

PROJECT 3

MIMBRES 87

Figure/Ground (Ground Dominates Over Figure)

PROJECT (2 Weeks)

Like the artisans who created Mimbres pottery, students select an object from everyday life and create designs that communicate the importance of their selection to their life. Also, just as in Mimbres pottery design, the spaces between the "objects" attract our attention first and are more dominant than the objects.

BACKGROUND

Urban designers, architects, landscape architects, and interior designers manipulate both the form of solid things (buildings, plant materials, walls, floors, ceilings, furnishings) and the form of the spaces inbetween them. Both object and space must be designed. Usually the solid is the figure and the space is the (back)ground. In this project we will reverse the normal expectation of seeing figure against background and will create designs where the background has the dominant shape. This is exactly what designers often do. For example, the great urban plazas of the world are famous not because they are surrounded by famous buildings but because we revere the activities that happen in them and because the nothingness between the buildings has a shape, a "form", that is more memorable than the surrounding buildings.

GOALS

- Further reinforce that form and meaning are parts of all design problems.
- Introduce "flowing" eye movement (to complement the "patterned" eye movement required in the first two projects).
- Identify the characteristics that make some shapes dominant and memorable and other shapes inconspicuous and forgettable.
- Increase skill in using a design process.
- Practice making forms (rather than manipulating "given" forms as in the first two projects).

REQUIREMENTS

PREPARATION. In a "brainstorming"¹ session with other students identify a variety of objects from everyday life that might be used for this project. The more important the object is to daily life the more in the spirit of Mimbres pottery the project becomes. Complete the readings about Mimbres Pottery.

INITIAL STUDIES. As part of the brainstorming session each student should experiment with drawing silhouette views of each object. Before selecting an object, discuss what characteristics make some objects more vivid in silhouette than others. After selecting an object, try drawing the object different ways. Initial studies should be 1" high and should be done with a thick bold marker to help simplify the image to its most essential elements. Draw a minimum of five silhouettes and exaggerate a different aspect of the object in each. For instance, the length of the ears of the rabbit in Mimbres pottery are exaggerated. Try elongating or compressing the whole image. The goal of these initial studies is to develop an understanding of the visual character of the object. This is basically the same thing you did in the first project of the semester where you analyzed the geometry of a simple geometric shape. However, this time your shape is no longer simple and you must give it its character. These initial studies should make it easier to distort your object as you try to get it to fit into the circle. Save all your studies.

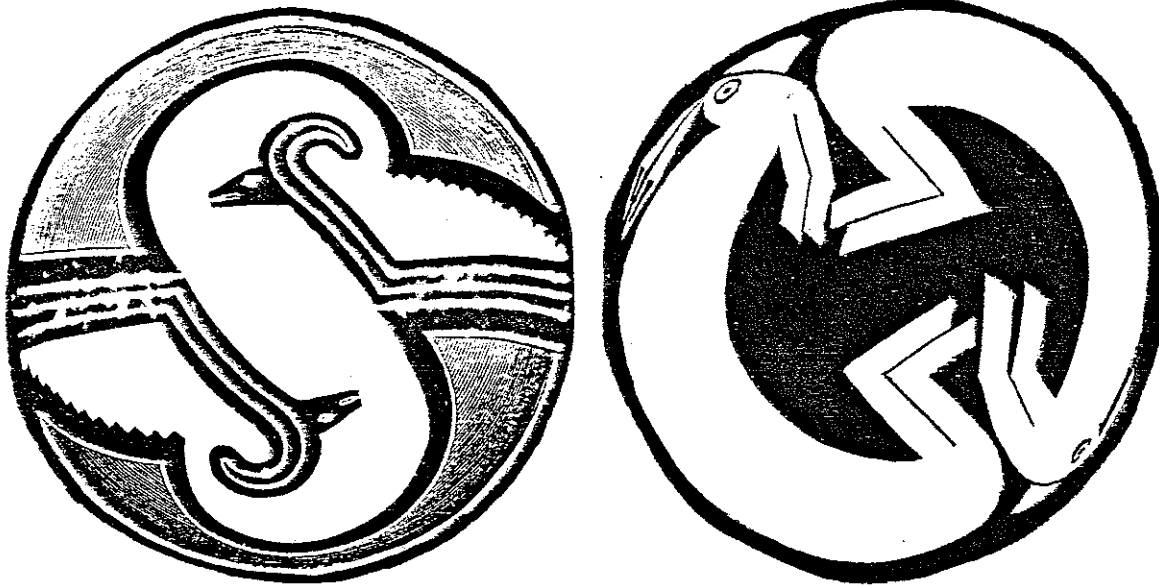
DEVELOPMENT. Experiment with reshaping and arranging **two, three** or a maximum of **five** images of your object so the spaces between them are more dominant and attract more attention than the shapes. Develop two separate designs, one that is based on *static patterns* and one that is *dynamic* in the way it leads the eye around the design. What makes some designs static and some dynamic? Save all your studies.

