



jewish film institute
presents



2025 Filmmakers in Residence Pitch + Kvell November 16, 2025

The Projects

Brian Becker: *Meet Me At The Mall*
Shaina Feinberg: *None of This Matters*
Toby Perl Freilich: *Maintenance Artist*
Leah Galant: *Landscapes of Memory*
Karin Kainer: *Hot Spot*
Hilla Medalia: *Missing Vivian Silver*

The Panelists

Masashi Niwano, Director of Artist Development, SFFILM
Lisa Kleiner Chanoff, Co-founder, Catapult Film Fund
Sarah Burford, Chief Operating Officer, CANVAS

*Hosted by Ash Cook: Programmer, Sundance Film Festival &
Guest Festival Director, San Francisco Jewish Film Festival*



Meet Me At The Mall

Brian Becker

When Albanian immigrant Leo Karruli semi-accidentally purchases a Pennsylvania mall in 2023, he uproots his life and tries his hand at reviving it. Utilizing the aesthetics of 90s Hollywood mall movies and an incredible cache of archival, *Meet Me At The Mall* creates a thought-provoking and humorous dialogue between the mall's unexpected socialist Jewish origins, its storied past, and its uncertain future.

Brian Becker, New York, NY

Email: beckerfilm1@gmail.com

Website: [imdb.com/name/nm7972653/](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm7972653/)

Project Status: Post-Production



Brian Becker is a New York-based filmmaker who directed and produced *Time Bomb Y2K* (co-directed with Marley McDonald) which premiered on HBO in December, 2023. The film was nominated for a Cinema Eye award and its lengthy festival run included True/False Film Festival, Hot Docs, Sheffield DocFest, IDFA, Camden International Film Festival, and DocNYC. Brian served as archival producer on *Free Chol Soo Lee*, *MLK/FBI*, *Spaceship Earth*, and *The Fourth Estate*, and as co-producer on the series *Bobby Kennedy for President*. Brian is a 2022 Doc NYC 40 Under 40 recipient, Impact Partners Producing Fellow, Points North Fellow, and a FOCAL Jane Mercer Researcher of the Year award nominee. Before turning to production, he worked as a mosquito ecologist.



None of This Matters

Shaina Feinberg

Struggling filmmaker Shaina Feinberg travels to Maine to interview trailblazing TV director and teacher Joan Darling. Over years of filming, Shaina uncovers Joan's final storytelling wish and enlists her former mentees and collaborators to fulfill it, only to find the 90-year-old legend has a few plot twists of her own. Blending vérité, archival and interviews, the film is a hilarious meditation on art, legacy and what it means to build a life.

Shaina Feinberg, New York, NY

Email: shainafeinberg@gmail.com

Website: [instagram.com/shainafeinberg/](https://www.instagram.com/shainafeinberg/)

Project Status: Production



Shaina Feinberg is an award-winning American filmmaker and writer known for her bold, personal storytelling. She spent her twenties making a stoner-punk sketch show (*The Spew*), has been on *This American Life*, had a column in *The New York Times* (2019–2024), created two original series for Audible and is the author of three books. She's directed two short docs for The New York Times: *A Brief History of Hating My Face* (2023) and *I Almost Quit My Career for My Kids. Then I Met Joan Darling*. (2025). Her doc, *My Mom's Eggplant Sauce* (2022), opened the Aspen Film Festival, won her a best-

director award and is now taught at university in the U.K. Her short *Cleo From 8:20 to 2:35* received a New York Foundation for the Arts finishing grant in 2024 and her film, *We Should Eat* (2024), won the Reboot Studios grant in 2023, the Caz Matthews Award at SeriesFest in 2025 and, to date, has gone to 26 film festivals. Her award-winning films have played at film festivals around the world, including the Tribeca Film Festival, Rotterdam International Film Festival, Aspen, Hot Docs, Palm Springs, and Provincetown.



Maintenance Artist

Toby Perl Freilich

“After the Revolution, who’s going to pick up the garbage on Monday morning?” challenged Mierle Laderman Ukeles. Crashing through the boundary between art and action, in 1977 she became the first artist-in-residence at NYC’s Department of Sanitation, collaborating with city workers to inject art right into the city’s bloodstream.

