

Contemporary South African design inspired by the post-apartheid flag

Leon Breytenbach

ABSTRACT: Following the unfurling of South Africa's post-apartheid flag, there has been an explosion of artistic and commercial design-work inspired by the new flag's colours. This paper presents a personal selection of diverse illustrations chronicling not only the artworks themselves but also placing them in a broader socio-historical context as well.

The illustrations for this paper appear on Plates 3-6.

It is safe to contend that the post-apartheid South African flag must have come of age if it can now appear in all its glory on a condom promoting an AIDS awareness campaign by the Society for Family Health, a non-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health and quality of life of all South Africans. The VIVA condom (**Fig. 1**), identifies with the commonly used rallying-cry of the previously disenfranchised peoples of South Africa in their numerous rallies and protest marches. This emotive unifying chant is now focusing the populace's attentions onto the "struggle" with the even deadlier foe of AIDS - a battle with a scourge that precedes the relatively recent birth of the new post-apartheid South African flag.

It was on the glorious late autumn day of 10 May 1994 when a contingent of 74 aircraft of the South African Air Force (almost the entire SAAF if some wags were to be believed) participated in a spectacular flypast in honour of the inauguration of South Africa's first democratically elected president (**Fig. 2**). A more spectacular display of the new multi-coloured national flag, flying high

from beneath four SAAF Oryx helicopters, could not have been conceived. The presidential inauguration was a very emotional moment for most South Africans - being conscious as we were of being part of history in the making. Prior to the general elections South Africa had peered into the abyss of possible future instability - yet miraculously we managed to draw back from the brink of disaster when nobody expected us to. Our good fortune was attributable to a large dose of faith, hope and even, it is said, divine intervention. A new era had begun!

IBM's local subsidiary ushered in South Africa's new beginning (Fig. 3) with the creative commissioning of a limited edition calendar for 1995 featuring hauntingly graphic artworks giving artistic expression to the emergence of our newly vitalised nation. A rival computer company, Unidata, had however stolen the march on all of its competitors with the quick capitalisation of the euphoria of South Africa's first free and fair democratic elections (Fig. 4) by publishing a cheerful and very upbeat advertisement in the local press within a day (15 May 1994) after the results of the elections were announced. A shrewd byline indicated Unidata's commitment to support the new government in its endeavours to build a new and better South Africa for all. The expectation of peaceful growth was great.

A tree symbolises the positive forces in nature (Fig. 5), so it is fitting that the new South African flag and the peoples it represents should find expression in the 1994 Arbor Day poster. Contrary to what some nay-sayers may think, the shovel depicted at the bottom of the poster is not for the eventual use of having to dig ourselves out of the proverbial mess should our new South Africa not work (but then very little can shield us from our own destiny).

Universally the shield symbolises strength and security. Fig. 6 shows the South African flag depicted on a shield as the badge of a security firm, but note the spread of the flag over the whole of the African continent. Could a more subtle force be at work here? Generally South Africans do seem to succumb to the notion of believing that we are the only country of note in Africa - a perception nurtured through many years of political isolation during the apartheid era. This laager mentality has fueled the belief that only through the efforts of South Africa will the continent of Africa find its salvation - politically, morally and economically.

The Masakhane campaign, with its slogan of *BUILDING TOGETHER NOW* (Fig. 7), strives to re-instill a sense of responsibility and patriotism in the peoples of South Africa. Masakhane encourages local communities to form development fora to find ways to spur both private and public sector investment to build up the local economies - especially in the sub-economic townships and communities which in the past boycotted the old regime by withholding payment of rates and taxes. This culture of non-payment needs to be reversed as without funds the government cannot uplift the poorer communities. The Masakhane design also featured on one of the country's postal stamps.

In similar vein to the Masakhane project, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry is also currently engaged in an innovative *WORKING FOR WA-*

TER campaign (Fig. 8). This initiative is not only creating sorely needed jobs for the unemployed but is also helping to achieve a vital environmental objective of clearing invasive alien plants from South Africa's mountain catchment areas - restoring to our communities important water resources that our semi-arid country desperately needs to nurture. Foreign governments have also given donations towards this national project - as evidenced by the sign board showing both the South African and United States flags. Unfortunately the manufacturers of the signage have depicted the colours of the USA flag incorrectly - with the top bar in white instead of red. Whilst in Cape Town to launch this bi-lateral cooperative agreement, USA vice-president Al Gore was presented a striking ethnic bead neck-tie in the colours of the South African flag by a local community organisation.

