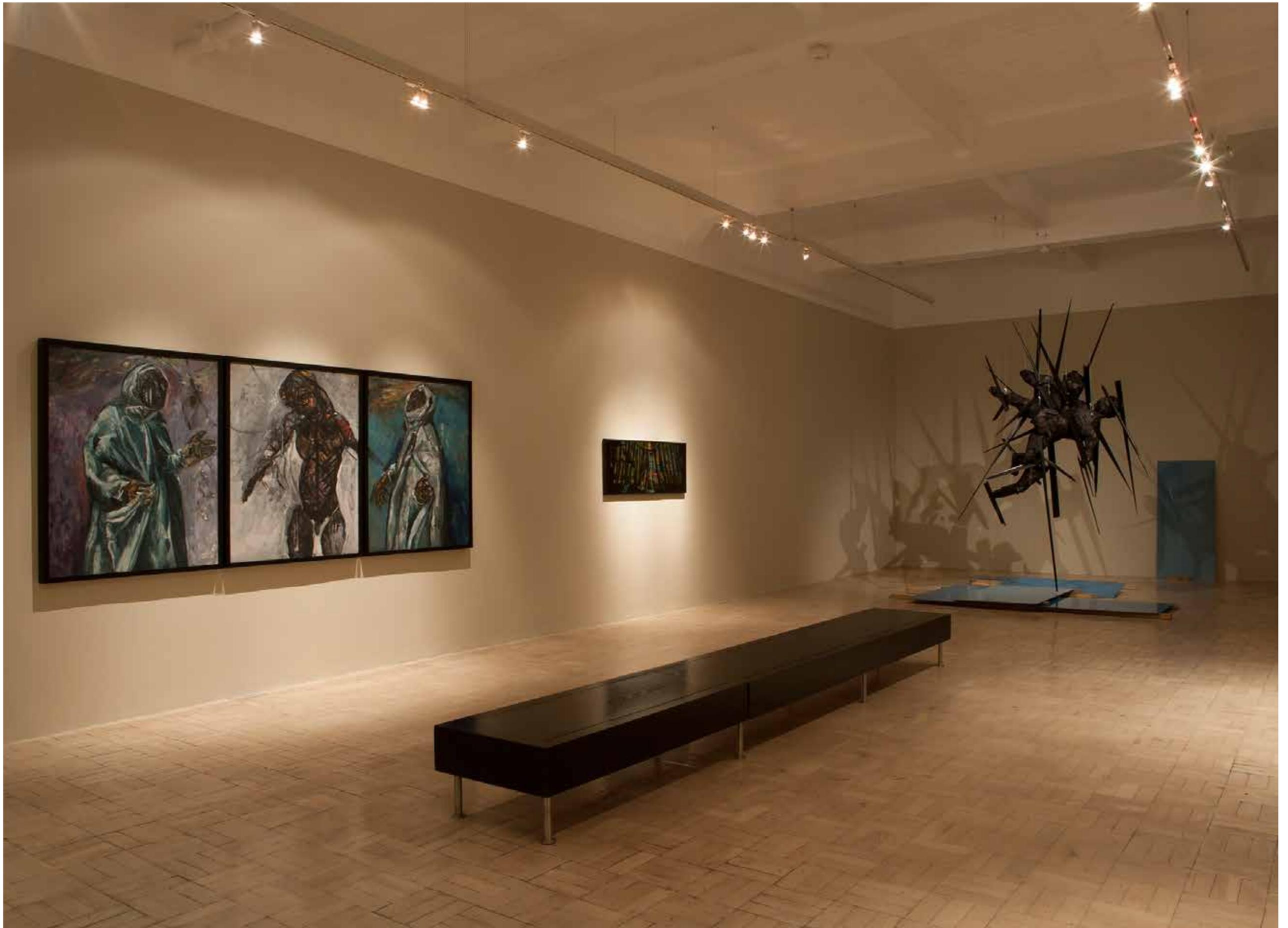
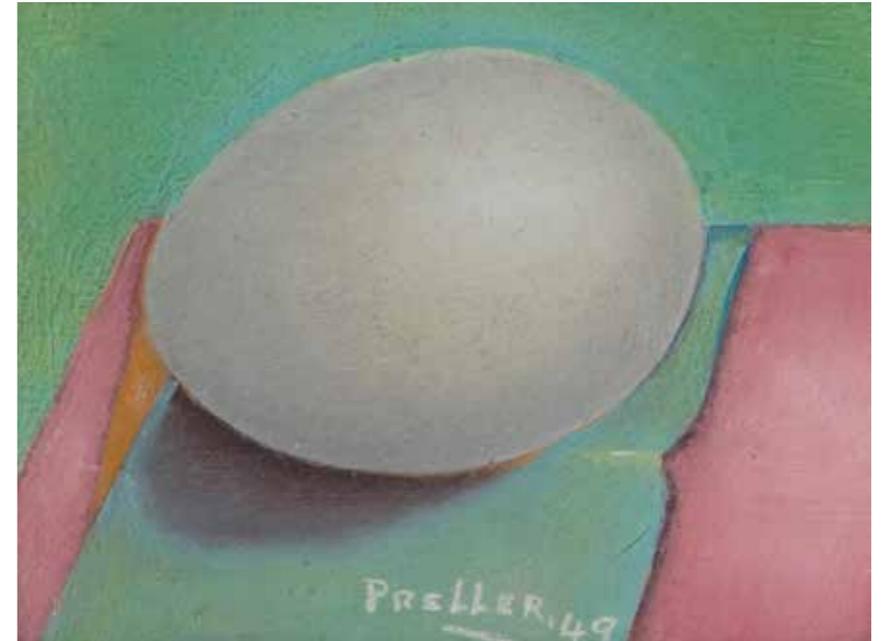
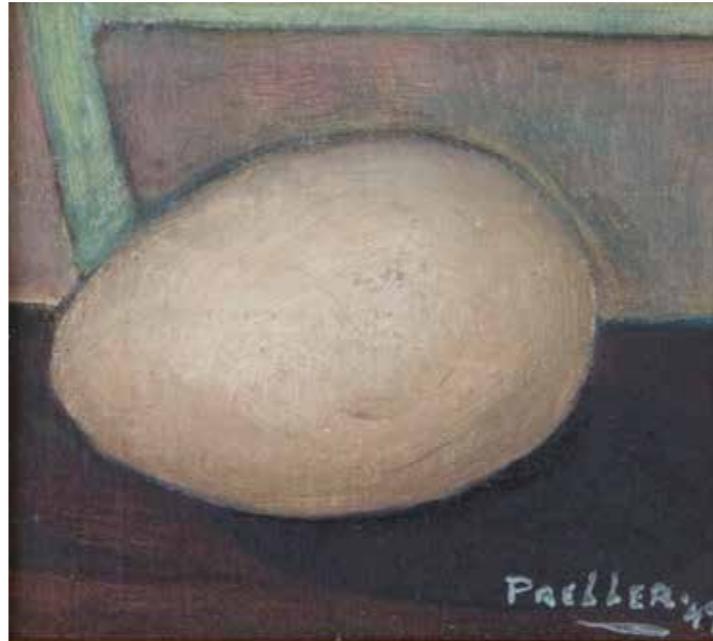
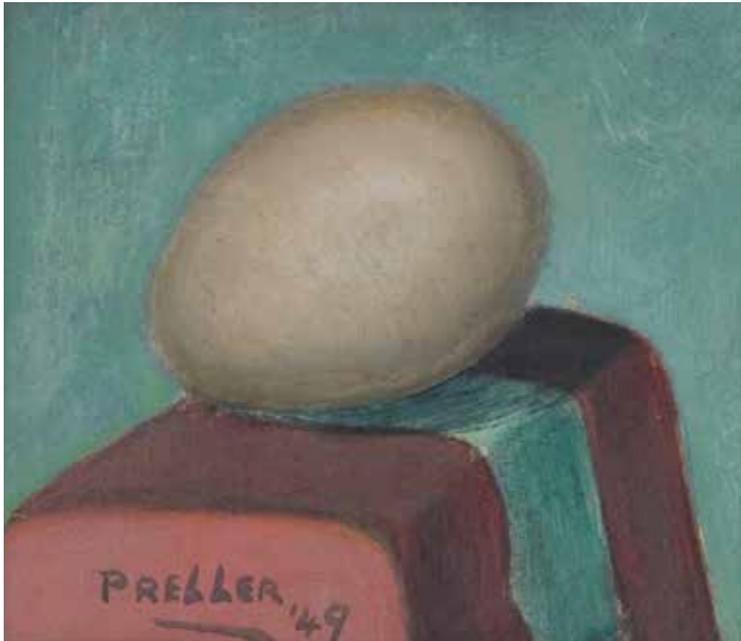




