



AFI Announces the Directors Selected for the AFI DWW+ Class of 2026

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson



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Award-winning Filmmaker Marie Jamora Named Guest Artistic Director

Alums Include Lesli Linka Glatter, Siân Heder, Dime Davis, Cicely Tyson, Lee Grant, Gandja Monteiro, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Maya Angelou and More

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE, Los Angeles, CA, February 13, 2025 â?? Today, the [American Film Institute](https://www.afi.com/) (AFI) announced the filmmakers selected for the AFI DWW+ Class of 2026. Founded in 1974 as the Directing Workshop for Women, AFI DWW+ is a tuition-free year-long directing program, open to all applicants, that supports emerging narrative filmmakers through the production cycle of a short film, providing hands-on instruction led by industry experts. The short films will premiere at the annual DWW+ Showcase in Spring 2026.

The artists selected for the AFI DWW+ Class of 2026 are Ragini Bhasin, Reena Dutt, Maja Fernqvist, Melissa Fisher, Ran Jing, Eunice Levis, Chaconne Martin-Berkowicz and Destinee Stewart.

The eight participants demonstrate a passion for visual storytelling, the tenacity to pursue a directorial career and a willingness to learn and grow, among other program requirements. Each participant went through a rigorous selection process and were ultimately selected from 20 finalists who met with the Final Selection Committee.

AFI also announced that Marie Jamora (AFI DWW Class of 2020) has been named the AFI DWW+ Guest Artistic Director for the Class of 2026.

“For over 50 years, AFI DWW+ has had a meaningful impact on the industry,” said Susan Ruskin, Dean of the AFI Conservatory and Executive Vice President of the American Film Institute. “We are honored that AFI DWW+ Alum and trailblazing director, Marie Jamora, will be guiding the new cohort as they create their films and showcase their unique visions. We look forward to watching the Class of 2026 flourish as directors and inspire the next generation of filmmakers.”

“AFI’s DWW changed my life – the short film that I produced in the program became my calling card that launched me into the television directing career I aspired to,” said Jamora. “The filmmakers in my class are not just my dearest friends, we continue to provide each other with support and feedback in our ongoing projects. I’m honored to be able to give back to the program that gave me so much, to design the curriculum setting up this amazing new cohort for success. Now more than ever, we need to elevate voices like theirs to contribute to the film industry that we all love and grew up dreaming about.”

Born and raised in Manila, Jamora is an award-winning filmmaker who has directed countless films and television programs, including episodes of FIRE COUNTRY, THE CLEANING LADY and QUEEN SUGAR. Most recently, she directed an episode of the MATLOCK reboot starring Academy Award® and Emmy® winner Kathy Bates. Her short film, FLIP THE RECORD, won the Grand Jury Award for Best Narrative Short at Urbanworld and was shortlisted for the 90th Academy Awards®. Her first feature, WHAT ISN’T THERE, premiered at the Slamdance Film Festival. Jamora also produced and directed a project for Ava DuVernay, created for Starz. After two decades of filmmaking and teaching in the Philippines, she has taught at the AFI Conservatory and Sundance Co//ab. She is one of the leaders of the DGA’s Women’s Steering Committee’s Squad Mentorship program, the founder of the non-profit community organization Cinema Sala, and proudly one of the few Filipinos in the Directors Guild of America.

Jamora will act as a mentor for the DWW+ participants throughout the production cycle and industry showcase and oversee and direct the artistic curriculum, which is taught by film and television professionals working at top levels within the industry, as well as experienced Faculty from the AFI Conservatory.

As one of the longest-running and preeminent film and television workshops nationwide, AFI DWW+ has trained hundreds of artists whose directorial work has entertained global audiences and defined our collective cultural landscape. Distinguished Alums of the AFI DWW+ program include Maya Angelou, Anne Bancroft, Neema Barnette, Pippa Bianco, Tessa Blake, Tricia Brock, Ellen Burstyn, Rebecca Cammisa, Dyan Cannon, Dime Davis, Jan Eliasberg, Naomi Foner, Jennifer Getzinger, Lesli Linka Glatter, Lyn Goldfarb, Randa Haines, Siân Heder, Victoria Hochberg, Marianne Jean-Baptiste, Matia Karrell, Maggie Kiley, Lynne Littman, Nancy Malone, Gandja Monteiro, Sarah Gertrude Shapiro, Becky Smith, Cicely Tyson and Joanne Woodward. [View full list of 350+ AFI DWW Alums here.](#)

