Sundance Institute Names 2021 Momentum Fellows

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

New Collaboration with NBCUniversal to Support Underrepresented Filmmakers in Building Sustainable Careers

Los Angeles â?? Sundance Institute announced today the third class of the **Momentum Fellowship**, a full-year program of deep, customized creative and professional support for mid-career writers and directors from underrepresented communities who are poised to take the next step in their careers in fiction and documentary filmmaking.

The fellowship includes unrestricted grant funding, industry mentorship, professional coaching offered by Renee Freedman & Company supported by The Harnisch Foundation, writing workshops and industry meetings in Spring 2021, and bespoke year-round support from Sundance Institute staff. Additionally, the FilmTwo Fellowship has merged into the Momentum Fellowship, and NBCUniversal will provide an opportunity to select Momentum fellows working on fiction projects to participate in the Universal Directors Initiative. The two-year at-will initiative provides select participants access to NBCUniversalâ??s creative executives and producers to build career momentum and exposure to potential directing opportunities across Film, TV, and Streaming.

â??We are thrilled to bring back the Momentum Fellowship for a third year, to support these visionary artists at such a critical moment both in their careers and in our culture at large,â?• said Karim Ahmad , Director, Outreach & Inclusion, Sundance Institute.

Karim Ahmad, Director, Outreach & Inclusion, Sundance Institute.

The Momentum Fellowship, which launched in 2018, evolved from the Women at Sundance Fellowship, a highly successful model that merited expansion for impact across a broader cohort of underrepresented communities.

Those eligible for this intersectional program include artists identifying as women, non-binary and/or transgender, Black, Indigenous, and/or people of color, and artists with disabilities. Past recipients include Andrew Ahn, Linda Yvette ChÃ¡vez, Christina Choe, Deborah Esquenazi, Rodney Evans, Penny Lane, Avril Z. Speaks, and Malika Zouhali-Worrall.

The Sundance Institute Outreach and Inclusion program is made possible by support from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Emerson Collective, Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation, The Harnisch Foundation, NBCUniversal, Ruderman Family Foundation, Critical Minded, Jason Delane Lee and Yvonne Huff Lee, Netflix, SAGindie, Asante Family Philanthropic Fund, Easterseals Disability Services, Rene Cruzâ??Esperanza Arts Foundation, Philip Fungâ??A3 Foundation, and Open Society Foundations.

Women at Sundance is made possible by leadership support from The David and Lura Lovell Foundation, The Harnisch Foundation, and Adobe. Additional support is provided by Kimberly Steward, Paul, and Katy Drake Bettner, Barbara Bridges, Abigail Disney, and Pierre Hauserâ??Like a River Fund, Hollywood Foreign Press Association, Rhianon Jones, Suzanne Lerner, Cristina Ljungberg, Susan Bay Nimoy, Ann Lovell, Zions Bank, Visionary Women, Gruber Family Foundation, Pat Mitchell and Scott Seydel, Brenda Robinson, and an anonymous donor.

Also announced today: NBCUniversal is partnering with the Institute on the final FilmTwo Fellowship. The recipients of the **Sundance Institute | Universal FilmTwo Fellowship** are: Ash Mayfair, Marcel Rasquin, and filmmaking team Samantha Buck and Marie Schlingmann.

The 2021 Momentum Fellows are:

Cristina Costantini

Cristina Costantini is an Emmy award-winning director. Her latest documentary *Mucho Mucho Amor*, about famed Puerto Rican astrologer Walter Mercado, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival and was released on Netflix in 2020. The film was nominated for a Critics Choice Award and won the Best Latinx Film award from the National Association of Latino Independent Producers (NALIP). Her first feature film, *Science Fair*, told the story of nine high schoolers from around the world who set out to win the International Science and Engineering Fair. The film won the Sundance Festival Favorite Award in 2018 as well as the SXSW Audience Award, a Critics Choice Award for Best First Time Director, and an Emmy award. Before becoming a documentary filmmaker, Cristina worked as an investigative journalist, covering immigration, detention centers, sex trafficking, and the opiate epidemic for ABC News, Univision, The Huffington Post, and Fusion. Her investigative work has been recognized with a GLAAD Media Award, National Association of Hispanic Journalists Awards, and an Alfred I. duPontâ??Columbia University Award. The Wisconsin native is a Yale grad who now lives in California with her husband, Alfie, and their pug dog Harriet. She is a partner at Muck Media, a Los Angeles-based production company.

Natalie Erika James

Natalie Erika James is a Japanese-Australian writer/director based in Melbourne, Australia. Her debut feature, *Relic*, is a psychological horror starring Emily Mortimer, Bella Heathcote and Robyn Nevin,

produced by Carver Films, Jake Gyllenhaalâ??s Nine Stories and executive produced by the Russo Brothersâ?? Agbo Films. *Relic* premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and was programmed in SXSW, BFI London Film Festival and Sitges Film Festival, where it was awarded a Special Mention for Direction. The film was nominated for Best Original Feature Film at the 2019 Australian Writerâ??s Guild Awards and nominated for Best Direction in a Feature Film at the 2020 Australian Directorâ??s Guild Awards. Natalie is currently developing *Drum Wave*, a Japanese folk horror with development support from Screen Australia and Film Victoria. *Drum Wave* was one of 14 projects selected for the project market at the International Film Festival & Awards Macao, taking home the Best Co-Production prize. Her 2018 proof-of-concept short for *Drum Wave* was nominated for Best Australian Short Film at the Sydney Film Festival and premiered internationally at Fantastic Fest. Natalie is signed to WME and directs commercials and music videos through Australian production company, Fiction.

