

Film co-op plans new £750,000 HQ

Centre would have 120-seat cinema

LIGHTS, camera... action! The London Film-makers Co-operative, the pioneering avant-garde collective which this year celebrates its 27th birthday, is preparing to move to a new location.

Negotiations are under way for the co-operative, which was born in the West End and settled in Camden towards the end of the '70s, to move to the Grand Union Building, in Kentish Town Road, near Kentish Town tube.

The Foundation for Sport and the Arts has provided a £200,000 grant towards the new media centre — which would cost at least £750,000 and would be shared with London Video Access, and will boast new workshops and a 120-seat cinema.

Staff at the co-operative say the building, which is owned by Sainsbury, will have many advantages over the current first-floor premises in Gloucester Avenue, Camden, reached by a flight of metal stairs.

The proposed new site in Kentish Town Road would make more people aware of the co-operative; it also offers greatly improved access and facilities for people with disabilities and more comfortable surroundings.

The co-operative, which is funded by the British Film Institute with some additional funding from the Arts Council for specific projects, has proved an important breeding ground for new talent in the world of experimental celluloid.

Through it film-makers can exercise control over production, distribution and showing of their work.

Staff also work to make avant-garde films more accessible to the public, and are pleased to recall that in recent years there have been showings at the Scala Cinema in Pentonville Road, Kings Cross, and at the Tate Gallery.

Today the work of the co-operative slips into four main categories.

It offers facilities for filming, editing and dubbing; has the largest film distribution library of its kind in Britain, which is widely used across Europe; screens experimental work in its own 70-seat cinema and runs practical and theoretical courses, offering basic tuition right through to advanced techniques.

It is all a long way from humble beginnings in a bookshop off Charing Cross Road, back in the 1960s.

British and American film-makers in London, some inspired by a New York co-operative which counted Andy Warhol among its members, were looking for somewhere to produce and show experimental work.

They gravitated to the bookshop, which owner Bob Cobbing kept open after a day's business for screenings. It was after one of these film showings that the co-operative was born and since then it has played an important role in bringing young film-making talent to the fore.

One of the better known names in the film world involved with the co-operative is Derek Jarman, whose films include *Jubilee*, *The Tempest*, *Caravaggio* and *The Garden* and who early in his career showed work there.

Sandy Weiland, administrator of the co-operative, said: "Our current premises are run down and we are quite aware of that. The lease here expired four years ago and we have been looking for somewhere to go.

"If the negotiations are successful then these new premises would be far more suitable. They provide a much higher profile as well as better disabled access.

"Basically anyone can come along and make a film pretty cheaply. We are the only people in Britain whose remit is specifically to screen this kind of work. Quite a few of our film-makers get BFI new director awards and the one-minute slot on *The Late Show*."

David Curtis, Film and Video Officer at the Arts Council, said the co-operative was unrivalled in Europe.

"People from all over Europe come to make films and show them, there is a beaten path from France and even Germany," he said.

Irene Whitehead, head of BFI planning, said of the proposed new media centre: "It is a unique venture and one of national importance. We are very grateful to the foundation for such a substantial sum of money."



● Inger Lise Hansen, a film-maker using the co-operative's editing facilities.