

THESIS

SET

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by Heidi Leech entitled *SET* be accepted as fulfilling in part requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts.

Committee on Graduate Work

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

SET

“It was no longer merely important to be something [on television], you also had to *appear* to be something.”

—Phil Ross Boynton, Winning the Media Game¹

“You’re not anybody in America unless you’re on TV. On TV is where we learn about who we really are. Because what’s the point of doing anything worthwhile if nobody’s watching? And if people are watching it makes you a better person.”

“...If you get too close to the screen, all you can see is a bunch of little dots. You don’t see the big picture until you stand back. But when you do, everything comes into focus.”

—Suzanne Stone, in the film To Die For (1995)²

SET is an illusion. The viewer looks at a larger-than-life television set to see a scene containing a TV, a chair and other items: pictures on the wall, a quilt draped across the chair, a vase of flowers and a lamp on a table. Playing on the TV in this inner scene is a room, an iteration of a television scene, this one animated with a television set and a blinking eye. This initial enclosed view appears cramped and solitary, but not extraordinary. Looking closer—or watching longer—the viewer discovers that each item in *SET* is composed of televisions. Pictures of televisions, framed in televisions, hang on

¹ Phil Ross Boynton, Winning the Media Game, p. 73. This quote refers to the importance of image on TV.

² To Die For. Screenplay by Gus Van Sant, Nicole Kidman as Suzanne Stone.

the wall. The flowers are televisions with screen-shaped petals and antenna leaves. The lamp rests on a TV posing as a table; its shade and base show television faces. The quilt shows television imagery on its squares. The chair is covered in eyeballs with television-screen-shaped pupils.

This work began when, as a whimsical element to an art project, I screen-printed images of six well-known women from the entertainment industry onto t-shirts. Over the years acquaintances had told me I resembled these women in one way or another. Suddenly I became fascinated with the television set (on which I had seen these women's images) as a formal element; it was a compelling box full of reflections and symbolic mirrors. I began creating illustrations of televisions in unique situations. At the same time, I turned the mirrors on myself and became more aware of unanswered questions about my own identity. Since I am adopted, the origins of my appearance are a mystery. I have no visual history with which to inform my own image, and I believe I was subconsciously reaching to TV for resemblances, so I could experience the feeling of identification that others take for granted. I realized the illusory quality of image and appearance on television and how the illusion is perpetuated.

This is the basis upon which the work is built. *SET* is a stage for the exploration of illusion, appearance and reflection. The eye is the subject. Within the animation, the TV faces the eye and becomes an eye of its own. Each flower and wall hanging are eyes. The empty chair draped with the quilt refers to the animated eye and becomes a representation of self in a situation of watching, searching and wondering.

