

# MAYA DEREN, TAKE ZERO

A film by Jaime Ballada & Gerard Gil



## SYNOPSIS

This documentary is a dialogue between, on one hand, films and voice recordings by **Maya Deren** (1917-1961) and, on the other, interviews with characters from the celluloid and anthropology worlds who knew her first hand. *Maya Deren, Take Zero* displays a brief voyage through different ways of approaching art, ethnography and, above all, cinema.

The film includes interviews with **Jean Rouch, Jonas Mekas, Alexander Hammid, Graeme Ferguson, Cecile Starr, Herbert Passin** and **Robert Gardner**, as well as images from Maya's unfinished film *Witch's Cradle* (in collaboration with **Marcel Duchamp**).

## CREDITS

Directed by **Jaime Ballada & Gerard Gil**

Co-produced by **Marcial AV & La Ferida Producciones**

Music: Recordings by **Maya Deren** and **Teiji Ito**

Cast: **Alexander Hammid, Jonas Mekas, Jean Rouch, Robert Gardner, Graeme ferguson, Cecile Starr, Herbert Passin.**

Date: 2002-2012

DVCAM

30 min.



## DIRECTORS' STATEMENT

It is hard to tell why this remarkably short and simple piece has taken us almost ten years to complete. The whole story started in a second hand store in Barcelona. A bootleg video tape of Maya's films was there and the picture on the cover was so beautiful that we had to buy it. After seeing the films, fascination had increased considerably and by the time we had read all the books available both by her or on her, it was clear we had to make a documentary. One day, searching for information on the internet, we got an e-mail by **Alexander Hammid**, Maya's second husband and co-director of some of her films. He was 95 then, and his kindness and willingness to help us with the project was the spur that fueled us into New York. We had just finished our studies and we didn't even have a video camera, so we bought a shared one with some friends and, since September 11th was still quite recent, we were able to find plenty of cheap flights to New York.

Although we had some experience working for broadcast companies, this was really one of our first personal projects. and, in that sense, we were absolute beginners. Travelling to New York and meeting all this amazing people was, for us, a journey of discovery, and, most of all, a great time. Encountering filmmakers like **Jonas Mekas** or **Jean Rouch** (whom we met later in Barcelona) we realised that someone's ideas on life and on film can change your way of filming them and your way of approaching both life and film later on. Before we started shooting, we had many preconceived ideas of what we wanted to show in our film. After we finished, all these ideas were gone and, luckily enough, our footage had nothing to do with our previous conceptions. Yes, a nice departure point for creative editing, but it wasn't so easy. At that time, video editing stations were not so easily available or affordable as today. We could have borrowed one for a very limited amount of time, but we knew we had to work for quite a while on the materials. Then, the fact that I went to live to a different city while my colleague stayed in Barcelona didn't help much to the quick conclusion of the project. From then on, we met from year to year for a few days, usually during the Summer, to work on the film and, finally, here it is!

*Maya Deren, Take Zero* is not a biographic film. Even though it includes some anecdotal data regarding the relationship between Deren and people such as **Alexander Hammid**, **Margaret Mead**, **Gregory Bateson** or **Marcel Duchamp**, anyone looking for a detailed essay on Maya's life will be deceived and should better find a copy of **Martina Kudlacek**'s excellent film *In the Mirror of Maya Deren* or the available volumes of Maya's amazing biography, *The Legend of Maya Deren*, by **Neiman**, **Hodson** and **Clark**.

*Maya Deren, Take Zero* is, to us, a reminder of different ways of thinking cinema. Through the fictional dialogue between **Maya's** friends and her own voice recordings, the documentary re-enacts some of the **Deren-Mekas** debates regarding form and improvisation that filled the *Village Voice's* pages between 1960 and 1961. The film also links all these ideas to *cinéma vérité* and ethnographic films by revisiting Maya's unfinished film on Haitian Voudun along with her thoughts on dance, ritual and art.

Maya used to say she made her pictures for what Hollywood spent on lipstick. Nowadays, when almost everyone has a camera in their cell phone while capitalism seems to be looking for a deathbed, Maya's ethic and aesthetic ideas are very much alive. The main purpose of this film is no other than to celebrate these ideas and, as happens in Voudun rituals, to meet at the Crossroads and give new flesh to old spirits.

Jaime Ballada & Gerard Gil

December 2011



Maya in Los Angeles, photographed by Alexander Hammid.

# STILLS



Alexander Hammid, Jonas Mekas, Herbert Passin,  
Still from Meshes of the Afternoon, Maya Deren, Still from Witch's Cradle,  
Jean Rouch, Robert Gardner, Graeme Ferguson.

## ABOUT THE DIRECTORS



Jaime Ballada in Central Park (NYC) during the shooting of *Maya Deren, Take Zero*.

## JAIME BALLADA

**Jaime Ballada Larrasa** (b. Barcelona, 1976) has worked since 1999 as a cameraman editor and director for several broadcast media (Eurosport, Al-jazeera, Espn, TVE, Paramount Spain, etc.).

