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Sundance Institute Announces New Merata Mita Fellowship For Indigenous Artists and 2016 Recipient

Fellowship Will Support an Emerging Indigenous Artist in Honor of Late Māori Filmmaker

PARK CITY, Utah — The Merata Mita Fellowship, a new annual fellowship named in honor of the late Māori filmmaker Merata Mita (1942-2010), was announced today at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, which is taking place through January 31 in Utah. The first recipient is Ciara Leina'ala Lacy (Kanaka Maoli) from O'ahu, Hawai'i. In addition to networking opportunities at the Sundance Film Festival, Lacy will receive a monetary grant, yearlong continuum of support, access to strategic and creative services offered by Sundance Institute's artists programs and mentorship opportunities.

Merata Mita (Ngai te Rangi/Ngati Pikiao) was New Zealand's first Indigenous female filmmaker. She served as an advisor and artistic director of the Sundance Institute NativeLab from 2000 to 2009, where she championed emerging Indigenous talent. The 2016 Merata Mita Fellowship is supported by several international partners, including: the Embassy of Australia; New Zealand filmmaker Taika Waititi (Te Whanau a Apanui); Indigenous Media Initiatives; and Pacific Islanders in Communications.

"As a noted activist, documentarian, and the first—and only—Māori woman to write and direct a dramatic feature film, Merata committed her life's work to telling Māori stories from a Māori perspective," Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Film Program Director Bird Runningwater (Cheyenne/Mescalero Apache) said. "Throughout her career she identified the lack of training for Māori people in the New Zealand film and television industry and, therefore, an underrepresentation of her community's stories. Merata dedicated her life to addressing these areas. She was a global advocate for Indigenous voices and we are proud to continue her efforts through this new fellowship."

Lacy is a documentary filmmaker whose interest lies in crafting films that use strong characters and investigative journalism to challenge the creative and political status quo. She has received fellowships from the Sundance Institute's NativeLab as well as the Sundance Institute in partnership with Time Warner, the Firelight Documentary Lab, the Princess Grace Foundation, and the Independent Filmmaker Project (IFP). Her latest project is *Out of State* which is the story of outcasts, native Hawaiian prisoners shipped 3,000 miles across the ocean to a private prison in the desert of Arizona. Desperate to repair relationships with faraway family and friends, these men practice their indigenous chants and dances behind bars in the hopes of winning everything they love most.

Lacy has worked as a producer, writer, production supervisor, and production manager of both nonfiction and scripted programming. Her work has shown in theaters as well as aired on PBS, ABC, TLC, Discovery, Bravo and A&E. She holds a bachelor of arts degree in psychology from Yale University and is a graduate of the Kamehameha Schools in Hawai'i. Lacy grew up dancing hula and speaks her Native language.

The Merata Mita Fellowship will be open to Native or Indigenous filmmakers around the world who are in any stage of career or production, with an emphasis on those who have a feature-length project—documentary or dramatic—in development. Fellows will receive a monetary grant and a yearlong continuum of support with

activities including a trip to the Sundance Film Festival, access to strategic and creative services offered by Sundance Institute artist programs, and mentorship opportunities.

Sundance Institute Native American and Indigenous Film Program

Sundance Institute's Native American and Indigenous Film Program is one of the few programs to provide resources to the Native American and Indigenous population, and the only one in the United States that provides Native directors, screenwriters and producers with creative, strategic and financial support for their first films and throughout their careers. Formally established in 1994, the Program conducts outreach and education to identify a new generation of Native voices and inspire self-determination among Native filmmakers and communities. The Program and its activities engage 1,270 artists and audience members annually, including direct support for 25 artists in the form of Fellowships and grants, and outreach programs for 1,245 members of Native communities across the U.S. The Program's Indigenous Film Circle currently includes more than 300 Native artists and provides leadership for individual artists and organizations.

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 War*, *The Square*, *Dirty Wars*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

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