



(Left to right: MV, AR, MG, FM, RG)

### **LEIPZIG PANEL DISCUSSION: TRANSCRIPT**

Mark Gisbourne: Moderator (English)

Arno Rink: Artist (German)

Rayk Goetze: Artist (German)

Miriam Vlaming: Artist (German)

Francis Mallett: TLF Chair (English)

#### **Ute Weingarten (UW):**

I'd like to give you some brief practical information. There will be a second educational event on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> July – a presentation of Lenkiewicz's tonal painting method (by former student Louise Courtnell). We'd like to invite you also to join our exhibition tours of each Saturday.

The purpose of this exhibition is to present Lenkiewicz, who died 10 years ago in Plymouth, to a broader international audience. As most of us are just encountering it for the first time, it was important to us that on the opening weekend we would have a panel discussion which sets up a context for the work, and which also refers to contemporary artists. We are very happy to have Mark Gisbourne here, not only for today's talk but also because he joined us right from the

beginning for the Leipzig showing of this work. Mark Gisbourne is an art critic, theologian and philosopher. For a long time he studied and taught in Great Britain. He lived in Paris and is now living in Berlin. He is an internationally renowned art critic and author. He is very conversant with the development of art in Leipzig, so in this respect it seemed ideal to refer to someone who has had knowledge of British art scene throughout his life and can put the artist's work into context. I shall pass you over to Mark for a short introduction of approximately 10 minutes, and will of course present the panellists. The resulting discussion should last for about an hour, and afterwards we look forward to your questions.

**Mark Gisbourne (MG):**

Welcome, on a very sunny day, to Leipzig. I'm going to talk to you about Lenkiewicz in a moment. First of all, I think we should thank our sponsor and host who is here today, Andrea Acker, who is an important collector of Robert Lenkiewicz' work and it is under her patronage that The Lenkiewicz Foundation have brought his work to Leipzig. So I particularly want to thank her for her major contribution to this project. The subject today is 'The Artist as Social Conscience', and we'll debate that in due course. I think I shall outline the exhibition after I've introduced the panel.

To my right is Emeritus Professor of Painting at the Kunstakademie here in Leipzig, Arno Rink, who is a very important figure in the history of Leipzig painting because he's the link between the post-war tradition of Heisig and Mattheuer to the new generation of Leipzig painters that are known internationally. He's a very crucial figure, a lynchpin as it were, of Leipzig art history. So we are delighted to have him here. To my left we have a selection of practitioners and mediators. Three artists and two mediators, which is unusual as usually the mediators outnumber the artists, but today it's the other way around. To my left is Francis Mallett, who's a fellow mediator and curator of this exhibition and also the chairman of The Lenkiewicz Foundation. He installed the exhibition and initiated this project. Further to my left is Rayk Goetze, a well-known Leipzig painter proud to call himself a realist in the tradition of realism which we will discuss today. And last but not least – because the subject of women features a great deal in this show, to my right is Miriam Vlaming, also a painter and former student of Professor Rink. I won't go too much into the biography of Mr Lenkiewicz, but let's say that women hold an important part in his life. Miriam Vlaming will, I hope, bring a forceful female perspective to the work this afternoon. Miriam I know very well because she was in an exhibition I just curated on Berlin painting, your rival city of painters, which travelled the world. Anyway that's the panel who I am delighted to have with me.

I want to say something about the title of the exhibition, which of course as Germans you will all know comes from Nietzsche's famous text "Human, All too Human", which was a book he published in 1876. It's a very important book in the history of German writing, not least because it's the first book by Nietzsche that is aphoristic; in it, he abandons his essay form. "Human, All too Human" as the name of the exhibition, is slightly paradoxical in a sense given the tendency towards elitism in Nietzsche set in opposition to Social Realism. This is something I think that Francis will talk about. Lenkiewicz himself was a man who we would define as a painterly realist. Realism has a long history. There are two great traditions of realism. One is the social realist tradition that began in France in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, and is emblematised by the great French painter Courbet, in fact one of the greatest master works of Courbet (The Stonebreakers) was sadly destroyed during the second world

