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FILM INDEPENDENT SELECTS 21 PROJECTS AND 37 FILMMAKERS FOR ANNUAL PRODUCING LAB AND FAST TRACK FINANCING MARKET

$50,000 in grants awarded by Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

LOS ANGELES (November 17, 2020) — Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Spirit Awards, announced today the filmmakers and projects selected for two of the organization’s signature artist development programs – the Producing Lab and the Fast Track Financing Market. Across both programs, a total of 37 filmmakers and 21 projects will be supported.

“It’s especially important, particularly in light of the challenges brought on by the pandemic, to support independent filmmakers with the production, financing and distribution of their films,” said Lisa Hasko, Director of Artist Development. “The Producing Lab and Fast Track finance market create a space to empower producers and directors not only to hone their craft, but also develop important relationships so crucial to bringing their projects to life and sustain long term careers.”

Producing Lab

Now in its 20th year, the Producing Lab recognizes the importance of creative independent producers to the field and offers a dedicated space to help develop their skills and further their careers by introducing Fellows to film professionals who can advise them on both the craft and business of independent producing.
Each Producing Lab Fellow will be paired with an experienced Creative Advisor with whom they’ll work to develop their project over the course of the program.

This year’s mentors and guest speakers include: Rebecca Green (*It Follows*), Sheila Hanahan Taylor (*Final Destination*), Amanda Marshall (*Swiss Army Man*), Karin Chien (*Circumstance*), Ira Deutchman (*Searching for Mr. Rugoff*), Lena Vurma (*Adventures of a Mathematician*), Shrihari Sathe (*Screwdriver*) and Lauren McBride (*Selah and the Spades*).

The Sloan Producers Grant, a $30,000 grant to further develop a project that explores science and technology themes or characters in engaging and innovative ways, was awarded to *The Mushroomers*, produced by Yu Hao (David) Su. “It's my honor to receive the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Award. *The Mushroomers* is a universal story about loss and healing, filtered through the distinct lens of fungi,” said filmmaker and grant recipient Yu Hao (David) Su. “During these Covid times of uncertainty and immeasurable losses, we hope our film will be able to speak to our collective grief in a small way and introduce audiences to an overlooked, yet unexpectedly cinematic and charming corner of our natural world.”

Previous projects developed through the Producing Lab include Tayarisha Poe’s *Selah and the Spades*, produced by Lauren McBride which premiered at Sundance Film Festival 2019 and was acquired by Amazon to be developed into an Amazon original series; Chloé Zhao’s Spirit Award-nominated *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, produced by Angela C. Lee and Mollye Asher; and Joseph Wladyka’s Spirit Award-nominated *Manos Sucias*, produced by Elena Greenlee and Márcia Mayer.

The 2020 Producing Lab is supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Additional support comes from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The 2020 Producing Lab Fellows and their projects are:

**Title:** *all dirt roads taste of salt*
**Producer:** Maria Altamirano
Logline: Through lyrical portraits evoking the texture of memories, *all dirt roads taste of salt* viscerally and sensorially explores the life of Mack, a Black woman in Tennessee, from her youth to her older years.

**Title:** *Gulab*
**Producer:** Apoorva Charan
Logline: A married Pakistani man secretly takes a job at a night-time Mujra (erotic dance) theatre in Lahore and finds himself falling for a fiercely ambitious trans dancer. Their impossible love story pushes him, his wife, and the dancer toward a path of self-discovery and sexual rebellion.

**Title: Joy and Pain**  
**Producer:** Sue-Ellen Chitunya  
Logline: A meditation and an exploration of two families, through a young couple burying a parent and bearing their first child.

**Title: (The Legend of) Manchild Kenny**  
**Producers:** B. Quinn Curry  
Logline: Struggling comedian Kenny Reed's controversial set goes viral, thrusting him into fame, creating a media frenzy that threatens his sobriety.

**Title: The Mushroomsers**  
**Producer:** Yu-Hao (David) Su  
Logline: A recently widowed mycologist attempts to heal a contaminated old-growth forest in Washington State using only super fungi—but Mother Nature and the mechanics of her own mourning prove far fickler than anticipated.

**Title: We Were Born Kings**  
**Producer:** Milana Edwards  
Logline: Titus King is an aggressive teen, struggling to follow the rules in his mother’s house. When his dad is released from a 8 year stint in prison and Titus is kicked out of his mom's house, Titus is forced to stay with a father he barely knows. As the two bump heads, Titus learns powerful lessons in love that will change his life forever.

**Fast Track**

Now in its 18th year, the Fast Track program is an intensive, three-day film-financing market in which participants are connected with established financiers, production companies, agents, managers and other film industry professionals who can move their current projects forward.

