

# SUNDANCE INSTITUTE

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For More Information Contact:  
Willa Yudell, willa\_yudell@sundance.org  
435.658.3456

## SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES TWELVE FEATURE FILM PROJECTS FOR JANUARY SCREENWRITERS LAB

### Filmmakers Explore Subjects Ranging from the Impact of War and Cultural Assimilation to the Search for Meaning and Identity in a Fragmented World

**Los Angeles, CA**—Sundance Institute has selected twelve projects for the annual January Screenwriters Lab, to be held January 12-17, 2007 at the Sundance Resort in Utah. The Screenwriters Lab is a five-day writer's workshop that gives independent screenwriters the opportunity to work intensively on their feature film scripts with the support of established writers in an environment that encourages innovation and creative risk-taking. Individual story sessions bring participating screenwriters together with creative advisors for problem-solving discussions.

These projects represent a wide range of topics including: the wide-reaching ripple effects of a soldier's death at the Iran/Iraqi border; the painful path for Haitian immigrants in America seeking to escape their pasts; the legacy of violence in Argentina; the harrowing tale of a south Texas woman helping immigrants cross the border; to a comedic portrait of a suicidal artist as he looks back at his life to figure out where he went wrong.

Projects and participants selected for the Screenwriters Lab are:

- **THE BOOK OF INTERNAL GRAMMAR**/Nir Bergman, writer/director, (*Israel*);
- **CIRCUMSTANCE**/Maryam Keshavarz, writer/director, (*U.S.A./Iran*);
- **COLD SOULS**/Sophie Barthes, writer/director, (*U.S.A.*);
- **DOG SECURITY**/Jorge Gaggero, writer/director, (*Argentina*);
- **THE GIRL**/David Riker, writer/director, (*U.S.A.*);
- **GREEN**/Peter Craig, writer/director, (*U.S.A.*);
- **HAITI CHERIE**/Patricia Benoit, writer/director, (*U.S.A./Haiti*);
- **HERE**/Braden King, co-writer/director, Dani Valent, co-writer, (*U.S.A./Australia*);
- **JESSE SANCHEZ: AN IMPERFECT LIFE**/John Leguizamo, writer/director, (*U.S.A.*);

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8530 Wilshire Boulevard, 3rd Floor  
Beverly Hills, California 90211  
PH 310.360.1981 FAX 310.360.1969

P.O. Box 684429  
1825 Three Kings Drive  
Park City, UT 84068  
PH 435.658.3456 FAX 435.658.3457

[www.sundance.org](http://www.sundance.org)

- **SPOONS**/Eric Lahey, writer/director, (*U.S.A.*)
- **TSHEPANG**/Lara Foot Newton, writer/co-director and Gerhard Marx, co-director, (*South Africa*);
- **WATER & POWER**/Richard Montoya, writer (*U.S.A.*)

Participating writers will work with an extraordinary group of creative advisors, including Artistic Director Scott Frank, Marcos Bernstein, Anthony Drazan, Naomi Foner Gyllenhaal, Erik Jendresen, John Lee Hancock, Christopher McQuarrie, Walter Mosley, Tom Rickman, John Ridley, Jose Rivera, Howard Rodman, Susan Shilliday, Zach Sklar, Michael Tolkin, and Audrey Wells.

“We are thrilled to be supporting such a diverse and singular group of filmmakers”, noted Michelle Satter, Director of the Feature Film Program. “They are all committed to telling stories with humor and heart that reflect the complexity and humanity of the world we live in. The Feature Film Program continues its commitment to international work including filmmakers from Argentina, Israel, South Africa, Iran, and Haiti.”

