

# **TERRA INCOGNITA: MAPPING A REGIONAL DESIGN HISTORY IN SOUTH AFRICA.**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

The paper will start by discussing some aspects of the state of History of Graphic Design. These will include approaches to teaching the subject, the place of research at Technikons, and then, particularly, the question of African content in the discipline. This will refer to historical rather than contemporary material. The inclusion of material in Philip Megg's "History of Graphic Design" for example, has been explicitly based on the author's judgment of what has led to the current condition of the discipline in the United States of America, and this has been accepted as being largely accurate for South Africa. However, looking at the functions of the material included gives a much broader range of applications than the current condition of the discipline would suggest, Professional graphic design today is overwhelmingly oriented towards commerce, with graphic design work for other fields, such as for example education, often being handled by people who are not trained in graphic design. History of Graphic Design and Graphic Design courses generally follow this orientation. They also follow the main system of cultural influence in today's world, that of Euro-American popular culture. The widespread use of Meggs' volume is a natural consequence of this attitude. The result is that material from outside the current condition of the profession, and from other cultures, tends to be neglected. There is a wide range of visual material that is directly comparable to subject matter commonly taught in history of graphic design, which falls into this category. Amongst this material is a large quantity of knowledge from Africa sources, which I suggest is or relevance to us. My own interests in this material are writing and proto-writing.

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It needs to be recognised that design history and theory is in its infancy in South Africa and currently there are no specialist design history courses available at any South African universities or Technikons. As a lecturer of design history and theory within a graphic design degree programme one is aware of the consequences of the lack of appropriate texts and materials for students in a culturally and politically complex country such as

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South Africa. Further, the training of graphic designers in South Africa demands that the history and theory aspects of their course should not only be culturally relevant, but also compatible with the applied nature of the discipline. Hence there is a need to encourage an integration between history, theory and practice. Many academics who work in culturally sensitive countries will be aware of these challenges and understand the difficulty that many design students experience in understanding how culture, more specifically, their own culture and a unique sense of identity can be an important and dynamic part of the design process. This is particularly true of South African students who have no locally produced texts to which they can refer. Hence the development of an appropriate regional history is a high priority. However this process is easier said than done.

One difficulty is the fact that many of the academics who are involved in the teaching of design history are trained with an art history background. Art history is a well established discipline and, although it may currently be experiencing radical ideological and philosophical revision (this is particularly true of art history in South Africa), it still has a wealth (if not a weight) of literature and tradition behind it. Conversely, design history has not been defined and as the north-American academic Victor Margolin has pointed out “the question of what design history is about has never been thoroughly addressed or debated, which has resulted in considerable confusion in the field” (Margolin 1994: 235). Hence South African academics who endeavour to contribute to the establishment of an appropriate regional design history inevitably find themselves working within an uncharted territory - a “Terra-Incognita” that stills needs to be mapped.

This paper proposes to deal with some of the challenges of mapping a relevant regional history by means of a discussion that focuses on visual

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communication design in South Africa during the decade c.1988 - 1998. This period is particularly important in that it defines the demise of the apartheid regime and the transition to democracy. In the process the challenges that faced designers in the creation of a new identity for what was then referred to as the "new" South Africa is instructive. As such, my presentation intends to investigate the relationship between political ideology and the notion of identity in advertising design during a period of dramatic change.

### **Aspects of the colonial legacy**

In common with many countries that have a colonial history, a study of visual communication design in South Africa cannot take place without reference to the historical and colonial context in which it evolved. This was particularly true of advertising design which was at first framed within a British colonial mould, during the latter part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries, then influenced by international (largely American) trends after the Second World War, until the current bombardment by varied global influences at the end of the millennium.

As in other countries the development of advertising in South Africa is inextricably linked with the development of the press since the mid-nineteenth century. However it appears as if international trends first became influential upon advertising in South Africa during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). As British troops disembarked in the port town of Durban local traders were quick to exploit an expanded market. British brands were advertised in new ways in that the consumer (the British soldier) was featured in the advertisement in a South African war context. In the process it could be argued that the war began to change the way South African advertisements looked.

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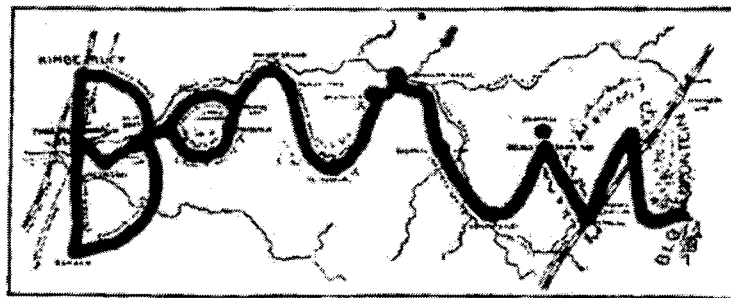
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For example Bovril advertisements were fiercely patriotic to the British cause and Bovril products were promoted throughout the Empire. McClintock maintains that companies such as Bovril began to represent their products as a "magic medium capable of enforcing and enlarging British power in the colonial world" (McClintock 1994: 146). Hence in "How Lord Roberts wrote BOVRIL" she observes that "the letters BOVRIL march boldly over a colonial map of South Africa - imperial progress consumed as spectacle" (Figure 1).

Figure 1

### THE EVENT OF THE YEAR.



### How Lord Roberts wrote BOVRIL.

In a later Bovril advertisement aimed at British soldiers in South Africa in 1901 a propagandist painting "The Relief of Ladysmith" by John H. Bacon was offered" free to purchasers of Bovril in Bottles" (Figure 2).

Figure 2

# BOVRIL WAR PICTURE

"The Relief of Ladysmith."

By JOHN H. BACON

*A Magnificent Historical War Picture 28 in. by 18 in., printed on fine Plate Paper 40 in. by 30 in., free from Advertising Matter.*

**FREE TO PURCHASERS OF BOVRIL IN BOTTLES**



From February 1 until May 31, 1903, every 2-oz. of Bovril (from 614 to 622) sold to the public will bear a coupon, and this coupon will vary in value in proportion to the size of the bottle.

