

Echoes

Jez Welsh, 29 mins

Originally commissioned as a performance work by Projects UK in 1987 and subsequently toured throughout the UK, *Echoes*, the videotape, seeks to "bring together the various layers of the live work within the condensed frame of a single TV screen and, in the absence of the glass tower building, concentrates instead upon the stories and anecdotes that run through the piece". (From artist's statement).

Perhaps best known for his hi-tech articulation of video's effects spliced to a concern with the strangeness of living in an 80's world - themes of dislocation, mass media and 'reality' are frequently mapped out in Welsh's work - *Echoes* comes as something of a change as the multi-coloured whirlygig style of earlier works gives way to a more direct and anecdotal approach. Large sections of the tape offer up the artist - seated or standing - talking us through a series of inter-related stories, thoughts and personalised viewpoints while various images - purposefully tacky computer graphics, the gleaming cityscape of New York, Welsh's child at play - both illustrate and supplement the spoken word.

Mixing footage from the live performance with other material, Welsh is once again exploring issues of memory, popular culture and experience with the difference that unlike previous tapes, this is achieved through a monologue which is often funny and, mostly, engaging. In returning to an often under-used device - the performer telling stories or involved in simple actions - Welsh offers both spoken and visual examples to his own questions on such broad ranging concerns as hyper-reality, architecture and perception. Where past tapes have seen these issues illustrated in broad and sometimes vague terms, *Echoes* gets to grips with its ideas through an assured mix of storytelling, shifting imagery and the confident use of time-lapse and picture mixing techniques.

Powered by a tape-looped soundtrack, *Echoes* opens with

Welsh at play with building bricks, marbles and an abacus, shifts to images of architecture and a child at play and quickly develops its themes through a monologue delivered by the artist. It's this central core of dialogue which takes us through a section about The Sun newspaper - 'Boy With Two Brains!', 'Warhol AIDS Death!', 'UFO Monster!', 'Woman Eats Sink!' - thoughts on simulcra and angry words on science, war games and the "go for it" mentality of the late 80's. Riddled with puns, word-play and the comic edge of anecdote, Welsh's text explores the notion of why and how "Things are

cover every inch of New York", he states as the image of camera toting tourists flicks across the screen).

Rooted in everyday observation and experience, *Echoes* delivers itself as an antidote, perhaps, to all those works which make loud noises about addressing themes of hyper-reality, language and the 'information age' without really doing much more than reworking the ideas of Baudrillard and other cultural theorists into fastcut, but often empty, video works. The relief one feels with Welsh's tape is that instead of overloading the viewer with information, words, sounds and signals an approach which allows the watcher space to reflect and respond is evident. While on the downside, *Echoes* is a little overlong at nearly 30 minutes, it's a work which amply compensates for this by its directness and face-to-face quality. Angry, sad, funny and thought-provoking, *Echoes* is the



not themselves", what constitutes memory and the complexities of the "riddle of language". If this sounds heavyweight, however, the appeal of *Echoes* lies in the WAY it approaches these topics - through tales of contemporary folklore, barside encounters and half-jokey diatribes on everything from computer games to our obsessive need to document experience. ("Why do we feel the need to take photos of our holidays?", Welsh asks; "Imagine how many thousands of photos have been taken from the Empire State Building ... Enough, perhaps, to

product of a tapemaker taking risks and, literally, "showing his face". That risk has paid off and *Echoes* is, for my money, one of Welsh's best tapes.

Nik Houghton

Echoes is a 29 minute colour tape available on VHS and U-matic formats. It is distributed by both London Video Arts and Media Arts Projects: LVA 01-734 7410 Media Arts Projects: 66A Manor Park, London SE13 5RL. 01-318 0466.