JEWISH FILM INSTITUTE

Presents

PITCH + KVELL

2026 Filmmakers in Residence

November 22, 2026

The Panelists

Klara Nilsson Grunning, Western Norway Film Fund
Lance Kramer, *Holding Liat*
Sky Sitney, DC/DOX

Hosted by Ash Cook
Festival Director, San Francisco Jewish Film Festival

The Projects

Russ Finkelstein, *Our Home is Not of This World*
Ira Eduardovna, *The Iron Road*
Abraham Troen, *Family Pictures*
Jacob Fertig, *Offcuts*
Zoe Potkin, *Daddy's Girls*
Yasmin Hed, *The Lost Reel*



OUR HOME IS NOT OF THIS WORLD

Russ Finkelstein

An observational portrait of the work of a medical examiner's office in Texas that identifies people who die crossing the border. Dr. Stern's forthcoming retirement reveals the office's profound personal, political and spiritual significance.

Russ Finkelstein, New York, NY
Email: russfinkelstein@gmail.com
Website: https://www.instagram.com/russfinkelstein/
Project Status: Post-Production



Russ Finkelstein was born and raised in San Diego, California. After graduating from UC Santa Barbara, he lived and worked in South America for more than 8 years, producing documentaries for Al Jazeera English on social and political issues in Argentina and Colombia. Russ received his master's degree from Columbia Journalism School where he specialized in documentary filmmaking. He's worked as a producer for NBC, CBS, ABC, Vice News, Fusion Network and CNN. Russ' first independent documentary *Looking for Love* premiered at the American Documentary Film Festival in 2018. His films have received support from the Ford Foundation, Catapult Film Fund, Jewish Film Institute, and Jewish Story Partners.



THE IRON ROAD

Ira Eduardovna

While recovering from a brain injury, a filmmaker creates an animated film tracing her family's journey from Soviet Uzbekistan, uncovering legends of migration and a railway that echoes across generations.

Ira Eduardovna, New York, NY
Email: ira1080@gmail.com
Website: https://www.iraeduardovna.com/
Project Status: Development



Ira Eduardovna is a video installation artist and filmmaker born and raised in Uzbekistan. She is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including a 2025 Guggenheim Fellowship in Film-Video, a New York Foundation for the Arts award (2018), New York State Council on the Arts grants for Film and Electronic Media (2015, 2019), Jerome Foundation Travel and Study Grant, Artis Exhibition Grant, among others. Her work has been presented internationally in solo and group exhibitions at venues including Anthology Film Archives; the Jewish Museum in Frankfurt; Oi Futuro Museum in Rio de Janeiro; Museum Morsbroich in Leverkusen, Germany; LOOP Video Art Fair in Barcelona; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; the Israel Museum in Jerusalem; and FUTURA Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague. In 2021, she published her first graphic novel, *The Iron Road*. In 2025, she completed her first narrative short film, *Tongue Behind Teeth*. She received her MFA from Hunter College in New York and currently teaches in the MFA Photography and Film program at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.



FAMILY PICTURES

Abraham Troen

When violence claims a mother and great granddaughter a century apart, one family's past and present collide, forcing each generation to decide what legacy of peace, justice and dignity they will carry forward.

Abraham "Abie" Troen, Los Angeles, CA
Email: aphotob@gmail.com
Website: https://abtroen.com/
Project Status: Production



Abraham "Abie" Troen is an award-winning documentary filmmaker. He's lensed and led film projects across Israel, Kenya, India, the U.S. and Canada, with work for Netflix, BBC, ARTE, Vanity Fair, and more, screened at Tribeca, TIFF, SXSW, DOC NYC and IDFA. Abie studied film at the Sam Spiegel School in Jerusalem, earned a BA at Brandeis (Phi Beta Kappa) and an MFA from USC, where he received the Annenberg Fellowship. His films include *Just Sing, Finding Home*, and *'Til Kingdom Come* ('21 JFI Grant).



