

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE APRIL 10, 2026

A HOLLYWOOD SALON FOR THE DIGITAL AGE: AI INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL REVEALS THE HUMAN HEART BEHIND THE MACHINE

HOLLYWOOD, CA — On Wednesday night, filmmakers from around the world gathered — some at candlelit tables, others on Zoom at 3 AM from the other side of the world — to screen films about grief, trauma, blindness, war, addiction, corporate dehumanization, and the quiet courage of survival. **Every one of those films was made with artificial intelligence. And every one of them was unmistakably, deeply human.**

On April 8th, the AI International Film Festival and AI Music Video Festival transformed D.W. Griffith's historic El Cid property into an exclusive, Golden Globes-style VIP Salon. **Trading traditional theater rows for upscale table seating, the event brought international filmmakers, tech innovators, and Hollywood veterans together for twelve films from around the world.**

If the March 1 festival at the Promenade Playhouse signaled momentum, the April 8 edition at El Cid made something larger visible: **AI cinema is beginning to generate not just films, but stars, collaborations, and leaders.** Around the room, creators were not only being screened, but being recognized. Filmmakers who only recently met each other at a previous festival gave progress reports on new collaborations.

Six world premieres were celebrated with live, unscripted Q&A sessions connecting creators from South Korea to Colombia to Thailand with the Hollywood audience. The festival proved that **the next great wave of cinema is not defined by the software, but by the artists** wielding it.

The Gala Awards evening recognized leading AI filmmakers with red-carpet interviews, drinks and tapas, audience voting, a formal awards ceremony, and an afterparty on the venue's patio.

Humanity Over Code

Far from being a sterile showcase of technical demos, the festival's most striking quality was its emotional depth. The selected works tackled complex humanitarian subjects, proving that generative tools are unlocking new avenues for deeply personal storytelling.

"What I love about a lot of the AI films... is the fact that it shows how people are feeling and thinking again," observed **Drew Bird**, the legendary Hollywood and Las Vegas costume designer a.k.a. 'the

Galactic Queen'. "That there is humanity out there, which is a great message for the world to know. **These kinds of films tie us together as human beings"**

The Centerpiece of the LA Creator Scene

The success of the new VIP Salon format solidified the festival's reputation as an essential platform for the digital renaissance. "I'm super happy that this festival's in town," said Jonathan Perry, an award-winning filmmaker and rising force in the AI community, who stopped by together with fellow winner Michael Eng to attend the gala in person before driving together through the night to San Francisco to compete at the Soulscape AI Film Summit. **"It's one of the centerpieces for LA as far as the AI scene goes. This is really the best of the best that we have right now."**

The gratitude was equally palpable from the international creators: **Swiss** filmmaker **Marc Devaud**, a past festival winner speaking from **Thailand**, noted that his live-action AI future-themed film **"Thaidi"** — world premiered at the festival three years ago — has since been placed on Amazon Prime. "Coming to see you in Park City was so great for us," Devaud told the audience. "I'm so happy to still be in touch with you." He is now producing a full-length AI feature film, **"The Pilot."**

Colombian filmmaker **Guillermo Trujillo**, whose **Eclipse** tied Audience Choice for **Best Film Overall**, thanked the festival "for creating this space and giving filmmakers the opportunity to share the ideas that lie in our minds."

Trujillo was one of **16 international filmmakers who participated live via Zoom** on the big screen, joining an in-person audience of filmmakers, industry professionals, and creatives at what multiple attendees described as unlike anything they had experienced before.

A Global Slate with a Human Center

The April selections moved across countries, genres, and tones, but the strongest works were united by a refusal to let AI flatten emotion. Instead, the best films used the new tools to sharpen feeling, memory, and moral stakes.

The films, **selected out of 150 submissions from 27 countries**, carried a striking humanitarian thread, unplanned but unmistakable.

The evening opened with **"WCNSF"** by **Antonio Cortés of Spain**, a **world premiere** depicting post-war devastation through the eyes of a child — performed entirely in Arabic, submitted months before the latest escalation in the Middle East. It won the **Jury Award for Best AI Film and the Audience Choice Award for Best Message**.

Ashlee Matthews, joining from the **United States**, described her bilingual film "*I'll Be a Bird (Seré un ave)*" as something that emerged from a need to process loss. "I needed to express some of the grief I've been feeling for a long time," Matthews said. "Maybe the collective grief a lot of us are feeling. It came out through the story of an old woman grieving the passing of her husband in a South Texas town." The film's refined visual language earned the **Jury Award for Best Art Direction**.

