



Our Ref:

Enquiries: Azola Mkosana
Tel: 021 462 4502
Email: amkosana@sahra.org.za
CaseID: 1336

Date: Thursday February 28, 2013

Page No: 1

Letter

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

Attention: Mrs Penny Culverwell
Bonhams South Africa
P.O Box 651535
Benmore
2010

Artist: Vladimir Griegorovich Tretchikoff (South African, 1913-2006) Title: The Herb Seller Size: 110 x 90cm (43 5/16 x 35 7/16in) Medium: oil Inscription: signed 'TRETCHIKOFF', inscribed 'S.A.' and dated '1949' (lower right) Date: 1949

Outcome of Permit Application to export "The Herb Seller" by Vladimir Tretchikoff

The South African Heritage Resources Agency's Permit Committee regrets to inform you that after careful deliberation, it has decided not to approve your application for a permit to export "The Herb Seller" by Vladimir Tretchikoff.

The Herb Seller is an exceptionally important work in the artistic output of South Africa for the following reasons:

It was produced in 1948/49 (first exhibited in 1949) by a recent emigrant to South Africa (Russian-born, and arriving in South Africa in 1946 but having lived in China, Singapore and Java before that) and comments on significant political events at the time that the National Party took power in S.A. in 1948. With this white electoral victory, Apartheid policy would become official.

The painting shows a well-known "character" in Cape Town, a female herb seller who was permanently ensconced in the CBD and who had taken over her trade from her mother and passed it on to her daughter. (Her grand-daughter was present at the opening of the Tretchikoff retrospective at the ISANG in 2011.) This woman, who would be categorized as "Coloured" in the Apartheid nomenclature had been disenfranchised by racist policies and legislation in South Africa. She sits between two frayed and peeling political posters, with the white leaders who contested the 1948 election, Smuts and Malan on either side of her, seemingly ogling each other. Her view meets the viewer's directly and the artist has portrayed her with a stolidness and gravity that speaks of permanence (in contrast to the ephemeral posters). The work can easily be interpreted (as I have done elsewhere) as implying a sense of presence and permanence in the face (or the background) of white politics that exclude her.

This work is virtually unique in the body of artist Vladimir Tretchikoff's output. He produced one other work that addressed Apartheid politics directly, entitled *Black and White*. This showed a frontal female face, one half



The South African Heritage Resources Agency

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of which was made up of that of a black woman and the other of one who is white. Together the features meet up exactly and the implication is that the two women are, in essence, the same. This work (ca. 1951) caused comment in the press at the time and Tretchikoff, who was not yet a S.A. citizen had his "loyalty" to his adopted country questioned. As a Russian national in the time of the "RooiGevaar" he seems never to have tackled such subject matter again. *Black and White* was sold to a Canadian and immediately left the country and remains untraced.

In terms of SAHRA's Guidelines for export I would argue that it should not be exported due to:

(a) its outstanding significance by reason of its close association with South African History or Culture,

- This appears to be clear, the 1948 election was a landmark and watershed event in the history of SA and very few artworks (especially by "white" artists) address this directly.

(b) its aesthetic qualities,

- Tretchikoff's work is generally considered to be of lesser aesthetic value by many critics but it does have some interesting features, e.g. the three layers of realism depicted between the almost abstract quality of the foreground and the high, almost fictive realism of the wall with the solidity of the main figure between.

(c) its value in the study of the arts, or sciences; and

- This is an important work, even one of the most important works, in Tretchikoff's output. As an artist who consciously disseminated his work to working class people of all races via the medium of prints, the fact that as an "outsider" who had had a "mulatto" lover during his wartime incarceration and his seeming bemusement at Apartheid policies, it is of inestimable value for the study of art, social relations and the history of Apartheid in South Africa.

(d) is of such degree of national importance that its loss to South Africa would significantly diminish the National Heritage.

There are virtually no comparable works that have had the same reach (via print) by a populist artist and directly commenting on Apartheid policy. The subsequent notoriety or dismissal of Tretchikoff's artistic abilities do not in any way lessen the significance of this work to the National Estate. It's provenance – the fact that no less than two Apartheid-era cabinet ministers owned it – is also intriguing and significant.

You are now at liberty to exercise any right available to you in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999, including the right to appeal against this decision should you choose to do so. Please see appeal procedures attached.



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Export of 'The Herb Seller', Vladimir Griegorovich Tretchikoff



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Page No: 3

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

Yours faithfully

Azola Mkosana
Heritage Officer: Heritage Objects Unit
South African Heritage Resources Agency

Regina Isaacs
Manager: Heritage Objects Unit
South African Heritage Resources Agency

ADMIN:

Terms & Conditions:

1. This approval does not exonerate the applicant from obtaining local authority approval or any other necessary approval for proposed work.
2. If any heritage resources, including graves or human remains, are encountered they must be reported to SAHRA immediately.
3. SAHRA reserves the right to request additional information as required.



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