

Women & Hollywood

News and Commentary About Women and Hollywood from a Feminist Perspective

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Interview with Roberta Marie Munroe-Expert on Short Films

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Roberta Marie Munroe has spent the better part of her career programming shorts at festivals like Toronto and Sundance. She has put all her wisdom together in a book to help people wanting to learn how to make shorts. She answered some questions for Women & Hollywood.

The book entitled [How Not to Make a Short Film: Secrets from a Sundance Programmer](#) will be released Tuesday at Sundance.

Women & Hollywood: How did you become interested in shorts?

Roberta Marie Munroe: I have always been a writer and a visual artist. Back in the early 90's I was offered a job at the Toronto Lesbian & Gay Film Festival. It was there that I saw what someone could do with both words & visuals and I got the movie-making bug! From there I worked at Viacom Canada, The Toronto International Film Festival before moving to New York to work at IFP and NewFest.

W&H: Most people don't get an opportunity to see shorts at their multiplex. How can people interested find shorts?

RMM: It's far easier than you think! Aside from the user-generated sites like YouTube, Revver there are many shorts compilations out there for purchase and for rental. I personally have two shorts on two different DVD compilations, *Dani and Alice* on *She Likes Girls* and *Happy Birthday* on *She Likes Girls 3* which are both available on Netflix and iTunes. As well, the past few years of Academy Award nominated short films have been theatrically released (something we haven't seen for decades in this country) by Magnolia Pictures. This was an amazing event because in 2008 they made an astounding \$500,000 at the box office - more than most independent features!

W&H: What do you look for or not look for when programming a short film festival?

RMM: My guideline has always been, "Has this director realized their vision?". Utilizing that thought process made it far easier to have a broader selection of work to choose from - experimental, animation, narrative, documentary and with various levels of production values so that not only filmmakers who had \$40,000 budgets got in. I've worked at some incredible festivals and learned where and on what to place value when watching submissions.

W&H: Why did you decide to write a book now?

RM: After 5 years programming at Sundance I realized that in order to create my own films I needed to not be in such a high-intensity job. After my last festival I had coffee with filmmaker friends who insisted I write a book. To be honest, I always felt just a little sad when I couldn't just call up a filmmaker whose work I was watching, where I *knew* exactly what they needed to do to make it better - but the conflict of interest, being a Sundance programmer, I couldn't just give advice randomly. Free to do just that running my consulting business for filmmakers, I soon realized there is only one of me and if I took the time to write this book I could help thousands of filmmakers instead of a few hundred. Corny as it may sound, writing this book and knowing it's potential impact on an up and coming filmmaker meant the world to me.

W&H: Any specific advice for female filmmakers?

RMM: My advice to women directors is get out there, watch other successful filmmaker's work so you're working with very necessary knowledge of what's already been made. Often I'll see work by women that touches on the same cliched storylines that men create - they're just generally from a women's perspective which they mistakenly think makes the work different. Trust me - it doesn't. When writing your script think way outside the box - that's what makes a successful filmmaker, female or male. Admittedly, when choosing films to watch I am always drawn to work with female writers and/or directors - there is some brilliant female produced work out there. Join me and get out there and watch it.

Book signing at Sundance:

Time: 1:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Place: Dolly's Book Store

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