



MAY 31, 2025

Altitude Awards



About the Altitude Awards



2024 ALTITUDE AWARDS SEMI-FINALISTS WITH
PRESENTER, ALICIA ROBBINS AND
WIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TEMA STAIG

Now in its fourth year, the 2025 Altitude Awards honor outstanding women and gender non-conforming cinematographers, gaffers, and camera operators. Since their inception, the awards have served as a powerful catalyst—helping recipients upgrade their gear, gain industry visibility, and take significant strides in their careers.

“IT’S LIKE CHRISTMAS!” ~ GABI KISLAT, ALTITUDE AWARDS 2024 THIRD PLACE WINNER

Ten semi-finalists, four winners, and one emerging filmmaker will earn not only recognition—but also career-changing prizes and industry credibility.

Generous awards of equipment and services, provided by our incredible vendor partners—the true backbone of the filmmaking community—are more than just gifts. Access to professional-grade gear can mean the difference between landing a job, commanding a higher kit fee, or negotiating better rates for your crew. The impact is real, tangible, and immediate.

Our panel of esteemed judges takes great care in evaluating each submission, offering thoughtful insights. Savvy winners often capture photos of their award show slides—featuring their reels and judges' commentary—to showcase their work to potential clients and collaborators, and to share across social media platforms.

That kind of validation from respected industry professionals is powerful. It not only boosts visibility, but also confidence—helping our winners step into interviews with assurance, leverage opportunities, and negotiate from a position of strength. We love hearing their accomplishments and take great pride in being even just a small part of their successes.

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Voices Raised, Not Erased

**A TIMELY MESSAGE FROM TEMA STAIG,
WOMEN IN MEDIA FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

In a sudden move, our NEA grant funding—along with that of numerous other educational arts nonprofits—has been terminated. We stand united with our fellow organizations. We also stand in solidarity with artists and storytellers across the country and around the globe. Together, we confront this alarming setback to creative and cultural expression.

Our Federal NEA grant supported Pre-CAMERAderie classes, a career development initiative that prepares filmmakers for the next stage of their careers through our flagship program. Our previous two CAMERAderie cycles, fueled by advanced education and mentorship, resulted in seven high-production-value short films, enhancing countless careers.

Participants gained jobs, visibility, and momentum that transformed their career trajectories. This program has changed lives.

Who do we want to be? The narrowing of the NEA's agenda sends a chilling message. The question of America's priorities and who gets to tell stories is just as vital as the stories themselves. A lack of diverse voices threatens not only our culture, but also America's relevance on the global stage.

Defunding NEA grants is a slippery slope and we're at a crossroads as a nation. Will we choose artistic collaboration or cold transactionalism? Will storytelling be monopolized by a privileged few, or will we embrace the rich tapestry that defines the American experience?

It's the economy..... This isn't just about artistic freedom. Exclusion leaves real money and opportunity on the table. The arts aren't just about expression. They drive employment and economic development. For example, WiM members are found on our CrewList by viable employers. This resource makes it easy for department heads to find, vet, and hire - saving employers valuable time. Additionally, participants gain practical skills, recognition, and access to work opportunities through our programs.



Our focus has always been on high-quality training, thought leadership, and employing inclusive, gender-balanced creative teams. Women In Media is advocating everyday for artists like you as well as for the American ideals of fairness and a level playing field.

The film business is not for the faint of heart, for anyone, and we continue to be here for our community. If you have the desire, the will, and the resilience to pursue a career in this industry, you deserve your shot at a sustainable career. We are actively working on how to expand jobs with a proposal in the works to expand the CAMERADERIE program to bring filmmaking jobs to LA county.

It goes beyond employment. We are on a precipice. From an historical perspective, creative work has been threatening to those afraid of losing control over the narrative. America's true strength lies in its support for diverse viewpoints and freedom of speech. That's how we became a global haven for creative brilliance—drawing icons such as Marlene Dietrich, Fritz Lang, Erich von Stroheim, and Hedy Lamarr during the Weimar Republic era, when censorship drove talent into exile. Germany lost a generation of artists, scientists, and thinkers. It took years to rebuild what censorship destroyed. Defunding is an early step down a slippery slope of losing what has taken decades to build. Is this who we want to be, or will we stiffen our spines and fight for what we know is right, and do it NOW?

This is not a drill. We, as artists, don't have the luxury of silence. We must speak up, and let the powers that be know that we will not be muzzled. The demise of the NEA is not just an administrative decision—it's a warning shot meant to intimidate. True heroes understand the urgency of meeting the moment, and we are relying on you.

Will you join us in this movement? Your commitment to our mission as a grassroots 501(c)(3) educational, economic development filmmaking nonprofit can make all the difference.

WOMEN IN MEDIA IS FACING AN URGENT FUNDING SHORTFALL, AND WE NEED YOU NOW, MORE THAN EVER.

Please support our unique programs ~ that help people & our industry thrive ~ with the most generous donation you can.

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WIM IS A 501(C)(3) CHARITY. CHECK WITH YOUR TAX PREPARER ABOUT BENEFITS OF DONATING TO WOMEN IN MEDIA.



