment. Anchored by an extremely strong performance from Farzana Nawabi, this film leaves such an impression that it stays with you long after viewing.

National Bank Best First Feature Film Award:
TWO THUMBS UP (Director Lau Ho-Leung, Hong Kong 2015)
All first feature films are eligible for this prize. $500 cash prize
Jury statement: This film presents viewer with a magical and almost surreal experience, with off kilter performances with some of Hong Kong's leading actors. We see great potential in Ho-Leung's directing and look forward to his future films.

***NEW AWARD* Truth To Power Documentary Award:**
DRIVING WITH SELVI (Director Elisa Paloschi, Canada 2015)
All feature-length documentary films are eligible for this prize. $750 cash prize
Jury statement: From the moment she appears on the screen, we are charmed by the radiance of her smile and the sweetness of her laugh. She asks us why we like her, and how could we not? Robbed of her childhood through marriage, abuse and neglect, our protagonist nevertheless exudes an unfailing innocence, optimism and generosity of spirit. Shot over the course of 10 years, we know that the intimacy and depth we witness on the screen, is a reflection of the real relationship and dedication between the filmmaker and her subject. Like a friend, we share in the joy of seeing her grow and flourish. As we probe into the trauma of her past, we are initially met with a silence, so much more powerful than words. And when the horror is finally revealed to us, when our hearts are broken and angered, we are shown that hope and love prevails. Like the protagonist, this film makes us feel both tearful and happy. More importantly, it reminds us of what a courageous and revolutionary act it remains, for a woman to live by her convictions.

Honourable Feature Mention: **SITI** (Director Eddie Cahyono, Indonesia 2014)

Animasian Award:
THIS HOME IS NOT EMPTY (Director Carol Nguyen, Canada 2015)
All animated films and videos are eligible for this prize. $500 cash prize
Jury statement: Arresting in its in a palette devoid of colour, This Home is Not Empty is infused with our fears, our perceptions and our notion of home. As our own history is coloured by the translation of our memories, so we are held captive by this rich piece of storytelling that unfurls its mystery with each captivating frame.

Air Canada Best Short Film or Video Award:
All short films and videos are eligible for this prize. Opportunity to broadcast on Air Canada's international in-flight entertainment movie channel in May 2016.
Jury statement: The final films selected for the Air Canada award were all quite varied with regard to the themes and approach, however, each one of these films captivated our hearts and took us on a journey that we hadn't anticipated. Some of them made us laugh, others made us cry, but the talent and craft of the filmmaking teams behind them, was evident in every one.

The winners are:

SUMO ROAD THE MUSICAL (director Ken Ochiai, Japan 2015)
SUN (director Eui Yong Zong, Canada 2015)
THE LOBSTER KID (director Joseph Chen-Chieh Hsu, Taiwan 2015)
THREE BROTHERS (director Aleem Khan, United Kingdom 2014)
VISHAL (director Sumit Judge, Canada 2015)
NU-LIFE (director Lynn Kim, USA 2015)

WIFT-T Award:
NAYAN AND THE EVIL EYE (Director Shaleen Sangha, Canada 2014)
All films made by female GTA-based artists are eligible for this prize.
$1,200 programming pass and one-year membership from WIFT-T
Jury statement: This film is funny, beguiling and subversive. It blends West Asian traditions, old testament style cautionary tales and the wonderful gruesome horror of a child's imagination.

Honourable Shorts Mention: **AGOS: THE MANILA DREAM** (Director Lyka Gonzalez, Philippines 2015)

Independent juries comprised of distinguished members of the media arts community selected this year's award winners. The Features jury included:

- James Heron (Executive Director, Japanese Canadian Cultural Centre)
- Sidney Chiu (Producer)
- Nicole Mendes (CBC Executive)

The Documentary jury included:

- Karla Bobadilla (Board member, WorkInCulture)
- Immanuel Lanzaderas (Lawyer, Legal Aid Ontario)

- Victoria Shen (Board member, Federation of Asian Canadian Lawyers)

The Shorts jury included:
- Grace Lynn Kung (Actress)
- Elisha Lim (Filmmaker)
- Lea Marin (Producer, National Film Board)

***So You Think You Can Pitch?* Awards**

This year's 10th annual Pitch Competition was hosted by local artist Keith Cole. A live audience watched 7 teams compete for more than $35,000 in cash and services. The winners were chosen by a panel of jurors including:
- Michael Fukushima (Executive Producer, National Film Board)
- Albert Shin (Filmmaker)
- Lisa Valencia-Svensson (Producer, Storyline Entertainment)

Charles Street Video and Reel Asian Pitch Award – Established Filmmaker Category:
Nicole Chung, **SWITCH**
Production package (equivalent to $18,000 at industry rental rates), post-production support, $2000 cash and ACTRA acting support.

Charles Street Video and Reel Asian Pitch Award – Emerging Filmmaker Category:
Philip Leung, **THE SUITCASE**
Production package (equivalent to $10,000 at industry rental rates), post-production support, $2,000 cash and ACTRA acting support.

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