Welcome to the First Look Festival of 2021!

One of my great pleasures as Dean of the School of Cinematic Arts is being able to introduce our festival films each year, and congratulate all the deserving students who contributed to them.

This year I am especially proud of the determination and dedication inherent in these projects, as they were completed within the limitations of Covid 19 protocols. Despite this, the work you will see here is of the highest quality, and many will go on to tour the film festival circuit and win awards in the year ahead. They will also serve as calling cards for the talented young professionals who are graduating from the School and launching careers as filmmakers.

Our students always depend on their family and friends to help them through their programs. Filmmaking is a challenging endeavor, and it takes a village of encouragement to have the confidence needed to bring a project to fruition. This year our students truly needed support, as our campus was shut down and many of them had to return home. Despite not being able to meet in person, the filmmakers found ways to collaborate. And as their films will attest, did so brilliantly!

So please enjoy this year’s festival. And congratulations to all the students whose names appear in the end credits of these films.

Elizabeth M. Daley
Steven J. Ross/Time Warner Professor and Dean
USC School of Cinematic Arts
I firmly believe that film has been the major art form of the 20th century, and will continue to have a powerful influence on our culture and society. So please enjoy this exposure to the “Learning Exercises” of some of tomorrow’s important artists. I’m proud to be a participant in this program.

Sincerely,

Marcia Lucas

Sponsorship for this program is made possible by a grant from The Oha-na Foundation, a private foundation funded by Marcia Lucas.

Watch USC First Look films at IndustryRelations.usc.edu Invite Code: FIRSTLOOK
WINNERS & NOMINEES

INDUSTRY
Winners & Nominees

Animation:
Monsters of Mine - Winner
Metamorphosis - Runner up
Simulacra - 2nd runner up

Comedy:
Unmothered - Winner
Time Again - Runner up
Spit it Out, Margot! - 2nd runner up

Documentary:
Unfinished Lives - Winner
Vicky & Xingyu - Runner up
Spokespeople - 2nd runner up

Drama:
Numb - Winner
Straw Man - Runner up
Soak - 2nd runner up

Genre
You Missed a Spot - Winner
Thrall - Runner up
The Collector - 2nd runner up

Social Change:
Headlock - Winner
For Rosa - runner up
Magnolia Bloom - 2nd runner up

FACULTY AWARDS

Directing:
Damon Laguna for Headlock

Cinematography: (Tie)
Hark Hu for For Rosa
Tara Jenkins for Spokespeople

Editing:
Mozhu Yan and Yucong Chen for Unfinished Lives

Sounds
Cat Gensler and Noah Donner-Klein for You Missed A Spot

Producing: (tie)
Vivian Ip for Headlock
Queen Kim and Sharon Park for Soak

Production Design:
TJ Ryan for Niño de Nadie

Screenwriting (tie)
Hannah Bang for Soak
Youssef Gouda for Jurassic Punk
Watch **USC First Look** films at *IndustryRelations.usc.edu*
Invite Code: **FIRSTLOOK**
DIVINE SINS
2:55
Animation, Sci-Fi, Fantasy, Science
Sentient Artificial Intelligence seek to break their moral programming by worshipping the Seven Deadly Sins.

IZZY’S DEMONS
7:26
Animation, Fantasy, Black/African American, Latino
Izzy is a person who struggles with the decision to reconnect with an old friend. As she gives into her jealousy for her friend's success, she makes a decision that her subconscious does not let her get away with so easily.

LOW-KEY
9:00
Animation, Comedy, Family/Teen/Kid, Fantasy
Cal and his friend Grace traverse through Cal's memories to figure out why he had a falling out with his old best friend, and by looking through the past they hope to fix the present.
**METAMORPHOSIS**

3:34  
*Animation, Experimental, Asian/Asian American, Fantasy*

The humanoid butterflies, ghosts of the lost world that tell the dream of a beautiful ruin.

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**MONSTERS OF MINE**

5:36  
*Animation, Family/Teen/Kid, Fantasy, Science*

A lonely girl uses high-tech glasses to fill her world with imaginary monster friends, but when they break, she discovers the value of true human connection.

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**PAUSE, PLAY, REPEAT**

4:29  
*Animation, Experimental*

‘Pause. Play. Repeat’ is a film that identifies the patterns that exist in the macro and micro systems around us.

