

# ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

## COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

December 2020

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

As the semester comes to a close and we think about spring programming, we wanted to get your thoughts. If you have any ideas for alumni programming, [please submit them in this brief survey](#) . We look forward to hearing from you!

I also wanted to draw your attention to some events happening this week that we think you'll enjoy. Tomorrow evening at 7:00 PM EST, in partnership with the Columbia Alumni Association, The Wallach Art Gallery is hosting a [virtual tour of the Uptown Triennial 2020](#) as part of the Columbia at Home Series. School of the Arts Dean Carol Becker will give an introduction. The work of alumni **Derrick Adams** '03 and **Hugh Hayden** '18 are also part of the exhibition.

On December 10 at 4:00 PM EST, we are [hosting a conversation](#) with **Amy Talkington** '99, Co-Executive Producer and Writer for Hulu's *Little Fires Everywhere*. You can learn more about Amy's time at the School of the Arts in this month's Alumni Spotlight. We hope you can join us.

Please continue to send your updates to [artsalum@columbia.edu](mailto:artsalum@columbia.edu), and follow our alumni [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) pages, as well as the Artists' Resource Center's [LinkedIn](#) page.

I look forward to writing you all in 2021 (and for this year to finally be behind us). Have a wonderful holiday season.

Warmly,

Laila Maher  
Dean of Student and Alumni Affairs

### **Film**

**Sola Fasehun** '15 was invited to participate in a panel with the Writers Guild of America titled "Pandemic Effects on Features." *Belly of the Beast*, produced by **Angela Tucker** '05, premiered on [PBS](#), and is now available to view on their site. *All-American Sex Offender* , a web series directed by **Chloe Lenihan** '16 and co-written by Chloe & **Alex Cannon** '17, won the award for Best Web

Series at the [HollyShorts Film Festival](#). *Girl Friend*, written & directed by **Chloe Sarbib** '20, produced by **Gina Hackett** '20 and co-produced by **Lauren Lopez de Victoria** '19, is available to view online at [Beyond the Short](#), [Booooooom TV](#), [Directors Notes](#), and [Film Shortage](#). **Eugene Ramos** '07 is currently serving as an associate writer for the Netflix series [The Dragon Prince](#). *I'm No Longer Here (Ya No Estoy Aqui)*, written & directed by **Fernando Frias de la Parra** '15 and produced by **Gerry Kim** '11, was chosen as [Mexico's nominee](#) for Best International Feature Film at the Academy Awards. It recently won ten [Ariel Awards](#), including Best Picture, Best Direction and Best Original Screenplay. *Inspector Ike*, written, directed & produced by **Graham Mason** '11, won the Jury Award for Best Narrative Feature at the [New Orleans Film Festival](#). *Broken Keys*, written & directed by **Jimmy Keyrouz** '16, was chosen as [Lebanon's nominee](#) for Best International Feature Film for the Academy Awards. *Twilight's Kiss (Suk Suk)*, written & directed by **Ray Yeung** '13, recently won the Best Actor Jury Award at the [LesGaiCineMad](#) Madrid International LGBT Film Festival. It is screening at the [Five Flavours Asian Film Festival](#) and the [QCinema International Film Festival](#) through December 6. **Sameh Zoabi** '05 will executive produce *Dinner at the Center of the Earth*, a series for [Sony Pictures Television Studios](#) and Showtime. *St. Louis Superman*, co-directed by **Sami Khan** '09 and **Smriti Mundhra** '09, won the [Critics Choice Association Documentary Award](#) for Best Short Film. *Empires of New York*, a series overseen by VP of Current Programming **Tobey List** '10, [premiered on CNBC](#).

