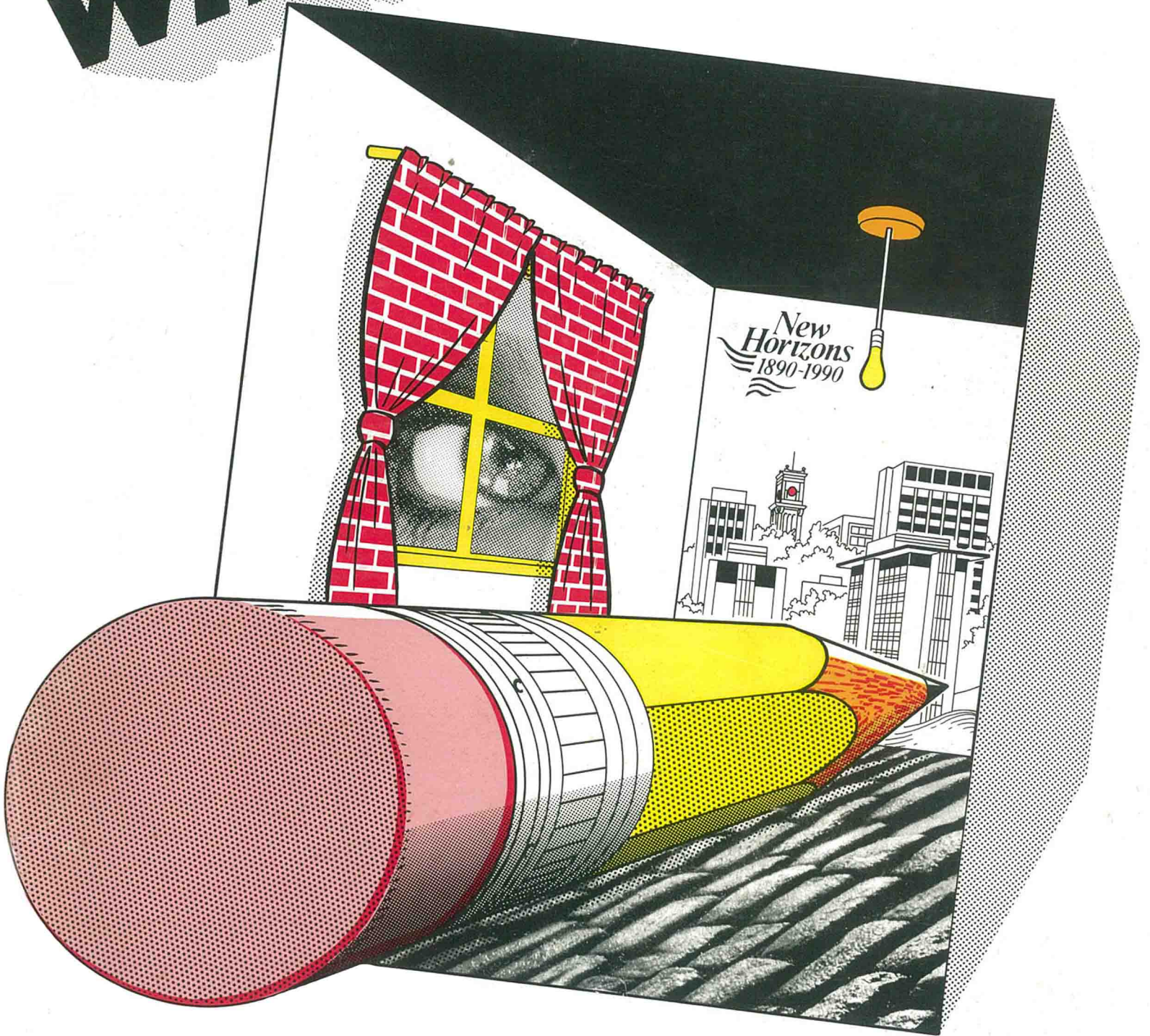
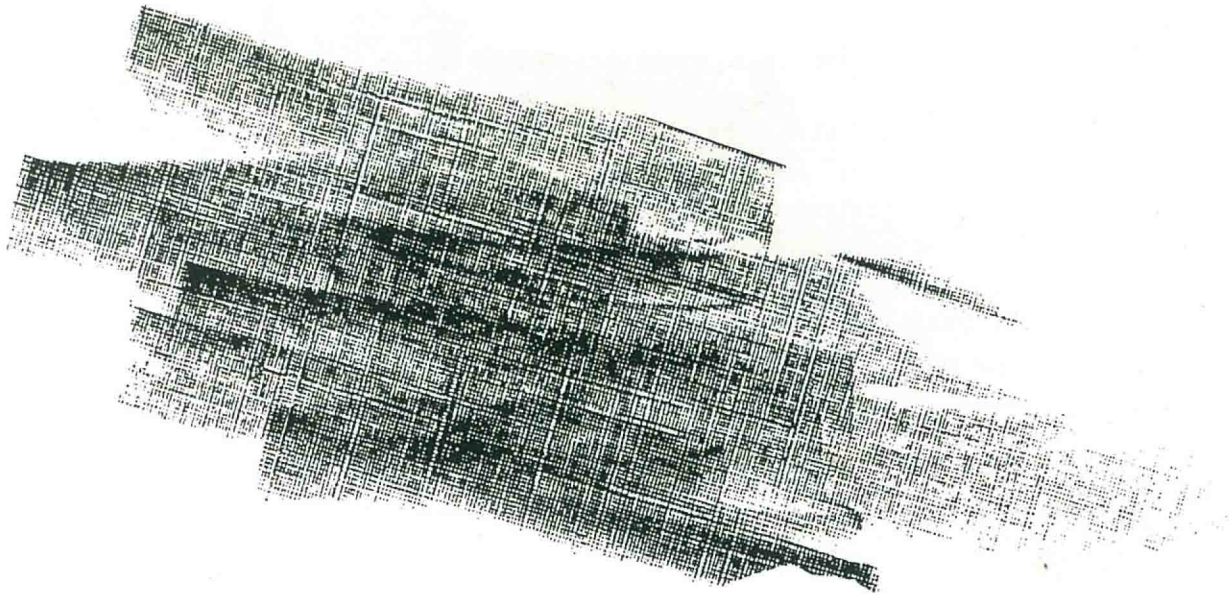


