

MEDIA RELEASE

Mill Valley Film Festival
Showcasing the Best in Independent and World Cinema
Thursday, October 5-15, 2023

**VISIONARY FILMMAKER LILA AVILÉS WINS \$10,000
MIND THE GAP CREATION PRIZE AT
2023 MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL FOR *TÓTEM***



Lila Avilés ©Limerencia Films



Tótem ©Limerencia Films

San Rafael, CA (September 26, 2023) The Mill Valley Film Festival is thrilled to announce the 2023 Mind the Gap (MTG) Creation Prize recipient, who will receive an impressive \$10,000.00 accolade. Awarded to honor exceptional talents in the cinematic realm, this year's recipient is the incredibly gifted Lila Avilés for her exceptional directorial achievements in the production of *Tótem*. Designed specifically for emerging female and nonbinary filmmakers screening their first or second feature film at the festival, this award celebrates fresh perspectives in cinema, highlighting a sharp artistic vision and a skilled mastery of the cinematic craft.

Tótem, the official submission from Mexico to the 96th Academy Awards® for Best International Feature Film, stands as a testament to Avilés' remarkable vision and expertise in the world of cinema.

"We're thrilled that Lila Avilés is the recipient of this year's Mind the Gap Creation Prize. Her film, *Tótem*, is such beautiful work. She and her co-finalists, Hadley Austin (*Demon Mineral*) and Monica Sorelle (*Mountains*), renew my faith in the power of storytelling," said Zoë Elton, Mill Valley Film Festival and Mind the Gap Director of Programming. "Their films all show a vision tempered by empathy, compassion, and commitment to community, and confirms the importance of having the Creation Prize as a platform for supporting the art of cinema."

Building on the success of her 2018 debut, *The Chambermaid*, Lila Avilés once again demonstrates her storytelling prowess with this similarly impressionistic tale that places a child at the center of a family in crisis. *Tótem* follows a sprawling middle-class family through the eyes of seven-year-old Sol. As her

relatives prepare a final birthday celebration for her dying father, Sol navigates their chaotic world, wondering how to stop the inevitable.

The jury was incredibly moved by Lila's dynamic work in *Tótem*. Through richly drawn characters, stunning visuals, and a delicate balance of emotion, she brilliantly captures the richness of family life in all its joy and sorrow. The ambitiousness of her narrative is complemented by her sophisticated craftsmanship and depth of spirit. The jury celebrates Lila and her work and is honored to present her with the 2023 Mind the Gap Creation Prize.

A panel of industry professionals, including Zoë Elton (MVFF & MTG Director of Programming), Osinachi Ibe (MTG Manager), Karen "KD" Davis (MVFF Emeritus Senior Programmer–World Cinema), Celeste Wong (MVFF US Indies Programmer), and Christine A. Schantz (MTG Executive Advisor and Creation Prize Underwriter), convened to select the recipient of the 2023 Mind the Gap Creation Prize. All first- or second-time Mind the Gap filmmakers screening their narrative or documentary feature-length film at the 2023 Mill Valley Film Festival were eligible. The recipient receives a \$10,000.00 prize to use at their discretion.

Launched two years ago, the previous Mind the Gap Creation Prize awardees are Ellie Foubi (2022) for her daring feature directorial debut, *Our Father, The Devil*, and Nana Mensah (2021) for her feature directorial debut, *Queen of Glory*.

Tótem will screen on Friday, October 13, at 8:00 PM at the Smith Rafael Film Center in San Rafael and on Saturday, October 14, at 4:30 PM at the BAMPFA in Berkeley.

Complete press materials are available here:

[MVFF46 Press Kit](#)

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About Mind the Gap

Films represent one of our greatest opportunities to impact society. Films break through language barriers and highlight common values and shared experiences. Movies change the way we think and operate in society. Which is why it's so important for films to reflect the totality of the world. Every race, every age, every religion, every sexual orientation. And every gender. We have a long way to go on all counts, but the Mill Valley Film Festival (MVFF) is focusing on where we can have the greatest immediate impact: Gender. After decades of supporting the work of women filmmakers, CFI formally launched Mind the Gap in 2015, an initiative dedicated to achieving gender equity in the film industry.

The **Mind the Gap Award** honors creatives, leaders, and craftswomen whose work has helped close the gender gap in the film industry and in our lives. Recognizing talents above and below the line, the Award celebrates their groundbreaking achievements and acknowledges their importance as role models. Previous Mind the Gap Award recipients include Chinonye Chukwu, Danielle Deadwyler, Nina Yang Bongiovi, Jane Campion, Viola Davis, Dawn Porter, Céline Sciamma, Maggie Gyllenhaal, and Carrie Mulligan, to name a few.

About Mill Valley Film Festival

Presented by the California Film Institute (CAFILM), the 46th Mill Valley Film Festival runs October 5-15, 2023. MVFF is a significant cultural cinema event in the San Francisco Bay Area. It has gained international recognition for its commitment to showcasing exceptional films, supporting emerging talent, and fostering creative dialogue. Over the years, it has hosted renowned filmmakers, actors, and industry professionals, further establishing its reputation as the West Coast launch pad for many Academy Award-winning films and a hub for cinematic excellence.

About California Film Institute

The California Film Institute (CAFILM) is a non-profit organization that celebrates and promotes film and media arts through its renowned programs, which include the Mill Valley Film Festival and DocLands Documentary Film Festival. CAFILM fosters the next generation of filmmakers and film lovers through CAFILM Education, offering a wide range of activities, including screenings, Q&A sessions, seminars, and a rich program of classes and hands-on workshops led by international & local filmmakers and

industry professionals. The Christopher B. Smith Rafael Film Center, one of the leading non-profit independent theaters in the country, serves as a year-round hub for cinema-centric programming. CAFILM utilizes the power of storytelling through film to entertain and address social, environmental, and cultural issues, reaching 275,000 guests annually. Additionally, CAFILM is the majority owner of the Sequoia Theater in downtown Mill Valley. The organization relies on the generosity of its community; the invaluable support from our sponsors, foundations, individual donors, and members ensures our ability to sustain these vital programs. For more information, visit cafilm.org.

The California Film Institute and Mill Valley Film Festival are in Marin County, California, on the traditional, ancestral, and contemporary homelands of the Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo peoples. This includes the Southern Pomo and Graton Rancheria Tribes. These tribes were removed or displaced from their lands. We recognize this history and the harm to present-day Coast Miwok, Pomo, and Wappo peoples and to their ancestors. The California Film Institute commits to moving forward from a place of authenticity and working with present-day tribes to elevate their stories, history, and present-day legacy through film.

Supporters

The California Film Institute is once again proud to acknowledge the leadership support of the Christopher B. Smith Family, Jennifer Coslett MacCready, Nancy P. and Richard K. Robbins Family Foundation, and Vickie Soulier, and the continued major support of Marin Community Foundation, The Bernard Osher Foundation, and The Gruber Family Foundation. We are also fortunate to have the contributions of the following Signature and Major Sponsors of the Mill Valley Film Festival: Jackson Square Partners, Lucasfilm, Ltd., Wareham Development, and Bellam Self Storage and Boxes.