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AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
THE FORMAL MEANS OF COLLAGE AND ASSEMBLAGE AND THE
PAINTED SURFACE.

Documentation and commentary on the body of practical
work submitted to meet the requirements for the
degree of Master in Fine Art at the University of
Cape Town.

Cape Town, November, 1984

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2. PROPOSAL

The work includes a variety of approaches varying from the use of images selected from the media and found objects to objects transformed or manufactured by the artist. A major formal concern is the integration of collage or assemblage with the painted surface. Subject matter is drawn from personal preoccupations with biographical details, womanhood and social and historical context. The format and scale of the works vary and are determined by the content.

The practical body of work is accompanied by a short dissertation which discusses the nature of the formal mode used and its relationship to the content of the work.

"I am untangling the filaments of my history."

Michelle Cliff

Claiming an Identity They taught me to Despise 1

SECTION A

SECTION D

SECTION E

The final presentation consists of a body of practical work, a written dissertation and the photographic documentation of the work. The written dissertation and documentation are included in this book. The practical work is presented in the form of an exhibition.

The written dissertation includes notes on the method and content of each work and a conclusion. The works have been grouped into five sections under five broad themes -

SECTION A - WOMEN AND CULTURE

SECTION B - WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

SECTION C - A TIME AND A PLACE

SECTION D - THE CURIO SERIES

SECTION E - DOMESTIC OBSESSIONS

4. LIST OF WORKS

SECTION A - WOMEN AND CULTURE

1. FOUR WOMEN CONTEMPLATING A PICASSO AND THE IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ART AND CRAFT

32,0 x 10,5cm

Paper, fabric and oil paint on board.

2. MY MEMORY OF MOTHER AND MIRO

18,5 x 22,5 x 4,0cm

Paper, fabric and oil paint on board.

3. A FEMININE COMPOSITION - WITH A BLONDE BRUSH

13,5 x 19,5cm

Paper, fabric and oil paint on board.

4. TO WOMEN BEHIND CULTURE

29,0 x 49,5 x 8,5cm

Paper, fabric, wood and oil paint on board.

5. BREAST-PLATE I

28,5 x 42,5cm

Paper and oil paint on board.

6. BREAST-PLATE II

30,5 x 43,5 x 5,0cm

Paper and oil paint on board.

SECTION B - WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

1. A PINKY-PEACHY PICTURE, AND A BLUE VACUUM HEAD

24,5 x 26,0 x 4,5cm

Paper and oil paint on board.

2. A PRACTICAL SURFACE

33,0 x 30,0cm

Linoleum, fabric, upholstery nails and oil paint on board.

3. IN MEMORY OF WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

24,5 x 55,0 x 5,0cm

Wood, fabric and oil paint on board and enamel.

4. A REINFORCED APRON

39,5 x 37,0 x 5,5cm

Beadwork, paper and oil paint on board.

5. A DOMESTIC PLATFORM

Height 126cm

Oil paint on linoleum and wood.

SECTION C - A TIME AND A PLACE

1. FRAGMENTS OF ART AND AFRICA

50,0 x 18,0cm

Paper, fabric and oil paint on board.

2. THE 'PRIMITIVE' AND THE 'NAIVE'

29,0 x 34,0 x 4,0cm

Paper, wood and oil paint on board.

3. CULTURAL CAMOUFLAGE

34,5 x 44,5cm

Paper, moulded foam frames, wood and oil paint on board.

4. BRUSH ASIDE

52,0 x 29,5cm

Paper, wood, metal and oil paint on board.

5. FRINGE BENEFIT

47,0 x 42,0 x 8,0cm

Wood, paper, steel tacks, beads, leather and oil paint on board.

SECTION D - THE CURIO SERIES

1. CURIO I

24,5 x 30,0cm

Wood, paper, soap, epoxy putty, fabric and oil paint.

2. CURIO II

19,5 x 25,5 x 6,5

Wood, paper, fabric, beads, shells, metal and oil paint.

3. CURIO III

Base 41,0 x height 23,0cm

Wood, paper, bone, rubber, plastic and oil paint.

4. CURIO IV

46,0 x 40,0 x 6,0cm

Wood, fabric, paper, nails and oil paint.

SECTION E - DOMESTIC OBSESSIONS

1. OLIVES FOR AFRICA

11,0 x 22,5 x 15,0cm

Wood, epoxy putty, paper and oil paint.

2. ON A PLATE NO.1

Diameter 27,5cm

Wood, plastic, fabric and oil paint.

3. ON A PLATE NO.2

Diameter 20,0cm

Fabric, epoxy putty, wood and oil paint.

4. POWDERBOX NO.1

15,5 x 14,0 x 20,0cm

Porcelain, wood, paper, fabric, oil paint and French chalk.

5. POWDERBOX NO.2

12,5 x 13,5 x 10,0cm

Ceramic, fabric, French chalk, wood and oil paint.

6. POWDERBOX NO.3

15,5 x 19,5 x 15,5cm

Tacks, wood, French chalk, polish, beads and oil paint.

7. CURLER CACTI

Height 15,0cm

Plastic, metal, ceramic, sand and oil paint.

8. A SPADE IS A SPADE IS A ...

Height 25,0cm

Rubber, sand and paper.

9. A DOMESTIC SCREEN

21,5 x 178,0cm

Wood, fabric, paper and oil paint.

SOURCE MATERIALS

Selection of materials is made from within my immediate environment. These elements are most often produced or processed by culture or industry and have an intended function or points of reference. The methods of collage and assemblage offer a means of utilising this material in its original form within the considered, constructed environment of the art work.

The accumulation of objects and material has an unconscious dynamic, where value judgements give way to spontaneous responses. The processes of collage and assemblage provide the means of shifting through this quantity of information in a search for appropriate material to articulate personal concerns.

FORMAT

A wide range of formats are used, varying from flat surfaces to arrangements of displaced flat surfaces extending ultimately towards free-standing three-dimensional objects. Decisions are based on a consideration of the scale of the source material, and the concepts to be articulated in the work.

FORMAL PROCESS

(a) The Nature of Collage

The flexibility of the collage method allows for the arrangement and re-arrangement of elements before a satisfactory solution to the composition is arrived at. The potential diversity of the materials used allows for the possibility of initiating a dialectic by juxtaposing elements. This dialectic is an essential component of much of the work. In this manner it is the intention of many of these works to draw attention to what ideologies inherently conceal.

(b) Integration of Collage with the Painted surface.

The use of oil paint in combination with collage allows for a greater visual manipulation of diverse elements. This means of formal synthesis has been a central concern in the body of work.

THE FORMAL MODE AND THE CONTENT

(a) Concerns

The themes in the presentation are a reflection on personal history, cultural heritage and context. The question of what it means to be perceived and to perceive the world as a woman artist in Africa is explored. The work is seen as a means of finding a personal voice.

(b) Personal Experience

"..... the material of our feeling, our most intimate experience of identity and of sexuality are socially permeated, if not constructed and constrained by determinations outside our control and consciousness."

Parker and Pollock
Old Mistresses 2

The authority of experience is the premise for the priority given to personal perceptions in this work. If experiences are, as Hester Eisenstein says "symptoms of a society-wide structure of power and powerlessness"³, the "personal" is then a valid point of departure.

6. NOTES ON INDIVIDUAL WORKS

6.1 SECTION A - WOMEN AND CULTURE

"If we assume that culture is an asexual absolute, it means that women have just one problem, historical backwardness, which will be overcome with time, with the general social evolution and the demonstrative anticipation of an emancipated female elite. Between this theory and women's traditional docile reverence, there is no opposition but a great deal of agreement: male humanism remains the yardstick of value and strength."

Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti

Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art 4

TITLE -

FOUR WOMEN CONTEMPLATING A PICASSO AND THE IDEOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES
BETWEEN ART AND CRAFT

"Art history views the art of the past from certain perspectives and organises art into categories and classifications based on a stratified system of values, which leads to a hierarchy of art forms. In this hierarchy the arts of painting and sculpture enjoy an elevated status while other arts that adorn people, homes or utensils are relegated to a lesser cultural sphere under such terms as 'applied', 'decorative' or 'lesser arts'. This hierarchy is maintained by attributing to the decorative arts a lesser degree of intellectual effort or appeal and a greater concern with manual skill and utility.

The art and craft division can undoubtedly be read on class lines, with an economic and social system dictating new definitions of the artist as opposed to the artisan."

Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock
Old Mistresses - Women, Art and Ideology 5



ART AND CRAFT

It is generally true to say that most women are universally home-based. If not, it is a fact that women have traditionally reared children. These two constraints have, for the most part, restricted women's contributions to the field of craft rather than to that of fine art. Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker developed this line of argument convincingly, when they wrote -

"For in fact what distinguishes art from craft in the hierarchy is not so much different methods, practices and objects but also where these things are made, often for the family. The fine arts are a public, professional activity. What women make, which is usually defined as 'craft', could in fact be defined as 'domestic art'

It is out of these different conditions that the hierarchical division between art and craft has been constructed; it has nothing to do with the inherent qualities of the object nor the gender of the maker." 6

Although neither art nor craft is the prerogative of either sex, this hierarchy has particular implications for women artists and the craft-orientated. It is this hierarchy which is the subject of this particular collage and much of the later work.

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

The collage elements in this composition are chosen for their associations with either fine art or craft. At the left of the collage four women contemplate Pablo Picasso's The Lovers of 1923, (National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.) What is suggested is the disjuncture between the potential realisations of these women and their essential, though not necessarily inherent creativity. The statement suggests a comment on historical

traditions of fine art which has often tended to preclude the heritage of many creative female contributions in the field of crafts. This key to the dynamic of the picture is reinforced by the continual juxtaposition of details with domestic overtones and reproductions of paintings throughout the surface. Blankets, tapestry fabric, decorative fans and paper bows, including an inappropriate curtain over a painting hung in a museum, are carefully integrated. Much consideration has been given to the extension of colour in quantity and intensity throughout the composition, in much the same way that housewives are advised by the media to arrange their homes. The small scale and attention to detail reflect the preciousness which women's magazines prescribe.

TITLE -

MY MEMORY OF MOTHER AND MIRO

"The onlooker may be startled to recognise the visible being.

The onlooker may react with disbelief: sometimes, with recognition."

Michelle Cliff

Claiming an Identity They taught Me to Despise 7



POINTS OF DEPARTURE

Both subjects of the title are revered, albeit ironically, in this collage. A tapestry design by Miro emerges from a background of a fragmented grid of fine black lines. An image of a nursing sister extracted from a Dettol advertisement of the 1950's bears a coincidental likeness to my mother (a nurse herself) as I remember her from childhood.

The enthusiasm felt for these individuals either through their work or personal contact is clear in the title and the visual pun in the paper 'fan'. The visual activity of the composition is created by the use of black and white lines moving in different directions over the picture surface and frame, vitalising an image whose source material is nostalgic.

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

Elements of this composition are used not only to present the subject but also as a satisfying arrangement of shapes with varying tonal values, eg. the dark triangle of the left shoulder and the grey oval of the face. These formal elements are considered in much the same way as the subject matter in a synthesis of disparate elements. Red bands (a detail from Miro's tapestry) hover around the mother's head suggesting a halo; the use and positioning of a fan and a zebra refer to a location in Africa, and extend the surface pattern. The application of paint adds a greater variety of elements to the surface. This is applied in thick and gestural marks and thinner glazes, either to add new elements, or to articulate existing form. The quality of paint on the shiny surface (shellac) suggests a texture, at times close to relief. This offers a bridge between the three-dimensional objects and the flat papered surface.

TITLE -

A FEMININE COMPOSITION - WITH A BLONDE BRUSH

"One is not born, but rather becomes a woman ... It is civilisation as a whole that produces this creature described as feminine."

Simone de Beauvoir
The Second Sex 8



This collage plays on the use of the term "composition" in both the tradition of abstract painting and music. The tools of 'high culture' are represented here by the paintbrush and score sheet. However, this is where these associations end. A score sheet is embellished by a piece of embossed white linen and a scattering of pink bows emerge and obscure the surface.

The pink bow is the signifier of femininity which has come to adorn women's clothing, hair and underwear in recent history. Previously these details adorned the clothing of both sexes. Today this stereotype finds expression in the cliché "pink for girls, blue for boys". The description of the brush as "blonde" is consistent with the idea of grooming, adornment and an inherently artificial ideal. Simone de Beauvoir suggests that femininity is not an inherent quality of women but one that is created and nurtured by society and commerce. In an analysis of the work of the contemporary British painter, Allen Jones, Laura Mulvey states - "In a patriarchal culture, femininity is not an alternative to masculinity, but its negative."⁹ The implications of this gender stereotype are not necessarily superficial. Parker and Pollock in their book Old Mistresses go on to say that femininity as a quality is traditionally seen as irreconcilable with the image of the artist from the nineteenth century onwards when -

"... artists became increasingly associated with everything that was anti-domestic, outsidersness, anti-social behaviour, isolation from other men, disorder and the sublime forces of untamed nature. As femininity was to be lived out in the fulfilment of socially ordained domestic and reproductive roles, a profound contradiction was established between the identities of artist and woman."¹⁰

It is this conflict in our cultural heritage that I inherit as a woman artist if I am to wield the paintbrush.

TITLE -
TO WOMEN BEHIND CULTURE

"I'm a marginalised person because as a woman in this culture I do not have a female language. I am excluded from culture and from cultural traditions unless I speak as a man."

Susan Hiller

Feminism and Decadence 11



The subject matter of this work is women's position in culture. The fixed gaze of a set of eyes stare through a fringed recess. This feature represents a woman excluded from the assumed serious realms of culture. She is presented behind a veil that condemns many women to anonymity, subservience and confinement. The abstract decorative surface is a reference to the non-representational visual heritage of Islamic art which the veiled women of Islam share. In this case the decorative surface serves to conceal the image as much as the veil.

The resistance of the Algerian women to French colonization in the 1950's and 1960's is a historical point of reference in this work. Their struggle to transcend colonial oppression and cultural limitations is a central concern - as too my own need to locate and identify myself as a woman artist within Africa. In this regard, it would be apt to quote Sheila Rowbotham -

"Though solidarity between women can help it must be the colonised women who shatter this legacy of humiliation and domination. The liberation of women in developing countries requires the revolutionary emergence of the colony within the colony."¹²

The veiled women of Algeria were oppressed not only by French colonialism, but also by the tradition of Islamic law. Not to wear a veil was understood by the Algerians to have succumbed to the 'vices' of French colonialism and Western decadence. The women in the resistance movement used this double-bind to their own ends. By wearing Western dress, they were able to penetrate the French part of the cities, even if this meant being jeered at by their own people, to deliver crucial messages and they were also known to plant bombs. However, after independence, despite the transcendence of women's traditional roles during the resistance and their vital contribution, male comrades argued for the re-establishment of women's traditional roles under Islamic law. Once again the veil was lowered and women excluded from positions of power.¹³

Women are condemned by patriarchy to be categorised as "the Other".¹⁴ This has meant their being presented in painting as the muse, the matriarch or some other female archetype. The woman is rarely portrayed as an individual in her own right. This absence of woman as individual in the subject matter of traditional painting is symbolised in this work by the physical separation of the eyes within the recess from the patterned surface.

