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Tennant Room

30 May – 26 October 2008



The Young Lion

Early Drawings by

John Frederick Lewis RA (1804–1876)

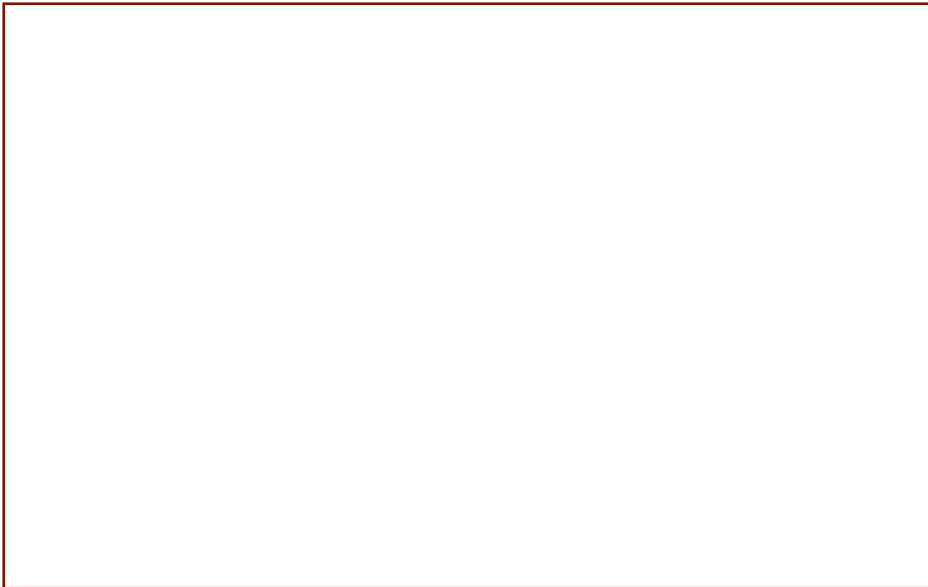
**A Guide
for Families**



John Frederick Lewis RA (1804–1876) was an English artist famous for his brightly coloured and detailed paintings of the Middle East. He was called an Orientalist, which means someone who paints pictures of scenes from Eastern lands, or the Orient, as they were known in the nineteenth century.

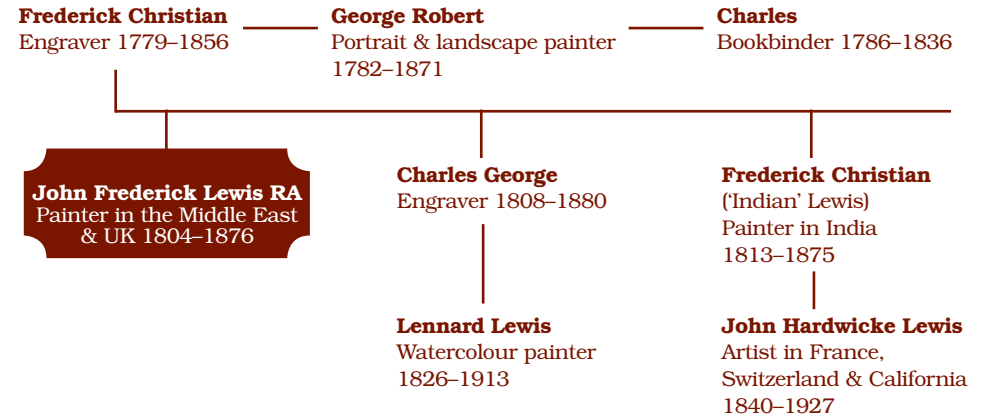
When Lewis was a boy in England, however, learning to draw and paint, his subjects were the things he saw around him. He practised drawing whenever he could, sketching his family, animals, farms, churches and the countryside.

Have a look around the Tennant Room and find a small sketch of a few quickly drawn profiles with prominent noses. To warm up your brain and hands, start with your own quick sketch. Sit down on the floor and take a look at the other people in this gallery. Quickly sketch their profiles while they look at the art on the walls and in the cases. Don't spend more than a few seconds on each face.

