

The Telegraph

Woman paid £160 an hour from public money to stand still by a loch

The public purse is helping to pay a woman artist more than £160 an hour to stand completely still beside a Scottish loch.



Sam Firth has stood in the same spot every day since June to make the film

6:40AM GMT 06 Feb 2012



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Sam Firth's only exertion is to walk into exactly the same position each day, switch on the camera being used to film her solitary pose, and switch it off again 10 minutes later.

In return she has been awarded £10,000 funding made up jointly by the British Film Institute and Creative Scotland and provided by taxpayers' money and Lottery Funding.

By the time Miss Firth's silent vigil - which she describes as "an emotional journey" - is completed, on June 21, she will have shot over 61 hours of footage.

This will then be edited down to make a 20-minute film Creative Scotland intends to show at

documentary festivals around the world.

Miss Firth's funding package for the work, entitled Stay The Same, was condemned yesterday by Taxpayers Scotland.

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Eben Wilson, the organisation's director, said: "We all know artists can say anything is of value that they believe can be called art.

"But when we reach the point that nearly all of us are totally baffled, and probably in this case bored stiff, by an idea then we really do have to ask 'Why the state is allowed to fund these things?'"

The 37-year-old artist herself has no such concerns.

"It's about an attempt to catch a year's experience on film," she said. "It's an emotional journey."

Miss Firth, a former teacher who moved to the remote Knoydart Peninsula from London seven years ago, has not spent a night away from home since shooting began this summer.

"I started on June 22 so have just passed the half-way mark. It was timed to start at the lightest point and end at the lightest point, so the film goes through darkness and comes out of it again.

"I go out just before 8.30am. I have built a wooden platform which has got slots in it, and I put my tripod in exactly the same place each day."

The artist, whose platform overlooks Lochs Nevis and Hourn, said: "In the film you will sometimes see a few seconds of each day, sometimes a bit more, but you will see the light changing and the tide coming in and out."

The venture has not always been easy. "Since I began I have been bitten by midges and rained, snowed and hailed upon.

"I have tied the tripod down against hurricane force winds, dug a trench to divert a stream and built a path of pebbles to stop it sinking into a bog.

`Stay the Same` is Miss Firth's third film. She won international awards with an earlier work, `The Worm Inside`.

"I am pretty sure most of the locals think I am bonkers and a lot of my friends are worried the film might send me mad," she said. "But on a day to day basis I am actually enjoying it."

Creative Scotland said it had commissioned the work as part of its initiative to promote the making of short documentaries.

A spokesman added: "She successfully applied to Creative Scotland as her work was of quality and is rooted in identity, Scotland and its landscape."

The BFI said: "The Film Fund noted that Sam was developing a very individual filmmaking voice, and following a successful application to the fund a development award was made to support Sam's career progression with a longer form piece."

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