

BAMcinématek presents *Fight the Power: Black Superheroes on Film*, Feb 2—18, a series highlighting mythical and iconic black screen heroes

Series will include specials guests and panel discussions

December 5, 2017/Brooklyn, NY—From Friday, February 2 through Sunday, February 18, BAMcinématek presents *Fight the Power: Black Superheroes on Film*. Inspired by the release of Disney and Marvel's *Black Panther* (opening the Steinberg Screen at BAM's Harvey Theater on Friday, February 16), this 28-film series examines an entire alternative cinematic history of black screen heroes who challenged establishment power structures through their sheer existence. From Blaxploitation icons to supernatural avengers to anti-colonial outlaws, this series spotlights industry-defying images of black heroism and empowerment in films that are as socially and politically subversive as they are downright fun. *Fight the Power* is programmed by BAMcinématek Senior Programmer Ashley Clark, who says: "Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* is one of the most hotly anticipated blockbusters of the year, and is rightly seen as a new high watermark in the representation of black characters in the fantasy genre. But it is preceded by a rich if under-acknowledged history. *Fight the Power: Black Superheroes on Film* presents the mythical, fantastical, and groundbreaking icons that laid the path for *Black Panther*."

The series kicks off with Melvin Van Peebles' *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971—Feb 2). Van Peebles wrote, directed, and stars in this thriller that follows male prostitute Sweet Sweetback (Peebles) as he dodges police arrest with help from some unconventional accomplices. *Fight the Power* also features some iconic Blaxploitation films with heroic characters including *Cleopatra Jones* (1973, Starrett—Feb 3), *Foxy Brown* (1974, Hill—Feb 3), *Shaft* (1971, Parks—Feb 4), eccentric rarity *Abar: The First Black Superman* (1977, Packard—Feb 2) and affectionate spoof *Black Dynamite* (2009, Sanders—Feb 6), plus the independent, anti-establishment cult classic *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1973, Dixon—Feb 5) and Sidney Poitier's thrilling revisionist Western *Buck and the Preacher* (1972, Poitier—Feb 4).

Four series films come straight from the pages of comic books, including selections from the *Blade* film series, *Spawn* (1997, Dippe—Feb 6) and *Catwoman* (2004, Pitof—Feb 17). Based on the Marvel comic book character *Blade* (Feb 9), the 1998 hit film, written by David S. Goyer and directed by Stephen Norrington, drew a cult following and subsequent film franchise. Wesley Snipes stars as Blade—the half human, half vampire out to avenge his mother's death and rid the world of vampires. In 2002, Guillermo Del Toro directed the sequel, *Blade II* (Feb 9), wherein Blade (Snipes) joins forces with vampires to combat a new type of deadly monster. Based on the comic book hero of the same name, *Spawn*, features Michael Jai White as hell's reluctant soldier. And in *Catwoman*, based on the DC Comic, Halle Berry stars as a shy graphic designer, who, upon discovering a grave industry secret, is killed and reborn with cat-like reflexes.

A selection of films spotlight fantasy and science fiction heroes. These include Will Smith in *Men In Black* (1997, Sonnenfeld—Feb 11); Sun Ra in Afrofuturistic odyssey *Space Is the Place* (1974, Coney—Feb 5); *The Brother From Another Planet* (1984, Sayles—Feb 16) about a mute extraterrestrial with a gift of technical wizardry who escapes from another planet and ends up in New York; *The Meteor Man* (1993, Townsend—Feb 11), which tells the story of a schoolteacher who develops superpowers after being struck by a meteor and uses his new found powers to fight crime in his neighborhood; *Sleight* (2016, J.D. Dillard—Feb 16), a naturalistic film infused with fantastical elements about a street magician; *Attack the Block* (2011, Cornish—Feb 18) stars John Boyega and is set in a South London invaded by angry aliens; Jim Jarmusch's *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* (2000—Feb 17), in which Forest Whitaker plays a hired hitman who lives by the code of the ancient samurai; and Dystopian epic *Strange Days* (1996, Bigelow—Feb 18) featuring a tough-as-nails Angela Bassett.

