

# Special effects video junkie

In our Out-takes column a few months ago we reported the tale about the appearance of mysterious apple symbols on Complete Video's Paintbox system, which turned out to be the work of the company's self-confessed special effects junkie Andy Brewer.

Since then, Brewer's name has cropped up with alarming regularity on a diverse collection of work for Anglia, TVS, LWT, and the BBC's *25 Years Of Top Of The Pops*.

He has already been tipped in some circles as the newcomer most likely to succeed Ken Morse as the most credited technician on the broadcasting circuit.

Why then, this sudden rise to prominence, this record spate of Paintbox wizardry? "Absolutely no idea," is the reply. "I hadn't noticed it until you mentioned it."

"But if it is happening, it has nothing to do with talent in the narrow sense of the word, but more a case of know-how. I started using Complete's Paintbox for no other reason than as a TV junkie I was fascinated by what it could do.

How, for instance, was it possible for someone like me, trained as an engineer, to produce and construct images that were creative when I couldn't actually draw?"

Brewer calls himself a special effects designer rather than an artist. "Artist usually means talent, or some kind of formal art school training. I haven't had it. Nor do I see what I do as art, in the sense that Paintbox operators with fine art degrees see themselves.

"Also there are Paintbox artists who take this idea a bit too far. They see a client's work as nothing more than a board for them to mark their style on. By the same token you get designers and commissioning clients who give you a storyboard and expect you to turn it into a masterpiece.

"These are things I just don't want to know about. My job is to give the client what they want, not vice versa. What they are getting from me, and what they should be looking for, is my knowledge of how machines like Harry and Paintbox can best be used to improve on their ideas. This sounds like a cop-out, but



Self portrait of Andy Brewer — complete with apple — done on Paintbox.

it's the way I think a good paintbox user has to work.

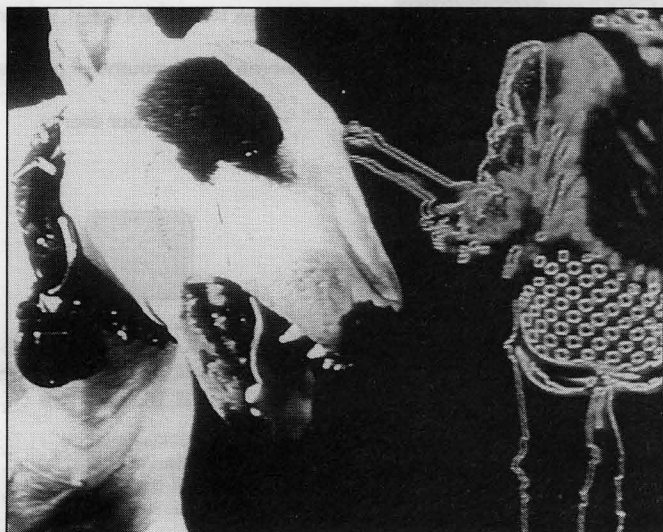
This, if anything, is why he thinks people like his work. "Effects designer means what it says. You are scaling your abilities and their storyboards into an overall format that makes people pay attention. That's what I want to do most."

On his own work he says: "There is a taped personal compilation, and I have thought about working towards an exhibition, but that's not Brewer the special effects designer. It's Brewer playing

about in his own time."

So there is a Brewer the artist? "Perhaps, but even then I try to temper what I do to take into account that somebody else may have to look at it, and I don't want them bored simply because it is me on the screen and not one of the people who use me.

"Even in art you have to make an effort — and that doesn't mean compromise, it means quality. By working on other people's ideas I have learned how to develop and edit my own."



Putting the case for analogue in this digital-dominated age might smack to many of a techno-backlash on a par with Phil Spector's famous *Back To Mono*. Even so, it hasn't stopped George Snow turning out high-quality, low-budget promos using his trusty Cox T8 mixer, a Pluto graphics computer, self-written software and a lot of ingenuity and care.

Snow's forte is layering images upon images in a rich visual collage. "People always go on about the degraded image you get mixing on analogue machines. But, for me, the effect you get matting and layering on digital can, if anything, be too sharp, too clear. On analogue, building up images the way I do, those at the bottom do start breaking up, but it does have the advantage of giving the picture a kind of depth. It's like in painting, for instance, where you detail the foreground but fill out the background with broad, simple strokes."

The rough-edged glossiness of Snow's approach tied in neatly with the image of grungy glamour-pusses *Dogs D'Amour*. Snow's promo for their single *How Come It Never Rains* is a lush three minutes of canine culture which mixes studio footage of the diamanté *Dogs* with shots of this year's trendy bon-mutt, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. The result is a swirling, mock-baroque promo similar in style to Snow's video-art piece *The Assignment*, shown last spring on Channel 4.