# PERSPECTIVES 1

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1.  
Alexis Preller  
*The Egg 1-3*

# 1. ALEXIS PRELLER (1911-1975)

*The Egg 1-3*

1949

Oil on board

8 x 9.5cm, 7 x 8.5cm, 7.5 x 10cm

Signed and dated

Alexis Preller, at his retrospective exhibition in 1972, described his oeuvre as 'a very direct narrative, with a true beginning and a true indication of a conclusion'. Few images evoke the idea of beginnings more succinctly than the perfect, unblemished ovoid of the egg, and it was one of the motifs that Preller returned to again and again in his work. In instances, an egg even stood in for the artist himself, as in *Still-life with Eggs*, painted in 1948 (Berman and Nel, Vol II, illustrated pp64-5). Or they took on other meanings as in the box of eggs in the various Icarus paintings (pp106, 250-1), in *Eggs on a Plate*, 1957 (p107) and in one of the last paintings in which eggs featured prominently, *Plate of Eggs*, 1973 (pp253-4).

These three paintings of single eggs were all painted in 1949, a time which was a new beginning for Preller after he decided to give up his studio in Ygdrasil in search of new inspiration. In these paintings, Preller rests the eggs on a plain surface; by accentuating their depth, they become volumetric forms that seem to float rather than lie upon a surface, even when painted with shadows. They evoke a profound sense of serenity, contemplation, solitude and promise.

The provenance of these three eggs would suggest that he presented them as gifts to his closest friends and companions.

*Eggs 1 & 2*, Collection of Guna Massyn: Preller met Guna Massyn

(1951-1975), the attractive youth who was to become his life's companion, in 1968. After Preller died in 1975, Guna was killed in a motor accident on his way to arrange Preller's funeral; he was buried next to Preller in a walled graveyard on his Dombeya estate in Hartbeespoort.

*Egg 3*, Collection of Christi Truter: Preller met Christi Truter in 1935, and he became his partner until 1946. He was an aspiring ballet dancer and Preller was captivated by his youthful good looks and also by an emotional and artistic empathy. Truter was the author of the first monograph that was published on Preller in 1948, entitled *Alexis Preller, with notes by Christi Truter*.



REFERENCE Esmé Berman and Karel Nel, *Alexis Preller: Vol I - Africa the Sun and the Shadows; Vol II - Collected Images*, Johannesburg, 2009

PROVENANCE *Egg 1 & 2*: Guna Massyn; Private collection; Die Kunsamer, Cape Town, c2000; Private collection, Johannesburg, 2000-2014

*Egg 3*: Christi Truter; gifted to a friend; Private collection, Johannesburg, c2005-2014

EXHIBITED *Egg 1 & 2*: *Alexis Preller: Retrospective*, Pretoria Art Museum, 1972, nos 42 and 43



2.  
Albert Adams  
*South Africa 1958-59 (Deposition)*

## 2. ALBERT ADAMS (1929-2006)

*South Africa 1958-59 (Deposition)*

Oil on canvas

127 x 101.5cm each

Inscribed 'Deposition' twice on the wooden stretcher

-

My work is based on my experience of South Africa as a 'vast and terrifying prison' - an experience which even now, after a decade of democracy, still haunts me.<sup>1</sup>

Albert Adams was born in Johannesburg on 23 June 1929. His father, a Hindu, emigrated from India to South Africa in 1911. His mother, Emma Caroline, was classified as a 'coloured' South African, and she made a living as a domestic worker. At the age of four, after his parents separated, Adams moved to Cape Town with his mother and sister.

His youth in South Africa in these years of apartheid meant much confusion, frustration and pain - from his childhood when he had to sneak in and out of his mother's small room, and later when he was refused entrance to the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town because of the colour of his skin. Late in life he recalled that "'Black" art students were not allowed to work next to "White" art students, especially in nude life classes'.<sup>2</sup>

Adams studied in London from 1953 to 1957 where he was offered a scholarship to the Munich School of Art until 1959. In 1959 he studied under the Expressionist artist Oskar Kokoschka in Salzburg and they

became close friends - a recorded speech by him was played at Adams' first solo exhibition at the Modern Homes Gallery in Cape Town in 1959 (see below for text). For this exhibition Adams produced the seminal triptych *South Africa 1958-59 (Deposition)* to underscore the daily humiliation of the 'dark man'. In 2005, as Adams commented, 'Apartheid brought about conditions of great suffering, imprisonment, and in many cases death. It also brought about rebellion, 'Dictators create artists, artists rebel.'

