

A movie theater interior with a large screen showing a desert landscape. The theater has red seats and a high ceiling with a hanging light fixture. The screen displays a dirt road winding through a desert valley with mountains in the background. A person is visible walking on the road.

American Museum
of Natural History

MARGARET MEAD

FILM FEST IVAL

WE ARE THE STORY

May 1–3, 2026

amnh.org/mead



WELCOME

We are intricately tethered to the land that sustains us.

This is something our ancestors and communities around the world have always known, something our bodies remember even when our minds forget. Across this year's films—from the Bunong people's ancestral ties to the forest, to Indigenous mycologists in Mexico reimagining coexistence through fungi—we're invited to examine our relationship to the natural world, to honor what nourishes us, and to recognize how deeply interconnected we are with the planet and each other. At the Margaret Mead Film Festival, we gather to witness these stories not as distant observers, but as participants in the same unfolding future.

What moves me about this slate of films is how they call us to be protagonists in our own transformations, whether big or small. The everyday is held in balance with the extraordinary: a simple mushroom, a pestering neighbor (who happens to be a polar bear), a lobster molting its shell—each becomes a lens into ancestral tradition, evolving expressions of identity, and the fight for survival. What is often overlooked is celebrated here, in the giggles of girlhood, the wisdom of elders, and the courage it takes to grab life by the horns.

Since its founding in 1977, the Mead has traced the evolution of visual anthropology and documentary storytelling, bringing the questions of gaze, representation, authority, and embodiment into broader public conversation. The filmmakers who are part of this festival offer reflections of our shared reality and invite us to consider new ways of thinking. I hope you leave here not just moved, but ready to see the world differently, to act with intention, and to be part of the story we're capturing together.

See you in the theater,

Jacqueline 'Jackie' Handy
Director of Public Programs
American Museum of Natural History

ENTRANCE

The entrance for all Margaret Mead Film Festival programs is on 77th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue.

ACCESSIBILITY

Mobility Access: The 77th Street entrance to the Museum is step-free. All screenings take place in wheelchair-accessible theaters with nearby accessible restrooms.

Hearing Access: All theaters are equipped with hearing loop systems, and Assistive Listening Devices are available. Please contact us at meadfest@amnh.org or 212-769-5305 to request one in advance.

Sensory Access: Sensory Bags containing noise-cancelling headphones, sunglasses, and fidget tools are available to borrow for screenings in the LeFrak Theater. For screenings in the Kaufmann Theater, please request a Sensory Bag in advance of your visit.

If you have additional questions about accessibility at the Mead or would like to request an accommodation not listed here, please contact us at meadfest@amnh.org or 212-769-5305.

TICKETING

Opening night film and reception tickets are \$20 (\$15 for Members and students).

All other screenings and programs are \$15 (\$13 for Members and students).

Weekend passes are available for \$75 (\$50 for Members) and include the opening night film and reception, plus all other screenings.

FOOD AND DRINK

Museum cafes are open throughout the festival during regular hours. Theater-compliant reusable Mead cups are available for sale in the Futter Gallery. No outside food or beverages will be allowed in the theaters.

OPENING NIGHT



MAY 1

7 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Time and Water

Entrusted with writing a eulogy for Okjökull, the first Icelandic glacier lost to climate change, Andri Snær Magnason embarks on a profound exploration of environmental love and mourning. Academy Award nominee Sara Dosa crafts an intimate, transcendent meditation on loss, memory, and the deep time of the natural world, set against Iceland's sweeping landscapes and layers of cultural history. Poetic and urgent, this film uses powerful cinematic language to confront the climate crisis on a human scale.

NEW YORK PREMIERE
2026 | 90 min | USA, Iceland

DIRECTOR
Sara Dosa

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE



MAY 2

11:30 AM | LEFRAK THEATER

We Are the Fruits of the Forest

From Academy Award nominee Rithy Panh, Cambodia's foremost filmmaker, comes a portrait of the Indigenous Bunong people, tracing their deep connection to ancestral traditions and the natural world. As pressures of modernity, climate change, and global development encroach, the community navigates a fragile balance between continuity and change, development and alienation. Weaving archival ethnographic material with lyrical contemporary images, the film moves fluidly between memory and observation, offering a layered reflection on time, belonging, and resilience.

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE
2025 | 87 min
Cambodia, France

DIRECTOR
Rithy Panh

2:30 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Bucks Harbor

Acclaimed documentary photographer Pete Muller makes his feature debut with *Bucks Harbor*, winner of the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in Berlinale 2026's Panorama section. Set against the rugged beauty of Downeast Maine, the film tenderly portrays a fishing community shaped by the unforgiving coastal landscape. Attuned to the interplay of gender, labor, and environment, Muller situates human life alongside the creatures that sustain it, offering a nuanced, quietly revelatory portrait.

NEW YORK PREMIERE
2026 | 98 min | USA

DIRECTOR
Pete Muller

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE





3:30 PM | KAUFMANN THEATER

River Dreams

Winner of the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury in Berlinale 2026's Forum section, *River Dreams* asks young women living in Kazakhstan to imagine themselves as a river, delving into the emotional landscapes of their inner worlds. Director Kristina Mikhailova gives space for conversations on toxic masculinity and domestic abuse against a backdrop of deep-rooted gender conservatism. An ode to sisterhood, healing, and resistance, the film offers a vivid portrait that is both culturally specific and universal.

NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

2026 | 99 min | Kazakhstan, Switzerland, United Kingdom

DIRECTOR

Kristina Mikhailova

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE

5:15 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Whispers in May

In China's majestic Liangshan Mountains, 14-year-old Qihuo has just had her first menstruation, marking the start of a traditional coming-of-age ritual. With her parents away as migrant workers, she and two friends set out on a road trip to buy a ceremonial skirt. Winner of the prestigious DOX:AWARD at CPH:DOX 2026, *Whispers in May* blurs documentary and fiction, inviting Qihuo to be the protagonist of her own adventure as she leaves childhood behind.

NEW YORK PREMIERE

2026 | 95 min | Hong Kong, Netherlands, Republic of Korea (South Korea), Sweden

DIRECTOR

Dongnan Chen

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE

6:15 PM | KAUFMANN THEATER

Black Zombie

Fascinating, sprawling, and incisive, *Black Zombie* excavates the hidden history of the mythical figure, tracing its path from Haitian Vodou to Hollywood horror. An electrifying act of reclamation and spiritual resistance, the film moves through the Caribbean's layered cultural histories to the global pop stage of Michael Jackson and the work of George A. Romero. Tracing a ubiquitous fable back to the land that birthed it, this film ensures you'll never see zombies the same way again.

NEW YORK PREMIERE

2026 | 90 min | Canada

DIRECTOR

Maya Annik Bedward

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE

8 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

The Oldest Person in the World

More than a decade in the making, documentarian Sam Green returns with a charming, deeply felt portrait of the world's oldest living person—a title that changes hands several times throughout the film. Profiling a succession of record holders, Green captures the wit, grit, and humor that accompany extraordinary longevity. The result is both a moving reflection on the passage of time and a joyful celebration of life.

NEW YORK PREMIERE

2026 | 87 min | USA

DIRECTOR

Sam Green

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE



Daughters of the Forest

MAY 3



Jaripeo

2 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Daughters of the Forest

Winner of the Visions Audience Award at SXSW, this alluring, immersive journey into the forests of Mexico blends modern science with ancestral knowledge to evoke a world beyond human perception. Following two Indigenous mycologists charting new possibilities for ecological coexistence through mushrooms, the film is a clarion call for integrating science and culture. As one scientist observes: "Nothing can be rescued if you have no knowledge of it; you can't love what you don't know."

NEW YORK PREMIERE
2026 | 94 min | Mexico

DIRECTOR
Otilia Portillo Padua

DIRECTOR IN ATTENDANCE

5 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Jaripeo

Playfully reworking the iconography of masculinity, *Jaripeo* travels to the rodeos of Michoacán, where queer desire and belonging simmer just beneath the surface. With intimate, observational sensitivity, the film follows riders and performers whose lives shimmer with pleasure, style, and resilience across richly textured landscapes. Set against the figure of the bull, a symbol of will and defiance, an unexpected, vibrant portrait of queerness and community emerges.

NEW YORK PREMIERE
2026 | 70 min | Mexico, USA, France

DIRECTORS
Efraín Mojica
Rebecca Zweig

DIRECTORS IN ATTENDANCE



Nuisance Bear

7:30 PM | LEFRAK THEATER

Nuisance Bear

Winner of the U.S. Documentary Competition Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, *Nuisance Bear* drops us into northern Canada, where a wandering polar bear has become an unlikely menace to a small town. As polar bear safaris draw waves of tourists, the film observes an uneasy coexistence among the bear, the region's Inuit community, and a booming tourism economy. Visually arresting and morally complex, this film overturns nature-documentary conventions, reframing animals as active agents in a rapidly changing world.

NEW YORK PREMIERE
2026 | 87 min | USA, Canada

DIRECTORS
Gabriela Osio Vanden
Jack Weisman

DIRECTORS IN ATTENDANCE

SPECIAL EVENT

SUNDAY, MAY 3 | 11:30 AM-2 PM

DCTV Workshop

This workshop for teens features youth producers from the Downtown Community Television Center (DCTV) Youth Media program presenting their original short documentary films, along with an in-depth look at their creative process.



Generous support for the Margaret Mead Film Festival has been provided by The Mead Trust.

A portion of the Margaret Mead Film Festival is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



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Museum Audio/Visual Team
Museum Movers, Security, and Facilities

2026 Mead Volunteers



The Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award

The Margaret Mead Filmmaker Award recognizes documentary filmmakers who embody the spirit, energy, and innovation demonstrated by anthropologist Margaret Mead in her research, fieldwork, films, and writings. The award is selected by the jury and given to a filmmaker whose feature-length documentary displays artistic excellence and originality in storytelling technique while offering a new perspective on cultures and communities. All films are eligible for awards.

Audience Award

The Audience Award, voted on by Margaret Mead Film Festival attendees, celebrates the power of community engagement and the diverse perspectives that enrich the cinematic experience, fostering a vibrant dialogue between filmmakers and their audience. All films are eligible for awards.

Jurors

Alice Apley is executive director of Documentary Educational Resources (DER), an organization that champions the creation, circulation, and preservation of documentary film and media. At DER, Apley oversees the curation, marketing, and exhibition of nearly 900 titles, leads the organization's filmmaker services program, and advises filmmakers on works-in-progress.

Robert Y. Chang is the co-producer of POV, the longest-running independent documentary showcase on American television. Chang has served as programmer, panelist, and reviewer for a range of film festivals, foundations, and funders of the arts and received his Ph.D. in cultural anthropology from NYU, with research on the intersection of religion and media.

Brittany Shyne is an award-winning filmmaker and cinematographer whose films explore the complexity of everyday life, examining themes of personal history, alienation, and modernization. Her debut feature, *Seeds*, premiered at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival, where it received the U.S. Documentary Grand Jury Award, and was shortlisted for the 2026 Academy® Awards. *Seeds* made its New York premiere at the Margaret Mead Film Festival in 2025.

