

NEWS RELEASE

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National Film Board of Canada brings a wealth of BC stories to VIFF 2019

*Local perspectives lead the way
as nine NFB films and a new augmented reality work debut*



September 4, 2019 – Vancouver – National Film Board of Canada

Powerful stories from across British Columbia and beyond are featured in a selection of 10 new works at the 2019 [Vancouver International Film Festival](#), September 26 to October 11.

As a new liquefied natural gas plant in Kitimat promises to bring increasing tanker traffic, VIFF is presenting the North American premiere of Mirjam Leuze's [The Whale and the Raven](#) (Busse & Halberschmidt/Cedar Island Films/NFB/ZDF/ARTE/TOPOS Film/Vizion), illuminating the issues that have drawn whale researchers, the Gitga'at First Nation and the BC government into conflict.

Making its Vancouver premiere in VIFF Immersed is [East of the Rockies](#), an augmented reality story from acclaimed Vancouver author [Joy Kogawa](#), produced by [Jam3](#) and the NFB, which follows the experiences of a 17-year-old girl forced to live in BC's Slocan Japanese internment camp.

Three local short works make their BC debuts: **Christopher Auchter's** [Now Is the Time](#) revisits a day 50 years ago that signalled a cultural rebirth on Haida Gwaii, while **Sandra Ignagni's** [Highway to Heaven: A Mosaic in One Mile](#) is a poetic look at an utterly unique place of multifaith worship on Richmond's No. 5 Road. Vancouver director **Ann Marie Fleming**, whose 2016 [Window Horses](#) was named Best BC Film and Canadian Feature at VIFF, is back at the festival with her short [Question Period](#), in which recently settled Syrian refugee women in Vancouver have questions about life in their new home.

The festival is also showcasing the best in feature-length documentary storytelling from across Canada with three more works enjoying their BC premieres in VIFF's True North stream: [Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger](#), the 53rd film by legendary director **Alanis Obomsawin**; the entertaining and oh-so-timely [Assholes: A Theory](#) by **John Walker**; as well as **Nance Ackerman, Ariella Pahlke** and Vancouver-born filmmaker **Teresa MacInnes'** look at alternatives to imprisonment in [Conviction](#).

VIFF is also featuring great new animated shorts, with Academy Award nominee **Theodore Ushev's** [The Physics of Sorrow](#) and [The Procession](#), a collaboration between illustrator and graphic novel writer **Pascal Blanchet** and animator and filmmaker **Rodolphe Saint-Gelais**.

The Whale and the Raven (101 min.)

On Gil Island off the northwest coast of BC, the sound of waves lapping and ravens cawing is punctuated by whale calls emanating from a network of loudspeakers. Drawn to the rich food sources and quiet waters, humpback whales, pods of orca, fin whales, and porpoises eat, play, and raise their young here, in the Kitimat fjord system. Researchers Hermann Meuter and Janie Wray founded the Cetacea Lab on the island to study this unique marine environment. But the imminent construction of a new LNG exporting plant in Kitimat promises to bring increasing tanker traffic and noise, with unknown consequences. As the people in the Great Bear Rainforest struggle to protect their territory against the pressure and promise of the gas industry, caught in between are the countless beings that call this place home.

Mirjam Leuze's first feature doc, *Flowers of Freedom*, premiered in 2014 at the 64th Berlinale. ***The Whale and the Raven*** is a Germany/Canada co-production of Busse & Halberschmidt; Cedar Island Films; the NFB; ZDF in collaboration with ARTE; TOPOS Film in cooperation with Vizion, with the support of the Film- und Medienstiftung NRW; the Province of BC/Film Incentive BC; Creative BC and the Canadian Film or Television Tax Credit. The film is produced by Marcelo Busse (Busse & Halberschmidt), Henrik Meyer and Andrew Williamson (Cedar Island Films), Shirley Vercruysse (NFB), Sandra Brandl and Mirjam Leuze (TOPOS Film), and Christian Vizi (consulting producer, Vizion). The executive producers are Sabine Bubeck-Paaz (ZDF/ARTE) and Shirley Vercruysse (NFB).

