LOT 15

ALBERT TUCKER

AUSTRALIAN
1914 - 1999

FAUN ATTACKED BY PARROT 2

Signed and dated Tucker '68 (lower right); bears artists name, title and date on reverse; titled and dated on label on reverse.

Acrylic and mixed media on composition board

136 by 105cm

ESTIMATE 250,000-350,000 AUD

PROVENANCE

Alan C Atwill, Sydney

Private collection, Sydney; purchased from the above in 1985

LITERATURE


CATALOGUE NOTE

Curiously, in view of their essential Australianness, Albert Tucker's Intruder figures were initially developed when the
artist was still in exile, in Rome in the mid-1960s. 'A rough welding together of the frontally-placed Kelly helmet and the profile "Antipodean" head,'¹ the Intruders in fact owe a substantial debt to European sources, from 'a double-headed axe ... seen in the Etrucan Museum' and the horned fauns of classical antiquity through 'the Saint Sebastians, the Christ, the Martyrs and Crosses and Virgins with a thousand swords plunged through them, all bleeding from wounds and gashes and suppurating sores'² seen in Roman Catholic altarpieces, to the scarified surfaces of the modern Italians Alberto Burri and Lucio Fontana. Over time the image evolved from that of a masked faun to the crater-headed 'squared crescent', with its complimentary curved smile (from the earlier Images of Modern Evil).

The present work is one of a small group of pictures from 1969 which represent the final refinement of the Intruder motif – others include Faun attacked by parrot III (1968, Art Gallery of New South Wales) and Armoured faun attacked by parrots (1969, National Gallery of Australia). Here the labrys-headed figure stands central, half-length, his head pocked and scarred, his body eroded into emptiness, with scimitar ribs like the thorns of Jesus' crown in Wounded man (1955, private collection), or like the blade-like flames in Surrender at Glenrowan (1957, Heide Museum of Modern Art). Behind him, cloud-shadow camouflage patterns on the dry earth lead the eye back to a forest of leafless, blasted trees, while the red earth fades streakily through orange-yellow dawn horizon to blue sky above. In raucous echo of this subtle rainbow transition, a bright-feathered, moon-headed parrot grips tightly to the top of the Intruder's head, looking like some monstrous Cup Day fascinator.

Tucker once described the parrot as 'a ready-made symbol ... The claws that tear and the beak that rips in the middle of the colours of paradise, stands as a marvellous allegory – heaven and hell incorporated in the one natural form – beautiful but murderous inside – a conflict between destruction and creation.'³ However, a recent reminiscence by Barbara Tucker gives another, less fiercely dialectical perspective, and an insight into the parrot's incorporation into the Intruder paintings: '...just after we shifted to our bush paradise in Hurstbridge in the early 60s, Bert nursed a rosella back to health after it had flown into a window. As he released it, the darn thing turned around, looked him straight in the eye, sunk its beak into his finger drawing blood, and then just flew off. Bert wasn't at all upset: "We're in its territory. The Australian bush is dangerous and if you intrude, you've got to expect trouble sometimes."'⁴

2. Albert Tucker, quoted in James Mollison and Nicholas Bonham, Albert Tucker, Melbourne: Macmillan, in association with the Australian National Gallery, pp. 59, 60
3. ibid., p. 61