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SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES 14 PROJECTS FOR 2006 JUNE DIRECTORS AND SCREENWRITERS LABS

25TH LAB INCLUDES NEW WORK FROM U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL ARTISTS

Los Angeles, CA – Sundance Institute, which is celebrating its 25th Anniversary, has announced the selection of 14 projects for the annual June Directors and Screenwriters Labs, which will take place at the Sundance Resort in Utah from May 29 – June 29 2006. These Labs are the core components of the Sundance Feature Film Program, Sundance Institute's founding program. Originally conceived to support emerging American independent directors and screenwriters, the Labs have evolved to include emerging film artists from around the world, providing an opportunity for these Lab fellows to develop distinctive new work under the guidance of experienced mentors and Creative Advisors in an environment that encourages innovation, collaboration, and risk-taking.

The projects and participants selected to participate in the **2006 June Directors Lab** from May 29-June 24 are:

- **A BREATH AWAY**/Kit Hui (writer/director), *U.S.A./China*
- **FREE IN DEED**/Jake Mahaffy (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **MY HABIBI**/Kirsten Johnson (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **SIN NOMBRE**/Cary Fukunaga (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **THE STRENGTH OF WATER**/Armagan Ballantyne (director) and Briar Grace-Smith (writer), *New Zealand*
- **TREELESS MOUNTAIN**/So Yong Kim (writer/director), *U.S.A./Korea*
- **UNCLOUDY DAY**/Milford Thomas (co-writer/director) and Kristin Gorell (co-writer), *U.S.A.*
- **YELLING TO THE SKY**/Victoria Mahoney (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **ZION AND HIS BROTHER**/Eran Merav (writer/director), *Israel*

These Fellows will be joined at the **2006 June Screenwriters Lab from June 24-29** by the following participants and projects:

- **FARMING**/Adewale Akinuoye-Agbaje (writer/director), *England/Nigeria*
- **HAY FEVER**/Xiaolu Guo (writer/director), *China/England*
- **JAMES DEAN AND ME**/Sameh Zoabi (writer/director), *Palestinian/U.S.A.*
- **THE LEFT-HANDED PATH**/Blackhorse Lowe (writer/director), *U.S.A.*
- **VICTORIA DAY**/David Bezmozgis (writer/director), *Canada*

Over the course of the Directors Lab, the selected nine Fellows work with the Creative Advisors, who are among the most noted artists and professionals from the film world, and professional production crews, shooting and editing key scenes from their

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scripts. Through this intense, hands-on process, the Fellows push the boundaries and core ideas of their scripts, re-working and refining their material in an atmosphere where experimentation is encouraged. Directors Lab Fellows also join in the week-long Screenwriters Lab with five additional Screenwriter Fellows to participate in individualized sessions under the guidance of Creative Advisors, who are among the most reputable and experienced screenwriters in the field.

“We have selected a group of projects which explore the universality of human experience with humor, grace, and authenticity. Depicting worlds as varied as the US/Mexico border and a Maori village in rural New Zealand, these projects reflect the filmmakers’ commitment to writing bold, timely, and personal stories,” said Michelle Satter, Director, Sundance Institute Feature Film Program. “Over the 25 years of the Feature Film Program, we have remained true to the original mission of the Labs – to support new and emerging directors and screenwriters and to encourage original voices and storytelling. This year’s group exemplifies the evolution of the Lab and the ever increasing international aspect of the Feature Film Program and all of Sundance Institute’s programs.”

Gyula Gazdag returns for his 10th year as Artistic Director for the Directors Lab, and Todd Graff again returns as Artistic Director for the Screenwriters Lab. This year’s other Creative Advisors include: Allison Anders, Henry Bean, Affonso Beato, Walter Bernstein, Antonia Bird, Robert Caswell, Joan Darling, Caleb Deschanel, D.V. DeVincentis, Ziad Douieri, Stuart Dryburgh, Anthony Drazan, Atom Egoyan, Suzy Elmiger, Rodrigo Garcia, John Gatins, Carlin Glynn, Keith Gordon, Stephen Gyllenhaal, Elizabeth Kling, Ellen Kuras, Malia Scotch Marmo, Peter Medak, Harold Ramis, Robert Redford, Howard Rodman, Susan Shilliday, Stewart Stern, Joan Tewkesbury, Stanley Tucci, Tyger Williams, Erin Cressida Wilson, Gary Winick, and Doug Wright.

