

JOHN ZACHARY THURMAN

Producer | Cinematographer | Director | Post-Production Supervisor
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Summary

I'm a writer, director, and content creator known for my viral horror-comedy film FINLEY, which has over 11 million views and 60+ awards. With experience working with clients like Delta, Audi, and Home Depot, I create engaging content that resonates with audiences and elevates brand visibility. I studied Production at USC's Graduate Program, blending creative storytelling with technical expertise in cinematography and editing. Passionate about collaboration, I deliver innovative solutions that meet client needs while pushing the boundaries of cinematic storytelling.

Education

University of Southern California, School of Cinematic Arts Masters of Fine Arts in Cinematic Arts - Film and Television Production	2021 - 2024
Georgia State University Bachelor of Arts - Film and Television Production	2012 - 2016

Professional Experience

Sloan Foundation - The Demon Core (Narrative) Los Angeles, United States
Writer | Director | Producer | Cinematographer | VFX Supervisor 09/2024 - Present

- Led all aspects of production, from pre-production to post-production, including budgeting, scheduling, and securing resources. Managed the logistical complexities of moving the production crew from one state to another, coordinating travel, accommodations, and transport for a seamless transition between locations.
- Negotiated contracts, obtained permits, raised over \$100k in revenue, and ensured the smooth execution of all production requirements while maintaining the project's integrity and vision.
- Wrote the screenplay, developing a nuanced narrative that balanced character-driven storytelling with scientific themes -- for which the film was awarded the prestigious Sloan Foundation Grant.
- Directed the cast and crew, providing clear guidance and support while fostering a collaborative environment to bring the script to life. Managed the creative vision of the film, including pacing, tone, and performance, ensuring it resonated with both artistic and scientific aspects of the project.

Unplugged Films LLC Atlanta, GA
Founder & CEO | Digital Content Director & Editor 05/2015 - Present

- Established and currently run Unplugged Films LLC, overseeing all aspects of film and video production from concept to completion for both digital platforms and cinemas.
- Conceptualize, write, pitch, and produce original content, collaborating with studio executives, marketing leads, and brand ambassadors to ensure alignment with vision and goals.
- Manage multiple production projects simultaneously, maintaining clear communication and collaboration across teams in production and post-production to ensure smooth workflow and successful delivery.
- Develop and maintain comprehensive production documentation, including shoot schedules, call sheets, shot lists, gear lists, timelines, releases, and scripts, ensuring all project details are meticulously organized.
- Spearhead the creative direction and technical execution of complex VFX shots, supervising on-set VFX elements and overseeing the post-production VFX workflow to deliver high-quality visuals.

Neers Los Angeles, United States
Cinematographer 01/2025 - 05/2025

- Shot detailed macro cinematography of 3D-printed dental products, highlighting precision and quality through specialized lenses and lighting techniques to create engaging, visually stunning social media content.
- Directed lifestyle shots with actors to showcase the practical use of the products, ensuring brand messaging was communicated effectively while capturing relatable, dynamic visuals for various platforms.
- Collaborated with the creative and marketing teams to ensure all content aligned with brand identity, contributing to increased social media engagement and positioning the company as a leader in 3D dentistry printing technology.

Professional Experience

SprintRay (Collaboration with The Art of Dental Wellness)

Los Angeles, United States

Producer | Cinematographer

12/2024 - 01/2025

- Captured dynamic footage of a dentist performing procedures, highlighting both the technical precision and patient care aspects to create engaging social media content that showcases the brand's expertise and professionalism.
- Directed and shot behind-the-scenes footage, focusing on key moments that highlight the dentist's skill, the technology used, and the overall patient experience to foster trust and educate viewers.
- Collaborated with the marketing team to produce visually compelling videos tailored for social media platforms, enhancing brand visibility and increasing audience engagement with educational and informative content

Umei (Social Media Content Series)

Los Angeles, United States

Producer | Cinematographer

11/2024 - 12/2024

- Served as Cinematographer for Umei, crafting innovative product shots of their 3D printed shoes, utilizing advanced cinematography techniques to highlight the shoes' design, comfort, and cutting-edge technology for digital social content.
- Collaborated with top social media influencers to create compelling, trend-driven content that showcased Umei's products in dynamic, real-life settings, ensuring the brand message resonated with a diverse audience.
- Produced high-impact videos that achieved millions of views across social platforms, strategically using visually stunning shots and influencer partnerships to drive brand awareness, customer engagement, and viral marketing success.

