

ANIMATION GUILD AND AFFILIATED ELECTRONIC AND GRAPHIC ARTS

Los Angeles, California, December 2023

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# A YEAR TO REMEMBER

It's exciting to look back on TAG's activities and accomplishments in 2023. We grew at an unprecedented rate on a national level–welcome New York, Texas, Puerto Rico, and Virginia! We gained national jurisdiction over animation organizing, and our members were more active than ever before, from spearheading social networking events to organizing strike support activities. Here are a few of the highlights from this history-making year.

### January

Not only did 99% of all TAG members at Walt Disney Animation Studios (WDAS) vote to ratify the 2021-2024 The Secret Lab (TSL) Agreement, almost 80% of eligible voters cast a ballot–a historic turnout!

Nickelodeon agreed to voluntarily recognize The Animation Guild as the bargaining representative for 177 animation production workers at the studio.

#### IN THIS ISSUE

2023: A Year To Remember	1
From the Business Representative: Preparing for 2024 1	0
Field Rep Corner: The Year in Review 1-	4
Meet the Recruiter: Jessie Juwono 1	8
TAG Announcements 1	9
Keeping an Eye on AI 2	0
In Memoriam 2	1
January Gallery Show: Rachel Liu	2
Upcoming Events at The Animation Guild 2	3

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### February

Seventy-eight Production Coordinators, Production Supervisors, and Production Managers demanded voluntary recognition to unionize at WDAS.



For the first time since the start of the pandemic, TAG hosted an inperson mixer. Held at the Golden Road Brewery, the response was so positive that the guest list maxed out almost immediately.

Carrying on a tradition that began in 1996, the volunteer-led Afternoon of Remembrance paid tribute to TAG members and other animation industry members who passed away the previous year.

### March

Keyframe, TAG's quarterly magazine, celebrates its 5th anniversary.

## April

The AI Task Force is established to examine the impact of machine learning and AI on the animation industry and its workers. The group begins to investigate how to protect the membership from the potential negative effects of automation and explores the ethical implications and potential drawbacks of using these techniques in order to compile a report based on findings and make recommendations to the membership.

The Animation Guild leadership and TAG's WDAS artists joined WDAS production workers in a Solidarity Walk at Disney Studios to apply pressure on the studio to voluntarily recognize the production workers. More than 100 people walked the perimeter of the studio lot, and a group of 12 representatives presented a solidarity petition for the production workers' demand to join the Union. To date, the petition has been signed by almost 100,000 animators, production workers, and supporters.

Having asked for voluntary recognition and been denied, animation workers at Rough Draft Studios were forced to hold a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election. The workers voted strongly in favor of joining the union, and the NLRB certified The Animation Guild to represent the workers.

## May

As part of developing a K-8 animation curriculum with industry experts, TAG joined partners The BRIC Foundation and the Inglewood Unified School District for a ribbon cutting to unveil the new Animation, Visual Effects, and Gaming (AVG) Career Technical Education Pathway Lab at Crozier Middle School in Inglewood. This is just one of the ways TAG is dedicated to expanding access and creating pathways to animation careers for students from all backgrounds.

In a history-making moment, Titmouse NYC workers ratified their first union contract. Titmouse NYC was TAG's first organizing effort outside L.A. County. Working with a supermajority of support from the Titmouse NYC animation crew and voluntary recognition from the studio, TAG is now able to enforce its first contract outside L.A. County.



Starting in May at Warner Bros. Studios, TAG ME members organized member-led picket support events to show solidarity with WGA members. Hundreds of TAG members walked in solidarity at studios during the following months, supporting WGA members and then SAG-AFTRA members until the end of both strikes.

On the 100th day after demanding voluntary recognition at WDAS, the production unit and TAG allies staged a silent protest following the screening of the company's 100th anniversary film, Wish. Artists and production workers lined the hallways holding up signs with their wishes such as "I wish Disney would respect its workers" and "I wish I could afford eggs."

### June

The 79th District 2 Convention, held in Hawai'i, saw a record turnout with 235 registered delegates in attendance. Four resolutions proposed by The Animation Guild delegates passed including one supporting comprehensive adoption and fertility benefits, and another recommending the expansion of transgender medical treatments.



Skybound Entertainment voluntarily recognized The Animation Guild as the bargaining representative for its animation production employees, including remote workers.

Bento Box production staff held a ratification vote over a tentative agreement with their employer. The unit voted overwhelmingly to ratify the agreement.