“The Creative Advisors are the key to the success of the Labs,” explained Satter. “It is their passion for storytelling and their generosity with the filmmakers that creates the truly valuable exchange at the labs. The time that they dedicate to mentoring and providing guidance is an invaluable contribution to the artistic development of the Lab participants.”

The participants and projects selected for the **2006 June Directors Lab** are:

A BREATH AWAY/Kit Hui (writer/director), *U.S.A./China*

As a typhoon approaches Hong Kong, the residents of a high-rise apartment explore their need for human connection, family, and cultural identity in their increasingly isolated worlds.

Born and raised in Hong Kong, **Kit Hui** immigrated to the United States at age 16. She received her MFA from Columbia University’s Graduate Film Program. Her short film *MISSING* screened at the 2005 Tribeca Film Festival and the 2005 Cannes Film Festival, and she was recently selected to participate in the 2006 Hong Kong Asian Financing Film Forum (HAF) and the Cannes Résidence du Festival de Cannes with *A BREATH AWAY*.

FREE IN DEED/Jake Mahaffy (writer/director), *U.S.A.*

In order to tend for his own ill son, an intensely religious man secretly returns to his hometown where, years ago, his attempted miracle became a criminal act. With complexity and emotional power, *FREE IN DEED* explores faith and redemption in rural America. Born in Ohio and currently residing in southwest Virginia, **Jake Mahaffy** has made a handful of short films and the feature-length *WAR*, which screened in the Frontier section of the 2004 Sundance Film Festival. Mahaffy studied filmmaking in Russia and co-founded the Handcranked Film collaborative in Boston in 2001. Mahaffy has received a grant from Creative Capital and is the recipient of Sundance Institute’s inaugural Lynn Auerbach Screenwriting Fellowship for *FREE IN DEED*.

MY HABIBI/Kirsten Johnson (writer/director), *U.S.A.* – In post-9/11 New York, a Moroccan immigrant finds his reckless past catching up with him just as he is falling in love with an American photographer, forcing each of them to choose whom they must betray.

Kirsten Johnson’s most recent film, *DEADLINE*, (co-directed with Katy Chevigny), premiered at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, was broadcast on NBC, and is the winner of a Thurgood Marshall Award. Her cinematography is featured in *FARENHEIT 9/11*, the Academy Award-nominated *ASYLUM*, and the Sundance Film Festival documentaries *AMERICAN STANDOFF*, *TWO TOWNS OF JASPER*, and *DERRIDA*.

SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES 14 PROJECTS FOR 2006 JUNE DIRECTORS AND SCREENWRITERS LABS / page 3

SIN NOMBRE/Cary Fukunaga (writer/director), *U.S.A.*

During a brutal attempt to cross into the United States from Central America, two adolescents learn to survive by discovering their inner strength and the power of redemption.

Cary Fukunaga received his MFA from NYU's Graduate Film Program. His most recent short film, *VICTORIA PARA CHINO*, has won more than 19 international awards, including a Student Academy Award and Honorable Mentions from BAFTA and the Sundance Film Festival. *SIN NOMBRE* will mark his feature debut as a writer/director.

THE STRENGTH OF WATER/Armagan Ballantyne (director) and **Briar Grace-Smith** (writer), *New Zealand*

Set in a Maori village in rural New Zealand, *THE STRENGTH OF WATER* tells the magical story of Kimi Kaneha, a fat, fist-throwing, bed-wetting little boy who can't accept the death of his twin sister and will do anything to keep her spirit alive.

New Zealander **Armagan Ballantyne** studied film at FAMU, the film school in Prague, and received her Masters in directing at the Australian Film School in Sydney. Her award-winning short films have screened at festivals world wide, including Venice, London and Telluride. In 2004, Ballantyne spent six months at the Binger Institute in Amsterdam developing *THE STRENGTH OF WATER*.

Briar Grace-Smith, a Maori writer of Ngapuhi descent, was recognized with the Inaugural Laureate Award of the Arts Foundation of New Zealand in 2000. Her 1997 play *PURAPURAWHETU* won the Chapman Tripp Theatre Award for Best New Zealand Play. She has also received the Premiere Literature Award and the Bruce Mason Playwrights Award. *THE STRENGTH OF WATER* is her first feature film.

