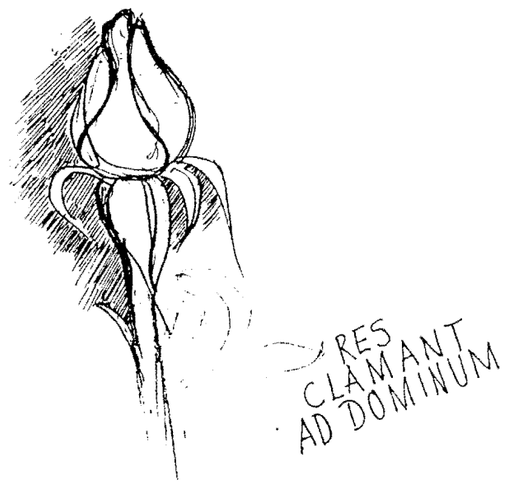
'Let us not be sentimental about District Six. Let us say, simply, that its houses were lived in and were homes; its business places centres of human exchange; so too its churches, and mosques, and bioscopes.... All its brick and mortar edifices were "touched by human hands". The destruction of the District's buildings was bound to be a matter of injuring souls'.

(Small: 1986:5)

RES CLAMANT – THE LAND CRIES OUT

A practical study of the communicative and visual potential of a large-scale mural painting situated within a defined historical and cultural context

by Peggy Delport



Dissertation and documentation of the mural painting submitted to meet the requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town

November 1991

Proposal

A Practical Study of the Communicative and Visual Potential of a Large-scale Exterior Mural Painting Situated within a Defined Historical and Cultural Context

Latiefa and Amien Hendricks with Fasiega, Roshada, and Abubaker. 1982

Dedication

This mural commemorates the existence of District Six which was destroyed between 1966-1981 and emptied of its inhabitants. It is dedicated to all who once lived there.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the Human Sciences Research Council for their financial assistance at the outset of this period of study. In addition, the mural project itself was made possible through grants from the University of Cape Town and the Oppenheimer Institute of African Studies, from whom I have continued to receive generous support for different aspects of the project and for associated research ventures.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to my supervisor, Neville Dubow. He has encouraged and supported me in many ways from the outset of this project. I am grateful for his trust in my capacities, as well as the ideas and friendship we have shared.

This mural arose out of the reminiscences and commentaries of a number of residents prior to their eviction from District Six. Their continuous participation, guidance and encouragement throughout the mural project were of profound value; they enriched my insights and influenced the development of the work. I wish to thank in particular, Naz Ebrahim, Latiefa and Amien Hendricks, and Fr Basil van Rensburg, who in addition made possible the use of the Holy Cross site for the mural.

I have received generous support, advice and assistance from numerous friends and colleagues, from other fields as well as my own, at different stages of the project. I express my great appreciation to them, particularly to Helmut Starcke for his consistent advice, and to Stanley Hermans, Ann Field and Geoffrey Grundlingh whose generous assistance have been invaluable. Geoffrey has played a major role too in making an extensive photographic record of the mural and in guiding the compilation of this document. My thanks to Mark Davies of Ampersand Publishing for his interested and professional contribution.

Lastly, I express my great gratitude to my family for their patience and caring, and above all to my husband, Sean Archer, for many years of unfailing support. His rigorous example, insight and good sense have helped me bring this project to its realisation.

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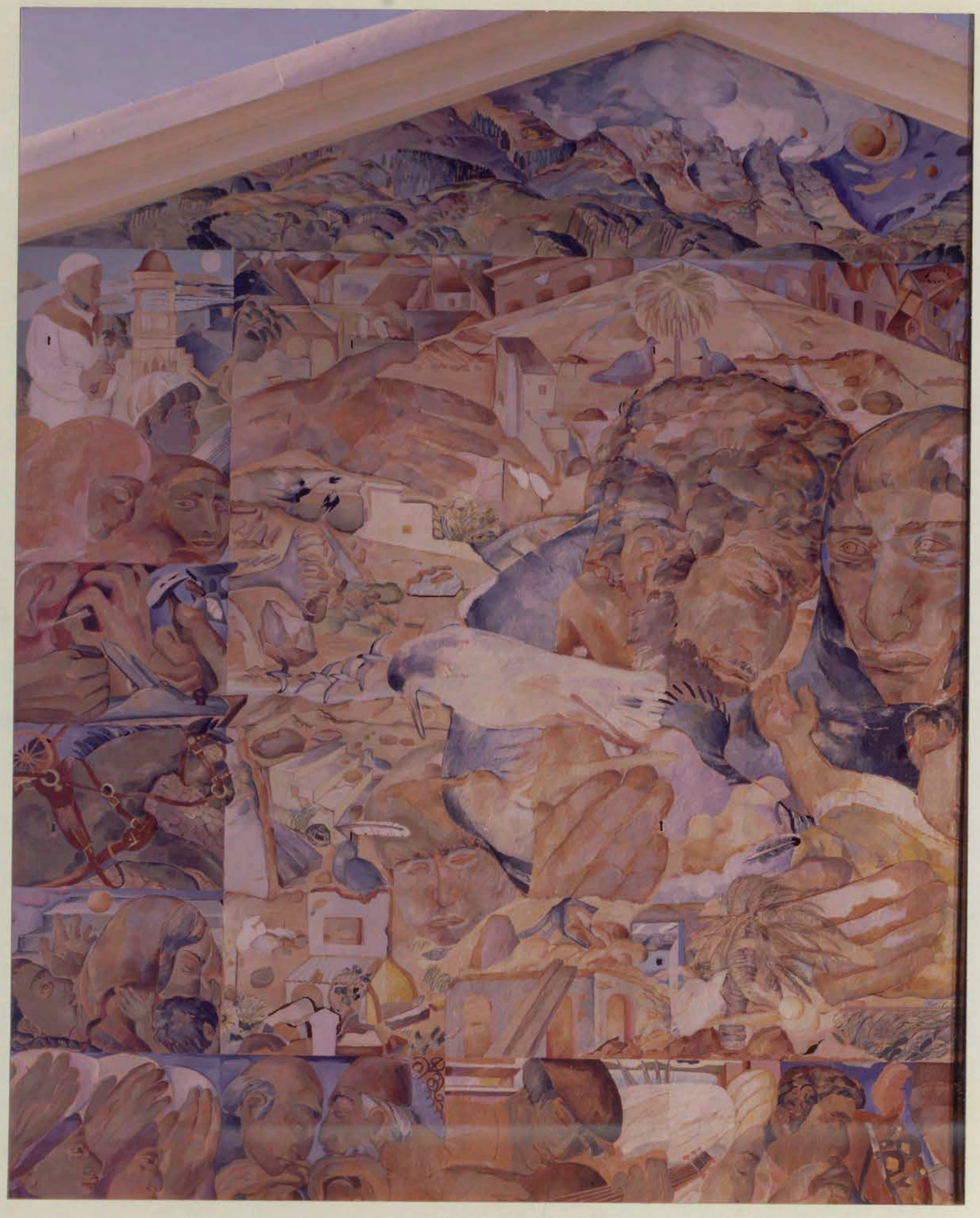


1. Historical Note

'Men make a city, not its walls nor its ships'

(Thucidides 490-460 B.C.)[1]

The place District Six was located centrally in the 'mother city,' Cape Town. Once the most integrated of our cities, it became through the implementation of the Group Areas Act the site of the greatest number of population removals in the country. 'Spatial apartheid' changed its face and the lives of most of its people. Between 1950 and 1980 more than 150,000 people suffered forced resettlement in the Cape Town area alone, including the 34,000 inhabitants of District Six. This is an official figure widely believed to be so conservative as to reflect only ± 50% of the actual number[2].

Nature of the Community

As the oldest urban settlement in the country. *'The District'* lay at the foot of Table Mountain, flanked by Devil's Peak, Lions Head and Signal Hill, within easy walking distance of harbour and city centre. Densely-populated and mainly residential, its character reflected cultural, religious, economic and racial diversities, contained, however, within relatively secure community structures. The history of the settlement that preceded the 1940s was turbulent, its many phases reflecting the early economic history of the country (addendum, p.3). The heterogenous population grew through natural increase and a steady influx, spanning the period that began with the freeing of the slaves in 1833 until the mid-forties[3], and representative of most race groups, both indigenous and from abroad. As the new arrivals stabilised into community formations their diversity of origin and circumstance remained an integral characteristic of the place. The ancestry of many inhabitants had roots throughout the interior, from whence the rural population migrated citywards in search of work, settling in the dense urban catchment area of District Six; and the Eastern origin of others remained evident in the culture of the inhabitants, their religious and social life, architecture, skills, dress and language. When the National Party came to power in 1948, except for Sophiatown on the Rand, District Six was the largest and most central of urban settlements and certainly the most multiracial residential area in the country.

1 *Thucidides, Born 455 BC, Athenian historian, moralist, political theorist and tragic prose-poet.*

2 *Unofficial estimates of the District Six population at the time of the Declaration vary from 55,000 to 65,000 (Hart: 1990:126)*

3 *District Six, Occasional Paper No. 2. Compiled and published by the Centre for Intergroup Studies, U.C.T, 1980, p.1.*

Thornton and Ramphele, in their essay *The Quest for Community*, write:

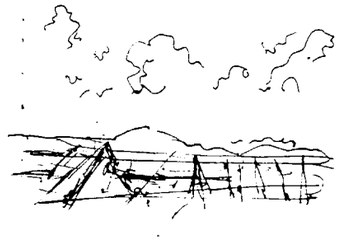
"The cruel irony of the destruction of District Six was that a recognizable community was destroyed in order to accommodate the 'ideology' of community held by government administrators serving their white constituency. People who have been victims of such 'community development' actions are too numerous to list. The result is illustrated by the remains of Sophiatown outside of Johannesburg, now renamed 'Triomf' (Triumph), which has been rezoned for the 'white community'." (1988:33).

In addition to schools, mosques, churches, creches, shops, restaurants, markets and a multitude of small businesses, an extensive informal economy existed, much of it based upon the home. Success in this kind of enterprise was enhanced by central and accessible location in relation to an external market. Barbers, tailors, dressmakers, caterers, plasterers, builders, harness-makers and carpenters proliferated. A higher density of skilled craftsmen lived there than anywhere else in the city or indeed the country, often using tools and techniques handed down through successive generations. Much of the vivid daily expression of community life including social and religious rituals was public and visible, creating a varied and tolerant cultural environment. Education and the practise of the arts gradually established dimensions and traditions which permanently enriched the city. The Eoan Group is only one example of many individuals and groups who made a major contribution to the cultural life of the city (See p. 93). As a consequence form and characteristics unique to the place emerged in language, music and cultural patterns.

Many social problems undoubtedly existed, namely unemployment, overcrowding, crime, and a large measure of poverty. In part these were the consequences of years of neglect by urban and state bodies but these ills were largely contained and managed within the social capacities of a community that was generally stable. Informal business and family enterprise grew out of the determination of urbanised people to subsist within an environment where there was a large degree of want. Unemployment and low wages were countered by ingenuity, barter and the combined small-scale productive activities of the extended family. In spite of the different economic strata that existed it was not a fundamentally divided society. Those that had shared with others in need and the notion of sharing became a known characteristic of this community, exemplified in its popular name, 'Kanalladorp'

(town of giving /sharing),[1]. In effect social problems and needs were met with support systems and resources ,encompassing not only the extended family but the wider community. An organically generated system was gradually constructed out of social interaction, interdependency and the varied nature and functional patterns of community life. Adam Small has spoken of District Six as *"a place and a time. A specific context of the life that we call human"* (1985: 5). Inhabitants took pride in its particular history, physical characteristics and location as well as the vibrant and diversified culture, urban liveliness and largely stable community life, which added up to a uniqueness that was valued.

Relationship with City



This place came into existence more than 300 years ago and the city grew up around and beyond its environs. Rooted on the slopes of the mountain, near the heart of the city, the area brought to the urban centre a congeniality and dynamism, and the sterility suffered by centres deprived of their resident populations was kept at bay through this contiguity. At night it was a common experience to see families from up the hill strolling with children in night-clothes on the pavements of Adderley Street past brightly-lit shop windows[2]. (A wry reference to the panoramic view from District Six of the myriad city lights spreading below and into the distance appeared in the line of graffiti on a last desolate wall in Rochester Road: *'You are now entering Fairyland'*, it read).

The human make-up of the central city reflected its mixed functions, not only of business centre but meeting point, common space and focal area for visitors, as too for the widespread and varied population of Cape Town. Tourists from abroad, the rural areas and the suburbs mingled with inner-city residents, school children, students, musicians, labourers, hawkers and the business district work-force. The residential proximity of a large stable community tempered the predominant commercial character of the

1 *The term 'Kanalladorp' was repeatedly mentioned and explained by the narrators. Also see report "Kanalladorp's Spirit Comes Alive", Muslim News, July 1988.*

2 *Childhood memory of city visits in the forties from my home in a Western Cape village.*

city which was in consequence both more convivial and secure by night as well as by day than it became after the removals. Its spirit and environment remained alive, in the sense of human enjoyment of the place, long after the working day ended. Before its destruction the constant presence of residents provided, as in the case of many other inner city populations throughout the world, a vibrant pulse to the urban environment[1]. When the end came for the community the loss was multiple; immeasureably great for the inhabitants, but also with deeply negative implications for the city as a whole. The well-being of central Cape Town itself was affected, its character and human dimension permanently altered and impaired. The loss of a close residential market also negatively affected the commercial life of the city. The final period of demolition between 1975 and 1981 resulted in a sense of desolation which still characterises many previously residential parts of the city ten years later Where the unaffected population might have been able to claim unawareness of the fifteen-year long forced exodus, they could no longer ignore the evidence which confronted them in the raised face of their maimed and blighted city. When the act was done and the people gone an emptiness remained, for years to come, to speak of what had been.[2]

The Removals

In February 1966 under the race zoning provisions of the Group Areas Act the State proclaimed District Six a White Area (See Appendix 2). Of a population numbering then more than 34000 people (official figure), 'whites' made up 1% of the number[3]. In the years to follow vociferous protests, pleas, negotiations and perhaps too the massive scale and economic implications of the

1 *Many Western cities and their inner-city communities have suffered the same fate: social sterility in the former, and displacement to new peripheral housing estates, social dislocation and breakdown of community life in the latter. Although the causes of these resettlements on the whole are not altruistic and there are parallels, such as the commercial value of inner city property, the main difference lies in the racial nature of the South African resettlements. In general the gain has been on the side of one specific racial group and the loss experienced on the other; the losers being the disenfranchised group. Some well-known examples of resettlement abroad – a number proving so problematic that they were abandoned or even demolished – are Pruitt-Igoe in St Louis and Queen village in the U.S.A, St Ebbs in Oxford, Liverpool and Manchester, U.K.*

2 *Ten years after the razing of District Six the land still lay bare. This state reflected in a way the words of a number of erstwhile inhabitants that the land was 'cursed'; that none other but the original inhabitants should ever live there; that the site must remain empty as a monument to what had been destroyed; that no one must ever forget. The prominence of the devastated area, in appearance a battlefield on the slopes above the city and visible every day to commuters travelling on the freeways, as well as from the sea and from the outskirts of Cape Town, has communicated the events more powerfully than any conventional monument could do. International companies sold land bought in the wake of the removals under the pressure of public and international opinion, and for the same reason developers held back. Except for the Technikon gradually spreading further into the area, other state-owned properties such as police accommodation and a few rows of restored and 'gentrified' terrace houses, new property development has been limited and, on the whole, the land has lain empty to the present time. (See addendum p.6)*

3 *See Occasional Paper No. 2, p.2.*

impending task partially slowed the expropiation; but by June 1981 the destruction was complete. A large tract of empty land in the very heart of the city, of both symbolic and economic significance for the State, lay in their hands, the total population having been evicted, and dispersed.

"What happened, of course, was a breaking of a place and time, a sundering of thousands of lives... We have an image here, with a clear focus and a sharp definition, of personal suffering, and of family suffering, and of community suffering and of social suffering. Also of human folly and of earthly power abused" (Small: 1986:7). These events destroyed the intricate 'webbing' of a settled community. The social effects were disastrous, not only at the time but continuing thereafter. A 'web of interlocking mutual interest' comprised the networks of the community.

> *"The old working-class neighbourhoods... were places in which different levels of the working class had won space for their own forms of life. These spaces were both physical (the networks of streets, houses, corner shops, shebeens) and social (the networks of kin, friendships, neighbourhood and work). They were a mixture of rights and obligations, intimacies and distances, providing a sense of solidarity, local loyalties and traditions."*
>
> (Pinnock:1984:55)

The concept of the web as metaphor for the various supportive structures of community life originated in a report by Dr Oscar Wolheim in 1959[1]. As individual families were dispersed and relocated on the perimeters of the city, mostly in new semi-developed, socially problematic dormitory townships, the structure of this 'webbing' was disturbed. Neighbours lost touch with one another. Children were withdrawn from their schools, the elderly from their places of worship; all the facilities and stimulus the city offered, shops, hospitals, libraries: in short, the secure and comfortably familiar context of their lives was lost to them. Deaths

1 *"The rings closest to the centre are represented by the man's immediate and extended family and closest friends. The next would represent his acquaintances, his church, his school and the clubs he frequents. Other rings represent his employer, his transport and communications, the shops he frequents, the municipal and other officials he meets, his doctor, the police, the postman, the tax official. The anchors of the web represent the customs, habits and moral concepts of the community in which he lives. Each individual has his own personal web which varies in size and complexity, according to the impact he makes on those around him and the influence he wields in the community. His usefulness to and within the community is determined entirely by the freedom with which he is able to move in and about his web, his knowledge of its structure and the facility with which he is able to make contact with the correct position of the web at the correct time." Oscar Wolheim, "Peninsula's Tragedy of the Poor", Cape Times, 26.1.1959.*

of the elderly escalated with the forced removals and many ex-residents commented on this syndrome[1]. John Western writing about the social effects of the implementation of the Group Areas Act, says, *"many old people simply lack the resilience necessary to construct anew a social world around themselves, and they give up."* (1981:219). Working people were distanced from work-places and opportunities. A community used to public domain, such as streets providing a safe and lively arena for the rituals and mundane daily practise of community life and used to free and confident social intercourse, were cast into an alien situation where insecurity forced families behind the doors of their homes. From being able to move freely within a familiar network they became separated by new circumstances into single isolated family units, deprived of their support systems as well as their rightful habitat.

Effects of Removals

One major hardship for the resettled people was the product of the planners' ideology which depicted *"the basic working-class social unit as a nuclear family...[and] the fact that the basic social unit... was the extended family was simply ignored."* (Pinnock:1984:51). Speaking retrospectively of the 'spirit' that once prevailed, Anwar Nagiah says *"One's entire existence was then not as an individual, it was as a community!"* [2] The sense of losing what was known, familiar and dependable in the new circumstances was acute. The *"need to know on what I can rely"* (Gasset:1959:108) and the presumption by individuals of this reliance was severely undermined. Another intensely felt hardship was the disruption of communal religious life and the physical separation from traditional places of worship. In 1980/81 the situation was such that some of the new townships like Belhar Extension besides totally lacking facilities like shops, transport and clinics, had no mosque, Muslim school or church within easy reach, so that a traumatic break in the practise of religious life occurred. Latiefa Hendricks (see addendum, p.5), a young Muslim wife and mother suffering acutely the effects of environmental and cultural deprivation, said in 1981: *"I have lost my religion"*. Jung speaks of the 'natural religious function' of people and says that their *"psychic health and stability depend on the proper expression of this"* (Fordham:1966:69).

1 *A wellknown case in point was the death of 'the grand old lady of District Six', Mrs Mabel Dias on September 30, 1978. Rand Daily Mail, Oct 23, 1978.*

2 *One of the speakers at a conference on District Six, 9 July, 1988, Report in Muslim Views, July, 1988.*

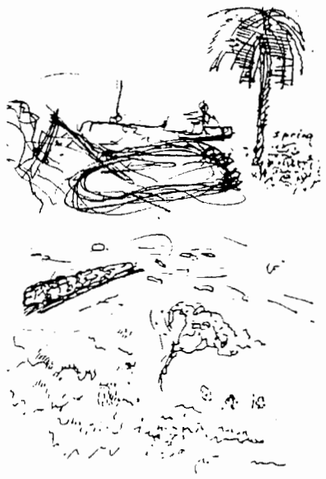
Children walking to school, District Six 1980

Riedewaan Bull (7 years) and Noer Bull (10 years) of 47 Constitution Street, and Michael Fortuin (9 years) of Highlands Peak

"The geography of disadvantage" (Western:1981:219) presented and generated immense social problems in the new as well as the older dormitory townships. The great distances from the city with related transport problems and expenses, the effects of unemployment, loss of the opportunities for subsistence provided by an 'informal' economy, and other economic hardships linked to the displacement were exacerbated by the disruption of social support systems. Without a secure social webbing to contain it, crime escalated and the more vulnerable individuals, women, children, the frail and elderly, deprived of the protective arena of community life, were suddenly at risk, and men struggled to make their homes and families secure.

In the vacuum of the socially structureless townships the growth and power of gang activity was unchecked. Indeed many young men and boys sought to combat rootlessness, joblessness and loss of 'community' through gang membership. Pinnock says, *"community structures simply fell apart. For this reason an understanding of 'Group Areas' relocations is not peripheral to a study of the gangs but lies at its very centre."* (1985:22) and Hallett speaks of the *"disastrous effects of the Group Areas Act, particularly in the removal of the population from District Six"* and *"the disturbing process of atomization"*[1]

The Geography of Apartheid



After the final removals nothing of District Six was left, except memory. The State attempted to erase even this by a radical restructuring of the terrain, drawing up a new map and changing the old place names (appendix 1). District Six became *Zonnebloem*. Hanover Street which once wound up the hill, the site of intense and varied commercial and social activity, thus constituting the spine of the place, was excised. A broad straight freeway was laid down in its place and named *Keisersgracht*, while Constitution Street became *Justisiestraat*. Except for the legally-safeguarded mosques and churches and a few rows of Victorian semi-detached cottages (whose profit potential had at the last minute been recognized and so saved from demolition and restored in anticipation of property market opportunities), the physical place was razed to the ground. The terrain was given a new urban geography: cobbled streets were ploughed up, landmarks, even old trees and flowering shrubs, fell before the machines. *"Thus it came about that... the old city was destroyed and rebuilt to a different rhythm."* (Pinnock: 1984: 22).

1 *"They (criminologists) speak of the disastrous effect of the Group Areas Act, particularly in the removal of the population from District Six. As a result of these removals, the complex structure of extended families and neighbourhoods, built up over four or five generations, was completely broken down. In their new homes on the Cape Flats people of District Six were housed as nuclear families. Further shifts and changes – women going out to work and leaving their children with no-one to look after them – could lead to an even more disturbing process of atomization." Robin Hallett. Cape Times, 2/9/80.*

Historical Memory

It is often noteworthy that the collective memory of the disinterested public is only as long as it takes to fill an empty site with new buildings; and that is short indeed. In the case of Group Areas removals throughout Cape Town an urgency was manifested to change the appearance of the sites in every conceivable way: through new road systems, new names, new building developments, new inhabitants. It is unsurprising therefore that even caring members of the enfranchised population can comfortably shop in a fashionable development like Cavendish Square, Claremont and claim ignorance of the settled community that lived there for generations until as recently as the seventies when the last families were evicted, or are able to savour the closeness of sea or mountain from century-old cottages in Green Point or Newlands without consciousness of the human history of their homes and environments.

No visible public record exists of the ill-fated communities who once lived throughout Cape Town to remind its citizens of this history. Official city bodies have made little attempt to commemorate the dispossessed communities publically and to preserve and communicate their experience on the actual sites they inhabited. In its prominent and enduring emptiness District Six has constituted a historical beacon, reminding us for twenty years not only of its own fate but of that of numerous other communities throughout Cape Town. Without nurture and rigorous retrieval the memory of the city remains vulnerable to manipulation and even erasure, especially as the old die holding the key to rich sources of oral history. Concern exists therefore not only for the historical conscience of the city but for the threatened loss of personal and community history to the new generation born of evicted District Six families, now growing up on the Cape Flats. This awareness has generated numerous projects, both written and oral, which collate in various ways the full history of the Western Cape. Current research, using their active participation, is introducing the first generation of Cape Flats pupils and students to their full history[1].

Faced with these actions against an officially designated section of the population, acts termed by Adam Small as *"human folly and earthly power abused"* (1986: 7), it is compulsive to ponder on the reasons why. Official explanations were certainly spurious, such as that of 'slum clearance'. At a conference on District Six in 1989 these official rationalizations were analysed. Bill Nasson, speaking of the early history, said that *"the Nationalist government used as its rationale for the eventual removal of District"*

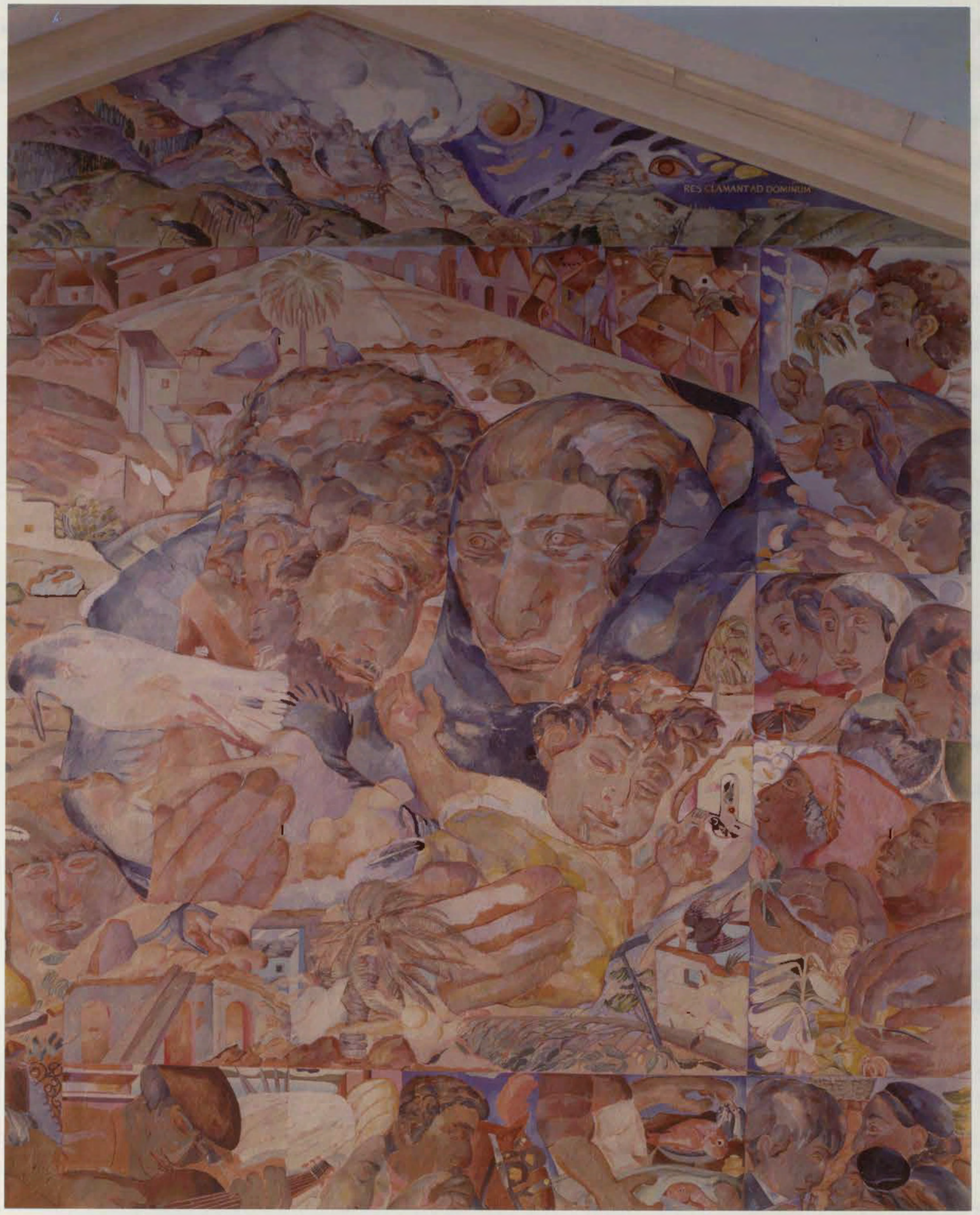
1 *e.g. The Western Cape Oral History Project co-ordinated by Dr Bill Nasson, U.C.T.*

Six its stereotype as a slum area", and he argued that poverty and overcrowding were largely a result of neglect and overcrowding by the city council and the State[1]. Over the years between the Declaration in 1966 and the actual removals, landlords, in anticipation of the impending evictions, and tenants through similar uncertainty, neglected maintenance of properties. Much of the motivation for population removals was imbedded in the ideological ambition of one group, which in turn spawned a system of social engineering to make concrete their ideal of 'spatial apartheid'. These ambitions became reality after the Nationalists won the election of 1948, largely through paying heed to white worker and trader demands for residential segregation and the removal of business competition.

Yet the causes were rooted deeper in time and political complexity and so could not in their totality be laid at the door of one ruling body. Responsibility should be ascribed to the wider society, its interest groups and representatives as there were many who gained from the losses experienced by victims of Group Areas removals. Rapid and excessive profits were made on the property market by estate agents and developers, and tempting opportunities were offered to individuals to acquire cheap, attractive and conveniently-situated homes. It was predominantly a buyer's market in the localities affected by Group Areas proclamations, with profits grossly disproportionate in relation to the rest of the property market (Western:1981:188). The individuals involved in this flourishing business like the state itself found a usefulness in euphemistic language and coated their real intent, with phrases like 'appreciating area' and 'gentrification'[2] The State did not act without a large degree of either silent consent or opportunistic collusion from many who stood to gain from the dispossession. To simplify the issue of responsibility, to forget any aspect of the events along with their causes and circumstances, as has happened before, would be to have learnt little which can contribute to the composite wisdom and historical good sense of a future society.

1 *Paper at District Six Conference 9 July, 1988. Report in Muslim Views, July, 1988.*

2 *Examples of the euphemisms of the property market. The first represents property redecoration in the taste of a different cultural group to that of the original owners. The latter refers to the process of displacement of a racially mixed community and consequent influx of a 'white' group.*


RES CLAMANT AD DOMINUM

The Changing City

A 'Segregation City' giving physical expression to the spatial separation of race groups already existed before the Nationalists came to power and through new legislation created an 'Apartheid City' (Davies:1986:6). The existence of the pre-Nationalist spatial segregation did not however come about through a natural grouping of the population but rather through deliberate urban planning projects which sought to marginalise and contain the geographical settlement of all groups of socalled 'non-white' inhabitants. Urban problems in the early part of the century, such as overcrowding, epidemics of infectious disease and acute housing shortages for the working class, were related to a range of causes such as the growth of manufacturing, increased demand for unskilled labour, lack of access to land and work opportunities in the rural areas, and population migration to the city generating a high rate of urbanisation, particularly during the Second World War. The Slums Act was used by the City Council in the mid-forties to 'clear up' squatter settlements, expropiate dwellings and other properties and relocate people in massive new housing schemes. The move from squatter settlements to new residential areas may have initially improved sanitation but did not lessen overcrowding; and in the new townships on the Cape Flats social problems quickly exceeded those of the old working-class areas like District Six which were close to the City centre. Living costs such as food, transport and child care increased, and low wages prevented individuals from entering the private housing market to improve their living circumstances (Le Grange:1985:16).

The racially segregated nature of these removals and resettlements, co-inciding with the emergence of segregation in other spheres such as education and public transport, led to the association of the City Council's housing policies of the forties with racial separation and control of population groups; and as such it met with strong objections from residents. Lucien le Grange discusses the demands for housing and the official responses with which they were met (1985:16) Opposition to the segregated housing policies was frequently voiced at the time but largely ignored by both central and local government.

> *"By 1947 the City Council had developed a spatial framework on the Cape Flats that gave physical expression to policies of segregation. Developments such as the Q-Town project successfully tested the Cape Administration's segregationist recommendations suggested twenty years earlier and gave substantial form to this separated spatial framework....It was this segregated housing provision and spatial structure which accommodated the Group Areas Act of 1950 without difficulty after the Nationalist Party victory of 1948."*
>
> (Le Grange:1985:19).

City Planning in the Forties

An urban vision compounded of certain social, economic and racial attitudes together with the need to solve serious problems of scale and location, found the concept of European 'Garden City' planning of the early 20th century influential in its own plans. Factors in Cape Town urban planning were derived from the 'radical surgery' approach of urban designer Le Corbusier and the 'Garden City' concept of the Englishman, Ebenezer Howard, and the possible misuse of those concepts. Howard's ideas were co-opted in the late 19th century to decongest London and create a ring of satellite suburban towns; and Le Corbusier states that; *"surgery must be applied to the city's centre. Physic must be used elsewhere. We must use the knife..."*(1929:258). It has not been difficult in this country to distort these approaches to urban design in the interests of commercial development and to the grave disadvantage of central urban communities.

The restructuring of Cape Town in the 1940's was based on schemes which located the work force along with industry, beyond the 'security zone' of green belt which encompassed the city. In 1940 detailed proposals for 'Slum Clearance Projects' by the chief architect of the French Government, Eugene Beaudouin, appointed by the City Council on specific urban planning projects, showed a strong influence of the 'surgical' aspect of Le Corbusier's approach. In his report of 1940 to the city council (Pinnock:1984:44), the radical restructuring of District Six was described as 'an opportune occasion' for the extension of a freeway towards the Cape Flats. Pinnock argues further that there were direct connections between the Foreshore scheme separating the central city from the sea, the destruction of the inner-city communities and construction of housing estates on the periphery. According to this viewpoint the destruction of District Six was presaged in the planning chambers of the city council 26 years before the announcement of its fate by the State in the Group Areas Declaration of 1966. This interesting contention awaits further research work.

Despite the massive housing developments of the forties on the outskirts, settled pockets of racially-mixed communities still survived throughout the city. Households as well as communities were economically and culturally heterogenous. They were not predominantly working-class but comprised artisans, craftsmen, business and professional people, and included both owners and those who rented their homes. A characteristic could be said to have been the tolerant absorption of economic, cultural and religious differences into cohesive and settled community life. Communities were integrated into different parts of the larger city where their particular nature, living patterns and characteristics became an inherent and recognisable aspect of that area. Thus

for example, the Protea Road community in Claremont, though small, contributed integrally to the range of recognizable urban characteristics of that particular part of the Southern suburbs; and the extensive communities on both sides of the inner city such as those of District Six, Schotche Kloof and Loader Street, left their stamp on central Cape Town.

