

# PLAYBACK

## WEST COAST DIRECTORS IN CANADIAN IMAGES

BY CHERYL BINNING



Black Field



Under Rich Earth

Popular and prolific West Coast directors are being showcased in VIFF's Canadian Images, starting with Vancouver filmmaker Bruce Sweeney, whose romantic comedy *Excited* opens the program.

Other well-known B.C. directors represented in Canadian Images include Carl Bessai, with the small-town drama *Cole*, and Reginald Harkema's stylized period comedy *Leslie, My Name Is Evil*.

Canadian Images will screen a total of 83 features and short films.

Several world premieres from local filmmakers are also in the lineup, including Terry Miles' *The Red Rooster*, about a creatively blocked writer, and Leanne Allison's documentary *Finding Farley*, in which the director and her family walk and paddle across Canada retracing the wanderings of Canada's beloved author Farley Mowat.

While a total of 31 B.C. productions are scheduled, there are only four local dramatic features, compared to eight last year.

"It was a soft year for B.C. dramas," says Canadian Images programmer Terry McEvoy, noting that the majority of local films in the festival are documentaries and shorts.

In fact, documentaries are very strong this year, says McEvoy, pointing to Vancouver filmmaker Pete McCormack's *Facing Ali*, which looks at the fighter via interviews and tributes from the perspective of his rivals.

Canadian Images receives around 600 submissions, so McEvoy says he pars down the crop of films by looking for stories that surprise him.

"It has to be an extraordinarily brilliant idea or be executed in an extraordinary way," he says. "The film has to make me sit up and really pay attention."

Canadian Images is also featuring some fresh faces.

Winnipegger Danishka Esterhazy makes her feature directorial debut with the prairie gothic suspense drama *Black Field*, in which two sisters' lives are changed by the arrival of a mysterious man at their farm. From Vancouver, Nimisha Mukerji and Philip Lyall's first feature documentary, *65\_RedRoses*, is the remarkable story of cystic fibrosis patient Eva Markvoort.

"We have a lot more personal films and less of the big-budget movies this year," notes McEvoy.

Other films bowing for the first time in Canadian Images include Lenin Sivam's *1999*, a drama about three young Tamil immigrants grappling with gang violence in their Toronto community; and Kristin Booth's *At Home by Myself... With You*, a romantic comedy about a multi-phobia-plagued single woman who hasn't left her apartment in six years. •