Another national project dovetailing into the above campaigns is the Reconstruction and Development Programme, or 'RDP' (Fig. 9). The significant usage of bricks being laid in the building of a new structure as depicted on the cover of the first year's annual review powerfully illustrates the aims and goals of their community upliftment focus.

Big business has not been slow to realise the benefits of supporting the community through the government's RDP initiative. As an example the Southern Life Association (a life assurance company) launched an investment portfolio called Futuregrowth (Fig. 10) which invests retirement funds in disadvantaged communities aligned with the government's Reconstruction and Development Programme. This product's marketing slogan is *INVESTING IN SOCIETY FOR A BETTER FUTURE*. As a measure of its attractiveness and financial soundness, Futuregrowth has to date fund assets under management in excess of R 1.2 billion. Accentuating the message that the portfolio's commitment is to the RDP, is the clever usage of a sliver of the South African flag thus strongly identifying Southern Life with the new South Africa.

Quite significantly one notices the increasing tendency for lodging establishments to display the South African flag - be it on a wall (Fig. 11) or on a flagpole. A few years ago this open display of the national flag was decidedly less popular as unfortunately the previous flag was too readily associated with the ruling party of the day - which was somewhat politically provocative.

Fortunately Dulux paints did not need to be too politically sensitive when they launched their marketing campaign which featured the new South African flag being 'rolled-out' (Fig. 12). Ironically the name of the paint shop on which one of these painted adverts appears is *ORANJE, BLANJE, BLOU*. This is the local Afrikaans translation of *ORANGE, WHITE, BLUE* - the colours of the old South African flag. In its marketing Dulux uses the slogan *PAINTING A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE NATION*.

In characteristic entrepreneurial style, a hawker illegally set up a boldly emblazoned corrugated-tin stall featuring a mural of the South African flag (Fig. 13) on the side of a busy highway within a few hundred metres of a bustling shopping complex. But, having very few overheads, his wares are

probably much cheaper and he seems to be making an honest living. This stall-keeper's flag mural is a powerful marketing draw-card quite likely guaranteeing him a steady stream of customers attracted to the patriotism inherently associated with the South African flag.

Olympic fever swept South Africa in 1996 (Fig. 14). As this was the year that a more representative and cohesive national team participated in the world's premier sporting event, it is not surprising that there was a host of Olympic-related marketing drives. One of the more striking adverts superimposed the Swiss flag onto the SA flag with the byline of *THE ONLY SWISS ASSOCIATED WITH THE 1996 SA OLYMPIC TEAM*.

When the Springbok rugby team, with their slogan of *ONE TEAM ONE COUNTRY* won the World Rugby Cup in 1996 a tidal wave of patriotic fervour swept the country (Fig. 15). It is generally accepted that this single sporting event played as significant a role in the process of nation building as the 1994 presidential inauguration. Considering the passionate interest displayed by a large proportion of the general populace, one could believe that sport in South Africa is an alternative religion to some. It is at sporting events in particular that the South African flag is very much in evidence. In the early days of post-apartheid South Africa we witnessed the waving of the new flag upside-down. Today a wide spectrum of sports clothing and merchandise - along with the painted faces of sporting fans - prominently and proudly display the colours of the nation's flag. And what is not more eye-catching and endearing than the sight of a cheerful trio of children with their faces painted-up, wearing the country's flag with joy and uninhibited delight (Fig. 16). Children, with their finely tuned appreciation of colour, seem to be instinctively drawn to the bright, almost carefree, and fun colours of our rainbow flag.

IBM SA reinforced their link with the South African flag (Fig. 17) when their 1995 annual report featured an attractive butterfly whose wings displayed the colours of the Rainbow Nation. Two years later IBM's rival, ICL, continued the computer industry's love of the butterfly-flag motif when it announced its strategic partnership with a local computer firm and its print advertisement showed a similar flag-winged butterfly floating free from out of a pair of open hands in metamorphic flight.