Fight the Power also incorporates a few films with unconventional superheroes, including **Candyman** (1992, Rose—Feb 7), George Romero's **Night of the Living Dead** (1968—Feb 7) and Michael Rymer's **Queen of the Damned** (2002—Feb 13). *Candyman's* Tony Todd is an anti-hero in a film rich in compelling racial and social commentary. Duane Jones was one of first black actors to play a lead role in a mainstream American horror film, as Ben in *Night of the Living Dead*. *Queen of the Damned*, meanwhile, features a stunning turn from late pop icon Aaliyah.

A selection of series films with international flavor include **Kirikou and the Sorceress** (1998, Ocelot & Bulet—Feb 11), Cannes Grand Jury Prize-winning **Yeelen** (1987—Feb 17), **Besouro** (2000, João Daniel Tikhomiroff—Feb 12) and a special screening of **Brown Girl Begins** (2017, Lewis—Feb 13), an adaptation of the Afrofuturist novel by Nalo Hopkinson, and the first Caribbean-Canadian sci-fi feature film ever made.

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Fight the Power: Black Superheroes on Film Schedule

Fri, Feb 2

7pm: *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*
9:45pm: *Abar: The First Black Superman*

Sat, Feb 3

7pm: *Foxy Brown*
9:30pm: *Cleopatra Jones*

Sun, Feb 4

7pm: *Shaft*
9:30pm: *Buck and the Preacher*

Mon, Feb 5

4:30, 9:30pm: *The Spook Who Sat By the Door*
7pm: *Space Is the Place*

Tue, Feb 6

4:30, 7pm: *Black Dynamite*
9:30pm: *Spawn*

Wed, Feb 7

4:30, 9:30pm: *Night of the Living Dead*
7pm: *Candyman*

Fri, Feb 9

7pm: *Blade + Blade II*

Sun, Feb 11

12pm: *Kirikou and the Sorceress*
2pm: The Future of Black Screen Superheroes shorts program + panel discussion
4:30pm: *The Meteor Man*
7:15pm: *Men in Black*

Mon, Feb 12

7pm: *Besouro*

Tue, Feb 13

7pm: Caribbean Film Series: *Brown Girl Begins*
9:30pm: *Queen of the Damned*

Fri, Feb 16

4:30, 9:30pm: *Sleight*
7pm: *The Brother from Another Planet*

Sat, Feb 17

2, 7pm: *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*
4:30pm: *Yeelen*
9:30pm: *Catwoman*

Sun, Feb 18

4:30, 9:45pm: *Attack the Block*
6:45pm: *Strange Days*

Film Descriptions

ABAR, THE FIRST BLACK SUPERMAN (1977) *Dir. Frank Packard. With Tobar Mayo, J. Walter Smith, Roxie Young.* A black revolutionary (Mayo) is transformed into an indestructible, telekinetic man of steel who sets about unleashing justice of biblical proportions upon a racist white suburb. This wildly entertaining, shoestring-budget film mixes Blaxploitation antics with subversive commentary on racial integration, class, and political corruption. *102min.* Fri, Feb 2 at 9:45pm

ATTACK THE BLOCK (2011) *Dir. Joe Cornish. With John Boyega, Jodie Whittaker, Alex Esmail.* This breathless British satire blends 80s-style creature-feature thrills, whip-smart wit, and incisive racial and class commentary into a near-perfect genre confection. John Boyega (in his film debut) plays a South London tough who leads a band of local teens in the fight against an alien invasion targeting their block. *DCP. 88min.* Sun, Feb 18 at 4:30 & 9:45pm

BESOURO (2009) *Dir. João Daniel Tikhomiroff. With Ailton Carmo, Jéssica Barbosa, Flávio Rocha.* The Afro-Brazilian martial art of capoeira gets a thrilling showcase in this alternately poetic and kinetic retelling of the life of Besouro Manganga, a legendary fighter who used his superhuman skills to liberate black workers from brutal white plantation owners in 1920s Brazil. The breathtaking action sequences—set amid the scenic splendor of the Bahia region's jungles—are courtesy of *Kill Bill* and Jet Li choreographer Huen Chiu Ku. *DCP. 95min.* Mon, Feb 12 at 7pm