LAIKA Studios - Coraline Live Action (Short)

Atlanta, United States

Producer | Cinematographer | Visual Effects Artist

06/2024 - 07/2024

- Led the adaptation, reimagining the stop-motion aesthetic for live-action while maintaining the original's emotional intensity and visual style
- Crafted a world that balanced surreal, dreamlike elements with grounded, real-world settings, ensuring the tone resonated with both new audiences and fans of the original film.
- Shot the short film using cutting-edge camera techniques and innovative visual effects to emulate the tactile, hand-crafted look of the stop-motion animation, particularly in the Other World scenes
- Utilized creative lighting, camera angles, and movement to create a sense of wonder and unease, mirroring the film's haunting atmosphere.
- The project received recognition by LAIKA Studios for its groundbreaking visual techniques that bridged the gap between traditional animation and live-action film, earning accolades for its seamless integration of practical and digital effects

Say less (Feature Film)

Los Angeles, United States

Producer | Cinematographer

09/2023 - 11/2023

- Produced and managed all aspects of the feature film's development, including budget, scheduling, casting, and logistics, ensuring smooth production from start to finish.
- Directed cinematography, crafting a unique visual style through thoughtful lighting, camera work, and composition to support the film's narrative and tone.
- Collaborated closely with the creative team, including the team behind MONK, to deliver a feature film that resonated with audiences, receiving praise for its compelling visuals, storytelling, and production quality

UMEI

Los Angeles, United States

Cinematographer

08/2023 - 08/2023

- Shot Umei's launch video, employing dynamic cinematography to highlight the innovative 3D-printed shoes, showcasing both their cutting-edge design and functionality.
- Captured a range of lifestyle shots featuring social media influencers, blending high-energy action and stylized moments to resonate with the brand's audience and enhance the product's appeal.
- Collaborated closely with the creative team and influencers to deliver visually striking content that was optimized for social media, driving engagement and brand awareness

Sprintray

Los Angeles, CA

Assistant Director | Cinematographer | Editor

06/2023 - 06/2023

- Assistant Director: Coordinated logistics for a large-scale shoot involving dozens of dentistry professionals, managing talent, scheduling, and set organization to ensure smooth operations across multiple interview setups.
- Cinematographer: Shot high-quality, polished commercial-style interviews, capturing the professionals in a controlled, visually appealing setting, using advanced camera techniques and lighting to enhance the overall aesthetic and maintain brand consistency.
- Collaborated with the director and production team to ensure clear communication and efficient workflow, delivering compelling, professional content that met the client's objectives

Professional Experience

University of Southern California (Part Time)

Los Angeles, California

Teaching Assistant - Intermediate Cinematography

05/2021 - 05/2023

- Intermediate Cinematography University of Southern California (Part Time) / Los Angeles California Developed and taught a comprehensive cinematography curriculum, covering technical skills (camera operation, lighting) and creative aspects (shot composition, visual storytelling) for undergraduate and graduate students.
- Integrated industry-standard equipment (RED cameras, ARRI Alexa) into lessons and guided students through hands-on projects, offering mentorship and feedback to enhance both technical abilities and artistic vision.
- Stayed current with industry trends and collaborated with faculty to design interdisciplinary courses, while also organizing film screenings and advising students on career development within the cinematography and film industries