The 1-oz. bottle will bear a coupon for 614	614
" 2-oz. " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	1 1/2
" 4-oz. " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	3 1/4
" 8-oz. " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	6 1/2
" 16-oz. " " " " " " " " " " " " " "	12 1/2

Every person sending in to BOVRIL, LTD., 102, OLD STREET, LONDON, E.C., before May 31 next, coupons to the aggregate face value of one pound or more, will become entitled to one of these Bovril

This promotion constitutes one of the earliest examples of the visual arts being used as a marketing tool in South Africa, a theme to which I will return later. At this juncture however, it is instructive to note that advertising of this nature introduced a merging of political and commercial interests that would be repeated less than a hundred years later during South Africa's transition to democracy.

For the most part it can be argued that until the 1980's advertising in South Africa during the twentieth century was focussed solely on the white minority sector of the market, particularly the English speaking audience who had strong cultural ties with Britain. The colonial ties also ensured that many "commercial" artists working in the fledgling South African industry were immigrants from the United Kingdom, and many advertising agencies, based in London, established offices in South Africa. This economic and cultural dominance remained intact in spite of the political ascendancy of the Afrikaans community after the election of the Nationalist Party to power in 1948, the subsequent introduction of Apartheid and the declaration of a

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Republic in 1961.

Although the British influence in South Africa had always been strong, the undisputed home of advertising was, and still is, the United States of America. Douglas contends that because American agencies and advertisers control the vast majority of the money spent on advertising around the world, it is not surprising that the style and techniques of American advertising would be adopted in many countries (Douglas 1984: 16). This is particularly true of South Africa where multi-national advertisers, such as Coca-Cola and Johnson & Johnson, have adapted their US advertisements for use in the local market (Figure 3).

Figure 3



Often products that are not made in the United States are advertised and marketed to resemble American products. One glaring example is the tobacco products that, originating in Southern Africa, are sold with images of cowboys or positioned globally to promote the notion of the "Big Wide World Of Peter Stuyvesant" (Figure 4).

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Figure 4



However, one of the main constraints upon the widespread influence of such advertising is the recognition of the importance of regional differences of language and culture.

One of the ironies of the globalization of media and marketing is that it is accompanied by a growth in national and regional consciousness (Poggenpohl 1997: 30-34 ).In addition, in the international visual arts sphere, an important strand of post-modernism was the move to insert a regional dimension into art and design. Thus it is to be expected that as South African society changed during the transition from a country internally divided and isolated by the world, to a democracy integrated within the global economy, the issue of a "local" identity in both art and design should become an important one.

### **The search for identity c. 1988-1994**

By the late 1970's and early 1980's the practice of "importing" advertising

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artists from "overseas" slowed as graduates from local design schools began to assert themselves. Similarly political events such as the Soweto uprisings (1976) led to the international isolation of the country which not only discouraged immigration from Europe but actively encouraged disinvestment by international advertising agencies based in the country. In these circumstances it could be argued that isolation encouraged the growth of the local advertising industry. Although during this period the education of local graphic designers remained essentially Euro-centric, it is almost inevitable that as the commercial and political environment changed a different sense of identity would emerge.

Just as academics since the late 1980's became concerned with restoring the "other" to their rightful place in the various histories in South Africa, so advertising sought to correct the image of, not only the past, but for commercial reasons, the imperfect present. One of the most prominent examples of this trend is to be seen in South African Breweries (SAB) advertisements for beer since the mid-1980's which showed multi-racial groups enjoying SAB products (*Figure 5*).

**Figure 5**



Significantly at the height of Apartheid, "mixed" consumption of alcohol in unsegregated public venues was anathema to the system of racial segregation, and it is ironic that this type of commercially driven

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aspirational advertising began to reflect the views of those politically opposed to the system of Apartheid. Interestingly, Nelson Mandela's ANC Youth League Manifesto had called for art that would act as a "cultural weapon" and maintained that "works of art can and should reflect not only the present phase of the national liberation struggle but also the world of beauty that lies beyond the conflict and turmoil of struggle" (Mandela quoted in Cook 1997: 27) (Figure 6).

Figure 6



The north-American academic Michael Schudson also links the aspirational quality of advertising with politics when he draws parallels between the conventions of capitalist advertising and aesthetic conventions of Soviet Social Realism.<sup>1</sup> He refers to this convention as "Capitalist Realism" in which he describes, amongst other things, that Art [advertising] should picture reality in simplified and typified ways so that it communicates effectively to the masses. Secondly that Art [advertising] should picture life, not as it is [but] as it should become and finally, that Art [advertising] should picture reality as progress towards the future and so represent social struggles positively. It should carry an air of optimism (1984: 214-215).

A significant amount of South African advertising and sponsorship promotions conformed to these principals during the late 1980's and early 1990's (Figure 7).

Figure 7

**PEACE IS NOT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ANY ONE PARTY OR GROUP BUT OF ALL OF US.**

The time has come for all South Africans, ordinary men and women, to accept responsibility for peace. To make peace with one another. And to make peace with the past.

Because only if we work together can we ensure that the doves of peace live. Live as a symbol of hope for the future. A future characterised not merely by the absence of strife, but by economic prosperity and social harmony.

But, to make all that the peace emblem symbolizes a reality we need the help of all South Africans. So if you want to find out how you can use the peace symbol write to: The Peace Office, P.O. Box 785203, Sandton 2146. And help to build peace in our land.



**PEACE IN OUR LAND**

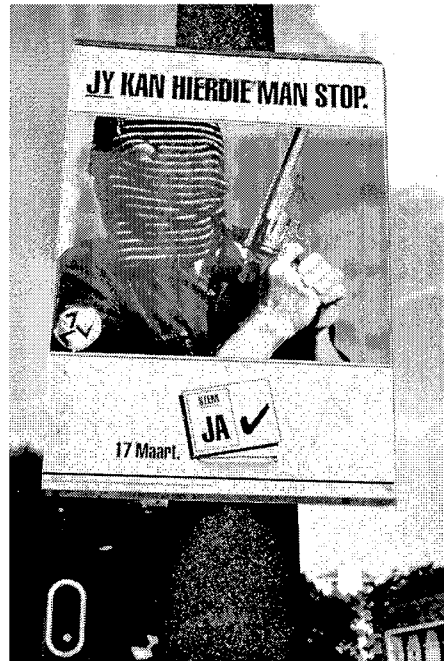
This occurred at a momentous time for the country. During this period secret negotiations began which led, finally, to the unbanning of the anti-apartheid movements, the dismantling of apartheid and the birth of what was then popularly referred to as the "new" South Africa. However as the euphoria of Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990 receded, South Africa, during the period 1992-1994, began to experience spiralling political violence. This led to a great deal of anxiety and uncertainty at a time when interim constitutional talks were convened. These talks were accompanied by the threat of a right-wing uprising, and the assassination of the Communist Party leader Chris Hani almost catapulted the country to the brink of civil war (Figure 8).