When the fate of District Six was pronounced in 1966 it stood out with its population of at least 34,000 people against the history of a long line of besieged and crumbling communities (see appendix 2). Its predecessors being smaller, were more vulnerable. Their annihilation could be carried through more swiftly and unobtrusively, the occupants moved and the traces and memory of their occupation obliterated more rapidly than in the case of District Six. Being more extensive, its imprint remains prominent and it has retained and displayed the evidence of these events to the present.

> *"There it lies, then: the ground on which the District once lived for real: red earth of Table Mountain; empty now: and open mouth, wounded, and – as I say – screaming silently. And I know that even should this ground be built up again, this mouth will be crying beneath the new foundations. Indeed there is something quite final about the fall of District Six"*
>
> (Small: 1986: 5).

2. Introduction

"So short was time
That between morning and evening
There was no noon
And already on the old familiar ground
Stood mountains of concrete"

(from "Of the Crushing Impact of Cities")

(Brecht: 1976: 109)

2A: Background To Mural

In April 1980, looking West from Hanover Street, the mutilation of the city was apparent. A huge area lay raw and bare like a war zone. The grid pattern of streets, normally not visible in its entirety, was suddenly exposed on the scraped contours of the terrain. The location, inclusive of the slopes of Devil's Peak and Table Mountain, descended as far as harbour and city centre. Soon the last clusters of houses defining the upper reaches of the site would be gone, as if nature had repossessed for a moment the foundations of peak and mountain. Here and there faint interruptions in the flatness, queer-shaped fragments of buildings, showed through dust-haze. Some rows of linked houses still stood raised on the slopes; also mounds of rubble, twisted iron structures, reddish wounds in sun-baked walls. Mechanically landscaped, crumbling under the onslaught, the last features of the place eroded by the day. Yet like the first or last markings on a map, like a beginning or an end, mosques and churches still remained, separated by emptiness.

This was the final phase of the annihilation. As one process ended another began – the attempt to change the identity of the site through renaming and physical alteration. As the last traces of District Six were obliterated a radical planning and engineering process began to remould the old form with new roads and hasty buildings. The State's new creation, Zonnebloem, was intended to supersede both the location and memory of the original place. In 1978 the program of demolition and removals accelerated and in 1980 began to near completion (see addendum, p.5).. It seemed as if the intention was to raze the settlement as rapidly as possible. Only a small number of families who through hope of reprieve, belief in salvation, disbelief in the extensiveness of the act, courage in the face of ruthlessness, fear of the unknown, uncertainty, outrage – some or all of these

reactions – still remained[1]. Around them every familiar form changed and fell; communal spaces, homes, shops, streets, walls and the gardens within them.

Because of the sloping terrain many flights of steps once gave access to buildings or led from one level to another. Steps were thus a common feature of the ruins – flights of steps now leading nowhere, or crowned with rubble, and roofless shells of houses, roughened outside, yet with illuminated interiors reminiscent of the tinted lining of sea-shells. Yet schools remained nearby and in the area, and places of worship, some amongst the oldest of their kind in the country. Ex-residents still travelled from far afield to attend the churches, mosques and schools, and on most weekends activities and celebrations stemming from all sections and religious denominations within the community, such as fetes, dances and wedding receptions continued to take place in the hall of the Holy Cross Catholic Centre.

During an 18-month absence from the country I heard of the state's intensified drive to realise their vision of an Apartheid City and to erase District Six. All efforts by a great variety of representative groups and individuals failed to halt the process[2]. By early 1980 the noise of massive machines and dust clouds from the disturbed earth clung to the city with the sound and texture of destruction. For those who listened, voices that clamoured and cried out were ever-present. These were not only of dispossessed inhabitants but, because the excavation scooped out a visible and established part of the city's anatomy and drained much of its life-blood, the sense of loss spread wide amongst its citizens. The extent of protest represented an unusually widespread expression of social loss. The erosion of the city's human and physical fabric was so extreme that once completed the damage seemed irreparable, and it became evident that even if the place were to be physically reconstructed in a future era its lost social composition and community life could never be recreated. As the pace of demolition slowed, the last walls fell, and the human evacuation came to an end, little remained but the finality of the demise.

1 *Among the last inhabitants to leave were Naz and Harry Ebrahim and their family of Manley Villa, Rochester Road, who moved to Gatesville in July 1981, and Latiefa and Amien Hendricks and their family of Horstley Street, who moved to Belhar Extension a few months earlier. Naz Ebrahim, Latiefa and Amien Hendricks were the main informants guiding me in the formulation of the mural.*

2 *The Wolheim Collection in U.C.T Archives includes a comprehensive collection of press reports, letters and articles on District Six which document the extent of the protest.*

The upper reaches of the cleared area swept up onto the mountainside, while the sides were flanked by built-up areas representing the official boundaries of the condemned area. This act of social engineering, planned street-by-street on a State drawing-board, succeeded in annihilating in its entirety almost every aspect of a community just short of physical life; homes, environment, community life and the close and comfortable relationship of the inhabitants to their city; and attempted to replace it as swiftly as possible with a new urban identity. In the arena-like space, the last scattered structures stood like contenders, until they too were felled.

The boundaries of the site traversed mountain slopes to city centre, sea, and the residential neighbourhood south of the area. On the eastern edge lay the Holy Cross complex of buildings; school, church, community centre, convent and rectory. Southwards lay the shorn edge of residential Woodstock, Walmer Estate and historic Zonnebloem Training College, school, art centre and associated buildings. To the South-west the highest reaches of the site lay open, bordered by De Waal Drive and flowing into the mountain slope. From the west to the north the gradually heightening architectural skyline included central business development within the 'city bowl'. At sea-level, directly below the area, the north-eastern backdrop consisted of dockside with cross-hatched silhouette of shipping and cranes. Behind that lay the bay and deeper still the long mountain ranges which mark the interior. From the harbour itself the building line rose up the slope towards the Holy Cross centre on upper Hanover street.

These were the last days of the District and the moment in which the idea of the mural was generated. In the months before the turbulence ended in 1981, above the noise of demolition machinery and falling masonry, there were still residential voices and activity. The streets, many of them cobbled, were unnegotiable for normal traffic for lopped trees, fallen walls, hills of rubble and excavations blocked them in many places. Already grass was finding its way between cracks and paving-stones. Heavy-treaded wheels ground over the obstacles, through clay-brick dust, knocking, scraping, scooping, dumping. Every day people watched structures, possessions, plants and shrubs being flattened into the earth. The last stalwart residents awaited eviction; others returned from where they had been 'relocated' to look again or to search for belongings in the debris. School children negotiated the mounds of rubble and observers from outside the area came daily to note the destruction.

I too came to look and record. By seeing them being taken apart I noted how houses were made and embellished; the strange inner structures of roofs and walls; how painted interiors glowed as light fell through roof cavities. I was shown the way plaster had been shaped by tools handed down over generations. The physical scale of what was happening was too extensive to absorb in its entirety. Rather facts and details were perceived individually. People spoke of the particularities of their lives and of the place, and as I listened I sketched my observations in notebooks.

Notion of Community

Many people dwelled on their experience of the community in which they had lived. They spoke too in analytical and philosophical terms, exploring the notion of 'community', in particular the historically specific multi-faceted life they and their families had known in the District. When the term was used by informants (and people spoke vividly about community life without necessarily using the word), it was not intended in a 'loaded' political sense, (i.e. '*the* community') but instead with ironic consciousness of its gross misuse by statutory authority. An official body, euphemistically entitled 'Department of Community Development', was in fact the instrument of destruction of communities through the system of forced removals throughout the country. The term 'community' had been co-opted and corrupted by different political and social groupings as well as by the State, to project or obscure different agendas[1]. The components of an existing community are particular and unique, so if the notion is too abstracted or idealised it is readily in danger of being sentimentalised. It is a complex and elusive notion, amounting to more than the commonality of geographical, familial, racial or economic circumstances, so that sociologists and anthropologists seek continually to define the constants, if any, present in the concept. *"Communities do exist. People believe in communities, desire community"*. In analysing the usage of the term Thornton and Ramphele speak of *"an image of coherence ...[and that] the sociological existence of communities is founded on more or less intense social interaction among their members, which inevitably produces social boundaries defining them and giving them identity"*. They say further, *"Communities are dynamic, and are almost always in a constant state of flux, even when they are apparently most stable....Community is the unpredictable product of history, and the product of people. It is not the same thing as the category created by government or statisticians for reasons of their own. It must not be confused with 'society' for this is always much larger."* (1988:38). Earlier in the same essay they cite specific historical

1 *See the discussion on the constituents of community in the following: Thornton & Ramphele, 1988, p.29 – 39 and Western 1981, p. 163.*

instances and mention District Six as *"a diverse neighbourhood [which] had achieved a high degree of community awareness and cohesiveness"*.

The First Commentaries

As the last truckloads of rubble and building material were carted away, my informants attempted to reconstruct their community in this sense – in the memory-based recreation of the life and place they had known. They expressed an urgency to record the fact and nature of their existence, and said to me, as they said to many others, 'You must write about this, tell the world.' I replied, 'On that wall I will try and paint what you are telling me.' (appendix 4, p.112) My impulse was to make concrete, not the factual description alone which was too dense to be contained on one surface, but some other reality contained within their words, related to the concept of community. This is something to which many of us aspire, which we may have experienced at some point in our lives but may since have lost or rejected; which, as I listened, stirred recognition and memory; that which I had often sought to identify and saw and sensed as a common human need. Within the factual weave resided a deeper more abstract experience about human interrelationships, attitudes and the notion of 'belonging'; wider, more flexible and enduring than those of narrow family confines. What the narrators sought to communicate too was a belief in their own capacity to survive the present darkness. Their statements were indicative of *"the extent of human adaptability and the strength of the will to survive"*, and *"a testimony to the life that has survived"* (Berger:1969:99). Jung once said that *"art evokes those beneficent forces that enable mankind to outlive the longest night"*. In the case of the work which is the subject of this thesis, it can perhaps be said that there were beneficent forces present in the form of affirmative human impulses which provided a generative pre-condition to its existence.

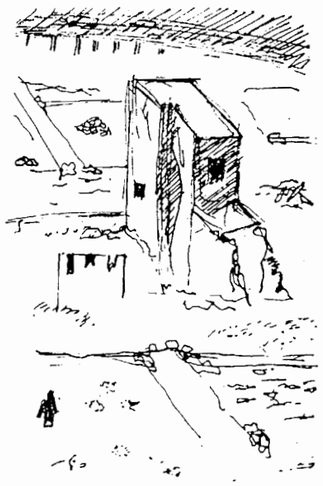
2b. Overview of Project

"The limitations of art relate to its content
as death does to life. If, while fully conscious of death,
we could concentrate our entire attention upon life,
what we experienced would acquire the quality of a work of art."

(Berger:1969:51)

In this way the study began, not from a single idea or impulse but arising with some inevitability from a composite set of circumstances. These factors were varied and generated a visual form which retained the imprint of multiplicity. In the preceding texts I have attempted in the first to summarise the historical and social parameters objectively, followed in the second by a subjective view of those same factors, describing thereby the essential background to the work; i.e. the context and its affective role in relation to the mural. The notion of study beyond the visual field itself was a crucial concern; that is, not only as a means towards making a work, but the work itself and its preliminary processes as a means of gaining further understanding of the situation in which it was sourced.

The Site



The mural is located on the highest slope of the South-Eastern corner of District Six. This represents the officially-declared boundary of the condemned area; thus the Holy Cross complex of buildings on the border survived and behind it the built-up residential areas of Walmer Estate and Woodstock still stand. All that existed in front and below this point, except for mosques and churches, have gone, including Hanover Street whose upper reaches ended between the Holy Cross and Zonnenbloem complex of buildings opposite. At the time of working on the mural and still at the time of writing, nothing lay between wall and mountain, and looking down the slope, very little between it and the city centre and harbour to the right and below. From the base of the mural situated one storey above ground, the space encircling it on three sides was, and still remains, a primary factor in the way the painting is seen.

The mural, measuring approximately 8 x 8.5 metres, forms part of the Holy Cross Catholic centre at the crossing of Searle Street and Keisersgracht (the freeway which displaced old Hanover Street). A platform 3 metres deep, at right angles to the wall and as wide as the mural, is formed by the roof of the bottom storey which juts out a little distance. The mural is thus one storey

above the road, extends to the height of the roof following its pointed gabled shape, and is set back from the pavement at the point at which the roof-platform juts out. The dimension of the mural surface, its height and elevated position 3 metres above ground level, allow clear perspectives, both of the wall itself and of its spatial context. The painting can be viewed close-up from the platform at its base, seen as a whole looking up from the pavement, at a greater distance from the island in the centre of the freeway, or even further from the rise beyond the road; and if the surrounding area becomes built-up in the future, these viewpoints will still provide clear visibility. At the time of writing, the mural in relation to its empty surroundings can still be seen from considerable distances, including the viewpoint of mountain slopes above the site. Once at the site the viewer simultaneously enters the spatial context in which the mural stands and is presented with an extensive view of the site and the state of the area. This inclusive spatial relationship is an integral aspect of the functioning of the work and a reflection of the non-autonomous nature and conception of the painting.

A certain set of problems, concerns and parameters existed at the beginning of the project. Some, related to the form and intention of the work, were to shift and change with the developmental process, and others, related to the documentary aims, remained fairly constant. The problem of combining the social role of the painting, the public accessibility and significance of its imagery, with adherence to the disciplines of pictorial form, was major concern, and this remained problematic as long as the project stayed in design form on the drawing board. Some intentions were unclear at the outset but reached more certainty through the work process. There were also pressures and dilemmas, some of less import than I had imagined, with which I had to come to terms. One of the greatest problems was the existence of pictorial, ideological and historical precedents: until the process could free itself of the imposition of these models and groupings and draw energy from within the limits of its own circumstances, direction could not be established.

Approaches and Contradictions

The work embodies that *"familiar crucial dilemma... the artist's duty to engage in society, versus the poet's wish for freedom of the imagination"*[1]. A fluctuation of personal alignments and tensions generated by seemingly polarised states, were thrown to the fore by the project. Recognition that both states – i.e. those of social engagement and of imaginative responses, and which in my case

1 *"The familiar crucial dilemma in Heaney most fully set out in Station Island: the artist's duty to engage in society, versus the poet's wish for freedom of the imagination." O'Donoghue, B., lecture on Seamus Heaney, Oxford, 1989, report in Oxford Today, Hilary Issue, 1990, p.2.*

had accompanied a long developmental process and were felt to be necessities requiring simultaneous acceptance – was reached at the point at which the work was made. Tensions had always existed in the shifting proportional relationship between the two stances. However in the case of the mural, it was not in spite of but perhaps because of this "crucial dilemma", that much of the central energy of the work was generated.

The different approaches in Historical Note and Background, can be explained in the following way. the former (p.1 - 12) is not a comprehensive history. It notes only those events, pre-conditions and circumstances which contributed in some way to the dissolution of the place and the community; for this one event was the initial generating factor for the study. Only those aspects directly related to the thematic development of the mural, and which featured centrally in the oral histories are included in this section. Objectivity was intended in the text and yet it was clear that already in the selection and grouping of facts, elements of subjective interpretation existed. I have been concerned here not to over-simplify the question of blame, but rather to suggest the existence of more compiex and comprehensive causes within wider aspects of society than that of the State alone, and that are normally acknowledged, and to pursue a personal need to gain insight into how and why these acts were allowed to happen. This history not only preceded the work but remained minutely threaded into the project, triggering responses and interpretations both in the art process and the oral expression of the narrators, thereby repeatedly recharging creative impetus and affecting procedural decisions. Consciousness of this particular history loomed large throughout the work process, remaining a dominant and in terms of the physical context, a visible backdrop, during the growth of the mural.

The approach in the second text (pp. 13 -17), in contrast, is subjective by nature and attempts to describe my own perceptions and responses to a specific moment with its details. These conditions triggered the generative impulse which sought in its turn, an appropriate equivalent. My response was essentially that of an individual whose life's circumstances on entering this situation would not be concretely affected. In witnessing the events in District Six I was exposed to the physical and human trauma of my own city, and in that sense experienced loss. Yet I remained an outsider, a recorder of events which tore apart the fabric of people's lives without materially changing my own. My observations remained those of a witness who heard words which could not adequately convey the experience they attempted to describe, and which lay outside my full understanding; nor was it possible to interpret with exactness the feelings of others or know or represent the full content of what was said. Yet I could speak for myself;

and the nature of my perception was that of a subjective interpretation of the expression of others, and of the concrete evidence before me.

The mural was thus based on my own feelings about my city and what befell it and its inhabitants, and its content is defined by the limits of my experience of the external factuality. Simultaneously it was fuelled by a perceptual process which assimilated information and found meaning through subjective means. The sense of necessity was not that of being visual vehicle for the expression of others, through to a certain extent this was so. Mainly it was an instinctive necessity to consolidate a diversely-sourced inflow of information into a unified body before it dissipated; to explore the nature and relationships of the different parts, and to pursue in the process the meanings evoked, but not necessarily defined, by the oral accounts.

The Role of Oral Commentary

The responsiveness of human beings to art's potentialities to represent not only what is immediate and visible, but to absorb and carry in some way their expressive yearnings is, I feel, not unrelated to the impetus that spurs creative action. By that I mean that the viewer or sitter, and the artist, have mutual but different expectancies about the capacities of art as a means of expression, and that the interchange is a productive one. This 'responsiveness' is evident in the way in which sitters may participate in an art process like portraiture by volunteering aspects of their histories to the artist. Tolstoy wrote that, *"by words man interchanges thoughts, but through the forms of art he interchanges feelings"*, and Malraux spoke of the "*deep craving of man's nature [to which] a work of art responds"* (1953:66) This participatory relationship consists of the expectation of the sitter and a responsiveness on the part of the artist to that "deep craving" through visual interpretation of what is seen, heard and imagined. I have come to recognize this two-way process as a bridge to the exterior world within creative procedure, and it remains a point of access.

In the case of the oral histories and shorter commentaries I heard, usually drawing whilst I listened, I was conscious of the fact that individuals needed to speak about particulars rather than generalities; and yet, through the continual sifting and re-arrangement of facts and details they sought to interpret experience and to establish some kind of perspective. Ortega y Gasset wrote that *"to live is to interpret life"*, and that the human past cannot be *"a basic continuity of loose facts, without structure, form or law... This means that the true nature, the reality, of that fact lies not in what it may seem to hold as a raw and isolated happening, but in what it may signify in that man's life."* (1959:16). A basis of emphatic detail preceded the mural and projected a character of

particularity into the design. I wanted to retain the specific nature of the commentaries and to explore the possibilities of visual interpretation through this means, despite the dangers of over-descriptiveness. I concur with the view that *"there is no inherent contradiction between an artist's depiction of the socially and historically specific and the transhistorical and universal"* (Cooper:1986:4), but felt in this case that the route through specific historical and social detail was the authentic one, and that this would be a primary focus.

The major and most persistent source for the mural was that of oral histories and these directed me to secondary sources such as those of archives and museums. The oral material affected not only the descriptive and narrative elements in the design but the abstract language of the painting. The narrations took place intensively during the last period of demolition from mid 1980 to mid 1981 as a small number of inhabitants each faced in their own way their inevitable displacement. It could be said that whilst facing the termination of a major aspect of their existence they simultaneously concentrated their "entire attention upon life" in attempting through oral expression to define its constituents, as perceived and experienced by them. The narrations were continued in a more extended, less urgent way after these events, in close and influential relationship with the development of the painting, and affected the pace and manner in which thematic emphases shifted and consolidated. The narrators were mostly erstwhile residents or individuals with close knowledge of the place. Their oral contributions continued, together with those of new contributors who came to view the work-in-progress, during the two-year period in which the mural was formulated and executed, informing and influencing its content until completion in February 1985.

Painting as Memory

Central to the narrations was an urgent concern, repeatedly expressed, that what had existed and been experienced would be forgotten, that a process bent on changing the physical and oral indentity of a place was also intent on erasing its history. Hence the plea to 'tell the world' and my response that I would fill the blank space of that wall with a visual record marking the existence of this 'place and time'. The concept of 'visibility', of making a pictorial remainder of historical memory and experience, was thus probably the dominant motivation in the project.

The resolve to make a mural on this one prominent undamaged wall surface grew out of the consolidation of primary factors which were rooted in the immediate context. These were; the appropriateness of the wall in terms of location, form and scale; the

felt need to visibly commemorate the site, the density and diversity of source material, the availability of the surface as an immediate means to counter the sense of mounting 'invisibility', and with it to record, prominently and without delay, the oral expression of those who spoke and wanted to be heard. Language was an important influence in the project. The nature and content of the language to which I listened generated another source of imagery and visual equivalents. It was as if the outrageous corruptions of official language, which lightly masked the actions of the State, made the exact and truthful verbal recall of events and circumstance imperative[1]; and the statement related to a wide historical perspective, that *"the defilement of the language precedes and prepares the defilement of life and dignity"* had a particularly pertinent application in this specific historical instance[2].

1 *Many official phrases were contradictions in themselves. "The Group" (an ironic term given to Group Areas 'spokesmen') spoke of the "upliftment" of targeted groups whilst destroying the homes and communities of the people concerned: the removals were orchestrated by the Dept. of "community development": human displacement was called "slum clearance": low-grade housing in deeply problematical and remote new townships was referred to as "suitable alternative accommodation". In conversation with Naz Ebrahim and other commentators.*

2 *"Tyranny, oppression, moral degeneration, persecution and mass killing have always and everywhere started with the pollution of the language, making it sound clean and decent where it should have been base and violent... Wherever war is called peace, where oppression and persecution are referred to as security, and assassination is called liberation, the defilement of the language precedes and prepares the defilement of life and dignity. In the end, the state, the regime, the class or the idea remain intact where human life is shattered."(Oz:1986:19).*

3. Conceptual Framework

Scope of art-historical relationships

At the outset of the project I had no clearcut art-historical context to provide a guideline. Although I had made a study of contemporary mural precedents and had practical experience of the form[1], no model provided more than a limited parallel and it was the contextual circumstances from which the mural arose rather than art-historical precedent which were the primary sources and influenced the scope of references. Influential examples were diverse and ranged widely in time from Pre- and Early Renaissance frescoes to Early and Late 20th Century painting; from sources in Europe and North America to those located in Mexico and Southern Africa. The common denominators were perhaps those of figuration and thematic or contextual social relationships in the works. Some aspect of every individual example or movement cited touched directly on those concerns of mine which comprised the conceptual framework of the project. Some were related to social commentary; others were broader-based, rooted in what I consider essentials of creative experience, expressed through the cumulative insights of artists over centuries. The determinants of influence at times generated both negative and positive responses. A case in point was Léger's simultaneous rejection of easel painting (see p.36) and inspirational promotion of murals (see p.52) and a social role for art. Urban mural painting also provided models that demonstrated both acceptable and unacceptable elements – of poor form and craft on the one hand and dynamic function on the other (see pp. 57 - 58). Examples cited did not necessarily have a direct relationship. For instance, not all were large-scale murals or explicit social/historical commentaries: but all were primary or important influences in my development and were relevant to the evolution of the project. Other factors took the form of subjective responses to influences that were felt to be intrusive or inappropriate to the contextual development of the work. Examples which generated negative stances were for instance certain visual conventions in local and international 'protest art', and perceived assumptions about mural form.

1 *Two large-scale murals executed in the sixties alerted me to certain aspects of the potential of muralism. In the first, six large murals were executed in tempera on a circus theme in the wards of the Maitland Cottage Hospital for Crippled Children. The murals are no longer in existence. The memorable experience in this case was the act of working within an active social context, and the responses of the children played a dynamic part in the development of the design. The second case was that of a mural commissioned for the Republic Festival. A freestanding 100 ft (35 m) mural in oil paint on canvas with a history of 'white settlement' theme. I was one of two assistants to Russell Harvey. A film record exists. Designed to be erected on a spiral ramp in a pavilion. In this case the structure was noteworthy and I have kept in mind the spatially autonomous properties of this mural which could be rolled up, its supporting structure dismantled and erected in different venues.*

Past exposure to influential artworks and theory was largely sourced abroad. The reasons for this emphasis lay in the Western-based traditions of art training in this country; a bias in this direction in the acquirement of published and other visual material; extensive exposure to secondary and foreign sources; and the focus of the 'art world' in general on prevailing trends abroad. Although there had been opportunities to see works of art in the original in European galleries, the bulk of my formative art-historical influences derived from the study of indirect sources in the form of reproductions. However, by the time I began the mural project I had studied both centuries-old frescoes and contemporary urban murals in Europe in the original. In addition, there were sources of interest within the radius of my home ground, as well as an urgent need to work within the ambit of direct visual engagement.

For the purpose of this section I will summarise the art-historical experience I consider formative and pertinent to the work in four sub-sections; A. A Sense of History; B. Influential Models; C. Related Concerns and D. Mural Precedents. Included within this discussion are some speculative points arising out of concerns with the social function of art, which I consider centrally related to the aims of the project.

Art-historical precedents that influenced my thinking had several facets. The relationship was not a vertical one of background and influence. Rather it was complex and ambivalent; re-examinating aesthetic parameters whilst seeking to locate formative elements and constants. It was a multiple engagement, simultaneously wishing to loosen bonds with a specialised environment and to relocate within the ordinary world; standing back from a Western-based art history, yet acknowledging the permanence and value of what had been absorbed; affirming a local identity yet acknowledging those diverse facets which informed my hybrid consciousness.

A. A Sense of History

A primary concern at the time the mural began was the notion of 'a sense of history'[1]. I saw the visual arts in its two-dimensional form as a means to re-examine neglected or excluded social history with particular emphasis on recording aspects of the present. My concern lay with the potential of painting to act as historical beacon, that is, as symbol and key to social memory at a time when the conservation of that broad and eventful history in all its particularity was in danger. It also offered a means of uncovering aspects of history which, because of the schisms and dislocations in this society were not easily apparent[2]. I was interested in testing narrative and pictorial possibilities as a means of sifting and synthesising observations of contemporary life in order to establish a symbolic visual unity.

Graphic Commentary

Prints and drawings have a long and honourable role as social commentary and the artistic achievements of Europe, America and Mexico in this field have enriched our perspectives and helped preserve historical memory. Though names like Daumier, Kolwitz, Steinlen and Posada are synonymous with graphic commentaries, it is less apparent perhaps that a large number of art history's best-known painters, among them Courbet, Manet, Millet, Van Gogh, Signac, Pissarro, Roualt, Klee, Ensor, Shahn, Orozco and Rivera, to name only a few, used graphic means effectively and prolifically in addition to painting[3]. This heritage of graphic commentary over centuries illustrates the contention that *"drawings, personal and immediate, are the closest we can get to an artist's spontaneous reaction to a circumstance"*. I was strongly influenced by those artists who drew *"to increase the works of the imagination while demanding honesty of society"* and in so doing tried *"to close the gap between ideal and practise"* (Shikes:1969:xxiv); and the constancy and immediacy of these works were an influential model to me as a painter. In addition as a practitioner I appreciate the definitive qualities of graphic art, both as a direct means of engaging with the visible world and as a vital adjunct to painting, and in this sense I regard the graphic discipline as a central component of two-dimensional practise.

1 *In an interview Art Spiegelman, artist, teacher and writer notes the lack of historical knowledge he has observed in art students and stresses the importance of artists having 'a sense of history'. (Terkel:1988:35)*

2 *There are multiple examples of hidden history in this country; textbook distortions, legislated suppression of facts, geographical manipulation ie. demolition of settlements, changed street layout and place-names, distortions of language and in the case of individuals, evasion of knowledge and lack of will to inform themselves. Oral history projects throughout the country are attempting to save much of our unwritten social history.*

3 The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso, *Shikes, R.1969. Provides comprehensive documentation to the wealth of prints and drawings in this field. Included are examples of the work of all the major figures such as Bosch, Goya, Daumier, Beckman and Grosz as well as less wellknown commentators from Europe and the Americas.*

Prints and drawings have always been means of commentary more accessible than painting in terms of reproduction, circulation and economy, and through the medium of literature, posters and pamphlets, and still is so today. In part this is because the monochromatic form remains dynamic in reproduction whereas a reproduced painting is seriously deprived of its material presence, scale and exactness of colour values. Since the decline of fresco painting in Europe and the rise of easel painting in the 16th century, through until the Mexican Mural Renaissance in the 20th century, painting gradually lost ground in society as a readily accessible and familiar art form. My interest has been evoked by the perceived loss of a social role for painting and the potential I judge to exist in this country for painters with these concerns to re-enter this arena.

In the debate surrounding Albie Sachs' paper, 'Preparing Ourselves For Freedom'[1]. Karen Press speaks of *"the artist's capacity to surprise and enrich an audience – by offering them an interpretation, a re-telling, a celebration of their reality that they could not have asked for in advance...[this] is a great part of what makes art valuable to people. And this capacity is in no way contradictory to the idea of art as progressive, politically conscious or socially responsible"* (1990:69). In Gavin Younge's response to the debate he quotes artist Sipho Hlati explaining, "*What I mean by using 'art as a weapon' is [to] actually reveal the conditions, day to day activities and just leave it to teach these conditions through art"* (1990:81).

A Social Role for Painting

There is potentially a public role and an appropriate space for painting within the arena of daily life. I believe in the possibility of painters with the pre-disposition to work in this field revealing their observations of the historical process responsibly, but on their own terms; meaning by this, in a varied and non-prescriptive way – rather in the same way that official War Artists were employed in Europe earlier this century. In addition my concern is with extending the space that painting can occupy,from public galleries to an architectural context and from static site-bound murals to those produced on mobile surfaces[2]. This would of course be productive only for those painters with the predisposition and interests to take on this direction, so such notions are not in the nature of a directive.

1 *Prepared for an A.N.C in-house seminar on culture, it reached South Africa via its publication in the Weekly Mail, February 1990.*

2 *For example, I think here of the tradition of intricate pictorial banner painting for guilds and unions in Britain; and travelling religious paintings on large canvas surfaces which were unfurled and displayed in different venues in the United States early in this century. There are other possibilities that are under consideration such as structures that can support wall-size paintings on canvas which can be dismantled and reassembled. The advantage besides mobility would be the independence from architectural support.*

Painting of this kind, while committed to social concerns, should however be disinterested and reveal specific and uncompromised insights rather than be a channel for generalised political rhetoric, whatever the persuasion. A recent paper highlights the danger of art's *"inherent secondary status associated with political movements"* and asks: *"...will culture come to mean primarily political culture?"* It continues, *"The task facing cultural theorists, critics and historians is to devise ways of ensuring that cultural practise and aesthetic experience be conferred a place of equal importance to political and economic design...not as that which 'lags behind' material conditions, or ensures political cohesion, but as that which is itself imbued with moral and political power"*(Nolte:1991:26). Socially-contextualised art should be able to depict the human effects of historical processes as evidenced in the lives of ordinary people in an independent way. Despite their efforts to grapple with and perhaps even gain a measure of control over the forces brought to bear on their lives, they continue on the whole to show the effects of major social processes in the essential circumstances of their existence as well as in the 'details of everyday'. It is the potential documentation of these everyday manifestations of an era that I find of particular interest.

Mass Media

Today with the development of mass media such as magazines, film, television and advertising, the world more than ever before is being understood and perceived through man-made images, sounds and gestures. Climactic events like love, death, war, social upheaval and revolution are now interpreted through entertainment as much as through direct experience, religion and politics. *"The dead on both sides in Vietnam – efficiently slaughtered by technology – have told their tales at firesides wherever the invention of television has carried them. That paradox, and what it means, that mixing of news and entertainment, morality and sensation, is a key one for the contemporary world and the quality of our lives in it."* (Baynes:1970:16) The nature of society has changed since the industrial revolution and equally decisive has been the related change in the role of art. As a direct result of technological innovation, culture – with the exception of 'high art' – has on the whole become a mass culture that is overt and accessible on many levels. Socalled 'high art' has lost the social role and content which was once its condition in the way that Giotto and Piero della Francesca's frescos and Gothic cathedrals fulfilled such a function. However, with the gain brought by the media in increased information and awareness of current events in the world, has come a retreat of the fine arts to galleries and institutions, losing in the process the visible and familiar public role of aesthetic and metaphoric language and the long-term symbolic value of individual works. Simultaneously, the sensibilities and judgment of people become blunted through the daily intrusion of those media forces which are aesthetically impoverished and exploitatively directed.

Public Art

If painting wishes to reach a broad public, in the form of murals for instance, it should do so without taking on the guise, stridency or tone of the media, by stepping beyond the artist's subjective arena of practise and bringing the direct material presence, subtlety and complexity of individual expression into public life, thereby making it a familiar part of that environment. If, however, the exigencies of form, and the peculiar demands of sustained visual language are less rigorously resolved than would be the case in a specialised forum, for any of the many reasons that contribute to the aesthetic failure of public works[1], then meaning and communicative power would not be realised. Ben Shahn, referring to Goya writes,

> *"Beauty? Yes, it is beautiful, but its beauty is inseparable from its power and its content. Who is to say when a weeping face becomes a trenchant line? And who may presume to know that the line might have been trenchant apart from the face? Who can say that this passage of colour, that formal arrangement, this kind of brush-stroking could have come into being were it not for the intensity of belief which demanded it?"*[2]

For a painting to be enduring in the sense of being memorable it needs to have 'intensity of belief'. It needs also be informed by acute consciousness of the external world but without allowing the kind of interference that dislodges the artistic judgment and rigour of the artist. (The aesthetic horrors and confusion of 'generalised' art works, e.g the classic public building mural, whether post office or railway station, Cape Town or Chicago, mosaic or paint, are wellknown and lamented). This role, seeking to establish a constant environmental presence, differs radically from the visual presence of the media-based disciplines which are characterised on the whole by swiftness of production, topicality and ephemerality. Integral to this view of art fulfilling a particular role is the belief in the perceptive abilities of its audience, which seem to survive despite the pervasive influence of various media forces.

In our heterogenous society a publically-functioning art should reflect the diversity of visual language and perceptions of its artists and in so doing they should feel free to express themselves within the limits of their own experience and expressive capacities. In addition I feel that the past should remain part of present and future historical consciousness, because the danger in every society in flux, of remoulding existing history, of sweeping some part of it under the carpet of current national identity threatens the wholeness of that potential culture. Perhaps no monument should ever tumble, no plaque be removed, whatever the sentiments. All of these should survive together with those art works still to come which must record metaphorically the nature of

1 *e.g. Because of lack of artistic conviction, pictorial banality, or a misconception about the perceptive capacities of the viewers.*

2 Shahn. B. The Shape of Content. *p. 96.*

our time and, added together, act as reminders of our common history. The following quotations call for a particular and different emphasis in historical consciousness which applies equally well to the visual field. The Mexican writer, Carlos Fuentes said, *"We must go forward – but we cannot kill the past in doing so, for the past is part of our identity and without our identity we are nothing";* and Martha Gellhorn wrote, *"We have before us the memory and the lesson: let us not imagine that anyone can use frightfulness in a good cause"* (1988:87).

