Cosey Fanni Tutti
With Instruments for Marcel Duchamp's 'Next Work'
1975
Black and white photograph

According to Butler, these themes 'make the case for women whose practice may have fallen outside the articulated language of feminist art', especially those in isolated circumstances. Even so, it was hard to see how Clark, whose work acknowledged no distinction between genders, made sense in this exhibition. Her favoured term was 'human'. Similarly it seemed perverse to include artists such as Jay DeFeo, who scorned Feminism, or the obnoxious Orlan, while leaving out most of the artists who attended the Feminist Art Program at Fresno State and CalArts.

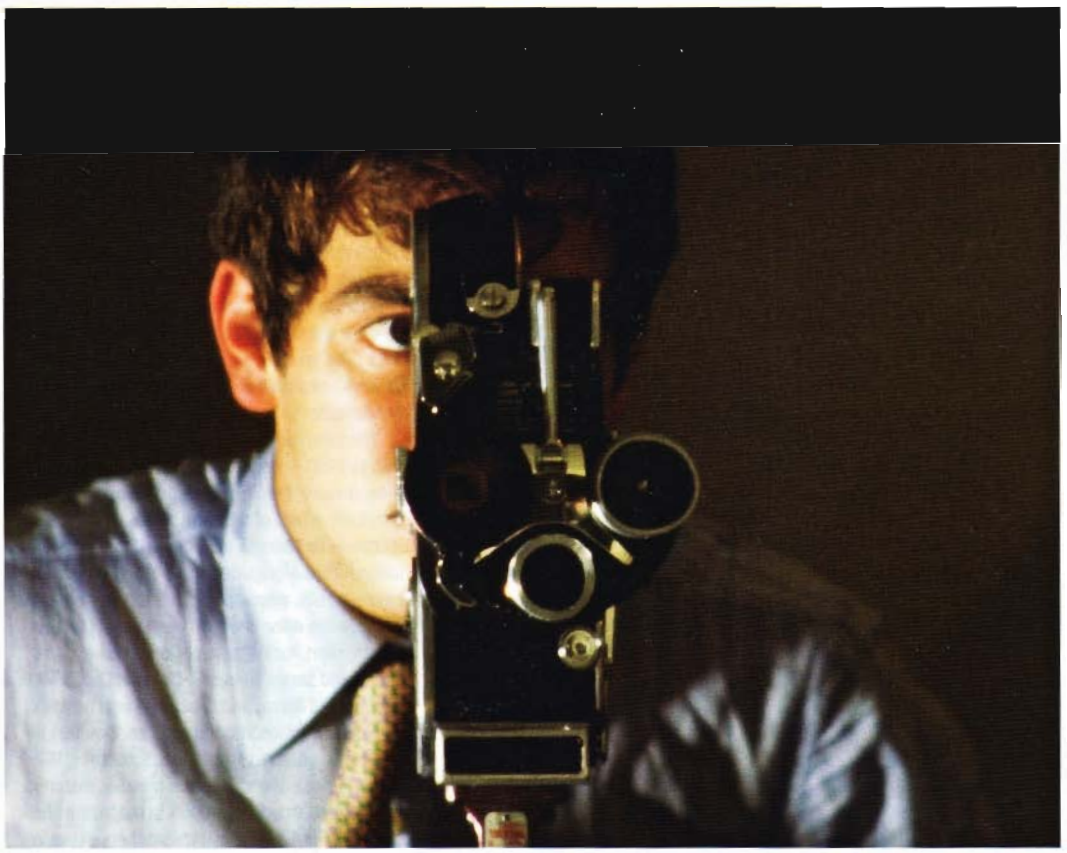
The exhibition suffers most by abstracting feminist art from the political movements that gave it force and meaning. One might be forgiven for being mystified by the fact that feminist artists took labour struggles to be a central issue (for example, Berwick Street Film Collective, *Nightcleaners*, 1970-5). The unequal division of labour is not mentioned anywhere conspicuous. Despite language, autobiography and confessional being everywhere in the exhibition, the 'consciousness-raising' discussions where such personal testimony gained political meaning are obviated. Without it these fundamentally political techniques look merely modish.

