

# LENKIEWICZ RECONSIDERED

## PERSPECTIVES IN CONFLICT

*"The majority of books present with a title that requires no further explanation. Perhaps, though, with this particular title, the word 'reconsidered' might be expected to provoke questions – not the least of these being, 'Why would the work of the painter, Robert Lenkiewicz, acquire a standing wherein it needed to be reconsidered?'"*

This is the question the author poses in his introduction to *Lenkiewicz Reconsidered*. Keith Nichols first met with Robert Lenkiewicz in 1996. They became friends and would meet every few weeks until Robert's death in 2002. It became established between them that Keith would write a book recalling some of their conversations and taking stock of Robert's life, work and achievements. The intention was that the project would be completed while he was alive and working. However, the book *Robert Lenkiewicz – The Artist and the Man*, was published in 2005 since few expected such an early death.

Being a clinical psychologist by profession Keith Nichols put some emphasis on attempting to understand Robert's approach to life and painting from a psychological viewpoint. Now the emphasis has changed to that of assessing Robert's achievements. By inviting critics and fellow artists to express their views on this controversial figure, many who knew Robert well or were his contemporaries, the author provides us with a new and valuable perspective on his life and work.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Keith Nichols is a clinical psychologist and academic. While his book is based on a long term friendship with the artist, the author's professional interests provide the basis on which this book has been written.

Born and educated in Essex, Keith attended Leeds University 1962–1968, obtaining a Degree in psychology followed by post graduate training as a clinical psychologist. Appointed lecturer in clinical psychology at the University of Exeter in September 1968 he was involved in the creation of clinical psychology training at the University. He also developed courses related to workplace stress.

As well as teaching at the University Keith took on a clinical role within the NHS in 1970, initially working in the mental health field then progressing in 1978 to develop a clinical psychology service for The Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital. Now retired from the University Keith continues as consultant clinical psychologist working with people struggling to adapt to physical health problems such as heart attacks, diabetes and chronic pain.

Keith lives in Exmouth and has two adult children. Life long interests are flying and sailing and latterly, mainly as a result of meeting Robert Lenkiewicz, he has a serious interest in art and the psychology of artists.

### CONTRIBUTERS

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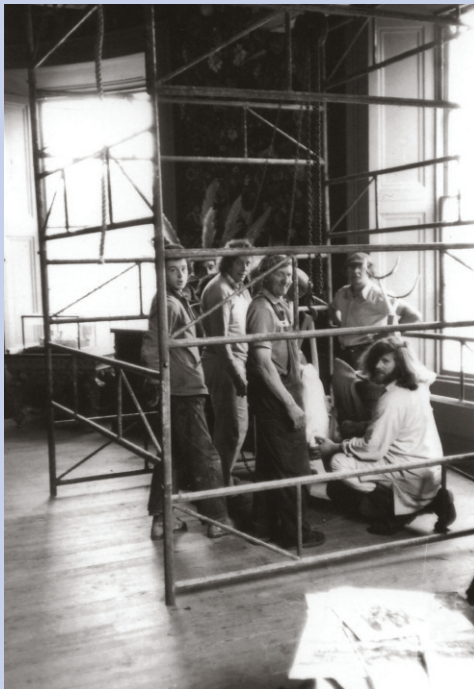
Robert with some of his philosophy collection.



Mary O'Reilly relating the history of the mural.

Below left: Work in progress...

Below right: photo courtesy of Nahem Shoa



LENKIEWICZ THE PAINTER

are so realistic they are like photographs." Or, as is often said, "He can't draw hands," and "The way he paints the glint in the eye is like magic." Then there is the London art world who, if they are even aware of who Lenkiewicz is, see him as a slick showman and a second rater with mediocre technical skill who painted thousands of kitsch porn pictures of semi-naked women. The internet has widened Lenkiewicz's audience but, sadly, so much of the work on the web falls into this kitsch category. It is a shame that, because of their inherent commercial value, this five per cent of his lifetime painting output has become the Lenkiewicz face on the web. Lenkiewicz produced possibly some thirty thousand or more paintings in his lifetime (including watercolours and paint sketches), more work single-handedly than almost any artist in history. You have to expect that inevitably a large percentage of this work will be uneven or, dare I say, weak in quality. I am aware of the fact that, to achieve some clarity on this subject and to place Lenkiewicz correctly, I will have to address the issue of the so called 'Girlie Pictures' painted over the last ten years of his life. This will be touched upon later. Firstly, for me to place Lenkiewicz in the canon of Great British Painters I will need a measuring stick in order to define suitable criteria by which to judge paintings. How does one tell which paintings are good?

## The age of the amateur

The psychoanalytical works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung have had a profound effect on our modern society with their notions of Self. Capitalism needs and feeds on the individual putting him or herself before the community. Everyone feels they have the right to pronounce judgements on areas of life they know nothing about and that their opinion is as equal in value as anyone else's. Art has suffered more than most areas of society as a result of this. The Postmodernism movement has dominated the art world of the last forty years, believing as its premise that there can be no notion any more of good and bad art: that is, all images are of equal artistic value. This has been a marketing dream for the art market. With the right promotion, even the most talented artist could become world famous. In every art discussion, someone will always say art is subjective or that it is down to one's own personal taste. I have always felt that if taste was the judge of all things then the best cuisine would not be French but fast food, as it is far more popular. Mastery of the art of painting teaches you how to appreciate and understand many major works of great art that visually one does not like but can learn from. Taste is for amateurs.

Examples of double-page spreads.

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Robert in the Library within St Saviours.

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Fading health, Robert with Anna Navas in Dentford Hospital.

