



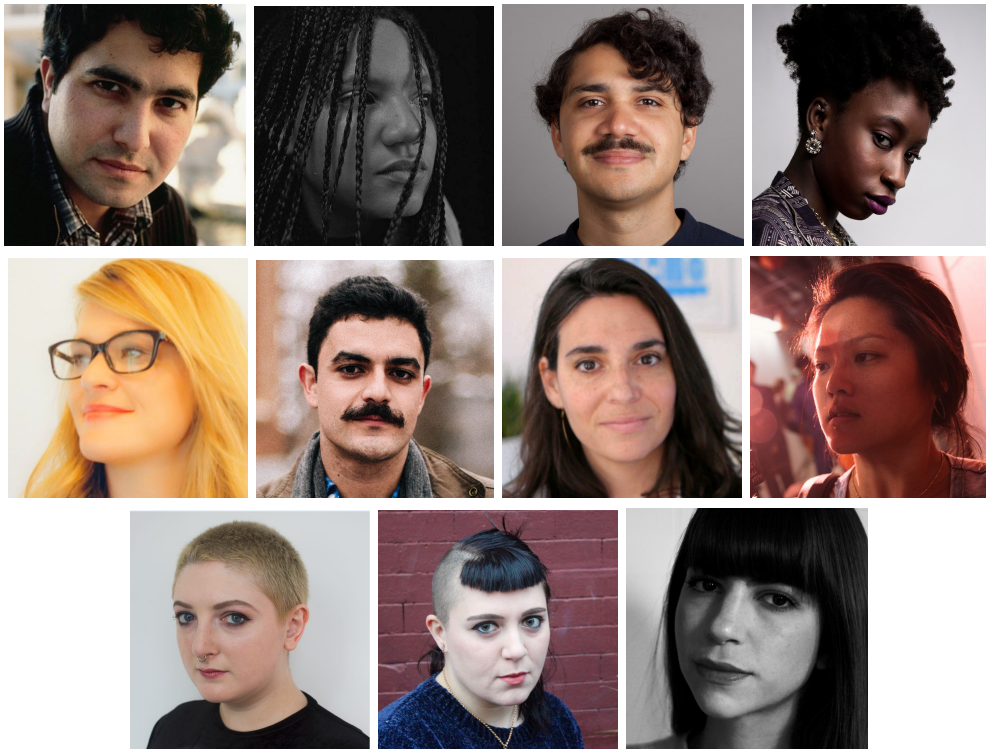
5900 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 800, Los Angeles, CA 90036
1825 Three Kings Dr., Park City, UT 84060
321 W 44th Street, Suite 805, New York, NY 10036

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Media Contact:
Spencer Alcorn
310.360.1981
spencer.alcorn@sundance.org

Sundance Institute Selects 11 Emerging Storytellers for Screenwriters Intensive

**Group of Writers to Connect in Los Angeles for Two-Day Program,
Supported by the Will & Jada Smith Family Foundation**



L to R, top to bottom: Fawaz Al-Matrouk (Mr. Rob), Haley Anderson (Coyote Boys), Justin Denis (Beware of the Boomerang), Adamma Ebo (Honk for Jesus, Save Your Soul), Skye Emerson (Challenger), Gerardo Coello Escalante (Forgive Us Sinners), Deborah Esquenazi (Queen of Wands), Tiffanie Hsu (Wonderland), Carlen May-Mann and Beck Kitsis (Strawberry Summer), and Laurel Parmet (The Starling Girl).

LOS ANGELES — Eleven screenwriters have been selected to participate in Sundance Institute's seventh annual Screenwriters Intensive in Los Angeles, to take place February 28 - March 1, 2019. Part of the Institute's commitment to introducing the industry to an inclusive pipeline of exciting new storytellers, the Intensive is a two-day workshop for writers or writer/directors from underrepresented communities developing their first fiction feature. Fellows at the Intensive will advance the art and craft of



their work under the guidance of experienced filmmakers and in collaboration with Institute's Feature Film Program.

