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Sundance Institute Continues Support for Creators of TV and Online Series; 10 Projects Selected for 2015 Episodic Story Lab

Fellows Include: Matt Berninger of Indie Rock Band The National; Academy Award-Nominated Filmmakers of *The Square*, Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim; and *Blue Valentine* Co-Writer Cami Delavigne

Creative Advisors Include Rich Appel (*Family Guy*), Mara Brock Akil (*Being Mary Jane*), Howard Gordon (*Homeland*) and Jenni Konner (*Girls*)

Los Angeles, CA — Sundance Institute today announced the 10 projects selected from more than 2,500 submissions for its second Episodic Story Lab, representing some of the most promising new writers creating TV and online series. The Lab supports first-time show creators and is one of 24 residency Labs the Institute hosts each year for independent artists in theatre, film, new media and episodic content.

Under the leadership of Michelle Satter, Founding Director of the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program, with Jennifer Goyne Blake, Senior Manager of the Episodic Story Lab, Fellows will work with an accomplished group of showrunners, television executives and producers on developing their spec pilot and series overview. They will participate in one-on-one creative story meetings, Writers' Rooms for selected projects, pitch sessions and group conversations about the creative process and current episodic field. Following the Lab, Fellows receive customized, year-round support from Feature Film Program staff, Creative Advisors and Industry Mentors.

Keri Putnam, Executive Director of Sundance Institute, said, "By offering both creative and industry guidance, our Episodic Story Lab prepares exciting, diverse voices to navigate the evolving landscape for episodic stories in order to advance both their projects and their careers."

Satter said, "The Fellows selected for this year's Episodic Story Lab bring a wide range of creative experience from disciplines including filmmaking, music, literature, comedy and new media. We are excited by the diversity of perspectives represented by this new group, whose projects are ambitious, timely and original in voice and vision."

Creative Advisors for the Lab include: Rich Appel (Executive Producer, *Family Guy*), Jenny Bicks (Executive Producer, *Sex and the City*), Chris Brancato (Co-Creator and Showrunner, *Narcos*), Mara Brock Akil (Creator, *Being Mary Jane*), Chic Eglee (Writer/Producer); Tom Fontana (Creator, *Oz*); Howard Gordon (Co-Creator, *Homeland*); Jenni Konner (Co-Showrunner, *Girls*); Amy Lippman (Executive Producer, *Masters of Sex*); Glen Mazzara (Creator, *Damien*); Jeff Melvoin (Executive Producer, *Army Wives*) and Veena Sud (Creator, *The Killing*).



Industry Mentors include: Betsy Beers (Partner, Shondaland), Bob DeBitetto (President, Brand Strategy, Business Development and A+E Studios, A+E Networks), Dante Di Loreto (President of Television, Chernin Entertainment), Susie Fitzgerald (Executive Vice President of Scripted Programming for AMC and SundanceTV), Peter Friedlander (Vice President, Netflix Original Series), Mark Johnson (Producer, Gran Via Productions), Sophie Mas (Producer, RT Features), Erica Motley (Acquisition Consultant, Sonar Entertainment), Francesca Orsi (Senior Vice President, Drama Programming, HBO) and Sarah Timberman (Producer and Principle, Timberman-Beverly Productions).

The Sundance Institute Episodic Story Initiative and Lab is made possible by Founding Supporters Lyn & Norman Lear; Leadership Supporters A&E, Netflix, SundanceTV, and Time Warner Foundation/HBO; Discovery Supporters Cindy and Alan Horn, RT Features, and Sonar Entertainment; and Supporter BBC America who provide financial and advisory resources to the Lab and its artists.

Artists and projects selected for the 2015 Episodic Story Lab are:

12 Miles South

By Michael Krikorian

After a gang killing goes wrong, Los Angeles faces a resurgence of violence that threatens to unravel the city's fragile peace. In *12 Miles South*, a cop, a reporter and a gang leader on death row find their agendas dangerously entwined as they deal with the fallout.

Michael Krikorian is a veteran Los Angeles crime reporter and the author of the critically acclaimed novel *Southside*. Born in Chinatown and raised in Gardena, Krikorian was a writer for the *Los Angeles Times* for 11 years. Krikorian has had three personal essays published in the New York Times Sunday Magazine's "Lives" page. He continues to report about L.A. street gangs on his website *Krikorian Writes*.

Crude

By John Lopez

In *Crude*, a young mother desperate to sustain her family's existence leaves them behind to pursue a steady job in a North Dakota oil boomtown. A brutal murder on the outskirts of town sets a chain of events in motion that thrusts her into the middle of a war between a drug cartel, a Native American gang, and an overtaxed local sheriff.

John Lopez, a Los Angeles native, has been a regular contributor to *Grantland's* "Hollywood Prospectus," *Vanity Fair's* "Little Gold Men," *GQ* and *the Huffington Post*. Most recently he directed segments for NBC's 2014 *Actor's Showcase* and served as associate producer on Hossein Amini's film adaptation of Patricia Highsmith's *The Two Faces of January*.