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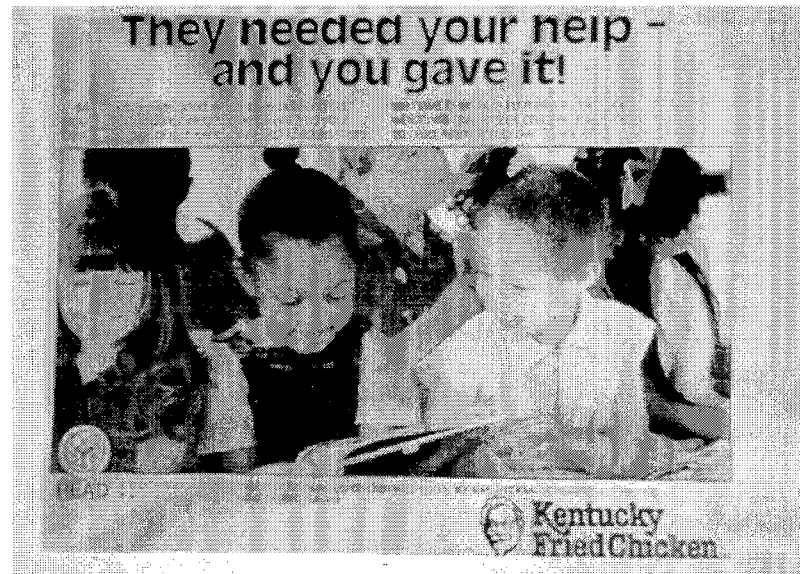
Figure 8



### **A sense of identity**

During this period the notion of "nation building" became a theme that both politicians and advertisers adopted.<sup>2</sup> In doing so a significant number of South African advertisements adopted elements of "Capitalist Realism" as defined by Schudson. For example the local supermarket group Pick 'n Pay linked consumerism with nation building in "Together We can make it Better" (c.1988/89) and multi-national companies such as Kentucky Fried Chicken linked consumption of their products to support of literacy campaigns (Figure 9).

Figure 9



The building of a nation however requires a sense of nationhood, but sadly no sense of it existed as the South African art historian Colin Richards in his essay "About Face - Aspects of Art History and Identity in South African Visual Culture" points out : "Ploughing the waves of the sea is probably easier than finding common ground in conflicting nationalisms in South Africa" (1991: 104).

In a society which was emerging from a divisive and violent conflict, the issue of what symbols and images could be used to represent the nation and unite people became paramount and inevitably the issue of identity became central to the debate. It could be argued that in the fine arts and literature, artists and writers had struggled with this question for a long time, but it was not until the late 1980's that art historians actively called for a revision of history.<sup>3</sup> Soon thereafter in 1988 exhibitions such as *The Neglected Tradition - Towards a New History of South African Art (1930 - 1988)* were mounted at the Johannesburg Art Gallery to draw attention to the large body of art and craft work that had been produced outside the mainstream of art practice in South Africa. The inclusion of crafts such as

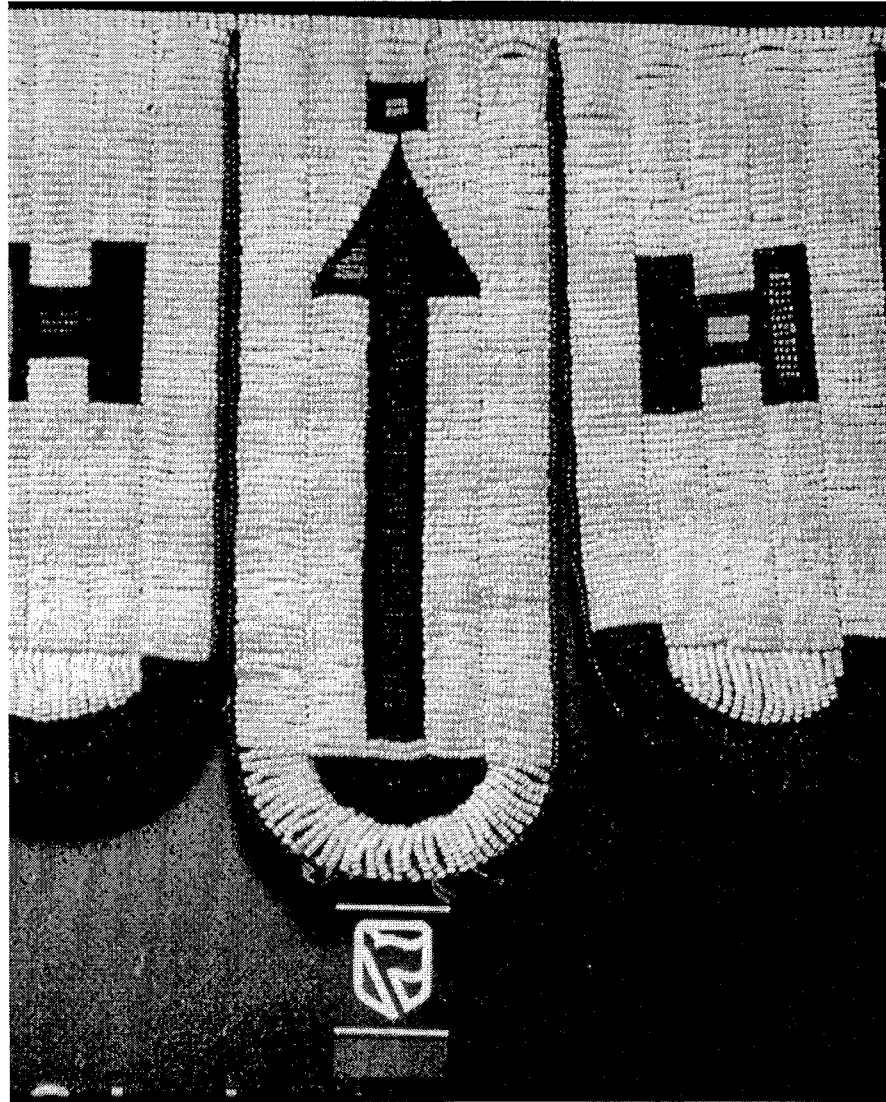
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beadwork was of particular significance because it not only affirmed the value of indigenous craft which had been denigrated within the colonial paradigm, but it also drew attention the most marginalised of the cultural producers: women (*Figure 10*).