Toby Perl Freilich, New York, NY

Email: tobyperl@gmail.com

Website: frameworkfilms.org

Project Status: On the Festival Circuit



Toby Perl Freilich co-produced/co-directed *Moynihan*, broadcast in 2024 on PBS’ American Masters series, and an L.A. Times Critic’s Pick. Freilich wrote/directed/produced *Inventing Our Life: The Kibbutz Experiment*, deemed “fascinating” by the NY Times. She co-produced and wrote the HBO/Cinemax feature documentary, *Secret Lives: Hidden Children and Their Rescuers*, for which she was nominated for a news and documentary Emmy. Freilich was co-producer of the PBS Emmy-nominated *Resistance: Untold Stories of Jewish Partisans*. She is a contributing writer to *Tablet*, *Sh’ma*, the *Jewish Review of Books* and the *Forward*, where she received a Rackower Award for excellence in Jewish Journalism.



Landscapes of Memory

Leah Galant

Interweaving the stories of a Holocaust-survivor descendant, a Nazi descendant historian, Palestinian artists in exile, and the filmmakers' own reckoning with her familial trauma, *Landscapes of Memory* explores Holocaust remembrance and the uses and abuses of memory culture.

Leah Galant, New York, NY

Email: leahgalant7@gmail.com

Website: leahgalant.com

Project Status: Post-Production



Leah Galant is a Jewish director and Fulbright Scholar based in New York whose storytelling focuses on unexpected narratives that challenge perceptions. In 2022, she was recognized as one of DOC NYC's 40 under 40. Leah's directorial debut *On the Divide* premiered at the Tribeca 2021 Film Festival and was broadcast on POV PBS on April 18th 2022. She was a Sundance Ignite and Jacob Burns Fellow where she created *Death Metal Grandma* (SXSW 2018) about a 97 year old Holocaust survivor named Inge Ginsberg who sings death metal which won "Best Documentary" at the

American Pavilion at Cannes Film Festival, and is a NY Times Op Doc. While at Ithaca College in 2015 she was named one of *Variety's* "110 Students to Watch in Film and Media" for her work on *The Provider* that follows a traveling abortion doctor in Texas (SXSW 2016, Student Emmy Award) and *Beyond the Wall* about a formerly incarcerated individuals re-entry process. She is currently a member-owner at Meerkat Media cooperative production company and working on her second feature length film on memory culture.



Hot Spot

Karin Kainer

An intimate six-year coming-of-age journey tracing Maher, Lola, Tom, Iman, Luka, and Noam—Gen Z teens from across the globe, including enemy nations—who first meet at a radical peace boarding school in conflict-ridden Israel during COVID. As they grow up on camera, love, war, and identity test whether friendship can survive a divided world.

Karin Kainer, Tel Aviv, Israel
Email: karinkainer@gmail.com
Website: [instagram.com/karinkainer/](https://www.instagram.com/karinkainer/)
Project Status: Post-Production



Karin Kainer is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and producer who creates riveting documentaries that have garnered worldwide critical acclaim. Screened internationally in theaters and on television (BBC, Amazon Prime, FRANCE1, AL Jazeera, ARTE), her range of titles include - Award winner best documentary series of 2023 in the Documentary Forum Awards competition - *Tiberias under the Red Line* which aired in August 2023 on kan 11. The public broadcaster received rave reviews and was also one of the most watched series in the last year. 'Shula & Geuala' 3 part series (2025), 'Kosher Beach'

(Israeli Oscar 2020, won Krakow FF 2020 and BEIJIN FF, World premiere DOC-NYC 2019, Docaviv 2019), 'Rinascita' (winner of Haifa FF 2011), 'Das iz der valt' (winner short Docaviv 2010), 'SKATE OF MIND' (Sundance 2011, winner LAMA FF Los Angeles), 'South Wind on Hilton Beach' (Haifa FF 2006, Hotdocs 2007).



Missing Vivian Silver

Hilla Medalia

Peace activist, Vivian Silver, dedicated her life to reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. On October 7th she was murdered in her home in Kibbutz Be'eri, becoming a victim of the very disaster she had warned against. In the wake of her death, as Israel begins its brutal attacks on Gaza, Vivian's sons along with her Jewish and Palestinian friends struggle to hold onto her vision for peace, wondering what would Vivian do?

