





Strauss & Co, Johannesburg

Tuesday 28 July 2020

Session 5 at 7 pm

Modern, Post-War and Contemporary Art

Lots 421–490

Including Property of a Collector

Lot 433 Gerard Sekoto *Washday, Sophiatown* (detail)



421

Walter Battiss

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906–1982

Athletics, Pretoria Boys High

signed; dated 1946 in pencil on the reverse

oil on artist's board
40 by 50,5 cm

R120 000 – 180 000

Art master at Pretoria Boys High School for a good 30 years of his life, Walter Battiss was known as a quirky and eccentric teacher. He was seconded from Park School, Turffontein in 1936 where he started his teaching career after graduating from the Johannesburg Teachers' Training College in 1932. He only left Boys High in 1964, to take up a professorship as Head of the Department of History of Art and Fine Art at Unisa.

Battiss painted various school activities, and in Lots 421 and 422 he focuses on sports events on the school campus – athletes competing on the orange earth track in an inter-house athletics meeting, and cricketers battling it out on the field now known as Hofmeyr Oval. There is something undeniably festive about marquee tents full of eager spectators and the banners arranged around the athletics track. The tall central banner is the school's flag and the others represent the three boarding houses (Rissik, Solomon and School) and the three day-boy houses

(Arcadia, Town and Sunnyside). The cricketers are playing in the Masters' League, a longstanding PBHS tradition in which internal games were arranged for boys who did not play for regular school teams. The schoolmasters would each manage a team.

In the background behind the athletics track, the copula of the main school building is just visible above the mass of trees in the middle ground. On top of the dome is the figure of a schoolboy holding a book and a rugby ball in his hands. Battiss assisted two other local sculptors, Rottcher and Gallman in carving the figure out of a solid block of kiaat wood. The figure was then cast in more permanent bronze, prompting the boys to jokingly refer to the figure as the god Mercury, as it purportedly deflected bolts of lightning from the building.

The joyous, energetic spirit of generations of boys at Boys High surfaces ebulliently in these two paintings.



422

Walter Battiss

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906–1982

Masters' League (Cricket Match)

1946

signed, dated and inscribed with the title

oil on artist's board

29 by 38,5 cm

R100 000 – 150 000



On the sports fields at PBHS, looking towards the school buildings (Photographs: Pretoria Boys High School)



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423

Maggie Laubser

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1973

Landscape with Houses and Figures

signed
oil on canvas laid down on board
45 by 34 cm

R400 000 – 500 000

LITERATURE

Dalene Marais (1994) *Maggie Laubser: Her Paintings, Drawings and Graphics*, Johannesburg: Perskor, illustrated in black and white on page 375, catalogue number 1689.



© The Estate of Maggie Laubser | DALRO

424

Maggie Laubser

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1973

Birds in a Landscape with Figure and Huts (Blue Cranes)

signed
oil on board
53 by 39,5 cm

R500 000 – 700 000

LITERATURE

Dalene Marais (1994) *Maggie Laubser: Her Paintings, Drawings and Graphics*, Johannesburg: Perskor, illustrated in black and white on page 369, catalogue number 1650.



© Irma Stern Trust | DALRO

425

Irma Stern

SOUTH AFRICAN 1894–1966

Near Amanzimtoti

signed and dated 1936
gouache on paper
50 by 62 cm

R800 000 – 1 200 000



Amanzimtoti on the KwaZulu-Natal South Coast, probably in the 1930s (photograph illustrated in Karel Schoeman (1994) *Irma Stern: The Early Years, 1894–1933*, South African Library, page 76)



426

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

*Die Plaas naby Rustenburg,
Transvaal*

signed; inscribed with the title

on the reverse

oil on board

28 by 32 cm

R250 000 – 350 000



427

John Meyer

SOUTH AFRICAN 1942-

Landscape with Farmstead

signed

acrylic on canvas

91,5 by 120 cm

R280 000 – 350 000

428

Maud Sumner

SOUTH AFRICAN 1902–1985

View of Toledo

signed

oil on canvas

62 by 51 cm

R150 000 – 200 000



El Greco, *View of Toledo* (1596–1600)
(Photograph: Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)



Maud Sumner lived between South Africa, France and England at various stages of her life, and works depicting views of these countries, and later of Namibia, are familiar lots at auction. Paintings of scenes in Spain are less so because she seems to have visited the country only once, in 1936. The present lot depicts the city of Toledo with its tumble of honey-coloured stone buildings rising from the Tagus River valley up to the iconic Alcázar, the fortified stone palace that dominates its surroundings from the highest point on the hill. Sumner was an ardent admirer of the Greek/Spanish late-Renaissance artist known as El Greco (Doménikos

Theotokópoulos, 1541-1614) and 'many books [on the artist] and innumerable postcards of his paintings' form part of the Sumner archive.¹ His famous *View of Toledo* (1596–1600) (above, left) was evidently a favourite, as Sumner painted a copy of it, a work that now resides in the South African state archives. Both El Greco and Sumner, in the present lot, include the distinctive Roman arched bridge, the Puente de Alcántara, but from opposite sides – El Greco from the north and Sumner from the southeast. Using Google 3D maps it is possible to navigate Toledo and its surrounds street by street, at ground level and from above, and determine that Sumner painted her view

of the city from the hill where the Toledo Infantry Academy now stands, although that building post-dates Sumner's visit. The position Sumner was painting from is visible in El Greco's view, probably the undeveloped rounded hill above the fork in the road. Sumner looks down into the river valley showing the bridge with its tall western tower rising above the Turbinas de Vargas, the city's old, now ruined, waterworks. She shows the two roads – the Ronda de Juanelo hugging the river, and the Cuesta los Cantos Doce sweeping up the hill.²

Sumner's visit, in early 1936, just pre-dates the Spanish civil war. The palace and surrounding buildings were all but

demolished by mine explosions and artillery fire during the Siege of the Alcázar which took place from July to September that year. Although the palace itself was rebuilt after WWII, a visitor to the city today would no longer be able to see the buildings on the hill exactly as they were in Sumner's day.

1. Frieda Harmsen (1992) *Maud Sumner: Painter and Poet*, Pretoria: Van Schaik, page 33.
2. Ronda de Juanelo = the Circle of Juanelo (Juanelo Turriano, an Italian-Spanish clock maker, engineer and mathematician, who worked in Toledo for the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V, from 1534; Cuesta los Cantos Doce = The Hill of the Twelve Songs.

429

Irma Stern

SOUTH AFRICAN 1894–1966

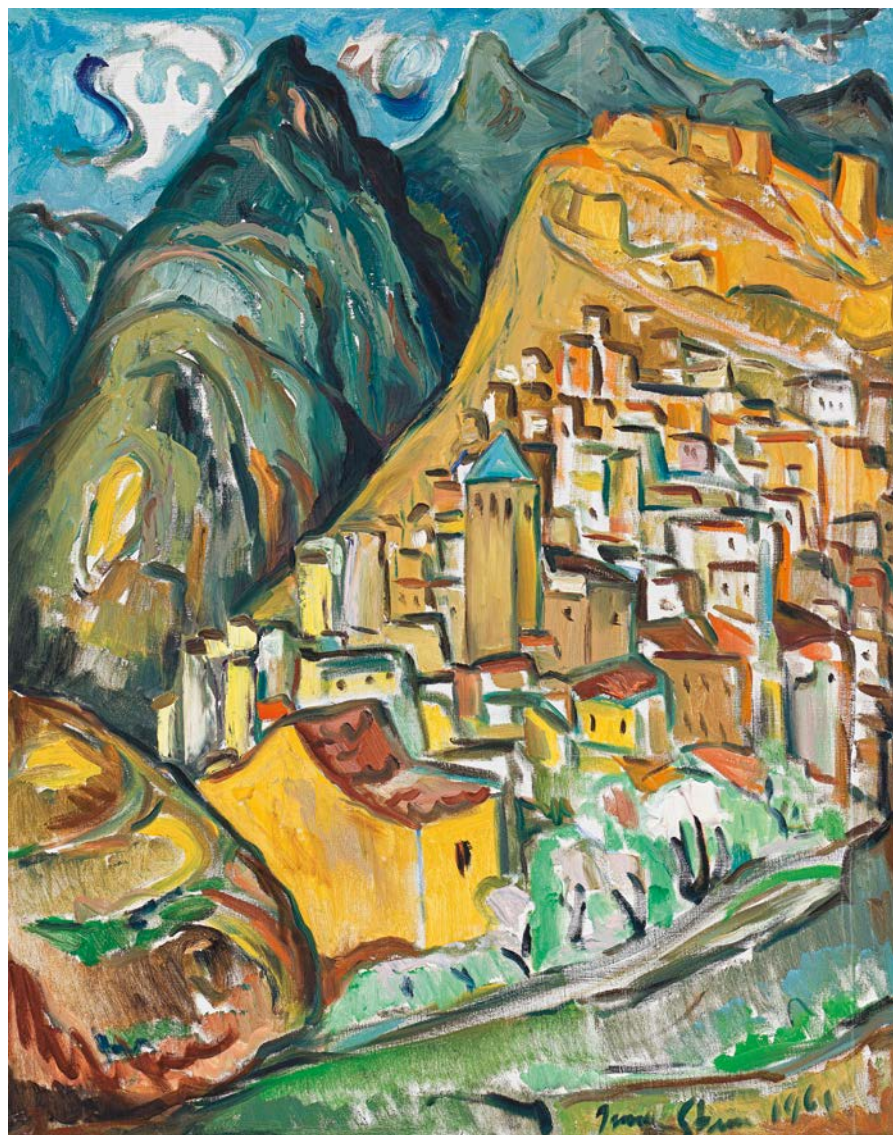
Spanish Village

signed and dated 1961

oil on canvas

90 by 71 cm

R1 000 000 – 1 500 000



© Irma Stern Trust | DALRO

Painting small, cube-like buildings nestling against a steep mountain is a subject one would normally associate with the post-impressionist Paul Cézanne, not with the expressionist Irma Stern. Other examples of this subject matter and composition can be found in singular paintings Stern executed while visiting Tuscany, Turkey, North-Africa and Madeira. Spain, which she visited in the summer of 1960, had a special allure for Stern, and her paintings of Spanish pimento harvesters and olive pickers are well-known, paintings that Neville

Dubow describes as 'lyrical figures-in-landscape compositions, loosely knit, yet held together by sweeping rhythms that bind earth, workers and sky together'.

Another well-loved subject was the harbour, in the small Spanish coastal town of Alicante, located across the road from the Carlton Hotel where she stayed. Stern vividly describes this enchanting view from her room in letters to her good friends, Richard and Freda Feldman, in Houghton, Johannesburg.² She also writes about the day trips she undertook, exploring the surrounding villages and

farms, and the numerous sketches she made, which served as inspiration when painting works such as the present lot. It exhibits a quiet lyricism, of small buildings in harmony with their dramatic surroundings.

It is also striking how similar this strong composition of cube-like buildings on top of one another is to the work of Gladys Mgudlandlu who painted numerous scenes of Gugulethu and Nyanga outside Cape Town, especially in the period 1961 to 1971. Mgudlandlu made a point of attending every exhibition Maggie Laubser

held in Cape Town, and she might also have seen some of Stern's exhibitions as well. Mgudlandlu's characteristic cube-like shanty buildings nestle against a dramatic Table Mountain in the background in a similar manner to the village in Stern's Spanish village.

1. Neville Dubow (1974) *Irma Stern, Cape Town: Struik*, page 21.
2. Sandra Klopper (2017) *Irma Stern: Are You Still Alive? Stern's life and art seen through her letters to Richard and Freda Feldman, 1934–1965, Cape Town: Orisha*, page 207.

430

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

Temple of the Sun

signed and dated '63
oil on canvas
125 by 136 cm

R1 000 000 – 2 000 000

EXHIBITED

South African Association of Arts,
Polley's Arcade, Pretoria, *Alexis
Preller*, 15 to 31 October, 1963.



For nearly four years, beginning late in 1958, Alexis Preller was engaged in an epic, all-consuming and vast commission for the Transvaal Provincial Administration Building in Pretoria. The result of endless preparatory drawings, close historical research, scaled and squared-up cartoons, and even a custom-built new studio at Dombeya, the so-called *Discovery* mural, measuring 3m in height and spanning nearly 13m across, while an enormous triumph, proved a meticulous and painstaking labour. With the sharply linear and intricate masterpiece behind him, however, he began to re-engage with a more painterly, enigmatic and fluid

aesthetic. Landmark examples included the palimpsestic *In the Beginning* (1962) and *The Golden Fleece* (1962) which, as his first exhibited out-and-out abstract painting, caused a commotion at the Pieter Wenning Gallery.

An increasing number of non-objective, scintillating canvases, many dominated by gold-encrusted surfaces or expanses of deep crimson, violet and azure, began to feature in his exhibitions. A work called *Credo* (1963), for instance, a dazzling cascade of colour fragments, was a talking point of the artist's exhibition at the Pretoria branch of the South African Association of Arts in October 1963. So too

was a memorable group of seven abstract paintings – of which the present lot must be one – all listed in the catalogue under the heading *Temple of the Sun*. While Preller was given to producing variations of a concept, the series had in common a flat, fragment-like form, whether notched, pierced or disintegrating, against a luminous or black background. Much like a tablet marked with puzzling inscriptions, or a ruin scarred with defaced hieroglyphics, a sense of ancient civilisation, a lost language, or a deteriorating history, was evocatively conjured.

