

## **Interview with Debra Zimmerman**

*“I believe that social change happens one person at a time.”*

Debra Zimmerman has been the executive director of Women Make Movies since 1983 and was instrumental in Women Make Movies transformation into the largest distributor of films and videos by and about women in North America and the only major distributor working solely for women.

In 2002 Women Make Movies celebrated its 30th anniversary with a year-long series of events commemorating multi-cultural films made by and for women with diverse and timely programs both in the U.S. and around the world.

From October 9-14, the Center for Social Media celebrated Women Make Movies with a film series and a panel discussion on women.

Debra Zimmerman spoke with Jana Germano from the Women Make Movies office in New York City in August 2002.

*What was the mission of Women Make Movies when you first came on board?*

One of the really interesting things is that the mission hasn't changed at all. I don't know so generally, I wasn't one of the ones who wrote it but basically the mission has always been to production, promotion, distribution and exhibition of films and video by and about women and is kind of amazing. So the name Women Make Movies really did refer to the fact that Women Make Movies made movies in the beginning. We don't do that anymore. We were founded by two women Paige and Ariel Dougherty in 1972 and their intentions were to put cameras into the hands of women receive the training necessary to be able to do their own films. It was part of the feminist movement informed by the second wave of feminism, with the idea that women should be able to tell their way that they wanted to tell their stories on the issues that were most important to them. In fact the film that was made during those years between 1972 and 1978 that really put us on the map *Healthcaring from Our End of the Speculum*, which was an extraordinary film, we're actually it. It was a film that was very much like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the seminal book on it looked at the way women were being treated by the health care profession.

In the early eighties we shifted focus because after about ten years of Women Make Movies, more women making movies. For various reasons, not the least of which was financial, we decided to distribution, at that point there were a number of women who had made films that films weren't also were defunded for the first time in our history, not the last, by the National Endowment for point Reagan had come into power and decided that women had achieved what they needed to no need for special funding for women's organizations, which had gotten funded from a special NEA.

Combined with our financial difficulties and the state of what was happening with women decided to shift our focus to distribution and that's where I got involved with

the organization. to the organization straight out of college, actually now its become kind of a myth but it's true. three months on the street where Women Make Movies was and was terrified to walk in the door 2I just want to wo rk here for free. I finally did and I go t an internship. After working as an intern months, I was offered a position as a Associate Producer on a documentary called Why Women about domestic violence, w hich, unfortunately, was o ne of the last videos that Women Make Movies made. I left the organization soon after that and came back in 1983 and was part of the decision focus towards distributio n. So that's a bit of history.

*So what motivated this shift towards distribution?*

Part of it w as financial. Truthfully, we were hanging on by a thread. We had no anymore. It was really a moment that a lot of women's organizations went through. We had been part of the CETA program, which was a comprehensive employment-training program that Carter implemented through the governm ent and it was a wond erful program. I was on e of those CETA employees so when that fund ing dried up we were really left not really knowing how to make it up. We had a series of community meetings where we invited peop le to talk about whether or n ot they needed the organization to function or whether it sho uld die a n ice death. A nd a lot of people came to th is meeting and said look, Women Make Movies was key in helping me to become a filmmaker, it was so important, there's still a need for it. At the same time, even though we had the catalogue come out in fact we ran out of catalogues there were still people writing us saying 2I really want to see this film, can I rent this film? So myself and a woman named Lydia Dean-Pilcher (who's now a really successful producer) sat down and put together a plan and saw that if we shifted focus to distribution there'd be enough money coming in to keep the office open, which was really our only intention at the time. So we started w orking on this plan, prom oting the films that we had in our collection and acquiring new films. Our first effort was around a film called *Being a Prisoner*, which was about women's prison issues. And after a year, it was so successful that we were able to acquire more films, we got funding from the New York State Council on the Arts and Women Make Movies as a distributor was born. We had about thirty films in the collection then and our budget was about \$30,000, half of w hich was my first salary. Although when Lydia and I first started we actually were paid \$50 a week, \$25 deferred if our grant came through.

The entire Women Make Movies office could fit very neatly inside the office that I now have w ithin our larger office. It was without windows, connected to the editing room and you had to walk the Women Make Movies office to get to the editing room. So I heard the sound track of the original *House Party*, a Richie Hudlin film, over and over and over again. But there are a lot of people that have to be acknowledged in the rebirth and birth of Women Make Movies. We had an extraordinary board of women at the time that put tremendous energy into it. The filmmakers who trusted us with their films when we were rather unproven, I salute all of them. We also made a couple of really good decisions. First was to not build another organization that w as solely dependent upon funding for its survival.