Cinnaholic

Los Angeles, CA

Producer | Director | Cinematographer | Editor

05/2023 - 05/2023

- Shot tabletop cinematography for a cinnamon roll company, producing high-quality, visually compelling content for both in-store marketing and social media platforms.
- Focused on capturing the product in an enticing and mouth-watering way, utilizing lighting and composition techniques to showcase the texture, detail, and appeal of the cinnamon rolls.
- Collaborated with the marketing team to align visuals with the company's brand identity, ensuring the content effectively promoted the product and drove consumer engagement

Sketch (TV Mini-Series)

Los Angeles, United States

Cinematographer | Gaffer

03/2023 - 05/2023

- Served as both Gaffer and Cinematographer on 3 episodes of the TV mini-series Sketch, responsible for the lighting design and overall visual aesthetic of the show.
- Utilized top-of-the-line industry equipment, including Panavision lenses, ARRI cameras, and Technocranes, to achieve cinematic visuals that enhanced the narrative and atmosphere.
- Worked closely with the director and production team to ensure that lighting and camera movements aligned with the creative vision, delivering high-quality content that met both technical and artistic standards

Don't Feed the Cat (Narrative Short)

Los Angeles, United States

Writer | Director | Editor | VFX Artist | Colorist

02/2023 - 02/2023

- Wrote and directed a horror short film, crafting an engaging, suspenseful narrative designed to immerse audiences in a terrifying experience.
- Designed and coordinated the use of practical effects and special effects makeup to create realistic and impactful scares, enhancing the horror elements while ensuring they integrated seamlessly with the story.
- Shot the film using industry-standard equipment, including high-end cameras and lenses, to achieve a cinematic look that elevated the visual impact of the practical and special effects

Hellbilly Hollow (Feature Film)

Atlanta, United States

Editor

01/2023 - 01/2023

- Edited key scenes for Hellbilly Hollow, a big-budget feature horror film, working closely with the director to shape the pacing, tone, and intensity of the film to maximize suspense and emotional impact.
- Utilized advanced editing software to seamlessly integrate visual effects, sound design, and raw footage, ensuring a cohesive narrative and smooth transitions between scenes.
- Collaborated with the sound, music, and visual effects teams to enhance the horror elements, creating an immersive and thrilling viewing experience that amplified the film's atmosphere.
- Managed tight deadlines while maintaining the highest level of editorial precision, ensuring the final cut adhered to both creative and production requirements

Portal to Hell (Feature Film)

Los Angeles, United States

Camera Operator | Second Assistant Camera

11/2022 - 12/2022

- As Camera Operator, operated the camera during scenes, ensuring smooth and precise shots while adhering to the director's vision and maintaining continuity.
- As 2nd AC, assisted with camera setups, maintained focus pulls, managed camera equipment, and ensured smooth workflow on set, supporting the first AC in lens changes, and preparing cameras for each shot

Professional Experience

Ebezina (Narrative Short)

Los Angeles, United States

Cinematographer

10/2022 - 11/2022

- Served as Cinematographer for a critically acclaimed short film, contributing to its visual style and helping bring the director's vision to life through dynamic camera work and lighting.
- Collaborated closely with the director to craft compelling compositions and lighting setups that enhanced the film's emotional impact, contributing to its overall storytelling.
- The film received several accolades, including the DGA Award, for which the cinematography played a key role in its success, showcasing a blend of technical precision and artistic creativity

The Spirit Became Flesh (Narrative Short)

Los Angeles, United States

Gaffer | Key Grip

06/2022 - 06/2022

- Served as Gaffer and Key Grip on a horror short film, overseeing complex lighting setups in large field locations at night using Condors and multiple large HMI lights to create eerie, atmospheric lighting that enhanced the film's tension and horror elements.
- Managed lighting design and grip work, working closely with the director and cinematographer to ensure that the visual tone was consistent and impactful throughout the production