The collage within the frame is a conservative solution using the conventional means of presenting and preserving images of importance. The composition has been built up from arranged and pasted fragments of torn patterns in paper or fabric. The picture plane and the surface of the frame have been unified in an overall patterned surface. The paper patterns provide a grid over which the tonality of the image has been carefully controlled by the use of oil paint. A predominantly black and white surface has been transformed into a contrasting surface pattern of graded creams, ochres, greys and blacks. Almost the entire surface has been painted in order to give the flat surface the conviction of a unified pattern.

TITLE -
BREAST-PLATE I

"Any associations with the traditions and practices of needlework and domestic art can be dangerous for an artist, especially when that artist is a woman."

Parker and Pollock
Old Mistresses 15



linea del corte
ligne de coupe
cutting line

parti - la
piece - la
part - la

H
vest front

button
nut
stap

cutting line
ligne de coupe
linea del corte

buttonhole

buttonhole



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

This work is defensively guarded in attitude, as suggested by the title. The bodice of a paper dressmaking pattern is mounted on a wooden board. This rigid support contrasts with the original flimsy nature of the thin, delicate tissue paper of such patterns. The new surface has the solidity of a piece of armour or protective clothing. The surface patterns are painted to suggest leather or even metal, without losing the reference to patterned fabric. The composition is filled with aggressive shapes : a pointed dart, a painted pattern of stars, arrows and edges cut with pinking shears. These assertive details and signs contrast with the right-angled planes of the composition which literally retreat into a corner.

The familiar occupation of many women, dressmaking, is undervalued by society. However, the pair of scissors can be seen as a weapon as well as a tool.

TITLE

BREAST-PLATE II

"My work models an attempt to both speak and erase the meanings of representational discourse, as, through layering and fragmentation, they are rendered illegible, broken open as they are sealed in the process of representational closure itself."

Aimee Rankin

Sense and Sensibility 16



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

A new direction in attitude and method is introduced in this work. The integration of small objects with a background provide a point of departure. Ribbons and buttons can be seen to have associations with surface feeling and protective qualities of women's clothing. The surface is prepared by glueing layers of torn fragments of papers. Torn papers, selected from magazines for tonal value or pattern, can no longer be read as the original images, but provide a flickering tonal surface. When the objects were being arranged on this surface, I was struck by the merging of buttons with the background. This suggests that the objects are in camouflage. This observation gave a direction to the method of integrating objects with the picture plane. The tonal quality and markings of the background surface are extended to cover the surface of the object. Paint is used to cover, obscure and extend these surfaces. Created shadows are painted around certain paper fragments and objects to increase the ambiguity between real objects and the flat plane. From this agitated, layered surface visible and invisible objects and planes are seen to emerge or be submerged. The objects, by assuming local colour and pattern, are visually absorbed.

6.2 SECTION B - WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

"Housework is the most deadening form of labour because it is rendered invisible within a modern consumer society. Its yield lies outside the conspicuous forms of consumption - the spectacle of bourgeois society."

Rosetta Brooks

Women Visible : Women Invisible 17

TITLE -

A PINKY-PEACHY PICTURE - AND A BLUE VACUUM HEAD

"Probably more than most artists, women make art to escape, overwhelm, or transform daily realities. So it makes sense that those women artists who do focus on domestic imagery often seem to be taking off from, rather than getting off on, the implications of floors and brooms and dirty laundry. They work from such imagery, because it's there, because it's what they know best, because they can't escape it."

Lucy R. Lippard
From the Centre 18



IT CLEANS FLOORS!

The central image is a reproduction of an interior by Raoul Dufy. From this predominantly pink interior of a painting-within-a-painting, emerges a detail from a San rock painting of running buck. The painting tradition of Africa is juxtaposed with that of Europe, and given equal status in the composition.

A smaller detail of "a blue vacuum head" with the accompanying slogan "IT CLEANS FLOORS!" adds another dimension to the tidy interior by Dufy, that is the invisible labour of women who maintain domestic spaces. This detail introduces a facet of reality which is so often omitted "because meanings in art depend on how they are seen and from which ideological position they are received".¹⁹ The carefully arranged domestic scene which is the subject of Dufy's painting is not unlike that of an interior - decoration magazine - Habitat or House and Garden - in that the labour that maintains these spaces is seldom made visible.

"This regime of imagery represses any idea of domestic labour. Labour is there all right but it is the labour of decorating, designing and painting which leads to the house ending up in this perfect state. We hear about how much the wallpaper cost and how long it took to get the underlying wall into good condition. We don't hear about how long it took some women to get the room tidy, or who washed the curtains Domestic labour, the relentless struggle against things and mess, completely disappears in these images."²⁰

This point is underlined by the declaration "IT CLEANS FLOORS!". It is not a vacuum cleaner which cleans floors but an invisible person in this case who operates the machine.

It is my intention to highlight prescriptions of stereotypical femininity in the details which have belittled woman's experience. Solutions are the superficial "matching" of pinks

throughout the composition, and an emphasis on decorative detail for its own sake. Examples are the pink polka-dotted painted frame and a fragile paper fan (suggestive of a memento). These details obscure the real drudgery of women's housework.

So, when women's art explicitly
it re-enters the LEGIBLE cu)
and in order to be antagonistic
it has to recompose itself
through a provocative use of
scenes betraying the basic
OTHERNESS of women's experience

