

**Michael Nank**

Interview with Pragda founder Marta Sanchez: Festival of New Spanish Cinema

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After working 10 years in New York distributing independent films, Marta Sanchez saw that there was a lack of Spanish films in US movie houses. So five years ago she set out to change that by founding [Pragda](#), an organization whose mission is to expose US audiences to a wider and more diverse pool of Spanish films.

Sanchez's first project under the Pragda umbrella was ShortMetraje, a Spanish film series hosted by the Film Society of Lincoln Center. Sanchez's instincts proved to be right as the series was well received in the 15 US cities it traveled to its first year.

After five years of promoting, exhibiting and distributing Spanish films in the US, Pragda has become one of the most prominent promoters of Spanish films.

Last year the series, now titled the [Festival of New Spanish Festival](#), expanded to additional cities including Seattle. Sanchez was recently in town to promote the festival which runs through October 21st.

Q. What was the impetus behind the formation of Pragda?

A. I had worked in New York for 10 years distributing independent films. So I distributed films from Bangladesh, Argentina, Japan, Czech Republic...everywhere. But I also really wanted to work with the Spanish films. Because of what I did I had a knowledge of the people interested in independent films...the movie theaters in America and the different film outfits. If you don't have this experience it can be really hard because America is such a huge market. If you don't live here or didn't have the experience of working here it's really hard to get in...it's almost impossible.

So I was lucky enough to know the ways of showing films and I thought I always wanted to work with the Spanish films - let's put both things together. Now the distribution is hard for everyone. It's very hard to make an independent film in America.

Q. How do you work with other film organizations in the cities your festival is showcased?

A. I believe in collaboration. To be here under the umbrella of SIFF Cinema is wonderful because they do it so well. To be working with them is a great value because you get the best venues, and the best team behind you. I provide them with the films and tools that they can use to promote the festival.

Q. Does your Festival include an outreach component as well?

A. I travel to the various cities with the film festival. I like the public screening but also if a Spanish director is visiting with the festival we like to do something with the other institutions -- like the University of Washington to make sure that the students have the experience of having an instructor from Spain. (Click [here](#) for additional information on director Irene Cardona's visit to the University of Washington)

Q. What is your selection criteria for the festival?

A. Of course it's the quality in the storytelling. But also what is really important is that they show the diversity of the Spanish film making that is happening right now. So you have big budget films, you have independent films, you have different genres -- drama, animation on a little bit more on the experimental side, comedy, social issue films. We have first time directors and really well known directors. So it's a little bit of everything for every taste.

Q. Is there an online component to the festival?

A. We really like short films because it's a genre that allows filmmakers to be risky with telling their stories. It's a language filmmakers can create what they really want to do. This year we decided to have them online - so you can see 11 short films as eclectic as the feature length films. (Click [here](#) to see this year's short films)

Q. What are some other ways filmmakers have participated in the Festival?

A. We had one other experiment that we call Teaser Land. Last year I met someone that had, what I thought, a crazy idea. They wanted to open a contest for people to submit fake trailers. I thought this was a fun idea but also was interesting because of the new technologies...the language of film is changing and the way you consume film is totally different.

I was very interested to see 1) what kind of movies people wanted to see and 2) are they going to manage to make a trailer of something that doesn't exist -- so it's how they use the language.

So before each feature film in the festival we show two fake trailers. Usually one by a well established filmmaker and another from a first time or unknown filmmaker.

Q. There's a period of Spanish film history that is little known in the US. Is one of Pragda's missions to change that?

A. Absolutely. Pedro (Almodóvar) has been fundamental for Spanish films. Thanks to him it's on the map. Another reason we founded Pragda is the realization that movie goers know about French movies, Italian movies, Brazilian movies -- but no Spanish movies. There was one major reason for that - which is for 30 years we didn't export any of the movies we made. We had a huge industry in Spain but we had a dictatorship that didn't let things go out of the country.

All of the sudden Pedro is on the map and became famous in the US with *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*. He started making movies in the transition to democracy but we have a very rich heritage of classic Spanish films. So when people think of Almadovor it feels like it came out of nowhere. But if you know a little bit of Spanish history you can tell that he's a result of all of that. So in a way that is one of Pragda's mission.



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