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[54] **HIDDEN MESSAGE APPARATUS**

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** ..... **283/6,** 40/2 R

[51] **Int. Cl.** **B42d 15/00**

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 283/6; 206/56 AB; 273/139; 40/2 R

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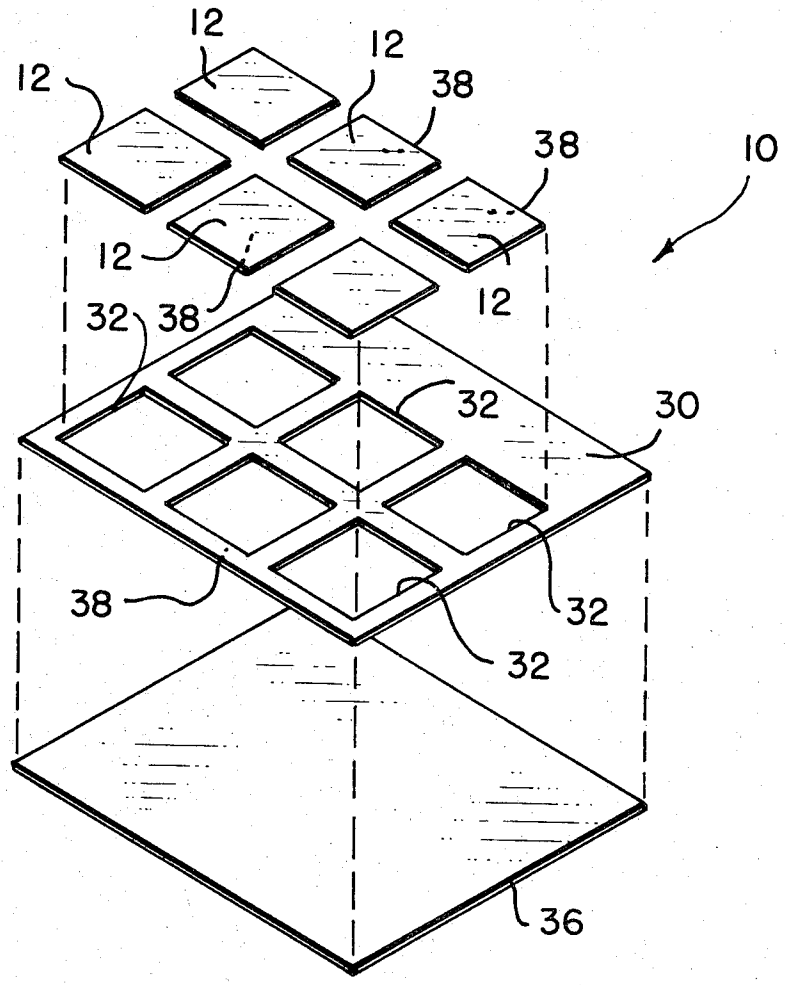
[57] **ABSTRACT**

A hidden message apparatus comprising at least one element having a first message zone with a first message disposed therein and removable opaque means covering said message. A second element having a second message zone and a second message disposed therein. The second message is the same as the first message. Means are provided for releasably coupling the first element to the second element so the content of the first message will be known until the first element is separated from the second element.

