

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Presents Feature Film Prize to Son of Monarchs, Announces New Grants to Artists at 2021 Sundance Film Festival

Description

Posted by Larry Gleeson

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

Director-Screenwriter Alexis Gambis Honored

Park City, Utah â?? At the 2021 Sundance Film Festival today, the beneficiaries of $70,000 in grants from Sundance Institute and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation were named. **Doron Weber**, Vice President and Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, presented the Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize to *Son of Monarchs* and announced the new winners: **Tania Taiwo** for *Pharmacopeia* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Commissioning Grant); **Alyssa Loh** for *Chariot* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Development Fellowship); and **Jennifer Lee** and **Graham Sack** for *The Harvard Computers* (Sundance Institute | Sloan Episodic Fellowship). **Alexis Gambis**â??s *Son of Monarchs* will receive a $20,000 check as part of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Feature Film Prize, as previously announced.

More information about the 2021 awardees is available on the Festivalâ??s digital platform. 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 addresses members of the press at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival Press Conference at the Egyptian Theatre in Park City, Utah, on January 23rd, 2019. (Photo by Larry Gleeson)

â??The world has been uniquely preoccupied with science for the last year, and itâ??s clearer than ever that it has crucial implications for our culture,â?• said **Keri Putnam**, Executive Director of Sundance Institute, â??The Sloan Foundation has always recognized that artfully-told stories about science, technology and human engagement have the power to advance our understanding and imaginations.â?•



Doron Weber, Vice President and Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

â??In this plague-ridden year that has shuttered so much of our lives but not our imaginations or our creative output, we are thrilled to continue Sloanâ??s 19-year partnership with Sundance Institute by honoring Alexis Gambisâ??s *Son of Monarchs* as our juried feature film prize winner and by supporting three exciting new screenwriters,â?• said **Doron Weber**, Vice President and Program Director at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. â??All this yearâ??s winning projects portray underrepresented figures in conflict with their environment who turn to science in one form or another. Gambisâ??s beautiful, poetic film depicts an immigrant scientistâ??s effort to understand nature and his own family past as he crosses boundaries of time, nationality, and species. Our three winning scripts and teleplays tell the tales, respectively, of a Black pharmacist who becomes a drug dealer to support herself (*Pharmacopeia);* brilliant but marginalized women who defied sexism and discrimination to become astronomers *(The Harvard Computers)*; and 1958 plan to use nuclear weapons to blast a new harbor among the indigenous population of Alaska (*Chariot*). These winners along with dozens more from other film partners across the country show that science does not just make for great storytelling and great characters, but it can help us better understand the world around us and we ignore it at our peril.â?•

The nineteen-year partnership between the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and Sundance Institute forms part of the Sloan Foundationâ??s nationwide Film Program, which includes support for 12 film schools and seven screenwriting development partners and has resulted in over 30 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 *Ammonite, The Aeronauts*, *First Man, Searching*, *The Martian, The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* and *Tesla*, last yearâ??s recipient of the Feature Film Prize.

Son o



Son of Monarchs

Son of Monarchs has been awarded the 2021 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize and received a $20,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. 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 recognized at the 2021 Sundance Film Festival closing Awards Night.

The 2021 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize Jury was named on January 22, 2021 and includes Joy Buolamwini (founder, Algorithmic Justice League) Aneesh Chaganty (writer/director, *Searching*, 2018 Alfred P. Sloan Feature Film Prize winner), Dr. MandÃ« Holford (associate professor of chemistry, Hunter College and the Graduate Center, City University of New York), Lydia Dean Pilcher (director, *A Call to Spy*), and Lena Vurma (producer, *Adventures of a Mathematician*).

The jury stated, â??For its poetic, multilayered portrait of a scientistâ??s growth and self-discovery as he migrates between Mexico and New York City working on transforming nature and uncovers the fluid boundaries that unite past and present and all living things, the 2021 Sloan Feature Film Prize at the Sundance Festival goes to Alexis Gambisâ??s *Son of Monarchs*.â?•

Son of Monarchs / Mexico, U.S.A. (Director and Screenwriter: Alexis Gambis, Producers: Abraham Dayan, Maria Altamirano) *â??* After his grandmotherâ??s death, a Mexican biologist living in New York returns to his hometown, nestled in the majestic monarch butterfly forests of MichoacÃ¡n. The journey forces him to confront past traumas and reflect on his hybrid identity, sparking a personal and spiritual metamorphosis. *Cast: Tenoch Huerta MejÃa, Alexia Rasmussen, LÃ¡zaro Gabino RodrÃguez, NoÃ© HernÃ¡ndez, Paulina GaitÃ¡n, William Mapother. International Premiere*

Alexis Gambis is a filmmaker and biologist. His films combine documentary and fiction, often embracing animal perspectives and experimenting with new forms of scientific storytelling. In 2008, he founded the Imagine Science Film Festival. In 2016, he launched the science-focused streaming platform and online magazine Labocine. His first narrative feature, *The Fly Room* (2014), is about the birthplace of genetics at the turn of the 20th century.

