



October 20, 2023

## LEF Foundation Announces \$52,500 in Pre-production and Early Development Grants to New England Documentary Filmmakers

The LEF Foundation has awarded **14 Moving Image Fund grants totaling \$52,500** in support of feature-length documentary works by New England-based filmmakers.

The [LEF Moving Image Fund](#) invests in feature-length documentary films that demonstrate excellence in technique, a resonant story or idea, and originality of artistic vision and voice. The most recent round of awards includes **seven grants of \$5,000 to projects at the Pre-production stage** and **seven grants of \$2,500 to projects at the Early Development stage**.

The group of projects funded in this round amplify local and global perspectives. From neighborhoods around Boston, to Western Massachusetts and the overlooked corners of Maine, New England is a rich backdrop for some of the projects while functioning as a springboard to other parts of the country like Illinois, South Carolina, Florida, and Alabama, and globally to places like Wales, Greece, Ireland, Palestine, and the upcoming Paris Olympics. These films reckon with legacies both personal and cultural, enlisting innovative nonfiction storytelling strategies to bring to the screen considerations of artistic freedom, mythmaking, ecology, sexuality, personal history, and political action.

At LEF's August deadline for Pre-production and Early Development, 37 eligible applications were received by filmmakers working throughout New England. Three peer readers from the local filmmaking community who represent a diversity of perspectives on documentary were invited to review, discuss, and make recommendations on the applications. These peer evaluations informed LEF staff's final grant decisions.

**"The filmmaking community here is dedicated to peer support for one another and to ambitious filmmaking, making New England a strong incubator for nonfiction,"** said Lyda Kuth, Executive Director. **"In each round of the Moving Image Fund, we at LEF are exposed to dozens of projects that bring greater nuance to well-known histories or reveal new experiences altogether. The abundance of filmmaking practices in our region is reflected in this round of selected projects, which, even in early stages, are a driving force in the kinds of stories and voices New England has to offer."**

Now completing its fourth year, funding at the Early Development stage is still one of the Moving Image Fund's newest additions, giving initial seed funding to filmmakers who have not yet had a chance to shoot or edit sample footage for their current projects.

All applicants who applied for LEF funding for either Pre-production or Early Development will have the option to receive review notes from staff to learn how their proposals were evaluated by the peer reviewers and to ask any questions.

**“We are excited to be able to facilitate an application process that invites peer reviewers to share feedback on proposed projects in their earliest stages,”** said LEF Program Director Gen Carmel. **“We know that writing a project grant application takes time and care, and we hope to reciprocate by hosting calls with each team that might find it helpful to hear what reviewers found most resonant, and where they had any questions, ideas, or resources to share. Additionally, these calls are one way for us to continue the conversation with applicants, learning about what LEF might be able to improve about its review process.”**

In addition to this group of grantees, LEF will also award \$205,000 to 11 projects in Production and Post-production later in the fiscal year, following the next January 2023 application deadline. **In total, LEF will be distributing \$257,500 in funding to documentary productions over the course of its 2024 fiscal year.**

**[See the attached list of grantees.](#)**

For filmmaker bios, see LEF’s [Moving Image Fund Grant Directory](#).

The next Moving Image Fund grant deadline will be in January 2023 for New England-based directors and producers seeking Production and Post-production support for feature-length documentaries. Please check [lef-foundation.org](http://lef-foundation.org) for details regarding LEF Moving Image Fund guidelines and eligibility. You can subscribe to the [LEF New England newsletter](#) for the latest updates on deadlines, grantees, filmmaker opportunities, and more. For further information on the Foundation or its funded projects, please contact Program Officer Matthew LaPaglia at [matthew@lef-foundation.org](mailto:matthew@lef-foundation.org).

## Summer/Fall 2023 LEF Moving Image Fund Grantees

### PRE-PRODUCTION (\$5,000)



#### **97**

Directed by Kate Way (MA)

Produced by Jennifer Wiggin, Tom Wiggin, Allyson Rice, + Kate Way

*Students in a small South Carolina town take a stand when 97 books are suddenly banned from their school libraries. Colliding with the book-banning frenzy sweeping the nation, they become leading activists for the freedom to read.*



#### **1511**

Directed by Michelle Trujillo (MA)

Produced by Sydney Combs

A farewell letter to my childhood home.