Although all seven paintings in the original *Temple of the Sun* series were

uniquely titled, the habit of critics, and Preller himself, to use the catch-all title interchangeably, has caused confusion when it comes to identifying specific works. Be that as it may, this particular version of the theme, with its screaming scarlet palette and absorbing devices and scrawls, is magnificent, gripping and imposing. No surprise then that it might be the very work captured in a striking and intimate photograph (opposite), hanging low on a lime-washed wall, and given pride of place by the artist in his Dombeya home.

(Photograph: Esmé Berman and Karel Nel (2009) *Africa, the Sun and Shadows* (vol. 1), and *Collected Images* (vol. 2), Johannesburg: Shelf Publishing)





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431

Cecil Skotnes

SOUTH AFRICAN 1926–2009

Kitchen Still Life

signed; inscribed with the artist's name and the title on a Johans Borman Fine Art label adhered to the reverse carved, incised and painted wood panel with brass surround
99,5 by 121,5 cm

R350 000 – 500 000

EXHIBITED

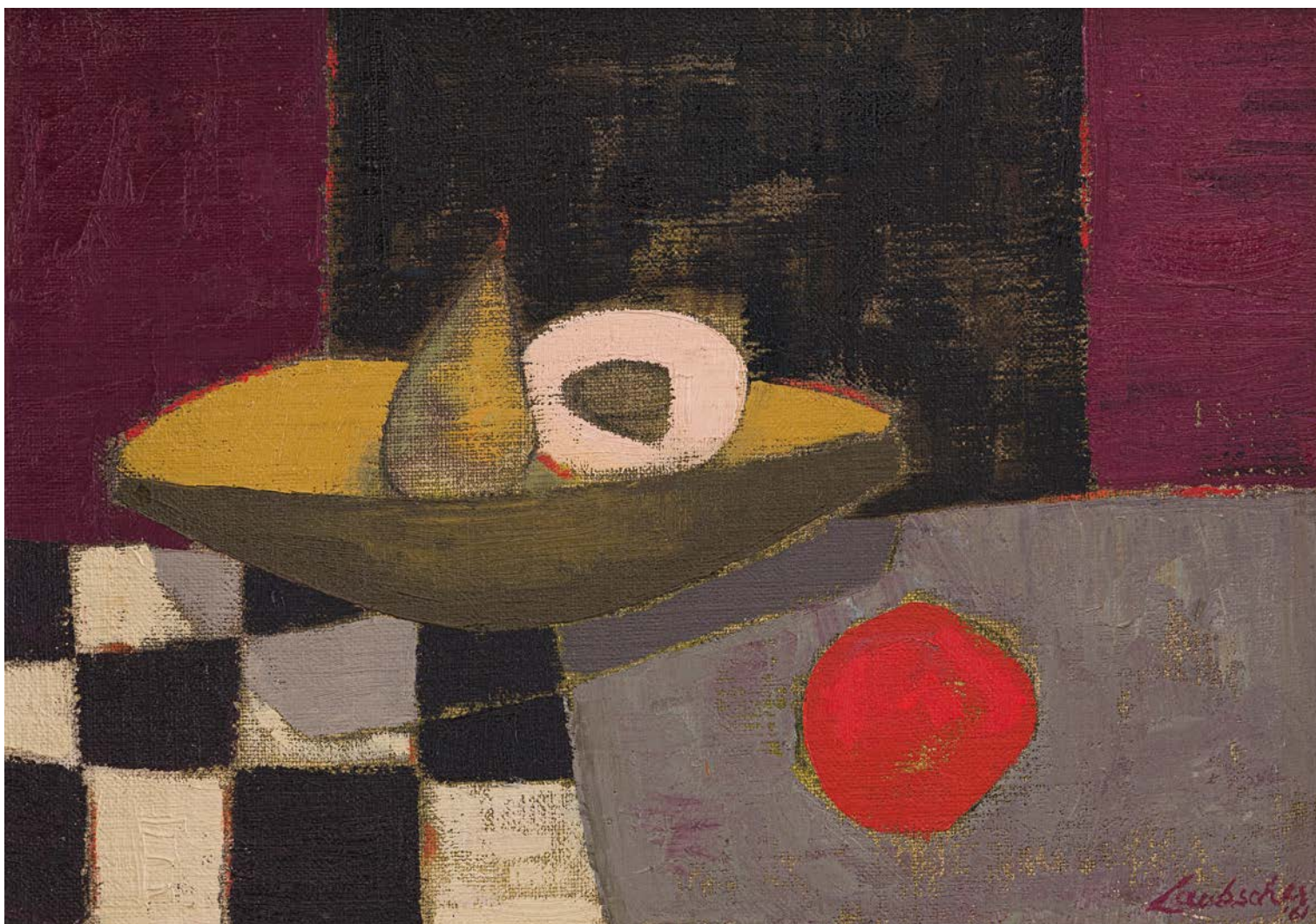
Johans Borman Fine Art, Cape Town, *Masterpiece*, 17 September to 15 October 2016.

LITERATURE

Johans Borman (ed.) (2016) *Masterpiece*, Cape Town: Johans Borman Fine Art, illustrated in colour on page 89.

Cecil Skotnes studied painting at the University of the Witwatersrand where the still-life genre was part of the new art school's parochial curriculum. His first professional exhibition in 1955, at Whippman's Gallery in Johannesburg, included still lifes. Although best known for his graphics and abstracted figural studies on incised wood panels, Skotnes did not give up producing still lifes. *The Origin of Wine* (1977), a three-panel scene for the Cape Wine Growers Association (KWW), includes a still life with fruit, fish, bottles and glasses in the left panel. After relocating to Cape Town in 1979, where he started painting again, Skotnes worked on numerous 'kitchen' paintings.

They include *Still Life with Fruit, Olives, Wine Bottle and Coffee Pot*, a similarly incised and painted wood panel that was sold for R909 440 by Strauss & Co in 2013. These kitchen compositions are typified by their classificatory arrangement of food and objects seen in variable, albeit flattened, perspective. The depthless planes of his compositions are, of course, offset by the rich texture of his panel paintings. The numerous instances of painterly energy, notably in the treatment of the white tablecloth and gorgeous detailing of the broken eggs, contribute to the visceral energy of this work, which speaks to enduring ideas of sustenance and communing.



432

Erik Laubscher

SOUTH AFRICAN 1927–2013

Still Life with Pear

signed and dated '61; dated 1961 and inscribed with the title on the reverse
oil on canvas laid down on board
34 by 49 cm

R500 000 – 700 000

Erik Laubscher's *Still Life with Pear*, painted in 1961, typifies the artist's paintings of the 1960s, with their graphic simplicity and flattened perspectives. In this still life, a pear in an elongated mustard yellow and olive-green bowl seems to float alongside an eye-catching red tomato perfectly placed on a flattened mauve-grey surface that suggests a table. A chequered black and white block perhaps indicates a tiled floor below the central vertical darkened block of colour, which is flanked by two bands of aubergine, giving the work a

decidedly dramatic effect.

Laubscher had studied at the Anglo French Art centre in London in 1946, where he was exposed to the work of Picasso, Braque and Matisse. His decision in 1950 to further his studies in Paris at the Académie Montmartre, where he was a pupil of Fernand Léger and Bernard Buffet, also greatly influenced his art practice. The 1960s became a period of consolidation for Laubscher with incremental innovation in the delineation of forms, flattened picture planes and bold use of colour.

433

Gerard Sekoto

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1993

Washday, Sophiatown

signed

oil on canvas laid down on board
34 by 50 cm

R1 800 000 – 2 400 000

PROVENANCE

Bought by the current owner's parents from an exhibition at the Gainsborough Galleries or the South African Academy of Art in the 1940s.

EXHIBITED

Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, *Song for Sekoto*, retrospective exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth, 26 April to 2 June 2013.

LITERATURE

Barbara Lindop (1988) *Gerard Sekoto*, Randburg: dictum, illustrated in colour on page 57.

Barbara Lindop (1995) *Gerard Sekoto: My Life and Work*, Johannesburg: Viva Books, illustrated in colour on page 48. The date of the work is given as 1942.

N Chabani Manganyi (2004) *Gerard Sekoto: I am an African*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press, mentioned on page 37.

Gerard Sekoto Foundation (2013) *Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto 1913–2013*, exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg: The Gerard Sekoto Foundation, illustrated in colour on page 148.



Sophiatown (Photograph: Bob Gosani @ BAHA).

Gerard Sekoto's colourful and animated *Washday, Sophiatown* – recorded as having been painted in 1942 – is a lively and empathetic representation of the lives of those he observed and lived amongst. He portrays his subjects with dignity and humanity, despite their extreme adversity. 'His insight of his fellow human beings within their social environment is profound. His paintings are subtle commentary on the social, political and economic circumstance.'¹

Washday, Sophiatown is dominated on the right-hand side of the picture plane by a large somewhat stark well that is straddled by a tall wooden triangular support required for the lowering and hoisting a water bucket. To the left, another more loosely formulated triangular composition shows an energetic hive of human activity, the maternal figure carrying a baby on her back is vigorously going about her task while the young girl equally energetically strides with her load from the door of the house. They are surrounded by bright white

laundry and other related paraphernalia.

Sekoto beautifully counters the many hues of dusty pinks and burnt orange with the bright blue sky, the red speckled blue length of fabric and head scarf, as well as the blue dress of the young girl. The picture is theatrically presented alongside the burnt orange fence, similarly shaded door mat and hat of the young man who emerges from the house.

After four years as a teacher near Pietersburg, now Polokwane, Sekoto took a first step towards expanding his horizons in 1939 when he moved to Johannesburg and found accommodation with cousins on Gerty Street, Sophiatown. Sokoto recalls, 'To me it was already a great excitement to have arrived at this longed-for destination of Johannesburg'. Strolling through the suburb or looking through the window of his room he witnessed the rich, varied and colourful lives of the community.

1. Barbara Lindop (1988) *Gerard Sekoto*, Randburg: dictum, page 18.



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434

Walter Battiss

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906–1982

Landscape with Figures

signed

oil on canvas

30 by 41 cm

PROVENANCE

Bonhams, London, 2 October 2013,
lot 63.

R240 000 – 280 000



TWO VIEWS OF LOT 435



435

Sydney Kumalo

SOUTH AFRICAN 1935–1988

Reclining Figure

1984

signed and numbered 3/5
bronze with a brown patina
height: 21 cm; length: 38 cm;
width 19 cm

R200 000 – 300 000

From 1982 to 1987, while represented by Linda Givon at the Goodman Gallery, Kumalo produced a number of seated and reclining figures. It is clear that these particular sculptures were strongly inspired by sculptures by Henry Moore of similar subject matter. In addition to a number of seated figures, Goodman Gallery's records list various reclining figures – *Reclining Figure I*, *Reclining Figure II*, *Hugging Reclining Figure*, *Reclining Female Form* and *Joyous Reclining Figure* – all of which were produced during this period. As the surviving records are incomplete, it is unclear exactly which of these titles relate to the present lot. The proportions of Kumalo's seated and reclining figures are sometimes lacking but not so in this case!

Gavin Watkins



436

Ruth Everard Haden

SOUTH AFRICAN 1904–1992

The Dangerous Sea

signed; inscribed with the artist's
name and the title on a label

adhered to the reverse

oil on canvas

72 by 114cm

R350 000 – 450 000



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437

Cecil Skotnes

SOUTH AFRICAN 1926–2009

Figure with Raised Arms

signed

incised and painted wood panel

121,5 by 121,5 cm

R400 000 – 600 000

In the 1960s Cecil Skotnes's work developed from the two-dimensional woodcut prints to working with the wood block itself to create a three-dimensional sculptural object. With this, he explored colour in his work in a different way, using a range of earthy warm reds, whites, and ochres. The present lot is a great example of his craftsmanship and use of material, the large-scale wood panel, with incisions creating movement throughout the work. He sets the lighter ochres against the darker rich dramatic shades of red in the background.

Skotnes was exposed to and influenced by

German Expressionism, particularly the artists Rudolf Scharpf (1919–2014), in printmaking, and Willi Baumeister (1889–1955), with whom he shared an interest in African and Aztec art as well as prehistoric and ancient cultures. Skotnes was inspired by archaeological sites, temples, churches and museums as well as mythological, biblical and historical heroes. Throughout his career, Skotnes combined the influence of German Expressionism with traditional African aesthetics in an attempt to understand the archetypes of humanity.

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

African Head

signed and dated '53; inscribed with the artist's name on a Groninger Museum, The Netherlands, label and the artist's name and the title on two Pretoria Art Museum labels on the reverse
oil on wood panel
51 by 40,5 cm

R2 000 000 – 3 000 000**EXHIBITED**

Katzen Collection, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, April 1968.

