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Sundance Institute Announces Leya Hale as 2020 Merata Mita Fellow

Now in its Fifth Consecutive Year, Fellowship Honors Artistic Contributions of Late Māori Filmmaker

Park City, Utah — Sundance Institute today announced director and producer **Leya Hale** as the 2020 recipient of the Sundance Institute Merata Mita Fellowship, an annual fellowship named in honor of the late Māori filmmaker Merata Mita (1942-2010). The announcement was delivered today at the 2020 Sundance Film Festival by **N. Bird Runningwater**, Director of the Sundance Institute's Indigenous Program.

Sundance Institute selected Hale from a global pool of applicants. She will be awarded cash grants and a yearlong continuum of support with activities, including a trip to the Sundance Film Festival, access to strategic and creative services offered by Sundance Institute's myriad artist programs, and mentorship opportunities.

Leya Hale comes from the Sisseton Wahpeton Dakota and Diné Nations. She is an award-winning Producer for Twin Cities PBS. She is best known for her directorial debut, *Reclaiming Sacred Tobacco*, winner of the 2017 Upper Midwest Emmy Award for Best Topical Documentary. Her most recent Vision Maker Media funded documentary, *The People's Protectors*, received a 2019 Upper Midwest Emmy Award for Best Cultural Documentary. She is proud to be one of four 2017 Sundance Film Institute Knight Fellows, a 2018 Big Sky Film Institute Native Initiative Fellow, and a 2019 Sundance Film Institute Creative Producing Fellow. She makes her home in Saint Paul, Minnesota with her companion and three children.

"This annual fellowship celebrates the enormous artistic contributions and memory of our beloved colleague and friend Merata Mita, who was a mother, an activist, documentarian and the first Indigenous woman to write and direct a dramatic feature film," said Runningwater. "Further, it underlines Sundance Institute's ongoing global commitment to supporting Indigenous artists. The selection of Leya Hale as the 2020 recipient reflects the incomparable talent, productivity and lifelong creative and artistic energy in everything that Merata accomplished throughout her life."

Merata Mita (Ngāi Te Rangi/Ngāti Pīkiao) was New Zealand's first Indigenous female filmmaker. She served as an advisor and artistic director of the Sundance Institute Native Lab from 2000 to 2009, where she championed emerging Indigenous talent.

The Merata Mita Fellowship is supported by New Zealand Film Commission, Indigenous Media Initiatives, Felix Culpa, Sarah Luther, Pacific Islanders in Communications, and Susan Shilliday.



Sundance Institute's Indigenous Program

The Sundance Institute Indigenous Program is supported by John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, Oneida Indian Nation, Surdna Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Nia Tero, SAGindie, New Zealand Film Commission, Indigenous Media Initiatives, Felix Culpa, Sarah Luther, Pacific Islanders in Communications, Susan Shilliday, and an anonymous donor.

The Sundance Film Festival®

The Sundance Film Festival has introduced global audiences to some of the most groundbreaking films of the past three decades, including *Sorry to Bother You*, *Won't You Be My Neighbor?*, *Eighth Grade*, *Get Out*, *The Big Sick*, *Mudbound*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *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®. 2020 Festival sponsors include: Presenting Sponsors – Acura, SundanceTV, Chase Sapphire; AT&T; Leadership Sponsors – Adobe, Amazon Studios, DIRECTV, Dropbox, Netflix, Omnicom Group, Southwest Airlines®, Stella Artois®, WarnerMedia; Sustaining Sponsors – Audible, Canada Goose, Canon U.S.A., Inc., Dell Technologies, Fire TV, GEICO, High West Distillery, Hulu, IMDbPro, Lyft, Unity Technologies, University of Utah Health; Media Sponsors – The Atlantic, IndieWire, Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, Variety, 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 Festival's costs and sustain the Institute's year-round programs for independent artists. Look for the Official Partner seal at their venues at the Festival. [sundance.org/festival](https://www.sundance.org/festival)

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. [Sundance Col/ab](https://www.sundance.org/colab), a digital community platform, brings artists together to learn from Sundance Advisors and connect with each other 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 *The Farewell*, *Late Night*, *The Souvenir*, *The Infiltrators*, *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*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *Fruitvale Station*, *State of the Union*, *Indecent*, *Spring Awakening*, *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder* and *Fun Home*. Join [Sundance Institute](https://www.sundance.org) on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/sundance), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/sundance), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/sundance) and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/sundance).

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