



INDIECOLLECT

A Program of the Laboratory for Icon & Idiom, Inc.



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INDIE FILM PRESERVATION GETS BIG LIFT FROM FORD FOUNDATION

\$200,000 Challenge Grant Accelerates IndieCollect's Film Preservation & Documentation Campaign

IndieCollect, a national film documentation and preservation initiative launched by the Laboratory for Icon & Idiom (LII), is getting a big lift from the Ford Foundation in the form of a \$200,000 challenge grant. This funding comes at a crucial moment when LII is being flooded with requests to help various laboratories empty their film vaults.

"The Ford Foundation has a long history of supporting independent documentary filmmaking to advance social justice," said Cara Mertes, director of JustFilms at the Ford Foundation. "**IndieCollect's** emergency efforts to preserve the history of independent film and video in America will help ensure that these important works actively inform the future of the field and inspire new generations of makers, subjects, and audiences."

LII is working closely with the Academy Film Archive, UCLA Film & Television Archive, Library of Congress, Museum of Modern Art, Anthology Film Archives, and George Eastman House, whose archivists have already preserved many important independent films. A number of specialty archives are also collaborating. **IndieCollect** seeks to increase the funding and personnel available for their initiatives so as to rapidly accelerate the number of indie films slated for collection and preservation. "Our aim is to secure a safe berth for every film that needs it, whether the work originates on a film, video or digital format," says LII's President Sandra Schulberg, "This is a gargantuan task, but we are not going it alone."

IndieCollect is building on the efforts of the Sundance Institute -- whose partnership with the UCLA Film & Television Archive has resulted in the conservation of almost 2000 titles -- and will supplement initiatives taken by Appalshop, The Film Foundation, National Film Preservation Fund, Women's Film Preservation Fund, and others.

"Many producers and directors have put preservation at the bottom of their to-do lists, so we have to instill a preservation consciousness in our fellow filmmakers," says Schulberg. "Some of us have made films that the archives have sought out; but most of us must take active steps to preserve our work -- and do it NOW -- before it is too late." Filmmakers are asked to register at www.indiecollect.org and to send a list of their film and/or video materials. Film programmers and advocacy organizations (including Sundance, IFP and Film Independent) all have important roles to play in helping to provide **IndieCollect** with information about films and filmmakers.

The Ford Foundation grant enables **IndieCollect** to set its sights on preserving the living history of independent film by 1) creating a comprehensive, searchable, **IndieCollect Index** of American independent film, video and digital titles; 2) developing an **IndieCollect Encyclopedia** for scholars, programmers and cinephiles; and 3) doing outreach to hundreds of filmmakers and film advocacy organizations to **Identify and Collect** the works that need archival repositories.

IndieCollect is advocating for the conservation of the entire field of independent cinema, across all genres, including fiction, non-fiction, hybrid and experimental works. Independent films represent alternative voices, innovative



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storytelling techniques, geographical and demographic diversity, and they tackle a vast array of topics. **IndieCollect** will make an eloquent case for how each film fits into the nation's social and artistic fabric and why this or that archive might wish to safeguard the work so that it can be studied and elucidated by future historians. In the largest sense, **IndieCollect**'s mission is to insure that when the history of motion pictures is written at the end of this century, the work of independent filmmakers will not be eclipsed.

To define and corral the field is challenging. Chief Technology Officer Israel Ehrisman is designing the **IndieCollect Index** in consultation with various archivists and with input from the team at NYU's Moving Image & Archive Program. The distinguished film scholar and Columbia University professor Richard Peña has agreed to serve as Editor-in-Chief of the forthcoming **IndieCollect Encyclopedia**. Mr. Peña, who served for 25 years as Director of the New York Film Festival, commented: "Until now, there has been no single resource or clearinghouse for information about American independent films. That's really a big hole when you think about it. I look forward to engaging a diverse coterie of critics, curators and journalists to write thoughtful pieces that link to our Index and put the films in context. Over the years, we expect to grow the encyclopedia into a magnificent library for future scholars and historians of American independent cinema to delve."

IndieCollect's Collection Assessment & Archive Liaison Officer is Steve Blakely, formerly Vice President of DuArt Film & Video. For the past two years, **IndieCollect** has been operating *sub rosa* in order to focus on helping DuArt empty its film vaults. Thanks to the cooperation of the leading American archives, the support of DuArt Chairman Irwin Young, and the dedication of Mr. Blakely, more than 750 films have been placed in cold storage at no future cost to the filmmakers. **IndieCollect** is in the process of documenting the remaining 700 films in order to place them in suitable archives too. Two other laboratories have since requested help to empty their vaults, including storied film company Deluxe Media and Entertainment. "Now that digital distribution is the order of the day and the entire industry is divesting itself of film materials," said Steve Blakely, "we must act very fast to save material that might be otherwise be lost forever."

IndieCollect is equally concerned about work that was recorded on what are now antiquated videotape formats. With DCTV (Downtown Community Television), it is undertaking a pilot project to assess the condition of 2000 tapes that have been stored in abysmal conditions for decades. It is also working with Warrington Hudlin to document 700 African-American films that constitute the collection of the Black Filmmaker Foundation. Another big issue is how to safeguard digital media. The **IndieCollect** website will soon host a series of "best practices" developed by filmmaker Allison Berg (*The Dog*) for media makers whose work is born digital. Eventually, **IndieCollect** will offer digital storage for indie filmmakers and streaming for those who want this service.

Besides the Ford Foundation, LII's **IndieCollect** campaign is funded by donations from LII Board member Lyda Kuth and from the Ravenal Foundation. Their gifts count towards the \$200,000 Ford Foundation matching requirement, but additional matching funds are urgently needed. The New York State Council on the Arts, through its Wave Farm program, has provided funding to create a long-term sustainability plan, which is being developed by LII President Sandra Schulberg and Board member Brian Newman with input from fellow Board members Ted Hope, Nicole Guillemet, GERALYN Dreyfous and Caroline Camougis.

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