

Terry Wooff
South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education

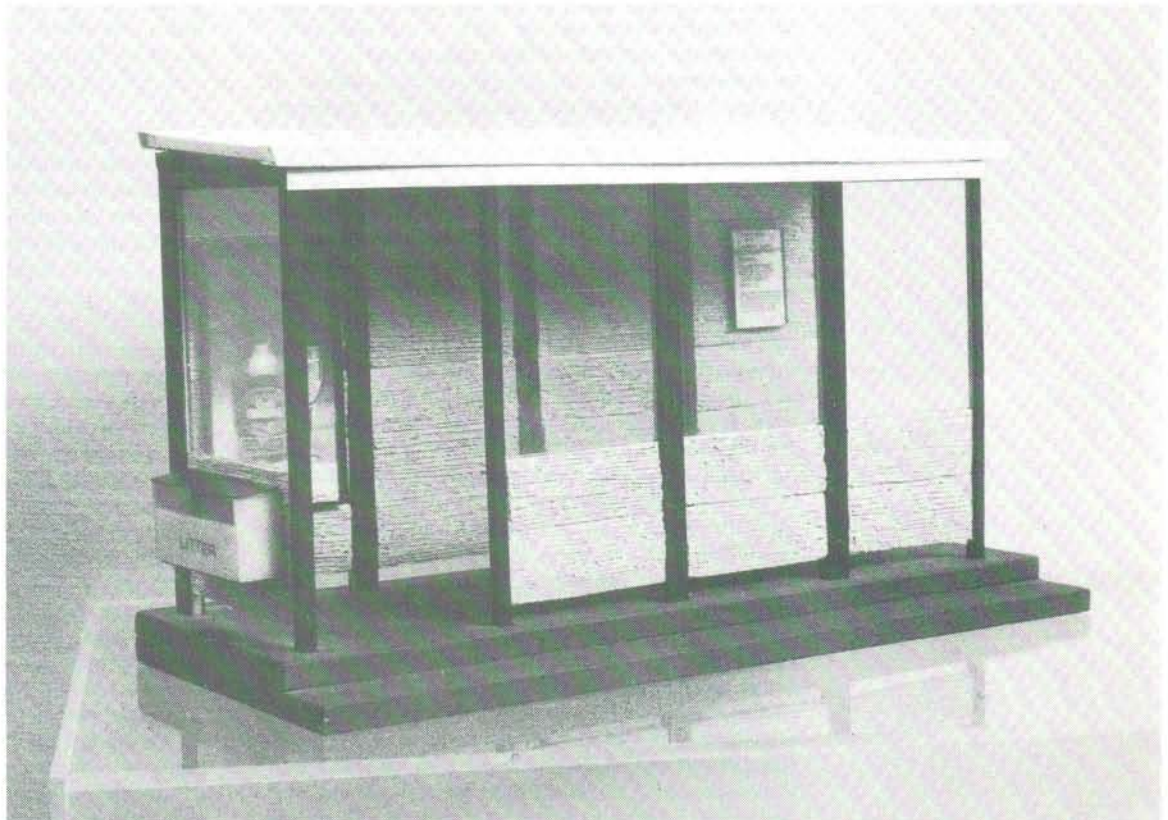
It may seem a little strange to readers of this magazine that an exhibition of design studies from schools should be regarded in anyway as unusual. Most of us perhaps are well aware that they are being found more frequently in schools and have been given the accolade of acceptance by various Examination Boards. Certainly those readers who are members of professional bodies such as NADE or EIDCT (Institute of Craft Education) may be inclined to feel that such a show no longer needs justification as a valid aspect of educational concern, and would be perhaps more concerned as to whether the quality and content of the exhibits, fulfils the description of 'Design'.

