

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE ARTISTS FILMS COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22 JUNE 1977 IN THE CINEMA OF THE
ARTS COUNCIL, 105 PICCADILLY, LONDON W1V 0AU

Present:	Professor Stuart Hood	Chairman
	Mr Ian Christie	Committee Member
	Mr Simon Field	" "
	Mr Rodney Wilson	Film Officer
	Mr David Curtis	Asst Film Officer
	Mr Richard Landau	Finance Assistant
	Ms Stephanie Featherstone	Secretary

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Ms Laura Mulvey, Mr Tony Rayns and Ms Caroline Tisdall.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Minutes were still to be circulated.

3. Financial Report

The Financial Report was tabled, showing expenditure to date of £8,420 and an uncommitted balance of £36,580. The Film Officer suggested the provisional reservation for Film-makers on Tour should be increased from £500 to £2,000, subject to review, as it was planned to expand the scheme. The Committee agreed to this amendment.

4. Matters Arising

- b. The Committee discussed a letter the Film Officer had received from Mike Leggett, a lecturer at Exeter College of Art, which contained a proposal for a number of film-makers additional to those in the catalogue to visit the college and hopefully a number of other places in the South-West.

In principle the Committee were in favour of expanding the scheme as was stated in the catalogue. However, the Film Officer pointed out that there would be some practical difficulties. Some of the suggested participants had not been funded by the Arts Council but by the B.F.I. As the B.F.I. retained copyright in the films, support by the Committee would constitute a subsidy to the B.F.I. The Film Officer said he had discussed informally with Peter Sainsbury, the possibility of some form of co-operation and he had expressed interest. The Chairman felt that ideally it would be best to include both B.F.I. and Arts Council funded films in the scheme, assuming that the B.F.I. were involved financially. The Film Officer thought it would be in the best interests of B.F.I. funded film-makers that the B.F.I. should be persuaded to establish its own scheme, although he accepted that there were some film-makers who could benefit from showing work in the context of Film-makers on Tour. It was important, whatever

was decided, that the Arts Council was not seen to promote B.F.I. productions.

Mr Christie said he thought the Committee should state clearly the kind of films it supported. Mr Field agreed. Mr Curtis emphasised that he was keen for the Committee to support a widening range of film-makers and to encourage film-makers working outside of the apparent mainstream of avant-garde film-making. Mr Christie told the Film Officer that applications would probably be received from other members of groups such as the I.F.A. now that the Production Board was pursuing, if unofficially, a policy of not repeating awards. The Film Officer replied that he would welcome that happening if the ideas were good and the work within the Committee's terms of reference. He did not think that it was helpful if film-makers should be regarded throughout their lives as being of one type or another. Their work would progress and change and it would seem logical for a film-maker to be supported by the B.F.I. at one time and at another by the Arts Council. The major consideration should be the nature of the project, not whether the individual had received support previously from another institution. Returning to Mr Christie's original point he said that the Committee's terms of reference for the definition of work supported should be made explicit although he was not in favour of too rigid a set of criteria. In his view the definition established for "Perspectives of a British Avant-Garde Film" was sufficient, namely, that the Committee funded films that were within the context of avant-garde film practice, both in historical and a current conceptual framework. In particular this was seen as meaning work within the modernist tradition, which addressed itself to the medium and its own means of creating meaning.

The Committee then discussed the list of Film-makers submitted by Mike Leggett. All of the Film-makers were considered to be potentially eligible with the following exceptions. Margaret Tait was resident in Scotland and therefore under present devolution agreements could not be funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain. Steve Farrar was currently a student at the R.C.A. and therefore ineligible for support. Stewart Mackinnon's only film was copyrighted by the B.F.I.

The Film Officer agreed that he would discuss the relationship with the B.F.I. in more detail with Hilary Thompson of the Production Board. He would also write to Mike Leggett and inform him of the Committee's deliberations.

a. Video Funding

(i) London Video Arts

The Film Officer summarised briefly the recent meeting with members of the LVA held to discuss the application for the funding of an exhibition venue and tape distribution scheme. The revised application in front of the Committee now answered points which the Committee had raised on that occasion. In addition LVA were able to confirm that they now had premises in Brixton, arranged through the Acme Housing Association, which the Film Officer explained to the Committee was a registered charity, receiving some financial assistance from the Council and specialising in finding living

accommodation and studios for artists as well as running the Acme Gallery in Covent Garden. He felt that this demonstrated the seriousness of their intent. The premises would be shared with artists working in other fields, including a musicians collective, which he thought a good thing.

