

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

April 2021

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

I hope your spring is off to a good start and that you've had a chance to enjoy the beautiful weather. In addition to information regarding this year's Commencement ceremonies, I've included some additional noteworthy forthcoming events.

Many of you may know that due to the pandemic, the University's 2020-2021 academic calendar shifting Commencement to April 30. You can watch both the University Commencement and School of the Arts Convocation at [this link here](#). While we were saddened once again to not be able to celebrate in person, I am excited to share our virtual presentation with the graduating students and their families, and with our alumni community as well. We are honored and delighted for Keynote Speaker **Ayad Akhtar '02** to address our graduates as they embark on the next steps of their artistic journeys. In this he will be joined by **Dean Carol Becker** and Chairs of each of our Programs, as they commend our graduating class for the creativity and resilience they have demonstrated that has inspired us all.

Columbia University's Committee on Equity and Diversity in Arts and Sciences will host an interdisciplinary panel, [We Have to Reimagine: A Conversation about Anti-Asian Racism and Violence](#), on Wednesday, April 21 from 2:00-3:30pm ET. School of the Arts Professor **David Henry Hwang** will join as one of the panelists.

[The 33rd Annual Columbia University Film Festival](#) will be held from April 23 to May 3, 2021. Free all access passes are available to alumni with a promo code that can be acquired by emailing [soa-cuff@columbia.edu](mailto:soa-cuff@columbia.edu). More detailed information about how to attend the festival can be found [here](#), along with an up-to-date schedule of events.

Connect with School of the Arts alumni through the [Facebook group](#) and [LinkedIn group](#), where you can also share updates about your work, upcoming events, and be inspired by what your fellow alums have been up to. The Artists' Resource Center's [LinkedIn page](#) is a great place to find grant, fellowship, and residency opportunities.

This will be our last newsletter until classes resume this fall. However, please continue to send your updates to [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu); we love hearing from you! With that I will share with you this month's news from your peers, as well as our Alumni Spotlight of Film alum **Daniel Fermín**

**Pfeffer '18.**

Sincerely,

Laila Maher

Dean of Student and Alumni Affairs

### **Film**

This year's Columbia Blue List has been announced with the following alumni and projects making up the list: *Dynamos*, an original pilot by **Kristin Slaney '16**; *Hysterical*, an original screenplay by **Henry Evans '18**; *Kung Pow Chicken*, an original pilot by **Daniel Boddicker '16**; *Laylayon*, an original feature by **Nic Yulo '18**; *Refugio*, an original pilot by **Andrés Fernández '19**; *Smoking Tigers*, an original feature by **So Young Shelly Yo '18**; *Tangles and Knots*, an original feature by **Renée Petropoulos '17**; and *You Kill Me*, an original feature by **Nicholas Santos '19**.

*Manila is Full of Men Named Boy*, written & directed by **Andrew Stephen Lee '18**, co-written by **Emre Gulcan '17** and **Neda Jebelli**, co-produced by **Mica Coburn '17** and executive produced by **Valerie Castillo Martinez '16**, is now screening on [Short of the Week](#). *The Oblivion Theory*, a feature project written and directed by **Annemarie Jacir '02** won the [Eurimages Co-production Development Award](#) at the Berlin International Film Festival's Co-Production Market. **Gauri Adelkar '19**, **Raj Trivedi '17**, **Ijaaz Noohu '18**, and **Apoorva Charan '18** were selected to participate in The Salon's inaugural [Salon Mentorship Program](#). **Julia Solomonoff '00** was named [Chair of the Graduate Film Program](#) at New York University. An untitled drama series about COINTELPRO co-written and co-executive produced by **Leon Hendrix '15** and **Ajani Jackson '15** is [currently being developed](#) by Peacock. In a previous update about this project we didn't include Ajani Jackson as co-creator and sincerely apologize. **Lauren Wolkstein '10** was the [Producing Director](#) on Season 5 of Ava DuVernay's critically acclaimed *Queen Sugar* for which she directed five episodes of the season and oversaw each episode. **Marie Jamora '05** directed a [forthcoming episode](#) of *Queen Sugar*, which will premiere on OWN this Fall. *Privy To*, a project by **Michelle Leddon '00**, will show at the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival in the Digital Identities category. *Lurkers*, a novel written by **Sandi Tan '00**, was published by [Soho Press](#). *Anita*, written & directed by **Sushma Khadepaun '20** and co-produced by **Sasha John '17**, won the Best International Short Award at the [Virgin Media Dublin International Film Festival](#). It also recently screened at the Arthouse Asia Film Festival in India, and the Portland International Film Festival. *Yasmine/Jasmine*, a series written and directed by **Yossera Bouchtia '19**, was selected to participate in [Torino FilmLab's TFL Next workshop](#). It was also chosen as a quarterfinalist for the Stowe Story Labs Fellowship. **Zachary Morrison '18**'s half-hour comedy pilot script, *Canusa Street*, has been named quarterfinalist in the 2021 Atlanta Film Festival screenplay competition. Morrison was also chosen as one of the four screenwriters for Coverfly's Writer Mentorship program.

