

amorous antiquated audacious

Stories of lesbian (in-)visibility in Vienna in the 50s & 60s



A Film by Katharina Lampert and Cordula Thym

with Rosmarin Frauendorfer, Ursula Hacker, Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel

Press Notes

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P R E S S N O T E S

amorous, antiquated, audacious
verliebt, verzopft, verwegen

Stories of lesbian [in-]visibility in Vienna in the 50s and 60s

A Film by
Katharina Lampert and Cordula Thym

Audience Award „Best Documentary“ – identities 2009. Queer Film Festival Vienna
Special Mention Jury Award Documentaries – QueerLisboa13 Portugal
Second Place DOKULA Audience Award – Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg 2009

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*A taboo.
A historical and visual void.
A queer documentary from Austria (!).*

The city was rather gray and antiquated back in the old days. If there was any scene at all, it was a gay men's scene. The so-called "sub" scene was not particularly inviting. During the frequent police raids lesbians and gay men had to be seated nicely at tables – "normal" and "inconspicuous." Lesbian life took place in private – behind closed doors.

Unlike in other countries, there is very little imagery documenting it in Austria. This visual gap still exists today with the exception of an interruption in the well-documented 70s, during which the lesbian movement was quite active politically and in the media, although "lesbians are always and everywhere."

Katharina Lampert and Cordula Thym's ambitious film project deals with the lives and networks of lesbians in Vienna in the 1950s and 60s.

amorous, antiquated, audacious is based on interviews with three witnesses to history, who were active in the lesbian scene during that period. In an eloquent, entertaining, and refreshingly ironic manner, they talk about what it was like to realize that they were "different" in their youth and find their own identity despite society's impediments and a lack of positive lesbian role models.

"I have worn a few too many lacy blouses in my life, although I am not at all the type." (Rosmarin Frauendorfer in original sound)

Rosmarin Frauendorfer, actress and ORF elocution trainer, was born in 1942 in Vienna and raised there. She had a "slow, stuttering coming out" in Germany at the age of 24. In an effort to avoid the cliché from the "other side" at all costs [i.e. looking like a "man"], Rosmarin "wore quite a few lacy blouses," although she was "not at all the type." Ursula Hacker, born in 1946 and raised in Vienna's Karl Marx Hof, a municipal tenement complex, was in love with her teacher when she was in school. *amorous, antiquated, audacious* also raises the issue of many lesbians' "straight past." Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel's boyfriend was hardly overjoyed when his suggestion that they visit a gay bar was accepted and led to his girlfriend's first kiss with a woman, her coming out, and the end of their relationship.

During their five years of research, the filmmakers received numerous rejections to interview requests. It is a fact that lesbians are present in politics, business, schools, and the arts. Nevertheless, there is still a tendency toward invisibility in society today.

amorous, antiquated, audacious is an important film that tries to change this.

Synopsis

The city was rather gray and antiquated back in the old days. If there was any scene at all, it was made up of gay men. The so-called "sub" scene was not particularly inviting. During the frequent police raids lesbians and gay men had to be sitting at tables nicely – "normal" and "inconspicuous." Lesbian life took place in private – behind closed doors. Unlike in other countries, there are very few photos documenting this in Austria. The visual gap still exists today with the exception of an interruption during the well-documented 70s, during which the lesbian movement was quite active politically and in the media. Even though "lesbians are always and everywhere."

A new documentary fills this gap for the first time. Katharina Lampert and Cordula Thym's ambitious film project deals with the lives and networks of lesbians in Vienna in the 1950s and 60s. What communities and places were there, and how public, i.e. accessible, were they? How did women organize themselves? How did they present themselves to the outside world? And what did it mean to identify as a lesbian at that time? Information like this is hard to find and is often passed down through history in oral stories or rumors.

verliebt, verzapft, verwegen [amorous, antiquated, audacious] is based on interviews with three witnesses to history who were active in the scene at that time and talk about it in an eloquent, entertaining, and refreshingly humorous way.

Rosmarin Frauendorfer, born in 1942 in Vienna and raised there, had a "slow, stuttering coming out" in Germany at the age of 24. In an effort to avoid the cliché from the "other side" at all costs [meaning: looking like a "man"], Rosmarin "wore quite a few lacy blouses," although she was "not at all the type."