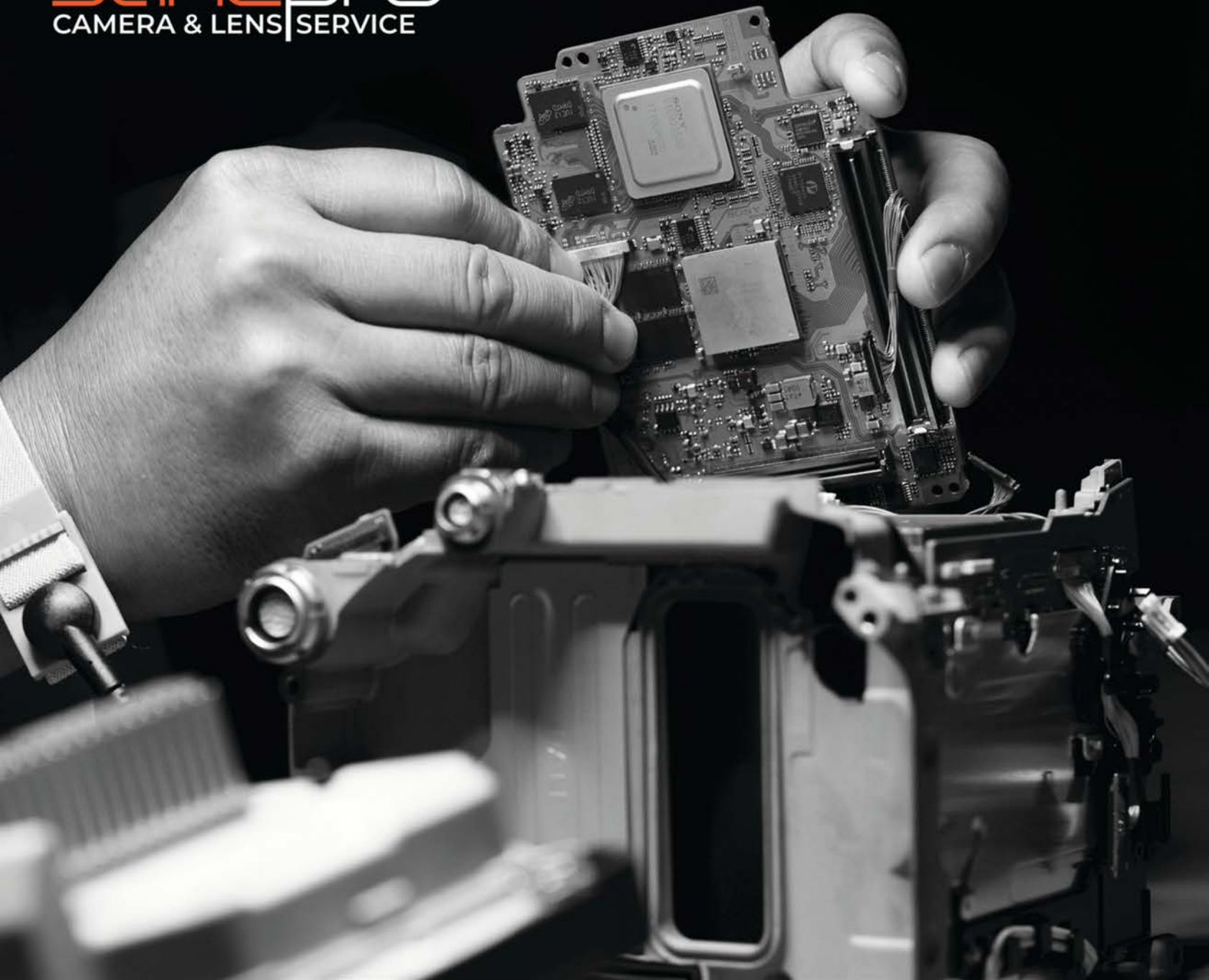
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Kathy.N@WomenNMedia.com

Community is everything! When we pull together, we are strong. We will fight for our voices and we will keep creating. Women, men and all genders are invited to join Women in Media.

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Idit Dvir - Head Judge

FILM FACULTY, HOWARD UNIVERSITY

Idit Dvir earned her MFA in Cinematography at the American Film Institute (AFI) in Los Angeles where she was the recipient of the 2005 Hollywood Foreign Press Association Scholarship. She interned under Kramer Morgenthau, ASC on the blockbuster FRACTURE and shot DISFIGURED for writer/director Glenn Gers.

Dvir is an associate Professor at Howard University in Washington, D.C., where she has taught filmmaking since 2007. She returned to AFI to teach the second-year Cinematography Fellows during the 2011-12 academic year.

She has also taught several screenwriting workshops for Women in Media, was a mentor for the development process for WiM's CAMERADERIE Initiative, and she heads up Women in Media's Developing Filmmaker Fellowship Program.

Alan Caso, ASC

CINEMATOGRAPHER: SIX FEET UNDER, THE ROOKIE, AMERICAN GOTHIC

Alan Caso, ASC learned the basic principles of light, color and composition from his father who was a photographer for the United States Air Force, a graphic artist and lithographer. Alan studied painting at Massachusetts College of Art and transferred to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, when his interest shifted to film. During this time, Caso also avidly pursued photography, learning the fine skills of black and white photography and darkroom techniques. After graduation, he moved to Los Angeles and found a niche in the Industry as a gaffer. He switched over permanently to camera operating in the late 1970's – early 1980's while additionally mastering the Steadicam, becoming one of the few operators in the 80's who performed both A Camera and Steadicam.

Caso's first feature, 84 CHARLIE MOPIC, was shot in 1988. He has subsequently compiled over 60 narrative credits for cinema and television screens. He won the ASC Outstanding Achievement Award in 1997 for the miniseries, *George Wallace*, and additionally received an Emmy nomination. His cinema credits range from Muppet movies to John Frankenheimer's stark drama, REINDEER GAMES.



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Caso created a unique look on HBO with *Six Feet Under*, for which he received two more Emmy nominations. He received an ASC nod for his work on *Frankenstein* and an Emmy nomination for Stephen Spielberg's *Into the West*. This well acclaimed miniseries also distinguished him in the western genre, which was followed by *Comanche Moon*, the prequel to *Lonesome Dove*. He filmed two feature films after that; *FIRST SUNDAY* and *LOVE HURTS*. He has continued to work for Showtime, HBO, FX, and USA, as well as network projects. Alan's other television work includes *Paradise Lost*; *Still Star Crossed*; the pilot and first season of *For the People*; the pilot episodes of *Roswell, New Mexico*; *Reverie*; *Heroes Reborn*; *Hawaii 5-0*; *The Rookie*; *Why Women Kill*; and *American Gothic*.

Alan was an Executive Committee member for the Cinematography Peer Group from 2000 – 2002 with the Television Academy. Subsequently, he sat as a Governor for two consecutive terms. He was an active member of the ASC Technical Committee from 2001 through 2005. He continues to be a mentor for the International Photographers Guild Mentor Program. Additionally, he has hosted several interns for the Television Academy's Internship Program, and is a Women In Media Advisory Board member.

