



CAAMFest 2023 Celebrates 11 Joyful Days of Gathering In Community and Storytelling

SAN FRANCISCO, May 25, 2023 - The [Center for Asian American Media](#) (CAAM) celebrated a successful return to fully in-person programs at [CAAMFest 2023](#), with more than 11,000 people in attendance. Over 11 days of expanded programming for film, food, and music, CAAMFest presented 55 programs at 15 different venues, an increase from last year's hybrid program.

"I am in awe at how the community has embraced and celebrated the return of CAAMFest," says CAAM Festival & Exhibitions Director Thúy Tran. "Together, we experienced a transformative 11 days, immersed in the beauty and boldness of Asian American storytelling that's multifaceted; transcending the boundaries of our imagination into reality. We honored those that came before us while introducing a new generation of creatives. We gathered in dark theaters, on grassy lawns for a historic concert, and around dining tables for nourishing meals with guest chefs. This year's CAAMFest was the most sensorial yet and we are only just beginning."

"We are thrilled and a bit humbled by the turnout at this year's CAAMFest," says CAAM Executive Director Stephen Gong. "From the Castro Theatre at capacity on Opening Night, to full and enthusiastic audiences at our venues throughout San Francisco and in Oakland, it's evident that our community wanted to see and share Asian American stories."

With over 11,000 attendees, the festival brought the community together to celebrate and witness the power of storytelling from the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community.

CAAMFEST 2023 AWARD WINNERS

CAAMFEST 2023 NARRATIVE COMPETITION AWARD

Jury Members Include: **Arij Mikati**, Managing Director of Culture Change, Pillars Fund; **Lacy Lew Nguyen Wright**, Executive Director of Hillman Grad Foundation; **Michelle Sugihara**, Executive Director of Coalition of Asian Pacifics in Entertainment

Winner: *Land of Gold*, directed by Nardeep Khurmi

Jury Statement: “We were blown away with the breathtaking cinematography, incredibly strong performances, and a cross-cultural, nuanced take on this time-old story of human connection. We believe this film is an absolutely exceptional example of the power of narrative storytelling.”

CAAMFEST 2023 DOCUMENTARY COMPETITION AWARD

Jury Members Include: **Chloe Walters-Wallace**, Director of Regional Initiatives for Firelight Media; **Nancy Xiong**, Executive Director at Hmong Innovating Politics; **Zosette Guir**, Manager of Content Operations and Production at Detroit Public Television

Winner: *unseen*, directed by Set Hernandez

Jury Statement: We feel this remarkable film pushed not only the visual form, but also forced us as viewers to literally grapple with the full spectrum of Pedro’s world: the pressures, the expectations to succeed that all immigrants feel, and in the midst of all that, joy and community. We experienced a sense of immediacy from the opening moment, and the relationship between Set and Pedro showed how even those of us deeply enmeshed in the disability fight are still continuously learning, exposing biases that we must Unearth.

Honorable Jury Mention: *Liquor Store Dreams*, directed by So Yun Um

We’re delighted to give an honorable mention to *Liquor Store Dreams*, a film that shows in a real and visceral way, a way forward to having the difficult, necessary and intersectional conversations about racism experienced by both the Asian American and Black communities. So Yun Um’s direct conversations with her father about Sa-I-Gu, George Floyd are an example of the challenges that addressing those topics intergenerationally present; showing Danny’s story, and his efforts to build community

solidarity in his corner of the neighborhood present a real picture of the hopeful practice of bridging the racial divide.

In the current political climate, where divisiveness and polarization seem to loom large, *Liquor Store Dreams* presents a real-life example of putting intergenerational and inter-racial healing into practice—no matter what region of the country one resides in, this story resonates in both the challenges and the possibilities it presents.

LONI DING AWARD FOR SOCIAL ISSUE DOCUMENTARY

The Loni Ding Award for Social Justice Documentary recognizes the film and filmmaker that most reflect the passions of late TV producer Loni Ding. Ding devoted her life to advocacy and played a key role in the founding of several public media organizations, including CAAM.