### **Theatre**

**Chas LiBretto** '16's *Cyclops: A Rock Opera* will be performed as part of the Harvard Center of Hellenic Studies "[Reading Greek Tragedy Online](#)" series on December 16. [Let's Get Lit with Blaze Mancillas](#), a podcast from **Blaze Mancillas** '12 was reviewed in [Comedy Cake](#) and [Paste](#). **Mark Barford** '19, Artistic Director for the Australian Theatre Festival, recently announced the festival's upcoming [NYC online season](#). **Anchuli Felicia King** '18 serves on their Advisory Committee. **Erika Latta** '97 received a tenure-track position at Simon Fraser University School of Contemporary Art in Theater Performance in Vancouver. **Kea Trevett** '16 was selected as an [Outfest Screenwriting Lab 2020 Fellow](#). **Gina Stevensen** '18 was named a finalist for the [2020 Theatre503 International Playwriting Award](#). **Paola "Pie" Soto** '20 performed in Garage Magazine's latest production [A Cakewalk](#), in which Jeremy O. Harris assembled graduates from the country's leading theatre programs—after COVID-19 cancelled their senior showcases—to put on a play, using Gucci's Fall 2020 collection as a jumping-off point. **Christina Quintana** '13's two-hander *Enter Your Sleep* appeared on [Zoom Theatre](#). **Shayok Misha Chowdhury** '16's production *Vichitra* will be produced by [The Bushwick Starr](#). **Johnny Lloyd** '20 and **Max Mondy** '18 partake in The Tank's [RULE OF 7x7](#), an ongoing online series where in each show, seven playwrights each come up with one rule, and then all seven playwrights create new plays using all seven rules. **Hammaad Chaudry** '14 had his play *Bobby & Rabia* produced at the Edinburgh Royal Lyceum Theatre as part of the [Lyceum's Christmas Tales](#). PlayCo and Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company's [This Is Who I Am](#) will premiere online, featuring work by **Annie Wang** '20. **Tara Ahmadinejad** '14 recently directed [Underground Fairy](#) by Satoko Ichihara for Japan Society.

### **Visual Arts**

**David Brooks** '09 holds his exhibition *Stayin' Alive* at [Another Space](#) in New York through March 25, 2021. He and Visual Arts mentor **Mark Dion** also participate in [The Great Bird Blind Debate](#) that is showing until May 29, 2022 at the Planting Fields Foundation in Oyster Bay. **Patrice Aphrodite Helmar** '15 has her exhibition [This Nettle, Danger](#) at Gaa Gallery in Provincetown, MA, until February 27, 2021. **Wai Lau** '20 participated in the [Hong Kong Spotlight by Art Basel](#) from November 27-30. **James J.A. Mercer** '20 shows his work at Solutions until January 9, 2021 at [Tomato Mouse](#) in Brooklyn. **Kamari Carter** '19 has work in the exhibit *Edge of Light* until December 27 at the [Plaxall Gallery](#) in New York. **Norma Markley** '85 was part of the group outdoor exhibit *Collective Pause* at [Openings Collective](#) in New York. **Patrice Renee Washington** '14 is part of the exhibition *Barring Freedom* at the [San Jose Museum of Art in California](#) until April 25, 2021. **Priscilla Aleman** '19 shows her work at [Do it \(Home\)](#) for the YoungArts in collaboration with Independent Curator International (ICI) in New York.

