

# NYWIFT || New York Women in Film & Television

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## NEW YORK WOMEN IN FILM & TELEVISION ANNOUNCES RAVENAL FOUNDATION FEATURE FILM GRANT AWARDEES SARAH KNIGHT AND SIGNE BAUMANE

**The organization also presented five scholarships to film and television production students**

NEW YORK, NY – December 15, 2020 – New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT) is pleased to announce the presentation of two grants funded by the Alan M. & Mildred S. Ravenal Foundation. **The NYWIFT Ravenal Foundation Grant** supports the production of a feature film from a female director over 40. Funds may be used for pre-production, production, or post-production. The two directors who received grants were selected from a wide range of submissions from women filmmakers around the country.

NYWIFT also announced the recipients of four scholarships for aspiring women filmmakers studying at Brooklyn College and Hunter College, funded by the Ha Phuong Foundation, and the NYWIFT Sabrina Wright-Gilliar Award at the Academy for Careers in Television & Film (TvF).

“We recognize the importance of supporting women at every stage of their careers – especially now, when so many in our industry are facing unprecedented challenges and uncertainty due to COVID-19. We offer our heartfelt congratulations to the scholarship recipients and thank Ha Phuong for her generous support. We are so proud to join forces with the Ravenal Foundation once again to support two incredible – and wildly different – films that speak to the diversity of women’s stories and the breadth and depth of their creatives voices,” said NYWIFT Executive Director **Cynthia Lopez**.

This year’s first-place \$5,000 NYWIFT Ravenal Foundation grant has been awarded to **Sarah Knight** for ***In the Land of Fire & Ice***, in which a powerful Kuwaiti CEO, finding herself under attack by a hostile activist investor, makes a tactical retreat to a remote peninsula in western Iceland to clear her head and strategize her return. There she meets a reclusive Scottish innkeeper who fled to Iceland many years ago for reasons of his own. Together, they explore the Land of Fire and Ice, reigniting her passion for her work—and for life itself. The film, which was also an Athena List Winner, is in pre-production and Academy Award-nominee.

Knight’s narrative feature debut *Vino Veritas* was released by Gravitas Ventures in 2013. Strong female-driven stories have been a hallmark of her work, which include the documentaries *Diamonds are a Girl’s Best Fiend*, about the female head groundskeeper of the Baltimore Orioles, and *Hot Flash*, about the band Saffire-The Uppity Blues Women. She attended the 2019 Stowe Story Labs Spring Writer’s Retreat with *An Ideal Wife*, her gender-reversal updating of Oscar Wilde’s *An Ideal Husband*. Her adaptation (co-written with Sarah Skibinski) of Michael

Dorris' bestselling novel *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, about three generations of Native American women, was featured at IFP Independent Film Week.

"I am thrilled the NYWIFT Ravenal Grant has recognized and embraced this project," said Knight. "A few years ago, I discovered the Arabian Business Magazine's '100 Most Powerful Women' list and was surprised to learn how many female CEOs exist in the Middle East. I traveled to Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates and interviewed several prominent female CEOs in various fields. All were extremely generous with their time and shared a wealth of personal and professional experiences, which formed the lead role's foundation. I cannot wait to introduce audiences to this magnificent character and the support from NYWIFT Ravenal will help tremendously in that effort!" said filmmaker **Sarah Knight**.

A second-place prize of \$2,500 was awarded to **Signe Baumann** for her animated feature *My Love Affair with Marriage*, which is currently in production. The film uses music and science to examine the biological chemistry of love and gender, as well as the societal pressures on an individual to conform to social mores. Latvian-American filmmaker Signe Baumann has written, directed and animated 16 shorts and one feature film, many of them with a strong female point of view. She believes passionately that animation is a perfect medium for adult storytelling. Her films collectively have screened at over 560 film festivals including Sundance, Berlin, Venice and Karlovy Vary.

Filmmaker **Cornelia Ravenal**, who initiated the grant, said, "Women directors have stormed the industry's ramparts in the last few years, so while barriers to women working at full capacity and pay still exist, they're falling fast. But for women over 40, there's an additional obstacle: ageism. We hope this grant begins to address that inequity and encourages all women directors to forge ahead."