### **Theatre**

**Anthony McDonald '13** has been appointed as Schubert Theatre's new [Executive Director](#). **Carl Cofield '14** has been announced as the incoming [Chair of Grad Acting](#) at NYU. **Gethsemane**

**Herron '19** won a prestigious [Jerome Fellowship](#). *Interlude*, a personal reflection of a gay Black man's experience during the transformative events of 2020 by **Harrison David Rivers '09**, ran virtually in March and was produced by [New Conservatory Theater Center](#). [Shakespeare in the Park](#) starts again from July 5 to August 29 in Central Park with *Merry Wives*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, written by **Jocelyn Bioh '08** and directed by **Saheem Ali '07**. Bioh also wrote *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*, which was produced by TheatreSquared. **Kait Mahoney '21's** thesis project [Lego Harry Potter and the Transgender Witch](#) was featured in *The Seattle Times*. **Kate Flanagan '12** won the 2021 New Ohio Theatre Indie Film Race Jury Prize for her short film *20 Seconds* which she wrote, directed and starred in for their 72 hour competition. *A Saturn Return*, an audio experience (with optional video components) written by **Luke Hofmaier '18**, [premiers online](#) with Squeaky Wheelz Productions, founded by and featuring the following members of the MFA Acting Class of 2018: **Luke Hofmaier, Amy Miyako, Alinca Hamilton, Fang Du, Sam Simone, Hope Ruffin Ward, Tiffany Small, Eddie Powers, Freddie Fulton, and Justin Michael Cooke**. **Max Mondì '18** writes and produces *Right Now!* as part of [The Tank's](#) digital programming which will recur monthly. **Alinca Hamilton '18** and **Amy Miyako Williams '18** perform in the show. **Nadia Foskolou '14** wrote multiple essays about the NYC landscape for the biggest Greek newspaper *Ta Nea*. Faculty member **Robert O'Hara '96** directed [an audio production](#) of *A Streetcar Named Desire* for the Williamstown Theatre Festival. **Saheem Ali '07** directed the Public Theater's [podcast production](#) *Romeo Y Julieta*. **Samantha Chanse '12** was commissioned as one of five female Asian American playwrights by First In The Briefing: [NAATCO](#) to write a monologue for characters no younger than 60-years-old. Her monologue will be at least 30 minutes long, and all five will be performed together as a piece entitled *Out of Time*. **Zhangqiyu "Ada" Zhang '20** [wrote the article](#) "Will Hamilton Sell In China?" which was published on Theater Art Life.

