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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

L.S. LOWRY THE LONESOME VISIONARY

BY

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

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Fig.1 Lowry in his Studio

INTRODUCTION

"I know from my own experience that a mans life work is nothing but a long journey to find again by all the detours of art the two or three powerful images upon which his whole being opened up for the first time" (1)

Many elements from Lowrys background went to form what Albert Camus describes as the "long journey" through life. Lowry was born with a rich imagination and he found in his native Manchester an environment that stimulated it. Lowry dedicated his lifetime to portraying the industrial north of England, it was to become what writer Julian Spalding describes as Lowrys outlook or message.

The fact that Lowry did not live in London, and was not at the metropolitan heart of things, alongside his need to paint from the everyday activities of the industrial worker, removed him geographically and socially from the mainstream art world and its development in Britain. Lowry at this stage of his career was totally uninterested and unaffected by the activities in London. In 1922 he is reported as saying:

"I don't care tuppence for what they do in the London art world, it doesn't matter to me. I don't think

of it. All I am concerned with is doing my own thing in my own way as well as I can. (2)

Ironically, it was not in Manchester, the city that he dedicated his whole life to, that he was to hold his first major exhibition, but London. While Manchester still regarded his work as amateurish, Lowry's paintings found a far more appreciative audience in London. In 1939 the Lefevre Gallery had the courage and confidence to promote Lowry's work and have done so ever since.

To some people Lowry had the appearance of being aloof and austere, and to others he seemed charming and mild mannered. He glowed under the attention of friends, but he was also known to hide himself away from what he called the parasites of the art world, people whom he despised as always:

"wanting something for nothing" (3)

Lowry assumed characterizations or roles when dealing with people. He compartmentalized all his relationships. He never once got his roles mixed up. Shelley Rohde in her biography, "A Private View of L.S. Lowry", compares him to a chameleon, in his ability to change his attitude and manners to match those of his companions, or of their expectations of him. He was different things to different people.

Robert Tyrell in his documentary on Lowry "Old Man of the

Sea". reports on the artists skill at role play:

"If he thinks he is being cast into a role, his inner demon of perversity will make him act the part" (4)

One part which Lowry acted out to perfection, was his role of full-time painter and worker. Completely unknown to his professional colleagues and close friends, Lowry worked from the years 1910-1952 as a collector of rents, and clerk for the Pall Mall Property Company. Not only did he manage to deceive the public of his dual role until his retirement, but he carried his well guarded secret to his grave. It was not until after his death in 1976 that the real truth was to shock the public.

The duality of worker and painter wasn't the only role Lowry was to play. The artist throughout his lifetime assumed many.

When the knowledge of Lowry's employment was exposed after his death, many thought that due to the nature of his job as a rent collector, working in direct contact with poverty and deprivation, he was in some respect assuming the role of social commentator. This however is untrue, as Norman Colquhoun reported in his journal on mental science:

"Lowry is not making a social comment on man or

on his environment, but revealing a type of mental organization which sees the world from the heightened standpoint of watcher or spectator" (5)

So Lowry played the role of spectator of life rather than partaker. He was the observer unobserved. The role of spectator of his scenes however, was not an easy one to play. His paintings attracted continuous ridicule from friends, artists and most of all his mother.

Her dominance over him has been widely recognized as being of crucial significance in Lowry's perception of life and his choice and treatment of subject matter. The third role Lowry was to play was that of unworthy son to an unnaturally demanding mother. Elizabeth Lowry regarded Lowry's paintings as a waste of time, and dismissed his total dedication to his art as being a mere pastime or hobby.

He was, in his mothers eyes, a failure, and throughout his life he was constantly trying to justify himself to her. But she never had a good word to say for his paintings. It seems that his mother was a cold ambitious woman, as a family friend Doreen Fletcher recalls:

"It was embarrassing to hear Elizabeth going on about the ugliness of what her son was doing, how sordid it was, how devoid of beauty and unnecessary, she never seemed to have a good word to say for

them" (6)

The last role he was to play, and one which preoccupied his later years, was that of Fairy Godfather to several young girls. This relationship of Lowrys is unusual, in that the appearance of the girls is familiar, and each had her allotted span in his life. Pat Gerard, one of Lowry's young friends, remarking on his compartmentalizing of the girls, who were all part of his 'Ann' image remembers:

"Subtly he always let you know that...there was another Ann around the corner" (7)

Aloof and with an obsessive devotion to his industrializations, his mother and in later years with his 'Ann' image, he allowed no one to get too close to him, and he remained known as Mr. Lowry to even his closest friends.

Lowry's paintings and drawings, visionary in their intensity are complete realizations of his state of mind and emotion. He was unique in taking a conscious decision to record industrial life. The intensity of his vision was remarkable. For one who drifted in and out of friendships and art schools, the strength of his decision is notable. Nothing could shake his belief. The laughter from contemporaries, the lack of encouragement from his adored mother, no matter what the opposition, he remained true to his mission.

Lowry's true character remains an enigma. The man who successfully contrived devices, codes, barriers and schemes in his paintings, used these same characteristics in his private life.

Throughout his eighty nine years, the role of outsider and artistic eccentric came naturally to him. When his 'powerful images' are viewed together, they add a chilling insight into Lowry the lonesome visionary.

Lowry was a solitary creature in his behavior. He was not a socializer and he was not a talker. He was a man who lived in his own world, a world of his own making. He was a man who was not interested in the world around him, but in the world within him. He was a man who was not interested in the world of the future, but in the world of the past. He was a man who was not interested in the world of the present, but in the world of the mind.

Truthfulness was not always high on Lowry's personal list of priorities. He maintained he had never been anything but a painter. When in fact he worked until his retirement at age 65, at a time to live for as a real collector for the day. He was a man who was not interested in the world of the future, but in the world of the past. He was a man who was not interested in the world of the present, but in the world of the mind.

