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#### ERRATA: Pg 12 Paragraph 7 should read:

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As an experience, the experiment has been important to me in that I was motivated by and learnt from the interaction with a public and in that it indicated . . .

Pg 18 Line 2, 5th word should read: designs

Pg 21 Paragraph 2, 1st line should read: The torsos in Prototypes II and III were set up . . .

Pg 21 Paragraph 3, 1st line should read: In colour drawings I and IV . . .

## RAPHICS

based on South African certain characteristics of the oster.

chaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

ard Ford van de Vijver ember 1983



## STREET GRAPHICS

Thirty-one silkscreen prints, based on South African iconography, with reference to certain characteristics of the street poster.

Submitted for the Degree of Master in Fine Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

by Simon Gerard Ford Supervisor: Jules van de Vijver Cape Town November 1983

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### PREFACE

An exploration by graphic means of selected South African iconography is the subject of this thesis.

I have produced a collection of thirty-one silkscreen prints, which combine elements of the fine print and the street poster. The screenprints have been mounted on board and presented in a box, accompanied by an illustrated dissertation.

During the production of the prints, I displayed a number of individual screenprints, and later complete series, at various public locations (e.g. bus shelters, fences and walls of buildings) on the U.C.T. campus, in order to relate my working process to a direct public response. The whole collection of prints is ultimately envisaged as an exhibition on simple screens in a public place.

The imagery in these prints is drawn from magazines and other mass publications, as well as from personal observation.

My themes are based on aspects of South African popular culture and have been developed under eight different titles.

The first five prints: OBSERVATIONS, can be seen as the visual parallel to a preface.

Series One: ARTEFACTS, asserts the associative values of a well-known object when it is taken out of its context.

Series Two: PROTOTYPES, links the quest for individuation with identification by means of uniform or dress.

Series Three: INTERIORS, depicts environments that represent the concerns of the people who inhabit them.

Series Four: MERE FAÇADES, portrays selected buildings which reveal aspects of the nature of the society they shelter.

Series Five: AHEAD OF OUR TIME, focuses on outward appearance as a denominator of identity and on the resulting loss of individuality.

Series Six: SUNNY SKIES, is a personal interpretation of some typical South African images (icons).

Series Seven: MEMORABILIA, serves as a conclusion to the collection and is a personal homage to Joseph Cornell.

This dissertation comprises a discussion of aspects of the practical work, concentrating on some elements of the historical background to my investigation; notes on my graphic methods and their implications; a documentary report on the display of the prints on the U.C.T. campus and an introduction to the prints.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am most grateful for the financial assistance—from the following sources—which has made this thesis possible; The Manuel and Luby Washkansky Scholarship; the Jules Kramer Music and Fine Art Grant; the Harry Crossley Travel Grant, and the U.C.T. Postgraduate Research Scholarship.

I am much indebted to my supervisor, Jules van de Vijver, for his instruction, advice and encouragement and for the high standards of excellence which he upheld throughout our association.

During the course of my studies I received valuable practical assistance from Unifoto (Pty.) Ltd., Cape Town. I was also able to attend a specialist silkscreen course at the invitation of Autotype International in England. To both these firms I would like to express my sincere appreciation.

I would like to thank Nigel Fogg for photographing the prints for the reproductions in this book.

James Ambrose Brown for proof reading the text and my friends for all their help.

Finally, I wish to thank my mother for her constant encouragement, interest and support.

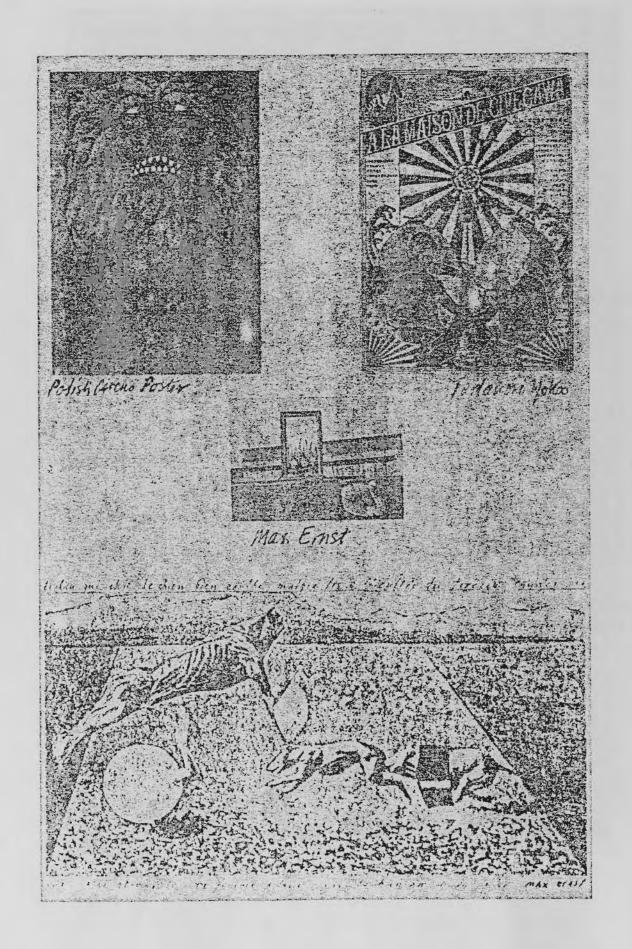
### 1. INTRODUCTION

In South Africa an appreciation of the fine art of printmaking is confined to a relatively small group of collectors and visitors to galleries and museums. The poster in all its forms, displayed in a variety of locations, however, reaches a mass public. In these prints I have attempted to extend my range as a graphic artist by applying the techniques and methods of poster-making in a fine art context. I have also experimented with methods of display which have more in common with the way in which posters are displayed than with the traditional exhibition of framed prints.

A desire to react directly to public sentiment and to reflect on visual symbols institutionalized by the organs of mass communication accompanied the attempt to find a form which could reach a broader public. While trying to incorporate popular imagery in my work I have been careful neither to merely elevate the profane to the level of art, nor to celebrate provincial and strict ideological attitudes to art. The themes in these prints are immediately relevant to the place which I know best. By handling in my work that which I know most intimately, I hope to have touched on a more universal form and significance. Questions of identity, the past, the present and the future have been approached in my prints by disintegrating, recomposing and juxtaposing some typical South African images.

My artistic aims are best clarified by means of a concise discussion of those aspects of contemporary art and of those traditions in poster-making which have been an inspiration to me. It should be directly apparent from the majority of screenprints that, stylistically, they rely heavily on the collage technique. *Max Ernst* (b. 1891) whose use of collage I much admire, defines collage as:

'... the systematic exploitation of the fortuitous or engineered encounter of two or more intrinsically incompatible realities on a surface which is manifestly inappropriate for the purpose — and the spark of poetry which leaps across the gap (my italics) as these two realities are brought together.'1.



Franz Mon writes:

"... collage does not mean simply one artistic technique among many, but reveals a basic attitude to artistic activity which pervades the whole of modern art. A collage unites in a composition elements which originate from the civilized environment, bear traces of modification, and are therefore socially mediated . . . Collage transposes received reality, as seen through the filter of civilization, into an artistic world ripe for reconstitution."<sup>2</sup>

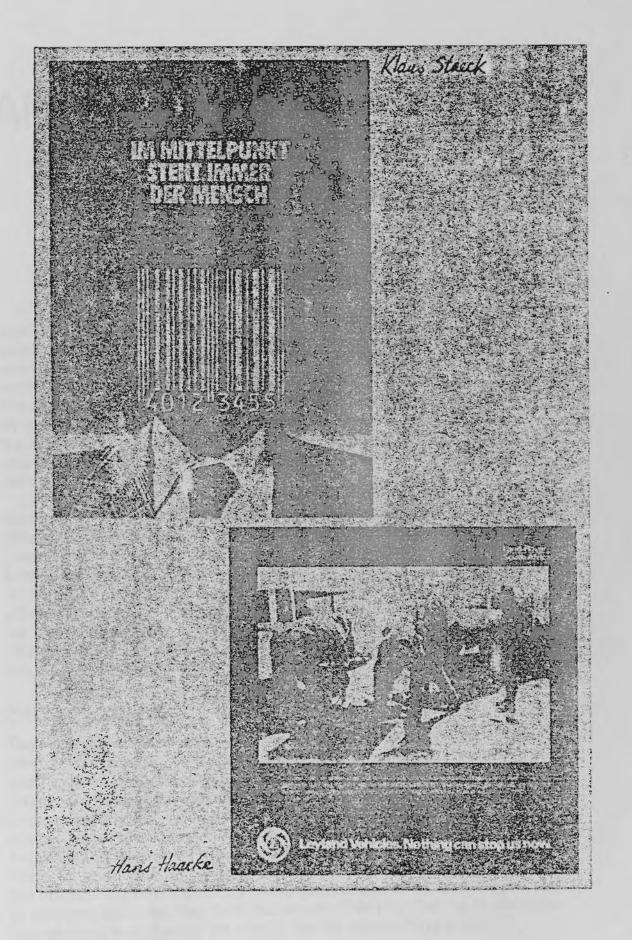
Some other artists whose work has been an influence on me in this connection are *Joseph Cornell* (1903–1972) and *Richard Hamilton* (b.1922). Pop Art, with its use of popular imagery and its thematic concern with the ordinary, has been another important source of reference. Pop Art as seen in the work of some of its exponents, drew heavily from contemporary forms of labels, magazines, poster-making and commercial printing techniques; for example, screenprinting. Works by *Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein* and *Robert Rauschenberg* are well known examples. In turn, the recent development of Billboard Art in the United States has direct links with the preceding Pop Art movement, making the circle of influence between popular commercial forms and the fine arts complete.<sup>3</sup>

Certain common characteristics of the poster found in the American, the Japanese, the German and the Polish traditions have been influential in my work. Firstly, the decorative aspects of the poster in an urban setting:-for example the billboard poster in America and the circus and theatre poster in Poland – are recognized as effective decorative elements in a city environment, quite apart from the message which they may try to convey. Secondly, the mass appeal of a good poster suggests the possibility of mass communication by means of a print. The effectiveness of the political and commercial poster on the one hand relies largely on aesthetic qualities which touch on popular sensibilities, while on the other hand it has led artists with strong socio-political orientations – like Hans Haacke (b. 1936) and Klaus Staeck (b. 1938) in West Germany – to choose the poster form as their means of expression.<sup>4</sup>

The Japanese artist *Tadanori Yokoo* (b.1936), who uses a personally characteristic collage technique, can give free reign in his commercial as well as his private work to a less ideologically directed, more playful social comment.<sup>5</sup>

By making the 'spark of poetry' (of which Max Ernst speaks,) occur in printed images having strong decorative qualities, and placed in public locations, I have attempted to make art which, by virtue of its form, would reach a wider public, as is the case with the street poster.

- 1. SCHNEEDE, Uwe, M. The essential Max Ernst (1972) p. 29
- 2. SCHNEEDE, Uwe, M. Op. cit. p. 122
- 3. cf. HENDERSON, Sally. Billboard Art (1981)
- 4. cf. Documenta 7. Kassei. 1982 Exhibition Catalogue Vol. 1 & 2
- 5. cf. KOICHI, Tanikawa. 100 Posters of Tadanori Yokoo (1978)



## 2. MY GRAPHIC METHODS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

The decisions which I made regarding the techniques and methods to be employed in the production of my prints were governed by a number of practical objectives:

The techniques chosen had to be cost-effective, as is the case in the production of posters.

I restricted the number of colours I would print from the outset and designed printing plans which were as simple as possible. I wished to print large editions with a minimum of difficulties.

The methods to be employed had to be flexible. They also had to allow for the use of imagery drawn from a variety of sources.

The prints themselves had to withstand weather conditions and it had to be possible to paste them to walls, fences, etc.

I chose to work in screen-printing because in the circumstances it seemed the most appropriate and versatile technique. It allowed me to hand-print and to experiment with large colour images at a relatively low cost.

For purposes of clarity I have grouped a description of the methods used under three headings: Preparation of the positives, Stencil making and Printing.

#### Preparation of the positives.

When preparing my positives, I worked in a number of ways, often combining different methods before arriving at the final separations for the print. Firstly, I used direct drawing techniques with opaque ink on clear base. Secondly, I employed a variety of photographic methods. In some cases I took my own monochrome photographs, which were then processed further by means of posterization and halftone screening, and by combining positive and negative sections of the photograph on a single

positive. Some prints started as colour transparencies of sets which I produced for the purpose. Others originated as monochrome or colour drawings or as collages combined with drawing. When I worked with slides, collages or drawings, I started my designs at one third the size of the eventual print. Halftone colour separations were subsequently made by means of a laser-scanner, as my earlier method of personally producing the photomechanical colour separations, — with a reproduction camera and colour filters — proved too costly. After the colour separation phase I enlarged the individual separations myself.

Generally, the photographic four-colour separation was considered as simply a further stage in the development of the envisaged image. Often, I reworked the individual separations by hand and later achieved still further variation in the stencil making and printing phases. Dot and halftone effects employed were varied throughout, as I tried to meet the artistic needs which arose out of preceding prints. I found photomechanical colour separation a useful method, although, when used by itself, it often seemed too rigid, and needed modification in order to achieve more expressive qualities.

#### Stencil making.

The indirect photostencil technique was the main method of stencil making employed. I used only one kind of screen mesh – 110 T Polyester, as this width proved versatile enough to print the fine dots as well as flat areas of colour. In those instances where the stencil did not have to meet the requirements of good definition and high resolution of detail, I sometimes made use of direct photostencils, while for the simplest stencils the blockout filler technique proved adequate. On average, six stencils were made for each print. I completed all the stencils before starting to proof the colours. In many instances I reworked parts of the stencil by painting or spraying blockout filler onto the screen. This enabled me to intervene expressively and change the design during the proofing phase.

