

## SEEFest Champions Romanian Cinema in the U.S.

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**Abstract:** South East European Film Festival in Los Angeles, SEEFest, now in its 15<sup>th</sup> year, has been a major proponent of Romanian cinema and indeed the cinema of the Balkan countries and their neighbors all the way to the Caucasus and the Black Sea. Over the years it presented movies with a capacity to enrich our understanding of issues that run deeply beneath divides separating peoples, ethnic groups, religions and cultures. As the only film festival of this kind in California as well as in the U.S., SEEFest pioneered a regional perspective on South East Europe with programming that offers multiple perspectives on the problems that plague not only the Balkans, but our fragmented world as a whole. Among innovative, unique films championed by SEEFest those coming from Romania have been the focal point of the festival. The rise of the Romanian New Wave provided a rich texture for SEEFest's examination of the region, of its history and cultural traditions. With scores of Romanian films shown at the festival since its inception and presented at other forums, SEEFest has carved a singular place for the specific style of Romanian cinematic storytelling, and offered a broad platform for Romanian filmmakers to have their films seen by American audiences. Romania, more than any other SEE (South-East European) country, has been the world-class powerhouse of international cinema for the last 20 years. Auteurs like Cristian Mungiu, Radu Jude, Razvan Radulescu, Cristian Nemescu, Corneliu Porumboiu, Calin Peter Netzer, and Anca Damian have been consistently and steadily championed by SEEFest. Alongside prominent auteurs many documentary and short films populated festival programs, bringing to light different features of Romania from its village life to old religious customs, from Cold War memories to contemporary romance on the boulevards of Bucharest.

The programming focus of SEEFest is on the region as a whole, and for a good reason. When diverse cultures and traditions of the Balkans and Caucasus are shown together in a well-balanced program, their story emerges as an epic one, multi-layered and rich, fraught with remarkable and sometimes suicidal passion, and endowed with an amazing pool of artistic talent. This presentation will highlight the ways in which SEEFest presented, promoted and championed the new generation of Romanian filmmakers, and the Romanian cinematic stories they create.

**Keywords:** SEEFest, Romanian cinema, Romanian New Wave, South East Europe,



*Vera Mijoljić founded in 2006 the South East European Film Festival in Los Angeles (SEEFest), curated major film retrospectives for the UCLA Film Archive and Austin Film Society, and initiated a national tour of landmark short films with the Los Angeles FilmForum, Pacific Film Archive, Harvard Film Archive, and National Gallery of Art. She has received multiple recognitions from the U.S. Representative for California's 28th congressional district, California State Assembly, County and City of Los Angeles, City of Beverly Hills, and in 2018 Women in Leadership Award from the City of West Hollywood. She guest-lectures at universities, works as a creative adviser and mentor to independent filmmakers, and has a distinguished record in humanitarian work.*

*In Los Angeles since 1992, Vera worked in advertising, produced and directed numerous festival trailers, TV commercials, Los Angeles film premieres and award season screenings, as well as produced and moderated filmmaker panels including more than ten film business conferences, guided project development programs, and organized workshops for local and visiting filmmakers. She co-founded and ran for five years an invitation-only film business breakfast series and has on-going partnerships with a wide roster of entertainment organizations, festivals, cultural and academic institutions in the U.S. and overseas. She began as a cultural reporter and film critic in Sarajevo, and holds a degree in journalism from the University of Belgrade.*