

CANADA AND WYNDHAM LEWIS THE ARTIST

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NOTICE OF WYNDHAM LEWIS'S first and only official connection with Canadian art is preserved in the Canadian War Services Records:

2nd Lieut. P. W. Lewis, Royal Garrison Artillery, attached to Canadian Corps Headquarters for duty with Canadian War Records, 31st December, 1917.
Ceases to be attached to Canadian War Records, Canadian Corps, on proceeding to England, 26th January, 1918.

Because of this brief union the National Gallery, Ottawa, is richer by *A Canadian Gunpit*, a canvas approximately ten by eleven feet intended for a proposed Ottawa Memorial to be designed by E. R. Rickards, the architect who did Central Hall at Westminster. A sketch for the painting is on permanent loan to the Beaverbrook Gallery in Fredericton.

"England's artists were being 'saved'," Lewis wrote later in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, "by Canada of all countries, and by Lord Beaverbrook of all people. I mean of course that we do not associate the land of the 'Mounties' and Montcalm with the fine arts, and Lord Beaverbrook I imagined fully occupied making and unmaking Governments and Cabinets." At his own request Lewis was seconded from the Royal Garrison Artillery while he was on leave in London. He returned finally not to the Salient around the ruins of Ypres and to experiences like those documented in the fifty-four pictures exhibited in the Goupil Gallery in 1919, but this time to Vimy Ridge as a "painter-soldier, attached to the Corps-headquarter Staff of the Canadian Army." He could be useful, he had suggested to P. K. Konody, the art critic charged with the selection of artists, because he knew all about howitzers.

In a report submitted to the Canadian Government Beaverbrook mentions Lewis's assignment and refers to his place of birth:

The latest recruit is the celebrated modern artist Hon. Major Augustus John, whose ambition is to paint a gigantic decoration thirty feet in length symbolizing the experiences of modern war. Among other artists who are working for the fund are C. R. W. Nevinson, also employed by the Imperial Government, and 2nd. Lieut. P. Wyndham Lewis, a native of Nova Scotia and an artillery officer, who is painting a picture of a Canadian gun-pit.¹

Augustus John exceeded his ambition by ten feet according to the *New York Sun*, June 3, 1919, which reported that his panel, forty by twelve feet, would fill one wall of "an imposing artistic memorial of the part Canada played in the Great War." In fact John only finished the cartoon. He arrived at the Canadian Corps Headquarters several days after Lewis, who had been sent back after much delay to his battery at Poperinghe to report to his O.C. "to be personally seconded by him." It was a private sortie with Augustus John that Lewis particularly recalled when he recorded his experience with the Canadian unit. And it was to John that he wrote from Ottawa in 1945 just before he sailed back to England after his four and a half year stay in Canada during the second war, "The peculiar state of mind of these people cannot be conveyed in a letter."²

At the time of his transfer in 1917 Lewis had been particularly impressed by the informality of the Canadian Quarters at Vimy. The officers, he said, "had no ambition to be imitation toffs as the English had." They held commissioned rank "but it was on such a rigid understanding that they should not throw their weight about, they enjoyed it under such awful democratic safeguards, that the only advantage that it took with it was that they had the equivalent of much more *money* than their subordinates, not much more *rank*. Also they had a Sam Browne belt and the others hadn't."³

Lewis, however, was not a participant in the routine life of the Mess or of the adjacent battery. He was an "onlooker" in an area of questionable local peace which contrasted sharply with the rolling wastes of mud at Passchendaele, the "hell-blast" at Nieuport, the bursts of shell-fire with their whizzing "spawn of 'splinters'," the duck-boards and observation posts. Although he was detached from action, a palette on his thumb, he was soon reminded that responsibility was as inescapable as it had been when he had led a group of his men to an O.Pip of "most evil report." At this time, realizing that they were being hunted from the air by "creatures of another dimension," he had jumped into a shell-hole to save himself. What happened next was a simple parable.

The N.C.O. who was on my heels came in at my back. . . . No fellow human has ever impinged with so resolute a pressure on my own flesh. . . . 'The bastards are bracketing!' muttered the N.C.O. upon my chest. . . . My sensation was resignation to an ordeal rather than expectation of extinction. The bitter taste of stupidity was in my mouth . . .⁴

When he wrote *Monstre Gai* and *Malign Fiesta* after the second war Lewis described how that luxurious extension of mobility and privacy, the automobile, was placed at the *naif* Pullman's limited convenience by both the Bailiff and Sammael. Every morning in the new quarters, Lewis recalled in *Blasting and Bombardiering*, a staff car reported for duty:

I ran down to my battery in the car — to my new Canadian battery. It was a '6 inch How' battery. I had nothing to do with it, of course, except to paint it. It stood by itself in the great open spaces of Vimy Ridge. There was nothing near it.

The battery seldom fired. Everything was different in this part of the Line — so different to start with I could scarcely believe my eyes, or ears.

. . . Away in the distance, over the ruins of Lens, a shell would fall occasionally. That was all; like a big door banging far away in the distance. After my recent experience this peace was almost uncanny. . . .