The projects selected for development at this Lab join an impressive group of recent films supported by the Institute’s Feature Film Program, including Ryan Fleck and Anna Boden’s *HALF NELSON*, Dito Montiel’s *A GUIDE TO RECOGNIZING YOUR SAINTS*, Hilary Brougher’s *STEPHANIE DALEY*, Goran Dukic’s *WRISTCUTTERS*, Michael Kang’s *THE MOTEL*, and Cam Archer’s *WILD TIGERS I HAVE KNOWN*, all of which recently received Independent Spirit Award nominations. Over its 25 year history, the program has supported an extensive list of significant independent films including Miranda July’s *ME AND YOU AND EVERYONE WE KNOW*, Hany Abu-Assad’s *PARADISE NOW*, Debra Granik’s *DOWN TO THE BONE*, Ira Sachs’ *FORTY SHADES OF BLUE*, Josh Marston’s *MARIA FULL OF GRACE*, Peter Sollett’s *RAISING VICTOR VARGAS*, John Cameron Mitchell’s *HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH*, Darren Aronofsky’s *REQUIEM FOR A DREAM*, Kimberly Peirce’s *BOYS DON’T CRY*, Tony Bui’s *THREE SEASONS*, Walter Salles’ *CENTRAL STATION*, Chris Eyre and Sherman Alexie’s *SMOKE SIGNALS*, Paul Thomas Anderson’s *HARD EIGHT*, Tamara Jenkins’ *SLUMS OF BEVERLY HILLS*, and Quentin Tarantino’s *RESERVOIR DOGS*, among many others.

Five new films supported by the Feature Film Program Labs will premiere at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival. These include: *FOUR SHEETS TO THE WIND* (Dramatic Competition), written and directed by Sterlin Harjo; *EAGLE VS. SHARK* (World Competition), written and directed by Taika Waititi; *SWEET MUD* (World Competition), written and directed by Dror Shaul; *RED ROAD* (Spectrum), written and directed by Andrea Arnold; and *YEAR OF THE FISH* (Spectrum), written and directed by David Kaplan. In addition, several Lab alumni including David Gordon Green, Tamara Jenkins, Adam Bhala Lough, Alfredo DeVilla and Nat Moss, Chris Smith, and Andrew Wagner will premiere new work at the Festival.

The projects selected for the **2007 January Screenwriters Lab** are:

**Nir Bergman** (writer/director), **THE BOOK OF INTERNAL GRAMMAR** (*Israel*): Set in the early 1960's, THE BOOK OF INTERNAL GRAMMAR tells the story of ten-year-old Aaron, son of holocaust survivors, who struggles to cross the elusive boundary from childhood to maturity despite his body's refusal to grow.

A resident of Tel Aviv, Israel, Nir Bergman graduated from the Sam Spiegel Film School in Jerusalem. His first feature film, BROKEN WINGS, won the Israeli Oscar in 2002 along with several other international awards, and was distributed worldwide by Sony Classics. Since then, he has co-written the successful television drama REACHING FOR HEAVEN and the series IN TREATMENT, an American adaptation of which is currently being developed at HBO.

**Maryam Keshavarz** (writer/director), **CIRCUMSTANCE** (*U.S.A./Iran*): CIRCUMSTANCE tells the story of how a single event – a soldier's death at the Iran/Iraq border – irrevocably connects the lives of four people across continents.

Having grown up between Iran and the United States, Maryam Keshavarz drew on personal experience to direct her feature documentary THE COLOR OF LOVE, which screened at international festivals including Full Frame Documentary Film Festival and Montreal World Film Festival and won prizes such as the International Documentary Association's David L. Wolper Award. Her short film THE DAY I DIED screened at Clermont-Ferrand, New York Film Festival, and won two awards at the Berlin International Film Festival.

**Sophie Barthes** (writer/director), **COLD SOULS** (*U.S.A.*): In the midst of an existential crisis, a famous American actor stumbles upon a Soul Storage, a private lab offering New Yorkers a relief from the burden of their souls.

Born in France, Sophie Barthes grew up in the Middle East and South America. After graduating from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, she co-directed the short film SNOWBLINK with cinematographer Andrij Parekh. She recently wrote and directed the short film HAPPINESS, set to screen at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival; both HAPPINESS and COLD SOULS won the NYSCA Individual Artists Grants and the Showtime Tony Cox Award for Best Screenplay (Feature and Short categories) at the Nantucket Film Festival.

**Jorge Gaggero** (writer/director), **DOG SECURITY** (*Argentina*): In a society that fosters fear and paranoia, a family takes measures to protect their home only to find themselves mirroring the violence they were trying to escape.

A graduate of the AFI masters program in film, Jorge Gaggero won the Director's Guild of America Award for Best Latino Student Filmmaker for his short, A PIECE OF EARTH. His feature debut, LIVE-IN MAID, won several international awards including the Special Jury Prize at the 2005 Sundance Film Festival's World Cinema Competition, and was programmed at MOMA and Lincoln Center's New Directors/ New Films Festival. He also produced and directed the feature documentary LIVING IN A FALCON which was awarded the Special Jury Prize at the 2005 Buenos Aires Independent Film Festival.