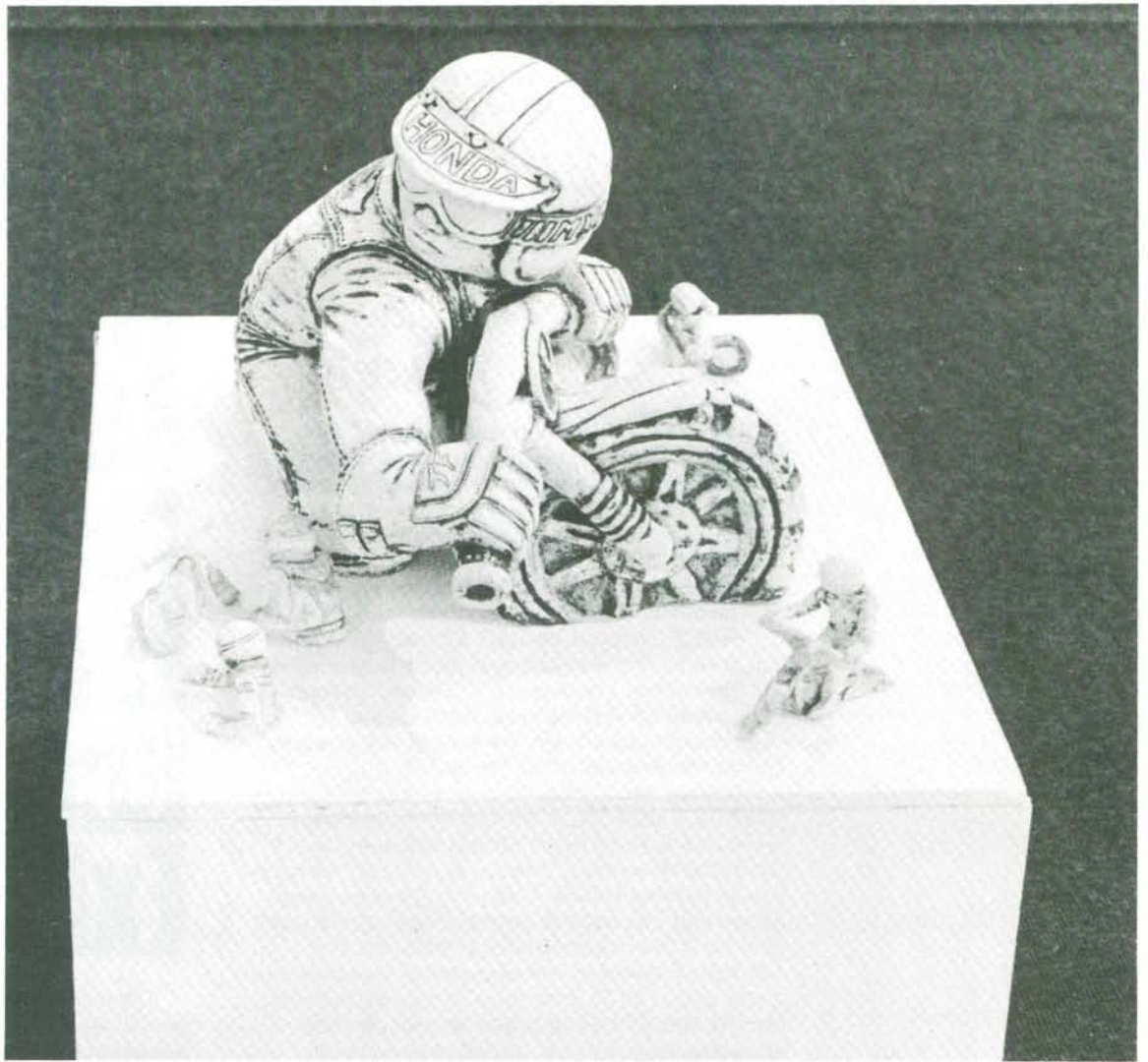
Perhaps what is mainly important about the SWADE Exhibition is the degree of significance accorded to it by virtue of its position in the National Museum of Wales; a significance which it has previously lacked. Undoubtedly some would argue that this claim is premature to say the least, and certainly exaggerated, but when the first SWADE Exhibition was mounted at Newport two years ago in 1977, over three and a half thousand people visited the exhibition, and a number of enquiries from parents, designers and others suggested there was a modicum of *Public* interest. Despite the recent industrial troubles, and bad weather, the private view of SWADE 2 was well attended, and a steady stream of visitors and enquiries has again seemed to justify the exhibition and its didactic nature.

The South Wales Association for Design Education: Schools Exhibition

The exhibits were chosen from those entered by schools which are members of the South Wales Association for Design Education. This body has been in existence for six years. While it is befittingly independent of the National Association for Design Education, to which it is 'fraternally' affiliated, it nevertheless shares much of the philosophy and objectives of NADE, in that it also aims to identify and encourage characteristically local and regional

*Bus stop designed
by Paul Chamberlain
Whitchurch High School
Cardiff*





examples of curriculum development in the field of design education, as part of its overall 'raison d'être'.

