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Sundance Institute Selects Two Projects for Native Filmmakers Lab

First Sundance Institute Residential Lab to Include Grants and Tactical Support for Production of Short Films

Lab will be Followed by Native Writers Workshop for Six Emerging Native Storytellers

Park City, UT — **Razelle Benally** (Navajo/Oglala Lakota) and **Randi LeClair** (Pawnee) have been selected for the **Sundance Institute Native Filmmakers Lab**, where the two writers will receive grants for production and targeted support during a residential Lab to prepare for production of their short films. The Lab takes place in Santa Fe, New Mexico July 10-14. The Lab is a highlight of the Institute's year-round work with Native American and Indigenous filmmakers and is one of the 24 residential labs the Institute hosts each year to discover and foster the talent of emerging independent artists in film, theatre, new media and episodic content.

The Native Filmmakers Lab builds on the Institute's former NativeLab to include grants to support production of the Fellows' short films – a first for the Institute's renowned independent artist Labs. The writers and directors serving as Creative Advisors for this year's Lab include: Janicza Bravo (*Gregory Go Boom* and *Pauline Alone*), Beck Cole (*Plains Empty* and *Here I Am*), Sydney Freeland (*Drunktown's Finest* and *HoverBoard*), Aurora Guerrero (*Pura Lengua* and *Mosquita y Mari*) and Lucas Leyva (*#PostModem* and *Life and Freaky Times of Uncle Luke*).

N. Bird Runningwater (Cheyenne/Mescalero Apache), director of the Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Program, said, "Our Native Filmmakers Lab responds to the unique need within our community to support Native American artists with grants and mentorship focusing on the crucial phase of producing their films. I am excited to embark on this creative journey with these two bright female directors as they begin the tactical phase of creating their films."

The Native Filmmakers Lab will be followed by the inaugural Native Writers Workshop, jointly hosted by Sundance Institute and the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA). The Workshop will support six emerging Native storytellers who seek to share their voices in film and television: Gabe Abeyta (Taos Pueblo and Navajo from Santa Fe, NM), Katie Avery (Iñupiaq from Los Angeles, CA), Kelly D'Angelo (Haudenosaunee from Los Angeles, CA), Felicia Nez (Navajo from Albuquerque, NM), Blue Tarpalechee (Muscogee from Santa Fe, NM) and Kaherawaks Thompson (St. Regis Mohawks of Akwesasne from Memphis, TN). They will be mentored by: Beck Cole (Writer, *Here I Am* and *Black Comedy*), Jason Gavin (Writer, *Greek; Friday Night Lights*), Derek Santos Olson (Writer, *Friday Night Lights*), Sierra Ornelas (Writer, *Selfie* and *Happy Endings*), Alex Rivera (Writer/Director, *Sleep Dealer*) and Joan Tewkesbury (Writer, *Nashville* and *Thieves Like Us*).

True to founder Robert Redford's original vision, the Institute maintains a strong commitment to supporting Native and Indigenous filmmakers. The Native program has built and sustained a unique support cycle for Indigenous artists through grants, labs, mentorships, a fellowship program at the Sundance Film Festival, and screenings for Native communities to inspire new generations of storytellers. Currently operating programs in the United States,



Canada, and formerly New Zealand and Australia, the Institute has established a rich legacy of work by supporting more than 300 Native and Indigenous filmmakers, including Taika Waititi, Chris Eyre, Sterlin Harjo, Billy Luther, Andrew Okpeaha MacLean, Aurora Guerrero, Sydney Freeland and Yolanda Cruz.

Artists and projects selected for the 2015 Native Filmmakers Lab:

I Am Thy Weapon

Razelle Benally (Navajo/Oglala Lakota)

A young artistic Navajo woman relives memories of her deceased sister, that in turn help her heal and battle against the modern-day adversities of reservation life.

Razelle Benally is of Oglala Lakota and Navajo blood. Benally's firsthand experience while filming and traveling with renowned skateboard company Apache Skateboards has helped her hone a self-developed style of editing and directing. She most notably gained acclaim for her short documentary *The Humble*, and six-minute experimental piece *Love is a Losing Game*. Benally is one of five young women featured in the 2011 documentary, *Apache Chronicle*. She has shown in galleries in Long Beach, CA and in Phoenix, AZ. Her films have been shown nationally and internationally at select screenings in Portland, Winnipeg Manitoba Canada, and Sweden. She earned a third place award in the 2007 AIHEC Film Festival, and is the 2010 Santa Fe Indian Market jury-awarded winner for Best Documentary in SWAIA's Classification X. Benally is an alumna of the 2012 Sundance Institute Native Filmmakers Lab.

The Other Side of the Bridge

Randi LeClair (Pawnee)

After two high school football stars are found dead, decade's long racial tensions sizzle in a small-town diner.

Randi LeClair is an enrolled member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. She graduated from Oklahoma State University with a BA in English (Creative Writing) and is currently a graduate student in the University of Oklahoma's Master of Professional Writing program. Recently, Randi and her husband, Todd, signed an option agreement for the screen adaptation of Todd's book, *6'6" and Other Distances from Home: The (Baseball) Life of Mose YellowHorse*, which follows the story of Pittsburg Pirates pitcher Mose YellowHorse, the first full-blood American Indian in the major leagues. In addition to screenwriting, Randi also engages her love of literary fiction and is currently working on a collection of short stories. As well, she also serves as co-editor for *Out of the Stars: An Anthology of Pawnee Writing, Stories, and Art*. Her dream is to help bring Native Cinema to the mainstream. She is an alumna of the 2010 Sundance Institute Native Filmmakers Lab.

The Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Program is supported by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Time Warner Foundation, Surdna Foundation, Ford Foundation, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, SAGIndie, Comcast-NBCUniversal, Cindy and Alan Horn, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation and CBS.

Sundance Institute

Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, Sundance Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides and preserves the space for artists in film, theatre, and new media to create and thrive. The Institute's signature Labs, granting, and mentorship programs, dedicated to developing new work, take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally. The Sundance Film Festival and other public programs connect audiences to artists in igniting new ideas, discovering original voices, and building a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Sin Nombre*, *The Invisible*



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