war in Dresden. It was destroyed when the paintings were unfortunately bombed by The Allies whilst being moved in 1945. Another tradition of realism comes out of Russian art in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often referred to as Repinism – Ilya Repin was the favourite painter of Joseph Stalin, and it became sort of an ideological doctrine. It was this tradition in post-war Germany that social realism came into the country. I'm sure Arno will have very strong opinions as to what extent that tradition was assimilated in Germany. So that's two traditions. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, realism has gone into many diverse strands. Robert Lenkiewicz, however, is a singular and unique figure in the history of post-war British painting, not least because there is very little realist painting in England after the second world war. There was a brief period of Neo-romantic painting, and there was a brief period of a group that you probably won't know of, called the "kitchen sink painters" in the 1950s. In a sense he is very much against the grain and against the establishment of the whole tradition of British painting. In that sense he remains a unique figure in the post-war situation. Also, in the installation – and I'm sure Francis will say something about this – although it reflects themes as you travel around the exhibition, it is the case that the works were conceived in a "Project" structure. I've already intimated that Robert Lenkiewicz was something of a bibliophile, a great reader, and when he died there were 25,000 books in his library on the most extraordinary subjects from witchcraft to the occult to anthroposophy to Rosicrucianism, to contemporary philosophy and sociology: there was almost no avenue of 20<sup>th</sup> century and historical thought that he hadn't explored. With that element, the notion of "Projects" are central to his work, so when you see works on Vagrancy, for example, you have to understand these works within the context of huge body of paintings that actually relate and shape the theme that is part of the "Projects" study. This is a man who very much researched, and personally experienced the subjects that he brought forward. And so this opens up the issue of the sources of iconography which are very relevant in many of the works. I shall now ask Francis to speak about that, and Arno Rink to respond to this question of the artist as a social conscience. Francis will make a statement of how he understands it, as an intimate friend of Robert Lenkiewicz, allowing him to frame him within a more personal perspective.

**Francis Mallet (FM):**

What I'd like to do is try and explain something about the exhibition in fairly straightforward terms. I think that the first conclusion you would come to when looking round this exhibition is that Lenkiewicz was a painter of people; people's lives, his own life, but also someone who documented the world around him in a very unusual way. We used a phrase in his obituary, that "the history of Lenkiewicz was also the history of Plymouth in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century". He played a very strong role within the life of the city. People became very attached to him because of the fact that he had a studio that was open to the public, he would paint people from all walks of life; he really had an open door policy which is highly unusual, of course, in today's art world. I think he probably modelled that somewhat on Courbet, who was a great hero of his. Just to talk about the exhibition itself, as Mark has alluded, we have moved away slightly from the Project structure that Lenkiewicz used, to try and explain a more central and overriding theme in Lenkiewicz's paintings and his ideas, which is the relationship between ethics and aesthetics.

Something of Lenkiewicz's background is probably useful here: His parents were immigrant Jews. His father left Germany just before the war, and his mother was from Berlin. They went to London, where they opened what was effectively a boarding house for Jewish refugee families. Many of

them were very elderly, many were infirm. That's why Lenkiewicz used to describe them as "half-crazed". It was in that environment that the young Lenkiewicz grew up, so he saw suffering at close hand and I think that had a deep impact on his work. The other thing that background gave him, mainly through his mother, was a fascination with the culture that they had come from, particularly a fascination with the great writers and thinkers of German culture, many of whom had close association with Leipzig. That attracted Lenkiewicz to a certain way of seeing the world. He never described himself as an Artist with a capital "A" and he didn't describe his work as "Art" with a capital "A", but he described his work as "sociological and philosophical enquiry by visual means". The sociological and philosophical are really to do with the content of this exhibition. Growing up in the Hotel Shemtov in London, I think he was quite a solitary child and a great reader. Two of the people who were most influential to him through the books that he read were the Swiss missionary Albert Schweitzer, who of course set up the hospital in West Africa in Lambaréné. This fascinated Lenkiewicz, and he later said that had he not become a painter he would have liked to have studied medicine and joined Schweitzer in his mission in Africa. He had an interest in the ethical applications of philosophy. Then of course, his slightly later interest was in Friedrich Nietzsche, which brought out a further philosophical and aesthetic interest. Those two things run parallel through his whole career. You could perhaps say that his earlier paintings are more driven by a sociological approach with some philosophical overtones, but his later paintings are certainly much more philosophical with a sociological undertone. His interest was really in people on the fringes of society, and it's those people that you see in these paintings: they are the homeless, the dispossessed, people suffering from mental and physical hardship, the elderly, and this really was something that stayed with Lenkiewicz. However, it would probably be very misleading to believe that he was interested in those people in society for reasons of making any particular social change. That wasn't what really interested him. He was interested in the human condition *in extremis*, and that takes you very much into the area of philosophy that was so important to him in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche. And at the same time as these sociological projects, Lenkiewicz was working on a much more personal set of Projects that relate to "attitudes towards love". So these two things connect with the idea of how we feel about people who are outsiders. Do we feel sympathy for those people? Is it *possible* to feel sympathy for those people? As Lenkiewicz later said, he felt that claiming to have an altruistic feeling about another human being is a completely irrational point of view. He believed we are mainly concerned about our own feelings, and that the other factor in that relationship, be it a person, an idea, or a belief system, doesn't really exist. It's all about our own aesthetic response to these particular factors in our lives. So really, that's the theme of this exhibition.