#### Printing.

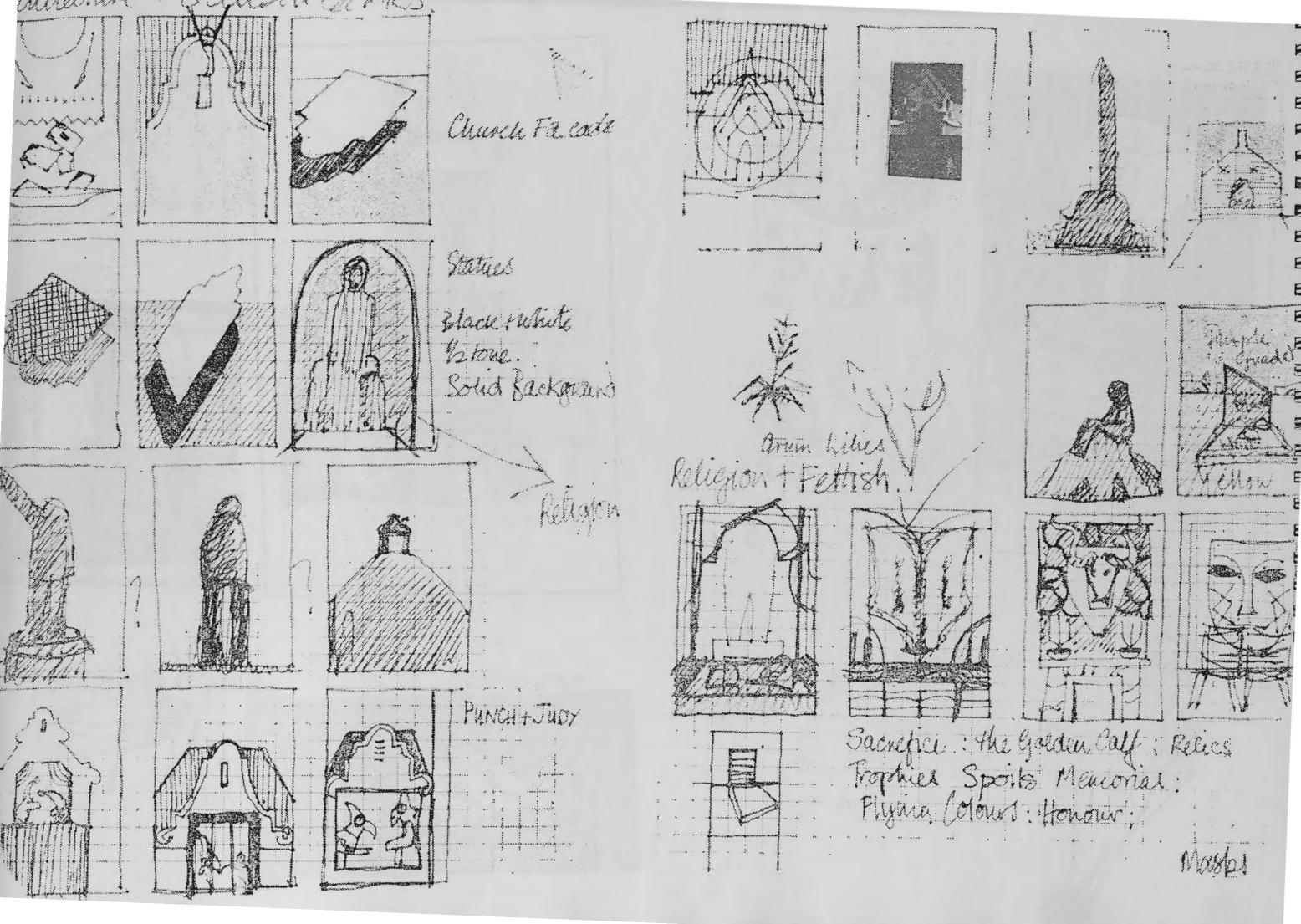
When all the stencils had been completed, I tested and decided on the individual colours. Generally, I would then make a complete proof print before going ahead with the production of the edition. I would often rework sections of the individual stencils with blockout filler and change colours on the basis of the proof print. I sometimes rejected a whole print or some of the stencils and remade them completely.

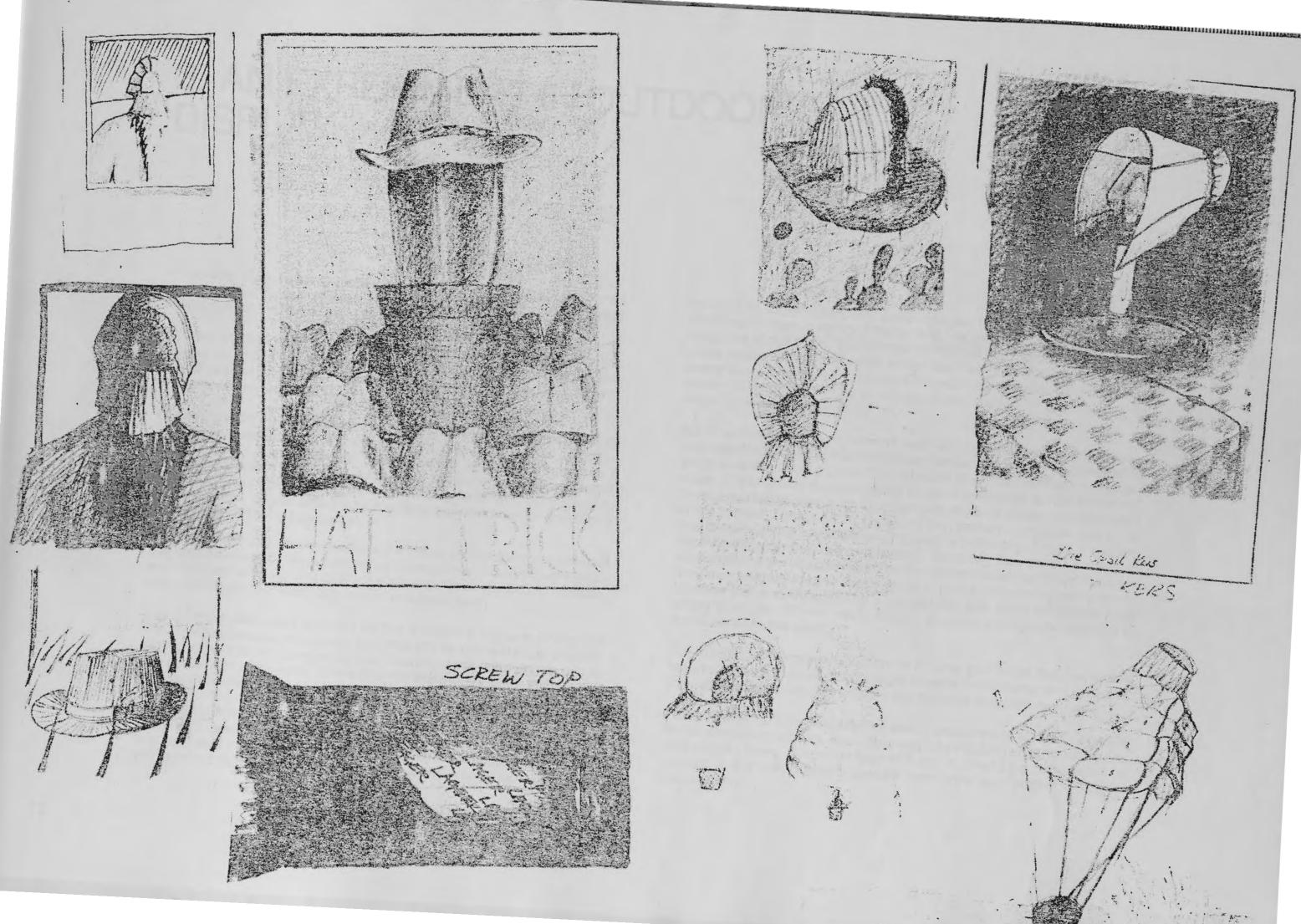
The editions consisted of about fifty prints each:- thirty printed on Dukuza paper, to be signed and kept as high quality copies, and a number of proofs printed on poster paper, to be distributed as outdoor display copies. Because of the cost involved I could not print the large editions which would be necessary if a project of this nature were to be executed on a large scale. About fifteen copies were sufficient for the more limited project of showing the work on the U.C.T. campus.

Trichromatic inks were used to mix the required colours. In addition I made use of opaque, metallic and fluorescent inks to increase my colour range. In some cases the screenprints were overprinted with a gloss or matt varnish.

The methods which I have described were governed by the overriding objective of drawing directly from existing visual material, and had to allow a free rearrangement of observed and borrowed imagery. Most prints were first conceived as collages or drawings. This practice allowed greater freedom in composing the image. However, the first design was never seen as complete in itself. The collage, drawing or colour transparency was a starting point to be fully developed in the ensuing process. This way of working proved very versatile and provided me with a host of different possibilities. Whereas I attempted to unify single series by confining myself to the exploitation of certain possibilities only, I employed various approaches from one series to another. If one compares the different series, a certain degree of eclecticism may be evident. I consciously chose this approach, as I preferred a broad investigation to a singularly unified realization, and moreover felt that such an approach was appropriate in the light of my chosen subject matter.







## 3. AN EXPERIMENT IN OUTDOOR DISPLAY

In February 1983, when a number of prints had been completed and I had finally decided on the general direction of my work, I started to display prints at various sites on the U.C.T. campus.

By doing this before all the prints were finished, I hoped to learn from the experience and to adapt the final form which the work would take. I also wished to establish as direct a contact as possible with the public. One of my aims was not to be isolated in a studio.

The prints were made to be seen in the outdoors and actually exhibiting them there seemed to be a practical way by which difficulties could be resolved and the effectiveness of the designs judged. Furthermore, I hoped to prove that this form of exhibition could generate a public interest in the way I anticipated. The experiment also facilitated photographic documentation of the effect which different environmental conditions and wear and tear had on the prints.

Ideally, a whole city centre should be the venue for a graphic exhibition of this kind. Because of the experimental nature of my ideas I thought that it would be preferable to first attempt a trial version on the U.C.T. campus, which could be seen as an equivalent of a small town.

Ten different sites were selected for the display:- a highway bridge, an entrance to a pedestrian subway, bus shelters, fences and faces of buildings were specifically chosen for their location. I obtained permission to use these sites and pasted different prints there every week for approximately six months.

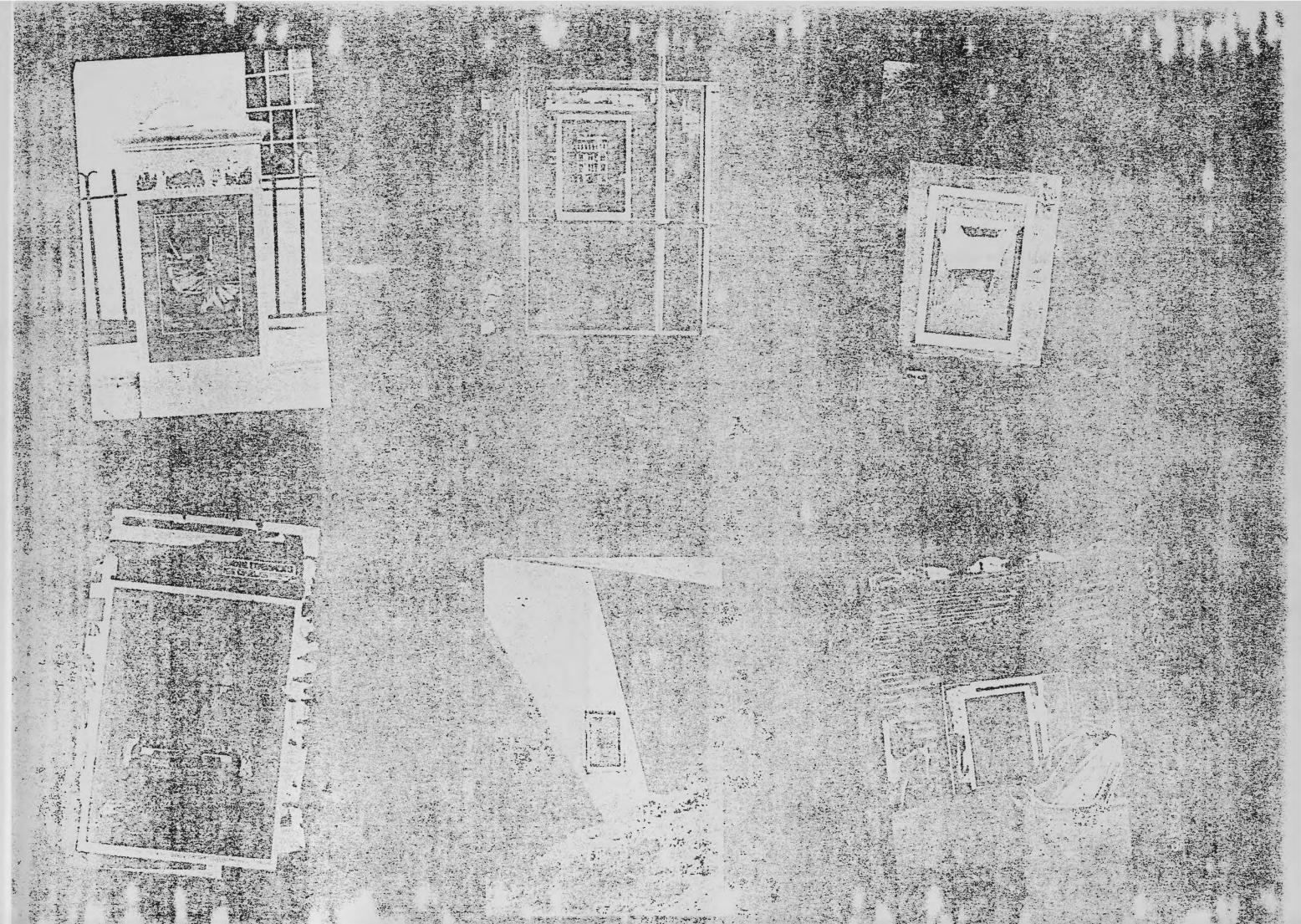
The order in which I displayed the prints was not the same as it is at present; prints were shown by themselves, instead of in series. In some instances this confused the viewers; some had difficulty in understanding the significance of it all. However, the routine of a new image every week eventually

