



5900 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 800, Los Angeles, CA 90036  
1825 Three Kings Dr., Park City, UT 84060  
321 W 44th Street, Suite 805, New York, NY 10036

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**January 28, 2019**

**Media Contact:**  
Chrissy Riley  
310-360-1981  
[chrissy\\_riley@sundance.org](mailto:chrissy_riley@sundance.org)

## **Sundance Institute Announces 2019 Recipients of Merata Mita Fellowship for Indigenous Artists**

### **Fellowship Honors Artistic Contributions of Late Māori Filmmaker**

**Park City, Utah** — Co-Directors Ainsley Gardiner and Briar Grace-Smith are the 2019 recipients of the Sundance Institute Merata Mita Fellowship, an annual fellowship named in honor of the late Māori filmmaker Merata Mita (1942-2010). The announcement was delivered today at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival.

Sundance Institute selected the two filmmakers from a global call for applicants. They will be awarded cash grants 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.

Ainsley Gardiner (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Pūkiao and Te-Whānau-ā-Apanui) has produced television, shorts and features, including *Two Cars*, *One Night* and *Tama Tu* by Taika Waititi, and Waititi's features, *Eagle vs Shark* and *BOY*. She directed *Mokopuna*, winning at Dreamspeakers International Film Festival.

Briar Grace-Smith (Ngā Puhī descent) is a filmmaker and writer of stage plays, screenplays, fiction and television scripts. She attended the Sundance Institute Screenwriters lab with *The Strength of Water*. Her short film *Charm* was part of *Waru*, a feature made up of eight parts.

"Now in its fourth consecutive award year, this special Fellowship pays tribute to the immense artistic contributions and memory of our beloved colleague and friend Merata Mita, who was an activist, documentarian and the first and only Māori woman to write and direct a dramatic feature," said N. Bird Runningwater (Cheyenne/Mescalero Apache), director, Sundance Institute's Indigenous Program. "The Merata Mita Fellowship reflects Sundance Institute's ongoing commitment to supporting Indigenous artists around the world. The selection of Ainsley and Briar as the 2019 recipients exemplifies the creative work and the efforts that Merata championed throughout her life."

Merata Mita (Ngāi Te Rangi/Ngāti Pūkiao) was New Zealand's first Indigenous female filmmaker. She served as an advisor and artistic director of the Sundance Institute Native Lab from 2000 to 2009, where she championed emerging Indigenous talent.

Mita's memory will be honored at this year's Festival with the International Premiere of *MERATA: How Mum Decolonized the Screen*. The documentary — an intimate portrayal of Mita told through the eyes of her children — includes hours of never-before-seen archival footage. Hepi Mita, Merata's youngest child and the film's director and screenwriter, discovers the filmmaker he never knew and shares with the world the mother he lost.



The Merata Mita Fellowship is supported by New Zealand Film Commission, Indigenous Media Initiatives, Felix Culpa, Sarah Luther, Pacific Islanders in Communications, and Susan Shilliday.

### **Sundance Institute's Indigenous Program**

This month, Sundance Institute's Native American and Indigenous Film Program has officially changed its name to the Indigenous Program. The Indigenous Program champions Indigenous independent storytelling artists through residency Labs, Fellowships, public programming, and a year-round continuum of creative, financial, and tactical support. The Program conducts outreach and education to identify a new generation of Indigenous voices, connecting them with opportunities to develop their storytelling projects, and bringing them and their work back to Indigenous lands. At its core, the Program seeks to inspire self-determination among Indigenous filmmakers and communities by centering Indigenous people in telling their own stories. "The program name change is both appropriate and timely, especially in light of our increasingly global Indigenous reach, which transcends borders," said Runningwater.

### **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 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 *Boyhood*, *Swiss Army Man*, *Manchester by the Sea*, *Brooklyn*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Life, Animated*, *Sonita*, *20 Feet from Stardom*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Sin Nombre*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

###

**Note to Editors:** Photos of Ainsley Gardner and Briar Grace-Smith are available at [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/150uUM4O51yU0sfb9b0vyG\\_h\\_nPG-yht5?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/150uUM4O51yU0sfb9b0vyG_h_nPG-yht5?usp=sharing).  
Photo credit: Courtesy Sundance Institute.