The other side of this is the style of painting. We have this kind of sociological and philosophical enquiry by visual means. Now, "by visual means" refers to Robert as a painter, which was a deeply unfashionable thing in itself, as Mark has said, in England during the years when he was growing up. Not only was he a painter, he was a figurative painter which makes him even more unfashionable. When one thinks about the other movements in art which were happening when Lenkiewicz was painting these works, you think of abstract painting, of Pop Art and later more conceptual work. The strange thing about Lenkiewicz is that he was nearly completely uninfluenced by any movement in 20<sup>th</sup> century art.

-Audience member gestures to ask a question-

Yes?

**Audience 1:**

I just wanted to say, at that point, is that ironically living in Plymouth in the south west of England, he was in the home of an informal abstract movement known as the St Ives School. He was surrounded by what the French called “Informal Painting” and the Americans called “Abstract Expressionism”. In that sense he was really isolated...

**FM:** The South West was very well known for that.

**Audience 1:** That’s indeed why there is a Tate at St Ives.

**FM:** Absolutely. The influence on Lenkiewicz’s painting all really came from his visits as a student in London to the National Gallery. He would spend hours and hours with the paintings to an extent where he knew where every painting in the Gallery was hung. It mortified him one day because they re-hung the entire gallery, making everything he previously knew completely outdated! It fostered his love of the great Old Masters, particularly artists such as Michelangelo or Rembrandt. You can see those paintings referenced in his own paintings. He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of those paintings and it was almost second nature to him. He would never consider that people wouldn’t understand those references in his paintings. Here you have an artist that is very much out of time in the way that he painted. Those are the two things that I would like to introduce the show with.

**MG:** Thank you very much Francis. To my right is Professor Rink. There are two questions that I would like him to respond to. First of all as a painter and practitioner, and a very famous one, how he responds to this work itself; how he feels about the work of Robert Lenkiewicz. And then to address what is the subject of this discussion; the artist as a social conscience. Perhaps you would like to say something on these two issues for us Professor Rink.

**Arno Rink (AR):** About the environment of figurative painting, there was a reference to the School of Leipzig. Whenever I was asked, I said that I could imagine that he would have been part of it. I didn’t know beforehand that he grew up surrounded by non-figurative painting or worked in such an environment. I can only imagine how difficult that must have been under such circumstances, when you are so different, which reminds me that figurative painting of the Leipzig School was actually well isolated from the western development of fine arts, due to The Wall. We had no Western American modernism etc., so we were in a kind of productive situation where the figurative artists had a certain love for them and nobody was speaking against it. We felt good about it, there was no criticism. Now imagine how he (Lenkiewicz), in a kind of hostile environment, had his ideas about painting and how he had to push for them; this gives you the impression of the difficulty he must have encountered.

I really like the exhibition. This is my first encounter with Lenkiewicz. He is a man who really knows his subject. There are certain pictures that are very close to me, whereas others aren’t. Concerning the question of the Artist as Social Conscience, actually nothing came to my mind beforehand, except perhaps the question of whether the artist knows himself to be a social conscience. I don’t think he needs to have a social conscience, but does he know that he IS a social conscience? So, asking this, I state that I don’t have a social conscience and I don’t know how I could work or operate

as one. Maybe a little anecdote: there is an image that I painted in 1981, where I got a letter from a woman that was eight pages long. She said that she had just been divorced, and told me how the image I had painted had helped her deal with this divorce. Looking at the picture, she grew conscious of her part of blame in the divorce. This was such an alien reaction to me. I never painted a picture to help someone cope with their divorce, but this happen; it just happens. I don't read philosophers, not really, because I think if I as a painter participate strongly and take things seriously then it gives me an old philosophy that evolves. Maybe it shows that I deal in a strong way with my time, and need to use it as effectively as possible. Those are my two cents. Thank you.

**MG:** Well, thank you very much Professor Rink. I like this anecdote of helping with divorce – usually with every woman I know that is divorcing her husband, they're fighting over ownership of the paintings, let alone contemplating the social therapeutic role with the painting they possess. It's a very interesting comment. I find it very interesting and salutary that you talk about not having a social conscience, in the sense of the artist having a responsibility to possess such a thing, which I think would be the argument of Courbet in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a utopian socialist. Anyway I want to ask Miriam, as the theme of women is a major one of this exhibition, and I want her to respond as a painter as Arno has responded, both to the work (her feelings and reactions) and whether it has a social conscience or indeed should have a social conscience.

**Miriam Vlaming (MV):** I'm starting with the last point as well. I don't really see social conscience here. For me, painting doesn't start with this question. For me, painting starts with paint; with colour, and thinking in colour, and then maybe finding a topic or theme that can show this. I don't really see a theoretical approach which is then implemented. I agree with Arno Rink, this doesn't apply to what I do. It would be an obstacle to me, as it would limit my possibilities to find a solution for an image. With regards to the question of my views as a female painter...

**MG:** Could I just interject? I want to stress that I didn't pose the question to you as a "female painter", but rather as a painter who just happens to be a woman. There's a big difference.

