

# Santa Fe Art Institute

## ***For Immediate Release***

May 18, 2011

Libby Spears' Documentary Film

# ***Playground***

**What:** *Playground* Screening and Talk by Libby Spears

**Where:** Tipton Hall

**When:** 6pm Friday, June 3

**How Much:** \$5 everyone

The Santa Fe Art Institute is pleased to present Libby Spears and her award-winning documentary film, *Playground* about the international and domestic child sex trafficking trade.

While traveling to the Philippines in 2001, filmmaker Libby Spears gained first hand knowledge of the horrific practice of trafficking human beings for the purpose of sexual exploitation. She examined a little deeper, and discovered that most of these victims were young children.

Facing death threats to be “knocked off” for only \$10, Libby went undercover to infiltrate brothels in South Korea and Thailand. She held first-hand interviews with victims, their pimps, and their abusers. She mapped the trafficking routes of the sex tourism industry, and charted the commerce fueled by the purchase and sale of minors—she was disheartened to find that virtually the entire globe was involved and affected by this growing industry.

What she was astonished to find, however, was the involvement of the United States and the degree to which they were influencing the global demand and growth of the sex trafficking industry.

Previously, she had mistakenly believed that sex trafficking was primarily an “international” occurrence in countries like Philippines and Cambodia. But a meeting with Ernie Allen, President of the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children, confirmed to Libby what her research was beginning to uncover: that the trafficking of children for commercial sexual exploitation is every bit as real in North America.

This is where *Playground* begins.

Sexual exploitation of children is a problem that we tend to relegate to back-alley brothels in developing countries, the province of a particularly inhuman, and invariably foreign, criminal element. Such is the initial premise of Libby Spears' sensitive investigation into the topic. But she quickly concludes that very little thrives on this planet without American capital, and the commercial child sex industry is certainly thriving. Spears intelligently traces the epidemic to its

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disparate, and decidedly domestic, roots—among them the way children are educated about sex, and the problem of raising awareness about a crime that inherently cannot be shown. Her cultural observations are couched in an ongoing mystery story: the search for Michelle, an American girl lost to the underbelly of childhood sexual exploitation who has yet to resurface a decade later.

Executive produced by George Clooney, Grant Heslov, and Steven Soderbergh, and punctuated with poignant animation by Japanese pop artist Yoshitomo Nara, *Playground* illuminates a sinister industry of unrecognized pervasiveness. Spears has crafted a comprehensive revelation of an unknown epidemic, essential viewing for any parent or engaged citizen.

Music by: Bjork, Radiohead, Chris Martin, Blonde Redhead, Cat Power, Sigur Rós, CocoRosie, Basement Jaxx, DJ Shadow, Kazu Makino, Masato Suzuki.

Film clips available here: <http://www.playgroundproject.com/>

**About Libby Spears:**

Libby Spears is a director of both narrative and documentary work. She conceived of the idea for *Playground* in 2001 while photographing a documentary in the Philippines and Central America about women's sexual self-image. Libby's background in social issue filmmaking and commercial production has produced works for PSI in Nepal on water and sanitation, and IOM in Indonesia, on human trafficking and the aftermath of the tsunami. Libby's film directing and producing credits include a film on the jazz band MEDESKI, MARTIN & WOOD, Bruno Coppola's RULES OF LOVE and Christopher Walken's directorial debut, POPCORN SHRIMP for Showtime Television.

**About *Half Life: Patterns of Change*:**

*Cycles of Creation, Decay, and Renewal in Art and Life*

When an object or system stops performing its assigned function in contemporary society, we tend to replace it rather than repair it. However, artists redefine useless as useful by creating a new life for objects, and that renewed life alters the role of these objects entirely. Artists work similar magic with degraded landscapes, blighted neighborhoods, and other systems—infusing them with new purpose and expanding the potential for positive change. Ideally, this change is accomplished with the participation of the surrounding communities—transforming not only objects and systems, but also the communities themselves.

**About the SFAI:**

Founded in 1985, the Santa Fe Art Institute's mission is to promote art as a positive social force — both in our community and around the world — and to highlight art as a powerful tool for facilitating dialogue, bridging perspectives, and evoking visions of a better future.

For more information about this or any SFAI programming, please contact Michelle Laflamme-Childs at [mchilds@sfai.org](mailto:mchilds@sfai.org) or call (505) 424-5050.

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