



LUCIAN FREUD. *New perspectives*

14 February to 18 June 2023

The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in collaboration with The National Gallery, London, presents a retrospective on the British painter Lucian Freud (1922-2011) to mark the centenary of the artist's birth. Curated by Daniel Herrmann in London and Paloma Alarcó in Madrid, this exhibition brings together more than 50 works spanning the seven-decade career of one of the most important European artists of the 20th century. The extensive accompanying catalogue, which has texts by the curators and contributions by experts on Freud's work and by contemporary artists, poses new questions on the relevance of the artist's work with the aim of introducing it to younger generations. The exhibition was on display in London until 22 January 2023, and will open at the Museo Thyssen in Madrid in mid-February, where it will benefit from the support of the Comunidad de Madrid.

“I go the National Gallery rather like going to a doctor for help”

Exhibiting Lucian Freud's work in the context of two historic museums allows it to be shown as an uninterrupted continuation of the past. Freud was an assiduous visitor to the world's leading art museums and his work reveals a series of allusions to the great masters of the past, from Holbein to Cranach, Hals, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Watteau, Ingres, Courbet, Rodin or Cézanne, although these connections coexist with a powerfully independent approach. The new perspective adopted by the exhibition, which is the first major retrospective to be organised since Freud's death in 2011, focuses attention on his lifelong commitment to the essence of painting.

“What do I ask of a painting? I ask it to astonish, disturb, seduce, convince”

Subversive, incisive and on occasions shocking, Lucian Freud's painting, which ran contrary to the abstract and conceptual trends that prevailed at the time when it was created, always focused on the depiction of the human body and on the portrayal of modern man. Freud's true abiding interest throughout his work was to present painting on painting – his personal meta-artistic reflection – and the “intensification of reality” that he always strove to achieve.

Images, from left to right: Lucian Freud. *Double Portrait* (1985-1986). Private collection; *Large Interior, W9* (1973). The Devonshire Collections, Chatsworth; *Leigh in Taffeta Skirt*, (1993). Private collection.

More information and images:

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<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/lucian-freud-new-perspectives>



THYSSEN-BORNEMISZA
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The Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza is the only Spanish museum that has works by Lucian Freud in its collection; a total of five, all of them included in this exhibition. Baron Hans Heinrich Thyssen-Bornemisza was one of the first private collectors to focus on the artist's work: he and the painter established close ties and Freud painted him twice. The lengthy posing sessions of the type to which the artist always subjected his sitters fostered their friendship, which was a long-lasting one. In addition, Watteau's painting *Pierrot content* (ca. 1712), which forms the background of one of these portraits and belongs to the collection of the Museo Thyssen, provided the inspiration for another of Freud's paintings.



Lucian Freud. *Portrait of a Man (Baron H.H. Thyssen-Bornemisza)*, 1981-1982. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

The exhibition has a broadly chronological structure, divided into various thematic sections that analyse the painter's evolution from the 1940s to the start of the 21st century.

Becoming Freud



Lucian Freud. *Girl with Roses*, 1947-1948. Courtesy of The British Council Collection

From his earliest works produced in the mid-20th century, painted with a primitivist detail and tinged with a neo-Romantic and Surrealist air, Freud opted for figurative art, adopting a position of resistance in relation to the prevailing abstract trends.

The artist's personality and working methods are already evident; Freud, painted slowly with a meticulous brushstroke based on the use of very fine brushes. The hieratic figures - created through the application of highly worked layers of paint against plain backgrounds and holding attributes - reveal his interest in the northern Renaissance painters. Frontality and the distance transmitted by these sitters, as we see in *Girl with Roses* (1947-48), a portrait of the artist's first wife Kitty Garman, are the defining characteristics of these early works.

Early portraits

Freud's portraits of his second wife Caroline Blackwood, including *Girl in Bed* (1953) and *Girl in a green Dress* (1954), or the troubling *Hotel Room* exhibited in the British pavilion at the 27th Venice Biennial of 1954, mark the end of his initial period. From that point onwards he painted standing up, moving around his models with the physical closeness that allowed him to appreciate the smallest details. Freud used the broadest brushes available, while the influence of Francis Bacon led his brushwork to become loose and heavily charged with pigment. Nonetheless, his working method remained precise, slow and highly meditated with the aim of capturing the essence of his models.



Lucian Freud. *Reflection with Two Children (Self-portrait)*, 1965. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

We also encounter numerous self-portraits from this period, in which the artist often made use of a mirror as a pictorial device, including *Reflection with two Children (Self-portrait)* of 1965, which has a surprising low-angled viewpoint achieved through the mirror on the floor.

A number of the intentionally unfinished portraits reveal the artist's pictorial technique based on accumulation, starting in the centre of the painting and allowing us to appreciate the creative process behind the work.

Intimacy



Lucian Freud. *Two Men*, 1987-1988. National Galleries of Scotland. Purchased 1988

“I use the people to invent my pictures with, and I can work more freely when they are there”

Freud always painted from life and preferred depicting those closest to him - friends, family members and lovers - in order to achieve greater freedom. His ability to convey non-erotic intimacy in his works, including affection, friendship or paternal love, has been little investigated until now. This intimacy is above all reflected in his double portraits, such as the one of his friend the painter Michael Andrews and his wife June (1965-66), the portrait of his daughters Bella and Esther (1987-88) and *Two Men*, which depicts the artists Angus Cook and Cerith Wyn Evans.

