

Love's Body

An essay by John-Paul Somerville of The Lenkiewicz Foundation

Robert Lenkiewicz's private language works on paper are the least explored aspect of his creative output. Visitors to the *Love's Body* exhibition will be familiar with Lenkiewicz's oil paintings; figurative, realistic representation, often on a grand scale, typically on a dark ground framed heavily in black with gold slip. They command attention and can be identified with ease. The works on paper displayed in this exhibition are equally distinctive, but for various reasons (particularly the challenging nature of their content) have not been publicly displayed to the same extent as the oils.

These works represent a shift in Lenkiewicz's visual language. They begin chronologically in 1974 with the DEATH & THE MAIDEN material and end with THE PAINTER WITH MARY in 1981. The work explores 'attitudes towards love', Lenkiewicz's phrase for inter-personal relationships and human physiology in a state of crisis. The format: image and text, an original observation by Lenkiewicz or a carefully selected quote, accompanied by a graphic. This formula would become known as an 'aesthetic note'. In this exhibition we see the development of this visual communication throughout the 1970s.

Project 2: DEATH & THE MAIDEN, gives us our first work in this exhibition – ① *Death as the Lover Presents His Entrails*. 1974. The works on paper and Project notebook consist largely of imagery influenced by the German Renaissance, for example the woodcuts of Hans Baldung Grien (1480-1545) and Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528). The text is typically brief at this point; Lenkiewicz is *illustrating* ideas.

Lenkiewicz conceived of DEATH & THE MAIDEN as part of the relationships theme. Having explored the notion of Eros and Thanatos he took a more ironic look at the theme in LOVE & ROMANCE (1975) and LOVE & MEDIOCRITY (1976). Work from these Projects are not included in this exhibition but the Project notebooks are now available to view on the Foundation's website. They represent Lenkiewicz's early enquiries into 'attitudes towards love', as Lenkiewicz says of that period in his 1997 interview,

I was looking at it empirically and the only person I could use constructively was myself, which I proceeded to do . . . the most effective area of inquiry was the 'falling in love' process, which is why there was a lot of work done on Projects relating to 'love': Love & Romance, Love & Mediocrity, Death & the Maiden.

This is a period of transition into a private visual language, a language that we see being refined in the JEALOUSY material, for example the pair of 'physiology' studies ② and ③. By 1978's ORGASM material we see Lenkiewicz's bold exploration of colour metaphor in works such as ⑧ *Uniquely rich sexual event with Lizbeth ...* 1978. The formula matured all the way through to the SUICIDE Project in 1980 (see ⑩ *Man in a knot by the straight back of a woman.*), and virtually concluded with THE PAINTER WITH MARY Project in 1981, the first material from which was shown concurrently at the ORGASM exhibition in the summer of 1978. It is through the Mary work that Lenkiewicz's own voice decisively appears. The entire assemblage intensively recorded the artist's thoughts and sensations during four years of his relationship with the enigmatic Mary, from its beginnings in 1977 to their honeymoon in Rome. The vast notebook, digitally published last year through Harper Collins, is available to download for iBook and eBook platforms.

So who is accompanying Lenkiewicz on this developmental journey throughout his thirties? Many writers, thinkers and philosophers are cited in these works. One, notably, is not. Norman O. Brown, whose book *Love's Body* lends its title to this exhibition, was an American academic and visionary. The text, until recently out of print, was first published in the mid-sixties. It explores the role of erotic love in human history, describing a struggle between eroticism and civilization. Brown was surprised to find himself, as noted in his New York Times obituary, popular 'on the reading lists of undergraduates aspiring to the counterculture'. Brown's ambitious manifesto amounted to a "resurrection of the body", placing the unconscious, and thereby human physiology, at the centre of a new spiritual principal for a kind of Nietzschean superman in whom the Dionysian and the Christian ethos would be fused.

Forty years after that publication Brown has all but faded from academic discussion, but his influence upon Lenkiewicz's ideas and visual language in the later aesthetic notes appears to have been profound.

