Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival
No. 39 | May 4 - 13, 2023
festival.vcmmedia.org
WHAT IS VC?

Visual Communications (VC) is the first non-profit organization in the US dedicated to the honest and accurate portrayals of the Asian Pacific American peoples, communities, and heritage through the media arts.

VC was created with the understanding that media and the arts are important vehicles to organize and empower communities, build connections between peoples and generations through the development of AAPI film, video, and media. The organization has created award-winning productions, nurtured and given voice to our youth and seniors, promoted new artistic talent, presented new cinema, and preserved our visual history.

Our mission is to develop and support the voices of Asian American and Pacific Islander filmmakers and media artists who empower communities and challenge perspectives.

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2023 LOS ANGELES
ASIAn PACIFIC
FILM FESTIVAL

The Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival (LAAPFF), presented annually by Visual Communications (VC), returned for its 39th year from May 4th to 13th in Los Angeles and featured an exciting lineup of in-person programming, along with virtual programming for our audiences at home in Southern California and beyond.

The LAAPFF 2023 Lineup celebrated Native Hawaiian, Pasifika, Indigenous Voices, and Artists across the Asian American and Asian Diaspora Communities, commemorating the 20th year since the passing of VC’s founding Executive Director Linda Mabalot.

5,600+ ATTENDEES
306 ARTISTS SERVICED
70 IN-PERSON EVENTS
8 VIRTUAL EVENTS
37 COMMUNITY PARTNERS

ANIMATION PROGRAMS
This year’s animated short films highlights a community of filmmakers expanding the format. Though animated, these films are reflections of everyone.

CINEMA MUSICA
This year’s Cinema Musica program continues to broaden the experience of Cinema and Music; not simply via a pop cultural Music Video form, but dissolves the boundaries to welcome in experimental narrative film and verite documentary filmmaking.

DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMS
Storytelling of lived experience is a powerful way to grow empathy and build solidarity. This year’s Documentary program welcomes in a learning experience to better understand each other so that we can navigate life together.

NARRATIVE PROGRAMS
With 16 Narrative Features in the festival, each film brings in a perspective from all over the globe; united in varying degrees of connection and joy.

PACIFIC CINEWAVES
In our fortified commitment to amplify Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, Pacific Cinewaves programming celebrates stories and storytellers emerging from Hawai‘i, Aotearoa (New Zealand), Guāhan (Guam), Rapa Nui (Easter Island), Samoan, and throughout the Pacific region.

SHORTS PROGRAMS
Short films tend to be a distilled experience of emotional storytelling, savvy editing and heart. It is often the form where filmmakers dare to dream, and where audiences find new emerging talent.

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS
As one of the first film festivals to center Asian and NHPI storytelling, LAAPFF works with artists and filmmakers to carve out programming that serves campaign needs to enrich outreach to the Asian American and NHPI communities.
WHO IS LINDA MABALOT?

Linda Mabut was the beloved Executive Director of Visual Communications from the mid-’80s until her passing in 2003. She guided VC through a most difficult and challenging time when the organization was focused on survival and still committed to serving and continuing Asian Pacific American media projects. Linda’s resilience, political savvy, and commitment to multicultural collaboration served her and VC well. She was creative, spontaneous, and had a generously inclusive nature with an infectious laugh, which helped her staff confront the challenges and survive a difficult time. Today, the staff is still propelled by the vision and foresight brought to the organization by this widely admired, one-of-a-kind leader.

“WHETHER WE ARE PRODUCING MEDIA, OR WHETHER WE ARE IN AN ADVOCACY ROLE... OUR WORK IS NOT OVER.”


FESTIVAL RENEWAL

In 2020, Visual Communications reached its 50 year milestone because of community support and collective work. However, this anniversary is also a product of decades of sacrifices from staff, volunteers, and artists, surviving through periods of scarcity. We ruminate how/if our programs and presentations create impact by asking difficult questions such as:

- Are we an organization that is an agent of change, or an impediment?
- Are we doing anti-racist work? Or are we just a cog in a system of media and entertainment?
- Are we creating community, or are we inflating individual egos?

Through these reflections come renewed intentions and desired impact. In our continued challenge to improve and create brave spaces, we have to mitigate extractive practices to make our work more impactful.

This year, we dedicated LAAPFF 2023 to Linda’s regenerative impact and cultural abundance to VC and our communities. We are called to be in closer community with Artists and Allies in order to build a Festival that fosters wellness and joy.
WEEKEND 1 | LITTLE TOKYO

Visual Communications is an organization founded on Community. When we gather around film presentations and panel discussions, we look to our VC Values to help us connect to audiences in a most meaningful and impactful way. We deepen our practice of programming in venues, like the Japanese American National Museum, that have a legacy of cultivating connections with the communities of Los Angeles. We desire to present programming that compliments that legacy, helps strengthen solidarity and activates storytelling towards impact. When we select venues, we continue our journey of how to make our programs accessible for everyone. As we look for venues for film presentations, we welcome the opportunity to activate non-theatrical venues that are more meaningful to our audiences.

