



53. *Sunbeams or sunshine. Dust motes dancing in the sunbeams*, by Vilhelm Hammershøi. 1900. Canvas, 70 by 59 cm. (Ordrupgaard, Copenhagen; exh. Royal Academy of Arts, London).

subject-matter he seldom strayed beyond the confines of his own apartment or, at most, the Copenhagen hinterland – and he was dubbed by his friends ‘the secret king of Danish painting’ – both he and his work were in fact well-travelled: he exhibited regularly in Berlin, Munich, Paris and London, represented his country at the Venice Biennale in 1903, and journeyed extensively throughout Europe. Sadly, in some ways the exhibition falls prey to the tendency of monographic shows to present the artist in isolation from his times and contemporaries. Although much is made in both the exhibition and the catalogue of his affinities with Whistler – whose acquaintance and approbation he repeatedly sought, although the two men never met – and of the fact that during his lifetime, his work found more admirers abroad than at home, his connections with other foreign contemporary artists and movements could have been given more attention. A major case in point is his relationship with the Belgian Symbolists, particularly Xavier Mellery, whose concern with the ‘secret life of things’, monochrome palette and brooding silences display a strong kinship with Hammershøi; indeed, the sinister *Coin collector* (no.42), one of his few nocturnal scenes, bears striking similarities to Mellery’s work, especially in its stark, glacial rendering of candlelight and shadows. These links are adumbrated in Felix Krämer’s catalogue essay, but they merit further exploration. Hammershøi may have dismissed Bonnard’s work as ‘complete rubbish’ (ironically, considering the many points of commonality in the two artists’ *œuvres*), but there is much to suggest that he was keenly alive to the artistic currents of his time, and we can only hope that this avenue will be investigated more thoroughly in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Catalogue: *Vilhelm Hammershøi: The Poetry of Silence*. By Felix Krämer, Naoki Sato and Anne-Birgitte Fonsmark. 160 pp. incl. 140 col. ills. (Thames & Hudson, London, 2008), £35 (HB). ISBN 978-1-905711-28-4; £19.95 (PB). ISBN 978-1-905711-29-1.

## Wyndham Lewis

London

by ANDREW CAUSEY

THE EXHIBITION *Wyndham Lewis Portraits* at the **National Portrait Gallery, London** (to 19th October), consists of some fifty oil paintings, watercolours and drawings made between 1911 and 1949. Lewis’s legacy has not been well-nurtured through exhibitions. Since his death in 1957, there has been only one full retrospective, organised by Manchester City Galleries in 1980, circulated, but not shown in London. The Imperial War Museum’s 1992 exhibition *Wyndham Lewis. Art and War* was memorable in showing the extent of his interest in martial themes in general alongside the products of his service in the First World War. The Courtauld Institute’s small show, *The Bone beneath the Pulp. Drawings by Wyndham Lewis*, held in 2004, shed new light on some of the small late watercolours whose themes are hard to decipher in reproduction (and not always easy in front of the works themselves). The 1993 show *The Talented Intruder. Wyndham Lewis in Canada, 1939–1945* greatly extended knowledge of Lewis’s career during the Second World War.

There are several reasons why Lewis has not been much exhibited. Among them are his ambivalent attitude to Modernism after the First World War, the widely held but erroneous belief that his painting was only a sideline to his writing, and the fact that his work does not have the obvious overall coherence that some think necessary for a successful exhibition. Also the fact that his most interesting works are often watercolours, tend to be small,



54. *T.S. Eliot*, by Wyndham Lewis. 1938. 133.3 by 85.1 cm. (Durban Municipal Art Gallery; exh. National Portrait Gallery, London).

and reflect Lewis’s varied reading and vivid imagination without, in many cases, offering entry points to understanding, even for seasoned gallery-goers, is surely a factor. Lewis was in every sense difficult. Having decided early on that the general public was not worthy of his art, he steamed ahead on his own.

