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18th October, 1982

Rodney Wilson & Film & Video panel,
A.C.G.B.
105 Piccadilly, W1

Dear Rodney Wilson and panel,

I would like to apply for a bursary of £2,955 to develop my work in video. I am involved in a project which currently exists as a series of fragments and I only need a little more material before I begin to edit. Simultaneously, I intend to collect sequences and images for my next work which is linked to the recent passing of my thirtieth birthday. Before I enlarge on these projects, I will briefly sketch in the development of my ideas to date.

In the mid'70s, I was making figurative paintings and reliefs based on a rather jaundiced view of human relationships. These evolved into a more specific feminist analysis of a middle-class Catholic upbringing and the patriarchal culture it prepared me for. A certain sense of urgency prompted me to explore the more direct and flexible media of performance and video. Using stories, fantasies, pointed gestures and "The Personal is Political", I attempted to link my individual struggle for personal liberation to the wider issues of the women's movement. A combination of Marxist/Structuralist argument and the experience of selling my "celebratory" feminist nudity to a lascivious Danish collector resulted in the purging of the female form from my work. I performed in semi-darkness or became physically absent leaving only my pre-recorded voice to fill the breach. It soon became obvious that my self-imposed exile was doing nothing to challenge dominant representations of femininity and I cautiously re-emerged from the gloom. Language, visual or otherwise is not an immovable structural straightjacket and I began to look for ways in which to subvert and dislodge the ideological baggage of conventional female iconography. For example, the performance "Each Fine Strand" was an image of a woman creating a series of images, drawings and stories. During much of the performance, my back was turned to the audience and the features I was drawing replaced any emphasis on my own face and body.

Around this time, I began to work more exclusively with video. The dangers and difficulties involved in manipulating female imagery demanded greater control than I was achieving in performance. (The only person who never saw the performance was me). The medium's immediacy and flexibility coupled with my growing ability to control the results are very important to my current needs and objectives. I find video as a working process like making a (very expensive) drawing - you put something down, next to

something else, move it around, rub it out and start again. Laurie Anderson recently described video as a kind of visual irritant, but perhaps its precarious existence as neither art nor television, object nor illusion offers woman (that aberrant consciousness) an important strategy for cultural intervention - a new way of finding a voice. What that voice sounds like, what the speaker does or looks like or says is a problem I attempt to tackle in all my work.

"Little Death Hunt", the tape I am now working on explores a traditionally tabooed area, tabooed no less by feminists than by Mary Whitehouse, that of female sensuality. I use the word sensuality as a very broad term - the pleasures and frustrations of creating an image being at one level a perfect battleground for the conflict of libidinal drives and inhibitions. Existing representations of female sensuality/sexuality in the media and in art will obviously condition the reading of any images I produce, so without denying the possibility of a natural response, I am carefully collecting, dissecting and selecting sequences which I "spontaneously" respond to with pleasure. These range from urgent steps in a greenhouse to extended sequences of a man's back being scratched - the nail's passage forming warm words which disappear as soon as they are written. Presiding over these fragments is the image of Artemis the huntress who assisted at the birth of her brother Apollo. Her mother's agony so appalled Artemis that she swore never to marry and took to hunting instead. According to Robert Graves, her celibacy was not a feature of the original myth. Never marrying in matriarchal terms meant never being subject to any one man but taking pleasure in many lovers. It was later patriarchal Greek culture that imposed her virginity. The active expression of sexual desire in contemporary women is equally unacceptable and a passive sexuality (a sexual drive with passive aims) is largely produced by patriarchal ideology and legitimised in Freudian theories of femininity. More recently a dual sexuality with both active and passive aims present has been proposed by Montrelay and others. It is this shifting duality that I am beginning to identify through experience and observation. There has recently been a proliferation of feminist literature on female sex/sensuality and I am enthusiastically digging for further confirmation of what my eyes, ears and more subtle senses tell me.

My second project involves the documentation of physical changes that are heralded by my 30th birthday. Women's preoccupations with their bodies were interpreted as sad attempts to preserve the value of their major currency - the physical power to attract and trap a man. Feminism rejected both the imagery and the economic realities of that sexual market place leaving women the onerous task of building a new feminist aesthetic - an unoppressive vision of beauty. This new work will be a self-portrait built up over a year recording both small changes and dramatic transformations.... an attempt to retrieve self-image. Many women artists are trying to rethink the problems of female imagery - how

to adapt traditional representations without distorting and limiting our aesthetic preferences. For some this has meant exploring the "forbidden" territories of pornography and S/M scenarios on the grounds that a degree of "honest" violence is the most reasonable response to the violence of feminine socialisation. I find this argument as limited as the one that reduced me to muttering in the dark. Simple reproduction of imagery that serves the interests of an oppressive system can only be collusive. In "Little Death Hunt" I am trying to avoid this problem by using unspecific, anonymous or evocative images and working the "meanings" in through timing and pacing in the editing stage. The urge to loosen up women's art is of course inevitable and desirable. For me it could mean a return to some of my earlier directness and where "Little Death Hunt" is proceeding with great caution, my self-portrait will offer a concurrent alternative approach with direct illustrative images.