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**SIMULACRA**

6:21  
*Animation, Experimental, Asian/Asian American, Women*

An elderly Buddhist woman recalls a ritual from her past, undertaking a journey of duality expressed through her many identities.
Eight-year-old Jackie is determined to protect her newest pet, a tiny turtle named Lucy, at all costs. even if it means chasing down a massive hurricane called the Hollow Monster.
GET KISSED OR DIE BRIAN
11:00
Asian/Asian American, Jewish, Latino

When 12-year-old Brian hears a rumor that his girlfriend is ready to “hook up,” he seeks guidance from his peers and the internet in order to navigate the awkwardness of pre-pubescent sex.

HARDCORE HALBERT
11:59
Family/Teen/Kid, Fantasy, Music

A young man with an ailing ficus, desperate to escape his mother’s scrutiny, finds refuge in his connection with his neighbor Abby and their mutual love of Heavy Metal.

JURASSIC PUNK
13:53
Drama, Family, Music

In 1976, punk rocker Danny Brooklyn was kicked out of his own band... 45 years later, he's crashing the reunion.
**NO SMALL TALK**

17:55  
*Drama, Comedy, Asian/Asian American, Family/Teen/Kid, Women*

Ross and Paul, two angels sent by God to spread love and happiness, make a bet over two unlikely people falling in love during the pandemic.

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**SPIT IT OUT, MARGOT!**

14:09  
*Drama, LGBTQIA+, Women*

A musical film about Margot, a shy high school girl with a stutter, who falls head over heels for her speech teacher Raz.

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**TIME AGAIN**

19:00  
*Sci-Fi, Fantasy*

When he finally succeeds in building a time machine, Griffin must go back in time to fix the moment that’s haunted him his entire life in order to win back the girl of his dreams.

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**UNMOTHERED**

17:55  
*Drama, Comedy, Asian/Asian American, Family/Teen/Kid, Women*

A tragicomedy about the lies we tell the ones we love. When Priyanka, an iconoclastic American, goes back to India to immerse her mother’s ashes, she discovers her funny family has kept a serious secret.
**IN HER CORNER**
18:37  
Women, sports

An artist, a mother, and a trailblazer seek wholeness in life through boxing.

**IMMIGRANT AT HOME**
19:33  
Arab/Muslim, Women

Years after a family trauma, the daughter of Arab Immigrants struggles with finding independence as an entertainer and maintaining her culture at home.

**SPOKESPEOPLE**
23:30  
Social Change, Educational

For Los Angeles natives living in the early 1900's, bicycles and streetcars shared the road as our primary modes of transportation. But the arrival of the freeway effectively wiped them out. Today, communities of cyclists fight for protected bike lanes and road safety, determined to bring a new era of mobility justice to the city.
UNFINISHED LIVES
23:23
Asian/Asian American, Educational

An understated and ignored story about Xinran Ji’s death.

US VS US
19:35
Social Change, Latino, Women

In the run-up to the presidential election of 2020, filmmaker Anne Brashier brings together two Southern Californian activists - one Democrat, one Republican - to find out if what unites them is stronger than what divides them.

VICKY & XINGYU
3:44
Animation, Asian/Asian American

Vicky (Xingyu) Gu explains the complexities of being immersed in a new culture and learning to communicate in another language.
CLOTHESLINE
17:00
Arab/Muslim, Family/Teen/Kid, Fantasy

An idle, Arab-American stoner discovers a portal to the memories of his mother’s past while doing the laundry chore.

FIRST SNOW
20:57
Family, Asian/Asian American, European

Two strangers, amidst a cold, snowy day, find escape, liberation, and connection in a foreign land.

HURRICANE
19:25
Family/Teen/Kid, Women

As a young girl grapples with her mother’s absence, a chance encounter with a woman coping with the loss of her son creates an unlikely friendship.
**LAST DAY**
16:18
*Social Change, European, Women*

Last Day is a surreal meditative short that observes an Eastern European woman as she moves between reality and dreams at the end of her life.

**NIÑO DE NADIE (NOBODY’S BOY)**
16:10
*Family/Teen/Kid, Latino*

Two boys survive on the street together until one believes he’s discovered his missing father.

