

FILM FESTIVAL

This festival is made possible with support from











01 **FESTIVAL TEAM**

LETTER

Breakthroughs Film Festival is run by a dedicated team of staff, volunteers, and board of directors whose passion for celebrating and elevating the work of emerging women and non-binary filmmakers drives the organization and propels it's continued growth and success as a truly unique and supportive festival space.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alexandra Tse **Board Chair**

Angi Shen Vice Chair

Olivia Wong Secretary

Ali Weinstein Treasurer

Claire Allore

Paige Murray

Robyn Citizen

Leah MacNeil Karam Masri

V.T Nayani

FESTIVAL STAFF

Mariam Zaidi **Executive Director** **Chrisann Hessing** Festival Manager

Aashna Thakkar Lead Programmer

Lief Ramsaran Festival Trailer

Amira De Vera Publicist

Miru Yogarajah Event Producer

Vesna Asanovic Illustrator

Nadia Ali Graphic Designer

SCREENING COMMITTEE

Robyn Matuto

Dhvani Ramanujam

Faduma Gure

Niya Abdullahi

Jess Goldson

Stephanie Poruchnyk-Butler

FESTIVAL VOLUNTEERS

Chloe Nava

Melissa Domingos

Lina El Daly

Nedda Sarshar

Nicole Hayward

Julia Lewis

Canada Council Conseil des arts

The arts further our understanding of one another, and they bring us together to imagine a better world.

In these unprecedented times, artists and arts organizations are embracing innovative approaches so that they can continue to create their work and share it with audiences. As we grapple with enormous global challenges, the arts offer an endless supply of renewal, inclusion, and resilience.

The Canada Council for the Arts is proud to support Breakthroughs Film Festival, which centres on the unifying power of the work it presents.



Simon Brault, O.C., O.Q. Director and CEO



On behalf of the staff and board of the Ontario Arts Council, I am delighted to welcome everyone to the 10th annual Breakthroughs Film Festival.

For ten years, the Breakthroughs Film Festival has championed the artistic voices of emerging female and non-binary directors. The festival not only seeks to increase the representation of women and non-binary creators in the filmmaking industry. It also elevates the perspectives and experiences from other underrepresented communities, including those who identify as Black, Indigenous, people of colour, trans, non-binary, working-class, neurodiverse, and people with disabilities.

This year, the festival's theme of VISIBLE INVISIBLE unites a lineup of works that touch upon marginalized identities. Through the lenses of the featured directors, audiences will bear witness to the seen and unseen aspects of being apart from the whole – whether the disconnect is in relation to society, to community, to family, or to one's own body.

The Ontario Arts Council is proud to support the Breakthroughs Film Festival in nurturing filmmakers as they grow in their careers. Congratulations to the festival's organizers and to the featured directors and thank you to the audiences for celebrating these important innovative, non-mainstream works.

Wishing you all a wonderful festival!



Rita Davies, C.M.

Chair, Ontario Arts Council



Welcome to the 10th iteration of the Breakthroughs Film Festival!

Toronto Arts Council is a proud supporter of Breakthroughs Film Festival, a festival celebrating short films. We recognize the work being done to amplify and celebrate these incredible emerging women and non-binary directors. From the at-home screenings, to the artist Q&A's offered alongside each piece, TAC applauds the lasting impact that this festival brings to artists and audiences alike.

The City of Toronto, through Toronto Arts Council, invests public funds in the arts allowing millions of Torontonians and visitors the opportunity to enjoy an incredible wealth of artistic activity, including Breakthroughs Film Festival. As we know, the arts matter to Torontonians: nearly 90% of Torontonians believe that the arts make Toronto a better place to live, while 95% of Ontario residents believe that the success of Canadian artists gives people a sense of pride in Canadian achievement. We are proud to support artists and arts organizations that held to build Toronto as a thriving, inclusive, and creative city.

Enjoy the festival and the unique perspectives that it showcases.



Claw Hur

Claire Hopkinson, M.S.M. Director and CEO, Toronto Arts Council and Toronto Arts Foundation

TELEFILM

A celebration of artistry in film, festivals provide an important venue to showcase Canadian creativity across the country and beyond. That is why we are proud to support the 2021 Breakthroughs Film Festival!