Painters of History

Painting does not possess the means to document and mirror society with the comprehensiveness of film and photography, but the capacity of the discipline for the imaginative and material transformation of historical facts, as well as the symbolic and metaphorical nature of those records, engaged my interest. I noted the heights of achievement reached by certain artists working with this kind of purpose within highly-defined, fields of reference and noted too the loss of formal power and content that sometimes occurred with departure from those locations and a return to predominantly subjective concerns.

The cases of two very different kinds of social commentator whose lives spanned an almost identical period of time are illustrative: Stanley Spencer (1890-1959) and George Grosz (1893-1959). The former was an exceedingly insular, idiosyncratic and religious painter who left his native village, Cookham in England, only as an official War Artist in World War 1; and the latter, Berlin-born Grosz, was a powerful critical commentator of the nature of Weimar society up to the time that Hitler took power. Spencer's later work was characterised by subjective claustrophobia and loss of visionary power as compared to his earlier war theme paintings which are widely regarded as among the outstanding British paintings of the century. (Fuller:1983:88). Grosz characterised his own work not as *"documents of class struggle, but eternally living documents of human stupidity and brutality"* (Hess:1974:240). He fled Germany in 1933[1] and settled in America where he sought new directions. There the acuteness of his commentary was dissipated and he succumbed eventually to loss of creative focus and despair, symbolised by the persistent 'Painter of the hole' images (Hess 1974:226). In addition he suffered that loss of identity and sense of not being fully 'understood' that is often the lot of an exile, an experience which has also touched the creative lives of many South African exiles[2].

1 *He left only eighteen days before the Nazi terror began and thus only narrowly escaped death. His books and those of his friends were burnt and left-wing artists, writers and poets were defamed, imprisoned, murdered, exiled or silenced, (Hess:1974:179)*

2 *Nat Nakasa, the gifted young writer who died in New York in the sixties, Azaria Mbatha the graphic artist who lost creative impetus in Sweden and Dumile Feni who died October 1991, aged 52, come to mind.*

B. Influential Works

My own interests often lie with those works where the tension exists in the interface of external objective and subjective perceptions; those which simultaneously describe appearance and encapsulate individual insights. Without seeking visual influence overtly, this engagement assisted me in establishing conceptual and directional concerns. Narrative painting of the 19th century, although engrossing as social documents[1], and 20th century Social Realism have largely failed to interest me, mainly because of their failure of form as a vehicle of meaning, their excessive dependence on description and an impoverished material process, therefore offering little of value in terms of reference value for the mural.

War Artists

Restrictive demands upon painters to look beyond personal experience and to harness their varied skills for the purpose of depicting and interpreting an observed reality, have often produced powerful works. A number of examples functioning as visual symbols for complex events, were to the forefront of my awareness at the time the mural was conceived. Some of these were depictions of war by official War Artists. The 'emotional symbolism of form itself' (Fuller:1983:90) emerging from the union of 'personal imagination' and the 'experience of the world as seen' resulted in works like Spencer's visionary "Travoys" (1919) showing mule-born stretchers arriving at a dressing station during a battle in Macedonia. His work of this period does not refer directly to the horrors of war, but in his words rather 'found a sense of peace in the middle of confusion'. The memorial murals at Burghclere chapel (1927-1932), compared favourably by John Rothenstein to Matisse's chapel at Vence (Fuller:1983:88), show all these qualities. In "The Resurrection of the Soldiers" on the east wall the theme is a regenerative one; it depicts the factual turmoil of a battleground with massed detail of mud, horses and figures, yet the spirit of the work is affirmative and the soldiers are in the act of rising from the dead.

Other examples include Paul Nash's stark depiction of a deserted and decimated battleground in the painting, "We are Making a New World" (1918); the extensive series of Spencer's documentary wartime drawings of Clyde shipbuilders which I was able to study closely at a comprehensive exhibition in London in 1980 and Henry Moore's drawings of the London Underground being used as bomb shelters in World War 11. In the case of Nash (1889-1946) too, his development and direction as a painter were accelerated by his commissions as official War Artist in World War 1, during which time his romantic visionary approach to

1 *Lucie-Smith, E. and Dars, C.,* Work And Struggle: The Painter As Witness, *Paddington Press, London 1977, this publication provides comprehensive documentation of the work of narrative painters in Europe during the period 1870-1914.*

landscape was united with certain aspects of Surrealism. Edward Lucie-Smith judges him one of the most important artists of the inter-war period in his essay 'The Story of British Modernism'. (1989:11)

The interplay between heightened individual perception and external factual material in these works interested me. For example, Nash's pictures of both world wars demonstrate the way in which images that fit into personal artistic vision are located. The peacefulness of his early pantheistic landscapes carries over into his war paintings, while the sparseness and compositional order of his "We are Making a New World" generate completely different meanings to those of the battlefield chaos depicted in photographic documentation of World War 1. In World War II he painted subjects like the rhythmic hulks of destroyed German aircraft and aircraft trails in the sky with lyricism, yet the implications of war are not denied by visual poetry but implied instead are through absence and the nature of opposites: in other words, through the capacity of the imagination to soar away from horror. The same elements – particularity of vision combined with factuality – can be seen in the first world war paintings of C.R.W.Nevinson, "French Troops Resting" (1916) and the brightly-hued "Parachutes" (1941) by Eric Kennington in the comprehensive collection of the Imperial War Museum, London. Henry Moore described how his fine series of shelter drawings began through a moment of recognition when he saw the tunnels of the London Underground filled with 'his' reclining figures: the event thus matched his lifelong obsession (Baynes:1970:23).

Social Commentary

I refer to British War Artists without for a moment wanting to promote deep social trauma as a means of artistic growth, but to make a point about sense of purpose and the functional potential of art. I was conscious too of the classic European commentaries: amongst these the eighteenth century engravings of English society by William Hogarth; Goya's "Horrors of War" etchings (1810-1820), a lament for the suffering of the Spanish people during the struggle against Napolean, and his subsequent cycle of drawings (1818-1824); Grosz's pre-Nazi Germany; Käthe Kolwitz's (1867-1945) unabated recording of the social history she perceived; and Picasso's mural, "Guernica", which marks the German bombing blitz of the Spanish town on 29th April 1937[1]. Goya's work demonstrates dramatically the complexity of the interaction between art, everyday life and the imagination. Malraux

1 *Picasso began work on the mural Guernica within days after the bombing of the town. It was housed in the building of the Spanish Government-in-exile at the World Fair in Paris, 1937.*

Goya, *"The element 'from life' in the Disasters and the Caprichos, is indeed slight.... Like all artists Goya eagerly probed reality for what he needed; a gesture, a kind of lighting, very often an expression, by isolating them from their surroundings and by introducing them into his dream, the dream to which they had given shape"*[1] Most noteworthy in Kolwitz's work is its basis of intensive observation of her subjects. She said, *"... my real motive for choosing my subjects almost exclusively from the life of the workers was that only such subjects gave me in a simple and unqualified way what I felt to be beautiful... And portraying them again and again opened a safety valve for me: it made life bearable"* (Shikes:1969:259).

European Models

At this point in my own development, the beginning point of the mural project, I leant towards a static and symbolic, non-expressionistic kind of figuration, and the works that affected me with the most immediacy had all or some of these qualities. I sought and responded to those works in which meaning was distilled and projected through all the elements, both formal and representational. The European models that affected me most enduringly, ranging in time from Giotto and Cimabue to Spencer, representing thus a wide time and cultural span, all had a measure of these properties. The fresco cycles of Giotto (1267-1337) and those of his followers, among the great achievements of the Christian art of the late Middle Ages, as also those of Piero della Francesca (1410-1492) more than a century later, have never waned in their influence since my earliest exposure to art history. These came to the fore again as my interest in muralism developed. Some fifteen years after first seeing the images of Giotto, Cimabue, Sassetta and Piero della Francesca in book plate form, I visited Arrezzo, Padua, Assissi and Siena and saw the frescos in the original. In these paintings I responded both to their full form and to their particularities, and to the synthesis and significant role of every visual element, and to their totality in the sense of visual synthesis. This mode strongly displays the unity of non-figurative and figurative components; and I found that union meaningful, despite the historical distance from my own point in time. Also of interest were the narrative techniques, particularly the ploy of showing two phases of action within one frame.

"Piero della Francesca was, apart from everything else, a master of the integrated view of metropolitan life. He could characterise a city as exactly as any painter who ever lived. No one ever had a keener sense of fact, or could do more with the details of everyday: the graining of a plank, the edging of a gutter, the broad band of a dog-collar. He did not generalise. He was interested to make a noble space, and he knew how to make one: better, perhaps, than anyone in history. But he also knew that fact has its own nobility, and he knew how to conjoin the two."

(Russell:9:1968)

1 *Malraux, A. Saturn. An Essay On Goya, published in Britain in translation by C.W.Chilton, Phaidon Press, 1957.*

In a similar spirit, when approaching the twentieth century I have been drawn to works that share these qualities and generate a similar emotive power for me. The massive painting "La Guerre" (1894), also called "The Ride of Discord", is a major model. The monumental (1.14 by 1.95 m) work by Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) was inspired by the late 14th century Apocalypse hangings in Angers cathedral and completed by him before the turn of the century (Le Pichon:1982:222). The symbolic power and interplay of all formal and figurative elements as well as the explicit imagery in this work (to which the artist added the comment, "It passes, terrifying, leaving despair, tears and ruin everywhere"), possesses a vividness and force that continues to be felt and to evoke experiential equivalents in this century. Its roots lie in the specific history of its time and yet it is also of all time. It recalls too the sustained thematic tension of Cimabue's late 13th century "Crucifixion" in S. Domenico, Arezzo; and Giotto's "Lamentation of Christ" and "Last Judgment" in the Arena Chapel, Padua and the "Massacre of the Innocents" in Assissi.

In 'The Voices of Silence' Malraux wrote, *"The Douanier Rousseau...joins the most remote popular domain...he is less a naif than the translator of an age-old language...The horse in War is that of a Magdalenian painting. The greater paintings of Rousseau are tied to a past without history"* (LePichon:1982:216). This work and the lithographs (commissioned by Alfred Jarry for his journal "L'Imagier") became effective models at the time. Le Pichon notes that the Guernica was made under the twofold influence of Goya's and Rousseau's "La Guerre" (1982:224).

The quiet emotional key and sense of containment in some of Spencers major works such as the Burghclere cycle of murals and the two murals at the Tate made a profound impression on me. This essential spirit which characterises many of Spencer's works are fully realised at Burghclere. *"He shows them as being offered up in all the profound innocence of that which is no more, released at last from the hellish torment of cities and of time, still intact but henceforth inaccessible...they are like creatures who were once beheaded and now, newly risen from the dead, retain that dreamy look that harmonises with the shockingly natural*

universe around them"...(Camus:1968:32). Camus writes here about Balthus but the words evoke certain qualities of Spencer equally well. These impressions were recalled when I sought a visual parallel for the phenomenon of social violence, the central subject of my mural, yet found myself resistant to a negative content. In Spencer's works the emotional character is defined through finely weighted formal balances in the relationships of colour, light, shape and compositional rhythms, more than through narrative explication.

The murals at the Tate, "The Resurrection" (1923-26) and "Christ Carrying the Cross" (1920) were seen at first hand in 1973, a time when 20th century figurative painting was relatively undervalued and the works were consequently poorly lit and displayed. Nevertheless so powerful a response was generated in me by the paintings that their influence remained one of the most formative, resurfacing more than a decade later when I made my mural. Once again the influential factors were not those of form alone but of a sustained spirit, rigour and the contribution of every element, even the smallest, towards elucidating content.

Some Independent Painters

Two areas in which I had an enduring interest were those 20th century American and English painters who retained a figurative language, a large measure of artistic independence and in many cases even an insularity in the face of the fluctuating currents of contemporary art movements from the 1920's to the present day. In 1927 Edward Hopper (1882-1967) wrote of compatriot artists *"who are no longer content to be citizens of world art, but believe that now or in the near future American art should be weaned from its French mother"* (Levin:1980:5). In cases like the Americans Hopper and Neel, and British painters Spencer and Auerbach, their inward perspective, particular locations and rootedness in immediate experience contributed to their intensity of vision. Because of a degree of artistic insularity, out of personal choice, an ongoing involvement in the human figure as subject, and the way in which I was bound by the subject matter in my mural, my long-standing interest in these works and artistic concerns were once again stirred in a way that was pertinent to the work at hand.

British Painting

The 'resurgence' of British painting in the seventies (Hicks:1989:11) showed that it was largely rooted still in a continuum of national traditions, amongst them: figuration, landscape and narrative. The 'image-laden, passionate, individualistic, well-executed painting' (Higgins:1989:75) of the present-day generation of painters was not preceded by a vacuum in the discipline. Yet sweeping announcements of the demise of painting in the fifties and sixties seemed to claim that this was the case. Even as early as the

forties easel painting was declared dead by figures as diverse as Fernand Léger and Victor Passmore, and by the sixties painting was pronounced 'in crisis' (Hicks:1989:11).

However, diverse and undeterred painting persisted throughout the century, although, as in the case of Bomberg, it was often undervalued; and this living continuity preceded and indeed kept open the possibility for the internationally acclaimed 'revival' of the seventies. The young painters of this productive period readily acknowledge these influences and precepts from 'father figures' such as Nicholson, Nash, Sutherland, Sickert, Spencer and Bomberg (Higgins:1988:75). Perhaps the 'new spirit' invoked in place of the declared demise is a perception confined to the onlookers of the international art world rather than shared by the painters themselves, who have been, if not fully recognized, at least unflagging in their endeavours throughout the century. My hypothesis is that many painters tend to keep working in their own way because it is more productive for them to do so – through pressure of creative necessity, consistency of artistic impulse and *within the bounds of their own experience* – rather than through reference to shifting external prototypes.

Lucie-Smith cites four artists as "*of major importance for understanding British art in the 1980's*": Stanley Spencer, David Bomberg (1890-1957), Francis Bacon (b.1909 Dublin) and Lucian Freud (b.1922 Berlin). All of them "*were deeply resistant to categorization*" and Spencer proved "*unassimilable to any art movement*" (Lucie-Smith:1989:39). The fortunes of these four varied considerably. Bomberg became a neglected outsider after the first world war at a time when the Bloomsbury critics, Fry and Bell, expressed their resounding contempt for British painting which they regarded as regressive. He remained so for decades until his large retrospective exhibition at the Tate in 1988 thirty years after his death. In contrast, Bacon met with considerable acclaim soon after World War II. All four are now distinguished figures in the history of British painting, yet Lucie-Smith says, "*...it is striking how far all of them seem to deviate from the ideal model for modernist art originally proposed by Roger Fry. All of them put some emphasis on the importance of subject-matter: none makes compositions which are self-referential and self-sufficient in a Cezannian way*" (Lucie-Smith:1989:41).

Aspects of British painting relevant to my concerns are exemplified in those artists who retained their interest in figuration and their commitment to the act and craft of painting over many decades. They did so in the face of the denigration of

representational painting and the sometimes overwhelming promotion of the avant-garde, from the forties until the socalled 'revival' in the late seventies. At the same time many of this 'herd of loners' (Hicks:1989:11) were committed teachers, sharing with a subsequent generation of practitioners their skills and strong beliefs in the practise of drawing along with the traditions and craft of the painting discipline as a whole. Bomberg provided a didactic link, having taught Auerbach and Kossoff. They in turn were a 'patient example' and gave encouragement to younger artists; and Kitaj became the stirring voice for the "School of London" (Hicks:1989:11). Thus continuity and knowledge were conserved, but in an active sense which kept fertile the ground for present-day painting.

Tension between the asserted denial of painting's living reality and the continuing necessity felt by many artists to practise the discipline, was felt throughout the Western world including its periphery. True to the process of colonial diffusion, the effects of what Fuller described as recent art-history's over-estimation of 'the importance of stylistic innovation' were felt even more oppressively in remoter locations such as Cape Town (1983:193), and the 'patient example' of these painters in the dimensions of rigour, single-mindedness and independence were inspirational models in the seventies and eighties, and have continued to have relevance to my creative and didactic concerns.

Certain English painters, within a loose alignment, had challenged the legacy of Abstract Expressionism for some time. In the late sixties when the American painter Philip Guston's rejection of abstraction was seen to indicate the figurative revival, this group of London-centred painters had already been working in individualised figurative terms from the outset of their careers. While movements like Pop Art, Minimalism and Conceptualism swept Europe in swift succession, painters like Frank Auerbach (b. Berlin 1931), Francis Bacon (b.Dublin, 1909), Lucien Freud (b. Berlin 1922), R.B.Kitaj (b. Cleveland, Ohio 1932), and Leon Kossoff (b. London 1926), all English trained, showed 'a whole-hearted commitment to the process of painting' in exploring the full potential of the medium on their own terms (Hicks:1989:12). There was no uniformity to suggest a movement. Each practitioner evolved a different pictorial language; yet there remained a common thrust. Having absorbed freely whatever personal expressive benefits were to be had in the experience of Abstract Expressionism, Surrealism, Cubism and Post-Impressionism, a robust individuality held each painter to their own path. Auerbach points to the advantages for artists where there is a lack of group definition and comments that, *"there is something quite bracing to be somewhere where painters are not categorized"*.

Several comprehensive exhibitions were landmarks of the new vitality in the practise and recognition of such painting, particularly in the resurgence of figuration. These were A New Spirit in Painting in London 1981, the Berlin Zeitgeist in 1982, The Hard-won Image at the Tate Gallery in 1984, and The Vigorous Imagination: New Scottish Art, at the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh in 1987. These were preceded by R.B.Kitaj's exhibition, Human Clay in 1976 at the Hayward Gallery in London, followed thereafter by the The New British Painting exhibition that toured the U.S.A.

The term 'School of London' was coined first when the Human Clay exhibition was held, the work of thirty-five painters being shown in a challenging spirit and provoking the first serious public re-assessment of London painters, and indeed of the significance of painting. Hicks groups these painters into three 'generations': amongst them are Auerbach, Kitaj, Kossoff and Freud in the older group; Andrzej Jackowski, Ken Kiff, Paula Rego in the middle group; and Celia Paul in the youngest group. Perhaps Auerbach, through his integrated work process, his commitment to extract profound meaning out of continuous study of a few familiar subjects, and the major role ascribed to drawing in his mode of work, has been the most powerful model in my experience of contemporary British painting. He says, *"Newness arises from repetition. It is the unfamiliar found in the midst of the most familiar sight, like the head of someone you have been painting for twenty years"*; and *"I'm hoping to make a new thing that remains in the mind like a new species of living thing... the only way I know how...is to start with something I know specifically, so that I have something to cling to beyond aesthetic feelings and my knowledge of other paintings."*(Hughes:1989:11).

American Influences

America was not without its areas of influence on me and these, more overtly than the previous works cited, embraced historical or social commentary and the human subject as a prime vehicle of meaning. Sources were diverse spanning the greater part of the century with a particular interest in certain works of the forties and fifties. These ranged from the 'socially conscious' painters who emerged in the Depression years, to the regionalist Hopper, symbolist/realist George Tooker, and Alice Neel; photographers Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange, and the visual historian/cartoonist Art Spiegelman.

Hopper and Neel both worked actively from the twenties, he into the 1960s and Neel into the 1980s, virtually spanning the century between them through their different but similarly uncompromising means of representation. During the decades that saw the fluctuation of Modernist and Post-Modernist art movements, turning full circle back to a re-evaluation of image-making and the

craft of painting, they pursued their artistic paths undeterred by the changing fashions around them. Hopper said, *"In every artist's development the germ of the later work is always found in the earlier. The nucleus around which the artist's intellect builds his work is himself; the central ego, personality, or whatever it may be called, and this changes little from birth to death. What he was once, he always is, with slight modification. Changing fashions in methods or subject matter alter him little or not at all."*(Hopper:1980:15) Each was acutely absorbed in their perceptions of the immediate environment – Hopper in a more regional sense and Neel, whilst closely engaged with locality, yet with a broader sense of historical consciousness and of the questions of the time. Alice Neel (b. 1900) said, *"I love, fear and respect people and their struggle, especially in the rat race we live in today, becoming every moment fiercer, attaining epic proportions where murder and annihilation are the end."*(Hills:1983:185).

Although the dimensions of her paintings are not architectural but easel-related and thus not publically located, their content is tied to a sense of the particular moment in time and place as well as what she herself called 'the feel of the era' in which she lived, with subjects that shared her urban territory, experience and time. Her work is also sharply analytical for, as Hills writes, *"she has also absorbed the legacies of Freud and Marx, and she is always conscious of our twentieth century political and intellectual revolution. For Neel a painting achieves its true importance when it blends art and history, offering the viewer an engaging sensuous surface, and at the same time capturing the essences of people, like herself, who have come to accept contradictions and to be themselves."*(1983:194)

It is of interest that there is a similar spirit in the last works of both artists in that they are paintings that have been emptied of the physical presence of human subjects and stripped of objects yet seem filled with a sense of the experience of that space. In other words, with the barest reference to subject-matter the space and its pictorial parameters becomes sole subject and vehicle for content. A comparison would be Hopper's "Sun in an Empty Room" (1963) and Neel's "Loneliness" (1970). Each painting shows an empty room and a window: Neel's has one chair. In both tactile and colour qualities are subdued, yet the spirit of each is active and the spaces described through planes of light and warmth generate a sense of experience in a way that is not dissimilar to Rothko. Fuller describes Hopper's work as being as concerned with a "structure of feeling" as with topography. He also compares relationships in the pictorial conventions of Hopper and Rothko and quotes them both. Hopper once said, *"To me, form, colour and design are merely a means to an end, the tools I work with, and they do not interest me greatly for their own sake. I am interested*

primarily in the vast field of experience and sensation." Similarly Rothko, protesting against those who called his works 'abstracts', wrote, *"It is not [my paintings'] intention either to create or to emphasize a formal colour-space arrangement. They depart from natural representation only to intensify the expression of the subject implied in the title – not to dilute or efface it."* (1983:85)

Form as Content

The primary role of abstract elements as a vehicle of content, in particular that of colour, was of ongoing concern in the mural project. Yet the extent to which I became acutely aware of these principles during the painting process of this highly figurative work was surprising. In my development as a painter I have attempted to evolve a visual language which synthesises figuration and abstraction and where these elements speak in a simultaneous and accumulative way: that is, that colour, for instance, does not attempt merely to amplify the role of the image by emphasising its contours, but in an independent yet complementary way projects meanings which lie beyond the capacities of the image.

During those stages in the painting of the mural when colour planes superceded the drawing, and then again when colour and tonal weightings were manipulated, not in descriptive terms, but in order to deepen symbolic and emotional expression, my consciousness of artists such as Matisse and Rothko came to the fore. Possibilities for the definition of content and the emotional spirit of the painting, seemed to lie in the visual behaviour or interactions of the abstract elements. Thus at different stages of the work process varying art-historical examples were remembered in response to the formal, pictorial or conceptual emphasis of the painting at that moment.

Mark Rothko (1903-1970) was of persistent interest in his attempts torepresent human experience through the exploration of nuanced colour fields and relationships. *"I'm not interested in the relationship of colour or form or anything else. I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions – tragedy, ecstacy, doom and so on."* He says further of his works. *"If you are moved only by their colour relationships then you miss the point"* (Fuller:1983:28). A gradual eclipse of colour and light in the last paintings made before his death, at a time when he struggled against despair, engulfed not only the generative capacities of his work but himself. Yet the works that were of particular interest to me were those made in the late fifties when he moved away from bright, sensuous colour towards deep, somber and by implication, tragic, statements. In the sixties he made huge wall paintings and murals for Harvard University and a chapel at St Thomas University, Texas, where the architectural-pictorial relationship parallels

that of Pre and Early -Renaissance religious murals. He stimulated in me an increased interest in the contemplative capacities of colour and tone where used on a large scale or in an architectural context.

The Depression Years

During the Depression years a close-knit group, the most notable of whom were Ben Shahn, Jack Levine and Philip Evergood, responded to the hardships of that period by questioning the justice of the social order in passionate and explicit terms, and their work contains a unique synthesis of their historical era. They had a sense of common purpose in their conviction *"that art must justify itself by its service to humanity"* (Baur:1957:95) and used human imagery as a prime means of communication. Their work was accessible and explicit on one level but also attempted the richest possible expression through the means of paint. They attempted to arouse public awareness of social hardships and injustice, aligning themselves with the worker, the jobless and racial minorities, and attacked wealth, privilege and corruption. Abstraction was rejected as a means of depicting the reality they perceived, and acute observation combined with expressionist elements were used as commentary: yet abstract orders were understood. Although some of the work was rather declamatory the best of it was stylistically advanced from its contemporaries and achieved a synthesis of means and meaning. They were sufficiently competent at their craft to meet the stringent demands of a passionate and specific content. These 'socially conscious' artists generated a revival of interest in contemporary life which, without the same degree of social protest, became a dominant trend in American art until the 1940s. The group kept working into the 1950s and produced major works of their genre at that time.

The murals, easel paintings, photographs, posters and drawings of Ben Shahn (1898-19), in particular "The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti" series (1931-32) have always been influential on many levels. The latter record the celebrated cases of Sacco and Vanzetti and Tom Mooney who were widely believed to be innocent of the treason for which they were indicted and executed, and attacks the role of the judiciary. The images are explicit but handled with sparseness and restraint and the formal elements are subtle. Shahn was a fine craftsman with an understanding of the poetic potential of the medium. His visual voice was quiet and he generated power through understatement. He said,

"If the work is successful; if such sustained awareness is impregnated into the physical materials, the colors and forms, so that it dominates and transcends them, then I believe the work lives permanently, communicating its pitch and intensity and arousing a responsive awareness within those persons who look at it. That is only the basic aesthetic act or experience, and it does not touch upon the relative immensity or triviality of the images into which are transmuted the physical materials of the art. It is within the stature and kind of the images created that the fuller meanings of art lie."

(Baur:1957:123)

Jack Levine (1915) was the most direct of these commentators in his perceptive depictions of corruption. He massed his picture plane with light, restless plastic qualities and densely grouped figures. Light and shadow were a primary means defining the dramatic character. His understanding of the traditions of painting were channelled into observations of metropolitan life which fluctuated in mood from being witty, sardonic, poignant or somber. His pictures set out to depict more than emotion: they are specific 'satires and sermons' using the human form almost as sole subject in shallow space, He said, *"dehumanisation seems the key note of every field of modern endeavour"*. (Baur:1957:128). The WPA experience[1] contributed to Levine's socially-conscious orientation and his insights, based on acute observation of his society, provide extraordinary historical documents of that era. The "Feast of Pure Reason" (1937), "Gangster Funeral" (1952) and "The Trial" (1953/54) are among his prime achievements.

Philip Evergood (1901-19), an English-born and trained painter who settled in the U.S.A made, in addition to his paintings, powerful graphic commentaries. His painting, "The New Lazarus" (1949) combined religious symbolism with war commentary, and realism with El Greco-like distortion. Another figurative painter of this period who produced some of the most memorable images in American art is Alton Pickens (1917-19); amongst them are "Carnival" (1949) and the intense massed group portrait, "The Henry Hope Family" (1950-54). He said, *"I attempt to capture the warping of the truth and the fiction in one schismatic reality. The limitations of my skill and perception compel me to select the minutest aspect of this phantasmagoria,... underlying all is the consciousness that each new hour verifies another intangible – the feeling of imminence and threat that follows the life of any man"* (Baur:1957:211).

In addition to American painting there were other visual documents that were of value to me because of the ways in which they added vivid new dimensions to written history. Amongst them were photographic records of the victims of the Depression.

1 *See footnote - p. 43.*

James Agee's '*Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*' – is a study of the work, lives and homes of a group of sharecropper families in America in 1936. It includes an extraordinary series of photographs by Walker Evans which enlarge and complement the intensity of observation in the text. Dorothea Lange was another photographer who created unique and monumental historical documents, making explicit the human cost of those years of want, whilst working under the auspices of the Farm Security Administration (F.S.A) during the thirties[1]. Some of these images exercise the same kind of metaphorical power over me – in the sense of a persistent presence, long after seeing the pictures, as do certain influential paintings and drawings.

An unusual recent publication in which image and text unite and in which oral history plays a dynamic role is written and drawn by Art Spiegelman. *'Maus: A Survivor's Tale'* (1986) is a low-key and almost down-to-earth account of the history of an extended Jewish family living in Poland during the rise of Nazism and outbreak of the war. Animal characters are used in a narrative comic-book form to portray a family history within specific historical circumstances. The synthesis of varied historical material gleaned from many sources; the factual approach, the central role of the oral history process; and finally, drawing as a means of synthesis, paralleled many of my concerns. Historian Joshua Brown comments; *"Maus is not a fictional comic-strip, nor is it an illustrated novel: however unusual the form, it is an important historical work that offers historians, and oral historians in particular, a unique approach to narrative construction and interpretation. Maus also provides us with the opportunity to evaluate simultaneously a finished work and a work in progress."* (1988:91).

1 *Foundation of the Works Progress Administration under Roosevelt's New Deal during the Depression years. Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange, Ben Shahn and others worked in the economically stricken Mid-West for Roy Stryker's Farm Security Administration (F.S.A).*

3C. Related Concerns

Certain attitudes arising out of art-historical and cultural issues had a bearing on this project. Amongst these was my expressed belief in the potential of each artist to interpret perceptions most fruitfully through an individually-rooted aesthetic language, and the linked concern that such a language, if unfamiliar, is often less readily acceptable to others. Lack of the protective support found amongst groupings where artistic consensus exists, makes the practitioner vulnerable to pressures to conform to the dominant cultural or political trends. My concern lies with a cultural arena sufficiently tolerant of the broadness of its constituency and the singularity of its members to allow, and even nurture, the multitude of differences arising from the precedents and interests of its artists. A climate like this would create multiple roles for the visual arts and possibly even provide, in the process, a comprehensive reflection of an era.

Two areas of opinion evoked strong reactions on my part and influenced the way in which I approached the project. The first was the immediate resistance-orientated art milieu in South Africa which seemed to promote assumptions about visual forms of commentary: the second was that school of opinion which adhered to prevailing Western-based art trends as a criterion of acceptability. Both appeared to harbour notions of figuration which were at odds with my own approach and prompted a resistant stance. In one case I reacted against perceived expectations of 'protest'-related modes of working. In the other I felt that there still existed a discomfort with certain kinds of observation-based imagery, and at the same time a seeming assumption of close visual links with contemporary historical models. These areas of opinion, while pertinent up to a point, impinged on my mine[1] namely, that the iconography of the mural should be directly sourced in its historical and social basis and not in external models or interest groups. These challenges were productive in causing me to re-examine my imagery and approach – locating pertinent sources of influence, so as gradually to find a satisfactory direction.

1 *Diverse opinions varied from those of political and other interest groups to individuals. I refer here not to the participation of commentators in the project, but to less constructive interjections. One example was that of a directive from the Catholic archbishop. It noted that a tally had shown there were a greater number of 'Muslim' than 'Christian' images on this 'Catholic' wall and requested me to reverse the proportion. In response I pointed out the religious symbolism or biblical references in numerous mundane images such as fish, snail, wood, carpentry tools, lilies etc. Another example was that of a local gang leader who felt that because the painting was located within his territory his portrait should be included. However, the major pressures experienced were those of the cultural alignments mentioned in the text.*

At this point, in the arena of 'protest art', I perceived at times a potential disjuncture between the artistic integrity and curiosity of the individual and certain norms of visual commentary, which gave me concern. In my teaching experience I had been disturbed by the self-denial of talents and learned skills in many young visual artists who were, I judged, often less effective in their adopted mode of expression emanating from local conventions of protest art, than they were with the more individualised and complex ways of working which they had cast aside. Younge writes that, "artistic freedom, if it is to remain artistic, is the freedom to act socially." (1990:83). I would add that for an artist to act socially is not necessarily also to act effectively. Effectiveness lies in strength and quality of visual communication, and this in its turn is governed by formal realisation. Therefore the fulfilment of an intention is tied to aesthetic form and therein lies the ultimate challenge.

I accept that terms like 'artistic merit' or 'quality' have connotations which often imply exclusivity. In this instance I use the terms to mean visual standards based on sound craft and creativity, as well as the merit that comes with the material realisation of content through every aspect of a chosen aesthetic form, and in a manner authentic to the capacities of the artist. I look for fresh insights and a fresh vocabulary: not for one kind of veneer or another. The nature of the form should be related not to prevailing conventions but to individual observations and their appropriate expression. "*In the making of culture*," Njabulo Ndebele writes, *"even those elements of life that are seen not to be explicitly resistance-orientated, are valid. Indeed the latter may upon reflection... be found to represent a much wider, and richer, because more inclusive, context of resistance."*[1]

Conventions in 'protest art'

Two concerns related to certain visual conventions were pertinent to my project. The first related to conventions in the use of human imagery, the second to the notion of rigour. First, I had observed the prevalence of what I judged to be degraded human imagery. I refer to a pedestrian and derivative visual code based not on the study and perception of living form but on indirect and often inferior sources and false assumptions. Most disturbing in this genre, more so than the flag-and-fist syndrome originating in other histories, was the corruption of that ultimate symbol and 'relative constant of human experience', the representation of the human form (Fuller:1983:164). Sometimes these images had the look of photographs or were clumsy and simplistic, as if the capacities of intended viewers could only be reached through a kind of visual falsity. They appeared as if made by artists who denied their own powers to formulate insights. I reacted strongly against these practices and prescriptions which, if not the norm, were

1 *Staffrider Vol 6. No.1; p. 48*

sufficiently widespread to result in many unsatisfactory models, and I resolved in the case of the mural to root my subjects in direct study as far as possible.

Rigour of form

Another source of concern lay in what I perceived to be an attitude demanding less rigour, both of a formal and technical kind, in the production of murals and other visual forms of social commentary, as if the significance of the intended content together with the commitment of the maker outweighed the need for aesthetic and technical standards. I have no argument with the place of political struggle in art – as motivation and theme, because this is integral to the lives of most people and is central to our history – but with its dangerous tendency to downgrade artistic processes as evidenced in much art of this kind. My contention is that to neglect drawing standards and the craft of painting is to undermine not only pictorial richness but also the power of the work to engage the viewer, and thereby fulfil its potential to play a social role.

Location

One dimension of the Western-based art history and theory which played a formative role for me was that of location. I found problematical the divergence between my own geographical and historical bearings and those of the historical and theoretical traditions I drew upon, including that of contemporary art in Europe and America. The problem was not one of denying a rich and enduring relationship with this culture, or of overlooking 'the origins and histories' of visual codes, nor indeed of accepting that painting 'subsumes the artist's experience of other art', but instead to be free of 'the tyranny of art history' (Hughes:1989:214). My stance was one of desiring to function primarily upon the basis of my own location and time, and rejected an attitude of cultural exile from the Western world which was prevalent in the academia-related art arena. I felt that my conceptual concerns and visual language were derived essentially from lived experience in this country. Influences from further afield represented a broader world-related viewpoint facilitating and enriching my perspective on the local situation, and including access to the accumulated traditions of painting and image-making. But the core of each work of my own and the tendencies through which form evolved from that content, sprang from a blood relationship with location.

