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MUSEUM PIECE:

A Different Kind of Documentary Exhibition

Museums have become a key part of the exhibition strategy for nature and science documentaries, with institutions using 3-D, IMAX and HD theaters to lure patrons in for a visit. However, museums also provide a wonderful work opportunity for filmmakers who create the multi-media pieces that are part of large traveling exhibitions.

Filmmaker Maggie Burnette Stogner of Blue Bear Films just produced four short documentaries that are currently being featured within the new, worldwide traveling exhibition *Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology*. The project is a joint partnership between Lucasfilm Ltd., National Geographic, X3 Productions, Penn Museum and Laval University. After its debut at the Montreal Science Centre, it will travel for five to seven years throughout Europe and Asia. Each of Stogner's short films profiles a "real Indiana Jones"—a passionate archaeologist who is working on new discoveries.

A previous producer at National Geographic TV and Film, Stogner loves both the freedom and the collaborative process involved with creating films for museum exhibitions. She is often involved with the actual design of the various galleries that are part of the exhibition because the films she creates must work in conjunction with the other items in the room.

"I think of it as 'immersive filmmaking,' where you try to put the visitor inside the story rather than just watching the story on the screen," Stogner explains. "You try to really involve them and make them feel like they are traveling through a storyline as they walk through the galleries. The films create a time and a place and a mood to really help visitors connect with the artifacts. And then there might be other content material in the room as well—text

panels or photographs—and they are all placed together, so it has to work with that. It's a very different approach."

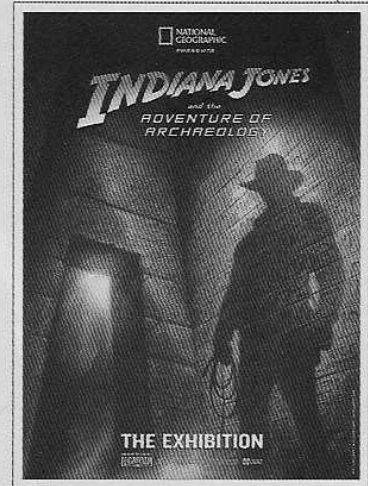
Another key difference between television and film documentaries and films created for exhibitions is the tremendous amount of information that needs to be conveyed in a brief amount of time. Stogner says that the rule of thumb is that museum visitors will stand and watch a maximum of 3.5 minutes of video, so she tries to keep her films' running times to that length. But it can be a huge challenge, such as with the exhibit *Tutankhamun: The Golden King and the Great Pharaohs*, which covered approximately 2,000 years of ancient Egypt.

"I call it the 'haiku of filmmaking,'" says Stogner. "It really involves some very creative thinking to get to a point where you can distill the big picture into that short of a time frame. And it's not just about the information; it's almost more about the emotional, visceral connection you are trying to make with the visitor to really transport them back in time and place."

Each piece is also a visual haiku, in which every shot has impact. There's no sloppy shooting or editing. For Stogner, it's an exciting challenge. "Because they are short, there's no room for anything extraneous. It all has to count; it all has to come together and create that mood and that connection very quickly in a big way. I feel like it's part commercial—if you look at the beauty of a 30-second or one-minute spot and how it's storyboarded out and how every shot counts, and you combine that with the fascination of nonfiction documentary and the opportunity to bring history alive, that's really what this is about."

One thing that is decidedly different from the commercial world is the budget for museum work. While earlier exhibitions such as *Real Pirates: The Untold Story of the Whydah from Slave Ship to Pirate Ship* had larger amounts allotted for production of new recreations and integrated media throughout the exhibition, the recession has contributed to lower budgets all around.

"In this economy, things have scaled back a little bit, so I'm working much more with archival and stock footage," says Stogner. "Fortunately, I've been in this business a long time, so I know people around the world and I've been able to dig really deep and



Poster for the Montreal Science Centre exhibition *Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology*. Courtesy of Blue Bear Films



Filmmaker Maggie Burnette Stogner filming ancient artifacts in Panama for the *Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology* exhibition. Courtesy of Maggie Burnette Stogner



Filmmaker Maggie Stogner interviews Mayan hieroglyph expert Simon Martin at the University of Pennsylvania Museum for one of the archaeology videos in the Montreal Science Centre exhibition *Indiana Jones and the Adventure of Archaeology*. Courtesy of Helena Swedberg

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come up with some fabulous different kinds of footage to bring things alive. And then I add some impressionistic footage that I shoot myself, just different techniques, to create that mood. There's certainly less budget today, but I always feel like when you're hamstrung with things like budget or equipment, it forces you to become more creative—you have to really think hard about how you're going to make things work on this shoestring."

The recession has not stopped visitors from attending exhibitions, and that's another exciting aspect of this type of work. Most of these are big traveling shows that are seen around the world for seven to ten years. For example, by the time *Tutankhamun and the Golden Age of the Pharaohs* is done, it is estimated that it will have had at about 10 million visitors. "Those are big numbers, especially in our fragmented TV documentary world now," says Stogner. "I like the fact that my work is out there and lasting for a number of years." □

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