

STEVE ROGERS on the view from the street:

WATCHERS

WATCHED

Housewatch is a great idea. Take an ordinary house and turn its windows into screens on which to project films from within the house. The spectators remain outside in the street. This particular ordinary Edwardian terraced house in Leyton, East London, had four screens. Two large windows, one up, one down, and a small bathroom window above a glazed front door. Six artists made works for this unusual multi-screen public event. The films ranged from the predictable to the genuinely revelatory, but all of them and the event itself was immensely entertaining and enjoyable.

Four of the artists made works for some conceptual house that could be anywhere. Alison Winkle's *The Red Room*, based on *Jane Eyre*, used the idea of the house as a place of fiction and mystery and was technically one of the best of the six using the four screens and the rooms behind them very effectively. Ian Bourn made the house a setting for romantic Mills and Boon style fantasy which is finally deflated by the mundane concerns of tiredness and the cold. George Saxon's gathering of gaudy suspicious looking cartoon characters romped through the house in a farce like burlesque of a rock video. Chris White literally turned the house into a fish tank, the rather trite idea saved by an infectious good humour. Only Tony Sinden and Lulu Quinn showed any real interest in the life of this particular house in this street in the neighbourhood. Tony Sinden's series of dog silhouettes accompanied by Indian music, made effective

comment both on the physical structure of the house and the feeling of living in such a street. Lulu Quinn's film revealed a plasterer working in the house in a *verismo* way, and used the other screens to comment on the nature of the house as a man-made place and a place of work. This too seemed far more appropriate to this house than did gothic fantasy, or easy satire on working class dreams and aspirations.

I also had reservations about the house itself and the presentation of the event. The street, although not especially narrow was not wide enough to allow the spectator to view the films as part of an ordinary street. It made us focus on that one house and on the film images with the result that it was often difficult to remember where exactly this was all happening and that it wasn't some fancy film installation in an art gallery. This problem was compounded by the street being a rather quiet siding with very little going on, no traffic and no passers-by. Except at the being, when a few curious locals came and barracked and shouted, the audience was an art audience, local people probably looked at the audience and decided it wasn't for them. This seemed to me to defeat much of the point of *Housewatch*.

I would like to see it again, but this time in a wide, busy street. I realise this will exacerbate the technical problems but the idea of *Housewatch* is quite definitely strong enough for these to be overcome. ■