Recent Fast Track projects completed include Bing Liu’s 2019 Oscar-nominated documentary *Minding the Gap*; Hikari’s 2019 Berlinale jury prize and audience award-winning debut *37 Seconds*; Kirill Mikhanchovskiy’s *Give Me Liberty*, which premiered at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival and Directors’ Fortnight at Cannes; Christina Choe’s 2018 Sundance Jury prize-winning fiction feature *Nancy*; Nijla Mumin’s 2018 SXSW jury prize-winning fiction feature *JINN*; Dyana Winkler and Tina Brown’s 2018 Tribeca Film Festival Audience Award-winning documentary *United Skates* and Lana Wilson’s 2018 Spirit Award-
nominated documentary *The Departure*. Additional projects supported through Fast Track include Chloé Zhao’s Spirit Award-nominated debut *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, David Osit and Malika Zouhali-Worrall’s Emmy award-winning documentary *Thank You for Playing*, Robbie Pickering’s Spirit Award-nominated *Natural Selection*; and Courtney Hunt’s Academy Award and Spirit Award-nominated *Frozen River*.

Industry participants this year include: A24, Be A Kindred Spirit, Big Swing Productions, Blumhouse, CAA, Cold Iron Pictures, Endeavor Content, Gamechanger Films, Gersh, HBO, Hulu, Media, Lagralane, Lionsgate, Mandalay Pictures, Neon, Netflix, Participant Media, Searchlight, and YOMYOMF.

The Sloan Fast Track Grant, a $20,000 grant to support the production of a project that explores science and technology themes or characters in engaging and innovative ways, is awarded to ASIA A, directed by Andrew Reid and produced by Jake Katofsky. “I am thrilled to have the support of Film Independent and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for ASIA A. The resources provided are invaluable, as we continue to build a team passionate about bringing this story to life,” said Reid.

With support from the Ministry of Culture of Taiwan, Taiwan Academy in Los Angeles partners with Film Independent to first launch “Taiwan Academy Fellowship,” which aims to provide resources for aspiring Taiwanese filmmakers to better connect Taiwanese film industry with international platform. The inaugural $10,000 grant will be awarded to Taiwanese producer Clifford Miu for project *American Girl* and will go towards supporting the film with its theatrical release. Taiwan Academy in Los Angeles is a nonprofit governmental institute that functions as a cultural bridge between Taiwan and the west coast of North America to increase global visibility of Taiwanese culture, to enhance cultural exchange, and to raise appreciation of the rich, diverse culture of Taiwan.

Additional support for the Fast Track program is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and RespectAbility.

The following filmmakers have been selected to participate in Film Independent’s 2020 Fast Track program:

**FICTION**

**Title:** *all dirt roads taste of salt*  
**Director/Writer:** Raven Jackson  
**Producer:** Maria Altamirano

Logline: Through lyrical portraits evoking the texture of memories, *all dirt roads taste of salt* viscerally and sensorially explores the life of Mack, a Black woman in Tennessee, from her youth to her older years.
Title: **American Girl**  
**Director:** Feng-I Fiona Roan  
**Producer:** Clifford Miu  
Logline: Uprooted from the U.S. after her mother is stricken with breast cancer, thirteen-year-old Fen struggles to adjust to life in Taipei amidst the SARS epidemic.

Title: **ASIA A**  
**Director:** Andrew Reid  
**Producer:** Jake Katofsky  
Logline: After suffering a spinal cord injury, a college basketball player struggles between hoping for recovery and accepting his new life as a paraplegic.

Title: **End of the Line**  
**Director/Writer:** Rani DeMuth  
**Producer:** Christina Sibul  
Logline: An eccentric, dysfunctional family struggles to reunite after the mother, in mid-life crisis, decides to pursue performance art.

Title: **Flash Before the Bang**  
**Director/Writer:** Jevon Whetter  
**Producer:** Delbert Whetter  
Logline: Inspired by the true story of unlikely heroes from an Oregon deaf school track team that overcame adversity and discrimination to seize an unprecedented victory at the 1986 State Championship.

Title: **Gulaab**  
**Director/Writer:** Saim Sadiq  
**Producer:** Apoorva Charan  
Logline: Amidst a deadly heatwave in Lahore, a meek and conservative family man joins the dance troupe of a fiercely ambitious trans starlet at an erotic theatre and gets engulfed in a blazing summer of romance and rebellion.

Title: **(The Legend of) Manchild Kenny**  
**Director/Writer:** Alfonso Johnson  
**Producers:** B. Quinn Curry  
Logline: Struggling comedian Kenny Reed's controversial set goes viral; creating a media fame frenzy that threatens his sobriety and his fragile relationship with his daughter.

Title: **Mabel**  
**Director:** Nicolas Ma  
**Producer:** Luca Borghese
Logline: No one gets Callie, an awkward kid whose one friend, Mabel, is a plant - except Ms. G, her teacher who introduces her to the controversial world of “plant intelligence.” Desperate to impress her, Callie builds a secret greenhouse in her backyard, but Callie’s obsession sets her on a collision course with her mother and threatens her first connection with another kid.

**Title: Palm Trees and Power Lines**  
**Director/Writer:** Jamie Dack  
**Producers:** Lizzie Shapiro and Maddy Askwith  
Logline: During summer break, a disconnected teenage girl falls into a relationship with a man more than twice her age. She sees him as the solution to all of her problems, but his motives are not what they seem.