### **Writing**

**Terese Svoboda** '78 will have her eighth book of poetry, *Theatrix: Poetry Plays* published by Anhinga Press in March 2021. Her fourth book of poetry, *Treason*, [was just reissued](#) by Doubleback Books. **Christina Rumpf** '09 is hosting a [conversation on magazine editing](#) with fellow alumna **Michelle Legro** '11 as part of FORA's monthly ASK A series. **Ida lodemel Tvedt** '17 published an essay titled "Heimat(t)" in [n+1](#). Her essay collection was published last year in Norway, and will be published in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland next spring. She is now hard at work on her third opera. **Steven Schwartz** '73 is producing a new spy thriller, *All the Old Knives*, starring Chris Pine, Thandie Newton, Jonathan Pryce and Laurence Fishburne, now in production in London. **Judy Bolton-Fasman** '86 published her essay "Blessings" in [Signal Mountain Review](#) and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Her memoir, *Asylum: A Memoir of Family Secrets*, is scheduled to be published in the fall of 2021 by Mandel Vilar Press. **Frank Meola** '93's story "[The Looking Glass of Arthur Gordon Pym](#)" won first place in the summer fiction contest of *Azure: A Journal of Literary Thought*. His novel *Clay* is scheduled for publication in April 2021 from Green Writers Press in Vermont. **Abbigail Rosewood** '17's short fiction was nominated for Best American Short Story by [Hypertext Magazine](#). **Gavin Thomson** '19 was nominated for the PEN/Robert J. Dau Short Story Prize by *The Southwest Review*, where he also published an interview titled "[Stories are Coffins: A Conversation with Pete Beatty](#)." **Karishma Jobanputra** '18 published [a book review](#) titled "What Society Allows Us To Be: Megha Majumdar's *Burning*" in *The Rumpus*. **Kate Greene** '20 published three poems in [Can We Have Our Ball Back?](#) An interview with Green appeared in [Air and Space Magazine](#). **Kayla Maiuri** '16 [interviewed Jean Kyoung Frazier](#) '19 for *BOMB Magazine*. **Meredith Broussard** '05 appears in a new documentary film, [Coded Bias](#), now playing nationwide at 70+ virtual theaters. **Nina Sharma** '16's essay "[Shithole Country Clubs](#)" was published in the Asian American Writers' Workshop Radio Longreads Series. **Saretta Morgan** '13 participated in an event with [The Segue Foundation](#) and Artists Space.

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## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

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[Amy Talkington](#) '99 is an award-winning screenwriter, director, and author. Amy wrote *Valley Girl* (MGM's musical remake of the 80s cult film, released May, 2020) and *Undercover* (currently in pre-production at Lionsgate with Steve Pink directing Zachary Levi and Cole Spouse). She has written numerous other studio features that are in various phases of development, including *All Night Long* currently in active development at Netflix, with Doug Wick and Lucy Fisher producing.

In the television arena, Amy has developed pilots for network, streaming, and cable. She was a co-executive producer and writer on Hulu's Emmy-nominated hit series *Little Fires Everywhere*, starring Reese Witherspoon and Kerry Washington, who also executive produced. And she is currently adapting Lawrence Wright's book *Saints and Sinners* into an anthology series for HBO-Max.

Previously, Amy wrote and directed the independent feature film *The Night of the White Pants* as well as five short films which won multiple awards (including Best Student Short from Austin Film Festival) and played festivals all over the world, including Sundance.

Before making films, Amy wrote about music and film. She has written for Spin, Mademoiselle, College Music Journal, Interview, Seventeen and Ray Gun Magazines.

Originally from Texas, Amy graduated magna cum laude from Barnard College with a degree in Art History and earned an MFA in Film from Columbia University.

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

How can I possibly pick just one!? First, Maggie Greenwald was my directing mentor. In our first directing class, she showed us her noir film, *The Kill Off*. I loved it. And frankly just to have a woman director standing before me, especially one who'd made such a dark film, had a profound impact on me – women can do this, *women do do this!* Maggie had me relentlessly prep my first film *Number One Fan* and encouraged me to go outside the Film Division for my cast and crew. It all paid off. The film went on to play many festivals, even winning the top prize at the Hamptons Film Festival, and I developed a relationship with cinematographer Jim Denault and actors Aleksa Palladino and Glenn Fitzgerald, all of whom came on board for my thesis film *Second Skin*.

My screenwriting mentor was Lewis Cole, who was also the Chair of the Film Division at that time. He taught me the rules of screenplay structure. I came to Columbia with a visual arts and art history background, so I really needed to learn those nuts and bolts. But what he really taught me was to be empathetic and vulnerable, in writing and in life. I remember once there was a student revolt over the "Faculty Selects" selection process, one that he'd gone to great efforts to make as fair as possible. Hearing of the unrest, he immediately called a meeting and stood on stage in front of the angry mob. He patiently listened to all the students' complaints and, instead of being defensive, he nodded and talked about his own professional rejections and failures, saying he deeply understood how they felt and how much it hurt. He even cried. I'll never forget that day – his empathy, his vulnerability – and all there was for us all to learn in that moment.