Madison Records

Atlanta, GA

Digital Content Producer | Videographer

05/2017 - 06/2022

- Created, directed, and produced high-quality digital content, including music videos, promotional clips, and social media assets for top-tier music artists and brands.
- Shot and edited engaging music videos, utilizing advanced filming techniques and creative concepts to visually represent artists' music and brand identity.
- Developed dynamic content across social media platforms (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook), driving audience engagement and increasing followers by tailoring content to each artist's unique style and target demographic. Collaborated with artists, producers, and marketing teams to ensure visual content aligned with overall branding strategy and promotional campaigns.
- Managed the end-to-end production process, including pre-production planning, storyboarding, filming, editing, and final delivery of assets to meet project goals and deadlines. Optimized content for social media performance, utilizing analytics and trends to maximize reach and engagement on various platforms.
- Produced behind-the-scenes content, interviews, and live performance videos, enhancing fan engagement and artist visibility.
- Stayed up to date with digital content trends, emerging platforms, and video production techniques, ensuring that content remained fresh, innovative, and relevant to the music industry.

RUN (Narrative Short)

Atlanta, United States

Writer | Director | Cinematographer | Editor

05/2022 - 05/2022

- Wrote and directed a thriller short film featuring named talent, creating a gripping and suspenseful narrative that captivated audiences and showcased strong performances.
- The film received multiple awards, including Best Student Short and Best Director, and was recognized as one of USC's Top Short Films, cementing its place as a standout piece in the genre.
- Led the creative vision, overseeing all aspects of production from concept to final cut, ensuring a cohesive and thrilling cinematic experience that resonated with both critics and audiences

Delta Airlines

Atlanta, United States

Cinematographer

01/2022 - 02/2022

- Served as Cinematographer and Camera Operator for Delta Airlines in-flight videos and social media spots, capturing high-quality visuals that showcased the airline's services, destinations, and brand identity.
- Operated cameras and managed lighting setups to ensure polished, professional shots, providing engaging content for both in-flight entertainment and Delta's social media platforms.
- Collaborated with the creative team to align the visual style with Delta's brand messaging, producing impactful content that resonated with the airline's diverse audience

Dream Jar (Narrative Short)

Atlanta, United States

Writer | Director | Cinematographer

11/2021 - 12/2021

- Wrote, directed, and oversaw the VFX for a VFX-heavy short film featuring named talent, crafting a visually immersive story that blended complex special effects with narrative-driven performances.
- Acted as VFX Supervisor and Artist, creating and implementing groundbreaking visual effects that enhanced the film's unique aesthetic while collaborating with the post-production team to seamlessly integrate them into the storyline.
- The film's innovative direction and stunning VFX work earned critical recognition, culminating in a Best Director award, showcasing the successful integration of cutting-edge technology and storytelling

Professional Experience

Audi USA

Atlanta, United States

Cinematographer | Drone Operator | Editor | Colorist

03/2021 - 03/2021

- Served as Cinematographer and Drone Operator for Audi R8 social media content, capturing high-speed, commercial-quality visuals that showcased the performance and sleek design of the vehicle.
- Utilized both ground and aerial shots, using advanced drone techniques to capture dynamic action sequences and cinematic shots, highlighting the vehicle's agility and luxury appeal.
- Worked closely with the creative team to ensure the final content met Audi's brand standards, producing impactful social media videos that engaged and captivated the target audience

Buffalo Wild Wings

Atlanta, United States

Cinematographer | Editor | Colorist

01/2021 - 02/2021

- Served as Cinematographer and Editor for the viral Buffalo Wild Wings "Tarot Card" social media spot, where a gypsy predicts the Super Bowl winner, generating millions of views across various platforms.
- Captured dynamic, engaging visuals and worked with the creative team to ensure the spot aligned with Buffalo Wild Wings' brand identity, using humor and dramatic flair to appeal to the audience.
- Edited the final video to create a seamless narrative, integrating visual effects and pacing to maintain viewer engagement, while ensuring the final product resonated with the brand's tone and messaging