I made the acquaintance of the officers and men of the battery. I was my own master of course. Next day I went down again with my sketchbook, took up my position and began to make a few drawings of the guns. It was a fine winter's day, there was no battery or anything at all in sight. Just a rolling expanse of old battlefields, gradually softening into an effect like a rather untidy looking common.

I took my pencil and was just about to make a mark on the paper, when immediately overhead a great angry shrapnel burst occurred, spraying the ground all round and, in this idyllic scene, causing such an uproar that all the birds of the neighbourhood began dashing about — the officers came flying up from the Mess dugout, shouting in amazement, 'What's that?' and as to the gunners, pottering among the guns, they just vanished right and left as if they'd been shot. . . . It was just as if the Germans had got wind of my activities, and had said, 'Ha! We will put a little shellfire into this picture!'

I felt somehow guilty for this outrage.

He was thinking, no doubt, about the pre-war visual revolution, of dogmatic abstraction, and of the dangers inherent in the expressionist doctrine which he had already explored as he created the figure of Otto Kreisler in his novel *Tarr*. When he recalled the event in 1937 he was thinking of a new war in the making, of a new explosion of expressionist violence, of the fact that someone was already putting a torch to the workshop.

Early in his account of the conditions under which *A Canadian Gunpit* was

conceived Lewis recalled a picture which had been reproduced in the first issue of *Blast*.

My picture called 'The Plan of War' painted six months before the Great War 'broke out' as we say, depresses me. A prophet is a most unoriginal person: all he is doing is imitating something that is not there, but soon will be. With me war and art have been mixed up from the start. I wish I could get away from war. . . . Writing about it may be the best way to shake the accursed thing off, by putting it in its place as an unseemly joke.⁵

He had, he said, been very *sans façon* about art and perhaps a little callous about war. In art as in war he had been a *condottiere*. He had flung himself into trigonometry and ballistics as "lightheartedly as Leonardo did when he designed siege-sledges for the Florentine General Staff."⁶ He had enrolled others now enlisted in the service of the Canadian War Records — David Bomberg, Frank Dobson, Frederick Etchells, C. R. W. Nevinson, William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth⁷ — under the banner of Vorticism, or, at least, displayed their work in his two issues of *Blast*. Their "records" like Lewis's *A Canadian Gunpit* and Augustus John's charcoal sketch for a mural — Wadsworth's *Dazzle Ships*, Bomberg's *Sappers at Work*, and Roberts' *The First Gas Attack at Ypres* among others — were, after a series of exhibitions in 1919, to disappear into the storage rooms of the National Gallery.

Some of the pictures were shown with work done for the Imperial Government at the Burlington Galleries in Picadilly, where they were reported to be "viewed by great throngs" — including Clive Bell, who concluded with some satisfaction that all the painters were belated Pre-Raphaelites, and that "the brothers Spencer, the brothers Nash, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Bomberg, and Mr. Lamb were probably not born to be painters." Their pictures, he said, departed from "moral conviction" not from "visual sensation." They were not "expressing something that had moved them as artists but rather what they thought about something which had horrified them as men."⁸

When the pictures were shown at the Anderson Galleries in New York, June 10 to July 31, 1919, the "post-war" period, which Lewis saw culminating in England with the General Strike of 1926, had already begun to settle in. The New York *Herald*, June 11, reported:

The Duke of Devonshire, Governor General of Canada, who with members of the Cabinet was to have occupied the centre of the stage [at the opening of the exhibition] was detained in Ottawa by the labour troubles which are now occupying the serious attention of the Dominion Government. Arthur Knowlton, President

of the Canadian Club of New York, was in the chair. He briefly introduced Colonel R. F. Parkinson, D.S.O., the Royal Ottawa Regiment, of the *Ottawa Journal*, who is director of the Canadian War Records Office.

Lewis's canvas, together with the canvases of Wadsworth and Roberts, drew the general attention of the press. *A Canadian Gunpit* was reproduced in the *New York Times Magazine* of June 8. It was noted that "Wyndham Lewis is the leader of an Independent Group of which Roberts was a member in pre-war days. His picture of a Canadian gun pit also marks a return to something akin to realism, though by no means a complete surrender." The *New York Tribune*, June 10, observed, "The 'Gas Attack' painted by Gunner William Roberts and the 'Canadian Gunpit' painted by that celebrated Vorticist, Wyndham Lewis, have undeniable vitality, but one cannot say that either is the least beautiful." *The World*, New York, June 8, reported, "Wyndham Lewis, whose somewhat cubist 'Gunpit' is shown was for three years a Lieutenant in the Field Artillery." Between 1919 and 1920 the pictures were exhibited in both Toronto and Montreal. A history of the collection was later written by Captain Percy F. Godenrath. The title was *Lest We Forget*.

LEWIS MADE HIS OWN COMMENT on all this activity in the Foreword to the catalogue for the exhibition *Guns* at the Goupil Gallery:

The War has, so far, been reflected in art with the greatest profusion. But the same can be said for life at any time and we are not much the wiser. Whatever we may think about that it is certain that the philosophy of the War, all the serious interpretation of it, has yet to be done. That could not, for a hundred reasons, be accomplished during the War. This in no way means the disparagement of the good work relating to the War, in painting, that has been done so far. But all the War journalism, in painting and writing, will cease with the punctuality and *netteté* of a pistol shot when the curtain goes down. It will then be the turn of those with experience in the subject, the inclination, the mood, to make the true record. Truth has no place in action.

