

Editorial

Collaborative special edition of *Image & Text*

The nine articles in this special edition of *Image & Text* are derived from two institutions, namely the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria and the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. The articles reveal common areas of research such as identity, ideology, ethics, sustainability and the politics of representation in design and visual culture, yet also consider the ontology and epistemology of specific fields of endeavour. The first four articles are contributions from members of staff of the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria and reflect some of the research interests of the Department as well as engaging with the Centenary of the University. The Centenary was marked in May 2008 by two exhibitions curated by the Department of Visual Arts: *Visuality / Commentary* and *X-ings: shaping culture through design*.¹

These two exhibitions highlighted the work of alumni and staff of the Department of Visual Arts over the last forty years, but the origins of the current Department can be traced back to the Department of Afrikaans Art and Cultural History (*Afrikaanse Kuns en Kultuurgeskiedenis*), which originated in 1931 under Professor Martin Lourens du Toit.² Throughout the last eight decades, the Department has experienced many transformations and name changes; in its present manifestation, it houses three discrete yet interrelated fields of endeavour: Fine Arts, Information Design and Visual Studies, each of which is represented in this volume.

Information Design was first taught in the Department of Visual Arts in 1972 as a specialist area of the Fine Arts degree, but the particular nature of the course later lent it status as an independent degree. The first article in this volume, *Nomads at a crossroads (X-roads); a framework for ethical design in South Africa* by Duncan Reyburn reflects the growing interest in issues related to a specific South African design discourse. Reyburn reflects on some of the ways in which design and ethics are inter-

related and looks at the implications this has for information design in South Africa. Although Reyburn's article is primarily philosophical and speculative, he relates his argument to a consideration of a number of designs included in the *X-ings: shaping culture through design* exhibition. In particular, he alludes to the 'creatively nomadic' nature of work such as laan Bekker's seminal design for the new South Africa National Coat of Arms (2000).

Visual Studies is most closely related to the scope of the original Department of Afrikaans Art and Cultural History yet the ideological and methodological divides between art history in the 1930s and in the twenty-first century are almost immeasurable. The second article in this volume, *Sightseeing in art and visual culture* by Jenni Lauwrens, considers some of the major changes that have taken place from art history to visual culture studies that reflect the growing visuality of westernised culture; the straightforward project of art history has been replaced by a variety of visual regimes, according to Lauwrens. She summarises some of the pertinent aspects of this contentious debate and contextualises it in relation to the theory subjects offered by the Department of Visual Arts.

The third and fourth articles in this volume offer observations on recent art practice in South Africa as reflected in a number of artworks from the *Visuality / Commentary* exhibition. Although the first student art exhibition at the University of Pretoria was held as early as 1938, the incorporation of studio based fine arts only took place in 1955 when the BA degree in Fine Arts was instituted. In *(Im)Materiality: on the matter of art*, Amanda du Preez examines some of the shifts in the material status of the art object that relate to the increase of conceptualism in art since the 1960s. Du Preez refers to the theoretical turn that has transformed the landscape of art practice and alludes to the influence of new technologies and visual regimes that have influenced the work of artists such as Minette Vari. In *Unlocking identities in globalising South African art*, Elfriede Dreyer refers to a number of artworks also discussed by Du Preez, but takes as point of departure the discourse of globalisation. Dreyer points out the influence this discourse has had on art production in South Africa and examines artworks that deal with social and political inequities and the notion of contested and hybrid identities in the global melting pot.

Articles five through to nine are contributions from members of staff from the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg. The University was established in 2005 when the former Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR), Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) and two Vista University campuses were merged into a single comprehensive university. The articles reflect not only some of the research interests of members of staff, for instance representation, sustainability and artistic media, but also the manner in which a previous technikon is confronting the challenges of the changing higher education landscape with its redefinition of educational institutions, reconfiguration of qualifications, revised curricula and the emphasis on research endeavours. Amanda Breytenbach maps aspects of this landscape in her article *Interior Design education: quo vardis?* She sites Interior Design education within the broad framework of international and national structures and the demands posed by professional, student and institutional thinking and perceptions. Breytenbach exposes the dilemmas the prior technikon-type programmes face in identifying and rethinking an appropriate direction for future development.

Angus Campbell tracks the changing nature of the first Industrial Design programme offered in South Africa in the article entitled *Industrial Design and South African imperatives*. Campbell briefly describes the programme's historical beginnings that are closely tied to post-World War II design education in Britain, specifically at the Central School of Art, and touches on the realisation in the 1980s and 1990s that design education needed to respond to the country's socio-economic realities and the inequities of the prevalent political system. Initiatives in the area of 'design for development' are more fully documented through discussion of student projects undertaken at the University of Johannesburg that are located within the ambit of specific community needs. Here the participation of community members, the remodelling of the design process and an on-going trajectory in post-graduate research have entrenched an approach to Industrial Design education at the University of Johannesburg that Campbell suggests is particularly suited to South Africa with its economic and social dichotomies.

Desiree's Smal's article on eco fashion echoes Campbell's concern with social responsibility and the need for designers to be educated in new ways of thinking. Smal is concerned that eco fashion should not be viewed as a short-lived fad, but a sustainable trend that permeates production for the mass market and informs decision making in design. Her article *Eco fashion: fashion fad or future trend?* is based on the premise that if the definitive essence of fashion is change, designers are the drivers of this change and they thus have a significant role to play in changing perceptions and fostering acceptance of the importance of eco fashion. She suggests that for designers to fulfil this role they need to closely investigate and be innately aware of all the components and processes that contribute to the development of eco clothing.

Countering stereotypes: the representation of Africans in Communist Party of South Africa cartoons 1930-1936, Deirdre Pretorius' article, follows on an article she published in the previous edition of *Image & Text*³ that examined the construction of class, race and gender identities in the anti-pass laws cartoons published by the Communist Party of South Africa between 1933 and 1936. In the article for this edition, Pretorius focuses on the manner in which printed cartoons published by the South African Communist Party in the early 1930s countered racist stereotypes of Africans as part of the Party's commitment to changing not only social realities, but also changing representations. She points out how the cartoons constructed new stereotypes of Africans and created a counter discourse to the racist images that served imperialist and colonialist interests for more than three centuries.

David Paton ventures into more esoteric territory in this edition's concluding article. In his contribution *Body, light, interaction, sound: a critical reading of a recent installation of Willem Boshoff's Kykafrikaans*, Paton contends that the artist's work in digital and sound format fundamentally transforms the content, power and interaction of its initial presentation as a scripto-visual phenomenon. He explores the constituent components of the recent installation, their relation to each other and to the printed form.

The collection of articles in this special edition of *Image & Text* provide some insight into, on the one hand, the history and celebration of creative work and research endeavours of a long established institution like the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria and, on the other hand, the growing engagement with research into art, design and visual culture at the newly established University of Johannesburg. The articles offer a rich and diverse platform for further scholarly enquiry and create the space for research collaboration and partnerships among academics with similar interests.

Notes

- 1 Catalogues of these exhibitions are available from the Department of Visual Arts; please contact Mrs Petro Moraal at petro.moraal@up.ac.za
- 2 For a more comprehensive history of the Department of Visual Arts, see 'The Department of Visual Arts: a brief sketch' by J van Eeden in the *Visuality / Commentary* catalogue published by the University of Pretoria in 2008.
- 3 Pretorius, D. 2007. Amapasi Asiwafuni! To hell with pass laws! Class, race and gender identities in the anti-pass laws cartoons published in *Umsebenzi / South African Worker 1933-1936. Image & Text 13:4-1.*