

Permit Application for the permanent export of the painting "In the beer hall" by Gerard Sekoto intended for sale by Piasa Auction House in Paris, France

Our Ref:



an agency of the
Department of Arts and Culture

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CaseID: 15123

Date: Thursday June 11, 2020
Page No: 1

Final Decision

In terms of Section 32(19) of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999)

Attention: Mr Ruarc Peffers

89 Central Street
Houghton
Gauteng
2198

Permit application for the permanent export of Gerard Sekoto's painting "In the Beer Hall", lodged by Aspire Art Auctions. The painting is proposed for export and sale on auction at the Piasa Auction house in Paris, France.

The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) regrets to inform you that your application to permanently export the artwork *In the Beer Hall (1939/40)*, by South African artist, **Gerard Sekoto** has been refused.

After careful consideration, SAHRA has decided that [in accordance with Section 32 (24) and Section 3(3) of the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA. Act 25 of 1999)], the painting

(a) *Is of outstanding significance by reason of its close association with South African history or culture, its aesthetic qualities, or its value in the study of the arts or sciences.*

As you will be aware, Gerard Sekoto is widely recognized as the father of black South African art. Sekoto's work is received internationally with critical acclaim; and although much of his career was spent in exile in Paris, his works executed whilst still in South Africa are considered to be his most significant.

In 1930 Sekoto started working as a school teacher, and was introduced to fellow black artists, Ernest Mancoba, Nimrod Ndebele and Louis Makenna; who encouraged him to pursue his painting. In 1938 Sekoto won second prize for a painting submitted to the May Esther Bedford Art Competition, hosted at the University of Fort Hare (notably first place was awarded to George Pemba). Spurred on by this success and the encouragement of his fellow artists, he moved to Sophiatown (Johannesburg) where he began by drafting



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sketches onto brown paper of scenes of daily life around him.

Sekoto was introduced to Joan Ginsberg of the Gainsborough Art Gallery, as well as two members of the influential *New Group* namely Judith Gluckman and Alexis Preller, both of whom were already established artists. Through their influence and encouragement, Sekoto was able to embark upon his own artistic career.

In 1939 Sekoto participated in a group exhibition at Gainsborough Art Gallery in Johannesburg, his works would continue to be exhibited and sold there for many years to come. Notably, *In the Beer Hall* may well have been exhibited and sold at this exhibition. This would make the artwork in question one of Sekoto's earliest sales of his work.

Sekoto's reputation grew as he continued to exhibit and work in Sophiatown, in District Six (Cape Town) and Eastwood (Pretoria), working alongside contemporaries within the *New Group*, including other significant figures in South African art such as Gregoire Boonzaier and Walter Battiss, amongst others. His works during this period, between 1939 and 1947, are considered some of his most significant. His works portrayed the lives of black South Africans living in these areas, and showed them in a vibrant and sympathetic style and contrasted their lives with the many tensions of living in those areas, and of the lived experiences of those he painted. In this regard his work of this period transcends mere artistic expression, but also gives a glimpse into the historical record of the lives of his subjects, and his response to them. His work represents some of the earliest works painted by a black South African artist which represented the lives of black South Africans in a sympathetic light.

Sekoto would later move to Paris in (1947), to pursue his artistic career in self-imposed exile. He never returned to South Africa. Sekoto garnered international recognition with his work and artistic style.

(b) is of such a degree of national importance that its loss to South Africa would significantly diminish the national heritage.

The painting, *In the Beer Hall*, although perhaps not stylistically his best, clearly bears all of the hallmarks of what would become distinctive of his oeuvre. As the work is also one of his earliest, it is considered to be a significant work in the development of his unique style, and characteristic use of colour and stylization. It must be noted that works from this earliest period are very rare and not well represented in South African collections.

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Sekoto's works from this period, are considered among his most significant, due to their intimate connectedness with the lives of those he observed and painted. His portrayal of the lives of the black people living around him in Sophiatown, District Six and Eastwood provides a unique and authentic experience of his subjects. The painting *In the Beer Hall* is a clear depiction of his subjects' daily lives, portraying the relaxed atmosphere and interactions between patrons inside a Sophiatown beerhall during the late 1930's.

As a rare example of the work of Gerard Sekoto, considered to be the father of black South African art, the painting *In the Beer Hall* is considered of such importance that the loss of this painting to South Africa would diminish the National Estate.

You are at liberty to exercise any right available to you in terms of the NHRA, including the right to appeal against this decision. Should you choose to do so, please see the appeal procedure <https://sahris.sahra.org.za/sites/default/files/training/2015/05/12/PROHIBPR041208%20%281%29.pdf> Such an appeal must be made in writing within 14 days of receipt hereof.

Should you have any further queries, please contact the designated official using the case number quoted above in the case header.

Yours faithfully

Cuan Hahndiek
Heritage Officer
South African Heritage Resources Agency

Regina Isaacs

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Manager: Heritage Objects Unit
South African Heritage Resources Agency

ADMIN:

Direct URL to case: <http://www.sahra.org.za/node/537150>