

Merger and Acquisitions

Global Film Initiative Announces Grantees as New Headquarters opens in San Francisco

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In November, the Bay Area film community got an infusion from the east as the Global Film Initiative announced the transfer of its operations from New York to San Francisco.

The organization, which acquires the North American rights for eight to ten films each year, also awards grants for post-production costs and sponsors screenings for children around the United States. All of these movies are written and directed by independent filmmakers from developing countries.

The mission of the Initiative, according to executive director Kristin Wiederholt, is to promote cross-cultural understanding

through what is increasingly become the world's most influential medium after television. Since 1980, major American studios have gobbled up the global theatrical market, making it difficult for many national film industries to compete.

That's caused a vacuum in the area of storytelling, says Wiederholt. In every corner of the planet, people nowadays are consuming a diet of Tom Cruise and Tom Hanks, rather than seeing native actors delivering drama reflective of their own cultures.

Skyrocketing poverty is also curtailing artistic output in many parts of the world.

The idea of funding and touring foreign films originated a decade ago with the Netherlands-based Hubert Bals Fund. In 2002,

ten of its cinematic works were selected for the Cannes Film Festival, a stunning accomplishment in the eyes of industry watchers. The U.S. based Global Film Initiative formed that same year, using money from private donors to expand the concept. Approximately 50 filmmaking grants of up to \$10,000 have been awarded since then, including eight announced last month.

"The money we give them is sort of that crucial bit at the end that lets them go the final mile to get it done," says executive director Kristin Wiederholt.

The newest grantees include directors from Argentina, Uruguay, Turkey, Vietnam, Iran, Albania and Indonesia. While the industry continues to be dominated by men, the Initiative has also recognized the work of women directors whose productions have gone on to receive prizes at film festivals.

Those films acquired for distribution are scheduled onto an annual Global Lens Tour which crisscrosses the United States. The tour passed through the Bay Area in September and October, with screenings at the Balboa Theatre and the San Francisco Art Institute. The De Young Museum hosted several showings for kids.

Explaining that education is a big part of the group's mission, Wiederholt says the Initiative hopes "to get these films to young people so they start to see that there are other things in the



The Night of Truth (2004). "The psychological snarls that result from years of genocidal civil war are impressively dramatized and crafted into a shocking parable in Fanta Regina Nacro's tyro feature," says Robert Koehler of *Variety*. Ms. Nacro, who is from Burkina Faso, won Best Screenplay at the San Sebastian International Film Festival.

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world.”

After the acquired films finish their theatrical run, they’re handed over to First Run Features, a distributor that markets and sells DVD’s.

Wiederholt points to emerging technologies currently pioneered in the Bay Area as the reason her group decided to hang its shingle here.

“We’re looking at different ways of reaching out to people and some of the newest kind of technologies are online video sharing, Web 2.0, that sort of stuff.”

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Stolen Life (2005). An encounter with a delivery boy triggers unexpected events for a young girl in China. Director Li Shaohong received an award for Best Narrative Feature at the Tribeca Film Festival