

Applying a range of critical theories, identify and discuss an artwork of your own choosing.

L.S Lowry is one of the most recognisable British painters and has been known for his unique style of painting. Most described as naïve modernism, his paintings had the realities of the working class and showed normalcy in day-to-day life such as crowds of people, bustling streets and industrial scenes. He never wanted to achieve the truest to reality, he insisted on showing his imagination, his way of thinking and feelings through his work as he believed they were an extension of himself. His paintings included elongated human figures that had a distinctive look on white background. He uses a limited colour palette consisting of flake white, vermillion, ivory black, Prussian blue and yellow ochre “it meant Lowry was in absolute control of all the colours and tones he could achieve and allowed him to concentrate on composition, perspective and subject matter” (Windsor Newton). His paintings are straightforward and show qualities of dreamlike simplicity that are stuck in time, the world as he saw it. He demonstrates this in his painting ‘Coming Out of School’ (Clark, T. J. 2013), which shows a bleak dreary scene of a school that isn’t a depiction of a specific area, but one people can call to mind and empathise with. (Gallery Label April 1994 Tate).



Clark, T. J. (Timothy J.) (2013): Lowry and the painting of modern life. London: Tate Publishing

Lowry had a complicated relationship with his parents as his father was a reserved person and passed away in 1932, Lowry had to look after his mother who had become bedridden. In his life Lowry’s abilities were constantly put down by his mother in which he would always search for approval but received no appreciation from her, resulting in him having low self-esteem and feeling the need to impress his mother. He would dedicate paintings to her which were never valued. His relationship to his mother was so significant to him that he’d even turned down OBE and knighthood in 1968 after his mother's death and stated, “There seemed little point...once mother was dead.” (L. S Lowry, Mrs. Lowry & Son 2019 Film). His lonely upbringing was prevalent in his later work as his paintings would give off the feeling of loneliness even when surrounded by lots of people. After School Lowry took evening classes at the Salford School of Art and the Municipal College of Art with French impressionist art teacher Adolph Valette and as a result his older paintings had a more pictorial approach (Cecilia Lyon, 2013, Artuk.org). Though his iconic paintings depicting where he lived in Pendlebury are famous today for his industrial crowded town scenery, they weren’t always regarded highly at the time and his paintings were harshly criticised and often called ‘childish’ and works of a ‘Sunday painter’ (Adrian Hamilton Independent 2013). However, his paintings now are easily recognisable and praised for making the industrial scene his own

and scenes where you can feel lost within the crowd of people whilst not being physically there.

One of his paintings called 'Britain at Play', had been painted in 1943 ironically when Britain was at war, the painting was painted in the well-known style and used the same 5 colours like a lot of his other paintings. It shows crowds of people on their day off heading to unknown places all frozen in time. In the time Lowry worked as a rent collector, he would sketch the people he would meet or even his tenants and later use them in his paintings as he mentions "I'll always be grateful to rent collecting. I've put many of the tenants in my pictures." (L.S Lowry), which made them feel more real contrasting with the elongated matchstick look of the figures. As you look further into the painting you get a sense of dreamlike tranquillity, a perfect world, by the stark white background and lack of shadows it shows us a simpler time when taking into consideration when it was painted it was most likely quite the opposite. He had said 'I'm a simple man, who uses simple materials' (L.S Lowry 1975 by Mervyn Levy) showing his preference for his 5 main colours and oil paints. Lowry had quite a lonely life and had often looked for the beauty in it which can reflect on his use of painting large crowds instead of barren streets, there was a sense of community in his works even though the people in his paintings didn't know each other they were all connected. Though each person he paints emitted a feeling of personal space and undisturbed everyday affairs, it reflected Lowry and his personal life. His work remains relevant to people today with his contemporary unique style focusing on the working class, urban life and social development, his work gave rise to people today inspiring artists like Paula Rego and Jeremy Deller (Isabella de Souza, myartbroker). Many artists were inspired by him painting his surroundings and the places he'd often visit in his town, they would delve into their own hometowns and explore through their art. His work encouraged many other artists to look introspectively while also paying attention to what's around them. "An artist can't produce great art unless he has a philosophy. A man can't say something unless he has something to say. He can see things a camera cannot see." (L.S Lowry, a life 2007), in this book it suggests that Lowry mainly saw for what it is instead of the meaning. Allowing this to Roland Barthes mythologies, Lowry denotes his surroundings in the sense that it creates a simplified world in which he saw no meaning, which shows in his work through the 'matchstick figures' and pallet.

After Lowry's death in 1976 due to pneumonia, there were paintings uncovered from his studio depicting young women in tight, restrictive clothing where their bodies were being squeezed into corsets and male clothing. He had an obsession of drawing these women which suggests he could have had a more complex mind rather than the famous man known for being 'simple'. During his life many people said he did not have a significant other or had ever been married therefore seeing this 'darker' side brought a new underlying meaning to his paintings (BBC News Michael Simpson).

Overall, L.S Lowry's work remains prevalent today and can be seen in galleries such as the Tate. His work is famously known for the depictions of rural industrial areas, crowds of matchstick figures and the resilience of the working class. Many people can relate to his work and recognise the predictability and normalcy of life, even nowadays it's remained the same. Though many things have changed since 1940 these paintings of crowds reflect the future and how people still live their lives within their bubble and personal margin. Lowry was

someone who encouraged people to go deeper into their art, to really investigate into shape and colour and not to be distracted by other people's preferences and ideologies.

L.S Lowry (Online)

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Available at: link <https://thelowry.com/about-us/l-s-lowry/his-work/> (accessed — 25 November 2023)

Cecilia Lyon (2021) (Online) *Did you know that L. S. Lowry was taught by a French Impressionist?*

Available at: link <https://artuk.org/discover/stories/did-you-know-that-l-s-lowry-was-taught-by-a-french-impressionist> (accessed — 25 November 2023)

Adrian Hamilton (2013) (Online) *LS Lowry and his legacy: The matchstick man is back in vogue at last as Tate Britain showcases first retrospective of Manchester's controversial painter.*

Available at: link [LS Lowry and his legacy: The matchstick man is back in vogue at last as Tate Britain showcases first retrospective of Manchester's controversial painter | The Independent | The Independent](#) (accessed — 25 November 2023)

Laura Bulbeck (Online) *The Developing Style of L.S. Lowry | Masterpieces of Art*

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Rohde Shelley (2007) *L.S. Lowry, a life* p. 47. London: Haus

Mervyn Levy (1975) (Book) *Paintings of L. S. Lowry* p. 11. London: Book Club Associates

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Isabella de Souza: MyArtBroker. Article (Online) *The Impact of L. S. Lowry on Contemporary British Art: Examining His Artistic Legacy*

Available at: <https://www.myartbroker.com/artist-l-s-lowry/articles/impact-lowry-contemporary-british-art-legacy> (accessed — 25 November 2023)

Ian Youngs (2013) (Online): *Unseen art shows the 'real' LS Lowry*

Available at: [Unseen art shows the 'real' LS Lowry - BBC News](#) (accessed — 25 November 2023)