

← To achieve this goal, filmmakers may need to change some of their practices. The society notes that it is “creating a certified training program that will allow for other voices in casting rooms,” and that it is “pitching the program to studios and networks in the hopes of seeing forward-moving change in this area over the next few years.”

Jennifer Bender, exec VP of Central Casting of New York, understands the need for change and for equal and fair representation. “What has changed in recent years is a demand for authenticity,” she says. “Productions don’t want background talent to portray a specific role. They prefer to have real heart surgeons play heart surgeons, real gang members play gang members. We’ve been asked to find actual chemotherapy patients to work background.... We’ll go to great lengths to find the right look and feel for background talent.”

Vanessa Portillo, who heads up Santa Monica-based Creative Extras Casting, also speaks of the inherent need for diversity within her field. “As a woman with a multicultural background, I’ve always felt the responsibility to ensure that the projects we cast feel real,” she says.

As writers and directors look to connect their material to the world around them, Portillo is ready for any request. “It’s more recent that productions are becoming aware that the audience wants to resonate with the stories they are watching and see a part of themselves in these characters,” she says. “Diversity is authenticity. Keeping it real and including everyone is the best way to ensure that the audience doesn’t feel tricked or manipulated. We make every effort to bring to life the world around us.”

Veteran casting director Marci Liroff concurs. “Having grown up in Los Angeles, which is a melting pot of diversity, I try to cast each role in a way that resembles the world around me,” she says.

That kind of proactive approach can make all the difference if an audience is to make the connection between what they’re seeing on the streets and what they see on the big or small screen.

Casting directors Sharon Bialy and Sherry Thomas, who have worked on “Better Call Saul” and “The Walking Dead,” say: “You tell where casting directors are making the effort. For ‘The Handmaid’s Tale’ we updated the world to reflect our modern reality.... Broadway’s ‘Hamilton’ has a lot to teach Hollywood about an audience’s reaction to diverse actors.”

Storytellers, after all, are teachers as well as entertainers. **■**

“

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Vanessa Portillo, Creative Extras Casting topper

Cinematographers



Wild West
Paul Cameron,
middle, on the
“Westworld” set.

Below the Line Artists Create Practical Magic

They may be below the line in showbiz slang, but the work these artisans do is essential to the above the line names that audiences pay to see. *Variety's* Elite list includes DPs who are artists as well as master technicians, while the costume designers, production designers and hair and makeup professionals distill history and contemporary influences to tell a story sometimes in one outfit or shot of a room. The composers expertly convey a character’s internal makeup in aural form. And bigger films and TV require more spectacular stunts. The elite in this report create onscreen magic via practical math plus good old risk-taking.

Paul Cameron

“Westworld,” “Fahrenheit 451”



Cameron’s work made waves everywhere this year: on the big screen in “Pirates of the

Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales,” and in the pilot for HBO’s “Westworld,” which brought him one of the series’ dozen Emmy nominations. On the latter, the cinematographer brought a classic theatricality to Western exteriors and an unnerving sleekness to the sterile underground facility where robots are made. “We shot train

sequences on a trailer rig in Utah, using natural interactive light and red-rock backgrounds instead of blue screen, which was fabulous,” says Cameron, who lensed on 35mm film. He recently completed “The Commuter,” directed by Jaume Collet-Serra, and is shooting HBO’s “Fahrenheit 451.”

Larry Fong

“Kong: Skull Island,” “The Predator”



Fong’s work on “Kong: Skull Island” recalled such ‘70s-era classics as “Apocalypse

Now,” and his epic imagery for “Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice” was a big part of that film’s appeal. Each project has passed a half-billion dollars and still counting at the box office. As a boy, Fong often screened the original 1933 “King Kong” for his friends, and he was an extra in the 1976 Dino De Laurentiis edition. Regarding “Skull Island,” Fong says, “It’s a blockbuster, popcorn kind of movie, and a pop culture mash-up to some degree. We tried to take an artistic approach while making it accessible to audiences all over the world.” Fong recently wrapped “The Predator” with director Shane Black.

Greig Fraser

"Rogue One," "Lion"



Fraser's versatility is evident in his credits, which include the sparkling world

of "Snow White and the Huntsman," the intense naturalism of "Zero Dark Thirty" and the gripping dread of "Foxcatcher." In 2016, his chameleon-like run continued with the sure-handed "Star Wars" spinoff adventure tale "Rogue One," and the lyrical "Lion," which was set in India and Australia. "Lion" earned six Oscar nominations, including noms for Fraser and for best picture. "Doing different types of projects exercises different muscles," says the Aussie. "I hope there's a thread of strong drama running through my work, and on any project, I try to be very supportive of great actors doing their thing." Fraser recently finished "Mary Magdalene," from "Lion" helmer Garth Davis, on large-format digital, and is prepping a feature in L.A.

Dana Gonzales

" Fargo," "Legion"



For each season of FX's " Fargo," Gonzales has designed a specific look tailored to the

period and setting, bringing feature-film techniques to the endeavor, while earning three Emmy nominations and a win last year. This year, he and " Fargo" creator Noah Hawley added Marvel's " Legion," also airing on FX, to their oeuvre, lending Kubrickian surrealism to the superhero proceedings. " There are plenty of people who want to keep things cheap and not take risks," says Gonzales. " They're not the ones getting noticed. We're making some radical choices, and the success we've had gives us more credibility." Ric Roman Vaughn's " Shot Caller," a feature lensed by Gonzales, premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival this summer, and the cinematographer is planning to direct an upcoming episode of " Legion."

James Laxton

" Moonlight," " Here, Now"



Laxton's luminous, often handheld work on Oscar best picture winner " Moonlight"

brought him an Academy Award nomination as well as *Variety's* Artisans Award, among many other accolades — including what seems like every critics' group across the country — for the Barry Jenkins-directed drama. " We were hoping to create an immersive experience, a first-person perspective where an audience feels that they belong inside the film," says Laxton, who often operated the camera himself. Counter to current trends, he imbued the images with strong contrast, and used a lower-resolution format in order to extend takes. Laxton shot the Amazon pilot " The Legend of Master Legend" for James Ponsoldt, and recently wrapped on the Alan Ball HBO pilot " Here, Now," which stars Holly Hunter and Tim Robbins.

Linus Sandgren

" La La Land," " The Nutcracker and the Four Realms"



Sandgren's intuitive camera has been trained on a string of intriguing projects,

including " American Hustle" for David O. Russell, " The Hundred-Foot Journey" for Lasse Halström and " Promised Land" for Gus Van Sant. But his exuberant work on Damien Chazelle's musical " La La Land" took him to another level, and brought him an Oscar, one of six for the film. " It's a contemporary drama, but since the characters are dreamers, it was important to bring them to a magical moment, to travel between reality and dream," says Sandgren. " It's a blend of old and new — inspired by golden-era musicals, but transformed by up-to-date sensibilities and techniques." Sandgren's reteaming with Halström, a fellow Swede, on " The Nutcracker and the Four Realms," a dramatization of the ballet.

By the Numbers

12

Emmy noms for " Westworld," including one for D.P. **Paul Cameron**

6

Oscar noms for " Lion," including one for DP **Greig Fraser**

3

Emmy noms for lenser **Dana Gonzales**, with one win for " Fargo."

1

Oscar win for DP **Linus Sandgren's** work on musical " La La Land."

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