Sundance Institute Announces Screenwriters Lab In Jordan

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Los Angeles, CA (RPRN) 10/02/09 — SUNDANCE INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES 7 PROJECTS FOR THE 2009 RAWI MIDDLE EAST SCREENWRITERS LAB IN JORDAN

Royal Film Commission of Jordan to Host Fifth Annual Lab October 3 – 7, 2009

Sundance Institute today announced the seven projects chosen to participate in the fifth annual RAWI Middle East Screenwriters Lab run by the Royal Film Commission in consultation with Sundance Institute, to be held in Jordan from October 3-7, 2009. An initiative of the Royal Film Commission of Jordan, the RAWI (an Arabic word that means storyteller) Middle East Screenwriters Lab, is part of Sundance Institute's Feature Film Program which supports emerging filmmakers from around the world.

Launched in 2005, the RAWI Middle East Screenwriters Lab provides an opportunity for filmmakers from the region to develop their work under the guidance of accomplished Creative Advisors in an environment that encourages storytelling at the highest level. The five-day Lab is held at the Wadi Feynan Eco-lodge in the breathtaking south Jordanian desert hills, the perfect setting for these one-on-one inspired sessions between advisors and fellows. This year’s Lab brings together seven Fellows from the Middle East and North Africa with Creative Advisors from the United States, Brazil, United Kingdom, Lebanon and Egypt.

The projects and participants selected for the2009 RAWI Middle East Screenwriter's Lab are:

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    - MY NAME IS ALI / Dima Hamdan (Writer/Director), Jordan
    - IKSARA / Suha Araj (Writer/Director), Palestine/USA
    - SMALL VICTORIES / Jacob Kader (Writer/ Director), Palestine/USA
    - THE REPLACEMENT/ Gilles Tarazi (Writer/ Director), Lebanon
    - SHELTER/ Kasem Kharsa (Writer/ Director), Egypt/USA
    - WAJDA / Haifaa Al Mansour (Writer/Director), Saudi Arabia
    - FATHER / Yann- Mounir Demange (Writer/Director), Algeria/France

"Sundance Institute continues its commitment to international storytelling through our partnership with the Royal Jordanian Film Commission. The 5th Annual RAWI Middle East Screenwriters Lab has gathered an extremely talented and original group of emerging screenwriters from the region who will be joined by an extraordinary group of Creative Advisors from around the world," said Michelle Satter, Director of the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program.

"Throughout the past five years, the Lab has helped transform the wealth of stories from the region into films. The Lab known as RAWI is a stepping stone for regional screenwriters and directors, helping them to materialize their films and individual visions," said Mohannad Al-Bakri, Capacity Building Manager at the Royal Film Commission.

The seven Fellows will work with highly accomplished Creative Advisors from all over the world in one-on-one story sessions. This year’s Creative Advisors are: Karim Ainouz, Brazil (Madame Sata, Suely In the Sky); Michael Almereyda, USA (Nadja, William Eggleston in the Real World); Ronan Bennett, UK (Hamburg Cell, Public Enemies); Anthony Drazan, USA (Zebrahead, Hurlyburly); Ziad Doueiri, Lebanon (West Beirut, Lila Says);

Yousry Nasrallah, Egypt (The Door to the Sun, Aquarium); Elena Soarez, Brazil (Me, You, Them; House of Sand); Tyger Williams, USA (Menace II Society).

Details regarding the participants and projects selected for the 2009 RAWI Middle East Screenwriters Lab follow:

MY NAME IS ALI / Dima Hamdan (Writer/Director), Jordan
Two strangers' lives intersect on the streets of Casablanca when a middle-aged bourgeois woman and a desperate street urchin discover they are irrevocably linked and must revisit their past demons.

After studying law and journalism, Dima Hamdan became a reporter for many international news outlets, including the BBC World Service. A self-taught filmmaker, Dima has been writing and directing her own work, including, Going Away, and 11am at Firdous Square - Part1, both winners of the Entry Level competition at Filmaka.com. Her latest short Gaza-London, is about the effects of the Gaza War on a family in Gaza during the winter of 2008-2009.

IKSARA (Void After Expiration) / Suha Araj (Writer/Director), Palestine/USA
A Palestinian American woman on the verge of old-maid status struggles to create her own way to happiness amidst the tremendous pressures of her large, albeit loving, immigrant family to get married as soon as possible.

Suha Araj has focused her installation art and filmmaking on the themes of identity and displacement in oppressed and immigrant communities. Her short film I am Palestine was screened at festivals around the world and has been used as an educational tool. She is also a member of the selection committee of the Arab Film Festival in San Francisco.

