

Marian Sauthoff

*a design award  
scheme founded  
on pedagogic  
principles offers  
a functional  
alternative to  
traditional design  
competitions  
which by their  
nature tend to be  
controversial and  
questioned in terms  
of purpose and  
desirability.*

Participation in the international design arena increasingly requires designers to contribute ideas which reach beyond the traditional role and boundaries of design and to deliver conceptual innovations and new insights. Renowned design educators Katherine and Michael McCoy (1996) believe that designers can no longer rely on traditional skills alone. The McCoy's maintain that the future calls for culturally literate designers with multidisciplinary knowledge and appropriate research skills, an insight into cognitive human factors and a comprehensive understanding of electronic technologies.

- \* meet the requirements of reconstruction and development, promote greater cultural harmony across all sections of society, and widen job opportunities.

The design industry must itself undertake meaningful transformation and normalisation, implement affirmative action measures and effective training programmes. Designers must develop a better understanding of cultural diversity and its ramifications, forge a South African identity and explore the adaptive and appropriate use of technology.

- conceptual thinking
- \* communication skills (eloquence in product presentation as well as the effective expression of ideas integral to the design process)
- \* an awareness of the importance of research and the utilisation of appropriate methods
- \* an aesthetic sensitivity and appreciation
- \* an understanding of the designer's multifunctional role in industry and society (Meyer 1996: 16).

An initiative which has evolved to keep pace with changing professional needs and played a strong sup-

# developing DESIGN LEADERSHIP

They postulate that three trends will increasingly characterise design, namely interpretation, narrowcasting and convergence. Designers must be interpreters of culture, information and technologies while simultaneously understanding design interpretation, user/audience interaction and design's impact on people's lives and perceptions. The dissolving of the mass production and mass media markets will result in a myriad of smaller, more highly defined groups. Designers will have to be acutely attuned and responsive to individualised needs and preferences. As design solutions become more integrated, design disciplines will be obliged to co-operate, co-ordinate and work together closely.

In South Africa the duality of the first world/third world context poses its own particular challenges as the country moves into a new phase in its history. To be successful, South African commerce and industry as a whole, will have to

- \* compete in the global marketplace
- \* compete in the local marketplace with international competitors who are establishing themselves here

As design becomes more complex and more demanding on its practitioners, so too must design education impart relevant strategies that students can use as tools in their future careers. These strategies must be robust to prepare students for the scenarios they will encounter presently and into the next century. In fact, failure to prepare designers to fill a multifunctional role has resulted in design education being criticised, both here and abroad, for not keeping up with the rapid evolution taking place in the profession.

The South African design industry expects students to enter its ranks with an awareness of the many factors impacting on design, and the skills which will enable them to cope with the multifaceted nature of design. The graphic design industry, for instance, currently demands that entry level students demonstrate:

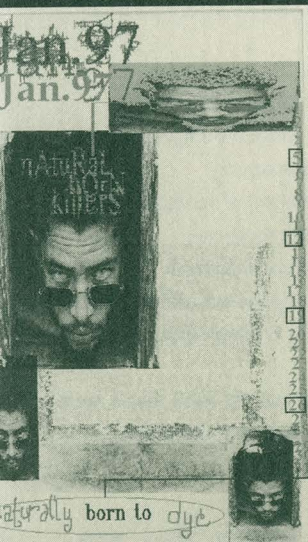
- \* a thorough comprehension of digital and other relevant technologies
- \* the ability to function within the arenas of marketing and product management
- \* resourcefulness in problem solving and strong

portive role to design education, has been the Design Achievers Award administered by the Design Institute of the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS). The award scheme, described by the Design Institute as part of its youth leadership and design entrepreneurship promotion programme, not only affords student designers a platform to expose their creativity and rewards such efforts with recognition, but has also provided an opportunity for them to confront some of the unique problems and challenges facing design in South Africa.

The award was inaugurated in 1987 as a joint venture between the Design Institute and the Society of Designers of South Africa. From the start, the philosophy underpinning the scheme has been a commitment to the development of young people through an exposure to critical aspects of design practice. This marks a fundamental change from the accepted format of design awards where a design product is







honoured, usually on the basis of originality, innovation and so on. The scheme was planned to draw on maximum student participation and is open to all design disciplines and design schools in the country. The intention is that award recipients will form a nucleus of future leadership that ultimately should become an important force in the development and promotion of design in South Africa.

