

# MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

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**MoMI's Marvels of Media Festival, celebrating autistic media-makers, announces fourth annual edition, March 27–29, and first-ever expansion to venues across the country**

**New York premiere of *Once More, Like Rain Man*, the directorial debut of Sue Ann Pien, star of Amazon's *As We See It*, to open festival; Pien, along with producer Darren Dean (longtime Sean Baker collaborator), in person**

**Marvels of Media Advisory Council members include Tony Goldwyn, Brian Grazer, Cheryl Henson, Tony Spiridakis, and other leaders in entertainment**

**Film festival also to include exhibition featuring VR experiences and video games, discussions with media-makers, and workshops**



Pictured (L to R): Bella Zoe Martinez and Matt Jones in *Once More Like Rain Man*. Credit: Sue Ann Pien

**Astoria, New York, Mar. 5, 2025** — Aziz Isham, Executive Director of Museum of the Moving Image, announced today exciting news and the lineup for the fourth annual [Marvels of Media Festival](#), a celebration of the outstanding work created by autistic media-makers, from March 27–29. In addition to screenings, panel discussions, and workshops, this year the festival will also feature an exhibition, and, for the first time, an expansion tour across the country, March 27–April 30. The main festival kicks off with an opening night celebration including welcoming remarks; a program of short films, including *Once More, Like Rain Man* introduced by producer Darren Dean (longtime collaborator with Sean Baker) and discussion with actor-director Sue Ann Pien, actress Bella Zoe Martinez, and *Elegy for the Future* director Christina Phensy; and an exhibition opening and reception. The festival continues through Saturday.

**Admission to all Marvels of Media screenings and events is free with RSVP.**

“Marvels of Media has shown the brilliant work of neurodiverse media-makers in clear evidence,” said Josh Sapan, MoMI trustee and founder of Marvels of Media and Sapan Studio. “I can think of no better fourth anniversary present for Marvels of Media than the theaters and art centers around the country that are becoming showcase partners of Museum of the Moving Image. Now people who go to the Jacob Burns Film Center in Pleasantville, NY or the North Fork Arts Center on Long Island or Gray Area in San Francisco will be able to share the experience.”

In late 2024, MoMI launched an ambitious new initiative to bring Marvels of Media—and the groundbreaking work created by and for the neurodivergent communities it celebrates—to hundreds of thousands more people nationwide. By joining forces with leading arts institutions and theaters, MoMI is substantially expanding the festival’s reach and impact. Next month, partners around the country will present a specially curated selection of the 2024 Marvels of Media festival lineup, introducing diverse stories and innovative perspectives to fresh audiences. Looking ahead, MoMI aims to confirm partnerships with up to two dozen venues around the world by 2026, underscoring the Museum’s unwavering commitment to championing inclusivity and showcasing the rich talents of neurodivergent creators on an ever-growing stage.

The fourth annual edition of the Marvels of Media Festival invites audiences to discover a diverse selection of 22 new films, five video games, and two virtual reality experiences. The program includes works by autistic media-makers of all ages and experiences, including *Once More, Like Rain Man* directed by Sue Ann Pien, who starred in the Amazon series *As We See It*; *Lone Wolves*, with a screenplay by autistic writer-actor Matt Foss and directed by Ryan Cunningham, whose writing credits include *Amy Schumer: Growing* and *Broad City*; and Exceptional Minds’ *Secret of the Hunter* and Spectrum Laboratory’s *House of Masks*, which are produced by organizations dedicated to supporting autistic media-makers and rising autistic animators, artists, and game designers tackling a wide range of genres, mediums, and subjects.

“Expanding the audience’s understanding of an autistic female’s reality is a perspective changer for those more accustomed to stereotypically male depictions in film and television history,” said Sue Ann Pien about her directorial debut. “It’s a culturally relevant reminder that no one person is meant to represent an entire spectrum (just like not everyone with blue eyes or brown hair is the same). *Once More, Like Rain Man* gives a voice to a young autistic teenage girl’s own experiences finding her creative empowerment through the casting process.”

The festival is part of the Museum's year-round Marvels of Media initiative, which showcases, celebrates, and supports autistic media-makers of all ages and skill sets. During the festival, the Museum expands its accessibility efforts for visitors with autism

through the creation of a temporary sensory relief space, providing complimentary sensory kits, and introducing [visual stories about visiting the Museum](#).