**MV:** This is what I wanted to hear, and put right. What I find exciting is the representation of relationships. The first three portraits present this. Yesterday I was told a nice story about the first portrait of ... I think "Mouse". This painting shows a journey where he nourishes himself at the female breast; presenting the close and extreme relationship. Maybe we could continue like that forever, if you try to get into the intensity of his passion and way of living. We are only privy to a partial view, a glimpse. These self-portraits are about closeness; a symbiosis between men and women as a larger theme. It stays in the portrait, it's stuck there, but really that's exciting too. For me, this is the first time I have been confronted with the works in reality, so to speak. When I got the catalogue for this show to have a little connection to the new generation of the Leipzig School and everything that happens around, it reminded me of Martin Eder who had this Baroque diversity of passion presented in a very professional way with many facets. It is only a tiny little part of Lenkiewicz's work which reminds me of this, but it does remind me. This was my first impression.

**MG:** Well thank you Miriam, I too can see similarities to Martin Eder. I should perhaps clarify something. The painting I originally thought you were referring to was an earlier one which can be viewed upon entering the building, and is a painting of his first wife who he nicknamed "Mouse". He met her at St Martins Art School as a very young man. I should tell you that this man went to art

school when he was 16 years of age, so he was an extremely gifted young artist. He was admitted based upon his anatomical drawings of dead pigeons, I believe. He was a rather extraordinary young man. What Miriam is in fact referring to is a series that sketches from 1988 to 1993-4 entitled "The Painter with Women". There are many sub-categorisations within this investigation of his self-analytical understanding of his relationship to love, physiology and women. However, I won't digress there because I want Rayk Goetze to answer the same question I have posed to Arno Rink and Miriam Vlaming. Hopefully he will come up with a different answer, one that is a more theoretically engaged view. Does an artist have a social conscience? And how do you respond to the work of Robert Lenkiewicz?

**Rayk Goetze (RG):** Thank you first of all for inviting me here to the panel. The notion of the artist as a social conscience, much like what Miriam and Professor Rink has said, doesn't really fit well in my view. However I can present two differences that compare to the conclusions of these previous two speakers. First of all I'm maybe of a generation younger than my professor, and secondly, unlike Miriam, who is from the west of Germany whereas I am from the east, the notion of intentional painting, painting for a purpose, this is a kind of intention that I grew up with. Art, right from the beginning, was checked for functions it could fulfil in the context of spiritual or mental orientation of the system that I grew up in. This means that my thoughts were brought out quite early in opposition to that system we activated here. I know a lot of these images were celebrations of the Socialist Party, and there were many images with intentional and purposeful depictions that you had to find your way through in order to find what painting actually can be. In that respect it gives me a bad gut feeling, and I have to reflect on the question myself.

Do I as an artist work with a social conscience? I spontaneously say no. After some hesitation I might change that to an admission that I do, but not intentionally so. Things where the intention is too obvious; the intention to show something, say something, trigger something, often leads to the opposite. So in this exhibition here, we see someone who did not grow up in that environment, but rather as Professor Rink said in a more "hostile" environment (with regards to the reception received by figurative painting). He did something that was opposite to that was done in the east of Germany. He followed his own path. I find it very convincing to see how somebody exclusively develops from himself, finds a language and themes that form this work. This is what I wanted to comment with regard to the artist as a social conscience. When I first started studying in Leipzig, The Wall had just come down. Something important happened at the art school. Painting used to be a royal discipline, so to say, but now had a deteriorating reputation. Young people at the school not only wanted their freedom, which they suddenly had, but they also wanted that freedom in art. They wanted new media like photography. This suddenly led to a situation where people looked strangely at you if you were a painter, and even more so if you were a figurative painter. Two years later when I joined the class of Arno Rink, he told me that figurative painting at the school was dead, but he assured me that it would be back. I stayed calm, and figurative did indeed come back.

**MG:** I want to turn to Francis now and rephrase this question. Not, should the artist have a social conscience, but rather should an artist in their work seek to have a social effect with what they do? It's quite clear that Robert Lenkiewicz sought to have a social impact and his identification with the social was central to realism.

**FM:** Well I'm not sure that he really sought to have a social impact, but he certainly sought to draw attention to social issues. There is a difference between social and political. He wasn't a political artist in any shape or form. What interested him was the human condition. So yes, maybe the question should be rephrased as I don't believe we're intending to say that the artist should have a social conscience, but is it possible that some artists do work in that way? I know many artists work in a completely different way, which is entirely fine and I don't think there is any debate about that, but Lenkiewicz was unusual because he had much less regard for the whole notion of "Art"; despite what you see around you. He strongly believed that life, people, the event that he was painting was of far more significance than paint on a canvas. He never referred to himself as an artist, he instead saw himself as much more as a craftsman. The whole idea of social documentary is crucial to Lenkiewicz's work. You could perhaps compare it to a photographer. There are certainly many photographers with a social conscience and I'm not quite sure why it should be any different with painting.

