

Lucian Freud – Social and Cultural Influences



Social Influences - (meaning 'public' - Politics, Fashion Identity, Consumerism, People Opinion/Choice)

Cultural Influences - (meaning 'artistic' - Religion & Tradition & Art/Design Movement)

Lucian Freud was born into a **wealthy Jewish family** in Berlin on Dec 8 1922, the middle brother of three. His father, an architect, was the youngest son of **Sigmund Freud**, the founder of psychoanalysis.

The rising tide of **anti-Semitism in Germany** and the appointment of Hitler as Chancellor prompted the Freud's to **move to England in 1933**.

Expelled from school at 15 he started Art Collage first at Central School London, then East Anglian School, and was taught by **Cedric Morris**.

In **war time London** he took a studio, he was considered to be a prodigy, and known already for being very eccentric, walking around the streets in a fur coat and carrying a bird of prey!

Freud spent most of his career in Paddington, London, an inner-city area whose seediness is reflected in Freud's often sombre and moody interiors and cityscapes. His time was spent in London drinking, gambling and moving between the lower and upper parts of society.

In the 1940s he was principally interested in drawing, especially the face. He experimented with Surrealism. He was also loosely associated with Neo-Romanticism. He established his own artistic identity, however, in meticulously executed Realist works, imbued with a pervasive mood of alienation.

From 1946 until 1948 Freud lived and painted in **Greece and France**, where he met **Picasso**.

When Freud returned to England in 1948 it was to begin teaching at the Slade, and to **marry Kitty Garman**, the daughter of the sculptor Jacob Epstein.

Freud's wife became the subject of his first important series of portraits, notable for their flat contours, stylized line and stark lighting. The wide-eyed subject of 'Girl with a Kitten' (1947) is treated with an unsettling, detached sensuality reminiscent of 15th-century Flemish portraiture or, more recently, of Ingres – **so much so that Herbert Read called Freud "the Ingres of existentialism"**.



A private man, Freud's relationship with his sitters was played out behind the closed door of the studio.

A **close relationship with sitters** was often important for Freud. His models were friends, lovers, relatives and occasionally his own children. Well known sitters include David Hockney, Francis Bacon, Kate Moss and a Royal Portrait of Her Majesty the Queen.

Working only from life, he once claimed, *'I could never put anything into a picture that wasn't actually there in front of me'*. Freud demonstrated an unrelenting observational intensity. Freud was heavily influenced in **his early work** by a group of 20th century figurative painters known as **the Slade School**. **William Roberts and Stanley Spencer's**, use of flat cubism, and distortion is evident in his work from pre 1950. His work was compared at this time to German expressionism, something he denied.

While working as a visiting lecturer at The Slade he was **introduced to Cremnitz White**, a paint so dense as to be sculptural. Freud decided this would be good to paint flesh tones, and lead whites like Flake White became a mainstay of his palette.

From the 1950s, he began to work in **portraiture**, often nudes (though his first full length nude was not painted until 1966), to the almost complete exclusion of everything else, and by the middle of the decade developed a much **more free style** using **large hogs-hair brushes**, with **an intense concentration of the texture** and colour of flesh, and much thicker paint, including **impasto**. Influenced by his friendships with Frank Auerbach and Francis Bacon he took on a much looser paint style and impulsive handling of paint.



In 'Interior at Paddington', (1951) the pose that Harry Diamond adopts is in essence a mirror-image of the famous aggressive pose that was commonly used by Holbein for his full-length portraits of Henry VIII.

The London School (Francis Bacon, Frank Auerbach, R.B.Kitaj, Michael Andrews). He became part of a group of painters called '**The London School**' a **group of figurative painters** at its core who were drawn together by shared respect from the late 1950's onwards. They followed each other's work closely and exhibited in the same West End gallery.

Freud constantly used mirrors to give him odd angles, distancing and that slight sense of behind-the-glass isolation.



'The Two Brothers from Ulster'.

Freud worked exclusively from life, usually using a nude model posed on his studio's threadbare furnishings or against piles of painter's rags. He would **start with a rough charcoal sketch** on the canvas, and then lay in the paint, working from the head outwards. Occasionally he would extend the canvas by gluing on extra strips to accommodate the composition such as 'The Two Brothers from Ulster'.

Freud was a gambler and accumulated many debts to bookmaker Alfie Mclean but they soon became friends. In lieu of his debts Freud preserved McLean sons' Sam and Paul anonymity by simply calling the 2001 painting