

Craft and Design at the Pensnett School

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The school is a mixed 12-16 years group comprehensive located in the heart of the Black Country. It presently has 801 pupils on roll, 239 boys and 562 girls.

The Faculty of Art, Craft, Design and Technology benefits from a modern, well equipped, self contained building erected in 1976. The facilities include three workshops that have been developed into multi-media areas, capable of dealing with resistive materials. The building also houses ceramics, fabrics, technology, dark rooms and additionally two art studios. Whilst all rooms and workshops are self contained, all are in easy access of each other.

One of the advantages of a faculty is the breadth of staff expertise, encompassing both the technical and the aesthetic. If these major aspects of designing and making can be 'married' and their collective influence brought to bear across all activities within the faculty, then an opportunity exists to break down traditional barriers and

enrich the awareness and interpretation of both pupils and teachers.

The faculty curriculum is based upon lower and upper school activity where years two and three comprise a foundation course in preparation for examination courses in years four and five.

The foundation course revolves around a series of themes which serve as both a stimulus and a focal point for the pupils to generate ideas and images.

The whole faculty is engaged in dialogue which consists of interactive discussion to generate them. The circulation of ideas and exchange of experiences in the discussions of the projects and the co-operation between staff has helped to develop much closer understanding, a more creative use of materials and greater experimentation.

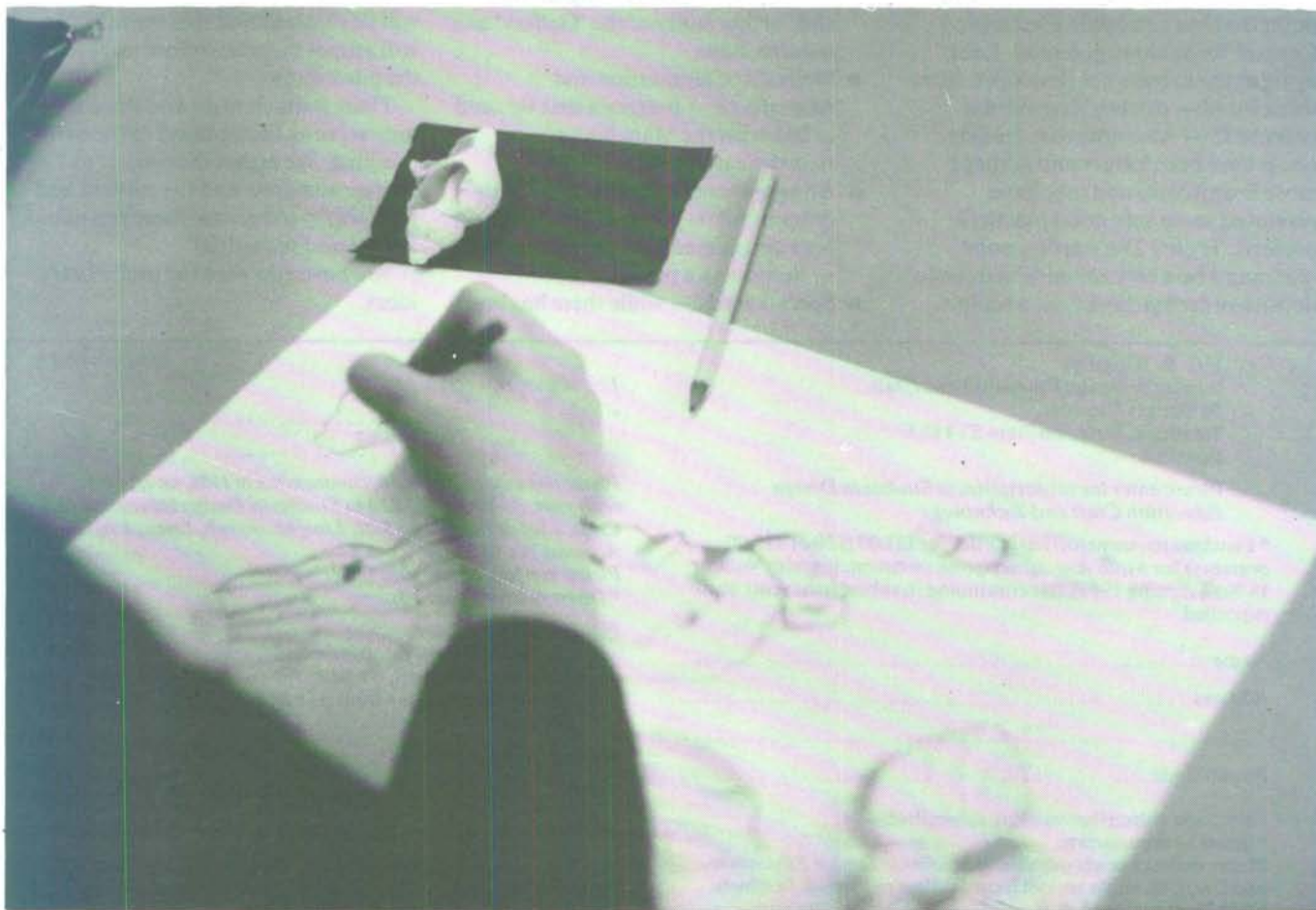
We have to mediate between the two opposing schools/traditions and allow for different interpretations, giving way to a rethinking of critical attitudes and a shift towards a new concept of Design

