

THE EARLIEST KNOWN SPORTS PAINTING BY L.S. LOWRY DEPICTING CROWDS GATHERING FOR A RUGBY MATCH

TO BE UNVEILED IN PUBLIC FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER 50 YEARS
AHEAD OF ITS AUCTION DEBUT AT SOTHEBY'S THIS SUMMER

British Art: Modern/ Contemporary
29 June at Sotheby's London



LONDON, 30 April – Painted in 1928, *Going to the Match* is among the earliest known, if not the earliest, depiction of one of L.S. Lowry's most iconic and timeless subjects – that of spectators thronging to a sporting occasion. Famed for his images of football, it is significant that it is a rugby match he chose to paint first, no doubt testament to the importance of the Rugby League to Northern communities. One of only a small handful of paintings of the sport known to have been painted by Lowry, the extremely rare work is an exceptional example of the beloved artist's unique visual language. In this painting, the red flag seen flying by the ground, as well as the red scarves worn by several of the crowd members, hints at the Salford Red Devils – Lowry's local team.

Having remained in the same family collection since 1972, and only exhibited once before now in 1966, *Going to the Match* will be offered with an estimate of £2,000,000 – 3,000,000 as part of Sotheby's inaugural British Art: Modern/ Contemporary live-stream auction this summer. The painting will travel to New York, Edinburgh and Dublin for public exhibitions ahead of the auction, before going on view at Sotheby's New Bond Street from 22 – 29 June.

In August 1895, twenty-two clubs met at the George Hotel in Huddersfield to form the Northern Rugby League, leaving the Rugby Union in order to enable working class players to be compensated for wages lost when playing. During the game's development over the course of the twentieth century, Rugby League became deeply entrenched in the social and cultural fabric of the north of England and matches drew enormous crowds, with the culmination of each season being the Challenge Cup Final which continues to this day.

"Lowry was the ultimate onlooker, and in his compositions focusing on sporting subjects, it is the crowd that fascinated him above all else. Not only is this likely to be the earliest sports related picture Lowry

painted, but it is also one of his very first depictions of a mass of people going to and from anywhere. In this phenomenal painting, the figures lean forward in unison, emphasising their common purpose in being drawn to the rugby posts clearly visible on the left-hand side of the canvas. The pre-match sense of energy, excitement and anticipation is palpable and will resonate with any sports lover today, almost 100 years after it was painted."

Frances Christie, Deputy Chairman of Sotheby's UK & Ireland

"People think crowds are all the same. But they're not, you know. Everyone's different. Look! That man's got a twitch. He's got a limp. He's had too much beer... It's wonderful isn't it"

L.S. Lowry quoted in conversation with art critic Edwin Mullins

The work was painted in the same year that a 41-year-old Lowry finished a thirteen year stint of attending art school part time – starting with evening classes at the Manchester School of Art and ending at the Salford School for art – while working around his daily job as a rent collector. This early masterpiece demonstrates the key influence of his art teacher in Manchester, French Impressionist Adolphe Valette, as Lowry takes up the mantle set by Manet, Pissarro, Degas and Van Gogh in their recording of modernity from the 1870s. In France, the focus was on the parks, boulevards, tramcars and grittier aspects of life on the edges of the city, whilst Lowry took Manchester's industrial environment and atmosphere as his lifelong subject.

This atmosphere is felt keenly in the monochrome palette and heavy clouds of *Going to the Match* – a cold, drab day as the crowd make their way past grey factories and a billowing chimney to the match. Unlike the more picturesque elements of the Impressionists, Lowry gives a more matter-of-fact rendering, demystifying the industrial landscape through a game entrenched in the fabric of northern life.

A New Auction Dedicated to the Very Best of British Art

This June, with its New Bond Street galleries once again fully open to the public, Sotheby's will stage a special exhibition and marquee live-streamed sale* dedicated to celebrating the best of British art over the course of the last century. Works by established titans with international renown will be offered alongside beloved British masters primed to make their mark on a global stage.

The eight-day pre-sale exhibition will be specially designed to welcome back the public to Sotheby's galleries, with a host of gallery tours and talks spotlighting the important contribution and achievements of British artists over the last century. The auction, titled *British Art: Modern / Contemporary*, will be live-streamed to the world – bringing together the energy and interaction of a bustling auction room with Sotheby's latest technological innovations.

* Marquee auctions are the ultimate platform in the art market, traditionally preserved for the most prestigious artists and artworks. Sotheby's first introduced its "livestreamed" auctions in June 2020 as an innovative solution to hosting its major auctions despite restrictions on gatherings and travel during the pandemic. Using state-of-the-art technology, the auctioneer standing alone in the London, is able to field bids from colleagues on phone banks across the world, as they are streamed in real time to screens in front of them. Sotheby's has since held 19 livestream sales, which have totalled in excess of \$1.6 billion. Click [here](#) to learn more.

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Images are available upon request

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