

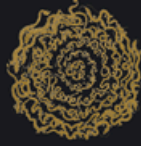
Gender Parity in Cinema: Anna Serner and the Swedish Film Institute

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Anna Serner

Source: Frankie Fouganthin, Wikimedia Commons



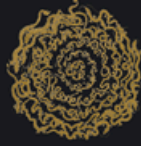
The gender gap in the entertainment industry is a concern that has been expressed quite a lot across the globe. Although more female creators, filmmakers, and directors have been stepping out into the spotlight recently, the issue is far from being resolved. Amidst these widespread concerns, a country that is taking sizable steps forward is Sweden. Sweden's film industry was also dominated more by male participants not long ago; however, the situation is quite different now. A key player in this change is the Swedish Film Institute and its former CEO, Anna Serner.



Logo of the Swedish Film Institute

Source: The Swedish Film Institute, Wikimedia Commons

Anna Serner is one of the leading pioneers of the gender equality movement in Sweden. Armed with a degree in law and courses in film studies and practical filmmaking, Serner was appointed the CEO (Chief Executive Officer) of the Swedish Film Institute in 2011, succeeding journalist Cissi Elwin in the role. One of her most well-known contributions to this role is the ambitious target she set for the Institute: half of all films produced by the Institute should be made by women. Her prior experience in running her own marketing communications consultancy business and in executive positions like MD (Managing Director) of the Swedish Media Publishers' Association and CEO of the Advertising Association of Sweden made her a formidable force in this position. She also has a wide range of experience in board-level appointments, including at Stockholm University of the Arts, Berghs School of Communication, Fanzingo, Polarbröd, Folkoperan, and Anna Lindh Academy.

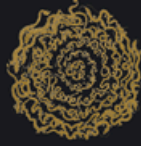


Most of Sweden's cinematic output is funded by the Swedish Film Institute, so most studios had to adapt to abide by Serner's target. Serner did achieve her target, pretty quickly too: the percentage of Institute funding received by female filmmakers rose from 26% in 2011 to the goal of 50% in 2014. These issues have to be tackled more at the roots, like encouraging more women to step into filmmaking roles and helping them navigate the issues they face along the way, than just superficially only promoting women creators. Granted, this is not exactly an all-encompassing solution for a quite deep-rooted problem but moves like these can help level the playing field and make actual progress toward promoting gender parity. To this end, Serner's initiative was not put into place using quotas or reservation systems; rather, each project had to be petitioned for by its creators or producers, and funding was determined based on its quality defined by their "relevance, originality, and craft" (Lodderhose, 2021). The Institute's nudge to female filmmakers has thus helped significantly in promoting gender equality in Swedish cinema, with almost as many women directors as men creating well-known works and winning awards like the Guldbagge Awards currently.



The Office Building of the Swedish Film Institute

Source: Petri Krohn, Wikimedia Commons



Serner at Berlinale 2019

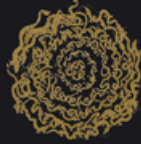
Source: Kauraisa (Image for Reference)

Serner has frequently given keynote addresses and spoken in panels on themes related to gender equality in cinema and the entertainment industry as a whole. She also sat on a panel with representatives from WIFT (Women in Film and Television) Germany and WIFT Nordic, where they discussed how the financing stage can play an important role in ensuring quality by rewarding diversity and equality. Serner played an important role in organizing several events from the Institute, like the seminar 'Closing the Gap' organized in cooperation with the Berlin International Film Festival.



A Poster for the 5050x2020 Campaign

Source: ResearchGate (Image for Reference)

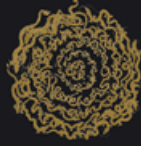


'Fifty-Fifty by 2020' (5050x2020) is perhaps one of the most internationally well-known of Serner's many feminist initiatives. Launched by Serner and the Swedish Film Institute at Cannes in 2016, the campaign featured several speakers from the film industry and the political milieu: Alice Bah Kuhnke, Audrey Azoulay (the French Minister for Culture), and Roberto Olla (the Executive Director of Eurimages), alongside directors Ruben Östlund and Alexandra-Therese Keining, and producers Emilie Lesclaux and Chiara Tilesi. These speakers and the many supporters of the campaign rallied for Serner's 50-50 goal across the globe, which resulted in the skyrocketing impact of the campaign. Many national film commissions and institutes pledged their commitment to the 50-50 goal, including the British Film Institute, Telefilm Canada, Screen Ireland, Screen Australia, and the Austrian Film Institute. Creative Scotland pledged to achieve this goal across their boardrooms as well, and Eurimages (the cultural support fund of the Council of Europe) adopted a new Gender Equality Strategy in 2017.