In 2008, he and Daniel Torres founded the production company **Marcial AV**, which has developed, from then on, a wide variety of projects, taking always special interest in the documentary genre.

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

**Cultura Gitana a Catalunya** (2004)

**IP Nanoker** (2009)

**Concierto Fantástico de Isaac Albéniz** (2011)

**Maya Deren, Take Zero** (2002-2012)



Sasha Hammid & Gerard Gil while shooting at Sasha's.

## GERARD GIL

**Gerard Gil** (b. Tarragona 1976) has worked as a cameraman, director and editor for several Catalan broadcast media (*Btv, TV3, Mediapro*) and as a screenwriter for Spanish director **J.A. Salgot**. In 2005, along with **Blai Mesa** and **David Fernández**, he set up his own company: **La Ferida Produccions**. During the last ten years, he has produced and directed several short experimental pieces, as well as documentaries like *Cirlot, la mirada de Bronwyn* (UAB international Film Essay award 2005) and *Maya Deren, Take Zero*, co-directed with **Jaime Ballada**.

As a musician, he has played in the bands **Zul, Pupille, H de Casa** and **Don Simón y Telefunken**. He has composed the soundtracks for some of his own films as well as for some feature-length films such as *Los Condenados* and *Los Pasos Dobles* (Concha de Oro San Sebastián 2011), both by **Isaki Lacuesta**, and also for documentaries like *Qatar, the race*, by **Alba Sotorra**.

<http://gerardgil.com>  
<http://bso.gerardgil.com/>

## SELECTED FILMOGRAPHY

*(As director and editor)*

**Cirlot, la mirada de Bronwyn** (2005)

**Maya Deren, Take Zero** (co-directed with Jaime Ballada, 2002-2012)

**La Casa de la Fuerza** de Angélica Liddell (co-directed with David Fernández, 2010)

**Regina** (co-directed with David Fernández, 2010)

**Gloria** (co-directed with David Fernández, 2009)

**Cristalls** (2009)

**Adagio** (co-directed with David Fernández, 2008)

**Unveiled Views** (editor, directed by Alba Sotorra, 2008)

**Miralls** (2005)

**Cruces** (2005)

**Al final de la via** (2005)

**Puertas** (co-directed with Eva Moreno, 2004)

*(As a musician)*

**Los Pasos Dobles** (Isaki Lacuesta, 2011)

**Qatar, the race** (Alba Sotorra, 2011)

**Nocturno** (Eva Moreno, Gerard Gil, 2010)

**Los Condenados** (Isaki Lacuesta, 2009)

**Cristalls** (Gerard Gil, 2009)

**Mars on Earth** (Isaki Lacuesta, 2007)

**Traces - Frederic Amat** (Isaki Lacuesta, 2007)

**Miralls** (Gerard Gil, 2005)

**Al final de la via** (Gerard Gil, 2005)

## DISCOGRAPHY

*(As a musician)*

**Zul - el golpe de la aguja** (Slow Coloured Records, 2001)

**H de Casa – Blanco** (Slow Coloured Records, 2003)

**H de Casa – Negro** (Slow Coloured Records, 2002)

**Pupille - Himnos Olímpicos** (Bcore disc, 2005)

**Pupille - Superstatic Revolution** (Basement Apes Industries, 2006)

**Pupille - La música de Moda** (Bcore disc, 2008)

**Don Simón, Klimperei y Telefunken - 25 songs looking for ears** (AcidSoxx Musicks, 2009)

*(As a producer and guest musician)*

**Don Simón y telefunken - Música de Vanguardería** (Slow Coloured Records, 2003)

**Don Simón y telefunken + Ajo en directo en el Matadero** (Unedited)

*(As guest musician)*

**Pupille – monochrome** (Slow Coloured Records, 2000)

**Pupille -s/t** (Slow Coloured Records, 2002)

**Derviche** (Unedited)



**Marcialav** is the fruit of harmony between **Daniel Torres** and **Jaime Ballada**. **Marcialav** arises from the shared desire to unite passion, experience and high doses of work. Since 2007, we have made fictional films, TV programs, reports, video clips, documentaries, infomercials, concerts, screenings, events, and animations 2D and 3D graphics.

**Marcialav** works as an integral video factory thanks to a network of partners and specialists in various fields of audiovisual production. We work with them from script development up to digital post-production and also in all the technical and artistic aspects of a shooting. We love transforming an idea, a speech or a story into images. But it's not just what we love, it's also what we do better.

#### **MARCIALAV**

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**La Ferida Produccions** is a video production company based in **Tarragona**, Spain. It was founded in 2005 by **Blai Mesa**, **David Fernández** and **Gerard Gil**. Their work covers a wide range of fields related to contemporary history, art and culture. From documentaries and experimental pieces to installations for museums or music festivals, la Ferida's philosophy has always been to keep the technical side simple while taking risks on the creative side.

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