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FITL Internship Report
Summer 2010
Sewanee, TN

The Use of Gender and Sexuality in Feminist Video and Performance Art

This summer I had the privilege of working under Professor Pond's mentorship through a Fund for Innovative Teaching and Learning (FITL) internship. With his guidance I researched popular feminist video and performance artists who largely worked in the late 1960's through the early 1980's. We discussed the role that these artists played, especially regarding the use of the gaze, presenting yourself to the camera, the use of sexuality as a tool for change, and a change in the way the body was presented following the feminist movement. Each of these subjects allowed for a more narrow exploration of feminist artists as well as the cultural situation that prompted their existence.

During the first half of my internship I researched the lives and works of Carolee Schneemann, Orlan, Martha Rosier, Anna Mendiate, Pipilotti Rist, Barbara Kruger, Linda Benglis, and Karen Finley among others. Each of the artist's I studied worked in very unique ways but centered their primary ideas on the importance of gender in their specific society. In addition I studied selected readings from *Art and Today* by Elanour Heartney, *A History of Video Art: The Development of Form and Function*, and *Gender and Art* edited by Gill Perry, in addition to various smaller articles on specific artists and their work. *A History of Video Art* was influential in understanding how the shift in video technology changed the nature and technical appearance of video art. Both *Art and Today* and *Gender and Art* provided valuable artistic references as well as cultural and historical

background into the topics the artists were addressing. During this time I primarily worked in the library and divided my time between researching specific pieces of work and gathering broader background information. The first four weeks, the primary research stage, I compiled all of my information into an interactive document.

During the second half of the summer I made a series of 5 videos that reflected the broad constraints of my research. Professor Pond and I discussed each piece for its technical strengths and weaknesses as well as its ability to visually discuss issues of gender inequality. The video pieces were each short segments that were edited and improved throughout the summer. Although they were separate pieces they connected to the others through their technical structure. Each video had an accompanying written segment that was linked together into a final research paper. By creating both the videos as well as writing a paper I was able to interact with the information I had researched in two very different but useful ways. Creating the videos was invaluable to understanding how to translate specific knowledge and cultural opinion into works of art. The paper allowed me to document and explain the most important facets of my research in a concrete and more direct manner. During the last 6 weeks I would alternate between filming and writing in the first part of the workday and editing the films in the latter part.

Although this internship provided me with a background on the interaction of the gender binary as well as cultural stipulations of sexuality, it also helped me understand the value of perception within art. I was able to research individual works of art in much more depth than normally allowed in a class setting and understand the implications of that work to different individuals. In addition I was able to show my video pieces to several individuals and observe their reaction of the piece when they were given no

introduction or any other guiding information. This new understanding is very valuable as an artist, to begin thinking about how each piece can affect a viewer in very distinct ways based on their own individual perceptions. My past work has often struggled in directly conveying its intention to an audience whom bring different experience. This internship was important in teaching me that in order to prompt a single repeated response the piece must be set up extremely calculated and intentionally.

My internship was invaluable to my success throughout my Sewanee experience and my thesis work as an Art Major. My thesis for the comprehensive exam deals directly with some of the underlying issues of gender and sexuality that I researched this summer. It provided a valuable background and broader understanding of the issues I am trying to confront in my thesis work. In addition I learned about the process of researching and creating work on a larger scale than simple class assignments.

Although my career goals are still not concrete, I fully intend to spend my life working for gender equality by means of the art world. Through this internship I was able to better grasp the historical and cultural implications of addressing these issues of gender and sexual inequality. As stated above my internship was invaluable to my growth artistically, academically, and in understanding my future career goals. I am thankful for the opportunity to explore a research topic in this manner and to Professor Pond for his work and guidance throughout the summer.