

**THE
OLMEC-MAYA
& NOW**

**NEW WORK BY
AUBREY WILLIAMS**

6 JUNE - 7 JULY 1985

Joan
245 - 0 990



MAYA CONFRONTATION

Catalogue

**Commonwealth Institute
Kensington High Street
London W8 6NQ 01-603 4535**

Commonwealth Institute in association with the Greater London Council

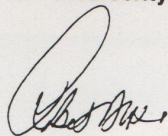


Commonwealth Institute

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition of Aubrey Williams' paintings is the second time in four years that the Commonwealth Institute has had the opportunity of presenting a major series of his current work related to a single theme. In 1981 we showed the work based on the Symphonies and Quartets of Shostakovich and now, with the support of the Greater London Council, we are able to show the Olmec-Maya paintings.

We are particularly pleased to have the exhibition as one of the principal events of this year's Gallery programme, because the paintings are superb, because our Gallery seems to suit Aubrey's work so well and because the Commonwealth connection is appropriate for an exhibition which so passionately expresses the value and the vulnerability of cultural identities in a world threatened by the domination of materials and mediocrity.



Robert Atkins
Arts Director
Commonwealth Institute



SUN HEIROGLYPH



MAYA SUN III

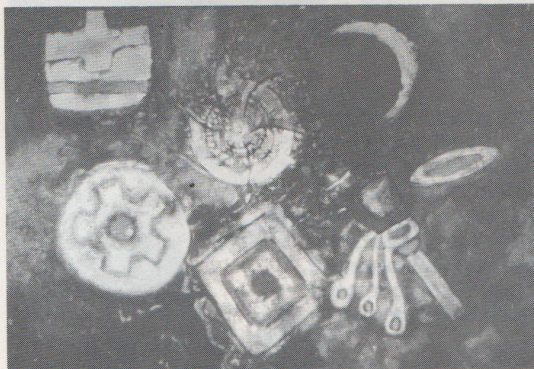
AUBREY WILLIAMS

My feelings about Aubrey Williams' paintings are made up of a mixture of pleasure and anger. I can't help seeing the richness of his colours, the power and scale of his best paintings, without at the same time being aware of the narrow-mindedness and lack of discernment of the art establishment which has prevented Aubrey Williams' pictures from hanging alongside those other British artists who are his contemporaries at the Tate Gallery. For Williams is not an eccentric or obscure artist. He handles the large scale, and belongs to a generation of artists who gave abstract painting an epic quality able to convey a wide emotional range, from intense conflict to a feeling of peace. And yet the sensibility and dynamism of his work is quite distinct. Seen alongside the painting of Alan Davie or Peter Lanyon for example, or a younger painter like John Hoyland, it would create astonishment visually. For colours are being forged in London which are unknown to the 'keepers of the modern collections' and would change our perception of the art produced here.

A narrow cultural perspective fixated on outmoded nationalism is still denying the reality of London as a centre of the arts and therefore giving continual misinformation about the nature of contemporary art. The absurdity of this position becomes painfully ironic in relation to Aubrey Williams who himself has continuously attempted in his own work to achieve a synthesis not only between cultural traditions —

those into which one is born and those which one has 'paid attention to' (his phrase) as one has grown — but also, as another kind of challenge and another kind of enigma, a synthesis between art forms. The series of paintings he exhibited before the present one, and which he worked on for 12 years, was based on Shostakovich's music. He was doubly inspired: by the well-known but still largely unexplored links between music and abstract painting (going beyond merely literal ideas of translating music into visual terms), and by what he calls Shostakovich's 'world aesthetic', his openness and sympathetic understanding of all kinds of musical traditions.

Aubrey Williams once described his paintings to me as 'Stonehenges'. It is an apt metaphor for a certain concept of abstract painting, close to that of the Abstract Expressionists: a kind of elemental and indestructible mark of scale and presence, implying a relation of human beings to the cosmos, raised up on the white wall as the stones are raised up in the open landscape. Stonehenge not as a relic, or an archaeological puzzle, but 'stonehenges of feeling'. In terms of his new paintings Stonehenge is equivalent to Monte Alban, the mountain-top temple complex of the Olmecs in what is now Mexico. His new paintings fall into two modes: the more abstract ones which seem to lead on directly from the Shostakovich works, and the more figurative which give an almost documentary reference point to Mayan myth and cosmology since they don't really tackle the problem of how to refer to traditional culture in modern terms.