**Figure 10**



Commercial interests were quick to seize the opportunities that this restoration of the "other" presented and by 1991 artists such as the Ndebele mural painter Ester Mahlangu (b.1936) was commissioned by BMW to

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become a part of the international BMW Art Car series (Figure 11).

Figure 11



However, the "discovery" of the "neglected tradition" by academics and collectors and the subsequent quest to preserve it in the form of private collections and museum exhibits was motivated by a complex set of values which is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice to note that in this context it is inevitable that "status" and meanings of the indigenous crafts become quite different from those intended by the producers. Thus, as with any form of art that is "emptied" of the meaning intended by the producer, it became vulnerable to appropriation by different institutions, be they the culture market, museums or the visual communications industry (Figure 12).

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Figure 12



Although beadwork motifs provided a useful signifier of identity, more complex images were often required and here there were no easy options. For example, according to Pieterse, during the nineteenth century in popular novels, songs and images, the "Zulu" was frequently used to represent Africa or black people to British and other audiences. He explains that the British admired the Zulus as a "martial race" (1992: 104). However, in a society in which ethnicity had been used by the Apartheid State to "divide and rule" the majority, such stereotypical images were not acceptable.

This was particularly so in a violent political environment in which the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP,) which was a fierce opponent of the African National Congress (ANC), projected itself as a "traditional" Zulu cultural and political movement. Consequently, according to the South African

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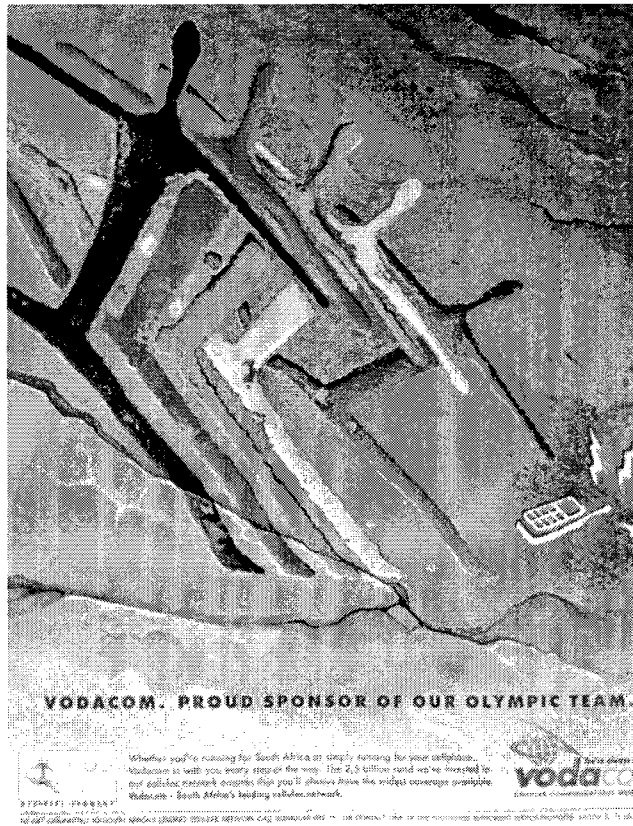
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academic Barbara Buntman, the notion of Zulu ethnicity on a symbolic level was more likely to inspire emotion and strong opinion, rather than to be an easily manipulated signifier available for the advertising agency's uses as it had in the past (1996: 16). Buntman maintains that much of the above explains why Bushman/San images became so attractive to advertisers in the late 1980's and early 1990's because "the average viewer and consumer, Bushmen/San are largely uncontested and uncontroversial symbols of blackness and African-ness" (op. cit. 13).<sup>4</sup>

Buntman maintains that the myth of the bushmen/San allowed consumers to embrace the idea of being part of black Africa and multi-racial South Africa without making the audience and consumer identify with other socio-political groups. In this process the "Bushman (sic) thus became available for nation (or company) building" (ibid.). An example of this is the logo for the South African Olympic bid in 1995 (*Figure 13*).

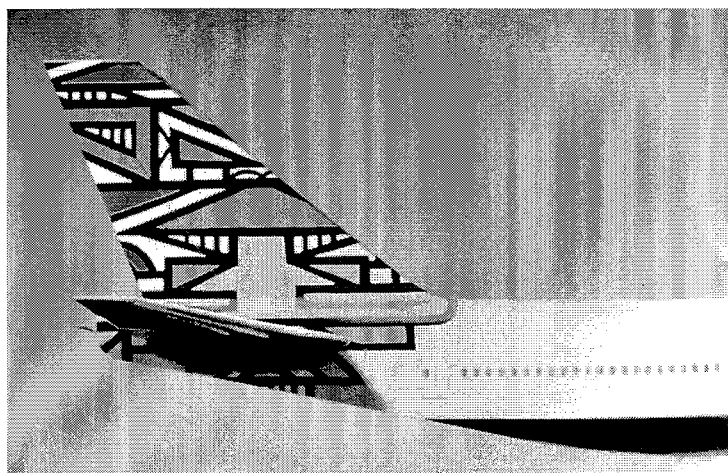


Figure 13



Notwithstanding everything that Buntman has said about the dangers of advertisers using "ethnic" imagery, after the example of Ester Mahlangu's BMW, the mural painting and beadwork of a minority group, the Ndebele, became widely used in South African design and was eventually to be incorporated in the new corporate identity of British Airways (Figure 14).

Figure 14



In fact what was created is not a specific South African identity but rather a *mélange* that has resulted in a "pan African" identity. Hence "Ndebele-like" paintings are used to "decorate" litter bins in Durban in the heart of KwaZulu Natal, and global products with a strong American identity such as Coca-Cola attempted to create a local identity by using a visual and verbal pun with their "Afri-can" using similar motifs (c.1996) (Figure 15).