**MG:** Maybe I should just say something that I perhaps didn't highlight clearly enough at the beginning. These two traditions, I separated as social realism, the tradition of Courbet, and socialist realism which became the ideological style of the likes of Stalin in the 1930s; cultivated in the satellite states of Eastern Europe as they were called by us in the West during the post-war period. Do you think Arno that your work seeks to have a social effect? Or is your intention purely aesthetic when you present your work?

**AR:** I very much enjoyed painting the female nude, so it's very present in my works and Robert's. I am highly committed to painting, but we are committed to a different theme. You may not think that he has a social conscience because he deals with social themes, and you might think that Rink has no social conscience because he only paints nudes. While I have admitted that I have no social conscience in my work, I would have liked to have had a conversation with him on how he really sees it. The images that I see tell me that he was a passionate painter, and as a painter whether he wanted to realise that or not, and whether he said he was a painter or not I don't know, but in any case the paintings say that "this man has a theme and subject which he is fervently interested in". Behind the theme is where he puts everything he has in terms of painting skills. In that respect there is no difference between us, other than how we deal with different topics. You have to be careful. His topic and theme seems more social than what I deal with ...

**FM:** Can I just say something on that note? I think that the other side, which I forgot to mention about Lenkiewicz's Projects, is that they really came with a series of publications in which Lenkiewicz allowed his sitters to have a voice. He got these people to talk. One of the big influences there was Danilo Dolci, the Italian activist from Sicily, who really drew attention to the poverty and injustice there relating to the Catholic Church and the Mafia. This was very important to Lenkiewicz. He allowed these people, many of whom had never really had a voice in society, to be able to speak for themselves without judgement; without any kind of moral judgement, which is an important aspect to Lenkiewicz's work.

**MG:** I would agree, and one of the striking things about all his work is its lack of moral judgement. In that sense it is true realism. Miriam what do you think about this? Do you expect your work to have a social effect? You're not so driven by iconography. In Lenkiewicz's work there is always some

reference to an iconographic source. Always a reference to the past in the conventional tradition of iconography; suckling at the breast of a woman, for example, derives from a Roman myth. The story of a daughter whose father was sentenced to starve himself to death, and in an attempt to save him she fed him from her breast. This is, of course, just a nice Roman myth, but it shows that in Lenkiewicz's work there are always origins. Your work is very different in that sense Miriam. You don't start from a pre-given iconographic reference. Perhaps you would like to say something about that also.

**MV:** We watched some films yesterday about Robert, and at least one was quite enlightening. He takes the theme or topic for his painting from the entire art history. He read a lot, his library being very impressive, and this was also the trigger for his painting. Maybe it was rooted beforehand in the life experience at the hotel, with visitors coming and going, and this leaned him more towards philosophical and fundamental questions that were his trigger. So, if I understood you correctly, you also asked where I took source for my paintings? We will have to make a big diversion here. I came to the figurative academics of Leipzig from the west; in 1990s Dusseldorf it was more about installations, video and photography. That was all very exciting, but I was always interested in the human and the human figure. You could not learn that in that intensity in the west, which was why Leipzig was a kind of Mecca in this respect. I wanted to learn it academically. I wanted to know how to find a solution and make a figure work. The fourth generation of Leipzig let go of the figurative and this differentiates from the portraits and realism and many ways of today's figurative painting. The figure isn't so much about portraits and individual traits. It's more the contrary. This brings me back to my own painting, which presents humans as a human and not a personification of individual traits. But to find an allegory for being human, that might be the vocabulary that I deal with in my painting. What is essential to being human? Why are we what we are? Then, of course, this brings us to questions of: What is society? What is culture? But those are more in the background.

**AR:** That's a good point. This is maybe why I would be inclined to describe you as a painter with a social conscience. I have listened to you and now you say these things are more in the background, to which I reply that it's nice that you say you're not, but you can do nothing against it. I'm sorry for interrupting; you know what it's like.

**MV:** The question was, is it my intention or wish? This is not the case. We are all children of our times, and of course this influences my paintings, but the approach of my work is just painting; it isn't me trying to show you how things are or should be.

**RG:** I'm sitting here and noticing that I'm cornered so to say. I would like to add the following. There is a term in the GDR that "Art is a weapon". There was socialist realism, a term that did not come from the painters, there were the painters of the regime, but people aren't interested in those images any more. I just noticed that this question of an artist as a social conscience, gives me a kind of allergic reaction, because this is something regarding the GDR that gives us a stamp of art as a weapon, as socialism, and art as everything you can think of. I must say, that Lenkiewicz working within this hostile environment just did his own thing. Painters of the GDR who survived, somehow did so and did their own thing in a world of the Brigade images. I just wanted to state I have this allergic reaction to such phrasing due to my history.