TREELESS MOUNTAIN/So Yong Kim (writer/director), *U.S.A./Korea*

Left by her mother in the care of their unsympathetic aunt, 5-year-old Ling must take care of her younger sister as they adjust to a harsher life in the rural countryside of South Korea.

So Yong Kim was born and raised in Pusan, Korea, then immigrated to the United States when she was 12. She studied painting, performance, and video art at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago where she earned her MFA. Her directorial debut *IN BETWEEN DAYS* premiered in the Dramatic Competition at the Sundance Film Festival, where it won a Special Jury Prize for independent vision, and screened at the Berlin Film Festival's International Forum in 2006, where the film won the FIPRESCI Prize.

UNCLOUDY DAY/Milford Thomas (co-writer/director) and **Kristin Gorell** (co-writer), *U.S.A.*

Told in the style of an early "talkie", *UNCLOUDY DAY* is the story of a dangerous animal spirit who wreaks havoc on the life of a simple Alabama man before she finds final peace through his handicapped daughter's magical vocal talent.

Milford Thomas was raised in the North Alabama foothills of the Appalachians and worked as a production coordinator for Japanese television in Atlanta and Japan. His award-winning first film, *CLAIRE*, is a silent featurette shot entirely on an antique 35 mm hand-crank camera which has opened several major international festivals.

Kristin Gorell received her MFA from Georgia State University and her MA in Japanese Studies from Stanford University. She has studied or presented work at the University of Colorado, Boulder, the Center for Puppetry Arts, and Second City, among others. Recently she was nominated for a show at the Museum of Modern Art in Berlin.

YELLING TO THE SKY/Victoria Mahoney (writer/director), *U.S.A.*

In a depraved New York neighborhood, the youngest of three mixed-race sisters navigates an identity between the known: a violent life of crime, and the unknown: a life of purpose and meaning.

Victoria Mahoney began her career working with Shelley Winters at Actors Studio New York. She produced *JESSE BORR*, a short film directed by Don Cheadle, and he returned the favor by starring in her short film *GRADUATION*. She is currently directing *RARE BIRDS*, a documentary about Amanda De Cadenet's photography. *YELLING TO THE SKY* marks her feature debut as a writer/director.

ZION AND HIS BROTHER/Eran Merav (writer/director), *Israel*

After his complicity in the tragic death of a classmate, 14-year-old Zion must choose between his domineering older brother and the possibility of a better life without him.

Eran Merav was born in Haifa, Israel, and graduated from the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem. His graduate short film *UNDERDOG* won First Prize at the 2002 Lodz International Film Festival, Best Short at the Jerusalem Film Festival, and a Special Mention at the Berlin Film Festival (Panorama).

The participants and projects joining them for the **2006 June Screenwriters Lab** are:

FARMING/Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje (writer/director), *England/Nigeria*

Abandoned by his parents, a young boy desperately searches for love and belonging within a brutal racist skinhead subculture where violence becomes his only friend. Born in England, **Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje** earned a masters degree in law from London's prestigious King's College before beginning his career as an actor in the film *CONGO*. Since then his credits have included the films *THE MUMMY RETURNS* and *THE BOURNE IDENTITY*, as well as regular roles on the television series *OZ* (for which he received two NAACP Award nominations) and *LOST*, on which he currently stars and which won a 2006 SAG Award for Best Ensemble Cast.

HAY FEVER/Xiaolu Guo (writer/director), *China/England* – Searching for adventure away from her rural Chinese village, Mei embarks on a life-changing journey of self-discovery which takes her to modern Beijing and later to England. Intimate and authentic, *HAY FEVER* chronicles the immense challenges and small victories of forging a new life in another culture, another world.

Xiaolu Guo lives in London and Beijing. She has directed several award-winning documentaries including *THE CONCRETE REVOLUTION*, which won the Grand Prix at the 2005 International Human Rights Film Festival. In addition, she is also a recognized author with six books published in China and three novels in English and other languages.