- **REFINEMENT STUDIES.** Select the most promising static and the most promising dynamic design and improve them through a series of overlays. Make shure you have enough detail so the function of your object is revealed. Size, about 8".
- **FINAL ILLUSTRATION.** Submit in two parts. Sheet one: select and mount images from your studies to show the process you went through. Sheet two: create a final illustration of your dynamic and your static design.

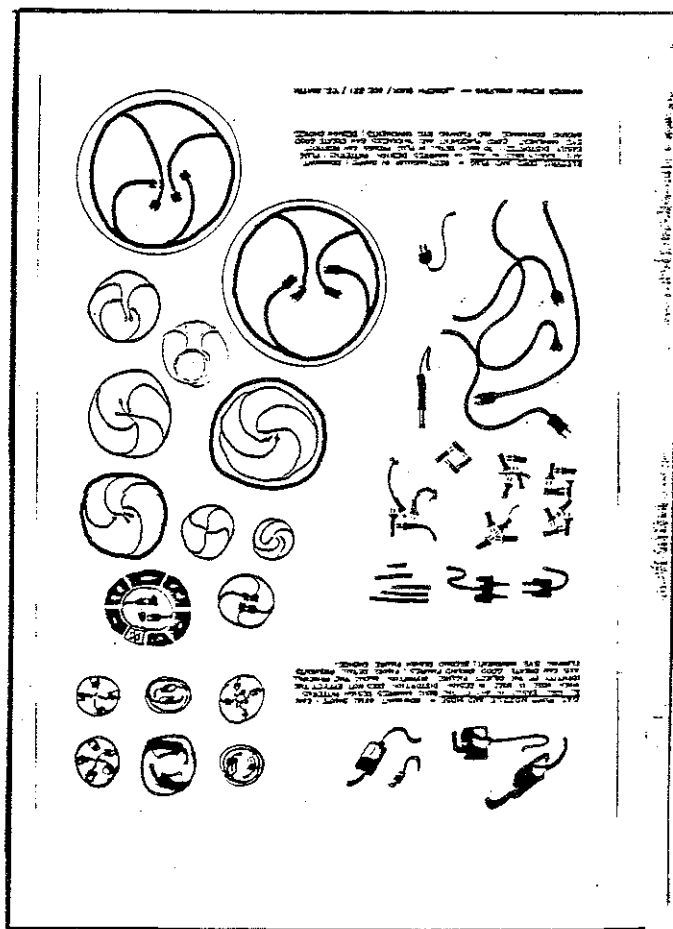
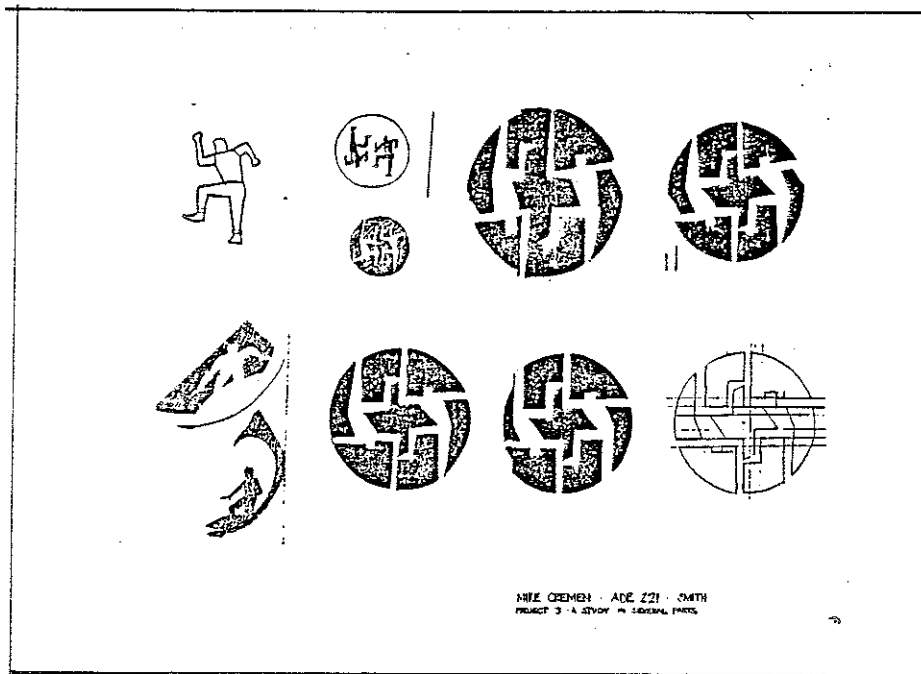
- EVALUATION CRITERIA**
- "Ground" dominates over "figure" when one first looks at the design.
 - Process adequately documented.
 - Craftsmanship in final presentation.
 - One design is "static" and one design is "dynamic."
 - Humor and/or appropriateness of the object you selected.
 - Sophistication and refinement OF DETAIL in the graphic image of the object selected.

