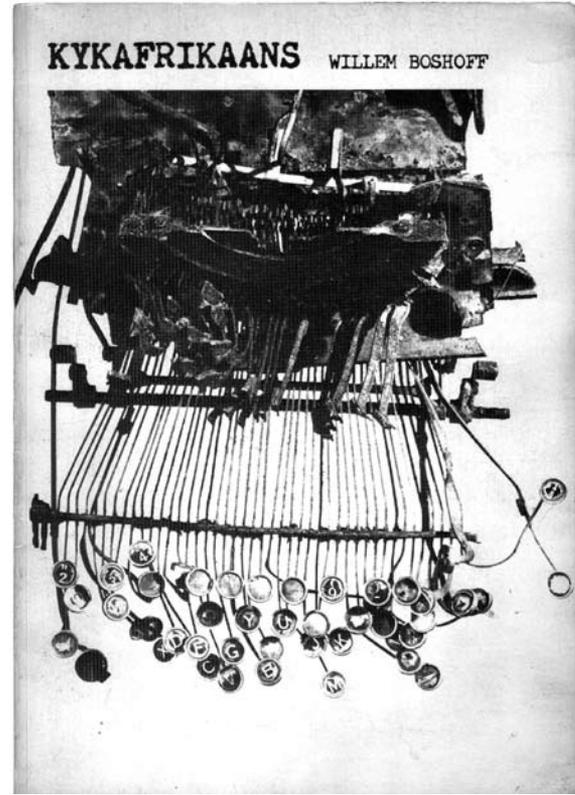


Willem Boshoff

KYKAFRIKAANS is an anthology of concrete poetry published in 1980 by Uitgewery Pannevis. This publishing house was founded by Markus de Jong and, during its short existence, focused on the publication of alternative Afrikaans literature.

Originally a thousand copies were printed, but KYKAFRIKAANS has been out of print for fifteen years. Few conceptual poems have ever been written in Afrikaans and KYKAFRIKAANS is arguably the only full anthology of such divergent poetry to have been published in this beleaguered 'modern' South African language.



PRO PATRIA (For the fatherland)

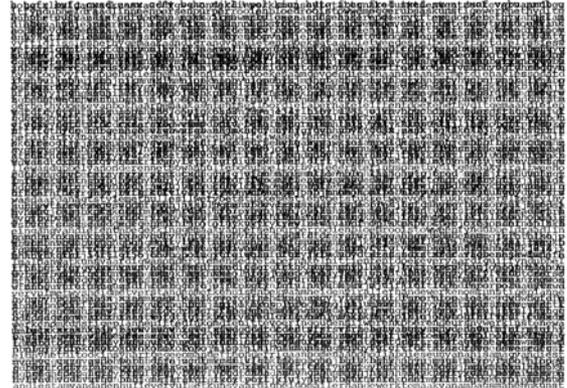
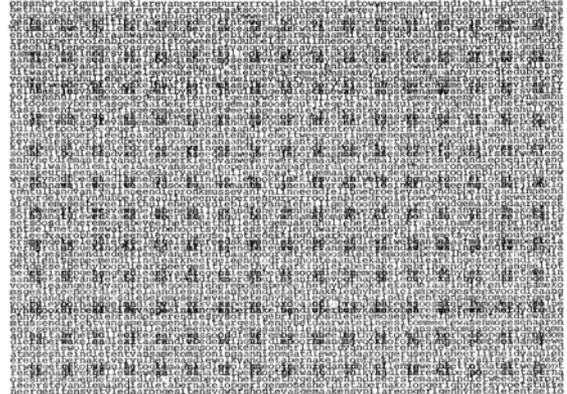
Boshoff, a pacifist, wrote his PRO PATRIA during a period of anxious military service. Five 'soldiers' are 'marching' across the page. Their trail of five rows of footprints repeat fragments of the words 'links - regs' (left - right). These broken syllables are interrupted by snippets of private thought that dwell on home, family and the easy life outside. The poem is to be recited by a platoon of five 'army' voices marching in tempo. The title Pro Patria! is the order to march, and instead of yelling the self-assured "left, right, left, right ...," the troops bellow their time and intermixed thoughts simultaneously. The troop to the far left marches by the following abstruse three-letter cries: "bre, ekl, ink, sre, wer, kli, gsl, ink."