SMALL VICTORIES / Jacob Kader (Writer/ Director), Palestine/USA
Beaten down by the stresses of life in Gaza, a discouraged young father turns to boxing as his last chance for hope for his family and his divided

community.

Jacob Kader graduated with a BA in Film and Media from Temple University, where his short film American Falafel received the Derek Freese Award. He began his graduate studies at Columbia University in 2004 concentrating on directing and writing. His short film Parade of Horribles screened at the 2007 Columbia University Film Festival and the NewFilmmakers screening series in New York.

THE REPLACEMENT/ Gilles Tarazi (Writer/ Director), Lebanon
In a country on the edge of civil war, a teenage thug's desperate struggle to escape the precariously explosive streets of Beirut leads him down an even darker path.

Gilles Tarazi studied theater and film in Beirut, and then specialized in documentary films at the Superior School of Cinematographic Studies (ESEC) in Paris. Gilles has worked as an assistant director on commercials and feature films, including A New Day in Old Sanaa, the first Yemeni feature film, by Bader Ben Hirsi; Melodrama Habibi by Hany Tamba; The Last Man by Ghassan Salhab; the Lebanese part of Hadewijch by Bruno Dumont; and Carlos the Jackal by Olivier Assayas.

SHELTER/ Kasem Kharsa (Writer/ Director), Egypt/USA
Accused of being a war criminal, an Iraqi refugee in Lebanon suffering from dementia struggles to rebuild his muddled memories of war to uncover the truth of his role as victim or victimizer.

Kasem Kharsa spent his childhood between the United States and Middle East. He was originally trained as a mechanical engineer, but after several years of working in the field, he decided to pursue filmmaking. He began taking workshops and enrolled in the Red Sea Institute of Cinematic Arts, in Aqaba, Jordan where he has made several short films.

WAJDA / Haifaa Al Mansour (Writer/Director), Saudi Arabia

On the outskirts of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a feisty young girl tries to fulfill her dream of buying a green bicycle but faces repeated obstacles in a society ruled and governed by and for men.

Haifaa Al Mansour is the first female filmmaker in Saudi Arabia. She studied comparative literature at the American University in Cairo and completed a Master's in Film Studies at the University of Sydney under the Endeavour Scholarship Award. She directed the shorts, Who?, Bereavement of the Fledgling, and The Only Way Out, followed by her award-winning documentary Women Without Shadows.

FATHER / Yann- Mounir Demange (Writer/Director), Algeria/France
In 1991 Algeria, a teenage Londoner of Algerian origin, is sent to visit his father's estranged family and instead of the summer of fun he had expected, he gets caught up in the onset of an Islamic revolution, forcing him to find a sense of self while his country does the same.

Yann-Mounir Demange studied film at the London College of Printing, and his graduation film Joe was shown at many International festivals. He then attended NFTS for the Fiction Direction MA, where he was the recipient of a full scholarship from Disney. Since graduating he has directed several hit TV shows, including A Man in a Box, The Secret Diary of a Call Girl, and Dead Set penned by Charlie Brooker, which received a BAFTA nomination.

Since 1981, the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program (FFP) has supported more than 450 independent filmmakers whose distinctive, singular work has engaged audiences worldwide. Program staff fully embraces the unique vision of each filmmaker, encouraging a rigorous creative process with a focus on original and deeply personal storytelling. Each year, up to 25 emerging filmmakers from the U.S. and around the world participate in a year-round continuum of support which can include the Screenwriters and Directors Labs, Composers Lab, Independent Producers Conference, Creative Producing Lab, ongoing creative and strategic advice, significant production and postproduction resources, a rough-cut screening initiative, a

Screenplay Reading Series, and direct financial support through project-specific grants and artist fellowships. In many cases, the Institute has helped the Program's fellows attach producers and talent, secure financing, and assemble other significant resources to move their projects toward production and presentation.

About the Royal Film Commission
The Royal Film Commission was established in July 2003 with a mandate to promote for and contribute to the development of an internationally competitive Jordanian audio-visual industry through the advancement of human, technical, and financial capacities. In addition, it aims to provide comprehensive production support services to local, regional, and international productions. www.film.jo

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Sundance Institute
Founded by Robert Redford in 1981, Sundance Institute is a not-for-profit organization that fosters the development of original storytelling in film and theatre, and presents the annual Sundance Film Festival. Internationally recognized for its artistic development programs for directors, screenwriters, producers, film composers, playwrights and theatre artists, Sundance Institute has nurtured such
projects as Angels in America, Spring Awakening, Boys Don't Cry, Sin Nombre, Born into Brothels and Trouble the Water. www.sundance.org.

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