And that was another big reason to chose distribution as the focus. Distribution was for me a triple-win situation. You sell a film, the filmmaker gets royalties, they get money so they can go on to make other films, the organization that you sell it to gets a program they need for their community or educational or cultural work and we as an organization also got money. And I just got really hooked with the idea that we could serve three masters at the same and help everybody. And that in fact is what happened.

The other thing that we did was, and I've already felt this way, that our filmmakers keep us ahead of the curve. We had a very strong commitment to being a multi-racial organization in the beginning of Women Make Movies and certainly through its history. We had this incredible collection of films by women of color before the term multi-cultural was even coined so when this big multi-cultural wave hit universities in the late eighties we already had a collection. We just found that the same thing happened around September 11th. We have a very strong collection of films by and about women from the Middle East and by and about women and Islam. And when people were looking for resources around that issue they could come to us. The same thing is happening now in terms of globalization, which is a big focus for us this year. Because we're really driven in many ways by the wonderful films that women make. As long as they're out there doing them, we're out there distributing them .

*Tell me something about the buyers, vendors or exhibitors you work with.*

I think that's another unique thing about Women Make Movies, our collection is really diverse, not just in terms of being multicultural, but also in terms of being the kind of films that we distribute. We distribute everything from four-minute animated films to a four-hour experimental feature film from Germany, with everything in between with, of course, a special focus on documentary. And as a result we work with an incredibly diverse constituency, everything from prisons and libraries, health organizations, government agencies, youth centers, to museums and art centers and film festivals and cinemas, as well as broadcast. Because we are where women are, we are kind of everywhere.

And I think that's very special. I think that what we tend to do sometimes is bring experimental films, or more interesting kinds of films that really challenge the form of cinema to audiences that are looking for subject-oriented filmmaking on social issues. And we bring social issue, subject-oriented films to film festivals that are sometimes more concerned with form. So we play an ambassador on both levels.

*How do you go about selling the films you believe in?*

There's so many different ways. It depends on the kinds of films we distribute. It would help to go back and bring it up to date. In the eighties, one of our first campaigns was a campaign that brought to the United States from Latin America films by Latin American filmmakers. We actually did that, interestingly enough, because we couldn't find enough films made by Latina women in this country at that time. Which is quite amazing to think about how things have changed since the late eighties. We juried this collection; we then

marketed it to media art centers and museums. Tried to market it to television without much success. We also organized the funding for a series of community based screenings throughout the metropolitan area, really deep into the Latino community.

And at the same time, the thing that has always been the backbone of Women Make Movies is marketing to universities and colleges, which represent a primary market for us. Universities are what we call the proven media buyers. They're the people who have a need for diverse and large amounts of media and they have the budgets to pay for it, which is really important.

But the triple approach of working with communities, working with cultural institutions and working with the educational system has informed the way we do all our marketing.

And through the years we've had number of different project along the same lines and that's what we're doing right now with our Girls' Project and our Globalization Project.

*Of the programs you consider each year for inclusion in your catalogue, how many do you usually accept and what are the criteria?*

We probably get in the office about 300 films a year. We're then going out, it's not just myself, there's about three or four of us who are actively going out to festivals constantly looking for work. We pick up only about 20 to 25, so it's a really small percentage. Probably we look at about 1,000 works a year. So it is very, very competitive.

The criteria that we use are a) although the quality of work is the most important, we're not just looking for high quality, straight-forward narratives or documentaries, we're looking also for films that really challenge the form of cinema and try to represent the way that women see the world creatively and accurately. We're not looking just for positive stories about women you know, women do bad things too but we're looking for films that somehow challenge people's perceptions of women's lives, either break stereotypes or look at women who are doing interesting things or working in some way against the status quo. We don't believe that there is a key feminist film there are many, many different kinds of feminism, and we very proudly call ourselves a feminist organization.

Another part of the decision is, unfortunately, sometimes, but not always, financial. We want to pick up films that we think that there is a market for. Often we see films that are really wonderful but we just know that there is so little we can do with it. Every year we pick up four or five films like that. In fact saying, it doesn't matter, it may not sell but we just believe in this filmmaker. We believe that we can play a role in developing this filmmaker's career. That's another part of what we're doing, we work with both emerging and established filmmakers and have always considered it an important role that we can play, in getting someone from making their first film to their second film, from their second film to their feature film.

A third part of our decision is what we're planning on marketing in the coming year. So

sometimes there are films that are really good but we know we don't have the resources to handle them. This is very much driven by our filmmakers, for example, one of our new releases is the Special Jury Prizewinner from Sundance, *Senorita Extraviada*, a very important film about the murder of young women on the border between Mexico and the U.S. It's an incredible story and it's still going on. In many ways *Extraviada* is the exemplary film that Women Make Movies wants to distribute. It's about an issue that has not been covered enough by the mainstream media and such an important one. It's made by a Latina filmmaker [Lourdes Portillo] and for her it's a very personal issue.

