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Visual Effects Society Announces Special 2024 Honorees *New VES Fellows to be Recognized This Month*

Los Angeles, CA (October 7, 2024) – Today, the Visual Effects Society (VES), the visual effects industry’s professional global honorary society, announced the Society’s newest VES Fellows, who will be celebrated with the other honorees at a special VES Honors event later this month. This year’s venerated VES Fellows who will be bestowed with the post-nominal letters “VES” are: **Matt Aitken, Girish Balakrishnan, Randall Balsmeyer, Michael Conte, Lisa Cooke, Bryan Grill, Thomas Knop, Arnon Manor and Susan Rowe.**

VES 2024 Fellows

VES Fellow Matt Aitken, VES. Matt Aitken has been an integral part of Wētā FX since it first opened its doors. With two Oscar nominations and five VES Award wins, including the top award of Outstanding Visual Effects in a Photoreal Feature for *Avengers: Infinity War*, Aitken’s versatility and creative talent are foundational to the studio’s success. As Head of Visual Effects, Aitken leads Wētā FX’s artists across three countries, and is responsible for filmmaker and studio relationships. Prior to assuming this executive role, Aitken was one of Wētā FX’s most experienced Visual Effects Supervisors on projects including *Avengers: Endgame*, *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts* and *Marvel’s Eternals*. Aitken has been an active VES member for 20 years. He was instrumental in establishing the New Zealand VES Section in 2011, the 5th VES Section to be created, and was New Zealand Section Chair for its first five years of operation.

VES Fellow Girish Balakrishnan, VES. Girish Balakrishnan has more than a decade of experience driving business studio strategies, business development and production innovation across live action, animation and games. As Director of Creative Innovation at Netflix, Balakrishnan leads the content & production studio investment strategy on the application of emerging technology, like generative AI, real-time and transmedia. While overseeing Netflix’s global virtual production strategy, he built a team that has delivered 200 diverse titles, including *The Midnight Sky*, *Jingle Jangle: A Christmas Journey* and *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. He holds a patent for a mobile virtual camera system and has received the prestigious SMPTE Progress medal. Balakrishnan has contributed to the *VES Handbook of Virtual Production*, helped create the VES Virtual Production Resource Page and Glossary, and participated as an expert on VES webcasts.

VES Fellow Randall Balsmeyer, VES. Randall Balsmeyer is an award-winning Titles Designer and Visual Effects Supervisor with a 40-year career. He is acknowledged as a go-to partner for some of the world’s most acclaimed filmmakers including Spike Lee, Joel and Ethan Coen, Martin Scorsese and Woody Allen. Balsmeyer won Emmy Awards for his work on *Sesame Street* and *Between the Lions*, and was nominated for another Emmy for the opening sequence to *Angels in America*. Balsmeyer’s filmography includes *Da 5 Bloods*, *BlackKkKlansman*, *The Adjustment Bureau*, *The Giver*, *Burn After Reading*, *The Royal Tenenbaums* and *Vicky, Cristina Barcelona*. In 2015, the VES New York Section presented Balsmeyer with the inaugural Empire Award, in recognizing him as a New York-based visual effects professional who has made

enormous contributions to the field of visual arts and filmed entertainment and whose work embodies the spirit of New York.

VES Fellow Michael Conte, VES. Michael Conte is a VES award-winning artist and supervisor. In his 33-year career at ILM, he has worked on over five dozen shows and built a reputation for leadership in both artistic and technical roles. Conte has held many different positions at the company including technical assistant, artist, supervisor, and 2D department head. While serving as compositing supervisor for films such as *Day After Tomorrow*, *Battleship* and *Terminator Genisys*, he was also the 2D technical lead at ILM. In 2015, Conte took the helm of the newly-formed ILM Image Unit. Conte won a VES Award for compositing on *Transformers* and was nominated for his work on *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*. Conte has served multiple terms on the board of the Bay Area section and has held every officer position. He is currently the Bay Area Section Chair.

VES Fellow: Lisa Cooke, VES. Lisa Cooke is an Executive Producer at Tippett Studio, where she produces VFX for numerous projects including *Alien: Romulus*, *Poker Face*, *Gaslit*, *The Resort*, and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, among others. Previously, she founded and led a company that specialized in visual effects for the scientific community and taught storytelling techniques to scientists to aid in the effective communication of their research. Cooke has been actively involved with the VES for many years, including serving on the VES Bay Area Board of Managers for six years and on the VES global Board of Directors for another six years, including service as VES Chair from 202 to 2023 – the first woman to lead the global organization. Currently, Cooke is the Co-Chair of the VES Roth Virtual Museum of VFX, and is co-leading a new initiative, focused on the advancement of women in the visual effects industry.