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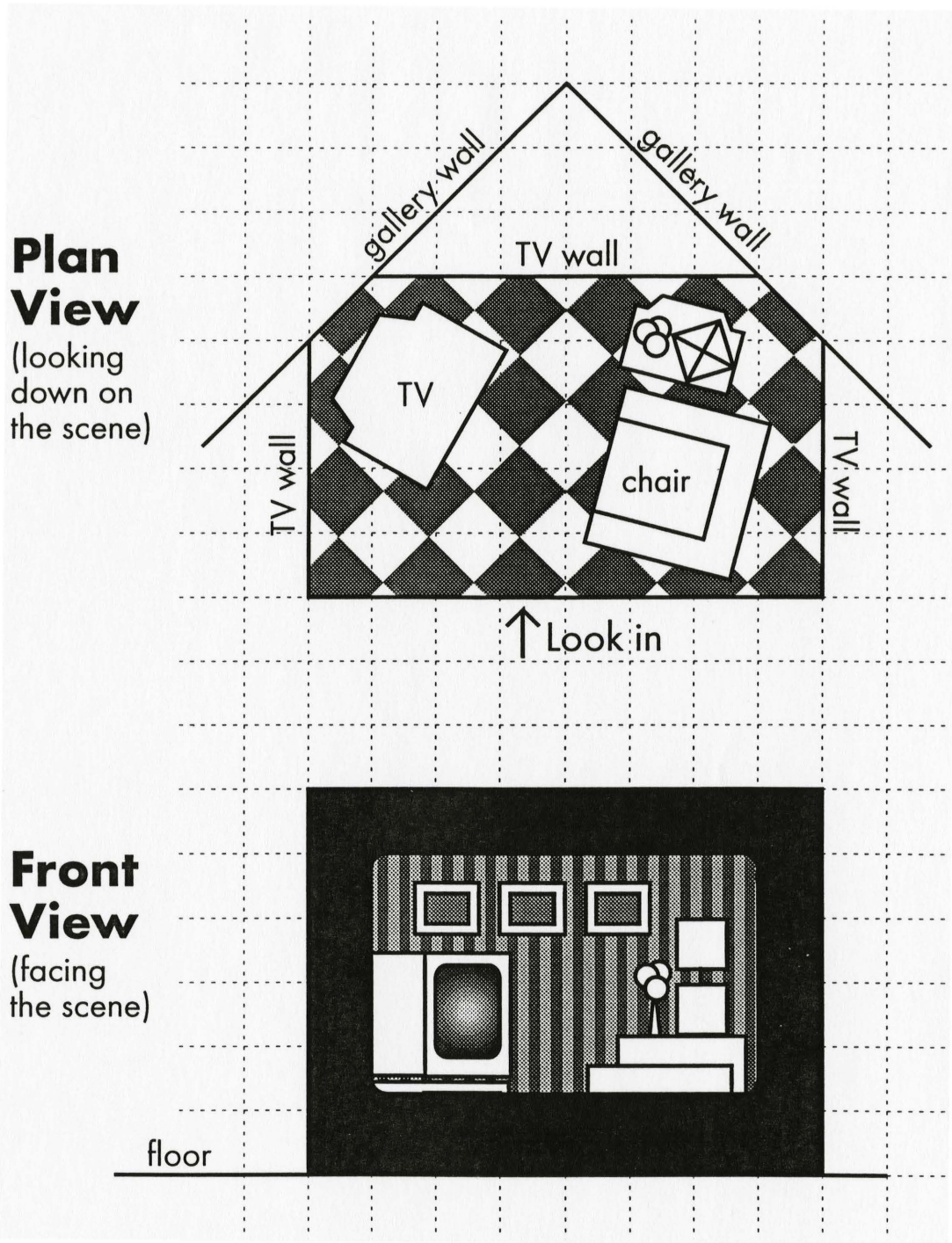


Figure 1: SET, Plan and front view layouts



Plate 1: *SET*, Front View, *Big TV*
Constructed and painted masonite, floor tile, 6'H x 8'W x 5'D

