



A touring exhibition from the V&A

Lucian Freud's Etchings

V&A

Lucian Freud's Etchings: a creative collaboration

Lucian Freud (1922–2011), perhaps best known as a painter, was also a renowned printmaker, and though the prints often complemented his paintings, and feature familiar sitters and subjects, they were conceived and realised as independent works of art. For over 20 years he worked with master printer Marc Balakjian (1938–2017), and this exhibition explores the extraordinary creative collaboration between the two men. We see Freud learning and mastering a new graphic language – etching – and exploiting the particular capacities of the medium, which became for him a substitute for drawing.

Using the V&A's unique and extensive collection of trial proofs, variant states (many with Freud's hand-drawn corrections), cancellation proofs, and unique impressions, plus selected copper etching plates, the exhibition presents the physical evidence of this long and fruitful collaboration and shows how Balakjian's skills supported and enabled Freud's achievements in print. Ranging from small and intimate, to large-scale and dramatic, these prints demonstrate the compelling appeal of print as a medium for original artistic expression. Most of these proofs have never been exhibited before and this will be the first exhibition to examine Freud's long engagement with printmaking by illustrating the process, showing how his works in print have a compelling originality that is the equal of his paintings.



The creative relationship between artist and printer

Many of the trial proofs demonstrate Marc Balakjian's expertise in choosing inks and papers, and his skills in inking and wiping the plates, contributing significantly to the character of Freud's finished prints.

The process

Several sequences of proofs show Freud reworking the image, making changes to the plate until he was satisfied. He sketched with pastel on some of these proofs, trying out ideas and indicating his proposed changes. Prints such as *Reclining Figure* and *Bella in her Pluto T-shirt* were extensively reworked.



Inspirations and influences

Freud's prints were often related to his paintings, but they were never copies of paintings. Often of the same sitters or scenes, the prints show Freud exploring these subjects in a more intimate manner, though the prints are often on a similar scale.

Curatorial team

The exhibition is curated by Gill Saunders, the recently retired Senior Curator of Prints, with support from Rebecca Billingham, Assistant Curator of Prints. Gill is an internationally renowned expert on 20th-century and contemporary printmaking and was responsible for acquiring this remarkable collection of Freud proof prints for the V&A in 2019.

Size: 300–500 m²
Touring from 2024

Contacts

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Trial proof of *Bella in her Pluto T-Shirt*, 1995
Cancellation proof of *Self-Portrait: Reflection*, 1996
Proof of *Pluto Aged Twelve*, 2000
Trial proof of *The Painters Garden*, 2000
Trial proof of *Woman Sleeping*, 1995
All etchings by Lucian Freud, printed by Marc Balakjian
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