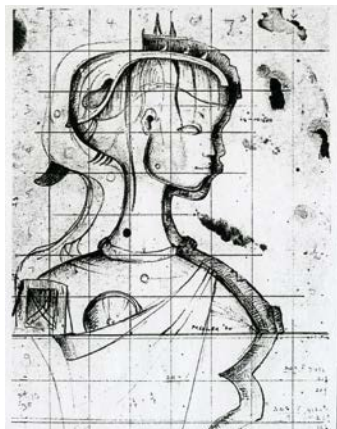
Alexis Preller Retrospective, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, October 24 to November 26, 1972.

LITERATURE

Pretoria Art Museum (1972) *Alexis Preller Retrospective*, Pretoria, exhibition catalogue, illustrated in colour on page 5, catalogue no 73.

Esmé Berman (1983) *Art & Artists of South Africa*, Cape Town: AA Balkema, illustrated in black and white on page 10.

Esmé Berman and Karel Nel (2009) *Collected Images* (vol. 2), Johannesburg: Shelf Publishing, a work from the same series, belonging to Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, illustrated in colour on pages 183 and 218.



Alexis Preller, *The Gateway*, 1949.

This small fresco-like painting on a wood panel was in all probability completed in early 1953. This would have been before Preller's study trip to Europe and Egypt to look at mural painting in preparation for his first large-scale commission for the new Receiver of Revenue Building in Johannesburg.

Two versions of this *African Head* (I and II) were exhibited at the HAUM Gallery in Cape Town in April 1953, with the exhibition opened by the then-director of the National Gallery, John Paris. In these two works (the present lot and the work now in the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Museum, Port Elizabeth), the mirrored images of the same head have their origins in the earlier 1949 work, *The Gateway*, painted by Preller on his return from the Seychelles. In the larger work, *The Gateway*, twinned profiles, based on an East African ebony head in Preller's possession, face each other across a

walled walkway that leads to a small Ndebele lapa. The lapa's unusually shaped walls are decorated with characteristic geometric patterning, also seen in the later *Mapogga* works.

In *African Head*, 1953, the painting on auction, the left-hand head in *The Gateway* becomes the focus of the work. It is meticulously re-created, having been gridded and traced in the manner that historic European painters used for master works. Preller's process is revealed in a 1964 prototype sketch for a similar *Primavera* head.

The icon-like presence of the huge, freestanding female head fills the format, like a guardian at the gate. Her profile is set against an expanse of bleached aquamarine sky with its small flat-bottomed clouds. As in the forerunner work, she looms over the decorated entrance to a small Ndebele homestead. The startling scale of the objects is brought about by

the low horizon line of a barren, almost Karoo-like landscape punctuated by distant, isolated outcrops: the architectural features around the head appear distant, and miniature by comparison.

The work evokes a stark, stylised metaphysical quality. The head is surrounded by an auric echo, partly in shadow and partly in light. This 'echo' is adorned with a dorsal fin, curved red spines and punctures which seem to reveal the sky beyond. These characteristics are shared with the famous *Mozartian Fish* painted the previous year.

The female profile has an elongated nose, full lips, a strong jawline and a precisely delineated ear. Her hairstyle has characteristics of an early Ntwana or North Sotho coiffure, coloured with red ochre and neatly faceted. Strong, dark lines sweep over her face from the crown of her head but it is the staring, circular eye that rivets. It has the visual power of

the bead- or metal inserts placed in the eye-sockets of ritual, carved figures found all along the eastern seaboard of Africa. Perhaps it seems even more like the eye of a fish than that of a human. Using details like this, Preller at his best challenges and tempers the beauty and precision of his vision, opening up an inner world that is mysterious and sometimes unnerving.

His consummate skills as a draftsman and colourist are to be seen in this work with its sombre umbers, reds and aquamarines; its precision of form in the smooth surfaces played against the spiky shapes and cerulean and black circular punctuations. The delicate bloom or leaves in the right hand corner that seem almost propitiatory complete a mesmerising conception so distinctive to Preller's African vision.

Karel Nel



439

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

Nude

signed and dated '39; inscribed with the artist's name and the title on a Pretoria Art Museum label on the reverse

oil on canvas laid down on board
45,5 by 29,5 cm

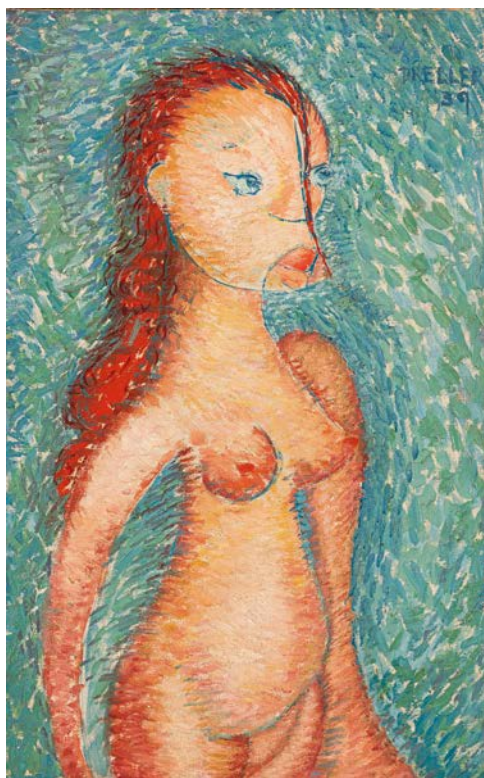
R350 000 – 500 000

EXHIBITED

Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, *Alexis Preller Retrospective*, October 24 to November 26, 1972.

LITERATURE

Pretoria Art Museum (1972) *Alexis Preller Retrospective*, Pretoria, exhibition catalogue, illustrated in black and white on page 24, catalogue no 9.



440

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

Three Figures, Congo

signed and dated '39

oil on canvas
73 by 56 cm

R600 000 – 800 000

In 1937, after returning from a stay in Paris, Preller was 'impatient to proceed with the development of his African theme'¹ and was convinced that in order to do this, he needed to immerse himself in what he perceived to be natural, traditional, unspoilt, rural Africa. He and his partner Christi Truter set off in a ramshackle old car, bound for Swaziland and northern KwaZulu-Natal, via the Eastern Transvaal (now Mpumalanga).² This trip proved to be a huge inspiration and it emboldened Preller to venture even further afield to more remote and unfamiliar climes in 1939. This time a small Austin van was purchased, which had the benefit of space to sleep in the back so there was no need to set up camp every night on the long journey. The car had endless mechanical problems but Alexis and Christi headed north through Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) and into Zambia (Northern Rhodesia). Christi had to return to his job in South Africa, but Preller carried on into what is now the Democratic Republic of Congo. He set up camp at Lake Kivu when the car finally gave out completely, and he marvelled at the appearance and customs of the Mangbetu community he encountered there.³ He witnessed a dramatic eruption of the Nyiragongo volcano, which was an intense sensory experience that stayed with him and informed his work for years.

The present lot dates from this time, and the three figures are depicted against an expressionistic green-blue background that seems to include the volcanic eruption on the left. The exaggerated, artificial colour use continues a breakthrough



Preller made earlier, which he described in a letter dated 1937 to his sister Minnie. He wrote about how he was working on 'a large picture of my new [African] form – a landscape of natives walking down a hill with pots of food on their heads ... Here the colour is marvellous. The intensest I could find of each shade, terribly fierce'.⁴

The composition in the present lot seems to be a reworking of this earlier scheme, which was characteristic of Preller's practice throughout his life, and the colour here is equally intense. The figure in the centre carrying a gourd on her head is a generic African 'type' he might have distilled from actual women he saw on his travels but the two flanking figures, coloured surely with the most modern, industrially-produced pigments in Preller's paintbox, have the presence and three-dimensionality of Mangbetu carved wooden standing figures he would probably have come across in Lake Kivu.

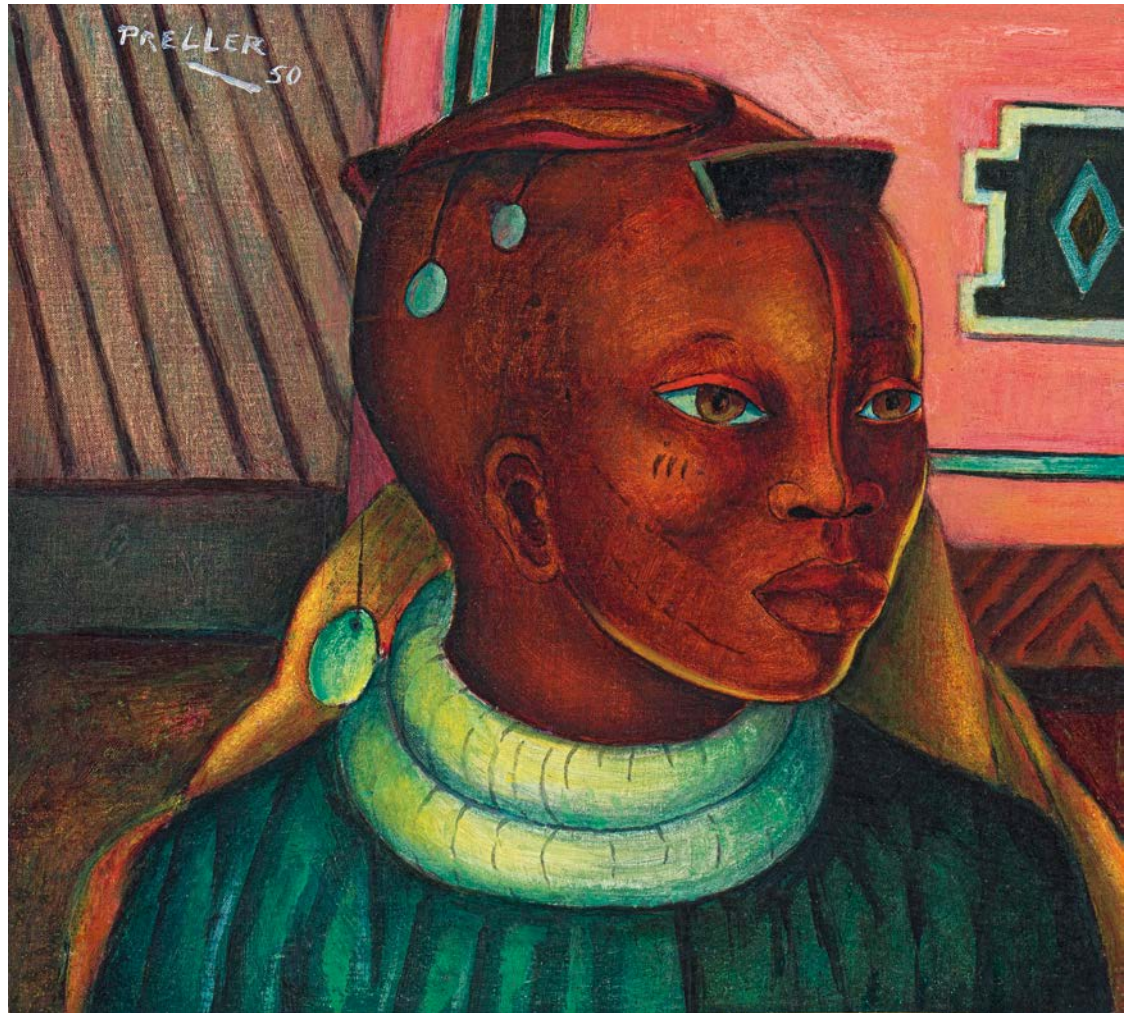
Preller's stay in the Congo was cut short by the outbreak of WWII and he made his way back to South Africa with difficulty, by riverboat and train, to join the army and serve in a field ambulance unit of the SA Medical Corps, where he could contribute without compromising his principles by carrying a weapon.

1. Esmé Berman and Karel Nel (2009) *Africa, the Sun and Shadows* (vol. 1), Johannesburg: Shelf Publishing, page 39.

2. *Ibid* page 41.

3. *Ibid* page 52.

4. Letter to Minnie, 24 April 1937, quoted in Berman and Nel (2009), page 35.



441

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

Head of a Mapogga Woman

signed and dated 50; inscribed with the artist's name and the title 'Head of a Native Girl' on a Pretoria Art Museum label adhered to the reverse oil on wood
26 by 28,5 cm

R600 000 – 800 000

In a documentary made for broadcast on television by the SABC, Alexis Preller is described as 'a man who collected images' and he particularly searched for images in his everyday life, in his travels on the continent, and in books on art and mythology, that represented an idea of Africa, not so much as it is, or was, but as he imagined it to be.¹ He was particularly interested in the costumes worn by the Ndebele women (or at that time more commonly known as 'Mapogga') who lived near Pretoria, and the colourful geometric murals they painted on the walls of their homesteads. Much of what is nowadays thought to be 'typical' Ndebele visual style and material culture is in fact of fairly recent origin, only developing in the 1940s in response to particular political, social and economic conditions prevailing at the time, rather than time-honoured traditional practices.^{2,3} Nevertheless, this represented for Preller a link to an arcane and mysterious Africa of the distant past that encompassed southern and central African cultures as well as Egyptian forms and archetypes.