education and a break out of the traditional craft oriented mould.

The design problems are chosen for their visual appeal and imaginative content and for the way in which they offer scope for different interpretation using different techniques. Every year the pool of briefs/ideas keep changing.

In the second year the foundation course takes the form of a materials study where the pupils are introduced to all of our available materials and encouraged to explore the potential of them, to discover their major properties and the means of exploiting these properties in pursuit of their design ideas loosely based upon the given theme. The materials are studied in isolation via a 'cyclic modular' approach, though the inclusion of other materials is not discouraged here provided emphasis is given to the main material stipulated for that module.

1. Observation drawing. Theme — Sea

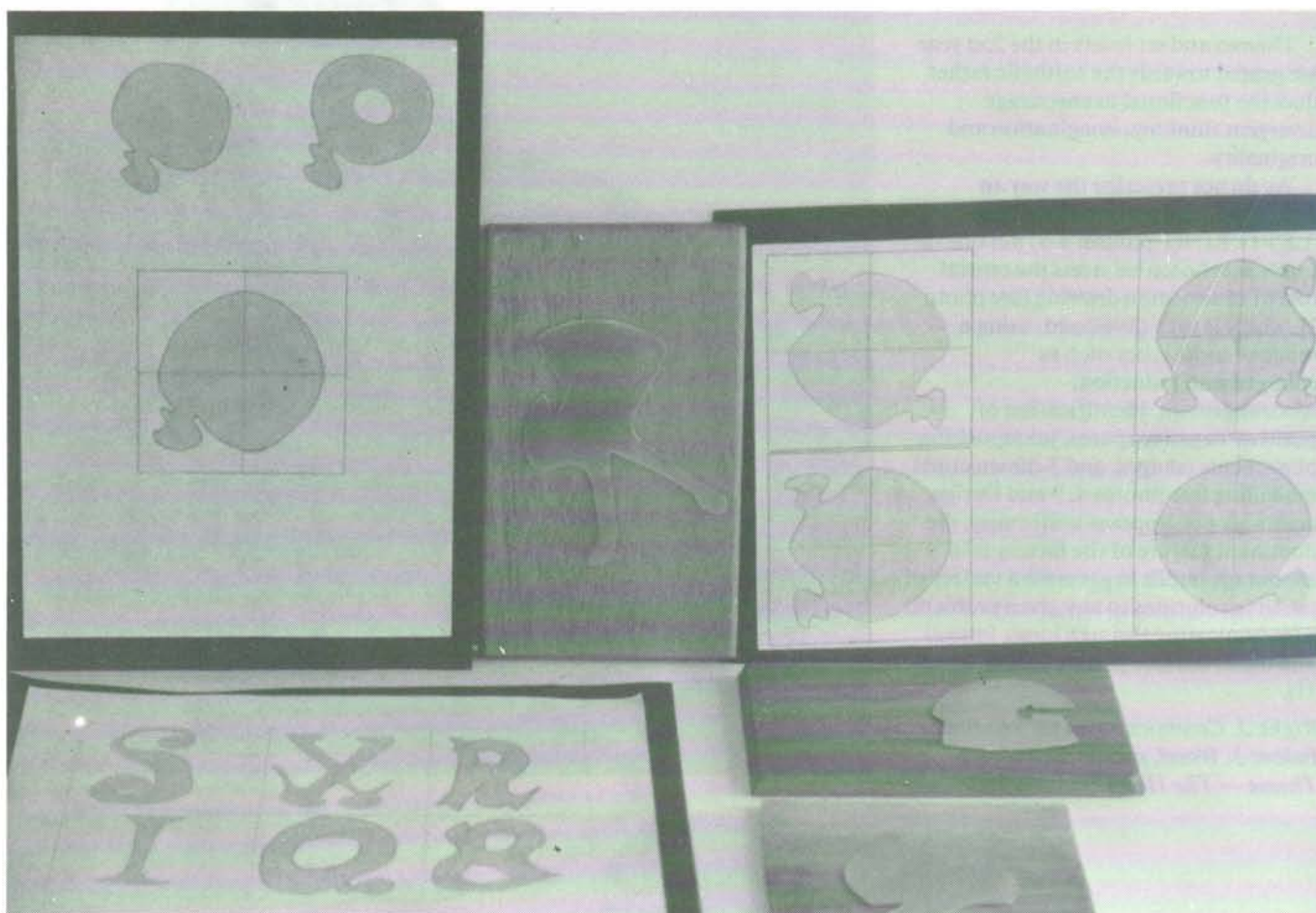


Themes and set briefs in the 2nd year are geared towards the aesthetic rather than the functional to encourage divergent thinking, imagination and originality.

We do not prescribe the way an individual interprets the brief (see 'LETTERING' photos. 5-8) but once the briefs are chosen we stress the central role of observation drawing (see photo 1), which is then developed, using a range of techniques such as enlargement, reduction, re-arrangement, identification of positive/negative spaces, juxtaposition of elements (shapes, and 3-dimensional modelling (see photos 4, 9 and Design no longer presupposes uniformity, the dominant feature of the faculty is to encourage pupils to generate a variety of possible solutions to any given problem, communicating through ideas, images and materials (see photos 2, 3, 4, 8 and 11).

*Right: 2. Ceramics based on Sea-theme
Below: 3. Wood, plastic & ceramics.
Theme — The Head*



