

United States Artists Awards Maori Karmael Holmes 2023 Berresford Prize

Curator, filmmaker, writer, and founder of BlackStar Projects honored with the \$50,000 award for significant contributions to the advancement, wellbeing, and care of artists

CHICAGO, IL—May 31, 2023—**United States Artists (USA)** is thrilled to announce Maori Karmael Holmes as the recipient of the **2023 Berresford Prize**, USA’s annual award honoring cultural practitioners for their significant contributions to the advancement, wellbeing, and care of artists in society. As a curator, filmmaker, and writer, as well as founder and Chief Executive & Artistic Officer of [BlackStar Projects](#), Holmes’ dynamic career emphasizes the porous boundaries between artmaking and organizing, illuminating how the creation of new paradigms for supporting artists can be an artistic practice in and of itself.

Across filmmaking, curating exhibitions, organizing film and performance programs, and writing about the field, Holmes’ practice is grounded in this sense of worldbuilding, imagining alternative frameworks for storytelling, collaboration, and being in community with one another. In 2012, she founded BlackStar Projects, an organization dedicated to fostering new platforms for Black, Brown, and Indigenous film and media artists. Over the last decade, participants and collaborators have lauded the thoughtfulness, intentionality, and artist-centered approach represented in BlackStar’s programming, most notably the acclaimed BlackStar Film Festival, opening its 12th edition this summer.

As well as the celebrated festival, the organization produces a podcast, [Many Lumens; Seen](#), a journal of BIPOC film and visual culture; the [Philadelphia Filmmaker Lab](#), a



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year-long fellowship program supporting projects by emerging and mid-career Black, Brown, and Indigenous filmmakers in Philadelphia; and the [Williams + Louise Greaves Filmmaker Seminar](#), an annual gathering for Black, Brown, and Indigenous artists working in the field, featuring talks, panels, workshops, and other programs. As host of the podcast *Many Lumens*, which is now in its third season, Holmes has spoken with pioneering artists, changemakers, and cultural workers including fashion designer Telfar Clemens, filmmaker Sterlin Harjo, poet Sonia Sanchez, and artists Arthur Jafa, Amy Sberald, and Sky Hopinka, encapsulating Maori's frequent role in inviting dialogue and exchange.

She has organized programs at Anthology Film Archives, ICA Philadelphia, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), The Underground Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, and her films, which have been screened internationally, include the 2006 feature documentary *Scene Not Heard: Women in Philadelphia Hip-Hop*. Her writing appears in *The Believer*, *Film Quarterly*, and *Seen*, and she has contributed essays to *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, *How We Fight White Supremacy: A Field Guide to Black Resistance*, and *Collective Wisdom: Co-Creating Media within Communities, across Disciplines and with Algorithms*, among other books, and she most recently curated the exhibition [Terence Nance: Swarm](#), currently on view at ICA Philadelphia.

"I've been involved in organizing exhibitions and programs throughout my entire life, beginning with producing hip hop after school workshops in high school and putting on concerts in college," said **2023 Berresford Prize Recipient Maori Karmael Holmes**. "My work is fueled by an understanding of how crucial the creation and facilitation of spaces is to propelling artists' practices and nurturing their visions. I am honored to receive the Berresford Prize in honor of these efforts."

"Maori Karmael Holmes is a visionary whose gentle humor, powerhouse work ethic, and boundless generosity have created life-changing opportunities for countless



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Black, Indigenous, and people of color artists and creatives,” said writer **Jeff Chang, a 2008 USA Fellow**. “Through her work she has built a global creative community deeply rooted in and guided by the aesthetics and ethics of the Black freedom-makers in the Philadelphia area that she calls home. By building new forms of representation, collaboration, and inspiration, she reflects and advances our collective yearning for futures large enough for all our humanity.”

“Central to the Berresford Prize is this element of care for artists, which is part of what makes BlackStar Projects and Maori’s work as a whole so uniquely generative,” said **Judilee Reed, President and CEO of United States Artists**. “We are delighted to celebrate Maori for her work championing Black, Brown, and Indigenous artists, cultivating spaces where they feel seen, empowered, and cared for.”

“From providing resources and support to emerging local artists through mentorship and laboratories for experimentation, to connecting filmmakers with international audiences through the BlackStar Film Festival, to creating platforms for dialogue through *Seen* and *Many Lumens*, Maori’s contributions enrich and enliven so many aspects of arts ecosystem,” noted **Ed Henry, United States Artists Board Chair**. “Her important work demonstrates how crucial it is to uplift and celebrate cultural practitioners who allow creativity to blossom.”

The Berresford Prize is named for Susan V. Berresford, former president of the Ford Foundation, co-founder of USA and still-active USA Trustee. The unrestricted \$50,000 prize extends USA’s commitment to artists by honoring the influential administrators, curators, scholars, and producers who are building platforms and creating conditions for artists to thrive. Introduced in 2019, the award was proposed by several USA Fellows in response to the widespread lack of recognition for those who have dedicated their careers to the betterment of artists.



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Previous recipients of the Berresford Prize have included **Kristy Edmunds**, Executive and Artistic Director of UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance at the time of the award; **Linda Goode Bryant**, social activist, gallerist, filmmaker, and Founder and President of Active Citizen Project and Project EATS; **Lulani Arquette**, President and CEO of the Native Arts and Cultures Foundation (NACF) and **Roberto Bedoya**, Cultural Affairs Manager for the City of Oakland (jointly awarded the Prize in 2021); and author, bookseller, artist, and Native Arts advocate **Louise Erdrich**.

About Maori Karmael Holmes

Maori Karmael Holmes is a curator, filmmaker, and writer. She founded BlackStar Projects in 2012 and serves as its Chief Executive & Artistic Officer. She has organized programs in film at a myriad of organizations including Anthology Film Archives, Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), The Underground Museum, and the Whitney Museum of American Art. As a director, her works have screened internationally including her feature documentary *Scene Not Heard: Women in Philadelphia Hip-Hop* (2006). Her writing has appeared in *The Believer*, *Film Quarterly*, *Seen*, *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*, *How We Fight White Supremacy: A Field Guide to Black Resistance*, and most recently, *Collective Wisdom: Co-Creating Media within Communities, across Disciplines and with Algorithms*. She is a member of Lalibela Baltimore, Brown Girls Doc Mafia, and Programmers of Color Collective. Maori was a 2019–2020 Soros Equality Fellow and serves as Mediamaker-in-Residence at the Annenberg School for Communication at University of Pennsylvania, and Curator-at-Large at Penn Live Arts/Annenberg Center. In 2022, she was named one of the Kennedy Center's *Next 50*, and most recently, she was awarded a Philadelphia's Cultural Treasures Artist Fellowship.

About United States Artists

United States Artists is a national arts funding nonprofit that supports the country's most compelling artists and cultural practitioners. Since its founding in 2006, the



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organization has awarded more than 800 individuals with over \$38 million of direct support.

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