Lewis turned his own attention first toward the possibility of collaboration between the artist and the engineer, next to the appearance of the Tyros and Apes who began to people the landscape. Finally, after the General Strike, he turned again to the range of possible imagery between "Ucello's aloof pageant of armours, clothes . . . the trappings and wardrobe of War" and the furious satire of



Mary McLean, 1940

oil, 29 x 20

Reproduced by courtesy of Mrs. Douglas Stewart

Goya's "Desastros de la Guerra." Behind him he had not only the experience of 1914-1918 but also the Timon drawings, the Vorticist abstractions, and the images of embattled machines which can be found in the Captain Guy Baker Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum.

The great canvases, *The Surrender of Barcelona* (Tate Gallery), *The Armada* (Vancouver Art Gallery), *The Stations of the Dead* (Aberdeen Municipal Gallery) were completed in 1936-1937 at the time of the publication of *Blasting and Bombardiering*, *Count Your Dead They Are Alive or A New War in the Making*, and *The Revenge for Love*, a novel which stirred up as much controversy about the nature of reality as the portrait of Eliot painted at the same time was to do.

In Canada during the second war Lewis continued to explore and to expand this theme. *Lebensraum: The Battlefield*, watercolour and ink, 12¾" by 18¾", the property of the Art Gallery of Ontario is, as far as I know, the only example in a public Canadian collection. *Lebensraum No. 2: Empty Tunic*, watercolour and ink, 9½" by 13¾", *Three Martyrs*, watercolour and ink, 14½" by 18¼", *Dragon's Teeth*, watercolour and ink, 10" by 14¼", all in the Douglas collection, Toronto, are dated 1941 and 1942. Another watercolour and ink drawing, 9¾" by 15", *Three Gladiators*, the property of Norman Endicott, also belongs to the same group. In two of the pictures classical architectural detail appears in the context of warrior figures. "Nationalism," Lewis had written in the early months of 1939, "perhaps because to-day it is self-conscious, is invariably antiquarian." In the other two pictures "Creation Myth" images on which Lewis was working at the same time are conceived in an atmosphere of foreboding. A drawing of 1943, *Mother and Infant with Male*, as it was called in an exhibition at York University, Toronto, pastel and pencil, 14¾" by 11", the property of Marshall McLuhan, indicates the vitality with which Lewis continued to record "that never failing paradox, the real."

Images with which Lewis had been preoccupied between the two wars — and earlier — appear in the work of this period. Among these are *Witch on Cowback*, watercolour and crayon, 11½" by 15½", in the Duncan collection, *Witches Surprised at Dawn*, watercolour and crayon, 17¾" by 11¾" in the J. S. McLean collection, Toronto, and *Cow*, exhibited at York University as *Bull's Head*, crayon, 12" by 10", the property of Norman Endicott. All are variations on the theme of *The Childermass*, a skilfully constructed phantasmagoria, in which the relationship between the artist and his model — between Pullman and Satters-thwaite — between the executive will and the not-self — is recapitulated by a mass cast — the Bailiff and the appellants — the crowd-master and the crowd

which now includes the artist and his model however disaffected they may seem to be.

As an epigraph for *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926) Lewis had taken some lines from Chapman in which the figure of horse and rider is transformed into an emblem, "A doctrinal and witty hieroglyphic/ Of a blessed kingdom." As a postscript he had added a fragment from Parmenides, "I wish to communicate this view of the world to you exactly as it manifests itself: and so no human opinion will ever be able to get the better of you."

About the same time a mounted figure had appeared on the cover of the first issue of Lewis's review *The Enemy*. A variant version was made for the prospectus. In 1931 Lewis was depressed by the apathy of England. In *Hitler* he had registered the disturbing waves set up by the "powerful machine of the German consciousness." The sedentary habits of six years of work had begun to weary him. He left England for North Africa. There, meditating between Agadir and the Anti-Atlas on the camel pasturing with its leather lips between the stones on the salty ground of the steppe, he had occasion to think again of the "witty hieroglyphic." The camel on which the life of the group depended, he observed, had never become domesticated like the horse. He "roared with indignation at constraints on his liberty when he was locked up and fed on grain and dates in his brief stop in an oasis."⁹

In 1934 Lewis wrote his controversial essay on "folk prose," "The Dumb Ox: A Study of Ernest Hemingway." This time the image he invoked was not that of the horse or of the camel but of "cattle outside the slaughter-house, serenely chewing the cud . . . of *those to whom things are done* in contrast to those who have executive will and intelligence." "The expression of the dumb-ox," he admitted, "would have a penetrating beauty of its own, if it were uttered with genius — with bovine genius . . . just as much as would the folk-song of the baboon or of the 'Praying Mantis' "¹⁰ — that is, if genius were allowed to express itself at all. Lewis's *Cow* of 1941 is such an expression articulated in a language of form in which it finds a simple and adequate correlative. Only a scale of western values separates it from another picture, this time in the Duncan collection, *Head of a Woman*, crayon and watercolour, 12½" by 18", also dated 1941. Three pictures of the following year, also in the Duncan collection, *Figure Knitting*, *Cat-nap*, and *War News* are subtle and compassionate variations on the same theme.

