

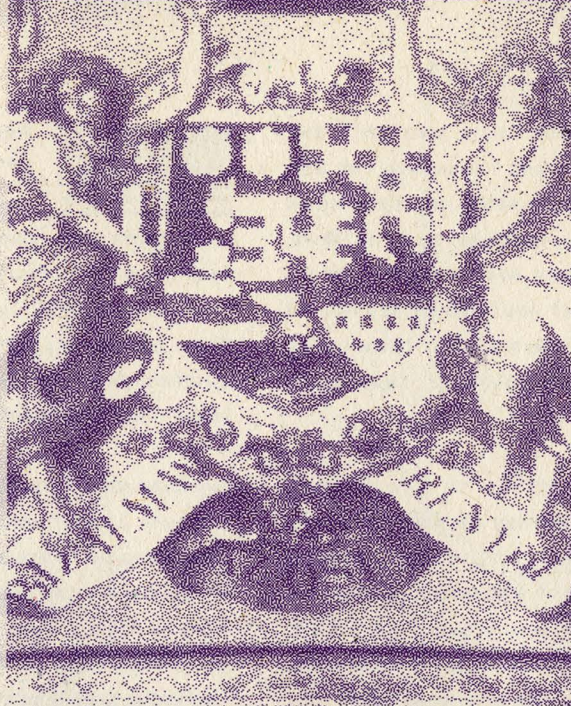
STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Monty Filter

It was clear to me from the start that South Africa was perceived as a country with a political identity as opposed to the European countries, who projected and were accepted as countries with strong cultural identities. Attendance of the conference by Ian Sutherland and myself was not met with an equal degree of enthusiasm by all the contingents. We had to work hard to establish our own credibility and to convince certain delegates of the significance of developments and changes occurring in South Africa.

An 'African Evening' presented by Ian and myself comprising examples of Ndebele beadwork, wildlife slides as well as videos on the economic and political situation in South Africa was well received. However, I had to assure the Belgian and Dutch contingents that the video footage had been filmed by an independent body and not a government agency. This presentation and the continuous informal exchange of cultural information about our country and its diverse and multiple composition resulted in us becoming the centre of interest, especially amongst the Belgian contingent, who had planned to boycott the seminar on hearing of South Africa's proposed attendance.

In an attempt to promote the importance of creating design solutions for the cross-over cultures in South Africa, I presented a project that was undertaken by



final year information design students at the University of Pretoria. The project entailed the active involvement of township communities in the creation of information packages promoting educational, health and environmental issues. The principle of integrating developing communities into the design process elicited a positive response and added an important dimension to the on-going debate on the potential alienation of individuals by popular design.

I could not help taking note of the freedom with which many participants criticised their own countries, without fear of jeopardising their national loyalty or losing their sense of identity or culture. This made me realise that a mentality of trying to please everyone exists in South Africa. We need to develop a sense of who we are and a greater feeling of confidence in ourselves as designers.

South Africa is a developing country which is trying to establish a new identity. I was made aware of the great opportunity, and accompanying responsibility, that exists to help shape a visual identity that fuses the multiple realities of our country into a visual language which symbolises South Africa's diversity. I find this all very exciting. **South Africa is a country where a designer can still make a difference.**

As a South African graphic design student, my visit to the Zsennye Seminar enabled me to review a number of aspects related to my own country with renewed insight, and to crystallise some of my own thoughts on the potential role of design here.