

# 7th Annual Blue Water Film Festival Announces Its Film Festival Jury

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SAN DIEGO, CA, UNITED STATES, March 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 2026 Blue Water Film Festival (BWFF), presented by the Blue Water Institute, is proud to unveil its distinguished honorees and film jury for the 7th Annual Festival, a four-day cinematic celebration returning to La Jolla from March 19–22, 2026. This year's edition promises a dynamic lineup of global films, industry conversations, and cultural programming dedicated to ocean conservation, climate storytelling, and cross-cultural dialogue.

The Blue Water Film Festival is also proud to announce this year's Feature, Short, and Animated Jury members, who each represent international excellence in filmmaking, environmental storytelling, and cinematic innovation.

## FEATURE JURORS

Taira Malaney is a writer, director, and producer from Goa, India. A member of the Explorers Club 50 (2023) and a Jackson Wild Media Lab (2019) fellow, Taira creates deeply moving, character-driven films exploring human relationships with the natural world. Her work integrates impact campaigns tied to social justice and environmental issues. She received her B.A. in Psychology from Occidental College, where she studied empathy-building in youth and later applied this learning to her award-winning films. Her directorial debut, *Turtle Walker*, won the Grand Teton Award at the Jackson Wild Media Awards, premiered at DOC NYC 2024 and won the Blue Water Film Festival Grand Jury and Best Director awards. It has since screened at more than 60 film festivals worldwide.

Chet Thomas is a veteran producer and director with over 30 years in the film industry. Through Flet Chet Entertainment, he and partner Darrin Fletcher currently have three series greenlit with Angel Studios. Chet has directed and produced 13 documentaries, including the 18-time award-winning *Waterman*, narrated by Jason Momoa. He recently produced Lionsgate's box-office hit *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*, widely praised as an "instant Christmas classic." Earlier in his career, Chet partnered with Gerald Molen (*Schindler's List*) and worked with Steven Spielberg's teams on *Minority Report*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *Amistad*, *Deep Impact*, and more. He is also the co-founder of *Sneak On The Lot*, an online film school empowering high school students to channel creativity into filmmaking. Chet is the founder of *HaitiStrong.org*, a nonprofit dedicated to humanitarian work in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to combat human trafficking.

Elisabeth de Casta Beaugard has served as President of Storyboard Media since 2017, overseeing production, finance, and global sales alongside partner Philip Kim. Storyboard Media has co-produced numerous films, including: FREAKS (Emile Hirsch, Bruce Dern); Heilstätten (20th Century Fox, Germany); Arkansas (Liam Hemsworth, Vince Vaughn, John Malkovich, Michael K. Williams); The Comeback Trail (Robert De Niro, Morgan Freeman, Tommy Lee Jones); Marlowe (Liam Neeson, Jessica Lange, Diane Kruger). The company has also sold films such as A Great Divide, Line of Descent, Alicia in Wonderland, and the 2025 release Looking Through Water, starring Michael Douglas and David Morse. Elisabeth has served on the Board and Executive Board of IFTA, and she is actively involved with BAFTA, WIF, and STOP POACHING NOW!

## SHORTS JURY

Laura Kutnick was raised around the world and later built her career in Connecticut. A Dartmouth graduate in film studies, she furthered her education at the Sorbonne and the University of Pennsylvania. She worked as a communications consultant for the Aspen Institute, contributed to Emmy Award-winning ABC documentaries, and served as a health producer for CBS Evening News. Laura's work includes a 2018 drama on nuclear disarmament and a Sotheby's documentary on her family's contemporary art collection. She now serves as President of the Dale and Laura Kutnick Foundation, supporting climate-change initiatives.

Dr. Alex Rivest is an MIT-trained neuroscientist whose research has been published in Science and Nature Neuroscience. He received MIT's Angus MacDonald Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching and founded the nonprofit Blue Kitabu, which built a sustainable primary school in Ghana. Alex co-directed CANARY, winner of Best Feature at both the Jackson Wild Media Awards and the Blue Water Film Festival (Best Eco Impact Film).

Roni Avni is an Israeli director, video editor, and photographer from Haifa, now based in Tel Aviv. A graduate of Minshar College for Art with a B.A. in Humanities, she made her directorial debut with Wild City (2024), which won Best Short Film at both the Tel Aviv Film Festival and the Blue Water Film Festival. Roni's work blends striking visual storytelling with thoughtful explorations of place, identity, and human connection. She is currently developing her first feature-length film.

## ANIMATION JURY

Born in Rome, Federico Fiecconi is the CEO and Creative Director of GraFFiti Creative in Milan. A respected animation historian and critic, he has written more than 300 articles, essays, and monographs on animation, comics, and illustration. He has curated major exhibitions including The Art of The Simpsons and Bruno Bozzetto: Animation Maestro! at The Walt Disney Family Museum. Federico served as Artistic Director for the Cartoon Preview Festival (Asolo) and BergamoToons, and has been Executive Producer of the award-winning animated series AcquaTeam, honored internationally, including Best Animated Feature Film (2025) at the Blue Water Film Festival.

Daniel Kreizberg is an award-winning filmmaker whose animated short, anyone lived in a pretty how town (narrated by Dr. Jane Goodall), premiered at the 2025 SCAD Savannah Film Festival. His debut film, Tahlequah the Whale: A Dance of Grief, won over 40 festival awards, including the Grand Jury Prize at the Blue Water Film Festival, a Special Mention at Animayo, and recognition at Jackson Wild. His work is supported by the Prince Albert II of Monaco Foundation, the Princess Grace Foundation, and the Jane Goodall Institute.

Jason Reisig is a tenured professor of animation at USC, teaching advanced 3D character animation and MFA thesis production. He co-directed the Warner Bros. animated feature Smallfoot and spent over 20 years at DreamWorks Animation, serving as Head of Character Animation on Shrek Forever After and Home. He received a SciTech Technical Achievement Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences for his work on DreamWorks' Premo animation system. Jason has contributed to major films including Trolls, Kung Fu Panda, Kung Fu Panda 3, and Over the Hedge.

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