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SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES TWELVE FEATURE FILM PROJECTS FOR JANUARY SCREENWRITERS LAB

Bold Group of Storytellers Embrace the Personal and the Political, Humor and Pathos,
Documentary and Magical Realism

Los Angeles, CA— Sundance Institute has selected twelve projects for the annual January Screenwriters Lab, to be held January 9-14, 2009 at the Sundance Resort in Utah. The Screenwriters Lab is a five-day writer's workshop that gives independent screenwriters the opportunity to work intensively on their feature film scripts with the support of established writers in an environment that encourages innovation and creative risk-taking. This year's Fellows are a varied and diverse group, with filmmakers from the U.S., the Middle East, India, Latin America, and Europe.

The screenplays selected for the Lab represent a broad spectrum of genre and subject matter, from the moving tale of two Muslim brothers confronting prejudice in post 9/11 London; to stories that embrace magical realism in locales as far-ranging as India and New Orleans; to the outrageous and darkly comic account of a Boy Scout trip gone horribly and hysterically wrong. The common thread that runs among the projects, from autobiographical stories to a hybrid documentary/fiction film examining Allen Ginsberg's poem HOWL, is authenticity of voice and distinctive, singular storytelling.

The projects selected for the **2009 January Screenwriters Lab** are:

- **BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD**/Benh Zeitlin (co-writer/director) and Lucy Alibar (co-writer), *U.S.A.*
- **FUGA MORTIS**/Kirill Mikhanovsky (writer/director), *U.S.A./Russia*
- **HOWL**/Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman (co-writers/co-directors), *U.S.A.*
- **I'M DOWN** /Mishna Wolff (writer), *U.S.A.*
- **MY BROTHER THE DEVIL**/Sally El Hosaini (co-writer/director), *U.K./Egypt*
- **PORFIRIO**/Alejandro Landes (writer/director), *Brazil/Ecuador*
- **ON THE ICE**/Andrew Okpeaha MacLean (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **ON SPEAKING TERMS**/Carlos Contreras (writer), *Mexico*
- **SCOUTMASTERS**/Todd Rohal (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **THE STORY OF RAM**/Ritesh Batra (writer/director), *U.S.A./India*
- **UNTITLED ELGIN JAMES PROJECT** /Elgin James (writer), *U.S.A.*
- **ZEROES AND ONES**/Avi Zev Weider (writer/director), *U.S.A.*

"We are pleased to bring together such a diverse and singular group of writers and writer/ directors for the January Screenwriters Lab," said Michelle Satter, Director of the Feature Film Program. " With humor, irony, pathos, and a fierce determination to tell their stories, each project is rooted in the writer's passionate desire to fully engage in the complicated, ever-changing world we live in. This year, our American writers will be joined by writers from India, Mexico, Ecuador, and the UK, as we continue our commitment to the work of international writers."

The fellows will work with a distinguished group of creative advisors, including Lab Artistic Director Scott Frank, Marcos Bernstein, Naomi Foner, Nelson George, Michael Goldenberg, Deena Goldstone, Erik Jendresen, Etgar Keret, Kasi Lemmons, Doug McGrath, Walter Mosley, Ron Nyswaner, Tom Rickman, Susan Shilliday, Zach Sklar, Dana Stevens and Bill Wheeler.

The projects selected for the upcoming Screenwriters Lab join an impressive list of Feature Film Program-supported films, including 10 films which will screen at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. They include the Dramatic Competition selections *Sin Nombre*, written and directed by Cary Fukunaga, *Cold Souls*, written and directed by Sophie Barthes, *Don't Let me Drown*, co-written by Cruz Angeles and Maria Topete and directed by Cruz Angeles, and *Amreeka*, directed by Cherien Dabis; the World Cinema Competition selections *Zion and His Brother*, written and directed by Eran Merav, *Victoria Day*, written and directed by David Bezmozgis, and *The Clone Returns*, written and directed by Kanji Nakajima; and the Spectrum selections *Lymelife*, co-written by Derick and Steven Martini and directed by Derick Martini, *Pomegranates and Myrrh*, written and directed by Najwa Najjar, and *Barking Water*, written and directed by Sterlin Harjo.

2009 January Screenwriters Lab Fellows and Projects:

Benh Zeitlin (co-writer/director) and **Lucy Alibar** (co-writer)/**BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD** (U.S.A.): In this epic comedy set on the crumbling grounds of the Louisiana delta, a 10-year-old girl desperately tries to hold on to whatever love is left for her despite the imminent death of her father and in defiance of the impending Apocalypse.

Raised by two folklorists in Queens, New York, Benh Zeitlin is a director, animator, and composer for the Court13 coterie. He has directed the award-winning shorts *Egg*, *Origins of Electricity*, *I Get Wet*, and *Glory at Sea*. Zeitlin currently resides in New Orleans, where he is developing two feature films and transforming *Glory at Sea*'s ship, the U.S.S Jimmy Lee, into a rolling, popcorn-making, movie projector cum Mardi Gras float in preparation for a *Glory at Sea* American tour.