And finally, the incredible, Milos Forman. Milos was one of the reasons I picked Columbia. Even though I knew he was no longer teaching, the fact that he had been a part of creating the Film Division made Columbia my first choice -- that's how much I loved his films. And then, the year that I was completing my thesis, he offered to mentor a student and, shockingly, they chose me. I sent him a rough cut of my short film *Second Skin* (on ¾" video!). He watched it and then I was summoned to his home-office on Central Park South. When I arrived, thrilled and terrified, I found him sitting at his massive desk, watching my movie on his big screen TV. I stood by awkwardly as he watched the end of the film and I will never, ever forget that moment -- watching Milos Forman watch (and enjoy!) my film. It was probably the highlight of my film career. And then we watched it again together – stopping and starting – and he gave me his thoughts on the edit: ten frames more here... ten frames less there. They seemed like such tiny notes but I ran back to the editing room and tried his suggestions and, of course, he was right. Those "tiny" notes made all the difference and that was a great lesson in editing. He was a master and having him a part of my thesis film was the greatest privilege and honor.

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

Well, I had kind of a fairy tale story. Fellow Columbia student, Simon Kinberg, was interning for Ira Deutchman's company Redeemable Features (yes! He'd already sold *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* but was also interning for Ira). They had optioned a Rolling Stone article called "Diary of a Mad Freshman" and Simon, who was a fan of *Second Skin*, pitched me for the adaptation. I was obsessed with the article and they attached me to adapt it and direct it – it was my first

“assignment” but it was not Guild (and not paid). But.... as I was working on that adaptation, *Second Skin* screened in Los Angeles as a part of the Faculty Selects. And sitting in that audience was a young agent who loved my movie (yes! Executives and agents actually used to go to theaters to watch our short films!). I got a call from her the next day, we met. And, while I had no intention of signing with an agent just yet, I liked her and I signed (she’s still my agent, by the way). Soon I made a trip back to LA to have some general meetings. I had no idea what I was supposed to do in those meetings, so I just babbled on about my crazy family and by the end of my first day I had a “blind pilot deal”. I didn’t know what that was, but it was WGA (which means it paid and got me into the Guild). So, right out of the gate, I had an indie project that I was attached to direct and a Hollywood paid gig.

Now, that said, things didn’t move so smoothly afterward. *Diary of a Mad Freshman* never got made – though it came close – and the pilot I wrote for my “blind deal” didn’t get shot, but those projects got my foot in the door for both features and TV.

*What advice would you give to recent graduates?*

Well, I think it goes without saying that you need to work all the time and keep working. And then work more. And you need to find a healthy way to deal with the near constant rejection. Ideally you find a way to learn from the rejection and make your work stronger for it. But the advice that I really needed to hear was “slow down, pace yourself and stay focused on the kinds of stories you want to tell”. I was in such a huge hurry to make my first feature that I constantly beat myself up that it wasn’t happening now. And by the time I was finally able to make that first feature, I was already burnt out and a little desperate. I don’t mean to say that you don’t need hustle and drive – you do! – but you also need to step back and keep an eye on the big picture. Have a vision of where you want to be – the kinds of stories you want to tell – and methodically work towards that. You’ve got to remember that you’re building what is, hopefully, a lifelong career. And you can take some time to get to your end goal. I know, because I’m still working on it!

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## ALUMNI BENEFITS

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- +[Artists' Resource Center \(ARC\)](#)
- +[Update Your Information](#)
- +[Email Forwarding & CU Address](#)
- +[Online Alumni Community](#)
- +[CAA Arts Access](#)
- +[Complete List of Benefits](#)

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