11 Claims, 4 Drawing Figures



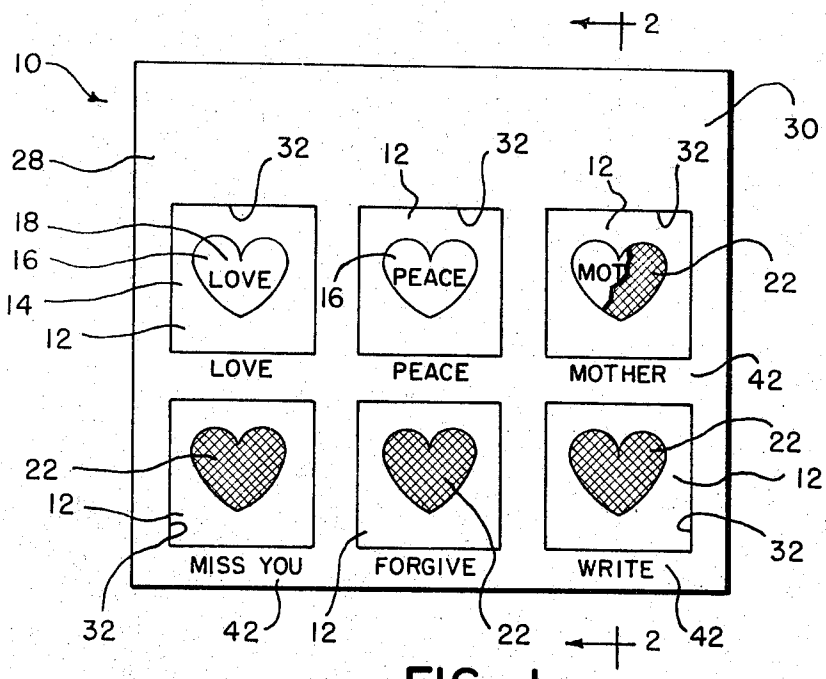


FIG. 1

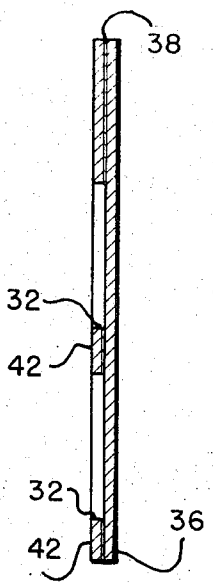


FIG. 2

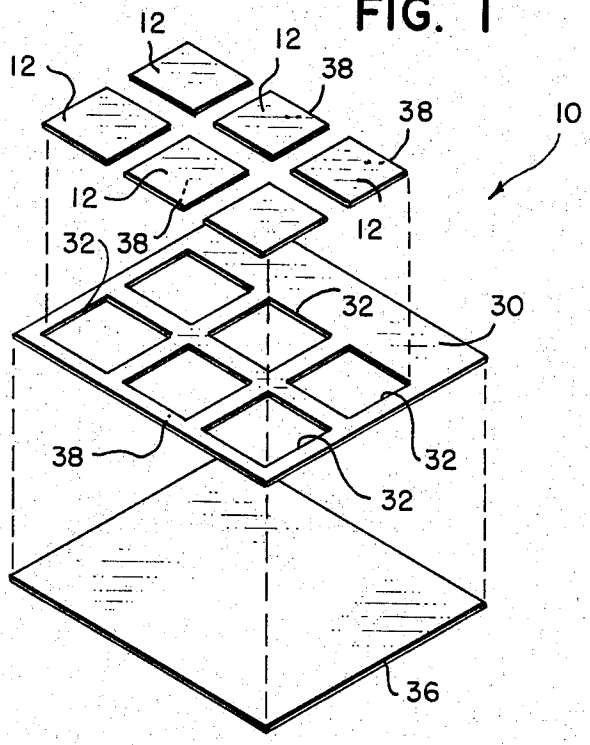


FIG. 3

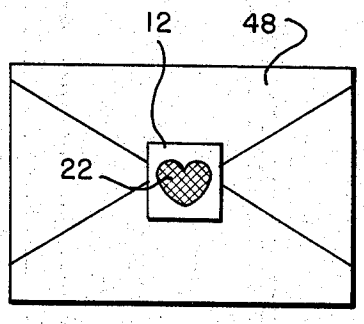


FIG. 4

HIDDEN MESSAGE APPARATUS

This invention relates to a hidden message apparatus and more particularly to a hidden message apparatus of the type wherein a message which is the same as the hidden message is displayed so that the content of the hidden message can be determined.

It would be desirable to provide a convenient way for affixing hidden messages to various articles such as letters, envelopes, and the like, so that the existence of the message would be known only to those having a familiarity with the nature of the apparatus employed to transmit the same. Further, it would be desirable if the apparatus in which the message was hidden would indicate if some one had tampered with it.

Additionally, it would be advantageous if such hidden messages were arranged in a convenient form so that they could be readily merchandised to the public.

Accordingly, the invention generally relates to a first element having a message thereon and a removable, opaque means overlying the message and covering it. The first element is releasably coupled to a carrier. The carrier has a second message thereon which is the same as the hidden message. Thus, while the first element is connected to the carrier, the nature of the hidden message can be readily determined. However, once the first element is separated from the carrier, the content of the message can only be determined by removing the opaque hiding material.

