JULY
2026

THE 14TH INTERNATIONAL CELLPHILM FESTIVAL

https://internationalcellphilmfestival.com/



FUTURES NOW

McGill

Participatory Cultures Lab

TransfoRM

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 14th McGill International Cellphilm Festival screening wouldn't have been possible without the hands-on support of various members at the Participatory Cultures Lab. We would like to firstly express gratitude to Emilia Vera Romero for organizing cellphilm workshops, guiding us through the organization of the festival, and coordinating the ICF screening. This would not have been possible without you. We'd also like to thank members of the PCL for ensuring a smooth festival screening. Thank you Gabriella Gratton for monitoring and translating the chat content, Leann Brown for email monitoring, and Rosa Valentina Costilla Prieto for admitting guests.

We are additionally grateful to Maude Dupuis, Twisha Singh, Tianna Kloepfer, and Samuel Montengero Roa for their behind-the-scenes technical support

We would like to extend gratitude to this year's judges—Candace Amarante, Sasha Utkina, and Brett Pardy—for carefully watching and reflecting on every cellphilm. We'd also like to give thanks to our keynote speaker, Dr Emma Harden Wolfson, for her thoughtful speech and presentation, asking guests to reflect on what 'Futures Now' means to them. We would like to give a big thank you to everyone who participated in the 14th McGill International Annual Cellphilm Festival: thank you to Prudence Caldairou-Bessette and Carolina Cambre for their help in facilitating cellphilm workshops, and thank you to all who created an amazing cellphilm, helped spread the word about our festival, or supported us by attending our online festival.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. Claudia Mitchell for all the years of work she has devoted to expanding the use of visual participatory research methodologies such as cellphilm. This festival wouldn't have been possible without her.

Authors: Ingara Maidou and Jenna Mackenzie

Ingara Maidou is a summer intern at the Participatory Cultures Lab and a final-year McGill student pursuing a Joint Honours degree in Political Science and Gender, Sexuality, Feminist, and Social Justice studies. She is interested in feminist praxis, post-colonial theory, and African history.

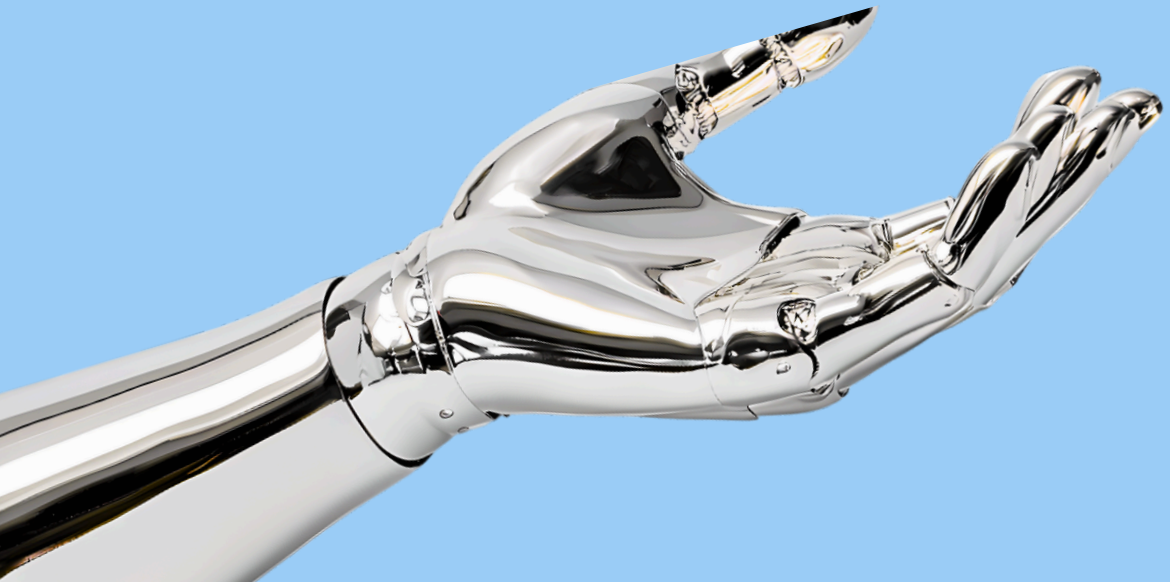
Jenna Mackenzie is a summer intern at the Participatory Cultures Lab and a final-year undergraduate McGill student pursuing a major in Psychology and a double minor in Sociology and Behavioural Science. She is interested in youth development, wellbeing, and intersectionality theory.

BACKGROUND

The McGill International Cellphilm Festival is a project of both the Institute for Human Development and Well-being (IDHW) and the Participatory Cultures Lab (PCL), a Canada Foundation Innovation-funded unit led by Claudia Mitchell in the Faculty of Education at McGill University. The establishment of the Cellphilm Festival in 2013 recognized the growing use of cellphones around the world, the burgeoning work in the area of participatory visual methodologies (PVM) in community-based research, and the role of cellphilm methodology within PVM.

Inspired by the work of South African researchers Jonathan Dockney and Keyan Tomaselli, who coined the term ‘cellphilm’, the PCL research team embarked upon its first use of cellphilms in 2011 in work with rural teachers in South Africa. Since that time, numerous doctoral and master's students attached to the PCL have incorporated cellphilming into their research around the world as well as through their publications and presentations. This inspired many others, including International NGOs, to include cellphilming in their programs. Three of the original Cellphilm Festival team, Dr. Katie MacEntee, Dr. Casey Burkholder, and Dr. Josh Schwab-Cartas, published their ground-breaking book in 2016, What’s a Cellphilm? Integrating mobile phone technology into participatory arts-based research and activism.

This year, the International Cellphilm Festival used social media and in-person outreach to support and celebrate the unique voices of diverse communities across the world. The Participatory Cultures Lab anticipates fostering further collaboration and knowledge exchange among progressively larger audiences in future festivals.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE



Claudia Mitchell

Distinguished James McGill Professor Professor in the Department of Integrated studies with the Faculty of Education at McGill University, and an Honorary Professor in the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban, South Africa. Current Director of the Institute of Human Development and Well-Being.

Futures ... Now!, the theme of McGill's 14th International Cellphilm Festival, was an invitation to cellphilm makers of all ages to explore a theme highlighting contemplation, vision and urgency, inspiring creative endeavours from 15 countries. This year's festival featured a record number of virtual and in-person 'companion' workshops supporting new productions. These included workshop sessions with children in an afterschool program in Montreal, in-person and virtual workshops at several universities in Chile, Brazil, and Canada, and support to secondary and CEGEP teachers in Montreal. Congratulations to each and every individual or group who took the time to figure out what they wanted to say and who so creatively presented their ideas and images. And thanks to all the teachers, parents, family members, and fans who supported the festival, and of course pitched up for the many watch parties on the night of the screenings.

