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Pictorial Heroes A Reflection On The Art Of The State

Art Of The State is the Pictorial Heroes' latest tape in a catalogue of works which all, more or less, deal with a UK society in crisis. Jammed with often repetitious images of urban warfare, inner city desolation and acts of both fictionalised and real violence, the Heroes consistently highlight the uglier aspects of life in the late 80's and the edgy and potentially explosive atmosphere of the UK.

At their most raw and angry in *The Cover Up* of 1986, the Heroes have since developed their style through *Sniper I* and *Sniper II* to arrive at a new work, *Art Of The State*. Made in 1988, *Art...* is, in a strange way, both the best and worst tape the Heroes have made. Initially eye-catching, inventive and stylish, *Art...* deals with the by-now familiar issue of the hegemony of television, the language and rhetoric of TV where any act of subordination is tagged as 'terrorist activity' and the 'status quo' is at all times of primary importance. Familiar though all this might be, the Heroes manage to handle the subject with a new freshness as the tape starts and we see a woman TV

presenter preparing for a 'take' - "OK ... Ready whenever you are ... Let's do it" - before launching into a scripted monologue which uses the authority of some pseudo-Panorama situation to comment, cleverly, on the conventions of news reportage. Pacily edited and complemented by ever-changing camerawork and the use of various video devices - images culled from TV swirl and tick across screen - this first section of the tape has both the energy and ideas to make it a tight, tough and admirable piece bereft of the wearying dull-but-worthy style of too much agitational video art.

This, however, is not enough for Pictorial Heroes. As this section closes, the tape charges onward into a post-scratch place where electro-funk pulses loudly, and tediously, and the economy of the first section is destroyed by repeat edits and a dull play with pirated footage of gunfire and riots, snatches of text and videographically treated images of violence. As the bass-heavy soundtrack plays on, any impact or significance is displaced by a numbed irritation.

While the primary frustration is that such an excellent first section be undercut by a sloppy second half, broader questions arise as to the ideas behind such a tape. By ex-

ample, the question might well be asked, "When do images of aggression, struggle and confrontation become neutralised by repetition and video treatment, by pumping funk music and edit-suite tricks? And, more specifically, in this context, aren't the Heroes treating the very TV footage they so ably comment on in the first part of *Art...* in a way which further contributes to its status as mere imagery?"

While the Heroes are not wholly alone in this minefield of politicised tapemaking - a recent tape I viewed chose to cut footage of death and gunshots to a whipcrack beat - *Art Of The State* in many ways exemplifies both the potential and the pitfalls of agit-art. After the long running discussion of what's pop and what's political infected scratch, it may seem retrogressive to return to these questions once again; yet, as then, it's only through asking those self-same questions that the agitational edge of video art will be able to develop.

Nik Houghton

A Reflection On The Art Of The State, 12 mins, U-Matic is distributed by Annalogue Productions, 20 Starfield Road, London W12. Tel: 01-743 3630. The Pictorial Heroes are Doug Aubrey and Alan Robertson.

Questions which we hoped the answer might be able to

Rated ↓ made the point we had hoped with the tape -

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Somehow to really de-value things you have to de-value them.

Significant either to what rather than to what becoming paper (i.e. strategy) - the conflict more about what's going on & giving us behind the scenes

Style content ✓
pose ✓ pose
word ✓ image, make ✓ female.

need by the woman trying to say it's just a scratch - if not behind the scenes

David O'Vang - ...