

A FILM BY TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU

Lesvia



Graphic design & Illustration: George Katsis, Cyprus, Greece

CINEMATOGRAPHY & SOUND TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU EDITING IVA RADIVOJEVIC, PANAGIOTIS GAKIS POST PRODUCTION SOUND AND ORIGINAL MUSIC STEFANOS KONSTANTINIDIS & NASSOS SOPILIS - FABRIKA
POST PRODUCTION IMAGE SAKIS BOUZANIS - 2|35 POST PRODUCTION SERVICES MASSIVE PRODUCTIONS PUBLICITY PANAYIOTA PAGOULATOS - PINK ORCHID INTERNATIONAL
PRODUCERS TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU, REA APOSTOLIDES, YURI AVEROF ASSOCIATE PRODUCER JAN ROFEKAMP FESTIVAL DISTRIBUTION THE FILM COLLABORATIVE

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Lesvia

LOGLINE & SYNOPSIS

[32 words](#)

Lesvia chronicles 40+ years of lesbian identity and conflict between the locals of a small village on the Greek island of Lesbos and lesbians who arrived searching for love, freedom and community.

[80 words](#)

Since the 1970s, lesbians from around the world have been drawn to the island of Lesbos, birthplace of the ancient Greek poet Sappho. When they find paradise in a local village and carve out their own lesbian community, tensions simmer with the local residents. With both groups claiming ownership of lesbian identity, filmmaker Tzeli Hadjidimitriou—a native and lesbian herself—is caught in the middle and chronicles 40+ years of love, community, conflict, and what it means to feel accepted.

[335 words](#)

On the southwestern coast of Lesbos Island in Greece lies the small agricultural village of Eressos which is the birthplace of Sappho, the first female poet to write about love between women.

For centuries, Eressos had been isolated from the rest of the world but in the mid-1970's, women from across the world began to arrive, in search for Sappho's traces. At first, the local inhabitants felt pride that these women had come to pay tribute to the great poet, born in their lands.

But in the middle of the 1980s, more women flocked to the island, including filmmaker Tzeli Hadzidimitriou, a lesbian born and raised on the island. The women lived on the beach, there were no separations of class, country or ethnicity. Expressing larger social and political developments, they proudly claimed the right to be called lesbians and to express their identity. This was a radical experience, offering them absolute freedom from the prejudice they had experienced at home. At the same time, it led to open conflict with the local inhabitants, who felt threatened by the lesbians.

In the 1990s, lesbians began to rent rooms and buy houses. Hotels and restaurants opened run exclusively for and by women. A lesbian bar opened in the middle of the village square. The conservative villagers of Eressos embraced the new economic force. Hetero normativity was turned on its head. Some villagers sided with the lesbians, identifying with a persecuted minority. Many of the local children came to consider lesbian relationships as natural and local women appreciated the freedom of the foreign women. Great change took place.

Today, a stable lesbian community of women from across the world lives in Eressos. Filmmaker Tzeli Hadzidimitriou is one of them, spending half of the year in the village.

The documentary is based on archival films and photographs as well as contemporary filming. The materials are combined with personal testimonies and excerpts from the director's diary, who records the story of lesbian community of Eressos through her personal experience.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was born and raised on the island of Lesbos, whose light, landscapes, people, and everyday life are my source of inspiration. I am moved by all those stories, things and life forms that are on the verge of disappearing and being lost forever. In my work, I use all my experiences and possibilities, to give space and voice to ordinary people, who do not stand out in any way, but who live their lives in simplicity, outside daily headlines.

In all my previous works I have sought to capture the spirit of the people of Lesbos. In "Lesvia" - my first feature film - I also want to talk about my own intermediate, borderline experience as a proud member of the lesbian community and tell the story of how this community was created.

After the publication of my book "A Girl's Guide to Lesbos" in 2012, I started collecting pictures, shots, archival photos to tell a bigger story. This film is the result of ten years of filming during which I carried out in-depth interviews with members of the lesbian community, as well as with the local inhabitants. The interviews have been freely structured as a communal voice, giving people the space to be themselves.

With this documentary I try to discover what happened in the last 40 years in Eressos, where unexpected interactions changed the lives of inhabitants and visitors. Eressos itself, this stunning volcanic landscape with a three-kilometer beach, blue sea and unique light that inspired the poet Sappho, is one of the main characters in the film. It exists in the film in all four seasons and is intertwined with my own personal narrative and story. In this sense, the film takes the form of a personal essay film that documents not only my personal journey but also that of the village and the community.

This is a personal film as much as it is a collective film. It also documents the history of hundreds of lesbians who carved out a space for themselves and the history of the only lesbian community which continues to exist today, evolving and accepting new forms of gender diversities and offering a safe space for self-expression.

CREDITS

CINEMATOGRAPHY & SOUND	TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU
EDITING	IVA RADIVOJEVIC, PANAGIOTIS GAKIS
ORIGINAL MUSIC and POST-PRODUCTION SOUND	STEFANOS KONSTANTINIDIS & NASSOS SOPILIS - FABRIKA
POST-PRODUCTION IMAGE	SAKIS BOUZANIS - 2 35
POST-PRODUCTION SERVICES	MASSIVE PRODUCTIONS
CONTENT ADVISOR	ELISAVET PAKIS
PUBLICITY	PANAYIOTA PAGOULATOS - PINK ORCHID INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATE PRODUCER	JAN ROFEKAMP
PRODUCERS	TZELI HADJIDIMITRIOU - ANEMOS DIMIOURGIAS PRODUCTIONS, REA APOSTOLIDES, YURI AVEROF -ANEMON PRODUCTIONS
FESTIVAL DISTRIBUTION	THE FILM COLLABORATIVE

DIRECTOR'S CV

Tzeli Hadjidimitriou was born and raised on the island of Lesbos, Greece and is an award-winning filmmaker, fine art photographer, and writer. Her photographs, which capture liminal atmospheres, places and people, have been exhibited in solo and group shows in Australia, China, Italy, Turkey and Greece and have been published in ten books.

After attending a series of seminars by Michelangelo Antonioni on the art of cinematography, she pursued further studies in Cinematography in Rome.

Tzeli has been filming and photographing the lives of the inhabitants of Lesbos since 1990. In her work, she uses all her experiences and capacities, aiming to give space and voice to ordinary people, who are not famous or considered extraordinary in any way, but who live their lives in simplicity, outside the daily headlines.

She captures liminal atmospheres, places, people in her photographic books '39 Coffee Houses and a Barber's shop'; in the 'Sacred Water: The Mineral Springs of Lesbos'; in 'In Communion With Stone', about the rural architecture of Lesbos.

She works as a consultant for television on programs about Sappho and Lesbos. Her book 'A Girl's Guide to Lesbos' is the first guide for the island that speaks about the story of the lesbian community in the village of Eressos and her connection to the ancient poet Sappho.

Her short films have been screened across the world and won several awards.

In her short documentary 'In Search of Orpheus' she meets local fishermen, who tell her their stories of life and place woven through the myth of Orpheus.

Recent short films focus on gender, including "Sappho's Granddaughters", where the older women of Eressos tell their stories; 'Mr Dimitris and Dimitroula', a record of a gender-nonconforming person on Sykamia Lesbos, who tragically lost his/her life after being unjustly detained in a mental asylum; and 'Sappho singing', a joyful ode to Sappho, who revisits contemporary Lesbos.

'Lesvia' is her first feature documentary.



Photo by Bea Uhart