Witch on Cowback presents a terrified cow, ridden inland into a glaring light by a partly hollow figure which appears to be manipulated by a smaller figure on

its back. The witch's head is the "loud-speaker" head which Charles Handley-Read says first appeared in designs for *Beyond This Limit* (1935), a collaboration between Lewis and Naomi Mitchison." The figure of the "loud-speaker" can be found in Lewis's work, however, as early as *The Childermass* where it is associated with the executive will as it is in *The Apes of God*, where in one of Lewis's illustrations the "loud-speaker" head is combined with antennae.

While he was living at the Tudor Hotel during 1941 and 1942 Lewis also completed a number of works in a series called "Creation Myth." An ink and gouache, 12½" by 13½", dated 1927, a section of dark sea with fish and rising submarine forms called *Creation Myth No. 1*, is now in the Tate collection. Another, also called *Creation Myth No. 1*, was exhibited by Hugh Kenner at Santa Barbara in 1957. There are in the Duncan collection at least four pictures, dated 1941 and 1942, that belong to this group, all are in mixed media and all of dimensions similar to those already indicated: *Creation Myth No. 17*, *Creation Myth: Maternal Figure*, *Gestation*, and *Still Life in the Belly of the Bird*.

Two pictures reproduced in Charles Handley-Read's *The Art of Wyndham Lewis*, *Four Figure Composition* (1938) and *What the Sea is Like at Night* (1949) link two other pictures painted in Toronto to the "Creation Myth" series: *Allegresse Aquatique*, ink and watercolour, 12½" by 17½", in the collection of the Art Gallery of Ontario, and *Jehova the Thunderer* in the Duncan collection. Other pictures in the Duncan collection, *The Island*, oil on canvas, 31" by 22 1/8", *Marine Fiesta*, watercolour and ink, and *Two Women on a Beach*, watercolour and crayon on the same blue paper as that used for *Creation Myth: Maternal Figure*, belong to the same world of fluid forms.

Eric Newton, speaking of the surrealist aspect of Lewis's work, observed in 1951 that perhaps Lewis had not created quite enough specimens of what he and Charles Handley-Read called "imaginative composition" as distinct from his paintings of the 1914-1918 war and from his paintings and drawings from life "to furnish a classifiable world with its own fauna and flora." Mr. Newton was alluding specifically to the world of the "ball-headed creatures that inhabit the 'Mud Clinic,'"¹² a painting now the property of the Fredericton Gallery. Even if this questionable presupposition with its consequent classification were granted, it should be remembered that the "ball-headed creatures" appear in some of the pictures painted in 1941 and in 1942 which have not been seen except in two exhibitions in Toronto — one at Victoria College, University of Toronto, from February 6 to February 28, 1950, one at York University, Toronto, November

27 to December 30, 1964 — and in an exhibition at the Santa Barbara Museum of Art, August-September, 1957.

In two of the Toronto watercolour and ink pictures — *Lebensraum: The Battlefield* and *Allegresse Aquatique* — these figures may be seen in landscapes which include details of Lewis's immediate environment. In the first they lie like a blood-sacrifice with their rifles and helmets at the base of a distant group of small skyscrapers. In the second they sport and make love in a wide stream below a red barn. Both are related to the *Inferno*, reproduced in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist* and in the Tate Gallery Catalogue for the exhibition of 1956. This picture was first shown at the Leicester Galleries in an exhibition of Lewis's work in December 1937, when, according to the catalogue, the paint was "still wet."

Lewis himself had something to say about doctrinaire Surrealism in 1929. In an essay entitled "The Diabolical Principle," *The Enemy* No. 3, he spoke of a "dogmatic subjectivism which would manipulate objective truth, of necessity, in favour of some version of the private world of the isolated mind" by omitting from its consideration the fact that all reality is a merging, in one degree or another, of the external and the internal, that all reality, to some extent, is one reality saturated with the imagination." "Even more is it the case," he said, "with the reality of art, or myth. . . . All art worth the name is already super-real."¹³

Another group of works painted in Canada which have not been seen except in Toronto and at the Santa Barbara exhibition is the "Crucifixion Series." *Crucifixion Series I* and *Crucifixion Series III* are in the Duncan collection. *Crucifixion Series II Pieta* is in the McLean collection. Another unnumbered example is the property of John Reid of Toronto. The images in these pictures differ from the primitive cruciform figure in an ink, watercolour, and crayon painting dated 1912, and from the sketch of the crucifixion which appears in the *Portrait of Naomi Mitchison, 1938*. The images suggest that Lewis had continued to entertain a belief which he had expressed in *Time and Western Man* when he rejected among other images the image of Bradley's monotonous Absolute. In form and mood these pictures belong with the "Creation Myth" series.