"PRO PATRIA"

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| bre ekl ink sre | hot not kkr | sre die lin egg | kul lin kkr egg | Yrf kif dks reg |
| wer kli gsl ink | pro ink sre | sia die reg sif | Yry sre gsl | sif gsl ink |
| die lin egg kkr | hol kkr sre egg | die egg lin | die lin egg kkr | ten lin egg |
| die lin egg kkr | nou kkr lin egg | die egg lin | die lin kkr | die kkr lin egg |
| blâ rri ere lin | nou lin gsl kkr | sro sti ein egg | kil lek kkr lin | vol leg egg kkr |
| wil kri sif reg | hin kkr dks sif | sky die kkr nks | wil lee sif reg | pil egg nks sif |
| bil lin egg | die kkr lin | sre lin kkr | kou kkr lin egg | vir egg kkr lin |
| wol kri kkr | pri ein egg | ski die kkr lin | yel lin egg kkr | pel lin egg |
| bvl ink lin sre | hou sre lin gsl | vir gsl ink | van kkr sre | die sre lin gsl |
| deu rin kkr gsl | pre die ink ink | inl kkr ink sre | vir egg gsl | vir lin sre ink |
| die lin sif sre | hor tee ank gsl | die kkr sre ink | kan tee gsl sre | vad egg gsl |
| die lin egg | opl kkr lin | hin egg kkr | die lin egg | die egg kkr lin |
| bor ein gsl nks | hel est nks reg | sro die reg sif | afl sre sif nks | vre egg sre mre |
| ore lin kkr | dar die lin egg | var kpa egg lin | val eks egg kkr | pvn tre lin egg |

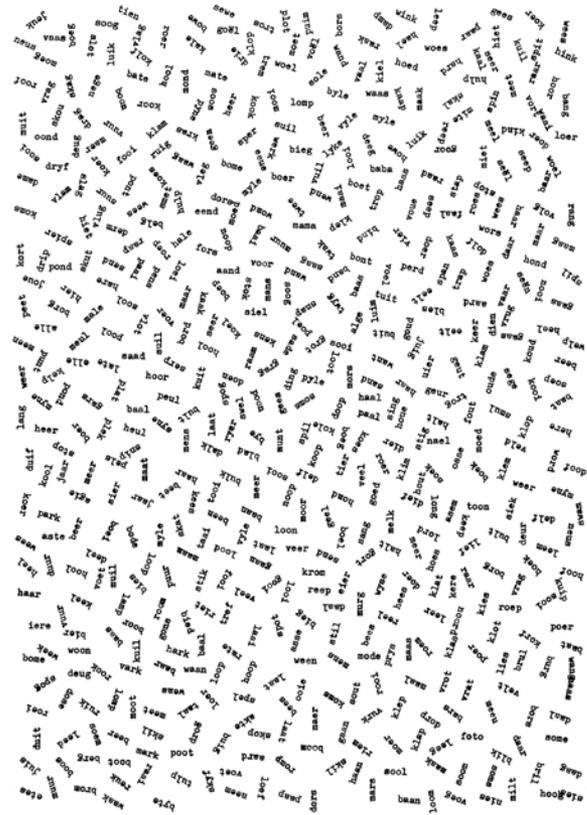
VLEGSKRIF (WOVEN WRITING)

The word 'text' derives from Latin texere – 'to weave', as on a loom. Words like 'textile', 'texture', and ultimately 'text', also come from this source. The 'text' of all our writing was first so-called because it looks like a bit of weaving. In Latin plectere is 'to plait'. To perplex is to 'weave through' and complex things are literally 'woven together'. In VLEGSKRIF the typewriter uses the thread or yarn of real text to produce a plaited or knit fabric much like knitting-needles knit a pattern into a jersey.