At the same time, another one of our filmmakers made a film called *Escuela*. And both of these, interestingly enough, are going to be on TV in the next couple of weeks. *Escuela* is a film about migrant farm worker education. So because those two films are on Latina issues, clearly we knew that would be a focus for us in the coming year.

One of our filmmakers right now is finishing a film about female genitalia mutilation in Africa and at the same time we're picking up two other films by African women filmmakers so we know that in 2003 Africa will be an issue of concern to us.

And threaded through all of those films is the focus on globalization, which is very much a culmination of the work that we've been doing for the last 15 years.

*I'm curious what you said about the 4 to 5 films that you accept that may not be as easy to market. What makes a film marketable for you?*

There's a film that we distribute which is a 1/2-hour narrative, beautifully done, which is coming-of-age story about a girl on the cusp of adolescence. Now, primarily our market is universities and stories about 12-year-old girls are not top of the list and dramas about 12-year-old girls are certainly not top of the list. That makes it very hard and the real market for a film like that is probably a small broadcast sale and festivals so that does make it really hard for us.

Another example would be our commitment to women filmmakers from other countries. We're much more interested in seeing films made by African women about African issues. But the truth is that sometimes the films that they make are not really easy to market to a U.S. audience because they're speaking from a position of within. And it is easier for Americans to hear an American voice talking about what's going on in Africa than they are in an African voice. Generally that's when we say yes we will pick it up, even though we know that our job's going to be harder. But in the way we believe that women should tell their own stories, we believe that Africans should tell their own stories. But it does make life harder.

*Do you ever accept films made by women concerning an issue not directly related to women?*

Very rarely, I would say no is the right answer but ever now and then one slips through but you probably wouldn't even know it. So no, we really don't and we don't

distribute films made by men about women's issues and there are some wonderful ones. And we do get the question "what about men?" and I always say, hey, men are covered. How come there can't be one small organization that puts women first?

*Is Women Make Movies the only distributor dealing solely with women's films and, if so, why do you think you have no competitors?*

It's not that we don't have competitors because there are other distributors that do pick up films about women but their collections aren't solely made up of women's films so it's very complicated. I think that distribution is a very difficult thing to do. Sometimes I think I make it sound easy but it isn't. We've been working very hard and for a really long time to build up collection that we have. It's not very glamorous and it's very rare that we find somebody coming to us saying "I've always wanted to work in distribution." It takes a lot of staff training and a lot of commitment because you're dealing with a lot of different people.

There certainly are other wonderful distributors, like Third World Newsreel, that distributes third world films. I don't know why there isn't another organization that focuses on women. Well, I will say this, I know that for a long time the NEA would only fund one organization, they felt that one was enough. In other parts of the world there have been women film distributors but unfortunately many of them have closed. One of them, for example, in Holland is an incredibly successful distributor but what happened with them, which is really interesting, is that as they got grew, their funders pushed them to not just focus on women's films. Although the women that run the organization are feminists and their roots are as a women's organization, it's no longer just a women's distributor. In England, the reverse happened and there were actually two women film distributors and the funder pushed them to form one, again, one is enough and unfortunately they went out of business. But I think that the reason they went out of business has more to do with the reality of educational distribution in Europe, which just barely exists.

Again, it goes back to Women Make Movies link to universities. That link is critical for our existence. Without that support there would be no Women Make Movies. And we're very lucky because it seems to be only in English-speaking countries is there this emphasis or this use of media in the classroom that is the reason that our films are used in the university and the reason that we have that base of support.

On the other hand, I have to say that I think the other reason why Women Make Movies has always had such a strong link to universities is that our collection has always been both about theory and practice. It also has to do with the interrelationship between the women's movement, or feminist filmmaking and feminist film theory, which grew side by side. Women in academia were deconstructing films to look at the role of women in society or look at the role of women in film, while the filmmakers were using feminist film theory to inform their work. So this very healthy interrelationship developed and I think that's happening now in Gender Studies.

*You've lectured on women's media and media distribution issues around the world, what is your main message?*

I guess my main message is that while it's important to celebrate right now and to acknowledge the accomplishment of women filmmakers, it's also really important to look at how much further we have to go. There have been incredible developments in the years that I've been here. When I came to Women Make Movies there were maybe 10 women filmmakers in Hollywood making films, now it's almost impossible to open up a newspaper in any major city in the United States and not see a film by a woman showing in a theatre. That is an incredible accomplishment. At the same time, no woman has ever gotten nominated or won the Academy Award for directing.