In the present lot, Preller repeats a form that appears many times in his work. The same face appears in the various iterations of *The Kraal*, painted in the late 1940s and early 1950s, one

of which is in the Iziko South African National Gallery. The heads appear in the close foreground in each of those works, severed at the neck by the lower margin of the picture plane. In the present lot the head and shoulders are visible and the woman's rolled and padded neck rings, characteristic of many southern African traditional dress styles, can be seen more clearly. Her facial scarification and mud-packed braided coiffure, although with some historical precedent in Luba and Makonde practices in central and east Africa, and possibly sourced in part from historical colonial ethnographic photographs Preller might have seen on one of his visits to the Trocadéro (now Musée de l'Homme) in Paris, are likely to be largely a product of his own imagination and sense of design.

1. Hancock Film Productions (1973–1976) 'The World of Alexis Preller', television production commissioned by the SABC, in collaboration with Edgar Bold, Esmé Berman and the Art Institute of South Africa.
2. Elizabeth Ann Schneider (1986) *Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, page 217.
3. Franco Frescura (1990) *Accommodation or Protest? The Rise of a Wall-decorating Tradition in Rural South Africa*, online, available at <http://mobile.wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539>





442

Edoardo Villa

SOUTH AFRICAN 1915–2011

Mother & Child

1974

painted tubular steel
height: 490 cm

R1 500 000 – 2 000 000

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, Johannesburg/
United Kingdom.

Private Collection, Johannesburg.

EXHIBITED

Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg,
Edoardo Villa Sculpture 1974, 9 to 23
November 1974.

Rand Afrikaans University,
Johannesburg, *VILLA '76 RAU*, March
to June 1976, catalogue no. 18.

Rand Afrikaans University,
Johannesburg, *Edoardo Villa
Retrospective*, May to November 1980,
exhibition monograph page 174.

House Villa, Kew, Johannesburg 2014
to 2020.

LITERATURE

Afrox Metalart (1976) *Edoardo Villa
'76*, catalogue, Johannesburg: Aprox
Public Relations Department, 1976,
illustrated on page 12.

EP Engel (ed) (1980) *Edoardo Villa
Sculpture*, South Africa: United
Book Distributors, illustrated on the
reverse side of dust jacket standing
to the side of *Confrontation* and on
page 174.

Karel Nel, Elizabeth Burroughs and
Amalie von Maltitz (eds) (2005) *Villa
at 90*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball
with Shelf Publishing, illustrated on
page 196.

ITEM NOTES

The Goodman Gallery invitation
(1974), the *VILLA '76 RAU* catalogue,
the *Afrox Metalart Edoardo Villa
'76* catalogue and a signed copy
of *Edoardo Villa Sculpture* (1980),
accompany the lot.

Not long after Edoardo Villa's 59th
birthday, in May 1974, the sculptor
embarked on a series of monumental
tubular steel sculptures, each
painted in a striking bright colour.
These five sculptures were Villa's first
experiments using tubular steel,
which is today regarded as the
definitive hallmark of a classic Villa
sculptural form. Not only did these
new sculptures signal the advent of
a new medium, but they also shifted
the landscape of South African
contemporary sculpture, pushing the
envelope of both imagination and
scale way beyond that of any of Villa's
contemporaries.

The importance of this new sculp-
tural direction was quickly recog-
nised by Villa's art dealer Linda Givon,
who selected *Orange Involvement*
(1974) to illustrate the dynamic trian-
gular invitation card for the *Edoardo
Villa Sculpture 1974* exhibition, which
opened at the Goodman Gallery

in Hyde Park, Johannesburg, on 9
November 1974. Three mammoth
vertical works and one horizontal
work, all of tubular steel, dominated
the exhibition. The five sculptures on
the exhibition, ranging in height from
3,5 to 5,9 metres are listed below:

- *Orange Involvement* (1974), tubular
steel (orange), height 4,85 m,
purchased by Rand Afrikaans
University (RAU)/University of
Johannesburg (UJ).
- *Composition in Light Blue* (1974),
tubular steel (light blue), height
3,5 m, purchased by the Medical
Association, Pretoria.
- *Conversation in Yellow* (1974),
tubular steel (yellow), height 5,9 m,
purchased by the Rembrandt Art
Collection, Stellenbosch.
- *Mother & Child* (1974), tubular steel
(green), height 4,9m, purchased by
a private collector Johannesburg/
UK.
- One other sculpture, not part of
the Goodman Gallery exhibi-
tion as it was only completed in
early 1975, completed the group.
It was titled in honour of Villa's
dear friend Monty Sack, an early
champion of the sculptor and a
visionary architect: *Homage to an
Architect* (1975), tubular steel (dark
blue), height 3,92 m, purchased
by the Rembrandt Art Collection,
Stellenbosch.

The sculptures are beautifully docu-
mented in an historic photogra-
ph of the *big five* taken in Villa's garden
in Kew, Johannesburg, in summer
1975 (left).

The five sculptures were exhibited
at the grand public opening of the
Rand Afrikaans University in March
1976. As a result of great public
interest and the huge success of the
VILLA '76 RAU open-air exhibition, the
sculptor was awarded the coveted
annual *Afrox Metalart* sculpture
award in 1976. *Mother & Child*
was sold a few years later to art dealer
and collector Lesley Sacks, who in
turn sold it to a private collector who
exhibited the work in the grounds
of his home in the UK. The work
was shipped back to South Africa
in 2013, and until recently, has been
on exhibition at House Villa in Kew,
Johannesburg. This work is the last
of Edoardo Villa's *big five* tubular steel
sculptures still in private hands.



LEFT The big five on display at House Villa, Kew.

443

Peter Clarke

SOUTH AFRICAN 1929–2014

Koppie and Cattle, Tessaarsdal (sic)

signed and dated 19. Nov. 1959;
inscribed with the title and catalogue
no. 8 on the reverse
gouache on paper
52 by 44 cm

R280 000 – 340 000

The Tessaarsdal period is considered formative in Peter Clarke's artistic development, with visits starting in 1949, when he still worked in the docks in Simon's Town, and continuing almost annually, often extended stays of up to three months. In around 1957, he decided to give up his job in the docks and dedicate his life to art.

In Clarke's approach to the rural farmland landscapes one notices 'a distinctly modernist agenda' with the pastoral views from Tessaarsdal 'representing the new challenges presented by the less formal qualities of a rural landscape in contrast to the more complex perspectives of man-made urban views with their demanding geometry'.¹ At the same time, the 'powerful graphic sensibility' evident in his paintings began to be explored in an extensive variety of printmaking processes, culminating in his time at Michaelis School of Fine Art with lecturer Katrine Harries from October 1961.²

The present lot, executed towards the end of 1959, shows Clarke experimenting with a style reminiscent of Cézanne and the 'bold contours and tipped up planes' of the post-impressionist landscapes are quite unlike the 'impressionistic naturalism of his earlier studies'.³ Clarke chooses to play with distance, and strip the details down to their bare essentials. Using pointillist brushwork to give his planes texture, the cows are anchored in the fields by a thin, delicately painted grey shadow. The clouds float whimsically away across a monumental sky, balancing the pictorial slope of the hills down to the left.

1. Philippa Hobbs and Elizabeth Rankin (2014) *Listening to Distant Thunder: The Art of Peter Clarke*, Johannesburg, Standard Bank, page 58.

2. *Ibid.*, page 72.

3. *Ibid.*, page 58–60.



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© The Estate of Maggie Laubser | DALRO

444

Maggie Laubser

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1973

Seagull

signed; inscribed with the artist's name,
the title and 'Strand' on the reverse.

oil on board
42 by 47 cm

R400 000 – 500 000

LITERATURE

Dalene Marais (1994) *Maggie Laubser:
Her Paintings, Drawings and Graphics*,
Johannesburg: Perskor, illustrated in black and
white on page 363, catalogue number 1611.





**Important South African Art
from the Property of a Collector**

Lots 445–490

Lot 475 Irma Stern *Congo Forest Scene* (detail)

445

Gerard Sekoto

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1993

The Waiting Room – Mother with Baby

1940

signed; inscribed with the artist's name, the date, the title and the medium on a Johans Borman Fine Art Gallery label adhered to the reverse watercolour and gouache on paper 25,5 by 35,5 cm

R300 000 – 500 000

EXHIBITED

Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, *Song for Sekoto*, retrospective exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth, 26 April to 2 June 2013.

LITERATURE

Gerard Sekoto Foundation (2013) *Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto 1913–2013*, exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg: The Gerard Sekoto Foundation, illustrated in colour on page 34.

The present two lots, 445 and 446, were done near the beginning of Gerard Sekoto's career, in 1940, not long after he left his job as a teacher in Pietersburg (Polokwane) and relocated to Sophiatown, Johannesburg, in 1939, to pursue a career as a full-time artist. During the first five years of his career, with the support of gallerists, collectors, fellow artists and the press, he gained in reputation, despite the significant barriers faced by black artists at the time. His art provides a visual representation of life in South Africa for the poor black city dweller. In *The Waiting Room*, a woman with a baby on her back sits on a row of benches, waiting patiently, while in *Going Home* a group of workers carry their bags and parcels, heading home after a day's work. Sekoto's work is most appreciated for its ability to captivate the viewer, setting a scene that tells a story. The emotional interest is heightened by the colour, tone and texture of the work that aesthetically draw the viewer in. These two works show the early prowess of the artist that lead to his standing in the artworld today.



© Gerard Sekoto Foundation | DALRO



© Gerard Sekoto Foundation | DALRO

446

Gerard Sekoto

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1993

Going Home

1940

signed; inscribed with the artist's name, the date, the title and the medium on a Johans Borman Fine Art Gallery label adhered to the reverse watercolour and gouache on paper 25 by 35 cm

R300 000 – 500 000

EXHIBITED

Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, *Song for Sekoto*, retrospective exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth, 26 April to 2 June 2013.

LITERATURE

Gerard Sekoto Foundation (2013) *Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto 1913–2013*, exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg: The Gerard Sekoto Foundation, illustrated in colour on page 37.

447

Ezrom Legae

SOUTH AFRICAN 1938–1999

Man on Horse

signed and numbered 4/7

bronze

height: 72 cm; length: 36 cm;

width: 20 cm

R300 000 – 400 000**PROVENANCE**Graham's Fine Art Auctioneers,
Johannesburg, 19 May 2010, lot 119.

Ezrom Legae viewed sculpture as a symbolic medium that could be simple yet structured, to create both form and visual ambiguity. In the present lot the figure stands tall on the animal, deliberately anonymous by a flattened face and elongated neck, which reflects the influence of British sculptor Lynn Chadwick. There is emphasis on the extended abdomen and heavy thighs weigh the figure down. Even the animal remains somewhat anonymous with no distinctive head or tail. Legae's oeuvre is loaded with political, philosophical and metaphysical content. He frequently uses animal imagery in his work as a metaphor for the oppression, sacrifice, violence, and pain caused by the harsh socio-political context of the apartheid era in South Africa. Despite these political symbols, the work is able to express itself in multiple ways through its aesthetic ambiguity, a factor that may have contributed to the popularity of the sell-out exhibitions during the artist's lifetime. In an interview with Barbara Buntman the artist states, 'There should be some mystery about it. You know, you have got to search. It must be there. It must be very DARK; you must hunt for this little light!'

1. Barbara Buntman (1987) *Ezrom Legae 1976–1986*, unpublished Honours paper, University of the Witwatersrand, interview with the artist, 30 September 1986.





© The Estate of Cecil Skotnes | DALRO

448

Cecil Skotnes

SOUTH AFRICAN 1926–2009

Visit to a Battle Site

signed; dated December 1974 and inscribed 'Series: Paintings on a Visit to a Battle Site' on the reverse oil on canvas laid down on wood panel with painted and incised found wood

122 by 122 cm

R600 000 – 900 000

PROVENANCE

Bonhams, London, 24 March 2010, lot 99.

LITERATURE

cf. Frieda Harmsen (1996) *Cecil Skotnes*, exhibition catalogue, Cape Town: South African National Gallery, other works from the series illustrated.

'I attempted to create the silences ... The battle site was Isandhlwana in Natal, but it could have been any monument to man's folly. After all, I have strode over battlefields when the smoke was still all-embracing and the roar of guns was still in my ears ... After great noise the silence is almost unbearable – it is the mind and spirit summing up the causes of the cataclysm, and those who pause to understand usually never survive. They are the spirits of reason, and our times, while taking cognisance of reasons, never indulge in reason. The creative souls can and usually do quickly sense the times and are usually first to set down their reactions. Also, at the moment of conception there is no fear. Those figures on the battle site are not the ghosts of dead men – they are the

understanding of what is to occur or the wilderness created by storm ... The silence of the battle site lets the spirits live again.'

1. Skotnes, as quoted in Harmsen (1996), page 37.



449

Alexis Preller

SOUTH AFRICAN 1911–1975

Surreal Minoan Bulls

signed and dated '54
oil on canvas laid down on board
38 by 50 cm

R2 000 000 – 3 000 000

Like many motifs in Alexis Preller's work, the bull appears in different guises and in different contexts in works decades apart. At times it is a recognisable African Nguni bull (for example in *The Herd Boy* (1949) and *The Small White Bull* (1953), bulky, humped and muscular with an impressive set of horns and a bevy of egrets in attendance. At other times, the animal is stylised to the point of becoming a decorative cypher rather than a flesh-and-blood animal (for example in *The Bull* (1956) and *Ritual Bull* (1962), sold at Strauss in October 2010 and March 2018, respectively). In the present lot the animals are almost origami, paper fold-outs, beautifully patterned, with African masks for faces and huge implausible sickle-shaped horns. Hovering Morning Glory blooms replace the birds in Preller's

other less surreal compositions.