Fernando Argüelles, ASC, AEC

CINEMATOGRAPHER: PRISON BREAK, GRIMM, SWAMP THING

Fernando Argüelles, ASC, AEC is a renowned cinematographer whose journey began in Madrid, Spain, where he studied visual storytelling at Complutense University. He later earned a Master's of Fine Arts in Cinematography from the American Film Institute (AFI) in Los Angeles. A respected member of both the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) and the Spanish Society of Cinematographers (AEC), Argüelles also belongs to the International Cinematographers Guild, the Television Academy, and the Society of Camera Operators (SOC), among other professional organizations.



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With an impressive body of work spanning film and television, Argüelles has brought his distinctive visual style to acclaimed productions such as *Prison Break*, *Swamp Thing*, *Hemlock Grove*, *Fear the Walking Dead*, *The Ditchdigger's Daughters*, and *The Princess Switch*, among others.

Passionate about nurturing the next generation of filmmakers, Argüelles serves as Co-Chair of the ASC Vision Mentorship Program, which promotes diversity and inclusion in the industry. He is also a dedicated educator, regularly leading webinars, master classes, and teaching engagements around the world.

Jay Holben

**DIRECTOR/PRODUCER AND AUTHOR:
THE CINE LENS MANUAL**

Jay Holben is an independent director and producer in Los Angeles. He is a world-renowned expert in the field of cinematography, an associate member of the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC), co-chair of the ASC's Motion Imaging Technology Council, and contributing technical editor for *American Cinematographer* magazine.

Jay has authored over 600 articles for *American Cinematographer* and *The Hollywood Reporter* (among others) on the art and science of filmmaking. In addition he has written six books: *A Shot in the Dark: A Creative DIY Guide to Cinematic Lighting on (Almost) No Budget*; *Behind the Lens: Dispatches from the Cinematographic Trenches*; *Shot Craft: Lessons, Tips and Techniques on the Art and Science of Cinematography*; *Lessons from American Cinematographer: Sharing Nearly Three Decades of Tips and Techniques Learned from the World's Top Cinematographers*, the international best-seller often noted as the "Bible of Lenses" *The Cine Lens Manual: The Definitive Filmmaker's Guide to the Design, Implementation and History of Motion Picture Optics*, co-authored with Christopher Probst, ASC; and, most recently, *The Director's Guide to Everything: A Comprehensive Guide for Motion Picture Directors on Every Aspect of Filmmaking*.

As a filmmaker, Holben has worked his way through all of the trenches serving in every role in production and post with very few exceptions. His feature film directorial work includes *BEFORE THE DAWN*, *BLACK TAR ROAD* and *THE INVOKING 2* along with high-profile technology innovations such as the ASC's Standard Evaluation Material 2.0 (StEM2) film *THE MISSION* a project completed in connection with the ASC, The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Amazon Studios, Disney, Sony, Warner Bros. and more. He has also served as additional unit director for HBO/Cinemax and Showtime as well as directed documentary, television, music video, commercial, reality television and shorts.

Johanna Coelho

**CINEMATOGRAPHER: THE PITT,
THE ROOKIE, SÉANCE**

Johanna Coelho is a TV and film cinematographer, who has served as a sole DP on HBO MAX's *The Pitt*, a new unique medical drama where each episode follows a single hour of the same 15-hour ER shift.

Previously, she also worked on seasons 2 and 4 of *The Rookie* on ABC and has worked on a variety of content from narrative to documentary and reality TV with other renowned companies such as Netflix, Oxygen Network, Hello Sunshine, Scout Productions, and COSM. Outside of television, her recent feature film *SÉANCE* premiered at the Newport Beach Film Festival, while her other recent feature film, *ALL HAPPY FAMILIES*, premiered at the Chicago Film Festival, followed by a theatrical release across the country.

Johanna was born and raised in France. Seeking to enrich her European approach with the American perspective, she moved to Los Angeles in 2011, where she studied cinematography at the prestigious American Film Institute. She was featured in *Variety* in 2018 as one of the Up Next generation of filmmakers.



Nancy Schreiber, ASC

CINEMATOGRAPHER- P-VALLEY, STATION 19, BETTER THINGS

Nancy Schreiber, ASC was the fourth woman voted into membership of The American Society of Cinematographers and the first woman honored with the ASC President's Award for her contribution to the art of cinematography and service to the industry. She paved the way as the first female gaffer in New York's NABET Local 15, gaffing the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *THE OTHER HALF OF THE SKY: A CHINA MEMOIR* for Shirley MacLaine and Claudia Weill.

As Director of Photography, Schreiber earned an Independent Spirit Award nomination for *CHAIN OF DESIRE*, an Emmy nomination for HBO's *THE CELLULOID CLOSET* and was named one of *Variety*'s 10 Cinematographers to Watch. Schreiber has won Best Cinematography at Sundance Film Festival (twice) for the films *MY AMERICA...OR HONK IF YOU LOVE BUDDHA* (shared) and *NOVEMBER* with Courtney Cox. She received the Kodak Vision Award at Women in Film's Crystal Awards. Her additional narrative feature credits include John August's *THE NINES*, Kevin Bacon's *LOVERBOY*, Neil LaBute's *YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS*, and Ondi Timoner's period film *MAPPLETHORPE*.

Schreiber's television cinematography includes HBO's *The Comeback*, ABC/Hulu's *The Rookie* *Feds* with Niecy Nash Betts, FX's *Better Things*, ABC/Shondaland *Station 19*, and Starz: *P-Valley*. Schreiber was also the cinematographer on the award winning documentaries *METALLICA: SOME KIND OF MONSTER*, and *LINDA RONSTADT: SOUND OF MY VOICE*.



Schreiber taught advanced cinematography at the American Film Institute and has guest lectured extensively worldwide. She also served on the board of the ASC for seven years, was on the foundation board of Women In Film, is a huge supporter and member of Film Independent, The Gotham and IDA, and is a member of the TV Academy and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She is an active member of Women in Media's Advisory Board.

Dr. Rachel Raimist

DIRECTOR: ELSBETH, THE SPIDERWICK CHRONICLES, WU-TANG: AN AMERICAN SAGA

Dr. Rachel Raimist is a trailblazing television director and former tenured college professor whose work centers on smart women, complex families and the messy, magical reality of adolescence.

Her wide-ranging directing credits span drama, comedy, action, musicals, science fiction and fantasy. She has brought her distinctive voice to hit series including *Elsbeth* (CBS), *Bel-Air* (Peacock), *The Spiderwick Chronicles* (Roku), *Sex/Life* (Netflix) and *Wu-Tang: An American Saga* (Hulu), among others.



