|  |
| --- |
| Freud, Lucian (1922-2011)  Rina Arya (University of Wolverhampton)  Lucian Freud was a British painter and draughtsman whose work is characterized by his intense figure studies and muted palette. Born in Berlin on 8 December 1922, Freud was the grandson of Sigmund Freud. His family moved to England in 1933, where he would remain for the rest of his life. In 1939 Freud acquired British citizenship. In the same year, he studied at the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing, under Welsh-born painter Cedric Morris. Freud’s work is characterized by a realism of the flesh, as seen in his portraits and nudes, and by dramatic charge. From the late 1950s, Freud’s work became freer in his handling of paint, which is conveyed by the exploration of the spatial contours of faces and bodies. His figures are situated in stark interiors which add to the pervasive feeling of alienation. Freud was part of the postwar generation of British realist painters who were preoccupied with the human figure. He is loosely associated with Neo-Romanticism and is part of the ‘School of London’ with other artists including Francis Bacon, Michael Andrews and Leon Kossoff but this grouping was primarily based on social affiliations rather than on shared artistic preoccupations, with the exception of their common interest in the human form. He is a master of realism and his merciless approach strips the human being down to its gruesome nakedness. |
| Lucian Freud was a British painter and draughtsman whose work is characterized by his intense figure studies that are rendered in unconventional poses and muted palette. Freud’s work involves a realism of the flesh, as seen in his portraits and nudes. His interiors are stark, simultaneously mundane and eerie. Freud was part of the postwar generation of British painters who were preoccupied with the human figure. He is part of the ‘School of London’ with other artists including Francis Bacon, Michael Andrews and Leon Kossoff but this grouping was primarily based on social affiliations rather than on shared artistic preoccupations, with the exception of their common interest in the human form.  Born in Berlin on 8 December 1922, Freud was the grandson of Sigmund Freud. His family moved to England in 1933 to escape the National Socialists’ rise to power, where he would live for the rest of his life, with the exception of a short visit to Paris and then Greece in 1946. In 1939 Freud acquired British citizenship. His artistic training was minimal. In 1939 he spent a few months at the Central School of Arts in London before moving on to the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing at Dedham in Essex, and then Hadleigh in Suffolk, that was run by Cedric Moss and Arthur Lett-Haines. He was invalided out of the Merchant Navy in 1942 after which time he began his career as an artist. From the late 1940s to the 1950s Freud taught at the Slade School of Fine Art. In 1954 he represented Britain at the twenty-seventh Venice Biennale and his first retrospective was held in 1974 at the Hayward Gallery.  Freud painted nature studies, interiors, and cityscapes viewed from his studio window, but his central subjects were portraits and nude studies. His work is characterized by its realism, especially the attention paid to the tone and texture of flesh. Weighty, meaty bodies lie against surfaces in poses that enhance their nakedness. They appear uninhibited, and Freud paints their every imperfection. Another characteristic of his work is its dramatic charge, as captured in *Interior at Paddington* (1951). The painting was commissioned for the Arts Council exhibition *Sixty Paintings for 51* as part of the Festival of Britain. It features the photographer Harry Diamond in a raincoat; one hand holds a lit cigarette while the other is clenched. Looking into space, he is dwarfed by the presence of a huge spiky potted plant.  File: freud1.jpg  1 'Interior at Paddington' (1951). Owned by Walker Art gallery in Liverpool. http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/picture-of-month/displayPicture.aspx?id=171  In the 1940s he was chiefly interested in drawing and focused mainly on studies of faces. He also experimented with Surrealism as demonstrated by *The Painter’s Room* (1943-4), which shows an incongruous grouping of unconnected objects, like a potted plant, which would appear in later works. His early paintings are relatively flat and stylized. From the late 1950s onwards Freud’s handling of paint became freer, in its broader treatment and application, which he achieved by using hogs’ hair brushes instead of sable. This was also conveyed by the exploration of the spatial contours of faces and bodies and a richer palette. His rougher brushwork was suggestive of space, structure, and texture. This work stood in contrast to earlier work that was more intent on cultivating an intricate and meticulous surface. From the 1950s onwards Freud was more interested in probing the flesh and exploring the anatomy of the individual, imparting an experience of corporeality, which he did so deftly in masterpieces such as *Benefits Supervisor Resting* (1994) and *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* (1995). In the 1980s and 1990s his work became more ambitious in both style and content with more diverse formats used as seen in *Large Interior, WII (after Watteau)* (1981-3) for example, which features five sitters and has a more modelled sense of form.  Freud’s work can be described as autobiographical insofar as he preferred to paint people in his life and in surroundings that were known to him such as inner-city Paddington, where he spent much of his career. Sitters included his mother and daughters, his first wife Kitty Garman, and the performance artist and fashion designer Leigh Bowery who posed for a number of works in the early 1990s. He also painted portraits of a number of his contemporaries, such as David Hockney, Francis Bacon and Frank Auerbach. Freud’s intimacy with his sitters is conveyed in the attention to detail of physiognomic and bodily expression, which imparts a strong sense of character, and the sense of privacy that his paintings capture, which is a shared relationship between painter and sitter and was nurtured through the hours, days or months through which the sitter would pose. And yet, in spite of this intimacy his austere depictions convey an objectivity that is unflattering, extreme, and at times voyeuristic. We are looking at the person stripped bare. His existentialist portrayals contain individuals lost in themselves in bare, stark, interiors that are devoid of warmth. The addition of random and isolated objects in the room – a dish of eggs, a rat, a pestle and mortar – all of which are rendered naturalistically and given equal weight contribute to the surreal atmosphere and pervasive sense of alienation. The stripping away of any background details of the identity of the sitter also intensifies the viewing experience as there is little to distract from the raw realism.  Freud’s acclaim as a painter of the flesh was celebrated in the Tate’s 2002 major retrospective of his work, which toured to Barcelona and Los Angeles. Freud continued to paint until his death on July 20th 2011 in London, leaving an unfinished painting of his assistant and close friend David Dawson and his whippet, *Portrait of the Hound*, which was displayed in the National Portrait Gallery’s 2012 show of his portraits. |

References and further reading

Fever, W. (2007), *Lucian Freud*, New York: Rizzoli International Publishers.

Gowing, L. (1982), *Lucian Freud*, London: Thames & Hudson.

Lampert, C. (1993), *Lucian Freud: Recent Work*, London: 1993.