The Film Officer said that the Committee would now have to decide whether or not to support the LVA applications made by John Hopkins in his Video Distribution Report (ii). He explained to the Committee that although it was not an application they had been asked to comment. The Report made recommendations for similar activities to those that LVA were asking support for. The Chairman summarised the differences between the two applicants by saying that broadly speaking Mr Hopkin's sympathies lay with Community Video and LVA's with Artists' Video. The Film Officer added that Mr Hopkin's recommendations involved work currently being funded by the Community Arts Department and therefore outside the terms of reference of the Artists' Films Committee. The Assistant Film Officer reminded members that LVA had moderated their original request considerably; at one time Mr Hopkin's plans had seemed more viable but now the position had changed.

The Film Officer informed the Committee he thought that a number of the video activities in the report were really the province of the B.F.I. and the Community Arts Committee. However, he had been told unofficially that they were unlikely to support Mr Hopkins recommendations.

The Film Officer read out extracts from a letter commenting on Mr Hopkin's recommendations received from Jim Pierce, Film Officer of the Yorkshire Arts Association. His main points were: contrary to Mr Hopkin's basic premise most schools use Phillips rather than Sony equipment because it is cheaper; was it worth spending such a large sum of money on video distribution systems; would it not be better to use local broadcast TV stations rather than cable TV stations for video transmissions. He felt that Mr Hopkin's had misinterpreted the Annan Committee's Report on a fourth television channel. The Committee agreed with the last point. Basically the problem was the difficulty of assessing the level of production or demand at the moment. He felt the amount of money requested was out of proportion to the quality and amount of tapes currently being produced. The Film Officer confirmed that video equipment was expensive to buy and maintain, particularly in relation to film equipment.

The Committee discussed the report in detail. The figures concerning the proposed national dubbing centre implied that this would be a profitable concern. Although Mr Christie and the Film Officer thought that the centre was necessary the Committee agreed with the Finance Assistant when he said that this argued against Arts Council support being necessary. The Finance Assistant also said that the Council could not take on new revenue commitments with implications for future years, but the Film Officer felt none was implied; all that was needed was initial capital investment for the scheme to get under way; after which it would become self supporting. This expenditure would have to be provided by one or other of the funding bodies or the centre would never be set up.

The Committee were then asked by the Film Officer for their comments on the Report so that they could be relayed officially. The Committee approved the idea of Concord Films Council handling the distribution of tapes whilst noting that artists video would be distributed by LVA.

The idea of a National Dubbing Centre was approved although the amount required was outside the level of funding the Committee could handle. Nor was it felt to be within the Committee's terms of reference.

The Film Officer then raised the question of the Artists' Films Committee funding video bursaries through cable TV stations, as suggested by Mr Hopkins in his Report. Mr Christie was not in favour of the idea as he did not think there would be much interest in artists video in the provinces when even regional non-commercial cinemas were having to close down. The distribution of cable TV stations was completely haphazard and bore no relation to cultural centres. The Chairman was inclined to agree, but the Assistant Film Officer thought the fact that video could be seen with little effort, in the home, rather than in a cinema, might make an important difference.

The Film Officer was keen to explore this idea as he was in favour of introducing video to wider audiences. It was decided that he should investigate possibilities and report back to the Committee with a view to inviting specific applications, perhaps on a competitive basis, for video bursaries in conjunction with cable TV stations.

Returning to the application from LVA the Chairman asked about the maintenance of equipment. The Film Officer replied that the idea was for the Arts Council to remain the owner of the equipment and be responsible for maintenance costs, usually 25% of initial purchase cost annually. He thought there were advantages to this method of providing subsidy. Firstly it could be insisted that open access to the equipment be provided and secondly the equipment could be withdrawn if the project did not work out satisfactorily. Mr Christie asked about staffing and whether it would be adequate to make the facilities as widely available as possible. The Film Officer replied that LVA members would provide staffing on a rota basis until such time as the revenue from tape-hire made it feasible to employ someone on a part-time basis.