Both styles of representation 'allude to the sacred nature and centrality of the bull to the value system of the herders of the southern and eastern African seaboard. Amongst these groups these ceremonial and monumental animals are seen to be connected to the symbolic and ancestral world. The white Nguni cattle in particular are associated and much revered within the royal clans of KwaZulu-Natal ... [T]his symbolic animal ... cosmologically resonates beyond its local context and as far back as the bull cults of Minos of Crete and of the earliest archaeological sites of Çatalhöyük in Anatolia, Turkey!'

1. Karel Nel (2018) 'Ritual Bull', catalogue text, lot 590, Cape Town: Strauss & Co, 5 March.

450

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

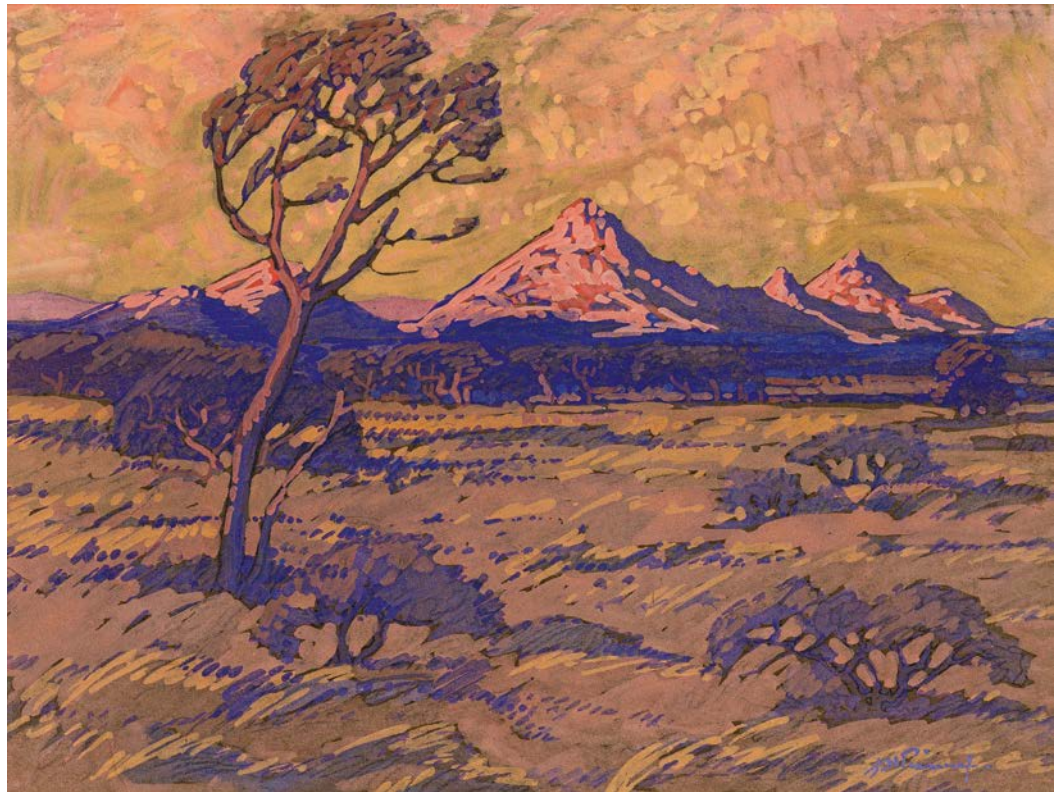
*A Windswept Tree on an
Extensive Landscape*

signed
casein on paper
22 by 29 cm

R350 000 – 500 000

PROVENANCE

Stephan Welz & Co, Cape Town,
24 February 2009, lot 373.



451

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

*Landscape with Distant
Mountains*

signed
oil on board
22 by 29 cm

R350 000 – 500 000

PROVENANCE

Graham's Fine Art Auctioneers,
Johannesburg, 19 May 2010, lot 39.





452

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

A Lowveld Landscape with Trees

signed and dated 45; inscribed with the artist's name and the title on a label adhered to the reverse
oil on board
45 by 59 cm

R1 800 000 – 2 800 000

Painted in 1945, this ethereal lowveld landscape displays Pierneef's mastery of composition and subtle harmonies of colour and tone.

The iconic character of these leadwood trees (*Combretum imberbe*) in the foreground is faithfully rendered in a naturalistic manner and they serve as powerful pictorial devices, creating a strong vertical aspect, linking earth and sky, and creating tension in opposition to the horizon line. Radiocarbon analyses show that leadwoods easily live for several hundred years and the oldest specimen tested in a survey by the CSIR was more than 1 000 years old when it died.¹ Because the wood is so hard, dead trees can remain upright in the landscape for as much as

80 years, and they are consequently a common component of the bushveld landscape of southern Africa

Pierneef's palette is restrained to tones of ochre, taupe, grey and russet, offset against the graduated blue backdrop of the sky. Eloquent line-work unites the elements and simultaneously describes the forms and volumes within the painting, while giving vitality to the composition. The boughs and branches of the trees intersect one another in a dynamic play of movement and in this way, under the artist's brush, this poetic composition, sculpted in light has been crystallised in time.

1. JC Vogel and A Fuls (2005) 'Life-span of Leadwood Tree's, *South African Journal of Science*, vol 101, January/February, pp 98-100, available online at <https://researchspace.csir.co.za/dspace/handle/10204/1951?show=full>

453

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

A Street Scene in Cornwall

signed and dated 1935
oil on canvas
50 by 50 cm

R200 000 – 300 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Cape Town, 11 October
2010, lot 209.

Newly independent, out from his father's shadow, and with three successful Cape Town shows recently behind him, a young and roguish Gregoire travelled to London in February 1935. Having known poverty at home as a young man, and having developed his ability through discipline rather than formal training, his experience of Europe, and his time at the Heatherley Art School and the Central School of Arts and Crafts in London, were life-changing and style-questioning.

Gregoire produced a fantastic but small group of pictures based on a visit to Cornwall in 1935 and, no doubt, inspired by the off-kilter, naïve paintings by Christopher Wood and Alfred Wallis. The present lot, with its playfully corrupted perspective, its patches of pure colour, and its folksy figurines, is a wonderful and rare example. Comparing it to *Evening, Cape Town Harbour* (Lot 454), painted just two years prior, is particularly revealing: the artist's willingness to experiment is clear, as is the remarkable ease with which he had assimilated a Eurocentric and gentle avant-gardism.



454

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

Evening, Cape Town Harbour

signed and dated 1933; inscribed with
the artist's name and the title on a
label adhered to the reverse
oil on canvas
35 by 45 cm

R180 000 – 240 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Johannesburg,
7 September 2009, lot 25.





455

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

Wale Street, Bo-Kaap

signed and dated 1938

oil on canvas

78 by 99 cm

R500 000 – 700 000

PROVENANCE

Mark McNulty.

Many of the most desirable and critically acclaimed paintings of Boonzaier's output were produced against the rich textural backdrop of Cape Town's oldest suburbs, including the historic Bo Kaap and District Six. These paintings, animated by pedestrians, give us a glimpse of life in these vibrant multi-cultural communities before forced removals of residents and demolition of buildings by the apartheid regime.

One of Boonzaier's earliest stylistic influences was Pieter Wenning, an artist whose paintings of Cape architectural heritage instilled in Gregoire an appreciation of eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings at the Cape. Wenning painted there on his first, brief, visit in 1916, and the young Gregoire would have been familiar with these works from Wenning's visits to the Boonzaier home and subsequent exhibitions which

informed and inspired the younger artist's early development.

In 1935, Boonzaier went to England to study art, first at the Heatherley School of Art in the company of Freida Lock and Terence McCaw and later at the Central School of Art. During this time, he went on painting excursions to Cornwall (see Lot 453) and in 1936 he visited Spain.

The present lot, painted in 1938 after his return from Europe and at the time of the formation of the New Group, marks in Boonzaier a new visual vocabulary informed by exposure to the work of the post-impressionists, whose work he encountered on his travels. In this work, the artist employs a looser painterly style with fresh, vibrant colours inspired by the Mediterranean light he had experienced before his return to South Africa.

456

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

Bosveld

signed and dated 53
oil on canvas
75 by 100 cm

R9 000 000 – 12 000 000**PROVENANCE**

Bonhams, London, 27 October 2010,
lot 58.

EXHIBITED

Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg,
*A Space for Landscape: The Work of JH
Pierneef*, 8 July to 12 September 2015.

LITERATURE

Wilhelm van Rensburg (2015) *A Space
for Landscape: The Work of JH Pierneef*,
Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery,
illustrated in colour on page 104.



Pierneef holidaying on the farm Vreeland in Henley-on-Klip, 1953
(Photograph: PG Nel, *JH Pierneef: His Life and his Work*, 1990 (Perskor))

When facing a picture as monumental, as rewarding, and as magnificent as this, there can be no doubt whatsoever of Henk Pierneef's deep love of the bushveld. No other scene was more inspirational to the artist, and no other subject closer to his heart. Even among Pierneef's exceptional output, rarely in a single picture does one get a sense that he has at once summoned all his powers of compositional design, all his sensitivity for subdued colour harmonies, and all his flair for the grand and the dazzling. *Bosveld*, this sale's exceptional cover lot, shows Pierneef at his most iconic: the linear clarity and convincing depth is familiar – so too the hush and peace – not to mention the heavy, deeply-rooted trees fanning upwards to the sky, their

branches forming a graceful tracery through which can be seen a moody, glowing cloudburst.

Certainly one of Pierneef's mature masterpieces, *Bosveld* was painted in 1953, with his name long in lights. Over the previous half century, he had developed an ever-recognisable aesthetic, helped establish a local landscape tradition, and achieved enormous popularity and critical success. With all this behind him, little surprise then that the best paintings from his twilight years were suffused with an extra sense of ease, lucidity and confidence.

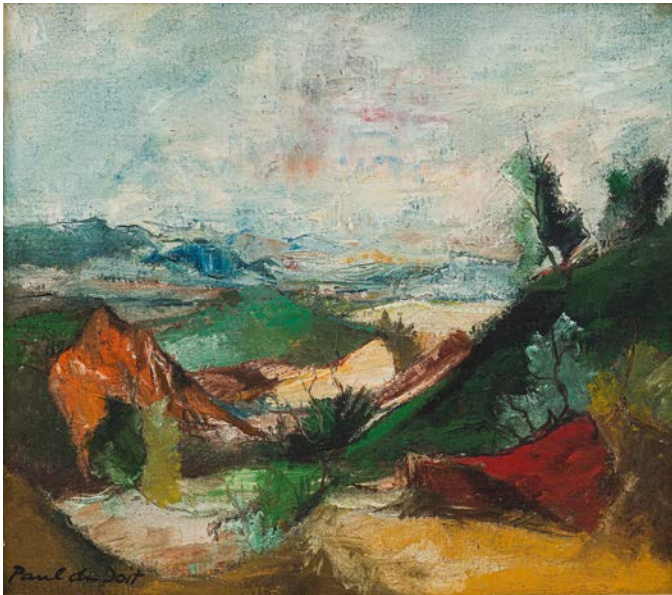
Inundated with studio visits, embassy and consulate invitations, lecture requests, and exhibition openings, Pierneef's painting time in the early

1950s was often limited. To avoid these obligations, and to clear time to work, he habitually travelled. He regularly visited *Vreeland*, for instance, the Lion-Cachet farm at Henley-on-Klip, where he would hole-up in a guest *rondavel* and paint his beloved willow trees. Significantly, he made several trips to the Lowveld in 1952 and 1953, any one of which might have inspired the present lot. Pinpointing the scene is difficult without artist inscriptions, but the flora and terrain suggests a northern territory, perhaps along the Luvuvhu or Limpopo rivers. While always favouring decorative power and divine balance over a straightforward likeness, Pierneef's knowledge of indigenous trees remained obvious. In this wide riparian floodplain, certain species are clear: an

ana tree (*Faidherbia albida*) dominates the foreground; a statuesque mopani (*Colophospermum mopane*), with its orange-tinged crown, is placed on the left of the composition, just ahead of a silvery-barked leadwood (*Combretum imberbe*). Whether or not these trees naturally appeared in such a rhythmic formation is moot: Pierneef edited the scene, no doubt, but he painted a magic bushveld view one might conjure from happy memory.

Thanks to Professors Bob and Mary Scholes from the University of the Witwatersrand for their help with the description of this lot.