Additionally, the invention relates to an apparatus having a plurality of first elements which are coupled to a carrier wherein each of the plurality of first elements has a message thereon hidden by removable opaque covering means. Messages which are the same as the hidden messages are disposed on the second element so that the content of each of the hidden messages can be determined.

For the purpose of illustrating the invention, there is shown in the drawings a form which is presently preferred; it being understood, however, that this invention is not limited to the precise arrangements and instrumentalities shown.

FIG. **1** is a plan view of an apparatus constructed in accordance with the present invention.

FIG. **2** is a sectional view taken along line **2—2** of FIG. **1.**

FIG. **3** is an exploded view of a presently preferred form of the invention.

FIG. **4** is a plan view of an envelope with one of the first elements of the present invention attached thereto.

Referring now to the drawings in detail, wherein like numerals refer to like elements throughout the several views, there is shown in FIG. **1** an apparatus **10** constructed in accordance with a presently preferred form of the invention.

The apparatus comprises a plurality of first elements **12.** Each of the first elements may be of any convenient shape although, it is presently preferred that they be rectangular. The elements **12** have a surface **14** on which a first message zone **16** is defined. The first message zone may be defined by embossment, colors, an outline, or the like. As illustrated, the message zone may take the configuration of a heart. However, it is conceivable that the shape of the first message zone **16** might be that of a diamond, a triangle, a square, a circle, a star, or any other convenient configuration.

Disposed within the first message zone **16** is a suitable first message **18.** The messages may have any desired content. As illustrated, they may comprise simple one word sentiments such as "LOVE," "PEACE," "MOTHER" or the like. Additionally, other messages such as "ARE YOU FREE", "CALL ME TONIGHT" and the like could be utilized. For the purposes of the invention, the sentiments expressed by the various messages are not important. However, they may be selected to have substantial commercial appeal in connection with the merchandising of the apparatus.

Suitable means **22** is provided for hiding the first message in each of the first message zones **16** so that it is not visible. A suitable hiding means may comprise a plurality of discrete pressure sensitive opaque tape portions wherein each portion covers one of the first message zones **16.** Thus, to read one of the first messages **18,** the tape portion which covers it is removed.

Another hiding means may comprise a metal foil having an adhesive coating on one face thereof.

A presently preferred hiding means is a metal foil having a thickness of about 0.0003 to 0.0010 inches. The metal foil may be heat stamped from a paper or plastic backing onto a first message zone **16.** Preferably the hiding means has the same configuration as the first message zone **16.**

Foil or pressure sensitive tape may be readily removed without destroying the message within the first message zone. When the metal foil is heat stamped on the message zone, it may be easily erased, thereby revealing the message printed thereunder. The metal foil is particularly advantageous since any unauthorized attempt to erase it will be readily apparent.

In the drawing, for the purposes of illustration, some first messages are revealed entirely, other first messages are partially visible since the opaque means **22** covering them has been partially removed, and still other first messages are totally hidden by the opqaue means **22.**

The first elements **12** are releasably coupled to a carrier **28.** Carrier **28** may be a relatively large card or other suitable member having a zone **30** in which illustrations or advertising materials may be printed.

In a presently preferred form of the invention, carrier **28** is provided with a plurality of apertures **32** in which the first elements **12** are disposed. To this extent, each of the apertures **32** has the same configuration and is substantially the same size as the first element **12** which is to be disposed therein.

Suitable means is provided for releasably coupling the first elements to the carrier.

A presently preferred means for releasably coupling the first element to the carrier comprises the use of a third element **36** (FIGS. **2** and **3**). The third element also functions as a backing and reinforcement member for the apparatus. To this extent, a layer of adhesive is placed on the surfaces of the first element and the carrier which is opposite to that on which the hidden messages are located. The third element may have a surface treated by materials that are well known in the art so that the adhesive is readily removable therefrom. The treated surface is placed in contact with the adhesive layer **38.**

The apertures **32** are disposed in spaced relation to each other to form second message zones **42** adjacent each apertures **32.** A second message is displayed in each of said second message zones. The second message is the same as the message which is hidden by the opaque covering means **22.**

While the second message zone is shown adjacent the aperture **32** in which the first element containing the same message is located, such arrangement is not necessary in order to achieve the purposes of the invention. Thus, any convenient arrangement may be utilized provided there is a manner whereby correspondence can be obtained between the hidden messages and the displayed messages so that the content of each hidden message can be identified without removing the opaque covering means therefrom.

