



FILM & VIDEO UMBRELLA

Organisers: Michael O'Pray & Cordelia Swann
7 Rossetti House
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3rd Nov, 1986

Report to Film & Video Committee on the tour of 'A Camera of One's Own' and the progress of the tour of 'Heroic Times'.

'A Camera of One's Own'

Spacex Gallery, Exeter

Programme 1-April 15th/audience: 3

Programme 2-April 22nd/no screening because of organisational and equipment problems at the gallery

Film House, Edinburgh

Programme 1-April 22nd/audience: 40

Good reception except for a few women who thought that the films were art college and London biased. As a result there was much heated discussion after the screening.

Programme 2-May 1st/audience: 10

New Cinema, Nottingham

Programme 1-May 7th/audience: 10

Good reception by women who, for the most part, had never seen experimental film before. Enthusiastic and positive reaction nevertheless.

Programme 2-May 14th/audience: 10

Plymouth Art Centre

Programmes 1&2-May 10th/audience: 60

Very good reception of films which were shown as part of an all day event of discussion and screenings. Film extracts were shown and discussed by Jane Root and the films of Maya Deren were introduced by Judith Higginbottom. There was also the first screening of work produced by the Penzance Women's Video Collective. Many of the audience came long distances for this event so that it was a particularly good idea to have put the programmes together for this screening as it is unlikely that a majority of the audience would have been able to return in the following week.

Cornerhouse, Manchester

Programme 1-May 20th/audience: 30

Good reception on the whole except that audience really was unprepared for experimental film and found the more formalistic films in the programme particularly difficult.

Programme 2-May 22nd/audience: 30

Derby Metro

Programme 1-May 20th/audience: 50

Very good reception and very interesting discussion afterwards. Many of the comments at this screening both perplexed and inspired me. probably the most successful screening because of the audience response.

Programme 2-MAY 27th/audience: 20

Phoenix Cinema, Leicester Super 8 Festival

Programmes 1&2-May 29th/audience: 80-90

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Part of an evening of women's events. Although there was no time for discussion there were many questions and discussions throughout the rest of the festival.

Watershed, Bristol

Programme 1-June 4th/audience: 10

Very little response except when someone asked me 'Don't you think that experimental films are made for other experimental film-makers?'

Programme 2-June 26th/audience : 10

Brighton Workshop

Programmes 1&2-June 10th/audience: 25

A long evening due to the projectors not working properly with the result that there was no time for discussion; although I did have several conversations with women in the audience about the films and my talk.

Ipswich Film Theatre

Programmes 1&2- June 19th/ audience: 20

This was the first screening of experimental films at this theatre and the response was warm considering that there were some disasters with the projection so that only half the films could be screened.

Whitechapel Gallery, London

Programme 1&2-June 29th/audience: 25

Very low attendance for this London venue. This was mostly due to many of the films being screened elsewhere in the previous week. Also a hot June afternoon after weeks of college shows is not an audience puller especially as the gallery decided not to have a press show so that the programme could be reviewed in City Limits or Time Out, etc.,.

Chapter Workshop, Cardiff

Programmes 1&2-July 3rd/audience: 60

Good attendance, but a sense of disappointment especially from the more formalistic films in the first programme. Occasion also marred by Joanna Woodward's magnetic striped film being damaged by double tape splices in at least 25 places.

Rendezvous Cinema, Portsmouth

Programme 1&2-July 9th/audience: 25

Several disasters with the sound on the projector combined with an antagonism towards both myself and the films caused this screening to be one of the more memorable ones.

Transmission Gallery, Glasgow

Programmes 1&2-October 11th/audience: 45

For this trip I was accompanied by Martine Thoquenne who answered questions about her film as well as helping me with the projection. We received a very positive response from all of the audience despite the screen being made out of a sheet. It was the gallery's first 16mm screening, as a result we did all the projection as well as explaining the necessity



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for splicers, rewinds and take up spools. It was unfortunate that this venue which was one of the more eager places to screen the films was forced to pay more towards my speaker's fee because it could not go through the 'books' in London. Obviously the speaker's fee was shared between Martine and myself as she paid her own train fare.

