

BlackStar Projects Announces Film Lineup for 2023 Festival

Passes now on sale for BlackStar Film Festival

*12th edition will feature a global selection of films and robust
accompanying programming*



(Philadelphia, PA – June 7, 2023) BlackStar Projects, the premier organization celebrating visionary Black, Brown, and Indigenous film and media artists, today announced the films selected for inclusion in this year's 12th annual BlackStar Film Festival. The 2023 BlackStar Film Festival will take place **August 2-6** with in-person screenings at the Perelman Theater at the Kimmel Center Cultural Campus, Suzanne Roberts Theatre, and Lightbox Film Center in Philadelphia as well as online.

The 2023 BlackStar Film Festival is set to feature a total of **93** films representing **31** countries, including **19** world, **11** North America, **5** US, and **10** East



Coast premieres. 47 films will be Philadelphia premieres. The films presented this year engage with climate justice, queer stories, and narratives of migration and displacement. Highlights include the world premiere of Ja'Tovia Gary's *Quiet As It's Kept*, a contemporary cinematic response to Toni Morrison's first novel *The Bluest Eye*, and *Invisible Beauty*, a documentary championing the career of pioneering model and activist Bethann Hardison. Additionally, *La Lucha* directed by Violeta Ayala, which will have its world premiere at the festival, tells the story of a group of people with disabilities in Bolivia who trek the Andes in their wheelchairs, in order to protest for their pension and fight for their civil rights.

"We are excited to present another groundbreaking lineup and hope it allows filmmakers of the global majority to connect with new audiences through intimate and important storytelling," said **BlackStar Chief Executive and Artistic Officer Maori Karmael Holmes**. "We consider every aspect of the festival to be an intentional community building effort, centered on joy, radical care, and thriving, and we are looking forward to presenting another festival that embodies this generous spirit."

"Once again we went through the film programming process with a brilliant group of curators, makers, and thinkers. At this year's festival we will explore wide-ranging and urgent themes, from queer futures in cinema to climate justice and resistance to land theft," added **Festival Director Nehad Khader**. "And we are thrilled to be able to continue to share this work with our community around the world both in-person in Philadelphia and virtually."

Selections from this year's lineup include:

Above and Below the Ground—a feature documentary directed by **Emily Hong** that follows Indigenous punk rock pastors and women activists who are determined to protect a sacred river from a Chinese-built megadam in Myanmar. From Aung San Suu

Kyi's broken promises to a military coup threatening their homeland, they fight back through protest, prayer, and Karaoke music videos.

Accidental Athlete—a short documentary directed by **Kevin Jerome Everson** and **Claudrena N. Harold**—in which Paulette Jones Morant waxes poetically about being one of the first Black woman scholastic athletes at the University of Virginia.

Black Santa—a short narrative directed by **Travis Wood**—tells the story of father-son duo Henry and Otis; every year, Henry looks forward to his job working as a mall Santa alongside his son Otis, but as Otis grows older, this may prove to be their last holiday season as a duo.

Coconut Head Generation—a feature documentary directed by **Alain Kassanda**—spotlights a group of students from the University of Ibadan, the oldest in Nigeria. Every Thursday, they organize a film club, transforming a small lecture hall into a political agora where they develop a critical voice.

Dau:ăncut // Moving Along Image—an experimental film by Adam Piron—pursues an unknown man in Ukraine who tattooed a portrait of a relative of a filmmaker in his traditional Native American regalia in 2014. Stitched together from footage of the search for this man, the film interrogates what happens when the control of an image is lost and the time's circular ironies.

Fire Through Dry Grass—a feature documentary directed by **Andres "Jay" Molina** and **Alexis Neophytides**—Wearing snapback caps and Air Jordans, the Reality Poets aren't typical nursing home residents. In *Fire Through Dry Grass*, these young, Black and brown disabled artists document their pandemic experiences, their rhymes underscoring the danger they feel in the face of institutional neglect.

Girl—a feature narrative directed by **Adura Onashile**—tells the story of eleven-year-old Ama and her mother, Grace. Ama's thirst for life and her need to grow and

develop, challenges the rules of their insular world and gradually forces Grace to reckon with a past she wants to forget.

Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project—a feature documentary directed by **Michèle Stephenson** and **Joe Brewster**—taking audiences on a journey through time and space to uncover the enduring influence of world-renowned poet Nikki Giovanni.

Goodbye Morganza—a short documentary directed by **Devon Blackwell**—examines a property dispute that led to one family's displacement from the home they'd owned since 1892. Today, their youngest daughter is left to pick up the pieces—all of them fitting within two storage units.

