

# VULTURE

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## The Best Lesbian Awards Show Extravaganza in New York City, Period

By Whitney Mallett



Jazzelle Zanaughtti (@uglyworldwide). Photo: Whitney Mallett

“Never in my life have I been so proud to be called a thot,” raved Jazzelle Zanaughtti, better known as @uglyworldwide, parading into the spotlight at gallery Gavin Brown Enterprise’s uptown space to accept the award for “Best Art Thot” on the night of October 21. Zanaughtti, serving dark magic realness in a goth corset and Hogwarts-chic glasses, also snatched the prize for “Baddest Boss Bitch” at the first-ever Family Awards and Lesbian Ball, a celebration of New York’s queer underground. It was coordinated in conjunction with the end of a series of screenings of Leilah Weinraub’s documentary about the evolution of an early-aughts L.A. lesbian-strip-club scene, *Shakedown*.

“We wanted to give life to everybody who usually doesn’t get an award,” said Robot MoonJuice, who organized the event together with Weinraub and Aya Brown.

First, awards were given based on online voting from a preselected list of nominees. Winners included Princess Nokia for “Community Leader of the Year”; @patiasfantasyworld for “Best Finsta”; Mazurbate for “Best Stylist”; Dese Escobar for “Nightlife It Girl” and Laina Berry for “Who Carries the Most.”

After the formalities concluded came the party: Overhead lights turned on and a runway formed for a raucous ball — à la *Pose* or *Paris Is Burning* —

complete with voguing, prancing purebred pets, and some debate over whether one qualified for the bundle category whilst wearing a weave.



“The concept for the awards originated in fashion,” explained Weinraub, whose résumé includes being CEO of the label Hood By Air. “We did a really good job awakening the concept of fashion *shows* in New York, and then when we went on hiatus, I thought the fashion shows should evolve into an awards ceremony. The coolest people at those fashion shows were always our friends anyways.”

Princess Nokia voguing with the House of Mofongo. Photo: Whitney Mallett

While the first half of the evening celebrated the girls whose cool is already certified, the ball portion of the night was open for anyone to compete in categories like “Best Couple” and “Lesbian with Nails.” One of the night’s freshest faces was Alexis @getherhelp who won “Best Bundle” with a game-changing shirt made out of hair extensions. The halter top, which she designed herself, was actually braided into her hairdo. “You never seen someone’s shirt grown out they head period!” she wrote on Instagram, captioning a photo featuring the hirsute ensemble.

Some of the night's most unpredictable moments turned out to be the most heartwarming. Nightlife maven Ladyfag pulled an Adele choosing to share her award for "Best Mother" with fellow nominee and fashion designer Raul Lopez, bringing him up onstage with her. And Princess Nokia organized a surprise award, recognizing MoonJuice with the honor of "Best Father,"



introducing him with a stirring speech that acknowledged his pivotal impact on her life, beginning with their meeting as teenagers at Union Square. "He has given me a lot of cunt so I could go out into the world and storm!" MoonJuice, who also won "Best Party" for his regular fête Fightclub, told me he met a lot of people involved in Sunday's celebration about a decade ago at Union Square — including the event's MC-musician Ian Isiah. "It was definitely the center of culture when we were 16. You went to the steps. You served a look. You came with a cute crew. You had to sit next to someone and so you said 'what's up' and all of a sudden

Alexis @getherhelp won "Best Bundle." Photo: Whitney Mallett

there was this spiderweb of kids," MoonJuice recalled. "We've all grown up together."

And in growing up, this community's seen a lot of success. Hood By Air won the CFDA in 2015. Art-Thot nominee Raúl de Nieves broke out of last year's Whitney Biennial (*Shakedown* was shown as part of its film series, too.) Princess Nokia's an internationally touring recording artist with a recent campaign for Margiela under her belt. And each and every one of them is clearly invested in uplifting the next generation of the queer underground and in showing gratitude to the members of the community who helped them get where they are.



“Family is not the people you are born into, it’s the people you make along the way,” declared Nokia, emphasizing the concept of chosen family at the core of the evening’s festivities. Ladyfag championed the same values, albeit with a different mental image. “Until I’m in a wheelchair,” she promised, “I will provide milk for as much of this city as I can.”