

October 7, 2020
Media Release



DR. SHIRLEY CHEECOO

Artist, Actor, Writer,
Director & Producer

Reelworld Honours Dr. Shirley Cheechoo With 2020 Reelworld Visionary Award

Toronto, ON: 07 Oct 2020 - The Reelworld Film Festival and Reelworld Screen Institute will present filmmaker, actor, writer, and visual artist, Dr. Shirley Cheechoo with the 2020 Reelworld Visionary Award in recognition of her incredible 30 years of dedication toward diversifying the Canadian entertainment industry and in honour of her living legacy. This award honours industry leaders who have made unparalleled strides for the advancement of people of colour and/or people in Indigenous communities and people of colour.

Reelworld proudly recognizes Dr. Shirley Cheechoo for her unmatched body of work in the film industry. She is renowned as the first Indigenous woman to write, produce, and direct a dramatic feature film, *Bearwalker*-- for which she won the Best Director award at the first Reelworld Film Festival in 2000, and screened at the Cannes Film Festival.

Reelworld Founder and Executive Director Tonya Williams shared her thoughts on honouree “I saw Shirley Cheechoo’s film back in 2000 and was shocked that no film festival in Canada accepted to screen it even though it had screened at Cannes. Her powerful film set the standard and beacon for the festival ever since, especially as Shirley has always used her talent to bring attention to the issues of her community with the creation of the Weengushk Film Festival and the Institute. She continues to teach and mentor so many Indigenous youth on how to take their authentic voices and speak truth to their experiences.”

While working on her feature film *Bearwalker*, Dr. Cheechoo became aware of how many Indigenous youth had an interest in the filmmaking process but had limited opportunity. This led to the inception of the Weengushk Film Institute (WFI) in 2002. WFI is a non-profit, charitable organization, dedicated to exclusively supporting the creative works and pursuits of Indigenous artists. Thanks to the environment and training fostered by the WFI, many participants have gone on to receive awards for their short films at notable Canadian film festivals including Cherokee Film Festival and Cinefest Sudbury Film Festival.

“It is an honour to be recognized by The Reelworld Film Festival and Reelworld Screen Institute for the second time, but this time as a Visionary,” stated Dr. Shirley Cheechoo. “I believe that film is one of the most powerful vehicles for bringing people together and materializing the social change we desperately need in our industry.”

Dr. Shirley Cheechoo will be joining us for a special [“In Conversation With” webinar](#) on Monday, October 19th, 2020 at 12:00pm EST. All Reelworld Film Festival industry programmes are free and available worldwide. Click [here](#) to sign up.

The Reelworld Film Festival and Reelworld Screen Institute are the largest national platforms dedicated to supporting Canadian filmmakers and artists from the Black, Indigenous, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American communities. Since its inception in 2001, Reelworld has been at the forefront in promoting racially diverse Canadian talent.

For more information on the Reelworld Film Festival and Reelworld Screen Institute, visit <https://www.reelworld.ca>.

Weengushk Film Institute (WFI) is a non-profit, artist-focused film and television-training centre, dedicated to unlocking the creative potential of Indigenous youth.

For more information on the Weengushk Film Institute (WFI) visit <https://www.weengushk.com/about>

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INQUIRIES

For media inquiries and interviews, please contact:

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Film Screeners will be available upon request