

Welcome to Grace Lee and Joaquin Alvarado— *Viewers Like Us* Working Session UCLA TFT, March 19, 2026



It is always so powerful to come home to TFT as alumni. Look around you now. These rooms at TFT have a history of socially impactful creativity that changed our country.

The LA Rebellion happened here. Haile Gerima. Charles Burnett. Billy Woodberry. Julie Dash, Irene Zeinabu Davis, Sylvia Morales, Montezuma Esparza, Duane Kubo and Bob Nakamura. Filmmakers who looked at what American cinema was refusing to show and filled those absences with the truths of their multiracial communities in LA. So many of their films are now inducted into the Library of Congress National Film Registry — because they showed what American cinema could be.

Grace and Joaquin, what you are doing with *Viewers Like Us* is that same work, in this same spirit and now, in this same building.

Grace — your 2020 Ford Foundation essay gave language to what hundreds of makers had been carrying for years. When you wrote that decades of PBS broadcast hours, funding, and marketing had been devoted to one filmmaker's lens on America — and asked viewers like who, exactly — that landed hard. It made the world more clear, less oblique. Robert Hayden wrote a poem about the Underground Railroad called "Runagate Runagate" — bells ringing in the night, both alarm and beacon, danger and the sound of freedom at once. *Viewers Like Us* feels like a bell you can't unhear.

A sound we need right now — because it is staggering to have to say that the infrastructure that made independent, community-centered storytelling possible for fifty years — CPB, PBS — is being dismantled. On purpose. Quite quickly.

Why? Because stories that tell the truth about who we are, in all our complexity, are a threat to those who prefer a simpler, more controllable version of America. The LA Rebellion understood that. Grace and Joaquin—and Set—and all of you understand that. Or you wouldn't be in this room today.

What you are doing — this working session, this documentation, this refusal to let this history disappear quietly — is the lineage of this place, and it must continue. Let the LA Rebellion ripple and reverberate.

I am so grateful to Grace and Joaquin for coming back to do this work here — and for how they showed up during our post-8-year review that decimated our road from which we are still recovering. You show up when it matters. You activate this community in ways that moved us forward because we need each other—alumni, students, staff, faculty and friends. The stakes are larger now. And they're back again, with all of you.

Thank you, Grace. Thank you, Joaquin. Welcome home. Let's get to work.