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SUNDANCE INSTITUTE NAMES 2009 NATIVE FILMMAKING FELLOWS

FOUR NATIVE FILMMAKERS TO RECEIVE FORD FOUNDATION FILM FELLOWSHIPS: ATTEND SUNDANCE LAB ON HOMELANDS OF MESCALERO APACHE TRIBE, RECEIVE YEAR-ROUND SUPPORT AND MENTORING

Allison Anders, Sterlin Harjo, Kasi Lemmons, and Merata Mita to Serve as Advisors

Los Angeles, CA – Sundance Institute today announced the four Fellows and projects selected for the 2009 Sundance Institute Ford Foundation Film Fellowship: **Sydney Freeland (Drunktown's Finest)**, **Adam Piron (The Last Thanksgiving)**, **Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson (Nanum Kigutinga (The Nanuk's Tooth))**, and **Brian Young (Walk in Beauty)**. Chosen from a pool of distinguished artists representing diverse Native communities and backgrounds, these fellows will participate in the Institute's Native Filmmakers Lab in Apache, New Mexico May 18-22, and attend various events at the 2010 Sundance Film Festival in Park City, Utah.

Under the guidance of Bird Runningwater, Associate Director, Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Program, the Native Filmmakers Lab provides an opportunity for Native filmmakers to workshop their early-stage work in an environment that encourages innovation, collaboration and risk-taking. Over the course of the Lab, the Fellows work with an accomplished group of Creative Advisors including Allison Anders, Sterlin Harjo, Kasi Lemmons, and Merata Mita. This year's Lab will take place on the homelands of the Mescalero Apache Tribe located in southeastern New Mexico. The land covers 460,661 acres of Otero County and is home to more than 3,000 tribal members.

"Storytelling for Native peoples is thousands of years old, while film is just over 100 years old," said Runningwater. "At this Lab, we are excited to explore the intersection of both of these forms of storytelling and we anticipate that it will yield something new and exciting. The land on which we will be working is sacred and spiritual, ripe for creativity. We're especially thrilled to work with this year's Fellows whose projects cover fresh cinematic terrain that we haven't seen before."

Sundance Institute supports emerging Native American filmmakers whose work is defining the next wave of Native cinema. In addition to the Native Filmmakers Lab, the Fellowship brings participating filmmakers to the Sundance Film Festival to discuss their early-stage feature film projects with established writers, directors, independent producers, and financiers. In addition to one-on-one meetings with accomplished film professionals, Ford Fellows attend screenings and participate in Native Forum panels and events. After the Festival, Sundance Institute's Ford Fellows receive ongoing support to bring their projects to fruition.

The projects and participants selected for the Sundance Institute Ford Foundation Film Fellowship and Native Filmmakers Lab from May 18-22 are:

Drunktown's Finest/Sydney Freeland (writer/director): Three Native American teenagers struggle through the hardships of life on an Indian Reservation. As their lives begin to intersect they learn they all share one thing in common.

Sydney Freeland was born and raised in Gallup, New Mexico. Her father is Navajo and her mother is Scottish. She is a graduate of Arizona State University with a BFA in Computer Animation, and also received a MFA in Motion Pictures & Television from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco. She was selected as a 2004 Fulbright scholarship recipient, and also attended the ABC/Disney Summer Institute in 2005 & 2006. She is a 2006 Disney Scholarship recipient and a 2007 Disney Fellowship semi-finalist. Sydney currently lives and works in Los Angeles.

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The Last Thanksgiving/Adam Piron (writer/director): Ike, a young Native American, must trek home across a post-apocalyptic wasteland to deliver a mysterious wrapped object.

Adam Piron is a Kiowa/Mohawk Filmmaker and a recent graduate of the University of Southern California's School of Cinematic Arts where he wrote and directed several short films. Prior to USC, he grew up traveling throughout 25 countries; he is fluent in English, French, and has studied Spanish, Portuguese, and Mandarin. He was accepted twice into the California State Summer School of the Arts (CSSSA) held at CalArts for animation and film production. In addition to filmmaking, Adam is pursuing a Masters in Architecture from Arizona State University. In the future he hopes to use his skills in film, design, and visual communication to benefit and celebrate Indigenous communities and cultures.

Nanum Kigutinga (The Nanuk's Tooth)/Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson (writer/director): Inspired by one of his grandmother's ancient stories, a shy Iñupiaq boy swallows an old polar bear's tooth with hopes of changing his destiny and becoming a shaman.

Rachel Naninaaq Edwardson is an Iñupiaq/Norwegian/Sami filmmaker from Ukpiagvik (Barrow), Alaska. She is a graduate of Colorado College with a BA in Film and Performance. Rachel produced and directed the 13-part Alaskan political and current affairs series, *Home Rule* and she is producing and directing the landmark *History of the Iñupiat* documentary series. Rachel has spent 7 years working with Indigenous and marginalized youth running film and storytelling workshops. She is currently developing a media training and production facility on the North Slope of Alaska that will aim to stream Indigenous media content from around the world. Rachel is currently writing the second episode of her feature length Iñupiaq fantasy trilogy. She and her husband David Vadiveloo live between Barrow, Alaska and Melbourne, Australia.