Anyone concerned with Lewis's attraction to aspects of neo-Thomism would be interested in the typewritten text of a lecture on Rouault which Lewis gave for the Arts Club in Chicago, February 1944. In this lecture he recalled by quotation the Conclusion of *Time and Western Man*. Although Lewis saw in the "uncompromising images" of Rouault not only a "religious impulse at the maximum of its creative power" but also one particularly attractive to those caught in the void left by the erosion of the notion of Progress, he was still reluctant to

admit the exclusive claim of a tragic vision. At the end of the discussion of "God as Reality" in *Time and Western Man* he had observed that it was in the interest of a democratic God who had shared his creative power with men that "we should find our salvation in being simply what we are."

THE LETTERS of the Canadian period record that Lewis made some portrait drawings and painted a number of portraits while he was living in Toronto. In his letters he mentions specifically a drawing of Lorne Pierce¹⁴ and a drawing of Douglas LePan which he sent to Felix Giovanelli who was trying to make arrangements for Lewis to lecture in St. Louis.¹⁵ The employees of J. S. McLean commissioned Lewis to paint a portrait of McLean which is now at Canada Packers in Toronto. Lewis also painted Mary, J. S. McLean's daughter. A portrait of Mrs. R. J. Sainsbury, the gift of R. J. Sainsbury, was lent to the York University exhibition by the National Gallery of Canada.

Lewis's *Portrait of an Englishwoman*, reproduced in *Blast* 1914, a witty abstract construction with the diagonal, dynamic, spatial play of forms which were being developed at the same time by the Russian Suprematist Kasmir Malevich, had been qualified in the same number by the assertion that to paint a recognizable human being "should be the rarest privilege, bestowed as a sort of Freedom of Art." By the time he wrote *The Caliph's Design* in 1919 Lewis noted ironically that "it had been possible within the trivial space of ten years, entirely to eliminate from the face of the earth the naked, clothed or other lady — every vestige and tatter even of a human being from the horizon of the purest, the latest art." As an examination of Lewis's painting will show he continued to take advantage of the privilege which his technical mastery of abstraction had conferred upon him.

Lewis could hardly have expected to support himself either in the United States or Canada by portrait painting at the end of 1939. In the final pages of *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*, a collection of critical essays on the visual arts, which included some sharp prefatory comment on the role of the amateur, the eclectic, and the entrepreneur, Lewis spoke of the rejection of his 1938 portrait of T. S. Eliot by the Royal Academy. The rejection indicated, Lewis remarked, "how our particular plutocracy expresses its patronizing contempt for the things of the mind, when those things take a visual form." The submission of the portrait had been a test case for him.

The *Portrait of Edith Sitwell* (begun in 1923 and completed in 1935) now in the Tate Gallery, the gift of Major Beddington Behrens, Lewis finally sold to

the Leicester Galleries for £50. The 1938 *Portrait of Ezra Pound* was purchased for £100 by the Tate Gallery out of the Knapping Fund in 1939, but Sir John Rothenstein recalls that he himself failed to persuade the Trustees of the Tate to buy the portrait of Eliot for £250.¹⁶ It was finally sold to the Durban Municipal Gallery. The first part of the payment made it possible for Lewis to leave London. In October of 1939 Lewis was writing to T. J. Honeyman from Buffalo to thank him for sending part of the payment. "I am sorry," he said, "that I had to bother you so much."¹⁷

The National Gallery of Canada, to whose acting director Lewis was to apply for work with the War Records, had consented in 1939 to give temporary safe-keeping to some of the British pictures from the New York World's Fair. In October John Rothenstein was in Ottawa, a guest of the Tweedsmuirs at Government House, arranging for the temporary exhibition for which Lord Tweedsmuir had consented to perform the opening ceremony. *The Surrender of Barcelona* had been in the English Pavilion. Perhaps Lewis thought that Canada was still interested in saving British artists as well.

It was, however, the interest of particular people that made it possible for Lewis to work. On July 15, 1941, he wrote to Sturge Moore, whom he had known since his boyhood, "I have been miraculously fed and sheltered (I have what Americans call an 'angel'.)"¹⁸ In 1941 he also wrote to Archibald MacLeish, "I have succeeded in making a living of sorts here — mostly by portrait painting — it is very gruesome work struggling with people about the shape of their nose and the size of their feet; and Canada being a small and backward country does not make it easier."¹⁹

