

Do Women Make Films?  
By Barri Cohen

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The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) has programmed over 25 Canadian feature films this season, some with au courant cute boy-minded titles like *Young People F\*cking*, and some from the usual masters like Cronenberg and Arcand. Nestled in with all the men is only one film helmed by a woman, Kari Skogland, for her adaptation of Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*. In a summer that's seen Judd Apatow's superhuman sprint to the bank on the heels of his films on male juvenilia, it's a little hard to take. One could be forgiven for asking, 'Do women make movies?'

There's no way to finesse the words: it *appears* we women don't direct features and that's inexcusable. We have better gender parity in the recent right-wing Federal cabinet shuffle, which is *down to* 18% of women in Cabinet.

I acknowledge the groan of 'Oh no, not that old chestnut again.' Its tone of irritation owes more to the anger that this is still part of an egregious problem than it does to the stale whiff of a supposedly outmoded feminist whine. I wish it *were* history, but as any postmodern-minded soul will tell you, there's nothing ipso facto progressive about history. And undeniably there's nothing progressive about the dearth of women as feature film directors.

Let's be fair and clear about one thing: TIFF is not alone in shutting women out. "But there aren't any women who *are* directing, and certainly few – like men – who are directing good work," you might say. Jane Campion smartly addressed these myths of scarcity and excellence at this year's Cannes Film Festival. There, she screened her latest work, a short fantasy film about a woman dressed in a ladybug costume who gets stomped in a movie theatre—clearly a metaphor for women in the film world. It's not hard to see why she made the film: Campion was the lone woman among 29 other filmmakers, all men, who were honoured this year at Cannes. Of her film she explained, "I just think this is the way the world is, that men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to,"

and they're not giving it to women who, it seems, are stubbornly attached to "hard sell" stories shunned by rich producers.

Debra Zimmerman, the executive director of feminist distributor Women Make Movies in NYC, claims (on their website) that the industry's sexism is because of the "intersection of two things that are incredibly important to men: one is business, and the other is art." Zimmerman says that part of the problem is that men run over 80% of the film festivals, from boards to juries.

On a brighter note, there are lots of Canadian women filmmakers at TIFF this year in the short film programme. I guess ladybugs are good at tiny things, and we should ask what groups like WIFT-T and their ilke are going to do about it.

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*Barri Cohen is a filmmaker and television producer whose recent documentary, "Toxic Trespass", will be launched this fall. She is the publisher of POV and its past editor.*

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