Figure 15



This type of adornment has not only been limited to products and their promotion but has been placed on buildings. Significantly, in an attempt at

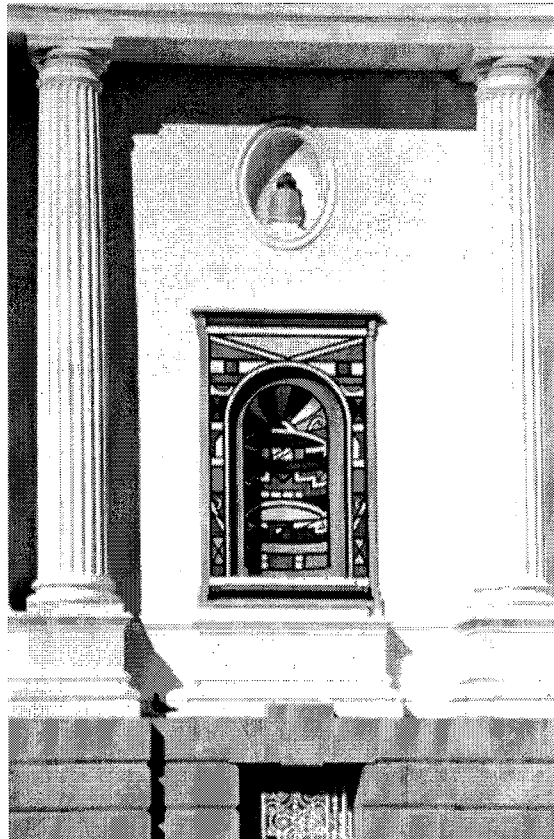
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Africanisation, the Neo-Classical buildings of the South African National Gallery (SANG) in Cape Town have been painted by Ndebele women (Figure 16).

**Figure 16**



The logo for the SANG is a clear indication of how this in turn provides a series of post-colonialist, post-modernist opportunities for the graphic designer to merge Neo-Classical architectural form with an African identity (Figures 17a and b).

Figure 17a

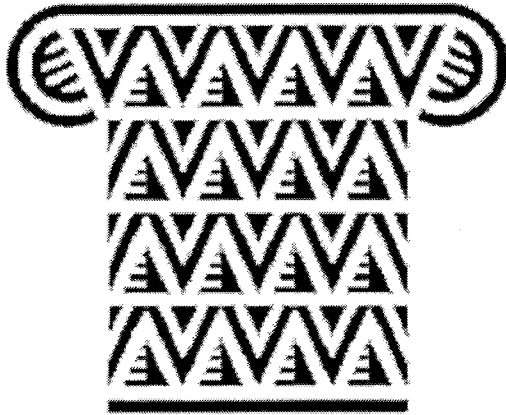


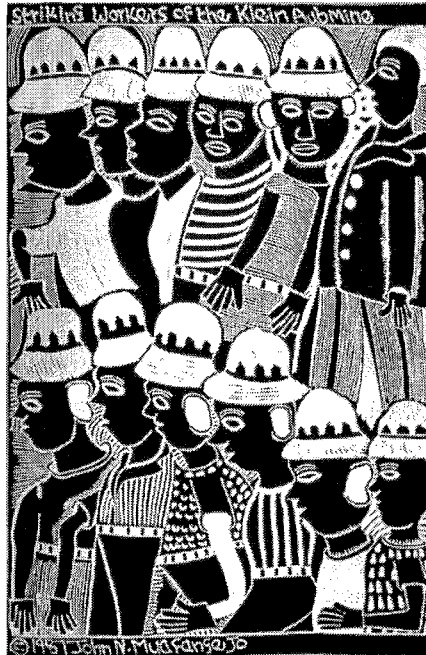
Figure 17b



### Technique and medium as signifier of identity

Another signifier of an African identity that has been used widely is the medium of relief printing. According to Athavanker, although certain materials and techniques may not be specific to a region, it is how they are used within a culture that creates the sense of identity (1997: 2). This is particularly true of the lino cuts produced by artists such as John Muafangejo (1943-1987) and Azaria Mbatha (b.1941) (Figure 18)

Figure 18



There has always been a strong carving tradition in Southern Africa but the introduction of relief printing methods at mission centres such as Rorke's Drift in the 1960's was particularly influential because as Koloane explains:

"the lino print technique is one of the most accessible mediums available for artists living in the crowded social conditions of the townships. The technique does not require elaborate space facilities and sophisticated equipment. One of its primary virtues is that it can be executed in any place and at any time. It is this portable quality which enables the township artist to preserve (sic) in his creative experience."  
(1985: 76)

Significantly, in mainstream South African advertising at the time, a less radical set of images using the same technique were designed by Ogilvy & Mather, Rightford, Searle-Tripp and Makin for the Chamber of Mines. In a

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set of corporate advertisements that was published in the press during October and November 1989, graphic designer Riccardo Cappecci was commissioned to prepare over two thousand wood-cuts for a short animated television advertisement (*Figure 19*).

**Figure 19**



A recent fire in the Orange Free State (a discovery of which turned out to be the world's largest goldfield) has prompted the Government of South Africa to take steps to improve the safety of the mining industry, as well as to ensure that the industry's resources are used to the best advantage. The Government has approved a programme of measures to improve the safety of the mining industry, and has also approved a programme of measures to improve the efficiency of the industry. The Government has also approved a programme of measures to improve the efficiency of the industry.

**TWO KILOMETRES DOWN, THEY'RE BUILDING THE SKYLINES OF TOMORROW**

Students at the University of the Witwatersrand and the South African Institute of Mining and Metallurgy have been instrumental in the mining industry, as well as in the development of the country. The students have been instrumental in the development of the country, and have also been instrumental in the development of the country.

More than 25% per cent of the wealth generated in South Africa every year (R2700 million) is contributed to the mining industry.

Through national development contracts by paying R400 million annually in taxes, the industry's personnel will contribute R200 million to the country's economy of goods and services, most of them of local origin. It spends more than R100 million every year.

Substantially being an integral part of the working industry, the Chamber of Mines is proud of the part the industry plays in South Africa's growth. Through its role in the development of the industry, it has been instrumental in the development of the country.

This mine is all yours, the gold that is yours, the minerals that are yours, the wealth that is yours, the South Africa that is yours.

**BORN THE FOUNDATION OF OUR NATION**



South African Chamber of Mines, 1989

Significantly the images of both workers and managers were rendered in what was perceived to be an "African" technique to create what appeared, at the time, a "new" South African identity (*Figure 20*).

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Figure 20



When the forces of nature exact the tribute paid for our work, they demand to  
know if they in the earth's great resources, hidden veins. It has been established in quantities,  
one of the hardest and most sensitive problems in our time.