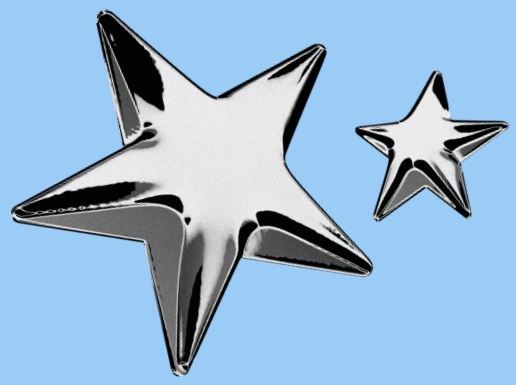
There are so many people to acknowledge. What a team! Many thanks to Ingara Maidou and Jenna MacKenzie, who so enthusiastically led the festival planning this year, from developing social media posts, coordinating with the judges, and conducting workshops, and who so ably hosted the online festival event on June 18th, and to Emi Vera, who provided continuity, supported all the planning, conducted workshops herself, and kept everything running. Many thanks to this year's judges, Brett Pardy, Candace Amarante, and Sasha Utkina. Your time spent viewing all the cellphilms, participating in the adjudicating sessions, and your encouraging comments on the night of the screening offered so much to all the cellphilm makers.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

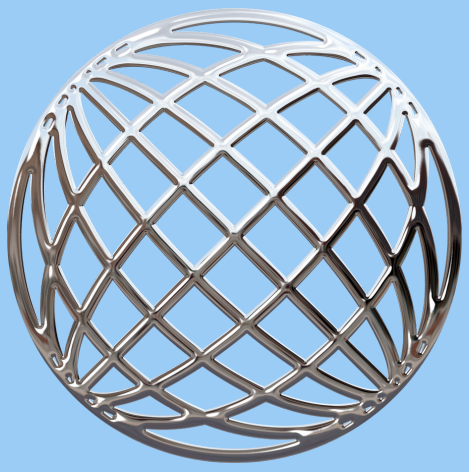
Thank you as well to Emma Harden-Wolfson of the Faculty of Education, McGill University for her inspiring "Futures … Now" keynote address. The talk, locating this year's theme in a global context, provided a set of touchstones for assessing where we are in the now and what that might mean in a future context. Finally, the success of the event rests on the administrative support provided by Leann Brown, alongside the administrative support through the Department of Integrated Studies in Education. My personal thanks to the whole PCL team working away behind the scenes on the night of the festival: Twisha Singh. Gabriella Gatton, Tianna Kloepfer, and Rosa Valentina Costilla Prieto.

Onward to McGill's 15th International Cellphilm Festival!

Claudia Mitchell,
Distinguished James McGill Professor



INTRODUCTION



Chosen by Lauren Fresca and Sasha Utkina, summer interns for the 13th International Cellphilm Festival, this year's theme, 'Futures Now,' calls on participants to reflect on the kind of legacy we want to leave for future generations. While the geopolitical conflicts and setbacks in human rights that have marked the past year seem to be insurmountable, cellphilms from this festival demonstrate that impactful change can still begin at the grassroots level. Hence, participants from this year have responded to our current climate by reflecting on challenges faced by their communities and outlining what changes can be made for future generations.

Exploitation, colonialism, and self-harm are just a few difficult topics that participants were able to shed light on in a sensitive yet impactful manner. Still, recurring themes from past festivals also appeared in submissions from this year as well, with topics spanning from environmental awareness to bullying. This range of themes demonstrates that, despite the many uncertainties that we face today, a strong enough desire for improvement can encourage us to take more initiative and reflect on the kind of change we want to see.

This year, the International Cellphilm Festival received 37 submissions from 15 countries around the world, including Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, Greece, Hungary, India, Jordan, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Uganda. Cellphilms were created by over 90 participants, allowing people from all backgrounds and ages to come together. There were 14 cellphilms in the children's category, 9 in the youth category, and 7 in both the individual and group categories. The ages of participants were also varied, with creators as young as 4 years old all the way up to 55 years old.

INTRODUCTION

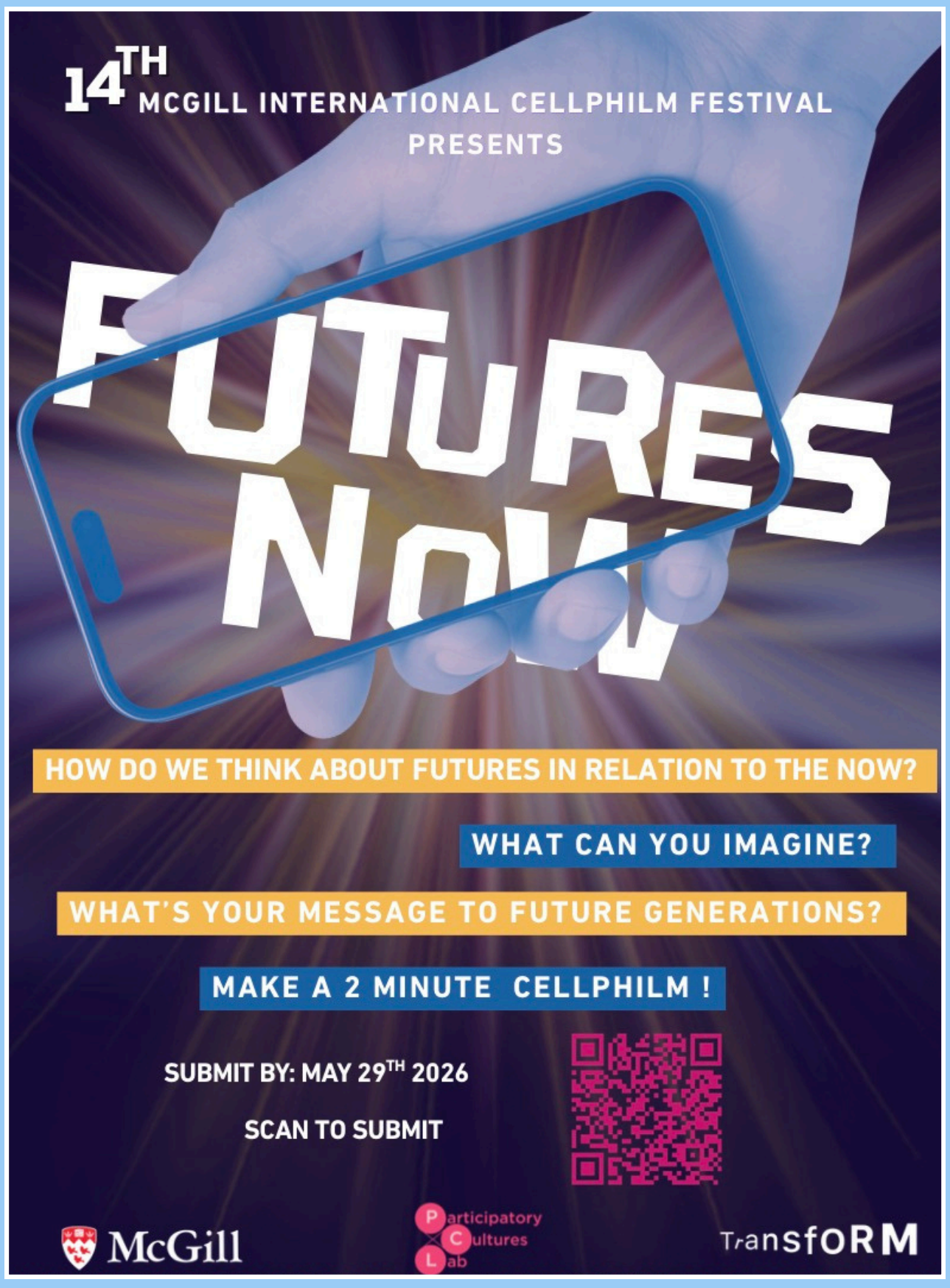


Figure 1: 'Futures Now' ICF Banner

CELLPHILM WORKSHOPS

Prior to the International Cellphilm Festival, the Participatory Cultures Lab hosted five cellphilming workshops for educational communities throughout Montreal. The goal of these workshops varied, as the target audiences ranged from kindergarten to graduate students. Nonetheless, the primary intention of these workshops was to introduce cellphilimg as a visual pedagogical tool.

Cellphim workshop at the Participatory Culture Lab, May 6th 2026.

The first cellphilming workshop in this series took place at the Participatory Cultures Lab on May 6th, 2026. The workshop was organized by Emilia Vera Romero, a Research Assistant at the Participatory Cultures Lab and incoming PhD candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.



Figure 2: Cellphilming Workshop at the PCL

The interactive workshop was the first of three geared towards the university level, with six participants: two undergraduates, three graduate students, and one professor.

