

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF THE ARTS

February 2020

Dear School of the Arts Alumni:

We're happy to be back in touch after the winter break. I hope you had a wonderful holiday season (for those who celebrate) and a Happy New Year.

Since the publication of our last newsletter we've learned that **Christine Chambers**, a noted photographer who studied playwriting at The School of the Arts, passed away. *The New York Times* published a beautifully touching [obituary](#) that praised Christine's documentation of an energized black theater movement. Kelley Girod, a close friend and fellow playwright, added "She made us proud of who we were and where we came from, and that's what we were trying to express on stage...She helped us see ourselves in the act of claiming ourselves."

While in many ways, including globally and nationally, it has been a fraught start of the year, all of us at the School of the Arts are encouraged by the great art you are all bringing into the world. It matters and makes a difference.

With that in mind, please see below for exciting news from our community, and this month's Alumni Spotlight of Film alumna **Melina León '08**, who recently received the [New Voices/New Visions Award](#) from the Palm Springs International Film Festival.

Film

Klaus, directed by **Jinko Gotoh '82** was nominated for an [Academy Award](#) for Animated Feature. Also nominated for awards were alums **James Mangold '99** for *Ford v Ferrari*, **Jennifer Lee '05** for *Frozen 2*, as well as **Smriti Mundra '09** and **Sami Khan '09** for *St Louis Superman*. The following filmmakers were chosen to participate in Berlinale Talents development program at the Berlin Film Festival in February: **Mehrnoush Aliaghaei '13**, **Konstantinos Antonopoulos '12**, and **Valerie Castillo Martinez '16**. *This is My Desire Eyimofe*, edited by **Andrew Stephen Lee '18**, will also premiere at the [Berlin Film Festival](#), as part of the Berlinale Forum. **Sherman Payne '10** wrote two episodes of [Shameless](#) that premiered in December and January respectively, "Adios Gringos" and "Now Leaving Illinois." **Kevin McMullin '14** was selected for the [2019 Black List](#) and 2019 Blood List for his script "First Harvest".

Charm City Kings, written by alumnus **Sherman Payne '10**, won the U.S. Dramatic Special Jury Award

for Ensemble Cast. *Dick Johnson is Dead*, produced by faculty members **Maureen Ryan '92** and **Marilyn Ness** and shot by alumnus **John Wakayama Carey '14**, also won the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Innovation in Non-fiction Storytelling. Other CU affiliates associated with the film are: **Michael Toscano '12**, **Sarah Seulki Oh '15**, **Joshua Ryan Troxler '18**, **Mahak Jiwani '18**, **Kristy Richman '19**, **Markus Kirschner '09**, **Federica Gianni '17**, **Ewing Luo '18**, **Frank Liu '19**, current student **Alex Yarber**, **Jaclyn Noel '19**, and **Christina Wood '20**. [32 Columbia Filmmakers](#) headed to Park City this year to participate in the Sundance and Slamdance Festivals. Kudos to all!

Theatre

Robert O'Hara '96 directs the world premiere of the new musical *Gun & Powder*, written by **Angelica Chéri '13**, which runs through February 23 at the [Signature Theatre](#) in Arlington, VA. **Roberto Tolentino '19** will star in the new play *Fandango for Butterflies and Coyotes*, which runs February 6-March 28 at various theaters around the city. **Njideka Agwuna '18** directed **Gethsemane Amy Herron-Coward '19's** play *Blanks or Sunday Afternoon, After Church* as part of [JAGFest 3.0](#) at the Briggs Opera House. *There's Always the Hudson*, written by **Paola Lazaro '13**, will play at the Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, DC, April 6-May 3. **Kareem Fahmy '07**, **Christina CQ Quintana '13** and faculty member **Leslie Ayvazian** will present their works at NYC Reading Series organized by [New York Stage and Film Company](#). Caborca, a School of the Arts alumni based theatre company, celebrates ten years with a bilingual performance of **Javier Antonio González '06's** *Zoetrope* at the 2nd International Pueblos-Escenas Festival in Cuba, starring **David Skeist '06**, **Laura Butler Rivera '06**, and **Tania Molina '07** and produced by **Jenny Tibbels '03**. **Lori J Laing '17** is currently performing in *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* at [Classic Stage Company](#). **Lucy Powis '18** produced the show *Really Really Gorgeous* at [The Tank](#). **Celine Song '14** and **Anchuli Felicia King '18** were named finalists for the [Susan Smith Blackburn Prize](#). **Lonnie Firestone '08** released [a new episode](#) of *Places, Everyone* about the balance of industry and artistry with theatre director Sam Gold. **Marc Atkinson '16** is Associate Director of *Hamlet* at St. Ann's Warehouse February 1- March 8. He'll also be Artist in Residence at [The Gate Theatre](#) this spring.