**MG:** I would like to just say something that we haven't brought up, and I don't want to digress into Art History, but the 1980s saw of course the beginnings of postmodernism and the return to iconography. Allegory was increasingly rethought of in the west of Germany. It was a precursor to The Wall coming down and the end of the division of Europe. That's one thing I'd like to say that would perhaps enhance our understanding of Lenkiewicz's interest in allegorical forms. A second thing I'd like to say is that he is a Jewish painter. He isn't a conventional Jew, or a religious one, but as a culture all Jews are readers and writers. Their intellectual history in Germany paints them as people of the book. You could say something about that in the context of him as a Jewish painter, alongside the fact that he seemed to exemplify social realism as his ultimate goal.

**RG:** I don't know what makes you think I could say something about Lenkiewicz as a Jewish painter, as this is a field that is not exactly my speciality. What pops up in my mind is that I'd rather be interested in the aspect that is also something we can't catch, in terms of social relevance in terms as an artist. I like Rink's story (about the divorced woman), about the intention of having it. Something happened when confronted with an image that triggered something. The same happens with the quite normal images that just touch people. I think at that point, something happens that one might refer to as the effect of a social conscience, even if it's not intended. This is what I meant beforehand. What effect it has, and what stage it comes to play, is about honesty and commitment to the topic. Does this create an effect and meaning? That is what I feel about this exhibition; that Lenkiewicz communicates directly that he was entirely committed to his work and painting. Maybe there is less intention behind it than assumed by this panel. In this context, I am trying to look at the social conscience with regard to Miriam's, Professor Rink's, and my own painting.

**MG:** In a double sense, we know that the leading intellectual painters of post-war Britain were largely Jewish, perhaps with the exception of Bacon. Freud and Auerbach, for example, were Berlin Jews who left in the 1930's as refugees that immigrated to England. There is an issue here. Francis, perhaps you could say something about that?

**FM:** We did an exhibition a few years ago in the Ben Uri Jewish Museum of Art in London, which was an exhibition of self-portraits. I think apart from what we have already spoken about, with regards to the style of Lenkiewicz's painting being deeply unfashionable in a period where abstract was preferred (the painting as an object in its own right without referencing anything outside of the painting), his work also fails to align with the Jewish doctrine of "thou shalt not make any graven image". He was very much out on his own there. The other interesting thing about Lenkiewicz which I feel makes him stand out, is that he was almost entirely a painter from life. He really didn't use anything else other than the object or model in front of him to paint. He was fascinated by the relationship between himself and the model, or himself and the object he was painting, and I imagine that would be unusual with regard to the Leipzig School.

**MG:** The fact that he related immediately to his models, also reminds me of the subject: to what extent is his work an engagement with the tradition of Baroque? There is a very strong theme of the Baroque in his work. Painting directly from the model is usually associated with that tradition, which is in turn usually associated with Caravaggio, who was the founder of the so called Tenebrist School in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Anyway, that's another area, a vast area. Before we open this to the audience, I just want to ask the panel if they would like to make a final statement. Would you like to make a

final statement Professor Rink? No statement. Miriam, would you like to say anything before we open to questions?

**MV:** I find that quite remarkable, this closeness to the living objects. We only know this from our education we have on models, and most don't really work with sitters anymore. They have second-hand images. We are living in a media world now, and this gives you a different intensity I think, a different kind of energy. This can be sensed in this exhibition, and I think that it's a valuable aspect. Behind the canvas and behind the colour are intimate stories. This brings me back to the point that the symbiosis I mentioned between him and women evidences them to be partners in real life. He coped with his life story, and everything he lived, through painting. In those little works, small drawings, illustrations and texts, he also expressed that as well as in many, many notebooks. What I find remarkable too is the passion and energy that was decisive for Lenkiewicz, and essential to the creation of such work, such effort. That's my final statement.

**MG:** Fantastic, that's very clear and very insightful in regards to working directly and immediately with the model. Do you want to say something Rayk before we finish? No. Francis?

**FM:** I thought what Miriam said was fascinating. She also drew attention to something else here, that we haven't discussed and probably isn't for today, which is the other work here; the work on paper, which was Lenkiewicz's so-called "private language", illustrating much more personal things about his personal relationships. I suppose the theme of this is almost the relationship between the public and the private. This is a big area in Lenkiewicz's work. What you see in the private aspect, is Lenkiewicz trying to record his physiological responses to being in certain situations in relationships.

**MG:** Thank you. Now we're going to open this to the audience. If you have a question, can you please wait until you get the microphone s the translator can translate your answer into the appropriate languages. Do you have any questions?

**Audience 2:** Is the relevance of the work not its ability to induce thinking and reactions? The images are very strong and you can look at them on a single visual level, but their ability to enable viewers of the image to think about the condition not only of the images they see, but their thoughts about themselves. I think that's the relevance of the work as well as the impact visually. I think that perhaps not enough thought has been given to that. I personally think Robert's strength was to enable people to look at pictures of individuals and then ask questions about themselves and the human condition.

