

## WOMEN ILLUMINATED FILM FESTIVAL PREMIERES PARALLEL TO THE UNITED NATION'S 62ND ANNUAL COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

### International Community Convenes and Celebrates Women Storytellers

**WHAT:** The first *Women Illuminated Film Festival* takes place March 12, 2018 at the Anthology Film Archives in New York, parallel to the United Nation's 62nd Annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

The one-day event showcases documentary, short, and feature-length films by women filmmakers, grappling with the most pressing issues of our time. In addition, *Women Illuminated Film Festival* features discussions by the creatives and experts behind the films, an award ceremony honoring leaders in the global movement to achieve gender equality, and a wine and dessert reception for fans and filmmakers alike.

The *Women Illuminated Film Festival* is particularly timely as this year's CSW review theme is "participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women."

**WHO:** ***Honorees and Special Guests***

- **Akon:** Artist, producer, songwriter, actor & AKON Lighting Africa Co-Founder, Akon also stars in *Women Illuminated Film Festival* selection *Road to Redemption*.
- **Rachael Denhollander:** Former gymnast, Rachael Denhollander is the #MeToo survivor who broke the Larry Nassar Case with the Indianapolis Star Newspaper. She is being honored at *The Women Illuminated Film Festival* with the Heart Ambassadors Lifetime Achievement Award.
- **Mrs. Onari Duke:** Mrs. Onari Duke is a lawyer, public servant, entrepreneur, philanthropist, and former First Lady of Cross Rivers State, Nigeria. The *Women Illuminated Film Festival* is honoring her with the GWEN Luminary Award for her work to end early-child marriage in Nigeria.
- **Lenora Lapidus:** Lenora Lapidus is the Director of the Women's Rights Project of the American Civil Liberties Union. She litigates gender discrimination cases in courts throughout the country, engages in public policy advocacy, and speaks on gender equity issues in the media and to the public. *The Women Illuminated Film Festival* is honoring Lenora with the Heart Ambassadors Lifetime Achievement Award for her work with the EEOC to investigate the low number of women hired by studios to direct film and television, which has led to an in-depth investigation.
- **Rahama Sadau:** A leading figure of Nigeria's Kannywood, Rahama Sadau is an award-winning actress and producer. Working in Hausa, she is the most followed Kannywood actress on social media. The *Women Illuminated Film Festival* is honoring Rahama with the GWEN Luminary Award for her work around ending early-child marriage in Nigeria.
- **Jennifer Warren:** Although best known as an actress, Jennifer Warren is an Academy Award winner for the short documentary, *You Don't Have to Die* and the director of several feature films. The *Women Illuminated Film Festival* is honoring Jennifer with the Heart Ambassadors Lifetime Achievement Award for her work as

founding member and present chair of The Alliance of Women Directors and professor at USC's School of Cinematic Arts.

### ***Festival Co-Founders***

- **Tess Cacciatore:** is the CEO of Global Women's Empowerment Network (GWEN) and GWEN Media, producing conscious content and distributing it on Apple TV, Roku, Amazon Fire, and Samsung streaming devices to make a difference through social impact programming, as well as provide a safe place for people to share their stories and #RevealToHeal [www.GWEN.Live](http://www.GWEN.Live) [www.GlobalWomensEmpowermentNetwork.org](http://www.GlobalWomensEmpowermentNetwork.org)
- **Sheva Carr:** As the Co-Vice President of United Nations Peace Messenger Organization Pathways To Peace, Sheva Carr is the co-founder of the *Women Illuminated Film Festival*. An author, speaker, doctor of Oriental Medicine and expert trainer and coach, she is also the founding CEO of *Fyera! / Heart Ambassadors*, and the founding Executive Director of the Fyera Foundation and Sunflower SunPower Kids. She initiated the multimedia platform [www.OperationBigSister.org](http://www.OperationBigSister.org), designed to contribute to the global efforts to eliminate sex trafficking.
- **Cristina Escobar:** Co-founder of the *Women Illuminated Film Festival*, Cristina Escobar currently serves as the director of communications for The Representation Project before spending nearly a decade in domestic violence prevention. The organization behind documentary films *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In*, The Representation Project uses film and media to inspire individuals to challenge gender stereotypes.

### ***Featured Filmmakers and Speakers***

- **Jeta Amata:** Jeta Amata is an award-winner Nigerian filmmaker whose work includes *Black November*, *Amazing Grace*, and *Inale*. The director of *Women Illuminated Film Festival* selection, *The Road to Redemption*, Jeta has screened his work in front of the UN General Assembly, the Kennedy Center, and the Library of Congress.
- **Andrea Bucko:** Andrea Bucko is a Canadian actress, producer, and writer best known for her roles in *Big Eyes*, *Neon Candy*, and *Bloom*. A *Women Illuminated Film Festival* selection, *Bloom* begins with the lifeless bodies of ten women washed up on a deserted shore and takes its viewers on a visceral experience of coming to life and standing together.
- **Betsy Chasse:** Betsy Chasse is a writer, director, producer, and actress, known for *What the Bleep Do We Know?*, *The Player*, and *The Empty Womb*. A *Women Illuminated Film Festival* selection, *The Empty Womb* is authentic exploration into the deep painful emotions such as grief, jealousy, rage and loss experienced by one woman's journey through infertility.
- **MarySue V. Heilemann, PhD, RN:** Associate Professor at the UCLA School of Nursing, MarySue V. Heilemann, PhD, RN has done extensive research with US Latinas related to depression, anxiety, resilience, and motivation. In collaboration with community partners and urged by Latinas who found the help they needed, Heilemann developed a story-based transmedia pilot project to address the concerns voiced by Latinas and so the video series *Catalina* was born.
- **Robbi Firestone:** Robbi Firestone is a Licensed Spiritual Practitioner (RScP), Spirit Capture Oil Portrait artist, creative muse, speaker, coach, and Reiki practitioner. She