This past year more than ever, Canada has shown the many innovative and resourceful ways in which we make our audiovisual sector thrive. We have given the world many reasons to take notice of Canada and why we continue to be a Partner of Choice!

Our mission to foster and elevate authentic storytelling from Canadians of all backgrounds, especially those of underrepresented communities, is more pressing than ever before. At Telefilm, our priority to create a more representative screen-based industry continues as our efforts across all our initiatives, including our funding programs, increase.

Stronger together, I want to thank and congratulate the 2021 Breakthroughs Film Festival for continuing its work of uplifting a diversity of voices through films and celebrating the brilliance of Canadian content at home and around the world.

As always, continue to watch Canadian films wherever they are available and tell others to do the same!



Executive Director, Telefilm Canada

For the last decade, Breakthroughs Film Festival has been a vital space in the city celebrating the work of emerging, women and non-binary directors, as well as those from around the world.

Even with our transition to an online space, the festival continues to grow and bring in new audience members year after year. This year we are proud to hit our highest record of submissions, and under the leadership of an incredible team we've been able to show 26 films, including a lookback at filmmakers who screened at the festival before and are now making waves in the industry.

This year's program of 26 films ranged from stories of personal family narratives, our relationship to our environments, and celebrations of friendship and sisterhood, amongst so many more rich and layered works. The talent and ability of these emerging voices to create these thought-provoking and stylistically distinct works is truly spectacular and I am eternally grateful to all the filmmakers for sharing their works with us this year.

This was also the first year we held an online emerging filmmaker pitch competition, a panel, and two workshops during the 5 days of the festival and none of this would have been possible without the staff, volunteers, board members, workshop facilitators, audience members, and most of all the filmmakers who generously contributed their time and energy in ensuring our most extensive and far-reaching festival yet.

I am proud and honored to have led this collective of dedicated, wonderful people and together contribute to tangibly shifting things in the industry so that emerging women and non-binary filmmakers get the recognition and attention they truly deserve.

With gratitude, Mariam Zaidi



Mariam Zaidi Executive Director, Breakthroughs Film Festival I couldn't be more honoured/excited/nervous/proud to play a role in curating this milestone festival, and working alongside the incredible BFF team to bring you another year of the best of emerging talent!

When the team presented the theme 'Visible Invisible' to me this year, I began thinking of the ways in which women and those who inhabit marginalized bodies and identities, are both highly visible, yet so invisible at the same time. We are openly critiqued and controlled, and yet, our daily lived experiences are so overlooked. This often includes the physical and emotional labour that play a role in our relationships, careers, accomplishments, and our journey's to self-discovery.

While we won't single-handedly resolve these deep rooted structural and societal issues through a single festival, I offer this year's program as a start to many much needed conversations. Conversations to reflect on turbulent pasts, a resilient present, and a future where generations of multi-dimensional experiences are no longer invisible.



Aashna Thakkar Lead Programmer, Breakthroughs Film Festival

Jury



Lora Campbell is a Canadian Screen Award nominated transgender non-binary filmmaker, educator and Queer advocate from Newfoundland. They have created and produced over two hundred digital episodes across multiple series for broadcasters like CBC and the TELUS Fund. They are currently working on their first features as a Director (Let's Do This), Producer (Blue Blood) and Writer (Stonewalled).



Tiffany Hsiung is a Peabody award-winning filmmaker based in Toronto, Canada and is listed as one of DOC NYC's 40 under 40. Her latest film Sing Me a Lullaby (2020) won the Oscar qualifying Grand Jury Prize at DOC NYC, America's largest documentary film festival, along with the inaugural Toronto International Film Festival 'Share Her Journey Short Cuts Award' during her world premiere at TIFF.

'Sing Me a Lullaby' went on to winning The Directors Guild of Canada Best Short Film Award, and is Listed as one of TIFF Canada's Top Ten of 2020. Recently nominated for a Canadian Screen Award for Best Short Documentary. Tiffany's feature debut documentary 'The Apology' (2016) earned over 15 international awards which includes the prestigious Peabody award, the DuPont Columbia Award and the Allan King Memorial Award. Her work has been released around the world, broadcasted and theatrically released across Asia, Us and Canada with partnerships with Al Jazeera, PBS and The New Yorker. Tiffany's latest film short documentary, 'Until Further Notice' will have a Toronto premiere at Hot Docs this year.