When this work was first exhibited in 1959 it received two favourable reviews along with some questionable and confused comments. In one review, Neville Dubow in the *Cape Argus* noted Adams' 'technical ability to express himself fluently in several media, and more particularly the tremendous emotional intensity behind that expression'. It was a talent, Dubow continued, 'well above the ordinary and a training to match'.<sup>3</sup>

In the second review, Matthys Bokhorst, writing in the *Cape Times* in 1959 under the headline 'Show by Coloured Artist: A Venture Into a New Expressionism', grappled with his respect for the triptych alongside his unease with intense subject matter:

The triptych 'South Africa' I can only see as a miscarried attempt at symbolism because the treatment of the composing element - the abstracted 'Crucified Dark Man' and the two realistic Marys is so completely different as to prevent seeing the group as a unity. This, however, does not prevent us from feeling, even here, that we are in the presence of an artistic production which might well mean the beginning of a new era in South African art.

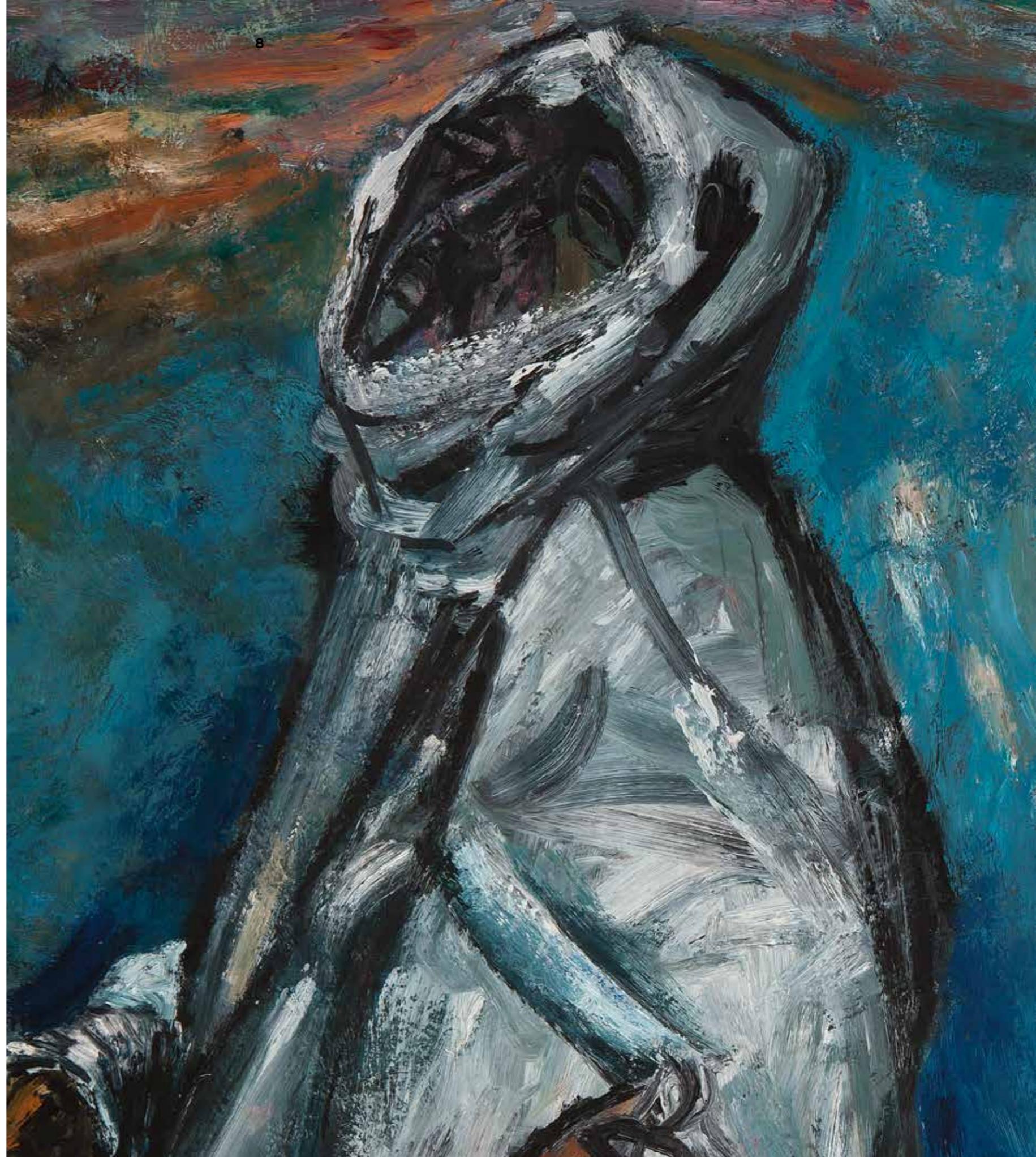
It is a venture into new, often undisciplined, but passionate expressionism, which one also finds in recent years in the art of Ceylon, Japan, Mexico, the Caribbean and certain African

1 University of Antwerp Exhibition leaflet, 2005

2 Ibid

3 Neville Dubow, *Cape Argus*, 6 October 1959





territories. White people may like it or dislike it, according to their breeding, but they must realize that they and their conceptions play very little part in it.<sup>4</sup>

On the occasion of Albert's second exhibition in Cape Town in 1960, Dubow referred to his 'brilliant expressionist technique' and compared the quality and intensity of his etchings to those of Goya. The influence of Kokoschka was profound, as was that of Francis Bacon and Picasso.<sup>5</sup>

Adams has silhouetted the central skeletal figure of a black Christ against a painterly white field. The figure itself comprises layers of painting starting with a loosely painted colour-filled ground which is incised with sgraffito, and overpainted with the black outlines of Christ's body. His head is bowed, as his body is lowered off the cross, and arms outstretched; he is flanked by Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary, each cloaked in white sculptural robes, their expressionist faces intense with lament, and hands outstretched to receive him. A background of sky colours illuminates the flanking panels, purple-lilac to the left, and blue to the right, with vestiges of a landscape on a high horizon running across them. Adams has used the suggestion of draping ropes to visually bind the panels of the triptych.

The tradition of painting the Descent from the Cross, or Deposition of Christ, stretches back to the 10th century in European painting, and in particular by artists in the Quattrocento, Renaissance and Baroque periods. The scene is described in the Gospels' accounts of Christ being taken down from the cross after his crucifixion (John 19:38-42). The Gospels mention the presence of a number of women watching the crucifixion, including the Three Marys (Mary Salome being mentioned in Mark 15:40), and also the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene who saw the burial (Mark 15:47). Some interpretations suggest that the right figure in Adams' *Deposition* is the disciple John yet the similarity of the two veiled figures would strongly suggest that the flanking figures are probably the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

After the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, Adams left South Africa and settled into a life of exile in London. When the ANC was unbanned in 1990,

he started to make regular trips to South Africa. In 2001, at the age of 72, there was a small exhibition of his work at the South African National Gallery when he reflected on his life and ambivalence about belonging to any one country or race:

For me, as I walk through the streets here I feel the passers-by regard me as a visitor. I am no longer a South African. I was never a South African.<sup>6</sup>

In a conversation in 2005 he expanded on his strongly felt belief in the universal nature of mankind:

When I visited India for the first time, I discovered that I had an enormous relationship - mainly visual - with the land. I looked at the people and thought how closely I resembled them, although I was from England and felt at home in England.

