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NEWS RELEASE

TIFF 2017 TALENT LAB PARTICIPANTS ANNOUNCED

A creative hub for the next generation of filmmakers at 2017 Toronto International Film Festival

Toronto — Twenty emerging filmmakers from across the globe have been selected for the **14th annual TIFF Talent Lab**. They will have the opportunity to learn from leading international film artists, with an emphasis on developing their creative vision and craft. The five-day artistic development programme will take place from September 5 to 9, 2017.

“We are excited to welcome this group of talented filmmakers, and to support them to develop their artistry and expand their connections,” said Kathleen Drumm, TIFF Industry Director. “The breadth of their work displays the quality and diverse storytelling that TIFF is committed to supporting, and we see them as important filmmaking voices for the future.”

Since its inception, TIFF Talent Lab has been crucial in shaping the careers of many young directors and screenwriters. Notable Canadians who have attended Talent Lab in the past include Wiebke Von Carolsfeld, Richie Mehta, Elan Mastai, Semi Chellas and Michelle Latimer. Distinguished directors and producers, acting as Talent Lab Governors, will be mentoring the 20 up-and-coming filmmakers (10 international, 10 Canadian) through workshops, pitch sessions and masterclasses, with a focus on creativity, artistic process and independent voice.

To lead the newest cohort, this year’s Governors are producer Cassian Elwes (*Dallas Buyers Club*, *Blue Valentine*, *Lee Daniels’ The Butler*, *Paperboy*), along with Carole Scotta and Caroline Benjo from French production and distribution company Haut et Court (*The Lobster*, *Foxfire*, *The Class*). Additional Governors will be announced soon.

Special TIFF Talent Lab guests, including acclaimed international filmmakers, will be announced in the coming weeks. Talent Lab is produced by Hayet Benkara, TIFF Talent Development Programmer.

The 2017 Talent Lab participants are: Nathalie Álvarez Mesén (Sweden/Costa Rica); Jessica Beshir (Mexico); Mamadou Dia (Senegal); Belén Funes (Spain); Tinna Hrafnisdóttir (Iceland); Sara Kern (Slovenia); Jacqueline Lentzou (Greece); Samantha Nell (South Africa); Jenni Toivoniemi (Finland) and Wei-Ning Yu (Taiwan/USA/Canada). Joining them from Canada are Alexandre Dostie; Connor Gaston; Lawrence Le Lam; Trevor Mack; Emilie Mannering; Ryan Noth; Lina Roessler; Jorge Thielen Armand; Thyron Tommy and Heather Young.

TIFF GERMAN RESIDENT ANNOUNCED

Helene Hegemann (*Axolotl Overkill*) is the inaugural German Resident at TIFF. Hegemann will take up residence at TIFF Bell Lightbox this month. She is the first German beneficiary of the TIFF Residency Exchange programme, produced in collaboration with Medienboard Berlin-Brandenburg. The programme provides one Canadian and one German filmmaker per year with the opportunity to live, work and find inspiration in two countries as they develop their next screenplay. Andrew Cividino (*Sleeping Giant*) travelled to Berlin earlier this year as the first Canadian filmmaker to take advantage of this new programme. Canadian candidates for the Residency programme were nominated by established members of the local film industry.



BIOS

Nathalie Álvarez Mesén is a Swedish–Costa Rican writer and director. Her short film *Filip* (15) was awarded Best Live Action short under 15 minutes in Palm Springs International ShortFest 2016 and has screened in prestigious festivals around the world. Her short *Asunder* (15) screened at the Telluride Film Festival in 2016. She was also part of Berlinale Talents in 2017. She's currently studying an MFA in film directing and screenwriting at Columbia University while working on the development of her first feature film, *Clara Sola*, a Swedish/Colombian co-production.

Jessica Beshir is a Brooklyn-based filmmaker born in Mexico City and raised in Ethiopia. She made her directorial debut with the short film *Hairat* (16), which premiered at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival. Her short film *He Who Dances on Wood* (16) premiered at the 2017 Hot Docs Film Festival. Most recently she directed *Heroin* (17), which made its world premiere at the 2017 Tribeca Film Festival. Currently, Beshir is working on her first feature documentary set in Ethiopia and developing her first feature narrative.

Mamadou Dia is a Senegalese director currently based in New York, where he is finishing his MFA at Tisch School of the Arts. His stories are rooted in daily intimate realities inspired by his life growing up in Senegal and travelling across Africa. His shorts have been selected for international festivals such as the African Film Festival, Inc., the Toronto International Film Festival, and the Venice International Film Festival. He is currently working on his first feature film set in today's northern Senegal.

