

GRIERSON

The British Documentary Awards



The Griersons: Winners of the 2009 British Documentary Awards are announced

London, Tuesday 3rd November: Tonight, at the BFI South Bank, the great and the good of the documentary world gathered to celebrate the 2009 British Documentary Awards - fondly known as The Griersons. Founded in 1972, the Griersons are the ultimate accolade for documentary filmmakers. Hosted by Andrew Marr, ten awards were presented in front of a packed, star-studded audience.

The doyenne of documentary making, **Norma Percy**, led the evening's events as she received the Trust's highest accolade, The Trustee's Award, in recognition of her outstanding achievement and contribution to the art of documentary filmmaking during a career spanning more than 30 years. She then went on to win the 2009 Envy Best Documentary Series prize - along with her Brook Lapping colleagues **Dai Richards**, **Delphine Jaudeau** and **Paul Mitchell** - for *Iran and the West*. The judges described the series saying: "With its extraordinary access, *Iran and the West* told a gripping story with a consistent and clear narrative, often revealing new material and throwing a timely light on events today. An important historical record, which never faltered."

Considered by the judges to be one of the toughest categories of the year, **Havana Marking** took the Shell International Best Documentary on a Contemporary Issue for *Afghan Star* (Roast Beef Productions - More 4) for its fascinating insight into Afghan society. Chairman of the judging panel, Murray Weston said: "By following the participants in a television talent show, the documentary confronts many cultural issues and exposes a viewing public, of diverse ethnic backgrounds, to a democratic process with all sorts of challenges. This was an excellent idea which has resulted in a revealing film full of tension that could not have been the easiest project to complete. The filmmakers should be admired for following the individual stories and facing the risks in the process."

Flying the flag for the art world, the Best Arts Documentary went to **Mandy Chang** for *The Mona Lisa Curse* (Oxford Film and Television for Channel 4). Jury Chairman Emma Hindley commended the film for being "beautifully made and consistently engaging, with a strong and opinionated thesis at its heart, it successfully traced a complex intellectual argument via a very personal journey".

In a year dominated by films and explorations of the life and work of Charles Darwin, the 2009 Science Award was presented to Sacha Mirzoeff for *Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life* (BBC Natural History Unit/Open University for BBC One). The judges praised the series for being superbly made, with good science, and well told saying: "It tells an engaging story, using great graphics with a strong personal involvement."

As well as celebrating the achievements of some of the world's most illustrious documentary makers, the Grierson Trust also recognises new emerging talent in the genre with the Best Newcomer Award. This year the prize went to **Elizabeth Stopford** for her Storyville film: *I'm Not Dead Yet* (Passion Pictures for BBC Four). The judges unanimously agreed that this was the one

outstanding documentary in this category. “An epic and compelling film about a family's dark and devastating secrets. Elegantly crafted on every level, the director skillfully leads viewers through the twists and turns of a complex and haunting story that unfolds right in front of our eyes.” Summing up, the judges said: “This film would be an achievement for any director but from a newcomer it really is exemplary.”

In the History Today Best Historical Documentary category **John Dower** came out fighting with his ***Thriller In Manila*** film about boxing greats Joe Frasier and Mohammed Ali (Darlow Smithson Productions for Channel 4). “A compelling and beautifully shot story, *Thriller in Manila* is an insight into the bitter enmity between two great boxing rivals against a backdrop of black power politics,” the judging panel said.

The Most Entertaining Documentary award was won by **Andy Bichibaum** and **Mike Bonnano** for ***The Yes Men: Fix the World*** (Renegade Pictures (UK) Ltd/Arte/Article Z/Channel 4 Britdoc Foundation). Chairman of the judging panel Roger Mills said: “Here were two brave individuals taking on Big Business in an inventive and riveting way. There was high comedy here, but with a serious purpose. For the film was exposing its audience to the danger of Greed running the world.”

As ever there was stiff competition on the Best Drama Documentary category with **Alex Holmes** and **Jim O’Hanlon** winning the plaudits for their BBC Two film about Saddam Hussein ***House of Saddam*** (BBC Productions/HBO). The judges commended the film for being: “A subject that was truly difficult to pull off. It was emotionally dramatic, bravely and well cast, and strongly characterised. It was able to say and show things that could not have been done in a documentary form.”

Finally, the UK Film Council Best Cinema Documentary was presented to **Anders Østergaard** for his compelling film about Burma – ***Burma VJ*** (Magic Hour Films). Presented with a diverse shortlist for the award, Chairman of the judging panel Rick Senat said: “We found this to be an exceptional and important work, combining outstanding journalism with subtle, formal artistry. It is a film of admirable political engagement that is also a compelling piece of storytelling, managing to capture the rage, the level-headed generosity, the courage and the democratic aspirations of Burma's hard-pressed citizenry.”

Summing up this year’s awards, Chairman of The Grierson Trust, Murray Weston, said: “Competition for the Grierson Awards has been especially fierce this year with outstanding quality on show and the quantity of productions entered has increased significantly on 2008. Documentary production may therefore *seem* to be in rude health. But looking forward, there are continuing challenges for filmmakers trying to make sense of the new economics of production and distribution as audiences fragment and online delivery becomes increasingly powerful. Documentary makers have always been resourceful, and coping with change has been part of their repertoire since Grierson’s time. There is therefore a quiet confidence in this community, and John Grierson would be proud to know that his spirit continues to influence this important sector of the film business in the UK.”

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Notes to Editors:

The Grierson Awards commemorate the work of pioneering Scottish film maker John Grierson (1898 – 1972), famous for making *Drifters* and his association with *Night Mail* – the man widely regarded as the father of the documentary. Established in 1972, the Griersons annually celebrate

documentaries that have made a significant contribution to the form. The list of past winners – which includes luminaries such as Olivia Lichtenstein, Nick Broomfield and Pawel Pawlikowski - is testament to the high standard of work which is celebrated through these awards. They are the ultimate UK prizes for documentary film makers.

The winners in full:

Envy Best Documentary Series: *Iran and the West* - Norma Percy, Dai Richards, Delphine Jaudeau, Paul Mitchell for Brook Lapping Productions (BBC Two)

Shell International Best Documentary on a Contemporary Issue: *Afghan Star* - Havana Marking for (Roast Beef Productions - More 4)

History Today Best Historical Documentary (Presented by Paul Lay, Editor of *History Today*):
Thriller in Manila - John Dower for Darlow Smithson Productions (More 4)

UK Film Council Best Cinema Documentary: *Burma VJ* - Anders Østergaard for Magic Hour Films

Most Entertaining Documentary: *The Yes Men: Fix the World* - Andy Bichibaum, Mike Bonnano for Renegade Pictures (UK) Ltd/Arte/Article Z/Channel 4 Britdoc Foundation

Best Drama Documentary: *House of Saddam* - Alex Holmes, Jim O'Hanlon for BBC Productions/HBO (BBC Two)

Best Arts Documentary: *The Mona Lisa Curse* - Mandy Chang for Oxford Film and Television (Channel 4)

Best Newcomer: Elizabeth Stopford for Storyville: *I'm Not Dead Yet* - Passion Pictures (BBC Four)

Best Science Documentary: *Charles Darwin and the Tree of Life* - Sacha Mirzeoff for BBC Natural History Unit/Open University (BBC One)

Trustees' Award: *Norma Percy*