

RESPONSE TO BARRY AVRICH'S "IT DOESN'T MATTER" STATEMENT

Reelworld congratulates all the winners of the CSA awards. Winning this important award can be life changing for filmmakers. Considering the importance of this event and its ability to bring people together, it was extremely disheartening to hear Barry Avrich's closing comments in his acceptance speech for Best Direction in a Documentary, *"That this is a testament that there are so many Black stories in Canada that need to be told, it doesn't matter who tells them, we just need to tell them."*

For decades, White directors have enjoyed the privilege of telling Black, Indigenous, Asian and South Asian stories with no reproach. Diverse creators have fought - with much effort and little success - to receive equitable access to funds and distribution to tell the stories of their communities. Only in the past few years has the industry at large recognized this oversight and made efforts to give some control and support to those artists.

We have now reached a critical point in time. We have made major strides as an industry, we are finally beginning to create space and opportunities for creators of colour to spearhead their own projects and tell their own stories. We have opened up dialogue and our hearts to be more accepting, respectful, and welcoming, with the goal to enrich the lives of all creators and storytellers. The words expressed by Barry Avrich were extremely damaging — they undermine the authenticity checks that have started to become standard practice, devalue the importance of Black-led works, and ignore the economic injury the Black community has endured as a result of the lack of ownership of their own stories. His words are reflective of a past system that we are working to change.

We ask the industry to reflect on the ways in which authenticity and ownership matter and for each of us to examine what deeply held biases we may harbour.

Reelworld Screen Institute.

Reelworld was founded in 2000 by award winning actress and producer Tonya Williams to advance opportunities for Canadians who are Black, Indigenous, Asian, South Asian, and People of Colour in the screen industries by providing professional development and advocating for racial equity in Canadian content and production. Reelworld Screen Institute, a non-profit, provides training programs and presents the acclaimed Reelworld Film Festival, which celebrates stories by racialized Canadians. Providing access to opportunities is core to Reelworld, and Access Reelworld is Canada's leading hiring platform for racialized crews and talent. Reelworld Foundation, a registered charity, is transforming the industry by creating mechanisms that hold systems accountable for greater equity. For more information go to www.reelworld.ca

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