

21 February 2003

Antonia Byatt
The Women's Library
Old Castle Street
London
E1 7NT

Dear Antonia,

Cinenova: Women's Film and Video collection

I am writing to you as Chief Executive of London Film and Video Development Agency, the regional support agency for cultural film, about Cinenova, the women's film and video resource who are one of our clients. I am not sure how much of the background you have been given but briefly, approaches have been made in the past about the possibility of Cinenova's collection of films and videos by women being integrated in some way with the Women's Library. For various reasons which were to do with your re-location and changes in personnel this has never been fully explored. I understand that your predecessor had indicated a renewed interest in taking things further and suggested you were contacted. I am doing so now because one way or another Cinenova's future needs to be decided without further delay.

Cinenova was established in the early 90s, with distribution based on the titles held by the women's film and video distributor Circles, although some of the old Cinema of Women collection was also added to the catalogue. During the early 90s it flourished, added a number of new titles and established a real presence both in the UK and internationally. However by the end of the 1990s it was clear that within the economic realities of the film industry as a whole and the priorities of public funding of arts projects, the earned income versus public funding balance was woefully out of kilter, and as a stand alone organisation with paid staff Cinenova was no longer viable. To give a context, there are now virtually no specialist film and video distribution companies (targeting gender, race or sexuality specifically) in the UK where there were about a dozen thriving in the 80s/ early 90s. Only in the US where the non-theatric/educational market is vast can an organisation like Woman Make Movies survive.

However, whilst Cinenova's activity has been curtailed, the collection is still virtually extant as most filmmakers have not withdrawn their titles and the BFI are still holding the 16mm film prints. Dedicated volunteers and a small board have kept the operation alive although there has been no new acquisition of titles for



**LONDON FILM AND VIDEO
DEVELOPMENT AGENCY**



114 Whitfield Street
London W1T 5EF

Tel: 020 7383 7755

Fax: 020 7383 7745

Email:

lfvda@lfvda.demon.co.uk

Website:

www.lfvda.demon.co.uk

Registered in England

No. 2755689

Registered Charity

No. 1015551

Vat No. 657 3369 06

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several years. There is also a related website which received significant public funding and was intended to act as a wider resource on women's filmmaking from a historical and cultural perspective. Please take a look at the site on www.cinenova.org. In addition some of the Cinenova collection is now being digitised as part of a major online project supported by the New Opportunities Fund.

What I would like to suggest is a meeting involving the Women's Library, the Cinenova board and myself to see if there is any mileage in some form of partnership or collaboration. I was an original founder member of Cinenova and I have a strong belief that there is such synergy between their collection and the resources of the Women's Library that this would definitely not be a waste of anyone's time to give this active consideration. Could you give me a ring or send an email if you are interested in taking this further?

Best wishes

Gill Henderson
Chief executive



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