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**Reel Sisters Gives $15K to 3 BIPOC Women Creators from their Micro Budget Film Fellowship**

*Each fellow will receive $5,000 to produce a project from script to screen!*

(Brooklyn, NY — July 19, 2023) — Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival & Lecture Series, the first Academy qualifying festival devoted to women filmmakers, has selected three fellows to receive cash awards for script to screen projects in its Micro Budget Film Fellowship Program. The fellowship offers creators an opportunity to produce a web series pilot or a short film. Information on the [Reel Sisters Fellows](https://reelsisters.org/reel-sisters-fellows/) and [Honorable Mentions](https://reelsisters.org/honorable-mentions/) is available at [www.reelsisters.org](http://www.reelsisters.org). Fellows have a year to produce their project.

“We’re proud to announce our three fellowship recipients who were selected from a pool of more than 77 outstanding short scripts by women of color from across the globe,” says Carolyn A. Butts, founder of African Voices, the nonprofit arts organization that runs Reel Sisters. The Brooklyn-based arts organization supports artists of color in the areas of literature, visual arts and film. An independent [jury](https://reelsisters.org/jury/) selected our fellows.

“Reel Sisters encourages film lovers to support our eight finalists who are celebrated on our website as Honorable Mentions. Exercise your personal power by encouraging friends and family to support their film projects,” Butts adds.

Our fellows are **Candace D. Patrick**, a Los Angeles based screenwriter whose work explores grief, healing and mental wellness; **Vivienne Shaw**, a Taiwanese-American screenwriter interested in creating Asian-American, queer and female-centered stories; and **Morgan Alicia Smith**, a New York based screenwriter with a background in theater and music. Vivienne and Morgan are MFA students in Columbia University’s film and screenwriting programs.

Each fellow will receive $5,000, access to mentors and scholarships to **Scriptwriting Essentials: The Art of Creating Strong Female Characters**™ and Reel Sisters filmmaking workshop series. Scriptwriting Essentials, launched with BRIC, provides a writing community where women of color screenwriters can create and revise scripts for production.

As a writing institution, African Voices is committed to supporting writers in creating stories for books, film, television and new media outlets. *African Voices* magazine is celebrating its 31st Anniversary in publishing over 4,000+ writers and artists. Spelman College is archiving African Voices’ arts collection, which includes a list of close to 10,000 women of color filmmakers in the industry. The organization is marking Reel Sisters 26th Anniversary festival season.

“We’re proud to offer fellowships to an exceptional community of women storytellers to support their script-to-film projects. We hope our fellows will use their short film project as a calling card to attract financing for future film projects,” says Butts. “Please join us in saluting our fellows and finalists.”

**Introducing The 2023 Reel Sisters Micro Budget Fellows:**

**FILM PROJECT: Finding JaMia’s Spirit**

**Logline** | A little girl looks for her dad’s ancestor spirit.

**Candace D. Patrick**

Candace D. Patrick is a writer, director, and producer who was born and raised in Los Angeles, CA. She first became passionate about screenwriting in high school after her drama teacher encouraged her to apply to the Scriptwriters Network High School Fellowship Program, of which she was accepted. Participating in that fellowship led her to earn a Screenwriting degree from Loyola Marymount University, where she developed her voice focusing on stories that authentically displayed human journeys. Having had the opportunity to travel to 25+ countries while working as a marketing director for Semester at Sea, a study abroad program, Candace learned that the feeling of joy is universal, but the path to joy and healing are uniquely traveled and often include laughter. Her writing often explores grief & healing, mental health and finding joy, and debunking the Strong Black Woman concept. She earned semifinalist rankings for her first feature, “Glow,” in the 2010 StoryPros contest, and the 2017 Screencraft Film Fund for her short script, “Cycle.” In 2019, she wrote, directed, and produced the short film, “The 5th Room,” which received awards and nominations for Best Short, Best Writer, and Best Director. Since then she has worked on several independent film and web projects. Her 1-hour family drama pilot, “Harrington’s Crossing,” advanced to the finalist round of the Spring 2021 WeScreenplay Diverse Voices competition. When not writing, Candace loves to travel, and fight with her cat, Nougat, for the most comfortable seat in her apartment.

