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**A CORNISH PALIMPSEST: PETER LANYON  
AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF  
A NEW LANDSCAPE, 1938-1964**

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**Submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy at the University of Kent at Canterbury**

**June 2000**



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# Abstract

The thesis examines the emergence of Peter Lanyon as one of the few truly innovative British landscape painters this century. In the **Introduction** I discuss the problematic nature of landscape art and consider the significance of Lanyon's discovery that direct description and linear perspective can be replaced with allusive representational elements by fusing the emotional and imaginative life of the artist with the physical activity of painting. **Chapter One** concentrates on the period 1936-8 when Lanyon was taught by Borlase Smart, a key figure in the St Ives art colony between the wars. **Chapter Two** examines the influence of Adrian Stokes and the links between Lanyon's painting and the theories developed in books such as Colour and Form and The Quattro Cento. **Chapter Three** analyses the period 1940-45 when Lanyon was directly influenced by the constructivism of Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo. I look closely at their approaches to abstraction and assess Lanyon's relative position to them. The importance of Neo-Romanticism and the status of St Ives as a perceived avant-garde community is also addressed. In **Chapter Four** I discuss how Lanyon resolved to achieve a new orientation in his art on his return from wartime service with the RAF by synthesising constructivism and traditional landscape. The Generation and Surfacing Series demonstrate his preoccupation with a sense of place, a fascination with the relationships between the human body and landscape and his struggle to find a technique and style that was entirely his own. His sense of existential insideness is discussed in **Chapter Five** through an examination of the work derived from Portreath, St. Just and Porthleven - key places in Lanyon's psychological attachment to the landscape of West Penwith. In **Chapter Six** I examine Lanyon's attachment to myths and archetypal forms, tracing the influence of Bergson's vitalist philosophy as well as his use of Celtic and classical motifs. **Chapter Seven** is a discussion of the malaise evident in Lanyon's work by 1955 and the impact of American Abstract Expressionism at the Tate Gallery a year later. In the summer of 1959 Lanyon joined the Cornish Gliding Club and **Chapter Eight** looks at how this necessitated a dynamic, expanded conception of the landscape and a re-thinking of relations within the picture field. The ability to dissolve boundaries encouraged him to break down distinctions between painting and construction so that abstract sculptural elements were now assembled into independent works of art. Finally, **Chapter Nine** assesses Lanyon's overall position in relation to his early influences and to St Ives art as a whole, his response to new directions in art coming out of London and New York in the early 1960s and the importance of travel as a stimulus for further realignment in his artistic and topographical horizons. His pictorial inventiveness and vitality remained unabated at the time of his death and would undoubtedly have continued to be enriched by travel abroad and contact with new movements in modern art on both sides of the Atlantic.

# **Introduction**

## **A "PLACE MAN" - THE CHANGING FORMS OF PETER LANYON'S LANDSCAPE ART**



## "A PLACE MAN": THE CHANGING FORMS OF PETER LANYON'S LANDSCAPE ART

Peter Lanyon has long been acknowledged as one of the few truly important and innovative British landscape painters of the twentieth century. The present thesis attempts to provide an overview of Lanyon's continuous artistic development until his death in 1964. Its purpose is to distance itself from previous critical works which sometimes give the impression that Lanyon's oeuvre constitutes a seamless journey from the late Impressionism of the 1930s St Ives School painters to 1960s Pop Art, via Constructivism and Abstract Expressionism. A pioneer of complex pastoral abstraction, Lanyon's quest to find the apposite image was attended by much uncertainty and difficulties of many kinds. Works which may now strike us as admirably resolved often came about after lengthy experimentation in fusing traditional landscape forms with the technical and expressive possibilities offered by modern abstraction. While Lanyon held a range of ideological and intellectual beliefs, his work passed through a sequence of phases each generating their own distinct emotional and thematic pressures. He was influenced by contemporaneous artists such as Gabo, Nicholson, de Kooning and Rothko, but his correspondence and writing show that he was never a passive follower - developing his own views as he gained confidence in his own judgement and artistic abilities.<sup>1</sup>

This study will attempt to elucidate the particular and unique qualities in Lanyon's work which consistently defeat stereotyping into convenient art-historical categories. In the process it is hoped that the different levels of meanings and associations found in the paintings and constructions will become apparent while at the same time revealing an essentially consistent vision of the landscape. Acutely conscious of the hesitant position occupied by painting after the idealising and aestheticizing Neo-Romanticism of the war years, Lanyon was willing to experiment with new and untried means - assimilating the purity of Constructivism while maintaining a Romantic concern for place. His stated understanding of his work was that "there is some reality which the artist is going to paint, but I would insist myself that the artist is usually painting a reality which has not been seen before."<sup>2</sup> At the risk of oversimplifying, a unifying theme might be



identified in Lanyon's persistent concern with depicting the Cornish landscape through experimentation with the formal qualities which allow a concentrated blend of physical and emotional sensations to emerge. Offering us an expressive landscape vision through a prism of refraction and disruption, Lanyon's paintings suggest a way of resolving the conflict between the depiction of an objective reality and the artist's subjective need to reshape the given world in a style which resonates with the representational codes of the time.

Landscape painting is often caricatured as a rear-guard, conservative, activity: a full understanding of the emergence of Lanyon's aesthetic vocabulary must acknowledge the essential originality of his cultural pluralism. The thesis argues that he employed the styles of modernism as part of the grammar of available forms to be scavenged and recycled, quoted, paraphrased and parodied in order to create a new kind of landscape painting that evokes the sensation of being in a specific location. The presence of formal similarities in Lanyon's work - drawn from a diverse range of influences - should be seen as a sign of conceptual complexity which post-modern critical theory might recognise as evidence of cultural vitality and eclecticism.

Particular attention has been paid to the late 1930s when Lanyon began to paint seriously - abandoning his intended career as a commercial poster artist. A focus on this period constitutes in itself an original approach: the enduring influence of Lanyon's early mentors, Borlase Smart and Adrian Stokes, has often been overlooked in the rush to highlight the importance of Nicholson and Gabo as aesthetic father-figures. Borlase Smart, a central figure in the St Ives art colony and an accomplished draughtsman and painter of dramatic seascapes, taught Lanyon to appreciate the endurance and structure of the landscape, presenting it on its own terms by painting the sky, land and sea as equals. Many of Lanyon's later works engender form by adopting Smart's binary opposition of the "permanent" past locked in the geological rock formations of West Cornwall and the "transient" present found in the movement of the sea and sky. This contrast between motion and stasis precipitates a profound sense of temporal disruption as the artist sought to recreate his phenomenological experience of a place as well as addressing its natural and social history.



While Lanyon was taking private lessons with Borlase Smart a chance encounter with the critic and painter, Adrian Stokes led him to the aesthetics of the international avant-garde. Stokes introduced Lanyon to "those urgent voices, deep in the mind" - the unconscious processes which determine artistic form.<sup>3</sup> The significance and enduring nature of Stokes' influence has only received occasional critical attention. Though there is no direct evidence of Lanyon's knowledge of Freud's theories, the characteristics of his work and the terms in which he discussed it would suggest an appreciation of the central tenets of psychoanalysis. His youthful proximity to Stokes, an enthusiastic follower of Freud who began seven years of analysis with Melanie Klein in 1930, would make such an understanding probable.

It is very difficult to separate conscious influences and unconscious emanations which express an artist's evolving psychological gestalt. The landscape is as much a product of the imagination as the objective reality of a natural environment. In his development of a new landscape art Lanyon referred optical and sensory information to a stock of schema, mental templates, located deep in his consciousness. The painter and his environment, past and present, were fused in a space-time continuum which challenges the conventional "reality" of a single perspective landscape determined by the static viewer. Like Freud with his passion for archaic culture and archaeological excavation, Lanyon used classical, Celtic and Christian symbols to serve as a metaphorical bridge to the excavation of the instinctual, atavistic life buried deep in the Cornish landscape. He saw the countryside as a palimpsest on which its history and that of its inhabitants was inscribed and his paintings frequently attempt to synthesise the visible and the invisible, the conscious and the unconscious.

Stokes persuaded Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo to settle in St Ives while German bombers threatened London. The presence of some of the key figures of pre-war Constructivism in St Ives effected a transformation in Lanyon's work and he established a strong sense of creative kinship with the three artists. Nicholson taught him how abstract art could be employed to form a dialectic to rival the structures of natural forms, while Hepworth's stringed sculptures introduced him to a new type of surface neither fully closed nor open, the straight lines of taut thread articulating contrasting spatial structures and curvilinear forms. However, it was Gabo



who provided Lanyon with the ideological creed which was to sustain him through the war by providing a hope that art might be able to bring a radical change for the better in society.

A broad distinction can be made between Lanyon's works before and after 1949. Before this year his paintings and constructions can be seen as an attempt to give expression to Gabo's Constructivist ideology while pursuing a Romantic quest to define the intangible genius loci of his native Cornwall. Paintings executed immediately after his demobilization from the RAF in 1945 relate predominantly to the earth, anthropomorphic landscapes of subterranean cavities and chambers emblematic of the artist's return to a landscape whose every winding lane, sandy beach and jutting headland he was familiar with. The thematic characteristics of paintings belonging to the Generation and Surfacing Series are best explained by a need for security after the existential dislocations imposed by a six year absence from home. The "poetic" and "linear" formal qualities are matched by an autobiographical quality in the imagery, pictorial equivalents of the artist's psychological state set in a deep internal space located both within the earth and the unconscious mind.<sup>4</sup> The iconography employed in works like Generator and Earth - ovoids alluding to the womb, the foetus and the protective, nurturing embrace of the mother - suggests a Kleinian negotiation of the artist's need for regeneration expressed through the medium of constructivist and organic aesthetics.<sup>5</sup>

As Lanyon gained in confidence, he began to develop a method and manner that was entirely his own. There was a gradual change of emphasis as his work drew inspiration from "the places where solids and fluids meet".<sup>6</sup> The opposition of earth and air finds its most emphatic expression in the quasi-aerial perspectives of Bicyclist in Penwith (18 x 6in., oil on masonite, Arts Council), Green Mile (62½ x 19½in., oil on masonite, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.102) and Trevalgan (48 x 45in., oil on masonite, Witte Memorial Museum, San Antonio, Texas, Pl.93). He described Bicyclist in Penwith as a painting about "cycling among walls, boulders and farm country on the coast road."<sup>7</sup> It belongs to a group of narrow vertical paintings which are painted as though from a great height, subverting any traditional held beliefs about the practice of landscape painting. The vertiginousness of



the painting complements the dramatic interface of land and sea experienced at the edge of a cliff:

I paint very thin tall vertical paintings sometimes because I am fond of climbing cliffs, and I find them very all and thin. It is just a matter of doing paintings that are not visual paintings so much, but are related to some physical experience.<sup>8</sup>

A horizon to divide the canvas into two arbitrary and irreconcilable areas has no place in work which was intended to present "a turning out of experience - a making immediate of a time process-in-space."<sup>9</sup> By tipping the horizon on its side, converting it from a passive pictorial entity into a disconcerting vertical line, Lanyon disturbs the equilibrium of the observer - presenting him with "an image of his own existence":

I used to employ a convenient lumping together device in painting by lopping off sections of the painting and putting a sky in and calling it a landscape. Sky is just a flat blueness in that case. Now I have begun to get the sky on my back and there is no way out - I have to draw it down my side and breathe it into my belly and gesture it out. The only "lumping" is in the indigestion!<sup>10</sup>

He did not set out to paint nature from any fortuitous angle, but was determined to present the landscape on its own terms, painting the physical opposition of the elements - sky, land and sea - as a synthesis of many sights and viewpoints. This reformulation of opposites and states of disequilibrium can be seen in Kleinian terms as an attempt to break through the tired, familiar surface of existence to achieve psychological individuation through the process of making art.

This iconoclastic approach to conventional landscape painting reflects Lanyon's mounting sense of freedom and excitement in the mid-1950s as he used a post-cubist syntax to forge a new language for landscape painting. He began to see how pictures could be turned into physical events. Landscape was not just to be admired in the conventional sunsets and seascapes favoured by more traditional artists, but was something to be climbed over, trodden on, lain in and experienced from every conceivable angle. He believed that landscape painting should not just represent a sense of place from a single, fixed and static viewpoint, but achieve an independent identity by fusion



with the emotional and imaginative life of the artist.

Using Cornwall in the same way that Constable used Suffolk, Lanyon tore up any agreement about what might constitute the correct subject matter for contemporary painting by combining all his experiences of the landscape into a single image. His challenge to the conventions of landscape painting is similar in magnitude to Constable's decision 150 years earlier to select his subject from Suffolk's wheatfields lined with summer elms, hedgerows, wind-rippled streams, billowing cloud formations, cart tracks and towpaths:

My art follows Constable - it is to be found in the hedgerows, but my heaven what apprehension there is today even in a country lane!<sup>11</sup>

Lanyon's imaginative transformation of his genius loci, the landscape of North Cornwall, echoes Constable's "painting is with me but another word for feeling".<sup>12</sup> The specifically local and topographical recollections of the Cornish landscape provided a constant source of his imagery, the activating prompt to imaginative discovery and plastic invention. Like Constable, Lanyon understood that the term landscape embraces both the objective forms of the environment as well as the medium by which the artist inscribes its cultural codes, meanings and symbols.

If Constable introduced expressive naturalism to British painting, then Turner must be seen as the father of the psychological landscape. Lanyon understood how the twin possibilities embodied in Constable and Turner could be reconciled. They had both explored nature as an equal, a mirror, and a source of man's primal unconscious desires. Like Turner, Lanyon's range encompasses a Wordsworthian sensitivity for the ordinary scene as well as a Wagnerian conception of the grandeur of nature at its most romantic and sublime. A contemporary account describes how Turner began his watercolours by saturating the paper with wet colour, then, "like one possessed", scratched, scribbled and scraped everything into an apparently chaotic state until, "as if by magic", the motif emerged.<sup>13</sup> All of Lanyon's major works impart a sense of spontaneity as he substituted direct description and linear perspective with allusive representational elements, intense textural paint handling and a pictorial architecture which fuses structure



and sensation. He was both a poet, seeking moving and dramatic effects through the interaction of shapes and colours, and an artist who kept the motif - the appearance of a particular place, its history and his associations with it - in front of him. Each image is the result of an intense blend of emotion, physical sensation and a sense of the permanent past and the transient present which he explored with all the honesty and insistence at his command.

His later works - particularly the gliding paintings - reach a complex and original pictorial equivalent for the sublime in nature. There is an exhilaration and confidence in the many paintings connected with the sensation of flight as he discovered the ethereal, floating, translucent quality of Turner's late landscape vision. These works do not project us into the landscape so much as detach us from reality and project the viewer into the poetic realms of the subjective and the associational. Recognisable objects, such as a green field, a hill, a Cornish headland, a swirling sea are diffused by waves of translucent colour filled with pale light. We are transported by the rhythms of the paint into the poetic realms of our subjective selves:

Turner certainly, and Richard Wilson before him, used quite extensively a spiral, they got smaller and smaller away into the distance. Today it's possible I think - and this is why I go gliding myself - to get actually into the air itself to get a further sense of depth and space into yourself, as it were, into your own body, and then carry it through into a painting. I think this is a further extension of what Turner was doing.<sup>14</sup>

In the air he found solitude and excitement: a new way of interpreting themes which had persisted since the war - the sensation of vertigo and a pictorial equivalent for the passage of time. He completed Turner's aesthetic journey by subordinating the liquefied facture of Abstract Expressionism's self-referential planes of chromatic and textural relationships to the externally referential evocation of a particular place. Pictures such as Rosewall (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Pl.160), Long Moor (60 x 60 in., oil on canvas, Private Collection, Pl.151)

and Drift (60 x 42 in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.164) are all aerial views that have been influenced by gliding. They have little or nothing to do with the literal representation of a straightforward view, but everything to do with how Lanyon felt about what he had seen and experienced in and above the landscape when he returned to the studio to face the canvas.

Despite the Abstract Expressionist bravura, a lingering respect for the past remained. Lanyon's paintings are concerned with depth, rhyming colour, symmetry, balance and other traditional qualities. Where his wilful temperament appears - in the convulsive stroke, the multi-coloured sweep of industrial brushes, or in wild accidents that spray themselves wantonly over the picture - he is still not submitting to random order. Standing behind him at all times is the memory of Gabo, Nicholson, Smart and the whole tradition of landscape painting in Cornwall.



## Notes to Introduction

1. It is important to differentiate between the long-standing influence of Gabo - the result of Lanyon's high regard for his work and his deep engagement with constructivism - and his looser association with other artists such as William Scott or the members of the Abstract Expressionist movement in America.
2. Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler Talking to Michael Canney on "The Subject in Painting", Horizons, BBC radio programme, 22 May 1963, TGA/TAV 212AB.
3. The phrase is from "Michelangelo", The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes, vol.III, Thames and Hudson, 1978, p.12.
4. Michael Ayrton identified the linear and poetic qualities of Neo-Romanticism as evidence of continuity with earlier traditions in English art: Studio, vol.132, no.s 641-4. August-September 1946.
5. Melanie Klein saw art as a reparative activity resolving subconscious anxieties and attacks on the mother's womb in infantile fantasy: "Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and the Creative Impulse", International Journal of Psycho-Analysis, vol.10, 1929, reprinted in Juliet Mitchell (ed.), The Selected Melanie Klein, Harmondsworth, 1986, pp.84-94.
6. This quotation comes from the recorded talk which Lanyon made for the British Council in 1962. Alan Bowness wrote the script for the lecture using Lanyon's own words. Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 526AB.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Peter Lanyon, letter to Paul Feiler, c.1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.125.
10. Peter Lanyon, letter to Roland Bowden, 20th July 1952, Tate Gallery Archive, 942.13.
11. Letter to Paul Feiler, c.1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.125.
12. Constable is quoted in Andrew Graham Dixon, A History of British Art, BBC Books, 1996, p.147.
13. Quoted in Werner Hoffmann, Turner und die Landschaftsmalerei seiner Zeit, Munich, 1976, p.24.
14. Recorded talk, Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler talking to Michael Canney on The Subject in Painting, BBC Horizons programme, 22nd May 1963, transcript in Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 212AB.

## **Chapter One**

# **A CORNISH APPRENTICESHIP: BORLASE SMART AND THE TECHNIQUES OF PAINTING**



## ST IVES AND THE PAINTERS OF LIGHT

Peter Lanyon was born in St Ives on 8 February 1918 into a prosperous and cultured Cornish family at a time when the art colony was not only well established but thriving. Turner is known to have sketched in St Ives during his tour of the West Country in 1811 and Whistler spent three months in the town in the winter of 1884 painting a series of pochade panels depicting seascapes, street scenes, shop fronts and views of boats and fishing vessels in the harbour. By 1888 an informal Artists' Club had been formed in St Ives by the Australian Louis Monro Grier (a painter, raconteur and musician whose loose and impressionistic style owed a great deal to Whistler).<sup>1</sup> This was followed two years later by the "St Ives Arts Club" housed in permanent premises on Westcott's Quay. The club became the meeting place for a group of marine and coastal painters who were attracted to the somnolent seaside town by the pellucid quality of the light and the possibility of finding an inexpensive studio in the lofts where herring fishermen had once stowed their sails. In the years before the First World War artists like Julius Olsson, Adrian Stokes, Arnesby Brown and Algenon Talmage gained a reputation for plein air works and direct landscape painting which eschewed the picturesque allegorical symbolism characteristic of much Newlyn School painting of the same period.

Lanyon was fortunate in being born into an affluent, liberal and cultured family. His mother, Lilian, came from Camborne where her father owned a drapery store. His father, William Herbert Lanyon, was a pianist, composer, photographer and painter whose family derived its wealth from the tin mining industry around Redruth.<sup>2</sup> Herbert knew many of the artists that had congregated in St Ives and shared his Attic Studio in St Andrews Street with the painter John Park in the years before the First World War.<sup>3</sup> On Sunday evenings the Lanyon home, the Red House, became a gathering point for anyone with a serious interest in the arts and there was music, poetry and discussion of painting.<sup>4</sup>

Herbert's passionate socialist principles were expressed in a strong distaste for the divisions of wealth and class which prevented social harmony "by the institution of rigid and permanent barriers of restriction".<sup>5</sup> His

son inherited this belief that inequality lay at the root of social distress. Encouraged by his father to defy the conventional public school ethos of muscular Christianity at Clifton College so that he could concentrate on music and painting (he refused to join the Officers Training Corps "because it wasn't consistent with the policies of the League of Nations"),<sup>6</sup> Lanyon was firmly committed to the left by the time he left Clifton in 1936:

I had read as much as I possibly could of Webb's Soviet Communism and New Civilisation; I had read a lot of the left books and been interested in the birth of communism, and particularly in socialist movements in England. In fact the book I presented to the Clifton Library when I left was Sawdust Caesar, a book on Mussolini.<sup>7</sup>

This radical political undercurrent, mixed with a rather patrician belief in the possibility of an elite creating a socialist society, continued to form the core of Lanyon's political convictions for the rest of his life. During the war he wrote to his sister that he had (unsuccessfully) applied for a commission to prepare himself for active leadership in building the new social order:

I blame myself and my kind for (the working class's) condition, because rightly it is our duty to teach them and then hand over to them the power to develop into complete moral beings and societies.<sup>8</sup>

Lanyon's family wealth protected him from the financial worries which plagued many of the artists who had come to St Ives after the war (he inherited a third of his father's estate on his twenty-first birthday). Nevertheless, he empathised with the plight of the miners who struggled to extract from the Cornish granite the mineral wealth of bismuth, malachite, copper, iron, aragonite, garnet, gypsum, silver, cuprite and tin. Against a backdrop of falling prices, exhausted seams and cheaper competition from the Far East, South America and Australia, Lanyon spoke of "the shame that I feel...seeing these ruined tin mines"<sup>9</sup> and felt guilt through his family's association with the exploitation of the miners by greedy English industrialists.



In May 1961 he appeared at a Ministry of Housing inquiry at Penzance as the only witness who would speak on behalf of developers who were proposing to reopen a coastal mine at Carnelloe, near Zennor. The proposal met widespread criticism and was denounced for posing a potential blight on this area of outstanding natural beauty, just a few miles from St Ives. Patrick Heron (who had bought the Eagle's Nest near Zennor in 1955) blanched with horror at the thought of three hundred West Indian miners coming to live on a housing estate "and then the mine going bust".<sup>10</sup> He campaigned against the proposed development and raised a petition with 900 signatures to preserve the integrity of the landscape (and his scenic views). Lanyon drafted (but did not send) a letter to The Cornishman:

The opponents of the scheme talk of beauty and the magnificence of scenery as if nature were incapable of wrath that would touch them... Generations of Cornishmen have had to leave their native coast and have died in exile, leaving only a chimney as their monument. When new-arrived see the revenge of time creep on their doorsteps, they wail out that we destroy the beauty of their view - what view do they think the Cornishman has, who desires above all to make his own riches, but is barred by some concept of beauty that denies him the honour of his labour?<sup>11</sup>

Lanyon's opposition to those who sought to preserve the Cornish countryside was part of a wider dissatisfaction with the area's growing dependence on tourism. He despised the "foreigners" - tourists and artists - who wanted to preserve the landscape as a post-industrial theme park, complete with stunning views and romantically crumbling engine houses and half-empty villages (the population of St Just declined by 16.6% between 1931 and 1938). He railed against the greedy commercialism of St Ives which drove up rents and property prices so that local fishermen were forced out of their harbour cottages and into council housing on the margins of the town:

The native knows he is being exploited and is not any longer the innocent in the game. He is liable to become abstracted himself and to live entirely on the subsidies of philanthropic bodies geared to the preservation of things - a large scale way in which wealth stops life from being awkward and progressing. We shall become a huge museum.<sup>12</sup>



For Lanyon, Cornwall was not just a working environment for artists or a place to be visited by busloads of tourists, but a source of economic riches to be farmed, fished and mined by the indigenous population.

The young Lanyon "got the smell of paint very early".<sup>13</sup> He and his younger sister, Mary, were taken to the studios where artists like Moffatt Lindner, Julius Olsson, John Park, Algernon Talmage and Borlase Smart prepared works destined for the Royal Academy summer exhibitions. Unlike many of the painters who came to form the post-war avant garde in St Ives, Lanyon never lost respect for the long artistic heritage of the town or for the artists who had helped to establish the town as a centre for the scattered groups in Newlyn and Lamorna. In a recording made two years before his death, he recalled the excitement of seeing a picture of bluebells by Lamorna Birch:

I was so excited by the quality of this thick paint that I went up to it and smelled it...I remember distinctly expecting to smell bluebells.<sup>14</sup>

S.J. "Lamorna" Birch, a Newlyn School painter trained in Paris, found his subject matter in the depiction of the freshness of nature and the excitement and urgency of working out in the wind and the sun. He had founded his own colony of artists and writers in the Lamorna valley, but after the war he lived and worked in St Ives, eventually becoming chairman of the St Ives Society of Artists in the 1930s. His large and melodramatic paintings of the Lamorna valley, rivers and streams, quarries and tall cliffs, are essentially vehicles for the study of light and movement in the natural world and can be seen as an inspiration for Lanyon's more expressive interpretations of the landscape many years later.

Lanyon's belief that he was working within a long tradition of Cornish landscape painting is clearly illustrated in an exchange of letters in the St Ives Times which followed a one-man exhibition of his work in Plymouth City Art Gallery in 1955.

I have often wondered why Peter Lanyon's pictures are hardly, if ever, exhibited in our own galleries. Nor as far as I know, are any of his

works on the walls of any public building. He is a native of St Ives and he lives in St Ives. He has long been recognised by connoisseurs as one of the most promising of young British painters.<sup>15</sup>

In his response to this letter Lanyon wrote:

I share his concern, but I must remind him that I was brought up in St Ives with such artists as Milner, Grier, Park, Schofield, Borlase Smart and many others and I share with them a respect for tradition. When paintings by these artists have adequate hanging space in a town museum such as Borlase Smart envisaged I would be proud to join their company. My own isolation has been voluntary and arises from my refusal to accept the idea that modern art is apart from traditional art.<sup>16</sup>

He described himself as "a provincial landscape painter"<sup>17</sup> and had a deep distaste for the divisions which emerged when the initiative was seized by younger artists led by Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson who broke away from the traditional painting of the St Ives Society of Artists in order to form the more progressive Penwith Society in February 1949. Although Lanyon seldom ever painted a picturesque view, he did not consider his work to be abstract:

I do not consider my painting to be abstract. However, I make use of abstraction as part of my working method.<sup>18</sup>

He appreciated the exquisite atmospheric and impressionistic effects of the earlier St Ives painters and admired their talent for painting the surface of the sea, its reflected colours, and the effect of sun and light over wet sand. His ambition was to rank with the greatest figures of the Newlyn and St Ives Schools - to fulfil the grandeur of tradition and at the same time to pioneer a new visual language of landscape painting. He believed that he was continuing the dialogue with the landscape - interpreted in a modernist idiom.



## BORLASE SMART: LANYON AND THE TECHNIQUES OF SEASCAPE PAINTING

Lanyon's formal training in art began at the Penzance Art School in 1936, where he stayed for about eighteen months reluctantly drawing casts of antique sculptures. At the same time he received private lessons from Borlase Smart, secretary and later president of the St Ives Art Society. Smart was to become a key conciliatory figure between the warring factions representing modernism and tradition in St Ives. He specialised in marine painting and particularly favoured the twelve miles of rocky coastline between St Ives and St Just (the same stretch which Lanyon later claimed was "actually in my bones").<sup>19</sup>

The importance of Borlase Smart has often been overlooked in the literature on Lanyon.<sup>20</sup> The later influence of Nicholson-Hepworth-Gabo has tended to overshadow the fact that Lanyon emerged from a long-established tradition of painting the landscape and coastline of West Penwith. His apprenticeship with Borlase Smart placed him in a continuum which owed much to the techniques and traditions of plein air painting popularised by the followers of Bastien Lepage in their version of "a sort of English Concarneau"<sup>21</sup> - Newlyn during the 1880s. He was also heir to the tradition of sea and landscape painting practised in St Ives after 1918 by Smart, Julius Olsson, John Park and Fred Milner.

Smart had come to St Ives in 1913 as a student at Julius Olsson's School of Landscape and Marine Painting (Olsson had won widespread acclaim for the romantic naturalism of his coastal scenes and dramatic seascapes by moonlight). He had served in the First World War as a subaltern in the Queen's Regiment, the Artists' Rifles and in 1916 with the newly formed Machine Gun Corps. Retaining a precise military air, Smart "would have no nonsense with poor drawing". His painting was direct and traditional, based on observation, interpreted by sound draughtsmanship and a vigorous, bold use of paint, often on a large scale. He drove Lanyon hard, teaching him the importance of immersion in the landscape, "drawing the general idea in black and white almost as fast as a wave moves or breaks".<sup>22</sup>

Lanyon became accustomed to drawing rapidly and never lost the habit

of sketching his subjects in situ: John Wells still recalls expeditions such as the one to sketch Geevor mine with Lanyon and Sven Berlin in 1946.<sup>23</sup> The numerous studies for Portreath (20 x 16in., oil strawboard, 1949, Private Collection, Pl.82) and the drawings for the Clevedon Series (1963, Pl.213) testify to Lanyon's commitment to careful observation of place, grasping ideas with a series of almost shorthand notes, even if the painting of large abstract pictures became an exclusively studio exercise:

When I began to paint, the cliff edge and winter storms put more pressure on me than I could absorb. My pictures became so messy and dispersed that I was driven indoors and settled for experiments in the technical problems of painting.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike the plein air painters that could still be seen with their heavy easels and brass-bound paint boxes on the water's edge - trying not to be distracted by the comments and idle curiosity of holiday visitors - Lanyon preferred to resolve the problems raised by the particular character and presence of the landscape in the safe confines of the Attic Studio.

Smart encouraged his pupil to respond imaginatively to the complex movement of the sea pounding against the cliffs, the constantly changing effects of light on water and rocks, and the geological construction of the Cornish coastline.

He loved the open coast and the cliffs and he would get me out and make me draw the rocks so that they looked, not just like the rocks, but he would say to me: remember there are thousands of tons of weight there, and the sea has been battering this for years and years...This sort of quality really excited me and connected up with my own feelings for the country.<sup>25</sup>

Lanyon's earliest works are conventional but sensitive landscapes, the products of a young and talented student. A painting such as Carn Galver (13 x 16in., oil on board, 1937, Private Collection, Pl.2) captures the atmospheric and impressionistic effects of the light and landscape of the inland hills of Penwith, capped with great boulders and earthworks. Battleship



Rock, Bosigran, (25 x 30in., oil on canvas, 1936, Private Collection, Pl.3) depicts the spectacular cliff formation and site of an ancient castle on the North Cornish coast, between St Ives and Land's End. The organic construction of the rock formations is emphasised by the short, broken vertical brushstrokes employed to construct patches of interlocking planes of light and shadow. The foreground rocks are rendered in rough diagonal strokes that draw attention to cracks, gaps and crevices - creating varied planes of light and shade. The drama of this composition derives from the contrast of the dark rocks and the foaming sea. It is important to note that the foam is not merely a mass of white paint but has a distinct sense of pattern and direction, based on Lanyon's study of the way the sea breaks into channels and moves among the rocks. In contrast with the rocks, the rhythmic flow of the waves is interpreted by the softer, curving strokes of the brush, which blends the tones together to produce the subtle light and shade of water and foam. The rounded swells of the water in the foreground are carefully modelled in subtle planes of light and shade to emphasise the three-dimensional quality, rather than merely reducing them to a pattern of strokes.

These paintings reflect a realist trend dominant in provincial art in the 1930s that had little to do with the revolution in painting and sculpture taking place in Europe. Cubism, Futurism, Suprematism, Constructivism, Dadaism and Surrealism were foreign concepts to most artists working in Cornwall at this time who took acceptance by the Royal Academy as their yardstick of excellence.

#### SOUTH AFRICA, 1938

Smart's influence can be detected in Lanyon's sensitivity to the nuances and character of the South African landscape. In March 1938 he left Cornwall for an extended holiday with his mother and sister, visiting relatives in Johannesburg and touring Rhodesia.<sup>26</sup> According to his sister, Mary Schofield, Lanyon painted all the time, concentrating on landscapes and the occasional portrait.<sup>27</sup> Africa gave him his first opportunity to extend the range of his painting-repertoire by using a palette of warmer colours

(mostly yellows, yellow-greens, browns and brown-greys) to evoke the dry earth colours and dusty textures of the bush. In forging his memories into painted equivalents such as Hill, South Africa (13 x 16in., oil on board, 1939, Private Collection, Pl.8), Lanyon captures the brilliance of the light, the intense heat and the immensity of the vast tracts of land covered with brushwood and shrubby plants.

Smart's insistence on a direct and imaginative response to the light, weather, scale and endurance of the landscape allowed Lanyon to respond empathetically to the challenge of depicting a topography which was completely different from his native Cornwall. The trip brought out more of Lanyon's latent pantheism: "I enjoyed myself more I think camping at night amongst the lions than at any other time".<sup>28</sup> He later recalled that he only "really began to get to grips" with the country after climbing a 300 foot rock face, Mont-aux-Sources, 9,500 feet up in the Drakensberg mountains.<sup>29</sup> The trip involved him not merely looking at the landscape, but seeing into it and appreciating the essential elements of its identity:

South Africa had an immense influence on me. I found I suddenly met a country which was uncultured, a country which was wide open and had no sensibility...(the country) had an influence on my interest in high places, vastnesses, for instance, in what I call a frontier civilisation...<sup>30</sup>

Smart had taught him to be open to the significance of a place, to feel it, to know and respect its symbols - much as a person might experience a holy site as sacred without necessarily believing in that particular religion.

Lanyon was acutely sensitive to the particular character and presence of the places he visited and to a remarkable degree was able to identify with the people he met and share their concerns. His ability to get inside a place allowed him to draw on the symbols, traditions and cultural imperatives of new environments. He was perceptive enough to see that the identity of Africa went deeper than superficial appearances and later recalled his repugnance for the social divisions and racial segregation which he



witnessed on his travels. On one occasion, while staying on a farm in Northern Rhodesia, he expressed an interest in painting an African. He was presented with a "native" who was told to pose with a round concertina for the nineteen-year old artist. Twenty-five years later he could still recall his embarrassment at this grim display of racial inequality. Horrified by this affront to the man's dignity, Lanyon threw away the unfinished painting and asked him to sit down and play his own music, refrains of which would continue to haunt Lanyon for the rest of his life.<sup>31</sup>

The trip clearly had a positive effect on his work. In June 1938, towards the end of the holiday, he felt sufficiently confident to stage his first one-man show, held in a small gallery in Johannesburg.<sup>32</sup>

#### THE PROTECTOR OF MODERN ART IN CORNWALL

Smart's influence on Lanyon's career did not stop when the period of tutelage ended. He was also a key figure in getting Lanyon's works shown both during the war and immediately after Lanyon's return to Cornwall in December 1945. Smart's sympathy for the cosmopolitan avant-garde sheltering in St Ives during the war gave him a key unifying role as conciliator between the rival factions of "traditional" and "modernist" artists working in St Ives. He had become secretary of the St Ives Society of Arts in 1930 and was instrumental in persuading Nicholson and Hepworth to join the society and exhibit work in its Porthmeor Gallery during the war.<sup>33</sup> Through Smart's mediation Lanyon and Sven Berlin were also able to exhibit their works among the more traditional paintings of the Society. Reviewing the annual Show Day, March 1945, the Western Echo reported that "a young corporal, G. Peter Lanyon, who is now in Italy, showed a well executed painting of Ypres."<sup>34</sup> A year later, Smart opened his Porthmeor Studio on Show Day for an exhibition which also featured work by Nicholson (Painting 1946), Hepworth (Wood Sculpture with Strings and Drawing for Sculpture), and Lanyon (works unknown).<sup>35</sup>

It was Borlase Smart who obtained a promise from the Anglican Church authorities that their Mariners' Chapel, a large building with good light



built in 1902, would be offered to the Society of Artists after deconsecration (most fishermen were Methodists). A loan of £2,800 for the purchase of the freehold was negotiated with the church authorities.<sup>36</sup> The Society's first exhibition in the newly-decorated chapel opened on 26th July 1945. Smart helped to secure a separate space around the font of the Mariners' Church for the "advanced" artists, Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth, Naum Gabo, Sven Berlin, John Wells, Wilhemina Barns-Graham and Lanyon. In a letter of August 1945 to the St Ives Times, an optimistic Lanyon wrote:

A new exhibition of the St Ives Society of Artists has undoubtedly aroused great interest both because of the gallery and the unorthodox willingness of the members to mix so many points of view. I feel that the artists of St Ives are making an attempt to revive themselves and become a more positive part of the community.<sup>37</sup>

Smart's patronage of the modernist movement in St Ives continued when the younger "exhibitors around the font", impelled by Lanyon, decided to show their work in a separate exhibition. With typical magnanimity Smart suggested to Lanyon that the crypt of the Mariners' Chapel would make a good exhibition space for their works. Smart facilitated this move by appeasing the conservatives within the Society. The Crypt Group (at first Lanyon, Berlin, Wells, Bryan Wynter and the printer Guido Morris) held their first exhibition in September 1946 - the show was officially opened by Borlase Smart. His encouragement of "these alleged modern ideas" was harshly criticised in The Western Echo by the painter, illustrator and caricaturist, Harry Rountree.

I would remind him that some people are so tolerant that they hunt with the hounds and run with the hare. Surely this brand of tolerance commands no respect.<sup>38</sup>

Smart wrote back that the flurry of correspondence instigated by Rountree's attack on the "pitiful racket" of modern art had improved attendance figures for the Crypt exhibition. His accommodating stance, building bridges between the old and the new, the figurative and the abstract, is reflected in his reply:

I have been accused of running with the hares and hunting with the hounds. That is precisely my outlook, as I definitely intend to like the best in both traditional and advanced art.<sup>39</sup>

In 1949, two years after his death, the Penwith Society of Artists was founded as a "tribute to Borlase Smart"<sup>40</sup> and a eulogy was published in the Society's first exhibition catalogue:

His large hearted generosity and sympathetic understanding were ever at the service of all who needed them.<sup>41</sup>

#### THE ENDURING INFLUENCE: BORLASE SMART AND LANYON'S LATE WORKS

Many of the ideas contained in Smart's useful book The Technique of Seascape Painting (1934) continued to influence Lanyon's painting methods long after Smart's untimely death following a heart attack in 1949.

When a seascape picture calls for the addition of incident to make up for its apparent emptiness, it proves that there has not been enough convincing sea interest in the work. It is lacking in observation, colour, form, composition and the study of sea phenomena necessary to its completeness.<sup>42</sup>

Lanyon was taught that great landscape painting did not require unnecessarily complex compositions (for example, one of Smart's favourite painters, Winslow Homer, often needed no more than one or two waves and just a single rock for a successful painting). Smart's imaginative response to the elemental drama which occurs where land and sea meet deeply influenced the young Peter Lanyon.

In his later work, Smart introduced a more bravura expressiveness and a bolder use of colour - anticipating Lanyon's landscapes of the 1950s. Smart's advice to the student of marine painting, "Don't hesitate, but splash",<sup>43</sup> humorously anticipates Lanyon's advice to Michael Canney on



coming to a halt with a painting:

Just take a large paint-mixing knife and put a great slab of chrome yellow from top to bottom. That'll get you going again; sorting that one out!<sup>44</sup>

Smart believed that the "contrast of calm and turmoil can be the secret to an effective marine painting" and that the work should be colourful, pure in expressive painting and "the whole executed with a freedom of handling consistent with the subject."<sup>45</sup>

An analysis of Lanyon's large abstractions painted after his first visit to America in January 1957 reveals Smart's enduring influence. Silent Coast (48 x 36in., oil on masonite, 1957, Manchester City Art Galleries, Pl.134) was painted shortly after his first New York exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery.<sup>46</sup> A superficial glance at the picture would suggest an entirely abstract composition. Lanyon described the work as "the first of many weather paintings".<sup>47</sup> However, in spite of its broad handling, the painting can also be seen in landscape terms: the swelling central area of strong mid-blue has the shape of a pregnant belly and the translucence of the sea viewed from above; below is the more turbulent quality of sea washing over and around projecting rocks, brownish-greens show through as islands lapped by waves. It is important to note that the sea in Silent Coast is not merely just a mass of blue paint but derives from a distinct sense of pattern and direction which recalls Smart's advice on lateral lines of composition to show movement in a seascape.<sup>48</sup> The slow, stately movement of the sea across the diagonal is offset by the broader horizontal brushstrokes depicting the sky.

Smart's advice that "nature composes itself" is followed in the apparent spontaneity of the brushstrokes and compositional structure which nevertheless manages to embrace the finest elements of balance, movement, massing and spacing. Smart felt that drawing and painting "should be broader in expression towards the edges" as this contributes to a feeling of bigger spacing, making the work appear larger in design. "Experience will teach you that general all-over detail in a seascape, if carried to the edges of your

drawings or paintings, is apt to make your work too photographic."<sup>49</sup> In a talk recorded in 1963 Lanyon recalled that Silent Coast was

...a very calm picture, with everything simplified and pushed right to the edges. I painted it from very high up, looking down on a broad expanse of coast. Everything was still and slow moving, as on those days when after stormy weather one gets extreme silence and restfulness on the coast of West Penwith.<sup>50</sup>

The painting may owe something to the American Abstract Expressionists (and particularly to Willem de Kooning) whose work Lanyon would have seen in January 1956 when the Arts Council Exhibition, Modern Art in the United States, was held in the Tate Gallery.<sup>51</sup> He certainly became much more aware of developments in American abstraction after visiting New York in January 1957 for the first of his five one-man exhibitions at the Catherine Viviano Gallery. However, while Lanyon's paintings now showed the influence of his new American contacts (Robert Motherwell and Mark Rothko became friends) his work never entirely lost its connection with the studies of the Cornish coast undertaken with Borlase Smart.

Many works from this period of Lanyon's career reflect passages in Smart's painting and writing. St Ives Bay (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1957, Private Collection, London, Pl.133), Long Sea Surf (72 x 48in., oil on masonite, 1958, Joseph H Hirshorn Collection, Pl.139) and Zennor Storm (48 x 72in., oil on hardboard, 1958, Tate Gallery, Pl.137) recall Smart's attempts to capture the vigour of the sea and the ever changing weather patterns of the Penwith peninsula. The paint is applied thickly, without too much attempt to blend or iron out the surface, and thereby detract from the vitality of the total effect. The colours are those favoured by Smart: Naples yellow, yellow ochre, raw sienna, rose madder, viridian, cobalt blue, and ivory black.<sup>52</sup> Smart wrote that "the merit lies in knowing what to leave out in painting the sea. Too much detail suggests that the sea stood still to be portrayed."<sup>53</sup> Few could accuse Lanyon of painting pictures where the subject looked petrified, frozen, or overworked.

In his analysis of painterly technique Smart commented on Rough Weather



by Roger Deering:

In this kind of painting, where intense emotion is conveyed and the artist gives the impression of having painted in white heat, there is more planning and more cool-headedness than one might suppose...These seemingly casual strokes must be planned and must follow the forms, based on precise observation of the subject.<sup>54</sup>

Lanyon's pictures were often only worked up after months of preparatory study. He would execute charcoal and pencil drawings produced on the spot - investigating the subject from as many angles as possible. In order to understand the structural and spatial elements in the composition he would build constructions - proof of how sensitive the artist was to the plastic and formal demands of rendering three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. Drawings and constructions were used to "develop an image in my mind and to explore it in actual space before painting it."<sup>55</sup> Porthleven (96 x 48in., oil on hardboard, 1951, Tate Gallery, Pl.91), commissioned by the Arts Council for the Festival of Britain exhibition, "Sixty paintings for 1951", was painted in four hours - the culmination of a year of contemplation, drawing, and the building of six constructions. The immediacy of the work, its broad brushstrokes and freshness belies the considerable thought and experimentation that went into its gestation.

Smart's presence is felt in one of Lanyon's most celebrated works, Conflict of Man with the Tides and Sands (28 feet x 9 feet 10 inches, semi-matt porcelain tiles with on-glaze enamel colour, 1959-60, Pl.159), a mural for the Civil Engineering Department building at Liverpool University. To help him understand the subject, Lanyon visited the Hydraulics Research at Wallingford where he was able to investigate and observe the science of Loose Boundary Hydraulics.<sup>56</sup> He examined numerous scale models which demonstrated the flow of tides and the movement of mud and sand in the estuaries.<sup>57</sup> The building had been designed by Maxwell Fry and it was on his recommendation that Lanyon was chosen to submit various designs which would cover the entire end wall of the entrance hall. The mural had to be in keeping with the research carried out in the building and Lanyon's interpretative freedom was restricted by the title given to him by the



commissioning faculty. The mural was to be made "student proof" and the artist's initial preference for a large painting on either canvas or board was rejected in favour of a composition painted onto 750 six inch white semi-matt porcelain tiles. He produced six full-sized sketches (evidence of only two remains) on paper as "exercises, practice runs, to prepare myself for the work on the tiles..."<sup>58</sup>

Lanyon wanted to produce an image which "signifies man and his struggle with natural forces".<sup>59</sup> This was to be achieved by producing a synthesis of ideas based on experiments to generate and control wave movement by using paddles and breakwaters. Although he "wanted to avoid reference to previous concepts of man and nature"<sup>60</sup> there are some clear similarities to Smart's methodology and compositional structure. Describing his method of laying the image on the canvas Smart wrote:

Personally, I do not even draw any preliminary shapes with charcoal on a canvas. I just sweep in the main lines of composition with a brush flowing with thin ivory black. I then paint in solidly. This applies not only to small sketches, but to canvases up to 50" x 40".<sup>61</sup>

Lanyon worked in a similar way: there is a striking photograph of the artist perching precariously above a sloping platform working on one of the preparatory sketches with a wide brush attached to a long handle so that he could reach into the centre of the work.<sup>62</sup> The brush has been charged with ivory black and Lanyon is delineating the main lines of movement in the sketch by drawing great arching curves in a rhythmic progression across the paper. Smart advised his students not to rush into colour until the forms have been mastered in black and white. Lanyon's mural sketches are almost all monochromatic. The only colour suggested in the surviving sketch for Conflict of Man with Tides (110 x 204in., paper on board, Gimpel Fils, Pl.158) is provided by dark blue-green tints of sea, yellow ochre of sand and the brilliant white of sea-foam.

Smart had analysed and understood the patterns and dynamics of wave movement.<sup>63</sup> His numerous illustrations of opposing forces in tidal movement,<sup>64</sup> heavy seas crashing into rocks or breakwaters, and waves rippling foam



onto flat Cornish beaches<sup>65</sup> must have influenced Lanyon. Smart's analysis of brush strokes to describe wave and foam movement (Pl.5)<sup>66</sup> shows how an artist can convey an impression of the weight and mass of the sea stirred up by powerful forces.

Lanyon made copious notes after completing the Liverpool mural and indicated that the left-hand section should be seen as a generator (modelled on paddles used to generate waves in the laboratory). It is also and more obviously "a mood of threat which stretches out and across the whole top section of the mural"<sup>67</sup> to the point where the composition dissolves into a more lyrical white section towards the top right-hand section of the mural. The eye is led down to an area which Lanyon regarded as "a coda being an interpretation of the whole mural in a different rhythm and in another key".<sup>68</sup> Lanyon positioned what Maxwell Fry termed "the penstock motif" - a dark blue "frustrum of a right angled triangle" to represent a breakwater - in the centre of the composition. This great vertical slab demonstrates Lanyon's architectonic skill in design. The breakwater provides the cornerstone of the mural, the point where land and water meet, "the kernel of Lanyon's creative myth".<sup>69</sup> This solid architectural structure unambiguously signifies control over the movement of natural forces (even allowing Lanyon to paint "a gentle beach and blue sea landscape of considerable tenderness"<sup>70</sup> just above its flattened top).

The menacing arm of the wave generating paddle creates rapid and violent movement as the water gushes and sprays across the middle of the mural from left to right. The forward movement of the wave is slowed down as it cascades over the sloping side of the breakwater and falls into deeper, darker, slower moving water (longer, sweeping brushstrokes) before eventually rebounding against the 45° incline of the harbour (another solid structure securing the right-hand base of the composition). The agitation of mud and sand in the harbour area is conveyed by the quicker, shorter, brushstrokes of yellow ochre contrasted against the more fluid movement of the cobalt blue sea on the left.

This commission presented new challenges for Lanyon (for example the problem of firing 750 tiles in a kiln which could only hold 36 at a time).

Many of the tiles cracked or suffered from crazed surfaces and frequently the enamel paint did not survive the glazing process.<sup>71</sup> Trial and error eventually resolved most of the technical problems involved in the commission (although Lanyon complained that "modifications were suggested by the committee months after I had begun seriously firing tiles and in some cases I had to remake whole sections. This has led, I am convinced, to certain breaks in the composition which would not have been there without the hindrances.")<sup>72</sup>

The techniques required for the execution of the Liverpool mural may have been novel, but Lanyon's visualisation of loose boundary hydraulics may also have its roots in a much earlier stage of his artistic development. Borlase Smart's analysis of forward tide movement and backwash provides a lucid diagrammatic explanation of the main theme of Lanyon's work.<sup>73</sup> The arrows pointing right in the constructional sketch indicate the force of the rising tide while the arrows pointing left show the opposing movements of the rebound. The Liverpool mural also follows Smart's dictum that the "artist's aim must be to present a picture in which variety is presented in a harmonious whole".<sup>74</sup> Lanyon fulfilled this criterion by employing musical devices such as phrasing and counterpoint:

I arrived at a relationship of pulses which differed above and below a horizon line approximately halfway up the mural. These pulses operated on the horizontal direction as a four rhythm below the line and a three rhythm above it.<sup>75</sup>

Lanyon never forgot Smart's importance as a teacher and then as a friend in the difficult period immediately after World War Two had ended. At the opening of his one-man exhibition at Plymouth City Art Gallery in 1955, Lanyon made a speech in which he gave thanks for Smart's support of modernism and acknowledged his own indebtedness to the artist:

If it hadn't been for Borlase Smart, I should never have started painting at all. If it hadn't been for him there would be very few artists in Cornwall today.



To explain his work Lanyon quoted the following passage from the catalogue:

This painting is abstract, but not non-figurative; it is dominated by a rhythm that is organic rather than geometric; it is evocative of place, but is not illusionistic; not in any sense an orthodox presentation of landscape.<sup>76</sup>

For him there was no contradiction between his response to the landscape and that of the earlier generation of St Ives artists, represented by Borlase Smart, who had been trying to achieve the same "rhythm" and "evocation" of place by more traditional means. Lanyon had absorbed Smart's teachings never to be satisfied with a "pretty pretty" type of work, "the sort of picture that is "cooked up" from memory with false tints".<sup>77</sup> He did not seek to please the eye of the uninitiated and maintained a high regard for truth of tone and form - even if the expression of his landscape vision had changed dramatically after the time of his acquaintance with Borlase Smart.

## Notes to Chapter One:

1. St Ives in the inter-war years is discussed in Peter Davies, The St Ives Years: essays on the growth of an artistic phenomenon, The Wimborne Bookshop, 1984, pp.9-19. Grier came to St Ives from Australia, via Toronto and King's College, London. He was one of the earliest painters in St Ives and left a permanent mark on the community. The Book Gallery, St Ives, has a 6" x 8" photograph of Grier's studio, "The Foc'sle", on The Wharf, St Ives (item 82, catalogue 15, January 1999). It was used to illustrate his 1895 article, "A Painter's Club" for The Studio which describes how over 60 men and women attended a meeting in 1888 which formalised the organisation of the St Ives Arts Club.
2. Biographical details, letters and statements have been compiled by his son, Andrew Lanyon in Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990.
3. Andrew Lanyon, *ibid.*, p.14: "Herbert was the only artist in the family. He was an amateur painter and photographer, a composer, a pianist and judging from letters sent by pupils in between various American trips, a well-loved teacher of music".
4. Herbert Lanyon was described as "a brilliant pianist...Sunday evenings at Lanyon's were a regular institution. He also composed". C. Marriott, "Memories of Cornwall's Art Colonies", The Cornish Review, spring 1950, pp.66-71.
5. Herbert Lanyon was extolling America as a country which had successfully eradicated class barriers: "My heart is in America...", printed in Andrew Lanyon, *op.cit.*, 1990, p.14.
6. "An Unfamiliar Land", tape recording made in 1962 with Lionel Miskin, Falmouth School of Art. Lanyon was discussing his early life. Tate Gallery Archive Audio-Visual Material (TAV), 211AB. Transcript is printed Andrew Lanyon, *op.cit.*, pp.23-31.
7. *Ibid.*, pp.23-31.
8. Letter to Mary Schofield, 26th May 1943.
9. "An Unfamiliar Land", *op.cit.*, 1962.
10. Patrick Heron, letter to Ben Nicholson, 24th May 1962, TGA 8717.1.2.1633.
11. Undated letter, not sent, printed in Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon: Paintings, Drawings and Constructions, 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, 1978, p.29. The original letter is in the manuscript collection of Lady Mander. A full report of the inquiry can be found in the Western Morning News, May 11th 1961.
12. Peter Lanyon, untitled manuscript, n.d.
13. "An Unfamiliar Land", quoted in Andrew Lanyon, *op.cit.*, pp.23-31.
14. *Ibid.*, p.23.
15. Quoted in Marion Whybrow, St Ives, 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony, The Antique Collectors' Club, 1994, p.140.
16. Letter to St Ives Times from Peter Lanyon, 1955.
17. Quoted in Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, St Ives Artists series, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.6.
18. Peter Lanyon, "Abstractions and Constructions", TGA/TAV 213AB.
19. From Lionel Miskin's recording, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, *op.cit.*, p.31.
20. Borlase Smart's influence is mentioned in passing in Peter Davies, St Ives Revisited, Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994, p.111; Andrew Cross, Painting the Warmth of the Sun, St Ives Artists 1939-75, The Lutterworth Press, 1984, second edition, 1995, p.77; Margaret Garlake, *op.cit.*, 1998, p.14 and Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: At the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.28. None of these authors suggest that Smart remained



an influence after Lanyon's introduction to Adrian Stokes and modernism (1937-39).

21. "A sort of English Concarneau" is Stanhope Forbes' description of Newlyn after his arrival in 1884. Their work was characterised by academic draughtsmanship, the use of a square brush (also favoured by Borlase Smart), a muted palette, and closely observed tonal discipline. Forbes founded the Newlyn School of Painting in 1899. By 1900, the Paris trained "Lamorna" Birch (a prolific painter of water, tall cliffs and sunlit valleys and an early inspiration for Lanyon) had settled in Lamorna Cove, four miles from Newlyn. Laura and Harold Knight, Charles Simpson and even A.J. Munnings soon followed. After the First World War, Simpson and Birch spent more time in St Ives: the former running a painting school from the Porthmeor Studios and the latter becoming chairman of the St Ives Society of Artists in the 1930s. The division and rivalry between the Newlyn and St Ives School can be exaggerated.

22. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.24. Borlase Smart: The Technique of Seascape Painting, 1934. Revised edition published by Watson-Guption Publications, New York, 1969, p.16.

23. Conversation with author, 14th August, 1995.

24. Peter Lanyon: Script for Recorded Illustrated Lecture, British Council, "The Artist talks about his Painting", no date, TAV 526 AB.

25. Peter Lanyon interviewed by Lionel Miskin, 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.24.

26. Rhodesia is now Zimbabwe and Zambia. An account of this trip is given in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.29. It was not Lanyon's first trip abroad as he had visited the Netherlands in 1937.

27. Margaret Garlake, "The Letters of Peter Lanyon to Naum Gabo", The Burlington Magazine, 1995, pp.233-41.

28. Peter Lanyon interviewed by Lionel Miskin, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.29.

29. Ibid., p.29.

30. Ibid., p.29.

31. Ibid., p.29. Recording his admiration for the indigenous black Africans, Lanyon commented that the "Europeans with their sort of flowered dresses [looked]...inhibited, tight and pale next to the black African children."

32. Margaret Garlake believes that the exhibition took place in mid-June 1938, just before the family returned home. M. Garlake, op.cit., 1998, p.15. Chris Stephens has identified the gallery from an unidentified newspaper cutting in the papers of the late Lilian Lanyon as the President Street studio of Zaida Bullock. The reviewer noted "a sure eye for colour with a marked preference for subdued tones..." Peter Lanyon: at the edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.31.

33. Smart had asked Wilhemina Barns-Graham to introduce him to Nicholson and Hepworth. The event was recalled in a letter (8th October 1984) from B-G to Dr David Brown, compiler of the chronology of the St Ives artists' colony for the 1985 Tate Gallery exhibition catalogue: "Borlase Smart was an academic painter and it is to his credit in these last years of his life he had an ever increasing open mind, tremendously energetic and busy devoting himself to widen the society with "new blood" and arranging travelling exhibitions at home and abroad...After many talks together, Borlase thought it deplorable having artists living in the area of the calibre of Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth not exhibiting in the St Ives Society of Artists...He was primarily an enthusiast and this is the word I used when preparing the way for Borlase with my telephone call to Ben Nicholson,



- himself an enthusiast and a feeling for people he'd call "very alive". Borlase immediately followed up this introduction and returned to my studio with his success. B.N. and B.H. had agreed to exhibit at the gallery! He later came in for some harsh criticism from his colleagues for "bringing in the moderns with their rubbish"! He was quite undaunted, passionate for knowledge - eager to learn, for sharing and understanding of art, however much in contrast to his own work." St Ives, 1939-64, Tate Gallery Publications, revised edition, 1996, p.102. For evidence of Nicholson and Hepworth's involvement see the Exhibition catalogues of the St Ives Society of Artists, Spring, Summer and Autumn 1945: items 402, 404, 408 for sale in the Book Gallery, catalogue, 15, January 1999.
34. Show Day was an annual event (held in March) which continued a practice developed by the Newlyn painters. Artists who had prepared work for the Royal Academy's spring exhibition traditionally opened their studios to friends and visitors. In St Ives this had developed into a series of group exhibitions to which the public was invited. On Smart's suggestion, the 1945 Show Day was changed from a Thursday to a Saturday "so that the man-in-the-street could see for himself the works by these "foreigners" who have come to reside in their midst." Ibid., p.103. The Western Echo, 10th March, 1945. Lanyon had painted Ypres on a holiday to Belgium and Holland in the spring of 1937.
35. St Ives Times, 22nd March 1946; The Western Echo, 23rd March, 1946.
36. Marion Whybrow: St Ives, 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony, Antique Collectors' Club, Suffolk, 1994; p.221.
37. Letter from Lanyon to St Ives Times, August 1945; quoted in Whybrow, op.cit., p.121.
38. Letters from Harry Rountree to The Western Echo, starting on the 21st September, 1946: "This modern racket started in France; it rotted French art - in France it is now dead...Young men, drop it - get back to work and sweet sanity". Borlase Smart, Guido Morris and Bryan Wynter defended the position of modernism in St Ives in the following week's paper (28.9.46). Rountree resumed his offensive by attacking Smart (5.10.46): "Surely this brand of tolerance commands no respect..." The following week (12.10.46) saw ten letters published, including one from Lanyon, all critical of Rountree.
39. The correspondence closed with the publication of the next edition of The Western Echo, 19th October, 1946. Both Rountree and Smart had letters published which re-stated their views.
40. See microfiche copy of the minute book of the Penwith Society, Tate Gallery Archives.
41. Tribute by Leonard Fuller to Borlase Smart published in the Penwith Society's first exhibition catalogue, June 1949. Fuller had known Borlase Smart while serving in the army during the First World War and had moved to St Ives in 1938. He was a founder member of the Penwith Society and its first Chairman.
42. Borlase Smart, op.cit., preface, p.7.
43. Ibid., p.7.
44. Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.159. Canney, an artist and close friend of Lanyon's, studied at Redruth and Penzance Schools of Art, St Ives School of Painting and Goldsmiths. He became director of the Newlyn Orion Gallery.
45. Borlase Smart, op.cit., p.7.
46. January 1957. The 16 paintings in the exhibition have much in common with American abstract expressionism.
47. Undated hand-written note, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.168.
48. Borlase Smart, op.cit., p.38.
49. Ibid, p.19. To make his meaning clearer, Smart drew an ellipse over



a seascape study. The lines of composition of rock forms, especially where they form larger masses, fall into definite planes of recession and lead the eye to the focusing point of the picture.

50. See Peter Lanyon, "The Artist Talks about his Painting", British Council, recorded talk, 1963, TGA/TAV 526; Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.169.

51. Both Martin Holman (in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land, and Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992 p.64) and Sheila Lanyon (in conversation 26th August, 1996) assert that Lanyon visited and admired the Modern Art in the United States exhibition at the Tate Gallery in January 1956. Interestingly, de Kooning's most atmospheric landscape based paintings such as Bolton Landing and Parc Rosenberg were produced in 1957 and 1958. Patrick Heron has contended that the Americans may not have been as innovative and uninfluenced by current trends in European painting as their chief apologists would have us believe: "The British Influence on New York", Arts Guardian, October 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1974. The issue of the influence of the American Abstract Expressionists on Lanyon and other "middle generation" artists is discussed in chapter seven.

52. Borlase Smart, op.cit., 1969 edition, p.23.

53. Ibid., conclusion, p.141.

54. Ibid., p.28; the dimensions of Rough Weather are not given.

55. Tate Gallery Acquisitions, 1968-9; quoted in Tom Cross, Painting the Warmth of the Sun: St Ives Artists, 1939-75, op.cit., 1984. Second edition, 1995, p.124. John Wells, a close contemporary of Lanyon in St Ives, influenced by both Nicholson and Gabo, described the constructions as "three dimensional studies of sketches in preparation for a two dimensional work". Letter to author, 12th June, 1996.

56. Lanyon left detailed hand-written notes describing his research into "loose boundary hydraulics...rivers, estuaries and harbours in the U.K. and abroad; basic research on waves and on the mechanism underlying the transport of bed material and suspended solids." From the "Report of the Hydraulics Research Board", H.M. Stationary Office, quoted by Lanyon and facsimile reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.296.

57. Lanyon struggled to find a visual two-dimensional equivalent to illustrate a complex and technical area of study: "It became increasingly clear to me after visiting Walingford Hydraulics Laboratory that it was impossible for me as a layman to illustrate the variety and complexity of the science of Loose Boundary Hydraulics. I conceived my duty to be concerned with a general background alluding to but not representing the problems of this science." Ibid., p.296.

58. Ibid., p.299. Lanyon wrote that "because of their visual nature there is resemblance between the final work and the exercises...the image became stronger and less variable until the final state when only minor detail and technical alterations could be made..."

59. Ibid., p.296.

60. Ibid., p.296.

61. Smart, op.cit., p.20.

62. Illustrated in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.203.

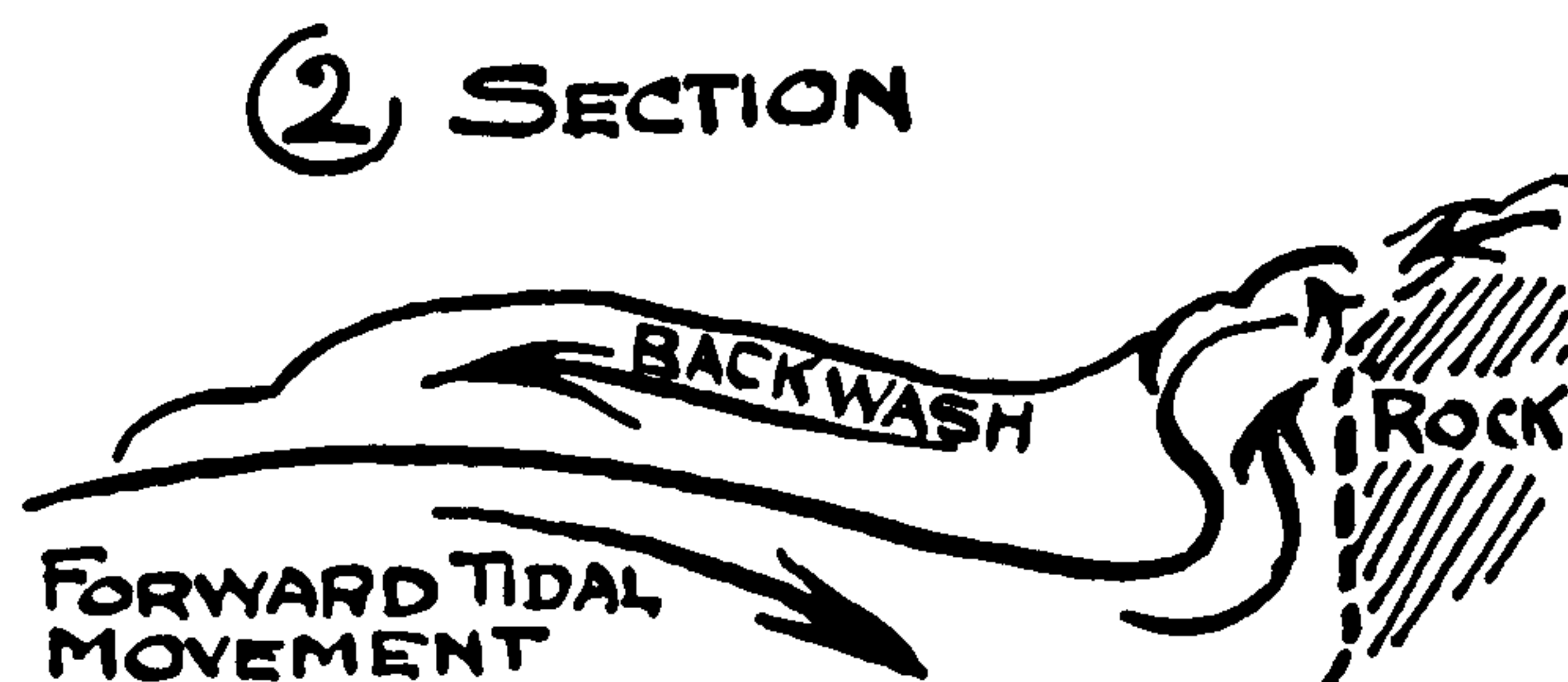
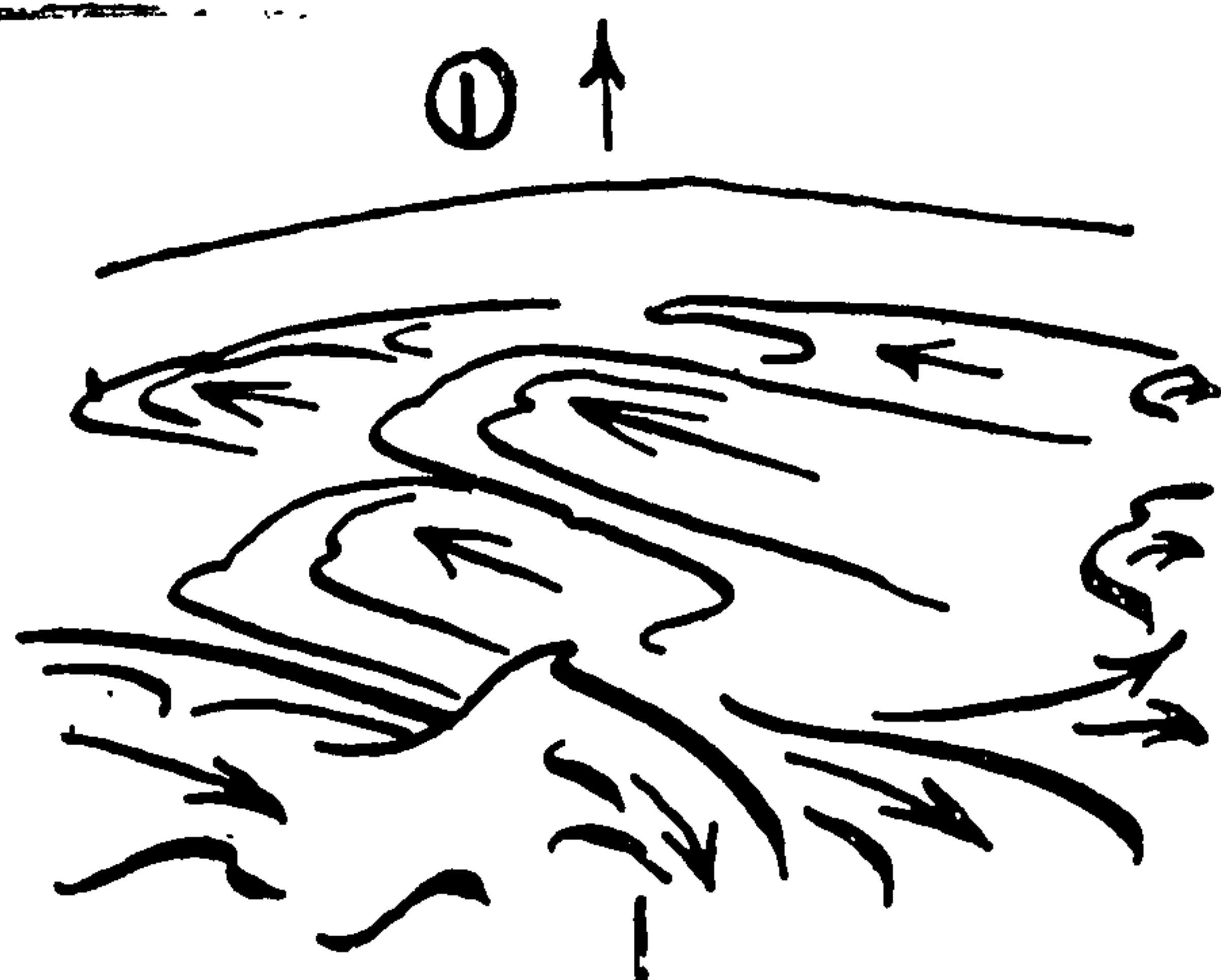
63. Smart, op.cit., plate II, p.66.

64. Smart, op.cit., plate IV, depicting a receding wave rebounding and meeting an oncoming one, resulting in a mass of water being forced up. The idea of "rush-back meets oncoming breaker, top of which is forced in mass of broken water and foam" is echoed in the principles explored by Lanyon's Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands. P.67.

65. Smart, op.cit., Plate IV, p.68 and Plate XXII, p.81.



66. Smart, op.cit., Plates XI and XVI, p.74.
67. Lanyon's notes, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.300.
68. Ibid., p.300.
69. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aiden Ellis Publishing, Henley-on-Thames, 1971, p.25.
70. Lanyon's notes, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.3.
71. Sheila Lanyon has a coffee table covered with some of the tiles found wanting in the quality control process.
72. Lanyon's notes, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.298.
73. Smart, op.cit., p.54.



74. Smart, op.cit., p.53.
75. Lanyon's notes, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.299.
76. Lanyon, quoted in Marion Whybrow, St Ives, 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony, op.cit., p.141. Lady Nancy Astor, opening the exhibition, replied: "While the paintings themselves have done nothing to me, the artist's speech has done a great deal. For the first time I can see there is something going on inside. I recognise sincerity and vision when I see them and Mr Lanyon is a man of very great sincerity."
77. Smart, op.cit., p.7.



## **Chapter Two**

# **COLOUR, FORM AND THE CARVING PRINCIPLE: THE INFLUENCE OF ADRIAN STOKES**

Lanyon was introduced to contemporary directions in English painting by the writer and art critic, Adrian Stokes, in 1937. Their first meeting, a chance encounter which distantly echoes the story of Cimabue's discovery of Giotto, took place when Stokes spotted Lanyon painting beside the road that runs between St Ives and St Just. Stokes stopped his car, inspected the painting (Landscape near Morvah, 1937) and immediately negotiated its purchase. Although Stokes' contacts with Lanyon were largely informal, the writer's influence on the young painter was considerable. Stokes' sophisticated knowledge of painting, his ardent admiration for Cézanne (it was probably Stokes who introduced Lanyon to Cézanne's technique of a shifting, mobile viewpoint) and his familiarity with the more modern painters and sculptors made a strong impression. Lanyon abandoned his idea of pursuing a career as a commercial artist and committed himself to painting: "Meet Adrian & read Colour and Form. Decision to give up Posters".<sup>1</sup>

Stokes' growing reputation as a critic and expert on Quattrocento art had been established by three volumes written before the Second World War (The Quattro Cento, 1932; Stones of Rimini, 1934; and Colour and Form, 1937).<sup>2</sup> He had first visited St Ives in 1936 for a painting holiday with the artist Adrian Kent and his early paintings were unpretentious still-lives and landscapes of Cornwall and Italy which he modestly dismissed as "my fuzzy paintings of bottles, olive trees and nudes, dim as blotting paper."<sup>3</sup> On a second visit to Cornwall, a year later, he befriended Lanyon's sister, Mary.

Through her he got to know me, then he saw one of my paintings and bought it. He helped me a lot. I was about nineteen and he suggested I should go to the Euston Road. If it hadn't been for his suggestion I wouldn't have gone there and I wouldn't have met this exceedingly good training.<sup>4</sup>

Although unhappy in London, spending only two months<sup>5</sup> at the Euston Road School in 1939 (Stokes had been a pupil in 1937), Lanyon benefited from "the careful, structural concern" of William Coldstream's precisely observed painting and Victor Pasmore's "extreme enthusiasm and beautiful use of paint".<sup>6</sup> Pasmore's paintings of the Thames at Chiswick acknowledge Whistler and Turner in their acute sensitivity to colour and atmosphere. His art had evolved towards a combination of observed realism and painterly abstraction, a sensitivity that Lanyon would embrace later in his career.



Lanyon's Euston Road-influenced figurative sketches and paintings (for example, the seated Nude, 24 x 18in., oil on canvas, 1939, Private Collection, Pl.11) reflect the School's belief that the practice of art should be based on direct observation and the mastery of standards of craftsmanship appropriate to this requirement. None of this contradicted what he had been taught by Borlase Smart or at the Penzance School of Art. However, the post-impressionist realism of the Euston Road Art School with its almost puritanical denial of surrealism or painterly abstraction did not influence Lanyon for long and when he left London he decided to pursue mainly non-figurative painting forms.

As Lanyon's experience broadened, he combined a growing interest in the various forms of landscape painting with experimentation in methods of abstracting from nature. Encouraged by Stokes and his first wife, the constructivist Margaret Mellis, the pictures of 1937-1939 demonstrate a willingness to experiment with the pictorial language and syntax of modernism, evoking the presence of an object by use of vivid fragments of colour and exploring the relationships of shapes as a means of strengthening compositional structure. Stokes' interest in Lanyon's work resulted in a more complex arrangement, composition and representation of visual matter. His accessibility, willingness to engage in dialogue, was a refreshing change from the student-teacher relationship that Lanyon had previously experienced at Borlase Smart's hands.

Paintings from the immediate pre-war period show a growing awareness of how naturally abstract forms suggested by a sea wall, a cliff face, or a breakwater could act as the base for a composition, allowing a degree of abstraction appropriate to depictions of places where sea, sky and land meet - without eliminating the particulars by which such images are recalled. This phase of rapid artistic development culminated in a painting holiday to Aix-en-Provence in the spring of 1938 where Cézanne's influence seemed to offer some means of welding together observation and everyday reality, as taught at the Euston Road School, with Lanyon's own poetic feelings for the countryside. Cézanne can be seen quite clearly in the study of Mont St.Victoire (20 x 24in., oil on board, Private Collection, Pl.10) where the possibility of constructing an image based on the formalization



of landscape motifs is more fully explored.

#### LANYON AND THE "CARVING AESTHETIC"

Although Lanyon always acknowledged Stokes' support and interest in his painting, he played down any direct link between his work and Stokes' writing: "He was a really invaluable man - not an influence - but an important person who could understand me."<sup>7</sup> Lanyon's distancing himself from the theories developed in Stokes' writing is odd given that many of Stokes' ideas frequently surface in his works. The Cubist fragmentation and multi-perspectival orientation of a painting such as Porthleven (96 x 48in., oil on board, 1951, Tate Gallery, Pl.91) echoes Stokes' belief that Cubist forms expressed a "tactile sense in virtue of the multiplicity of planes".<sup>8</sup>

Sheila Lanyon remarked that "Peter referred to Colour and Form as his "Bible" and often re-read key passages."<sup>9</sup> His copy of the book bears witness to careful scrutiny, with many sections underlined and annotated. Friendship with Stokes brought him into contact with the Italian art and humanism of the early Renaissance: Luciano Laurana's Courtyard at Urbino, Alberti's unfinished Malatesta Temple at Rimini (along with Agostino di Duccio's superb low relief carvings inside) and the paintings of Giotto and Piero della Francesca were all singled out for special praise in The Quattro Cento and The Stones of Rimini. Stokes also introduced Lanyon to contemporary art movements in England and Paris where "a new plastic freedom invaded and revived the carving approach".<sup>10</sup>

Stokes used the term "carving aesthetic" to describe the approach of Quattro Cento artists such as Agostino di Duccio towards their material.<sup>11</sup> According to Stokes at no other time have the materials that artists used been so significant in determining the aesthetic object. For Stokes, Quattro Cento art meant "fifteenth century Italian art in which fantasies connected with material (always in the last resort stone) are directly and emphatically expressed."<sup>12</sup> He believed that the true artist, the carver, responds to the "otherness" of his stone, looking for a form that is already present in the marble to make what he imagines is already there reveal itself.<sup>13</sup>



For such an artist, "the materials are the actual objects of inspiration, the stocks for the deeper fantasies."<sup>14</sup> His creative activity is a thinning out of the stone block, allowing the material qualities of the object being fashioned to play a determining role. Conscious as he must be of the grain, the hardness and points of fracture in the block, he must be respectful of his material to coax from it a shape lying within, revealed by the cutting away, the reducing process of stone carving.<sup>15</sup>

The Stones of Rimini can be read as a hymn of praise for white stone, low relief carving and its manifestation in light. For Stokes, carving is a male process while modelling or moulding is a female process,<sup>16</sup> and his book concludes with the assertion that the future of art is directly linked to the values of carving and its shaping of our perceptions of space.<sup>17</sup> His encounter with the work of Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth at the Lefevre Gallery in London led him to write a 1933 review for The Spectator which embraced their art as the embodiment of the carving aesthetic.<sup>18</sup> These three soon became close friends, discussing art theory and sharing an appreciation of fifteenth century Italian painting and sculpture. Nicholson and Stokes regularly played tennis at the Hampstead Tennis Club and the artist even designed the jacket for the first edition of The Stones of Rimini. In Colour and Form Stokes praised Nicholson as an artist whose "work is the fruit of pure carving conception; indeed these paintings are developments from previous and concurrent work in the cuttings of similar designs in wood".<sup>19</sup> Stokes' praise encompassed Hepworth's sculpture as the realisation of his idealised concept of true carving through her rediscovery of the possibilities offered by stone.<sup>20</sup>

The connection between the carving principle and Lanyon's work does not reveal itself immediately - particularly as the artist is known more for his paintings than his sculpture or constructions. However, Stokes held that the carving aesthetic was a fuller resolution of the integrative process of art, a process which he characterised as a drama of individual and cultural identity. This aesthetic could, he argued, be realised in any artistic medium. Carving, according to Stokes, was the concrete archetype of all artistic creation:



The face of mankind, the symbol of living...the creating that turns emotion's multiplicity into concrete and particular and individual acts.<sup>21</sup>

The carving that Stokes analyses in Stones of Rimini is all in relief, an enlivening of the surface that could easily be assimilated into painting. Of the contemporary art on which Stokes commented, it was not sculpture but Nicholson's painting that exemplified most unproblematically his aesthetic of carving. Hepworth's carving exposed the problematic sexual tension inherent in an aesthetic ideal that was rooted in the notion of a masculine force activating female matter so as to give birth to a new male offspring. Stokes envisaged the return of the carving ideal in metaphorical rather than literal terms. Writing about the renaissance of this aesthetic in an essay on Henry Moore, Stokes argued that "...it was a carving approach to the canvas that underlay the modern movement in painting."<sup>22</sup> For Stokes the virtual materialisation of space on the surface of Cézanne's paintings constituted the most compelling realisation of the carving ideal in modern times.

Much has been made of Lanyon's "Constructivist" side, but the "carving" aspect was exceptionally well developed and should not be seen as a contradictory tendency. Lanyon explored the landscape to reveal its inner forms and structures. Joe Keene, one of Lanyon's pupils, remarked that he worked "in an excavating sort of way, a process, not just putting on".<sup>23</sup> Instead of having pictorial tradition dictate to nature, he tried hard to dissolve the artistic ego to allow the mythic landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary to emerge. Lanyon was fully engaged in the process of carving the landscape: through drawing, making constructions, layering on paint and scraping it off, his work might be thought of as an excavation, beginning with the familiar, digging down through layers of memories and representations towards the primary bedrock, laid down centuries even millennia ago, and then working up again toward the light of contemporary recognition.<sup>24</sup>

Stokes valued the carving approach at the expense of the modeller in clay, the bronze caster, or iron founder. He believed that the contemporary emphasis on "manufacture and plasticity"<sup>25</sup> represented a violation of the



materials, an act analogous to the untimely ripping of the child from its mother's womb.<sup>26</sup> The "modeller" uses his materials to give expression to his imagination, moulding the clay and building up forms, "he imbues spatial objects with the animus and calculation of inner life".<sup>27</sup> However, for all his success in projecting a "lively feeling", the modeller is producing little more than "an augmentation upon the surface, a mere outwardness".<sup>28</sup> Instead of modelled forms, Stokes valued works which did not veil themselves with a rhythmic music of forms, but presented the "mass effect": a "feeling that here you witness a concatenation, a simultaneity, that the object is exposed to you, all at once."<sup>29</sup>

Lanyon attempted to achieve this feeling of "simultaneity" in all his landscapes. He saw his role as that of an artist who had rejected the conventions of landscape, while remaining recognisably in the country. The later paintings often appear to have been "put down in a throwaway fashion".<sup>30</sup> In fact he was a very cerebral artist who prepared his work carefully, maintaining "the primary importance of knowing before making".<sup>31</sup> He located the basis of a fully resolved work of an art in a sense of spatiality that was optical and existed outside temporal constraints.<sup>32</sup> In an essay written in 1959, Abstractions and Constructions, Lanyon wrote, "my aim is to hold experience in time and suffer it through until it is fixed in space, until it is exhausted."<sup>33</sup>

Lanyon shared Stokes' view of the importance of unifying form with content to create a synthesis of memory, fact and sensation. Stokes believed that "a good picture gives its all in a fraction of a second...space is simultaneity."<sup>34</sup> In order to make a statement which crystallised all his perceptions of the particularity and the actuality of place, Lanyon would take long walks on the coastal paths leading from St Ives, ride his motorbike recklessly across the network of roads within the triangle of St Ives-Penzance-Land's End, and eventually find a way of getting into the atmosphere itself (he took up gliding in 1959). All this was part of his search for "a moment of vision".<sup>35</sup> He wanted to achieve some totality of awareness, so that the blur of hawthorn, heather, gorse, bracken, rocks, granite cottages, harbour walls, light reflected up and off the sea, endless oceanic blues and deep viridians of pasture, could all be focused into



"the central impulse of the creative act" and the creation of "a final statement which is right in all senses and in which consciousness of self and medium are lost in resolution".<sup>36</sup>

Lanyon once described his method of working in a letter to his friend, the artist John Wells:

It appears to me that I must deny the accepted image of landscape or face or bottle, anything for that matter, and construct a new image which relates to neither, but to all. This would at first reading mean that I must become abstract.<sup>37</sup>

The "new image" was reached through complete identification with a place by walking, climbing, "moving in a dancing sense within that place",<sup>38</sup> examining the flora, fauna, earth and rocks. Having achieved some sense of the "substance of the place", he would proceed to draw a number of views, avoiding the temptation to fix on a single static viewpoint, but "coming on it unawares...letting it get up my side, in my guts, in my head and to tickle my feet".<sup>39</sup> These sensory and visual experiences form the "space and time sequences" which are then reconstructed into a pictorial reality. However, early impressions and sketches are dismissed as largely "valueless" (apart from having "some colour relationship to the original experience"). It is only when the artist is "assured of something working deep down inside" that the final image can be laid: "this image will often refer to experiences forgotten and previously disconnected from the original motif experience. Perhaps this proves that the motif is only an answer to a constructive process within - it is the liberator".<sup>40</sup>

Just as the sculptor carves and rubs his stone to elicit the shapes which his eye has sown in the matrix, ensuring that it is his material and not the figure which has come to life, so Lanyon believed that he was digging into his sensory and cognitive experience of place to reveal the inner core of the Cornish landscape. His work recalls the Freudian metaphor of psychology as an excavation of the mind to uncover the past buried deep in the psyche. Lanyon used the scraped down textures of paint and hardboard to evoke the geological sandwich of the Cornish rock strata. John Berger,



an early supporter of Lanyon's work, discussed his presentation of the Cornish landscape as involving much more than the visual description of the terrain. It as though Lanyon is examining a lump of ore - to fully appreciate its qualities and discover the precious metal in its centre the artist has to examine it from many different angles before cutting into the material substance of the maternal block. Only then can the inert and indifferent lump of matter be transfigured into an object that carries a psychic charge.<sup>41</sup>

By crystallising all sensory, cognitional and conceptual experience of a place into a single frame Lanyon came close to achieving Stokes' "mass effect":

My painting is the revelation, a turning outward of experience - a making of a time process-in-space. Paint represents experience and makes it actual. I do not start with the idea, but the experience. My source is sensuous...Also plastic form is arrived at, not by modelling with chiaroscuro and fixed perspective but by sensory paint manipulation. My aim so far as I can see is to make a face, an "actuality", a "thingness" for experience".<sup>42</sup>

Lanyon's descriptions of his sense of physical immersion in space, place and time are keys to understanding how he escaped the confines of landscape painting based on perspective and scenic views. In his notes for the 1961 St Ives Carnival Programme Lanyon wrote:

The construction of the work is the continual substitution of form and colour for specific experience, the artist's concern. His love is not for the subject but for the problems of form, construction and colour, the subject reveals itself in this process.<sup>43</sup>

He would start with an intuitive idea and then allow planes of chromatic and textural relationships, interlocking configurations of multi-referential forms, to determine the final composition. The near abstract diagrammatic fish-eye lens perspective of Trevalgan (48 x 45in., oil on masonite, 1951, Witte Memorial Museum, San Antonio, Texas, Pl.93) depicts the hill with its rocky

outcrops and stone walls both in plan and section in the manner of medieval cartography. The landscape is mapped out by lines which serve both formal and figurative functions. There is a strong sense of the picture being divided into compartments within the central circular shape; the eye is directed by differently-coloured scratched and painted lines which also represent the field boundaries characteristic of this part of Cornwall. Lines traced across space serve as signifiers of movement and time, a form of self-inscription and a codifier of emblems and shapes whose meaning can only be understood by apprehension of the internal logic within the painting. This simultanism, conflating time, topography and depth, accords neatly with Stokes' belief that the "emblematic effect" of the carver's work should make manifest a generalised symbol for the inner life of both epoch and artist.

Stokes found in the art that manifested the carving principle a completeness of life summed up as a "timeless presence". He preferred to see the rhythm or process of life as an emergence projected by the artist into the stone, minimizing the temporal element by visualising it presented on an object's surface:

Carving creates a face for the stone, as agriculture for the earth, as man for woman. Modelling is more purely plastic creation: it does not disclose, as a face, the significance of what already exists.<sup>44</sup>

Lanyon believed that his painting revealed the timelessness of the Cornish landscape, its ability to sustain and regenerate life, its capacity to absorb and integrate all of man's efforts to either harness its forces or exploit its natural resources.

I think my identification with this country is not that the fields go off into the distance and stop at the edge of a hill or something like that. I am much more interested in the fact that perhaps this hedge I am walking along has been touched by the shoulders of earlier generations. They are man made and they have a physical proportion to man.<sup>45</sup>



A deep and sometimes oppressive sense of history permeates many of Lanyon's paintings. The landscape is depicted as a network of residues and remnants formed by its geological, political and religious history. According to Stokes "we scan our past for our present"<sup>46</sup> and a knowledge of history is a fundamental human necessity:

The need for the psyche to project into its surroundings a history of its development, to receive from this projection an image of the psyche's architecture constructed upon firm and ancient foundations.<sup>47</sup>

In emphasising his belief that painting should "remind people of their roots"<sup>48</sup>, Lanyon used Cornwall's historical and geological foundations to explore his own underlying psychic structures as part of a process of self-discovery and integration.

