

EXHIBITION OF NEARLY 100 WORKS BY LUCIAN FREUD EXPLORES THE CRUCIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIS ETCHINGS AND WORKS ON CANVAS

Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings

December 16, 2007–March 10, 2008

Special Exhibitions Gallery, third floor

NEW YORK, December 11, 2007—*Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings*, on view at MoMA from December 16, 2007, to March 10, 2008, highlights the artist's exceptional achievements in the medium of etching and explores the crucial relationship between these works on paper and his works on canvas. In a career spanning more than six decades, Freud (British, b. Germany, 1922), has redefined portraiture and the nude through his frank scrutiny of the human form. Although best known as a painter, Freud has made etching a constant part of his artistic practice since 1982. The full scope and significance of Freud's achievements in etching are represented here, ranging from rare, early experiments of the 1940s to the increasingly large and complex compositions created since his rediscovery of the medium in the early 1980s, including a new work completed in 2007. *Lucian Freud: The Painter's Etchings*, Freud's first solo exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art and his first museum exhibition in New York City in 14 years, is organized by Starr Figura, The Phyllis Ann and Walter Borten Assistant Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books, The Museum of Modern Art.

Ms. Figura states: "Although Freud's etchings speak for themselves in terms of their quality and strength, this aspect of his work remains relatively little known as compared with his paintings. This exhibition reveals the integral and vitally important place of etchings within Freud's oeuvre."

In an unusual cross-media installation, some 68 etchings of the 82 that Freud has created to date are juxtaposed with 21 related paintings and five drawings, revealing the dramatic dialogue among mediums in Freud's oeuvre. Also included are three large copper plates from which three of Freud's most extraordinary etchings were printed.

The exhibition is organized around the themes that are central to Freud's oeuvre, including, most prominently, the works that he calls "Naked Portraits" and "Portrait Heads," as well as other subjects that he occasionally turns to, such as dogs and views of the garden behind his house. Within each gallery, etchings, paintings, and drawings are paired or grouped to underscore Freud's long-term fascination with particular subjects or sitters, to highlight his intense preoccupation with the physical properties of his different mediums, and to suggest how the mediums of painting and etching nourish and inform one another in Freud's practice. Among the individual sitters who appear in more than one work within the exhibition are Freud's mother

Lucie, his daughter Bella, performance artist Leigh Bowery, and the British lawyer and political advisor, Arnold Goodman.

A grandson of the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, the artist was born in Berlin in 1922. He emigrated with his family to London in 1933 to escape the Nazi takeover of Germany, and became a British citizen in 1939. His formal training was brief but included an important period in 1939 when he studied at painter Cedric Morris's East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing in Dedham. Freud began to work full-time as an artist in 1942 and had his first solo exhibition in 1944 at London's Lefevre Gallery.

Freud often describes his work as autobiographical, stating in 1974: "It is about myself and my surroundings. It is an attempt at a record. I work from the people that interest me and that I care about, in rooms that I live in and know. I use the people to invent my pictures with, and I can work more freely when they are there." Often awkward and anything but idealized, his works reflect his belief that art should be based on observable reality—and for Freud reality is disturbing. His etchings and paintings depict the people in his life, mostly family members and friends who, once they've agreed to participate, come for several hours on a regular, sometimes near-daily basis to sit for him. Freud is known as a very slow worker. Each painting takes from several months to more than a year to complete, and each etching also typically occupies months of the artist's time. The finished works bear the evidence of progressive revision and reinforcement.

Freud and Etching

Freud's etchings are often directly related to specific paintings and are sometimes part of an extended series of works dealing with a particular subject. He makes them not by consulting his paintings, but by undertaking a separate round of sittings in the studio; each new encounter provides its own fresh revelations. Painting and printmaking offer him alternative means of acquainting himself with a subject—one gestural and colorful, the other linear and black and white—and, in fact, etchings have largely taken the place of drawings in Freud's oeuvre. Contrary to possible assumptions, Freud's etchings sometimes precede rather than follow the execution of related paintings. When etching, Freud always works directly from his models and uses variously bunched, feathered, and hatched lines to bring their individual features into relief. Pared down to linear essentials and depicting figures cropped or isolated against empty backgrounds, Freud's etchings achieve a startling sense of psychological tension and formal abstraction.