Brown deserves credit for a pervasive influence on Lenkiewicz's fundamental approach to the aesthetic note in the late 1970s. Brown developed a highly individual writing style, which David Greenham (*The Resurrection of the Body*, 2006) describes as 'collage, quotation and comment', and we see this method used over and over in the aesthetic notes.

Lenkiewicz doesn't attribute quotes to Brown in the passages from *Love's Body* which permeate the ORGASM Project because he is saturated with the ideas at this point. At times he paraphrases Brown's text, perhaps knowingly, perhaps not. For example in his *Orgasm/ Affinities/ Attitudes* notebook Lenkiewicz writes,

To stretch oneself to breaking point. No truth until it hurts.

While the exact passage in *Love's Body* reads, '*Stretch yourself, to the breaking point. It is not true unless it hurts: the evidence is martyrdom.*'

Lenkiewicz's attention moves in this period from the world 'out there' to the world 'inside'. He focuses his observations on the body, on physiology, which, like Brown, Lenkiewicz feels has been suppressed in Western thinking. You see in the works of 1974 onwards a sustained fascination with human viscera and entrails. Lenkiewicz copies this extract from *Love's Body* into his *Orgasm/ Affinities/ Attitudes* notebook,

No word is metaphorical without it first being physical; and the body that is the meaning of all things is sexual. All metaphors are sexual.

And later in the notebook,

The physiology of the aesthetic/ To pleasure/ To 'beauty';/ To terror.

Two decades later Lenkiewicz reflects upon these ideas in interview,

Up to the age of thirty-five I was engrossed by the notion that when lovers embraced each other what they really wanted to do was to pass their arms through each other, not round each other: they wanted to make holes and get a good grip. And this was in order to compensate for the fact that no matter how much you press skin against skin you remain separate – it doesn't matter how intense the embrace is, you're separate.

Lenkiewicz's notes on work ② 'Physiology', 1977 display a preoccupation with the body: 'make serious study of the abdomen's physiology. Pancreas. Spleen. Kidneys. Intestines, small intestines, colon. Liver. Stomach. Ovaries. Uterus (women). Lymph glands. Mesentery. Network that holds gut in place.' We see this enquiry develop visually in works ⑮, ⑯ and ⑰ beginning with 'Go Away – Nearer!' 1978 from the ORGASM Project.

Through the internalisation of Brown's writing on the body, Lenkiewicz consciously changed his output from the symbolic representation of the external world to the metaphorical representation of the internal world. Tellingly, a remark from his 1997 interview reveals quite how conscious this seems to have been. When asked of a 'symbolic element' in his work Lenkiewicz replies, 'Not *symbolic*; it's a word that I'm extremely uncomfortable with. I really try to avoid it where paintings are concerned'. This rejection of the *symbol*, in favour of metaphor and allegory to express the behaviour of the body is Brown's legacy in these works, a legacy for which his text firmly deserves the title of the exhibition.

Death and love are carnal, hence their magic and their terror. Only allegory to express these things – cannot be represented in conventional, literal ways. Everything is only a metaphor, there is only poetry.

- Norman O. Brown.

LOVE'S BODY 20 Nov 15 — 6 Jan 16

Works on paper by Robert Lenkiewicz (1941–2002)

