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***Reel Sisters & BAM Honor Trailblazing Documentary Filmmaker  
Samantha Knowles (Harlem Ice Director)***

On **Wed., Oct. 22, 2025 at 7 pm**, Reel Sisters and the **Brooklyn Academy of Music** will present a trailblazer award to Brooklyn filmmaker **Samantha Knowles**, director of *Harlem Ice* (Disney+), for her distinguishing career in documentary film making. Her latest work includes directing an episode of “**Katrina: Come Hell and High Water,**” a highly acclaimed Netflix docuseries. The event will be held at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. **Tickets:** \$25 (\$15, Code: REEL SIS2025). Visit BAM: [Trailblazer Award](#).

Our celebration will showcase a retrospective of Samantha’s work including episodes from *Harlem Ice* (Disney), *Eyes on The Prizes III: We Who Believe In Freedom Cannot Rest 1977-2015* (HBO) and *The Coder*, a short film about Jay Jay Patton, a rising star in the tech industry, who built her ground-breaking app Photo Patch at age 16.

**Stacey Holman**, the series producer/director of Henry Louis Gates’ *The Black Church: This Is Our Story*, will present our Trailblazer Award to Samantha.

**Yoruba Richen**, a Peabody award-winning documentary filmmaker, will lead a dynamic conversation with Samantha on the power of the female lens in storytelling.

Join us for an exciting evening of film, conversation and inspiration!

**Reel Sisters of the Diaspora Film Festival & Lecture Series** is celebrating our 28<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season presenting 50+ films by women of color. Our in-person screenings and events will be held from Oct. 25 through Oct. 29, 2025. Reel Sisters Virtual Showcase will stream online beginning Oct. 25 until Nov. 10, 2025. For information and schedule visit [www.reelsisters.org](http://www.reelsisters.org).

“We’re proud to present our trailblazer award to Samantha for her outstanding and prolific filmmaking career in telling untold personal stories,” said Reel Sisters Founder Carolyn A. Butts. “I’m encouraging young filmmakers and families to attend our celebration — Sam’s films are something the entire family can enjoy together.”

### **Trailblazer Award Honoree Bio**

**Samantha Knowles** is an award-winning director. She won a Cinema Eye Honors Award for Outstanding Achievement in a Nonfiction Series for co-directing the HBO docuseries "Black and Missing" and her film, "How We Get Free", was shortlisted for the 2024 Academy Award for Best Documentary Short. She has also won a Television Academy Honors Award, an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Directing, and a Gracie Award for Best Director of a National TV Program. In 2023 she was named to the DOCNYC 40 Under 40 List, which honors and celebrates emerging talent in the documentary world. Her work has screened as part of Hot Docs, DOC NYC, the Tribeca Film Festival, the New York Times Op-Doc series, on HBO, Showtime, and more. Most recently, she directed the series “Harlem Ice” for Disney+, an episode of the seminal series “Eyes on the Prize” for HBO, and an episode of in the docuseries “Katrina: Come Hell and High Water” for Netflix.

Sam’s first short film, “Why Do You Have Black Dolls?” was the recipient of Reel Sisters Spirit Award 2012.

### **Mistress of Ceremonies**

**Gha’il Rhodes Benjamin** (Actress, Master Teaching Artist, Grammy nominated spoken-word performance artist) is a 2020 Audelco Award recipient, for the role of “Wilhemina” in SASSY MAMAS. In 2019 she was featured in the role of ‘Dynamite Texas Entrepreneur’ Poliina Graves in REUNION IN BARTERSVILLE;(also an Audelco winner) and was featured in the National Black Theatre Festival’s 2019 Winston Salem, North Carolina celebration performance in that same role. Other credits include A Raisin in the Sun, Steal Away, We are your sisters, Bee-Luther Hatchee (NY premiere) and The Gift. Gha’il is the actor/spoken word artist in Al Santana’s film REPARATION BLUES (PBS), Mrs. Thang in the film SWEET THANG, and the Poetess in DARK SEED (films by China Colston).

Gha’il’s writing is featured in *African Voices Magazine’s* spring 2020 issue (tribute to Ntozake Shange/Part II) with a poem titled “Tiddies aint everything/for Sara the Butterscotch Sunflower Queen,” which recognizes the tenacity of breast cancer survivors. Other highlights include performances on NYC Summer Stage, Community Unity Festival in Grand Rapids, Michigan, NYC Disability Unite Festival, Lincoln Center Outdoor Summer Series, Central Park Celebrates Juneteenth (2022) at Seneca Village, and most recently a customized poem written for Roberta Flack (performed as Ms. Flack received the Key to the City of New York by Mayor Eric Adams). Info: [www.ghailrhodesbenjamin.com](http://www.ghailrhodesbenjamin.com)

## Moderator

Yoruba Richen is an award-winning documentary filmmaker whose work has been featured on multiple outlets, including Netflix, MSNBC, Peacock, FX/Hulu and PBS. Her film *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks* won a Peabody and a Gracie Award and was honored by the Television Academy. Other work includes the Emmy-nominated films [American Reckoning](#), *How It Feels to Be Free*; *The Sit In: Harry Belafonte Hosts the Tonight Show* and *Green Book: Guide to Freedom*.

Her film, *The Killing of Breonna Taylor* won an NAACP Image Award. She Co-directed the series *The Fall of Diddy* for HBO Max and ID and her latest film FREE JOAN (pronounced Jo-Anne) LITTLE is premiering at DOC NYC on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

Yoruba is the Founding Director of the Documentary Program at the Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism at CUNY.

## Awards Presenter

Stacey L. Holman is a Harlem-based filmmaker who's directed/produced several award-winning projects including episode three of the 2018 PBS series *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War* hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. She was a producer on the critically acclaimed documentary *Tell Them We Are Rising: The Story of Black Colleges and Universities* and served as Associate Producer on the Emmy award-winning film *Freedom Riders* produced/directed by Stanley Nelson. Additionally, Stacey was Coordinating Producer for Nelson's Peabody Award-winning documentary *Freedom Summer*, and she was Co-Producer on *Mary Lou Williams: The Lady Who Swings the Band*.

Stacey's short film *Dressed Like Kings* garnered the Tribeca Film Festival All-Access Award and aired on the WORLD Channel as part of the AfroPoP Shorts Program. She was the Series Producer/Director of Henry Louis Gates, Jr's *Black Church* series *The Black Church: This Is Our Story*. Currently, she's one of the producers/directors on Gates' *Making Black America: African American Social Networks* airing on PBS in 2022. Stacey Holman is a 2022 Reel Sisters Trailblazer Award recipient. Information visit [www.blackbutterflyproductions.net](http://www.blackbutterflyproductions.net).

Reel Sisters is supported, in part, by Councilmembers **Crystal Hudson**, **Farah Louis** and **Yusef Salaam**, **West Harlem Development Corp.**, the New York State Council on the Arts, the Brooklyn Arts Council and private donors. Special thanks to our venue partners **651 Arts**, **BAM**, **Center for Fiction** and **BRIC**.

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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 Radio One founder Cathy Hughes to HBO's *Insecure* writer and director **Issa Rae**.