



# ***Black Maria Film Festival***

## ***Set To Light Up Hoboken Historical Museum***

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**by Candace Nicholson**

Hollywood may still be the epicenter of the American film industry, but most cinephiles know that the birth of American film began right here in the state of New Jersey. In 1892, when W.K.L. Dickson and Thomas Edison collaborated to invent the motion picture camera, little did they know it would change the world of art and en-

tertainment forever. A year later, Edison began showcasing the first of his 75 short films created at his revolutionary -- literally -- studio in West Orange known as Black Maria. Now that legacy is honored every year by the Hudson County Office of Cultural and Heritage Affairs and Tourism with the Thomas Edison Black Maria Film Festival.

Currently in its 38th year, the **Thomas Edison Black Maria Film Festival** will bring its international juried competition for film shorts to film buffs, young and old, inside the **Hoboken Historical Museum** on Thursday evenings throughout the fall season. Celebrating the diversity of short film, the festival invites participants from across the country and the globe to explore the power of short film and break new ground with stories that create a lasting impact.

Staying true to its vision, the festival welcomes filmmakers from communities who are often underserved and under-represented in cinema, in front of the camera as well as behind it. For the fall, Black Maria Film Festival Executive Director Jane Steuerwald has focused the festival series into a curated program designed to lead a discussion with the audience and engage in the topics the films bring to life. In the past, the filmmakers have tackled everything from climate change to immigra-



**Watch a short video about Thomas Edison's Black Maria Studio**

tion to people with disabilities to LGBTQ+ issues to gun violence.

With the state of the current sociopolitical climate, not just in the U.S., but also abroad, this year's program will have no problem maintaining its reputation for spotlighting contemporary issues and social struggles with nuance, insight and heart. The Thursday program lineups maintain a tradition Steuerwald hopes will fuel the film festival's growth and encourage filmmakers for years to come.

On Thursday, September 12th, in Program 1, the winners of the 45th Annual NJ Young Filmmakers' Festival will take over the screen as the cinematic works of New Jersey high school and college students bring their ideas to life in the competition's standard juried categories: animation, documentary, experimental and narrative. The filmmakers will be in attendance to present their work and discuss their experience and vision.



For Program 2 held on Thursday, October 10th, audience members get to play an important role in the festival's competition thanks to the "You Be The Judge" sneak preview and pre-screening workshop. Led by Steuerwald, viewers will vote on their favorite entries in the Black Maria Film Festival for the upcoming 2020 season.

Special guest filmmaker Karl Nussbaum will join festival attendees on Thursday, November 14th to screen his film, "Ghost Dance for America, 1890," a tale of the religious movement began by the Native American community

in the late 1890s as a response to the U.S. government's move further west and the decimation of cultures, livelihoods and lives the expansion caused in its wake. Other select short films from the festival will be screened with Nussbaum's film.

The final event of the series taking place on Thursday, December 12th will give the audience an opportunity to explore history through multiple artforms connected to Edison's legacy -- the motion picture camera and the phonograph. "Once and Again," an award-winning documentary from the mind of Isabel Dunn, introduces us to three collectors of antique phonographs, including the only remaining phonograph disc jockey in Austin, TX. The evening and series concludes with screenings of "Mr. Sand," an animated film about the origins

of film projection; "Theatricum Magicum," a cinematic homage to animator and filmmaker George Melies; and a tribute to one of the remaining fully functioning drive-in theaters in upstate New York titled "The Last Projectionist."

Clearly filmmaking has come a long way since the days of Edison and Dickson physically revolving that tar-paper shack studio around on a track so their team could follow the sun throughout the day as they created film shorts. And thankfully technological advancements have made such physical labor unnecessary to tell a compelling story that leaves audiences moved far more than the buildings themselves. In the process, filmmakers of all backgrounds continue to prove that short films are as central to cinematic storytelling as any feature-length film aspires to. ♦