I think the most difficult question to be answered by anyone is, 'Who am I?' I have never regarded myself as an exile, although South African born and raised, I was a second-class citizen who never felt South African. I don't regard myself as British either in spite of having for the first time experienced freedom in Europe, for there is antagonism against foreigners. I have never called myself South African or mentioned that I am from South Africa.

Above all I have discovered myself in India, believing that age and education can help one to understand things. I am 72 but I still do not understand. *I am still investigating with my brush.*

Towards the end of 2006 he was diagnosed with lung cancer, and he passed away on 31 December 2006. A large retrospective of his work was finally held at the South African National Gallery in October 2008.

4 Matthys Bokhorst, *Cape Times*, 30 October 1959

5 Ibid

6 *Baggage Art: Albert Adams Self Portraits. An Interview*, 2002



In 1959, Oskar Kokoschka gave a speech at the opening of Adams' exhibition at the Modern Homes Gallery in Cape Town, as follows:

We live with closed eyes, not daring to see the misery we create on earth.

The task of the artist is to see.

It is a great pleasure for me to say a few words of introduction on the occasion of Albert Adams' s exhibition in Cape Town. In art I am anxious to concentrate on what the present has to show, because the significance of art today is more vital to us than any criticism from a conventional historical aspect of a later epoch.

We live with closed eyes, not daring to see the misery we create on earth. *The task of the artist is to see.* In the years between and after the world wars, an artistic movement became the fashion even in countries far away from Paris where it started. It did away with artistic heritage of humanity. Now this so-called "Non-objective Art" is only a signal of the general romantic spirit of modern man, who would rather visit the moon than reconcile his individual existence with the changing environment, conditioned by modern technical civilisation.

My humble opinion always was (and is) that, first of all, an artist has to provide his fellow men with visual information. This must be derived from individual experience if it is to be of any importance for others.

My young friend, the painter Albert Adams, felt the sensation of individual experience as a student in my School of Vision, which I hold every summer in Salzburg. He set his teeth into a kind of fruit, new to most of our contemporary artists. Now it is for the visitors of this exhibition in Cape Town to tell us how the fruit tastes.

REFERENCES Warren Siebrits, *South Africa: Another Country*, 2004; *Albert Adams: Journey on a Tightrope - Retrospective Exhibition*, South African National Gallery, Cape Town, 2008, illustrated, pp22, 75.

PROVENANCE Private collection, Pretoria; Warren Siebrits, Johannesburg, April 2004; Michael Stevenson, 2005; Private collection, Cape Town, 2005-2014

EXHIBITED Modern Homes Gallery, 1959; Warren Siebrits, 2004; SA National Gallery, 2008, no 7



3.  
Wim Botha  
*Annunciation*

### 3. WIM BOTHA (1974-)

*Annunciation*

2012

Wood

335 x 245 x 230cm

-

This new sculpture by Wim Botha is based on the wooden maquette that he used for his paper sculpture, *Study for the Epic Mundane*, which was shown at the South African pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2013 (illustrated right). He recently exhibited both sculptures, at either ends of an installation in the Albany Museum on the occasion of the 2014 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Interestingly, Botha has also chosen to title this work *Annunciation*, which sets it up in direct conversation with the Albert Adams triptych in this exhibition.

Botha describes his room installations in an interview by Brenton Maart, conducted at Botha's Cape Town studio on 23 May 2014, in preparation for his exhibition *The Epic Mundane*, in Grahamstown, and published in the accompanying catalogue *Rooms 2001-2014*.

Sculpture is oppressively technical and physical, and always absolutely process-bound. This is the factor that led me to the polystyrene carvings, in order to make spontaneous sculpture - large, voluminous forms that can exist as if by thinking them, like brush strokes, like a painted gesture (something not usually possible in sculpture). In this instance, trying to negate the technical is an attempt to let the sculptures become more free, expressive. The spontaneity of mark-making allowed by the polystyrene led directly to the really rough, semi-spontaneous wood carvings.

I follow a vague idea without desire and intention, and then there's a moment when it's done. And this is new to me: that



*Study for the Epic Mundane*, South African Pavilion, Venice Biennale, 2013

moment when images overlap, in focus. It's a kind of ecstasy, when a certain type of energetic experience can be engendered from a visual experience that transcends object, beauty and technicality.

Leaving it incomplete - leaving it up to people to make up their own minds - used to be something I consciously thought of. I wanted that open-endedness, and I still believe in it. Incidental sounds like it's unintended, and it's not, but it is also not manufactured. It's a welcome result of me not wanting to define something in its entirety. Aesthetically and conceptually, it becomes much less interesting for me to complete it. The more complete something is, the more you reduce its possibilities. I like allowing my *mind* to complete it, because as I grow, so it changes.

The idea of us having come into existence is improbable. The idea of making art is ridiculously improbable. So making art is the most unbelievably unlikely, precious thing imaginable. And at the same time it is utterly meaningless. It has no effect whatsoever. It does not change anything at all. And at the same time again those two realities - both profound and inconsequential - are true; they exist, and they don't negate each other; they live side by side.



4.  
Alexis Preller  
*Flight of Icarus*

## 4. ALEXIS PRELLER (1911-1975)

*Flight of Icarus*

1965

Oil and gold leaf on canvas, signed and dated

51 x 138cm

-

Throughout Alexis Preller's oeuvre he continually returned to the familiar themes of flight and Icarus, the Greek youth with a dream of flying.

Esmé Berman writes that Preller had always been excited by the challenges of making art; but in the months preceding his 20th exhibition in 1965, 'he was carried on a wave of discovery that occasioned even greater exhilaration than before'.

*Flight of Icarus* was one of the works that emanated from this period through a technique that he discovered accidentally. While working on developing an emblematic concept on an abstract foundation of gold leaf he became desperate as the desired form failed to appear.

In desperation, he seized a roller and proceeded to coat the canvas with black paint to obliterate the existing brushwork. Halfway through he paused, horrified by what he was doing, and began to wipe away the wet black paint. Again he came to a sudden halt, arrested this time by what he saw before him. The remaining streaks of black had transformed the partly realised underlying emblem into a mysterious gilded form, with hints of time-worn symbols half-hidden in the shadowed surface.

(Vol I, p246)

However, he was unable to abandon the figurative image completely and elements of previous subjects made their way back into several of his compositions exploring new realms of ritual and the heraldic in mythology and cosmology, as in the case of the story of Icarus. He used gold leaf in these paintings not only for its ornamental value but also because he felt that gold reflected the divine light of spirituality: it had associations with the sacred solar discs of the Egyptians; it symbolised the radiance of enlightenment to Buddhists.

