

Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud

Conversations

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Floor 2

Press Release

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Marlborough New York is pleased to present *Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud: Conversations*, an exhibition which will bring together an overview of the two artists' graphic output and the differing approaches each took to printmaking. Both Bacon and Freud are widely recognized as leading figurative artists of the twentieth century and had shared a mutual interest in expressing the essence of the human experience.

The marks and techniques Lucian Freud employed during the etching process were a natural progression from his work as a draughtsman. Freud's approach to printmaking was informed by his painting; by placing the etching plate upright on an easel, he was able to meticulously work from life. Always working directly from his models and demarcating their forms through meticulous networks of finely etched lines. Unsettling and unyielding, these portraits contain a remarkable honesty and an awkwardness that adds to the psychological tension.

Francis Bacon's graphic works reflect his relentless strive to "open the valves of feeling." He acted as a self-proclaimed witness of mankind, setting himself the task of scrutinizing the human condition. Whether self-portraits, depictions of former lovers, or evocations of the human figure, each produces the same expressive and fiercely charged effect seen in his paintings. He worked closely with his printmakers to capture the same color quality, especially evident in the bright oranges and deep blacks.

Bacon and Freud shared an impassioned, yet tumultuous, nearly forty-year friendship. When the pair met in the mid-1940s through their mutual friend Graham Sutherland, they quickly struck up a friendship and became inseparable, often seeing each other daily. The two would frequently partake in debauchorous activities, spending time at the Gargoyle Club (and later the Colony Room) gambling, drinking, and fraternizing with fellow bohemians, which on one occasion, lead Freud to competitively gamble away everything he owned, including his car.

Their friendship was also fueled by their mutual interest in their own and each other's art practice. Freud deeply admired Bacon's work and was struck with the distinct emotive qualities and rawness of the human form. When Freud sat for Bacon in 1951, he was moved by the artist's spontaneous, hurried approach to artmaking. Conversely, when Freud drew Bacon the following year, Bacon was astonished by the level of detail and time Freud invested in the piece.



Lucian Freud with Francis Bacon in Bacon's London studio, 1953 © Daniel Farson

In the studio, the two shared a complex relationship, with Bacon and Freud fiercely critiquing, whilst inspiring, one another's work. While Bacon encouraged Freud to break away from traditional modes of portraiture, Freud motivated Bacon to tap into his subject's psyche and explore the emotional depths of his sitters. As Freud recounted, "I realized immediately that [Bacon's] work related to how he felt about life. Mine on the other hand seemed very labored. That was because there was a terrific amount of labor for me to do anything—and still is. Francis on the other hand, would have ideas, which he put down and then destroy and then quickly put down again. It was his attitude that I admired. The way he was completely ruthless about his own work. I think that Francis's way of painting freely helped me feel more daring."