

Northwestern University

Department of Radio/Television/Film

Fall 2021

Alumni News



Carrie Barrett (MFA WSS '09) and her co-creator, theatre alum Katy Fullan wrote and starred in a series of shorts based on their self-produced short, "CHOWDER," an off-kilter, early-80's evening soap. Think David Lynch meets Dynasty. Their concept was acquired by FX Networks who greenlit a series of additional Chowder shorts for Season 5 of their series Cake, "a handcrafted assortment of bite-sized content." Several of these shorts can be seen in various episodes of CAKE on FX and Hulu. Previously, Carrie & Katy wrote and starred in LUXURY, a micro-series for Adult Swim's Smalls. Luxury was produced by Abso Lutely Productions including producer, **Dan Millstein** (RTVF '09)



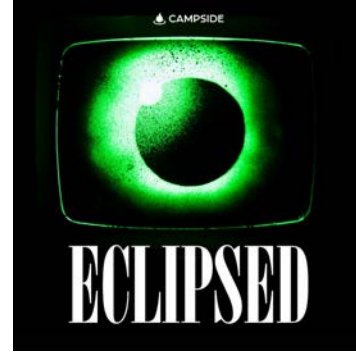
Nevo Shinaar (MFA Doc '17) and **Ashley O'Shay** (RTVF '15) is part of DOC NYC's 40 Under 40 Class of 2021; Now in its fourth year, the 40 Under 40 list shines a spotlight on emerging talent as part of the country's largest documentary film festival. The program is co-presented by HBO Documentary Films. The 40 Under 40 selection process begins with an open call for nominations for filmmakers based in the U.S. and Canada. The

final list of honorees was chosen by a selection committee that included DOC NYC staff and leading industry decision-makers. In addition to directors, the list encompasses talent working in producing, editing, cinematography, and other creative roles.

Leah Bognanni (MFA WSS '08) signed with new management this year at Elevate Entertainment and was selected as a comedy television writing fellow for Lena Waithe's Hillman Grad Mentorship Lab. The 10-month program included weekly meetings, writing a new television pilot and show bible, headshots, collaborating with and casting actors, receiving notes from industry executives, a writing retreat in August in LA, and a celebration showcase in November in LA.

Layne Gerbig (MA Sound '19) accepted a producer

position at Campside Media, where she is producing its first weekly podcast. *Eclipsed* is a narrative history podcast hosted by journalist Bijan Stephen. Each episode features a true story hidden in the shadow of another event.

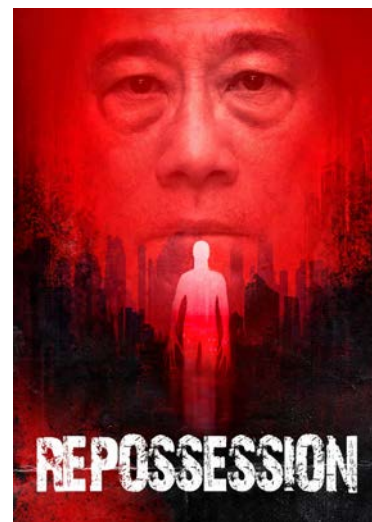


Alessandra El Chanti's (MFA Doc '21) thesis film, *WHEN BEIRUT WAS BEIRUT*, has premiered in Canada, North Africa, and the Middle East over the last 4 months. This film is a hybrid documentary about three monumental buildings in Beirut that come to life through animation, to tell their stories of their lives pre, during, and post the 1975 Civil War. Alessandra El Chanti attended its QATAR PREMIERE at the Ajyal Film Festival in November as part of the Made in Qatar Program of the festival.

Jennifer Boles's (MFA Doc '19) film, *The Reversal*, was exhibited as an installation as the Mimesis Documentary Film Festival in Boulder where it won an honorable mention in Documentary Arts. *The Reversal* also screened as a looping site-specific installation outside on the limestone of the McCormick Bridgehouse and Chicago River Museum in an event sponsored by Illinois Humanities, the Block Museum, Friends of the Chicago River, and the NU Doc MFA Program with sound provided by Experimental Sound Studio. it was also exhibited out the windows of the Ashland Bridgehouse in Bridgeport in an event hosted by the Chicago Tenderhouse Project.