The percentage of women in the Director's Guide of America is still appalling and it's going down, it's not going up. It's about 11 percent of the membership of the Directors Guild is women and that's not just directors, that's producers, second assistant directors, production managers. So that's disheartening. If you look at the film catalogues of major film festivals all over the world you see a dearth of women filmmakers and that unfortunately includes documentary festivals, where women are thought to have succeeded so much more than feature filmmaking. So at the same time, again, it's the good and the bad, there's been an incredible growth of women film festivals. In Asia, for example, there's now a film festival in Taiwan, in Seoul, a part of the Tokyo film festival is devoted to women. In France, women there swept the Cesars, which is the French equivalent of the Academy Awards two years ago, winning Best Director, Best Cinematographer, Best Editor and Best Film.

*The feminist movement is not as discernable as it used to be partially because of its own success where do you think the fight is now and how can it be addressed?*

I'll take the first part of the question and I'm going to contemplate a bit about whether or not the feminist movement is as discernable as it used to be, that's a good way of putting it. It is certainly part of the success of the movement that it's perhaps not about being out there and screaming anymore. Though I personally think that it's as needed, if not more needed because it's a little bit more insidious now.

I would say two things; one is that for whatever reason filmmaking is still a place where sexism is still so incredibly rampant. I think it has to do with the intersection of two things that are incredibly important to men, one is business and the other is art. Women artists across the board in visual arts, in every area of the arts have had an incredibly difficult time reaching any kind of parity. There is no parity. Whereas women in the legal profession or the medical profession, the numbers are there, if the impact isn't yet, though the impact is certainly being felt. I think that men are holding on really, really

tight to the images that they want out there in the world. It's also a very complicated process. I don't think that there's a bunch of men sitting around in Hollywood that are saying we don't want to see these kinds of images of women. But individually in their own choices and their own decision-making they are, in fact, doing that because it's very threatening.

Men are used themselves in control of what's up on the screen and they're used to seeing women objectified on the screen and they're used to men being the ones who are driving the story. Add that to the business side of all of this and you've got a very lethal combination.

So whether the feminist movement is discernible or not, there is so much work to be done in this particular area in terms of filmmaking. Part of it taking down the old boy's network and it's taking a long time to do this. Most film festivals in the world are still run by men, by a long shot. We're talking about numbers something like 80 to 90 percent of film festivals being run by men.

Also juries and people who are on the board in studios who chose which films get made and who are on the committees that decide who gets grants. These things are changing but there's just an incredible need for even more activism than what Women Make Movies provides around these issues.

The other thing that's happening, which is very interesting, is that women have achieved a kind of parody in terms of film school, half of the film schools are now made up of women, but they're learning a very hard lesson when they get out of school. Because the world they encounter in school is actually quite different from the world they encounter outside of school.

At the same time, in another way I think that one of the reasons that Women Make Movies has been so successful and one of the things that we're proudest of goes back to what I was talking about in terms of where we get our support. Since we don't actively seek many grants we do get support from government agencies like NYSCA and the NEA sometimes, and every now and then a very nice foundation gives us a grant, this year the Andy Warhol Foundation gave us a grant we are really supported by the people who use our films, by our constituency. What that says is that there is a tremendous need for the kind of media that we distribute because if there wasn't, we wouldn't be so successful. And that also says to me that women's issues, and again I'm trying to reflect on this notion of discernability, I think that in fact women's issues have become so embedded in courses, in universities, that it's become very status quo. And as it becomes status quo, Women Make Movies becomes part of the curriculum. So that it's much easier for us to sell films now than it was twenty years ago.

*Women Make Movies is dedicated to advancing social change how do you think that films support a social movement?*

