

ELLIOTT FINE ART

Nineteenth Century to Early Modern

David Bomberg
(Birmingham 1890 – 1957 London)

Camels Resting

Signed and inscribed on an artist's label: *Camels Resting / David Bomberg*

Oil on canvas-board
31.7 x 40.5 cm. (12 ½ x 15 ¾ in.)

Provenance:

Vint Trust, by 1967;

Private Collection, UK;

Anonymous sale, Christie's London, 29th September 2020, lot 63;

Private Collection, London, until October 2023.

Literature:

David Bomberg 1890 – 1957 Paintings and Drawings, exhibition catalogue, London 1967, p. 30, no. 48.

Exhibitions:

Tate Gallery, London, *David Bomberg 1890 – 1957 Paintings and Drawings*, March – April 1967, no. 48.



Though undated, this vibrant and spontaneous oil sketch of three resting camels was executed sometime during the four intense years Bomberg spent in Jerusalem between 1923 and 1927. These years witnessed a remarkable transformation in Bomberg's style, a time prior to which the self-proclaimed 'poor boy from the East End' had 'never seen the sunlight'.¹ The bright, vibrant light of the Near East had a profound effect on the artist's palette, introducing dazzling tonalities into his work, such as the flash of pink which enlivens the present painting, one of the numerous and freely-painted oil sketches made by Bomberg in Jerusalem.

Up until the outbreak of the First World War, Bomberg had been the most radical and avant-garde young painter in Britain, creating a series of dynamically powerful near-abstract paintings which glorified the machine age (fig. 1). After the trauma of the Great War, during which his brother was killed and Bomberg shot himself in the foot, the artist searched for alternative, milder visions of the world. Shattered by the destruction wrought by war, Bomberg shunned his previously complex geometric style which evoked modernism in all its forms and, led by a burgeoning interest in the natural world, began exploring the countryside, seeking redemption within it.

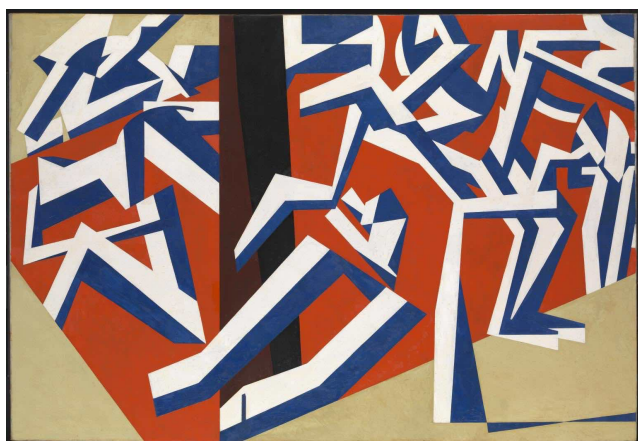


Fig. 1, David Bomberg, *The Mud Bath*, 1914, oil on canvas, 152 x 224 cm, Tate Britain

Ready for a new direction, Bomberg reacted with enthusiasm when he was approached in 1923 by the Scottish artist Sir Muirhead Bone on behalf of the newly formed Zionist Organisation to paint Jewish sites in the Holy Land (fig. 2). Of Polish-Jewish heritage, Bomberg himself was not a Zionist, yet welcomed the patronage as a chance of escaping the poverty to which he had hitherto been accustomed, as well as experiencing the transformative heat and sunlight of what was then known as British Palestine.

Arriving in Jerusalem in April of 1923 with his wife Alice, Bomberg was immediately inspired by the nourishing luminosity of the city, allowing him to produce an extraordinary body of work over the next four years, consisting for the most part of detailed landscapes, as well as many oil sketches of great freedom. A newly found artistic liberation is clear in the loose, virtuoso brushstrokes which skilfully create the resting volumes of the camels, escaping from the heat which the Bomberg himself must have learned to endure. Indeed, camels, the essential mode of transport and haulage in the Palestine of the 1920s, were ubiquitous, and

¹ R. Cork, David Bomberg, exhibition catalogue, London 1988, p. 24.

Bomberg was clearly intrigued by their odd and awkward forms, as a charcoal study of horizontal format in a private collection also attests (fig. 3)



Fig. 2, David Bomberg, *Jerusalem from Mount Scopus*, 1925, oil on canvas, 57 x 75 cm, Tate Britain

Though today Bomberg's period in Jerusalem is seen as a high-point of 20th-century British painting, his works were not so warmly received by collectors when he returned to London. Though the critics were complimentary regarding his 1927 show at the Leicester Galleries, this did not lead to many sales, with only seven out of the fifty-five exhibited paintings sold. Due to expenses related to the exhibition, Bomberg was left with £80 debt.

Bomberg continued to be woefully neglected by the artistic establishment until the end of his life. By the time of his death in 1957 due to cirrhosis of the liver, and in a state of near starvation, he had been virtually forgotten. And yet, only a day later a reverential obituary appeared in the Times newspaper, lauding Bomberg for his 'independence of vision'. Bomberg's reputation soared after his death and ten years later a major retrospective was held at the Tate, in which *Camels Resting* was exhibited. Today his status has been completely reassessed and Bomberg stands as one of the great masters of the 20th century.

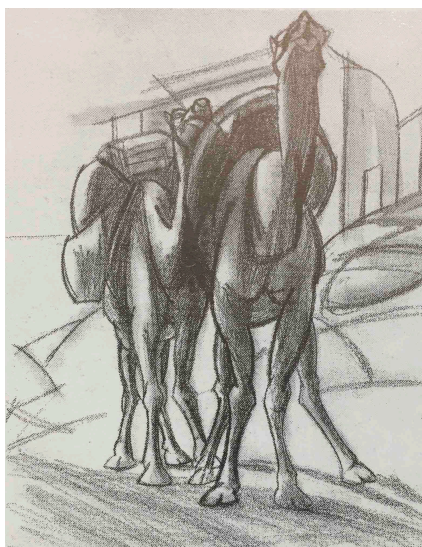


Fig. 3, David Bomberg, *Camels*, 1925, charcoal on paper, 65 x 52 cm, Private Collection