

# BEFORE THE WINTER



Within the pages of her diary, a middle school girl recounts her harsh reality: the mother's desperate attempt to protect their sick cat. Dark secrets are threatened when the diary falls into the hands of her concern but nosy professor.

# Synopsis

After getting into trouble with a classmate at middle school, May, a petite and meek girl, faces an unexpected turn when her notebook is confiscated by her teacher, Mrs. Lee.

As Mrs. Lee secretly delves into the contents of the notebook, she discovers a series of heartfelt letters from May to her family pet, a cat, in which her deep-seated loneliness is unveiled, as well as how her family, solely supported by her mother, Yu, struggles with financial difficulties, ultimately aggravated by the medical expenses of their sick cat.

During the winter, as it becomes increasingly difficult to make ends meet, May stumbles upon the shocking revelation that Yu is secretly prostituting herself.

When Mrs. Lee leaves for class, Juan, May's classmate who got in trouble with her earlier, slips into the office and reads the last few pages.

Here he learns about May's desperate decision to relieve her mother's financial burden—killing her only friend, the cat. Astonished and heartbreaking, Juan tears away the last page to safeguard May's privacy from Mrs. Lee.

At that moment, Yu comes to school to ask Mrs. Lee for an absence permission for May, bringing the news that May's father has recently passed away and they need to prepare for the funeral. From the conversation, Mrs. Lee also surprisingly learns that this family has never had a cat.

It turns out that May refers to her own father as a sick cat. However, the truth of May's patricide remains concealed from Mrs. Lee, who never finishes the last letter, and Juan who never discovers that the cat is a figment of May's story.





# Director Statement



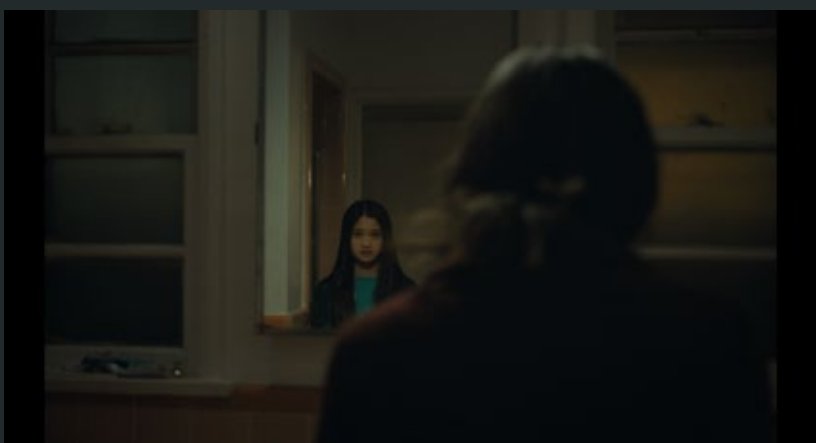
“Before The Winter” started as a script that was included in the “Producer-Initiated” Thesis initiative at Chapman University.

From the very first moment, I knew I had to do everything I could to direct this story. There was something about it I deeply connected with at first glance, something about the character of May I understood: It was the idea that absolutely everything we humans do in life, is initiated by love.

It was precisely this premise, that guided my process. My goal was to unveil that core in the big screen, by designing a story where a middle school girl decides to commit an unthinkable sin, sacrifice her own innocence and all for a one-of-a-kind-love, the love for one’s mother.

A sentiment all human beings share, for this type of love, and sometimes even the lack of it, shapes who we are. That is what this film; for me, ultimately became, a love letter to all mothers.

And I hope with it, I am able to offer audiences the opportunity to understand themselves among others, to have a little bit more of forgiveness in their personal lives, to unite in this common struggle we all share that manifests in so many different ways, and ultimately, and this is me being an idealist, to offer healing to those who haven’t understood yet why people, including themselves, behave the way they do. It is love, and that it will always be.



