

# KUNKEL FINE ART

Zeichnungen, Gemälde und Skulpturen  
des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts

## Antoinette von Saurma

1960 Windhoek, Namibia – lives in Munich

The daughter of German émigrés, Antoinette von Saurma grew up on a farm in Namibia. In the years before World War I the region that is today's Republic of Namibia was a colony of the German Empire. It was known as German South-West Africa. This chapter of Namibian history is marked by the campaigns of extermination and expulsion led by the German occupiers against the Herero people as they consolidated their rule in the new colony. The consequences of this socio-cultural caesura are still felt today. They are a central theme in Saurma's *oeuvre*. Antoinette von Saurma trained in Johannesburg, London and Munich.



Antoinette von Saurma

In a watercolour cycle titled *Masks*, created in 2020, Saurma addresses questions of the roots and fate of Namibia's indigenous population. The impetus for the cycle came from her encounter with an artist friend living in South Africa. On a wall in his studio he had set up a display of his own ceramics and combined them with sculptures by other artists and with natural objects and crucifixes, thus removing the objects from their original context and placing them in a new one. The juxtaposition of artefacts associated with the Christian religion and traditional African religions fascinated Saurma. It provided the initial impulse for a cycle of watercolours in which she engages with the cultic meanings of the animals and legendary creatures represented by the masks. She also examines the abstract formal language of masks, which earlier on had influenced classical modernism. Following a tradition that existed long before colonial times, the indigenous population created traditional headdress to protect humans against the dangers of nature. When the mask wearer put on the mask, he shed his individual personality and his identity was invested with the powers attributed to the mask.

The particularity of Saurma's *Mask* cycle lies in the mutual interchange of aesthetic and ethnological factors. Her aim is not to create a realistic portrayal of her motifs but rather to lend her representation an equivalent degree of abstraction through the reduction of form and colour – the result of a cognitive process triggered by her intensive study of African masks. Their rich and diverse heritage finds its full expression in the *Masks* cycle. Her watercolours offer the viewer rare insights into the spiritual power that such cultic artefacts continue to emit today.