



SOCIALS:

IMDb | DIRECTOR | FILM

MEDIA LINKS:

STILLS | POSTER | CLIPS |

TRAILER | DIR HEADSHOT

WORLD PREMIERE:

GETTY

DISTRIBUTION CONTACT:

Five and a Half LLC

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KAYA

ISABEL LAMERS
EJ LIPANA
GAYE ANGELES PICCIO
KAYLEY CARRIGAN

TV

KAYA (エモ)
A FILM BY ISABEL LAMERS

SYNOPSIS

LOGLINE: An outsider in her own culture, half-Filipina Nia secretly trains with queer outcast Malic to join a popular Filipino Martial Arts team in Manila, only to discover that winning starts with accepting who you truly are.

SHORT SYNOPSIS: Half-Filipina kickboxer Nia sees a chance to finally belong by joining a prestigious Filipino Martial Arts team. When top-dog gym owner, Angel, turns Nia down, she secretly starts training with queer outcast Malic, who introduces her not only to the techniques of FMA, but to the philosophy and values at the heart of it. As pressure mounts outside the gym from her social-climbing mother, Maria, to become more acceptable, i.e. more white, more feminine, Nia realizes that belonging will never come from shrinking herself to fit others' expectations. When Angel denies her a place at tryouts, Nia refuses to give up. In a final show-down, Nia allows her Western-influenced kickboxing background and her FMA training to merge into a fighting style that is uniquely her own.

LONG SYNOPSIS: Returning to Manila for college, half-Filipina Nia, a trained kickboxer, sees a chance to join a prestigious Filipino Martial Arts (FMA) team. Domineering gym owner, Angel, holds a lot of pride in her team: They compete for nationals, are highly trained and, most of all, they are proudly Filipino.

Determined to prove herself, Nia secretly trains with queer outcast Malic, who not only shows her FMA techniques, but also the philosophy and values at the heart of this ancient martial art. Outside the gym, Nia faces pressure from her mother, Maria, to conform to her and societal expectations. Fixated on social mobility, she pushes Nia to become more "acceptable", i.e., whiter, more feminine and more conforming.

At Maria's mahjong night, Nia runs into her *titas* (aunties, i.e. the embodiment of Filipino cultural expectations), Nia snaps. She realises that reconciling her fractured identity is only possible if she stops adapting, and instead learns to embrace all parts of herself.

At tryouts, Angel still refuses to let Nia participate. In very un-Filipino fashion, Nia doesn't back down, leading to a final face-off with none other than Angel herself. In a gripping fight, Nia lets her mixed heritage inspire a unique fighting style that blends her Western kickboxing training with all she's learned about FMA.

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DIRECTOR STATEMENT

“The Tagalog word “kaya” represents the ability, capability or possibility. This has a very personal meaning to me. I have always lived with an internal dichotomy of what I somehow knew I was capable of versus what I thought I was capable of. A part of me believing in possibility, pushing me to pursue my dreams, while another part held me back. I think this is an experience many can relate to. We are not born questioning ourselves. We are born complete, yet, over time, experience teaches us certain things - and sometimes we cope in ways that don't bring out the best in us. And then we have the rest of our lives to get there!

I wanted to externalise Nia's internal struggle in KAYA. Her mixed race identity crisis goes deeper than mere lookism and a post-colonial mindset. She wants her mother to accept her as she is. She needs to learn to accept herself instead of trying to be like everyone around her. And yet, isn't it such a natural human impulse to want to belong and fit in? After all, we are social animals; and especially third-culture kids struggle with this social need to belong. Even more so, if their parental home doesn't give that homogeneity and acceptance; how can a child learn that two distinct cultures can peacefully coexist, if the opposite is modelled to them?

Of course, in KAYA, we only scratched the surface of these themes. It is meant as a proof of concept. I hope that the success of our short can help us get the feature film on the way and explore the topics of belonging, family and mixed-race identity more profoundly - with more exciting fight scenes, awkward family moment and heartfelt little wins.”

– Isabel Lamers (Director)

KAYA (エモ)

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KEY CREW BIOS

Director, Writer, Producer

Isabel Lamers is a Filipina-German actor, writer and director based in Los Angeles. Shaped by her mixed-race heritage and upbringing, Isabel strives to tell stories from a unique point of view. In particular, she likes to tell larger societal issues in intimate, character-driven narratives that everyone can relate to. She also aims to give a voice to women-empowering stories. Isabel's notable acting credits include *Tar*, *Club Zero* (a 2023 Cannes Palme d'Or nominee) and *Black Nights Tallinn* main selection Philippine feature *SISA*. She also co-wrote and starred in the award-winning short *A DOZEN SUNS*, nominated at the Cannes Short Film Festival, and FilAm Creative 2025 Audience award *A SERIOUS GAME*.