At the Directors Guild of America (DGA), Raimist made history as the first woman appointed Co-Chair of the Special Projects Committee and was named Co-Chair of the Disability Committee by DGA President Lesli Linka Glatter. She also serves as Alternate Co-Chair of the Women's Steering Committee and formerly held the same role on the Latino Committee. A passionate advocate for equity and representation, Raimist co-founded the DGA's annual Women's Day and leads initiatives spotlighting groundbreaking, diverse directors. She continues to champion inclusive storytelling both on screen and behind the camera.

Sandra Valde Hansen, ASC, LPS

CINEMATOGRAPHER: THE SUMMER I TURNED PRETTY, THE L-WORD: GENERATION Q, CLEAN SLATE



Sandra Valde-Hansen, ASC, LPS was named one of Variety's 2019 Artisan Elite Up-Next. Valde-Hansen holds an MFA from the American Film Institute (AFI). Story is key when Sandra looks for projects to shoot. She maneuvers through the feature film, television, and documentary world, lensing the series *The L Word: Generation Q*, the feature *PLAN B* directed by Natalie Morales for Hulu, and the Showtime Documentary *BURN MOTHERFUCKER BURN*.



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Collaborating with indie darling director Gregg Araki, Valde-Hansen lensed his STARZ TV Series *Now Apocalypse*, as well as his last two Sundance features, *KABOOM* and *WHITE BIRD IN BLIZZARD*.

Valde-Hansen recently completed working with showrunner and New York Times Best Selling Author Jenny Han on her two television series: *XO, Kitty* Season 1 for Netflix, and *The Summer I Turned Pretty* Season 2 for Amazon.

Much of Sandra's work concentrates on promoting diversity in front and behind the camera. She has committed that her work helps open up experiences of many diverse voices.

Valde-Hansen worked her way up through the camera department and was mentored by luminaries such as Stephen Lighthill, ASC, Alan Caso, ASC, Nancy Schreiber, ASC and Steven Poster, ASC.

Born in Miami, Florida, to a Filipino medical family, in 2022, she became a member of the prestigious American Society of Cinematographers (ASC), her lifelong goal. She is also a member of The Society of Camera Operators, The International Cinematographers Guild, the American Association of University Professors, and The Academy of Television Arts & Sciences. She resides in Los Angeles with her husband and daughter. When she is not shooting, she is a Cinematography Senior lecturer AFI.

CAMERA DEPARTMENT FOR THE PITT
CINEMATOGRAPHER JOHANNA COELHO
A CAMERA ERDEM ERTAL, SOC
B CAMERA AYMÄE SULICK (NOT PICTURED)



CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS AND SEMI-FINALISTS OF THE 2025 ALTITUDE AWARDS

PHOTO BY WARRICK PAGE / HBO MAX

Tara Sanders Brooks

MEET THE INTERVIEWER

Tara Sanders Brooks is a cinematographer and writer residing in Los Angeles. She is a graduate of the USC School of Cinematic Arts, where she earned her MFA in Film Production. Her work on the documentary *SPOKESPEOPLE* won the 2021 First Look Award at USC for Outstanding Cinematography, as well as Best Short Doc at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. Other honors include being named a 2023 Women in Media Altitude Awards Semi-Finalist and lensing the short *Gays' Straight Makeover*, which premiered at the American Pavilion Emerging Filmmaker Showcase at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival. Tara spent four years as a writer and content creator for *American Cinematographer* magazine, where she has published over fifty articles. She is also a FAA certified drone pilot, member of ICFC, and proud IASTE Local 600 AC.

If she isn't writing about or creating films, she is taking photos of her cats with her Leica.



Carolina Costa, AMC

FUELED BY THE LANGUAGE OF FILMMAKING

Originally from Brazil, Carolina Costa studied at the University of the Arts, London, where she was mentored by Sue Gibson, the first female president of the British Society of Cinematographers. Costa then moved to Los Angeles and earned her Masters in Cinematography from the American Film Institute. She has traveled the world lensing critically-acclaimed feature films, documentaries, shorts, and commercials, including season 1 of Ryan Murphy's series *GROTESQUERIE*. She shot *FANCY DANCE* starring *KILLERS OF THE FLOWER MOON* Oscar-nominee Lily Gladstone and directed by Erica Tremblay, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2023 and can now be watched on Apple TV.

Costa has served as the DP on films that have premiered at Cannes, Tribeca, SXSW, and Sundance. One of her five Sundance features, *HEROICO*, premiered at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival and was featured in the 2023 Camerimage Directors' Debuts Competition. The film was directed by Mexican filmmaker David Zonana, whom Carolina previously collaborated with on *WORK FORCE (MANO DE OBRA)*. Carolina's work on *HEROICO* earned her her third Ariel Award nomination in 2024 for Best Cinematography (Mejor Fotografía).

She has numerous award nominations and won the SXSW 2023 ZEISS Cinematography Award for her work on *FANCY DANCE*, Tribeca's 2023 Best Cinematography Award for her work on *THE GRADUATES*, the 2022 Women in Media + ZEISS Altitude Award, and was on *Variety's* list of "10 Latinxs To Watch in 2020".

WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO WORKING IN CAMERA?

My first real relationship with the camera began through photojournalism. I had dreamed of becoming a war photographer, driven by the idea of capturing a single, raw moment in time, an image that could hold truth and maybe even shift people's understanding of the world. Growing up in Rio, though, I was confronted early on with the complexity and weight of real-world violence. At some point, I realized that kind of work wasn't right for me; not because I didn't care, but because I was already living in a kind of everyday war zone.

That reality made me rethink what kind of images I wanted to make. I still wanted to move people, to spark emotion, to shift perspectives, to share stories, but I realized I could do that through a different kind of lens. I hadn't even known cinematography was a career path until I heard at English class that someone's dad was a DoP! That's a real job? I thought? When I stepped onto a film set for the first time, something clicked. I was working as a camera trainee, but I knew films were my language, I was certain of that.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I try to carry that first spark with me on every project. Staying curious, open, and ready to explore is a huge part of what keeps me inspired. That inspiration can come from so many different places: watching films, seeing art, or even something as simple as a strange, beautiful light while scouting, or an actor making an unexpected choice on set. For me, it's all about staying present and keeping that sense of wonder alive.