In practical terms, I anticipate my costs for the completion of "Little Death Hunt" to be approximately as follows:

	£
Voice overs (actors)	180
Video tape stock	100
Camera/portapak/mic. hire	300
Editing	1,100
TOTAL	<u>1,680</u>
For the initial work on the self-portrait tape:	
Video tape stock	200
Camera/portapak/mic. hire	500
Photographic film, b & w and colour slides	35
Photographic paper and chemicals	40
Initial editing	500
TOTAL	<u>1,275</u>
<u>GRAND TOTAL</u>	<u>£ 2,955</u>

*see the
Tape.*

You have recently allocated £400 (£15 a day, for a day a week) towards my costs for researching an exhibition to be held at R.C.A. in 1984. This show will involve 24 artists, 10 or so seminar speakers, a catalogue etc.. The money I am applying for now is on behalf of myself as an artist, not a part-time art administrator.

I enclose four video tapes (see separate list) and a portfolio of earlier work in support of my application.

Yours sincerely,

Catherine Elwes

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Catherine Elwes

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My art education began in 1969 at the West Surrey College of Art & Design and has been interspersed with periods of training and full-time work in other professions, including three years as a BBC make-up artist. Lanchester Polytechnic, the Slade and the Royal College of Art have since contributed to my formal education which I completed in 1982. Between 1976 and 1981 I was a member of the Women Artist's Collective and between 1978 and 1980 co-organiser of "Women's Images of Men" held at the I.C.A. in 1980. This exhibition toured widely as did "About Time" an exhibition of Video, Performance and Installation work by women which I organised to follow "Images of Men". I was recently voted onto the Council of Management at London Video Arts and I am currently fundraising for a mixed exhibition of time-based art to be held in the Gulbenkian Hall at the Royal College of Art in January 1984. I plan to work on the project for a day a week this academic year, leaving plenty of time for my own work and any teaching commitments that might arise. I have already done day visits to colleges like Exeter, Newcastle, Portsmouth and Sheffield to teach or lecture on women in performance and I occasionally run two-day video workshops. Since feminist art historians tend to draw the line at around 1960, it is important that others should be writing a contemporary history of women's art. My contributions have appeared in Time Out, Undercut, Art Monthly, Feminist Art News, Aspects, P.S. Magazine and Performance Magazine. I do not write exclusively about women artists, but my main interest lies with their work and I am currently revising a chapter about performance for Readers and Writers forthcoming book on women's art.

For some years I worked as a narrative or figurative painter/sculptor and a need to tell my story more directly produced several performances, some slide-tape pieces and a sound work. I am now concentrating principally on video whilst retaining a strong element of performance in my approach to the medium.

Exhibitions/performances/video screenings

The Women's Arts Alliance, "New ways of seeing and being seen" with Annie Wright, 1977

Kvindegalleriet, Copenhagen with the financial assistance of the British Council, 1977

The Women's Festival, Action Space, London 1977

London Video Arts, Acme Gallery, London 1978

New Contemporaries, I.C.A. London 1979

The Basement, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1980/81/82

London Film Makers Co-op event, London 1980

Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 1980

"About Time", I.C.A. London, 1980

" " Arnolfini, Bristol 1980

" " Third Eye Gallery, Glasgow 1981

Southill Park, Bracknell, 1981

"Women Live", Newcastle/London 1982

2nd National Independent Video Festival, I.C.A. London 1982

Women artists at the Midland Gallery, Nottingham 1982 (forthcoming)

Air Gallery Basement, for London Video Arts, 1982 (forthcoming)

Bibliography

"Feminist Perceptions", Alexis Hunter, Artscribe, 1980

"Women's Exhibitions", Tamara Krikorian, Aspects 13, 1980

"About Time, a ten-day diary", P.S. Magazine, Christmas 1980

"Pretty Promises, Happy-Traps", an introduction to About Time, Sarah Kent, Time Out, October 1980

"Making Up Glasgow", documentation, Performance magazine 12, July 1981

"Making Up Glasgow", documentation, Performance magazine 12, July 1981

THE TAPES

(Please note that the sound is carried on both channels 1 & 2)

I would like to suggest that you view the work in the following order:

1. Kensington Gore 14 mins August 1981

(This tape is briefly described in my portfolio)

It is primarily an exercise in storytelling, exploring different conventions used in television drama and documentaries. At another level it is about the suspension of disbelief in the face of the overriding evidence of a constructed illusion - even tho' the wound is seen to be built of wax, when the knife goes in, most people wince. It also tells a true story.

2. Nostalgia 14 mins May 1982

(This tape is briefly described in my portfolio)

I made the tape while our screens were inundated with Falklands reports. Old generals were dug out to comment on the proceedings. The nationalism, the stiff upper lip and fair play. The old school middle-class male was in his element. I began to think about my own fantasies of parental pasts and I wondered why they hold such a fascination for me.

4. Untitled (as yet) 26 mins July 1982

I recently finished this tape and haven't looked at it since. I think it's about watching television and my assumption that I'm an informed viewer.

5. The Plain Woman's Guide to her first Performance

The Plain Woman's Guide to her last Performance

Le Coq est Mort

20 mins

(The tape is fully described in my portfolio)

I have included this tape because it uses documentation and reconstructions of my past performances and black & white videos.