Speaking of flight, in keeping with the transformation sweeping the land, South African Airways, as the national carrier, in 1997 changed the livery of its fleet (Fig. 18) to incorporate the South African flag. The airline's mission was also changed to, *inter alia*, state that SAA would "... fly the spirit of the nation to the world; be a role model to South Africa's people; and to embody the magic of a free South Africa in a warm African experience for all those who fly to, and within the country." However, whilst the new colours on the tails of the airline's aircraft (which feature a sun atop the South African flag) are supposed to depict the carrier's intent to be, "Africa's warmest welcoming airline," one could be forgiven for incorrectly associating the design with the national flag of Namibia which, unlike South Africa, does in fact carry a golden orb on it.

A few years ago the mere possession of literary material (Fig. 19) depicting a black and white couple (in a society obsessed with racial matters) copulating on the flag would have rendered the owner liable to a term of imprisonment (or at the very least the imposition of a hefty fine by the courts of law). As with much that is changing in our newly liberalised South Africa not all of it is necessarily of a savoury nature. The aforementioned caricature was taken from an Afrikaans pornographic magazine (the first such in South Africa) where the Afrikaans text asserts that if motor-vehicle commercials use sex to sell their products; hardware stores use patriotism to sell hammers; perfume advertisers show skin; and beer adverts extol the South African worker, then so too is it one's patriotic duty to have sex on the flag.

What, though, is the legal position with regard to the use of the South African flag by all and sundry in a truly 'free-for-all' situation? *Government Gazette* No. 16779 (Volume 364, 27 October 1995) makes it fairly clear that the national flag cannot be used for commercial/advertising purposes. Furthermore, the flag cannot be reproduced without permission from the State President's office as the flag is a national symbol protected by the new constitution as well as the Merchandise Marks Act 1941, and its amendment, Act No. 3 of 1946. Naturally, however, the State cannot police every infringement and the authorities have taken the pragmatic approach that if the flag is used in a sensible and non-inflammatory manner then one has tacit approval to use the flag in any way that at least endeavours to promote a sense of nation building and unity.

There is an urban legend that confides that the reason for the South African flag bumper sticker (Fig. 20) selling so well and appearing on a large percentage of South African cars is because the Readers Digest magazine, when giving the sticker away as a freebie with one of its editions, also included an article on sex in that issue. As in other emerging democracies it is not uncommon nowadays to have the national flag commandeered for use in strikes and demonstrations. A recent protest bumper sticker was seen to boast *WITHOUT TRUCKS, SA STOPS*. The protesting truckers certainly did stop a fair amount of traffic on some of the county's highways, but their disruptive actions didn't endear them to the general public.

You name it and there is a strong likelihood that someone somewhere in South Africa has put the national flag to commercial use (Fig. 21). One can now find the flag on cuff-links, playing cards, key-ring holders, place mats, neck-ties, bow-ties, socks, men's braces, thimbles, tea spoons, fridge magnets, traditional bead necklaces and ankle bracelets, aprons, earrings, button-hole pins, soaps-on-ropes, purses, caps, T-shirts, clothing, packaging, plastic-woven floor mats, motor vehicle sun visors, mugs, decals, Table Mountain fresh air cans, telephone cards, Internet websites, Cape Town's Hard Rock Café's 13-metre guitar, murals, Nelson Mandela's 76th birthday cake, yacht spinnakers, etc- the list is seemingly endless. Even retailers have solicited the flag for use in their advertising campaigns (Fig. 22) - such as the rendition of the flag which

clothed a mouse extolling the virtues of consuming local cheeses.

Not surprisingly, the newly semi-commercialised Post Office also tried to capitalise on the public's interest in the national flag when it produced an airmail stamp in 1996 (Fig. 23). This airmail sticker has become a collector's item as shortly after limited issue the State Herald's office quickly pointed out to the postal authorities that they were not entitled to deface the national flag in such a manner as to depict it as an eagle. The offending item was quietly removed from circulation but not before SAVA managed to acquire a stock to use in one of its mailings announcing the 1997 ICV. On the subject of defacing the flag, one can now acquire underwear which is not shy in its use of the South African flag (Fig. 24).

The national flag has even been plastered onto the walls of the country's parliamentary press briefing room (Fig. 25). In the centre of this flag mural is a stylised blue crane depicted on a stylised protea (both national symbols in South Africa). The artist's Indonesian origins are very much in evidence in this avant-garde mural which certainly enlivens what was once apparently a very dull room. There are nine panels which are meant to represent the country's nine provinces.