Goh Ming Siu (RTVF '04) & Scott C. Hillyard's *REPOSSESSION*, an indie feature film from Singapore, will be released on December 21 by Gravitas Ventures. In this blend of social critique and arthouse psychological horror, 50-year-old Jim has constructed a perfect life in the world's most expensive city. When he's unexpectedly laid off, he desperately clings onto the symbols of his success, while wrestling with resurfacing demons from his past. The film has garnered multiple awards and played in festivals worldwide, including Cinequest, Dances With Films, and Five Flavours Asian Film Festival in Warsaw.



Michael Kastelein (MFA WSS '14) will return to the show for Season 3 of Apple TV+'s

TRUTH BE TOLD starring Octavia Spencer, Kate Hudson and Ron Cephas Jones as a Supervising Producer, writing the 4th and 9th episodes, after being the on set Writer / Producer for Season 2.



Alvaro Saar Rios (MFA WSS '10) received a commission by Chicago Children's Theatre & Omaha's The Rose Theater to adapt Matt de la Peña's New York Times Bestseller *Carmela Full of Wishes* for the stage. The play will premiere in [OMAHA IN JANUARY 2022](#) & [CHICAGO IN APRIL 2022](#).

Patrick Corley (MFA WSS '16) organized thousands of workers to stand up for themselves during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic. In summer 2020, after putting up with poverty wages and neglect from management, SEIU Local 73 union members at UIC went on strike. Then in December & again in June 2021, workers at Cook County hospital & corporate went on strike. As essential workers in healthcare and higher



education, their demands were: Protect us, Respect us, and Pay us. After 11 hard days of picketing at UIC, and 19 days at Cook County, these workers won historical contracts. Proving that if you stick together with your community, you can make real change happen in your life.

Dolores Díaz's (MFA WSS '19) [ZULEMA](#) was produced by Goodman Theatre — in partnership with Sones de México, the Chicago Park District, the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, Chicago Latino Theater Alliance (CLATA), and the National Museum of Mexican Art — and enjoyed a tour of the Chicago Parks District with a finale in Millennium Park. In December, her newest play, *Black Sunday*, will be presented as a reading as part of [FIRST DRAFT](#): Playwrights Collective Festival through TimeLine Theatre where she is in residence. Díaz taught at Columbia College Chicago in the fall and will teach at Texas Tech in the spring.



Julissa Castillo (MFA WSS '11) recently completed a stint as a staff writer on an upcoming series for Apple TV+ and has another series in development at HBO.

Aalisha Sheth's (MFA WSS '19) one act "THE LAST PLAINT," produced by Ekjut Theater was performed at the South Asia Institute, Chicago on October 10th, 2021 alongside a line up that also included NU's 2017 Kaplan Artist in Residence Rohina Malik.



Cara Ehlenfeldt (MA SAI '19) is now working as an editor/sound designer at MUMBLE MEDIA, a worker-owned audio production cooperative specializing in audio fiction.

Jennifer Boles and Luther Clement-Lam (MFA Doc '19) screened their short experimental film, *Blue*, at the Chicago Underground Film Festival.



Special Announcement

Pritzker Pucker Studio Lab Launches

David Tolchinsky, director of the Pritzker Pucker Studio Lab for the Promotion and Creation of Mental Health via Cinematic Arts (PPSL), announced the Lab's inaugural class. This intriguing group of undergraduate and graduate students will be commissioned to write screenplays or create films across comedy, drama, and horror with a focus on mental illness and health. As part of the Lab, beginning in winter quarter, there will be public events on Thursdays evenings from 7-9 p.m. at the new Virginia Wadsworth Wirtz Center for Performing and Media Arts in Abbot Hall in downtown Chicago. The Studio Lab will host public screenings, lectures, performances, and discussions around depictions and mental health/illness. All are welcome. The PPSL inaugural class includes:

Jaila Carey (SoC, Third Year)

Seunghee Chang (SoC/WCAS, Third Year)

Mandy Chen (SoC, Third Year)

Lizzie Davis (SoC, Third year)

