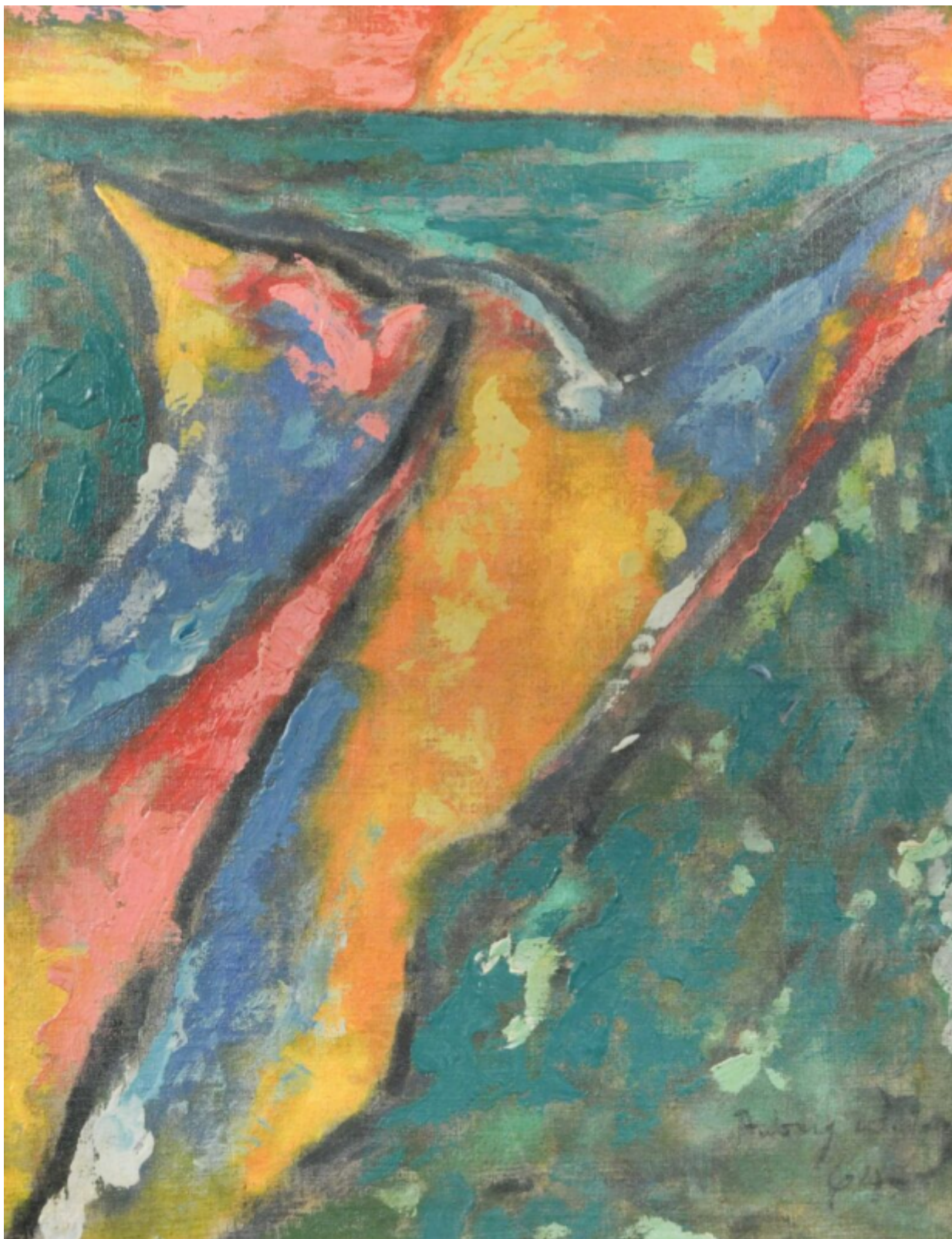


## Essequibo

Aubrey Williams (1926-1990)



REF:

## Description

Oil on Canvas Signed and dated Aubrey Williams / '64 (lower right) Further signed, titled and dated to the reverse 53.5 x 42 ins (21 x 17 ins)

Essequibo is the largest river in Guyana, the largest between the Orinoco and the Amazon. It flows for 1014 kms rising in the Acarai Mountains on the Brazil-Guyana border and flows through forest and savanna into the Atlantic Ocean. Aubrey Williams was born in 1926 in Georgetown, Guyana's capital city, the son of a civil servant and eldest of 11 children. He began drawing as a child taking lessons from a restorer of religious paintings in Guyanese churches. He joined the Working People's Art Class at the princely age of 12. Guyana was a British colony in the days of Williams' youth, an important producer in the sugar industry. Williams trained as an agronomist and in 1944 started working as an agricultural field officer on the coast. He encouraged the exploited farmers to claim their rights against the British owned sugar plantations. Seen as a troublemaker, he was soon banished to the remote north-west rainforest settlement of Hosororo. "It was like sending someone to Siberia" he commented. However, he met Warao Amerindians whose history and culture came to greatly influence his artistic work. He listened to the local people talking about colour and form. He often depicts a bone-like claw or glyph which is recorded in the Warao's pictorial language. His utilisation of this symbol depicted the violence of humanity, especially of the colonising forces. He speaks of "strange, very tense, slightly violent shape, which haunted me all my life, a subconscious thing coming out". This formed the basis of a lifelong interest in pre-Columbian culture and artefacts. Williams was also interested in ornithology, mostly predators, raptors and waterfowl, his work of which can be seen in the personal archive in the Tate Gallery. He describes the birds as "possessing qualities we can only admire, the gift of direction and control during migration". After two years of living immersed in nature, he returned to the capital to find that many of his friends had joined the Peoples Progressive Party, fighting for Guyana's independence. Once again, the government saw him as a political agitator and after a shooting on a plantation, he left the country for his own safety, only returning once it had gained independence. He migrated to Britain in 1952, won a scholarship for an agricultural course at Leicester University. He was disappointed with the teaching standards, so dropped out and travelled across Europe. As he did so, he came face to face with German Expressionist Art. He met Picasso who did not see him as an artist but more as a model to use for his own work. In 1954 Williams settled in London and studied at St Martins School of Art. He attended and exhibited at art galleries across the city. He was most influenced by a couple of exhibitions on Abstract Expressionism held at the Tate Gallery. "Modern art in the US" 1956 and "New American painting" in 1959. He referred to Jackson Pollock as "our God" and referred to Kline, Newman, Rothko and de Kooning as "great". The work of Arshile Gorky had a very prof...