Walk in Beauty/Brian Young (writer/director): Set in the 1600s two Navajo twins come across a dead Spaniard's body and find the skin so beautiful that they leave their tribe in search of a way to turn their own skin white.

Brian Young belongs to the *Tach'iinii'*, *Taneezahnii'*, *Todich'iinii'* and *To'dik'ozhi* clans of the Diné Nation. He was reared in Fort Defiance and Sawmill, Arizona. He is currently attending Yale University, majoring in Film Studies with a focus in screenwriting and plans to will graduate in 2010. In 2007 Brian participated in the Fox Studios American Indian Summer Institute. As a child Brian was fortunate be rooted in his Navajo culture and to have the exposure to the Navajo language. He is proud to say that he made his first batch of frybread without the guidance of his family.

Creative Advisors

Sterlin Harjo belongs to the Creek and Seminole Nations, is a native of Holdenville, Oklahoma, and attended the University of Oklahoma. Harjo's short films include *They're Playing His Song* and *Goodnight Irene*, which premiered at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival and has played around the world. Harjo participated in the Sundance Institute's 2004 Filmmakers Lab with his feature script, *Four Sheets to the Wind*, which premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival in Dramatic Competition and received a Special Jury Prize. His second feature *Barking Water* premiered at the 2009 Sundance Film Festival. He is developing his third feature *Before the Beast Returns*, which received the top narrative prize at the Tribeca Film Festival's All-Access Connects.

Kasi Lemmons began her career as an actress, appearing in such films as *Silence of the Lambs*, *Hard Target*, *Fear of a Black Hat*, *Candyman*, *Drop Squad* and *Vampire's Kiss*. In 1997 she made her feature screenwriting and directorial debut with *Eve's Bayou*, which became the highest grossing independent film of 1997. The film won the Independent Spirit Award for "Best First Feature", received seven NAACP "Image Award" nominations, and earned Lemmons a special first-time director award from the National Board of Review. Her most recent feature *Talk to Me*, starring Don Cheadle, was released nationwide in July 2007 by Focus Features to widespread critical acclaim. She received the 2008 NAACP Image Award for outstanding directing. As well as attending New York University School of the Arts, UCLA and The New School of Social Research Film Program, Lemmons was awarded an Honorary Degree, Doctor of Humane Letters, from Salem State College in 1998. Currently Ms. Lemmons is developing a moving civil rights drama, *The Children's Crusade* for HBO/Picturehouse Films, REUNION for Paramount Pictures and a film adaptation of the gospel musical, *Black Nativity* for Fox Searchlight.

Merata Mita belongs to the *Ngati Pikiao* and *Ngai te Rangī Iwi* of the Maori people and was born and reared in a small, traditional Maori community in Maketu, New Zealand. She has been involved in film and video production for over 25 years, and has made significant inroads for indigenous filmmakers both in Aotearoa and globally. Mita's documentary films include *Patu!*, *Bastion Point: Day 507*, *Waka*, *Rapanui*, *Dread*, *The Shooting of Dominick Kaiwhata*, and *Hotere*, which have all screened at numerous festivals around the world. Mita has also appeared as

an actress in Geoff Murphy's historical drama *Utu* and produced his film *Spooked*, and Executive Produced Vilsoni Hereniko's feature *The Land Has Eyes*. She is currently a Co-Producer on Taika Waititi's forthcoming feature *The Volcano*.

Allison Anders is a screenwriter and director, a mom of three, and a professor at UC Santa Barbara. A MacArthur Fellow and Peabody winner, she also founded and runs the Don't Knock The Rock Film And Music Festival in Hollywood, California. Her films include GAS FOOD LODGING, MI VIDA LOCA (which was workshopped at the 1992 Sundance Screenwriters Lab), GRACE OF MY HEART and THINGS BEHIND THE SUN.

About Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Program

Rooted in the recognition of a rich tradition of story telling and artistic expression by Native Americans, Sundance Institute's Native American and Indigenous Program scouts world-wide and across the United States for Indigenous artists with projects that can be supported through the Institute's Feature Film Program, Documentary Program, Theatre Program, the Independent Producers Conference/Creative Producing Initiative, and Sundance Film Festival. The Program also operates the Sundance Institute-Ford Foundation Film Fellowship established for emerging Native American filmmakers, as well as the Indigenous Producers Initiative. Filmmakers and projects identified for support include Sterlin Harjo and his Spirit Award-nominated FOUR SHEETS TO THE WIND; Academy Award nominee Taika Waititi and his feature debut EAGLE VS. SHARK; Billy Luther's award-winning MISS NAVAJO; And, Andrew Okpeaha MacLean's Sundance Jury Prize winning SIKUMI. Forthcoming projects include: Blackhorse Lowe's SHIMASANI; Julianna Brannum's LADONNA HARRIS: INDIAN 101; Briar Grace Smith's THE STRENGTH OF WATER; Andrew Okpeaha MacLean's ON THE ICE; Aurora Guerrero's MOSQUITA Y MARI; Sterlin Harjo's BARKING WATER; and Taika Waititi's THE VOLCANO.

About the Ford Foundation

Over the Foundation's 70-year history, more than \$15 billion in funding distributed worldwide has supported programs related to asset building and community development; peace and social justice; and knowledge, creativity, and freedom.

About 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*.

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