The 2025 program was organized by MoMI's Associate Curator of Public Programs Tiffany Joy Butler, MoMI's Director of Education Leonardo Santana-Zubieta, Access Consultant Miranda Lee, Tour Consultant Sachar Mathias, and MoMI Intern Alex Poppe with the Marvels of Media Steering Committee: filmmaker and playwright Jackson Tucker-Meyer, President and Founder of Strokes of Genius, Inc. Rosa Martínez, and Film Event Accessibility Consultant and Producer Yaara Kedem.

The 2025 Marvels of Media Advisory Council includes: media executive William J. Abbott; Founder and Chairman of David & Goliath David Angelo; executive producer Rich Battista; neurodiversity advocate Wendy Belzberg; President of Franklin Pierce University Peter Eden; media executive David Epstein; actor and director Tony Goldwyn; producer Brian Grazer; media entrepreneur John Hendricks; President of the Jim Henson Foundation Cheryl Henson; Executive Director of Pioneer Works Mara Manus; media executive Judy McGrath; CEO of CableLabs Phil McKinney; actor-director Sue Ann Pien; media executive Josh Sapan; journalist Paula Zahn; media entrepreneur Strauss Zelnick; and director Tony Spiridakis.

Marvels of Media partners include Exceptional Minds, Spectrum Laboratory, Tech Kids Unlimited, and Strokes of Genius.

Marvels of Media is made possible with major support from Sapan Studio, David Angelo / David & Goliath, and the Zelnick/Belzberg Charitable Trust.

#### PROGRAM FOR MARVELS OF MEDIA FESTIVAL, MARCH 27–29, 2025

All programs take place at Museum of the Moving Image, 36-01 35 Ave, Astoria, NY 11106. All programs are FREE with RSVP. Full schedule below and online at [movingimage.org/series/marvels-of-media-festival-2025/](https://movingimage.org/series/marvels-of-media-festival-2025/).

#### **Marvels of Media Festival Opening Night**

Thursday, March 27, 6:30 p.m.

Opening remarks from the founders and organizers of the Festival will kick off a short film program followed by a discussion about autistic representation behind and in front of the camera with Sue Ann Pien, actress Bella Zoe Martinez, and director Christina Phensy, moderated by filmmaker-playwright Jackson Tucker-Meyer. Program followed by reception.

#### ***Once More, Like Rain Man***

Dir. Sue Ann Pien. 2024, 15 mins. With Bella Zoe Martinez, Matt Jones, Sue Ann Pien, Sosie Bacon, Tal Anderson, Joe Mantegna. *Once More, Like Rain Man* presents a “day in the life” of autistic actress Zoe (Martinez), who travels across Los Angeles for

auditions only to keep running into the same stereotypical parts. Produced by Darren Dean (*The Florida Project*, *Tangerine*), Pien's directorial debut exposes the restraints of autistic casting and ableism in the film industry. New York premiere.

### ***Elegy for the Future***

Dir. Christina Phensy. 2024, 14 mins. With Sue Ann Pien, Jordan Hull, Arden Lassalle, Anna Mongeluzo. In an alternate technocratic future, digital sex worker Sybil (Pien) struggles to find meaning in an isolated world. Everything changes when she meets Ophelia, an AI created from a once living being. As Sybil navigates different levels of relationships among clients, friends, and a mysterious new lover, viewers are invited to question what it means to engage with a screen. Recommended for ages 13 and up. East Coast premiere.

### **Vibrant Voices: Four Shorts**

Friday, March 28, 4:00 p.m.

The four short films in this program, including thrillers, horror films, and comedies, each uniquely uses light in an innovative way to emphasize tone and enhance the story. The films explore themes of friendships, neurodivergence, and puppetry. Followed by a discussion with filmmakers Jason Weissbrod, Samara Huckvale, Ben Stansbery, and Tal Anderson. Recommended for ages 13 and up.

### ***House of Masks***

Dirs. Atticus Jackson & Jason Weissbrod. 2024, 20 mins. With Atticus Jackson, Domonique Brown, Josh Ash Rose, Ann Postlewaite. This psychological thriller created by neurodivergent and autistic artists from Marvels of Media partner Spectrum Laboratory combines comedy and horror as it follows Jim's unraveling nightmarish experiences at a college Halloween party. New York premiere.

### ***420 Ways to Die***

Dir. Samara Huckvale. 2024, 13 mins. With Kedeem Francis, Celia Rose, Ashlee Hughes, Elissia Harris, Martia Thomas, Anania. *420 Ways to Die* gives “stoned to death” a new meaning as a neo-noir, anti-smoking mockumentary. The film showcases the untimely demise of three roommates in Bushwick. World premiere.

