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## **FIRST PERSON FESTIVAL Announces Line-up** **Seventh Annual Festival explores real-life stories through** **memoir and documentary art, November 11 – 16**

PHILADELPHIA – **First Person Arts** announces the seventh annual **First Person Festival** of memoir and documentary art – the only festival dedicated to presenting works of art based on real-life experiences – held in Philadelphia from **November 11 – 16, 2008**. With its annual Festival, First Person Arts takes the lead as a presenter of first person stories in all forms, showcasing works by local and nationally renowned artists and nurturing the talents of emerging artists.

The multidisciplinary Festival features memoir readings and author discussions, documentary film screenings, performance art, experiential tours, visual arts exhibitions, music, competitions, artist receptions and more. First Person Arts Founder and Executive Director **Vicki Solot** says, “More than ever before, this, our seventh festival, expresses our vision of a creative community – one that is built on the diversity and richness of our experiences and knit together through the stories we share.”

First Person Arts’ original programming for emerging artists will take center stage at the Festival with a bonus **First Person Salon** series event, the highly anticipated **Grand Slam Championship of the StorySlams** and a presentation by winners of the nationwide **First Person Impressions** competition. Festival topics range from competitive eating and sports, to family histories and the heated debate over immigration, to Philadelphia’s music legends and the next generation of young rockers, creating an eclectic assemblage of personal stories. From intimate dinners with renowned chefs to the gripes of everyday Philadelphians in the **Complaint Choir**, the 2008 First Person Festival brings a wide variety of memoir and documentary artists and experiences to Philadelphia.

All Festival events will be held at the **Painted Bride Art Center**, located at 230 Vine Street in Philadelphia’s historic Old City neighborhood (with the exception of Festival preview events and tours). Tickets and a full schedule of Festival events are available online at [www.firstpersonarts.org](http://www.firstpersonarts.org) or by calling **(267) 402-2055**. Many events are free and ticket prices range from \$10 to \$15, with special events priced individually. Ticket packages and all-Festival passes are also available.

*(more)*

### **First Person Arts Original Programming**

First Person Arts' year-round programming for emerging artists will culminate in festival events featuring rising talent from Philadelphia and beyond.

**Best Impressions** (November 12) will showcase winners of the 2008 nationwide **First Person Impressions** competition for memoir and documentary artists in readings, film screenings and a photography exhibition.

**Salon du Festival** (November 13), a bonus First Person Salon, will feature a theatrical performance by **Pete Pryor** excerpted from *Beautiful Boy*, his play about parenting an autistic child, a short film screening by First Person Arts' Artist-in-Residence **David S. Kessler**, a suitcase puppetry performance by Artist-in-Residence **Beth Nixon** and friends, and a memoir reading by StorySlam winner **Katonya Mosley**.

The eleven winning storytellers from this year's crowd-pleasing, Best of Philly award-winning **First Person StorySlams** will compete for the title of Philadelphia's Best Storyteller at the **Grand Slam Championship** (November 15). Since April 2007, the monthly competitive storytelling series has captivated the city's creative community with a steady diet of hilarious, moving and confrontational real life stories. At the Grand Slam, storytellers will go head to head with their take on the theme "Champs and Chumps."

Philadelphia actors and legal experts will bring the real voices of immigrants into the overheated debate about immigration. In **Underground America**, audiences will experience immigrants' stories through an original dramatic reading based on first-person accounts, directed by Philadelphia-based theater artist **Jenny Jacobs** and featuring a cast of local actors. The November 12 reading will be followed by a panel discussion addressing the legal, economic, and humanitarian issues surrounding the immigration debate with **Peter Orner**, editor of *Underground America: Narratives of Undocumented Lives*, and legal experts **Judith A. Bernstein-Baker**, **Jaykumar Menon** and **Sarah Paoletti**.

