



Filmmaker and Photographer María Alvarez Named Winner of 2026 YoungArts Jorge M. Pérez Award

Alvarez to Receive \$25,000 Unrestricted Prize to Advance Her Artistic Career



MIAMI (January 8, 2026) — YoungArts announced internationally acclaimed filmmaker and photographer **María Alvarez** as winner of the **2026 YoungArts Jorge M. Pérez Award**. Alvarez, a 2014 YoungArts award winner in Film, will receive an unrestricted cash prize of \$25,000 to advance her artistic endeavors.

“YoungArts is honored to be partnering again with The Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation to bestow this esteemed award upon our esteemed alumna María Alvarez,” **said Clive Chang, President and CEO of YoungArts**. “This award is a prime example of how YoungArts’ deep network of partnerships enables us to provide unparalleled opportunities for advancement to artists throughout their careers and across disciplines. Together, we are proud to extend this award to Alvarez, whose deeply personal cinematic practice explores timely themes of memory, identity, and belonging.”

“María centers the raw humanity of our shared experience through her work, using her practice to encourage introspection and dialogue while challenging the narratives we inherit about the world around us,” **said Jorge M. Pérez, internationally renowned philanthropist and founder of the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation**. “Her creative vision and the insight she brings strongly align with the mission of our foundation. Darlene and I are honored to champion María in partnership with YoungArts as we continue nurturing courageous, innovative artists who are influencing the cultural conversations of our time.”

Through filmmaking and photography, Alvarez’s storytelling-based practice explores the intersection of memory and identity and questions how people preserve love, grief, and time.

Rooted in collaboration and intuition, the Cuban-Dutch artist uses her image-making process as a means of translating emotional truth into tangible visuals, often working with her subjects in tender environments and capturing intimate physical gestures, such as hand movements, glances between people, or the light on a subject's face. Her perspective is guided by her long-term fascination in what humans choose to remember and forget, ultimately stemming from her own personal and familial tensions with belonging and memory.

Alvarez's films have been screened at dozens of festivals and institutions, including the Tribeca Film Festival, Toronto Film Festival, Cannes Court Métrage, San Francisco International Film Festival, Santa Barbara International Film Festival, Cleveland International Film Festival, NALIP Latino Media Fest, and the Museum of Modern Art, among others. She was a 2021 Horizon Award Finalist, 2023 Rising Voices Fellow, 2023 Sundance Institute Latine Collab Scholar, and has earned an award from Google, nomination for Best Documentary at the National Film Festival for Talented Youth, and created an Oscar-Qualifying film for Best Live Action Short at the 2024 Academy Awards, in addition to numerous other awards and distinctions. Beyond her narrative photography, Alvarez has created commercial work for clients such as Nike, Netflix, Coldplay, Selena Gomez, and more.

"I am humbled beyond belief to receive this award, building on a decade of life-changing support that YoungArts has empowered me with," said **María Alvarez**. "As artists, we carry a deep desire to create, yet real world limitations often shape when and how we're able to pursue our dreams. At a time when funding for the arts has become increasingly at risk, this award arrives at such a meaningful moment, granting me the freedom, encouragement, and ability to pursue a project I'd previously had to put on hold. I aim to honor this recognition by pouring it back into my work -- telling stories that honor memory, connection, and the communities that shape who I am."

Established in 2018 and one of YoungArts' largest financial awards, the Jorge M. Pérez Award honors a previous YoungArts award winner who has strengthened their community through their artistic endeavors. Winners ages 25 and over are invited to apply, and selections are made by the Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation. Recent recipients include **Rachel Zhang** in 2025 (2015 and 2016 Visual Arts Winner), **Diana Eusebio** in 2024 (2016 Visual Arts Winner & U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts), **Cornelius Tulloch** in 2023 (2016 Visual Arts & U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts), **Juan Jose Cielo** in 2022 (2015 Visual Arts), **Malaika Temba** in 2021 (2014 Visual Arts), **Ilana Harris-Babou** in 2020 (2009 Visual Arts) and **Mateo Nava** in 2019 (2013 Visual Arts & U.S. Presidential Scholar in the Arts).

About The Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation

The Jorge M. Pérez Family Foundation at The Miami Foundation fulfills the philanthropic vision of Jorge M. Pérez, Chairman and CEO of The Related Group, and his family to develop South Florida as an exemplary world-class urban center. The Family Foundation promotes sustainable, inclusive and just communities by supporting programs and organizations focused on arts and culture, health and well-being, education, environment and economic development – with a

particular preference for programs and organizations that could serve as models for other urban centers. In the first 10 years since its inception, the Family Foundation has committed \$135 million in support of nearly 150 non-profit organizations. For more information, please visit www.jmperezfamilyfoundation.org.

About YoungArts

YoungArts—the national foundation for the advancement of artists—was established in 1981 by Lin and Ted Arison to identify exceptional young artists, amplify their potential, and invest in their lifelong creative freedom. YoungArts provides space, funding, mentorship, professional development and community throughout artists’ careers. Entrance into this prestigious organization starts with a highly competitive application for talented artists ages 15–18, or grades 10–12, in the United States that is judged by esteemed discipline-specific panels of artists through a rigorous adjudication process.

For more information, visit youngarts.org, [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), and [Facebook](#).

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