Despite the aspirations of such bodies, however, it is an unfortunate fact that much of the debate on the question of whether design can be workable within the curriculum of schools is still bedevilled by attitudes which take an 'Art', 'Craft' or some other stance. Attitudes which suggest an exclusiveness either for or against the inclusion of Design within particular disciplines. The problems of implementation are complex enough to those professionally involved. To the parents, pupils, and governors of most schools it is perhaps a professional mystery beyond comprehension. What the pupils involved understand or make of the outcomes of the debate is anybody's guess, but it may be suggested that in this exhibition at least, there is evidence of young people having become involved, committed, and enthusiastic, in a number of activities which involve the identification and response to problems – to design. Of course, this is not necessarily the case. It can be suggested that given the right conditions and a suitably behaviourist curriculum, most schools could produce evidence of pupils having gone through a course of problem identification, analysis, and solution. One can be trained in methodology. That is not design, and certainly is not Education, in the sense of a liberal preparation for life. Neither does the fact that a small hardworking group of teachers have managed to organise, mount and present such an exhibition, prove anything more than the fact that there are still members of the teaching profession who are committed, involved and enthusiastic. What marked this exhibition's status as being well justified was the evidence of 'creative' education in the area of **designing, having occurred in a number of schools**

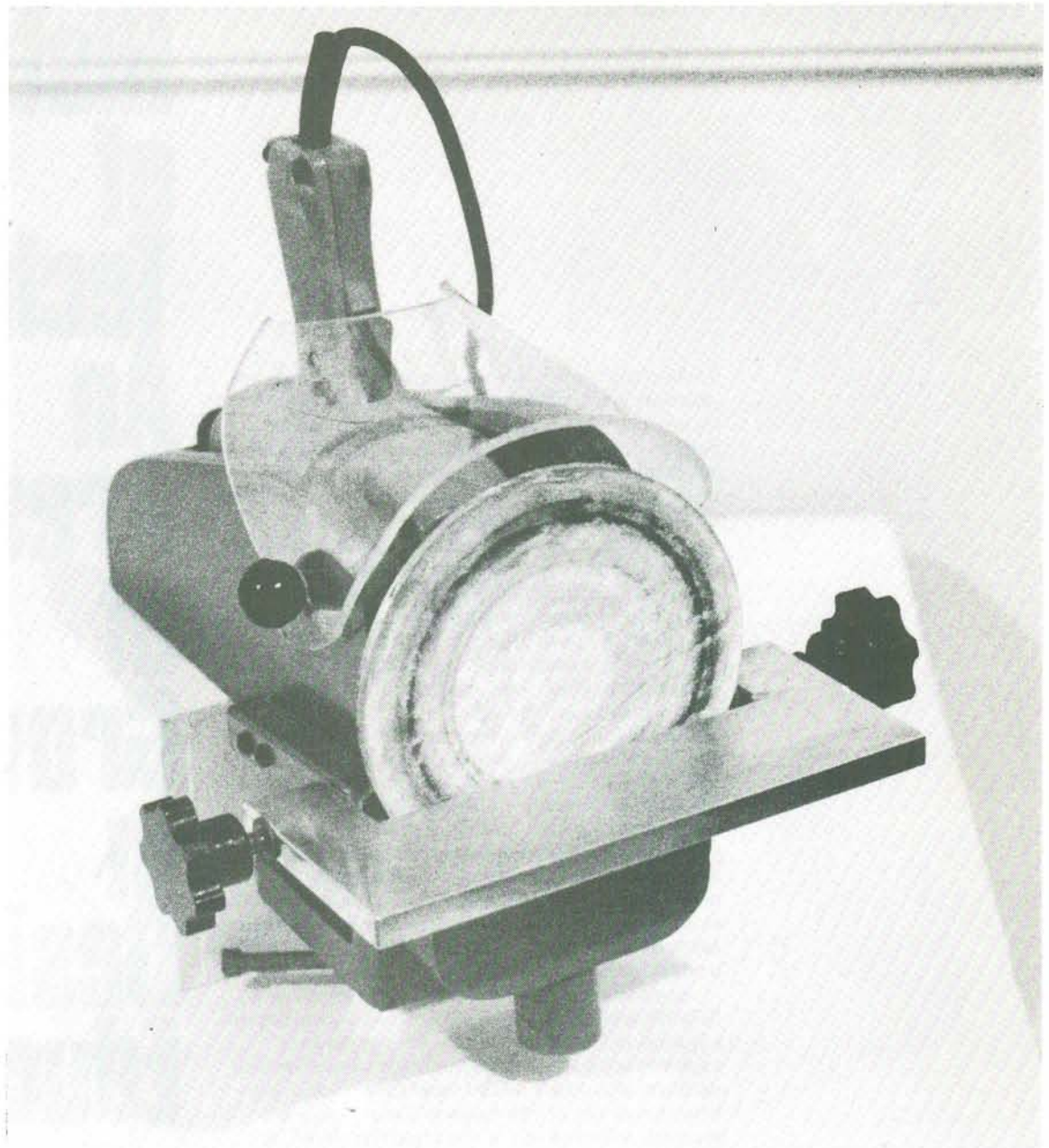
being on show to the public at large. The exhibits were presented in the context of a number of quotations describing and defining the activity of design. For example: 'The imaginative jump from present facts to future possibilities'. 'Methodology should not be a fixed track to a fixed destination, but a conversation about every thing that can be made to happen'.