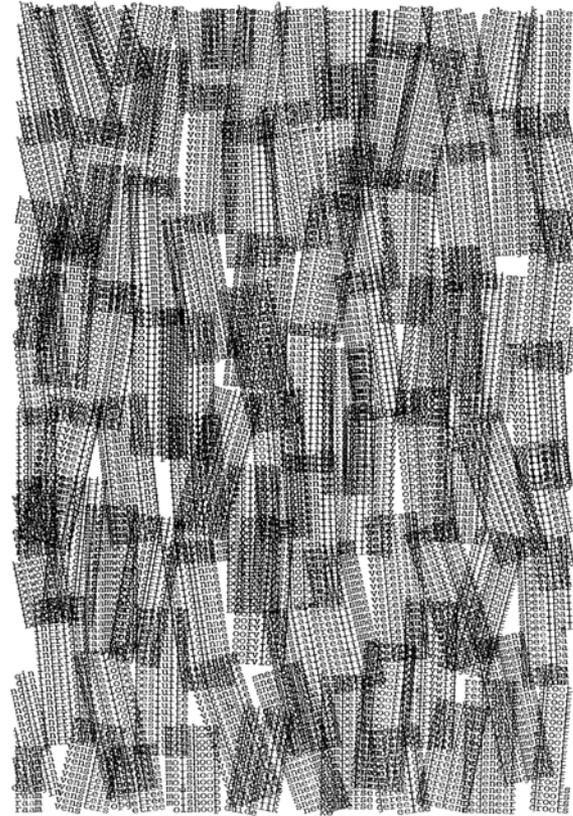
VIERLETTER WOORDE (FOUR-LETTER WORDS)

VIERLETTER WOORDE composed in 1979, consists of a snow-fall of four-letter words that are not at all swear-words: snap (comprehend), seer (sore), keel (throat) etc. The recital of this has a cathartic function when the words are shouted out loudly and at random by individual members of a 'choir'. Members of the 'choir' offload, in a manner of speaking, poisonous elements that they dare not utter through swearing which is not generally regarded as a suitable form of social expression. The four-letter words face in all directions, upside down, sideways, upright, etc. Performers are encouraged to look for a word, and as soon as they can read one, to treat it as if it is indeed an expletive. Their indignant shouts must 'fall' down like 'hail' on a tin roof. The more people reciting the piece, the harder it 'hails'. One of the methods of composition in stochastic (Iannis Xenakis) and aleatoric music (music by chance) is creating effective graphic diagrams for performers (Edison Denisov). Performer are free to bring their own interpretative talents to the graphic representation and find equivalents for it by the instrumental or vocal means at their disposal.



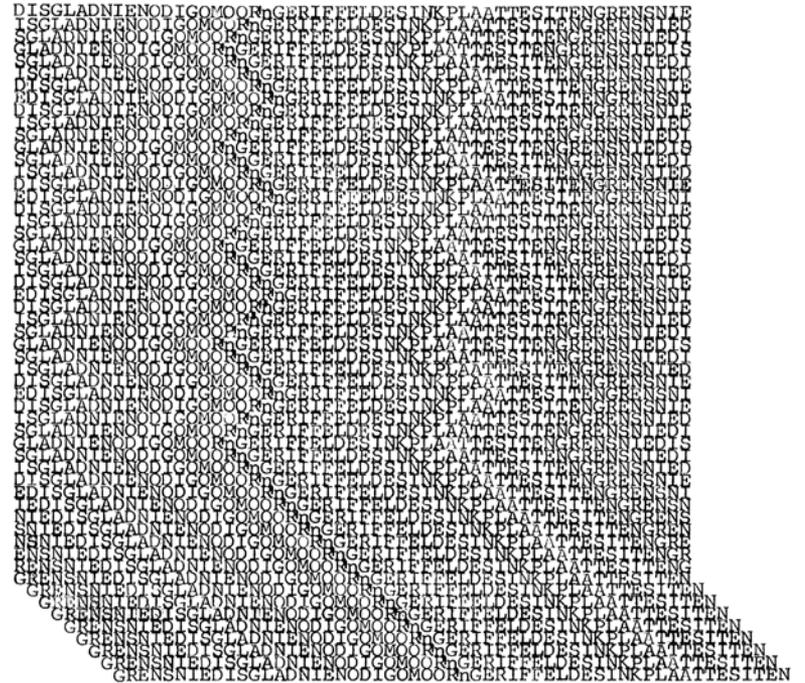
GETIKTE KWASHALE (TYPED BRUSH STROKES)

