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National Image

“The postal stamp operates as both official currency and as a miniature work of art with distinct aesthetic qualities,” the South African artist Siemon Allen says. “But the stamp is also a highly mobile record of visual propaganda, reflecting how a country at a given period sees itself and seeks to present itself. It disseminates a narrative, on both local and global levels, that speaks as much about what is shown as what is not.” In an exhibition opening on Saturday at the Corcoran Gallery in Wash-



ington, Mr. Allen investigates a history of subtle visual propaganda. On view through Aug. 13 in “Stamp Collecting — Imaging South Africa” are more than 8,000 postal stamps issued in South Africa since the colonial era.

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