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52ND SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL HONORS LOURDES PORTILLO WITH GOLDEN GATE PERSISTENCE OF VISION AWARD

***Al Más Allá* to have U.S. Premiere at Tribute to Local Activist and Documentary Filmmaker**

San Francisco, CA – The 52nd San Francisco International Film Festival (April 23–May 7) is thrilled to present the Golden Gate Persistence of Vision Award to documentary filmmaker Lourdes Portillo for her contribution to documentary filmmaking. Over a long career, Portillo has challenged the boundaries of the documentary form and remained dedicated to broadening the scope of Latino and Chicano portrayals in film. Portillo will be presented with the award **Monday, April 27 at 7:00 pm** at the **Sundance Kabuki Cinemas**; the U.S. premiere of her latest film ***Al Más Allá*** will follow.

Established in 1997, the Persistence of Vision Award each year honors the achievement of a filmmaker whose primary work is crafting documentaries, signature narrative films, animation, experimental pieces or work for television.

“Lourdes Portillo’s work seeks to challenge, inform and change common perceptions,” said Linda Blackaby, director of programming of the San Francisco Film Society. “This applies to gender, Latino and Chicano images and the notion of the documentary and truth itself. Her passion and creativity transform those who encounter her work. We are especially proud to award this distinction to a woman whose vision directly impacts the filmmaking community in San Francisco and beyond. The Festival has championed her efforts and embraced her artistic vision throughout her flourishing career, and is proud to honor her with this year’s Persistence of Vision Award.”

Spanning three decades, Lourdes Portillo’s work is exemplary in a richly varied range of forms, from television documentary to satirical video-film collage. Mexico-born and Chicana identified, through her films Portillo has focused on the search for Latino identity. *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* (SFIFF 1986) presents accounts of the protests organized by mothers of Argentinean *desparacidos*, the young men and women who disappeared by the thousands at the hands of death squads for resisting their country’s military dictatorship. The result of a three-year collaboration with writer/director Susana Muñoz, *Las Madres* was a pivotal film in Portillo’s career. Its nomination for the Academy Award for Best Documentary in 1985 and the 20 other awards it received internationally earned Portillo the funding for her next film, *La Ofrenda: The Days of the Dead* (SFIFF 1989). Greeted with widespread critical acclaim, *La Ofrenda* was Portillo’s most serious attempt to date to challenge the notion that, as she says, “Documentary is always associated with injustice.” In the film, she focuses on the Mission District of San Francisco, exploring racial and gender issues that emerge as the Latino and Chicano cultures subsist in the multicultural landscape of the United

States. All portrayed in loving color, the film is a celebration of the days of the dead and utilizes the dreamlike structure that has become a hallmark of her later work.

Frequently tackling serious issues, Portillo's humor permeates her work. *Columbus on Trial* (SFIFF 1993) presents a fanciful version of a courtroom trial as it might transpire in contemporary times, were Christopher Columbus to return from his grave to take the stand. In 1994 she was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship in recognition of her contributions to filmmaking. In *The Devil Never Sleeps* (Golden Gate Award, SFIFF 1995), Portillo develops her hybrid genre of investigative reporting and storytelling to filter the suspicious circumstances surrounding her uncle's death, resulting in a documentary mystery, a first-person real-life thriller, with Portillo playing the filmmaker/detective. Portillo explored the Mexican psyche and broadened the spectrum of screen representation of Latinos and Chicanos in *Corpus: a Home Movie for Selena* (SFIFF 1999), which earned her another Golden Gate Award. Using original interviews and archival footage, Portillo examined the impact of the tragic Latina rock star's life and death on her audience and the culture from which she came.

Portillo's work often focuses on topics easily swept to the periphery. In *Señorita Extraviada* (2001) she sheds light on the tragic fate of more than 200 young women of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico who were kidnapped, raped and murdered. She searches for the perpetrators and to examine the pressures of a global economy that led to such horrific crimes. *Señorita Extraviada* won a FIPRESCI Award in 2002 at Thessaloniki's Documentary Film Festival, "for its energetic approach to a big and unsolved problem and its powerful documentary investigation."

Al Más Allá, Portillo's newest film, mixes documentary and narrative techniques to report on the expansive world of drug trafficking across Mexico and to explore the personal ambition of the documentary filmmaker. In *Al Más Allá* (translated as "beyond the beyond"), Portillo employs layers of reflexive humor and allegory to stretch the boundaries of nonfiction filmmaking and explore the realities that vacillate between truth and fiction. Renowned Mexican actress Ofelia Medina plays Portillo's alter ego, a self-important director leading a fictional Mexican film crew in pursuit of three fishermen who find a wayward package of cocaine off the Mayan coast. The crew learns the floating packages of narcotics are common occurrences, as the alluring, undeveloped shoreline plays a growing role in the trafficking of drugs from South America to the U.S. Weaving in interviews with real tourist guides, merchants and American expats about the corruption and violence caused by the drug trafficking, Portillo raises the question of globalization's impact on local culture.

Last year documentary filmmaker Errol Morris was honored with the Persistence of Vision Award. Previous winners include documentarian Heddy Honigmann (2007), Canadian iconoclast Guy Maddin (2006), documentarians Adam Curtis (2005) and Jon Else (2004), experimental filmmaker Pat O'Neill (2003), Latin American cinema pioneer Fernando Birri (2002), avant-garde filmmaker Kenneth Anger (2001), animator Faith Hubley (2000), documentarians Johan van der Keuken (1999) and Robert Frank (1998) and animator Jan Svankmajer (1997).

San Francisco Film Society

The San Francisco Film Society is a nonprofit arts and education organization dedicated to celebrating the world of film and media in four core areas: Internationalism and Cross-Cultural Exchange; Educating and Inspiring Bay Area Youth; Showcasing Bay Area Film Culture; and Exploring New Media.

SFFS shows the best of world cinema year-round on its SFFS Screen at the Sundance Kabuki Cinemas and presents the San Francisco International Animation Festival, New Italian Cinema and French Cinema Now annually in the fall. In all, the Film Society presents more than 300 days of programming each year, reaching a total audience of more than 100,000 people. Its acclaimed youth education program introduces international cinema and media literacy to more than 7,000 teachers and students annually.

The Film Society publishes a daily online magazine, SF360.org, with broad-ranging news and features on Bay Area film culture and provides crucial support to the Bay Area filmmaking community through SFFS filmmaker services including grants & residencies, fiscal sponsorship, production assistance and development, networking and conference events, and professional-level filmmaker classes and workshops.

52nd San Francisco International Film Festival

The 52nd San Francisco International Film Festival runs April 23–May 7, 2009 at the Sundance Kabuki Cinemas, the Castro Theatre and Landmark's Clay Theatre in San Francisco; and the Pacific Film Archive Theater in Berkeley. Held each spring for 15 days, the International is an extraordinary showcase of cinematic discovery and innovation in the country's most beautiful city, featuring 25 juried awards, 200 films and live events with upwards of 100 participating filmmakers and diverse audiences of 75,000+ people.

For tickets and information, go to www.sffs.org or call 925-866-9559.

This release is available at <http://www.sffs.org/press/releases.aspx>.

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