Power

As his fame grew, Freud occasionally accepted commissions from individuals whom he respected or admired. Before he started on the portrait, the sitters were obliged to accept his demanding conditions regarding posing and the length of sessions, which always took place in his studio.

These works follow the tradition of portraits of power by Rubens or Velázquez, with the models shown seated, their hands on the arms of their chair or armchair and introspective expressions. *Man in a Chair (Baron H. H. Thyssen-Bornemisza)* of 1985 and *Two Irishmen in W11* (1984-85) are among the outstanding examples exhibited in this gallery.



Lucian Freud. *Two Irishmen in W11*, 1985. Private collection

The studio



Lucian Freud. *Evening in the Studio*, 1993. The Lewis Collection

From the 1980s, Freud's studio became the setting and subject of his paintings. It acquires growing presence as the place where he was able to impose his rules on reality, taking things to their furthest extremes.

Freud's studio is seen as a distinctive and recognisable place, with its characteristic furniture, the walls peeling or thickly crusted with gobbets of paint, and the floor shown in a rising perspective which creates a marked sense of instability in the figures and elements depicted. This is to be seen, for example, in *Large Interior W9* (1973) and *Evening in the Studio* (1993).

Flesh

The exhibition concludes with a section that brings together various monumental nudes; works that reveal a profound observation of the vulnerability of the human body and the plasticity of flesh as painting.

“I want paint to work as flesh”, the artist said in 1982; a declaration echoed in the flesh-like materiality of their faces and bodies and in Freud’s ability to paint the texture of flesh itself.

The vigorous depiction of flesh on the canvas is possibly the most notable and recurrent aspect of Freud’s painting throughout his career. He started to paint nudes in the 1960s but it was above all in the late decades of his career that the deliberate emphasis on the very large size of the bodies of his models Leigh Bowery and Sue Tilley made him a pioneer in the depiction of non-normative bodies, which he painted with heavily impastoed brushstrokes like sediments of the passing of time.



Lucian Freud. *Portrait of the Hound*, 2011. Private collection

David Dawson: Lucian Freud’s studio

At the end of the exhibition a selection of photographs by the artist David Dawson, Lucian Freud’s assistant during the last twenty years of his life, offers a vision of the painter’s secret laboratory and of his creative process.

ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES:

Lectures

Four lectures have been programmed in conjunction with the exhibition. They will focus in depth on some of the issues presented in it and also offer new viewpoints on Lucian Freud’s work. Taking place on Thursday 9, 16, 23 and 30 March in the afternoon, the lectures will be given by Paloma Alarcó and Daniel Herrmann, the exhibition’s curators, Guillermo Solana, artistic director of the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, and Clara Marcellán, the exhibition’s technical curator.

Education Department activities

All about...Lucian Freud, a practical workshop aimed at the general public aged 16 and over, which aims to encourage a different experience prior to a non-guided visit to the exhibition.

Lucian Freud for adult groups, a guided tour for adult groups which makes use of a range of questions and ideas to introduce participants to one of the 20th-century’s most renowned painters.

Lucian Freud for teachers, a visit to the temporary exhibition aimed at teachers from Primary School level to the 15 to 17-year-old age group. This activity will approach the painter’s work as a resource for classroom work or for preparing a subsequent visit.

EXHIBITION DETAILS

Title: *Lucian Freud. New perspectives*

Organisers: Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza and The National Gallery, London.

With the collaboration of: Comunidad de Madrid.

Venues and dates: London, The National Gallery, 1 October 2022 to 22 January 2023; Madrid, Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, 14 February to 18 June 2023.

Curators: Daniel F. Herrmann, curator of modern and contemporary projects at the National Gallery, London, and Paloma Alarcó, chief curator of modern painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Technical curator: Clara Marcellán, curator of modern painting at the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Number of works: 55

Publications: Catalogue with texts by the curators Daniel F. Herrmann and Paloma Alarcó, and others by Christina Kennedy, Catherine Lampert, Maria H. Loh, Nicholas Penny, Gregory Salter, Jasper Sharp, Andrew Wilson and the artists David Dawson, Tracey Emin, Chantal Joffe and Jutta Koether. Didactic Guide and Audio Guide (Spanish and English).

VISITOR INFORMATION

Address: Paseo del Prado, 8. 28014, Madrid. Temporary exhibition galleries, ground floor.

Opening times: Tuesdays to Sundays, 10 am to 7 pm; Saturdays, 10 am to 9 pm. Closed on Mondays.

Ticket prices: Combined ticket: Permanent collection and temporary exhibitions. Standard: 13 €; reduced price: 9 € for visitors aged over 65, pensioners and students with proof of status; Groups (7 or more people): 11 € per person; free entry: visitors aged under 18, officially unemployed Spanish citizens, disabled visitors, Large Families, currently employed teachers and holders of the Youth Card and European Youth Card. Advance ticket sales from the museum's ticket desks, its website and on tel: 91 791 13 70.

More information: <https://www.museothyssen.org/en>

PRESS INFORMATION

<https://www.museothyssen.org/en/private-area/press/dossiers/lucian-freud-new-perspectives>