Chewy.com

Atlanta, United States

Director | Cinematographer | Editor

08/2020 - 10/2020

- Shot a multi-day campaign for Chewy.com, featuring animal actors and collaborating with Volvo and PlushPaws seat covers to create engaging, cross-branded content.
- Managed the cinematography of complex scenes involving animal talent, ensuring smooth performances and capturing compelling visuals that highlighted the products and the brand's messaging.
- Coordinated the integration of Volvo vehicles and PlushPaws seat covers, maintaining visual continuity and ensuring a seamless blend of the brands' identities in the final product

Novelis

Atlanta, United States

Cinematographer | Editor

06/2020 - 07/2020

- Served as Cinematographer and Crew Lead for Novelis Aluminum, shooting across multiple states and overseeing a crew in high-risk environments, including a smelting plant.
- Ensured the safety of the crew and equipment in the hazardous plant environment, implementing strict safety protocols and coordinating with plant officials to maintain a secure working environment.
- Captured visually compelling footage that showcased the brand's operations and products, while aligning with Novelis' messaging and maintaining the highest technical standards

Home Depot

Atlanta, United States

Cinematographer | Editor

06/2020 - 06/2020

- Shot multiple social media spots for Home Depot, creating engaging and visually dynamic content that contributed to millions of views across various platforms.
- Worked closely with the creative team to ensure brand messaging was seamlessly integrated into each video, producing high-quality visuals that resonated with Home Depot's diverse audience.
- Captured content that highlighted Home Depot's products and services, utilizing advanced cinematography techniques to maintain visual consistency and appeal across campaigns

Shift Drinks (TV Series)

Atlanta, United States

1st Assistant Camera

03/2020 - 05/2020

- Served as 1st AC for a TV series, managing camera operations including focusing, lens changes, and pulling focus during dynamic scenes.
- Worked closely with the Director of Photography (DP) to ensure camera equipment was set up and maintained to industry standards, ensuring smooth operation throughout production.
- Coordinated with the camera team and other departments to ensure that all shots were captured accurately and on time, while maintaining the technical integrity of the footage

Home Depot

Atlanta, United States

Stop Motion Supervisor | Stop Motion Animator

03/2020 - 04/2020

- Served as Stop Motion Supervisor and Technician for a Home Depot social media spot, overseeing the stop-motion animation process to bring to life new porch and backyard designs in an engaging, creative format.
- Coordinated the setup, lighting, and movement of elements to ensure smooth and fluid animation, working closely with the creative team to match the brand's vision.
- Managed the technical aspects of the stop-motion process, ensuring the seamless integration of animation with live-action footage, delivering a polished, visually captivating final product for social media distribution

Professional Experience

When It Comes (Narrative Short)

Atlanta, United States

Director | Cinematographer | Gaffer | Producer | VFX Artist

01/2020 - 03/2020

- Directed, produced, and served as Cinematographer for a big-budget horror short film, overseeing the project from conceptualization to final cut while ensuring a high level of artistic and technical quality.
- Shot in remote wooded locations at night, utilizing large and complex lighting setups to create a chilling and immersive atmosphere, incorporating high-end equipment and multiple light sources to capture the haunting visuals.
- Managed named talent, working with actors to deliver powerful performances while coordinating with the production team on logistics, locations, and schedule, ensuring smooth operations throughout the shoot.
- The film received critical acclaim for its visual storytelling, innovative lighting techniques, and its ability to capture suspense and horror effectively on screen

Bad Candy (Feature Film)

Atlanta, United States

Camera Operator

10/2019 - 11/2019

- Operated the camera for a feature film horror, capturing dynamic and suspenseful shots that heightened the film's eerie atmosphere and intensified the horror elements.
- Collaborated with the director and cinematographer to ensure the visual style aligned with the narrative tone, executing complex shots that enhanced the storytelling and tension

Slow Violence (Music Video)

