

## FRITZ KRAMPE

With this Exhibition we pay tribute to the art of Fritz Krampe whose tragic and untimely death has robbed South West Africa of one of our great painters. Krampe was in the prime of his life when he died and we have no doubt that had he been spared, his work would have still further enriched the art of our country. As it is, he will always occupy an important place in the art history of South West Africa.

Krampe was born in Berlin on the 19th of December, 1913. In 1931 he studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Berlin. While still a student he joined the crew of a Norwegian cargo-boat that made its slow way to northern Siberia, a journey that took three months. Probably what he saw on this voyage inspired his illustrations of Herman Melville's classic "Moby Dick"-illustrations that explode with life, power and movement.

After studying in Munich, Krampe returned to Berlin where he served a year's military service. In 1935 he was accepted as a "master pupil" at the Preussische Staats-Akademie der Bildenden Künste. He also did memorable book illustrations for "Moby Dick", "Peer Gynt" and "Reineke Fuchs".

In 1939 Krampe served as an officer with the German army in Poland and France. He volunteered for Rommel's Afrika Korps, and was taken prisoner by the Australians at Tobruk in 1941. He was sent to prisoner-of-war camps in Egypt, Palestine and ultimately Australia where he spent five and a half years in a camp at Victoria. He occupied himself sketching and painting and tamed two falcons which he trained in mediaeval style. He described them later in illustrated articles.

After the war Krampe returned to Germany, and discovered some of his earlier sketches in the bomb-wrecked academy.

He was commissioned to do book illustrations on animal life. However, wanderlust again overtook him, and he decided to return to Australia. Through a chance meeting he sailed instead for South Africa, arriving in Cape Town in 1950. He received several commissions there, one of which was a frieze for a house in Sea Point which he did in tempera on all four walls of the room. Characteristically it depicts natives on a lion hunt, a group of Arabs on horseback, and two African herdsmen urging on their cattle.

In June 1951 he held an exhibition of drawings, watercolours and lithographs in Cape Town. He then left for South West Africa and settled in Windhoek, if it can be said that he ever rested long enough anywhere to call it home.

South West Africa fascinated Krampe and he travelled throughout the territory, being especially drawn to the northern areas where game abounded. He loved the Etosha Game Park and after his visits, usually made recommendations for the development of the Pan. He wrote several articles on wild life for the Allgemeine Zeitung.

Krampe painted the game with bold and dynamic insight, showing knowledge of their motivation and behaviour. In his pictures they are vital primeval creatures — vultures with cruel unrelenting patience, wildebeest stampeding in a cloud of dust, buffalo bursting from a march, giraffe moving with singular grace in spite of their odd shape, ostriches like a corps de ballet and massive elephants. His huge oils gave scope for bold brushwork, and his animals fill the canvases. He was completely fearless and even reckless in encounters with elephants and stories about this are legion.

Fritz Krampe thought and painted big. His subject matter was not usually suited to the conventional lounge — monstrous gorillas locked in combat, vultures at a kill, a leopard tearing at the carcass of an antelope, the agony of a dying elephant. He was a fine draughtsman and essentially a graphic artist, saying much with a few incisive restless lines. Perhaps he was at his greatest in his graphic work.