In March 1997 Britain's esteemed Burke's Peerage decided to enter the arena of commercialised heraldry (Fig. 26) and so concocted a coat-of-arms for president Mandela. Whilst they certainly garnered some rather negative publicity, it is interesting to note what is perhaps the first such use of the South African flag on a coat-of-arms. Needless to say Mr Mandela respectfully declined Burke's offer.

A peculiar design seen in tourist shops is that of a rather attractive T-shirt incorporating the South African flag (Fig. 27). Closer inspection of this design reveals the incorrect association of lions, elephants, rhinos and traditionally garbed tribes-people with Cape Town; in fact, none of these animals or tribes are to be found anywhere near the vicinity of metropolitan iKapa or Cape Town.

The Smarties man (a chocolate-coated button candy man (Fig. 28)) was introduced to the South African candy-eating public in 1996. With his jaunty, bright and breezy swagger and South African-flag baseball cap he very effectively captured the attention of his company's targeted consumers. But then perhaps the lure of the fabulous prizes that were on offer in the Smarties competition also had something to do with the appeal of this candy man (Fig. 29). The use of a South African flag-coloured rainbow ending in a pot brimming over with Smarties very cleverly tapped into the country's entrenched acceptance of being referred to as the 'rainbow nation.'

The term rainbow nation was coined by our erstwhile and colourful, internationally renowned cleric, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who believed that as the nation is comprised of many ethnic groupings with a rich diversity of cultures and traditions, and the rainbow is so eloquently symbolic of peace, hope and the promise of salvation, South Africans should come to call themselves the rainbow nation. Nelson Mandela took up this theme in his inaugural presidential

address in 1994 when he stated: "we shall build a society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right of human dignity - a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world." What better depiction of harmony, then, than with a cheerful cover of a book (**Fig. 30**) featuring two children who together embark on many true and exciting adventures exploring their new South Africa.

The Post Office published a colourful art-calendar in 1997 (**Fig. 31**) celebrating sport in South Africa as interpreted by the nation's youth. One work meriting mention was rendered by a nine-year old child, showing three hands (black, white and coloured) clasping each other and forming the outline of the South African flag. One takes heart that our youth (unlike a small number of the older generation) seem to have a very good grasp of the positive forces inherent in our society. It is with this positive attitude that the country's destiny of peaceful unity will be realised.

It was rather unfortunate that South Africa's first bid to place its national flag atop the world's highest mountain peak (**Fig. 32**) was so dogged with intrigue and controversy. Despite the negativities, two South Africans did reach Mount Everest's summit in mid-1996 and proudly unfurled the rainbow flag. In conjunction with the ascent of Mount Everest, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund was linked to a national fund raising effort where the president's own words were used as the slogan in which he exhorted his countrymen to be ever mindful that "... in creating a new South Africa our children must be one of our highest priorities!"

Another annual national fund raising event (in aid of Child Welfare) linked to the South African flag (**Fig. 33**) and known for its emphasis on fun for everyone - especially the disadvantaged children who are the targeted beneficiaries - is Red Nose Day. South Africans are encouraged to display their support for this charity by contributing a donation to the purchase of a red plastic nose and then, of course, wearing it.

When, in 1996, South Africans were presented with their first ever constitution (modelled on the best the world had to offer), it was significant that on the millions of free booklets handed out (**Fig. 34**) there should feature the South African flag - for as the constitution embodies the nation's togetherness, so too does its flag. The byline on the booklets reads *ONE LAW FOR ONE NATION*.

Woolworths, a national retailer, designed an impactful and colourful marketing campaign (**Fig. 35**) based on the nation's favourable disposition towards the flag by identifying the company's branding with that of the colours of the flag. To this end the company also labelled its garments with the evocative phrase 'Shosholozo,' the title of an old mining refrain which gained national prominence when it was used as the theme song for the triumphant 1996 Springbok World Rugby squad. Woolworths furthermore magnanimously committed itself to donating a percentage of the sale of its branded garments to the development of the South African community (no specifics mentioned).

With taxis plying their trade on the roads of South Africa, sporting bonnet

to bumper rainbow-flag coloured coachwork (Fig. 36), one should not easily miss these vehicles in traffic, if only to steer well clear of some of their more reckless drivers.

