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Sundance Announces 2020 Festival New Frontier Selection



Hominidae by Brian Andrews (Photo: Courtesy of Sundance Institute.)

by [Scott Macaulay](#)
in [Festivals & Events](#)
on Dec 12, 2019

Thirty-two independent experimental and independent media projects comprising the 2020 Sundance Film Festival New Frontier program were announced today by the Sundance Institute. Included in what is often Sundance's most surprising section are an art/journalism project riffing on the newsreel format by artist and *Lemonade* collaborator Khalil Joseph; an "under construction" AI based on the thoughts of linguist and critic Noam Chomsky; and a 35mm short consisting of 16,000 cuts. Also included are new works that are the latest installments in the lifelong practices of artist and filmmakers (and Sundance veterans) Lynn Hershman Leeson and Narcissister. Of note too is New Frontier's screening of Pedro Costa's latest feature, *Vitalina Varela*; with its focus on the physical as well as emotional architecture of memory and grief, it's an apt work to include alongside so many of these spatially-focused pieces.

From the press release:

This curated collection of cutting-edge independent and



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experimental media works are by creators who are pushing artistic innovation across mediums that include rocket travel, biotech, facial recognition, mixed reality (MR), smartphone AR, underwater VR, game engines, big data, AI, the human archive, and innovative uses of SMS text & iPhone video capture. Programmers assembled a global slate of work from a mix of invitations and submissions to an open call for work earlier this year.

Comments Sundance Institute President and Founder Robert Redford, “Technology infuses most aspects of modern life — and is evolving at a historic pace. The New Frontier artists that we showcase are taking completely fresh and thoughtful approaches to how the newest technological formats engage with the ancient art of storytelling.”

Adds Shari Frilot, Chief Curator, New Frontier, “Powerful technologies now enable experiences that capture, replicate, and replace “the real.” But it is even more special when the human touch converges with technology, we are provoked to reach beyond what we know to be real and enter into unfamiliar terrain. This transcendence can shift who we believe ourselves to be, where our bodies begin and end, what we are to each other, and who we are ultimately capable of being. The 2020 edition of New Frontier stares down the fear of losing our neighborhoods, and losing ourselves, and reminds us that the future is now — and because the future is now, the future can be ours.”

New Frontier selections will screen at New Frontier at the Ray and New Frontier Central. “AR dances” will occur throughout the festival, and the aforementioned newsreel piece will also screen across Park City as well as at 11 arthouse theaters across the country.

The complete New Frontier list follows.

FILMS AND PERFORMANCES

BLKNWS / U.S.A. (Director: Kahlil Joseph, Screenwriters: Sheba Anyanwu, Lee Harrison, Darol Kae, Producers: Onye Anyanwu, Kahlil Joseph) — An ongoing art project that blurs the lines between art, journalism, entrepreneurship, and cultural critique, appropriating the newsreel format as an opportunity to reimagine the contemporary cinematic experience, mixing an element of seriousness with a lighthearted twist on what news can be. Cast: Helen Molesworth, Alzo Slade, Amandla Stenberg, Trifari Williams. *BLKNWS* will also screen at 11 art house theatres around the country.

Infinitely Yours / U.S.A. (Director: Miwa Matreyek) — A live performance at the intersection of cinema and theater exploring what it means to be living in the Anthropocene and the time of climate crisis. A kaleidoscopic meditation that is an emotionally impactful and embodied illustration of news headlines we see everyday.

A Machine for Viewing / United Kingdom, Australia (Directors: Oscar Raby, Richard Misek, Charlie Shackleton, Producers: Richard Misek, Oscar Raby) — A unique three-episode hybrid of

real-time VR experience, live performance and video essay in which three moving-image makers explore how we now watch films by putting various ‘machines for viewing,’ including cinema and virtual reality, face to face.

małni – towards the ocean, towards the shore / U.S.A. (Director, screenwriter and producer: Sky Hopinka) — An experimental look at the origin of the death myth of the Chinookan people in the Pacific Northwest, following two people as they navigate their own relationships to the spirit world and a place in between life and death. Cast: Jordan Mercier, Sweetwater Sahme. World Premiere

Sandlines, the Story of History / Iraq (Director, screenwriter and producer: Francis Alÿs) — The children of a mountain village near Mosul re-enact a century of Iraqi history, from the secret Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916 to the realm of terror imposed by the Islamic State in 2016. The children revisit their past to understand their present. World Premiere

Vitalina Varela / Portugal (Director and screenwriter: Pedro Costa, Producer: Abel Ribiero Chaves) — Vitalina Varela, a 55-year-old, Cape Verdean, arrives in Lisbon three days after her husband’s funeral. She’s been waiting for her plane ticket for more than 25 years. Cast: Vitalina Varela, Ventura.