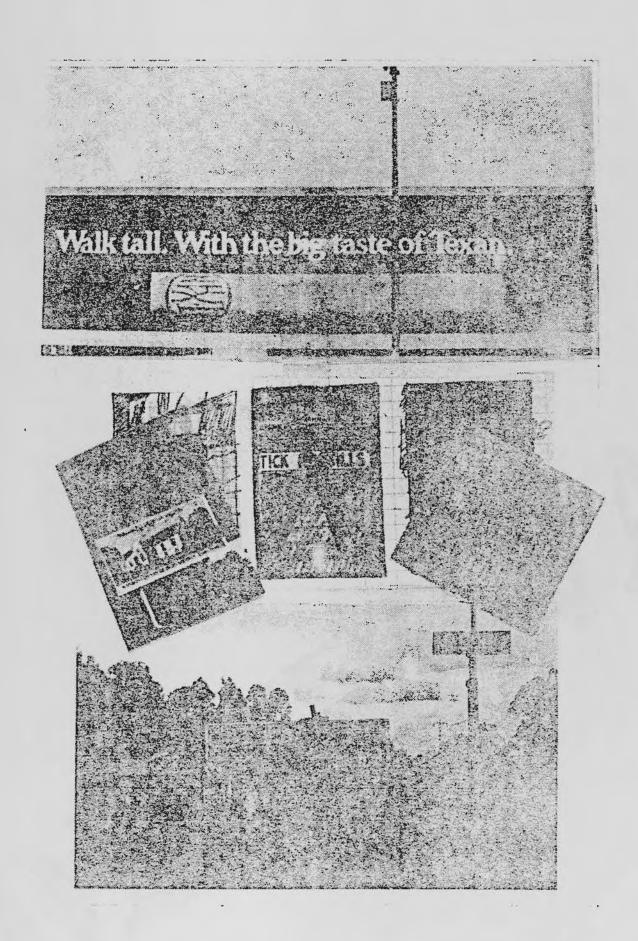
created an expectation, and people began to react to what they saw. Prints were often stolen or defaced and I received many requests for and enquiries about them. The images combined with words seemed to be more easily understood while series such as 'Interiors' were generally better liked. I finalized and clarified the experiment by showing complete series of prints in various locations, accompanied by the title and an explanation of my intentions.

As an experience, the experiment had been important to me in that I was motivated by and learnt from the interaction with a public, in that it indicated ways in which such a project could work when undertaken on a larger scale. It was also a decisive factor in how I eventually edited the prints. Quite a number of them were found lacking and were therefore not included in the present collection. I concluded that certain conditions had to be met to make a public exhibition of this nature effective: Firstly, the prints should preferably be of a topical nature. Secondly, they should add visual excitement to the environment. Thirdly, content-wise they should provide their own context. I found that a series of prints, grouped together in one location and accompanied by a printed title was more accessible than single prints in different sites. Finally, duration and routine seemed to institutionalize the event.

The display of the prints outdoors in no way precludes their exhibition indoors; I designed a number of simple screens in order to be able to display the collection as a whole in places like theatres and civic centres.

I believe that the form of exhibition which I have tested and which is akin to the display of posters, is a viable way of exhibiting my graphic art. As one among many cultural events in a city it should be considered by municipal authorities and/or private enterprise as a project worthy of sponsorship.





# 4. THE PRINTS OBSERVATIONS

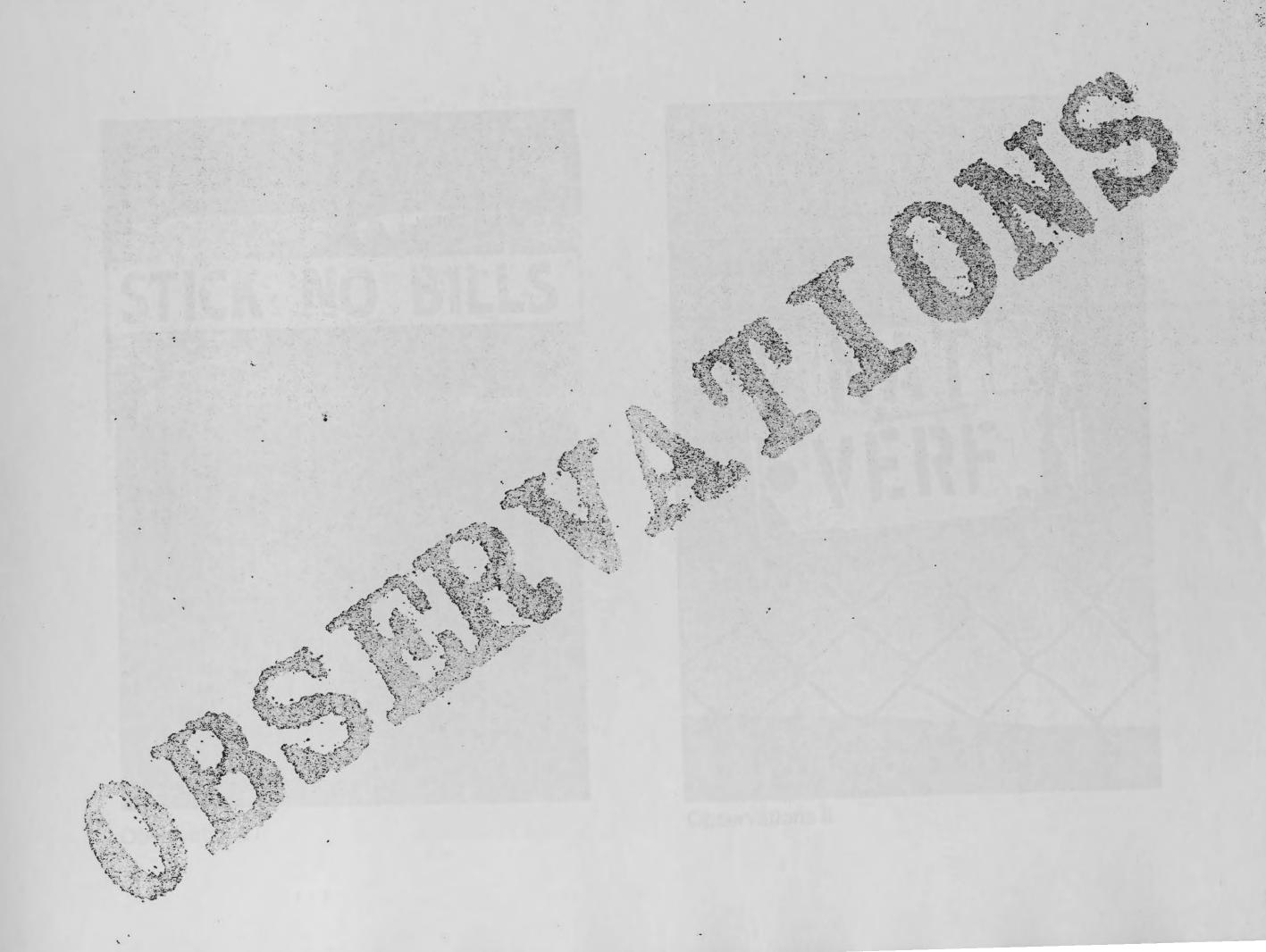
'Posters, those decorated pieces of paper which, depending on your point of view, accent, deface, blotch, clutter, or adorn the walls, fences and posts of the world.'

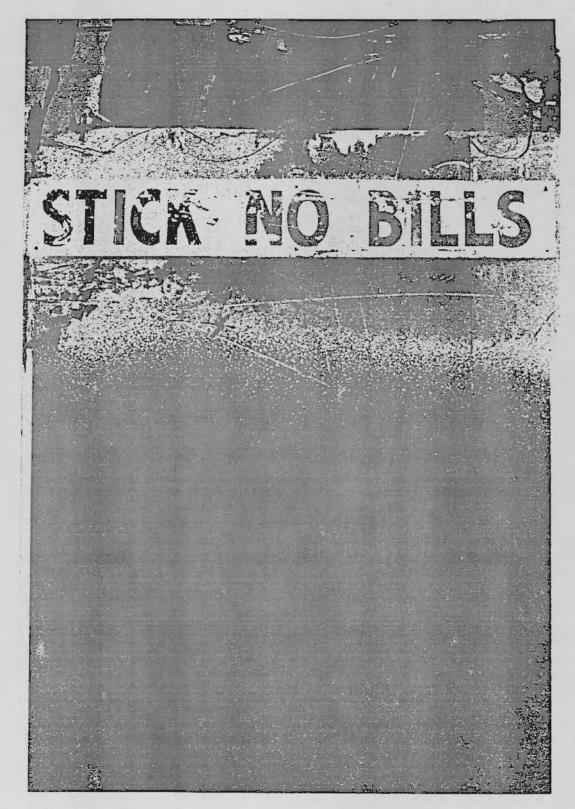
Larry Sommese Colorado Poster Exhibition Catalogue

The first five prints of the collection serve as a visual parallel to a preface. They reflect a number of different uses to which signs and posters are put and also follow the way in which a graphic image may be reshaped in time by environmental conditions.

Stick no Bills and Nat Verf are based on black and white photographs of two signs found in South Africa. The prints, reworked versions of the signs, draw attention to their aesthetic and poetic qualities.

Observations' III, IV and V – directly reproduced colour photographs – are examples of decollage which I found in Johannesburg, Washington and Cape Town, respectively. In these prints I have tried to reproduce the impact made on me by the abstract decorative quality of these decomposing groups of prints. The prints have been made more direct, enhancing their documentary qualities, by reinforcing the four-colour separation principle by means of fluorescent inks and localized supportive drawing.