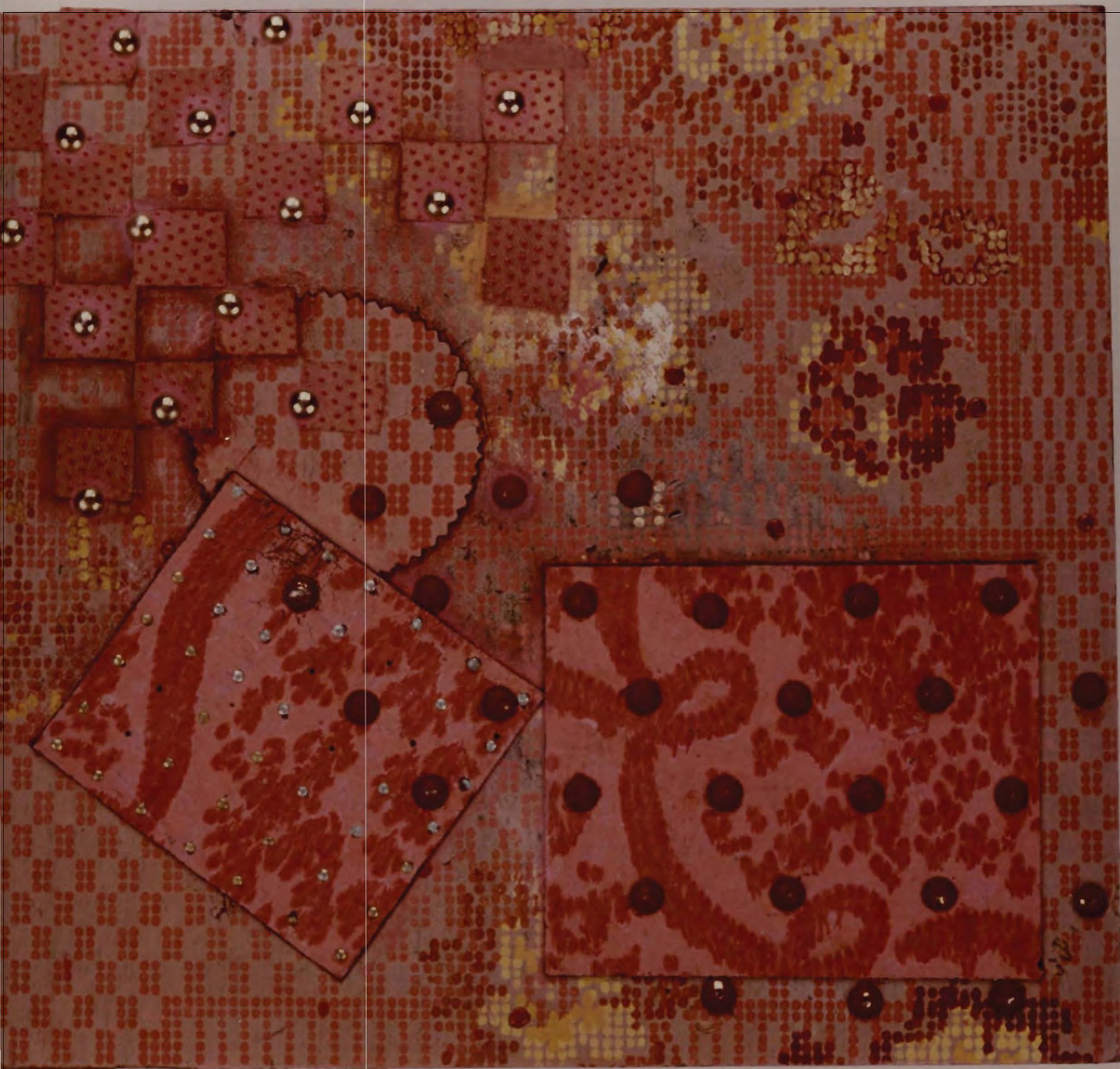
TITLE -

A PRACTICAL SURFACE

"So, when woman's art explicitly accuses and vindicates, it re-enters the LEGIBLE cultural space as militancy; and in order to be antagonistic (a type of dialogue), it has to recompose itself artificially (for instance through a provocative use of Pop technique), which means betraying the basic discernity, 'negativity' and OTHERNESS of woman's experience."

Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti

Negative Capability as Practice in Women's Art 21



This composition of collage is approached by giving precedence to the formal concerns of the abstract collage tradition as exemplified by Kurt Schwitters, to whose work I am much indebted. Yet I am unable to accept his arguments for the autonomy of art.²² This composition does not only refer to the world of art, but it has a strong domestic presence as a detail of a linoleum-covered floor. The nature of linoleum as "a practical surface", being inexpensive and easy to maintain, is an important consideration. These are the criteria of people, particularly women who maintain domestic spaces and receive little social acknowledgement for this labour. This reference is an essential element in the content of this work. In a society which maintains elitist hierarchies of exclusion and oppressive structures along lines of class, colour and sex, the autonomy of art and its apparent neutrality is questionable. This view of the linoleum as a floor surface is supported by the use of studs and upholstery nails to secure the compositional elements. These are the identical methods used to secure the linoleum to wooden floors. This is a far cry not only from Kurt Schwitters but Harold Rosenberg's assertions in the 1960's which read -

"The novelty of the new Minimalism lies not in its reductionist technique but in its principled determination to purge painting and sculpture of any but formal experiences, and even of resonances of experiences."²³

Anne-Marie Sanzeau-Boetti suggests that this approach, in asserting women's experience, does not go far enough -

"The actual creative project of women as a subject involves BETRAYING the expressive mechanisms of culture in order to express herself through the break, within the gaps between the systematic spaces of artistic language. This is not a matter of accusation or vindication, but of TRANSGRESSION (closer to madness than to reason) This kind of project

offers the only means of objectivizing feminine existence : not a positive avant-garde subversion but a process of differentiation. Not the project of fixing meanings but of breaking them up and multiplying them." 24

She presents an awesome challenge and it is to this that the collage is addressed.

TITLE -
IN MEMORY OF WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

"Housework is communicated as a craft and mothers condition young girls into its mysteries. Cleanliness and shine assume a fetishistic quality for the houseproud woman. It is almost as if she seeks her own reflection in the surfaces she polishes."

Sheila Rowbotham

Women's Consciousness, Man's World 25



CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO
GODLINESS

TO WOMEN AND MAINTENANCE

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

This assemblage is a monument to the domestic heritage of women. The empty soap dish and the painted banner bearing the slogan "Cleanliness is next to Godliness" contain nostalgic sentiments. Brightly coloured strips and dots that pattern the edge and surround of the enclosure are painted over a worn surface. The application of paint is not fresh and even nor the objects modern. This mood is the antithesis of the pristine newness of a hand towel hanging from a rail beneath.

A view that has gained ground in feminist discourse is that of Sheila Rowbotham -

.. "it is important to recognise what kind of value women find in housework. Every time housework is devalued women who are bound up with their homes feel threatened." 26

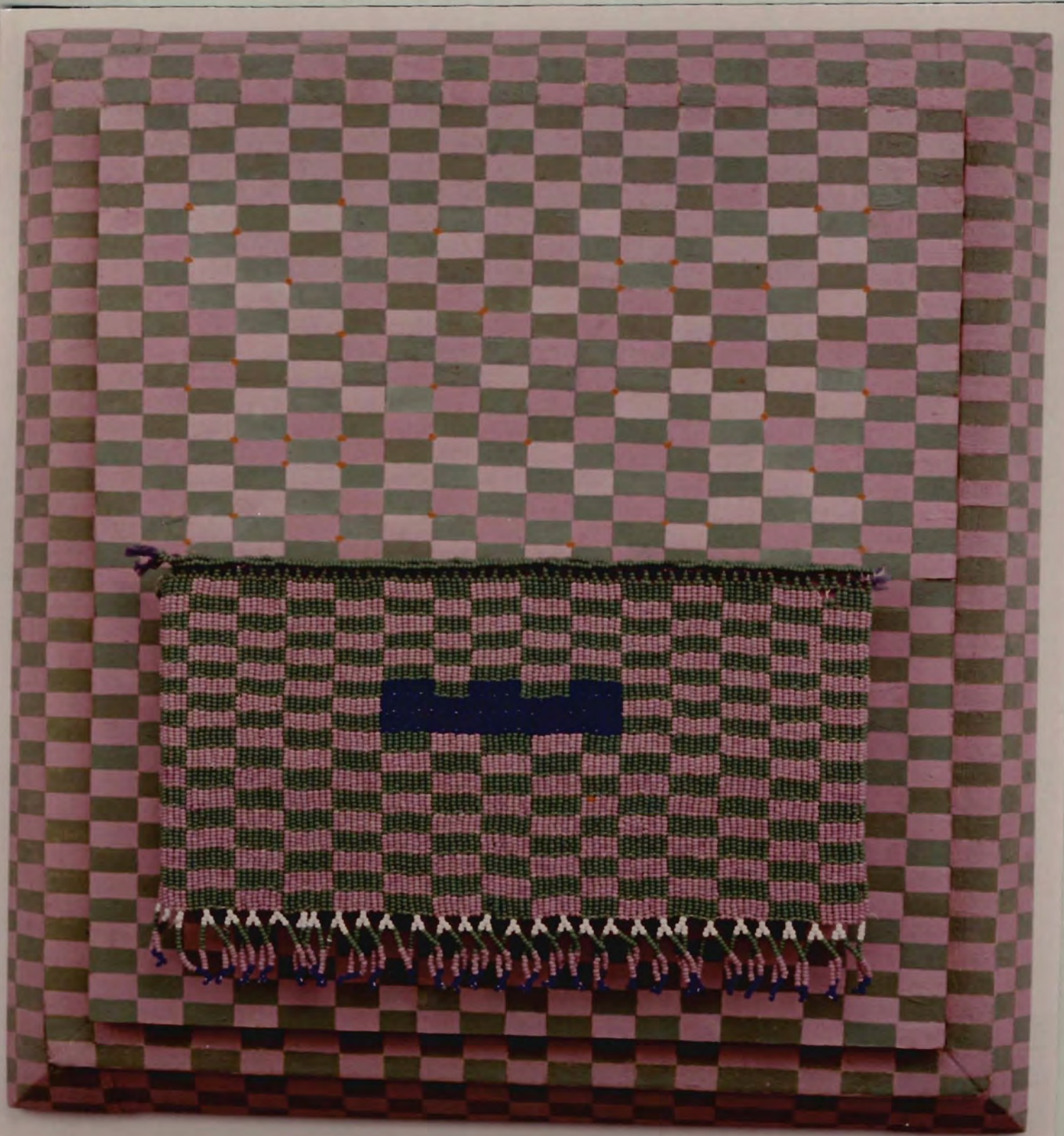
She develops this further by saying that -

