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Major film cycle ends on a note of sweetness

BY ROBERT EVERETT-GREEN

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By his own estimate, Bruce Elder is about 10 years ahead of schedule. In 1973, the Toronto filmmaker conceived the idea of a massive cycle that would chart "the history of consciousness in the era of modernity," and figured the job would take a quarter-century to complete. Fifteen years later, Elder has finished the last major instalment of *The Book of All the Dead*, a three-part, 14-hour film entitled *Consolations: Love is an Art of Time*. The new work will be given its first complete public showing this Thursday, Friday and Sunday at Innis College Town Hall and the Art Gallery of Ontario's Jackman Hall.

Elder, a leading experimental filmmaker, seems more than a little amazed to have reached the end. "I really believed all last year that I would not finish the cycle," he says, citing problems with health and financing, and "the sheer duress of doing the thing."

The resumption of his labors came about partly through the realization that "there's more sweetness around than I would have thought." Such words may surprise those who have come to think of Elder as the avenging angel of experimental film.

But then, by his own admission, *Consolations* marks a fundamental change of tone from earlier sections of the cycle, in which he tried to evoke a "darkening of the world, a spiritual decline that results from our having broken with both the earthly and the divine." In *Consolations*, Elder believes he has made at least a gesture toward a renovation of spirit. "I feel that the film is a kind of begging for peace," he says, "and a recognition that despite all reasons for pessimism, something is leading us toward more understanding."

Reasons for pessimism, in the Elder view of things, include virtually the whole history of rational philosophy, from Plato onward, and our continuing faith in the intrinsic worth (and moral neutrality) of knowledge. The glimmer at the end of that long tunnel comes through the essentially nonrational force of love.

The style of *Consolations* is as complex as its subject. As in earlier segments of the cycle, the viewer's attention is often inten-

tionally taxed to the limit, as a rich stream of images jostles with philosophically dense voice-overs and inter titles. But in place of the spiritual bleakness of *Lamentations* (1985), the new film offers what Elder calls "hints of the holy."

The Innis-AGO premiere of *Consolations: Love is an Art of Time* marks the beginning of a three-week exhibition of Canadian avant-garde film, which continues at both Jackman Hall and Innis Town Hall to Nov. 20. Parts 1 and 2 of *Consolations* will be shown at Innis on Thursday and Friday evenings respectively, with the third and final segment to be screened at the AGO on Sunday afternoon.

Other films in the series include Michael Snow's *Seated Figures* (Innis Nov. 3, AGO Nov. 20); Richard Kerr's *The Last Days of Contrition* (AGO Nov. 6); Barbara Sternberg's *Tending Toward the Horizontal* (Innis Nov. 10, AGO Nov. 20); Chris Gallagher's *Undivided Attention* (AGO Nov. 13); and Michael Hoolboom's *From Home* (Innis Nov. 17). There are also recent works by West Coast filmmakers Ellie Epp (AGO Nov. 6) and Fumiko Kiyooka (Innis Nov. 10). For more information, call 979-6608 or 977-0414, ext. 260.

Out of the Valley: *The Funnel* is back — sort of. Three months after the loss of both financing and its Soho Street theatre, the beleaguered film co-operative is showing films again, this time at the Ontario College of Art's Nora E. Vaughan Auditorium.

But the resumption of screenings does not prefigure a new *Funnel* exhibition space. "I don't believe we're interested in building another theatre," says board member David Bennell.

The group intends to refocus its activities on production and distribution, though as yet it has no permanent home for its production facilities. As for the suspension in government financing, "that's fine as far as what we want to do now," says Bennell.

The current *Funnel* series, entitled *Film from the Other Side*, features recent work by filmmakers from Toronto and New York. The next program, on Nov. 4, includes works by Leslie Thornton, Jon Moritsugo, and Ross McLaren. The number for more information is 977-5311.