In KYKAFRIKAANS the type-writer is often used as a drawing instrument, and in GETIKTE KWASHALE it is used as a 'brush'. Although the brush is best suited to the flat application of pigments – in other words, to painting – its use in a clearly delineatory function, with the monochrome line dominating, as is typical of brush drawing, can be traced back to prehistoric times. In France, brush drawing plays a major role, especially in the work of the painters of the École de Paris (School of Paris), such as Pierre Soulages and Hans Hartung, who consider the line, the framework of lines, and the network of lines, as primary manifestations of form. The quality of an individual brush-stroke can also be enhanced by the grain and texture inherent to its paint. In GETIKTE KWASHALE the adage "A picture is a thousand words" is sabotaged when texture is applied to the painterly streaks in the form of meaningless/meaningful eight-letter repetitions.



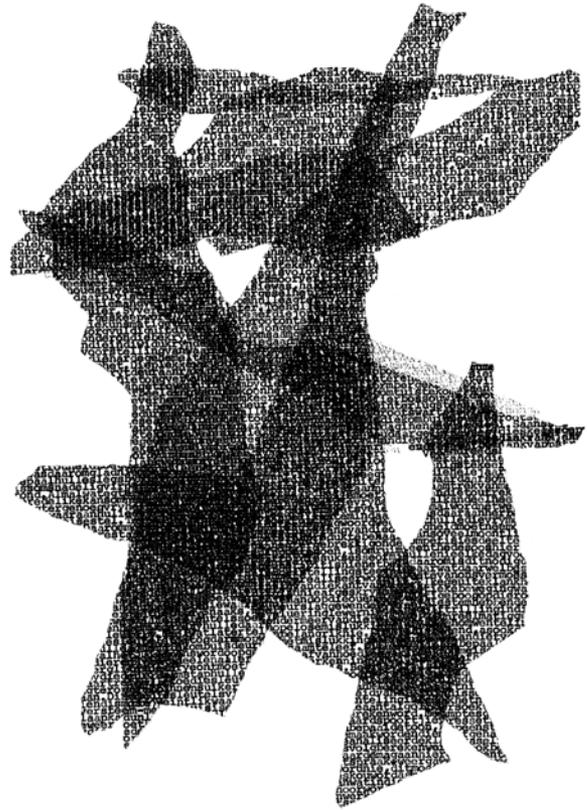
HEKELSKRIF (CROCHETED WRITING)

HEKELSKRIF elaborates on the link between text, textile and texture – all derived from the Latin *texere* 'to weave'. Crocheting is performed by a repetition of stitches, in a certain sequence, and its various loops, cross-overs and pull-throughs culminate in a field of rich flourishes of repeated visual effects. Crocheting is especially suitable to create ornamental borders. The text of HEKELSKRIF is fairly easy to read: "Dis glad nie nodig om oor 'n geriffelde sinkplaat te sit en grens nie." (It is not at all necessary to sit down and weep over rippled corrugated iron). In Afrikaans *grens* means 'border', but it also means 'to weep'. Also "om oor iets te grens" (to weep over something) can mean to cry about it, or to be above it and cry down onto it. The poem plays with crying and with borders – with the ambiguity of endings 'where will it all end'. At the base of HEKELSKRIF a break-out of text takes place over the border. The text escapes its boundaries and 'definition', derived from the Latin *definire* that literally means both 'to terminate or end' and 'to place within a boundary'.