This is the sixth year the NYWIFT Ravenal Foundation Grant has been presented. Last year's first-place winner, Lydia Dean Pilcher's *A Call to Spy*, will be released by IFC Films in theaters and VOD October 2, 2020; second-place winner *T11 Incomplete* by Suzanne Guacci had its US Premiere at Outfest on August 27. Other past recipients include Diane Paragas for *Yellow Rose* (picked up by Sony Pictures Worldwide), Debra Kirschner for *Mallwalkers*, Rachel Feldman for *Lilly*, and Janet Grillo for *Jack of the Red Hearts*. Learn more about past recipients at [www.nywfit.org/ravenal](http://www.nywfit.org/ravenal).

As part of New York Women in Film & Television's ongoing commitment to nurturing the next generation of women filmmakers, it also presented **scholarships** to four college students thanks to the generous support of the Ha Phuong Foundation. The Ha Phuong Foundation is one of the largest of its kind and was founded by Vietnamese actor, singer, writer, philanthropist and NYWIFT member Ha Phuong (HP), as a result of her passion for music and her fierce devotion to supporting young people's causes. Awards were presented to Brooklyn College Film Production students **Osa Faith Adu** and **Destiny Blackwell**, and Hunter College students **Melissa Lent** and **Tanisha Williams**.

This year's **NYWIFT Sabrina Wright-Gilliar Award**, Academy for Careers in Television & Film (TvF) was presented to **Katarina Dacanin**. The scholarship honors the memory of the legendary prop master Wright-Gilliar (*The Good Wife*) and supports a high school senior committed to a career in production.

All were also welcomed into the organization's Next Wave membership program.

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**Images of Filmmakers + Films:**

[DOWNLOAD IMAGES FROM DROPBOX HERE](#)

**About New York Women in Film & Television:**

New York Women in Film & Television (NYWIFT) advocates for equality in the moving image industry and supports women in every stage of their careers. As the preeminent entertainment industry association for women in New York, NYWIFT energizes women by illuminating their achievements, presenting training and professional development programs, awarding scholarships and grants, and providing access to a supportive community of peers. NYWIFT brings together more than 2,500 women and men working both above and below the line. NYWIFT is part of a network of 50 women in film chapters worldwide, representing more than 15,000 members. NYWIFT is a nonprofit 501c3 public charity.

More information can be found online at: [www.NYWIFT.org](http://www.NYWIFT.org). Follow on all social media platforms @NYWIFT.

**Ravenal Grantee Bios:**

**Sarah Knight, *In the Land of Fire & Ice:***

Sarah Knight's narrative feature debut, *Vino Veritas*, starring Emmy winner, Carrie Preston ("The Good Fight," "Claws"), was released by Gravitass Ventures. Her documentary *Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend* is a portrait of Nicole Sherry, Head Groundskeeper for the Baltimore Orioles at Camden Yards—one of only two women ever to hold that position in Major League Baseball. *Hot Flash*, her documentary about the band Saffire-The Uppity Blues Women, was nominated for a Blues Music Award. She attended the 2019 Stowe Story Labs Spring Writer's Retreat with *An Ideal Wife*, her gender-reversal updating of Oscar Wilde's *An Ideal Husband*. Her adaptation (co-written with Sarah Skibinski) of Michael Dorris' bestselling novel, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, about three generations of Native American women, was featured at IFP Independent Film Week-Emerging Narrative. She has won fellowships to Tribeca All Access, the Berlinale Talent Campus and the Rotterdam CineMart Producer's Lab.

**Signe Baumane, *My Love Affair with Marriage:***

**Signe Baumane** was born and raised in Latvia when it was still part of the Soviet Union. At age 14, she began publishing short stories. At 16 she won poetry reciting competitions. At 18 she was singing and dancing with the folk group Skandenieki. Signe received a BA in Philosophy from Moscow State University. After graduating she started to work at Riga's Animated Film Studio as a cel painter and later as a writer, director and designer. Signe directed three animated shorts in Latvia before moving to New York. There she worked for independent animator Bill Plympton as art director and production manager. In 1998, Signe received her

U.S. green card as an 'extraordinary ability alien' and began making films at her own studio. In 2005 she became a U.S. citizen.