#### CARVING, ANIMISM AND SYMBOLS

The carving artist's work was cherished by Stokes for its "emblematic effect", which he imagined as the ability to create a generalized symbol for the "inner life" of both epoch and individual.<sup>49</sup> This inner life bespeaks the importance of psychoanalysis as a means to uncovering the substratum of art. Stokes had a profound interest in Freud and in 1930 started a seven-year period of analysis under Melanie Klein. The Freudian theory of the subconscious, the identification of an inner, animal world, in which repression would create neurosis, became extremely important in his art criticism. He began to generalise tentatively in Colour and Form on the importance of the subconscious drive in releasing artistic creativity:

Where lies the perennial strength of this fantasy? It is, of course, all the figures of the inner life, of the unconscious, that are shown as a fixture, as one harmonious family, steadfast, completed as an open rose, open, revealed.<sup>50</sup>

Stokes believed that painting was the act of portraying various aspects of the artist's inner world and of the world outside in visual form.<sup>51</sup>

Lanyon's use of archetypal symbols may have been inspired by his reading of Stokes' works. According to Andrew Causey, Stokes had introduced Lanyon to the idea that the world in general is animate and that every natural object has its spirit or soul.<sup>52</sup> The following passage in Colour and Form was underlined by Lanyon:

Art is the mirror of life, just because the creative process mirrors and concentrates the character common to all the processes of living, namely, the identification of inner states with specific objects animate or inanimate in the outside world. The conversion entailed when fantasy life is attached by the conscious mind to the world of reality.<sup>53</sup>

Much of Lanyon's work can be interpreted as a struggle to integrate the artist's inner and outer worlds, as this letter which explains the genesis of the Surfacing series (1947-9) makes explicit:

All this series have left the inner forms of the mines and of seeds and begun to evolve a relationship of these forms to the outer forms of the surfaces.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout his career Lanyon used composite and double images which embody the conscious and the unconscious, a synthesis of the aesthetics and psychoanalysis found in Stokes' sexualised mythology of the carving process.

Post-modernist critical theory has warned against searching for objective truths in literature, history or art and it is important to recognise the speculative nature of interpretations which view Lanyon's paintings as straightforward maps of his mind. With this proviso, the different layers within each painting can be related to aspects of the artist's unconscious which might also resonate with images of universal significance. Lanyon himself indicated the appropriateness of a psychological reading of his work when he wrote:

My problem is to represent precisely the experiences which are mostly at the level below normal consciousness, that is to say they are not



revealed unless by a process of painting them out.<sup>55</sup>

He understood that the unconscious is organised in an intricate network of associations and metaphorical meanings which could be brought to the surface during the act of painting:

I have, before I start [painting], a very strong sense that may be a purely physical sense - it may be tactile on the end of the fingers or something of that sort...I think an image [is] at it were, a part of the paint and the painting itself - something which is coming through.<sup>56</sup>

Archetypal forms and images which function both on a sensory and symbolic level are used creatively and freely throughout Lanyon's oeuvre.

The immediate post-war romanticism of Blue Horse Truant (21 x 15in., ink, crayon and gouache on paper, 1945, Private Collection) sees Lanyon depicting himself as a colt looking back at the farm from which it has escaped; the imagery vividly conveys the paradox of the artist's need for freedom and his longing to return to the womb-like security and shelter of the enveloping, maternal hill after the trauma of war.<sup>57</sup> Stokes wrote that "in art the mother must be recreated through the forms of the integrated ego-figure to which she already belongs as introjected objects".<sup>58</sup> This idea relates to Melanie Klein's belief that the infant's lost relationship with its mother was of the greatest importance in providing the dynamic for human creativity.<sup>59</sup> Lanyon's attachment to the Cornish environment may, at an unconscious level, relate to a continual urge to return to an original state of cathexis with his mother. The landscape serves as a metonymy for this primal unconscious desire for fusion with the displaced object.<sup>60</sup>

The Generation Series (1945-47) is linked by a common thread of ideas connected to fertility, the Cornish earth as protective womb, creativity and birth. Barry Dodge has interpreted the hill in The Yellow Boat in Freudian terms as "representing the part-object of the mother's breast" while the subterranean pool and boat can be seen in terms of Jungian symbolism as representing the unconscious.<sup>61</sup> Some of the configurations and signs have

a universal and immediate significance: the mineshaft/crucifixion which runs through the middle of St Just suggests that even in the midst of physical tragedy (the Levant mining disaster of 1919) and economic collapse the promise of regeneration and redemption through Christ's sacrifice on the cross somehow remains valid.<sup>62</sup> Mining served another purpose as a metaphor for creativity:

I used the mining as a double through a process of sublimation. My concept of creative work was the surfacing of deep and almost unconscious memories, a kind of revelation on the surface...Man knows a mine in him...<sup>63</sup>

There are other unconscious emanations - such as the vivid triangle of blue and red which appears as a window in the green ground of the same painting - that contain a private meaning, incapable of resolution without being deciphered by the artist.

The metaphor which Lanyon returns to most frequently involves a vitalist conception of artistic creativity depicted in Stokesian terms of endless intercourse: the masculine sea element caressing, rubbing and ultimately penetrating the yielding, feminine body-in-landscape Cornish coastline. In his later paintings the theme is reworked to absorb the Europa myth so that the landscape doubles as a female figure, while the bull takes the form of uncontrollable, primitive forces in nature represented by vortical areas of intense painterly activity rotating around an area of calm stillness (Offshore, 1957, Rosewall, 1960, and the Birmingham Mural, 1963).<sup>64</sup>

#### ALFRED WALLIS - THE CARVING PRIMITIVE AND LANYON

Stokes was a great admirer of Alfred Wallis' work and regarded him as an artist who possessed an intuitive carving vision. Wallis used household and boat paints, working on cardboard supplied by Mr Baughan, the local greengrocer, or on pieces of wood salvaged from the boatyard. Stokes owned several of Wallis' paintings and particularly admired the way the old fisherman painted the sea with earth colours, white and black, "colours



which if gathered up, will equal in hue or tone or by some sort of affinity, the colour of his boats."<sup>65</sup>

According to Stokes, Wallis conceived the sea in relation to what lay beneath it - sand, rock and fish. Not for Wallis the blue-green glassy surface of the sea reflecting the sky, the black-brown solidity of rocks resisting the sea's cold fury by breaking the backs of rolling waves, or the architectonic area of azure sky and fluffy clouds to mediate a composition along a horizon set three-quarters of the way up the painting. Instead, Wallis visualised boats as "a solid darkness from the depth, the final fruit of an organic process",<sup>66</sup> achieving tonal affinity with their surroundings: a red-brown boat will be matched against a dirty white-brown sea. The adjacency of colour and tone creates a strong interactive bond between boat and sea. Slight variations are all that is needed to convey meaning.

In Colour and Form Stokes gives a detailed analysis of a picture by Wallis which recalls a voyage to Labrador (Voyage to Labrador, oil on board, 1936, Pl.13).<sup>67</sup> Flecks of white paint suggest melting ice in a slush-brown sea and tinges of red on the boat create a feeling of comparative warmth and security on the vast expanse of ocean. In the background Wallis has painted icebergs as looming presences against the black and green depths of the night. Relying on his imagination to recollect voyages and places, Wallis substituted the plein air methods of "real artists" for an intuitive grasp of the actual substance of sea, rock, grass or boat.

Wallis is not directly mentioned by Lanyon as an influence in any of his broadcasts or notes (although, according to Michael Canney, Wallis could appear as an accidental image in a painting - on one occasion Lanyon jokingly pointed out, "Look! There's old Alfred [Wallis] looking out at you, with his cap on").<sup>68</sup> He clearly cared deeply about Wallis' place in the history of the St Ives Art Colony and wrote "as a personal acquaintance" to The Cornish Review in 1949 to denounce the accuracy of Sven Berlin's biography which had only just been published.<sup>69</sup> Traces of Wallis can be found in many of Lanyon's works. West Penwith (11½ x 43in., oil on plywood, 1949, Eugene Rosenberg Collection), Fishboat (5½ x 21in., oil on board,



1946, Private Collection) and Clevedon Night (48 x 72in., oil and polystyrene on canvas, 1964, Private Collection) are among the pictures which share the elongated horizontality of Wallis' preferred format.

Wallis' varnish and boat paints were based on stand oil, which had a fast drying time, enabling him to work quickly and spontaneously. The relative simplicity of the compositions, the limited palette and the roughly dragged application of paint establish a general affinity appreciable in Lanyon's works of the early 1950s. He liked to grind his own colours and discovered that by using stand oil mixed with turps he could paint on different layers of pigment in a short space of time, often exploiting the incidental smearing which occurred as the brush was dragged across a tacky undercoat.<sup>70</sup> This technique can be traced back to Wallis' use of heavy impasto - as if the paint literally acted for the water - dragging one colour over the other in horizontal strokes.

The fact that the "innocent eye" of Wallis' vision, with its great feeling for the motion, moods and texture of the sea, should influence the young Lanyon is hardly surprising given the high esteem in which Wallis was held by two of Lanyon's mentors, Stokes and Ben Nicholson. Nicholson and Christopher Wood had famously "discovered" Wallis on a day trip to St Ives in August 1928. Both painters were much influenced by Wallis' unaffected primitivism and direct creative energy:

Using the materials nearest to hand is the motive and method of the first creative artist. Certainly his vision is a remarkable thing, with an intensity and depth of experience which makes it more than childlike...One only finds the influences one was looking for and I was certainly looking for that one.<sup>71</sup>

It has long been recognised that Nicholson had already begun to embrace "primitive" ideas before this first encounter with Wallis - see for example, Foothills, Cumberland, (oil on canvas, 1928, Tate Gallery) and Walton Wood Cottage no.1 (oil on canvas, 1928, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh).<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, he was impressed by the intuitive skill with which Wallis fitted his pictures onto scraps of cardboard, his innate



feeling for rhythm, and the strong geometry to his design.

Wallis used simple system compositional techniques which avoided the illusionism of linear perspective. Instead he would simply scale objects according to his own sense of their importance. These paintings gave Nicholson and Wood a new impetus in their search for pictorial immediacy and in their rejection of tired naturalism. His ability to work with unsophisticated materials on virtually any surface may also have inspired Nicholson to extend the range of artistic objects produced in the studio - perhaps encouraging him to make the earliest reliefs between December 1933 and March 1934.<sup>73</sup>

Lanyon would almost certainly have seen examples of Wallis' work in the collections built up by Adrian Stokes and Ben Nicholson. Sven Berlin records that on Show Day in 1940, when local artists opened their studios to the public, Nicholson, Hepworth and Lanyon visited the increasingly eccentric and paranoid Wallis at 3, Back Road West where he lived and worked.<sup>74</sup> They would have encountered a scene similar to that described by the painter Wilhemina Barns-Graham, a neighbour of Wallis in 1940:

It seemed grey and dirty, paintings everywhere, even the tabletop was a painting. Piled against the walls and in the doorway on the right-hand side panel were paintings one after another...with no interval between them from ceiling to floor, greys, blacks and greens on cream-painted panels.<sup>75</sup>

On another visit, shortly before he joined the R.A.F., Lanyon was able to purchase Saltash Bridge (oil on board, c.1938-40, Private Collection, Pl.14), but only after he had promised to read the Bible every day while he was in the services.<sup>76</sup> He learnt from Wallis that the gentry are coming down to the ferry, that the moon is pulling at the tide and the boats are dragging at their anchors. According to legend, he also asked how a specific effect had been achieved in the painting. Allegedly Wallis told the younger artist "to mind your own business".<sup>77</sup> Executed on a piece of table top, Wallis uses the bridge to establish a balance between the linked shores with their characteristic trees and single houses. The steam train conveys



a sense of movement across the top of the board, linking the two banks of the channel, while the recollection of the chain ferry and the boats riding at anchor in the shadow of the bridge demonstrates Wallis' unerring memory for detail. Such compositions were the products of his imagination and a response to his materials, although his themes clearly did come from observation. This may be what he meant by his nostalgic declaration that he painted "what used to Be...hout of my mery [memory]".<sup>78</sup> The paintings protest against the passage of time and ideas of progress.

Lanyon also individualised his past through his painting, paying tribute to his immersion in the remote and mysterious landscape of West Cornwall and, less frequently, his experience of unfamiliar places. The elongated compositional format of Saltash Bridge resembles one of his last paintings, Clevedon Night (48 x 72in., oil and polystyrene on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.218). Both paintings show a silvery-green nocturnal light on the sea; the Victorian architecture of Clevedon's pier performs the same function as Saltash bridge, mediating the viscous fluidity of the water. Wallis' moored boats find their echo in the horizontal movement of Lanyon's naked swimmer, while the solidly formed houses beneath the bridge become two collaged strips of polystyrene in Lanyon's composition. Stokes recalled a steady flow of visitors - "admirers of which at that time there were many" - in Wallis' final years before his death in the Madron Institution on 29th August 1942.<sup>79</sup>

An undated sketch of St Ives Harbour, (7 x 8in., pencil on paper, Private Collection, Pl.49) shows the influence of Wallis' system of drawing and perspective. In his transcription of three-dimensional reality onto the two-dimensional surface Lanyon has rendered the view in the simplest way possible by not differentiating spatial values or object equivalents. This is similar to Wallis' way of working within the two dimensional picture plane: This is Sain Fishery that use to be (oil and pencil on card, 16 x 23in., Private Collection) and the The Hold House Port Mear Square Island Port Mear Beach, (oil on cardboard, 12 x 15½in., Tate Gallery) illustrate how in this plane things can be large or small (depending on their relative importance to the artist), close together or far apart - the third dimension remains "undifferentiated".<sup>80</sup> In other words there is nothing in the drawing



that distinguishes between a flat and a voluminous object or between depthlessness and depth. A rectangle is made to stand for the cubic space of a house, with smaller squares standing for windows. Lanyon has drawn the picture as a visual journey which starts at the West Pier of the harbour and finishes by the Lighthouse on Smeaton's Pier. The two granite piers envelop the harbour, protect the tethered boats, and create a circular route. The composition is similar to Wallis' diagrammatic cartography of places as they would be experienced in a literal journey across space and over time. Line has a variable function: it can act as a configurational boundary, a two-dimensional orthographic projection, a one-dimensional elevation or a conceptual equivalent of an object.

It is difficult to assess how much Lanyon's later work owed to Wallis' Cornish primitivism. A painting like Porthleven (96 x 48in., oil on board, 1951, Tate Gallery, Pl.91) depicts the clock tower in elevation and the harbour with its three basins as if in plan, a vertiginous combination of many sights and viewpoints that recalls Wallis' St Ives Harbour and Godrevy Lighthouse (oil on card, c.1932-4, Pl.15). The boat formations rocking gently in Porthleven harbour create a rhythmic movement that complements the underlying abstract geometry of the work.<sup>81</sup> He was clearly interested in how Wallis was able to respond imaginatively to the paucity of his materials while conveying complex allegorical ideas within a strong narrative composition.

Lanyon's multi-perspectival imagery, his explorations of space, location and viewpoint probably owe as much to Nicholson, Gabo and his own desire to find a new way to present the landscape without conventional perspective, as they do to Wallis' "undifferentiated vision". By the time that he had reached a fully resolved landscape style in the early 1950s, he had dispensed with Wallis' childlike drawing and naive composition. Instead, differing concepts of spatial and perceptual values are allowed to coexist simultaneously in one work, reconciling the shallow space of cubism with the infinite depths of the landscape.

I wasn't satisfied with the tradition of painting landscape from one position only. I wanted to bring together all my feelings about the



landscape, and this meant breaking away from the usual method of representing space in a landscape painting - receding like a cone to a vanishing point. I wanted to find another way of organizing the space in a picture. For me, painting is not a flat surface. I've always believed that a painting gives an illusion of depth - things in it move backwards and forwards.<sup>82</sup>

More direct traces of Wallis' influence can be found in Lanyon's use of strongly evocative colour to describe the Cornish landscape. Wallis used very few colours - dark browns, shiny blacks, granite greys, metallic blues, creamy whites and a pungent lichen green. He told David Lewis who once supplied him with "rock colour and sand colour" yacht paint that "You don't want to use too many colours."<sup>83</sup> Lanyon's smoothly painted abstract works executed between 1946 and 1949, after his return from war service with the R.A.F., share the same tonal qualities as Wallis' work, relying chiefly on muted greys and dull greens. As Patrick Heron commented in the first extended piece of critical appreciation on Lanyon, "they had no vibration of colour; nor did they show any relish in the actual pigment, which has become a notable characteristic of the later Lanyon."<sup>84</sup> The limited palette employed by Wallis did not suit the more ambitious, immediate and physical landscape painting pursued by Lanyon. In 1959 he maintained that "the green field is for me the essential reality"<sup>85</sup> and his paintings began to evoke all the sensory experiences of a place which might be derived from a variety of visual and haptic responses. The range of colour became bolder as he attempted to depict the quality of the light in Cornwall, reflected up and off the sea and travelling in all directions simultaneously. As the 1950s progressed, he began to experiment with a more varied spectrum of colours: instead of one blue, the later canvases contain pale cerulean, harsh prussian, soft cobalt, indigo and ultramarine. The works produced after Lanyon's travels to America, Italy and Czechoslovakia positively vibrate with colour.<sup>86</sup>

Nicholson and Stokes chiefly admired Wallis for his unselfconscious innocence and directness while remaining faithful to the intensity and precision of original experience. Stokes saw Wallis as a painter imbued with the carving vision, a great artist who painted without affectation



(saying of his own work: "these pictures are for others to take off from.")<sup>87</sup> Lanyon was perhaps less interested in the technical aspects of Wallis' work. Instead, he saw him as a fellow Cornishman (he had in fact been born in Devon although his parents had originally come from Penzance)<sup>88</sup> whose paintings spoke of "an emotional and mystical oneness with the sea and ships, with lighthouses and cliffs, with harbours and boats riding the storms and with nestling granite houses holding firm under threatening skies."<sup>89</sup> He recognised in Wallis a painter who deployed elements - sea and ship, land and lighthouse - in the natural relationship of memory rather than the conventions of perspective.

Lanyon was immensely proud of his Cornish roots and heritage - "I am CORNISH BOTH SIDES and that means inside and outside".<sup>90</sup> He would frequently bear an irrational grudge against "the foreign pilers up of culture and art"<sup>91</sup> who led the modernist movement in Cornwall. He felt that to really understand the true nature of the Cornish landscape an artist had to be born in Cornwall. Of the St Ives artists who came to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s only Lanyon qualified as a true Cornishman. His resentment increased as St Ives' reputation as a centre for British abstraction grew. He felt that the new arrivals had taken over: "if they behaved", he said, "we don't mind them being here".<sup>92</sup> One of his favourite sayings was "Up the rebels!"<sup>93</sup> - the rebels being the Cornish, defending the county from invasion across the Tamar. In Wallis, Lanyon identified a kindred spirit, an outsider, a rebel who was understood and appreciated by only a handful of enlightened thinkers.

#### STOKES AND COLOUR

Stokes' book Colour and Form showed Lanyon that certain colours appear to come forward while others recede. He began to explore the ways in which an artist can use the properties of colour in offering visual resistance to establish a poetic relationship between different forms, textures and distances. Lanyon's first abstract paintings, Ponniou (13½ x 16½in., gouache on paper, 1937, Private Collection, Pl.7) and Untitled Abstract (Red Cushion) (8 x 6in., oil on board, 1937, Private Collection, Pl.6 fig.1) demonstrate



a clear understanding of how colour can be the chief determining factor of form. For Ponniou Lanyon employed blue as the dominant colour, exploring its associations with the film colours of the sky, drawing the viewer after the biomorphic shapes (outlined in colours more resistant to the eye) lying on the shoreline. The lines have a formal significance as dividers of the picture plane while also recording the trajectory paths of the various objects within the image. The loose abstract handling of organic contours and the colours of the maritime environment demonstrates a clear understanding of how colour can be the chief determining factor of form.

Following the use of a single colour, red, through various stages in Lanyon's career reveals his increasing competence as a colourist: Stokes wrote in Colour and Form that red "bores into us. It is the most truculent, the most characteristic, surface colour."<sup>94</sup> Untitled Abstract (Red Cushion) is dominated by the glowing radiance of a cushion on a solid upright chair projected against a dark blue background, possibly the back of a sofa. The experiment with red was repeated more obliquely and with greater subtlety in Untitled (Abstraction from a Room) (8 x 9in., pencil and gouache on paper, c.1938, Private Collection, Pl.6 fig.2). The strength of the red rectangle provides the clearest form in the composition, indicating something of singular importance in the room. It works in the same way that Malevich's art is able to allude to the faith and mysticism attached to an Orthodox icon by using the simplest geometrical forms, rectangles of various shapes and sizes usually painted in primary colours, examining their relationships with monochrome backgrounds.

Stokes released in Lanyon a growing awareness of the expressive and symbolic potential of colour: the russet red "fox as field"<sup>95</sup> in Yellow Runner, (18 x 24in., oil on board, 1946, Whereabouts unknown, Pl.51), the blood-red blanket covering the sexual coupling of Europa and the white bull in Europa (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1954, Private Collection, Pl.118), the strong cadmium reds delineating the flightpath of Lanyon's glider - resonating with the associated excitement and danger (Glide Path, 60 x 48in., oil and plastic on canvas, 1964, The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, Pl.211). Rarely has a painter turned red into a more expressive carrier of emotion and he fully exploited its powerful and basic associations



with fire and blood.

Stokes abhorred the tendency to regard colour as "little more than a by-product, or at best a concomitant, of other more important processes".<sup>96</sup> He believed that the intrinsic quality of colour was "the vitality that shows upon the surface of an object"<sup>97</sup> and that the true colourist should make objects appear to be "self lit in virtue of their colour, as if breathing."<sup>98</sup> True colour, Stokes argues, is inside, "like the blood which comes to the fulness of the lips, lights and vivifies the skin."<sup>99</sup> Stokes advocated a use of colour to support and enhance form - denigrating anything that seemed merely "stuck on".<sup>100</sup> He believed that colour was the ideal medium for the carving conception: an artist had only realized the carving conception in a painting when "one feels that not the colours but each and every form through the medium of their colours has come to equal fruition".<sup>101</sup> In other words, correct use of colour should strengthen composition, "providing something that is calm, clear and demarcated as a panorama in the evening light".<sup>102</sup> Stokes' notion that colour was a primary instrument for generating form, creating a "total identity" within a composition, can be seen in his own paintings (particularly those produced after 1939) where the subject is invested with an iridescent quality of chromatic harmony, expressing subtle relationships between objects and the spaces separating them.<sup>103</sup>

Of all the artists working in Cornwall, Lanyon especially used the tonal and chromatic properties of colour to stress the inherent and essential luminosity of form. The paintings of the late 1940s, particularly the Generation and Surfacing series,<sup>104</sup> possess a luminous radiance that appears to emanate from deep within the works themselves. Fortunately, Stokes' idea that colour should not be accidental or incidental was shared by Lanyon's new intellectual and aesthetic icon, Naum Gabo and his brother Antoine Pevsner. They were motivated by a complete acceptance of machinery and mass produced objects and an aesthetic idealism based upon the absolute functionalism of machinery and the efficiency of the materials of industry:

Thence in painting we renounce colour as a pictorial element, colour is the idealised optical surface of objects; an exterior and superficial



impression of them; colour is accidental and it has nothing in common with the innermost essence of a thing. We affirm that the tone of a substance, i.e. its light absorbing material body is its only pictorial reality.<sup>105</sup>

Lanyon adhered to the belief that colour should emanate from form, reflecting "the outward and simultaneous otherness of space"<sup>106</sup> for his entire career. The abstract landscapes of the 1950s repudiated the referential line as an arbitrary or decorative element and rely almost exclusively on the metaphysics of space, colour and tone to achieve feeling, movement and rhythm:

They are concerned with environment rather than view and with air rather than sky. The country is used to make something just as clay is used to make a pot.<sup>107</sup>

Wheal Owles (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1958, Private Collection, Pl.135) uses intricate colour arrangements to evoke the presence of a defunct mine on a cliff. A lot of red and orange is used in the picture to represent the rusted and abandoned equipment from the mine and the iron oxide which has stained the cliff. The centre of the picture is mediated by "a heavy black cross for the shafts of the mine and the wealth of the minerals still there underneath."<sup>108</sup> Broad brushstrokes of royal blue dominate the base of the picture and the sea also cuts a horizontal swathe through the middle, threatening to flood the mineshaft. The picture is sustained equally throughout; rhythm is established by boldly executed cursive brushstrokes and a relationship between the different forms is suggested by the unifying presence of the oxidising red/orange which fecundates the whole composition.

Lanyon's emergence as a highly individual practitioner of modernist landscape painting might not have occurred had it not been for Adrian Stokes' discovery of the young artist. The paintings which pre-date Stokes show more than a passing similarity to the works of the older generation of Newlyn and St Ives painters - like Borlase Smart and Lamorna Birch. The two-month spell at the Euston Road School in London brought Lanyon into contact with Coldstream and Pasmore and their different methods of



transcribing objective reality on to the canvas made a lasting impression. There are phrases in Colour and Form which resonate with passages in Lanyon's paintings at every stage of his career:

This is where representational pictures score over abstract pictures: a poetic relationship exists between the picture seen for its subject matter and when seen as an organisation.<sup>109</sup>

Lanyon shared this commitment to relational painting, a belief that abstract forms are more potent when they have in some way incorporated references to an external object. Stokes' view that "the visual world is an accumulation of time apprehended instantaneously"<sup>110</sup> is reflected in the indefinite number of dynamic gestalts to be found in Lanyon's abstracted Cornish landscapes.

It is perhaps not just coincidence that Lanyon shared Stokes' admiration for Giorgione and Piero della Francesca and it is frequently overlooked that many of Lanyon's ideas about space may have derived as much from Stokes as Nicholson and Gabo.<sup>111</sup> Writing about Piero della Francesca's altarpieces, Stokes praises the spatial intervals which form such an integral part to the Renaissance painter's art. All good painters are aware of the arrangement of voids and solids in their art, but seldom are they able to imbue their forms with the feeling of immutability found in all Piero's major works:

In Piero della Francesca's paintings, by the religious reverence for spatial intervals, by tonal and perspective organization, all feeling, all movement, all rhythm, all plasticity itself, were translated equally into panorama terms.<sup>112</sup>

This seamless quality of making each form and each void appear as though it has somehow been preordained finds echoes in the way that Lanyon was able to establish a poetic relationship between his landscape-inspired subject matter and the compositional organisation of the painting.

Adrian Stokes was responsible for Ben Nicholson, Barbara Hepworth and Naum Gabo moving to Cornwall with their families when war broke out in

September 1939.<sup>113</sup> Seeking shelter from the German bombs that were about to fall on London, these prominent members of the pre-war avant-garde found sanctuary in the provincial backwater of St Ives. Hepworth and Nicholson arrived on 25th August and stayed at Little Parc Owles, a large rambling house in Carbis Bay which Stokes and Margaret Mellis had bought in April. A few weeks later, on 15th September, Naum Gabo and his family moved into a nearby cottage called Faerystones, their home from September 1939 until November 1946, when they left for America.<sup>114</sup> This extraordinary gathering of talent had a profound and enduring effect on Lanyon and the character of his subsequent work changed completely, displaying an active interest in the theories and practice of Constructive art.



## Notes to chapter Two

1. "Paintings 1935-40", undated, c.1942. Quoted in Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: at the edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.29.
2. All published by Faber and Faber, London.
3. "Adrian Stokes on his painting": Studio International, volume 185, no.954, April 1973.
4. Interview with Lionel Miskin, 1962, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.25.
5. Considerable confusion surrounds the length of Lanyon's stay at the Euston Road School: the biography compiled by Martin Holman for Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992, p.62 claims that he was there for four months. This is supported by Tom Cross, Painting the Warmth of the Sun, The Lutterworth Press, second edition, 1995, p.77. However, Lanyon's most recent biographers, Margaret Garlake, op.cit., 1998, p.15, and Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: At the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.31, have reduced the period to only two months.
6. Interview with Lionel Miskin, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.25.
7. Interview with Lionel Miskin, ibid., p.27.
8. Adrian Stokes, "Greek Culture and the Ego", in The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes, vol.III, Thames and Hudson, London, 1978, p.113.
9. Interview with author, August 27th 1996.
10. Adrian Stokes, Colour and Form, Faber and Faber, 1937, p.113.
11. In Stones of Rimini, Faber and Faber, 1934, Stokes especially valued Alberti's Malatesta Tempio along with Agostino di Duccio's low relief carving: "the forms in the stone put the structure at a tension similar to the most vibrant instant of a singer's longest note...Agostino's figures are the apotheosis of carving...no other sculptor can teach me so much about carving", p.116.
12. Ibid., p.110.
13. "Carving is an articulation of something that already exists in the block. The carved form should never, in any profound imaginative sense, be entirely freed from its matrix." Ibid., p.114.
14. The Quattro Cento, op.cit., p.16.
15. Stones of Rimini, op.cit., "The sculptor rubs his stone to elicit the shapes which his eye has sown in the matrix. The material, earth or stone, exists. Man makes it more significant...", p.109.
16. "Man in his male aspect, is the cultivator or carver of woman who, in her female aspect, moulds her products as does the earth...The stone block is female, the plastic figures that emerge from it on Agostino's reliefs are her children, the proof of the carver's love for the stone. This communion with a material, this mode of eliciting the plastic shape, are the essence of carving." Ibid., p.110.
17. "The calligraphic and supremely personal element in graphic art is always to be associated with modelling conception (particularly in the case of oil painting), while painting, for instance, that essentially illuminates a certain space, the use of pigment that is more directed by some architectural conception of planes, is preferably classed with carving." Ibid., p.119.
18. The Spectator, 3rd November, 1933.
19. Colour and Form, Faber and Faber, 1937, p.143.
20. "The steadiness of shape, through many ages unconsciously expressed by visual art, in recent times has altogether been lost. To cultivate a reverence for stone thus became an aesthetic need. Miss Hepworth is one of the rare living sculptors who deliberately renew stone's essential shapes."



Adrian Stokes writing in The Spectator, 3rd November, 1933.

21. Colour and Form, op.cit., p.48.

22. Adrian Stokes, The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes, volume II, Thames and Hudson, p.166.

23. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.149.

24. Peter Lanyon, undated text (c1959), printed in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.292: "The beginning of a painting may be down a tin mine or on top of a bus above the fields, there are no real beginnings except an abnormal degree of apprehension or a sense of rightness in the presence of some happening or place. Whatever the beginning may be, the ending of a painting is definite and complete. I think the ending of a whole experience. The beginning is situated deep down and I know the signs for myself. In West Cornwall this whole existence of surfacing deep and ancient experiences is obvious. Everything surfaces in a definite and almost shocking manner. For the whole journey of a painting out of insensibility, through many discoveries towards a face, the landscape of my own West Cornwall is my pattern. My security arises from there and I was born inside it. It is a painting scene, a place of revelation on the surface of old and fundamental weathers."

25. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.60.

26. Stokes, Stones of Rimini, op.cit., p.126.

27. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.42.

28. Ibid., p.42.

29. Stokes, The Quattro Cento op.cit., p.15.

30. Text by Peter Lanyon, dated 28th March, 1962; quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.285.

31. Ibid., p.285.

32. Stokes, The Quattro Cento, op.cit., pp.28-29: "I consider that in painting and architecture, and even in sculpture, the appeal should be first and primarily to the eye: that is to say the appeal should be such that the eye, with the assistance of previous tactile experience in materials and textures, would be able to synthesise the successive element in the tactile part of the appeal, and cause it to be something immediate as vision itself."

33. Peter Lanyon: Abstractions and Constructions, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 213AB; see also Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, p.59.

34. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.94.

35. Patrick Heron, essay on Peter Lanyon, for Arts (New York) in February 1956. Re-printed in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, op.cit., p.11.

36. Text by Peter Lanyon, 28th March, 1962; see Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.286.

37. Lanyon writing to John Wells, 31st March, 1949 - see Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.93.

38. Ibid., p.93.

39. Ibid., p.93.

40. Ibid., p.93.

41. John Berger review in The New Statesman, 15th March, 1952.

42. Lanyon writing to Paul Feiler, c.1952, quoted in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992, p.67.

43. Peter Lanyon, handwritten note for the 1961 St Ives Carnival Programme, printed in Andrew Lanyon's Portreath, op.cit., p.7.

44. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.41.

45. From recording by Lionel Miskin, op.cit., TAV 211AB.

46. "We scan our past for our present: for our past we need landscape, history and art. Art, as we ourselves, is of past event surviving into



- the present." Adrian Stokes, "The Invitation in Art", in The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes, vol.III 1955-67, Thames and Hudson, 1978, p.299.
47. Ibid., p.295.
48. Peter Lanyon quoted in J.P. Hodin, "The Icarus of Cornwall", Studio International, 1965, vol.170, p.78.
49. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.27.
50. Ibid., p.42.
51. "What is desirable...is...a well-integrated inner world to live in...The artist is, and always has been, concerned with that image, attempting to assimilate into structures various aspects of himself and of the world outside." Adrian Stokes, "The Invitation in Art", op.cit., p.266.
52. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aidan Ellis Publishing Ltd., 1971.
53. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.21. Lanyon's annotated copy is still in the possession of his widow, Sheila.
54. Peter Lanyon writing to Naum Gabo, February 1949. Printed in Margaret Garlake, "The Letters of Peter Lanyon to Naum Gabo", Burlington Magazine, April 1995, pp.233-241.
55. Peter Lanyon quoted in Alan Bowness, "Peter Lanyon", Cimaise, Paris, April-June 1960, serie VII, no.3, p.50.
56. Peter Lanyon, "Derbyshire 1957", transcript of talk on 28th July 1957, Tate Gallery Archive TAV 297B. The best discussion of this aspect of Lanyon's work can be found in The Art of Peter Lanyon 1946-64: A Psychological Interpretation by Barry Dodge, M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, May 1991. Dodge's inquiry investigates the enduring presence in Lanyon's work of the early infant-mother cathexis, the repressed Oedipus complex and the underlying psychic structures which reveal the artist's personal unconscious as well as traces of the Jungian concept of the collective unconscious.
57. Although he witnessed little direct action during the war, Lanyon suffered from "attacks of claustrophobia and fear in trains, closed rooms etc." Peter Lanyon writing to Naum Gabo, February 1949, op.cit., Burlington Magazine, 1995.
58. Adrian Stokes, "Greek Culture and the Ego", The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes, op.cit., p.91.
59. Melanie Klein, Love Guilt and Reparation and other works, 1921-45, Virago, 1975, pp.334-335. In Kleinian object-relation theory, "the desire to rediscover the mother of the early days is...of the greatest importance in creative art and in the ways people enjoy and appreciate it." Ibid. The split in the cathexis with the mother leads to intense feelings of loss and guilt and a constant desire for the return of the "good object", the introjected mother's body and the part-object - the nurturing breast. For more details read Barry Dodge, op.cit., pp.9-11.
60. "The desire can never be satisfied because it is always a substitute for the primal lack - the need for fusion with the mother". Jacques Lacan, quoted in A. Lemaire, Jacques Lacan, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, pp.127-129. According to Lacan, "the primal unconscious desire becomes alienated in demand." Ibid., p.166. Lanyon's overwhelming interest in the Cornish landscape can be seen as an attempt to "keep alive the image of the mother in the early days". Melanie Klein claims that people who retain a close connection with nature "preserve themselves and her in phantasy by remaining close to her - actually by not leaving their country." Melanie Klein, Love Guilt and Reparation, op.cit., p.338.
61. Barry Dodge, op.cit., p.12. It is a "part-object" because in Kleinian terms the infant is unable to perceive its mother as a separate person



until it is four months old. Jungian symbolism is discussed in J. Jacobs, The Psychology of C.G. Jung, Yale University Press, 1962, p.98. The oval forms of the boat and pool recur in many of Lanyon's early paintings: the shape "expresses in me a sense of protection and solitude". Lanyon writing to Gabo, February 1949, op.cit., Burlington Magazine, 1995.

62. The cross is a ubiquitous symbol in Lanyon's work: "call it X: it is found in his painting, his drawing, his handwriting...consistent, all of a piece. X - the cross, sideways, being carried - signifying the essential humanity. It appears - and disappears - in his painting. It is at the top of his Porthleven at the Tate...in a fine drawing of Perugia...in a wild biro sketch of a house by the sea it masquerades as a weather vane." John Dalton, "The Drawings of Peter Lanyon", The Painter and Sculptor, Vol.1, No.1, Spring 1958.

63. Peter Lanyon, "Coast Journey and Painting", 1959, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 216AB.

64. "My work has returned frequently to the shore as female and the sea as male". Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler talking to Michael Canney on an "Horizons" programme entitled: The Subject in Painting, BBC, no date, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 212AB. "In the unconscious the longed for return to the womb and exploration of it takes place by way of coitus." Melanie Klein, "Early Analysis", in Love Guilt and Reparation, op.cit., p.98. Quoted in Barry Dodge, op.cit., p.12. Dodge connects the circular movements in Lanyon's later paintings to mandala figures in Jungian psychology: circular or square forms with an accentuation on the centre which symbolises the self and the potential for wholeness. Ibid., p.41. For more details of the "circumambulatio" - defined as "an exclusive concentration on the centre, the plane of creative change" - see J. Jacobi, The Psychology of C.G. Jung, Yale University Press, 1962, p.127.

65. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.64.

66. Ibid., p.64.

67. Ibid., p.64.

68. Michael Canney - artist, writer, broadcaster, curator of the Newlyn Art Gallery and a close friend of Lanyon's. His reminiscences of Lanyon are printed in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.159.

69. Lanyon's letter to The Cornish Review (1949) denounces Sven Berlin's accusation that artists such as Ben Nicholson exploited Wallis by paying low prices for his work. Instead, "they rescued his pictures from the possibility of destruction and distributed them (often as gifts) to as wide a public as possible." Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Old Iron, Alfred Wallis, Penzance, 1998, p.46.

70. Interview with Sheila Lanyon, 27th August 1996. See, also, Peter Davies, The St Ives Years: Essays on the growth of an artistic phenomenon, The Wimborne Bookshop, 1984, p.32.

71. Ben Nicholson, "Alfred Wallis", Horizon, issue 37, 1943.

72. Nicholson's interest in primitivism is evident as early as 1920 when he saw the works of Gauguin on his honeymoon. He also shared H.S. Ede's admiration for early Renaissance art. According to Jeremy Lewison in his essay, "Primitivism and Landscape", Tate Gallery catalogue for the Ben Nicholson exhibition, 1993, p.33, Nicholson was aware of the resurgence of interest in "naive" art through exhibitions of the work of Henri Rousseau and Andre Bauchant at the Lefevre Gallery in London in 1926 and 1928 respectively. A 1927 edition of Cahiers d'Art which contains an essay by Yvangot, "Art Maritime: Les "Ex-Voto" des Marins", can be found in the Nicholson box in the Tate Gallery archive. Yvangot praises the work of



the "untrained" sailors for their "perfect lack of consciousness of the value of their work" and for using "the most diverse materials which were to be found on board or that they found on their journeys".

73. According to Charles Harrison, Wallis was responsible for the idea "that real creativity was somehow direct and innate, that the imagination was fettered by training, that a painting was more importantly a thing in itself than a representation of something else, that strength of expression and vitality of working were more important than accuracy and description and technical skill, that the child, the primitive and the modern artist were somehow joined." C. Harrison, "The Modern, The Primitive and the Picturesque." Scottish Arts Council, 1987, p.10.

74. Sven Berlin, Alfred Wallis: Primitive, London, 1949, reprinted Bristol 1992, p.79.

75. Quoted in Matthew Gale, Alfred Wallis, St Ives Artists series, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.35.

76. Quoted in Matthew Gale, op.cit., p.75. The story is also recounted in Andrew Lanyon, Old Iron, Penzance, 1998, p.33.

77. Matthew Gale, ibid., p.66.

78. Wallis letter to Jim Ede, 1st April 1936, Kettle's Yard Archive (Alfred Wallis 23).

79. Adrian Stokes letter to Ben Nicholson, 8th March 1949, TGA 8727.1.2.4562.

80. The term is used by R. Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception, University of California, Faber and Faber, London, 1956, p.192: "...The two-dimensional...(child's drawings) are equivalents of solids and/or two-dimensional aspects of the outside of solids, depending on what is needed. The relationship between flatness and depth is undifferentiated so that by purely visual means there is no way of telling whether a circular line stands for a ring, a disc or a ball."

81. For a more detailed discussion of Porthleven read chapter five.

82. Recorded talk for The British Council, 1963, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 526AB.

83. Quoted in "St Ives: A personal memoir, 1947-55", by David Lewis: St Ives, 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, 1996 (Revised edition of 1985 Tate Gallery exhibition catalogue), p.22.

84. Patrick Heron, "Peter Lanyon", Arts (New York), February 1956. Reprinted in Air, Land and Sea, 1992, op.cit., p.8.

85. Lanyon in conversation with Alan Bowness, May 1959, quoted in Peter Lanyon: Drawings and Graphic Works, by Hayden Griffiths, 1985, p.1.

86. Lanyon visited Italy frequently after the war: for example, between January and April 1953 he was in Rome and Anticoli Corrado on an Italian government scholarship. He first visited America in January 1957 for his one-man exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York. He returned in 1959, 1962 and 1963. He travelled around Czechoslovakia in February 1964, lecturing on recent British art and landscape painting for the British Council.

87. Peter Davies, The St Ives Years, 1985, op.cit. p.10.

88. Peter Barnes, Alfred Wallis and his Family: Fact and Fiction, St Ives, 1997, p.6.

89. David Lewis, "A personal memoir, 1947-55", 1985, op.cit., p.21.

90. Letter to Lady Mander, 5th May, 1950. Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.98.

91. Letter to Lady Mander, 16th May, 1953, ibid., p.136.

92. Michael Canney recalls Peter Lanyon, ibid., p.157.

93. Andrew Lanyon recalls his father, ibid., p.9.



94. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.29.
95. Handwritten note reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.72.
96. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p28.
97. Ibid., p.29.
98. Ibid., p.31.
99. Ibid., p.89.
100. Ibid., p.47.
101. Ibid., p.45.
102. Ibid., p.36.
103. An early example of Stokes' work demonstrating this principle can be seen in the St Ives Tate Gallery: Landscape, West Penwith Moor, oil on canvas, 24 x 20in., 1937.
104. See chapters Four and Five for discussion of the Generation and Surfacing series (otherwise known as the "Cathode Ray" or "Second" series).
105. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner; The Realistic Manifesto, first published on August 5th, 1920, by the Second State Printing House, Moscow. This extract is from The Tradition of Constructivism, edited by Stephen Bann, Da Capo Press paperback edition, 1990 (originally published by Viking Press, 1974), pp.9-10.
106. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.26.
107. Notes made by Lanyon, c.1958, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.172.
108. Recorded talk 1963: "The Artist talks about his painting", British Council lecture by Peter Lanyon, TGA TAV 526AB.
109. Adrian Stokes quoted in Alan Bowness, Peter Lanyon, Arts Council exhibition catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.
110. Ibid.
111. Lionel Miskin, interview, 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., pp.27-31. Lanyon thought that "space is not just the organisation of a surface or an intellectual thing...it is the actual living and breathing substance in which we exist." Ibid.
112. Stokes, Colour and Form, op.cit., p.44.
113. They had been invited for a holiday - but Stokes allowed them to stay on when war broke out. After Christmas the Nicholsons moved to a nearby house, Dunluce.
114. Nicholson and Hepworth were unsuccessful in persuading Mondrian to join them in Carbis Bay; "The last person we saw was Mondrian and we begged him to come with us in our battered old car...But he would not." Barbara Hepworth, A Pictorial Biography, Tate Gallery Publishing, revised edition, 1978, p.17. He preferred the urban environment of Hampstead, but left for New York after his studio was damaged by the blast of a bomb.



## **Chapter Three**

# **WARTIME ABSTRACTS: THE INFLUENCE OF NICHOLSON, HEPWORTH AND GABO**

## LESSONS IN ABSTRACTION: 1939-40

The arrival from London in September 1939 of the leading members of the inter-war constructivist avant-garde came at a critical moment in Lanyon's emergence as an artist. Prior to his meeting with Nicholson, Lanyon's exposure to contemporary artistic developments had been limited to his friendship with Adrian Stokes and the pages of journals and publications such as Axis, Horizon and Circle. Paintings such as Poinnou (1938) demonstrate an affinity with and interest in the biomorphic forms of surrealist art while his sketchbooks and still-life drawings reveal the influence of Impressionism and Cézanne (Pl.9). The advances made in the period 1937-39 had expanded his range of formal expression, but he had not yet discovered a system of pictorial thought and emotion which directly communicated his perceptions of the landscape in a style of his own:

I got extremely disillusioned with painting what was in front of me. I found that going down the coast and painting a bit of Hannibal's Carn or Zennor Carn was very boring because I had tricks and ways of doing it...I had a sort of nervous breakdown, which was probably an escape.<sup>1</sup>

Unconsciously anticipating Nicholson's influence, Lanyon began a radical revision of his painting, reducing the elements of landscape to the fewest possible elements - a line on a white board, a few simple geometric divisions:

I was left with nothing but the plain white surface of boards...The outside world was no good to me at all.<sup>2</sup>

However, he remained at a loss as to how to resolve this crisis in his painting, later claiming that he seriously considered breaking the impasse by joining the Republicans in the dying days of the Spanish Civil War ("I was always good at finding escapes"). Stokes immediately suggested that Nicholson would be the ideal tutor to resolve the artistic deadlock Lanyon was experiencing.

Stokes saw this going on. He had asked Nicholson and Hepworth to come



away from London because of the danger of war, and they came down and stayed in Carbis Bay. He got me to see Ben, and I walked down to the house...and saw these extraordinary things, these white reliefs of Ben Nicholson's, and I couldn't believe that here was a person who was doing this, all this, seriously, the same thing that I was trying to do myself.<sup>3</sup>

Nicholson and Hepworth have strong claims to be considered the most significant artists in the British avant-garde between the wars. Nicholson's work was shaped by the "Analytic" and "Synthetic" Cubism of Picasso and Braque and a reaction against the elegant naturalism of his father's painting style, a desire to "bust up the sophistication all around me".<sup>4</sup> For most of the late 1920s and 1930s Nicholson and Hepworth directed an evangelical crusade committed to the cause of modernism: in 1933 they joined the Association Abstraction Création (a movement founded in Paris in 1931 "pour l'organisation des manifestations d'art non figuratif").<sup>5</sup> Statements which Nicholson and Hepworth wrote in 1934 for the book Unit One, edited by Herbert Read, reflect an aesthetic idealism, a shared belief that only through abstraction could the artist truly express a universal "right idea".

I feel that the conception itself, the quality of thought that is embodied must be abstract - an impersonal vision, individualised in the particular medium.<sup>6</sup>

What we are searching for is the understanding and realisation of infinity - an idea which is complete, with no beginning and no end and therefore giving to all things for all time.<sup>7</sup>

This mystical belief in the universality and absoluteness of modern art led Nicholson to produce the uncompromising carved, geometric reliefs which rivalled the most extreme non-figurative work of the European avant-garde (characterised by Mondrian, whom Nicholson visited in Paris for the first time in 1934).

As chairman of the Seven and Five Society Nicholson engineered a ruling that only non-representational works would be eligible for future exhibitions.

In October 1935 the society held its final exhibition - possibly the first all-abstract exhibition in England.<sup>8</sup> Hepworth's sculptures of this period were also reduced to the barest elements and purged of their characteristic organic or biomorphic features, making her one of the first to produce completely abstract sculpture. The new elements in her sculptural language included the sphere, the ellipsoid, the hollow cylinder and the hollow hemisphere. Nicholson and Hepworth were at the centre of Hampstead's "nest of artists" which included pioneering figures in European abstraction such as Naum Gabo, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Walter Gropius and Piet Mondrian.<sup>9</sup> This expanding and cosmopolitan group of artists, designers and architects, many of them refugees from the political oppression of continental fascism, found support for their work in publications like Axis and Circle.<sup>10</sup> Bauhaus, Constructivism and the architectonic mysticism of Mondrian's squares, verticals and horizontals transformed London into a melting-pot for the pre-war avant-garde.

The Utopianism manifested in Circle and the concatenation of creative spirits concentrated in North London dispersed with the outbreak of the Second World War. Hepworth wrote:

Everywhere there seemed to be abundant energy, and hope, and a developing interest in the fusion of all the arts to some great purpose. But just when we felt the warmth and strength of this new understanding it eluded us.<sup>11</sup>

Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo now faced an uncertain future in St Ives, a provincial backwater with an artists' colony that had gained its reputation at the turn of the century for faithful depictions of the sea and dramatic landscapes. Many of the established local artists viewed this influx of modern artists with profound misgivings. Both Nicholson and Hepworth were impecunious and felt geographically marginalised. A letter to Nicholson's close friend, Herbert Read, reveals some of the difficulties they were experiencing:

As far as Barbara & I are concerned the lack of money has meant a loss of independence which is the anvil & above all has meant never



a quiet moment which one could depend on to work out an idea.<sup>12</sup>

The money generated by teaching Lanyon twice a week was extremely useful at a time when it seemed that "all we represent and have fought for is threatened by the most appalling reaction".<sup>13</sup> Prices for Nicholson's work in 1939 were lower than they had been at the start of the decade and Hepworth's only income came from the sale of small maquettes and drawings.<sup>14</sup> Norbert Lynton discovered that a local electrician had to be persuaded to accept a Nicholson painting in return for a radio.<sup>15</sup>

Nicholson's interest in Cubist composition, his early experimentations with different spatial arrangements and the simplification of the picture plane, provided Lanyon with fresh and challenging approaches ("...who could be better for a companion than Ben, whose name is synonymous with squares and circles!").<sup>16</sup> After seeing his white reliefs, Lanyon began to reconcile some of the conflicts which had left him paralysed with uncertainty. Nicholson introduced a more formal discipline into Lanyon's work, supplying a unifying influence on the disparate forms visible in the pre-war work. He would set up objects and they would draw and make constructions - exploring the possibilities created by the materials and shapes. The drawings that survive from this important period (Sept 1939 to March 1940) show strong traces of Nicholson's compositional structures and motifs.

So Nicholson came along twice a week. He would say: well, let's put up two pots, just an old jug or something like that and a bowl and see what we can do with them; make them into not what they are but something else; let's draw lines round them, draw lines from them and so on. And then perhaps next week he would come along and say: well, that's interesting...Supposing we put a piece of wood on top of this board and another piece of wood at the bottom. You see what you can do with that. And so I would find I would have a space in front and so on. This is the way he worked with me, and I think it was first-rate, he made me understand that there were actual plastic values which I'd lost due to my cleverness of looking at the landscape.<sup>17</sup>

New vistas opened up in Lanyon's work as he began experimenting with



the nature of the picture plane and the possibility of exploring the internal pictorial space in a non-perspectival form. Nicholson introduced Lanyon to the technical solutions derived from Cubism. In the transcription of a three dimensional reality on the two-dimensional plane Lanyon now began to allow differing concepts of space, location and viewpoint to co-exist simultaneously in one work. He replaced the fixed, illusionistic landscapes and portraits that had been the staple of his output with the multi-perspectival imagery of Cubist practice.

Following Nicholson's example, Lanyon introduced a modern treatment of representational subjects, by-passing the abstract-figurative division by setting linear structures against contrasting flat surfaces and spaces. Nicholson's treatment of spatial relationships can be detected in the cross-section of a table in Untitled Abstraction (10 x 12in., pencil and gouache on paper, 1939, Private Collection, Pl.16); on the right-hand side of the sheet various still-life objects have been set in sharply-drawn profile on top of the table; on the left, Lanyon has created a cluster of brightly coloured forms, dissolving divisions between foreground, middle distance and background in a way which recalls Nicholson's handling of still-life motifs in terms of shapes and overlapping coloured planes to suggest space. Boat (6 x 7in., oil on board, 1939, Private Collection, Pl.17) reflects Nicholson's influence in the rendering of individual parts of the boat (including the rigging) as independent flat surfaces performing autonomous functions within the painting. The limited range of geometric shapes and colours demonstrate how Lanyon was successfully able to combine Nicholson's explorations of forms and "constructive" application of colour with more obvious pictorial references.

The most important work to be produced under Nicholson's tutelage was a series of constructions, later itemized in a list of "work done from September 1939 to March 8th 1940", showing the range of Lanyon's formal concerns ("Space became my conscious sphere of operation").<sup>18</sup> He began to work in three dimensions using new materials such as coloured boards and transparencies placed at various positions on the base:

I made a miniature stage set, the depth in that almost frightened me!...Ben said, when he saw the coloured boards on the base, that it was hardly solved. I didn't know what he meant. Next time he came



I had solved it! Box Construction No.1 was the "solution".<sup>19</sup>

Box Construction (13x 16 x 3in., wood, glass and gelatine filters, 1940, coll. Pier Art Centre, Stromness, Orkney, Pl.18) exemplifies the type of work Lanyon produced under Nicholson's guidance - successfully challenging Lanyon's perceptions of space, time and movement. By working with various shapes and coloured gelatine filters, Lanyon discovered that it was possible to create an internal dynamic and visual coherence within the enclosed space of the box. He used the interrelationship of form and colour to dissolve volumes. From this experiment Lanyon became aware of the different effects of colour in a painting and the importance of organising the "perpendicular-horizontal problem."

On the back plane I made a dish form, a cylinder with a red square on it and another brownish shape which you see on the left hand side. The idea was to fill the whole space described by the outside dimensions of the box. Inside the box shapes and colours seem to take up different positions. The black line and red square come right forward. The yellow is in front of the green, the greyish shape before the yellow. The odd thing is that as you move from right to left they change places. The whole thing is rather like a stage.<sup>20</sup>

The arrangement of the elements in the composition of this construction recalls Nicholson's interest in the absolute beauty of "straight lines and curves and the surfaces and solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rulers and squares."<sup>21</sup> Nicholson's Painting 1937 experiments with the deposition of rectangular forms in strong primary colours - red, yellow and blue - onto an L shaped, cool-grey base rectangle. He arranged the rectangular forms on a strict horizontal and vertical axis, making an extremely pure painting in which the key elements of colour, form and line are used only in their most basic, irreducible forms. The base rectangle appears to hover on top of a surface of background greys, allowing the blocs of interlocking colours to create different perceptions of space receding and projecting on the frontal picture plane - the same visual phenomenon recorded by Lanyon in his notes on Box Construction No 1.



Lanyon's fruitful instruction in the universal language of modernism resulted in a companion piece to Box Construction - a work called White Track (1939/40, relief construction of mahogany, jarrah wood, three-ply and string, 17½ x 19½in., Tate Gallery, Pl.21). The construction was mounted without a "restricting" frame and it was conceived "to reduce the heaviness of the wood" by using a diagonal line (the sling) attached to a white dish and a red cylindrical form travelling round an outer track chalked in white:

These two elements make the whole construction light and dynamic instead of heavy and static. You could say that just as the first construction is about space, this one is about movement in painting. They probably show two basic types of my own pictures. Some start with a quiet, flat frontal plane, and others are altogether more agitated and moving.<sup>22</sup>

As Lanyon acknowledged, these experiments in spatial arrangements form the basis of many of his later works. White Track anticipates the sense of movement across an unrestricted surface that becomes a familiar component in many of the landscapes after 1950 and, more particularly, the gliding paintings produced after 1959. The configuration of lines and forms is reminiscent of Nicholson's 1933 (Painting - milk and plain chocolate) while the trajectory of the white and red circles bear the influence of Miro. It should be remembered that the exploration of movement in painting and sculpture occupied many artists at this time: Gabo's solution was to dematerialise the solidity of his constructions with abstract notations of space and time created in transparent perspex. Giacometti adapted a Surrealist idiom for one of his best known "cage" sculptures, Suspended Ball (1930), a kinetic construction which allows the viewer to participate by swinging the ball back and forth over a crescent form.<sup>23</sup>

Shortly before Lanyon was called up on 8th March 1940, Nicholson wrote a glowing report on his young apprentice:

(Lanyon) has immediately a simple and profound understanding of the new ideas...He is a very good example of the liberation that our ideas produce...Gabo & Barbara & I, too, think he's about the most promising of the young artists in England.<sup>24</sup>

In his last exploration of "the relation of movement to static", Triangle Construction (Destroyed, Pl.22 fig.2), completed a few days before he joined



the RAF, Lanyon tried to fuse the practical formalism learnt from Nicholson with his own deep-felt desire to depict the Cornish landscape:

Many years, every week I have been to Bosigran, to look at the rock. I worship it. I absorbed it a bit more every time. One day I watched the sea gulls, how they fly round the rock and play in currents at the back of it. Then fly around it, caressing its shape as the sea caresses its base, and glide up and down behind it, always moulding the space between the rock and the shore.<sup>25</sup>

The central problem was how to recreate the dynamic element, the gulls, wheeling across the cliff-face and then round the rock: he resolved to use the elliptical movement made by the white line in White Track as the compositional basis for the construction. Drawings and sketches show Lanyon experimenting with the possibility of using a triangle as part of the ellipse (the triangle is provided with its own axis on which to turn).

The key elements in the completed Triangle Construction are provided by two rectangles, a circle and a triangle. The rock at Bosigran is represented by two rectangles positioned on the frontal plane. Lanyon has divided the background board into four quarters, using threaded lines to link the shapes and trace the movement of the gulls across the surface. The passing of the thread between the overlapping rectangle and triangle suggests the movement of the gulls moulding "the space between rock and shore". The white circle, partially obscured by a semi-transparent rectangular filter, suggests "the form which sea gulls made around the rock."<sup>26</sup> He constructed an elaborate set for Triangle Construction: opening up the enclosed space of Box Construction Number One by providing two frames set at an angle, perpendicular to the base. The work stands on a circular wooden turntable on a square base bevelled off towards the top. Lanyon believed that "in the space between the frames the whole haunting problem is solved."<sup>27</sup>

Nicholson thought of his reliefs as "a mental experience" as this statement from 1941 explains:

One of the main differences between a representational and an abstract painting is that the former can transport you to Greece by a representation of blue skies and seas, olive trees and marble columns...whereas the abstract version by its free use of form and colour will give you the actual quality of Greece itself, and will



become a part of the light and space and life in the room.<sup>28</sup>

It is arguable whether Lanyon's early forays into abstract formalism truly succeed in capturing the "actual quality" of Cornwall and it is not surprising that he was to return to representative forms after the war, rediscovering the redemptive power of the landscape on his return from active service. Works like Triangle Construction or Box Construction Number 2 (Destroyed, Pl.19) and Number 3 (late 1939, destroyed, Pl.20) can appear contrived, more like exercises in spatial awareness and composition than true reflections of the complex images derived from the landscape: In Triangle Construction it is as though excessive cerebration in the search for the solution to the "circle-square + horizontal-perpendicular problem" has squeezed the inspiration out of the idea and transformed the gulls moving around the rocks at Bosigran into something closer to geometry than nature.<sup>29</sup> He later felt that Triangle Construction fell short of its aims and destroyed the piece. The more rhythmic and rounded forms required for transferring perceptions of space into visual terms would come from a different master - Naum Gabo.

#### CONSTRUCTIVISM IN CORNWALL: 1940-42

After their initial despondency, Nicholson and Hepworth attempted to revive the spirit of Constructivism by modelling the community of artists in Carbis Bay on the creative kinship which they had tried to establish in Hampstead before the war. The presence of Gabo, the unmatched leader of the Constructive movement, gave credibility to the notion that Cornwall could provide the location for a revived constructive aesthetic which would play an active role in rebuilding society after the war.

At the outbreak of the Russian Revolution Gabo had been asked by his parents to leave Norway and return to Bryansk. By August 1917 he had moved to Moscow with his brother Antoine where they shared the exalted hopes of those who supported massive social change. The Realistic Manifesto was published in Moscow on August 5th 1920 to defend constructions in an exhibition that opened a day later in an open-air bandstand on Tverskoi Boulevard.<sup>30</sup> Gabo argued that the Cubist revolution had left painting in a "heap of shards"<sup>31</sup> and that a new approach was required which embraced



futurist concerns with movement. Gabo was fascinated by science and engineering - for him space and time were not abstractions but elements to be used in the construction of his sculptures: "Space and time are the only forms on which life is built and hence art must be constructed."<sup>32</sup> He made an art form of space itself, non-static and without mass or volume, building his constructions of materials that were new - transparent plastics, stainless steel, wire, glass and chromium.

Gabo believed strongly in the responsibilities of the artist to promote an idea of progress in society. His position as a pioneer of constructivism, dedicated without reserve to the abstract (which he called the "concrete") gave him a certain authority on his arrival in England in March 1936.<sup>33</sup> He was ardent in the cause of clarity, order, precision and purity of style - requirements which he believed man's future environment would demand from art and architecture.

In 1937 he joined Nicholson and the architect Leslie Martin in editing Circle, a publication that gave expression to the "constructive" impulse which sought to bring unity and harmony to all domains of the new culture. Through a belief that lines, colour and geometric forms are reflections of a universal ideal Gabo predicted that the constructive idea would not merely reflect reality - but become part of reality. Under four headings - "Painting", "Sculpture", "Architecture" and "Art and Life" - the editors aimed to gather together "those forces which seem to us to be working in the same direction and for the same ideas" and to "make clear a common basis and to demonstrate, not only the relationship of one work to the other but of this form of art to the whole social order".<sup>34</sup> Drawing on ideas that he had put forward seventeen years earlier in the Realistic Manifesto, Gabo proclaimed that the Constructive movement was more than an artistic trend:

The Constructive idea is not a programmatic one. It is not a technical scheme for an artistic manner, nor a rebellious demonstration of an artistic sect; it is a general concept of the world, or better, a spiritual state of a generation, an ideology caused by life, bound up with it and directed to influence its course.<sup>35</sup>

With unwavering optimism he asserted that "in the realm of ideas we are now entering a period of reconstruction"; Science and Art were to spearhead the "construction of a new stable model for our apprehension of the universe".<sup>36</sup> The constructive idea seemed to him the most suitable because it represented a general concept which was valid for all domains of the new culture. This optimism was shattered with the outbreak of World War Two: Gabo feared for "the whole constructive idea" and did not believe that the global aspirations for Art and Science voiced in Circle could be salvaged from the wreckage of world war. However, Nicholson and Hepworth persuaded him to postpone leaving for America to lead what remained of the movement from Carbis Bay:

They stand on the threshold and see the future in the bright light of constructive ideas - but I know how slow and painful the processes of history can be. I do not foresee the triumph of the constructive idea in the near future.<sup>37</sup>

At a time when Britain stood as an island fortress resisting the onslaught of European totalitarianism, Constructivism was viewed by many critics as a discredited and sterile attempt to promote cultural internationalism. It was commonly argued that the idea of an exclusive and all-sufficing beauty in plastic values was inappopropriate in "a culture so ill-conditioned to uncompromising theories".<sup>38</sup> Unsurprisingly, it was many months after his arrival in this community before he felt able to resume his work or join Nicholson and Hepworth in their attempt to regroup and strengthen their cause.<sup>39</sup>

In retrospect it is clear that a great deal of confused ideology and muddled Utopianism surrounded this attempt to rebuild pre-war Constructivism. Gabo presented his own highly partisan version of the history of Constructivism (Hepworth only found out about "the two schools in Moscow and how [Gabo] split from Tatlin, Rodchenko School etc." in May 1944).<sup>40</sup> Gabo's belief that his constructions were not merely aesthetically pleasing objects, but communicated progressive values by means of artistic metaphor expressed in the clear and universally understood forms of geometry did



not have much in common with the more technocratic and utilitarian definition of artistic design and creation promoted by Tatlin in the Programme of the Productivist Group.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, younger artists like Lanyon, John Wells and Margaret Mellis were encouraged to feel that they belonged to a collective "movement",<sup>42</sup> sharing ideas and contributing to the alliance of British and European avant-garde artists which had reached its apogee with the publication of Circle in 1937.

It is our common duty to pool our thoughts and reach together an impersonal point of view which we all shared in the past at a time of less stress. This enrichment is very easily within our grasp and so much more important than all the various problems we torment ourselves with...Unless we share things we are but empty shells of a past culture.<sup>43</sup>

Wells, a doctor working as Admiralty Surgeon and Agent for the Isles of Scilly, maintained his friendship with Nicholson (they had met in 1928 and kept in touch in London throughout the 1930s) with periodic visits to the mainland.<sup>44</sup> His collages, constructions and paintings combine Gabo's articulation of space with the perceptual tensions created by Nicholson's use of geometric shapes and application of coloured planes. His medical knowledge and understanding of scientific theory allowed him to embrace the theory and forms of Constructivism at a rather higher and more sophisticated level than Lanyon.

Margaret Mellis also found Nicholson a "very helpful and exhilarating" aesthetic mentor. Writing in 1977, she recalled his commitment to establishing a new regional flowering of Constructivism:

Ben never stopped working and if he wasn't actually painting or making reliefs he was writing letters to people who were interested in the (Constructive) movement. They might show works, buy them or write about them. When he wasn't doing that he was looking round St Ives for new people who might be interested. He had already begun to work towards what might eventually become the Penwith Society in 1949.

His aim was always to help people to do good work and get it shown and stimulate a wider interest in modern art.<sup>45</sup>

In 1941 Nicholson tried to clarify and define the position of the abstract artist, arguing that modernism could continue to play a useful role in the development of a national culture during the war. The language he chose to frame his unified vision of the arts is strikingly reminiscent of the "constructive" internationalism of Circle:

I think so far from being a limited expression, understood by few, abstract art is a powerful, unlimited and universal language. Within the means of abstract expression there are immense possibilities and it is a language with a peculiar power to itself. But the kind of painting which I find exciting is not necessarily representational, but it is both musical and architectural, where the architectural construction is used to express a "musical" relationship between form, tone and colour and whether this visual, "musical" relationship is slightly more or less abstract is for me beside the point.<sup>46</sup>

This passage epitomises Nicholson's enduring belief that abstract art could affect contemporary sensibilities in the same intuitive way as music and architecture. It also suggests that Nicholson's attachment to Constructivism was more about art as a form of "actual experience"<sup>47</sup> than its potential to create an idealised, almost platonic model of reality.

While Nicholson's adherence to Constructivism was based on its elevation of abstraction as a means of depicting a truer kind of "reality", Hepworth's commitment was more in line with Gabo's wider social and philosophical aspirations for the movement. Her essay in Circle rejected the term "abstract" because it only had relevance for "the outer form of a work of art".<sup>48</sup> Compared to Nicholson's epigrammatic statements which pointedly refused to predict the "precise future" as "a living present necessarily contains its own future", Hepworth's four-page essay is more theoretical and programmatic.<sup>49</sup> The war did not diminish her belief in the constructive vision of contemporary art and science uniting to contribute positively to a general process of reconstruction:



If there is any virtue in this present war-time destruction it is, I feel, only to be found in its fluid quality - out of which could spring new impulses.<sup>50</sup>

Two years later Hepworth responded to an article by Herbert Read which expressed certain reservations about the Constructivists' "illusion of the transcendence of the work of art", by producing a counterblast which reiterated Gabo's vision of the role of the artist in society:

I firmly believe that the emotional link is far greater now between society and the artist than at any time since the last war...We are... quite clear about reconstruction but there is much to be done - now... good art is always socially relevant...it must contain the seed of social critique...It is now time for action - the artists are ready - society not yet.<sup>51</sup>

It is interesting and perhaps not without significance that as the war dragged on Lanyon's conception of the artist as an engineer of social reconstruction, "directing and coordinating forms of social behaviour",<sup>52</sup> echoes the collectivist ideology behind the constructivism formulated by Hepworth (and Gabo) more than Nicholson's theoretical notations about creative individualism.

#### LETTERS HOME: ABSTRACT ART AND WAR

In the Spring of 1940 Lanyon was sent to an R.A.F. training camp near Morecambe Bay. His dream of becoming a pilot came to nothing when he was rejected on medical grounds (he suffered from migraine). Instead, he spent the war as an aircraft engineer, repairing pressure gauges, pumps and valves. At first he found it difficult to adjust to military life and there was a hiatus in his creative work:

...I was beginning to wonder whether I should ever get that creative urge again. Whether this mechanical life would suppress it or kill it. I found before, especially on the boat to and from S.Africa that I couldn't paint I got restless and into a sort of highly strung state. Last night I got it and felt like yelling...I wanted to do something. At home I could have been in the studio and exhausted the energy. Here I can't. I couldn't even draw. It just wasn't possible in the surroundings.<sup>53</sup>

However, it did not take him long to start benefiting from the Cornish revival of the collectivist spirit that had been embodied in Circle before the war. By December 1940 he was able to work through some of the extrinsic conceptual implications of Nicholson and Hepworth's ideology while exploring their intrinsic achievements in pushing the boundaries of form consciousness towards a timeless aesthetic underpinned by mathematical logic.

A work like Untitled Construction (1940, destroyed, Pl.25) epitomises the patterns of affinity and difference between Lanyon and Hepworth's sculpture at this time. Its curvilinear character, the penetration of the collar-like form in the centre by another looping configuration, echoes the inventive exploration of space and volume, the dissection of solid material and the rejection of closed form, characteristic of Hepworth's sculptures after 1936. Although the sculpture retains an emphasis on the tactile association of solid form, its suggestion of movement and spatial ambiguity also has affinities with the mathematical planes found in Gabo's work.<sup>54</sup>

A letter, dated 14th December 1940 and sent from R.A.F. Hawnden, reveals the interesting blend of influences operating on him at this time. Lanyon describes a construction (subsequently destroyed), inventively made from piston rings salvaged from one of the aircraft repair hangars.

I strung two rings together with thread...and twisted one...I don't know how it went, but some wonderful curves appeared and I played with the two rings for days and did drawings of circles connected by lines.<sup>55</sup>

He used a perspex disc and a "glass circle...rather like a lens - only hollow" to float in the space between the piston rings. The overall effect of transparent circles delicately suspended within a metal construction recalls Nicholson's lessons in exploring space and movement. Unlike the interplay of transparent and visually continuous planes found in many of Gabo's works, Lanyon's construction is given clearly articulated dimensions by the material solidity of the metal rings.<sup>56</sup> The perspex and glass indicate space through an angular intersection of planes, but it is the complex



arrangement of the stringing that creates a dynamic field of linear energy and guides the internal rhythm of the structure. The incorporation of point to point stringing to show direction across pockets of space is very different from Gabo's linear striations incised into semi-transparent plastic to highlight a sense of movement of planes in space. Stringing sculpture was the most obvious manifestation of Hepworth's artistic influence as Gabo did not use this technique until the 1942 Linear Construction in Space No.1.<sup>57</sup>

During the war Lanyon came to rely on Nicholson and Hepworth for advice and news of developments in the visual arts. He kept up a continuous correspondence with them (letters are usually addressed jointly) while serving with the Air Rescue Maintenance Units in North Africa, the Middle East and Italy. The relationship was not one of equals but assumed the traditional master-pupil pattern with Nicholson maintaining his position as aesthetic mentor and intellectual guardian. Lanyon would explain the evolution of and rationale behind various wartime constructions assembled in snatched moments between shifts maintaining and repairing aircraft engines. Nicholson, acting as Lanyon's informal agent, arranged for work to be photographed and viewed by collectors and critics.<sup>58</sup> As a result of his efforts Triangle Construction appeared in the New York arts journal Partisan Review alongside works by Gabo, Wells and Hepworth. He also kept Lanyon in touch with events in St Ives - an undated letter thanks Nicholson for some photographs of Wells' constructions:

Your letter and photos were a great tonic...The photos of Wells' things - especially the last - look grand. I am immensely thrilled with the last one. It is what I am onto at present. Did he ever paint or deal with flat planes?<sup>59</sup>

Several of Lanyon's wartime letters refer to articles in World Review, Horizon and Art Now as well as Herbert Read's commentaries on contemporary art ("I have ordered Herbert Read's book and am looking forward to reading it").<sup>60</sup> It is clear that Nicholson was encouraging the younger artist to read and reflect on the work of critics sympathetic to the modernist aesthetic. Edward Hulton's popular magazine, World Review, representing perhaps the most significant example of the survival of the optimistic spirit of pre-war Constructivism, made a significant impact on Lanyon in the North African desert:



...Great interest in reconstruction. Any constructive articles or news as welcome as beer. Hulton's efforts very popular. Any news of cultural side of our "new order" very acceptable. A great chance here to show the truth in articles and pictures. Politics, ethics, philosophy and the arts - a source of interest to a remarkable degree.<sup>61</sup>

Hulton had published an ambitious series of articles entitled "This Changing World" which kept alive the debate started in Circle about the perceived social function of art and science. Writers, artists and scientists were brought together to establish if there were "some common factors behind the contemporary manifestations of thought and life"<sup>62</sup> and to establish how contemporary art and science could contribute positively to the wider process of social reconstruction after the war. Read's introductory essay reiterated modernism's essential continuity with the idealistic constructive paradigms established in Circle and intimated a programme of artistic and social regeneration which would be launched after the war:

They may not be in the public eye, but the individuals in whom the spirit of modernism is embodied still survive, still work, still create - however obscurely and intermittently. When the cloud of war has passed, they will re-emerge, eager to rebuild the shattered world... They will say: our world is in ruins; it needs not only hard work perseverance to rebuild it, but also skill and vision. We are scientists and we believe we have the skill: we are artists and we believe we have the vision. Let us direct your work and we promise you that out of the ruins a better world will emerge.<sup>63</sup>

There can be little doubt that Lanyon's conversion to Constructivism was strongly influenced by the idea that contemporary art and science shared a common progressive spirit. Further evidence of his interest in the issues raised by the World Review series can be found in a letter to Nicholson and Hepworth from Blackpool in February, 1942:

I have just read "Helter Skelter Universe" in World Review and it has started me thinking. The measurement of speed by sound and colour frequencies is very vital stuff. The imaginative speed of lines in



frequencies is very vital stuff. The imaginative speed of lines in drawing suggested movement and now this desire of mine to find where colour comes in. It all helps. Expression of form with energies.<sup>64</sup>

The last line particularly relates to the kind of work Lanyon was producing at this time. Sketch of Paths of Moving Points. Moving about Solids. Segments of a Sphere (also titled Moonlight Agir, Palestine, 6 x 9in., pencil and ink on paper, 1942, Pl.32) uses pencil-lines and ink to mark out the angulation of planes and the interpenetration of light and space. The rhythms of the composition suggest a path of motion for the moon and the drawing conveys the growing influence of Gabo's theories concerning line as a delineator of kinetic forces.

Lanyon's absorption and synthesis of artistic developments in Cornwall during the war can be seen in works which evoke the same hidden, geometric order explored by Hepworth in her "crystal" drawings. Abstraction (6 x 5in., ink, crayon and pencil on paper, 1941, Pl.30 fig.1), Abstract (8 x 10in., ink and crayon on paper, c.1941, Pl.30 fig.2) and Untitled (10 x 14in., pencil on paper, 1940 or 1941, Pl.30 fig.3) are studies of geometric structures with interlocking parts joined by converging, diverging and intersecting lines echoing Hepworth's complicated internal designs, her use of colour and her highly personal expression of spatial feeling. By unlocking a dynamic field of linear energy derived from the internal geometry of the crystal both artists sought to find the balance between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, the poetic and the concrete.

These precisely drawn crystalline forms, sometimes seen from above, sometimes from the side, confirm that Gabo's influence was strongly felt by both artists. The intersecting straight lines and parabolic curves of Lanyon's drawings satisfy Gabo's requirement that form should shape and articulate space itself. Read spatially the drawings appear to articulate the internal spaces of imaginary forms with linear threading. Abstraction (Pl.30 fig.1) recalls one of Hepworth's very early linear drawings, executed in 1940, which itself strongly echoes the side view of Gabo's perspex Construction in Space with Crystalline Centre (c.1938).



After the war Lanyon described his meeting with Gabo as the final stage of his induction into the Constructivist fraternity.

I'll never forget the first time I went to Gabo's house and saw a perspex construction. You know the feeling that people always find mysterious: hello, I've been here before. Well, I got exactly the same feeling when I looked at these things: this is so familiar. I've seen this before and I don't think I had ever seen an object which was so obviously right in every way and full of poetry...He was trying to define space, and space after all has no quality...it isn't solid, and I felt the means he used for this were absolutely ideal for this, he was creating forms in space itself, and he was using space like sculptors use stone...previously I was just somebody flapping around looking around bits of country.<sup>65</sup>

It is not known which of Gabo's perspex constructions Lanyon saw. When Gabo took refuge in Cornwall he had been working on experiments which he termed the "Spherical Theme" since 1936. His rejection of "mass as a sculptural element"<sup>66</sup> and interest in the kinetic potential of art to express "the basic forms of our perception of real time"<sup>67</sup> led him to construct more rhythmic and rounded forms - reducing the angularity of earlier works such as Construction in Space with Balance on Two Points (1924/25). Even his carvings in stone - where the solid medium might appear incompatible with the stated kinetic intentions - employ the same continuously curving, spiralling surfaces, but this time enclosed within the volume of the stone. Lanyon's wartime drawings reveal a synthesis of references drawn from the artistic lexicon of all three of the Carbis Bay masters, but as the war progressed he became more interested in Gabo's vision of space and the relationship between art and science.

Gabo's long-term influence on Lanyon was both profound and enduring: he offered a coherent theoretical and ideological foundation upon which art for the twentieth century might be built. While Nicholson's understanding



of the ideological ramifications of the concept of Constructive art was unlikely to have extended beyond an intuitive sense that a "right" idea was involved and that "the present constructive movement is a living force and that life gives birth to life",<sup>68</sup> Gabo possessed an undisputed mastery of how the "constructive" impulse would be able to build new structures of knowledge, culture and society to usher in a brave new post-war order.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important not to accept Lanyon's version of the speed and absoluteness of his conversion to Gabo's constructivist creed entirely at face value. Ironically, given his later espousal of Gabo as his "aesthetic father figure",<sup>70</sup> the wartime correspondence with Nicholson and Hepworth reveals a reluctance to align himself to the Constructivist movement - whatever his personal regard for Gabo's philosophical and artistic attainments. In February 1942, shortly before embarking from Blackpool to North Africa, he expressed his doubts about some of the claims made by the constructive artists:

The Constructivists claim so much for having released painting from its frame, the sanction of the easel picture, the end of preciousness. Don't they substitute another frame for it? Isn't it necessary to remove all extraneous trappings from the mind to look at a construction? To adopt an attitude which is cut off and so to manufacture a frame for the object to be observed?<sup>71</sup>

He was clearly uneasy with the prospect of belonging to a movement which was under attack for being out of step with the "true" concerns of the artist which were "poetic" rather than "plastic", concerned with content rather than the chimerical search for "significant form". The avant-garde received harsh critical reviews at this time and were accused of being "grammarians" and "extreme purists" who were merely experimenting with "visual speech".<sup>72</sup>

A growing interest in establishing the imperatives of a national culture alighted on a quintessentially English sensibility based on a world of sentiment and association reaching back to the myth of a temperate island Arcadia. Ron Landau's Love For a Country embodied the view that landscape

painting was the only appropriate artistic expression in a time of national crisis:

No one could dispute that the English culture and civilisation are inseparable from the English countryside or that the latter has produced some of the finest in the native character.<sup>73</sup>

A letter, written in June 1941, once again illustrates Lanyon's attempts to distance himself from the Constructivist resurgence:

I feel, although rather vaguely, that the attitude of labelling things, giving names, measuring everything carefully, being too rational, is a disease. Is there no room for instincts and intuitions, the vague things, which Science does not label?<sup>74</sup>

He shared the neo-Romantic appreciation of the countryside as the "genius loci" of artistic inspiration. It was difficult to ignore that the global aspirations for an unlimited and universal abstract art heralded by Circle had been shattered by the outbreak of world war. He anticipated his movement towards landscape painting as a context for the forms and devices of abstract Constructivism:

Surely the creative power is only diluted by too much forethought and not enough of the blotting paper attitude, soaking in and digesting. The creation comes first from the whole being, thought afterwards...I have not the mathematic mind, is it dangerous that way or is the post which the scientists and mathematicians claim to hold on to in flood times, only worse than swimming? (or drifting).<sup>75</sup>

However, at some point during the war Lanyon overcame his reservations and began to see himself as a member of the Constructivist movement. A letter, dated May 2nd 1942, sent to Nicholson and Hepworth while he was serving in the North African desert, shows that he now considered himself to be part of the "new order".<sup>76</sup> It is difficult to be precise about the timing of Lanyon's Constructivist conversion as he continued to produce



more traditionally representational drawings and gouaches alongside his three-dimensional work. As the war progressed he felt increasingly distant from his native Cornwall and the dominant neo-Romantic aesthetic prevalent in England. His experiences encouraged him to aim at objectivity, a universal idea of abstract beauty which, in its harmony and balance, would correct some of the disorder and chaos prevalent in wartime life.

The gradualness of this shift can be seen in two sketches produced in 1940: In the Constructive Drawing, Two Columns (No. 1) (6 x 9in., pencil on card, Pl.23), Lanyon uses a motif favoured by many Cubists (and Nicholson), the tilted table-top. The drawing is a Nicholson-inspired study concerned with the relationships of shapes which have been abstracted from a specific visualised object. The rendering of table top, legs and surface objects as independent flat surfaces on a single pictorial plane, functioning autonomously within the picture, was a feature of Cubism (and is apparent in much of Nicholson's work after 1924). In Constructive drawing: Two Columns (No. 2) (10½ x 14in., pencil on card, 1940, Pl.24), hatching is introduced and the table top is becoming a twisted construction. The title of these two works and the introduction of a more complicated sequence of linear hatching shows that Gabo's influence was becoming stronger. Lanyon's drawings now turned to a more precise and diagrammatic solution than was offered by the flat planes derived from Cubist practice. The influence of Gabo's constructivist engineering becomes even more noticeable in Drawing for construction in perspex and aluminium (8 x 11in., pencil on card, 1941, Pl.31), Drawings for a frustrum (8½ x 12in., pencil on card, 1944, Pl.36) and Construction on a frustrum: the path of a moving point (9 x 11¼in., pencil on card, 1944, Pl.35). Lanyon has abandoned the attempt to simplify the planal presentation of objects (as he had attempted in Triangle Turning) and explores a more complex geometric solution: areas of positive form and negative space are inextricably intertwined (as in Gabo's perspex constructions) and a feeling of kinetic movement is implied.

During the war, Lanyon was engaged in technically demanding work testing and repairing Spitfire engines and his appreciation of the sophistication of these machines influenced the drawings and constructions produced at this time. Testing pneumatic pumps and hydraulics gave him a deeper understanding of the spatial dynamics involved in advanced engineering.



Hayden Griffiths has observed how many of Lanyon's wartime abstracts hint at his growing awareness of how engineering motifs could be turned into interesting abstract creations. Works such as Drawing for Construction in Pespex and Aluminium, (8 x 11 in., pencil on card, 1941, Pl.31) employ devices derived from his daily contact with aero-engineering: cross-sections of cylindrical forms, orthogonal projections of rectangular forms, spheres projected into parabolic ovoids and intersections of consecutive curves.

His engineering work gave him a genuine understanding of complex mechanical principles and an insight into the importance of design in modern aesthetics.

The Spitfire construction is wonderful and savours of really good workmanship, it is beautiful to look at...the shapes are wonderful, forms like graceful birds, elliptical forms, triangles and aerofoil shapes. Shapes I used before I came here and here they are...Is there not the germ of spiritual revival: in the works of people like Gabo, with machines in his blood, the beat of growing Russia and his engineering past. It heartens me to think that I may be on some right trail, not a sheep following the shepherd, but one who admires the shepherd and will follow, believing myself in the rightness of it all.<sup>77</sup>

Clearly his technical experience as an aero-engine fitter, repairing shattered aircraft and testing new engines, had immediate application for the experiments he was conducting in translating three-dimensional forms onto flat surfaces and inspired him to find new solutions to the problems of establishing coherent relationships between plane, point and line:

One reason I like my job is because one has to interpret many operations into visible and understandable terms. Actions that occur simultaneously interpreted into say one gauge, differences of pressure transformed into reciprocating, then rotary motion and finally through fluid to pressure and by differences of pressure to visual data. I am now on a job which entails work with automatic valves and pressure compensating diaphragms again I have to evolve a test rig to check these actions. So in my photograms I have similar problems of space and three



dimensional aspects interpreted onto flat planes - there is a similarity here.<sup>78</sup>

The wartime workshops provided the young flight mechanic with a constant supply of materials which could be salvaged for a construction - or to produce a "much needed apparatus for the maintenance of the service":

This finding something to make into something else was a fundamental part of my existence...The life was that of an inventor not in the abstract but with things already real and formed. I believe this crystallised my interest for content in painting.<sup>79</sup>

Working with the detritus of aircraft engines gave Lanyon a "beach-combing" mentality, a magpie's instinct for seeing the potential of a limitless variety of materials which could be transformed into art. However, his interest in the laws determining both artistic and scientific form show his aesthetic ideas moving closer to Gabo's constructivist philosophy.

Science comes to the rescue with the suggestion that time and space are different facets of a unified underlying world of space-time and it became clear that mass and energy hitherto thought to be distinct, are also double personalities and can therefore be transformed into one another. The logical conclusion of these remarks, as related to my own work, is not for me to find in logic and reasoning, but to weld into the whole human existence and the social order through my art.<sup>80</sup>

This statement and others that followed reflect Lanyon's growing grasp of the implications of Gabo's assertion that time perceived through kinetic rhythm is a basic ingredient of art. His hope that "Art will bring the balance of physical and spiritual to modern chaotic science progress"<sup>81</sup> unconsciously echoes Gabo's appeal in Circle that constructivism will bring "an entirely new approach to the nature of Art and its functions in life."<sup>82</sup> Lanyon's enhanced grasp of scientific principles led him to believe that the speed of progress in science alone could be detrimental to society unless the new technology could be harnessed to a visual aesthetic which

would serve as a metaphor for the process of reconstruction. Gabo had expressed similar thoughts when he stated that while "Science teaches, Art asserts...Science looks and observes, Art sees and foresees". Yet, the two disciplines spring "from the same creative source and flow into the same ocean of the common culture."<sup>83</sup>

In March 1942 Lanyon showed two drawings and two constructions alongside works by Gabo, Hepworth and Nicholson in the New Movements in Art - Contemporary Work in England exhibition organised by Margot Eates and E.H. Ramsden at the London Museum.<sup>84</sup> It was the most significant display of modernist art in England during the war. Herbert Read, reviewing the exhibition for Horizon, singled out Gabo's Construction in Space: Spiral Theme (Pl.65) as "a miracle of precision and harmony...an axial system (which) crystallises energy itself." Lanyon was mentioned as one of the younger constructivists who provided evidence that "expansion and development are possible in this direction".<sup>85</sup>

By mid-summer 1942 Lanyon was serving with the Central Mediterranean Force in Palestine. His eclectic wartime work, including a reference to his supervision of aircraft engine test rigs, is described in a lengthy letter written to Gabo on 11th June - by now he has clearly aligned himself to the Constructivist aesthetic:

...many landscapes and during the last few months a few constructive paintings which I am approaching from the colour angle. I found a ring of metal, which had been the nucleus of most of my works. Curves derived from it, involutes, parabolas and other curves together with the colour of this country have formed them...My work has, lately, developed into something of immense interest being constructive and the type which requires thought and the application of original ideas...I find myself developing and becoming more conscious of my own purpose. Your "Construction in Space Spiral Theme" I have with me, in photograph...<sup>86</sup>

Lanyon's letters to Gabo, infrequent at the beginning of the war (even



though Gabo was using his studio behind the family home, the "Red House"), reveal a greater sense of intimacy and shared purpose by mid-1943.

Whether I am right I don't know, probably I am sinking. I realise such times are essential, but here now, it is a colossal strain wondering what is happening. Such things are perhaps personal, lonely, to be solved alone. Your letters and your letter to Read, Horizon articles often help quite a bit. At the same time I long for home.<sup>87</sup>

It is clear that Lanyon's experimentation with engines, mechanics and scientific instruments had stimulated his interest in the creative possibilities offered by Constructivism.

#### CONSTRUCTIVISM VERSUS NEO-ROMANTICISM

Ironically, Lanyon's full conversion to Constructivism took place at a time when Nicholson and Hepworth were modifying the purely mathematical resonances of their structures with suggestions of more natural and organic forms derived from familiar visual experience - moving unselfconsciously across the supposed frontier between figuration and abstraction.