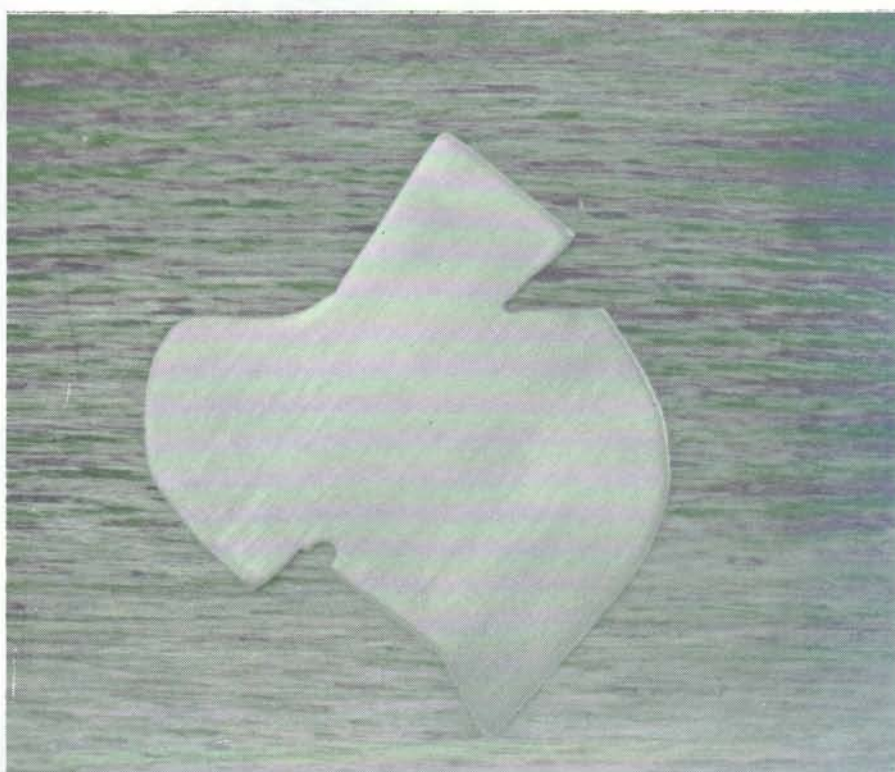


Foundation work in the third year is designed to build upon pupils experience of materials from the previous year by the introduction of the Design Process in a relatively simple form. This experience makes pupils more readily able to address functional constraints and some of the limitations imposed by material properties. A hallmark of third year work is a multimedia approach where pupils choose their own materials within the constraints of access and availability. Upper school courses in the fourth and fifth years lead to examinations in Art, 2 and 3-dimensional Design and Technology.

Every design department possesses its own intrinsic qualities, strengths and weaknesses, and an additional advantage of the broader faculty base is in the evaluation of courses, based upon