Visual Arts

Mary Lovelace O'Neal '69's *Chasing Down the Image*, her first solo exhibition, in New York in over 25 years, will be at the [Mnuchin Gallery](#) through March 14. **Grace DeGennaro '86** opened her exhibition [Spotlight](#) at Cove Street Arts in Portland. **Korakrit Arunanondchai '12** was covered in *ARTnews's* list of "[Who Will Shape the Art World in 2020](#)." **Christine Rebet '11's** exhibition [Time Levitation](#) runs at Parasol Unit Foundation for Contemporary Art in London until March 26. **Vikram Divecha '19** exhibits his work *How to maneuver: Shape-shifting texts and other publishing tactics* until February 16 at [Warehouse421](#) in Abu Dhabi. **Pamela Council '14** was awarded a 2020 residency to the [Joan Mitchell Center](#) in New Orleans. **Jim Holl '77** was recently [profiled](#) for his Hudson Valley Exhibition *Both a Point and a Wave*. **Kambui Olujimi '13** and **Allison Janae Hamilton '17** were featured as [breakout artists](#) of 2019 in *Artnet News*.

Writing

Andes Hruby '96 received an [Iowa Review Award](#) in their Memoir Contest, judged by Roxanne Gay. "The Artist Who Gave Up Her Daughter" by **Sasha Bonet '16** was named a *Longreads* [Essay of the Year](#). The book trailer for **Abigail Nguyen Rosewood '17's** *If I Had Two Lives* can be found [here](#). Her essay, "[Publishing Your Novel Won't Cure You](#)," was recently published by *diaCritics*. **Francisco Gonzalez '19's** story "Annulment" was an honorable mention in the *Zoetrope: All Story* [Short Fiction Competition](#). "[Systemic Functional Linguistics](#)," a poem by **Jose Edmundo Ocampo Reyes '03**, was recently published in *Rattle*. [Homeland Elegies](#), a forthcoming novel by **Ayad Akhtar '02**, was named one of the *New York Times*' "20 Books We're Watching For in 2020." **Kevin Magruder '15's** new short novel [Godflower](#) will be published via Outpost19. **Ashley Nelson Levy '12** and **Adam Z. Levy '12**, have been awarded with a [National Endowment for the Arts Grant](#) for their press Transit Books. **E. J. Koh '13** was featured on *Tin House's* podcast, *Between the Covers*, where she spoke about her new book, [The Magical Language of Others](#). *The Little Mushroom*, written by **John Reed '94**, will run with musical accompaniment at [Dixon Place](#). **Tanya Paperny '11** was selected as the winner of the [2019 Tusculum Review Poetry Chapbook Prize](#). **Sarah Ramey '07** will publish *The Lady's Handbook for Her Mysterious Illness: A Memoir* in March with Doubleday. **Mark Alpert '84's** new novel, *Saint Joan of New York* is now available from Springer.

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

Best,
Laila Maher
Dean, Student and Alumni Affairs

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

This edition of the Alumni Spotlight features Film alumna **Melina León '08**. If you would like to submit your own stories to be included on our website, you can do so at this [link](#).



Melina León '08 is a Peruvian director based in Lima and New York. Her opera prima *Canción sin Nombre* premiered at Cannes Director's Fortnight 2019 and it was nominated to the *Caméra d'Or*. The film has been selected to over 60 international film festivals winning several awards including the prestigious Cinevision Award for Best Emerging Director at the Munich Film Festival. Set in Peru, in 1988, the film is inspired by a true account of child trafficking originally reported by Ismael Leon, her father.

An MFA Film graduate of Columbia University, her short film *El Paraíso de Lili* (*Lili's Paradise*), also set in Peru in 1988, made its international debut at the 47th New York Film Festival.

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

Watching *Yellow Earth* in the class of Chinese Cinema with Richard Peña. I think I wasn't the only one who was thinking "my life maybe just changed".

Acting a scene of *Sex, Lies and Videotape* for Directing Actors with June Stein. I still can't believe it worked.

Listening to Eric Mendelsohn talk about *Taxi Driver*. I figured I was going to need that same level of passion to keep going in spite of all the crazy difficulties of filmmaking.

Observing Tom Kalin trash our 8-12 in a compassionate way, without losing faith and respect in any of us for one single moment.

ALUMNI BENEFITS

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