

Report on Two Pierneef Paintings for Art Specialists Advisory Committee (ASAC)

At the meeting of the ASAC of 17 February 2012 I was asked to write a report on two paintings (items 1 & 5 on the agenda) in light of the fact that they both represented Black settlements in a South African context and this, as well as other factors, may contribute to them being considered articles of special historical significance given that the 'received notion' of J.H. Pierneef is that he excluded Blacks from his work and that these may be unusual historically and iconographically.

I present my findings and research on each painting below and then make general observations.



1 *View of Chuniespoort* (Oil on Canvas, 1945)

This work, a detail of which has been selected for the cover of the Bonhams catalogue is, in my view, an artistically fine painting by Pierneef. It shows a settlement built in an African vernacular style of architecture in Chuniespoort (now Chuenespoort) in what is now Limpopo Province (in Pierneef's time known as the northern Transvaal). Chuenespoort is a gorge through the foothills of the Strydpoort mountains, approx. 35 km south of Polokwane on the main road to Lydenburg. This area is of historical significance having being originally known locally as Tshwêne (from which the current corrupted name comes, and which in North Sotho means 'baboon') and was recorded Voortrekker leader Louis Trichardt's diary as the 'Klijn Poort'. The local name referred to the leader of a neighbouring Sotho tribe.



lim, K.P., *naby Bredasdorp*, (oil on canvas, 1950)

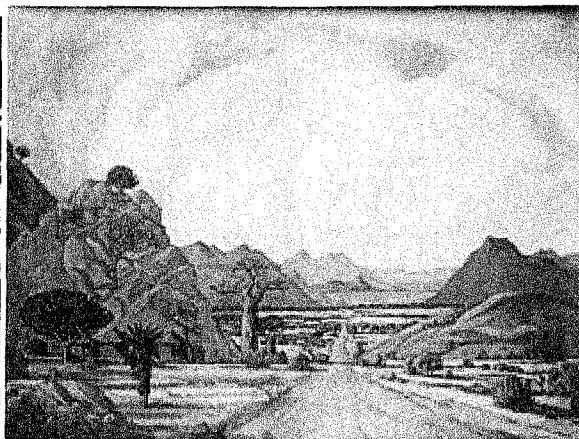
This work is, in my view, of mediocre quality, having something of a 'colouring book' feel but shows the exceptionally historically important town of Elim in the Cape Province (the titling may have been to distinguish it from Elim, near Makhado, in Limpopo Province). Elim was founded in 1824, during the waning years of slavery in the Cape by the Moravian missionaries who named it after the Biblical land mentioned in Exodus 15:27 where the Israelites set up after having crossed the Red Sea from their enslavement in Egypt. It was specifically established as a settlement for former slaves and the Moravians chose the site for its proximity to water, the likelihood that grapes for communion wine could be grown there and as a place where former slaves could be trained in practical skills for employment. It has always been, and remains demographically almost 100% 'Coloured' in population. It is the oldest settlement in the Bredasdorp area and is historically noted for its roof-thatching industry and high standards of local education. There are photographs of the town contemporaneous with this painting. (See, for example, that reproduced in *SESA*, vol. 4, p. 291.)

Comments

While it has become a chestnut of informal South African art history that 'Pierneef removed evidence of Black settlement from the landscapes he painted' there are, in fact, numerous examples of his painting such settlements in his work. He was particularly fond of representing the settlement of Matlala, also in Limpopo province. Two examples of such are reproduced below:



'Matlala's Mount' (linocut), undated



Matlala, Pietersburg (oil on canvas), 1935

I am very grateful to Eunice Basson who provided the following information on Pierneef's paintings of Black settlements which I quote verbatim:

Pierneef did indeed paint African settlements as part of his landscapes. One of the seven panels Pierneef was commissioned to paint for South Africa House in London is entitled 'Matala's Location'. It should read Matlala. These panels were his second major commission which came his way as early as 1931/32. I stand to correction but this panel might have been removed since?

There are quite a few paintings, drawings and linocuts depicting the area near Pietersburg (Polokwane) known as Matlala. Matlala's village is in close proximity to Cheune's Poort. I have seen the spelling as Chuniespoort. I have also seen a watercolour by Pierneef of Matlala's

village. A typical Bushveld setting with spectacular 'koppies' and the huts/village in the foreground. (See Nilant 1974:99)

Pierneef spent much time in the eastern Free State in the late thirties and there is the well-known painting by him entitled *Sandstone Hill* (1937) in which he depicted a Basotho village against a backdrop of the typical sandstone rockface.