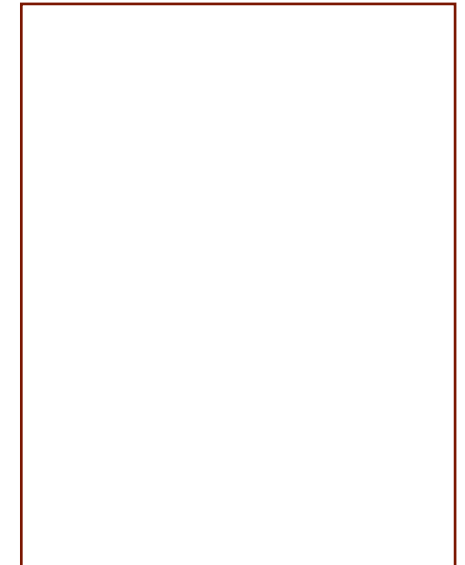
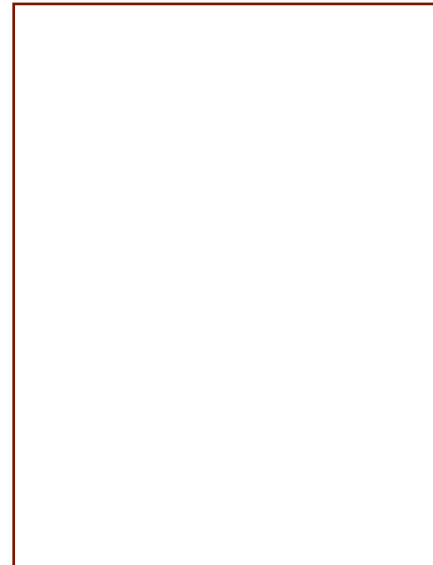


J. F. Lewis RA (1804–1876), *A cow with her calf: farm buildings in the background* (detail), c. 1820, watercolour and pencil on paper

Lewis came from a family of artists. They drew one other often, and many of the drawings exhibited here are of Lewis's family members.



Think of a member of your family or a close friend – someone who is very familiar to you but isn't with you at the moment – and draw them from memory in one of the boxes. When you see them next, draw them again in the other box, this time looking at their face. How do the two pictures compare? How well did you remember them?



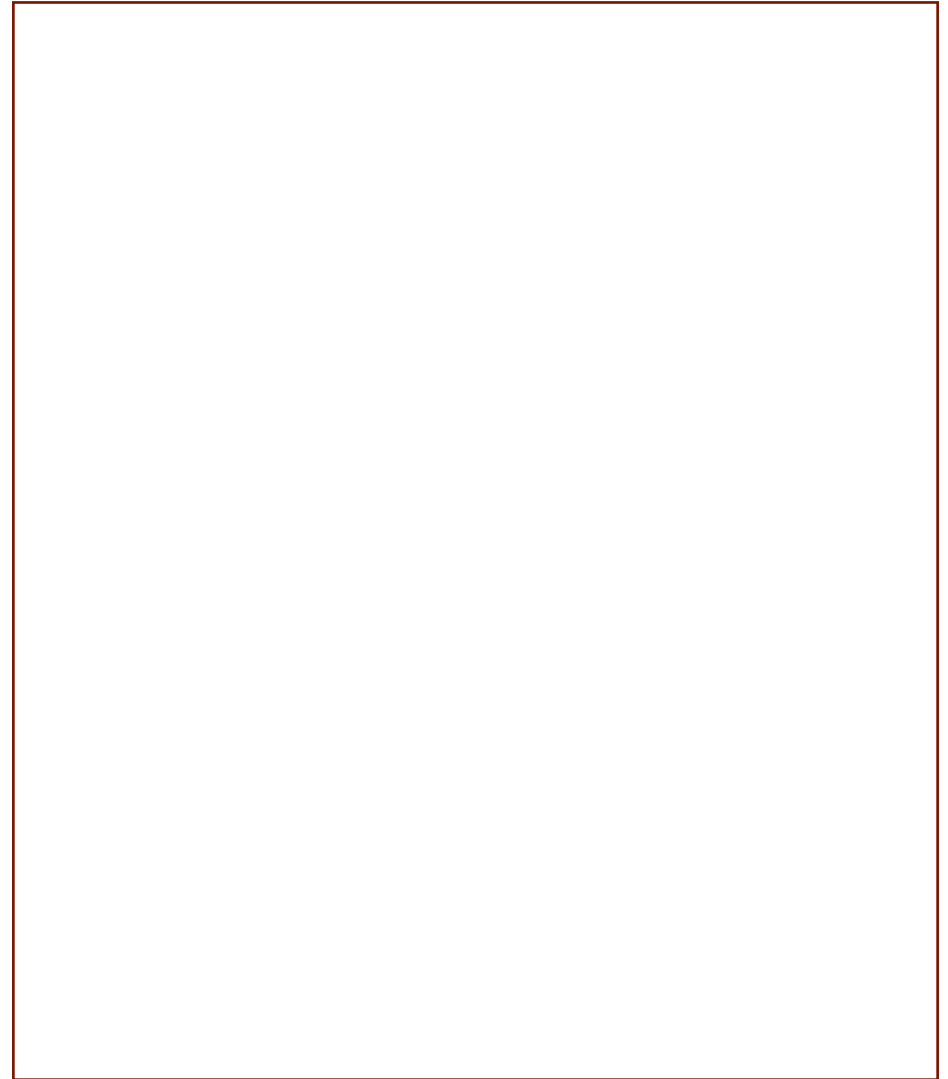
Lewis was taught to draw and paint by his family, rather than at an art school. His good friend Edwin Landseer, who became a very famous painter of animals, studied art at the Royal Academy Schools, but the Lewis family worked and learned together, often copying one another's work.