VES Fellow Bryan Grill, VES. Bryan Grill has over 30 years' experience in visual effects. He most recently served as overall production VFX Supervisor on the Netflix feature, *Beverly Hills Cop: Axel F*. Grill received BAFTA Awards for Best Visual Effects for his work on *Black Panther* and *Apollo 13*, two VES Awards for *Independence Day: Resurgence* and *Flags of Our Fathers*; and multiple Academy Award nominations and additional BAFTA nominations. His filmography also includes the BAFTA and Oscar-nominated *Free Guy* and *The Golden Compass*, *The Gray Man* and *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*. Prior to joining Scanline as Senior Visual Effects Supervisor, Grill's career included 10 years at Digital Domain. Grill has served the VES on the global Board of Directors and as an active contributor to the Education Committee.

VES Fellow Thomas Knop, VES. Thomas Knop is an Executive Producer with more than 25 years' experience working in visual effects, media production, technology change management and Virtual Production for TV, streaming and film. His industry leadership roles included Head of Studio at MPC and TRIXTER and Managing Director at Stargate Germany. He is best known for his work on *The Swarm*, *Captain Marvel*, *Brightburn*, *Sonic*, *The Kangaroo Chronicles*, *Rocca* and *Guns Akimbo*. Knop has served on the global VES Board of Directors and on the VES Germany Section Board of Managers in multiple roles, including Chair and Co-Chair.

VES Fellow Arnon Manor, VES. Starting as a VFX artist, supervisor and producer, and, for the last 13 years as a studio executive, Arnon Manor has collaborated with some of the industry's most talented filmmakers across the globe, bringing international experience and sensibilities to his work. As Senior Vice President, Production Visual Effects at Sony Pictures Entertainment, Manor is responsible for overseeing the VFX production of studio feature projects, across the feature divisions of Columbia, Tristar, 3000 and Screen Gem. He is a recognized industry leader, and in the fight for social justice, he received a Peabody Award in 2021 for producing and directing the Black Lives Matter-themed animated short *Cops and Robbers*. As a

VES global board member, Manor helmed the Education Committee to create opportunities and increase diversity and inclusion in VFX through education and mentorship.

VES Fellow: Sue Rowe, VES. Sue Rowe is a seasoned visual effects supervisor with over 25 years of industry experience, contributing to films including *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *The Golden Compass*, which earned a Best VFX Oscar. Her unique blend of traditional artistic talent and deep industry knowledge allows Rowe to excel across all aspects of VFX production from storyboard to previz to on-set shoots to final pixel. She has served as a client VFX Supervisor for films including *John Carter* and *The Maze Runner*, and as an on-set supervisor for productions including *The Adam Project* and *Shadow and Bone*. Her leadership extends across top VFX companies including Sony Pictures Imageworks, MPC, Cinesite and more. An Emmy-nominated professional for her work on HBO's *Into the Storm*, Rowe is the former Co-Chair of the VES Vancouver Section.

As previously announced, Producer and VFX industry leader **Brooke Breton, VES** was named recipient of the 2024 VES Founders Award. The Society designated VFX Producer/Supervisor **Reid Paul** and VFX Producer **Ronald B. Moore** with Lifetime VES memberships. The Society's newest Honorary Members are Director and Animator **Don Bluth**; Visual Effects Supervisor and Filmmaker **John Bruno**; Director, Production Designer & Visual Effects Specialist **Robert Stromberg**; and Animation and Optical Effects Supervisor **Harry Walton**. The 2024 class of VES Hall of Fame inductees includes **Tim McGovern, VES**; **Thad Beier**; **Maya Deren**; and **Dorothy Davenport**.

About the Visual Effects Society

The Visual Effects Society is a professional global honorary society dedicated to advancing the arts, sciences and applications of visual effects and to upholding the highest standards and procedures for the visual effects profession. It is the entertainment industry's only official organization representing the extended global community of visual effects practitioners, including supervisors, artists, producers, technology developers, educators and studio executives. VES' more than 5,000 members in 50 countries worldwide contribute to all areas of entertainment – film, television, commercials, animation, streaming, games and special venues. To learn more about the VES, visit www.vesglobal.org and follow us on Twitter @VFX Society. Read our award-winning signature publication *VFX Voice* at www.vfxvoice.com.