### **Visual Arts**

Many Columbia alumni and current students will have their work shown at the group exhibition [In Repsonse: We Fight to Build a Free World](#) that will take place virtually on April 18 from 4-5:30pm at the Jewish Museum in New York. The participating students and alumni are: **Aika Akhmetova '20, Lindsey Brittain Collins '21, Baris Gokturk '20, Juan Hernández Díaz '21, Yifan Jiang '20, Joseph Liatela '21, Kate Liebman '19, Paula Lycan '20, Cara Lynch '20, Farah Mohammad '21 and Yi Sa-Ra '20**. **Cy Gavin '16's** work is shown at the exhibition [Cy Gavin](#) at Aspen Art Museum until July 11. Work by **Derick Whitson '17** is part of a group show called *Friends of Dorothy* at [Spantzo Gallery](#) in New York and [his solo exhibition](#) *Sugar (Chapter II)* is set to show at Kaiser Gallery in Cleveland from June 12 – August 8. **Jeffrey Meris '19** participated in the exhibition [Seascape Poetics](#) at Concordia University in Montréal, Quebec. **Susan Chen '20** presented her work as part of the [Where the Heart Is](#) exhibition at the Palo Alto Art Center in California. **Vikram Divecha '19** shows his work at the exhibition [Out of Place](#) until May 22 at the Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde in Dubai.

### **Writing**

**Aaron Henry Aceves '20** recently published [the short story](#) "An Allergy in Little Engines." *Meiselman: The Lean Years*, [the debut novel](#) of **Avner Landes '08**, was published this month by Tortoise

Books. **Aaron Hamburger** '01 [interviewed Avner](#) for *Fiction Writers Review*. **Daniel Felsenthal** '15 [published a review](#) of the exhibition *David Hockney: Drawing From Life* at The Morgan Library & Museum in *Village Voice*. *BOMB Magazine*'s upcoming installation of "A Room with a View" includes *Justine*, the new novel by **Forsyth Harmon** '13. **Frank B. Wilderson III** '91 will talk about his book *Afropessimism and the Status of the Subject* at the [UCLA Hammer Museum](#) on Thursday April 22 followed by a Q&A. **Hannah Kauders** '20 translated the novel [Las Biuty Queens](#) by **Iván Monalisa Ojeda** from Spanish into English. **Jakob Guanzon** '17 was [interviewed on NPR](#) about his novel *Abundance* (Graywolf Press). **Katrine Øgaard Jensen** '17 recently translated **Ursula Andkjær Olsen**'s [book of poetry](#) *Outgoing Vessel! Save The Village*, the new novel by **Michele Herman** '85, will be published by Regal House in February 2022. **Nathaniel Bellows** '98 released his third album *Three*, a work in collaboration with renowned music producer **Malcolm Burn**. Bellows also created [a series of lyric videos](#) for each of the eight songs on the album, each of which features one of his large scale drawings. **Ryan Smernoff** '15 [wrote a review of Kevin Brockmeier's](#) *The Ghost Variations* that was published by the *Los Angeles Review of Books*. **Sara von Oldershausen** '19 published a piece in the New York Times titled "She Kept a Library Book for 63 Years. It Was Time to Return It." **Elizabeth Steiner** '18 wrote the fiction piece "Fish You Can Feel Good About," published in Dark Moon Lilith Press's Spring 2021 Issue.

---

## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

---



**Daniel Fermín Pfeffer** '18 is an award winning Mexican-American filmmaker. He earned a BFA from NYU's Tisch School and an MFA for Screenwriting and Directing from Columbia University. His short film, *While I Was Gone* screened at various festivals and won the Denver Film Festival Domestic Student Award. His first feature, *I'll See You Around*, premiered in 2019 at the Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival. *I'll See You Around* has since been picked up for distribution by Breaking Glass Pictures.

His first minisodic directorial effort, *Chosen*, premiered at the Catalyst Story Institute/Content Festival winning several awards and at the Austin Film Festival. His latest feature script, *Brujería*, combines social justice with psychological horror. It is about migrant farm workers who face violence and discrimination in upstate New York. *Brujería* is an official selection for Columbia University's annual Blue List (2020). In May of 2020, Daniel's commissioned music video, *Hold That Weight* received a Vimeo Staff Pick and is considered the third installment to his ongoing film work with childhood friend, Lucas Monroe.

Daniel has taught at Columbia, Ithaca College, NYU, and Northwestern. Starting in the fall of 2021, he will begin his visiting assistant professorship at Cornell University to teach screenwriting and directing for the Performing and Media Arts Department.