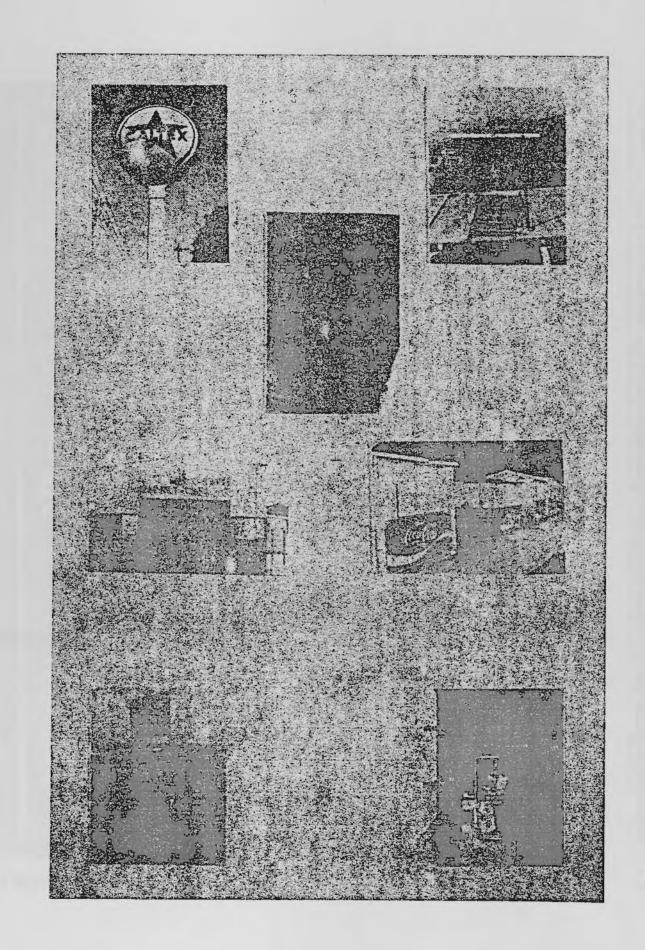


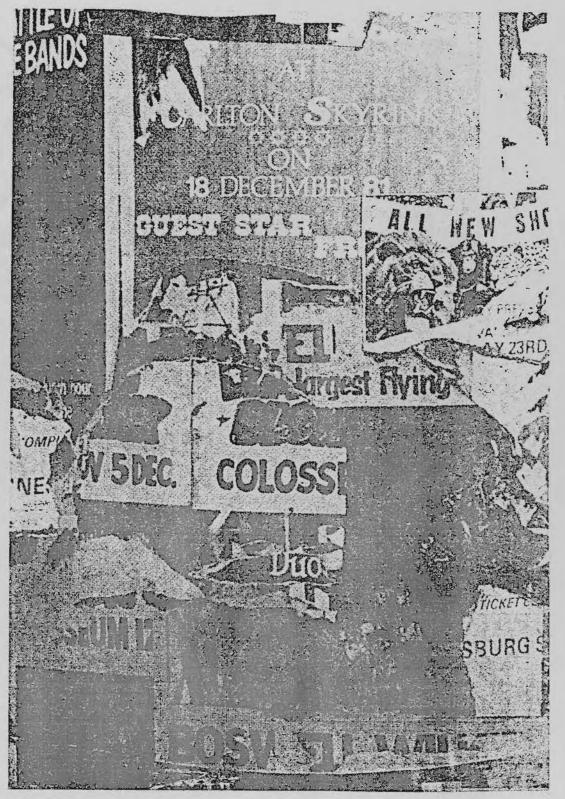


Observations I

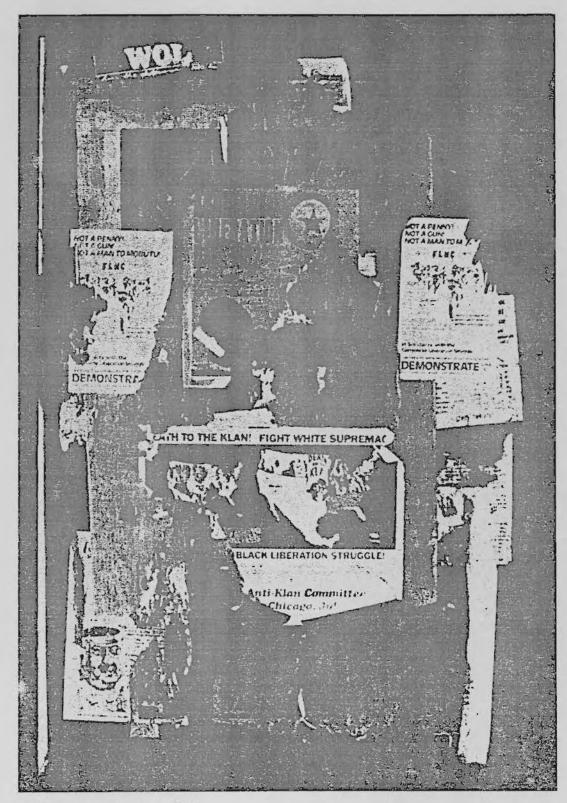


Observations II





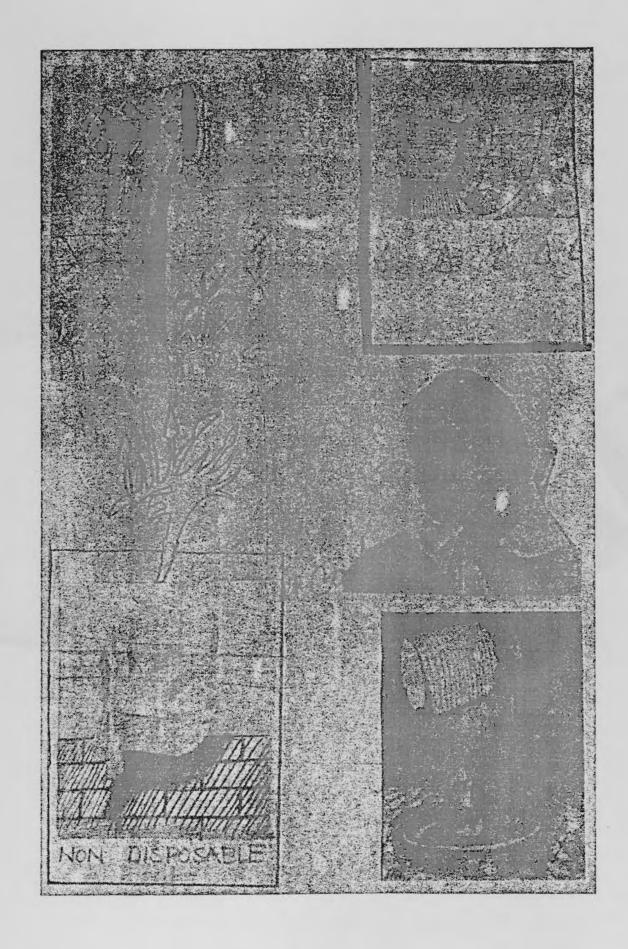
Observations III



Observations IV



Observations V



### Series One: ARTEFACTS

'Kappie A large sunbonnet usu. of white lawn or linen freq. tucked and embroidered in intricate disigns, worn by Voortrekker women and still by volkspelers in costume . . .

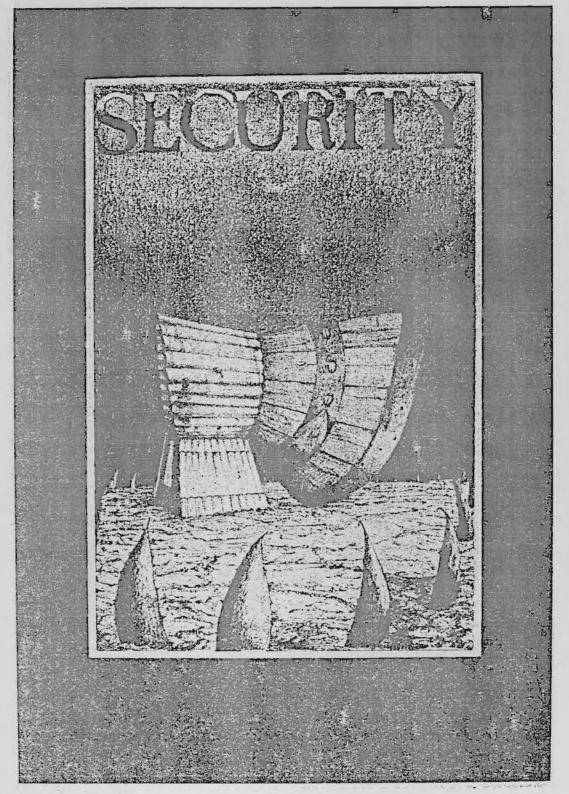
In the Dutch community, linen caps and scarves, popular since Van Riebeeck's day, have developed into the kappie, later to be the most typical feature of the Voortrekker woman's costume . . .'

Jean Branford
A Dictionary of South African English

'Artefacts' consists of four prints. The 'kappie' is taken out of its context and placed in new relationships to other objects and words. In this way a satirical comment is made on those aspects of South African reality with which it, as a symbol, is inversely related.

Graphically, the series has been handled in as sober a way as possible. Four-step posterizations were made of pencil drawings and printed in brownish-grey on a cream base colour. Flat, stronger colours were printed as borders, in order to lend added austerity and restrained variation to the prints.

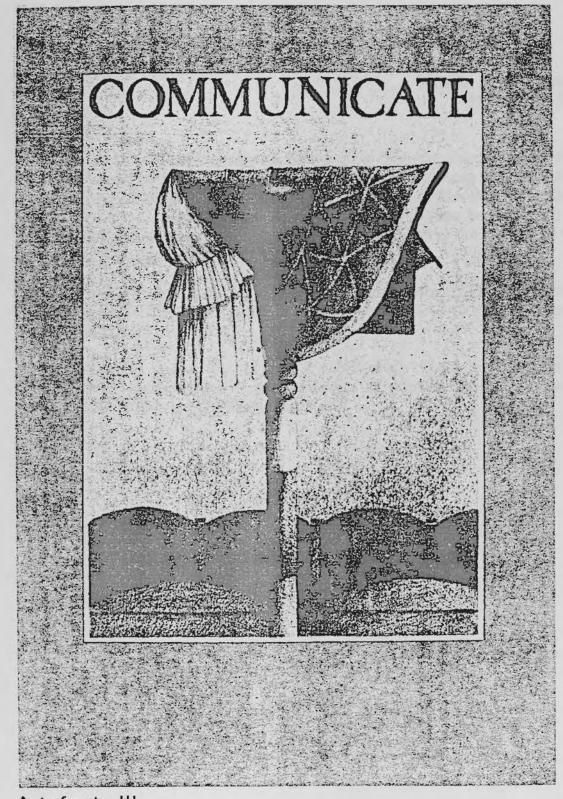




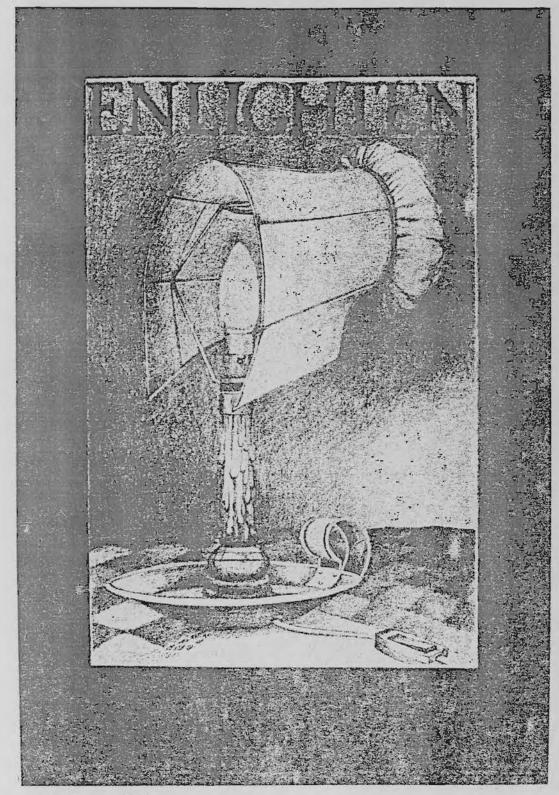
Artefacts I



Artefacts II



Artefacts III



Artefacts IV

### Series Two: PROTOTYPES

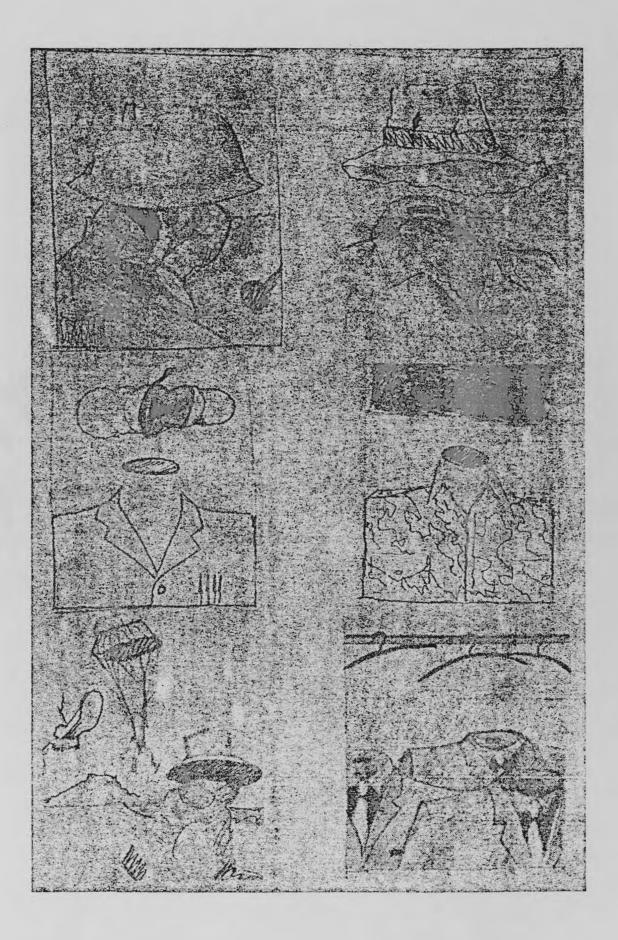
'... For the apparel oft proclaims the man;'

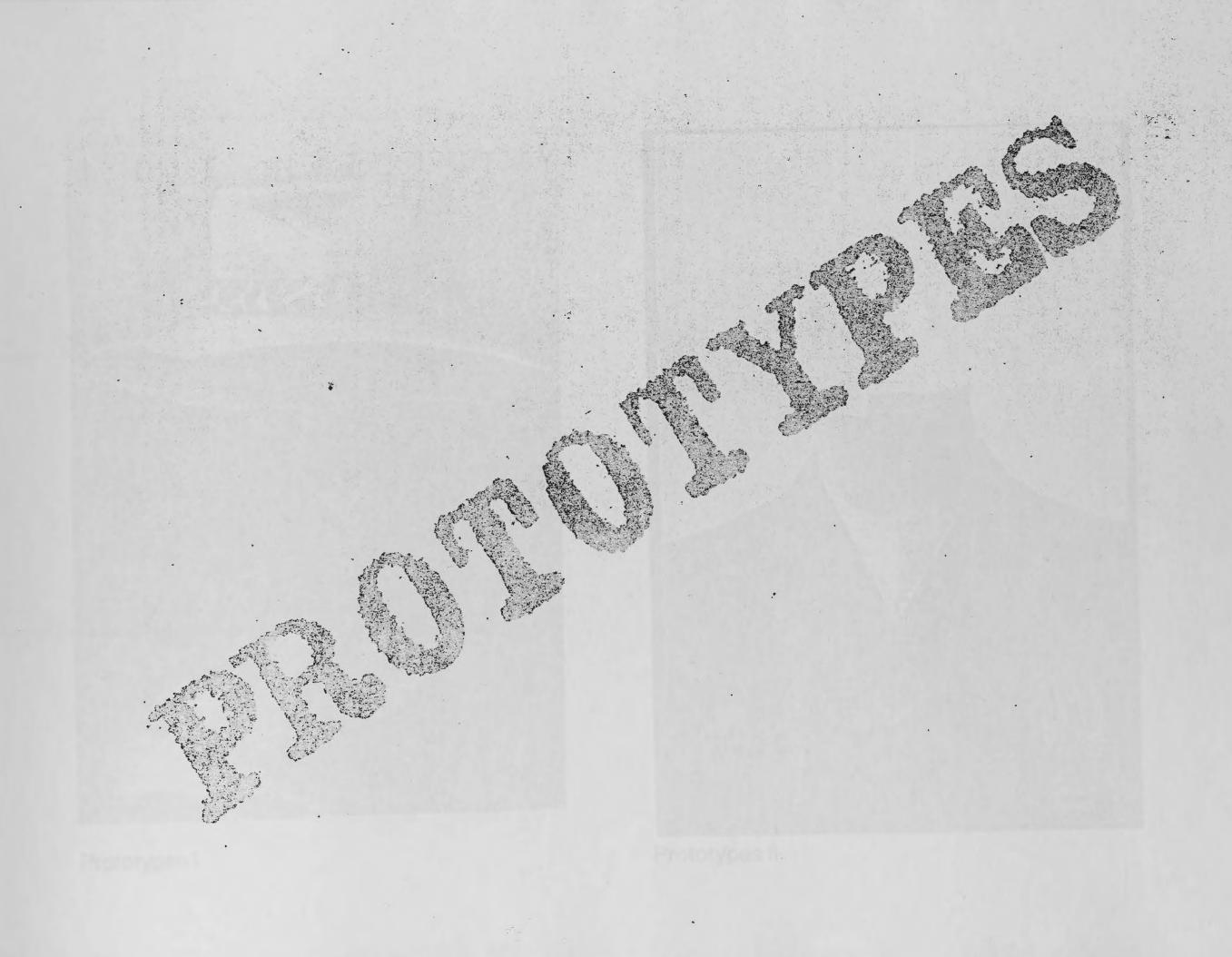
William Shakespeare Hamlet I.iii. 73.