Collaboration means working together to create one thing from the ideas of several people. In the box below, make a collaborative drawing with your family. Think of something you all know well – maybe a family pet or a place you've visited on holiday – and start the drawing in this box. After a few minutes, pass it to someone else and have them continue from where you stopped. Keep going until everyone has had a turn and your group drawing is finished.



The Lewis family took great pride in its artistic ability and achievement. They influenced one another and were like a family studio, or workshop. They often copied each other's work to practise drawing. Sometimes they copied each other's style, or way of drawing.

Can you draw something in Lewis's style? Find a drawing in the exhibition that you particularly like and try to copy it here.





Some of the drawings signed with Lewis's name may actually have been drawn by other members of his family and signed years later, after he had become famous. Because of this and because of their habit of copying one another's work, we now do not know exactly who drew what and when.

A drawing in the exhibition titled *Self-portrait* shows the side and back of the young artist's head. The drawing is signed 'JF Lewis RA / by himself', but Lewis did not become a Royal Academician – an RA – until he was an adult.

Do you think Lewis would have signed this drawing with the title RA when he was still a young boy? Can you think of a way he might have drawn this view of his head? Do you think this is a self-portrait? Who do you think might have signed it and when? Why?

Lewis also practised drawing by sketching outdoors, directly from nature. The family often visited the countryside, drawing landscapes and animals.

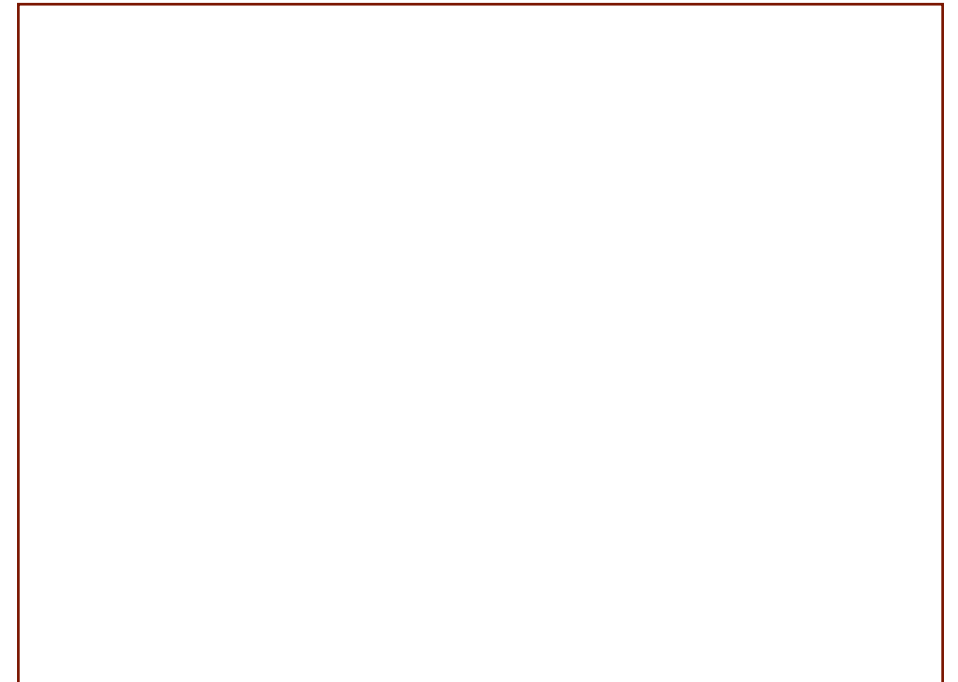
Can you find any landscapes in the exhibition? Can you guess where Lewis and his family have been?

Nowadays when people travel, they tend to use cameras to take pictures of their holidays. They might keep their photos in an album or store them on a computer. When Lewis was a boy two hundred years ago, personal cameras were not yet invented.



