
WELCOME TO THE LAING ART GALLERY AND ARTICULATION

The Laing Art Gallery sits in the heart of Newcastle City Centre and opened its doors in 1904 thanks to the local merchant Alexander Laing who gifted the gallery to the people of Newcastle. Unusually, when the Laing Art Gallery first opened, we didn't have a collection! Laing was confident that local people would support the Gallery and donate art.

In the early days the Gallery benefitted from a number of important gifts and bequests from prominent industrialists, public figures, art collectors, and artists. National galleries and museums continued to lend works, and, three years after opening its doors, the Laing began to acquire art. In 1907, the Gallery's first five paintings were purchased.

Over the last 100 years, the Laing's curators have continued to build the collection, and it is now a Designated Collection, recognised as nationally important by Arts Council England. The Laing Art Gallery's exceptional collection focuses on but is not limited to British oil paintings, watercolours, ceramics, and silver and glassware, as well as modern and contemporary pieces of art. We also run temporary exhibition programmes which change every three months.

LAING
ART GALLERY

TYNE & WEAR
archives &
museums

Newcastle 
City Council



Supported using public funding by
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ENGLAND**



ARTiculation

The Roche Court
Educational Trust
NewArtCentre.

WELCOME TO THE LAING ART GALLERY!

Here is your chosen artwork:

River Scene by Laurence Stephen Lowry



Key Information:

By Laurence Stephen Lowry
Produced in 1935
Medium: Oil on board
Dimensions: 37.5 x 51.4 cm
Location: Laing Art gallery
Currently on display in Gallery D

PAINTING SUMMARY

The background is painted white, which was a characteristic feature of Lowry's work. The painting uses the 'typical' colour palette of Lowry. He claimed to use just five colours to produce his works. The vermillion red guides the reader's eyes through the painting, breaking up the dull industrial colours.

Lowry produced many paintings of imaginary industrial landscapes. Most of them were inspired by his walks around Pendlebury in Greater Manchester as a rent collector. Some people interpret his cityscape paintings as a social criticism of industrialisation. Lowry admittedly saw beauty in industry and claimed no political motivation behind his art.

The scene is devoid of human figures. The movement within the painting comes from the smoke arising from the chimneys. Lowry painted smoke using a wet rag to smudge the oil. The lack of human figures suggests a barren landscape and one where industry has predominated over nature. The broken fences suggest dereliction.

The reverse-side of *River Scene* provides additional information about the painting. It contains various labels which document the galleries and exhibits that the painting was displayed at. They include the Lefevre Gallery in London (a gallery which helped to promote the popularity of Lowry in London), Salford Art Gallery (exhibited in the L.S. Lowry Centenary Exhibition 16th October – 29th November 1987) and the Barbican Art Gallery, London.

ARTIST PROFILE

Laurence Stephen Lowry (1887 – 1976) was an artist most famously known for his ‘matchstick men’ and paintings of North West England. Lowry’s fulltime job as a rent-collector led to him being given the demeaning label of a ‘Sunday painter’, alluding to someone who paints as a hobby. However, this label is an injustice to his formal artistic training and his technique derived from acute observations of everyday life.

Lowry was born in 1887 in Lancashire to aspirant lower-middle-class parents. His mother, Elizabeth, came from a middle-class family. She was well-educated and a gifted pianist. In contrast, Robert Lowry had been orphaned at a young age. He later became a rent collector and clerk, but his income failed to sustain Elizabeth’s desire to live a middle-class life and after his death it became apparent that he had accrued a large sum of debt. The death of Robert marked a huge turning-point in Lowry’s life. Elizabeth became increasingly bed-bound and depressed. Meanwhile, Lowry had to take on the burden of her care whilst repaying the debts.

Lowry, in line with Elizabeth’s wishes to uphold a middle-class family appearance, was sent to the expensive independent Grafton House School. He was a quiet child and despised his time at this institution. After finishing school, Lowry used part of his income as a clerk to attend an evening art school in Manchester. Here, he was taught by the French Impressionist painter, Adolphe Valette. The influence of Valette was to shape Lowry’s work throughout his life. In particular, his use of a limited colour palette and the application of dry paint.

Although Lowry is most famously associated with his paintings of industrial life and the people within it, he also produced paintings of seascapes. These seascapes, barren of human life, have been interpreted by art historians to reflect his own loneliness. He lived alone after the death of his mother and never married or had children. Despite his feelings of loneliness, Lowry had many friends of all ages. His artistic skills were finally recognised when he was invited to become a member of the Royal Academy at the age of 68.

Sources:

* Michael Howard, *Lowry: A Visionary Artist* (Lowry Press, 2000)

* Shelley Rohde, *Lowry: A Private Life* (London Book Club Associates, 1999)

LABEL TEXT

Lowry grew up in the industrial area of Pendlebury, Greater Manchester. He left school at 16 to become an administrator for an accountancy firm before taking a job as a rent collector – his main job for the next four decades. Lowry was never a full-time artist, but painted most days after work. Lowry took evening classes at Salford School of Art and the Municipal College of Art, where he studied under the French Impressionist Adolphe Valette. He always acknowledged Valette as a great influence. Lowry is best known for painting scenes of ordinary life in industrial North England in the mid-20th century.

PROMPTS AND QUESTIONS

- Remember to write down your thoughts, ideas and feelings about the piece as you go.

- With the information you have, go find your chosen artwork and spend some time familiarising yourself with the piece.

- Is there anything that particularly stands out when viewing the artwork? Look at the use of colours, medium, subject matter.

- What is the subject matter? Explore the narrative behind the artwork. Use all the information you have been provided.

- Make a list of the key topic points you wish to discuss in your presentation.

- Do any of the artist's other works produce similar themes/emotions? How do they compare/differ?

- Think of the historical context surrounding your chosen artist's life and work.

- Make sure to prioritise which information you wish to include in your allotted presentation.

PRESENTATION SKILLS – THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Practice** - Being familiar with your material is vital for delivering a good presentation.
- **Take notes** of your classmates' presentations – what have they done well and what parts could they improve upon? You do not have to share your evaluation, but think about how you can apply this to your own.
- **Plan** - Having a well-planned presentation ensures them to run more smoothly, with mistakes less likely to happen. Practising with prompt cards could help you to maintain a good flow of speech and structure.
- **Remember** – Your classmates are probably just as nervous as you are.
- **Breathe** - A simple yet effective way to get through a presentation!
- **Take pauses** – Do not be afraid to take a pause in between sentences. This helps ensure you are not speaking too quickly and makes sure you are breathing!

SIMILAR ARTWORKS



Laurence Stephen Lowry, *Industrial Landscape* (1953). Oil on canvas, 45 x 60 cm. The Lowry Collection, Salford.
© The Estate of L. S. Lowry.
<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/lowry-industrial-landscape-t00111>



Laurence Stephen Lowry, *An Island* (1942). Oil on canvas, 45.6 x 60.9 cm. Manchester Art Gallery. © The Estate of L.S. Lowry.

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/an-island-205458>