

# Spectacolor

*ABC, Baby Sees* by Jeremy Welsh  
An Artangel Production



If you'd been passing through London's Piccadilly Circus in March or early April, and if you'd directed your gaze away from the bustling crowds and up towards the flashing neon signs and brightly lit signboards of the Capital's best known advertising location, you might have caught a glimpse of something a little unexpected.

*ABC, Baby Sees* is the fourth contribution to the Artangel Trust's scheme to commission artists to make a work for the "Spectacolor" screen: a massive array of coloured lights that wink and blink messages from high on top of a building just off Piccadilly Circus. For thirty seconds, every four minutes, from 8am to midnight, throughout the whole of March, the

relentless flow of advertising on the screen was interrupted by images of the bewildered face of video artist Jeremy Welsh's 9 month old son, Laurie. *ABC, Baby Sees*, shows a child just beginning to deal with the daily bombardment of visual images. The child attempts to make sense of simple crosses, squares and circles; as way down below, we grown-ups struggle with the complex images of the commercial world. Welsh says, "Being an artist and a parent, I am interested in the way children begin to develop an understanding of form and colour, of how they learn to read the world first through shape, colour, movement and sound and how they develop this into verbal and non-verbal languages".

The Artangel Trust was set up in 1985, to produce and promote temporary art in public places. They became interested in the Spectacolor site as it offers the opportunity to infiltrate into space more usually used for corporate promotion, and to present artists' work on the same level as major business advertising. Arthur Maiden Ltd who own the screen, offer the site to the Artangel Trust at a reduced rate and work with the artists, turning their original storyboards into the computer animation programme that operates the system of lights. The company sees artists' use of the screen as a way to explore the creative potential of Spectacolor, and for publicity. The Artangel Trust sees the system as a means of making a major intervention into public space.

These dual aims are partially realised by Jeremy Welsh's work. In terms of technical difficulty, some of the clever metamorphoses of images achieved in the advertising sequences surpass any tricks to be found in *ABC, Baby Sees*, and unfortunately, the public seemed to have their eyes firmly on the ground and their minds fixed on their daily battle with London's ever-expanding crowds and ailing transportation system. However, I welcome any attempt to put public sites and commercial media at the service of ideas, rather than selling, and I think that the Artangel Trust has tapped an imaginative and potentially powerful means of creating and exhibiting artists' work.

The next "Artist of the Month on Spectacolor" will be film and video maker, Tina Keane; whose work, *Circus Diver* is scheduled to appear in August 1989. The Artangel Trust hope to make the scheme an on-going one; they have many artists with backgrounds in many different media on their list of potential contributors. All they need now is a long-term sponsor. I wish them luck.

*Lisa Haskel*

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*Photo by Harry Chambers*