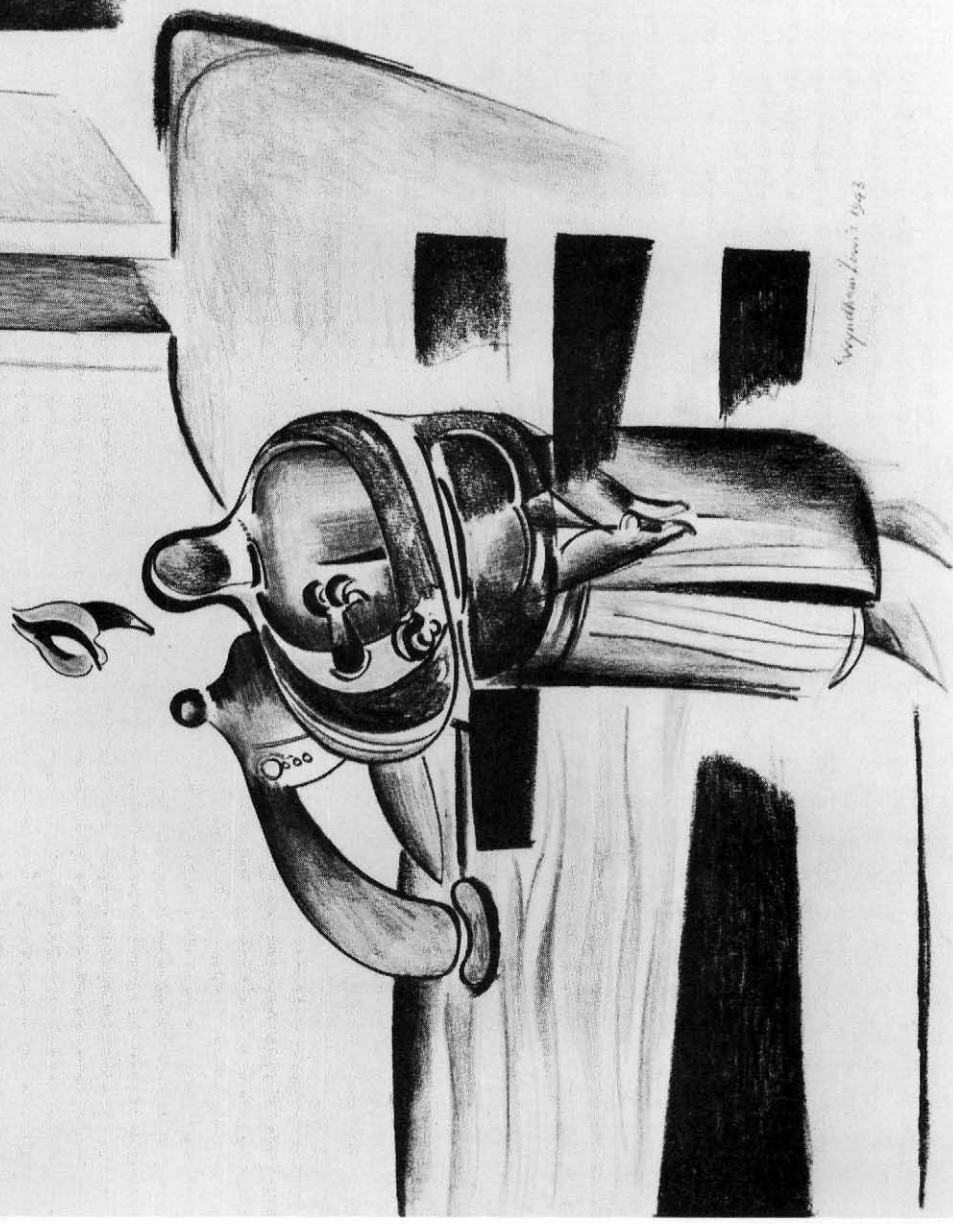
Nevertheless Lewis was depressed by the psychological chill of wartime Toronto, by the combination of money and methodism, by his failure to find himself, until he went to Windsor, in any meaningful context. "I am reduced to writing articles," he wrote, "to fill the time and my pocket — on 'Will there be a Canadian Renaissance?' . . . So I make quite a spectacular explosion of intellectual energy. The only intelligent people here like the painter, Jackson, regard a marriage with the States as their best bet and I think the same."²⁰ Lewis admired Jackson for his integrity as a painter and as soon as he returned to England paid particular tribute to him in the first of a series of articles for *The Listener*, August 29, 1946, in which he showed his broad capacity to understand work which had its base in a "creative necessity" that was not closely related to his own.

Lewis apparently met A. Y. Jackson in 1939 at a dinner in the York Club given by J. S. McLean and arranged by Terrence MacDermot, then Headmaster

of Upper Canada College, and Douglas Duncan. John Reid recalled that the dinner took place on November 30, St. Andrew's Day, because Charles Comfort, who had been invited with Jackson and Carl Schaefer, was wearing a plaid tie. Reid recalled, too, that Lewis was late for dinner because it was on this day that he had been taken on a tour of Hart House by the Warden. Lewis, then, must have returned to Toronto from Buffalo for a few days before he went to New York to see about *The Vulgar Streak*, a novel finally published in wartime format by Robert Hale in London. The visit to Hart House provided Lewis with an amusing chapter in *America I Presume*, a book which he wrote during his unhappy year in New York.

AFTER HE RETURNED to Canada in November 1940, Lewis found accommodation in the Tudor Hotel not far from the old post office on Bay Street and close to Duncan's small gallery on Charles Street. As his letters indicate he went almost immediately to Ottawa to make enquiries about work for the War Records. Eric Brown, who had been Director of the National Gallery since the time of the Beaverbrook scheme and who had secured the services of a number of resident artists for the first War Records, had died in April 1939. H. O. McCurry was acting director. Lewis apparently received promises but nothing seemed to come of them. This time paradoxically he was to be commissioned not by the Canadian Government but by the British War Artists Advisory Committee to paint what is usually referred to as the "Anaconda picture."

