‘POV’ Uncovers the Devastation Experienced by New York City Nursing Home Residents During the Pandemic and Their Fight to be Seen, Heard—and Survive in the Poetic 
Fire Through Dry Grass

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Debuts on PBS Television Nationwide Monday, October 30, 2023 and Streaming on PBS.org and the PBS App Until January 28, 2024

New York, N.Y. – September 5, 2023 – Multi Emmy® Awards and Peabody Award winning series, POV, exposes—in real time—institutional neglect experienced by a group of disabled Black and brown artists on lockdown inside Coler Specialty Hospital, a New York City rehabilitation and nursing center, during the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic in Fire Through Dry Grass. Co-directed by one of the residents, Andres “Jay” Molina (feature debut), and Alexis Neophytides, the documentary follows Jay and his fellow Reality Poets
as they fight the city to protect the lives of 500 vulnerable nursing home residents. Animated sections of their poetry highlight the danger and imprisonment they feel—and their refusal to be abused, confined, and erased by a system that acts as if their lives don’t matter. The documentary was produced by Jennilie Brewster and Neophytides. Oscar® nominees Sara Bolder and Jim Lebrecht (Crip Camp) are the executive producers.

**Fire Through Dry Grass** makes its national broadcast premiere on **POV, Monday, October 30, 2023 at 10pmET/9C** (check local listings) and will be available to stream without PBS Passport membership until January 30, 2024 at **pbs.org**, and the **PBS App**. In addition to standard closed captioning for the film, POV, in partnership with audio description service **DiCapta**, provides real time audio interpretations for audiences with sensory disabilities. POV, currently in its **36th season**, is America’s longest running non-fiction television series.

Through the Mayor’s Office of Media and Entertainment’s Made in New York (MINY) campaign, out-of-home advertising placements promoting **Fire Through Dry Grass** will run in subways across New York City from October 16 through November 12, 2023.

In **Fire Through Dry Grass** co-directors Molina and Neophytides take viewers inside Coler, a nursing home on Roosevelt Island, where Jay lives with his fellow Reality Poets. Wearing snapback caps and Air Jordans, Jay and the other Reality Poets don’t look like typical nursing home residents. They used to travel around the city sharing their art and hard-earned wisdom with youth as part of a network of artists, activists and advocates motivated by community building, gun violence prevention and disability rights.
Now, using GoPros clamped to their wheelchairs, they document their harrowing experiences on lockdown. COVID-positive patients are moved into their bedrooms; nurses fashion PPE out of garbage bags; refrigerated-trailer morgues hum outside residents’ windows. All the while public officials deny the suffering and dying behind Coler’s brick walls.

The Reality Poets’ rhymes flow throughout the film, underscoring their feelings that their home is now as dangerous as the streets they once ran and—as summer turns to fall turns to winter—that they’re prisoners without a release date. But instead of history repeating itself on this tiny island with a dark history of institutional neglect and abandonment, co-directors Neophytides and Molina show these disabled Black and brown artists refusing to be ignored.

*Fire Through Dry Grass* paints a human-scale portrait of the devastation inflicted upon American nursing home residents during the coronavirus pandemic, in particular people of color, immigrants, and formerly incarcerated people. The circumstances they are documenting show how toxic ideas that certain lives matter less, and are a threat, have penetrated long-term care. In solidarity with the Black Lives Matter protests erupting in the streets, the film’s disabled Black and brown protagonists launch Nursing Home Lives Matter.

“I want people to understand who lives in nursing homes, and for us to be recognized for our talents and skills in front of, and behind, the camera.” said Co-Director Andres “Jay” Molina. Alexis Neophytides, the film’s other Co-Director added: “As the history of Covid is being put into the public record, it feels very important that this story told by Black and brown disabled nursing home residents is part of that record. I can think of no better place than public television to have our film broadcast, reaching millions of people across the country with no barriers to access.”

