

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

CHRISTOPHER NEVINSON (1889-1946)



Now Back the Bayonets, 1918

Lithographic poster

75 x 48 cms

(29.48 x 18.86 in)

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Printed in three colours, red, black and yellow on thin wove, backed onto linen.
Printed by Dangerfield Printing Co, Ltd, London.

Ref: Black 44b

Nevinson first produced his bayonet design for the poster for his own show of paintings at the Leicester Galleries, March, 1918, entitled "War", illustrated in Edward Bayes's "The Underworld: Taking cover in a Tube Station during a London air raid" in the Imperial War Museum collection. Nevinson later adapted the design and the accompanying text for a poster issued by the National War Savings Committee to promote the raising of funds.

The remarkable design depicts massed fixed bayonets printed in orange against a bright yellow background. The bold design and the superimposition of the black stylized text against a field of fiery colour variants is arresting. Image and text are successfully integrated through the elaboration of an appropriately cubist letterform, whose spikey design echoes the raised bayonets, rendered with mathematical precision.

Furthermore, Nevinson's design exemplifies the optical disturbance associated with "dazzle" effects, those made possible by combining the geometric experimentation of cubism with the simplifications of the Japanese woodcut of the Ukiyo-e (floating world). In poster terms, dazzle effects were deployed to attract the eye against an increasingly hectic background of metropolitan spectacular. Large-scale dazzle effects were famously used by Norman Wilkinson and colleagues to camouflage shipping.

The cultural significance of Nevinson's poster cannot be overstated. Looking back over the artistic experimentation of the 20th century, the consistent recurrence of dazzle and strobe effects points to the power of this design as a major breakthrough.