

# JANET MOCK FINDS POWER IN THE NARRATIVE

*Director, writer and producer for “Pose” says what’s important is revealing the stark reality of the show’s characters*



Director, writer and producer Janet Mock speaks at The Wall Street Journal’s Future of Everything Festival. PHOTO: ADAM SCHULTZ/PRODUCTIONMANAGER FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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## READING TIME

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**J**anet Mock doesn’t see herself as an activist. The director, writer and producer for FX Networks’ television show “Pose,” which follows the lives of trans women of color within the late ’80s and early ’90s LGBTQ house-ballroom community of New York City, says, “I am a storyteller; I am a writer.”

It is easy to understand why others may assume Ms. Mock is an activist. Over the span of her career, she has been a trailblazer in many ways: as an editor at People magazine, the author of two memoirs, and now, as the first trans woman of color to write and direct an episode of

television through “Pose.” When interviewed at The Wall Street Journal’s Future of Everything Festival Wednesday, Ms. Mock emphasized that what’s important is being able to show the “stark reality” and nuanced lives of the show’s characters. Rather than being an activist, she finds power in moving people through narrative.

Over the past few years, how to do this right has been contested. When Eddie Redmayne starred in “The Danish Girl” as Lili Elbe, one of the first known recipients of sex-reassignment surgery, the film’s casting was criticized for not choosing a trans woman to play the role. Ms. Mock and the “Pose” cast and team approach the situation with an awareness of the realities of the communities they portray.

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“If it was more equal on both ends, I would be completely for it,” Ms. Mock explained. “In our show, we always cast it authentically.” She elaborated that in our current cultural climate, LGBTQ actors are underrepresented and rarely have an opportunity to work in film and television in any role, not just ones that directly reflect their identities. “For us, our ethos is ‘we’re going to let the people who’ve lived it tell it.’”

This distinct care follows Ms. Mock in the writers’ room. Common tropes in narratives that include transgender people typically focus on difficulty and trauma. But Ms. Mock is clear on who her

show’s audience is. Transgender people already know what trauma looks and feels like, she explained. “We don’t need a scene of her getting beat up on the street...we don’t need to show the attack. We always tend to pull back just a little bit.”

“[What] we don’t ever pull back on is people making mistakes, because we don’t want to paint them as saints,” said Ms. Mock.

When she works with the actors in “Pose,” she tells them, “You already have it in you.” Though Ms. Mock may write and direct for the show, she said that “actors aren’t robots” and instead engages them in the role, eschewing the sort of prescription that has historically been harmful to marginalized communities in the past and allowing the actors the space to consider how they would act the scenes out.

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“We always ask ourselves, ‘who are we making this for?’” said Ms. Mock.

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