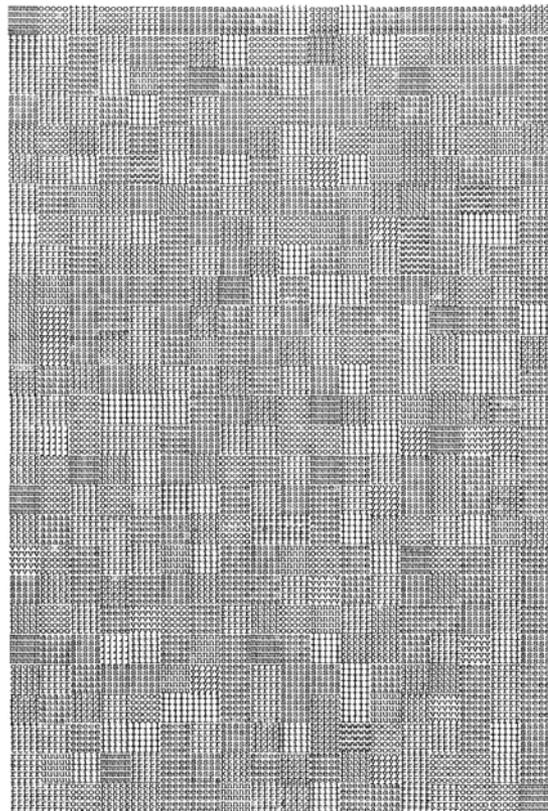
SKRIFSKERWE (SHARDS OF WRITING)

Thin ice, delicate porcelain ware and sheets of glass shatter easily into shards when manhandled. In Victorian times, a broken vessel or broken glass symbolised lost innocence or lost virginity. The ancient Greeks used the ostrakon or 'potsherd' as an instrument of voting to indicate what or whom they preferred. This democratic voting process was called ostracism. Voting against someone in office was also done by ostracism – the bad administrator, so pointed out, was then banished or ostracised. This was literally done by stoning the undesired person with the selfsame potsherds used in the voting, thereby driving him or her out of town. SKRIFSKERWE arranges shards, filled-in as indistinct writing, into the structure of a house of cards, precariously teetering on the brink of collapse. It speaks about upending the power-base of abusive, self-assured autocrats. Selfish visions and excessive policies can be toppled and shattered by the consolidation of citizens who might, at first, think them to be unbreakable.



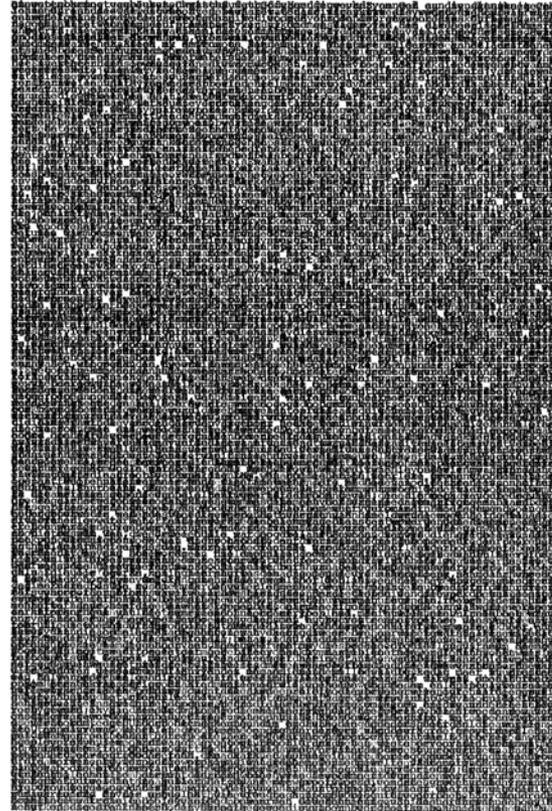
STADSPLAAS (FARM IN THE CITY)