The process of cellphilm was explored as a participatory pedagogical and research tool, with topics such as storyboarding, ethical considerations, and accessible storytelling touched on. Participants were also encouraged to make their own cellphilms in groups of three and reflect on the collaborative process.

CELLPHILM WORKSHOPS

Spanish cellphilm workshop, May 11th 2026.

Just a few days later, Emilia organized a bilingual virtual cellphilm workshop with Dr. Gloria Romero. The workshop kicked off online via Zoom on May 11th from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. EDT. The first half of the workshop was conducted in English, as the eight participants were English as a Second Language pre-service teachers from the Universidad de Santiago de Chile.

When the floor opened for questions in Spanish, the conversation really took off. The group wanted to unpack the prompt, asking, "What do you mean by future?" This question opened up a great discussion about what the future can be and what they want it to look like: Is it driven by technology? Focused on social justice?

While only one group from this workshop ended up submitting to the festival, Martina Silva, Antonia Soto, and Sebastian Troncoso's effort paid off tremendously, as they took home the win in the Group category with their cellphilm, "A Future On Hold."



Emilia Vera Romero



Figure 3: Cellphilming Process at Espace Jeunesse

Espace Jeunesse workshop, May 13th 2026.

In mid-May, the PCL organized two rounds of children's cellphilm workshops, beginning with one at Espace Jeunesse on May 13th 2026. This workshop was organized and facilitated by: Prudence Caldairou-Bessette, Professor of psychoeducation and psychology department at L'Université du Québec à Montréal; Ingara Maidou, an undergraduate intern at the PCL pursuing a Joint Honours degree in Political Science and Gender, Sexuality, Feminist, and Social Justice studies at McGill University; and Emilia Vera Romero.

CELLPHILM WORKSHOPS

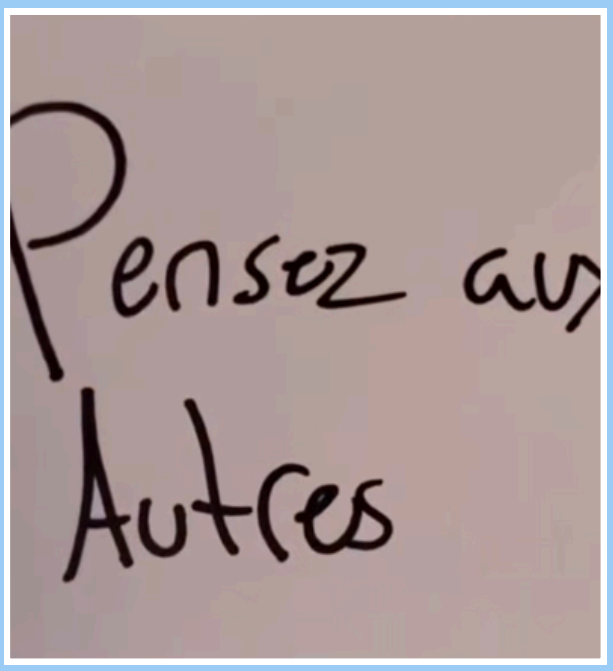


Figure 4: Cellphilm submission, “Pensez aux autres” by Nikke et Penelop, made at Espace Jeunesse

The workshop at Espace Jeunesse was presented to middle school students with the goal of introducing cellphilms as a means to depict their ideas of the future issues through storyboarding, filming, and editing. Six students participated in the workshop at Espace Jeunesse on May 13th, with around 3 cellphilm submissions, including the children’s category winner, “La nature naturel de 2026 !” by Constance Lean, Léonie Gillet, and Lya Frechette, coming from this group.

Service d'Accueil CME St-Louis (SACME), May 15th 2026.



The second children’s cellphilm workshop was once again organized by Emi, Ingara, Prudence, and Myriam Faucher, an Art Therapy student and research assistant at L’Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. This workshop took place at the Service d'Accueil CME St-Louis (SACME), and participants included approximately 20 children between the ages of 4 and 7 years old. This cellphilm workshop was adapted to a younger audience, providing them with the basic explanation of the theme, what a cellphilm is, and the steps needed to create their own. Children in this workshop worked collaboratively to create a total of 7 cellphilms that would go on to be submitted to the International Cellphilm Festival.

CELLPHILM WORKSHOPS

Concordia Univeristy, June 2nd 2026

The final cellphilm workshop took place at the beginning of June at Concordia University. The workshop was presented at a Visual Pedagogies class taught by Dr. Carolina Cambre, Professor of Education at Concordia University. This workshop was facilitated by Ingara and Jenna Mackenzie, an undergraduate intern at the PCL, pursuing a BA in Psychology and a joint minor in Sociology and Behaviour Science at McGill University.

This final workshop offered a practical introduction to the cellphiming method and outlined how it could be applied as a pedagogical tool as well as a participatory research methodology. The discussions in this workshop focused on the cellphilming as a visual research tool, comparing it to other methodologies such as digital storytelling. Approximately 15 graduate students participated in the workshop, with one of the participants, Timea Nagy, submitting to the festival and receiving the Honourable Mention 2 award in the Individual category for her cellphilm, “Notes from the sidewalk.”



Figure 5: Ingara Maidou and Jenna Mackenzie presenting cellphilming workshop at Concordia University

Festival Overview

In total, the festival received 76 registrants, with approximately 50 of the registrants attending the festival screening. A few registrants also hosted watch parties, with many more participants joining the screening through these events.