Lucy Alibar is a playwright and actress born and raised in Florida. Alibar's plays have been performed around the world, and include *Juicy and Delicious*, *A Friend of Dorothy*, *Gorgeous Raptors*, *Mommy Says I'm Pretty on the Insides*, and *Home Baking Made Easy*, a musical about sex and southern food. She is an Affiliated Artist of New Georges, and works with SLAM Theater and SLANT Theater Project.

Kirill Mikahnovsky (writer/director)/**FUGA MORTIS** (U.S.A./Russia): In modern-day Havana, a city where everything is for sale, an adolescent hustler is willing to beg, steal, or do just about anything else to get his sister off the streets.

Born in Moscow, Kirill Mikhanovsky moved to the United States in his teens. He received an MFA from the NYU Graduate Film Program and has written and directed four short films. Mikhanovsky's first feature, *Sonhos de Peixe* (*Fish Dreams*), which features a non-professional cast and was shot in a small Brazilian fishing village, premiered in Critics Week at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, where it won the Prix Regards Jeune.

Rob Epstein and **Jeffrey Friedman** (co-writers/co-directors)/**HOWL** (U.S.A.): A hybrid feature about the creation of the ground-breaking poem by Allen Ginsberg and the resulting 1957 obscenity trial—an opening volley in the coming "culture wars."

Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman have been working as a filmmaking team for 20 years. As writer/directors their films include *Common Threads: Stories from the Quilt* (Academy Award, 1990); *Where Are We?* (Sundance Film Festival, 1992); *The Celluloid Closet* (Sundance award winner, 1995, Emmy Award for Directing); and *Paragraph 175* (Sundance 2000 Directing Award). Rob Epstein's previous films include the Oscar-winning *The Times of Harvey Milk*, which won a Special Jury Award at the first Sundance Film Festival, and *World is Out*. *Howl* marks their movement towards incorporating elements of mixed media and narrative film into their work.

Mishna Wolff (writer)/**I'M DOWN** (U.S.A.): Adapted from Wolff's memoir, I'M DOWN tells the story of a white girl living in a black community who strives to be cool enough to hang with her white but very "down" father.

Originally from Seattle, Mishna Wolff now splits her time between New York and Los Angeles. Her first foray into writing was at age 20 when she wrote a humor piece for *BlackBook Magazine* about models-turned-actresses. For the next several years, she took the stage at the old Luna Lounge, Stella and Upright Citizens Brigade, honing her comedic voice and performing personal essays. Her memoir, I'M DOWN, comes out in hardcover in the spring of 2009 through St. Martin's Press.

Sally El Hosaini (writer/director)/**MY BROTHER THE DEVIL** (*U.K./Egypt*): Two brothers must face their prejudices head on if they are to survive the perils of being young, Arab, British, and Muslim on the streets of gangland, post-9/11 London.

Sally El Hosaini is an Egyptian-Welsh writer/director based in London. After making award-winning documentaries in Belgium, Yemen, and Iraq, she worked as a production coordinator on features, and as a script editor in television drama. Although El Hosaini has written and directed several short films, one of which won a regional BAFTA in 2008, *MY BROTHER THE DEVIL* is her first feature.

Alejandro Landes (writer/director)/**PORFIRIO** (*Brazil/Ecuador*): After years of futile waiting for his pension, a Colombian man confined to a wheelchair hijacks a plane with his unwitting teenage son in an effort to draw the attention of the President to his plight.

Alejandro Landes studied economics at Brown University. After a stint writing for a U.S. newspaper and a television show, he directed the feature documentary *Cocalero*, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. He is currently in residence at the Cannes Film Festival Cinefondation.

Andrew Okpeaha MacLean (writer/director)/**ON THE ICE** (*U.S.A.*): In the remote arctic village of Barrow, Alaska, a young Iñiut man tries to help his best friend get away with a murder.

Andrew Okpeaha MacLean is an Iñupiaq filmmaker born and raised in Alaska, currently living in New York City. His most recent film, *Sikumi (On The Ice)*, premiered at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Jury Prize in Short Filmmaking. MacLean was recently named a 2008 United States Artists Rasmuson Fellow.

Carlos Contreras (writer/director)/**ON SPEAKING TERMS** (*Mexico*): The existence of a rare indigenous language is threatened with extinction when the last two practitioners have a fight and refuse to speak to one another.

While working in advertising in 1998, Carlos Contreras began to write short films for his brother, director Ernesto Contreras. With *Blue Eyelids*, their first feature film, Contreras won the Best Ibero-American Script Award at the XXII Guadalajara Film Festival. The movie participated in the 46th International Critic's Week, the 60th Cannes Film Festival, the San Sebastian Film Festival, and the 2008 Sundance Film Festival, where it won a Special Jury Award. Contreras has twice been selected for the Binger Film Lab in Amsterdam.

