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Locarno Film Festival Signs Pledge for Gender Parity in Programming

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Locarno Film Festival officials have signed a pledge for parity and inclusion in programming, following in the footsteps of the Cannes Film Festival.

The pledge was signed Sunday by Locarno fest president Marco Solari and vice president Carla Speziali. The initiative was put together by the Swiss Women's Audiovisual Network (SWAN) with director **Ursula Meier**, who is the pledge "godmother," and producer Pauline Gyga, the pledge advisor.

"We are thrilled about this first step towards equality and diversity in festivals. Just as with budgets and funding, women are entitled to an equal share of the spotlight and the screens. Visibility of our films is essential," said Gabriel Baur, Laura Kaehr and Stéphane Mitchell, SWAN's co-presidents, in a statement.

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"The financing part is essential to allow women directors to make movies, and being selected at a festival plays a key role in the financing because it can raise a profile of a filmmaker and create a demand," Kaehr said.

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"As at Cannes, this is just a beginning," added Meier. "People have to walk the walk. So, as Americans say shooting movies, 'Action!'"

The biggest action so far has been the \$1 million grant announced an hour later by Suissimage, the country's rights collections society, to Meier's English-language debut, "Quiet Land." The film was produced out of Switzerland by up-and-coming company Bandita Films.

Meier told *Variety* that the gender parity in film schools should be reflected not only in festival lineups but also in selection committees. "When I was a film student in Belgium, we were only two women out of 20 students, but today the ratio is about 50-50. So there's no reason why the ratio in festival programming should be around 20%," said Meier.

The director said she has always had a strong bond with Locarno since winning the Tomorrow Leopard Award with her first short, "Le Songe d'Isaac," in 1994. She then won the Silver Leopard and the Youth Award with "Tous a Table" in 2001. She has also discovered the work of major directors at Locarno, from Alexandre Sokourov to Hou Hsiao Hsien and Wong Kar-Wai.

"Locarno has built a reputation for being a great international showcase of cinema, and as such, it must highlight films directed by women and as well as men," said Meier, adding that through her career she has been inspired by the work and personalities of talented female directors such as Jane Campion, Chantale Ackerman, Lucrecia Martel, Celine Sciamma and Agnes Varda.

At Sunday's pledge-signing event in Locarno, there was a consensus that numerical parity is not enough: Women have to raise the glass ceiling. The federal cultural minister promised an in-depth study of film industry parity in employment and in key decision-making positions; to be issued next spring, the report will serve as a pilot for studies analyzing other sectors of the culture industry.

Besides the pledge, SWAN is also pushing the Swiss film board to look closely at the number of projects from female directors submitted for subsidies and the ratio of projects selected for public funding, according to Meier.

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Following the Sunday's pledge signing, the Mexico table of Locarno's Match Me! networking event also discussed at length the emerging generation of female filmmakers in Mexico who are changing perceptions about what should be expected of a film made by a woman in the country, and what may be the market for certain kinds of Mexican films.

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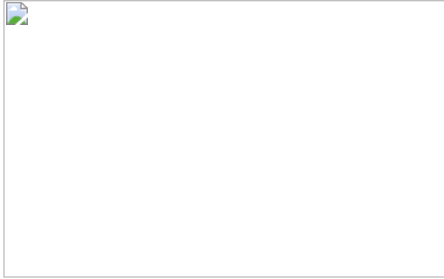
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