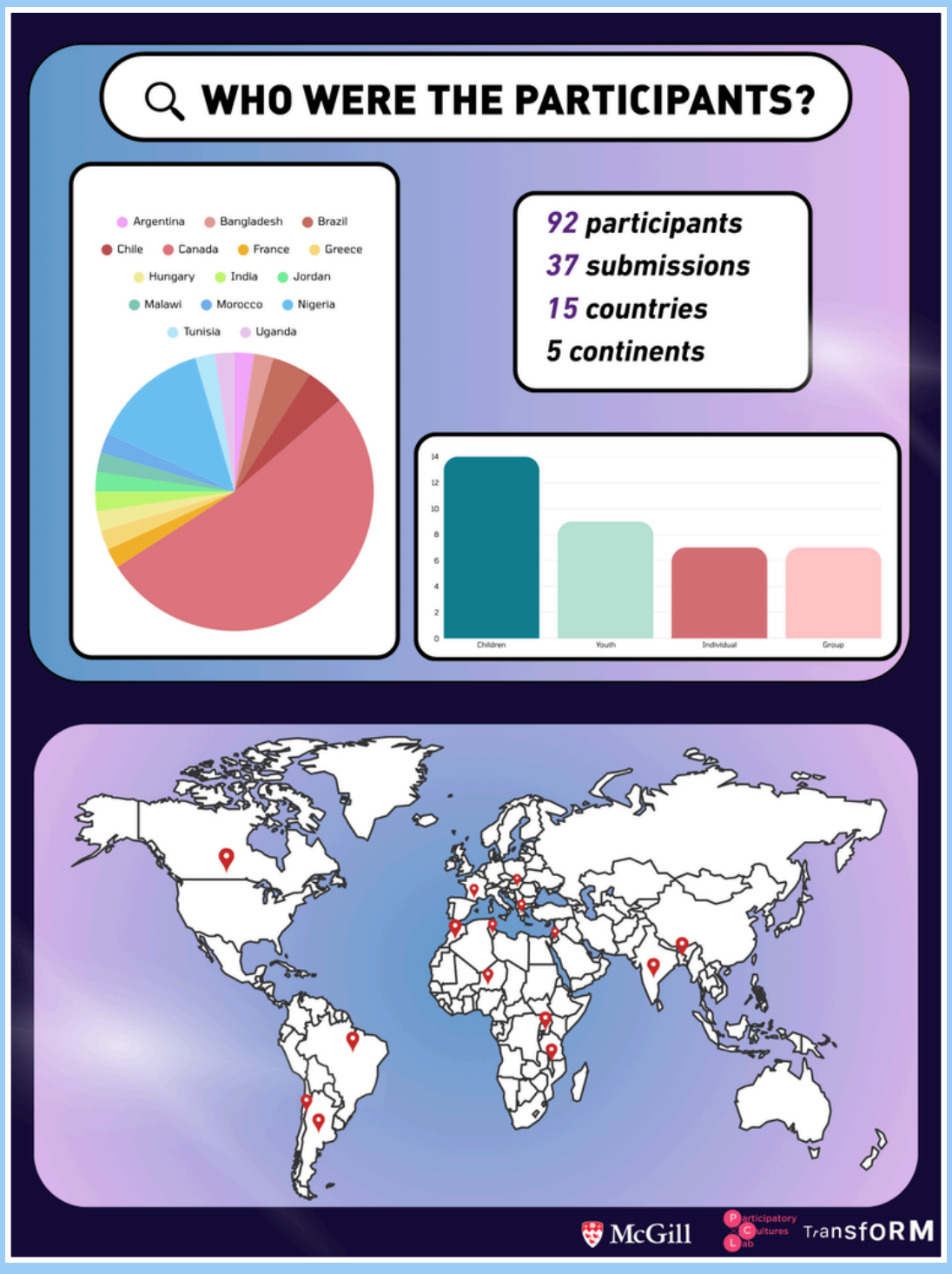


Figure 6: Submission statistics from the 14th International Cellphilm Festival

Festival Overview

The Festival opened with interns Jenna and Ingara welcoming the guests and participants, then introducing the keynote speech for the evening by Dr Emma Harden Wolfson.

During her keynote presentation, titled “Imagining The Futures,” Dr. Harden Wolfson highlighted her research on education policy, specifically focusing on their work on The Futures of Education project led by UNESCO. The project aimed to reimagine education possibilities, evaluating responses over four key groups: quality of life, social change, care of the environment, and development of technology.

Dr. Harden-Wolfson informed the audience that in order to consider the future, her had to reflect on the past, assess how it changed from the present, and then pose questions about possibilities for the future: What is your biggest hope, and what is your biggest concern?

The responses in the project were varied, with sustainability, social justice, wellbeing and health, and advances in technology being some of the major desires and concerns. Dr Harden-Wolfson stressed how these different responses highlighted the need to always consider the plurality of futures rather than just one.



Dr Emma Harden-Wolfson is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education and Associate Member of the Department of Equity, Ethics and Policy at McGill University, Canada. She is an international and comparative higher education policy specialist who demonstrates a sustained commitment to understanding and shaping higher education policy processes through critical, comparative, and equity-focused perspectives. She is President of the Canadian Society for the Study of Higher Education, a founding Advisory Board member of the World Access to Higher Education Network and Associate Editor of the journal Studies in Higher Education.

Festival Overview

"When we think about the futures, it can drive us to toward visionary thinking about what might be possible and what might be desirable, and in that way it can help us break negative patterns of the present or the past and plan how to achieve our hopes and address our concerns"

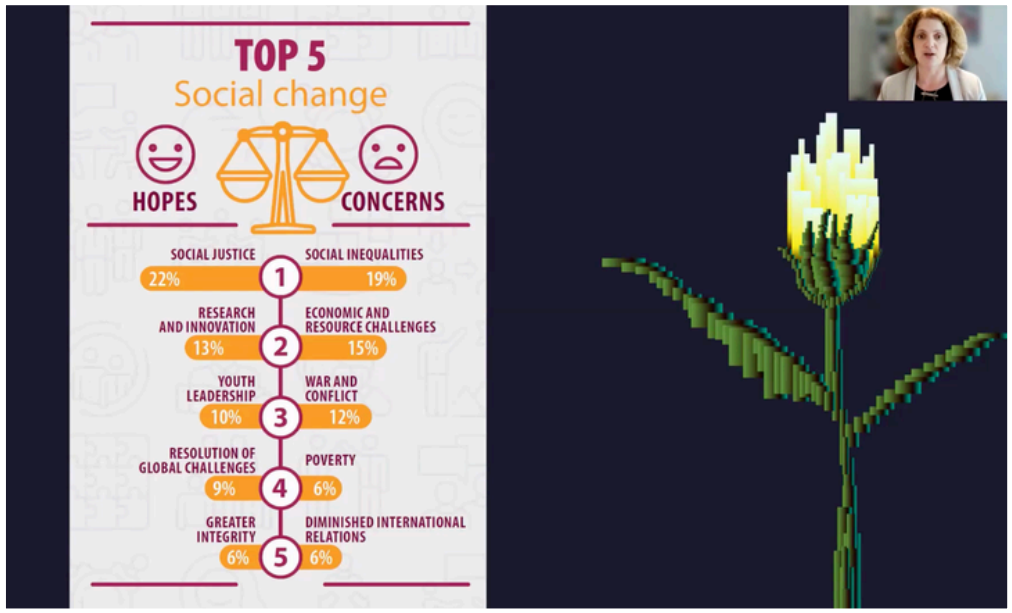
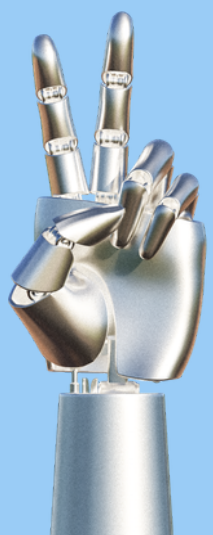


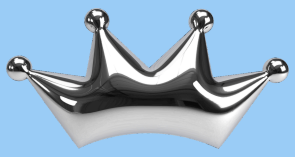
Figure 7: Keynote Speaker Dr. Emma Harden-Wolfson

Next, Dr. Claudia Mitchell, Director of the Participatory Cultures Lab, gave a few opening remarks. Dr. Mitchell thanked Dr. Harden-Wolfson as well as all the attendees for joining. She then spent some time discussing the various themes explored and the diversity of submissions, reintroducing the questions: *How do we think about futures in relation to the now? What can you imagine? What is your message to future generations?*

Her speech concluded with a warm thanks to all the members of the PCL for helping organize the festival.



Festival Overview



Judges

This year, we were joined by two new judges, Dr. Candace Amarante and Sasha Utkina, as well as a returning judge for the sixth year, Dr. Brett Pardy. Judges independently completed the judging packages and met with members of the ICF Team, Ingara Maidou, Jenna Mackenzie, and Emilia Vera Romero to come to consensus on the winner and two honourable mentions for each category prior to the festival. The judges also each prepared a category presentation speech to announce the winner and honourable mentions, with each judge presenting a different category.

The children category was presented by Sasha Utkina, who brought her experience as a former PCL Intern from last year's ICF to the judging process. From masks and costumes to the use of drawings and toys, Sasha described how much she enjoyed seeing the variety of creative ways in which the no faces approach was used in this category. Dr. Candace Amarante presented the youth category by sharing insights on how the cellphilms in this category not only name injustice, but poetically illustrate how we can confront injustice head-on. Next, Dr. Brett Pardy, presented the individual category. Brett cited how the theme of rich yet hidden histories was a general theme that came out of this category, one that allows viewers to recontextualize the spaces around us. Finally, Jenna Mackenzie presented the group category. Jenna reflected on the variety of themes touched on in this category, such as reproductive health, the rise of individualism, and support from family and community.