In this painting the underlying emblems, streaked with dark folds, are transformed into a mysterious gilded form. Out of the shadowed surface, wing-shapes emerge with feathery lower edges and sweeping semi-circular marks alluding to the effect of flight.

There are a number of closely related works. Perhaps the best-known is the large *Gold Temple of the Sun*, 1965 (illustrated Berman and Nel, Vol II, pp208-9). An almost twin image in size and subject to *Flight of Icarus* is *Anubis* (Strauss and Co, Johannesburg, 12 November 2012, lot 215).

REFERENCE Esmé Berman and Karel Nel, *Alexis Preller: Vol I - Africa the Sun and the Shadows; Vol II - Collected Images*, Johannesburg: 2009

PROVENANCE Johannesburg art market, 2012; Michael Stevenson, 2012-4

EXHIBITED Lidchi Gallery, Johannesburg, 20 October 1965, no 9



5.  
Helen Sebidi  
*Who Are We and Where Are We Going?*

## 5. HELEN SEBIDI (1943-)

*Who Are We and Where Are We Going?*

2005-2008

Oil on canvas

236 x 331cm

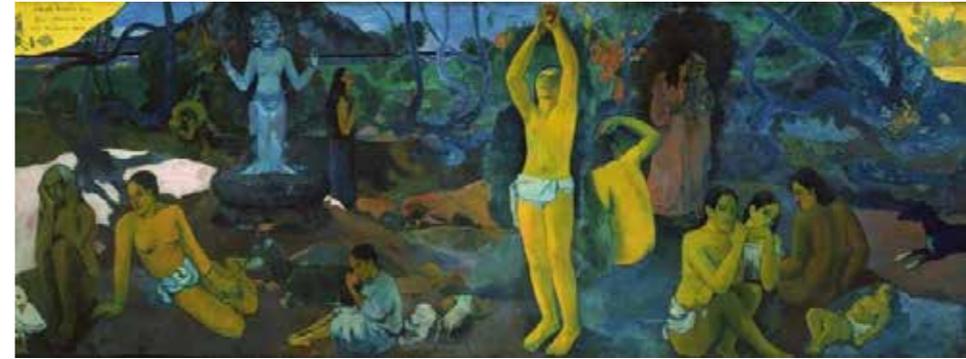
Courtesy of the artist and the Everard Read Gallery

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Mmakgabo Mapula Helen Sebidi was born in 1943 in Marapyane (Skilpadfontein), in the Hammanskraal area of the Northern Transvaal.

Her first teacher of art was her grandmother, a traditional artist who taught the vernacular aesthetic which has such a strong presence in Sebidi's work. They lived a rural life, mixing the mud that they used to construct walls and floors and which they then decorated. From her mother she learnt dressmaking and embroidery, and the artist stresses the importance of acquiring these traditional skills. Because Sebidi had limited means, she sought employment as a domestic worker in Johannesburg. In her own time she explored her creative sensibilities, and in the years 1970 to 1973 she studied informally with the black painter John Koenakeefe Mohl in Johannesburg. In 1975 she returned to Marapyane to care for her grandmother until she died in 1981, and on her return to Johannesburg worked in various art projects. In the mid-1980s she became interested in clay; she taught pottery and sculpting to children at the Katlehong Art Centre, and in 1986-87 worked at the Johannesburg Art Foundation, under the guidance of Bill Ainslie and others, and taught at the Alexandra Art Centre. Perhaps a turning point in her art and life was receiving a Fulbright scholarship for travel to the USA in 1988, and winning the Standard Bank Young Artist Award in 1989.

The title of this monumental work recalls Gauguin's iconic painting



Paul Gauguin (1858-1903), *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* 1897-1898, Museum of Fine Arts Boston

*Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* painted in 1897 and now in the Museum of Fine Arts Boston. In this work, painted in Tahiti, Gauguin asks the perennial questions of our existence, and it is then interesting that Sebidi creates a conversation between her monumental painting and Gauguin's masterwork. Like Gauguin, Sebidi constructs the image around a non-Western mythology, and in her instance, it is around the traditional beliefs of ancestors. She speaks very emphatically about the guidance provided to her by her grandmother and how she feels protected by her spirit. The imposition of Christianity, in her opinion, destroyed the traditional African values of the community. The result is that this country and its people were left destroyed, paradoxically as Sebidi recalls her grandmother saying: 'We all came from one womb, far away ...'

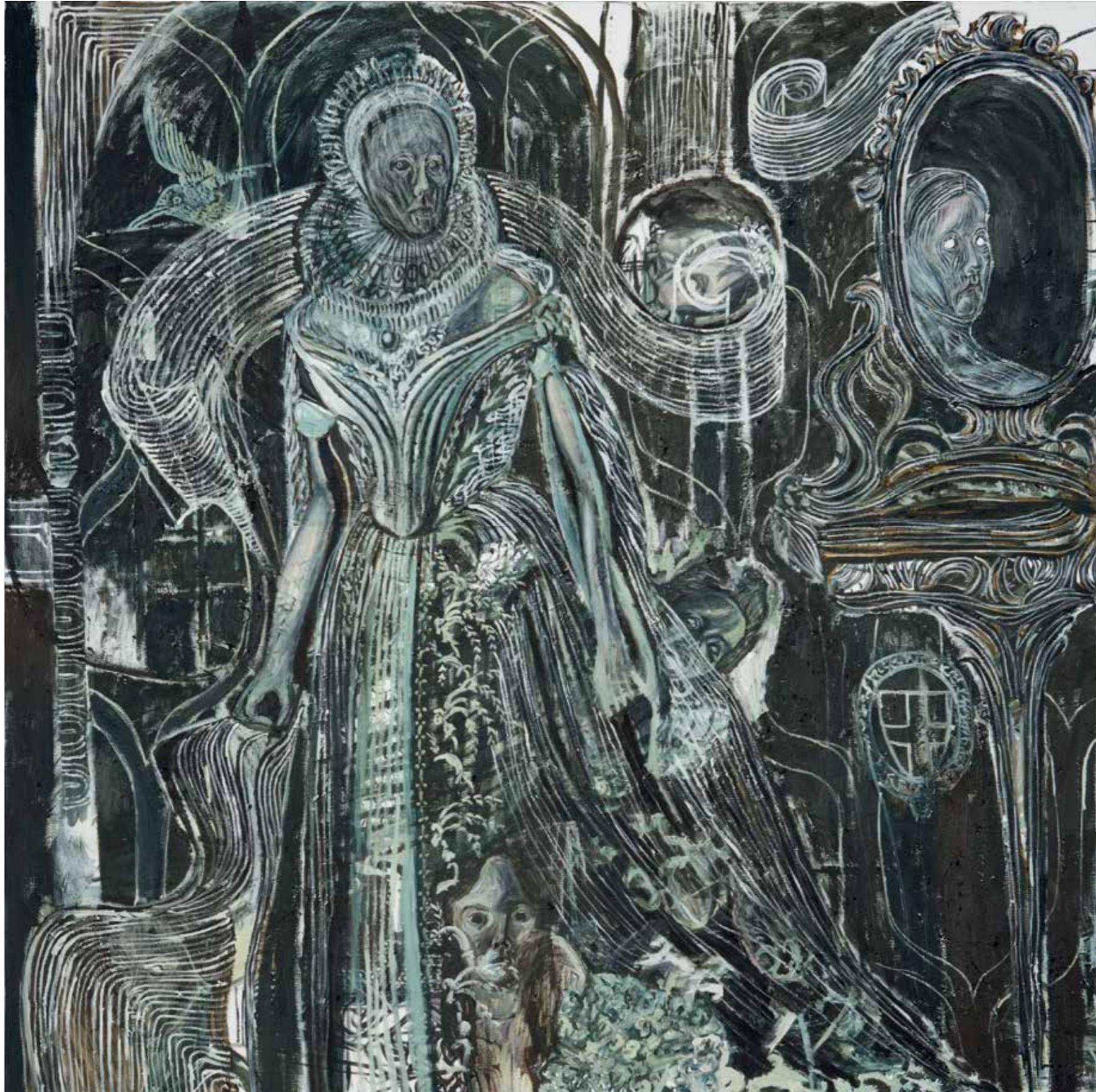
Sebidi chooses the traditional Christian form of the altarpiece for this painting. In the tradition of using multiple panels usually with a central image of Christ or the Madonna and Child and flanked by saints, the artist creates a constellation of figures and scenes that evokes reverence, awe and devotion. The large scale of Sebidi's triptych, with its many mythical figures, also evokes these responses in the viewer, and it dissolves our boundaries as we are absorbed into her celestial and ancestral universe.