As early as 1937 John Piper and Paul Nash had announced a return to the English landscape tradition (albeit modified by the experience of Surrealism). Piper's contribution to The Painter's Object, a chapter entitled "Lost, a Valuable Object", called for the restoration of representation in painting and made an even more reactionary demand for objects to be depicted in their familiar context:

It will be a good thing to get back to the tree in the field that everybody is working for. For it is certainly hoped that we shall get back to it as fact, as a reality. As something more than an ideal.<sup>88</sup>

By the early 1940s landscape was regarded as the most appropriate subject for British artists - a view supported by Kenneth Clark in "The Living Image - Art and Life" (a 1941 radio discussion with Graham Sutherland and

Henry Moore). A consensus emerged that only romantic painting was truly compatible with the national character.<sup>89</sup> The finest products of the Romantic movement included Sutherland's paintings based on his poetic and imaginative response to the "exultant strangeness"<sup>90</sup> of the remote Pembrokeshire landscape, Piper's studies of the Welsh mountains, Moore's famous "shelter drawings" and Paul Nash's visionary landscapes.

This myth of the primacy of landscape painting was reinforced by countless paintings, postcards, films and photographs designed to summon up loyalty to the beleaguered nation. J.B. Priestley's radio talks reinforced the feeling of a nation unified by shared values and objectives when he spoke of Britain's historic past, its countryside, and the promise of greatness to come. Benjamin Britten reflected pastoral yearnings in his evocative settings of popular folk songs and poetry. The government demonstrated its endorsement of this movement (retrospectively identified as Neo-Romanticism) through the War Artists' Advisory Committee, headed by Clark, which sponsored artists such as Piper, Sutherland and Moore to record images of a traditional and shared way of life under threat from the yoke of tyranny and oppression. Schemes such as the national topographic survey, Recording Britain, set up by the Council for the Encouragement of Music and Arts in 1941, encouraged the idea of a "country culture" - a green and pleasant land imbued with a sacred, mythic quality - threatened not only by Nazi stormtroopers across the Channel, but also by the drab suburbia of the emergent middle classes.

While Nicholson and Hepworth continued to present themselves as key exponents of international modernism, the early war years saw them turn away from the visual manifestations - the geometrical forms and pure abstraction - of constructivist enquiry. In December 1939 Nicholson told Paul Nash that he was working on "one or two Cornish best-selling schemes" and went on to describe the impact that nature was having on his work:

The country here is very lovely & it's many years since I lived in the country and with all these majestic mines and dictators left & right one never knows if each marvellous thing one sees may not be the last time one sees it and so it becomes very intense - I used



to have one or two dreams recurring annually about the sea - I always thought the stories were overdone & the drama & the terrific intense colour - but the real thing has been much more so.<sup>91</sup>

The growing ascendancy of the Neo-Romantic movement as well as daily contact with the Cornish landscape had an immediate and irresistible effect on Nicholson and Hepworth. Nicholson's renewed interest in nature encouraged him to respond more directly to the visual world and his work is suffused with his experience of the Cornish light, sky, land and sea.

The sheer variety of his work after the move to St Ives reflected a broadening, as well as a relaxation in his output - a return to the openness of the 1920s. The carefully drawn lines and shadows of the cup, mug and rectangular window frame in the foreground of St Ives, version 2 (1940, Pl.27) recall the composition of the 1930s reliefs. However, the severity of the earlier reliefs is softened by a view of the world beyond - St Ives, The Island and St Nicholas' chapel:

There is light and lightness everywhere, as well as a return to the playful note of innocence that sounds from some of the 1928 Cornwall landscapes and also from such occasional pieces as the textile design of 1937, George and Rufus.<sup>92</sup>

Just as Nicholson's rigorous abstraction of the pre-war years had been mediated by the irresistible pull of natural forms - so Hepworth soon found herself responding to Cornwall in terms of a referential and associative naturalism.

It was during this time that I discovered the remarkable pagan landscape which lies between St Ives, Penzance and Land's End; a landscape which still has a very deep effect on me, developing all my ideas about the relationship of the human figure in landscape-sculpture and landscape, and the essential quality of light in relation to sculpture, which induced a new way of piercing the forms to contain colour.<sup>93</sup>

The compact pre-war carving of solid spheres and faceted forms is opened

up to combine a greater sense of organic rhythm with an exploration of the interpenetration of form and space. Sculpture with Colour (Oval Form) (1943) has been carved so that the exterior and interior are allowed to assume equal importance, the boundaries between the voids and solids have been dissolved to form a single curvilinear movement.

Hepworth put into her work emotions stirred by observing the natural processes of growth and form in the Cornish landscape. Naturalistic colours invest her carvings with a degree of association and meaning which openly show their derivation from the visual world - for example, the correspondence of the blue interior in Sculpture with Colour Deep Blue and Red (the first and smallest of the plaster sculptures made in 1940, Pl.28) with the colour of the sea. The incorporation of stringing across a deeply carved void denotes an abstract equivalent of bodily sensations in the landscape.

The colour in the concavities plunges me into the depths of the water, caves of shadows deeper than the concavities themselves. The strings were the tension I felt between myself and the sea, the wind or the hills.<sup>94</sup>

Although Hepworth's Cornish sculptures do not depict the hills, beaches, towns or prehistoric menhirs which give titles to the works as literal representations, she nevertheless believed that they were generalized equivalents created out of the original landscape stimulus.<sup>95</sup> These semi-abstract sculptures serve as three-dimensional counterparts to the Neo-Romantic landscape painting of Sutherland, Hitchens and Piper.

Even Gabo was led to explorations of structures generated by natural forces - crystals, shells and precious stones - in his search for a "kinetic image of continuous extension".<sup>96</sup> While he continued to adhere to his belief that artists "cannot go on forever painting the view from their window and pretending that this is all there is in the world, because it is not",<sup>97</sup> he became increasingly interested in the inner structure of the landscape and the geology of Cornwall, amassing a collection of pebbles from the beaches west of St Ives and taking many to America in 1946.<sup>98</sup> Gabo once



intimated to Lanyon that the germination of his ideas for the spiralling spaces and curves of the constructions assembled in Carbis Bay came from the organic forms of the landscape, shells, precious stones and watching the Atlantic rollers crashing onto Porthmeor beach:

We were walking along the coast at Carbis Bay and Gabo described the germination of his ideas - a sweep of the beach over there; a certain curve in a specific dimension; the trajectory of a shooting star, a curve in another dimension. Their intersection. And maybe, the curves of a small leaf at one's feet - a relationship of curves and planes in space - not an abstraction but an art based on observation.<sup>99</sup>

The attempt to build a brave new world according to Constructivist precepts did not survive the onslaught of Neo-Romanticism and a reassertion of natural forms and forces derived from the Cornish landscape in the work of both Nicholson and Hepworth. In 1943 they announced their wish to be dissociated from Constructivism - but not "the constructive idea" which they saw as a common thread running through all of art history, linking Mondrian to Giotto.<sup>100</sup> The friendship with Gabo dissolved in acrimonious feelings of betrayal and charges of plagiarism. In March 1945 Gabo remarked to Herbert Read:

I hardly see B and B lately and when I see them the room does not get warmer.<sup>101</sup>

A monograph on Constructivism failed to materialise and Nicholson was accused of attempting to subvert the supranationalist ideals of the pre-war movement with his own nationalist strain of modernism.<sup>102</sup> The practice of sharing ideas and technical discoveries was now regarded with profound suspicion as Gabo believed that Hepworth had made little attempt to disguise the provenance of her stolen forms.<sup>103</sup> He was keen to have an exhibition in 1946, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Realistic Manifesto, and in July 1945 wrote to the Alex Reid & Lefevre Gallery about a possible show between January and April 1946. Duncan McDonald, a gallery representative, came to see him in St Ives in December 1945 and suggested November 1946 for an exhibition.<sup>104</sup> In the event the plans came to nothing and Gabo partially

blamed Hepworth as she had contrived to organise an exhibition of her work at the same gallery in October 1946.<sup>105</sup> He left England for New York in November 1946 and did not return until 1954.

It is hardly surprising that internecine feuding broke out between three such powerful personalities trapped in a small provincial town in the South-West during the difficult days of World War Two. Nevertheless, the squabbling and disappointments were not entirely to blame for Gabo's decision to leave England for New York. His wife, Miriam, was an American citizen and he had often thought of leaving during the war:

...It would be better to leave here if we could get a visa for America. We are waiting for a reply; and although crossing the ocean is dangerous, here there is no less danger.<sup>106</sup>

He had visited America for the first time in 1938, accompanying his well received one-man exhibition, Constructions in Space, which travelled to Connecticut and New York.<sup>107</sup> Many of the leaders of the European avant-garde had already emigrated to a land of opportunity which seemed more sympathetic to the cause of experimental abstraction than England. While the disagreements with Nicholson and Hepworth might have hastened Gabo's departure, it was unlikely that his stay was ever intended to be permanent.

#### A RETURN TO NATURAL FORMS: LANYON 1943-5

In early 1944, two years after leaving England, Lanyon was transferred to Italy. His unit landed at Taranto and was stationed near Brindisi until December 1944. At first he experienced some difficulty in finding subjects which he could paint:

I wondered how I could illustrate the heart of the Italian peasant, vital and strong like the slow lumbering white oxen on the planes beyond Foggia.<sup>108</sup>

This block was overcome when he began to sense similarities between the



region of Apulia, the eastern heel of Italy which faces the Adriatic coast, and his own native Cornwall.<sup>109</sup> He was particularly interested to hear that trade links existed between the two regions in the fifth century B.C. when Taranto was the most prosperous town in Magna Graecia and the local tribe, the Lapyges, tenaciously resisted Greek colonisation. As Lanyon's experience broadened, he began to depict landscapes, naturalistic street views of Foggia and Naples, architectural studies and portraits in what appears to have been an attempt to make a diary of the world about him (Pl.37-39). He variously tried his hand at oils, watercolours, gouaches and pen and ink or pencil drawings as well as metal and wire constructions inspired by Gabo's Spiral Theme.

The drawings and gouaches are extremely competent, if not highly original, impressions of the transitory nature of his time in Italy. They reveal his impressive command of traditional drawing techniques, hatching, visual editing and tonal construction. He was immediately struck by the Mediterranean quality of light:

There are no deep hard shadows as in Cornwall because all reflected light is strong. The colour is therefore, of an exquisite quality.<sup>110</sup>

This way of seeing, reiterated in a letter to his sister ("this is the country of flowers and a blue sky and not the ponderous mists and the heavy storm clouds"),<sup>111</sup> seems to have been conditioned by Stokes' belief that the artistic creation in the Quattro Cento was inextricably linked to the climate and pellucidness of the South which "induces even a Northerner to contemplate things in their positional or spatial aspect, as objects revealed, as symbols of objective realization."<sup>112</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting work belonging to the period of Lanyon's wartime service in Italy was a mural for the officers' mess at Brindisi called Wine, Women and Song (dimensions unknown, destroyed).<sup>113</sup> He used aircraft paint for its intensity of colour and set out the composition to fit in with the semicircular form of the wall and "its slight tendency to gothic proportions". He gave a detailed description of this large work in a letter to Gabo on 3rd December 1944:

I found myself doing something like a Picasso, but with less destruction of objects, but in organisation I let myself go...I found myself organising the objects, bottles, barrels, dart board, wine glass, man playing an accordion, man drinking in the curved space making a sort of room where they all had life like the interior of a sphere filled with these things living together with their different weights, speeds, colours and textures and associations.<sup>114</sup>

Although he felt inhibited by the need to collaborate with a Canadian artist, producing "something which would appeal to the gaze of equally inhibited officers over a drink at the bar",<sup>115</sup> the mural afforded Lanyon an interesting opportunity to return to figurative painting on a scale larger than anything he had previously undertaken.

The paintings and drawings produced between 1943 and 1945 reveal that Lanyon was moving freely between the non-figurative forms of constructivism, plein air sketches, oils, watercolours and even the art of painting murals. As the war came to an end Lanyon drew away from the extremes of purist abstraction. The terms of constructivist composition were too absolute and Lanyon followed Nicholson and Hepworth in relying once more on associative naturalism to express his feelings for the landscape:

All these experiments I have made in form and construction in space are not finality for me: they are experiments which I shall attach to the pictorial as the meaning of things grows stronger in me.<sup>116</sup>

He sensed that his experimentation with "bloodless abstract conception" had failed to capture the essence of "human feeling and expression...tears and blood and the deepest emotions...Perhaps I shall bear something fresh of this union and leave the valuable year of construction behind."<sup>117</sup>

The way his work wanders freely between the purity of the abstract drawings and the softer, more referential paintings, makes neat classification of his material impossible. It is difficult to trace the evolution of Lanyon's styles and themes with exactitude during the war years. In general, however,



he did not feel that this eclecticism compromised his adherence to a constructive ideology which focused more on the indivisibility of "Content and Form" and an aspiration for spiritual and moral renewal than a didactic insistence on an aesthetic code.

Works such as Drawing in Oval - Agir, Palestine (9 x 8in., pencil on paper, 1943, Pl.34), Two Abstract Studies (12 x 11in., crayon on paper, 1943, Pl.33) and the numerous sketches of ideas and forms for constructions were produced side by side with pictures from nature. Small diagrammatic sketches such as Construction on a Frustrum: The path of a moving point (pencil on paper, 1944, Pl.35) and Drawings for Frustrum (pencil on paper, 1944, Pl.36) are drawn using transparent planes, geometrical rhythms and curvilinear surfaces and line in a constructivist manner. When colour is used, as in Dust Forms, Generation, Italy (pencil and crayon on paper, 1945, Pl.41), Green Form (15 x 11in., oil on board, 1945, Pl.42) and Abstract Study, Italy (8 x 16in., ink and gouache, 1945, Pl.43) Lanyon achieves the same iridescent inner glow which can be seen in Gabo's dozen or so small wartime paintings (the use of colour to denote translucency would also have pleased Adrian Stokes).<sup>118</sup> He shared Gabo's concern for depth, devising a series of overlapping and enveloping circular forms which suggest movement and growth, echoing the Realistic Manifesto's renunciation of the delusion "that held the static rhythms as the only elements of the plastic and pictorial arts".<sup>119</sup>

The elaborate and multi-layered spatial complexes of Green Form contains strong affinities with Gabo's Kinetic Oil Painting in Four Movements, though the depiction of taut linear threading to connect the various surfaces is more reminiscent of Hepworth's use of stringing to articulate an existing spatial structure, juxtaposing straight lines against curvilinear form. A matrix of artists - including Hepworth and Wells - drew on Gabo's work to produce imagery which alludes to the theme of generation. The womb-like ovals, enclosing embryonic shapes, hint at the post-war themes of procreation and fertility which forms such an important leitmotif to Lanyon's Generation Series.

He also took many photographs, finding the camera "an almost ideal



instrument for this life, being better than painting which requires so much quiet and concentration".<sup>120</sup> A book of seven photographs (Pl.40), dated 1944, with a "photogram" cover derived from Gabo's translucent curves, contains some evocative images of farm houses, a square at Lecce, an olive grove and interesting architectural details which caught the artist's eye. The pictures are accompanied by a free-association wordscape of dense and searching imagery which tries to locate the inner significance of the external world:

These arches, churches, quiet chapels by the road, even the small houses with their dunce hats, the trees; they have a grandeur and there is a permanent side to them. At the turn of the road the farm seems to have grown in the arcs of its country, in the hot day it rests. In the morning and the evening the farm works the soil and all is brought back to its motherly care. What comes of the earth is of the earth and man has found no more profound thing than the earth and the stones, so he built with them.<sup>121</sup>

Lanyon's identification with his subject, his attempt to reach behind the visible facade, leads him into a fantasy connected with material reminiscent of the carving metaphor advanced by Stokes. His identification of the farm and the soil as a symbol of maternal nurture shaped by the work of man recalls Stokes' gendering of artistic creativity: "man, in his male aspect, is the cultivator of woman who, in her female aspect, moulds her products as does the earth..."<sup>122</sup>

By the beginning of 1945 the war in Italy was nearly over and Lanyon joined the Educational and Vocational Training Scheme, teaching painting and organising exhibitions of work by RAF art clubs. He was able to return to landscape painting with renewed vigour:

...It appears as if much of the fog which has surrounded my painting is lifting and last night I painted a thing which seems to be something at last. I say it with all reservation - but it is a strong feeling that I have found something in landscape which has been there all the time and is a part of me. I also find that every painting of the past few months has been prophetic of it. It is like on the hills I found a maiden dancing simply just like that, there she was obviously



but of some degree precious. So that they are particular hills and a particular maiden, found like a jewel when you open the box from the mantelpiece...Everything in this land seems to be doing things simply and innocently...I begin to wonder if after all I am doing something that is near to life and it makes me hopeful.<sup>123</sup>

The Italian landscape and the many well-preserved monuments which he visited (he drew the Colosseum and St Peter's in April 1945) intimated the same sense of something timeless and irreducible in nature that he was able to experience in Cornwall. This passage clearly celebrates the return of his ability to enter into an animistic communion with nature. The significance of this moment of enlightenment lay in his ability to move away from the purely local sensation, the inevitable vicissitudes and exhaustion of historical existence as the war drew to a close, to the exaltation of a mythopoeic consciousness.

By the end of the war he had begun to evolve the rich metamorphic style that was to inform his work up to 1949 and became his signature in the Generation and Surfacing series. Paintings such as Ruins at Capua (11 x 9in., oil on board, Private Collection, Pl.46) and Blue Horse Truant (21 x 15in., ink, crayon and gouache on paper, Private Collection, Pl.47), both painted in Italy in 1945, mark a return to naturalism - now tinged with a poetic melancholia and a sense of atmospheric mystery not present in the pre-war works. The soft muted colours and scraped down surfaces are reminiscent of Nicholson's style, but there is a brooding introspection, a combination of romantic feeling and classical sensibility, absent in the abstract formalism of 1930s constructivism.

In Ruins at Capua we are led into the picture through a half-collapsed proscenium arch to survey the destruction wrought by warfare on a Renaissance palazzio. It is reminiscent of some of Piper's wartime studies of bomb-damaged buildings in London. The mood is reflective, the scene suffused in autumnal light, suggesting the going down of civilisation. Blue Horse Truant is a picture which employs the symbolism of the protective nurturing qualities of the landscape. A farmhouse is made secure by an enveloping curtain wall, but an open gate has allowed the blue horse to escape onto a road which

can be seen receding into the distance. It is possible that he is describing the gouache in this letter to his sister, Mary, written on 4th April 1945:

In it is Rome and the pillars I have seen and Italy in a queer gate and Godolphin [his sister's house] is the atmosphere. The birds are singing, sheep calling and a horse majestically, as horses do, standing on the grass, the house is full of secret staircases, intimate corners and beamed ceilings, but all in a lighter vein than you know because this is the country of flowers and a blue sky and not the ponderous mists and the heavy storm clouds.<sup>124</sup>

The imagery of the horse in the landscape reappears in one of Lanyon's first paintings after his return to St Ives in December 1945, The Yellow Runner (1946, oil on board, 18½ x 24in., Pl.51).

Lanyon's work in 1945/6 reflects the almost universal return to representative forms experienced in English art during the war. He began employing elements of naturalism and abstraction, combining the real and the unreal, constructivism and free imaginative painting. Shortly after V.E. Day he was transferred to Naples where he worked on murals for the Three Arts Club and gave a series of lectures entitled "Piercing the Picture Plane".<sup>125</sup> He wrote to his sister expressing his hopes for the future:

I maintain that this war is part of a revolution in man's minds and no years of this life have lessened that belief. We are either the fathers of a new hopeful but austere and courageous world or we are the lost generation.<sup>126</sup>

His experiences in the Servicemen's Educational and Training Scheme made him optimistic that a new social and cultural order could emerge after the trauma of warfare:

Here on the unit we have seen the beginnings of the new Britain, of education schemes, of clubs and hobbies...a more conscious community...a more vital electorate. The integration of Art in life...a consciousness of directing and coordinating forms of human behaviour - in fact the





When he returned to St Ives in December 1945 he found that the relatively harmonious balance of relationships which he had left six years earlier had fragmented into rival camps that were barely on speaking terms. He now faced enormous difficulties trying to reconcile his deep longing to re-discover the fundamental characteristics of his Cornish homeland, its inner essence, its special ensemble - concerning himself with the entire range of experiences through which he could locate the landscape in visual terms - while at the same time remaining true to the main precepts of Gabo's Constructivist vision.

### Notes to Chapter Three

1. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about his early life, 1962, TGA/TAV 211AB, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.27.
2. Ibid., p.27.
3. Ibid., p.27.
4. Quoted in Frances Spalding, British Art since 1900, Thames and Hudson, London, 1986, p.66.
5. This was not the first group dedicated to promote the interests of abstract art in France: for example, "Cercle et Carré" had been founded in 1930 by Joaquin Torres-Garcia and Michel Seuphor to advance non-figurative styles. Sculptures by Hepworth were reproduced in Abstraction-Création: Art Non Figuratif, No.2, 1933, p.6 and No.3, 1934, p.23.
6. Nicholson in Unit One: The Modern Movement in English Architecture, Painting and Sculpture, edited by Herbert Read, Cassell and Company Ltd., London, 1934; p.89. In his foreword, Paul Nash explained that despite using the term "common language" to describe the work of artists belonging to Unit One, this did not imply that there was only one method of painting, sculpting or designing buildings: "the title...combines the idea of unity - Unit - with that of Individuality: One."
7. Barbara Hepworth, *ibid.*, p.20.
8. The original broadsheet for the last Seven and Five Society exhibition, October 1935 is reproduced in Charles Harrison, English Art and Modernism, 1900-1939, Yale University Press, 1994 (first published 1981), p.344. A table on pp.346-7 gives dates and locations of exhibitions and members of the society. J.M. Richards, writing for Axis, 4, November 1935, declared that the Seven and Five represented a "school of abstract artists...working all with the same intentions...exhibiting one consistent point of view."
9. Herbert Read, reminiscences published in Apollo, September, 1962, reprinted in Read and Thistlewood (eds), Herbert Read: a British Vision of World Art, London, Lund Humphries, 1993, p.61.
10. Axis commenced publication in January 1935 as "a Quarterly Review of Abstract Painting and Sculpture". There were eight issues, edited by Myfanwy Evans (later Piper). Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art was published in 1937 by Faber & Faber, London (edited by Naum Gabo, Ben Nicholson and the architect Leslie Martin). It contained contributions from an international selection of artists, architects, scientists and critics and discerned in their work a new cultural unity reflecting "one common idea and one common spirit: the constructive trend in art of our day." (editorial p.vi).
11. Barbara Hepworth, Carvings and Drawings, with an introduction by Herbert Read, London, 1952. Quoted in C. Harrison, English Art and Modernism 1900 to 1939, first published 1981, second edition, Yale University Press, 1994, p.293.
12. Nicholson to Herbert Read, 5th December 1939. Quoted in "The War Years", essay by Virginia Button, Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery Catalogue, edited by Jeremy Lewison, 1993, p.56.
13. Herbert Read writing to Ben Nicholson, n.d., Christmas 1939, Nicholson Archive, Tate Gallery, London. Quoted in Chris Stephens, "From Constructivism to Reconstruction: Barbara Hepworth in the 1940s", in Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered, Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1996, p.140.
14. Charles Harrison, *op.cit.*, 1994, p.293. See also the chronology in St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery, *op.cit.*, p.100: "apart from making a few



small plaster maquettes she is restricted to drawing and painting in gouache until 1943 when she begins to carve in wood again". The arrival of triplets in 1934 had made financial matters more critical. In Carbis Bay, "the day was filled with running a nursery school, double-cropping a tiny garden for food, and trying to feed and protect the children". Quoted in Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, Phaidon Press, abridged paperback edition, 1998, p.102.

15. Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, Phaidon Press, London, 1993, p.187.

Margaret Mellis wrote an account in 1977, based on her wartime diaries, detailing some aspects of life at Little Park Owles in 1939/40. An extract is published in St Ives, 1939-64: Twenty-Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery; Tate Gallery Publishing Ltd., 1985 (revised edition, 1996), p.100. "...At this time Peter Lanyon was finding it hard to know what to do next with his painting....(Stokes) now suggested that Ben should give him lessons. It was a brilliant idea and gave Peter a great stimulus and he never looked back after that. It suited Ben because he was very hard up. The dual influence of Ben and Gabo who were quite different and yet part of the same movement was very fruitful. After Peter had been working with Ben for some months we all went to his studio to see what he had been doing and were very impressed by the liveliness and variety of his work."

16. Notes made by Peter Lanyon in 1940, printed in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.47.

17. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin, 1962, op.cit., TAV 211AB. Also printed in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.27.

18. Peter Lanyon, notes made in 1940, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.46. Peter Lanyon, list of "Paintings 1935-40", c.1942

19. Ibid., p.46.

20. "The Artist talks about his Painting", British Council lecture by Peter Lanyon, 1963, TAV 526 ABC. Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, p.10.

21. Herbert Read, Art Now, 1933.

22. Recorded talk, British Council lecture, op.cit., 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.49. Oliver Parfitt has observed that the formal principles in White Track have a precedent in Ponniou, 1937. The Generation of Tradition, M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute of Art, 1994, note 19, p.51.

23. "A perpetual state of arousal with no possibility of final gratification", Valerie Fletcher, Alberto Giacometti: 1901-1966, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C., 1988, p.26.

24. Ben Nicholson, undated letter to Herbert Read, early 1940, copy TGA 8717.1.3.34.

25. Peter Lanyon, notes made in 1940, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.47. Bosigran, a cliff formation and site of an ancient castle between St Ives and Land's End was a popular motif in Borlase Smart's paintings.

26. Ibid., p.47.

27. Ibid., p.47.

28. Ben Nicholson, "Notes on Abstract Art", Horizon, no.22, October 1941, pp.272-275.

29. Lanyon repudiated the exclusively formal and structural concerns under which he was labouring when he produced Triangle Construction: "I was not content to play variations on a theme of areas and dynamic tensions...I discovered that when I began to construct a space I was invaded by images of a musty kind which became more imminent as I tried to suppress them in the interests of structure. I had to suppress the facts against my will that I functioned best when concerned with my immediate environment...I



- began to doubt that some artists were constructing a concrete reality...I had to learn how to take control of complex images and allow them to emerge at the end of my brush. To do this I had to accept another characteristic; that of an apparent provincialism, I became a place man." Peter Lanyon, "A Sense of Place", The Painter and Sculptor, vol.5, no.2, Autumn 1962.
30. Naum Gabo was born in Briansk, Russia, in 1890. He made his first construction in Norway in 1915. He returned to Russia in 1917 and stayed until 1922, when he left Moscow for Berlin. He lived in England between 1935 and 1946, finally moving to Connecticut, U.S.A. Gabo and his brother, Antoine Pevsner, issued The Realistic Manifesto on August 5th 1920, published by the Second State Printing House, Moscow. Reprinted in Stephen Bann (ed.), The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo paperback, 1990, reprint of the 1974, Viking Penguin edition, pp.7-11.
31. Naum Gabo, "The Constructive Idea in Art", introduction to Circle, Faber and Faber, London, 1937, p.4.
32. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, op.cit., The Realistic Manifesto, p.9.
33. Gabo had become friendly with Nicholson and Hepworth by early 1936. Writing to Herbert Read from Paris on 24th January, Nicholson reported that "Gabo is directly in touch with Today & with a very wide & far reaching grasp of life. Potentially, he is one of the most important people working. He seems to hold a very high opinion of Barbara's work - he said her sculpture is the most important being made either abroad or in England." Herbert Read Archive, University of Victoria, British Columbia. Quoted in "Hepworth and Gabo: a Constructive Dialogue", essay by Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, in Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered, Critical Forum Series, Vol. 3, edited by David Thistlewood, Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1996, p.110. Gabo's awareness of the progress of abstract art in England probably precipitated his decision to leave France. He had found Paris, "violent, gossipy, and full of intrigue and jealousies, which I hated, and London to me was like coming to a place of peace..." "Naum Gabo talking to Maurice de Sausmarez", in Ben Nicholson: Studio International Special, 1969, p.23
34. "The Constructive Idea in Art", op.cit., 1937, p.6.
35. Ibid., p.6.
36. "The Constructive Idea in Art", 1937, quoted in Naum Gabo: Sixty Years of Constructivism, edited by Steven Nash and Jorn Merkert, Prestel-Verlag, 1985, p.57.
37. Naum Gabo quoted in Ben Nicholson, Norbert Lynton, Phaidon Press, London, abridged paperback edition, 1998, p.103 (first published in 1993).
38. Robin Ironside, Painting since 1939, London, 1947. The critical approval of Neo-Romanticism is illustrated in this short book commissioned by the British Council. Nicholson was singled out as typifying the sort of international modernism which was not consonant with the native culture: "he has vainly concentrated much of his energy upon the production of larger scale works (sometimes in low relief) in which he carried abstraction to the verge of a vacuum", p.47.
39. See the chronology in St Ives 1939-64, Twenty-Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, 1985 (revised edition 1996), Tate Gallery Publications, p.101, Naum Gabo diary entry for 7/2/40: "This is the third month now that I have not been able to work. It isn't apathy, or laziness, or any lack of interest. It is like a sack pressing against me which does not allow me to move."
40. Letter from Hepworth to Herbert Read, 17th May 1944. Herbert Read Archive, University of Victoria, B.C., quoted in Chris Stephens "From Constructivism



to Reconstruction: Hepworth in the 1940s", essay in Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered, op.cit., p.146.

41. It is commonly thought that Tatlin published a Programme of the Productivist Group (1920) in reply to Gabo and Pevsner's Realistic Manifesto which had been issued a few months earlier. However, Stephen Bann has drawn attention to the fact that despite Gabo's assertions that the constructivist/productivist group was "led by Tatlin", the manifesto was only signed by Alexei Rodchenko and his wife, Varvara Stepanova. It is now generally held that Tatlin was not in agreement with the Productivist ideology - though Gabo assumed him to be. The manifesto sought to give a public definition to the term "Constructivism": it was seen as an act of construction ("tektonika") or organization of industrial materials guided by an ideological commitment to communism and the changing of "the material elements of industrial-culture into volume, plain [sic], colour, space and light" (termed "faktura"). Stephen Bann, introduction to the Programme of the Productivist Group, The Tradition of Constructivism, op.cit., p.18. The 1922 translation of the manifesto is printed on pp.19-20.

42. Margaret Mellis interviewed by Chris Stephens, 13th March 1993. Quoted in "From Construction to Reconstruction", op.cit., p.140.

43. Barbara Hepworth writing to Naum Gabo, 1941/42, TGA TAM66/108.

44. Matthew Rowe, John Wells: The Fragile Cell, Tate Gallery Publishing, London, 1998, p.9.

45. Part of a lengthy extract from Margaret Mellis' 1977 diary-based account of life at Little Park Owles and the activities of the artists staying in Carbis Bay during the war. St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery, op.cit., p.100.

46. Ben Nicholson, "Notes on Abstract Art", Horizon, edited by Cyril Connolly, October 1941.

47. Ben Nicholson, Circle, op.cit., quoted in Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, Phaidon paperback edition, 1998, p.103.

48. Barbara Hepworth, "Sculpture", in Circle, op.cit., p.115.

49. Nicholson's statement in Circle, headed "Quotations", is printed in full in Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, Phaidon paperback edition, op.cit., 1998, p.86. A full discussion of the social and ideological content of Hepworth's art can be found in Chris Stephens, "From Construction to Reconstruction: Barbara Hepworth in the 1940s", op.cit., pp.134-153. Hepworth claimed that constructive work "moves us profoundly because it represents the whole of the artist's experience and vision...it is an absolute belief in man, in landscape and in the universal relationship of constructive ideas." Circle, op.cit., p.116.

50. Letter sent by Barbara Hepworth to Herbert Read, 2nd May 1940, Herbert Read Archive, University of Victoria, B.C., quoted in Chris Stephens, "From Construction to Reconstruction", op.cit., p.140.

51. Barbara Hepworth, letter sent to Herbert Read, 8th April 1942, Herbert Read Archive, University of Victoria, B.C., quoted in Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, "Hepworth and Gabo: a Constructive Dialogue", in Barbara Hepworth Reconsidered, op.cit., p.127.

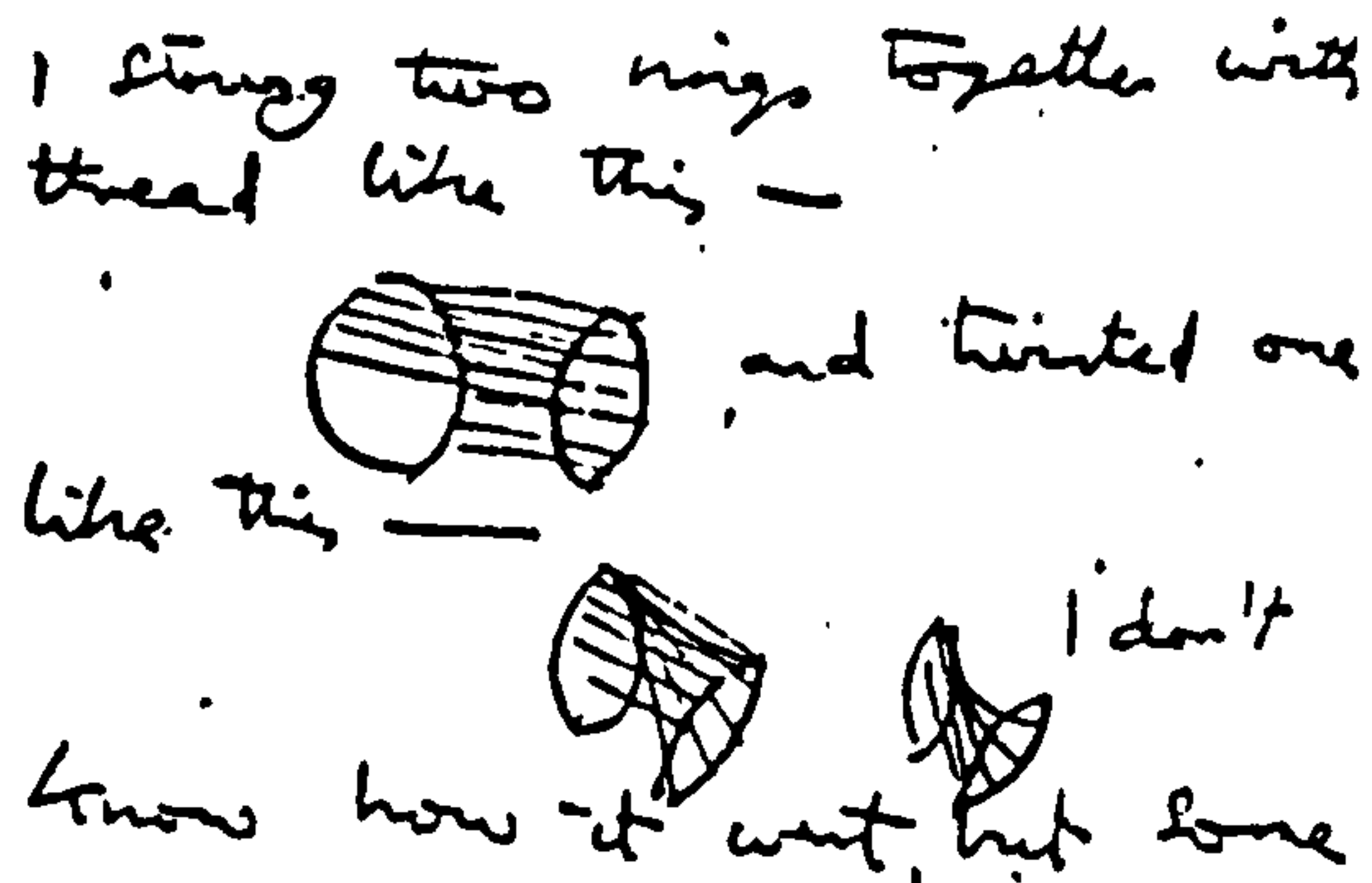
52. Peter Lanyon, letter to his sister Mary Schofield, 2nd June 1945.

53. Lanyon, from a letter to Mary Schofield, dated 22nd March 1940, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts: The Paintings of Peter Lanyon, Penzance, 1996, p.26.

54. For a useful discussion of the extent that Hepworth's interest in mathematical models provided an inspiration for her 'sculptures and carving see Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, "Hepworth and Gabo: a Constructive Dialogue", op.cit., pp. 115-121.



55. Letter addressed to "Ben and Barbara" from A/C Lanyon, M. Flight, R.A.F. Hawnden, nr. Chester, 14th December 1940. Lanyon sketched how he had strung the two rings together with thread:



56. The work also has some affinity with Alexander Calder's sculptural work; Lanyon was also aware of Calder's mobiles: "All yesterday I poised triangles and wire on a wire pedestal and played with it Calderwise..." (Undated letter to Nicholson, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.29). While the connections between Lanyon, Hepworth and Wells are well documented another influence at this time might have been provided by the paintings of John Tunnard. Peter Davies claims that Lanyon was "inspired by Tunnard's work" (St Ives Revisited, Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994, p.123) and cites a similar use of prominent landscape features (telegraph poles, roads and stone walls) as "space articulators" as evidence of this. It is difficult to know the truth of this claim. Tunnard was based in Cadgwith, a village on the eastern side of the Lizard peninsula, and did not associate with the artists' colony in St Ives. His second one-man show at the Guggenheim Jeune in 1939, backed by an article in The London Bulletin, was well received and Tunnard continued to exhibit and sell paintings during the war. Psi (1938) and Fulcrum (1939) display an interesting synthesis of constructivism and the sculpture of Calder. A reviewer of the Guggenheim exhibition referred to Tunnard as "the Heath Robinson of the Constructivist movement" (The Observer, March 1939). Lanyon's various wartime constructions show a similar conjunction of beautiful if improbably balanced forms, showing a Heath Robinson delight in invention combined with geometrically balanced constructivist principles.

57. Steven Nash and Jorn Merkert (eds.), Naum Gabo: Sixty Years of Constructivism, op.cit., p.229. A detailed discussion of dates and the materials used in the stringing of the Linear Construction in Space constructions.

58. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson and Hepworth, Chester, July or August 1941, accepting Nicholson's offer to have a construction photographed and suggesting angles from which the photographs should be taken. Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., 1996, pp.32-33.

59. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson, undated, probably 1941, in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.45.

60. World Review is mentioned in a letter dated 27th June 1941; Art Now is mentioned in a letter dated 14th December 1940; Horizon is mentioned in a letter dated 4th September 1941. Herbert Read's book (probably Art Now: an introduction to the theory of modern painting and sculpture, Faber and Faber, 1936) is cited in a letter dated 14th December 1940. The letters are printed in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., 1996.

61. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson and Hepworth, dated May 2nd 1942, sent from R.A.F. A.A.D., M.E. Middle East Forces. TGA 8717.1.2.2164. Also reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.47.



62. Herbert Read, "Threshold of a New Age: Renaissance or Decadence", World Review, June 1941, p.25. Contributors to the series included E.H. Ramsden, Kathleen Raine, J.D. Bernal, Karl Mannheim, Lewis Mumford and John Summerson.
63. Herbert Read, *ibid.*, p.29. Discussions for a second edition of Circle were also taking place in 1941. See Chris Stephens, "From Constructivism to Reconstruction", *op.cit.*, p.141.
64. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson and Hepworth, sent from Blackpool on 6th February 1942, TGA 8717.1.2.2163, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, *op.cit.*, p.46.
65. Extract from a tape recording made in 1962 with Lionel Miskin, printed in Andrew Lanyon, *op.cit.*, 1990, p.28.
66. "We renounce in sculpture the mass as a sculptural element". Quoted in S. Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, *op.cit.*, p.10.
67. *Ibid.*, p.10.
68. From Nicholson's statement in Circle, 1937, quoted in Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, *op.cit.*, paperback edition, p. 64.
69. Nicholson's adherence to constructivism was always looser and less conceptual than Gabo's. His interest in abstraction was characterised by an intuitive craftsmanship rather than intellectual theory: "a painter creates his idea out of form and colour and by this means it is possible to achieve a reality at least as unreasonable, as actual as life itself; but if he paints with his intellect alone then a "key" is required, and it is this "key" which comes between the painter and life itself." Tate Gallery, Ben Nicholson, 1955. p.4.
70. Margaret Mellis, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea, The South Bank Centre, catalogue for touring exhibition, 1992, p.52.
71. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson and Hepworth, 6th February 1942, sent from Blackpool, TGA 8717.1.2.2163, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, *op.cit.*, p.46.
72. Virginia Button, "The War Years", essay printed in Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery Catalogue, 1993, p.54. Also V. Button, The Aesthetic of Decline: English Neo-Romanticism, 1935-56, unpublished PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute, 1991, chpt.1 and chpt.4. See note 85 for details of the criticisms aimed at the avant-garde.
73. Ron Landau, Love for a Country: Contemplation and Conversations, 1939, p.348. Quoted in "The War Years", essay by Virginia Button, Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery Catalogue, 1993, p.59.
74. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson and Gabo, 27th June 1941, TGA 8717.1.2.2158. Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, *op.cit.*, pp.35/36.
75. *Ibid.*, p.36.
76. Letter to Nicholson and Hepworth, May 2nd 1942, TGA 8717.1.2.2164.
77. Letter from Lanyon to his sister, Mary, October 1941, TAG 8717.1.2.2161, Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, *op.cit.*, p.38.
78. Letter from Lanyon to Nicholson, 10th April, 1944, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, *op.cit.*, p.63.
79. Undated text by Peter Lanyon, printed in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, pp. 290-291.
80. Letter from Lanyon to his sister, Mary, c. September 1943, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, pp.50-53. He did admit later in the letter that "this last page with the rigmarole of Space and Time is not my own, I can see that now."
81. Letter from Lanyon (recently promoted to Lance Corporal) to his sister, Mary, October 1941, sent from R.A.F. Hawnden, nr. Chester. TAG 8717.1.2.2161.



82. Naum Gabo, "The Constructive Idea in Art", in Circle, 1937, printed in S. Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, op.cit., p.210.
83. Circle, Faber and Faber, 1937, op.cit., pp.8-9.
84. The exhibition was held at the London Museum, Lancaster House, between March 18th and May 9th 1942. It was a broad survey of modernist art which contained ninety paintings and twenty sculptures. Lanyon's drawings and constructions were no.s 20-21 and Q and R respectively.
85. Herbert Read, "Vulgarity and Impotence, Speculations on the Present State of the Arts", Horizon, vol.5, no.28, April 1942, pp.267-76. Read positively gushed in his review, declaring Gabo's Spiral Theme as "the highest point ever achieved by the aesthetic intuition of man..." This view was later revised in The Politics of the Unpolitical, Routledge, London, 1943, pp.81-92. Other reviews were frostier: Eric Newton reviewing the exhibition in "New Movements in Art", The Listener, 19th March 1942, p.376, labelled the constructivists "grammarians" and "extreme purists" who were merely experimenting with "visual speech". In Newton's view the constructivists' "search for the Holy Grail of pure form is manifestly sincere; but so obsessed are they by the sheer joy of searching that they must do something with it now they have found it". He judged that Paul Nash, Henry Moore and Graham Sutherland had harnessed the "new language" of modern art for positive purposes.
86. Peter Lanyon to Naum and Miriam Gabo, 11th June 1943. The letter starts by apologising for the sporadic quantity of his wartime correspondence, expressing a hope that Nicholson had kept them informed of his experiences. Quoted in Margaret Garlake, "Peter Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", Burlington Magazine, April 1995, pp.238-239. For a full discussion of Spiral Theme (1941), see C. Sanderson and C. Lodder, "Catalogue Raisonné of the Constructions and Sculptures of Naum Gabo", in S. Nash and J. Merkert, eds., Naum Gabo: Sixty Years of Construction op.cit., 1985, pp.232-33.
87. Lanyon writing to Naum and Miriam Gabo, 3rd December, 1944. published in Margaret Garlake, "Peter Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", op.cit., p.239. Now a corporal, Lanyon was with a General Educational Services Corps maintenance unit attached to the Central Mediterranean Force. The Horizon article referred to is "An Exchange of Letters between Naum Gabo and Herbert Read", Horizon, vol.10, 1944, p.60.
88. John Piper, The Painter's Object, London, 1937, edited by Myfanwy Evans (Piper). The publication contains essays by Helion, Sutherland, Ernst, Kandinsky, Leger and Nash.
89. Clark, Sutherland and Moore took part in the discussion chaired by V.S. Pritchett. Clark was the Director of the National Gallery and head of the War Artists' Advisory Committee. V.S. Pritchett, "The Living Image - Art and Life", Listener, 13th November, 1941, pp657-9.
90. Sutherland, "Welsh Sketch Book", letter printed in Horizon, 1942. He described his response to the Welsh landscape as "an emotional feeling of being on the brink of some drama". Reprinted in Sutherland in Wales. A Catalogue of the Collection at the Graham Sutherland Gallery, Picton Castle, Haverfordwest, Dyfed, London, 1976.
91. Letter dated 4th December 1939, quoted in Virginia Button, "The War Years", in Jeremy Lewison (ed.), Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery Publications, 1993, p.59.
92. Norbert Lynton, Ben Nicholson, Phaidon paperback edition, op.cit., 1993, p.107.
93. Quoted in Herbert Read, Barbara Hepworth, Carvings and Drawings, Lund Humphries, London, 1952, section 4, unpaginated.



94. Ibid.

95. Alan Bowness asked Hepworth about the connections between titles and sculptures, referring specifically to the 1961 bronze Curved Form (Bryher):

"They are always added later. When I've made something, I think: where did I get that idea from? And then I remember...I don't start with a title: I make a shape and there may or may not be an association with it - but this comes afterwards." Alan Bowness (ed.), The Complete Sculpture of Barbara Hepworth 1960-69, London, 1971, p.12.

96. Herbert Read, quoted in David Lewis, "St Ives: A Personal Memoir, 1947-55", in St Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, Tate, op.cit., p.23.

97. Naum Gabo, On Constructive Realism, Trowbridge Lecture at Yale University, 1948. Reprinted in S. Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, op.cit., p.241.

98. For more details of Gabo's interest in pebbles (both collecting and carving) see entry 41, St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery, op.cit., p.163.

99. Peter Lanyon, recalled by Michael Canney in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, op.cit., 1990, p.159. Canney, a painter, writer and broadcaster also ran the Newlyn Gallery. Lanyon was elected chairman of the Newlyn Society of Artists in 1961.

100. Chris Stephens, "From Constructivism to Reconstruction: Barbara Hepworth in the 1940s", Liverpool Tate, op.cit., p.146.

101. Naum Gabo letter to Herbert Read, 12th March 1945, Read Archive, University of Victoria, B.C., quoted in Martin Hammer and Christina Lodder, "Hepworth and Gabo: a Constructive Dialogue", Liverpool Tate, op.cit., p.130.

102. Chris Stephens, "From Constructivism to Reconstruction..." op.cit., p.146.

103. Sven Berlin, The Coat of Many Colours, Radcliffe, Bristol, 1994, pp.107-108. In 1946 Hepworth told E.H. Ramsden that the argument with Gabo had "started 3 yrs ago when he accused me of stealing the OVAL! and since that time I havn't [sic] seen any of his work. Letter to E.H. Ramsden, n.d. [1946], TGA 9310. All the artists were sensitive to accusations of plagiarism. When Gabo first saw Hepworth's 1962 sculpture, Winged Figure, on the John Lewis building, Oxford Street, he is said to have shouted, "That's mine!" Sally Festing, Barbara Hepworth: A Life of Forms, Penguin, 1995, p.148. Festing charitably remarks "to those she idolized, Barbara paid the unconscious compliment of drawing on their sensibilities". Lanyon later helped to spread the rumour that Nicholson and Hepworth's self-promotion at Gabo's expense explains his departure for America in 1946.

104. St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery, op.cit., p.103.

105. Martin Hammer and Christine Lodder, "Hepworth and Gabo: a Constructive Dialogue", Liverpool Tate, op.cit., p.130.

106. Naum Gabo diary entry for 6th July 1940. St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery, op.cit., p.101. Gabo kept a war diary which reveals that he stayed in England to keep constructivism alive: "I should acknowledge myself to be conquered if I left Europe and then the whole constructive idea would come to naught..." 28th July 1940, p.101.

107. The exhibition opened at the London Gallery and travelled to Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut; Julien Levy Gallery, New York and Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York. Gabo's work had received only limited exposure in terms of exhibitions and sales while he was in England; he believed that he would be able to sell more work in America and had been encouraged by various museums and galleries to exhibit more work (letter of 15th January, 1946, to Herbert Read, Gabo papers, Beinecke Library, mentioned in S.A. Nash and J. Merkert, Naum Gabo: Sixty Years of Constructivism, op.cit., p.39.

108. Peter Lanyon radio broadcast, "In the Gramophone Library", 1954, quoted



- in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts op.cit., p.66. It is difficult to accept Margaret Garlake's dates for Lanyon's service in Italy. She contends that "he was stationed, from May 1943 to December 1944, in or near Brindisi." "Peter Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", Burlington Magazine, April 1995. However, the Anglo-American landings in Calabria and Salerno took place on 3rd September 1943. Lanyon himself said, "I landed at Taranto in 1944..." "In the Gramophone Library", ibid. p.66. A letter sent to Mary Schofield, dated 16th February 1944, provides a valuable chronicle of his service life in Africa, Palestine and Italy.
109. Peter Lanyon, letter to Mary Schofield, c. 1944, "Apulia...was a new Cornwall for me...", printed in Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.66.
110. Peter Lanyon writing to Sydney Schofield, 25th January 1944, printed in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.55.
111. Peter Lanyon. letter to Mary Schofield, 4th April 1944, Wartime Abstracts op.cit., p.75.
112. Adrian Stokes, The Quattro Cento, Faber and Faber, 1932, p.16.
113. Wine, Women and Song is reproduced and discussed in Margaret Garlake, "The Letters of Peter Lanyon to Naum Gabo", The Burlington Magazine, April 1995, pp.233-46. A second wartime mural was painted on a wall at the allied servicemen's arts club in Naples. Richard Hoggart remembers it as a "a great, swirling colourful thing which we all admired". Letter to Margaret Garlake, 2nd September, 1993.
114. Peter Lanyon writing to Naum and Miriam Gabo, 3rd December 1944, reproduced in Margaret Garlake, "The letters of Peter Lanyon to Naum Gabo", op.cit., p.239.
115. Ibid.
116. Letter to his sister, Mary, 23rd July, 1944, quoted in Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.70.
117. Ibid.
118. When asked if these paintings and drawings were conceived as studies for sculpture, Gabo replied: "They are works in themselves, but sometimes I paint the image so realistically that it can be taken as an image of a sculpture. However, I often turn to painting when the image of my experience becomes so involved in structure, in forms and colour that there is no possible way for me to execute it in three dimensional material." The paintings were sometimes mounted on motorized revolving panels to activate different spatial movements and patterns latent in the luminous compositions. Katherine Kuh, The Artist's Voice: Talks with 17 Artists, Harper and Row New York, 1962, interview with Gabo pp.94-104; this extract is on p.96.
119. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, The Realistic Manifesto, 1920, quoted in S. Bann, op.cit., p.10.
120. Peter Lanyon, letter to Mary Schofield, 23rd July 2944, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.70.
121. Peter Lanyon, text accompanies seven photographs (including the cover photogram), dated 1944, Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., pp.59-61.
122. Adrian Stokes, The Stones of Rimini, Faber and Faber, 1934, p.110.
123. Letter to Mary Schofield, 22nd January 1945, quoted in Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.72.
124. Letter to Mary Schofield, 4th April 1945, quoted in Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.77.
125. The Three Arts Club was a centre for servicemen interested in painting. Lanyon collaborated with another RAF artist, David Goodman. Their time together is chronicled in Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: At the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, pp.42-43.
126. Letter to Mary Schofield, 16th May, 1945, quoted in Wartime Abstracts, op.cit., p.83.
127. Letter to Mary Schofield, 2nd June, 1945.



## **Chapter Four**

**THE GENERATION AND SURFACING SERIES:**

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EXPERIENTIAL**

**CONSTRUCTIVE LANDSCAPE**

## LOOKING FOR ROOTS: ST IVES AFTER THE WAR

After the dislocation and upheavals experienced during more than five years in the R.A.F., Lanyon, like many other painters of his generation whose lives had been interrupted by the war, felt a compulsive urge to re-establish a secure domestic life and remake his career. In April 1946 he married Sheila St John Browne. Andrew, the first of their six children, was born in May 1947.

The failure to establish a constructivist community in St Ives meant that younger artists like Lanyon, Wells and Bryan Wynter (who moved to St Ives in 1945) were thrown back on their own resources. Stokes had returned to London when his marriage broke up in 1946, Gabo and his family emigrated to America in November 1946, while Nicholson and Hepworth belonged to a different generation (when the war ended he was 51 and she was 42) and were soon to re-establish their pre-war international reputations. The activities of the Crypt Group (1946-48) and the foundation of the Penwith Society in 1949 provided an attractive and stimulating alternative to the constructive art that had dominated St Ives since 1939 and the insular neo-Romanticism of the 1940s which prevailed elsewhere.

Artists such as Lanyon, William Scott, Roger Hilton, Alan Davie and William Gear emancipated themselves from any parochial conservatism by rejecting those forms of figure-ground relation and spatial illusionism which they associated with English Romanticism and the conservation of a spent culture. They advocated a revival of modernism, but reworked to reflect the changed conditions of post-war Britain and their disillusionment with the utopianism to be found in Circle. While it is the precedent of Gabo and Nicholson's work above all that seems to lie behind Lanyon's abstract paintings immediately after the war, many of his contemporaries re-established their links with the French modern tradition.

Heron described his glimpse of Matisse's Red Studio at the Redfern Gallery in 1943 as "by far and away the most influential single picture in my entire career".<sup>1</sup> Until 1955 he worked in a figurative idiom derived from Bonnard, Braque and Matisse, painting still-lives and interiors with figures which



often have complex and ambiguous spatial relationships. The post-war London exhibitions of Picasso and Matisse (at the Victoria and Albert Museum in December 1945) and Braque (at the newly re-opened Tate Gallery in the spring of 1946) were events of special, almost symbolic significance which represented the re-establishment of an important dialogue with French modernism and the Ecole de Paris. Canvases by Davie, Gear, Scott and Hilton between 1946 and 1950 contain informal grid-like structures, penetrated by bright colours and earth tone, which betray the influence of the lyrical "paysagisme abstrait" of the Jeunes Peintres de la Tradition Française (artists like Manessier, Estève and Bissière - one of Hilton's teachers at the Académie Ranson before the war).

Another vital influence on artists resurrecting the abstract tendency in England after the war was the mature work of Mondrian. He had demonstrated that a highly concrete form of aesthetic order could be sustained after the technical assumptions distinguishing the composition of traditional figurative art had been abandoned. Consciously or not, many of the "middle generation" painters drew strength from Mondrian's severe non-objective style. His "pure reality" restricted design to horizontals and verticals and his colours to the three primary hues, plus black and white, thus eliminating every possibility of representation. However, painters like Scott and Hilton found it inappropriate to repeat the utopian forms of non-symmetrical balance which characterised Mondrian's exquisite pre-war output. Following the example of many practitioners of "l'art informel" or "tachism", the disciplined, near-geometric style of Mondrian was made to buckle as if under some inexorable spoiling force, producing an image "like a Mondrian that is melting".<sup>2</sup>

Lanyon rejected the positive cosmopolitanism which looked to pre-war abstraction and the Ecole de Paris for inspiration ("what the abstract means is a continuation of a cosmopolitan culture which is dead").<sup>3</sup> He denounced "Alphabet Searching - a new sleazy research into development forms etc, - beyond the usefulness of it".<sup>4</sup> He took pride in not sharing the admiration of his contemporaries for the French School, boasting that he "considers Italy to be a second home. Has visited Paris for one day."<sup>5</sup> This anti-French chauvinism should not be taken entirely at face value.



Early Cubism was an important influence on Lanyon's paintings in the early 1950s: the vertical shape and internal layout of a work such as Porthleven (1951, Pl.91) is reminiscent of the 1909-10 landscapes and still-lives by Braque.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, he was clearly aware of Nicholas de Staël, a painter whose "figuration in abstraction"<sup>7</sup> had a pervasive influence on the British avant-garde after his first London exhibition in 1952 at the Matthiesson Gallery and two memorial exhibitions at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and Tooths in 1956. De Staël's sensuous virtuosity in the handling of paint and his ability to condense space itself into a luminous substance of lyrical abstraction without completely destroying the representational motif can be linked to Lanyon's later attempts to capture atmospheric conditions and the experience of gliding.

#### THE GENERATION SERIES

After the war Lanyon resolved to steer a middle course between the Scylla and Charybdis of conservative figuration and idealistic abstraction. The important thing was for the painting to give expression to images of individuality rather than simply allow the spectator to look for congenial likenesses and reflections. Neither figuration nor abstraction would be allowed to prevail and he was determined that the visual associations should not support redundant conventions or compromise the "plastic" effect of the painting.

The Cornish landscape made an immediate impact on Lanyon's work and he began to develop a more coherent pictorial language for the group of paintings, the Generation Series, produced between September 1946 and August 1947. The series illustrates how Lanyon began to resolve the problem of remaining loyal to Gabo's appeal not to paint "nature-appearances" while at the same time striving to achieve "the new orientation in art that is now in order".<sup>8</sup> Although constructive art remained an ideal, it was no longer possible to ignore what Henry James called the "imagination of disaster". The optimistic conception of man's nature and condition posited by the pre-war avant garde had lost its relevance. Instead of embracing universal and eternal constructs, Lanyon began to rely on his own particular



experiences and vision in order to develop a new form of abstraction within the configuration of the West Cornish landscape.

The series shows Lanyon at his most eclectic, combining motifs and ideas from several sources. The pure geometry of many of the wartime abstracts, the idea that the internal ordering of the picture was an end in itself or could be used to convey universal truths, was replaced with a more complicated and less dogmatic vision usually allied to the landscape. He confessed to experiencing

a continual temptation to seduction by the scenic boys that I presume is because of their damned contribution to my ancestors and my youth. Curiously enough my paintings are all landscapes or in the sense of landscape. I don't know whether I can claim to be a Constructivist any longer because of this - but on my understanding of the constructivist idea, I feel I can.<sup>9</sup>

Lanyon's preoccupation with a sense of place, searching for the genius loci, his use of myth and exploration of the relationship between the human body and landscape, suggests a closer association with the concepts and themes of Neo-Romanticism than has often been acknowledged. However, instead of dismissing the immediate post-war years as a less creative phase in Lanyon's career, weakened by nature-romanticism, the period should perhaps be seen as a time of revision, synthesising constructivism and traditional landscape, before the emergence of a more individual painterly idiom based on his own experiences and perception of the landscape. There is an instinctive predisposition to certain formal devices, particular gestures, forms and configurations which may be recognised as the expressive idiolect of the young artist finding his own technique and style to match his own vision and unique aims. The struggle in which he was now engaged was ultimately to take him to his infinitely more personal style of the early 1950s.

The Generation Series was identified by Lanyon in the catalogue for an exhibition of his work at Downing's Bookshop, St Ives, in August 1947. At this point, only Yellow Runner (18 x 24in., oil on board, September



1946, Whereabouts unknown, Pl.51), Landscape with Cup (Annunciation) (12 x 15in., oil on board, October 1946, Private Collection, Pl.55), Prelude (24 x 38in., oil on board, April 1947, Private Collection, Pl.58) and Generation (34 x 13in., oil on plywood, 1947, Private Collection, Pl.59) were identified with any degree of certainty as belonging to a series: they were numbered 1-4 in the catalogue. In addition, the inscription "4/4/47. Series Generation 4" is written on the back of Prelude, suggesting that the painting does have a fixed place in a sequence.<sup>10</sup> However, a letter to Gabo written in February 1949 suggests the existence of another four works in the series:

It appears my painting goes in series. The first set I did recognise as a series. They took about 18 months to complete and consisted of eight works. I called them the Generation Series...A spiral went through every painting of the series in every case closely associated with the oval form...I find this form expresses in me a sense of protective solitude - a prayer - it is in fact the hands held in protection or prayer vertically and the resting body horizontally...<sup>11</sup>

No other source has been found which specifically identifies the existence of a series of eight paintings and knowledge of the other four pictures in the Generation Series remains speculative, especially as dates on the back of works can be misleading: Lanyon would often allow pictures to remain in the studio for months before he felt satisfied with the matured image and the inscribed date could refer to the moment when he felt the composition complete and ready to be released for exhibition.<sup>12</sup>

For the purpose of brevity I will use Margaret Garlake's choice for the Generation Series: Generator (30 x 20in., oil on canvas, September, 1946, Private Collection, Pl.52); Earth (16 x 25in., oil on board, September 1946, Private Collection, Pl.54); The Yellow Runner (18 x 24in., oil on board, September 1946, Whereabouts unknown, Pl.51); Landscape and Cup, Annunciation (12 x 15in., oil on board, October 1946, Private Collection, Pl.55); Prelude (24 x 38in., oil on board, April 1947, Private Collection, Pl.58); Construction in Green (12 x 16in., oil on board, 1947, Private Collection, Pl.61); Tinstone (13 x 16in., wax on board, 1947, Private



Collection, Pl.60) and Generation (34 x 13in., oil on plywood, August 1947, Private Collection, Pl.59).<sup>13</sup>

A good case could be made for the inclusion of the The Yellow Boat (15 x 19in., oil on board, 1947/48, Private Collection, Pl.70), Trip Round Lighthouse 20 x 23in., oil on board, September 1946, Private Collection) or St Mary's Scilly Isles ( 24 x 20in., oil on canvas, 1946, Private Collection) as paintings belonging to the series made immediately after Lanyon's demobilisation: they share the same strong associations - a return to the protective security of a familiar landscape, harbour forms enclosed by walls and hills, moored boats, tethered embryos in the womb. The Yellow Boat has strong correspondences with The Yellow Runner, particularly in the way that the artist's unconscious longings are represented by the feminine contours of the landscape and the boat sheltering on the dark womb-like pool. The difficulty lies in deciding which painting in Garlake's list should be substituted (if we accept that there were indeed eight paintings in this series). Tinstone is arguably the most questionable choice for inclusion. Although Garlake detects a "very clear bifurcated hill at the top" and "linear shapes which are loose variants on those in the centre of Prelude",<sup>14</sup> the composition sits uneasily with others in the series. It is made of reddish-brown wax on board (the other seven are in oil) and the tracery of incised sgraffito striations, enclosed within a curtained proscenium frame, have more in common with Lanyon's wartime abstractions than the richly metaphorical procreative-landscape content of the series as a whole.

Garlake has divided up the paintings into "chronologically fluid" pairs which restate an "inner/external" theme containing "rhyming" shapes of abstract and representational forms: Earth/Yellow Runner, Prelude/Landscape with Cup, Construction in Green/Tinstone, and finally the framing pair, suggesting a sequence from cause to effect, Generator/Generation.<sup>15</sup> This is an attractive idea as Lanyon certainly felt that the paintings shared common motifs and themes derived from his renewed acquaintance with Cornwall and its landscape after the war:

My first series has been definitely concerned with the inner forms



of growth. The final picture of the series being vertical has a curious relationship to a mother and child...My first series then appears to be inner. They all derive their information from the tin mines here and things under the soil. They are organic in their nature. It does not seem extraordinary that I should find these inner forms and dark colours the only country in which I could live. I have found much in El Greco that helped me in this first series...<sup>16</sup>

The pairs develop the idea that the function of the artist is to appropriate symbols which correspond to the myths and metaphors of the past as well as to real events in the external world. These symbols stimulate multiple associations - the long history of mining Cornwall's rich mineral resources is equated with the artist's quarrying of themes and search for inspiration. Grouping the series into pairs reveals an interesting dialectic in Lanyon's post-war style which balances representational figuration with symbol-laden imagery derived from the inner universe of the subconscious imagination. This goes some way to explain why one painting in each pair is more abstract than the other and symbolises the struggle involved in holding fast to the ethical idealism of Gabo's constructive idealism while at the same time finding inspiration in the familiar sights of the sea, shells, rocks and birds of West Cornwall.

Although a faint narrative thread does run through the series - the idea of a semi-mythical landscape as a metaphor for home and family, nurturing a regenerative power as well as the mineral wealth vital to this region's prosperity - it is nevertheless important not to invest the series with an almost impossible to prove thematic coherence. Garlake's research into exhibition dates, thematic consistency, tonality and scale provides us with a plausible (but by no means conclusive) list of pictures. It is possible that it is only with hindsight that Lanyon was able to recognise paintings as forming a logical sequence of visual, narrative and metaphorical themes.

The catalyst for the first series, Generator (1946, Pl.52), is a development of Lanyon's constructivist paintings and drawings produced between 1943 and 1945. According to Sheila Lanyon, "Generator generated many paintings, but that does not necessarily mean that it was included" in the first



series.<sup>17</sup> Patterns of interlocking planes enclosed within a protective sphere suggest a foetus in the womb, while the fertilising agent can be seen as the green aquatic creature swimming into the right of the picture. The embryo is connected to the surface by a white umbilical cord running down the middle of the enclosing ovoid. In psychological terms Generator exposes the ambiguity of Lanyon's longing for a return to a pre-natal state of innocence and calm.<sup>18</sup> In common with many of the paintings belonging to the series, the movement across the surface recalls the trajectory of White Track (1939-40). Justification for its place is further strengthened by the closeness of its design to the vertical shape mentioned in Lanyon's letter to Gabo and its incorporation of the spiral which "went through every painting of the series".<sup>19</sup> An outline of the bifurcated hills at Gunwalloe on the Lizard can just be detected at the top of the picture (repeated in The Yellow Runner, Prelude, Landscape with Cup and Tinstone). Lanyon has produced a complex configuration of archetypal symbols to depict an animating presence submerged within a composite landscape.

The serenely tonal picture which gives its name to the series, Generation (Pl.59), echoes the popular mother and child theme (found in the post-war sculpture of Henry Moore and the hollowed-out figure carvings produced by Hepworth).<sup>20</sup> The painting brings together themes drawn from Lanyon's personal mythology while strongly reflecting Gabo both formally and in the conception of nature it embodies. The artist's home-coming has been resolved in a tender depiction of the body in landscape and a view of the landscape below the earth's surface. His return from active service, marriage and the birth of his children finds expression in this poignant metaphor for family relationships, fecundity and the organic process of natural regeneration after the horrors of war.

Earth (Pl.54) and Yellow Runner (Pl.51) continue the theme, showing a cross-section of the landscape with subterranean caverns, nurturing various forms of life. They are brought together as a pair, not just chronologically, but because they share the same arrangement of forms around a central focus. Earth, which can be dated by a photograph bearing the inscription, "Sept. 1946 finished. St Ives and Zennor Moors. Attic Studio",<sup>21</sup> strongly suggests the spiralling form which Lanyon believed went through every painting in



the series - but this time in a horizontal or "elongated" format. One is also reminded of the abstract drawings Lanyon produced during the war - for example, Abstract Study, Italy (1945, Pl.43). It is instructive to think of the abstract wartime drawings and the Generation Series as complementary bodies of work. The tonal drawings are exercises in the construction of space in two dimensions and in the relationship of colour to form and space. They also allude to the theme of generation, illusory planes creating the image of enfolding womb-like forms.

The setting of The Yellow Runner is the hill above Gunwalloe on the Lizard. The eponymous runner is a horse travelling at speed across a distant hillside. The composition is once again derived from the vortical movement of White Track and line is carefully used to lead the eye through the narrative:

Painted as a story. Runner with message on way to stockaded horses. Fox as field. Reference to horses cut in hillside. Yellow Runner as fertilising agent. Stockade as womb. A homecoming.<sup>22</sup>

The narrative, mythic element involving a return and fertility clearly places this work near the beginning of the series:

It is the pollen and the flower, the sperm and the egg, and a whole range of rituals connected with fertility .<sup>23</sup>

The central section of the composition contains the womb-like hollow or stockade containing equine forms. Lanyon was particularly fond of the symbolic use of the horse as a messenger across time, linking him to his ancient Celtic ancestry (made explicit in the reference to ancient figures carved into the hillside).<sup>24</sup> This self-identification is made more explicit by the monogram of his initials at the bottom of the stockade which becomes legible when the painting is rotated ninety degrees clockwise. The painting reflects the artist's psychological state in the early post-war years - the importance he attached to a sense of belonging, returning to the safety of his homeland and his need for security.



Yellow Runner is perhaps excessively allegorical and is flawed by the over-complexity of the central stockade image. Landscape and Cup, Annunciation (Pl.55) also contains clear referential images - a chalice floating in front of a receding landscape, muddled cottages, and the line of a hill to provide the horizon. The presence of the Virgin (implicit in the subtitle) is hinted at in the prominent inclusion of a circle of royal blue juxtaposed next to a bright red chimney on the left. An echo of The Yellow Runner can be discerned in the outline of the tail-end of a horse disappearing behind the chalice. The work is reminiscent of the way Nicholson combined abstracted still-life motifs within a naively rendered landscape setting (for example, 1947, November 11 (Mousehole)), upsetting traditional divisions of foreground and background. Lanyon has reversed Nicholson's spatial arrangement by depicting the chalice as a three-dimensional form, complete with suggestions of light glinting off its curved surfaces, while the fields and houses in the middle distance are merged and flatly rendered. The varying spatial relationships between the chalice in the foreground, the cottage structures and the background hill are unified by colour and texture. Lanyon was not happy with the inclusion of too much direct representation in his painting and moved away from direct figuration towards a more synthesised abstraction of fluid curves and natural forms for the painting's companion piece, Prelude.

It is interesting that the early paintings in the series witness a bolder use of colour than anything seen in the wartime abstracts. He briefly moved away from the use of soft and muted pigments favoured by Nicholson and started to use colour more symbolically. However, paintings like Prelude, Construction in Green and Generation display a lingering reverence for the Stokesian notion of colour within, a monochromatic use of pigment that is directed by some architectural conception of planes rather than a plastic conception "when the material with which, or from which, a figure has been made appears no more as so much suitable stuff for this creation".<sup>25</sup> An iridescent light emanates from the heart of Lanyon's "Gaboid" compositions - strikingly illustrated in the glowing centre of Construction in Green (Pl.61). The use of colour to light up the pictorial object from inside gives the work an autonomous life, suggesting the core of a reactor or a mysterious subterranean genesis.



The influence of Gabo becomes even more pronounced in the compositional structures of Prelude and Generation. The interplay of flowing interlocking planes present in many of the Generation Series paintings suggests the rhythmic spiral forms of Gabo's sculptures as well as the spatial convolutions of his wartime paintings (such as Kinetic Oil Painting in Four Movements and Turquoise which was mounted on a motorized revolving disc). Gabo had found it useful to work out his ideas in paintings in order to continue his exploration of alternatives to the notion "that held the static rhythms as the only elements of the plastic and pictorial arts".<sup>26</sup> He often envisioned constructions which would have been impossible to translate into three-dimensional reality. Lanyon's paintings for the Generation Series have a similar purpose and incorporate the syntax, movement, curves, spirals and planar transparency of Gabo's constructions: "the curves of perspex and metal were literally depicted in paint, even echoing the transparency of perspex."<sup>27</sup>

The Generation Series reveals the beginning of that process whereby the space and movement in a composition were worked out in three-dimensional form before translation into the finished painting. In his letter to Gabo, Lanyon made much of the formal, sculptural qualities of the works - relating "the spiral (that) went through every painting of the series" to Gabo's "spiral theme" constructions of 1941/42.<sup>28</sup> His own carvings and constructions were now of greater importance in finding the right compositional format for each painting. A photograph (Pl.57, fig.2) of the September 1946 Crypt exhibition shows two of Lanyon's wood carvings - a horse's head, Painted Deal (1946, destroyed) and Construction...the Wing (1946): the shape of the horse's skull is repeated in Submarine (7 x 12in., oil and wax on paper, 1947, Private Collection, Pl.62), a painting which could easily belong to the original Generation series were it not for the fact that it was executed on paper (all the other contenders for inclusion in the series are on board or canvas).<sup>29</sup> Andrew Lanyon makes the connection between the paintings and carvings explicit when he writes that "much of the painting in this series appears sculptural and many of the forms were in fact derived from his wood carvings such as...the horse's head exhibited in the 1946 Crypt show".<sup>30</sup> Earth, Construction in Green and Generation can be seen as pictorial representations of complicated and intricate three-dimensional constructions.



Lanyon himself linked the whole series to "one three dimensional construction in aluminium and plywood" (Construction, 12in. high, 1947, Tate Gallery, Pl.63).<sup>31</sup> The angulation of dynamic curves and spirals opens the object to an interpenetration of light and space while at the same time protecting the embryonic shape of twisted metal at the core of the structure. Its basic shape can be detected in many of the Generation Series paintings, particularly in Prelude and in the nurturing womb of the female figure suggested in Generation. Lanyon's use of opaque material for his construction went against Gabo's quest for a dematerialization of solids - taking transparency as a formal principle to new heights - and can be seen as an original analysis of space and the constructed object.

Other constructions made in 1947 show that he had been unable to realise his artistic aspirations in three-dimensional form without displaying excessive reverence for the exemplars provided by Gabo. Perspex Construction No.1 "Quaker Grey" (March 1947, Pl.64, fig.1) and Perspex Construction No.2 (Pl.64, fig.2) are heavily dependent on Gabo's Spheric Theme sculptures. The perspex constructions follow Gabo's ideas in using simple geometrical forms to stimulate imaginative thinking about energy, light, space and time. The helical forms suggested by these works can be traced back to the swinging curves of Lanyon's late wartime abstracts (Construction on a Frustrum: The path of a Moving Point, Pl.35)<sup>32</sup> and forwards to the spiralling convolutions in Prelude and Generation. He later felt that these constructions had been modelled too closely on Gabo's work and destroyed both pieces.

Lanyon would have agreed with Gabo's essay on Constructive Realism when he remarked that there are many non-figurative subjects for the artist to tackle - aspects in the world unseen and not experienced.<sup>33</sup> However, after the war, his style diverged from Gabo's efforts to extract and refine the universal and the eternal from experience. While Lanyon shared Gabo's conception of man's nature and condition, he began to rely on his own particular experiences and vision, developing an expressive idiolect out of formal devices, imagery, forms and configurations shaped by his Romantic feelings for the landscape. The war had encouraged him to think about his place as an artist with renewed energy and vigour. He was convinced that his first series of post-war work was "definitely concerned with the inner forms of growth" and wondered whether Gabo's spiral theme "was done during



the formation of Nina or after her birth".<sup>34</sup> The embryonic shape of his son, Andrew, born in 1947 can be clearly discerned in Prelude (Pl.58), while "the final picture of the Series being vertical has a curious relationship to a mother and child" (ie Generation).<sup>35</sup>

In the end, the series marks a vital transitional period in Lanyon's career in which he began to resolve the conflict between his intellectual attraction to the philosophy of constructivism and the stronger atavistic pull of the Cornish landscape. The result was a series of paintings in which the formal rational order of constructivism was overlaid with totemic and archetypal images that helped to dispel the insecurity and confusion produced by the upheavals of the war. There can be little doubt that a Jungian notion of restitution was part of his intention. Responding to criticisms of "the lack of sensibility in constructive or abstract art", he wrote:

A loss of the "sensitive line" seems to send a work to eternal damnation and to indicate Lyso rubber gloves and the great mind aloof from the intricate sadness of life! How can I convince these people that I too feel all these intimate things so that the pain of generation seems to appear in every hurt of every day!<sup>36</sup>

The polarisation of neo-Romanticism and Constructivism has obscured the possibility that Lanyon could reconcile apparently conflicting ideological positions into a fecund amalgam. He was able to combine his individual, empathetic feelings for the nurturing landscape with a liberal interpretation of Gabo's constructivist ethos of creativity. The key word in the passage quoted above is "generation", which is used - consciously or not - to describe both the creative act and the age gap which separated younger artists such as Wells, Wynter and Lanyon from the avant-garde of the 1930s and the practitioners of the neo-Romantic orthodoxy during the war years.

It was Lanyon's belief that the intense, anthropomorphised perceptions of landscape and place achieved in Sutherland's apocalyptic reveries of Pembrokeshire could be rendered in a way that did not conflict with the constructivist vision of a metaphysical aesthetic. His repeated depiction



of the womb can be interpreted as a symbol for the reparation of his sense of belonging and the restoration of feelings of security after the dislocation and anxiety of the war. As such his imagery has much in common with the elegiac nostalgia of neo-Romanticism. However, the Generation Series owes much to Gabo and it is important to remember that Lanyon continued to refer to himself as a Constructivist well into the 1950s.

#### POST-WAR ISOLATION?

Although Gabo left St Ives for America in November 1946, Lanyon kept up a steady communication with his new aesthetic mentor. He felt himself to be isolated from the mainstream of modernism in St Ives and clearly resuming painting after the war had not come without a struggle:

I found myself left with only the real understanding support of John [Wells] and opposition from every quarter of my own age and generation. I have nobody trying to take me under their wing (you warned me about this). On Saturday 24th May Sheila brought me a son....I enclose some photographs of my work in which you will see the concern I have felt for the whole process of generation. I felt so hopeless at the end, not being able to do anything, that I was unable to paint and fell back on landscapes in blacks and dark greens...I have felt ill in body and my eyes and head have played me tricks. It has been much like climbing the ventilation shaft of a mine inch by inch away from a tomb.<sup>37</sup>

While not wishing to play down the significance of the acute depression and physical collapse experienced by Lanyon in the reformulating of his work after the war, he was not quite as isolated as this letter perhaps suggests. Relations with Nicholson and Hepworth continued to be quite cordial: they exhibited together at mixed shows (for example in Borlase Smart's Porthmeor Studio for Show Day in March 1946)<sup>38</sup> and at the St Ives Society of Artists in 1946<sup>39</sup> where their work was grouped together around the font as if they constituted a distinct group. Hepworth and Nicholson even invited the two most promising younger artists in St Ives, Wells and Lanyon, to exhibit with them at Downing's Bookshop in July 1947 (Lanyon exhibited four of the eight pictures in the Generation series).<sup>40</sup>

In "A Personal Memoir" written for the Tate's St Ives 1939-64 exhibition catalogue, David Lewis recalled a happy meeting with Nicholson and Hepworth at Chy-an-Kerris, their house overlooking Carbis Bay.



Barbara sat at the table with a plate of chops, peas, boiled potatoes and salad, which she consumed without offering us any. She clearly knew Peter well, and began talking about his painting and sculpture as though I wasn't even present...Ben emerged and sat on the wall listening to us with his head on one side like a cocky sparrow.<sup>41</sup>

Lanyon's paintings of this period had not entirely jettisoned the technical lessons received from Nicholson. He used the same textured surfaces - layers of thin pigment applied with broad brushes, or wiped on with rags soaked in turpentine, and scraped with razor blades to form what Nicholson called "a ground". Following the method employed by Nicholson, he either drew or painted interstitial shapes on to the ground, adding muted greys, cerulean blues and greens to balance the work and capture the tone of moor, granite headland, gorse and sea.

The juxtaposition of abstract and actual in Tinstone, where Lanyon incised fine white lines into reddish brown wax to represent the human interventions in tin-mining country, resembles Nicholson's compositions on board prepared with a substantial gesso ground (eg Guitar, 1933, Tate Gallery) and Composition in Black and White, 1933, Swindon Permanent Art Collection). The chalice in Landscape with a Cup (Annunciation) could easily have come from a Nicholson still-life such as Goblet and Pears (c.1925, Kettle's Yard Collection, Cambridge). Even the theme of the Yellow Runner, with its central motif resembling a prehistoric hill carving such as the white horse at Uffington, finds an echo in Nicholson's Birch Craig (1930, Jake Nicholson Collection).

#### THE CRYPT GROUP

The Generation Series does show that the experience of war had changed Lanyon's attitude to painting. He had absorbed the lessons of abstraction and constructivism and was engaged in a struggle to find a new form for his work - his concern now was for the physical reality of the landscape realised in time and space. Deeply dedicated to his subject, he moved closer to younger artists who were more closely aligned to his own artistic and emotional experiences. There were increasingly bitter disagreements about



the selection procedures employed for exhibitions of the St Ives Society of Art - the "advanced" artists felt that they were not fairly represented and resented being placed in a poorly lit corner of the Mariners' Church near the font. Lanyon led a group of younger artists (John Wells, Bryan Wynter, Sven Berlin and the printer, Guido Morris) to form the Crypt Group. Exhibitions were held in the Crypt of the Mariners' Church.

The first exhibition of the Crypt Group was opened by Borlase Smart in July 1946 and consisted of 105 drawings, paintings, and sculptures. Each artist showed a sample of work spanning several years. Lanyon exhibited twenty-six works, choosing the melancholic war paintings Blue Horse Truant (1945) and Ruins at Capua (1945) to hang alongside Generator (1946) and Trip Round Lighthouse (1946).<sup>42</sup> In order to emphasise the emergence of a cadre of younger artists with clearly divergent interests, established members of the avant garde like Hepworth and Nicholson were not invited to exhibit with the Crypt Group.

Although the Crypt Group did not publish an artistic programme or manifesto,<sup>43</sup> the exhibitions were important launching pads for several careers and gave Lanyon the opportunity to assert his growing independence from the Nicholson-Hepworth axis. Perhaps the most interesting relationship to develop at this time was his growing friendship with Wells. Contemporary photographs and documents indicate that they took on the bulk of the responsibility for organising the hanging, lighting and publicity for each of the shows.<sup>44</sup> Both artists were working on paintings derived from the work of their mentors - Nicholson, Hepworth and Gabo - and a shared consciousness of the power of the Cornish landscape to prompt imaginative discoveries and plastic invention. Their friendship was strengthened by drawing expeditions (for example, in 1946 they visited Geevor tin mine with Bryan Wynter creating "strange constructions out of abandoned machinery")<sup>45</sup> and their mutual admiration for Gabo who maintained contact with both artists, exalting them to continue their creative endeavours:

You know that I expect much from you and Peter...I can tell you ... that any work which you have done...from what I have seen in the last exhibition is far ahead of anything the young artists here have



reached.<sup>46</sup>

These shared influences and the collaborative nature of their work with the Crypt Group led to close affinities appearing in their painting: Wells' Still Life (1947-48, Pl.66, fig.1) has compositional and colouristic links with Lanyon's Landscape with Cup (Annunciation). Both works use the same colour key and play on the ambiguity between the studio still-life and the sap-green Cornish landscape beyond, challenging the sophistication of Nicholson's post-cubist experiments with fractured angular forms set against simple landscapes. Wells' Embryonic (1947, Pl.66, fig.2), shows the influence of Gabo's Painting: Construction in Depth (1944), but the title and the oval chrysalis enveloping a glowing red core against an earth-coloured background also relates this painting to Lanyon's Construction in Green and others in the Generation Series. Lanyon and Wells also exhibited together at the 4th Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris during the summer of 1949.<sup>47</sup>

The Crypt Group exhibitions, literally and metaphorically, undermined the traditional Society of Artists by adopting "the metaphorical guise of a gunpowder plot".<sup>48</sup> The group of artists soon attracted critical attention outside St Ives and the first successful show was followed by another in August 1947 (Wilhemina Barns-Graham had now joined the Group). Lanyon included Prelude, Annunciation, Yellow Runner, and Generation in the second Crypt exhibition. Construction in Green and Tinstone were shown in the third and final exhibition, held in August 1948. By this time Kit Barker, David Haughton, Adrian Ryan and Patrick Heron were added to the list of exhibitors.

The three exhibitions between 1946 and 1948 represented a significant contribution to establishing St Ives as an alternative centre for abstraction outside London after the war. Commercial galleries were unwilling to give exhibition space to relatively unknown artists as a letter written by Lanyon on his return from a trip to London suggests:

...The reaction to the abstract is very strongly against - in fact the Hanover Gallery said they could not sell them at all. The whole set up is most disturbing and I think the whole thing smells of a



new academism [sic].<sup>49</sup>

The Crypt Group was an artist-led initiative which provided a genuine opportunity for lesser-known talent to emerge from the avant-garde movement in St Ives. A letter written by Lanyon to Sven Berlin after the final exhibition explains why he felt reluctant to participate in any further Crypt Group activities after 1948:

I am greatly disturbed by the lack of any real cooperation among the Crypt members. It appears to me that my position as founder and director of the Crypt leads to responsibility being left to me. I therefore intend to discontinue the organisation of the Crypt but will be perfectly willing to show if anybody decides to organise it. I believe that the three years of shows have completed the revolution in the Society which I aimed to achieve...I do not wish to be in a position of administration at a time when my own ideas are crystallising and, therefore, my opinions hardening...As a point of interest I think the next three years will be concerned with writing about the last three years, a propaganda campaign if you like.<sup>50</sup>

The Crypt Group broke up primarily because it had outlived its usefulness and because members were becoming more established, forging styles of their own which were sometimes incompatible with the idea of belonging to a movement intended to be a rallying point for the younger "advanced" artists. Lanyon felt particular contempt for the romantic expressionism favoured by Berlin:

The three [Crypt] exhibitions...were outwardly calm, but rarely so in the personal relations. I found a peculiar antipathy to Sven Berlin, which still goes on. This is a matter of aesthetic preferences...a tension was set up between the "Primitive" of Sven Berlin and the constructivist attitude of Gabo...represented by Nicholson, Wells, Hepworth and myself.<sup>51</sup>

Lanyon was right in his belief that his ideas were crystallising and developing in an important new direction. However, he was wrong in his prediction that the focus of any group activity would be one of literary consolidation. No sooner had the final Crypt exhibition been dismantled than more seismic tremors conspired to destroy the fragile partnership that kept the advanced artists in the St Ives Society of Artists.



## THE SECOND SERIES: LANYON SURFACING, 1947-49

After the second Crypt exhibition Lanyon began work on a new series, untitled, but identified by a common motif ("a spiral...elongated...rather like the wave on a Cathode ray tube").<sup>52</sup> The paintings form a natural progression from the "luminous subterranean growth forms" of the Generation Series, "evolving upwards into the daylight and out into the landscape of the Second Series."<sup>53</sup>

This opening out of the spiral has been occurring during the last eighteen months. With it the organisation has become precise. Colour is now beginning to effect the spatial existence of the elements. All this series have left the inner forms of the mines and of seeds and begun to evolve a relationship of these forms to the outer forms of the surface.<sup>54</sup>

We know even less about the Surfacing Series than about Generation. The series took 18 months to complete (c. August 1947 to February 1949), but Lanyon is frustratingly vague about the exact number and identity of the works. His letter to Gabo stresses the horizontality of the final painting in the series, providing a diagrammatic schema to illustrate how the spiral seen in the Generation Series has been elongated into something "rather like the regular wave on a Cathode-ray tube". This description appears to be referring specifically to the forms found in West Penwith (11 x 43in., oil on plywood, 1948/9, Private Collection, Pl.68) which had emerged by allowing naturalistic elements to overlay a more abstract painting called Horizontal by the Sea (Pl.67, fig.2). The elongated wave pattern runs like a refrain through Headland (20 x 30in., oil on canvas, 1948, Private Collection, London, Pl.69), North (18 x 7in., oil on board, Private Collection, Pl.71, fig.2), Godrevy Lighthouse (20 x 10., oil on masonite, 1949, Private Collection, London, Pl.74) and Green Coast (8 x 16in., oil on panel, 1949, Private Collection). Portreath (20 x 16in., oil on strawboard, 1949, Private Collection, Pl.82) should almost certainly be considered as the penultimate painting in the series, paired with West Penwith, though its composition is more obviously derived from a particular location and its box-like dimensions sits uneasily with the horizontal seascape format of the latter.



Describing the evolution of West Penwith in a letter to its buyer, the architect Eugene Rosenberg, Lanyon wrote that it was "one of a pair painted in 1949, the other called Portreath and exhibited in the inaugural Exhibition of the PENWITH SOCIETY OF ARTS IN CORNWALL."<sup>55</sup>

Andrew Lanyon's inclusion of Godolphin (7 x 10in., oil on board, 1948, Private Collection) and Cape Family (72 x 48in., oil on masonite, 1947/49, Western Australian Art Gallery, Perth, Pl.77) in his choice for the second series remains more speculative. The elongated spiral mentioned and illustrated in Lanyon's letter is difficult to detect in either painting and their contrasting sizes place them at the extremes of the series. Isis (14 x 4in., oil on board, 1948, Private Collection, Pl.67 fig.3), a vertical picture depicting the Egyptian goddess, wife and sister of Osiris and mother of Horus, is perhaps a more convincing candidate for inclusion. Turned sideways the Cathode Ray wave movement becomes more apparent and the body in the landscape shares a compositional affinity with Headland.<sup>56</sup>

It is important not to exaggerate the division between the Generation and the Surfacing Series or indeed the consistency of Lanyon's movement "upwards" into the "outer" landscape: most of these paintings continue the exploration of the "inner" forms within the landscape begun in the Generation Series and the surface description of the landscape remains of secondary importance (reminding us, nevertheless, that these images are a response to the real world and not pure abstractions).

