Alexis Preller
South African 1911-1975

Adam
1972

oil on canvas
signed and dated lower right
102 x 102 cm

ZAR 8 000 000 – 10 000 000*
USD $567 000 – 710 000
GBP £435 000 – 544 000
EUR €489 000 – 611 000

*exchange rates at 1 October 2018

SPRING AUCTION
Johannesburg | 28 October 2018
Historic, Modern & Contemporary Art

ENQUIRIES & SALE CONTACT
RUARC PEFFERS
Senior Art Specialist | Managing Director
+27 84 444 8004 | ruarc@aspireart.net
www.aspireart.net
Collecting Alexis Preller

Aspire Art Auctions has seen several highlights in sales of Alexis Preller’s work to his dedicated collectors over the last few years. His work is amongst the most collectable in South Africa and his reputation has steadily risen in the secondary market in the forty or so years since his last exhibition.

In the company’s inaugural auction in 2016, Preller’s *Profile Figures (Mirrored Image)* from 1967, sold for a remarkable ZAR7 048 160, one of the top prices ever fetched for his work, and the record price at auction for that year. This late work was one of the first paintings viewers encountered on entering his famous retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 1972, and is perhaps the best late example of his depictions of powerful and other-worldly, deified female figures.

The personal cosmology that marked his later work was again evidenced in another work sold by Aspire Art Auctions in March this year for ZAR4 547 200. *Gold Angel (Arête)* dates from 1970, and is one of Preller’s signature intaglio relief paintings which characterised the last few years of his career. A captivating work depicting a floating head in profile that combines many features of the deistic belief systems which interested the artist, including Yoruba and ancient Egypt.

Now Aspire Art Auctions brings to market one of the artist’s most remarkable late works - an electrifying oil painting from 1972 - imbued with the drama and spectacle for which Preller is most celebrated. *Adam* is one of a small group of Adamic figures that engrossed the artist in his late career. He was interested in both Adam as the first human figure, and also in Adam as a version of the Apollo of Classical antiquity, in many ways an ideal of male beauty. This current work on auction fits exactly within this group, and demonstrates many of the key characteristics of Preller’s imagining of the male psyche in his oeuvre and in his personal mythography. In the Adamic and Apollonian works around this time there is often a gender ambiguity, and a certain

continued on p.3
Collecting Alexis Preller

Aspire Art Auctions has seen several highlights in sales of Alexis Preller’s work to his dedicated collectors over the last few years. His work is amongst the most collectable in South Africa and his reputation has steadily risen in the secondary market in the forty or so years since his last exhibition.

In the company’s inaugural auction in 2016, Preller’s *Profile Figures (Mirrored Image)* from 1967, sold for a remarkable ZAR7 048 160, one of the top prices ever fetched for his work, and the record price at auction for that year. This late work was one of the first paintings viewers encountered on entering his famous retrospective exhibition at the Pretoria Art Museum in 1972, and is perhaps the best late example of his depictions of powerful and other-worldly, deified female figures. The personal cosmology that marked his later work was again evidenced in another work sold by Aspire Art Auctions in March this year for ZAR4 547 200. *Gold Angel (Arêté)* dates from 1970, and is one of Preller’s signature intaglio relief paintings which characterised the last few years of his career. A captivating work depicting a floating head in profile that combines many features of the deistic belief systems which interested the artist, including Yoruba and ancient Egypt.

Now Aspire Art Auctions brings to market one of the artist’s most remarkable late works – an electrifying oil painting from 1972 – imbued with the drama and spectacle for which Preller is most celebrated. *Adam* is one of a small group of Adamic figures that engrossed the artist in his late career. He was interested in both Adam as the first human figure, and also in Adam as a version of the Apollo of Classical antiquity, in many ways an ideal of male beauty. This current work on auction fits exactly within this group, and demonstrates many of the key characteristics of Preller’s imagining of the male psyche in his oeuvre and in his personal mythography. In the Adamic and Apollonian works around this time there is often a gender ambiguity, and a certain eroticism, which this Adam figure embodies, infused with an ethereal, saturated colour palette characteristic of some of his later work.

Preller was a unique figure in the history of South African art. His style evolved as an amalgam of different reference points and art histories, with his early exposure to European modernism in his years spent in the UK and France, and then with his committed interest in history and anthropology, in his travels in both Europe and Africa.

Far from being a simple accretion of different styles, his work progressed as a unique development of his talents and vision as a painter. His use of his so-called ‘household gods’ – *objets d’art*, bric-a-brac and tourist paraphernalia gleaned from his travels – in his often surrealist later paintings, has been widely remarked upon. But as his style matured, so too did his thematic and philosophical concerns. A series of powerfully imagined fantasy figures populate his later work, all serving to articulate Preller’s idiosyncratic yet coherently and beautifully realised mature cosmology. These figures are all signs of the artist’s visioning of an alternative universe, informed strongly by African myth and legend, but also by the themes and images of European and Classical antiquity.

Concludes Ruarc Peffers, MD of Aspire, “This rare and unique painting, which was one of only five works Preller personally selected to represent him at the São Paulo Biennale of 1973, is one that will excite his collector base. The market for his work remains strong - especially with regard to significant, museum-quality examples like this, steeped in history and pedigree ingrained in its exhibition history and provenance, enthusiastically endorsed by the artist and hailed as one of his top works at the time. We anticipate a positive response.”

---

**Provenance:**
Acquired directly from the artist, 1973. Thence by descent.

**Exhibited:**
SOUTH AFRICAN AUCTION MARKET PERFORMANCE

INTERNATIONAL AUCTION MARKET PERFORMANCE

SOLD LOT PERFORMANCE AGAINST ESTIMATE
Tracks the performance of lots against their estimate, indicating how many sold within, above or below this range, or remained unsold. This chart shows how the artist’s market performed compared to pre-sale expectations.

CHANGE IN TOTAL SALES, NUMBER OF LOTS OFFERED AND SOLD
Tracks the change in total value of sales as well as the total number of lots offered and sold annually. The chart shows whether the artist’s total sales are going up, and if so, whether this is because more works by the artist have been offered and sold or, because more high value artworks have been purchased.