**NUMB**
18:24
*Social Change, Women*

An inner-city tomboy celebrates her graduation, but when celebrations are marred by tragedy, she is drawn deeper into the violence of her surroundings.

**RAINY DAYS**
13:09
*Comedy, Family/Teen/Kid, Women*

After learning a popular high school senior plans to kill herself, a rebellious dropout spends the afternoon trying to understand and, along the way, discovers how alike they really are.
**SNAKE TRAIL**

17:19
Asian/Asian American, Family/Teen/Kid, Fantasy, Women

Urged to complete the traditional Chinese death ritual as her mother’s only daughter, but without the legal documentation to prove her kinship to the woman who gave birth to her—a girl finds herself in an institutional conundrum.

**SOAK**

16:39
Asian/Asian American, Family/Teen/Kid, Women

A 16-year-old tries to convince her runaway mother to return home.

**STEAM!**

18:45
Fantasy, LGBTQIA+, Western

The conductor of a tourist steam train deserts his boyfriend for a night with a dangerous outlaw.

**STRAW MAN**

13:46
Family/Teen/Kid

At risk of losing the only family he’s ever known during the dustbowl of the 1930’s, a scarecrow must leave his post and journey into town in search of work. But facing the world proves challenging when your face is a burlap sack....
1949. At the height of the Chinese Civil War, a young soldier is forced to wrestle with his morality when he is ordered to execute a child.
ASYNC
19:00
Drama, Fantasy
A woman with a troubled past becomes a devoted member of a church that is not all that it seems.

HEARTSTRINGS
23:00
Drama, Fantasy
Long into the aftermath of climate change, the cycle of oppression continues... underground, where the wealthy have imprisoned the poor, farming them for meat.

SYMPATICO
17:30
Drama, Science-Fiction
When memory recording technology is under experimentation in the dystopian future of 2040, a police officer is accused of murdering his artist friend. He must prove his innocence in order to escape the punishment of reliving his friend’s death moment.
THE COLLECTOR
14:23
Drama, Fantasy, Women, Science
When Hal discovers and restores a damaged android he must let go of the past in order to give the living a chance at a future.

THRALL
12:50
Drama, LGBTQIA+, Women, Horror
When a young woman returns home to Mother, she finds herself besieged by a sinister force that has origins deeper rooted than she could have ever imagined...

YOU MISSED A SPOT
14:00
Comedy, Fantasy, horror
In a world where every single person is a clown, a mime must find his voice to save the girl of his dreams.
#WHITINA
15:56
Drama, Family/Teen/Kid, Latino, Women

After a confrontation with an ICE agent, a 16-year-old whitina (white-acting Latina) is forced to go on the run with two unlikely companions, becoming a social media icon along the way.

ALONE TOGETHER
13:38
Drama, Black/African American, Family/Teen/Kid, Women

Isolated in an assisted living facility with only her caretaker, a grandmother battles her loneliness and fading memory as she searches for human connection through a series of family Zoom calls.

DISCONNECTED
11:45
Drama, Family/Teen/Kid

Kathy receives a text from her daughter that there is a shooter at her school, then the line goes dark. Kathy will spend the next few hours desperately trying to contact her daughter, or she may never see her again.
**FOR ROSA**

21:22  
Drama, Latino, Women

For Rosa is inspired by the Madrigal Ten, a group of women who were ten of many Latinas sterilized without consent while giving birth at Los Angeles County USC Medical Center during the 1970s.

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**HEADLOCK**

16:06  
Drama, Family/Teen/Kid, Latino, LGBTQIA+

Headlock is a coming-of-age drama about an introverted Latinx high school wrestler who must stand up to his father and come to terms with himself after his secret sexual identity is exposed.

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**MAGNOLIA BLOOM**

14:44  
Drama, Black/African American, Women, Period

In 1950s Las Vegas, a black singer is on the verge of her big break, but she risks it all when she learns her audience won’t be integrated.

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**MARIE**

15:10  
Drama, Family, LGBTQIA+

Marie uses the holidays to bridge a gap with a father who never knew her.
A queer, Latinx Army Airborne officer returns home from deployment to marry her girlfriend, but on the eve of their engagement party they’re in a terrible accident. When the court system fails them, the officer must decide whether or not to take matters into her own hands to make things right.
Agustí Argelich Girones

Animation

Agustí is currently the Director of Curtcircuit, shorts TV3 Televisió de Catalunya and Artistic Director of FILMETS Badalona Film Festival. He has been on many festival juries such as Roanne Animation Film Festival, Sitges and many more. He is also the director and producer of more than 15 animation, documentary and fiction short films.