Todd Rohal (writer/director)/**SCOUTMASTERS** (*U.S.A.*): When a well-meaning but immature Scouting Leader kidnaps his adopted Sudanese nephew to indoctrinate him into the joys of scouting, his good intentions are quickly thwarted as he leads his troop down a darkly comic road of chaos, death, and destruction.

Todd Rohal is the writer and director of the feature film *The Guatemalan Handshake*, which was self-distributed theatrically in 26 cities around the world with the film's single 35mm print. He directed the short films *The Sweaty Salesman* and *Sins of the Nude* starring Danny McBride, co-created a series of music videos with *The American Astronaut* frontman Cory McAbee, and directed an award-winning music video for the band Ola Podrida.

Ritesh Batra (writer/director)/**THE STORY OF RAM** (*U.S.A./India*): A chance encounter over the radio waves leads to an extraordinary friendship between the Prime Minister of India and an ordinary tea vendor.

Born and raised in Bombay, India, Ritesh Joginder Batra is now based in New York and attends NYU. In 2006 he attended the MAISHA Film Lab. Batra recently worked on a feature screenplay for Santosh Sivan and is currently writing a feature on commission for an Indian production house. In previous lives, he has worked as a management consultant, a disaster relief worker and as a programmer for the Silk Screen Film Festival.

Elgin James (writer)/**UNTITLED ELGIN JAMES PROJECT**, (*U.S.A.*): A homeless teenager on the streets of Boston gathers a crew of throw-away kids to battle drug dealers and inner city gangs with a pact to help the less fortunate. When he is betrayed by someone close to him, he's left with an explosive choice.

As a homeless teenager, Elgin James founded a national street gang that robbed drug dealers to give money to charity. In 2006, after a life spent torn between violence and altruism, James crawled out of the criminal lifestyle

and settled in Los Angeles. The following year, he shot a short film version of *Goodnight Moon*, which ultimately sold to THINKFilm.

Avi Zev Weider (writer/director)/**ZEROES AND ONES (U.S.A)**: In creating an intelligent machine out of discarded computer parts, a young woman completes her grandmother's fractured story of survival at Auschwitz and emerges from her own secluded life.

A lifelong New Yorker, Avi Zev Weider's award-winning short film, *I Remember*, premiered at the 1998 Sundance Film Festival. He is also at work on a documentary feature about our human relationship to technology, *Welcome to the Machine*. With his company, Loop Filmworks, Weider has produced over 50 commercials and network spots for clients like HBO, Disney, Nickelodeon, Bravo, and the Sloan Group. He is the recipient of a 2008 New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) fellowship in screenwriting.

Since 1981, the **Sundance Institute Feature Film Program** (FFP) has supported more than 450 independent filmmakers whose distinctive, singular work has engaged audiences worldwide. Program staff fully embrace the unique vision of each filmmaker, encouraging a rigorous creative process with a focus on original and deeply personal storytelling. Each year, up to 25 emerging filmmakers from the U.S. and around the world participate in a year-round continuum of support which can include the Screenwriters and Directors Labs, Composers Lab, Independent Producers Conference, ongoing creative and strategic advice, significant production and post-production resources, a rough-cut screening initiative, a Screenplay Reading Series, and direct financial support through project-specific grants and artist fellowships. In many cases, the Institute has helped the Program's fellows attach producers and talent, secure financing, and assemble other significant resources to move their projects toward production and presentation. In 2008 the FFP launched the Creative Producing Initiative, a year-long Fellowship program for emerging independent producers, which will include a Creative Producing Lab, industry mentorship, and financial support.

Over its 27 year history, the program has supported an extensive list of significant independent films including Alex Rivera's *Sleep Dealer*, Fernando Eimbcke's *Lake Tahoe*, Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden's *Half Nelson*, Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now*, Debra Granik's *Down to the Bone*, Ira Sachs' *Forty Shades of Blue*, Josh Marston's *Maria Full of Grace*, Peter Sollett's *Raising Victor Vargas*, John Cameron Mitchell's *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, Darren Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream*, Kimberly Peirce's *Boys Don't Cry*, Tony Bui's *Three Seasons*, Walter Salles' *Central Station*, Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie's *Smoke Signals*, Paul Thomas Anderson's *Hard Eight*, Tamara Jenkins' *Slums of Beverly Hills*, and Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*.

Sundance Institute

Founded by Robert Redford in 1981, Sundance Institute is a not-for-profit organization that fosters the development of original storytelling in film and theatre, and presents the annual Sundance Film Festival. Internationally recognized for its artistic development programs for directors, screenwriters, producers, film composers, playwrights and theatre artists, Sundance Institute has nurtured such projects as *Angels in America*, *Spring Awakening*, *Boys Don't Cry* and *Born into Brothels*. www.sundance.org

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