Freud typically has several projects going on at any one time: at least two or three paintings and usually at least one etching. Not a typical printmaker, he treats the etching plate like a canvas, standing the copper plate upright on an easel and working slowly over the course of several weeks or months to complete his image. Unlike most other artists who have made as many prints as he, Freud does not work in any print technique other than etching, nor has he ever incorporated color into his etching. He works on prepared copperplates in his own studio,

delivering them to a trusted printer for proofing only after the image is complete. For him etching is an intimate, autographic medium, comparable to drawing but with what he has called an “element of danger and mystery. You don’t know how it’s going to come out. What’s black is white. What’s left is right.”

Freud made his first six etchings between 1946 and 1948, all of which are on view in the first gallery of the exhibition. In the 1940s, Freud’s work was based on a miniaturist technique, in which forms and textures were replicated through precise lines and smooth edges. Etching, with its potential for minute linear details, was naturally suited to this style. After 1948, Freud stopped making prints for 34 years and focused exclusively on painting. His rediscovery of the medium in 1982 was prompted by the publication that year of a major monograph about him and his work by the renowned British art historian Lawrence Gowing. To satisfy the desire for a new etching to be inserted into each of the 100 copies of the deluxe edition of the book, Freud created 15 prints then chose four to be published in editions of 25 each. The subjects of all 15 etchings—13 of which are included in the exhibition—are people who frequented Freud’s studio at the time, including Gowing; the artist’s mother, Lucie Freud; and his daughter, Bella Freud. Freud’s etchings from 1982—and ever since—are still based on a slow and intense process of observation and scrutiny, but their fluid style reflects the more painterly and gestural approach that Freud had by then developed in his works on canvas.

Naked Portraits

Freud’s “Naked Portraits” of men and women are his most disturbing and subversive works. His figures are shown reclining on a bed or sofa, often either asleep or in a state of introspection or reverie, in strange or unflattering poses that nevertheless may be natural to the way they sleep or relax. Commonly rendered from an unusual vantage point, the angular limbs, foreshortened faces, and tortured body language rebuke the tradition of the ideal nude. Freud made his first etchings of naked figures in 1985, a year in which he began to work on much larger copper etching plates, challenging himself to combine linear detail with expansive and complex compositions. In these etchings, he often omits the background elements seen in related paintings, leaving his subjects strangely isolated.

One gallery in the exhibition is devoted to naked portraits of women, and another highlights naked portraits of men. Among the most striking of the female portraits are the paintings and etchings of Sue Tilley, known as Big Sue. Without the color or physical substance of paint to map out the surface of her flesh in the etchings, Freud explored the ways that lines alone can be used to describe weight, bulk, and texture. The etching *Woman Sleeping* (1995) is related to a large painting in which Tilley is portrayed asleep in a chair inside Freud’s studio. Without the background elements of the chair and room in the etching, the full weight of her body is left to float, illogically weightless, on the flat surface of the paper.

Portrait Heads

Freud's "Portrait Heads" of men and women are grouped in separate galleries. As in his naked portraits, the subjects of these works are often portrayed in unguarded states. A dramatic highlight of the exhibition is a group of three paintings and three etchings depicting Leigh Bowery (1961-1994), one of Freud's favorite subjects from 1990 to 1994. An Australian fashion designer, performance artist, and larger-than-life personality, Bowery became known for his outrageous costumes and outlandish behavior on the London club scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In contrast to his brash public persona, the works in the exhibition focus on the more reflective side of his personality and show him sleeping serenely, his makeup and costumes stripped away. In the etching *Large Head* (1993), Bowery's pliant features and slack skin are almost palpably rubbery, their malleability somehow coexisting with the solid weight of his being.

