

NYWIFT || New York Women in Film & Television

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

NEW YORK WOMEN IN FILM & TELEVISION ANNOUNCES

LOREEN ARBUS DISABILITY AWARENESS GRANT AWARDEES
***Still Judy* by Lisa Denker and**
Honorable Mention *I Am More Than My Hair* by Alyscia Cunningham

The organization will also partner with ReelAbilities for a special NYWIFT Talks focused on disability awareness in media

NEW YORK, NY – April 13, 2021 – New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT) is pleased to announce the presentation of the **Loreen Arbus Disability Awareness Grant** to winner **Lisa Denker** for her documentary feature ***Still Judy***, with a first-ever Honorable Mention awarded to **Alyscia Cunningham** for her documentary feature ***I Am More Than My Hair***. The film completion grant, now in its 14th year, is provided through the generosity of longtime disability rights advocate Loreen Arbus and awards \$7,500 to a woman filmmaker for a film on physical or developmental disability issues; the Honorable Mention receives \$1,500.

Lisa Denker's *Still Judy* is an hour-long documentary about the remarkable Judy Finelli, who transcends the burden of living the multiple sclerosis by connecting to the circus arts and her family, and regains the will to live anew. *I Am More Than My Hair* is a documentary film and photography book that brings awareness to alopecia and dispels the myth of what beauty is "supposed" to look like, by featuring women who have experienced hair loss and how they empower themselves to see beauty beyond the media's standards.

The projects were chosen from a wide range of applications submitted by women filmmakers from around the country.

"Not only is it important to give incentive to people with disability who are pursuing their dream of becoming filmmakers, but this grant in and of itself raises awareness since it's offered through organizations that have a vibrant membership," Loreen Arbus said. "NYWIFT is a preeminent organization in the entertainment industry. My seven grants have visibility throughout the entire country and reach different members of organizations which exponentially increases the number of people who will think about advancing people with disability through their art."

"NYWIFT is committed to raising the underrepresented voices of the disabled community and championing women filmmakers through our continued partnership with Loreen Arbus," said NYWIFT Executive Director Cynthia Lopez. "We are especially proud to be able to support two films this year, both of which celebrate the joy and resilience of women, and the empowerment of the those with disabilities. In a year that has been particularly difficult for so many, it is especially meaningful to support two films that are fueled by hope."

In addition, Arbus grant winner *Still Judy* received an in-kind post-production grant for audio description for blind and low vision audiences, generously provided by Michele Spitz of Woman of Her Word. Spitz has provided this support to the NYWIFT Loreen Arbus grantees since 2016.

“I am deeply honored to have been provided this opportunity to audio describe Judy’s remarkable life’s journey and share her extraordinary story with low vision and blind audiences. I am equally proud to stand by the meaningful cause of inclusive media accessibility in perfect alignment with Loreen Arbus and NYWIFT,” Michele Spitz said.

“It’s been important to show that beyond Judy’s living with M.S. there exists a whole layered complex person,” said *Still Judy* filmmaker Lisa Denker. This is the only grant I applied for that is focused on disability, and it makes the NYWIFT Loreen Arbus Disability Awareness Grant that much more of an honor to receive, because it is rare in its focus. Additionally, Michele Spitz’s generous offering to do the accessibility asset of audio description is a tremendous bonus.”

Both *Still Judy* and *I Am More Than My Hair* will receive promotional support from ReelAbilities Film Festival, the largest festival in the US dedicated to promoting awareness and appreciation of the lives, stories and artistic expressions of people with different disabilities.

NYWIFT will also partner with the festival for a special edition of its NYWIFT Talks series, which has provided weekly industry updates and vital information about the impact of COVID-19 on the media and entertainment since March of 2020. **NYWIFT Talks: ReelAbilities Film Festival** will be presented virtually on **April 14 at 4 PM EST**, and will explore the festival’s contributions to media, the ways movie theaters need to re-structure to accommodate ADA laws, how filmmakers are paving their way to Hollywood with their original stories, and what ReelAbilities offers for disabled filmmakers. ReelAbilities Director and Co-Founder **Isaac Zablocki** and **Michele Spitz** of *Woman of Her Word* will be in conversation, moderated by Executive Director of the Cerebral Palsy Foundation **Rachel Byrne**. The panel is free to attend. RSVP required at <https://www.nywift.org/event/nywift-talks-reelabilities-film-festival/>

Learn more about NYWIFT grants at <https://www.nywift.org/fund-for-women-filmmakers/>.