Stepping beyond the confines of received art practise brought closer engagement with local art activity. Extra-mural teaching and painting experience in workshop venues in the years preceding as well as during the painting of the mural exposed me to visual expressions emerging from quite different experience and cultural forces than those found within the specialised

Western-aligned art arena. I refer not only to cultural alignments but to the different social experience created by economic and political forces. Involvement in the late sixties in an art co-operative with a national membership, The Artist's Gallery[1], brought me into direct contact with the work of South African artists working outside the formal institutional parameters[2]; it also introduced me to peer group relationships with artists working outside formal training institutions, many of whom were directly influential in my artistic development[3]. The example set by certain artists was not only formative but profound enough to provide a lasting reference point which, as with Spencer, emerged to be influential in the mural process.

Andrew Motjuoadi (1935-1968), Dumile Feni (b.1939-1991), Azaria Mbatha (b.1941), Cyprian Shilakoe (b. 1946), Fikile Magadledla (b.1952), Dikobe Martins, Peter Clarke (also a poet, b.1929) and Gladys Mgudlandlu (1925-1979) in varied ways comprised the most significant of these indigenous artists in the development of my interests. All were creatively engaged within their immediate contexts and attempted to visualize their responses in ways closely bonded to their experience. The particular qualities in their work which stirred me were the following; Motjuoadi's metaphorical power, Dumile's authentic social voice, Mbatha's narrative idiom and monumental character, Shilakoe's poetic unity, the transcendant reality of Fikile Magadledla and the way in which Mgudlandlu and Clarke imbued simple things with lyricism. Many of these elements were recalled whilst planning and constructing the mural.

1 *The Artists' Gallery comprised one large and two smaller galleries situated in the old Manne Bros Building, on the corner of Adderley and Strand Streets from 1966 to 1972, when the building was pulled down. It was an excellent exhibition space and became known for showing some of the best art in the city as well as for showing works of artists and groups from areas beyond Cape Town, such as Soweto, Rorke's Drift and Thabana Limele in Lesotho. It was a viable artists's co-operative with a comprehensive membership throughout the country but mainly from the Western Cape and Boland. It played an active cultural role, serving as a venue for music, plays and poetry readings. This was the first occasion in South Africa in which a group of artists withdrew from commercial gallery participation to form a commercially viable co-operative for five years. The cultural experience proved of primary importance to many of the artists including myself. The capital amount remaining after the closure was given towards the establishment of the Community Arts Project some years later in 1977.*

2 *By formal institutions I mean the state subsidised university and Technikon art schools but not community-based art training centres such as Polly Street, Rorke's Drift, Community Arts Project, Nyanga art centre and Fuba (see Sack, S. for full list, (1988:25).*

3 *Gladys Mgudlandlu and Peter Clarke from Cape Town and Azaria Mabatha from Rorke's Drift were directly influential. I was unable to meet Andrew Motjuoadi from Mamelodi, Pretoria to whose work I responded most strongly, although I was able to correspond with him.*

Andrew Motjuoadi. Untitled (figures husking millet) May 1966, Pencil on paper, 68 x 100cm. Private collection, Oxford U.K.

Andrew Motjuoadi. Study for township life 1, 1965. Pencil on paper 68.3 x 100cm. Pretoria Art Museum.

Motjuoadi like Shilakoe had a tragically short working life, but he made works of lasting influence. Those I have seen are large, graphite, minutely-handled representations which depict aspects of community life in a specific but muted way. Although only pencil is used the compositions have a conceptual layering associated more often with a denser picture plane like that of painting. One particular work by Motjuoadi[1], has a form as powerful and haunting as I have ever experienced: what is particularly memorable is the metaphorical richness which amplifies and reaches significance beyond the factual depiction. The central figures and subjects are an old man husking millet in a primitive, box-like machine. A woman looking into the machine holds a baby. Directly behind her head another, belonging to a partly obscured second figure, looks away. The description is factual and unambiguous yet the memory holds the metaphor and the detail becomes secondary. What is most vividly retained is a coffin-like space, a sense of lament and a two-headed figure simultaneously looking into and away from the present while questioning the future. The remembered, quiet, unrhetorical character and the metaphorical strength of Motjuoadi were qualities that I aspired to in my mural.

Distancing

In the effort to establish an independent direction and in order to affirm my chosen location, I experienced a reaction which was to a certain extent isolationist. In the art-historical relationships of this project it is pertinent that most of those 20th century artists whose work and theories I found influential, worked outside the mainstream movements of their time. I see this distancing whether conscious or not as means to nurture certain art forms and practises. The major ones to which I was committed, as directly relevant to the mural were: individual creative procedure and form, notions of study and of craft related to the disciplines of drawing and painting, and the representation of specific subject matter. My withdrawal from the normal specialised art and academic environment to a working location outside it was the spatial manifestation of my conceptual location. It was a time of reassessment in that the project offered, in addition to its concrete aims, an opportunity for the re-examination of my pictorial and conceptual guidelines. The work process continually threw up for reconsideration most questions of artistic procedure and allegiance already within my experience.

Figuration

Although my formal skills have been enriched through the study of art practices and concepts, like those of Abstract Expressionism and the colour theories of Itten and Albers, my commitment to figuration and to the human figure in particular remain

1 *Unfortunately located out of the country, in a private collection in Oxford, U.K. Untitled, signed and dated May 1966. Dimensions 100cm wide x 68cm high. Pencil on paper.*

entrenched. I see the human body, in relation to my work, as *"the field of all possible metaphors... it represents the quintessence of all that is not death."* (Berger:1969:106). My commitment to figurative representation was a bridge to the social world of which I was part, and a natural vehicle for the expression of my perceptions, for making accessible these perceptions to others, and for countering my feelings of dislocation in my relationship to that social world. I saw figurative images as visual elements which evoke common references and to which there is collective access. Hockney said, *"People want meaning in life. That's a desperate need, and images can help."* (1980:174) It was also a means of exploring my concerns with history, memory and social context. Because of this focus my art historical interests have lain squarely in the area of figuration and of social commentary. Images arose for me in response to attempts at finding the visual equivalents for ideas I wisned to express. If this was the case for myself, I reasoned that there must be others who imagined and conceptualised in similar terms. Yet for decades, including my formative years, a vacuum existed in the practice of contemporary art. This gap originated in the field of figurative painting and the dearth of visual parallels and inspirational models led to a sense of alienation for many practising artists and students. At the same time, with the possible exception of photography, recognizable visual means through which to explore the immediate world were lost. Fuller uses the term 'recuperative' in discussing the nature of the 'aesthetic conservatism' in Post-Modernism, and he equates its spirit with that of the conservationism of the ecological movement, rather than with the international swings to political conservatism of the last two decades (1983:3).

Separateness

A general political and economic exclusion of black students from state-funded art training institutions existed until the nineties. The sixties and seventies were particularly hard years for black artists as the apartheid laws tightened, curtailing their freedom of movement and excluding them in the process from access to independent art training centres like Polly Street in Johannesburg, which eventually closed down.[1] *"This enforced separation compelled artists to find new forms of cultural organisation through which to develop artistic and political responses to an increasingly polarised society."* (Sack.S:1988:17) The exclusion meant not only the deprivation of artistic training opportunities but also an impoverishment and one-sidedness of cultural experience within the institutions themselves. A double loss was thus the consequence: of the black artists from access to training opportunities, and of

1 *Polly Street art centre was a significant venture providing training for a whole generation of artists. It was a centrally located, easily accessible facility established essentially for the training of black artists but bringing together both black and white artists in "the sharing [of] technical knowledge and aesthertic debate" (Sack:1988:15)*

the politically privileged, mostly white students from discovering a realistic sense of place and of function in their society. A cultural isolationism seemed to settle over the art schools, and, because of their Western focus and their predominant social composition, relatively few extra-mural influences were able to find their way inside, nor when they did were they appropriately valued. The gradual inclusion of more indigenous students over the years proved insufficient for them to retain enough identity to leaven the cultural ground and generate new approaches. Therefore the lack of a localised contextual relationship for most training institutions endured and the experience of working within an art school constantly included the struggle to maintain a sense of broader location.

Some effects on art education and practise

Regardless of the achievements of Modernism, an erosion of shared symbolic belief and of an 'aesthetic dimension'[1] was also an outcome, leading to the barren years of Late Modernism which persisted in Europe until the revival of the eighties. Fuller described that as a time when the 'Kenosis' or 'self-emptying' behaviour – the 'dead blank of the arts' predicted by William Morris, was realised: but continued further to say that just possibly, what he had been calling Post-Modernism was the 'sprouting of a new seed.' (1983:24). The dominating and somewhat monolithic art movements of the Late Modernist decades obscured the continued existence of painters who chose to go on depicting their responses to the world in visible and recognizable terms, including those artists in this country working outside art-training institutions. As our art schools echoed the patterns of foreign institutions, those of London in particular, and our internationally aware artists followed the post-Second World War mainstream art, the effects on practise and teaching in art schools here were felt. David Hockney recalls, *"At the Royal College, dealing with the figure was considered very unmodern"* (1980:180) and, *"The destruction of drawing in the art schools was almost criminal. One of its effects was to downgrade the activity of painting."* (1980:173)

Art of that time *"began to reflect that squeezing out of a cultural space for imagination, individual subjectivity and expressive or affectively satisfying work."* (Fuller:1983:24) and Conceptualism threatened to displace many of the material and repre-

1 *"The aesthetic dimension" is a term used by Marcuse to describe "a significant potentiality of our species" which has been progressively diminished in recent decades, during Late Modernism in particular. Marcuse argues that when art is faithful to its own aesthetic form it "breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience". He says further that the rejection of aesthetic form is an "abdication of responsibility" which "deprives art of the very form in which it can create that other reality within the established one – the cosmos of hope" (Fuller:1983:129)*

sentational manifestations of creative processes. The reaction of a number of artists within my experience to this trend was one of attempting to conserve certain material methods and traditions. A perceived loss of the visual means to engage with the visible world and thereby to respond to historical experience as well as to communicate it, provoked a degree of alienation and resistance to these tendencies, both as teachers and artists[1]. Essential aspects of art training and practise such as that of drawing were lost, as also were the study of form and environment, and the craft aspects of the discipline. Responding to the recommendations of the second Coldstream Report on art education in Britain, Fuller called for *"a rerouting of art education in a way which will emphasise imagination, basic skills, tradition and perception of the natural world".* His view: *"that a higher education in Fine Art should be based on drawing rather than the pursuit of some intangible fine art attitude"* (1983:229), I regard as pertinent to art education in this country too.

The desire to explore and reaffirm certain artistic procedures and apply them to mural production played a more important role than than that of art historical precedents. Hence the relevance of these questions to a discussion of the project. In particular, a view of drawing as a multiple imaginative and observational process; a means of 'looking at the roots of ideas'[2]; and having an integral relationship with the compositional aspects of painting, was established in the project as one of the priorities of two-dimensional practice.

1 *At the same time many other students struggled to evolve visual means other than figuration with which to comment on the political and social experience of the time within South Africa.*

2 *Gavin Jantjes in a lecture on his work, Michaelis School of Fine Art, April 1991.*

3D. Mural Precedents

"It appears from certain social and artistic indicators that a renaissance of mural art is on the horizon. Monumental art can and must utilize this new conception and expand it."

Fernand Léger made this statement in 1945, and as Europe lay shattered he looked to the *"pictorial possibilities in architecture"* and the aesthetic enrichment of society as part of the process of post-war reconstruction (1973:136).

Some Aspects of Mural Painting

Muralism, depending on placement and accessibility, is essentially a social art with a function that links with ease to the historical process. Its potential is not only didactic – a means of exposing history as well as reflecting on it – but it is capable of playing a fuller role in the life of that society than is the case with most gallery-based contemporary painting. It is not a matter only of access to a work, but of a symbiotic social relationship between it and the viewer which both enriches and is itself enriched in the course of interpretation. The Mexican muralists made visible the historical experience of their era and played a vigorous role in developing a new post-colonial consciousness. But their movement, allowing for the diversity of individual expression, only found its unique identity once contextual essentials such as indigenous cultural traditions and social experience were absorbed into the creative process.

Social context

The conceptual framework of this mural project includes a range of issues which lie outside direct art-historical references, but which nevertheless bear a relation to them. Thus, historical parallels were sought and practical applications in painting considered from the standpoint of existing social concerns. Views on the social function, location and communicative capacities of painting alerted my interest in the mural form, in particular in relation to exterior locations. Murals have been described by

Chicago muralists Eva and James Cockcroft and John Weber as *"not simply large paintings on walls; they are painting wedded to architecture, public art conceived in a given space, art rooted in a specific human context"* (xxii:1977).

My reflections on the social role of painting were closely tied to a critical view of the art market; in particular, the void perceived to exist between most galleries and broader social strata, as well as the potentially negative effects of that market on individual creative practise, including interaction among artists and between them and communities[1]. Notions about accessibility were a central stimulus to my interest in mural painting. Opposition to the social and aesthetic effects of media and market-related visual codes and practises, and the desire to explore a visual alternative within the same sphere occupied by advertising, were also important contributory motives. The primary issue however was the potential of murals to mirror historical experience through its ability to retain traces of imagery and commentary after the manifestations of that experience are gone, and to do so within easy access of ordinary viewers.

Fernand Léger (1881-1955) returned to an explicitly figurative tradition after the 1914-1918 war and went further after the next war to become strongly committed in form and practise to bringing the experience of fine art into public life. He saw "monumental art", as he called murals, as a means to do so: *"The masses are rich in unsatisfied desires. They have a capacity for admiration and enthusiasm that can be sustained and developed in the direction of modern painting"*. He appealed for easier access to public galleries through opening them on Sundays and evenings, with his working-class origins and experience as a soldier giving him a particular conviction and concern, and the historical moment being one which made for hope and fervour: *"Give them time to see, to look, to stroll around. It is inexcusable that after five years of war, the hardest war of all, men who have been heroic actors in this sad epic should not have their rightful turn in the sanctuaries. The coming peace must open wide for them*

1 *See footnote p.47 on The Artists' Gallery. There were a range of reasons why individual artists and art groups formed this co-operative. For many the desire for broader artistic and social interaction was primary. There was also unanimity in the desire of artists to manage the exhibition and sale of their work themselves and the presumption that they could do so more effectively than the dealers. Public response to the gallery was highly favourable, with the range of exhibitions on the whole adventurous and broader-based than those of other galleries while maintaining a high standard. Although its initial aims were modest and mostly practical in intent, the gallery became an artistic focal point with a wider constituency and lesser commercial function than initially foreseen. Artists unable to rouse the interest of the conventional galleries found a footing through the co-op and its five-year experience demonstrated the unfulfilled need in the city for social and artistic interaction, as well as the viability of gallery practise in which artists and public engaged directly. With the loss of this venue came again a retreat of individual artists to the separate contexts in which they lived and worked and the weakening of this particular network.*

doors that have remained closed until now. The ascent of the masses to beautiful works of art... will be the sign of a new time." (1965:135).

Some aesthetic considerations

Léger amongst others foresaw the ending development of 'this delicate and luminous edifice' of abstract art, but continued to regard abstract principles as an essential part of pictorial form, in that the *"return of the subject, rather than destroying the abstract, must join with it on the walls of the future"* (Léger:1973:165). He clearly believed in the capacities of an untrained public to respond to the 'pure' aspects of form if given the opportunity to do so, and showed concern with developing stringent and appropriate aesthetic principles for application within the mural arena. Léger probably did not foresee the extent to which the technological development which he welcomed, would bring with it a corrupted and corrupting visual language, eventually to pervade the consciousness of prospective viewers and those same public spaces where he had envisaged "the greatest mural flowering of modern times".

I am interested in the potential of murals to offset the visual manifestations of commercial life, by bringing work of a similar scale but with different aesthetic and functional intentions into the same public space. My concern lies with the conditioning effects of advertising language, particularly the absorption of such codes into modes of creative expression, as is evidenced in much contemporary mural painting, especially in the States. This was a central consideration in the way I approached my work. I regard the practises of the 'mega-visual world'[1] to be an impediment to human perceptions of the actual world, as directly experienced, and an impediment to the survival of aesthetic dimensions in everyday life. I judge Berger correct in writing that *"the culture of capitalism has reduced paintings, as it reduces everything which is alive, to market commodities, and to an advertisement for other commodities"*.

1 *"...[A]dvertising takes everyday materials – like soap, beer, or tobacco – and through imagery associates them with our imaginative longings for a world transformed according to our wishes. But this is prostitution where art is love. Unlike a religion, the symbolic order within which the advertisement is articulated is cynically displaced from deeply held feelings or values; the transformations of the real we can perceive in an advertisement occupy a shallow and accentuated 'potential space', massively impinged upon by economic interest. Who actually believes that drinking Coke rather than Pepsi will bring about peace on earth? Or that using one brand of detergent rather than another will deepen family love?" (Fuller:1983:34)*

In a critique of Hadjinicolaou's reductionist theory[1] Berger argues that *"If paintings have no purpose, have no value other than their promotion of a visual ideology, there is little reason for looking at old pictures except as specialist historians. They become no more than a text for experts to decipher"*. He goes on to say that both approaches, those of marketing culture and of *"the new reductionism of revolutionary theory"*... threaten the purpose of art in a similar way. *"What the one uses as an advertisement... the other sees as only a visual ideology of a class. Both eliminate art as a potential model of freedom, which is how artists and the masses have always treated art when it spoke to their needs."* (1978:703)

Fuller argues that the 'biologically given aesthetic potentiality' of human beings requires a facilitating environment to develop and to flourish; and furthermore that *"the change in the nature of work brought about by the rise of modern industrialism, and its subsequent development, have combined to erode the conditions under which this great human potentiality can flourish"* (B 1983:79) In this view the nature of the urban environment is one no longer created by the direct intervention and creative expression of the people who live there. Instead visual falsities mask it through consumer directed images, as do the spatial and material priorities of commerce, so that an impoverishment of the aesthetic dimension masks most visible aspects of the urban environment. This is a deeply formative context in which to live; it obscures the real world and smothers both direct responses and evaluative capacities. A century ago Ruskin rejected the isolation of 'good art' and said, 'The question is first... whether what art you have is good or bad. If essentially bad, the more you see of it the worse for you.' This dictum still holds pertinence today.

Fine art principles

The public context of murals brings with it accountability not only in thematic but in formal terms so that the nature of the aesthetic language should both stir emotions and responses related to direct experience and enrich in the ways characteristic of any 'pure' or disinterested art. It seems that where there is complex subject matter and thematic specificity in large-scale mural painting, execution demands no less stringent application and understanding of fine art principles than in the case of a smaller studio-based work: in my experience I found the demands to be even more challenging.

1 *Berger's review of Art History and Class Consciousness by Nicos Hadjinicolaou, Pluto Press: London, 1978, 'In Defence of Art', New Society, 28 September 1978.*

I am concerned too with soundness of technique in mural painting. Although exterior murals have a *degree* of ephemerality built into them, because of structural dependence, physical exposure and vulnerability to climate and other environmental uncertainties, I think these considerations are often over-emphasised at the expense of formal and technical rigour. This has resulted in visual and conceptual weaknesses in much mural painting, at least in part because of assumptions about a short life and transitory viewing. The process is hurried, fine art principles are hesitantly applied, and the message becomes divorced from the means.

If a mural were to have only a ten-year lifespan – because of the demolition of the building, for instance – the actual length of time it would be exposed to viewers would still be greater than the accumulated exposure a single painting would have in the lifetime of an artist, even if exhibited annually. If a work hangs in a state gallery, access is for limited periods of time and to a narrow audience. My contention is that a mural in a public location has extensive and broad-based exposure to a viewing public so that the greatest rigour is warranted in every aspect of the work also for the purpose of clear communication. It's production should be approached with the intention of achieving as much "relative permanence" as in any form of painting, and appropriate technical procedure should be carefully researched and applied to that end.

Community context

The possible advantages of an approach to mural painting purposely broad-based in intent are immediacy of content and community participation in the material process, and so a high likelihood of vitality. In Boston and Chicago where there is a vigorous street art it is said that "*people decorate the streets because that is where their life is*", and murals are claimed to be "instructive", to "*make a sociological statement*", and to provide "*yards and yards of metaphor for people who lack a real channel of expression*" (Sommer:1975:2). The disadvantages stemming from the absence of principles of craft and form, however, are numerous: poor technique and material impermanence, uneven visual standards which re-inforce degraded visual elements, often influenced by advertising and media-based elements, are amongst them. Even more crucial, little of value in terms of visual form is learnt or demonstrated, so that through their visibility the weak elements of murals become negative models and undesirable conventions become established.

Unfortunately, adherence to fine art principles is often regarded as elitist an approach which excludes the participation of untrained painters. But this need not be the case: it should be possible for skilled painters to play a prominent role in training others whilst working on a project themselves so that access to skills can be acquired within the context and constraints of an actual project. The enthusiasm of aspirant but untrained painters can be harnessed in a workshop situation offering access to painting craft and drawing skills, including mural techniques such as scaling-up, as well as through the kind of informal learning situation that takes place where artists with greater and lesser degrees of expertise work side by side. Learning-by-example is a pedagogic method of particular interest to me, and the open nature of mural activity is conducive to it. In traditional Sotho-Ndebele wall painting, skills are acquired in this way, and I have observed the same informal learning process (the notion of purposive teaching was emphatically denied), on a large scale at the Tengenene sculpture community in Zimbabwe[1].

Writing on American 'Street Art', Robert Sommers says, "*For the street painter, the role of art in the community becomes a more important consideration than the technical quality of the painting*" (1975:8). My contention to the contrary is that where poor technical standards are applied there tends to be a parallel lack of rigour in all aspects of a work, resulting in diminished social effectiveness. So where 'co-operative mural painting' undermines artistic judgment in the way Sommers describes, the community

1 *The Tengenene Sculpture Community was established in 1966 by Tom Blomefield, who had been mining chrome and farming in the area, in order to provide alternative employment for miners and farm workers. By 1980 over 500 sculptors had passed through Tengenene. Currently there are approximately 20 resident sculptors, amongst them artists of international stature like Bernard Matemera, and 100 others from nearby areas.. Some practising artists come to work there but many are beginners despite there being no training system. What exists is the contiguity of intensive creative practise, consisting of small, often family-based groups, spread over an extensive area to constitute essentially a community of artists. The carvings, made from local serpentine have powerful imaginative and folkloric sources. Tengenene is today recognized as a successful venture in rural development, providing economic stability for a large number of rural people.*

gains little visual enrichment and potential valuable experience is lost. Where artists work within a community, sharing skills and encouraging participation, yet sustaining individual direction and practise, as in the case of the Chicago muralist William Walker, then development of the genre can occur. Painting on the streets has sustained this murallist's links with the local people who watch him at work and assist him in preparation of walls and materials. His themes, such as the futility of violence and unity of all people, are accessible and pertinent. Another instance is the Scottish Arts Council's sponsorship of an artist-in-residence system whereby artists are employed to live and work within specific urban areas. Those in the projects I visited in Glasgow in 1979 and 1980 described their brief as seeking ways to use art processes and events for the benefit of individual and community life[1].

Accessibility

The notion of accessibility which concerns me in mural painting has multiple dimensions. Some of these, such as physical accessibility through environmental placement and historical contextuality, have already been discussed under different sub-headings. But visual accessibility through legible images and accountability of theme were additional considerations in my project, alongside the creative, procedural and technological access for which I aimed. I saw value in the fact that the step-by-step technical and compositional stages of the mural were a visible demonstration of creative and technical practise. Also I considered it an integral part of my task to discuss any aspect of craft and procedure or to advise on related projects where requested, and have continued to do so since completion of the mural. I used the simplest traditional technology in the scaling-up procedure (see p.79) in order to demonstrate the minimisation of cost in manpower and materials. In choosing to work with low-cost methods, I intended to demonstrate the affordability of a mural of this scale within a lower-income community, but at the same time through rigorous preparation and careful technique I sought to stretch the visual and technical capacities of the material to its limit, thereby showing the technical, formal and communicative possibilities of the mural form.

1 *I viewed several of these Scottish projects during research work on urban murals. Their emphasis generally was on group participation and the fostering of community interaction and consciousness. An artist-in-residence project in Glasgow in an area where the community was divided and unsettled through urban resettlement and rapid immigration was of particular interest. Amongst the activities were mural painting, mosaics, workshops and arts festivals. Of particular interest to me was a community-centred exhibition in which every family (mostly immigrants) set up a display demonstrating their individual family history and cultural background through a range of historical and creative material and activities.*

Scope of Contemporary Mural Precedents

The scope of 20th century mural references I considered in relation to my project ranged from the Mexican mural movement of the 1920s, the contemporary 'street art' movement in the U.S.A. which started in the late sixties and the urban murals of the seventies in Britain, through to certain examples situated in southern Africa. Most pertinent examples from my own geographical location were the post-revolutionary Mozambican mural movement, traditional Sotho-Ndebele rural wall paintings, and the mural cycles at the chapel of the Cyrene Mission School in Matopos, Zimbabwe. Those in Mexico, Mozambique and the U.S.A were not seen in the original[1]. In my judgment the Mexican movement is the major model for 20th century mural painting. It is also, in its indigenous roots and historical basis, one of the most sustained and independent painting movements of the post-Cubist era. This episode in art history was inadequately represented in the material to which I had access until as recently as the mid-eighties, and even then the stocks of slides and publications within reach were still limited relative to that available on the art of Europe and America. Yet the three leading Mexican painters worked and exhibited in the U.S.A for extended periods of time and major examples of their work can still be seen there[2].

The vast scope, and the monumental achievements of form, technique and intention of the Mexican movement, make it a difficult task to summarise adequately, to synthesise its character, and also to reflect its influential weight relative to other more minor movements. Its influence upon me has been proportionately greater in keeping with the Mexican achievement, nevertheless the minor examples also affected my thinking in one way or another, and they are treated together for that reason..

1 *Where the material presence of an art work is encountered the experience is qualitatively different and more acute. Part of colonial art-historical relationships has been the lack of primary access to European and American art, familiar mainly through reproduction processes, so that some distortion in the perceptions of their essential visual elements is unavoidable. Such elements are scale, colour, materiality and the 'immediacy' of the painting; that is, the way in which all the elements unite to project a particular emotional or metaphorical emphasis. If I see published material, for example, on a particular Sotho wall painting, I am able to conceptualise the original more vividly having already seen similar examples and therefore know the exact environment in which it stands, the relationship of its earth coloured-decoration to the colour of the sky, the shape of the clouds and so on; so the emotional response to its physical qualities is more intense than to those seen in a reproduction of a work I've never seen, like for instance,a Mexican fresco.*

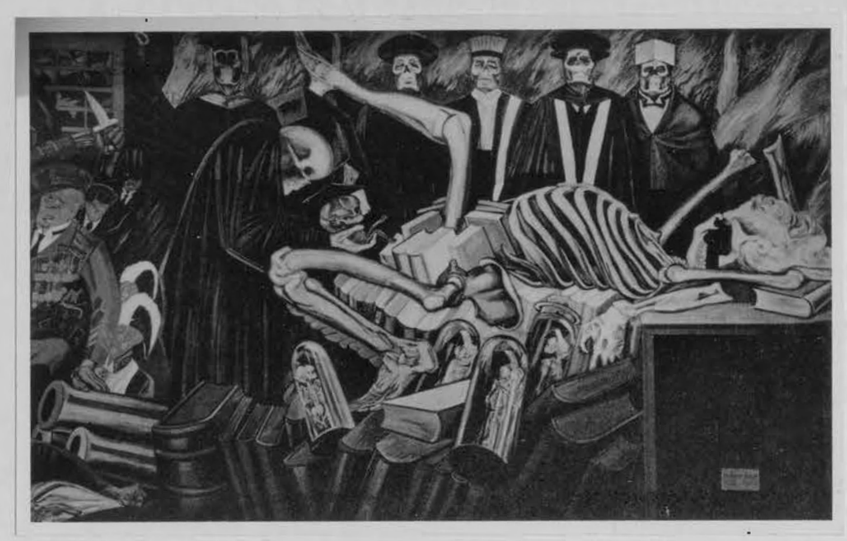
2 *Examples are Orozco's mural cycle at the Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire 1932-1934; Rivera's murals at San Francisco Stock Exchange 1931 and the Detroit Institute of Arts 1932; and Siqueiros's murals in the Chouinard School of Art, Los Angeles 1932.*

There is great disparity between the high level of technical and formal achievement as well as the breadth of intention in the Mexican models compared to that of most contemporary murals. In the former the painters dedicated years to single series of murals, and lifetimes to the unswerving development of their field. It is unfortunate that these models are geographically distant from most sites of current mural activity, including art training centres and institutions. It is regrettable too that adequate visual records have not been more widely available, and that few models at a similar level of craft and form exist within these present centres of activity.

The continuation of the tradition of outside wall painting in Central Europe into this century, which has endured despite the post-Renaissance specialization in easel painting and the associated notion of art as a commodity, was also of interest to me. In towns close to the Austro-German border, such as Mittewald, Oberammergau and Innsbruck, in cities like Treviso and Trento in northern Italy and in northern Rumanian churches, examples of exterior painting are still to be seen. England lost all exterior painted decoration after the Reformation and destructive events like the Great Fire of London, but in Northern Ireland the central European custom of wall painting has inspired the political folklore murals which have persisted since the reign of William of Orange. Despite the seeming cycle of emergence and subsidence of mural painting in this century, mostly linked to patterns of political upheaval and social aspiration, diverse threads of practise have persisted. I was aware also, for example, of other politically-related art activity such as the agit-prop trains and trucks of revolutionary Russia, and the Chilean murals made by the "Brigadas Ramona Para" during 1969-1971 until the works and many of the artists vanished in the counter-revolution of 1973.

The Mexican mural renaissance

The Mexican mural movement emerged at the close of the revolution in 1920 out of decades of oppression and civil war, but it was interrupted less than a decade later as a new period of repression began in 1928. In 1920, when Obregon deposed President Carranza, he gave Jose Vasconcelos the education portfolio, at which point an enormous expansion of educational facilities began, including the sponsorship of public murals. Until power changed hands again in 1928 with Obregon's assassination, Vasconcelos was a key figure in facilitating the mural movement. In 1923 he commissioned the first two major mural cycles. Siqueiros and Orozco, with others in the group, painted the frescoes at the National Preparatory School, and Rivera those at the Ministry of Public Education, Mexico City. The movement can be said to have begun in 1923 with the organisation of the 'Syndicate of Revolutionary



Jose Orozco. 'Gods of the Modern World' 1932 - 1934, fresco cycle at the Baker Library, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.

Jose Orozco. 'The Friar and the Indian' 1926, fresco cycle at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. Mexico City.

Painters, Sculptors and Engravers'. Siqueiros, Orozco, Guerrera and Rivera[1] were all involved in the publication of the syndicate's illustrated magazine *'El Machete'*, which Siqueiros called *"our letter of introduction to the Mexican popular masses"* (1975:13). Students like Charlot and Leal, as well as mature artists were called on to join the group and those who witnessed the activity commented on their youth. In 'The Plumed Serpent' D.H.Lawrence writes of "men – or boys" painting frescoes, and Gruening describes the scene as follows: *"In every corner the younger painters, some of them little more than boys, are at work painting – painting with a verve unknown elsewhere – working all of them as craftsmen for... humble wages, and glorying in their opportunity."* (Charlot:1967:152)

These were years of intense productivity, marked by fervour and a high level of technical discipline and research, when the painters strove to evolve appropriate form while working in the face of threats and sabotage from increasingly reactionary elements. Yet in this short period what Charlot called "a climax of a sort" was reached in 1923-24: by Rivera in the scenes from "Tehuantepec" frescoed in the Ministry of Education, by Orozco in his mural set on the "Life of St Francis", and by Siqueiros in "Burial of a Worker", both located at the Preparatoria School (Charlot:1967:viii). Jean Charlot, one of the group of painters[2], has done much to record the history of the movement. Siqueiros, in addition to his experimental work on mural techniques and materials for modern buildings[3], emerged as the main chronicler and spokesman. In 1921 he published the first theoretical document of the movement[4]. Rodrigues recounts that Siqueiros appealed to artists of the *"new generation of America"* to create *"an art style appropriate for our time... he incites us to approach the work of the ancient inhabitants of our valleys, the native painters and sculptors (Mayan, Aztecs, Incas etc.)"* (1989:2).

With increasing political repression, many of the muralists dispersed to the U.S.A. or spent long periods working there. Nevertheless Rivera was a major national figure by this time, becoming Director of the Academy of San Carlos in 1929, and painting

1 *David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), Jose Orozco (1883-1949), Xavier Guerrero, and Diego Rivera (1886-1957).*

2 *De la Cueva, Pacheco, Romero, Leal, Beloff, Lavanderos, Revueltas, Alva and others.*

3 *In 1935 Siqueiros set up his Experimental Workshop in New York which Jackson Pollock attended.*

4 *"Three appeals of contemporary orientation to painters and sculptors of the new American generations". Transcribed completely in David Alfaro Siqueiros, Antonio Rodrigues, CREA and Terra Nova, Mexico 1985, p. 85-88.*

Detail of 'Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda'.

