

Creating Pathways for Artists to Tell Their Stories

An Interview with Maha Dakhil and Joel Lubin, Co-Heads, CAA Motion Picture Group

EDITORS' NOTE Maha Dakhil serves as Co-Head of the Motion Picture Group and Co-Head of the agency's International Film Group. She also serves on the CAA Board that is responsible for the day-to-day management of the agency. Additionally, she represents some of the world's most successful actors and actresses. An 18-year veteran of the agency, Dakhil has long been at the forefront of cultivating opportunities for diverse talent and championing underserved voices and their stories. Dakhil is a founding member of Time's Up, an initiative that addresses systemic inequality and injustice in the workplace. She is a champion for underrepresented storytellers, creating opportunities for them to transition into the global marketplace. Dakhil also serves on the boards of Baby2Baby and the UCLA Lab School. She began her career at Genesis, a literary agency. Dakhil graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles with a degree in sociology.

An 18-year veteran of leading entertainment and sports agency Creative Artists Agency (CAA), Joel Lubin serves on the CAA Board which is responsible for the day-to-day management of the agency. He is also Co-Head of the agency's Motion Picture Group and represents many of the world's most acclaimed talent. An avid art collector, Lubin currently serves on the Board of Advisors for the Hammer Museum and the Board of Directors of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Lubin received his BA degree from Skidmore College.

AGENCY BRIEF Positioned at the nexus of talent, content, brands, technology, sports, and live events, CAA (caa.com) creates limitless opportunities for the storytellers, trendsetters, icons, and thought leaders who shape popular culture. Across film, television, music, sports, digital media, marketing, and beyond, CAA represents thousands of the world's leading actors, directors, writers, producers, musical artists, comedians, authors, athletes, coaches, broadcasters, teams, leagues, chefs, designers, fashion talent, consumer brands, and more. With a global network of employees and strategic partners in North America, Europe, Asia, and beyond, CAA taps its internal and external ecosystem of experts, relationships, access, and industry intelligence to help ensure that its clients achieve their goals. CAA has created an ever-widening scope of services and businesses. It was the first talent agency to build a sports



Maha Dakhil



Joel Lubin

business, create an investment bank, launch a venture fund, found technology start-up companies, establish a business in China, create a brand marketing services business, and launch a philanthropic arm, among other industry innovations.

Will you highlight the history of CAA's Motion Picture Group and how the Group has evolved?

Lubin: CAA represents the world's premier actors, directors, writers, and producers whose work garners awards, drives the box-office, and centers cultural conversations. Since CAA opened its doors in 1975, the agency has fiercely championed our clients' success, with world-class experts and resources to maximize

every opportunity. This has been a continuous and core tenant of our work and drives our innovation.

As in every industry, our business is ever-evolving. In particular, change has been accelerated these past few years. There are so many options for audiences to see a movie, which is exciting. We don't necessarily see it as a streaming versus theatrical world – the businesses are complimentary. Our role as artist advocates is to try to match the distribution vehicle – theatrical or streaming – to each story or property in a way that best supports our clients expressing themselves artistically, as well as commercially.

Dakhil: This is a dynamic business in terms of how audiences see a film – whether it is in a theater or via streaming – but the one constant is the insatiable appetite for high-quality storytelling and the stars who bring the magic of movies alive. We have the great fortune of representing artists who have a tremendous impact on pop culture and are at the center of every awards season, major blockbuster, and zeitgeist-shaping film.

How do you describe CAA Motion Picture Group's mission and purpose?

Dakhil: Our mission is to create pathways for artists to tell their stories and reach the broadest audience possible. We recognize

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Lubin: Our goal is to create an environment where an artist has a rich creative experience and where their work is valued from a financial perspective. To do this, we apply this lens in identifying the next generation of film agents – we look for colleagues who bring an entrepreneurial spirit to their representation. We look for people who know how to connect internally to offer the most enriched experience for the clients of tomorrow, and build businesses that support artists’ passions.

Will you provide an overview of CAA Motion Picture Group’s services and capabilities?