OFFCUTS

Jacob Fertig

After the death of a disabled child, a family confronts conflicting memories of the institution where he lived. His concealed existence becomes the subject of collective reckoning as scenes from the past unspool.

Jacob Fertig, New York, NY
Email: jacob@denizenstudios.com
Website: https://www.denizenstudios.com/jacob
Project Status: Production



Jacob Fertig is a nonfiction producer and director, working across shorts, features and interactive media. His films have played at festivals including SXSW, Hot Docs, AFI, NOFF and Doc10, and been published by Scientific American and New York Magazine. He has been a featured speaker and panelist at SXSW and NYU, and selected to pitch at Big Sky Pitch, Edinburgh Pitch, Ji.hlava New Visions Forum, AFO Camp 4Science and AIDC. His archival producing work spans museums to magazines, including permanent exhibits at Ellis Island and The Holocaust Center. His projects have received support from Ford Foundation, Field of Vision, Tribeca Institute, Doc Society, Jewish Story Partners, Amnesty International, Forensic Architecture and Docs by the Sea. He is a former Doc Society Art & Impact Fellow, Full Frame Fellow, NYU Feature Development Studio Fellow and a Senior Fellow at Humanity in Action. He holds a BFA in Film & Television from NYU Tisch School of the Arts and an MPA in Public Policy from NYU Wagner Graduate School of Public Service. Jacob is co-founder of Denizen Studios in New York.



DADDY'S GIRLS

Zoe Potkin

Daddy's Girls follows the return of an estranged father who, with advanced Parkinson's and nowhere to go, is taken in by the women he once left behind—his ex-wife and four daughters—suddenly tasked with keeping him alive.

Zoe Potkin, New York, NY
Email: zoepotkin@gmail.com
Website: https://www.imdb.com/name/nm3378715/
Project Status: Post-Production



Zoe Potkin is a New York–based documentary filmmaker whose work is rooted in an observational, character-driven approach shaped by long-term immersion and intimacy. She often films her own material, working closely with participants over extended periods and bringing a strong visual sensibility informed by her photographic practice. She was named to DOC NYC's "40 Under 40" list, has received the New York State Council of the Arts Individual Artist's grant, and her projects have participated in the Gotham Film Labs and Gotham Market. She produced the Emmy-nominated *Take Care of Maya* which premiered at Tribeca and was released on Netflix, and is currently producing feature documentaries with Story Syndicate and Edgeline Films while working on her directorial debut.



THE LOST REEL

Yasmin Hed

When a filmmaker unearths 16mm footage filmed by her late father of a musical born in apartheid South Africa, she locates the forgotten performers whose stories of resilience, long buried by history, finally rise through the transcendent power of music and dance.

Yasmin Hed, Los Angeles, CA
Email: yasmina4@mac.com
Website: https://www.yasminhed.com/
Project Status: Production



Yasmin Hed is a director and producer who is a TFI / A&E IndieFilms Story Lab grant recipient (2019). She received her BFA from Tisch School of the Arts, and after graduating, directed her first short documentary, *Children of Bahia*, in the favelas of Salvador, Brazil. This short documentary premiered at the Havana Film Festival and SXSW. Relocating to Los Angeles, she immersed herself in exploring the actor's craft with actress Lelia Goldoni, icon of the beat scene of cinema and star of John Cassavetes' *Shadows*. In 2010 Yasmin created *Unmarked Guide*, a curated travel series on the hidden gems of Los Angeles highlighting the people who are the city's treasure. Her shorts from Unmarked Guide screened on Virgin's in-flight channel Virgin Produced from 2012 to 2013.

MEET THE PANELISTS



Ash Cook [Hoyle] is the founder & CEO of the grassroots physical media distributor, Video Store•Age. Before that, he spent almost a decade as a features programmer at the Sundance Film Festival. Ash is currently serving as the Festival Director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and the Deputy Director of the Los Angeles Festival of Movies. Ash is a 2026 Queer|Art Mentorship Fellow and has programmed at Damn These Heels Film Festival, Outfest, Palm Springs Shorts Fest, NewFest NY, Sun Valley Film Festival, Overlook Film Festival, and AFI Fest. He is originally from Philadelphia, PA and holds a dual degree in Film & English from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY.



