



VIDEO THAT ROARS

LionArt Media's work for clients includes video, motion design and animation projects. The company works with corporations, nonprofits and news organizations – in 2021, LionArt's clients included the "Today" show on NBC, *The Washington Post*, *Milwaukee Magazine* and Planned Parenthood.

LionArt Media
262-818-9401
laura@lionart.media
lionart.media

DOCUMENTARY Divas

How two Milwaukee women built a video production company from the ground up

By EVERETT SULLIVAN

LionArt Media's origins begin with an unpaid internship. Laura Dyan Kezman was working as the senior video producer at 88Nine Radio Milwaukee, when Vianca Fuster applied for the video intern position in 2016.

"She put together this incredible PowerPoint presentation for her application," Kezman says. "Within the first couple of weeks of her starting, we clicked pretty immediately."

Kezman helped Fuster turn the internship into a full-time position, first as a programming photographer and then as a multimedia producer. For the next three years, the two of them directed, filmed and edited dozens of short documentary projects for the station, as well as *Invisible Lines*, a feature-length documentary about segregation and racism in Milwaukee, which premiered at the 2018 Milwaukee Film Festival.

Laura Dyan Kezman, left, and Vianca Fuster of LionArt Media

PHOTO: BY SPENCER ORTEGA, COURTESY OF LIONART MEDIA

"88Nine was really the platform for both of us to keep doing the thing that we love," Kezman says. "After getting [*Invisible Lines*] accepted to the Milwaukee Film Festival, that solidified a lot of unanswered questions about what we could really do together."

On Fuster's birthday in 2017 the two of them were hanging out on the rooftop of the station's offices. "We were talking about how cool it would be if we had our own production house that just made documentary content," Fuster says. "We always knew we wanted to do more."

While still working their day jobs, they started freelancing on the side, creating short video content for clients. As their freelance business grew, the idea of starting off entirely on their own became a more realistic possibility. At the same time, in 2018, Kezman's father died, and the difficult moment prompted her to take the leap and make the vision a reality.

Fuster left her job at 88Nine, and a few months later Kezman followed. In September of 2019, they launched their new media production company.

"A word that really resonated for both of us at that time was *lionheart*," Kezman says. "The idea of overcoming adversity and showing courage in the face of fear and risk. ... It's reflective of the storytelling we do best."

With a play on that word, they came up with the name of their new company, LionArt Media.

"I like to say we took Lionheart and dropped the 'he' out of it," Fuster says. "That was not on purpose. It just happened. One of many happy accidents."

They hit the ground running, transitioning their ongoing freelance production work into the new LionArt Media brand. In the two years since, they've produced dozens of projects, including covering the protests in both Minneapolis and Milwaukee that followed the murder

of George Floyd. Fuster helmed a short documentary, *The Warrior Princess*, about Violet Lopez, a 12-year-old Milwaukee girl who is a five-time national boxing champion.

"That project is my baby," Fuster says. "I met her and saw so much of myself."

The short documentary premiered on the "Today" show in 2021 and is now streaming on NBC's Peacock platform.

LionArt also took on its biggest project to date in the form of a feature-length documentary, *Cycle*. The investigative film follows the story of Ty'Rese West, an 18-year-old who was fatally shot by a Mount Pleasant police officer on the day of a Juneteenth celebration in 2019 after being pulled over for riding a bicycle without a headlight. "This is a case that hadn't been examined by anybody else in depth," Kezman says. "[The documentary] is about how the structure that builds and reinforces our law enforcement system reinforces the cycle of police brutality."

The film is slated to be completed in the spring of this year.

Beyond making their own work, Kezman and Fuster always wanted to use LionArt as an educational platform to provide opportunity to women in film. The industry remains a predominantly male one, and Fuster points out that the disparity applies even more to the technical jobs, such as camera operators, only 19% of whom are female. As LionArt expands, with a new office space opening up on Martin Luther King Drive this spring, Kezman and Fuster plan to start an apprenticeship program to provide that practical training in filmmaking.

"We're trying to build a space to support people making their own original content," Fuster says. "Our goal is to keep growing, to keep adding people to the team that are on the same wave as we are and who want to pay it forward to the generations that follow." ♦