Family bonds and ruptures spill out as I attempt to unravel the relationship between memory and space, moving forward and reminiscing on migrations.

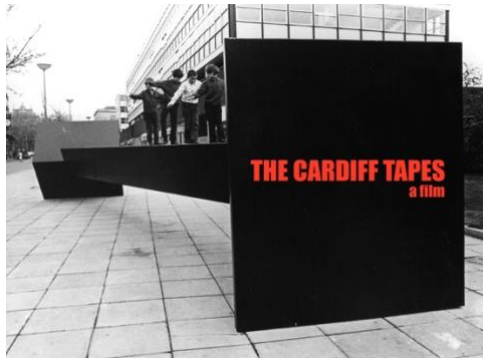


#### **BY ALL YOUR MEMORIES**

Directed by Kelly Gallagher

Produced by Mary Jirmanus Saba (MA)

*An Irish-American abolitionist traces histories of solidarity between Ireland and Palestine after learning about Robert Kennedy's assassination and the conviction of Palestinian Sirhan Sirhan. What happened to the anti-colonial politics of many Irish immigrants after they came to America? What role can memory play in building a future liberated world?*



### ***The Cardiff Tapes***

Directed by David Shayne

Produced by Leila Philip (CT)

*THE CARDIFF TAPES* takes place in Great Britain and the U.S., from a seminal event in the 1970s to its repercussions 50 years later. The film explores themes of history, class and memory as it examines the complex relationships between public artists and the communities that experience their work.



### ***Rebounds***

Directed by Fern Silva (CT)

Produced by Rea Apostolides

*Rebounds* explores contemporary Greek national identity through the lens of Afro-Greek basketball legend Giannis Antetokounmpo. While Greek nationhood has been predominantly and intrinsically tied to the fetishization of the ancients, Antetokounmpo's story and representation provides a way to uncover themes of nationalism and immigration in modern Greek society.



### ***The Selma Project***

Directed by Jay Paris (NH)

Produced by Jay Paris, Anna Myer, Carlos Mejia, + Charles Bonner

*In 1965 non-violent protesters led by Selma teenagers were massacred on a march to Montgomery, fueling Congress to pass a landmark Voting Rights Act. Today it is a forgotten town decimated by poverty, racism and struggle. Now some of the original Civil rights activists are determined to turn it around.*





### ***Uncovered***

**Directed and Produced by Sarah Bliss (MA)**

A lyrical portrait of eros, sexuality and creativity in aging bodies subject to illness, loss, and death. This candid ethnography tracks a female filmmaker and her friends and lovers as they uncover full erotic power in later life. It insists that erotic connection is fundamental to the human condition.

## **EARLY DEVELOPMENT (\$2,500)**



### ***Breakin' Away***

**Directed by Oliver Arias (RI)**

**Produced by Eric Axelman (MA)**

Three working class professional dancers pour their hearts into the journey towards competing at Breakdancing's Olympic debut. Amidst the challenges that come with financial instability, mental health setbacks, familial responsibilities, and physical injuries, they push to make Breakdancing a life-sustaining sport for their community as it enters a new Olympic era.



### ***Cosmic Moose and Grizzly Bears Ville***

**Directed and Produced by Amber Bemak (MA)**

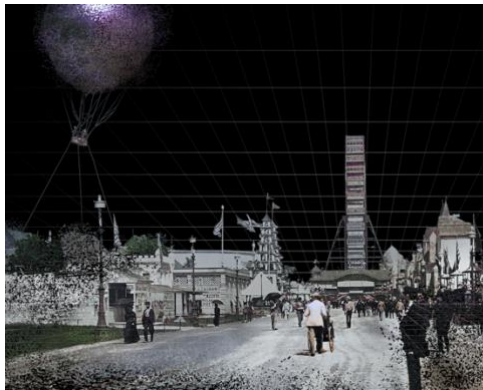
*This is a film about a person, his house, a city, and a family. Peter Zak Valentine, long ago diagnosed as schizophrenic but choosing to live his life unmedicated, lived independently, riding the edge between mental illness and magic.*



