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Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Presents Feature Film Prize to Tesla, Announces New Grants to Artists at 2020 Sundance Film Festival

## Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

### Winners of Commissioning Grant, Episodic Storytelling Grant and Lab Fellowship Revealed

#### Director-Screenwriter Michael Almereyda Honored

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (January 28, 2020) Park City, Utah.** At a reception at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival today, the beneficiaries of \$70,000 in grants from Sundance Institute and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation were revealed. Doron Weber, Vice President and Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation presented the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize to *Tesla* and announced the new winners: Tim Delaney for *The Plutonians* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Commissioning Grant); Kiran Deol for *Tidal Disruption* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Development Fellowship); and Courtney Smith for *Higher* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Episodic Fellowship). Michael Almereyda's *Tesla* was formally presented with a \$20,000 check for winning the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Feature Film Prize, as previously announced.

The awards were presented at an afternoon cocktail reception at High West Distillery. These activities are part of the Sundance Institute Science-In-Film Initiative, which is made possible by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.



Keri Putnam, Executive Director  
of Sundance Institute

**“Science is key in bridging the gap between the real and the potential, and seeing stories of science told boldly, independently, and with creative vision can spark our own imaginations,” said Keri Putnam, Executive Director of Sundance Institute. “With the aid of the Sloan Foundation, works that tell these stories can enlighten us on the progress we’ve made and help to inspire us to take on the challenges of the future.”**

“We are thrilled to partner with Sundance Institute for our 18th year in a row and to honor Michael Almereyda’s *Tesla* with Ethan Hawke in the title role as our juried feature film prize winner,” said **Doron Weber**, Vice President and Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. “Nicola Tesla was a technological pioneer far ahead of his time and this highly original film for the first time in movie history does both technological and poetic justice to this enduringly fascinating and enigmatic figure. We are equally thrilled to develop with Sundance an exciting pipeline of new screenplays and teleplays including *The Plutonians*, *Tidal Disruption* and *Higher*, encompassing a brilliant satire about astronomy and truth, a psychological drama about sexual harassment in science and a social and historical epic about the construction of the Empire State Building. These three new winning scripts along with many previous Sundance winners still in development and dozens of more projects with our five other film partners across the country comprise one of the best lists in the film industry and show yet again the science makes for great storytelling and great characters.”

The eighteen-year partnership between the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and Sundance Institute forms part of the Sloan Foundation’s nationwide Film Program, which includes support for six of the

nation's leading film schools and seven screenwriting development partners and has resulted in over 25 completed feature films. In addition to *Hidden Figures*, originally supported by a Sloan book grant, the film program has long championed stories about women in science from *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story* to stories about Louise Pearce, Rosalind Franklin, Marie Curie, Lise Meitner, and Jane Goodall. The program has also supported many works about the role of technology in daily life, including the impact of machine learning, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Sloan has supported feature narrative films such as *Adventures of a Mathematician*, *One Man Dies a Million Times*, *The Sound of Silence*, *To Dust*, *The Catcher Was a Spy*, *The Man Who Knew Infinity*, *The Imitation Game*, *Experimenter* and *Operator*, along with documentaries, such as the 2020 Sundance Film Festival selection *Coded Bias* and several new projects, including episodic television, in development. The program has also given early recognition to stand-out films such as *The Aeronauts*, *First Man*, *Searching*, *The Martian* and *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, last year's recipient of the Feature Film Prize.

### **Tesla: Winner of the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize**

**Tesla** has been awarded the 2020 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize and received a \$20,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at today's reception. The Prize is selected by a jury of film and science professionals and presented to an outstanding feature film focusing on science or technology as a theme, or depicting a scientist, engineer or mathematician as a major character, and will be included in the 2020 Sundance Film Festival closing Awards Night.

[The 2020 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize Jury](#) was named on January 14, 2020, and includes Dr. Ruth Angus, associate professor in astrophysics at Columbia University; actress Emily Mortimer; multimedia artist Jessica Oreck; materials scientist and science communicator Ainissa Ramirez; and director and screenwriter Michael Tyburski.