Above: 4. Sketching ideas. Theme — Lettering

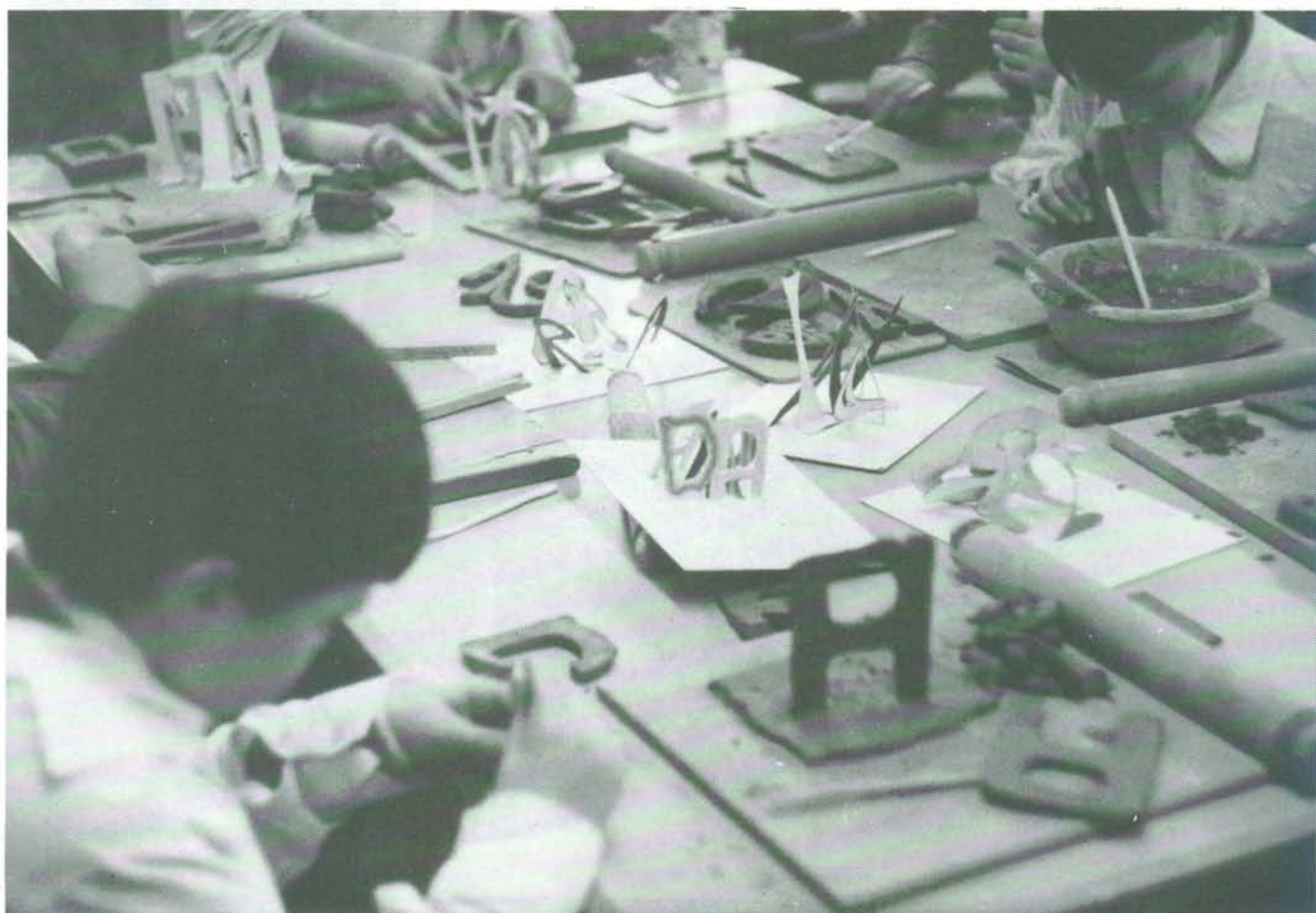
Right: 5. Metal. Theme — Lettering (re-arranged juxtaposed shape of letter)





