

CROSSING LINES

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The complexity,

contradiction and

diversity inherent in our

society, enabled South

African delegates to

contribute unique

perspectives to core

issues at the Zsennye

Design Seminar.

The political threshold that both South Africa and Hungary crossed during 1990 paved the way for South African participation in the 15th International Design Seminar, the Zsennye Workshop, convened by the Hungarian Association of Artists and Designers at Zsennye, county Vos in Hungary.

The symbolic significance of South African participation in a conference convened by an Eastern European country was obvious to all. The crossing of lines between North and South, East and West became the implicit message of the workshop.

The lines of communication were initially established through the tireless efforts of Adrienne Viljoen of the Design Institute who secured an invitation for South Africa to this important conference. Due to her efforts and the generosity of the South African Bureau of Standards, the end of the academic boycott was confirmed when Egmont Filter, a final year Information Design student at the University of Pretoria, and I presented papers at the workshop.

The workshop was held at the beautiful castle of Zsennye from the 20th to the 26th September, 1992. Hungary is geographically well placed to provide a venue for this unique gathering of professional and student designers from Western, Central and Eastern Europe. The facilities at Zsennye are excellent and unique, its ambience relaxed but intellectually stimulating. Professional designers and students were invited from

Belgium, Finland, Germany, Holland, Hungary, Romania and South Africa. The fact that all the delegates were accommodated at the castle allowed for a great deal of informal discussion, personal contact and the establishment of friendships.

Ten main issues were discussed at length during the week, both during the formal and informal sessions viz:

- Respect for the environment through design
- Ethics of design
- Cultural and spiritual values within the design process
- Consumerism and design
- Quality and craftsmanship
- Design in Hungary
- Design education
- International co-operation and communication
- The role of the Zsennye Student Workshop
- The need to build Zsennye into an international design conference of even greater importance.

It was clear at the formal opening that the Zsennye Workshop is at the crossroads. After the events of 1990, the mood in Hungary is one of a new found freedom and potential, in which it was felt that the Zsennye Workshop could be developed into a unique gathering of designers, academics and intellectuals from all over the world.

Reference was made to the fact that the 1992 Workshop marked the first time in 15 years that the majority of participants were from Western Europe. In this curious mix I discovered a great deal about the potential role that South Africa, as a design nation from the southern hemisphere, may have to play.

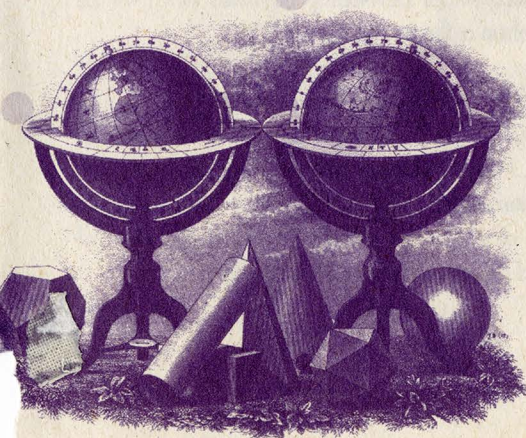
PARALLELS

Like South African designers, Hungarian designers are very concerned about the need to adapt to the great changes within and outside their country in the 1990s. Specifically, they are concerned about the need to develop Hungarian industrial design practice in the face of competition from Western Europe and the high design specifications required by the European Economic Community.

Many of the Hungarian delegates expressed concern that consumption threatened their culture and environment. The presence of the Hungarian Minister of the Environment at the opening of the conference is indicative of the importance accorded the environment by the Workshop. Their concern for the need to satisfy aspirations, to develop the economy and to face economic challenges as well as other forces made me aware that the present debate in South Africa on these issues should not be seen as an isolated case.

Indeed, because of our particular circumstances in South Africa, our experience has prepared us well for a world in which complexity and contradiction are the new order. All the delegates, including myself, were excited by the perspectives that Africa could provide in the debate about the issues which formed the core content of the conference.

Throughout the conference, the parallels between South Africa and Hungary, on the one hand, and South Africa and Western Europe on the other, were commented upon by myself and other delegates.