"I was willing to try anything, rather than take
a hardass job. I've always been a left
heart" (1)

Writing of Lowry's personality, John Rothwell, a
private investigator or detective that there is nothing
that Lowry's personality

CHAPTER 1

THE OUTLOOK OR MESSAGE

"was inspired by malice or the intention of causing"
Lowry was utterly devious in his determination to keep the
knowledge of his full-time employment hidden from the public.
It was a well kept secret that only began to unravel itself
after his death in 1976. The discovery shocked many, not
only because of the nature of his employment, but
professional artists, critics and numerous close friends were
amazed at the deviousness with which he managed to disguise
his double life.

"They laughed at us for thirty years in Pendleton" (2)
Truthfulness was not always high on Lowry's personal list of
priorities. He maintained he had never been anything but a
painter, when in fact he worked until his retirement at sixty
five, at a nine to five job as a rent collector for the Pall
Mall Property Company. A duality of character emerged, as an
employee he dismissed any claims of being serious about his
painting by brushing it off as a pastime. As a painter he
scoffed in an almost condescending manner at the thought of
having to work:

"...which he was compelled to undertake" (3)

"I was willing to try anything, rather than take a humdrum job. I've always been a lazy man at heart" (1)

Writing on Lowrys deviousness . John Rothenstein defends the artists character by stating that there is nothing to suggest that Lowrys deception:

"was inspired by malice or the intention of causing harm to anyone" (2)

Lowry merely wanted his art to be recognized on merit alone. The fact that he kept his painting life and occupation in complete isolation is testimony to his struggle to find self respect for his work. He was painting at a time when Manchester regarded his work as unprofessional:

"They laughed at me for thirty years in Pendlebury" (3)

They laughed at his work and disapproved of his outlook or message. Several reasons could be examined as to why Lowry guarded his employment with such secrecy. John Rothenstein puts forward the idea that Lowrys' forty years silence resulted out of an:

"enduring embarrassment at the menial work as a collector which he was compelled to undertake" (4)

His father died in 1932 leaving outstanding debts which Lowry repaid. This occurred at a time when he was still unknown as an artist and was financially dependant on his employment. At this stage of Lowrys career, nobody took much interest in his paintings. People thought that for a contemporary artist to be worthwhile, he had to be part of a current trend, and had to have an influence in art circles. Lowry fitted into none of these categories. His work was not fashionable and defied easy classification. The Manchester public remained highly sceptical of Lowry and his work. Writing on Lowrys rejection at this time, Margo Ingham stated:

"They continued to treat him with tolerant amusement, they didn't take his work seriously and had no inkling of his coming importance. They blinked, took stock, but remained unconvinced." (5)

At this sensitive stage of Lowrys career, when he was trying so hard to establish himself as a reputable painter, had the knowledge of his full-time employment reached the ears of the art critics, it would have had a detrimental effect on his future development. He feared that the professional art world would use the discovery to devalue and demoralize his art, by casting the title of amateur artist, or Sunday Painter upon him. As producer John Read in a B.B.C.

documentary on the artist confirms:

"He feared that if he were caught he might still be regarded as an amateur, a weekend painter, not to be taken seriously" (6)

Whatever Lowrys reason was for deceiving the art world and close friends of his dual role, the influence his employment had on his paintings and drawings cannot be overlooked. His job allowed him the freedom to weave himself through streets, lanes and alleyways, observing men, women and children in their daily activities. He was the lonely spectator of industrial life, as he claimed himself:

"Be by yourself and observe; you can only do that if you walk alone" (7)

And walk alone he did for forty years. he walked the streets of Pendlebury on his rounds, mentally cataloguing people, places and things which could later be compiled on canvas:

"If I was to say my chief recreation, I ought to say walking the streets of any poor quarter of anyplace I may happen to be in" (8)

When Lowry first moved to Pendlebury in 1903, he was depressed by the squalor of some of the surroundings. Later however he became less affected and began to see something

behind the apparent drabness and poverty:

At first I disliked it. After a year I got used to it. Within a few years I began to be interested and at length I became obsessed by it" (9)

It was in 1910 that Lowry began his double life as a painter and worker, but it was in 1916 that his true vision and obsessive dedication to the industrial scene was realized. The year 1916 marked the beginning of a major development in his life, for it was in that year when he was twenty nine years old that he was introduced to a new way of looking at industrial life.

"The mill was turning out hundreds of little pinched black figures, heads bent down leaning and lowered - and suddenly I knew what to paint" (10)

His creative mind had been opened up to the touching beauties of the industrial suburbs of Manchester, and he immediately began to make paintings. He wanted to show that in the bleak surroundings there was a subject matter worthy of an artist and even a beauty, and one which no other artist had made his central theme:

"My ambition was to put the industrial scenes on the map because no one had done it,...no one had

done it seriously" (11)

From that memorable day, he became an industrial painter. His mission to put the industrial scene on the map fascinated and absorbed all his time and energy, until as John Rotherstein describes:

"it had him enslaved" (12)

Throughout his life he maintained a solitude under which his acquired vision flourished. If in 1916 Pendlebury was to provide the vision, his job as rent collector provided the means. The means to quietly observe the hustle and activity of a working class town. He observed from afar. The vision of that illuminating day in 1916 was to haunt not only Lowry's memory, but haunt many a Lowry canvas over the next thirty years. As Michael Leber describes in his book L.S Lowry:

"By making that one decision he shaped his destiny" (13)

The nature of his vision marked the beginning of a long struggle for Lowry. From 1910-1939 he painted alone without recognition, he followed his mission in complete isolation and seemed to have been:

"sustained only by his vision and the conviction that what he was doing was right" (14)

Lowry's devotion to his vision, coupled with his daily observations in the industrial environment in which he lived, resulted in a gradual development of a style and vocabulary of images. His method, style and vocabulary enabled him to describe people and places in a way which made them instantly recognizable and uniquely his own.

