How To... Make It As A Female Director

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By Florine and Kim Nüesch on 20th September 2018

Anorak's Florine and Kim Nüesch, who picked up a silver award at this year's YDA for their short film, Forget Me Not, have some advice for aspiring women directors.

"In 2018 and we have a five-year-old sister who, thanks to some old-fashioned illustrations in kids' books, thinks boys are doctors and girls are nurses.

She is raised in a very progressive household with a mother who works as a full-time journalist, but when you're young you believe what you see.

When we were growing up all the big directors, like Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg, were men. Although we always had an intense passion for film, as girls we didn't immediately picture ourselves as directors. At first we decided to become actresses, which lead us to make our own films with our dad's VHS camera at the age of eight or nine. Once we got into the whole process there was never a question that we would become directors and writers.

Challenge the boys' club

Just like the film industry itself, film school is a boys' club that can be hard to break into. In the early years, when it is important to learn the craft from older students by working on their sets, we were often asked to help out as make-up artists or wardrobe stylists. If you want to become a director neither position is helpful. Meanwhile the boys were asked to do the heavy-lifting jobs like being a grip, and from there they would work their way up into the camera and lighting department.

The male students just didn't think of women as camera assistants or gaffers, so we needed to find another level of determination to get involved and keep learning. But this wasn't a disadvantage – determination comes in handy once you're out in the real world.

If you are uncomfortable with something, don't do it

Luckily, we've never had any experiences in the Harvey Weinstein league, but there have been moments where we were treated differently and where situations were uncomfortable.

From getting job offers for obviously the wrong reasons, to being looked at as if you must have an inappropriate relationship with someone successful to have made it this far, there have been and probably will always be moments in which being a woman can be hard. We have the luxury of having each other. But whether you are a woman in a team or alone, there are ways to navigate these situations successfully, as long as you trust your gut. If you are uncomfortable with something, don't do it.

Support positions for women

Inevitably a lot of the people who have supported us the most are men, because there aren't that many women in the business. There are many great and talented men in the film industry, you just have to choose carefully who to work with and who to surround yourself with.

We do however believe that as women, we can actively back the women who are already in the business and encourage young women to work in the industry.

Besides our all-female cast, our short film *Forget Me Not* had a very gender equal crew. We had a female editor, casting director, production designer and gaffer, which is a position that is rarely filled by a woman. It is important to us to collaborate with and support other women, who are like us breaking into this male dominated field.

To influence and to be influenced

Films – and stories in the broader sense – take us to places and times we haven't been to, they can put us into someone else's shoes, they provoke emotions and they affect the way we perceive the world. For all those reasons we fell in love with the medium of film, and because of them there is a responsibility attached to being a director and a writer.

"At the moment it seems there is great responsibility attached to which stories we choose to tell as women."

This past year has brought a lot of positive change into the movie industry, with films like *Wonder Woman* and *Lady Bird* celebrating huge successes. There also emerged a new trend of remakes and reboots of previously told stories – like *Ocean's 8* and *Ghostbusters: Answer the Call* – where women take the place of former male characters. While we don't want to criticize the quality of these films, we do feel that is important to tell new stories that are written specifically for female characters.

As writers, we have found ourselves stunned by how greatly the male-centric stories are engraved in our very core and how strongly they still influence us. At times there even seems to be an automatic tendency to move away from a female protagonist to focus on a male supporting role. In other moments, we fall back into very old-fashioned ideas of gender roles. Then we have to really examine why we would stick to those patriarchic norms and what the more modern, authentic, approach could be.

At the moment it seems there is great responsibility attached to which stories we choose to tell as women. On one side, we have to make films that are entertaining and successful across the board, to prove that films by women about women can reach just as many people as male-heavy films have done over the years. On the other side, we want to make films that challenge the way people – mostly the younger generations – see women and their position in our society.

It's a very political moment to be making movies as women and our toughest critics are, as you might guess, women. Men don't get condemned for writing their male lead too macho or not macho enough, but for us the line between being called a man-hating feminist or a traitor to the cause can easily get blurry.

In the end the most important factor is to tell the truth of how you see the world. We think films shouldn't educate, but inspire you to think for yourself.

Find your role models where you can

Nowadays there are more female directors and writers – Greta Gerwig, Patty Jenkins, Lynne Ramsay, Sofia Coppola, Crystal Moselle, Reed Morano, Kathryn Bigelow – than back when we were little, and it's great for the new generation of women to have these people to look up to. Women aren't a minority. We are half of the planet, so we should make up half of the film industry.

It is 2018 and we have a five year-old sister who thinks boys are doctors and girls are nurses. But because of us, she thinks women are filmmakers. That's a start.

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