"We're excited to bring together this vibrant group of distinctive voices for two days of deep creative exploration and indispensable lessons in the craft of screenwriting," said Michelle Satter, Founding Director of Sundance Institute's Feature Film Program. "Our goal is to provide early support for emerging artists as a first step in a continuum of support as we connect them to a larger creative community," noted Labs Director **Ilyse McKimmie** who leads the Intensive.

The **2019 Screenwriters Intensive Fellows** (and their projects) are: **Fawaz Al-Matrouk** (*Mr. Rob*), **Haley Anderson** (*Coyote Boys*), **Justin Denis** (*Beware of the Boomerang*), **Adamma Ebo** (*Honk for Jesus, Save Your Soul*), **Skye Emerson** (*Challenger*), **Gerardo Coello Escalante** (*Forgive Us Sinners*), **Deborah Esquenazi** (*Queen of Wands*), **Tiffanie Hsu** (*Wonderland*), **Carlen May-Mann and Beck Kitsis** (*Strawberry Summer*), and **Laurel Parmet** (*The Starling Girl*). More information on each Fellow and project appears below.

Advisors for the 2019 Intensive include **Andrew Ahn**, **Kyle Patrick Alvarez**, **Patricia Cardoso**, **Deena Goldstone**, **Tanya Hamilton**, **Elgin James**, **So Yong Kim**, **Sarah Koskoff**, **Tracy Oliver**, **Joan Tewkesbury**, and **Andy Wolk**. Previous alumni of the Intensive include Ahn, Reinaldo Marcus Green, Tina Mabry, Natalia Almada, and Roger Ross Williams.

The Sundance Institute Screenwriters Intensive is made possible with leadership support from the **Will and Jada Smith Family Foundation**.

Fawaz Al-Matrouk
Writer/director, *Mr. Rob*

Fawaz Al-Matrouk is a Kuwaiti writer-director based in San Francisco. His narrative shorts have played in festivals worldwide, including Cannes, Kuwait, and Dubai, winning writing, directing, and audience awards. Al-Matrouk received his MFA in cinematic arts at the University of Southern California, where he was mentored by Ridley Scott on his thesis film *To Rest in Peace*. He has since directed over a hundred commercials, and his short story "The Tail of Danny Whiskers" was published in *Nature*. Al-Matrouk is currently a resident at SFFILM FilmHouse, and his screenplay *Mr. Rob* won the SFFILM Rainin Grant.

***Mr. Rob*:** At the notorious 'Jungle' refugee camp in Calais, Rob Lawrie, an ex-soldier and devoted father, meets Reza and his four-year-old daughter Bru, who travelled all the way from Afghanistan to join family in Rob's hometown of Leeds. A bond forms between the two fathers, but with no legal way across the border, Rob has to risk himself to bring them home. Based on a true story.

Haley Anderson
Writer/director, *Coyote Boys*

Haley Elizabeth Anderson is a filmmaker, writer, and visual artist from Houston, Texas. She developed her own process of collaborating with non-professional actors after street casting on a Terrence Malick project and continues to explore approaches to the doc-narrative hybrid. Her short film, *Get Out Fast*, on which *Coyote Boys* is based, premiered at the 2017 Slamdance Film



Festival, where she was named a filmmaker to watch. She is in post-production for her next narrative short film, *Summer Animals*, made with generous support from Kodak. Anderson is currently filming a documentary about the homeless experience of teenagers in New York, which is sponsored by Tribeca Studios, Proctor&Gamble, and Queen Latifah within the Queen's Collective.

Coyote Boys: Homeless and alone on the streets of New Orleans, 17-year-old Trey spends his time dodging the authorities and searching for Marcus, his estranged graffiti-writer brother. When he meets Luke, a reckless train hopper who is an unexpected link to his brother's whereabouts, Trey joins him on a dangerous journey into off-the-grid America that threatens to unravel the limited family he has.

Justin Denis

Writer/director, *Beware of the Boomerang*

Justin Denis is a Nuyorican filmmaker from New York City's Lower East Side. His first short film, *8 Million Miles From Hintahood*, was an official selection at the 2018 Blackstar and Urbanworld Film Festivals, among others. He holds a BA in English from Wesleyan University.