I have referred a great deal to my own landscape painting in this process...During the last painting of this series I have found for the first time after years of absence a real love for such things as the sea and granite rocks, the forms of ivy and the dark vicious growth of pine trees. I found it possible to walk during my process of painting and to bring back with me significant objects to have with me during the next stages of the painting. The actual painting proceeds on an unconscious plane - I am concerned primarily with the application of paint and the evocation of the image.<sup>57</sup>

Motivated by a desire to create a poetic effect without sacrificing structural



properties, Lanyon searched the landscape for biomorphic abstractions - not to imitate nature but to interpret his own psychic state. The series can be interpreted as an important stage in his bid for artistic identity, illustrating how he prepared for his own leap into originality through eclecticism - continuing to build his forms by using the methods learned from his mentors.

The generic creation myths seen in the Generation Series also run through the Surfacing Series. Lanyon continued to reach back into an atavistic Cornish pantheism, uniting an idealised figure of maternity with the imagery of a fertile, benevolent, sheltering landscape. The carved appearance of the landscape forms in the Surfacing Series possess a sculptural quality, reminiscent of figures such as Hepworth's hollowed-out Pelagos (1946) with its strong allusions to the womb and to the sheltering, caring function of the mother.<sup>58</sup>

It may also be significant that while working on this series Lanyon experienced one of his recurring and debilitating bouts of depression and illness in the spring on 1948:

The work has become harder and harder, every picture a more deadly struggle than the last...The fight during the last few months has reached a fever pitch and I have been unable to stand it physically, so I collapsed.<sup>59</sup>

This breakdown prompted Lanyon to leave Cornwall for a trip to Italy in the summer - travelling to Florence, Siena, Perugia, San Gimignano, Assisi, Pesaro, Urbino, Bologna and Venice. Some gouaches survive recording his impressions of Italian cities (his view of Siena includes a rare glimpse of a figure in his work - gazing across the scallop-shaped Piazza del Campo as it slopes down to the long brick and stone facade of the Palazzo Pubblico, Pl.75). He was deeply impressed by the work of Giotto, Masaccio and Donatello which he saw in Florence, and admired the poetic way that the Tempesta in Venice's Galleria dell' Accademia combined "the whole history of that civilization in this one picture".<sup>60</sup> He was captivated by the almost casual and accidental positioning of the figures as the eye follows the river deep into the composition to meet the thundery sky. This was, of course, an admiration shared by Stokes who regarded Giorgione as one of the foremost originators in art.<sup>61</sup>



While in Venice Lanyon also visited Henry Moore's one-man exhibition at the XXIV Biennale.<sup>62</sup> Moore stresses the analogies between the female figure and the natural landscape, even in the work destined for urban or metropolitan settings. This would have resonated with Lanyon, already familiar with the correspondence between the human and natural forms in Hepworth's carvings.<sup>63</sup> The mother-goddess in Isis, the child-bearing Virgin suggested by Generation, the earth-mother figures buried in Headland and West Penwith, act as metaphors for the underground mineral wealth, primarily tin and copper, which had sustained the region's population since the early days of the Industrial Revolution. Lanyon's metaphor of the sea as the masculine element bearing down on the procreative landscape is made explicit in the shafts of water which pierce the harbours and headlands in West Penwith, Portreath, and Headland, fertilising the female forms below the surface.

It is possible that Lanyon's trip to Italy offered a way out of the psychological and artistic problems which he had been experiencing. A good illustration of Lanyon's transcription of an ordinary landscape scene into a fully developed synthesis which abandons the depiction of deep space in favour of a complex variety of visual and haptic responses can be seen in the two versions of Godolphin painted in 1948.<sup>64</sup> The first interpretation, a conventional landscape in the style that Nicholson perfected in the late 1920s, is painted in sombre hues and is particularly noteworthy for the way in which the white gesso ground is employed as a visible component of the painting by being allowed to show through the surface (Godolphin, 10 x 14in., oil on board, 1948, Private Collection, Pl.71). The second version has the same thin application of paint through which the gesso emerges, but the subject is treated in an abstract manner. The contours of the landscape are transmogrified into the roughly hewn male (sea) and female (earth) forms copulating. The figures resemble Cornish "menhirs" (standing stones) of which there are said to be ninety in West Penwith alone, erected during the Bronze Age as gravestones, memorials or places for pantheistic worship. Lanyon's preoccupation with the mother of all mothers, mother nature, was shared by many artists of his generation. Unlike Piper and Nash, however, Lanyon eschewed the mood of wistful, quiet pastoralism in favour of mythological landscape forms, which reflects his conviction that nature possesses a redemptive and generative force.

Cape Family (Pl.77) returns to an archetypal Lanyon theme - the point where land and sea meet. In this picture, worked on between 1947 and 1949,



Lanyon tried to introduce a human element directly into the picture to illustrate the dependence of man on nature. Cape Family is typical of Lanyon's paintings in that it shows his concern to represent a particular place, Cape Cornwall, primarily in terms of its history. The wan faces peering out of the Cornish granite represent generations of inhabitants whose lives have been shaped by a struggle to eke out an existence from the tin mines and fishing villages of the Penwith peninsula. Lanyon was convinced that a consciousness of historic ancestry was an essential stage in the process of gaining self-knowledge and an understanding of man's place in relation to the landscape.<sup>65</sup>

The Cape Family group is framed by two vertical columns which resemble Cornish menhirs (or Easter Island statues as, according to Andrew Causey, Lanyon had researched into primitive art and medieval illuminations to get the ideas for the figures). The mother is encased in the left-hand column, while the father appears in the straighter, less yielding form on the right.<sup>66</sup> The archaeological metaphor was a favourite conceit intended to account for the present in terms of the signs of the past. This can be related to the way in which Lanyon considered his paintings to possess "layers of meanings": the creative process is often equated with an excavation of the artistic unconscious. Unfortunately, Cape Family represents one of the least successful paintings of this period: it is very large and the colour seems flat and washed-out, the peaky little faces appear faintly ridiculous imprisoned in their granite obelisks. Lanyon did not repeat the experiment of incorporating such directly recognisable human features in the later landscapes, melding the two in a more oblique and integrated human-landscape fusion.

Godrevy Lighthouse (20 x 10in., oil on masonite, 1949, Private Collection, Rome, Pl.74), North (18 x 7in., oil on board, 1949, Private Collection, Pl.71 fig.2) and Green Coast (8 x 16in., oil on panel, 1949, Private Collection, Pl.67 fig.1) begin the process of substituting the "inner" exploration of subterranean organic forms for a deconstruction of the "outer" surface of the landscape. Ambiguity, however, persists in all the forms: The heart of Godrevy Lighthouse contains the shape of an embryo - a motif familiar from the earlier Generation series. Turned on its side the painting shares the same compositional format as Prelude and Headland. North contains



two upright figures, male and female, and is in some ways a vertical version of the reclining figures in West Penwith or a less referential working of Cape Family. In all these works Lanyon continued to exercise a Nicholsonian self-restraint over the formal elements, making use of a limited palette of muted greys, browns and dark greens, rubbing and razor-scaping the pigment to achieve complete tonal harmony. The paint surfaces achieve a sense of eroded unity which replicate the natural textures found in weathered wood and granite piers. The dark tonality and limited colour range are close to those of contemporary Italian painting which Lanyon may have seen during his war-service or on his travels through Italy in June 1948.<sup>67</sup>

Lanyon's journey to the surface of the landscape was most fully resolved in Portreath and in West Penwith, the final work in the Surfacing Series. It was matched by a parallel process of declaring his artistic apprenticeship to be at an end. Portreath, a small port on the north Cornish coast, is perhaps the most accomplished of Lanyon's Surfacing Series. His numerous sketches reveal his fascination with the place: the crumbling, jagged cliff, the way the sea enters the two inner harbours through a narrow channel created by a deep cleft in the hills, the long pier, the sense of protection offered by the inner harbour, the flow of tides and currents.<sup>68</sup> The drawings represent his first explorations of the subject and show how a particular design would suggest itself after the initial views had been bent and twisted to reveal the "bones and tendons" of a landscape view.

Lines convey structure, though they move with fluidity. In some of the looser drawings he lassoes a place with lines that convey the velocity of eye movements and others that are playful, imitating a chimney stack or a tree, then a sheer drop. His later paintings do this with huge brushstrokes and painted lines that hesitate then sweep. Though these marks are less obviously representational they are no less informed or structured.<sup>69</sup>

In the final painting, Portreath (Pl.82), the forms of the harbour walls and sea are laid flat on the canvas with strongly emphasised interlocking planes: It is a very frontal picture with shapes looking at you, and it might almost have been made in a square box.<sup>70</sup> Natural perspective is wholly



altered, the cliffs, the inner harbours and their relationship to the encroaching sea have an encircling, bone-like structure: "You might say that the place is an excuse for me to construct a square picture with planes working in depth and on the surface."<sup>71</sup>

By returning to the methods discovered in Box Construction of 1939 Lanyon created "a direct portrait of place - the Cornish fishing harbour of Portreath".<sup>72</sup> There are traces of Nicholson's influence in the fresher, lighter tone and colour of this picture (Lanyon shared Nicholson's enthusiasm for the work of the Italian Primitives such as Piero della Francesca and the picture bears similarities to Nicholson's Cortivallo Lugano, oil and pencil on canvas, 1921-23).<sup>73</sup> He had abandoned the attempt to provide allegorical or emotive references beyond the elements given in the painting itself. His technical interests are revealed by the method of compositional instantiation. The application of the paint in patches and the emphasis on its materiality are Cézannesque (the motif itself faintly recalls Cézanne's views of Mont Sainte-Victoire and Portreath was unique in being the only place Lanyon would return to at every stage of his painting career). The space of the actual, three-dimensionally perceived world is evoked not so much by illusion as by analogy: the sense of depth is produced as a function of relationships in tone and colour and does not depend on an Albertian perspective drawing the viewer into the picture or a "tapering off" towards the upper edge of the painting. The bright red house outlined against the flat grey-white wall of the inner reach of the harbour wall generates a feeling of space because the red is perceived as closer and as more palpably the colour of an object than the grey-white and the two surfaces thus appear to separate in space. In fact, as photographs testify, this skilful control over colour relationships was also derived from observed reality: "The little red square is more of a device to hold the forms in place, but in fact it derives from a red brick building down on the dock."<sup>74</sup>

Portreath is a triumphant vindication of Lanyon's decision to return to a specific place for inspiration and it formed the cornerstone of his Lefevre Gallery exhibition in October 1949. The painting is sophisticated according to criteria different from those employed to regard the luminous subterranean growth forms of the Generation series and points to the more



complex methodology which Lanyon was to employ in the 1950s to convey his sense of "placeness" in the naturalistic world.

Lanyon realised that he had reached a turning-point in his painting and Portreath is a brilliant summation of his various influences: Smart's ability to simplify the complex interaction of sea moving against vast sculptural cliffs ("the rock of Portreath is all slate, and slate tends to come away in big, flat planes, and I used these throughout the picture");<sup>75</sup> Stokes' belief that colour should support form and that one form should enhance the next through use of complementary colours "at all angles and directions throughout a picture...carving as opposed to plastic";<sup>76</sup> Nicholson's thin use of paint, rubbed or scraped to allow the texture of the ground to show through, emphasising the flatness of the picture surface, while still retaining an identifiable subject; Gabo's conception of art as an organic process which seeks to "construct the image of the world as we wish it to be...shaping...order out of a mass of incoherent and inimical realities"<sup>77</sup> is echoed in Lanyon's "I see only the raw material which is mined in the instinctive belly of the earth and transformed through the constructive processes of the mind."<sup>78</sup>

Lanyon was still not satisfied that he had yet found a way to express the multi-dimensional sensuous experience of the landscape. He decided that the only way to proceed was to allow a more expressionistic vigour to enter his painting. This is best illustrated in the transformation of the Gabo influenced composition, Horizontal by the Sea (1947, Pl.67 fig.2) into West Penwith (1948/9, Pl.68) "as a development and on top of the former".<sup>79</sup> Lanyon described the production of West Penwith in terms of an artistic epiphany:

...the initial breakthrough from Gabo-Hepworth-Nicholson abstraction and (it) is the basis of all my paintings since...The first state exercises the spatial illusions and construction. This exercise releases the imagery. I believe further that the activity of creating illusion precipitates images which would otherwise remain dormant...Abstract construction illustrated in Horizontal by the Sea is already evocative but is resolved only as far as all the forms and planes operate



successfully in themselves. References outside these are impurities. It is these references and impurities which I developed in the later painting and so by choice opted for a richer and in fact more local vein. Subsequently moral and aesthetic differences led me to break with Nicholson-Hepworth, though not with Gabo whose constructivist philosophy is the basis of all my work.<sup>80</sup>

This decision to allow "impurities" to dictate the final form was crucial: It allowed Lanyon to escape the overwrought conceptualisation which characterises some of the Generation Series. Instead he began to develop a more complex portrait of place, setting out to bring together all his feelings about the landscape:

My painting is the revelation, a turning outward of experience - a making immediate of a time process-in-space.<sup>81</sup>

In effect Lanyon had found that the twisting intersecting planes, the play of negative and positive space, solid and void, found in the first painting, Horizontal by the Sea, satisfied the structural requirements necessary for the formation of the pictorial space, but did not meet the requirements of the subject matter. He reversed the process employed to find the final image in Godolphin: instead of starting with the representational image and moving on to an abstracted, metaphysical rendering of the same subject, he had begun with ordered harmony and tonal rhythms, an emphasis on form as opposed to content. When he found the geometric spirit and the absoluteness of these forms inappropriate to convey his total experience of the landscape, he abandoned Gabo's purist approach and painted over the original work - opting for a "richer and more local vein".

West Penwith is recognisably a landscape view over the Penwith coast, organised into a threefold division of sea/sky, coastal landscape and a more generalised foreground.<sup>82</sup> Again, however, there is an interchangeability between the human and landscape forms: A reclining figure lying horizontal in the landscape is suggested by the curves of the harbour and headland. Turned through ninety degrees and there are evident parallels with the vertical figure-paintings such as Isis, Generation and North. Left horizontal,



the composition has more in common with Headland and Green Coast.

By 1949 Lanyon had found a way of uniting the inner world of the imagination with his experience of real events and places in Cornwall. He had freed himself from dependence upon the examples of other, older, artists and approached the domain of his own unique, mature expression. The complementary pairing characteristic of the Generation Series had been replaced by a more resolved style which integrated an intense blend of physical and psychological sensations within landscape formations that also assumed the properties of the human body.

#### THE PENWITH SOCIETY

These important changes in the aesthetic direction of Lanyon's work were mirrored by equally momentous upheavals in the St Ives art world. The death of Borlase Smart in November 1947 robbed the avant garde of their most important supporter within the establishment of the St Ives Society of Artists. Smart had been secretary of the Society since 1930 and was elected president to succeed Dod Proctor in May 1947. He had been instrumental in persuading Nicholson and Hepworth to join the Society and welcomed their many and varied contributions to exhibitions through the war years and beyond. As the organiser of the Crypt exhibitions and a local artist, Lanyon was elected to the committee in 1948. However, with Smart's moderating influence gone, the division between the "moderns" and the more traditional painters in the Society opened up and hostilities soon erupted (Lanyon was immediately reprimanded for expanding the membership of the Crypt Group without consulting others on the committee).

The appointment of the arch-reactionary, Sir Alfred Munnings, as President of the St Ives Society in June 1948, illustrated that the era of "convivencia" had passed. On 5th February 1949 an Extraordinary General Meeting of the St Ives Society of Artists was called by ten members (including Harry Rountree - a vociferous opponent of "this pitiful modern racket").<sup>83</sup> They accused the chairman, Leonard Fuller, and secretary, David Cox, of acting without consultation and complained that as a result of a rule passed



at the 1948 annual general meeting members might not necessarily have at least one picture hung in an exhibition. There was a fear that the quality control exerted by the hanging committee might be squeezing out the traditional landscapes, seascapes and genre pictures which had made up the staple of the Society's output. Insults were traded with those artists who represented the modern movement (Hepworth and Nicholson were both present), leading to a mass resignation (17 members left, including David Cox, Leonard Fuller, Shearer Armstrong, Hyman Segal, Peter Lanyon "and the entire section of modern artists").<sup>84</sup>

On 8th February, the Penwith Society of Arts in Cornwall was founded at a meeting held in the Castle Inn, St Ives. Present were the artists who had resigned from the St Ives Society and others sympathetic to the idea of starting a movement which would "follow a policy of being catholic in its outlook".<sup>85</sup> There were nineteen founder members (including Lanyon, Hepworth, Nicholson, Berlin, Wells, Barns-Graham, and Segal) and Herbert Read was invited to be President (he accepted).<sup>86</sup> It was agreed that the Society should be founded as a tribute to Borlase Smart "because he was broad in outlook and....made room for the modern, and encouraged young artists with fresh ideas. It is on his ideas of progress that the new Society has broken away from the old."<sup>87</sup> It was decided that the Penwith should include both artists and craftsmen among its members.

The Minute Book for 1949 shows that Lanyon, determined to extend the pioneering work of the Crypt Group, was one of the most active members of the Penwith Society. At a committee meeting on 10th February he was appointed Assistant Secretary (liason officer) to deal with the press "so that a unified answer should be given to all enquiries".<sup>88</sup> The Society first met on its own premises on 27th April in the Public Hall, Fore Street, rented from the Labour Party for 35 shillings a week. On 28th April, at a general meeting, he was given responsibility for supervising and coordinating designs for the gallery and empowered to coopt any members to submit designs. His efforts transformed a bare hall into a modern exhibition space with white walls, screens and gallery lighting. The first exhibition which opened on 18th June 1949 proved to be the highpoint in the Society's attempts to forge a new spirit of creative and harmonious endeavour to promote modern art in Cornwall. 2,755 people paid to see the exhibition and sales (27 items) amounted to £222.<sup>89</sup>



## LANYON ALONE: PARTING FROM THE PENWITH

Not surprisingly, the consensus among such a disparate group of personalities did not hold for long. Dissent broke out over the selection procedure adopted by the hanging committee. At a general meeting held on Tuesday, 15th November Lanyon proposed a change in the wording of the Society's aim to promote the "furtherance of Art in Cornwall" to the "furtherance of the Arts in Cornwall". He also suggested "that groups should be called A and B...instead of "Representational" and "Abstract" respectively and group C for "Craftsmen".<sup>90</sup>

According to Cross, the categorisation of artists into "Representational" and "Abstract" groupings had been proposed by Nicholson ("although characteristically his name was not attached to it").<sup>91</sup> The selection panels for each exhibition was to contain members representative of each interest. In selection, Group A would have two votes if a traditional work was being chosen, against one vote from each of the others; the same system would apply to the choice of modern and craft work. Nicholson's proposals had immediately alienated some artists who felt that such categories were "artificial and unnecessary".<sup>92</sup> At a General Meeting held on 29th November, Sven Berlin, Isobel Heath and Henry Segal refused to be placed in any group. Lanyon's rejection of Nicholson's scheme had sown the seeds of dissension which would eventually break up the Society. The Chairman, Leonard Fuller, appealed for unanimity (he was supported in this by Lanyon and Nicholson!).

The adoption of the A, B and C group system led to a flurry of resignations from the Penwith Society in February 1950. Segal resigned on the 7th February followed two weeks later by Cox (secretary of the Penwith) and Berlin. Lanyon was alarmed at the increasing domination of Nicholson and Hepworth over the St Ives colony of artists (he was especially resentful of Hepworth as she had temporarily resigned her post on the Penwith committee in favour of him - her health was not good - but continued to exercise an influence which Lanyon felt unable to match). The categories suggested by Nicholson were seen as the first step towards an assertion of the primacy of abstraction over figuration and the subsequent furore was reminiscent of the divisions within the Seven and Five Group after 1934.<sup>93</sup> Lanyon was dismayed when he was censured by the committee for disloyalty after a meeting with one of the recently resigned dissenters. His fears that the society was betraying



its regionally based catholicity seemed to be confirmed when Hepworth proposed a change in the rules that would allow artists from outside Cornwall to join.

Lanyon was uneasy with the idea that figuration and abstraction were incompatible. His background and training, admiration for the Newlyn School of Artists and respect for the traditions of Cornish painting (particularly the work of Lamorna Birch, John Park and Borlase Smart), placed him at odds with this drive to separate the old from the new, the crafts from the arts. On 16th May he resigned from the Penwith Society. The acrimonious split with Nicholson-Hepworth and many of his former colleagues was permanent and at first debilitating.

On 20th October Lanyon wrote to the St Ives Times that he had been unable to work since leaving the Penwith and that he was thinking of leaving St Ives. He did not, of course, leave St Ives - but he refused to re-join the Penwith even after the Society abolished the A and B group rule in 1957. Instead, he became a member of the Newlyn School of Artists in 1953, joining the committee and eventually becoming its chairman in 1961. According to a recent biographer, he was attracted by Newlyn's catholic and eclectic exhibitions policy which contrasted favourably with the exclusively "precious" modernism on show at the Penwith. He promoted Newlyn Gallery exhibitions, encouraged members to show their work and brought arts administrators and distinguished visitors to the gallery.<sup>94</sup>

#### THE LONGEST HATRED

Lanyon now nurtured a very special hatred for both Nicholson and Hepworth: he missed no opportunity to belittle his debt to their artistic tutelage and attacked their reputation and work. He replied to Roland Bowden's review of his first one-man exhibition at the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London which had mentioned the Nicholson/Hepworth influence:

Nicholson remained an essentially romantic painter. Nicholson avoided the essential problem of being involved in place or life (in a wide superficial sense) by concentrating on the substance itself - on the



material of making and proceeded to play games on his own pitch...Gabo accepts a much wider field, his material for instance is the means of expressing a spatial image evolved from physical and sensory apprehensions. It is inevitable for instance that by Nicholson's approach there should be a return to a dualist concept and thence to the sort of visual pun-making which characterises the consciously naïf escapism of pre-war art. A really dynamic approach aiming to construct out of a process of abstraction has not been achieved by Nicholson nor by Mondrian and least of all by Hepworth who remains wedded to mass concepts...<sup>95</sup>

Writing about the current stage of his work, Lanyon continued:

It owes its present situation to Gabo and only to Nicholson and Hepworth insofar as it reacts very strongly to the social outcome of their approach which to me (after 6 years of service life) is cruel in the widest human sense. My painting Alone (which you have) should in fact be the property of Barbara Hepworth so that she might know what her outlook and aesthetic must cause in others...So I place myself not where you do, as an innovator, but as a disciple of Gabo.<sup>96</sup>

The vitriol of the language used in this attack on Nicholson and Hepworth reveals the depth of hatred Lanyon felt for the pair. He dismissed Nicholson's post-war painting as derivative pastiche, repeating or paraphrasing motifs coined in the days of Unit One, Abstract and Concrete and Circle, oscillating uncertainly between the figurative and the abstract. He condemned Nicholson's fondness for visual puns - exploiting correspondences between a steeple spire and a glass decanter - as frivolous:

Nicholson was very much more concerned with purely plastic problems. He was a man of wit, he would see things and make puns on them. He was a great sportsman as well, but he used to make his own rules for a game of table tennis: if he found he wasn't winning he would make other rules. He was a man with blinkers, not broad, but incisive and really an almost pedestrian surgeon, while Gabo, on the other hand was in every way a very big man. I am not saying that Nicholson



wasn't a big man and I think with restrictions you can be a big man,  
but that Gabo was broader.<sup>97</sup>

The irony that Lanyon himself was a British artist using the language of constructivism and abstraction - while maintaining a very English concern with nature - did not seem to have occurred to him. A more detached critic might argue that Nicholson's post-war work reveals a masterly skill in maintaining "a finely controlled equilibrium between the given order of nature and the invented order of art", successfully reconciling the shallow space of Cubism with the limitless depth of the landscape.<sup>98</sup>

Lanyon kept up a steady stream of letters to local newspapers, complaining that the reporting of cultural events in the town reflected a bias "towards the group centred around Mr Nicholson or Miss Hepworth". He appealed to the impartiality of the St Ives Times, arguing that "the only newspaper in St Ives should not appear to be biased in favour of those with the biggest names or who can bask in the reflected glory of other's achievements".<sup>99</sup> Following a report in the St Ives Times on a talk given by Leonard Fuller to the Rotary Club, Lanyon wrote:

...There will be no art in St Ives soon if this idiotic division continues...Modern art, traditional art, primitive art, big and little art, may one day be able to bump around in a jolly manner again and bless St Ives for its ignorance about the fine points of art politics...<sup>100</sup>

Another letter, a few days later, again criticises the grouping system and betrays Lanyon's obsessive hatred for the influence exerted by the Hepworth-Nicholson axis:

...I must express dismay, horror and a little anger at the idea of a two party system or a multi-party one for the arts, because I am persuaded that there is only one partisan of art, and that is the artist, and there are as many sorts of art as there are artists, but there still remains Art...For the convenience of criticism or philosophy, it may be useful to categorise the arts, but it is impertinent and



even arrogant for artists to attempt to control other artists by making party loyalty a condition of sale and amenities. This is what the Penwith Society does.<sup>101</sup>

Nicholson, whose growing post-war international reputation made him the most acclaimed and renowned of the St Ives artists simply ignored the protestations of his former pupil. While Lanyon was still struggling for recognition, Nicholson was enjoying a triumphant progress across Europe and America: exhibitions at the Lefevre Gallery, the Durlacher Gallery in New York, the 1952 award of first prize for painting (for Poisonous Yellow, 49 x 64in., oil on canvas, 1949, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Venice) at the thirty-ninth Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, retrospective exhibitions at the Detroit Institute of Art in Dallas, the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, a show at the 1954 Venice Biennale (for which Nicholson won the Ulisse prize) and the Belgian Critics' Award for best show of that year.<sup>102</sup> Lanyon was particularly bitter about the success of Poisonous Yellow:

Poor Ben how happy I was to think he could look out to sea and know his poisonous yellow was raking in the dollars. There is never boredom in the sea but perhaps for Ben there is only something intriguing when an imaginary son rises out of the horizon...TIN PAN BEN with a squeaky scream, tried to tell the critics about CORNISH CREAM.<sup>103</sup>

Nicholson's success conspired to take him away from St Ives for prolonged periods, distancing him from the art politics of the colony. He had separated from Hepworth in 1950 and left St Ives for good a few months after his first triumphant Tate Gallery retrospective in 1955. He resigned from the Penwith Society in February 1957.

St Ives continued to be Hepworth's home until her death in 1975 and after Nicholson's departure she bore the brunt of Lanyon's anger. The quarrel was particularly painful for Hepworth as her daughters, Rachel and Sarah, had been flower-girls at his wedding in 1946. Lanyon's plea for tolerance of a variety of artistic expressions, traditional and modern, was not carried through in his attitude towards "foreigners" (those unfortunates not born



in Cornwall).<sup>104</sup> Hepworth and Lanyon shared the same total commitment to their art and both embraced a mythopoeic animism - a sense that the sacred forces of life were to sought, above all, in landscape.<sup>105</sup> Echoes of Hepworth's sculpture continued to resonate in the semi-hidden, male and female animating presences which can be detected in many of his paintings throughout the 1950s. One might argue that by imbuing her work with associations drawn from the natural world, expressing a sense of belonging to a specific local community, Hepworth was consciously addressing and articulating her own distinctive solution to the problem of the alienation of the modernist artist from society. However, Hepworth had been born and brought up in Yorkshire and was commercially more successful than Lanyon.

Lanyon used every opportunity to rail against the injustices he felt that she had perpetrated: most memorably, perhaps, at one of the Penwith Arts Balls of the 1950s (with Hepworth in attendance).<sup>106</sup> In St Ives' maze of narrow streets, everyone ran into everyone else and perceived slights and insults that time and distance might otherwise have healed remained as suppurating sores.<sup>107</sup> Lanyon continued to accuse Hepworth of using the colony and the Penwith Society for her own self-promotion:

...when these flaws on the surface of the Society (the Penwith) have been cleared away, and the art of painting ceases to be a way to personal fame or common advertisement, I shall feel free to be an artist in my own town. At present it is my workshop. The finished product is for export only.<sup>108</sup>

The two artists remained unreconciled at the time of Lanyon's death in 1964, although Hepworth spoke movingly and generously at his funeral:

He was a unique spirit - a spirit that was perhaps airborne. I don't suppose he knew how much we all thought of him, but we did love and admire him tremendously.<sup>109</sup>

Perhaps Lanyon recognised that Hepworth's sense of herself as a shape-making medium for the larger animistic forces of life so closely mirrored his own ideas about the spiritual and transformative significance of art that



he felt obliged to foment a violent and irrational hatred for this critically and commercially more successful artist. There was simply not enough room in St Ives for two such powerful egos.

#### TOWARDS A CONSTRUCTIVE LANDSCAPE

Only Gabo, now settled in Woodbury, Connecticut, provided the true support as teacher, friend and confidant that Lanyon required during this period of internecine warfare. He remained attracted to constructivism's "method by which experience itself can be transformed into a tangible, spatial configuration"<sup>110</sup> and felt that Gabo had solved the problem of space in painting. He resolved to present his own sensory experience of landscape without illusionistic perspective in a way that might allow him to transcribe different concepts of spatial values, location and viewpoints simultaneously onto the two-dimensional plane.

I wasn't satisfied with the tradition of painting from one position only. I wanted to bring together all my feelings about the landscape... another way of organising the space in a picture.<sup>111</sup>

He compared his own movements in the Cornish landscape with the aesthetic sensation induced by experiencing one of Gabo's translucent constructions:

The transparent formations of a Gabo involve me in a bodily movement as I adjust myself to the space forms. The same sort of adjustment that I make out of doors on a cliff top.<sup>112</sup>

Lanyon believed that Gabo's organisation of space in a sculpture as "the actual living and breathing substance in which we exist"<sup>113</sup> provided one of the main sources of inspiration for his own transcription of fluctuating spatial values and object equivalents on the two-dimensional surface. He shared Gabo's wish to present "not the image of the landscape but the image of his experience of it."<sup>114</sup>

Gabo believed that the configuration of the landscape - its lines, shapes



and forms - could be transmogrified by the imagination into a visual equivalent:

The rhythms and the state of mind I would wish the world to be in...the image of good - not of evil; the image of order - not of chaos; the image of life - not of death.<sup>115</sup>

Lanyon was fortunate in that many constructivist ideas corresponded closely to the theories put forward by Adrian Stokes in Colour and Form. Gabo and Pevsner repudiated superficial line in the Realistic Manifesto as an arbitrary or decorative graphic element. Line had no connection with "the permanent structure of things" and space could therefore only be measured through "continuous depth".<sup>116</sup> Gabo considered that any colour should come from the very nature of the materials, even if that colour be pure undifferentiated light. In the Realistic Manifesto, Gabo had renounced colour as a pictorial element, arguing that it "has nothing in common with the innermost essence of things".<sup>117</sup> His avoidance of accidental, incidental or superficial colours parallels Stokes' advice to reduce the separateness of illumination, "to identify it with the colour of objects so that these objects appear to be self-lit in virtue of their colour, as if breathing."<sup>118</sup>

Lanyon remained acutely conscious of the closeness of some of the forms in the Generation and Surfacing series to Gabo's curvilinear constructions. In March 1949 he wrote to his close friend, John Wells, whose gradual move away from constructive art paralleled his own:

Gabo's constructions are such complete things that their very presence is paralysing. It requires a certain amount of disregard to be able to find one's own roots...The tendency is to say "I want to make a construction" not "I want to construct".<sup>119</sup>

In this long letter Lanyon described how he envisaged his art developing a style and vision which he could claim as his own.

I must deny the accepted image of landscape or face or bottle, anything for that matter, and construct a new image which relates to neither,



but to all.<sup>120</sup>

While his painting would never bear a facile, figurative semblance to the visible world, Lanyon believed that he should nevertheless represent a distillation of his emotional involvement with the landscape, offering his experiences back in a form which reflected an intuitive consciousness of the time and space particularity of this most westerly point of the Cornish peninsula. This could only be achieved by

coming on it unawares...disturbing one's own sense of being fixed in relation to a place which comes from the static viewpoint of traditional linear perspective.<sup>121</sup>

Increasingly frustrated with his lingering status as a disciple of Gabo, he struggled for many years to find a way of producing landscape painting which could be understood in terms of constructive principles but without slavishly imitating Gabo's sublime forms. Patrick Heron's review of Lanyon's first London exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery in October 1949 (which included many of the Surfacing Series paintings) criticised Lanyon for being excessively beholden to his mentors, Gabo and Nicholson, and urged him to take more risks with the paint:

Gabo has left too deep a mark: Lanyon searches too often and too hard for the abstract archetype of the form of a hill or a rock...His paintings would crystallise harder and clearer if Lanyon were more often content to record the visual impact itself, the mere sensation, the mere appearance of his subject.<sup>122</sup>

Henceforth he eschewed Gabo's idealised and geometricised abstraction while continuing to explore the tension and poise of expanding and contracting space within a landscape composition. He rejected any pictorial element that eliminated the artist's hand and evoked the impersonal and machine made: the wartime output of precisely lined closed forms were rejected in favour of indeterminate, dynamic compositions.

Lanyon's paintings in the 1950s were to operate on a more immediate and



sensory level, allowing emotions derived from his experience of the Cornish landscape to take form as paint to the point where they themselves generate a form of scenery - complicated theatres of the mind, thronged with shapes and forms of varying indefiniteness. They express with remarkable intensity the immediacy of his experiences and sensory perceptions so that the paint possesses not only colour and texture, but subtly varying density, almost taste and aroma.

It was clearly important for Lanyon's own development to make the break from his earlier mentors as rancorous as possible so that any return to the safety of the St Ives art establishment became impossible. As soon as he left the Penwith Society, severing all formal ties with the art establishment of St Ives, his painting began to establish a method and manner entirely his own and he was able to overcome the early difficulties of reconciling the art of Gabo, Nicholson and Hepworth with his own deep feelings for the landscape of his childhood. By 1949, he had finally come to terms with the Nicholson-Hepworth-Gabo influences and felt confident enough to eschew the exemplar of his earlier mentors so that he could follow his own muse:

I faced a year's struggle in which I broke from my concern for structure only and attempted a more complex portrait of a place.<sup>123</sup>

While remaining attracted to the constructive ideology, he renounced his claims to be considered a Constructivist:

I appreciate the courageous achievement of Naum Gabo who, in his manifesto in 1920, together with Pevsner, his brother, was able to say: "Art should stop being imitative and try instead to discover new forms". Possibly the effort to discover new forms, that very emphasis, has given the impetus to my own painting. What emerged in Gabo's case was a constructive reality different from, for want of a better word, "academic" realism. It shifts the emphasis of realism away from the bottle, jug, tree, or horizon, towards a reality which is constructed out of experience...In these conjectures I have been encouraged by the achievement of Gabo - the constructive approach



to be the formation of an image is I believe in agreement with my own approach. But I am certain that my own use of it in many ways violates the principles of Constructivism. I do not therefore claim to be a Constructivist.<sup>124</sup>

His apprenticeship at an end, Lanyon was now in a position to master the divergent streams of influences - merging them successfully - so that his complete commitment to interpreting the Cornish landscape could be expressed in painterly terms. While continuing to espouse the social vision of Gabo's constructive ideology, he increasingly reacted against the formalist aesthetics of Constructivism and Neo-Plasticism which he felt could not adequately reflect the human, and intensely personal dialogue between abstraction and nature which he longed to express. He believed that his experimentation with dynamic, open and unfinished forms did not conflict with his general adherence to a constructive ideology and its pursuit of purity in absolute forms.

Lanyon now developed his own signature - characterised by a seemingly effortless fusion of abstraction and figuration, making distinctions between them either meaningless or irrelevant. Gradually the more random elements of the landscape were allowed to challenge the accepted notions of compositional harmony. Paintings such as the Yellow Runner and Headland, reminiscent of works by other British romantics such as Nash and Sutherland, gave way to an art which placed more emphasis on the unpremeditated and subjective, a landscape based on sensations and feelings, charged with symbols and associations, incorporating in a generalized abstraction the distinguished features of the Penwith locality.

Although their relationship cooled over the years (in 1956 he tetchily rebuked Gabo for not contacting him on a fleeting visit to England),<sup>125</sup> Lanyon continued to write to Gabo and even visited him at his Connecticut home. His final letter, written in May 1964, concluded "I always tell all my students here that you Gabo are the master".<sup>126</sup> According to Gabo's widow, Miriam, "Gabo kept Peter's photograph on his desk till the day he died".<sup>127</sup>



## Notes to Chapter Four

1. Mel Gooding, Patrick Heron, Phaidon Press, London, 1994, p.56.
2. Norbert Lynton, William Scott, Modern British Masters, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 1990.
3. Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, letter written by Peter Lanyon to Peter Gimpel, August 1951, p.110.
4. Ibid., p.110.
5. Peter Lanyon, extract from a biographical note written in 1957, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.165.
6. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon: Paintings, Drawings and Constructions, 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, exhibition catalogue, 1978, p.22.
7. Patrick Heron, Arts (New York), May 1956.
8. Charles Biederman: Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge (1948), a substantial extract appears in Stephen Bann's The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo Paperback, 1990, p.231 (originally published in New York by Viking Press, 1974).
9. Lanyon writing to Gabo, February 1949, from The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Held in the Tate Gallery Archive on microfiche, TAM 66/53-4. Reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, pp.19-21.
10. Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, pp.22-23.
11. Lanyon's letter to Gabo, February 1949, Portreath, op.cit., pp.19-21. Lanyon clearly saw his work as developing in a sequential series and this can be interpreted as an expression of his evolving psychological state after the trauma of warfare.
12. According to Sheila Lanyon, interviewed in August 1996, Lanyon would not declare a painting ready for release until "the image had been properly cooked". This could sometimes happen after the painting had been stored in the studio for several months and occasionally even years later.
13. Margaret Garlake's list appears in Portreath (1993), p.22. Andrew Lanyon's selection and discussion of the difficulties involved in compiling such a list follows on pp.22-23. The Tate Gallery, St Ives, produced a useful and interesting "Study Display" (22nd October to 8th January 1995) which sets out some works which might be in the series (or the later Second Series). Both Andrew Lanyon and Margaret Garlake contributed essays to a short pamphlet accompanying the exhibition. Andrew Lanyon does not consider The Yellow Boat for inclusion in the series. Trip Round Lighthouse and St Mary's Scilly Isles are included as possible contenders - along with Submarine, Fishboat and Dance of a Glass Jug.
14. Margaret Garlake: "Peter Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", The Burlington Magazine, April 1995, p.237. Garlake does acknowledge "the inclusion of Tinstone is highly speculative..."
15. Margaret Garlake: "Peter Lanyon's Generation Series". Essay for Generation Study Display, Tate Gallery, St Ives, October to January 1995.
16. Lanyon's letter to Gabo, February 1949, Portreath, op.cit., pp.19-21.
17. Sheila Lanyon quoted in Portreath op.cit., p.23.
18. Melanie Klein, Early Analysis, p.98, quoted in Barry Dodge, The Art of Peter Lanyon 1946-64: A Psychological Interpretation, M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1991, p.12.
19. Peter Lanyon writing to Naum Gabo, February 1949, Portreath, op.cit., pp.19-21.
20. Margaret Garlake states that "the mother and child theme was particularly



prominent in the early postwar period because of Moore's Northampton Madonna and Child and his many versions of the Family Group which...were perfectly congruent with the government's explicit and urgent desire to raise the declining birthrate." See footnotes to The Constructions of Peter Lanyon, by Margaret Garlake, in Peter Lanyon: Air, land and Sea, South Bank Centre catalogue, 1992, p.61. Interestingly, the sculpture which resembles Generation most closely is Moore's Internal and External Forms (1953-54).

21. Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., p.22.

22. Taken from facsimile of Lanyon's handwritten notes on The Yellow Runner, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, 1990, p.72.

23. Ibid.

24. Lanyon's metaphoric use of the horse has been discussed in relation to the poem, In the Side of My Eye (reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.277). A wood carving of 1946 makes the interrelationship of man and horse more explicit: see Man and Horse, 13 x 11in., incised line on board, 1946, illustrated in Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, p.72. Another example of Lanyon's fondness for equine symbolism can be seen in The Returned Seaman, 20 x 28in., hand coloured linocut, 1949, p.94, ibid. The outstretched arm of a female figure envelopes a harbour, stockade containing a horse and a mine. She is overlooked by a protective, vertical, masculine, figure that seems to have been carved out of stone and acts as a sentinel in the composition. Barry Dodge has suggested a psychological interpretation by reminding us that Freud believed that wild animals could symbolise sexual impulses in dreams. S. Freud, The Interpretation of Dreams, The Pelican Freud Library, vol.IV, 1975, p.536. This approach is continued in Dodge's assertion that the primacy of yellow may be related to Melanie Klein's observation that urination and sexual intercourse are linked in the unconscious mind". Melanie Klein, "A Contribution to the Psychogenesis of Manic-Depressive States", Love Guilt and Reparation and Other Works 1921-45, Virago, 1975, p.281.

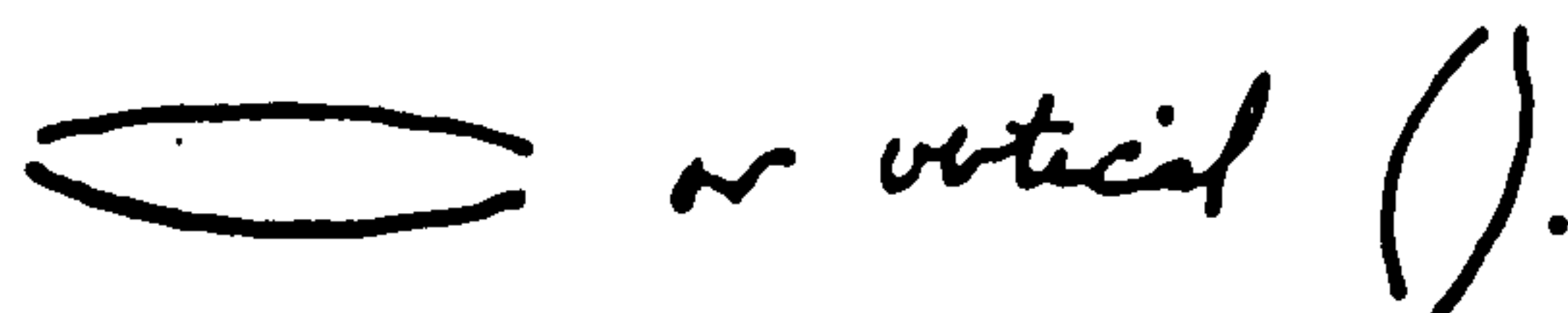
25. Stokes, Colour and Form, Faber and Faber, 1937, p.43.

26. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner: The Realistic Manifesto, 1920, first published on August 5th 1920, by the Second State Printing House, Moscow. This translation by Gabo (1957) is reprinted in S. Bann's The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo Paperback, 1990, pp.9-10.

27. Margaret Garlake, The Constructions of Peter Lanyon, essay in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, South Bank catalogue, 1992, p.52.

28. Letter to Gabo, February 1949, op.cit., Portreath, Andrew Lanyon, Penzance, 1993, p.19.

*The spiral went right through  
every painting of the series  
in every case closely associated  
with the oval form  
rather elongated like this*



29. Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., 1993, p.24. A photograph of Painted Deal is on p.25.

30. Ibid., p.25.



31. Letter to Gabo, February 1949, op.cit., p.20; the work Lanyon refers to is illustrated in Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, Andrew Lanyon, Penzance, 1990, p.79.

32. See Chapter Three.

33. Naum Gabo: On Constructive Realism, delivered as the Trowbridge Lecture at Yale University, 1948 and published in Katherine S. Dreier, James Johnson Sweeney, Naum Gabo, Three Lectures on Modern Art, New York, Philosophical Library, 1949. Reprinted in The Tradition of Constructivism, ed by S. Bann, Da Capo paperback, 1990, p.241: "I don't deny them their right to go on painting their images; I don't even deny that their images are real and true; the only thing I maintain is that the artist cannot go on forever painting the view from their window and pretending that this is all there is in the world, because it is not. There are many aspects in the world, unseen, unfelt, and unexperienced, which have to be conveyed..."

34. Letter to Gabo, Portreath, 1993, op.cit., p.19. Prelude is a painting which combines ideas of mining under the ground with woman giving birth to children". Alan Bowness: Peter Lanyon, exhibition catalogue, Arts Council, London, 1968.

35. Letter to Gabo, February 1949, Portreath, op.cit., p.19.

36. Letter to Gabo, The Attic Studio (originally built by Herbert Lanyon, the artist's father, as a photographic studio), St Ives, 30th May, 1947.

37. Letter to Gabo, ibid., 1949. John Wells, one of the few St Ives artists to remain on friendly terms with Lanyon, was co-founder of the Crypt Group. Gabo was a close friend who once described Wells as "the Paul Klee of the Constructivist movement". Lanyon often compared the creative process to mining and bringing the final image "up to grass" (Lanyon's letter to the poet Roland Bowden, TGA 942.1, 20th April 1952).

38. Show Day was a tradition appropriated from the Newlyn School painters: Artists who had prepared work for the Royal Academy's spring exhibition first showed it to the public in their studios. According to the St Ives Times, Nicholson exhibited his Painting, 1946, Hepworth displayed Wood Sculpture with Strings and Drawing for Sculpture. Lanyon's works are not identified.

39. The St Ives Society of Artists' Summer Exhibition, 1946, included two works each by Stokes, Mellis, Berlin and Nicholson, Hepworth, Lanyon and Wells: works by the latter four were grouped together in the catalogue, suggesting that they were shown together. According to Tom Cross, the "advanced" group became known as the "exhibitors around the font"...a cause of some resentment as this area of the gallery was inaccessible and dimly lit. See also section on The Crypt Group.

40. G.R. Downing held numerous exhibitions at the back of his bookshop, 28 Fore Street. The mixed exhibition featuring work by Nicholson (White Relief, 1936), Hepworth (Sculpture with Colour, Blue and Red, 1943), Lanyon and Wells, lasted from 15th to 26th July, 1947.

41. "A Personal Memoir, 1947-55", an essay by David Lewis, in St Ives, 1939-64: Twenty Five years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, Revised edition, 1996, pp17/18.

42. Guido Morris' catalogue for the first Crypt exhibition is reproduced in Painting the Warmth of the Sun, Tom Cross, The Lutterworth Press, revised edition, 1995 (originally published in 1984), p.87. Lanyon's works for this show included Bruges (1936), Porthleven (1939), Box Construction (1940), Blue Horse (1944), Ovoid (1944), Ruins at Capua (1945), Generator (1946), Trip Round Lighthouse (1946), Dance of a Glass Jug (1946) and two constructions (The Wing and Painted Deal).



43. According to a letter received from John Wells, 6th July 1996, the decision not to print a manifesto was deliberate and reflected Lanyon's idea that arts and crafts, abstract and representational, should co-exist. In an autobiographical note written in 1957, Lanyon wrote that he was: "A non-conformist, dislikes groups and isms, international art and systems." Quoted on p.167 of Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, Andrew Lanyon, 1990.
44. There are a number of short notes from Lanyon to Wells about practical matters relating to the hanging and promotion of the exhibition. TGA Box 8178.
45. See David Lewis, "St Ives: A Personal Memoir" in St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery Publishing, second edition, 1996, p.35.
46. Naum Gabo letter to John Wells, 5th May 1947, TGA Box 8178.
47. Only 14 British artists were selected by the British Council for the 1949 4th Salon des Réalités Nouvelles in Paris. Wells had been invited to take part in the 1947 and 1948 exhibitions, but this was the first time his paintings were shown at the Salon. (TGA Box 8178).
48. Peter Davies, St Ives Revisited: innovators and followers, Old Bakehouse Publications, Gwent, 1994, p.21.
49. Peter Lanyon letter to John Wells, c.1948, TGA Box 8178.
50. Letter to Berlin quoted in Peter Davies: The St Ives Years: essays on the growth of an artistic phenomenon, The Wimborne Bookshop, 1984, p31. The letter is in the collection of Eric Quayle, Zennor.
51. Letter to Stanley Wright, nd (?March 1949), quoted in Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: At the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.83. Sven Berlin abandoned the struggle to find a modernist idiom and reverted to romantic expressionism for much of his long career. Lanyon featured as a wealthy dilettante in Berlin's thinly disguised and controversial account of his time in St Ives: Dark Monarch, London, 1962.
52. Letter from Lanyon (the Attic Studios, St Ives) to Naum Gabo, February 1949. The Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Microfiche copy held in the Tate Gallery Archive: TAM 66, 66/54. Reproduced in Margaret Garlake: "Peter Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", The Burlington Magazine, April 1995, p.237.
53. Ibid., letter to Gabo, February 1949, also printed in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, pp.19-21.
54. Ibid.
55. Peter Lanyon writing from Little Park Owles, 9th December 1960, to Eugene Rosenberg who had purchased West Penwith. The letter has been reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., p.28.
56. Reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., p.27. Lanyon painted another version: Isis (finding a limb of her slaughtered son), 11 x 8in., oil on board, 1948, reproduced in Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.85. Isis has been formed out of shapes which resemble the ubiquitous, roughly carved and weathered standing stones (menhirs) of West Penwith. See, for example, the figure of Men Scryfa, the Writing Stone, a fifth century standing stone on the moors of West Penwith.
57. Letter to Gabo, Feb. 1949, printed in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., pp.19-21.
58. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aiden Ellis Publishing, London, 1971, p.12. "I like using suggestions of human forms in my paintings - even in the landscapes - because that's something you respond to and seem to take part in." Lecture for the British Council, 1963, TGA/TVA 526AB.
59. Letter to Gabo, February 1949.
60. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about his early life, 1962, TGA/TVA 211AB. This trip allowed Lanyon to test the lofty claims made by Stokes on behalf of artists who allowed the material qualities of the carved object to play a decisive role in determining form.
61. "There has never been an art less mannered, and at the same time less formalized." Adrian Stokes, notebook, March 1944, draft of book on Giorgione,



comprising an essay on the Tempesta, TGA 8816 Box N1B2. Published in The Image in Form, selected writings of Adrian Stokes, edited by Richard Wollheim, Penguin, 1972, pp.184-185.

62. Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, South Bank Centre catalogue, 1992, p.63.

63. See, for example, Hepworth's Two Figures, 48in. high, elm, painted white, 1947/8, Minnesota University, Moore's Recumbent Figure, 1938, Green Hornton stone, lft 55in., Tate Gallery and Reclining Figure, 1939, Elmwood, lft, 78½in., Detroit Institute of Arts. After 1945 Moore would emphasise that the great challenge of his work was "to combine sculptural form (POWER) with human sensitivity and meaning i.e. to try to keep Primitive Power with humanist content." Quoted in Compton, Cork and Fuller, Henry Moore, Royal Academy of Arts, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988, p.35. Ultimately there is more pantheism than humanism in Moore's world, integrating body and landscape. Lanyon wrote an appreciation of Moore's sculpture in a piece for The London Magazine in 1961.

64. Godolphin (first version), 10 x 14in., oil on board, 1948, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance (1990), p.81. Godolphin (second version), 7 x 10in., 1948, reproduced in Portreath, p.26.

65. From a recording about Lanyon's early life made by Lionel Miskin, 1962, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 211AB.

66. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, op.cit., 1971, according to Causey, Lanyon intended Cape Family to represent "a family by the sea at a cape...the tin mines of Botallack" (p.17). Andrew Lanyon prints an undated note written by Lanyon (Peter Lanyon 1918-64, op.cit., p.94): "Family in the granite. Based on primitive carvings and ivories. Also medieval manuscripts."

67. There are some interesting overlaps with the work of Bolognese artist, Giorgio Morandi (1890-1964), who produced abstracted still-lives and landscapes in the 1930s: objects lose their individual characteristics in a unifying veil of colour and atmosphere. Sheila Lanyon believes it unlikely that the Lanyon knew the artist's work directly, but he was certainly aware of current artistic trends in Italy both before and after the war. Interview with Sheila Lanyon, August 1996.

68. Portreath is reproduced as the frontispiece in Andrew Lanyon's 1993 book, Portreath, op.cit., 1993. West Penwith and Horizontal by the Sea are illustrated on p.26 and p.27 respectively.

69. Drawings and gouaches for Portreath appear on pp.29-39 of Andrew Lanyon's book, Portreath, op.cit., 1993.

70. Recorded talk, 1963, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon, 1918-64, op.cit., 1990, p.90.

71. Ibid., p.90.

72. Ibid., p.90.

73. Interview with Lionel Miskin in 1962 (TAV 211AB) for Lanyon's admiration of Piero della Francesca. Nicholson had lightened his palette in response to della Francesca whose cool blues contrasted with reds are echoed in Cortivallo Lugano.

74. Recorded talk for the British Council, 1963, Tate Gallery Archive, 526AB. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.90.

75. Ibid.

76. Stokes, The Stones of Rimini, Faber and Faber, 1934, p.110.

77. Letter from Naum Gabo to Herbert Read, 1942, published in The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo paperback, ed. By Stephen Bann, 1990 (first edition published in 1974), p.219.

78. Lanyon's letter to Gabo, February 1949, Andrew Lanyon, 1993, op.cit.,



pp.19-21.

79. Lanyon's letter to Eugene Rosenberg, 9th December, 1960. Reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., 1993, p.28.

80. Ibid., p.28.

81. Letter to Paul Feiler, 1952, extract printed in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, South Bank catalogue, 1992, p.67.

82. There is also a similarity between West Penwith and Bryan Winter's work Zennor Coast from the Sea, gouache, 13 x 29in., 1949, Molly Marriner Collection, illustrated pl89 St Ives, 1939-64, Tate Gallery catalogue.

83. Letter published in The Western Echo, 21st September 1946, by Harry Rountree.

84. St Ives Times, 18th February 1949: "At an extraordinary general meeting of the St Ives Society of Artists on Saturday, called by ten members, a split, which has been threatened for some years took place, broadly between the more progressive and the conservative element. As a result seventeen members of the SISA have resigned."

85. Microfiche transcripts of the Penwith Society minutes are held in the Tate Gallery Archive. Dr David Brown has advised that discrepancies exist between the recorded events and eyewitness accounts: Hepworth, in particular, was prone to "tampering with the evidence" (conversation with Dr Brown, August 1996).

86. The first page of the minute book records the foundation members as Herbert Read (president), Leonard Fuller (chairman), David Cox (honorary secretary), Shearer Armstrong, Wilhemina Barns-Graham, Sven Berlin, Agnes Drey, Isobel Heath, Barbara Hepworth, Marion Grace Hocken, Peter Lanyon, Bernard Leach, Denis Mitchell, Guido Morris, Marjorie Mostyn, Dicon Nance, Robin Nance, Ben Nicholson, Henry Segal and John Wells.

87. Catalogue for the first exhibition of the Penwith Society of Arts in Cornwall, summer 1949.

88. Tate Gallery Archive microfiche.

89. The First Exhibition of the Penwith Society was reviewed in the St Ives Times in June 1949: "...an event of more than local importance because of the sheer quality of the work...Nicholson's expression is geometrical, that of Peter Lanyon is curvilinear. The latter is a young artist of rare promise, one who has completely identified himself with the Cornish landscape as in Portreath and West Penwith."

90. See Tate Gallery Archive microfiche of minute book. Also, p.106, St Ives, 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery; Tate Gallery catalogue, 1985 (revised edition, 1996).

91. T. Cross: Painting the Warmth of the Sun, The Lutterworth Press, revised edition 1995 (first published 1984), p.89.

92. Henry Segal's view was that "the new society had been formed to get away from such an artificial state of affairs and the two groups had seeds of dissension".

93. Nicholson had been chairman of the Seven and Five Society since 1926. In 1934 he proposed that it should change its name to the "Seven and Five Abstract Group" and that all exhibits in the 1935 should be abstract. This alienated a number of artists and contributed to the collapse of the movement. Only eight artists were represented at the Society's last exhibition in 1935.

94. Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, St Ives Artists series, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.34. "He promoted the Society's exhibitions, encouraged members to show their work and brought arts administrators and distinguished visitors to the gallery. Sending in dates for exhibitions were meticulously



noted in his diary...the eclecticism of the Society's exhibitions was an appealing counterbalance to the "precious" abstractionism and modernism of St Ives."

95. Letter from Lanyon to Roland Bowden, TGA 942.1, 20th April 1952.

96. Ibid.

97. Peter Lanyon, from a tape recording about his early life made in 1962 with Lionel Miskin, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.29.

98. Stephen Nash, Ben Nicholson, Fifty Years of his Art, New York, 1979, p.34.

99. St Ives Times and Echo, 22nd November, 1957.

100. St Ives Times: 7th August 1953.

101. St Ives Times: 24th August 1953.

102. Details taken from the chronology in Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery catalogue, 1993, compiled by Jeremy Lewison, pp.246-247.

103. Peter Lanyon writing to Ivon Hitchens, undated letter (probably in 1953), printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.133.

104. For Lanyon's use of the word "foreigner" for anyone non-Cornish see his letter to the St Ives Times, 19th June 1953, on the occasion of the St Ives Festival: "many laugh at Cornish nationalism, but when a lavish festival comes to St Ives and does not come out of St Ives, many are persuaded that here is another case of the "foreigner" rejecting the contribution of the "local". In a letter to Lady Mander, written on 16th May, 1953 Lanyon referred to the "many droppings left on my doorstep by the swine of St Ives (the foreign pilers up of culture and art)..."Quoted in Peter Lanyon, 1918-64 by Andrew Lanyon, Penzance, 1990, p.136.

105. "I rarely draw what I see - I draw what I feel in my body. Sculpture is a three-dimensional projection of primitive feeling: touch, texture, size and scale. hardness and warmth, evocation and compulsion to move, live and love. Landscape is strong - it has bones and flesh and skin and hair." Barbara Hepworth, Drawings From a Sculptors's Landscape, Cory Adams and Mackay, London, 1966, p.11.

106. Sally Festing: Barbara Hepworth: A Life of Forms, Penguin Books, 1995, p.194.

107. Ibid., p.235: "Of all the artist rivalries, none was more firmly entrenched than the Lanyon/Hepworth-Nicholson divide. Visiting the three artists they represented, the Gimpels had to be careful not to spend more time with any one of them. Even friendship with one party rather precluded a relationship with the other..."

108. Peter Lanyon, letter to the St Ives Times, 15th April 1955.

109. Barbara Hepworth quoted in St Ives 1883-1993: Portrait of an Art Colony, Marion Whybrow, Antique Collectors' Club, 1994, p.161.

110. Peter Lanyon, "Abstractions and Constructions", 1959, TGA/TVA 213 AB. In an undated text, c.1952, he acknowledged "I owe my debt to Gabo because from him I gained the assurance that a constructive process develops into a space configuration." Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.288.

111. Peter Lanyon, recorded talk, Cloudbase, 1963, printed in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, op.cit., 1992, p.69.

112. Peter Lanyon, c. 1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.228.

113. Peter Lanyon, "Abstractions and Constructions", 1959, TGA/TVA 213 AB.

114. Naum Gabo, Of Divers Arts, The A.W. Mellon lectures in Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1959, p.120.

115. Naum Gabo writing to Herbert Read, 1942, published in Horizon (London), vol. X, no.53, July 1944. Reprinted in S. Bann, op.cit., 1990, pp.215-220.



116. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, The Realistic Manifesto, first published in Moscow on 5th August 1920. Reprinted in S. Bann, op.cit., pp.7-11.
117. Ibid.
118. Adrian Stokes, Colour and Form, Faber and Faber, 1937, p.31.
119. Letter to John Wells, 31st March 1949. Quoted in Peter Lanyon, 1918-64 by Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.93.
120. Ibid., p.93.
121. Ibid.
122. Heron's review in the New Statesman, October 15th, 1949, is otherwise positive and complimentary.
123. Handwritten notes by Lanyon reproduced in Portreath, 1993, p.34.
124. "Abstractions and Constructions", 1959 talk by Peter Lanyon, printed in Portreath, Andrew Lanyon, 1993, p.61. TAV 213AB.
125. "I heard Gabo was in town a year or so ago and I believe he was escorted by Pat [Heron] to Gimpel Fils. Perhaps I will be able to meet you myself this time." Letter headed "Little Park Owles Carbis Bay St Ives, 3 January, '56". Printed in Margaret Garlake, "Lanyon's letters to Naum Gabo", The Burlington Magazine, April 1995, p.238.
126. Headed "May 1st. Carbis Bay", the year is known by Gabo's reply of 24th August 1964. Margaret Garlake, ibid., p.238.
127. St Ives 1939-64, Tate Gallery catalogue for 1985 exhibition, revised edition (1996), essay by David Lewis: "A Personal Memoir", p.25. The quote is taken from a taped interview with Miriam Gabo (conducted by David Lewis and Sarah Fox-Pitt), 31st May, 1981, Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 270AB. Gabo wrote to Sheila Lanyon expressing his "deepest sympathy" on the death of her husband, "my warmest friend and one of the best artists of the coming generation whom we loved and admired." Note dated November 1964, Tate Gallery Archive. Gabo also contributed an introduction to Andrew Causey's 1971 Peter Lanyon, in which he paid tribute to Lanyon's tireless "investigation of new paths...the high quality of his colours and the soundness of the composition...during all the later years he was fast developing and remained devoted to the abstract ideas, remaining all the time himself and never falling into the trap of repeating what had already been done by others, but constantly going ahead." p.8



## **Chapter Five**

### **A SENSE OF PLACE: CORNISH VITALISM - PORTREATH, PORTHLEVEN AND ST JUST**



## A SENSE OF PLACE

It seems a commonplace that almost everyone is born with the need for identification with his surroundings and a relationship to them - with the need to be in a recognisable place. So sense of place is not a fine art extra, it is something we cannot afford to do without.<sup>1</sup>

The notion of the identity of place is a fundamental one in everyday life. Heidegger believed that, "Everywhere, wherever and however we are related to beings of every kind, identity makes its claims upon us."<sup>2</sup> He argued that a sense of place is a profound and complex aspect of man's experience of the world:

"Place" places man in such a way that it reveals the external bonds of his existence and at the same time the depths of his freedom and reality".<sup>3</sup>

Possibly because it is so fundamental, identity of place is a phenomenon that evades particular definition. Although we may be largely unaware of our deep psychological and existential ties with the places where we live, the successful landscape artist must capture some sense of the absolute presence which connects us to our environment. Landscape is more than just a representation of the surface of things. Visual information serves only to let us know that a place is distinct and indentifiable from other places, a physical world uncoupled from human subjectivity. While this is important for orientation and even survival, an artist who opens his senses to all aspects of a particular place, experiencing it both empathetically and sympathetically, is clearly achieving something more complex and profound than merely differentiating localities on the canvas.

Harvey Cox has described "the sense of continuity of place necessary to people's sense of reality"<sup>4</sup> as of vital importance if we are to successfully orient ourselves in a time-place continuum. The significance of place, both functionally and existentially, in any interpretation of Lanyon's art confirms Hugh Prince's statement that "a knowledge of place is an



indispensable link in the chain of knowledge".<sup>5</sup> A "Sense of Place" certainly provides the key unifying concept in Lanyon's work.<sup>6</sup> He embraced the term "provincial" - sensing in Cornwall the foundation of his identity as an individual and as a member of a community, an irreplaceable centre of significance and the dwelling place of his being. The strong and profound bonds which existed between Lanyon and West Cornwall were similar to the ties between farmer and property expressed in John Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath:

Funny how it is. If a man owns a little property, that property is him, it's part of him, and it's like him. If he owns property only so he can walk on it and handle and be sad when it isn't doing well and feel fine when rain falls on it, that property is him, and in some way he's bigger because he owns it. Even if he isn't successful he's big with his property. That is so.<sup>7</sup>

For Lanyon the commodification of landscape was less important than a sense of being part of the land: he embraced the people, their social and political concerns, their history and myths. Through his paintings he envisaged re-uniting the physical and the phenomenological worlds that science and technology had separated.

### EXISTENTIAL INSIDENESS

While it cannot be denied that Lanyon achieved high levels of "empathetic insideness" when painting outside Cornwall, his true "genius loci" lay in the twelve mile stretch of coastline between St Ives and St Just - a wild, elemental landscape of bracken-covered moorland, standing stones, scattered farms and old mineworkings. He was a fanatical Cornishman and the region provided a source of security and identity, a familiarity and close attachment, a sense of belonging to a particular place. Simone Weil wrote in The Need for Roots:

To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define, A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of the community, which preserves in living shape certain



particular expectations for the future. This participation is a natural one in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession and social surroundings. Every human being needs to have multiple roots. It is necessary for him to draw well-nigh the whole of his moral, intellectual and spiritual life by way of the environment of which he forms a part.<sup>8</sup>

According to Weil, attachment to place is an important human need and is a necessary precondition for human happiness. To have roots is to have a secure point from which to look out on the world, a firm grasp of one's own position in the order of things, and a significant spiritual and psychological attachment to somewhere in particular. Weil suggested that the need for roots is at least equivalent to the need for order, liberty, responsibility and security.

Lanyon's native Cornwall gave him a sense of being part of an indivisible unity which he strove to capture, comprehend and communicate in his art:

I often lost sight of the civilization of home and the order of it, but I always had a root in Cornwall. I could always find a pattern there both for living and for the darker and deeper things which can make a joke of the idea that man is a rational being. For an artist, these inward things, which are labelled "the spirit", "the psyche" or the "subconscious" are one of the sources of energy and even subject matter. These sources by themselves would be without form or meaning unless there is something or in my case some place where these inner things find reflection and are therefore made sensible. If I am ever at the bottom of a hole deep down and in the dark, I remember I am a Cornishman.<sup>9</sup>

While many artists have tried to explore place as a formal geographical concept, any exploration of space as a phenomenon of direct experience must be concerned with the entire range of sensations in order to "make a face, an "actuality", a "thingness" for experience".<sup>10</sup> Lanyon saw Cornwall as the focus where he experienced the most significant events of his existence. His sense of being rooted in Cornwall is well expressed by E. Relph's concept of "existential insideness" and is characterised by a sense of "belonging to a place and the deep and complete identity with a place



that is the very foundation of the place concept."<sup>11</sup> Existential insideness requires a knowledge that this place is where you belong, "in all other places we are existential outsiders no matter how open we are to their symbols and significances."<sup>12</sup>

West Cornwall was not just a region for Lanyon - it was the creative matrix composed of deeply assimilated topographical recollections, colours and shapes. The specifically local actuality of what is seen and known, the environment, is continuously modified by emotive associations and the creative imagination to become the landscape. He possessed a profound and unselfconscious identity with the place of his birth - an awareness not only of the remote and mysterious beauty of Cornwall where land, sea and sky inter-penetrate in a brilliant Atlantic light - but also an understanding that the landscape was the product of man's interventions with nature and the setting for economic and social activity.

Through his painting Lanyon attempted to establish the integration of elements of nature and culture, discerning the special order and ensemble carved out of the landscape by succeeding generations of Cornishmen. His art is an attempt to make place and everything that occupies that location into an integrated and meaningful phenomenon, the activating prompt to imaginative discovery and plastic invention. In psychological terms, his deep attachment to the Cornish environment may, at an unconscious level, be rooted in a deep "desire to re-discover the mother of the early days".<sup>13</sup>

Lanyon's paintings can be seen as a struggle to convey an authentic attitude to place: a direct and genuine attempt to rescue landscape from the peripheral concerns of modern art by interpreting the genre in modernist terms. Although the forms in his paintings bear no easy reference to figurative sources, they are rooted in the visible world. The most important issue raised by his work is to show how it is possible to be a landscape painter when the depiction of deep space is abandoned. Most of the paintings have little or no pictorial depth - yet the imagined spaces created by the flow and drag of paint across a surface can be turned in the imagination to serve as the visual equivalent of the hills, hollows, cliffs, fields, sea and sky of West Cornwall.



His achievement was to translate the maxim "Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit prius in sensu" (there is nothing in the mind that is not first in the senses) into pictorial reality, crystallising all cognitional, conceptual and sensory values into a single integrated statement. He appears to have sensed that his early post-war paintings, although distinctive and masterly, did not reflect an incipient style of his own and were too derivative to open up radical ways of seeing and experiencing. He did not want to be known simply as a promising but second-rate follower of Gabo, Nicholson and Hepworth with a few romantic and surrealist leanings of his own. It was only when his painting style reached full maturity in the early 1950s, reacting against cultural fashions and stereotyped conventions which dictated how the countless spaces of the landscape should be presented, that Lanyon reached a vision of the landscape which reflected his intense experience of belonging to Western Cornwall.

#### PORTREATH

When making notes for a television programme about his work, Lanyon placed Portreath at the top of his list of important locations. It is unique in being the only place that he painted at every stage of his artistic career. We can, therefore, see how the stimulus of place was subjected to the changing directions of Lanyon's creativity from the pre-war Borlase Smart plein air scenes to the time of his final paintings. The variety of images provides testimony to his versatility and readiness to adopt new forms in his search for ways of converting "native knowledge into universal objects":

So many different kinds of images reveal how a single place served as a spring-board for new discoveries with the acrobatic language with which he was struggling. They also show his progress up from the subterranean uncoiling to "grass", as the miners call that thin level in which most of mankind labours and from there up the Western Hill to paint the weather and finally, lifted clear of his native soil, to zig-zag in the sky above the spread-eagled ground.<sup>14</sup>



His first interpretation of this small port, Portreath (13 x 16in., oil on board, Private Collection, Pl.12), five miles from Redruth on the North Cornish coast, was painted in 1939. Its fully realised, instantaneous, sense of optical spatiality and clear tonal harmony accords with the teaching of Adrian Stokes:

I consider that in painting and architecture, and even in sculpture, the appeal should first be primarily to the eye; that is to say the appeal should be such that the eye, with the assistance of previous tactile experience in materials and textures, would be able largely to synthesise the successive element in the tactile part of the appeal, and cause it to be something immediate as vision itself.<sup>15</sup>

Lanyon depicts the narrow channel which feeds the two inner harbours, a cluster of buildings in the foreground and a hill rising steeply away from the town. The brio of brushtrokes conveys a rhythm to every part of the painting: the flow of tide and current, the protective solid mass of the harbour walls and the varied texture of the hill (browns mixed with white to show chalk coming through). The interplay of adjacent earth colours in this painting establishes commonality to all the forms and allows the artist to accomplish "identity in difference and difference in identity".<sup>16</sup>

He went back to Portreath in 1949 to complete the transfiguration of style and content developed in the Surfacing Series. His concern was to paint "a more complex portrait of place"<sup>17</sup> and he returned to the Nicholson inspired idea of building up a painting by bringing all planes to the surface ("the rock at Portreath is all slate and slate tends to come away in big flat planes").<sup>18</sup> Nicholson's influence can again be detected in the rubbing and scraping of the picture surface in the belief that a deeper sense of reality lay within the paint. Nine drawings of Portreath have been identified as studies for the painting and they provide useful information about the techniques employed to convert three-dimensional space into the flat space of a neo-Cubist paint surface (Pl.78, 80, 81). In order to unify the topographical features in terms of flat "facing" planes, Lanyon had to build up the right-hand cliff to enclose the sea and extend the pier out to the horizon. He admitted that Portreath "is an excuse for me to construct



a square picture with planes working in depth and on the surface"<sup>19</sup> and in many ways it is surprising that such a strong sense of place survives the restricted palette and shallow space of the painting.

For Offshore (60 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1959, City Museum and Art Gallery, Birmingham, Pl.144) Lanyon painted Portreath from the Western Hill overlooking the harbour and town. Over ten days he recorded the various stages of the painting's development, providing us with an illuminating insight into the "gathering process" before the final image could be laid.<sup>20</sup> The recording demonstrates how vital a genuine sense of place was in unlocking his creative instincts. The commentary begins with a description of the town and the artist's movements across the landscape, isolating particular details and incidents which could be incorporated into his interpretation of Portreath on a bright gusty day: a small fishing gig bobbing on the water, waves rolling in from the Atlantic, the sheltering calm of a grassy lea on the southern side of Western Hill, the effect of changing light on the sea. This gave him enough material to make a start in organising and clarifying his experiences into visual equivalents.

Not satisfied with the initial results, Lanyon collected more information on colour composition by driving around the back hills of Carbis Bay and St Ives to get "a sense of the green-ness which I was to put into the Western Hill". Returning to the painting a stronger structure began to emerge "where the sea section became more amorphous and the hill section became more structural, much more angular, much more one might call it Cubist". After some modifications he thought that he had reached the final stage ("I had an idea it was quite a good painting") until he realised that "I had almost left the image I was after". This spurred him into re-working the canvas "faster and more certainly...the painting came out in about five hours of continuous painting". Even now, he did not feel completely satisfied with the painting:

What I didn't recognise was that I hadn't pushed the painting far enough away from myself - that the involvement of myself in the sea, in the roughness, the tumble in, the coming in and going out, the pushing of the Western Hill's central section back, the forcing into



a formal quality of the return or left section...It was all too active.<sup>21</sup>

In its final state the painting was turned so that the image became a vertical representation of Portreath and the Western Hill: the swirling vortex at the top of the picture suggests the north-westerly wind blowing offshore; the black shapes below, "the return element", are derived from anchors, grapples and tarred nets stretched out on the grassy hill and sheltered from the offshore wind by its southerly slope: "The gear for the fishing trade is often seen on the island at St Ives which is like this painting".<sup>22</sup> This area of the painting also represents the town of Portreath - providing "a form of authority" for the composition (an idea he returned to with the "penstock motif" in The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands, Pl.159).<sup>23</sup> Lanyon's recording demonstrates the possibilities latent in so vital and stimulating a form of abstraction - expressing with remarkable intensity the clarity of his sensory perceptions and the precision required to convert this information into a coherent painting.

It is not inconceivable that Lanyon identified himself, consciously or unconsciously, with the male sea element whose advance across the archetypal maternal anima of the Western Hill has been checked by the "negative authority form" of the grapples and anchor. Barry Dodge has interpreted the painting as a revelation of an Oedipal complex: the black anchor representing the "name of the father", the prohibitive super-ego that suppresses incestuous desires.<sup>24</sup> Evidence to support this claim is provided by the presence of the shadowy outline of Lanyon's head in the foreground - perhaps a symbolic allusion to the Oedipal fear of castration in its traditional inverted disguise as decapitation. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the artist returned to this theme two years later when he painted Salome (60 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection) as a blonde, phallic female with the severed head of John the Baptist on the right. Lanyon anticipates the psychological problems attendant on any attempt to liberate culture from the constraints of a conservative and moralistic paternalism. His challenge to the righteous fathers of St.Ives had led to the disturbing "surfacing of such unconscious depths".<sup>25</sup>

Lanyon returned to Portreath in the final stage of his career to paint



Portreath Watch (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1962, Private Collection, Pl.187).

Although not a gliding picture, the composition has elements in common with the high aerial perspectives and diaphanous frontal planes of his "weather pictures". The eye follows the black line of the inverted "S" which guides the viewer from the bottom right to the top left of the composition. Patches of dark blue sea, rocks and a cross-shaped sandbank break through the blanket of thinly painted cloud cover (or perhaps surf on a turbulent sea). The figure which appeared "as a shadow lying stiffly in the grass"<sup>26</sup> in Offshore, possibly representing the town, is here propped up vertically, dominating the left-side of the painting. Its glowering, strongly defined dark presence is sinister and forbidding - more the nightmare anxiety of a vengeful "femme tentaculaire" than the animating Earth Goddess of earlier landscapes. Illusionism has been stripped away so that a completely personalised response can emerge.

The open rectangle painted in red could be taken to signify some unspecified danger: a gouache, Portreath Rock (10 x 14in., 1950, Private Collection, Pl.83), shows Lanyon using freely painted black tresses and the suggestion of a horizontal figure to describe the barely submerged rocks outside Portreath harbour; if the gouache is turned so that the figure stands vertically, the flowing black lines show some correspondence with the menacing figure in Portreath Watch. He used strong reds in paintings such as Solo Flight to denote the path of his glider and to mark areas associated with danger and excitement. It is likely that the area enclosed by the rectangle represents a place of considerable risk to the unwary! The encounter of blues and white in Portreath Watch evokes the sense of "something far away and down below, inside the red track"<sup>27</sup> while the sea tunnelling beneath the black rocks echoes a similar drama in Offshore. Lanyon's depiction of Portreath seems, by 1962, in danger of disappearing from him - and us - into a void of meaningless sensation, but it is still a nature out of which we can, if only just, extract a compelling sense of aesthetic order and consoling harmony. There is a strong feeling of light moving towards shadow, of solid rock carved by liquid sea, a vertiginous feeling of the landscape lying drawn out across the canvas "like a pelt nailed to a barn door"<sup>28</sup> with horizons stretched along all four margins.



## PORTHLEVEN

In a series of large vertical pictures begun in April 1950 with the studies and constructions for Porthleven (96 x 48in., oil on board, 1951, Tate Gallery, Pl.91), Lanyon achieved a fresh dramatic poetry that must rank among the quintessential achievements of the St Ives School. The Festival of Britain provided him with an opportunity to work on a larger scale than he had previously attempted: the Arts Council commissioned a range of pieces from sixty contemporary British artists for their Festival of Britain exhibition, Sixty Paintings for '51, the chief requirement being that they should be at least 40 by 60 inches. The commission allowed Lanyon to give expression to an authentic sense of place and to monumentalize the quasi-figurative and abstract symbols and themes which had surfaced in the Generation and the Second Series. Although he continued to execute intimate pictures throughout his career Lanyon preferred the more suprapersonal visionary statements which could only be imparted by larger canvases. Fluid forms are suggested rather than defined, no limits are set on the emotional content of the painting, and Lanyon directly exploited the expressive potential of the painting medium to suggest the particular creative action of the artist, his active presence and temperament.

Porthleven displays an original synthesis of biomorphism, symbolism and abstraction. For the first time Lanyon began to realise the vital and stimulating possibilities latent in the fusion of different artistic styles to reach a holistic expression of his unique experience of place. The painting witnesses Lanyon forging his own brand of sensory abstraction:

Porthleven is another Cornish harbour. The village lies at the end of a long steep valley, and you look down at it from the hills on either side. The harbour is constructed in the estuary itself - there's a long outer harbour, a central one controlling the waters, and an inner harbour enclosed behind the lock gates. The water runs down the middle of the picture, which is rather like an aerial view. It's a much more complicated construction than Portreath. There are some frontal planes, but down at the bottom there are a number of shapes which roll and pitch - like boats moving around in the inner harbour.<sup>29</sup>



The bustling activity within this painting, with objects overlapping and interpenetrating, gives Porthleven a deceptive appearance of spontaneity. It is more lively and expressive than his earlier works and marks a more confident, lyrical phase in his creative development. In fact, the final composition, although painted on masonite in only four hours, represents almost a year's gestation (from April 1950 to February 1951) and belies the considerable work and experimentation that went into its preparation. Several versions of this composition were attempted, including a full-sized one that wore through in several places after extensive rubbing and repainting which had to be abandoned. Although a long gestation period was not untypical of his studio practice, Lanyon blamed his difficulties in resolving the final image on the acrimonious conditions prevailing in St Ives since his departure from the Penwith in May 1950. He wrote to Patrick Heron that "it is very difficult when all one's hopes and ideas have been shat on."<sup>30</sup>

The loss of so much work exasperated Lanyon's London dealer, Peter Gimpel, prompting the artist to write a letter defending his methods:

You seem to have obtained the idea that I destroy my paintings out of masochism or some such ism cooked up by the fairies. Or perhaps I misjudge your words. I "destroy" my paintings etc., because I am aware of another sort of blood sucking which goes on in the aesthetic world whereby a dracula invades the studio and removes unborn limbs from early conceptions...None of my remarks about Dracula etc., apply particularly to you and in the same sense I do not consider myself a victim - yet!<sup>31</sup>

Lanyon expended a vast amount of energy on ascertaining how best to translate his vision of place in pictorial terms. An analysis of Lanyon's "gathering" process reveals how he was able to solve the formal and organisational problems of combining "aesthesis" (Ruskin's term for sensory experiences) and "theoria" (the response to nature of one's whole moral being).<sup>32</sup>



## DRAWINGS FOR PORTHLEVEN

Lanyon started with a series of free and exploratory drawings, described as "skirmishes" by William Feaver, which were made from a number of locations, mostly looking down the line of the inner and outer harbour, the long quay and out towards the open sea (Pl.86-88). Individual details of the town - the clocktower of the Working Men's Institute, harbour walls, terraced houses, net lofts, china clay stores and the Ship Inn - are examined and tested for compositional clarity. Employing Wallis' technique of dispensing with conventional perspective, fitting form to format, he searched for the decisive qualities which would achieve the breakthrough from the three-dimensional environment into an eventual two-dimensional solution. Schematic drawings were produced to unite individual features into plans of the whole harbour area, or aerial views, plotting the broad planes of movement into and across the picture surface. A pencil and oil sketch of 1950 shows an overall design schema which is surprisingly close to the final composition - particularly in the emergence of two vertical shapes suggesting human forms facing each other (Study for Porthleven, 22 x 12in., pencil and oil on paper, 1950, Pl.88 fig.1).

Gradually a design for a vertical painting began to emerge with the sea as its background, the clock tower on the left, the estuary running down the middle, and the flattened and raised form of the quay and harbour buildings to the right. In the lower portion Lanyon painted the concentric, curving shapes of the inner and outer harbour basins. The importance of the drawings in "fusing the image and mark" is demonstrated by a photograph of Lanyon's studio in 1951 which shows a crayon drawing pinned to a screen next to an early stage of the painting. The drawing depicts the outer harbour mouth, the end of the quay and the open sea on the left with a series of flat interlocking planes on the right denoting buildings (including the pub) around the inner harbour. Although this early version of the painting did not survive, Lanyon incorporated the basic design suggested by the drawing into the final version. More specifically, traces of the harbour buildings can be seen in the white shapes drawn on the grey-green vertical area of the quay and the boats in the harbour are incorporated into the rolling and pitching shapes at the bottom of the picture.



## PORTHLEVEN CONSTRUCTIONS

Lanyon claimed that he made around twelve constructions for Porthleven "to test how the image is cooking". A book of photographs compiled by the artist provides visual documentation of only six three-dimensional structures related to the painting, although it is possible that the artist destroyed or dismantled the others before recording their existence (Pl.89).<sup>33</sup> The relationship between the constructions and the painting is summarised by Lanyon in this undated text:

...I need to make a three dimensional construction out of wood, stone, iron, and glass as a doodle. This I have found to be a satisfactory way of establishing the kind of space and what at the same time the painting was to be like. These objects are prophecies which keep me company while I paint.<sup>34</sup>

Margaret Garlake was the first to acknowledge the centrality of Lanyon's construction in any full appreciation of his work. In what remains the most balanced and judicious discussion on the seminal role played by the constructions Garlake interprets them as constituting a "serial self-portrait". They served as important mediators between his experience of a certain cove, hill or beach and its translation into paint on the canvas.<sup>35</sup> With his abandonment of traditional single-viewpoint perspective, the constructions assisted him in finding an equivalent for the multi-viewpoint perspective which impels the spectator to move around and study a freestanding sculpture from all angles. As transitional structures they also work as substitutes or symbols for the original object.

The constructions for Porthleven allowed Lanyon to resolve the relationship of different parts of the composition in real space before committing himself to the illusionistic statement contained in the flat space of the painting. The works differ from the earlier constructions in many respects: unlike the self-contained geometrical constructions inspired by Gabo's purist belief that "space and time are the only forms on which life is built and



hence art must be constructed",<sup>36</sup> these objects were intuitive means of understanding structural and spatial elements, a question of "hands releasing meaning through making". These "space articulators" speak a different language from the precision and occasionally precious intricacy of Gabo's sculptures:

These objects are essentially throwaway things and could be compared to scaffolding. They should not be confused with the complete and determined work. They are not space constructions but they are indicative of a constructive process.<sup>37</sup>

The complexity and sophistication of some of these objects, particularly Porthleven Boats (24 x 17 x 14in., galvanized iron, board on wood, 1950, Tate Gallery, Pl.85) makes one doubt whether they really were meant as "throwaway things" to be compared to "scaffolding". Lanyon claimed, however, that these constructions should not be regarded as independent works of art with an existence which extended beyond their functional role as part of the "formative process which the artist has undergone".<sup>38</sup> Instead, they were an integral part of "the gathering process",<sup>39</sup> reconstructing in depth a particular aspect of the composition:<sup>40</sup>

Porthleven was the catalyst for a new type of construction, conceived as an intermediate aid in the process of transferring a three-dimensional image to a flat plane rather than as a self-sufficient work of art.

At the time of the Porthleven painting I had not evolved a way of developing an image in my mind and had to explore it in actual space before painting it...My constructions are not complete things in themselves but are experiments in space to establish the illusion and the content of the space in the painting.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, Lanyon was primarily interested in how these sculptures altered and enriched the resolution of specific pictorial problems and saw them primarily as drawings in space. These three dimensional essays do not possess the self-contained poetic delicacy of Gabo's work and many were destroyed not long after the works they informed had been completed. Those which survived were not usually exhibited in public shows of Lanyon's



art until the major Arts Council retrospective at the Tate Gallery in 1968.

Several sketches survive which illustrate how Lanyon combined the spatial elements suggested by the constructions with the visual information provided by the drawings. The studio photographs provide first-hand evidence for an analysis of how the final work came into being. The chief dilemma was to find a new way of organising the picture surface so that the town could be presented from all angles simultaneously, building moments of perception into a recognisable and shared experience of place. Andrew Lanyon discovered his father's notes discussing the significance of the some of the constructions behind a review in a press cuttings album:

Armature. A wood structure eight feet high in a metal support - not truly three-dimensional but essentially a form suggestive of depth, motion and horizontal motion on a plane. Hence the name "Armature" for a painting. Painted white with red photographic filter on top and green at right side of the "flag" structure.

Space Articulator. A wood structure of separate wood forms/carvings attached to a board so that they project to right or left horizontally. The space between these forms and the space extensions off the vertical board comprise the essential spatial factors of the painting. Approx. one foot six inches high. Painted white and green.

Mobile. During most of the painting these two forms were at a distance of 18 inches from one another on a mirrored piece of green glass.

These two forms rock at a different rate and are painted white.<sup>42</sup>

Our apprehension of the links between these constructions and the finished painting is necessarily incomplete and speculative. Nevertheless, Lanyon's documentation of the work in progress shows that all the constructions, with the exception of Tall Country and Seashore (70 x 8 x 8in., jarrah wood and coloured perspex, painted, 1951, Tate Gallery, Pl.90), had been built before he began to develop the painted image.<sup>43</sup>

He may have assembled them without knowing exactly how they were to assist in the spatial organization of the composition and then proceeded to use them with considerable precision as the work unfolded. The Armature,



resembling a device which a sculptor might use, corresponds most closely to the left-hand section of Porthleven. The structure can be seen as an interpretative skeletal framework for the road, two harbour areas and the clock tower. Lanyon's attachment of a red photographic filter near the top and a green filter on the end of the "flag" shape might refer to the navigation lights which guide ships into Porthleven harbour. In the first version of the painting (on canvas and destroyed) the elements within the Armature are made to face left, pointing outside the picture, while for the final painting a more harmonious spatial balance would be created by turning the composition so that the two "figures" face each other, reducing the components down the "margin" and leading the eye from the top (the clock tower), down the estuary and into the harbours. The Space Articulator which provides the "essential" spatial arrangement for the painting has a broad correspondence with the horizontal boat shapes in the middle of the destroyed version of the painting (made explicit by the letters PZ - the registration code for Penzance shipping and perhaps also a nod to Christopher Wood's painting PZ 613) and lower down in the "shapes which roll and pitch like boats moving around in the inner harbour" of the final painting. The Mobile, a rocking construction made of twisted bronze on green glass, has much in common with the tilting, black oval that represents the inner harbour. A photograph and a gouache reveal that Porthleven Boats relates to an early stage of the painting's development, unifying the harbour mouth, clock tower and the shape of a boat into a single form at the top of the vertical armature on the left.

By the time Lanyon came to paint his final version of Porthleven the clock tower had been differentiated from the armature and forms the apex of the composition, drawing attention to the harbour estuary which allows the water to move down the middle of the picture. The construction, unsuccessful in resolving the spatial relationships in the earlier painting, helped to focus Lanyon in finding new solutions to the problem of articulating shapes and forms into a complex amalgam of perspectives and viewpoints.

Tall Country and Seashore was, according to Causey, made after Lanyon abandoned the canvas on which he was working and decided to transfer the composition on to board. There are no photographs of this particular construction in Lanyon's book documenting the evolution of Porthleven and



it seems to relate more directly to Lanyon's final attempt to secure the image. According to the cataloguer of the Tate Gallery's record of acquisitions in 1968, Tall Country and Seashore was made for the painting currently hanging in the St. Ives Tate Gallery and specifically corresponds to the central axis of the painting.<sup>44</sup> The downward motion of the horizontal white ribbing in the middle of the painting can be traced back to the spiralling black lines on the construction and the attachment of an oar serves as a reminder of the harbour's central importance to the town's economic survival.

