

GIVING BACK

through film

BEHIND THE SCENES
WITH BETH JANSON



New York City youths on their way to becoming award-winning film makers.

Beth Janson is a self-proclaimed “film geek.” As the newly appointed Executive Director of the TriBeCa Film Institute, she is also a champion for bringing funding, support and education to up-and-coming film enthusiasts of all ages.

This year alone the TriBeCa Film Institute (TFI) will award over \$1,000,000 in grants to independent filmmakers. In addition, TFI is launching a citywide initiative with the New York City Department of Education, providing 100 New York City public school classrooms with TFI Teaching Artists as a means of integrating media arts into the educational experience. Janson’s philosophy is simple: “Culture should be something that everyone can participate in.” Over the past 10 years, TFI has gone to great lengths to make Janson’s statement a reality.

The TriBeCa Film Institute is a nonprofit arts organization founded by Robert De Niro, Jane Rosenthal, and Craig Hatkoff. In the wake of September 11th, TFI came into fruition to organize the inaugural TriBeCa Film Festival as a means of revitalizing Lower Manhattan. Following the Festival, TFI spun itself off as an independent affiliate focusing on year-round support for individual artists. Now in its 10th year, TFI administers a dozen major programs annually, empowering filmmakers through grants and professional development.

Programs such as TFI’s TriBeCa All Access, awards directors and screenwriters of color and women of any race the following: a project development grant of \$10,000; aid of project realization through one-on-one meetings with industry representatives; career development workshops and exposure to narrative and documentary informational panels. In particular, the support of women filmmakers is very impor-

tant to Janson. As she explains, “Only seven percent of films are currently directed by women. A woman has a better chance of being head of a Forbes 500 company than being a film director. When you think about how accessible the [filmmaking] tools are, that’s an astounding number. It’s something we’re really passionate about changing.”

TFI is equally passionate about their Youth Education Programs, which introduce underserved New York City students to the career options available in the filmmaking industry. In TFI’s TriBeCa Film Fellows program, 20 high school juniors and seniors are selected to explore the realm of cinema and develop their voices through film. Along with the chance to receive a \$1,500 scholarship and access to one-on-one support in preparing college applications, Fellows are exposed to a series of workshops, creative filmmaking exercises, screenings, panels and mentoring by TriBeCa Film Festival (TFF) film directors. In addition, the Fellows collaborate on a short film that captures the essence of all five boroughs through their eyes. Their work serves as the introduction to Our City, My Story, TFI’s annual screening series during TFF that showcases outstanding film and video made by New York City teens.

As Janson concludes, “Our goal isn’t to just celebrate our students, but to make sure we are seeding the next generation of audiences with the ability to appreciate independent media. In a city that creates so much media and inspires so many films, we really want to be a resource that allows independent filmmakers the necessary support to grow and flourish.”

To learn more about TFI, visit tribecafilminstitute.org.

—Stacy Seiler

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Left and center photographs courtesy of TriBeCa Film Institute; right photograph courtesy of TriBeCa Film Festival.