Beware of the Boomerang: When grad school reject and self-proclaimed scholar of the fresh, Clay Stuart, discovers his mother's unexpected connection to a revolutionary cultural movement, it leads him back to the source of his life's work: the OG necropolis known as Hintahood, whose history, he believes, is entangled with that of a mysterious government project.

Adamma Ebo

Writer/director, *Honk for Jesus, Save Your Soul*

Raised in a half-Nigerian, half-Black American/Southern Baptist household, **Adamma Ebo** received her BA in English from Spelman College and her MFA in Directing & Production from UCLA's School of Theater, Film, and Television. Ebo was a screenwriting finalist at the Atlanta Film Festival for her short script *Honk For Jesus. Save Your Soul*, and in the Scriptapalooza TV Writing Competition for her animated comedy pilot *SupaShawty Girls, Funkadelic RoboMagic BangBang*. Originally from Atlanta, she now lives in Los Angeles with her identical twin sister and works as a showrunner's assistant for an upcoming Amazon horror series.

Honk for Jesus, Save Your Soul: In the aftermath of huge scandal, Trinity Childs, the first lady of a prominent and respected Southern Baptist megachurch, attempts to help her pastor-husband rebuild their now borderline non-existent congregation. However, they must find a way to reconcile their faith with their personal demons in order to make the biggest comeback that commodified religion has ever seen.

Skye Emerson,

Writer, *Challenger*

Skye Emerson is an accomplished screenwriter and filmmaker, recently receiving her MFA in Screenwriting from UCLA's School of Theater, Film & Television. She has lived multiple lives, including as a Project Manager, Sports App Developer, and Volunteer Dog Walker. She divides



her time between her homes in Salt Lake City and Los Angeles, which means that her wardrobe is in constant flux between snow boots and stilettos.

Challenger: When guarded, brilliant astrophysicist Sally Ride joined the first NASA astronaut class to include women, her fight to get to space seemed her greatest challenge. Now, her mission to find the truth about the Challenger explosion—and her own identity—will prove to be her biggest test.

Gerardo Coello Escalante
Writer/director, *Forgive Us Sinners*

Born and raised in Mexico City, **Gerardo Coello Escalante** is currently based in New York where he graduated from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He has worked professionally in narrative content and publicity in Mexico and the U.S., directing several short films of his own and working in production for independent feature films and commercials. He's a 2018 Sundance Ignite Fellow and attended the 2018 Creative Producing Summit with *Forgive Us Sinners*.

Forgive Us Sinners: Mexico, 1964. After the sudden death of his father, eight-year-old Daniel is sent to a decaying estate in the countryside to live with his father's family, whose exaggerated religious fervor conceals family secrets that lead Daniel to a new understanding of his own identity.

Deborah Esquenazi
Writer/director, *Queen of Wands*

Deborah S. Esquenazi is a film director and journalist. *Queen of Wands*, a gay phantasmagoric coming-of-age set in the Gulf, is Esquenazi's first screenplay. Her debut feature, the critically acclaimed documentary *Southwest of Salem: The Story of the San Antonio Four*, won a Critic's Choice Award, a Peabody, a GLAAD Award for Outstanding Documentary, and was nominated for an Emmy. The film helped exonerate the San Antonio Four of their wrongful convictions. Esquenazi lives in Austin, Texas, with her wife and two sons.

Queen of Wands: In 1989, as a hurricane looms, Violet, the daughter of Cuban immigrants, struggles with her sexuality as her uncle, a famous shoe designer, rapidly deteriorates from the AIDS virus. Before his death, he leaves Violet a grim message about the world that will change her destiny.

Tiffany Hsu
Writer/director, *Wonderland*

Tiffany Hsu is a writer/director selected as an HBO Visionary for her short film *Wonderland*, and she is currently developing the feature adaptation as the 2019 Sundance Institute Asian American Fellow. Her feature documentary, *Waterschool*, tells six young women's stories of empowerment around water and sustainability living along the major rivers of the world, and has screened at festivals worldwide. In 2018, she was selected as a directing fellow in Sony Pictures Television's Diverse Directors Program. She is also an alumna of AFI's Directing Workshop for Women.



