

Lucian Freud

Freud was thought of primarily as a painter of portraits, but although his subjects were often well-known people, he was no **society** portraitist. **His purpose was not to flatter**, and **the starkness of his images**, many of them highly detailed nudes, were very unusual within the history of art of the human form.

So early was Freud's reputation established – while he was still a teenager – that for almost all of his career he was able to paint on his own terms, and only what he was interested in. "My work," he said, in a remark at once typically truthful and egotistic, **"is purely autobiographical. It's about myself and my surroundings."**

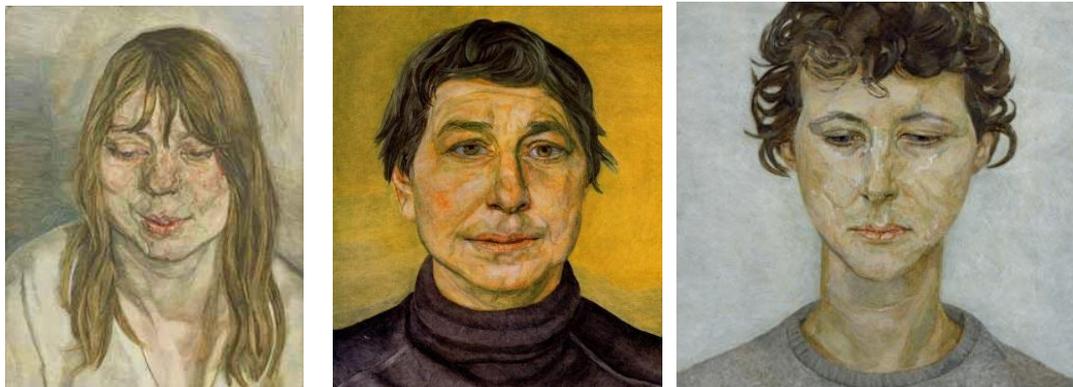
Early drawings show a much more detailed and linear based work.



The results of this style divided both the critics and the public. For many, Freud was a master of capturing the true essence of a sitter, his paintings being, as he said, not *like* people but *of* people. Others found the stern intensity of Freud's scrutiny unsettling and too uniform, thinking his paintings revealed not their subjects but his view of humanity.

His pictures were said not to celebrate the differences between individuals, but their **'melancholy similarities'** – an opinion reinforced by the **anonymous titles** Freud gave many of his works, **as if they were exercises rather than pictures of real people.**

In the 1950's his work took a dramatic change



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In the 1950's his portraits began to become more tactile, demonstrating eventually an **almost sculptural fascination with flesh and its contours**. **Always painting from life**, Freud abandoned the fine lines of his early work **for broader strokes** – swapping sable brushes for hogshair – and began to work with a more **limited palette** in which greasy whites and meaty reds predominated.

His subjects were also **often foreshortened** or seen from a **peculiar angle**, a change in technique brought on by Freud's beginning to paint while standing up rather than sitting.

Most of the best-known works that Freud executed in the next 40 years were of nudes, rather **vulnerable figures** usually placed against a white sheet on an iron bed or on an old Chesterfield sofa in Freud's studio. The subjects often seemed to be **tired or even asleep**, yet Freud's gaze remains tireless, even pitiless under the glare thrown by an interrogator's 500 watt bulb. Moreover, there is little independent communication between sitter and onlooker, for the eyes of Freud's subjects rarely meet any outside the studio.



Freud sometimes described the change in his style to a conversation with Frances Bacon in which he was urged to put more of his own life into his work. Some critics who sought evidence of this concluded that what was going into the work was Freud's dissatisfaction with his own life.