The difficulties which beset the painter *de métier*, already indicated by the dimensions of the paintings of 1941-1942, the skilful and integrated use of blue drug-store paper, and the use of most easily accessible materials except in commissioned portraits, became acute at the time Lewis began his work for the British Ministry. To Eric Kennington, who had also worked for the Beaverbrook fund in 1914-1918 and was of help to Lewis at this time, Lewis wrote in March 1943, "Since I have been given the choice, I paint a picture in oils. I believe I can put my hands on the money to buy a canvas: and I can get free transport to the factory." After a hiatus in the letter which is explained by the comment "Six weeks ago the hotel burnt down all but the annexe", Lewis mentions the problem again. "I bought the last box of white conte in the 'Art Metropole' here the other day. I am turning over in my mind methods of making paint, when the last brush and the last tubes of Burnt Sienna and Venetian Red are sold and I and a few others here are back where Cimabue was — lassoing hogs and cutting their



Mother and Infant with Male, 1943

PASTEL AND PENCIL, 14 3/4 x 11

Reproduced by courtesy of Marshall McLuhan

hair off for brushes. There is a lot of hoarding going on in artists materials I believe.”²¹

After the fire at the Tudor Hotel, Douglas Duncan recalls, Lewis moved across the street to the Selby. He was not to be there long. Before he had been commissioned by the British War Artists Advisory Committee he had been attempting to find some civilian employment in which he could be of use and freed from the necessity of painting portraits, since, as he told Kennington, “he could not even masquerade as a soldier.” Although he brushed it aside he was also beginning to have trouble with his sight. By curious coincidence the opportunity came only when he was beginning work on the Anaconda picture — the “line of furnaces serviced by an infernal personnel (mainly Central European and Russian)” and the monster with a solitary claw which drew jars of molten glass from the furnaces.²² In March he was invited by Father J. Stanley Murphy to lecture at Assumption College in Windsor. This was undoubtedly one of his happiest experiences in Canada, but it created complications for him as an artist.

In August Lewis wrote to Felix Giovanelli from the Royal Apartments in Windsor, “I have to work a little more on my painting for the British Government, and then get down to the reading necessary for my October lectures and collect material for my book.” (*America and Cosmic Man*). Two days later he wrote again, “My picture is giving trouble and threatens to interfere with the reading I had planned in preparation for the Heywood Broun Lectures. But I have an excellent small studio thank goodness.” On November 11, he told Giovanelli, “The Ministry of Information have thrust a new problem on me; they suggest that I should secure a zinc cylinder here in Windsor, roll up the painting I did for them, so that it may be transported in a bomber to England. I don’t feel that this is going to do my picture very much good, especially as the paint is rather thick in places.”²³

“Writing and picture-making are not activities, I have found, which mix very well, unless one becomes the servant of the other, as was the case with Blake, or with Rossetti,” Lewis wrote in *Rude Assignment*.²⁴ Although the move to Windsor appears to have brought to an end the activity of 1941-1942 Lewis’s picture making did not cease. “It is my plan to paint one of the priests here,” he wrote to John Burgess from Windsor. “He is a whole hogging Thomist; and I shall call it ‘The Thomist’.”²⁵ Father Murphy sat for him. He painted a portrait of Mrs. Paul Martin. He made a fine pastel drawing of Pauline Bondy and began a portrait in oil which was unfinished when he left Windsor. It was returned to Canada by Mrs. Lewis after Lewis’s death, as a pencil sketch of Marshall Mc-

Luhan was and an oil portrait of Margaret Giovanelli. In *Rude Assignment* Lewis mentions a pastel of "Mrs. O'Brien of Montreal" dated 1945. It should be remembered also that *Mother and Infant with Male* is dated 1943.

From St. Louis came offers of help from Marshall McLuhan and Felix Giovanelli. "Please tell McLuhan," Lewis wrote to Giovanelli, "(though I am writing to him about this) that I propose to do 'Thirty Personalities of America' . . . But that is in the future and I want some portable specimens of my handiwork. . . ." To Giovanelli, who had sent him twenty-five dollars as an advance on a portrait of his wife, Lewis replied, "Let me thank you first . . . when I come to St. Louis in February I shall enjoy portraying her — though I don't like to think of your paying for it."²⁶ Brought to St. Louis by the two men in 1944, Lewis painted a portrait of Dr. Joseph Erlanger, who that year had been awarded the Nobel Prize.

