

Maya Lin: A Strong Clear Vision



It was one of the most bitterly disputed public monuments in American history. Only 21 when her design for the Washington, D.C. Vietnam Veterans Memorial was chosen in 1981, Maya Lin has never shied away from controversy. Her starkly simple slash of polished black granite inscribed with the 57,661 names of those who died in Vietnam was viciously attacked as "dishonorable," "a scar," and "a black hole," but Lin remained committed to her vision, and the Memorial, a moving tribute to sacrifice and quiet heroism, was built as planned. Since then, Lin has completed a succession of eloquent, startlingly original monuments and sculptures that confront vital

American social issues. Freida Lee

Mock's Academy Award® winning feature documentary follows a decade in the life of this visionary artist.

The film opens with footage chronicling the hailstorm that followed the selection of Lin's unconventional design. Political commentator Patrick J. Buchanan and Illinois Republican Representative Henry Hyde led the fight, circulating letters alleging that one of the jurors on the selection committee was a communist and that four had been active anti-war protestors. The detractors wanted the Memorial's color changed from black to white. Attacking Lin's memorial, outraged Vietnam veteran Tom Carhart howled, "Black, the universal color of sorrow and shame and degradation, in all races and all societies worldwide." Protestors also lobbied for a flagpole to be planted at the vertex of the walls. Lin's retort was, "That's like putting a mustache on the Mona Lisa." Says Freida Lee Mock, who spent five years filming the artist for this documentary, "I was struck by how a person could stand up under such tremendous pressure at a very young age."

Lin withstood the personal and artistic attacks with clarity and grace, and she prevailed with her original design. Continues Mock, "The Memorial would not have been built without her central position in the fight to maintain the integrity of that design... It was her single-minded devotion to what she thought was right." The Memorial's dedication in 1982 was a profoundly cathartic moment -- not just for those who fought in Vietnam, but for the entire nation. Since its completion, Americans have flocked to the site to grieve, to contemplate the consequences of war, and to heal. In one of the film's most moving segments, veterans and surviving family members search for the names of their loved ones arranged chronologically by date of death. "So many guys on the same day. It's incredible," says one veteran, shaking his head sadly. "What difference does it make if you find one name?" his friend asks, beginning to weep angrily. "Look at all the... names!"

"If you can't accept death, you'll never get over it," says Lin. "So what the Memorial's about is honesty... You have to accept, and admit that this pain has occurred, in order for it to be healed, in order for it to be cathartic... All I was saying in this piece was the cost of war is these individuals. And we have to remember them first."

FILM INFORMATION

Premiere Date: Nov. 27, 1996

Photos: [Download Here](#)

Filmmaker(s): Freida Lee Mock

Press: [Press Release](#)

FILMMAKERS



Freida Lee Mock

CRITICAL ACCLAIM

“It begins stunningly as it recounts the controversy over Lin's superb Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington.

— *Newsweek*