**MG:** So what you're suggesting is that there is always a self-reflective engagement with painting? Of course, I would argue that there is always the self-reflective concern that an artist is always aware of their painting. Perhaps you could say something about that?

**AR:** I like your comment a lot. It's not like we approach the images as neutral beings. We always have our own history, our own experience and that can differ so much. For example, I was always happy to not be involved in the war, and for me said war means something very different to me compared to someone who was involved and fought there. The question is: how can your life experience, context and expectations influence you when you approach an image? That's normal.

That's how a real dialogue is established between an image and a viewer; there is no other way than that.

**MG:** Thank you, Miriam do you want to say something?

**MV:** I can only agree with that. You see what you know, and everything else remains hidden. So this reflection can only trigger what is already in you; everything else remains unanswered. Of course, with each viewing this grows, but for Lenkiewicz the self-reflection is interesting. The formal solution of self-reflection makes up a major part, irrespective of the relationship of the viewer.

**MG:** This issue of reflection and the mirror is very central indeed. Rayk, I want to ask you how you respond to this question, would you like to add anything?

**RG:** I think this comment also raised the question of "what is good art?"; a question that can't be answered. However, what was said there gives you an idea of what good art is, being reflected back on oneself, to ask questions about oneself. This can happen with music, art, dancing, with everything. This brings into play what previous speakers had said. Two people in front of the same painting will experience entirely different things in regards to their inner reactions.

**MG:** Francis?

**FM:** Rather than the question of "what is good art?", Lenkiewicz was more interested in the question of "what is the purpose of art?". Of course, one of his projects is an investigation into how people perceive art and the precious idea of the "art object", which Lenkiewicz didn't believe in. His paintings certainly had a power to communicate something important to people about their own lives and the world they live in. I think that because he is so far outside having to understand theoretical concerns about art that enables him to do that. The paintings are very direct in their message. We live in a time where the art world is very self-contained and enclosed. The art world likes to speak to the art world, but Lenkiewicz likes to speak to everybody. This is a very important side to his work.

**MG:** I'd like to say a little bit about his rather monkish nature, although given his relationships he wasn't a monk in the conventional sense! St Anthony was a figure he identified with extensively, but beyond that there was a sense of him not being part of the norm. He left London in the 1960s, and the last place you would want to leave in the 1960s if you were young and hip was London. It was The Beatles, it was the King's Road, it was Twiggy, it was Unisex, it was women who had the Pill, it was a whole new culture. Yet he decided to go off to Plymouth, which was a long way from London. So in a sense it was another aspect of him being very much against the grain. As far as I know he hardly ever looked at television. Yet, we as people are constantly mediated by images, so really he was in his own head a lot of the time. That in a sense colours how we might look at his paintings. He was a person locked in his own head, and created his own world. He created his own art world because he didn't identify with other artists in the art world. That is a very powerful aspect. Shall we open the floor to more questions at this point?

**Audience 3 (John Lenkiewicz, the brother of Robert Lenkiewicz):** One of Robert's favourite sayings was, "If you have a choice between two things always take both", and that really identifies a truth about Robert. He was a man of contradiction. For example, he would refer to his work as not

possibly having any real power in comparison to the thing he was recording, but at the same time if you were a student of his he wouldn't even consider taking you on before you had drawn a tedious object 50 times. He focused so much on "the tone of the tone, and the colour of the colour, and the shape of the shape", and you can see that intensity in the work that he produced. On the subject of whether he had a social conscience, we are presented with a paradox. If you spoke to him about the work, he would insist that it was about the physiological response to an event. Yet, as we saw in the film yesterday, he would comment on the atrocities in the world. He was very popular, for one thing because he was very accessible to people. People would often say that when they were talking to him, it would feel as if he was giving his undivided attention to them. Yet people who know him well, comment that he may well have been thinking the entire time about his dinner or the woman he was to meet in 10 minutes time. It's very hard to sum someone like Robert up. I also think that he should have studied medicine, because he would have had more access to the type of language he believed necessary and tried to portray in his painting. In *The Painter with Mary Project*, for example, he uses colour to represent emotion in a very interesting and maybe unexplored way (with regards to other people).

**MG:** Thank you very much John. Are there any more questions? Are there any people who would like to comment their response in either a positive or negative point of view?

**[Due to a technical fault, German translation audio cuts out between 1.11.23 and 1.22.08, making this section of interview unavailable]**

**MG:** I would just like to say, that whenever we look at his paintings (though maybe I'm just a boring old Art Historian), there are always constant references. Whenever I look at the work I constantly see resonance, and that may be good or that may be bad. From an Art Historical point of view, this man was intensely intimate with the History of Art. In that sense he had two of relationships in his life, and maybe I'm being provocative by saying this; the relationship as a painter, and the intense emotional, sexual set of relationships in his life. It was a very passionate engagement. Francis do you want to say something?