In the same way Lowry was to separate his working and painting careers, so to did he isolate and categorize his subject matter and stylistic approach, as Francis Hoyland confirms:

"He is forced to develop a series of devices in order to get his picture to make sense. Having made up his mind to present straightforward images of the industrial north; Lowry made his devices work in the interest of clarity" (15)

By means of successfully developed devices and codes; Lowry was able to pigeon-hole his paintings. Firstly by breaking down subject matter it can be assessed under the following headings: landscape, portraits, solitary figures and industrializations. His technical devices range from using centralized composition, barrier elements, topographical viewpoints, impressionistic, expressionistic approach, crowd, rhythm, movement and finally his use of white and four

colours:- prussian blue, vermillion, yellow ochre and black.

Lowry today has become stereotyped as the painter of industrial scenes, and creator of the matchstick men and women. Although the industrialization is only one section of his versatile collection, it is unmistakably his most productive, and now fourteen years after his death, his most popular.

MANUFACTURING TOWN (Fig. 2) is one of Lowrys earliest depictions of his obsession with the industrial scene. Painted in 1922, six years after his vision in Pendlebury, this composite view, showing the choking atmosphere of a manufacturing town, was painted while Lowrys palette was still dark, and in this case, appropriate for the scene.

This painting provides the viewer with a closer examination of the industrial worker. He was struck by the significance of the landscape of the industrial towns. Here was a whole society surrounded by limited surroundings - cobbled street, red brick houses, soot covered factories and mills. In this painting Lowrys Pendlebury echoes similarities to the industrial scenes in George Orwells book, *The Road to Wigan Pier*:

"As you walk through the industrial towns, you lose yourself in labyrinths of little brick houses, blackened by smoke" (16)

Lowrys basic imagery is rooted in the 1920's. MANUFACTURING TOWN is successful in capturing the style and flavour of the Chaplinesque years. He clearly utilizes the fashion of the 1920's; the baggy clothes, caps and oversized boots. The figures stoop forward as they walk or stand with legs astride. A sameness is established between the drab colouring of the workers and the smokey muted tones of the background. The Lancashire sky is grey, and the bulky figures are constantly overshadowed by the vast rectangular mills, hovering into the smoke-filled sky.

LANDSCAPE IN WIGAW (Fig. 3) also belongs to Lowrys early dark depictions of industrial life, but unlike MANUFACTURING TOWN man is completely absent. Painted in 1925 it represents an early industrial portrayal in all its rawness. Executed in a vaguely impressionistic nature, it reeks of bronchial gloom. The landscape is corroded and worn away by the evil fumes of industry. Despite the darkening of the landscape by smoke and pollution, Lowry still permits the colours to be rich and full bodied while generously applied. It is a scene of merging images, a dreamscape in all its smoky glory. Lowrys famous stylistic devices are as yet undeveloped, but there is a hint of his later explosion, in his introduction of the tall verticals of the chimneys searing into the choking sky.

It was these early depictions of Manchester that the public

did not like. The people of Manchester felt that he was giving a sordid impression of the city. Writing in her biography on Lowry, Shelley Rohde summarizes public feeling at the time:

"It was his honesty in his work that made it so distasteful to those to whom such people and places were the most familiar. The truth disturbed them. Lowry never had to romanticize the Dark North" (17)

Owing to the primitive character of his early portrayal of the Dark North, Lowry's mastery of composition tends to be overlooked.

Lowry considered the 1950 painting THE POND (Fig. 4) to be his finest industrial composition. Jumping forward twenty eight years from his painting MANUFACTURING TOWN it is easy to see how developed, polished and presented his interpretations of industrial life has become. Out of the choking atmosphere of MANUFACTURING TOWN and LANDSCAPE IN WIGAW emerges a completely fresh approach to the portrayal of the industrializations.

THE POND contains all the elements of Lowry's visionary language. The raised viewpoint, the barrier across the foreground, the organized rows of houses, the scattering of workers and general activity all acted out in an almost

toytown setting. Norman Coloquhoun writing on Lowrys organization of scenes states:

"He reveals himself as a spectator in a world in miniature and moreover that the position he assumes is that of looking down on this world from a height" (18)

The intensity of this miniature scene is calmed by the presence of the large oval pond dotted with boats. The Stockport Viaduct which appears in the background, held a strong fascination for Lowry. The overall success of the painting lies in Lowrys interesting combination of vertical, horizontal and curving components. Of THE POND Lowry wrote:

"This is a composite picture, made up, part real, part imaginary...bits and pieces of my home locality. I hadn't the slightest idea of what I was going to put in the picture, but it eventually came out as you see it" (19)

INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE (Fig. 5) is similar in subject, ambition and level of accomplishment to THE POND. This 1952 painting like THE POND is a complete celebration of Lowrys industrial motifs that haunt his vision. Horizontal and vertical elements are a dominant feature of Lowrys art. His tall mills and chimneys rise up from flat streets, alongside

gatherings of people outside working class houses. The Stockport Viaduct also makes an appearance, speaking of this regular feature Lowry states:

"it dominates my life, like some recurring subject in a dream" (20)

The structural arrangement of the scene is executed with the sharpness of an architect. The construction is strong, firm and contains scene within scene. There is a place for everything. Speaking of this painting, art critic Eric Newton assessed it as being:

"an organisation from foreground to horizon. It is a masterpiece" (21)