Degenerates

By Christianne Hedtke

In 1939 Paris, bohemian Jewish heiress Peggy Guggenheim sets out to establish the first museum dedicated to the art of her time - mischievous, radical Surrealism. As Hitler expands his assault on Europe and wages war on so-called "degenerate" art, Peggy is torn between helping these endangered artists escape and rescuing the art itself.

Christianne Hedtke is a Los Angeles-based screenwriter. She was born and raised in Minnesota, and studied film and art at the University of Denver. Prior to her time in LA, Hedtke developed original content for Nickelodeon in New York, and has spent over a decade on staff at the Telluride Film Festival. She is a founding member of the Greenpoint Writers Group, and a contributor to *MovieMaker Magazine*.

Hell or High Water
By Maria Melnik

Hell or High Water takes place during the five-year construction of the Hoover Dam at the height of the Great Depression. Part Western, part political dystopia, part steampunk clash of primordial rock and radical technology, it tells the story of the men and women who lived and died to make the desert bloom.

Born in Magadan, Russia, Maria Melnik immigrated to Alaska at the age of 11. She received her BA from Vassar and her MFA from the UCLA School of Film and Television. She is currently a staff writer on the upcoming series *American Gods* (Starz).

I'm Down
By Mishna Wolff

I'm Down is the story of a socially awkward white girl whose new-agey mother leaves her in the hands of her father, a white man who self-identifies as black. This dysfunctional family comedy, set in 1990s-era Seattle, explores racial identity and the lengths to which a child will go to win a parent's love.

Mishna Wolff is the bestselling author of the critically acclaimed memoir *I'm Down*. Her award-winning book is taught at high schools and colleges throughout America and sold at the Nobel Peace Museum and Northwest African American Museum. Wolff is an alumna of the 2009 Sundance Institute January Screenwriters Lab.

Mistaken for Strangers
By Matt Berninger and Carin Besser

Based on the acclaimed documentary of the same name, *Mistaken for Strangers* is the story of an indie rock singer and his family whose lives are upturned when his band begins to enjoy mainstream success and his unemployed younger brother moves in to help out.

Matt Berninger is the lead singer of The National, the Grammy-nominated indie rock band, and the newly-formed EL VY. Matt produced the music documentary *Mistaken for Strangers* with his wife, Carin Besser.

Besser worked as a fiction editor at *The New Yorker* before moving to Los Angeles with her husband and daughter. She co-produced and co-edited the documentary *Mistaken for Strangers*, which opened the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival.

MK-ULTRA
By Mac Smullen



At the dawn of the Cold War, a group of CIA agents with conflicting agendas find their morals tested and their lives changed by the clandestine efforts to exploit the newly discovered chemical compound LSD.

Mac Smullen is a writer and filmmaker from New York. Since graduating from SUNY Purchase's Conservatory of Film, Smullen has worked as a freelance editor, directed music videos for Stones Throw Records, and had original short fiction published by American Eldritch.

Radicals

By Karim Amer and Jehane Noujaim

Radicals is a limited series about three Muslim-American friends from Jersey City's "Little Arabia" whose lives are ripped apart after the FBI accuses them of orchestrating a terrorist plot on American soil.

Jehane Noujaim is the Academy Award-nominated director and producer of *The Square*, which received the prestigious Directors Guild and International Documentary Awards in 2014 and was the first film to win the Audience Award at both the Sundance and Toronto Film Festivals. The film was supported by the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program in 2012. Noujaim has produced and directed other award-winning films including *Rafea: Solar Mama*, *Control Room* and *Startup.com*.

Karim Amer is the Academy Award-nominated producer of *The Square*, which won three Emmys for Directing, Cinematography and Editing. The film was seen in over 50 film festivals around the world and was the recipient of the 2014 IDA Award and Berlinale's Amnesty International Award, among many others.

The Sleep

By Cami Delavigne

Inspired by the short story by Caitlin Horrocks, *The Sleep* is a supernatural dark comedy about a small-town history teacher and his two children who, grieving the death of their wife and mother, decide to hibernate through the winter. When they awake as younger, better versions of themselves, their transformation attracts both devotees and detractors to their quiet New England town.

Cami Delavigne co-wrote *Blue Valentine*, the romantic drama starring Ryan Gosling and Michelle Williams, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in 2010. She is currently a staff writer for *The Son*, the upcoming AMC multi-generational drama, and teaches screenwriting at NYU.

Unlikely

By Akilah Hughes and Lyle Friedman

Unlikely is a comedy web series about a pair of biracial twins, one of whom looks white, the other black. After transferring to the same college in their senior year, the codependent siblings struggle to find their own identities while keeping their close bond.

Akilah Hughes is a writer, stand-up comedian and YouTuber residing in Brooklyn. She is currently a digital correspondent for *Fusion's* Pop and Culture team. In the fall of 2016, *Razorbill*, an imprint of Penguin Random House, is publishing a collection of her personal essays.



Lyle Friedman is currently a staff writer for Darren Star's new hit TV show *Younger*. She co-created the web series *#hotmessmoves* and has a project in development with Jill Soloway. Lyle trained at both UCB and the LAByrinth Theatre Company in New York.

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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