### ***Insight***

Dir. Ben Stansbery. 2024, 3 mins. A depressed puppet seeks guidance from an unusual source. But is the answer he discovers helpful or hindering? This surreal horror short, inspired by visionary director David Lynch, uses its uniquely strange premise to represent ideas of self-identity, masking, and the fear of change.

### ***Breaking Normal***

Dir. Jessica Cabot. 2024, 6 mins. With Tal Anderson, Anthony Purnell. In this story about accepting oneself and courage, two neurodivergent friends find a way to relieve their

anxiety before interacting with the “real world.” This comedic short alludes to *Breaking Bad* in an unexpected, heartwarming way. New York premiere.

### ***Lone Wolves***

**With director Ryan Cunningham in person, and writer-actor Matt Foss joining via live video**

Friday, March 28, 6:00 p.m.

Dir. Ryan Cunningham. 2024, 95 mins. With Cora Vander Broek, Matt Foss. Cunningham of *Broad City* directed this heartwarming romantic comedy that follows the experiences of being a single woman trying to build a family while grappling with grief. Fran enlists Ben, a high school friend she has not seen in 20 years, to be her sperm donor. She meticulously plans a stay in a hotel where the process of artificial insemination will take place. As they struggle, panic, and argue over the situation, the formerly estranged pair find themselves bearing their souls. New York premiere.

### **Playful Tales: Six Shorts**

Saturday March 29, 1:00 p.m.

These six animated shorts, for families and people of all ages to enjoy, are crafted by autistic animators. Each short exhibits a distinct style and imaginative world, with lessons of creativity, perseverance, and accepting differences that relate to our everyday lives. Followed by a discussion with Harry Schad, Jacob Lenard, and Rae Xiang.

### ***Secret of the Hunter***

Dir. Jessica “Jess” Jerome. 2024, 7 mins. A young huntress, burdened with a hidden secret, tries to defend her new animal companion from an even larger threat in this film written, developed, animated, edited, and composed by students, alumni, and faculty from Exceptional Mind Academy's “Animation Club.” Marvels of Media partner Exceptional Minds is an academy and studio dedicated to preparing artists on the autism spectrum for careers in animation and the digital arts.

### ***Wilson S. Whale***

Dir. Harry Schad. 2024, 4 mins. *Wilson S. Whale* is ridiculed by other whales because he spouts rainbow-colored sprinkles from his blowhole instead of water. One day, Wilson meets a lost fish named Guppy and the two embark on an adventure to find Guppy’s family. Featuring animation reminiscent of a children’s book, *Wilson S. Whale* teaches that anyone who feels different will find their true friends in the end.

### ***Abelard the Traveling Hedgehog’s Underwater Adventure with Max the Turtle***

Dirs. Pete Peterman and Ambrose Peterman. 2024, 7 mins. *Abelard the Hedgehog and Max the Turtle* venture into the depths of a lake, searching for the playful “Poconos” sea dragons. Through puppetry and do-it-yourself aesthetics, this whimsical short depicts a world inspired by the works of Jim Henson and Fred Rogers.

### ***Joust My Luck***

Dir. Jacob Lenard. 2023, 3 mins. In this animated comedy, Sir Sammy and the Great Rodney of Snobb compete in a jousting match. *Joust My Luck* harkens back to the slapstick, creativity, and wit of cartoon classics like Looney Tunes and early Nicktoons like Rocko's Modern Life.

### ***The Ugliest Masterpiece***

Dir. Rae Xiang. 2023, 1 min. A girl wants to make extraordinary drawings like her sister, yet she isn't happy with the result. Using 3D animation, *The Ugliest Masterpiece* thoughtfully represents Chinese American family life with an important message of self-expression and confidence.

### ***Julius' Identity Crisis***

Dir. Brendan Ratner. 2024, 1 min. This satirical short stars Julius the Cat, a public domain cartoon character who used to be a pop culture icon, playfully exploring the ways a character can be shaped in different contexts.

### **Life Lessons: Four Shorts**

Saturday, March 29, 2:30 p.m.

The documentaries and narratives in this program spotlight some of the struggles and challenges the disabled and neurodivergent communities face. Rather than focusing on tragedy, these films emphasize the individual and collective work that can be done to improve the lives of those in these communities, along with the importance of both acceptance from others and self-acceptance. Followed by a discussion with Violet Gallo and Carley Dummitt.