---

***Was there a specific faculty member or peer who especially inspired you while at the School of the Arts? If so, who and how?***

It was inspiring to connect with the activist and artist, Jamal Joseph, and furthermore to have him as my thesis advisor. I was inspired by the deep conversations we would have about life beyond Columbia along with Professor Joseph's thoughtful attention to my writing and films. I believe this creative push and reinforcement was key for me when it came to graduating with a confident portfolio. Another professor who changed my life was Eric Mendelsohn. Professor Mendelsohn broke down how to direct a film in ways I had never thought of before, while reinforcing some of the skills I came with, and the combination pushed me to new levels in my filmmaking.

***How did attending the School of the Arts impact your work and career as an artist?***

School of the Arts taught me how to truly be a productive working artist, how to multi-task effectively with creative projects. Getting to be a full-time artist while learning from amazing faculty and peers prepared me to re-enter the industry from a different perspective. Without the SOA training and time spent on my craft, I would not be the same working artist I am today. In many respects as an independent writer and director, SOA prepared me to thrive as an artist working alongside the industry but not for it.

**What were the most pressing social/political issues on the minds of the students when you were here?**

Lots of social and political issues took hold during my years at SOA. There was the "MeToo" movement which first exposed the film and media industry in its predatory behavior. This was a time of unlearning from what we were conditioned to believe and the culture many of us grew up in. Just before the "Me Too" movement exploded Columbia was having its own internal issues with students as well, which served almost like a microcosmic precursor to what was about to happen to our nation and eventually the world. Then in 2016 meltdowns occurred all over campus when Trump was elected president, everyone was in utter shock. I remember even some classmates were so disturbed

they called off script revision class to recoup from the blow. This new reality certainly stirred many of us as grad students to think about how our stories and films were to confront this new political reality. However, one couldn't have fathomed how a few years later we'd be dealing with COVID, a true unveiling of our society's disparities.

*What was your favorite or most memorable class while at the School of the Arts?*

One of my fondest memories was script revision with professor Trey Ellis. The students in the class all took the readings and feedback seriously and we all saw graduation on the horizon. With that said, the atmosphere was tough but constructive, challenging but truthful. Professor Ellis is a generous reader and was always engaged with the students in that revision class. I believe most of us walked away from that particular semester inspired, and ready to tackle the industry as creatives.

*What were the first steps you took after graduating?*

Immediately after graduation I was flown to Detroit to direct a short period piece titled *One Sweet Night* starring JD Williams (*The Wire*). This was challenging on many levels and taught me further how to direct projects for hire and handle a range of personalities, especially in the sense that this wasn't my own passion project, I didn't necessarily hand pick everyone I wanted to work with. I also immediately applied for adjunct positions in cinema production and screenwriting and landed my first teaching job outside of Columbia at Ithaca College. This first contract allowed me to find other teaching opportunities that I feel compliment the independent writer/director lifestyle well.

*What advice would you give to recent graduates?*

When applying to jobs, grants, labs and so on, stop to ask yourself what your true intentions are. Then figure out if that's the path you want to take for your bigger goals and dreams. In other words, is that the path for you? I feel many of us scramble to get any paid job in the industry, but we don't stop to think if it's actually in line with what we want in the long run. Just because you work for a high-profile producer, doesn't automatically guarantee you a spot at the creator's table. Working smaller projects where you have more autonomy in how you go about a project and what you're actually doing for the project, and what you're learning from it, can be more valuable than being some high-level person's assistant.

---

## ALUMNI BENEFITS

- +[Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
- +[Update Your Information](#)
- +[Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)

- +[Online Alumni Community](#)
- +[CAA Arts Access](#)
- +[Complete List of Benefits](#)

---

Columbia University School of the Arts  
[artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu)

**Office of Alumni Affairs  
Columbia University  
School of the Arts  
305 Dodge Hall, MC 1808  
2960 Broadway  
New York, NY, 10027  
email: [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu)**