HIGHLIGHTS

- World Premiere of Armed With a Camera Vol, 2023 and Digital Histories 2023
- Instead of C3: Conference, VC hosted R3:NEWAL, a series of restorative activities and gatherings to connect peoples as themselves, instead of our titles as artists and creators
- Free outdoor screenings of HITO HATA: RAISE THE BANNER and THE FALL OF I-HOTEL
- Pacific Islanders in community for a sold out PACIFIC CINEWAVES screening
- The debut of our “HOWZIT: THE LINDA MABALOT EFFECT” Photographic Exhibit as a part of our Linda Visions Series to honor Linda Mablot.

Featured Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander Films and Programs at LAAPFF 2023:
- Armed With a Camera Vol. 2023
- Indigenous Now
- KĀINGA
- Pacific Cinewaves
- Red, White & Brass
- The Weather Inside (Cinema Musica Shorts Program)
- The Wind and The Reckoning
- Trenton: To The Moon & Back (You Are Here Shorts Program)
- WHETU MĀRAMA / BRIGHT STAR

“We’re honored to center Native Hawaiian and Pasifika artists in the 2023 edition of AWC as well as our Pacific Cinewaves program. This is a continuation of our intentions from early works like OMAI FA’ATASI: SAMOA MO SAMOA and NA PUA O LAKA, and a renewed commitment to uplift and amplify Indigenous storytellers in spaces where Asian-American artists may historically hold privilege. We have to amplify artists who utilize media to preserve cultural traditions and present diasporic stories if we are being earnest in our efforts to truly build community and collective power.”

- Francis Cullado, Visual Communications Executive Director
ARMED WITH A CAMERA

To kick off this year’s fest, LAAPFF presented an Opening Night lineup of films representative of VC communities and values – setting the stage for a community-forward film festival. Included in the lineup was the World Premiere of ARMED WITH A CAMERA VOL. 2023 (AWC). This year, AWC featured six short films produced by Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander artists, in reflection of VC’s renewed commitment to uplifting Native Hawaiian and Pasifika stories.

KA ‘ĀUME’UME: NAVIGATING HOME
Directed by M. Kaleipumehana Cabral
Six Kānaka ʻOiwi weave a story of grief, hope, wisdom, and struggle in navigating diaspora and returning to their homeland.

MORE BOUNCE
Directed by Alexis Siti
MORE BOUNCE documents three Samoan men as they reflect on their time as bouncers in Southern California, and the dangers that came with it.

TALA’S BEDTIME STORY
Directed by Peter Filimaaua
In order to help Tala fall asleep, his mother tells him a tale about his grandfather and Pulotu, the underworld.

SNACK
Directed by Lauren Toʻomalatai
After a night out with friends, Jess returns home and shares a late night snack with someone unexpected.

MY BROTHER
Directed by Misa Tupou
At rugby training, Malu knows time is against him, but his support for his sister Alofa will not be deterred.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS OF AWC

At this year’s festival, we celebrated 20 years of the Armed With a Camera Fellowship. After the World Premiere of ARMED WITH A CAMERA VOL. 2023, we renewed our connections at Señor Fish with our current fellows, alumni, and mentors.
Digital Histories is a mechanism for APA older adults to use their unique voices and perspectives in sharing stories with the generations to come. Since its creation in 2003, Digital Histories has provided a space for seniors to create and share their stories and experiences through film and media.

This program seeks to engage the under- and misrepresented population of APAs in mainstream media in a visible way. Seniors are particularly marginalized, and a major outcome of this project is the development of a unique voice from each program participant. Digital Histories allows for the exhibition of these films to educate viewers about APA history in California and to illuminate how place helps shape identity and community.

The Festival is proud to present the World Premiere of 13 short documentary films from our Digital Histories class, taught by Weldon Powers Wong.

- **They Served**
  Directed by Don Banno

- **When I’m 64**
  Directed by George Wada

- **Mochi, Sticks Us Together**
  Directed by Teresa Matsushima

- **Chip Off the Old Block**
  Directed by Barbara Woo

- **The Tale of Uncle Frank and Stories for Another Day**
  Directed by Stony Furutani

- **A Glimpse of Antarctica**
  Directed by Hana Tong

- **There Is No Straight Line in Life**
  Directed by Tracy Quan Nichols

- **A Purpose Driven Life**
  Directed by Fran Ito

- **SNIP SNIP SNAP IKBANA SENSEI**
  Directed by Glen Tao

- **Missing Pieces**
  Directed by Barbara Kagawa Shore

- **See You in My Dreams**
  Directed by Robert M. Shoji

- **Profits Enslave the World: A Song Across Generations**
  Directed by Emilio J. Virata Jr.