Tiffany currently sits on the board of DOC Canada Ontario chapter and was elected as second vice-chair of the Directors Guild of Canada Ontario Executive Board in 2020 and recently invited to be part of the HOT DOCS Executive Board. Tiffany is also a member of the National BIPOC committee for the Directors Guild of Canada.



Kadon Douglas is the inaugural executive director of BIPOC TV & Film, a Torontobased grassroots nonprofit organization advocating for greater equity for Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour professionals working—at all levels, in front of and behind the camera—in Canada's film and TV industry, Prior to BIPOC TV & FILM, Kadon championed gender equity and inclusion in screen-based media at Women in Film & Television-Toronto (WIFT-T) as the manager of communications and engagement. At WIFT-T, Kadon was instrumental in the growth of the organization and bridged new partnerships with academic institutions and community organizations. Most recently, she worked within the Dean's Office at FCAD, Ryerson University's faculty of communication and design. There she revitalized the academic brand (digital, PR, internal communications), ushering in a new era of bold, revolutionary and innovative storytelling to the FCAD ecosystem as its manager of marketing and communications. Kadon also worked for several years on feature documentary films by producers Ann Shin, Anne Pick and Nadine Pequeneza in various roles (production coordinator, researcher and digital marketing). She is a 2019 Ontario Nonprofit Network RBC Leading the Future fellow, and a two-time fellow of the Hot Docs Film Festival: Doc Accelerator (2013) and Shaw Media Diverse Voices (2015). Kadon is also an active member of the screen-based media community, volunteering her time on various committees and juries, and is the former chair of the Reelworld Film Festival.

BEST OF BFF

Missed out on watching any of BFF's shorts from the past decade? Look no further, this program is a blast from BFF past, showcasing the festival's evolution and rich history. These 6 shorts celebrate the creators who have paved the way for filmmakers today and who continue to make waves since their very first screenings with us.

Paruparo (2014)

5 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



A migrant nanny expresses her loneliness and pain through dance.



Shasha Nakhai is a storyteller whose work has aired on the BBC, CBC, ZDF, and Arte; been nominated for 5 Canadian Screen Awards and a Golden Sheaf; named TIFF's Top 10; and shortlisted for an Oscar.

Parkdale (2013)

15 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



Over the course of a night, two sisters roam the streets of their rough neighbourhood as they try to avoid another stay in foster care.



Lisa Jackson is an award-winning filmmaker whose work has played major festivals, including Sundance, Tribeca, SXSW, Berlinale and Hot Docs. She is Anishinaabe (Aamjiwnaang) and lives in Toronto.

Seaview (2016)

12 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



An exploration of early memories and modern experiences guides this look at Pakistan through one filmmaker's aim to reflect the personal and cultural divides of her own identity.



Zinnia Naqvi is an interdisciplinary artist based in Tiohtià:ke/Montreal and Tkaronto/Toronto. Her work examines issues of colonialism, cultural translation, language, and gender through the use of photography, video, writing, and archival material.

Bootleg (2017)

4 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



A Muslim woman is taken aside in airport security, only to reveal an unexpected hidden secret.



Writer/director **Reem Morsi** is an alumna of Berlinale Script Station, TIFF Talents, Canadian Film Centre, Women in the Director's Chair, London Film School's MA in Filmmaking & Realness Screenwriting Residency. Her short films won multiple awards and screened internationally. Her debut feature, *Hysteria*, received Telefilm Canada's Talent to Watch Grant.

Wanted: Strong Woman (2020)

15 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



Nadège lacks the confidence to get what she wants from life... until the day she discovers a new passion that awakens the beast inside her.



After graduating from film studies, **Marilyn Cooke** explores the themes that fascinate her, including family relationships and dreams. She was a finalist in screenwriting competition Sprint for Your Script. Her first short film, *Nothing But Us*, was screened at various film festivals and was selected for the Solveig Anspach short film competition in Reykjavik, Iceland.