The jury stated, "For its bold and original approach to cinematic storytelling, and for its beautifully shot portrayal of a technological pioneer and visionary futurist who foresaw our age 100 years ago, the 2020 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize goes to Michael Almereyda's *Tesla*."

**Tesla** / United States (Director and screenwriter: Michael Almereyda, Producers: Avi Lerner, Jeffery Greenstein, Uri Singer, Christa Campbell, Lati Grobman, Isen Robbins) "Highlighting the Promethean struggles of Nikola Tesla, as he attempts to transcend entrenched technology—including his own previous work—by pioneering a system of wireless energy that will change the world. Cast: *Ethan Hawke, Kyle MacLachlan, Eve Hewson, Jim Gaffigan, Hannah Gross, Josh Hamilton*

**Michael Almereyda's** films include features, documentaries, and shorts. *Marjorie Prime* premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival, where it was awarded the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize. *Experimenter* premiered at the 2015 Festival. Almereyda's adaptation of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* premiered at the 2014 Venice International Film Festival.

### **Sundance Institute / Sloan Commissioning Grant**

Tim Delaney will receive a \$25,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at this year's Sundance Film Festival for *The Plutonians*. Previous winners include Alex Rivera's *La Vida Robot* and Robert Edwards's *American Prometheus*.

***The Plutonians*** (U.S.A.) / **Tim Delaney** (Director, Screenwriter) â?? When the redefinition of planethood threatens to exclude Pluto, a motley coalition of astronomers and outsiders conspires to defend it by any means necessary, challenging what it means to be special in an indifferent universe.

**Tim Delaney** is a writer and director from Bronxville, NY. He is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, where he was awarded Best Undergraduate Screenplay, and currently resides in New York where he attends NYU's Graduate Filmmaking Program as both a thesis student and an adjunct professor.

#### **Sundance Institute / Sloan Development Fellowship**

Kiran Deol will receive a \$15,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at this year's Sundance Film Festival for *Tidal Disruption*. Previous winners include Logan Kibens's *Operator*, Darcy Brislin and Dyana Winkler's *Bell* and Rob Meyer's *A Birder's Guide to Everything*.

***Tidal Disruption*** (U.S.A.) / **Kiran Deol** (Director, Screenwriter) â?? A starry-eyed graduate student desperately struggles to maneuver between her passion for astronomy and her charismatic mentor's advances in this claustrophobic psychological thriller.

**Kiran Deol** is a filmmaker, comedian, and actor based in Los Angeles. Her first film, *Woman Rebel*, a documentary about women rebel soldiers, was nominated for an Emmy, shortlisted for an Oscar and distributed by HBO. She currently stars in as â??Malloryâ?? in the new NBC/Hulu series *Sunnyside* from Mike Schur and Kal Penn, tours nationally as a standup comedian and can be heard on the Crooked Media's *Hysteria* podcast. *Tidal Disruption* is her first feature film.

#### **Sundance Institute / Sloan Episodic Fellowship**

Courtney Smith will receive a \$10,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation at this year's Sundance Film Festival for *Higher*.

***Higher*** (U.S.A.) / **Courtney Smith** (Screenwriter) â?? The Empire State Building, a symbol of American can-do, is a dream that nearly was not. Sparked by the Roaring Twenties and fueled by New York's â??Race to the Sky,â?? the building was birthed right into the Wall Street Crash of 1929. This upstairs/downstairs drama will explore the lives of those brave men and women â?? immigrants, investors, and industrialists â?? who risked it all to raise the rafters on the world's tallest building while the world around them fell apart.

**Courtney A. Smith**, an NYU/ Tisch grad, is a screenwriter living in Los Angeles. She was a Second Round Finalist at the Austin Film Festival (2015) and her feature film *Archangel* (co-written by Patrick Massett) received offers from Blumhouse, Sony International and IM Global. She is currently working on Swagger for Apple TV+ and has worked in writer's departments on shows including *Friday Night Lights*, *The Get Down* and *The Blacklist*.