Hilla Medalia, Tel Aviv, Israel

Email: hilla@medaliaproductions.com

Website: medaliaproductions.com

Project Status: Post-Production



Hilla Medalia is a Peabody Award-winning director, producer, writer and has received six Emmy award nominations. Her projects have garnered critical acclaim and screened internationally in theaters and on platforms including HBO, Netflix, MTV, PBS, BBC and ARTE. Her range of titles includes: Children no More: "Were and are Gone" (2025, DocNYC), "Adaptation to Darkness" (Docaviv, Palm Springs 2025), "ADA - My Mother, the Architect" (JFF, 2024), "Tropicana" (Jerusalem Film Festival) "Wanted: Roni Kalderon" (DocAviv, 2024), "Mourning in Lod" (MTV Documentaries, DocAviv, 2023) "Innocence"

(Venice International Film Festival, 2022), "H2: The Occupation Lab" (Hotdocs, Fipa, 2022), "Love & Stuff" (HotDocs, DOCNYC, POV 2020), "Leftover Women" (Tribeca, ARTE, 2019), "The Oslo Diaries" (Sundance, HBO, ARTE, 2018), "Muhi" (IDFA, HotDocs, 2017), "Censored Voices," (Sundance, Berlinale, 2015), "The Go Go Boys" (Cannes, 2014), "Web Junkie" (Sundance, POV, BBC, 2014), "Dancing in Jaffa" (Tribeca, IFC, 2013). Hilla is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and she holds an M.A. from Southern Illinois University.

Meet the Panelists



Ash Cook is a features Programmer at the Sundance Film Festival and Guest Festival Director of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. At Sundance he focuses on both fiction, nonfiction, and the Midnight sections of the Festival. Previously he was Associate Programmer for shorts and features, working closely with Director of Programming Kim Yutani. Ash's programming experience also includes Damn These Heels Film Festival, Outfest, Palm Springs Shorts Fest, NewFest NY, Sun Valley Film Festival, Overlook Film Festival, and AFI Fest. Ash is a 2021 Project Involve Fellow on Film Independent's programming track. Originally from Philadelphia, PA Ash holds a dual degree in Film & English from Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY.



Masashi Niwano is the Director of Artist Development at SFFILM. He focuses his time on supporting global filmmakers through a slate of grants, artist support and fellowships. Through SFFILM's portfolio of artist development programs, he has provided career guidance and millions of dollars to the independent film community. Before SFFILM, he was the Festival & Exhibitions Director at the Center for Asian American Media (CAAM) and the Executive Director of the Austin Asian American Film Festival (AAAFF). He is a Bay Area native who holds a Bachelor's Degree in Film Production from San Francisco State University.



Lisa Kleiner Chanoff is co-founder of Catapult Film Fund. Catapult provides research and development funding and mentorship to launch important, moving and artful documentary films. Founded in 2010, Catapult has launched over 250 documentary films with both research and development support. Before her career in filmmaking, she practiced law in San Francisco and with the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice in Washington, D.C. Lisa's executive producer credits include documentaries *Watchers of the Sky*, *Art and Craft*, *Brimstone and Glory*, *When God Sleeps*, *Extremis*, *Life Overtakes Me*, and *Lift*, as well as several fiction feature films. She is president of the board of Catapult Film Fund and serves on the boards of SFFILM and the photojournalism nonprofit Catchlight. She is an advisor to the Close Up Initiative for filmmakers from Southwest Asia and North Africa. Lisa is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.



Sarah Burford is the Chief Operating Officer of CANVAS, a funder and fieldbuilding collaborative that supports and amplifies the 21st century Jewish cultural renaissance. At CANVAS, Sarah oversees organizational strategy, operations, grantmaking, national partnerships, and leadership development initiatives supporting arts organizations and cultural leaders across North America. Before joining CANVAS, Sarah served artists and organizations nationwide as a Film and Media Arts program officer at the National Endowment for the Arts, at the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and in curatorial roles at the Institute for Contemporary Art, Philadelphia and The Jewish Museum. As a visual artist, cultural strategist, and philanthropy professional, Sarah is an advocate for the power of the arts to foster community, nurture a culture of care, and envision more vibrant futures for all.



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 Filmmakers Residence Program is the only dedicated artist development program in the United States that provides mentorship and for emerging and established filmmakers whose documentary projects explore and expand thoughtful consideration of Jewish history, life, culture, and identity.

For more information, visit www.jfi.org/filmmakers.

JFI thanks the generous supporters who make the Filmmaker Residency possible.

Anne Germanacos
The Firehouse Fund
K180 Studios
Sandy Monteko-Sherman



Upcoming Filmmaker Opportunities

2026 JFI Grant Applications: Opening January 2026

46th San Francisco Jewish Film Festival Call for Entries: Closing February 28, 2026

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