Festival Overview



Candace Amarante is an artist-researcher focused on “writing rights”. She writes stories and plays, emphasizing children’s rights, and features children with chronic illnesses. Recent works include The Dream Machine (April 2023), "Let's not talk about it anymore: a dialogue" (Fall 2022), “The Ugly Ones, a one-act play on children's rights” (co-written with C. Woolley, Geordie Theatre Fest 2020), and "You, Me & Victor Hugo!" a play on censorship, which was a runner-up in the 2023 Playwrights for Change National Playwriting Contest. Candace holds a doctorate in political science from Columbia University.



Sasha is a recent graduate of McGill University, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and International Development Studies. Last year, she interned with the Participatory Cultures Lab, contributing to projects related to the 13th International Cellphilm Festival, social media outreach, and community engagement initiatives. She works in educational support roles and is interested in youth engagement and community-based learning.

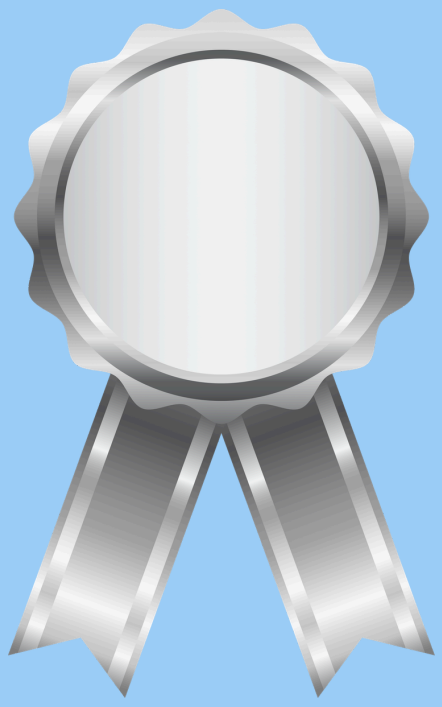


Dr. Brett Pardy teaches Media and Communication Studies at the University of the Fraser Valley. His research focuses on how media communicates through emotions, particularly how media affects a sense of empathy for other people's experiences. He is returning as a judge for the Cellphilm Festival for a 6th straight year!

Prize Winners

Award Criteria

The judging criteria for this year's festival included five general categories.



The first criterion was the appropriateness to the theme. This criterion asks how successful cellphilms were in conveying a clear message with an original angle. The second criterion was the coherence of the narrative. This criterion considered if cellphilms transmitted a clear message in a compelling manner. The third criterion, creative use of a cellphone, questioned whether cellphilms utilized phones in a way that amplifies the overall cellphilm.
The fourth criterion, aesthetic devices, asks if the cellphilm includes unique visual or auditory elements such as music, strong editing, dramatic silences, or special camera effects. Finally, the fifth criterion, technical qualities, examines the overall skill of the cellphilm, looking for consistency in elements such as landscape/portrait mode, the quality of lighting and sound, and the use of title and credits.

Three extra judging considerations were included for the judging criteria of the children's category. These extra considerations specifically asked: Does the cellphilm convey an important message that adults should hear from children? If the cellphilm was created with a no faces approach, does it implement unique ways to make the story interesting? And finally, does the cellphilm use artistic methods to illustrate and voice the ideas conveyed (material, drawing, puppets, etc.)?

Prize Winners

Children Category





Figure 8 and 9: Frames fom the Children Cellphilm "La nature naturel de 2026"

The winner of the Children category, "La nature naturel de 2026," stood out with its clever reporter-style format and satirical tone. In the 'episode,' the young filmmakers Constance Lean, Léonie Gillet, and Lya Frechette act as 'scientists' and explain the different types of flora that were found in 2026. The scientists address the imagined audience of the future, one in which there are no more natural trees, plants, or air. Instead, they insinuate that this future consists of factory-produced, plastic trees and marshmallow-scented, bottled air. These creators deliver a powerful and cautionary message about the necessity of protecting the environment for future generations to see.

Two noteworthy submissions received honourable mentions. The first honourable mention, "L'Album de vie, un espoir pour les enfants confiés," by Sophie An, Tiago, Alexis, Eric, and Emmanuel, portrayed children building an "album of life" filled with photos and drawings of their heartfelt memories and wishful hopes for their future. "Qu'est-ce que c'est ce monde ?" by Marie Caldairou, Leonica Bellazzi, Evi Shapiro, and Mia Rochon earned second honourable mention, depicting how people today are overconsumed with their cellphones and their electronic devices, and they should instead aim for more connection with people and nature.



Figure 10: Frame from the Children Cellphilm "L'Album de vie, un espoir pour les enfants confiés"



Figure 11: Frame from the Children Cellphilm "Qu'est-ce que c'est ce monde ?"

Prize Winners

Youth Category

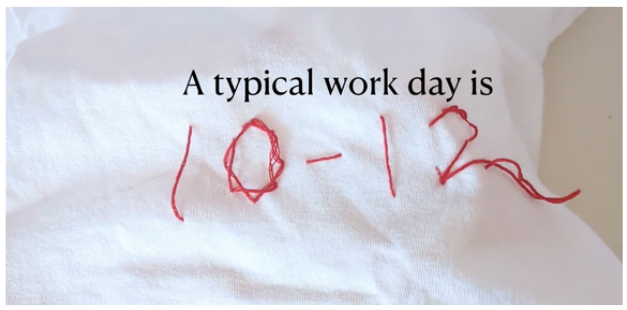




Figure 12 and 13: Frames from the Youth Cellphilm "The cost beneath the price"

The Youth category winner, "The cost beneath the price" by Rachel Olien, offered a powerful message on the costs of fast fashion. Using the no-face approach and typed dialogue, the cellphilm portrays how fast fashion contributes to environmental pollution and exploitation in developing countries by billion-dollar corporations. Scenes of environmental devastation and of a single thread being sewn drew attention to the issue at hand. The cellphilm concludes with the sobering question, "Is this what we want our future to look like?" prompting viewers to reflect on the consequences of fast fashion consumption habits going into the future.



Figure 14: Frame from the Youth Cellphilm "Let's Talk"



Figure 15: Frame from the Youth Cellphilm "EcoEcho"

"Let's talk" by Shuraim Alamin, Khalid Abdulaziz, Mubarak Adamu, and Nuru Abdulaziz received an honourable mention in the category for its comparison between watering a plant for growth and support from parents/guardians for adolescent development, emphasizing the importance of community dialogue. "EcoEcho" by Yunyi (Helen) Guo was recognized as a second honourable mention for its stunning doodle-inspired animation and impactful message. The cellphilm illustrates the current environmental crisis, the alarming would-be consequences, drawing on the book The Marrow Thieves to drive the message home, and highlights solutions emphasizing the importance of indigenous wisdom, respect for the environment, and working as a community.

Prize Winners

Individual Category

The Individual category winner, “Leave the canoes and go back” by Adonai Kirabo, reflects on the need to hold restraint and respect for land. The filmmaker draws on the significance of the Humber River (River Kabechenong) for indigenous people through the metaphor “leave the canoes and go back.” The metaphor puts forth the message that moving through the land ethically is to take only what is needed and recognise when it is time to step back.

It is also meant to clarify that we are not owners of the land, but merely guests. The cellphilm closes with the sentiment that the river had provided for the generations before us and will continue to serve the generations to come, reminding us to consider our own agency and responsibility when moving through the natural environment.