## July

Once again TAG volunteers stepped up to make the 5th Annual Portfolio Review Day a huge success. The virtual event organized by the POC committee received 559 submissions, with more than 90 TAG volunteers giving a total of 370 reviews.



After a successful organizing effort to be represented by The Animation Guild, the bargaining unit of 129 artists and production workers at Powerhouse Animation in Austin, Texas, received voluntary recognition from the studio. This marked a significant moment for the animation industry as Texas became the first Right-to-Work state and second state outside of California to have union-represented animation workers.

A small but mighty group of animation workers at Gladius Studios in Puerto Rico voted 13-0 to join The Animation Guild–TAG's third successful organizing effort outside L.A. County!

Animation production workers at both Warner Bros. Animation and Cartoon Network filed separately with the National Labor Relations Board to join TAG and demanded voluntary recognition from their employers.

### August



At the IATSE General Executive Board Meeting in Chicago, the General Executive Board granted national jurisdiction to The Animation Guild to represent people working in the animation industry across the United States. This historic moment is the first time the IATSE granted national jurisdiction to a local union in more than 25 years. This not only gives TAG the ability to organize animation workers throughout the country, but it also means that no other IATSE Local can now attempt to organize in the animation industry.

IATSE announced the first campaign to organize game workers in the U.S. This campaign was led by TAG member and IA organizer Chrissy Fellmeth.

### September

Animation workers at *Stephen Colbert Presents Tooning Out the News* overwhelmingly voted to join The Animation Guild–this was the second group of animation workers and production staff in New York to do so in less than a year.



The NLRB issued a Direction of Election in a landmark decision paving the way for Production Coordinators, Production Supervisors, and Production Managers at Walt Disney Animation Studios to vote on whether to unionize with IATSE.

### November

At this year's second member mixer, not only did almost 200 TAG members gather to eat, drink, and mingle at Brewyard Beer Company, they also filled boxes to overflowing with new toys for the Labor Community Services holiday toy drive and illustrated personalized holiday cards for the Motion Picture and Television Fund's Angel Cards program for industry seniors.

In a groundbreaking move, a unit of 10 animation workers at WDAS "The Traveling Lab"–working remotely across six states–called for voluntary recognition from the studio and filed with the NLRB to be represented by TAG, marking a significant shift in the animation industry's approach to remote work.

WDAS production workers held an election with the NLRB to unionize with TAG. With a 96% turnout, the workers voted a decisive 63-5 for TAG representation.



### December

Animation production workers at Warner Bros. Animation and Cartoon Network achieved voluntary recognition from their studios to unionize with TAG.

TAG tradition continued with two popular events-the in-person Holiday Gift Market, showcasing artisan goods made by TAG members, and the 5th Annual Post-It Note art show and auction, presented by TAG's PAL Committee and raising more than \$3,700 for the IATSE PAC.

The artists, writers, and technicians at Whiteboard Geeks in Virginia vote unanimously to join The Animation Guild in a NLRB supervised election. Whiteboard Geeks becomes the fourth state/territory where animation workers will be represented by TAG.



Production workers at *King of the Hill* demanded voluntary recognition to unionize with TAG. This demand encompassed similar job classifications as their sibling FOX TVA shows, including Production Assistant, Production Coordinator, Writer's Assistant, Showrunner's Assistant, Production Manager, and more.

#### FROM THE BUSINESS REPRESENTATIVE STEVE KAPLAN

#### **PREPARING FOR 2024**



I hope each of you was able to enjoy a relaxing and fulfilling Thanksgiving holiday. I'd like to take the opportunity to celebrate our successes and look forward to 2024 and note what challenges we have ahead of us.

As I've shared throughout this year, our successes in organizing and negotiating first-time agreements for new classifications in Los Angeles and for new studios outside California have permanently increased our leverage and given us the opportunity to achieve recognition from the International President and General Executive Board for representation of the animation industry across the country. Our organizers Ben Speight and Allison Smartt are hard at work answering the calls for representation from crews learning of the successful efforts of their colleagues across the country. Our organizing successes over the last year have been extraordinary, and instrumental to the increase in the public awareness of our efforts and our strength. While the studios are actively trying to sap that strength away, their efforts are futile and our growing ability to represent this crucial part of the entertainment industry is a concern for them.

