

NewFilmmakers Los Angeles Showcases Latinx and Hispanic Talent on The Academy's Turf

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Courtesy of NMFLA

NewFilmmakers Los Angeles' InFocus: Latinex & Hispanic Cinema event

Members of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers, SAG-AFTRA, the Hollywood Foreign Press Association and more celebrated upcoming directors at NewFilmmakers Los Angeles' InFocus: Latinex & Hispanic Cinema event.

Hours after [Alfonso Cuarón](#) accepted the Venice Film Festival's top prize Saturday for his film *Roma*, the next generation of Latinx and Hispanic filmmakers was feted in Beverly Hills at The Academy's Samuel Goldwyn Theatre.

Each month, the 11-year-old festival NewFilmmakers Los Angeles hosts a day of themed screenings, panels, and networking. For the past six years, early fall has been set aside for InFocus: Latinx & Hispanic Cinema, as National Hispanic Heritage Month officially kicks off September 15.

Those on the 900-person guest list — including CBS Entertainment's senior vice president of comedy development, Edith Mendoza; the DGA's executive in charge of diversity, Frank Gonzalez; and Catherine Hardwicke, who helmed Columbia Pictures' January 2019 remake of *Miss Bala*, starring Gina Rodriguez — were treated to a trio of shorts programs.

Festival programming director Bojana Sandic said she winnowed down approximately 170 short and feature submissions to arrive at her chosen 15 selections, comprised of narrative, documentary, and animated work.

The young directors in the spotlight hailed from 10 different countries (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Peru, Spain, the United States, and Cuarón's native Mexico), and 12 film schools sent delegations to pepper them with questions. An all-access pass cost just \$15, and the crowd of mostly 20-and-30-somethings enjoyed an open bar and snacks from Trejos Tacos between programs. Thirty-plus sponsors also loaned their support this weekend, including the National Association of Latino Independent Producers, SAG-AFTRA, HBO, CAA, Sony Pictures, and the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

"We're thrilled to partner with NewFilmmakers L.A. for a third year," Bettina Fisher, Director of Educational Initiatives at The Academy, wrote to *THR* in an email. "Both organizations champion filmmakers and connect people through film so it makes sense we work together."

In a first, The Academy will co-host the festival's Middle Eastern and Dutch Cinema offerings this December, at its other venue, The Mary Pickford Center's Linwood Dunn Theater. Outside these months, NewFilmmakers festivities take place in Downtown Los Angeles, at the South Park Center, and the Best of NFMLA Awards are presented each spring, culling from its annual slate of about 150 films.

At destination festivals such as Sundance and Cannes, NewFilmmakers executive director and co-founder Larry Laboe said, "There's so much going on like panels and tributes and galas and workshops and mixers, that a lot of the times these smaller films — which are amazing — get overlooked."

Among InFocus: Latinx & Hispanic Cinema's three world premieres was *Mrs. Genovese* (*Sra. Genovese*), writer-director Daniela Arguello's second film in a row to be acquired by HBO. Her tale follows an Italian woman whose retirement home escape is instigated by an infomercial.

Programmers in attendance saved additional excitement for *The Contract*, Pablo Gómez-Castro's film about a couple that attempts to subvert Spain's anti-surrogacy statute for same-sex partners by enlisting a Russian gestational carrier; and *Maxima: This Land of Mine*, Mariel Sosa's story about an endangered farm in the Peruvian Andes, described as "a beautiful, simple, direct, compelling documentary," by Hebe Tabachnik, world cinema programmer for the Palm Spring International Film Festival.

The Samuel Goldwyn Theatre is where the Oscar nominations are announced. As critic and journalist Carlos Aguilar, who served as a moderator, put it, "We rarely see Latinos be nominated for Oscars or getting attention from The Academy, but you bring these young filmmakers and they see Latino stories at The Academy's theater — that's kind of a big deal, to see that people that look like them are being presented on a screen of this size, with the Oscar statues around them, in this very iconic building."



JENNA MAROTTA

✉ THRnews@thr.com

🐦 @thr