**David Riker** (writer/director), **THE GIRL (U.S.A.)**: A young mother from South Texas is thrown into an unexpected and life-changing journey when her attempt to smuggle immigrants across the border goes terribly wrong.

David Riker is a New York-based filmmaker currently living in Mexico. His debut feature, *LA CIUDAD*, filmed over five years in New York's Latin American immigrant community, screened at the Sundance Film Festival and won a number of awards including the Open Palm from the Independent Feature Project. Riker is the recipient of Guggenheim and Rockefeller Fellowships.

**Peter Craig** (writer/director), **GREEN (U.S.A.)**: Gil Green, whose only accomplishments in the past two decades are smoker's lung and an orange belt in karate, has his life completely disrupted by his presumed-dead brother, who returns home after a 19 year absence with some highly ambitious plans.

Peter Craig has written and directed an eclectic portfolio of award-winning short films which have been shown at AFI Fest, Tribeca Film Festival, SXSW, and the Los Angeles Film Festival. His work has garnered further recognition as a part of national ad campaigns, international competitions and world-wide broadcast exhibition with companies and organizations that include Converse, Travelocity, Independent Film Channel and Film Independent.

**Patricia Benoit** (writer/director), **HAITI CHERIE (U.S.A./Haiti)**: Three refugees from Haiti start a new life in the United States, but shedding the past is impossible when it is marred by torture and violence.

Born in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, Patricia Benoit grew up in Queens, New York. Her documentaries about Haiti's political turmoil include *COURAGE AND PAIN*, produced by Jonathan Demme, which was shown at the Walter Reade Theater in New York and the London Film Festival, and *TONBE/LEVE*, which was selected by the New York Film Festival, The Havana Film Festival, and the San Juan Film Festival. She also founded the Haitian Women's Program, a community based organization in Brooklyn providing services and creating educational materials for Haitian refugees as well as HIV+ Haitian refugees detained in Guantanamo.

**Braden King** (co-writer/director) and **Dani Valent** (co-writer), **HERE (U.S.A.)**: Real and imaginary landscapes merge as a solitary satellite mapping engineer charts the Armenian countryside with an expatriate art photographer revisiting her homeland.

Braden King co-directed the film *DUTCH HARBOR: WHERE THE SEA BREAKS ITS BACK* with photographer Laura Moya, which toured internationally with live, improvised soundtrack accompaniment by the Boxhead Ensemble under the direction of composer Michael Krassner. King has directed music videos and short films for Sonic Youth, Will Oldham, and Yo La Tengo, among others. He has lectured at Yale University and Bard College, and his works have been screened on HBO, the BBC, The Sundance Channel, Showtime, MTV, and Channel 4 (UK) and more.

Australian writer Dani Valent spent eight years traveling the world for guidebook publisher Lonely Planet as a researcher and writer. Her book *WORLD FOOD TURKEY* was short-listed for the Andre Simon Memorial Fund Book Awards in 2000, and her stories and poems have appeared in various Australian literary magazines and arts festivals. Valent currently lives in Melbourne, Australia, where she works as a freelance journalist, contributing regularly to *Travel + Leisure* (Australia) and *The Age*, Melbourne's daily broadsheet.

**John Leguizamo** (writer/director), **JESSE SANCHEZ: AN IMPERFECT LIFE** (*U.S.A.*): Adapted from Leguizamo's solo stage show *SEXAHOLIC*, *JESSE SANCHEZ: AN IMPERFECT LIFE* is a comedic portrait of a suicidal artist as he looks back at his life and tries to figure out where he went wrong.

John Leguizamo received an Emmy Award for the Spike Lee-directed presentation of his Tony-nominated Broadway solo show *FREAK* for HBO. His numerous other accolades include a Golden Globe nomination for *TO WONG FOO, THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, JULIE NEWMAR*, and a SAG Award nomination for his work in Baz Luhrmann's *MOULIN ROUGE*. Leguizamo's other credits include Baz Luhrmann's *ROMEO & JULIET*, Spike Lee's *SUMMER OF SAM*, and *UNDEFEATED*, which he also directed, as well as a recent recurring role on the hit series *ER*. He just penned his autobiographical memoir *PIMPS, HOS, PLAYA HATAS, AND ALL THE REST OF MY HOLLYWOOD FRIENDS* for Harper Collins.