Megan O'Neill

Animation

Megan is currently a consultant to film festivals, including the Tribeca Film Festival, where she is the Associate Shorts Programmer/Animation. She curates an animated program with Whoopi Goldberg that has premiered two Academy Award-winning shorts - Kobe Bryant’s Dear Basketball and Pixar’s Bao. Megan has 25 years experience acquiring, developing, producing and distributing short-form content. As the head of AtomFilms Studio, she worked with emerging artists and animators on original web productions. She has acquired and/or developed content with Academy Award nominees PES, Jason Reitman, Bill Plympton, and Aardman Animation, as well as JibJab and the Duplass Brothers. Megan co-produced the Sundance Film Festival feature, Relax, It’s Just Sex, and licensed it to over 40 worldwide broadcasters. She co-founded one of the first US short film distribution companies, Forefront Films, and negotiated the sale of the company to AtomFilms. Megan has been an invited panelist at over 60 international film festivals and industry conferences, including Sundance, SXSW, Tribeca, and Clermont Ferrand.

Kris Pearn

Animation

Kris Pearn was born in London, Ontario, Canada. After graduating from Sheridan College, Kris has spent most of his life making cartoons for both film and television. His credits include: Open Season, Surf’s Up, Arthur Christmas, and Shaun the Sheep Movie to name a few. He was Head of Story on Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs, and co-directed Cloudy Two: Rise of the Leftovers. He has most recently written and directed the Netflix animated feature The Willoughbys based on the novel by Lois Lowry. He’s currently developing a few projects at Sony Pictures Animation from a donkey farm in the wilds of Canada.

Stewart Cavanagh

Documentary

Stewart primarily represents prolific clients in the Alternative and Documentary space. He has spent 4 years as Vice President of Alternative at The Gersh Agency, 6 years as the Vice President of Alternative at Rebel Entertainment Partners and 3 years as an Alternative Agent at Innovative Artists. In the past, Stewart learned unscripted television at The William Morris Agency. He is currently the head of Unscripted and Documentary at Cartel. He is very proud of his heritage, born in Australia and growing up in Los Angeles to a Scottish father and Filipino mother.

Ivan MacDonald

Documentary

Ivan MacDonald is a Blackfeet filmmaker, media artist and educator based in Missoula Montana. His work has been shown across the country and at various film festivals. His most recent producing project Blackfeet Boxing: Not Invisible premiered in June 2020 on ESPN. He was also recently named a Firelight Media Fellow for the 2020-2022 cohort. His current project When They Were Here is a feature length documentary focused on the missing and murdered indigenous women and girls crisis in the state of Montana and has received support from ITVS and The Montana Film Office. He is the co-founder of the Niîsîy indigenous Film Festival based in Missoula and has worked as a programmer for the Big Sky Documentary Film Festival. Decolonization of media is a large focus of his work and is the foundation of many of his projects.
**Ariel Richter**  
**Documentary**  
Ariel Richter is a member of the Non-Scripted Advisory department at Endeavor Content, a division of global entertainment leader Endeavor. In his role, Richter supports the group in identifying financing opportunities, handling sales and providing advisory services for media companies and content creators in the premium non-scripted space.  
Richter joined Endeavor Content in 2019. Prior to that, he served as Director of Israeli Competitions at the Jerusalem Film Festival and as Associate Director of the Jerusalem International Film Lab. He holds a BFA in Film & Television Production for The Jerusalem Sam Spiegel Film & Television School.

**Whitney Fuller**  
**Drama**  
Whitney Fuller is a Creative Executive for Will Packer Productions working across Features and Podcasts. Whitney began her career in talent and literary representation at Industry Entertainment and Innovative Artists before transitioning to WGN America as a Development Associate. While at WGN America she helped the network on the launch of such successful shows including, *Underground* and *Salem*. She subsequently joined Legendary Television where she immersed herself in big budget genre content such as *Lost In Space* and *Carnival Row*.  
Whitney Fuller is a graduate of Temple University’s Klein College of Media and Communication.