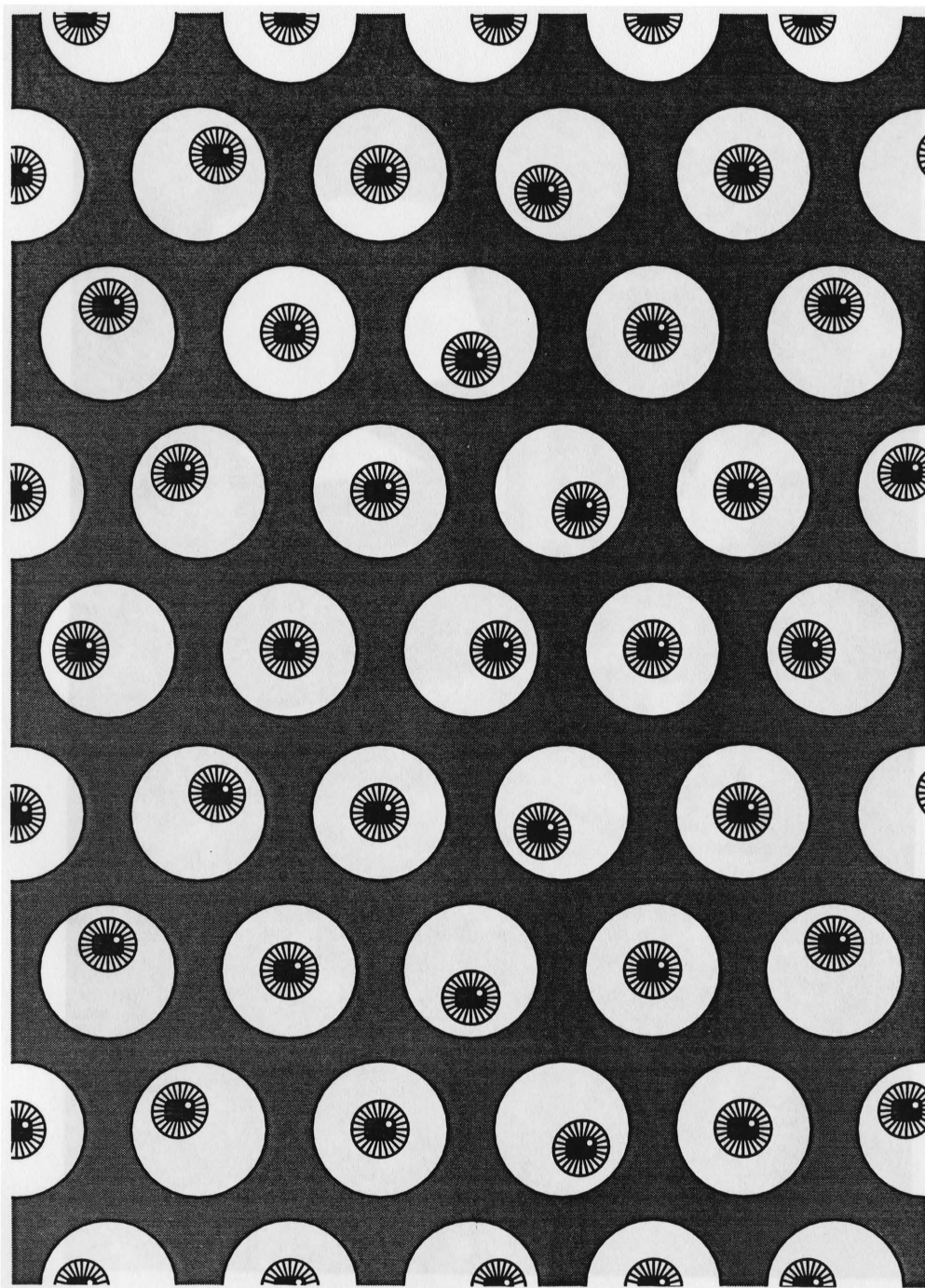


Figure 2: *SET*, Detail of *TV Chair* pattern (shown at 50% actual size)



Plate 2: *SET, TV Chair, TV Quilt and TV Lamp*

TV Chair: screen-printed fabric sewn into slipcover, 30" x 30" x 30"

TV Quilt: screen-printed, embroidered and quilted fabric, 68" x 68"

TV Lamp: hand-cast abaca paper shade, painted wooden base, 22.5" x 11.5" x 11.5"

