



*Mouse With Wool - interior, 1965* flanked by preparatory sketches for the painting.

## 'STUDY OF THE PAINTER'S DEAD MOTHER', 1977

Visitors to the exhibition of works from The Lenkiewicz Foundation collection on show in The Hurdle Gallery at Plymouth City Museum will be able to inspect the preparatory sketches for the painting *Mouse With Wool - Interior* (1965), which have never been exhibited before.

The most interesting item is an early watercolour sketch which includes Lenkiewicz's own notes on the picture. These explain the method of construction of the perspective in the painting and show that Lenkiewicz had meant to place the three chairs in the picture in an unbroken line, a reference to Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1923). In the finished oil painting itself there's evidence that the leftmost seated figure was later moved in the composition to break the perspective. Like Duchamp's work, this painting was long in the making - the sitter, Celia 'Mouse' Mills, Robert's first wife, has said that she made countless sittings for it over a six year period.

Another picture in the show known to have been made from preparatory drawings is the *Study of the Painter's Dead Mother*. The location of the sketches made by the artist at the mortuary where his mother's body was taken was not known until the painting was re-framed for this exhibition. They are affixed to the rear of the wood panel on which the oil painting was made. The sketches, about four or five inches on a side, are made on yellowing paper from a sketchpad which Lenkiewicz later used to make the finished oil painting.

At the mortuary, Lenkiewicz found his mother Alice's body wrapped in a shroud, her jaw secured with a bandage wrapped around her head, which he drew from three different points of view. On opening the shroud, he discovered that her toes had been tied together with string. Lenkiewicz later painted this scene in a notebook (see page 3) inscribed on the spine *Self-Portrait/Death Bed*.

Begun in 1977, shortly after his mother's death in March of that year, the notebook (which is on display at the Museum) contains studies and notes relating to the oil painting *Self-Portrait on Death Bed*, which formed part of the *Self-Portrait Project* shown in 1978. In that painting, Lenkiewicz portrayed himself in the same guise as his mother's corpse, but surrounded by friends and family. The notebook also accurately dates *Study of the Painter's Dead Mother* as being made three days after his mother's death.

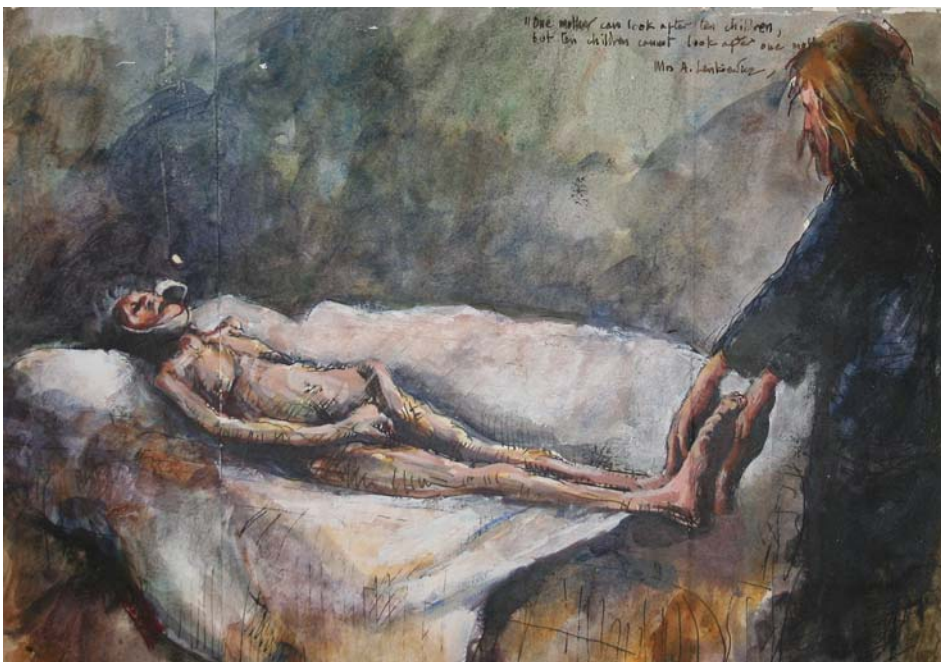


*Study of the Painter's Dead Mother, 1977*. Oil on wood panel, 32 x 25cm.





Sketches for *Study of the Painter's Dead Mother*. The five preparatory sketches are fixed to the rear of the wood panel (32 x 25cm) on which the completed oil painting was made (see right).



Study from *Self-Portrait/Death Bed Notebook (1977)*. Mixed media on paper, 16 x 24 cm. The picture shows the scene at the mortuary where Lenkiewicz's mother's corpse lay wrapped in a shroud.

*"One mother can look after ten children, but ten children cannot look after one mother."*

*Mrs A Lenkiewicz.*

That there were no portraits of Mrs Lenkiewicz alive in Robert's possession chimes with Robert's accounts of his mother being reluctant to sit for him. During a 1997 interview he described his final exchanges with her:

*"She was very, very fond of me, but her last words to me were, 'I know you have many troubles, I know you have many difficulties and that life is very hard. But frankly, I don't give a damn!' To which I replied, 'Well ma, you're not in a very cheerful mood - let me paint you.' She said, 'Over my dead body you'll paint me!' To which I replied, 'OK.' Those were my last words to her."*

'Lenkiewicz: The Legacy' continues at Plymouth City Museum until 11 July.



*Self-Portrait on Death Bed, 1977*. Oil on canvas, 213 x 190cm.