Another well-known painting of his is his *Native Kraal* of 1932 (Grosskopf 1947: Catalogue section).

In the fifties Pierneef spent more time at the Lion-Cachet's farm at Henley-on-Klip and it is there where he drew much of the labourers' houses and 'dwellings' (Nel 1990:104).

There are also other lesser known examples in the National Archives in Namibia as Pierneef was a frequent visitor to that region.

Given this information it would seem that *A View of Chuniespoort*, fine as it is, is not particularly unusual in Pierneef's oeuvre.

As far as the picture of Elim goes, I approached Nico Coetzee of UNISA for comment and this was his reply:

The one of the house or homestead or cottage is really very interesting and special. Pierneef came late the depiction of Cape scenery as his patron were northerners by-and-large. But the rural Cape appeal to him greatly and he was also, and in addition, very taken with indigenous architecture. I of course can't see so well on the photocopy, but it appears not to be in pristine condition? But it should not be allowed to leave these shores. Any date known?

This picture, though not of great artistic quality, is historically important. Iconographical images of Elim, while they exist in photographs are rare in paintings and this work is historically significant.

Andrew Lamprecht
24 February 2012

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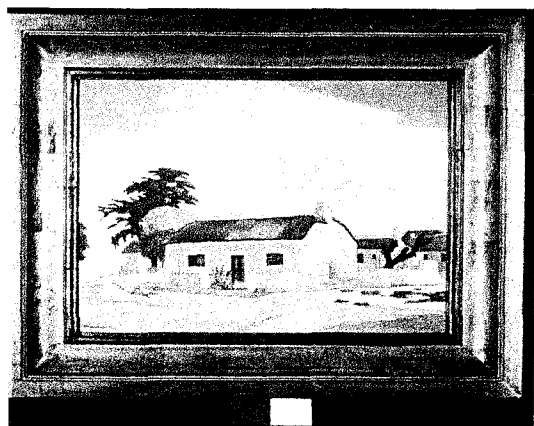
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Farm, K.P., naby Bredasdorp, (oil on canvas, 1950)

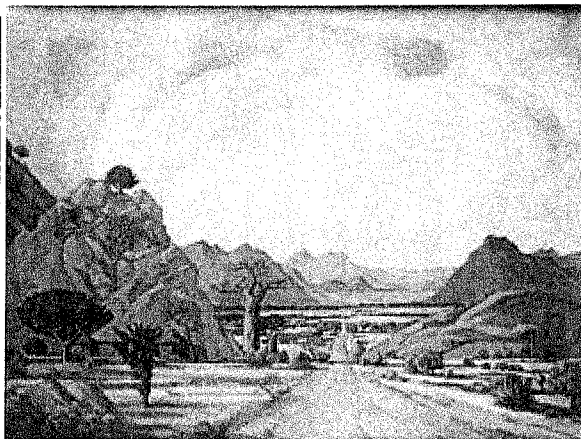
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Pay Recipients

Account		Date	Total	Processed	Failed	Pending	
Encore Portfolio - 50370039742		2012-02-13	1800.00		1	0	0
Recipient Name	Recipient Account	Recipient Reference	Pay & Clear Now	Pay Amount	Reference	Payment Details	Status
S A Heritage Resourc	4064180070	Culverwell	No	1800.00	VODSYRCNLK2B	Download / print	✓

Azola Mkorana
Happy ♥ Day!
Lenny

PENNY CULVERWELL**South African Representative of Bonhams Auctioneers**

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South Africa
Tel: +27 11 783 1813
pennyculverwell@telkomsa.net

SAHRA
Attn Azola Mkosana
P.O. Box 4637
CAPE TOWN
8000

30 January 2012

REGISTERED MAIL

Dear Azola

EXPORT PERMIT APPLICATIONS FOR BONHAMS, 21 MARCH 2012 SALE

Attached please find export permit applications for the following:

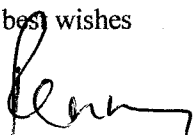
Mr & Mrs P. Goetsch	J.H. Pierneef
Ms S.E. Jaffe	Irma Stern
Mr M. McElligott	3 x J.H. Pierneef
Mr H.P. de Jager	2 x J.H. Pierneef
Mr. A. Stanger	J.H. Pierneef
Mrs. Ruth Bernstein	Irma Stern
Mrs Brendalyn Stempel	M. Laubser
Prof. M.A. Gillman	M. Laubser
Mrs P.M. Nel	P.H. Naude

I also enclose a disc with the photographs. You asked that we sent photos of the pictures both with and without the frames.