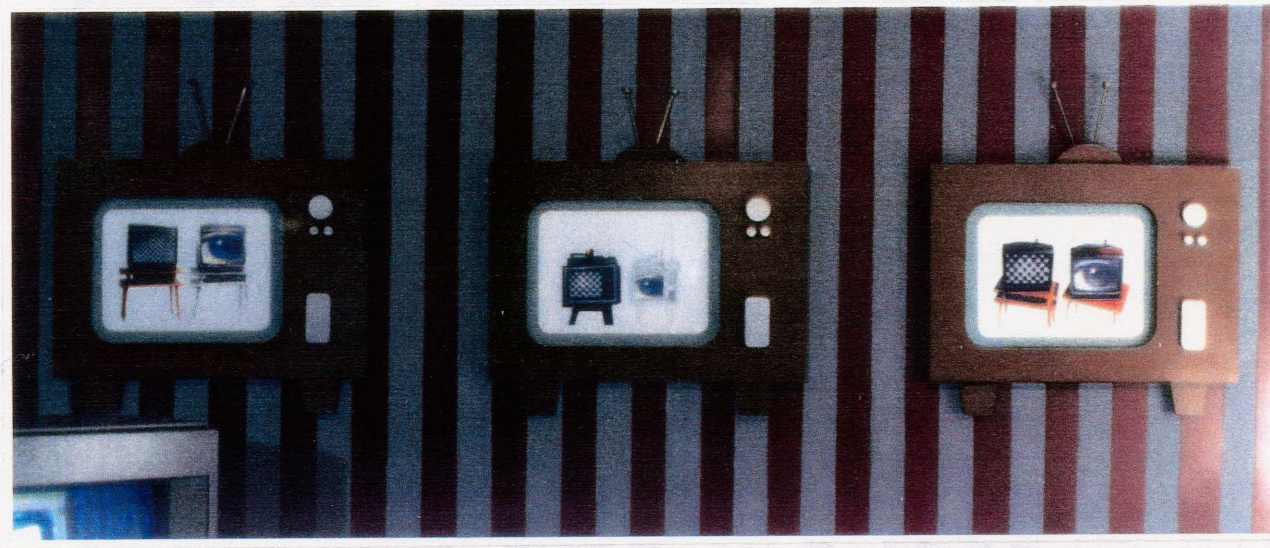


Plate 3: *SET, TV Pictures*
Computer (*Adobe Photoshop*) illustrations in laser-cut and painted frames, each 13" x 9"