The result is an underground environment unique to the mining world, with  
moments that pressure and our imaginations will share those of the human body.

#### MINING TOOLS HAVE COME A LONG WAY SINCE PICK AND SHOVEL

Unifying our mineral wealth in these conditions demands the kind of innovation,  
multi-faceted and approach by engineers and scientists that has made possible a hundred  
year-old mining technology.

Changing rock engineering research using advanced electronic designs and complex  
social computer programs has revolutionized the design of mine layouts, the prediction  
and control of rock stress and the support of excavations.

Custom designed computer programs also optimize mine ventilation and air  
distribution systems, using their own and are produced in a massive scale.

The latest energy in solutions of water power have made it possible to power  
mining operations in the world, with significant environmental and cost benefits. When  
used in combination with skills, power and less costly than synthetic skills.

Every day, innovative technology is dedicated to making mining more efficient,  
healthier and - really important - safer.

© 1998, THE CORPORATION OF ICM



A closer analysis of the images with their bold distortions and perspective emphasizing the hands and machines of workers (and managers) is, however, reminiscent of the socialist spirit of the Mexican revolution in murals of Diego Rivera (1886-1957) and significantly, the posters and murals that Ben Shahn (1898-1969) produced for the Federal Arts project which has been described as representing a "capitalist-democratic realism" that portrayed the "proletarian-citizen set to work by Roosevelt's New Deal" (Wood et al. 1993: 24) (Figure 21).

Figure 21



It could be argued, therefore that what creates a new identity for the Chamber of Mines is a subtle reference to socialist-inspired murals emphasised by the expressive use of the "traditional" medium. This view is confirmed by the copy which has an ambiguous headline "Mining. The Foundation Of Our Nation" which, with hindsight, can be recognised as an early example of corporate advertising promoting the company's own image and the notion of nation building. Soon the relief print was widely used to promote products as diverse as music and shopping centres! (Figure 22).

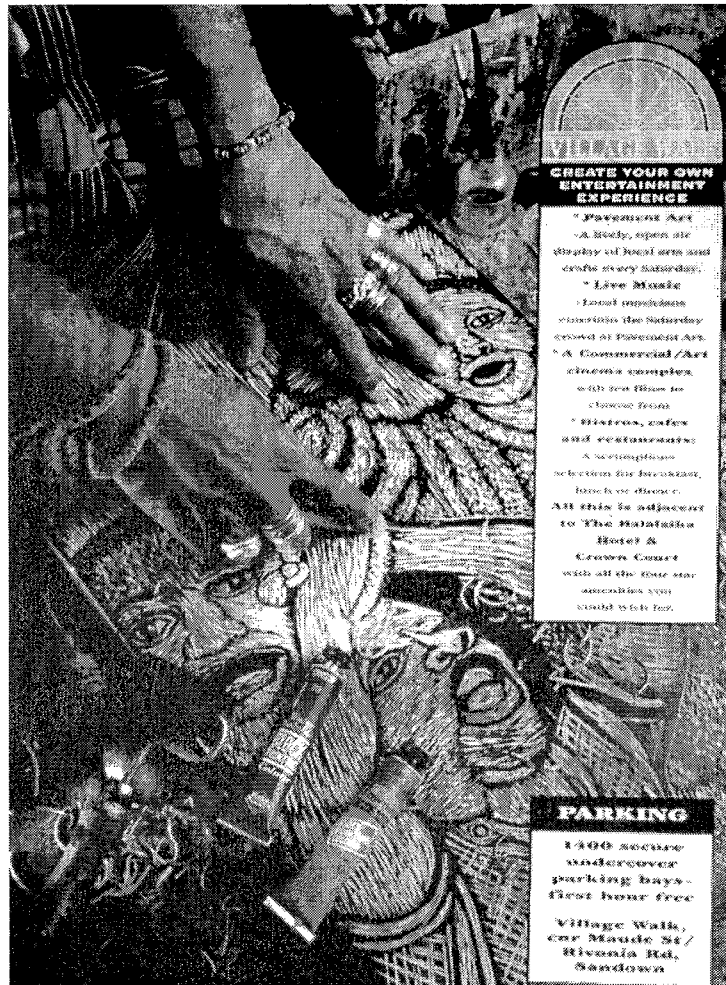
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Figure 22



### The power of the vernacular

In South Africa the blurring of the cultural boundaries can be regarded as a direct result of the forces of transformation since 1990. Since then there has been a growing trend to invite public participation in everything from submission of proposals for the constitution, to the design of the national flag, livery design for the national airline carrier (South African Airways) and the creation of art for advertising. The blurring of the boundaries between art, advertising and democratic participation occurred when in 1991/92 the Johannesburg based Young & Rubicam developed a television viewer competition supported by *Bona* magazine to promote Colgate toothpaste

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(Figure 23).

Figure 23



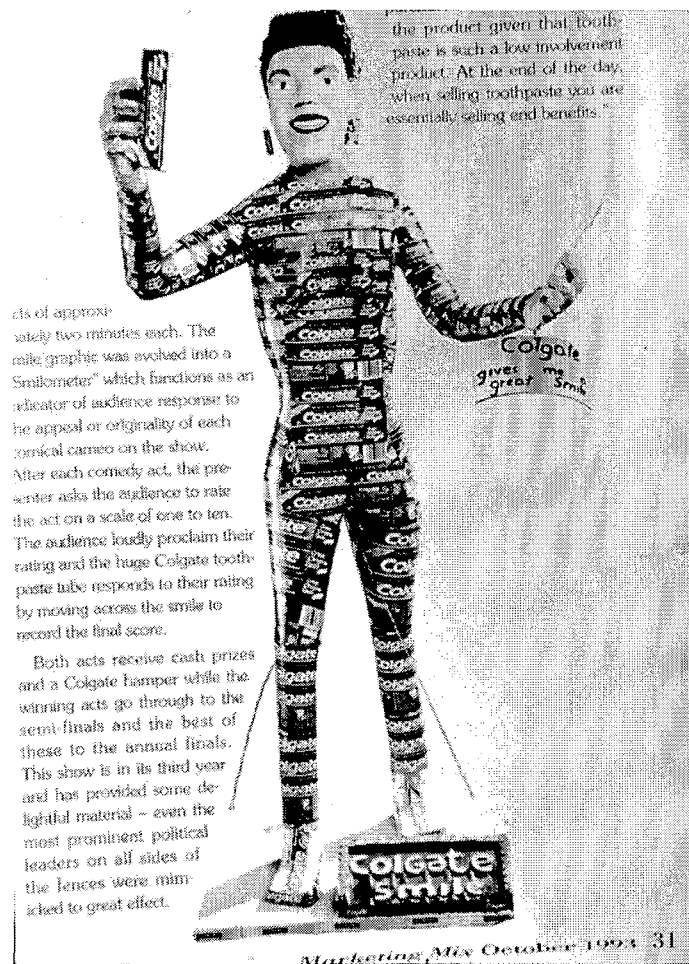
The stated marketing problem at the time was that the "Colgate Smile" was a concept conceived in the United States. In an effort to avoid the racial connotations implicit in the American white toothpaste smile on pink skin, Young & Rubicam changed the background to the dominant brand colour - red (*Marketing Mix*, October, 1993: 31). Looking for a growth in what, in 1992, was referred to as "the main market" the viewers of the CCV TV programme, "Nogomgqibelo Show" were asked to create their own expression of the "Colgate Smile" by using Colgate packs to construct a design or sculpture (*Figure 24*).

