



Cardozo School of Law Center for Visual Advocacy

NOVEMBER 2021 NEWSLETTER



The Filmmakers Legal Clinic at the CVA

A new generation of filmmakers and video journalists are telling the stories that represent the diversity of our country--in terms of background, experience, viewpoints, and stories. As technologies have improved and the costs of both shooting and editing a film have gone down, the industry has opened to many stories have largely gone untold.

But, at the Filmmakers Legal Clinic (FLC), we know that the legal hurdles these stories been seen have increased.

Legal questions surrounding contracts, copyrights, corporate formation and governance, financing, licensing and releases require a broad range of legal knowledge. These projects also often raise significant first amendment issues in addition to questions of transactional and intellectual property law.

We do not want these important stories to get lost in the quagmire of legal questions. Therefore, we aim to bring down the legal costs of filmmaking so that the door can be thrown wide open for stories of all types to make their way to the screen.

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In furtherance of our mission, the FLC served **23** clients in the Spring 2021 semester and **8** clients over the summer, bringing the total number of clients served during the 2020-2021 academic year to **nearly 50**, and bringing the total number of filmmakers represented by the FLC to **over 250**.



We are deeply engaged in our work in the Fall 2020 semester with students in both the Clinic and the Advanced Clinic working on a broad group of projects. Projects the Clinic is currently working on include a focus on the cost of insulin and resulting harm to many diabetic Americans, the airbrushing industry and its impact on perceptions of beauty, the immigrant experience and the long-forgotten contributions of women to the space industry.

HIGHLIGHTS: SPRING 2021 CLINIC EVENTS



POP-UP LEGAL CLINIC

The FLC ran a number of pop-up legal clinics with our partner organizations, including Big Sky Documentary Film Festival and Ghetto Film School. With this format, clinic students were able to provide tailored legal advice quickly to more than twenty filmmakers working on films that aligned with the FLC’s mission.

FLC X BLACK TV AND FILM COLLECTIVE: LEGAL EMPOWERMENT SERIES

The FLC and the Black TV and Film Collective (BTFC) continued our fruitful partnership, hosting a three-part legal empowerment series throughout the semester. For the first installment, the clinic presented on best practices for dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and the legal and business structures required to safely return to work. The second installment was a deep dive on the fair use doctrine of copyright law. The third installment was an overview of contracts and online distribution channels.

FLC X NYU PRODUCTION LABS: LUNCH AND LEARN

FLC has continued our work with NYU Production Labs FLC provided monthly legal trainings to members of NYU Production Labs, with topics including music licensing, filming protests and issues in intellectual property.



MIRANDA FAMILY FELLOWS PRESENTATION

FLC provided in-depth guidance on “how to read your contract” to a group of the Miranda Family Fellows. The lecture was tailored to address talent and other contracts for actors, managers, and agents—as the Fellows are moving forward in their own careers and becoming more versed in the process of reviewing and signing these contracts.

HIGHLIGHTS: SPRING 2021 FILM PROJECTS



JUSTUS

JustUs follows its subjects as they experience life while being incarcerated and life after incarceration. The film grapples with how formerly incarcerated persons can connect with one another and serve as mentors to each other, in a community that is often isolated.

QUESTIONMARK BUTTERFLY

Questionmark Butterfly is a docuseries of five videos that cover taboo topics of generally held “truths” in society. The conversations include race, politics, sex, and relationships; and a deeper look and highlighting of additional perspectives show that the truth is not always what one believed it to be.

HERE

HERE is a poignant short that follows Meskerem, an eleven-year-old Black girl preparing for her first day of middle school. She immediately encounters racism as her teacher suggests she use a nickname. The film emphasizes the importance of identity, representation, and knowing your worth.



THE LESSER EVIL

The Lesser Evil is a careful look at the homeless population as pet-owners. While showing the challenges involved, the film highlights the positive aspects of pet-ownership, responsibility, and love.