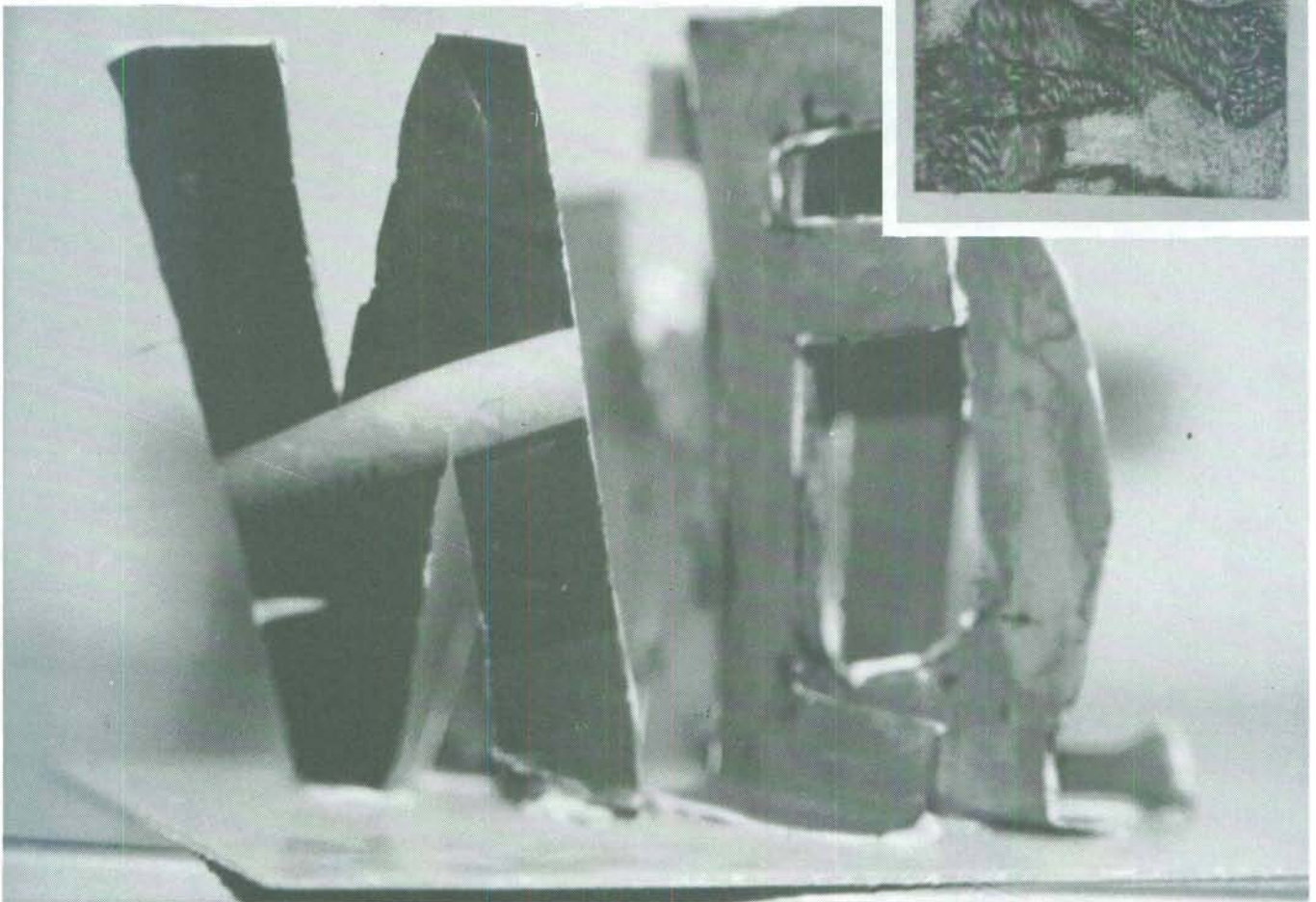
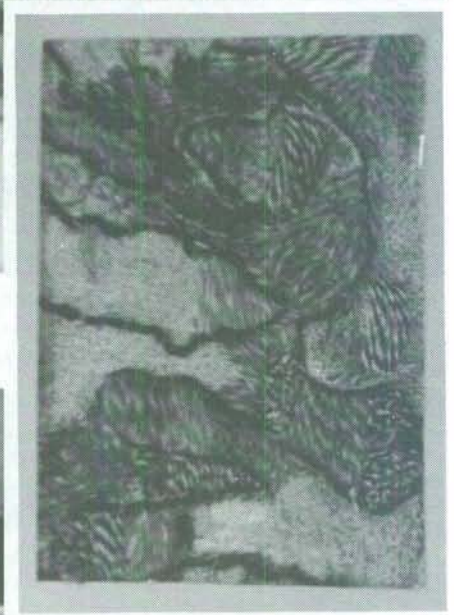
Above: 6. Ceramics. Theme — Lettering

