

# IN THE LOOP

A Message from Stony Brook University's MFA Film and TV Writing Programs



## MFA in FILM & TV

IN ASSOCIATION WITH KILLER FILMS

### Welcome Back!

This fall we are thrilled to welcome our students, new and old, onto our Manhattan campus for in-person classes. It has been extraordinary to finally get to know each other in real life.

### Incoming Student Accomplishments

Each year, Stony Brook Manhattan opens its doors to a new wave of incredibly talented individuals and we are so excited to introduce a few of them to you.

First up is the Television Writing Program: Ryan Winnick has helped rewrite, Assistant Direct, and will star in the upcoming web series, *Love & Lockdown*, from creator Leah Lamarr. The series is currently being shopped to Netflix.

Emily Weisberg has co-written a pilot script for an upcoming series entitled, *Take the Whip*. The series is an hour-long dramedy centered around the inner world of roller derby.

Anna Zabel has written a pilot titled, *Belly*, which has been selected as a finalist at the Miami Screenplay Awards, a semi-finalist at the Best Script Award Film Festival Television, and is a quarter-finalist at the London International Screenplay Competition. Zabel's pitch for the series has also been selected as a semi-finalist at The Pitch Competition hosted by the ATX Television Festival.

Gabby Brown produces and hosts the widely popular stand-up comedy show, *Anne Hathaway Presents*, at the QED Astoria. The show features rising comics such as April Body (Hulu), Sam Morrison (The Drew Barrymore Show), and Divya Gunasekaran (Fire Starters Comedy).

Next, in our film program, many of our incoming film class this semester have already started building a name for themselves within the industry.

Andy Fidoten's short film, *Gay Teen Werewolf*, has been selected to screen at The YOUKI International Youth Media Festival in Austria, Reel Q: The Pittsburgh LGBTQ+ Film Festival, Fringe! Queer Film and Arts Fest in London, and the Santa Fe Independent Film Festival.

Liza Renzulli is a highly accomplished editor who worked on high-profile projects such as the Comedy Central series, *Doing the Most* with Phoebe Robinson, a hybrid talk-show that weekly features guest stars such as Hasan Minhaj, Amber Ruffin, and Tan France.

Rachel Johnson was recently selected to participate in the Artistic Professional Development Lab (DEAR Artist) sponsored by the CCCADI Institute as well as the Indie Memphis Film Festival's Black Creators Forum this October.

Nathan Kovar's short *Opening Number*, a project that he co-wrote and served as Director of Photography, was selected to screen at The Paris Film Festival, Venice Shorts Film Festival, Sidewalk Film Festival, Toronto Independent Festival, and the Independent Shorts Film Festival in Los Angeles where it received a total of five awards. It was also a 2021 Holle Award Finalist.

### IN THIS ISSUE:

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- New faculty
- Internships
- Highlights of Current Student Works

Welcome to our first newsletter of the 2021-2022 school year! We have a lot of exciting developments over the summer, and even more happening right now or in the near future. Tune in to this newsletter to find out more!

### New Faculty and Staff Highlights

We are proud to spotlight two faculty members who are elevating our Film and TV programs at Stony Brook Manhattan, Chanelle Elaine and Kris Lefcoe. Chanelle is a powerhouse producer, who works in community with filmmakers, activists, and philanthropists in advancing the global initiative of equality for girls and women everywhere. Chanelle will be teaching our upper-level and producing track students the art of budgeting and scheduling to preserve the artistic integrity of projects in our new Art of Line Producing class. Writer, director and producer, Kris Lefcoe, has taught with us before and will be teaching Webseries to our second and third-year TV Writing students this year. Kris recently directed a Superstore episode for NBC and has won multiple awards, including Overall Best of the Fest, and Best Writing, at the 2017 New York Television Festival.



Elaine and Lefcoe will join our core faculty: Christine Vachon, Alan Kingsberg, Simone Pero, Perry Blackshear, Jennie Allen, Lenny Crooks, Jordan Roberts, Scott Burkhardt, Karen Offitzer, Magdalene Brandeis, Shira-Lee Shalit, Ethan T. Berlin, Jim Jennwein, Adam Yaffe, Stephen Gates, Jacquelyn Reingold and more.

### Master Class With Christine Vachon



Did you catch the nice shout out to Christine Vachon from Ewan McGregor during his Emmy win speech for Best Actor for *Halston*? Christine's aptly-named Master Class in Independent Film Production has kicked off, meeting weekly to talk shop on the industry. Test learning cases include the marketing, distribution and festival run of Todd Haynes' new documentary, *The Velvet Underground*, Billy Porter's directorial debut, and production of Celine Song's *Past Lives*.