Wonderland: When her mother disappears with the family funds during a Christmas holiday in Las Vegas, twelve-year-old Adeline Tang hires a disillusioned magician to bring her home before her father finds out.

Carlen May-Mann
Co-writer/director, *Strawberry Summer*

Beck Kitsis
Co-writer, *Strawberry Summer*

Carlen May-Mann's short film *The Rat* was an official selection of the 2019 Sundance Film Festival, and her feature length screenplay *Strawberry Summer* is a Cinereach-supported project. *Strawberry Summer* was also recognized by Tribeca/AT&T Untold Stories (top 15 finalist), the Black List/Women in Film Feature Lab (semifinalist), and the BlueCat Screenplay Competition (semifinalist). May-Mann produces her filmmaking through New York-based film and media collective NITE SHIFT, an organization she co-founded. Her body of work also includes several music videos, which have been featured in *Impose Magazine* and *AdHoc*. In addition, her credits in the art department include A24's *Menashe* and Washington Square Films' *11:55*. May-Mann is an alumna of Wesleyan University, where she was awarded departmental honors, the NNK Award for Best Undergraduate Film, and the Leavell Memorial Prize for Outstanding Work in Film Studies.

Beck Kitsis the co-writer and producer of *Strawberry Summer*, which has received support from Cinereach and is slated to shoot in 2019. She is also developing the screenplay *Route One*, a psychological thriller which will mark her feature directorial debut. As a director and editor, Kitsis has worked across short film and music video content. Her music video for her band SIGNAL premiered on NYLON in November 2018. She recently produced the short film *The Rat* (2019 Sundance Film Festival), as well as the feature documentary *Narrowsburg* and a short 16mm film based on the German mountain films of the 1920s and '30s entitled *The Inconceivable Mountain*, both currently in post-production. Kitsis produces her work through NITE SHIFT, a New York-based film and media collective, which she co-founded.

Strawberry Summer: A young girl's first menstruation and ensuing puberty open her eyes to a world of hidden dangers. As her comfortable and familiar life disintegrates into a surreal nightmare, she must protect herself from the mounting threat of unwanted male attention.

Laurel Parmet
Writer/director, *The Starling Girl*

Laurel Parmet is a filmmaker based in New York, where she attended NYU Tisch's Graduate Film Program. She has written and directed several award-winning short films; the latest, *Kira Burning*, premiered at SXSW and screened at the Museum of Modern Art in NYC. Her previous short film, *Spring*, screened at SXSW, Outfest, Palm Springs, and continues to play and win awards around the world. Parmet's music videos have premiered on MTV, Pitchfork and Spin, and in 2014 her work was shortlisted for the Young Director Award at the Cannes Lions Festival.

The Starling Girl: It's a sweltering summer in rural Oklahoma and all 16-year-old Jem can think of is her handsome youth pastor, who's well-loved in their fundamentalist community and doesn't



seem to mind that she's something of an outcast. But when they enter into an affair, Jem's chaste life is thrown into turmoil, jeopardizing her place in her family and the only world she's ever known.

Sundance Institute

Founded in 1981 by Robert Redford, Sundance Institute is a nonprofit organization that provides and preserves the space for artists in film, theatre, and media to create and thrive. The Institute's signature Labs, granting, and mentorship programs, dedicated to developing new work, take place throughout the year in the U.S. and internationally. The Sundance Film Festival and other public programs connect audiences to artists in igniting new ideas, discovering original voices, and building a community dedicated to independent storytelling. Sundance Institute has supported such projects as *Sorry to Bother You*, *Eighth Grade*, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Hereditary*, *RBG*, *Call Me By Your Name*, *Get Out*, *The Big Sick*, *Top of the Lake*, *Winter's Bone*, *Dear White People*, *Brooklyn*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *20 Feet From Stardom*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *I'm Poppy*, *America to Me*, *Leimert Park*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](#) on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#).

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