The Assistant Film Officer said that the application fell firmly within the Committee's terms of reference and LVA would promote the interests of artists using video. The Committee agreed that the new application had answered questions raised earlier and should be treated as a priority. It was agreed to recommend £3500 from the 1977/8 Artists Films Allocations, £750 of this to be made available to LVA immediately and the balance to be used to purchase equipment that would then be loaned to the group.

c. Print purchasing of Funded Films

The Film Officer reminded the Committee that part of the conditions under which awards were made stated that the Arts Council could purchase prints from the film-maker at twice the laboratory cost. Obviously the film-makers were keen to sell prints and this arrangement was now proving very expensive and could not be continued on an ad hoc basis. He thought the Committee should reserve some of the 1977/78 Allocation for this purpose. He suggested that the Committee should be notified of all films purchased in this way and consulted over dubious cases.

It was agreed to recommend that £1000 should be reserved from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation in the first instance, with the option of review at a later date.

5. Applications

1. Deferred from 2 May

a) Derek Boshier

The Committee saw an extract from the 16 mm film supporting the application - REELS and did not feel that the applicant had progressed since this film had been made. It was decided to reject the application.

b) Kevin Pither

Having seen an extract from a 16 mm film TOO FAR GONE the Committee decided unanimously to reject the application.

c) Stuart Pound

The Committee saw part of his supporting film and there was considerable discussion.

Mr Field found Stuart Pound's attempts to incorporate science in his films very interesting. However, both he and the Film Officer felt that the applicant misjudged the degree of familiarity there was with the ideas quoted in the commentary. The Committee were generally puzzled by the visual images chosen to accompany the commentary, but thought the camera-work very competent.

It was felt that the applicant had progressed since earlier applications and that there were some encouraging signs but bearing in mind the amount requested it was decided to reject the application outright.

d) Jane Rigby

Some of the Committee had been to see a recent show of her work and a book of photographs supporting the application was circulated. It was agreed to recommend a £750 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

2. Production - Film

a) Mitch Davies

The Committee were shown some of his supporting 16 mm film and found his work very interesting. They agreed to recommend a £750 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

b) Martin Hearne

After looking at some Super 8 supporting material the Committee unanimously decided to recommend a £750 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

c) Tony Hill

The Committee were shown a series of 16 mm tests indicating the kind of work Tony Hill wished to continue with. It was agreed to recommend a £1250 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

d) Amanda Jones

The Committee saw one of her animated films PUTTING ON THE STYLE. Mr Christie thought she showed potential and Mr Curtis said he knew her work when she was a student at Croydon College of Art and thought quite highly of her.

It was agreed to recommend a £300 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

Mr Curtis then left the meeting.

e) George Mitchell

Having seen a 16 mm film as evidence of the applicant's work, the Committee rejected the application.

f) Adrian Munsey

There was no support for the application and it was rejected.

g) Alan Welsford

The Committee were in favour of the application and it was decided to recommend a £300 bursary from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

h) Gail Wright

From her supporting artwork the Committee could see that the applicant was talented but did not feel that her animation was original enough to merit an award. The application was rejected.

3. Exhibition

a) 2nd International Exhibition of Artists' Video in Washington New Town

The Film Officer told the Committee that there had been a good response locally to last year's exhibition and that he would be in favour of supporting another show. The Committee agreed and it was decided to recommend a grant of £400 from the 1977/78 Artists' Films Allocation.

6. Any Other Business

a) Tony Sinden - Request for £100 to be advanced from 2nd Instalment of £600 awarded on 4 March

The Film Officer tabled a letter from Tony Sinden in which he explained that he needed the additional money to provide material which would be used in both shows. The Committee agreed to the request.

b) Mr Field asked the Film Officer whether it would be possible for organisations to apply to the Committee for help with paying travelling costs for visiting overseas film-makers. The Film Officer replied that one way of making such funding more acceptable to English film-makers would be for the person concerned to guarantee at least one public show/lecture in return. From the Committee's point of view this could be seen as a legitimate extension of the Film-makers on Tour scheme.

Mr Curtis said he thought film-makers would be very enthusiastic about the possibility of this kind of financing as it was very important to keep in touch with what was happening abroad.

7. Date of Next Meeting

To be arranged later.