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Van Warmerdam comedy wins Venice sidebar

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Queer Lion, Lion Cub, Digital awards also announced

ROME -- "De laatste dagen van Emma Blank" (The Last Days of Emma Blank), an unlikely comedy about a wealthy woman who drives her servants to mutiny from Dutch director Alex van Warmerdam, won the top prize at the Venice Days sidebar, it was announced Friday.

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In addition to Venice Days, the Queer Lion (which selects the best film with a gay plot or sub-plot), the Future Film Festival's Digital Award (for the best film using digital technology), the new Persol prize for 3-D films, and the Leoncino d'Oro, or the Golden Lion Cub, award for the best film selected by local school children with a knack for picking the overall winner were all announced Friday.

The Queer Lion award went to "A Single Man," the story of a man struggling with the loss of his partner set during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. The debut film from noted fashion designer Tom Ford, is the first film to take home the Venice Queer Lion that did not screen in the Venice Days sidebar.

According to the jury, the film was selected because it reminded them of "the absolute necessity of laws guaranteeing the equality of rights, so that all love can be lived openly in the light of day."

The Future Film Festival's Digital Award went to "Metropia," a surreal animated anti-Utopian love story directed by Tarik Saleh. The film screened in the Critics Week sidebar.

The 3-D prize, awarded for the first time this year, went to Joe Dante's "The Hole," a story about two young brothers who find a hole in their basement that unleashes some of their worst nightmares. The prize is set to become an annual event at future editions of the Venice festival. A jury of 26 local youths selected Michael Moore's "Capitalism: A Love Story" for the Leoncino d'Oro. In its 17 previous editions, the Leoncino d'Oro winner has gone on to win the main Venice prize six times, and it has almost always taken up some other major Venice prize. If Moore, who made his first visit to the Venice Lido, is honored on Saturday it will not be a major surprise: he took home a major prize in each of his two visits to Cannes.

Venice Days, the popular sidebar now in its sixth edition, focuses on emerging directors. In presenting van Warmerdam's film with its award, the Venice Days jury called it "ironic and terrifying" and said it was "a tragic-comic look at greed, manipulation, and power within the family."

The Venice festival got underway Sept. 2.