Several questions are left hanging. What accounts for the lag between radical Feminism's emergence as a political movement (gathering momentum through women's experiences on the front lines of the civil rights and student movements throughout the 1960s) and feminist art (articulated as such in the early 1970s)? How were these ideas transmitted to Chile, Croatia, Australia and elsewhere - how did it become an international movement? And what brought this investigation to a close in 1980? These questions are answerable; not addressing them in the exhibition makes the titular 'Feminist revolution' an empty signifier or, worse, a myth, locked in some distant, inaccessible past.

Julian Myers

Robert Beavers

Tate Modern, London, UK



Robert Beavers
Early Monthly Segments
1968-70/2002
Film still

'There is no fear of isolation while the filmmaking continues', Robert Beavers once observed about his particular relationship to the craft. 'Its development is response enough.' The enigmatic and intensely private conditions under which Beavers has laboured for over 40 years have indelibly coloured the remarkable body of work presented in this comprehensive Tate Modern retrospective. 'My Hand Outstretched to the Winged Distance and Sightless Measure' provided the elegiac title for the epic chronological cycle comprising 18 of Beavers' completed films (many of which he has re-edited in the past few years) produced since 1967, the year in which he and his lifelong partner, the then already eminent filmmaker Gregory Markopoulos, left their native USA for Europe. Their relocation was clearly intended as more than a mere geographical distancing from the vibrant American experimental film scene at that time, with both filmmakers refusing to screen their works in the USA (Beavers did not do so again until 1996) and Markopoulos requesting the removal of the chapter on his work from P. Adams Sitney's seminal 1974 textbook of avant-garde cinema *Visionary Film*. (Following Markopoulos' death in 1992, the chapter has subsequently been restored to the text, with Beavers' permission.) Indeed, for Beavers at least, an 18-year-old filmmaker at the beginning of his career, this self-imposed exile has, until recently, all but ensured his omission from any 'official' narrative of experimental filmmaking.

A sense of blissful isolation permeates Beavers' jewel-like films, generally composed of precisely edited and exacting sequences of images and short scenes that rapaciously capture the processes of filmmaking itself, Beavers' intense emotional and intellectual relationship with Markopoulos, and the vividly beautiful rural and urban landscapes encountered in their newly adopted European surroundings. Structural and mechanical devices used to suture together the image sequence or to emphasize the 'objectness' of the depicted forms frequently interrupt these elegantly composed visual chains. Images are by turns framed and obscured through the use of opaque mattes, which play with the inherent antagonism between illusionistic depth and the flatness of the projection screen. Tinted light filters are applied to the lens to create carefully masked patches of saturated colour emphasising the passing of light through the celluloid film strip. Beavers frequently employs the technique of turning the lens on the turret of the camera, causing the image to slide off the screen and introducing interstitial moments of blackness to the films' hypnotic procession of images.

Early Monthly Segments (1968-70/2002) provides a notional prologue to the entire cycle, encompassing the entire range of these visual

leitmotifs and containing sequences of film that are reused in several later works. In this, the earliest of the films shown here, images of the filmmaker dominate. As if watching the uncertain moments in which the artist holds a camera for the first time, Beavers tentatively establishes his relationship with the device, exploring its ability to capture the world around him and what it may reveal about his own image. The autobiographical tenor of the film is heightened by scenes depicting interactions between Beavers and Markopoulos as well as recurrent shots of Beavers in his studio – in this instance a simple table in a sun-dappled room – cutting and editing carefully arranged fragments of film. Beavers, like many filmmakers who began working in the 1960s, uses reversal film stock, allowing him to view the positive images on the film strip by holding it up to the light. Because he cuts his films manually and edits the sequences through visual memory alone (only in the making of his most recent works has he projected the images during the editing process), the final compositions preserve a patina of this intricate handcrafted process.

Work Done (1972/1999) masterfully demonstrates Beavers' use of metaphor and visual allusion, drawing correspondence between a series of daily routines and traditional craft techniques and the 'work' of filmmaking itself. Shot largely in Florence, entrancing images of trees being felled, an antique book being rebound or traditional Florentine blood pancakes being fried in lard become meditations on the notions of process and transformation. An abstract narrative is subtly suggested, as in all his films, through the fragmentation and subsequent dispersal of images that develop across each work's duration. Other narrative impulses derive from tacit references to an assembly of historic artistic personalities including John Ruskin, Leonardo da Vinci and the architect Francesco Borromini. More evocative than illustrative, films such as *From the Notebook of ...* (1971/1998), filmed in Florence and inspired by the notebooks of Leonardo, and the stately *Ruskin* (1975/1997), encouraged by a reading of *The Stones of Venice* (1851–3), form redolent portraits of these ancient cities viewed abstractedly through the eyes of Beavers' conjured forebears.