WHAT DOES BEING A 2022 ALTITUDE AWARD WINNER MEAN TO YOU? HOW HAS IT INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER IN THE LAST THREE YEARS?

Being a 2022 Altitude Award winner was a real milestone for me. It felt like a moment of recognition not just for the work I had done, but for the way I was doing it, leading with intention, curiosity, and care. So to have my work acknowledged by such a meaningful platform was incredibly validating. It gave me the confidence to keep trusting my instincts. But beyond the career impact, it also reminded me why I started this path in the first place. It grounded me. It made me even more committed to telling stories that matter, that resonate, and that reflect the world in all its complexity. The award wasn't a finish line, it was fuel.



WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM THE FILM FESTIVAL CIRCUIT?

I've had the fortune of screening films at Sundance, but also at other incredible festivals like Cannes, Venice, Tribeca, and Berlinale. What I've learned is that no matter how many times you see a film in post, nothing compares to the shared experience of seeing it with an audience of strangers sitting together in a dark room. That makes it all worth it.

I'll never forget the Sundance premiere of *FANCY DANCE*. The audience was laughing so much throughout, and then by the end, everyone was in tears. To witness that full emotional journey, to see how the film lives in real time with people it's so special. There's a scene early on in *MANO DE OBRA* when a construction worker falls, and at the screening in Havana, the entire audience



WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

Last year was an intense one, in the best way. I got to collaborate with a lot of friends, which always makes the work more meaningful. I reunited with Karena Evans for a commercial project that was just pure fun, and I also shot the pilot and five more episodes of *GROTESQUERIE* with Max Winkler and Ryan Murphy. That project really pushed creative boundaries for me, and I'm proud of what we built together. This year has been just as full. I recently shot a couple of episodes for the new season of *MONSTERS*, and going to the premiere of *OLMO* in Berlin was a really special moment too.

I realized I needed to recharge a bit, so I've been going on long sunrise walks with my dogs. Honestly, that's what's next for me - some quiet, some space to think and feel grounded again. We are also finishing post for my latest short as a director, which I'm really excited about. We're getting ready to start the festival run for it, so that's a new chapter I'm looking forward to. It feels good to have a moment of pause to reflect, and to choose the next step with intention.



WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND NONBINARY FILMMAKERS AS THEY START THEIR JOURNEYS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY?

No matter the size of the project, I believe in always giving my absolute best—whether it's crafting the strongest visual language for a story or being the best leader I can be as a head of department. The most important job is always the one you're doing at that moment. I've never liked the attitude of "that'll do." I believe we should always strive to raise the bar, to push ourselves, and to chase excellence—right up until the very last shot. I believe adaptability and flexibility are essential for a long and successful career. At the same time, it's just as important to stay true to what makes you unique—the perspective and storytelling only you can bring to the table. As storytellers, our personal experiences set us apart. Embrace and appreciate that uniqueness.

For young women and nonbinary filmmakers in particular, I'd say this: your voice, your lens, and your lived experience matter. You might sometimes feel like you have to prove your place in rooms where you're one of the only ones who looks like you—but your presence there is powerful. Own it. Also, don't underestimate the value of community. The more we make space for each other, the more the industry grows in depth and richness. Lastly—nobody wants to work with someone who's always complaining. Take responsibility for your own stuff, be a positive force, and go have fun on set. We literally get paid to make art—it's one of the best jobs on the planet. Keep your sense of joy close, stay humble, stay curious, and remember why you started, it's easy to forget.

CONGRATULATIONS

2025
ALTITUDE AWARDS
SEMI-FINALISTS
& WINNERS!



Fernando Argüelles, ASC, AEC

PAINTING WITH LIGHT INSPIRED BY SPANISH AND ITALIAN MASTERS

Fernando Argüelles, ASC, AEC is a renowned cinematographer whose journey began in Madrid, Spain, where he studied visual storytelling at Complutense University. He later earned a Master of Fine Arts in Cinematography from the American Film Institute (AFI) in Los Angeles. A respected member of both the American Society of Cinematographers (ASC) and the Spanish Society of Cinematographers (AEC), Argüelles also belongs to the International Cinematographers Guild, the Television Academy, and the Society of Camera Operators (SOC), among other professional organizations.

With an impressive body of work spanning film and television, Argüelles has brought his distinctive visual style to acclaimed productions such as *Prison Break*, *SWAMP THING*, *Hemlock Grove*, *Fear the Walking Dead*, *The Ditchdigger's Daughters*, and *The Princess Switch*, among others. His work consistently demonstrates a deep mastery of cinematographic craft and a compelling sense of visual storytelling.

Passionate about nurturing the next generation of filmmakers, Argüelles serves as Co-Chair of the ASC Vision Mentorship Program, which promotes diversity and inclusion in the industry. He is also a dedicated educator, regularly leading webinars, master classes, and teaching engagements around the world.

WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO WORKING IN CAMERA?

I'd say curiosity was the starting point. I've always been drawn to images—not necessarily just movies, paintings, or photographs, but visual representations in a broader sense. I loved observing the work of artists and exploring how visuals communicate. My parents' passion for going to the movies certainly deepened my interest in moving images. My first camera was a Yashica 35mm with a fixed lens, and from there, I dove into black-and-white still photography. What began from the curiosity of a young amateur gradually evolved into both an artistic and professional pursuit. Every step along the way, I found myself more engaged and inspired. All those hours spent shooting and developing still images laid a strong foundation and became a valuable learning experience that shaped the rest of my career.



WHAT INSPIRES YOU ARTISTICALLY?

What always intrigued me was the power of images to hold memory and emotion. Even in my early photographs, I wasn't just trying to document—I was trying to understand something deeper about people, places, or moments. There's a kind of intimacy in visual work, a quiet way of connecting with others. That sensitivity stayed with me as I moved into other forms of visual storytelling.

Film noir from the 40's & 50's had a big influence on my career. I love John Alcott, BSC's work in black and white. I grew up in Europe so European films like; Italian neorealism, French "nouvelle vague", English New Wave had a big impact on my career. Japanese films, from directors such as Oshima, Kobayashi, and Kurosawa had a big effect on my filmmaker's philosophy.