Perhaps the most startling aspect of Porthleven is the confident handling of the landscape-figure relationship:

The forms in the picture have always suggested two people to me. This may be accidental or at any rate unconscious, but I always look for figures in my pictures when I've painted them. On the left there's a very tall masculine shape holding up something that looks like a lamp: and on the other side there seems to be a woman in a shawl - someone you could meet anytime walking round the Porthleven shore.<sup>45</sup>

The idea that Porthleven could incorporate the double imagery of harbour and people seems to have occurred to Lanyon at an early stage in the painting's development. Two photographs of the work in progress show the same drawing of a rear-view male figure standing next to the canvas and a clear correspondence between the top half of the painting and the drawing between shoulders and waist.<sup>46</sup> Garlake has argued that this was "the first time he recognised the "hidden figures", male and female animating presences, that occur in so many of his paintings".<sup>47</sup> This seems to ignore the unmistakable presence of human forms in earlier works such as Generation, Prelude, Headland and Cape Family. Multiple imagery, combining the Jungian concept of the anima with the natural forms of the landscape, had already become something of a "trademark" in Lanyon's works.

However, Porthleven certainly shows an advance on the ancient notion that the female figure is a simulacrum of nature by reminding us that male and female have complementary parts to play in nature and life. The unstressed



rounded shapes of boats and harbour in the "female" figure are balanced in the composition by the solid and vital repose of the masculine form on the left. The integration of male and female forms, the anima and animus, subverts the Stokesian idea that the landscape possesses a purely feminine aspect, willing to yield and be penetrated by the assertively masculine carver. Lanyon avoids a conventional "male" interpretation of the landscape, presenting instead a picture of Jungian individuation through a symbiosis between the objective autonomy of the painting and the subjectivity of the creating artist.

Lanyon painted Porthleven only once more in his career: in 1962 he was commissioned by Stanley Seeger Jr. to paint a mural for his music room in Frenchtown, New Jersey. The mural was to hang on a heavy horizontal beam stretching from one end of the room to the other - a distance of 32 feet. Although it was given the title Porthmeor (36 x 372 in., oil on canvas, 1962, original location, Bois d'Arc Estate, Frenchtown New Jersey, current location, School of Architecture, University of Manchester, Pl.185), the mural was based on the last of three full-sized gouache sketches (Bois d'Arc, Delaware, and Porthleven) which were sent to Seeger between February and May for approval. In his notes on the mural, Lanyon wrote that the sketch was "based on the painting of that name in the Tate Gallery dated 1950-51" and "contained the essential forms and drawing for the final work".<sup>48</sup> Fortunately, Porthleven has survived intact (Delaware and Bois d'Arc were cut up and the pieces re-worked as individual paintings, Pl.184, fig.2 and fig.3; Pl.186). Examination of the sketch and the finished mural reveal that Lanyon has used the original painting as a source of inspiration for certain passages - but the later work shows how adroit Lanyon had become at pulling together all the key elements into one statement by eliminating the directly figurative references (such as the clock tower). He felt this private commission possessed distinct advantages over work for "public gatherings" as Seeger allowed him to command "a complete resolution of the work" achieving an integrated statement "which contains its own meaning".<sup>49</sup> Mo Enright has described the Porthleven sketch in glowing terms:

Viewed from a distance, it is an all encompassing seascape of gigantic



proportions with all the blues and greens of the sea and golden yellow of washed sand. Seen close to, it becomes a magical wonderland of different scenes. An overwhelming feeling of allurements ensues, first by the turbulent sea and then, equally disarming, by the most tender passages of brushwork and colour creating an almost Turneresque sunset over the ocean. At other times, the illusion is of being in a small boat on a calm sea, then a moment later everything is completely reversed. Havoc ensues, reducing the small boat to wreckage and driftwood. It is an incredibly powerful painting.<sup>50</sup>

The composition underwent considerable alteration before the work was completed in February 1963 and only a few of the forms and shapes survived the transposition from sketch to music room mural. Lanyon interpreted the rhythms across the surface of this large work as a reflection of a "fast running sea with cross shore drift and counter drift".<sup>51</sup> He intended the work to be regarded in terms of musical phrasing (in much the same way that he composed the Liverpool University mural, The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands<sup>52</sup>) best seen in terms of "sequences" running from left to right and from right to left, converging at the centre into "a flatter forward movement".<sup>53</sup> The Cubist-style angularity of Porthleven has been loosened-up by a measured, nuanced and rhythmically controlled curvilinear movement across the canvas. The handling of the paint is more certain: the scraped down surfaces of the early 1950s have been replaced by a flowing calligraphy of brushstrokes. The flat use of green-blue colour (redolent of early Cubist still lifes) has been replaced by a more exuberant palette used to carry forward the mythic narrative component in the mural: Lanyon associated the yellow area on the left with the Golden Fleece, a carefully painted white arc represents "a flying fish (which) returns movement around the golden fleece to an open sea", the deep blue in the middle is "the calm deep water", beyond this lies an area of "sharp" yellow, cerulean blues, light touches of black and sea-foam white which suggest "a series of waves on a rocky shore". The rich cadmium red on the far right is "the booty of a sea chest".<sup>54</sup> At both ends of the composition Lanyon places a curving "return" element to create an unbroken pulse which invites the eye to wander back across the picture surface.



Porthleven furnished Lanyon with complex data and perceptual templates which he was able to translate into a personal sense of place interpreted through the language of modernism. His renditions of this small Cornish port reflect a belief that the landscape exists as much in the mind of the artist as in the physical world outside. Lanyon's approach suggests that learning about a place requires an interaction between subject and object: knowledge proceeds from perception, but perception then proceeds from further knowledge.

Comparing the two works, inspired by the same place but separated in execution by eleven years, provides an illuminating insight into the way Lanyon's work developed. Porthleven still contains fragmented hints of the objective external world from an aerial perspective and it has clearly been abstracted from actual visual appearance. Traditional pictorial space has been broken up by using the overlapping planes of Cubism and by unifying areas of figure and ground. By contrast, the burden of expression in the Stanley Seeger mural, Porthmeor, is carried by the artistic means of the painting - its colours, lines and forms - more than by any sense of what those colours, lines and forms may be depicting. Although the later work looks more spontaneous and impulsive, the elegant gracefulness of the contrapunctual rhythms was the result of extensive planning and preparation. Timbre, texture, continuity and discontinuity are manipulated deftly to produce complexity behind the ostensible simplicity. Despite the tone of abstract bravura created by the convulsive strokes, the layering of different colours in gestural sweeps and the elimination of the figurative, at no point is Lanyon submitting to chaos. The tonal balance, rhyming colour, symmetry and clear description of space - all demonstrate a lingering feeling of respect for the traditions which nourished him. What is palpable in Lanyon's work is the sense of landscape as a constantly evolving medium, a site of conflicting readings, in which various styles of representation vie for primacy to convey in paint the direct experience of landscape forms.



## ST JUST, 1951-53

St Just is the last town in England before you reach Land's End. It is an old ruined town with disused mineshafts all round it and structures like the telegraph poles in the photograph which interfere with the view from the hills around the town.<sup>55</sup>

To produce St Just (96 x 48in., oil on canvas, begun 1951 - probably finished late 1952 or early 1953, dated on back 1953, Private Collection, Pl.99) Lanyon gathered together all his experiences, attitudes, memories and immediate sensations of this small mining community and then tried to find a stable ordering of relationships between objects and concepts. It is perhaps Lanyon's greatest painting, a testament to the artist's devotion to western Cornwall, not simply the landscape, but to the community. Lanyon includes not only the physical appearance of place, but his strong feelings for the miners and for the tragic cycle of death and disaster they had so frequently experienced.

St Just was intended to be "the place complete, with all its associations":<sup>56</sup> the mineshafts, the granite cottages, the people, the roads and fields around the small town. If one visits St Just today, knowing Lanyon's painting, the extent and profundity of the connection between place and picture is at once apparent. Although the motifs bear no easy reference to figurative sources (though they exist), they evoke a generalised landscape conveyed by the feeling that here are precisely the colours, the forms, the light of St Just.

I don't want to paint a view from a single place but a picture about St Just - the complete place, with all its associations. If you walk about the place you might see the bits and pieces that I combine into a picture. In the painting St Just, the central black section is the mineshaft. There are fields all round the town, with a grass of harsh smoky quality, and the town seems to be on the top of the fields. On the left are the houses, figures, rocks, maybe the church.<sup>57</sup>

Lanyon's paintings are not just selective abstractions of an objective



reality but are also intentional interpretations of what the artist considered to be the outcome of his emotional involvement with the landscape. In order to capture the identity of St Just, the most westerly town in England, he composed a picture that is the product of a variety of experiences, attitudes, memories, and immediate sensations. The landscape did not serve as a "motif" in the Cézanne sense, yielding the basis of a composition. Instead, Lanyon "extracted energy from places...offering his experiences back in a form which extends our consciousness of space and time within the context of the configuration of the landscape of west Cornwall."<sup>58</sup>

#### THE LEVANT MINE

Lanyon chose the mining industry to provide the central imagery for St Just. The mine depicted was Levant, 2 miles north of the town: if there is one Cornish mine which, above all the others, exemplifies the tragedy and achievement of the county's most ancient industry, that one must surely be Levant. Its aspect at surface is spectacular and dramatic in the highest degree: the engine houses still cling to the top of precipitous cliffs just six miles north of Land's End, gazing out over the restless, storm-lashed Atlantic Ocean.

Its principal workings went deep under the sea, extending for more than a mile from the coast. With the great Atlantic surges rolling above their heads, the miners drove their levels in search of the precious tin and copper, sinking two submarine shafts each fitted with a winding engine and tramping the ore back to the cliffside Skip Shaft with the aid of pit ponies. For the greater part of its career, Levant was one of the most profitable and successful mines in the country: between 1820 and 1930 Levant produced about 30,000 tons of black tin and about 130,000 tons of nine per cent copper ore. In 1912 it was computed that the value of the whole produce of the mine had probably exceeded the £2,000,000 mark.<sup>59</sup> The dividends paid were correspondingly handsome. Continuous operation was maintained from 1821 to 1930, when Levant fell victim to the Great Depression and was forced to close.



The mine still has a wild, elemental beauty, symbolising Man's struggle against the obdurate forces of Nature. On occasion the frailty of man's efforts to harness these forces have been cruelly exposed and Levant is also remembered as the scene of a tragic disaster when 31 miners were killed because the man-engine broke on October 20th, 1919. The man-engine, installed in 1857, had achieved great fame as a labour saving device for bringing miners "to grass" without the weary labour of climbing ladders. The device was extremely simple, representing merely a specialised adaptation of the pitwork section of the Cornish beam pumping engine, then in use in nearly every mine. At the time of the accident (2.50pm) the man-engine was fully loaded with men ascending the mine, forming a human pillar extending from the top to bottom of the shaft. The iron "cap" which attached the shaft rod to the quadrant beam fractured causing the rod to break and fall in a mass of debris and wreckage.

Some miners were instantly crushed to death, whilst others were mangled by falling wood and metal - the engine rod, the ladder-ways in the side of the shaft, and the platforms cut into its sides. Those standing on the lower part of the rod saw a flash of light above them, caused by ironwork striking fire from stone, and heard a tremendous roar, as the loose upper portion came crashing down, carrying all before it:

The engine-rod, on which we were riding, shook violently. The smash gave a terrible shock to us all, and everybody lost heart and nerve entirely. The screams of some of the men were awful, as they gripped the rod like grim death. A number of them had the presence of mind to jump on the nearest place and saved themselves by the skin of their teeth.<sup>60</sup>

At the inquest, the jury returned a verdict that "death was accidental, the cause being due to fatigue of a defective part of metal."<sup>61</sup>

Lanyon was deeply affected by the folk-memory of the Levant man-engine disaster and his own observations of miners, red-stained and weary, coming up "to grass" from depths of 300 fathoms below. He saw in mining a strong analogy for the constructive processes involved in his own struggle to



bring images to the surface of his creative consciousness.

One day at Levant mine (it was what they called a DRY MINE for arsenic copper and tin) where I understand everything was particularly happy, there was an accident and some 20 men were lost as they were climbing on the Man Engine to the surface. That has always remained as part of me as if it happened to me....While I am moving about the country here with all the history under foot, I find the sky on my back as I climb the hills and the sea behind me, then at my side and it becomes the same thing in my painting, but it is not remote because I have it up my side and in my belly and I carry a load of miners in my own workings.<sup>62</sup>

In this respect the central black column in the painting St Just can be interpreted figuratively as a mineshaft and metaphorically as an emblem of Lanyon's concern for the Cornish miners, an emanation of creativity from the unconscious depths of his mind and the hope that in death lay also the possibility of spiritual renewal and resurrection.

#### PRINTS FOR ST JUST

The first work which can be directly related to St Just is a group of linoleum prints produced in 1949: The Cornish Miner (linoleum print, 17 x 6½in., 1949?, Private Collection, Pl.94 fig.1), Four blocks for St Just (linocut, the two left-hand images 7 x 3½in., the two right-hand images, 7 x 2½in., 1949, Private Collection, Pl.94 fig.2) and St Just (linoleum print, 7 x 7½in., 1949, Private Collection, Pl.94 fig.3). While it is impossible to prove that Lanyon intended these prints as explorations of design and imagery to be used in the painting (begun two years later), it is indisputable that they share many of the characteristics and motifs to be found in St Just: the strongly vertical format, undifferentiated spatial solutions, flattened houses, shops, church, mine chimney/shaft dividing the composition and the appearance of skeletal Giacometti-like figures.



Much of the inspiration for the forms in the painting appears to have derived from these earlier images. The black column which can be read as a mineshaft or a crucifix, branching at the top with a suggestion of a "crown of thorns" (recalling Sutherland's paraphrasing of thorn bushes) corresponds with the left-hand corner of the linoleum print, St Just (Pl.94 fig.3), which also shows a mineshaft forking at the surface.<sup>63</sup> Lanyon returned to this print for the design of the houses which are strung along the edges of the painting, displaced vertically and horizontally from the centre, recalling Alfred Wallis' reshuffling of visual experience to serve his intuitive sense of composition. The painting reverses the design format of the print by placing the fields on the right and the town on the left.

The composite and double imagery employed in the final painting is suggested in The Cornish Miner (Pl.94 fig.1) by the mineshaft simultaneously representing a mine chimney. Lanyon refined this idea by combining mineshaft, crucifix and human form in the black vertical axis of the oil painting. The underground figures, a miner working at the rock face while another stands on the man-engine, are further abstracted in the final composition and subsumed in the deeper metaphorical meaning of the "crucifixion". Causey reminds us that Lanyon's inscriptions linking the prints to the final painting may have been added later when the sheets were sent for exhibition: "it does not necessarily imply that Lanyon had the painting St Just in mind when he made these designs, only that he made use of them when he did work on the painting."<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, although the mining imagery may have derived from prints such as The Cornish Miner, it is clear from studio photographs that the process of refining and developing the image was evolutionary and complicated, requiring frequent repainting and alteration:

Paintings have layers of meanings...while I work at a picture I like to build up associations and an image crystallizes during the painting.<sup>65</sup>

Finding the appropriate imagery was a preliminary stage in a long and complicated creative process. Lanyon only allowed a work to leave his studio once the character of the subject, a fusion of Lanyon's own experience of place combined with a complex spatial organisation of the picture surface, had been fully realised by suggestion rather than implicit detail.



## DRAWINGS FOR ST JUST

Before committing himself to paint, Lanyon sketched numerous freely executed charcoal and pencil drawings in situ, investigating the subject from as many different angles as possible. The studies, exhibited together with the linoleum prints and the single Construction for St Just (glass, paint and Bostick, 23 x 10 x 9in., 1952, Private Collection, Pl.97) at the Whitworth Art Gallery in 1978, represent his first explorations of space, revealing an interest not so much in the portrayal of particular views, but in a design which the place suggests. In an undated handwritten note, Lanyon confirms the importance of drawing as a vital part in the "gathering process" for a composition:

It seems to be important to take positive action, to look in other words, and to observe very minutely everything that is about in places - and further, to make something in the presence of a place which seems important. It may be the same as wanting to dance for joy and tell everybody about a real find. There is certainly in this procedure a preparation for further experience, perhaps miles away from the first place which will remind of the first and inform further procedure.<sup>66</sup>

The numerous drawings of St Just convey structure, though they move with his characteristic fluidity as he crystallises his experience of place and awareness of spatial relationships. In some of the looser drawings lines are used as lassoes to convey the velocity of eye movements; other sketches give St Just a playful, toytown quality as chimneys, telegraph poles, church tower are stacked on top of each other and rows of houses are strung upside down along the edge of the paper in a manner reminiscent of Alfred Wallis.

Sketch for St Just (charcoal and pastel, 14½ x 10in., 1952, Private Collection, Pl.95 fig.1) and Study for St Just (16 x 9in., pencil and red crayon, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.95 fig.2) show how Lanyon was able to reorganise the factual information from earlier sketches to produce the coherent compositional structure which emerges in the painting. A



telegraph pole with its crossbar and tangle of wires in the middle of the Sketch for St Just introduces the crucifix/mineshaft motif for St Just. The latter Study for St Just also displays a significant affinity with the final work: the composition has been clearly divided into two sections by a strong vertical line down the middle. Lanyon emphasises the separation of the two halves by drawing with pencil on the left-side and using red crayon for the right-side of the composition. A human form is discernable on the left and is similar in shape and aspect to the figure incorporated into the corresponding part of the oil painting. A vertiginous assembly of buildings is presented on the right-side of the drawing, incorporated within the profile of the church/chimney stack. Lanyon returned to this reference when he depicted the silhouette of the church/chimney in white paint on the lower right-side of the painting. Lanyon still had to find a means of merging his impressions of St Just located in the drawings with the mining imagery located in the linoleum prints in order to produce a truly integrated and coherent image of "the place complete, with all its associations."<sup>67</sup> The discovery of the unifying symbolism of the mineshaft-crucifixion was a gradual affair, hinted at in the powerful gouache Cruciform (30 x 22in., 1952, Sheila Lanyon Collection, Pl.103).

#### CONSTRUCTION FOR ST JUST

Lanyon only made one construction to help him fuse his visual and spatial experience of St Just with the complex metaphorical imagery of the prints.

I began to crystallise my experience of the landscape into an object made of sheets of glass painted and stuck together. What happens is mostly to do with mining - the pithead gear of the mine, the shaft itself, the lodes of tin - and perhaps also the telegraph poles around the town."<sup>68</sup>

Sheets of glass were piled up and cemented together and he restricted colour to a few fragments of green stained glass and densely scrawled black paint which, on one face of the glass, corresponds to the rib-like formation of the figure on the left-hand side of the painting, suggesting that it



began to emerge through the medium of the construction. Lanyon's reference to "pithead gear" corresponds with the vertiginous appearance of the construction and the mention of the telegraph poles suggests an important link with the drawings and his earlier attempts to find "spatial indicators" for arranging the composition. Heron describes Lanyon's constructions from this period as "three-dimensional essays", reconstructing in depth aspects of location "which Lanyon is in the process of turning into a painting".<sup>69</sup> He provides a literal association of the construction's relevance to the painting, juxtaposing a wintry photograph of fields near St Just next to Lanyon's glass and bostick construction. By turning the photograph on its side Heron points to the "parallelism" between place, movement, sensation and the constructed image:

The rhythmic nature of the black scribble on the glass in the construction, as well as the actual shapes it makes when its grid-like lines cross over each other, seems to me quite remarkably evocative of the loose stones of the near wall (all Cornish walls between fields are like this). Then, the taut, but irregular outlines of the scribbled area, as well as the lines of the ladder-like form up on the platform of the construction - these seem to echo the curved, ladder-like trellis of the distant walls curving over the fields towards the sea.<sup>70</sup>

By way of contrast, Garlake produces a more metaphorical explanation for Lanyon's dense, black markings. While acknowledging the importance of the construction in fixing the vertical format of the painting and providing the sense of "an internal core, corresponding to the section that is "capped" with green at the top of the construction", Garlake sees the marks as "a form of self-inscription" which present an analogy "between acute depression and the effort of climbing a mineshaft, which he likened to a tomb".<sup>71</sup> On another level, Lanyon's ragged planes of glass, crudely stuck together with lumps of bostick can be seen as an unconscious inversion of Gabo's elegant, transparent, curving planes which Lanyon had admired before the war:

The joints were superb, and this was the interesting thing, You would see a craftsman making a joint and it had "that" quality. They were



beautifully made, every single joint was superbly made...<sup>72</sup>

The crude scribbling across glass could be taken as the Cornish landscape equivalents of Gabo's delicate linear striations to emphasise the movement of planes through space. It is important not to forget that although Lanyon no longer saw himself as a Constructivist, he still talked about his art in terms of a "constructive process" to reach the final image:

Painting is concerned with the making of images not with imitation. These images modify the idea of reality.

The painting is primary. The painter constructs out of experience making an object which modifies and develops further experience...

To assist this changeover I make three dimensional constructions...

They are not space constructions but they are indications of a constructive process.<sup>73</sup>

The Construction for St Just (23 x 10 x 9in., glass, paint and bostick, Private Collection, Pl.97) provides strong proof of the importance of plastic and formal approaches in Lanyon's conceptualisation of space and place. Although Lanyon played down the significance of his constructions - dismissing them as "doodles" - he was aware of their importance in helping to lay down the final image in a painting.<sup>74</sup>

The Construction for St Just, considered with the preparatory drawings, showed Lanyon how to re-structure his composition so that the painting emerges as a vertical mass, an ascent from below the ground to an all-embracing vantage point, with horizons stretched along the four margins of the canvas. Any analysis of the exact relationship which exists between the linoleum prints, the drawings, the construction and the final painting is, however, almost certain to be incomplete and conjectural. Lanyon himself seems to have been muddled about dates and in a handwritten note explaining aspects of St Just claimed that it had been painted in 1951.<sup>75</sup> This confusion may help to explain why The Cornish Miner, clearly related to the other prints made in 1949, was stamped "Lanyon 1951".



## EVOLUTION OF THE FINAL IMAGE

For the final version of the painting Lanyon included not only the physical appearance of place, but his self-identification with the miners and their tragic cycle of death, disaster and economic exploitation:

Many people in St Just lost their lives in mine disasters, so the mineshaft becomes a cross and the barbed wire round the disused mine a crown of thorns. For me this picture is also a crucifixion...<sup>76</sup>

Lanyon had written to his friend, the poet Roland Bowden, expressing his strong empathetic and emotional involvement with St Just and its people:

At present I seem to be on a pilgrimage from inside the ground, as if I were the only one saved from the Levant disaster as if I moved, an unlucky mourner, along the gale ridden coast to St Just...Then up the hill to the vast chapel which by some twist reminds me of an Odeon cinema where there is a vast round window behind a "board-room" table no doubt for the Last Supper...<sup>77</sup>

It is impossible to be certain about the precise sequence of creative activity and the exact "moment of vision" which led Lanyon to the double imagery of the mineshaft and crucifix as the "axis" of St Just. The vertical structuring, the Crucifixion/mineshaft with its suggestion of upraised arms and a crown of thorns, represents the intensity and depth of experience as Lanyon conveys his empathetic understanding of the struggles and sacrifices faced by the mining community. It also stands for "the whole constructive process" which lies at the core of Lanyon's creativity:

...I will not avoid the conflict of existence, but I am unable (as



yet) to transform them. Therefore due to my own failings my work contains the whole constructive process which I illustrate as follows: The miner extracts inside the earth; his trolleyings in the galleries and shuttling within the earth and his laborious incisions are eventually brought to "grass" (a miner's term for the surface). Here the change continues by controlled processes in the furnaces and eventually the product has no resemblance to the rock ore. That is the mechanics of it. But the mine is also hollow and men have their being therein and the miner also comes up to grass and that is what I also hope for in my painting and he brings up with him the ore in his legs and is a body of it and he passes it all upward and is an optimist...<sup>78</sup>

The letter to Roland Bowden reveals that Lanyon had alighted upon mining as the metaphorical key to the work by April 1952. He had frequently used the subterranean mineral wealth of West Penwith as an animating presence in the Generation and Surfacing series, sensing the strong potential for a metaphor fusing content and meaning to reflect the source of his creative inspiration. John Berger wrote a perceptive criticism for the New Statesman of Lanyon's first one-man exhibition at the Gimpel Fils Gallery in London in March 1952:

The West Cornish landscape is like a piece of ore rather than, as others, like an orchard. The secret is in its centre and the painter, in order to discover its true nature, must dig into it, turn it this way and that, simultaneously examine it in detail and weigh it as a whole. Lanyon does this by gathering into one painting the sensation and vision of many different viewpoints, He tilts the landscape up and looks at it from the air, he extends it sideways as if seen from a car racing across it, he sounds its depths within the mineshafts. His paintings are like maps, but with horizons, and with images, made volatile and sensuous by the beautifully slow application of paint.<sup>79</sup>

Lanyon's difficulty in locating the appropriate iconography for St Just lay in the fact that his earlier themes of birth, growth and renewal - explorations of space and time showing the correspondence between human and natural forms - failed to communicate the radical undercurrent of his



social concerns for the people of West Cornwall and the effects of mining on the local community and the landscape. Instead, the Generation and Surfacing series display a lingering attachment to Stokes' conception of artistic creativity as a masculine force activating female matter (the landscape) so as to give birth to a new male progeny (the painting). Lanyon's least successful large-scale painting of this period, Cape Family, was also the only one to contain immediately identifiable human figures. Cape Cornwall, near St Just, was a tin-mining area and there is a strong suggestion that this family group is trapped inside an underground prison, a mine, suffering for generations, crying out for a carver to release them from this static and lifeless composition.

Although Cape Family is in some ways a precursor of St Just, Lanyon had to find some other means than direct figuration to invoke the cruelty and exploitation endured by this Cornish mining town. The grotesque violence of the Levant mine disaster is made explicit in his Bacon-like description of "...those bits of miners, so much meat hanging from the man-engine collected up into shovel-fulls and processed to St Just for the lying in state..."<sup>80</sup> In his approach to this painting, Lanyon needed to destroy the equilibrium and address the theme of life and death by exploring the abject corporeality of decay and rotting flesh.

Lanyon identified a less significant companion picture, Levant Old Mine (47 x 50in., oil on board, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.104), as the starting point in his search for a new painterly language to express human suffering without compromising his attachment to either landscape or the architectonics of composition.<sup>81</sup> A large painting, fluently articulated with flowing areas of sonorous colour, it is chiefly notable for its suggestions of spatial movements and the recurrence of the body-in-landscape theme. The traditional landscape conventions of single static viewpoint, horizon, perspective and scenery are exchanged for multiple viewpoints which allow the viewer to be at once outside, then above, the mine; looking down into dimly-lit galleries below ground or looking from below up the long shaft to the brittle scratched surfaces of sunlight. The tone of the painting is one of romantic melancholia, recalling the atmosphere of The Yellow Runner and Blue Horse Truant, but completely failing to express the intensity of Lanyon's sensory perceptions or his anger over the treatment of Cornish miners.



The interchangeable forms of embryonic life and underground mineral wealth is an idea borrowed from the Generation Series. The figure on the left can be seen as a vertical abstraction of the horizontal form deployed in Prelude while the figure on the right is remarkably close to the shape of Trencrom (36 x 24in., oil on masonite, Private Collection, Pl.92). A more vital form of abstraction would be required to translate Lanyon's emotional engagement with place onto the paint surface.

Lanyon made his first direct reference to the "crucifixion" as a form in the painting when he wrote to Patrick Heron on the 10th January 1952. By April he had "three large sketches for a crucifixion...all eight foot tall."<sup>82</sup> He soon began to experience difficulties, complaining of being "at the bottom of a black pit and climbing out slowly." At the beginning of June he wrote: "Crucifixion is in cold storage pro tem. A long term job." A few weeks later, however, he announced that "the Crucifixion is finished".<sup>83</sup> Clearly this was premature - on 20th July Lanyon wrote to Bowden that he was once again working on the painting. In this letter he presents the painting process as a matter of unlocking the psyche, receiving revelation direct from the subconscious, as though the image could be arrived at freely and directly through automatism:

I am piling paint onto the canvas at the moment in an all out effort to paint this Crucifixion. I am afraid I will remain in the trees with virgins and innocent surfaces unless I let myself into my secret which exists as a crucifixion...nothing could be more immediate personally and yet so universal as that myth, and it mainly literary! My form of image development is insecure....There is no thought in my case except in action. I think with my fingers and only possibly in their gesture can I express the form or process of my thought. Experience is whole: it is oddly tied up and completed for me at a surface...I manipulate for this end - to make outward whatever I have. If the process takes a form then I don't know of its nature.<sup>84</sup>

Lanyon reiterated the indeterminate and open nature of his painting technique in another letter, written on 16th December 1952, which reflects how directly he exploited the expressiveness of the painting medium to suggest the



particular creative action of the artist:

If I am unbalanced by an experience the equilibrium is only re-established by a sensuous immersion to events (in my case at the picture plane). The nearest thing I know to this experience is love and sex expression...If I had put down a generous ooze of hand made paint (however impulsive and dedicated it is) generally it contains the essence of the experience of which I am not fully aware but which is revealed to me only after subsequent experiences - in other words I rarely precipitate immediately full revelation.<sup>85</sup>

Although this seems to provide clear evidence of an early interest in the techniques of American abstract expressionism we should be circumspect before accepting the artist entirely at face value. Apart from the debts to cubism through Nicholson and constructivism through Gabo, Lanyon was little touched by developments in the wider art world at this juncture in his career - he was too concerned with experiencing and re-shaping the world around him. Automatism did not provide the answer to Lanyon's protracted struggle to find the key iconographic image for his Crucifixion. However, in the same letter, written on the 16th December, he once again announced to Bowden that he had completed the work:

I have just finished my Crucifixion and Christ is nowhere...It is nearly all black and white and without colour; no greens at all. A new deep purple, black and white. I think it is the beginning of painting chiaroscuro or light and shade in my own way...This crucifixion (which is un-named yet) is all gossip and mocking and napalm burning but without the Francis Bacon illustrative obsession. An odd thing happens at the top of the painting which is three headed, the centre one has a military flash or feather to it and a window. It will be some time before I can begin to decipher the meaning of it all. Giotto, Cimabue and the Italian landscape will I hope restore the colour to me. Here there is only the charring of bones, Eisenhowers and Eden...<sup>86</sup>

From this passage and the "doodle" which illustrates the design format of the painting, it is obvious that Lanyon is not talking about the extant



version of St Just. A photograph exists of an early version of St Just in the studio and it matches Lanyon's description perfectly (Pl.98): Christ is indeed "nowhere" and there is no trace of the central axis of a crucifixion! The figuration is less complex - three crudely devised boulder-headed forms emerging from a scraped and rubbed paint surface - showing some stylistic similarities with the gossiping figures in Porthleven. This unfinished version of St Just seems cluttered and lacks the fluency, originality or brilliance of the completed painting. The male and female figures join hands stiffly in the middle - but otherwise fail to connect. The reference to the "feather" and "window" in the centre of the composition can only be traced to the studio version and has been obliterated by the time the painting was released for the "Space in Colour" exhibition at the Hanover Gallery in July 1953.

The human dimension to the landscape, cluttered in the studio version with its three heads, has been simplified and further abstracted for the finished painting. The painting's mineshaft-crucifixion-Christ figure provides its axial visual and metaphorical meaning, alluding to Lanyon's belief that even in the midst of the desolation of abandoned mines and capitalist exploitation lay the hope of economic and spiritual revival. Without wishing to diminish the significance of the Levant Mining disaster, the painting is capable of a more universal reading (as Lanyon indicated in his reference to "the charring of bones, Eisenhower and Eden"). The final version of St Just unifies composition and themes into a grand statement of the artist's concerns. In the aftermath of Belsen, Hiroshima and Nagasaki and fuelled by Cold War anxieties over the escalation of conflict in Korea, Lanyon sought to create a more archetypal image to symbolise economic oppression and the unbearable horrors of modern war.

In a letter to Bowden - written shortly after the painting was put on show for the first time - Lanyon again alluded to the Kleinian idea of renewal and reparation by suggesting that the key to the painting lay in "two triangles, one at the top (a structure of wires to stop high tension cables dropping on the land!) and one in the black - the Hymen. The first set inverted and depressed above eye level, the other just above the thighs of any spectator." He also identified the "little coronation flag waving



in the country" (bottom right of the axis) as a figure representing the Virgin: "she stops the banging around in the mine by a quiet resignation and courageous bright blueness of the hat".<sup>88</sup>

It had needed an Italian government sponsored trip to Anticoli Corrado (January to April 1953) to re-awaken his interest in the potential of paint pigment to vibrate with the colours of West Cornwall. Lanyon was not satisfied painting "a picture with no colour like glass"<sup>89</sup> and the dark viridian greens and pale ceruleans of the Cornish landscape forced its way back into the finished composition. In his own description of the completed work, he associated the left-side of the painting with the town and the right-side with the surrounding fields. The colours used are naturalistic and belong to the granite buildings of St Just and the bedrock smeared with grass, lichen, gorse and hawthorn to be found in the surrounding countryside. Lanyon conveys the idea of the town lying "on top of the fields", an uninvited intrusion into the landscape, by allowing the pale cerulean blues and greys of the town to combine with the greens of the fields, producing "a harsh, smoky quality".<sup>90</sup>

Images and ideas had to be explored and developed one by one before they could slowly be synthesised into a whole. While Lanyon's prints of 1949 are mostly connected with mining, his numerous drawings (1951-52) record the buildings, streets, telegraph poles and wires of St Just and are almost exclusively intended to provide source material for an overall design composition: there are few direct references to the many abandoned mines and derelict engine houses which litter the countryside. The construction clearly helped Lanyon to merge the ideas brought to the surface by the prints and the sketches, crystallising his experiences and providing a model to assist in reaching a decision about the size, shape and to some extent subject of the final painting. However, it is important not to present the emergence of the remarkably unified and aesthetically coherent end product as a seamless process of gathering sensory material, producing a construction and then working on the picture surface. It seems that Lanyon did not develop the central image of the mineshaft/crucifix until very late in the gestation of the work and it may well have been elements within the Italian landscape which brought about the final, successful, transformation of the painting.



St Just demonstrates Lanyon's aesthetic position in 1952/53 very clearly: while distancing himself from the "cold inhuman mathematical paintings" of Nicholson and Mondrian,<sup>91</sup> believing that they reflected composition for its own sake, he was still concerned with the plastic qualities of composition and continued to cultivate structural cogency and painterly finesse. Lanyon was too deeply rooted in the landscape for automatism to be anything more than an incantatory technique: the kaleidoscopic flow of paint which results from a genuine vacating of consciousness failed to produce anything other than the raw material which Lanyon then transposed into a more articulate, aesthetic language. It could be argued that Lanyon had a "horror vacui" and intensely disliked art lacking in form or meaning. St Just brilliantly resolves his predicament of presenting a sense of "genius loci" while at the same time carrying mythic, social, psychological and even political meaning.

#### BOJEWYAN FARMS, 1951

St Just was intended to be the centre-piece of a Crucifixion triptych, with two narrow vertical paintings Green Mile (62 x 19in., oil on masonite, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.102) and Harvest Festival (74 x 24in., oil on masonite, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.100) at the sides. Curiously, most previous commentators on Lanyon have substituted Green Mile with Corsham Summer (72 x 24in., oil on masonite, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.101) even though Lanyon specifically identified the two panels conceived to frame the triptych:

This St Just was conceived as the centre of a tryptich in which two mourners occupied the side panels; these were called Harvest Festival and Green Mile.<sup>92</sup>

No explanations for this substitution are offered. Lanyon may, of course, have been mistaken in his identification of the paintings which comprised the triptych, but this seems unlikely given the importance of the work. Corsham Summer certainly looks right as one of the side panels for St Just: there is a clear evocation of a cowled figure facing the main painting



- perhaps one of the mourners mentioned in Lanyon's commentary? The dominant colours are the same heavy, hot, dark greens found in St Just and Bojewyan Farms (48 x 96in., oil on masonite, 1952, The British Council, London, Pl.105); the relationships between greens, greys and blues immediately evoke the grass, rock, sea and sky of West Cornwall (although the picture purports to be inspired by Corsham, Wiltshire, where Lanyon was teaching at the Bath Academy of Art). The vertical white brush-strokes down the middle (recalling the surf depicted in many of his cliff/sea encounters) provide a balance to the black crucifix/mine axis in St Just. Corsham Summer works as a fine example of Lanyon's expressionist abstraction, conveying very precisely a feeling of solitary meditation. Green Mile, by contrast, seems too bright and exuberant to succeed as a companion panel to the crucifixion, sitting uneasily next to the much darker hues of St Just and Harvest Festival. It is also twelve inches shorter than its putative facing panel. The figure is less evident in the paint and the vertical form resembles, more obviously, a church spire. Perhaps Green Mile represents the spirit of resurrection after the crucifixion? There is no easy way of resolving the confusion: perhaps Lanyon's "triptych" should be seen as a very loose confederation of related paintings. After all, he did not attempt to assemble the paintings and even if an enterprising curator were to try to unite Lanyon's paintings into a grand statement of artistic belief he would quickly discover that none of the sections actually fit together!

Bojewyan Farms - a pastoral rhapsody which incorporates Lanyon's thoughts on birth, life and death - was to serve as the predella for the ensemble:

To go underneath this crucifixion I painted another picture, Bojewyan, which is a small village near St Just, probably one of the most ancient and primitive parts of the district. This isn't mining, but a farming picture - a bucolic scene, rather earthy. It's also a triptych, with three sections to it. On the left there's the sea at the top, and the grass and hayricks. The middle is some sort of animal, even a head. And on the right the chaff which comes from the corn and harvesting. In some ways I think it's a picture about birth and life and death, which is why it belongs with the Crucifixion. Dry stone walls that run round the fields in this part of Cornwall divide up



Lanyon's claim that Bojewyan Farms (48 x 96in., oil on masonite, 1951, The British Council, London, Pl.105) was to have its place serving as a predella for St Just should not be taken literally. In Renaissance altarpieces, particularly those in the form of triptychs or polyptychs, the predella is an integral part of the structure, and its face usually contains a series of small paintings or carvings related in subject matter to that of the main panels. While Bojewyan Farms shares some of the themes explored in St Just it is less of a commentary on the centre-piece than a discrete and unified statement on the cyclical nature of birth, life and death and the possibility of resurrection: a triptych within a triptych! Bojewyan Farms was the first of the four paintings to be completed - making its debut at Lanyon's one-man exhibition at the Gimpel Fils Gallery in March 1952 (over a year before St Just was on show at the Hanover Gallery). Causey suggests that "as all the pictures are connected with the theme of birth, life and death, it was the treatment of this cycle within the one picture, Bojewyan Farms, that gave Lanyon the idea of treating it separately in three pictures."<sup>94</sup>

The importance of location, fundamental in Lanyon's art, is re-iterated in a close study of Bojewyan Farms. The farms, lying on the coastal road between St Ives and St Just, were falling victim to economic pressures - low agricultural prices combined with the difficulties of farming land divided into ancient agricultural strips and strewn with giant granite boulders. Many of the farmsteads were falling empty and the buildings were in a state of ruin as farming seemed to be following the fate of mining as a source of employment in West Penwith. Lanyon's best paintings succeed because they describe the external characteristics as well as the internal connectivity which binds the people to the land. Bojewyan Farms provides further evidence of Lanyon's deep understanding and empathy for the Cornish predicament: a dramatic landscape which would attract the tourists, but a failing resource for the people who lived in Cornwall and wished to cultivate its land or mine its mineral wealth.

Lanyon wrote of Bojewyan Farms that it is "a life birth and death



painting".<sup>95</sup> The painting reads from left to right and is divided into three sections using thick black lines ("the dry stone walls that run round the fields in this part of Cornwall")<sup>96</sup> which act as spatial indicators, carrying the eye from section to section, and holding the composition together like lead in medieval stained glass: each section has one predominant plastic form - a convex barrel-shape on the left for the "Life" panel, a concave uterus shape in the middle for the "Birth" panel, the shape of a large Easter island standing stone on the right for the "Death" panel.

The "Life" section is the most lyrical and rhapsodic part of the painting, converting the paint into the chlorophyll of lush pasture; the sea intrudes round the top left-hand corner of the painting - in a manner which recalls Lanyon's earlier analogies of the sea as a masculine force carving the contours of the feminine landscape. Lower down, an anthropomorphic animal stands in the "bucolic scene" of green fields and hayricks, gazing out at the curving ladder-like trellis of black lines (loose-stone walls echoed in the rhythmic black scribbles found on the Construction for St Just) which run down to the cliff's edge. The farm buildings are suggested by the pencil lines contained in the off-white rectangle which also contains a hint of a human face. This section is partially obscured by the legs of a rustic figure whose body doubles as the hayrick. The central, "Birth" panel is introduced by a patch of pink, possibly a cow's udder. A large composite "animal" stands behind the strongly defined "head" - its two hind legs double as the bending figure belonging to the third, or "Death" panel, its front legs and head (the hayrick given yet another role!) emerging in the green pastures of the first panel.

The key to the composition is the "head", a cross-section of the interior of the landscape (earth, rock, an underground lake, precious minerals are all suggested) and a regenerative womb. Roland Bowden, reviewing Lanyon's second one-man show at Gimpel Fils, saw this section of the painting as a more literal "birth": in his analysis the "head" becomes the interior of the cow's uterus, "containing, amongst other suggestions, the glutinous blood of the birth, the froth and spurt of milk, an indication of grey placental shine, with below, a black-toothed shape which suggests both the birth pangs and the cog in the reaper".<sup>97</sup> This part of the painting



corresponds most closely to the Bojewyan Construction (19½ x 10½ x 17in., fragments of wood, metal, plastic, ceramic, 1951, Private Collection, Pl.106). This complex assemblage once again demonstrates how Lanyon formulated his ideas for organising spatial relationships in a painting: the grey upright and linking ring at the base of the construction are transferred to the central section and the red glass on the cylinder becomes an eye as the "head" is shown in profile. The white semi-cylinder could be related to the animal across the whole middle section of the painting.

Individual elements are difficult to distinguish on the right-hand side, the "Death" panel. There are suggestions of a threshing scene - brown decaying straw, black blades, fluttering chaff, a grey figure bending over a cold, monotonous and lifeless landscape. The land awaits the re-birth of spring.

There are certain similarities with the symbolism which Lanyon used in The Yellow Runner: the sea/cliff encounter, the stockade/head suggesting subterranean regeneration and the use of Lanyon's favourite sexual metaphor, the horse. Lanyon's treatment of these themes in Bojewyan Farms transforms the romantic aestheticism of the earlier painting into an exuberant sensory abstraction of place. A letter to Rosalie Mander reflects Lanyon's pleasure in his achievement:

Have finished a farmyard 8 foot long x 4 foot which really stinks of dung, old cow, whiskered implements and stale cats all among huge granite dwellings for ancient Britons (without toplights). Somewhere near Pendeen, possibly Bojweyan.<sup>98</sup>

The exact meaning of each panel is probably less important than the transformation of the paint into the pith and pulp of organic matter, the chlorophyll of fresh grass, the grey hardness of Cornish granite. Lanyon's emotional involvement with the subject produces a more varied and textural use of paint (though losing none of the tonal balance to be found in his earlier work). The sensuous enjoyment of the pigment is conveyed by Lanyon's obvious delight in his discovery that: "...my new big painting is ten shades of green, yellow, black, grey, red, pink and GOLD!"<sup>99</sup>



Bojewyan Farms offers the hope of the renewal of life after the death of winter, providing a spiritually optimistic outlook to balance the dark, despairing tone of the crucifixion in St Just. Unfortunately, Lanyon's optimism may have been misplaced. The tin mining industry did not recover, the last Cornish mine was earmarked for closure in 1998.<sup>100</sup> Tourism rather than farming provides the economic sustenance of the hamlet of Bojewyan. The deaths depicted in both paintings were perhaps more permanent than Lanyon could have realised in 1952/53.

#### LANYON AT THE ST IVES POTTERY

Lanyon's view was that the mainspring of form-making "was to do with the Cornish earth, the Cornish weather, the winds and the rain, the form of the landscape, the jutting out of granite from the soil".<sup>101</sup> For an artist who believed that to see Cornwall as a Cornishman sees it, "it is necessary not merely to have been born and brought up in the country, but to come from Cornish stock",<sup>102</sup> working with raw material dug out of the Cornish earth took on a symbolism loaded with atavistic significance (see the Christmas card of the Iron Age village of Chysauster shaped into a pot, Pl.107). Only a true Cornishman, born and bred in West Penwith, could claim to really understand the concept behind the battlecry "Truth to Materials".

The whole emphasis of Lanyon's approach was to achieve some intuitive apprehension of organic form. His pottery, like his painting, resonates with the powerful rhythms of submerged forms found in the natural world. Pure arcs, straight lines and sharp angles have been re-shaped and blunted to produce an equivalent in clay for the swells of the sea and the eroded shapes of water-hollowed rocks. He was excited by the idea of creating forms out of Cornish clay, letting the material express itself and the manifest similarities with what he was trying to achieve in his painting.<sup>103</sup>

Pottery attracted Lanyon because of the physicality of his vision and because he wanted to gain total possession of his subject. The malleability of clay allowed him to touch, mould and handle the object during the creative process. He could make any number of alterations and there was also the



added attraction of decorating and reworking the sculpture in paint once fired. He strongly believed that "Painting cannot be taught by theory but only by a growing awareness of sensation". To this end he encouraged his students in "other means of communication involving practical making...such as pottery, sculpture, engraving and if possible, dance and music".<sup>104</sup>

Warren MacKenzie, an American potter who studied at the St Ives Pottery with his wife (Alix MacKenzie) for 2½ years (from June 1950), recalls that Lanyon was on good terms with Bernard Leach and often discussed things at length with England's pre-eminent artist-potter.<sup>105</sup> Leach encouraged Lanyon's various artistic endeavours and their works were frequently shown together in mixed exhibitions (for example, in March 1949 Lanyon, Wells and Leach displayed work at Robert Nance's shop in St Ives). A 1950 Christmas card, hand-painted by Lanyon in the same colours favoured by Leach and using vaguely Oriental brushwork, is a testimony to their friendship (Pl.107 fig.2). Leach allowed him to set up a studio in the loft above the pottery showroom to work on silkscreen printing.

Warren MacKenzie taught Lanyon the various techniques of serigraphy (including the film-stencil method) which he employed to produce a characteristically individual set of four prints. A mistake in the printing led him to experiment with some unorthodox methods:

Instead of being a purist about it and scrapping it and starting over or something like that, he took rags with turpentine and he washed the paint off the paper and the paint left a stain on the paper and this stain - which was the first 4 or 5 colours that he had printed on there became the background and then he looked round and said "Ha!" and then he made another little stencil you know and he printed a bit of pale blue and a bit of black and the print was done. And essentially what it is, is washed off print with some overprinting on it. And it's fantastic because instead of just opaque colours, of course, it has transparencies...you see the paper. You have all sorts of things which happen and it was not a uniform edition because of the way it washed off...That's the way Peter always worked of course. He would do anything like that and he would just turn it over and



do something better with it.<sup>106</sup>

This episode provides an excellent illustration of Lanyon's intuitive creativity - his belief that art was literally an act of discovery revealing aspects of reality never consciously known before or obscured by more conventional approaches. The result of these experiments at the pottery was an exhibition at Robert Nance's shop, Prints under £1, with works by Patrick Hayman, Alix and Warren MacKenzie and John Wells (it was reviewed favourably by Leach in the St Ives Times at the end of November 1951).<sup>107</sup> Lanyon was later able to persuade the Arts Council to sponsor a regional tour of the prints (although without much commercial success - only one print was sold).<sup>108</sup>

Having learned the techniques required for silkscreen printmaking, Lanyon was now keen to experiment with clay and find out more about this ancient form of non-figurative art. However, he feared that England's pre-eminent artist-potter "would not approve of non-traditional work methods."<sup>109</sup>

He was fascinated, talking with us about the pots we were making. But he was absolutely scared to death of Bernard in terms of he didn't want to impinge on Bernard's turf, as it were, and Bernard was a potter. And Peter simply wouldn't come into the pottery or even talk about pots in front of Bernard. And yet he had this desire...to do something in clay.<sup>110</sup>

Part of his reticence probably arose from Leach's irritation with Lanyon's decision to leave the Penwith Society of Arts in May 1950 as a result of the institution of the A, B and C group system ("Representational", "Abstract" and "Craftsmen" respectively).<sup>111</sup> A reading of Leach's hugely influential A Potter's Book would suggest a shared sympathy with Lanyon's integrative view of the arts.<sup>112</sup> Leach encoded the idea of pottery as a vocational way of life whose every activity - from extracting the clay, grinding the glaze to throwing and decorating the pot - was of equal importance, to be treated as a hieratic mystical rite. His advocacy of a common standard of "fitness and beauty" meant an acceptance of natural materials, simplicity and spontaneity in throwing and "a subordination of all attempts at technical



cleverness to straightforward, unselfconscious workmanship."<sup>113</sup> In practice, however, Leach's relationship with those who worked for him at the St Ives Pottery contradicted such wartime rhetoric and he elevated painting, slip-decorating, sgraffito, fluting, etching and combed decoration above the craftsmanship required for throwing and modelling the clay:

The workshop "craft" ethos that he promulgated was based on the centrality of an artist as catalyst for those whose creativity was of a lesser kind. His views on the craftsman were never complex, his views on the artist, the decorator of the craftsman's work, the conductor of the studio were considerably more flattering. Decorating, like conducting, are more visible roles to adopt.<sup>114</sup>

It is also possible that Leach did not wish to jeopardise his friendship with Nicholson and Hepworth - senior figures in the hierarchical St Ives art world - by siding with the relatively unknown Lanyon. Lanyon's defiance of the Penwith could be taken as an example of the "over-accentuated individualism"<sup>115</sup> which had sapped creative vitality in the West. Leach, one of the nineteen founder members of the Penwith, remained a member of the Society until his death in 1979.

Lanyon waited until the master-potter was in London before he ventured into the workshops to try his hand at manipulating clay: He was not interested in trying to replicate "the traditional thing that Bernard did"<sup>116</sup> - the Raku pots, earthenware chargers, enamel-decorated porcelain and large tenmoku jars that had secured an international reputation for the St Ives Pottery. Instead, after receiving some basic instruction from the MacKenzies,<sup>117</sup> he started making pots which he called "pasty pots":

He'd roll out a sheet of clay on a table like crust, yes, but then...and this I've never been able to explain - ever - I never saw Peter make a mistake with these things. I never saw him try something and sort of do it as a sketch and then do the final thing. He'd roll out a sheet of clay, take a needle tool which permitted him to cut through the clay in any direction and he'd start cutting and he'd cut this form out and peel off the edges...Then he'd pick up the sheet of clay



and begin to wrap it around, seal it as you would a pie crust, and in a very few minutes he would have the completely 3 dimensional object, which he had visualized in the flat. And it had handles and spouts anything else that he had expected it to have on it and it all happened in a very few minutes.<sup>118</sup>

His spontaneity and intuitive directness in exploring form while making irreverent pots was the antithesis of Leach's carefully articulated methodology. According to his most recent biographer, Leach would sketch his preliminary ideas on paper rather than allow forms to emerge through experimentation at the wheel. His prescriptive diagrams which carefully delineate the correct way of analysing a pot would have been abhorrent to Lanyon.<sup>119</sup>

Lanyon did not concern himself with complicated glazes, preferring the tactile value of fired clay to emphasise the "local" character of his pots, mugs, bowls and pots (Pl.126, 127). The formal components of a pot (its foot, belly, shoulder, neck and lip) did not interest him. In fact, MacKenzie recalls that

He was never happy with the initial object. It was always much too stiff, much too rigid, and he'd then begin to beat it around and bang it down on the table and let it sag and squeeze out, and lump, and cave in...<sup>120</sup>

According to MacKenzie, his creations required only an oatmeal glaze to allow the colours (mostly brown, brown-black or a simple iron wash) to emerge during the firing.<sup>121</sup> Only occasionally did Lanyon decorate other people's pots (Pl.122):

I had a set of cups and saucers and did not know what to do with them... Peter took them and quickly brushed iron oxide on in a pattern which perfectly complemented and completed the pots.<sup>122</sup>

When Leach saw Lanyon's "pastie pots" he was enthusiastic and encouraging, "amazed and disturbed...that Peter could work clay so easily".<sup>123</sup>



It is possible that Lanyon was influenced by the example of Picasso's collaboration with the Madoura pottery in Vallauris, near Antibes: MacKenzie remembers that Picasso's ceramics were attracting a great deal of attention and that Leach had obtained a copy of a book detailing Picasso's modelling, drawing, engraving, etching, painting and slip decorating.<sup>124</sup> It is an interesting parallel: Picasso, earthed in the Mediterranean culture, interested in the "kosmos" of polytheistic Greek mythology, working on ceramics in the "vallis aurea", the classical valley of gold. Lanyon, rooted in Celtic quoits, moors and mythology, kneading and shaping the parturient clay to express his deep poetic feelings for the coastal landscape of West Penwith. Both artists used humour to precipitate unexpected imaginative leaps and deflate pomposity. Lanyon's expressive Gossip Pot and Burp Pot (Pl.108) find their equivalent in Picasso's extensive series of pigeons and doves, made by manipulating and cutting into freshly made clay vases or bottles to form tufts of feathers, eyes, beaks and wings.

However, the analogy should not be carried too far. Lanyon's visits to the St Ives Pottery were relatively sporadic as he had to wait for Leach to be away before he could go into production. MacKenzie suggests that over a period of about nine months in 1951 there were about four occasions that he could avail himself of the facilities and consequently only a modest number of pots, mugs, bowls and jugs was produced. Furthermore, Picasso's vases and pots had all been wheel-thrown by others and he remained primarily a decorator of surfaces. Lanyon, on the other hand, "wasn't being a painter. Peter was being a sculptor in clay".<sup>125</sup>



## Notes to Chapter Five

1. Ian Nairn, The American Landscape, Random House, New York, 1965, p.6.
2. Martin Heidegger, Identity and Difference, Harper and Row, New York, 1969, p.26.
3. Martin Heidegger, "An Ontological Consideration of Place", The Question of Being, Twayne Publishers, New York, 1958, p.19.
4. Harvey Cox, "The Restoration of a Sense of Place", Ekistics, no.25.
5. Hugh Prince, "The Geographical Imagination", Landscape no. 11, pp.22-25.
6. Peter Lanyon, "A Sense of Place, notes on my Painting in general", Painter and Sculptor, volume 2, 1962, pp3-7: "I had to learn how to take control of complex images and allow them to emerge at the end of my brush. To do this I had to accept another characteristic; that of an apparent provincialism, I became a place man."
7. John Steinbeck, Grapes of Wrath, Bantam, New York, 1969, p.39.
8. Simone Weil, The Need for Roots, The Beacon Press, 1955, p.53.
9. Peter Lanyon, from the radio programme, "In the Gramophone Library", broadcast on West of England Home Service, 10th August, 1954. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.284.
10. Letter to Paul Feiler, undated, probably 1952. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon: 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.125.
11. E. Relph, Place and Placelessness, Pion, London, 1976, p.55.
12. Ibid.
13. Melanie Klein, Love, Guilt and Reparation, Virago, 1975, pp.334-5: "The desire to re-discover the mother of the early days is...of the greatest importance in creative art and in the ways people enjoy and appreciate it."
14. Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, p.63.
15. Adrian Stokes, The Quattro Cento, Faber and Faber, 1932, pp.28-29.
16. Adrian Stokes, Colour and Form, Faber and Faber, 1937, p.70.
17. Notes written by Peter Lanyon, reproduced in Portreath, op.cit., 1993, p.34.
18. British Council illustrated lecture, 1962, TAV 526 ABC. Also found in Portreath, op.cit., 1993, p.12.
19. Ibid., p.12.
20. Offshore: recording made over ten days in June 1959. Transcript printed in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, op.cit., 1993, pp.48-53.
21. Ibid., pp.48-53.
22. Undated letter to Alan Bowness, printed in Peter Lanyon, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.
23. Notes for Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands, 1959-60, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, pp.295-301.
24. "In the Freudian Oedipal complex the young male child's early involvement with his mother's body leads him to desire sexual union with her. However, he is forced to abandon incestuous wishes by imagined threats of castration by the authority figure of the father. The child's desire is thus repressed, and the father's authority introjected into the ego to form the super-ego, where the taboo regarding incest is perpetuated. Nevertheless, the repressed complex may persist in an unconscious state and resurface at a conscious level at a later stage." Barry Dodge, The Art of Peter Lanyon 1946-64: A Psychological Interpretation, M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, May, 1991, pp.34-37.
25. Peter Lanyon, "Abstraction and Construction", 1962 talk, Tate Gallery Archive TAV 213AB. Lanyon was aware that the making of Offshore brought to the surface aspects of his psyche which had hitherto remained unexamined: "There's something, say, inside me which is wanting to be said, something



which is dominating...this human element, though it wasn't known well enough to me, has been revealed in the painting, and in that sense perhaps there is a mysterious journey. "Offshore in Progress", op.cit., p.59.

26. British Council illustrated lecture, 1962, TAV 526 ABC.

27. Lanyon talking about "the first gliding painting", Solo Flight, British Council illustrated lecture, 1962, TAV 526 ABC. Also in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.194.

28. William Feaver, Cornwall, Peter Lanyon's drawings and Andrew Lanyon's photographs, 1983.

29. British Council illustrated talk, 1962, TAV 526 ABC.

30. Letter to Patrick Heron, nd (May 1950), TGA, quoted in Chris Stephens, Peter Lanyon: At the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.74.

31. Letter to Peter Gimpel, 5th May 1951, in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.108.

32. Peter Fuller, Modern Painters: Reflections on British Art, Methuen, 1993, p.10. It should of course be recognised that Fuller was using the terms in his own specific way while discussing the legacy of Romanticism. According to Fuller, Ruskin was dismissive of art which merely appealed to the "aesthesis" (sensual pleasure). "Theoria" encompassed all "structures of feelings...the whole terrain of imaginative and symbolic thought".

33. Peter Lanyon, "About 12 constructions were made for this painting and set a pattern which I have followed since." Undated notes for a slide show; printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.106. A book made up by Peter Lanyon and inscribed LANYON/PORTHLEVEN contains photographs taken by the artist at various stages of Porthleven's development. Two of the constructions are in the Tate (T950 and T1082).

34. Undated text by Peter Lanyon, c.1952, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.288.

35. Margaret Garlake, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", printed in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992.

36. Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner, The Realistic Manifesto, first published 5th August 1920, Moscow, translated by Gabo in 1957. Reprinted in S. Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo paperback, 1990, originally published in 1974, p.9.

37. Peter Lanyon, "A Sense of Place", Painter and Sculptor, Autumn 1962.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. "Only by partially resolving certain spatial aspects of the cove or hill or beach and cave landscape in terms of these physically three dimensional constructions is he able to get on with the illusionistic statement of space which is contained in the painting." Patrick Heron, "Peter Lanyon", essay in Arts (New York), February 1956, reprinted in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, South Bank Centre catalogue, 1992, p.7.

41. Letter to the compiler of the Tate Gallery catalogue, 6th September 1958, Tate Archives.

42. Discovered behind a review in a press cuttings album, Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.105.

43. Photographs of five of the six constructions made for Porthleven feature in the book compiled by Lanyon recording the development of this painting (Tall Country and Seashore is missing). They all appear with the earliest versions - indicating that they made at the beginning of the image making process.

44. The Tate Gallery Acquisitions, 1968-69, pp.17-18.

45. British Council lecture, 1962, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.106.



46. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Whitworth Art Gallery catalogue, 1978, p.20.
47. Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon: Air, Land and Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992, p.53.
48. Peter Lanyon, "Note on painting Porthmeor mural for Stanley J. Seeger, 1962", reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.306.
49. Ibid., p.304.
50. Mo Enright, The Mural Studies of Peter Lanyon, Gimpel Fils catalogue, 1996, unpaginated.
51. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.307.
52. See Chapter One.
53. Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.307.
54. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.309.
55. British Council illustrated lecture, 1962, TAV 526 ABC.
56. Peter Lanyon, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue by Alan Bowness, 1968.
57. Peter Lanyon, recorded talk, 1963, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.121.
58. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aidan Ellis, 1971
59. Cyril Noall, Levant, the Mine Beneath the Sea, Bradford Barton Ltd., Truro, 1970, p.9.
60. Robert Penaluna, a miner from St Just. Ibid., p.114.
61. Ibid., p.117.
62. Letter to Roland Bowden, 20th April 1952, TGA 942.1.
63. Sutherland's post-1945 work transforms rocks into womb-like conglomerates, thorn bushes into crucifixions or a crown of thorns. See Thorn Cross, 44 x 36½in., oil on canvas, 1954, National Gallery, Berlin. The Y-shaped cross is called the "Furka"; it is "very ancient in origin...a Pythagorean emblem of the course of life." Rudolf Koch, The Book of Signs, Dover, 1955, p.7. The shape can also be interpreted as "the expectant soul, gazing aloft with outstretched arms." Ibid.
64. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Paintings, Drawings and Constructions, 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, 1978. The back of The Cornish Miner has been inscribed by the artist with the title and "Lanyon £8, 1951"; the front bears a studio stamp mark, "Lanyon, 1951".
65. British Council lecture, op.cit., 1963.
66. Undated note in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon, 1917-1964, Penzance, p.279.
67. Alan Bowness, Arts Council exhibition catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.
68. British Council lecture, op.cit., 1963.
69. Patrick Heron, feature on Peter Lanyon for Arts New York, February 1956. Reprinted in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992.
70. Ibid., pp.6-16.
71. Margaret Garlake, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", printed in Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea, op.cit., 1992. The letter to Gabo is in the Tate archive (TAG TAM 66, 66/55).
72. Interview with Lionel Miskin printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.28.
73. Peter Lanyon, "A Sense of Place", Painter and Sculptor, Autumn 1962.
74. Peter Lanyon, undated text, c. 1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.288.
75. Peter Lanyon, handwritten note dating St Just 1951, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.120.
76. British Council talk, 1962. Ibid., p.121.
77. Letter to Bowden, 20th April 1952, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.280, TGA 942.1.
78. Ibid. TGA 942.1.
79. John Berger, New Statesman, 1952, quoted in Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Modern British Masters, Bernard Jacobson Gallery, 1990.



80. Letter to Rosalie Mander, 17th March, 1952.
81. "...The painting Levant Old Mine is the beginning". Letter to Bowden 20th April, 1952, TGA 942.1.
82. Lanyon attached a postscript to a letter to Heron postmarked 10th January 1952. "I am painting a crucifixion". He wrote to Peter Gimpel on 20th April, 1952.
83. Lanyon complained about being depressed in a letter to Bowden, nd (May/June 1952), TGA 942.7. He announced that he was no longer working on the painting in a letter to Bowden, 1st June 1952, TGA 942.6, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.120. His belief that St Just was finished - letter to Bowden, 20th June 1952, TGA 924, printed in Andrew Lanyon, ibid., 1990, p.120.
84. Letter to Bowden, 20th July 1952, TGA 942.13.
85. Letter to Bowden, 16th December, 1952, TGA 942.22.
86. Ibid. TGA 942.22.
87. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p. 120.
88. Letter to Bowden, 14th July, 1953.
89. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, late 1952, in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.121.
90. British Council recorded talk, op.cit., TAV 526 ABC, 1962.
91. Letter to Peter Gimpel, August 1951, Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.110.
92. Note written in Lanyon's hand printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.122. Margaret Garlake does not commit herself in Peter Lanyon, St Ives Artists series, Tate Publishing, 1998, p.40. She concludes that Harvest Festival and Green Mile may be deliberately mismatched to confirm that the polyptych was "a gathering of themes rather than of works." Chris Stephens argues that "the second panel is more likely to have been Corsham Summer" on the grounds that it is the same size as Harvest Festival (and half the width of St Just), op.cit., 2000, p.112.
93. British Council recorded talk, op.cit., 1962.
94. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.22.
95. Handwritten note in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.124.
96. British Council talk, op.cit., 1962.
97. Roland Bowden, "Peter Lanyon and the Third Abstraction", re-printed in Modern Painters, Autumn 1993, volume 6 no.3, p.92.
98. Letter to Rosalie Mander, 1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.124.
99. Letter to John Dalton, 1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p. 124.
100. The Guardian, Friday August 8th 1997: South Crofty, Britain's last working tin mine, announced that it would close over the next six months. In the winter of 1998 the mine was given a reprieve and a consortium promised to start mining again in 1999.
101. Warren MacKenzie and David Lewis discuss "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", 21-22 July, 1984, TAV 365A, p.4.
102. Ronald Bottrall, Director of the Education, British Council, from the foreword to Paintings from Penwith, Peter Lanyon, 1950. Quoted in St Ives: 1963-64, Twenty-five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, Tate Gallery Publishing, revised edition, 1996, p.107.
103. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.8: "This ability to translate the two dimensions into three dimensions...was directly related to his ability to translate the three dimensions of the Cornish coast into the two dimensions of an aerial view..."



104. "The Nature of Painting", Athene, vol.8 no.3. April 1957.
105. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., MacKenzie reiterated that "Peter came to dinner many times" when interviewed by Andrew Lanyon for Peter Lanyon: Pottery and Postcards, Penzance, 1997.
106. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.4-5. The print described is Underground.
107. St Ives Times, 30th November 1951.
108. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.3. There is a slight variation in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon: Pottery and Postcards, Penzance, 1997: MacKenzie says that "we didn't sell a single print even though Peter and John Wells were artists with a reputation in England..."
109. Warren MacKenzie quoted in Peter Lanyon: Pottery and Postcards, op.cit., 1997.
110. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.4 & p.8
111. Ibid., p.2: "Bernard was very fond of Peter and also, I shouldn't say, antagonistic, but he was irritated with Peter. Peter was always making trouble in the Penwith and Peter was always trying to ginger things up so they were more exciting for himself..."
112. Bernard Leach, A Potter's Book, London 1940
113. Ibid., quoted in Edmund de Waal, Bernard Leach, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, pp.50-51
114. Ibid., p.73
115. Bernard Leach, op.cit., quoted in Edmund de Waal, op.cit., p.51.
116. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.8. "We were amazed to watch Peter construct with sheets of clay pots which he called "pasty pots". He rolled out a sheet of clay and then, after visualizing the pot he wanted to make, cut a free form shape which he then proceeded to fold, join, lift and squeeze until the piece stood complete, including handle if needed and footring as well." (Andrew Lanyon, Postcards and Pottery)
117. Andrew Lanyon, Postcards and Pottery, op.cit., "All we could do was try to explain how to make clay stick together and stand up to the firing."
118. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.8
119. Edmund de Waal, op.cit., p.73
120. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.9.
121. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.11.
122. Andrew Lanyon, Postcards and Pottery, op.cit., 1997. Another version of this account can be found in "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., pp.12-13: "We had 700 pots that had to be decorated and glazed...Peter was up and we were putting his pots in this firing and so I said to him: "Peter, got any brilliant ideas of how to decorate these?" and he said "Sure" and he picked up a brush and just painted some iron brush strokes on these cups and it was so lively and so wonderful and it exactly completed...it was exactly what was needed to complete the cups. It loosened them up. It enriched them and embellished the surface of the 3-dimensional form..."
123. "Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery", op.cit., p.13: "Peter was horrified at what Bernard would say about these awful things he was making and about his sneaking up there doing these things in the pottery and Bernard loved them and was very excited about them. Bernard would look at them and try to relate them back to the Orient. And then he would just say...they're not the same. but they're exciting." According to MacKenzie, Leach was perturbed by Lanyon's untaught fluency in articulating shapes and forms because "one has to struggle; one has to spend years of one's life doing this kind of thing and it wasn't occurring in this manner with Peter."
124. Ibid., "Bernard was disturbed that this man who was a painter taking to clay and painting on clay and doing things that were more exciting than many of the potters were doing at that time."
125. Ibid., p.14



## **Chapter Six**

# **TRANSPARENT TO TRANSCENDENCE: CELTIC, CLASSICAL AND CORNISH MYTHS**



## THE IMPORTANCE OF MYTH IN PLACE IDENTITY

Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were; it is a sequence of radically unchangeable gestures...Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change."<sup>1</sup>

Lanyon was attracted to ancient myths because they embody deep-lying truths and eternal symbols which express primitive fears and motivations, constant awareness of powerful forces in nature, and a recognition of the insecurities of life. Nietzsche spoke in The Birth of Tragedy about what he called "the mythless man" of the industrial west, who was fired by the energies of material progress but at the same time troubled by an immense nostalgia:

And now the mythless man stands eternally hungry, surrounded by past ages, and digs and grubs for roots, even if he has to dig for them among remotest antiquities...the tremendous historical need of our unsatisfied modern culture, the assembling around one of countless other cultures, the consuming demand for knowledge - what does all this point to, if not the loss of the mythical home, the mythical maternal womb?<sup>2</sup>

While most modern societies possess space by building and organising it mainly in terms of material objects and utilitarian functions, Lanyon's cognition and sense of place identity came from an exploration of myth. His art lays great emphasis on the spiritual and his interest in myth reflects his desire to overcome a sense of metaphysical homelessness in the modern world. Cornwall provided Lanyon with the foundation of his identity as an individual and the main source of his artistic inspiration. His attachment to the location was based on more than just past experiences and future expectations: he felt a profound and deep respect for the country - the earth, the sky, the gods and his Cornish ancestors.

Lanyon is a good example of the attempt by the modern artist to return to that state of consciousness which the Jungian psychologist, Erich Neumann, has called "participation mystique". Neumann - one of the most perceptive



Jungian commentators on art - has spoken of the "the breakdown of consciousness in modern art", a breakdown which carries the artist "backward to an all-embracing participation with the world." Neumann argues that such a return to the archaic qualities of "participation mystique" contains the "constructive, creative elements of a new world vision."<sup>3</sup> Lanyon's painting has its basis in a direct and empathetic response to the environment and unlike many of his contemporaries he did not see the archaic as irretrievably outdated and lacking in relevance. He came to rediscover and transmute the ancient feelings of "participation mystique", turning the empiricism of sight into a vision of primal simplicity, a feeling for the supernatural presence in things, and an intense empathy with his surroundings. He was very knowledgeable about the archaeology, mythology, "ancient and primitive" folklore, legend and earth mysteries of his native Cornwall and his art intimates a sense of resurrecting "a magical universe in which man no longer felt separated from all that lived."<sup>4</sup> The images that emerge in his painting have a depth "in history, in pressure in upthrust, in knowledge which is in our own racial background."<sup>5</sup>

Lanyon was familiar with George Frazer's The Golden Bough. This general treatise on primitive religion, superstition, the rule of the priesthood at Nem and the relationship between man and nature in primitive societies, clearly had a profound influence on Lanyon. He sensed how some of the more obscure mythical themes could have resonances with images rising up from his unconscious mind:

My concept of creative work was the surfacing of deep and almost unconscious memories, a kind of revelation on the surface...painting as much more an evocation of experience, an emergence more than a statement, a revelation more than an art...In painting gesture must attach itself and become its opposite to be cut and thrashed and extracted from a wealth of soil based and rooted.<sup>6</sup>

#### CORNISH ÉLAN VITAL

Lanyon's interest in myths and archetypal forms was given further stimulus



by his introduction to the vitalist philosophy of Henri Bergson and the German embryologist, Hans Driesch. According to Hayden Griffiths, he was introduced to Bergson and Driesch at the Bath Academy of Art at Corsham (where he taught between 1950 and 1957).<sup>7</sup> Lanyon found that Bergson's explanation of evolution in terms of "élan vital", a river of life flowing through generations, matched his own beliefs in the way Cornish identity had been formed.

Bergson's understanding of vitalism is dualistic: the world is divided into two disparate portions, on the one hand life, on the other hand inert matter. The whole universe is the clash and conflict of two opposite motions: life which climbs upward, and matter, which falls downward. Life is a single "creative evolutionary impulse", given once for all from the beginning of the world, acting on organic and inorganic matter, irrespective of intellect, with consciousness as "le principe moderne de l'évolution" driving it forward.<sup>8</sup> It is not difficult to grasp how a painter attracted to the Stokesian notion of the carving aspect as the concrete archetype of creativity might also be drawn to the idea of the "élan vital" struggling to break its way through matter, coaxing from it shapes and forms lying within.

Bergson saw an analogy between the dynamic properties of the "élan vital" and the processes involved in artistic creativity. "The artist", he wrote, creates a picture, "by drawing it from the depths of his soul...It is a vital process, something like the ripening of an idea".<sup>9</sup> His vitalism finds a clear parallel in Lanyon's painting: his subjective, expressive interpretations of the landscape are painterly equivalents of the animating "élan vital", connecting human and animal activity with the vitality of nature. The landscape provided Lanyon with inert matter which his own conscious creative impetus transformed into a work of art:

The painter is before his canvas, the colours are on the palette, the model is sitting - all this we see, and also the painter's style: do we foresee what will appear on the canvas? We possess the elements of the problem... but the concrete solution brings with it that unforeseeable nothing which is everything in a work of art. And it is this nothing which is everything in a work of art. The sprouting



and flowering of this form are stretched out on an unshrinkable duration which is one with their essence.<sup>10</sup>

This "unforeseeable nothing", the key ingredient in the alchemy of creativity, can only be reached through instinct and intuition rather than applied intelligence:

Instinct is sympathy. If this sympathy could extend its object and also reflect upon itself, it would give us the key to vital operations - just as intelligence, developed and disciplined, guides us into matter. For - we cannot too often repeat it - intelligence and instinct are turned in opposite directions, the former towards inert matter, the latter towards life...<sup>11</sup>

If Bergson's concepts are to be accepted, intuition should lead the artist to "the very inwardness of life". The existence of an aesthetic faculty is proof that it is possible to discover "the intention of life" without recourse to science: "in placing himself back with the object by a kind of sympathy, in breaking down, by an effort of intuition, the barrier that space puts up between him and his model",<sup>12</sup> the artist is able to discover the source of life itself. It seems very likely that Lanyon would have agreed with Bergson's exhortation:

...If intelligence is charged with matter and instinct with life, we must squeeze them both in order to get the double essence from them...If consciousness has thus to split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because of the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life.<sup>13</sup>

Lanyon understood this bifurcation of instinct and intellect. His paintings usually started with an impulse to action, an undefined want, created by his experiences or reactions to a particular place. Further exploration of place, topography, history and myth would allow Lanyon to release the image buried in his consciousness and thereby satisfy the creative impetus. Only by fusing intuition and intelligence was it possible to construct a painting containing the "essence of the experience...a full revelation".<sup>14</sup>



In Matter and Memory (1896) Bergson outlined a philosophical trajectory which confirmed the importance of the body as the centre of our perception. Pitting himself directly against the abstract emptiness of the Cartesian cogito, "I think, therefore I am", Bergson proposed that perception is shaped by the impact of lived experiences in the external world. Our consciousness, then, is always embodied perception conditioned through a filter of memory and anticipation. This notion, which anticipates Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenalist conception of the perceptual body and its environment as bound together into a single structure, might be compared to Lanyon's emotional and physical engagement with the Cornish landscape and his attraction to liminal experiences. The centrality of the sensate body in the gathering process for a painting meant that Lanyon's landscapes are open to an indefinite number of perspectival views which blend with one another according to the dictates of the composition.

Bergson's view of mathematical time as a form of space was very attractive to an artist whose paintings warn against the shibboleth that the only time we can recognise is one of linear progression. Bergson calls the time which is the essence of life the "duration". He argues that the isolated moment in time should not be considered a static point in reality; instead past and present must be considered as an evolutionary dialogue, one organic whole, and that to comprehend the present history should be considered as an active conditioner of contemporary events and subjective responses. It is only when "our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states" that a true understanding of time ("pure duration") can be reached.<sup>15</sup>

Lanyon recognised that the experience of the sacred and mythical dimension in life exists upon a plane fundamentally different from that of historical time-lines: he believed that his art was engaging in a creative dialogue between the past and present, time being subjected to the continuous flow of his mental and physical activity. Key passages in Bergson's writings seem to echo the central concerns in Lanyon's work:

When we add to the present moment those which have preceded it, as is the case when we are adding up units, we are not dealing with these moments themselves, since they have vanished for ever, but with



the lasting traces which they seem to have left in space on their passage through it.<sup>16</sup>

His paintings give expression to a temporal simultanism, a binary polarity which records the artist's presence in a painting, exploring his surroundings on foot, in a car or airborne in a glider, while the network of lines and emblems can also be read as the pictorial equivalents of historical remains embedded in the landscape - brought to the surface by an excavation of the unconscious. Lanyon believed in the persistence of a Cornish identity - a continuity in the historical and spiritual development of the region which could be discerned in its enduring myths. He felt that just as the individuality and distinctiveness of any one person endures from childhood to old age so the identity of a particular place can persist through external changes because there is some inner, hidden force - a "god within".

Drawing freely on imagery ranging from the pre-historic to the post-industrial, time and space are compacted to create composite symbols linking ancient Cornish fogous with nineteenth century tin mines. The poet, Frances Bellerby, put it well in some words of advice to artists in Cornwall when she wrote, "The bones of this land are not speechless and first you should learn their language".<sup>17</sup> Lanyon was fascinated by the ancient belief that the earth was a living being, and every rock, animal, tree, flower and fruit was imbued with the same spirit that flowed through men and women. His animism has much in common with goddess worship as the source of all creative life, continuity, growth and fertility. The paintings show a spiritual awareness of the shape and form of the land and the relationship of ancient religious sites to the land.

Lanyon also found support for his ideas in the work of the German embryologist, Hans Driesch, whose vitalist philosophy, a modification of Bergson's writing, gained a considerable following at Corsham: Driesch's first book, The Soul as an Elementary Principle of Nature, emphasised the importance of "entelechy", akin to the Aristotelian notion of the soul, a formative force which could explain "the phenomena of ontogenic development" and the existence of a "whole-making" factor in nature.<sup>18</sup> Driesch did not



specify the source or the form of this vital element of "energy" but believed that it exerted an underlying force controlling and acting upon all matter.<sup>19</sup> Lanyon's anthropomorphic treatment of natural forms can be seen as an attempt to provide imagery for the "entelechy" flowing through successive generations, peeling away the different layers of the landscape to reach Cornwall's generative pulse.

The Generation and Surfacing series suggest a kind of psychic geology, a mythic metamorphosing in which landscape proclaims a world of animistic myth. Lanyon's animism, allowing soul and spirit to inhere in all things - not just humanity - resulted from his intuition of an integrated, sacred dimension to life. His art takes us beyond the ego-centred consciousness and into the unitary realm of archetypal and transpersonal experience. Space is full of significance for Lanyon and the landscape, rather than being comprised of just physical and geological features, provides a record of mythical history in which the rocks, hills and trees could be experienced as sacred. He described the Generation Series as a "form of artistic homecoming....I started painting again, but it had changed. I had discovered something about myth".<sup>20</sup> Figurative and metaphoric images are combined in a compositional framework that allows many layers of meaning to emerge: the "inner form of mines and seeds", embryo and child, the mineral wealth encased in the protective womb of the earth, a belief in the potential of art to offer spiritual renewal - all these themes are explored in the early post-war paintings. The symbols and myths which are to be found in Lanyon's immediate post-war painting have much in common with the romanticism of much English landscape painting of the time: however, they were not devised as elements to provide a superficial stylishness but were a genuine attempt to re-discover a sense of place through highly personalised objective correlatives after the dramatic dislocations of the war.

The leitmotif of the Generation and the Surfacing series is the idea that the "inner" core of the Cornish landscape harbours a procreative essence, cocooned inside protective planal forms. This belief that forms and feelings drawn from the artist's subconscious mind should be projected into the visual symbols may have derived from Lanyon's "Bible", Adrian Stokes' Colour and Form. Stokes' theories about animism, a belief that all forms of organic



life have their origin in the soul, encouraged Lanyon to make use of archetypal symbols and folk-myths as part of his visual language to explore his own response to the landscape. He believed that the earth possessed a feminine character as mother and sustainer of natural life, while the sea, pressing against and violating the coastline represented a masculine element (illustrated in The Yellow Runner, Headland, Bojewyan Farms and Wheal Owles). The metaphysical interiors of Lanyon's landscapes reveal an interweaving of his psychological preoccupations with information drawn from particular aspects of his environment.

#### CELTIC AND PAGAN MYTHOLOGY

Lanyon's painting recalls Jung's famous dream while travelling with Freud in America. In the dream Jung was led down through layer after layer (and historical era after historical era) of a house. He eventually reached "a low cave cut into the rock, Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like the remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I awoke."<sup>21</sup> What the dream revealed to Jung was the layers of his psyche; the collective unconscious at work. It was thus of inestimable importance for the development of his ideas over the next half-century. Lanyon, although not a particularly intellectual painter, was familiar with Jungian psychology and his work broke the surface of consciousness in order to draw inspiration from ancient layers of imagery and imagination:

From Wicca to Levant the coastline emerges out of carns and bracken and cultivated greenland, revealing in its various forms a sea history and a land history of men within and without and a commerce of man with the weather. Here, in small stretch of headland, cove and Atlantic adventure, the most distant histories are near the surface as if the final convulsion of rock upheaval and cold incision, setting in a violent sandwich of strata, had directed the hide-and-seek of Celtic pattern. A motor-boat in some solemn gaiety with insistent cough searches out the exacted payment of ocean on land; the small rituals of business



at the junction of rock and sea wall.

On carns of Zennor, Hannibal and Galva, where giants may have hurled their googlies in mild recreation, an outline of earthwork makes evidence for a primitive brotherhood of man, of the great and small in life death wherein animal joy and terror found resolution in the protective care of monolith and fort. Hereabouts, perhaps, the sun sets westwards, shifting down the monolith to bury the light of primitive fire, and rose again in the hearts of men from the east. The saints were in Cornwall.

From Levant to Wicca, an easterly direction, chimneys are crowned by brick flourish and towers are lichen covered, castellated and pinnacled. They rise upward out of the horizontal ground as if the thrust of the stone had surfaced to the call of the native, given up its wealth to his endeavour, and been revealed by manufacture as an expression of inner intent. Invention, leading to extensions of native culture, made present in time a process of ancient development. The craft and skill and meaning of the native journey are outward and revealed at the land surface.<sup>22</sup>

This almost surreal word-scape provides startling testimony to Lanyon's complete involvement in the landscape of West Cornwall, a Bergsonian belief in the past and the present belonging to one organic whole and his awareness of an underlying significance to his art derived from symbols and images drawn from his unconscious. He was steeped in Cornish lores and myths - absorbed from an early age when a colourful cast of characters (such as Al<sup>o</sup>ysius Smith, the heavily bearded and eccentric Preston-born African explorer and merchant - better known as Trader Horn) would be invited into the family home, The Red House, on Sunday evenings. The Penwith peninsula provided Lanyon with a plethora of evidence for a Celtic golden age: megaliths and portal dolmens (such as Zennor Quoit), cliff castles, hill forts, carns (such as the great rocky outcrop of Carn Galva) stone circles (such as the Merry Maidens) and menhirs (such as the Men-an-tol near Morvah). The places described in the passage are imbued with Lanyon's idea of "genius loci" - a magical, spiritual world where primal forces released images



which merge the known with the unknowable.

There was nothing sentimental or romanticised in Lanyon's emotional reaction to the landscape, sharing to some extent John Heath-Stubbs' view of Cornwall after his first visit to Zennor:

This is a hideous and wicked country,  
Sloping to hateful sunsets and the end of time,  
Hollow with mine shafts, naked with granite, fanatic  
With sorrow. Abortions of the past  
Hop through these bogs; black-faced, the villagers  
Remember burnings by the hewn stones.<sup>23</sup>

Zennor feels very ancient indeed, and the Penwith moors above almost primeval in a landscape of strangely sculptured rocks and carns. Sacred sites are marked by standing stones either natural or deliberately placed: they seem to be placed in straight lines, a trail across the country as old as the stones themselves, which date from about 3000 BC. Some (for example, the Zennor stone row) seem shaped to reflect the female contours of Mother Earth. Others, like Lanyon Quoit - perhaps the monolith mentioned in the passage - were ancestral burial chambers where the spirits of the dead continued to watch over the living tribe. Close to Zennor there are a number of places which would have had spiritual significance to Lanyon's Neolithic and Bronze Age ancestors: Giant's Rock, where according to local legend, a person would be turned into a witch by circling the rock nine times at midnight (the nearby hamlet of Wicca may mean "the witchcraft" place).

Lanyon's feeling that past and present, moments and centuries, are all entangled and interwoven is illustrated in his treatment of Cape Family: generations of the same family are entombed in the standing stones of West Penwith. George Meredith observed that to the Celts the past is at their elbow continuously:

The past of their lives has lost neither face nor voice behind the shroud, nor are the passions of the flesh, nor is the animate soul,



wanting to it. Other races forfeit infancy, forfeit youth and manhood, with their quick progression to the wisdom age may bestow. These have each stage always alive, quick at a word, a scent, a sound, to conjure up scenes, in spirit and in flame.<sup>24</sup>

Paradoxically for an artist who prided himself on his Celtic forbears, the ancient standing stones of West Penwith pre-date by centuries the first arrival of the Celts. This however, did not trouble Lanyon who shared Robert Hunt's view that "the spirit of the Celts, possibly the spirit of yet older people, dwell amidst these rocks".<sup>25</sup>

Zennor Church contains a very ancient carving of a mermaid - the visual depiction of a legend that a local boy, Matthew Trewhella, had been enticed away into her watery realm. Along the coast, the hamlet of Morvah may be named after Morverch, meaning mermaids. Lanyon's interest in the legend and his knowledge of the bench carving in the church at Zennor is made apparent by a linocut, Mermaid (16 x 11in., 1948, Private Collection, Pl.72) which is a more expressive version of the medieval original (the mermaid seems to be wearing a mask similar to those worn by two of the figures in Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger). He returned to the local legend in Long Sea Surf (72 x 48in., oil on masonite, 1958, Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Pl.139) by conflating the local story ("in Cornwall we have a myth about a mermaid who does the seducing"<sup>26</sup>) with the myth of Europa ("the moment when the God disguised as a bull appears out of the sea and captures the girl").<sup>27</sup>

Lanyon's mention of giants hurling their "googlies" is another reference to a legend associated with the area: the giants Cormoran and his wife Cormelion were supposed to have endlessly reshaped the landscape with a giant hammer, tossing boulders from Trencrom Hill to their friends on St Michael's Mount, nestling in the waters of Mount's Bay off the south coast seven miles away. The tale hints at the ancient geomantic marking of the land which so intrigued Lanyon. According to legend, Cormelion was killed by a giant throwing the hammer from Trencrom Hill, and was buried beneath Chapel Rock, a solitary greenstone rock marking the beginning of the causeway to St Michael's Mount.



Lanyon's Trencrom (36 x 24in., oil on masonite, 1951, Private Collection, Pl.92) is, at first glance, a near abstract composition in tints of ivory, blue, grey, several shades of brown and a rich dark green. The painting has been subjected to razor-blade scraping and some rubbing which allows the background brown to establish a tonal unity over the composition. The work has strong affinity with Lanyon's earlier works (such as Godrevy Lighthouse, 1949, and Carthew, 1950), but hints at the beginning of a more expansive use of paint. The basic form of the composition allows numerous suggestions to surface - including the shape of a giant's head built up out of the weathered texture of Cornish stones. A visit to the rocky outcrop of precariously balanced boulders easily suggests the handiwork of giants.

He repeatedly returned to the idea of the rocks and boulders containing "a human history and meaning"<sup>28</sup> - most directly in Farm Backs and Boulder Coast (both 1952, Pl.109 and 110). These pictures turn their back on the pure, contemplative constructions of his wartime output and demonstrate a willingness to experiment with new and untried means to bring a fuller sense of place to his painting. The textures successfully evoke weathered stones, the weight of the boulder and the lichen that grows on the surface of the rock. The mossy greens, lichen yellows, granite greys are held in place by a strong sense of design mirroring the actual shapes of Cornish standing stones and boundary walls which mark the ancient division of land.