BLACK DYNAMITE (2009) *Dir. Scott Sanders. With Michael Jai White, Tommy Davidson, Salli Richardson.* In this hilariously spot-on spoof of/homage to Blaxploitation cinema, kung-fu-fighting ex-CIA agent Black Dynamite (*Spawn* star White, channeling Shaft) sets out to get even with the man who killed his brother and is inundating orphanages with smack. From the music to the fashion to the jive, *Black Dynamite* nails the low-budget, goofball charm of the genre it affectionately parodies. *35mm. 90min.* Tue, Feb 6 at 4:30 & 7pm

BLADE (1998) *Dir. Stephen Norrington. With Wesley Snipes, Kris Kristofferson, Stephen Dorff.* This inventive, super-stylized science-fiction-horror-hybrid paved the way for the Marvel-verse's subsequent box office takeover and made Wesley Snipes the first black actor to anchor a mega-budget superhero franchise. He is instantly iconic in the title role, an avenging half-vampire "daywalker" who slays fanged menaces in increasingly spectacular fashion. *35mm. 120min.* Fri, Feb 9 at 7pm
**Screening with Blade II*

BLADE II (2002) *Dir. Guillermo del Toro. With Wesley Snipes, Kris Kristofferson, Ron Perlman.* Guillermo del Toro brings a sleek, neo-noir visual flair to this hyperkinetic sequel to the cult hit. Wesley Snipes returns as the leather-clad, quasi-vampiric martial arts maven who this time around descends into a shadowy netherworld to combat a strain of nefarious, cannibalistic bloodsuckers. Mixing comic book

action with CGI spectacle, *Blade II* is a big, brash B-movie of the best kind. 35mm. 125min. Fri, Feb 9 at 7pm

**Screening with Blade*

THE BROTHER FROM ANOTHER PLANET (1984) *Dir. John Sayles. With Joe Morton, Darryl Edwards, Steve James.* In this lo-fi treasure, a mute-black alien (Morton) crash-lands in Harlem, where he encounters both suspicion and, gradually, acceptance (thanks in part to his telekinetic powers which are, as it turns out, helpful in repairing video games). Built around a sensitive, Keaton-esque performance from Joe Morton, John Sayles' offbeat indie balances wry comedy with a heartfelt political consciousness. 35mm. 109min. Fri, Feb 16 at 7pm

BROWN GIRL BEGINS* (2017) *Dir. Sharon Lewis. With Mouna Traoré, Rachael Crawford, Alli Chung.* Inspired by Hugo Award-nominated author Nalo Hopkinson's "Brown Girl in the Ring," this film prequel explores the early life of the novel's hero Ti-Jeanne, a reluctant priestess who in a post-apocalyptic 2049 must choose between young love and accepting her legacy - or her people will die. Skillfully interweaving Caribbean folklore and fantasy elements, the Afrofuturist *Brown Girl Begins* is the first Caribbean-Canadian sci-fi feature film ever made.

**This screening is part of The Caribbean Film Series, which presents feature films made by Caribbean filmmakers that highlight the richness, uniqueness, and viability of Caribbean cinema to Brooklyn, home to the largest population of Caribbean nationals in the United States, and to all New York City residents and visitors.*

BUCK AND THE PREACHER (1972) *Dir. Sidney Poitier. With Sidney Poitier, Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee.* Sidney Poitier became one of Hollywood's first black directors with this ambitious, politically charged-shoot-'em-up, the rare Western to address African-American pioneer life. He stars as the freed slave Buck who teams up with Harry Belafonte's crooked preacher to fight back against a ruthless band of white oppressors. 35mm. 102min. Sun, Feb 4 at 9:30pm

CANDYMAN (1992) *Dir. Bernard Rose. With Virginia Madsen, Tony Todd, Xander Berkeley.* "Candyman...Candyman..." Say his name five times in front of a mirror and the hook-handed serial killer spirit—the murdered son of slaves—appears. Or so the legend goes. Set in Chicago's now-demolished Cabrini-Green housing projects, this Clive Barker adaptation features Tony Todd as a memorable—and terrifying—antihero in a film rich in compelling racial and social commentary. Bonus: an ultra-unsettling Philip Glass score. *Intro by novelist Victor LaValle.* 35mm. 99min. Wed, Feb 7 at 7pm