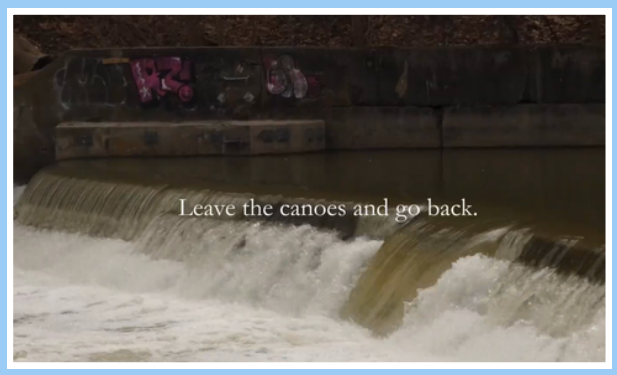


Figure 16 and 17: Frame from the Youth Cellphilm “Leave the Canoes and Go Back”

“Beneath the surface of Sankofa Square” by Salma Gharaibeh received first honourable mention for its exploration of the intersection between colonial land, renaming and multicultural urban scapes in downtown Toronto. The creator provides the example of the renaming of Dundas Square to Sankofa Square as a representation of how naming relates to colonial legacies of power and ties to land, and how, as an immigrant, one must take accountability for contributing to these structures as well. “Notes from the sidewalk” by Timea Nagy also caught the judges' attention as second honourable mention for its poetic portrait of an immigrant’s personal journey of belonging and resilience in Quebec. Through the lens of commuting and walking, this cellphilm invites viewers to imagine the future as designed at the pace of a pedestrian.



Figure 18: Frame from the Youth Cellphilm “Beneath the Surface of Sankofa Square”



Figure 19: Frame from the Youth Cellphilm “Notes from the sidewalk ”

Prize Winners

Group Category





The winners of the group category, “A future on hold,” featured a trio of Chilean creators: Martina Silva, Antonia Soto and Sebastian Troncoso.

Figure 20 and 21: Frames from the Group Winner Cellphilm “A future on hold”

Their cellphilm depicted the individualistic reality that many young people are living in today, characterized by increased loneliness and isolation. The speaker emphasizes that ‘this isn’t the future I dream about’, but questions whether future generations are doomed to fail or whether there is hope. The cellphilm ends with a rail suicide at a metro station, while the speaker is focused on how that will affect their day, and not the individual itself, driving home the collective harms of individualism. The shock-value dark ending and its message resonate strongly with the audience: this state of individualism is a problem, and change is crucial for the future.

“Change is necessary” by Ummi Murtala, Asiya Iliyasu, Nafisa Muazu, Nazira Dahiru, Aisha Mustapha, and Murja Ahmed was celebrated as the first honourable mention. The cellphilm was celebrated for raising sexual and reproductive health awareness in their community, reducing physical violence and abuse, as well as improving communication and relationships in the community.



Figure 22: Frame from the Group Cellphilm “Change is necessary”

The cellphilm “No time for silence” by Jacob Daniel, Chikondi Jowabe, Brian Chidule, Desire Makumba, Stella Mlolongo, Mervis Kadzuwa, Hacson Howard, and Zaithwa Chidule was also highlighted as an honourable mention for its emphasis on addressing fake news in the community and using technology for good, not bad.



Figure 23: Frame from the Group Winner Cellphilm “No time for silence”

Acceptance Speeches

Award recipients from every category attended this year's festival and provided insightful acceptance speeches reflecting on the intentions behind their cellphilms.

Children Category



Figure 24: Creators of "La nature naturel de 2026 !"

The first acceptance speech of the evening came from the winners of the children's cellphilm, "La nature naturel de 2026 !" by Constance Lean, Léonie Gillet, and Lya Frechette. The speech was concise and appreciative, discussing how they didn't expect to win considering their cellphilm was in French, while the ICF was hosted by McGill University, an English institution. Nonetheless, they were pleased to win and thanked all the attendees for supporting their cellphilm.

Next, Nathalie Chapon, a French literature professor who collaborated with a social worker on the first honourable mention of the children's category, "L'album de vie, un espoir pour les enfants confiés," thanked the audience on behalf of the children for the award. She explained how the children made the cellphilm with their caregiver and chose to express their desire to learn about their family history and to imagine a better future for themselves.



Figure 25: : One of the facilitators of "L'album de vie, un espoir pour les enfants confiés"

Acceptance Speeches



Figure 26: Creators of "Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce monde ?"

The final acceptance speech in the children's category came from the winners of the second Honourable mention, "Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce monde ?" by Marie Caldairou, Leonica Bellazzi, Evi Shapiro, and Mia Rocho. The speech was given in English and French by three of the creators and included live translation. The creators explained that they created the cellphilm because they noticed that too many people around them were focused on their phones rather than connecting with nature and the people around them. The winners discussed how their topic was very important to them, and despite the cellphilming process taking a long time, they found it to be fun.

Youth Category

Only one acceptance speech was given for the youth category. The speech was given by Sani Muhammad Abdullahi, who assisted with the creation of the first Honourable mention, "Let's talk." Sani described how the cellphilms were made in a rural community in Northern Nigeria, where a dialogue group promoted the use of youth community intervention to improve sexual and reproductive health among adolescents.



Figure 27: : One of the facilitators of "Let's talk"

Sani expressed gratitude on behalf of the absent creators, noting that the cellphilm was also screened for local community leaders, parents, service providers, and youth.

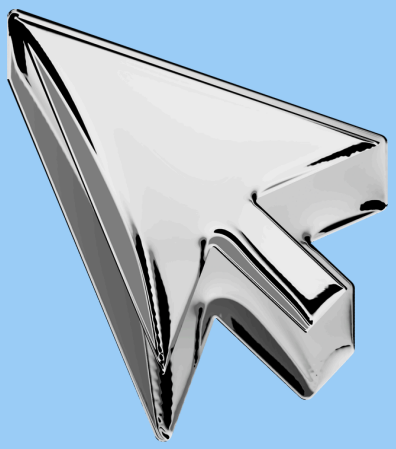
Acceptance Speeches

Individual Category



Figure 28: Creator of "Beneath the Surface of Sankofa Square"

In the individual category, Salma Gharaibeh, a university student in Ontario and award recipient for the first honourable mention, "Beneath the Surface of Sankofa Square," thanked the audience for the award. Salma went on to describe how, in the face of so many global issues, one can either get trapped in the cycle of pessimism and hopelessness or work towards addressing issues that matter to them.



She explained how this cellphilm was a result of her pursuing the latter choice, and expressed how the creation of this cellphilm allowed her to pour her creativity somewhere generative. Finally, Salma expressed how this cellphilm helped her connect to the issue of indigenous struggle and reflect on her own place in the system, reminding the audience that knowledge is power.

The two other award recipients in this category were unable to attend the festival. Luckily, they sent their acceptance speeches to the PCL to be read the night of the festival.

Acceptance Speeches

From Adonai Kirabo, the Individual category winner for “Leave the canoes and go back”

When I began creating Leave the Canoes and Go Back, I was inspired by something many people pass without a second thought: a river. To most of us, a river is just part of the landscape. A scenic, unassuming sliver of water. But standing beside the Humber River in winter, watching its water continue to flow beneath the cold, heavy layers of ice, I saw something different. I saw persistence. I saw history. I saw a reminder that this land carries stories far older than any of us. The process was simple but deeply meaningful to me. I spent time observing the river, listening, filming, and reflecting on the name given to it by the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, and Wendat peoples: Kabechenong - “Leave the canoes and go back.”

The more I sat with those words, the more they felt like a lesson in humility. A reminder that we are not owners of these places, but guests. If there is one thing I hope viewers take away from this cellphilm, it is the importance of looking beneath the surface. Whether it is a river, a landscape, or a history we have inherited, there is always more flowing underneath than we first see. And perhaps caring for this land begins with recognizing that our presence here carries responsibilities, not just privileges.

Thank you.

From Timea Nagy, second Honorable Mention for, “Notes from the Sidewalk:

Hello everyone,

Thank you so much for this recognition. I am truly honoured and deeply touched that Notes from the Sidewalk was selected as Honourable Mention #2 in the Individual category.

The idea for this cellphilm came to me during one of my walks home from class. As someone who has spent countless hours walking between places – through different cities, seasons, and stages of life – I began to think about how much of our lives unfolds in commuting.