During the 1980s Beavers and Markopoulos established the Temenos (meaning 'a sacred place') – a piece of land in Lyssaraia on the Peloponnese in Greece that the two filmmakers considered the ideal location for screenings of their work, a project Beavers continues to this day. This eye-opening retrospective however, one of several recent public presentations of Beavers' work, signals the filmmaker's tentative emergence from self-imposed obscurity and, more significantly, from out of the shadow cast by Markopoulos' indomitable legacy, to claim his long overdue place in the pages of experimental film's polyphonic narrative.

Andrew Bonacina

Roni Horn
Vatnasafn/ Library of Water
2007
Installation view

Stykkishólmur, Iceland

Perched on top of a low cliff in the coastal village of Stykkishólmur in Iceland – a country with a population of only 300,000 people, and the place where, in Jules Verne's famous novel travellers began their journey to the centre of the earth – is a former library. The scenery around it is breathtaking. The cold sea changes colour in a heartbeat, while the village's small tin houses huddle around the bay like cold pensioners. The sky is huge and capricious, washed clean every few minutes with achingly clear light. Distant islands seem to appear and disappear at whim. It's the kind of place you assume is on good terms with fog.

For more than 20 years, American artist Roni Horn has been visiting Iceland, a country she said she chose 'the way another artist might choose marble as the substance of one's work.' Concerned with language, water and weather, and the complicated machinations of identity, the artist – whose survey exhibition, 'My Oz', opened at Reykjavik Art Museum in May – wanted to offer something back to the island that had given her so much. Visiting Stykkishólmur, she had heard of plans to move the library and proposed ideas for its possible use to the Mayor. Soon after, the London-based arts organisation Artangel committed to making Horn's idea a reality and *Vatnasafn/ Library of Water* (all works 2007) was born.

Horn's idea in many ways simply extends the notion of what a library is: a place of reflection, cataloguing, community activity and learning; book readings, meetings about environmental issues, yoga, music classes and women's chess sessions. As Horn put it, she wants it to be 'a lighthouse in which the viewer becomes the light.'

The library's windows were enlarged to look over the ocean, and rubber floors were installed and embedded with a field of 144 adjectives, in Icelandic and English, that describe the various moods of weather (torrid, fine, *kyrrt*, *slarkfaert*, sunny). One circular room remains empty; the other contains *Water, Selected* – 24 three-metre glass tubes of water collected from glaciers around Iceland. The tubes are minimal, graceful and glow softly; water, such an ubiquitous yet precious substance, is displayed at once like a combination of still life and rare object (which in many places of the world, it is, and in many more, is fast becoming). The basement has been converted into a writer's residence. Young novelist, Gudrún Eva Minervudóttir, the first recipient of the grant, said to me that living below the *Library of Water*, overlooking the sea, was 'a kind of heaven'.

The third part of the project involves an ongoing archive of weather reports gathered from people living in and around Stykkishólmur, where, coincidentally, the regular monitoring of meteorological conditions in Iceland was first undertaken by Árni Thorlacius in 1845. Horn has taken literally Sigmund Freud's theory that to 'talk about the weather is to talk about oneself'. The first collection of reports has been published as a book or, as the artist describes it, a 'collective self-portrait', entitled *The Weather Reports You*. Horn has long been interested in the weather; 'everyone has a story about it. This may be one of the only things each of us holds in common ... it is finally, one weather that we share.' The book makes for fascinating reading: fishermen, teachers, farmers and ambulance drivers tell stories about their experiences of the weather, and it's a page-turner. A child states that 'the best weather is weather I can play basketball in' while a woman in her 80s says that the 'weather's like a part of my body'.

For the library's opening, Horn invited a friend to play music in the space. In a red dress, Ólöf Arnalds sang, in a voice as pure and clear as the air outside, folksongs and songs she had written, some a cappella, others accompanied by guitar or a small instrument shaped from an Armadillo's shell. As she played, the light swiftly changed; the sea sucked and swelled, and the water from the glaciers glowed like sentinels. International visitors mingled with locals. When Arnalds finished her astonishing performance, we walked down the path through the arctic wind to eat ice-cream and drink wine. It was almost midnight but refused to get dark. No-one wanted to go to bed – the start of just another night in Stykkishólmur.

Jennifer Higgie

Roni Horn