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Merchant Ivory to Receive the British Academy Fellowship

At this year's **Orange British Academy Film Awards** on 24th February 2002 the British Academy will honour Merchant Ivory with the Academy's Fellowship – the highest accolade bestowed in recognition of an outstanding contribution to world cinema.

Merchant Ivory is only the second film production team, following Powell and Pressburger in 1981, to be honoured with a Fellowship which places them alongside eminent names from the world of cinema including Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean, Ingmar Bergman, Louis Malle, Elizabeth Taylor, Stanley Kubrick, Sean Connery, Steven Spielberg and Albert Finney, who received the award last year.

Established in 1962 by Ismail Merchant, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and James Ivory, Merchant Ivory continues to produce a sequence of exceptional feature films, all of which draw praise for their visual beauty, mature and intelligent themes, shrewd casting and superb acting. ¹

Previous BAFTA awards include Best Screenplay Adaptation for *Heat and Dust* in 1983, Best Film, Best Actress (Maggie Smith) and Best Supporting Actress (Judi Dench) for *A Room With A View* in 1986, and Best Actor (Anthony Hopkins) for *Remains of the Day* in 1993. Oscars® received include Best Costume for *The Europeans* in 1979, Best Screen Play Adaptation, Best Art Direction, Best Costume for *A Room with a View* and Production Designer, Best Adapted Screenplay and Best Actress (Emma Thompson) for *Howards End* in 1992.

Ismail Merchant, comments, "It is a great honour to receive the Academy Fellowship and particularly to be included among such distinguished company."

Simon Relph, Chairman of BAFTA comments: "Merchant Ivory are amongst Britain's most prolific and respected film makers and are much loved and appreciated by our community. We are delighted to welcome them to the Academy Fellowship."

The Fellowship award is in the gift of the Council of the British Academy of Film and Television Arts, a Council which is elected annually by the members.

The Orange British Academy Film Awards will be held at the Odeon, Leicester Square on Sunday 24th February 2002 and will be hosted by Stephen Fry and broadcast on BBC ONE.

Editors Note

1 Merchant Ivory Productions A History

From *Shakespeare Wallah*, the bittersweet tale of a wandering theatrical company in India, which established the company's reputation in 1965, to the richly detailed comic masterpiece *A Room With A View* in 1986, and the poignant Oscar-winning film *Howards End* in 1992, Merchant Ivory has provided audiences around the world with thoughtful and beautifully crafted features, documentaries, and shorts. *The Golden Bowl* in 2000 starring Nick Nolte, Uma Thurman and Anjelica Huston, showed Merchant Ivory adapting once more from a literary classic to create cinema with timeless relevance and appeal.

Merchant Ivory is actually a collaboration of three remarkable people from three vastly different cultures: Ismail Merchant, the producer, born in India; Ruth Praver Jhabvala, the screenwriter, born in Germany and educated in England; and James Ivory, the director, born in the United States.

The diversity of Merchant Ivory's cultural roots is evident in the range of locations in which their movies have been shot: Delhi, Bombay, and Benares; London, Paris, and Florence; New York, New England, and Texas. They capture a vital sense of place and often lyrical feeling for widely varying periods and landscapes, from Paris in the 1920s and Edwardian England, to nineteenth-century America and British India.

The scope of their subjects is as broad as their range of locations. They have explored India's past and present in such features as *The Householder*, *Bombay Talkie*, and *Autobiography of a Princess*. Clashing cultures feature in *Shakespeare Wallah*, *Heat and Dust* (official selection, Cannes 1983), *Savages* (selected for Quinzaine des Realisateurs, 1972), and *The Europeans* (official selection Cannes, 1979). The conflicts and anomie of a modern urban life are explored in *Quartet* (Cannes winner, 1981, Best Actress for Isabelle Adjani), *Roseland*, and *Slaves of New York*; and the struggle for self-discovery is evoked in *The Bostonians* (selected for Quinzaine des Realisateurs, 1984), *A Room With A View*, and *Maurice* (both selected for the Venice Film Festival). *Jefferson In Paris*, also starred Nick Nolte and was selected for official competition at Cannes in 1995

The Golden Bowl starred Nick Nolte, Uma Thurman and Anjelica Huston, and was adapted from the celebrated novel by Henry James. Set in England and Italy at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century it told the story of two marriages entangled in a complex, almost incestuous relationship.

Merchant Ivory's latest film *The Mystic Masseur*, adapted from Nobel prize-winner V S Naipaul's novel, opens in the UK on 29th March 2002. Their next production entitled *Le Divorce* starts filming in Paris next month and stars Kate Hudson, Sigourney Weaver, Naomi Watts and Matthew Modine.

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