

20 October 2010

To Whom It May Concern: Recommendation for **Rika Ohara**

I am very pleased to recommend Ms. Rika Ohara for a grant to assist her in the completion of her film project, *Carmilla*, and to do so very strongly and with total confidence. The project itself is extraordinarily interesting and my respect and admiration for her previous work convinces me that, with assistance, she will be able to bring it to a splendid fruition.

Division of
Critical Studies

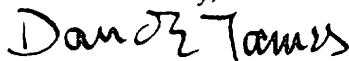
Ms. Ohara first came to my attention some twenty-five years ago, when I was performance and video critic for *Art Week* magazine. In that capacity I had to sit through a certain amount of juvenile and rodomontade work; but it was worth it for the occasional jewels that I encountered. Such was the case when I reviewed an omnibus performance event at the old Los Angeles Center for Photographic Studies; the first two were less than memorable, but Ms. Ohara's piece, *Neither Garlic Nor Beans*, was stunning, and it prompted one of the few rave reviews I wrote in about seven years. I can still see much of it in my mind, as I say, some twenty five years later! I assume that she has submitted this review along with her application, so I won't repeat what I said. But I think what was fundamentally important about it was Ms. Ohara's ability to make work of high aesthetic complexity around issues of identity that did full justice to their specific reference yet were not limited to them in their resonance.

Since that time I have followed her other work, specifically films of her performances, and find that that same sensibility and value system are maintained. *Tokyo Rose* (1994) continues her investigation of the situation of Japanese American women in a highly imaginative multi-media recreation of several aspects of the WWII Pacific theater and its consequences. It is a compelling meditation on history, as elegant as it is incisive. Her more recent, *The Heart of No Place* continues Ms. Ohara's historiographical meditations, but is much more film-- actually, video-- specific; that is, it relies not on her skills and wit as a performer, so much as on her ability to stage and shoot scenes and especially to combine on a variety of montage (editing) techniques to create an audio-visual essay.

It is this last ability that most persuades me of the promise of her new project. The synopsis is really impressive: it continues her historiographical interests, but expands them into a wider field, outside her immediate experience. The research and imaginative construction are both very mature, and as always the personal and the political are interwoven. I think it will be a very important contribution to the genre that my colleague, Professor Michael Renov, designates as the "Essay Film." The fact that she has previously been able to produce works with such high production values from very limited resources persuades me that in this case too she will similarly achieve a major work.

I encourage you to supporter in all confidence and enthusiasm.

Yours sincerely,



David E. James, Professor
djames@cinema.usc.edu
213 740 2923