I've also shared the ongoing efforts of our Field Representatives, who are building internal support campaigns inside our signatory studios and finding new and innovative ways to defend our agreement. Leslie Simmons and Evangelina Nevarez have shouldered answering the majority of incoming emails to <u>membership@tag839.org</u> and built the Member Contract Help Form (<u>https://tinyurl.com/MemberHelpForm</u>) to help sort and triage the number of questions they receive. I am pleased to report they have begun assessing how to appropriately divide the signatory studios and will be releasing a list of primary studios once they have completed their study. Eva has quickly absorbed much of the intricacies of the animation industry, and Leslie has not only shared the Field Representative duties but also shouldered the duties as the Local's Political Coordinator. Leslie's experience with Local politics and beyond have grown the awareness of our Local in political circles, which has given us strength in areas not ever seen before.

The addition of staff has brought a new level of support for membership than we've had before. Member Managers Kristal Landa and Leah Semiken have spent the last year focused on the transition away from the antiquated Union Accounting System (UAS) to the first TAG version of WinMill's eMembership platform. Working with a dedicated team of administrative assistants, Kristal and Leah have almost completed the integration of the new platform into our operations, including adding new or improved workflows that will speed up our processes. Alexi Drosu, our Director of Communications and Content, has been hard at work with the WinMill team to prepare the Membership Portal portion of the database. We are all extremely excited to roll out these new changes for you.

The Executive Board has approved the hiring of an Assistant Business Representative. We have designed this role to help take some of the workload off my shoulders and hand it to someone who has experience in Local Union leadership and Union member representation. This person will be taking on the negotiations of some of our agreements, as well as the contract enforcement responsibilities across all of our contracts. A subcommittee of the Executive Board has been formed that will help select the person from a pool of 30 candidates and growing.

Our Master Collectively Bargained Agreement will expire in 2024, along with the IATSE-AMPTP Basic Agreement (Basic) and Area Standards Agreement (ASA). The cycle of contract renewal negotiations will come to the IATSE in early 2024, and we are already taking names of those interested in participating on our contract Negotiations Committee. The 2023-2024 negotiations of other entertainment unions have been fraught with tension and strikes, and I hope the studios have come to their senses and are willing to negotiate the meaningful changes we need in our agreements that have been shared in our craft meetings and in the surveys that the IATSE Basic and ASA Locals have been collecting. While we can hope the studios have had the fight beat out of them, we need to prepare for the worst in our efforts to be ready to negotiate our contracts.

For the last six months, TAG's AI Task Force has been meeting on a bi-weekly basis to investigate how to protect the membership from the potential negative effects of AI and compile a report to make recommendations to the membership ahead of negotiations. Representatives from the group recently traveled to Washington, D.C. with the Concept Artist Association to meet with legislators. This high-level member engagement is critical to increasing the Local's strength. Our member engagement group TAG ME has been an inspiring example of member activism, leading efforts on multiple solidarity pickets that supported the WGA and SAG strikes and galvanized hundreds of members. Their incredible commitment to the Guild will be key to catalyzing member engagement in our upcoming negotiations.

It is important to note that we will be renegotiating our contract at a time when the studios have collectively undertaken one of the most concerted efforts to move work away from our collective agreements in recent times, impacting our ability to influence how the workplace is designed. While we will continue our efforts to organize the animation industry across the United States, we should focus efforts on building a California incentive to support the animation industry here in California and across the country.

Given our internal and external successes, and the impending struggles with the studios who have shown their interest in fighting with Organized Labor as opposed to negotiating, 2024 is shaping up to be a challenging year. However, we are ready to face it. In order to reach our goal of addressing our priority concerns, we must be ready to stand united against the petulant, obstinate, and intractable studios who will oppose our efforts. We have to create and maintain a level of solidarity that has not been achieved in our Local before, and sustain it throughout the next contract term to defend and support what we achieve in our negotiations. I believe we can do that through our growing internal organizing efforts, and through the consistent outreach to members asking for support.

I look forward to continuing our growth, and I hope you will be ready to join the fight, add your voice to our efforts, and share new and different ideas on how we can achieve our goals. Together, in Union, in Solidarity, we will succeed.

I hope you all enjoy a peaceful, relaxing, and joyous holiday with family and friends. Happy New Year. Here's to a successful 2024.