"The woman who becomes obsessive about housework seeks her own sense of value. By constantly tidying up she proves that she is needed." 27

It is therefore no wonder that self-effacement and domestic preservation are two sides of the same coin in women's experience.

TITLE -

A REINFORCED APRON



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

A small beaded indigenous apron is the major vehicle in this work. The protective function of an apron is emphasised by the "reinforced" presentation of the subject which is mounted on a wooden block and placed on the lower half of a framed platform. This stepped format advances forward towards the viewer and transforms the apron into a form redolent of a shield. The pattern is developed by extending the design of ultimating rectangles of pink and green beads over the entire surface using oil paint. By presenting the object within the context of painting, perhaps the visual quality of the crafted apron is thereby examined more seriously. Attention is drawn to the inexplicable use of one orange bead within the apron by duplicating orange dots within the painted field. This work articulates a greater emphasis on surface pattern which direction is taken further in later works.

TITLE -
A DOMESTIC PLATFORM

"Something used by someone else carries a history with it. A piece of cloth, a platter, a cut-glass pitcher, a recipe.

A history and a spirit. You want to know when it was used. And how. And what it wants from you."

Michelle Cliff

Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise 28



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

This tall, elongated platform is developed from personal associations evoked by a piece of linoleum covering the top surface area. Like that of a table top, this is the area most likely to need a strong servicable covering. The worn condition, degraded colour and dated design of this covering contains nostalgic elements. It recalls the humble utilitarian farm-kitchens of relatives in the Eastern Cape recollected from childhood. The affectionate monument to this heritage is distinguished from ordinary furniture by the unified surface pattern, covering the bowl and platform and its distorted dimensions. The pattern is extended in crude impasto gestures of oil paint applied with a brush. This uniformly patterned surface presents the bowl and platform as a unit.

6.3 SECTION C - A TIME AND A PLACE

"A colonial country is one which has no memory. The discontinuities of colonial experience make it almost inevitable that this should be so. A political entity which has been brought into existence by the actions of an external power; a population consisting of the descendants of conquerors, of slaves and of indentured labourers, and of dispossessed aboriginals; a language in the courts and schools which has been imported like an item of heavy machinery; a prolonged economic and psychological subservience to a metropolitan centre a great distance away One hardly needs to labour the point that such conditions make it extremely difficult for any section of population to develop a vital, effective belief in the past as a present concern, and in the present as a consequence of the past's concern."

Dan Jacobson, Introduction to
The Story of an African Farm
Olive Schreiner 29

TITLE -
FRAGMENTS OF ART AND AFRICA



This composition is a presentation of many details concerning my position and location as a woman artist in Africa.

A clear, contained image of a young, seated woman painting a desert landscape represents my role as a woman artist. Suspended from this image is a separate format representing the turbulent cultural and political heritage of Africa. These elements make up my cultural heritage.

History shows a fragmentation of Africa by colonial rule. This is a history of imposition of a culture and eventual control through divisions imposed on the land and the people - "not in a position to affirm or negate it".³⁰ These boundaries, whether based on natural or abstract lines have been imposed by a culture "and its competitors in imperialism",³¹ as a means of ordering or civilizing a territory - in the interests of the colonisers alone.

The surface contains a map of Southern Africa which is torn into fragments and rudely reconstructed. This offers a visual parallel to the history of conflict. Details from the cultural traditions of Africa and Europe appear in the composition. Fragments of a painted European landscape of delicate trees, a lake and herons are combined with an image of a bronze sculptured Nigerian head. These pictorial elements are submerged amongst the fragments of the surface. A hardy desert cactus which blooms and survives in harsh environmental conditions is used here to signify hope. The colonial cultural tradition devalued the Black culture that survived in the aftermath of the slave trade. Both women and Black culture share this devaluation of their cultural heritage. The composition attempts a formal synthesis of these diverse elements. This apparent formal unity is assisted by the restricted use of colour, particularly bleached greens with small quantities of contrasting colour. This careful choice of papers provides a successful and economical formal unity. Here the paint is applied in only soft transparent glazes without the manipulation of images.

TITLE -
THE 'PRIMITIVE' AND THE 'NAIVE'

"To be 'the Other' is to feel that one is always in a shaky position, to be always on guard, ready to be rejected and unconsciously doing everything needed to bring about exactly this catastrophe."

G. Guex

La neurose d'abandon 32



The images of a warrior on a postcard and a naked girl holding a basket of red flowers in a reproduction of a Picasso painting, are the 'primitive' and the 'naive' elements referred to respectively.

Women and people of colour share or at times identify with the categorisation of being the 'Other' in relationship to white men who for the most part occupy positions of power. The effects of this perception of relationships between black men and women and white men and women and their interactions are analysed by Frantz Fanon in "Black Skin - White Masks".³³ Sheila Rowbotham summarised Fanon in "Women, Resistance and Revolution".

"The passivity and complete subordination of the colonized woman fascinated the white imperialists; with her they could act out the fantasies of domination they were forced to suppress with their own women. The right to possess his own woman thus becomes a kind of madness in the mind of the colonized man as he takes off the white mask. With it develops the idea of invading and desecrating the white man's women. These are the means out of humiliation. He wants to act out the domination he has been made to suffer by imperialism. He has taken over the same structure of sexual fantasy as the white man. He is still trapped within the white mask; he has simply inverted its facial characteristics. The white woman is in an ambiguous position. She comes from among the powerful but she finds herself at once humiliated and revered by the men she was taught to regard as both forbidden and inferior. In going towards the colonized man she implicitly rejects the male of the dominant race, but she keeps her own skin, the passport back into imperial protection. She is looked down upon and secretly envied by women of her own kind, while colonized women resent her as encroaching on their own underprivilege."³⁴

Mike Kirkwood explains this relationship further in the paper "Beyond Butlerism". The white male coloniser -

"fails to assert a critical awareness of his own ethnocentric assumptions and projections and uses the colonized as exotic models for rudimentary raids into the fascinating history of his own psyche." 35

The individuals presented in these reproductions could be seen to be patronised and regarded as curiosities in much the same way, rather than being confronted as people with independent experiences and identities. Rowbotham defines possible attitudes of patronage.