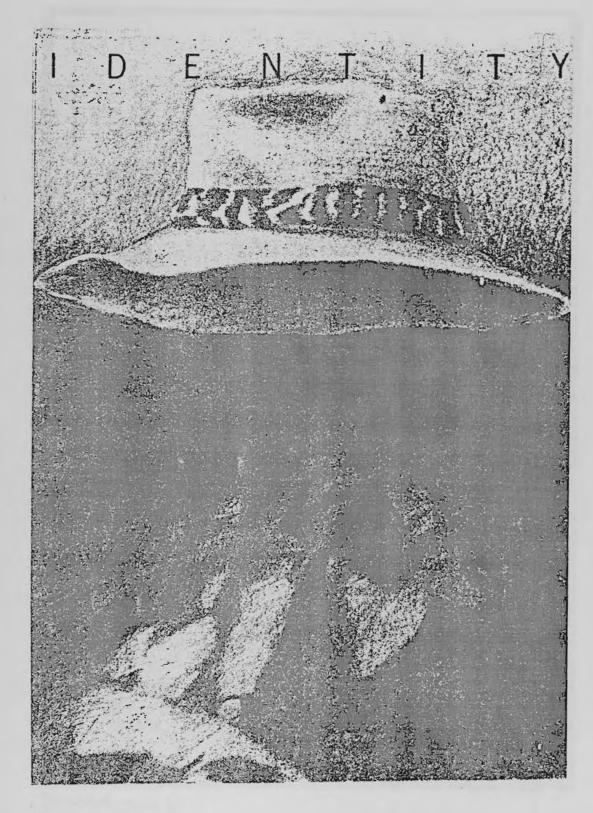
This series of two sets of two stylistically contrasting images seeks the viewers' recognition of the well-known items of clothing represented. The absence of faces and the repeated use of the word 'identity' is intended to reinforce a sense of alienation, which, ironically, may be the basis of the common practise of identifying and characterizing the individual by means of group insignia.

The torsos in 'Prototypes' I and III were set up in a studio, photographed and scanned. They were printed without changes to the conventional trichromatic range of inks.

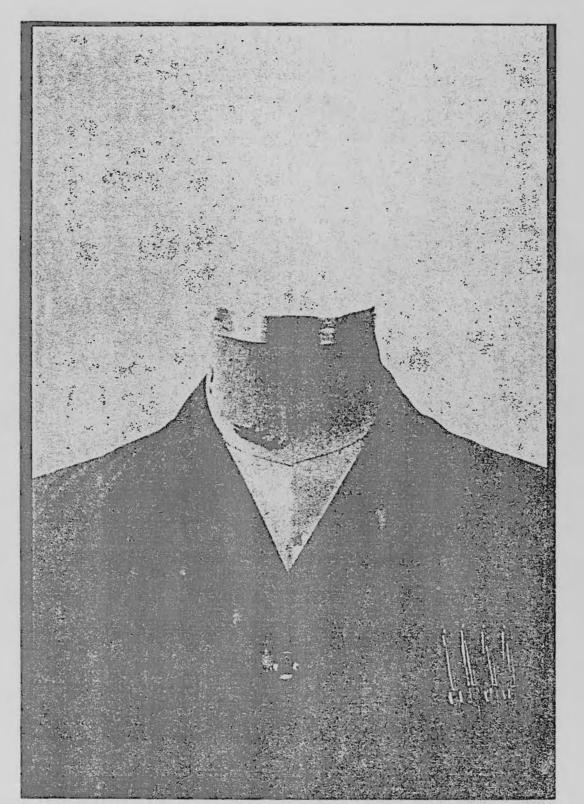
The colour drawings in 'Prototypes' II and IV were colour-separated with a mezzotint halftone screen and printed after hand drawn alterations to areas on the stencils had been made.







Prototypes I



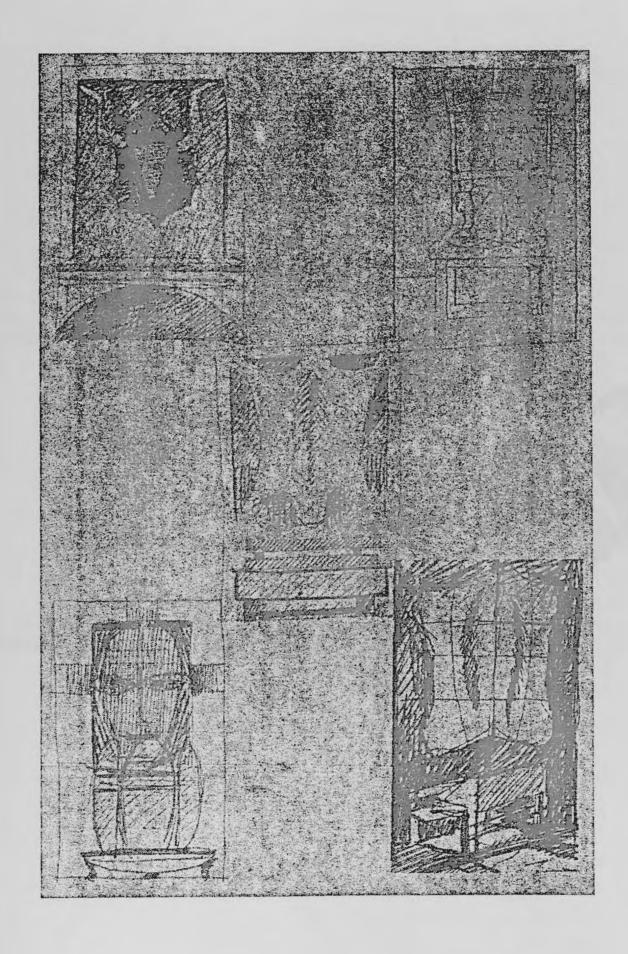
Prototypes II



Prototypes III



Prototypes IV



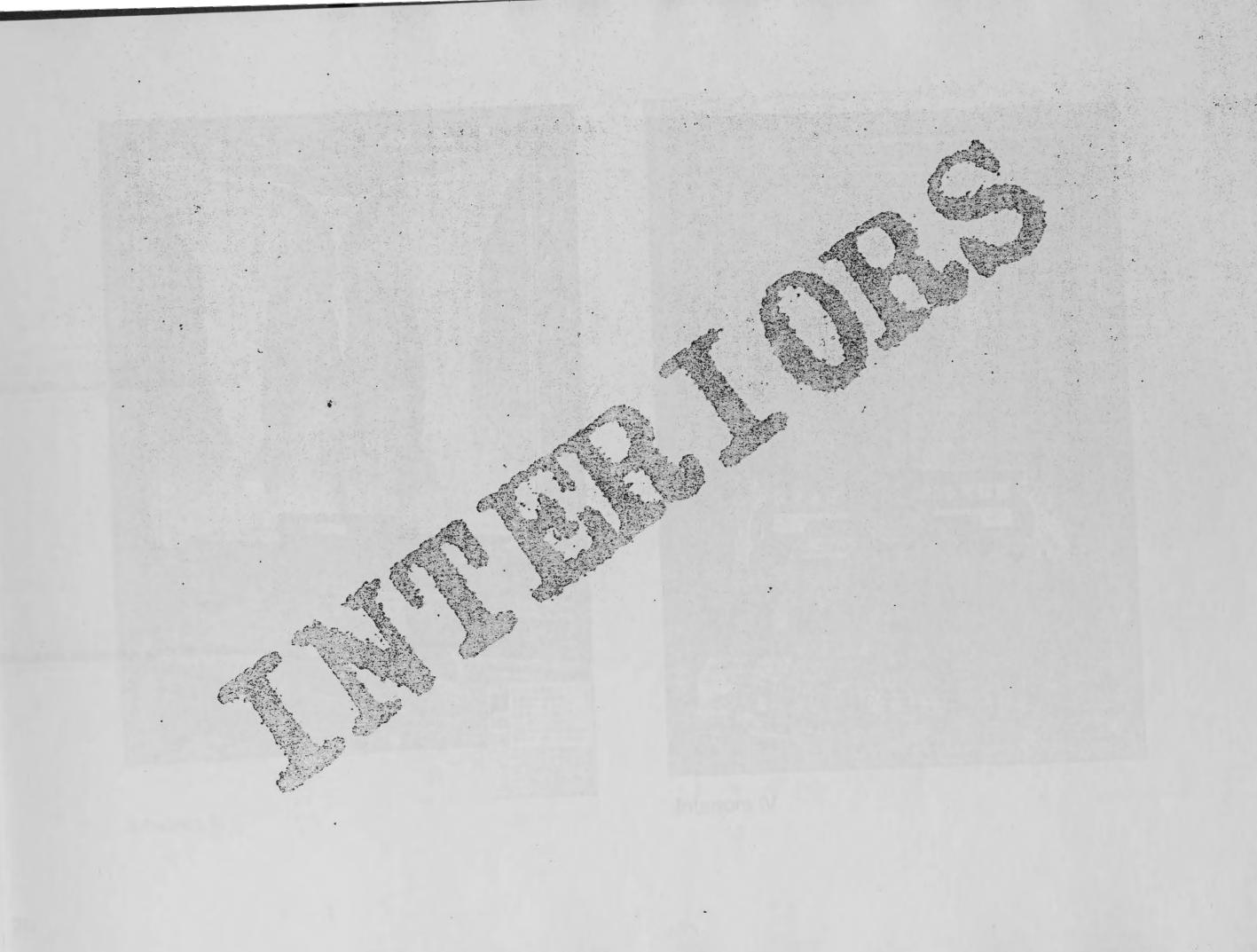
### Series Three: INTERIORS

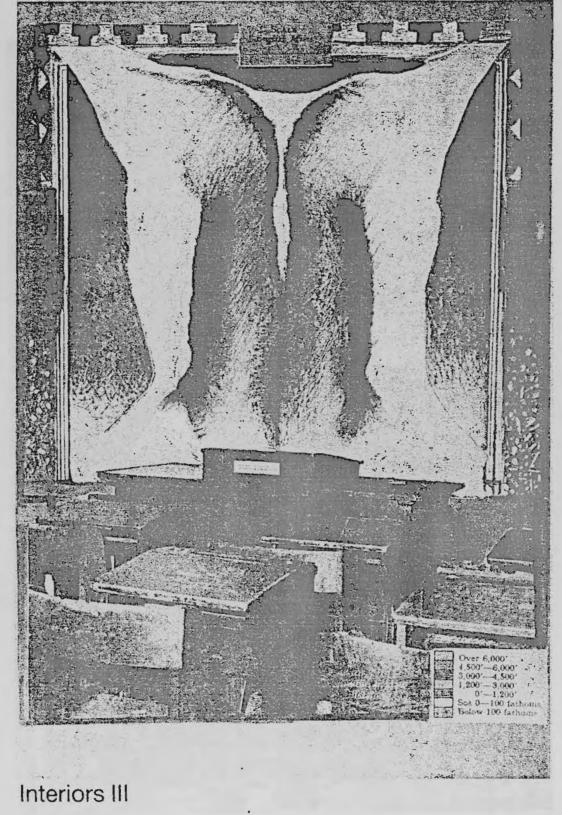
'Any interior is a set of anachronisms, a museum with the lingering residues of decorative styles that an inhabited space collects. Banal or beautiful, exquisite or sordid each says a lot about its owner and something about humanity in general.'

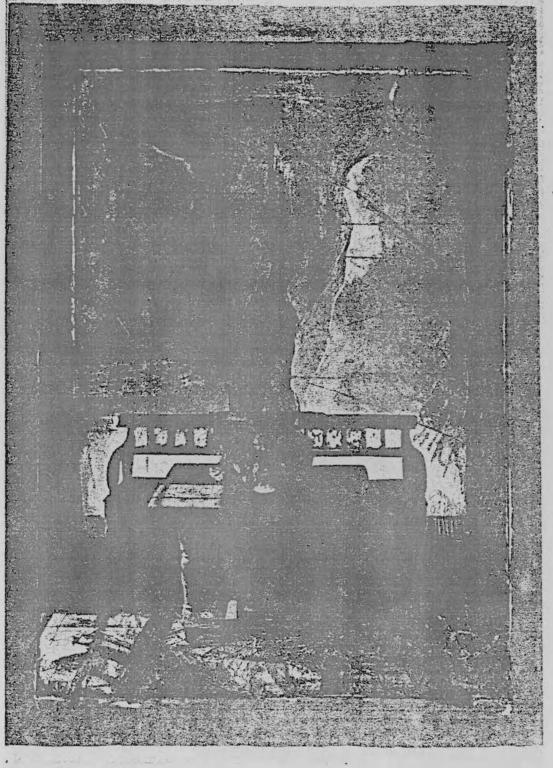
Richard Hamilton Collected Words

In these four interiors various trophies of ornamental and symbolic character and tokens of power and skill are combined with more fundamental, utilitarian objects of our everyday surroundings, in an attempt to realize the concerns, aspirations and character of an affluent South African lifestyle.

In this series I made extensive use of collage. The original designs combine materials from a variety of sources. Various adjustments were made to the colour separations by means of drawing and scratching on the positives and by printing metallic colour. These technical variations aimed to break down the rigid conventional trichromatic method and to thereby create an atmosphere of iconic reverence.