In the past few weeks, the masterclass has heard from the extraordinary producer and entertainment lawyer John Sloss (Sloss Eckhouse Law & Cinetic), agents Robb Rothman & Andrea Kavooosi (Rothman Brecher Ehrich Livingston Agency), Killer Film lawyers Bethany Haynes and Jason Ervin who shared intel about the complex yet fascinating world of intellectual property disputes and finally, producer Mynette Louie (*The Tale*, *I Carry You With Me*, *Black Box*, *Swallow*) spoke with MFA faculty Simone Pero on their shared experiences on *The Tale* and other projects with social impact producing and taking a film from development to distribution — a process that can sometimes take 10 years.

### Internships

Here at the Manhattan Center, internships are a big part of the learning experience. Students make connections with prestigious companies that help further their network base and careers. Last year two of our TV Writing students, Brittany Ramjattan and Omani McDaniels interned for 6 months at Production Company The Population. This indie production company focuses on TV and Film projects created by or about women, LGBTQIA+, people of color and all other underrepresented voices. The Population is run by Emmy nominee Mynette Louie, Derek Nguyen and Oscar winner Mollye Asher. Mynette Louie has also been a guest speaker in our Master Class with Christine Vachon.



**Omani:** "This internship was really like a crash course in script analysis. Because of Covid we [the interns] were all working remotely, which meant that I could only take part in development and not in production. For me, as a TV Writer, it couldn't have worked out any better. I learned what not to do, through the disappointing scripts and had the joy of having a first read of scripts that will hopefully make it to production. This internship taught me what works, what doesn't, and why. An immensely valuable experience for any aspiring writer."

**Brittany:** "Having juggled three internships that semester, I can truly say [The Population] stood out from other experiences. Both Derek and Molly were phenomenal teachers who encouraged us to use our unique perspectives. We weren't just helping them complete coverage every week, we were having very real conversations about diversity and inclusivity in the film industry. Additionally, I invited Derek as my thesis reader, and he not only made a real effort to engage with my script, but gave me really thoughtful notes about how to navigate the fine line between creating something for a niche audience and the general public."

Our students regularly serve as interns at Killer Films. Three alumni (Victoria Coram, Richard Duque-Henao, and Jason Evans) were credited participants (research, director's assistant, and secondary photography) in the full-length film *Still Alice*, winning an Academy Award® for "Best Actress in a Leading Role" for Julianne Moore.

Other film students have interned with Tony Gerber's Market Road Films, the population, The International Emmys, and at Sony Pictures Entertainment.

### Student Work Highlights

#### Ryan Harman

Second year Film student, Ryan Harman and partner Craig Hunter will premiere their film, *FORT*, at Geneva International Film Festival, on October 8th. *FORT* is about two boyfriends who wander beaches near New York City, finding shade under crude shelters they build from driftwood. *FORT* was workshopped in Simone Pero's class on marketing and distribution.



#### LISA THOMAS' new hit animated series TEENAGE EUTHANASIA

For those who love Adult Swim programming, *Teenage Euthanasia* was produced by the film program's thesis students Lisa M. Thomas & Parker Cowden. The show, which was created by Alissa Nutting (*Made for Love*) and Alyson Levy (of *PFFR*) stars Maria Bamford, Jo Firestone, Tim Robinson & Bebe Neuwirth. On Sept 30, 2021, *Time Magazine* called it one of the top 5 new TV Shows of the year.

#### Micah Demby's Summer Film Project

With the prestige and help from the Turner Summer Research Grant, second-year Film MFA student and Turner Fellow, Micah Demby, is completing her short film, *Silhouette*. Shot in New Orleans, Louisiana late this summer after taking a break for Covid, *Silhouette* focuses on a young sex-worker who falls in love with one of her clients, only to discover that he is not the man he seems to be. Shot on a pocket black magic camera, *Silhouette*'s pre-production began in late 2019 with Micah and friend Nurah Lambert. They shot a proof of concept and applied for funding through the Turner Summer Research Grant, being awarded a total of \$2,275. Micah wrote an essay detailing her project in order to secure the grant as well as go through an application process, and she needed to create a budget. Micah's project, *Silhouette*, is the first film research project the Turner program has accepted. When asked what her experience filming this project was like, Micah said, "I learned that it is possible to plan your film from another state during a pandemic if you have a solid team behind you. I was living in Texas, going to school online in New York, and in pre-production in New Orleans!" Click [here](#) for a link to the film's instagram page where you can see some of the progress made as well as inspiration for the film.



Special thank you to William Esper Studios for supplying the amazing talent to our Acting for Directors class.

### Connect With Us!



Thank you for tuning into our first newsletter of the school year! See you in our next edition. Be sure to follow us on our social media pages for any summer updates:

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To apply to our Film or TV Writing MFA programs or for more information, please visit <http://stonybrook.edu/film-tv-writing>

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