Diego Rivera. 'Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda' 1947-1948, fresco,
4.8 x 15m, Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City.

the National Palace and Cuernavaca murals. After completing mural cycles in San Francisco, Detroit and the monumental project at the Rockefeller Centre that was rejected and destroyed by Rivera himself rather than agree to submit to the political censorship of the patrons, Rivera returned to paint again in Mexico in 1934. Notable amongst his prolific output of this period is "The Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda"[1], filled with allusions to Mexico's past and evocative, in its compositional cross-currents, of the shifts and contradictions of human behaviour and historical processes. The dense urban figure composition, containing many portraits including his own, lacks the rhetorical heroics sometimes present in the American frescoes. The characterisation is subtle yet complex, evocative of historical particularity as well as suggesting broader sweeps of time. This painting represents qualities in Rivera's work which I have found of particular value, in terms of colour expression, other abstract elements, and the compositional unity of massed human forms, and coherence is achieved without resort to geometric structural features. In the last years of his life he made the massive Lerma River Waterworks mural which contains elements of an Aztec sculpture[2]. It is his most unusual work, designed to be seen from above through running water. Its evolutionary theme intermingles science and imagination, pre-Hispanic myths and contemporary history, together with a synthesis of sculptural and painted forms. The "History of Medicine in Mexico"[3], containing a powerful indigenous theme as was typical with Rivera, went far beyond the initial intention and rhetorical title of the work (The People's Demand for Better Health), and instead "created a mythical, philosophical and social vision of how health problems had been confronted in the pre-Hispanic world and since the origin of social medicine." (Rodrigues:1989:151)

The Cardenas reforms, which began in 1935, brought a new burgeoning of the arts in Mexico, including film, music and literature. The conventional view of the movement, shared even by Charlot the insider – that it's impetus lasted only from 1920-1925 – refers to the period of intense group activity and purposefulness, but overlooks the series of great individual achievements of the artists from the thirties onwards. Orozco, who Charlot called 'a one-city man' (1967:208), had a close relationship with Mexico City. During the years 1927-1934, when Orozco lived in the U.S.A, he made his first and only tour of Europe. For the rest of the time he

1 *"Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in the Alameda" 1947-1948. Fresco on a metallic framework. Dimensions 4.8 x 15m. Museo Mural Diego Rivera, Mexico City.*

2 *"Carcamo del Rio Lerma" (Lerma Waterworks) 1950-1951. Polychrome relief 3-dimensional mural. Polystyrene emulsion paint especially formulated for this project lasted for only a short time under the water and was technically less successful than his traditional fresco and mosaic techniques in terms of permanence. Painted surface area 224 sq m. Walls and floor of the water reservoir. Chapultepec Park, Mexico City.*

3 *"History of Medicine in Mexico" 1953. Fresco, tempera with casein and glass mosaic. 7.4 x 10.8 m. Hospital de la Raza, Mexico City.*

lived in Mexico. His social commentary included brothels and street life as well as political caricatures. As a child he watched Posada at work in his workshop daily and his own career which started as a cartoonist and illustrator, was influenced by this experience. He describes this encounter with Posada's draughtmanship and craft as his "awakening to the existence of the art of painting"; so his awakening to painting was through the route of drawings and prints.

After completing a fine fresco series at Dartmouth College in the United States[1] he returned to the States in 1940 to paint the six panel mural, "The Dive Bomber and Tank" at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. he returned to Mexico to make a series of lithographs, the "Suite Mexicana", and at Guadalajara mural cycles with *"a terrible beauty"* (Rochfort:1980:74)[2] His last working years from 1940-1949 were his most productive, when he struggled towards new metaphorical form and even returned to easel paintings again as an additional and simpler means of visual definition. In these last mural cycles there is 'a new poetry' (Elliot:1981:97) and great metaphorical power and inventiveness in the metamorphic forms. In the frescoes at Jiquilpan depicting scenes from the revolution, the colour is predominantly black and white, the iconography is simpler, and it bears a more direct relation to the themes and methods of handling in earlier graphic series. A range of images, some of them evocative of the chaotic fragmented character of the Guernica, show the malleability of the masses in the crowd scenes representing historical events around Jiquilpan.

Orozco was a deeply philosophical artist whose preoccupations differed from those of the other muralists in that he kept his distance from political parties, and throughout his life maintained a position of committed non-alignment. In the face of accusations of subscribing to anarchism, he stated, *"I am a partisan with absolute freedom of thought, a real free thinker; neither a dogmatist nor an anarchist: neither an enemy of hierachies nor a partisan of unyielding affirmations"* (Orozco:1981:74). His work contains ruthless criticism of all usurpers of freedom whatever their political alignments. Contradictions between the oppressive circumstances he perceived on the one hand and the fragile ideals on the other are often central to his painting. He spoke of locating

1 *Baker Library, Dartmouth College, New Hampshire. 1932-1934*

2 *Guadalajara. Assembly Hall: 'Creative Man and the People and its False Leaders' 1936. Vault in Government Palace: 'National Independence;Hidalgo; The Carnival of the Ideologies; the Phantasms of Religion in Alliance with the Military' 1937. Hospicio Cabanas: 'Humanity; Mexico before and after the Spanish Conquest; Man and his Quest for Improvement.' 1938-39. Gabino Ortiz Library, Jipulquin 1940. 1940. Supreme Court, Mexico City: 'Justice and False Justice. Proletarian Struggle. National Wealth' 1941-1942..*

in visual terms what he perceived through a 'penetrating mission of the spirit and an expressive capacity in art.' I found his work influential, although not as a direct visual model. I see its affective energy as stemming from a tension between his metaphysical questioning and powerful concrete representations, between his 'freedom of thought' and the physical fact of the experience he depicts. He acknowledged this duality in his work and said that, *"I accept these characteristics as forming part of a unity. In everything, in men and in things, I believe there are good and bad sides. It is in this way the artist must face the problems which he utilises as raw material for his works"* (1981:74).

This episode in Mexican art history has done much to inform my understanding of the potential in painting for historical rootedness of form and content, together with the level of paint craftmanship necessary to attain full formal realisation. Rivera and Orozco in their individual pursuits and achievements are the two painters of this period, and perhaps of this century, who provided me with lessons on the broadest front. I was interested in the background of rigorous and rather oppressive classical training they received at the Academy in Mexico City, combined there with the inspirational guidance of Dr Atl, and I judge their resultant sound draughtsmanship to have been an essential element in their mastery of the fresco medium. It is a process destined to failure unless handled with decisiveness and sureness of hand. The fresco techniques they developed were instructive to me in the way the methods evolved drew on different traditions, in effect a combination of sources ranging from those of Cennini's fifteenth century practical treatise on painting methods, the experience of Mexican stone-masons, careful study of ancient pre-Cortesian Mexican frescoes, and innovative experimentation on the walls of the first mural site. The final techniques so developed have been comprehensively described by Orozco, Siquieros and others in texts which exist as invaluable documents for muralists who wish to take the craft of mural painting seriously[1].

Other Examples

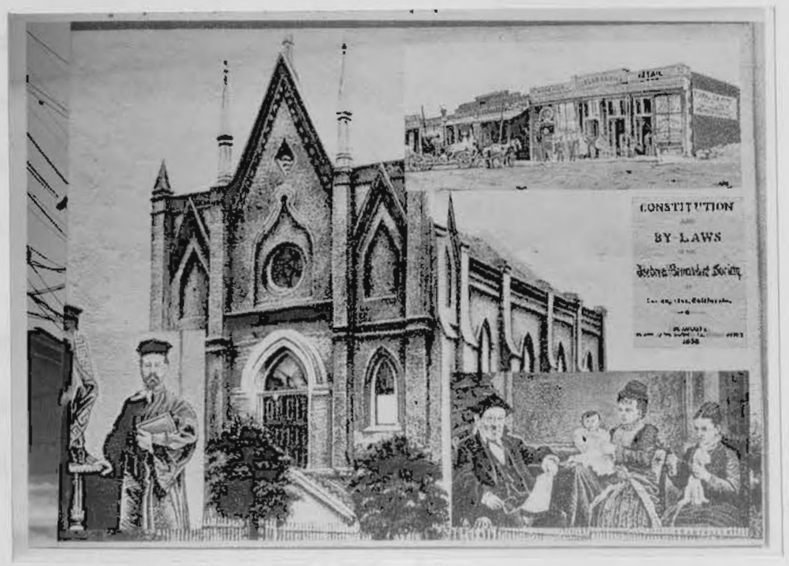
The contemporary urban mural movement emerged in North America in the wake of the radical political and cultural currents of the late sixties. Examples of the movement that interested me have been those demonstrating close social and contextual relationships. The outdoor street paintings of Chicago, Boston, New York and other American cities have retained the spirit of the

1 *See Orozco's text, prepared for the catalogue of his retrospective exhibition in 1947 held in Mexico City, reprinted in Elliot,D. 'Orozco! 1883-1949', Museum of Modern Art Oxford 1981, p. 113-116. See also Siquieros (1975:14-15) and Lucienne Bloch's detailed written record of the fresco process in her account of the ill-fated Rockefeller Center fresco 1931-1933. 'On Location with Diego Rivera', Art in America, Feb 1986, p 103-120.*

At Estrada Courts, L.A at least forty two-storey walls are covered with murals as part of a co-ordinated project involving youth groups

'Beginnings 1841-1880', The Fairfax Community Mural, 35 images on 7 panels depict the history of the L.A. Jewish community.

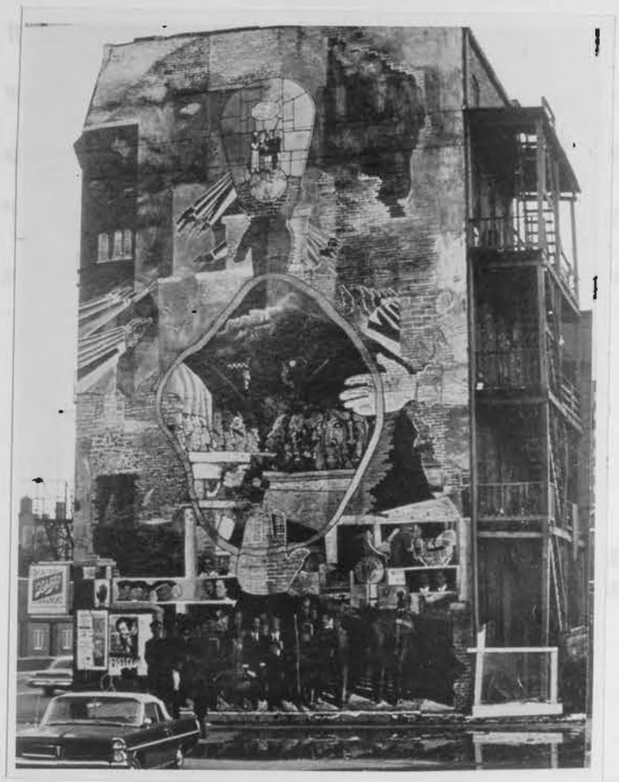
A mural by Ann Thiermann, outside a rehabilitation centre, Clare, Santa Monica U.S.A.



Detail of 'Beginnings'

'The Spirit of New Harlem' 1974 by Hank Prussing in New York

'Black Women' by Sharon Dunne. Part of Boston's 1970 Summerthing programme



'Peace and Salvation, Wall of Understanding' 1970 by William Walker, in Chicago

'Housing Budget Cuts', a Cityarts Workshop mural directed by Lynn Murray in New York

sixties in their traces of psychedelic and pop art elements, but a range of different approaches and intentions exist, some of which I describe here briefly.

Los Angeles

Although of some note because of scale, promising locations, and enviable equipment, the 'big pictures' of Los Angeles miss opportunities to transcend the limits of the 'mega-visual' aesthetic, and on the whole remain infused with visual cliches drawn from photo-realist, pop and advertising modes, and themes that celebrate sensation and the make-believe reality of the cinema and television industries[1]. These enthusiasms lie well outside my area of concern, both formally and conceptually. However, an admirable civic consciousness is manifested in the prolific and bold-painted designs which bring liveliness to barren urban features like motorways, bridges and huge building facades.

Some residential neighbourhoods in L.A reflect the cultural characteristics of their inhabitants in lively and expressive murals, such as those at the Estrada Courts Housing development (Levick:1988:62), and projects aimed at the participation and expression of different groupings, such as women, youth, gang, or ethnic-related affiliations. Other endeavours attempt to play a role in revitalising the historical consciousness of the city, but none as far as I am aware realise substantially the potential offered by mural painting."The Fairfax Community mural"intended to revitalise cultural activity in this urban area and depicts the history of its Jewish community, although here the medium of paint is used merely to duplicate and enlarge photographic images and not for its intrinsic qualities."La Vida Breve de Alfonso Fulano"is a three-part history of its area and describes in narrative visual form the changes that have occurred there from the turn of the century. It is noteworthy that the 1932 Siquieros mural,"American Tropical" in Los Angeles, white-washed at a time when its intention became politically unpopular, still lies obliterated. If restored it might demonstrate many strengths and provide a useful model of form, technique and historical contextuality.

1 *For example, the 5-storey high photo-realist portraits of media celebrities by Kent Twitchell painted in the late 70s. The mural form has been used to promote the sale of products without appearing initially to be advertisements e.g. the huge Victor Clothing factory murals and the Nike mural,'Baseball' in L.A*

"Street art"[1]

A strong thrust in American mural painting is that of purposeful, community-based activity and expression. Community interaction is diverse, including group participation as viewers, discussants, critics, painters and facilitators. Murals in this context can act as a "*vehicle of self-definition... even when the mural is painted by one person and that person is an outsider*" (Cockcroft:1977:86). Great social value has been shown in the numerous projects involving the participation of different groups in a process that looks critically both at the nature of the society and in it the place of the individual. The act of making murals can be one of common purpose where construction brings shared enrichment and practical experience. Such work with gang and youth mural groups has been extensive in the United States and successful particularly in L.A and San Diego.

The ghetto area of South Chicago generated the first of many murals inspired by the experience of urban people. They represent an "intrinsic connection between murals and neighbourhood" (Sommer:1975:), aiming to protest at the social conditions of the time, especially those of the working classes and unemployed, and to articulate urgent community preoccupations. These murals remain an emphatic expression of group affirmation. The first of this kind was "The Wall of Respect" (1967) depicting the achievements of Black Americans and becoming thereby a powerful symbol of racial pride that set a significant precedent for a succession of murals amongst other minority groups . William Walker[2] the central contributor has been involved in these murals over two decades. Other examples of large-scale street painting in a similar spirit are: "Wall of Choices" by a young Chinese painter, New York; "Up You Mighty Race" from "Wall of Pride", St Louis, Missouri; "Black Women", Boston 1970; "Housing Budget Cuts", New York; "Dove of Peace Enfolding People of All Races", Estrada Courts, L.A 1973; and another "Wall of Choices" by John Weber, Chicago, 1970. Although such titles have a rhetorical ring, these are strong, individual designs, each having a particular kind of direct visual poetry. All of them were made under the ambit of umbrella projects formed in response to the rapid emergence of murals and the need to structure and co-ordinate the activities required for their realisation[3].

1 *Street Art by Robert Sommer specifically explores murals within a social context, and Towards a People's Art: The Contemporary Mural Movement by Eva and James Cockroft is a valuable and comprehensive documentation of community-based mural activity in the United States.*

2 *Walker, like many others, turned to mural painting in frustration at rejection by galleries, in the process becoming one of the major exponents in the field.*

3 *Some organisations which co-ordinate programmes and raise sponsorship are the Cityarts Workshop, New York; Summerthing Program, Boston; Murals For The People, Chicago; and Los Artes Guadalupanos de Aztlan, Sante Fe.*

A medieval circus scene by Ed Povey located outside castle walls in Conwy, Wales

The Laycock School murals in Islington, London, by David Cashman & Roger Fagin

This mural in Covent Garden, London, was painted by Stephen Pusey using the method of projecting slides onto the wall at night.

, was painted by Stephen Pusey using the
/all at night.

Britain

I visited Britain in 1973 at the time the mural movement was commencing, and a
activity. The murals had a similarity of format because of the uniform scale and str
was the traditional one found at the end of a row of terrace houses, similar in he
three storeys high, squarish, and with a peaked gable. As in the United States the
in British murals ranging from the camouflaging of urban decay without really posir
in Glasgow do, to assertive records of united community action. Two outstandir
mural by Stephen Pusey which commemorates the achievement of the local inha
wall on which the mural is made; and the wellknown example of the Laycock S
skillfully integrated into the overt brickwork pattern by painters David Cashman an
have created a mural that functions on a rich contextual and environmental level

In Britain there is less evidence than in America of a media-derived visual
with many of the murals having strong spatial relationships. Official sponsorship of
has facilitated a more central role for professional artists and fine arts graduate
result a large number of murals are of a high technical and artistic standard
community-generated art activity. Amongst the British examples that I found mo
were the "Barbican mural" in Plymouth painted by Robert Lenkiewicz in 1972; E
Golden Lion Bridge mural" which describes aspects of local history; and the stro

1 *The Pusey mural in Earlham Street, Covent Garden, is a figure composition which clo
event. The Laycock School murals cover two gable front walls. Designs showing scho
brickwork pattern had been printed by the children, and then scaled-up and painted by*

2 *This was the case in 1979-1980 when I visited murals and related projects in England
have been cut in the interim.*

The Golden Lion Bridge mural in Swindon, Great Britain, by Ken White, 1976, commemorates the centenary of a local poet and also features Brunel and the now demolished canal bridge.

The Barbican mural in Plymouth, Great Britain by Robert Lenkiewicz, 1972, shows the metaphysical pursuits of the Elizabethan time.

'Locomotion' on the side of a museum in Manchester, Great Britain designed by Ken Billyard and painted in 1976 by Walter Kershaw after Billyard's death

the walls of a museum in Manchester. The Barbican mural of a dense and complex composition, is considered to be 'the first significant modern wall painting', meaning clearly, exterior painting in Britain. (Cooper & Sargent:1979:8).[1]

Turning to African examples whilst working on the Holy Cross mural I considered three diverse instances of mural painting activity geographically closer to Cape Town and of related interest.

Maputo

The Mozambique mural movement which arose in the wake of the revolution, had significance mainly because of the way it became the visible expression of a people's aspiration, and spontaneous response to historical events. It occurred in three stages: (1) The euphoric wave of public art largely unprogrammed and of an ephemeral nature (much of the paint has peeled off already), expressing emotions emphatically, for example, through images of hand gestures which are prominent thematic elements. (2) The second wave of murals made with more skill; larger, more colourful and compositionally more complex; were accorded official approval with sites specially chosen. (3) In the final stage the murals were recognized fully and promoted as symbols of post-colonial aspiration. Walls were constructed in prominent spaces to accommodate specially designed and professionally executed paintings. Sachs writes that after independence came to Mozambique in 1975 "*people not only celebrated the end of centuries of colonialism, but also the unfolding of a deep process of internal transformation, the sudden flowering of all that had been hidden in darkness and fear.*" (A.Sachs:1983:1).

Prominent Mozambican artists Mankeu and Malangatana were central proponents in this movement, as also were the Chilean agronomist Claudio Reis, who brought with him knowledge of the Chilean mural experience, and his Mozambican wife C.M. Reis. Two noteworthy works, both in Maputo, are Malangatana's large voluntary mural in the garden of the Natural History Museum, with a theme that depicts 'the people's struggle in the context of nature', and the mural "Workers in the Factories and Fields, the Future is Yours", executed by the two Reis' and a painting collective at the Cinema Matchedje.

1 *Povey's mural was sponsored by the Aberconwy Borough Council. The Golden Lion Bridge mural in Swindon was painted by Ken White in 1976 and supported by the Job Creation Programme. It features historical personages and a bridge since demolished. The Manchester 'Locomotion' mural was executed by Walter Kershaw in 1976 after the death of Ken Billyard but followed his design. The project was funded by the Greater Manchester Council.*

Malangatana, details from his mural in the garden of the Natural History Museum in Maputo, Mocambique

The three Malangatana walls at the same museum comprise paintings of great vitality and imaginative expression. It is described as, *"A brilliant fresco*[1] *of human and animal figures... Unlike most murals this one has neither poles nor perspective, no place for the eye to rest on, no depth, no swirling lines of continuous movement... just these faces and arms and animals jostling with each other at the dimension of the surface..."* (Sachs:1983)

Cyrene

The unique cycle of murals made by local artists at the Cyrene Church, 32 km south of Bulawayo near Matopos, have always touched closely on my concerns. To a large extent this is because of the way the biblical themes are interpreted solely through the experience of the artists: that is, their social and spiritual life, beliefs, folklore, history, and minute observation of their environment, so that the form itself is infused with subjects and insights drawn from these sources. Additional interest lies in the community-based nature of the centre, both its lively relationsnip with the surrounding community and the communal nature of living and artistic practise within the institution. Many of my own convictions regarding art process and education are exemplified in the approach and traditions established at the centre in 1937.

A discussion of Cyrene and its historical role as the first African-rooted art training centre in Zimbabwe is beyond the scope of this brief survey of mural interests; therefore I note the background to its paintings only in order to contextualise the works. The high-point of artistic practise at the centre occurred in the first fifteen years, but sound and integrated approaches to academic, agricultural, craft, and art education are still practised. Its first Warden, the Anglican priest/painter Ned Paterson[2], initiated the art and craft-focussed training programme in 1939, in close association with the needs of the rural area in which it is located[3]. He believed that art has a social function over and above its aesthetic role. Although the emphasis on academic training has increased it remains essentially an art community with something of the spirit of Tengenene and Vukutu (Walker:1985:83). It is of interest to

1 *As the medium is wall paint and* ***not*** *fresco the term is clearly being used loosely, perhaps meaning 'mosaic' in a descriptive sense.*

2 *Paterson trained at the Central School of Art in London before entering the priesthood.*

3 *On research leave in Zimbabwe I met numerous established artists and teachers who had been educated and trained at the Cyrene Mission School. One was the wellknown sculptor and teacher, Sam Songo, with whom I had discussions when I directed mural-painting workshops at the Msilikatsi Art Centre, Bulawayo in 1989. Although now an elderly disabled man in a wheelchair he is still extremely competent, and is mentioned in the biography, 'Paterson of Cyrene' (Walker:1985:48), as a small, severely crippled boy, who was "one of the most remarkable of the many handicapped people" to pass through Cyrene. Primarily a sculptor, Songo is also an admirable painter and one of the smallest and finest murals inside the chapel, at floor level behind the altar, was painted by him.*

The Parable of the talents by Sylvester Chibayi

The exterior Eastern wall of the church on which is depicted a Nativity by Livingstone Sango.

The Eastern wall behind the altar. These are the first of the series and the only ones where Ned Paterson did some of the painting. They show African martyrs and saints and an African Christ figure around which a legend is inscribed in Sindebele

note that a European critic when writing on Cyrene in the 50s compared the communal atmosphere of the training centre to that of the Bauhaus, and saw both institutions permeated by the "*tension and excitement of continuing discovery and invention*"[1].

The Chapel

The walls began to be filled with murals from Cyrene's earliest years, after Paterson painted the first central work behind the altar. The students slowly began to cover the entire surface of the church themselves with African-based interpretations of New Testament teaching. The cycle of paintings grew until every wall space including the small areas along the floor and above doorways, was covered. A further series of paintings then developed on the outside walls until the small chapel was encircled with images and colour made luminous by sunlight. A number of different painters participated, so that style and interpretation vary. Yet through the nature of the collective process, of artists working together "in close association as in a guild, seeing and discussing each other's work" (Walker:1985), overall integration was achieved. Paterson's contributions have a Byzantine character but in the other paintings consistency of theme and subject matter create a convincing visual world, and the compositional approach of 'filling' the entire area, creating shallow spatial planes makes the whole reminiscent of Persian painting.

Amongst the components appearing in the interior are the tall African figures, surrounded by decorative and narrative motifs, on the curved eastern wall behind the altar. The subjects are from the left, "Mqamesela, the first Zulu martyr"; "Bernard Mizeke, the first Shona martyr": "The Living Christ": "Simon of Cyrene" (reputed to be an African), carrying the cross; and "Masomela, girl martyr of Sukukuneland". Above the vertical format of the main figures lie horizontal panels of angels and the New Jerusalem, portrayed as an African village, and below at floor level are depicted narratives of village life.

Paterson describes one of the numerous individual murals as follows: "*The most recent mural is twenty-four feet wide and depicts a student's own idea of The Last Judgment. Over the centre of the west door Our Lord is seated on a throne. He holds in His Hands an adze and a mealie-cob, and by this twin standard of 'What have you made and what have you grown ?' He judges the world. Scattered over the wall in strange arabesques are groups of working people busy about their village crafts and manual labour or enjoying the relaxation of music, or reading or writing or dancing... In the far corner a fearsomely-patterned snake guards a pit down which a parcel of nudes fall headlong into decorative flames and darkness.*" (Walker:1985:37). Other examples of

1 *Anton Ehrenszweig, Studio, VolCX LV111, No. 738, Sept 1954 p. 80-83.*

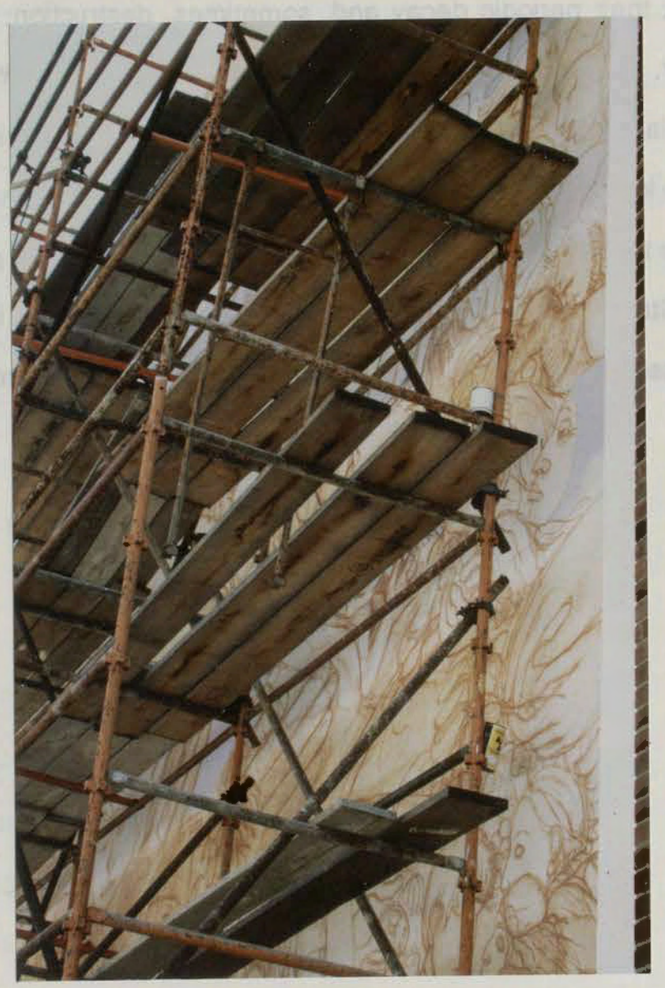
paintings are the superb "Parable of the Talents" by Sylvester Chibayi, and John Mhlabi's "The Good Samaritan," narrated as a tale about a local traveller attacked by thieves and saved by the Good Samaritan who takes him to a local hotel where girls dance in welcome and where he is given given food and sustenance.

The exterior walls have compositionally less complex renditions of the "Nativity" and "Crucifixion" scenes, once again translated into African terms. There is a particularly fine Nativity painting by Livingstone Sango on the east wall. It is most regrettable that a more durable material process such as fresco was not used on exterior paintings of such historical and artistic significance. This is surprising in view of Paterson's sound training and emphasis on craft skills. However, he was also reputed to have placed greater value on the immediate expressive value and place of the art process in daily life than on long-term permanence. Fresco is a low-cost medium, using simple materials such as lime plaster and pigments; and as even natural local pigments can be used there is thus no dependence on expensive imported art materials. Once dry it is still the most stable paint medium in existence. At present the interior paintings seem reasonably sound but the outer cycle are badly deteriorated. I saw them being poorly restored, with inappropriate methods and materials, when I visited the centre in 1989. The general loss of craft skills and knowledge of materials in the last few decades has not left even Cyrene unaffected.

Sotho-Ndebele wall painting

This final area of interest can be sketched briefly. I perceived parallels between my working process and the vivid environmental relationships manifested in Sotho-Ndebele wall painting. As my mural progressed a strong relationship developed with the natural aspects of the space in which it stood. Responses to cyclical events, such as weather and the patterns of plant growth in the immediate environment, entered into the visual elements of the mural. As this happened I recalled the wall paintings I had observed in Lesotho and the Orange Free State. The aspects I reflected on were the symbolic relationships of their texture, colour, shape and pattern with those of the natural elements of earth, sky, water and plant forms in southern Sotho mural painting. The synthesis of Ndebele geometric design and of brilliant synthetic pigmentation with that of the organic earth tints and plant design elements of the Sotho mode, visible in examples of what has been termed "hybrid Sotho-Ndebele style" (Changuion & Mathews:1989:121), were of particular interest.

One other area of conscious parallelism was that related to time. Surrounding my mural were unbaked clay-brick building remnants: their gradual dissolution and submergence under new growth was an influential environmental factor in the painting. A growing awareness of the earth colours exposed by the bulldozers and the use of corresponding images and tints in my painting were the cues for reminders of other parallels. The cyclical nature of the erection and habitation of informal homes, and often their vivid symbolic decoration in different parts of this country; their periodic decay and, sometimes, destruction; as well as the wanderings of the inhabitants in search of work and shelter, is a reflection of their tenuous ties with the land. Where tenure is ephemeral, dwelling places are similarly so. Patterns of social migration are linked to the survival needs of individuals, or to the enforced shifts of whole communities as happened during the long years of Group Areas legislation. Mathews & Changuion in their fine visual record of Sotho and Ndebele wallpainting describe the "melting back into the soil" of dwelling places, in particular those of the masterly wall painter Malvel Dani in the Orange Free State. Perhaps this is due less to a relationship of the inhabitants with organic environmental change, as the writers seem to suggest, than to profound political and material disadvantages and their resultant lack of choice (1989:145).



Completed conté drawing on wall surface

4. The Making of The Mural

A. Planning

The composition was formulated through discussion with the main narrators and advisors on the project[1]. Images were selected with the intention of constructing a symbolic representation of those visible aspects of community life felt to be the most common. The role the advisors played was to give historical guidance on the selection of these subjects and themes, but the manner of composition and the appearance of the final painting was my complete responsibility.

Design

The design adhered to the limits set by the factual and historical sources, these being: the oral histories recorded during the time of the removals as well as after; direct observation of the site and terrain; portrait drawings of the narrators; my series of notebook drawings recording the demolition; and existing historical material[2].

The first design was made on a small scale, following the same peaked format as that of the mural wall. The design area was divided into a geometric grid within which the linear composition was developed. Several attempts to plan the colour composition on this small intricate scale were unsuccessful and further colour planning was postponed until direct work began on the wall. The scale of the original drawing was increased into a larger working diagram through a photostat enlargement and the grid section was emphasised.

Scaling-up methods

I was familiar with the process of projecting cartoon drawings[3] onto a mural surface and I explored its suitability for the physical situation of this project. The method consists of using an electric light projector to cast sections of the design onto the wall surface whilst simultaneously converting the image through drawing directly over it and onto the wall. The advantages of this method are

1 *These were Fr Basil van Rensburg, resident priest of the Holy Cross church for ten years; Amien and Latiefa Hendricks of Horstley Street, both fourth generation inhabitants who had spent their whole lives in the area; Mrs Naz Ebrahim of Rochester Road, chairperson of the District Six Rent, Residents and Ratepayers Association, with a long and illustrious family history within the area including prominent historical figures such as Dr Abdullah Abdurahman and Cissie Gool.*

2 *This included the Wolheim collection of press material on District Six in the U.C.T archives; individually owned photographic and written material; sources available in the Cultural History Museum and The Bokaap Museum in Upper Wale Street; and artifacts, tools, furniture, clothing, heirlooms and memorabilia.*

3 *'Cartoon' is the traditional term meaning fullsized working drawings on strong paper to be used during the execution of mural, tapestry or other large designs. In this case the cartoons were not fullsize but approximately nine times larger than the original.*

the feasibility of using assistants to trace the original drawing, and speed of application. But the disadvantages in this case were considerable: equipment and labour costs being the first – because the use of a projector would necessitate swift application of the drawing and therefore assistance would be needed; and the problems in using extensive electrical equipment in the open and the physical difficulties of setting this up and working one storey above ground level. The projection method demands a clear view of the wall and at the same time the conversion of the drawing needs access to the whole wall surface but in this case only a small part of it was within reach of the base of the mural. Ladders were too unstable at this height whereas scaffolding blocked visibility. There were thus logistical problems so that in this case advanced technology offered no advantage, being both expensive and complicated.

Anotner important consideration was an aesthetic one. My view on process is generally not to favour mechanical means. In the case of the scaling-up operation an important flexibility in the procedure, that of allowing each step to be adaptable to new possibilities. would be lost if the design drawing were merely enlarged. Where too rigid an application of the design at any stage of the mural procedure precludes the scope for further development or is unresponsive to the spatial potential of the full picture plane, crucial opportunities are missed. In the classic novel about the experience of making painting, '*The Horse's Mouth*' the main character, Gulley Jimson, says as he faces a potential mural wall, "*It's one thing to see or think you see a set of forms, and another to put it down. But this set came up nearly complete. Not a gap anywhere. No filling required. And as far as I could tell in the sketch, the shapes would fill the surface. But that as every mural painter knows is not very far. For the line that is as lively as spring steel in the miniature, may go as dead as apron string on the wall. And what is a living whole on the back of an envelope can look as flat and tedious as a holiday poster, when you draw it out full size.*" (Carey:1944:243).

I decided quite early that the traditional manual method of 'squaring-up' the drawing onto the final surface would be the most suitable in terms of cost, simplicity and adaptability. In this method a fullscale fine-line grid, corresponding geometrically to the grid in the original design, is laid down on the wall by simple manual means consisting of the application of taut chalk lines. Assistance would be necessary only for laying down the main grid and the smaller sub-divisions, while the actual drawing would be done by myself. I estimated it would take me and two assistants not more than a day to complete the task. The evolution of the design from oral histories and descriptions necessarily linked the visual process to the pace and flow of these relationships, so that the most

Details of conté drawing

appropriate means of transferring the design onto the wall appeared to be a flexible drawing method which would allow further inputs and shifts of emphasis when necessary. The only equipment required were three rolls of coloured chalked lines available from hardware stores. To have access to the whole surface the scaffolding had first to be in place but visibility was not a problem because the drawing would be executed in sections directly from the scaffolding.

Equipment

The major item of equipment for a mural painter is scaffolding. A less essential but desireable contraption is a mobile "dolly", comprising a small hydraulic seat which enables the artist to move about the wall surface at will thus making any other equipment unnecessary and retaining clear visibility of the whole working surface[1]. Unfortunately this was not available to me but I was offered the loan of substantial scaffolding from an engineering firm. Not only was it extensive enough for access to any part of the wall but it was secure enough to withstand the high winds to which the site was exposed.

The only other equipment necessary were the basic ones of the paint process; hard brushes, many small containers in which to mix colours; large, deep plastic trays in which to store paint containers at different levels of the scaffolding; and cylindrical tins lashed to the upright supports at every level for storage of drawing material, brushes, rags, water jars, etc.

Problems not foreseen in the initial plans caused work delays until appropriate solutions were found. For instance, the behaviour of birds was sometimes a problem, one example being the way in which starlings congregated on the entire gable edge of the roof overhanging the mural. This resulted in repeated messing of the painting surface below the gable until a deterrent wire stretched along the edge prevented further perching[2]. Other problems were movement of the scaffolding in high winds and platform planks being dislodged in storms[3].