Sundance Institute | Sloan Development Fellowship

Alyssa Loh will receive a $15,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for *Tidal Disruption*. Previous winners include Kiran Deolâ??s *Tidal Disruption,* Logan Kibensâ??s *Operator,* Darcy Brislin and Dyana Winklerâ??s *Bell* and Rob Meyerâ??s *A Birderâ??s Guide to Everything*.

Chariot / Alyssa Loh (Screenwriter) â?? 1958. In a purported attempt to â??redeemâ?• nuclear weapons, the American government embarks on a plan to blast a new harbor into the Alaskan coastline using five thermonuclear bombs â?? one of them 10 times the size of the weapon dropped on Hiroshima. A Native village next to ground zero must join forces with a young American scientist to face down the government and save their home from destruction. Inspired by true events.

Alyssa Loh is a writer and filmmaker. She serves on the Editorial Board of the history journal *Laphamâ??s Quarterly.* She writes on technology and culture (virtual reality, data collection, social media) for publications such as *Artforum, Los Angeles Review of Books*, and more. She contributed to a published PEN America roundtable on surveillance while serving as Deputy Editor of The American Reader. Alyssa is a joint MBA/MFA (filmmaking) candidate at NYU. At NYU Graduate Film, she is the winner of the Essential Entertainment, Bernie Brillstein, and Tisch scholarships. She holds a BA from Princeton in literature and creative writing, where she won the Ward Mathis Prize for best short story. She also received Outstanding Work by a Junior and Outstanding Work by a Freshman for her creative work those years, including a short story selected by Toni Morrison for development into a sculptural piece installed at the Lucas Gallery.

Sundance Institute / Sloan Commissioning Grant

Tania Taiwo will receive a $25,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for *Pharmacopeia*. Previous winners include Tim Delaneyâ??s *The Plutonians,* Alex Riveraâ??s *La Vida Robot* and Robert Edwardsâ??s *American Prometheus*.

Pharmacopeia (U.S.A.) / Tania Taiwo (Director, Screenwriter) â?? *Drowning in student loan debt, a quirky Black pharmacist rebels against the system and becomes the drug dealer pharmacy school never taught her to be.*

Originally from Texas, **Tania Taiwo** is a recovering pharmacist-turned-writer/filmmaker based in New York City. Her short film, *Pharmacopeia,* has been selected for regional, national, and international film festivals, including Best U.S. Short, Special Mention (for Stylistic Vision and Emerging Talent) at The Palm Springs International Shortfest, a finalist for Festival International du Film PanAfricain de Cannes, and also currently a SFFILM Rainin Grant Finalist. Taiwo believes in using her voice to champion the causes of underserved and Black communities, Women, and People of Color â?? illustrating the humanity in their stories.

Sundance Institute / Sloan Episodic Fellowship

Jennifer Lee and **Graham Sack** will receive a $10,000 cash award from the Alfred P. Sloan

Foundation for *The Harvard Computers*.

***The Harvard Computers* / Jennifer Lee** (Producer) and **Graham Sack** (Screenwriter) â?? Inspired by the true story of the â??Harvard Computers,â?• a group of women who braved gender and class discrimination to become Americaâ??s first female astronomers in the 1880s.

Jennifer 8. Lee is a producer, journalist, and entrepreneur. In the area of film, Jenny produced the documentaries *The Search for General Tso* (2014), about the history and ubiquity of Chinese-American food, and *Picture Character* (2019), about the secret world of emoji, both of which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Jenny is co-founder of Plympton, a literary studio that creates innovative projects in publishing. Jenny was the youngest full reporter ever at The New York Times at the age of 24, and went on to author *The Fortune Cookie Chronicles,* which hit #26 on the New York Times Bestseller list. She is a vice-chair of the Unicode Emoji Subcommittee, and co-founder of Emojination, an organization responsible for over 100 emoji on your mobile devices, including HIJAB and INTERRACIAL COUPLE. She graduated from Harvard with a degree in applied math and economics and spent a year at Beijing University on fellowship.

