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The Writers Lab Expands to Welcome Television Writers

The screenwriting program for women over 40 announces TV and film call for submissions for its seventh annual retreat

New York, NY – February 2, 2021 – The Writers Lab opens for submissions for its 2021 program for women screenwriters over the age of 40. With demand for content from diverse voices skyrocketing, the Lab expands its call this year to include pilot scripts as well as narrative features. Feature and pilot writers selected for the October 2021 retreat will work one-on-one and in group sessions with acclaimed screen industry leaders to develop their scripts and their craft, and to build tools and strategies to achieve success, thus expanding the diversity of new content.

Submissions are open February 2 to March 30, 2021. Learn more and apply at thewriterslab.nyc.

A supporter of The Writers Lab, **Meryl Streep** stated, “The Writers Lab provides practical tools and spirited encouragement for the work of screenwriters whose point of view, fruit of their age and gender, has been consistently undervalued in the marketplace. I am proud to support the greenhouse of such work!”

Established in 2015, The Writers Lab is the only program in the world devoted exclusively to script development for women writers over 40. The Lab is produced by co-founders **Elizabeth Kaiden** and **Nitza Wilon** and **New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT)**, and has been supported by **Meryl Streep**, **Nicole Kidman**, and **Oprah Winfrey**.

The Writers Lab 2020 welcomed its most inclusive class to date, with half of the selected participants identifying as diverse, and half of the projects identified as “genre.” In its first-ever fully virtual experience, the 2020 Lab, which saw a 25% increase in

submissions, sought to address the extraordinary circumstances of the historic global moment. The desire for more women-led storytelling is clear, and the expansion to include pilots in 2021 will only serve to further The Lab's mission of amplifying the oft-unheard voices of women over 40.

The Writers Lab alumni have gained recognition post-Lab: Six landed writer-for-hire jobs, five were signed by managers or agents, two won The Academy Nicholl Fellowship. Four Lab projects have been optioned or moved into production, one is in post-production, and the Lab will see the emergence of its first completed project in 2021, Alyson Richards' horror film *The Retreat*.

As The Writers Lab enters its seventh year, it continues to emphasize the importance of community, advocacy, and support for its now six seasons of alums. New in 2021, The Cornelia T. Bailey Foundation, dedicated to the promotion of the arts, education, and initiatives that seek to better our world utilizing nature and the sciences, will provide funding for The Writers Lab to provide additional resources for its 72 alumni, including its first CharacterFest Pitch Session for the class of 2020 with agents and managers planned for Spring 2021.

"With the explosion of streaming accelerated by the pandemic, the line between features and episodic content is fading. Writers must be - and *are* - adapting their stories and skills to the form most appropriate. We strive, as always, to ensure that as many talented women as possible are successfully creating compelling content, regardless of form."

- *Elizabeth Kaiden, The Writers Lab co-founder*

"We have long hoped to provide more robust support beyond the Lab for the outstanding writers who attend so we can convert our impact into lasting change, for the industry and for audiences. We are deeply grateful to the Cornelia T. Bailey Foundation for making this possible."

- *Nitza Wilon, The Writers Lab co-founder*

"New York Women in Film & Television has long recognized the opportunities for storytellers on both the 'big' and 'small' screen. In recent years, and especially during COVID-19 with so many traditional theatrical releases re-invented, it's clear that the line between what is 'film' and what is 'television' can blur. We're thrilled to welcome television writers to the The Writers Lab this year, to support a new group of women bringing fresh stories to screens of all sizes. The new cohort of writers will be welcomed to an incredible, diverse, and established group of alumni, and we can't wait to meet them."

- NYWIFT Executive Director Cynthia Lopez.

The mentors for 2021 – including industry leaders specializing in television development – will be announced soon. 2020 mentors included producers **Anne Carey** (*Can You Ever Forgive Me?*), **Susan Cartsonis** (*What Women Want*), **Shruti Ganguly** (*The Color of Time*), **Mary Jane Skalski** (*Hello I Must Be Going*), **Frida Torresblanco** (*Pan's Labyrinth*), **Jamie Zelermyer** (NYWIFT Board President and former Focus Features VP), and screenwriters **Mara Brock Akil** (*The Game*), **Pamela Gray** (*A Walk on the Moon*), **Lisa Jones** (*Disappearing Acts*), **Gina Prince-Bythewood** (*Beyond the Lights*), **Theresa Rebeck** (*355*), **Robin Swicord** (*The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*), and **Pat Verducci** (*True Crime*).

Partners include the Writers Guild of America, East, The Black List, Falco Ink, Film Fatales, Filmarket Hub, Relativity Ventures, Roadmap Writers, Stony Brook Manhattan Center for Creative Writing & Film, and Untamed Stories. A special thank you to Final Draft for their product contribution.

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ABOUT THE WRITERS LAB

Founded by Kyle Stokes with Elizabeth Kaiden and Nitza Wilon, and produced with New York Women in Film & Television, The Writers Lab is dedicated to developing narrative scripted content by diverse women over the age of 40. We are industry veterans who elevate the work of women screenwriters in their prime through mentorship, advocacy and exposure.

For more information visit thewriterslab.nyc.

Follow at @The_Writers_Lab

ABOUT NEW YORK WOMEN IN FILM & TELEVISION (NYWIFT)

New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT) advocates for equality in the moving image industry and supports women in every stage of their careers. As the preeminent entertainment industry association for women in New York, NYWIFT energizes women by illuminating their achievements, presenting training and professional development programs, awarding scholarships and grants, and providing access to a supportive community of peers. NYWIFT brings together nearly 2,500 women and men working both above and below the line. NYWIFT is part of a network of 50 women in film chapters worldwide, representing more than 15,000 members. NYWIFT is a nonprofit 501c3 public charity.

For more information visit www.nywift.org.

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