

CULTURE

Emerging Latinx and Hispanic Filmmakers on "Fighting the Good Fight" in Short Films

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Courtesy of Newfilmmakers L.A.

From left: Fany de la Chica, Anna Victoria Salinas, Christina Santa Cruz, Astrid Dominguez and Bosco da Costa.

"The act of making a film about these topics is part of that fight," said NFMLA programming director Bojana Sandic of the film's recurring themes.

From a 10-minute horror short about a mythological beast from Yucatan to a mini-documentary showing a group of women's efforts to keep roaming migrants fed and healthy, the fifteen short films at the NewFilmmaker's 2019 InFocus: Latinx and Hispanic Cinema had two themes in common: hope and fighting.

"Those were definitely themes that have become more and more salient in a lot of films that we're seeing come through," said Sandic. "They all felt like they were in conversation with each other."

Saturday's festival, which the Academy of Motion Pictures and Sciences has sponsored since 2017, screened emerging filmmakers' short films at the Linwood Dunn Theater in Hollywood. In addition to providing the selected artists with a platform to share their projects with a wider audience, the film festival also allowed the celebrated filmmakers to mingle with industry professionals.

Among the industry names celebrating the emerging artists are Film LA, Warner Bros. Pictures, HFPA, Fox Searchlight Pictures, HBO, Focus Features, UTA, CAA and more.

HFPA's Rocio Ayuso told *The Hollywood Reporter* that support from current industry members is imperative to nurture the new generations of filmmakers. She noted that supporting rising artists also means diversifying the content that hits the big screens.

"You see the big blockbusters and big titles but you're always looking for something new: someone else, something that you haven't seen on the screen and that's what you find with not only NFMLA but all these other organizations that are really helping to shape the future of our media," she said.



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The festival kicked off with a round of programming focused on women of different countries, ages, occupations and hardships.

Director Astrid Dominguez's *We Vanish* sees a string of murders of women in Mexico (a.k.a. femicides) through the eyes of a desperate mother hoping to learn more about her daughter's brutal murder. Dominguez detailed the process of writing and shooting the film during a Q&A with the other directors moderated by LAFCA's Claudia Puig.

To speak with the three women whose stories inspired the short film, Dominguez said she had to undergo some unorthodox steps to meet with them.

"They're all under death threats," said Dominguez, a former commercial director. "They dressed me like I was a lawyer so I could get in...they changed locations four or five times for me to meet with them."

Though other filmmakers' obstacles weren't as extreme, many who showcased their shorts said that getting proper funding was a major challenge in bringing their work to fruition. To have enough money for their films, some resorted to their significant others' wallets and another turned loved ones into crew members.

But what the filmmakers lacked in funding, industry partners can make up for in grants, representation, distribution and connections. Film LA President Paul Audley told *THR* that providing the upcoming artists with such resources can positively affect Los Angeles' industry-driven economy.

The night continued with two more programs featuring more shorts including comedies about a wait-your-turn purgatory and a failing alternative science institute. Shorts from the remaining programs also featured more serious topics such as immigration and gun reform.

"Most of this program can just be a shorts program entitled 'Fighting the Good Fight,' "said Sandic. "But even the act of making a film about each of these topics is part of that fight."



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