And finally I also enclose a separate list detailing the particulars of each picture, together with provenance etc.

I would appreciate receiving the permits by not later than Thursday 1 March, so that I can arrange the soonest dispatch of the pictures to London, with the exception, of course, of anything that is denied a permit.

With best wishes



PENNY CULVERWELL

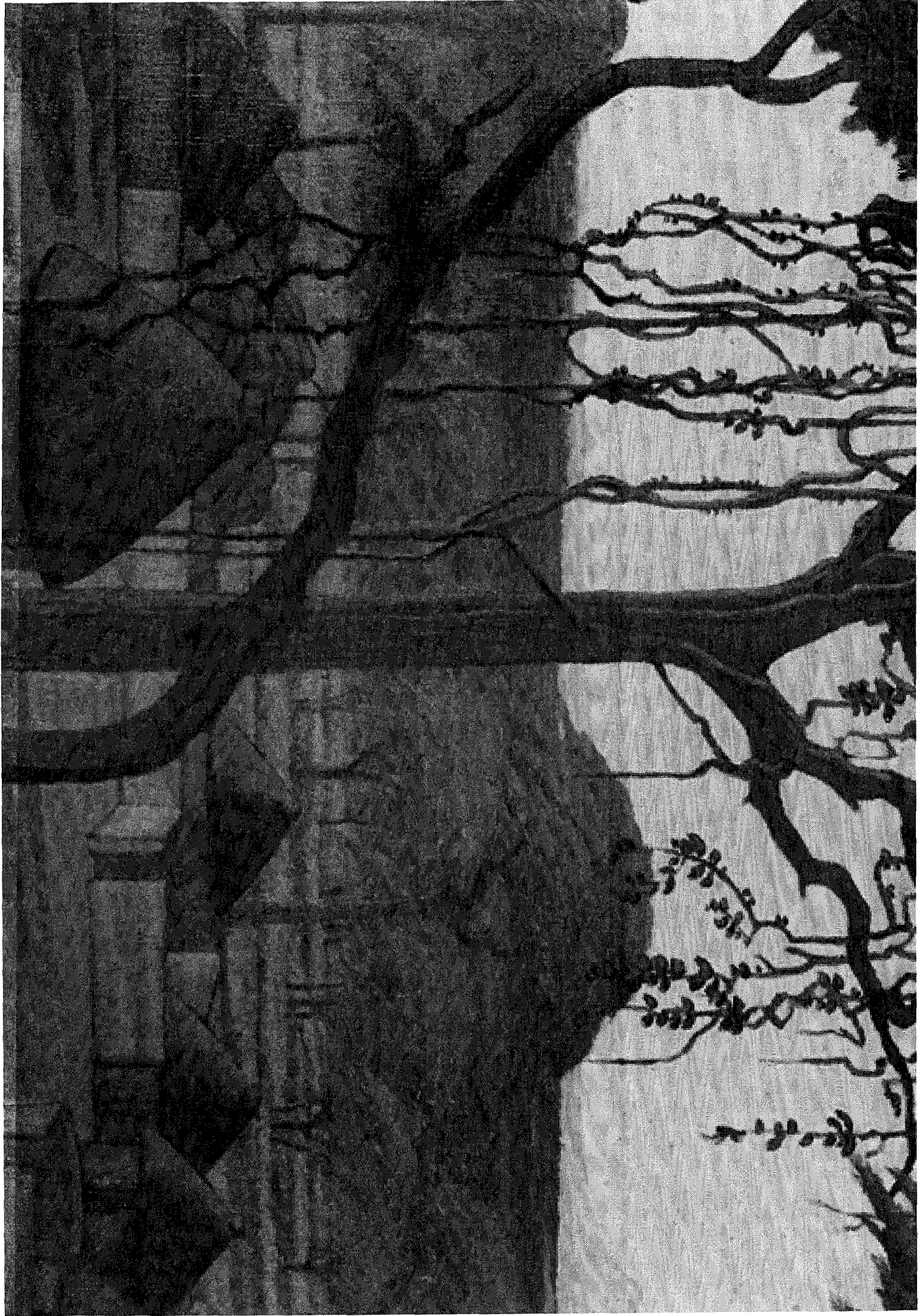




PLATE 10