(J. Christopher Jones – 'Design Methods')

The work was arranged into a number of groupings, involving Painting, Graphic Design, Textiles, Ceramics, Woodwork, Metalwork and Jewellery. Additionally, a project on Environmental Landscaping exemplified a design activity in which young people were not merely used as cheap labour to carry out the ideas of professional designers, but themselves used professional expertise and advice as a means of promoting their own investigation of a design problem, and a support in executing their individual and group proposals for a solution. The project provides a valuable illustration, not only of the complexity of most design situations and the need for a team approach to their solution, but also the value of a number of agencies, such as The Prince of Wales Committee, Llanover Hall Arts Centre, Local Government and Education Authorities, and bodies like SWADE jointly supporting teachers, and young people on real, actual, local, problems. What is more important perhaps is the recognition by the young people concerned that designing can be both an individual and corporate activity.

To claim that there was creative education, needs some evidence of which the photographs which accompany this article can only be a part. Inevitably **any judgement concerning the quality and content**

*Electric Drill
Attachment
Steven Cochrane
Caldicot Comprehensive
Gwent*



of such an exhibition must remain subjective. If, however, one bears in mind the view of Vernon that the characteristics of a creative action are fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration, or Lee and Williams' suggested framework for judging the creative qualities of a product, viz: novelty, appropriateness, transformation, and condensation, personal bias can perhaps be diminished if not eliminated.

For my part then, certain entries to the exhibition seemed to satisfy these criteria at least to a reasonable degree. The ogee shaped plant containers carried out in bent plywood by Paul Tomlinson and the storage units by Stephen Davies, both of Whitchurch High School, Cardiff, offered a variety of juxtaposition and forms which allowed for personal and individual elaboration, as well as being the subject of some extensive and extending research. Appropriateness and condensation seemed to be evident characteristics of the electric drill attachment offered by Steven Cochrane of Caldicot Comprehensive, while the qualities of fluency, originality and flexibility, were embodied in the embroidery of Linda Ray of Bassaleg School, and the astoundingly confident Ceramic 'Motor cyclist' by Toni Avis of Fairwater School, Cwmbran. As I have mentioned previously, the Environmental project (carried out by pupils of Glan Ely School, Cardiff) encapsulated the interaction of the pupils,

professionals, and outside agencies in a design approach to a barren courtyard of the school. This project has not only become the subject of a film, featured on HTV Wales, but has generated further local community endeavours of a similar kind, thus underlining the generative nature of effective design education.

While the SWADE Exhibition could not provide a massive and extensive demonstration of educational change, and perhaps a particularly disappointing feature was the lack of scientific and technical entries (e.g. related to electronic devices – surely an essential focus for 'creative' technology?) it nevertheless provided an opportunity for the people of Wales, and elsewhere to become aware that design studies, appropriately taught, offer young people a potent means of self actualisation. Perhaps Walter Gropius put it more neatly:

'Our guiding principle was that design is neither an intellectual or a material affair, but simply an integral part of the stuff of life, necessary for everyone in a civilised society. Our ambition was to rouse the creative artist from his otherworldliness, and to reintegrate him into the working world of realities, and at the same time to broaden and humanise the rigid, almost exclusively material mind of the businessman'.