Sophie De Bruijn (MFA Writing)

Andrew Kline (SoC, Third Year)

Ginny Lee (SoC, Third Year)

Danielle Llevada (SoC, Third Year, Theatre Major)

Salwa Meghjee (MFA Writing)

Meghan Wells (MFA Doc)

Faculty News

Erik Gernand's new play [YEAR ONE](#), about the rise of fascism in 1933 Germany, had its world premiere at Premiere Stages in Union, NJ in September. [THE STAR LEDGER](#) of Newark said of the play: "A compelling dive into extremism's creep... It leaves audiences with the difficult task of recognizing the seeds of evil concealed in otherwise perfectly pleasant people. This point of view ensures that 'Year One' is not a history play exploring specific events of 1933, but rather a valuable meditation on the unseen or—worse— willfully overlooked origins of violent extremism."

JP Sniadecki's film *A SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME* continues to screen around the world, including at the American Festival in Warsaw, the Ex-Ground Film Festival in Wiesbaden, the Environmental Film Festival Australia, and the Now Instant Image Festival in LA (<https://now-instant.la/screen-17-archive>). His 2017 film *EL MAR LA MAR* was the central theme of MIRAGE festival in Norway, and screened at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London. Solax, a Spanish language online screening platform, is distributing all his works as a special focus, and China language platform Cathay Play will also distribute his films. Upcoming screenings include in Brussels, France, and China.



Exal Iraheta's (MFA WSS '19) *Last Hermanos* will be part of [A Red Orchid Theatre's 2021-22 season](#), set to premiere in Spring 2022. Iraheta will also be The Chance Theatre's 2022 Playwright in Residence. This fall, Iraheta's play *La Fuente de Cascabeles* was also part of [The Goodman Theatre's 2020-21 Playwrights Unit](#) showcase, an in-person staged reading of work in progress. exaliraheta.com for more.

Ariel Stess workshopped her new play, *The Last Class*, with the Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis in June. The workshop was directed by Kimille Howard and culminated in a reading.

Lakshmi Padmanabhan awarded [UNDO](#) fellowship - collaborative research fellowship on documentary art.

Assistant Professor **Danielle Beverly** took her feature documentary [DUSTY](#)

GROOVE: THE SOUND OF

TRANSITION on a multi-state outdoor tour for community screenings in Summer 2021. At each location she partnered with local record stores, built the screen herself, and spun vinyl on a portable turntable as audiences arrived with lawn chairs. DIY self-distribution is a hallmark of her filmmaking practice, to connect with and directly



engage communities invested in the themes of her documentaries. Check out the photos and tour diary [HERE](#). Her Summer 2021 tour was generously supported by grants from the Illinois Arts Council and The Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events.



Ines Sommer organized the Chicago Cultural Center for *DOC CHICAGO* (Nov 5-7), a hybrid mini-conference in early November where regional documentary filmmakers gathered. From panels to round tables and a community conversation, Doc Chicago was co-presented with the Chicago Film Office and allowed filmmakers to exchange ideas, learn, and connect with each other. A special thanks to MFA in Documentary Media students who helped run and document the event: Lily Freeston, Meghan Wells, Yanyi Xie, and Naomi Zidon! And thanks to JP Sniadecki for moderating and Meredith Zielke for speaking on one of the panels! The accompanying Short Film Showcase at Chicago Filmmakers featured a fun mix of Chicago productions, including work by alumni Mari Oliva and Naeema Torres and current grad student Lily Freeston. Thanks to Nely Montina (class of 2022) for moderating a lively post-screening discussion!

Eliza Bent's new play *RACK UP* was among the 2020/2021 Goodman Theatre Playwrights Unit cohorts that were showcased at in-person readings this autumn. Elsie takes tennis lessons. Actually, "Elsie" isn't her real name, but that's beside the point. As she rallies, volleys, and hits Elsie, her classmates, the tennis teacher, and the ball boy long for the meaning of life. "Elsie!" the tennis teacher commands. "Your TikToks are funny but need more romance. Think about it." As water breaks and walks home accumulate, an exploration about the elasticity of time and the nature of identity emerges in *RACK UP*.