In Solidarity,

#### Steve Kaplan Business Representative The Animation Guild, IATSE Local 839 steve.kaplan@tag839.org



TAG members show up in the community! Clockwise from top left: Justin Weber and Brandon Jarratt support striking WGA workers at WDAS; Steve Seung, Samantha Gray, Davey Cummings and a friend from Teamsters Local 399 help out at a food distribution event; Davey Cummings spreads the word about TAG ME at a Craft Meeting; and Alex Quintas (left) meets with future TAG members working at Gladius in Puerto Rico.

Don't miss out on Animation Guild events! Keep your contact information up to date and sign up for our email list at <u>https://animationguild.</u> <u>org/about-the-guild/change-address/</u>. You can GO GREEN—and save the Guild printing and mailing costs—by choosing to view our TAG publications digitally rather than receiving a hard copy in the mail. Visit <u>https://animationguild.org/about-the-guild/publication-preferences/</u>.

## FIELD REP CORNER

#### **2023: THE YEAR IN REVIEW**

By Leslie Simmons TAG Field Representative

This past year has been an incredibly busy and successful year for The Animation Guild and our handling of member issues with the studios. We expanded our staff to meet the growing membership and celebrated some important contract enforcement victories along the way.

In April this year, TAG hired Evangelina Nevarez, Field Representative. Eva comes from decades of work in the labor movement as an organizer and union rep. Her entertainment union resume includes working at AFTRA where she was merger manager for the historic creation of SAG-AFTRA. She also represented members of IATSE Local 600 (the Cinematographers Guild). And she worked for Warner Bros. in its Labor Relations Department. Her vast knowledge and experience was a huge gain for our Local! With two Field Reps on the job, the ability to split work has been beneficial in representing the TAG membership.

We'd like to share some of the big wins we had in 2023. It's important to note that without an educated and empowered membership reaching out to us, none of these victories would have happened.

#### Top Four Issues and Victories TAG Field Reps Tackled in 2023!

1. Misclassifications. We always have members reaching out to us about their job classification and occupation code. Sometimes, the classifications are correct—but sometimes they are not. In one case settled in 2023, a Storyboard Revisionist at Nickelodeon reached out in August 2022 indicating they were doing more storyboarding than revisionist work.

The studio initially responded that this member was only doing revisionist work so there was no misclassification. In discussing the response with the member, they indicated they had multiple examples of communication where they were being asked to do storyboard work. With the paper trail and record-keeping by the member in hand, we brought this to Nick's attention. Without admitting any kind of mistake, they indicated they were "promoting" the member to Storyboard Artist and providing back pay to the date of hire. This amounted to \$5,250 being paid to the member for their misclassification.

The lesson to learn here is DOCUMENT EVERYTHING! Without the member's "receipts" in hand, this issue may have ended with the producers denying the member was doing storyboarding. But it didn't—only because a smart, educated, and organized member had the proof!

2. Missing MPI Hours. MPI hours may go missing from a member's account for various reasons:a payroll mix-up, or in the case of multiple writers working under unit rates, the studio might not only split pay but also MPI hours—which should never happen.

Recently, a couple of writing duos working on shows for Disney Jr. and Nickelodeon had this very issue. With outreach to the studio and a firm position, the studios acquiesced and correctly reported the individual hours to MPI, resulting in more than 200 missing MPI hours being reported for each member. These kinds of hours can make the difference between qualifying for their next period of MPI coverage or not. It's important to always reach out to the Union immediately if you believe your MPI hours are incorrect because missing hours are applied retroactively not prospectively. Members can check their work history and hours by logging into MPI at <u>www.mpiphp.org</u>.

**3. Underpaid Vacation/Holiday.** In April, several members working for Warner Bros. Animation reached out to TAG regarding their annual vacation and holiday payout, reporting that the studio calculated it wrong.

The members were all in positions where they were "On Call" and had 60 hours contributed to MPI each week. On Call is usually a work status for those in supervisory or specialized positions that meet the federal standards for exempt workers. But a misconception about the On Call hours is that members are required to work 60 hours. This is false. The MPI hours contributed for On Call employees is simply a set of hours the studios and TAG agreed upon as a realistic amount to report to MPI.

In the case with Warner Bros., their animation HR and payroll incorrectly divided the members' weekly rate by 60 hours to get an hourly rate to pay out the members' holiday and vacation time. What this calculation did was put the members well below their regular rate of pay. Thousands of dollars below, to be more accurate.

