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SEVEN FILMMAKERS SELECTED FOR THE 2023 FILM INDEPENDENT PRODUCING LAB

Film Independent and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to award
Distribution Grant and annual Producers Grant, totaling $80,000

LOS ANGELES (October 11, 2023) — Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Spirit Awards, announced today the producers selected for its annual Producing Lab, now in its twenty-third year. This intensive program is designed to help creative, independent producers 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 lead creative advisor is Rebecca Green and guest speakers include Jason Michael Berman, Apoorva Charan, Marissa Frobes, Nate Kamiya, Kristen Konvitz, Stephen Lee, Alex Lo, Lauren Mann, Jack Pearkes, Shira Rockowitz, Anita Surendran, Sheila Hanahan Taylor, Jeanette Volturno, Lena Vurma and Maria Zuckerman.

“We’re delighted to shepherd this group of devoted creative producers through the Producing Lab and give them a dedicated space to further their projects and careers. We’re thrilled to have feature films both in development and post-production in the program this year and be able to support producers at various stages of the filmmaking process,” said Dea Vazquez, Associate Director of Fiction Programs.

Film Independent is awarding a total of $80,000 across two grants – the Sloan Producers Grant and Sloan Distribution Grant – to outstanding projects whose screenplays integrate science or technology themes and characters into dramatic stories. The Grants are part of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation’s nationwide film program to advance public understanding of science and technology.

“We are pleased to partner with Film Independent for our second decade and to support two outstanding projects, Smoke Country and Radical, the former a screenplay about the impact of climate change on a working-class family in rural Australia and the latter an inspiring true story about a maverick teacher who transforms the lives of underprivileged students in Mexico,” said Doron Weber, Vice President and Program Director at the Sloan Foundation.
The annual Sloan Producers Grant, a $30,000 grant, was awarded to producer Fiona Hardingham, for her feature film *Smoke Country*.

"I'm deeply appreciative of the Sloan Foundation for recognizing me with this grant and for their dedication to bringing science-themed narratives to the screen," said Fiona Hardingham. "Scientific progress is imperative to the survival of our civilization in an increasingly warming climate. Bridging science and humanity, our film *Smoke Country* interweaves the climate crisis with an intimate portrait of a family displaced by wildfires. With the climate crisis looming large, telling this story now is not only essential but a genuine effort to inspire actionable change. Thank you Film Independent and the Sloan Foundation for your generous support!"

The $50,000 Sloan Distribution Grant was awarded to *Radical* written and directed by Christopher Zalla and produced by Benjamin Odell, Joshua Davis and Eugenio Derbez. The film stars Eugenio Derbez, Daniel Haddad, Jennifer Trejo and Mia Fernanda Soli and will be released in November 2023. This grant is awarded to one eligible finished film entering the distribution phase.

"We are truly grateful to Film Independent and the Sloan Foundation for supporting *Radical* with this grant to amplify the marketing efforts for the film," said Ben Odell. "It's a vital story about how we educate our children and heroes who are the teachers that dedicate their lives to making a difference."

Over the last twenty-three years, the Film Independent Producing Lab has developed films such as Elegance Bratton’s *The Inspection*, produced by Chester Algernal Gordon, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and the New York Film Festival and was released by A24; Saim Sadiq’s *Cannes Un Certain Regard and Spirit Award* winner *Joyland*, produced by Apoorva Charan; Chloé Zhao’s Spirit Award-nominated debut *Songs My Brothers Taught Me*, produced by Angela C. Lee and Mollye Asher; Monica Sorelle’s *Mountains*, produced by Robert Colom, which premiered at Tribeca and was awarded U.S. Narrative Feature Special Jury Mention and had its international premiere at the Toronto Film Festival. In addition, the Producing Lab has supported some of the film industry’s most exciting independent talent, including Lizzie Shapiro (*Shiva Baby*), Lena Vurma (*Adventures of a Mathematician*) and Avril Speaks (*Jinn*).

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); Episodic Directing Intensive, Fast Track finance market and Fiscal Sponsorship, as well as through Grants and Awards that 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 artistdevelopment@filmindependent.org. Additional information and an application form can be found at filmindependent.org.