VOCABULARY

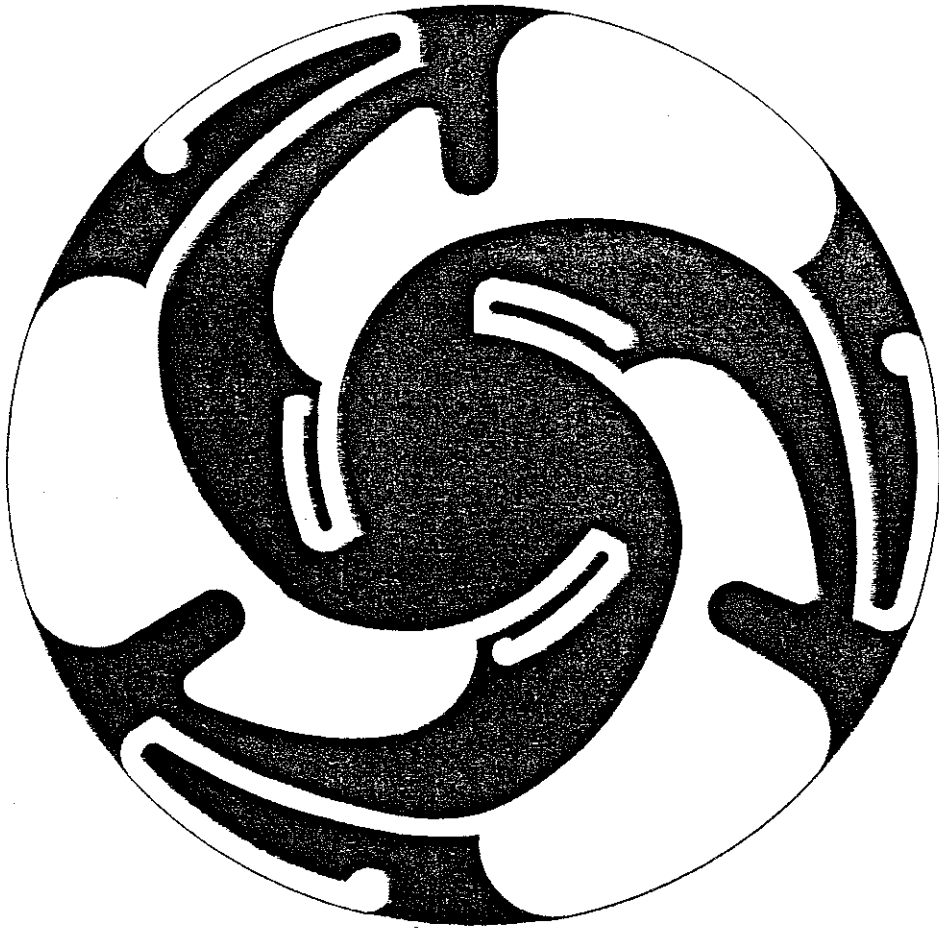
vignette profile alternating silhouette ambiguous reve
 contour interacting edge dominance brainstorming reveal