As a filmmaker and artist I am inspired by all forms of art, from photography to architecture, from paintings to design and the remarkable visionaries that created such extraordinary works. Four painters had a great influence in my career regarding lighting, composition, perspective and how to approach my visual point of view in storytelling; Velázquez, Caravaggio, Goya and Sorolla. I've shot film most of my career; 35 mm, 16 mm., super 8. The study of these Masters helped me to understand the combinations of colors and pigments with different layers of shades, tints and tones in their work. My general approach was trying underexposing/pushing and sometimes pulling film stocks to formulate color hues in blacks and shadows for a more painting approach.

WHEN YOU WERE COMING UP, YOU CO-FOUNDED A PRODUCTION COMPANY AND CREATED OVER 30 SHORT FILMS. WHAT DID YOU LEARN FROM PUTTING IN ALL THOSE HOURS?

I do not think I'd be in my position now without that training and experience. That small production company laid the foundation of my career, the excellent continuous practice working mainly in 35 mm., color and B&W, 16 mm and Super 8 short films was crucial in my formation as a cinematographer. Working with many directors, producers and crews as well gave me the experience of teamwork.

WHAT DREW YOU TO BEING INVOLVED IN THE ALTITUDE AWARDS?

I met Tema Staig a couple of years ago when I expressed interest in doing a Master Class on 35mm film for WIM. Following that, Tema invited me to a WIM event where my potential participation in last year's Altitude Awards was discussed. I saw it as a great opportunity to collaborate with WIM, so I presented an award at last year's ceremony—and now I'm thrilled to be back this year.

I believe WIM is a unique and valuable platform for women in the filmmaking industry. It's an incredible space to grow, learn, and connect with inspiring professionals.



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AS AN ASC AND AEC MEMBER, WHAT HAVE YOU GLEANED FROM YOUR INTERNATIONAL CAREER THAT YOU WISH MORE CINEMATOGRAPHERS KNEW?

One of the most important things to keep in mind is the need for flexibility. What we're used to in one country may not be the same—or even similar—elsewhere. This applies to everything from equipment and crew dynamics to production workflows. More and more people are filming internationally these days, which makes adaptability even more essential.

Clear communication is also key. I highly recommend having a translator from the local production company with you at all times to avoid misunderstandings. Use common sense, and remember that some local crews might feel a bit intimidated working with a U.S. production. Be kind, show respect for other cultures, and take the opportunity to learn from them as well.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG FILMMAKERS AS THEY START THEIR JOURNEYS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY?

My biggest advice to young filmmakers is: stay interested, intrigued, stay humble, and keep creating. Don't wait for the "perfect" project or the perfect conditions—just start. Every film, no matter how small, is a chance to learn and grow. Also, collaboration is key. Surround yourself with people who challenge and inspire you, and don't be afraid to ask questions or try something new. Be open to feedback, stay persistent, and remember that your unique voice matters. Lastly, be respectful on set, learn from everyone—from the DP to the PA—and always keep evolving, both as an artist and as a human being.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

Staying curious indeed!!

Read more about Fernando's work on Swamp Thing in American Cinematographer magazine's Dec 14, 2019 Issue: Filmmaker's Forum: Don't Panic, It's Organic — A Swamp Thing Discovery Saga <https://theasc.com/articles/filmmakers-forum-dont-panic-its-organic-a-swamp-thing-discovery-saga>

Kelly Mason

2024 ALTITUDE AWARDS WINNER WAS BORN TO BE BEHIND THE CAMERA

Kelly Mason, is an award-winning cinematographer, producer, and transformational guide with over 30 years of experience in the entertainment industry. She has worked on major productions for Netflix, Warner Bros., Disney, Apple TV, and the CW, collaborating with A-list talent and visionary creators. As a trailblazer for women behind the camera, Kelly shattered industry barriers early in her career, paving the way for greater representation of women in cinematography and storytelling. She is a proud recipient of the WiM Altitude Award, recognizing her excellence in media, leadership, and her commitment to uplifting stories that catalyze positive change.

Kelly's impact extends beyond film into environmental activism, spiritual mentorship, and transformational education. Whether capturing powerful imagery or mentoring the next generation of change-makers, Kelly embodies a fierce commitment to using storytelling as a vehicle for healing, empowerment, and global transformation.



WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO WORKING IN CAMERA?

I was one of those people who was born with a camera in my hand. I received my first Kodak camera as a Christmas present when I was eight years old, and by the time I was thirteen, my father had built me my first darkroom. When I was sixteen, I got my lucky break into the industry on a big-budget film called Cannonball Run III (later renamed Speed Zone). On that production, the director actually created a new position for me called "Camera Trainee." After that experience, I returned to Toronto, asked the union for a list of cinematographers, and offered to work for free as a camera trainee on their productions. That's how the official Camera Trainee position was born.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

I'm easily inspired — life itself inspires me. The strength of the human will, the resilience we show in the face of challenges, constantly moves me. I often have a steady stream of visions running through my mind: images of how I would like to film certain moments, or stories I feel called to tell. Inspiration feels like an innate part of my nature — it's something I live with daily, like a quiet, constant current that's always guiding me.





HOW HAS YOUR WORK AS A CINEMATOGRAPHER INFORMED YOUR WORK IN FILM CONSULTING?

My work as a cinematographer laid the perfect foundation for my transition into film consulting. Spending decades on set, collaborating with directors, producers, and crews, gave me an intimate understanding of every stage of the filmmaking process — from development to final delivery. I learned how to solve problems creatively under pressure, how to balance artistic vision with practical realities, and how to see both the micro and macro needs of a project.

As a consultant, I bring all that hands-on experience to the table, helping filmmakers not only navigate challenges but also elevate the quality of their films by making smart, informed decisions early on. I know what it takes to bring a vision to life, because I've lived it from the inside out.

I've been fortunate to work across many facets of filmmaking throughout my career. I primarily work on large-scale productions like TV series and feature films, often collaborating with very large crews, complex special effects teams, stunts, second unit action sequences, green screens, and volume stages. I'm deeply familiar with the fast-paced, high-pressure environment that comes with those kinds of productions. At the same time, I love the creative freedom and intimacy of independent projects. No matter the size of the production, I bring the same level of dedication, artistry, and problem-solving to every set I step onto.