The Eiffel tower was erected in 1889 to commemorate the French Revolution. The world's highest man-made structure of its time, at 984-foot (300-metre), provided a unique view of the city of Paris. Some art critics believe that the fragmented city blocks, discernable for the first time from so high up, gave rise to the block-like patterning of cubist painting. Before this time, views from a great height were mostly gained from high mountains with a patchwork quilt of farmlands stretching out beneath them. STADSPLAAS shows a rigid mechanical plotting of agricultural land where all individual plants are discernable as letters and where stretches of squares combine in sentences that are hard to decipher. Modernism, and particularly the idea of international style, enforces strict universal laws of design, but sentient, flesh-and-blood people find it hard to cope with its rigidity. They can't breathe within the cruel lines of its unyielding apartment projects. Does international style, its rectilinear forms and light, taut plane surfaces that are stripped of applied ornamentation fail the human appetite?



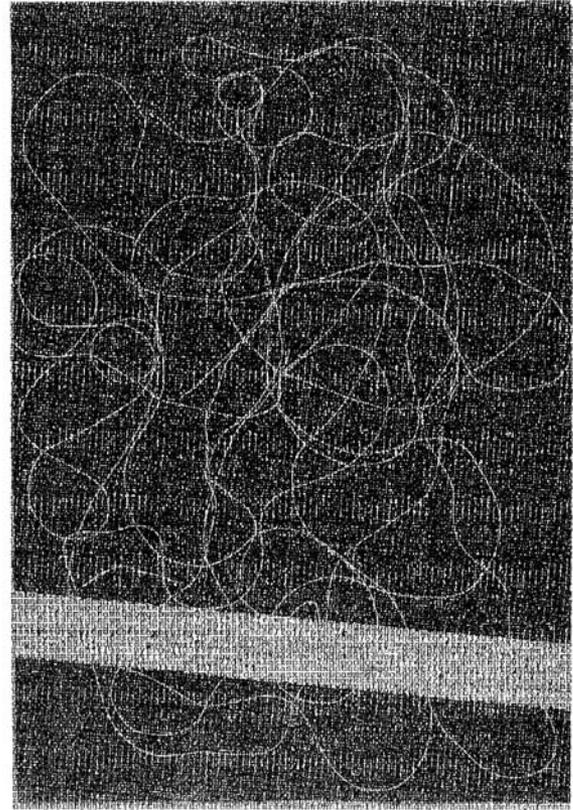
VERSKANSTE OPENBARING (CONCEALED REVELATION)

The two names of the last book in the Bible, 'Book of Revelation' and 'Apocalypse', create the expectation of a removal, at last, of our 'veil of ignorance' (John Rawls). 'Apocalypse' is from the Greek apo 'away' and kalyptos 'veil'. Likewise 'Revelation' is from Latin re- 'back' and velum 'veil' or 'membrane'. Regrettably, we still don't understand anything at all when our veil is drawn back by the notorious Book of Revelation. Behind the veil we find, not clarification, but obscure and impenetrable mysteries – 'revealing' the unknowable (Jacques Derrida). VERSKANSTE OPENBARING is a typewriter version of the actual text of the Book of Revelation. Each visible line of unclear, typed text has two extra lines of Biblical text superimposed. White 'dots' appear in the text where three white spaces between words accidentally overlap. Single letters are readable here and there where a single letter in the KYKAFRIKAANS text is not overlapped by one or two other letters from the biblical text. The obfuscated text is a true visual reflection of a 'revealing' book that fails to 'reveal'.



