

# Niche is nice after shoestring struggle

Herne Bay filmmaker Mandrika Rupa has tapped into an international niche market after years of struggling to make short films on shoestring budgets.

Ms Rupa's work is being snapped up by prestigious United States universities and New York's Museum of Modern Art.

The breakthrough came last year when she was invited to Berkeley University, California, as a visiting scholar to audit courses in filmmaking and study film theory and worldwide film trends.

Ms Rupa didn't take any of her work to Berkeley because she thought she'd be learning from the people there. But that approach backfired until she had her films urgently sent over.

"When I got there they wanted to see my films and four departments set up presentation screenings for me," she says.

When they arrived, the screenings created a flurry of interest. Each department bought copies of her films for their libraries and orders soon started coming in from other universities.

Ms Rupa is thrilled at the international acceptance of her work after years of struggling to find money for her films. "It's exciting for me to know the work is in an academic environment, that people are able to use it in their course work."

She also went to New York to present her films at a festival and made valuable contacts.

"A film curator saw them and gave me a contact at the Museum of Modern Art. I've now got a network of friends in New York who are really supportive. It's nice feeling so validated because I'm isolated here [in New Zealand]."

Ms Rupa specialises in portraying images of Indian people without stereotyping them and her work fits in to many different academic disciplines such as women's, ethnic and Asia/Pacific studies. She says her three films — *Poonam*, *Laxmi* and *Naya Zamana* — are popular overseas because they are filmed from an insider's perspective, rather than categorising Indian people in an anthropological gaze.



**THE REEL THING:** Years of hard graft have paid off for Herne Bay filmmaker Mandrika Rupa.

Ms Rupa researched for her next film while at Berkeley and later this month she returns to the United States.

First, she will attend a film seminar in New York city and then she travels to Washington DC to look for archival footage in the US Library of Congress. She plans to use footage in a piece on caste that looks at the dynamics behind Indian emigration, why people left their homeland to travel to unfamiliar countries.

"I want to examine why my great grandparents left India and the pressures that made them come to a new country," she says. "I want to explore the old prejudices and the new prejudices and why we have chosen these new prejudices over the old oppression."