Now that the tour of 'A Camera of One's Own' is over I can recover from the shock of finding myself not only defending (with, as one filmmaker described it, a pioneer spirit) the role of women as initiators in experimental and personal film-making, but also defining experimental film history; all within the short space of half an hour. There were times when I found the realisation that experimental film seemed to have had very little impact on audiences outside London very depressing indeed, but at the same time these same regional audiences often seemed more genuinely interested in the films than ones I had come across in London.

I think that there were probably a few mistakes in the programming of this package, not so much in the choice of films, but in the running order. Quite early on in the tour I discovered that some of the more formalistic films in the first programme, which I found the easiest to view, were difficult and often irritating to many people in the audience so that by the time programme 2 was shown in the following week there would be a smaller audience. This was a great pity especially as the films in the second programme had more 'content' and 'accessibility'. To make sure that at least some of the audience saw the second programme, I decided to show both programmes on the same evening in as many venues as possible. This strategy gave less time for discussion and some audiences found the amount of films too much to absorb, but I felt that at least the films in the second programme were being seen. In some venues we also tried switching the running order of both programmes and this was also successful. Of course each venue had a different reaction to the films and I don't think there was a single film which had the same response in any of the venues. Nevertheless, there were enough women at each venue who felt that some of the films in the first programme were 'regressive', that it would have been a mistake not to take notice of their opinion. My premise was that all the women in the package, whether working in abstract animation or trying to build a narrative, were following in a tradition of 'personal', poetic and 'amateur' film-making which had often been initiated by women who then formed the foundation of what we now consider experimental and avant-garde film. There is so little in film-history which includes women film-makers that I felt that it was particularly exciting to reveal this other unknown tradition which women had been working in since the beginning of film. At almost every screening I met women who either wanted to start making films or who wanted to continue making films on the basis of what they had seen or heard. Sadly, the enthusiasm that these women showed did not outweigh, for me, the fact that so many others were very resentful of most of the package.

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There is no doubt that in terms of attracting new audiences the tour of 'A Camera of One's Own' was a success. It was also an important precedent as it was the first package of women's films to emanate from the Arts Council. There were times when I felt that the tour was historically almost too late especially as this first package of women's films had such a low budget. Most people couldn't reconcile the low budgets of the films and the package as a whole with the Arts Council as an institution. Questions like: 'Why hadn't there been a more national selection and a less London biased selection?' could only be answered with: 'There wasn't enough money to advertise, make the selection or to organise and pay for prints, soundtracks, etc.,' and this answer was very inadequate for most of the audience. I might add that many of the film-makers in both this package and in 'Heroic Times' are very resentful at the way they cannot have prints made for a tour which is going out under the name of the Arts Council.

I'd like to thank Tina Keane, who continued to give support throughout the tour and all the organisers at the venues who were hospitable, sympathetic and on the whole interested in the films.

Heroic Times

After much planning 'Heroic Times' has finally started its tour. The first venue is the New Cinema, Nottingham and more venues are in the process of booking for the new year. There are several articles planned in the NME, The Face & The New Statesman. There will also be television coverage of the London venue.

There have been a great many problems getting this package off the ground, not least of which was a row about my fee during the summer. In case the committee is unaware, I have resigned from the Umbrella Scheme under the condition that I finish off the preparation for the tour of 'Heroic Times' at which time Michael O'Pray is meant to take over. As usual I find myself working months over the time it was planned that I should do and as Michael O'Pray has made himself unavailable to me for the last six weeks I seem to be expected to continue working for the Umbrella with no income indefinitely. As I have committed myself to the film-makers, I feel obliged to continue working, but I now feel that I have been exploited for such a ridiculous amount of time that it really isn't worth writing about it anymore. On the other hand, I would be very happy to come to the policy meeting in the Spring in order to make a final report.

Cordelia Swann

Please excuse the fact that this report was not sent out with the others, but as I only heard that it had to be in the day before it was due there was not enough time to complete it.