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Undocumented filmmakers present their work this May 14 at the film festival

The group hopes to showcase their talent in film both in front of and behind the camera.



Lidieth Arévalo is an undocumented filmmaker from Los Angeles. (Supplied)

PHOTO: LIDIETH ARÉVALO / COURTESY

By: **Jacqueline Garcia** | Updated May 11, 2022, 19:33 pm EDT

The undocumented filmmaking community celebrates that this May 14 they will be presenting a series of documentaries and films at the NewFilmmakers Los Angeles (NFMLA) monthly film festival.

InFocus: Immigrant Stories is a compilation of short stories about the immigrant experience by a diverse group of storytellers.

The group belongs to the **Undocumented Filmmakers Collective (UFC)** where they not only highlight the work of undocumented immigrants in front of cameras, but also behind them.

UFC addresses the systemic inequities faced by undocumented immigrants in the field of filmmaking, as creators, artists, and primary audiences.

One of the documentary filmmakers and leaders of the UFC is Lidieth Arévalo, a beneficiary of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), who will be presenting her short film "Mojosito and Me", which is the story of Arévalo and his car, which he has had for over 17 years.

"My mom got it a month after I arrived from El Salvador in 2005," Arévalo said. "The car has not only been the one that has taken me in more than 15 [relocations], it has also seen me grow, celebrate my graduations, cry when I am stressed and much more."

Arévalo said that his documentary, like other films that will be shown, are stories that go beyond just talking about immigration status.

"These are very complex and different stories in each filmmaker's experience. Someone who sees my story is going to see that the issue is not only immigration, but also my life experience like any other human being," said Arévalo.



Lidieth Arévalo made the short film "Mojosito and Me". (Lidieth Arevalo)

Arévalo said that the UFC collective has around 55 undocumented members of different ethnicities —with and without DACA—from all over the country. He indicated that the goal is to create a space for other filmmakers with shared experiences.

"As an immigrant in any profession and as a first generation you will always find yourself navigating those spaces where there is uncertainty, where you are not 100% sure where you are going, what you have to do and it is very difficult to reach the film industry without connections or being recognized. Arevalo said.

She said that through the UFC group everyone shares the talent and experiences they have either as documentarians, specialists in fictional narratives, audio, among others.

"This is how we are building a network to support each other," he said.

Another of the founders of the group and who has experienced this support from the filmmaker group is Dorian Gómez Pestaña, a DACA beneficiary in the state of North Carolina, who is a born filmmaker.



Dorian Gómez Pestaña is an undocumented filmmaker. (Supplied)

Pestaña, 23, came from his native Mexico with his family to North Carolina 16 years ago and despite the fact that this is the place they call home, he also recognized that there are not as many opportunities in higher and/or professional education. She graduated as a professional translator but her passion has always been cinema, mainly in the audio area.

In 2018, he met a Rahi Hasan, another undocumented person with DACA from the Center for Documentary Studies and with a professional degree in film.

"She connected me with Set Hernández, who is another Filipino filmmaker from Los Angeles, and from there a group was created between five people from different parts of the country," Pestaña said. "Between all of us we began to connect with more filmmakers with the experience of being undocumented."

The young woman, who has experience in audio, said that she likes to see the way undocumented immigrants have organized in California since in her state there is not so much support.

"It is very common to see that one does not even know where the Hispanic communities are because we are so separated and the same circumstances do not allow us to have as much knowledge of what organizations there are," said Pestaña. "But when I get here I feel welcome and privileged to have been able to connect with so many people."

Other films on the UFC schedule include: Rahi Hasan's "35," Set Hernández Rongkilyo's "COVER/AGE," Frisly Soberanis' "I Know What Pandemic Means," Karolina Esqueda's "Oda a Los Frijoles," "What The Pier Gave Us" by Luna X. Moya, "Ziola" by Marcos Nieves and "Thank You, Come Again" by Nirav Bhakta.

NFMLA is a non-profit organization designed to showcase innovative work by emerging filmmakers from around the world, providing the Los Angeles community of entertainment professionals and moviegoers with a steady increase in monthly screening events.

InFocus: Immigrant Stories will be presented on Saturday, May 14 at the South Park Center located at 1139 S. Hill Street, Los Angeles 90015.