HIGHLIGHTS: CLIENT ACHIEVEMENTS



ACCOLADES & AWARDS

Malpelo was selected by Film Independent for their Fast Track Finance Market 2019, Screenwriting Lab and Directing Lab 2020.

Diego Nájera (*Chalino*) was elected for the Sundance Institute's 2020 Creative Producing Labs.

Here (Bethel Dixon) was awarded the Wavelength/Black TV & Film Collective Black Producers Fellowship.

Victoria's Foil won the Gold Award at the 2020 Spotlight Documentary Film Awards and was the winner in the online/digital feature videography category at the 2020 SPJ Mark of Excellence Region 1 Awards.

7 Pennies was an official selection of the BronzeLens Film Festival for the Oscar-Qualifying Short Film Award (2020).

Egghead & Twinkie won the Grand Prize at Women Making A Scene (WOMAS) International Film Project (2019).

GRANTS AND FUNDING

Maya Ben-Shahar (JustUs) received Northwestern's Greenlight Grant.

Malpelo was supported by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Neon Tilapia is supported by Cine Qua Non Lab and Sundance Screenwriting & Creative Producing Labs and also received the Tribeca Film Institute Sloan Production Grant and the NYU Alfred P. Sloan Development Grant.

Florence from Ohio became the first independent film to receive equity funding from One in a Billion Productions, Inc.

FILM FESTIVALS

The Last Blockbuster premiered at the 2020 BendFilm Festival.

Manzanar, Diverted: When Water Becomes Dust is a 2021 Official Selection at: One Earth Film Festival, DOXA Documentary Film Festival, Washington D.C. International Film Festival, Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, & others.

Esther in Wonderland premiered at the 2021 Tribeca Film Festival (Shorts).

Invisible won the Audience Award at NewFest 2021 and was accepted to the 2022 Palm Springs International Film Festival.



Film Profile: *The Last Blockbuster*

The Last Blockbuster premiered on Netflix on March 15, 2021. The fun, quirky documentary tells the history of the company Blockbuster from its founding in Dallas, Texas in 1985 to its current, diminished state—with one franchised store remaining open in Bend, Oregon.

Through relatable and comical narration along with creative uses of archival news reporting and interviews, the film ties the turbulent history of Blockbuster to the history of the American economy over the past few decades. The economy has seen the rise of corporate raiders, then their acceptance as activist investors. The economy has seen debt crises. The economy has seen booms and busts and races to franchise and races to sell. Blockbuster has similarly weathered all of this, and the lone store in Bend, Oregon is trying desperately to survive—both as a video rental store and as a relic, and a poignant reminder, of the past.

In particular, *The Last Blockbuster* follows Sandi Harding, the Bend store's general manager, showing her dedication to the store and its community, even with the anachronistic aspects of her job. The film also uses interviews with the actor and *Clerks* director Kevin Smith, the actor Adam Brody, and other interesting, memorable characters who give the film a unique spirit.



CENTER FOR VISUAL ADVOCACY

LEADERSHIP & SPONSORS

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Clinical Fellow at the Filmmakers Legal Clinic

The Filmmakers Legal Clinic has benefited from the support of its partners, including the **Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund**, whose support has led to the exponential growth of the clinic, and **The Legal Clinic Fund**, a collaborative fund to support the growth and sustainability of legal clinics across the United States that seek to advance and defend first amendment rights, media freedom, and transparency in their communities and nationally. The Fund is generously supported by **The Abrams Foundation**, **Democracy Fund**, **Heising-Simons Foundation**, and **The Klarman Family Foundation**. **The Miami Foundation** serves as fiscal sponsor for the Fund. The clinic is also supported by the **Miranda Family Fund**, the focus of which includes creating opportunities for artists of color, promoting diverse representation in all levels of government, increasing and protecting reproductive rights, and building resilient systems in Puerto Rico. The clinic also appreciates the support of alumni and friends as it moves forward.

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