

March 2017

Black Rose Africa and *Shell*, produced by Christo Coetzee at the peak of his career, are amongst a select group of works that celebrate this underrated artist at Aspire Art Auctions' inaugural Cape sale on 27 March 2017 at the Avenue in the V&A Waterfront.

Soon after completing his fine art degree at Wits, Coetzee left South Africa in 1951 on the crest of a solo exhibition organised by John Paris, then director of the South African National Gallery in Cape Town. It was to launch an extraordinary period in his career that included a two-person exhibition with the renowned Italian artist, Lucio Fontana, at the prestigious Parisian gallery of Rodolphe Stadler, and collaborations with the radical Gutai Group in Japan from 1959 to 1960.

Shell, painted in 1960, formerly owned by Marie Brecher, the mother of Coetzee's wife Ferri Binge-Coetzee, was one of the first in a new approach to painting. Its rich painterly surfaces and decorative detail are not only evidence of the influence of Antonio Gaudi's decoration of the Parc Guell and Sagrada Familia cathedral in Barcelona which Coetzee visited on extended visits to Spain but also the world of European avant-garde artists such as the French Tachistes.

During his decade-long sojourn in Europe, Coetzee's work caught the attention of major European and American collectors, including celebrated photographer and designer Anthony Denney, architect Philip Johnson and actress Sophia Loren, and was included in the seminal Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) exhibition *The art of assemblage* in 1961.

The diamond-shaped *Black Rose Africa* has a fascinating history. The stimulus for this extraordinary painting was the stained glass rose windows of the Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, a stone's throw from the artist's basement studio at Rue de l'Hotel Còlbert.

Coetzee was fascinated by what he described as "the multitude of mysteries and ideas distinctively associated with the circle as a perfect and closed unity and symbolic source of energy" as Johan Myburg points out in Aspire's informative auction catalogue. In *Black Rose Africa*, the rose-pattern formed by a myriad of predominantly black dots is overpainted with irregular petal-like forms (the half of the infinity symbol that characterised Coetzee's earlier work), textured by means of parallel hatching.

Other works by Coetzee included in Aspire Art Auctions' inaugural auction include the impressive *Italian Heads* of 1987 as well as the original painting produced in 1980 when Coetzee was commissioned to design the fire curtain for the Drama stage of the State Theatre in Pretoria.

Inaugural Cape Town Auction 2017

Avenue | V & A Waterfront | 40 Dock Road | Cape Town
27 March 2017
Day Sale | 4pm
Evening Sale | 8pm

Auction preview:

Friday 24 March | 10am to 7pm
Saturday 25 March | 10am to 5pm
Sunday 26 March | 10am to 4pm

Exhibition walkabouts:

Saturday 25 March & Sunday 26 March | 11am

For queries, please contact Emma Bedford | emma@aspireart.net | +27 83 391 7235

Image Caption

Christo Coetzee | *Black Rose Africa* | 1970/71 | oil and sand on canvas | 212.5 x 212.5 cm | Image: Repro Pictures