As Lowry in INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE leads the viewers eye into the composition, he exercised the same device in BRITAIN AT PLAY (Fig. 6). In this lively painting of 1943 Lowry leads the crowds into a main recreation area, through a street which partially divides the composition. In this painting we witness the full explosion of the masses. The bulky forms of the black clothed figures in MANUFACTURING TOWN have been shed; enter the storm, the Lowry army, men, women, children everywhere, small figures, large figures, figures who as Julian Spalding describes, are like:

"iron filings springing to obey the force of a

hidden magnet" (22)

It is thought by some that these later figures, commonly termed his 'matchstick men' were as Michael Leber describes:

"some sort of slapdash innovation at best or primitive depiction at worst" (23)

Defending such allegations of his work, Lowry in speaking to Tilly Marshall states:

"I paint them that way, because thats the way I see them in my minds eye, always moving, but look they've got weight. Take that fellow - his front leg is maybe no more than one stroke of paint, but he's got all the weight of his body on it and you know that is only achieved by years in the life class" (24)

He perfected his figures by a twenty year academic training, and thirty years of walking the streets in observation.

Another of Lowrys devices which he used quite boldly in this painting, is the barrier element. In BRITAIN AT PLAY the barrier takes the form of a wall and railing, in other paintings it is not unusual for him to substitute a fence, footpath or railway track. By slicing the canvas he

immediately creates a barrier, and prevents the viewer from getting any closer to the scene. In this painting the gentle flowing movement of the workers is enclosed by the barrier and the people are sandwiched between their homes and factories, the only lives they know.

Even though this is predominately a recording of a recreational scene, possibly a day of leisure, the immediate joviality of the event is overshadowed by the looming presence of the mills and factories in the background. The workers vision is limited to an industrial horizon. As the workers who populate his painting were driven by destiny, so too was Lowry. His destiny was to record the daily activities of the industrial life. He wanted to put his art on the artistic map and to prove that there was subject matter for a painter in the industrial north. As Eric Newton wrote of Lowry:

"Mr Lowry has formulated his own creed and consequently he will fit into no category...He belongs to no school, but ultimately he may be the founder of one" (25)

On a contemporary level, Lowry, although he remained outside mainstream development, was not alone in his obsessive exploration of his immediate surroundings. Novelist David Storey coupled Lowry and Stanley Spencer together as representing:

"The reclusive charm of our native art" (26)

However differing in approach and style the visionary intensity remains the same. As Lowrys art was constructed within the boundaries of Pendlebury, Spencers vision was concentrated within the borders of his native Cookham. Both artists maintained private visions, while at the same time employing exaggeration and distortion for dramatic purposes. Stanley Spencer only had to look over his garden wall to find a scene he could easily translate into a religious theme. Likewise Lowrys material was on his doorstep:

"My subjects were all around me...there were mills and collaries all around Pendlebury, the people who worked there were passing morning and night. All my material was on my doorstep" (27)

Lowrys paintings unlike those of Stanley Spencers, rarely tell a story. Lowry just painted what he saw and John Rothenstein describes Lowry as painting:

"The bleak grim twilight of disorderly dereliction, the last decaying vestiges of the Industrial Revolution" (28)

Lowrys obsession with the industrial landscape did not stem

from sympathy of the working class. His fascination lay in man, not as an individual but in man as one of the masses. The crowds of people trudging diligently to and from their work place, the patterns, shapes and rhythms they create against a backdrop of woollen mills, smokey chimneys and giant concrete buildings, became his life long vision.

To Lowry, his job as rent collector offered him nothing more than the chance to be outdoors, weaving himself through the streets of Pendlebury. His relationship with the fabric of northern society is at once intimate yet removed. While his works are based on daily experiences of all that was meaningful and immediate to him.

Lowry displayed no feeling of sentimentality in his paintings. He had no sympathy for the characters in his scenes:

"the thing about painting is that there should be no sentiment, no sentiment" (29)

The public often made the mistake, when looking at his portrayals of working class areas, of identifying Lowry as a social commentator. On the contrary, Lowry explains:

"To say the truth, I was not thinking very much

about the people, I did not care for them in the way a reformer does. They were a private beauty that haunted me. I loved them and the houses in the same way, as part of a vision" (30)

It took the best part of thirty years for the 'private beauty' that haunted him to succeed. Today he is celebrated with justification, of not only being the main artistic pioneer of the industrial north, but also the:

"aesthetic historian of a particular part of England, and artist whose singular vision became widely accepted and who could communicate to everyone through his pictures" (31)

CHAPTER 1
ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig.2 MANUFACTURING TOWN (1922)



Fig.3 LANDSCAPE IN WIGAN (1925)



Fig.4 THE POND (1950)



Fig.5 INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE (1952)

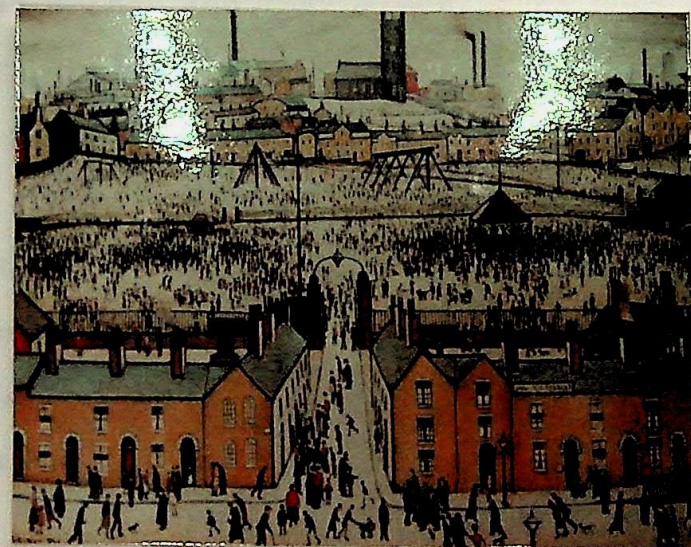


Fig.6 BRITAIN AT PLAY (1943)