Even the staid South African Police Services are jumping on the bandwagon (pun intended). A delightful donkey-cart (Fig. 37) was noticed in the little seaside village of Stillbay, sporting a South African flag bumper sticker. What was especially noteworthy was the fact that the cart was in fact a fully fledged police patrol van. One could have at first glance been justifiably concerned that perhaps the hard pressed police force might be running out of funds for the purchase of squad cars. However, initial anxieties were put to rest when it was established that this quaint donkey-cart was being used as a promotional exercise to bring the police services closer to their local community. This exercise has apparently been quite successful with the added spin-off of the cart now also having become a tourist attraction in its own right. Equipped with a siren, flashing blue light and radio, the fully operational 'squad car' has in fact been used successfully in the apprehension of a number of errant locals caught disturbing the peace after having imbibed too much alcohol.

Imagine a puzzle (Fig. 38) of the South African flag the size of a soccer field and you will have a pretty good idea of the intended giant jigsaw puzzle that almost got built in 1996. All of the pieces (measuring 2×1.5 metres each) were in fact made, but when attempting to lay the puzzle out on the field, the wind created havoc with the puzzle and the attempt had to be abandoned. This was a great disappointment because the puzzle was the culminating event of a major fund raising affair and, had the organisers succeeded in the building of the puzzle, it would have entered the Guinness Book of Records as the world's largest flag puzzle construction. Due to various factors the attempt could not be repeated at a later date and the puzzle pieces were subsequently destroyed in recycling.

In July 1997, 160 000 postcards bearing a South African flag riddled with bullets (Fig. 39), were dumped by a number of paragliders and trucks on the lawns of the Union Buildings in Pretoria in a display of public concern for the escalating crime situation in South Africa. These postcards carried an impassioned plea to the State President, Nelson Mandela, to make crime prevention an urgent priority as people were becoming desperate, fearful and anxious about the deterioration of law and order. SAVA acquired a large number of these postcards and made them available to delegates at ICV97. A subsequent follow-up card was issued, depicting the same bullet riddled South African flag, but this time there were band-aid plasters covering the holes, with a message on the reverse-side appealing to South Africans to get involved in building-up their country and to re-commit themselves to civil obedience and the honouring of their commitment to pay taxes, *etc.*

Rather than the aforementioned postcards using plain plasters, perhaps the promoters could have given thought to the use the Elastoplast brand of plasters which are colourfully-festooned with the South African flag (Fig. 40). *CARING*

FOR THE NATION is the rather apt byline used on the plaster boxes.

The Vision South Africa logo, with its Christian cross and South African flag straddling a map of the country (Fig. 41), is meant to be symbolic of the challenge to the youth of South Africa to identify with the mission of Jesus Christ in seeking to 'save' (in a Christian context) others and to take ownership of this newly 'liberated' country. It is felt in a number of religious quarters that South African society needs both vision and a speedy return to a sound moral foundation as there is an awareness that the country's hard gained liberation has opened the floodgates to international crime syndicates with their attendant problems.

One of the advertising posters for Cape Town's unsuccessful bid for the 2004 olympic games (Fig. 42) creatively depicts the South African flag as swimming-lane guide ropes. The use of the flag is meant to underpin Cape Town's bid as having the support of the country as a whole.

In conclusion, it is reasonable to assert that the South African flag has been widely accepted by the majority of South Africans. There is a sentiment expressed by certain fringe elements within our multiculturally diverse nation who contend that the current flag is a portrayal of the anti-Christ (prompted by the inclusion of the ruling party's African National Congress colours of black, gold and green). A more positive colour interpretation is that the blue in the flag symbolises peace, the black represents the country's black population, and the white represents the white-population group, gold is for the country's wealth whilst the green represents our heritage and culture. The flag's designer, Fred Brownell, strongly asserts that there is not necessarily any significance attached to the flag's colours. What matters is that the man in the street has accepted and readily associated the flag with the country's new nationhood and sees its symbolism as a coming together, a convergence of the old and the new, moving forward in the true spirit of national reconciliation in line with the country's motto of *EX UNITATE VIRES (UNITY IS STRENGTH)*.