MOON TIME III



HYMN TO THE SUN I



THE KEEPER OF THE TEMPLE



NIGHT AND THE OLMEC

The abstract pictures often seem like ruminations on single fertile themes: for example the relation between the sun as a universal boundless source of energy and the pictogram or glyph for the sun invented by the Maya. Natural phenomena set against human culture in the form of language, realities which are still very close to one another and as if in a continuous turbulent relationship of interdependence and conflict. There are many paintings on this theme. In one (No. 14), the sun's rays seem to energise a small rectangle of signs which may be living things, or flames, or an element of language. In others, symbolic emblems seem almost indistinguishable from molten rock or precious stones. A characteristic device of Aubrey Williams is his skillful play of the sharp against the nebulous. It becomes a way of embracing both traditional symbols and the modern scientific view of interchangeable matter/energy, into a unified personal style of expression.

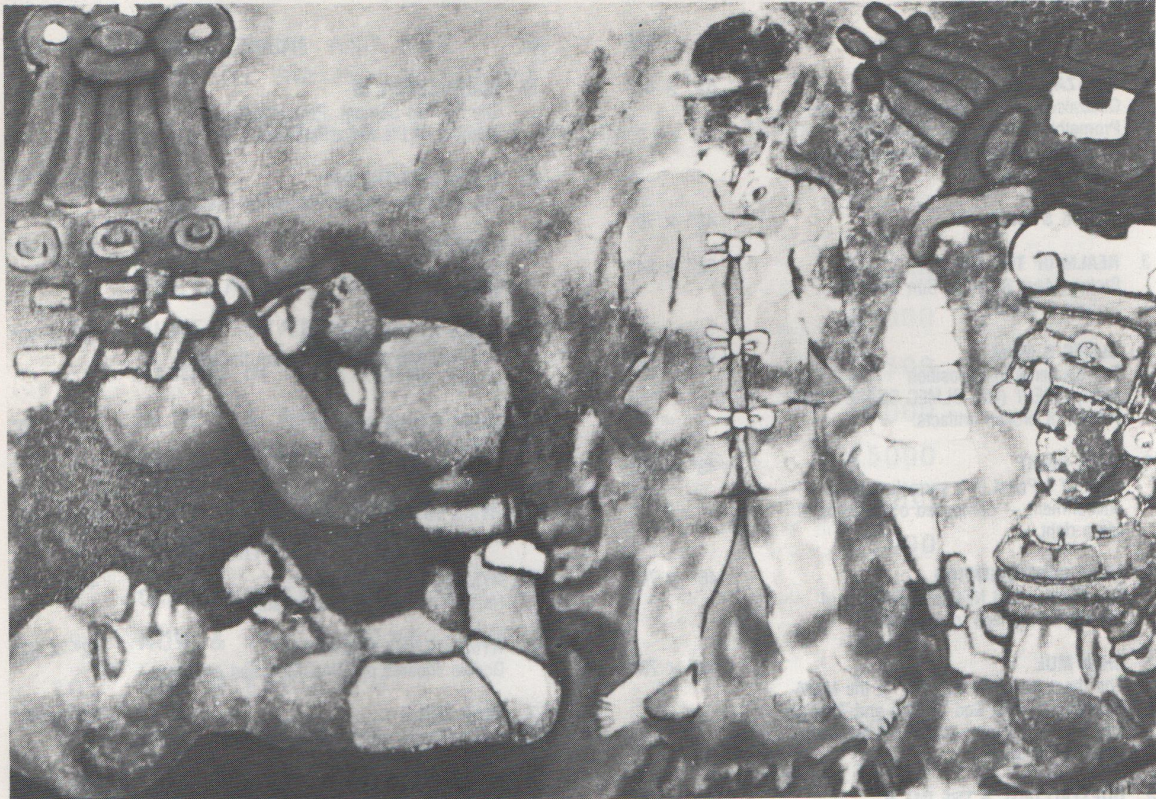
This series on the Maya also enables him to combine two long-time preoccupations: sources of energy, sources of wonder, in an ancient civilization with which he feels linked, and a modern, everyday, growing sense of anxiety which, for him, is best summed up in the ecology crisis. Nobody knows what destroyed the Maya's brilliant culture but Williams is convinced it was some form of uncontrolled technological development within their local environment. Certainly, in the relics of ancient wall paintings and sculpture Mayan art shows a strange dichotomy: the simple way the figures of people are treated contrasts with the detailed

rendering of ornaments and accessories. Their very brilliance seems encumbering. 'Ornaments and details of dress overwhelmed the human element', as Miguel Covarrubias has said.