**Title: The Weight of the Land**  
**Director/Writer:** Daniel Drummond  
**Producer:** Gia Rigoli  
Logline: When a family of Latino ranch hands become ranch owners, small-town politics and violent land feuds drive a wedge between the Estradas and their small Arizona town.

**NONFICTION**

**Title: After Antarctica**  
**Director:** Tasha Van Zandt  
**Producer:** Sebastian Zeck  
Logline: *After Antarctica* follows polar explorer Will Steger’s life journey as an eyewitness to the greatest changes in the polar regions of our planet. After a lifetime of groundbreaking expeditions, no one alive has seen more of our polar world.

**Title: The In Between**  
**Director:** Robie Flores  
**Producer:** Alejandro Flores  
Logline: A lyrical coming-of-age portrait of growing up on the U.S./Mexico border. Woven from the daily lives of children in the sister cities of Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras, the film celebrates and explores how the fronterizo identity takes shape.

**Title: Mama Bears**  
**Director:** Daresha Kyi  
**Producer:** Laura Tatham  
Logline: *Mama Bears* explores the many ways in which the lives of conservative, Christian mothers are utterly transformed when they decide to accept their LGBTQ children.
Title: *Sam Now*
Director: Reed Harkness
Producer/Editor: Jason Reid
Logline: A mother’s disappearance sends pain and mystery through her family. *Sam Now* follows her son’s quest for answers—and healing.

Title: *Seeds*
Director: Brittany Shyne
Producer: Daniel Varga
Logline: *Seeds* is a portrait of a centennial African-American farm in Thomasville, Georgia. Using lyrical black and white imagery this meditative film examines the decline of generational black farmers and the significance of owning land.

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 and Fiscal Sponsorship, as well as through Grants and Awards, which provide over one million dollars annually to visual storytellers.

For more information on any of the Labs or the projects that have been developed in them, please contact Lisa Hasko, Director of Artist Development, at lhasko@filmindependent.org. Additional information and an application form can be found at filmindependent.org.

**ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT**

Film Independent is the nonprofit arts organization that champions creative independence in visual storytelling and supports a community of artists who embody diversity, innovation and uniqueness of vision. Film Independent helps filmmakers make their movies, builds an audience for their projects and works to diversify the film industry. Film Independent’s Board of Directors, filmmakers, staff and constituents is comprised of an inclusive community of individuals across ability, age, ethnicity, gender, race and sexual orientation. Anyone passionate about film can become a Member, whether you are a filmmaker, industry professional or a film lover.

In addition to producing the Spirit Awards, Film Independent produces Film Independent Presents, a year-round screening series for its members that offers unique cinematic experiences for the Los Angeles creative community and the general public.
Through annual screenings and events, Film Independent provides access to a network of like-minded artists who are driving creativity in the film industry. Film Independent’s Artist Development program offers free labs for selected writers, directors, producers and documentary filmmakers and presents year-round networking opportunities. Project Involve is Film Independent’s signature program dedicated to fostering the careers of talented filmmakers from communities traditionally underrepresented in the film industry.

For more information or to become a Member, visit filmindependent.org.

ABOUT THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is a New York based, philanthropic, not-for-profit institution that makes grants in three areas: research in science, technology, and economics; quality and diversity of scientific institutions; and public engagement with science. Sloan’s program in Public Understanding of Science and Technology, directed by Doron Weber, supports books, radio, film, television, theater and new media to reach a wide, non-specialized audience and to bridge the two cultures of science and the humanities.

Sloan’s Film Program encourages filmmakers to create more realistic and compelling stories about science and technology and to challenge existing stereotypes about scientists and engineers in the popular imagination. Over the past two decades, Sloan has partnered with top film schools in the country—including AFI, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, NYU, UCLA, and USC plus six public film schools—and established annual awards in screenwriting and film production, along with an annual best-of-the-best Student Grand Jury Prize. The Foundation also supports screenplay development programs with the Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute, SFFILM, the Black List, the Athena Film Festival, the North Fork TV Festival, and Film Independent’s Producing Lab and Fast Track program and has helped develop over 25 feature films including Michael Almereyda’s Tesla, Lydia Dean Pilcher and Ginny Mohler’s Radium Girls, Thor Klein’s Adventures of a Mathematician, Jessica Oreck’s One Man Dies a Million Times, Michael Tyburski’s The Sound of Silence, Shawn Snyder’s To Dust, Logan Kibens and Sharon Greene’s Operator, Morten Tyldum’s The Imitation Game, and Matthew Brown’s The Man Who Knew Infinity. The Foundation has supported feature documentaries such as Picture a Scientist, Coded Bias, In Silico, Oliver Sacks: His Own Life, The Bit Player, Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story, Particle Fever, and Jacques Perrin’s Oceans. The Foundation’s book program includes support for Margot Lee Shetterly’s Hidden Figures, which became the highest grossing Oscar-nominated film of 2017 and a social and cultural milestone.
For more information about the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, please visit www.sloan.org or follow the Foundation at @SloanPublic on Twitter and Facebook.

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