JAMES DEAN AND ME/Sameh Zoabi (writer/director), *Palestinian/U.S.A.*

In the days leading up to the 1967 Israeli-Arab war, a 14-year-old Palestinian boy discovers parallels between his own life and James Dean's and tries to emulate that rebel spirit as a way of coping with the turmoil and uncertainty that surrounds him.

Born in Iksal, a village near Nazareth, Israel, Palestinian filmmaker **Sameh Zoabi** holds degrees in Film Studies and English Literature from Tel Aviv University. He recently completed his MFA in Film Directing at Columbia's School of the Arts. His short film *BE QUIET* screened at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, and has won several awards, most recently at the 2006 Aspen Shortsfest.

THE LEFT-HANDED PATH/Blackhorse Lowe (writer/director), *U.S.A.*

In the late 1980's on the Navajo Reservation, a 16-year-old girl struggles with her faith, family, culture and devil-worshipping.

Blackhorse Lowe was born in New Mexico near the Navajo reservation. His short film *SHUSH* screened at the 2004 Sundance Film Festival, and his feature debut *5TH WORLD* was an official selection at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival. He currently works with the American Indian Film Institute teaching filmmaking to youth at various reservations across the country.

VICTORIA DAY/David Bezmozgis (writer/director), *Canada*

After his classmate and rival suddenly goes missing, a teenage boy's world is thrown into confusion as he must deal with familial pressure, a budding romance, and his secret belief that he is partly responsible for his friend's disappearance.

Born in Latvia, **David Bezmozgis** emigrated to Canada at a young age. He received his MFA in Production from USC's School of Cinema-Television, and his documentary *THE GENUINE ARTICLE: THE FIRST TRIAL* aired nationally in Canada. His collection of short stories, *Natasha and Other Stories*, received numerous prizes and his written work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *Zoetrope*, and has been anthologized in the 2005 and 2006 editions of *Best American Short Stories*.

Sundance Institute Feature Film Program receives major support from The Annenberg Foundation, The Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art, The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and The National Endowment for the Arts. Sundance Institute also gratefully acknowledges the generous assistance provided by Alice Arlen, John August, Directors Guild of America, The James Irvine Foundation, James V. Hart, HBO Films, The Hollywood Foreign Press Association, Richard LaGravenese, MTV Films, NHK, Panavision Digital Imaging, SAGIndie /Screen Actors Guild, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Writers Guild of America, west for their support of

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the 2006 Feature Film Labs. Sundance Institute's Feature Film Program would like to thank the following companies for their recent contributions: Panavision, Deluxe Laboratories, E-film, Kodak Entertainment Imaging, and Pacific Title and Art. Sundance Institute also recognizes the generous support provided by its Board of Trustees and by contributors to the Sundance Alumni and Filmmaker Fellowship Fund.

Sundance Institute Feature Film Program

The June Directors and Screenwriters Labs are part of the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program, a year-round Program dedicated to supporting artist development and the advancement of distinctive, singular independent projects. Each year, 20-25 emerging filmmakers from the U.S. and abroad participate in the Program which includes the Screenwriters and Directors Labs, Composers Lab, Independent Producers Conference, ongoing creative and strategic advice, significant post-production resources and direct artist support through project-specific mini-grants and fellowships. In many cases, the Institute has helped the Program's fellows attach producers and talent, securing financing and assemble other significant resources to move their projects toward production and presentation. The Feature Film Program also presents the Screenplay Reading Series, in Los Angeles and New York, which provides a valuable opportunity for Fellows to hear their scripts read aloud by a full selection of professionally-cast actors.

