

Venice Festival Finds Its Own Way to (Near) Gender Parity

Nearly half of the films in competition this year were directed by women, but the world's oldest film festival still rejects the idea of a quota system to improve gender representation.

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Courtesy of Searchlight Pictures

'Nomadland,' directed by Chloé Zhao, is one of Venice 2020's buzz titles

The Venice Film Festival likes to go its own way.

While Cannes bowed to pressure from theatrical distributors and banned Netflix films from competition, Venice rolled out the red carpet for "streaming" titles like *Roma* and *Marriage Story*. When other festivals — from South by South West to Cannes to Telluride — canceled amid novel

coronavirus fears, Venice pushed ahead with plans to hold an in-person event. On Tuesday, festival director Alberto Barbera came through, unveiling his 2020 lineup.

And while other international film festivals, shamed by their dismal levels of female representation, have proposed quotas or selective systems to boost the number of women directors, Venice and Barbera always rejected the idea. In 2018, Venice signed the 50/50 by 2020 [gender parity protocol](#), which commits the fest to release statistics on the gender makeup of submissions, but the festival boss said he would never select movies on the basis of their director's sex, only on the "quality" of the work.

Apparently, that quality has gone up. Sharply. Of the 18 films Barbera and Venice unveiled Tuesday that will make up the competition lineup for 2020 Venice Film Festival, eight, or 44 percent, were directed by women. That compares to just two female directors in competition last year and one female filmmaker each in competition in Venice in both 2018 and 2017.

Women directors are behind some of the most buzzworthy titles in Venice this year, including *Nomadland* from Chloé Zhao, a road movie starring Frances McDormand; period drama *The World to Come* by Mona Fastvold, featuring Vanessa Kirby, Katherine Waterston, Casey Affleck and Christopher Abbott; and *Never Gonna Snow Again* from acclaimed Polish filmmaker Malgorzata Szumowska (co-directed with Michal Englert). Nicole Garcia's French drama *Lovers*, Susanna Nicchiarelli's *Miss Marx*, *Le Sorelle Macaluso* from Emma Dante, Julia Von Heinz's *And Tomorrow the Entire World*, and *Quo Vadis, Aida?* from Bosnian filmmaker Jasmila Zbanic (*Grbavica: The Land of My Dreams*) complete the list.

Up until now, Barbera acknowledged, the "female component" in films selected for Venice "has been limited to embarrassing percentiles," but he insisted the eight titles picked for competition this year "were selected exclusively on the basis of their quality and not as a result of gender protocols. This is an unprecedented percentile, which we hope augurs well

for a future cinema that is free of any sort of prejudice and discrimination."

If one looks at the entire Venice lineup — including out-of-competition films and ones in its Horizons sidebar — the view isn't so rosy. Fewer than 30 percent of all films screening in Venice this year were directed by women but, the festival noted, the representation was in line with the ratio of female-helmed films submitted.