457

457

Paul du Toit

SOUTH AFRICAN 1922–1986

Landscape

signed

oil on canvas laid down on board
28 by 30,5 cm

R30 000 – 50 000

458

Cecil Higgs

SOUTH AFRICAN 1898–1986

Washer Women

signed; signed and dated
March 1947 on the reverse
oil on canvas
52 by 70 cm

R35 000 – 45 000

459

Pieter Wenning

SOUTH AFRICAN 1873–1921

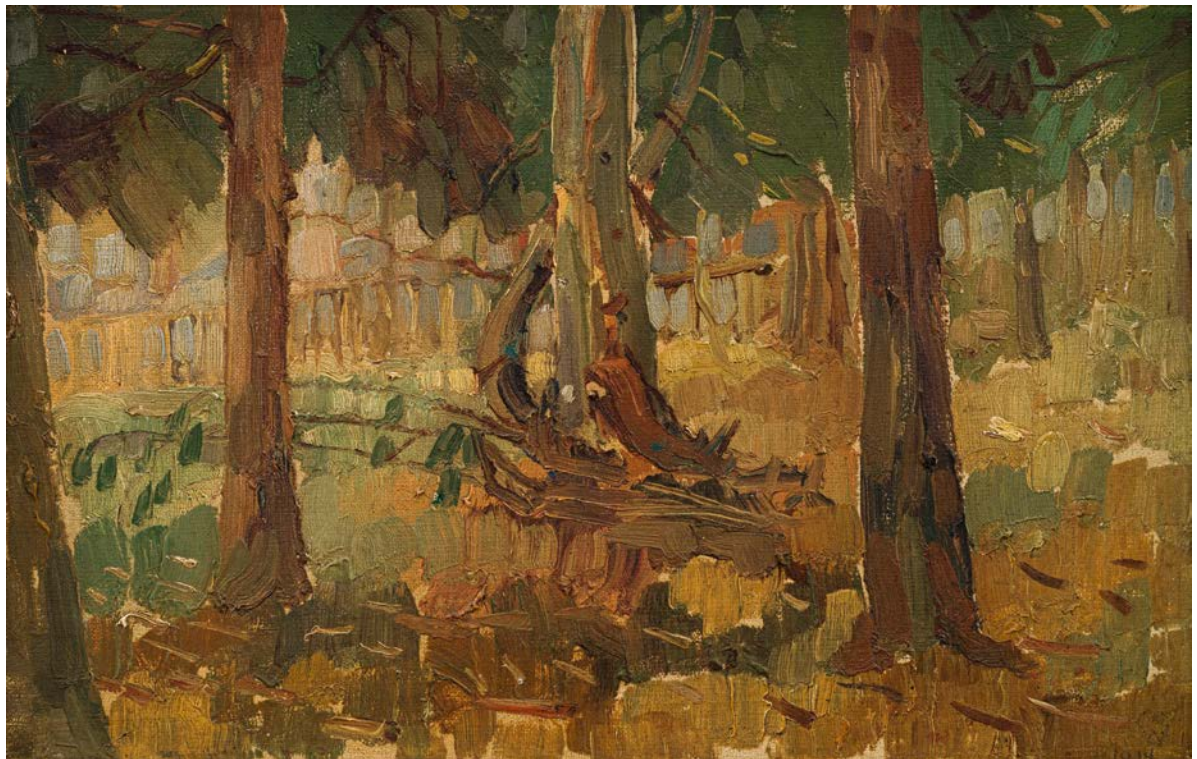
Trees

signed with the artist's
monogram and dated 1914;
inscribed with the artist's name
and the title on a Strydom Gallery
label adhered to the reverse
oil on canvas
22,5 by 34,5 cm

R100 000 – 150 000



458



459

PROVENANCE:
Strydom Gallery,
Stephan Welz & Co, Cape Town,
13 February 2007, lot 891.



460

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

Houses in Pink and Grey

signed and dated 1957

oil on board

42 by 31 cm

R150 000 – 200 000

PROVENANCE

Bonhams, London, 27 October
2010, lot 65.



461

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

Cape Homestead

signed and dated 50

oil on board

45 by 60 cm

R800 000 – 1 200 000



462

Pieter Wenning

SOUTH AFRICAN 1873–1921

Landscape, Pretoriaoil on board
35 by 42,5 cm**R500 000 – 700 000****PROVENANCE**Gordon Campbell Tomlinson.
Strauss & Co, Johannesburg, 1 November 2010, lot 155.
Private Collection.**ITEM NOTES**

Attending an auction of Pieter Wenning's works at Ernest Lezard in February 1919, Gordon Campbell Tomlinson, an attorney at Vredefort, author, and a major player in the second Afrikaans language movement, purchased two pictures, including the gorgeous *Landscape, Pretoria*. He paid £15, a record for Wenning at the time. While Wenning's debt to the artists of The Hague School is clear in this work, his Pretorian palette, with lush summer greens, creamy whites in the clouds, and the bright denim blue of the Highveld sky, is more vivid and dazzling. A sense of confidence and freedom comes across in the brushstroke, while exciting flashes of intense olive and terracotta punctuate the scene.



A photograph of Mr Gordon Campbell Tomlinson's sitting room – with the current lot visible at top left – that appeared in *Die Huisgenoot*, 25 June 1954.

463

Jan Ernst Abraham Volschenk

SOUTH AFRICAN 1853–1936

*Zand Veld and Heather,
Riversdale*

signed and dated 1922; signed, dated
and inscribed with the title on the
reverse

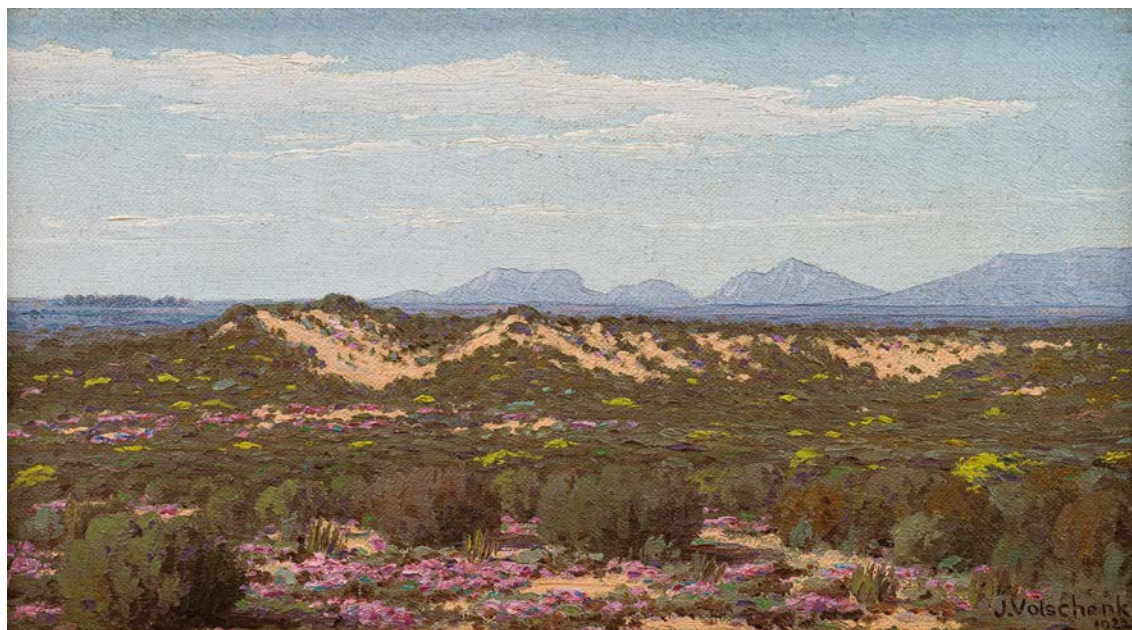
oil on canvas

18,5 by 33 cm

R40 000 – 60 000

PROVENANCE

Stephan Welz & Co, Cape Town,
20 October 2009, lot 599.



464

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

Mount Ararat, Eastern Freestate

signed and dated 1963; inscribed
with the artist's name, the title and
the medium on a label adhered to
the reverse

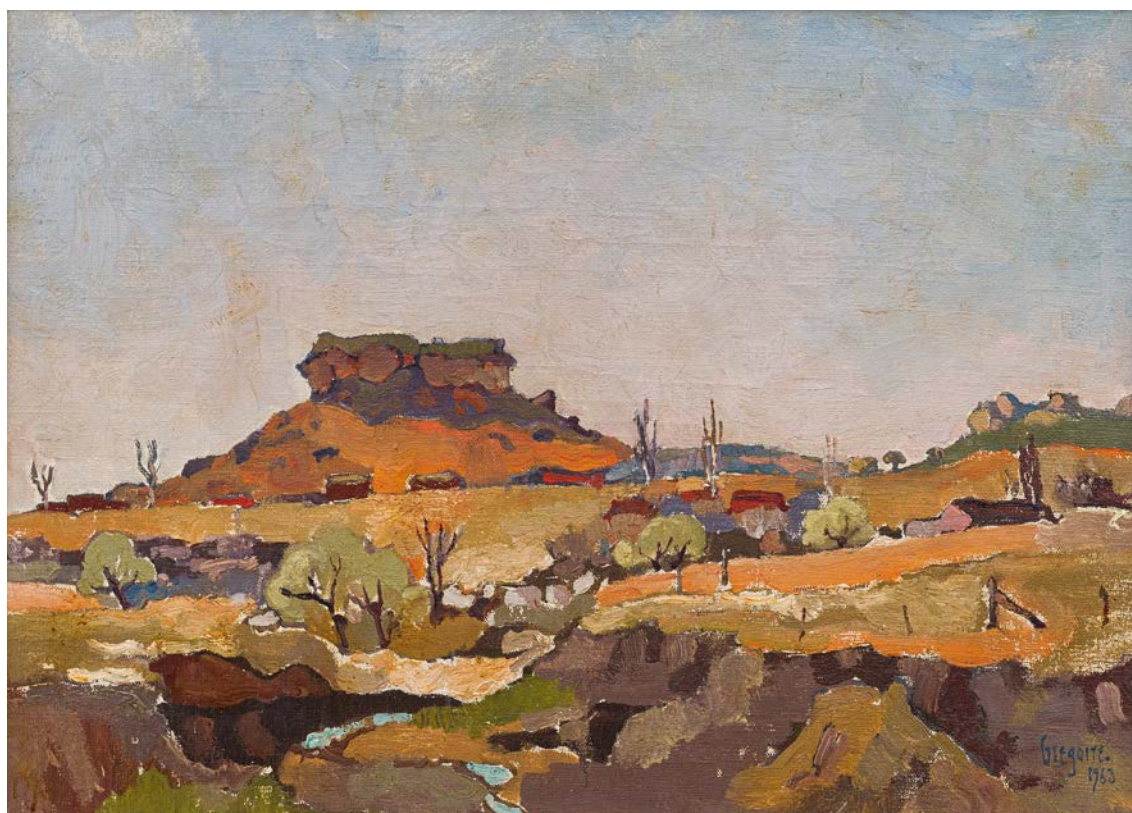
oil on canvas laid down on board

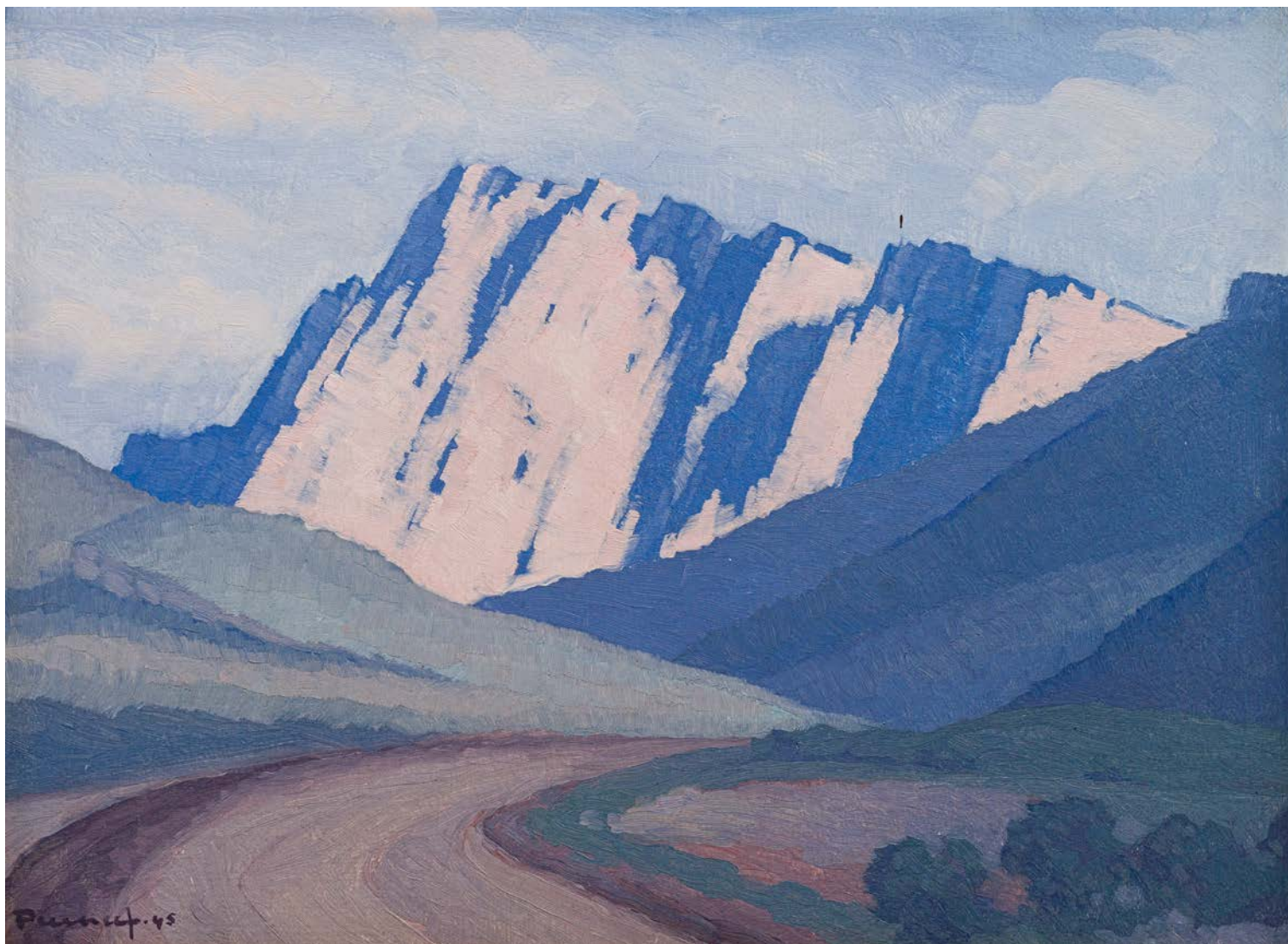
39 by 54 cm

R150 000 – 200 000

PROVENANCE

Stephan Welz & Co, Johannesburg,
4 August 2009, lot 284.