Jury Members Include: **Sapana Sakya**, Talent Development & Special Projects Director, CAAM; **Stephen Gong**, Executive Director, CAAM; **Dharini Rasiah**, Filmmaker, Film Teacher, and associate of Loni's

Winner: *Cambodian Futures*, directed by Dustin Nakao-Haider

Jury Statement: *Cambodian Futures* examines the legacy of colonization, war, and genocide while imagining the possibilities for the Cambodian community by restoring and redefining culture and identity through food. Through his award-winning culinary creations, chef Ethan Lim explores what Cambodian cuisine might have become if not disrupted by war. Ultimately Lim's path in life is grounded in his desire to honor and comfort his parents.

Dharini Rasiah's Statement: "As a student of Loni Ding, I was immersed in the idea that filmmaking was something that was beyond our individual vision and work. She brought that sense of urgency to our classes, one that demanded our work be driven by community needs. She screened many Asian American activist films of the '70s and '80s, as well as the work of other filmmakers of color, some of it experimental, deeply personal, and all rooted in the goal to empower as well as shift the representation of communities of color. But Loni taught us something much more than filmmaking. She taught us how to build community, how to be generous with ourselves and others, and how to create a collective multiracial identity.

Loni's teaching is always at the forefront of my work. In reflecting on the outstanding finalists for CAAM's 2023 Loni Ding award, I was drawn to one piece for its deeply personal portrayal of the often unspoken injustices of war and dislocation, of inherited refugee trauma, and the urgency to imagine a life of joy and hope."

Honorable Jury Mention: *Here, Hopefully*, directed by Hao Zhou

A special jury mention goes to *Here, Hopefully*, by Hao Zhou, a film that explores the intersection of identity and survival in a world of restrictive immigration policies rooted in racism and xenophobia. In their efforts to obtain a nursing license, Zee endures isolation while seeking a gender-affirming life in the Midwest.”

AT&T InspirASIAN Award

This award recognizes promising voices in Asian and Asian American media, the InspirASIAN Student Film Award is presented to college students who exemplify the voice of a new generation. One award is presented to an undergraduate student, and a second award is presented to a graduate student.

Jury members comprised of the **InspirASIAN team**, a nonprofit and AT&T Employee Group

Undergraduate Winner: *The Last September*, directed by Sophia Shi

Under the stress of applying to college, an Asian American high schooler begins to see himself—and his Black best friend—in a whole new light.

Graduate Winner: *Instant Noodle*, directed by Michelle Sastraatmadja

A young woman ends up on an epic, cross-city trek to track down instant noodles for her widowed father’s birthday and reconnects with her Indonesian heritage in the face of her grief.

CAAMFEST 2023 AUDIENCE AWARDS

The CAAMFest Audience Award gives members of our audience the honor of selecting their favorite film of the Festival.

Documentary Feature Winner: *Nurse Unseen*, directed by Michele Josue

Even though Filipino nurses make up only 4% of the U.S. nursing population, 31.5% of COVID-19 nurse deaths have been Filipino. *Nurse Unseen* is a love letter honoring the history and humanity of Filipino nurses who have been the backbone of the American caretaking system.

Narrative Feature Winner: *Land of Gold*, directed by Nardeep Khurmi

Kiran Singh (Nardeep Khurmi), a 1st generation Punjabi-American, accepts a last-minute trucking job and discovers Elena (Caroline Valencia), a 10-year-old Mexican-American stowed away in his trailer. They connect through family, dreams of the future, and a healthy debate over God’s existence, all while the ghosts of the past, racially charged encounters, and the threat of I.C.E. linger over their journey.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

Opening Night Film: *Joy Ride*, directed by Adele Lim

CAAMFest 2023 opened with *Joy Ride*, a hilarious and unapologetically explicit story of identity and self-discovery where four unlikely friends embark on a once-in-a-lifetime international adventure. With over 1300 attendees, laughter bounced from wall to wall and the Castro Theatre was left with a rush of joy. Introductory remarks were given by City Attorney David Chiu and the screening was followed by a Q&A with cast members Ashley Park, Sherry Cola, Stephanie Hsu, and Sabrina Wu. This screening was made possible with support from Amazon.