Graham Sack is an award-winning screenwriter, director, and academic. Graham wrote and directed *Lincoln in the Bardo*, a VR experience for New York Times VR. He wrote and directed *The Interpretation of Dreams*, a four-part episodic series and co-created â??objects in mirror AR closer than they appear,â?• an immersive theater + augmented reality installation at Tribeca Storyscapes 2018 that transferred to Next Door at New York Theater Workshop. He is currently developing an original interactive episodic series with Felix and Paul Studios on the topic of artificial intelligence. Graham began his career as a child actor on Broadway, and also holds a BA in Physics from Harvard, an MSc in Economics from the London School of Economics, and is completing a PhD in Digital Humanities at Columbia University. He is the founder of Chronotope Films.

The Sundance Film FestivalÂ®
The Sundance Film Festival has introduced global audiences to some of the most groundbreaking films of the past three decades, including *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, 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. 2021 Festival sponsors to date include: Presenting Sponsors â?? Acura, SundanceTV, Chase Sapphire, Adobe; Leadership Sponsors â?? Amazon Studios, AT&T, DoorDash, Dropbox, Netflix, Omnicom Group, Southwest AirlinesÂ® , WarnerMedia; Sustaining Sponsors â?? AMC, Audible, Canada Goose, Canon U.S.A., Inc., Dell Technologies, Documentary Plus, GEICO, IMDbPro, Stella ArtoisÂ®, Unity Technologies, University of Utah Health, White Claw Hard Seltzer, Zoom; Media Sponsors â?? The Atlantic, IndieWire, Los Angeles Times, NPR, The New York Times, Variety, Vulture, The Wall Street Journal. Sundance Institute recognizes critical support from the State of Utah as Festival Host State. The support of these organizations helps offset the Festivalâ??s costs and sustain the Instituteâ??s year-round programs for independent artists. sundance.org/festival

Sundance Institute
As a champion and curator of independent stories for the stage and screen, 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, 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, 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.

About the Sloan Foundation
The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is a New York based, philanthropic, not-for-profit institution that makes grants in three areas: research in science, technology, and economics; quality and diversity of scientific institutions; and public engagement with science. Sloanâ??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.

Sloanâ??s Film Program encourages ï¬•lmmakers 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 top ï¬•lm schools in the countryâ??including AFI, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia, NYU, UCLA, and USC plus six public film schoolsâ??and established annual awards in screenwriting and ï¬•lm production, along with an annual best-of-the-best Student Grand Jury Prize. The Foundation also supports screenplay development programs with the Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute, SFFILM, the Black List, the Athena Film Festival, the North Fork TV Festival, and Film Independentâ??s Producing Lab and Fast Track program and has helped develop over 30 feature films including Michael Almereydaâ??s *Tesla*, Lydia Dean Pilcher and Ginny Mohlerâ??s *Radium Girls,* Thor Kleinâ??s *Adventures of a Mathematician*, Jessica Oreckâ??s*One Man Dies a Million Times*,â?¯Michael Tyburskiâ??s*The Sound of Silence*, Shawn Snyderâ??s*To Dust*, â?¯Logan Kibens and Sharon Greeneâ??s*Operator*, Morten Tyldumâ??s *The Imitation Game,* and Matthew Brownâ??s*â?¯The Man Who Knew Inï¬•nity*. The Foundation has supported feature documentaries such as *Picture a Scientist, Coded Bias, In Silico, Oliver Sacks: His Own Life, The Bit Player, Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story, Particle Fever*, and Jacques Perrinâ??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 Wohlâ??s *Continuity*, Charly Evon Simpsonâ??s *Behind the Sheet*, Chiara Atikâ??s *Bump*, Leigh Fondakowskiâ??s *Spill*, Lucy Kirkwoodâ??s *Mosquitoes*, Nick Payneâ??s *Constellations*, Lucas Hnathâ??s *Isaacâ??s Eye*, and Anna Zieglerâ??s *Photograph 51*. The Foundationâ??s book program includes support for Margot Lee Shetterlyâ??s*Hidden Figures*,â?¯which became the highest-grossing Oscar-nominated film of 2017 and a social and cultural milestone.

(Sourced from Sundance Institute Press Release)

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1. #Sundance
2. Sundance
3. Sundance Film Festival

Tags

1. Alexis Gambis
2. Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

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