KAYA (2026) is Isabel's directorial debut. It's a deeply personal story inspired by Isabel's upbringing in the Philippines and her discovery of the indigenous martial arts of the Philippines as a powerful tool of self-expression, cultural connection and identity. The film is both an homage to her home, the Philippines, and a testament to the trials and tribulations of reclaiming one's own identity.

Cinematographer Cesca Lee

Cesca Lee is a Filipina cinematographer drawn to stories that feel intimate, emotionally honest, and deeply human. Known for her soft yet intentional visual language, her work often explores themes of womanhood, identity, vulnerability, and connection. Whether shooting indie films, mainstream series, music videos, or fashion projects, she approaches every frame with sensitivity, curiosity, and a strong sense of collaboration. Based in Manila, Cesca continues to shape contemporary Filipino cinema through images that feel lived-in, textured, and quietly powerful.

Executive Producer Mari Acevedo

Mari Acevedo is the first female CEO of Birns and Sawyer, an employee owned and operated camera and film gear rental company. She is an expert in digital camera systems, multiplex systems, LED lighting and supporting gear with 30 years of broadcast camera system integration experience. Mari is a fierce supporter of gender balance in the film and entertainment industries and has worked tirelessly through outreach programs, networking, professional development and advocacy to achieve gender equality both above and below the line.

KAYA (ኃላ)

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KEY CREW BIOS

Executive Producer Rafa Laperal

Rafa Laperal is a Manila-based producer and the Vice President of RSVP Film Studios. Driven by a mission to empower Filipino storytellers, he aims to provide filmmakers with access to world-class cinematography equipment and high-end technical standards. Laperal first transitioned into producing with the independent feature “When This Is All Over” , which premiered at the Cinemalaya Independent Film Festival—winning awards for Best Cinematography and Best Production Design—before traveling to international stages such as the Udine Far East Film Festival and the New York Asian Film Festival. Committed to elevating the visual language of Filipino cinema through technical excellence, as an Executive Producer for Kaya he actively helped bridge the gap between cutting-edge industry tools and impactful narrative filmmaking.

Supervising Producer Omar Sortijas

Omar Sortijas is an accomplished Filipino producer and creative force whose work continues to elevate storytelling in Philippine cinema. From *Die Beautiful* (2016), which earned international recognition at the Tokyo International Film Festival, to *Kung Paano Hinihintay ang Dapithapon* (2018), awarded Best Film at Cinemalaya, his projects reflect both depth and excellence.

His producing credits include *The Boy Foretold by the Stars* (2020), *Here and There* (2021), *Mallari* (2023), and *Uninvited* (2024) — the latter securing multiple nominations and awards from FAMAS — along with a wide range of film and television productions. He is also one of the Supervising Producers behind *Uninvited* (2024). Omar was supported and coordinated the initial post-production of Kaya.

Consulting Producer Sibyl Santiago

With over three decades of experience in film, television, and stage production across the US & Asia, Sibyl is currently the President of Sitting Cat Productions. She has produced notable films, incl. the feature “SAM” with Executive Producer Mel Brooks, and “FOLLOW HER” by award-winning director Sylvia Caminer. Sibyl is a valued Board Member & VP of Events for NY Women in Film & Television; is an active member of SAG-AFTRA, BAFTA, Producers Union and Producers Guild of America, and founding member of the its AAPI Working Group. Her achievements earned her The Outstanding Filipino Americans in NY awarded at Carnegie Hall. Currently, she serves as Executive Director & Head of Programming for the SOHO International Film Festival, marking her 14th year in these roles. Sibyl was crucial in getting Kaya off the ground and continues to champion its development into a feature.