East of the Rockies

Part of the BC Showcase at VIFF Immersed, ***East of the Rockies*** is an experimental augmented-reality narrative written by acclaimed Vancouver author Joy Kogawa and told from the perspective of Yuki, a 17-year-old girl forced from her home and made to live in BC's Slocan Japanese internment camp during the Second World War. Users follow the story by tapping, swiping, inspecting and zooming in on key elements within each scene. Every interaction activates a piece of scripted narrative spoken by Joy's own grandchild, Anne Canute. Spoken in the first person, each line illuminates a different aspect of life in the camp, as documented in Yuki's journal.

Canute will be taking part in a panel discussion at VIFF Immersed. ***East of the Rockies*** is produced and executive produced by Robert McLaughlin for the NFB's Digital Studio in Vancouver and co-produced with Jam 3. VIFF Immersed is being presented in the Annex from September 27 to October 3.

Now Is the Time (16 min.)

When internationally renowned Haida carver Robert Davidson was only 22 years old, he carved the first new totem pole on British Columbia's Haida Gwaii in almost a century. On the 50th anniversary of the pole's raising, Haida filmmaker Christopher Auchter steps easily through history to revisit that day in August 1969, when the entire village of Old Massett gathered to celebrate the event that would signal the rebirth of the Haida spirit. Resplendent with animation, emotional interviews, and original footage shot by what was then known as the NFB's Indian Film Crew, ***Now Is the Time*** captures three generations of Eagle and Raven clan working together to raise the pole in the old way, inching it higher and higher, until it stands proud and strong against the clear blue sky.

Auchter made his directorial debut in 2017 with the NFB animated short [*The Mountain of Sgaana*](#), named Best Animated Film or Series for Young Audiences – Ages 6–12 at the Ottawa International Animation Festival. ***Now Is the Time*** is produced by Selwyn Jacob and executive produced by Shirley Vercruysse, with Teri Snelgrove as associate producer, for the NFB's BC and Yukon Studio.

Highway to Heaven: A Mosaic in One Mile (17 min.)

A place utterly unique in British Columbia and the world, Richmond's No. 5 Road, also known as the "Highway to Heaven," hosts a multitude of faiths. Side by side are numerous houses of worship, including Buddhist temples, a Sikh gurdwara, Hindu and Swami temples, Shia and Sunni mosques, Christian churches, and Jewish, Islamic and Christian schools. In ***Highway to Heaven***, Sandra Ignagni merges beautiful, carefully

framed images with a symphonic soundscape that illuminates the intimate lives of the faithful—in an evocative documentary that is both a meditation on multiculturalism and a subtle critique of the tensions that underlie cultural diversity in Canada today.

Ignagni's previous films have screened at festivals around the world, with her short *Ranger* garnering the Matrix Award for Outstanding Achievement at VIFF 2017. *Highway to Heaven* is produced and executive produced by Shirley Vercruyse, with Teri Snelgrove as associate producer, for the NFB's BC and Yukon Studio.

Question Period (5 min.)

A group of Syrian women, refugees recently resettled in Canada, have questions in Anne Marie Fleming's new film. *Question Period* was produced as part of *Five Feminist Minutes 2019*, a reboot of [Studio D's](#) landmark 1990 short-film series *Five Feminist Minutes*. The 2019 edition features four new NFB shorts inspired by a work from the original series. For Fleming, that's her own 1990 short [New Shoes: An Interview in Exactly Five Minutes](#), which combines astonishing narrative shorthand with heightened visual poetics to trace the trajectory of a love affair gone bad. *Question Period* is produced and executive produced by Shirley Vercruyse for the BC and Yukon Studio in Vancouver.

True North stream

Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger (66 min.)

Jordan River Anderson never got to live at home like most kids. Born with a genetic muscular disorder, he spent his first years in a Winnipeg hospital, far from his home on the Norway House Cree Nation Reserve. When he finally got clearance to move into a family setting, a dispute between federal and provincial authorities over costs would prevent the move. He died—in hospital—before his sixth birthday.

His story inspired the creation of "Jordan's Principle": a child-first principle that aims to ensure that First Nations children get equitable access to government-funded services. But while Jordan's Principle was passed into law, many Indigenous parents still faced obstacles. Tracing the parallels between the lives of Jordan and another Indigenous child, Noah Buffalo-Jackson, the film chronicles a long legal fight that culminates with a powerful victory for Indigenous kids, their families and communities.

Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger completes Obomsawin's seven-film cycle devoted to the rights of Indigenous children and peoples that began with [The People of the Kattawapiskak River](#) (2012).

