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Contact: Seanna Hore, Ginsberg/Libby
Seanna.Hore@ginsberglibby.com

Gladys Santos, Ginsberg/Libby
Gladys.Santos@ginsberglibby.com

**FILM INDEPENDENT SELECTS SIX WRITERS FOR
10TH ANNUAL EPISODIC LAB**

**Netflix Returns as Founding Sponsor;
Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Awards \$20,000 Grant**

LOS ANGELES (August 6, 2026) - Film Independent, the nonprofit arts organization behind the Spirit Awards, has selected six writers for the 2026 Episodic Lab, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Running August 10–21, the intensive two-week program provides individualized story and career development for writers with original television pilots. This year's Fellows are Lauren Ferebee, Kristian Mercado, Nikki Palumbo, Sam Schaefer, Val Tan and LaDarrion Williams.

Nikki Palumbo has been selected to receive the \$20,000 Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Grant for their pilot, *Personality Hire*. Awarded annually by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation to one Episodic Lab Fellow whose project meaningfully incorporates science or technology themes and characters into a dramatic story, the grant will support Palumbo's development of the pilot through the Lab.

The Episodic Lab is an in-person program that helps further the careers of its Fellows by introducing them to industry veterans who offer guidance on both the craft and business of writing episodic content. Through personalized feedback from experienced showrunners, creative producers and executives, Fellows will gain the tools to revise and refine their pilots

and navigate a changing industry landscape. A final networking and pitch event will offer Fellows the opportunity to introduce themselves and their work to studio and network executives.

“We are thrilled to be celebrating ten years of championing visionary writers through the Episodic Lab,” said Dea Vazquez, Associate Director of Fiction Programs. “We are proud to welcome the new cohort of bold and inventive storytellers to the Lab, where we will further hone their visions and support the advancement of their careers in entertainment.”

The Episodic Lab Creative Advisors and Guest Speakers include Akil Rashad Anderson, Olivia Blaustein, Mel Eslyn, JaNeika James, JaSheika James, Henry “Hank” Jones, Justin S. Lee, Montserrat Luna, Caroline Mak, Glen Mazzara, Colleen McGuinness, Robbie Pickering, Loretta Ramos, Gina Reyes, Beth Schacter, Ellen Shanman and Ligiah Villalobos.

As Founding Sponsor, Netflix is deeply committed to supporting each year’s selected Fellows, providing them with opportunities to learn about the process of creating and producing shows. This unique access is a crucial step in helping the Fellows move forward in their careers.

Past Episodic Lab Fellows include April Shih, who has written on FX’s *Fargo*, *Dave*, *Mrs. America*, *You’re the Worst*, and struck an overall deal at FX Productions; Kimi Lee, who wrote on Amazon’s *Expats*, Apple’s *The Morning Show*, and sold her show *Sugar* in a four-way bidding war to Hulu; Henry “Hank” Jones, who has written on ABC’s *Will Trent* and Apple’s *Truth Be Told*; KD Dávila, who has written on CBS’ *Salvation* and Freeform’s *Motherland: Fort Salem*; Stephanie Adams-Santos, who has written on The CW’s *Two Sentence Horror Stories*; Van B. Nguyen, who is a writer on CBS’ *Blue Bloods*; Eddie Quintana, who has written on Fox’s *Duncanville*, ABC’s *Not Dead Yet* and NBC’s *Lopez vs Lopez*; Rom Lotan, who created the forthcoming Amazon Prime series *Embassy*, and Justin S. Lee, who created the series *Recap* with Fifth Season.

Film Independent Artist Development programs promote unique, independent voices by helping filmmakers create and advance new work through Project Involve, Filmmaker Labs (Episodic Directing, Documentary Story, Documentary Producing, Episodic, Fiction and Nonfiction Producing and Screenwriting), Fast Track, Fiscal Sponsorship, Amplifier Fellowship and the Imaginar Producers Residency, as well as through Grants and Awards that provide over one million dollars annually to visual storytellers. For more information on any of the Labs, or the projects that have been developed in them, please contact artistdevelopment@filmindependent.org.

Additional information can be found at filmindependent.org.