Opening Night Gala

Opening Night Gala returned to the Asian Art Museum featuring music by DJ Umami and DJ Hideemode. The night wasn't complete without tasty eats by Hết Sầu Cali, Tacos Sincero, Noodle Belly, Nusa, Korean Superette, Chili Cali, and vegan nom noms by Chef Reina. The stars of the gala were the city's hottest drag artists, Tila Pia and Kristy Yummykochi, who gave an incredible performance with the finest death drops. Attendees danced the night away while having access to observe some of the exhibits showing. This program was made possible with support from Asian Art Museum and Amazon.

World Premiere: *Last Summer of Nathan Lee*, directed by Quentin Lee

From the group of trailblazing Asian American filmmakers known as the Class of 1997, Quentin Lee returned to CAAMFest with his world premiere of *Last Summer of Nathan Lee* at the Castro Theatre. When 18-year-old Nathan Lee finds out he has brain cancer, he asks his best friend Dash to document his remaining life which he vows to live with passion. The film captures the essence of coming-of-age joyful abandon and explores the blurry lines between friendship and sex. This screening was followed by a Q&A with Filmmaker Quentin Lee, writer/producer Dennis Escobedo, Producer Kevin Huie, actor/producer Harrison Xu, actor Matthew Mitchell Espinosa, actor Dru Perez, and actor Aaron Guest.

Centerpiece Documentary: *Liquor Store Dreams*, directed by So Yun Um

Liquor Store Dreams is a portrait of two second-generation Korean Americans trying to create their own future by honoring their parents' past through understanding and healing. Director and liquor store baby, So Yun Um and her father, Hae Sup, have never seen eye to eye on anything. With tension between So and her father, and how their Korean culture and store have had a complicated past within a Black community, So goes on a journey to unpack this tension as well as the existing generational divide. This screening at the Castro Theatre was followed by a conversation with director So Yun Um and her father, moderated by Charles Choo & Daphne Wu from the Cut Fruit Collective.

Centerpiece Docu-Narrative: *Starring Jerry As Himself*, directed by Law Chen

Based on a true story, this docu-narrative follows Jerry, a retired, divorced Taiwanese immigrant in Orlando who embarks on a spy mission. Under threat of arrest and extradition to China, Jerry becomes an undercover agent for the Chinese police. After months of keeping the investigation a secret, Jerry reveals everything to his family. His three sons decide to document his ordeal and discover the truth about what really happened and how it changed Jerry's life forever. This screening at the Castro Theatre was followed by a Q&A with Filmmaker Law Chen, Producer Jonathan Hsu, and Actor Jerry Hsu, moderated by Miko Lee of Apex Express. It was a special moment to have the star himself, Jerry, present at the screening to witness how his story has touched people from all over.

Centerpiece Narrative: *The Accidental Getaway Driver*, directed by Sing J. Lee

Long, a Vietnamese driver in Southern California gets taken hostage by three escaped convicts from an Orange County jail and is forced into their getaway plan. Inspired by a true story, this is not just a crime film, but a stirring portrait of this lonely, old man and the burdens of his past. The film explores lyrical and gently surreal interludes of war, family estrangement, and loneliness. This in-person screening at the Castro Theatre was followed by a Q&A with members of the production team: Joseph Hieu, Andy Sorgie, Jes Vu, Jennifer J. Pritzker, Quynh Nguyen-Le, Christian Bustamante, Hanrui Wang, Jennifer Nash, and Yang-Hua Hu. This was moderated by CAAM Board member, Jennifer Nguyen. This screening was made possible with support from Bloomberg.

Directions in Sound: Fanny and Friends

Directions In Sound returned to the Yerba Buena Gardens with the iconic 70's band Fanny rocking the stage, the day after the documentary *Fanny: The Right to Rock* screened at SFMOMA Phyllis Wattis Theater. Fanny members included: June and Jean Millington, Brie Darling, Alice de Buhr, and Patti Quatro. Local Filipinx artists Peaboo and the Catz and Ruby Ibarra were part of this epic line-up. June Millington of Fanny joined in on Ibarra's revolutionary Pinay anthem "Us", gifting the crowd with a true powerhouse moment that brought the lyrics to life: "Island woman rise, walang makakatigil (no one can stop us). Brown, brown woman, rise, alamin ang 'yong ugat (know your roots), they got nothin' on us."