Today the eco-crisis has a planetary scale, but at the same time intensely local expressions. Each person carries in their mind a particular vision of the 'living environment' and the 'quality of life'. Parallel to the pictures he has exhibited in public, Aubrey Williams has painted another, quite different, series which remain in his studio: studies of tropical birds, which today are either extinct or threatened, scrupulously realist, one to each small canvas. Revealingly, when the first Europeans arrived in the New World, the range of colours they saw in the bird plumage was beyond their range of experience and baffled their powers of description.

In Aubrey Williams' large abstract paintings qualities of celebration are mixed with qualities of warning, both the magnificence and fatality of the Maya's relationship with their environment. Their symbols for him of course are not 'exotic', any more than are the colours he uses. Nor is he 'bringing' symbols or colours from somewhere else to graft them to a 'modernism' which a common prejudice locates in Europe or the West. His work is the autonomous creation of a contemporary person, which is why the presence of his painting at the Tate would change mental horizons.

Guy Brett



MAYA RITUAL V

THE OLMEC-MAYA AND NOW

It seems recently that all art Exhibitions must be titled, and Artists are made to give reasons for what they do. I must pay respect to my Time and Circumstance.

Why the above enigmatic title? In my view, any artist who makes statements on his work is automatically suspect, but I must pay respect to the requirements of the media.

The work in this exhibition has come out of a rankling core of anxiety that has grown for a long time. Anxiety regarding the quality of life on our planet.

I consider myself very fortunate to be alive and working within the last freedom left to mankind — ART.

I have been immersed in Pre-Colombian Art and Artifacts for more than half of my life — primarily for their intrinsic aesthetic values and, growing with time, its warning.

The Maya Civilization quickly developed and lived out the fantastic benefits inherited from the Olmec and vanished off the face of this earth in as short a period as 30-50 years (if we have any faith in C14

isotopic reckoning). In explanation of the passing of the Maya we have only conjecture, but our most eminent scientific archaeologists seem involved in a world conspiracy to avoid comment on this major occurrence. Of course, we have a few ineffective remnants of the Great Maya with us today.

The Maya, the greatest Civilization of their time, capable of moving great masses without the use of the wheel, of cutting and polishing primal basalt and crystal though there was nothing harder in their metallurgy than copper — a people who produced a technology and cosmology from which we are still learning today; these people vanished in a very short space of time leaving only tarnished artifacts due, I feel, to their inability to cope with their technology and the changes their achievements engendered within their metabolism of their living environment and ecology: exactly the position we find ourselves in today.

I am grateful to the GLC for their contribution towards the production of this exhibition. My thanks also to the Commonwealth Institute and all who look and feel.

