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PEOPLE WATCHING: THE ART OF L. S. LOWRY

ONLINE: 15 JUNE – 2 JULY 2020



L. S. Lowry, *Coming from the Match* (1959, estimate: £500,000-800,000)

London – People Watching: The Art of L.S. Lowry, Christie's focused presentation of original works by L. S. Lowry, will showcase an important private collection of 11 key examples that highlight the ongoing fascination the artist had for the characters and scenes he observed around him. This collection includes examples previously owned by Monty Bloom, Lowry's most enthusiastic patron, and The Reverend Geoffrey Bennett. The online-only sale will be live for bidding from 15 June to 2 July 2020 and comprises 19 paintings and drawings with estimates ranging from £4,000 to £800,000. A trio of paintings will lead the sale, each underlining an area of interest for the artist. *Coming from the Match* (1959, estimate: £500,000-800,000, *illustrated above*) is the only painting of a rugby match Lowry ever created, while *Iron Works* (1941, estimate: £500,000-800,000, *illustrated page two, left*) depicts a

sprawling industrial landscape in which the River Irwell has flooded its banks and left deep pools of water for Lowry's people to walk around. Offered from a separate private collection, *The Elite Fish and Chip Shop* (1949, estimate: £500,000-800,000, *illustrated below, right*) depicts an orderly queue of would-be diners, eagerly anticipating their supper after a long working day. A classic northern street scene composite from Lowry's post-war period, the artist gives the terraces and backstreets dramatic staging and focuses on a random group of strolling figures, complete with dog and pram, and the bowler-hatted gentlemen who populate his urban landscapes.



As Lowry himself disclosed to the initial buyer of *Coming to the Match* (1959, estimate: £500,000-800,000, *illustrated page one*), the subject is of a game at the Rochdale Hornets rugby stadium. Familiar motifs of chimneys, electrical wires, and red-bricked factories engross the nondescript and monochrome rugby stadium, identifiable only by the two goal posts peering out from behind the dividing walls. Throngs of utilitarian crowds funnel out of the stadium in varying directions, dominating the foreground of the scene. The rugby match remains an incidental element of the composition, and Lowry instead brings attention to the mass of crowds retreating from the stadium.

The flooded industrial panorama in *Iron Works* (1941, estimate: £500,000-800,000, *illustrated above, left*) depicts small figures who teem in bunches towards the factory buildings. Lowry's tiny figures are emphatically dwarfed by the enormous buildings that dominate the horizon.

From the 1950s onwards, Lowry's eye increasingly turned to the people that had populated his previous industrial landscape paintings. The subject matter that had been a key part of his life, factories with belching chimneys, dingy streets of terraces, and dirty canals was fast disappearing, either destroyed in the Second World War, or cleared away in the frenzy of post-war development. The people that Lowry chose to paint, following the landscapes, were closely observed, often based on individuals he would have come across in his job as a rent collector. This is exemplified by *Landscape with Figures* (1957, estimate: £250,000-350,000, *illustrated page three, left*), where the landscape can be faintly glimpsed as a backdrop to the three figures that form a sharp study of the human condition. Lone characters are the subject of both *A Woman Standing* (1965, estimate: £120,000-180,000, *illustrated page three, right*) and *Man Searching in a Dustbin* (1960, estimate: £80,000-120,000).



In *Landscape with Figures* (1957, estimate: £250,000-350,000, illustrated above, left), the towering smoking chimneys, scurrying workers with heads bent, and urban industrial setting can be faintly glimpsed in the background beneath a heavy fog. They are divided from the main subject of the painting by the metal railing that draws attention to the three standing figures and dog, which become the primary focus of the painting.

Monty Bloom, a successful business man from Southport formed a friendship with Lowry and upon visiting the artist's studio for the first time, found that he preferred Lowry's figure studies to the industrial landscapes and bought four paintings on the spot, including *Man Searching a Dustbin* (1960, estimate: £80,000-120,000). Lowry had now found a patron for the pictures that he really wanted to paint, the people that he observed on the streets of Manchester.

By contrast, *Ebbw Vale Steel Works* (1962, estimate: £150,000-250,000) was painted during the 1960s when Lowry revisited the theme of the industrial landscape. His highly individualised aesthetic recast traditional perceptions of the British landscape, as his cityscapes subverted deeply-set sentimental notions associated with the genre.

Lancashire Street (1951, estimate: £150,000-250,000) conveys a townscape in which the structures and buildings have been stripped of their particulars to forming a generic setting for the cast of characters depicted in their daily lives.

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.

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