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FILM INDEPENDENT SELECTS FILMMAKERS FOR 2020 DOCUMENTARY LAB

LOS ANGELES (March 10, 2020) — Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Spirit Awards, announced the 11 filmmakers and eight projects selected for its 2020 Documentary Lab. This year's Documentary Lab consists entirely of women filmmakers whose projects cover a range of topics including a coming of age story about young women surfers in Bangladesh and a lush, poetic portrait of China's industrial supply chain, among others. The Lab is an intensive program designed for filmmakers currently in post-production on their feature-length documentary films and provides creative feedback. The program advances the careers of its Fellows by introducing them to film professionals who can advise on both the craft and business of documentary filmmaking.

Elizabeth D. Costa, a documentary filmmaker from Bangladesh, is the recipient of the Global Media Makers Fellowship, sponsored through a partnership between Film Independent and the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, making her travel and participation in the Documentary Lab possible.

"The 11 visionary filmmakers represented in this year's Documentary Lab take risks to create artful nonfiction storytelling that impacts the broader cultural conversation,” said Documentary Programs Manager Lisa Hasko. “We’re thrilled to work with these diverse voices and look forward to helping them hone their craft and nurturing their careers through the Documentary Lab and as Film Independent Fellows."

During the Lab, filmmakers will work with Lead Creative Mentors Keith Fulton and Lou Pepe (He Dreams of Giants, The Bad Kids). Additionally, Fellows will be introduced to advisors and guest speakers on both the craft and business of documentary filmmaking. This year’s Documentary
Lab Mentors and Guest Speakers include Liz Manashil (Picture Motion), Marylin Ness (Dick Johnson is Dead, Cameraperson), Matthew Radecki (Founder, Different By Design), Academy Award nominee Smriti Mundhra (St. Louis Superman, A Suitable Girl), and Spirit Award winner Bing Liu (Minding the Gap), among others, along with industry partners the UCLA Doc Law Clinic and ScreeningRoom.

Film Independent Artist Development programs promote unique independent voices by helping filmmakers create and advance new work through Project Involve, Filmmaker Labs (Directing, Documentary, Episodic, Producing and Screenwriting), Fast Track Finance Market, Fiscal Sponsorship, as well as through Grants and Awards, that provide over one million dollars annually to visual storytellers.

The Documentary Lab is supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Notable past Documentary Lab supported projects include Academy Award-nominated and Spirit Award-winning Minding the Gap from Fellows Bing Liu and Diane Quon; Sara Dosa and Shane Boris’ Seer and the Unseen; Sarita Khurana and Smriti Mundhra’s A Suitable Girl and Dustin Nakao Haider, Daniel Dewes and Derek Doneen’s Shot in the Dark.

For more information on the Documentary Lab and the projects supported through the program, please contact Lisa Hasko, Manager of Documentary Programs and Fiscal Sponsorship, at 323 556 9392. Additional information and an application form can be found at filmindependent.org.

The 2020 Documentary Lab projects and Fellows are:

Title: Bangla Surf Girls
Director: Elizabeth D. Costa
Logline: Bangla Surf Girls is an observational coming-of-age documentary set in Cox’s Bazar along a natural sea beach in Bangladesh. The beach, a haven for tourists, is just a place of work for three young girls who sell trinkets to tourists—until they join a surf club and get a taste of freedom. The documentary takes place over the course of three years and follows the girls as they ride the highs and lows of their lives.

Title: How to Escape from Prison
Director: Elizabeth Mirzaei
Logline: Each year, thousands of California prisoners serving life sentences fight to get parole; one resolute Dominican nun has made it her mission to see them succeed. But can mock hearings, self-critique, and tough training pay off in a broken system?
Title: *Untitled Terrorist Rehabilitation Film*
Director: **Meg Smaker**
Logline: This film follows a group of former Islamic extremists as they attend a deradicalization program. Is it possible to rehabilitate a terrorist?

Title: *The Kids Are Not Alright*
Director: **Mikaela Shwer**
Logline: Despite decades of documented abuse and hundreds of deaths, thousands of teenagers across the United States are held in cult-like reform programs that generate multibillion-dollar profits with little-to-no government oversight. *The Kids Are Not Alright* reveals the devastating effects this industry has on its survivors and draws the curtain back on this controversial industry.

Title: *Mama Bears*
Director: **Daresha Kyi**
Producer: **Laura Tatham**
Logline: *Mama Bears* is a feature documentary that explores the many ways in which the lives of conservative, Christian mothers are utterly transformed when they decide to accept their LGBTQ children. Spread throughout the country but connected through private Facebook groups, they call themselves “Mama Bears” because they fight ferociously for the civil rights of their children and the entire LGBTQ community.

Title: *Manzanar, Diverted*
Director: **Ann Kaneko**
Director: **Jin Yoo-Kim**
Logline: From the snow-capped Sierras to the now-parched valley of Payahuunadü (the Owens Valley), this intersectional documentary tracks women from three communities -- Native Americans; Japanese American World War II incarcerees and local environmentalists -- who form an unexpected alliance to fight for dignity, their home and for future generations against the city of Los Angeles, owner of 90 percent of the land.

Title: *That's How We Roll*
Director: **Sara Terry**
Producer: **Alysa Nahmias**
Logline: When housing on the lowest rung of the American dream is being devoured by the wealthiest of the wealthy, whose dream are we serving? *That’s How We Roll* addresses urgent issues of class and economic (im)mobility through mobile home park residents fighting to
preserve their dreams and homes as wealthy investors buy up parks, squeezing every penny from mobile home owners who rent the land they live on.

**Title:** Untitled PRC Project  
**Director/Producer:** Jessica Kingdon  
**Logline:** Untitled PRC Project is a portrait of China’s industrial supply chain through its accelerated economy in an increasingly consumer-driven yet repressive society. With an observational lens, the feature documentary examines megatrends of today’s China, revealing paradoxes born from prosperity of the world’s emergent superpower through the cycle of production, consumption and waste. This impressionistic collage of the new “Chinese Dream” consists of conceptually linked vignettes, immersed in locations ranging from the remote Sichuan mountains where farmers mine cryptocurrency, to bustling megacities where live-streamers build their brands by selling goods.

**ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT**  
For over 38 years, Film Independent has helped filmmakers get their projects made and seen. The nonprofit’s mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling and support a community of artists who embody diversity, innovation and uniqueness of vision.

In addition to producing the Film Independent Spirit Awards, the organization supports creative professionals with Artist Development programs, grants and labs, and signature mentorship program Project Involve fosters the careers of talented filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Weekly Education events and workshops equip filmmakers of all ages and experience levels with tools and resources. International programs include Global Media Makers, a cultural exchange program that provides career-building opportunities for international film professionals. Film Independent Presents is a year-round program offering screenings, conversations and other unique cinematic experiences to Members in Los Angeles and beyond.

While working to make the entertainment industry more inclusive, Film Independent provides access to a network of like-minded artists. Film lovers, industry professionals and anyone passionate about visual storytelling can become a Member at filmindependent.org and connect with @FilmIndependent across social platforms.

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