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WOMEN IN FILM / CRYSTAL + LUCY AWARDS

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Female directors on the hunt for work

Filmmakers look elsewhere for employment

By JENNY PETERS

It has been more than 35 years since Women in Film was formed, with the goal to help "women achieve their highest potential within the global entertainment, communication and media industries." In 1973, few females had attained the high-powered position of director in either film or television.

Cut to 2009, when ex-Directors Guild of America president Martha Coolidge (whose helming credits include "Valley Girl," "Rambling Rose" and "Introducing Dorothy Dandridge") comments about the number of female directors working in film and television: "It's terrible. The percentage is awful. We're talking ranging between 6% and 11% of the total, with 11 being the highest women have ever achieved."

Dr. Martha Lauzen, the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film's executive director, tracks the employment of women in the industry. Her 2008 figures are striking. Women accounted for 9% of directors of feature films, a number that "represents no change from the percentage of women directing in 1998." Women did a bit better in the world of primetime television, mustering 11%.

What's a female helmer to do?

Diversify, diversify. So says Angela Robinson, who in the past decade has carved out a career, directing Lindsay Lohan in "Herbie Fully Loaded" and seven episodes of the Showtime series "The L Word."

"Right now I am writing a comic for DC Comics, and I did a Web series, and I just wrote a graphic novel," Robinson reveals. "I feel like I am working everywhere, in television, in comics, in books and on Web series. I don't feel like you can, as an artist, only make studio movies. What I'm trying to do is so diverse, and I think we all need to work across all the platforms out there now."

Robinson, who is pretty much a poster child for the disenfranchised ("I am a woman, I am black, and I am a lesbian, too, so statistically, I am nonexistent!"), talks frankly about the tough state of the business for females -- or anyone -- these days.

"It is pretty brutal out there right now for women. I was incredibly depressed about the Catherine Hardwicke thing with the second 'Twilight' movie. I mean, that would have never happened to a guy," she says of Chris Weitz, and not Hardwicke, helming "The Twilight Saga: New Moon."

"That was really kind of like Prop. 8 for me, where you were just like, 'What?'" Robinson adds, referring to the recent California ban on same-sex marriage. "And while I feel like it is brutal for women out there, I feel like it is bad all around. The industry has really batted down the hatches and is trying to figure out what's going forward, with so many different media. It's a really weird, fearful time, in publishing, in Hollywood, in newspapers, everywhere."

Director Sanaa Hamri mixes directing Prince videos, feature films like "Something New" and episodes of "Desperate Housewives." But unlike Robinson, she sees another layer to female directors finding opportunities in both film and television.

"The boys want to hire me, the boys are excited about my pitches," Hamri says, "The problem is the women (who) are



Robinson



Hamri



Hughes

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not supportive of other women. I'm finding that more and more.

"There are some women in positions of power who like being the only girl in the room, so to speak," she continues. "They want to have that attention, they don't want another woman kind of competing with them. We as women, at this point in time, have to talk about supporting each other. That's the reason it has taken so long, because we are not supporting each other. It's tragic."

Director Bronwen Hughes ("Harriet the Spy," "Forces of Nature," "Burn Notice") finds hope in the future. She points to the ratio of men to women enrolled in filmmaking courses.

"When I go to the AFI or film schools and speak to the classes, they are 50-50 or even 60-40. It sure was not like that when I was in film school," Hughes recalls. "In those courses, nobody is apologizing for being a girl! So I think the real test of change will be when 50% of the candidates coming into the marketplace are girls. Then we will see who gets hired."

Tip Sheet

What: Crystal + Lucy Awards

Where: Hyatt Regency Century Plaza Hotel, Los Angeles

When: Friday -- 6 p.m. cocktails, 7:30 p.m. dinner, 8 p.m. program

Host: Chelsea Handler

Honorees: Jennifer Aniston, Elizabeth Banks, Holly Hunter, Catherine Hardwicke, Petra Korner

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