"Patronage takes several shapes. Sometimes it is the assumption that everyone must naturally want to be what they are or what you hope to be. Sometimes it is quite the opposite, the assumption that other human beings are a different order of creature from yourself and therefore would never share your aspirations. The disinherited are sensitive about such attitudes. As a woman I am aware of patronage." 36

The warrior, in traditional battledress offers no threat in an age of advanced nuclear weaponry. The young woman is rendered vulnerable by the voyeuristic contemplation of the viewer and the artist himself. These images of individuals are not however presented as entirely defenceless in the context of the composition. The reproductions merge with a background of torn paper fragments and scattered painted symbols. The symbols overlap the reproductions at intervals and the background is similar in tone and hue to these images. This lack of differentiation of object and background could be seen to absorb the two images in a protective field. Both subjects are products of cultural and sexual domination respectively.

TITLE -
CULTURAL CAMOUFLAGE

"It would seem to me that only when the black world is powerful enough to neutralize the camouflaged but hideously menacing power of white nations of the West will it be possible for black and white men with a humanistic, conciliatory vision to share an identity of interests across the colour line."

Lewis Nkosi

Black Power or Souls of Black Writers 37



E. SCHWEICKERT
Verlag
Bismarckstr. 10
10117 Berlin

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

The means of camouflage can conceal the vulnerable as well as the oppressive. This composition contrasts ordering and disruptive elements. A fragmented, broken picture frame lies scattered across the format, releasing the crumpled Pierrot - image of a Picasso reproduction. The process of building up the surface of the composition from layered fragments of paper and paint marks suggest a visual depth of shifting images. This loose, spontaneous arrangement is contrasted by a second picture frame which defines a rectangular area of the composition. The entire surface has been ordered by the overpainting of a right-angled chequered grid of transparent glazes of oil paint. Insights by Aimee Rankin on her own work give an interesting parallel to this presentation of contrasts.

"Thus my work models an attempt to both speak and erase the means of representational discourse, as through layering and fragmentation, they are rendered illegible, broken up as they are sealed in the process of representational closure itself." 38

TITLE -
BRUSH ASIDE



川 釧
路
尾

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

This painting is a response to a piece of driftwood picked up on the Cape coast at Arniston. The Cape in its historical position on the trade route from East to West shows evidence of these links in its cultural detail. There is a human heritage too from the East that enriches our history. The composition acknowledges this contribution in a symbolic gesture. Details, like the driftwood printed with Taiwanese characters, are chosen for their associations with the East. The title is derived from the bleached Japanese paintbrush placed above the driftwood to the left of the painting, and refers to the use of discarded materials.

TITLE -

FRINGE BENEFIT



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

A detailed monochromatic collaged surface is surrounded by an imposing studded frame. This small, delicately constructed abstract composition is overpowered rather than complimented by the excessive bold detail and dimensions of the frame. The title refers to the excessive quality of the decorated frame and the use of a fringed recess not unlike that of the composition "Women behind Culture". This recess articulates the withdrawn quality of the small, abstract composition in relation to the outward thrusting frame. The spirit and character of this considered composition asserts its collaged and painted presence as insistently as the shared painted surface of the armoured enclosure of the frame.

The pattern of skin which
against its habitat.

And-yes-this camouflage
I am not what I see to be

I must make my
there exists a
mondhack with

6.4 SECTION D - THE CURIO SERIES

"Camouflage: ground lizards in a schoolyard rustle under a pile of leaves - some are deep-green, others shiny blue: all blend in. I fear they might be there - even when there is no sound.

To this day camouflage terrorized me.

The pattern of skin which makes a being invisible against its habitat.

And-yes-this camouflage exists for its protection. I am not what I seem to be.

I must make myself visible against my habitat. But there exists a certain danger in peeling back. The diamondback without her mottled skin loses a level of defense."

Michelle Cliff

Claiming an Identity they Taught me to Despise 39

TITLE -
CURIO I



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

The composition is similar to a miniaturised version of a simulated environment in a natural history museum. A shallow stage is provided by the recess of the frame, and a reproduction of a cave painting provide the backdrop. This image has been torn up, reconstructed and modified with paint resulting in an ambiguous landscape suggesting sky and mountain rock, with details of fishermen and fish. A clear image of a strelitzia extends its stem, modelled in relief, to the edge of the picture frame. Along the inside recess of the frame small cubes of blue marbled soap are stacked. The soap complements the textured rockface, yet the blue streaks are immanent in the soap itself; geological, as against the painted texture in the work.

This is a collection of both mundane and exotic elements: the polka-dotted frame, cubes of soap and fabric-covered buttons represent the mundane, while the strelitzia and rock painting have exotic overtones much like the presentation of local art and flora in tourist manuals.

TITLE -
CURIO II



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

A metal rose and floral beadwork representing Western European craftsmanship are juxtaposed with objects rich in associations of the African continent. The African elements are an outsized pair of thorns from an indigenous thorn tree, fragments of a patterned bangle and a scattering of cowrie shells which frequently appear on African sculptures and bodily decorations. This composition is another synthesis of diverse elements.

TITLE

CURIO III



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

Like the previous composition, elements from both African and European cultures are represented. The application of paint gives structure, colour and texture to an initially chaotic and diverse surface. Details extracted from knitting patterns and musical notations are utilised. The relief elements of a horn button and fragments of a bangle form an integral part of the composition by virtue of their position, shape and surface patterning.