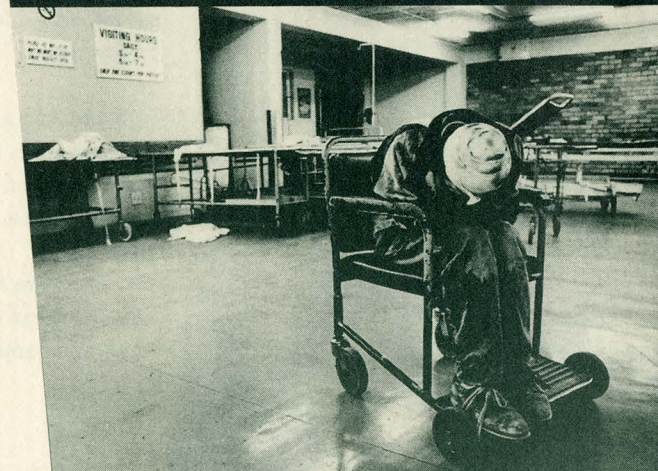
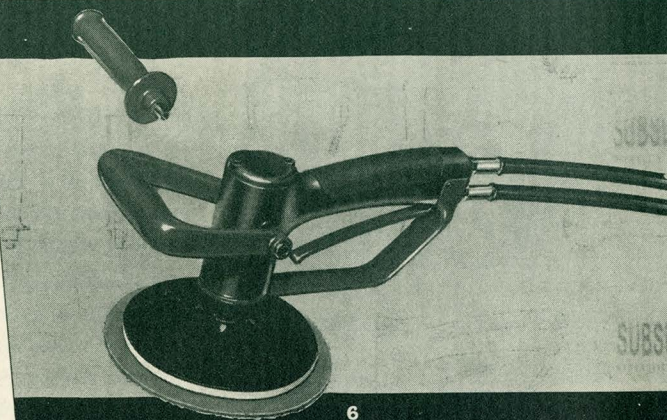
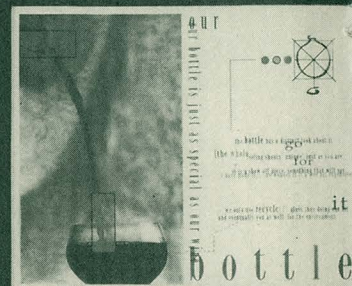
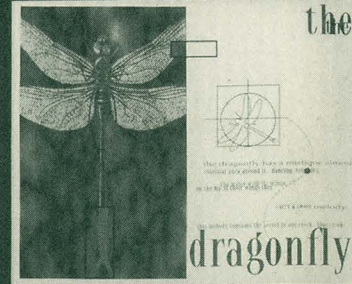
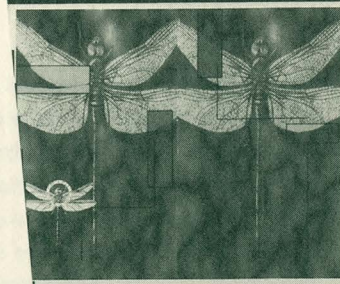
The scheme initially allowed each design school to nominate a number of candidates on the basis of leadership, entrepreneurship and good design skills. A shortlist of finalists, selected by a panel of judges, attended a three day programme during which they were interviewed by the panel and visited various design studios. The objectives of the programme were to identify the winner, get young designers together in order to develop a network which would stand them in good stead in their professional careers and to sensitise them the business environment. In 1992 the first prize was extended to include a trip to Hungary to represent South Africa at the Zsennye International Student Design Week, held annually under the auspices of the Hungarian Society of Designers.

The format was changed slightly in 1995, with each participating institution nominating a single candidate to attend the three day programme during which time a final recipient was selected. This change was motivated by a need to allow all institutions, but particularly students from less privileged backgrounds, to benefit from the exposure afforded by the programme.

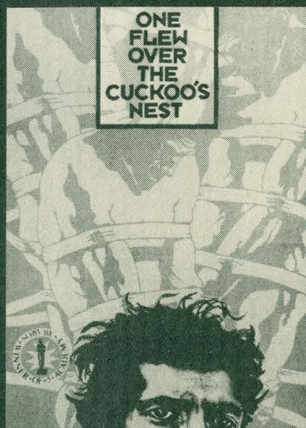
A new brief was developed in 1996. The focus of the award became the application of design to fundamental and problematic issues facing South Africa today. Nominees were required to present a design business concept which would contribute towards solving a social, environmental, industrial or cultural problem currently being experienced in South Africa. The revised aims of the award are '... to promote the entrepreneurial spirit amongst young designers, making them aware of the challenges of their times and inspiring them to address these challenges by making a contribution through design' (Design Institute 1996). The students thus had to identify and formulate a pertinent problem as well as offer a viable design solution to the problem.

Thirteen nominees participated in an extensive three day programme in Pretoria during June 1996, as part of the renewed scheme. This included interviews with the judges, workshops and lectures. The Small Business Development Corporation (SBDC), which also awarded a number of bursaries, presented lectures on starting a business, with particular emphasis on determining the feasibility of new business ventures. A clinical psychologist led a motivational workshop which dealt with strategies for personal management and development. The programme culminated in a co-ordinated workshop where the students designed and erected an exhibition for their own work, which was open to public viewing.