EXHIBITIONS

All Kinds of Limbo / United Kingdom (Lead Artists: Toby Coffey, Raffy Bushman, Nubiya Brandon) — The National Theatre of Great Britain’s communal musical journey reflecting the influence of West Indian culture on the UK’s music scene across the genres of reggae, grime, classical, and calypso. Immersive technologies, the ceremony of live performance and the craft of theatrical staging bring audiences into a VR performance space. Cast: Nubiya Brandon.

ANIMALIA SUM / Germany, Brazil, Iceland (Lead Artists: Bianca Kennedy, Felix Kraus) — I am animals. I eat animals. A duality explored in a virtual reality experience in which insects will be the future’s main food supply.

Anti-Gone / U.S.A. (Lead Artist: Theo Triantafyllidis, Key Collaborators: Connor Willumsen, Matthew Doyle) — In a post-climate change world, environmental catastrophe has become normalized. Cities are sunken, yet the vestiges of late-capitalist culture live on, clinging like barnacles to the ruins of civilization. Spyda and Lynxa are a couple navigating this world, gliding frictionlessly from shopping to movies to psychedelic drugs. Cast: Lindsey Normington, Zana Gankhuyag, Matthew Doyle.

Atomu / France, Kenya, U.S.A., United Kingdom (Lead Artists: Shariffa Ali, Yetunde Dada, Key Collaborators: Antoine Cayrol, Rafael Pavon, Arnaud Colinart, Opeyemi Olukemi, Annick Jakobowicz, Cassie Kinoshi, Toby Coffey, Steve Jelly, Simon Windsor) — Go inside the cyclical center of a Kikuyu Tribal Myth from Kenya, where man may become woman and woman may become man. Through virtual reality, dance and music, a sacred space is created to explore many versions of yourself. Cast:

Cassie Kinoshi, Alexander Whitley, Clément Chériot, Amaury La Burthe.

The Book of Distance / Canada (Lead Artist: Randall Okita, Key Collaborators: David Oppenheim, Sam Javanrouh, Emma Burkeitt, Luke Ruminski) — In 1935, Yonezo Okita left his home in Hiroshima, Japan for Canada. Then war and racism changed everything. Three generations later his grandson leads us on an interactive pilgrimage through an emotional geography of immigration and family to recover what was lost.

Breathe / Sweden, Canada, U.S.A. (Lead Artist: Diego Galafassi, Key Collaborators: Jess Engel, Myriam Achard, Stephen Mangiat) — A mixed-reality application that uses body movement and breathing to immerse participants in the story of air. Recast the ordinary experience of breathing as an immediate, direct link to a complex living world. We are alive to a planet that is alive to us.

Chomsky vs. Chomsky: First Encounter / Canada, Germany (Lead Artist: Sandra Rodriguez, Key Collaborators: Michael Burk, Cindy Bisho, Johannes Helberger) — A prologue to a timely conversation on AI's biggest promises and pitfalls. Lured by the possibility of emulating one of today's most famous minds, we meet and engage with CHOMSKY_AI, an entity under construction, evolving from the arsenal of digital traces professor Noam Chomsky has left behind. Cast: Sandra Rodriguez, Michael Burk, Cindy Bishop, Johannes Helberger, Moov.AI.

Dance Trail / Switzerland (Lead Artists: Gilles Jobin, Camilo De Martino, Tristan Siodlak, Susana Panades Diaz, Key Collaborators: Laurent Rime, Léo Thiémar) — A dance piece in augmented reality enabling users to invite virtual dancers into our world. Site-specific and mobile, the app allows to see dance sequences outdoor and indoor during the Festival. Users can place dancers anywhere in the world and share snapshots and videos. Cast: Susana Panadés Diaz, Victoria Chiu, Maelle Deral, Diya Naidu, Tidiani N'diaye, Gilles Jobin.

The Electronic Diaries of Lynn Hershman Leeson / U.S.A. (Lead Artist: Lynn Hershman Leeson) — In 1984, after teaching herself how to use a video camera, Lynn Hershman Leeson sat down in front of it and began to talk and for 40 years developed a sly, profound and raw confessional mediated expression for an unknown audience that led towards personal evolution and survival. Cast: Lynn Hershman Leeson, Dr. George Church, Eleanor Coppola, Dr. Caleb Webber, Dr. Elizabeth Blackburn, Dr. Anthony Atala.