The Lewis family kept a record of their lives, but they did so using pencils, chalk and paint. They seem to have kept many of their little drawings, no matter how sketchy or quick. Why do you think this was?

Thanks to Lewis's drawings of its church and graveyard, we know that the Lewis family visited the village of Elstow. Find Elstow Church, Bedfordshire in the gallery. Its pencil lines are rather light, but take a careful look at the drawing. Lewis has hidden his name within the drawing. Can you find it? Draw a landscape below. Can you turn your signature into a part of your drawing?





One of Lewis's early drawings shows an example of a family painting outing. In *Uncle George and his Nephew Charles the Engraver*, we see Lewis's uncle, George, setting out with his painting equipment and umbrella. Lewis's younger brother Charles follows him, calling out, 'Uncle you've forgot your Squirts'.

Can you find this drawing in the exhibition? What do you think Lewis means by the word Squirts? We don't know for sure; it was probably a funny family word.

As Lewis kept practising, his drawing became more skilled, but it is not easy to date his work exactly. After he died, his sketches and drawings were collected by his brother Charles and years later, they were bound in a big leather album in no particular order. We now have no way of knowing exactly when they were drawn, but we can find clues in some of his drawings that point to his development as an artist.

Can you find a watercolour painting called *A lioness 'at Exeter Change'*? Do you think her head and face are drawn in the same way as her hind legs and body?

Although Lewis travelled a great deal when he grew up, he probably never went to the parts of Africa and Asia where lions live. But nineteenth-century Londoners could see a huge variety of foreign animals at one of the city's most popular attractions, the Exeter 'Change on the Strand. In this early zoo, wild – and in the lions' case, big – animals were kept in tiny cages and lived amid a din of noise and a filthy stench. The young Lewis and his friend Edwin Landseer frequently visited the Exeter 'Change and drew animals they would never otherwise have seen. Maybe the fact that Lewis studied this lioness in her cage from such a close distance is the reason she gazes back towards us.

Here is a reproduction of the lioness's body, without her head. Can you finish the drawing?



Lions were one of Lewis's favourite subjects. In his pictures of domestic animals we see familiar English characters, such as cows, dogs and horses. The lion pictures show us an animal that is not only exotic and foreign, but also a powerful symbol of the British monarchy.

You have probably seen the royal coat of arms, which features a crowned lion and a unicorn, holding a shield together.

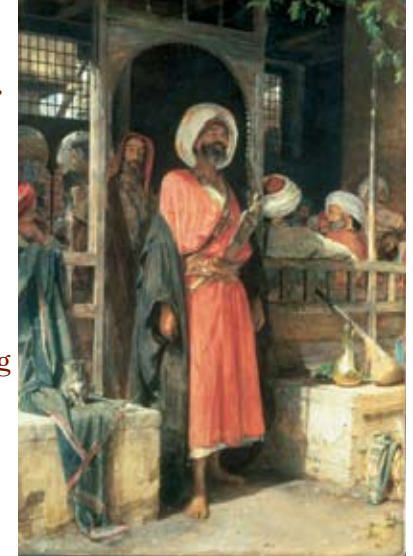


The lion represents England and the mythical unicorn is a symbol of Scotland. Although the lion is known as king of the jungle, it is also associated with the kings and queens of England.

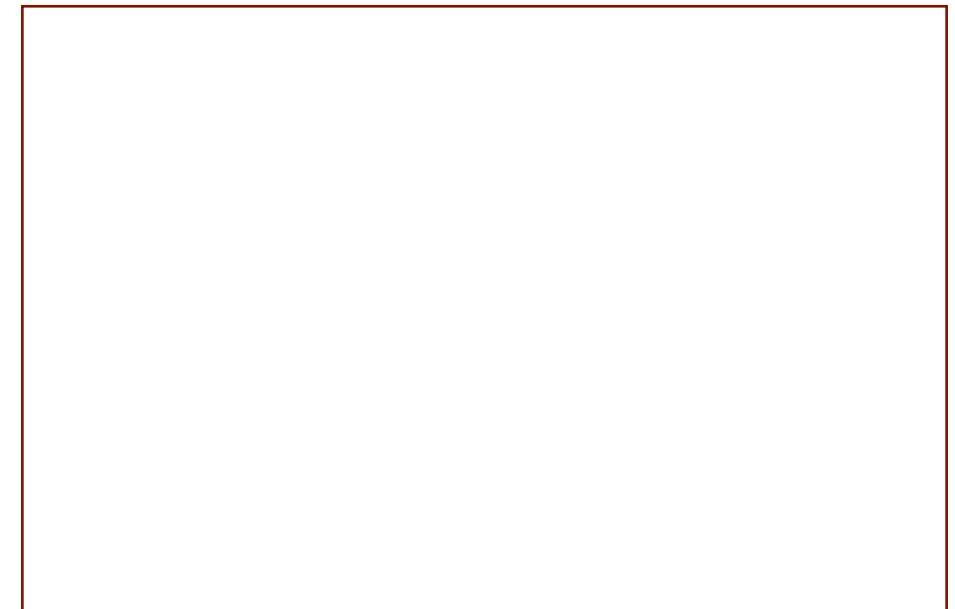
During Queen Victoria's reign (1837–1901), the British Empire expanded through exploration and trade. Exotic goods, including animals, were imported to England. The capture of foreign animals made some people proud of the British Empire's strength and what they saw as their country's dominance over the people, goods and animals of foreign lands.