Lewis’s portraits are different, more accessible but nonetheless enigmatic. This show is only one part of Lewis’s *œuvre* but nevertheless stimulating and worthwhile. Many portraits are of fellow members of the contemporary intellectual elite – T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Edith Sitwell, Stephen Spender, Naomi Mitchison – and others are of women with whom he had liaisons – Iris Barry, the mother of two children by Lewis, and Nancy Cunard. There is a group of elegant portraits of his beautiful wife, Anne (Froanna), which show more human feeling than most but still have Lewis’s characteristic detachment. Lewis had little conventional domestic life and his portraits, whether of public figures or of women to whom he was close, are objective. In the background there are sometimes books and pictures, representing the shared interests of Lewis and his sitters, but there is not much eye contact to suggest that these people are like us, the viewers, or have mundane concerns. Eliot, in the historic 1938 portrait that was rejected by the Royal Academy of Arts (p.69; Fig.54), gazes into the distance beyond us, the 1939 Pound portrait from the Tate (p.63) seems to show the poet asleep, while several sitters have a downward melancholic gaze that seems to point inwards, away from the world at large. Occasionally, as with *Froanna (Portrait of the artist’s wife)* (1937; p.95; Fig.55) a tea set is allowed in as an exceptional intrusion of the every day but, even so, is plainly unused and without human reference. Lewis liked to present himself as inhuman, and maybe in personal relationships he was. But the masks he adopted and attributed to others were connected with Eliot’s concern for objectivity and the suppression of personality. The 1938 Eliot portrait tells us not just what Eliot looked like but demonstrates Lewis’s respect for Eliot’s creative principle.

Sitters’ faces in Lewis’s portraits are like masks in the way individual expression or the registering of particular moments in time are eliminated. The paradox is that these masks do resemble the sitters. Why mask the face if you want to represent it? It was Lewis’s way of acknowledging his sitters’ individuality while keeping his distance and recording the typical rather than passing features. The *Portrait of the artist as the painter Raphael* (1921; p.14; Fig.56) has the distinctive face of Lewis himself and is at the same time conceptualised as a Byzantine icon, with austere golden-brown face and small mouth with reddened lips. As for Raphael, he might be thought to stand at the cusp of the modern world emerging from Byzantinism, or it may just have been that, in the atmosphere of the post-War *rappel à l’ordre*, coinciding with the fourth centenary in 1920 of the Renaissance master’s death, his work was rousing great interest.



55. *Froanna (Portrait of the artist's wife)*, by Wyndham Lewis. 1937. Canvas, 76 by 63.5 cm. (Glasgow City Council; exh. National Portrait Gallery, London).

The idea of the mask extends to some of Lewis's drawings made immediately after the First World War – among the most engaging works in the show. There seem to be half-hidden references to African artefacts in the head of Iris Barry in the drawing *L'Ingénue* (1919; Manchester City Galleries; p.35), and more clearly in another portrait of Barry, *Study for painting (Seated lady)* (1920; Manchester City Galleries; p.37). These references again play off the portrait's essential responsibility to representation against Lewis's sense that even a portrait, with all its particularities, is part of an established and continuing tradition. A portrait is no less an aesthetic expression because it also has a duty to represent.

A question mark stands over the decision to omit all of Lewis's work from the Second World War with the exception of the fine life-size portrait of Samuel Capen, Chancellor of the State University of New York at Buffalo, in his robes (State University of New



56. *Portrait of the artist as the painter Raphael*, by Wyndham Lewis. 1921. Canvas, 76.3 by 68.6 cm. (Manchester City Galleries; exh. National Portrait Gallery, London).

York at Buffalo; 1939; p.102). Lewis, who had dual British-Canadian nationality, spent the Second World War in North America, where he suffered poverty exceptional even for him and had more or less to tout for portrait commissions. It may be that the results were below his usual standard, but it is difficult to know as most of us have never seen them. As the National Portrait Gallery's brief is documentary as well as aesthetic, this might have been the right opportunity to show more of them.

The selection and catalogue are in the hands of the leading Lewis scholar, Paul Edwards, with the help of Richard Humphreys, another long-standing pioneer of Lewis studies.<sup>1</sup> The catalogue reproduces all exhibited works in colour, but the pictures are not numbered, and the authors have been allocated only a modest space in what is quite a substantial publication. One key painting, *Praxitella* (1920–21; Leeds City Art Gallery) is reproduced in full-page colour without a note that it is not in the exhibition. The catalogue's layout and typography are based on Lewis's Vorticist publication *Blast* (1914–15), pretty much the only period of Lewis's work that the exhibition does not represent.