Lanyon's piece for The Cornish Review hints at the coming of Christianity - "burying the light of primitive fire...The saints were in Cornwall". During the 5th-7th centuries, Cornwall was visited by many Irish and Welsh holy men working as Christian missionaries. It was the custom of the Celtic Church to call all its missionaries and teachers "Saint", a distinction showing that they were men and women of eminent virtue, holy people preaching Christian doctrines. Although few were canonised by the Catholic Church, it is said that there are more saints in Cornwall than there are in heaven! Christianity was not instantly accepted and for many years it co-existed with a very active paganism. It was often claimed by Rome that Celtic Christianity was just an extension of Celtic Druidism. Indeed, in Celtic literature the "saints" of the Celtic Church are sometimes said to be "druids"



as well as churchmen. Not surprisingly, in AD 601 Pope Gregory instructed his envoy to Britain not to destroy pagan temples and customs and to assimilate them into the new religion. In parts of Cornwall aspects of pagan faith, myths and legends lingered on until comparatively recently and it is arguable whether all the pre-Christian ways and beliefs were ever completely eradicated. Pagan legends often became attached to the lives of the saints and many of the Christian feast days coincide with the ancient Celtic festivals (Imbolc - St. Iudgvan, St. Euny, St. Ives; Beltane - St. Teath, St. Ewe, St. Buryan; Lughnasad - St. Germoe, St. Neot, St. Sinnius; Samhain - St. Gwithian, St. Just, St. Winnoc).<sup>29</sup>

The Celts freely mixed many pre-Christian traditions and social concepts into their Christianity, which thus developed as a distinctive culture. Lanyon was acutely conscious of this rich blend of Christian belief and pagan ritual. Although professing to be a Christian,<sup>30</sup> his paintings contain references to much earlier beliefs in primal deities, personifying the sacred quality of Cornwall as the Goddess of the Land. Pre-Christian idols and myths co-exist and merge with Christian beliefs as Lanyon explores the inter-changeability of ideas and faith.

Lanyon's fusion of the beliefs of the distant past with the religion in which he was educated by his parents and at Clifton College resulted in an essentially eclectic philosophy. The concept of an earth Goddess presiding over the life spirit of the land, providing the impulse for birth, fulfillment, decay, death and then rebirth was at least as attractive to him as the liturgical cycle of the Christian calendar: Prelude (Pl.58) combines ideas of mining with an animistic earth giving life to an embryo; Generation (Pl.59) is the culmination of Lanyon's first post-war series and reflects his interest in the sexualised mythology of artistic creativity. The mother and child, echoing the curving transparency of Gabo's sculpture, suggest not only a Christian Virgin and Child but also the regenerative power of the fertile Mother Goddess in nature healing after the trauma of war.

Bojewyan Farms (Pl.105) could be given both a Christian and a pagan gloss (although the pagan symbolism seems stronger); it is a painting about the



annual cycle of birth, life and death. The barrel-bodied figure of rustic contentment which dominates the "Life" section of the painting (on the left) might well represent the "Green Man", a fertility god from the depths of pre-history, commemorated by people dressing up in bucolic garb for the Celtic festival of Imbolc, the first stirrings in the womb of Mother Earth, and later Christianised into Candlemass and the Feast of St Ives (1st February). It is an interesting and perhaps significant coincidence that there is a field called "The Green Man" at Tregerthen, close to the hamlet of Bojewyan.

The "Death" panel can also be seen in terms of pagan ritual and belief patterns. Lanyon described this section as "the chaff which comes from corn and harvesting". Although there is an element of this in the panel, a more pronounced image is that of a reaper in the foreground, bending over and holding a sheaf of corn. It is possible that the reaper - the "Death" panel - represents Balder, a figure from Celtic-Breton mythology who died when the mistletoe in the bough of an oak tree was cut. The animal in the central section of Bojewyan Farm resembles a cow or bull, creatures used to embody the corn-spirit in certain primitive societies. At the end of harvest gathering a ritual would take place called The Crying of the Neck (revived this century by the Old Cornwall Society): the reaper who cut the last sheaf of corn - the neck - would cry out "I aven - I aven". The neck would be hung up and decorated for it was supposed to contain the spirit of the harvest, the Grain Goddess herself, and later became worked into the mysterious figure of the corn dolly. This custom was also widespread throughout Europe and represents the death of the vegetation goddess ready for her rebirth in Spring in the sprouting of the new corn. Lanyon certainly knew of this tradition - as is demonstrated in this 1952 letter to Ivon Hitchens in which he paraphrases The Golden Bough while venting his spleen at art critics searching for hidden symbolism in his painting:

Let them find faces and arses and anything else they want to in our pictures! They are all like Isis searching the middle east for the bones of Osiris...and what they find is exemplified in the festival of the corn where in Cornwall we "Cry the Neck". "I aven - I aven"



(I have it) they cry and hold aloft the best bundle - all is the phallus and if our critics were not so nervous they would find them more frequently in paintings.<sup>31</sup>

The connection between the pharaonic myth of Osiris and the corn spirit can be found in The Golden Bough: primitive thought sees a connection between the dead who are laid into the ground, and vegetation, which rises from it. Thus Osiris, who was murdered by his brothers, torn into fourteen pieces and scattered up and down the land, is also a mythical expression for the sowing of the seed. Lanyon's awareness of the identity of Isis is revealed as early as 1948 when he recognised the figurative forms generated by the promptings of his unconscious (Isis, 11 x 8in., oil on board, 1948) as the mother goddess archetype who pieced together the fragments of Osiris' body with the help of her sister Nephthys and the jackal-headed Anubis. He returned to the myth when he was painting St Just and described the miners killed in the Levant man-engine accident in terms which recall the slain Osiris (in Egypt the corn-spirit was represented by a human victim whom the reapers slew on the harvest-field):

St Just is full of dogs, remember the god Anoubis (sic) who descended in canine form to be a catalyst at the wedding, welding together the bits of Osiris, that is what my crucifixion is about, the underrated, undisturbed, and reviving in the open square of St Just.<sup>32</sup>

This passage reveals the complexity and eclecticism of Lanyon's thoughts: casting himself as Isis, a figure of reparation, he brought together historical tragedy, ancient myth and Christian symbolism.

The strongest Christian imagery is perhaps found in St Just (Pl.99) with the mineshaft doubling as a cross and the barbed wire round the disused mine a crown of thorns. Lanyon described two narrow vertical paintings, Green Mile (Pl.102) and Harvest Festival (Pl.100) as landscapes and "mourners on either side of the cross".<sup>33</sup> Another painting which owes its existence largely to Christian inspiration is Sarascinesco (Pl.120), inspired by Lanyon's visit to the Italian hill town in 1954: "The underlying story is, I think, the flight into Egypt and the return and eventual journey



to Jerusalem on an ass."<sup>34</sup> However, paintings which derive from the same trip - such as Primavera (Pl.119) and Europa (Pl.118) - owe their existence to pagan inspiration and myth. Lanyon's painting conjures a world of archaic, polytheistic and multivalent dimensions where humanity and the world participate in each other once more. Christian and pre-Christian imagery flows seamlessly into a mythopoeic vision which senses the presence of soul and spirit in all things.

In the Iron Age the main type of ritual monument was the "fogous". Unlike the souterrains of Ireland and Scotland, the fogous of Cornwall are underground chambers, reached by passing through curved passageways. They were primarily used for ritual and ceremonial purposes and may have been entered at defining moments - conception, birth, initiation, sickness or death. Another suggestion is that they were the places where shamans could contact the spirit world and where vision and dreams could more easily be experienced and interpreted. It seems likely that fogous represented ritual passages and womb-like chambers connected with the worship of an Earth Mother-goddess. Recent archaeological discoveries have connected the Cornish fogou with astrological beliefs (entrances tend to be directed towards the rising or setting midsummer sun) and with underground mineral lodes. Entering them is like going into "a dark dank cave of pulsating energies where unexpected things can occur".<sup>35</sup>

Lanyon cannot have been unaware of the Pendeen fogou and references to these underground chambers abound in his art: the "primitive enclosure" at Gunwalloe in the Yellow Runner (1946, Pl.51) is described by Lanyon as representing a "stockade as womb" with the eponymous runner acting as the "fertilising agent";<sup>36</sup> the mysterious and sexually suggestive glowing centre of Construction in Green (1947, Pl.61) is redolent of the idea of a regenerative core providing impetus for the eternal cycle of life; more figuratively, the chamber in The Returned Seaman (20 x 28in., hand coloured linocut, 1949, Pl.79) is guarded by the over-arching figure of the female, watched passively by the male who doubles usefully as a harbour wall. Male and female forms are linked through the linear umbilical cords which stretch from hand to shoulder and foot to foot. The horse enclosed in an inner compartment acts as a messenger linking male and female forms. Implicit in the iconography is the idea of a womb in the body of a fertile Mother Goddess, the giver and nourisher of life.



Lanyon's interest in Cornish myths and legends is often fused with known facts concerning the surrounding geology, geography and topography: the male/sea and female/earth analogy is an example of the way folklore derives from observation of the natural world. The sea continues to erode the coastline, changing the contours of the landscape. Submerged forests around the Cornish coast (most famously at Mount's Bay), dating back to the end of the last Ice Age (about 10,000 years ago), are often laid bare when winter storms wash away the sand to reveal roots and stumps. From earliest times inhabitants of Cornwall have been faced with evidence of inundations and lost lands. Professor Charles Thomas' archaeological research into the submergence of the Scilly Isles has shown that the islands remained a unitary block until perhaps as late as the eleventh century.<sup>37</sup> The islands in their present state are the surviving hills of a much larger land area now submerged in the Atlantic. For Professor J. Markdale, an appreciation of these sea incursions is fundamental to an understanding of classical Celticity and its Creation Myth: "this myth founded as it is on historical facts forms the last barrier to our understanding of the whole mystique of the Celts".<sup>38</sup>

It is possible that the progressive sea-incursion of the Scillies in historic times perpetuated the much older folk-memory inundations alluded to in Lanyon's Generation and Surfacing series paintings. He always maintained a fascination for painting "places where solids and fluids come together" and it is hardly surprising that he should regard the sea as the male element and the land as the female element in paintings such as Offshore (1959, Pl.144). Another possible interpretation for Lanyon's interest in places where the sea had forcibly entered the land derives from his interest in the history of Cornish mining and the frequent tragedies which accompanied the attempts to extract minerals from below the sea-bed.

Lanyon frequently made use of the horse as an allegorical messenger, a link between the past and the present, and as a metaphoric symbol of the physical relationship between male and female. His Romantic viewpoint is highlighted in the following poem, written in 1950:<sup>39</sup>

IN THE SIDE OF MY EYE  
I SAW A HORSE,  
MY ANCESTOR HORSES  
MY BROTHERS IN WISDOM.

I WILL RIDE NOW  
THE BARREN KINGDOMS  
IN MY HISTORY  
AND IN MY EYE.



FROM THE ISLAND OF MY RACE  
IS THE HORSE'S HOOF  
BEATING TERRIFIED  
BY A VISION IN THE SKY.

MY BOAT TAKES ME  
TO THE ISLAND AND I  
IN MY JOURNEY RIDE  
AGAIN  
MY ANCESTRAL HORSE.

Numerous prehistoric hillside carvings testify to the great significance of the horse to the Celts. Epona, or Rhiannon, were horse-goddesses identified as divine protectresses of mortal horses as well as the spiritual essence of the horse itself. Horse imagery is particularly important in Lanyon's post-war period of high Romanticism: Blue Horse Truant (1945) and The Yellow Runner (1946) share equine iconography: the horse serves as a symbol of the creative artist, virility, and a creature living in harmony with nature.

In Lanyon's poem the horse is seen as the guardian of a collective wisdom and a messenger able to transport the artist back to an ancestral "Celtic Cornwall". His references to the "barren kingdoms" could allude to the exploitation and over-mining that transformed West Cornwall from being one of the most prosperous centres of the Industrial Revolution into the eerie wasteland of abandoned mining works and engine houses which today litter the Penwith peninsula. The elegiac mood is reflected in paintings such as St Just (1952-53) and Bojewyan Farms (1952) which reveal the extent of Lanyon's regret at the passing of a way of life in Cornwall as he witnessed the closure of mines and the abandonment of uneconomic farms.

Lanyon twice refers to the "island" of his forefathers, returning there by boat in the third stanza: an echo, perhaps of the Lyonesse myth, an island between the Land's End peninsula and Scilly, mentioned in the fifteenth century by Malory in the Morte d'Arthur, which disappeared in a terrible storm and from which there was only one survivor, Trevelyan, who escaped to the mainland on a white horse.<sup>40</sup> Richard Carew's Survey of Cornwall of 1602 gave the legend a further boost when he explained Cornwall's peculiar geography by stating that "the encroaching sea hath ravined from it the county of Lyonesse there was these proofs as are yet remaining".<sup>41</sup> By the nineteenth century the Lyonesse myth had become inextricably entwined with the Arthurian legend. In Tennyson's The Passing of Arthur the dying king is rowed from Penwith to spend his last days in an indeterminate



Lyonnesse in the far west to join the other illustrious Celts already buried there: "...the sunset bound of Lyonnesse - a land of old upheaven from the abyss..."<sup>42</sup> Perhaps unconsciously Lanyon had already given expression to this idea when he painted The Yellow Boat (1947/8, Pl.70), the vessel sheltering in a dark, womb-like cavity, the landscape protected from further inundation by the rounded, breast-like hill. The terrifying vision in the sky could be an allusion to Lanyon's experiences in the R.A.F. during the war and his fascination with flying. The defenceless and naked male figure standing by the side of the text acts as both an autobiographic and a collective human symbol.

#### ANTICOLI CORRADO AND SARASCINESCO

Lanyon became interested in Greco-Roman myths as motifs for some of his paintings from the mid-1950s. In January 1953 he began a three month stay at the studio Cicarelli, Anticoli Corrado, in the foothills of the "great maternal hills" of the Abruzzi (the part of the Appenines which most suggests a country of high mountains). He was on a scholarship awarded by the Italian government. This visit brought him into contact with a region where myths, legends and primitive gods still seemed to resonate with the rhythm of life and local beliefs. These myths of antiquity possessed the potential for fresh human allegory, particularly useful for binding together the content and form of his non-Cornish paintings into a language of universal significance. From Anticoli he was able to travel up to the remote and inaccessible village of Sarascinesco:

I am here in the mountains and beginning to work...here the women are all beautiful and the country promising and I propose to get a horse and see the place that way. Very cold and primitive...what a place this is, I shall either paint or bust and I am staying for three months. There is a monastery town not far from here and Rome is 40 miles away so I can either go religious or Romantic - but probably the results will be tuppence coloured Lanyons - longer and thinner and stickier than ever.<sup>43</sup>

In fact the primitive charm of Anticoli did produce a change in his work and inspired several important, chromatically charged paintings which combine the romantic with the spiritual. His experience of the Italian landscape was as direct, complete and unselfconscious as his involvement with his native Cornwall: "the place is like Cornwall - living on a rich historic past".



The paintings, completed on his return to England in March 1953, are characterised by a greater variety in the material handling of paint, stronger use of colour, the elimination of superfluous figuration and a clearer sense of design. The calligraphy and brushstrokes are vigorous and fluid, more expressive of area and mass and he finally abandoned building up paint surfaces only to scrape them down again later. The subdued tonality, veils of restraint, reticence and understatement typical of much British art of the 1950s were replaced by the hot colours, blue skies, sharp shadows and loud voices of the Mediterranean.

Artists had been attracted to Anticoli Corrado's medieval buildings, picturesque views and classical associations since the beginning of the nineteenth century. The place had achieved an even greater popularity because the men and women of the village were prepared to pose nude for paintings. An artists' colony was established which specialised in pursuing the ideal of the classical landscape with a new romantic sensibility. By the 1880s a group of artists, calling themselves "In Arte Libertas", led by Nino Costa, had established themselves in the village. Inspired by a Ruskinian vision of art, they represented the avant garde and the bohemian current in Italian art which opposed the official "pompiere" tradition. Their vision of art could be described as a form of magical realism. The timeless and mysterious landscape of the Campagna Romana, populated by both mortals and gods, is expressed in terms of a belief in the immanence of the divine within creation. The importance of the village as a centre of Italian modernism continued after the First World War, serving as a base for the Roman School, the most complex and interesting current of Italian art in the 1930s.<sup>44</sup>

It is not difficult to see how the sublime perfection of Anticoli Corrado enchanted Lanyon so that it became his equivalent of David Bomberg's Spanish muse, the Andalucian town of Ronda. The drawings he made were later used to produce large, metamorphic and colourful paintings like Primavera (1953) and Europa (1954). Visits to the artists' museum (founded in 1935), his observation of the sharpness of classical forms and the clarity of the Mediterranean light, led him to employ a more intense use of colour and become less dependent on the limited tonal range of the Cornish works produced between 1950 and 1953. His interest in pantheism was reawakened by the beauty and vitality of the region and the harmonious balance which regulated man's



position in nature: I was fascinated by this strange human-animal relationship...where people sometimes sleep near the animals for warmth in winter".<sup>45</sup> This was the same co-existence of human settlement, animal husbandry and natural geography that he had discovered fifteen years earlier in South Africa.

### SARASCINESCO

One of the most important pictures to have been inspired by his sojourn in Italy was Sarascinesco (50 x 48in., oil on masonite, 1954, City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth, Pl.120), a small walled town about 2,000 feet above Anticoli Corrado:

Sarascinesco is a walled town with a wall running all round as it does in the picture. The stone is limestone, which isn't as hard as Cornish granite, and it's a different colour. In fact, the most Italian quality in the painting is the colour, for the place itself is rather like Cornwall which is probaby why I went there. In Sarascinesco mules and panniers are used to carry food and feeding stuffs for animals up to the village, which is cut off for most of the winter by snow and ice. The animals come into the picture, especially in the left-hand section.<sup>46</sup>

His description of the place shows that his experience of the Italian landscape was as direct, complete and unselfconscious as his involvement with his native Cornwall. He distinguished elements, bound together but identifiable nevertheless, that form the basic material out of which he fashioned the identity of the Italian hill town: the physical setting high up in the Abruzzi mountains, the limestone curtain wall, the quality of light, the mules and panniers hauling supplies up to the village during the winter. These elements are integrated in a compositional alchemy that echoes the way the painter's materials - each irreducible to the other - combine to form the image on the masonite. He left copious notes describing the laborious preparation of materials deployed in the painting:

Prepared on rough side by ammonia washing and application of three



coats of gesso. Rabbit skin glue - whiting zinc oxide composition. Pigments (supplied by L. Cornelisson and Son, London) ground in stand oil and turpentine (Windsor and Newton). Gold leaf transfer applied with resinous turpentine. Whites: white lead and zinc oxide 74% to 25%. Varnished 1956.<sup>47</sup>

The broad sweeps of paint and scribbles that appear on the picture surface make it seem that Lanyon arrived at these forms freely and directly, belying the structural cogency and painterly finesse which produced this work of unusual quality and power.

In Sarascinesco nature's materiality has been transformed into a highly organised painting of devotional, rhythmic and tactile power. The painting demonstrates Lanyon's characteristic interweaving of physical observation, mythology and personal experience into a unity which somehow captures the essence of place and the activities of the people whose place it is.

The journey to Sarascinesco took two hours walking across valleys. The track was used by mules carrying wood and by shepherds. It followed mostly a ridge which gave a magnificent view over the Abruzzi mountains to the north. Sarascinesco rose like a pyramid above this ridge, the town being built on this summit. I was reminded of the countryside between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The mule and the mountains, ridge and colour of high places are all suggested in the picture...There are references to primitive Italian painting, particularly in the colour.<sup>48</sup>

Lanyon broke with the idea that the landscape should consist of single perspective views. Instead, he compresses physical setting, human activity and symbolic meaning into a multi-perspectival, but essentially flat structure. The relative weighting of each component is of considerable importance in establishing the identity of this particular place. The Flight into Egypt, Sarascinesco's "rich historic past" and the legend that "it is said to be the last town of the Saracens or to have had a Saracen king like the Swedish King Corrado of Anticoli" (he discovered this on a visit to the Etruscan museum in Rome), the "heraldic" qualities of the colours,



echoes of "the joust" and the animals needed for survival through the winter months - all are brought into the painting literally and metaphorically.<sup>49</sup>

The reference to the countryside between Jerusalem and Bethlehem is characteristic of Lanyon's associative style of finding imagery - he had stayed in Jerusalem for ten days in June 1942 while he was stationed in Palestine.<sup>50</sup> Lanyon fuses topography and appearance, economic functions and social activities, to create a profoundly personal metaphysical alchemy of the spirit of Sarascinesco.

The Biblical references, "the underlying story" of the flight into Egypt and return to Jerusalem, can perhaps most easily be understood in terms of Mary and Joseph moving across a stage-like composition encased by the town's protective curtain wall. Mary, dressed in her characteristic blue and wearing a yellow shawl, reaches out to a Christ-like figure to the right. Her dramatic movement towards her son distantly resembles St John's passionate gesture of despair as he bends forward, arms extended sideways, to gaze at Christ's lifeless body in Giotto's The Mourning of Christ. Joseph is less clearly defined and partially obscured by Mary: a line of red paint demarcates his olive-green tunic from the scumbled paint of the surrounding countryside. His physiognomy is indistinct, a boulder-like shape represents his face which is framed by some cursive brushstrokes resembling a Middle Eastern head-dress. He appears to be leaning on a staff. The elongated Christ-figure is evoked by parallel horizontal strokes to suggest ribs (in the manner used to suggest the crucified figure in St Just). His body lies flat and motionless against the edge of the picture in a way which suggests that Lanyon was thinking, however unconsciously, of a deposition rather than a crucifixion.

Lanyon's compositional handling of the narrative - guiding the viewer up the left-hand side of the painting, round the top, and down the right-hand side is the same sort of visual journey used by Wallis in his "undifferentiated" cartography of remembered places.<sup>51</sup> The painting is full of movement, either depicted literally with broad sweeping brushstrokes or emblematically, through allusion to unrestricted lateral movement across the surface. The latter was first seen in White Track (1939), an early Nicholson inspired construction "concerned with stretching the surface



by leading the eye across a diagonal and into a centrifugal orbit."<sup>52</sup> Lanyon admitted to being influenced by "primitive Italian painting" (before he left for Anticoli he wrote "Giotto, Cimabue and the Italian landscape will I hope restore the colour to me").<sup>53</sup> Giotto's paintings often seem to be conceived as though they were being acted on a stage and there is a theatrical quality to Lanyon's *dramatis personae* which recalls Giotto's Flight into Egypt. The dominant cool light blue is found in a number of paintings much admired by Lanyon and his early mentors, Nicholson and Stokes.

The transformative, mythopoeic power of the villages in the Abruzzi mountains inspired other paintings on Lanyon's return to England: Primavera (28 x 28in., oil on masonite, 1954, Private Collection, Pl.119) was painted from a memory of Sarascinesco in early spring, before the snow was gone, when the village was brightened with dwarf cyclamens and the young girls of the village wore colourful dresses for the Festival of Spring. Lanyon channels this abundance of sensual energy into a celebration of the wholeness of the natural world. His art combines the objectivity of sight with the subjectivity of sensations in order to realise a harmony parallel to that of nature. Primavera is a long joyous hymn to spring, revealing the reawakening of the spirit after the long sleep of winter. Blocks of colour - yellows, reds, greens, blues and whites - help form the central image of a colourfully dressed figure moving across the frontal plane, bringing great vertical slabs of thickly applied yellow in its train, spring's regeneration transforming the dull green and grey landscape of the Abruzzi mountains.

Lanyon's ability to "dwell poetically on earth"<sup>54</sup> amounted to a kind of religious communion with the spiritual forces in the landscape:

Anticoli was a struggle with the elements; landscape, sex and death... The drums of a 6am. funeral oscillating a shutter in the cold winter morning, the challenge of the farmyard (the bantam on guard) and hollow windows in a piled up community and the advancing mountains behind in the air, the before-breakfast mountains - wolf teeth of the Roman provinces: and the reverse of the medal, Cornwall inside-out.<sup>55</sup>



He transports the viewer into a vibrant domain which seeks to replenish the poetic heart of existence by conjuring different layers of symbolism, Christian and pre-Christian, into an ecumenical work of almost shamanic transformation.

### EUROPA

No one aware of the dates of such paintings as Europa (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1954, Private Collection, Pl.118) or Blue Boat and Rainstorm (1954) can fail to recognise that Lanyon's stay in Italy had acted as a catalyst for change in his art. Paintings produced on his return to England generally demonstrate a much stronger range of colours, clearer and simpler images with enlarged individual areas freed from extraneous details. His renewed interest in the close association of woman and landscape in art is reflected in paintings like Europa, a nude-landscape.

The reclining girl, her head balanced on her arm (the elbow points downward into the surface of the bed or couch which supports her), is redolent of Giorgione's Sleeping Venus. Giorgione's naked goddess rests in country surroundings, her very relaxation a tribute to the harmony found in nature. The potent density of the expansive passage of whitish-brown at the centre of Europa could be a tribute to Giorgione's fluid virtuosity in painting glowing textures of flesh. It suggests that all possible alternatives have been tried, digested and then superseded in the final clearing away gesture which has produced this area. This analogy between the female figure and the landscape is echoed in Lanyon's painting:

For me this is a story about primitive life, about living among the animals. A God comes to Europa in the form of a beautiful white bull, and from their union the Minotaur is born. This seemed to me the most appropriate myth for this district where people sometimes sleep near the animals for warmth in winter. I was fascinated by this strange animal-human relationship; it is something very basic...In the painting the scene is set in the landscape, and the figures could be rocky boulders. The forms of the girl and the bull are all mixed



up with the heads on the left side. The red colour comes from the primitive habit of hanging out a red blanket after nuptials.<sup>56</sup>

In the painting the figure of Europa and the bull are seen as large rocky shapes, the reclining form of the girl, partly concealed by a red blanket, is united with the massive form of the bull. He conflated the legend of Europa, carried away by Zeus in the form of a bull to Crete, where she bore him three sons, Minos, Rhadamanthys and Sarpedon, with the story of Minos' wife, Pasiphae, whose sexual coupling with another white bull produced the half-man, half-bull Minotaur.

The merging of Europa and the bull to encapsulate Lanyon's experiences in the mountain towns of Anticoli Corrado and Sarascinesco provided him with a good analogy for the fusion of the figure and landscape: the inspiration may have been Mediterranean, but limbs and body seem articulated in terms of Cornish field-patterns.

I became interested in the myth of Europa in Italy. The white bull referring to the animals of Anticoli and the girl to the shore of Cornwall. Since this painting my work has returned frequently to the shore as female and the sea as male.<sup>57</sup>

Lanyon had used identification between landscape and female figure, the sea and masculinity, in earlier paintings belonging to the Generation and Surfacing series. According to a letter from William Scott, head of the painting department at Corsham, Lanyon availed himself of the plentiful supply of willing nude models at the Bath Academy to draw and sketch studies for the Europa figure in preference to painting the surrounding Wiltshire landscape which he found uninspiring.<sup>58</sup> It may seem paradoxical that Lanyon disregarded the numerous drawings of voluptuous nudes when he reduced the figure of Europa to a few totemic lines moving across the middle of the picture. This, however, would be to misunderstand the purpose of Lanyon's investigative techniques before laying down the final image:

These myths have always fascinated me, probably from living in an old country. I have actually painted three nudes of a specific person, but my nudes are much more concerned with nakedness than nudity. The



drawings I do I think are concerned probably with nakedness certainly, but also with sexuality. I think there's a certain sort of beauty in the nude woman which I want to try and get in these drawings. When they go through the longer process of painting the woman might become a mountain or something as remote as that. Eventually, I might be able to produce nakedness as the sensation of oneself against the impossible weather. It is information about certain sensuous qualities that I'm after.<sup>59</sup>

It is possible that Lanyon's transformations of his classical drawings of the human figure into the complementary forms of the landscape might have been influenced by the work of Marie-Christine Treinen, a French student at Corsham, whose Dubuffet-influenced drawings of the human figure were widely admired by many of the tutors at Corsham. Margaret Garlake has speculated that Lanyon might have encountered Treinen's squat representations of the human body before he left for Italy in early 1953. The female figure in Europa and other works of this period certainly bear some stylistic affinity with Treinen's stick-limbs and crude rectangular torsos topped with roughly drawn circles for heads.

Causey claims that the Europa story "can be interpreted as a seasonal myth - the abduction of spring"<sup>60</sup> and relates it to the speed with which life returns to the remote hill town communities after the spring thaw. If this is correct Europa can be interpreted as a classically inspired equivalent of the Celtic-pagan Bojewyan Farms. Certainly Lanyon found in the legend a way forward in his painting, using the Europa myth to match the sensuous qualities of the Italian landscape and simplify the compositional complexities of the earlier painting: there is breadth in the use of colour, the overall impact is more abstract and the process of elimination more decisive.

Lanyon continued to develop his interest in the metamorphosis of the nude into the landscape ("in painting the woman might become a mountain or something as remote as that")<sup>61</sup> by exploring the countryside from a high aerial perspective and by employing looser, gestural and more spontaneous brushwork. He returned to the same compositional format on numerous occasions



to find a solution to "the problem of the figure in the landscape"<sup>62</sup>, most obviously in Beach Girl (42 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.163), Salome (60 x 48in., oil on canvas, Private Collection, Pl.167) and Orpheus (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Premio Marzotti Institution, Valdagno, Pl.165) - all figures in landscapes:

Orpheus and Salome are all concerned with love and death. The Beach Girl with life: a rolling picture referring back to the Europa of 1954.<sup>63</sup>

There is a fundamental consistency between these works and earlier nude landscapes such as Europa. The enclosed shapes and figures of the earlier paintings have given way to a more relaxed sensuousness and openness of form. The suggestion of human forms - Beach Girl's "blonde girls on sandy beaches"<sup>64</sup> and Salome's "a figure in landscape, sited on moorhills of West Penwith"<sup>65</sup> - has been enlarged to fill out the entire picture surface. Although lighter in tone, the structure of these paintings, formed into compartments by vertical and horizontal divisions and broad swathes of thick paint, recall the succinctness and unity of Europa.

#### SEARCHING IN THE ANIMAL KINGDOM: PLASTER CONSTRUCTIONS

Shortly after returning from Anticoli Corrado, Lanyon made a plaster sculpture of a donkey (Pl.112). This was soon followed by three constructions modelled in plaster to assist the painting Europa. What is so remarkable is how much more naturalistic the sculptures appear than their pictorial counterparts (or any of the preceding constructions). It may be that Lanyon's new interest in sculpture which articulated solid mass rather than space arose from a need to surround himself with objects that forcefully reminded him of the primitive charms of Anticoli and his studio by the side of a track which led to Saracinesco further up the Abruzzi mountains to the north.

Since time immemorial objects based on animal figures have been dignified as symbolic conduits of man's spiritual needs. Lanyon surrounded himself



with intercessors that could take him beyond an ego-centred consciousness and return him to Anticoli Corrado's unitary reality of archetypal and primal experience. He had found it difficult to re-adjust to life in St Ives on his return from Italy. A letter to Lady Mander written a few days after arriving home is splenetic about "the foreign pilers up of culture and art" who were preparing for the St Ives Festival in June 1953 to celebrate the Queen's Coronation with art exhibitions and musical performances:

I came home last Saturday and have been avoiding the cold showers of St Ives so that I shall not get drowned before the flood (that is the Festival or as Sheila calls it "the Squatters' Concert"). My Arrarat [sic] is still blessedly unsullied by the swill probably because I am still part Italian. I am not all declared at the Tamar frontier, some bits of me are still with Bergman in Rome...attached to some haphazard beast in Anticoli. I have been letting my toes get wet a bit at a time and the water is surprisingly turgid.<sup>66</sup>

By moulding the plaster, embedding into it while it was still wet and delineating form with a knife, Lanyon was able to create a physical presence that embodied some of the classical ideas explored in the paintings. He was acutely sensitive to what one might call the "presence" of an object and these plaster sculptures tell us something about the alchemy of transformation which would find explicit expression in the paintings.

It could be argued that the plaster models allowed him to re-create in the studio the experience of "living close to the animals"<sup>67</sup> and were objects which were essential to the creative potency of Saracinesco, Europa and Primavera. Their presence released a plethora of associational imagery: the bull inspired Lanyon to think of the Europa myth while the donkey inspired the underlying narrative of the flight into Egypt, the eventual return to Jerusalem on an ass, as well as bringing back memories of the mules and panniers which would transport food and fuel up to the village of Saracinesco in the winter months.

The largest of the Europa sculptures (Construction for Europa, 47 x 21 x 18in., plaster, 1954, Private Collection, Pl.115) has been given a bathetic



pair of horns which echo the handle bars of Picasso's 1943 bicycle-bull sculpture, Bull's Head (bronze cast of handlebars and seat of a bicycle, Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris). Interviewed in 1963, Lanyon recalled that he made the construction before he started the painting and "the girl is enclosed by the bull. That part should be made of aluminium and the bull shape outside of bronze."<sup>68</sup> A loosely drawn sketch, Europa on Bull (17 x 13in., gouache on paper, Pl.114 fig.2) illustrates the intertwining of forms as Zeus, disguised as a bull and garlanded with flowers, ambling down to the edge of the sea with Europa on its back. Lanyon repeated the fusion of the white bull and female form in the painting, subsuming the horizontal female figure into the fleshy mass of the bull. Europa Bull (27 x 20 x 20in., plaster and stained glass, 1954, Pl.116) was a sculpture of the headless torso of the bull with Europa's hapless face carved into the hollow of its stomach. This clumsy union of forms was destroyed by the artist. A third construction, Europa Shore (16 x 9 x 9in., plaster, 1954, Private Collection, Pl.117), relates to the moment when Zeus (the darker mass) swims away while Europa (the white form that is being engulfed) looks back in terror at the receding shore.

Once finished the paintings were sent to Lanyon's London dealer, Gimpel Fils in South Molton Street. The constructions, on the other hand, usually remained in the studio and were daily presences in his creative life. A 1958 photograph shows Lanyon in his studio painting Long Sea Surf (72 x 48in., oil on masonite, Hirshorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution, Pl.138) with the original Europa Bull figure standing directly in front of the unfinished canvas. Lanyon described this painting as

another work that is connected with the story of Europa - this time the moment when the God disguised as a bull appears out of the sea and captures the girl.<sup>69</sup>

The same photograph also shows an earlier construction, Porthleven Boats (1950-51) prominently positioned in the foreground. An oar has been propped up against the wall, its blade decorated with arterial black lines. It seems a reasonable conjecture that if Europa Bull provided the conceptual inspiration for Long Sea Surf, the muted colours and curving boat-like



forms of Porthleven Boats might have directly influenced its compositional inflections. The different surfaces of the sculptures are reflected in the application of paint on the canvas. The vertical wave-like ribbons in the left-hand section of the painting (identified as "a long beach near Land's End where the waves come in directly from the Atlantic") could be informed by the arterial striations on the painted oar while the creamier application of paint on the right side echoes the solid mass of Europa and the sense of a white shape emerging from the sea.

The presence of the sculptural bull in the studio probably stimulated Lanyon's continued interest in the Europa myth long after he first painted the subject. By the time Europa Bull was placed in an exhibition (Gimpel Fils, March 1958), the figure was beginning to disintegrate:

About the bull, Charles, if you start at the window end of the gallery and charge it, it will probably disintegrate. But seriously, I suspect that someone has had a go at the horns. They were loose anyhow. If it appears to be weakening in other places I could withdraw it...it is only a sort of studio animal. Probably its flow of sexual energy is spent.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, Europa Bull and its companion pieces continued to haunt his imagination. In 1959, during the making of Offshore, he recorded that the painting's masculine vortex of white cloud coming in over the feminine headland at Portreath

Reminds me of the sculpture I did for the Europa painting, in fact, the bull coming in from the sea and taking the princess away is very much what I think happens in this painting.<sup>71</sup>

The potency of the imagery had not worn off five years later when he incorporated another spinning vortex in the magisterial Clevedon Bandstand (1964, Pl.21b), completed shortly before his death, a sea-shore encounter which brings together Europa with the myth of Orpheus.



## ORPHEUS

Lanyon returned to classical mythology when he painted Orpheus (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Premio Marzotto Institution, Valdagno, Pl.165):<sup>72</sup>

The story of Orpheus' search for Eurydice in the underworld and his return to the world above has always interested me, and it comes into this painting. It is a seasonal myth about the seed lying in the earth during the winter and coming back to life in the spring. The horizontal across the top divides the world from the underworld. Below there's a lyre shape and the female form of Eurydice. Orpheus himself hardly comes into the picture. To me, he's like the artist searching for his image, for the meaning of what he is doing.<sup>73</sup>

The story of Orpheus has, of course, inspired poets, musicians and painters of all periods. Apollo presented him with a lyre and the Muses taught him its use, so that he not only only enchanted wild beasts, but made the trees and the rocks move from their places to follow the sound of his music. Lanyon saw his own painting activity as having some kinship with Orpheus' legendary descent into Hades to recover Eurydice. He felt that his creativity depended on making "new ground in each work" as "the muse disappears if I look back or repeat myself".<sup>74</sup> There is an unintended irony in this statement as Lanyon's art was prone to more changes in style than many of his St Ives contemporaries - provoking criticism and accusations of inconsistency.<sup>75</sup>

The painting, Orpheus, is more an interesting summation of many of Lanyon's most important ideas than a breakthrough into new painterly forms: the source of artistic inspiration through a process of self-realization, the need for a journey, the landscape-figure relationship with Eurydice as an anima archetype and the regenerative powers of the earth giving new life to the seed in spring. The treatment of the subject is even more abstracted than Lanyon's earlier interpretation of the Europa legend: the earth's surface is indicated by the horizontal white line across the top of the painting, the vertical black lines chart Orpheus' movement into the underworld and the areas of deep red mark the forms of the lyre and Eurydice.



Perhaps the key to understanding the forms in the painting lies in the wall-relief, Orpheus (3 x 18 x 17in., paint, plastic, stained glass, chrome, ceramic tile and glass, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.166). Searching his subconscious (an equivalent for the underworld) Lanyon formed the image by using materials connected to his gliding interests: the round red plastic frame refers perhaps to the gliding-wheel as well as to Orpheus' lyre, the stained glass leading in to the construction might be showing the path Orpheus takes to reach Eurydice (Lanyon frequently used red across the paint surface to track movement in his glider), the shiny chrome lying on a diagonal could be an oblique reference to the instrument panel. The stick which forms the opposite diagonal has been entwined with painted wire, recalling the poisonous serpent which killed Eurydice as she fled from the unwelcome advances of Aristaeus. The moulded, breast-like form, the focal point for all the elements in the construction, is a sublimation of Lanyon's powerful erotic feelings for women and the sensual appeal of the landscape. The darkness of Hades lies on one side of Eurydice, while the red paint above represents the sound of Orpheus' lyre as it guides her towards the sunlight.

The Orpheus Construction allowed Lanyon to return to the planar experiments of his 1939-40 wall reliefs, creating the vivid sense of movement and tactility which he later transferred to the painting. The importance of the construction is defined best by the notion of metamorphosis: it is at once materiality and illusion, classical myth and modern flight, sculpture and painted image - all caught up in an inseparable process.

Lanyon's paintings do not readily give up their secrets and the allusions to mythology can sometimes appear pictorially obscure. Titles may have been given to works after the painting had been completed, suggesting that Lanyon was not working to a pre-conceived design - often allowing accident and spontaneity to change the course of a painting during its development: another interpretation of the figure in the landscape, Salome (60 x 40in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.167), was revealed to Lanyon only after he had finished the work:

I didn't set out to paint a Salome picture. I give my paintings names



only after they are made, and then I look at them with some detachment  
- they're something behind me, something done.<sup>76</sup>

The title of Antigone (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1962, Private Collection, Pl.180) should not be regarded as descriptive. The size of the work, its range of brushwork, the complex substantiality of its surfaces add up to a painting which has more in common with action painting than Sophocles. It could be that the rhetorical gesture of the inverted V-shape and the points of red glowing from within allude to the funeral pyre Antigone builds for her brother, Polyneices. Perhaps the dominant earth colours and the architectonic black lines refer to the tomb in which Antigone was to be buried alive for defying the wishes of her uncle, Creon. Each of Lanyon's abstract landscapes has a climate of its own and the pictorial inventiveness does not require a detailed knowledge of either place or subject to achieve its effects. As Lanyon himself said of his pictures:

Of course the subjects of my pictures are not all that important.  
I don't expect people to know them anymore than I know what the subjects of Poussin's paintings mean. They're just something extra, and help explain how I arrive at the painting.<sup>77</sup>

Again and again Lanyon returned to Anticoli Corrado, Sarascinesco and mythic narratives as a source of artistic inspiration, painting abstracts which progressively depart from figuration and visual reality in order to communicate that reality to us the more forcefully. However, traditional narrative content and figurative imagery were never entirely absent from his works and his third and final version of Sarascinesco (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.171) can be seen as an attempt to collapse time to combine ancient myths, a sense of place and the carnival atmosphere of the fiesta:

One of the big fiestas they have in this part of Italy celebrates the Spring - just the same as the Orpheus...This is a painting about the fiesta going on in very high country up in the Abruzzi mountains.<sup>78</sup>

This late painting is an abstraction from nature which also intuitively



articulates an emotional response to a place where the artist senses mysterious transfiguring spiritual forces normally beyond his apprehension.

A celebration of a high place and beyond where not only fireworks but moon rockets search for things beyond the primitive proportions of an Italian hill town. The fiesta and the sacrifice are still part of our behaviour.<sup>79</sup>

The design is as sophisticated as ever - photographs of Lanyon's studio show the work in various stages of composition, revealing how misleading it would be to see this as spontaneous action painting. Nevertheless, the physical attack upon the surface of the picture has become more vigorous and the figures in the landscape are less easily recognised. The wide, largely un-reworked black strokes - influenced perhaps by Franz Kline's elemental structures - allude to three-dimensional space while paradoxically evoking the shapes of matchstick men.

It is interesting and significant that the memory of this village in the Abruzzi mountains should continue to haunt Lanyon's imagination and inspire the creative process four years after his last visit. In its thoughtfulness, steady development and range of historical inspirations, his work refutes the notion that the high ground of modernism is necessarily made by rejecting the past. Anticoli Corrado and Sarascinesco provided him with the creative energy to develop new ideas and forms after 1953. It is arguable that the increased breadth of his brushwork and more intense use of colour owed as much to the classical south as to the influence of 1950s modernism and his very British interest in the weather and the least substantial aspects of nature - wind and air.



## MODERN MYTHS: CORNISH MINING

Lanyon was clearly fascinated by the myths and traditions which surrounded the Cornish mining industry. He believed that the abundance of mineral wealth which lay beneath the earth's surface represented the life-blood of the region's past and future development. These sentiments echoed those of the nineteenth century miner-poet, John Harris:

Hast thou ever seen a mine? Hast ever been  
Down in its fabled grottoes, walled with gems,  
And canopied with torrid mineral belts,  
That blaze within the fiery orifice?  
Hast ever, by the glimmer of the lamp,  
Or the fast-waning taper, gone down, down,  
Towards the earth's dread centre, where wise men  
Have told us that the earthquake is conceived...<sup>80</sup>

Cornwall had been one of the first places to industrialise in the nineteenth century and the early and successful application of steam power facilitated the development of deep mining - achieving for Cornwall an envied place in the forefront of technological innovation. The development of the Cornish beam engine for pumping, winding, ore-crushing, and operating man-engines had created a massive boom in tin and copper mining by the 1840s and the industry directly employed a third of the county's working population, with still more working in support and ancillary trades.<sup>81</sup> The first major indication that the industry was in trouble came with the crash of 1874 when forty-seven tin mines were closed (including Wheal Owles, near St Just): "in the history of mining in Cornwall it has known no such disastrous year as that of 1874."<sup>82</sup> Further crashes followed and the industry began its slow, inexorable decline - causing Cornwall to suffer economic marginalisation and the "Great Emigration", a sustained movement of people to Australia and the New World. By 1939, following the collapse in metal prices after the First World War and the Great Depression, only three mines were left working - Geevor, near St Just, South Crofty and East Pool & Agar in Camborne. Lanyon's paintings turn what is historical, the collapse of the mining industry, into what is mythic (and thus somehow beyond the



play of socio-economic forces):

All the way through the war, I had a feeling for this particular country, this strength, and it held me up many times as one is held up by odd things...when I came back I was interested in what happened between place just outside St Ives, called Hellesvean and St Just...and that bit of country was actually in my bones. I found when I came back from the war it had much more to it, had a lot of depth. I really began to realise that I came out of a family which was concerned with mining. I visited mines, went down them, I used to climb down the cliffs and into old adits and I think probably my own myth was built up over this thing of miners working under the ground, under the sea, coming up to the surface and fishing and so on, this extraordinary commerce which went on in this small strip of land - nothing very much in the south, it was always on this northern part which was full of minerals. And in addition the surface thing of weather and the sea against the rocks, Eventually I was able to associate it with male and female, and this became very much a central thing. I was married and had a family then. I got my ideas of how painting was something surfacing like a man's face with very old, deep roots, coming up, as it were, through my feet and my own bones, and then physically interpreting it all back into one painting, but I couldn't do it by a direct representation of a single viewpoint. In fact, I couldn't see my country from outside.<sup>83</sup>

The Cornish mining works which Lanyon saw scattered across the Penwith peninsula gave him a strong metaphor to develop his own polysemous landscape imagery. In his private mythology the miner can be equated with the artist bringing ideas from the inner recesses of his imagination to the surface of the canvas, while the sea represents the male penetrative element constantly threatening to inundate the female mainland through the tunnels and adits. Lanyon must have been especially conscious of the decline of the mining industry as he was descended from mine officers and part of the family's wealth derived from his grandfather's share in the Cornish Tin Smelting Company, the largest smelting firm in the county. He possessed a strong sense of collective guilt and his many attempts to articulate the suffering of the miners can be interpreted as atonement and subsequent reparation.



The principal workings of many of the mines, including Levant and Wheal Owles, extended for more than a mile beyond the engine houses which cling to the tops of precipitous cliffs. Disaster struck frequently and unexpectedly: in 1893 Wheal Owles was inundated by the sea with the loss of twenty miners whose bodies were never recovered. This event is reflected in the painting Wheal Owles. The centre of the picture shows the mine as a heavy black cross (a visual reminder of St Just) mediated by a swathe of blue sea rushing and inundating the shaft. Botallack (50 x 16in., oil on masonite, 1952, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto), was another response to the sea breaking through and flooding a mineshaft which had been worked too close to the surface:

Botallack arose out of the inundation of a mine. Botallack mine went to sea a mile under the rollers of the Atlantic and in the swell of the sea the boulders made a cavernous drumming in the galleries under the rock. Now the mine is inundated (sometimes they bored through to the seabed and blocked the hole with plugs and grease). The place Botallack is the village of the mine and the mine drops away down the face of the cliff from the village and all the back windows are tall and thin and the gates black and the grass as you could imagine is weeping with wet greenness. You see you do not detect boat shapes and rock pools that are apparent on the surface but only ECHOES of these things - see? When a miner comes out of the ground he comes to "Grass". From Botallack to St Just is two miles - I have taken two years to paint the journey and it looks like another two. St Just is the Jerusalem of this ride. St Just is wailing. All around are ruins. It is the place of no retreat, everything is undone.<sup>84</sup>

Lanyon has provided a very useful document to explain his methodology and approach. There is little direct figuration in Botallack, but the tall, thin vertical format, the suggestion of pit-gear and mine shafts, mineral deposits in the rock strata, boats and rock pools are all vividly evoked in a painterly equivalent which "constructs out of experience" rather than relying on visual perception alone.

The theme of the flooded mineshaft was to haunt Lanyon until his death



and he returned to it repeatedly, even exploring its resonances in three-dimensions with Forms of Levant (construction for the painting Lost Mine, 21 x 18 x 10in., bostik, stained and painted glass, 1960, Pl.153). Margaret Garlake has suggested that the close correspondence between the roughly cut sheets of glass and the painting, Lost Mine (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Tate Gallery, Pl.152) can best be understood "by looking at the construction with the red plane at the back, so that the colour is only fleetingly visible, just as in the painting it seems to come and go behind shifting clouds".<sup>85</sup> The coloured marks float on the clear planes of glass in space and present a three dimensional equivalent to the painting. Executed at the same time as The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands mural at Liverpool University and sharing some of its structural elements, Lost Mine also has compositional affinities with earlier depictions of sea-inundations (Headland and Wheal Owles). Lanyon wrote that the painting "is concerned with the inundation of a coast mine and its decay".<sup>86</sup> The Levant mine had closed in October 1930, at the height of the world economic depression, throwing about 200 men out of work. Not long after its closure the sea broke in (the adit above high water mark which connected to "Skip Shaft" was cleared in 1959 and observations taken on the water level in the shaft showed that it rose and fell in sympathy with the tides). The thick black line running vertically through the composition indicates the ruined shaft. Fluid, spontaneous brushmarks are used to express the sea breaching the mine shaft and this painting suggests a physical sense of anger at the abandonment of this mine to the elements. The red at the centre glows beneath the blues, greys and whites which flow and break above, suggesting that valuable mineral deposits (and associated dangers) were still to be found in the inundated mine.

It is likely that Lanyon would have been fully aware of the plans announced by the Geevor Tin Mines Ltd. to re-open the Levant lodes. In early 1960 an experiment was conducted to discover exactly where the damage lay by introducing a quantity of fluorescene green dye into the adit. It was discovered that the breach had occurred within ten feet of an area known as the "40 Backs" a well known weak spot in Levant, which had been a considerable source of anxiety since the middle of the nineteenth century when the men had worked too close to the ocean bed and caused an irruption.



It was in this place that the miners could hear the roaring of the sea in stormy weather and even the ordinary breaking of waves on the beach.<sup>87</sup>

Lost Mine affirms Lanyon's continuing desire to root his painting in his native West Cornwall. Unlike many of his American contemporaries he retained overt references to incidents, places and histories from the world around him. Writing to John Dalton in 1952, Lanyon emphasised the importance of his empathetic feelings towards the Cornish miners:

It is perhaps the tunnels and the man under the sea, the miner searching for his strings of tin (like the rosary) piercing his sombre ceiling and plugging the old ocean with wood wedges and stopping the flood of fishes into the ground that you don't yet apprehend in my work.<sup>88</sup>

The German psychologist Karlfried Graf Durkheim said that the whole problem of life is to become "transparent to transcendence".<sup>89</sup> Lanyon's paintings are a search for something irreducible in the landscape, a veneration of the earth goddess and her mineral wealth, a communion with nature and an empathy for the suffering and hardship endured by generations of miners forced to work in unsafe conditions for the profit of English industrialists and landowners. He saw Cornwall as a sacred place, replete with symbols, sacred centres and meaningful objects which had to be defended against the uncomprehending forces of destruction from across the Tamar. His greatest fear was that in the Cornish landscape "nothing but what the Briton planted remains..."

Lanyon had faith in the affirmative magic of painting and saw himself as a shape-making medium for the larger forces of life. He realised that myths, with their timeless symbols and resonances, contained the potential for fresh human content and allowed him to attain a more profound sense of existential insideness. His art intuitively grasps something of the aboriginal feeling which pre-historic man evinced for the sacred dimension of life. His consummate use of combinatorial imagery allows even someone with a shaky grasp of Lanyon's oeuvre to appreciate the importance of myth in his painting.



## Notes to Chapter Six

1. Frank Kermode, The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968, p.39.
2. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, translated by Walter Kaufman, Vintage Books, New York, 1967, p.136.
3. E. Neumann, Art and the Creative Unconscious, translated by R. Mannheim, Harper Torchbooks/The Bollingen Library, Harper and Row publishing, New York, 1966, p.125.
4. August Wiedemann, Romantic Roots in Modern Art, Gresham Books, Old Woking, 1979, p.9.
5. For Lanyon's interest in the "ancient and primitive" history of Cornwall read "Derbyshire 1957", transcript of Peter Lanyon, Anthony Fry and Andrew Forge talking on BBC Radio Third Programme, 28th July 1957, Tate Gallery Archive TAV 297B.
6. Peter Lanyon, "Landscape Coast Journey", 1959, Tate Gallery Archive TAV 216AB. Lanyon's familiarity with J.G. Frazer's The Golden Bough was established in an interview with Sheila Lanyon, 27th August 1995. A copy of the abridged edition, published by Macmillan and Co., London, 1922, can be found in the artist's collection of books. The significance of Frazer's work is discussed in Barry Dodge, The Art of Peter Lanyon 1946-64: A Psychological Interpretation, Courtauld Institute of Art, May 1991, p.19. Dodge reminds us that painters such as Mark Rothko and Paul Nash were also influenced by Frazer's book as were poets like Robert Graves, W.B. Yeats and T.S. Eliot. Frazer's general treatise on religions and superstitions developed into a thirteen volume comparative study of the relationship between man and nature in primitive societies.
7. Hayden Griffiths, Peter Lanyon, Drawings and Graphic Works, exhibition catalogue, Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, 1981. Evidence of Lanyon's interest in vitalism is supplied in recorded interviews with colleagues who taught with him at Corsham. Griffiths discusses Bergson's influence on Lanyon in Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court, Wiltshire, 1946-c.1955, M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute, University of London, 1979, pp. 31-32. Lanyon was introduced to the concept of "entelechy" and the élan vital by James Tower.
8. Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution, Macmillan and Co., London, 1922 (first published 1911), pp.275.
9. Ibid., p.359.
10. Ibid., p.360.
11. Ibid., p.186.
12. Ibid., p.186.
13. Ibid., p.188.
14. Peter Lanyon, letter to Roland Bowden, 10th October 1952, TGA 942.20.
15. Henri Bergson, op.cit., 1922, pp.211-212.
16. Henri Bergson, Time and Free Will, [1889], translated by F.L. Pogson, 1912, George Allen and Company Ltd., p.79.
17. Denys Val Baker, Britain's Art Colony by the Sea, George Ronald, London, 1959, p.10.
18. Hans Driesch, Science and Philosophy of the Organism, A. & C. Black, 1908, second edition, 1929. History and Theory of Vitalism, Macmillan, 1914.
19. Hans Driesch, The Soul as an Elementary Principle of Nature.
20. Recorded talk with Lionel Miskin, 1962, TAV 211AB.
21. C.G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, Flamingo/Fontana Paperbacks,



London 1989, p.293.

22. Peter Lanyon quoted in Denys Val Baker, op.cit., p.68. First published as "The Face of Penwith" in The Cornish Review, Spring 1950.

23. Denys Val Baker, ibid., p.10.

24. Ibid., p.11.

25. Robert Hunt, Popular Romances of the West of England, 1865, p.216.

26. Recorded talk for the British Council illustrated lecture, 1962, TAV 526 ABC.

27. Ibid., TAV 526 ABC.

28. Ibid., TAV 526 ABC.

29. Cheryl Straffon, Pagan Cornwall: Land of the Goddess, Meyn Mamuro Publications, 1993, p.38.

30. Lanyon spoke of his Christian beliefs in conversation with Lionel Miskin, 1962, TAV 211AB. Sheila Lanyon, interviewed by Barry Dodge (16.2.91), asserted that Lanyon was not exclusively Christian and was interested in all religions. Andrew Lanyon considered his father to have been an atheist. Barry Dodge, op.cit., p.59 note 22. Lanyon used Christian symbols to convey meanings of a more universal nature.

31. Peter Lanyon, letter printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.133. This letter shows that Lanyon must have read G. Frazer's The Golden Bough (see note 6 above). Lanyon alludes to the story of Osiris, the corn-spirit believed by the Egyptians to be present in the first corn cut and to die under the sickle - fragments of whose body were scattered up and down the land and buried by Isis where they lay. Frazer links "the melancholy cry of the Egyptian reapers, which down to Roman times could be heard year after year sounding across fields, announcing the death of the corn spirit, the rustic prototype of Osiris" to the West Country custom of "crying the neck" after the wheat is cut. Op.cit., p.444.

32. Peter Lanyon, letter to Rosalie Mander, 17th March, 1952.

33. British Council lecture, op.cit., TAV 526 ABC. Discussing the importance of the cross in Lanyon's work, John Dalton wrote, "call it X: it is found in his painting, his drawing, his handwriting...consistent, all of a piece. X - the cross, sideways, being carried - signifying the essential humanity. It appears - and disappears - in his painting. It is at the top of his Porthleven at the Tate...in a fine drawing of Perugia...In a wild biro sketch of a house by the sea it masquerades as a weather vane." The Drawings of Peter Lanyon, The Painter and Sculptor, Vol.1, No.1, Spring 1958.

34. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, letter to E. Cummings, director of Plymouth City Art Gallery and Museum, 20th December, 1960, p.140.

35. Cheryl Straffon, Meyn Mavros, edition no.9; Cornish fogous are discussed in Ian McNeil Cooke, Mother and Son - The Cornish Fogou, published by Men-an-Tol studio, Bosulow, Pezance, 1990.

36. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.72.

37. Professor Charles Thomas, Exploration of Drowned Landscape: Archaeology and History of the Isles of Scilly, Batsford, London, 1985.

38. J. Markdale, Celtic Civilization, Gordon and Cremonesi, London, 1978, p.36.

39. The original linocut with poem in monotype (19½ x 13in.) is reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.277.

40. Malory describes Tristan's homeland as "Lyones" and places it off the coast of Cornwall. By this time the literary tradition appears to have wedded the lost land stories to the sightings of submerged forests: Lyonesse has become the lost land beyond Cornwall.

41. Richard Carew, The Survey of Cornwall, 1602, edited by F.E. Halliday,



Melrose, London, 1953, p.53.

42. Quoted in Charles Thomas, op.cit., 1985, p.273. Cornwall also appears as the far-off land of Lyonesse in Thomas Hardy's novels.

43. Peter Lanyon, letter to Charles Gimpel, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.134. There is a photograph of Lanyon standing with friends in Anticoli Corrado.

44. "The Spiritual Place: The Artists of Anticoli Corrado", essay in Italian Art from Symbolism to Scuola Romana, edited by Fabio Benzi, Electa, Milan, 1996, pp.11-16.

45. "The Artist talks about his painting", British Council lecture, TAV 526AB, also quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.190.

46. Ibid., p.140.

47. Notes reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.141. An innovator in so many ways, Lanyon was a traditionalist when it came to studio practice and preparation of materials.

48. Letter to E. Cumming, director of the Plymouth City Art Gallery and Museum, 20th December 1960, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.140.

49. These references can be found in the letter cited above, Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.140.

50. From the approximate wartime itinerary, Andrew Lanyon, Wartime Abstracts, Penzance, 1996, p.7.

51. R. Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception, University of California, Faber and Faber, London, 1956, p.92. The term is used to describe the planar simplicity and absence of perspective in drawings by children.

52. Peter Lanyon, notes on White Track, written c.1952, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.48.

53. Peter Lanyon letter to Roland Bowden, 16th December 1952, TGA 942.22.

54. Holderlin, quoted in Michael Tucker, Dreaming with Open Eyes, The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture, Aquarian/Thorsons, San Francisco, 1992, p.12.

55. Peter Lanyon letter to Roland Bowden, Attic Studio, St Ives, 22nd March 1953, TGA 942.24.

56. British Council lecture, op.cit., TAV 526 ABC, 1962.

57. Lanyon's notes on Europa, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.142.

58. William Scott, letter to the Tate Gallery, May 1975, referring to the purchase of Lanyon's Corsham Model. See Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon: Paintings, Drawings and Constructions, 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery catalogue, 1978.

59. Recorded conversation with Lionel Miskin, 1962, in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.177.

60. Andrew Causey, op.cit., Whitworth Art Gallery, 1978, p.32.

61. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin, TAV 211AB, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.177.

62. Handwritten note in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.211.

63. Ibid., p.211.

64. British Council lecture, op.cit., 1963, TAV 526AB.

65. Handwritten note, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.211.

66. Letter to Lady Mander, 16th May 1953, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.136. Lanyon wanted the St Ives Festival to focus on artists living in Cornwall. He wrote to the St Ives Times on 19th June 1953: I could not object if the festival were encouraging native talent not only in St Ives but throughout Cornwall. You may laugh at Cornish nationalism but when a lavish festival comes to St Ives and does not come out of St Ives many are persuaded that here is another case of the "foreigner" rejecting the



contribution of the "local".

67. Peter Lanyon, "I became interested in the myth of Europa while in Italy I was living close to the animals". Undated note, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.142.

68. See Alan Bowness, Peter Lanyon, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968.

69. Talk recorded for British Council, 1963, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.180.

70. Note to Charles Gimpel, March 1958, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.180.

71. Peter Lanyon, "Offshore: A description of a Painting in Progress", TAV 210AB. The tapes were made over a ten day period in June 1959.

72. Orpheus won a Selection Prize in the 1962 Premio Marzotti (the first time in which the competition was open to non-Italian artists).

73. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.209.

74. Lanyon's handwritten notes, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.208.

75. Interview with Jeremy Le Grice, former pupil of Lanyon's at St Peter's Loft, 1955-56, the summer art school set up with William Redgrave and Terry Frost in 1955: "In his later work...he rushed ahead and lost his roots a little, perhaps the old element of ambition, even vanity, was creeping in, whereas his earlier work had been completely natural. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.146.

76. British Council lecture, op.cit., TAV 526 ABC, 1962.

77. Ibid., also in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.210.

78. Alan Bowness, Peter Lanyon, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968.

Bowness wrote the script for the British Council talk using Lanyon's own words taken from earlier recorded conversations.

79. Peter Lanyon, undated note, in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.219.

80. Poem printed in Philip Payton, Cornwall, Alexander Associates, Fowey, 1996, p.217.

81. Ibid., p.212.

82. The West Briton, 7th January, 1855.

83. Peter Lanyon quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.30.

84. Letter to John Dalton, probably late 1952, published in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.116.

85. Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, Air, Land and Sea, essay in the South Bank Centre catalogue, 1993, p.57.

86. Handwritten note by Peter Lanyon, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.204.

87. Cyril Noall, Levant: the Mine beneath the Sea, D. Bradford Barton Ltd., Truro, 1970, p.126.

88. Letter to John Dalton, 1952, op.cit., p.116.

89. Joseph Campbell quoting Karlfried Graf Durkheim, The Hero's Journey: the world of Joseph Campbell, Harper and Row, New York, 1990, p.40.



## **Chapter Seven**

# **A CHANGE OF DIRECTION? THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM**



The principal American Abstract Expressionists were not seen in this country until the exhibition of Modern Art in the United States held at the Tate Gallery in January 1956. Although the movement enjoyed the patronage of the New York gallery system and the support of influential critics such as Harold Rosenberg and Clement Greenberg, the Museum of Modern Art which selected the paintings was still so uncertain about the New York School's long-term significance that it allocated to them only one room out of six, allowing seventeen artists to show twenty-eight works. Among the paintings on show were Pollock's She Wolf (1943) and No. One (1948); de Kooning's Woman One (1952); Kline's Chief (1950), Still's Painting 1951, Rothko's No. One (1949) and No. Ten (1950); Motherwell's Granada (1949) and paintings by Baziotes, Tobey, Tomlin, Guston and Gorky. Artists such as Gottlieb, Reinhardt and the critically controversial Barnett Newman were not included.

Although critical opinion was divided, often reflecting a mean-spirited anti-Americanism,<sup>1</sup> artists - including Lanyon - flocked to the exhibition and greeted the freshness and scale of the new work with acclaim. The show made an impact equivalent to Picasso and Matisse, the first important exhibition of contemporary art after the isolation and introspection of the war years. Patrick Heron, hailed it as evidence of "the most vigorous movement we have seen since the war...We shall now watch New York as eagerly as Paris for new developments."<sup>2</sup>

Heron, one of Abstract Expressionism's most passionate advocates in 1956, subsequently revised his views in a series of essays which culminated in three epic articles for The Guardian in 1974.<sup>3</sup> Vigorously defending the integrity and independence of the "middle generation" of English abstract and near-abstract artists,<sup>4</sup> Heron claimed that their mature style would probably have been little different had Pollock, Rothko, Motherwell, Kline, de Kooning, Newman, Still and Gottlieb never existed. He contends that to portray Lanyon as little more than a derivative British substitute for the American Abstract Expressionists is to misunderstand the vocabulary and syntax of his landscape paintings and reflects the "usual but largely unconscious obeisance before New York" of British art critics.<sup>5</sup> According



to Heron, Lanyon confronted American Action Painting at the Tate in 1956 from an already established artistic position and it was not necessary for him to totally re-invent his painting when faced with this explosion of expressive power. The strength of the work from New York came as a confirmation of his own position and encouraged him to expand his planes, reduce superfluous gestures, and develop a looser, more open painting style. Can we accept Heron's analysis that Lanyon owed little or nothing to the Americans?

While it is true that Lanyon's early masterpieces Porthleven and St Just were completed between 1951 and 1953, at least three years before the Tate Gallery's Modern Art in the United States exhibition, Heron's claim that Lanyon had reached "his own brilliantly original art in total independence"<sup>6</sup> seems unjustified. The first person to notice strong similarities between the dominant style in New York and Lanyon's work was William Scott, Senior Painting Master and his head of department at the Bath Academy of Art. Scott had spent the summer of 1953 as a guest instructor at the University of Alberta Banff School of Fine Arts. He returned to England in September via New York where he met Pollock, de Kooning, Kline, Brooks and other American abstract painters - admiring the inventive energy of their work:

I returned convinced that the Americans had made a great discovery and that the mood in England - a longing for a nice comfortable realist art would not last much longer. When I got back I found that Patrick Heron was particularly interested.<sup>7</sup>

Heron recalls the excitement and enthusiasm which accompanied the "astonishing news" of the existence of an entire group of important abstract painters in New York and the realisation that Lanyon was "without knowing it already an American painter":

I remember very vividly from our first meeting on his return him saying...how remarkably close to these Americans he'd just seen was the painting of Peter Lanyon - which was extraordinary, because Lanyon, like the rest of us, had neither seen nor heard of any American painting of interest except Pollock's...he was drawing attention to



the extraordinary fact that Peter Lanyon had already arrived at his own brilliantly original art in total independence of all that American painting he was seen, after the event, most closely to relate to.<sup>8</sup>

A few unusually well-informed artists - including Lanyon - did have some knowledge of developments in America. The October 1947 issue of Horizon contained Clement Greenberg's article, "The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture". Heron admits that Alan Davie admired and was influenced by the early Pollocks which he saw in the Peggy Guggenheim collection on display in the otherwise empty Greek pavilion at the 1948 Venice Biennale, but plays down the significance of Lanyon's visit at the same time by reminding us that "this was a single occasion only". Why even a single visit should have made little or no impact is not explained. Significantly the Guggenheim collection also contained early works by de Kooning, Rothko, Motherwell and others.

It seems highly unlikely that Lanyon had achieved the remarkable feat of developing his mature style in "total independence" and that "none" of the Abstract Expressionists were known about until 1956. He almost certainly visited the XXV Venice Biennale, held from June to October 1950, where Pollock had been selected as one of the official representatives and de Kooning had been chosen by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. to be given a one-man exhibition in the American pavilion.<sup>9</sup> De Kooning's exhibition was widely publicised and included his largest abstraction, Excavation (1950), which went on to win the Logan Medal and Purchase Prize in the "60th Annual American Exhibition" at the Art Institute of Chicago. He was chosen again to represent the United States by Andrew Carnduff Ritchie at the XXVII Venice Biennale in 1954, showing twenty-six works. A number of the other Abstract Expressionist painters were shown in the Sao Paulo Biennale exhibitions of 1951 and 1953 (the latter included twelve paintings by William Scott and a number by Patrick Heron).

Contemporary American and European painting had been increasingly identified as Abstract Expressionist in character by critics writing for international art journals: John Ferren, writing in Art Digest, in November 1953, stated that "Abstraction gave us the fresh plastic truths of our time. Abstract



Expressionism gave a new range to the sensibility involving the whole, existential man. Its humanism is implicit not explicit."<sup>10</sup> Further evidence that there had been some exposure to post-war New York painting is provided by a meeting in the summer of 1954 between Heron and Clement Greenberg, the art critic most closely associated with the promotion of the new American abstraction.

The overwhelming emphasis, in all our talk, was on Pollock...and, but to a far lesser degree, other New York painters, none of whom we knew anything about at all, apart from Scott's verbal descriptions of their works.<sup>11</sup>

Apparently neither Scott or Greenberg could provide any images to illustrate and justify their enthusiasm for Abstract Expressionist sensibilities.

The credibility of Heron's argument is further undermined by minor factual errors which litter his Guardian articles: there was more than one Pollock in the mixed show, Opposing Forces, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in January 1953 (there was one large painting, One: Number 31, 1950 and two small works) and it was followed by an exhibition of Mark Tobey's calligraphic paintings in 1955. His assertion that only Pollock and de Kooning were represented by more than one painting at the 1956 Tate exhibition is incorrect - Rothko exhibited two important pieces. While links with America were undoubtedly weaker in the 1950s than they are today, Heron's assertions that the British modernists were almost hermetically protected from trans-Atlantic cross-fertilisation stretches credulity. Lanyon's freely painted abstractions from the visual scene bear a superficial resemblance to the style of painting developed in New York in the late 1940s and early 1950s and it is not difficult to find similarities in Lanyon's work of 1950-53 and de Kooning's of 1948-50. Both artists deployed a post-Cubist spatial shallowness, varied paint surfaces and successive layers of colour to create freely painted abstractions which retained some allusions to the visual scene. In this context, Abstract Expressionism, with its deep European roots, was as much a catalyst to further development in Lanyon's oeuvre, a confirmation of the validity of experiments already under way, as a revolutionary revelation.

The apparent invisibility of new developments in American painting before 1956 can be explained by the widespread apathy among British critics and



their general belief that America was culturally inferior to Europe. In contrast to 1945, when Picasso's paintings forced a re-evaluation of the antiquarian, nostalgic and "defiantly insular" romanticism which characterised British art during the war, Abstract Expressionism arrived at a time when artists like Heron, Gear and Hilton had assimilated the innovations and achievements of European and, especially, French modernism. Paris was still the place of pilgrimage for critics and artists alike. The Ecole de Paris, Jean Dubuffet, Nicholas de Stäel, the Tachisme of Sam Francis and Georges Matthieu, the sculpture of Alberto Giacometti and Germaine Richier, the lyrical abstraction of the "paysagisme abstrait", Bazaine and Manessier and the international COBRA group were widely admired for representing a self-sufficient, historically specific tradition of modernism. Even Lanyon, in spite of his affected disdain for the high culture of Paris, would have been made aware of contemporary French artists through his dealer, Gimpel Fils. Writing for Art News and Review in 1954, Heron compared Lanyon to Soutine. Some years later Lanyon described how the French artist could transport the viewer "into the painting, and the actual making of paint."<sup>12</sup>

#### 1956: FROM DEPRESSION TO FLIGHT: THE IMPACT OF AMERICAN MODERN ART

While Lanyon should never be regarded as merely a pale British imitation of American Abstract Expressionists (and de Kooning in particular), it is clear that striking developments - not unconnected with the influence of the New York School - were taking place in his art before 1956. How much significance should be accorded to the exhibition of twentieth-century American art at the Tate Gallery and how influenced was he by the single room devoted to work by Abstract Expressionist artists?

Early in 1954 Lanyon was awarded the Critics' Prize by the British section of the International Association of Art Critics for Mullion Bay (60 x 60in., oil on masonite, 1954, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Pl.123). The prize had been initiated in 1953 for outstanding work by a British painter or sculptor who had yet to achieve an established reputation and "whose work showed promise of further development". The citation declared: "At first glance, the paintings seem near abstract, but they are founded on the landscape of the country round St Ives."<sup>13</sup> However, by the time he received the award his work had reached something of an impasse and he was struggling to find new ideas. A letter to Peter Gimpel, written in April 1954, seems to confirm that he was experiencing difficulties:



I am not painting. Terrible time doing nothing. I am thinking of going on an expedition to Kanchenjunga to chase the abominable snow woman.<sup>14</sup>

A year later, in May 1955, he wrote to Gimpel again, this time drawing attention to his financial problems :

I am still worried about my financial prospects but I intend to set that right by doing something other than painting. How I will do it and where I don't yet know but I certainly have no intention of selling years of work in a market which is geared to paintings often produced in two hours instead of two years. This is no criticism of you. I realise that my painting is not in demand and it is a waste of time living in a fool's paradise about this.<sup>15</sup>

Depressed by low sales ("six out of 24 paintings sold in six years is not a high enough proportion to warrant the expense of taking them to town")<sup>16</sup> and mediocre reviews for his second exhibition at Gimpel Fils in the spring of 1954 ("a determined artist...obsessed by his subject matter and untidily groping for a more articulate style"),<sup>17</sup> Lanyon produced fewer paintings than at any time since the end of the war. The creative stimulus generated by his stay in Rome and Anticoli Corrado (January to April 1953) had worn off. Desperately in need of inspiration, he reverted to painting familiar landscapes in a formula tried and tested in earlier years. Moor Cliff, Kynance (51 x 27in., oil on masonite, 1954, Arts Council Collection, Pl.121) and Mullion Bay return to the built-up textures, hierarchical composition and sombre hues of Boulder Coast 36 x 48½in., oil on masonite, 1952, Private Collection, Pl.110). As Margaret Garlake has commented, they are "surprising reversals of the dynamism of Europa, suggesting a deep dilemma as to how to develop his work."<sup>18</sup>

According to Causey's cataloguing of all Lanyon's traceable pictures only one oil was painted in 1955 (Bird Wind, oil on masonite, 42 x 30in., Private Collection).<sup>19</sup> Andrew Lanyon has included a humorous but slight self-portrait (oil on board, Sheila Lanyon Collection, 1955, Pl.125) and the austere Nude in Black (12 x 18in., oil on masonite, Private Collection).



Heron makes no mention of this malaise in Lanyon's creative output at the age of thirty-seven and the artist's block receives scant consideration in most of the published literature. He may have been over-burdened with teaching commitments (not only was he a member of the painting department of the Bath Academy of Art at Corsham but he and William Redgrave had just set up St Peter's Loft in the space above the Penwith Gallery).<sup>21</sup> Part of the problem may have been that he found the Wiltshire landscape uninspiring and dull. Though he was given a studio and encouraged to develop his own work so that he could teach by example, the major paintings all tended to revert to the Cornish landscape. Marie-Christine Treinen, the student whose squat, inelegant figures (possibly derived from Dubuffet's "art brut") energised Lanyon's body-in-landscape paintings of the early 1950s, had returned to France. The only new material came from his numerous figurative drawings - taking advantage of the abundant supply of models and Corsham's encouragement of life drawing - which he would rapidly integrate into landscape imagery.

His difficulties were certainly exacerbated by the purchase of Little Park Owles, the large house in Carbis Bay that had been occupied by Adrian Stokes from 1937 to 1947. Lanyon needed the space to accommodate his rapidly expanding family. According to Margaret Garlake this "personal turning point" came in September 1956 and the "move may have helped to end the depression from which Lanyon had suffered during the previous two years."<sup>22</sup> This interpretation is not supported by the evidence: the move took place eighteen months earlier than suggested by Garlake (on 1st January 1955 he wrote to Charles Gimpel that he was "very busy moving into my palace...")<sup>23</sup> and the aura of the house which had been the centre for modernism in St Ives fifteen years earlier was not in itself sufficient to lift him out of his creative depression (as this postcard to Charles Gimpel, stamped 7th September 1955, demonstrates):

What do you think of our new house? Unless Gimpel Fils sell a few Lanyon's soon we shall have to pawn our children. 1 sculpture and 1 painting completed, absolutely unsaleable. Shall be in town 20th September with a gun...<sup>24</sup>



Is the "absolutely unsaleable" painting the dark and forbidding Nude in Black? The emphasis of this picture is less on the figure than on the tenebrous browns and blacks, the stark contrast of light and foreboding dark, which threatens to engulf the few remaining figurative associations. It is clear that 1955 was a sterile interlude for Lanyon, closing the fertile period of creative energy which had begun with Porthleven in 1950. He had virtually stopped painting and was perhaps searching for a way out of an impasse.

It is tempting to believe that the deadlock in Lanyon's creative development was broken by the stimulus received from the leading American Abstract Expressionists whose paintings he saw at the Tate Gallery exhibition in January 1956. This was closely followed by his first trip to America for the opening of a one-man exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York in January 1957.<sup>25</sup> As a result of these contacts he began producing works like Silent Coast (48 x 36in., oil on masonite, 1957 Manchester City Art Galleries, Pl.134), a serene painting of diaphanous planes and atmospheric blues "with everything simplified and pushed right to the edge".<sup>26</sup> The enclosed, compacted quality of his earlier work has been replaced by greater openness of form and a fluidity of handling which gives equal emphasis to the different areas of the picture surface. The gridded armatures of piled-up detail and rectilinear underpinning have given way to large areas of freely brushed colour held together by the force and rhythm of gesture:

After a year of elimination I produced the Silent Coast which became the first of many weather paintings and led to the later paintings of air rather than shore or coast.<sup>27</sup>

The subtle colour harmonies, simple composition and the translucency of the paint may owe something to Rothko's No. One and No. Ten, both included in the 1956 Tate Gallery exhibition. A letter to the artist, Paul Feiler, written in 1961, records Lanyon's particular admiration for Rothko:

I think the Rothko show [at the Whitechapel Art Gallery] is very powerful and warm in a human sense. Incredible "facing" quality. Somehow I



feel that Cézanne's forms, all facing outwards from many different levels, are richer, but this may be the result of time and acceptance.<sup>28</sup>

Lanyon's sharply focused experience of the American painters fed into a complicated set of creative-critical relations of thought and feeling with which he had been wrestling for some time. Shortly after visiting the Tate Gallery in January 1956 he decided to take a sabbatical term from teaching at Corsham "in order to paint" and to prepare for his forthcoming show in New York.<sup>29</sup> A period of intense creative energy followed which left him drained and exhausted:

I have to rest physically and mentally after making the last effort to produce that painting. I have no formula, perhaps that will mean something to you...When I strain everything I have to the limit and into the bargain my whole family on the result I expect more for it... I have been reduced to more misery and distress by such paintings than any human being can make for me, because I have had to fight in the dark with things I know nothing about with nothing and with no hope...<sup>30</sup>

The time "developing a new language"<sup>31</sup> produced impressive results: Andrew Causey lists fourteen large oil paintings completed in 1956 - most of them presumably worked on after he had visited the Modern Art in the United States exhibition at the Tate in January.<sup>32</sup> The sombre colours and agitated, churned-up brushstrokes of Lea Cliff (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1956, Private Collection, Pl.128), Lulworth (72 x 48in., oil on board, 1956, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, Pl.130) and Boscastle (47½ x 47½in., oil on masonite, 1956, Richard Brown Baker Collection) evoke the hue and texture of chalk, granite, flint and slate first explored in works like Portreath and Porthleven. Here, as in American action painting, the act of painting is presented as raw, immediate and vital. These paintings have the feel of transition about them, even of crisis. Their apparently arbitrary disposition of rough and inconsistent brushmarks, paintlines and diagonals, activate the surface of the painting, denying spatial depth and insisting on texture. However, although the representational image has given way to the power of the painterly gesture each of these works derives from



a specific vision of the landscape.

Lanyon's paintings are not the product of any kind of automatism - a concept often implicitly associated with the Americans and which precludes starting off with any prior image in mind or resolving the painting into any shape. His imagery would pass through a complex process of recognition, further development, and so on until "the painting looks at you and answers you back".<sup>33</sup> These stages of "informing" and "forming" were anathema to the original concept of action-painting. Heron is right in arguing that the complexity of Lanyon's picture surfaces is at variance with the emptiness, flatness and spatial shallowness of much American painting. Harold Rosenberg, one of the chief apologists for the Abstract Expressionist movement, argued that the painted act was its own representation and "the question of what will emerge is left open".<sup>34</sup> Robert Motherwell summed up these ideas at the end of 1950:

The process of painting then is conceived of as an adventure, without preconceived ideas on the part of persons of intelligence, sensibility, and passion. Fidelity to what occurs between oneself and the canvas, no matter how unexpected, becomes central...The major decisions in the process of painting are on the grounds of truth, not taste...no artist ends up with the style he expected to have when he began...it is only by giving oneself up completely to the painting medium that one finds oneself and one's own style.<sup>35</sup>

Lanyon would not have agreed with this assertion that the artist should deliberately avoid any evident association to specific contingencies in the material world by generating images in terms of a spontaneous procedure on the canvas. He was not interested in creating "art-shaped holes".<sup>36</sup> His images are not free-associational or the result of spontaneous enactments of feelings. His approach to Abstract Expressionism was deliberately anti-heroic, deflating its rhetoric by retaining a very British adherence to representations of the landscape.

The artist went through an elaborate "informing" process, collecting and sifting information, making sense of the landscape as well as his own



passions, thoughts, anxieties and sensual experiences: "My aim is to hold experience in time and suffer it through until it is fixed in space, until it is exhausted."<sup>37</sup> In order to translate his emotional responses Lanyon trained himself to select relevant information and then bring the variable elements together to form a coherent image:

...a formative action is set up, the artist proceeds to make marks in an apparently automatic fashion. Considerable training is required to precipitate marks which relate to the information received. The artist must proceed beyond the inspired guess towards certainty...This significance begins to show when the informing process or gathering is complete and the forming process begins. To assist this change-over I make three-dimensional constructions.<sup>38</sup>

At a time when the thrust of modern American painting was towards intense, unpremeditated, flat, non-representational images, Lanyon's obsessive desire to retrace the full experience of a multi-dimensional world was highly individual. In the process of painting the image could be subjected to a process of abstraction and "references to content in the final work may not be obvious".<sup>39</sup> The marks, brushstrokes, drips and use of paint may show a superficial kinship with the New York School of the 1950s. However, Lanyon's marks were not gestures in a cultural void, but an empathetic identification with the rhythms and forces of nature:

The paintings are the result of a whole experience...That which is under my feet is more urgent than all the ideas in my head.<sup>40</sup>

For Lulworth (Pl.130), a small port on the Dorset coast, he returned to the idea of figures merged into the landscape:

Here the rock is not granite as in Cornwall, but soft chalk in which one finds hard rounded flints. I've painted not only the shape of cove itself and the shape of the beach, but also of two lovers standing up hugging one another waiting to have their photograph taken by a rather old-fashioned photographer who's on the left hand side of the picture.<sup>41</sup>



The two young lovers having their picture taken are painted in heavy black lines to stand out from the chalk background. This is at once an aerial view of the Dorset cove, a study of a place where land and sea confront one another, a figurative painting presenting an analogy between nature and male and female forms, and a continuation of earlier compositions exploring similar themes: "A gaunt towering form on the left echoes the tower of Porthleven. It is the guardian (the photographer?)".<sup>42</sup>

Lanyon's visit to the Tate Gallery in 1956 to see such works as Pollock's She Wolf might have suggested a way forward. Here was a romantic existentialist artist-as-hero who shared his interest in the primitive, in Jungian theory and ancient myths. Pollock's very personal application of Surrealist devices, retaining fragments of Picasso's anatomical imagery and distorted memories of the Surrealists' bestiary, all within a scheme of continuous, circulating arabesques would have appealed to Lanyon:

THINGS HAPPEN. It is when things begin to happen that I begin to conceive a painting. (Admittedly the vision or image of Pollock as a discovery helps me to notice happening more strongly).<sup>43</sup>

The energy and expressive emphasis which flows through Pollock's configurations provides a unifying principle - a continuum of energy - which Lanyon admired. He shared Pollock's understanding that pictorial space, at its most basic, involves a tension of opposites: between what is seen and what is hidden, the abstract and the figurative, the contemplative and the impulsive. Lanyon's consistent claims that his seemingly abstract and semi-abstract works are always representational, echoes Pollock's own statements about his ostensibly abstract imagery: "I'm very representational some of the time," Pollock once stated, "and a little all of the time."<sup>44</sup>

Pollock's figuration takes the form of a disorientating shadow dance of spatial illusion. He aspired to depict "the energy, the motion, and other inner forces"<sup>45</sup> of the unconscious and found that this could be done by evoking the human figure without overtly representing it. Figurative elements emerge from the agitated coils of paint, dancing apparitions drawing the eye to the surface amid skeins and loops of colour before disappearing again into thin streaks of paint. Lanyon's representations perform in a



similar manner. It is often difficult to decide if what we are seeing is appearing or disappearing, being pulled out of the paint or obscured by it. Even more so than Pollock, however, Lanyon found himself on a thin edge between a European need for figuration and order and an American tendency towards freedom and chaos. Interestingly, Pollock returned to the more figurative subject matter of his early mythic works for the final phase of his work between 1953 and 1956. The need to invent new challenges after the "drip" pictures appears to have prompted him to rediscover the human figure. A late work like Easter and the Totem (1953), an anatomical abstraction which borrows from Matisse and Picasso, shares some compositional affinity with Lulworth.

While paintings such as Lea Cliff and Lulworth satisfied Lanyon's ambition to return to "the lonely places where physical danger and challenge are met...For high places and for edges"<sup>46</sup>, 1956 also saw him discover a new theme in his work. A key painting in this evolution, High Ground (48 x 72in., 1956, Whereabouts unknown, Pl.129), clearly shows the enclosed, centripetal quality of his earlier paintings being replaced with a new boldness and lyrical dynamism - the equivalent in paint of the complex movements contained within a Gabo construction.

I was helping the harvest on a farm when I painted High Ground. It's a picture of tall, dry grass blown about in the wind. It's in no way enclosed like the earlier boulder pictures: the diagonal lifts me from the ground into the sky. About this time I discovered I could do exactly this. I saw three gliders over a cliff and decided to go up there myself.<sup>47</sup>

The real significance of Lanyon's visit to the Tate Gallery in January 1956 lies in his sudden intuitive breakthrough to new formal possibilities and a renewed confidence to suggest rather than represent nature. The landscape is torn apart and rearranged into large square facing planes that are less enclosed than in earlier quasi-aerial views. The fragmentary forms, the newly independent brushstrokes and colour, represent a liberated approach to painting that prefigures the later gliding subjects. "Small details of paint are set off by a slow pulse of blocks and a diagonal",



creating a genuinely abstract response to "the high hills of the backbone of Cornwall".<sup>48</sup> While High Ground remains a somewhat transitional picture by clinging to a rectilinear compositional structure, it clearly predicts the direction in which Lanyon was going. The overall image is composed of open and mobile painterly marks, the "blown grass" on the hills, and appears to be impulsive and dynamic, expanding beyond the framing edges. It is therefore a seminal painting in that it heralds the first significant departure from his earlier diagrammatic paintings of the landscape looked at from above. With this painting Lanyon begins to resolve the polarities between topographical detail, coherent structure and all-over composition.

The paintings which come after 1956 continue to "bring together all my feelings about the landscape"<sup>49</sup>, but an interest in atmospheric conditions unlocks the enclosed, brooding areas in favour of a more open and free-flowing dynamic on the picture surface: broad swathes of paint appear to thrust forward into the viewer's space and then fall back into infinity. It would be facile to agree with Adrian Lewis' remark that Lanyon's "increasing breadth of handling owed more to the experience of gliding than to American painting".<sup>50</sup> He started gliding as late as 1959, joining the Cornish gliding club in the summer of that year. Aerial views had been part of his stock-in-trade since Porthleven in 1950, leading him to flatten out and press together the fictive planes of depth, creating a vibrating tension as the objects struggle to maintain their volume. After seeing the power and communal energy of artists like Still, Pollock, Rothko and Newman, Lanyon felt sufficiently encouraged to translate his vision of the natural world into quasi-abstract visions of storms and aircapes.

Works like Silent Coast (1957, Pl.134), St Ives Bay (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1957, Pl.133) and Barley Wind (72 x 48in., oil on masonite, Private Collection, 1958) are early attempts to "take movements in the figure paintings out into the air as the essential element of my environment".<sup>51</sup> They are characterised by the elimination of specific subject matter, a preference for the spontaneous, impulsive qualities of an unfettered brush, and an activated surface created by discursive, improvisatory techniques. However, they differ from much of contemporary American painting in that Lanyon refused to substitute form and content for an impulse energy



dramatised as purely "instinctual":<sup>52</sup>

I do not begin a painting until I know what I want. I do not always see the result but I am sufficiently conscious of a developing image to make drawings or objects which have a direct bearing on the resulting work. The final state of the developing image (which goes on developing through the process of painting) has invariably been a flat surface which is broken into, extended and vitalised by the style of realisation. Its final state has a look about it which in some cases is very personal and in others remote, but mostly there is an awkwardness and incompleteness such as I find in all human events...<sup>53</sup>

Abstract Expressionism encompasses two very different sensibilities: one, exemplified by de Kooning and Pollock, is characterised by energetic brushwork and rhythmic compositions; the other, represented by Rothko, consists of subtle colour harmonies, relatively static compositions, and produces a contemplative tone. Paintings such as Tamarisk (48 x 36in., oil on board, Private Collection. Pl.131), are significant in that they illustrate the possible impact of Rothko on Lanyon's painterly technique. References to nature are subliminal: colour and shape replaces traditional narrative content and figurative imagery. He is more concerned with the action of painting than depicting the tamarisk hedges on the coast between St Michael's Mount and Loe Bar or the bay "at Perranuthnoe. A place with a person".<sup>54</sup> A central octagonal area of pale blue and white hovers on the picture surface, framed by viridian green on either side and below by heavy strokes of grey and black painted over a square of pink-brown pigment. The colours and forms suggest a Cornish bay, gusty squalls scudding over the landscape, the evergreen shrub with its pink and white flowers, a hint of a figure. Lanyon achieves the integration of ground, form, colour, figure and landscape. Allusions to particular plants and places, the sea, the looming darkness of a cliff, the unpredictability of the weather are cloaked in the mystery of the act of painting.

