

191.1

Jacob Hendrik

PIERNEEF

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

An Extensive View of Farmlands

signed and dated 1926

oil on canvas

90 by 120 cm

R10 000 000–12 000 000

NOTES

In July 1925 Pierneef, with his wife May, sailed from Cape Town to the UK and Europe where, for close on six months, they travelled extensively visiting among others London, Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Antwerp, Bruges, Düsseldorf, Munich, Berlin and Paris. Here Pierneef was absolutely in his element visiting museums and galleries, going from one exhibition to the next, meeting artists and seeking out books and catalogues relating particularly to the Impressionists, Neo Impressionists, the Symbolists and Art Nouveau. He also promoted his own work selling linocuts to the Victoria and Albert Museum and in October 1925 exhibited paintings, drawings and prints on the Heerengracht in Amsterdam. The exhibition was well received.

Here he met Anton Hendriks who was later to become director of the Johannesburg Art Gallery. It was Hendriks who introduced Pierneef to Willem van Konijnenburg, an established Dutch artist, leading art teacher and theorist. They became lifelong friends with Van Konijnenburg having a strong influence on Pierneef.

From Amsterdam the Pierneefs went to Paris. Here, writing to a friend, Thom Steele, in Pretoria, Pierneef notes that he had benefited

considerably from the trip and adds 'We collected a score of catalogues and bought everything regarding modern art in the form of books and I feel that I can deliver a heavy blow with them on the Pretoria frontier and shock many an art connoisseur.'¹ He certainly did so on his return to Pretoria.

Esmé Berman notes:

'By the time of his return from Europe, Pierneef had tossed aside his sober, realistic style and a fresh Impressionist light infuses all his paintings of the East Coast. Though he returned intermittently to use of divisionist techniques, never again were his canvases so aerially exuberant, so sparkling.'²

An Extensive View of Farmlands certainly falls into this latter category. Painted within the first few weeks of his return this painting reflects Pierneef's joy, enthusiasm and understanding of what he had just been exposed to – the light and pure colours of the Impressionist and Post Impressionist painters and in the trees in the foreground a touch of Art Nouveau. This painting was painted with great passion and even the unusually large size would suggest the artist intended it to be a milestone in his career.

Esmé Berman divides Pierneef's career into three major periods: Apprenticeship, 1902–1924; discovery and mastery, 1925–1936; consolidation and repetition, 1937–1957. She believes all critics agree that his middle years were the period of his most valuable contribution to South African art. This important work was painted early in this celebrated period with great integrity and mastery.

1. Nel, Prof P.G. (editor). (1990) *J.H. Pierneef. His life and his work*, Cape Town and Johannesburg, Perskor

2. Berman, Esmé. (1983) *Art & Artists of South Africa*, Cape Town, AA Balkema



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ADDENDUM



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