After months of checking in and keeping on top of Warner Bros. Labor Relations, the studio finally indicated they were fixing the issue. But it took several more months to fix the compensation, and a few members who were part of the original underpayment issue had been laid off.

In the end, the studio provided spreadsheets of payouts for On Call members earlier in the year, as well as a spreadsheet of payouts for those who had since been laid off and underpaid. In the end, 147 members received underpayments payouts totaling more than \$300,000!

This is a great example of members reaching out with a problem and getting the issue fixed not only for them, but also for a group of TAG members who likely didn't realize this even happened!

**4. Timekeeping and Overtime.** This is a case where the TAG Discord really came into play and provided additional information for us.

We had a member working at Wild Canary reach out to us regarding multiple issues, but one of them was that the studio never let TAG members fill out timecards. Instead, the production accountant did it. As a result, overtime was not being reported.

Outreach via the Wild Canary channel on the TAG Discord confirmed this information. We also learned the studio was providing "Comp Time" for members who worked overtime, instead of paying out overtime. In the state of California, providing Comp Time to employees instead of overtime payments is not illegal, but there are several parameters the company has to meet in order to provide Comp Time. One of those parameters is that the Comp Time taken equals the time-and-a-half hours—not the hours worked. For example, if someone worked four hours of overtime, payout would be at time and a half, which is 6 hours. Therefore, the amount of Comp Time would be six hours, not four.

The studio was quick to respond that they would look into the issues and kept us updated.

A couple of weeks later, the studio indicated they implemented a timecard system in which TAG members sign-off on the hours reported prior to payroll. Once again, with the help of a group of members, change was made with a studio for the betterment of our members!

TAG Field Reps are here to help Local 839 members, and we will see the issue through. Sometimes, our hands are tied by contract language or time frames. It's always good to check the TAG contract you're working under and state labor laws if you believe there are violations and immediately reach out to us.

You can contact us via the Member Contract Questions Form, <u>https://</u> <u>tinyurl.com/MemberHelpForm</u>. Since its implementation, we have received 534 submissions to date!

Have a safe and happy holiday season and new year!



Do you have a contract question or workplace issue and need to speak with a TAG representative about it? Scan this QR code to link to a form, answer a few questions, and get assistance.

You can also use this link to connect to the same form:

https://tinyurl.com/MemberHelpForm

# MEET THE RECRUITER

#### Meet the Recruiter: Jessie Juwono Wednesday, January 17th at 12 p.m. via Zoom

Jessie Juwono is a Talent Development Coordinator with the Artist Management Team for Cartoon Network Studios, Warner Bros. Animation and Hanna-Barbera Studios Europe. She is also a Writer and most recently wrote for Apple TV+'s *Frog and Toad*. She lives in Burbank, CA with her husband, dog, and ghost dog.

RSVP: https://tinyurl.com/tag-meetrecruiter-jessiejuwono



# **KEEPING AN EYE ON AI**

In November, IATSE's Vanessa Holtgrewe participated in the seventh U.S. Senate AI Insight Forum titled "Transparency, Explainability, Intellectual Property, & Copyright." She urged Congress to develop a comprehensive policy framework that ensures entertainment workers are protected and strong copyright and intellectual property laws are maintained.

The bipartisan U.S. Senate AI Insight Forums were led by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sens. Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Mike Rounds (R-SD), and Todd Young (R-IN). The goal of the forums was to progress forward with detailed policy proposals for Congress.



This forum explored AI transparency—how to define it and the limitations of potential transparency regimes—as well as what AI means for creators and inventors, particularly with regard to intellectual property and copyright.

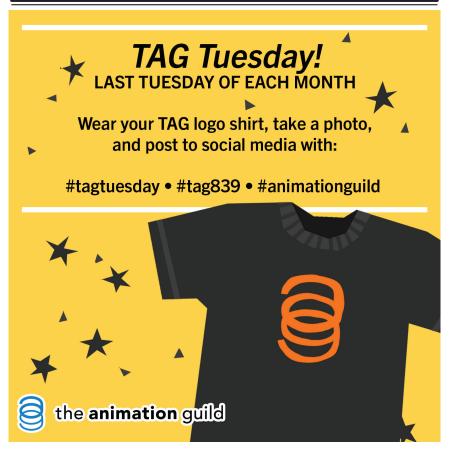
Speaking at the forum, Vanessa Holtgrewe, Assistant Department Director, Motion Picture & Television Production, said that AI poses an existential threat to certain jobs in the entertainment industry. Absent safeguards to ensure consent and compensation for the use of copyrighted works and individual intellectual property rights, and appropriate transparency of training sets, AI will be used as a sophisticated, deceptive tool for content theft.