Mahalia Melts in the Rain (2019)

11 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



Mahalia, a timid 9-year-old Black girl, feels different from the other girls in her ballet class. Hoping to boost her confidence, her mother brings her to the hair salon to get her hair straightened for the very first time.



After completing a master's degree in Television, Radio, and Film at Syracuse University, **Carmine Pierre-Dufour** secured an internship at Focus Features in Los Angeles. Perfectly bilingual, she adapted episodes of Web Therapy for TV5 Québec. She also wrote and co-directed the short film *Mahalia Melts in the Rain*.



Emilie Mannering's first short film STAR (2015) won several national and international awards. In 2016, she directed the feminist web-series Les Brutes. In 2017, she was selected by the TIFF Talent Lab and co-directed her second short film *Mahalia Melts In the Rain*. She is currently working on writing her first feature film, *Tous mes premiers amours*.

INDUSTRY PROGRAMS

To commemorate our 10th Annual Festival, BFF is proud to present industry programming that includes panel discussions, workshops and a very special pitch competition. Curated by emerging filmmakers for emerging filmmakers, all industry programs are FREE and happening during our festival on June 16-20.

Thank you to our Industry Sponsors & Presenting Partners

















Shorts To Features Panel



Recognizing the roadblocks that come in the way of graduating from short films to first features, filmmakers in this panel share candidly about their own personal challenges and offer gems of advice for emerging filmmakers who are making similar leaps in their careers.

Frame x Frame Cinematography Workshop



This workshop combines a panel discussion with interactive elements to provide emerging directors with a deeper understanding of the Director-DOP relationship and how to communicate the vision of a project effectively through meaningful collaboration

2021 Emerging Filmmaker Pitch Competition



This year's competition featured 8 finalists and 6 projects from emerging talent across the country and was hosted by CBC host, Saroja Coelho. The finalists virtually pitched their projects to 3 senior CBC executives. Winners will further develop their project with CBC and receive a \$500 cash prize from Front Row Insurance to be put towards their production

Web Series 101 Two-Day Workshop



This 2-part workshop takes an in-depth look at producing web series from development to distribution, providing foundational knowledge to guide emerging creators through their first web series production.

THROUGH OUR RITUALS

What rituals and traditions do you hold close to your heart? Have they been passed down to you or ones you created for yourself? Do they include your friends or family (blood or chosen)? This program examines the ideas around sustaining customs as we've come to know them, and the kinship, understanding and healing they bring to our lives.

Rematriate: Passing the seeds

6 MINS CANADA



A documentation of a the inception and cultural significance of the "Passing the Seeds" wampum belt, created as a record of the agreement, relationship and story of the rematriation of a collection of heirloom seeds from the Sisters of Providence in Kingston to Ratinenhayén:thos, a group of seed savers and knowledge holders, from Tvendinaga Mohawk Territory.



Shelby Lisk is a filmmaker, artist and writer with roots in Kenhté:ke (Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, in Ontario). She has a background in visual arts and photojournalism and currently works as a reporter covering Indigenous issues and current affairs.

I do, but I don't

11 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



A visual essay that explores weddings, marriage, and societal expectations with a look back on a childhood that set up unattainable standards.



Marlee Druker is a queer writer and director based in Toronto, Canada and a recent graduate of York University's film production program. She strives to have LGBTQ+ representation in every project she creates, no matter the genre.

Waiting (راظاتنا)

12 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



A young woman journeys to visit her grandmother. What transpires between the unsaid and silence propels into a prolonged moment of tension and desires of connection.



Erum Khan is a multidisciplinary artist based in Toronto and a film programmer for the Rendezvous with Madness Festival.

The Ritual of the Sex Magick Warriors

14 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



Through empathy, telepathy and tactile care, the Sex Magick Warriors spill the tea on their means of survival in these harsh urban environments. The ritual exposes the hardships of this army of lovers and reveals their sensual strategy for self preservation.



Maximilian Suillerot is a queer multi-media artist holding French and Mexican nationalities, currently living and working in Toronto.

