

MEDIA RELEASE

11 February 2021

Graduate duo bring drama to the global film circuit

Film graduates Melisa Visca and Heidi Ylä-Ajos are taking the international film scene by storm through their production company, [Taival Films](#) and their collection of emotionally charged documentaries and dramas.

With a 2018 Best Student Film Award at the Australian Independent Film Festival under their belts, Melisa and Heidi's projects have gone on to be featured globally at the [Golden State Film Festival](#), [New York Film Festival](#), [Lulea International Film Festival](#) and the [Worldwide Women's Film Festival](#) to name a few.

The two filmmakers met at [SAE Creative Media Institute's](#) Melbourne campus in 2018 through their Bachelor of Film degree. Heidi says they saw their time at SAE as an opportunity to create something meaningful that would help grow their careers.

"We worked so well together during our studies that we got together to co-direct our first documentary, *The Girl with One Eyelash*, and unexpectedly won Best Student Film," Heidi said.

The story follows Hayley, a young girl diagnosed with a life threatening illness, Rhabdomyosarcoma, and the relationship with her father.

Melisa and Heidi's most acclaimed film to date is the short-film drama, *Next Train from Castlemaine*, which has gone on to be featured at multiple film festivals around the world. The film highlights a recently widowed man and his struggle for independence, as his daughter makes plans to move him into a nursing home.



On this occasion, Heidi wrote and produced the story, with Melisa in the director's chair. The inspiration for the film, Heidi shares, was her family. "My grandmother is almost 90 now and she has always been like a force of nature to me; she always keeps going," Heidi said.

"I reflected on how she must be feeling as a person so strong, when her body's not able to do the things she wants it to do."

Melisa echoed Heidi and says her own life experiences naturally influence the filmmaking process. "For storytelling to be successful, there has to be a personal connection to a part of my life. In the case of this film, I was able to draw on my Grandad's life," Melisa said.

"We want to tell authentic stories that touch people's hearts, not necessarily to make money, but to make people happy and affect them in ways they wouldn't have realised."

Looking to the future Melisa plans to take advantage of the opportunities available in a COVID world where Hollywood films are produced in Australia. "I hope through this period, the American studios realise how hard working Australian cast and crew are," Melisa said.

Likewise, Heidi says she hopes Tavival Productions can go from strength to strength when "the world allows, as I feel there is still so much to be done for women in the film industry, with so many fascinating stories to tell".

SAE is the place for creators and innovators. Make the leap from a film fan to studying for a [Bachelor of Film](#) that covers everything from concept to cut. Find out more at [sae.edu.au](#).

For more information:

Barry de Silva, National Communications Manager

Phone: 0498 004 023

Email: b.desilva@sae.edu

Imagery

L to R: Melisa Visa and Heidi Ylä-Ajos; on the set of *Next Train from Castlemaine*.



About SAE

SAE Creative Media Institute is the place for creatives and innovators. Since 1976 we've been the leaders in creative media education across animation, audio, creative industries, design, film, games, web and mobile. Every year, we support more than 10,000 students globally to develop the skills and experience needed to carve successful careers. Students enjoy access to the latest technology and are taught by industry-experienced faculty, while putting their skills to the test in small class environments. Our graduates become part of a highly-respected global community of creatives that's been around for over 40 years.

We pride ourselves on being technically explorative, transformative and brave through our range of creative media programs, from short courses and professional training through to bachelor and postgraduate degrees. In Australia, our programs are delivered at campuses in Sydney, Brisbane, Byron Bay, Melbourne, Perth and Adelaide. SAE is a part of Navitas Pty Ltd. More information about SAE is available at sae.edu.au.

About Navitas

Navitas is a proud Australian company that pioneered an innovative university partnership model of education in Perth in 1994. Its entities have delivered education programs across the country since 1976. Further information about Navitas Pty Ltd is available at www.navitas.com.