***John Henry: Unmasking America's First Real Black Superhero (wt)***

**Directed and Produced by Randall MacLowry + Tracy Heather Strain (CT)**

An exploration into the origin story and legacy of John Henry—the legendary steel-drivin' man from the Jim Crow era immortalized in countless folk songs and stories—from Black work song to labor superstar to American superhero. With storytelling provided by compelling cultural figures, this film examines issues of myth making, industrialization, racial exploitation, cultural appropriation and Black masculinity.



***THE MIDWAY IN SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW: A 21st CENTURY GUIDEBOOK TO THE 1893 WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXPOSITION***

**Directed by Marc Fields (MA)**

**Produced by Marc Fields + Shaun Clarke (MA)**

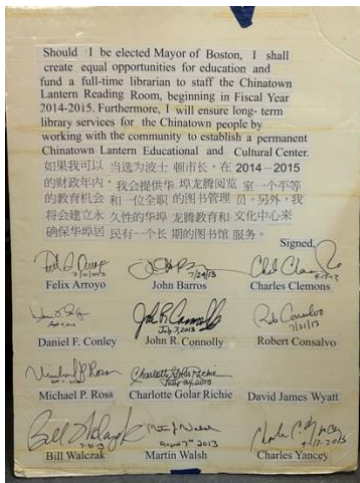
"The Midway in Sunlight and Shadow" is a hybrid documentary film consisting of immersive counternarratives that depict the experiences of those marginalized and objectified by the epochal 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Based on the era's popular guidebooks, "The Midway" uses digital video, spatialized sound, archival images and recordings, primary source texts and voice-over commentary with volumetric imaging including detailed historical reenactments to recontextualize the spectacles and performative displays.



### ***Opening the Heart (working title)***

**Directed and Produced by Zulilah Merry (ME)**

A deeply human and unexpectedly beautiful look at what it is like to live in poverty whilst becoming a parent in the US. Set in the beautiful vacation state of Maine, this story examines inequality, community, care, poverty and the bureaucratic systems that are in place to help those in need.

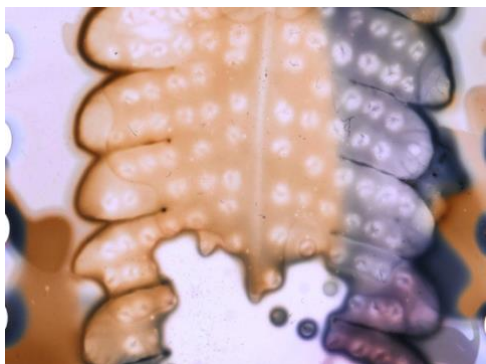


### ***OVERDUE: Boston Chinatown's struggle to reclaim and restore its branch library***

**Directed by Jesse Epstein (MA) + Melissa Taing (MA)**

**Produced by Heang Leung Rubin (MA) + Melissa Taing**

*Every single neighborhood in Boston has a permanent library branch – except Chinatown. The original library was destroyed in 1956 when construction began on the Central Artery highways during Boston's urban renewal era. Despite several Mayoral promises to bring this vital community asset back to the neighborhood - it never materialized. No one knows exactly why. It wasn't until 2001 that high school students from the Chinatown Youth Initiative began a campaign to bring library services back. Their passion and care ignited a community-wide, intergenerational, cross-neighborhood fight that would last for over two decades. OVERDUE is a documentary film project preserving the story of community struggle, hope, and celebration.*



## **SILVER & earth**

**Directed by Kathryn Ramey (MA)**

**Produced by Emily Abi-Kheirs (MA)**

*SILVER & earth is a speculative essay film investigating – through a variety of rituals, re-imaginings and conventional research – the historical and contemporary relationship between silver, analogue film and colonialism utilizing experimental developing and printing techniques involving indigenous plants, wood ash and sea water to offer an environmentally friendly place centered filmmaking.*

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