CATWOMAN (2004) *Dir. Pitof. With Halle Berry, Benjamin Bratt, Lambert Wilson.* Batman's nemesis received her own big-screen showcase with Halle Berry (fresh from a history-making Oscar win) as the mild-mannered office worker transformed into a leather-clad, whip-cracking super-feline prowling a noir-ish CGI nightscape. Though it passed almost instantly into pop culture infamy, this DC Comics adaptation deserves a second look for being the rare \$100 million studio spectacle built around a tale of black female empowerment. 35mm. 104min. Sat, Feb 17 at 9:30pm

CLEOPATRA JONES (1973) *Dir. Jack Starrett. With Tamara Dobson, Bernie Casey, Shelley Winters.* Altitudinous, Uzi-wielding Special Agent to the President, Cleo (six-foot-two model Dobson, listed by Guinness as the "Tallest Leading Lady in Film") blows up Turkish poppy fields as she takes down the smack business run by Shelley Winters' hysterical queenpin. This ferocious mix of feminism and fight-the-man attitude features a funky, gold-selling soundtrack and cameos by *Soul Train's* Don Cornelius and *Good Times'* Esther Rolle. 35mm. 89min. Sat, Feb 3 at 9:30pm

FOXY BROWN (1974) *Dir. Jack Hill. With Pam Grier, Antonio Fargas, Peter Brown.* Pam Grier cemented her status as a super-fly black power icon with this bam-bang-pow grindhouse classic, which smuggles in explosive social commentary alongside its vengeance-is-mine premise. She radiates tough-as-hell attitude as the titular "one-chick hit squad," packing a pistol in her afro and posing as a prostitute to infiltrate the gang of baddies that murdered her boyfriend. 35mm. 94min. Sat, Feb 3 at 7pm

GHOST DOG: THE WAY OF THE SAMURAI (1999) *Dir. Jim Jarmusch. With Forest Whitaker, John Tormey, Henry Silva.* Jim Jarmusch's inventively offbeat crime thriller stars Forest Whitaker as Ghost Dog, a Zen hitman who lives by an ancient Japanese samurai code and who refuses to betray his ideals, even when he's crossed by the mob. Jarmusch filters the New Wave cool of Jean-Pierre Melville and Seijun Suzuki through his own deadpan-sardonic sensibility, aided by Robby Müller's striking lensing and a super-cool score by RZA. *35mm. 116min.* Sat, Feb 17 at 2 & 7pm

KIRIKOU AND THE SORCERESS (1998) *Dir. Michel Ocelot.* Based on a West African folktale, this exquisite animated fable follows the adventures of the precocious newborn Kirikou who—never mind being straight out of the womb—sets out to save his village from an evil witch. Striking, jewel-box visuals are set to a vibrant soundtrack by Senegalese great Youssou N'Dour to yield a feast of sensory delights. *35mm. 74min.* Sun, Feb 11 at 12pm

MEN IN BLACK (1997) *Dir. Barry Sonnenfeld. With Will Smith, Tommy Lee Jones, Linda Fiorentino.* "Here come the M.I.B.s..." This defining smash hit made Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones—iconic in black Ray-Bans—the ultimate action-comedy duo of the late 90s. They are the dapper, memory-zapping galaxy defenders who crack wise while patrolling New York City for extraterrestrial funny business. The combination of dry wit, megawatt star power, and ingenious creature effects make for a refreshingly breezy blockbuster. *DCP. 98min.* Sun, Feb 11 at 7:15pm

THE METEOR MAN (1993) *Dir. Robert Townsend. With Townsend, Marla Gibbs, Eddie Griffin.* Writer-director-star Robert Townsend (the force behind the brilliant industry satire *Hollywood Shuffle*) helms this lovably goofy farce. He plays a DC schoolteacher who acquires super powers—chief among them, the ability to communicate with his dog—after being struck by a meteor, and sets about cleaning up his neighborhood, from taking on gangs to building a community garden. *The Meteor Man* boasts an eclectic series of cameos from Luther Vandross, Cypress Hill, Naughty by Nature, and others. *35mm. 100min.* Sun, Feb 11 at 4:30pm