**Micro Budget Statement:**

I am extremely honored and grateful to have been selected as an awardee for the Reel Sisters Micro Budget Film Fellowship Program! Being an independent filmmaker comes with many challenges, and having financial support tends to land right at the top of that list of battles to overcome. Receiving this award and having the support of mentorship over this next year will make all the difference in taking this vulnerable story I wrote and seeing it on film. This film is inspired by and dedicated to my father, whom I lost at age 11 due to stomach cancer. "Finding JaMia's Spirit" aims to challenge conventional narratives surrounding grief, particularly in the context of children's understanding and processing of loss, and I hope it will resonate with children, families, and individuals who have experienced loss and are now on their healing journey. Thank you so much to Reel Sisters for supporting me and our production team on this filmmaking journey!

**FILM PROJECT: 30 Hour Famine**

**Logline** | When a devout teenager discovers evidence of someone eating at her church group’s annual 30 Hour Famine event, she goes to absurd lengths to catch the culprit, only to reveal her true motivations in the process.

**Vivienne Shaw**

Vivienne Shaw is a Taiwanese-American screenwriter and director currently pursuing her MFA in screenwriting from Columbia University. She works primarily in comedy and horror with particular interest in Asian-American, queer, and female-centered stories. Vivienne is the recent recipient of an Alfred P. Sloan Screenplay Grant and a current Sloan Grand Jury Prize nominee for her psychological thriller feature script KILLING JAR. In addition to her own projects she has worked in development at multiple production companies, including ViacomCBS, Cinetic Media and Gamechanger Films, and has also served as a script reader for the former Sundance Asian-American Fellowship. Outside of film Vivienne also works in video art and projection design for theater, pursuing her continued interest in interactive storytelling. She received her BA from Wellesley College in computer science and cinema and media studies.

**Micro Budget Fellowship Statement:**

I'm so grateful to have been selected as a Reel Sisters Microbudget Fellow for my short film "30 Hour Famine", a passion project I've been developing for the past year. It's incredibly exciting to know that Reel Sisters believes in this story and the comedic lens with which it's told, and the much-needed funding and support will go a long way in helping this film get from script to screen. Enormous thanks to Reel Sisters and African Voices for continuing to invest in female POC filmmakers.

**FILM PROJECT: Cold Feat**

**Logline** | A suburban physical therapist has committed her life to helping others while sitting on the sidelines of her own dreams of ballroom dancing. After an embarrassing encounter with the new instructor in town, she must choose between listening to critics who tell her that her body is too big and ethnic for ballroom dancing, and pursue the flame in her heart that longs to waltz.

**Morgan Alicia Smith**

Morgan Alicia Smith is a New York based filmmaker who has spent her lifetime in love with film, television, and theater. After directing her first play at age 17, Morgan earned her undergraduate degree in Geology while also getting minors in Music and Theater. She found ways to keep her passions for storytelling alive by writing and producing stories for Milwaukee PBS, and broadcast news in Wisconsin and Texas. Morgan's path took a circuitous route when she found herself creating animated/graphical content, and running the in-game entertainment efforts for the Texas Stars, a minor league hockey team in Austin. Still, Morgan made time for her personal creative endeavors by writing plays for local festivals. She even wrote and performed a one-woman show, which took her to the finals of a fringe play competition. But when COVID hit and she was laid off from her job, Morgan took a chance at school again, and found herself in Columbia University's Creative Film Producing MFA program. Morgan hopes to put her degree to work telling stories about women, and for women who are underrepresented in mainstream media.

**Micro Budget Fellowship Statement:**

I am beyond grateful that Reel Sisters exists as a resource for artists like me. Being chosen as a Reel Sisters Fellow is an incredible opportunity, and a leap toward making my thesis film, which seeks to honor women who dare to dream in a world that too-often encourages them to give up. Reel Sisters actively offers a helping-hand that converts hopes into reality, and I am humbled and honored to be included.

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**About Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival**

Founded in 1997 by African Voices magazine and LIU Brooklyn Campus, Reel Sisters is among the first film festivals dedicated to supporting women of color filmmakers. Known for celebrating both veterans and rising stars alike, Reel Sisters has honored everyone from TV One founder Cathy Huges to HBO’s *Insecure* writer and director Issa Rae. Reel Sisters is supported, in part, by Council members Farah Louis (35 C.D.) and Crystal Hudson (45 C.D.), National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, West Harlem Development Corp. and Brooklyn Arts Council.