TITLE -
CURIO IV



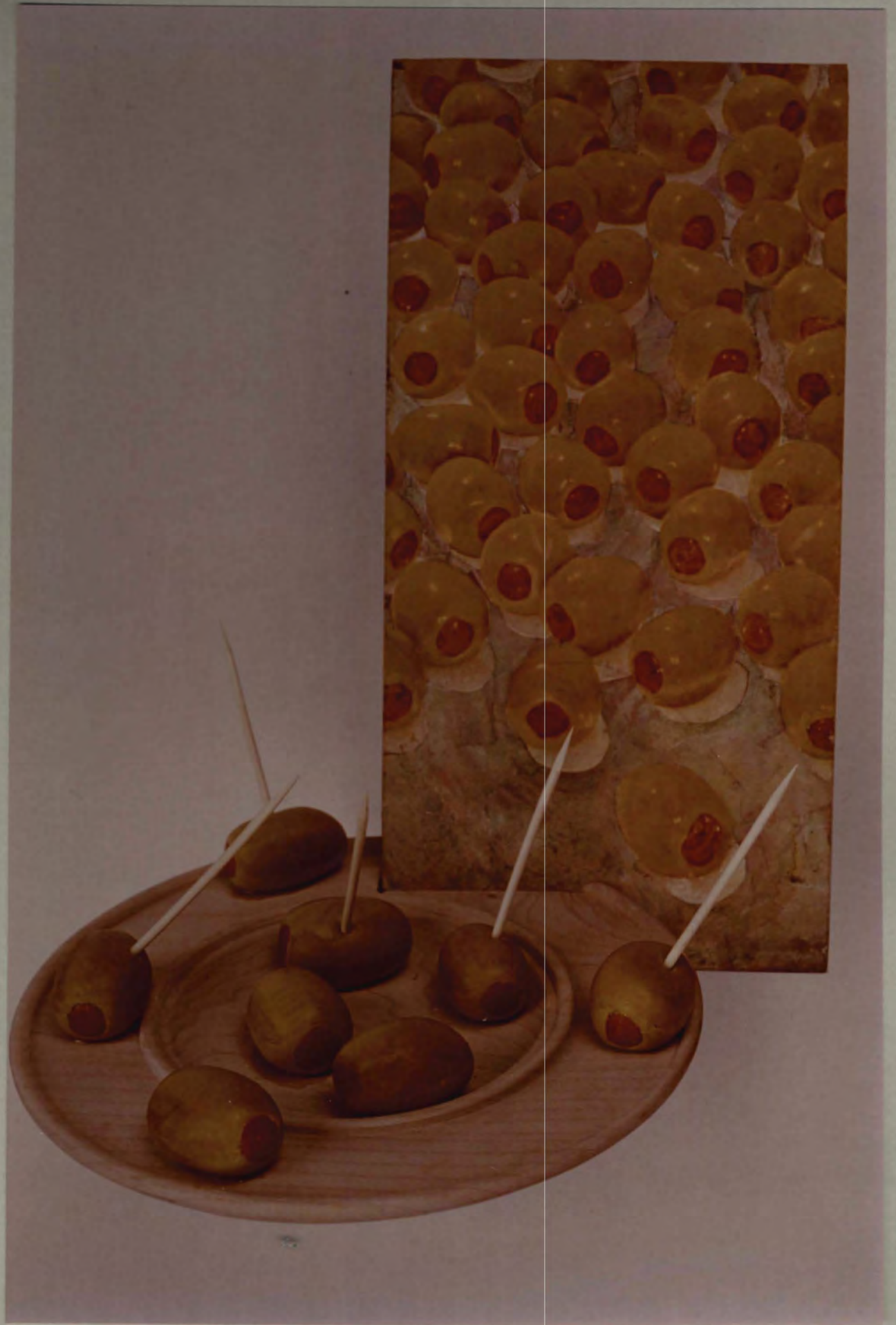
NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

An unusual frame surrounds the mottled, studded surface of this composition. This landscape conceals more than it reveals. Layers of paper and painted patterning absorb details in much the same way that animals and plants are protected by their ability to merge with the African savannah.

6.5 SECTION E - DOMESTIC OBSESSIONS

A group of small assemblages envisaged as sculptural sketches rather than resolved compositions, and one large wooden concertina screen.

TITLE -
OLIVES FOR AFRICA



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

A flat rectangular format is covered by a magazine image of stuffed green olives spread abundantly over the surface. The wooden plate attached to a lower corner projects out at an angle in a gesture that offers its contents to the viewer. Three - dimensional painted replicas of olives pierced with toothpicks are arranged on a plate. The inordinate quantity of olives reflects the exaggerated aspect of advertising and the inappropriateness of luxury goods in the African context.

TITLE -
ON A PLATE NO.1



TITLE -
ON A PLATE NO.2



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

The titles of these works reflect the playful spirit in which assemblages are approached and hint at states of privilege. These highly stylized and fantastic presentations of plates of food describe an opulent domestic gesture.

TITLE -

POWDERBOX NO. 1

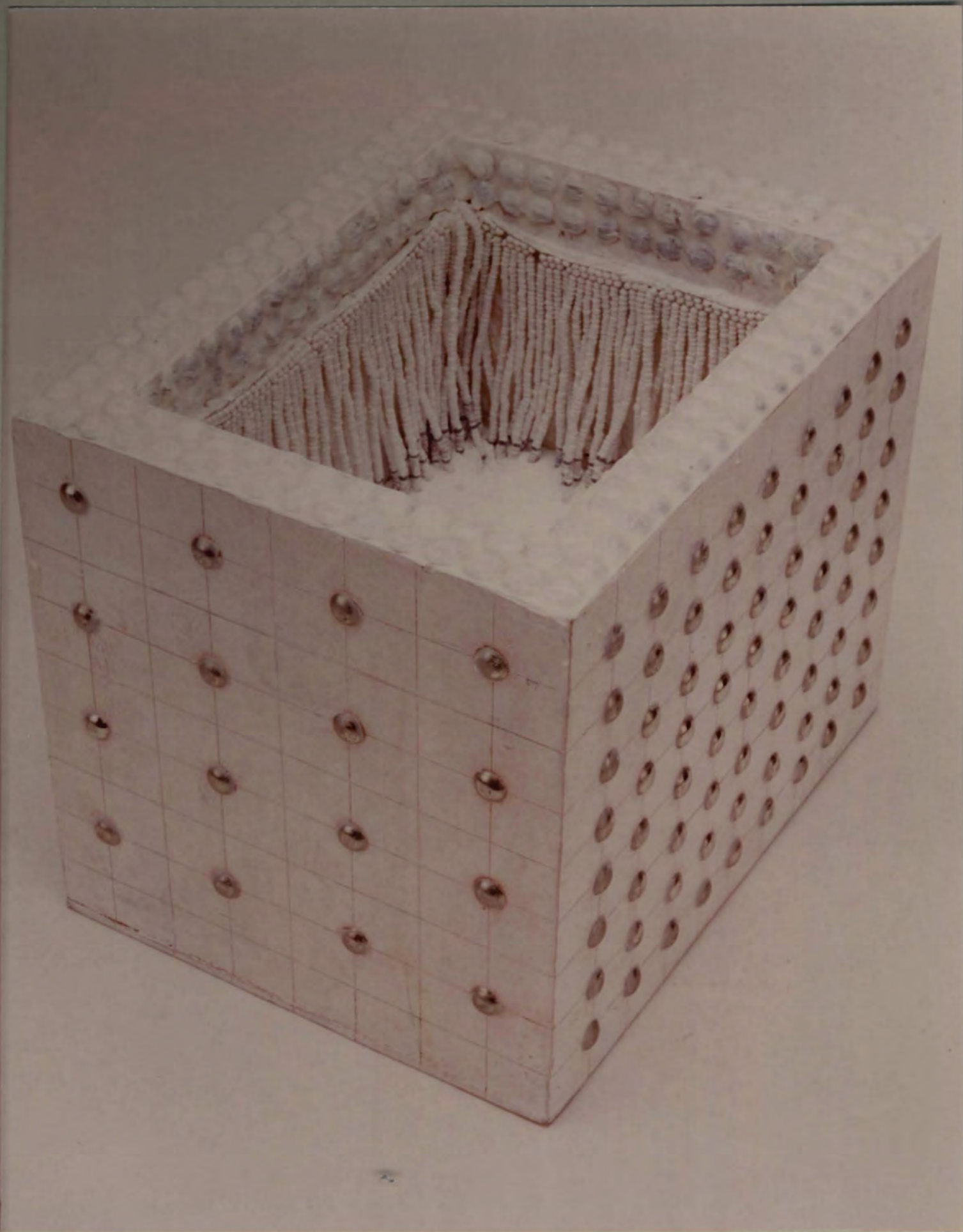


TITLE -
POWDERBOX NO.2



TITLE

POWDERBOX NO.3



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

Each assemblage is a variation on a receptacle for talcum powder. The white talc is seen as being part of a ritual of masking or concealing of the self.

"In the arena of the male castration complex, from disoriented, women are no more than their significance lies purely to their male and their star turn is to symbolize castration which men fear."