Among the other highlights in the section devoted to male portraits is Freud's most recent etching from 2007, *Donegal Man*, and the related painting of the same title from 2006. Also on view is a portrait of Lord Arnold Goodman, Freud's lawyer and well-known British barrister. For *Lord Goodman in His Yellow Pyjamas* (1987), the artist adopted an unusual horizontal format, to accommodate the thick, broad contours of the subject's physique. By positioning himself slightly below Goodman's sight line, Freud enhanced his sitter's looming, confrontational presence. Among the most accomplished of the female portraits is *Bella in Her Pluto T-Shirt* (1995). In it, Freud uses an extraordinary level of detail to depict the various surfaces and textures, from the long parallel lines of Bella's trousers to the thick, choppy lines of the wicker chair, and the dense all-over hatching that covers the background.

Occasional Subjects

While human beings are Freud's central artistic preoccupation, there are a few other themes that occasionally recur in his oeuvre. Examples of these subjects are grouped together in one gallery. They include dogs, mostly whippets that have been a prominent part of his life. In his images, they are treated not as accessories but as the equals of humans, reflecting the artist's lifelong affinity for animals. Freud's whippet Pluto had appeared regularly in his work until her death in 2003, as seen in the etching *Pluto* (1988), and the painting *Double Portrait* (1985-86). Landscape is a subject Freud sometimes turns to when he is under strain and prefers working in isolation. Over the past 10 years, Freud has created several views of his backyard garden in both painting and etching. With no depth or focal point, the etchings *Garden in Winter* (1997-99) and *Painter's Garden* (2003-04) demonstrate a dense, all-over handling that is relatively unusual in Freud's etched work. Freud is also occasionally inspired to create a new work or works based on paintings by Old Masters that he admires. The exhibition includes one painting (1999) and one etching (2000) after Jean-Siméon Chardin's *The Young Schoolmistress* (c. 1735-36).

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SPONSORSHIP:

The exhibition is supported in part by Patricia Phelps de Cisneros and The Contemporary Arts Council of The Museum of Modern Art.

PUBLICATION:

The accompanying publication features an essay by Ms. Figura; finely detailed color plates of works from the exhibition; additional comparative materials and text illustrations; and a selected bibliography. The book is distributed to the trade through Distributed Art Publishers (D.A.P.) in the United States and Canada and through Thames + Hudson outside North America. Available at MoMA Stores and online at www.momastore.org. Clothbound: 9 x 12 in. (30 x 30.5 cm.); 144 pages; 128 illustrations. Price: \$40.00. Please see separate press release for more information.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

A series of special public programs has been scheduled in conjunction with the exhibition. Lectures by award-winning art critic and historian Robert Hughes on January 15, and Freud biographer William Feaver on February 28 will take place, along with Brown Bag Lunch Lectures on February 11 and 14. See separate press release for detailed information on each program.

MoMA AUDIO:

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum will offer a MoMA Audio program including commentary by Starr Figura, Lucian Freud, and two of the artist's sitters, art critic Martin Gayford and the British barrister Lord Arnold Goodman. Free with Museum admission, courtesy of Bloomberg. MoMA Audio is also available for download on www.moma.org/audio and as a podcast on iTunes.

EXHIBITION WEB SITE:

An extensive Web site includes images of all the works in the exhibition, organized thematically; brief explanatory texts adapted from the essay in the catalogue; and a complete checklist of the works in the exhibition. It will also feature additional documentary material, including photographs of the artist and his studio. The site will be available when the exhibition opens to the public on December 16, 2007 at www.moma.org/lucianfreud.

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For downloadable high-resolution images, please register at www.moma.org/press.

Public Information:

The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, NY 10019

Hours: Wednesday through Monday: 10:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Friday: 10:30 a.m.-8:00 p.m. Closed Tuesdays, except December 19, December 26, and January 2.

Museum Admission: \$20 adults; \$16 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D.; \$12 full-time students with current I.D. Free for children 16 and under. Free for members. (Includes admittance to Museum galleries and film programs)
Target Free Friday Nights 4:00-8:00 p.m.

Film Admission: \$10 adults; \$8 seniors, 65 years and over with I.D. \$6 full-time students with current I.D. (For admittance to film programs only)

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Bus: On Fifth Avenue, take the M1, M2, M3, M4, or M5 to 53rd Street. On Sixth Avenue, take the M5, M6, or M7 to 53rd Street. Or take the M57 and M50 crosstown buses on 57th and 50th Streets.

The public may call 212/708-9400 for detailed Museum information.

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