Dakbil: We have a phenomenal team whose shared passion and creativity is inspiring: Dan Rabinow and Ida Ziniti lead the Motion Picture Literary department, which represents the screenwriters, directors, and producers of the world’s biggest hits and critical successes; Franklin Latt and Rachel Rusch oversee the Motion Picture Talent department, which represents many of the most accomplished actors and actresses working in film – from movie stars to emerging talent; Megan Crawford heads the Motion Picture Marketing department, which advises clients in all areas of marketing and distribution, including domestic and international release strategies, awards campaigns, and media plans. Megan also curates a tastemaker screening series which has become an important stop on the awards circuit.

Lubin: We also have the benefit of the agency’s Strategic Client Advisory Group, led by Roger Batchelder, that has exceptional expertise and strategic insights that support our efforts to architect and implement best-in-class deal structures that enhance and protect the value of clients’ work across multiple distribution platforms.

In addition, we frequently collaborate with CAA’s Media Finance department, led by Roeg Sutherland and Benjamin Kramer, which has done extraordinary work over the years advising clients as to the financing, licensing, and distribution sales of film and other media that fall outside the traditional studio system. In just the past year, they have broken film sales records at virtually every major festival. And Jenn Joel, Michelle Weiner, and Sloan Harris, who lead CAA’s Books department and spearhead the agency’s book-to-film/television and publishing activities, have their fingers on the pulse of the most sought-after IP.

What have been the keys to CAA Motion Picture Group’s industry leadership and how do you define the CAA Motion Picture Group difference?

Lubin: We have a deeply collaborative and inclusive culture, which is the cornerstone of our business. We have put a great deal of thought into building a team of the most dynamic and entrepreneurial people who are able to flourish in this type of environment and connect with artists in a meaningful way.

Dakbil: We spend a lot of time really thinking about how we support artists to amplify their voices and extend their reach. Key to that is defining our advocacy and making sure that our approach is as modern, innovative, inclusive, and forward-thinking as possible. We want to capture the interests of the most curious future leaders.

What has made your relationship at CAA work so well?

Dakbil: Joel and I have worked alongside one another for 18 years, many years before we became leaders together. We started at CAA at the same time. There is a closeness and rapport that we share and our trust was established a long time ago.

Lubin: We share a deep respect for one another. Though we may take a different approach from time to time, we have a shared vision.

Dakbil: To Joel’s point, we complement each other’s strengths. We give each other the space and room to come to our own conclusions. In the end, the word that comes to mind is equitable.

Will you discuss your views on the state of the global film marketplace and what you expect for the future?

Dakbil: The movie business is in an amazingly exciting time, and we have incredible optimism and hope for the ongoing success of the theatrical business. Over the past year, we have seen an amazing array of films draw audiences back to theaters. As we enter awards season, so many of the films in the conversation were put together at CAA. New talent and new voices are breaking through, including international stars and men and women of color – it’s exhilarating.

Lubin: When you see Squid Game become a global phenomena, it reinforces the idea that it’s the art itself that matters, not the language.

Dakbil: Hollywood is not the only access point – the next breakout can unexpectedly come from afar. In a time where there is so much anxiety and turmoil, it is gratifying to use the power of storytelling to create bridges with cultural communities across the world. Audiences are clearly responding.

For many of us, it is what drew us to the business in the first place.

What do you see as the role that CAA Motion Picture Group can play in championing underserved voices and their stories?

Dakbil: We value diversity and inclusion. It is integral to our company culture and business strategy.

Lubin: We have seen time and time again that diversity drives innovation and amplifying voices is good business.

How do you view your management styles?

Lubin: We are thoughtful about how we represent artists in a complicated time. It requires multi-dimensional thinking – there are 100 ways to do one thing. We are helping to support a group of individuals that have the freedom to be creative in their decision-making, and in how they build and sustain long-term careers for the artists we represent. This is a very personal business, not transactional.

What are your priorities for CAA Motion Picture Group as you look to the future?

Dakbil: The agency is a constantly evolving think tank of artists and advocates. Our clients are at the center of everything we do and always will be. To best serve them, we have to listen to the heartbeat of the industry. The second it changes or skips a beat, we know exactly where to operate. Being intuitive and flexible, while also being fiercely protective about deals, will continue to be as vitally important as ever.

Lubin: As the landscape shifts, we are two steps ahead to make sure the changing deal structures don’t undercut the value of the artists that drive the business. ●