

Twelve delegates set for NFMLA InFocus: Canadian Cinema

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2 hours ago

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Gavin Seal, who is among the Canadian cohort, says he plans to pitch two projects at the NewFilmmakers Los Angeles program.

The NewFilmmakers Los Angeles (NFMLA) annual InFocus: Canadian Cinema program is welcoming a new cohort of independent Canadian filmmakers to the Hollywood market.

This year, 12 Canadian delegates will participate in the program, including Gavin Seal, the 2022 Writers Guild of Canada prize winner at SODEC's Cours écrire ton court competition.

The South Asian, Montreal-based filmmaker will bring three of his projects to L.A., including a screening of his short film *Followers* (pictured), which premiered at the Fantasia International Film Festival and is currently airing on CBC.

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Directed, written and coproduced by Seal, the comedy-horror follows a demon who teaches life lessons to a social media addict. Howard Wan also coproduced the short, which had a micro-budget of about \$5,000.

As part of the delegation, he will also pitch his other two projects, which are currently in development with Montreal-based prodco Loaded Pictures, including his script *Do Not Resuscitate*. The dramatic short film, which won the Writers Guild of Canada prize, follows two brothers in the midst of a mental health crisis struggling with the burden of care. It has a budget of about \$130,000.

Seal tells *Playback Daily* that he has submitted the script for a Canada Council for the Arts grant, and Quebec's Minister of Culture and Communications CALQ grant, through its Vivacité program for artists of colour. "We will also be submitting it to SODEC [Société de développement des entreprises culturelles] when the production stream opens in September."

Seal is now in development on his first feature film, *Laughing with God*, which follows a comedian who is struggling with his sobriety and is reunited with his estranged brother when a mental health crisis brings them together. Written and directed by Seal, the budget for the drama is \$1.3 million.

“I have submitted this project for development funding to SODEC’s Emerging Creator program, as well as CALQ’s Vivacité program for artists of colour,” says Seal.

NFMLA’s six-year-old InFocus: Canadian cinema program, presented in partnership with the Consulate General of Canada in Los Angeles, Québec Government Office in Los Angeles and Telefilm Canada, allows filmmakers to meet with prodcos interested in coproducing with Canada, and screen their projects at the event.

The non-profit organization holds a mini film festival every month to support independent filmmakers, develop their talent and provide the necessary resources. Each month has its own theme, with July being Canadian cinema month.

“The big difference in our model is that instead of having a once-a-year festival, we have a mini once-a-month festival just because the market is always here. We always have industry that we can tap into,” explains NFMLA’s executive director, Larry Laboe, to *Playback*.

NFMLA meets with the chosen filmmakers two months prior to the festival to figure out the executives, sales agents, producers, and creatives who will be beneficial for them to meet. Based on the feedback from the filmmakers, NFMLA curates the group of industry leaders they can have meetings with a few days leading up to the festival.

Seal hopes to find a coproducer, licensor or distributor with a history of supporting stories on South Asian families and mental health issues for his two projects.

“Both of these stories are inspired by true events told at different scales. While both films are portraits of brotherhood and mental health, the feature film will allow me to dig deeper into these illnesses and intergenerational traumas uniquely through a South Asian lens,” he says.

Other Canadian NFMLA delegates include Montreal-based directors Joffre Faria Silva (*Being Brave*), Jorge Camarotti (*Ousmane*), Marilyn Cooke (*No Ghost in the Morgue*), Christine Rodriguez (*Fuego*), and Romain Dumont (*See You Garbage!*); and Toronto-based filmmakers Myles Yaksich (*Albatross*) and Daniel Abramovici (*Play It Again*).

Vancouver-based directors Brianne Nord-Stewart (*Shit Sponge*), Polly Pierce (*Slump*), Max Pearce (*Apotheosis*) and Cree/Ojibway from Peguis First Nation filmmaker Erica Daniels (*Gift to Give*) are also part of the program.

Image courtesy of Gavin Seal.

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