Ursula Hacker, born in 1946 and raised near Vienna's 'Karl Marx Hof', a municipal tenement complex, was in love with her teacher when she was in school. She knew she was a lesbian only after her first kiss, which happened during her apprenticeship. "My first kiss from a woman...butterflies in my stomach, and all that at the age of 14!"

verliebt, verzapft, verwegen [amorous, antiquated, audacious] also raises the issue of many lesbians' "straight past." Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel's boyfriend was hardly overjoyed when his suggestion that they visit a gay bar – he already had an idea about what was going on – was taken up and led to his girlfriend's first kiss with a woman, her coming out, and the end of their relationship. Beforehand they had been at the movies and had seen *The Children's Hour* [with Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine], where something finally clicked for Birgit, also born in 1946. 'Being a lesbian' continues to play a key role for the protagonists in *amorous, antiquated, audacious*. Many did not know what to do with their infatuations and feelings in those days. They just knew that they were "different" from their friends and other women around them. Similar to Greta Schiller's classic documentary, *Before Stonewall*, the relevance of finding a label for oneself and [with that] developing a self-image is a central theme.

Coming out today and living publicly as a lesbian is obviously not easy. The filmmakers received numerous refusals to their interview requests. It is a fact that lesbians are present in politics, business, schools, and the arts. Nevertheless, there is still a tendency toward invisibility in society.

verliebt, verzapft, verwegen [amorous, antiquated, audacious] is an important film seeking to change that. [Barbara Reumüller, identities 2009]

The Protagonists



Rosmarin Frauendorfer

„I have worn a few too many lacy blouses in my life, although I am not at all the type“.

Rosmarin Frauendorfer was born in Vienna in 1942. "I had a very slow, stuttering coming out when I was 24, that was in 1966, in Germany. My girlfriend was older; no one cared about that. We worked in theater, where people were used to homosexuality. Later on I went into a women's bar in Hamburg, what was then the notorious 'Ika-Stuben'. That experience frightened me so much that I only ventured into the scene again years later, after the age of 40 [around 1982]. In the meantime the Frauencafé in Vienna had a completely different atmosphere than in the dimly lit 'Ika-Stuben', with women dressed as men who behaved as though they were in a bad movie. The problems I was struggling with were more personal than environmental. However, I do have one rather depressing memory. I was in Lüneburg – which was truly a small, provincial town. When my girlfriend visited me in my apartment and spent the night, the house owner definitely noticed and sometimes even made comments. Back then I wished that one day I would have enough money for an anonymous apartment in a large building. I still have a thing for high-rise buildings. Actually I forgot why and just recently remembered."

After her acting career, she worked as a speaker and a voice and elocution trainer. She is now retired and lives in Vienna with her partner and their dog.

The Protagonists



Ursula Hacker

„My first kiss at 14 – I was in 7th heaven...“.

Ursula Hacker was born in Vienna in 1946 and grew up in a municipal tenement complex near the Karl Marx Hof. Her father, a former SS soldier, was extremely strict. Her relationship with her mother was also difficult. The atmosphere in her childhood home was rather violent.

In 1960, when she was 14, she began her apprenticeship in a flower shop in the 1st district, although she would have rather continued going to school. There she had her first intimate experience with a woman – her apprenticeship mistress – "butterflies in my stomach, and all that at the age of 14 and back in those days!" This experience, the first of many, confirmed her feelings that she had already felt as a young girl.

She came out to her mother at 16, who broke her trust and told the entire family. Because life at home was so hard to bear, she went to Finland for a year as an au pair when she was 18. "That was in 1965. Unfortunately I realized that the women there don't run around with a sign saying, I am a lesbian and available either. I didn't find any bars or anything else and didn't meet anybody that would have been able to help me. So I came back to Vienna." In 1969 she decided that she wanted to have a child and became pregnant. Shortly afterwards, she married a gay friend in order to have a cover for her lesbian relationships. In 1977 she and her son moved in with her girlfriend in Brussels, and she worked there at an EU institution for many years. She is now retired and lives alone in Vienna.

The Protagonists



Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel

„The women were just always incredibly beautiful.“

Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel was born in Vienna in 1946. She grew up with her liberal adoptive mother and her aunt, who lived in the same house and with whom she remained in close contact throughout her life. At 15 she began attending acting school. The atmosphere there was quite open. As an adult, Birgit realized that her mother also hung out in lesbian circles. In spite of this, it was still not easy for her to find her way in life. When she was 17 she attempted suicide and then began to see one of the first social psychiatrists in Vienna. He encouraged her to discover her identity and reassured her that he was working to change the law – §129.

