

SIMON LEWTY (1941 – 2021)

Simon Lewty passed away last year shortly after his 80th Birthday, leaving a rich legacy. After working with him for forty years, his gentle, brilliant presence is sorely missed.

Lewty's astonishing exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 1985 launched his career. The art critic Stuart Morgan wrote a prescient exhibition guide (later published in the 2010 monograph *Simon Lewty: The Self as a Stranger*) and these extracts offer his initial observations of Lewty's unique, surreal art at that time:

'It is hard to know what to think about the figures in a Simon Lewty drawing. Half child half dirigible, they float untethered around the picture space.....Common politeness makes us regard them as victims of their own passivity. These infant zeppelins elicit a single response: deep sadness as muffled and unspecific as their predicament itself.....'

Of the areas of text he adds: *'There are direct historical allusions; the interpolation of capitals in the prose recalls eighteenth-century typography, while the rendition of animals in particular looks back to Medieval models. Yet the entire effect is of liberation from history.'*

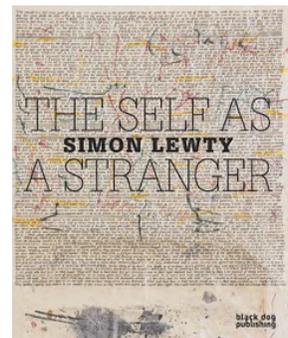
Leaving the Laurel Grove, 1991, is an example of the work which followed Lewty's London exhibition. It reflects his Warwickshire surroundings with open fields, hedges and timber framed barns, where he used to walk. But the poignant encounter between a strange young boy and a 'lewtoid' creature - an unearthly pilgrim carrying a burden on his back, his shoes removed and placed neatly to one side - is what holds our attention. The narrative in the sections of text only partly relates to this dream-like scene