# Key Crew



Juan Zuloaga Eslait  
*Director*



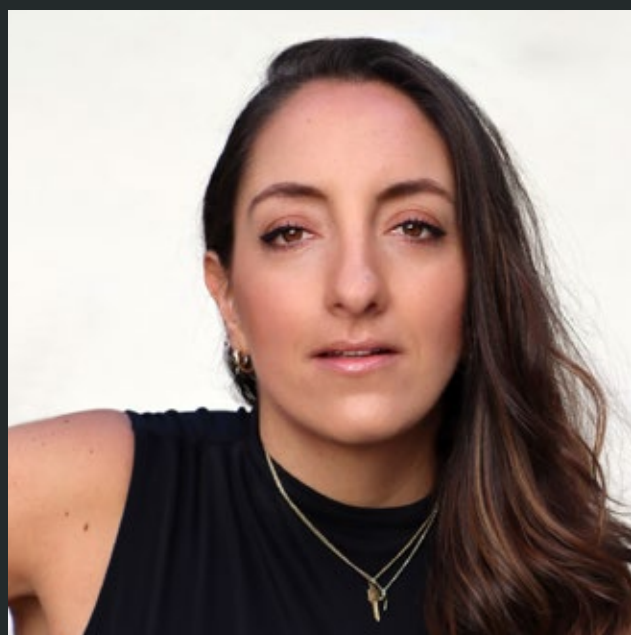
Flora Wengu Jiang  
*Writer & Producer*



Zhen "Donny" Li  
*Director of Photography*



Xiyu Lin  
*Production Designer*



Edurne Fernandez  
*Costume Designer*



Hari Muhic  
*Composer*



Dimitri Alexander Kyriakos  
*Editor*



# Cast



Venice May Wong



Yin Yin Liow



Ginger Che



Brandon Martinez



Lauren Bjel



# Interesting Production Facts



This project was part of the Producer-Initiated Thesis Film initiative at Chapman University, and the first directed by a 2nd Year Director.

Shot at “El Sereno Middle School”, a school that history’s dates to 1894.

The House where May and her family lives, was an empty house that was demolished after production wrapped.

Azul, The Cat in the movie, flew all the way from Argentina to be part of it, and is a professional cat actor who works for big commercials in the US and Latin America area.



# Film Festivals and Awards

Grand Prize Winner 30th DGA Student Film Awards

Bogoshorts 2024, Official Selection

ASC Graduate Student Award Nominee

Dam Short Film Festival 2025, Official Selection

Cleveland International Film Festival 2025, Official Selection

Jury Award Winner at the American Pavilion Showcase For Emerging Filmmakers

Crested Butte Film Festival Official Selection

Asian World Film Festival Special Jury Prize







# Press

## CINEMACY

[‘Before the Winter’ A Stunning DGA-Winning Short](#)

By Morgan Rojas - April 10, 2025

## FILM THREAT

[Before The Winter](#)

By Bobby LePire - April 11, 2025

## ACTION RELOADED

[Before the Winter – A Quiet Storm That Cuts Deep](#)

By Jeff Turner - April 25, 2025

## FILM FUGITIVES

[Interview: Before The Winter Director Juan Zuloaga Eslait On THAT Plot Twist, Venice Wong, & More](#)

By Pramit Chatterjee - 2025

## SCENE FOR SCENE

[Before the Winter – Love, Loss, and Sacrifice](#)

April 27, 2025

## BATTLE ROYALE WITH CHEESE

[Before The Winter: Review](#)

By Josiah Teal - April 27, 2025

## INDIEWIRE

[The American Pavilion Announces 2025 Emerging Filmmaker Showcase at Cannes](#)

By Christian Blauvelt - May 5, 2025

## GONE WITH THE TWINS

[Review](#)

By Mike Massie - 2025

## INDIEWIRE

[2025 Cannes Emerging Filmmaker Showcase Winners Announced by the American Pavilion](#)

By Christian Blauvelt - May 5, 2025

## FILMMAKER MAGAZINE

[American Pavilion Emerging Filmmaker Showcase Announces 2025 Winners](#)