Klara Nilsson Grunning is an Emmy Award-winning filmmaker and commissioning editor for the past 30 years. Currently she is funding fiction, documentary, series and games at the Western Norway Film Fund, but has in the recent past been commissioning for the Norwegian, Swedish and Danish film institutes. She has funded projects like *The Remarkable Life of Ibelin, No Other Land, A New Kind of Wilderness, Songs of Earth, The Dating Game, Queen of Versailles,* and many more. She has been a supervising producer at ITVS for nine years where, among other projects, she worked on *A Lion in the House* and *The New Americans*. Klara also runs several workshops, mentoring and training as well as sitting on selection committees for funding organizations.



Lance Kramer is a Washington, DC-based filmmaker and co-founder of Meridian Hill Pictures. Lance produced *Holding Liat* (Berlinale Documentary Award Winner, Oscars Shortlisted, CPH:DOX); *The First Step* (Tribeca, AFI DOCS); *City of Trees* (Full Frame, PBS, Netflix) and the Webby Award-winning series *The Messy Truth*. Lance has served as an advisor in the Sundance Producers Lab, was a Film Independent Fellow and Fast Track participant, was a fellow in the Sundance Creative Producers Summit and Impact Partners Documentary Producers Fellowship, and was named to the DOC NYC "40 Under 40" list. Lance received the DC Mayor's Arts Award in 2014, the highest honor given to working artists in the Nation's Capital. Lance is a former Board Member of Docs in Progress, a member of the Documentary Producers Alliance, and currently serves on the board of the Foundation for the Augmentation of African Americans in Film (FAAAF).



Sky Sitney is the co-founder and Festival Director of DC/DOX, Washington, DC's international documentary film festival, which she launched in 2023. She previously led AFI Docs (formerly Silverdocs) from 2005–2014, helping build it into one of the country's leading documentary festivals, and later co-created and co-directed Double Exposure, a festival and symposium exploring the intersection of film and investigative journalism. Sitney is a Professor of the Practice in Film and Media Studies at Georgetown University, where she served as Program Director from 2017–2023 and teaches documentary, avant-garde cinema, and film festival studies. A frequent juror and advisor, she has contributed to the Cinema Eye Honors, Gotham Awards, IDA Awards, and numerous film and cultural organizations, and currently chairs the Peabody Documentary Nominating Committee. She is a member of the Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



About the Jewish Film Institute

The Jewish Film Institute (JFI) is a San Francisco Bay Area-based nonprofit organization that champions bold films and filmmakers that expand and evolve the Jewish story for audiences everywhere. Presenter of the annual San Francisco Jewish Film Festival (SFJFF), the longest-running and most celebrated festival of its kind in the world, JFI is known for its provocative, independent programming that has helped to launch the careers of emerging filmmakers and highlighted previously untold stories from Jewish communities around the world.

JFI supports the careers of filmmakers from the Bay Area and beyond, from incubation through exhibition, through its grants, residencies, and other artist development services. The JFI Doc Lab (originally founded in 2013 as the Filmmakers in Residence Program) is the only dedicated artist development program in the United States that provides mentorship and support for emerging and established filmmakers whose documentary projects explore and expand thoughtful consideration of Jewish history, life, culture, and identity. **For more information, visit jfi.org/filmmakers.**

JFI thanks the generous supporters who make its Artist Development programs possible.

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Upcoming Filmmaker Opportunities

2027 Filmmaker Grants: Closing December 3, 2026
47th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival Call for Entries: Closing February 28, 2027

The JFI Artist Development newsletter is a monthly digest of need-to-know opportunities and updates. Scan the QR code to subscribe.