In January 1957 Lanyon made his first visit to the United States for the one-man exhibition at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York. Among the sixteen pictures shown were Tamarisk, Europa, High Ground and Tall



Summer Country (72 x 30in., oil on masonite, 1956, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo). On this ten-day visit he met many of the artists with whose work he felt sympathetic. His diary reveals that he saw the painters Robert Motherwell and Adolf Gottlieb, the dealer Martha Jackson, the critics Dore Ashton and Clement Greenberg and the collectors Richard Baker and Stanley Seeger.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, it is impossible to know the exact nature of Lanyon's connections with these Americans. His first meeting with Rothko, whose paintings he admired, is not recorded, although seventeen months later the American artist visited Cornwall with his wife and child and stayed at Lanyon's house, Little Park Owles, for about a week. They searched unsuccessfully for a chapel in West Penwith for Rothko to decorate.<sup>56</sup> Neither is there any mention of Franz Kline whose wife was half-Cornish and whose letters reveal that the artists had met in 1957. Robert Motherwell became a close friend, although a planned trip to Little Park Owles failed to materialise.<sup>57</sup> Sheila Lanyon also recalls her husband's growing acquaintance with Willem de Kooning after a meeting on this first trip to America.<sup>58</sup> These connections were important in encouraging Lanyon to follow the dictates of his passions, allowing content to emerge as a result of his total involvement with the act of painting. Causey is right in saying that Lanyon's contacts with the Americans did not effect any instant change in his work, "though American art speeded his development towards a looser and more open kind of painting."<sup>59</sup>

It is far more difficult to guess the source and subject matter of Lanyon's paintings after 1956. Although the titles of his later paintings proffer some clues to their subjects, their images are far from descriptive. Instead of portraying the specifics of nature Lanyon wrests from his environment elements of coolness, warmth, airy insubstantiality and sunlight. The tangible forms of figure and landscape submit to them, appearing almost as after-images.

#### LANYON AND DE KOONING: CONVERGENCE - INFLUENCE OR COINCIDENCE?

One of the most difficult problems surrounding any discussion of this period centres around the possible interaction between the work of Lanyon



and de Kooning. Although still essentially related to Cubism, Pollock's pouring and dripping of his paints over the canvas swept away a good deal of the rigorous proportion and compositional architecture that we associate with even the most modern European art. De Kooning's women, on the other hand, are classically composed and rigorously adjusted images. His perfectly formed brush-strokes, calculated erotic gesturalism, and the tightly constructed proportions of his canvases represented a surprisingly apt role model for Lanyon, particularly as de Kooning's favoured subjects - women and the landscape - were also his own. Causey suggests that in looking at Lanyon's works after the Tate Gallery's exhibition of the Abstract Expressionists there would appear to be an intuitive, if not studied, appreciation of de Kooning's abstract cityscapes and landscapes:

An influence of de Kooning on Lanyon is traceable in Cornish and Dorset landscapes of 1957 and 1958, and can be related to such pictures of de Kooning as Untitled Abstract, 1955, and Easter Monday, 1956, which the Guggenheim and Metropolitan museums respectively had bought from de Kooning's 1956 exhibition at the Janis Gallery, and which Lanyon could have seen in January 1957.<sup>60</sup>

According to Causey Rosewall (72 x 60 in., oil on canvas, 1960, Ulster Museum, Belfast, Pl.160) "is perhaps the closest Lanyon comes to the painting of de Kooning".<sup>61</sup> There are certain compositional similarities between this picture and de Kooning's depictions of women in the early 1950s (although, ironically, there is a closer resemblance to de Kooning's 1967 Woman on a Sign). The painting is characterised by an accomplished variety of handling: brushwork that alternates between the vigorously gestural and the light-wristed and delicately scribbled; iridescent colours that glow with the lustre of semi-precious stones, golden amber, flesh-coloured cornelian, feathery whites and gritty matts in earth and ore tones. The sensuous surfaces created by this virtuosity of touch are achieved by a rhythmic circular pattern of broad strokes, random arabesques and attenuated lines connecting different areas of the canvas.

In Rosewall Lanyon employs de Kooning's female iconography, pushing her identity to riotous extremes, without resorting to either the geometric



restructuring of Cubism or Surrealism's pictorially legible reorganization of body parts. His figure squats on creaking legs, her body kneaded into the vortex of a yeasty Cornish landscape. Lanyon was clearly interested in de Kooning's work (he owned a copy of De Kooning by Harriet Janis and Rudi Blesh, published in 1960) and suggestions of an influence bordering on plagiarism have frequently dogged critical appreciations of the British artist. However, Rosewall can, of course, be seen not just as a figure in the landscape deriving from de Kooning's sexualised maenads, but as a straightforward evocation of Rosewall Hill, outside St Just:

The top of a hill called Rosewall from the air. A hill top will appear flattened from this aspect. The sky which in traditional landscape occupies the top half of the picture is in this painting all around and is the element from which the land is experienced.<sup>62</sup>

According to Andrew Lanyon the spiralling vortex was suggested by a photograph of Lanyon's daughter, Jo, holding his hat and coat, spinning round on Rosewall Hill.<sup>63</sup>

Countering suggestions that he was merely a follower of de Kooning, Lanyon always maintained that he influenced de Kooning as much as de Kooning influenced him. Naturally, this argument has found support from Patrick Heron. Not only does Heron vigorously proclaim the independence of British abstraction from any American influence, he further suggests that "New York painting is actually indebted to British painting", a claim he acknowledges "will strike the majority, on either side of the Atlantic, as insane":

So far from having always been at the receiving end of influence emanating from New York - a myth still enjoying wide currency - several of my own generation...have consistently exerted crucial influence upon New York painting from the late fifties onwards.<sup>64</sup>

Heron is justifiably proud that between 1956 and 1963, he, Lanyon, Scott and Davie held fourteen exhibitions in New York, feeding ideas directly to the Abstract Expressionists. This, so his argument runs, led the American



painters to recomplicate the picture surface, abandon the academic formula of symmetry in painting (de Kooning's Woman series, Noland's targets, John's dartboard, Ad Reinhardt's foursquare format), develop a new "edge-consciousness" to replace the tired centre-dominated format, and emulate the brush-handling of the British "middle generation". It would be facile to dismiss Heron's thesis as irrelevant, the "manic ravings" of someone suffering from "persecution manias".<sup>65</sup> His case has never been satisfactorily answered and his contention that he, not Morris Louis, initiated colour stripe painting now seems irrefutable.<sup>66</sup>

Heron, however, takes his argument too far when he cites de Kooning as the New York painter whose work was most dramatically affected by Lanyon's style. The contextual evidence to substantiate this claim is tendentiously thin: in January 1953 Gimpel Fils arranged an exhibition of three British painters (Lanyon, William Gear and James Hill) at the New York Passedoit Gallery and Lanyon's works were illustrated in the American magazine Artnews. Not even Heron has the temerity to suggest that paintings such as Corsham Summer and Inshore Fishing have much in common with de Kooning's Woman series. A second wave of publicity came with a profile written by Heron for Arts (New York) in February 1956 which was illustrated with six reproductions of Lanyon's abstract landscapes - among them St Just (1951-53), Europa (1953), Vertical Landscape, Corsham (1952) and Blue Boat and Rainstorm (48 x 57in., oil on masonite, Private Collection, 1954).<sup>67</sup> This was closely followed by Lanyon's first exhibition in New York at the Catherine Viviano Gallery. The "instant result" of these two events was that "Lanyon exerted an immediate and dramatic influence on de Kooning" with the American abandoning the flat, non-figurative, "raggedly uniform picture surfaces worked by a smaller brush".<sup>68</sup> Instead, the "comparatively smaller touch regularity of his 1955-56 all-over format" (seen in paintings like Gotham News, Easter Monday, and Saturday Night) was replaced by "a huge brush whose strokes are both longer and wider, in relation to the picture surface."<sup>69</sup> The landscapes of 1957-58, particularly Parc Rosenberg (1957) and Suburb in Havana (1958), "startlingly reveal Lanyon's influence". Further evidence of Lanyon's significance is provided by de Kooning's replacement of the all-over grid upon which his 1956 paintings were based and the jettisoning of his "boring addiction to symmetry in the invariably central positioning of the woman in his series of paintings of women".<sup>70</sup> The abstracted landscapes, which de Kooning's hagiographers see as moving evocations of the vastness and sublimity of the American landscape, have



"the very pronounced asymmetry" of Lanyon's work. Heron, upon first catching sight of them in New York, "momentarily assumed I was coming upon some rather over-relaxed Lanyons, which I'd somehow never seen before."<sup>71</sup>

Unfortunately, while Heron is at pains to point out the logical consistency in Lanyon's progression, he fails to see that de Kooning's abstracted landscapes belong to the period when the American artist was attempting to extricate himself from his highly successful series of grinning, boss-eyed, big-breasted Woman paintings. The process had begun in 1955 with Woman as Landscape, an attempt at artistic burial and resurrection by ploughing his ferocious maenad back into the landscape. The result was an "image not so much ensnared by its surroundings as enlarged to fill out the entire picture surface...He spreads her to nearly all the edges of the canvas and comes up with a mountain-mama, treetop tall."<sup>72</sup> De Kooning's Woman series had destroyed the premise that representation of the human figure and Abstract Expressionism were antithetical and he now proceeded to demonstrate that landscape and gesture painting could also co-exist in a dynamic relationship. This achievement parallels Lanyon's progress as he moved from representations of the figure and the landscape, to paintings integrating figures within the landscape, before finally emerging with a new synthesis of figure as landscape.

Continuing his logical progression after the disintegration of woman as image, de Kooning placed more emphasis on autonomous brushwork - resulting in the total abstraction of the urban landscapes (Gotham News, Saturday Night, Easter Monday and The Time of Fire). They are among his most ambitious paintings - produced at the height of 1950s abstraction. Nothing is static: the range of brushwork, the muscular and complex substantiality of surfaces, spatial congestion, abundance of planes and patches of colour all add up to a brilliant evocation of city life - loud, brash, antagonistic. De Kooning's narrow and individuated brushstrokes change direction without warning, cutting into the paths of other strokes and planes, producing a synaesthetic equivalent of New York. The urban landscape - its movement, buildings, light and grime - becomes part of the dynamic of the painting. The paintings of 1955-56 are a distillation of the way in which de Kooning worked when he painted the Woman series. From 1956 de Kooning began his gradual relocation from the city to the suburban areas surrounding New York and finally to the rural landscape of The Springs, East Hampton. As



he ventured further from the city, he began to clarify and simplify his images, enlarging individual areas within his paintings, incorporating the flatness, horizontality, and the special quality of light on Long Island that he found so appealing. Palisade of 1957 blurs the distinction between the vertical structure of the city and the horizontal configuration of the country, a process that is all but completed by 1963 with Rosy Fingered Dawn at Louise Point.<sup>73</sup>

While the landscapes may not be de Kooning's strongest paintings, it is difficult to substantiate Heron's accusation of plagiarism. Part of the problem lies in de Kooning's inability to explore the American landscape with the same conviction that he explored his own mindscape to bring forth the Woman paintings. The colour of rural America - yellow, umbers, blues and greens - was incapable of inflaming the same passionate response as the fleshy viscera of his indomitable female archetypes. The abstract landscapes may not be de Kooning's best pictures - but it cannot be denied that they fit into a developing oeuvre which was unlikely to have been much affected by contact with the works of a St Ives artist whose works de Kooning could have seen in a 1956 magazine profile and/or at an exhibition at the Viviano Gallery in January 1957.

I am unable to agree with Heron in his argument over precedent in this case because it seems that Lanyon and de Kooning reached a point of compatibility from different directions at about the same time: while Lanyon was integrating figures in the landscape de Kooning was embedding his women into the collective consciousness. The agitated brushstrokes, scrapings and impacted planes and spaces of Moor Cliff, Kynance (51 x 27in., oil on masonite, Arts Council, 1954, Pl.121) and Lea Cliff (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, 1956, Private Collection, Pl.128) coincided with the sinewy muscularity of de Kooning's urban landscape battlefields. Lanyon certainly saw de Kooning's work at the Tate Gallery in 1956, but the paintings on show "were all earlier and not relevant to Lanyon's development".<sup>74</sup> While Tamarisk demonstrates that Lanyon may have achieved greater succinctness and unity slightly earlier than de Kooning, it cannot be proved that the looser calligraphic brushwork and asymmetrical composition of Parc Rosenberg and Suburb in Havana were the result of de Kooning's admiration of Lanyon's



work.

The paintings reproduced in Heron's profile of Lanyon for Arts (NY) and on show at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in January 1957 do not show any remarkable affinity with de Kooning's landscapes which followed. Both artists began painting large abstract landscapes with simpler forms and broader gestures at roughly the same time, 1956-57: Lanyon after his visit to the Modern Art in the United States exhibition at the Tate in and de Kooning after he had worked through the Woman series and had exhausted the seam from which the urban landscapes had been mined. The broad, expansive, strokes derived from his experience of "landscapes and highways and sensations of that, outside the city - with the feeling of going to the city or coming from it".<sup>75</sup>

A useful comparison to illustrate the independence of each artist can be made between Lanyon's Soaring Flight (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Arts Council Collection, Pl.157) and de Kooning's Suburb in Havana (80 x 70in., oil on canvas, Mr and Mrs Eastman Collection, Pl.150). Both paintings use V shapes as structural devices within the composition. De Kooning's inspiration for the painting was a trip to Cuba during which he looked for Hemingway's home in Havana.<sup>76</sup> The great sweep of blue certainly stands for sky, the yellow below for some lowland terrain. In the upper-left hand corner de Kooning proposes a different perspective, a new space, which relates to the V-shaped form below. This rhetorical gesture alludes to a three-dimensional space, a triangle of illusionistic depth in the no-man's land which exists between the city and the countryside. The blue is an abstract notation, relating the white emptiness to the lower-left of the painting, reminding us that this is not only a landscape, but a vision of some specific space he has negotiated. The V provides a logical thrust and counterthrust to brace this personal space from any further intrusion by the ever-expanding horizontal plane of scalding heat.

By contrast, Lanyon employs an inverted V to record his sensation of flight and accentuate the conflict between static and dynamic forces among the compositional elements.



The red rises up on the left side to set the whole in motion: one almost stays still in the inverted V, but then sweeps down to the bottom right-hand corner and back through the brown squiggle up to the red again. It's the way you see a seagull in flight: soaring, hovering, and turning away down wind very fast. The movement goes at different speeds, so does the eye as it moves across and into the picture. The horizontal line of the ground forms the static element against which these dynamic forces can play.<sup>77</sup>

While de Kooning's composition is extremely spare, with relatively few strokes needed to complete the horizontal-vertical integration, Lanyon's marks represent a complicated flight-path across the surface of the painting. The varying strength of colour and gestural force in Lanyon's strokes is explained by the need to track movement through air currents at different speeds. The slash of scarlet which leads the eye up to the inverted V resembles repoussage and signifies the excitement and danger of first becoming airborne (de Kooning employs the same device with a brown sweep of the brush that sits on the base foreplane of his canvas). There is very little illusionistic depth, with air and sea forming a single entity. The horizon provides a stable axis to anchor the composition, a rainstorm cuts a diagonal swathe of translucent blue across the painting and the glider enjoys unrestricted movement over the surface. This method of animating a flat surface can be traced back to Lanyon's lessons with Nicholson and his early exploration of movement across a diagonal, the 1939 construction, White Track.

The viewer is not supposed to be able to walk through de Kooning's Havana suburb or follow Lanyon's airborne journey in any literal sense. Both artists are inviting the viewer to wander across their personalised landscapes and share in the excitement of space, light, and colour distilled into abstract gestures using a swift-paced, heavily loaded brush.

Lanyon's work lay naturally in the area of expressive abstraction central to the ideas of the New York School, yet retained its essentially English character through attachment to landscape and the conditions of the weather. His paintings were well received in New York and Heron's figure of fifty-two



important works in collections in the United States illustrates Lanyon's popularity. His contact with American painting broadened and expanded his own work and encouraged his development of looser calligraphic brushwork with longer and wider strokes in relation to the total picture surface.

The broad sweeping gestures of Silent Coast and Offshore Floating (48 x 24 in., oil on masonite, 1958, Private Collection) represent the artist at his most liberated. There is still a sense of great pressure, but internal boundaries have been dissolved to create zones of space which direct the viewer's eye through the picture and a potential narrative. Increasingly, Lanyon began painting sensations - not things. After 1959 the composite sensations and emotions evoked by his memory of gliding above Cornwall explains why his paintings have no direct association with any particular visible experience.



## Notes to Chapter Seven

1. "...there have emerged some abstract expressionists who have excited curiosity here, principally...Pollock and de Kooning...Their works wear already an air of impermanence" (N. Wallis, The Observer, 8th January 1956); Abstract Expressionism "should certainly not shock or surprise anyone familiar with abstract or non-figurative painting in Europe since the early abstract pictures of Kandinsky (B. Taylor, "Modern American Painting", The Spectator, 20th January 1956, p.80).
2. Patrick Heron, "The Americans at the Tate Gallery", "Arts" (New York), 30, 6th March 1956, pp.15-17.
3. The Guardian October 10th, 11th and 12th October 1974. Heron stood by his original argument when interviewed at his home, The Eagle's Nest, Zennor, on Monday, 27th October 1997.
4. "Middle generation" artists like William Scott, Roger Hilton, Bryan Wynter, John Wells and Terry Frost form a middle cohort between significantly older painters like Paul Nash, Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore who had established their reputations before the war and the high profile British artists like David Hockney and Anthony Caro, who came to notice in the 1960s.
5. The Guardian, 12th October, 1974.
6. The Guardian, 11th October, 1974.
7. Quoted in Patrick Heron, by Mel Gooding, Phaidon Press, London, 1994, p.14.
8. Patrick Heron, The Guardian, October 11th, 1974.
9. Lanyon indicated that he would visit the Biennale in a letter to Patrick Heron, nd (mid May 1950). Paintings in the American pavilion included Pollock's Number One (1948), de Kooning's Light in August (1946), Dark Pond and Mailbox (1948). De Kooning's iographical details can be found in Willem de Kooning, Diane Waldman, Thames and Hudson, London, pp.144-150.
10. John Ferren, "Symposium: The Human Figure", Art Digest, November 15th 1953.
11. The Guardian, Friday October 11th, 1974.
12. Patrick Heron, "Peter Lanyon", Art News and Review, 6th March 1954, p.7. Lanyon's comments on Soutine are from "An Unfamiliar Land", 1962, TGA 211AB.
13. St Ives, 1883-1993, Marion Whybrow, Antique Collectors Club, 1994, p.139.
14. Letter of 25th April 1954 to Peter Gimpel, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.148.
15. Letter to Peter Gimpel, 18th May 1955, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.152.
16. Letter to Charles Gimpel, 18th December 1955, in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.152.
17. Eric Newton, Time and Tide, 27th March, 1954. Another critic scathingly remarked that the paintings were "less communicative than most work in children's exhibitions". "Peter Lanyon, Glimpses of Glory", The Scotsman, 27th March 1954. An anonymous review, dated 27th March 1954, stated that the works consisted of "an uncomfortable mixture of purely conventional and decorative forms with others that derive, however remotely, from obvservation of landscape." Tate Gallery Archive, press cuttings file. Robert Melville, writing for the Architectural Review, commented that "he seems to have mixed all his colours in preparation for atmospheric views of the Cornish scene and then slapped his paint onto the canvas in a very lively fashion without bothering to represent anything." He went on to urge Lanyon to "come into the open and either present an image or stop hinting that there may be one buried under the impasto [so that] we shall be able to admire his painting qualities with less irritability."



June 1954, p.414.

18. Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.44.

19. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aidan Ellis Publishing, London, 1971.

This includes a catalogue of known painting, p.52.

20. Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., pp.150-154.

21. St Peter's Loft operated as a summer school between 1955 and 1960.

Jeremy Le Grice, a former pupil, remembered that Lanyon "put all his energies into encouraging and teaching us...probing everyone to advance their own style." Quoted in Margaret Garlake, op.cit., 1998, p.44.

22. Margaret Garlake, op.cit., p.46.

23. Letter printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.150.

24. Postmarked St Ives, 6.00pm 7th September, 1955. Reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.151.

25. Catherine Viviano already represented Alan Davie. According to Margaret Garlake the gallery was "at the forefront of a wave of interest in such younger British artists as Richard Smith, Patrick Heron and William Scott." Peter Lanyon, op.cit., p.49.

26. Peter Lanyon, "The Artist talks about his painting", a British Council lecture, 1963, TAV 526 AB.

27. Handwritten note, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.168.

28. Letter to Paul Feiler, dated 18th October, 1961. Quoted in Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Paintings, Drawings and Constructions, 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, 1978, p.35. Lanyon visited the exhibition of Rothko paintings at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in October 1961.

29. Letter to Charles Gimpel, 10th May 1956, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.163.

30. Letter to Peter Gimpel, 16th May 1956, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.163.

31. Letter to Charles Gimpel, 10th May 1956, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.163.

32. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1971, p.52.

33. Michael Canney on Lanyon's painting, Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.159.

34. Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters", Art News, December 1952, New York.

35. Robert Motherwell, catalogue of "The School of New York" exhibition, Perls Gallery, Beverly Hills, California, 1951. Much as he valued the role of the unconscious in painting, Motherwell's emphasis was on decision making, on consciously shaping forms.

36. Peter Fuller quoted in Peter Davies, St Ives Revisited, Old Bakehouse Publications, 1994, p.161.

37. "A Sense of Place", Painter and Sculptor, Autumn 1962, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.230.

38. Ibid., p.230.

39. "A Sense of Place", quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op. cit., 1990. p.230.

40. Peter Lanyon, 12th July 1956, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.162.

41. British Council lecture, 1963, TAV 526 AB.

42. Handwritten note, Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.158. Oliver Parfitt believes that the central theme of Lulworth is tourism, note 72, pp.61-62, Peter Lanyon and the Generation of Tradition, M.A. report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, 1994.



43. Undated letter to Alan Bowness, printed in Peter Lanyon, Arts Council of Great Britain, exhibition catalogue, 1968.
44. Pollock is quoted in "A Long View", essay by Michael Auping, Howard Hodgkin, Thames and Hudson, paperback edition, 1997, p.29.
45. Jackson Pollock interviewed in 1951, quoted in Interpreting Pollock, Jeremy Lewison, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1999, p.37.
46. Notes for an article in Painter and Sculptor, May 1962, quoted p.68 in Peter Lanyon, Air, Land and Sea, The South Bank Centre, 1992.
47. British Council lecture, 1963, TAV 526 AB.
48. Handwritten note, Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.156.
49. British Council lecture, 1963, TAV 526 AB.
50. Essay on Lanyon by Adrian Lewis for Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, exhibition, September 16th to October 14th 1978.
51. Note written by Lanyon, possibly in 1960, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.195.
52. Leon Golub, "A Critique of Abstract Expressionism" from College Art Journal, winter 1955, reprinted in Abstract Expressionism, A Critical Record, David Cecile Shapiro, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.90.
53. Peter Lanyon, "A Sense of Place", Painter and Sculptor, Autumn 1962.
54. Quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.155.
55. Lanyon's engagement diary in the collection of Sheila Lanyon. See also Margaret Garlake, op.cit., 1998, p.50.
56. Correspondence between Lanyon and Rothko, illustrating the links that existed between the New York School and the St Ives painters, was on display in the Tate Gallery, St Ives in 1996. On the 14th August 1959 Lanyon wrote to Peter Gimpel: "We are in chaos here because Rothko Wife and Child and William Scott are arriving tonight and stay until Monday." An interesting account of Rothko's visit is given by Nancy Wynne-Jones in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.326.
57. Margaret Garlake, op.cit., 1998, p.50; see also Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.42.
58. Interview with Sheila Lanyon, 27th August 1996.
59. Andrew Causey, Whitworth Art Gallery, 1978, op.cit., p.18.
60. Andrew Causey, Whitworth Art Gallery, 1978, op.cit., p.40.
61. Ibid., p.40.
62. Handwritten note reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.198.
63. This photograph of Lanyon's daughter can be found in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, op.cit., p.199.
64. Patrick Heron, The Guardian, Friday October 11th, 1974.
65. Suzi Gablik, letter published by Studio International, March 1968, in response to Heron's article "A kind of cultural imperialism" in the February edition.
66. Matthew Collins in Modern Painters, winter 1997, volume 10, number 4, p.65 writes of Heron's "somewhat paranoid-seeming, but to him obviously very urgent and meaningful" quest to receive full recognition for inventing the stripe paintings. The earliest colour stripe painting was executed in March 1957 and a collection of them was exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in February 1958. Louis did not start painting his stripes until 1959-1960 (for example, Pillars of Hercules, 1960) and there is a dowdy and depressing feel about them which Peter Fuller believed "have the look of last season's used and abused fashions" (Peter Fuller, "Patrick Heron: the Innocent Eye", reprinted in Modern Painters, Methuen, 1993, p.218).
67. Arts (New York), February 1956.
68. The Guardian, October 12th 1974.



69. Ibid., October 12th 1974.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Harry F. Gaugh, Willem de Kooning, Abbeville Press, New York, 1983, p.55.
73. De Kooning started spending summers at Leo Castelli's house in East Hampton in 1951. In 1958 he rented Marca Relli's house in The Springs, East Hampton from the late summer until January 1959. In 1961 de Kooning bought a cottage in The Springs from Peter Fried, his brother-in-law, and built a studio. He moved out of his loft on Broadway in June 1963.
74. Andrew Causey, Whitworth Art Gallery, op.cit., 1978, p.40.
75. De Kooning, "Content is a Glimpse", Location, No.1, Spring, 1963, p.47.
76. Letter, Lee V. Eastman, August 30th 1982, see note 85, Willem de Kooning, Harry F. Gaugh, op.cit., p113.
77. British Council talk, 1963, TAV 526 ABC.



## **Chapter Eight**

### **GLIDING TO THE FURTHEST SHORE: A DUAL PRACTICE - PAINTINGS AND CONSTRUCTIONS 1959/64**



In the summer of 1959 Lanyon joined the Cornish Gliding Club at Perranporth and fulfilled his long-standing ambition of learning to fly. He had been unable to become a pilot during the war as he suffered from migraine and failed the Royal Air Force medical (though his work as an aero-engine specialist did allow him to "fly on tests and that sort of thing").<sup>1</sup> Before he started flying, Lanyon had always believed that his self-identity was defined by a concept of physical involution - full immersion into the Cornish landscape which allowed the artist to see himself as both part of and at one with his surroundings. Like Wordsworth, who in his long working life "traversed a distance of 175,000 to 180,000 miles", Lanyon built up "moments of perception into monuments of considered experience"<sup>2</sup> by travelling across Penwith on a bicycle or in a car, going down a working tin mine and taking up underwater swimming. Since the days of his pupillage with Borlase Smart he had been an avid cliff-walker, always seeking out the sensation of vertigo ("a sort of Angst applied to landscape")<sup>3</sup> which could then be transmuted into a vertiginous composition. He also encouraged his students at Corsham to use all their senses in response to their environment. To achieve this aim and to develop their understanding of space, he asked them to paint on and in the landscape so that their area of activity extended beyond the canvas to painting lines and marks on the earth and in the grass.<sup>4</sup>

All this activity reveals Lanyon's essentially romantic spirit. The individual confronted by the clash of elemental forces inevitably invokes Edmund Burke's conception of the sublime:

In nature dark, confused, uncertain images have a greater power on the fancy to form the grander passions than those which are more clear and determinate.<sup>5</sup>

Turner, the towering eminence in English Romantic painting, is said to have lashed himself to the mast of a ship to experience the force of the storm depicted in Lanyon's favourite painting, Snow storm - Steam boat off a Harbour mouth (1842). The potter Warren Mackenzie recalled seeing



Lanyon's Lear-like figure roaming the storm-blasted streets of St Ives in the middle of an Atlantic gale shouting, "It's great, it's going to tear the town down, isn't it wonderful?"<sup>6</sup> Lanyon admired Turner's churning, vortical tempests of wind and water that seized the immensities of elemental forces in a manner prophetic of his own search for a structure and a technical means to convey the overwhelming energies and velocities of nature. The spiralling vortex and the becalmed middle section is a device frequently used by Turner (for example in Light and colour (Goethe's Theory) - the morning after the Deluge, 1843). Lanyon usually employed whirling structures (or circumambulatio) to invoke the animating force of the Europa bull (as in Offshore) while still sections serve to balance these areas of intense activity by suggesting a nurturing core of generative power (as in the 1962 Porthmeor mural for Stanley J. Seeger Jr.). Barry Dodge has linked the rotatory movement in these paintings to mandala figures which, according to Jungian theory, symbolise the self and the potential for wholeness.<sup>7</sup>

In painting liminal zones - points of contact "where the land meets the sea, where flesh touches the lips" - Lanyon invoked a powerful sense of the Sublime in nature and placed himself in a tradition which was undergoing a revival in the expansive canvases of American painters like Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko.<sup>8</sup> Gliding allowed him to "extend my physical participation into more dimensions",<sup>9</sup> signalling an important repositioning in the way that the artist defined himself and his surroundings. By taking advantage of invisible forces the glider pilot is at the mercy of the natural world and feels himself to be part of the elemental forces. Because of the illusion of transparency and translucence in the environment in which he now operated, Lanyon was free to develop a new painterly language to express this ethereal world of atmospheric weightlessness:

I can't rationalise what the weather does to me. I don't know what it is. It probably creates a sort of excitement in me...<sup>10</sup>

Gliding seemed a logical progression in Lanyon's continuing re-examination of the spatial context within which the landscape subject was perceived:

The whole purpose of gliding was to get a more complete knowledge



of the landscape, and the pictures now combine the elements of land, sea and sky earth, air and water. I had always watched birds in flight exploring the landscape, moving more freely than man can, but in a glider I was similarly placed.<sup>11</sup>

For the first time he was able to experience Cornwall from the outside, reaching heights hitherto only imagined in the illusory spaces and liquefied abstractions of weather paintings such as Cape Wind (1952) and Moor Cliff, Kynance (1953).

One of Lanyon's favourite authors was the pioneer aviator Antoine de Saint -Exupéry who had served as a pilot in the First World War, opened the transatlantic airmail routes to South America and North Africa before dying in mysterious circumstances off the Marseilles coast in 1944. His books were translated into English in the 1930s and the author's feelings for the open skies, his love of flying, noble motivation and patrician sense of duty, find an echo in many of Lanyon's concerns and attitudes. Never a first-rate pilot (something else he had in common with Lanyon - some of his best writing is about his own crashes), he captured the exploits of pilots who pushed themselves to the limits of endurance and in so doing defined their own Being and achieved a sense of transcendental communion with the elements:

Fabien, the pilot bringing the Patagonian air-mail from the far south to Buenos Aires, could mark night coming on by certain signs that called to mind the waters of a harbour - a calm expanse beneath, faintly rippled by lazy clouds and he seemed to be entering a vast anchorage, an immensity of blessedness.<sup>12</sup>

The pilot's experience of an elemental nature - spiritual, bodiless, at once awesomely simple and awesomely complex - perpetuates that Romantic sense of a quasi-religious mystery behind the material surfaces of the seen world. For Saint-Exupéry, as for Lanyon, the sky provided a metaphor in nature of existential mystery, "becoming at once a sea in which one might drown and the Other that defines the edges of the Self".<sup>13</sup>



Lanyon's fascination with the immediate, physical experience of flying might also suggest an awareness of the philosophical concerns of the French existentialist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who advocated a form of phenomenology which saw the relationship of the perceptive body with its environment as the key to self-knowledge and self-definition:

My body is geared into the world when my perception presents me with a spectacle as varied and as clearly articulated as possible, and when my motor intentions, as they unfold, receive the responses they expect from the world. The maximum sharpness of perception and action points clearly to a perceptual ground, a basis of my life, a general setting in which my body can co-exist with the world.<sup>14</sup>

By exploring the dynamic interaction between the invisible elemental forces of the natural world and the movement of the glider through the air, Lanyon found a new dimension in which he could represent his own existence.

Lanyon's first-hand experience of nature's refusal to conform to the classical sense of order necessitated a dynamic, expanded conception of the landscape and a re-thinking of relations within the picture field. The framing edge became progressively less important in defining the scope of a view as he now offered the viewer a choice of several routes through the picture space to evoke the sensation of being lifted by thermals and moving through layers of cloud:

I have discovered since I began gliding that the activity is more general than I had guessed. The air is a very definite world of activity as complex and demanding as the sea...The thermal is itself a current of hot air rising and eventually condensing into a cloud. It is invisible and can only be apprehended by an instrument such as a glider...<sup>15</sup>

His art always involved a constant struggle to turn sensory perceptions into artistic vision and the experience of flight brought new complexities to his view of the landscape.

The gliding paintings can also be seen as part of his quest for wholeness,



a Jungian journey towards psychological individuation. In a discourse on his work, Lanyon spoke of going beyond the "immediate gesture" to enter the "human condition":

To transcend this is to achieve an act of commitment and choice and eventually an arrival at consciousness. The final act is once more a completely integrated gesture and a certainty...<sup>16</sup>

These paintings uncover an imagery for his inward spiritual urge to a higher and more complete existence: "We must take literally what vision teaches us: namely that through it we come into contact with the sun and the stars, that we are everywhere all at once."<sup>17</sup> He was able to use his freedom in the air to re-animate his visionary knowledge and, through his experience of one-ness with the elements, he intuited the wholeness of existence:

Today it's possible, I think, and this is why I do gliding myself to get actually into the air itself and get a further sense of depth into yourself, as it were into your own body, and then carry it through into a painting. I think this is a further extension of what Turner was doing.<sup>18</sup>

Gliding put the petty squabbles and rivalries of St Ives into perspective, allowed him to escape (albeit briefly) from the debilitating distractions of financial hardship,<sup>19</sup> and freed him from the emotional pressures of family life. In his insubstantial world of space and atmosphere he felt himself charged with energies from a deeper dimension of the self than the ego-centred consciousness. Michael Tucker has described these moments of sublime awareness in terms of a transmutative shamanic empathy with nature: "it is to sense the still, yet completely energised point at the crossroads of time and eternity, history and the cosmos within one."<sup>20</sup> Lanyon, like Turner before him, metamorphosed matter into some ultimate, insubstantial element of nature, an overwhelming power that evokes cosmic archetypes.

1959-62 were the most productive years of Lanyon's painting career: Causey lists twenty-eight known works for 1961 alone, many of which were exhibited



at the VI Sao Paulo Biennale, the Catherine Viviano Gallery, New York and Gimpel Fils in London.<sup>21</sup> The majority of the paintings were inspired by the transcendent liminality of gliding, the landscape of West Penwith and its appearance in different weather conditions (Airscape, Cliff Soaring, Rising Air, Drift, Calm Air, Headwind, Backing Wind). In contrast to the heavy earthiness of the earlier work, there is a greater identification with the rhythms of the sea and air, the interplay of light and atmosphere, sunshine, clouds and rain.

One of the earliest paintings inspired by the sensation of gliding is Solo Flight (48 x 72in., oil on masonite, Arts Council, 1960, Pl.149):

Solo Flight was one of the first pictures, done after I had learned to glide and fly around the coast. The red is the track of something moving over the surface of the painting and at the same time, the track of the aircraft moving over the ground below. Blue air merges with the land. I wanted to get the sense of something faraway and down below, inside the red track.<sup>22</sup>

The technical problem of depicting the path of the aircraft was overcome by the thick red band which cuts through the white and blue layers of atmospheric turbulence and clouds.

Airscape (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.162) is a synthesis of Lanyon's compositional concerns and thematic motifs at this time:

In Airscape distances are even more extreme. There's a spiral current on the left, quiet air in the middle, and stormy weather conditions - an approaching rainstorm on the right. Far below out of range at one's feet, is the landscape from St Agnes, looking eastwards into Cornwall. It is an ancient country, scored and marked by centuries of mining. This comes into the picture, but so does the sudden event happening in the present, for the whole idea of the painting began when lying over a cliff I disturbed a bird on its nest. It is this range of experience - from the immediate to the historical - that I want to include in my pictures.<sup>23</sup>

The heavy mixing of colours with white to achieve tonal blending is used



in paintings like Long Moor (1960) and Rosewall (1960) to transmit a sense of the landscape seen through a light covering of cloud and atmospheric haze. The painting shares structural and morphological similarities with Beach Girl (1961) and Europa (1954): there is the same "sexualization"<sup>24</sup> of the ancient landscape as he identifies the reclining female figure with the forms, rhythms and natural objects of his native country. He also drew a parallel between Airscape and the triptych compositional format of Bojewyan Farms (1951-52).<sup>25</sup> However, the aerial perspective and white overlay has allowed him to break up the schematic "solid blocks" of the earlier paintings and unify the different sections into a more cohesive image.

Increasingly dissatisfied with the emotionally loaded gestures and solipsisms of Abstract Expressionism, Lanyon's work in the early 1960s deliberately deflated the spatial and spectral energies of the American movement. This coincided with a switch to painting on canvas after his American dealer, Catherine Viviano, complained that masonite board warped in the centrally heated apartments of her New York clients. After some initial doubts about the permanence and stability of his work on canvas, Lanyon began to exploit the potential of using sparer means to dissolve his paintings into prismatic studies of light and atmosphere.<sup>26</sup> Thermal (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Tate Gallery Collection, Pl.161) strongly conveys the solitude of flying high above the West Cornwall landscape and the atmospheric conflict of static and dynamic forces:

Terrific turbulent action going up on the left-hand side, then slowing down completely into the deep blue below, which is almost completely static, like a threatening thunder cloud.<sup>27</sup>

His description of the thermal as "the basic source of all soaring flight...hot air rising from the ground as a large bubble" recalls Turner's more poetic vision of "earth's humid bubbles" brought forth by the "returning sun" only to burst "ephemeral as the summer fly, which rises, flits, expands and dies."<sup>28</sup> The painting also reminds us of his early interest in capturing the movement of sea gulls flying round Bosigran, a spectacular cliff formation (and site of an ancient castle) on the North Cornish coast: in some notes made in 1940, while he was still receiving instruction from Nicholson, he described how he would watch the gulls flying round the rock, "caressing its shape as the sea caresses its base, and glide up and down behind it,



always moulding the space between the rock and the shore."<sup>29</sup> The constructions which followed, particularly White Track (1939/40) and Triangle Construction (1940) were attempts to articulate "the form which sea gulls made around the rock". Lanyon himself stressed that Thermal was not just concerned with the phenomenology of gliding:

The experience in Thermal does not only refer to glider flight. It belongs to pictures which I have done before, eg Bird-wind (1955), and which are concerned with birds describing the invisible, their flight across cliff faces and their soaring activity.<sup>30</sup>

The greater serenity and stillness experienced while navigating his glider through invisible air currents and thermals came to supplant the agitated brushwork used to depict the elemental forces as seen from the ground in a painting like Zennor Storm (48 x 72in., oil on hardboard, 1958, Tate Gallery, Pl.137). There was no sudden break, but the slower tempo and ethereal glow of Long Moor (1960), Drift (60 x 42in., oil on canvas, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.164) and Still Air (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1961, New Art Centre, London, Pl.173) draw together all the strands of his lifelong concern for depicting movement, light and atmosphere. His evocation of air, wind and the sensation of flight reduces the image to a minimum, almost obliterating the residual traces of the landscape. In these transcendent visions of great beauty the muted palette of pale washes is punctuated with small areas of pure incandescent colour (John Wells once said of Cornwall that "its real colour is grey, out of that these colours glow from inside").<sup>31</sup> Their apparent formlessness is deceptive: the softened layers of paint hide a firm structure of strongly marked horizontal and vertical stresses that binds together light, air, water and the movement of the glider so that the viewer is swept up by the invisible thermals and shares the artist's experience of moving through space.

Lanyon described Long Moor (Pl.151) as a painting of "mystery. Flying off mining coast. A landfall. Approach to moor country from the air over the coast. Evening."<sup>32</sup> The two hovering tiers, divided by a horizon consisting of a thick black line and an amorphous semi-transparent veil drawn across the picture, are reminiscent of Rothko's archetypal statements of abstract painting. However, Lanyon has not reached the point where the image becomes a mysteriously resonant void from which all palpable form has been eliminated.



Instead there are metaphorical suggestions of an elemental nature: the horizontal division evokes the primordial separation of a blue-green sea from the oxidised red-brown of the mineral-rich soil. The painting is a classic Lanyon land-sea encounter - but without the sense of conflict that this normally implies. The vortex - normally a symbol for the rape of Europa - can here be seen as a setting sun that seems to be generating a quietly lambent glow. Lanyon has distilled the components of a primitive landscape experience - gliding over the Cornish coast in the evening light - into an almost abstract image of silent, mystical luminosity. He has reached a mental state in which the self is brought to the brink of dissolution through the powerful experience of unboundedness. His basic configuration finds its source in Turner who similarly achieved the dissolution of all local and chronological boundaries in his overwhelming visions of human ambition checked by the forces of nature. Andrew Causey cites Long Moor as belonging to a group of paintings belonging to the period 1960-62 which he considers as "perhaps the finest Lanyon made...certainly among the great British paintings of the 20th century."<sup>33</sup>

Lanyon's work during this period seemed to be leading him to a more universalized form of abstraction - increasingly removed from the existentialist self-realisation found in the gestural sweeps, broad brushwork, splashes and dribbles of the mid-1950s. While abstract expressionism projected an almost violent and pent-up dynamism, Lanyon's gesturalism is grounded in a profound gentleness, aspiring to the kind of spiritual poise and pictorial order he so admired in Gabo or de Stäel. Atmospheric oils like Two Birds (48 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Gimpel Fils) and Drift which gently dissolve the landscape forms into a vaporous haze have become purified of many of the forms, symbols and allusions of his earlier canvases. References to the external world have become subsumed into general statements recording the activity of flight - the directional strokes reflecting the glider's movements, the sense of calm and spiritual equipoise conveying the artist's achievement of transcendence. In the end, however, Lanyon was not ready to accept this quality of dematerialization. He remained stubbornly attached to the world of appearances, maintaining his adherence to the representation of the landscape, believing in the co-existence of figurative and abstract forms. After the purification had taken place he felt ready for a change of direction and cast around for a new way of presenting his imagery.



## CONSTRUCTIONS AND PICTORIAL SYNTHESIS: 1957-1964

Lanyon's decision to join the Cornish Gliding Club precipitated a dramatic change in how he placed himself conceptually in the landscape and by extension, in his paintings and constructions. Gliding gave him the unrestricted freedom to move between the elements, allowing him to "get a more complete knowledge of the landscape, and the pictures now combine the elements of land, sea and sky - earth, air, and water".<sup>34</sup> The ability to dissolve boundaries encouraged him to break down the distinctions between painting and construction: the constructions of the late 1950s and early 1960s are very different from the earlier "scaffolding" which he had used to elucidate compositional and spatial configurations within specific paintings. Now this process was reversed and abstract sculptural elements were assembled into independent works of art.

The later sculptures, constructions and wall-reliefs enabled Lanyon to reconstruct in depth the multi-dimensional, physical and perceptual experience of the landscape as seen from the vantage point of his single-seater glider. Once discovered, the experience of soaring flight - performing loops and arcs across an empty sky - released an innate versatility which he interpreted with the greatest freedom. Whereas conventional modelling and carving were relatively laborious procedures, requiring special materials and tools, Lanyon's sculptures seem to gather into one genus everything that came to hand. A limitless variety of textures and substances are employed to achieve rich and intricate effects. The constructions challenge our response to his paintings and they inform each other in an unprecedented way. The production of mixed media collage and three-dimensional constructions also reopened the dialogue with his past mentors - Nicholson's cubist exploration of tactility and Gabo's constructivist "changing of the material elements of industrial-culture into volume, plane, colour, space, and light."<sup>35</sup>

Many of Lanyon's St Ives contemporaries shared his interest in dissolving the boundaries between two-dimensional painting and sculpture: In 1960 Bryan Wynter began using "found" elements such as concave searchlight mirrors and painted shapes and strips of cardboard to create the three-dimensional kinetic mobiles which he called "IMOOS": Images Moving Out Onto Space.<sup>36</sup>



These works explored his interest in pictorial space in concentrated form, making depth tangible in terms of moving colour. Terry Frost was also experimenting with hanging objects, collaged elements, and painted sculpture - many of the forms which he later incorporated into his canvases can be traced to the period when he worked as an assistant to Barbara Hepworth.<sup>37</sup> Works of this kind, constructions, manipulated found objects, and kinetics, relate the St Ives artists to a wider international movement searching for new variants of pictorial and sculptural space through an exploration of unconventional media. However, descriptive meaning remained important for the Cornish artists and their forays into three-dimensional form were usually intended to transfigure the object into a new and unexpected landscape context without destroying its singularity or material integrity.

Coast Soaring (56 x 23in., copper, wood and oil on board, 1958, Private Collection, Pl.140), a construction mounted like a wall-bound sculptural relief, is an early example of Lanyon's determination to leave behind the constrictions of any specific modernist manner and break down the barriers between media, merging painting with assemblage. The work's object quality is enhanced by its setting within a deep box frame, the inside edges of which have been painted an evocative blue. Its stage-like composition contains echoes of one of Lanyon's earliest constructions, the Nicholson-supervised Box Construction (1939), while the painted illusion of a panel standing perpendicular to the base is redolent of Triangle Construction (1940). The clear division of components, accentuated by the thick black line that runs down the middle, creates the effect of a hard-edged version of the paintings which depict "the weather and the high places where solids and fluids meet. The junction of sea and cliff, wind and cliff..."<sup>38</sup> The collaged arcs of copper and wood bisecting most of the painting's vertical height are part of the internal armature which has broken through the surface skin of the painting and anticipate the excitement and thrill of gliding. This device is redolent of the sling trajectory of White Track (1939), but also anticipates the metal bars screwed into the red and green surface of Glide Path (60 x 48in., oil and plastic on canvas, 1964, The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester, Pl.211).

The earliest wall-reliefs should be regarded as modifications of the



picture surface, giving his canvases a dimension that already existed in the free-standing constructions by allowing a play between real and imaginary space. Working within a confined and shallow space Lanyon recontextualised fragments that relate to the Cornish landscape and/or the experience of gliding.

The country does not remain as a photographic image, it is the source of human experience. The thing constructed from this raw material is neither romantic nor classic. It is without terms except its own. Mobile sculpture forms composed of open metal, pierced forms in stone - all these are indicative of a desire to make distant things near, but over all the constructions remains the sensuous reality of substance and for the painter the reality of paint itself.<sup>39</sup>

Experiments in this method of juxtaposing visual phenomena through the reappropriation of found material appealed to the practical side of his personality and marked a change from a subjective, fluidly abstract art towards a revised association with the environment. With his mind focused on these objects he was able to create a fresh version of pictorial space which reflected his experience of natural objects and allowed the paint to vibrate with a stronger rhythm and more insistent pulse.

Built up Coast (24x 16in., ceramic tile, stained glass, wire, mirror and oil on masonite, Manchester City Art Galleries, 1960, Pl.154) is one of the earliest constructions associated directly with gliding. Lanyon was a master at recycling materials and imagery - a technique which gives his work the appearance of having been conceived as a series - but was more often the result of plastic spontaneity and improvised ingenuity. Part painting, part collage, Built up Coast incorporates fragments of tiles that he had made in Mary Redgrave's kiln in St Ives for the University of Liverpool mural, the Conflict of Man with the Tides and Sand. The sliver of red glass tracks the path of the glider as it approaches the coast, echoing the swathes of scarlet in paintings such as Soaring Flight and Solo Flight. The presence in the construction of more or less landscape and atmospheric elements, motifs and moods inspired by his experience of gliding over West Penwith, can be felt in the pictorial space created by



dragging white paint thinly across manganese blue to suggest either thin cloud over the sea or the textural association of the wind whipping up surf and foam. The predominance of green on the large central fragment of painted board suggests that its elevated surface denotes a Cornish headland facing the sea. The subdued sultry dark-greens, blue-greens and patches of earth brown evoke the colours of the landscape as viewed from an aerial perspective.

Often there is a contrast between the rectilinear geometry of the found object and the curvilinear shapes and contours of the paint surface, rather like a road or airport runway seen from above. The metal grid in Built Up Coast, rescued from the detritus of the Liverpool mural (the wire frame can be seen in a photograph of Lanyon's studio taken at the time he was working on the Liverpool mural),<sup>40</sup> stabilises the composition by providing the essential vertical architecture to balance the broad horizontal brushstrokes of the painting. Airoundland (30 x 31 x lin., paint, wood, glass, plastic and metal, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.172) plays on the contrast between the raised hard-edged geometry of a white triangle which has been screwed on to the board and the enveloping horseshoe of red paint which contains the landscape elements. As in the freestanding sculpture, what is at issue is the way in which we - as viewers - may or may not inhabit the work and experience how Lanyon wished to depict himself within land or airspace:

The artist is like a sponge and he absorbs information...he has to turn it into shapes which not only represent, say, specifically one apple in a very definite time and space or place; it has to represent not only an apple, but a bald head, or maybe a football...It requires from the spectator that they should look at the picture and be prepared to invent for themselves information about what they're looking at.<sup>41</sup>

Within the construction incident is created by the complex relationships between the triangle, painted glass, fragment of wood and the pictorial ground. The contours, edges and elevations subvert the traditional Albertian notions of linear perspective receding into space. The work is not conceived as a "window" into illusionistic space, but has become what Braque and Picasso called a "tableau-objet", existing in the real space of the viewer.<sup>42</sup>



refused to see Art as an activity devoid of humour.<sup>45</sup>

For Lanyon, the role of artist excluded the possibility of guarded frontiers between the various arts. The painted cards and photographic collages work as visual diaries - witty epistles and commentaries on everyday experiences as well as oblique criticisms of the self-importance that he detected in other St Ives artists. A 1958 card to Paul Feiler, based on a photograph of Hepworth's studio, features louche cut-out images of Lanyon, Heron, Hilton and Pasmore with Hepworth looking on benignly in the background (Pl.145). One of the textual fragments has the line "English painters are notoriously unwilling to band themselves together and proclaim a unity of purpose." It cannot have been accidental that Lanyon's head has been collaged on to a figure wielding a knife! Another card, this time a view of the harbour, has been overpainted with a hybrid flag (St Piran's cross and the Union Jack) bearing the letters B & B (Pl.146). The geometric design of the flag and the linearity of the drawn shapes recall Nicholson's combination of painting and drawing, texture and line. The B & B, of course, does not refer to Bed and Breakfast. Could the long-legged wading bird towering over the scene be a Heron?<sup>46</sup> The dominant compositional form is a crudely painted breakwater running across the centre of the card with the name Lanyon scribbled on its side.

It was inevitable that in such a rich pudding some cherries would decide to sit on top, just as it was inevitable that some of the under currants would blow raspberries at those perched aloft. There were three B's: Barbara, Ben and Bernard and it was an irresistible temptation for my father to play Goldilocks and help himself to their porridge.<sup>47</sup>

Sanitised postcard views of Penzance, St Just, Lamorna Cove, Coverack Harbour and St Ives served as excellent backgrounds for Lanyon's inventive manipulations (Pl.147). He was responsive to the character of the original image and its potential to be transformed by a skilful play of colour, shape and texture. These excursions into collage and humorous embellishments of photographs fed into and enriched his other artistic activities.

Colour Construction (25½ x 24½ x 25in., Arts Council Collection, 1960,



Pl.155) was made in response to an Arts Council commission for a free-standing construction in stained glass to be shown in an exhibition curated by John Piper and Revd Walter Hussey.<sup>48</sup> Being three-dimensional the spectator must consider the work from all sides until the various "views" can be assembled and a complete image formed. Aware of this ambiguity, Lanyon plays on perceptions of form and space so that anticipation and actual experience are at variance. Lanyon realised that light alters our perception of space and a close-up viewing of the construction forces a reappraisal of our first impressions. Viewed from a distance the structure appears as a single, closed, geometric box made predominantly of deep blue glass. Closer inspection, however, reveals that the box is trapezoidal and contains an interior structure of "multicoloured overlapping planes that continuously modify one another as one moves around it".<sup>49</sup> The effect is to create a three-dimensional version of Soaring Flight and other paintings which successfully capture the luminous translucency of the sky. A circular neon light gives the work the evanescent quality Lanyon had striven to achieve in the glowing interiors of the Generation series (paintings like Construction in Green). By using neon in Colour Construction, illumination associated with advertising signs and urban commercial buildings, Lanyon opened a door between landscape painting and Pop. Though a few commentators treated Pop as a betrayal of the most cherished principles of Modernism - Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg were bitter critics of the movement - it was in some ways a continuation of Marcel Duchamp's iconoclastic satire on artistic overproduction and institutionalised avant-gardism.

The residual glass fragments left over from the Arts Council commission can be located in a collection of small, free-standing constructions made in the same year: Look Down (6½ x 9½in., stained glass funnel, bostik and oil on cork on a ceramic tile, 1960, Gimpel Fils, London, Pl.156 fig.1), an inverted glass cone supporting an angled piece of blue stained glass, reminds us of his interest in the traditional rendering of space in British landscape painting:

Turner certainly and Wilson - Richard Wilson - before him, used quite extensively a spiral where you felt you were being drawn into a spiral and it got smaller and smaller away into the distance.<sup>50</sup>



Just as the gliding and weather paintings show an appreciation of Turner's pioneering work in developing a style which "transforms notions of time and space as well as physical matter",<sup>51</sup> these sculptures enabled Lanyon to find three-dimensional equivalents for the complex forms found in works like Rain, Steam and Speed (1844, National Gallery, London).

Several of Lanyon's constructions made in the early 1960s are evidence of his predilection for Pop Art and his ability to translate its imagery - normally associated with the currency of urban living - into a landscape design. Bringing together totally disparate objects in order to create an artwork complemented Lanyon's passion for beach-combing, the unexpected find occasionally precipitating new ideas for an assemblage:

After a north storm - a gale blowing inland on the north coast, seamen can be seen plodding the beaches and picking objects out of the sand. I have known men who could "see" money just below the sand surface. Beachcombing for objects washed in from the sea has a fascination which has affected me.<sup>52</sup>

Playtime (54½ x 15½ x 4½in., mixed media, Private Collection, Pl.212) is a Pop assemblage of objects (a shell, wooden spoon, inverted car mirror, broken glasses, coloured ceramics, sockets, screws, hinges and a piece of wood). Margaret Garlake asserts that it is, in its mechanical references, "an entirely urban work".<sup>53</sup> However, the dominant greens suggest a landscape allusion and the junk studded surface could have been compiled from the alluvia deposited on Cornish beaches after a storm. It is possible that Lanyon was drawing attention to the spoliation of the coast by unsympathetic developers and the tide of holiday-makers who flock to St Ives every summer. In this interpretation, Lanyon is anticipating some of the environmental concerns of an artist like Tony Cragg who used to delight in scouring rubbish dumps in order to reclaim plastic items and everyday bric a brac for assembly in coloured bands or recognisable shapes on the gallery floor or wall.

An insouciant humour entered his work as he abandoned the notion that aesthetic competence and sophistication should automatically be equated with tonal balance, compositional planning and an acceptance of some sort



of hierarchy of materials. Green Buoy (16 x 15 x 2in., stained glass, plastic, ceramic tile and oil on board, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.168) and Red Buoy (24 x 18in., mixed media, 1962, Private Collection, Pl.179) demonstrate the liberating effect of Pop on Lanyon's art. The "buoys" are two small, plastic objects that openly embrace the unreality of their connection to the described object. Lanyon deploys Pop Art's attenuated mimesis of "authentic" experience to dispense with traditional colour relationships. Green Buoy, particularly, plays upon ambiguity, setting up and then refuting expectations. The creamy-pink painted ground strongly suggests a vortex - the circular movement to be found in paintings associated with flying. However, to denote the elliptical path of the glider Lanyon has used black: red has been consigned to a background colour supporting patches of blue at the top of the wall-relief. The shapes of the collaged material evoke the instruments in the cockpit of his glider - but while the weathered surface of the disc is in tonal harmony with the picture surface, the long thin pencil perched jauntily on its edge is gaudily coated in gold. The incongruity of the green boss, the golden pencil, the fragment of ultramarine blue glass (perhaps from the consignment made for Colour Construction) - all set in the unmodulated context of Lanyon's swirling paint - reveals the virtuosity of a carefree assembler alive to the work of his contemporaries.

Lanyon's ability to dissolve elements in his work - transforming formlessness into image, abstraction into figuration - finds a parallel in the exuberant diversity of his constructions. In his late works he moved freely between constructions that work primarily as paintings (Glide Path, 1964), the colour and texture of the various surfaces responding to the dictates of the ground composition; wall reliefs which work as "collage with paint"<sup>54</sup> (Turn Around, 26 x 23½ x 3in, relief construction in oil paint on masonite, plastic, polystyrene, glass and wood, Private Collection, Pl.201); constructions which function as autonomous free-standing objects (Field Landing, (32½ x 54 x 18in., painted wood, plastic, perspex, metal, 1963-64, Gimpel Fils, London, Pl.202) and, finally, assemblages which delight in the formal qualities of the collaged material without hiding the original identity of the found object (Playtime).



Works such as Sea Air (59 x 15½in., corrugated perspex, oil on masonite, cloth strap, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.178), Oarscape (1962, Pl.178) and Playtime employ "readymade" objects - not in a Duchampian way - but as part of an amalgam which challenges the viewer's complacent response to familiar things. Lanyon is using the unmodified objects as key sculptural components; the suspended forms in Sea-Air do not surrender their material objectivity to the fragment of wood decorated in Lanyon's familiar "weather" painting colours. The oar in Oarscape, first seen as a studio prop in a 1958 photograph of Long Sea Surf,<sup>55</sup> is recreated as the chief element in this horizontal sculpture in an ironically literal way which makes fun of the traditional horizontal division of the picture plane in landscape compositions.

Today a journey has begun backward from the horizon, the landscape painter is at the middle distance, the edge of the plateau on which Leonardo set his Annunciation and Giorgione his Fête Champêtre...The horizon is only seconds away, space is inhabited by the aeroplane, the microscope has looked inside matter and science inside that. The mind of man has seen with a new vision...The new experience in landscape is one of journeyings, inducing patterns by a process of movement in time. What is picked up in these journeys is constructed into a thing which stands for reality as much as the recessions and weathers of earlier landscapes.<sup>56</sup>

Lanyon's constructions involve a two-way process: if objects have the capacity to be recontextualised as part of the Cornish landscape, the landscape could be recontextualised as an object. Lanyon's "beachcombing" instincts had at last found a legitimate outlet: the things that he could not bring himself to discard could be re-cycled to form the matrix of his sculptures.

Occasionally we find constructions which can be related to specific paintings: Construction for Lost Mine (1959, Pl.153) has close affinities with its eponymous painting. The oxidised reddish-brown Ironairscape (9 x 15 x 8in., construction in ceramic tile, painted and stained glass, bostick, oil on masonite, 1961, Private Collection, Pl.169) is clearly linked to the painting Iron Coast (1961). Its loosely assembled fragments of glass,



held together by bostick and painted with Lanyon's characteristic self-inscription of lattice-like black marks, looks back to the Construction for St Just (which shares the same mining motif).

Andrew Lanyon believes that Airplane (9 x 25 x 4in., oil, metal, tile, mirrors and bostik on wood, c.1958, Private Collection, Pl.143) is the construction referred to in Lanyon's description of the making of Offshore recorded over a ten day period in June 1959:<sup>57</sup>

I find now that a construction I made in October of the seashore is very, very close, in fact surprisingly close to the finished state of this painting which is now called Offshore. Therefore, I can assume from this constructive process that a space form, not only just a space form but also an awareness, is taken around with me...all the way through the process of painting there is this spatial awareness, this structural thing which was already made in glass and bostik in actual three dimensions - governing the sort of expansion/contraction, pushing in/pushing out and the problems of the way that a painting is made; that space construction actually governs the volumes and spaces which are employed in the finished picture.<sup>58</sup>

This is an interesting account of how spatial awareness has crystallised in the artist's consciousness long before the painting has begun to materialise. Unfortunately, it is extremely difficult to be confident that Airplane really is the construction referred to in the transcript of the recording. "Glass and bostik" seems an unnecessarily spare description of its constituent parts.

Airplane was displayed as a vertical construction in The South Bank touring exhibition, Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea (November 1992 to June 1993)<sup>59</sup> which would seem to make a nonsense of Offshore's "concern with wind in which both a horizontal rolling motion and a rising spiral is employed."<sup>60</sup> Neither does a vertical structure correspond with the form of "a reclining shadow lying in the grass in the lee of the wind".<sup>61</sup> Sheila Lanyon thinks it was supposed to be shown horizontally (if not to be viewed from above) which certainly strengthens the case for regarding Airplane as the structure



informing Offshore.<sup>62</sup> Viewed from this angle the metal rod can be read as a structural equivalent for the black grapple shape (which Lanyon interpreted as the town, "a return element...the anchor...almost a form of authority");<sup>63</sup> the tile functions as the area of "tarred nets stretched out on the grassy hill in the foreground",<sup>64</sup> its scratchy vortical painted surface preparing us for the rolling cloud and rough sea formations in the upper half of the painting. The idea of "expansion/contraction", implicit in the way the thick bands of black paint threaten to close the narrow strip of sea/sky running across the middle of the construction, is echoed in the painting's masculine/feminine imagery:

I see now that the rough sea is the male element and that it is both coming in and receding, that the Western Hill is the female element.<sup>65</sup>

The puzzling uncertainty surrounding Airlane and its correspondence with Offshore can perhaps be explained and resolved by a careful reading of the artist's recorded statement. He outlines the various encounters which enable him to become fully acquainted with the character of the place (the town of Portreath, the Western Hill and the harbour), giving a detailed narrative of the process of organising the painting's compositional details. The tapes indicate that at an early stage he had begun to think in terms of reprising the Europa myth: "the bull coming in from the sea and taking the princess away is very much what I think happens in this painting".<sup>66</sup> This association suggested a horizontal organisation of the final image:

The Europa sculpture was after all a horizontal one where the sea was on top and the female form in-shore as a horizontal below. The painting of Europa of course, itself, was in fact a horizontal painting. I am including this in this part of the recording much earlier than the time of the finished painting when it was turned on its side, because I think it may indicate that there was some expectation that the painting would itself turn over.<sup>67</sup>

It seems that at a subconscious level Lanyon always knew that the configurations in the painting would be subjected to a radical change. He became consciously aware of the necessity for this only after taking



Offshore out of the studio:

I repeated the old performance of bringing the painting back into the house and put it up, and within one day I found that it was so surrendering to a loss, a give up, that I brought it back to the studio.<sup>68</sup>

Large sections of the painting were then reworked:

The sea became much rougher, I had pulled a lot of white over it, and returned almost to the essentially masculine element. I produced a large black shape all the way round the green and enclosed that and began to open and extend the black shape out to the left-hand side.<sup>69</sup>

Lanyon repeatedly emphasises that at this stage the painting was still in its vertical state. However, he was becoming increasingly uneasy with the composition:

Gradually I found myself painting more and more with my left side bending over. I began to almost unbalance myself, but I went on painting in this vertical position until I pulled a large piece of white across the base and included a couple of red lines, and this was the final shift, the final push that turned the painting over on its side. It was then completed very very quickly and I turned my back on it. I didn't look at it again, put the brushes down and walked out the studio knowing in fact that it was finished.<sup>70</sup>

If Airplane was the construction used to inform the spatial dynamics of Offshore, Lanyon's decision to completely alter its structure by turning the painting on its side accounts for the horizontal/vertical confusion. Once we begin to look at the construction from all angles its strong affinities with the painting become more evident.

The interchangeability of his pictorial and sculptural ideas, the confident fluency of his late working methods, allowed a new spirit of metamorphosis



to enter Lanyon's art. The constructions become variations on themes rather than models to elucidate spatial problems to be resolved in the paintings, the artist's ideas assuming new meanings as they shift from one context or medium to another. Typical of the late constructions are works like Turn Around or Pendeen (28 x 20in., polystyrene, glass and oil on board, August 1964, Pl.208) which exist on the same terms as a painting, the picture surface enriched and recomplicated with objects that combine clarity of form and colour with spatial complexity.

Turn Around is characteristic of the wit which informs Lanyon's last constructions: the "eye" which serves as the compositional focus for the many of the gliding pictures literally stares out at the viewer. The colours are those familiar to us from other aerial views of the Cornish coastal landscape, but this is the first time we have seen the red arc of the glider's flight path doubling as a line for a comic profile of the artist wearing his trademark beret. The wooden rods set inside the frame provide a greater variety of planes as well as evoking different components belonging to the glider (the joystick and a wing-strut). Gliding remained a source of inspiration until the end, but a subversive sense of humour has punctured any excessive earnestness.

One of the last constructions, Field Landing, is a complete free-standing arrangement of horizontals, verticals and diagonals which continues the fight against the traditional monolith in sculpture begun by Gabo. Open, without a definite centre, it is reminiscent of the spatial engagement and modern industrial processes associated with the early works of Anthony Caro and his followers such as Phillip King. Yet the dialogue between modern abstraction and traditional perceptions of the landscape is maintained by the open-spaced nature of the forms (a distant echo of the 1946 whinnying horse construction, Painted Deal) and Lanyon's use of colour. By painting the raw metal he has emphasised the pictorial quality of the sculpture: its hard-edged geometry and planar shifts from field green to danger red link it to Glide Path. Garlake speculates that "perhaps it would have been the prelude to a dual practice of painting and sculpture."<sup>71</sup>

By the early 1960s Lanyon's art had become its own adventure as he



increasingly ignored the traditional boundaries between painting and sculpture, exploring the infinitely rich visual language of modernism. Lanyon's late sculptures acknowledge that the artist must deploy a full range of familiar and unfamiliar aesthetic elements if he is to generate meaning authentically. The landscape, weather and flight still provided the emotional seed, but description and metaphor, paint and solid object, are synthesized in such a way that the viewer does not necessarily recognise an emotion or scene so much as sense it. Paint permeates the found object, transforming its character, so that it can become sculpture. The constructions of Lanyon's later years reveal the artist's continuing interest in experiential space and the freshness of his invention as he returned to a fundamental priority, the foundation of form.



## Notes to Chapter Eight

1. Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.30. Lanyon wrote that "flying was getting in my blood", letter to Mary Schofield, 30th March 1944.
2. "Landscape as experience and vision", essay by Norbert Lynton in Towards a New Landscape, Bernard Jacobson Limited, London, 1993, p.47.
3. Letter to Roland Bowden, 23rd July 1953, TGA 942.31.
4. Haydn Griffiths, Bath Academy of Art, Corsham Court, Wiltshire, 1946-c.1955, M.A. report, University of London, 1979, p.32. Lanyon's colleagues and pupils have frequently recalled his unorthodox methods to capture the essence of the landscape. "He would drive the roads, and pointed out to me how the landscape appears to swing round you as you go round a corner; he would stand on a cliff top looking across the sea to the next headland - "see how that seagull articulates space...without it one couldn't interpret the distance at all..." He climbed cliffs, too, although he had a bad head for heights, to experience, as he said, "the thinness of the land"; he went down mines; he learnt to glide...he swam above and below the water..." Nancy Wynne-Jones, 1989, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.327. Another pupil, Francis Hewitt, taught by Lanyon when he was visiting lecturer at the Falmouth School of Art between 1960 and 1961, recalled his teaching methods when interviewed in 1989: Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.325.
5. Edmund Burke, A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful, 1756, quoted in Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Henley-on-Thames, 1971, pp.22-23.
6. "Warren Mackenzie discussing Peter Lanyon at the Leach Pottery with David Lewis", 21st July 1984, TGA TAV365A.
7. Barry Dodge, The Art of Peter Lanyon 1946-64: A Psychological Interpretation, M.A. report, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London, May 1991, p.41.
8. Peter Lanyon, letter to Bowden, 22nd March 1954, TGA 942.40. Key texts in the revival of the concept of the Sublime are Rothko's essay "The Romantics were Prompted", Possibilities, no.1, winter 1947/8, p.84 and Barnett Newman's text, "The Sublime is Now", Tiger's Eye, no.6, 15th December 1948, pp.52-53: "We are reasserting man's natural desire for the exalted, for a concern with our relationship to the absolute emotions..."
9. Peter Lanyon, notes on "The First Gliding Painting", nd, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.195.
10. Peter Lanyon in conversation with Lionel Miskin, 1962, Tate Gallery Archive TAV 211AB.
11. Peter Lanyon, quoted in Alan Bowness, introduction to the Arts Council catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.
12. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Southern Mail (1929), transl. Stuart Gilbert, New York, 1933. Chris Stephens cites Saint-Exupéry as an influence on Lanyon: Peter Lanyon: at the Edge of Landscape, 21 Publishing, 2000, p.155.
13. Chris Stephens, *ibid.*, p.155.
14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception (1945), transl. Colin Smith, Evanston, 1962, p250.
15. Alan Bowness, op.cit., 1968, catalogue entry no.62. See also Lanyon's letter of 28th November 1960 quoted in the Tate Gallery catalogue entry for Thermal.
16. Peter Lanyon, "Landscape Coast Journey and Painting", 1959.
17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, essay "Cézanne's Doubt", in Sense and Non-Sense,



Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1971, pp.9-25.

18. Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler talking to Michael Canney on BBC radio programme, Horizons, May 1963. The subject of the discussion was "The Subject in Painting". TAV 212AB.

19. Financial hardship was a constant concern for Lanyon in his correspondence with Gimpel Fils: "Hurry up and sell something so that I can like you again - nothing personal, just business." Note to Gimpel Fils, 1st May 1964, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.267.

20. Michael Tucker, Dreaming with Open Eyes: The Shamanic Spirit in Twentieth Century Art and Culture, Aquarian/Thorsons, San Francisco, 1993, p.80.

21. Andrew Causey has provided a list of all traceable paintings from 1945, apart from a few personal portraits and pictures from the later years where the larger dimensions are less than 10 inches. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aidan Ellis, 1971. The paintings for 1961 are listed on pp.61-65.

22. Recorded talk, 1963, quoted in Alan Bowness, op.cit., 1968.

23. "The Artist talks about his painting", British Council lecture, TAV 526AB. The remarks on Airscape can also be found in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.213.

24. The word is used by J.P. Hodin in "The Icarus of Cornwall: Peter Lanyon in Memoriam", Studio International, August 1965, p.76.

25. Hand written note reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.212.

26. "I hate to think I am painting on a ground which won't last because I don't like making a "temporary" thing". Letter to Peter Gimpel, 1959, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.190.

27. Recorded lecture for the British Council, 1963, op.cit., TAV 526AB.

28. Peter Lanyon, *ibid.*, 1963; Turner added this verse to the title of Light and colour (Goethe's Theory) - the morning after the Deluge - Moses writing the book of Genesis (1843) in the Royal Academy catalogue. The Turner Collection in the Clore Gallery, Tate Gallery Publications, 1987, p.92.

29. Notes made in 1940 printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.47.

30. Peter Lanyon, quoted in Alan Bowness, Arts Council catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.

31. John Wells quoted in John Wells, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.48. TGA 251AB.

32. Note reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.197.

33. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1971, p.26.

34. Quoted in Alan Bowness (ed.), Peter Lanyon, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968

35. Quoted in Stephen Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, Da Capo paperback, New York, 1990, p.19. Originally published by Viking Penguin, 1974.

36. "My painting has long been concerned with metamorphosis and movement, My kinetic work extends but does not replace it. It is a matter of submitting to the necessary mechanical restrictions to gain a new particular freedom because no other way is open." Catalogue of the exhibition Kinetics at the Hayward Gallery, 1970.

37. Terry Frost's first constructions were made in 1951, when he was working as an assistant to Barbara Hepworth. St Ives 1939-64: Twenty-Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, catalogue, Tate Gallery Publications, revised edition, 1996, p.181.

38. "Peter Lanyon - a Sense of Place", The Painter and Sculptor, Autumn 1962.

39. Peter Lanyon, undated text c.1959, op.cit., printed in Andrew Lanyon,



op.cit., p.90.

40. The photograph of the studio showing the wire frame is reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.202.

41. Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler talking to Michael Canney on an Horizons programme entitled: "The Subject in Painting", BBC, 22 May 1963. Transcript in the Tate Gallery Archive, TAV 212AB.

42. Pepe Karmel, "Beyond the Guitar: Painting, Drawing and Construction, 1912-14", essay in Elizabeth Cowling and John Golding, Picasso: Sculptor/Painter, Tate Gallery Publications, 1994, p.193.49. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon: Paintings, Drawings and Constructions. 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery exhibition catalogue, 1978, p.47.

43. Between 1941 and 1945 Schwitters lived in London where Nicholson met him for the first time (probably in May 1942). Nicholson gave Schwitters 1942 (bus ticket). A letter to E.H. Ramsden, 15th May 1943, acknowledged the importance of Schwitters' contribution to modern art. For details see Ben Nicholson, Tate Gallery Publications, 1993, p.223.

44. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Paintings, Drawings and Constructions 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester, 1978, p.47.

45. Andrew Lanyon, Postcards and Pottery, Penzance, 1997.

46. Almost inevitably Lanyon fell out with Heron shortly after the latter bought the Eagles Nest near Zennor in 1955 and permanently settled in Cornwall. The rift is described and analysed in Chris Stephens, op.cit., 2000, pp.91-93. 39.

47. Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1997, unpaginated.

48. The work was shown at the Arts Council's Modern Stained Glass exhibition, London, 1960. It was purchased by the Arts Council after the exhibition.

49. Margaret Garlake, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", in South Bank catalogue, op.cit., 1992.

50. Horizons, op.cit., quoted in Peter Lanyon: Air. Land & Sea, South Bank catalogue, 1992, p.69.

51. Stephen Daniels, "Human Geography and the Art of David Cox", Landscape and Research, vol.9, 1984, pp.14-19, quoted in Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.67.

52. Undated letter, c.1959, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.292.

53. Margaret Garlake, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", op.cit., 1990, p.59.

54. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.46.

55. A photograph of Lanyon painting Long Sea Surf with the painted oar, Porthleven Boats and Europa Bull as studio props can be found in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.180.

56. Undated text, c.1959, cited in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.289.

57. Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, Penzance, 1993, p.54.

58. "Offshore: A Description of a Painting in Progress", Peter Lanyon, June 1959, TAV 210AB.

59. The construction is reproduced vertically in the catalogue: Peter Lanyon: Air, Land & Sea, op.cit., p.27.

60. "The Artist talks about his painting", British Council lecture by Peter Lanyon, 1963, TAV 526AB.

53. Handwritten note reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, 1993, p.46.

61. Ibid., p.54.

62. Conversation with Sheila Lanyon, 27th August 1996.

63. Offshore, recorded talk, op.cit., TAV 210AB. Also printed in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, 1993.

64. "The Artist talks about his painting", op.cit., TAV 526AB.



65. Offshore, recorded talk, op.cit.. Also quoted in Andrew Lanyon, Portreath, 1993, p.50.
66. Ibid. p.50.
67. Ibid., p.51.
68. Ibid., p.52.
69. Ibid., p.53.
70. Ibid. p.53
71. Margaret Garlake, "The Constructions of Peter Lanyon", op.cit., p.59.



## **Chapter Nine**

### **A CHANGE OF LANDSCAPES: AMERICA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND THE CLEVEDON SERIES (1963-64)**



New art in 1950s London steadily moved away from the styles practised by the St Ives painters, associated with landscape, atmosphere and Englishness.<sup>1</sup> The constructivist torch, carried by Nicholson and Hepworth in the Thirties, passed to Victor Pasmore, who had been involved in the Objective Abstractions exhibition at Zwemmer's Gallery in 1934 and subsequently the Euston Road Art School, where he taught Lanyon in 1938. Inspired by Charles Biederman's Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge,<sup>2</sup> Pasmore and the London-based "Constructionists" abandoned the "native romanticism" of the St Ives artists for the more radical purist abstraction of mainstream European modernism.

In St. Ives they combine non-figurative theory with the practice of abstraction because the landscape is so nice nobody can quite bring themselves to leave it out of their art.<sup>3</sup>

The Constructionists practised a "concrete" non-figurative art and believed that the artist should not attempt to imitate the appearance of nature but construct a new visual language as a substitute for the historical styles emanating from St Ives. Their attempt to "reorientate the cubist constructive outlook"<sup>4</sup> led them to a modernity appropriate to a fast-moving urban and technological world. Artists like Mary Martin, Gillian Wise and Anthony Hill produced work heavily influenced by a sense that mathematics alone could count as certainty. Closely associated with architects and designers, the artists envisioned forms to complement the clean functionalism of post-war public sector housing. The organic abstraction favoured by the dominant figures of the St Ives School was beginning to look decidedly old fashioned, its aesthetic ideals as outmoded as neo-Romanticism must have seemed in the early 1950s.

In 1959 a group of artists from the Royal College of Art staged Place, an exhibition of large-scale abstract painting at the ICA in London. The artists Robyn Denny, Richard Smith and Ralph Rumney agreed to standardize dimensions and colours - restricting themselves to two formats (seven by six feet and seven by four feet) and two combinations of colours (black



and white and the complementary pair of red and green). The experience of the viewer, faced with maze-like corridors and vistas of paintings, was of being inside a total environment generated by colour. The following year, 1960, Denny and Smith were joined by a group of young British painters (which included John Holyand, Gillian Ayres and Bob Law) for an exhibition of abstract painting, Situation, at the Royal Society of British Artists.<sup>5</sup> No canvas of less than thirty feet square was included and artists were instructed to explore "values implicit in the large painting".<sup>6</sup> Paintings making reference to landscape, boats or figures were excluded to make room for impersonally structured, unsentimental and unatmospheric works which created their own sense of environment by relinquishing pictorial depth.<sup>7</sup> For an artist like Lanyon, unable to resist the pull of allusion, these developments meant rejection both on the grounds of size and because his colours and forms maintained their connections with the natural world.

It would be facile to suggest that exclusion from exhibitions like Place and Situation and other developments in British modernism made much of an impact on Lanyon in 1960/61.<sup>8</sup> He was becoming increasingly self-assured and critically successful: his status as a major British artist was confirmed by his inclusion in the second "Dokumenta" at Kassel from June to October 1959 and Offshore had been awarded second prize at the second John Moores Liverpool Exhibition in November. In September 1961 he showed twelve paintings at the VI Sao Paulo Bienal and his work was included in touring exhibitions of British art that went to the Soviet Union, the Middle East, America, Canada and Portugal. While the main source of his artistic inspiration continued to be conditioned by the landscape of Cornwall and the exhilaration generated by the sensation of flight, he had broken with the parochialism of belonging to a regional school.

Nevertheless, a change of style can be detected in Lanyon's work towards the end of 1962. A successful exhibition at the Gimpel Fils Gallery in October coupled with the (near) completion of the Porthmeor mural provided the right moment to reorientate the direction of his painting. He confessed his inability to escape from some representation of nature in his painting:

I find that every shape I make has some reference. I make a blue shape shape and it becomes a sky. It's an awful nuisance. I'd like to be able to get rid of it but I am, therefore attached, as it were, to a very specific subject which is landscape.<sup>9</sup>



However, the late paintings are more abstract in intention and consist of simplified shapes and vivid colours applied to the canvas in broad flat bands - a conspicuous inversion of the values which had been exalted by the Abstract Expressionist and quite different from the ethereal insubstantiality and sublime handling of his weather and gliding paintings.

Lanyon always had an eye for the main chance and was good at weighing up current trends in order to establish how best to counteract accusations of aridity and sterility. The late paintings and constructions confirm the triumph of his art over the flux and inconstancy of fashion. They provide an authentic, progressive and "constructive" alternative to

the sterile position of painting reached in Britain by academicians where its purpose is to reassure and bolster the social values of a decayed elite by anesthetising their creative impulses.<sup>10</sup>

It may be true, as Causey claims, that "in five years Lanyon had worked through a certain range of ideas".<sup>11</sup> His decision to change direction may also have been a belated reaction to wider developments in British and American painting. Although he claimed to have no interest in the London art scene ("I didn't go to the Tate and haven't been to see London for years"),<sup>12</sup> he was well informed about developments in both London and New York. He visited the travelling exhibition The New American Painting at the Tate Gallery in 1959 and kept in touch with the first generation Abstract Expressionists, corresponding with Rothko, Kline and Motherwell (who planned to visit St Ives in the summer of 1961 but had to cancel at short notice).<sup>13</sup>

There were numerous visits to America between 1959 and 1964. He had his second one-man show at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in New York in January 1959 and used this opportunity to catch up with old acquaintances, visit Washington, DC. and meet new artists like Helen Frankenthaler and writers such as Hilton Kramer and James Johnson Sweeney.<sup>14</sup> He was in New York again from 25th January to February 1962 to attend his third solo exhibition at Catherine Viviano's Gallery. On this occasion he met Stanley Seeger, an ardent collector of his work who commissioned him to paint a mural based on the rhythms of the sea for the new music room at his estate, Bois d'Arc, in Frenchtown, New Jersey.<sup>15</sup> This required two further visits to America, in June and November: the Porthmeor mural was preceded by three full-size sketches (Porthleven, Delaware and Bois d'Arc, all 42 x 380in.) which were shown to Seeger on Lanyon's second visit to the estate in June 1962.<sup>16</sup>



The mural was painted on canvas and completed in St Ives in July before being rolled up and sent to America. A further visit to Frenchtown was required in November to change about twelve feet of the central section. He visited the estate again in February 1963 to make minor adjustments to the right-hand section and resolve problems related to the appearance of fissures in the paint after the canvas had been stretched directly on the 32-foot-long beam.<sup>17</sup> Lanyon then went on to Texas where he spent eight weeks as a Visiting Painter at the San Antonio Art Institute.

The increasing number of visits to America (three in 1962 alone) made him aware of what was happening in the New York art scene at a critical time - between the advance of the "second generation" or "Post-Painterly Abstractionists" and the arrival of the Pop Art movement. His trips coincided with the commercial success and critical acceptance of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns (no less than four works were sold directly to the Museum of Modern Art during Johns' first show at Leo Castelli's New York Gallery in 1958).<sup>18</sup>

A year later, in 1959, Clement Greenberg, disillusioned with the increasing vacuity and absence of new expressive discoveries in gestural abstraction, championed the re-adoption of Barnett Newman as the new standard bearer of high modernism by arranging a retrospective at French and Company Inc.<sup>19</sup> Newman had arrived at his impersonal articulation of surface and complete refusal to violate the integrity of the picture plane by any naturalistic references as early as 1949 when he painted Abraham, which contained nothing but a single black stripe on a black field. His precise interest in the deployment of formalities - the means by which a painting sustains its effects - answered Greenberg's requirement for a counterweight to de Kooning and Johns (he dismissed them as practitioners of "homeless representation").<sup>20</sup> The new aesthetics of exclusion which presented space without the intrusion of specific images or real objects - the organization of space had become part of the subject - was anticipated by other artists such as Ad Reinhardt, Yves Klein and Agnes Martin who all exhibited their work in New York in the early 1960s. The New York art cognescenti endorsed the movement when Frank Stella was given the accolade of having four of his large "black paintings" (entirely regular grids arranged in rectilinear or cruciform



stripes) included in the exhibition Sixteen Americans at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (16th December 1959 to 17th February 1960).<sup>21</sup>

It is impossible to know precisely what effect (if any) these developments in New York had on Lanyon's work. A letter to Ivon Hitchens, written in 1960, caricatures the visual symmetry and neutral emptiness of painters of "the new academy who believe their flat space or area is valid, and by sticking to that belief escape the issue of having to make their own space."<sup>22</sup> Writing two years later, shortly after returning from his second visit to New York, he shows an exaggerated contempt for contemporary trends:

I had a gorgeous time at the opening of the Armoury Show in New York.

I praised Marin to the detriment of the present populars and got in huge trouble. I managed to get the Whitney twisting (they are as pompous as the R.A.).<sup>23</sup>

His dismissal of the "present populars" should not be taken entirely at face value - Hitchens was sixty-nine and had produced purely abstract pictures like Triangle to Beyond (1936) for only a short time before embarking on the long horizontal abstracted landscapes (the traditional "seascape" format) that became his signature.<sup>24</sup> Lanyon had only recently come to acknowledge the sophisticated and inventive fluency of Hitchens' Sussex landscapes which hover between description and abstraction, naturalistic recording and recreated visions, in much the same way as his own choreography of the Cornish countryside on the canvas. Lanyon's admiration for John Marin is revealing: he clearly still believed himself to be working within a firmly rooted historical tradition and it is entirely consistent that he should praise the work of one of the pioneering figures of American abstraction. Marin's pastoral ambience, flattened forms and encircling border-within-the-frame compositions would have appealed to Lanyon as painting "arrived at by a constructive process of experience. Arrangement is not made in a detached manner but as an integral part of the whole."<sup>25</sup>

While the developments of Lanyon's work can be related to various movements, from constructivism to abstract expressionism, it is crucial not to forget that his work also followed a very individual path based on his passion



for earlier art and his own distinct sensibility of mark-making based on his sensory perceptions of the external world. He was fully aware of the dangers of creating an eclectic style out of a confluence of different ideas and forces:

I will never take another look at British painting because I don't want to see what a load of creepers we are - bits of Matisse, Pollock, Kline, de Kooning, Johns and Mondrian and hardly anyone looking for themselves! Balls to them all. I shall paint landscapes red in tooth and claw from now on. Mud in their eye. I am thinking of calling my company Muckspreaders Ltd.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, there is a perceptible change in style towards the end of 1962 and it is possible that the dramatization of colour effects, gargantuan scale and strict geometry of Post-Painterly Abstraction influenced the greater simplicity of construction, brightly-coloured hard-edged forms and suppression of atmospheric details in Lanyon's late paintings.

The pronounced frontality of the vertical "zips" in a late painting such as Clevedon Bandstand (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.216), creating a sensation of deep space, are reminiscent of the Newman's planar divisions. It is easy to imagine how Newman's expansive planes of saturated colour could have assisted Lanyon's decision to re-examine the role of colour in his painting. Colour is at the core of his painting in the last two years of his life and this chromatic inventiveness is perhaps the most remarkable development from an artist who had always been a tonal painter rather than a colourist. Even Alan Bowness, a close friend of Lanyon's, admits that "he did not always find it easy to handle a broader palette".<sup>27</sup> Needless to say, Lanyon handles colour very differently from Newman: while the American distributes colour over huge panoramic fields of vision to create a sensation of expansion and saturation, Lanyon ignited colour by compression, pressing brilliant colours into smaller spaces without losing their intensity.

However, it is quite possible to argue that Lanyon could have reached this point of uniting sheer colour with form quite independently: red appears



insistently in different phases of Lanyon's oeuvre and he was fascinated by its optical potency and its ability to act as a carrier of emotion. Perhaps he was drawn to red because of its powerful and basic associations: Europa (1954) and The Yellow Runner (1946) exploit the colour's links with the elements and ritual - fire and blood - and thus with life, death and the spirit. A brilliant crimson architectonic structure was introduced into gliding paintings such as Soaring Flight (1960), Solo Flight (1960) and Calm Air (1961) to signify the machine's path, conveying a sense of danger binding together light, air, water and landscape elements.

Paradoxically, while gliding may have provided the inspiration for some of Lanyon's most carefully toned and transcendent work, moments of perception when the artist crossed the threshold and "reached the farther shore of art",<sup>28</sup> the risks associated with the activity initiated more direct colour contrasts bringing his painting closer to the hard-edged style which he professed to deplore for its total retreat from humanistic concerns and an anti-subjective inability to react directly to experience.

North East (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963, Private Collection, Pl.195) is an interesting transitional painting, an amalgam of Lanyon's various influences, signalling the arrival of a new hard-edged simplicity, purged of extraneous metaphor and meaning, deliberately deflating the rhetoric of Abstract Expressionism. He presents the viewer with an aerial view which conveys the idea of a swirling thermal and the movement of his glider above the green fields and coast of Cornwall. The three-armed shape which Causey sees as a sextant (it could just as easily allude to landing strips) provides a strong linear thrust across the diagonal, mediated by a thin blue circular line of paint - partially dissolved by white cloud - which envelops the central vortex. This would suggest that the composition owes more to the Nicholson-influenced White Track (1939) than the "unmistakeable" sculptural forms of Gabo.<sup>29</sup> This is confirmed by the striking parallel between the small circular area of blue paint which appears to be travelling just inside the track and the red cylindrical form moving round the original construction. Elsewhere forms appear boldly and simply configured (the top left seems to show the body of a woman which might have been derived from Beach Girl) and the enlargement of individual forms is matched by a firmer application



of pigment in flat areas across the picture plane.