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PHOTO STILLS

[LINK](#)



KEY ART IMAGE:



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CREDIT LIST

Written, Produced and Directed by	Isabel Lamers
Executive Produced by	Mari Acevedo Rafa Laperal
Supervising Producer	Omar Sortijas
Consulting Producer	Sibyl Santiago
Producer	RSVP Film Studios
Cinematographer	Cesca Lee, LPS
Assistant Director	Pia Velonza
Production Design	Juan Pablo Pineda III
Costume Design	Kristie Lee Contrevida
Editor	Daniel Tong
Score Produced by	Denise Santos
Original Music by	Carmichael B. Castaños
Edited by	Daniel Tong

Featuring

Nia Carlos- Koch	Isabel Lamers
Malic Calinao	EJ Lipana
Angel Bautista	Kayley Carrigan
Maria Carlos-Koch	Gaye Angeles Piccio
Fighter 1	Paolo Dumlao
Figheter 2	Lloyd Hatulan
Manicure Girls	Kristine Abbey Fe A. Lebaquin

Stunt Team LA

Stunt Coordinator	Nico Ramirez
Fight Coordinator	Lauren Mary Kim
Previz Production	Shane Yan & David Alarcon

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CREDIT LIST P2

Production Philipppines

Local Producer	Hector Barretto Calma
Line Producer	Bel Paquiz
Production Management	Pia Velonza
Production Administration	Frances Obille
Set PA	Chardene Lawas
Script Continuity Supervisor	Isaiah Omaña
Location Manager	Roy Arcega
Intern	Gorg Flores

Cam Department

AC	Prinze Pascual
Gaffer	Arnel Despa
Key Grip	Norman Tinitigan

Sound

Live Sound Recordist	Diamond Payumo
Boom Operator	Christopher Batara

Wardrobe

Stylist	Kristie Lee Contrevida
Wardrobe Assistant	Shin Miyamoto

HMUA

HMUA	Catherina Querubin
HMUA Assistant	Madison Querubin

Art Department

Art Director	Richard Aguillon
	Lorena Saivitri Villareal
Property Master	Jermaine Castro
Setman	Cyel Tanay
	Ruben Roque
Intern	Frank Ernest
Porter	Franz Billion
	Romano Tabirara

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CREDIT LIST P3

Logistics

Utility	Jerryco Aldea
	Jhemar Caguiran
Safety Officer	John Erick Villaviray
Crowd Control	Fernando Jr. Sitenta
	Eduardo Galvez Curay
Drivers	Marie Penafiel
	Armin Capunong Amoroto
	Regidor M Cosay
	Lito Laon
	Loreto S. Tabiras Jr.
	Reymart Casoy

Post-Production

FILM POST STUDIOS

President	Fatima Merikka Salim
Operations Manager	Immanuel Verona
Video Department Supervisor	Mervin Christian Pangue
Audio Department Supervisor	John Daniel Henry Buquid
Re-Recording Mixer	Fatima Merikka Salim
	Immanuel Verona
SFX Editor	Fatima Merikka Salim
Foley Artist	John Daniel Henry Buquid
Ambiance Editor	John Daniel Henry Buquid
ADR Engineer	Edward Thompson
Colorist	Em Lee
VFX Artist	Randal Kamradt Jr
Additional Re-recording Mixer	Rodney Sino-Cruz
Additional Foley/ Sound Assets by	FrameFusionCorp

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ACCOLADES & FESTIVAL SCREENINGS

(last updated: Sep 2026)

SCRIPT

SLICK FILM FUND 2024 - Shortlist

FILMMATIC SHORT SCREENPLAY AWARDS 2024 - Quarterfinalist

FILM

June

TRIBECA FESTIVAL - WORLD PREMIERE NYC, NEW YORK

July

WYOMING INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL CHEYENNE, WYOMING 07/11 5:30pm

August

HOLLYSHORTS - WEST COAST PREMIERE LA, CALIFORNIA 8/18 10pm

OUTSOUTH QUEER FILM FESTIVAL DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

BLACK CAT PICTURE SHOW AUGUSTA, GEORGIA 08/20 6:30pm

PATTAYA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL PATTAYA, THAILAND 08/27

September

BRIDGEPORT FILM FEST, BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

October

DIWA FILIPINO FILM FESTIVAL OF SEATTLE, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

FILAM CREATIVE FILM FESTIVAL, LA, CALIFORNIA

DYNASTY SPORTS FILM FESTIVAL, SOUTH BEND, INDIANA

LUSCA FANTASTIC FILM FEST, SAN JUAN, PUERTO RICO

November

RED ROSE FILM FESTIVAL, MARIETTA, PENNSYLVANIA

PLANET FEMALE GLOBAL STORYFEST, NORWALK, CONNECTICUT