

# Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



**David Bomberg (1890 - 1957)**

## **Rock Façade, North-East Wall, Petra**

Circa: 1924

1924

Oil on canvas

58.5 x 77cm

Signed and dated lower right Bomberg 24

“Petra was uphill work, entailing much inconvenience, expense and the maximum of annoyance - there was scenery of an extraordinary nature to compensate us for the setbacks. Scorpions, snakes, and lizards, have found a happy home in Petra, and the blue lizard who basks in the sun on the rocks of Petra.” - David Bomberg, recollections on Petra.

In 1923, Bomberg left London for Jerusalem. Organised by the artist Muirhead Bone and funded by the Palestine Foundation Fund, his brief was to record reconstruction projects in Palestine. Working en plein air he responded to the intensity of the heat and sun he encountered in Jerusalem by creating incredibly precise realistic works infused with a brilliance of light. It was here that he met the British Military Governor of Jerusalem, Sir Ronald Storrs. Storrs became an enthusiastic patron of Bomberg and it was he who funded and organised Bomberg's two expeditions to Petra in 1924. Accompanied by a military escort to protect him against thieves, Bomberg and his wife Alice embarked on this challenging expedition which took several weeks to reach the 'Rose City'.

Working as always, en plein air, Bomberg initially struggled with the sheer scale and monumentality of this city, hewn from rock, feeling "like a tiny ant, labouring along the white riverbed, with all the egotism knocked out me". (Exhibition catalogue, David Bomberg: Spirit in the Mass, Abbot Hall Gallery, July - October 2006, p.82). However, returning for a second visit he overcame this initial hesitancy and went on to create paintings such as The Rock Façade, North-East Wall, Petra. The present work is one of his

masterpieces from this extraordinary expedition and so it is unsurprising that Charles Aitkens, director of the National Gallery, Millbank, accepted the work on loan from the collector James Estens in 1929. In fact Bomberg himself wrote to Aitkens on 23rd October 1929 from Toledo referring to this painting;

"By this time I think the painting is at the Tate. I know you have a personal liking for the painting after all. It was a stupendous task to set to Petra, from the start, under the [?] and wildest conditions imaginable to do a hugely finished work. In this respect the picture is unique - it has never been attempted before and it is not likely to be tried again by any other artist"

In the present work Bomberg has managed to masterfully combine the sweeping monumentality of the landscape with the considered detail of the architectural construction. He ineffably transports the onlooker to this magical corner of Jordan through the freshness and immediacy of the paint surface. We involuntarily squint, shielding our eyes from the morning light, taking in the huge, sheer rock face in front of us and out of this red façade the holy temples and dwellings emerge. As they were carved out of the rock, so Bomberg carves them from his canvas through each painstaking brush stroke. All the more extraordinary when one is reminded that this work was not painted in the comfort of his studio, worked up from preliminary studies, but executed in the dusty, rocky, ancient and majestic landscape of Jordan.

### **Provenance**

James Estens, by 1929, purchased direct from the artist for £100,

(by whom loaned to the National Gallery, Millbank, from November 1929 until at least 1932)

John Flanagan Esq, by 1958,

Arthur A. Stambois, possibly purchased from the Arts Council Exhibition in 1958,

Stanley Mann, purchased from the above in 1961,

And by descent to his wife, Eithne Maureen Mann (nee Milne) (1937-2018)

By descent to the previous owner until 2022

### **Exhibitions**

London, Leicester Galleries, Paintings of Palestine and Petra by David Bomberg, February

1928, Exhibition no. 451, cat no. 41

Birmingham, The Ruskin Gallery, An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings of Palestine and

Petra by David Bomberg, February 1929, no. 20

Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, Exhibition Park, The Palace of Arts, North-East Coast Exhibition, 14

May-26 October 1929

The Arts Council, David Bomberg 1890-1957, An Exhibition of Paintings and Drawings,

Newcastle, Laing Art Gallery, 17 May - 7 June 1958, no. 16, lent by John Flanagan Esq.

(illus. pl. 4) (travelling to Swansea, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery 21 June - 5 July 1958;

Middlesbrough, Art Gallery 12 July - 5 August 1958; London, Arts Council Gallery 13

September - 4 October 1958; Bradford, Cartwright Memorial Hall, 11 October - 1 November 1958

**Literature:**

The Studio, Vol. 104, 1932, J. Newmark, The Artist on Tour, The Rose-Red City of Petra, Painted by David Bomberg, July to December, p. 103-108, p. 108 (illus.)

Richard Cork, David Bomberg, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press), 1987, illus. p. 161, no. 200