1 *Where civic funding is available devices like a dolly become possible. Kent Twitchell, the exponent of massive, five storey high murals in Los Angeles, uses this method. This was the only piece of sophisticated equipment which I would have found useful as the comprehensive scaffolding structure covering the wall and the three platforms cutting through the design in three places made visibility problematical for me. But besides this difficulty direct methods and simple processes and materials suited my creative aims and procedure.*

2 *Thin stainless steel wire and eyelets were used to make a taut line on the edge of the roof. This simple method was immediately effective and has remained so.*

3 *Because of the scaffolding's height and movement in the wind I took the precaution of wearing a mountaineering harness for some months when working on the upper platforms until the conditions became familiar.*

Some problems anticipated never materialised, but wasted valuable time. One example was the scheme to cover the mural at night to protect it from vandalism; this proved too expensive and unwieldy and was abandoned. Only one minor, random incident of vandalism occurred early on in the project, and for almost a decade since then the wall had stood unprotected and undamaged whilst every blank wall on either side of it and in the neighbourhood have been repeatedly covered with graffiti. Another scheme which proved a useful exercise but wasted time and resources was the setting up of a lighting system in order to work at night. This was abandoned after only a few night-time sessions because of security problems in an area that, because of the removals, had become completely deserted at night[1].

Choice of medium

The first medium considered was fresco. I conducted extensive research in this, making lime plaster and pigment experiments in wooden trays, but decided against its use in this instance for several reasons. It became apparent from reading on the subject that contemporary murals standing in exterior urban environments are endangered by the acids in polluted atmosphere, and therefore fresco is best suited for indoor spaces. Other reasons were my desire to work with an accessible medium such as housepaint, needing a lesser degree of technical skill, in order to demonstrate its potential. There was also the necessity for completing the mural as soon as possible because of the anticipation aroused in the commentators and in order to have a visible reminder of the recent removals. Planning involved discussions with a technical advisor on the preparation of the wall and choice of a range of basic colours in P.V.A and exterior acrylic paints, as well as the assembly of fifty small glass containers for storing mixed colours to satisfy my requirement for a comprehensive range of colour to be available.

Funding and consultation

Without funding, donations and practical support from many sources this project would have been difficult to realise. I believed it important to mobilise support for this venture not only to obtain the necessary funding but to promote the potential of painting with a contextual social function, and to underline the significance of those events which comprised the theme of the mural. Once the scaffolding had been obtained on loan the material cost was relatively low, yet careful planning was crucial in order to avoid delays once the painting began.

1 *The early 80s were years when the 'dirty tricks' behaviour of the security police still occurred and there was an obvious 'plainclothes' presence at the wall for some months – they tended to sit quite openly in a car within sight of the wall. In addition to other undesirable elements. I decided not expose myself to risk in a deserted area at night from any quarter. I also spent time inspecting the scaffolding every morning and had the structure checked at regular intervals by the construction company owning the scaffolding.*

This aspect of mural painting, the negotiation for space, equipment, support and funding, is a time-consuming but unavoidable phase of such a project. In addition, the social context of the work required intensive consultation. The role of participants in the formulation of the project and the ongoing discussions is part of a continuous process which differs radically from the self-sufficiency of studio-based painting.

Documentation

I intended to document every stage of the work from the outset, to create a comprehensive visual record for research, historical and teaching purposes. There is always a sense of the ephemeral about a mural in that it is tied to contextual circumstances and is not an autonomous art work. Although my intention was to use the material and surface in as rigorous a way as possible, I accepted that vulnerability and impermanence were inherent. I felt too that a detailed record of the finished mural was necessary as a reference source for repair work in the eventuality of damage or deterioration. In addition it would provide a guideline to the technical, formal and conceptual aspects of mural procedure, based on this particular experience, to other aspirant muralists.

One aspect of the documentation that I regard as unsatisfactory is the lack of taped recordings of the oral histories to which I listened. In retrospect I realise that the organisation of recording equipment and interviews should have been a primary part of the planning from the outset, with motivation for a research assistant included in my planning. Some tapes and written records exist but their acquisition was informal, simply listening, drawing and making notes. The whole process was primarily one of perceiving and making, if not direct visual representations, attempted metaphorical equivalents of the verbally expressed and visible experience. This activity was too demanding to allow me to spread my energies too widely and at this point a research assistant would have been invaluable. I regarded the oral commentaries as primary sources in developing the visual record, but lost the opportunity of retaining this material as historical records in themselves. It proved difficult to make taped recordings after the mural was finished as the narrators had been widely scattered in the removals and many were impossible to trace. In the case of the many elderly commentators, some of whom have since died, the lack of recordings of their personal histories is regretted. In any future project relying upon oral sources the planning and the methodology should include systematic documentation and assistance with such material.

B. Practical Process

The first technical task after the scaffolding was erected was the thorough examination and preparation of the wall surface. The durability of a mural executed in acrylic or emulsion paint is dependant on three primary determinants. In order of importance these are: **1** the structural soundness and careful preparation of the wall underneath the painting; **2** the thoroughness of surface preparation; and **3** the careful, firm, layered application of the paint[1]. These factors were more important in ensuring technical stability than the protective sealer painted over the completed mural. This, an acrylic glaze, allows thorough cleaning of the surface without wear and tear on the paint below and affords reasonable protection from external damage for a few years. But the corrosive effects of pollution and climate upon the paint surface, although always a problem for exterior murals, are potentially less harmful than the damage occurring from underneath and within the paint surface. These are damp, structural failures like cracks, poorly applied undercoats, and final painting too loosely or too thickly applied.

Preparation of wall

Manual help was required at this early stage and I was assisted by two men, both residents of District Six, who identified strongly with the project[2]. The wall surface and its surrounds were thoroughly examined and any cracks opened up and repaired. Fortunately, except for fine cracks, there was only one serious break in the plaster which required thorough repair. The next step was an intensive wire-brushing and sanding down of the whole surface, done by hand in order to treat every part of the area with minute care. An electric sander would not have done the job as thoroughly as it would have tended to skim over uneven areas of the surface. The wall and its surrounds were then wiped down with a formaldehyde solution in order to kill fungal growth[3].

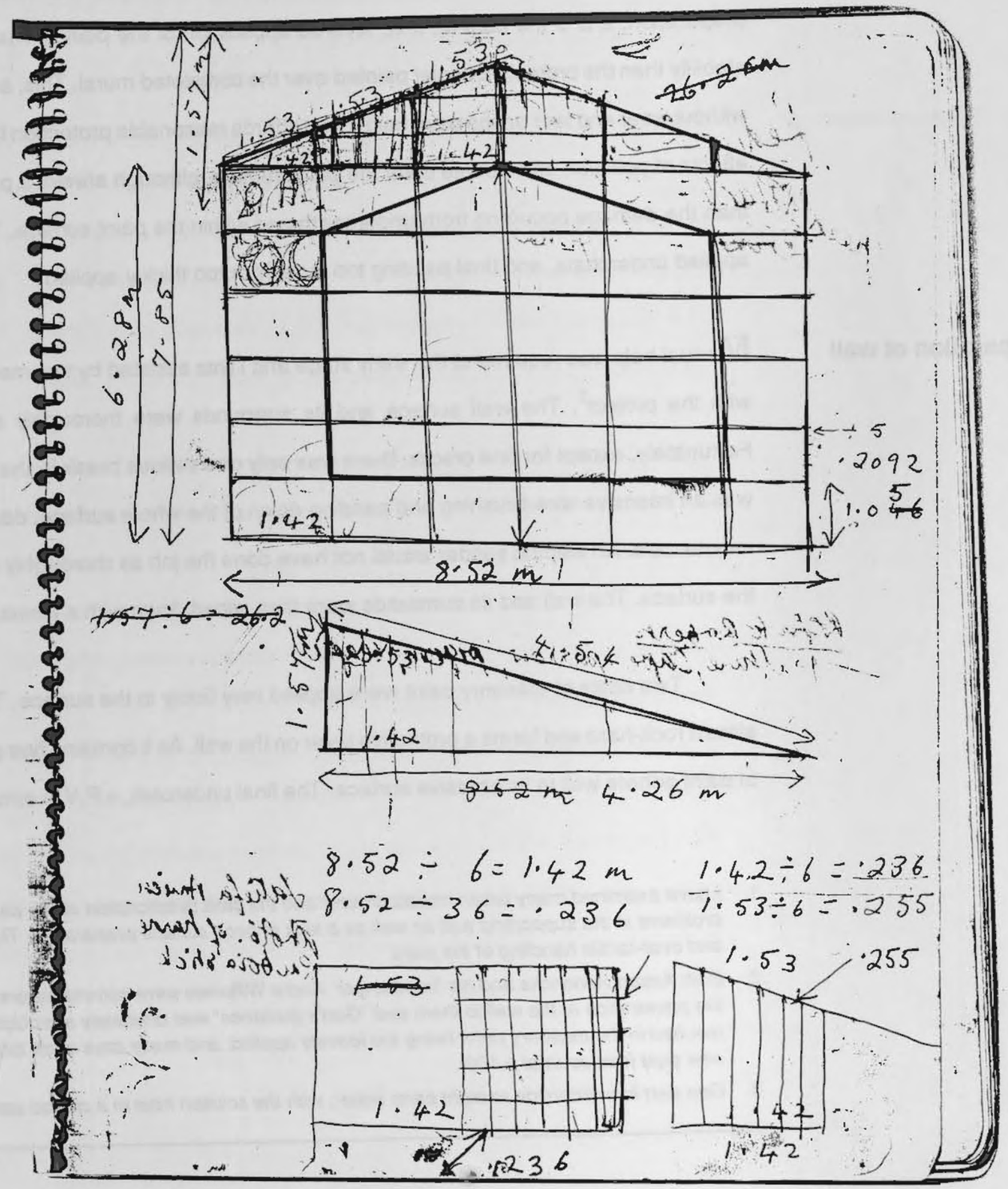
Two coats of masonry paint were applied very firmly to the surface. This is an extremely strong oil-based paint which dries almost rock-hard and forms a protective layer on the wall. As it contains fine gritty particles (like marble dust) the subsequent layers of paint adhere well to its abrasive surface. The final undercoat, a P.V.A emulsion in a neutral cream colour, was applied only after

1 *I have examined many urban murals closely and the swift deterioration of the paint seems to result from damp, cracks and structural problems in the supporting wall as well as a lack of good surface preparation. This is at least as important a cause as carelessly applied and over-tactile handling of the paint.*

2 *Both Amien Hendricks and his 'handlanger' Andre Willemse were commentators central to the project. Their conviction that I should leave the preparation of the wall to them and "God's guidance" was ultimately a problem. His resistance to my exact technical specifications resulted in the masonry paint being too loosely applied, and many days extra labour were needed to sand off the hard paint and apply a new coat (see Journal p.109).*

3 *One part formaldehyde to eight parts water, with the solution kept in a closed container and care taken not to inhale the fumes.*

Scaling-up


1.53
1.42
1.57 m
6.28m
7.85
8.52 m
1.42
.2092
1.046
1.57 ÷ 6 = 262
1.57
1.42
8.52m
4.26 m
8.52 ÷ 6 = 1.42 m
8.52 ÷ 36 = .236
1.42 ÷ 6 = .236
1.53 ÷ 6 = .255
1.53
.255
1.42
.236
1.42

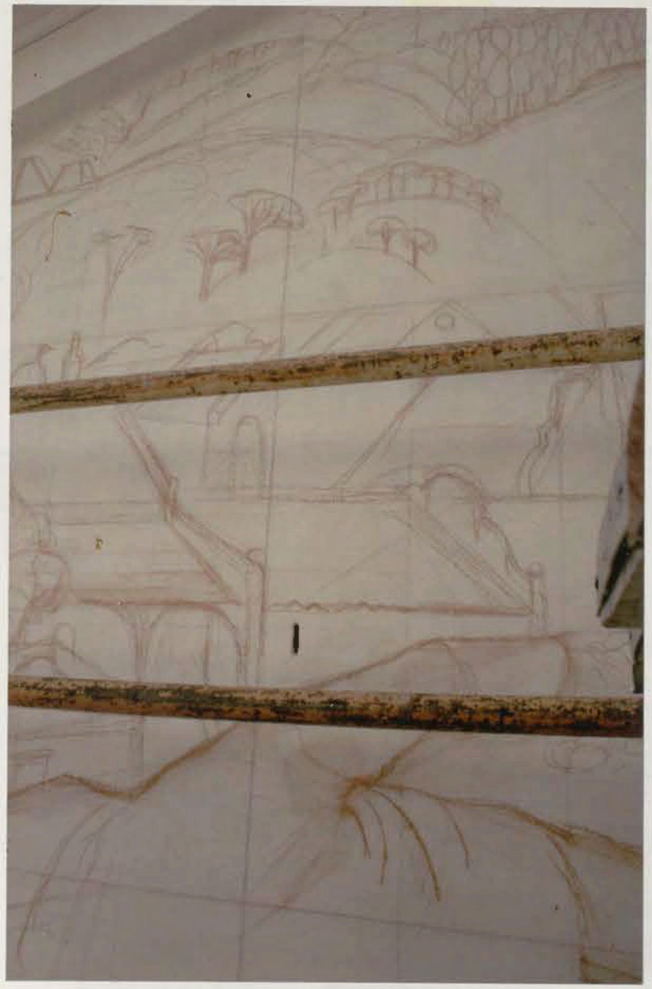
the masonry paint had been allowed to dry out thoroughly for 3/4 days. At this stage it was technically important to scrub the undercoat well into the surface in thin flat layers, applying pressure whilst painting. It was necessary to stress the importance of this method, understood by most painters as a technique to unite the paint layers with the surface, to my assistants, who were used to other less vigorous ways of applying paint to walls. The scrubbing technique makes for a strong knitting together of overpaint and ground, as also between the first layers of paint and the pictorial applications. For this reason only hard brushes were used from the first to the final paintwork.

Squaring-up

With the help of two students this procedure was completed in one day. The measurements of the fullsize grid 8.52 m (width), 7.85 m (height to central peak), 6.28 m (height of side) corresponded geometrically to that of the small-scale design, which were 52cm, 48.2 cm, and 38.6 cm. The subdivisions of the large sections of the grid were measured and marked out with chalk on the perimeters of the mural surface (see diagram opposite). When completed two people stretched a chalk line[1] from one point to its corresponding point on the opposite side until the line was taut. The third person then plucked the line allowing it to bounce back against the surface leaving behind a clear straight coloured line. This process was repeated until every vertical and horizontal line had been marked out to demarcate the whole area into 42 major sections.

At this point I decided against the initial intention which was to subdivide each of these sections further in the same way into 36 smaller sub-sections to assist the scaling-up (or matching-up) of the images. I felt quite capable of transferring the drawing freehand without resort to smaller units and I judged this would impede my responsiveness to the need for adapting the drawing to the spatial possibilities of the wall; that is, making changes of scale and proportion or introducing new elements. I decided further that a mechanical approach would destroy the dynamic potential in this first crucial engagement with the surface, which could generate directions for the next stage. I see the difference between a painting and a design, regarding the mural as essentially the latter, in the following way: a painting has the potential for growth in the way that it propels the artist forward through the generation of new possibilities during the execution, whereas a design is a process more static, more backward-looking in the sense of following a plan already created.

1 *A rolled line impregnated with brightly-coloured powdered chalk.*



Drawing

No further practical assistance by others was needed and from this point I proceeded on my own[1]. It would be misleading not to record the satisfaction of facing, with all my materials at hand, a blank, well-prepared surface large enough to explore physically and to allow speculation on its generative dimensions. [Like Gulley Jimson in 'The Horse's Mouth', I felt that "*I could have embraced that wall*" (Carey:1944:264)]. The moment was familiar, a taut sense of anticipation, of what Stravinsky called 'the foretaste of discovery'; it comprised much the same gathering together of capacities as when facing a primed canvas ready to flood it with, say an underpainting of cadmium yellow. When Stravinsky writes of the anticipation 'of work' he could be writing of the visual process, in this case applying closely to my own practical experience:

"The idea of work to be done is so closely bound up with the idea of the arranging of materials and of the pleasure that the actual doing of the work affords us that, should the impossible happen and my work suddenly be given to me in a perfectly completed form, I should be embarrassed and nonplussed by it..." (1982:52)

New beginnings are often possible at the changeover between procedural stages, and the constraints of even the most basic technical activity tend to open up creative speculation. The technical and organisational procedures of a painter have importance outside their immediate purpose and should not be rushed for several reasons. These are: for the sake of technical soundness; for understanding the layered, material structure of the painting and the spatial and topographical nature of its surface, in a way similar to a dancer or actor knowing their stage; and for the important conceptual and physical preparation that occurs in fulfilling practical tasks prior to creative engagement[2].

1 *When the mural was first considered I had in mind a shorter term painting project involving students, but as the planning and research materialised into a longer and more complex endeavour than originally anticipated I felt that for the sake of greater coherence and continuity I should handle it myself. As this was to be my first large-scale exterior mural I would be working under unfamiliar conditions and needed thus to concentrate on my own learning experience and the ongoing interaction with the commentators.*

2 *With the expansion of ready prepared art materials in the late sixties many artists, particularly painters, became consumers who lost a considerable degree of craft skills, and thereby also an understanding of the material nature of their work. Formal skills also have been affected, specifically in the area of colour. Because of the availability of ready-mixed colour in the form of pastels, acrylics etc. the ability to mix and extract the desired colour from limited materials has regressed. In general, a syndrome more noticeable in students and young painters, there has arisen a tendency to rush over the technical and organisational aspects of painting in order to focus on 'creative expression'. In addition to these poorer material skills has come also the loss of time for creative reflection that I believe should be associated with these procedures. Russell Harvey who taught me painting used to grind his limited range of colours in the sixties and regarded it as an act of mental preparation for painting. With this activity too came deeper understanding of the physical nature of his material.*

Application

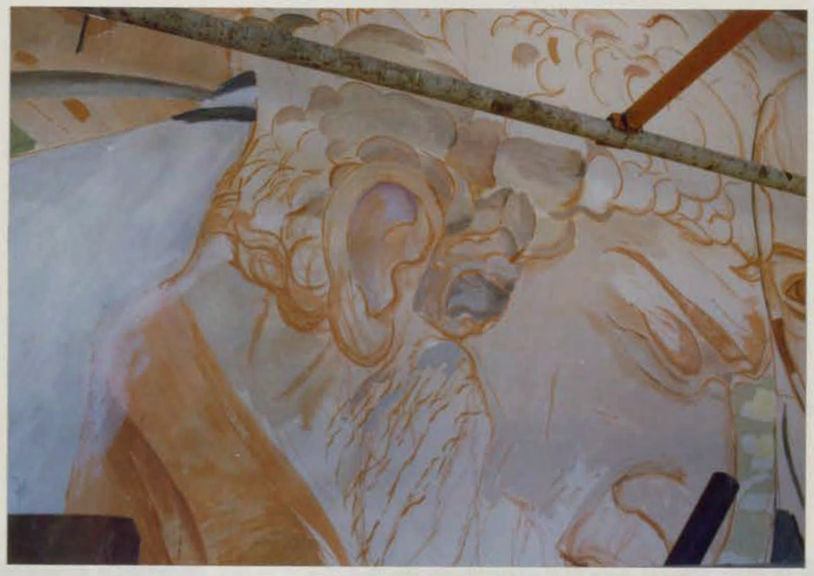
The most suitable drawing material proved to be a reddish- brown French conté. I experimented with brush drawing and different chalks, various colours and degrees of solubility but the conté proved the best for my purposes, being both flexible and durable. It had good definitive properties and was able to structure form firmly; it was sufficiently soluble to be erased easily with a wet rag when making changes and yet durable enough to withstand months of weathering without fading or dissolving. In some areas of the mural, left unpainted until the last, the conté application survived in good condition for two years. When the drawing was finished I found, after experimenting, that no glazing was needed to separate it from the paint and that it was possible to work directly into and over the reddish drawing with the brush, having first dusted away any surface chalk.

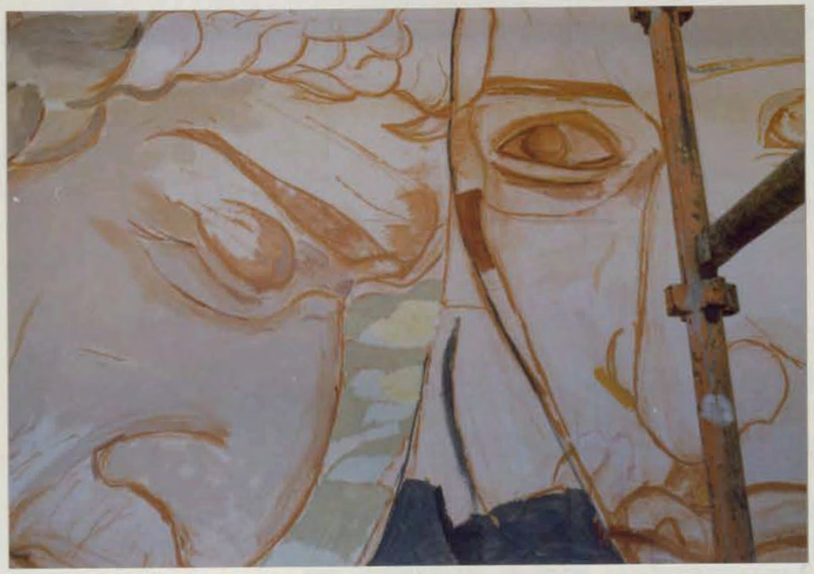
The application and development of the drawing on the wall was particularly satisfying because of the firm parameters within which I worked. This was surprising as I expected to find the rigid format restrictive. Instead it allowed me a freer play than if I had had to seek my own compositional restraints. This confirms my presumption of many work parallels between different art forms. An example is Stravinsky's writings on aesthetics and the creative process always proving of great value to me. In an essay on composition he writes of the creative impasse resulting from "*unrestricted freedom*". He says, "*I have no use for a theoretic freedom. Let me have something finite, definite...And yet which of us has ever heard talk of art as other than a realm of freedom?...it is imagined that art is outside the bounds of ordinary activity. Well, in art as in everything else, one can build only upon a resisting foundation: whatever constantly gives way to pressure, constantly renders movement impossible*" (1982:64).

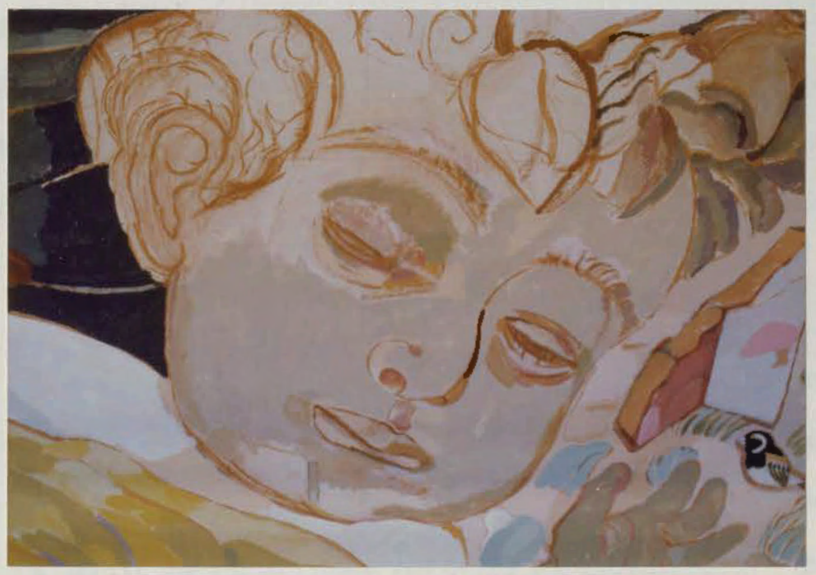
The geometric limitations of the grid together with the needed adherence to the imagery laid down in the design, had the effect of making me push the limits of these boundaries and explore interrelationships across the picture plane. The subdivisions of the sections invited breaching and yet their limits helped maintain stability. So the delimitation of 'the field of action' allowed a new freedom: *"Whatever diminishes constraint, diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit."*(Stravinsky:1982:64)

Procedure

Rather than working within one individual section at a time I moved through them all and sought the compositional and conceptual unity of the whole picture plane in both drawing and painting procedures. Essentially it was a mobile process. I would choose a particular area of scaffolding on which to situate myself for the day, partially dictated by weather conditions, organise my materials







Transitional stage from drawing to painting

at that spot, and yet find it necessary to climb down and view the wall from across the road at regular intervals in order to consider the whole composition. In doing so, I would be drawn back to making visual notes on different sections of the mural for future reference.

Weather affected my working pattern in a major way. Wet conditions, even drizzle, made painting impossible as the paint would dissolve. Wind was also a major problem: when it was strong I worked on the lowest platform or at the base of the mural, and the trays of paints and brushes had to be constantly secured under bricks. Yet I adjusted quickly to conditions, with the weather becoming an accepted and challenging dimension of my working environment and the wall and its environs a familiar space. Time of day and the angle of the sun were additional factors to consider. Early morning gave the most ideal light, while the middle of the day became a regular working shift for me, coinciding with working people who tended to visit the wall at that time. Regular commentators came to know my timetable and the cycle of activity swung between practical execution and consideration of the work, discussion with commentators, and making notes on different aspects of the project in a journal.

Working journal

This was an important part of the mural process because in retrospect it provides an informal written record of most aspects of the working procedure (see Excerpts from Working Journal, appendix 4). As the mural location was isolated from my normal working environment I felt the need at times for studio-based dialogue. In a certain sense the journal took the place of peer group intercourse. I was able to note my observations on a daily basis, on formal, technical, conceptual and contextual experience. The journal provided continuity and a perspective on the developmental nature of the work, of considerable value to me during the process.

Painting

The material used was a combination of P.V.A and exterior acrylic paints, both fast-drying and water soluble whilst wet. The notion of colour availability is a central tenet of my view of practise. In a studio I would prepare for the use of oil paint on canvas through an extensive mixing and gradation of colours on sheets of heavy glass and encourage students to do the same[1]. In order to have the breadth of 'pallette' I needed at hand, in the case of the mural, I made fifty or more modulated colours instantly available by mixing and storing the range of tints in small glass jars with lids. I was thus able to select a range of colours, move them to the area

1 *No wastage is involved as oil paint takes long to dry and must also be stored under plastic covers or water at night.*

in which I intended to work each day, and have them ready for use at short notice. The brushes that handled best were the same moderate-sized ones with the firmest possible bristles that I used for oil paint. The colours were worked well into the surface to spread out the paint as firmly as possible. Perhaps with certain conventions of mural painting in mind, I began working initially with flat colour fields but these, when combined with the defined shapes of images, appeared static and without spatial dimension until I developed a way of handling the paint more suited to my innate expressive means.

I quickly discovered it was possible to modulate areas of flat paint whilst wet, so that a field of grey, for instance, could be laid down and immediately tinted with warmer or cooler colours, made brighter or more neutral, its tones lightened or darkened, according to pictorial needs. This handling allowed a variation of qualities within the colour fields which seemed necessary to achieve vividness and energy in its pictorial values. The qualities I sought were not formal alone but closely rooted in content and the kind of responses, both emotional and conceptual, which I wished that area of the painting to evoke. Chagall's comment on his own process often came to mind. He said. "*I attenuate the white, muddy the blue by countless thoughts*" (1979:54)

Technical and pictorial needs were initially unsuited to textural elements and 'painterly' handling of the material. It was difficult at first denying the textural play that came naturally to me but it made me focus in a new way on other dimensions of form such as shape, structural planes and narrative elements: all important compositional devices in murals. In this way the physical properties and limitations of the material, along with techniques appropriate to it played an important role in the development of the final form.

C. Formal Process

"Reality which for one moment seemed an infinity of crystallized facts, frozen in position, liquefies, springs forth and flows. The true historical reality is not the datum, the fact, the thing, but the evolution formed when these materials melt and fluidify. History moves; the still waters are made swift."

(Gasset:1968:107)

The initial intention behind the mural was to record objectively and symbolically, through the selection of images, the "fall of District Six" (Small:1986:9). The beginning work was establishing the facts, dealing only with what was seen, heard, already recorded, in every way historically accountable. I intended to retain this factual dimension right through the creative process, from the first linear organisation to the completion of the painting, and to limit emotional content and my individual expressive tendencies. This intention parallelled an emphasis I perceived in the oral commentaries for the facts to be made known. Although I retained a measure of accountability in the factual elements of the mural, my hold felt precarious at times because the nature of the formal process was generative, precipitating new possibilities often in opposition to predicted content and thematic intention.

Form and mobility

Much of the formal and conceptual tension in the painting process lay thus in the interplay between the factual aspects of the imagery that is, what they appeared to represent and what they began to evoke; first singly, secondly, in their descriptive groups, and thirdly, through interplanar[1] linkages. The images were the primary visual element, but they remained 'frozen in position' until their formal manipulation (through drawing first and then with paint), began to 'fluidify' and to mobilise their static character. In his notebooks Chagall describes the way in which thought and the visual act engage in mutual activation, so that mind and hand develop together rather than one preceding the other. *"The psyche should get into the paint. You must work the painting with the thought that something of your soul penetrates it and gives it substance."* (Chagall:1979:54)

The formal process consisted of two stages. The first was the compositional integration of the subject-matter through drawing on the wall, with the emphasis on the images and their interrelationships. The second stage was the transition from drawing to painting, the emphasis changing here from direct representation, rhythm and line to abstract visual values such as colour, tone and mass. The process as a whole was one in which I needed, in Chagall's words, to "start with [a] precise thing [and to] proceed towards something more abstract", my aim being to synthesise form and content in a way that retained the factual and conceptual

1 *The picture plane*

dimensions of the project. The capacity of painting values not only to elucidate images but to suggest the essential conceptual character of the work was a primary objective and its achievement was dependent, as in all painting, on the resolution of the picture plane as a whole.

The notion of forms and space had to be converted into sustained pictorial relationships. In a certain way I sought a 'discontinuity of space' and a 'continuity of structure', as the Cubists did (Berger:1969:23); not only image and background as a secondary element, for I was not concerned with this kind of narrative hierachy but wanted rather, through a concrete application of paint, a substantiation of every area. I was interested in contradictions of scale, horizon and focus in order to bring to the pictorial surface those particular images, fragments and qualities I wished to emphasise. A central concern in this process of formal integration was that of 'reciprocal movement' between near and far, large and small, fragment and whole. Berger writes of the thinking in a pictorial context being that of 'coming-into-the-nearness-of-distance' and 'thought approaches the distant; but the distant also approaches thought' (Berger:1980:86). In such a way I wanted to bring elements like, stone, brick, plank, snail, leaf, person, together in a pictorial juxtaposition which reflected the underlying conceptual emphases. In Matisse's 'Notes of a Painter' he writes of achieving 'stability' and a 'condensation of sensations' and completing a work in a way that is 'representative of my own mind' (1987:117)

The need for form

A more conscious and deliberative (as opposed to intuitive) application of formal principles also occurred, in order to meet the inadequacies both in handling and colour quality of the material. A flat, even paint application was necessary technically as well as for reasons of clarity, boldness and legibility from a distance, restricting a painterly handling of the material. Colour composition had to be carefully organised not only for symbolic, conceptual and expressive needs but in order to make the colour and tonal relationships work at least as strongly as the images; if they did not, the narrative and descriptive elements would be overemphatic, as is common in much mural painting. Hockney warns that "*one thing you have to guard against is that if you let the subject dominate, you might finish up with illustration, with something that had just a temporary meaning*" (Fuller 1981:183). Because of this danger all aspects of form needed to achieve visual synthesis and immediacy, and the abstract language had to not play a secondary role but one of significance, for without the application of formal principles the symbolic and communicative value of the imagery would be undermined.

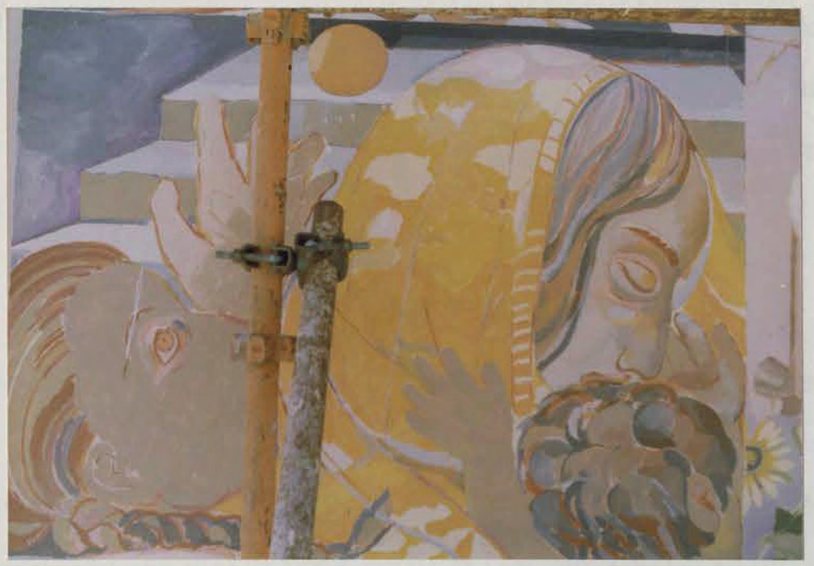
At the same time I was interested to explore and demonstrate the extent of colour richness that could be achieved with cheap household paint. I discovered that it is not necessarily the boldest contrasts of light and dark, shape, gesture etc. that achieve vividness from a distance but often subtle formal values such as modulations of tints and tones and fine adjustments to detail. I introduced a number of small images to test contrasts of scale and visibility from a distance through experimenting with visual values but without increasing the size of the images. I feel in retrospect that there is greater scope in the formal capacities of mural painting, even when using the most basic materials and in spite of material limitations, than is usually presumed.

Certain aspects of the formal process stood out in unexpected ways and these are worth noting. One of these was the emergence of opposites, the flow between extremes; between the observed and the imagined, from the area of knowledge to that of the senses, from objective to subjective. This flux affected expression and content and the mural's theme widened from one dealing with destruction to that of regeneration.

Some subjective aspects of interpretation[1]

My view of the working process is concerned with the way in which, in painting terms, directly presented 'objective' data achieve their aesthetic form not through representational means alone, but through an intuitive procedure based on a certain kind of parallel or common experience with the subjects of the painting. The artist cannot remain an outside recorder or commentator. The external fact needs to be linked with knowledge and interpretation which has been felt and internalised in order to find form. Vividness of form is dependent on this perceptual moment and the aesthetic elements which comprise that form consist of codes of meaning. My interest is firstly in the apparent necessity for external information to be processed subjectively prior to finding meaning; and, secondly, in the remoteness of the external objective world, even when visible, until perception is facilitated through this process of 'connection'. The theoretical intention in art endeavours remains visually static until energised by subjective meaning. Berger

1 *A portion of this material was used in my unpublished seminar paper, "'Closing the gap: consolidation of thought, and the 'overlap' between public and private areas of meaning in relation to the Holy Cross mural in District Six," 30 May 1990, Michaelis School of Fine Art U.C.T.*



speaks of 'our indestructible always pressing need for the recognition of ourselves in others'[1]. This need is difficult to realise through intentions alone, but needs in addition a moment of 'recognition' of certain kinds of shared or parallel experience.