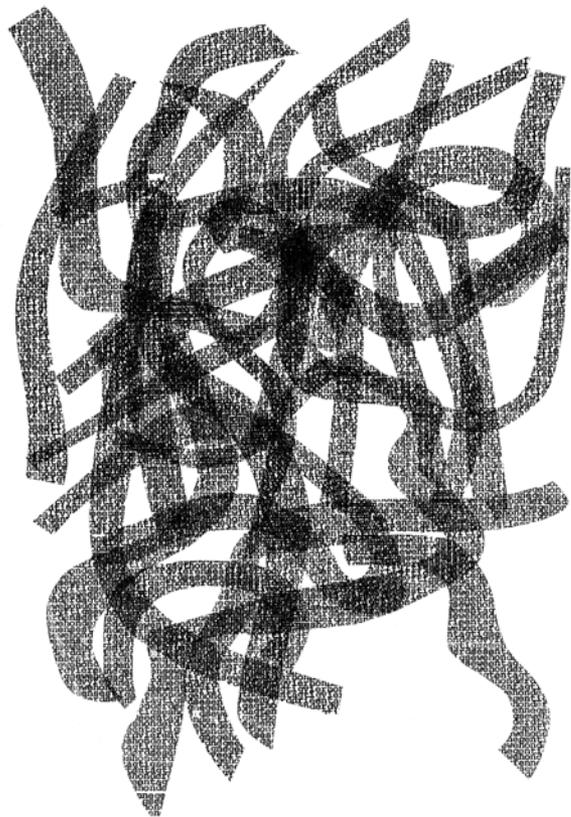
AAN 'N LYNTJIE (ON A STRING)

AAN 'N LYNTJIE a title that bears reference to control, or loss thereof (over puppets and thoughts). What power do we have over the yarn of our written sentences? As we spin our stories, whether fact or fiction, we tend to pull or drop stitches. We often pull the cloth of the thing apart when an inconsistency annoys us. The retrieved thread is as often saved as it is damaged and lost, even the 'knitting' pattern (or the memory of it) may be lost. The effort of knitting the same fabric again may fail for a lack of recall. The flawed fabric of our text disturbs and haunts us. If the entangled cloth does not make any sense, the absence caused by its disentanglement can make even less sense – and so too its tedious re-entanglement. The loose string in AAN 'N LYNTJIE is deliberately so posed that it is uncertain, whether it is pointlessly unravelled out of a faultless garment, or painstakingly knitted into a new article of defective cloth in an act of utter futility.



EENDUISEND EN EEN (ONE THOUSAND AND ONE)

One of Boshoff's preferred modes of expression in art is sculpture in wood, often linked, as in his BLIND ALPHABET PROJECT (1995), to text and language. He learnt a healthy respect for wood and wood-working from his father, Marthinus (Martiens) Boshoff (b. 1923, d. 1985), a trained carpenter who was still alive when EENDUISEND EN EEN was written. The wooden off-cuts and debris of saw dust appealed to the artist and he often thought of ways to include these in his work. Here the challenge was to create the effect of a jumble of wood shavings from an old-fashioned plane. This was 'typed' by inserting two sheets of white paper into the type-writer after placing squiggly cut-outs of carbon paper between the sheets. Real text was densely typed on the front paper, over each cut-out. The cut-outs would be inserted one after the other and each would leave the imprint of its own wavy outline. As the number of imprints increased, they would begin to overlap, leaving, in an uncanny way, a spectre of see-through shapes dangling in three-dimensional space.



Simplistically one can say that in KYKAFRIKAANS the typewriter is posed as an instrument for processing text in the same manner that a brush or pencil functions in drawing or painting. At face value the poems have been approached in a lettrist way, in a similar way many fine artists approach a canvas or drawing. However, at closer inspection these eccentric poems are at odds with writing and interpretation. At times they take up issue with literary prejudices such as coherence and economy of writing. They frequently subvert orthodoxy and venerate triviality or ambiguity in the guise of being meticulously and assiduously composed themselves.

Until the beginning of the 1990s KYKAFRIKAANS was never afforded a place in the literary and art circles of South Africa. Today, however, there is a great demand for information about KYKAFRIKAANS and it occupies a respected place in the history of art and literature, both in South Africa and internationally.

In 1980 six poems were selected from KYKAFRIKAANS, enlarged and silk-screened in a limited edition. This new edition, printed in 2003 contains twelve poems, different from the six previously published.

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- ⊗ - Richmond
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