CAAM's Director of Programs, Donald Young notes, "The historic Directions In Sound concert bringing together Fanny, Ruby Ibarra, and Peaboo and the Catz at Yerba Buena Gardens was a fitting tribute to the trailblazing Fanny, and simultaneously a joyous celebration of the future generations of fierce musicians."

This program was made possible with support from AARP.

I CAN'T KEEP QUIET with MILCK

A special mention to the exemplary Connie Lim (MILCK) who graciously performed her trailblazing song “Quiet” which sent chills down spines. Filmmaker Eurie Chung’s documentary *I Can’t Keep Quiet* screened just before the performance, giving an inside look into Lim’s journey and the meaning behind the anthem for the women’s movement.

CAAMFEST FOOD PROGRAMS

The expanded food programming for CAAMFest 2023 proved to be a showstopper. This year, two chef-led dinners featured cuisines from the Philippines to Jamaica and Northern Iran. We had an enlightening conversation with Andrea Nguyen on the latest release of her cookbook, *Ever-Green Vietnamese*, moderated by Soleil Ho and so many more.

Futurist Flavors: Abacá x Animae

An interstellar collaboration between Bay Area Chef Francis Ang and San Diego-based Chef Tara Monsod. This highly coveted dinner was sold out and transported all attendees into and beyond diaspora, time, and place with 13 delectable dishes that highlighted Filipino and Asian American foodways. This program was made possible with support from Dave Liu and Lauren Wu.

Futurist Flavors: Calabash

Chef Hanif Sadr and Chef Nigel Jones of Oakland’s new Calabash served up tasty bites reflective of their global Jamaican and Northern Iranian concept that left attendees with a beautiful reminder - that we are all connected and have shared histories and traditions to celebrate.

A Soy Story with Second Generation Seeds

In collaboration with KQED, this sold out event rooted guests in a night of seeds and soy storytelling. Kristyn Leach of Namu Farm, Steve Joo of Joodooboo, eco-educator Aileen Suzara along with artists Dohee Lee and JaeEun Jun and guest chefs QT Viet Cafe held this sacred place to teach and remind us how seeds carry histories that are transported through generations and form kinships throughout our Asian diaspora.

Filmmaker Summit

CAAM Talent Development & Special Projects Director, Sapana Sakya, is proud that over 100 industry professionals attended this year’s event, deepening the connections between filmmakers and community members.

“It was incredibly heartening to gather with so many friends in person at the Filmmaker Summit this year,” says Sakya. “As Asian American creatives, we value the rare opportunity to focus on our experiences, to connect with colleagues and celebrate filmmakers at CAAMFest 2023.”

This program was made possible with support from A-Doc, American Documentary, Inc. and GBH World, ITVS, and the Jessie Cheng Charitable Foundation.

Closing Night: Juicy Fruity Party at 7th West

The Closing Night Party for CAAMFest 2023 was a true reflection of the intent of the festival this year, which was to bask in joy. With the event collaborators and hosts, Soulovely, the night sky heard boisterous laughter, singing voices from karaoke, and the dancing beats that bodies moved to. Soulovely rooted the crowd in uplifting the beauty and resilience of Oakland's queer and trans-BIPOC community, where everyone was able to enjoy each other in culture and community. 7th West provided amazing food, drinks, and karaoke, along with Kimberly Yang from Formosa Chocolates who provided a beautiful CAAMFest chocolate bar that was to die for. The DJs of the night included DJ Emancipation, DJ Lady Ryan, DJ Dree, and DJ Livv. This Juicy Fruity night wrapped up CAAMFest 2023 with a reminder of soulful connections and stories.

Thanks to Our Supporters!

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About CAAMFest

Celebrating its 41st year in 2023, CAAMFest is the nation's leading showcase for Asian and Asian American talent in film, food, music, and arts. CAAMFest takes place May 11-21, 2023. Check CAAMFest.com for more programming and ticketing details.

About CAAM

For over 40 years, CAAM (Center for Asian American Media) has been dedicated to presenting

stories that convey the richness and diversity of Asian American experiences to the broadest audience possible. As a nonprofit organization, CAAM funds, produces, distributes, and exhibits works in film, television, and digital media. For more information about CAAM, please visit www.CAAMedia.org.

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