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FILM INDEPENDENT UNVEILS 2026 FILM INDEPENDENT FORUM LINEUP

**Film Independent Fellows HIKARI, Elegance Bratton and Chester Algernal Gordon
Set for Keynote Conversations**

**Two-Day Program Features *Doc Meets World* Screening, Filmmaker Case Studies and
Conversations on the Future of Storytelling**

Annual event returns September 25-26 at the Directors Guild of America

LOS ANGELES (September 9, 2026) — Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Spirit Awards, announced today the lineup for the 2026 Film Independent Forum, returning September 25-26 to the Directors Guild of America in Los Angeles. The two-day gathering will bring together filmmakers, creators and industry professionals for screenings, panels, workshops, one-on-one meetings and networking opportunities designed to help artists navigate a rapidly changing industry.

This year's Forum will address timely issues shaping independent filmmaking, including the future of Los Angeles' independent film ecosystem and its role in the city's creative economy, the rise of vertical storytelling and the new generation of creators making the transition from YouTube to the big screen. Additional conversations will explore distribution, artificial intelligence in the creative workplace and opportunities for filmmakers working across international borders.

Opening the Forum on Friday, Film Independent Fellow and filmmaker HIKARI (*Rental Family*) will take part in a Keynote conversation exploring her acclaimed filmmaking career across continents. At the center of Saturday's program, Film Independent Fellows and director-

producer team Elegance Bratton and Chester Algernal Gordon (*By Any Means*) will discuss, in a Keynote conversation, their journey building the breadth of their work together and navigating the move from very personal independent filmmaking into larger studio spaces. “Film Independent has been instrumental in the development of both of us as filmmakers. To be included among the extraordinary artists who have given this keynote before us is more than an honor; it’s a call to action. At a moment when forces are conspiring to demonize, consume, or defund independent voices in media, Film Independent remains a light in the darkness: a place that insists those voices matter and gives them the resources to be heard. We can’t wait to share a bit of our journey, what we’ve learned along the way, and what we believe is worth fighting for next,” said Elegance and Chester.

“It is an honor to welcome our Fellows, HIKARI, Elegance Bratton and Chester Algernal Gordon, for our Keynote Conversations and celebrate their remarkable journeys from independent film to studio films like *Rental Family* and *By Any Means*,” said Senior Director of Education and International Programs, María Raquel Bozzi. “From our Keynotes, current indie film case studies and bold new forms of storytelling to AI and the future of LA’s creative economy, this year’s Forum is a great expression of our organization here, today.”

The program will also feature established Forum offerings, including case studies that provide an inside look at the development, production and release of recent projects such as documentaries *Cookie Queens* and *Mistress Dissembler*; fiction films *Didi* and *Lurker*; and new indie series *Hal & Harper* and *The Screener*, as well as The New Wave Actors, which spotlights emerging performers across film and television. The Pitching Clinic will give Film Independent Fellows the opportunity to present their work to producers, financiers and industry experts while offering attendees practical strategies they can apply to their own projects.

The weekend will conclude Saturday evening with *Doc Meets World*, followed by a Q&A with actor Rider Strong, producer Alexandra Barreto, and directors Chris Levitus and Zane Rubin.

Industry Connect, the Forum’s signature series of one-on-one meetings, will return on both days. Attendees will have the opportunity to meet individually with agents, casting directors, distributors, film festivals, funding organizations, production companies and other industry professionals. Each meeting is designed to provide practical career and project guidance while creating the potential for meaningful professional relationships.

Now in its 21st year, the Forum continues to be the perfect space to meet and learn from independent filmmakers and executives who are calling the shots today, and to exchange ideas with peers in a very inclusive, festive and communal setting. Confirmed speakers include:

- **Patrick Adler** (Founding Partner, Westwood Economics)
- **Tal Anderson** (Actor, *The Pitt*)

