

Extract from catalogue entry on the section on Africa.

If Boshoff, like Bouabré, keeps a clean concentration on language, Malcolm Payne's very complex and critical work keeps a clean concentration on the political and subversive. Here the political functions not on a literal level, but as an act of contamination. Rather than responding to an oppressive regime via the clichéd fist-and-guns of the revolutionary artist, Payne engages in acts of subterfuge by penetrating ideological spaces, "carefully contrived confusion ... [as] the only weapon to keep my creative impetus vaguely alive."⁶ This struggle to maintain creative independence has typically been perceived as anarchic. For the 1973 Aquarius Art Festival in Durban, for instance, he proposed to explode underwater a huge quantity of red dye as part of the festivities marking the Afrikaner celebration of Blood River Day, during which they commemorate their defeat of the Zulus. According to Payne, "The idea was further nuanced to include the ultimate irony, to sell the idea to the organizers, explaining to them that they could achieve for themselves and followers an enhanced spiritual and religious experience if the river ran red."⁷ The organizers rejected the proposal.

Of all the African work included in this exhibition, Payne's early projects seem conclusively *conceptual*, in their orientation and rejection of the material base of what he called "an overdose of Greenbergian and late Caro modernism." This he endured as a student at St. Martin's School of Art in London in 1973. Partly because of his early exposure to the critical discourse of Western conceptualism, and his contact with the work of artists like Beuys, the practices of Art & Language, and others who were seeking broader spaces for their ideational propositions, Payne sought ways to transpose some of their theories to the situation in his own country.

Upon his return to a South African art scene still enthralled to Clement Greenberg, Payne turned increasingly to performance, using endurance as a metaphor for the individual's quest to transcend the political and intellectual fragmentation imposed by apartheid (fig. 83). Payne was among the first young artists to explore systems of representation of the self, and the state's overwhelming control over defining that self. Identity as an intense site of subjectification thus became a basis for resistance. Appropriating the tools of surveillance, Payne began to meld video, slide projections, photographs, and facsimiles of his body and face into a conceptually sophisticated practice, the goal of which was to deny the state's final right of adjudication in the construction of identity (figs. 77, 170). Payne's intense meditation on the political possibility of subversion laid the groundwork for many artists who would delve into similar questions twenty years later.

One such artist is Kendell Geers. Following Payne's stellar example ...