His mastery of the eclectic colouristic and formal nuances of modernism (within his own referential framework of creating an equivalent for experience of the landscape) is revealed in a work like Farm (42 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1963, Private Collection, Pl.189): Cornish greens and cerulean blues are given less prominence and the eye is drawn by a salient of red against a white ground. To ensure that the red does not obliterate or overwhelm the composition it has been brought under control by juxtaposition against white on three sides and balanced by the armature of a curving black form on the left. Graffito-like blue strokes hold the contrasting shapes and forms in a tense state of fusion. The centre is dominated by a fertile area of brown blended with a heavy white overlay which suggests an aerial view of farmland. Though Lanyon has limited his forms and restricted the number of colours, his intention was to enhance rather than reduce the expressive possibilities of landscape painting. To suggest multiple levels of meaning he had first to strip away extraneous detail. Once this purification has taken place the viewer is permitted new kinds of associations: formal reductivism thus gave rise to expanded meaning.

It is possible that the Neo-Dadaist work of Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns influenced his decision to introduce sculptural elements into many of his paintings after 1959.<sup>30</sup> Works like Pendeen (28 x 20in., polystyrene, glass and oil on board, August 1964, Pl.208) and Turn Around ( 26 x 23 x 3in., relief construction in plastic, polystyrene, glass, wood and oil paint on masonite, 1963/4, Pl.201) restore the sense of tactility found in his earlier agitated expressionist paint surfaces. Lanyon's multi-sensory awareness of his Cornish environment had threatened to become lost in the ethereal, floating realms occupied by his glider. Rauschenberg and Johns appropriated recognisable and banal objects from the surrounding environment that did not have a traditional place in sculpture (flashlights, stuffed goats, car tyres - whatever came to hand). This practice has parallels in the way Lanyon would pick up objects which had outlived their utilitarian function and find them a new lease of life as art:

I was in the Royal Air Force during the last war and there were



quantities of shattered machinery and broken aircraft wherever I went. A mentality common to many of the air force fitters and riggers was a kind of beachcombing, to see what was interesting or valuable or good salvage...This finding something to make into something else was a fundamental part of my existence...I have an idea that a picking up of something is very significant. It is not only an act of belief but a very personal thing. It is as if curiosity begins a whole series of events, because after picking up something and making its presence felt in the hand there seems to be an expectation of further discovery.<sup>31</sup>

Once the assemblage has been constructed the viewer is invited to contemplate the found object set in a new context, exploring its functional associations as well as its evidence of having been worked on by the artist. However, before accepting the Johns-Rauschenberg exemplar as a direct influence on his decision to make wall-relief constructions it is worth remembering that Lanyon had been engaged in "beachcombing" for as long as he had been a professional artist. Using collaged elements was a way of combining the spatial plasticity of the free-standing constructions with the colour, tone and rhythmic expressiveness of the paintings.

#### POP GOES THE EASEL

The arrival of the Pop Art movement was perhaps of greater importance in revitalising his creative approach than the American and British developments in hard-edged abstraction. In a skilful process of transformation, Lanyon realised that Pop's exuberant celebration of the object in art could be blended with his more traditional landscape derived forms, symbols and allusions to create a synthesis of the ironic and the sublime.

If it is possible to argue that one of Lanyon's primary considerations as an artist was to organize space in a new and distinctive manner, then the advent of the Pop Art movement helped inaugurate an important change in his creative direction. Pop broke the monopoly held by the precision impersonality and abstract formalism of post-painterly abstraction in the



early 1960s. It celebrated the artefacts of modernity, exploring the potential for re-engaging subject matter in painting. Pop's exemplar provided Lanyon with a means of manipulating space on the canvas in the same idiom as Rauschenberg's combine paintings. Lanyon confessed "I am seduced by the whole mad affair" in a letter to Ivon Hitchens<sup>32</sup> and there is a strong possibility that the movement influenced Lanyon's decision to make use of bolder colours and flirt with punning, playful forms:

I want to set up a sort of cheer for Pop Art. I think it's wonderful... It's the fairground which has come to back into art...I think Pop Art belongs to propaganda. I think it originated in Madison Avenue...as an antithesis to the self-conscious Social Realist paintings from the east...I enjoy it hugely.<sup>33</sup>

Though he clearly enjoyed Pop Art's light-hearted wit, he used its techniques selectively and did not succumb to the decorative banality or cool emotional detachment that characterises some of Pop's early output:

I am in favour of Pop Art, Shock Art and big bands because I can then eddy around in the still waters and catch a bit of fun when I want it.<sup>34</sup>

Ironically for an artist so closely associated with painting the elements and atmosphere, he particularly admired the Wunderkind of the British urban Pop movement, David Hockney.<sup>35</sup> That Lanyon was aware of Hockney's early work is not surprising (he became famous almost as soon as he arrived at the Royal College of Art and made a major impact on the London art scene with the work he exhibited at the Young Contemporaries exhibition of 1961). What does come as a shock, however, are the strong correlations that can be detected in the work of these two very different artists. Darkness and light are locked in a mutual embrace in Two Place (72 x 50in., oil on canvas, 1962, Private Collection, Pl.176) with patches of chrome yellow glinting through thickly applied overlay. This poignant landscape encounter, distantly related to the figurative imagery found in Marie-Christine Treinen's Corsham drawings of the early 1950s, also resembles Hockney's exuberantly defiant We Two Boys Together Clinging (oil on board, 1961, Arts Council), an emblem



of the artist's erotic interests. The irony is compounded when we discover that the title - a line from a Walt Whitman poem - came to Hockney after he had read a newspaper headline, "Two boys cling to cliff all night". The headline actually referred to a mountaineering accident, but in Hockney's homo-erotic reverie the boys become adoring fans of Cliff Richard! Lanyon would have enjoyed such multiple references in a work which at first glance suggests the primitive artlessness of graffiti.

Two Diving (34 x 16in., oil on masonite with glass, plastic and enamel, 1962, Gimpel Fils, London, Pl.188) signals how far Lanyon has moved away from the American Abstract Expressionist belief in the primacy of individual self-expression. Figure or landscape references are often read into Abstract Expressionism - but the Pop Artist, by leaving few questions as to the provenance or meaning of the images deployed, avoids ambiguity. Two Diving can be understood as belonging to the Pop Art genre. It is incomplete without its title and its clever incorporation of numbers echoes the work of Hockney and Jasper Johns: a zero can be found in the shape of the pool at the centre of the work, the number one is given in the vertical shape of the construction, two appears in the literal form of an enamel house number splashing into the water and a three has been scrawled in black paint with a suggestion that it too might be diving and breaking up on impact. Like Hockney, Lanyon had come to believe that style was a thing to be chosen to suit the requirements of the subject - refusing to allow his work to be characterised by any one branch of modernism.

Climb Out (48 x 72in., oil, p.v.a. and plastic on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.210) is a good example of the way that Lanyon was able to close the gap between the sometimes ponderous tradition of British landscape painting and the quixotic vitality of the new generation of younger Pop artists. Climb Out may look very much like an abstract assemblage at first sight: raised plastic fragments arranged in a circular form have been stuck to the canvas against an abstract expressionist surface of Cornish green and fleshy pink horizontal bands. A swathe of scarlet bisects the composition, preventing the wide area of cerulean blue overlay moving any further across the painting. However, according to Andrew Lanyon the painting was "occasioned by a near accident when his watch strap caught around the joystick".<sup>36</sup>



Once the identity of the forms is known (the raised circle represents his watchstrap and the thick red diagonal signifies the joystick and the glider's steep angle of descent into a hay field near Truro), the painting can be interpreted as an engagement with Pop Art's literalism and brilliant use of colour. The use of collaged material allows Lanyon to disrupt the usual conceptions of nature and art, artifice and reality - but without relinquishing his commitment to exploring a new visual language to depict the landscape.

Fistral Bay (60 x 48in., oil P.V.A. and plastic collage on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, 209) was painted after flying over Fistral Bay (near Newquay). In visual terms it is allusively structured so that the perceived reality of an aerial view of the broad open bay is depicted in a code familiar to us from Lanyon's gliding pictures. The sweep of the bay is rendered by a U-shaped piece of red-painted polystyrene, a pictorial device similar to the horsehoe in Loe Bar (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1962, Private Collection, Pl.181). The horizontal bands of red, white and blue evoke different spatial relationships through colour as well as the flight path of his glider over the sea on a calm day. However, the influence of Pop Art's "new figuration" is evident in the way that Lanyon annexes stylistic devices found in the work of artists like Allen Jones and Peter Blake. The coloured bands recall the red, white and blue chevrons in Blake's Got a Girl (1961) as well as conjuring up a host of other associational and schematic imagery ranging from patriotic bunting to the horizontal stripes found on beach windbreaks.

Lanyon also cleverly reworks Pop's penchant for using collaged materials to escape the visual limitations imposed by the flat canvas (Jones would stagger the sides of his Bus paintings to suggest movement or add extra pieces for wheels). The painted polystyrene shapes at the bottom of Fistral augment the physical presence of the work - its literal dimension in volume - and at the same time suggest rocks or tidal flotsam and jetsam. The red U-shape of the bay doubles as the window frame of Lanyon's (red) glider - a play on the device of framing one image within another. Conventional perspective which normally leads the eye into space is reversed by the flatly rendered horizontal bands and the three-dimensional actuality of



the collaged fragments. A line of copper wire marks the division within the composition, playing on our expectation of a traditional horizon. Lanyon's concern is to find a level of legibility at which associations between "high" art and everyday illustrative material could be clearly understood. This is humorously demonstrated by the two gull-like pieces of polystyrene stuck on to the red band of the glide track. The shapes recall his abiding interest in the flight of birds and play on his earlier attempts to convey their movements through space:

He would stand on a cliff top looking out across the sea to the next headland - "see how that seagull articulates the space", he said to me one time, "without it one couldn't interpret the distance at all, the flight of the gull fixes it".<sup>37</sup>

This rather lengthy exposition illustrates the complexity of Lanyon's achievement in depicting the sky, sea, weather and landscape from an aerial perspective by fusing elements of traditional abstraction with the visual patterns and image-bearing legibility of Pop Art. The result was a relaxed hybrid of insouciant pictorial inventiveness.

#### AMERICA, 1963

The process of transformation in Lanyon's mature painting style cannot be considered simply in the context of the flux and inconstancy of British and American art at the beginning of the 1960s. Many of the paintings of 1962-64 capture something of the fleeting and mobile character of travel. Man-made architectural imagery, rather than nature or the experience of flying, often provide the starting-point for these views. His use of colour is stronger, less tonal or naturalistic, and applied in flat and thinly painted layers quite different from the earlier expressionist brushwork. Reflecting the advance of hard-edged abstraction many of the compositions are braced with broad bands of clearly differentiated colour. Smoother surfaces and a reduction in the layering of the paint indicate that these paintings are rigorously composed and adjusted images, planned well before their execution in paint.



Just as Lanyon's visits to Anticoli Corrado in the 1950s account for the discovery of the metamorphosing energy - rather than the surface delights - of nature and classical mythology, the increasingly frequent trips to America between 1959 and 1964 account for the realignment of imagery in his later works. His two-month appointment as Visiting Painter at the Marion Koogler McNay Art Institute in San Antonio, Texas, proved to be particularly important in opening up new landscapes. In forging his memories of the vast scale, blistering heat and clear light of the American South into painted equivalents, Lanyon re-creates the perceptual space realm of direct emotional encounters with specific places which had become threatened by the liminality of the gliding paintings. To find a comparison with the brightly coloured constructions and paintings of his last years it is necessary to turn the clock back to 1939-40 and look at the abstracts he produced under the guidance of Nicholson and Gabo. By mediating the stylistic mannerisms of contemporary abstraction with forms that he had mastered years earlier, Lanyon was perhaps more at ease with introducing new concepts and ideas into his work.

There is no abrupt distinction between the paintings that describe Lanyon's existential involvement with the Cornish landscape and those inspired by an empathetic response to the appearance, rituals, routines, associations and symbols that he found in America. Paintings like Texan (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963, Private Collection, Pl.196) and Pony (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1963, Private Collection, Pl.198) offer us the sensation of perceptions and memories as they glide in and out of Lanyon's consciousness to achieve pictorial status. The itinerary of his brush, the accretion of many aesthetic decisions, indicates an assured and mature expressionism, a rare coordination of discipline and playfulness.

Close examination of both paintings reveals that although more abstract in intention, there are still vestigial references to the human form and other figurative references - the strong armature of a "nodding donkey" and the curve of a bull's horn in Texan, the childlike rendering of the head in Pony. Simplified flat shapes are fitted together on the plane of the canvas, their edges providing clearer borders between the different blocks of strongly evocative colour - dominated by burnt sienna, blended



whites and touches of cobalt and phthalocyanin blue. To prevent these areas from becoming incoherent emblems of separation, compositional unity is maintained by employing looser rhythmic marks (the sweeping horseshoe shape in Texan, the cursive olive green strokes in Pony) whose movements are analagous to the complex circuitry of memory and imagination. Lanyon sets in play a process by which organic modalities in the natural world can be intuitively recognised and assessed. The result is a synthesis of paint that renders the presence of a place or an experience without having to develop the half-hidden figures or scrambled landscapes.

There is something inward and natural about the works inspired by his travels across America. We are given insights into the way the final image is constructed: fewer strokes are required to reach the same emotional intensity and large areas of the canvas have been buried and obliterated by hard-edged monochromatic shapes. Although traces of the underpainting can be detected in both Texan and Pony, the simplified design expands towards generalities, both physically and metaphysically. Lanyon no longer felt it necessary to utilize a heavily laden brush to make a network of expressive marks, a highly charged calligraphy of design, in order to re-engage his memory of the subject or achieve a form of existential self-realisation. The immense plastic power of the shapes which float at different depths signals that greater austerity of design was combined with a more voluptuous exploitation of colour. The exact memory or place encapsulated by a painting is often left unclear: "I paint places but always with the Placeness of them".<sup>38</sup> The viewer is asked to respond to the emotional landscape achieved by the abstract harmony of colour, form and internal architecture rather than deconstruct the coding by which the painting achieves its effects or locate the precise external stimulus suggested by the title.

Each of Lanyon's abstract landscapes has a climate of its own: the direct experience of travel across wide open spaces can be seen in Eagle Pass (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1963, Private Collection, Pl.193) a painting whose rectilinear arrangement of strong reds with yellow and blue can be related to photographs taken by Lanyon as he drove from San Antonio to Mexico.<sup>39</sup> Lanyon's method of translating visual experience into representative symbols for his journey is revealed by comparing his 35mm colour slides



and photographs with the brightly coloured structures which dominate the compositions of this period. He was fascinated by the hard-edged juxtaposition of strong colours: a brightly painted slide in a playground, the frames of Mexican houses strongly outlined in red, the burnt sienna of the desert, the dazzling brilliance of the sky and the dark blues cast by the shadows of buildings. The apparently arbitrary disposition of rough and inconsistent brushmarks next to fully resolved areas of flat colour recaptures the mobile character of the experience (the car is indicated by a wheel that floats in the lower left-hand side of the picture). The sandy-yellow rectangular shape bordered by a red frame at the top of the painting can be equated to a windscreen and the pass can be seen as the tunnel which lies beyond.

Causey rightly draws attention to the novelty of the two right angles and the boldness of the hard edges between colours.<sup>40</sup> However, the incorporation of clean mathematical shapes in the collaged constructions (for example, Airoundland, 1961, Pl.172) has already prepared us for this method of juxtaposing primary colours and geometric forms. More interesting, perhaps, is the possibility that Lanyon's choice of colour and form could have been influenced by the exhibition of Allen Jones' paintings at Tooth's Gallery in London which he might have visited shortly before he left for America in February 1963. The striking colour contrasts, the fine balance between abstraction and figuration, suggestion and fact, come close to Jones' cosmopolitan renderings of London buses.<sup>41</sup> Although some of Lanyon's earlier paintings had been informed by the sensation of driving across the Cornish countryside, cars are rarely directly depicted in his work.<sup>42</sup> Eagle Pass presents the vehicle as an object which is at one and the same time abstract and recognisable. Many Pop Artists - including Richard Hamilton and Peter Phillips - incorporated references to the car as part of their iconography and it is characteristic of Lanyon's ability to integrate new ideas in his work that the paint is deliberately allowed to become something rather than forced to depict something. Pop Art had a significant effect not only in the encouragement it gave him to make more daring use of colour, but also by the freedom it offered in giving emphasis to the subject matter which is raised to the status of content by the artist's attitude to it.

Lanyon travelled to Mexico in March 1963.<sup>43</sup> His willingness to make himself



receptive to a place's essential elements of identity is immediately reflected in the works generated by this trip. Saltillo (36 x 48ins., oil on canvas, 1963, Gimpel Fils, London, Pl.200) is an archetypal painting of this period: the terms of identification of this small Mexican town have been left as open as possible within the context of certain clearly defined evocations. If nothing else the title gives us the security of knowing that this image did in fact derive from a specific place. The picture appears to have been built up from a phthalocyanine blue ground overpainted with cadmium red, patches of black, navy blue and pink. The upper part of the composition consists of an expansive area of cerulean blue moving down and across the canvas on a broad diagonal front. The most prominent feature of Saltillo is formed by a central area which juxtaposes two very different techniques of handling paint and focuses our attention on the materiality of the surface: the left side recalls Lanyon's aerial paintings and is redolent of the expressionist brushwork of the late 1950s. Wide gestural strokes of oceanic and cerulean blues are blended with a flesh-tinted pink, leaving traces of at least three layers of paint. The right-side balances the composition with an ethereal pale blue which possesses the translucence of great apparitional spaces in the Mexican light. There is little impasto and the flat, frontal design contains few traces that suggest the action of the artist through gesture or direction. This heightened objectivity perhaps reflects the growing influence of acrylic paints on the artist's technique. The phenomenological contrast of these basic visual elements creates a painterly equivalent for Lanyon's memories of the town. The brushy, textured section assumes a position of prominence, but in spite of the differences there is reciprocity and the areas are linked by a slightly darker bridging passage.

The use of the red and the black as an architectural framework to fuse the composition prevents the surface from dissolving into insubstantiality and becoming merely a study of atmospherics. Because the two key sections of the painting react differently with the strong cadmium red there is an interesting play on the power of paint to create form. The rougher, more gestural section dominates other aspects of the painting, including the area of red which can be glimpsed beneath the overlay. The thinly painted section of pale blue, however, is flanked on three sides by red, most



obviously by the pronounced vertical band which projects from the bottom edge of the canvas and connects the viewer with the upper right portion of the painting. The base has been anchored by a broad horizontal band of red overpainted with the same blend of blues and flesh pinks as the middle section.

Saltillo is a virtuoso display of Lanyon's late style, combining elements of evocative description, spatial complexity, compositional élan and decorative verve. The ecstatic vitality of his response to the immensities of Mexican space and the clarity of light was matched by an insouciant ability to absorb contemporary developments in abstraction and refract them through the lens of observed reality.

The monumental triangular form which dominates Mexico (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963, Arts Council of Great Britain Collection, Pl.199) resembles a totemic face blown up to a massive scale - recalling the calligraphic work of Franz Kline. The black shape seems to want to imprison the red that struggles to be free, provoking thoughts about the human condition as a dramatic conflict of opposite forces. The tension is partially mediated by the cactus green which occupies the frontal plane on the right (repeated in the more obvious cacti shapes which appear in the top left side of the painting). According to Alan Bowness this picture is partly based on a photograph of a brightly coloured slide in a children's playground - the shape (and perhaps a figure coming down) can be seen forming the sloping right side of the black triangle.<sup>44</sup> The trend to greater simplicity in Lanyon's pictures is clearly discernible, with fewer colours creating a more intense optical sensation through the sharper outline of a clearly defined linear border. The edge element, accentuated by the triangular framing device, binds the colours and forces the eye to engage with their interactional dynamics. There are still areas of atmospheric colour, but these are delimited and circumscribed. The humour of the work can be seen in the unmistakable form of a sailing boat that has been locked into the architectonic triangle.

While the oil paintings were becoming less physical and more about piecing together undifferentiated memories, space and material after a long period



of gestation and internalization, his gouaches proved to be an admirable outlet for more spontaneous and informal styles of painterly expression. An interesting group, highlighting his interest in the American automobile, was made by taking rubbings from number-plates.<sup>45</sup> This provided a starting point for an exploration into how the objective reality of the "given" material could be reshaped to fit the artist's subjective requirement of combining brilliant colour with clarity of form. GUS 153 (gouache on paper, 10½ x 13½in., 1963, Private Collection) is overpainted in red and black, the colours that appear so strikingly in Mexico; chrome yellow dominates the Texas plate We 2 (gouache on paper, 10½ x 13½in., 1963, Gimpel Fils, London). According to Adrian Lewis, Lanyon expanded this technique - finding inspiration from a gravestone rubbing for Sampson (gouache on paper, 10½ x 13½in., 1963, Private Collection) and a lawnmower label for Lawnboy (gouache on paper, 1963, Private Collection).<sup>46</sup>

Crossed Hill (gouache on paper, 14 x 10in., 1963, Private Collection, Pl.197) produces its dramatic effect through sharply differentiated areas of festive colour, a thick black line to denote the hill, crudely marked green crosses and a figurative shape moving across the frontal plane. Pietras Negras (gouache on paper, 14 x 17in., Private Collection, Pl.194) serves as a perfect companion piece to Mexico. The simplicity of its design - horizontal black planes loom large against a white ground - is balanced by a gestural use of a deep, sun-baked orange hue. Lanyon's reduced palette evokes the clarity of the desert air, the scalding heat and the depth of the shadows. Once again the totemic presence evokes the iconography of the Mexican Indians (the impression of a jaw is enhanced by the use of Hilton-like shapes protruding from a horizontal line of yellow ochre which runs across the middle of the image). Lanyon's achievement is an original synthesis of monumental form, symbolism, flatness, sensuousness, biomorphism and abstraction which matches the metaphorical lyricism of Motherwell's Elegies to the Spanish Republic.

Lanyon's art lacks the didactic purpose of much modernism. He was committed to the idea of painting as a process of discovery and revelation, experimenting with different forms and spatial relationships. Travelling in America and Mexico had widened his artistic and topographical horizons



so that while he remained interested in exploring the artist's relation to the external world of space and light this was done within the expanding referential framework of the latest developments to emerge from New York:

The parochialism of Lanyon's immediate sources was complemented by his receptivity to any innovation that he could put to good use in own painting. This is especially true of his openness to modern American painting and his love of America itself.<sup>47</sup>

His final painting on an American theme was Lake (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, Gimpel Fils, London, 1964, Pl.203).<sup>48</sup> Once again Lanyon eschewed any direct mimesis of natural phenomena, sensing that he would be unable to imitate a place in paint, and tried to find an equivalent for the appearance and sensations engendered by contemplating the landscape. Lake combines elements seen in Lanyon's American-inspired paintings of the previous year: white is used as an independent colour to delineate the large clearly formed oval, fringed by wavy blue strokes, which dominates the composition and suggests a female figure. A swimmer to the right is poised to dive in. A central block of thinly painted light blue is placed on top of a red background, making the eye focus back and forth to suggest different planes. The use of red, green and blue recalls the palette of Mexico and Pony, although it is important to remember that this canvas was painted after his experience of travelling through Czechoslovakia had unlocked a more inventive and even freer use of colour. Shades of pink, purple and mauve recall the evening shadows cast by brightly painted buildings in the desert towns. Lake works as an exhilarating landscape because the viewer is able to recognize patches of bright blue sky in the long horizontal brushmarks, vegetation in the swathes of cactus greens and the lake caught by a series of vertical strokes in monestial blue. The painting achieves its effects by spirit and intuition - achieving a life of its own as intense and communicable as the colour-contrasted landscapes Lanyon had observed in his travels across the American South-West.

The fact that many of these travel paintings are identified by place names does not mean that we are being offered a literal description of a location. Lanyon had never really been very interested in offering the



viewer an impressionistic representation of a fleeting moment, preserving the momentary and transitory nature of phenomena, the dominion of the passing mood over the permanent qualities of life. Instead, his choreography of colour and form demands a more active role from the spectator:

I have claimed before and think it's so, that today the person who is looking at the picture is very much the subject. This may be a very difficult thing to understand, that in fact the picture doesn't come to life until somebody looks at it. And this person who looks at it, participates in it, just as we participate in jazz, or if we can hear twist music we begin to move about in a twist movement. A picture can set somebody going, not only physically moving, but in a poetic sense; and then they become, as it were, the person who is acting this picture out. The picture is a lot of things which are generating information, which anybody who is receptive can pick up, if they're prepared to do it.<sup>49</sup>

These later works rarely harbour mimetic forms to represent purely visual experience and increasingly they achieve their effects by employing a range of metamorphic and self-referential denotations. Lanyon filters the unconscious data of the senses and the raw material of experience through a series of reductions, restrictions and simplifications leaving only the essence for the beholder to grasp the relation of the image to perceived reality. The titles and images are supporting echoes that act as guides to the artist's memory rather than as a statement of pictorial content. Even those works which evidently contain figures and landscape forms tend to reveal their intentional character largely through the details of their formal organisation and their facture. The travel pictures are more evocative than descriptive and the spectator is invited to form his own imagined view from Lanyon's patchwork inventory of marks and colours.

#### BIRMINGHAM UNIVERSITY MURAL

The importance of travel as a stimulus and his alignment with recent developments in contemporary art can be seen in one of Lanyon's most



important works of 1963, an untitled mural for the Faculty of Arts building at Birmingham University (114 x 192in. at the bottom and 240in. at the top, oil on blockboard panels, completed in September 1963, Pl.192). Lanyon visited the site on a snowy day in January - shortly before he left for America.<sup>50</sup> He was impressed by the location, an entire wall in the foyer which serves as a passageway linking the two wings of the Arts building. The walls which flank the mural are made of industrial glass and Lanyon responded sensitively to the natural light and the grassy vistas on both sides by producing a full-scale sketch on paper showing how the mural could create an internal rhythm as a bridging passage to link the movement of people inside the building to the pastorage playing outside.<sup>51</sup>

Lanyon returned to his Cornish colours for the mural sketch (gouache and indian ink on paper, five sections, four pieces 116 x 47½in., one piece 116 x 12½in., 1963, Sheila Lanyon Collection, Pl.190), employing a light sap green to unify the composition with the landscape elements outside, a broad band of crimson red to anchor the work to its base, sandy yellow ochre at the top and thick black lines to create vertical and circular movement around the composition. Unfortunately a trial showing of the mural sketch on location revealed that the design failed to match the spatial requirements of the building and the colours appeared strident and obvious: "It required a much lighter key to give the illusion of openness."<sup>52</sup>

When he returned from the San Antonio Art Institute in April 1963 he began working on the mural in earnest. Photographs of his temporary studio in Fore Street, St Ives show its gradual evolution after ideas from the sketch had been transposed - with modifications - on to blockboard panels (Pl.191). The key compositional shape, an irregular bowl, survived - as did the red triangular shape and the pale-blue rectangle in the bottom left-hand corner which Mo Enright sees as "representative of red brick and glazing".<sup>53</sup>

At first he deployed the hard edges, bright colours and flatter frontal planes familiar from his work inspired by his recent trip to America. Early versions of the mural show the bright green of the original sketch abutting pale ceruleans and primary reds, vertical strips of ivory black mediating



areas of burnt sienna. However, these attempts suffered the same problems as the original sketch and he began to reduce the chromatic variety, simplify the design and develop the sensation of being in a particular landscape:

I am concerned with the use of paint and the development of the pictorial as opposed to the sartorial embellishment of walls. This means the use of illusion with its attendant dangers of weak shapes and inappropriate content. It is only by permitting the content to grow with the painting that these dangers can be by-passed. If two develop together then the full meaning will arrive at the surface at the same time as the satisfaction of shape and scale.<sup>54</sup>

At first Lanyon's modifications led to a somewhat flat and motionless composition of interlocking colour planes and it was only when he changed the colour key to favour blue instead of green that the final mural began to emerge:

...each part depends for its wholeness on the existence of other parts. Through the use of colour, additive and subtractive processes generate meaning which calls up common experience and so makes the mysterious marks of painting into familiar events, space and time, immediacy and duration occur together. It is only in the art of painting as a way of arriving all at once on a surface that this immediacy occurs. It is a significant requirement of all the human psyche.<sup>55</sup>

This interpretation of the completed image recalls Adrian Stokes' term "simulacrum" to describe the configuration of lines, pattern, shapes and colour exposed to the viewer all at once with the emotional content being experienced before the "subject". Lanyon was interested in investigating the shape of our field of vision, the configuration of what we actually see, and tried to adapt the geometry of his compositions to conform to it. The fluid brushmark, the broad stain of colour that he liked to spread out on clear canvas, always lent itself to paintings of water and reflections on water. But it also epitomized his other preoccupation, that of generating space by the disposition of forms and the vibrant flatness of the paint.



The mural is an expressive re-interpretation of many of Lanyon's earlier concerns, mingling solid architectural forms, a large harbour area, the movement of the sea, a darkening sky. On one level the painting can be read as a high-angle, semi-panoramic view of the Cornish coast which illustrates Lanyon's continuing debt to his first mentor, Borlase Smart. The elliptical swinging curve of the harbour basin and the lines of rock patterns and breakwaters lead the viewer to the centre of the composition from all parts of the picture. Right at the centre of the painting a yellow "eye" provides a still point of total calm. Some of the devices used are redolent of the Liverpool Mural: The "penstock motif" of a frustum for a right-angled triangle is echoed in the solid structures on both sides which stabilise the circular, vortical movement of the sea.

To emphasise that the painting should not dissolve into a study of atmospherics and the motion of the sea, Lanyon returned to the device of phrasing and counterpoint by placing black bars of varying length and width at intervals across the surface. This has the effect of balancing the vortical movement with rhythmically significant vertical axes, giving the viewer a time signature for the spatial intervals as the eye travels across the mural. Lanyon ensures that the musicality of this complex visual experience is maintained throughout so that the image loses none of its coherence:

The top of the mural is a "tumbling rolling movement of the air" where the boundary layer is slowed down on a body moving through it. This is a familiar aerodynamic action but can be used in this case to slow up a visual movement across an area. At a deeper level this can evoke an idea of friction where turbulent and headlong inspiration slows down a neighbour activity transforming movement into heat which in turn is dispersed and felt among other parts of the structure.<sup>56</sup>

This complex arrangement of movement matches the activity of the concourse and reveals Lanyon's sensitivity towards the nature of the space occupied by the mural. Significantly the Birmingham mural has no title and being concerned with air and water, rock formations and harbour areas, as well movement over time, it should perhaps be seen as a distillation of all his work. The Birmingham mural demonstrates that by 1963 Lanyon's work



had evolved into a mature and calculated expressionism. Having observed the considerable changes in art around him, he had come to understand that the high ground of modernism is not necessarily held by those who reject the past.

#### CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1964

Lanyon visited Czechoslovakia in February 1964 to attend the opening of the British Council exhibition, British Painting 1900-1962, in Bratislava and lecture on recent British art and landscape painting since Giorgione. His international reputation was growing and as a frequent guest on radio programmes covering the arts he was known to be an effective communicator.<sup>57</sup> The country was experiencing the first wave of liberal reforms that would eventually culminate in the Prague Spring: westerners were being encouraged to visit<sup>58</sup> and the newspapers were openly criticising the government's handling of the economy.<sup>59</sup> Lanyon followed an itinerary set up by a representative of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, but enjoyed remarkable freedom in being able to make unscheduled stops and meet a variety of state-supported and independent artists.

He delivered two lectures in Prague: A Personal View of Modern English Painting to members of the Artists' Union and English Landscape Painting - An Artist's Point of View for students at the Academy of Art. He also gave a "mixed" lecture ("there were a few slides and talking") to an arts club in Bratislava.<sup>60</sup> The lectures were important to Lanyon as they forced him to clarify his own position as a modernist working within the landscape tradition:

I believe that the landscape, the outside world of things and events larger than ourselves is the proper place to find our deepest meanings. I do not in saying this wish to diminish the achievement of painters like Francis Bacon, whom I am proud to acclaim, or to place myself any way near him in excellence. I want to make the point that landscape painting is not a provincial activity as it is thought to be by many in the United States, but a true ambition like the mountaineer who cannot see a mountain without wishing to climb it or a glider pilot who cannot see the clouds without feeling the lift inside them. These things take us into places where our trial with forces greater than



ourselves, where skill and training and courage combine to make us transcend our ordinary lives.<sup>61</sup>

This is an important statement as it affirms Lanyon's belief in the absolute presence of the landscape. It is a place where we can experience another way of seeing in order to gain a serenity of understanding which can lead us to a whole, and perhaps holy perception of existence. Starting with Giorgione's La Tempesta, Lanyon outlined a tradition of landscape painting that was concerned with "a sense of the forces beyond human scale." He paid tribute to Cézanne's construction after nature, Gabo's experiments with time and space and the Abstract Expressionists who "brought back to painting the mark of the brush and the characteristics of paint itself".<sup>62</sup>

Lanyon found that his audiences were already well informed about twentieth century British painting - but knew little of Pop Art. At first he found some resistance - apathy in Bratislava and Prague when he passed round a Sunday Times supplement on Pop Art by David Sylvester. He believed this lack of enthusiasm was the result of a political "directive" and spent some time explaining the movement, showing work by Kitaj and Hockney (Cha Cha was well received but Sphinx was thought "really childish").<sup>63</sup> Occasionally, more overt political indoctrination revealed itself. A question in Prague focused on Francis Bacon as a critic of capitalism and ecclesiastical degeneracy because his subject matter included a tortured Innocent X and "the whole degradation of people who spend their time rolling around in bed...here was the drug taking and the drunkenness..."<sup>64</sup>

He was embarrassed by the paucity of the British Council exhibition ("It was not big enough and the impression was that we had not considered them as important as other countries"),<sup>65</sup> overwhelmed by the friendliness with which he was received and impressed by the support given to the arts by the communist regime. His report recommends that a bilateral agreement should be negotiated for a comprehensive exhibition of twentieth century British art ("While they would not wish to be ungrateful they wanted me to ask most urgently please for a really good exhibition with Moore and Bacon")<sup>66</sup> reciprocated with an important exhibition of Czechoslovak painting and sculpture in Britain:

I can visualise an exhibition which included the gothic up to the present day and I believe that what I have seen now will, in another two years, become a very strong central European art based differently from our own. It would be worthwhile to begin thinking about such



an exhibition and about an important British exhibition in exchange.<sup>67</sup>

It was typical of Lanyon's empathetic sensibility that what could have been a fairly routine visit by an artist "flying the flag", enjoying the hospitality laid on by the British Council and the Czech authorities, turned into a genuine journey of discovery in which he immersed himself in Czech culture and demonstrated an enviable talent for communicating openly and honestly with the people he met.

Perhaps the most enjoyable part of Lanyon's trip was his journey into Northern Slovakia and the High Tatra mountains, exploring the great charm of villages like Tatranski Lomnica. He was eager to visit the thirteenth century church of St James in Levoca and see the spectacular Gothic sculptures attributed to Meister Pavel.<sup>68</sup> He was captivated by the legendary Slovak hospitality and their zest for enjoying life - becoming particularly enamoured with his interpreter, Maricia Vilecekovato:

I was sent into the mountains with a beautiful interpreter and I fell in love, but being the party and the room taped and in an official position, my affections were returned in the sweetest manner in the forest at night and in a Christmas fairy land or floating high on a cable over a blizzarding country. This was near the Russo-Polish border.<sup>69</sup>

Travelling through Bohemia and Slovakia brought Lanyon into contact with Czech cubism, folk art and state sponsored Socialist Realism. He enjoyed visiting the national collections in Prague - particularly admiring the Picassos and Braques - and found time to look at some interesting regional collections such as the folk art museum in Bratislava.<sup>70</sup> He had always felt at home with the massive standing stones at Carnac and with the quoits of West Penwith, saying that they had a peculiarly intense feeling because they were not considered to be works of art. In Bratislava he found a folk art tradition (supported by the government as "workers' art") which unselfconsciously bridged the gulf between "high" and "low" culture:

They paint and decorate their carts in Sicily and Southern Italy,



they paint their houses in Mexico, and they do exactly the same thing, their carts are painted, their houses are painted in Slovakia, and they have a strong tradition of tapestry making, all this sort of thing, so there is a strong form of art.<sup>71</sup>

Apart from one gouache, Prague (1964), which incorporates elements of collage, the works derived from this trip behind the Iron Curtain seem to have been inspired by his experiences in Slovakia. Bohemia must have seemed anaemic and drab in comparison to Slovakia's highly decorated houses, the brightly patterned clothes worn by the villagers and the glow of winter sunlight on the Carpathian mountains. The trip had a very positive effect on Lanyon, as he indicated when he wrote to his New York dealer, Catherine Viviano:

I am in a good period at present. Czechoslovakia had a good effect. I hope I shall be allowed into the States after that!<sup>72</sup>

Paintings such as Tatra (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.204) and Lomnice (Marica) (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.206) are saturated with purples, reds and golds. These sensual pictures are powerful reminders of Lanyon's empathetic ability to respond to a new environment. His emotional engagement with the people and places visited in early 1964 is transposed into a complicated scenery of basket-weave patterns, shapes and forms of varying definiteness oscillating between representational suggestion and enigmatic allusion. Occasionally we are offered topographical or architectural clues which might capture our attention - for example, the dome of the observatory in the High Tatras which he tried to reach (but failed as the road was blocked with snow) can be seen clearly in the top left of Untitled (Observatory) (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.205).<sup>73</sup> The central section suggests an impenetrable barrier of snow confronted by the phallic figure on the right. Mostly, however, he deploys his gift for balancing associational imagery with evocative chromatic and phenomenological effects.

Tatra is astonishingly close to the underground embryonic forms found in paintings for the Generation Series such as Prelude (1947) and Headland



(1948) which combined ideas of mining with parturition. However, while the imagery may not have changed - the dark, weathered surfaces have been replaced with bright luminous exchanges of blue, violet, red, orange, ochre, "Kaisergelb" and white. This unalloyed enjoyment of pigment can be read as a rebuke to the austere puritanism of the immediate post-war period and a celebration of a country where weddings can last for days and huge amounts of slivovic and wine are consumed in riotous feasts of singing and dancing. The painting is charged with erotic physical intimacy - hinting at sexual consummation but without resorting to explicit figuration. The hill in Tatra has been driven into by four shafts which touch the enclosed human form, connecting the upper part of the picture to the middle and providing complex subdivisions of space which interrupt the "basket-weave" of webbed violet lines. The painting involves an implicit narrative as the eye moves in a circle from right to left - through the horizontally oriented white rectangle, past the sexually aroused red genitalia and "Kaisergelb" body to an intersection (of bunched hair?) where the white arc coming up from the base is temporarily obscured by the profile of a head before continuing its trajectory across the top to form the line of the hill.

Lomnica is a spa town of elegantly dilapidated villas and hotels which, during the communist period, offered rest and recreation for countless party apparatchiks. Lomnice (Marica) (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.206) is perhaps the most lyrical and tender painting of Lanyon's career. It is a key work which recalls the themes and procedures of his earlier work while developing his recently acquired chromatic fluency and new-found confidence in depicting sexual intimacy. There can be little doubt that this is a highly charged reverie about sexual consummation, although the exact nature of the union has been left deliberately ambiguous. Quantitatively and chromatically it is dominated by the great vertical band of cadmium red which seems to be forcing the various figurative elements together. The phenomenological effect of the work as a whole is determined by the black V-shape which occupies the stage-like space in the centre and links the sinuous figure on the left to the artist's silhouetted profile on the right - behind the white figure of Marica. Long flowing purple tresses mediate this powerful rhetorical gesture and soften the thrust of the red



column.

Lanyon has returned to the idea of the landscape as expressing our deep longing for a closer connection with the elemental forces of nature. The basic gestures do double duty in terms of image and form, figures are at once erotic emblems and passages of painterly expression. Paintings like Lomnica (Marica) and Tatra celebrate human sensuality more actively and openly than the post-war works which derive their inspiration from the fecundity of the earth. The figures in Lomnica surrender themselves freely to the principle of sensual pleasure, recalling Lanyon's liaison "in the forest at night...in a Christmas fairy land".<sup>74</sup> In his exploration of the erotic, Lanyon liberated sexuality from the constraints of a moralistic culture, anticipating the ethos of the 1960s with its banishment of the sense of sin that had plagued earlier generations.

Spring Coast (Perfumed Garden) 48 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.207) is characteristic of his work at this time and shows the extent to which his painting was gaining fresh vitality from contacts with the world outside Cornwall. Both titles are inscribed on the back of the canvas, with the date '64. Alan Bowness maintains that this is a Cornish subject, begun after visiting Birmingham for the unveiling of the university mural in September 1963.<sup>75</sup> The painting was exhibited at the Catherine Viviano Gallery in May 1964 and its close affinity with the decorative palette and internal exchanges of Tatra and Lomnica (Marica) suggests that it was completed shortly after his return from Czechoslovakia (Lanyon often returned to paintings after a pause to see if the image had "cooked"). Spring Coast presents itself as a tremendously sensual painting, possessing a gentle lyricism not usually associated with the coast of Cornwall. This is not so much a landscape painting as a landscape of paint - bright yellow, hot pink, red, purple and flesh tones - conjuring up a world of pleasure to be entered into.

Evocative, without being directly descriptive, Lanyon continued to operate on a border of his own devising between figuration and abstraction. The work produced in the last six months of his life reveals the revitalising influence of foreign travel as well as the assimilation of contemporary



developments in the international art world. No single style or set of ideas now dominated. Because contemporary practice was no longer shaped by a linear evolutionary progression of the kind that underpinned Greenberg's theory, Lanyon felt free to engage his interest in narrative, myths, symbols, expressionism and even the classical landscape tradition.<sup>76</sup> The strength of his art lies in his insistence on remaining loyal to his atavistic roots - Cornwall remained his primary subject - while at the same time remaining alert to the pictorial possibilities created by the experience of foreign travel.

### THE CLEVEDON SERIES

Lanyon's last series took images inspired by Clevedon, the seaside resort on the Bristol Channel, as its theme. He visited the town in May 1964 with students from the West of England College of Art at Bristol where he had been a visiting lecturer since 1960.<sup>77</sup> In many ways the paintings represent the summation of his chief concerns as an artist, demonstrating how successfully he had addressed the problematic familiar to many of the St Ives "middle generation" in the era of Pop Art and Post-Painterly abstraction: whether to remain locked in an increasingly comfortable aesthetic or to change with the times and risk accusations of lack of roots, betrayal of the original point of departure or simply of following the vagaries of fashion. He stuck to his original lexicon while reducing the personal hand writing, broad range of tonalities, layered textures, rich physicality and spontaneity of handling which are found in the broad-armed brushwork of his paintings from the 1950s. His discourse with the key dialectics of modern abstraction produced results that are at once more lyrical and decorative than anything produced by Situation or its American equivalent, but no less impressive.

Reverting to his early habit of extensive preparatory work, he produced twelve drawings, twenty-nine colour-slides, as well as seven gouaches. The sheer number and range of these gouaches, drawings and photographs reminds us that illumination was a natural, incessant part of his daily activity - a practice he had learned from Borlase Smart and Ben Nicholson



and which he constantly recommended to his own pupils.<sup>78</sup> There is a total commitment to the way he recorded the landscape, the different images making up a kaleidoscope of sensory impressions and notations of outline, volume, texture and depth.

The photographs provide a direct record of Lanyon's out-of-season visit on an exceptionally bright and still day when there were few people about. The items that Lanyon recorded - the Regency iron pier, some beach furniture, the boat house, bathing pool, a bandstand, a drinking fountain and a machine for stamping nameplates - evoke the character and atmosphere of the Victorian resort. Although the photographs are a true record of what Lanyon saw, they also convey the elegiacal nostalgia for faded grandeur which can be found in many of England's once fashionable seaside resorts - a quality which was successfully transmuted into the finished paintings.

The drawings mark a return to the practice of thinking on paper, a "hands-on" experience of seizing chances in the organization of spatial and formal considerations prior to the execution of the gouaches and oil works in the studio. The smaller scale of these works on paper allowed, or prompted, him to emphasise the more delicate hand-and-wrist gestures of linear drawing. They serve as personal seismographs recording immediate sensations - epigrams which are not intended to be academically correct or harmonised notations. Some of the sketches express a Nicholson-like concern for the documentation of three-dimensional structures, relating line to plane, detail to mass: the calm linear control shown in Clevedon Study 4 (15½ x 19½in., crayon on paper, inscribed on back, Clevedon sketch VI, 1964, Pl.213), a view across the boat pool towards the pier with a line of tethered paddle boats beaded across the foreground, stresses the horizontality of the view and the calm tranquillity of the scene.

Other drawings have a looser technical treatment - allowing a freer line to fluctuate between background and foreground planes, rapidly exploring form, contour and space. In Clevedon Study 3 (15½ x 19in., pencil on paper, 1964, Frank Overton Collection, Pl.213) the lines are thicker, more impressionistic, sweeping round the bay towards the pier and numbered paddle-boats, a close-up vertical structure (a diving stage?) clearly



articulating the surface division of the composition. These sketches recall the way that Lanyon solved the fundamental organisational problems in Portreath and Porthleven - giving presence to the surfaces by unifying objects and space rather than merely recording the sensation and visual impact of the place. However, the relationship between the drawings, gouaches and the three Clevedon paintings requires further scrutiny if we are to fully appreciate and understand how far Lanyon has come since his Nicholson-derived attempts to depict enclosed water and Cornish harbours.

The seven gouaches are interesting in the way they filter the spatial explorations and topographical information from the drawings and photographs into new and unexpected associations of pure colour and design. The unmistakeable architecture of the cast iron pier supports, the wall of the boat pool, the suggestion of a recumbent human form in the sweep of the bay are isolated from other pieces of visual information as part of a re-examination of the formal context within which these objects were perceived and also the nature and identity of the objects themselves. Each transparent patch of colour, each floating line appears uncalculated and exuberant, yet each plane, whether implied by a colour patch or momentarily bounded by a fragment of line, remains distinct and declares its complex but clear relationship with every other plane.

Lanyon was never content simply to be the manipulator of his materials and the gouaches show how he would develop certain ideas and motifs into imagery that might have universal resonance. Having established the formal components of representation to be included in the paintings, he would break through the outer skin of consciousness to draw inspiration from deeper layers of his imagination. By allowing himself to become "transparent to the transcendent"<sup>79</sup> a multivalent blend of animistic imagery and transformative mythopoeic connections were brought to the surface.

The cursive spontaneity of a work like Clevedon and Pier (22 x 29in., gouache, 1964, Private Collection) reveals Lanyon's sensitivity to the immediate concrete pictorial stimuli while laying himself open to the stirrings of his unconscious. As surface detail and psychological depth combine, the elegant arcade of the pier becomes a sexualised masculine



form bearing down on the female pool. The origin of this transformation lies in his earlier experiences of the landscape as a nude, identifying the female body with his native country (as in the 1957 painting Beach Girl). We are also powerfully reminded of Lanyon's interest in myth as a tool for synthesising the efforts of his imagination and universalising his subject. The sculpture Europa Shore (1954) describes the same violation in terms of a roughly textured shell prized open to reveal the smoothly undulating surface within.

It is in the gouaches that the metaphors at the heart of the Cleveland series paintings are brought to fruition: Andrew Causey traces the source of imagery in Clevedon Belle (22½ x 30in., gouache, 1964, Leeds City Art Galleries, Pl.214) back to the same primordial myth that had preoccupied Lanyon for much of his career as an artist. The blue radial focus of energy on the top right is related to the vortex of surf in Offshore (1959) which bears down on the black shapes (derived from anchors and grapples and tarred nets) stretched out on the grassy hill in the foreground. Lanyon associated Offshore with the Europa myth, describing it in terms of the white bull coming up out of the sea to seize the goddess. Thus the rolling blue form in Clevedon Belle and the figure-as-landscape motif suggests an iconographic relation to key ideas in Lanyon's paintings which stretches back to the Generation series produced immediately after the war.

The importance of the Cleveland gouaches lies in their poetic reshaping of Lanyon's ordinary sensory perceptions of reality into a landscape of the inner self which returns the artist to a state of "participation mystique", an animistic conception of the universe in which the sacred is revealed.<sup>80</sup> There is little evidence that such recurrent configurations were deliberately selected, rather they operate more like unconscious signatures which occurred to the artist as he attempted to keep a balance between spontaneity, intuition and inspired calculation.

At first glance Clevedon Pool (22 x 29in., gouache and indian ink on paper, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.215) seems radically unlike the other more topographically referential gouaches in the series. Greater emphasis is placed on inflected expanses of colour, the interplay of warm and cool



tones, nuances of dark and light, transparency and opacity. The rich spatial flux located in the drawings is present, but in a different guise, achieved with a very limited number of densely painted elements. The suggestion of structure and space is enriched by the dark background and sensuous band of ultramarine blue which cradles the large yellow ochre pool. Broad horizontal brushstrokes stress the width of the sheet (and the sweep of the bay), although the rhythmic uniformity of the composition is broken up by the assertive presence of three areas of brown paint in the centre of the pool. Each stroke provides a subtle inflection that sets up counter-rhythms on a smaller scale. The gouache makes little discernible reference to the actual physical reality of the site referred to by the title, yet the slender, curving tendrils are derived from the foreground depiction of the promenade seen in Cleveland Study 3 and the shape of the recumbent figure/pool recalls the view eastwards towards the pier. The gouache speaks of a far more timeless and universal experience than that evoked by mere verisimilitude to the site-specific subject.

The three Cleveland paintings, Clevedon Bandstand (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.216), Clevedon Lake (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1964, Private Collection, Pl.217) and Clevedon Night (48 x 72in., oil and polystyrene collage on canvas, 1964, Gimpel Fils, London, Pl.218) indicate the direction Lanyon's work was taking at the time of his death. What becomes evident in these late works is the artist's interest in creating zones of space which direct the viewer's eye through the picture and a potential narrative. While Abstract Expressionism expresses an intensely physical form of existential self-realization, Lanyon's later works are grounded in a lyrical gentleness, aspiring to the spiritual poise and pictorial order he once admired in Nicholson.

I seem also to be producing Clevedon paintings! A new Clevedon set,  
I guess! Work is crazy, quite invisible, Victorian, and unsaleable.<sup>81</sup>

The eye is led into Cleveland Bandstand by the skilful use of red diagonals (the upper one has been overpainted but is still visible beneath the cerulean blue) directing a downward-horizontal movement into the thinly painted light-blue boatpool. It is as if one is looking at a cross-section of a



tunnel and into the lateral expanse of a blue chamber that lies beyond. The pronounced verticality of the black and green strips echo the framing edges - establishing a relationship in which the literal limit of the painting (its actual edge) is given identity as a compositional function rather than merely as a condition of composition.

He conceived the painting in terms of a conflation of different elements in Greek mythology. The gouaches allude to his continued interest in the Europa myth with its sea-shore conflict and bull interpreted in terms similar to Offshore's gusting vortex. However, the final painting also draws on the myth of Orpheus - the musician of pagan antiquity whose lyre could enrapture animals and trees, birds and fish. The radial form seen entering the gouache Clevedon Belle as a dark, threatening presence has been softened into Orpheus - a whirl of white wind descending into Hades after the death of Eurydice, his lute wittily transmogrified into the shape of euphonium. As already discussed, Lanyon saw Orpheus as the archetypal figure for the modern artist:

He exemplifies the human striving to integrate conscious and unconscious forces, Apollo and Dionysus, animus and anima, the ego and the Great, or Cosmic Self. As such, he was bound to have a strong appeal for those Romantics who pursued Holderlin's dream that humanity might yet learn how to "dwell poetically" on earth.<sup>82</sup>

It is not difficult to understand why Orpheus continued to fascinate Lanyon: there is an element of self-identification with the visionary willing to risk everything to journey to the land of the dead and whose art could teach humanity how to "dwell poetically" on earth.

The portals to the Underworld are evoked by the dominant black band in the centre-right of the picture - originally the pavement beside the pool (seen in Clevedon Study 5) or perhaps the diving-stage introduced to stress the vertical plane in Clevedon Study 3; a second barrier is formed by the thinner green stripe which also evokes the hedge that grows parallel to the promenade. The decorative ironwork of the bandstand is recalled by the curvilinear line of brown paint that reaches the far right periphery



of the painting, enclosing the smoothly painted pink form that on prolonged inspection looks very much like a nude torso seen from the side and was probably inspired by the literal form of a caryatid as well as the female figure of Eurydice. More prosaically Lanyon's friend and colleague, Paul Feiler, appointed Head of Painting at the West of England College of Art in 1963, claims that this figure was derived from a nude which he and some of his students painted on the walls of a pill box along Poet's Walk during the Clevedon excursion.<sup>83</sup>

According to Causey, the Clevedon paintings were executed at a time when Lanyon was still consciously looking for new influences and different ways of presenting images.<sup>84</sup> He detects the presence of Francis Bacon in the diagrammatic device of using long straight lines to focus attention on specific parts of the composition. Lanyon has employed Bacon's device of dispensing with a continuously realized setting by isolating the figural elements (Orpheus and Eurydice) within a frame of lines on a monochrome canvas surface (Bacon would sometimes use a cage to achieve the same effect of localizing the figure within a closed space).

There is certainly a fair amount of contextual evidence to support the notion that Lanyon was interested in and admired Bacon's work. As early as 1952 he had compared aspects of St Just to Bacon's work: "This Crucifixion (which is un-named yet) is all gossip and mocking and napalm and burning but without the Francis Bacon illustrative obsession".<sup>85</sup> They became friends when Bacon spent four months during the winter of 1959/60 painting in a Porthmeor studio. Bacon's exhibition at the Tate in May/June 1962 had received wide coverage and generally favourable reviews - the visceral strangeness of the work had, in retrospect, taken on an ordered and coherent look. He was also one of the few contemporary artists that Lanyon paid tribute to in his British Council lectures of 1964. While considering landscape to be the most significant achievement of British painting, he did not want "to diminish the achievements of painters like Francis Bacon, whom I am proud to acclaim, or to place myself any way near him in excellence."<sup>86</sup> A day later, in an even more self-effacing and jocular mood, he wrote to Ivon Hitchens:



Looking through them - the slides - I have come to the conclusion that British painting is WORSE than I had thought. Sickert & of course Constable in his sketches & Turner in his most golden and mysterious ones. Bacon comes off very well and Hitchens. Ben does not nor Sutherland and as for Lanyon - well he looks like a cake that is unbaked.<sup>87</sup>

Bacon shared Lanyon's interest in the Ancient World and his admiration for W.B. Stanford's study of Aeschylus led to Triptych Inspired by the Oresteia of Aeschylus in 1981.<sup>88</sup> He identified the howling part-human, part-animal figures in the 1944 Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion as the Eumenides, or Greek Fates, who pursued the matricide Orestes. A painting like Clevedon Bandstand, however, highlights the distance between Lanyon's belief in the regenerative power of ancient myths and Bacon's belief that "man now realises that he is an accident, that he is a completely futile being, that he has to play out the game without reason...painting has become - all art has become - a game by which man distracts himself."<sup>89</sup> While Bacon's Triptych inspired by T.S. Eliot's poem "Sweeney Agonistes" held up an image of fragmentation and spiritual emptiness to represent modern man, Lanyon's art aims to unify the layers of air, sea, earth, geology and history so that the viewer can experience the totality of nature and metaphorically encounter the vitalistic forces which are normally beyond our apprehension. Bacon destroyed traditional expectations of post-war figurative art by suggesting that man at his most intense moments of sensation becomes physiognomically close to an animal. Lanyon disrupted the conventions of British landscape painting by combining all his sensual energy and experiences of the landscape into a single image which celebrated his "thirst for being", a life of the spirit as seen through the senses.

Clevedon Lake is the most abstract of the Cleveland paintings. It consists of a foreground of alternating red and blue parallel stripes running from edge to edge of the canvas - giving the softer atmospheric parts emphasis by remaining distinct from them. The lower half of the painting reveals form and representational image coalescing in a set of whittled-down anagrams projected in abstract shape, colour and texture. The boatpool is once again evoked by an area of pink and Causey suggests that the rectangular shapes



represent "an intricacy which is equivalent in a sense to the pier architecture in the painting Clevedon Night".<sup>90</sup> The extraordinarily bold device of obliterating most of the landscape references by painting bands of alternating colour bears an ironic relation to the compositional design of Frank Stella's Black paintings of 1957-58 which seemed to test the limits of art, contracting it to an irreducible essence and stripping away the technical virtuosity of gestural painting.

The mixed formal language of Clevedon Night includes geometry, gesture and figuration, demonstrating an intention to exploit abstraction and graphic figuration without ever completely submitting to either idiom. As the title suggests, the north Somerset resort - experienced at first-hand in broad daylight - has been used as a springboard for a meditation on how to select, rearrange, and finally transform the meaning of that scene into a nocturnal reverie. The pier's distinctive black archways appear against a night-blue sea, partially submerged beneath undulating white and aquarium-green wave forms; the horizontal accent of the composition is stressed by the incorporation of two rectangles of collaged polystyrene added to the surface to represent boats in front of the Regency iron pier. The recumbent flesh-coloured figure in the gouaches Clevedon Pool and Clevedon Belle, a conflation of the painted iron caryatids on the bandstand and the shape of the boating pool, has here become an elongated swimmer gliding through the composition. The form is presented as a lubricious playgirl of the deep, completely at one with her viscous medium having surrendered freely to the watery element. The mood of Clevedon Night is that of a nocturne in which memory, imagination and metaphor combine to create a poignantly lyrical image.

The Clevedon series completed Lanyon's Orphic quest for an alchemical language that might transmute the senseless and shapeless flux of thoughts and forms in life into fresh and inspiring configurations. He had left behind the constraints of any specific modernist manner, successfully fusing figurative and non-figurative alike, the conscious and the unconscious, the equivocal and the unequivocal, Apollonian (structure) and Dionysian (anti-structure), the sensuous and the spiritual. There is a sense in the Clevedon pictures that he had found a way of orchestrating the rhythms

of his creative energy into a synthesis which brought together the objective reality of place, the constructivist method of developing imagery, the sublimating power of archetypal myths and Pop Art's insistence that a picture was an image wanting to be recognised.

It is possible that the significance of the Clevedon series lies in the fact that it marked the emergence of an artist who had struggled through his apprenticeship and was now free to express himself in a rich visual language which was entirely his own. In the last year of his life a classical impulse towards order provided the unobtrusive architecture which marshalled and contained the intensity of his feelings for the sublime. Flat areas of primary colour are circumscribed within carefully delineated forms as part of a renewed investigation into the poetics of image making. To find a precedent for these tightly structured and ordered paintings it is necessary to turn the clock right back to the beginning and look at the linear abstracts produced under the guidance of Nicholson and Gabo.

## CONCLUSION

By 1964 Lanyon had loosened his ties with Cornwall and his art had taken on an increasingly cosmopolitan look:

At the time of his death in 1964 after a gliding accident, he was working way beyond the county boundaries, so to speak. Clevedon Bandstand with its natty blue and red, its black bugle shape, like a call to action, its reflection of a woman in the wings, is independent of the Duchy.<sup>91</sup>

Shortly before his fatal accident Lanyon had been contemplating much longer absences from Cornwall. Despite increasing national and international recognition, he was still unable to survive on the proceeds of his picture sales and his dealer was forced to admit that "the only thing I have been able to sell recently have been your gouaches".<sup>92</sup> A trip to Australia sponsored by the British Council was planned for January and February 1965 to be followed by a long-term teaching job in America:



I stayed there (New York with Catherine) three weeks and have I hoped negotiated a good job which could keep me away from this bloody country for three years.<sup>93</sup>

His pictorial inventiveness and creative vitality remained unabated at the time of his death and would undoubtedly have continued to be enriched by travel abroad and contact with new movements in modern art on both sides of the Atlantic. The fatal accident occurred when the plane he was piloting nose-dived on landing during a training course with the Devon and Somerset Gliding Club. Misjudging both his height and speed, Lanyon had dipped the wing of the glider in a cross-wind (despite having been warned against this) and the impact catapulted him out of the cockpit, fracturing his twelfth vertebra. Lanyon was taken to hospital in Taunton where an undetected blood-clot killed him four days later on the 31st August, 1964. The great tragedy lay not only in the termination of a promising career, but in the loss of the father of six children.

The Tate's St Ives 1939-64, Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery chose the year of his death as the point when the great era of creativity and innovation in St Ives ended: "totally unexpected and gratuitous, it [his death] was a blow from which painting in St Ives was never quite to recover."<sup>94</sup> While many artists such as Terry Frost, Roger Hilton, Bryan Wynter, Wilhemina Barns-Graham, Paul Feiler, Barbara Hepworth, John Wells and Patrick Heron continued to live and work in West Cornwall, critical opinion began to withdraw its support from the painting and sculpture identified as belonging to the St Ives School. The 1960s witnessed the resurgence of London as a centre of national and international art. Critics and commercial galleries were more interested in Pop Art's targets, stripes, bold patterning and glow-in-the dark colours than the non-formal pastoral abstractions of the St Ives painters. The art object and painting was subjected to a process of demystification and dematerialization. The "real" problems of abstraction were reflected in the urban impersonality of "New Generation" sculpture and the hard-edged clarity and emphatic two-dimensionality of American formalism rather than in the perceived solipsisms of art from St Ives.

As the 1960s gathered pace, landscape painting became increasingly

marginalised as a refuge for old-fashioned recidivists, unable to cure themselves of a lingering nostalgia for romanticised renderings of boats, beaches and pastoral reveries. Lanyon's first major retrospective, a 1968 memorial exhibition arranged by the Arts Council for the Tate Gallery which subsequently went on tour to Plymouth, Newcastle upon Tyne, Birmingham and Liverpool, garnered respectful reviews but failed to make much of an impression. Experimental artists like James Turrell and Richard Long were dissolving the distinctions between nature and art by manipulating light or altering the landscape in a purely ephemeral way. These interventions led to a much more complex interaction with nature, in keeping with a change in the cultural climate which led artists to react against industrial civilization.

The 1970s began with Andrew Causey's monograph on Lanyon's paintings, prefaced with a moving tribute from Naum Gabo.<sup>95</sup> There were exhibitions at the Sheviack Gallery, Torpoint, Basil Jacobs Fine Art, Exeter University, the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol and the Park Square Gallery, Leeds. This was followed in 1975 by an exhibition of gouaches (three oil paintings were included as makeweight) at the New Art Centre, London. William Feather, writing for the Financial Times, prematurely heralded this as the beginning of a revival in Lanyon's standing "as a pioneer in fields seemingly dominated by Americans over the past 20 years."<sup>96</sup> The constructions, dismissed by Lanyon as nothing more than working tools enabling him to resolve the fluctuating duality of surface and depth, concrete form and illusionism, were first exhibited as independent works of art by Gimpel Fils in the same year. These early initiatives kept Lanyon's reputation alive, but he was eclipsed by Conceptual artists who called for radical changes in the way art is produced, re-evaluating the status of the object, its site and the social relations represented by established aesthetic forms. His work was not seen again in a one-man exhibition in a commercial gallery until Gimpel Fils staged Peter Lanyon: Works 1946 to 1964 in November 1983.

Lanyon's current critical standing as one of the key innovators in British landscape painting since the war can be traced to the major exhibition of paintings, drawings and constructions organised by Andrew Causey for Manchester University's Whitworth Art Gallery in 1978. He produced a



comprehensive catalogue, charting each phase of Lanyon's career in a publication which remains a significant landmark in the literature on the artist. Three years later Haydn Griffiths produced a survey of Lanyon's graphic works to accompany a travelling show of nearly one hundred drawings and prints. The dozens of drawings of locations from all angles shed light on the crucial early stages in the creative process which led to the final paintings.

As Lanyon's posthumous reputation began to grow, painting was being restored to the position of centrality from which it had been displaced in the 1960s and 1970s. The Royal Academy's A New Spirit in Painting, provided a showcase for established artists such as Lucian Freud and Balthus as well as the new generation of figurative Expressionists who came to dominate the activities of the art world in the 1980s. This shift of perception was accompanied by the discovery or rediscovery of artists who had dropped out of view during the preceding decades. The reappraisal of the significance of St Ives as a regional school which bridged the gulf between conceptual constructions of the countryside and the plastic spontaneity and flow of energy associated with all forms of expressionism led to the popular exhibition, St Ives 1939-64, Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery at the Tate Gallery in 1985.

While failing to really establish how artists as diverse as Hilton, Heron, Wells, Leach and Lanyon constitute a school in any sense other than sharing the same location, the Tate exhibition had a strong public appeal and brought into focus the long-running discussion of whether the town itself should have a permanent home for the art with which it was so closely associated. It was no coincidence that the dates chosen for the exhibition exactly match the twenty-five year duration of Lanyon's career as a professional artist. Described as "perhaps the most gifted of the second generation of St Ives artists",<sup>97</sup> much was made of his Cornish ancestry and his grounding in the picturesque traditions of Stanhope Forbes' Newlyn and the Post-Impressionism of the "painters of light" from St Ives. Lanyon alone provided the link which bridged the gap between old and new, traditional and modern, figurative and abstract, local and cosmopolitan.

Lanyon's place as a significant figure in twentieth century British landscape painting is now secure. Prices for his best work have risen more than ten-fold since the early 1980s with important paintings such as Clevedon Night on sale at Gimpel Fils for £70,000 in 1998.<sup>98</sup> Specialist catalogues and exhibitions have shed new light on less familiar aspects of his work. In 1992 the South Bank Centre organised a touring exhibition which focused on the complex relationships between the constructions and the development of his paintings. The studies for the Birmingham University mural and The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sand went on show at for the first time at Gimpel Fils in 1996 after spending nearly twenty-five years in Sheila Lanyon's garage.<sup>99</sup> To date Andrew Lanyon has published three valuable source books containing works of art and material on his father.<sup>100</sup> The letters, notes, reviews, transcripts of interviews, personal reminiscences from contemporaries and those he taught, provide interesting and unusual biographical insights.

One of the most extraordinary shifts in contemporary British painting has been the almost complete abandonment of the landscape by artists representing the avant-garde. This neglect may be due to the fact that few contemporary artists can find a way of representing their experience of an increasingly mediated and abstracted phenomenological world by traditional means. Instead, artists concerned with issues such as gender theory, feminism, post-structuralism and music/media culture favour conceptual forms which have no obvious link with the natural world. Emphasis is placed on the primacy of a work's formal components, while thematic notions of subjects are of secondary importance. Lanyon suffered from no such doubts or anxieties: nature informed not only the imagery in his paintings, but also the means by which they were made. Organic processes provided a model for the development of a style of gestural abstraction that secured his reputation in the 1950s. His concept of the landscape as a bearer of memory, a record of its own past, is registered in the paintings' structure of superimposed layers which mimic the results of natural processes and the deposition of past occupations.

Perhaps one of Lanyon's most significant achievements was to extend the boundaries of landscape painting by defying the currents of modern art.



Modernism required the rejection of narrative content: meaning resided in the making and the materials of the work or the formal relationships that held the painting together. Lanyon brought naturalistic evocations back in a disguised form, as a psychic narrative, told through metaphors, puns and equivalences. He experienced landscape to the full, identified with it physically and emotionally, incorporating the historical and the modern, synthesising all his sensory perceptions of a place into images of his environment which bridge the gap between art and life. Through a process of metamorphosis Lanyon recomposed the landscape, cramming layers of meaning together to produce flashes of revelation. His ambition was to rank with the greatest figures of the Newlyn and St Ives Schools - to achieve the grandeur of tradition and at the same time to rebel against tradition. He came closer than any of his contemporaries to achieving this paradoxical goal.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER NINE

1. Lanyon, Hilton and Heron were doing more abstract and inventive work, but the St Ives School was still best known for its landscape-derived motifs.
2. Charles Biederman, Art as the Evolution of Visual Knowledge, privately published in Red Wing, Minnesota, 1948. A long extract from Chapter 18, "Non-Aristotelian Art" (pp.385-92), is reprinted in S. Bann, The Tradition of Constructivism, originally published by Viking Press, New York, 1974, reprinted by Da Capo Press, Inc., New York, 1990. Victor Pasmore was lent a copy of Biederman's book in 1951. His decision to reject the highly acclaimed lyrical romanticism of his Thames at Chiswick series (shown at the Redfern Gallery in 1947) in favour of making constructions came as a shock to the British art world. Herbert Read thought that this volte-face was one of the most revolutionary events in British modernism. In 1947 Terry Frost, Pasmore's pupil at Camberwell School of Art (1947 to 1949) introduced him to Hepworth and Nicholson. Pasmore visited St Ives in the summer of 1950, staying in Patrick Heron's flat. His sketches of Porthmeor beach were later reworked into abstractions. He joined the Penwith Society c.1952.
3. Lawrence Alloway, Nine Abstract Artists, London, 1954, p.12. Further information of the development of the non-figurative art of the Constructionists can be found in Adrian Lewis, "The Fifties. British Avant Garde Painting 1945-56", Artscribe, London, no.34, March 1982.
4. Victor Pasmore on the significance of Charles Biederman, quoted in S. Bann, op.cit., 1990, p.224.
5. The title was an abbreviation of "the situation in London now". There were two Situation exhibitions held in 1960 and 1961. Robyn Denny acted as organising secretary for the second exhibition, New London Situation. The loose association of 20 artists included Henry Mundy, John Hoyland, Bernard Cohen, Richard Smith and Gillian Ayres. The aim of the exhibitions was to by-pass the dealer system and show new large-scale, hard-edged abstraction.
6. Roger Coleman, introduction to the catalogue of New London Situation, 1961. He expressed the view that when artists abandoned pictorial depth, a logical expansion occurs both horizontally and vertically so that the painting acquires environmental definition without becoming a mural.
7. Roger Coleman, ibid., "The organisation of the canvas...expresses itself through an image, not an image in a directly figurative sense, but an image in the sense that the marks on the canvas cohere to communicate a specific, deeply felt experience, even if the spectator is not aware of what the experience is."
8. In spite of the prescriptive criterion for involvement, Situation did not have a manifesto or a programme. The exhibition was poorly attended and it is possibly only with hindsight and the subsequent success of those involved that the movement has achieved historical significance.
9. Horizons radio programme, May 1963. TAV 212AB.
10. Peter Lanyon, notes on painting, 30th September 1963, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, Penzance, 1990, p.245.
11. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon: Paintings, Drawings and Constructions 1937-64, Whitworth Art Gallery, 1978, p.44.
12. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 23rd June 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.225.
13. The Arts Council Exhibition The New American Painting was at the Tate Gallery, February-March 1959. Work by Baziotes, Brooks, Francis, Gorky,



Gottlieb, Guston, Kline, de Kooning, Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, Rothko, Stamos, Still, Tomlin and Tworkov. Evidence for Lanyon's visit comes from Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1971, p.26; interview with Sheila Lanyon, 27th August 1996. The exhibition had a profound effect on many artists - it included far more works by the Abstract Expressionists than the selection in the Modern Art in the United States exhibition at the Tate Gallery in 1956. "Even for conservative Brits the aftermath of seeing that exhibition at the Tate was enormous. No one who made art or wrote about it (in London) did it quite the same way after seeing that show. I particularly remember a lot of bad Pollocks being made. The point is that much of what was made - good or bad - was in some way a reaction to that show." (Tape recorded conversation between Lawrence Alloway and Michael Auping, September 26th, 1986, quoted in Howard Hodgkin Paintings, Thames and Hudson, 1995, pp.28-29. Some of Lanyon's correspondence with Rothko was on display in the Rothko and St Ives exhibition, Tate Gallery St Ives, 1996. Lanyon's friendship with Motherwell is discussed by Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.42. Motherwell sent Lanyon a copy of the booklet Robert Motherwell Collages in December 1961 and Lanyon visited an exhibition of Motherwell's paintings at the Janis Gallery.

14. Lanyon's engagement diary is in the collection of Sheila Lanyon. Details can also be found in Margaret Garlake, Peter Lanyon, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.50.

15. Stanley J. Seeger owned six paintings by Lanyon, including Europa, Salome and Susan. Seeger wanted a painting of the sea for the music room of his house. Of the three sketches presented by Lanyon only Porthleven (42 x 380in., gouache and India ink on paper, 1962, Sheila Lanyon Collection) survives intact. Delaware and Bois d'Arc were cut up and reworked into individual pieces with titles such as Upbeat, Charge and Circe.

16. Photographs in Sheila Lanyon's possession are dated July 1962 and show the Porthmeor mural in its "penultimate" stage. The central focus, painted out at a later stage, was a large red horseshoe, similar to that found in Loe Bar (1962).

17. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, discusses the conservation problems surrounding Porthmeor. The cracking may have been caused by synthetic polymers in the American paint (used when Lanyon was working on the mural in situ) which failed to bind with Lanyon's original surface (hand ground pigment mixed with stand oil), p.43.

18. Thomas Crow, The Rise of the Sixties, The Everyman Art Library, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1996, p.34.

19. Ibid., p.60.

20. Ibid., p.61. Greenberg was active as a consultant for commercial galleries and arranged for Newman's first major exhibition in New York for eight years (a retrospective at French and Company Inc.). He described Newman's complex "exploration of the tensions between different light values of the same colour and between different colours of the same light value" in the catalogue introduction. Quoted in Anna Moszynska, Abstract Art, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1990, p.190.

21. Thomas Crow, op.cit., 1996, pp.65-67.

22. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 29th May 1960, Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.35.

23. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 23rd June 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.225.

24. Perhaps some of Lanyon's admiration for Hitchens arose from the older (Hitchens was born in 1893) artist's commitment to painting the limited



world of Lavington Common, a particularly verdant part of Sussex. It should be remembered that Hitchens and Nicholson had been close friends in the mid-1920s and early 1930s. Nicholson joined the Seven and Five Society on his invitation. Nicholson's advocacy of pure abstraction ended in destroying the society and his friendship with Hitchens. It is quite possible that the similarities with his own experience of Nicholson and the Penwith Society were not lost on Lanyon.

25. Letter to Paul Feiler, 1952, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.125.

26. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 28th January 1964, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.257.

27. Alan Bowness, Arts Council exhibition catalogue, 1968, unpaginated.

28. Diane Waldman, Mark Rothko, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1978, reprinted in 1997, p.69.

29. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aiden Ellis, Henley-on-Thames, 1971, pp.29-30.

30. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.47.

31. Undated text, c.1959, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, pp.290-291.

32. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 23rd June 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.225.

33. Horizons radio programme, May 1963, TAV 212AB.

34. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 23rd June 1962, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.225. Lanyon was almost unique among the St Ives artists in holding this attitude. More common was the view expressed by John Wells in this 1964 letter to Ben Nicholson: "I don't know which way painting is going, present trends confuse me. "Pop Art" leaves me cold. Although I often get led astray, I always want to return to the more formal, constructional or structurist type of work..." (TGA 8717.1.2.5333).

35. Lanyon talked about Hockney in his lectures in Czechoslovakia, showing slides of Cha Cha and Great Pyramid at Giza with Broken Head from Thebes. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about Painting and his visit to Czechoslovakia in February 1964. Spring 1964. TAV 215AB.

36. The information is supplied by Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.268. There is also a letter to Paul Feiler, 6th July 1964: "I landed in a hay field near Truro on Saturday and am still sneezing." Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.238.

37. Nancy Wynne-Jones quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.325.

38. Letter to Paul Feiler, 1952, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.125.

39. Sheila Lanyon has a set of 35mm slides which record his journey into Mexico. According to Alan Bowness, Lanyon visited Mexico in March 1963, when he was teaching at San Antonio. He did no painting, but took many photographs. Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968.

40. Andrew Causey links the rectangular shape to a slide showing a Mexican terraced house with a pale blue-green wall edged in a frame of strong crimson. Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.45.

41. The exhibition opened on 12th February 1962. Lanyon left England on 24th February. Causey specifically connects Eagle Pass with Jones' 10th Bus Cornering (1962), op.cit., 1978, pp.45-46.

42. The most representational illustration of cars can be found in a piece of juvenalia, Racing Cars, 13 x 17in., oil on board, 1935, Pl.1, painted when he was 17 years old.

43. Alan Bowness, op.cit., Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968.

44. Alan Bowness, ibid.



45. Three of these gouaches appeared in the exhibition Peter Lanyon: the Final Years 1962-64 at Gimpel Fils, London, 11th February to March 28th 1998. They were being sold for £4000 each.
46. Adrian Lewis discusses the gouaches in his essay Later Work for the exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, 16th September to 14th October 1978.
47. Andrew Causey, Modern Art Exhibition, Poole Arts Centre, catalogue, 1980.
48. Wrongly identified by Adrian Lewis as one of the Clevedon series. The painting was exhibited at Catherine Viviano's Gallery in New York, 5th to 23rd May, 1964 - the same month that he went to Clevedon with students from the West of England College of Art. None of the paintings from the Clevedon series could possibly have been exhibited in America in May.
49. Peter Lanyon and Paul Feiler talking to Michael Canney on an Horizons programme entitled "The Subject in Painting", BBC, 1963, TAV 212AB.
50. For a full discussion of all of Lanyon's mural work see Mo Enright, The Mural Studies, Peter Lanyon, January 1996, text written to accompany an exhibition of mural sketches and gouaches at Gimpel Fils Gallery, London.
51. Lanyon wrote 7 pages of explanatory text for the Birmingham University Mural. Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, op.cit., 1990, reproduces Lanyon's notes to the text, pp.310-311. The untitled sketch is in four sections (4 pieces measure 116 x 47½in. and 1 piece measures 116 x 12½in., gouache and Indian ink on paper, Sheila Lanyon Collection). He also worked on a Presentation Sketch (10 x 20½in., watercolour on paper, 1963) copied from the larger gouache and retained by the University for a fee of 50 guineas. It is now on permanent display in the committee room.
52. Mo Enright, op.cit., 1996.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. Notes on the Birmingham University Mural, Andrew Lanyon, Peter Lanyon 1918-64, op.cit., p.310.
56. Ibid.
57. See the Tate Gallery Archive Audio-Visual Material list, p.50.
58. "And in fact I also discovered when I was back in Prague talking to people there that there was quite a definite move which had been directed not just from the Czechoslovak Communist Party but also from Russia, as in fact there should be more contact with the West; the loss of contact over the years, say the ten years from 1952 to 1962, had been extremely damaging to them." Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about Painting and his visit to Czechoslovakia, February 1964. TAV 215AB, p.23 of the transcript.
59. "There have been terrific attacks on the whole Communist dogma by the Czech press, I mean, it has all been published in Prague, and that sort of openness and liveliness is in fact quite terrific." Ibid., p21.
60. Ibid., p.26.
61. Part of the lecture, "A Personal View of Modern English Painting", 27th January, 1964, quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.21.
62. Extracts from the lecture, "English Landscape Painting", typescript dated 26th January 1964. Lanyon also welcomed the surfacing of "deep-rooted myths and elemental passions" in work characterised as Abstract Expressionist (for example, Pollock's Pasiphaë (1944) and Rothko's Tiresias).
63. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about Czechoslovakia, op.cit., p.28.
64. Ibid., p.20.
65. Extract from the report on the visit to Czechoslovakia, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.286.
66. Ibid., p.286.



67. Ibid., pp.286-287.
68. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about Czechoslovakia, op.cit., p.10.
69. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 25th February 1964, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.260.
70. Peter Lanyon talking to Lionel Miskin about Czechoslovakia, op.cit., p.12.
71. Ibid., p.12.
72. Letter to Catherine Viviano, 8th March 1964. Many of the paintings (eg Tatra and Lomnice (Marica) were sent to New York for Lanyon's one-man show in May.
73. Report for the British Council, extract printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.286.
74. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 25th February 1964, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.260.
75. Alan Bowness, Arts Council Exhibition catalogue, 1968.
76. Andrew Causey asserts that Lanyon's "greatest mistrust was of the critic Clement Greenberg and his circle, whom he believed encouraged artists to feed off art and not off experience." Causey, op.cit., 1978, p.35.
77. Paul Feiler, Head of Painting at the West of England College of Art, was a close friend and, despite critical acclaim, Lanyon needed to augment his income by teaching.
78. "He talked all the time about physical effects and got his students to make marks with charcoal on an imperial sheet that were related to experience, marks that were about bulk or hardness or softness." Frank Hewlett quoted in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.325.
79. P. Cousineau (ed.), The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on his Life and Work, Harper and Row, San Francisco, 1990, p.40. Campbell borrowed the expression from the Karlfreid Graf Durkheim.
80. The term was coined by Erich Neumann, a Jungian psychologist. "The breakdown of consciousness" in modern art carries the artist "backwards to an all-embracing participation with the world". Participation mystique contains "the constructive, creative elements of a new world vision." Art and the Creative Unconscious (translated by Ralph Mannheim, Harper and Row Publishers, New York, 1966, p.125. Quoted in Michael Tucker, op.cit., 1992, p.18.
81. Letter to Paul Feiler, 5th June 1964, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.272.
82. Michael Tucker, op.cit., 1992, p.179.
83. Paul Feiler's recollection of the Clevedon outing is printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.271.
84. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1971, p.30.
85. Letter to Roland Bowden, 16th December 1952, printed in "Letters from Lanyon", Modern Painters, Spring 1992, p.55.
86. Peter Lanyon, from an illustrated slide lecture on some aspects of modern British painting, 27th January, 1964. Printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.286.
87. Letter to Ivon Hitchens, 28th January 1964, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., p.257.
88. John Russell, Francis Bacon, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, first published in 1971, revised and updated 1993, p.68.
89. Michael Tucker, op.cit., 1992, p.62.
90. Andrew Causey, op.cit., 1971, p.30.
91. William Feaver, The Observer, 17th February 1985.
92. Letter from Peter Gimpel, 5th March 1964, printed in Margaret Garlake,



Peter Lanyon, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998, p.72.

93. Letter to Peter Gimpel, 18th May 1964, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.267. Another letter to Joe Kelleher, professor at Princeton University, 4th August 1964, mentions the trip to Australia, reproduced in Andrew Lanyon, 1990, p.275.

94. St. Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, Revised Edition, Tate Gallery Publishing, 1996, p.196.

95. Andrew Causey, Peter Lanyon, Aiden Ellis, Henley-on-Thames, 1971.

96. William Feaver, Financial Times, 21st January 1975, printed in Andrew Lanyon, op.cit., 1990, p.322.

97. Alan Bowness, Foreword to St Ives 1939-64, Twenty-Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, first published 1985, revised edition 1996, Tate Gallery Publishing, p.8.

98. Peter Lanyon: The Final Years 1962-64, February 11th to March 28th 1998, Gimpel Fils Ltd., London.

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100. Peter Lanyon 1917-64, Penzance, 1990; Portreath: The Paintings of Peter Lanyon, Penzance, 1993; Wartime Abstracts: The Paintings of Peter Lanyon, Penzance, 1996.

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- 157) Soaring Flight (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Arts Council Collection, London)
- 158) Sketch for The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands (110 x 204in., gouache and oil on paper in four sections, 1960)
- 159) The Conflict of Man with Tides and Sands (105 x 276in., mural at Liverpool University, Civil Engineering Building, 750 semi-matt porcelain tiles with on-glaze enamel colour, 1960)
- 160) Rosewall (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Ulster Museum, Belfast)
- 161) Thermal (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1960, Tate Gallery)
- 162) Airscape (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 163) Beach Girl (42 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 164) Drift (60 x 42in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 165) Orpheus (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961, Premio Marzotti Institution, Valdagno)
- 166) Orpheus Construction (3 x 18 x 17in., paint, plastic, stained glass, chrome, ceramic tile and glass, 1961)
- 167) Salome (60 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 168) Green Buoy (16 x 15 x 2in., stained glass, plastic, ceramic tile and oil on board, 1961)



- 169) Iron Airscape (9 x 15 x 8in., painted and stained glass, ceramic tiles, bostik and oil on masonite, 1961)
- 170) North Cliff (60 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 171) fig.1: early state of Sarascinesco, 1961  
fig.2: early state of Sarascinesco with Porthleven Boats on stand and Sea Air on wall, 1961  
fig.3: Sarascinesco (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1961)
- 172) Airoundland (30 x 31 x 1in., paint, wood, glass and plastic metal, 1961)
- 173) Still Air (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1961, New Art Centre, London)
- 174) Sea Air (59 x 15½in., corrugated perspex, oil on masonite and cloth strap, 1961)
- 175) Long Shore (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 176) Two Place (72 x 50in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 177) High Moor (72 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 178) Oarscape (8 x 72in., oar, wood and oil on board, 1962)
- 179) Red Buoy (24 x 18in., oil on board, plastic, 1962)
- 180) Antigone (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 181) Loe Bar (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 182) Two Close (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 183) fig.1: Two sketches (Porthmeor above and Porthleven below) for mural for Stanley Seeger, Back Road West, 1962  
fig.2: Detail of Porthleven Sketch
- 184) fig.1: Two later stages of the Seeger mural, both of the far left end. It was now called Delaware.  
fig.2: Circe (42 x 98in., liquitex on paper, 1962)  
fig.3: Birdie (42 x 100in., liquitex on paper, 1962)
- 185) fig.1: Stanley J. Seeger Mural (36 x 384in., 1962, School of Architecture, University of Manchester)  
fig.2: Stanley J. Seeger Mural, detail of central section
- 186) fig.1: Charge (41 x 112in., oil and liquitex on paper, 1962)  
fig.2: Upbeat (42 x 80in., oil and liquitex on paper, 1962)
- 187) Portreath Watch (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1962)
- 188) Two Diving (relief construction in oil on masonite, with glass, plastic and enamel, 1962, Gimpel Fils, London)

- 189) Farm (42 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1963)
- 190) Sketch for the Birmingham University Mural (gouache and Indian Ink on paper, five sections, four pieces 116 x 47½in., one piece 116 x 12½in., 1963)
- 191) Three stages of the mural for the Birmingham University mural (oil on blockboard panels, 1963)
- 192) Birmingham University Mural for the Faculty of Arts Building (oil on blockboard panels, 9 feet 6in. at the bottom, 20 feet at the top)
- 193) Eagle Pass (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1963, Gimpel Fils, London)
- 194) Pietras Negras, Mexico (14 x 17in., gouache, 1963)
- 195) North East (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963)
- 196) Texan (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963)
- 197) Crossed Hill, Mexico (14 x 10in., gouache, 1963)
- 198) Pony (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1963)
- 199) Mexico (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1963, Arts Council Collection, London)
- 200) Saltillo (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1963, Gimpel Fils, London)
- 201) Turn Around (26 x 23 x 3in., relief construction in plastic, polystyrene, glass, wood and oil paint on masonite, 1963-4, Tate Gallery)
- 202) Field Landing (33 x 54 x 19in., painted wood, plastic, perspex and metal, 1963-4, Gimpel Fils, London)
- 203) Lake (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1964, Gimpel Fils, London)
- 204) Tatra (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964, Gimpel Fils, London)
- 205) Untitled (Observatory), (36 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964)
- 206) Lomnice (Marica), (72 x 48in., oil on canvas, 1964)
- 207) Spring Coast (Perfumed Garden), (48 x 60in., oil on canvas, 1964)
- 208) Pendeen (28 x 20in., polystyrene, glass and oil on board, August 1964)
- 209) Fistral Bay (60 x 48in., oil, pva and polystyrene on canvas, 1964)
- 210) Climb Out (48 x 72in., oil, pva and plastic on canvas, 1964)
- 211) Glide Path (60 x 68in., oil and plastic on canvas, 1964, Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester)



- 212) Playtime (54½ x 15½ x 4½in., mixed media, 1964)
- 213) fig.1: Clevedon Study 3 (15½ x 19in., pencil on paper, 1964)  
fig.2: Clevedon Study 4 (15½ x 19½in., crayon on paper, 1964)  
fig.3: Clevedon Study 5 (15 x 19in., pencil on paper, 1964)
- 214) Clevedon Belle (22½ x 30in., gouache, 1964, Leeds City Art Galleries)
- 215) Clevedon Pool (22 x 29in., gouache and indian ink on paper, 1964)
- 216) Clevedon Bandstand (48 x 72in., oil on canvas, 1964)
- 217) Clevedon Lake (48 x 36in., oil on canvas, 1964)
- 218) Clevedon Night (48 x 72in., oil and poystyrene on canvas, 1964, Gimpel Fils, London)