



Les Ryder just out of prison

This painting is available as a Limited Edition Print.

NOTE : These paintings represent a small proportion of the exhibition on VAGRANCY first shown on the Barbican in 1973.

Many of these pieces have come from the painter's private collection and have never been seen before by the public.

The next exhibition will consist of paintings first shown in 1974.
Project 2 : DEATH AND THE MAIDEN.

Cover detail : 'KING RYDER'

This painting has been acquired by the William Sutton Trust, who are donating it to the Plymouth City Museum's Permanent Collection.

R.O. LENKIEWICZ
PIECES FROM PROJECT 1
EXHIBITION: VAGRANCY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID JONES



"The blindness that opens the eye is not the one that darkens vision.

Tears and not sight are the essence of the eye."

JACQUES DERRIDA

"Myself my sepulchre, a moving grave, buried . . ."

"Which shall I first bewail
Thy bondage or lost sight,
Prison within Prison. Inseparably dark?
Thou art become
The dungeon of thyself."

MILTON : SAMSON AGONISTES

Let us be careful.

Let us 'see' that the vagrant is a metaphor, not for Death nor Folly, nor the greed of breweries; but for invisibility – He is the nearest we get to the sighting of ghosts. They are called the 'invisible people'. He drinks to oblivion, damp brain, damp floor; the grey stench of isolation. The rats wait to eat his vomit; and while he sleeps – his eyes.

"If it moves, beg it!" says 'Brother Blair'.

"Too much blood in the wine-stream and a curse on Sundays!" says 'The Lynch'.

"I see that life's one red rag!" says 'Mac'.

"At least I'm good for one thing – nothing!" says 'Harmonica Jim'.

"When I looks at yer pictures of the 'lads' – I feels like I'm in a mortuary; I've seen everything, an' I'm out of control. My ears are full of nerves." says 'Black Sam'.

"Without suffering I'm lost, I wouldn't know what to do without suffering." says 'The Singer'.

"Seemingly, . . . there are better things to do . . . than what I'm doing. I'm what they call the unwanted guest, and that's the way I'm always going to be." says 'The Bishop'.

They know that life is deaf, the 'do-gooder' is easy prey. The best beg in the world? a student eating. The worst beg? a family on holiday.

And if you want your money safe, put it under the soap.

They 'know' you do not care, cannot care, will not care. Attempt to cheat them out of that knowledge, and they laugh in your blind eyes.

They smoulder alive; red and green eyed, noting every pocket full and empty. They lie in wait for your sentimentality. They 'mine-sweep' uninformed good will, and smile in their dark hearts as you do the 'Kerb-side twist'. And as we 'twist', as we watch the un-dead glide by – we tire a little more.

The breweries, relative poverty and ignorance, slide past with them.

We view these images from a dark space, from void to void, where for a short while we might hear ourselves breathe.

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Crying Man in Wells St Skipper.

In the early 70's Lenkiewicz schmilosophically influenced by Schweitzer, Buber and Dolci, took over a number of derelict premises where he housed several hundred (dossers, cowboys) vagrants.

The manager of Olivetti's in Southside Street allowed the Painter to present the Project on Vagrancy in the huge stables at the rear of his property in 1972/73.

Lenkiewicz became involved with a wide range of remarkable street-people. Some of them were difficult, dangerous and extremely demanding. He established relationships with similar 'do-gooding' group activities in Exeter, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leeds and London; as a result of which, it was possible to 'swap' the problem 'cowboys' with mutual benefit.

Endless tales can be told about these unusual personalities, some of whom reminded the Painter of wandering visionaries, like the Desert Fathers.

He learnt early on not to romanticise or sentimentalise the lives of people who suffered in varying and complex ways from alcoholism and who had severed normal contacts with society.

The 'cowboys' divided themselves into what they called "1st, 2nd and 3rd Division and non-League Players".



Les Ryder sleeping in 'Jacob's Ladder'.

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

"WALKING STICK" [William Bannen]

"It ain't no good in squawkin' when yo're stoney broke and walkin'."

"BROTHER BLAIR"

"If your feet get sore, walk on your hands."

"SENATOR LYNCH"

THEIR NAMES SPEAK VOLUMES. THEIR PRIVATE LANGUAGE MAKE THESE VOLUMES UNREADABLE.

"Let's tarpaulin muster, no deep tankin'. I've done a Hank Marvin with a comic singer, and the gaff hanger is coming to the bardo. Muster yolks are dead sham, shoot the crow, no more Jack the Ripper. I havn't broken ice and there's no Giro for Cairo.

A rustle is better than a rattle, we'll need a Burma Star for the quick draw. Box clever, dive bomb or we're for Jimmy the rattler.

The dirty rat's done a Cagney, so we'll need a bottle of the hurry up.

I'm stuck with a Tootie Hawker and a Colshy Muck, there's no ships on the horizon an' me trousers are a laggin' cage."

SOME OF THEIR NAMES:

'Gentleman Jim', 'The Horse', 'Juke-Box', 'Have-no-Fear', 'Mouth McCarthy', 'Be-My-Guest', 'The Bishop', 'Brother Blair', 'Chic the Bam', 'Steal-a-Horse', 'The Bag-O-Rags', 'The Singer', 'The Steam-Hammer', 'The Rodesian', 'Harmonica Jim', 'Scarface Fitz', 'Big John Wayne', 'One Way Rogers', 'Straight Back', 'The Road-Runner', 'Mephistopheles', 'Tank', 'Big Take it Easy', 'Black Sam', 'Cockney Jim', 'The Irish Compressor', 'Billy the Kid', 'Senator Lynch', 'Brighton', 'Big John Barr', 'The Janner', 'Tragic Limp', 'The Silent Begger', 'No more Cider for old Les Ryder',

Les Ryder is probably the only one of the above still living.

LIST OF PAINTINGS

1. 'The Bishop' and the Painter dance to Mahler in 'Jacob's Ladder'.
2. 'King Ryder'.
3. Crying man in Wells St Skipper.
4. Double study for 'Plymouth Mourning over its Unfortunates' (This painting can be viewed at the main studio.)
5. Les Ryder just out of prison (Available as a Limited Edition print.)
6. 'Diogenes' in the window studio at night.
7. Albert Edward Ernest Fisher ('The Bishop') startled.
8. Les Ryder sleeping in 'Jacob's Ladder'.
9. 'The Singer' asleep in 'Jacob's Ladder'.
10. 'The Lynch' asleep in 'Jacob's Ladder' (The Cardboard Box man).
11. Les Ryder in blanket.
12. 'Box-car Riley' Isolation Study.
13. 'Box-car Riley' Rear View Isolation Study.
14. 'The Bishop' explaining to 'Diogenes' why the sky was falling down. 'Diogenes' did not want to listen, but I did.
15. 'Black Mac' crying
The Man with big hands.
16. 'Diogenes' Double study.
17. Les Ryder judging the world in his sleep.
18. 'The Bishop' talking to the fox in Stoke Damerel Churchyard.
19. 'Diogenes' reading the newspaper.
20. 'The Bishop', 'Diogenes' and Les Ryder asleep in 'Jacob's Ladder'. Study for 'Plymouth Mourning over its Unfortunates'. See No. 4.
21. 'The Bishop' asleep on red chair.
22. 'The Bishop' and 'Diogenes' naked.