From **Belgium**, at 3 AM local time, **Ronny Nollet** presented "*ALYS1NE — 40 Jours*," a French-language exploration of a young woman trapped in the psychological aftermath of abuse. "It's about being trapped inside your own mind," Nollet explained. "A psychological maze you've constructed as a means to cope with trauma. You have to survive those traumas to get out." The film received the **Jury Award for Best International Short**.

Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre, a university professor and animator from Montreal **Canada**, screened "*The Pornographer (La Pornographie)*," a collaboration with Milla Cummings that uses AI tools animating innocent videos of nature to describe the sensual experience of women. "There are so many stereotypes and biases when you make films with AI," Saint-Pierre said. "I think it's a very feminist approach to AI filmmaking. We tried to really put some noise in the machine." It won **Best Experimental**.

The program also included **Eddie Tyler Wong's** "*The Lion Amongst Us*" from **Singapore** — a three-minute world premiere using a nature-documentary framework to deliver a parable about superintelligence — and **Zavvo Nicolosi's** "*But I Was Different*" from Italy, a Japanese-language portrait of a 1960s counterculture band whose leader hijacked a plane and was forced into exile in North Korea, that won both **Best Documentary** jury award and **Most Fun** from the Audience.

A Worldwide Conversation at Every Hour

Festival founder Bert Holland noted that **cross-cultural filmmaking has become a common characteristic among the AI festival's submissions**. "One of our earlier selections was made by a Brazilian living in Australia, filmed in Italian, based on a Spanish phrase," Holland said. "This seems to be something AI filmmakers love doing — going deep into cultures that are not necessarily their own. These tools don't just lower the barrier to production. They lower the barrier to empathy."

The festival's signature format — **screening each film individually, then immediately opening conversation with the filmmaker** — took on additional dimension with participants spanning time zones from South Korea (daytime) to Belgium and the Netherlands (3 AM).

Yebeen Seo, joining from **South Korea**, premiered "*Dream Guardian*," a music video about a one-armed dream delivery worker who sacrifices his own advancement to protect a child suffering

from bullying and abuse. "This is a story about empathy and solidarity between two wounded souls," Seo said. The film won **Best Storytelling**.

Michael Hess, a **German** filmmaker based in New York, screened "**Clock Out — F The System**," a gritty, VHS-aesthetic rap video about a Japanese office worker being destroyed by corporate overwork — inspired by the real phenomenon of "*karoshi*", death from overwork. "AI helps to bring these concepts to life," Hess said, "but it's just having an interest in people and humans and cultures. I think that's what helps in the first place." It won **Best Music Video from both the Jury and the Audience**.

An audience member observed: "**This is the first time I've seen AI imagery put together with real story**. The attention to the audio and the narratives — they made the difference in judging these as films, (they are) not just AI films."

Dave Uchansky, a filmmaker and past festival winner, addressed the room directly: "You weave together **a beautiful tapestry of films**, and you've got people joining from all around the world. You recognize something that's going to be a part of filmmaking, whether we like it or not. What you do is wonderful."

A Venue Steeped in Cinema History

The move to El Cid marked a new chapter for the festivals, which have now held 20 events since launching in 2021. **Originally created by D.W. Griffith in 1906**, the Sunset Boulevard property has been connected over the decades to figures including Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Bette Davis, Vincent Price, Marlon Brando, and even Carol Burnett.

"**We aren't just screening films. We are hosting the conversations that will shape the next century of cinema — on a property where cinema itself was born.**" said Holland. "When you strip away the massive studio budgets and put these powerful new tools into the hands of passionate veteran storytellers, the result is pure, uncompromised art."

AI International Film Festival: April 2026 Award Winners

(see aifilmfest.org)

• **Best Documentary (Jury), Most Fun (Audience), Best Film Overall (tie) — BUT I WAS DIFFERENT** - だけとおれはちが (Italy, 5 min) — Directed by **Zavvo Nicolosi**. A vivid plunge into the spirit, performance, and contradictions of a Japanese counterculture band whose leader hijacks a plane and exiles to North Korea in the 1960s, made by an Italian filmmaker reaching across time and culture.

