



*Ape on skeleton, etching & aquatint, 43 x 33 cm*

When the Johannesburg born artist Albert Adams died in London in 2006 he left behind a remarkable body of paintings, drawings and etchings, most of which had remained unseen outside of a small circle of friends and colleagues. Of mixed race his work draws much of its substance from the voices of the down trodden and marginalized and from the idioms, folklore, traditions and the political concerns of apartheid and the post-apartheid South African and from the struggles of an émigré adapting to life in England from the 60s onwards. This exhibition will be the first time these works have been exhibited together in London.

Racial discrimination had denied Albert Adams entry into any School of Fine Art but an influential teacher and the German émigré friends of the South African artist Irma Stern, had recognized his talent and helped him financially towards a scholarship at the Slade School of Fine Art in London (1953-56). A prestigious Slade's travel award and a Bavarian State Scholarship enabled him to study at the Munich Academy and then in Salzburg to attend the master classes of Oskar Kokoschka who was to remain a lifelong friend. He returned briefly to South Africa but in 1959, the year of Sharpeville, he emigrated to England, setting up a studio in the house he shared with his life-partner in Camden where he worked in self-imposed isolation, free of the demands of any art world concerns, developing his own unique vision of the world whilst teaching in London's East End schools.

Drawings and prints form the major part of Adams' output and it is as an intaglio printmaker that he excels. There are self-portraits that span his lifetime, a series of an ape on a man or on a skeleton, an ape on a tightrope and a trapeze, an incarceration series – he had relatives who had been imprisoned on Robben Island – a series based on the atrocities of Darfur and Abu Ghraib and numerous series of animals, in the wild and caged, alienated and forced into unnatural environments. They are full of inventiveness, originality and humanity; they push the expressive possibilities of printmaking to its limits and owe a debt to Irma Stern and her refugee friends from Nazi Germany who introduced him to the works of Goya, Durer, Rembrandt and the German Expressionists. His tutors at Munich and the Slade, Adolf



*Ape on standing man, etching & aquatint, 41.5 x 29 cm*

Thiermann and Anthony Gross respectively were also internationally renowned artists who had revived the art of printmaking, but above all they declare that Albert Adams had a belief in the value of art to transform "man's inhumanity to man" into something deeper and more meaningful than its surface violence.

Since his death there has been recognition of his importance in South Africa and his work has been exhibited and also collected by the Iziko South African National Gallery in Cape Town where Joe Dolby, Curator of Prints and Drawings has commented that: *His was a vision and identity forged in the crucible of apartheid but whose range was universal and timeless and which found its full expression in his graphic art.*