“During the Covid pandemic, there were many stories about the treatment of nursing home residents and the desperation felt by them and their families. What distinguishes Alexis Neophytides’ and Jay Molina’s documentary, *Fire Through Dry Grass*, is the film deftly provides a first-person account of the experience told from an artist’s perspective. The film also celebrates the determination of the residents to be seen, heard and respected. It is an inspiring story. This filmmaking choice by young directors is what POV is committed to supporting and strives to bring to public media audiences,” Chris White, Executive Producer POV and America ReFramed, commented.
Fire Through Dry Grass made its world premiere at the 2023 BlackStar Film Festival in Philadelphia, PA where the film won the Jury Award for Best Feature Documentary. The jury commented: “The feature documentary jury-award winning film stands strong as an investigative report with its concise clarity and unique perspective, yet it’s also stylized beautifully as a tapestry that weaves the characters together. With its brilliant approach, the jury wishes to recognize the many challenges these filmmakers faced in these conditions during this time period, yet made a film with elevated sound design, compelling cinematography, and phenomenal characters.”

Fire Through Dry Grass is a co-production of The Big Chair Inc, American Documentary | POV, and Independent Television Service (ITVS) with funding provided by Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB). The film is co-directed by Andres “Jay” Molina and Alexis Neophytides and produced by Jennilie Brewster and Alexis Neophytides. The executive producers are Sara Bolder, Jim LeBrecht, and Erika Dilday and Chris White for American Documentary | POV. The co-producers are Peter Yearwood and Sarah Feuquay. The cinematographers are Andres “Jay” Molina and Alexis Neophytides. The editors are M'Daya Meliani and Diana Diroy.

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Credits

Directors: Alexis Neophytides, Andres “Jay” Molina
Producers: Alexis Neophytides, Jennilie Brewster
Co-Producers: Peter Yearwood, Sarah Feuquay
Executive Producers: Sally Jo Fifer, Sara Bolder, Jim LeBrecht, Erika Dilday and Chris White for American Documentary | POV
Cinematographers: Andres “Jay” Molina, Alexis Neophytides
Editors: M’Daya Meliani, Diana Diroy
Impact Producer: Rosemary McDonnell-Horita
Associate Impact Producers: Peter Yearwood, Alexandra Lenore Ashworth
Impact Strategist: Vincent Pierce
Animation Designer: Guillermo Mena
Composer: Gene Back
Additional Music: Vincent Pierce
Cast: Reality Poets - Andres “Jay” Molina, Peter Yearwood, Vincent Pierce, LeVar Lawrence
Country: USA
Year: 2023

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Photos

Download Fire Through Dry Grass photos here.

About the Filmmakers

Andres “Jay” Molina, Co-Director, Cinematographer, Reality Poet, Fire Through Dry Grass
Andres "Jay" Molina grew up in the Dominican Republic where he played minor league ball. In his late teens he left the D.R. for New York's Lower East Side with dreams of going to college. Jay put school on hold, working twelve-hour days to support himself and his mother. In his late twenties, Jay found a way to make more money in a day than his whole paycheck driving a truck. He started selling drugs and spent time in prison all the while neglecting his health. In 2014, Jay developed a rare lung condition that attacked his vital organs and took away his ability to walk. Today, Jay is nourishing a passion for filmmaking and animation, and being of service to and advocating for people living with disabilities. His poetry and writings have been published in NYU’s Literacy Review, The Main Street Wire
and *Wheeling & Healing: A Poetry Anthology* Edited by OPEN DOORS Reality Poets. He’s a recipient of the 2020 NYC Mayor’s Office Safe In The City Grant.

**Alexis Neophytides**, Co-Director, Producer, Cinematographer, *Fire Through Dry Grass*

*Alexis Neophytides* is a documentary filmmaker and educator based in New York City. Her work centers around community and how we find meaning in people and place. She is the co-creator, co-director and producer of *Neighborhood Slice*, a public television documentary series that tells the stories of longtime New Yorkers who’ve held onto their little corner of the city despite fast-growing gentrification. She produced and directed the series 9.99, for which she won a NY Emmy® Award. Her first feature-length documentary, *Dear Thirteen*, premiered at DOC NYC in 2022. She is a Sundance Institute Documentary Film Grantee for her second feature, *Fire Through Dry Grass*, co-directed with Andres “Jay” Molina. Over the past decade she has developed filmmaking programs, implemented curricula and taught students all around NYC. In 2019 Alexis was a visiting artist for OPEN DOORS, where she met the Reality Poets and began working with Jay. She holds a BA from Brown University and an MA in Media Studies from The New School.