**FM:** It takes you back to the Nietzschean theme of "Saying Yes to Life", which seems to sum up the whole thing.

**MG:** Indeed. Ok, another question?

**[German translation audio is still cut out, so this question is unavailable]**

**MG:** The implication of it is that you need to be pushing against the grain to be able to put social content in your work. So we're talking about this particular spat in Egypt between the Revolution and the imposition of Islamism. Who knows what will happen in Egypt in the future? But in a sense you're arguing the case that it's too easy for artists today to do what they want to do in western culture. Maybe that's true. I saw a debate recently in China, where they said that everybody in the west could paint exactly what they like. We don't have the authorities against us and we don't live in a state of constant persecution. We can just choose our subject and do whatever we want. Maybe there's an influence there, what do you think Francis?

**FM:** I think with Lenkiewicz, there is a certain kind of paradox, but it has to be seen in the context of his whole theory of human behaviour; termed as “aesthetic fascism”. I think this is as, if not more, relevant than it ever has been. This whole idea that many of the problems in the world, whether in private relationships or the relationships of people in society, are caused by what he called an “addiction to ideas and concepts”. We are addicted to concepts and theories and beliefs, in the same way that we are addicted to a person when we claim to be in love with them. Lenkiewicz’s conclusion is that the idea was completely mistaken and doesn’t exist. It has many reverberations for the world that we live in.

**MG:** It’s a rather pessimistic view in some respects perhaps. Arno wants to say something.

**AR:** I just remember the GDR artist Heiner Müller was asked why he stayed in the GDR even though he could go to the west and work there. He said, that for him in the western society there would not be enough subjects to work his attentions on as a dramatist and playwright. We must always consider the environment of an artist. In the society we have today where there is not much friction, we must make sure there remains material for friction, and as a consequence artists might become too shallow and refrain from dealing with topics. We must make sure that it doesn’t.

**MG:** We have an idiomatic English expression for this, known as ‘Grit in the Oyster’. You have to have a bit of grit that irritates you. Irritation is necessary as Arno seems to be saying, and perhaps this is reflected in Robert’s work. Can I take one last question? Afterwards Francis and I will be available in the exhibition is any of you want to go round and discuss paintings.

**Audience 4:** I just thought that it might be quite interesting for people to know something about the students that Robert taught, and the tried to help young people. Several of them would paint eventually in their own language, but it was quite an intense course; nine months of black and white painting with simple objects. I actually studied for four years with Robert, and obviously wanted to move into more abstract work, but he wouldn’t let me as he felt I wasn’t ready. Robert actually taught me abstract work eventually, and showed me how to make marks on a surface that put across what I wanted to say. Looking at the way he put the paint to canvas was interesting.

**FM:** He was a great technician; incredibly helpful to young artists. On July 14<sup>th</sup>, we will have one of Robert’s former students here (Louise Courtneil) who is a very successful artist in her own right. She will be demonstrating the technique of painting from life that he was so obsessive about. She is very entertaining and it does look a little like a magic act! She is a very skilful painter. I think for anyone who is no longer used to this idea of painting from life, it will be a fascinating thing to come along to.

**MG:** In a certain sense this teaching practice of his, reflects a 19<sup>th</sup> century idea of working directly with the artist.

**FM:** Those traditions have been handed down for generations in a more formal way. Lenkiewicz, of course, did it free in his own studio whenever he wanted. It wasn’t based around a system. In Leipzig it has been a longer standing tradition within the art school. One of the reasons that people came to Lenkiewicz, is because they couldn’t learn those techniques anymore in the art schools of England.

**MG:** I want to bring this to an end now, but I hope that won’t be the end of the afternoon. I hope you’re all going to go around and look at these works in greater detail and imprint them in your

consciousness. I hope you'll come back again and again. I want to thank the members of the panel, and remember that you the audience are also part of the panel. There is no point in having a panel of five speakers unless people are out there to respond to them. I want to begin first of all by thanking particularly Professor Rink for being here and giving particular insight, as well as bringing to relevance those aspects that Robert might have fitted in well with within Leipzig. Miriam who is a close friend, I would also like to thank particularly. Obviously we also have a master and student as she studied with Professor Rink. Rayk as well, I would like to thank you. And Francis, I would like to thank you especially for curating the exhibition. And to reiterate again our thanks to Andrea Acker in terms of her sponsorship and support; she really made this happen here in Leipzig.

**FM:** And of course thanks to you Mark for chairing, and being part of this alongside our very distinguished panel guests. The Lenkiewicz Foundation is enormously grateful for all the support and help we have received here in Leipzig with regards to this show.

**MG:** Well as we say in England, "three cheers for Leipzig!" Thank you very much.