She also received support from her friends. "My boyfriend went to the movies with me, and we watched *The Children's Hour* with Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine. That was one of the first stories about lesbians, which of course ended tragically. I thought that was horrible. I was really pretty shocked back then. And after the movie I said to him, I think I know now. He didn't say much about it. Then he took me to a gay bar, one of the first ones in Vienna. I didn't even know such a thing existed. That night I kissed a woman for the first time in my life, or she kissed me, and I knew that was it. That was it. I was on the floor, so to speak. I was totally blown away." After a busy career, Birgit now does volunteer work in her retirement. She works with the Green Party's Seniors' Section and is involved with gay and lesbian issues. "What does being a lesbian mean to me? When I think about the positive side, being a bit exclusive. I like that part, not living a regular old life. ... For many years I have also considered it a political duty, a mission, to help other people with what I was lucky enough to have managed well myself."

Background

amorous, antiquated, audacious deals with the lifestyles and networks of lesbians in Vienna in the 50s and 60s.

Unlike the periods before and afterwards, the postwar period has not been studied. That means that more than 20 years of lesbian history is totally undocumented. There is no information about the communities and spaces and how public or accessible they were, how women organized and presented themselves, and what it meant to identify as a lesbian at that time.

Other periods – especially in Austria – have also only received minimal attention, and there is a general tendency toward the invisibility of lesbian history. However, other periods in lesbian history have been the subject of some research in Austria. A study of female homosexuality was developed in the second half of the 19th century, when women were defined and categorized as "lesbians" for the first time partially because of the research being done on sexuality by scientists like Sigmund Freud, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Richard von Krafft-Ebing. During the "red twenties" numerous women's clubs and social circles began to emerge in Austria, creating an international counter cultural network. It was not as extensive as in Berlin, where there were 160 bars for lesbians and gay men at the time, but for the first time Vienna had spaces designated specifically for lesbians.

During this period of great freedom of activity and movement and the international networking of lesbians between 1927 and 1933 (Nazi takeover), the two German magazines "Freundin" (published until 1933 by Bund für Menschenrechte) and "Frauenliebe," a weekly magazine for friendship, love, and sexuality (published until 1930), which both contained clearly lesbian material, could also be purchased in Austria. Both magazines also published articles by Austrian contributors writing under pseudonyms about the legal situation and changes in Austria. Austrian writers submitted serial novels and poetry as well. There were a number of "coded" personal ads from Austria, using terms like "Fräulein", "Dame", and "Freundin" as identifiers. "Frauenliebe" had a circulation of 10,000 copies.

The Nazi takeover – as well as the Austro-fascist corporate state – put a violent end to this early visibility and acceptance of lesbian life. The historical documentation of lesbian life in Vienna during the Third Reich that we have today does not generally come from eyewitness reports, but rather from law enforcement authorities, who documented it meticulously. When lesbians appeared in court, most of them were convicted for several years because of their sexuality. At that time, particularly after the Anschluss, a conviction meant that the women were sent to prison or a concentration camp.

Background - continued

During National Socialism, lesbianism was outlawed pursuant to article 129, passed in 1852, which forbid "unnatural indecency with a) animals and b) people of the same sex". At the end of the war, homosexuals returning from the camps were not considered victims of the Nazis; the remaining prison sentences had to be served and sentences issued by Nazi judges were confirmed as previous convictions. This was because article 129 was not abolished until 1971. The study of female sexuality did not begin again until what was considered the start of the lesbian movement in the 70s. This began with the 1971 reform mentioned above, which led to the introduction of a series of other articles in its place (§209: unnatural indecency with minors – concerned men only – repealed in 2002, §210: homosexual prostitution, repealed in 1989, §220: advertising ban, repealed in 1996, §221: association ban, repealed in 1996). The sentence for violating §209 had been six months to five years since 1852 (§129). In the early 70s the women's movement began to become active in Austria as well.