It is fitting to close my presentation with the Southern Life Association's advert (Fig. 43) depicting an undulating South African flag rolling off into the distance, like the hills of this magnificent country, where one's gaze is drawn to a new dawn heralding fresh beginnings - where the company's byline states: *CHANGE HAS OPENED NEW HORIZONS FOR US ALL, REVEALING A BRIGHTER FUTURE, A FUTURE WE CAN MANAGE BETTER, TOGETHER.*

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank the State Herald, Fred Brownell, for the use of his archival material on the South African flag. I would also like to acknowledge the moral support of SAVA, and my colleagues of the Cape Chapter in particular, for their encouragement in the bringing to fruition of this paper. This paper is dedicated

to the loving memory of my late wife Laurene who, prior to her death in May 1997, was a pillar of strength and an indefatigable supporter of my continued contribution to ICV97.

Leon Breytenbach

Leon Breytenbach was born and raised in Cape Town. After his compulsory national service in the Artillery and Data Services arms of the S.A. Defence Force, he moved into the finance sector of the public service. Two years later he moved to the private sector where he is currently in the Agency Administration division of a leading Life Assurance company. He is a member of the Southern African Heraldry Society and Secretary of the Cape Chapter of the Southern African Vexillological Association.

ADDRESS: 39 North Walk, PINELANDS 7405, South Africa

Plate 3



Figure 1



Figure 2

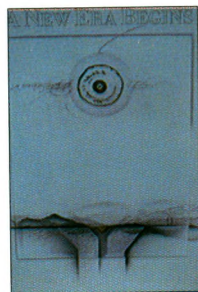


Figure 3



Figure 4

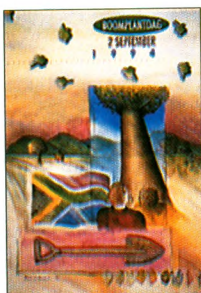


Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

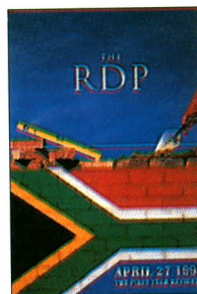


Figure 9



Figure 10



Figure 11

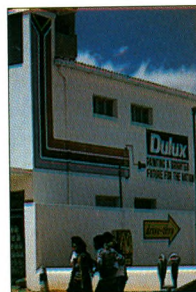


Figure 12

Plate 4



FIGURE 13



FIGURE 14



FIGURE 15



FIGURE 16



FIGURE 17



FIGURE 18

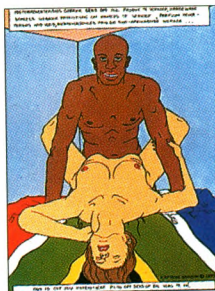


FIGURE 19



FIGURE 20



FIGURE 21

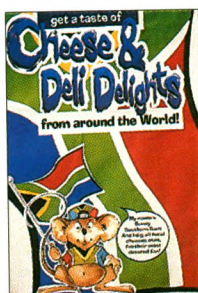


FIGURE 22



FIGURE 23



FIGURE 24

Plate 5



Figure 25



Figure 26

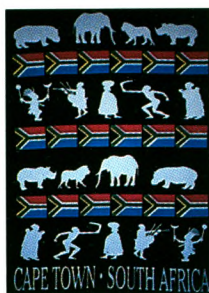


Figure 27



Figure 28



Figure 29

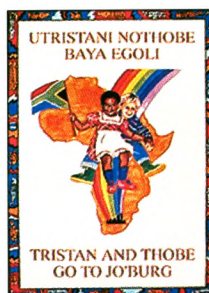


Figure 30



Figure 31



Figure 32



Figure 33

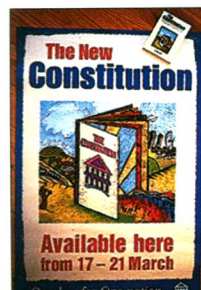


Figure 34

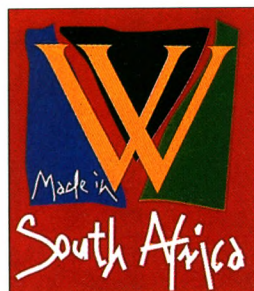


Figure 35



Figure 36

Plate 6



Figure 37

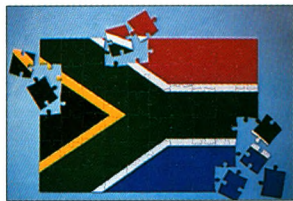


Figure 38



Figure 39



Figure 40



Figure 41



Figure 42



Figure 43