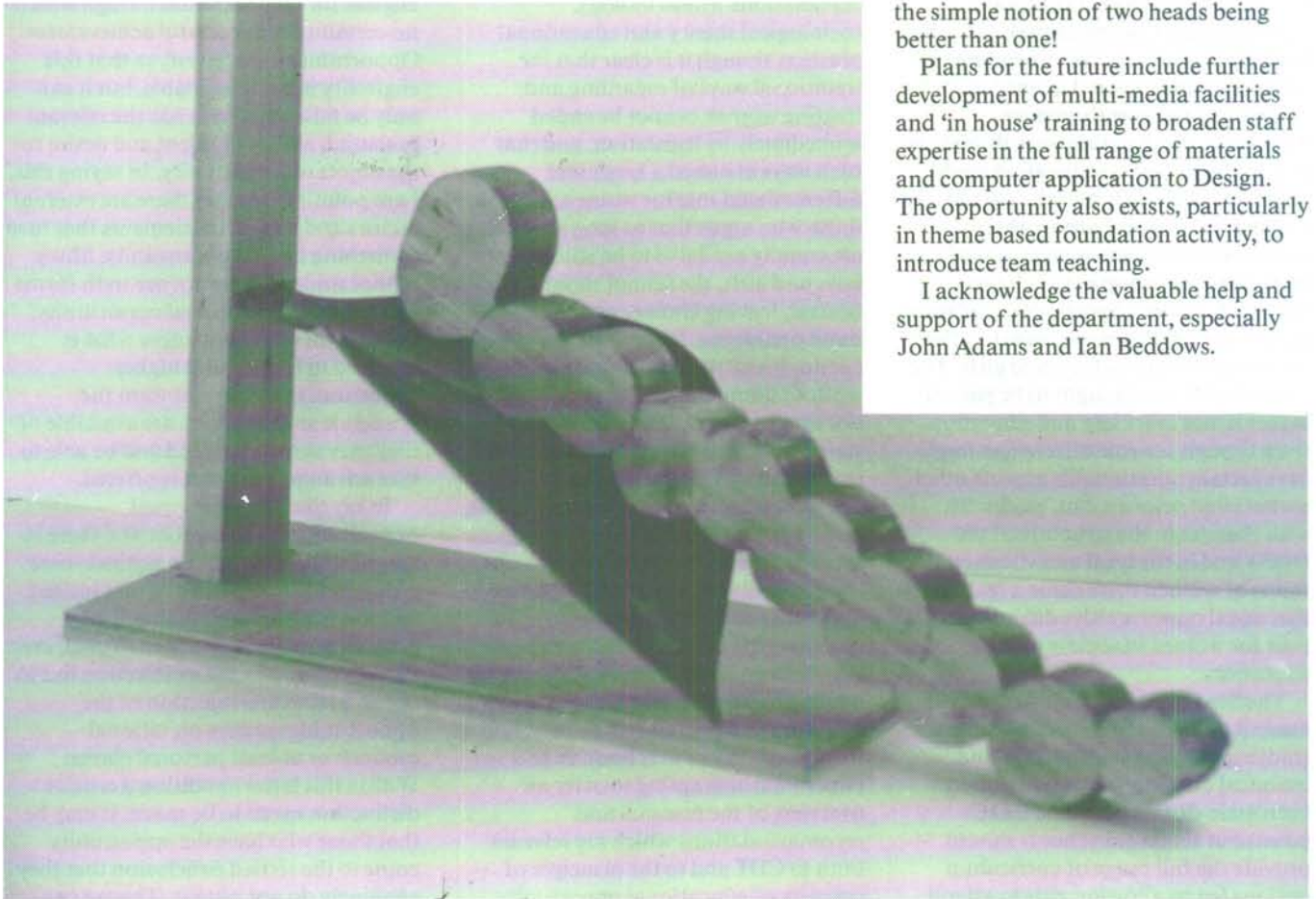
Below: 7. Ceramics. Theme — Lettering (maquettes in card & paint). Looking at negative/positive shapes.





Above: 8. Printing, card & ceramics. Theme — Lettering
 Right: 9. Observation drawing & fabric. Theme — Natural form
 Below: 10. Card & Paint. Theme — Lettering (Negative & positive space)





the simple notion of two heads being better than one!

Plans for the future include further development of multi-media facilities and 'in house' training to broaden staff expertise in the full range of materials and computer application to Design. The opportunity also exists, particularly in theme based foundation activity, to introduce team teaching.

I acknowledge the valuable help and support of the department, especially John Adams and Ian Beddows.

Above: 11. Wood and Plastic. Theme — Movement

Below: 12. Fabric. Theme — Natural form based on drawings of wood bark