The fact that South Africa is a mixture of the developed and the underdeveloped both in economic and design terms, means that we are able to provide unique insights relevant to participants from both Central and Western Europe. The diversity of our markets as well as our cultural and ethnic differences are a potential source of strength to us as a design nation. Exposure at such a forum is vital if we are to see ourselves, and others, in context.

A number of delegates commented that, prior to our visit, the complexity of our situation and the standard of our design had not been understood.

PRESENTATIONS

The 1992 Zsennye Workshop took the form of formal presentations of papers during the day and informal evening sessions during which discussions, demonstrations, and slide and video presentations took place on an ad hoc basis. Both Mr Filter and I presented formal papers and gave informal evening presentations.

Mr Filter presented a paper on a University of Pretoria graphic design project aimed at encouraging birth control and 'safe sex' amongst underprivileged communities in the PWV region. I presented a paper titled *Design Education in Transition* in which I outlined the challenges confronting the design educator in South Africa. I referred specifically to the challenges of multi-cultural and cross-cultural education as well as the Positive Response in Design Education (PRIDE) initiative for educationally disadvantaged students, funded by the De Beers Anglo American Chairman's Education Trust Fund at the ML Sultan Technikon.

I am pleased to report that both my presentations and those of Mr Filter were enthusiastically received. A formal response to my paper was made by Tibor Szentpeteri, a respected Hungarian industrial designer and lecturer at the Budapest Academy of Crafts and Design. With reference to PRIDE, he said:

It has taken someone from South Africa to show us the way and need for us to do something for the disadvantaged gypsy community in Hungary.

He then proposed that a similar project be initiated in Hungary and that the Zsennye Student Workshop would be a good place to start.

The social commitment of much of the education and graphic design work produced in South Africa received positive comment. A note of caution was however expressed by our Hungarian hosts about design that is considered to be 'socially desirable' as in their experience designers are, and I quote, 'easily abused to propagate tyranny.'

SUPPORT FOR DESIGN

One paper of particular interest was that presented by Mattie Veldkamp of the Dutch Cultural Ministry. Ms Veldkamp is in charge of Design within the Cultural Ministry. She made the point that the Dutch Government recognises the importance of design to the extent that a separate portfolio for design was created within the Cultural Ministry in 1989. The design section has an annual budget of ten million Dutch guilders (approximately six million US dollars).

From this sum of money individual designers are awarded grants (2,5 million guilders), cities in Holland receive three million guilders to promote design, a Graphic Design Academy in Maastricht is supported (one million guilders) and a further one million guilders is spent on the production of books on design.

The Dutch Government has also set up a Design Institute in Amsterdam, to be opened in 1994, at the cost of three million guilders. The function of the Institute will be to increase awareness of design and promote its importance to manufacturers.

THE FUTURE

The new Head of the Hungarian Association of Artists and Designers is a graphic designer from Budapest, Vladimir Monostori. In his opening address he spoke enthusiastically about the potential of the Zsennye Workshop and its future. He announced that two workshops were planned for 1993: one for students and one for professional designers. A large building in the grounds of the Zsennye estate has been refurbished for the production of work by students.

The success of South African participation has paved the way for student and professional participation in future. The significance of this success must not be taken lightly. Unbeknown to us, student representatives from Belgium and designers from Holland had expressed reservations about South African participation and had threatened to stage a walkout, the moment we said something which they perceived as being offensive. The fact that we had become the best of friends by the end of the conference, is another indication of lines that have been crossed.

Our Hungarian hosts never shared such reservations. On the contrary, there was a mutual feeling of warmth and friendship and a sense of the significance of our visit. We hope to reciprocate their hospitality by inviting Mr Monostori to the Design Education Forum conference *Design Education for Developing Countries* which will be held in Durban at the end of June 1993.

The Zsennye Workshop enabled us to open lines of communication and to tie these lines into firm bonds of friendship. I hope that these lines will kept open by future visits to international events of this nature. The results will surely be of enormous benefit to the development of design and design education in this country.