**Alex Gruszynski**  
**Drama**  
Alex was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA to two parents working in the movie business. His mother, a writer/producer and father a cinematographer. He attended Campbell Hall in the valley for high school and went on to the University of Southern California where he graduated from the Marshall School of Business.  
During his time at USC, he interned at various entertainment entities such as Common Sense Media as well as Anonymous Content. Upon graduation, Alex decided to take a job at William Morris Endeavor (WME) in order to further develop his knowledge of all facets of the industry. He currently works for Motion Picture Lit Agent Meyash Prabhu who reps auteur filmmakers such as Christopher Nolan, David Ayer, and Fede Alvarez.

**Amanda Salazar**  
**Drama**  
Amanda Salazar is the Head of Programming and Acquisitions at Argo, a new streaming platform specializing in short film distribution. She is also the co-Director of the Camera Obscura Film Society and Programmer at Northwest Film Forum, a non-profit arthouse in Seattle. Previously, she was a programmer at SFFILM, the Vice President of Film Acquisitions at Fandor, and Program Director of the Newport Beach Film Festival.

**Pamela Fryman**  
**Comedy**  
Pam Fryman is a multi-camera director well-known for directing all but 12 episodes of the 9-season smash hit, *How I Met Your Mother*. She has been nominated for three Primetime Emmy Awards, and four DGA Awards. Her resume includes *Frasier*, *Friends*, *King of Queens*, *Just Shoot Me* and *Two and a Half Men*. Pam has directed well over 600 episodes of television over the span of her career.

**Derek Horne**  
**Comedy**  
Derek Horne is currently the Director of Programming for the Annapolis Film Festival. He was also the director of programming for the Hot Springs Documentary Film Festival, the Santa Fe Independent Film Festival, and the Tampa Gay & Lesbian Film Festival and has programmed a dozen other festivals. Derek started his film career in the Filmmaker Services Department at the Sundance Film Festival for six years and he was the Film Coordinator at Chapman University’s film school for over ten years where he handled the promotion and distribution of thousands of student films and advised many talented students including the Duffer Brothers. Derek has worked in film acquisitions with Atom Films, Magnet Media, and Shortbuzz/iCast. Derek was the founding editor of Kodak’s student filmmaking magazine and has also written for IndieWire and Filmink.
Rob Carlson

Genre

Rob Carlson is an agent in the motion picture department of the United Talent Agency. Carlson started his career as a trainee in the William Morris Agency mailroom. He was promoted to agent in the television department and spent ten years representing writers and packaging television series. During that time, he gained recognition for moving tv writers into the feature business by selling spec screenplays. He ran the motion picture literary division for four years and also served as Co-Head of the Film division. In 2017 he joined UTA.

His clients include Jon M. Chu (Crazy Rich Asians, In the Heights), Wash Westmoreland (Still Alice, Colette), Ian Bryce (6 Underground, Almost Famous, Saving Private Ryan, the Transformers series) and Matt Shakman (Wanda Vision, The Great, Game of Thrones, Succession). Carlson also represents a number of international based talent including Tom Harper (Wild Rose, Aeronauts), Jack Thorne (Harry Potter, Wonder, Enola Holmes, His Dark Materials), David Slade (American Gods, Hard Candy, Twilight) and Colm McCarthy (The Girl with All The Gifts). Carlson also led the team that signed HASBRO and put together their branded entertainment strategy for film and television including the Transformers series, Gi Joe and Ouija. Carlson also represents a number of writers and writer/directors in the TV, film and publishing worlds.

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Claire Bargout

Genre

Claire Bargout is the Director of Development at SpectreVision, the production company behind such titles as A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night and Mandy. Originally from Toronto, Claire attended university in Montréal and San Francisco, after which she made her way to Los Angeles and entered a whirlwind of gigs spanning the music, fine art and film industries, eventually going on to work for Albert Berger and Ron Yerxa (Little Miss Sunshine, Nebraska, HBO’s The Leftovers). She also produced the features Wobble Palace (SXSW ’18) and We’re Still Together (Karlovy Vary ’16).

Ryan Cunningham

Genre

Ryan Cunningham is a literary manager and producer at Anonymous Content. Ryan began his career in physical production as a PA on several films and TV shows shooting in New Orleans while he attended Tulane University. After graduating, Ryan moved to Los Angeles where he worked in the story department at New Regency and at Stratus Films.