Commonality is defined by the survival and recall of patterns of essential experience that remain closely linked to the natural world, as well as those linked to constants of human experience like pain, birth, old age, death, friendship etc. along with our perceptions of them. Yet such constants occur within the constraints of particular historical moments. Timpanaro points to the danger of 'triumphalist' interpretations *"in which the emphasis on human history and human culture simply ignores or treats as a preliminary banality the relatively stable biological conditions which are at least elements of much cultural human activity."* (Williams:1978:109).[2]

In my case the subjective process of interpretation is mediated through areas of perception that are related less to cultural and historical factors than to those of untrammeled human and natural experience, but which are always inclusive of both. My identification with certain expressive or aesthetic elements is clearly rooted in early formative and environmental experience. However, there is always a context: some historical moment with its particular circumstances which not only frames the arena within which these human moments are lived through, but imposes itself forcibly on the very nature of that experience. People feel pain, anger, love, courage, despair, laugh, touch, feel life begin and ebb; in other words they live through moments of acute experience, but not within an historical vacuum.

In the case of the mural, the identification of sources and stimulants goes beyond the obvious area of the social, environmental and historical background which forms the research basis of this work. It extends into subjective and interpretive areas of perception, including my own as well as that of the commentators. These secondary layers, which emerged after the initial

1 *"It is those who accept the world as it is who are becoming the disinherited at the same time as the dispossessed are rediscovering their inheritance... The dimension of eternity which made the medieval vision of hell absolute is replaced in our terrestrial hell by the notion of the inevitable and absolute inequality of man. The torture within the absolute dimension of this inequality is not pain inflicted upon indestructable, always sentient bodies but the pain of totally denying our indestructable always pressing need for the recognition of ourselves in others. The torture is the existence of the other as an unequal." (Berger:1969:154)*

2 *In the same essay Raymond Williams points to difficulties in the materialist argument, and emphasises that "elements of the biological condition are mediated by socio-historical experience and by its cultural forms." (1978:109)*

depiction of the factual material, were mediated then through our joint perceptions. As facts were narrated so interpretations surfaced and were presented to me. Gasset writes that 'to live is to find oneself forced to interpret life', and that the human past cannot be *"a basic continuity of loose facts without structure, form, or law... everything which occurs to a man occurs and happens within his lifetime, and is converted, ipso facto, into a fact of human life; this means that the true nature, the reality of that fact lies not in what it may seem to hold as a raw and isolated happening, but in what it may signify in that man's life."* (1959:24). My assimilation of source material and its conversion into visual form, connected therefore not with bare fact alone but with the added elements of human responsiveness to those particulars.

Difficulty faced me in finding a painting parallel for this complex material. Narrative imagery could only present facets of appearance and the challenge was that of finding visual equivalents to amplify the images and to give symbolic representation to those areas of experience that could not be described through figuration. Continuous rhythms of social life, the 'webbing' of community, also expressions about retribution, justice, determination to survive, hope and belief in regeneration; these all weighted the aesthetic process. The selection, modulation and organisation of colours, tones, rhythms, images and their interrelationships, in fact the complete formal vehicle, carried a consciousness of all these conceptual elements, yet the beginning and the completion of the form remained rooted in particulars.

5. PICTORIAL KEY TO DESIGN

6. Guide to Design

The mural is made up of three main sections; the upper triangle **1 & 2**, the three-sided border **3 – 18**, and the largest area comprising the central space **20 – 36**. The triangle refers to the geographical location of District Six on the slopes of Devil's Peak and Table Mountain. The border is based primarily on oral histories and attempts to reflect the main emphases in the descriptions (specifically the patterns of their past life in the settlement). The central space represents the eviction of the inhabitants and its aftermath, being based on drawings both of the people and the place itself, more particularly the physical evidence of the demolition process.

1 & 2 The Upper Triangle. From 12 m above the ground on the working platforms of the scaffolding the outlook was that of the levelled expanse surrounding the mural site, overlooked by four mountainous features: Devil's Peak on whose slopes the S-E part of District Six lay, followed in a westwards curve by Table Mountain, Lion's Head and Signal Hill. This proximity allowed the images to be drawn and painted directly onto the wall whilst looking directly at the subjectmatter from the scaffolding. One aspect of each feature in their natural sequence is combined into a single landscape. The prevailing summer south-easter cloud fills the apex of the mural, dropping over the mountain and casting shadow. The composite image symbolises the original physical location of the displaced inhabitants: many used phrases like, '(We lived in) the shadow of the mountain', to refer to their geographical displacement, meaning the spatial manifestation of apartheid. Movement of cloud, light and shadow, the rhythmical pattern of growth and natural forms, sun and moon, night and day, all come together: they refer to place, time, decay and renewal. A severe fire swept the face of the mountain in March 1982 and destroyed the last of the old pine plantations which had surplanted the indigenous vegetation on the upper slopes of Devil's Peak. The alien trees, extensively planted at the turn of the century, had gradually been depleted in later years through fire and planned botanical reclamation. The few bands of trees still growing on the contours were drawn in detail on this section of the mural and although decimated by the fire it was decided to retain their image in the final painting as a time reference: the peak is thus shown as it appeared from District Six in 1981.

The single eye on the right echoes the eye theme throughout the mural, the source in this case being the words of a commentator that 'God watches'. The phrase which appears below the eye, '*Res clamant ad dominum*' – freely translated meaning, the land cries out for its rightful owner – has a biblical origin. The text was provided by a sermon preached in the Holy Cross church. On the anniversary of the Group Areas Declaration in District Six, 11th Feb 1983. It refers to the Old Testament parable of Naboth's

Details of completed mural

vineyard in which the king covets and steals a modest piece of land having had the owner killed, but the perpetrator suffers divine retribution and is unable to enjoy the object of his greed. The words provided the title for the work because in their commentaries the informants expressed strong views about the moral issues related to the expropriation of their properties, frequently saying that the land was cursed for all but the original inhabitants.

3-18 The Border. The narrative surround utilises familiar and commonplace subject matter selected from recurring descriptions in the oral accounts, and attempts to parallel the narrators' emphases on the extent of social activity that took place outside the home. The thoroughfares of the District were described as communal spaces filled with the lively and visible expression of a predominantly cohesive community life. In contrast, the streets and public spaces of the townships to which the inhabitants were relocated were described as hostile areas peopled with strangers, where families retreated into their homes for security. Generally this loss of communal life, with its 'special conviviality' (Soudien:1990:12), and of communal space, was represented as one of the most severe deprivations caused by the removals.

The border design attempts, through continuous compositional rhythms and the massing of images, to generate a sense of fullness. It is not intended to be decorative in a static way but opposes the theme of emptiness in the central panel with one of life, density and continuity. Gestures and actions are directed mostly towards the centre. Visual equivalents for the rich detail evoked in the oral commentaries are sought through colour and image. When discussing the border's design, the commentators suggested themes of daily life which were familiar and visible in a concrete sense; and their words conjured up images of the activities and environment that had been terminated. The narrative border evolved from these descriptions, and though drawing upon only a fraction of the extensive oral material it attempts to reflect their expressive spirit as well as the factual basis. In addition to the oral influences the physical presence of many schoolchildren at the work site and of the commentators themselves, influenced the character of the human imagery.

3, 4 & 17, 18. Many of the oral histories emphasised the diverse religious practises of the community, as well as the separation of the inhabitants from their congregations and their traditional places of worship that followed. In **3 & 4** a man and boy walk the short distance between their home and mosque: the image is that of the Ellesmere street mosque; close behind it lies the

city centre and Signal Hill. The images refer to the visible and aural evidence of religious practise within daily community life and the close proximity of the inhabitants to their places of worship. The veiled women in **4**, as well as the man and boy, resemble particular narrators.

17 & 18. Here the imagery reflects the public expression of religious activities in the form of the street processions which marked Christian festivals such as Corpus Christi and the Feast of the Holy Cross. The model for the cross depicted in the composition is one traditionally used for this purpose by the congregation of the Holy Cross church. The figure group in **18** is composed of singing children participating in an outdoor procession: the rose petals being ceremonially strewn are scattered further by the wind.

16. Compositional unity is attempted between the processional grouping above and a second group, one below, of festively-dressed Muslim children offering cakes in celebration of the Eid of Ramadan. Although the sacrifice of the lamb in ceremonial attire is witnessed only by male adults and is not therefore a fully public event, the Eid Al Adha which is the primary reference impinged on the consciousness of the community as a whole and therefore warranted inclusion. As with much of the other imagery in the mural the lamb carries several allusions; it holds a wider religious symbolism, underlines the theme of youthfulness by being part of the gathering, and links the design with the group below.

15 & 14. The two flower-sellers echo the inward-pointing direction of the upper images, their blooms held out toward the family group in the central panel. Hands in various gestures are a recurrent theme throughout the mural and in these two sections fill a large part of the area. The spring and early summer flowers refer to seasonal cycles and different origins, and are therefore also a pictorial metaphor for time and diversity; St Joseph's lilies, European daffodils and a rose, also indigenous arum lilies and a leucospernum, are massed together.

5. In the upper-lefthand border some of the crafts of District Six are depicted. The warm red veils of the women in **4** merge with the folds of the fabric handled by either tailor or seamstress. The wood-plane drawn across the plank, the trowel and hammer are modelled on actual tools and allude to the skills and equipment handed down within families over generations. These few images refer to the extraordinary range of specialised skills practised within the settlement.

6. The leather harness decorated with intricate brass detailing was reputed to be made in the area and represents another of its crafts. Commentators spoke about many stables, with horses and carts a common sight throughout the city until recently, but seldom seen since the removals. Few owners were able to accommodate their animals in their new environments, and the considerable distance between the townships on the outskirts of the city and the main business and suburban centres curtailed these means of transport and trade. The cobbled road behind indicates the historical texture of the area, and refers to the manner in which the physical identity of the place came to be dismantled and reconstructed.

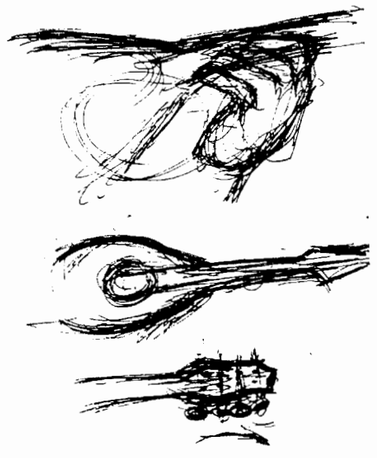
7. Steps are a persistent theme in the mural: not only the famous Seven Steps but, because the settlement lay on steep slopes they were a common structural element giving access between different architectural, spatial and road levels. These too did not survive demolition. The references once again are to the communal nature and diverse uses of outdoor spaces, to confident human passage and social and physical accessibility within the parameters of the community. The commentators reiterated a belief in the reasonably secure nature of such areas. Here the steps indicate steepness; the colour of the sky and cloud, and warm light on clothing, ribbon and ball suggest that sunset precedes a calm twilight; although night falls residents still move through the streets.

8. A common form of self-employment for many working-class women of the area was the laundering of clothes and linen for more affluent families, both within the vicinity as well as from further afield in the city: this involved washing, starching and ironing by hand. Washerwomen were described as being a familiar part of the social environment as they went back and forth to the municipal wash-houses carrying large bundles of laundry on their heads. In 1975 the long stone buildings were closed down and demolished. The text of Naz Ebrahim's documentary-based play about District Six, 'A Blot on Whose History?[1], written during the removals, proved a valuable source of reference for the border section. It gives expression to the extraordinarily varied social nature of the place, making reference to well known local inhabitants and historical figures from all walks of life. District Six was never a homogeneous society and from its midst came professionals, politicians, educationists, artists and entrepreneurs, as well as crafts, skills and a range of working class occupations, many of them linked to the clothing and building industries. In addition a variety

1 *The reference made in 1979 by Prime Minister P.W. Botha to District Six as "a blot on our history", makes evident the stereotype used by the state to rationalise their actions. It was obvious to all concerned that the ploy was "a convenient way of covering up their deed" (Naz Ebrahim, July 21, 1990).*

of informal occupations, often involving the whole family group, and which included that of the washerwomen, were extensive and ingenuous in their nature and provided a substantial sector of the population with the means to survive. The area also harboured many rural people seeking work in the city and poverty and unemployment were a significant part of the social reality. Although only the washerwomen are described in the imagery of this section there is an implied reference to the broad social scope and the differences of material circumstances within one community, throughout the border. The sharing of resources and commodities amongst residents, between those who had and those in need, was cited by narrators as being a particular social characteristic of the area, and great value was clearly placed on the informal title 'Kanalladorp'[1].

9. Two old men with walking sticks sit outside, either on or near a verandah. Old 'aboya'[2] sticks handed down in a narrator's family were models for those in the composition. As with all these border sections of the mural the location is exterior, with the elderly subjects still a visible and watchful part of the community. Many commentators spoke about the didactic and authoritative social role of old people, not only within extended families but also outside of them in the neighbourhood group. The recurring image of closed eyes throughout the mural suggests reflection and the act of remembering, while the hands though delicate still hold and control. The subjects also point to the invaluable, but clearly impermanent, repositories of history represented by the aged.



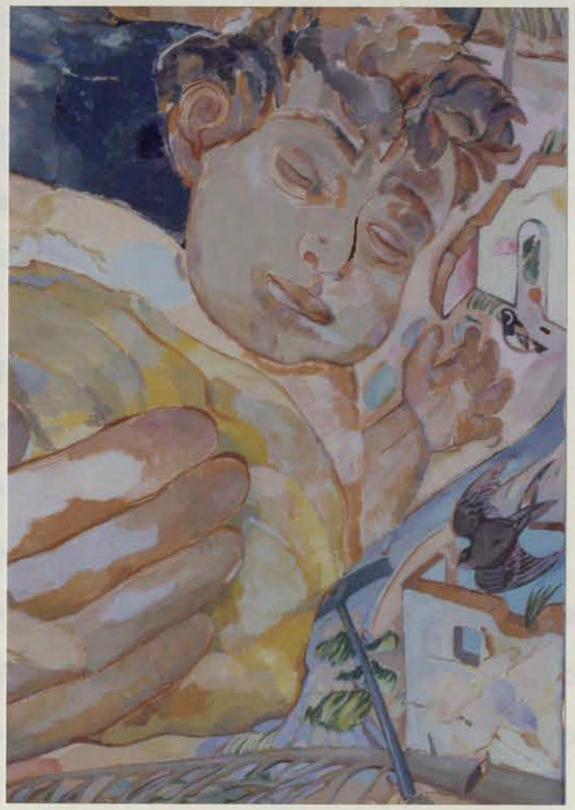
10. The guitarist, a composite figure drawn from observation of a group of erstwhile inhabitants who continued to meet on a regular basis, even after the removals, with their traditional instruments to play a form of music that is unique to District Six[3], represents the place of artistic expression, especially music, within daily life. The arts were strongly rooted in the area, generating both informal and professional as well as outstanding individual performers, who benefited the cultural life of the whole city. The Eoan Group, for instance, gave outstanding performances of Italian opera in the language and style in which they were written in the City Hall[4]. Although many artists for varying reasons left the country and entered the international field, their achievements have become part of the cultural history of the city. Even within a single field like music a wide range of expression and form

1 *"Kanalla": a Malay word meaning "to help one another".*

2 *"Aboya" means grandfather.*

3 *This group of musicians met and played together regularly under the leadership of Mr Bunny Floris.*

4 *"World Premiere. It will be the first time in the music history of the world that a complete Italian opera is performed in the traditional Italian style and sung in the Italian language by an entire Coloured case, from the Prima Donna to the last member of the back row of the chorus." Quote extracted from the Souvenir Programme, Eoan Group Arts Festival, March to August, 1956, City Hall, Cape Town.*



emerged: some maintained existing traditions, others developed idioms that were unique to the place. Commentators spoke in particular of the ways in which learning took place and how artistic skills were passed on and shared, not only through formal training but within families and between unrelated individuals. Although the imagery in the border is principally that of people, small architectural details like those in **9 & 10** refer to the physical character and construction-related skills of the area.

11. The image of the musician merges with that of the wedding: a common background of docks, bay and hills describes the north-facing outlook of the area. Weddings were generally ceremoniously celebrated and constituted an integral and visible part of communal life. Commentators spoke of their own weddings as times when they had anticipated that their lives and those of their families would continue forever in District Six. The bride here is a memory-image evoked by the reminiscences of a narrator; a return to the time and place of the marriage. The groom looks beyond the moment, while their united hands represent a shared destiny and history, and the plumed and blinkered horses refer to the old street environment.

12. The fish market on the corner of Hanover and Muir Streets was a familiar place and this image refers to the existence of many other similar facilities, including a great number and variety of shops within close range of the homes of the inhabitants. It points to the close proximity of the area to the docks and sea, and the occupation of many inhabitants as dockworkers, seamen and fishermen, and also as traders and shopkeepers. The fish images, the scale and the hands which weigh, whilst describing the subjects also hold other allusions, such as the notion of justice.

13. This section comprises the bottom righthand corner of the composition, with dark colours, the firm round shapes of the berets and the figures facing inwards towards each other, giving weight and stability to the base. The one other section where the images face each other are the old men in **9**, meaning that both sections have reflective themes which halt the one-directional parallel movements within the border. The reference here, as hinted also in **9**, is to scholarship and District Six's history of educational, professional and academic attainments. Schools in the vicinity with outstanding reputations, particular characteristics, traditions and, because many were mission or church-based, a certain independence, were deprived of their pupils. The children in turn lost the benefit of these stable institutions in being relocated to vastly inferior state schools in the townships. In this pictorial

section three children returning from school and deep in conversation pause with their books in a shopping street: models for these subjects were provided by the schoolchildren playing daily within sight of the mural.

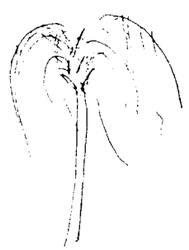
19. The representation of massed roof tops refers to the undisturbed form of old District Six and provides a visual contrast to the central section, forming a dense pictorial ceiling over the open area depicted below. The buildings are shown from a birds eye view, the perched birds emphasising the perspective in a memory-picture based largely on photographic sources. Although **19** forms part of the central square its darker tones unite it with the outer areas leaving the lighter inner space isolated.

20-36 The Central Space. The pictorial theme is that of the demise of District Six; the final acts of demolition and the departure of the last residents. The sources for this section were the notebook sketches of the demolition site and portrait drawings of inhabitants which preceded the mural. New environmental influences, however, both human and natural, intruded into the factual representation as work progressed, and slowly shifted the content from that of the ending of things, to the implication of regeneration. Thus, in the painting, fairly direct images are bound together in an expressive way. The colour attempts both to describe the locality and to provide an emotional and symbolic key to the content. The dark glow of flesh in the border pales into raw clay hues of brick and earth in the centre. Wind, dust, heat and rain erode and dissolve. New growth finds root in walls and pavements. The words of a commentator, 'the earth bleeds' tint the picture plane, and pockets of green break through the brick-warm field.

The family group is a massive composite image taking up two-thirds of the space. The figure group is symbolic of the disruption of family life and its dislodgment from the networks of community living. The figures are based on drawn portraits of the six-member Hendricks family, made during 1980-1982 and in this instance represent parents, Latiefa and Amien and the youngest of their four children, Abubaker. The figure group is weighted towards the righthand border, echoing the dominant rhythm of the rest of the mural, seemingly about to leave the space. One other smaller-scale human image is included in the left lower area, partly hidden by the wing of the seagull. The subject is a schoolboy, seven-year old Riedewaan Bull, formerly of Constitution street, drawn together with his brother and friends as they picked their way through the rubble to school in 1980. All other imagery represents aspects of the depopulated site.

The compositional space which surrounds the figure group does not act as a perspectival background. Although the drawn objects are relatively small and the colouring light-toned they are brought into the foreground through sharp definition and emphatic detailing. Certain pictorial elements recur, such as the shells and fragments of houses showing traces of painted interiors; planks representing the dismantling of building structures: roads, some overgrown, disrupted or obscured by rubble, which mark the old locations and describe their spatial relationships; trees, especially palms, surviving for that moment only because the area was cleared eventually of its trees and shrubs as well as its buildings; and birds, which rapidly claimed the space as it was emptied of its human occupants. All these elements are bound together in an atmosphere of dust and wind, signifying erosion but also holding a potential for continuity, and with it the possibility of renewal. The subject of birds was the last to enter the composition and they belong to the aftermath of the events, that is, to the time of painting; not only did they hover over the empty landscape but they settled on the scaffolding and wall as work progressed. Swallows and a variety of gulls circled over the silent landscape, as did raptors which moved in from the mountain to hunt over the new growth; while on the ground small common birds such as sparrows abounded.

21. In the top lefthand corner an open hand reaches into the composition. It is a gesture with multiple meanings: it shows, questions, challenges, promises. It is a reference to commentator's voices that said look, stop, why, yes, it is ours, we will remember, and, we will return. A continuous montage of visual fragments from the site fill the rest of the space. These refer to the specific moments of time when the painted subject in question, be it ruin, rubble, stone or tree, was drawn in a factual manner. As time went on and the drawings outlived their subjects they were translated into paint on the wall which faced the site where once they existed.

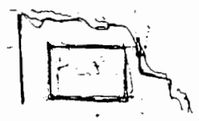


25 & 20. Above the hand image a tall rectangular house stands intact in the midst of a sweep of ground broken only by hills of rubble. This was the last building in the vicinity of the Rutger and Aspeling streets intersection, which for a period of months was a prominent landmark. The grid pattern of roads which became visible as the buildings were cleared away were in turn intersected by lines of earth mounds marking out the future structure of the area. The palm tree flanked by doves and the surrounding bare space are observed subjects from the environment, but are deliberately treated less realistically than the remainder of the composition. Scale is distorted and the birds are placed symmetrically one on either side of the simplified tree form which is

undisturbed by wind. Even more than the rest of the central space this uppermost area is illuminated to the point of every detail being exposed and brought to the pictorial foreground. The central subject refers to the universal symbolism of the tree as a 'tree of life', as well as the specific symbolism that seemed to emerge in this situation. "The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree" and, "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of nations"[1]. Most of the trees and shrubs that grew in District Six were felled or simply flattened in the path of bulldozers. The felled loquat tree, the subject in **36**, held a particular symbolic value for a resident, who observed it over a period of time. She noticed that the trunk though almost severed by an axe was still held together by a narrow strip through which source the green immature fruit continued to receive nourishment and thus began to ripen.

21. Below the hand a gabled house crowns a hill, rising in steps towards Constitution Street. Its walled yard encloses a fig tree carrying the first lime-green leaves of spring. Except for a few signs of nature's recovery everything outside the wall is devastated. The road that leads towards it from the foreground is blocked at both ends by rubble; the surface lies broken, an uprooted tree still clutches earth and stones, a fragment of a painted wall is strewn on the right, and in the foreground vigorous vegetation invades the road surface. At this stage in early 1981 the last terraces and clusters of houses were being demolished. In the midst of the razed areas however an occasional house, sometimes intact, seemed to escape the bulldozers a while longer than its neighbours and stood alone, its full washing line making known its habitation.

steps leading to mountains of rubble
Flight of birds
groups of trees



23. A flight of steps leads to a rubble landscape. The snail, as also the sparrow on the far right in **35**, were familiar subjects from the surroundings used as a scale test: introduced as the smallest images in the design they had to be painted in such a way that they would be visible from a 25 metre viewpoint. The shell of a house portrayed lower down could be seen standing alone in the vicinity of Arundel street for some months. Here too the line of clean washing blowing in the midst of stones and masonry indicated the stoicism of the inhabitants in persisting in their daily living patterns despite the threat to their continued existence in the District.

1 *Psalm 92: 12 and Revelation 22: 1-2. Also see Cook: The Tree of Life: Image of the Cosmos, 1974, p. 7. The loquat tree was observed near a house in the high-lying area known as Dry Docks, directly below De Waal Drive, in 1981.*

28, 32 & 36. Sections of buildings are in the process of being demolished. Light falls through roofless shells onto painted interiors: a glimpse of mountain is seen framed by a ruin: arched doorways in freestanding walls lead to rubble landscapes: a mechanical scoop dumps rubble and a sun is muted by dust haze: the loquat tree lies fallen across an unnegotiable street: and the boldness of the birds signal the ending of human habitation, and the beginning of the silence.

Afterword

This dissertation and the decision to let the mural become part of an academic study arose out of the suggestion of my supervisor whilst the work was in progress. This matched my feeling that it would be productive for future work to contextualise the different aspects of the process both in art-historical and in socio-historical terms, as well as to explain in detail the procedure and content. As I was already keeping a working journal to record its practical and conceptual dimensions, being aware that the substantial research component would need to be assessed and recorded, the suggestion fitted in with my inclinations. I was concerned also that this be done thoroughly before I moved on to other projects.

This process of explication has taken some time since the completion of the painting, paced as it was by the project's evolving social and historical relationships. My involvement in linked activities, like lecturing on the mural and its historical context and conducting mural workshops, have been invaluable in giving me perspective on this project as a whole and on the potential for others of this kind. In addition this period of time has coincided with a developmental phase in my own artistic growth: a time when it has been necessary to examine my creative concerns and my role as a painter. The academic component therefore has allowed reflection and reassessment on a broad front.

In February 1986 the mural was given a final cleansing and sealed, the scaffolding removed and the completion of the work marked by a dedication ceremony and the blessing of the wall by Fr Basil van Rensburg. Just as responses to the project during its making influenced the formulation of the work so the ways in which the mural has been received since completion have directed activities related to the wall. A strong feeling was expressed by many viewers that they wanted a printed visual record of the mural, together with a written explanation of its imagery and of how it came to be made. It was these responses that gave impetus to the production of printed material (see addendum), as well as to my explanatory talks to groups at the mural's site in District Six.

The mural project has continued to function in certain practical ways. The preservation of District Six's history through the establishment of a museum as the focal point to assemble and safeguard the scattered historical material is crucial. This proposal

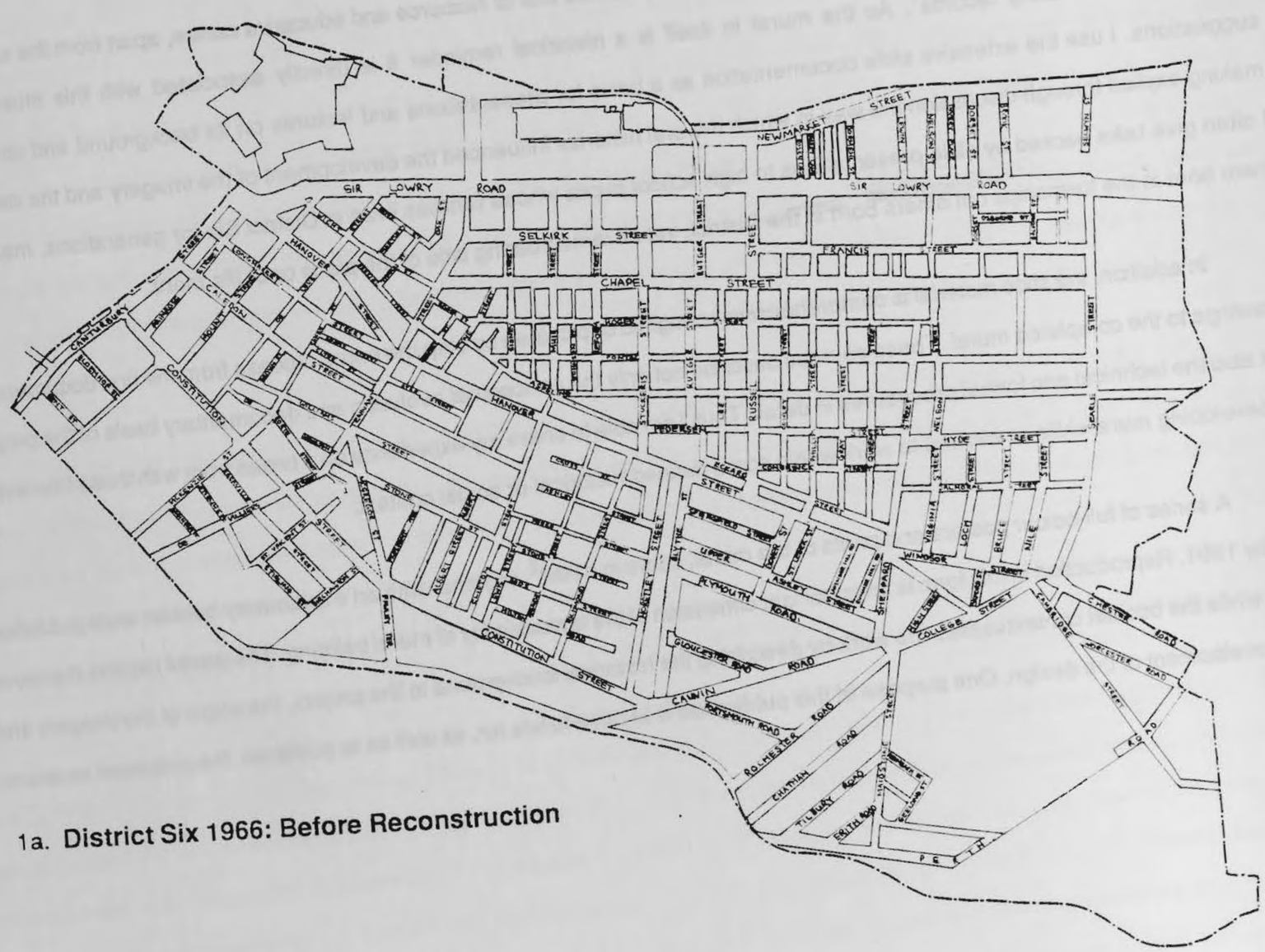
is at present in the planning stage but its intended nature would be that of resource and educative centre, apart from the storage and display of existing records[1]. As the mural in itself is a historical reminder it is directly associated with this museum's suggestions. I use the extensive slide documentation as a basis for presentations and lectures on its background and context, making explicit through discussion the way in which the oral histories influenced the development of the imagery and the design. I often give talks backed by slide presentations to high school pupils whose families lived in District Six for generations, many of them born in the townships but others born in the District, yet all remembering little of the place or of life there.

In addition, the slide material is comprehensive enough to depict step by step the entire process from the first documentary drawings to the completed mural. These sources describe not only the conceptual evolution and documentary basis of the project but also the technical and formal procedures in detail. Thus I am able to share my experience on a broad front with those interested in developing mural skills or wishing to work within some defined historical or social context.

A series of full-colour posters and prints of the mural, some in detail[2], together with an explanatory booklet were published in May 1991. Reproduction in this form is an important dimension of the accessibility of mural painting. The poster depicts the mural itself while the booklet contextualises the work by describing the historical background to the project, the origin of the imagery and the development of the design. One purpose of this publication is to raise funds for, as well as to publicise, the proposed museum.

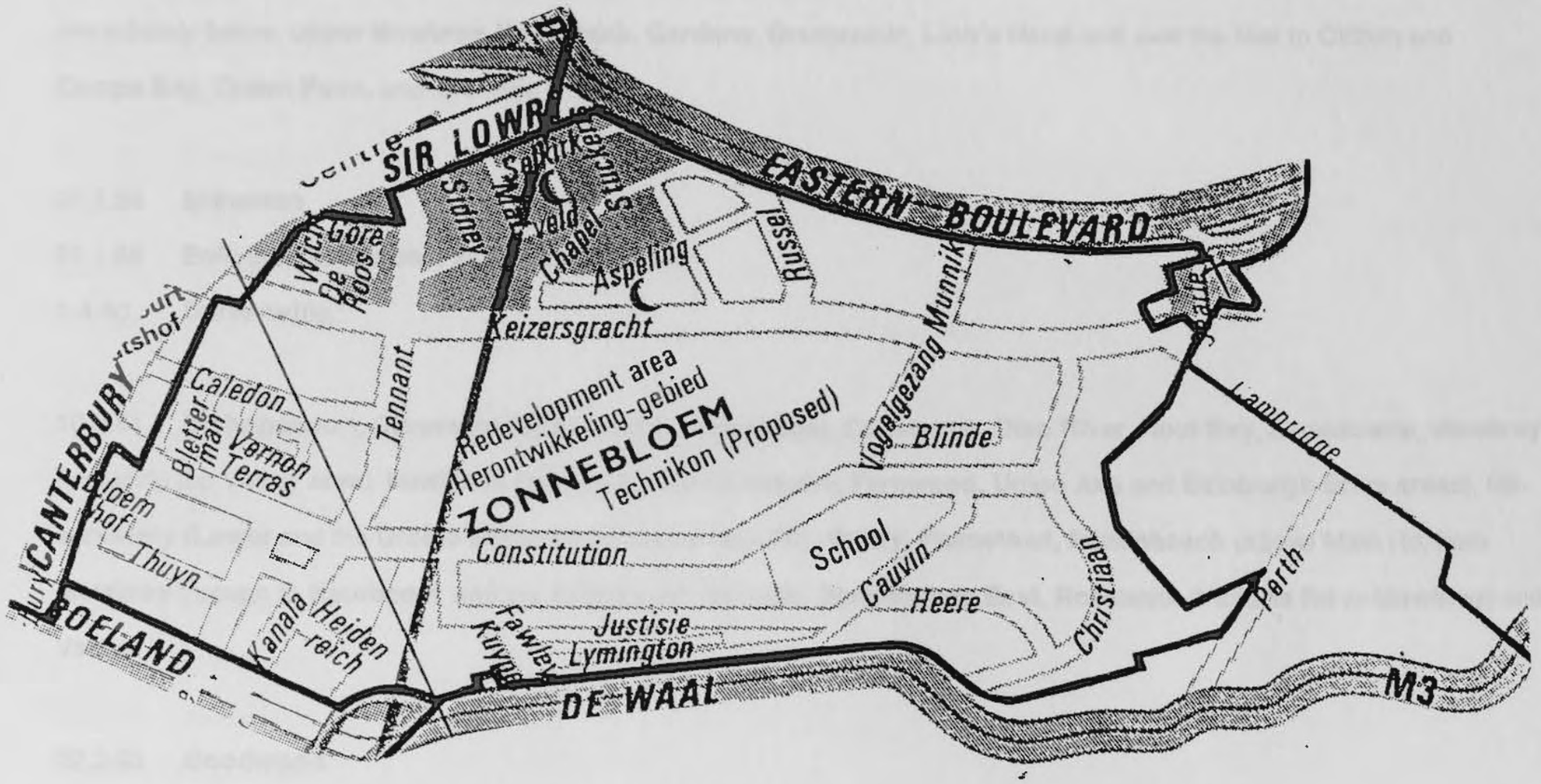
1 *The District Six Museum Foundation was formed in 1989 for the purpose of planning the site, character and function of the museum, and to find ways of realising this aim.*

2 *An edition of 2000 posters plus its accompanying booklet, and six editions of 1000 (6000 altogether) postcards showing different details of the mural.*



1a. **District Six 1966: Before Reconstruction**

Appendix 1 – Maps of Area



1b **District six 1986: After reconstruction**

Appendix 2

Some urban settlements with racially mixed populations which were declared white group areas in Cape Town and its environs from 1958 onwards

These figures are a first approximation drawn from different sources[1] and are as yet incomplete. Where place names recur under different dates it means that different sections of the same areas were 'declared' at different times.

