

Toronto filmmaker wins award in L.A., slap from Ontario

BY JOHN BENTLEY MAYS

DON'T ORDINARILY review art you can't see. But Toronto independent filmmaker Bruce Elder's *The Art of Worldly Wisdom* is not ordinary art. Last week, the 55-minute film was awarded the prestigious 1981 prize in the experimental category by the Los Angeles Film Critics Association.

But don't expect to see it in Toronto. The Ontario Board of Censors has refused to allow its public screening anywhere in the province until Elder cuts a brief shot of a woman's pubic area and a closeup of male masturbation. Elder has refused to mutilate his film. In that standoff, the Prudes Battalion can chalk up another victory for Hoserism, and the public loses another opportunity to see what film critics outside the heartland of The Great White North are raving about.

It is a meticulously crafted and acutely troubling document shaped around the tritest topic in the book: the artist's earnest telling of his personal and intellectual coming of age. Elder does nothing to camouflage or glamorize this prosaic core. "This is a photograph of me," begins the long, monotonous voice-over as this scrapbook of stills and film footage flips open. "It was taken quite a long time ago . . . The power transmission lines at the top of the photo would lead me to surmise that it was taken near our home in Hamilton."

If this is a portrait of the artist, however, it is a portrait of a decidedly Cubist sort; if Elder's life, times and trips are of only passing interest, his fractured, complex presentation of these things is harrowing. There is no meaning or story here, nothing to distinguish this life from any other, or to immortalize it. As the very brief clips of travel pictures, old snapshots, images of pets and faraway places and home-town Hamilton and late nights in the editing room tumble by under Elder's rambling speech, the viewer is faced with a melancholy, thoroughly modern vision of the self as so much data strewn behind as the body is thrown by time into the future.

"A world whose past has become obsolete and whose present churns out instant antiques invites custodians, decoders, collectors," says Elder, who himself plays all three roles in this deeply interesting experiment in structuralist cinema.