The 2023 Producing Lab is supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. Additional support is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts. All Producing Lab Fellows are being provided with complimentary access to Studio System to assist in their project development.

The 2023 Producing Lab filmmakers and projects are:

**AmeriGirl**  
Producers: Camila Grimaldi, Farah Jabir  
Stage: Development  
Logline: At Camp AmeriGirl, 12-year-old Aaliyah has one goal: to make a friend. When the cooler Brown girl arrives, Aaliyah will do anything to fit in.


**Gone by Morning**
Producer: Rob Cristiano
Stage: Development
Logline: Lucy, a free-spirited dancer and single mother, returns to the family ranch she desperately wanted to escape and realizes that her life might be there.

**In the Summers**
Producer: Daniel Tantalean
Stage: Post-Production
Logline: Culminating over four summer vignettes, Latine sisters visit their father in an expansive story exploring the growing pains of childhood to the reflections of adulthood.

**Not My Name**
Producer: Valeria Contreras
Stage: Development
Logline: 1996 – When a Colombian family must travel on a perilous rural road with fake identities, fear exposes their child to the reality of war.

**Obsolete**
Producer: Annalisa Shoemaker
Stage: Development
Logline: When retired programmer Eleanor is kidnapped for a bank heist, her captors soon realize their elderly hostage may be more in control than they are.

**Smoke Country**
Producer: Fiona Hardingham
Stage: Development
Logline: After a wildfire destroys their Australian bee farm, 12-year-old Mikey battles to unite her family amidst environmental fallout while her father turns to crime.

**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 a dozen leading film schools and established annual awards in screenwriting and film production. The Foundation also supports screenplay development programs with the Sundance Institute, SFFILM, Film Independent, The Black List, the Athena Film Festival, and the Toronto International Film Festival. The Sloan Film Program has supported over 800 film projects and has helped develop over 30 feature films, including *Tesla*, *Radium Girls*, *Adventures of a Mathematician*, *One Man Dies a Million Times*, *The Sound of Silence*, *To Dust*, *Operator*, *The Imitation Game*, and *The Man Who Knew Infinity*. The Foundation has supported feature documentaries such as *Vishniac*, *Join or Die*, Werner Herzog’s *Theater of Thought*, David France’s *How to Survive a Pandemic*, *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*. It has also given early award recognition to stand out films such as *The Pod Generation*, *BlackBerry*, *Don’t Look Up*, *After Yang*, *Linoleum*, *Son of Monarchs*, *Ammonite*, *The Aeronauts*, *Searching*, *The Martian*, *First Man* and *Hidden Figures*.

that became the highest grossing Oscar-nominated film of 2017 and Kai Bird & Martin Sherwin’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *American Prometheus*, adapted for the screen in Christopher Nolan’s hit film *Oppenheimer*.

For more information about the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, visit sloan.org or follow the Foundation on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook at @SloanPublic.

**ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT**

For over 40 years, Film Independent has helped filmmakers get their projects made and seen. The nonprofit organization's core mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling in all its forms, and to foster a culture of inclusion. We support a global community of artists and audiences who embody diversity, innovation, curiosity and uniqueness of vision.

In addition to producing the [Film Independent Spirit Awards](https://www.filmindependent.org/spirit-awards), the organization supports creative professionals with [Artist Development](https://www.filmindependent.org/artist-development) programs, grants and labs. Signature mentorship program [Project Involve](https://www.filmindependent.org/project-involve) fosters the careers of talented filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Education events and workshops equip filmmakers of all ages and experience levels with tools and resources. [Global Media Makers](https://www.filmindependent.org/global-media-makers), a cultural exchange program produced in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, provides career-building opportunities for international film professionals. And year-round screening series [Film Independent Presents](https://www.filmindependent.org/film-independent-presents) offers a robust program of unique cinematic experiences, including screenings, conversations, Live Reads and Bring the Noise musical events.

For more information or to become a Member, visit [filmindependent.org](https://www.filmindependent.org).