REFERENCE Extracts from MJ Darroll, brochure, published by the Everard Read Gallery, Johannesburg

This work is illustrated across the title page of Juliette Leeb-du Toit, *Mmakgabo Mmapula Mmankgato Helen Sebidi*, Taxi 14, Johannesburg, 2009







6.  
Natasja Kensmil  
*Hydra*

## 6. NATASJA KENSMIL (1973-)

*Hydra*

2009

Oil on canvas

230 x 200cm

-

Natasja Kensmil's style and subject matter are unequivocally rich in references to European painting, yet her imagery has a distinct sensibility that sets it apart from this tradition. This could be related to her Surinamese parentage and that culture's imagery and cosmology. She explains:

In the domain of my ancestors, nature is inhabited by dark and light creatures. Inanimate objects are considered to be living and to have a soul just like people, animals and insects. The belief in spirits and demons is almost universal. They evoke a hallucinating world, born of subterranean thoughts, and speak of man's deeply rooted fear of darkness, and of unknown nature.

This work was first seen in her exhibition *Frozen Queen* at Michael Stevenson, Cape Town, from 11 March to 17 April 2010, and is illustrated in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition. Kensmil writes in the catalogue for that exhibition:

Elizabeth I was one of the greatest queen figures. I am not only fascinated by her appearance as a great power but also by the way she held on to this power. Although she was

regarded as a loving queen, especially in England, there was a dark side to her reign too. In the time that she ruled England, witchcraft and witch hunts occurred. Elizabeth's mother, Anne Boleyn, was accused of being a witch and sentenced to death, yet Elizabeth I granted permission for the killing of witches and many innocent people. She was probably accused of being a witch herself - she could have inherited her mother's witchcraft. Another strong concern of hers was the suppression of the Catholic Church. These different factors instilled in her a fear of losing the throne and even her life, and forced her to be a severe and merciless sovereign.

With a lot of fear I let myself be carried away by her self-destructive, traumatic looks. In the portraits I wanted to reflect the psyche of the queen - full of love, pride and glory, but also full of terror, disgust, incomprehension, loss and violence.

Kensmil was born in Amsterdam in 1973 and continues to live and work there. She studied at De Ateliers from 1996 to 1998 and her work has been included in many exhibitions in the Netherlands.



7.  
Guy Tillim  
*Shepherd, Queen's Mercy, Transkei, 1988*

## 7. GUY TILLIM (1962-)

*Shepherd, Queen's Mercy, Transkei, 1988*

Silver gelatin print

31 x 40.5cm

Handprinted c1995 by the artist, signed in pencil on reverse

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This image was taken on Guy Tillim's travels in the Transkei and Pondoland in 1988. A group of photographs that he took on these travels is now in the collection of the South African National Gallery, including this image. Although he did not include this photograph in his *Departure* series which was first published in 2003, this image resonates with his sentiments at this time of seeing beyond the limits of the photo-journalistic aesthetic that was understandably so pervasive in images from South Africa and Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. He started photographing professionally in 1986, working with the Afrapix collective until 1990. His work as a freelance photographer in South Africa for the local and foreign media included positions with Reuters between 1986 and 1988, and Agence France Presse in 1993 and 1994.

Tillim described his *Departure* series in 2003:

My journeys have been idiosyncratic, often purposeless, not so much to commit journalism as to travel for its own sake. Perhaps the more successful images reflect this; perhaps a pattern can be discerned from their parts. I can describe moments, or trace a journey, by the images I am left with. They themselves form a thread. How I came to be in a certain place seems banal, often forgotten.

These moments are elusive, alluring for being so. My brand of idealism that had its roots in the time I started photographing in South Africa during the apartheid years of the 1980s has dimmed. There was right and wrong, it seemed clear to me which side I stood. One would forego, what I might now call subtlety, for the sake of making a statement about injustice. The world's press set the tone and timbre of the reportage it would receive, and I for one was bought by it. Perhaps that is why I now look for ways to glimpse other worlds which I attempt to enter for a while.

In the years since these early black and white photographs, Tillim's work has been widely published and exhibited and collected. Nine series of his work have been published as books, most recently *Joburg: Points of View* (2014), his work was included on the Paris Triennale in 2012, Documenta 12 in 2007, and the São Paulo Biennial in 2006, and is in the collections of Tate Modern, Centre Pompidou, MOMA, amongst other museums.



8.  
Berni Searle  
*Seeking Refuge*

## 8. BERNI SEARLE (1964-)

*Seeking Refuge*

Single-channel video projection

2008

Edition 1 of 5

Commissioned by the Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno in  
Las Palmas, Canary Islands

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The video begins with a metaphor as beautiful as it is dramatic. The horizon, that line pursued relentlessly by anyone who begins a passage, is almost imperceptible beyond a black veil that flutters in the wind. It is reminiscent of a past that refuses to go away, a part to which the hands of Searle's protagonist cling. She is no longer alone on this journey. The arms that hold the veil are coloured an intense crimson red. So are her feet, which the camera shows us a few second later. She has come to shore. For a moment, the deafening wind silences the sea, but not the land, which cracks at every step. Sand, stone, salt - we move away from the shore as this character guides us along a mysterious crossing. Now, as spectators, we are also involved in their trip.