The Film Independent Episodic Lab is supported by Netflix and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

The Episodic Lab participants and their projects are:

Crescent Sun

Writer: LaDarrion Williams

Logline: A precocious Black teen has his life turned upside down when he finds a supernatural amulet that awakens an ancient African demigod... who resembles his likeness along with a vengeful high priest that begins to wreak havoc on the modern world.

Cult Like Activity

Writer: Sam Schaefer

Logline: Following the sudden dissolution of their cult, two lost twenty-somethings realize they only have one option: start their own.

Dancing in a Forbidden World

Writer: Val Tan

Logline: In 1950s San Francisco, a disciplined Chinese-American ballerina secretly joins an Asian burlesque nightclub, but as her popularity rises, her double life becomes impossible to conceal.

Family Dynamics

Writer: Lauren Ferebee

Logline: When scandal shatters a legendary New York music dynasty, a gifted cello prodigy and her ambitious family must choose between protecting their legacy and being true to themselves.

The Hustler

Writer: Kristian Mercado

Logline: When a once-legendary hip-hop manager is pushed out of the industry by younger, data-driven execs, he gambles everything to rebuild his career by managing a reckless reggaetón prodigy, only to find himself pulled into a dangerous web of ambition and fame in modern-day Los Angeles.

Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Grant Recipient***Personality Hire***

Writer: Nikki Palumbo

Logline: An unlikely working relationship develops between an overzealous tech billionaire and a reluctant writer who realizes the only way to make artificial intelligence any better is to fix the broken real world it's trained on.

ABOUT THE ALFRED P. SLOAN FOUNDATION

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation is a New York based, philanthropic, not-for-profit institution that makes grants for research in science, technology and economics; quality and diversity of scientific institutions; and public engagement with science. Sloan's program in Public

Understanding of Science and Technology, directed by Doron Weber, supports Books, Radio & Podcasts, Film, Television, Theater, YouTube & TikTok, 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 a dozen leading film schools and established annual awards in screenwriting and film production. The Foundation also supports screenplay development programs with the Sundance Institute, SFFILM, Film Independent, The Black List, the Athena Film Festival and Toronto International Film Festival. The Sloan Film Program has supported over 850 film projects and has helped develop over 30 feature films, including *Tesla*, *Radium Girls*, *Adventures of a Mathematician*, *One Man Dies a Million Times*, *The Sound of Silence*, *To Dust*, *Operator*, *The Imitation Game* and *The Man Who Knew Infinity*. The Foundation has supported feature documentaries such as Werner Herzog's *Theater of Thought*, David France's *How to Survive a Pandemic*, *Picture a Scientist*, *Coded Bias*, *In Silico*, *Oliver Sacks: His Own Life*, *The Bit Player*, *Bombshell: The Hedy Lamarr Story*, *Particle Fever* and Jacques Perrin's *Oceans*. It has also given early award recognition to standout films such as *Frankenstein*, *Twisters*, *Oppenheimer*, *Don't Look Up*, *After Yang*, *Linoleum*, *Son of Monarchs*, *Ammonite*, *The Aeronauts*, *Searching*, *The Martian*, *First Man* and *Hidden Figures*.

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 best-selling book that became the highest grossing Oscar®-nominated film of 2017, and Kai Bird & Martin Sherwin's Pulitzer Prize-winning *American Prometheus*, adapted for the screen in Christopher Nolan's hit film *Oppenheimer*.

For more information visit sloan.org or follow @SloanPublic on X, Instagram or Facebook.

ABOUT FILM INDEPENDENT

For over 40 years, Film Independent has helped filmmakers get their projects made and seen. The nonprofit organization's core mission is to champion creative independence in visual storytelling in all its forms, and to foster a culture of inclusion. We support a global community of artists and audiences who embody diversity, innovation, curiosity and uniqueness of vision.

In addition to producing the Film Independent Spirit Awards, the organization supports creative professionals with Artist Development programs, grants and labs. Signature mentorship program Project Involve fosters the careers of talented filmmakers from underrepresented communities. Education events and workshops equip filmmakers of all ages and experience levels with tools and resources. International programs provide cultural exchanges and career-building opportunities for film professionals around the world. And year-round screening series Film Independent Presents offers a robust program of unique cinematic experiences, including

screenings, conversations, Live Reads and Bring the Noise musical events.
For more information or to become a Member, visit filmIndependent.org.

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