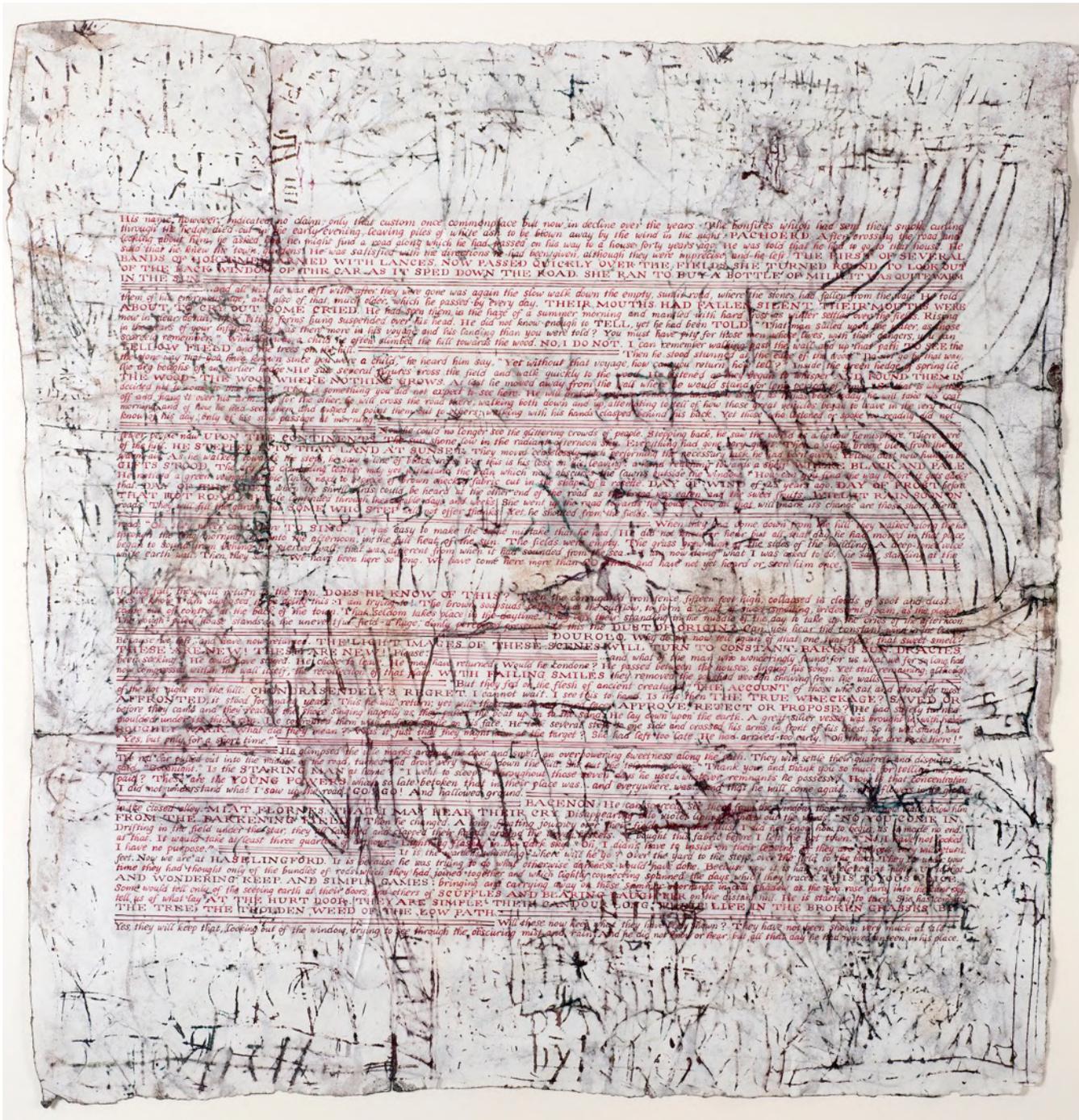
Lewty's mastery of the calligraphic, the palimpsest, graffiti and scripts of many kinds is inevitably matched by his own poetic content. He is a writer, and his art, his chosen 'mark' is writing. Towards the millennium he abandoned the figurative, reverting to pure text within the medium of pencil, ink and crayon applied to a variety of paper surfaces, either thickly layered as in *Joyous Voice*, or onto transparent tissue paper.

"This is work that makes demands on us, and at the same time opens up an intimate inter-subjective space of encounter. It may resemble a notary's agreement, summons, legal title or claim..... It may be coded into historic forms of shorthand or handwriting styles that only paleographers can read. But look again: Lewty's words can equally open out with almost complete limpidity.....The words frequently tell of everyday experiences, that are being related to us in as straightforward a way as possible. It is precisely in the shifts between obscurity and directness in his work that such unexpected power can be found."

Ian Hunt shares these insights in his essay for Lewty's 2016 exhibition, *The SIGNificance of Writing* at the Leamington Spa Art Gallery and Museum.

The 2010 monograph covering five decades of his life and work – *Simon Lewty: The Self as a Stranger* - inscribes Lewty's particular place in art history. Key regional museums in England (including Birmingham, Leamington Spa, Wolverhampton, Worcester, Stoke-on-Trent, Leeds, Preston) hold his work and in London his drawings are in the collections of the British Museum, the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Arts Council of Great Britain. In the USA he has strong representation in the remarkable Sackner Archive of Visual and Concrete Poetry, Iowa University.



