



## ART IN THE MAKING

# A Sign is a Fine Investment

### A Sign is a Fine Investment

*Director:* Judith Williamson  
*Production Company:* Arts Council of Great Britain  
*Executive Producer:* Rodney Wilson  
*Producer:* Judith Williamson  
*Writer:* Judith Williamson  
*Camera:* Clive Tickner  
*Additional Photography:* Erika Stevenson  
*Rostrum Photography:* Frameline  
*Stills Photography:* Clive Frost  
*Editors:* Brand Thumim, Trevor Williamson  
*Art Director:* Phoebe De Gaye  
*Music:* Steve Shearsby  
*Sound Recording:* David John, John Anderton  
*Sound Editor:* Sarah Vickers  
*Narrator:* Fiona Trier  
UK 1983  
44 mins  
Digital

### Exit No Exit

*Director:* Julian Henriques  
*Production Companies:* Formation Films, Arts Council of Great Britain, Channel Four  
*Executive Producer:* Rodney Wilson  
*Producer:* Deanne Edwards  
*Script:* Darshan Singh Bhuller, Julian Henriques  
*Photography:* Michael J. Fox  
*Rostrum Photography:* George Hladky  
*2nd Camera:* Graham Smith  
*Editor:* David Gladwell  
*Art Director:* Lia Cramer  
*Wardrobe/Make-up:* Sallie Estep  
*Music Composed and Performed by:* Barrington Pheloung, Martyn Phillips  
*Choreography:* Darshan Singh Bhuller  
*Sound Recording:* Fraser Jeffrey  
*With:* Tamsin Hickling, Celia Hulton, Michael Small, Darshan Singh Bhuller (*dancers*)  
UK 1988  
26 mins  
Digital

### 1 in a Million

*Director:* Terry Braun  
*Production Company:* Illuminations  
*Commissioning Companies:* Arts Council of England, BBC Television  
*Executive Producers:* Peter Maniura, Rodney Wilson  
*Music:* Django Bates  
*With:* Margo Gunn (*mother*)  
Jessica Vitmayer Braun (*daughter*)  
Django Bates (*traffic warden*)  
UK 1996  
14 mins  
Digital

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+ intro by director Judith Williamson and Steve Foxon, Curator of Non-Fiction, BFI National Archive

From the 1890s until the 1930s, early advertising frequently used images of industrial work to sell its products, showing in detail the actual manufacture of goods advertised. Modern advertising, on the other hand, surrounds us with images of idealised homes and families, shopping and holidays, offering a world of consumerism in which work has become completely invisible. *A Sign Is a Fine Investment* investigates the way work has disappeared from advertising imagery, and traces this phenomenon through archive advertising films, magazine and television material, placing advertising in the context of historical events and everyday life. The film repeatedly returns to a 'set' of a domestic interior, similar to that used in many contemporary television advertisements, following a schematic 'day' in the activities of a housewife and family – the primary targets of advertising. On a TV set, and via back-projection, the modern ads invade this 'home' while the commentary follows the wider history of marketing and examines the economic and social factors which determine the visibility or invisibility of different aspects of our lives in the world of advertising.

Arts Council of Great Britain

A history of advertisers' attitudes to work, presented through a compilation of advertisements from the First World War to the present day – taken from the cinema, television and billboards – and intercut with scenes of a housewife preparing dinner for her family. The film is structured in two halves – the first illustrating what is permissible in advertising, the second dealing with what is not, though these categories are also shown to shift through historical and cultural changes. A voice-over connects the use of labour in 'exotic' countries with the history of British imperialism, illustrating the thesis that work is only portrayed when it is either far away or motivated by nationalism. The film argues that work otherwise has been systematically erased from advertising to further the fantasy with which the merchandisers aim to sell their goods and services.

By focusing on this one aspect, rather than attempting to deal also with the aesthetics, finance and technology of advertising, Judith Williamson has produced a coherent and extremely useful introductory film. The inventive use of imagery aptly rephrases and comments on the visual pleasures advertisements have to offer. Steering clear of both a puritanical anti-pleasure stance, and a paranoid manipulation-of-passive-consumers position, Williamson constructs her thesis in imaginatively visual ways. Thus the kitchen scenes which comment on the advertisers' fantasy of the perfect household emphasise a tackiness all too reminiscent of everyday life, while a static black-and-white backdrop (seen through the kitchen window) ironically plays against the realism of the setting. Similarly, a scene of a working-class family uninterestedly watching a commercial for washroom hygiene clearly aimed at management cleverly undercuts assumptions about the all-powerful persuasiveness of the advertisers.

Ruth Baumgarten, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, October 1983

### Exit No Exit

The London Contemporary Dance Theatre perform a fantasy set in the city's underground system.

### 1 in a Million

A musical short story about a woman who decides her lottery ticket numbers on the basis of musical doodling.