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WIND ROW II





THE RITUAL

Dawn. A thin sliver of light pierces through the thick clouds. Rodents scatter hurriedly to the drains, aware of the imminent episodes. Stray dogs awaken from their slumber, punctuating the stillness of the night with ear piercing howls.

Clik klok, clik klok, clik klok.....A lone figure approaches the site, his wooden clogs sounding a staccato beat against the hard asphalt road. He stops, stretches his long sinewy fingers and waits. Other figures join him from the shadows. Soon, a truck overloaded with crates rumbles past. The figures approach the truck slowly, still trying to shake off the lethargic feeling of the morning. Moments later, more vehicles appear. The place is alive again. Crates are hauled down from the trucks and tattered canvas sheds put up. Tables and stands are formed mystically from idle boards and crates. Water hoses are brought out and the whole place is watered down.

Daybreak. Housewives arrive clad in their bright samfoos and cheongsams. They clutch their rattan baskets firmly in their palms. The sun awakens, showering the site with its golden rays. Cabbages, carrots, yams, bak choys and other vegetables are stacked perilously on on another, as if they would topple at any single instant. Soon, the place is near pandemonium, filled with the daily ritual of choosing wares

and haggling over prices. The din is further complemented by the cackling of geese and squawking of fowls as they await their fate. Down by the meat section rows of tile white pig carcasses hang from hooks, dripping with the fresh scent of blood. Nearby, a crab, its claws tied with bamboo twines, scuttles sideways, attempting to escape. It is noticed, picked up and unceremoniously thrown into a large straw basket, soon to share the same fate of its fellow crustaceans.

Noon. The crowd dwindles. Only a few stragglers are still there. Hoses are brought out again. The whole place is scrubbed and washed thoroughly. The stray dogs come back, looking for the unwanted bone or rib. They escape with one at the wrath of the butcher. Beneath the drains, the rodents have a feast on the gizzards, entrails and fish heads. Tables and stands are dismantled into boards and crates. They lie idle by the walls.

Dusk. The sun descends beneath the horizon. Dark clouds form and engulf the whole site. A lone figure lights up a cigarette and retreats slowly, his clogs sounding a rhythmic beat. The place is lifeless, but for a few hours. Soon the ritual will start....again.