CHAPTER 2

THE MAN BEHIND THE MASK

As Lowry was to remain alone in his portrayal of industrial scenes, he was also to remain isolated in his personal life. Born in 1887, an only child, he lived with his parents, then his widowed mother and then alone. He does not recall any happy memories from his childhood. Reflecting on his younger days Lowry remembers:

"I didn't like being a child. I was not interested. It was not a nice time at all. I have no use for the story that it is the best time of your life, that's all bunkum to me" (1)

Despite his unhappiness as a child, he developed a very strong affection for his mother. She did not approve of his paintings, and dismissed them quite cruelly as being:

"a little hobby" (2)

All he yearned for was a word of encouragement. His life was

strongly dominated by his mother. While she lived he dedicated his whole life to her. As he struggled to gain encouragement for his painting, he also struggled for acknowledgement at home. But he was rejected both publicly and privately. As family friend Edith Timperley was to recall of Lowrys upbringing:

"He did have a rough time, he had no emotional support at home and negligible recognition in the town. The only thing he wanted, was to be an artist, it was the only thing that moved him to animation. He craved to be appreciated" (3)

Shelley Rohde in her biography 'A Private View of L.S. Lowry' stated Lowrys relationship with his mother as being central to an understanding of his work:

"He conformed to no standards his mother could recognise, displaying no talents she could admire, inevitably as he grew to manhood Lowry came to see himself through her eyes, a failure, a misfit, a grotesque" (4)

After his fathers death, Lowrys mother became bedridden and remained there for the next seven years totally dependant, physically and emotionally, upon her only son. It was a

burden willingly undertaken but almost drove him to the brink of derangement.

The 1938 painting HEAD OF A MAN (Fig. 7) is instrumental in marking the beginning of Lowrys dramatic retreat into self absorption. Long considered an imaginary portrait, but in fact it presents a harrowing and introverted analysis of Lowry at his most desolate. He was deeply afraid of his mothers approaching death. A woman whom he had cared and worshipped for so long and a woman whose death would leave him completely alone. He poured all his emotions into this frightening self portrait:

"I was simply letting off steam. My mother was bedfast. All the paintings of that period were done under great stress and tension and were all based on myself. I reflected myself in those pictures" (5)

This brutal self satire reveals one of the rare moments where Lowry shows sympathy for his character. It personifies the emotional condition of Lowry at a time of great suffering and pain. The sharp vertical strokes are a stylistic device he employs to reveal feeling of despair and frustration. The unnaturally horizontal lines above the eyes are crucial to the whole effect. They make the eyes stare unbearably and draw attention to the blue in them. A blue that also streaks vertically down the background of the picture. The untidy

hair, stubbled chin, deeply carved eyebrows and sharp facial lines, add to the feelings of despair, tension and stress.

1939 was a crucial year for Lowry. Throughout his life all he wanted was acknowledgement for his work, so he could justify himself to his mother:

"In those early days, I was constantly trying to justify myself to my parents" (6)

On the brink of his first one man show, the acclaim that he had wanted for so long, he was tragically robbed of the one person he ever felt close to. After the death of his mother the sense of the futility of life was never to leave him. it was the cruellest blow ever to strike him, and HEAD OF A MAN remains a penetrating insight into Lowrys character. As feelings of total helplessness captured him, he was to repeatedly say of his success:

"It all came too late" (7)

Lowry at this most tragic time of his life could not communicate as he wanted to communicate, he could not give himself fully. To have done so would have allowed a glimpse behind what Shelley Rohde describes as his mask. Lowry successfully disguised behind his mask the secrets of his

most private emotions. As colleague Harold Riley describes:

"He could never confide his emotions. His mother was the one person in whom he felt he could have confided what was in his heart, yet when he tried to do so, she cut him off. He shut himself quite firmly into his own box, it was as if he felt that if it was open, people would climb into him and see what he was, and he didn't really think he was very much" (8)

In the 1955 painting *COURTING* (Fig. 8) the sense of isolation and lack of communication between the characters emerges. The figures sit apart from each other and despite the title, no closeness or affection emanates from this painting. Although the expressions of the figures are not as tortured in execution as his earlier painting *HEAD OF A MAN*, the psychological content is evident in the relationship between them. They sit apart with imaginary barriers constructed around them, unable to communicate or make any real contact with one another.

This highly coloured crayon drawing with its immediate comic quality can not hide the loneliness Lowry suffered in his personal life. The figure of the man looks distinctly like a self portrait.

The brightly coloured crayons dig harshly into the paper.

Similar to HEAD OF A MAN, Lowry applies slashing strokes and abruptly broken outlines to create an atmosphere of tension and frustration.

Containing shapes was vital for Lowry. he drew outlines with exceptional force. He used the black outline to express his gloomy fatalism and the two figures in this composition are as Julian Spalding describes:

"trapped by their own fate" (9)

The figures like Lowry are trapped behind barriers, unable to communicate. Lowry's fate, to be alone in life was determined by his mother.

His mothers dominance prevented any chance of Lowry having a relationship with a girl, never mind marrying. While she lived he had no need for another woman. His mother absorbed all his thoughts, time and energy. His mother declared that as long as she was alive:

"Laurie will never marry" (10)

At art school, where he spent the best part of twenty years, part time, he was referred to as a 'cold fish', and he went about a lot on his own. Recalling her college days with

Lowry. Muriel Orton says:

"He was basically shy and it was not easy to break those barriers. You had to go half way to meet him. He had not the slightest bit of sex appeal, nothing would convince me he ever had a sexual relationship" (11)

After his mothers death in 1939, Lowry must have felt a certain liberation, and what did transpire was something very different and is perhaps one of the most intriguing and mystifying features of his art.