The sidewalk became more than just a path from one destination to another; it became a space for reflection, observation, and quiet discovery.

Notes from the Sidewalk is my attempt to capture some of those moments and to reflect on themes of movement, resilience, belonging, and the stories we carry with us along the way. It is a reminder that even the most ordinary journeys can shape who we are and how we understand the world around us.

I am incredibly grateful to the festival organizers for creating a space where these stories can be shared and celebrated, and I feel very fortunate to be part of this community of storytellers.

Although I am unable to join you this evening, I am thankful for the opportunity to share my work with you. I hope the film encourages viewers to pause for a moment and notice the beauty, meaning, and possibility that can be found in the paths we travel every day.

Acceptance Speeches

Group Category



Figure 29: One of the creators of "A Future on Hold"

While Martina Silva, Antonia Soto, and Sebastian Troncoso, winners of the group category cellphilm, "A Future on Hold," were unable to attend the festival, they sent in an acceptance video to be screened at the ICF. The creators discussed their shift from optimism to pessimism regarding the future, as they began to notice the deep-rooted issues of the world. They further explained how, despite never having created a cellphilm before, receiving recognition for this project was deeply meaningful to them, and they were thankful to the audience as well as everyone who had resonated with their work.



Figure 30: One of the facilitators of "No Time for Silence"

Finally, the second honourable mention recipients, "No Time for Silence", created by Jacob Daniel, Chikondi Jowabe, Brian Chidule, Desire Makumba, Stella Mlolongo, Mervis Kadzuwa, Hacson Howard, and Zaithwa Chidule, were screened. Asma Usani, a Representative from Bauchi, Nigeria, who also works on the community-led-dialogue group, accepted the award.

She discussed how this group's efforts have been continuously improving relationships between youth and parents as well as between women and their spouses in the community. She also thanked the festival on behalf of the girls for encouraging their journey.

Social Media Campaign

This year, PCL interns continued the social media campaign using Instagram to promote the International Cellphilm Festival. As the theme for this year's festival was 'Futures Now', the aesthetic components of infographics made for the PCL Instagram were quite technologically oriented—featuring dark and chrome colours as well as website design and cellphone elements.

The content of this year's social media campaign were geared towards the process of cellphilming, including guides on how to navigate the ICF website, the steps of cellphilming, editing resources, and how to submit to the festival. The 23 posts made before the festival garnered significant engagement. The Participatory Cultures Lab Instagram account received 5.2 thousand views from reels and posts, amounting to a +2459% increase in engagement from the previous month. The Instagram account also gained 25 followers, received 155 likes, and 33 shares.

Additionally, the PCL contacted various McGill-affiliated clubs and services as well as Montreal-based associations to promote the festival over Instagram, reaching 45 groups. Accounts were directly messaged on the post with a quick description of the festival and a request to report it on their story and/or share with their newsletter and networks. The same outreach strategy was also implemented through Facebook groups, with the PCL promoting the festival to over 70 Canadian and international youth groups, activist groups, and film communities.



Figure 31: Instagram Post on How to Submit Cellphilm

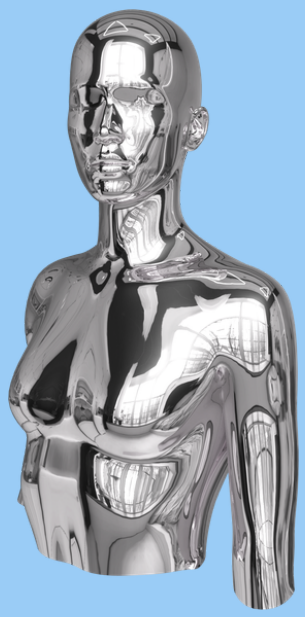


Figure 32: Instagram Post on Where to Find Cellphilm Resources

Thematic Analysis

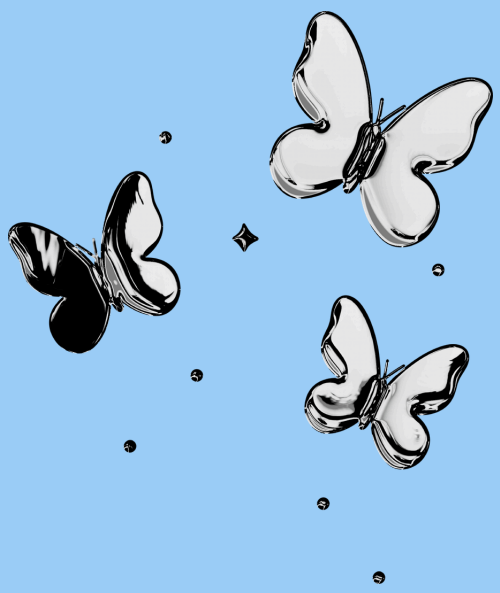
As mentioned in the Festival Overview, Dr Harden-Wolfson's keynote speech emphasized the importance of pluralizing the future, as there are endless possibilities for change. This mindset is in tune with the diversity of languages, age groups, and themes present in this year's ICF, showing that the future can look different for many people. Hence, this year, submissions took up the theme 'Futures Now' by responding to the questions: *How do we think about the future in relation to the now? What can you imagine? What's your message to future generations?* These questions were answered in many different ways...

One major theme that occurred in this year's ICF was the growing feelings of solitude that have impacted younger generations. A significant number of submissions explored this theme, satirizing selfishness and individualism to heighten this message. Correspondingly, the no-faces approach, an ethical cellphilming tool, proved to be incredibly useful for demonstrating this idea. For instance, the use of masks in "Que ce que c'est ce monde," or the blurring effect used in "A future on hold," protected individuals' identities while equally accentuating the feeling of isolation experienced by younger generations. This interplay of form and content stylistically elevated these cellphilms, while deepening the message regarding the solitude of the 21st century and its impacts on future generations.



Many cellphilms that stressed the importance of interpersonal relationships and community avoided the no-faces approach. "L'album de vie aux enfants confies," a cellphilm created at a children's home in France, included profound monologues from children expressing their desires to reconnect with their families. Moreover, many cellphims submitted from a TRANSFORM research site in Bauchi, Nigeria, approached the theme of community-led dialogue between youth and adults. For example, "Let's Talk" or "Change is Necessary" included two or more actors communicating with one another. This collaborative methodology is embedded in the stylistic and thematic elements of these cellphilms, as they were very dialogue-heavy, centring community discussions related to women's rights, sexual health, and parent-child relationships. These cellphilms addressed the theme of 'Future's Now" through a more optimistic lens, emphasizing the importance of hope, desire, and action.

Thematic Analysis



The exploitation of land and labour was another major theme that appeared throughout submissions this year. From the theme of colonialism explored in cellphilms such as “Beneath the surface of Sankofa Square,” to the unfair labour conditions investigated in “The Cost beneath the Price,” and the effects of climate change satirized in “La Nature naturel de 2026,” many creators questioned how sustainable our current way of living is for future generations. By critically examining the relationship between development and equality, these cellphilms highlight why we must continue to interrogate our everyday structures and reflect on whether we can maintain them for those who will come after us.

Other cellphilms submissions took a more abstract root thematically, subverting our understanding of time. Cellphilms such as “Leave the Canoes and Go Back” and “Notes from the Sidewalk” combined scenic montages with poetic narratives to discuss the beauty and plights of movement, immigration, and unrest. The use of the no-faces approach in these cellphilms permitted viewers to focus on the messages brought forth rather than the individuals presenting them. By highlighting their relationships with the Canadian state and its settler colonial history, the creators of these cellphilms asked viewers to slow down, stop, and focus on the now rather than accept the never-ending movement of time. These cellphilms adhered to the theme of ‘Futures Now’ in an unexpected yet pleasant manner. Rather than just question what kind of future they envisioned, these creations chose the very concept of time as something they wanted to see evolve, illustrating how our ideas of the past, present, and future are actually much more related than we may have believed.