465

Jacob Hendrik Pierneef

SOUTH AFRICAN 1886–1957

Mountain Pass

signed and dated 45

oil on board

29 by 39,5 cm

R350 000 – 500 000

466

Hugo Naudé

SOUTH AFRICAN 1868–1941

Seascape, Hermanus

signed

oil on board

25,5 by 35,5 cm

R80 000 – 120 000



467

Gregoire Boonzaier

SOUTH AFRICAN 1909–2005

Huisies, Suurbraak

signed and dated 1967

oil on canvas laid down on board

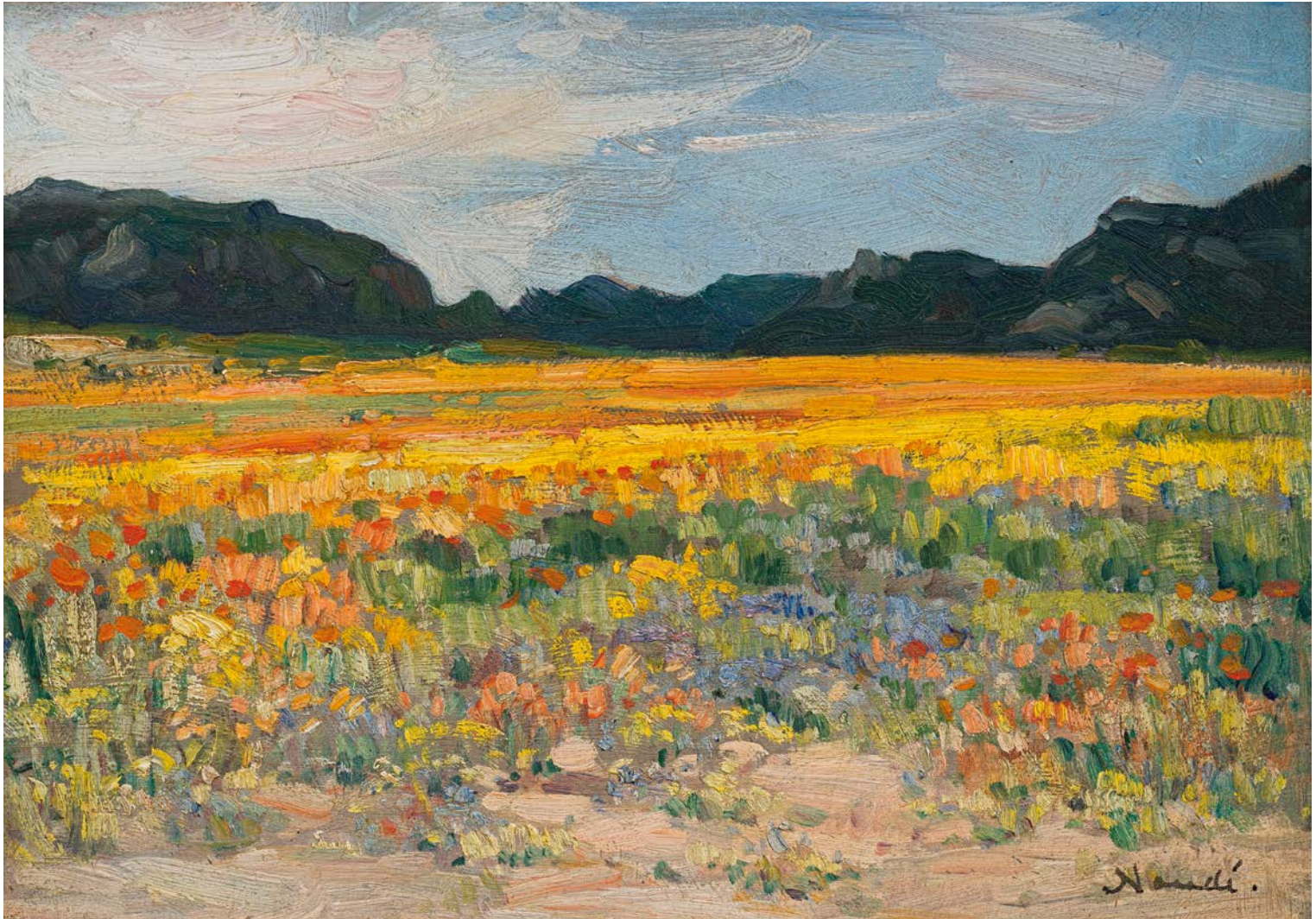
26 by 43 cm

R80 000 – 120 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Cape Town,
11 October 2010, lot 213.





468

Hugo Naudé

SOUTH AFRICAN 1868-1941

Namakwaland

signed

oil on wood panel

24,5 by 34 cm

R150 000 – 250 000

469

Gerard Sekoto

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1993

The Visitor, Eastwood

signed

oil on canvas laid down on board

45,5 by 40 cm

R3 000 000 – 4 000 000**EXHIBITED**

Wits Art Museum, Johannesburg, *Song for Sekoto*, retrospective exhibition to celebrate the centenary of the artist's birth, 26 April to 2 June 2013.

LITERATURE

Gerard Sekoto Foundation (2013) *Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto 1913–2013*, exhibition catalogue, Johannesburg: The Gerard Sekoto Foundation, illustrated in colour on page 102.

Not only did Gerard Sekoto never pass up any opportunity to speak out against racism,¹ but he also used every opportunity to depict the plight of its victims. As Mary-Jane Darroll writes: 'In his personal writings Sekoto clearly challenges his socio-political entrapment and that of his neighbours and fellow citizens. His artworks arose out of a consciousness, strongly sensitised by the oppressive nature of everyday life for 'non-white' South Africans. Through the depiction of domestic scenes, his work shows up the injustices of their time. Sekoto's detailed depictions of life, family and society in Sophiatown, Johannesburg 1938–42, District Six, Cape Town 1942–45, and Eastwood, Pretoria 1945–47, provide viewers with a valuable historical commentary on the prevalent social mores of the day.'²

The social, rather than the aesthetic factors were more important to Sekoto when he painted these scenes.³ An engaging social interaction is evident in the present lot, *The Visitor, Eastwood*: a local woman stands in the middle of the road, in conversation with a visiting cyclist, a scene pitted against the landscape beyond it. Sekoto flouts the conventional figures-in-a-landscape composition characteristic of such artists as Maggie Laubser by foregrounding the group, and arranging the figures in an interesting manner. In most of the works of this period, Sekoto captures people in mid-sentence, actively conversing with one another.

The landscape acts as compositional and thematic backdrop in his work, lending itself to dramatising the effects of social, economic and political realities

of the time. It configures interesting power relationships between the people depicted in the scenes. Says Sekoto, 'What I wanted to catch was the life of the people and their expressions.'⁴ The power in the present lot is clearly with the woman: she is talking to the visitor, possibly a stranger, and holding the child defensively by the arm. Is she just on the point of leaving, and about to hurry the child on? The narrative complexity of the scenes is subtly enhanced.

The formal innovation in his work and the depth of his thematic concerns, make Sekoto the true father of African modernism.

1. In Barbara Lindop (2013) *Song for Sekoto: Gerard Sekoto: 1913–2013*, Johannesburg: The Gerard Sekoto Foundation, page 20.

2. *Ibid*, page 22.

3. Mzuzile Mdudzi Xakaza, *ibid*, page 91.

4. *Ibid*, page 91.



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470

470

François Krige

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1994

Vase of Proteas

signed and dated 83
oil on board
28,5 by 23,5 cm

R60 000 – 80 000



471

471

Freida Lock

SOUTH AFRICAN 1902–1962

Still Life with Flowers

signed and dated 46
oil on canvas
35 by 40,5 cm

R120 000 – 160 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Johannesburg,
November 2014, Lot 204.



472

472

Pieter Wenning

SOUTH AFRICAN 1873–1921

Vase of Crassulas

signed
oil on canvas
35 by 24,5 cm

R300 000 – 400 000

PROVENANCE

Aubrey Krook.
Prof Ernst van Heerden.
Strauss & Co, Johannesburg,
29 July 2009, lot 261.
Private Collection.

473

Nita Spilhaus

GERMAN/SOUTH AFRICAN 1878–1967

Figures in a Landscape

signed with the artist's monogram;
signed and dated 1960 on the
reverse

oil on canvas laid down on board
25,5 by 35 cm

R40 000 – 60 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Cape Town, 11 October
2010, lot 139.

474

François Krige

SOUTH AFRICAN 1913–1994

Tolbos Farm

signed and dated 87
oil on canvas laid down on board
58 by 90 cm

R250 000 – 350 000

PROVENANCE

Bonhams, London, 14 October 2009,
lot 161.

ITEM NOTES

François Krige and his wife Sylvia had family friends, the Pienaars, who owned a farm in the Koo Valley, near the town of Montagu where the Kriges lived. Whenever the Pienaars were away, the Kriges would take care of the farm, which provided the ideal opportunity for painting excursions in the nearby hills. The present lot was painted on the farm, and it depicts a rocky outcrop with clumps of veld grass and other indigenous vegetation typical of the area, including a protea bush about to flower on the right. The artist has used a distinctly post-impressionist palette, reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's landscapes painted while he was in Arles, and the composition brings to mind Paul Cézanne's numerous paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire, the craggy peak near his home town of Aix-en-Provence, a motif he returned to time and again. Like Cézanne, Krige has used blocks of colour – green, yellows, blues and lilacs – to construct the forms on the picture plane, but he remains within a representational mode and has not moved as close to abstraction as the Provençal master did in his later years.



475

Irma Stern

SOUTH AFRICAN 1894–1966

Congo Forest Scene

signed and dated 1941
oil on canvas, in the original
Zanzibar frame
69 by 68 cm

R4 000 000 – 6 000 000

Best known for her energetic portraits and still lifes, Irma Stern also produced a considerable number of landscapes – in oil, gouache and tempera – throughout her career, enough to merit focus in a comprehensive 2003 survey exhibition in Johannesburg. Stern's earliest significant work in this genre dates from 1922. It depicts one of the twelve bridges on the then recently constructed Isipingo–Umzinto line of the South Coast railway, at Umgababa, a beach resort south of Durban where Stern also produced her formative figure studies. At a time when artistic practice and cultural debate held landscape portrayals in highest esteem, especially picturesque and heroic studies of unsullied and empty panoramas, Stern charted a different course in her practice. Wilhelm van Rensburg, curator of the 2003 exhibition, notes how, right

from the outset, Stern was 'aware of the intrusion of colonial culture and modes of political economy present in nature.'¹

The present lot, made during the artist's second visit to the Belgian Congo (now Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1946 and depicting a banana plantation, most likely in the Lake Kivu region, reiterates this insight. By 1946, table bananas – along with sugar, palm oil, coffee, cocoa, rubber, tea, and tobacco – formed an important, if globally marginal, contribution to Belgian Congo's overall agricultural economy.² Cultivation was split between large agri-enterprises and peasant farmers who staggered planting in forested environments in the wet foothills. Working en plein air, Stern produced a number of landscapes descriptive of Belgian Congo domesticated wilderness. The erect fronds in the foreground of

this lot are her principal subject, albeit camouflaged by a recessive landscape of vegetable greens that ultimately yields to alpine blues and an informal sky redolent of John Constable's experimental cloud studies from the 1820s.

Although frequently eulogised as an expressionist painter, Stern's landscapes from her triumphant middle period (1931–1946), reveal her impressionist methods. Her colours are engines of form. While her brushwork assiduously denotes things – foliage, mountains, sky – Stern does not subordinate her mark making to representation. She was a painter of impressions, not a photographer documenting and inventorying things. Joseph Sachs in 1942 praised the masterly way she simplified nature. Stern's skill, thought Sachs, was 'putting down on the canvas the general impres-

sion of a landscape – the impression which is the emotional response to the visual impact rather than the accumulation of material detail.'³ Sachs favourably compared her to Gauguin and Cezanne, flattery that Stern often sought and projected. It bears noting, however, that her Congo landscapes share greater affinity with lesser-known French orientalist painters working in a post-impressionist idiom, as well as with Clement Serneels, who worked contemporaneous to Stern in Belgian Congo.

