

Lucas SITHOLE LS7912 on auction 7th November, 2011 – comments by Emma Bedford

Will tallest Sithole break new auction records?

Lucas Sithole's Charging Afrikander (LS6718) set the auction room alight at Strauss & Co's May sale in 2011 when fierce bidding drove the price way above the estimates of R300 000 – 500 000 to achieve a record of R946 900. The tallest recorded work by the artist, *When I'm Guitaring* (LS7912), is coming up at Strauss & Co's sale on 7th November at the Country Club Johannesburg in Woodmead and the question is: can this impressive sculpture that stands 237 centimetres high break a new record for the artist?

A touching story is told about the inspiration for this work. According to the artist, he was passing his brother's closed bedroom door one day and heard him sing while playing the guitar. As the brother never sang, Sithole was intrigued and entered. The brother shyly denied any singing. A couple of days later, Sithole again heard him sing, this time a love song. After standing outside the door for quite a while, he tried to enter but the door was locked. After being allowed in, Sithole out of curiosity, checked inside the cupboard and also under the bed, as he was convinced his brother had a girlfriend in the room – but to no avail. As Sithole left, the only response from the brother was that it must have been the guitar singing!

To convey this intriguing mystery Sithole has presented two views: from one perspective the figure strums his guitar while from the other, he caresses a female form. The result is an imaginative interpretation that is both seductive and playful. Its appeal lies in the expressive hands and the sensitivity with which one figure enfolds another.

It was *clearly considered his most important work of the period* as it featured on the invitation for his solo show at Gallery 21 in Johannesburg in 1979. Reviews in the *Post* and the *Transvaler* also commented on the sculpture.

It is through works such as these that we come to understand the influence that Lucas Sithole had on major South African artists like Walter Battiss, as art historian Rory Bester has pointed out.

Text by Emma Bedford