It goes back to working on two levels. We feel that we provide films both for

empowerment education. On the empowerment side is providing gay and lesbian film festival with works that African-American film festivals or women film festivals. The other part of it is education, so Harvard Medical School uses some of Women Make films on health issues to teach doctors. We are educating those doctors as to the way that women own health issues and the impact of research that they may not have heard about. For me that's And it's very important as a distributor that we work in those two areas. One with people who our work and the other one, the people who are actually least interested in what we do, or they they're interested in what we do. The most successful film that we distribute, *Complaints of which* is a film about Alzheimer's is such a great example because it's by a lesbian filmmaker a lesbian is not central to the film whatsoever. There's a very small part in the film where you partner, who happens to be the camerawoman, interacting with her mother. Now this film has most widely used films on Alzheimer's. It's used by mainstream huge organizations dealing with health care facilities all over the country. The fact that it, in fact, has this section, is a really dealing with homophobia. I believe that that social change happens one person at a time. Recently, after 9/11 we started this campaign called "Response to Hate". Our offices were near the World Trade Center and we, of course, were really affected by it as everybody was. And we this collection of incredible films made by women about Islam, about the Middle East that looked different perspective than people were getting in the news. In fact, women were more or less left discussion after 9/11. And what we decided to do was launch this campaign called "Response" in response to one of the things that we were concerned about was the incredible stereotyping people of the Islam faith. So we offered these films for free for three months to any organization that wanted to use them to create discussion and dialogue on the issues. And we got responses from people literally all over the world, which unfortunately we couldn't send films outside of North America. From a transit worker in Vancouver, B.C. to high school teachers and church workers very local people working locally on issues with private screenings in churches and community centers. In up state New York there's a tiny town named Steenville (I happen to know it because I went to school around there) that ordered films from us and they had to turn away people from the community center and was begging me that they could use them again. That's a great thing. These are films that really were giving people a different view of what it means to be a Muslim woman or how do Muslim women see the situation in the Middle East.

There's a very personal story, which I told in Japan at the Tokyo film festival in October, just after September 11. At a press conference nobody wanted to talk about the Women's Film Festival, they just wanted to talk to me about being from New York since I was the only New Yorker there. And I told the story that after September 11 I had a huge fight with my father about the bombing of Afghanistan and he was all for going in there and just bombing the hell out of it, so we had such a huge fight about it that he hung up on me. Because he was my father I called him the next weekend and all of a sudden I felt like I was talking to a different person. So I said "Daddy, what happened?" I know it's not what I said and he said he'd seen *Beneath the*

*Veil* on CNN and that he had not realized that Afghanistan had already been bombed the hell out of and that it was mostly women and children that were affected. And I have to say that that was an extraordinary moment for me. I like a lot of people I think after 9/11, was questioning the work that they were doing and how important it was. And that gave me a lot of insight and strength into how what we do actually does impact on people's lives.

*Does being a non-profit help you in the marketplace?*

I think it helps us. I think there's many people that don't realize we're a nonprofit because we chose .com as our website. I take the responsibility for it. I did it because when we got our domain name people didn't even know what a .org was; and everybody was talking about .com.

I think that what it does, again because so many of the organizations that we work with are educationally-based, makes them assume, as we are, that we're a resource for educational materials. And it also absolutely allows us to take risks and to pick up those films that we know are not going to actually sustain themselves by their rental fees.

*Tell me about Women Make Movies Production Assistance Program and the reason for its conception.*

That's another part of what we do that is so non-profit based and it has its origins in our training program. When we moved to distribution there was part of our board that felt really strongly that we had to maintain our commitment to women filmmakers in terms of assisting them in a different way than just distributing their completed films.

What we decided to do was rather than focusing on the training classes, actually teaching women how to load a camera, was help them in terms of raising money to get their films made and by offer them technical assistance, meaning assistance with budgets, fundraising, legal issues and contracts. Everything that you don't get in film school. And it's become a very successful program, we've got about 150-200 projects in the program right now. Each year between 10 to 20 projects get completed, sometimes 30, we're always thrilled when films get done.

Also like with distribution, we deal with a very wide variety of filmmakers. Sometimes we work with filmmakers like Kimberly Pierce, who made *Boys Don't Cry* and kind of helped her to get the project going so that it actually gets investment in commercial interests and that, of course, ended up going on to win Academy Awards. Other filmmakers like Judith Helf and with her film *Healthy Baby Girl*, our documentary filmmakers that are not on their way to Hollywood but are committed to social change media and those are films that we work with again for production and sometimes pick up for distribution.

This year at the Sundance Film Festival we were really proud because ten of the films that we've worked with either in our Production Assistance Project or in our Distribution

Program or the filmmakers that we work with screened at Sundance. That was a great accomplishment for us as well.

*And four of them took top prizes?*

Lourdes Portillo's *Senorita Extraviada*, which I mentioned earlier; won the Special Jury Prize. Ellen Kuras, who's a filmmaker we work with through the Production Assistance, won for cinematography for *Personal Velocity*. Kim Roberts, a filmmaker from our Fiscal Sponsorship Program was the editor of *Daughter from Danang*, which also won the Documentary Grand Jury Prize, and Judith Helfand's film *Blue Vinyl* won the Excellence in Cinematography Award in the Documentary. There's another great statistic from Sundance this year, which I've been shouting out because I think it's really important. While I was there I was being interviewed by a reporter from Indiewire and we felt like there were so many films by women so she counted the numbers and it was indeed 25 percent. And we thought, okay, that's why it feels like so much but it still is only 25 percent! However, 50 percent of the awards were won by women, so that's a great statistic.