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Figure 24



The response was overwhelming with more than 15 000 entries, and the top 50 sculptures were exhibited at the Market Gallery in Johannesburg. A number of sculptures were also animated in a series of television advertisements throughout 1993. The notion of using the work of unskilled artists in advertising in this campaign was repeated in a number of similar promotions by other companies (Figure 25).

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Figure 25



In the process advertisers ensured audience (democratic?) participation with an artwork which carried a sense of a new identity. However the dangers of exploitation can be self-defeating. Taking from the streets to create Fine Art was an intrinsic part of Pop Art during the 1960's. But for it to go back into the streets in the form of design art is a relatively new phenomenon to be observed in contemporary South African design. This can not only be seen in the Mathews and Charter campaign for KwaZulu-Natal's East Coast Radio (1997). After the Standard Bank had sponsored an exhibition of West African hair dressing display art in art galleries throughout South Africa during 1995 (Figure 26),

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Figure 26



**Barber signs from Africa**

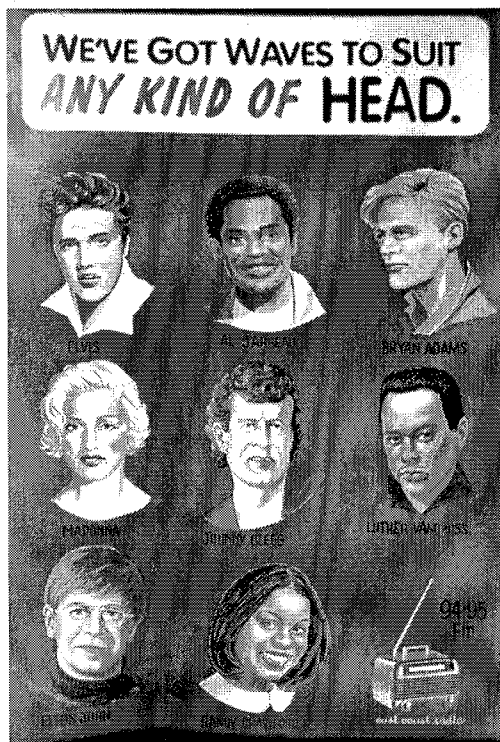
Exhibition of hand-painted boards used by African barbers to attract customers

Durban Art Gallery

March 15 - April 2 1995

Mathews and Charter saw the commercial possibilities of appropriating the style, including a crude wooden frame for the pun "We've Got Waves To Suit Any Kind Of Head" (Figure 27).

Figure 27



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Ironically, since the physical borders of South Africa have become permeable and prone to immigration from the north, this type of barber sign has become a popular feature on the streets of Durban (Figure 28).

Figure 28



The power of the vernacular was one of the prime motives for Durban based graphic designer, Garth Walker to publish *i-justi* a promotional magazine for his studio Orange Juice Design (OJD) (Figure 29).

Figure 29



The stated aim of the *i-jusi* (colloquial Zulu for juice) which is distributed to the industry free of charge is "to create a debate about a new visual language in South Africa" (Gunning and Walker 1995: 1). Walker describes the award winning publication as "Ray Gun meets Africa" which is significant in that *Ray Gun* is an international showcase for post-modern design when he wants to promote "local [design] because we don't need to copy Europe and America all the time" (personal interview with Walker 1997). Amongst other things *i-jusi*#1 documented informal typography and advertising on the streets of Durban "to show how ordinary South Africans use graphic design and advertising in their everyday lives so we can be recognised as a creative powerhouse" <sup>5</sup> (Figure 30).

**Figure 30**

4. *Thompson*. The *Thompson* is the latest in direct and digital printing. Work is received via computer, supplied as single pages on disk and printed directly from the computer. Being digital, the *Thompson* will allow for a truly integral marketing approach by using an infinite amount of data – each sheet of the press can be unique, with picture and copy changes on the fly, and no charging to the speed of printing. Pages can be supplied as single files, imposition is done via the system and final sheets can be printed simultaneously. Maximum size is 210mm x 297mm, plus ticks and bleed.



Naturally this practice has potential pitfalls for the professional designer particularly in a culturally sensitive society. In spite of these contradictions and dangers, *i-jusi* has been recognised both nationally and internationally as an important attempt on the part of the South African design industry to come to terms with a South African identity. For OJD this has been particularly useful when the brief demands a more inclusive approach such as the poster and promotional material for the Durban Art Gallery (DAG)

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(Figure 31).

**Figure 31**



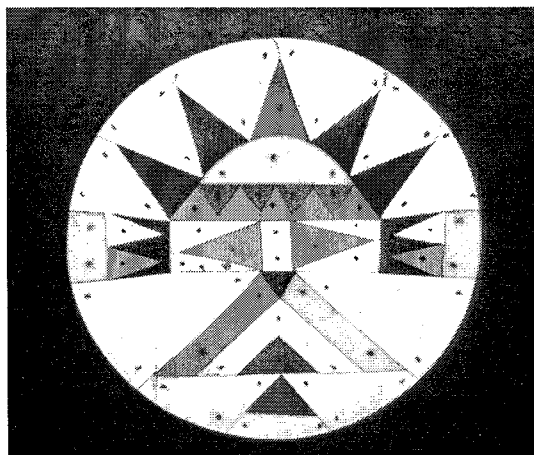
The central image of this poster is a mandala, which is based on a Zulu earplug design that OJD often use as a signifier of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region (Figure 32).