By Filmmaker Staff - May 22, 2025

## ASIAN MOVIE PULSE

[Short Film Review: Before the Winter \(2024\)](#)  
by Juan Zuloaga Eslait

By Panos Kotzathanasis - 2025

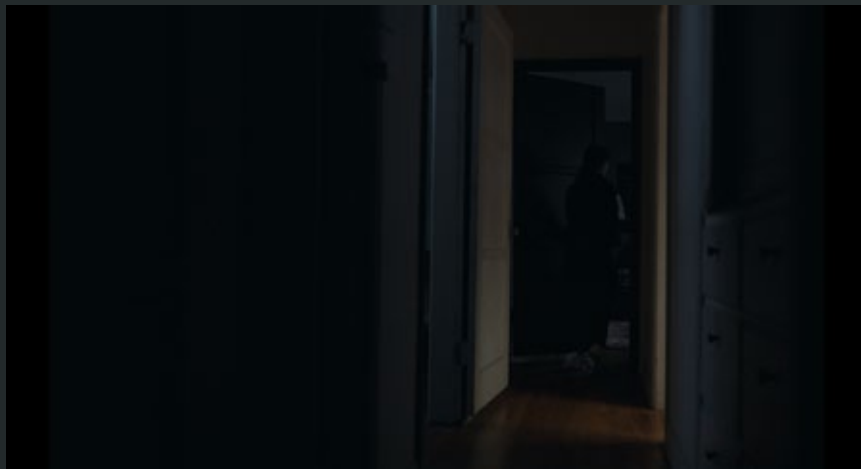
## DEADLINE

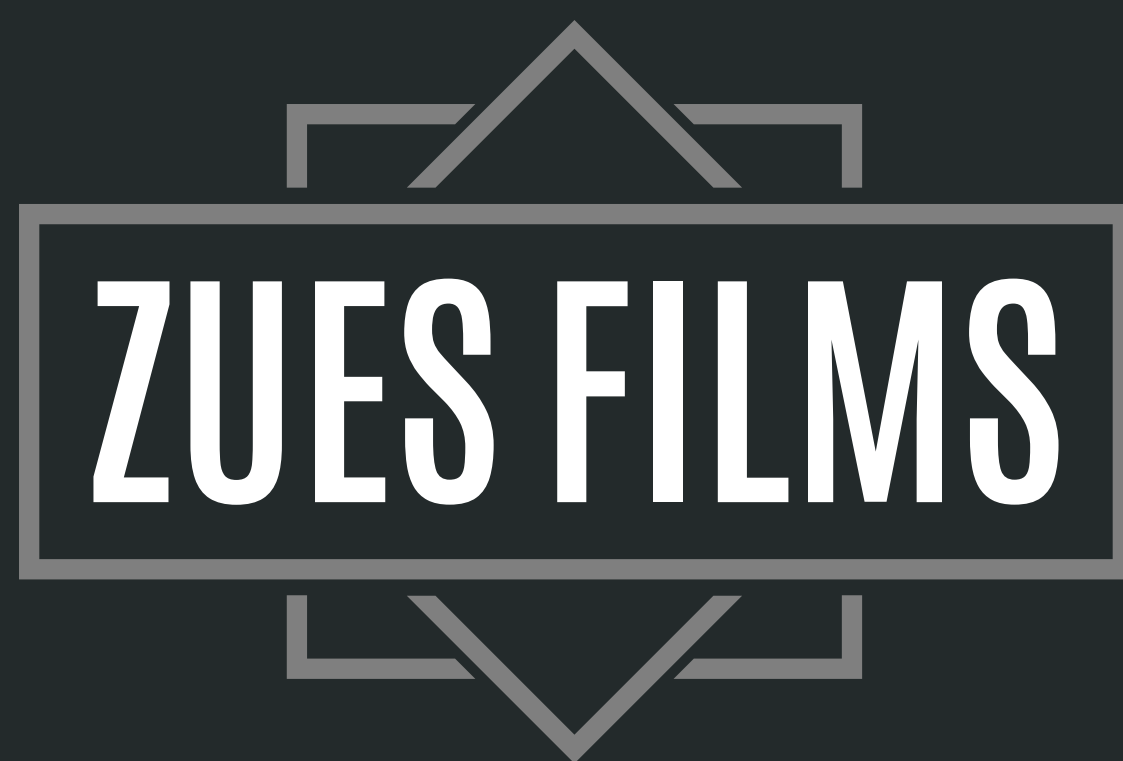
[Artios Awards Nominations: Netflix Leads Way As Casting Society Reveals Races For TV & More](#)

By Erik Pedersen - Oct 8, 2025



# Stills





[www.zuesfilms.com](http://www.zuesfilms.com)

[zuesfilms.co@gmail.com](mailto:zuesfilms.co@gmail.com)