**Jennilie Brewster**, Producer, *Fire Through Dry Grass*

*Jennilie Brewster* is an artist who works in various forms and in community. She has traveled around the country painting and writing in response to the topographies, mythologies, and metaphoric possibilities of landscape. Her work has been shown in galleries and museums and published in literary journals. Her awards include fellowships from the Ucross and Djerassi Foundations and Headlands Center for the Arts. For seven years, she lived on Roosevelt Island, where she initiated and led the arts-and-justice initiative OPEN DOORS. As director, Jennilie guided collaborations with the Reality Poets—an artist collective of long-term care residents and gun violence survivors.

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**About POV**

Produced by American Documentary, POV is the longest-running independent documentary showcase on American television. Since 1988, POV has presented films on PBS that capture the full spectrum of the human experience, with a long commitment to centering women and people of color in front of, and behind, the camera. The series is known for introducing generations of viewers to groundbreaking works like *Tongues Untied, American Promise, Minding The Gap* and *Not Going Quietly*, and innovative filmmakers including Jonathan Demme, Laura Poitras and Nanfu Wang. In 2018, POV Shorts launched as one of the first PBS series dedicated to bold and timely short-form documentaries. All POV programs are available for streaming concurrent with broadcast on all station-branded
PBS platforms, including PBS.org and the PBS App, available on iOS, Android, Roku streaming devices, Apple TV, Android TV, Amazon Fire TV, Samsung Smart TV, Chromecast and VIZIO. For more information about PBS Passport, visit the PBS Passport FAQ website.

POV goes "beyond the broadcast" to bring powerful nonfiction storytelling to viewers wherever they are. Free educational resources accompany every film and a community network of thousands of partners nationwide work with POV to spark dialogue around today’s most pressing issues. POV continues to explore the future of documentary through innovative productions with partners such as The New York Times and The National Film Board of Canada and on platforms including Snapchat and Instagram.

POV films and projects have won 46 Emmy® Awards, 27 George Foster Peabody Awards, 15 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the first-ever George Polk Documentary Film Award. Learn more at pbs.org/pov and follow @povdocs on social media.

About American Documentary, Inc.
American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, the Open Society Foundations, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Wyncote Foundation, Reva & David Logan Foundation, Park Foundation, and Perspective Fund. Additional funding comes from the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the Chasing the Dream and Peril and Promise public media initiatives of The WNET Group, Chris and Nancy Plaut, Ann Tenenbaum and Thomas H. Lee and public television viewers. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG.

About PBS
PBS, with more than 330 member stations, offers all Americans the opportunity to explore new ideas and new worlds through television and digital content. Each month, PBS reaches over 120 million people through television and 26 million people online, inviting them to experience the worlds of science, history, nature and public affairs; to hear diverse viewpoints; and to take front row seats to world-class drama and performances. PBS’s broad array of programs has been consistently honored by the industry’s most coveted
award competitions. Teachers of children from pre-K through 12th grade turn to PBS for digital content and services that help bring classroom lessons to life. Decades of research confirm that PBS’s premier children’s media service, PBS KIDS, helps children build critical literacy, math and social-emotional skills, enabling them to find success in school and life. Delivered through member stations, PBS KIDS offers high-quality educational content on TV – including a 24/7 channel, online at pbskids.org, via an array of mobile apps and in communities across America. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, one of the leading dot-org websites on the internet, or by following PBS on Twitter, Facebook or through our apps for mobile and connected devices. Specific program information and updates for press are available at pbs.org/pressroom or by following PBS Communications on Twitter.

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