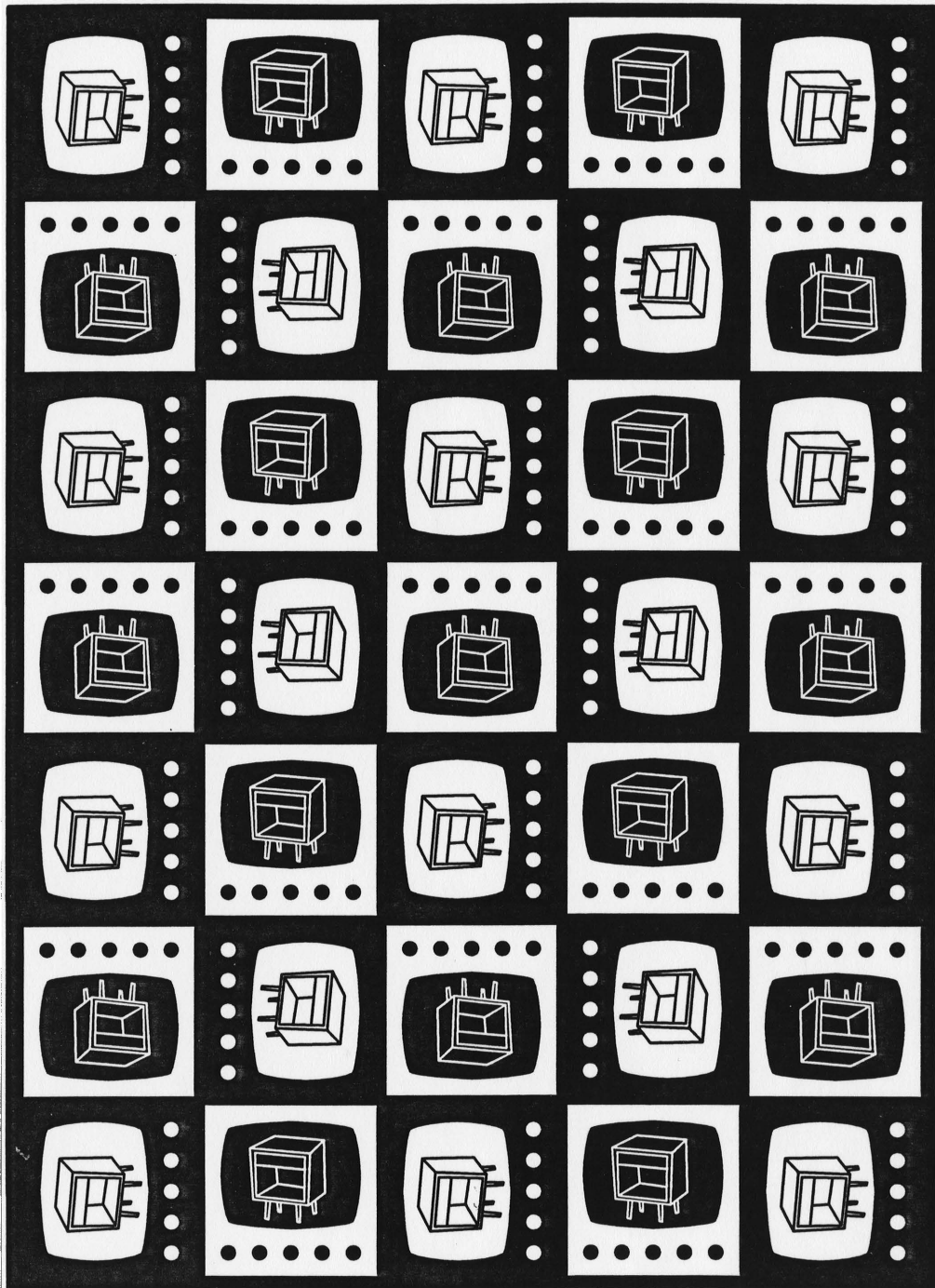
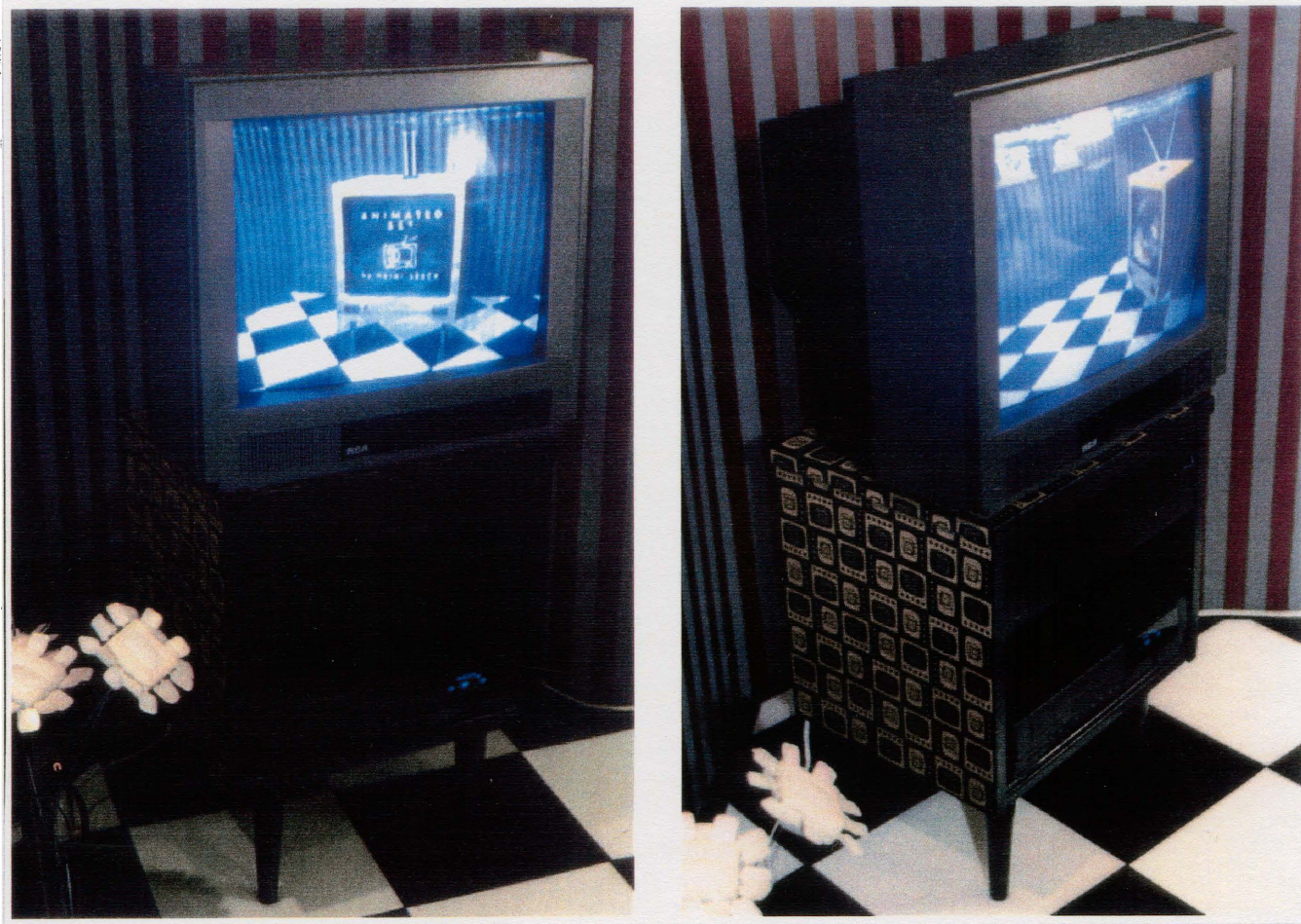
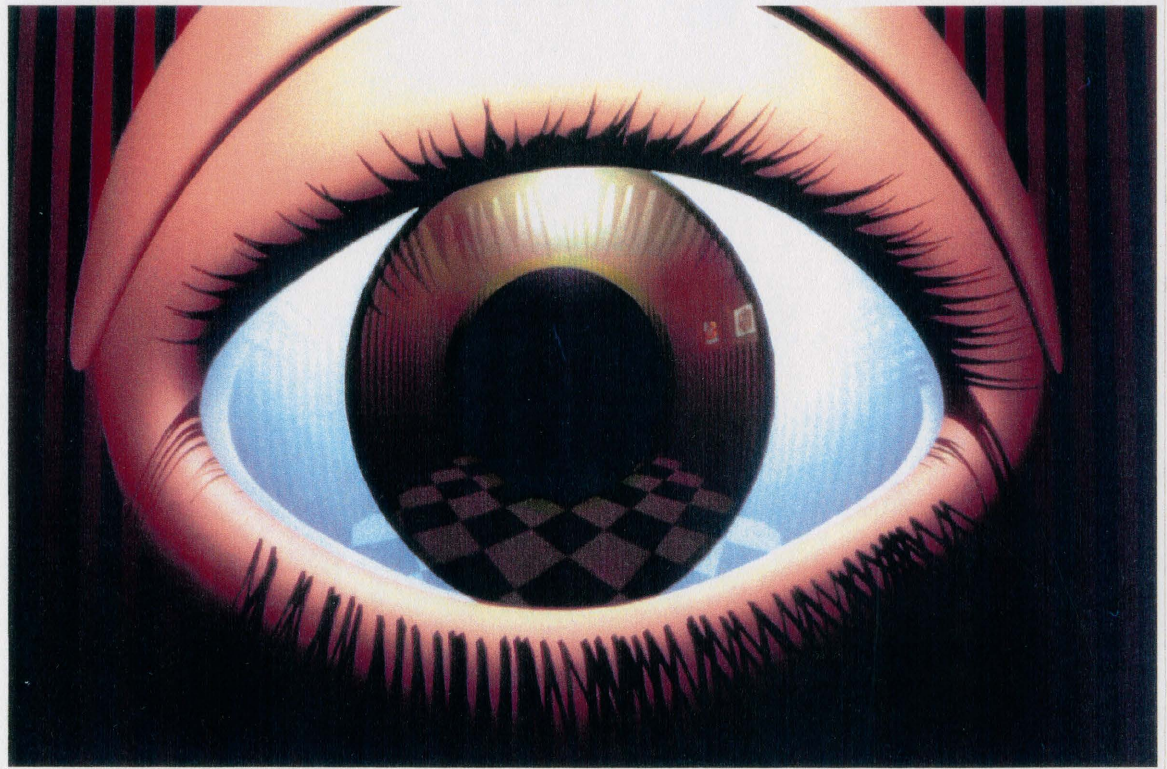


Figure 3: *SET*, Detail of *TV Table* pattern (shown at 50% actual size)



Plates 4 and 5: *SET*, *TV Table*, *TV Flowers* and *Animated Set*, two views
TV Table: existing table painted and collaged with paper design, 24”H x 18”W x 14”D
Animated Set: Computer (*Alias Studio*) animation piece, VHS tape, 70 seconds
TV Flowers: Molded and painted esparto paper, donated TV objects, 24” x 12” x 12”



Plates 6 and 7: *SET*, Video stills from *Animated Set*

REFERENCES

Phil Ross Boynton. Winning the Media Game (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Limited, 1989).

To Die For (Columbia Tristar Home Video, 1995). Directed by Gus Van Sant. Screenplay by Buck Henry. Nicole Kidman as Suzanne Stone.