Hypha / Chile (Lead Artist: Natalia Cabrera, Key Collaborators: Sebastian Gonzalez, Juan Ferrer) — An immersive virtual reality journey to heal the Earth—by becoming a mushroom. Experience the life cycle of a fungus, and comprehend the importance of the fungi kingdom, Earth's main bioremediation agent. Cast: Trinidad Piriz.

Living Distance / China, U.S.A. (Lead Artist: Xin Liu, Key Collaborators: Qinya (Jenny) Guo, Gershon Dublon, Reese Donohue) — A fantasy and a mission, in which a wisdom tooth is sent to outer space and back down to Earth again. Carried by a

crystalline robotic sculpture called EBIFA, the tooth becomes a newborn entity in outer space and tells the story of a person in this universe.

Metamorphic / U.S.A. (Lead Artists: Matthew Niederhauser, Wesley Allsbrook, Eli Zananiri, John Fitzgerald, Key Collaborators: Tim Fain, Siyuan Qiu) In this social VR experience, the body becomes a vehicle for expression within majestically drawn worlds. Participants explore the radical possibility of effortless transformation as movement and play alter appearances and surroundings.

My Trip / United Kingdom (Lead Artist: Bjarne Melgaard) — Simulating the experience of a DMT trip, this work draws on new psychedelia, black metal music and internet paranoia to question existential concerns such as procreation and overpopulation. A virtual retrospective, travel with characters such as Octo and Lightbulb Man through the dark web to unknown realms.

Persuasion Machines / U.S.A. (Lead Artists: Karim Amer, Guvenc Ozel, Key Collaborators: Jess Engel, , GERALYN WHITE DREYFOUS, Marni Grossman) — How are your likes, shares, selfies, and devices being used against you? By making the invisible world of data visible, this experience will show you how your digital footprint is shaping your reality.

Scarecrow / Korea (Lead Artists: Jihyun Jung, Sngmoo Lee, Taewan Jeong, Cooper Yoo, Key Collaborators: Chungyeon Cho, Sanghun Heo, Yeonjee Kim) — A user walks into a surreal Sisyphean world of cursed artists to break the spell. Cast: Seongtae Kim, Hyoungjun Kwon, Myungseok Chae, Donggen Shin.

Solastalgia / France (Lead Artists: Antoine Viviani, Pierre-Alain Giraud, Key Collaborators: Gabriela Friðriksdóttir, Valgeir Sigurðsson, Nicolas Becker) A mixed-reality installation set in a mysterious future exploring the surface of a planet that has become uninhabitable. The last generations of humans are living as holograms, repeating the same scenes over and over again. What secret does this strange paradise contain? Cast: Mehdi Belhaj Kacem, Audrey Bonnet, Anne Brochet, Nancy Huston, Arthur Nauzyciel, Corine Sombrun.

Spaced Out / France (Lead Artist: Pyaré, Key Collaborators: Sutu, Mourad Bennacer, Ando Shah, Stephen Greenwood, Atlas Roufas) — An underwater VR experience transports you aboard a voyage from the Earth to the moon, as well as within, led by the audio conversations of the Apollo 11 mission. Using special underwater VR goggles and a snorkel, the experience becomes a space simulation immersing all of the senses.

Still Here / U.S.A. (Lead Artists: Zahra Rasool, Sarah Springer, Key Collaborators: Naima Ramos-Chapman, Carvell Wallace, Viktorija Mickute, Maria Fernanda Lauret) — An immersive, multimedia installation exploring incarceration, erasure and gentrification through the lens of one woman who returns to Harlem after 15 years in prison. The use of interactive VR and AR technologies brings to life this heartfelt story about the reclaiming of space and identity in a changing black community. Cast: LeAsha Julius, Keith Buxton, Marion Green, James Brown-Orleans, George Watson,

Crystal Arnette.

VR CINEMA

After the Fallout / Switzerland, U.S.A. (Lead Artists: Sam Wolson, Dominic Nahr) — In March 2011, an earthquake caused a tsunami and a meltdown at the Daiichi nuclear power plant. The devastating consequences filled the communities in Fukushima with fear of the intangible and split Japan in a distinct before and after.

Azibuye – The Occupation / South Africa (Lead Artists: Dylan Valley, Caitlin Robinson, Stephen Abbott, Key Collaborators: Ingrid Kopp, Steven Markovitz) — When Masello and Evan, two homeless black artist/activists, break into an abandoned mansion in an affluent part of Johannesburg, they proclaim their occupation to be an artistic and political act in defiance of inequalities in land ownership in South Africa. Cast: Masello Motana, Evan Abrahamse.