Interiors IV



Interiors I



Interiors II

## Series Four: MERE FAÇADES

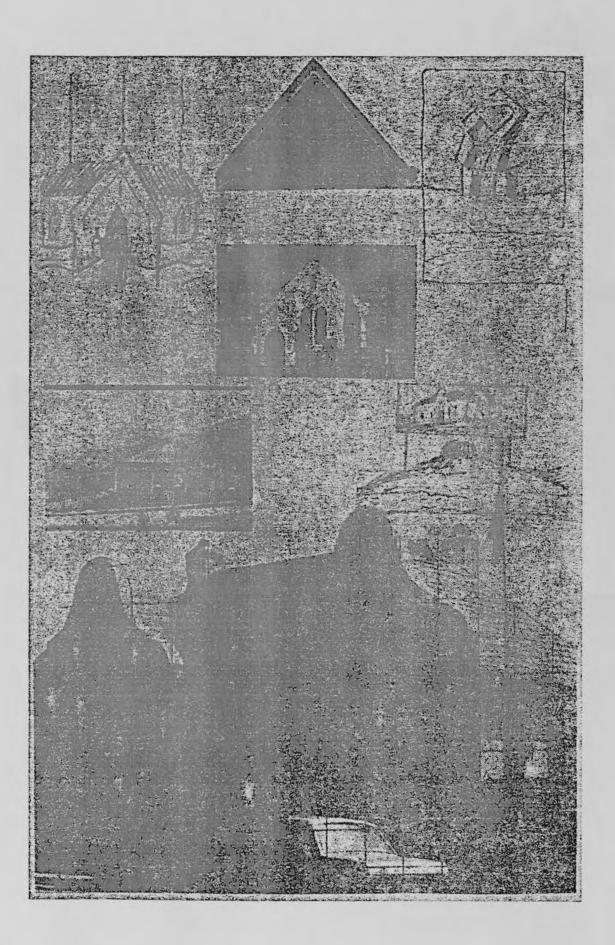
'Time is the architect, the nation is the builder'

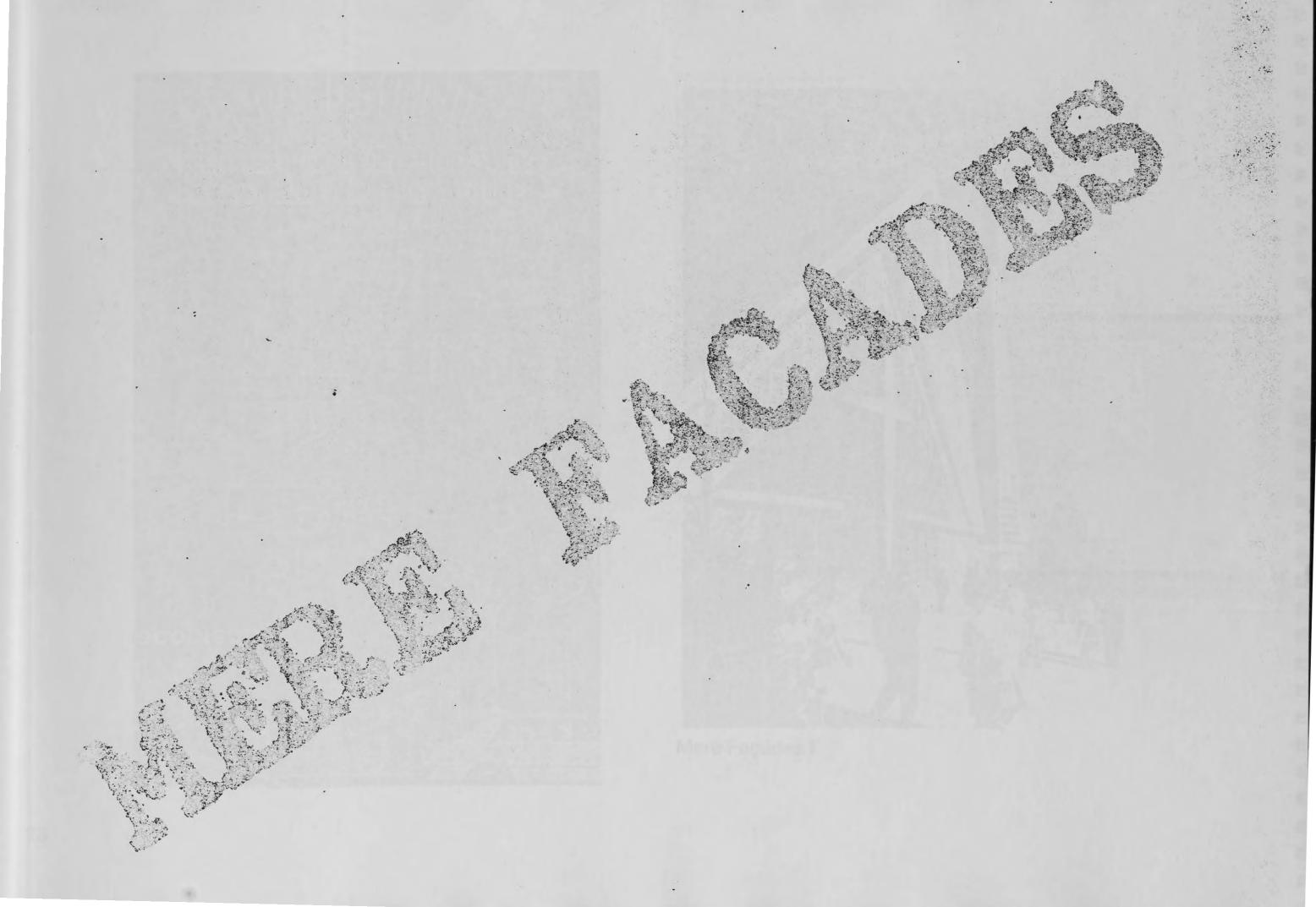
Victor Hugo as quoted in BROOKS, A.M. Architecture and the Allied Arts

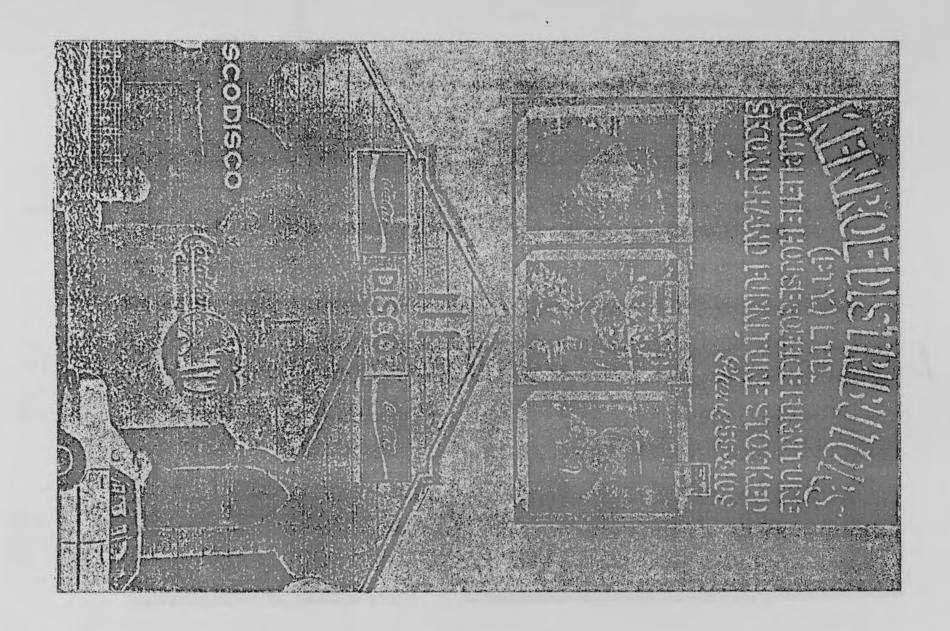
The image of a façade, a remnant of a sometimes elegant colonial past, is flanked by two prints, showing modern edifices in their appropriately idealized settings. The destruction of the remnants of the older transplanted taste makes way for constructions that often characterize the narrow spirit of their makers.

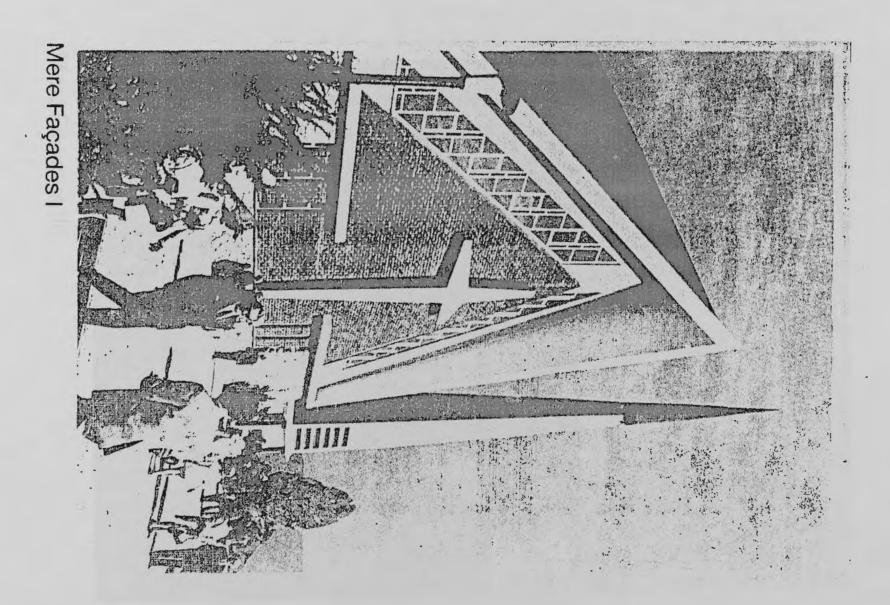
Technically and stylistically 'Mere Façades' I and III feature the direct use of photomontage. Realistic and illusionistic qualities are reinforced by means of the use of fluorescent inks and strong contrast effects.

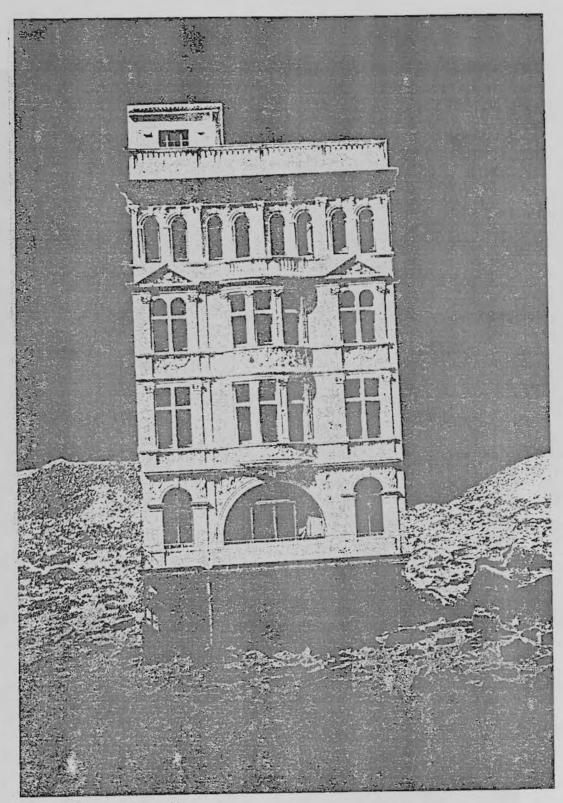
In 'Mere Façades' II, an overtly composite image, I employed various autographic techniques, combined with a posterized photograph, strong colour and gradation printing, in order to achieve a more dramatic representation.