- **Best AI Animation Short (Jury), Best Use of AI (Audience), Best Film Overall (tie) — *Eclipse* (Colombia, 4 min)** — Directed by **Guillermo Jose Trujillo**. **World Premiere**. Inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's lifelong fear of blindness, a poetic first AI film from a Colombian director that swept the evening's top honors.
- **Best AI Film (Jury), Best Message (Audience) — *WCNSF* (Spain, 8 min)** — Directed by **Antonio Cortés**. **World Premiere**. A child's-eye view of post-war devastation, performed in *Arabic* — a quietly devastating portrait of innocence amid ruin.
- **Best AI Short (Jury), Most Surprising (Audience) — *D'ombre et de lumière* (France, 9 min)** — Directed by **Fabien Loïacono**. **US Premiere**. A dark, atmospheric descent into one man's suffering — the evening's most viscerally unsettling work.
- **Best Superintelligence (Jury) — *The Lion Amongst Us* (Singapore, 3 min)** — Directed by **Eddie Tyler Wong**. **World Premiere**. A nature-documentary parable in which a sentient lion's attempt to integrate with a pride becomes a cautionary tale about coexistence with Superintelligence.
- **Best Art Direction (Jury) — *I'll Be a Bird (Seré un ave)* (US, 7 min)** — Directed by **Ashlee Matthews**. **World Festival Premiere**. A lyrical meditation on grief and the healing presence of nature, told through the story of a woman mourning in a South Texas town.
- **Best International Short (Jury) — *ALYS1NE – 40 Jours* (Belgium, 5 min)** — Directed by **Ronny Nollet**. **World Festival Premiere**. A French-language psychological survival portrait about addiction, isolation, dissociation, and the fragile will to keep going on the part of a young woman trapped in the aftermath of sex abuse and trauma — a maze of the mind with no easy exit.
- **Best Experimental (Jury) — *The Pornographer (La Pornographie)* (Canada, 4 min)** — Directed by **Milla Cummings** and **Marie-Josée Saint-Pierre**. A feminist exploration of female sexuality through AI videos of innocent natural processes, deliberately confronting the biases and stereotypes embedded in image generation tools.

AI International Music Video Festival: April 2026 Award Winners (see aimusicvideofest.org)

- **Best Music Video (Jury), Best Music Video (Audience) — *Clock Out – F The System* (US, 3 min)** — Directed by **Michael Hess**. **World Festival Premiere**. A German filmmaker in New York channels the Japanese phenomenon of “*karoshi*” — death from overwork — through a gritty, VHS-era rap aesthetic. The audience's overwhelming favorite.

- **Best Storytelling (Jury)** — *Dream Guardian* (South Korea, 4 min) — Directed by **Yebeen Seo**. **World Premiere**. A one-armed dream delivery worker sacrifices everything to protect a boy suffering from abuse and bullying — a story of empathy between two wounded souls, with original AI-generated music and filmmaker-written lyrics.
- **Best AI-Themed Music Video (Jury)** — *One Vow, Two Heartbeats* (South Korea, 4 min) — Directed by **Hyesun Lee**. **World Premiere**. Conjoined sisters negotiate with an omniscient AI about their future — a haunting exploration of autonomy, connection, and what we're willing to surrender to intelligence beyond our own.
- **Best AI-Human Collab (Jury)** — *Funky Time* (US, 3 min) — Directed by **Conni St. Pierre** with music and pastels by **Jeff Hudson**. **World Festival Premiere**. Hand-drawn pastels by the musician, animated through AI and intercut with nature imagery — a playful, layered, but painful commentary on the truly “funky” times we live in.

About the AI International Film and Music Video Festivals

Founded in 2021 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, the AI International Film Festival and AI International Music Video Festival are among the world's longest-running showcases dedicated to AI-related cinema. Accepting films whether live-action, hybrid, AI generated, or merely utilizing AI tools, the festivals operate on a monthly cycle, selecting from an international pool of submissions and presenting works in an intimate, conversation-driven format that prioritizes films from passionate storytellers. The April 2026 gala marked the festivals' 20th event and their first at the historic El Cid in Hollywood.

The next festivals are tentatively scheduled for May 6th 2026 at El Cid. Submissions are open at filmfreeway.com/aiinternationalfilmfestival and filmfreeway.com/aimusicvideofestival. Tickets will be available at tickets.aifilmfest.org.

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AI International Film Festival — a California **501(c)(3)** nonprofit

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