I Am More Dangerous Dead—a short documentary directed by **Majiye Uchibeke**—A poetic tribute to writer, poet and environmental activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed alongside eight other activists for opposing the environmental damage done in their oil-rich homeland, Ogoni.

Invisible Beauty—a feature documentary directed by **Bethann Hardison** and **Frédéric Tcheng**—traces the pioneering career of Bethann Hardison, the former model, agent, and activist who has had an indelible influence in the fight for diversity and representation.

Mirasol—a short narrative directed by **Annalise Lockhart**—chronicles Mirasol's monotonous and somewhat lonely life on a farm with her mother and grandmother. One day out gardening, she finds a seedling growing in a puddle outside. She takes care of it in secret, eventually getting the courage to show her mother what she's been working on.

Mountains—a feature narrative directed by **Monica Sorelle** about a Haitian demolition worker, looking for a new home for his family, who is faced with the

realities of redevelopment as he is tasked with dismantling his rapidly gentrifying Miami neighborhood.

Sol in the Garden—a short documentary directed by **Emily Cohen Ibañez** and **Débora Souza Silva**—chronicles a formerly incarcerated woman as she nourishes a garden with her new community.

Sweet Refuge—a short narrative directed by **Maryam Mir**—courses a passionate Syrian baker as he spends his first Eid in the US attempting to sell the sweet he's spent his lifetime perfecting: walnut baklava. As he roams the streets of Brooklyn, he bumps into a savvy Indian laddoo maker, who's figured out how to appeal to one of New York's health-conscious Brooklynites.

The Aunties—a short documentary by **Charlyn Griffith Oro**, a film based on the lives of Black farmers and culture keepers, Paulette Greene and Donna Dear. It also integrates the immense and incredible legacies of Harriet Tubman and Mt. Pleasant Acres Farms.

The Alexander Ball—a short documentary directed by **Jessica Magro** celebrating Samoan-Māori-Australian trans woman of color, Ella Ganza, and the Meanjin (Brisbane) ballroom scene, as the community prepares for one of the biggest ballroom events of the year: The Alexander Ball.

The Space Race—a feature documentary directed by **Lisa Cortés** and **Diego Hurtado de Mendoza**—uncovers the little-known stories of the first Black pilots, engineers, and scientists to become astronauts. Simultaneously championed and exploited as political pawns, some made it to space, while others were erased from history.

The Vacation—a short narrative directed by **Jarreau Carrillo**—tracks a group of friends attempting to take a trip to the beach on the last day of the summer but when their car won't stop they are forced to take their vacation in their car.

The Wind Carries Us Home—an experimental film by Udval Altangerel—follows as through rituals of birth and death, the filmmaker and her family reconnect with their ancestral land in the Gobi Desert.

Wetlands of Our Mothers' Tongues in Concrete—an experimental film directed by Jordan Deal—explores the notions of transness, motherhood, and healing. The speaker(s) find themselves dispersed between the channels of the ocean and fragments of memory as they dig into their family histories.



Stills from (clockwise from top left): *The Vacation*, *Sol in the Garden*, *Mirasol*, *Invisible Beauty*.

This year's festival will also include the world premiere of short films created through BlackStar's [Philadelphia Filmmaker Lab](#), presented by Black Experience on Xfinity. Founded in 2021 to uplift emerging and mid-career artists in the Greater Philadelphia area, the Lab provides equipment, space, crew, mentorship, funding, and critical feedback over the course of one year. Following an inaugural class of four directors, BlackStar expanded the initiative last year to include both directors and producers. The 2023 fellows are Zardosht Afshari (Director), Aaron

Brokenbough Jr. (Producer), David Gaines (Director), Simone Holland (Director), Stephanie Malson (Producer), Elizah Turner (Producer), and Samiyah Wardlaw (Producer).

Director Zardosht Afshari and producer Aaron Brokenbough Jr.'s *An Endoscopy* follows a film student accompanying a newcomer Iraqi student for a medical procedure, with the agreement that he will be her subject in a documentary. Director David Gaines and producer Elizah Turner's *The Freedom to Fall Apart* comprises an anthology of four vignettes together collectively the function of shame within the Black American body politic. Director Simone Holland and producer Stephanie Malson's *All That's Left* tells the story of Mercedes, who struggles to differentiate reality from her imagination as she embarks upon a journey of self-exploration and relationships.

In addition to its engaging lineup, the 2023 BlackStar Film Festival will feature parties, programs, and conversations, most of which will be announced in the coming months. A new and notable aspect of this year's festival will include an award presented by the Center for Cultural Power, honoring a film which addresses climate justice. Last year, BlackStar hosted an evening of art, live music, cocktails, and light fare at First Friday!—a mixer presented in partnership with the Barnes Foundation. The 2022 event featured performances by Omar's Hat and a screening of *Blackalachia*, an immersive film by Ghanaian-American singer-songwriter Moses Sumney, followed by a conversation with the filmmaker. First Friday! at the Barnes Foundation will return again this year with novel programming. BlackStar is also excited to partner with the **W Philadelphia hotel**, located around the corner from festival venues, as an official 2023 partner.