About the AFI DWW+ Class of 2026:**Ragini Bhasin**

Ragini Bhasin is a South Asian writer/director and graduate of Chapman University film school who specializes in everyday thrillers and socially conscious films told with a feminist lens. Her shorts have screened at several Oscar®-qualifying festivals, including two recent shorts opening at Palm Springs ShortFest. Her films have also been featured in The Wrap's ShortList festival, selected as Vimeo Staff Pick, and distributed by ARTE Channel, ShortsTV, Argo Channel and PBS. She received the Meredith MacRae Memorial Award from WIF, was a BAFTA Newcomer (2021-2024), won the 2022 Julia S. Gouw Short Film Challenge hosted by CAPE and Janet Yang Productions, and was a 2023 Film Independent's Project Involve Directing fellow.

Reena Dutt

Reena Dutt is dedicated to new and reimagined texts that catapult polarizing conversations through unexpected stories of the underheard. Her short film, FOUND is being used to start conversations within the transracial adoptee community, and TOO MANY BODIES was supported by NoRAnow.org and Survivors Empowered, advocating for gun reform. As a producer, her films have been screened at over 80 festivals including Sundance, Outfest, SF Dance and Frameline. She was a past producing fellow with SFFilm, TAP and Film Independent. Dutt is also a theater director working regionally in the USA and her next production opens in Long Beach in March.

Maja Fernqvist

Maja Fernqvist is a multi-award-winning creative director, with many years of experience in the advertising industry. Fernqvist focuses on telling stories in artful and visually arresting ways. Her work includes music videos, art films, commercials and short films officially selected by film festivals such as LA Short Fest and Brooklyn Film Festival. Fernqvist was chosen by Lionsgate to direct a short film from the Twilight Saga Universe and selected as one of the emerging directors for SHOOT New Directors Showcase. Fernqvist's work has received worldwide recognition from the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, Clios and British Television Advertising Awards.

Melissa Fisher

Melissa Fisher is an accomplished director, writer and multi-hyphenate in the industry with over 12 years of experience on Academy Award®-winning sets such as Damien Chazelle's LA LA LAND and FIRST MAN, and Emmy Award®-winning shows like GLOW and THE DROPOUT. A graduate of Chapman University's Dodge College of Film, Fisher's directorial work merges technical skill with poetic imagery to create emotionally evocative drama, tackling social justice themes and highlighting marginalized communities. Fisher's recent short BUSCANDO ALMA focused on immigration and gender identity, and won numerous awards including the Oscar®-Qualifying Jury Award at Atlanta's Out On Film Festival.

Ran Jing

Ran Jing is a transnational writer and director, acclaimed for her debut feature *MODEL*, which was featured in *Variety* China, won multiple awards at Academy Award®- and BAFTA-qualifying festivals, and had a theatrical release in China. Named one of *ISA*’s Top 25 Writers to Watch, Jing has written features for Ruyi Films. A former storyboard artist at Blue Sky Studios, she worked on blockbusters such as *SPIES IN DISGUISE*, *THE PEANUTS MOVIE* and the *ICE AGE* franchise. Her extensive experience in both Hollywood and China profoundly informs her passion for crafting nuanced, character-driven stories that explore themes of identity and belonging.

Eunice Levis

Writer and director, Eunice Levis, is a first-generation Dominican American from the Bronx, New York. Levis’ work focuses on genre-bending stories that explore technology, race, gender, history and diaspora identity. She was most recently a 2024 NALIP Media Accelerator fellow, and a Starz #TakeTheLead Writer’s Lab Intensive fellow. Levis was previously a Stowe Story Lab Fellow and a Netflix/NALIP Women of Color Short Film Incubator fellow. Her latest short, *RO & THE STARDUST*, a bilingual space fantasy, is currently streaming on Netflix. Levis is a film adjunct professor and holds an MA from New York University.