**Storysmithing 101** (November 15), a DIY workshop designed for all levels of experience, invites budding memoirists and documentary artists to learn storytelling techniques through digital storytelling, memoir writing and oral storytelling from experts in their fields.

### **Philadelphia Sound**

The diverse sounds of Philadelphia will be explored through several Festival events, from a conceptual choir to all-girl rockers and Philadelphia soul. Local artist **Shelley Spector** teams up with composer **Evan Solot** to create the aptly titled, **Complaint Choir** (November 12). Modeled after the Scandinavian-born phenomenon, the self-made chorus of Philadelphians will gripe in song about whatever bothers them.

The Festival will screen the all-ages documentary ***Girls Rock!*** (November 15) which follows one life-altering week at a camp for girls as they learn to play instruments, collaborate to produce a song and finally perform in front of a screaming crowd. Rock gurus Katy Davidson, sts, and Nicole Georges will talk about this empowering movement and the newly released book, *Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls*. All-girl rock bands from Philadelphia's own **Girls Rock Philly** will perform following the screening.

The Festival will also offer a taste of Philadelphia soul with **Soul Supper** (November 16), featuring the documentary screening of *Everybody Needs Somebody*, the story of Philadelphia's soulful son, Grammy Award-winner and Rock and Roll Hall of Fame member “**King**” **Solomon Burke**. A live musical performance by Philadelphia R&B sensation **The Barbara Walker Story** and a soul food buffet dinner will follow the screening. Soul Supper is presented in partnership with the Rhythm and Blues Foundation.

### **The Art of the Competition**

First Person Arts invites sports fans to a behind-the-scenes look at competitive sports, gaming and competitions, beginning with **American Fight Clubs**, featuring photographs by **Jim Lommasson** drawn from his acclaimed book *Shadow Boxers: Sweat, Sacrifice & the Will to Survive in American Boxing Gyms*. Lommasson will share the story behind the ten years he spent traveling to boxing gyms across the country, including such local landmarks as the famed Blue Horizon and the Front Street Gym, at a First Friday preview and reception on November 7 (the exhibition will run through December 31).

In filmmaker **Stephanie Johnes'** documentary ***Doubletime*** (November 15), competitive jump-rope sheds its segregated history when the Bouncing Bulldogs and Double Dutch Forces meet for the first time on stage at Harlem's Apollo Theater. Audiences of all ages can catch some of Philadelphia's finest competitive jumpers on stage before and after the film. In ***Okie Noodling 2*** (November 13) filmmaker **Bradley Beesley** explores the dangerous pastime of bare-handed catfishing in which fishermen (and women) dive underwater to catch giant catfish with nothing but their hands, set to a soundtrack by Beesley's longtime collaborators **The Flaming Lips**.

With one last competitive gulp, the Festival will present the premiere of ***Swallow Your Pride*** from director **Josh Camerote** and cinematographer **Andrew David Watson** on November 14. The documentary follows a group of competitive eaters as they struggle to qualify and compete in the 2005 Wing Bowl, considered the most gripping finish in history, played out in front of a crowd of 25,000 at the Wachovia Center in Philadelphia. Special guest El Wingador – one of the greatest champions to ever grace the Wing Bowl stage – will serve up his signature sauce and 25 cent wings and beer.

### **Culinary Journeys**

To preview the Festival, special guest **Sergio Esposito** will offer audiences a guided tour of Italy's finest flavors in an intimate dinner at Ristorante Panorama on November 6. The author of *Passion on the Vine: A Memoir of Food, Wine, and Family in the Heart of Italy* and founder of Italian Wine Merchants (along

with partners Mario Batali and Joe Bastianich), Esposito will explore the complementary relationship between simple rustic food and hand-crafted country wines, paired with personal storytelling. Featured artists from the First Person Festival will be seated at each table to meet, mingle and converse with the guests.