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968) *Dir. George A. Romero. With Duane Jones, Judith O'Dea, Karl Hardman.* George Romero's stunningly subversive horror milestone took what would soon become a familiar trope—a band of people crawling the walls of a farmhouse while the flesh-eating undead approach—and turned it into a canny commentary on race by making the film's sole black character the hero. More than just the mother of all zombie movies, this is a still-shocking vision of Vietnam-era America consuming itself. *DCP. 97min.* Wed, Feb 7 at 4:30 & 9:30pm

QUEEN OF THE DAMNED (2002) *Dir. Michael Rymer. With Aaliyah, Stuart Townsend, Marguerite Moreau.* Pop sensation Aaliyah—in the second and final of her two big screen appearances—lights up this deliciously dark, glitzy-goth horror extravaganza adapted from Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*. She's the all-powerful evil queen Akasha, whose wrath (and lust) is awakened by the vampire turned heavy metal superstar Lestat (Townsend). *35mm. 104min.* Tue, Feb 13 at 9:30pm

SHAFT (1971) *Dir. Gordon Parks. With Richard Roundtree, Moses Gunn, Charles Cioffi.* The Blaxploitation sensation that kicked off a wave of Afrocentric crime dramas stars Richard Roundtree as (per the iconic Oscar-garnering theme song) "the black private dick that's a sex machine to all the chicks." He roughs up perps left and right while tracking down the kidnapped daughter of Moses Gunn's Harlem crime kingpin—all backed by Isaac Hayes' classic-hot-buttered soul soundtrack. *35mm. 99min.* Sun, Feb 4 at 7pm

SLEIGHT (2016) *Dir. J.D. Dillard. With Jacob Latimore, Seychelle Gabriel, Dulé Hill.* One of the most unfairly overlooked releases of the last year is a subtly supernatural coming-of-age tale in which a teenage street magician (Latimore) growing up in LA is forced to put his Houdini-like skills to work as he struggles to leave behind his life as a drug dealer. Boasting an impressive breakout performance from Jacob Latimore, *Sleight* roots its refreshingly naturalistic origin story in a vividly realized socioeconomic reality. *DCP. 90min.* Fri, Feb 16 at 4:30 & 9:30pm

SPACE IS THE PLACE (1974) *Dir. John Coney. With Sun Ra, Raymond Johnson, Christopher Brooks.* Avant-jazz mystic Sun Ra brought his pioneering Afrofuturist vision to film with this movie version of his concept album. It's a wild, kaleidoscopic whirl of science fiction, sharp social commentary, goofy pseudo-Blaxploitation stylistics, and thrilling concert performance, in which the pharaonic Ra and his Arkestra lead an intergalactic movement to resettle the black race on their utopian space colony. *DCP. 85min.* Mon, Feb 5 at 7pm

SPAWN (1997) *Dir. Mark A.Z. Dippé. With Michael Jai White, John Leguizamo, Martin Sheen.* Michael Jai White—among the first black actors to play a leading role in a blockbuster comic book movie—is Spawn, the scarred avenger who makes a deal with the devil and finds himself caught between good and evil (personified by John Leguizamo's gloriously campy Clown). It all unfolds in a sensory-overload, pure cinema rush of “vivid, bizarre, intense images—including visions of hell that are worthy of Hieronymous Bosch” (Roger Ebert). *35mm. 89min.* Tue, Feb 6 at 9:30pm

THE SPOOK WHO SAT BY THE DOOR (1973) *Dir. Ivan Dixon. With Lawrence Cook, Paula Kelly, Janet League.* Arguably one of the most radical, anti-white-supremacy statements in film history, this explosive adaptation of the novel by Sam Greenlee follows a disillusioned black CIA agent (Cook) who goes rogue and uses his specialized training to build a guerrilla army intent on government overthrow. So potent is the film's call to revolution that for decades all prints of it were suppressed by the FBI. *35mm. 102min.* Mon, Feb 5 at 4:30 & 9:30pm