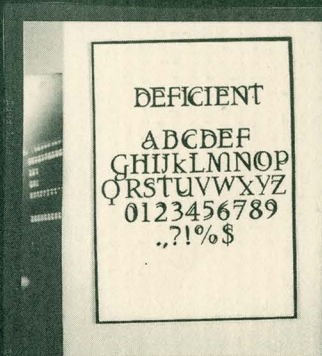
The scope and nature of the proposals submitted by the nominees demonstrated good insight into the practical applications of problem solving. Proposals ranged from documentary photography, with strong emotional impact, which portrayed sensitive images of the realities of life after the devastating war in Angola, to pragmatic proposals for waste disposal and safely equipment. Students revealed that they are in touch with the realities of South Africa by devising novel solutions for dealing with themes like employment creation; community development through the provision of facilities, information and training;







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improving personal relationships and dissolving cultural barriers; safety and the use of technology geared to meet preliterate needs.

The winning proposal was comprehensive and ambitious in its scope. Given that South Africa has had an educational system where personal accountability, lateral thinking, inter-activeness and independent questioning have traditionally not been encouraged, the proposal to establish a culture of constructive thinking to enable the country to move forward economically, socially and politically, is highly relevant in the daily lives of all South Africans.

Inspired by the work of cognitive psychologist Edward de Bono and based on the premise that creative thinking can be directly taught and developed as a skill, the proposal sets out a plan to stimulate creative thinking and problem solving in South Africa. The envisaged concept will be implemented by means of a three stage project, entitled *Think about it*. The project entails firstly, an awareness campaign targeted at various discrete groups; secondly, a range of products/ concepts which prompt members of society to think before they act; and finally educational games and quizzes which require an interaction between right (creative) and left (rational) brain activity, and stimulate personal development in thought.

According to Adrienne Viljoen (1996), manager of the Design Institute, the award scheme succeeds admirably in bringing young designers from different disciplines, environments and cultures together, with the changes made in 1995 resulting in a better representation of disciplines and design schools.

During the ten years of its existence, a number of distinctive features have emerged. The most obvious is the dominance of nominees and award recipients from graphic design. Six of the ten recipients have been graphic designers and in 1996 eight nominees, from a total of thirteen, were studying graphic design. Viljoen (1996) feels this may be attributed to the fact that graphic design is widely taught (most design schools in this country offer graphic design courses). Other reasons offered by her are that graphic design recipients demonstrated a better understanding of the communication process, superior language ability, excellent presentation skills and a sensitivity to audience interaction.

The award recipients are at the beginning of their careers. It remains to be seen if they will succeed in distinguishing themselves as leaders in design. One hopes that long-term tracking studies will be undertaken to evaluate, from an educational point of view, the format and criteria of the scheme and to determine whether its objectives have been achieved. Currently the compilation and analysis of statistical data, as well as a synthesis of judges' impressions and the comments of nominees and recipients could provide valuable feedback to design educators. The inherent ability of the scheme to reflect changing societal needs, cultural interpretations and design functions will no doubt, in time, constitute a useful source for design researchers and historians wishing to document and review the evolution of design education in South Africa.

## RECIPIENTS 1987 - 1996

Year	Recipient	Discipline	Institution
1987	Jacques Roussouw	Graphic design	Stellenbosch University
1988	Jacques Lange	Graphic design	Pretoria University
1989	Monica di Ruvo	Interior design	Wits Technikon
1990	Peiro Trincherio	Industrial design	Wits Technikon
1991	Domenique Tarr	Graphic design	Stellenbosch University
1992	Monty Filter	Graphic design	Pretoria University
1993	Sven Wagner	Industrial design	Wits Technikon
1994	Chris Garbutt	Graphic design	Stellenbosch University
1995	Joanne Gorrie	Textile design	Technikon Natal
1996	Robert Braune	Graphic design	Pretoria University

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Much of the information for this article was sourced from the Design Institute of the South African Bureau of Standards, Pretoria. The Design Institute may be contacted at Private Bag X191, Pretoria 0001  
TEL 012/428-6332 FAX 012/344-1568.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Nicole Chasan - Design Centre;
2. Corbett Borchers - Peninsula Technikon;
3. Nicole Chasan - Design Centre,
4. Hugh Norval - Free State Technikon;
5. Lauriza Onlee - Vaal Triangle Technikon;
6. Mark Gagiano - Cape Technikon;
7. Martinus van Heerden - Port Elizabeth Technikon;
8. Lisa Sark - Stellenbosch University;
9. Robert Braun - Pretoria University;
10. Cornelius Malotane - Setlogelo Technikon.