
Jury members clash over Roman Polanski as Venice film festival opens

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The controversial inclusion of [Roman Polanski](#) in the 76th Venice film festival and the event's poor record on female representation dominated the event's first day as jury members clashed over the issue of gender quotas.

At the opening press conference, Alberto Barbera – the outspoken director of the festival who is stepping down next year – said he was convinced he had made the correct choice to include Polanski despite the film-maker's conviction for raping a 13-year-old girl in 1978.

"The history of art is full of artists who committed crimes but we have continued to admire their works of art and the same is true of Polanski," said Barbera. "He is, in my opinion, one of the last masters in European cinema. We cannot wait 200 years to decide whether his films are great or easily forgotten, an aesthetic judgment needs to be passed at once."

Barbera added that he is not a "court judge" who has to say whether a man has to go to jail, saying he "only [has] the right to say whether or not a film should be in a festival or not". He had previously compared Polanski to [Caravaggio](#), the 17th-century artist who is thought to have [murdered a love rival](#), saying he "was a killer, but one of the major painters of the Italian baroque period. It's not so different."

Lucrecia Martel, the president of the international jury at Venice, agreed that Polanski's new film, [An Officer and a Spy](#), should be included, although she disagreed with Barbera on the issue of introducing gender quotas at the festival. The lack of female directors in the main 21

entries – the only films directed by women come from Saudi director Haifaa Al Mansour (*The Perfect Candidate*) and Shannon Murphy (*Babyteeth*) – has been criticised, with Venice lagging behind other major festivals such as [Cannes](#) and [Toronto](#).

“Quotas are never satisfactory,” said Martel. “But there are no other solutions to guarantee the inclusion of women or give them the position they deserve.”

Asked the same question Barbera said he is “fully against the idea of quotas for the selection of a film festival”, adding that it would “be offensive because it goes against the only criterion that we have to consider, which is the quality of the film”.

The two then debated the issue, with Martel asking Barbera whether he thought that by introducing a 50/50 gender rule, Venice could trigger a change across the film industry. “Can I ask Mr Barbera, just imagine a situation where we have to have a 50/50. Would the quality decrease? Or would it lead to a change in the industry? Perhaps it would be too bad if we were to implement an experiment like this?”

Barbera responded by saying that 23% of the films the jury considered for selection were directed by women and that until that number increased, it would be difficult to get near 50/50. He admitted that the fact that the buildup to the festival has been dominated by the gender debate had been “a little bit damaging”, and said he hoped he was “exempt from any prejudice” when selecting films for Venice.

The festival opened on Wednesday morning with Hirokazu Kore-eda’s first non-Japanese language film, [The Truth](#), the story of an ageing French actor, played by [Catherine Deneuve](#), who is coming to terms with her past and its impact on her daughter ([Juliette Binoche](#)) and her daughter’s husband ([Ethan Hawke](#)).

Thursday sees the premieres of James Gray’s space epic *Ad Astra* and [Noah Baumbach](#)’s *Marriage Story*, which is gathering Oscar buzz for lead actors [Adam Driver](#) and [Scarlett Johansson](#), and is the first of three films that Netflix is showing in Venice.