Aubrey Williams

EXHIBITS

No.	NAME	SIZE	No.	NAME	SIZE
1.	QUETZALCOATL IN THE SUN Quetzalcoatl (The Plumed Serpent), this Promethian Member of the Mayan Pantheon represented with corn-leaves instead of plumes.	52" x 64"	19.	QUETZALCOATL III The Plumed Serpent, Promethean member of the Maya Pantheon.	48" x 70"
2.	OLMEC STASIS	48" x 70"	20.	THE EYE OF THE DAY Sun emblems and environmental references.	48" x 70"
3.	REALM OF THE SUN Broken Maya & Olmec Sun Symbols — light & colour.	52" x 64"	21.	CHATO III Colossal Mayan head, usually of primal basalt.	36" x 40"
4.	OLMEC & MAYA Two elements in opposition MAYA PRIEST (left) OLMEC SNAKE (right) Pattern of broken artifacts.	48" x 70"	22.	HYMN TO THE SUN VI-A Sun emblems and square from the days of Chak Mul.	48" x 70"
5.	MAYA NIGHT Head of a Priest in a surrealist, Maya environment — composed of denizens of Maya right.	48" x 70"	23.	HYMN TO THE SUN VII Sun and fire emblems in a desert environment.	48" x 70"
6.	MAYA CONFRONTATION The Positive and Negative elements of the Maya Pantheon in opposition.	48" x 70"	24.	HYMN TO THE SUN VIII Sun and fire emblems and magic number 9.	52" x 64"
7.	CHAK MUL The most fearsome member of the MAYA Pantheon — The God of Rain and Thunder, into whose lap were placed the bleeding hearts of sacrifice.	48" x 70"	25.	HYMN TO THE SUN IX Rays of the sun and desert atmosphere.	48" x 70"
8.	QUETZALCOATL & THE DAY 9 The most benevolent GOD of the MAYA Pantheon — together with the symbols of the magic day 9.	52" x 82"	26.	HYMN TO THE SUN VI-B Double squares of CHAK MUL sun emblems.	52" x 82"
9.	NOW & COMING TIME I	48" x 70"	27.	MAYA SUN II Sun emblems and desert environment.	36" x 48"
10.	SUN HEIROGLYPH A treatment of broken Maya Sun symbols.	48" x 70"	28.	HYMN TO THE SUN IV A rendition of heat and light.	48" x 70"
11.	CHATO PRESENCE The Chatto (Colossal Stone Olmec Head) is looking in on a ritual through an aperture in a temple.	52" x 82"	29.	HYMN TO THE SUN V Sun emblems and heat atmosphere.	48" x 70"
12.	PRIEST Head of a MAYA KEEPER OF THE KNIFE.	48" x 70"	30.	STAR WHEEL Cosmic symbols.	36" x 48"
13.	NIGHT AND THE OLMEC A colossal Basalt Olmec head set in a surrealistic environment of mixed symbols.	48" x 70"	31.	MAYA MATRIX II From Maya Artifacts.	48" x 70"
14.	HYMN TO THE SUN I The first of nine in a series to the Maya symbol of life.	48" x 70"	32.	THE KEEPER OF THE TEMPLE Red stone jaguar with greenspots and day sign.	48" x 70"
15.	DAWN & THE EVENING STAR The Great Maya Dawn ritual is being enacted to Quetzalcoatl the Corn God — The Evening Star.	52" x 82"	33.	MOON TIME I Cosmic symbols taken from Maya artifacts.	48" x 70"
16.	PRESENCE AND IDOL The presence of the Maya-past is confronted by a Ghostly Idol of the Great Quetzalcoatl.	52" x 62"	34.	MOON TIME III Cosmic symbols taken from Maya artifacts.	48" x 70"
17.	HYMN TO THE SUN II The Maya Sun Rosette in an environment of heat and light.	52" x 62"	35.	MOON SIGN V Moon symbol with rays of cold light, taken from Maya symbols.	48" x 70"
18.	OLMEC PAST Broken Olmec symbols — dominated by an Olmec stylized Priest's head on the right.	48" x 70"	36.	MAYA RITUAL V Dancing wrestler, Blue-boy in flayed skin and Rain God.	48" x 70"
			37.	MAYA SUN III Variations of sun symbols and spectrum.	48" x 70"
			38.	SUN HYMN IV Variations of sun symbols and spectrum.	48" x 70"
			39.	NOW & COMING TIME II	
			40.	NOW & COMING TIME III	

All works are oil on canvas

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Aubrey Williams

He has lectured at the following Universities:

Oxford University
 Durham University
 Kent University
 St. Catherine's College
 Van Mildert College
 Rutherford College
 Elliot College
 University of York, England
 University of the West Indies, Jamaica
 University of Guyana
 and various Institutions, Associations
 and Art gatherings.

HONOURS

The Golden Arrow of Achievement, Guyana, 1970
 The Cross of Merit of St. Anthony of the Desert, 1980

AWARDS

Real Aula Mallorquesa seu Esquela Miramar, 1979
 Accademia Italia delle Arti e del Lavoro, (Nomination as
 "Academic of Italy with Gold Medal"), 1980

