

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Wyndham LEWIS (Amherst, Nova Scotia 1882 - London 1957)

Tut

Pencil with stumping and pale brown wash, heightened with white, on buff paper.

Signed and dated Wyndham Lewis. 1931. at the lower left.

284 x 240 mm. (11 1/8 x 9 1/2 in.) [image]

330 x 286 mm. (13x 11 1/4 in.) [sheet]

This charming drawing is a study of Lewis's black and white Sealyham terrier 'Tut' (sometimes called 'Tutsi', and his name apparently an abbreviation of Tutankhamun), who appears - often depicted rolling around on the floor - in a handful of charming drawings of the early 1930s. With the onset of the Second World War, Lewis and his wife Gladys Anne (known as Froanna) took Tut with them to America and Canada, where the dog died of a tumour in 1944. The Lewises were left devastated by his death, with the artist writing of Tut to a friend, 'Like the spirit of a simpler and saner time, this fragment of primitive life confided his destiny to her [Froanna], and went through all the black days beside us.'

In his catalogue raisonné of Lewis's work, published in 1971, Walter Michel lists a total of seven drawings of Tut. As he writes of this group, and of the present sheet in particular, 'In sketching his dog Lewis responded to nature as the Chinese did...Casting geometry aside, he drew an outline as feathery as a ball of fluff...Tut is composed of ears, muzzle, black paws and touches of pencil shading for the fur, all set off against a flat light-brown wash. Lewis liked this picture. He intended to include it in a volume of colour reproductions planned for the thirties but never issued...In pictures of Tut, Lewis makes out of nature a surprising design...' Another writer has noted that this group of drawings of Tut 'show Lewis at his closest to the art he admired most, the Chinese Sung period.'

As Michel points out, Lewis had planned to include a colour image of the present sheet in a book. As he further notes, 'The book, to be called *The Role of Line in Art*, was to be brought out by Lord Carlow in a hand-printed edition on special paper...It was to have had six colour reproductions, of which three – the final state of *Girl Sewing*...*Portrait of the Artist's Wife*...and *Tut*... – are extant in colour proof. The text was to have been by Lewis.'

A similar pencil and wash drawing of a frisky Tut, also dated 1931, is in the collection of the Wyndham Lewis Memorial Trust and on long-term loan to the Courtauld Institute of Art in London. Another drawing of the terrier was included in the 1956 retrospective exhibition *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism*, and the appeal of Lewis's studies of the dog is reflected in a newspaper review of that exhibition, which noted of the drawing, 'Don't miss Tutsi...the impudent pup...is an oasis in a stormy sea.'

The present sheet may be counted among the most spirited of Wyndham Lewis's studies of his beloved dog, and was included in the major retrospective exhibition of the artist's work held in Madrid in 2010. In the catalogue of that exhibition, it was noted that 'Lewis shows great sympathy with animals in this drawing, which focuses on the legs, belly and head and at one level is simply a virtuoso exercise in linear invention. However, Lewis also evokes the furry warmth of his pet and its simple enjoyment of physical life.' Drawings such as this, by their very intimacy and charm, remain somewhat apart from much of the artist's output. As another recent scholar has noted of the drawings of Tut, these 'carefree and playful sketches...provide a valuable antidote to the more commonly told tale of Lewis's notorious aggression, polemic and biting satire.'

Exhibitions

London, Ernst Brown & Phillips Ltd. (The Leicester Galleries), *Painting and Drawings by Wyndham Lewis*, December 1937, no.30; London, Tate Gallery and Arts Council, *Wyndham Lewis and Vorticism*, 1956, no.31 (as Tutsi, lent by the artist); London, Olympia, *Fine Art, Design & Antiques Fair, Wyndham Lewis 1882-1957: an exhibition of paintings and drawings*, March 2005, no.129 [ex-catalogue]; Madrid, Fundación Juan March, *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)*, 2010, no.138.

Literature:

John Rothenstein, 'Great British Masters', *Picture Post*, 25 March 1939, unpaginated, illustrated ('Few artists to-day capture the lovely simplification of this little drawing.');

Walter Michel, *Wyndham Lewis: Paintings and Drawings*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1971, p.396, no.730, pl.98, fig.730; Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis, Painter and Writer*, New Haven and London, 2000, pp.394-395, fig.222; Paul Edwards et al, *Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)*, exhibition catalogue, Madrid, 2010, p.229, no.138.

Artist description:

One of the most significant figures of the avant-garde in Britain in the first half of the 20th century, Percy Wyndham Lewis was unusual among his contemporaries in that he was highly regarded as both a writer and an artist. As he noted in one autobiographical account, 'I am a novelist, painter, sculptor, philosopher, draughtsman, critic, politician, journalist, essayist, pamphleteer, all rolled into one, like one of those portmanteau-men of the Italian Renaissance.' A student at the Slade School of Art in London between 1898 and 1901, Lewis spent the next seven years in Europe, mainly in Paris but also studying in Madrid, Haarlem and Munich. Returning to England in 1908, he exhibited from 1911 onwards with the artists of the Camden Town Group and at the Allied Artists' Association, and was also included in Roger Fry's *Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition* at the Grafton Galleries in 1912. Lewis joined Fry's *Omega Workshops* in 1913, but by the following year had left to establish the *Rebel Art Centre* and the magazine *Blast*, which first appeared in June 1914 and became the manifesto of the short-lived movement known as *Vorticism*. Lewis was one of the leaders of the Vorticist movement – a group which also included the much younger artists Edward Wadsworth and William Roberts - and was the author of most of the theoretical writings associated with the group. While Vorticism flourished for only a brief period, Lewis continued to work as an artist during and after his military service in the First World

War.

Around a thousand drawings and a hundred paintings by Lewis are known. Immensely gifted as both artist and writer, for most of his career he worked as both concurrently, although by the early 1920s it was his writing that began to take up much of his creative energy. As he recalled in later years, 'From 1924 onwards writing became so much of a major interest that that I have tended to work at my painting or drawing in prolonged bursts, rather than fit them into the intervals of the planning or writing of books. 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.' Nevertheless, he produced a significant group of paintings and drawings throughout the 1930s, much of which was shown in one-man exhibitions at various galleries in London. Lewis spent the years of the Second World War in America and Canada, but within a few years of his return to London in 1945 had begun to lose his sight and largely stopped painting, becoming completely blind by 1951.

Wyndham Lewis's output as a draughtsman was of considerable importance in his oeuvre. Apart from publishing three separate portfolios of his drawings - in 1913, 1919 and 1932 - Lewis frequently used his drawings to illustrate the numerous books, pamphlets and articles he produced. He included significant numbers of drawings in his gallery exhibitions, and in his submissions to such group shows as Roger Fry's Second Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1912 and the first Vorticist group exhibition in 1915. Furthermore, as one recent scholar has noted, at times 'drawing functioned, in a sense, as painting for Lewis...The drawings stand as substitutes for paintings when means, materials or the creative will was not there, or at times when Lewis was so taken up with his written work, as in much of the 1920s and '30s, that more significant production would have been unfeasible.'