1. Wilhelm van Rensburg (2003) *Irma Stern: Expressions of a Journey*, Johannesburg: Standard Bank Gallery, page 15.

2. Vladimir Drachoussoff (1965) 'Agricultural Change in the Belgian Congo: 1945–1960', in *Food Research Institute Studies*, Stanford University, Food Research Institute, Vol. 5(2), pages 1–65.

3. Joseph Sachs (1942) *Irma Stern and the Spirit of Africa*, Pretoria: J.L. van Schaik, page 39.





476

Walter Battiss

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906–1982

*Figures in an
Abstract Landscape*

signed
oil on canvas
40 by 50 cm

R200 000 – 300 000



477

Cecil Skotnes

SOUTH AFRICAN 1926–2009

Head

signed

painted and incised wood panel
102 by 76 by 6 cm

R300 000 – 500 000

PROVENANCE

Strauss & Co, Johannesburg,
7 September 2009, lot 95.

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478

Maud Sumner

SOUTH AFRICAN 1902–1985

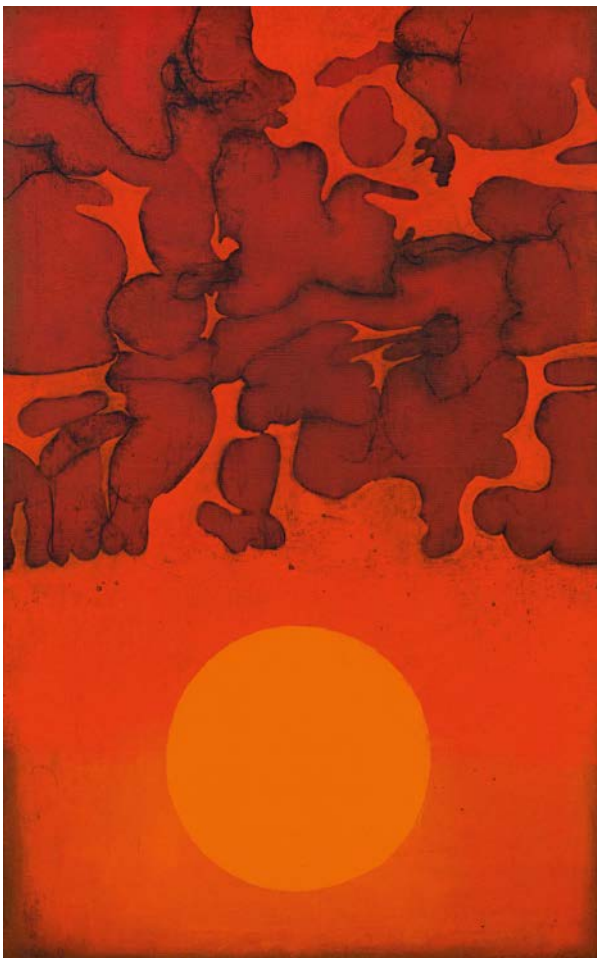
Thames, Evening Barges

signed; inscribed with
the title on the reverse
oil on canvas
49 by 99 cm

R200 000 – 300 000

PROVENANCE

Graham's Fine Art Auctioneers,
Johannesburg, 7 May 2009, lot 95.



479

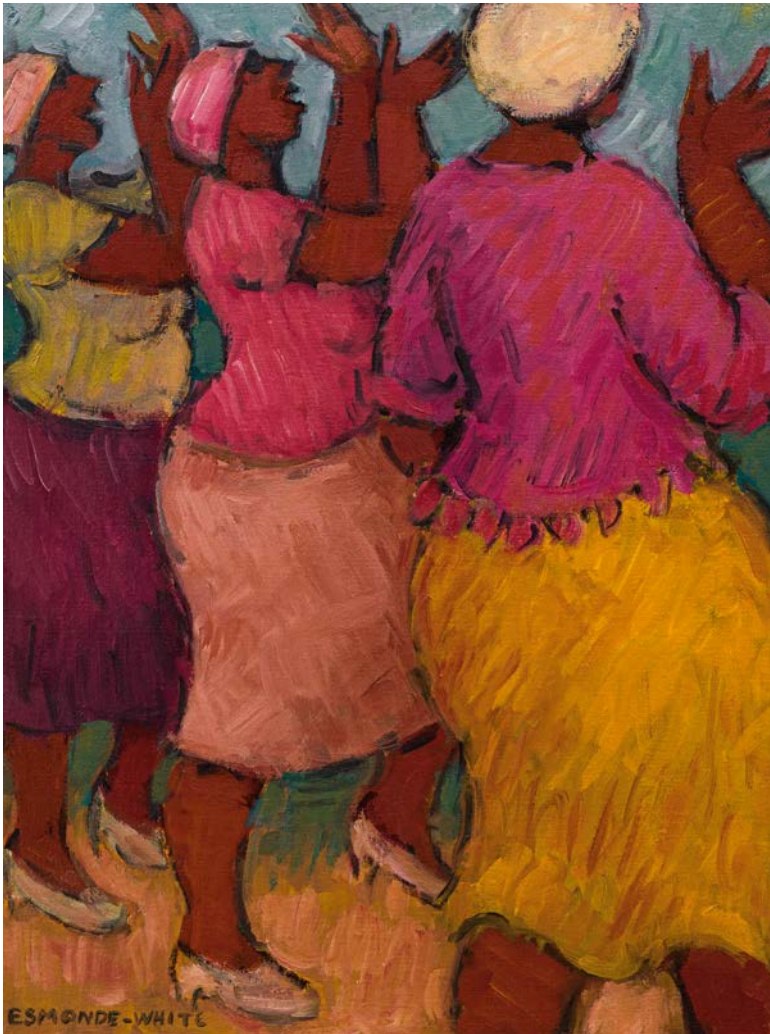
Douglas Portway

SOUTH AFRICAN 1922–1993

Red Sky with Sun and Clouds

signed and dated 71
oil on canvas
121,5 by 75 cm

R80 000 – 120 000



480

Eleanor Esmonde-White

SOUTH AFRICAN 1914–2007

Three Women Singing and Dancing

signed
oil on canvas
40 by 30 cm

R100 000 – 150 000**PROVENANCE**

Strauss & Co, Johannesburg,
7 September 2009, lot 147.

LITERATURE

Leanne Raymond (2015) *Eleanor Esmonde-White*, Paarl: Main Street Publishing, illustrated in colour on page 98.



481

Maurice van Essche

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906–1977

Portrait of a Young Woman

signed and dated 65; inscribed with
the artist's name, the title, the date
and the medium on a Johans Borman
label adhered to the reverse

oil on board
60 by 39 cm

R150 000 – 200 000

482

William Kentridge

SOUTH AFRICAN 1955–

Fire Walker

signed, numbered II and 2/12 in
pencil and embossed with the Artist
Proof Studio chopmark in the margin
ink wash with linocut
66 by 46 cm

R150 000 – 250 000



483

Edoardo Villa

SOUTH AFRICAN 1915–2011

Mother and Child

signed and number AP
 bronze with a brown patina on a
 steel base
 height: 220 cm including base,
 length: 51 cm, width: 51 cm

R900 000 – 1 200 000

Strauss & Co is particularly fortunate to be presenting on auction a wonderful selection of sculptures by the master sculptor Edoardo Villa. Among these are two outstanding large scale works both bearing the title, *Mother and Child*. Lot 442 is a 490cm high painted tubular steel sculpture produced in 1974, considered to be one of the most significant Villas to come to auction, and the present lot, a magnificent *Mother and Child* bronze cast by Luigi Gamberini at the Vignali Foundry in 1983.

This bronze *Mother and Child*, Lot 483, a more angular version, was cast in the same year that Villa completed another somewhat larger bronze of the same title that was destined for the gardens of the Durban Art Gallery. When the latter was installed Andrew Verster, with glowing appreciation, described the bronze as 'Quiet, dignified, elegant and loving. A simple column, its tallness gives it a spiritual presence that lifts it above the mundane.'¹ It is remarkable how in both these bronzes the child is so lovingly swaddled in the arms of her mother that only the head of the child is visible.

Italian born Villa was interned as a prisoner of war from 1942 to 1946 at Zonderwater prison of war camp, but even during this time he assiduously pursued his interest in art. Esmé Berman remarked that, 'his devoted study of the bronzes of Auguste Rodin heightened his appreciation of the place of light on surfaces and the role of hollows and projections in affirming the vitality of the sculpted object.'² Once liberated, the young Villa was eager to nourish his vision in the freedom of his adopted country and he perceptively absorbed local influences while keeping a keen eye on international artistic developments, such as those of European modernists Constantin Brâncuși and Jean Arp.

1. Amalie von Maltitz and Karel Nel (2005) 'Edoardo Villa, A Life Considered', in Karel Nel, Elizabeth Burroughs and Amalie von Maltitz (eds), *Villa at 90*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball with Shelf Publishing, page 82.

2. Esmé Berman (2005) 'Foreword', in Karel Nel, Elizabeth Burroughs and Amalie von Maltitz (eds), *Villa at 90*, Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball with Shelf Publishing, page 2.





484

Walter Battiss

SOUTH AFRICAN 1906-1982

Karoo Waterhole

signed

oil on canvas

38,5 by 44 cm

R80 000 – 120 000



485

Norman Catherine

SOUTH AFRICAN 1949–

Legal Advisor

signed and dated 2009;

titled in the painting

oil on canvas

120 by 100 cm

R250 000 – 350 000

486

Walter Meyer

SOUTH AFRICAN 1965–2017

Dusk

signed with the artist's initials and dated 97; inscribed with the artist's name, the title and the medium on an Everard Read gallery label adhered to the reverse
oil on canvas
40 by 50 cm

R40 000 – 60 000



487

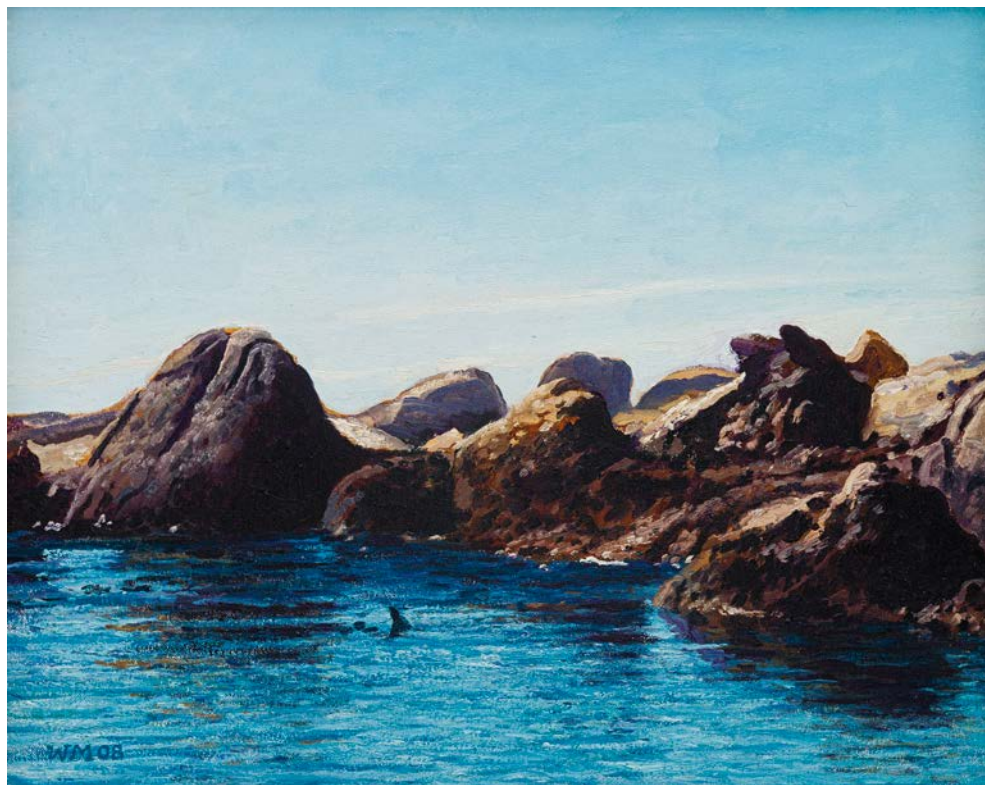
Walter Meyer

SOUTH AFRICAN 1965–2017

Rock Pool with Kelp

signed with the artist's initials and dated 08
oil on canvas
39 by 49 cm

R40 000 – 60 000





488

Dylan Lewis

SOUTH AFRICAN 1964-

Cheetah Running III

signed, numbered 9/12 and S236

bronze

height: 151 cm, length: 260 cm,

width: 50 cm

R900 000 – 1 200 000



489

Keith Alexander

SOUTH AFRICAN 1946–1998

The Boulder

signed and dated 88

oil on canvas

92 by 122 cm

R350 000 – 500 000



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490

Judith Mason

SOUTH AFRICAN 1938–2016

Study for Embrace

signed; signed and inscribed
with the title on the reverse

oil on board

63,5 by 86 cm

R70 000 – 100 000

END OF SALE