Lucy Mulvey

You Don't Know What's Happening

TITLE -
CURLER CACTI

"In the drama of the male castration complex, as Freud discovered, women are no more than puppets; their significance lies purely in their lack of penis and their star turn is to symbolise the castration which men fear."

Laura Mulvey

You Don't Know What's Happening, Do You Mr Jones? 40



NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

Simulated cacti have been assembled from clusters of bristle hair-curlers, and painted to look more authentic. Combinations of the cacti cluster in six small terra-cotta pots. They are made more ambiguous by the use of coloured sands and the hint of brightly coloured plastic structures barely seen through the unpainted areas.

These objects are indebted to Meret Oppenheim's assemblage of a fur tea cup, "Déjeuner en fourrure" (1936), and her use of suggested displacement in the sexual undertone of this piece. Similarly, the banal hair-curlers (associated with the agonising grooming rituals of women) have a strong phallic presence in their new domesticated potted context.

TITLE -

A SPADE IS A SPADE IS A ...



A SPADE

A SPADE IS.....

NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

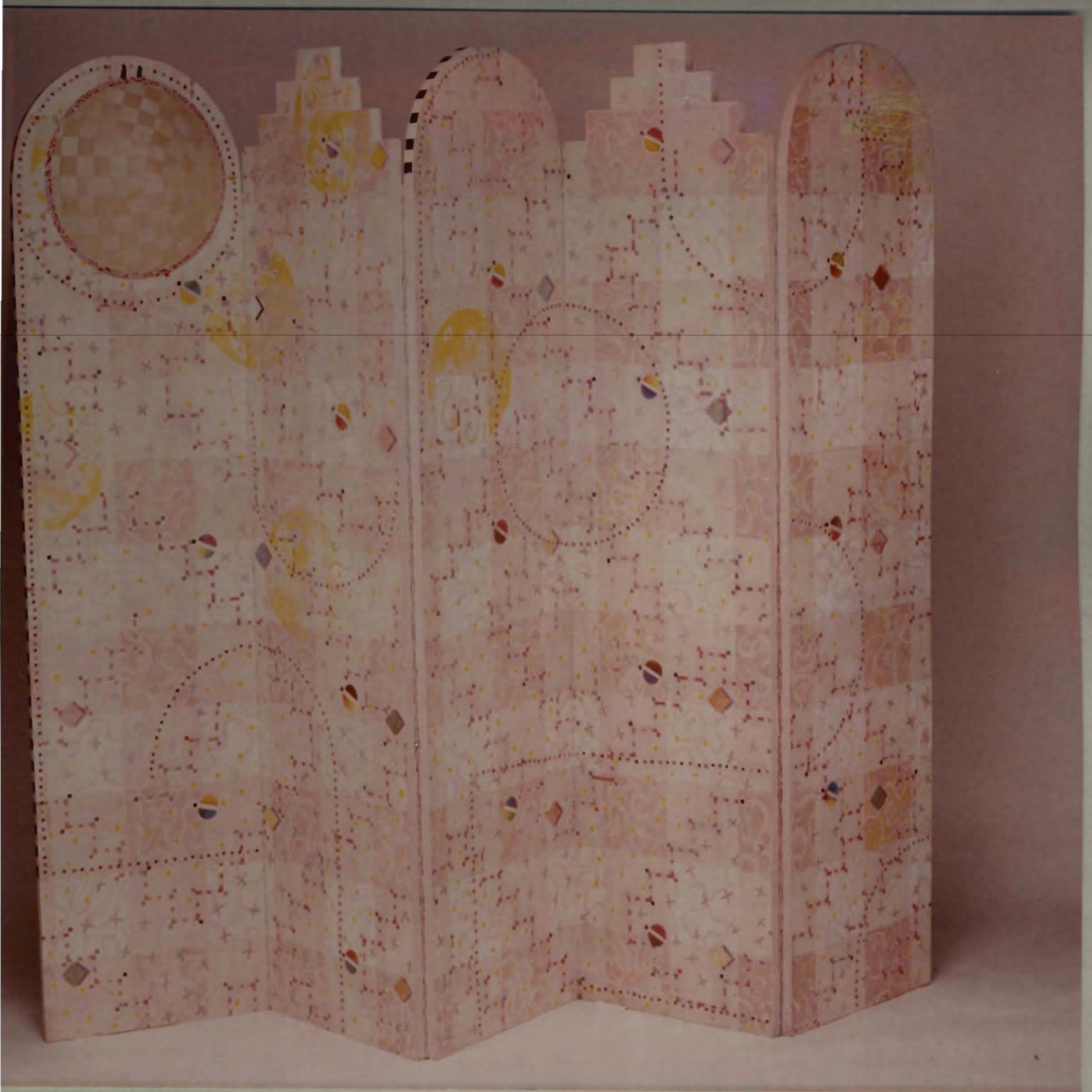
A rainbow coloured child's beach bucket and spade is filled with pink, blue and green coloured sand. Two beach spades stand upright with a label reading "A spade" and "is a spade .." attached to each respectively. Despite the down-to-earth tone of the title, this assemblage asserts the reality of play and fantasy.

TITLE -
A DOMESTIC SCREEN

"She desperately needed calm and desired to 'go and live somewhere where I met nobody I knew till I am so strong that people and things could not affect me beyond reason'".

Gwen John quoted in
Old Mistresses 41





NOTES ON METHOD AND CONTENT

In the spirit of the works "Breast Plate" I and II, and "Reinforced Apron", this work is a defensive statement. A "Domestic Screen" is used to divide up and conceal spaces. It is this potential to conceal and provide privacy that is explored here. The two sides of the screen articulate a difference of spirit between a stronger, engaging persona, and a more retiring, intimate, even playful state.

The subject matter of the work is the screen itself. Other references are abandoned unless they emphasize the primary concerns with surface pattern. Unlike many other pieces in this body of work, the screen does not expose personal concerns but rather offers a shelter away from the scrutiny of the world. In the spirit of Gwen John's statement above, this could be a necessary proportion to conserve and muster one's strength.

The nature of pattern assumes a new function. The uniformity of the pattern dominates the entire surface of the screen to the exclusion of all other elements. The dimensions of the screen easily conceal a human form. This solid front is only broken by holes drilled through the surface, which follow a design marking both sides of the screen. Each side is however approached differently. A dark monochromatic sombre front contrasts with the light, predominantly pink, chequered grid of the second side. Almost the entire surface is painted utilising the textural qualities of paint. More use is made of this medium than collage and the applications vary from transparent glazes to combing and impasto gestures.

7. CONCLUSION

"In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought."

Sékou Touré

The Wretched of the Earth 42

The content of this body of work is a continuing development of a means which reflects on my experience as a woman artist in Africa.

In earlier works objects and images from my environment (drawn from culture and its commodities) are incorporated into the collage. This method is modified as a need to articulate a more personal attitude and is given direction in the construction of assemblages that are more sculptural in character. The work has developed from the use of 'readymade' components, to the construction of free-standing objects. This direction incorporates a move away from the predominant use of overlapping paper collage towards a greater use of oil paint as a means of articulating the surface pattern and detail. The later structures; the screen, table and powder-boxes for example, are markedly domestic and utilitarian in spirit.

"I know what kind of work I have to do.
It takes such energy! I have the feeling
I'm moving somewhere, patiently, impatiently,
in my loneliness. I'm looking somewhere in
nature for new forms, old forms in new places,
the planes of an antique mouth, let's say, among the leaves.
I know and do not know
what I am searching for."

Adrienne Rich

Paula Becker to Clara Westhoff 43



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