#### **The Sundance Film Festival®**

The Sundance Film Festival has introduced global audiences to some of the most groundbreaking films of the past three decades, including *Sorry to Bother You*, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Eighth Grade*, *Get Out*, *The Big Sick*, *Mudbound*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *Whiplash*, *Brooklyn*, *Precious*, *The Cove*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *Napoleon Dynamite*, *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*, *Reservoir Dogs*, and *sex, lies, and videotape*. The Festival is a program of the non-profit Sundance Institute®. 2020 Festival sponsors include: Presenting Sponsors â?? Acura,

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### 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. [Sundance Co//ab](#), a digital community platform, brings artists together to learn from each other and Sundance Advisors and connect in a creative space, developing and sharing works in progress. The Sundance Film Festival and other public programs connect audiences and artists to ignite new ideas, discovering original voices, and build a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as *The Farewell*, *Late Night*, *The Souvenir*, *The Infiltrators*, *Sorry to Bother You*, *Eighth Grade*, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Hereditary*, *RBG*, *Call Me By Your Name*, *Get Out*, *The Big Sick*, *Top of the Lake*, *Winter's Bone*, *Dear White People*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *State of the Union*, *Indecent*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

### About the Sloan Foundation

The New York-based Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, founded in 1934, is a non-profit philanthropy that makes grants for original research and education in science, technology, and economic performance. Sloan's program in Public Understanding of Science and Technology, directed by Doron Weber, supports books, radio, film, television, theater and new media to reach a wide, non-specialized audience and to bridge the two cultures of science and the humanities.

Sloan's Film Program encourages filmmakers to create more realistic and compelling stories about science and technology and to challenge existing stereotypes about scientists and engineers in the popular imagination. Over the past two decades, Sloan has partnered with some of the top film schools in the country ??? including AFI, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, NYU, UCLA, and USC ??? and established annual awards in screenwriting and film production, along with an annual best-of-the-best Student Grand Jury Prize administered by the Tribeca Film Institute. The Foundation also supports screenplay development programs with the Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute, SFFILM, the Black List, and Film Independent, the Aretha Film Festival and the North Fork TV Festival and has helped develop such film projects as Thor Klein's *Adventures of a Mathematician*, Jessica Orek's *One Man Dies a Million Times*, Michael Tyburski's *The Sound of Silence* which premiered this year at Sundance, Shawn Snyder's *To Dust*, Ben Lewin's *The Catcher Was a Spy*, Morten Tyldum's *The Imitation Game*, Matthew Brown's *The Man Who Knew Infinity*, and Michael Almereyda's *Experimenter*. The Foundation has also supported theatrical documentaries such as *Coded Bias*, *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life*, *The Bit Player*, *BOMBSHELL: The Hedy Lamarr Story*, *Particle Fever*, and Jacques Perrin's *Oceans*.

The Foundation has an active theater program and commissions about twenty science plays each year from the Ensemble Studio Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, and the National Theatre, as well as supporting select productions across the country and abroad. Recent grants have supported Bess Wohl's *Continuity*, Charly Evon Simpson's *Behind the Sheet*, Chiara Atik's *BUMP*, Lucy Kirkwood's *Mosquitoes*, Nick Payne's *Constellations*, Lucas Hnath's *Isaac's Eye*, and Anna Ziegler's *Photograph 51*. The Foundation's book program includes early support for *Hidden Figures: The American Dream and the Untold Story of the Black Women Mathematicians Who Helped Win the Space Race*, the highest-grossing Oscar-nominated film of 2017 and the recipient of the Sloan Science in Cinema Prize at the San Francisco Film Society in December 2016.

For more information on the Sloan Foundation, visit [Sloan.org](https://Sloan.org) or follow the Foundation on Twitter and Facebook at @SloanPublic.

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