**Freud, Lucian** (1922-2011)

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; he moved to England in 1932 where he would remain for the rest of his life. In 1939 Freud acquired British citizenship, the same year that he studied 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 dramatic charge. From the late 1950s his work became freer in Freud’s handling of paint, which is conveyed by the exploration of the spatial contours of faces and bodies. His interiors are stark, simultaneously mundane and yet eerie. Freud was part of the postwar generation of British painters who were preoccupied with the human figure. He is frequently grouped with painters Francis Bacon, Michael Andrews and Leon Kossoff, termed the ‘School of London’, but this grouping was based on social affiliations rather than on shared artistic preoccupations, with the exception of their common interest in the human form.

Lucien Freud’s artistic training was minimal. He spent a few months at the Central School of Arts before moving on to the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing at Dedham in Essex with the founder Cedric Moss. From 1948 to 1958 Freud taught at the Slade School of Fine Art. Among his subjects were still lifes, interiors and cityscapes but his central subjects were portraits and nudes. 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 are uninhibited and Freud paints their every imperfection. Another characteristic of his work is its dramatic charge, as evidenced in the following work. *Interior in Paddington* (1951) (Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool) was commissioned for the Arts Council’s 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 and the other is clenched. Looking into space, he is dwarfed by the presence of a huge potted plant.

Freud’s later work, from the late 1950s onwards, is markedly different in its broader handling and application which he achieved by using hog brushes instead of sable, which he had previously used. His more rough brushwork was suggestive of space, structure and texture, and this was in contrast to his earlier work that was more concerned with optical and surface qualities, namely the cultivation of an intricate and meticulous surface.

Freud preferred to paint people who were known to him, including his mother and daughters; his wife, Kitty Garman, and the performance artist Leigh Bowery. However, in spite of his intimacy with his sitters in real life, his depictions of them convey a blankness and objectivity and his subjects rarely meet the gaze of the viewer. His portrayals can be described as existentialist insofar as they involve the individual in a bare, often stark, interior that is not defined nor explained by the often random and isolated objects in the room that contribute to the surreal atmosphere. This increases the sense of alienation and the intensity of the dynamic that the viewer has with the sitter as there is nothing to distract from the raw details.

In 2002, Tate Britain held a major retrospective of Freud’s work. Freudcontinued to paint until his eath, leaving an unfinished painting of his assistant and close friend, David Dawson, and Dawson’s whippet Eli. This final painting was displayed in the National Portrait Gallery’s 2012 blockbuster show devoted to Freud’s portraits.

Suggested image: 'Interior in Paddington' (1951) which is owned by the Walker art gallery in Liverpool for the image.

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.