Alexandre Dostie is a poet and performer from Quebec. He created the web series *Sainte-Cecile* (10), and his first poem collection, *Shenley*, was published in 2014 with many public readings and a second print run the following year. His first short film, *Mutants* (16), won the Short Cuts Award for Best Canadian Short Film at TIFF, Best Canadian Short Work at the Whistler Film Festival, the prestigious Best Live Action Short Film at the Canadian Screen Awards, and the IRIS of Quebec's best short fiction.

Belén Funes is a scriptwriter and director from Barcelona. Her first short, *Sara's Runaway* (14), won two Biznagas at the Malaga Film Festival and was also one of the candidates at the 30th Goya Awards. She is currently about to premiere her second short film, *La Inútil* (*The Hopeless*) (17), while she is developing her first feature film, *An Elder Sister*.

Connor Gaston is an award-winning filmmaker from Victoria, BC. His work has screened at film festivals around the world, including the Toronto and Vancouver International Film Festivals. Gaston's first feature film, *The Devout* (15), premiered at the Busan International Film Festival, earned five Leo Awards in 2016, including Best Picture, and won him the BC Emerging Filmmaker Award at VIFF. Gaston is currently working on his second feature film through The Harold Greenberg Fund's Shorts-to-Features Program.

Tinna Hrafnisdóttir is an Icelandic director, screenwriter, producer, and two-time Edda Award–nominated actor. She holds an MBA from Reykjavik University and runs her own independent theatre company, Háaloftid, and film production company, Freyja Filmwork. Her short films include *Helga* (16) and *Munda* (17), the latter of which won the Shorts TV Pitch Contest at Cannes. She is also a casting director for Zik Zak Filmworks. Hrafnisdóttir was a member of the 2016 Young Nordisk Producers Club in Cannes, and is now developing her first feature film based on the award-winning novel *Grand Mal* by Auður Jónsdóttir.

Sara Kern is a Slovenian-born writer and director based in Melbourne. Her award-winning film *Maks* (12) was distributed in Japan and screened at festivals worldwide. Her second short *Good Luck, Orlo!* (16) premiered at the 73rd Venice International Film Festival. The film won awards at VIS Vienna Independent Shorts, at the Athens International Film + Video Festival, and from the Directors Guild of Slovenia. Kern is currently developing her debut feature *Azra Nadine*.



Lawrence Le Lam is a filmmaker from British Columbia. His award-winning film *The Blue Jet* (15) delves into the hippie movement in 1970s Taiwan. His most recent film, *Cypher* (17), captures the conflict between the Korean and Black communities during the '90s in post-riot LA. His next project, and first feature, will explore the world of real estate, wealth migration, and wealthy Chinese satellite kids with luxury cars. He currently works as an editor and videographer at Point Blank Creative creating media for progressive organizations.

Jacqueline Lentzou is a writer and director from Athens. Her short film *Fox* (16) made its world premiere at the 69th Locarno International Film Festival, where it won Best International Short, while *Hiwa* (16) made its world premiere at the 67th Berlin International Film Festival. Earlier this year Lentzou was picked as a Spotlight guest in VIS Vienna Independent Shorts 2017 to present her body of work. She is currently developing her debut feature project in the Torino Film Lab.

Trevor Mack is an award-winning Tsilhqot'in nation filmmaker from British Columbia. His first short, *The Blanketing* (13), screened at the imagineNATIVE Film + Media Arts Festival. Mack's second short film, *Clouds of Autumn* (15), debuted at TIFF and received awards for Best Canadian Short Drama at imagineNATIVE and Best Cinematography at the Air Canada enRoute Film Festival. Mack has recently completed filming his new short *?Etsu (Grandmother)*, and is currently writing a feature film with Kathleen Hepburn with support from the Canada Council for the Arts.

Emilie Mannering is a scriptwriter and director from Montreal. Her first short film, *STAR* (15), won several awards, including Best National Short Film at the Festival du nouveau cinema, and was nominated for Best Short Film at the Gala du Cinéma Québécois and the Canadian Screen Awards. Mannering also directed the feminist web series *Les Brutes* (16-), which was nominated for the Prix Gémeaux. She is currently developing various film projects.

Samantha Nell is a South African writer and director who has worked in countries around the world. Her short films have played at festivals such as Cannes Film Festival, Palm Springs International ShortFest, and Durban International Film Festival. In 2017 she participated in Berlinale Talents. Her debut feature film *Miles From Nowhere* is in development with the support of the National Film and Video Foundation. She participated in Realness 2017, a pan-African screenwriter's residency in Johannesburg, and presented *Miles From Nowhere* at the 2017 Durban FilmMart.