**Figure 32**



Traditionally, Zulu earplugs are artifacts that were made to be worn in a hole pierced in the lobe of the ear as part of a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood ceremony (Jolles 1997: 49) (Figure 33).

**Figure 33**



While by the 1950's the ear-piercing ceremony had lost its ritual significance and had become cosmetic, the pattern of the earplug in the DAG poster reveals yet another legacy of Durban's colonial past when men manually cleaned the floors of many buildings with *Sunbeam* wax polish. The motif

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on the lid of the wax container became popular as a signifier of status within the various groups of workers (Figure 34).

**Figure 34**

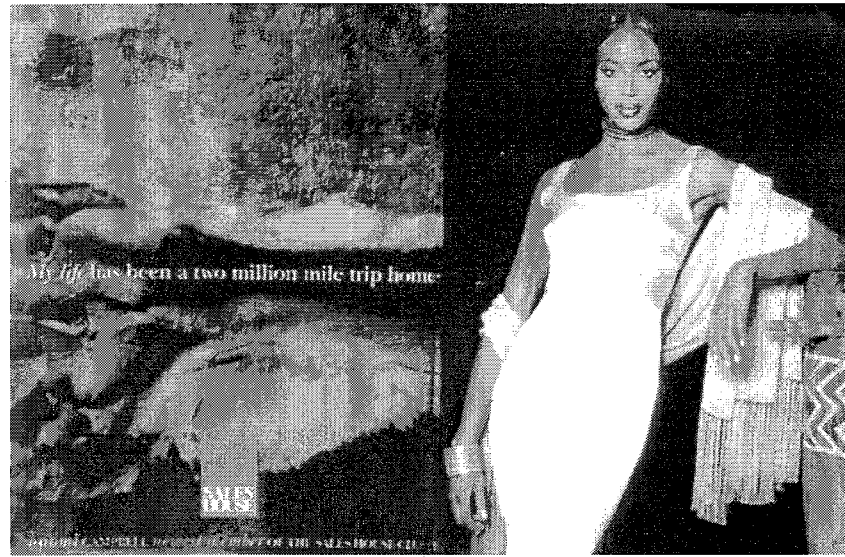


That OJD should use this motif in many designs as a signifier of KwaZulu-Natal, and specifically on the poster and brochure for a "high" cultural institution such as the Durban Art Gallery is an indication of the nature of the change in South Africa.

### **Conclusion**

The period prior to the second set of elections in 1999 can be characterised, politically, as one in which a growing trend towards an Africanist ethos is evident in many aspects of life. In part this is due to the new President Thabo Mbeki's call for an African Renaissance (Mbeki 1996).<sup>6</sup> Predictably this sense of identity is reflected in advertisements addressed to a very different audience that constituted the market at the beginning of the century. To this end Ogilvy & Mather, Rightford Searle-Tripp and Makin use "super model" Naomi Campbell as "the newest member of the Sales House Club" (Figure 35).

Figure 35



Less than a hundred years after the Bovril advertisements in this campaign Africa is positioned in the global context. Hence the headline "My life has been a two million mile trip home." In this advertisement the sophisticated, internationally recognised model leans against a traditional African drum on the right hand side of the double page spread. On the left hand page the bark of a tree is used ambiguously to create a sense of natural fabric that echoes the garment she wears. Golden browns and the hint of ethnic pattern on the drum signify Africa. It could be argued that in this manner both the model and the notion of Africa have become *objects of desire* in a manner that is informed by promotional images from Hollywood films of novels such as *King Solomon's Mines*. What is new however is that in this type of campaign the hint of the ethnic is subtle and serves to links the audience/consumer with cultural traditions which are no longer negatively perceived as they were during the colonial period. In fact in terms of the call for an African Renaissance, it has become what Preston-Whyte and Thorpe have described as "the focus of both a local and a pan-African consciousness which is centred on change and liberation" (1989: 124).

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## Endnotes

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1. Schudson points out that Socialist Realism was defined at the First Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934 and called upon the artist to present a "correct historically concrete representation of reality in its revolutionary development." According to Schudson, art was obliged to do so in a form that will educate "the working masses in the spirit of socialism" (1984: 214-215).

2. Nation Building had been proposed in the late 1980's by the editor of the *Sowetan*, Aggrey Klaaste as a non-governmental, self help exercise (Green and Lascaris 1990: 187).

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3. In 1987 the South African Association of Art Historians convened a conference at Stellenbosch University that called for the *Re-writing of Art and Architectural History of Southern Africa*. With hindsight it appears that the call for the *Re-writing of art history* was already underway and a number of revisionist publications appeared in quick succession. e.g. Matsemela's *Echoes of African Art* (1987), Younge's *Art of the South African Townships* (1988), Williamson's *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989) and Nettleton and Hammond-Tooke's *African Art in Southern Africa -From*

*Tradition To Township* (1989) were all published before the end of the decade.

4. In 1992 the Director of the Centre for Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal, Keyan Tomaselli made similar points in a paper *The Post-Apartheid era: The San As Bridge Between Past and Present* which he presented at the "Eyes Across the Water - Visual Sociology and Anthropology Conference in Amsterdam (1992). Subsequently he edited an edition of *Critical Arts*, "Recuperating the San" which focussed upon how the "new" South Africa has recuperated a different, affirmative image of the San in comparison to the negative, prejudiced representation of "bushmen" previously popularised by pro-apartheid media" (1995: 1). Buntman has also subsequently revised and expanded her 1994 text as *Selling with the San: Representations of Bushman People and Artefacts in South African Print Advertisements* published in *Visual Anthropology* 1996: 33-34).

5. In a further effort to "Africanise," OJD Walker has worked closely with students from the ML Sultan Technikon to produce *i-jusi#3* (1996), *i-jusi#5* (1997) and *i-jusi#7* (1998).

6. This speech was delivered at a ceremony marking the acceptance of the new Constitution in 1996. The term "Africanism" is sometimes used with its sister phrase "African Renaissance" which Mbeki also championed in the same speech Siluma 1997 in *Sunday Independent* October 1997: 8).