STRANGE DAYS (1995) *Dir. Kathryn Bigelow. With Ralph Fiennes, Angela Bassett, Juliette Lewis.* Kathryn Bigelow's dazzling sci-fi head-trip unfolds in the waning hours of the 20th century, as Ralph Fiennes' black market hustler is swept up in a conspiracy involving a virtual reality psycho-killer. He's aided by a tough-as-nails Angela Bassett, who's more than just a sidekick—she's one of the steeliest heroines of the 90s. Though overlooked upon its release, this visually propulsive masterwork has plenty of provocative points to make about the perennial issue of racist policing. *35mm. 146min.* Sun, Feb 18 at 6:45pm

SWEET SWEETBACK'S BAADASSSSS SONG (1971) *Dir. Melvin Van Peebles. With Van Peebles, Hubert Scates, Simon Chuckster.* Melvin Van Peebles' landmark of black independent cinema stars the one-man auteur as a strapping sex-show performer who stands up to police brutality then finds himself on the run from the law through the underbelly of 70s LA. Combining X-rated spectacle, New Wave experimentation, and stick-it-to-the-man politics, Van Peebles created what Huey P. Newton called “the first truly revolutionary Black film.” *97min.* Fri, Feb 2 at 7pm

YEELLEN (1987) *Dir. Souleymane Cissé. With Issiaka Kane, Aoua Sangare, Niamanto Sanogo.* Winner of the Jury Prize at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival, this transfixing masterpiece from Malian auteur Souleymane Cissé charts the coming-of-age odyssey of a young man (Kane) possessed of supernatural powers as he prepares to do battle with his evil sorcerer father. Set during the Mali Empire of the 13th century, *Yeelen* is shot through with an arresting, lyrical visual style and a spellbinding sense of mysticism. *35mm. 105min.* Sat, Feb 17 at 4:30pm

About BAMcinématek

Since 1998 BAM Rose Cinemas has been Brooklyn's home for alternative, documentary, art-house, and independent films. Combining new releases with BAMcinématek year-round repertory program, the four-screen venue hosts new and rarely seen contemporary films, classics, work by local artists, and festivals of films from around the world, often with special appearances by directors, actors, and other guests. BAMcinématek has hosted major retrospectives of filmmakers like Spike Lee, Chantal Akerman, John Carpenter, Manoel de Oliveira, Luis Buñuel, King Hu, and Vincente Minnelli (winning a National Film Critics' Circle Award prize for the retrospective), and hosted the first US retrospectives of directors Arnaud Desplechin, Hong Sang-soo, Andrzej Zulawski, and Jiang Wen. Since 2009 the program has also produced BAMcinemaFest, New York's home for American independent film, and has championed the work of filmmakers like Janicza Bravo, Andrew Dosunmu, Lena Dunham, and Alex Ross Perry. The 12-day festival of New York premieres, now in its ninth year, ran from June 14—25, 2017.

Credits

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General Information:

BAM Howard Gilman Opera House, BAM Rose Cinemas, and BAMcafé are located in the Peter Jay Sharp building at 30 Lafayette Avenue (between St Felix Street and Ashland Place) in the Fort Greene neighborhood of Brooklyn. BAM Harvey Theater is located two blocks from the main building at 651 Fulton Street (between Ashland and Rockwell Places). Both locations house Greenlight Bookstore at BAM kiosks. BAM Fisher, located at 321 Ashland Place, is the newest addition to the BAM campus and houses the Judith and Alan Fishman Space and Rita K. Hillman Studio. BAM Rose Cinemas is Brooklyn's only movie house dedicated to first-run independent and foreign film and repertory programming. BAMcafé, operated by Great Performances, offers varied light fare and bar service prior to BAM Howard Gilman Opera House evening performances.

Subway: 2, 3, 4, 5, Q, B to Atlantic Avenue – Barclays Center (2, 3, 4, 5 to Nevins St for Harvey Theater) D, N, R to Pacific Street; G to Fulton Street; C to Lafayette Avenue
Train: Long Island Railroad to Atlantic Terminal – Barclays Center
Bus: B25, B26, B41, B45, B52, B63, B67 all stop within three blocks of BAM
Car: Limited commercial parking lots are located near BAM. Visit BAM.org for information.

For ticket information, call BAM Ticket Services at 718.636.4100, or visit BAM.org.