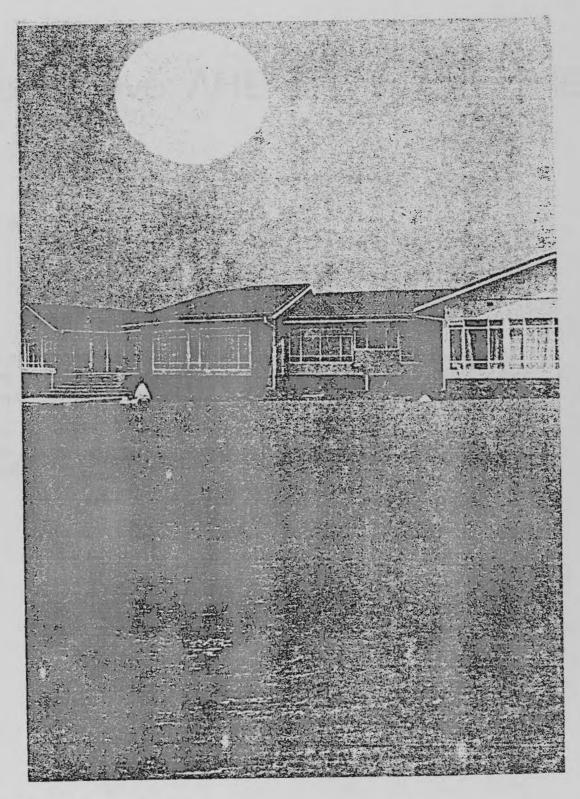




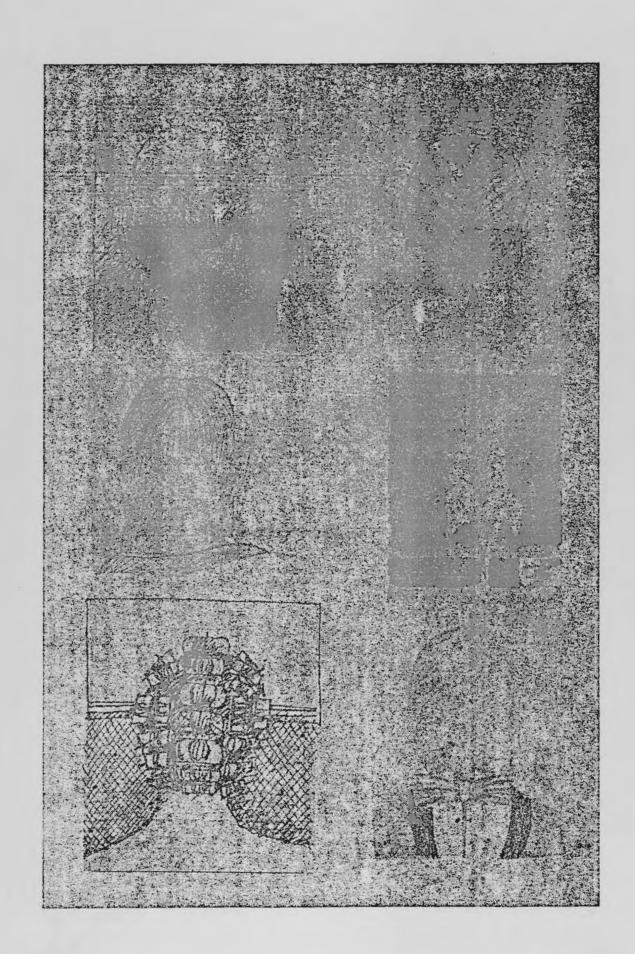




Mere Façades II



Mere Façades III



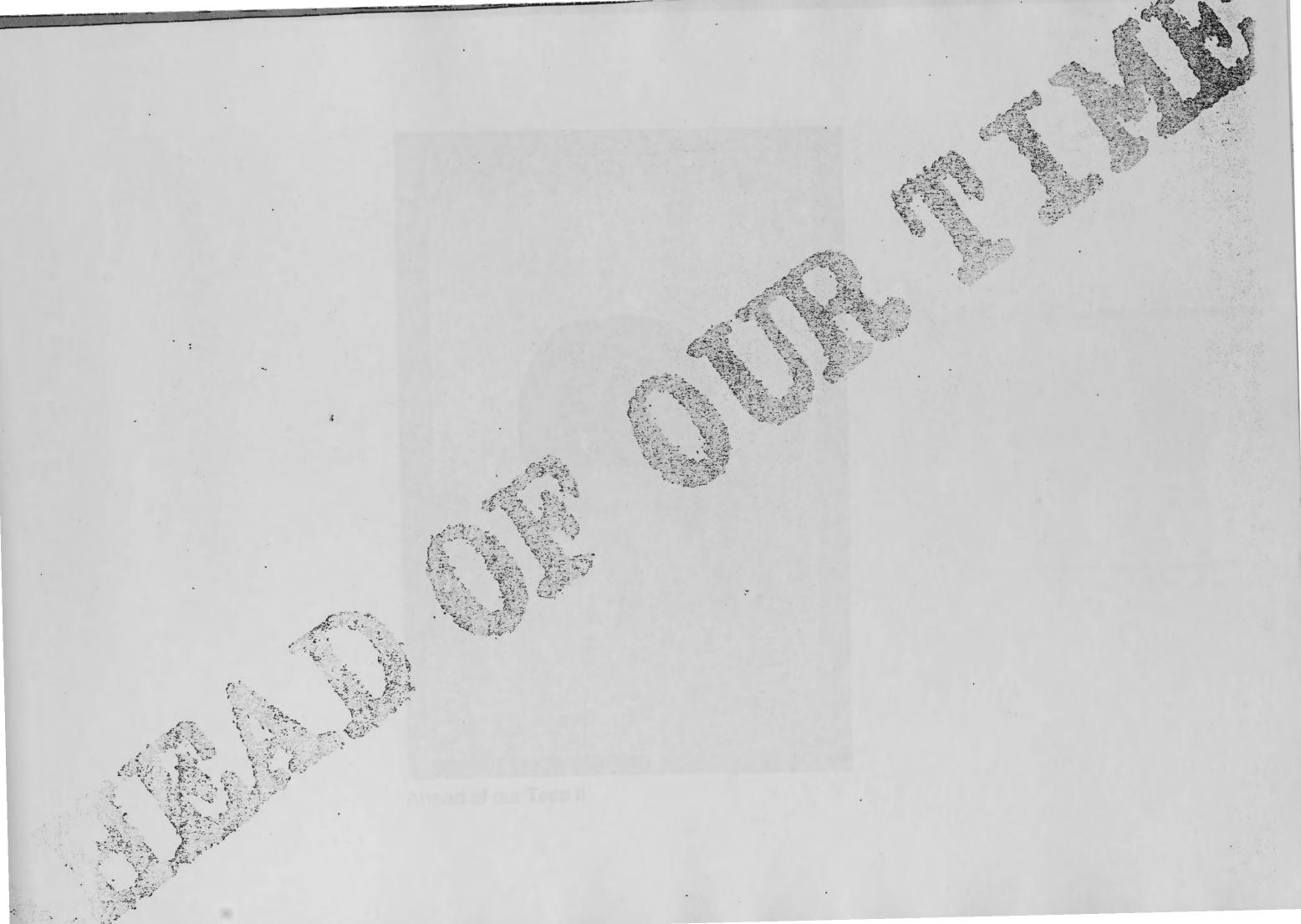
## Series Five: AHEAD OF OUR TIME

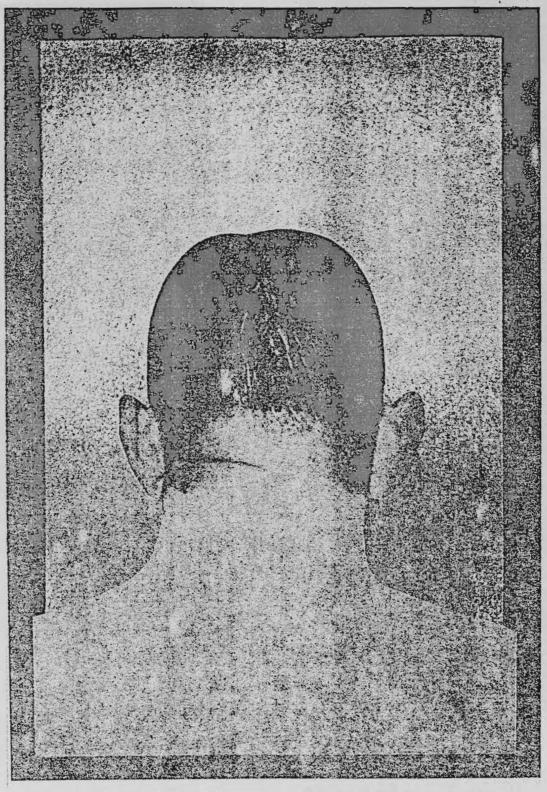
'Whoever feels observed observes himself'

André Gide Journals

The portraits in 'Ahead of our Time', when seen together, seem to become types, representative of some of the characteristic ideals of the groups with which these people identify.

Black and white photographs of models provided the central images for these prints. Extensive use was made of autographic techniques and bold flat colour.





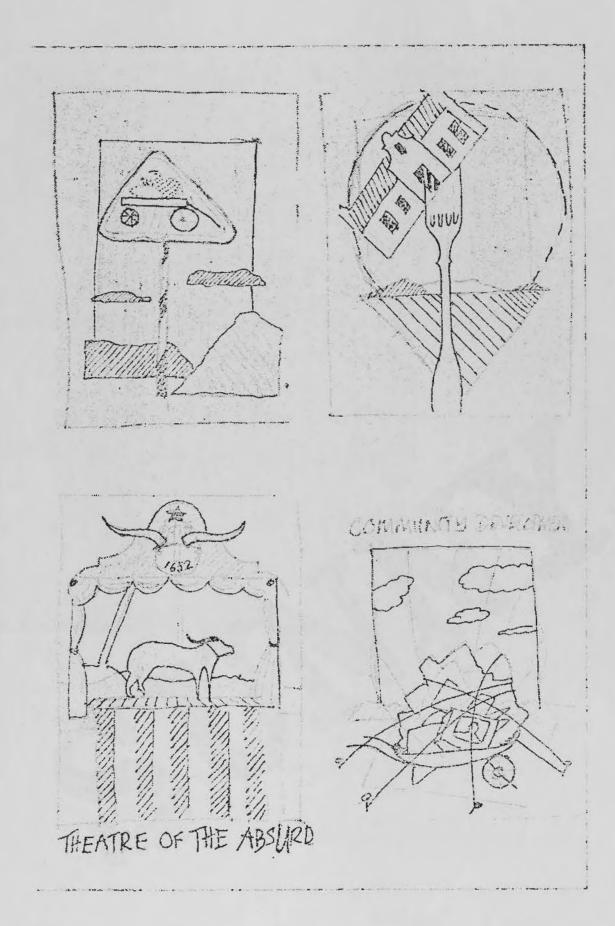
Ahead of our Time II



Ahead of our Time I



Ahead of our Time III



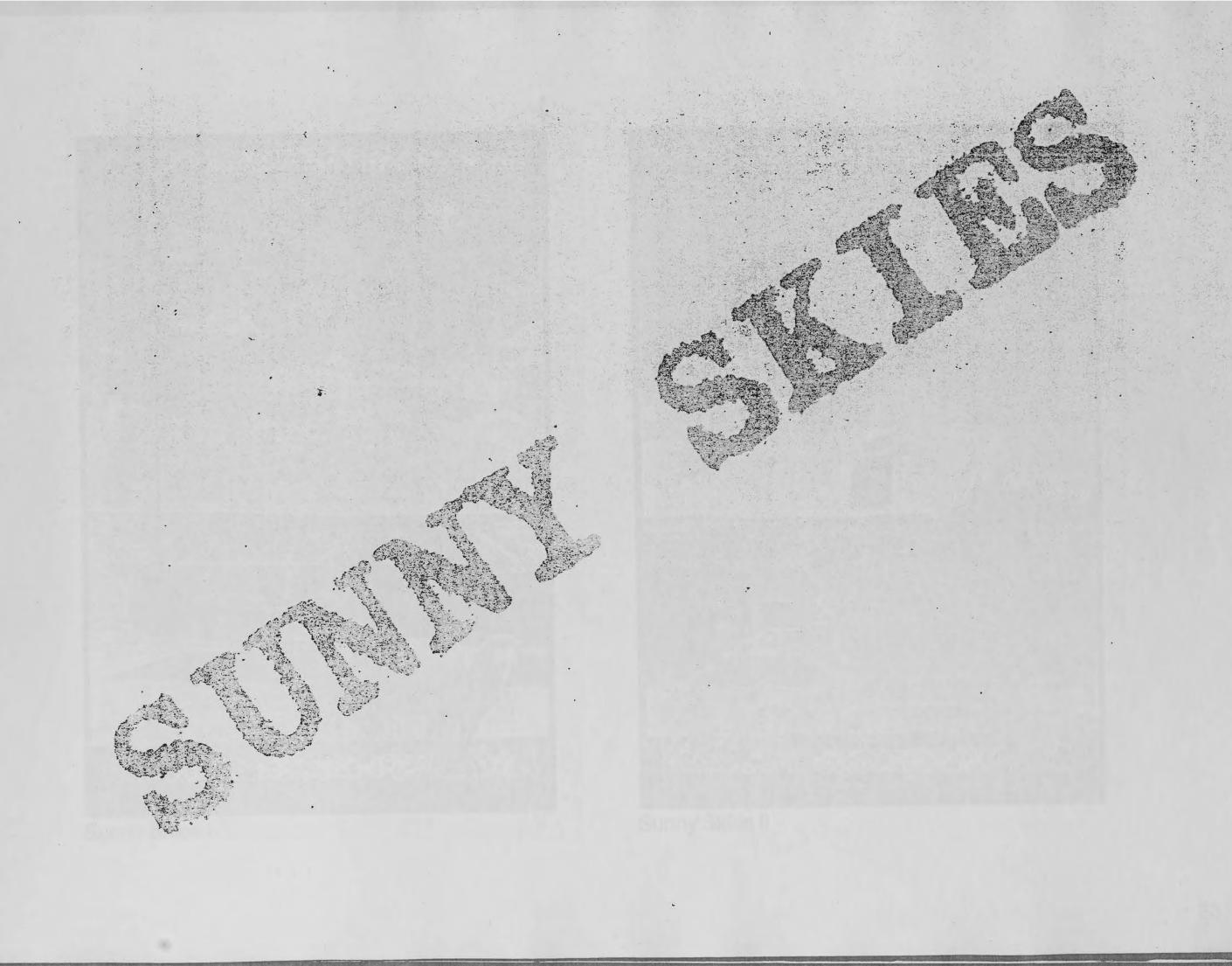
### Series Six: SUNNY SKIES

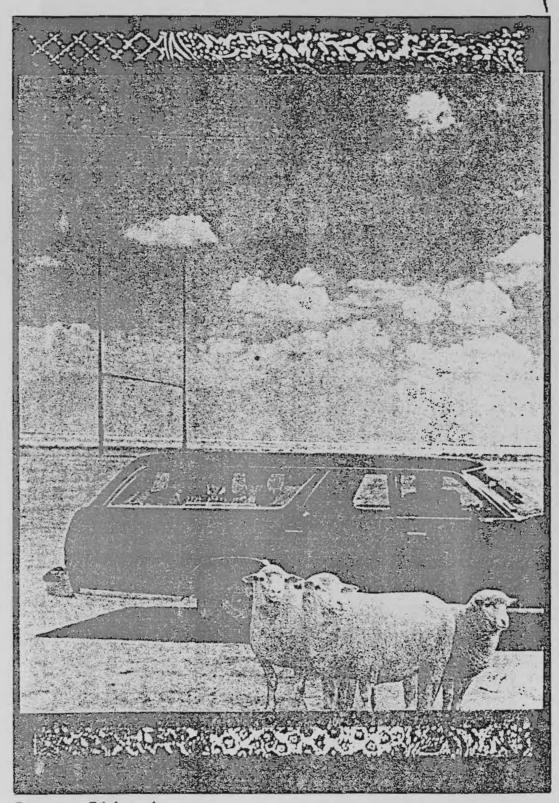
' . . . braaivleis, rugby, sunny skies and Chevrolet.'