He joined the Metropolitan Talent Agency in 2005 as an assistant and was promoted to coordinator in the literary department. He moved to Madhouse Entertainment in late 2006, soon after the company’s inception, as a junior manager and was promoted to full manager in 2009. In 2019, Ryan made the move to Anonymous Content as a manager and producer. Ryan represents a stable of writers and writer/directors in the TV, film and publishing worlds.

His clients include Scott Beck & Bryan Woods (A Quiet Place, Sony’s upcoming 65), David Birke (Paul Verhoeven’s Ÿlfe), Phil Gelatt (Love, Death, + Robots), Daniel Goldhaber & Isa Mazzei (CAM), Lynn Maxcy (The Handmaid’s Tale), Joël Wyman (NBC’s upcoming Debris), Jonathan Igl (Marvel/Disney+’s upcoming Hawkeye series), Ben Queen (A To Z, Powerless), Drew Daywalt (best-selling author of The Day The Crayons Quit), Jeff King (CW’s upcoming Republic Of Sarah), among others.

Ryan Executive Produced Sony / Screen Gems’ feature Slender Man. He’s also developing John Scalzi’s award winning sci-fi book series Old Man’s War as a feature for Netflix, Stephen King’s The Boogeyman for Fox, and has several other TV and film projects in various stages of development.

He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children and doesn’t sleep much.
Phillip Domfeh

Phillip Yaw Domfeh is the Senior Manager of the Disney Launchpad: Shorts Incubator and a Writer, Director and Producer from Los Angeles, CA. Prior to joining The Walt Disney Studios, he served as an Executive Producer of the 2019 AT&T Mentorship Program. There, he worked alongside Emmy Award Winner Lena Waithe and Rishi Rajani to mentor underrepresented filmmakers and produce five short films starring Dascha Polanco, Loretta Devine, and Rob Morgan.

His debut comedy short film, *Rudeboy’s Restaurant*, was financed by Little Ugly, Vimeo, Dolby Labs, and Ghetto Film School through the 2019 Emerge! Filmmaker Lab Short Film Competition and premiered August 2020 as part of the American Black Film Festival 2020 Emerging Director’s Showcase.

Prior to Emerge!, Phillip was a Comedy Finalist in the 2019/2020 ABC | Disney Writers Program and a Semi-Finalist in the 2018 Fox Writers Lab.

Alana Waksman

Alana Waksman holds an MFA from USC School of Cinematic Arts in Film & Television Production and a BA from Connecticut College in Theater and English. As an actor, she trained at The O’Neill National Theater Institute, Shakespeare & Company, Berkshire Theater Festival, and St. Petersburg Dramatic Arts Academy in Russia. While at USC, Alana was chosen as one of ten top directors to co-direct USC’s first feature film, *Don Quixote: The Ingenious Gentleman Of La Mancha* under the guidance of James Franco. The film premiered at the Palm Springs International Film Festival and is now available for streaming on Netflix. Alana has written and directed a number of short films and music videos, most notably *Blackout*, written by David Haskell, which received the Audience Award at the LA Shorts Fest, and Best Actor and Best Cinematography at the Women’s Independent Film Festival. Alana worked as assistant to the directors and post-production coordinator on Andrew and Alex’s Smith’s *Walking Out* (Sundance Film Festival 2017), and assistant to the director on Jared Moshé’s *The Ballad Of Lefty Brown* (SXSW 2017). Alana serves as director of Montana Film Festival, and DocShop and Big Sky Pitch producer for Big Sky Documentary Film Festival.

Alana’s debut feature film, *We Burn Like This*, which she wrote, directed, and produced, is executive produced by Emmy award-winning producer Neda Armian (*Rachel Getting Married, The Loving Story, Murder on Middle Beach*). She is currently in development for her debut feature documentary, *Various Ways To Cry And Yell*, also executive produced by Neda Armian, as well as her second narrative feature. www.alanawaksman.com

Cole Weinstein

Cole Weinstein is Head of Content Acquisition and oversees a small team to grow the iNDIEFLIX library with curated content from around the world (indieflix.com).
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Thank you for your support

Marcia Lucas