His central imagery becomes common. He painted a series of idealized women. They are not strictly portraits though some are based on a series of young girls, almost one a decade, all of whom bore a striking resemblance to each other. All the girls were young with dark hair parted and meeting at the back. Lowrys relationship with these girls was platonic, there was no sexual involvement. Colleague James Fitton, writing on this sensitive area of Lowrys life states:

"The sexual urge was not there, I formed the impression and it is one I retain to this day, that Lowry was an asexual being, a kind of neuter. He was interested in, and affected by women in the same way he was interested and affected by people. He persistently avoided any area that might demand

involvement" (12)

So great were the similarities of these girls that they became collectively termed as his 'Ann' image.

His 1957 PORTRAIT OF ANN (Fig. 9) epitomizes all the qualities of his 'Ann' image. He presents the viewer with a composite image, a conglomeration of all the qualities of his ideal woman. It depicts an ethereal, dramatic looking girl with dark hair, large red lips, heavily outlined eyes and elongated neck. PORTRAIT OF ANN possesses the same implacability, the same remote and anguished stare as the HEAD OF A MAN. The treatment of the girl is highly stylized, and represents not a portrait of a particular person but of an abstracted individual. He presents us with a stylized image, a rigid facade, which rigorously conceals the sitters personality. In the same way Lowry was to conceal his true character by assuming a mask, he conceals any feeling he may have for this image by imprisoning its expression. The gaze of the girl is distanced and appears almost hypnotic. Like a cut-out figure to be almost worshipped, she represents Lowrys dream woman or icon.

The influence of Rossetti in Lowrys PORTRAIT OF ANN can not be denied. Both artists create woman as a dream image, or fantasy. Lowry was completely obsessed with Rossettis portraits of women, and collected several of them. His most prized possession was Rossetti's painting PROSERPINE (Fig.

10) In this painting Rossetti represents a woman with a remoteness of gaze, heavy lids, upturned lips, and hair gently framing the face.

Lowry describes Rossetti's women as being:

"not real women, they are dreams, he used them for something in his mind" (13)

Both Lowry's PORTRAIT OF ANN and Rossetti's PROSERPINE represent images of dream women, however, unlike Rossetti, Lowry's painting has no suggestion of props to hint at a deeper meaning. Rossetti uses flowers for youth and fruit for sexuality. Lowry's painting displays no clues to any hidden sexuality.

Was Lowry like the Pre Raphaelite poet using the image of Ann for something in his mind? As one of Lowry's young friends recalls:

"There was a sadness within him that I could not define, almost as if he had missed out on something that he could never recapture" (14)

His image of Ann, like so many things in Lowry's life became a mystery, but the strangely beautiful yet disturbing drawings

which were discovered after his death are the climax of the mystery attached to Lowry.

These works, erotic in nature are a continuation of his 'Ann' image. They are however, far removed from the expressionless girl with the stylized features staring blankly from the canvas. These drawings (Fig. 11) present images of Ann in several guises, as a ballet dancer, doll and puppet. In some the costume is distorted and uncomfortable. They are engulfed with frustration, anger, gloom and pain.

Thus Lowry's 'Image of Ann' takes on a new importance, revealing in his hidden paintings a fearful frustration and dreadful pain of which he could not speak.

Carol Anne Speirs who met Lowry in 1957, was the last of his series of friendships with young girls. She does not assume her part in Lowry's life to have been more important to him than any other.

"I was simply the tag-end of what I, for want of a better description call the Ann thing. I filled a gap when he needed it, and perhaps had he lived longer, or had he been younger when we met, he would have passed from me to another, younger Ann" (15)

Throughout his life the relationship he had with these young girls was that of Godfather. He encouraged, entertained, and

was extremely generous towards all of them. After his death, when the drawings were exposed, each of the girls could identify aspects of their character in his images. As Carol Anne Spiers describes:

"There is a little bit of each one of us in his secret drawings; or, perhaps, a little bit of her in each of us. They are the essence of his real, his secret, his private image of Ann, who ever or whatever she was; the one who somewhere, sometime in his life hurt him dreadfully" (16)

Could she have represented the fantasy of a love he never knew, yet hoped to find, or did she represent an image of his mother, the only woman he ever felt close to. He lived for her smile, a word of praise. He was absorbed in her and she took up all his time. Perhaps in his creation of Ann he was trying to immortalize the memory of his mother.

No one knew who the real Ann was, whether she represented the innocence of young girls, or the memory of his mother.

Her true identity remains a mystery in the same way Lowry's identity is never released. He remains as always the man behind the mask.