WHAT HAS BEING A 2024 ALTITUDE AWARD WINNER MEANT TO YOU, AND HOW HAS IT IMPACTED YOUR CAREER OVER THE PAST YEAR?

Winning the 2024 Altitude Award means a great deal to me, especially knowing I am in the company of such incredibly talented individuals. It's a reminder that there is a supportive community out there that values excellence, creativity, and leadership. Receiving the award has given me a boost of confidence and has opened new doors — it's provided opportunities to share my skills and experiences more directly with producers and decision-makers. It has also become a great conversation point, enhancing my credibility and helping me continue to expand my career in meaningful ways.



*Congratulations
Altitude Award Winners!*

**THERE IS
NO FORCE
MORE POWERFUL
THAN A WOMAN
DETERMINED
TO RISE**

YOU RECENTLY RELEASED A HIGHLY PERSONAL DOCUMENTARY, PAVE THE ROAD, FOLLOWING YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN. CAN YOU SPEAK TO THE DECADE-LONG PROCESS OF MAKING THE FILM?

PAVE THE ROAD was the catalyst for my personal healing journey. During the making of the film, I was going through the painful separation from my children's father, and it marked a major break in our family and in my marriage. While the documentary was deeply personal, I also felt undeniably led by Providence to pursue the work. What started as a personal story evolved into something much bigger: we helped create environmental legislation to address plastic waste, and our efforts triggered a major investigation that ultimately led to the imprisonment of 72 corrupt government officials. Using the camera not just as a tool, but almost as a weapon for truth and change, proved to be an incredibly rewarding and transformative experience for me and my children. It reminded me of the true power of storytelling — to heal, to expose, and to build a better future.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

PAVE THE ROAD was the catalyst for my personal healing journey. During the making of the film, I was going through the painful separation from my children's father, and it marked a major break in our family and in my marriage. While the documentary was deeply personal, I also felt undeniably led by Providence to pursue the work. What started as a personal story evolved into something much bigger: we helped create environmental legislation to address plastic waste, and our efforts triggered a major investigation that ultimately led to the imprisonment of 72 corrupt government officials. Using the camera not just as a tool, but almost as a weapon for truth and change, proved to be an incredibly rewarding and transformative experience for me and my children. It reminded me of the true power of storytelling — to heal, to expose, and to build a better future.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR WOMEN AND NONBINARY FILMMAKERS STARTING OUT?

My advice to young women and nonbinary filmmakers is to trust your voice, even — and especially — when it feels different from what's around you. This industry can sometimes make you feel like you have to fit into a mold, but your uniqueness is actually your greatest strength. Stay curious, stay humble, and always keep learning, but never underestimate the power of your own instincts and vision. Surround yourself with people who believe in you and challenge you to grow, and don't be afraid to carve your own path if the traditional doors don't open. Persistence, integrity, and passion are your allies. And remember: the camera is not just a technical tool — it's a means to express truth, to heal, and to spark change. Your perspective matters, and the world needs your stories now more than ever.



BOB HEARTS ABISHOLA

Patti Lee, ASC

BUILDING FROM HER STRENGTHS AND CONTINUING TO EVOLVE

Born the youngest of five girls in a traditional Chinese-American family, Patti Lee did the unthinkable and went into show business. She debated between a medical career and one in the Arts, but after enduring a chemistry class, Patti quickly chose the latter. Following a Bachelor's degree from UCLA film school, she began her career lighting feature films, commercials, music videos and television shows, working first as a set lighting technician then becoming a gaffer. She continued to sharpen her skills as a cinematographer on independent projects, including the Independent Spirit Award nominee, BUNNY. Patti got her first big break as Director of Photography on The Bernie Mac Show. Since then, she has been busy shooting both single and multi-camera television and has received Emmy® nominations for her work on Superior Donuts, Bob Hearts Abishola and Call Me Kat.

In addition to her work as a DP, Patti Lee produced the Emmy® nominated feature documentary, A SMALL ACT, which premiered at Sundance and aired on HBO. The film was named by Roger Ebert as one of "The Best Documentaries of 2010."

Patti Lee lives in Los Angeles with her wife, director Jennifer Arnold.

YOU LENSED NEARLY 100 EPISODES OF BOB HEARTS ABISHOLA OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS. WHAT DID YOU LEARN WORKING ON A SITCOM FOR THAT LONG?

Even though you create a look for the show, each season evolves with the storylines. The show takes place in Detroit with the Maxdot sock factory as one of the main sets. We leaned into a more muted reality. As Bob and Abishola's romance grew through the seasons, so did the sun as well as the colorful influence of the beautiful Nigerian fabrics of the costumes. Also, we shot the first four seasons without an audience, so we had more freedom in camera placement and lighting. Some of our sets were built more like single cam sets too, which allowed us to look 360°. In our last season, the show was reconfigured to play in front of a studio audience. That was a big challenge, because we had to keep a consistent look but redesign the lighting with greater constraints.

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BOB HEARTS ABISHOLA

WHAT IS THE NUMBER ONE THING YOU WILL TAKE FROM BOB HEARTS ABISHOLA INTO YOUR NEXT PROJECT?

My crew, of course! I love my crew so much. They all are talented, hard-working and have great personalities. Your crew represents you on set to the producers and other departments even when you are not in the room.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR CINEMATOGRAPHERS INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE MULTICAM SPACE?

A multicam is to single cam what pickleball is to tennis. Be prepared to learn new rules, move in a different way and enjoy yourself. Multicamera sitcoms have been around a long time and it's good to learn the basics of how to light for 4 cameras. With that in mind, it's good to think outside the box and break a few of the rules as you go.



WHAT INSPIRES YOU OUTSIDE OF CINEMATOGRAPHY?

I really love cooking. My mom was a great cook and she passed away last year. She was definitely the matriarch of our immediate and extended family. I've been trying to keep her recipes in circulation and continue her legacy.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I wish I knew. The industry has been slow for many of us and the world seems topsy turvy. What I do know is that I'll stay busy with the ASC and continue learning, growing, and enjoying my friends and family.

WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST FOR EMERGING FILMMAKERS AS THEY START THEIR JOURNEYS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY?

One of the things that I wish I knew when I was younger is to know your strengths and what makes you unique. You can spend a lot of energy trying to fit yourself into a mold of what you think a DP should be. I think that effort can be put more fully into your work and your life experience that informs your point-of-view.

IS THERE A DREAM PROJECT YOU WOULD LIKE TO MANIFEST?

I would love to get back into single camera. You can find yourself pigeon-holed and I would love to break out of that and do something I haven't done. I don't have a specific kind of feature or drama I would like to do, but something to break the mold.

Natasha Braier ASC, ADF

FOSTERING ARTISTIC COURAGE AND COMMUNITY

Natasha Braier ASC, ADF is an award-winning cinematographer known for her bold visual style and emotionally charged imagery. Originally from Argentina, she gained international recognition with *XXY* and *THE MILK OF SORROW* (Golden Bear winner and Oscar nominee), and went on to collaborate with visionary directors like Lynne Ramsay, Nicolas Winding Refn, Park Chan-wook, Alma Har'el, and David Michôd. Her work on *THE NEON DEMON* earned her the Danish Academy Award, and she continues to shape the look of modern independent cinema with films like *THE ROVER* and *HONEY BOY*.

She is the first Latina to serve on the Board of Governors at the ASC, where she teaches regularly at their Masterclass. Natasha is also the founder of *DEEP LIGHT*, a global community created by and for cinematographers, offering mentorship and masterclasses that go beyond technique—fostering human connection, artistic courage, and a new standard of support for the next generation of filmmakers.

YOU'VE BEEN VERY BUSY OVER THE LAST FEW MONTHS. WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING ON?

I've been finishing a film directed by Boots Riley called *I LOVE BOOSTERS*. We wrapped principal photography last Christmas in Atlanta and this year I've been on and off doing pickups and supervising a crazy car chase shot with miniatures. In between I've been juggling some commercial work.



GLASERT AUDI 2019

YOU SHIFT BETWEEN TV, FEATURES AND MUSIC VIDEOS SEAMLESSLY. HOW DOES RHYTHM PLAY INTO YOUR VISUAL STYLE? HOW DO YOU ACHIEVE THAT TECHNICALLY?

I love jumping between formats. Each one brings something different to the table. Film is my passion of course but music videos feel like poetry. They're freer, more experimental and let me jam with the language of cinema. Commercials give me financial freedom and the flexibility to be really selective with film projects. They also keep me shooting constantly, testing new gear, meeting new collaborators, and keeping my regular crew working so when a special indie film comes along they can afford to join me on it.

WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO WORKING IN CAMERA?

I've been fascinated by light since I was a baby. My parents used to call me "periscope" because I'd lift my head in the crib to watch the light patterns on the wall. As a teenager I got into photography and would spend days in the darkroom printing and developing. I thought I'd make a living as a fashion photographer until I discovered that cinematographers existed. As a cinephile that changed everything. I went to film school and that was it.

WHAT INSPIRES YOU?

Stories that resonate with my own human experience where I feel I can contribute something meaningful to reflect the human condition and maybe even help others. But honestly I'm trying to explain with words something that's mostly instinctive. It's in the gut. I either feel it when I read a script or I don't. Then I'm inspired by directors and their unique way of seeing the world. If I resonate with a director's vision I feel incredibly motivated to become their right hand to help them translate that vision into images. That kind of collaboration is what excites me the most about filmmaking.

WHAT IS A DREAM PROJECT YOU'D LIKE TO MANIFEST?

A deeply psychological story like most of the films I'm drawn to but layered with a sci-fi element. Something that lets me go visually wild the way I often do in music videos or other freer formats.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?

I just wrapped Boots' film a couple of weeks ago and have been shooting commercials since. I was about to start prepping a beautiful Argentine project with director Agustina Macri but it just got postponed which is actually great because I could use a little vacation. So I'm taking some time off reading scripts and looking for the right project to jump into this summer before the Argentine film picks up again.



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THE NEON DEMON 2015

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG WOMEN AND NONBINARY FILMMAKERS AS THEY START THEIR JOURNEYS IN THE FILM INDUSTRY?

Be yourself. Don't try to conform to outdated ideas of how a cinematographer should look or act on set. Your uniqueness is your greatest strength. In the beginning it's natural to emulate your heroes as you try to find your voice. But ultimately the goal is to discover your own way of seeing and make sure every creative decision comes from that place.

Find mentors who help you walk through that process. Not to tell you how to do things but to help you connect with your inner compass. That's the heart of what I'm building with DEEP LIGHT, a community for cinematographers that's less about ego and more about guidance, growth and genuine human connection. There's no single path to becoming the artist you're meant to be. The most important thing is to stay close to your truth and find people who support that journey.

TELL US MORE ABOUT DEEP-LIGHT.

I was a guest teacher at a lot of institutions, and I always felt like it was focused on the technical side. I felt there was a very big need for people to talk about the harder part of the job – the political, PR, inter-relational side. During COVID lockdown, I thought, why don't I take this time to put together a program to tell people what I wish I knew when I had started? I wanted to help give people a clue as to how to approach these situations. Whether you come from film school or from assisting, you aren't used to working with any other DPs when you are DP'ing. There is so much faking it until you make it. Wouldn't it be great to just give people help to get through those moments?

I am talking to other DPs to have them create their own mentorships through DEEP LIGHT. The idea is to make a space where we can support and teach, not overly academic, just real and raw. I can talk to people about my experience, from a place of let me tell you about my mistakes so you won't repeat them. We've already had seventy people go through the program, which has been in the beta phase. Now, I'm taking the next two months to launch the program fully – it takes a lot of love and commitment to do it right.

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Thank you to our advisors who offer their talents, support, and guidance to our organization. Your passion for the art and craft of filmmaking fuels our community.



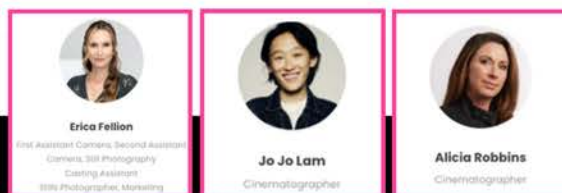
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