

SANDBAG DAM

Recognition

The film had the World premiere on 16 February 2025, as part of 75th Berlin International film festival and its Generation 14Plus section. It was made in a co-production between Croatia, Slovenia and Lithuania. In December 2024, the Open Reel acquired the international sales rights for the film.

Sandbag Dam is a drama directed by Čejen Černić Čanak. It is the filmmaker's second feature film, a story about forbidden love of two teenage boys, set in a small town in Croatia. We follow the life of Marko (Lav Novosel) and Slaven (Andrija Žunac), after they see each other again after the break due to Slaven's absence. They are confronting their past choices and navigate family restrictions. Following his father's death, Slaven returns to the place he grew up, where locals live in danger that swelling rivers could cause devastating floods.

After seeing this film, we had an opportunity to talk with the filmmaker, and she said: 'In the making of this film I lived in my own bubble, and didn't realize that still... It's a problem for people to be what they truly are.' Seven months of work, with a magnificent cast, importance was felt, but on the other hand the silence holds, thick enough to cut it with a knife, and the closer the floods loom in their village, the stronger were feelings and emotions, which just like water, have their own way of passing by, and breaking thru. Without too much dialogue and explanation, the recognition was present.

Simple, but then again, emotionally resonant piece of work, resulting in a compelling understanding. At the very end, we are taking full circle of acceptance, with the words of a father: "You are my... son." So maybe the point is understanding, and breaking down the walls of patriarchal norms, and making your own rhythm, just like the water motif.

Despite slow progress, LGBTQ+ films remain rare in Croatia, due to a complex mix of cultural and institutional resistance. But still, each one becomes not just a work of art, but an act of visibility. A quiet rebellion, a mirror for someone still hiding. And that is the power: not just to be seen, but to belong.