CHAPTER 2
ILLUSTRATIONS

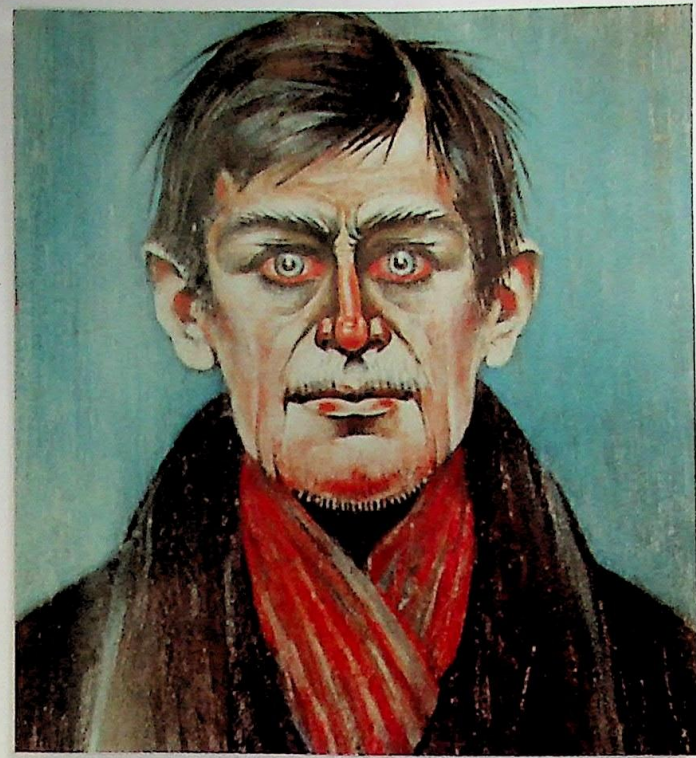


Fig.7 HEAD OF A MAN (1938)



Fig.8 COURTING (1955)

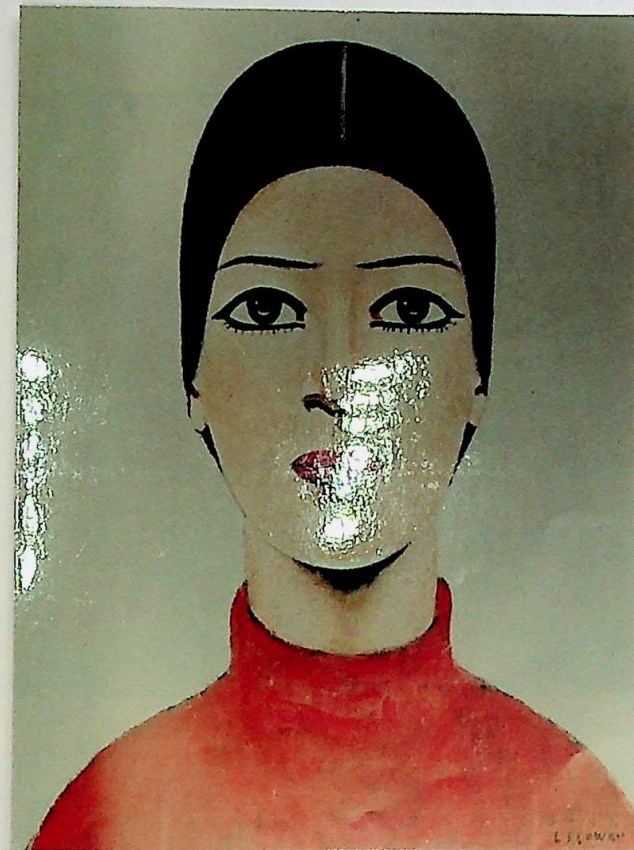


Fig.9 PORTRAIT OF ANN (1957)