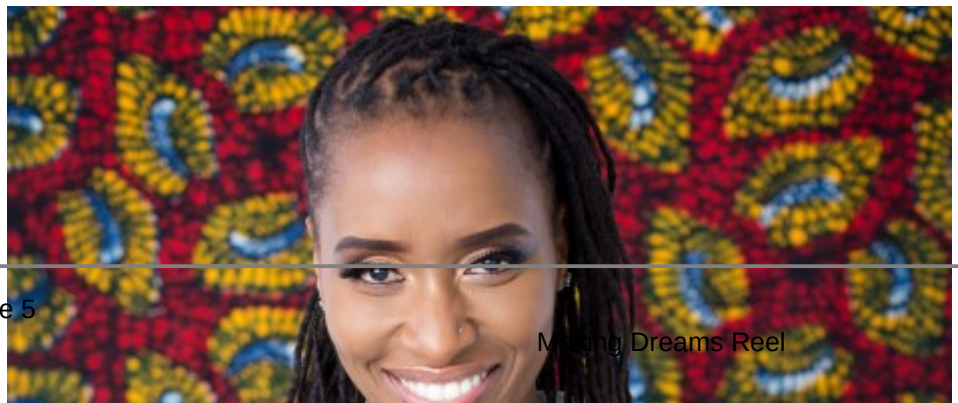
Shalini Kantayya

Filmmaker Shalini Kantayyaâ??s feature documentary, *Coded Bias*, premiered at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for a Criticsâ?? Choice Award for best science documentary. She directed the season finale episode for the National Geographic television series *Breakthrough*, a series profiling trailblazing scientists transforming the future, Executive Produced by Ron Howard, broadcast globally in June 2017. Her debut feature film *Catching the Sun*, about the race for a clean energy future, premiered at the Los Angeles Film Festival and was named a New York Times Criticsâ?? Pick. *Catching the Sun* released globally on Netflix on Earth Day 2016 with Executive Producer Leonardo DiCaprio, and was nominated for the Environmental Media Association Award for Best Documentary. Kantayya is a TED Fellow, a William J. Fulbright Scholar, and a finalist for the

ABC Disney DGA Directing Program. She is an Associate of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. Kantayya finished in the top 10 out of 12,000 filmmakers on Foxâ??s On the Lot, a show by Steven Spielberg in search of Hollywoodâ??s next great director.

Loira Limbal

Loira Limbal is an Afro-Dominican filmmaker and DJ interested in the creation of art that is nuanced and revelatory for communities of color. She is the Senior Vice President of Programs at Firelight Media. Firelight is committed to making films about pivotal movements and moments in the U.S. Firelightâ??s flagship program â?? the Documentary Lab â?? is a fellowship that provides mentorship, funding, and industry access to emerging filmmakers of color. Limbalâ??s current film, *Through the Night* is a feature documentary about a 24 hour daycare center. *Through the Night* was part of the 2019 Sundance Edit & Story Lab and was selected for world premiere at the 2020 Tribeca Film Festival. Her first film, *Estilo Hip Hop*, was a co-production of ITVS and aired on PBS in 2009. Additionally, she co-produces and helms the popular Brooklyn monthly #APartyCalledRosiePerez. Limbal received a B.A. in History from Brown University and is a graduate of the Third World Newsreelâ??s Film and Video Production Training Program. She is a Sundance Institute Fellow and a former Ford Foundation JustFilms/Rockwood Fellow. She lives in the Bronx with her two children.



Ekwa Msangi

Ekwaâ??s award-winning and critically acclaimed feature film *Farewell Amor* premiered in competition at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival, garnering 100% on Rotten Tomatoes. The film won the Sundance Amazon Producerâ??s Award, and NYWIFT Directing Award amongst other distinctions, and was bought for distribution by IFC Films for North America, MUBI and Netflix for Worldwide. Previous to that, Ekwa has written & directed several shorts, most recently award-winning comedy *Soko Sonko* (*The Market King*), and *Farewell Meu Amo*r starring Tony Award nominee Sahr Ngauja, and Nana Mensah. For *Farewell Amor* Ekwa was awarded the Jerome Foundation Grant, Tribeca All Access Fellowship, Cine Qua Non Lab Fellowship, IFP/No Borders, and Sundance Feature Film Development Fellowship, and is a 2020 BAFTA Breakthrough honoree. Ekwa has also written & directed several drama series for mainstream broadcasters in Kenya and MNET South Africa, including *The Agency*, MNETâ??s first-ever original hour-long Kenyan drama series. Ekwa has taught Screenwriting at The New School and Feirstein Graduate School of Cinema, and is faculty at the Vermont College of Fine Arts. One of Ekwaâ??s key goals as an artist is to transform our societyâ??s images and relationships with African cultures, and to empower African filmmakers in telling their stories.