Despite spanning a wide variety of topics, submissions from this year’s International Cellphilm Festival all reminded us why we must act on the issues that matter most to us today, in order to secure a brighter future. Participants were able to creatively draw from their desires and their grievances to create meaningful cellphilms. The directorial choices in each cellphilm was intentional and impactful, with most creators choosing to forgo complex editing for more personal projects, balancing satire and sincerity.

New Directions

Accessibility has remained one of the major strengths of the International Cellphilm Festival. In addition to the social media campaign, outreach was also done in person, such as through McGill summer classes and workshops. Moreover, during the screening of the ICF, all major information regarding cellphilms, judges, and speakers was included in the chat content in both English and French. Additionally, the festival was recorded and archived on the ICF website, with English closed captions available.

In the future, we're hoping to increase accessibility to the festival by expanding access to cellphilming internationally. One way of making the festival more accessible to international participants would be to have translations on the cellphilm submissions form. These could be written in the most widely spoken languages of countries that often submit to the festival, such as Spanish, Arabic, or Swahili. In addition, social media posts and workshops could include information about how to access cellphilm guides and submit cellphilms for those who may not have easy access to the internet. For instance, informing participants of local libraries or community centers that have free internet or storyboarding supplies could allow participants to access more resources to create high-quality projects.

Theme idea for the 15th ICF Festival

As seen throughout the report, one recurring theme that appeared in this year's festival was our relationship to time. Whether it came from the acceptance speeches or the cellphilms watched, participants drew on the past to get a glimpse into the future and reflected on the change they'd like to see.

Correspondingly, the 15th International Cellphilm Festival could focus on time's most famous companion: space. Specifically, the theme could explore our personal relationships to our physical environment. "**Migration and Immigration**," as a theme, could account for various interpretations of the spaces that we occupy, exploring questions such as: *What and where is home? and What would you change about your environment?*

We chose the theme of "**Migration and Immigration**" because of the global decline in people's access to freedom and movement. From the displacement of people in Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and the Democratic Republic of Congo to the increasing ICE raids in the United States, the world has become increasingly hostile to those who cannot return home.

Hence, we want cellphilm creators next year to reflect on their own connections to the land they occupy, the lands they are able to travel to, or the lands that are no longer accessible to them.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: 2026 ICF AGENDA



McGill's 14th International Cellphilm Festival
Theme: Futures Now
Date: June 18th, 2026
Time: 5:00 - 7:00 PM (EST)

Hosts: Jenna, Ingara, and Emi
Judges: Candace Amarante, Brett Pardy, and Sasha Utkina
Keynote Speaker: Emma Harden Wolfson

5:00 PM	**Welcome & Introductions (10 minutes)**

- Notice of recording and Land Acknowledgement
- Welcome to the festival (Dr Claudia Mitchell)

5:10 PM	**Keynote address (10 minutes)**

- Introduction to Dr Harden-Wolfson
- Dr Harden-Wolfson presents Keynote speech (10 minutes)

5: 20 PM	**Content advisory (2-5 minutes)**

- TW: Suicide, self harm, depression (Group category)

5:25 PM	**Children Category (15 to 20 minutes)**

- Introduction to category by Judge Sasha Utkina
- Honorable mentions #2 screening
- Honorable mentions #1 screening
- **Winner screening**
- Open floor for speeches!

Appendices

APPENDIX A: 2026 ICF AGENDA

5:45 PM	**Youth Category (15 to 20 minutes)**

- Introduction to category by Judge Candace Amarante
- Honorable mentions #2 screening
- Honorable mentions #1 screening
- **Winner screening**
- Open floor for speeches!

6:05 PM	**Individual Category (15 to 20 minutes)**

- Introduction to category by Judge Brett Pardy
- Honorable mentions #2 screening
- Honorable mentions #1 screening
- **Winner screening**
- Open floor for speeches!

6:25 PM	**Group Category (15 to 20 minutes)**

- Introduction to category by Jenna + content advisory reminder
- Honorable mentions #2 screening
- Honorable mentions #1 screening
- **Winner screening**
- Open floor for speeches!

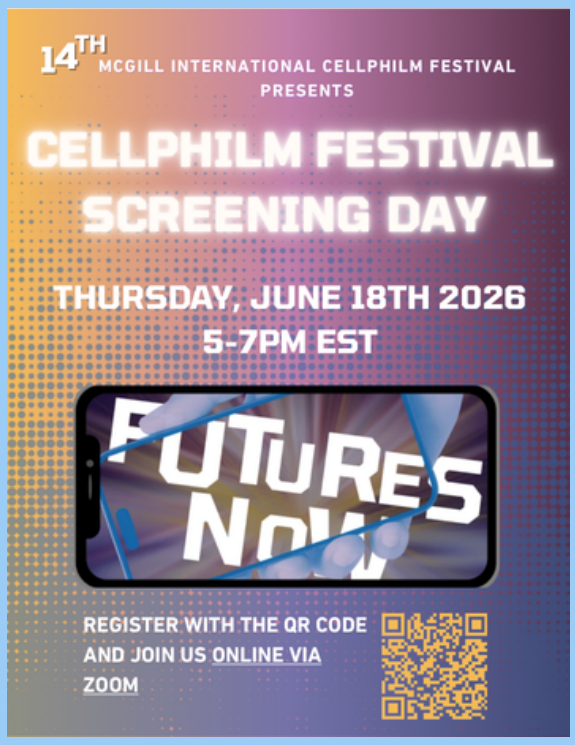
6:45 PM	**Closing (5 to 10 minutes)**

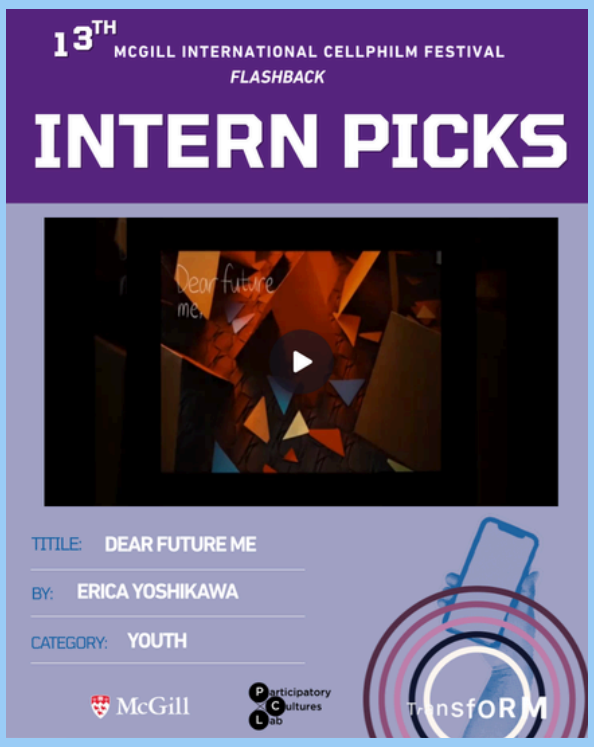
- Thank you participants and mention where they can find the recordings and winning cellphilms

Appendices

APPENDIX B: SOCIAL MEDIA GRAPHIC EXAMPLES









Appendices

APPENDIX C: ICF POSTERS





Appendices

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT



CERTIFICATE

OF ACHIEVEMENT

Proudly presented to

For the selection of " " as **Winner** in the **Individual Category** at the 14th McGill International Cellphilm Festival: FUTURES NOW

Thursday, June 18th 2026

McGill International Cellphilm Festival Organizing Committee

Dr. Claudia Mitchell
McGill University

TransforM

Participatory Cultures Lab

McGill