Assholes: A Theory (81 min.)

With venomous social media, resurgent authoritarianism and rampant narcissism threatening to trash civilization as we know it, the time has come for John Walker's *Assholes: A Theory*, inspired by Aaron James' *New York Times* bestseller of the same name. *Assholes* investigates the breeding grounds of contemporary "asshole culture" and locates signs of civility in an otherwise rude-'n-nasty universe.

Honoured with a Focus On retrospective at the 2018 Hot Docs film festival, Walker is one of Nova Scotia's most distinguished filmmakers. *Assholes: A Theory* is produced by John Walker and Ann Bernier for [John Walker Productions Ltd.](#) and by Annette Clarke for the NFB's Quebec and Atlantic Studio in Halifax.

Conviction (78 min.)

Nance Ackerman, Ariella Pahlke and Teresa MacInnes' *Conviction* envisions alternatives to prison through the eyes of women behind bars and those fighting on the front lines of the decarceration movement. Not another 'broken prison' film, this collaboration is a 'broken society' film—an ambitious and inspired re-build of our community, from the inside out. The film compels viewers to examine why we imprison the most vulnerable among us, and at what cost.

Conviction is the fourth NFB directorial credit for Ackerman, a documentary photographer, filmmaker and multimedia artist. Pahlke is an award-winning documentary filmmaker and media artist with extensive experience facilitating collaborative projects. MacInnes has directed more than 10 films with the NFB over her career, including the 2016 NFB short documentary [Mabel](#), named Best Social and Investigative Program at the Banff World Media Festival. **Conviction** is produced by Teresa MacInnes for [Sea to Sea Productions](#) and produced and executive produced by Annette Clarke for the NFB's Quebec and Atlantic Studio in Halifax.

Animated shorts

The Physics of Sorrow (27 min)

We are all immigrants. Some leave cities or countries, all of us leave our childhood. Like the Minotaur of mythology, we roam through personal labyrinths, carrying nothing but a suitcase of memories, a portable time capsule filled with assorted mementoes from a past we can no longer reach. The first fully animated film made using the encaustic-painting technique, Theodore Ushev's ***The Physics of Sorrow*** was inspired by the novel by Bulgarian writer Georgi Gospodinov, which tracks the outlines of an unknown man's life as he sifts through memories of his youth in Bulgaria through to his increasingly rootless and melancholic adulthood in Canada.

VIFF is presenting the English-language version of ***The Physics of Sorrow***, narrated by Rossif Sutherland, with a special guest-voice appearance by Donald Sutherland. Ushev's previous NFB work was the multi-award-winning [Blind Vaysha](#), which was nominated at the 89th Academy Awards. ***The Physics of Sorrow*** is produced by Marc Bertrand and executive produced by Julie Roy for the NFB's French Program Animation Studio.

The Procession (Le cortège) (11 min.)

After Catherine's fatal car accident, she speaks from the beyond to her grieving husband, Philip, who must endure the family ritual of the funeral. Co-directed by Pascal Blanchet and animator and filmmaker Rodolphe Saint-Gelais, ***The Procession*** is produced and executive produced by Julie Roy for the NFB's French Program Animation Studio.

About the NFB

The NFB is Canada's public producer of award-winning creative documentaries, auteur animation, interactive stories and participatory experiences. NFB producers are embedded in communities across the country, from St. John's to Vancouver, working with talented creators on innovative and socially relevant projects. The NFB is a leader in gender equity in film and digital media production, and is working to strengthen Indigenous-led production, guided by the recommendations of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. NFB productions have won over 7,000 awards, including 24 Canadian Screen Awards, 21 Webbys, 12 Oscars and more than 100 Genies. To access this award-winning content and discover the work of NFB creators, visit [NFB.ca](#), download its [apps](#) for mobile devices or visit [NFB Pause](#).

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Electronic Press Kit | Images, trailers, synopses: [NFB at VIFF 2019](#) | [Assholes: A Theory](#) | [Conviction](#) | [East of the Rockies](#) | [Five Feminist Minutes – Question Period](#) | [Highway to Heaven: A Mosaic in One Mile](#) | [Jordan River Anderson, The Messenger](#) | [Now Is the Time](#) | [The Physics of Sorrow](#) | [The Procession](#) | [The Whale and the Raven](#)

Associated Links

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[ARTE](#)
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