General Motors advertisement

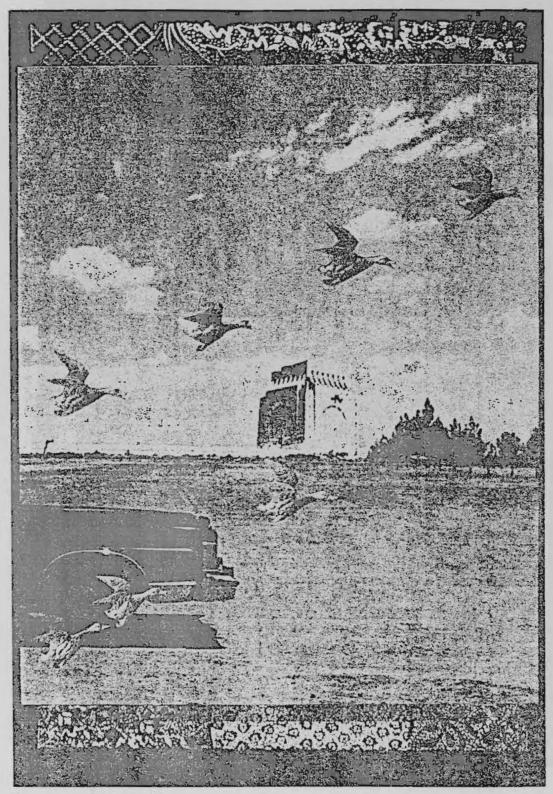
'Sunny Skies' consists of two groups of two and three prints respectively. In these screenprints, images which have become emblematic of the sentiments of the dominant culture in South Africa by their continuous projection through the mass media, are placed in a new relationship to each other. In this way the viewer is trapped between that which he knows very well and that which he sees in front of him. Visual and symbolic cross-references exist between the prints in the series, while the glamprized South African landscape provides a silent stage on which these doomed icons can play out their respective roles.

Technically, these prints represent the complete merging of collage with photomechanical and autographic separations and a diversified screen printing method.

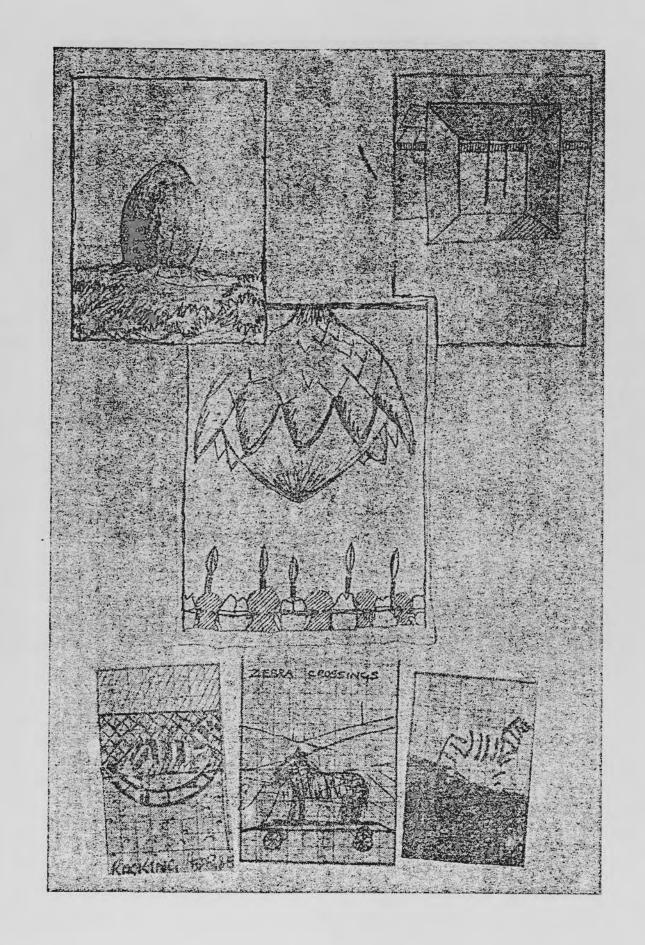


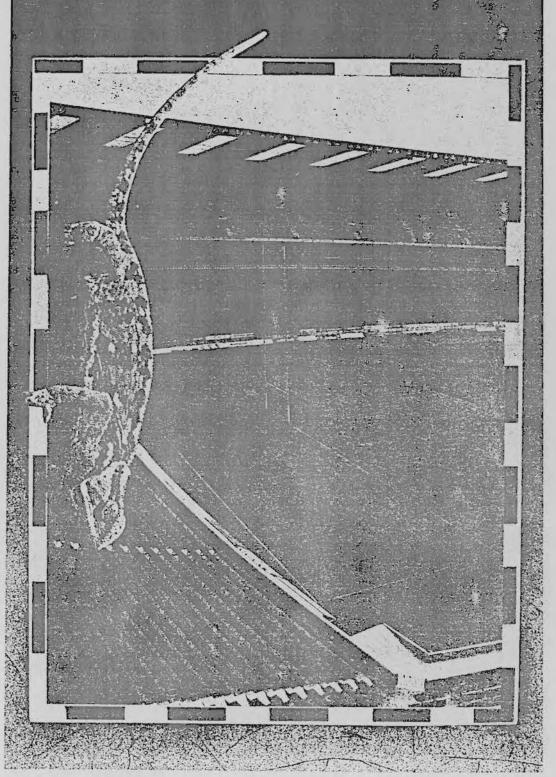


Sunny Skies I



Sunny Skies II





Sunny Skies III



Sunny Skies IV



Sunny Skies V



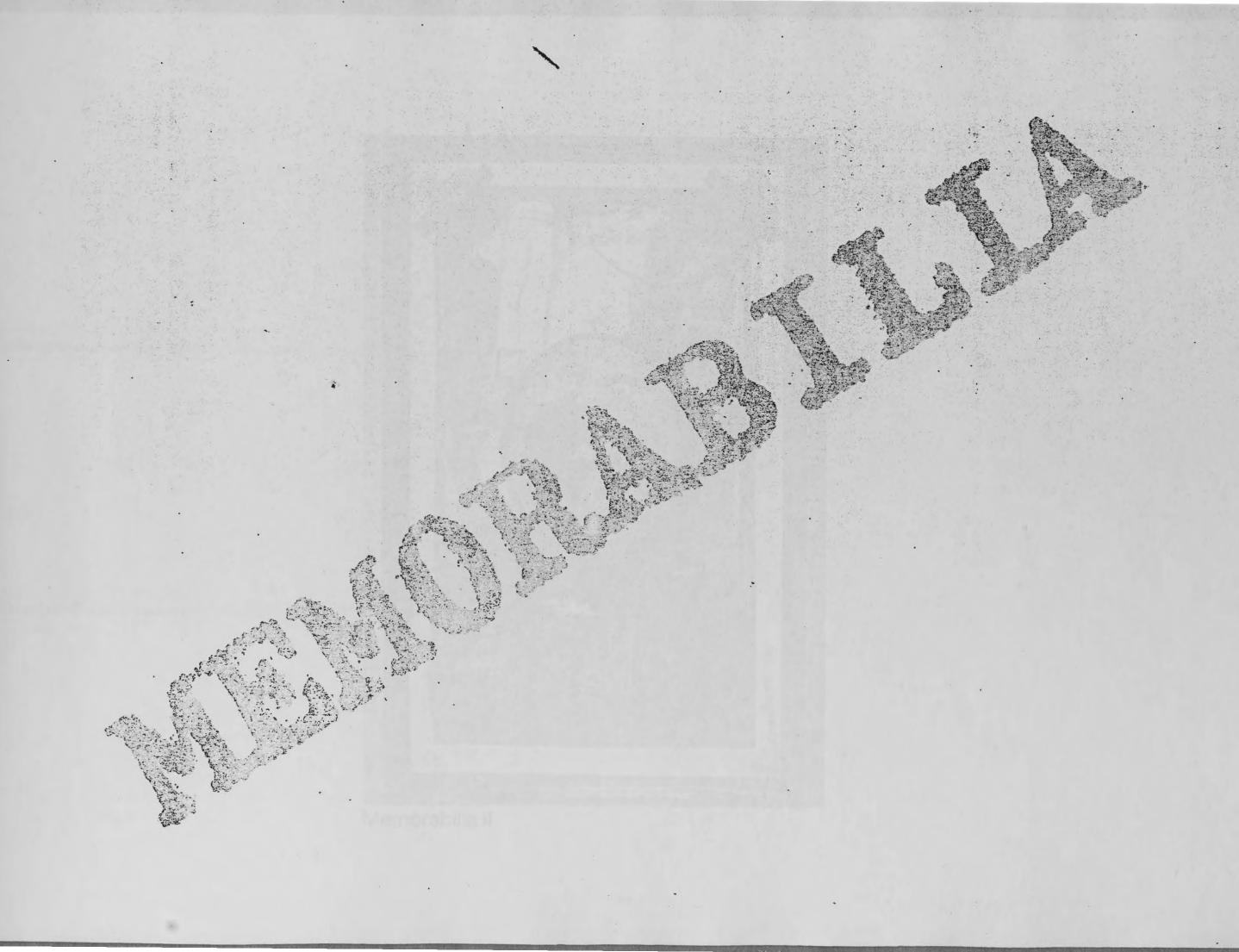
## Series Seven: MEMORABILIA

"... this private universe of objects and images, vivid with halfremembered fantasies, reminds us ultimately of the strangeness of the familiar, the odd familiarity of the strange, the final mysteriousness of the world we thought we knew."

> George Braziller Joseph Cornell

This final series is a personal homage to Joseph Cornell. His assemblages were a major source of inspiration to me. In his box constructions he made use of found and collected objects of a very personal nature which relate to one another within a real space.

Within an illusionistic space, I have brought together a collection of images drawn from South African periodicals, in an attempt to give visual form to my own personal memories and feelings about the place in which I live.



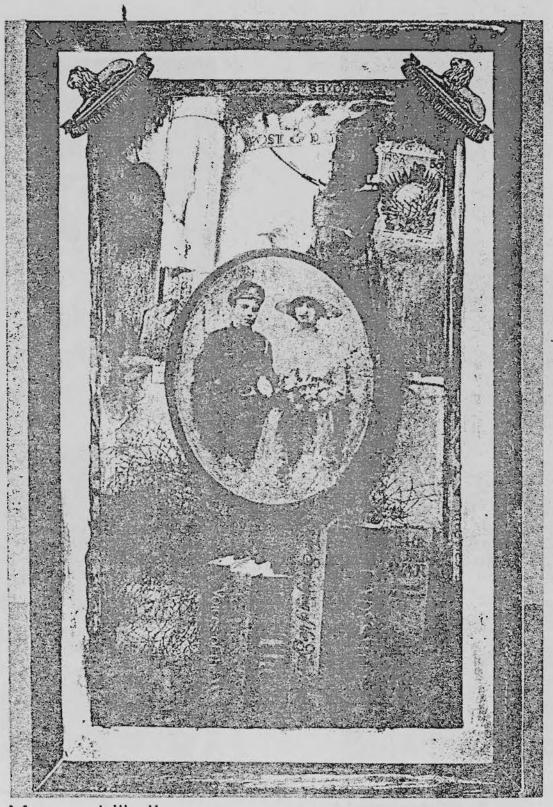
E

3

K

3

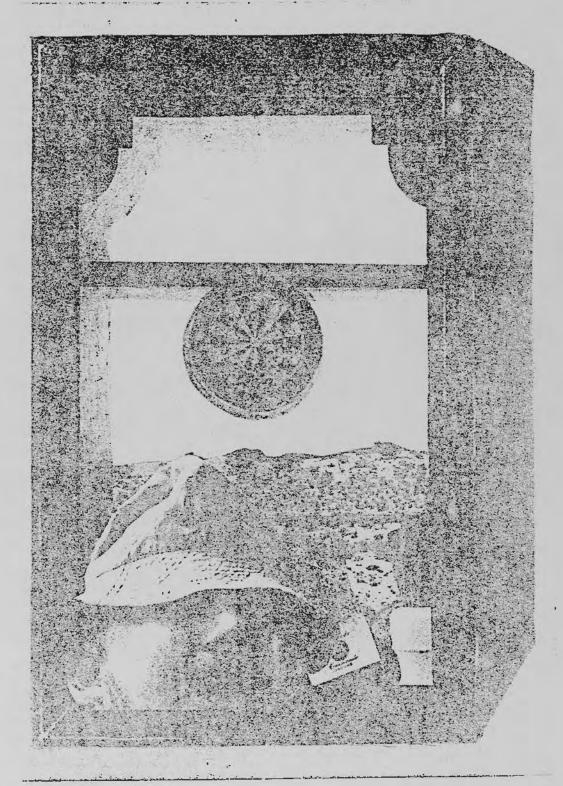
Y



Memorabilia II



Memorabilia I



Memorabilia III

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Signed proofs: 15 Signed proofs: 15
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#### Prototypes I

Screenprint, 1983

Print size: 790 mm × 540 mm

Numbered and signed edition: 27

Signed proofs: 15

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Screenprint, 1983
Print size: 790 mm × 540 mm.
Numbered and signed edition: 22 Signed proofs: 15.

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The Quarterly Journal of the Library of Congress Vol. 39 No. 3 Summer 1982 Editor: Frederick Mohr, Publisher: Dana J. Pratt Smithsonian Vol. 13 No. 10 Editor: Don Moser, Publisher: Joseph J. Bonsignore

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Documenta 7. – Kassel: Dierichs, 1982. 2 Vol.

Graphics 1 & 2 Munich: Schellmann and Klüser, 1981.

Grapus, Paris: Publications du Musee de l'Affiche et de la Publicité, 1970.

# STREET GRAPHICS

is a collection of thirty-one screenprints of which nos. 2 to 5 of the limited editions of each print are in boxes.

This collection is no.:

All the screenprints were printed by the artist using Sericol Inks on Dukuza Paper.

The text was set in Helvetica 55 by Unifoto (Pty.) Ltd. Cape Town and printed by the artist.