Congress must also ensure that entertainment workers are fairly compensated when their work is used to train, develop or generate new works by AI systems. Holtgrewe said, "AI developers cannot be allowed to circumvent established U.S. copyright law and commit intellectual property theft by scraping the internet for copyrighted works to train their models without permission from rightsholders. The theft of copyrighted works—domestically and internationally—threatens our hard-won health care benefits and retirement security."

## SAVE THE DATE FOR THE AFTERNOON OF REMEMBRANCE



Our annual memorial event for TAG members and other animation industry luminaries will take place on February 24, 2024 at noon. Please watch for a TAG email with RSVP details—this year you'll be able to attend in-person at Hulett Hall or via Zoom.



# IN MEMORIAM

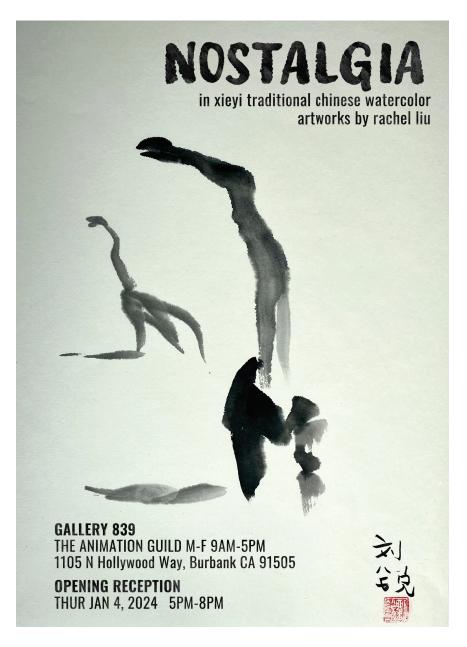
*Kathy "Kayte" Kuch* — 02/15/1952 – 10/15/2023 — Kathy worked as a Writer at Ruby-Spears, Marvel, Filmation, Disney TVA, Graz Entertainment, and Universal Cartoon Studios. Her credits include *The Scooby and Scrappy-Doo Puppy Hour, Punky Brewster, Centurions, New Kids on the Block,* and *Kim Possible.* She was 70.

*Garrett Ho* — 06/01/1964 – 11/05/2023 — A Storyboard and Layout Artist, Garrett Ho worked at Warner Bros, MGM, Disney TVA, Nickelodeon, and Universal Cartoon Studios. Among his credits are *Tiny Toon Adventures, Adventures of Sonic the Hedgehog, Hercules, ChalkZone*, and *SpongeBob SquarePants*. He was 59.

*Sue Bielenberg* — 02/06/1965 – 12/05/23 — Sue Bielenberg worked as a Layout Artist, Character Layout Artist, and Storyboard Artist on series including *The Simpsons, King of the Hill, Rugrats*, and *Dragon Tales*. She was 58.



Gallery 839 Opening: Thursday, January 4, 2023 from 5 to 8 p.m.



Regular Gallery Hours: Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE ANIMATION GUILD

## December

December 25th Contract Holiday: Christmas Day

**December 26th TAG Tuesday** *Wear your TAG T-shirt!* 



January 1st Contract Holiday: New Year's Day Happy New Year!

January 4th, 5 to 8 p.m. New Show Opening at Gallery 839 Featured Artist: Rachel Liu

> January 30th TAG Tuesday Wear your TAG T-shirt!

January 30th, 6:30 p.m. General Membership Meeting

In-person at Hulett Hall, or register ahead of time to receive a meeting link for remote attendance. Visit <u>animationguild.org/GMMJan24</u> to RSVP.

PLEASE NOTE: A call will be made at this meeting for 2024 TAG Delegate nominations; Delegates will go to the IATSE's District 2 Convention in Lake Tahoe, Nevada, in June. Attend the GMM to nominate yourself or to be nominated by another member in good standing, or email Recording Secretary Paula Spence ahead of time (<u>paula.spence@tag839.org</u>) to declare your intention to accept a nomination if you are unable to be there online or in-person.

Check the full TAG calendar, including special events and committee meetings, at: <u>https://animationguild.org/about-the-guild/calendar/</u>



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