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LINK TO DOWNLOAD PHOTOS / PROMOTIONAL ASSETS:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/24lqop58lrbx4ba/AADR_nisSWPWKAgsvGio8Sza?dl=0

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About New York Women in Film & Television:

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 more than 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.

More information can be found online at: www.NYWIFT.org

About Loreen Arbus:

Loreen Arbus is the President of the Loreen Arbus Foundation, The Goldenson-Arbus Foundation and Loreen Arbus Productions, Inc. Her philanthropy supports a broad scope of interests, including advocacy for women and girls, as well as for the world's largest minority, people with disabilities. She has established and funds many scholarships that both enhance and elevate social consciousness around her philanthropic interests – scientific and medical research, public policy, the arts, media responsibility, human and animal rights. Arbus holds the distinction of being the first woman to head programming for a U.S. network, a feat accomplished twice (both at Showtime and Cable Health Network/Lifetime). She has been twice nominated for an Emmy. Arbus, widely recognized for her humanitarian and professional accomplishments, has received The Heart of Giving Award presented by President Bill Clinton in 2001 and was chosen as one (of 40) Leading Women Entrepreneurs of the World 2002.

About Michele Spitz:

Michele Spitz of Woman of Her Word is a voiceover artist, public speaker, philanthropist, and influencer most passionate about advocating for media accessibility and disability awareness. Michele is dedicated to selectively funding audio description post-production accessibility grants to ensure that media content is equally accessible to low vision and blind audiences. She has 7.5 years experience of producing, narrating, consulting, and project managing audio description assets for over 80 projects including film, broadcast and digital media. Michele promotes media accessibility awareness and audience inclusion through ongoing public speaking engagements. She is committed to working closely with film clients to enlist their participation in advocating and promoting their film production's accessibility assets and advise on implementing and incorporating audio description deliverables throughout distribution and exhibition platforms for the shelf life of the film. Among creating audio description for many film genres and various subjects, Michele is a member of NYWIFT instating audio description grants for their annual disability film finishing fund and is also aligned with ReelAbilities, funding audio description film assets for their annual film festivals. Learn more:

<https://www.womanofherword.com/>

About the Filmmakers

Lisa Denker grew up in a family of artists and designers, innately developing her visual skills. She studied filmmaking at L.A City College and later at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA. Working as an Art Director and Set Decorator in the L.A film industry, she worked on features and productions such as: *Gas, Food and Lodging* (Dir. Alison Anders); the Grammy Award winning *Ain't It Heavy* music video for Melissa Etheridge, and was the Set Decorator for the film *Citizen Ruth* (Dir. Alexander Payne). She also worked on union films such as Warner Brothers *Batman Returns* (Dir. Tim Burton). Following her move to the Bay Area, Lisa Denker's *Heart of the Sea /Kapolioka'ehukai* 2003, a one-hour portrait of Hawaiian legend Rell Sunn, was broadcast nationally on PBS's The Independent Lens, as well as Broadcast internationally. The film has garnered many awards, including PBS's Independent Lens Audience Award 2003, the Audience Award Best Documentary Feature at the San Francisco International Film Festival 2003, the Audience Award at the Newport Beach Film Festival, the Aloha Spirit Award at the Hawaii International Film Festival 2002 and Best Documentary Award at the Ashland Independent Film Festival. Learn more: <http://stilljudy.com/filmmaker/>

Alyscia Cunningham is an entrepreneur, author, speaker, filmmaker, and photographer who has contributed to National Geographic, Discovery Channel, America Online and the Smithsonian Institution. Alyscia is also the Founder of Her House Media and the CEO of a Maryland Home Improvement company, Uprising Builders, LLC. Her work focuses on changing

the dialogue around beauty standards for women. After the success of Alyscia's first book, *Feminine Transitions: A Photographic Celebration of Natural Beauty* she became one of the FrontLine Voices for Stop the Beauty Madness, a campaign focused on changing the dynamics of beauty globally. She continues her contribution to social change with her documentary film and photography book, *I Am More Than My Hair*. Alyscia also co-organized Reel Moms, a supportive community for working Moms and Caregivers in the film and TV industry, in partnership with Women in Film and Video. Her goal is to continue producing documentary films and photo books. With the completion and direction provided through the Horror/Psychological Thriller workshop with Sundance Institute, she plans to also write and direct horror films. Learn more: <https://www.alyscia.com/about-alyscia>

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