

Extract from Hobbs, P. & Rankin, E. 1997. Printmaking in a transforming South Africa. Cape Town: David Philip.

Malcolm Payne's *Blindspots and Gods*, produced at The Caversham Press as part of the *Decade of Young Artists* exhibition at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival in 1991, also employs symbolic colour fields, and situates a dark ellipse on an expanse of gauze illuminated from behind with radiant light. The gauze was a section of old field dressings, ready-printed with visual instructions on bandaging techniques, which Payne back-lit on a vertical camera at different exposures. He then made photographic positives from sections of the negatives stripped up onto film, before exposing them onto the screen and printing the stencil with tints of process colours and subsequently adding an overprinted glaze. The negative reversal of the original printed gauze reveals the figures as glowing orange spectres, the subtle impression of dissolving veils of light at variance with the usual generalising tendency of screenprinting. Yet in the flat central ellipse and the day-glo spot at its centre, it is the opacity of pigment and the very flatness of the surface that lend it an iconic quality. Sections of the bandaged images are repeated in this area as reversed images against a surface which simulates grey gauze, printed from a positive exposure of plain bandage onto a black ground. Payne, who studied at the Pretoria College of Art and St Martin's, London, and lectures now at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, has stated his intention to use a formal language to recode meaning and challenge the descriptive narrative and metaphor of South African art. Various devices, such as repetition, symmetry, reversed and fragmented images, and multiple shaped formats, distance this piece from description and disrupt conventional figure-ground relationships.

Set in this context, the conventions of the first-aid diagrams are reminiscent of the stylised postures of Mannerist figures, the complex bandaging procedures suggesting elaborate ceremonial garb in their application to the elongated male bodies. In his rearrangement of the figures, Payne has heightened the sense of a ritual enactment, not ill-suited to the religious intimations of the central cruciform shape, set within a mandorla. But the capricious composition of the bodies also suggests the carnage of a battlefield or sacrificial victims. Such references may also evoke Christ's sacrifice, further reinforced by the fragments of bandaged limbs, transposed from the diagrams to take up axial positions as though bound to the arms of the cross. The iconic impact is heightened by the symmetry of image segments around the dominant ellipse, with its flanking severed limbs, as well as the brilliant disc set in the centre. Printed in cay-glo yellow over an opaque white, this pulsating form is perhaps the 'blindspot' that has caused these ungodly casualties of persecution and war.

The intellectual and technical complexity of Payne's images and the gratification of their withheld, layered meaning find an unexpected corollary in a collaborative work made in 1995 by Conrad Botes and Anton Kannemeyer, who lecture at the University of Stellenbosch.

