

John Lyons: Carnavalesque

The Whitworth and Manchester Poetry Library Commission



John Lyons, Before Ash Wednesday in Trinidad, 1988.

© John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss

The Whitworth is working with Manchester Poetry Library to commission two poets from the North West/West Yorkshire region to produce new creative responses to John Lyons' paintings and poetry.

About John Lyons: Carnavalesque

In 2024 the Whitworth presents *John Lyons: Carnavalesque*, the first major retrospective of the work of artist and poet John Lyons (b.1933, Trinidad). Surveying six decades of Lyons' contribution to British art, literature and art education, the exhibition centres on his exploration of Trinidadian folklore and mythology through painting and poetry.

For Lyons, painting and poetry are parallel languages that can reach deep into the psyche. Taking us on a journey into his inner world, the motifs and narratives at play in Lyons' work convey how his sense of self and artistic expression is underpinned by his formative experiences in Trinidad and Tobago. Carnival, the joyous, intoxicating, subversive celebration that captivated Lyons as a child and has compelled him ever since is a central theme. His poetry, shifting between quiet and reflective and playful and rhythmic, often incorporates Trinidadian calypso cadence and patois. Alongside this, Lyons explores folk tales, mythology, memory, landscape, nature, spirituality, the psyche, creativity and intuition. Throughout his practice, Lyons invites us to enter into a shared 'creative continuum' with him, discovering and negotiating meaning in his work through the lens of our own lives and experiences.

Lyons moved to the UK to study art in London in 1959. He moved to Manchester in 1967, working as a teacher and lecturer alongside painting, writing, exhibiting, running workshops, and participating in the city's grassroots art scene. In 1998 he moved to Hebden Bridge where he set up and ran community arts organisation Hourglass Studio Gallery with his partner Jean Rees. He currently lives and works in rural Cambridgeshire.

The Commission

The Whitworth is working with Manchester Poetry Library to commission two poets from the North West / West Yorkshire region to produce new creative responses to John Lyons' paintings and poetry. The commission will form layers of interpretation around the exhibition in the spirit of John's principle of 'creative continuum'.

The responses will be shared digitally by the Whitworth and each poet will be given the opportunity to perform their work at a curated 'Thursday Late' public event at the Whitworth.

Scope

We anticipate the creative responses will speak to a particular work, grouping of works, or theme in Lyons' practice, and will be expressed as either a single poem (30 lines, or 300 words maximum), a small grouping of shorter poems (up to the same overall line count), or a spoken piece with a performance time of no more than 5 minutes. The responses must be suitable for presentation to the general public at the Whitworth.

Fee

You will receive a writing fee of £1000, plus £500 to cover your attendance at commission guidance sessions, and the sharing event (2.5 days). You will be paid in three instalments - one at the outset, one halfway through, one on completion of the creative work. We will cover reasonable travel and (if necessary) accommodation expenses, and the costs of producing the responses for display.

Am I eligible?

In the spirit of John Lyons' commitment to supporting his local art scenes, this commission is for writers aged 18+ who are from, or currently based in, the North West (Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Merseyside) or West Yorkshire (Leeds, Wakefield, Kirklees, Calderdale, Bradford) regions. We would especially welcome applications from poets of colour.

Timeline

You will be supported with creative and professional development guidance from Whitworth and Poetry Library staff at key moments through the project. You will be invited to attend the exhibition launch on Thursday 9 May, 6-8pm. You are expected to attend an initial guidance workshop in May, a feedback workshop in June ahead of submitting your final response, and the final sharing event in August (Thursday 22 August, 6-8pm, tbc).

How do I apply?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Tell us about your practice (200 words max)
2. What interests you about John Lyons' work, and how would you want to explore this in the commission? (250 words max)
3. How do you think this opportunity will develop your artistic development and/or your professional practice? (200 words max)
4. Please confirm your connection to the North West / Yorkshire region. (30 words max)

Supporting materials

5. Please upload your CV outlining artistic practice and/or any relevant experience to date - no longer than two pages
6. Please include a sample of your work - no longer than two pages. Within this, you may include one link to a video of up to 5 minutes in duration.

Please submit your application via Google Forms: <https://shorturl.at/uyM59>

The closing date for applications is 23:59 BST on Sunday 21 April 2024. Applications received after this deadline will not be considered.

If we decide to hold interviews with shortlisted candidates, these will be online on Friday 26 April.

Successful applicants will be informed by Tuesday 30 April 2023.

We want you to make the best application possible. Becky Swain (Director, Manchester Poetry Library), Ruth Awolola (Learning Officer, Manchester Poetry Library) and Olivia Heron (Curator, the Whitworth) will be hosting an **online information session on Tuesday 9 April, 12.30pm-1.15pm** to answer any questions you might have. Please sign up [here](#).