Chaconne Martin-Berkowicz

Chaconne Martin-Berkowicz is a writer and director whose work explores desire, power dynamics and the female gaze. Her television writing credits include Amazon’s *CRUEL INTENTIONS* and Amazon’s *I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER*. As a director, Martin-Berkowicz’s short film *SCOTTY’S VAG* premiered at SXSW and is now streaming on Vimeo, where it received a Staff Pick. Her previous short, *IN SYNC*, premiered at the Maryland Film Festival and is streaming on NoBudge. Martin-Berkowicz is a 2024 Sony Pictures TV Diverse Directors fellow and is developing her feature directorial debut. She holds a BA from Johns Hopkins University.

Destinee Stewart

Destinee Stewart is a director and writer from Dallas, Texas, now based in Los Angeles, who explores identity, resilience and connection. Her most recent film, *THE OTHER PARTNERS*, premiered in 2024 at the Oscar®-qualifying RiverRun Film Festival, and her feature, *WADE IN THE WATER*, a psychological horror, has been supported by BendFilm: Basecamp and the Cucalorus Writing Residency. She is developing her proof-of-concept short film for her feature *WADE IN THE WATER*. Previously, she led international dubbing productions for Netflix, collaborating on global projects like *LOVE IS BLIND*, *REPRESENT* and *IN HIS SHADOW*.

AFI DWW+ is part of the AFI Conservatory’s Department of Innovative Programs, which also includes the AFI Cinematography Intensive Workshop. Through a range of learning opportunities, Innovative Programs serves a diverse community of aspiring visual storytellers to cultivate cutting-edge technological and media-making skills, bridge access to professional networks and place participants on an upward career trajectory.

Learn more at [Conservatory.AFI.com/Innovative-Programs/](https://www.conservatory.afil.com/innovative-programs/).

About the American Film Institute (AFI)

The American Film Institute (AFI) is a nonprofit organization with a mandate to champion the moving image as an art form. Established in 1967, AFI launched the first comprehensive history of American film and sparked the movement for film preservation in the United States. In 1969, AFI opened the doors of the **AFI Conservatory**, a graduate-level program to train narrative filmmakers. The Conservatory, which counts Deniese Davis, Affonso Gonçalves, Susannah Grant, Matthew Libatique, David Lynch, Melina Matsoukas and Rachel Morrison as Alumni, is ranked one of the top film schools in America. AFI's enduring traditions include the **AFI Life Achievement Award**, which honors the masters for work that has stood the test of time; **AFI AWARDS**, which celebrates the creative ensembles of the most outstanding screen stories of the year; and scholarly efforts such as the **AFI Catalog of Feature Films** and the **AFI Archive** that preserve film history for future generations. AFI exhibition programs include **AFI FEST** and year-round exhibition at the **AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center** in Maryland. **AFI Movie Club** is a destination for movie lovers from around the world to celebrate and engage with the art form every day. Other pioneering programs include workshops aimed at elevating emerging storytellers and technology, including **AFI DWW+** and the **AFI Cinematography Intensive Workshop**. Read about all of these programs and more at [AFI.com](https://www.afil.com) and follow us on social media at [Facebook.com/AmericanFilmInstitute](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanFilmInstitute), [YouTube.com/AFI](https://www.youtube.com/AFI), [X.com/AmericanFilm](https://www.x.com/AmericanFilm), [TikTok.com/@americanfilminstitute](https://www.tiktok.com/@americanfilminstitute) and [Instagram.com/AmericanFilmInstitute](https://www.instagram.com/AmericanFilmInstitute).

About the AFI Conservatory

The [AFI Conservatory](https://www.conservatory.afil.com) opened its doors in 1969 to an inaugural class that included Terrence Malick, Caleb Deschanel and Paul Schrader. Today, the Conservatory offers a two-year MFA degree in six filmmaking disciplines: Cinematography, Directing, Editing, Producing, Production Design and Screenwriting. In a collaborative production environment, AFI Fellows learn to master the art of storytelling, collectively creating up to 175 films a year. Fellows actively participate in the entire life cycle of a film, from development through production and exhibition.

Alumni of this elite program, ranging from modern masters to bold new voices defining the state of the art form, include Andrea Arnold, Darren Aronofsky, Ari Aster, Deniese Davis, Sam Esmail, Brad Falchuk, Affonso Gonçalves, Susannah Grant, Liz Hannah, Patty Jenkins, Janusz Kamiński, Matthew Libatique, David Lynch, Melina Matsoukas, Polly Morgan, Rachel Morrison and Wally Pfister, among others.

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