Bembé / Cuba (Lead Artists: Marcos Louit, Patricia Diaz, Key Collaborators: Andy Ruiz, Alain López, Ernesto Collinet) — Bembé is a Cuban tradition that encompasses elements of both Christianity and the African Yoruba, where the souls of dead slaves come to Earth and family, friends, and neighbors take part in a celebration lasting up to 7 days. Cast: Ernesto Collinet, Kalina Collinet, Katyleidy Collinet.

Flowers & a Switchblade / U.S.A. (Lead Artists: Nic Koller, Weston Morgan, Key Collaborators: Candice Lee, Bridget Peck) — An everyday scene—a real-life conversation in Brooklyn's Prospect Park—collaged together from hundreds of videos to form a fractured, hyper-stimulating, 360° Cubist world.

Go / Switzerland (Lead Artists: Sandro Zollinger, Roman Vital, Klaus Merz, Key Collaborator: Thomas Gassmann) — Searching for stability in his life, Peter Thaler sets out on a hike in the Swiss mountains, from which he will never return. An unprecedented symbiosis of literature and virtual reality, telling a story of everyday and final farewells, and opening the door to eternity a tiny crack. Cast: Klaus Merz, Niramy Pathmanathan, Robert Vital, Regula Stüssi.

Hominidae / U.S.A. (Lead Artist: Brian Andrews, Key Collaborators: Brian Ferguson, Robert Steel, Kahra Scott-James) — Against a landscape of X-ray imagery and wild anatomical reimagination, a mother and her children struggle for survival. This experience follows an Arachnid Hominid, an intelligent creature with human and spider physiology, from the birth of her children to her premature death in the teeth of her prey. Cast: Phyllis Griffin, Luis Mora, Emily Weems, Kidjie Boyer, Austin Daly, Oliver Angus.

tx-reverse 360° / Austria, Germany (Lead Artists: Martin Reinhart, Virgil Widrich, Key Collaborator: Siegfried Friedrich) — What is behind the cinema screen? What if the auditorium dissolves and with it the familiar laws of cinema itself? As reality and cinema collide, viewers are drawn into a vortex where the familiar order of space and time seems to be suspended.

VR Free / Italy (Lead Artist: Milad Tangshir, Key Collaborators: Vito Martinelli, Stefano Sburlati) — Exploring the nature of incarceration spaces by portraying slices of life inside a prison in Turin, Italy. The film also captures the reaction of several inmates during brief encounters with immersive videos of life outside of prison. Cast: Michele Romano, Albert Asllanaj, Cristian De Bonis.

NEW FRONTIER SHORTS

E-Ticket / Hong Kong, U.S.A. (Director: Simon Liu) — A frantic (re)cataloguing of a personal archive and 16,000 splices in the making. 35mm frames are obsessively rearranged in evolving-disorienting patterns, as a Dante's Inferno for the streaming age emerges, illustrating freedom of movement for the modern cloud.

Guisado on Sunset / U.S.A. (Director and screenwriter: Terence Nance) — Missed connection regret at that one late-night spot—the kind you keep playing back in your head but not quite ever remembering right, until it starts to look like something else. International Premiere

How Did We Get Here? / U.S.A. (Director and screenwriter: Michelle Miles) — A visual exploration of progressive atrophy. A study in how microscopic changes can go unnoticed, but amass over time. Even as these changes become drastic, we sometimes fail to realize anything has happened at all. World Premiere

Meridian / U.S.A., Italy (Director and screenwriter: Calum Walter) — Footage transmitted by the last unit in a fleet of autonomous machines sent to deliver an emergency vaccine. The film follows the machine before its disappearance, tracing a path that seems to stray further and further from its objective.

Narcissister Breast Work / U.S.A. (Director: Narcissister) — Focusing on the exercise by women of their right to bare their breasts in public, *Narcissister Breast Work* aims to investigate – and expose – how prohibitions on female toplessness are grounded in fear of, and desire to control, the female body. World Premiere

Pattaki / Cuba (Director: Everlane Moraes, Screenwriter: Tatiana Monge Herrera) — In the dense night, when the moon rises, those who live in a monotonous daily life without water are hypnotized by the powers of Yemaya, the goddess of the sea. U.S. Premiere

While I'm Still Breathing (Tandis Que Je Respire Encore) / France (Directors: Laure Giappiconi, Elisa Monteil, La Fille Renne, Screenwriter: Laure Giappiconi) — The blurred portrayal of a young woman as she moves through three steps of her sexuality. North American Premiere

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