*What do you think was the reason behind that unprecedented success for women at Sundance from one year to the next?*

It's a good question because the year before there were so few. One of the other things I was quoted as saying I was really happy that not only were there lots of films by women but there also were films about women. The year before there were a number of films by women but they actually weren't about women.

I think, answering this without a huge amount of thought, that the impact of television was really felt at Sundance, in terms of both features and documentaries. Because the films that were won by women were almost all films that were made for either HBO or ITVS, which is very interesting. *Women have Curves* was made for HBO. *Personal Velocity* was made for HBO. *Daughter from Danang* ITVS. *Extraviada* ITVS. I think it's television. If you look at who's in charge of those programs, they're women. If you look at who's selecting films for the documentary section at Sundance, it's women. So it's not at all surprising that, in fact, women are getting someplace.

Sometimes we have to be a little bit concerned about that because I remember one year at the Berlin Film Festival, there were almost no films by women. There's a women's film group in Germany that passed out highlighters (at film festivals you're always looking for a highlighter to mark up your catalog) that said "Have you seen a film by a woman today?" Of course, it brought to your attention that no, you haven't, why not? The reason why was because that year the Berlin Film Festival decided that they wouldn't show any films that were made for television because they had this whole thing about TV versus cinema. And so many of the women were getting their money to make their films from television that they were basically blackballed out of the festival.

But it's something that we have to be concerned with because we can't leave the most

glamorous, the most high profile events and funding to men.

*And, of course, the budgets are also smaller for television.*

There's a fabulous section in Susan Faludi's book "Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women", about the story of Cagney and Lacey and how it was dropped from the air even though it was incredibly successful. It was dropped by a bunch of men, kind of like my notion of a bunch of men sitting around saying, "We just don't like this!" Her supposition is that that's exactly what happened. They just didn't like it and they didn't understand the audience that was there for it. But I think since that time there's been this awakening in TV now that the audience is women. This is something that I think everyone's always known but has never bothered to think about it in that kind of way. Where I think that as more women get into positions of power in television, we're seeing programming that reflects that.

*Tell me about the fiscal sponsorship service.*

That is actually the biggest part of our Production Assistance Program. What we're able to do for these filmmakers is offer them a non-profit, tax-exempt umbrella. This allows them to go to funders and get funding from a) foundations that are not able legally to give money to individuals and need to give it to non-profit organizations, or b) to individuals or corporations that want a tax write-off. In some ways it makes it possible for them to get the money to get their films made.

And at the same time we offer them consultation services and suggestions on where they might go to get funding. It's a lot easier for somebody to get funding when it's being put forth by an organization that has a track record of using grants well from that funder. Unfortunately, we're only able to do it within the U.S. even though we get a lot of request from outside of the U.S., something that we're trying to deal with in the coming years.

*What are your criteria for accepting the projects?*

It's a little different from our distribution service. We do accept projects that are not just about women. The major criteria are whether or not we think that the filmmaker has the capacity to get the film made. That's really important to us, that it's a viable project. Secondarily, that there's a need for this film. I say secondarily because some of the projects are very artistic and are meant more for the art world than they are for the markets that we deal with in distribution.

*How many projects have been completed since its inception?*

We really have to get that number together. I would say it's likely that it's about 150 projects.

*When was it started?*

Between 1988 to 1992 is when we really started focusing on it and it became a program.

*Are the sponsored projects acquired by Women Make Movies for distribution?*

No, they're not, which is interesting. Generally one or two films a year. For example, this past year we have a film called *Between the Lines*, which is about Asian-American women's poetry. Also, *Made in Thailand* was also part of our Fiscal Sponsorship Program, which is one of the films we're showing at American University. *Daring to Resist*, which is a film made about Holocaust survivors. Another one that came out of the program was *Healthy Baby Girl*. And *Escuela* and *La Boda*, the two films by Hannah Weyer.

*Tell me about the workshops you offer and how they differ from other classes offered in the field.*

There're basically the kind of things that you don't get in film school marketing and distribution, insurance, contracts not very sexy stuff. We have a little newsletter that we send out to our filmmaker called *News You Can Use* and that's sort of the theme of the workshops. It's information you can use. We're actually changing them a bit this year and creating more of a clinic, a participatory environment. Where people are going to come in with specific projects and it's an opportunity to meet with resource people or work as a group on their own particular projects.

We always try to work at keeping up with the filmmakers that we're working with. We've been doing the same workshops over and over again for a long time so we're overhauling that part of the organization. We're looking towards doing more work with master classes that will put younger filmmakers in touch with more filmmakers.