Hamid Naficy was invited to give a virtual talk via Zoom on “Iranian Internet Cinema—a Cinema of Embodied Protest,” at The Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Lecture Series, University of Toronto, Canada on 10 September 2021. He also recently published “Iranian Internet Cinema, A Cinema of Embodied Protest: Imperfect, Amateur, Small, Unauthorized, Global,” *Media and Mapping Practices in the Middle East and North Africa: Producing Space*. Edited by Alena Strohmaier and Angela Krewani. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. 2021. Pp. 119-138. The [Hamid Naficy Book Award](#) was also established in 2021.

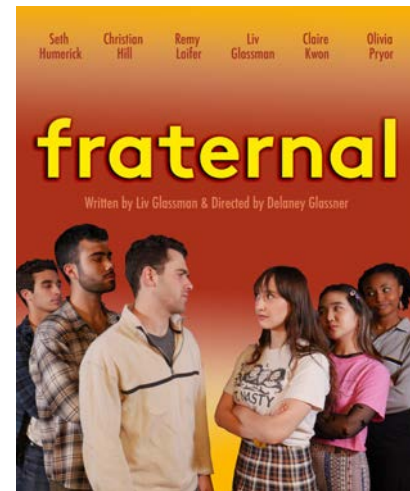
Current Student News

Undergraduates



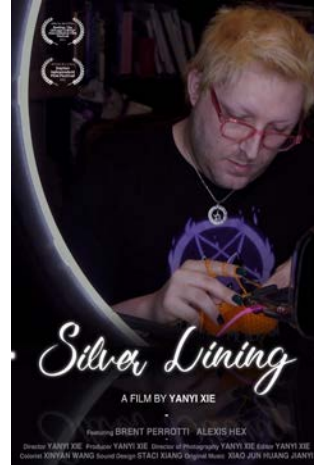
First-Year Filmmakers, a weekend-long filmmaking event for RTVF first-year students, was held on campus October 22-24. Eight teams of student filmmakers created original films that were screened that Sunday in Annie May Swift. First-Year Filmmakers is led by faculty advisor Erik Gernand.

Fraternal, a sitcom written by **Liv Glassman** (RTVF 2022) and directed by **Delaney Glassner** (RTVF 2023), released this fall thanks to Northwestern's Sitcom Production Grant. The Sitcom follows college feminist Eva begrudgingly who lets her twin Eli move in after his fraternity disbands, creating a divergent mix of her kooky roommates and his macho best friends. Catch the trailer [HERE](#).

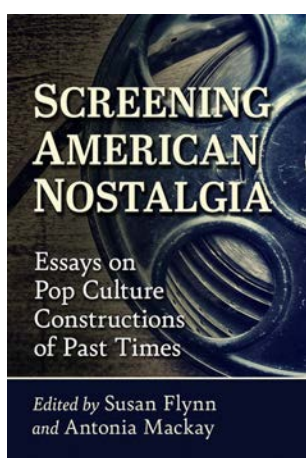


MFA Doc Media

Yanyi Xie's (MFA Doc '22) short documentary *Silver Lining* was part of the official selections at Reeling: The Chicago LGBTQ+ International Film Festival, Dayton Independent Film Festival, and Topaz Film Festival by Women in Film Dallas in 2021.



Screen Cultures



Kelly Coyne's (Class of 2022) chapter, "Regulating Sex, Surveilling Sex: Pornographic Nostalgia in 'The Deuce,'" was published in "[SCREENING AMERICAN NOSTALGIA](#)" (McFarland).

Jelena Jelušić's (Class of 2022) article, "[THE POLITICS OF A ROCK 'N' ROAD DOCUDRAMA—GENRE AND INTERTEXTUALITY IN ŽELIMIR ŽILNIK'S OLDTIMER \(1989\)](#)" was published in *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*. She presented her work on gender representation in Montenegrin cinema at the *Studies in Eastern European Cinema Conference* in June 2021. In Montenegro, Jelena contributed a chapter, "Politics of Gender Representation in Živko Nikolić's Work," to the essay collection *Discovering the Hidden: Montenegro, Queer & (Cor)Related Issues*, commissioned by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

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