### ***Unbreakable***

Dir. Alex Astrella. 2023, 16 mins. Mixing found footage with interviews, *Unbreakable* shares the true story of an orthopedic surgeon who, through faith and perseverance, pushed through barriers based on her gender, ethnicity, and disability. New York premiere.

### ***Glitter***

Dirs. Violet Gallo and Maya Velazquez. 2023, 15 mins. With Mandy Margot, Evie, Caroline Pastilha, Carly Gendell. A nerdy autistic teen throws a Halloween party in hopes of reconnecting with an old friend, only to be met with micro-aggressions from their guests who carry ableist bias. They soon must make a choice: rekindle a broken friendship or embrace their true self. A Reel Works film.

### ***Surviving the Spectrum***

Dir. Carley Marissa Dummitt. 2024, 29 mins. *Surviving the Spectrum* explores the mental health struggles of autistic people in Oklahoma, highlighting the need for more research and advocacy. The filmmaker's firsthand and secondhand accounts, autistic people

across age and gender, a mother who lost her autistic son, and a psychiatrist emphasize the importance of awareness and acceptance. World premiere.

### ***Late-Diagnosed***

Dir. Matthew Baltar. 2025, 4 mins. Matt often didn't recognize himself in photos and never really understood why—until one day his loss of hearing helped him see more clearly. This educational video breaks down what living with auditory processing disorder can feel like, as well as the complicated feelings that come with this and other diagnoses. New York premiere.

### ***Marvels of Media Exhibition: The Adventure of Nature and the Senses***

On view March 27–29 In the William Fox Amphitheater

As part of the Marvels of Media Festival, the Museum will exhibit works in a gallery space and in the Game Lab, featuring films, video games, and virtual reality experiences. These works will be on view for all visitors to enjoy:

- Video compilation: Using video art, experimental film, and virtual reality, the artists in this compilation are inspired by plants, rabbits, birds, jellyfish, clouds, water, and structures as they create animations and play with nonlinear forms of cinema. Featured work: ***Night City*** (Dir. Kyle Davis. 2024, 4 mins.), ***Daltokki*** (Dir. Daniel Oliver Lee. 2024, 2 mins.), ***CMYK Walk in the Woods*** (Dir. Quinn Koeneman. 2023, 5 mins.), ***As One*** (Dir. Bec Miriam. 2024. 3 mins.), and ***Jellyfish Memories*** (Dir. Eliza Young. 2024, 1 min.).
- Virtual Reality Experiences include: ***Booper, Get Home*** (Thomas Fletcher, 2024) With art created by Nathan Fletcher, who is on the spectrum, and programming developed by his father, Thomas Fletcher, *Booper, Get Home* allows players to jump, hop, and skip their way through a colorful, storybook-like platformer game filled with fun puzzles and quests; and ***MUD & TKU Student Work XR/VR Gallery*** (Mike S., Opy S., Patrick L., Rafat A., Tate B., Xavier A., Rose L., Briana G., Sasha R., Alejan T., Joshua K. and Koby F., 2024) This collaborative piece created by MUD Foundation and Tech Kids Unlimited's Digital Agency explores the vast spectrum of artistic expression through a neurodivergent lens, offering a virtual reality exhibition full of digital media work created by students.

Concurrently, in the Museum's Media Game Lab, a selection of video games made by autistic media-makers will be playable (free with Museum admission).

- ***A Night for Flesh and Roses*** (Elliot Rex White, Game Designer. 2024.) In the visual novel, the player investigates a strange gothic future, meets the creatures living within it, and constructs a body that goes beyond natural constraints.
- **Tech Kids Unlimited Games**, created by students, and inspired by retro games like *Mario Brothers: Metal Place* by Abdullah Kante; ***Fizzy Adventure*** by Alex Lundqvist; ***Awesome Game*** by Carter Lee; and ***The Happy Hedgehog Wants a Big Wish*** by Tech Kids Unlimited's Digital Agency (Alex, Milo, Carter, Sean, Maylene, Abdullah, and Dorien).

### **About Museum of the Moving Image**

Founded in 1985, MoMI celebrates the history, art, technology, and future of the moving image in all of its forms. Located in Astoria, New York, the Museum presents exhibitions; screenings; discussion programs featuring actors, directors, and creative leaders; and education programs. It houses the nation's most comprehensive collection of moving image artifacts and screens over 500 films annually. Its exhibitions—including the core exhibition *Behind the Screen* and *The Jim Henson Exhibition*—are noted for their integration of material objects, interactive experiences, and audiovisual presentations. For more information about MoMI, visit [movingimage.org](http://movingimage.org).

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[Press images are available here.](#)

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