*Philadelphia Inquirer* food critic **Rick Nichols** will take festival-goers on an adventurous walking tour through South Philadelphia's East Passyunk neighborhood in *Edible World: East Passyunk* (November 11). The tour invites diners to see past the area's famed restaurants for a behind-the-scenes look (and taste) of the region's hidden culinary gems.

Fork Restaurant will host a Sunday brunch with author **Kim Sunée** featuring recipes from her memoir, *Trail of Crumbs: Hunger, Love and the Search for Home* on November 16. Sunée's memoir recounts her search for her origins in South Korea, her identity as a child adopted and raised in New Orleans and the passion she acquired for food while living in France.

Natural food chef **Christina Pirello**, host of the Emmy Award-winning *Christina Cooks*, will share her own story and sign copies of her new cookbook, *This Crazy Vegan Life: A Prescription for an Endangered Species* (November 15). Following lunch with Pirello, audiences will view **Kris Carr's** touching documentary, *Crazy Sexy Cancer*. An entertaining blend of humor, emotion and life-affirming wisdom, Carr's struggle to heal parallels Pirello's journey to health. A discussion featuring alternative health practitioners will follow. This event is presented in partnership with the Linda Creed Breast Cancer Foundation and sponsored by Essene Market & Café.

### **Relative History**

Several artists in the 2008 Festival will present personal memoirs and family histories, through the written word and documentary film. Philadelphia-based author **Lori Tharps** will read from her memoir, *Kinky Gazpacho* (November 14), an exploration of the complexities of interracial and intercultural romance, and Tharps' investigation of Spain's slave heritage.

Nominated for an Academy Award in 1988, Philadelphia filmmaker **Lise Yasui's** *A Family Gathering* (November 16) follows her family's struggle to cope with internment during World War II. In recent years, the film has taken on new resonance as the U.S. government revives policies of detaining citizens and resident aliens considered to be security risks. Yasui will answer questions after the film.

Authors **Daniel Mendelsohn** and **Lise Funderburg** have devoted years to dissecting the minutia of family stories, framed by the grand sweep of history. They will read from and discuss their respective memoirs on November 16. Mendelsohn's *Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* is a gripping account of six of his own family members — Holocaust victims uncovered through a detective-like search for facts about their lives and deaths. Lise Funderburg's *Pig Candy* reconstructs the Jim Crow South as she tends to her

dying father during his final years in his boyhood home in rural Georgia. This event is sponsored by the National Museum of American Jewish History.

### **Additional Festival Events**

**Davy Rothbart**, founder and editor of the popular *Found Magazine* series and frequent contributor to NPR's *This American Life*, will tell the story behind the discovery of some of his quirkiest *Found* finds in an idiosyncratic presentation on November 14. An exhibit of *Found* items – from forgotten postcards, school notes, and lost snapshots – will be on display, and audience members are invited to contribute their own discoveries to *Found's* collection of anonymous ephemera.

**Jane Golden**, founder of the **Mural Arts Program**, will take audiences on a behind-the-scenes guided tour of North Philadelphia (November 15), exploring some of the region's best stories as told through its murals. The tour will feature murals seen in the book *My North Philly* and includes lunch at Las Cazuelas, famed for its authentic Mexican cuisine.

*Presenting sponsors of the 2008 First Person Festival include Philadelphia City Paper, Red Tettemer, and Harmelin Media. Supporting sponsors include Penn's View Hotel, Philadelphia Brewing Company, Essene Market & Café, Zipcar, and the National Museum of American Jewish History.*

### **About First Person Arts**

Founded in 2000, First Person Arts transforms the drama of real life into memoir and documentary art to foster appreciation for our unique and shared experience. First Person Arts believes that everyone has a story to tell, and that sharing our stories celebrates our diversity and forges the bonds of community that bring us together. First Person Arts supports the development of memoir and documentary work by artists from all walks of life and creates opportunities for it to be seen and appreciated by many. For more information, visit [www.firstpersonarts.org](http://www.firstpersonarts.org).

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**To request more information, press kits, photos and interviews, please contact:**

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