Ryan J. Noth is an award-winning filmmaker and editor based in Prince Edward County, Ontario. Noth's most recent short films have premiered at TIFF, including *The Road to Webequie* (16), which was nominated for a Canadian Screen Award. *The National Parks Project* (11), which he created and produced, premiered at Berlinale, SXSW, and Hot Docs and won Genie, Gemini, and Interactive awards. He edited for the TIFF Official Selection *The Stairs* (16), which won the Toronto Film Critics Association prize for Best Canadian Feature Film.

Lina Roessler is an actor and director from Toronto. Her directorial debut, *Little Whispers: The Vow* (14), has screened at dozens of festivals, including TIFF Kids, and also won First Prize, Best Children's Short at the Rhode Island International Film Festival. *Winter* (15), the second film in the *Little Whispers* series, received its Canadian premiere at TIFF Kids 2016 and was selected to screen at Cannes as part of Telefilm Canada's Not Short on Talent program. *Mustard Seed* (16) is the third short in the series.

Jorge Thielen Armand is a Venezuelan director based in Toronto. His debut feature film *La Soledad* (16) premiered at the Venice International Film Festival and has since won six international awards. His documentary *Flor de la Mar* (15) won the Jury Award for Best Documentary Short at Cine Las Americas International Film Festival, and screened at over 20 festivals around the world. In 2015, he founded La Faena with Rodrigo Michelangeli, a production company dedicated to art-house films.



Jenni Toivoniemi is a writer and director based in Helsinki. Her latest short film, *The Committee* (16), premiered at Locarno and won prizes at the Bergen International Film Festival, the Norwegian Short Film Festival, and the Minimalen Short Film Festival. Her short comedy *The Date* (12) also won several awards, and her feature film *Korso* (14) premiered at the Edinburgh International Film Festival. Toivoniemi has also written two produced plays, the second of which will premiere in the Finnish National Theatre in 2017.

Thyrone Tommy is an award-winning Toronto-based filmmaker. His films have been celebrated internationally at more than 30 festivals. Tommy's most recent short, *Mariner* (16), premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival and was later named one of TIFF's Canada's Top Ten Shorts. His work has been supported with grants from NBCUniversal Canada, Kodak Motion Picture Film, and the Ontario Arts Council, and he was also the 2017 Lindalee Tracey Award Winner. Tommy is currently developing a feature version of *Mariner*, as well as the feature *To Live and Die in Rexdale*.

Heather Young is a filmmaker from New Brunswick. Her short film *Fish* (16) played at festivals around the world, including the Palm Springs International ShortFest, the Festival du nouveau cinéma, and VIS Vienna Independent Shorts. It also won Best Short Film at the Screen Nova Scotia Awards, and was included in the Canada's Top Ten Film Festival. Young just finished post-production on a new short film called *Milk*.

Wei-Ning Yu is a Montreal-born, Los Angeles-based Taiwanese screenwriter. She has an MFA in screenwriting from the American Film Institute and has worked in foreign sales and acquisitions at Odd Lot Entertainment. Wei-Ning adapted the screenplay for *Winter Light* (15), based on a short story by acclaimed author James Lee Burke, which screened at over 40 film festivals around the world and was shortlisted as a top-ten finalist for the 2016 Academy Awards. Wei-Ning also penned the adaptation of the upcoming *The Inverted Forest*, and is currently developing a number of original feature film and television projects.

Support for Talent Lab participants gratefully provided by The Consulate General of Mexico in Toronto, The Icelandic Film Centre and Screen Australia.

German Resident Bio

Helene Hegemann was born in Freiburg, Germany. She is a writer and director of film, theatre and opera. Hegemann began writing at the age of 13, and her first novel, *Axolotl Roadkill* (2010), received international recognition. She made her directorial debut with *Torpedo* (2008) at the age of 16, and in 2007, her first theatre play, *Ariel 15*, premiered at the Ballhaus Ost in Berlin. Since 2010, she has written essays and reviews for German newspapers. Her second novel, *Jage Zwei Tiger*, was published in 2013, and she also directed the opera *Music: I make hits motherfucker*, which premiered at the Cologne Opera the same year. *Axolotl Overkill* (17) is her debut feature film.

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About TIFF

TIFF is a charitable cultural organization whose mission is to transform the way people see the world through film. An international leader in film culture, TIFF projects include the annual Toronto International Film Festival in September; TIFF Bell Lightbox, which features five cinemas, major exhibitions, and learning and entertainment facilities; and innovative national distribution programme Film



Circuit. The organization generates an annual economic impact of \$189 million CAD. TIFF Bell Lightbox is generously supported by contributors including Founding Sponsor Bell, the Province of Ontario, the Government of Canada, the City of Toronto, the Reitman family (Ivan Reitman, Agi Mandel and Susan Michaels), The Daniels Corporation and RBC. For more information, visit tiff.net.

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For information contact Karina Thevenin at 416.599.8433 ext:2688 or email kthevenin@tiff.net.