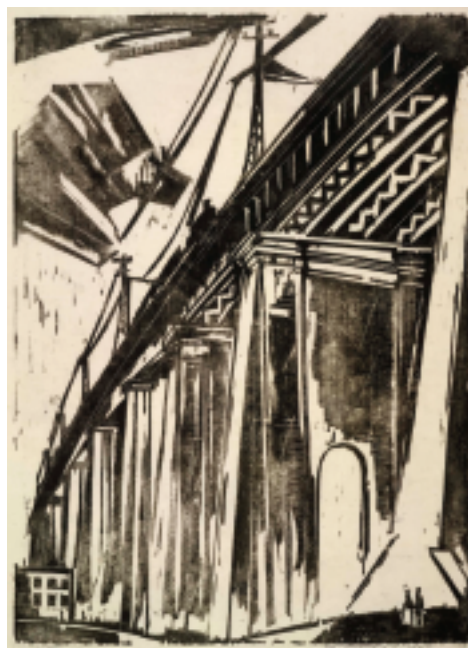
<sup>1</sup> Catalogue: *Wyndham Lewis Portraits*. By Paul Edwards with Richard Humphreys. 112 pp. incl. 60 col. ills. (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2008), £15. ISBN 978-1-85514-395-1.

## American prints 1910–60

London

by MARTIN HOPKINSON

ONE OF THE most remarkable transformations of a collection of twentieth-century art in Europe in the last thirty years has been that of the Department of Prints and Drawings in the British Museum. Driven by Antony Griffiths, ably assisted by his colleagues, the Museum's modern print collection has become outstanding, both through its purchases and through the generosity of its many perspicacious donors. In 1979 the Museum staged the first of a series of major scholarly exhibitions revealing its acquisitions of twentieth-century American prints, an area of art virtually unknown to British gallery-goers. Only two survey shows of significance preceded this exhibition, at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1929 and at the Royal Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers in 1954,<sup>1</sup> both of which have long been forgotten. Nor is it at all well known that, thanks to the generosity of the Glasgow lawyer and university administrator James A. McCallum, acting with the advice of A.M. Hind of the British Museum, the Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, had from 1948 a small but well-chosen collection of American prints of the first half of the twentieth century, particularly notable for its group of intaglio prints executed at Atelier 17 in New York. Over 220 prints dating between 1900 and



57. *Hell Gate Bridge*, by Werner Drewes. 1931. Woodcut, 40.5 by 29.3 cm. (British Museum, London).

1960 are now in that collection. A third important group of American prints acquired by a museum is worth mentioning here. Perhaps triggered by the example of the British Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, has acquired 250 works by American masters with the help of Reba and Dave Williams, its Honorary Keepers of Prints, who have also been among the individuals who have supported the British Museum's acquisitions over the last twenty-five years.

Since 1979 the Department of Prints and drawings at the **British Museum** has been very active in expanding its American print collection, so much so that *The American Scene. Prints from Hopper to Pollock* (to 7th September)<sup>2</sup> is very different from the earlier show. Less than a quarter of the works presented here were in that exhibition, which had begun with the work of Whistler and ended in the 1970s. What is more, the riches of the London collection would have permitted three or four different selections of prints, which means that the curator of the exhibition, Stephen Coppel, is presenting very much his own view of the most interesting works now owned by the British Museum. As the prints of the Ashcan School, Bellows, Hopper, Martin Lewis and the American urban scene were so well covered in the 1979 show, the comments below concentrate largely on the works not previously shown.

To this reviewer the exhibition seems to stress the 'American-ness' of American printmaking and downplays the relationships between American and European art, an impression largely due to the considerable number of Regionalist works in the show. It is surprising how few abstract works from the period before 1945 are to be seen. Early interest in Cubism and Constructivism is perhaps underplayed, although the impact of Albert Gleizes and Juan Gris is well displayed in the