Swedish Filmmaker Ruben Östlund

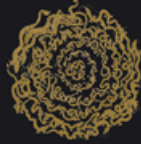
Source: Kortfilmfestivalen i Grimstad, Wikimedia Commons



Filmmaker Alexandra-Therese Keining

Source: Stefan Tell, Nordic Women in Film

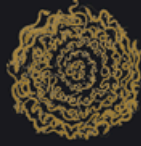
Although these institutes and commissions have contributed to the goal, the input of independent national initiatives and campaigns cannot be discounted in any way. Many of these campaigns by individual groups have spurred national commissions to join in. The British Film Institute set a diversity target that was largely influenced by the campaign by Directors UK. The campaign's impact was not just limited to the screen. The UK-based National Theatre pledged to achieve this goal with regards to writers and directors, and the industry-led campaign ERA 50:50 aimed for gender equality on British stages and screens. The Collectif 5050x2020 was launched by the French group Le Deuxieme Regard, which consisted of hundreds of French cinema industry professionals. Talent agencies like ICM Partners and Creative Artists Agency also pledged to commit to the 50-50 goal, making waves in the American film industry.



**Several Female Industry Professionals Gathered Together
at Cannes to Campaign for Gender Equality**

Source: IndieWire (Image for Reference)

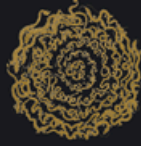
5050x2020 also influenced several film festivals, which have signed pledges after campaigning from several women's groups. After campaigning from the Collectif 5050x2020, the Cannes Film Festival signed a gender equality pledge in 2018. Extensive campaigning from WIFT International and several of its regional chapters alongside many other women's groups led to the Venice Biennale (in charge of organizing the Venice Film Festival) signing a 'Charter for Parity and Inclusion' in the same year. These two festivals were the two big ones that were among the most criticized for not including female filmmakers previously. Several other festivals also signed 50-50 pledges in the next few months, including Locarno Film Festival, Annecy International Animation Film Festival, Sarajevo Film Festival, Göteborg Film Festival, San Sebastian International Festival, Berlin International Film Festival, Rome International Film Festival, Mill Valley International Film Festival, and International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam.



Serner Speaking at a Film Event in Stockholm in 2015

Source: Frankie Fouganthin, Wikimedia Commons

Serner was nominated twice for the EDA Female Focus Award: in 2020 for her tireless work on 5050x2020, and in 2022 for her years of 'female forward work' at the Institute. She has also been honored with the Mill Valley Film Festival's Mind the Gap Award. After several highly impactful moves toward the goal of achieving gender parity in cinema, Serner stepped down from her role as the Institute's CEO in 2021, remaining the second-longest serving CEO of the Institute after its founder Harry Stein's two seven-year terms. News of her resignation prompted a joint letter from more than fifty international organizations, with appreciation for her efforts and commitment to working towards achieving gender parity in the international film industry. Serner also wrote a letter to WIFT International after her resignation, wherein she mentioned the need for working towards not only gender equality but also intersectional equality: "Gender equality means equality for all women, disregarding skin color, sexual orientation, age, etc., and it should apply to all budgets and genres" (Serner, 2021).

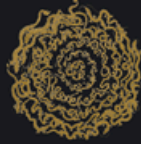


The importance of the Institute continuing to work towards this goal even after her resignation would certainly not be lost on her. Mathias Rosengren (Head of the Institute's Film Heritage department) served as the acting CEO until Serner's successor, Annette Novak (formerly Director of the Swedish Media Council and CEO at a research institute), was appointed. However, Novak too left the role within a year of her appointment, reportedly on instructions from the Institute's board. SVT (Sveriges Television) Executive Anna Croneman has been appointed as the new CEO of the Institute and is set to take over from acting CEO Asa Sjöberg in April 2024. It appears one has to wait to see how the Institute's future endeavors will progress. As Serner herself put it, there is still a lot to keep working on in progressing towards gender parity in cinema at an international level. Serner's efforts have certainly contributed significantly, and now it is time for many such Serners to step in across the globe.



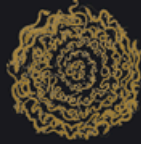
Serner at an NYFA Event

Source: New York Film Academy (Image for Reference)



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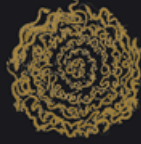


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