Because of its geographical position as a strategic enclave between territories, the [Canary Islands] archipelago has become a temporary destination for many African emigrants. Many die in the Atlantic Ocean or wander disoriented in their new cities... In *Seeking Refuge* we accompany Searle's protagonist as she arrives on the island of Lanzarote.

There are three elements to Lanzarote's landscape which are of critical importance in this piece: the black volcanic soil and calcified sea salt that villagers use for its benefits; the Geria, an area given over to a cultivation system that hides and protects the grapevine from adverse weather and gives the island;s landscape its peculiar architecture; and the cochinitilla or quermes, an insect that lines in the tuneras (local cactus) and contains large amounts of crimson acid, an excellent natural ink.



9.  
Penny Siopis  
*Blush: Scarlet*

## 9. PENNY SIOPIS (1953-)

*Blush: Scarlet*

2005

Oil, mixed media and found object on paper

120 x 168.5cm

-

The Romantic artists, writers and poets of the late 18th and first part of the 19th centuries were deeply curious about emotional and mystical states that cannot be objectively explained, as a reaction to the rationalisation and ordering of all existence that prevailed in the Age of Enlightenment. Artists working in this movement believed that displays of intense emotion were meaningful sources for aesthetic consideration, and experiences of dreams and death were often to be seen in their art and writing. There are many examples but the Swiss-British painter Henry Fuseli's *Nightmare*, first exhibited in 1781, is one of the most iconic, along with paintings such as Jean-Louis David's *Death of Marat* (1793) and Henry Wallis' *The Death of Chatterton* (1856).

Through engravings, the intensely sexual and erotic image of *The Nightmare* became famous. More than 200 years later the imagery still resonates with an artist like Penny Siopis who became intensely interested in emotive states in her *Shame* series in the early 2000s. These paintings formed part of her installation *Three Essays on Shame*, appropriately shown at the Freud Museum in London in 2005. With the *Blush* paintings that followed, Siopis used ink and glue, in a more restrained manner, and introduced red found objects into the visual images, and in the case of this painting, *Blush: Scarlet*, a shot of bright red fake hair.



Henry Fuseli (1741-1825), *The Nightmare*, 1781, Detroit Institute of Arts



Henry Wallis (1830-1916), *The Death of Chatterton*, 1856, Tate Britain

An observation about Fuseli's *The Nightmare*, that 'much of the power of his masterpiece derives ... from ambiguity, from its combination of classical and non-classical elements, from its illustration of both rational and irrational beliefs. And from its two layers of meaning - one universally applicable, the other intensely private' also succinctly describes the experience of viewing Siopis' *Blush: Scarlet*<sup>1</sup>.

When this work was first shown in 2005, at the Goodman Gallery, a reviewer wrote:

On the surface, *Scarlet* (2005), part of her Blush series, presents a formulaic image of a female subject constructed so as to invite the male gaze. On closer inspection, one notices that the woman has been conquered already and what this painting represents is the aftermath of a fatal seduction. This most aesthetically pleasing portrait of death recalls not only romanticised representations of death from the canons of art history but emphasises the price a woman pays for unconditionally and recklessly entreating the male gaze. In contrast to the white canvas, her daring red hair becomes the focal point. This artificial wig of hair which flows beyond the constraints of the painting, denotes sexual abandonment and rare beauty. Even in death, this subject remains enticing; despite having passed on, there is no escape from her physicality.



This painting was used on the publicity poster for the exhibition *Passions and Panics* at Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg, 5-26 November 2005.

1 Nicolas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, London., 1973, p20

REFERENCE Mary Corrigan, 'Alluring canvases deliver only violence and its aftermath', *Sunday Independent*, 13 November 2005





10.  
Wim Botha  
*Leda and the Swan*

## 10. WIM BOTHA (1974-)

*Leda and the Swan*

2005

78 x 150 x 108cm

Bone meal, marble, epoxy resin, webbing

-

Wim Botha first exhibited this work on his exhibition *Cold Fusion: Gods, Heroes and Martyrs* at Michael Stevenson Contemporary, Cape Town, in March 2005. Liese van der Watt, writing in the catalogue that accompanied his Standard Bank Award of the same year, describes this work:

After all, the history of great men - of landowners, magnates, heroes and statesmen - is necessarily also a history of victimization, expulsion and loss. Botha inaugurates this theme dramatically with an exquisite sculpture of *Leda and the Swan* as part of his 2005 solo exhibition entitled *Cold Fusion: Gods, Heroes and Martyrs*. Botha depicts Zeus-as-swan at the moment of possessing Leda, the figures sculpted primarily out of bone meal. His sculpture follows the dramatised style typical of classical depictions of mythological events and he has fragmented it, as if excavated and then reassembled. But Botha suspends each piece by yellow webbing, the moment of seductions strikingly arrested and literally interpreted to show Leda's moment of loss and destruction. What is narrated by history and depicted in art history as a moment of godly bliss and masculine potency, is revealed to be a moment of horrific rape and heartrending helplessness. Using bone meal rather than marble - that material reserved for royalty and heroes - Botha activates associations with mortality and death.

REFERENCE Liese van der Watt, 'The opposite of everyday: Wim Botha's acts of translation' in *Wim Botha: Standard Bank Young Artist 2005*, Cape Town: 2005, p10, illustrated pp50-51.  
PROVENANCE Michael Stevenson Contemporary, Cape Town, 2005; Private collection, Johannesburg 2006-2014