5.7.57 **Bellville, Milnerton, Pinelands, Sea Point, Table Mountain.** The Table Mountain Declaration was extensive in scope including, starting south, **Kirstenbosch, upper Newlands** (**Thistle Street** area), **upper Rondebosch** surrounding U.C.T and immediately below, **upper Mowbray, Vredehoek, Gardens, Oranjezicht, Lion's Head** and over the Nek to **Clifton** and **Camps Bay, Green Point,** and all of **Sea Point**.

21.1.58 **Milnerton**

31.1.58 **Bellville, Goodwood, Vasco, Woodstock.**

1.4.60 **Durbanville**.

10.2.61 **Bishopscourt, Claremont** (**Upper** and **Protea village**), **Constantia, Diep River, Hout Bay, Lansdowne, Mowbray** (including the **Valley area**), **Newlands** (most of Newlands including **Fernwood, Union Ave** and **Edinburgh Drive areas**), **Observatory** (**Lower** and the **Groote Schuur** area above Main Rd), **Ottery, Plumstead, Rondebosch** (above Main Rd, from **Mowbray** through to **Keurboom**, and the **Kromboom Rd** area), **Rondebosch East, Rosebank** (**Victoria Rd** to **Mowbray**) and **Vasco**.

22.3.63 **Goodwood**.

3.5.63 **Epping**.

4.6.64 **Rondebosch** (**Kromboom Rd**).

24.7.64 **Diep River, Newlands** (**Kildare Rd**).

24.4.65 **Hout Bay, Vasco**.

11.6.65 **Cape Town Central** (i.e. The **Central Business District** including areas like **Loader St**).

11.2.66 **District Six**.

1 *Sources from which this information is drawn are:- Surplus People's Project, Department of Planning and Provincial Affairs, Pretoria,and the City Planners Department, Cape Town*

1.7.66 **Claremont, Hout Bay, Observatory** (**Valkenberg** area), **Rondebosch, Rosebank.**

24.6.66 **Claremont** (**Draper St area**, and **Protea Rd area**).

23.3.67 **Fish Hoek, Noordhoek, Kommetjie.**

7.7.67 **Clovelly, Kalk Bay, Lakeside, Muizenberg, St James.**

11.8.67 **Bellville.**

1.9.67 **Simonstown.**

19.7.68 **Woodstock.**

12.7.68 **Kuilsrivier.**

16.8.68 **Brackenfell.**

30.8.68 **Three Anchor Bay** to **Chapmans Peak** (including part of **Hout Bay**).

13.6.69 **Parow.**

14.11.69 **Claremont (Harfield Rd area), Goodwood, Lansdowne.**

28.5.76 **Milnerton.**

29.3.74 **Phillippi.**

7.5.76 **Bellville.**

3.8.79 **Kuilsrivier.**

26.5.89 **Goodwood.**

2.3.90 **Durbanville.**

Appendix 3

Narrators and Commentators

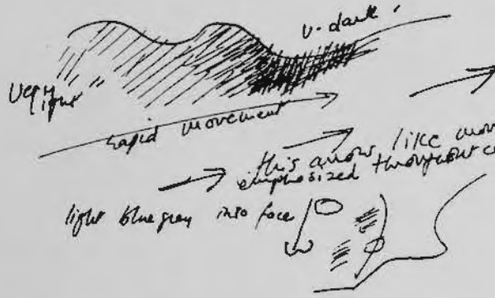
MR ABRAHAMS, ASA ARAFDIEN, YUSUF ARENDSE AND FRIENDS, MICHAEL BARRY, MARIE BOTHA, COLIN DANIELS, DICKIE DAVIDS, JOSEPH DAVIDS, NAZ EBRAHIM, EDWARD FOLLENTINE, IGSAAN AND KAFOORA GAMIET, LATIEFA AND AMIEN HENDRICKS, ISMAIL ISAACS, ABDURAGMAN ISMAIL, ICE JACOBS, DONALD JOHNSON, HILDA KANTOR, ORLANDO LINO, CHARLES MILLER, DAVID SCANNELL, T. TRIMBLE, FR BASIL VAN RENSBURG, C. WYNGARD, AND MANY OTHERS.

15

Colour, investigations + problems experiments extended / investigated further on smaller formats drawing graphic paint.

Massed billing forms. Changes of scale. imagery. like snapping forms. The theme of time, life cycle - continuum

tonal contrasts + flow within one form



March The colours convey feeling welling warmth earth heat Clay sculpture red and orange ebb + flow of colour

(1)

very cold. middle platform
en the complete — keep flexibility
bility of / flexibility of all elements

e particular consumptive eco nurture.
about description
description of given information.
of impersonal image
ence as a whole
te space more unique information
s usual than is possible on a
ur surface To fully utilise the
also explore — Contrast of scale of
provide possibles by

~~scribe~~ like this
city of images
l out potential of visual as painting
nal, value to community to artist as
to communicate, accessibility

oss of line as drawing is replaced by
troduction of linear / to real edge
phasis of geometric / aspects of basic
- originally part of basic
ayer. Now architectural
this emphasis also reference to architectural
or attempt to communicate yet so
creative need
city is only container for

Basins titles — the Kent Family

Large visual pkg in order to hold the eye to justify its scale - need use more of the formal elements than a smaller (easel or show) pkg. Must have solidity, stability (depth) not dependent on colour as this may fade. Needed, shape element in first stud. Shape + texture (flat) not ~~org~~ anticipated. Tone, colour, line, texture, shape
Repeat △ symbol.

Naive spirit in which design is conceived. Direct response to verbal + other information. Overriding in what could be left out. The narrative, main aspects of views history + observation of the demolition dictated the organisation of surface.

Quality in the inner space of light differed by outer. Quiet clouds - difficult. Sharpness of light in outer border. Pain of group to form clear. story + shape.

Family

re world, to, I'm not I'll paint that say.

literacy of needed is

To those who
build
Those who
build

RES
CLAMANT
AD DOMINUM

RES
CLAMANT
AD DOMINUM

RES CLAMANT AD DOMINUM

These demand their contrast
the clay its the purple blue light comple
axis/spine supporting major contrast
ii content- is the edge
Everything refers
back to this axis
The dynamic flow largely
on this edge. The tree of

Feb like nodules on a plant. All grow emerges from the central stalk
The axis not central

Res clamant ad dominum (Naboths vineyard)

There is a downward diagonal current too

Left to right

Pick up violet blue in this area

Emphasize this rhythm

metaphors + symbols stem from reality. Sometimes direct source like uprooted tree. Sometimes a narrative but based on a belief repeatedly expressed by the narrators eg: the cycle - god, retribution, famine, flood, fire on mountain a warning etc.
The role of the many narrators

pro-ok
a writer
you are telling

Have assumed
all people. All that
sight not education

The solution must come from the beginning. The original concepts. The consensus of the events. Obviously the solution lies within the pkg but outside of that must look back to the beginning point. Original small sketches. The recent history. What happened to the people. What motivated me to say this.

a motion picture except it's the viewer who moves. Man in street says it's like a film to him. Every time he walks past he sees something more.
Read Satsit Ray + Leger · Brecht

Dec 84

Life + death coming + going
A brief passage currents intermingling
the sparrow snail man woman
the intermingling of man his
contact with others what they
do for each other love nurturing
destruction the order. All the energy
between him + other.

Jan '85

Appendix 4

Excerpts from Working Journal

1983: June

Define nature of community as revealed by accounts of erstwhile residents. Recurrence of certain descriptions, including a certain use of language and phrases . This will be the source of imagery used in the outer border. Must not dictate or censor. Take the risk of working with 'cliched' material presented to me, e.g. flower-sellers, musicians etc[1]*. Find the sources in actual life. Pictorial border to represent oral descriptions of details of community life. Centre of mural represents destruction of place, where every piece of visual information must be based on observation i.e. notebook drawings of the process of demolition.*

Like Brecht I want to be very simple, very understandable. People are frustrated when faced by the inexplicable in art. A public work must be accessible. The viewer should be able to grasp an immediate sense of what the work essentially represents. The first layer of meaning could be elementary, factual but give access to other layers of meaning, even present the inexplicable. Face viewer with the familiar and use this as a vehicle for more complex thought. If the viewer cannot connect with a work in some sense it is an affront and invasion of his/her space. Must be authentically connected with the space in which it stands, a space on which that viewer has a claim. Must be about and for that space.

July

Very cold. Working on second platform. Keep images broken, incomplete. Keep fluidity of whole – flexibility of quantities i.e. colour, tone, image. Flexibility of all elements. Accept and utilise images from oral accounts that are familiar, common-place even mundane. Strive for objective unexpressive reflection of verbal description – impersonal depiction of given information. Montage of images. Yet make sense as a whole.

Aim to justify the massive scale of the wall and its prominent position fully. Integrate more images and information into this mural than is possible on a smaller surface. Utilise the space fully. Explore contrasts made possible by this scale i.e. big and small, more and less, groupings of elements reminiscent of Giotto, contrasts of shape, sharp/jagged/geometric as opposed to rounded/flowing/organic etc. Multiplicity of image, shape, scale, subject.

1 *The element of 'risk' refers to the decision to use within the narrative border of the mural a number of the same subjects displayed exhaustively by the tourist trade to promote a certain 'picturesque' veneer of city life, where images such as flower sellers, 'Coon Carnivals', 'picturesque' street scenes etc. abound. In the accounts of community life, to which I listened, descriptions of street life included repeated mention of similar subject matter. As these descriptions represent the factual existence of certain activities in communal spaces and reflect some aspects of community life no longer possible in the socially unstable dormitory townships to which people have been moved, I decided, in conjunction with the commentators, to include the most common and acceptable of these subjects.*

Consider full potential of mural as painting – not only the material and surface limitations. What is its potential as opposed to studio-based work? – the opportunity to communicate fairly directly, the accessibility, as well as the formal scope related to scale, natural light, relationship with space etc..

26th July *First platform. Strong cold South-Easter blowing. Loss of line as drawing is replaced by paint. Reintroduction of linear/tonal edge. As paint takes over there is need to emphasise geometric aspects which relates to the underlying grid*[1]*. Gives useful sense of underlying structure. Architectural elements of wall and surrounds seem to demand a geometric relationship within composition. Also relates to urban geometry and the imagery of building fragments in central panel representing theme of destruction.*

27th July *Overlapping boundaries of common experience in verbal accounts. One image must be found for many words. Every image must be accountable. Art is a common language.*

28th July *Calm warm day. No wind and top platform steady enough for work on upper section. But am eager to consolidate certain areas and details lower down. Looked at wall at length from the rise on the opposite side of the road thinking about colour planes. Want black, white and earths, also some saturated colours, mostly warm. – When blues are used in contrast they create space and air. Vertical columns of colour and light like fingers between images e.g. heads of bride and groom and trunk of palm tree above. The wall takes in its surroundings – the space, air, light, raw settling earth, clouds of dust, fallen trees, flights of birds.*

Find a sealer to fix drawing on wall surface without dissolving conté. A drawing like this could be a mural in the right kind of space. The quality of line would be the vehicle – line that is tonal, textural, broken or solid, massed or floating free, sustained,leading the eye throughout the picture plane.

18th August *Continuity lost. Only a few short sessions have been possible. Short stubby stippling brush perfect for scrubbing the paint well into this surface.*

20th August *Persistent drizzle, surface too wet to hold paint.*

23rd August *Less than 3 hours a session not useful. Light too sharp in late afternoon. Have lost the thread and am battling to make correct decisions. Strong North wind makes top platform too unsteady for work. Loneliness seems inherent in this situation not because of lack of contact with ordinary people but with peer group. Uncertainty and lack of nerve probably the reason for frame of mind,*

1 *Enlarged chalk grid applied to primed wall surface corresponding with grid over original design used in squaring-up process.*

growth of confidence will obviate the problem. It is a new experience to work without formal professional response. I miss a sense of shared responsibility.

29th August *Constant shifting of elements and imagery. Difficulties in dealing with so many aspects. Colour weights are a problem.*

9th September *Feel discouraged. Weather makes work impossible. Either rain or Black South-Easter. Notebook blown away. Father B v R voices complaints about preponderance of 'Muslim imagery' on this Catholic wall. Surely the religiosity of people is a common state not confined by particular dogmas. Dist 6 hosted many different practises and creeds. There must be a linking process, a sense of commonality then the particularities will seem less dominant.*

14th September *Not a literal description of a place but more a feeling about people, about renewal and about time, through the use of familiar subject-matter. Sunny, cold North wind. Sun hits wall earlier. As it sets a white hot sun in golden sky. Use, possibly in wedding. Clouds firmly formed as trees. Trees rounded as rocks.*

19th September *Clear light, slight wind. Must block in more colour and think about simpler colour groupings. Complexity but also clarity. Aim for synthesis of documentary and imaginative elements.*

30th September *A week of Black South Easter storms. Boxes of paint and equipment torn down, scattered and brushes lost. Two heavy scaffolding planks blown into road. Much loss but painting itself not badly damaged. Mixing of colours and filling of new bottles of paint slow work. Have secured new storage areas for materials with bricks. Practical delays as scaffolding must be checked and secured. North wind, cloud, endless cold fronts. Frustration produces new activity.*

The philosophical thought becomes more important than technique or description. The mural specific in its beginnings and yet becoming surprisingly centred on abstract meanings. The image speaks of abstractions.

18th October *Some good days and a little progress has been made. Warm energetic response from D.D and friend*[1]*. Increase earth colours.*

They speak of the 'earth bleeding'.

1 *Dickie Davids, ex-resident.*

A sense of the nature of 'community' emerges from what people intensely attempt to describe. More people speak to me every day and they speak with urgency.Must keep a record. Repetition of certain views about the nature of the community i.e. the diversity of human types, circumstances and beliefs – also the overall 'harmony', interdependence and tolerance.

20th October

Perfect weather. Must quickly extend colour areas. May be best to handle paint very loosely in order to resolve basic colour composition quickly and then repaint.

If there is any comment in this painting it has something to do with human synthesis, wholeness with fellow 'man' and nature – the interdependence of people – the continuity of cycles, not the individual but the common experience. The synthesis of all forms of life. The acceptance of death and renewal.

24th October

Cold North wind. Top scaffolding not workable. Every mural will have its spatial and human context and moment in time.

26th October

Warm and still. Will work highest level today. Content of painting related to change – human parallels with nature. Transience and transition. Extend blacks and earths. Think of both the inner nature and outward expression of the painting and sustain these until realised. Concept, character and subject together.

11th November

Lighten central colour areas. More tonal flow, less linear description. Let go of the drawing. Time important thematically, not the moment in time any more as much as the progression. Internal and external time processes. What lies outside enters into the painting – change of seasons, continuity, growth and movement – green to brown, earth to grass, grass to flower, building to rubble, grass over rubble, morning evening – the wind moves the sky from North to South – the trees from East to West then West to East – continuum of time-flow. Children pass, then return – young, old, then newborn. Passages and layers of time and experience each sealed with constancy. This the context of mural and also what is fed into it daily. Must embody quality of transience.

Composition must have layered structure. Definitely more complex than smaller form of painting. The formal ordering needs to work more surely than a canvas because the tactile emotiveness of the mark, the handling of the paint, is not experienced by the viewer, because of distance, and the handling through technical necessity must be flat. The immediacy of the mural will depend on the compositional elements of tone, shape, colour etc and the rhythmic energy set up by their interaction. These elements must present the meaning independently and more rapidly than the narrative and the imagery in the design. Interplay of negative and positive, of form and space.

This part of the city as human container has emptied and been shattered and the life once within it stilled. The rituals and patterns of movement are halted. Nature moves on covering the traces, its pace unchanged.

18th November

Not historical events but human experience within historical situation. The image is more important than usual in a symbolic way. Not only representing human experience as in my other paintings but referring to history, single events, communal activities, social rituals, concepts such as diversity and interdependence.

Colour continues to be problematical. Must achieve massive sweeps. Dominant colour masses must have immediacy. There's a problem in handling of small areas of colour and detail. Colour dynamics in this painting are complex but must keep striving for apparent simplicity, integration and coherence.

The tonal play increases, also the modulation within colour areas. Emphasize horizontal layered movements as in landscape.

To paint murals is to be alone amongst people. It's a solitary business although situated within the ordinary world. To choose to work in a social situation is to detach oneself from a support system provided by other artists. There is no-one to help make the decisions that must be made about how to make visible the invisible. The public relate to the visible but what is constantly manipulated to create vividness are the same old hidden strings as in any other painting struggle.

December

What is happening to colour – this flowering? Initially I thought that the colour would be sombre, quiet, reflective of destruction, the death of a community. But as people talked more and more the character has changed and begins to bristle with business, richness, pattern, motion and density. Make the form accessible in every possible way so that it launches itself at the senses, at what is known and remembered and experienced. The poetry of common life.

1984: January

Regardless of image the important elements are: – Dark masses – Light masses – Modelling of form, and space – Colour planes – The interplay and relationships between these elements

26th January

No wind. Without consultation the whole building surrounding mural has been repainted and changed from soft earthy khaki-green to brilliant blinding white. Disturbing and disconnected, totally throwing out the tonal balance of mural. Must intensify light passages. Will deal with tonal dynamics today, here and there, up and down – but main emphasis on bottom frieze.

Not in any way a description of the community life of District Six but an attempt to reflect something of the nature of the 'community' that is being described to me. Igsaan spoke today about the need to succour each other, the giving and the support[1]*. Asa spoke, as so many others have of the 'harmony*[2]*. This 'harmony' clearly represents concepts like tolerance and the kind of balancing of diversities that can exist in an old and organically formed settlement. Some had a great deal and others very little but sharing of resources seems to have been common practise. The term 'Kanalladorp' – 'kanalla' meaning 'to give' has been explained to me many times.*

4th February

Whole work still very difficult – can't yet see the unity of it. Whiteness of building unsympathetic to tonal order and has given me new problems. Must adjust colours and tones. Much time spent listening to various people, almost all ex-residents. They stop me working and take me to meet others but I am learning a great deal and every word feeds the painting.

Mural must be dedicated to the community. The longer I spend on the mural the more I come to terms with scale and formal problems. Through the responses of people I am also learning about the social role of the work.

February

Making a work is a process of extension. One sees further and more brightly each day but the ability to reach the goal always falls short. As vision grows the demands on oneself and the expectations become greater and so perhaps does the unattainability. The creative process is one essentially of both hope and disappointment.The continual aspiration that presses one on is perhaps always bigger than the ability to grasp it in concrete form. Like Sysiphus the task is accepted and any illusions of achievement, must be recognized as such. It's a continuous journey.

It takes a long time before colour is free of the image – before a painting is free of its beginning. Colour must be symbolic but need not start there, it can be rooted in very simple things. It must reach symbolic meaning through an intuitive rather than a conceptual process. It must first be felt.

The symbols are all there in the traces of human living and nature – they indicate the passage of humanity and the passing of time. Symbols must not be imposed but arrived at unprecipitately.

Because an outside mural competes with bold forms it must itself be clear and bold in shape, form and tone. It must compete with line of mountain against sky – rush of cloud, flight of birds, massed verticals of buildings. It cannot be timid and inward-looking. Yet

1 *Igsaan Gamiet, ex-resident.*

2 *Asa Arafdien, resident of Schotsche Kloof and commentator.*

it must have depths as well as boldness. It must be layered with meanings. The viewer must not pass by but be drawn into depths and currents of evocation. To be conceptually rich and complex yet visually lucid. The first visual planes to be clear as light yet absorb the eye.

Centre must reach out to border. Edge between, not a boundary but a metaphorical interface. Tension lies around this edge. Does not seperate one element from another, is not static but a zone of mobility. Until now have been concerned about disconnectedness between the two major areas. The centre panel and outside border were structured through necessity – but yet visual unity must be achieved. Relationships, points of connection slowly become clear. The interwoven compositional quality represents a meaning that ties together every image and visual element. Conceptual development suggests visual equivalents – they are synonymous. Form both follows and exposes meaning.The 'edge' – a dynamic bridge facilitating interflow, connecting centre and border, present and past, what I see and that of which others speak, what is concrete and what is remembered, that which is noted and that which is interpreted.

The symbols are natural and logical. They all have a basis in known, simple, often mundane fact. The dominant colour is earth-gut red – no subjective license with colour, every hue is accountable. Each colour demands its complementary, every quality its opposite. Ochre to orangey clays cast purple-blue light or shadow, young lime-greens echo crimsons and mauve-pinks, fading neutral-hued exteriors like shells enclose the remains of luminous hand-decorated interiors, vertical white lily opposes heavy massed left-to-right movement of black undulating shawl, dark agaist light. New sharp-bladed acid – tinted growth finds fertile beginnings in muddying brick, crumbling walls, dissolving shapes.

The border/edge like four-sided spine or axis. Must not enclose or frame. Want dynamic flow, must interlead – soft, but structured like a web. Everything refers back and through axis – energy-generating tree of life. Growth metaphor, images like nodules on a stalk. Theme of connectedness.

Res Clamant Ad Dominum. The earth cries out for its master. The land cries out for its rightful owner. The parable of Naboth's vineyard.

February

Metaphors and symbols stem from actuality. Sometimes source is visible like uprooted tree, steps leading to rubble pile, archways to emptinesses; evidence of regrowth, seed-nurturing ruins, snail, seed-bearing birds, nature's cycles – disruption of barrenness etc. Sometimes they are visual translations of repeatedly expressed statements by narrators e.g the 'eye of God', 'the earth bleeds', '-cries out', 'is cursed'; elemental forces like Laingsburg flood, mountain fire seen as warnings; geographical identification – 'in the shadow of the mountain', 'the heart of the city'; observations describing sociological experience and nature of community life e.g.

the 'harmony', sharing of resources, social stability, sense of security etc. The input of many narrators. Layering of information, sense of time, of repetition, continuity.

Massed living forms. Fullness, density, activity, richness of outer frieze. Deep emptinesses, quietness of centre. Rolling movement of mountain and sky in top triangle. Rapidity of light-dark shifts within geometric confines. Theme of time, life-cycles – continuum.

March

Colours to convey feeling: welling warmth, cold, earth-heat, red-orange clay, cloud-shadow, wind, rain-softened brick, melting walls, ebb and flow of warm/cold, brilliant/quiet, saturated/neutral, primary/tertiary, light/dark, living/decaying, growing/dying...

Symbols present themselves – displaced from close environment into the picture plane. Common images crowd into once-empty wall – feather, palm, mountain, fish, steps, doorway, hands, eyes, mouths like wings, cloud, bird, some still, some swift-moving. First comes image, then meanings. Symbols rooted in human experience. This the material of religious symbolism. To reach back into common experience. Check symbolic values of imagery within different philosophies, religions.

Warm colours contained within bold tonal structure – also blacks, whites and rich saturated fragments. Passerby says look in Book of Revelations for title.

Art channels and identifies experience. Every perception absorbed retained and released through the creative act. Remember mountain falcon on scaffolding. Our mutual stillness, closeness, recognition, black-holed eyes, white and speckled chest, gold-brown feathers; our immobility and how within that immobility we looked – nor did time seem to move. I felt saturated with reassurance. All moments of acute experience when time slows, that are of a never-to-be-forgotten intensity; from first infant sighting of blue sky (I have never seen a sky as cobalt-blue as that again – but every sky I paint has that memory in the hand that mixes); looking into an animal's eyes, the first seeing and touching after a birth – one particular moment of looking or feeling or hearing representing a kind of an understanding of all other similar moments that have ever happened or will happen again; these are moments of knowledge released over and over again in every creative act. Every living thing represents some small aspect of the act of life, the commonality. Most things grow and change. Inert rock and ruin also manifest time. Cycles of growth accompanied by other cycles of change. Wind, weather, the renewal of some things and the erosion of others.

Extend aspects of theme into other work: transition, transience, cyclical process of life. Qualities to extend: massed forms, multiple imagery.

April

Mural not a design. In painting as opposed to design energy is generated by the process. New problems are introduced. Dynamic shifts in development. Little is preconceived.

Greater tonal weight in top section of composition to lift it into the air. Like stained-glass window it must float, defy gravity. Respond to elemental rhythms of nature in gesture of forms. Chameleon-like response to immediate environment, to the wind-swept emptiness which is rapidly being reclaimed by nature. Unity not only within work but with what is outside. Not to start with the end but to arrive there, to journey. Whatever is there to start with cannot remain even if cycle of changes takes it back to the beginning. From A to Z or A to Z to A but not to remain at A. Yet the end will always be rooted in the beginning. A rebirth, re-examination.

15th August

Slow hard return to continuity. More and more letting colour, light and shadow travel through the images. Then picking up the edges of fragments of subjects. Each area repainted at least 3 times before it begins to satisfy. At this stage shape elements hardly used. Largest images give the greatest problems. Whole still incoherent.

When coherence of whole work is achieved then,last of all, power of subject-matter/imagery must be increased. Weight images from left to right.

There is no one way of painting a mural. No useful models to follow. There are technical and formal restraints and needs but then an individual path must be followed for every mural according to the nature of the painter and in response to the context and content.

16th August

Aim to translate line into mass. Outside my subjective experience there are a set of given, objective subjects. The impersonal must be synthesised into a unity and through subjective understanding imbued with feeling.

21st August

Notebooks lost and found with the help of others. At this moment aware of people's capacity to sustain and create bonds. Don't confuse ideology with work or ideology and content. Inevitably the start will be from an ideological position i.e. one's stance as social being. But then the painting process must be as far as possible a 'pure' and simple process. It is a task that demands its own resolution. Must use my own judgment. Mistake to accept Amien's[1] offer to help apply the masonry primer to wall. My acceptance of his help was theoretically influenced, but his participation in this instance inappropiate. My rigorous hand far surer. Fine cracking of masonry primer seems to have stabilised. Must not accept any other help with execution. Rather make own mistakes and decisions.

1 *Amien Hendricks, one of the principal commentators. He and another ex-resident helped prepare the surface of the wall.*

23rd August

Nature's symbols as seen by narrators – fire (mountain), flood (Laingsburg) and their faith in eventual justice. Faith in 'God' and time. 'Res clamant ad dominum'. To attempt visual equivalents. Three groups of subjects – those of the narrator, my equivalents of their narrative and concepts, and my own sourced in observation.

Border darker, central space lighter as planned, but too seperate, too static. Gradual displacement, modification of some tonalities to generate movement, interplay, between two sections. Definition must not be lost.

September/October

The more explicit the image the stronger the role of abstract elements need be i.e. equivalence in weighting. Mural must not read descriptively. Sense of meaning should be immediately transmitted through abstract language. Emotional sense of work should be absorbed firstly, followed by factual description. The denser the imagery and decription, the more powerfully abstract language need be deployed. Large murals must fully justify scale or eye will not be sustained. Control of formal elements becomes more important than in smaller, materially more expressive ways of painting. Mural needs strong ordering, solidity, stability, depth. Eye of viewer must be held over massive picture plane. Order elements boldly, punctuate with detail. Exploit contrasts fully. Sparrow smallest image that can be seen from road. Sharply defined contrasts make it visible. Want to create sense of big differences. Must not be too dependent on colour as this will fade eventually. Intensify tones and hues to allow for fading.

Tone, line, shape, colour juxtapositions, modulations, dynamic planes. Repeat triangle form.

Naive, receptive spirit in which mural is constructed. Direct response to verbal and other information. Crowding in what can't be left out. Composition dictated by historical impetus, narrative and continuing impact of environment. Symbolic values generated by subject matter.

Want quality in inner space of light suffused by dust. Difficult to make a subject as ephemeral as dust clouds concrete in flat paint. Want them solid, rock-like but transparent. Sharpen contrasts in border – softened edges, diffused light in centre. Link family group to geometric form of wall, define clear strong shapes in images.

Visual literacy of all people innate. Lack of formal education does not mean blindness. I work with this assumption but yet the corruption of human sensibilities through pervasive commercial images is always apparent. My belief in survival of that sensibility justified daily by lucid and perceptive commentaries.

Compositional elements influenced by factors related to mural – where it stands, how it will be seen, by whom, what should be told and remembered about place in which it stands. Didactic potential, yet cannot demand to be looked at, will be there to be noticed

and thought about only if passersby choose to do so. Hence the need to engage through aesthetic experience. Street remains street and not a gallery. Yet readiness of people to respond surprise. "I was driving past glancing around and suddenly it was there. I can't believe it". Panel-beater who works close by brings family every weekend. Mechanics, blue-collar workers from vicinity eat lunch in shade of wall, note progress. Zonnebloem students, teachers slightly shyer but notice changes and comment. Regular commentators who once lived here make special trips to see mural and continue their narratives. Regard them as participants yet in the end must take full responsibility myself for painting. There is danger in stopping when others are satisfied.

Planned sound design where every image was researched.

Concerned with accountability of every detail and element.Now want paint handling to come alive. Brushwork must be flat and firm for technical soundness but poster-like 'filling-in' of paint unsatisfying. Subtlety, sensitive modulation of colour areas, tonal clarity markedly increases vividness from distance. Quality of even very small areas affects whole and makes a difference when viewed from distance on rise across freeway. Little sparrow image testing point for visibility.

Must reach people in a full sense, ie. emotionally, not only conceptually or didactically. Mostly their critical instincts are acute and commentary is speculative, uninhibited. Is this because they are responding, not theoretically, but through knowledge and experience, not of the visual arts but of content of work? Often someone senses that there is a problem in the work, although they cannot locate it these perceptions are mostly valid. I must analyse problems, find solutions. More dialogue in relation to this one street painting than all the rest of my gallery-exhibited work put together. Concerns are with accessibility, removing barriers, comprehensibility, encouraging people's confidence in their judgment and feelings. An impulse to break down the barriers between art and life.

Although normally reclusive and private when I work, this eager viewer response, although initially startling, satisfies me.

Public art must have not only immediacy for those who are seeing it on constant mundane basis, but also depth of structure and content. Through sustaining the eye, mind and feelings must be engaged. Not enough to state obvious historical fact through contemporary mural form and rhetoric. Initial impetus was that of protest, wall stands as concrete record but, visual language not that of protest. Rage has somehow been absorbed beneath painting surface. It is more confirmation, examination of composite human experience. Perhaps more in joy of human potentialities than in mcuming for their suppression, a celebration as wellas requiem. Form is essentially aesthetic, poetic, affirmative.

Colour looks muddied, lifeless – lacks space at times. Structural problems, overlapping imagery, changes in scale and other inconsistencies almost insoluble. Intuitive beginnings have built-in problems. Why were certain decisions made originally? Everything must tie up, be comfortable, convincing. Recall beginnings.

Final form must be rooted in departure point. Process of painting must free itself of the beginnings but in final stages must return there. Time to look back at starting point – first small drawings showing street-by-street demolition, gaping walls, twisted wire innards, gulls circling high over rubble, stunned conversations and disbelief, what was done to people. They said write about this, tell the world, no-one must forget – I said I can't write but on that wall I'll paint what you are telling me.

December

A bit like motion picture except its the viewer who moves. Man in street says its like film to him. Every time he walks past he sees something more. Read Sajit Ray, Léger, Brecht.

1985: January

Death and life together. Belief expressed that the old who have spent their lives here cannot survive removal. Am told of many such deaths, taken on visits. Going and coming, brief passages, currents intermingle. Sparrow, snail, man, woman, rock, dust, branch, bud. Human intermingling – lives and feelings touch, ignite, pass, collide, decimate. They act and react – love, nurture, share, destroy. Manner of human living and that of snail. Discontinuities of one, quietness of other – the parrallels too. Human relationship with land, habitat, unstable, tenuous. Little permanence in concrete particulars, 'worldly goods' etc. Continuity in common human experience, the ways in which people 'touch' on one another, be it in caring or destructiveness. Reaching out to others to give or seek support. Fragility but self-sufficiency of sparrow, snail. Reaching, touching, holding, looking, spaces, gulfs, emptinesses and the bridging of them. Hands and eyes recurring image, mouths like wings. As I work am affected by what is around me, cold, wet wind, birds, mostly sparrows and gulls, sitting close by on scaffolding, starlings in rows on gable looking down on me. Sound of children in playground below, people calling from street.

Nature turbulent, expansive. Flutterings of energies brief, quickly stilled, continually rekindled in new forms.

Young man passing by says, "a painting must tell us something about human nature".

Point of gable reaches high into sky. Mural takes into itself the emptiness, cloud movements. Horizontally, nothing left between it and mountain. Birds move in, raptors hunt over new growth. Flights of seagulls have moved up from sea-level, circle steadily over rubble. Photograph details of wall in relation to sky. Mural base starts one storey above pavement. Looks down and across empty ground directly into mountain features, city centre, docks. Sky becomes as important a spatial context as horizontal environment. Only this wall reaches into air from flattened area. No buildings, no architectural skyline left. A distance below this space in hollow,

15 minutes straight walk down new broad highway with new name which once was Hanover street, lies city centre. Light and dark sky, birds, rubble landscape, move into and through mural, become part of subject-matter. The 'moving-picture' character related in part to slow, constant change in environment, both in earth and sky. Light, dark, sun, cloud, growth and movement interflow. One day a building, the next rubble, it settles, wind and rain smooths, new grass brightens, birds circle over mounds, mountain comes closer.

Concerned with spatial location of mural at this moment. Painting must be tightly wedded to context, must not impose. Although destroyed in original form place is alive with signs of growth.

Mural must take on character and content from context – nature of the situation must create nature of painting. Innate mood must arise in spontaneous response to where and how it stands, where it looks, what the past and present history of the place is. The essential and composite mood must be immediate.

Simplify. Sharpen up tonal values, be bolder. Almost at end. Scaffolding platforms obstruct, slice through composition in three places. Impossible to see uninterrupted whole, coherence remains a problem. Check subject matter, facts. Correct errors that disturb before surface is sealed. Consider pictorial logicality, consistency of scale contrasts. Edit.

Even now it is difficult to know what most important differences are between inner and outer areas of painting. Is there a hierachy of essentials? Emphasis seems to change in relation to how one looks at mural, what particular aspect acts as entry point. Not autonomous, perhaps it functions in relation to outside factors and as these change, so does the way in which it is seen. Am concerned about passivity, neutrality of expression. Has the outrageous act against a people and their city which spurred the work been submerged by other meanings? Mural has grown not only out of sense of history but through a sense of relationships with the world in which it stands.

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10. ADDENDUM