- **More than a Roast Chicken**
  Directed by Patty Fong
REGENERATION
RESTORATION
RENEWAL

Searching for wellness and joy at the Festival continues with our growing practice of restoration, regeneration, and renewal. For this year’s Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival, we renew C3:Conference for Creative Content by disrupting it. Instead of C3:Conference, Visual Communications presents R3:NEWAL, a series of restorative activities and gatherings to connect peoples as themselves, instead of our titles as artists and creators.

At this year’s festival, we offered six R3 Conversations centering wellness and joy, and how we find wellness while working in an environment that produces unwell practices of extraction and harm. Our R3 Conversations included:

CALLTIME: WELLNESS
DEEP BREATHS & DEEP CONVERSATIONS (HOSTED BY NBCU LAUNCH)
KEY FRAME
REFUGE AFTER WAR CONVERSATION
LOVE, HURT, & BASKETBALL
BUILDING COMMUNITY POWER - PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN MEDIA (HOSTED BY PACIFIC ISLANDERS IN COMMUNICATIONS)
LAAPFF 2023 made its way to the South Bay for the start of Weekend 2! We presented two feature films — No No Girl and Liquor Store Dreams. With over 500 people in attendance at Gardena Cinema, it was a great night filled with connections and community.

WEEKEND 2 | REGAL LA LIVE

The festival continued in-person programming from May 11-13 at Regal LA Live. With over 90 unique films — ranging from shorts, to documentaries, to narratives — and over 3,000 people in attendance, Weekend 2 was filled with an abundance of films, joy, and community.

HIGHLIGHTS

- This year's Cinema Musica program blurred the boundaries to welcome in experimental narrative film and verité documentary filmmaking
- SOLD OUT screenings for #LIFE Shorts Program, Your Son Shorts Program, Battling Demons Shorts Program, The Harvest, KAPWA Texas, Red, White & Brass, and B-Side for Taylor
Along with our in-person programming, we included virtual programming for our audiences at home in Southern California and beyond. This year's Virtual Cinema included R3 Conversations and selected presentations including BIG FIGHT IN LITTLE CHINATOWN, FLY IN POWER, THE FALL OF THE I-HOTEL, B-SIDE FOR TAYLOR, ZERO WASTE, and YOU ANIMAL! (HAYOP KA!)
We are thrilled to announce awards and recognitions to these especially moving films from this year’s festival:

**Emerging Filmmaker Award**
Danny Kim of ZERO WASTE and Set Hernandez of UNSEEN

**Grand Jury Award – Best Narrative Feature**
OLD NARCISSUS (老ナルキソス) by Tsuyoshi Shoji

**Special Jury Recognitions**
RED ,WHITE & BRASS by Damon Fepulea’i and Halaifonua (Nua) Finau, WHERE IS THE LIE by Quark Henares, Director Rahat Mahajan of THE CLOUD MESSENGER, Director of Photography Alfonso Chin of GOLDEN DELICIOUS for cinematography, Taijiro Tamura of OLD NARCISSUS, and Max Eigenmann of RAGING GRACE

**Grand Jury Award – Best Documentary Feature**
FLY IN POWER by Yin Q. and Yoon Grace Ra

**Special Jury Recognitions**
WHO IS NEXT? by Nurzhamal Karamoldoeva, Sultan Usualiev, IN SEARCH OF BENGALI HARLEM by Alaudin Ullah, Vivek Bald, and UNSEEN by Set Hernandez

**Golden Reel Award – Narrative Short**
TAKE ME HOME by Liz Sargent

**Golden Reel Award – Documentary Short**
TO WRITE FROM MEMORY by Emory Chao Johnson

**Linda Mabatot | New Visions Award**
THE VOYAGER’S LEGACY by Bailey Poching

**Special Jury Recognitions**
THE OLD YOUNG CROW (今昔カラス) by Liam LoPinto, KE KAHEA: AN INVITATION INTO SACRED SPACE by Justyn Ah Chong, BIRDSONG by Omri Zola Gupta, Sparsh Ahuja, NĀI & WĀI PO (GRANDMA & GRANDMA) by Sean Wang

**Audience Award – Documentary Feature**
UNSEEN by Set Henandez and LIQUOR STORE DREAMS by So Yun Um

**Audience Award – Narrative Feature**
MY PARTNER by Keili’i Grace and STARRING JERRY AS HIMSELF by Law Chen
IN-KIND

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

THANK YOU FOR SUPPORTING VC AND LAAPFF 2023!