If you go through the open wooden door in the corner of the Tennant Room, you'll enter the Reynolds Room. Look for an oil painting by Lewis, made later in his career after he had become well known and successful. Here is a reproduction of it. Can you find it?

The Door of a Café in Cairo is an example of Lewis's Orientalist painting. While living in Cairo for ten years, he sketched and painted the people, animals and things he saw in Egypt. When he returned to England, he combined them in his bright paintings of Eastern life.



Look at the drawings you've made so far in this sketchbook: faces, animals and places, among other things. Can you combine some of them here to create a new scene, imagined by you?



Compare *The Door of a Café in Cairo* with Lewis's boyhood drawings and watercolours that you have already seen. Would you have guessed that he would end up painting scenes of Eastern life?

After you have finished in the Reynolds Room, return to the Tennant Room and the lioness. Do you now see any clues to Lewis's future interest in the East in this lioness drawing?

Given the interest at this time in foreign places, scenes and people, Lewis was not the only artist to draw and paint animals from other countries. His way of showing them, however, was unusual for the time. Instead of placing the animals in wild and dramatic scenes like his friend Landseer did, Lewis tended to draw and paint his animals in natural poses, free of melodrama.



Wild animals were not Lewis's only popular or lucrative subject. He also earned money painting sporting scenes and portraits of the favourite hunting dogs of wealthy landowners and aristocrats. Some sketches in this exhibition show Windsor Park, the hunting grounds of George IV. We don't know today whether or not the king actually paid Lewis to paint, but certainly the young Lewis's paintings attracted attention from the royal household.

J. F. Lewis RA (1804–1876). 'Juno. at Kempston Hardwicke', 1819, watercolour and white gouache with wash on buff paper

A painting exhibited here, entitled *Sketch for 'An Old Newfoundland Dog Guarding the Catch'*, shows this very large breed of dog – popular with many country gentlemen – resting his head on his paws and staring rather strangely into the distance. Near his head lies a mournful-looking fish.

The watercolour sketch is reproduced below. Can you write a caption underneath it, as if it were a cartoon in a newspaper?



J. F. Lewis RA (1804–1876). *Sketch for 'An Old Newfoundland Dog Guarding the Catch'* c. 1822, watercolour with white gouache, black and white chalk over pencil on buff paper

The drawings in the Royal Academy album are exhibited here for the first time. Unfortunately after they were glued into the album many years ago, its leather cover and thick card pages became too heavy for them. As people have turned the pages over the years, the drawings have rubbed against one another and some have smudged. The Royal Academy Collections Department is now preserving the drawings so that they will survive long into the future.

As you have looked at the young Lewis's drawings and sketches exhibited on the walls, in the cases and on the computer, you have also drawn your own pictures in this sketchbook. Imagine that in 150 years' time, you have become a famous artist. How would you like the pages of your sketchbook to be displayed for people to enjoy?

Lindsay Rothwell

Would you like to have your sketches on the Royal Academy's website?

Please hand in your completed sketchbook with your name at Reception or send it to:

Education Department

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Burlington House
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www.royalacademy.org.uk/education/artdetectives

The Young Lion

Early Drawings by
John Frederick Lewis RA (1804–1876)



Exhibition open

1pm–4.30pm Tuesday to Friday
10am–6pm Saturday and Sunday
(Closed on Mondays)

Admission free

Free Gallery Talks for all ages

Sundays at 2pm

www.royalacademy.org.uk/finerooms

Above right, and front cover detail: J. F. Lewis RA (1804–1876), *Head of a lion, three-quarter view*, c. 1820–23, pen and ink on paper

Back cover: By a member of the Lewis family, 'at Uncle Charles the Binder' (detail), c. 1820, watercolour with pen and ink over pencil on paper

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