**Eric Lahey** (writer/director), **SPOONS** (*U.S.A.*): *SPOONS* tells the story of the relationship between a heroin addict and his young son; during a reunion after years of separation, the two men realize that no matter how far you move from the present, you never live that far away from the past.

Eric Lahey received his BFA in Film from the California Institute of the Arts. In 2005, his first feature documentary *THE CENTURY PLAZA* world premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival. That same year he received a grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to create a video propagating systemic education reform in Oregon. Most recently Lahey has worked as the director of photography for Alex Hammond's documentary on Haitian street kids in Cap Haitian. He has also illustrated a dark children's story about the extermination of the human race by animals, called *THE ANIMAL MUTINY* and his artwork can be seen throughout Gus Van Sant's *ELEPHANT*.

**Lara Foot Newton and Gerhard Marx** (co-writers/co-directors), **TSHEPANG** (*South Africa*): A devastating portrayal of child abuse in rural South Africa, *TSHEPANG* is a vivid portrait of a town cut off by poverty from its own heart.

Lara Foot Newton is the resident Director and Dramaturge at The Baxter Theatre Center in Cape Town, South Africa. As well as numerous contemporary classics, she has directed 25 premiers of new South African works, including her own adaptation of Zakes Mda's novel, *WAYS OF DYING*; *THE WELL BEING*, which she co-wrote with Andrew Buckland and Lionel Newton; and her own creation *TSHEPANG*, a devastating portrayal of child abuse in South Africa. In 2004 she won The Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative Award in the category of theatre; her mentor was Sir Peter Hall. Lara, in collaboration with Gerhard Marx, won six international awards for their short film *AND THERE IN THE DUST*.

Gerhard Marx is an artist, scenographer, animator, and theatre maker. His work, including *AND THERE IN THE DUST*, a short animated film co-directed with Lara Foot Newton and animated by Marx, has won numerous awards. His scenographic and theatre work has received international acclaim and has won him two Naledi Theatre Awards (Best Set Design 2003, 2004). He graduated from the Michaelis School of Fine Arts (UCT), where he received the Michaelis Award, and received his MA (FA) from Wits University, where he is now a lecturer in the department of Dramatic Arts.

**Richard Montoya** (writer), **WATER & POWER** (*U.S.A.*): Twin brothers nicknamed “Water” and “Power” from the Eastside streets of Los Angeles rise through the city’s political and police ranks to become players in a complex and dangerous web of Los Angeles’ powerful and corrupt.

Richard Montoya is a founding member of Culture Clash, a performance trio that has been creating works for the national stage since 1984. *WATER & POWER*, which was presented in the 2006 season at the Center Theater Group/Mark Taper Forum, is an official submission for this year’s Pulitzer Prize in Drama. *CHAVEZ RAVINE*, *ZORRO IN HELL* and *WATER & POWER* represent a trilogy of works committed to exploring the Chicano experience in Southern California. New works for the stage include *PALESTINE/NEW MEXICO* and *32 COFFINS*; both plays explore narratives of the ongoing Iraqi civil war. Montoya is an actor and Cultural Affairs Commissioner for the City of Los Angeles.

### **Sundance Institute Feature Film Program**

The January Screenwriters Lab is part of the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program, a year-round program dedicated to supporting artist development and the advancement of distinctive, singular independent projects. Each year, 20-25 emerging filmmakers from the U.S. and abroad participate in the program which includes the Screenwriters and Directors Labs, ongoing creative and practical advice, the post-production initiative, and financial support through fellowship opportunities. In many cases, the Institute has helped filmmakers find a producer, financing and other significant resources, helping to bring these projects into production. The Feature Film Program also presents the Screenplay Reading Series, in Los Angeles and New York, which provides a valuable opportunity for writers to hear their scripts read aloud by professional actors.

### **Sundance Institute**

Dedicated year-round to the discovery and development of artists of independent vision and to the exhibition of their new work, Sundance Institute celebrates its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. Since its inception, the Institute has grown into an internationally recognized resource for thousands of independent artists through its Sundance Film Festival and artistic development programs which provide a range of concentrated creative and financial support for fiction and nonfiction filmmakers, screenwriters, documentary film editors, composers, playwrights, and theatre artists. The original values of independence, creative diversity, and discovery continue to define and guide the work of Sundance Institute, both with artists in the U.S. and, increasingly, with artists from other regions of the world.