



NEWS RELEASE

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STUDENT ACADEMY AWARDS BESTOW TOP PRIZE IN NARRATIVE FILMMAKING TO AFI CONSERVATORY ALUMNUS JULIAN HIGGINS FOR HIS SHORT FILM, THIEF

Ed Zwick Presents Award to Higgins at Ceremony

LOS ANGELES, CA, June 14, 2011 – AFI Class of 2010 directing alumnus Julian Higgins has been awarded the top prize in narrative filmmaking at the 38th Annual Student Academy Awards for his thesis film, *THIEF*. Directed and co-written by Higgins, the film centers on a 12-year old Iraqi boy who befriends a young Saddam Hussein in 1959, and then comes face-to-face with him 40 years later after Hussein has fallen from power.

“This Student Academy Award is the ultimate validation of the hands-on, collaborative process that is a cornerstone of the two-year AFI Conservatory program,” said Higgins. “We all learned so much from each other, and the incredible AFI faculty and staff were invaluable to the process.”

Higgins joins a select group of other AFI Conservatory graduates who have been awarded the Gold Medal honor, including Alonso D. Mayo for *WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON* in 2003 and Marni Banack and JB Sugar for *JOHN* in 1999.

During the ceremony at the Academy’s Samuel Goldwyn Theater, Higgins received his award from Ed Zwick (*BLOOD DIAMOND*, *GLORY*), also a graduate of the AFI Conservatory (Directing, 1975). In his introductory remarks, Zwick talked about how his time at AFI brought him together with other talented filmmakers who he continues to work with today, including his long-time production partner, Marshall Herskovitz (*THE LAST SAMURAI*, *TRAFFIC*, *THIRTYSOMETHING*), as well as producer Pieter Jan Brugge (*THE INSIDER*, *DEFIANCE*) and Steven Fierberg (*LOVE AND OTHER DRUGS*, *ENTOURAGE*).

THIEF, which also recently won top honors at the 32nd College Television Awards, was directed by Julian Higgins, written by Julian Higgins and Matthew Wieland, produced by West Lee McDowell, photographed by Andrew Wheeler, edited by Justin LaForge, with production design by Erika Walters. Additional information about *THIEF* is available at endjen.com/thiefthefilm.

The Student Academy Awards were established in 1972 to support and encourage excellence in filmmaking at the collegiate level. Past Student Academy Award winners have gone on to receive 43 Oscar nominations and have won or shared eight awards. Past Student Academy Award winners include Spike Lee, John Lasseter and Robert Zemeckis.

About the American Film Institute

AFI is America’s promise to preserve the history of the motion picture, to honor the artists and their work and to educate the next generation of storytellers. AFI provides leadership in film, television and digital media and is dedicated to initiatives that engage the past, the present and the future of the moving image arts.

AFI preserves the legacy of America's film heritage through the **AFI Catalog of Feature Films**, an authoritative record of American films from 1893 to the present, and the **AFI Archive**, which contains rare footage from across the history of the moving image.

AFI honors the artists and their work through a variety of annual programs and special events, including the **AFI Life Achievement Award** and **AFI Awards**. For 39 years, the **AFI Life Achievement Award** has remained the highest honor for a career in film while **AFI Awards**, the Institute's almanac for the 21st century, honors the most outstanding motion pictures and television programs of the year. **AFI's 100 Years... 100 Movies** television events and movie reference lists, as well as **AFI Night at the Movies**, have introduced and reintroduced classic American movies to millions of film lovers. And as the largest nonprofit exhibitor in the United States, AFI offers film enthusiasts a variety of events throughout the year, including **AFI Fest presented by Audi**, the longest running international film festival in Los Angeles; **AFI-Discovery Channel Silverdocs**, the largest documentary festival in the US; and year-round programming at the **AFI Silver Theatre** in the Washington, DC area.

AFI educates the next generation of storytellers at its world-renowned **AFI Conservatory**, offering a two-year Master of Fine Arts degree in six filmmaking disciplines: Cinematography, Directing, Editing, Producing, Production Design and Screenwriting. AFI also explores new digital technologies through special workshops.

Additional information about AFI is available at AFI.com.

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