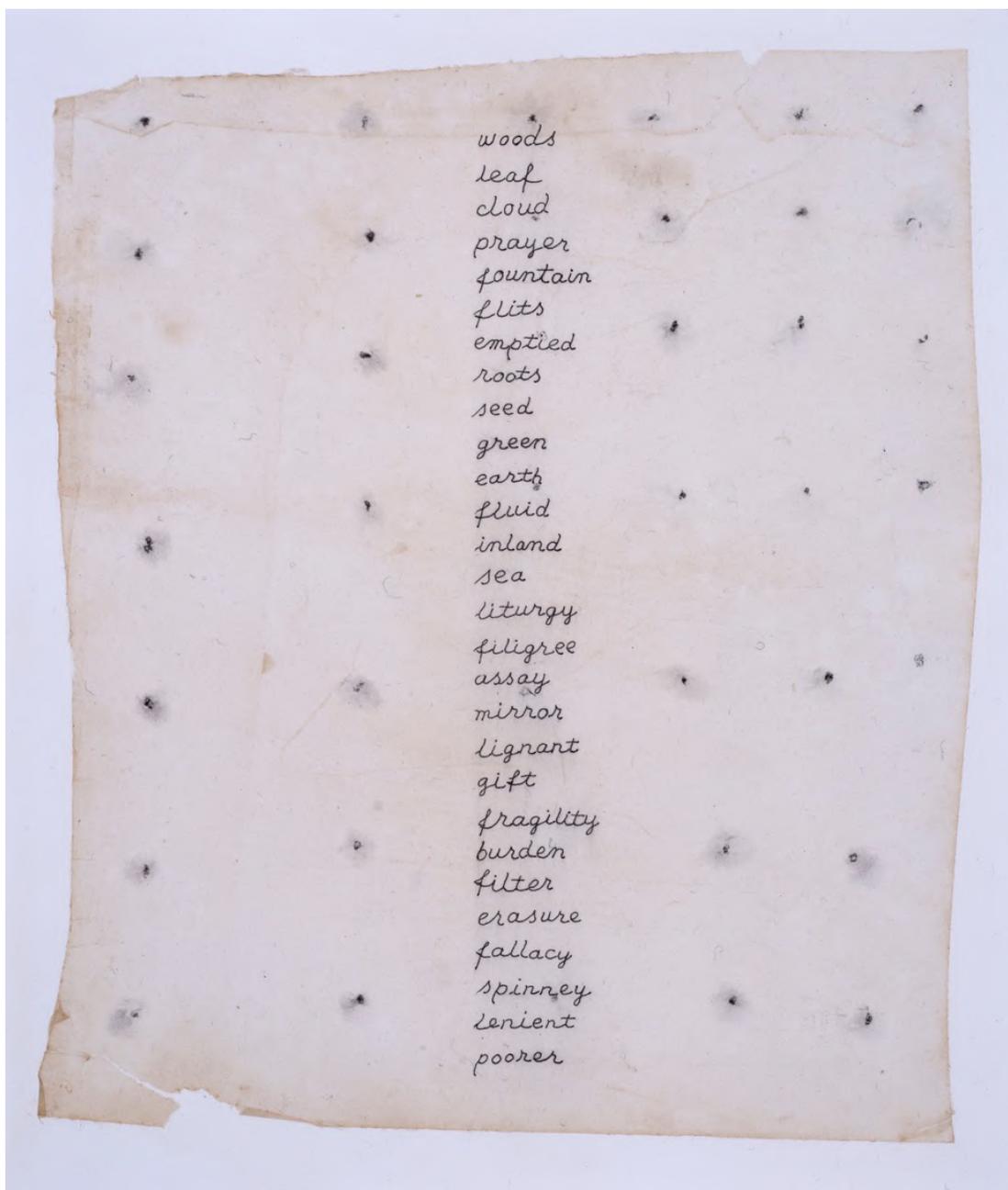


The Joyous Voice, 1999

Red ink and acrylic on paper, 91 x 87 cm, £15,000



Art First, The Forge, 15 St. Mary's Walk, London, SE11 4UA
E: clare@artfirst.co.uk | T: +44 (0) 7711 945098 | I: @artfirstlondon www.artfirst.co.uk



List : woods – poorer, 2019

Acrylic and ink on tissue paper, 35.5 x 30.6 cm, £2,400

For further information please contact Clare Cooper: clare@artfirst.co.uk, or visit www.artfirst.co.uk

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