Passes for the festival are now available for purchase [here](#). An all-access pass is available for \$350, and a virtual festival pass is available for \$175. Individual tickets for virtual and in-person screenings, which go on sale in early July, will be \$7.50 and \$18, respectively.

BlackStar Projects has seen considerable and continued growth over the past decade, both in the scope and reach of its festival and with new and continuing initiatives for the organization year-round. These include [Seen](#), a twice-annual journal of film and visual culture, the William and Louise Greaves Filmmaker Seminar, and [Many Lumens with Maori Karmael Holmes](#)—BlackStar’s signature podcast. The first half of the third season, which finds BlackStar founder Maori Karmael Holmes in dialogue with some of the most groundbreaking artists, changemakers, and cultural workers of today, debuted this spring. An additional five episodes will be available this fall, with episodes including Maori in conversation with Lisa Cortés and Bethann Hardison, following the Philadelphia premiere of *Invisible Beauty*—produced by Cortés and co-directed by Hardison—at this summer’s festival.

The lineup of films is as follows, with additional programming to be announced in the coming weeks:

A Bear Named Jesus, directed by Terril Calder

A Place of Our Own (Ek Jagah Apni), directed by Ektara Collective

Above and Below the Ground, directed by Emily Hong

Accidental Athlete, directed by Kevin Jerome Everson and Claudrena N. Harold

The After: A Chef's Wish, directed by Umar Riaz

The Alexander Ball, directed by Jessica Magro

All the colours of the world are between black and white, directed by Babatunde Apalowo

Amina and Shanrica Evans

Ampe: Leap into the Sky, Black Girl, directed by Claudia Owusu and Ife Oluwamuyide

Atopias: The Homeless Wanderer, directed by Daniela Yohannes and Julien Beramis

August Visitor, directed by Ifeyinwa Arinze

The Aunties, directed by Charlyn Griffith Oro

Before I Let Go, directed by Cameron A Granger

Beneath The Surface, directed by cai thomas

Between the Colony and the Stars (Entre a Colônia e as Estrelas), directed by Lorrán Dias

Birthing A Nation: The Resistance of Mary Gaffney, directed by Nazenet Habtezhgi

Black Girls Play: The Story of Hand Games, directed by Joe Brewster & Michèle Stephenson

Black Santa, directed by Travis Wood

Bone Black: Midwives vs. the South, directed by Imani Nikyah Dennison

Capital, directed by Basma al-Sharif

Coconut Head Generation, directed by Alain Kassanda

Companion, directed by LaTajh Weaver

Conversations with Ruth de Souza (Diálogos com Ruth de Souza), directed by Juliana Vicente

Dancing the Stumble (Mantjé Tonbé Sé Viv), directed by Wally Fall

Dau:añcut // Moving Along Image, directed by Adam Piron

The Difference Between Us, directed by Imran Siddiquee

Ebony, directed by Sean-Josahi Brown

Fierceness Served! The ENIKAlley Coffeeshouse, directed by Michelle Parkerson

Filho (Son), directed by Tomas Ponsteen

Fire Through Dry Grass, directed by Andres "Jay" Molina and Alexis Neophytides

Foragers (اليد الخضراء), directed by Jumana Manna

Gaining Ground: The Fight for Black Land, directed by Eternal Polk

Gaps, directed by Jenn Shaw

Girl, directed by Adura Onashile

Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project, directed by Michèle Stephenson & Joe Brewster

Goodbye, Morganza, directed by Devon Blackwell

Grape Soda in the Parking Lot, directed by Megan Kyak Monteith (Inuk) and Taqralik Partridge (Inuk)

Gromonmon, directed by Laurent Pantaleon

Here, Hopefully, directed by Hao Zhou

Honolulu, directed by Maya Tanaka

How to breathe out of water (Como respirar fora d'água), directed by Júlia Fávero and Victoria Negreiros

I Am More Dangerous Dead, directed by Majiye Uchibeke

If Heaven Had Heights, directed by Dr. Fahamu Pecou and Tremain Hamilton

Into The Violet Belly, directed by Thuy-Han Nguyen-Chi in collaboration with Thuyen Hoa

