

Why Does Sundance Institute Celebrate Indigenous Voices?

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

By Adam Piron

Weâ??re in a moment. As much as Indigenous people have always been carving their own ways throughout the dynamics of colonialism, the time weâ??re in now has been the result of generations of Indigenous peopleâ??s vigilance against being silenced. From the tribes of first contact to the current struggle of the Wetâ??suwetâ??en Nationâ??s land defenders, Indigenous people in North America (and everywhere) have remained steadfast in upholding their rights to control their own land and voices. Itâ??s from this resilience that weâ??re still here and itâ??s by their collective strength that we continue to maintain the foundation we have.

At Sundance Instituteâ??s Indigenous Program, our core values in how we support our artists have been rooted in that foundation and spirit of change. As filmmaker Darol Olu Kae recently stated in SEEN:

â??When faced with the violent history of cinema and its logic of storytelling, Black, Brown, and Indigenous artists canâ??t afford to simply appropriate the prerogatives of white image-makers. We have a different kind of history that requires us to move differentlyâ?¦â?•

Whether itâ??s been the success of television series like Sterlin Harjoâ??s *Reservation Dogs*, Taika Waititiâ??s recent Oscar win, or Sky Hopinkaâ??s *Iâ??ll Remember You as You Were, not as What Youâ??ll Become*, now currently on view at the Museum of Modern Art, Indigenous artists are continuing to forge new paths for not only what it means for us to make our own images, but also for the possibilities that this work creates for generations to come. As a program, weâ??re proud to support, uphold and celebrate all of our artists and alumni as they continue to add to that foundation and push forward.

In the continued spirit of celebrating Native American Heritage Month, my team and I also felt that in affirming our programâ??s support we ought to also share the values that inform the work that we do and why we celebrate the voices of our Indigenous artists and their communities. We hope you find them meaningful and that you continue to support and embolden Indigenous voices to tell their own stories.

Sundance Institute Indigenous Programâ??s Values Statement

Since the birth of the moving image, Native American communities have been mined for their imagery and stories but have rarely had creative control in the stories being told about their communities. This has resulted in the misrepresentation and invisibility of Native people in contemporary American popular culture and around the world. In the early years of Robert Redfordâ??s involvement with the film and television industry, he noticed the absence of Native writers, directors, and personally began to mentor and support them to tell their own stories. In keeping with this early work, in 1981 Native American filmmakers were invited to participate in the founding meetings of Sundance Institute and its first filmmaking Lab. Thanks to our founder, this formed the commitment for the Sundance Institute to serve Native filmmakers in its work nurturing artists. Since then that commitment has grown to become a core program of the Institute, the Indigenous Program, and provides deep support and championing of Indigenous-created stories that have broadened to include supporting Indigenous filmmakers on a global scale.

The Indigenous Program has prioritized serving Native American filmmakers in the United States and North America with opportunities like the Merata Mita Fellowship being awarded to an Indigenous woman honoree selected from a global pool. The Instituteâ??s Feature Film Program, Documentary Film Program, and Sundance Film Festival actively outreach to Indigenous artists and collaborate with the Indigenous Program to identify artists for support. Since its founding, the Sundance Institute has supported four generations of Indigenous artists who have firmly established our filmmaking community and created a significant body and canon of Cinema, and now the fifth generation is starting to emerge who we are beginning to invest in.

The Sundance Institute Indigenous Program honors and upholds the inherent Sovereignty of Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples. We respect and uphold that Sovereignty and the nuances of Indigenous cultures, kinship and community, and their right to determine belonging and citizenship. Throughout the Programâ??s history, and across Sundance Institute, this has remained a priority of our mandate of support for Indigenous storytelling. For Indigenous Peoples, the community comes in many forms and we recognize the shifting nature of community due to colonization and genocide that has impacted Indigenous peoples across the US and around the world in different ways.

Throughout the history of Sundance Institute and the Indigenous Program, we have maintained our commitment to supporting the voices of Indigenous artists and self-determination in storytelling. The Sundance Institute Indigenous Program works with Indigenous communities around the world from the Pacific, Australasia, Circumpolar Arctic, North America, and Latin America. Today, the artists and allies from these regions have contributed to a thriving global Indigenous Cinema community. In our work we emulate our core values of decolonizing the screen and uplifting the voices of Indigenous artists, recognizing that telling Indigenous stories comes with deep obligations and responsibilities towards

Indigenous peoples, communities, and their Sovereignty.

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1. #Sundance
2. Sundance
3. Sundance Film Festival
4. Sundance Film Festival 2021
5. Sundance Film Festival 2022

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hollywoodglee