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*Reflection with Two Children (Self-Portrait), 1965*  
*Reflet avec deux enfants (autoportrait), 1965*  
Madrid, Museo Thyssen Bornemisza  
photo : José Loren  
© Lucian Freud



## PRESS RELEASE

# LUCIAN FREUD. L'ATELIER

## 10 MARCH - 19 JULY 2010

GALERIE 2, LEVEL 6

**The Centre Pompidou is to pay tribute to Lucian Freud, one of the greatest of contemporary painters. Now 88 years old, he is one of the world's most important living artists. He has not shown in France since the Centre's last major retrospective of his work nearly a quarter of a century ago, in 1987, though his fame has since then only grown and his place in the history of art become ever more assured.**

**The exhibition will present an outstanding selection of Freud's work, consisting of some fifty large-format paintings, mostly from private collections, together with a number of prints and drawings, as well as photographs of the artist's London studio.**

**The exhibition is organised around the theme of the studio, this enclosed space so essential to Freud's paintings and to his practice as a painter. Occupying more than 900 square metres, it will bring together most of the painter's Large Interiors, his variations on the Old Masters, his self-portraits, and more recent very large portraits of Leigh Bowery and Big Sue.**



The distinctiveness of Lucian Freud's work resides to a great extent in his minute, almost obsessional treatment of the portraits and nudes, based on an absolute commitment to the craft of painting: "I want paint to work as flesh."

The model is observed within the enclosed world of the studio – the painter's laboratory. Freud paints only what takes its place in this space, setting his models within a precise scenography that draws on the furniture and other studio furnishings, which become recurrent and recognizable elements of his compositions: the pot plant, the sagging sofa, the old armchair, the iron bedstead, the hand-basin and the paint-spattered walls.

The few landscapes – London houses and factories, back yards, empty plots, gardens, rubbish tips – are viewed from above, generally painted from the studio windows or the door. Nature in Freud is an urban nature, meagre and cramped.

The addresses of his successive studios feature may feature in the titles (W11, W9...), offering a rough chronology, from the first thirty years in Paddington, to the loft in Holland Park and then the house in Notting Hill. The theme of the studio itself offers a metaphor for painting in the close, closed encounter between painter and model (from Rembrandt to Courbet and Picasso to Freud himself), the space of the painting (the representation of the real, the process of creation) and the figure of the artist (in the self-portraits and the re-readings of the masters).

The exhibition is organised in four sections.

## **1. Interior/Exterior**

The exhibition opens in this first room with an extraordinarily impressive group of studio interiors and urban landscapes. Among the latter, *Wasteground with Houses, Paddington, 1970-1972* and *Factory in North London, 1972*, show the obverse of the London streetscape, with its worn, undecorated facades. The studio, shown with its furniture, its pot plants, the surfaces of walls and floor, serves as a framework for an intense confrontation with the model. The power of Freud's painting derives from this closely monitored tension between distance and intimacy.



## 2. Reflections

The force and complexity of Freud's self-portraits spring from this same tension between interiority and representation, between reflective self-communion and ironic distancing. A regular exercise, his self-portraiture offers variations on the mirror image and the frontal head-and-shoulders portrait, while more oblique, passing glimpses of the artist are afforded by the reflections incidentally captured in the corner of other compositions. Directness itself becomes oblique in more parodical representations of the painter naked but for his boots with palette and brush in hand, or as the old master pursued by an amorous, unclothed model... Freud says, "to portray yourself, you have to try and paint as if you were someone else. In the self-portrait, 'likeness' is something different. I have to paint what I feel, without falling into expressionism."

## 3. Re-readings

A rebelliously conservative student, his instincts opposed to contemporary trends, Freud had long grounded his painting in an arduous wrestling with the object, in the intense observation of a familiar model – a friend or relative – within the privacy and isolation of the studio. It was in the 1980s that he came to both subsume and transcend the autobiographical aspect of his work in large-scale compositions that equally attended to the constitutive historicity of painting.

In this section, the works exhibited – drawings, prints and paintings – all offer re-readings of works by other painters: Cézanne's *L'Après-midi à Naples*, a study of a tree-trunk by Constable, a Picasso drawing, Chardin's *La Maîtresse d'école*. From loose copies to the radical reinterpretation of Constable's *Elm* as a "girl standing," taking in deliberately clumsy studio-bound re-stagings on the way, these variations serve as the vehicle of a subtle reflection on painting today, as art, and as history or tradition.

## 4. As Flesh

Following in the line of the Large Interiors and the paintings "after the masters," Freud's work since the 1990s includes a number of very ambitious, powerful yet enigmatic paintings of key models, among them drag performer Divine and the performance artist Leigh Bowery and his friend the benefits supervisor "Big Sue." These might be said to be Lucian Freud's own "history painting."



The exhibition closes with screenings of two films: Tim Meara's *Small Gestures in Bare Rooms* (2010, 10', colour, 16mm), a slow and silent exploration of the Holland Park studio, and a five-minute film of the artist in his studio by Freud's assistant David Dawson. The last room has a group of still photographs of Freud in his studio, also by Dawson.

To accompany the exhibition, Éditions du Centre Pompidou will publish a 304-page catalogue, with essays by Jean Clair, Philippe Comar, Laurence des Cars, Eric Darragon, Richard Shiff and Cécile Debray and a substantial illustrated chronology.

in media partnership with



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**Admission**  
depending on time  
Concessions  
♻8 - ♻9  
ticket valid the same day for the  
Musée National d'Art Moderne  
and all exhibitions  
Free for under-18s and  
members of the Centre  
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(holders of the annual pass)

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