No.	TITLE	PROJECT
1.	<i>Death as the Lover Presents His Entrails.</i> 1974 Charcoal, pencil and black ink. 16 x 8 ins.	Death & The Maiden
2.	<i>'Physiology'.</i> 1977 Aesthetic Notes. Mixed media. 11 x 8 ins.	Jealousy
3.	<i>'Lover with four memories suffering from mild withdrawal symptoms'.</i> 1977 Aesthetic Notes. Mixed media. 11 x 8 ins.	Jealousy
4.	<i>'My right arm... you were like my right arm'.</i> 1977 Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen ink and bodycolour. 11 x 8 ins.	Jealousy
5.	<i>'Maid & Wolf' / 'Maid with Snake & Wolf (Little Red Riding Hood)'.</i> 1974 Aesthetic Note. Cryla on paper. 3.5 x 6 ins/3.5 x 6 ins.	Death & The Maiden
6.	<i>Orgasm/Study.</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Cryla on paper. 13 x 7 ins.	Orgasm
7.	<i>March 1977: 'I am ill now: but a mere cold...'</i> 1977 Aesthetic Note. Pen, ink and watercolour. 16 x 11 ins.	Jealousy
8.	<i>'Uniquely rich sexual event with Lizbeth ...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, Pen and ink. 8 x 11.5 ins.	Orgasm
9.	<i>7 March '78 (late) 'Watched a young couple engrossed in each other ...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen and ink, heightened with white. 10 x 8 ins.	Orgasm
10.	<i>8 February 1978: 'Obsession. Monica seated in the studio...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Pen, ink and watercolour heightened with white. 10.5 x 9.5 ins.	Orgasm
11.	<i>30 March 78 – 'Extraordinarily interesting day in certain ways.'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen and ink. 11.5 x 8 ins.	Orgasm
12.	<i>31 March 78: 'Exquisite sense of her melting at the point of climax'.</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Pen, ink and watercolour. 11 x 8 ins.	Orgasm
13.	<i>31 March 1978: 'The body is vulnerable...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Pen and ink. 11 x 8 ins.	Orgasm
14.	<i>4.30am May 8th 1978: 'Awoke suddenly from an intense dream...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Pen, ink and watercolour. 11.5 x 15 ins.	Orgasm
15.	<i>'Go Away – Nearer!'</i> Note: <i>Orgasm Theme.</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Mixed media. 11 x 9 ins.	Orgasm
16.	<i>'I love you, please let me prove it...'</i> 1978 Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen, ink and bodycolour. 11 x 8 ins.	Orgasm

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| 17. <i>'Go Away – Nearer!'</i> 1978
Aesthetic Notes. Pen, ink and watercolour. 9.5 x 6.5/9.5 x 6.5 ins. | Orgasm |
| 18. <i>30. March. 78. 'And on arriving at the village she stops.'</i> 1978
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen, ink and bodycolour. 11 x 8 ins. | Non-Project |
| 19. <i>Man watching his empty hand.</i> 1980
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour and bodycolour. 16 x 11 ins. | Suicide |
| 20. <i>Man in a knot by the straight back of a woman.</i> 1980
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour and bodycolour on paper. 16 x 20 ins. | Suicide |
| 21. <i>Man dying.</i> 1980
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen, ink and bodycolour. 9 x 11.5 ins. | Suicide |
| 22. <i>22–23 Oct. 1979. 'Mary has not come to see me.'</i> 1979
Aesthetic Note. Cryla on paper. 11.5 x 8.25 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 23. <i>Tuesday 12 December 1978. 'First Contact.'</i> 1978
Aesthetic Note. Mixed media. 15 x 21 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 24. <i>'Man caressing his fear'/'Man watching his empty hand during the caress.'</i> 1977
Aesthetic Note. Mixed media. 13.5 x 14/6.5 x 13 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 25. <i>Mary Flayed. Marsyas.</i> 1981
Watercolour heightened with white. 13 x 12 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 26. <i>The Painter with Mary holding tightly as they make love to their own selves.</i> 1981
Aesthetic Note. Mixed media. 13 x 23 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 27. <i>The Painter with Mary, Design for Tomb Monument.</i> 1981
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen and ink, heightened with white. 16 x 12 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 28. <i>The Resurrection of Mary.</i> 1981
Aesthetic Note. Mixed media. 16 x 16 ins. | The Painter with Mary |
| 29. <i>April 12th – Friday 1985 – 10pm. The Painter with 'Ingres'.</i> 1985
Aesthetic Note. Watercolour, pen, ink and bodycolour. 18 x 17.5 ins. | Non-Project |
| 30. <i>'How heavy is a childhood load?'</i> 1990
Aesthetic Note. Pen, ink and watercolour. 20 x 16.5 ins. | Non-Project |

Opening hours: 11am–4pm | Thurs–Sun only

The logo for the Lenkiewicz Foundation, featuring the name 'Lenkiewicz' in a stylized, handwritten script above the word 'FOUNDATION' in a clean, sans-serif font.

e. info@lenkiewiczfoundation.org

w. www.robertlenkiewicz.org

t. 01752 221450

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