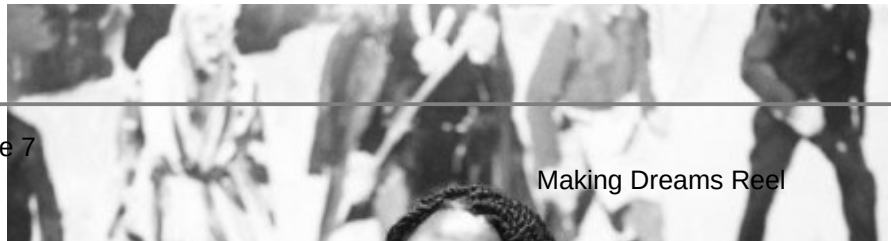
Edson Oda

Edson Oda is a Japanese-Brazilian writer/director based in Los Angeles. He graduated from the University of SÃ£o Paulo with a Bachelorâ??s in Advertising and completed his Master of Fine Arts in Film and Production at the University of Southern California. His first feature film *Nine Days* starring Winston Duke, Zazie Beetz, Benedict Wong, Bill Skarsgard and Tony Hale premiered at the Sundance Film Festival 2020 (U.S. Dramatic Competition), winning the Walt Salt Screenwriting Award. Oda also wrote, directed and supervised projects for Philips, Telefonica, Movistar, InBev, Whirlpool, Johnson & Johnson, Honda, Nokia. Heâ??s a Sundance

Screenwriters Lab alumni and Latin Grammy-nominated director for best music video.

Jacqueline Olive

Jacqueline Olive is an independent filmmaker and immersive media producer with more than fifteen years of experience in journalism and film. Her debut feature documentary, *Always in Season*, examines the lingering impact of more than a century of lynching African Americans. *Always in Season* premiered in competition at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival and was awarded the Special Jury Prize for Moral Urgency. It has received numerous festival jury awards and other honors that include winner of the 2020 SIMA Documentary Jury Prize For Ethos and nominations for Best Writing from IDA Documentary Awards 2019 and the Spotlight Award from Cinema Eye Honors 2019. *Always in Season* broadcast on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series, Independent Lens, on February 24, 2020, and was the most viewed film of the season. Jackie also co-directed and co-produced the award-winning hour-long thesis film, *Black to Our Roots*, which broadcast on PBS WORLD in 2009. Jackie has received artist grants and industry funding from Sundance Institute, Ford Foundation, Firelight Media, Tribeca Film Institute, Independent Television Service (ITVS), Chicken & Egg Pictures, International Documentary Association, Kendeda Fund, Catapult Film Fund, Southern Documentary Fund, Alternate ROOTS, and more. She was recently awarded the Emerging Filmmakers of Color Award from International Documentary Association (IDA) and the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation and profiled one of Varietyâ??s â??10 Filmmakers To Watch.â?• A Southerner and Mississippi native, Jackie currently teaches film as Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz in the Social Documentation MFA Program and happily makes films full-time.



Angel Kristi Williams

Angel Kristi Williams is a filmmaker born and raised in West Baltimore, Maryland. She was 8 years old when her late father gave her a VHS camcorder which sparked her love for the medium. After studying visual art, photography and experimental film, Angel developed a voice that embraces silence and the power of the image to tell a story. Her feature directorial debut *Really Love*, produced by MACRO, was selected to play in narrative competition at SXSW and won the Special Jury Recognition for Acting for co-stars Kofi Siriboe and Yootha Wong-Loi-Sing. The film recently World Premiered as part of AFI Festâ??s Special Presentations to much acclaim. Her previous film *Charlotte* won the short film jury awards at Atlanta and Sarasota Film Festivals. Angel is a 2014 Film Independent Project Involve Directing Fellow, where she was the recipient of the Sony Pictures Diversity Fellowship. She splits her time between Baltimore and Los Angeles and teaches in the MFA film program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). She holds an MFA in Cinema Directing from Columbia College Chicago.

Sundance Institute
As a champion and curator of independent stories for the stage and screen, the nonprofit Sundance Institute provides and preserves the space for artists in film, theatre, film composing, and digital media to create and thrive. Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, the Instituteâ??s signature Labs, granting, and mentorship programs which are dedicated to developing new work and take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally, are supported largely through contributed revenue. 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, discover original voices, and build a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as *Clemency, Never Rarely Sometimes Always, Zola, On The Record, Boys State, The Farewell, Honeyland, One Child Nation, The Souvenir, The Infiltrators, Sorry to Bother You, Wonâ??t You Be My Neighbor?, Hereditary, Call Me By Your Name, Get Out, The Big Sick, Mudbound, Fruitvale Station, City So Real, Top of the Lake, Between the World & Me, Wild Goose Dreams* and *Fun Home*. Join Sundance Institute on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube.

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