PRIZES WON

Commonwealth Prize for Painting, London, 1964

ONE MAN SHOWS

Archer Gallery, London	1954
New Vision Centre, London	1958
Ferens Art Gallery, London	1958
Blanden Art Gallery	1958
Peterborough Museum	1958
Cavendish Gallery, Dublin	1958
Redcliffe Gallery	1958
Galleries Collette Allendy, Paris	1958
Portal Gallery, London	1958
Contemporary Art Society, London	1959
A.I.A. Art Gallery	1960
Towner Art Gallery	1960
Gallery Caravan, New York	1961
The Walcheturm, Switzerland	1961
Irish Living Art, Dublin	1962
Grabowski Gallery	1963
Gallery Pater, Milan, Italy	1964
Commonwealth Institute, London	1964
Richmond Hill Gallery, London	1967
Expo 67 Administration Building, Canada	1967
Sussex University	1967
Oxford University	1967
Kent University	1967
Durham University	1967
House of Commons, London	1968
Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter	1969
John Peartree Gallery, Jamaica	1970
Camden Arts Centre, London	1971
Nicholas Treadwell Gallery, London	1972
Carifesta, Festival of the Creative Arts, Guyana	1972
Chicago	1972
Olympia International Art Centre, Jamaica	1974, 1975
Barry Watson Gallery, Jamaica	1976
Festival of the Arts, Lagos, Nigeria	1977
Coral Reef Murals, Wiltshire	1978
Dalhousie Murals, Nova Scotia, Canada	1978

Produced Paintings for a Book of Tropical Birds	1979-1980
Paintings on the Music of Dimitri Shostakovich	1981
Commonwealth Institute, London	
Paintings on the Music of Shostakovich —	
Royal Festival Hall	1984
October Gallery, London	1984
Goldsmith College, London	1985
Olmec-Maya (GLC) Commonwealth Institute, London	1985

GROUP SHOWS

Commonwealth Institute	1977
Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco	1960
Glasgow University	1968
York University	1968
Dutch Informal Group	1968
Hessenhuis, Antwerp	1968
de Warende, Gent	1968
Gallery Orex, The Hague	1968
Gallery 31, Dordrecht, Holland	1968
Leyden University	1968
Gallery Glassin, Kassel, Germany	1968
Contemporary African Painting, Nigeria	1970
San Paulo Bienally (XI) Brazil	1973

IMPORTANT PURCHASES

Arts Council of Great Britain
 Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter
 York Art Museum
 Booker McConnell PLC, London
 Guyana House of Assembly
 British Broadcasting Corporation
 University of the West Indies, Jamaica
 St. Catherine's College, Oxford
 Elliot College, Kent University
 Rutherford College, Kent University
 University of York
 Van Mildert College, Durham University
 Sussex University
 Tuesday Magazine, Boardroom, Chicago
 Olympia Art Centre, A.D. Scott, Jamaica (collection)
 Skopje, Yugoslavia
 Guyana Museum, Colgrain House, Guyana
 Jamaica House, Jamaica
 Marlborough House, London
 Greater London Council, London

COMMISSIONS

City of York Art Gallery	"Heraldry at York"
Airport Mural, Guyana	"Timehri"
Guyana Museum	"Revolt Guyana"
Guyana Museum	Mythological Murals
Guyana Museum	Guyana Collection
Rice Marketing Board of Guyana	"Apotheosis of Rice"
Wiltshire, England	Mural
San Francisco	Mural
Olympia Art Centre, Jamaica	Mural
Chicago	Mural
Jamaica	Mural
Dalhousie, Nova Scotia	Mural
London	Portrait, His Serene Excellency Baron Bradford of Kani

WORKS FEATURED IN FILMS, TELEVISION AND STILL PHOTOGRAPHY — 1976-77

ATV Series	"The Strange Report" with Anthony Quayle,
	Transcontinental Films, Pinewood Studios,
	England
ATV	"Journey to the Unknown" MGM
ATV	"Up She Goes" Millicent Martin
ATV	"Father Dear Father" T.T.L.
ATV	"Carry On Again Doctor" Rank Film
ATV	"Tiger Trap" Play
ATV	"Music Hall"
TV	"UFO" MGM

Also paintings used by many advertising companies, including Rayant Films, Presbury Films, Gerry Poulson, Natural Break, NHS Ltd., Augusta Productions.