11.  
Sydney Kumalo  
*Reptile*

## 11. SYDNEY KUMALO (1935-1988)

*Reptile*

Length 66cm

1 of 2 cast by the Fiorini & Carney Foundry, London, c1966

-

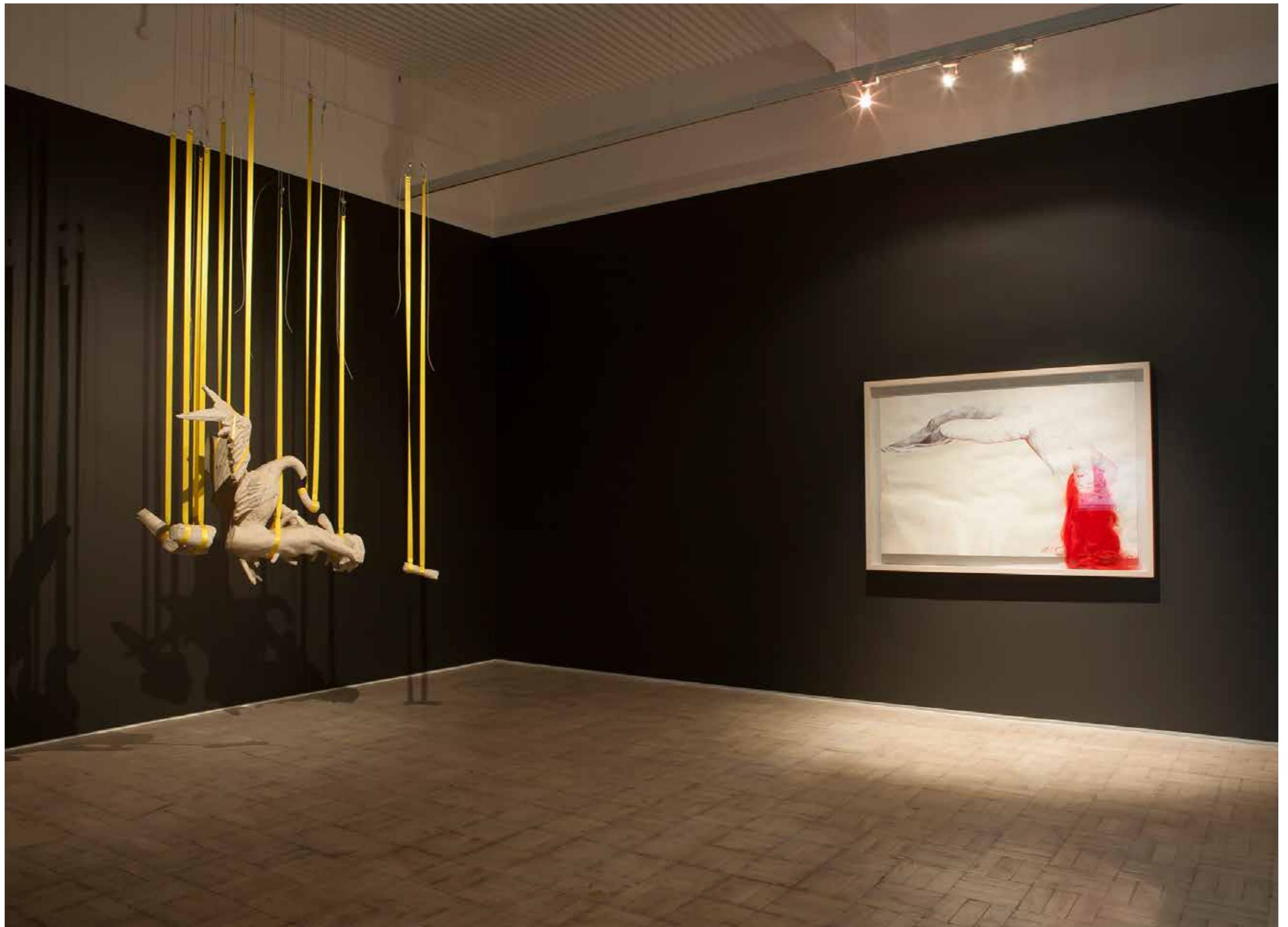
Sydney Kumalo was born and grew up in Johannesburg. He studied under Cecil Skotnes at the Polly Street Art Centre from 1953, and with sculptor Edoardo Villa from 1958 to 1959. He was employed as a teacher at Polly Street (and then the Jubilee Social Centre) in 1960, serving as an important influence on a generation of younger sculptors. His first solo exhibition took place in Johannesburg in 1962, and the following two years he exhibited as part of the Amadlozi Group, founded by the dealer Egon Guenther, alongside Skotnes, Villa, Ezrom Legae and others. He was able to devote himself to art full-time from 1964.

Kumalo would model his sculptures in terracotta, which was then cast in bronze. The cast in this catalogue dates from 1966, a momentous time in Kumalo's career. In this year he had a solo exhibition at the Egon Guenther Gallery in Johannesburg, his work was included in the South African Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and he held a joint exhibition with Cecil Skotnes at the Grosvenor Gallery in London (he had previously exhibited there in 1965 on the group exhibition *Fifty Years of Sculpture*). A brochure for the latter exhibition indicates that the pairing of Kumalo

and Skotnes was intended to illustrate to London audiences the interplay between Western and African styles in modern art, with comparisons drawn between Kumalo's work and the *Reclining Nudes* of Matisse.

This bronze was cast by the Fiorini & Carney Foundry, London, for the Grosvenor Gallery in the mid-1960s for the joint exhibition at the gallery which ran from 12 July to 6 August 1966. According to gallery records, in most instances only a small number were cast and the editions were not completed; in the case of *Reptile*, only two were cast.

PROVENANCE Two-person exhibition with Cecil Skotnes, Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1966, no 28; *Art from South Africa c1917-1980*, Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1995, no 29; *South African Art 1840 - Now*, Michael Stevenson, 2005, no 12; Private collection, Cape Town, 2005-2014



## AFTERWORD

This catalogue marks the start of a new series of exhibitions at STEVENSON. In the 1990s, Michael Stevenson dealt extensively in nineteenth- and twentieth-century South African art until the opening of the gallery in 2003, focusing on contemporary work. Going forward, the gallery will present periodic exhibitions, entitled *Perspectives*, that offer post-war South African and African works in the context of more recent works by contemporary artists.

My interest in contemporary art started as a collector, and predates my partnership in the gallery. Perhaps as a result, my intention is to link the works in these exhibitions through a quiet sensibility, in the way a collector might approach his or her home, rather than a hard curatorial framework. This allows one to discover the works, individually and collectively, at one's own pace.

I wish to encourage the act of looking and experiencing the art works without any prescriptions. My perspectives as collector, reader and dealer may, or may not, coincide with yours. (If you do wish to understand the artist's perspective and in some instances learn more about mine, there are art historical contexts for each of the works in the accompanying texts.) As Wim Botha writes along a similar theme about his works in his new catalogue, *Rooms 2001 - 2014*, "It's not that I don't want to prescribe a meaning; I don't think I can. I don't think it's possible, anymore, to say what these things must mean. The variability and the interchange between objects is so wide, I don't think I can come to a firm conclusion. I just walk through and see some of these links".

This first *Perspectives* exhibition is built around the Albert Adams triptych, a seminal work in the history of South African art. One has to remind oneself that it was painted 65 years ago because it resonates so strongly with the works of contemporary artists like Wim Botha and Helen Sebidi. In addition, works by Penny Siopis, Alexis Preller, Berni Searle, Guy Tillim, Natasja Kensmil also allude to a transitional space between life and death as well as experiences that we can feel but may have difficulty explaining.

If you wish to discuss any of these works further, or speak about possible consignments, please contact any of the directors at STEVENSON, or myself on [darren@stevenson.info](mailto:darren@stevenson.info)

Darren Levy

Cape Town, June 2014

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