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Interview

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## Mária Takács Director of *Secret Years*

Hungary



Mária Takács is a lesbian activist and a filmmaker, whose film *Secret Years* depicts the lives of 11 lesbian women between the ages of 40 and 70 in Hungary during the communist period and in the present. Based on interviews, the film shows the difficult situation of gay and lesbian people under communism, when homosexuality was not illegal but was ignored in an attempt to erase it.

***Secret Years* belongs to the documentaries that deal with the past of GLBT people, concretely with the lesbian past. Why did you make this movie and what do you think is the role of such movies in queer cinema?** Basically I made this film for the mainstream, and of course also for the GLBT subculture. But when I started to think about it - how to deal with this kind of a topic - I decided to send it as a message to society. That's why I decided to have a reporter - an interviewer - in the film coming from mainstream society. The reason for this was that I knew most of the women and we were very close to each other. So it would have been strange if I had asked them to tell me their stories from the very beginning as I already knew them. If I had asked the questions, I wouldn't have asked several things because some elements are just obvious for me and for the women in front of me, and also as a lesbian activist I would have started from another level. Those would have been false images on the

screen. However, I was omnipresent at the interviews and I asked questions when I felt something was missing.

**How was the film received in Hungary?** It was quite good; there were about 300 people at the opening night. It was quite successful within the subculture and it was really well received by the general public. We also won the audience award at the 7th edition of the Verzio International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival.

**You have made other films before; do they also deal with queer topics?** The first movie I directed was about a same sex dancing school in Hungary, Eklektika Dance School. At that time I was studying at the film academy, and it was important to me to make a film about the dance school with my friends who were very fascinated by same sex dancing and by same sex dance competitions all around the world. It was important to share their experience via the film. We set up the Budapest lesbian film committee in 2000, and because we were also lesbian activists we had the permission to shoot in the community and to screen it at the Budapest gay pride. And although we weren't allowed to show it in a proper cinema, we could send it to festivals outside of Hungary. The reason for this was that some people in the film didn't want to show their faces publicly. *Secret Years* was the first film where I made it clear to my protagonists that it was aimed at the general public, and so they needed to decide whether to participate or not. For instance, there were three elderly lesbians who didn't take part in the film although I wanted them so much.

**What do you think is the role of queer cinema in the post-communist countries?** To teach the majority, or rather help the majority deal with this topic; to explain the feelings, experiences and lives of the GLBT people and make a connection to the majority experience. When I was shooting I talked to a young social worker and she was very surprised about the historical side of the film. She actually thought that all this 'lesbian stuff' came only after 1989 as the product of American culture. That is why it is important to show that we have a history.

***Secret Years* is going to be released on DVD. When will we be able to buy it?** There was a possibility to apply for a grant and it was advertised as the Erste Social Integration Award, funded by the Erste Bank. It was a competition across 10 countries with over 1000 applicants; only 30 got the award and we were one of them in the end. This shows that the film is important not only for the subculture but also for the majority who I basically made the film for. Thanks to the grant, we were able to finance the DVD release and subtitling into several languages (world languages, but also regional ones like Slovak). It will be released in March next year.

By Michaela Pnacekova