is the featured artist in the film *The Empty Womb*, along with being a speaker of the film festival.

- **Sadhvi Siddhali Shree:** Sadhvi Siddhali Shree is a Jain monk and an international activist for social change, speaker, and author. She recently directed and produced *Stopping Traffic*, an award-winning documentary that aims to educate and unite people together to end human trafficking and selection of the *Women Illuminated Film Festival*.

**WHERE:** The Anthology Film Archives at 32 2nd Ave, New York, NY 10003, [\(212\) 505-5181](tel:2125055181)

**WHEN:** Monday March 12 with the following schedule:

- 11:30-2:30: Screening of *Miss Representation* and *The Mask You Live In* (feature films by Jennifer Siebel Newsom, CEO and Founder of The Representation Project)
- 2:30-2:50: Panel discussion to feature Cristina Escobar and Sheva Carr
- 3:05-3:50: Screening of *Catalina* (film short by MarySue V. Heilemann, PhD, RN) followed by Q&A with filmmaker
- 4:05-5:20: Screening of *Stopping Traffic* (feature film by Sadhvi Siddhali Shree) and *Operation Big Sister* (film sort by Sheva Carr)
- 5:20-5:40: Panel discussion to feature Sheva Carr and Sadhvi Siddhali Shree
- 5:55-7:45: Screening of *Road to Redemption* (feature film starring Akon and Viva Bianca), *The Empty Womb* (short film directed by Betsy Chasse), and *Bloom* (short film written by Andrea Bucko)
- 7:45-8:15: Panel discussion to feature Akon, Jetta Amata, Tess Cacciatore, Betsy Chassey, Robbi Firestone, and Andrea Bucko.
- 8:30-9:30: Dessert Reception and Awards Ceremony: Rachael Denhollander, Lenora Lapidus, and Jennifer Warren to receive the Heart Ambassadors Lifetime Achievement Award for their work advancing gender equality in storytelling; Mrs. Onari Duke and Rahama Sadau to receive the GWEN Luminary Award for their activism around early-child marriage.
- 9:30-11:00: Introduction by Lenora Lapidus and screening of *Equal Means Equal* (feature film by Kamala Lopez).

**WHY:** Honoree Jennifer Warren says “20 years ago when I started the Alliance of Women Directors, women's voices were shockingly missing from our media sources. The statistics were then and still are now that women only direct 7% of top grossing all films in the US. That means that a woman's point of view is hardly seen in both film and television due to the discrimination against hiring women as directors. I'm thrilled to support the *Women Illuminated Film Festival* in their effort to lift up women filmmakers.”

“Do you ever read the ingredients of your food? Is it organic? Fair trade? Many of us pay more attention to the food we eat than the media we consume,” says festival co-founder Sheva Carr. “And yet media makers provide food for our consciousness that shapes not just our bodies but our very perception and experience of reality. Our media meal would be completely different if more women were preparing the feast.”

“Especially during this tipping point, the voices of women are necessary for society's survival to go beyond male-dominated thinking and male-privilege -- we need women's

wisdom, compassion, and insight. Now is the time for women's voice to be equally heard” says featured filmmaker Sadhvi Siddhali Shree.

And featured filmmaker MarySue V. Heilemann, PhD, RN, adds, “Media portrayals of women are powerful. When women recognize themselves in a character, these portrayals have the potential to be life changing. The benefit is boundless.”

More details about the films can be found at <http://bit.ly/WomenIlluminatedFilmFestival>.

Co-founded by Sheva Carr, Tess Cacciatore, and Cristina Escobar, the festival is sponsored by several NGO's including Pathways To Peace a United Nations Peace Messenger Organization with ECOSOC Consultative Status to the UN, Fyera Foundation, Global Women's Empowerment Network (and Bloom a fiscal-sponsored empowerment project), Heart Ambassadors, and The Representation Project.

Audience members with UN Credentials for the Commission on the Status of Women will receive complimentary entry. Ticket fees for the general public will be donated to Operation Big Sister to contribute to the efforts to end sex trafficking of women and girls. Tickets can be purchased online at <http://bit.ly/WomenIlluminatedFilmFestival>.

Press interested in attending and/or speaking to the festival organizers, featured filmmakers, and/or honorees, should contact Shira at [shira@therepresentationproject.org](mailto:shira@therepresentationproject.org) or 628-253-5204.

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