**Hammid, Alexander**

**Vivian Zenari (Athabasca University)**

Alexander Hackenschmied (17 Dec. 1907, Linz, Austria-26 July 2004, New York City), Americanized as Alexander Hammid, created and promoted the artistic avant-garde in both Czechoslovakia and the United States. In 1930 he organized two Prague avant-garde exhibitions, “Nová ĉeská fotografie” [“New Czech Photography”] and the “First Week of Avant-garde Film” (during which he showed his own short film *Bezúčelná procházka* [*An Aimless Walk*]). He later worked in Zlín for the Baťa Film Studio, which hired young artists to make advertising films, such as *The Highway Sings*. Hammid collaborated with American filmmaker Herbert Kline on the feature documentaries *Crisis* and *Lights Out in Europe*, both about the early years of World War Two. After fleeing Czechoslovakia, Hammid came to the U.S. and helped Kline adapt John Steinbeck’s *The* *Forgotten Village*. With his first wife Maya Deren he made, among other films, the American avant-garde watershed *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943). While making industrial films, he continued directing and editing art films, such as adaptations of Gian Carlo Menotti’s opera *The Medium* and Martha Graham’s dance composition *Night Journey*. Among his later noteworthy films are the three-screen *To Be Alive* and the early IMAX documentary *To Fly*. Considered one of the first Czech avant-garde filmmakers, Hammid provides evidence of the transnational cross-pollination of documentary, avant-garde, and advertising modes in the early twentieth century. Hammid’s large-screen films can be seen as an extension of his interest in experimentation.

PARATEXTUAL MATERIAL

-Alexander Hackenschmied retrospective, including images of Hackenschmied: http://monoskop.org/Alexandr\_Hackenschmied (copyright unknown)

-Video for “Aimless Walk”: http://www.ubu.com/film/hammid\_bez.html

-Video for “Prague Castle”: http://monoskop.org/media/film/Hammid\_Alexander\_1932\_The\_Prague\_Castle\_Na\_prazskem\_hrade.webm

-Video for “The Private Life of a Cat”: http://archive.org/details/PrivateL1947

-Video for *Angry Boy*: https://archive.org/details/AngryBoy1950

**References and Further Reading**

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Drubek, Natascha. (2012) ‘*Bezúčelná procházka*/ *Aimless Walk* (1930): Alexander Hackenschmied’s ‘Film Study’ of a Tram Ride to the Outskirts of Prague-Libeň.’ *Bohemia* 52.1: 76-107.

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# Willoughby, I. (2004) ‘Czech Avant-Garde Pioneer Alexandr Hackenschmied (Hammid) Dies at 96.’ *Radio Praha* 30 July 2004. http://www.radio.cz/en/section/curraffrs/czech-avant-garde-pioneer-alexandr-hackenschmied-hammid-dies-at-96

**Selected Works**

Note: His surname appears in credits as either Hammid or Hackenschmied

Writings

-‘Film and Music’ (1933), ‘The First Screening of Avant-Garde Film in Prague at the Kotva Cinema’ (1930) and ‘*The Forgotten Village*: A Report on the Filming in Mexico’ (1947), translated from the Czech and published in *Film Culture* no. 67-68-69 (1979): 238-49.

Films

-*Bezúčelná procházka* [*An Aimless Walk*] (1930)

-*Ze soboty na neděli* [*From Saturday to Sunday*] (1931) (art director)

-*Na Pražském hradě* [*Prague Castle*] (1932)

*- Zem spievá [The Earth Sings*] (1933) (editor)

-*Silnice zpívá* [*The Highway Sings*] (1937) (co-cinematographer) (advertising film shown at the 1937 World Exposition in Paris)

-*Crisis* (1938) (cinematographer and editor)

-*Lights Out in Europe* (1939) (cinematographer and editor)

*-The Forgotten Village* (1941) (co-director, cinematographer and editor)

-*Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) (with Maya Deren)

-*At Land* (1944) (with Maya Deren) (co-cinematographer and co-editor)

-*A Study in Choreography for Camera* (1945)

-*The Private Life of a Cat* (1945)

-*Library of Congress* (1945) (director) (nominated for the 1945 Academy Award for short documentary subject)

-*Valley of the Tennessee* (1945) (director)

-*Ritual in Transfigured Time* (1945-46) (co-cinematographer and co-editor) (with Maya Deren)

-*The Medium* (1950) (co-director and editor)

-*Angry Boy* (1951) (director)

-*Night Journey* (1961) **(**director)

*-To Be Alive*! (1964) (co-director and cinematographer) (won 1965 Academy Award for documentary short subject)

-*To Fly* (1976) (editor)