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FILM INDEPENDENT ANNOUNCES EPISODIC LAB PARTICIPANTS

Netflix Returns as Founding Sponsor

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Awards \$20,000 Grant

MPAC Hollywood Bureau Awards \$10,000 Grant

LOS ANGELES (February 14, 2024) - Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization that produces the Film Independent Spirit Awards, announced today the eight writers selected for the seventh edition of its Episodic Lab. Desdemona Chiang, Giovanni Maldonado Chinae, Robert Cohen, Catherine Durickas, Myles Hawthorne, Azza Malik, Robert ToTeras and Ioana Uricaru were chosen for the intensive program, designed to provide individualized story and career development for writers with original pilots for television.

This year's Episodic Lab is a two-week in-person program that helps to further the careers of its Fellows by introducing them to industry veterans who offer guidance on both the craft and business of writing episodic content. Through personalized feedback from experienced showrunners, creative producers and executives, Fellows will gain the tools needed to revise and refine their pilots and navigate a changing industry landscape. A final networking and pitch event will offer Fellows the opportunity to introduce themselves and their work to studio and network executives.

"We're delighted to support a group of innovative and authentic writers telling stories that are both entertaining and impactful. It's an honor to be able to nurture their artistic voices and careers in the Episodic Lab," said Dea Vazquez, Associate Director of Fiction Programs.

The Episodic Lab Creative Advisors and Guest Speakers include Wendy Calhoun, Linda Yvette Chávez, KD Dávila, Kelly Kulchak, Gina Kwon, Justin S. Lee, Missy Laney, Jennifer Levine, Glen Mazzara, Dani Melia, Marc Mounier, Van B. Nguyen, James Ponsoldt, Robbie Pickering, Gina Reyes, Erica Rosbe, Ellen Shanman, Jiah Shin, McKenna Stephens and Ligiah Villalobos.

This year's Fellows are supported by Netflix and its Fund for Creative Equity. As a returning sponsor, Netflix will pair each Fellow with an executive to serve as their Industry Advisor, providing them with opportunities to learn from award-winning creative executives helming Netflix films and series. This access is a crucial step in helping the Fellows move forward in their careers.

Film Independent is excited to award this year's Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Grant to Robert Cohen and Ioana Uricaru, who will receive a \$20,000 grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to support the development of

their pilot, *Overcast*, through the Episodic Lab. Awarded to outstanding writers whose screenplays integrate science or technology themes and characters into dramatic stories, the Sloan Episodic Lab Grant is part of the Foundation's nationwide film program to advance public understanding of science and technology. Robert Cohen and Ioana Uricaru write, "We are honored and excited to receive the support and recognition of the Alfred P. Sloan development grant. Our series *Overcast* delves into the heart of difficult questions about science, morality and politics, with a story set in the American Deep South of the 60s, as it became the unlikely epicenter of rocket science. The Foundation's support is essential for telling this story, and it will be instrumental in ensuring a fascinating piece of American and science history receives the visibility it deserves."

Film Independent is also excited to award the MPAC Hollywood Bureau Writing Fellowship Grant to Azza Malik who will receive a \$10,000 grant from the MPAC Hollywood Bureau for her pilot, *Dear Azza*. The MPAC Hollywood Bureau works in the entertainment industry to elevate stories by and about Muslims. Azza Malik writes, "I'm honored to be the recipient of the MPAC Grant for *Dear Azza*. This project is a love letter to Sudan as she's fallen into war. It is the story of three Sudanese sisters who are at war with themselves as well as everything they once knew. Grateful for MPAC's support in championing a Sudanese story; global awareness of our identity is more crucial now than ever before."

Past Episodic Lab Fellows include April Shih, who has written on FX's *Fargo*, *Dave*, *Mrs. America*, and *You're the Worst* and struck an overall deal at FX Productions; Kimi Lee, who wrote on Amazon's *Expats*, Apple's *The Morning Show*, and sold her show *Sugar* in a four-way bidding war to Hulu; Henry "Hank" Jones, who has written on ABC's *Will Trent* and Apple's *Truth Be Told*; KD Dávila, who has written on CBS' *Salvation* and Freeform's *Motherland: Fort Salem*; Stephanie Adams-Santos, who has written on The CW's *Two Sentence Horror Stories*; and Van B. Nguyen who is a writer on CBS' *Blue Bloods*.

Film Independent Artist Development programs promote unique independent voices by helping filmmakers create and advance new work through Project Involve, Documentary Producing Lab, Documentary Story Lab, Episodic Lab, Episodic Directing Intensive, Screenwriting Lab, Producing Lab, 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 can be found at filmindependent.org.

The Film Independent Episodic Lab is supported by Netflix, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the MPAC Hollywood Bureau.

The Episodic Lab participants and their projects are:

Beige Is Not Dead

Writer: **Catherine Durickas**

Logline: In 2074, when a boring-ass introvert briefly dies only to find out she's been permanently deleted by the system, she delves into the underground society to regain her existence aided by her fuck-up guardian robot.

Dear Azza

Writer: **Azza Malik**

MPAC Hollywood Bureau Writing Fellowship Awardee

Logline: Three Sudanese sisters with opposing values try to navigate faith, love lives, and their place in Khartoum's tight-knit society.

Jourdain

Writer: **Robert ToTeras**

Logline: In Reconstruction-era New Orleans, one of America's first Black detectives battles widespread prejudice, police corruption and mistrust from his own community, while being tasked with solving America's first sensationalist child-abduction.

Overcast

Writers: **Robert Cohen, Ioana Uricaru**

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Fellowship Awardee

Logline: A multi-episode psycho-political thriller set in the early days of the American space program, focusing on the German scientists who worked for the Nazis before being brought to the US, and asking the question: how much of the past can we jettison along the way, as we try to attain lift-off to the future?

The Machetero

Writers: **Myles Hawthorne, Giovanni Maldonado Chinea**

Logline: At the turn of the 20th Century, a Puerto Rican freedom fighter turned machete-wielding assassin and his fiery, pre-teen daughter wander lawless roads in search of the American who destroyed their lives.

ZHIZHA! (紙紮!)

Writer: **Desdemona Chiang**

Logline: In the wake of their mother's death, two sisters struggle to keep their relationship and family business – the last Taoist funeral paper effigy maker in Southern California – alive.

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 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 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 *Oppenheimer*, *Love Me*, *BlackBerry*, *The Pod Generation*, *Don't Look Up*, *After Yang*, *Linoleum*, *Son of Monarchs*, *Ammonite*, *The Aeronauts*, *Searching*, *The Martian*, *First Man* and *Hidden Figures*.

The Foundation's book program includes early support for *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*, the best-selling book 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 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](#), the organization supports creative professionals with [Artist Development](#) programs, grants and labs. Signature mentorship program [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](#), 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](#) 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.

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