Invisible Beauty, directed by Bethann Hardison and Frédéric Tcheng

Is My Living In Vain, directed by Ufuoma Essi

It Lives Inside, directed by Bishal Dutta

Jonathan Thunder: Good Mythology, directed by, Sergio Mata'u Rapu

Keeping Time, directed by Darol Olu Kae

Know Your Place, directed by Zia Mohajerjasbi

La Lucha, directed by Violeta Ayala

The Last British Colony in Africa, directed by Ellianne Baptiste and Sarah Grile

Living Proof, directed by Tina Farris

Look Back At It, directed by Felicia Pride

Mafifa, directed by Daniela Muñoz Barroso

Mai Jeroum, directed by Adjani Salmon

Mirasol, directed by Annalise Lockhart

MnM, directed by Twiggy Pucci Garçon

Money, Freedom, a Story of the CFA Franc (L'argent, la liberté, une histoire du Franc CFA), directed by Katy Léna Ndiaye

Mother Just a Smile (Mama dan so que sorriso), directed by Cyrielle Raingou

Mountains, directed by Monica Sorelle

Negra, Yo Soy Bella, directed by Vashni Korin

Oba, directed by Femi Ladi

Over The Wall, directed by Krystal Tingle

Pacific Club, directed by Valentin Noujaïm

Pandemic Bread, directed by Zeinabu irene Davis

Quiet As It's Kept, directed by Ja'Tovia Gary

Rest Stop, directed by Crystal Kayiza

Scenes of Extraction (Sahnehaye Estekhranj), directed by Sanaz Sohrabi

The Script, directed by Brit Fryer and Noah Schamus
Sèt Lam, directed by Vincent Fontano
Sol in the Garden, directed by Emily Cohen Ibañez and Débora Souza Silva
Sound of The Police, directed by Stanley Nelson and Valerie Scoon
The Space Race, directed by Lisa Cortés and Diego Hurtado de Mendoza
Spirit Emulsion, directed by Siku Allooloo
Still We Rise, directed by John Harvey
Sundown Road, directed by M. Asli Dukan
Sweatshop Girl (Chica de Fábrica), directed by Selma Cervantes
Sweet Refuge, directed by Maryam Mir
Sydney G. James: How We See Us, directed by Juanita Anderson
The Taste of Mango, directed by Chloe Abrahams
Team Dream, directed by Luchina Fisher
This Place, directed by V.T. Nayani
Tierra en Trance, directed by Colectivo Los Ingrávidos
The Truth About Alvert, the Last Dodo (La Vérité sur Alvert, le Dernier Dodo),
directed by Nathan Clement
unseen, directed by Set Hernandez
The Vacation, directed by Jarreau Carrillo
We Are Griots (Nous les griots), directed by Demba Konate
We Were Meant To, directed by Tari Wariebi
Wetlands of Our Mother's Tongues in Concrete, directed by Jordan Deal
The Wind Carries Us Home (Нутгийн Салхи), directed by Udval Altangerel
What the Soil Remembers, directed by José Cardoso
What These Walls Won't Hold, directed by Adamu Chan

This year's festival is presented with the support of the following sponsors:
American Documentary/POV, Annenberg School For Communication, Black Public
Media, Center For Cultural Power, Expressway Cinema Rentals, Eventive, Firelight
Media, Gotham Film & Media Institute, Indego, ITVS, MediaJustice, NEON, University
of Pennsylvania Cinema and Media Studies, Runway, Taproot Earth, Temple

University Film and Media Arts Department, Urban Outfitters, Warner Bros/Discovery, W Hotel, and WORLD Channel.

BlackStar Projects and its year-round programs are generously supported by Critical Minded, Ford Foundation/JustFilms, Gucci Changemakers, Independence Public Media Foundation, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Mellon Foundation, Michael Jordan Black Community Commitment Fund, Mighty Arrow Family Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Nathan Cummings Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council for the Arts, Perspective Fund, Pew Center for Arts and Heritage, Philadelphia's Cultural Treasures Fund, Philadelphia Foundation/Black Community Leaders Fund, Pop Culture Collaborative, Ruth Foundation for the Arts, Samuel S. Fels Fund, Surdna Foundation, Wallace Foundation, William Penn Foundation, and Wyncote Foundation, in addition to its [board of directors](#), community partners, and a host of generous [individual donors and organizations](#).

Additional information on judging, sponsors, programming, and events will be announced soon. For more information on the festival and its programs, visit <https://www.blackstarfest.org>.

About BlackStar Projects

BlackStar Projects is the producer of the BlackStar Film Festival, an annual celebration of the visual and storytelling traditions of the African diaspora and global communities of color—showcasing films by Black, Brown, and Indigenous people from around the world. In addition to the acclaimed festival, BlackStar presents an array of programming across film and visual culture year-round, including the twice-annual journal *Seen*, the podcast *Many Lumens*, the William and Louise Greaves Filmmaker Seminar, and the Philadelphia Filmmaker Lab, among other initiatives.

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