When she was in college, Jennifer Baichwal was on the academic track as she studied philosophy and theology. However, she found that academia engaged the intellect only. “I turned to documentary as a more accessible way of exploring the subjects that preoccupied me then (and still do today), and found that film—like all art—has the capacity to move people, not just intellectually, but viscerally and emotionally as well,” says Baichwal.

Ten feature documentaries later, Baichwal confirms, “I knew from the moment I started shooting that I had found my vocation. And I feel incredibly lucky to be able to continue to do this work that I love.”

Baichwal is this year’s winner of the Director’s Spotlight at CIFF. Out of her extensive work, she is best known for her trilogy of documentaries on the environment: “Manufactured Landscapes” (2006), “Watermark” (2013), and the recent “Anthropocene: The Human Epoch” (2018).

Each film is being shown at this year’s Festival, as each film adds to the trilogy. “Manufactured Landscapes,” according to Baichwal, “took you to places you were responsible for but would never normally see, and tried to translate that experiential understanding into the time-based medium of film.”

Then, “Watermark’ deepened that somewhat by exploring a dialectic of scale and detail: trying to understand the enormity of human influence on water, but also following the detailed narratives implicit in this enormity, because these are what give it meaning,” she says.

Lastly, Baichwal comments, “‘Anthropocene: The Human Epoch’ adds the dimension of trying to think in geological time and on a planetary scale.”

The films cover different ways of looking at humans’ impacts on the environment, and they share a common mode of operating.

Baichwal says, “There is a shared philosophy in the three films that tries to shift consciousness by revealing rather than accusing, by creating a space for reflection on our responsibility for global environmental change, rather than … telling people what to think about what they are looking at.” This way of observing without forcing judgement has been very well received.

“I think trying to make these contexts, places, and concepts aesthetically compelling or intriguing is a way of drawing viewers in and inviting them to linger longer, to think in a sustained way about implication,” she says. The non-judgmental and aesthetically pleasing themes are second only to the idea of hope.

“Living and grappling and managing in them every day.” But even though she and her crew are there for days, maybe weeks, the experiences of the people she meets never leave her.

—W. Connor Drake

Jennifer Baichwal is the winner of this year’s Director’s Spotlight award. She is able to find positivity out of struggles. “But even in the most degraded environments, there are so many incursions of dignity, striving, and hope,” she says. “These incursions are what make me hopeful, and make the films an act of hope.”

Who says front row seats aren’t the best place to enjoy a film? These guests can’t wait for “The Show’s the Thing: The Legendary Promoters of Rock” to begin.
A ‘Call for Compassion’ for Recovering Crystal Meth Addicts

A fellow filmmaker childhood friend, an influential high school teacher, and a love for larger-than-life characters on screen made way for Terrence Crawford’s career as a film director. What began as a 20-minute student film evolved into Crawford’s first feature-length documentary, “Crystal City,” about recovery from crystal meth addiction in New York City’s gay community.

Unemployed and looking for work, Crawford and the film’s cinematographer and editor, John Maidman, decided to create an impactful project in their spare time. For Crawford, it was something deeply personal.

“I personally have been in recovery from crystal meth addiction since early 2015 and share much of the same history as my documentary subjects,” says Crawford. “Sobriety and the 12-step model of recovery have dramatically improved my life for the better ever since. However, for years, I was embarrassed to share my experience in recovery with even friends and family. Although the subject matter was all-too-familiar, that was inevitably the most challenging factor of bringing the film to life.

“Because so many of the film’s characters share my own history and experience with drug use, I found it difficult to ask for help from friends, family, and colleagues during production for fear of ‘outing’ myself as a recovering crystal meth addict,” Crawford admits. “My fear of being judged by strangers consistently limited the documentary’s scope, budget, and impact until I finally opened up about my personal history of recovery from addiction.”

Film and television’s typical portrayal of crystal meth addiction fuels a harmful stigma that often keeps honest discussion off limits. These perceptions make it even harder for recovering addicts to open up about their history and experience—even with those closest to them.

“I wanted to make a documentary that reduces this stigma by representing a group of crystal meth addicts as talented, resourceful, intelligent people in recovery capable of long-term sobriety and life improvement,” Crawford says. “My intention is for the general public to relate to these recovering crystal meth addicts, not to pity them as hopeless cases.”

“Crystal City” features voices from all walks of life to give a real-life depiction of the reaches of crystal meth addiction.

“I want CIFF audiences to leave the theater with a fresh perspective on people in recovery,” says Crawford. “Hopefully our audience will relate to these documentary subjects and recognize that the addicts in their own lives are capable of success and redemption.”

—Amy Brown

With so many stories to tell, Filmmaker Terrence Crawford, had to leave some out. One particularly powerful story that didn’t make the final cut, he notes, was of a man shooting up in Greenwich Village on September 11, 2001. He recounts that seeing the plumes of smoke rising from New York City’s ground zero motivated the man toward a decade of sobriety. This account, like so many others, is a unique story of recovery that can inspire addicts and provide hope to those in their support circles.

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Festival Updates

Late Additions:

Thursday April 4th
Mike Wallace Is Here 7:10 pm
Good Girl Gone Bad 8:30 pm

Friday April 5th
Cut Off 3:30 pm
Good Girl Gone Bad 5:30 pm
Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am 8:25 pm

Saturday April 6th
Toni Morrison: The Pieces I Am 9:00 am
Good Girl Gone Bad 4:50 pm
Mike Wallace Is Here 5:10 pm
Before You Know It 6:20 pm
Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile 9:25 pm
Cut Off 9:45 pm

Sunday April 7th
Cut Off 4:20 pm
Extremely Wicked, Shockingly Evil and Vile 6:55 pm
Before You Know It 7:00 pm

Check for the latest festival updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ciff or Facebook at www.facebook.com/ClevelandInternationalFilmFestival. Or visit www.clevelandfilm.org/festival/updates.

Challenge Match

The Challenge Match is the CIFF’s annual fundraising campaign, and the only time of the year that we ask for your support (we do not send out solicitation letters at any time). The challenge to you—our audience—is to raise $150,000, which will be matched by Cuyahoga Arts & Culture.

We are $12,336 closer to reaching our goal of $150,000!

A $10 DONATION QUALIFIES YOU FOR ONE OF THESE FABULOUS PRIZES!!

OUR WINNING SEASON: This is the ultimate sports prize package! We’ve included tickets to Cavaliers, Indians, and Browns games, dinner and a tour at Great Lakes Brewing Company, and packaged meats from Jaworski Meats for tailgating!

Stop by the Challenge Match table in the Tower City Cinemas lobby to donate.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

WELCOME

Official Airline of the 43rd CIFF

The Cleveland International Film Festival receives public support with local tax dollars from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture, to preserve and enrich our region’s artistic and cultural heritage.