THROUGH THE GENERATIONS

This collection of shorts considers the process of family planning, preservation, and betterment for generations to come. From the ways we grow our families, the language and heritage we pass on, and how we come together in the face of trials. This program highlights how we celebrate, grieve and display resilience through shared experience.

êmîcêtôsêt: Many Bloodlines

6 MINS CANADA



A Cree filmmaker and her white partner document their fertility process from finding an Indigenous donor, to parenting as an interracial queer couple.



Theola Ross is a 43-year-old social worker and filmmaker from Pimicikamak Cree Nation, Manitoba, now living in Tkaronto, Ontario. Theola is a parent to a fun-loving 2-year-old daughter named Kîwêtin-NorthWind. Theo works as a frontline worker with the YWCA. Armed with a tough exterior and a warm heart Theola also works within the community, teaching the Cree language to youth, sharing her story and bringing the arts through an Indigenous lens to schools in the Toronto District School Board. Theola Ross wrote and directed the short film, êmîcêtôcêt-Many Bloodlines, her latest film, in 2020.

Fo(u)r

15 MINS USA



A couple struggles to define the future of their relationship after years of trying to conceive. As tensions grow each deals with their loss in a different way; one seeks common ground, while the other throws herself into the creation of a theatre performance.



Ashley James is an Atlanta based filmmaker and theatre artist, originally from Mobile, Alabama. She recently graduated from Florida State University with her Master's in Film Production. Since her return to Atlanta, Ashley continues to produce film projects, working in various creative positions.

Inuit Languages in the 21st Century

10 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



Colonial languages have threatened the survival of Inuktitut, a complex language that includes several dialects varying from one generation to another. Could today's technologies be the solution to the language's survival?



Ulivia Uviluk was born in Kuujjuaq. She lives between Montreal and Kangirsuk, Nunavik. She is passionate about fashion. In her first involvement as a director with Wapikoni Mobile, Olivia wanted to show how Inuit winter clothes are fashionable. She has been involved with Wapikoni for Native Montreal youth campaign against discrimination and has worked as a local coordinator for Montreal and Kangirsuk workshops.

Daughter

15 MINS CZECH REPUBLIC



In a hospital room, a daughter recalls a moment of misunderstanding and a lost embrace that has led to a strained relationship with her father for many years.



Daria Kashcheeva was born in 1986 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Daria studies animated film at FAMU in Prague. Her student films have been featured at many international festivals. Daria's original To Accept won the Nespresso Talents 2017 film competition in Cannes. Her Bachelor's puppet animation Daughter has a premiere at Annecy Animation Film Festival and got Cristal for the best Student film. *Daughter* has won the Student Academy Award in the category Animation (International Film Schools).

Ain't No Time for Women

19 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



A group of women gather at a Tunis hair salon on the eve of the 2019 presidential election. The salon is transformed into a town square, mirroring the internal turmoil of the country and giving us an intimate look into Tunisia's young democracy.



Sarra El Abed finished her degree in film direction at UQAM in 2018, where she was awarded the best fiction prize for her graduation project. *Y'a pas d'heure pour les femmes* is her fourth film. Flirting between fiction and documentary filmmaking, she likes to breathe whimsy into the ordinary and comedy into dramatic situations.

IN THE CITY

What does living and growing in a city like Toronto mean to you? Urban centres are not only home to talented emerging filmmakers but are chock-full of people with various lived experiences and multifaceted identities. This program pays homage to the spaces, people, and movements that shape city dwellers through times of trial, injustice, and rapid change.

With Love From Munera

13 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



A young queer, non-binary Muslim storyteller walks us through the spaces and people that have shaped her healing and growth from some of the most trying moments of her past.



Yazmeen Kanji is an emerging TIFF Next Wave, Hot Docs Accelerator filmmaker and the founder of Films With A Cause. She works at Charles Officer's company, Canesugar Filmworks, and supports Oscar nominee Sami Khan's projects.

By the Train

3 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



This poetic piece reflecting a Hijabis inner thoughts as she waits for her train, explores the effects that Islamophobia has on the daily life of visibly Muslim living in the Western world.



Niya Abdullahi is a Filmmaker and founder of Habasooda, a platform dedicated to sharing the richness of the Muslim experience. Themes of identity, liberation and resistance informs her work.