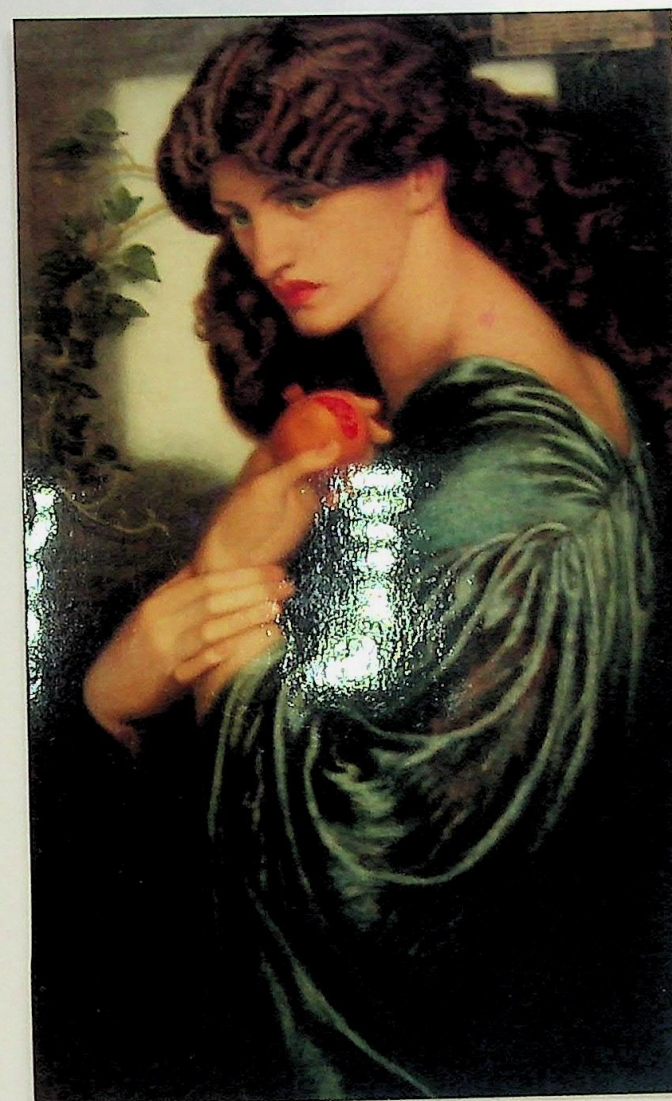


Fig.10 PROSERPINE

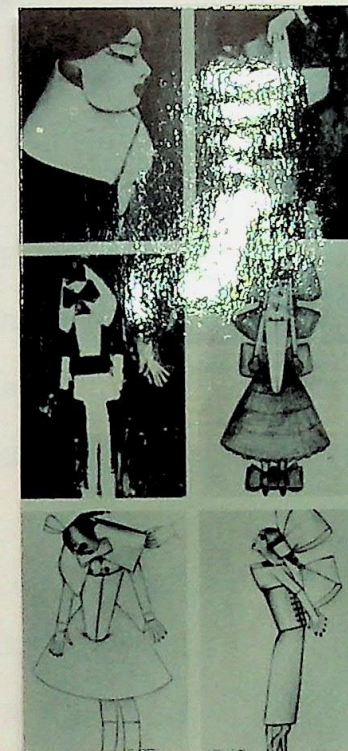
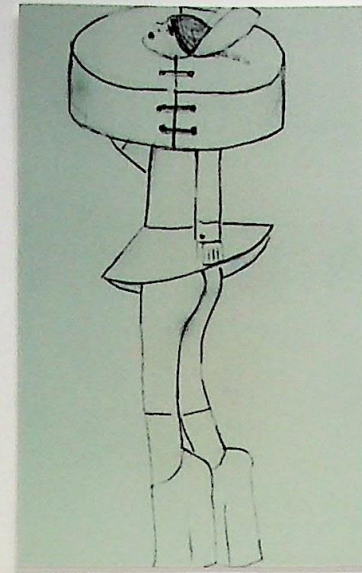


Fig.11 GIRL WITH BOW (1973)

CONCLUSION

It has taken almost a lifetime for the works of L.S. Lowry to receive the attention they deserve. His art is outstanding for the eccentric fanatical obsession he had with the urban landscape.

Lowry's aim as an artist was to explore and record the industrial north of England. He was able, because of his job and the area in which lived, to absorb the images which form the industrial landscape. He evolved a distinctive manner and style of working and remained true to it throughout his life.

Almost anything in the Manchester environment was potential subject matter for a Lowry painting. No matter how packed and crammed the industrial scenes became, the vision never changed. He developed an almost tunnel vision. For thirty years his props remained the same.

As he enjoyed regularity and routine in his nine to five job as a rent collector, Lowry exercised regularity and

organization in his paintings and also in the compartmentalizing of his friends, especially his Ann images.

He constructed imaginary barriers in his painting and private life. In the same way no one was aware of the artists employment, or the full extent of his relationship with young women, or his total obsession with the Ann image and later his erotic drawings; no one during the artists lifetime got beyond the barriers to reveal the real Mr Lowry. His true character remained a mystery.

Lowry has a particular English genius, the ability to express through his art, the spirit of a place. His reality does bite deep. He moved from his early academic training to the creation of a vision in his industrializations, to an idiom, an icon in his image of Ann.

Lowry throughout his life felt isolated, he was alone in his vision to record the industrial way of life, isolated within the family unit, he saw himself a failure in the eyes of an excessively demanding mother, and he remained detached from any personal relationships.

His self sought solitude, necessary for his painting, has long been misunderstood for an imposed loneliness. He was never a recluse, he simply kept his friends separate from his public image. The sense of isolation was important to Lowry's vision, in recording industrial scenes. It is not

for factual accuracy that we value Lowry - but for the independence and the imaginative truth of his outlook:

"my whole happiness or unhappiness was that my vision was like nobody elses. Had I not been lonely, I would not have seen what I did" (1)

He is remembered most famously today for his paintings, but in other ways also he influenced many people in his lifetime. Many have benefitted from his loyalty, companionship, humour, generosity, his eccentricities and peculiarities.

Lowry fits uncomfortably into the historical structure created by art historians, but his eccentric vision undoubtedly makes him one of the most important British artists of the first half of the twentieth century.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

1. Levy, Mervyn. Painters of Today LS Lowry
2. Spalding, Julian. Lowry p.13
3. Marshall, Tilly. Life with Lowry
4. Rohde, Shelley. A Private View of LS Lowry p.58
5. Ibid p.214
6. Ibid p.75
7. Ibid p.156

Chapter.1

1. Rohde, Shelley. p.94
2. Ibid p.xviii
3. Leber, Michael and Sandling, Judith LS Lowry p.16
4. Rohde. p.xvii
5. Ibid p.225
6. Ibid p.96
7. Ibid p.171
8. Leber and Sandling p.17
9. Spalding p.85
10. Leber and Sandling p.17
11. Rohde p.61
12. Rothenstein, John. Modern English Painters
Volume One: Sickert to Lowry p.273
13. Leber and Sandling p.17
14. Rohde p.63

15. Spalding p.89
16. Orwell, George. The Road to Wigan Pier p.45
17. Rohde p.59
18. Ibid p.214
19. Leber and Sandling p.109
20. Ibid p.109
21. Ibid p.100
22. Spalding p.16
23. Leber and Sandling p.17
24. Marshall, Tilly. Life with Lowry p.12
25. Spalding p.87
26. Leber and Sandling p.88
27. Ibid p.127
28. Rothenstein p.269
29. Spalding p.40
30. Ibid p.28
31. Vaizey, Marina. LS Lowry p.4

Chapter.2

1. Rohde p.27
2. Ibid p.75
3. Ibid p.112
4. Ibid p.3
5. Spalding p.33
6. Rohde p.82
7. Leber and Sandling p.9
8. Rohde p.220
9. Spalding p.21

10. Rohde p.149
11. Ibid p.152
12. Ibid p.151
13. Spalding p.35
14. Rohde p.158
15. Ibid p.194
16. Ibid p.196

Conclusion

1. Spalding p.30

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3. Landscape in Wigan 1925 - LS Lowry
4. The Pond 1950 - LS Lowry
5. Industrial Landscape 1952 - LS Lowry
6. Britain at Play 1943 - LS Lowry
7. Head of a Man 1938 - LS Lowry
8. Courting 1955 - LS Lowry
9. Portrait of Ann 1957 - LS Lowry
10. Proserpine - Rossetti
11. Girl with Bow 1973 - LS Lowry

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