

Why Lucian Freud's Nude Portraits Are Monumental In Every Way

April 7, 2019

Balasz Takac (<https://www.widewalls.ch/author/balasz-takac/>)

Balasz Takac is alias of Vladimir Bjelicic who is actively engaged in art criticism, curatorial and artistic practice.

The British portraiture painting of the 20th century was undoubtedly marked by the work of **Lucian Freud**. Throughout his six decades long career, this artist was rather introvert, and his subjects came from a close circle of friends and family. Although he was influenced by Surrealism during the early stage of his career, in the 1950s he submerged into more realistic depictions. [The nude](https://www.widewalls.ch/nude-figure-in-art/) became Freud's central genre, meaning that he devotedly explored the human anatomy – not just plain physicality, but various social meanings of representation of nudity, gender, and sexuality as well. By observing the body closely, **Freud examined various psychological states** through a prism of the relationship between the artist and model, or the beholder and the exposed subject. At **Acquavella Galleries**, the audience can now see Freud's **intense, expressive and powerful imagery**, in an exhibition titled *Monumental* and consisting of the artist's naked portraits made during the 1990s and 2000s.

Right: Lucian Freud – Large Interior, Notting Hill, 1998. Oil on canvas, 84 3/4 x 66 1/2 inches

(215.3 x 168.9 cm). Private Collection / **Left:** Lucian Freud – Sunny Morning—Eight Legs, 1997. Oil on canvas, 92 1/8 x 52 inches (234 x 132.1 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago; Joseph Winterbotham Collection

The Fascinating Bodies of Lucian Freud

The current exhibition is curated by [Lucian Freud](https://www.widewalls.ch/artist/lucian-freud/) (<https://www.widewalls.ch/artist/lucian-freud/>)'s longtime studio assistant, friend, and a director of the Lucian Freud Archive, **David Dawson**, who aimed to underline **the complexity of Freud's approach**. The artist's deep conviction was that the body, especially the naked one, should be perceived as **a specific language formed from an array of emotions**. By depicting the naked body of a living model, the artist engaged himself in **a specific role of a beholder or a listener**; interestingly so, such an approach seems to be **an extension of the methodology inaugurated by his grandfather Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis**. Freud once explained:

Being naked has to do with making a more complete portrait, a naked body is somehow more permanent, more factual.... When someone is naked there is in effect nothing to be hidden. Not everyone wants to be that honest about themselves, that means I feel an obligation to be equally honest in how I represent them. It is a matter of responsibility, in a way I don't want the painting to come from me, I want it to come from them. It can be extraordinary how much you can learn from someone by looking very carefully at them without judgment.

Throughout art history, various artists were exploring various features of the human body; the incarnate or the color of flesh in particular was observed closely and expressed in great detail. However, Freud was even more committed than his predecessors, in that he **depicted various types of skin in order to explore its painterly quality, texture, and form.** The obsession with the skin came to prominence more than ever during the last two decades of his life in **portraits of naked people with varying types and amounts of flesh.** To be more precise, the artist often compared skin to other materials, something that is apparent in the works featuring nudes as an element of still lifes – a good example is the painting *Irish Woman on a Bed* made in 2003–04. Eventually, **Freud's studio became like a changing portrait of skin** consisting of different textures spreading in different directions. The stairs covered with color led up to a tiny two-room studio completely dipped in paint.

Lucian Freud – *Irish Woman on a Bed*, 2003-04. Oil on canvas, 40 x 60 1/8 inches (101.6 x 152.7 cm). Private Collection

The Outstanding Paintings

The installment in New York features **thirteen major paintings**, including portraits of his most frequent sitters made during the 1990s and 2000s as well as his self-portrait from this period. It opens with two works depicting the performance artist **Leigh Bowery**; in order to properly capture Bowery's physique, Freud started working a larger scale which led the painter to embrace a new sort of grandeur in his practice. The following two paintings from the 1990s are featuring **Sue Tilley**, Freud's other model, one of the paintings being the impressive *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping*. At the end of the ninth decade, the painter met **David Dawson** who started acting as his assistant, and who also became one of his sitters – a few of his portraits are included in the exhibition as well. Dawson described the first time he posed for Freud, for the painting *Sunny Morning, Eight Legs* made in 1997:

I had been seeing Lucian every morning for six years when one day he said he had an idea for a large painting of me. At the first sitting, Lucian suggested I lie naked on the bed; he wanted Pluto in the painting, too, and she naturally found her spot curled under my arm. Lucian had a great fondness of painting fur next to skin. My legs under the bed came about after many attempts; the painting demanded a sort of drama. It suddenly brought a tension to the painting, my knees echoing those on the bed. It was like a visual stutter, an echo referring back to myself.

Although all of the compositions are grandiose, **all the sitters are depicted in respectful, somehow discreet and intimate manner** and they reflect Freud's meticulous and sincere psychological approach. The painter used to spend a significant period of time with his subject; for instance, for the purposes of the portrait of Ria Kirby titled *Ria, Naked Portrait* (also on display), this prolific art handler was coming to the studio of Lucian Freud almost every day during the course of sixteen months in 2006 and 2007.

Lucian Freud – Flora with Blue Toenails, 2001. Oil on canvas, 35.98 x 50 inches (91.4 x 127 cm).
Private Collection

Lucian Freud Portraits at Acquavella Galleries

This exhibition comes as a continuation of the gallery agenda to present the works of Lucian Freud since his death in 2011, and it would have not been possible without the loans from the Art Institute of Chicago, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Lewis Collection, and other private collections. [A fully illustrated catalog \(https://amzn.to/2UgOZ2v\)](https://amzn.to/2UgOZ2v) featuring essays by Dawson and longtime chief curator at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth Michael Auping will accompany the installment. *Lucian Freud: Monumental* will be on display at [Acquavella Galleries \(https://www.acquavellagalleries.com/\)](https://www.acquavellagalleries.com/) in New York until **24 May 2019**. Featured image: Lucian Freud – Benefits Supervisor Sleeping, 1995. Oil on canvas, 59 5/8 x 86 inches (151.3 x 218.4 cm). Private Collection. All works of art by Lucian Freud are © The Lucian Freud Archive / Bridgeman Images

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