Signe has written, directed and animated 16 shorts and one feature film, many of them with a strong female point of view. She believes passionately that animation is a perfect medium for adult storytelling. Her films collectively have screened at over 560 film festivals including Sundance, Berlin, Venice and Karlovy Vary. She is a Guggenheim Fellow and a New York Foundation of the Arts Fellow in Film. *Rocks in My Pockets* (2014), Signe's first animated feature film, is based on true events involving five women of Signe's family, including herself, and their battles with suicide and depression. It played internationally at 150 film festivals, was distributed in the U.S. by Zeitgeist Films, and has been screened by many colleges and mental health organizations. Learn more at [www.signebaumane.com](http://www.signebaumane.com).

### **Scholarship Recipient Bios:**

**Osa Faith Adu (Brooklyn College)** is a creative and hardworking Film Production student at Brooklyn College with extensive filmmaking experience. A Brooklyn native, this young New Yorker has hit the floor running, being able to establish herself amongst her peers as a talented director, writer, and producer, gaining an internship at Cinetic Marketing and PR and being based as a producer on multiple short film projects. She is currently working towards shooting her Thesis film in the fall semester of her senior year.

**Destiny Blackwell (Brooklyn College)** was introduced to film at a very young age. She fell in love with the art of storytelling and quickly became interested in learning more about it. She was introduced to Reel Works, which works with underserved minority youth to help them become more empowered through access and tools to use their own voice to tell their stories on film. This helped her to become more confident and self-actualized towards pursuing a career in the film industry. Through their organization, she was able to create a documentary centered on her personal experiences surrounding the impact of bullying, self-love, and the reclamation of one's identity which premiered at a screening held at HBO. She has gone on to intern at several media organizations, including Mass Appeal, BRIC TV + Radio, and most recently NBC's *NY Live* where she was able to write, pitch, produce, and edit a segment that aired live on TV. She is currently interning at USA + SYFY. She will use her scholarship award towards her educational costs at Brooklyn College where she is currently pursuing her degree in Film Production.

**Katarina Dacanin (Sabrina Wright-Gilliar Award, Academy for Careers in Television & Film (TvF))** was born in Serbia, and moved to Queens, New York with my family in 2008. She attended middle school at IS 93, and high school at Academy for Careers in Television and Film, a school her father, a freelance graphic designer, found for her. Kat, who describes herself as "normally very timid and quiet in most settings," found working in big crews in school gave her a chance to create a voice for herself and be heard. "I've forced myself out of my comfort zone in order to make progress in what I want to do, and to make sure that my ideas aren't swept under the rug." Kat plans to major in Film and Media at the Fashion Institute of Technology this Fall and hopes to continue honing her skills while expanding her knowledge of film, both the theoretical and practical aspects, and make connections with like-minded people. She wants to continue working on crew and hopes programs such as this one expand opportunities to people like me, and allow for more women to make it in the industry.

**Melissa Lent (Hunter College)** is a journalist and content creator who has lived in New York City all of her life. Throughout her college career, she worked for places such as WNYC, NBC, and Gotham Gazette, as well as VinaCapital Foundation in Vietnam. Melissa has experience in writing, photography, audio, and documentary, all of which she continues to explore in her career. She is a recent graduate of Hunter College with one B.A. in Media Studies and another in English. Her mission is to highlight the invisible stories for the public good.

**Tanisha Williams** (Hunter College) is a CUNY Hunter College graduate with a B.A. in Film and a concentration in English. She is based in Brooklyn, New York. In her free time, she enjoys writing, reading, going to museums, plays, and watching films. Her favorite TV show right now is *Living Single* since it is reflective of her life as a Black woman in her 20s. If you happen to see her in public, please give her TV show and movie recommendations. She would really appreciate it.

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