Bloordale Beach

5 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA WORLD PREMIERE



An ode to Shari Kasman's Bloordale Beach: a demolition grounds turned absurd community rallying point at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, and ironic emblem of Toronto's housing and public space crises



For years, **Beth Warrian** worked as sous chef of one of Toronto's original vegan restaurants, receiving love both tough and tender and learning more than is respectable about astrology. She studies filmmaking at Ryerson University.

We the People

7 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA WORLD PREMIERE



An in-depth analysis of how lack of access to food, financial means, and other resources is affecting lower-income communities in Toronto - COVID-19 being a large factor.



Nelie Diverlus has always been a story teller. Born in Naples, Florida, she has Haitian, American and Canadian culture coursing through her, and is always finding ways to establish her cultural values within her art.

Activate NDN Consciousness

7 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



Activate NDN Consciousness combines found footage of harmful portrayals of Indigenous peoples in contrast with images of contemporary Indigenous protest and rebellion, creating a work that captures the truth of a traumatic history as well as the desire and strength of Indigenous survival and resistance.



Natalie King is a queer Anishinaabekwe artist, facilitator and member of Timiskaming First Nation. King's practice ranges from drawing, painting, and installation as well as community engagement and activism.

Where I Am

5 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



Where I Am considers the filmmaker's shifting relationship to Hong Kong, as someone who is now observing the city from afar.



Christine Wu (she/her) is a diaspora-settler filmmaker living on the territory of the Williams Treaties First Nations. She creates from a place of self-compassion, reflecting an ongoing process of self-education about systemic injustice and healing.

IN THE BODY

Our bodies are our most intimate space, a vessel that grows and changes as we do. Who we choose to share it with should be our choice and yet, those who inhabit marginalized bodies are often at the centre of destructive public discourse. While these lived experiences may rarely receive external validation, these stories affirm that self acceptance is the most important form of healing there is.

Odehimin

3 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



Odehimin is reconnecting with oneself and relearning to love oneself.



Kijâtai-Alexandra Veillette-Cheezo was born in Val-d'Or to a non-Indigenous mother and an Indigenous father of the Anishnabe Nation. They consider themselves an artist and activist. They have directed three short films that address Indigenous realities (Kijâtai, Kabak and Odehimin) using images and sounds in a poetic way.

As Spring Comes

14 MINS QUÉBEC, CANADA



Suffering from a strange disease that transforms her into plants, a woman inhabits her lover's ice fishing cabin.

Covered

6 MINS USA



In a COVID impacted New York City, a Black woman has a few things to consider before going outside for a run.



Marie-Ève Juste worked at the Cinémathèque québécoise between 2003 and 2007, where she first got familiar with cinema history and practice. Since 2011, she directed five short films presented in various festivals and at Cannes 44th Director's Fortnight.



Cherrye J. Davis is a storyteller from NYC, who has worked with esteemed institutions as The Public Theater, LaMama, Classical Theater of Harlem, National Black Theater, and Oregon Shakespeare Festival. Her directorial work includes: Covered (2020), Spoiled (2021), Weapon: A Music Video (2020).

Houseplant

3 MINS ONTARIO, CANADA



Houseplant is an animated short film paired with an original spoken word poem, exploring issues of disconnection, body, and gender identity.



Angie Lawrence (They/Them pronouns) is a non-binary student filmmaker from Toronto. In their work, Angie emphasizes the importance of authentic storytelling and playful experimentation with the immense beauty of the cinematic form.

Egg Party

7 MINS USA

INTERNATIONAL PREMIERE



Six women in their late-thirties gather, with lots of wine and laughter, to dye Easter eggs. Through a series of whimsical portraits we discover each woman's view on her respective egg, lost dreams, and new beginnings.



From Colorado, USA, **Kersti Bryan** works as an award-winning actor, writer, producer and adventurer based in NYC. Her work includes film, television & off-broadway and international theatre. Recent acting credits include, *Hustlers, Blacklist, All Rise, Ray Donovan, FBI Most Wanted* and *Lincoln Rhyme. Egg Party* is her directorial debut.

Thank you to our Co-Presenters and Community Partners



























