About Manchester Poetry Library

Manchester Poetry Library (MPL) is the North West's first public poetry library - open to all. Based at Manchester Metropolitan University, we host a collection of over 14,000 books and recordings profiling 20th and 21st century poets, a growing children's collection, and a languages collection co-curated with bilingual and multilingual poets. MPL has a year-round learning programme for readers and writers, as well as free events, workshops, and an exhibition programme. The Poetry Library is changing and developing all the time in terms of the collection and its programme - tell us what change you want to see.

About the Whitworth

The Whitworth is proudly part of The University of Manchester, operating as a convening space between the University and the people of the city. Founded in 1889 for "the perpetual gratification of the people of Manchester" it continues this mission today in new contexts. The gallery, its park and gardens are home to the collection of over 60,000 works of art, textiles, sculptures, and wallpapers and provides a platform for artists from around the world. The Whitworth is driven by a vision to actively seek and manifest connections between art, creativity, and their role in developing a more resilient and caring society through its exhibitions and award-winning civic engagement programme.

Gallery opening times: Tuesday to Sunday 10am-5pm, Thursday late opening until 9pm

www.manchester.ac.uk/whitworth

Terms and Conditions

The John Lyons Poetry Commission is a collaboration between Manchester Poetry Library, Manchester Metropolitan University ("Manchester Met") and the Whitworth, The University of Manchester ("UoM"). Intellectual Property rights will sit with the poet, but the poet will grant the Whitworth non-commercial usage rights to use the work in relation to the exhibition and its accompanying publication.

To be eligible to apply, you must:

- Be at least 18 years of age; and
- Be a UK resident, born in or residing in the North West or West Yorkshire, defined as Cheshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Merseyside, Leeds, Wakefield, Kirklees, Calderdale, and Bradford.
- The deadline for applications is 23:59 (BST time) on Sunday 21 April 2024.

To be considered, applicants must submit:

- An online application form: (Please submit your application via Google Forms: <https://shorturl.at/uyM59>)
 - A CV outlining artistic practice and/or any relevant experience to date (no more than 2 pages);
 - An example of previous work (no more than 2 pages).
- Applications must be completed via the online form. If due to a disability or extenuating circumstance, you need to submit your application as a hard copy or in a different way, please email olivia.heron@manchester.ac.uk as soon as possible ahead of the deadline, using the Subject Header 'John Lyons Poetry Commission'.

John Lyons Information Pack



John Lyons, Self Portrait with Jumbie Bird and Alter Ego, 1990

Oil on canvas (1818 x 1525mm)

Courtesy Kirklees Collection: Huddersfield Art Gallery. © John C.M. Lyons



John Lyons, Mama Look A Mas Passin, 1990

Oil on canvas (1270 x 1020 mm)

© John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss



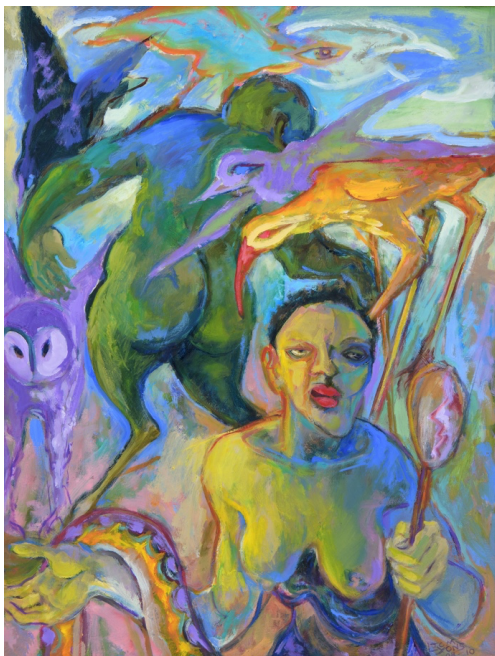
John Lyons, Masquerading, 1992
 Oil on canvas (1560 x 1860mm)
 © John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss



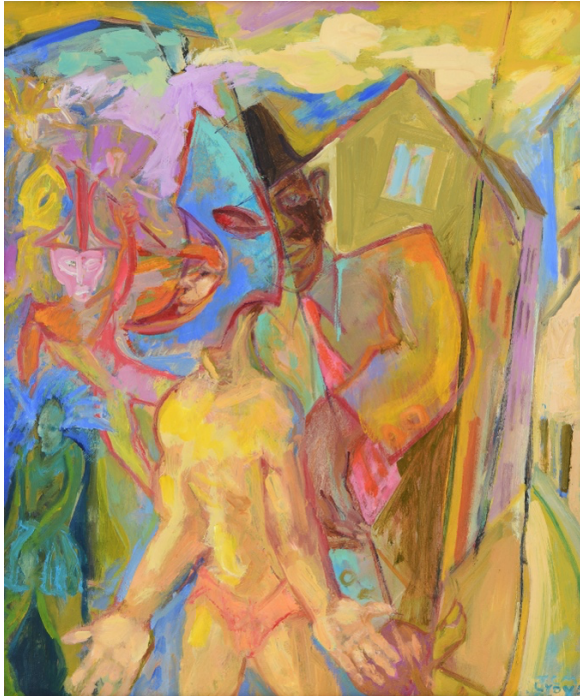
John Lyons, The Counsellor, 1996-1998
 Oil on canvas (765 x 610 mm)
 © John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss



John Lyons, Performance, 2000
 Oil on canvas (1060 x 762 mm)
 Courtesy Rochdale Arts and Heritage © John C.M. Lyons



John Lyons, Papa Bois and Mama Glo, 2008-2010
 Oil on canvas (855 x 660mm)
 © John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss



John Lyons, Carnival Spectator, 2007
 Oil on canvas (605 x 505 mm)
 © John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss



John Lyons, Folklore Convention, 2010
 Oil on canvas (740 x 930mm)
 © John C.M. Lyons. Photo: Anne-Katrin Purkiss

John Lyons – Poetry excerpts

Behind the Carnival

In the beginning was carnival:
the pulse that animated the germ in the soup,
made sperm a triumphant amphibian,
stirred seed to shoot, burned green
in every tree and herb.

Extract from Behind the Carnival, 1992. Published by Smith/Doorstop Books.

Nanny's Reincarnation

After the beating by plantation sun,
the silencing of the drums, night was a comfort.
Your ancestral ways simmered in a pepperpot
in the dark, spiced with wild thyme, casareep.

Obeah was your faith.
You soothed monthly pains with zebapique,
drove evil spirits away
burning cacajab in coalpot fire.

Extract from 'A Carib Being in Cymru', 2015. Published by Cane Arrow Press.

Weather Vane

Not easy to understand
the hard fettle of Hughes' poetry
distilled from the Calder Valley,
where the sun keeps its distance
and the sky is a puckered tissue
greying everything.
Sometimes there is a blessing
in perceiving language in landscape:
Autumn in mid-Winter
with gamboge yellow, Indian red;
blue wood smoke lifting
amid scraggy sycamores,
their dark bloom of rooks' nests.

Extract from 'Voices From a Silk-Cotton Tree', 2002. Published by Smith/Doorstop Books.

See more here:

<https://childrens.poetryarchive.org/poet/john-lyons/>

Privacy Notice

This Privacy Notice explains who we are, how and why we collect and use personal information about you, what personal data is collected and held about you for the John Lyons Poetry Commission 2024, our purposes and lawful bases for processing, who we share your personal data with, relevant retention periods, and how you can exercise your privacy rights.

Please do read this notice to understand our practices and if you have any questions, please contact us using the contact details provided below.

This privacy notice relates to the Whitworth, which is part of The University of Manchester. The University is registered as a Data Controller with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). We manage personal data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the University's Data Protection Policy. [The Whitworth's general privacy notice](#) and The University of Manchester's general privacy notice provide more detail.

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/privacy-information/data-protection/>

Your application submission data will be shared with an internal selection team and our partner organisation Manchester Poetry Library, Manchester Metropolitan University, as the Manchester Poetry Library team are part of the selection process for shortlisting applicants. You can read their Privacy Policy here: <https://www.mmu.ac.uk/data-protection/data-subject-rights>

If you choose to submit your application, we will collect and process certain data about you. This includes:

- Your first and last name
- Address and postcode
- Email Address
- Telephone number

Our lawful basis for processing the above details is 'legitimate interests'.

If you are unsuccessful in being shortlisted, your 'email address' will be retained for a mailing list, so you can be sent further opportunities but from which you can unsubscribe at any time. If you are successful in being shortlisted, your data will be retained for a mailing list and so you can be invited to workshops and opportunities, from which you can unsubscribe at any time.

If you are successful in being chosen as one of the John Lyons commissions, your data will be retained for the duration of the project and its evaluation and afterwards your email will be retained for a mailing list, from which you can unsubscribe at any time. Any relevant data you share with us about your experience of the project will be shared with Arts Council England as part of our evaluation of the project which is funded by Arts Council England.

If you no longer want your email address to be held, please contact the project team in the first instance via olivia.heron@manchester.ac.uk or our data protection officer at dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk.

Your personal data will only be retained for as long as it is necessary in accordance with the [University's Retention and Disposal Schedule](#). Specifically, we will retain your personal data for a period of 5 years, for a mailing list.

For further information about your data rights please visit our [website](#) or contact dataprotection@manchester.ac.uk.

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/privacy-information/data-protection/>

---ENDS---