The apparatus can be manufactured by preparing a sheet of material which will ultimately comprise the first element and the carrier. Each of the first elements, the first message zones, and the first and second messages may be defined by being printed on the sheet of material.

Subsequently, the opaque covering means **22** may be applied to the first message zone **16** and the sheet of material may be coupled to a backing sheet which is treated as described above by a layer of adhesive **38.** The first elements may then be cut so that they will be readily removable from the backing sheet.

The first elements **12** may be displayed in an arrangement such as that illustrated in FIGS. **1** or **5.** Thus, by perusing the second messages in the second message zones **42,** a suitable message may be selected. The first element having a first message which corresponds to the message selected, may be removed from its aperture. By virtue of the adhesive **38** thereon, that element may then be attached to an article such as an envelope **48** as illustrated in FIG. **4.** Upon receipt of the envelope, the recipient may remove the opaque covering means from the first message zone, thereby revealing the message therein.

While the invention has been described with reference to an embodiment wherein a plurality of first elements are provided and each has a different message thereon, it is apparent that the invention described herein also contemplates an arrangement whereby all of the messages are the same or where some of the messages are similar to others so that the total number of different messages is less than the total number of first elements presented.

Additionally, it is apparent that the apparatus may comprise only one first element rather than a plurality of first elements such as illustrated. In this regard, the apparatus could be sold as premiums or packaged as novelties or gifts in connection with articles to be merchandised.

Still further, it is apparent that any suitable means of releasably coupling the first elements and carriers to each other could be employed. Thus, while an adhesive layer has been shown, it is apparent that any other suitable means such as paper hinges, perforations, tape, or the like could be employed.

Therefore, while the invention has been described with reference to one particular form thereof, many other forms and embodiments such as those described above are encompassed thereby. Further, additional forms and embodiments will be obvious to those skilled in the art in view of the foregoing description. Thus, the scope of the claims should not be limited by the foregoing description, but, rather by the scope of the claims appended hereto.

I claim:

1. An article of manufacture comprising a first element, said first element having a first surface, a first message zone on said first surface, a first message disposed in said first message zone, removable opaque means in said first message zone covering said first message therein so that it cannot be determined, said opaque means in said first message zone being selectively removable therefrom to reveal said first message, a carrier, means for releasably coupling said first element to said carrier, a second message zone in said carrier, a second message disposed in said second message zone, and said first and second messages being the same so that the content of said first message will be known until said first element is separated from said carrier.

2. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **1** including adhesive means for coupling said first element to said carrier.

3. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **1** wherein said carrier is larger than said first element and has an aperture therein, said first element being disposed in said aperture and said second message zone is adjacent said aperture.

4. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **3** wherein said first element is substantially the same size as said aperture.

5. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **3** including a second element, said second element being disposed in mutually facing relation to said first element and said carrier so that said first and second message zones are visible, and said means for releasably coupling said first element to said carrier comprises a layer of adhesive disposed between said first element and said carrier, and said second element.

6. An article of manufacture comprising a plurality of first elements, each of said first elements having a first surface, each of said first surfaces having a first message zone therein, a first message disposed in each of said first message zones, removable opaque means in each of said first message zones covering said first messages so that they cannot be determined, each of said opaque means being selectively removable from its respective first message zone to reveal said first message therein, a carrier, means for releasably coupling said first elements to said carrier, a plurality of second message zones on said carrier, a second message disposed in each of said second message zones, said first messages being the same as said second messages and being in correspondence therewith so the content of said first messages will be known until its respective first element is separated from said carrier.

7. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **6** including adhesive means for coupling each of said first elements to said carrier.

8. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **6** wherein said second message zones are disposed adjacent those of said apertures in which a first element having the same message is disposed.

9. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **6** wherein said carrier has a plurality of apertures therein, said apertures being in spaced relation to each other, and one of said first elements being disposed in each of said apertures.

10. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **9** including a second element, said second element being disposed in facing relation to said first element and and said carrier so that said first and second message zones are visible, and said means for releasably coupling said first elements to said carrier comprises a layer of adhesive disposed between said first element and said carrier, and said second element.

11. An article of manufacture as defined in claim **9** where at least two of said first message zones contain different messages.

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