A clear lesbian movement did not start until 1976, when the first lesbian group formed as part of the independent women's group, 'AUF' [Aktion unabhängiger Frauen]. Further events followed, such as the founding of a lesbian shared flat in 1976 [Amazonenmarkt], the first lesbian flyer on May 1, 1976, the first "Club 2" [discussion program on Austrian public TV station] on homosexuality [1979], the first Austrian lesbian conference, the first lesbian banner at a demonstration on International Women's Day, or the first lesbian party in the U4 club against the advertising and association ban [all in 1980], to name a few. The 'Rosa Lila Villa' was squatted in 1980 and in 1983 the Austrian Society of Homosexual and Lesbian Research was founded.

Like the slogan that appeared all over, "Lesben sind immer und überall" [literally: lesbians are always and everywhere], a diverse lesbian movement began to establish social spaces for action and discourse.

The age group of the lesbians in *amorous, antiquated, audacious* is barely visible today, neither in the queer scene nor in the public consciousness.

amorous, antiquated, audacious counters this loss of collective history and thereby identity with a complex portrait.

Cast and Crew

WITH:

Rosmarin Frauendorfer, Ursula Hacker, Birgit Meinhard-Schiebel
and Brigitta Ehrenfreund, Denise Lister

RE-ENACTED SCENES:

Nic., Catherine Beyer, Steffi Dittrich, Alexandra Grass, Magdalena Grützbauch, Maria
Hönlinger, Christine M. Klapeer, Karin Schönflug, Claudia Wiesinger, Mia, Zora

WRITTEN, DIRECTED, PRODUCED and EDITED BY:

Katharina Lampert, Cordula Thym

CAMERA:

Leena Koppe

MUSIC:

Sara John, Magdalena Grützbauch

MUSIC RECORDING:

Claudia Wiesinger

SOUND:

Cordula Thym

SCRIPT/STORY CONSULTANTS:

Ursula Hansbauer, Johanna Kirsch, Wolfgang Konrad, Barbara Zorman

RESEARCH ASSISTANT:

Faika Anna El-Nagashi

SOUND MIX:

Stephan Amann

MODEL BUILDERS:

Kaj Osteroth, Catherine Beyer, Riki Gütter, Juma Hauser, Johanna Kirsch, Leena Koppe,
Severina Lampert, Gabi Mitterbauer, Paul Robert, Christine Rochelt, Michaela
Schmidlechner, Philipp Schwarzbauer, Barbara Zorman

LIGHTING:

Stephan Ludescher

COLOR CORRECTION:

Andi Winter

TITLE GRAPHICS:

Nick Prokesch, Patrick Anthofer

EQUIPMENT:

Mobile Film, 2K Film

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Culture/Film Department, City of Vienna - Arts Department, City of Vienna - Women's Department, Fohn
Foundation, ÖH Wien - Austrian Students' Union at the University of Vienna, Tirol Arts.

The Filmmakers

Katharina Lampert

was born in Vienna in 1976. She studied conceptual art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She has done solo and group projects in the fine arts and film. *amorous, antiquated, audacious* is her first joint project.

Cordula Thym

was born in Tyrol in 1977. She studied film editing at the Film Academy in Vienna and worked as an sound woman, and [assistant] editor. She also plays drums for "Dandies & Darlings".

Films [selection]: *Beyond Borderline*, 2002 [director], *Echos*, 2006 [editor], *Hana Dul Sed*, 2009 [sound, sound editor]

Festival Screenings and Invitations

[as of January 2010]

identities 2009. Queer Film Festival Vienna – June 2009 – in Competition

Budapest LGBT Festival – September 2009

QueerLisboa13. Lissabon Queer Film Festival – September 2009 – in Competition

Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg – October 2009 – in Competition

Diagonale 2010 – Festival of Austrian Film – March 2010 – in Competition

International Women's Film Festival Seoul – April 2010 – in Competition

Torino Intl Gay&Lesbian Film Festival – April 2010 – in Competition

Prizes and Awards

Audience Award „Best Documentary“ – *identities 2009. Queer Film Festival Vienna*

Special Mention Jury Award Documentaries – *QueerLisboa13*

Second Place DOKULA Audience Award – *20th Lesbisch Schwule Filmtage Hamburg 2009*

Quotes from Abroad

“The Jury decided to award a Special Mention to Austrian Documentary „verliebt, verzopft, verwegen“, by Katharina Lampert and Cordula Thym, „a well-crafted first film offering a glimpse of our past via an optimistic portrait of older lesbians and their lives.“ [QueerLisboa13, 2009]