We're also about to launch a new website, which we're excited about, and we've just okayed the design and we're going to launch it in October. That's going to have a wonderful new section on our Production Assistance Program so you'll be able to see what films are in production and get a scoop on everybody else as well as have lots of resources for filmmakers.

*Tell me about Women Make Movies 30th anniversary events.*

It's very funny because it truly was my idea and it's one of those things like if you wish for it, it will come true and once it comes true, why did you wish for it?

For our 30th, we decided to do a series of events here in New York, around the United States and around the world that reflect our relationship and our commitment to those three different strands of people that we work with educational institutions, museums and the art world and film festivals, as well as community-based organizations.

It's an incredible list of amazing organizations that we've been working with. Here in New York we've done screenings with a community-based program called Cinema

Tropical, their focus is on Latina filmmakers. We worked with the New York Asian-American film festival and the Jewish Community Center. And outside of New York, around the United States, we've worked with Halfway to Hollywood Film Festival in Kansas City, the Manchester Film Festival in Vermont, as well as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. We're also doing things with two small Latina film festivals, one in Michigan and another in San Francisco.

And then around the world we were in Brazil this summer at the Belo Horizonte Short Film Festival and in Korea at the Seoul Film Festival. In the coming months, we're going to be at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Warsaw; The Substation, Singapore's leading contemporary arts center; we're doing a day of programming at the World Congress on Middle Eastern Studies in Germany; working with NYU Center for Media, Culture and History; and with American University's Center for Social Media. I'm going to South Africa where we're been collaborating with the Jozi Summit Film Festival, which is a huge event happening alongside of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development.

So it's a great worldwide event and an opportunity for our films to be seen in Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America. And next spring we'll be doing something with the first Adelaide Film Festival in Australia. The year ends in April of 2003 at the One World Human Rights Film Festival in Prague. So that's the long list. What are we doing in all of those places? It's as diverse as the list of places. In some we're showing retrospectives, like in Poland is a retrospective of our more artistically significant films. In Johannesburg, we're showing films by women all over the world that deal with issues of globalization. In Germany at the Middle East Congress they're doing a reprise of the films that we offered for our "Response to Hate" campaign. We're doing premiers of new releases like *Senorita Extraviada* and *Escuela*, as well as experimental short film programs in Brazil. So it's a real mixed bag.

*What about your collaboration with Asian and Latina media arts organizations and festivals?*

It's one of those things connected to what's happening in the organization; we're working with a lot of Latino organizations as well as Asian organizations. We were very much involved with the first Seoul Women's Film Festival in Korea, which was founded after the Taiwan Women's Film Festival, which was called Women Make Waves, named after Women Make Movies, which we're really proud of. Both of those festivals represent this incredible young energy around women's filmmaking. They get sold-out audiences to all the films that they show. In fact, in Seoul when I was there I found out that more than 200 young people apply to be volunteers at the festival so they are carefully chosen and it's a badge of honor to work for the Women's Film Festival. In Singapore, The Substation is putting together programs by Asian and Singaporean women filmmakers and we're presenting films from all over the world with a special focus on Asian filmmakers. Then in New York, we did this program with the New York Asian-American Film Festival. It's their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and when they were looking at the films they were planning to show for their retrospective, they realized that so many of them were coming from Women

Make Movies, that we decided to something together. So we're presenting our newest films as well as take part in the retrospective. Which led to the idea of doing something in the Philippines because Angel Shaw, the director of Asian Cine-Vision, is from the Philippines, so that's [tentatively] planned to happen in December.

We have so many wonderful new Latina films. We also have two women on our staff who are originally Spanish-speaking, Marta Sanchez and Xochitl Dorsey. One of the things we're thrilled about is a small arts festival in Holland, Michigan and they're doing a special focus on our newest films, *Escuela*. And *Senorita Extraviada*. One of the reasons we're really excited about that is that about five years ago, we were celebrating our 25th anniversary, there was a state representative from Holland who decided to use Women Make Movies as a way to take down the National Endowment for the Arts. He started this whole nasty, dirty campaign calling Women Make Movies a lesbian pornographer and his home territory is Holland Michigan. We told them about it and they said even more reason to honor you guys.

*Once broadband hits, will the web be better positioned for independent film distribution and what do you see in the future for Women Make Movies?*

My brother happens to be one of the engineers who's working on Broadband technology and I keep on saying you're going to put us out of business. No, really, I can't wait until the day comes when we don't ever have to put another videotape in a brown bag. The idea of us eventually being able to be part of a server where people can download films, I think it's great. On the other hand, I have to say that I'm one of these people that have lived through the home video revolution, the cable revolution, and about to enter the DVD revolution and none of these things actually are a revolution. They're just a change of format. With cable everybody thought, oh, blue skies, there's going to be so many channels and there'd be so much room for independent media and it just doesn't happen. I do think now we're actually reaping some of the benefits of that with satellite broadcast and being able to reach targeted markets.