In the past several years, the Feature Film Program has supported the work of numerous emerging independent filmmakers, including Hilary Brougher's *STEPHANIE DALEY*, winner of the Waldo Salt Screenwriting Award at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival; Dito Montiel's *A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING YOUR SAINTS*, winner of the Directing Award and a Special Jury Prize for Best Ensemble Performance at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival; Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden's *HALF NELSON*, which premiered at the 2006 Sundance Film Festival, recently opened the New Directors/New Films festival at MoMA, and will be released theatrically by ThinkFilm later this year; and Hany Abu-Assad's *PARADISE NOW*, which won this year's Golden Globe for Best Foreign Film and was nominated for an Academy Award in the same category. These filmmakers are the latest in a long line of distinctive voices whose early work has been supported by the Feature Film Program, including Miranda July (*ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW*), Josh Marston (*MARIA FULL OF GRACE*), Debra Granik (*DOWN TO THE BONE*), Kimberly Peirce (*BOYS DON'T CRY*), Paul Thomas Anderson (*HARD EIGHT*), Tony Bui (*THREE SEASONS*), John Cameron Mitchell (*HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH*), Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie (*SMOKE SIGNALS*), Darren Aronofsky (*REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*), Tamara Jenkins (*SLUMS OF BEVERLY HILLS*), Nicole Holofcener (*WALKING AND TALKING*), Walter Salles (*CENTRAL STATION*), Quentin Tarantino (*RESERVOIR DOGS*) and many more.

A number of projects supported by the Feature Film Program are in various stages of production, including three which will premiere at this year's Cannes Film Festival: *RED ROAD*, written and directed by U.K. native Andrea Arnold, last year's Academy Award winner for Best Narrative Short Film; and Catalin Mitulescu's *THE WAY I SPENT THE END OF THE WORLD* and Györgi Pálfi's *TAXIDERMIA*, both winners of the Sundance/NHK International Filmmakers Award. Other films in post-production include Ryan Eslinger's *WHEN A MAN FALLS IN THE FOREST*, starring Timothy Hutton, Sharon Stone, and Pruitt Taylor Vince; *EAGLE VS. SHARK*, written and directed by Academy Award-nominated Maori filmmaker Taika Waititi; Salvatore Stabile's *WHERE GOD LEFT HIS SHOES*, starring John Leguizamo; and David Kaplan's innovative animated take on the Cinderella story set in modern-day Chinatown, *YEAR OF THE FISH*. Projects in production or gearing up to shoot later this year include Alex Rivera's *THE SLEEP DEALER*, a ground-breaking immigrant story set in the not-too-distant future; *FOUR SHEETS TO THE WIND*, the debut feature from Native American director Sterlin Harjo; and Tanya Hamilton's *STRINGBEAN AND MARCUS*, to star Mos Def and Sophie Okonedo.

Sundance Institute

Dedicated year-round to the discovery and development of independent artists and audiences, Sundance Institute celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2006. Founded by Robert Redford in 1981, the Institute has grown into an internationally recognized resource for thousands of independent artists through its annual Film Festival and artistic development programs for fiction and nonfiction filmmakers, screenwriters, documentary film editors, composers, playwrights and theatre artists. The original values of independence, creative diversity, and discovery continue to define and guide the work of Sundance Institute, both with artists in the U.S. and, increasingly, with artists from other regions of the world. The Programs of Sundance Institute include the annual **Sundance Film Festival**, held in and around Park City, Utah each January. Widely considered the premier showcase for American and international independent film, the Festival has introduced American audiences to films ranging from *Reservoir Dogs* to *Whale Rider* and from *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* to *American Splendor*. Through year-round support and a series of creative Labs and fellowship opportunities, the Institute's **Feature Film Program** has supported nearly 200 feature films which represent the early work of leading independent filmmakers, including Miranda July's *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, Joshua Marston's *Maria Full of Grace*, and Walter Salles' *Central Station*. Documentaries ranging from Zana Briski and Ross Kaufman's *Born into Brothels* to Eugene Jarecki's *Why We*

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Fight are among the 339 films that have been supported by the **Sundance Institute Documentary Program** which offers a series of workshops in editing, storytelling, and scoring for documentary filmmakers from around the world and grants for nonfiction film projects from the Sundance Documentary Fund. Connecting filmmakers with musicians, the **Film Music Program**'s Composers Lab allows accomplished musicians to explore composing for film while introducing filmmakers to the importance of music in film. With a series of Labs and retreats that provide a creative environment in which to develop new work with dramaturgs and full casts, the **Sundance Institute Theatre Program** has supported the development of more than 200 plays, including Doug Wright's *I Am My Own Wife*, and Adam Guettel and Craig Lucas' *The Light in the Piazza*. The **Native American Initiative** facilitates the participation of Native and Indigenous artists in the Institute's artistic development programs and the Sundance Film Festival. The Institute also maintains **The Sundance Collection at UCLA**, a unique archive of independent film.

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