After the rejection of the 1938 portrait Eliot had written to Lewis, ". . . it seems to me a very good portrait, and one by which I am quite willing that posterity should know me, if it takes any interest in me at all. And though I may not be the best judge of it as portraiture, I am sure that it is a very fine painting."²⁷ Earlier he had praised Lewis for his impersonality, the impersonality of the artist who can out of the particularity of experience express a general truth or create a myth. From the portrait of Mary McLean Stewart, oil, 29" x 20", painted in December 1940, when Lewis first settled down in Toronto under the "blanket of war" to the pastel portrait of Pauline Bondy completed in Windsor in 1943, the images of the creation myth which had begun to appear in the portraits of 1937-1938, the *Portrait of Eliot*, the *Portrait of Mrs. Honeyman*, *The Red Portrait*, *Froanna The Artist's Wife*, and the *Portrait of Stephen Spender* are caught and focussed in objects of everyday use. In the portrait of Mary McLean they can be seen in the patterns and shape of the chair and in the lines of her simple dress. In the pastel sketch of Pauline Bondy they appear on the jacket of the suit she is wearing, in the tree-like shapes in her brooch, and in the floating lines of the hat which suggest that she carries a new world on her head.

VORTICISM, LEWIS RECALLED in an essay in *The Architectural Review*, November 1934, was a movement initiated by a group of painters but it was aimed essentially at architectural reform. The Vorticists' work, like Mondrian's, was often an exercise in architectural theory, the picture a "spell", a positional abstraction designed to attract an architectural shell. In *Rude Assign-*

ment Lewis recalled that the way in which the experiences of the 1914-1918 war, of the "miles of hideous desert known as 'the Line'" altered his vision.

Had you at that time asked me to paint a milkmaid in a landscape of buttercups and daisies I should probably have knocked you down. But when Mars with his mailed finger showed me a shell-crater and a skeleton, with a couple of shivered tree-stumps behind it, I was still in my abstract element. And before I knew quite what I was doing I was drawing with loving care a signaller corporal to plant upon the lip of the shell-crater.

This was not a part of the enterprise which "turned an Academy rosebud into a khaki brave" or "in the outer fashion a cubed cockney into a cubed Tommy."²⁸ It was a movement away not only from the sentimentality which caricatured the great medieval virtue of compassion, but also from the vulgarization of disgust and from a scientific scepticism which cloaked itself in impersonality. Such scepticism could be confronted in no way except by a recognition of the essential absurdity of men who identified themselves with a machine. The specific at this point was laughter, not of the Bergsonian kind, but something primitive, hard, and unchangeable, "the sudden handshake of mystic violence and the anarchist" or "the bark of delight of a gregarious animal at the proximity of its kind."²⁹ The Chinese artist who thought of "human life as one piece" did not place man with a capital M at the centre of his pictorial universe. Since he allowed a fish, bird, tiger, fly, frog to enter it on an equal footing with the human biped, he never arrived at the apotheosis of the banal which brought about the decay of all form and elegance and fostered a defeatism in which the traditional guardians — religious and political — of the humanitarian values could contemplate the thought of bigger and better bombs, laden with poison for the destruction of "alien" cities.

In an essay on Picasso in the *Kenyon Review*, Spring 1940, Lewis had announced that his own solution was a return to nature, not, however, a return to the world of the camera or to the world of idealized archetypes, both the result of the isolation of the eye from the other senses. What Lewis had to say about Picasso's "witty, distorted reflections" and about his "power to caricature all that is brought to him" could have done nothing but alienate the "modernists" who in Canada, for instance, were to be startled in 1948 by the work of Riopelle and Borduas, or to find in the work of Pollock and Rothko and in the birth of abstract expressionism in New York a wholly unheralded development. Lewis was isolated in Canada partly by the condition of the civilian during war but also by a time lag. It is interesting that he found companionship not among the artists but among the neo-Thomists and the students of contemporary literature.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Canadian War Records Office Report Submitted by the Officer in Charge to The Honourable Sir Edward Kemp, K.C.M.G., M.P., Overseas Minister of Militia & Defence. March 30 (1918) by Beaverbrook, Lt. Col., Officer i/c Canadian War Records, p. 7.
- ² *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. W. K. Rose (London, 1963), 383.
- ³ *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London, 1937), 195.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁷ Canadian War Records Office Report Submitted by Lord Beaverbrook to the Honourable Sir Edward Kemp, K.C.M.G., M.P., Minister of Overseas Military Forces of Canada. Aug. 31, 1919. Appendix 2, p. 9.
- ⁸ Clive Bell, "Wilcoxism!" *Athenaeum*, No. 4688 (March 5, 1920), 311-312.
- ⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *Fillibusters in Barbary* (London, 1932), 174.
- ¹⁰ Wyndham Lewis, *Men Without Art* (London, 1934), 40.
- ¹¹ Charles Handley-Read, *The Art of Wyndham Lewis* (London, 1951), 57.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 27.
- ¹³ Wyndham Lewis, *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator* (London, 1931), 66-67.
- ¹⁴ *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 304.
- ¹⁵ Unpublished letter, August 13, 1943.
- ¹⁶ John Rothenstein, *Brave Day, Hideous Night* (London, 1966), 207.
- ¹⁷ *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 265.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 317.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, 352.
- ²² *Ibid.*, 353.
- ²³ Unpublished letters, August 9, August 15, November 11, 1943.
- ²⁴ p. 130.
- ²⁵ *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 370.
- ²⁶ Unpublished letter, November 11, 1943.
- ²⁷ *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, 251.
- ²⁸ Foreword, *Guns* (London: William Marchant, The Goupil Gallery), n.p.
- ²⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *The Wild Body* (London), 237.