- **Munir Atalla** (Head of Production & Acquisitions, Watermelon Pictures)
- **Alexandra Barreto** (Producer, *Doc Meets World*, *Late Bloomers*; Actor, *The Fosters*)
- **Elegance Bratton** (Director, *The Inspection*, *By Any Means*)
- **Wendy Calhoun** (Executive Producer, *The Rookie: Feds*, *Empire*)
- **Daniel Cardone** (Senior Manager, Nonfiction Programs, Film Independent)
- **Tiffany Yvonne Cox** (Writer/Director, *Leaving Mr. Wrong for Mr. Right*; Actor, *Reasonable Doubt*)
- **Mathew Cullen** (Founder, Mirada Studios and Motion Theory)
- **Jim Cummings** (Creator, *The Screener*)
- **Nicolas Curcio** (Writer/Director, *Play House*, Writer, *GOAT*)
- **Elizabeth Dell** (Producer, *Screen Time*)
- **Juan Devis** (President, Film Independent)
- **Ruth Fowler** (Writer, *Rules of the Game*, *Little Disasters*)
- **Adam Fowler** (Economist and Founding Partner, CVL Economics)
- **Carolyn Giardina** (Crafts and Entertainment Technology Journalist)
- **Darrien Michele Gipson** (Executive Director, SAGindie)
- **Denise Gutches** (CEO, FilmLA)
- **Jim Geduldick** (VFX Supervisor and Co-Founder, CCAI)
- **Amy Goldberg** (Producer, Studio/Network Executive - City of LA Production Consultant)
- **Chester Algernal Gordon** (Producer, *The Inspection*, *By Any Means*)
- **Kyle Greenberg** (Head of Marketing and Distribution, Utopia)
- **HIKARI** (Writer/Director, *37 Seconds*, *Rental Family*)
- **Steve Kang** (President and Chief Film Liaison, City of Los Angeles)
- **Tatiana Kelly** (Producer, *The Catcher Was a Spy*, *Cut Throat City*)
- **Miura Kite** (President of Global Content, Maria Farinha Films)
- **Missy Laney** (Film & TV Producer)
- **Angela Lee** (Director of Artist Development, Film Independent)
- **Chris Levitus** (Director, *Doc Meets World*)
- **Elizabeth Lo** (Director, *Mistress Dispellor*)
- **Hernán López** (Executive Producer, *Dying for Sex*, *WeCrashed*)
- **Valerie Martinez** (Senior Manager, Artist Development, Film Independent)
- **Myra Molloy** (Actor, *Girls Like Girls*)
- **Alysa Nahmias** (Director, *Cookie Queens*)
- **Alex Orlovsky** (Producer, *Lurker*)
- **Ryan Parker** (Production and Workforce Manager, Film Mississippi)
- **Caleb Phillips** (Writer/Director, *The Imposters*)
- **Cooper Raiff** (Creator/Actor, *Hal & Harper*)
- **Zane Rubin** (Director, *Doc Meets World*)
- **Alex Russel** (Writer/Director, *Lurker*, *Beef*)
- **Saagar Shaikh** (Actor, *Deli Boys*)
- **Shih-Ching Tsou** (Director/Producer, *Left-Handed Girl*)
- **Avril Speaks** (Producer, *Jinn*, *Uprooted*)

- **Rider Strong** (Actor, *Doc Meets World*, *Boy Meets World*)
- **Alexander Ullom** (Writer/Director, *It Ends*)
- **Vivian “Anan” Wang** (Writer, *Sleeping with my Billionaire Enemy*, *Alpha King's Mistake*)
- **Sean Wang** (Writer/Director, *Didi* (弟弟))
- **Dawn Yang** (Global Head of Entertainment & Micro-series, TikTok)
- **Harry Yoon** (Editor, *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*, *Michael*)

With additional names to be added. Forum passes are on sale now for \$165 for Film Independent Members and \$220 for non-Members. Passes are free for Arts Circle Members and Film Independent Fellows with an active Membership. Arts Circle, Filmmaker Pro and Secret Members also receive priority registration for Industry Connect sessions. For more information about this year's Film Independent Forum, to purchase a pass and/or become a Member, please visit filmindependent.org/forum

The 2026 Film Independent Forum is supported by Premier Partners Directors Guild of America and SAGindie, Principal Partner Taiwan Academy in Los Angeles, Ministry of Culture, Taiwan (R.O.C.) and Supporting Partners Explore Minnesota Film, Film Mississippi, Front Row Insurance Brokers and Shamel Studio. Getty Images is the Official Photographer. eTech Rentals is the Official Technology Rental Provider.

ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT

For over 40 years, Film Independent has helped filmmakers get their projects made and seen. The nonprofit organization's core mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling in all its forms and foster a culture of inclusion, in support of a global community of artists and audiences who embody diversity, innovation, curiosity and uniqueness of vision.

In addition to producing the [Film Independent Spirit Awards](#), the organization supports creative professionals with [Artist Development](#) programs, grants and labs. Signature mentorship program [Project Involve](#) fosters the careers of talented filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Weekly Education events and workshops equip filmmakers of all ages and experience levels with tools and resources. International programs provide cultural exchanges and career-building opportunities for film professionals around the world. And year-round screening series [Film Independent Presents](#) offers a robust program of unique cinematic experiences, including screenings, conversations, Live Reads and Bring the Noise musical events.

For more information or to become a Member, visit filmindependent.org.

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