

Hot Docs honours Jennifer Holness with Don Haig Award

The annual award recognizing a Canadian documentary filmmaker will be presented at the Hot Docs Awards ceremony on May 1.

BY BARRY WALSH

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Hot Docs will honour producer, director and Black Screen Office founder Jennifer Holness with this year's Don Haig Award.

The president of Toronto-headquartered Hungry Eyes Media has two films in this year's Hot Docs slate. She served as an executive producer for *Black Zombie*, helmed by Maya Annik Bedward, and is co-director along with Sidney Fussell of *#WhileBlack*.

Holness has made her mark on domestic and international cinema through both documentary and narrative features. Her doc work has included *Subjects of Desire*, which premiered at SXSW and ultimately was sold to Starz; and *Stateless*, which she coproduced, directed by Michèle Stephenson (*American Promise*) for PBS and the National Film Board, which made its debut at Tribeca and Hot Docs in 2020.

Her television documentary work has included *BLK: An Origin Story*, a documentary series produced for History in Canada that she co-created and produced, and which won five Canadian Screen Awards; and *Badge of Pride* for CBC and PBS, among other projects.

On the narrative front, Holness recently produced R.T. Thorne's thriller *40 Acres*, which leads the **film nominees** for this year's Canadian Screen Awards with 10 nominations, including for best motion picture, and has seen considerable success on the streaming front via Hulu and Netflix.

The Don Haig Award, presented annually at the Toronto documentary festival and conference, recognizes creative vision and entrepreneurship as seen via the recipient's body of work, and also honours the recipient's service as a mentor of emerging Canadian filmmakers. Holness will be presented with a \$5,000 cash prize, courtesy of the Don Haig Foundation, during the Hot Docs Awards presentation on May 1.

Last year's recipient was producer **Cornelia Principe** (*Shamed, To Kill a Tiger, Russians at War*).

"Documentary filmmakers are scrappy and relentless," said Holness in a statement. "We make work in a tough business that is driven by an independent spirit, artistic vision, integrity, passion and fortitude. These are only a few of the adjectives I thought of when I reflected on Don Haig's legacy. Then when you consider the incredible list of previous award recipients you get a small inkling of how humbled I am to be added to this group."

The 2026 Hot Docs festival is currently underway until May 3.

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Photo by Samuel Engelking