I think the same thing is true for the Internet. The Internet is by far the most important development for us as a distributor but not in the way that people tend to think of it. It's not because we see it right now at all as a delivery system but because of its ability for us to market to those very targeted, fragmented market. Where we used to have to send out thousands of flyers and maybe reach a tenth of the people we wanted to reach, we can now post to listserves, post through our website, send out e-newsletters, and reach so many more people than we were able to reach than before. And with listserves people are self-selected, so they're people who are gathered together in this electronic media by their interests.

We're launching our new website and we're very proud because we just found out that we're getting more hits by three times than almost any other independent distributor in the country. So people are already coming to our website and when we launch our new one we'll be able to increase that.

*Will you be expanding your website's educational material and links in the future?*

The Internet is an additional area that we expect to grow in the future. We are working with a wonderful man named Joe Bowles, who's at Northern Arizona University and who has developed one of the best sites on women's studies on the Internet. And we're going to be working together and we're going to have not only the best link section for women's films but also have subject area links on everything having to do with the issues our films are involved in.

We're also going to have a discussion board for people who are using our films to talk about how they're using our films, to give programming suggestions. We're going to have curricula and syllabi posted on the web for people to take a look at. We've made a decision to not have clips because we've spoken with the people that we work with most often and found that they're not all that useful to them. But we will have tons of biographical information and reviews and study guides along with the film description. And for the Production Assistance Program, there'll be lots of links and resources for women filmmakers.

One of the other things that the web has done is made us look at our relationship to world outside of the United States. We do primarily distribute in North America. Because we're known all over the world, and the Internet certainly has increased that, we do get requests from all over the world and we do a certain amount of distribution. It's not official yet but it looks like we're going to officially acquire our first title for worldwide distribution. So this is a really big thing in terms of us moving out into the world and starting to self our films to television internationally.

*What about your move towards creating DVD archives?*

DVD is wonderful. We've applied for funding to launch a DVD series of our most important filmmakers. And that will be exciting because of the kind of material that we can put onto the DVD in terms of use in academia, which is where we're really focused.

We're in a situation now with our 30th anniversary where we have a wealth of material here and we're really just trying to tackle the issues of archiving and preservation.

Do you see anyone else doing that kind of archival work for women's films? It's very interesting, we've been having conversations with the Sophia Smith Collection, which is at Smith College and talking with them about actually housing the Women Make Movies archives there and they're doing incredible work. What we would like to do is use our collection to encourage someone, maybe Smith, maybe someone else, to develop a real women's film archive, not just our material, but use ours as a basis for them.

*What will you be doing at the Center for Social Media?*

First let me say that I'm really excited about what's going on at the creation of the Center.

It's such a needed resource as a think tank for the future of documentary. I was thrilled to be part of the Center's conference so I was very pleased when we decided to do something around our 30th anniversary there.

One of the things that I was very interested in, in terms of being an advisory member, was to help the Center be sure to have the rest of the world on its radar because so much of the work that's being done by media arts groups in the U. S. is focused on American filmmakers and their concerns. So I was really glad to put together this program that reflects Women Make Movies international focus. And to be showing a film like *Georgie Girl*, which is an amazing film about (it's the one-line to kill all other one-lines) a Maori former sex worker, now transsexual in New Zealand who becomes the first trans elected member of Parliament and elected by a rural, white constituency. It's one of those films that in a very gentle way gives people such a different idea of what it means to be a transsexual, which is usually seen as this rather dark, dirty, somehow sexual environment. This is really about the amazing work that she's been able to accomplish while being a very outspoken transsexual.

The other amazing films we're going to be showing *Performing the Border* and *Made in Thailand*, are two of the films which are part of our new series which is called *Bringing it All Back Home*, about women labor in the global economy. And they're both films that look at the way that globalization has affected women's lives at a very local level. *Made in Thailand* being about women organizing in Thailand around issues of working in garment factories for American companies, which, of course, exploit their labor. And *Performing the Border* about a Mexican-U.S. bordertown and the environment that's created for women in those particular places. So I'm really pleased that the program is as diverse as it is and covers all those bases.

I do have to say this and this is absolutely for publication, I think that Pat Aufderheide is one of the smartest people I know and I'm so glad that she's able to do this kind of thing at American University. She's been an inspiration and a guiding light for many of us in the media arts field.