Atlanta, United States

Director | Cinematographer | Editor

08/2019 - 08/2019

- Directed and shot a high-energy music video featuring named talent, incorporating dynamic slow-motion sequences and dancing in an intense, fast-paced work environment.
- Collaborated with the talent and creative team to choreograph and capture visually striking dance moves, using innovative camera techniques to highlight the fast movement while maintaining fluidity and precision in each shot.
- Managed all aspects of the shoot, coordinating lighting, camera work, and talent direction to create an immersive experience that amplified the song's energy, resulting in a visually compelling and critically praised music video

Destitute (Music Video)

Atlanta, United States

Writer | Director | Cinematographer | Editor

05/2019 - 05/2019

- Served as Cinematographer for a critically acclaimed music video, creating a visually captivating narrative that complemented the artist's vision and enhanced the song's emotional impact.
- Crafted dynamic shots, camera movements, and lighting setups to visually communicate the themes of the song, collaborating closely with the artist and creative team to achieve a distinctive and memorable aesthetic.
- The music video received critical acclaim for its innovative cinematography and storytelling, gaining recognition across multiple platforms and contributing to the artist's growing popularity

Cinnabon

Atlanta, United States

Photographer

05/2019 - 05/2019

- Served as Photographer for a worldwide campaign for Cinnabon Minis, capturing high-quality, mouth-watering images that showcased the product's appeal for both print and digital media.
- Collaborated with the marketing and creative teams to ensure the visuals aligned with the brand's identity, producing photos that highlighted the irresistible texture, warmth, and freshness of the product.
- Contributed to the development of imagery that was used across global platforms, from advertisements to social media, driving customer engagement and brand recognition

Finley (Viral YouTube Short)

Atlanta, United States

Writer | Director | Cinematographer | Puppeteer | Editor | VFX Artist

03/2019 - 06/2019

- 10 million+ views on YouTube and achieved worldwide acclaim for its unique blend of horror and comedy.
- Created a captivating storyline and innovative visual effects, overseeing the film's entire production process from concept to post-production, ensuring the film's tone, pacing, and VFX were perfectly aligned with its genre.
- Directed and performed as a puppeteer, bringing the titular character to life with precision and emotional depth, and collaborated closely with the production team to ensure seamless integration of practical effects and VFX to enhance the puppet-driven narrative.
- The film's success led to meetings with well-known Film Studios and Production houses in talks for a feature version, further cementing the film's status as a genre-defining piece of horror-comedy entertainment.

Professional Experience

CapinCrouse

Atlanta, United States

Director of Digital Content | Cinematographer

01/2017 - 05/2019

- Produced and distributed content across digital and social platforms, supporting the strategic needs of division leaders and executing content strategies throughout the year.
- Led multi-platform content production during major news events, collaborating with station partners to ensure timely and accurate content delivery.
- Discovered, pitched, and reported potential news stories for OTV platforms, leveraging editorial expertise and news discovery tools to optimize content for search visibility.
- Partnered with data analytics teams to track and evaluate key performance indicators (KPIs), providing actionable insights to enhance content strategy and improve audience engagement.
- Prioritized digital content using both editorial judgment and data-driven insights, ensuring it met high editorial standards and resonated with target audiences.
- Contributed new ideas and concepts, identifying opportunities for growth and innovation in digital content creation to stay ahead in the competitive landscape.
- Directed, edited, and produced a variety of digital scripted content, including commercials, CEO videos, corporate updates, training videos, leadership presentations, and recruiting materials.
- Maintained regular communication with the executive leadership team and marketing department, ensuring alignment with brand messaging and content consistency across all digital initiatives.

Skills

ARRI · PANAVISION · SONY · RED · Avid Media Composer · DaVinci Resolve · Adobe After Effects · Adobe Premiere Pro · Pro Tools · DragonFrame · Autodesk Maya · Nuke · Cinema 4D · Photoshop · Advanced knowledge of Industry Lighting and Grip Gear

Portfolio

Directing | Cinematography Reel

<https://vimeo.com/1058388478>

The Demon Core Trailer | Website

<https://www.thedemoncorefilm.com/>

Branded Content Samples

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/10468274?share=copy>