Still Photographers: Terrence Donovan, David Franklin,
 Michael McCarthy Productions



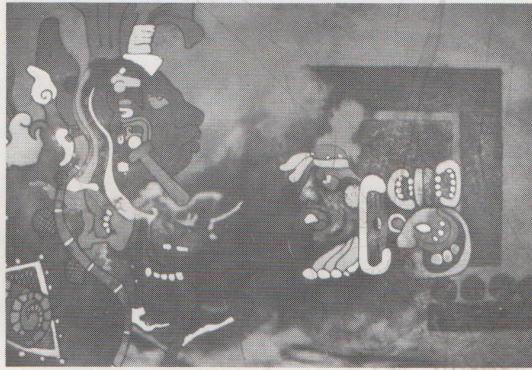
AUBREY WILLIAMS

AUBREY WILLIAMS was born in 1926 in Guyana, where he was educated and worked in the Civil Service. During service in the North West jungle of Guyana, he lived with the Warrau, a primitive Indian Tribe, for two years. During this time intense application in art work was maintained.

On return to city life, Williams studied first with De Winter and then with Burrowes (Guyanese Painters) and participated in the working Peoples' Art Group.

Williams came to Europe in 1952 and travelled extensively. He settled in London in 1954 where he studied at St. Martins College of Art. He continues to work, lecture and live in London at the present time.

Williams is a lecturer in Fine Art (Painting) Exeter College of Art, Devon, England, and the Camden Arts Centre, London.



QUETZALCOATL & THE DAY 9

THE OLMEC-MAYA AND NOW
New Work by Aubrey Williams

Commonwealth Institute Art Gallery, 6 June - 7 July 1985

Price List

1. QUETZACOATL IN THE SUN	£5000
2. OLMEC STATIS	£5000
3. REALM OF THE SUN	£5300
4. OLMEC & MAYA	£5000
5. MAYA NIGHT	£5000
6. MAYA CONFRONTATION	£5000
7. CHAK MUL	£5000
8. QUETZCOATL & THE DAY 9	£6000
9. NOW & THE COMING TIME I	£5000
10. SUN HIEROGLYPH	£5000
11. CHATO PRESENCE	£6200
12. PRIEST	£5000
13. NIGHT AND THE OLMEC	£5000
14. HYMN TO THE SUN I	£5000
15. DAWN & THE EVENING STAR	£6200
16. PRESENCE & IDOL	£5300
17. HYMN TO THE SUN II	£5300
18. OLMEC PAST	£5000
19. QUETZACOATL III	£5000
20. THE EYE OF THE DAY	£5000
21. CHATO III	£2000
22. HYMN TO THE SUN VI-A	£5000
23. HYMN TO THE SUN VII	£5000
24. HYMN TO THE SUN VIII	£5000
25. HYMN TO THE SUN IX	£5000
26. HYMN TO THE SUN VI-B	£6000
27. MAYA SUN II	£2000
28. HYMN TO THE SUN IV	£5000
29. HYMN TO THE SUN V	£5000
30. STAR WHEEL	£2000
31. MAYA MATRIX II	£5000
32. THE KEEPER OF THE TEMPLE	£5000

- 33. MOON TIME I
- 34. MOON TIME III
- 35. MOON SIGN V
- 36. MAYA RITUAL V
- 37. MAYA SUN III
- 38. SUN HYMN IV
- 39. NOW AND THE COMING TIME II
- 40. NOW AND THE COMING TIME III

Price List

1.	QUETZACOBAL THE SUN	£5000
2.	ORLEC STAR	£5000
3.	REALM OF THE SUN	£5000
4.	ORLEC & MAYA	£5000
5.	MAYA NIGHT	£5000
6.	MAYA CONTRIBUTION	£5000
7.	CHAK MUC	£5000
8.	QUETZACOBAL & THE DAY 2	£5000
9.	NOW & THE COMING TIME I	£5000
10.	SUN HIEROGLYPH	£5000
11.	CHATO PRESENCE	£5000
12.	PRIEST	£5000
13.	NIGHT AND THE ORLEC	£5000
14.	HYMN TO THE SUN I	£5000
15.	DAWN & THE EVENING STAR	£5000
16.	PRESENCE & EPOCH	£5000
17.	HYMN TO THE SUN II	£5000
18.	ORLEC PAST	£5000
19.	QUETZACOBAL III	£5000
20.	THE EYE OF THE DAY	£5000
21.	CHATO III	£5000
22.	HYMN TO THE SUN VI-A	£5000
23.	HYMN TO THE SUN VII	£5000
24.	HYMN TO THE SUN VIII	£5000
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29.	HYMN TO THE SUN V	£5000
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31.	MAYA MATRIX II	£5000
32.	THE KEEPER OF THE TEMPLE	£5000