

ALEX WAGNER  
1920-

### Personal Projection No. III

Alex Wagner's career has proceeded largely outside of the mainstream of South African art, yet he has painted consistently and exhibited regularly throughout his life. His subjects are uniquely personal, ranging from images from Eastern mysticism and esoteric religions to historical and literary incidents, drawing on a vast vocabulary of imagery and symbols. This work is one of a trio of paintings in which Wagner offers the viewer the opportunity to see the world from his perspective. Framed by his limbs, the strikingly unusual viewpoint brings the viewer into close association with the subject. By confining the composition to the area around his feet, he makes us aware of things that we often look on as mundane. In the patterned carpet, a lizard, a ram's head and the eyes on the butterfly wings allude to some other context which is suggested but not explored.

The artist situates the viewpoint at his own head, inviting the spectator to experience the intimate and introspective view which he projects. His foreshortened legs create a feeling of great distance, a metaphorical reminder of the disparity between body and mind. Manipulating his spectacles to capture the sunlight, he looks down into their glass as into a crystal ball or into his own eyes. Wagner has painted himself, daydreaming, lost in contemplation. The poodle at his feet, whom he has referred to as 'his mentor into old age', is at the heart of this reverie, and her devoted companionship in spite of her blindness is touchingly portrayed. The sense of pathos in the old dog, her bony physique and downturned head is reflected by the owner who perhaps projects himself into the same situation in time to come.