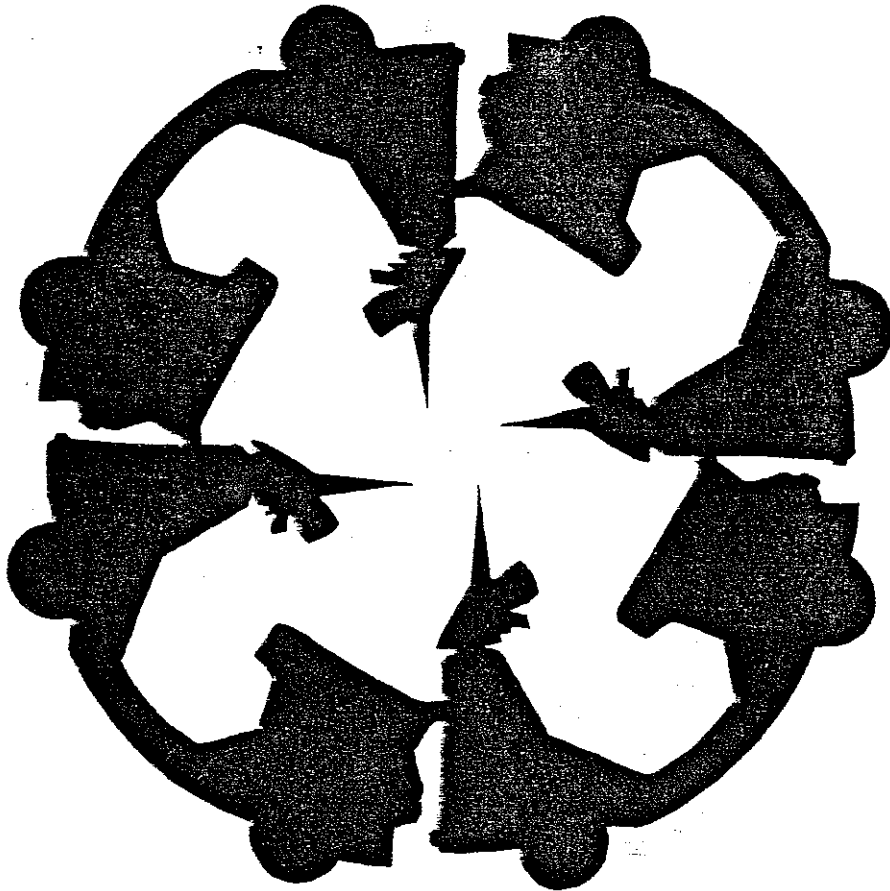
¹Brainstorming. A group problem solving technique where many ideas are developed in rapid succession. The key rule is: no one is allowed to criticise or dismiss any ope else's idea, no matter how stupid it may appear. One may only build on ideas. Everyone participates equally, but there must be a recorder, who writes all the ideas down on the blackboard (for everyone else to see) and a "facilitator" who keeps the process moving. The facilitator makes everyone obey "the rule". Brainstorming is frequently used by engineers, architects, designers and others to solve problems that have resisted solution.



studies



P. Whitworth



S. Arens