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Faculty of Design
Department of Craft

Representations of the Body in the
Work of Lucian Freud.

by

Margaret Clarke

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INTRODUCTION

There is a certain mystique which surrounds Lucian Freud. To an extent he has cultivated it himself, but it is also based on a very complex personal history. He is a person who is intensely private and inaccessible. He has always avoided painterly groups and even avoided areas and neighbourhoods in which artists and intellectuals resided. To this day he still lives on the same street in London which he moved to nearly fifty years ago, only moving studio when he had to, but never very far down the road.

This thesis will examine representations of women in the work of Freud. It will analyse various images and discuss the different manner with which each has been approached by the artist. The paintings of males have been specifically chosen to compare and contrast with the female images, and will make the suggestion that certain patriarchal ideals are being visually promoted by Lucian Freud through these particular works.

Issues which will be raised in this thesis are very problematic, the fact alone that it is dealing with naked females is a topic which creates many arguments and debates. I cannot resolve problems which have surrounded the image of the naked female for hundreds of years, and as a result I do not wish to prove anything here. Through my exploration and analyses of Lucian Freud's representational work it is obvious that the artist has striven to create meanings within these paintings, they are however somewhat ambiguous, but this only adds to the visual effect these paintings possess. Ambivalence is one of the main subtexts for all of Freud's work. The meanings within these paintings are what I will be examining ; how viewers of such images do or do not accept these meanings. This is not to say that any one reading of Freud's work can be taken for granted, there has been and still will be much debate and disagreement about how to interpret such images.

Representation is a political issue, from magazines and films, advertising and art galleries, women are depicted in ways which define what it means to be female in our society : what these representations are, what they should be like, what they are able



and incapable of, what roles they have in society and how they differ from representations of men. Art is not a neutral exercise, it is infused with cultural, social and political meaning, and this applies especially to Lucian Freud's nude portraits. These nudes or naked portraits as he prefers to call them, could be classed as erotic art, representations which are aesthetically sexual and confined to the limits of sexual representation within our culture. Elements of this eroticism or voyeuristic desire will be dealt with in the first chapter concerning the painting of *Rose* (Fig.1.). This whole idea of the naked female as erotic is hard to shift, as the female nude has been identified as an erotic object for a very long time now, epitomised through the centuries in the painted nudes and sculptures of high art right down to the present day sex symbols in popular culture.

Many women would have no problem agreeing with John Updike's statement that, "a naked woman is for most me the most beautiful thing they will see." (Goldstein, 1991, p.5.) It is not really desire which has caused such suspicion, but rather the masculine appropriation of desire, in a society which attaches this desire to power. The element of power and male dominance is introduced into the second chapter. It will be discussed in relation to three paintings of the same naked girl. (Fig. 6,7,8.) All of these paintings have been executed at different times, they do however appear to have a relationship to one and other. This desire to exert power over something, to control and dominate, tends to be evident in the majority of Freud's female portraits. He, himself, has quite obviously assumed the dominant position within the model-artist relationship. The confident and uninhibited style with which Freud approaches the female genitals not only makes us aware of the artist's attitude towards sexual difference, he is by no means inhibited by it, but also verifies this very point by realistically and rawly rendering the female genitalia, thus dismissing any ideas one might have of it as mysterious, hidden or threatening. And so by actively exerting his power over this situation, Freud is still seen to be the dominant male, the virile artist, in full control of his subject and how she will be represented.

These images produced on the ideological level of art can be read as relations of power between males and females, particularly in the representations discussed here. The female is represented as an image but with various connotations of body, and the natural and possessing characteristics such as passivity, powerlessness and vulnerability. The male, Freud, is absent from the image in visual terms, but it is his view and his position of dominance which these images signify.

Lucian Freud is an Existentialist, and as such he places prime importance upon the human being, it's existence and the experiences of the individual.

" In English culture Existentialism was used to supply a given. The given of Existentialism is Being, which is experienced as the essential consciousness of existence of each unique individual." (Brighton,1988, p.41.)

The sense of sight is given a special status in Existential theory because sight comes before speech or language. In other words sight is prior to initiation into the bad faith of collective culture."Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognises before it can speak." (Berger, 1972, p.7.) Therefore sight is closer to authentic Being, and so art like Lucian Freud's based on the authenticity of sight alone, is seen to be a sophisticated form of realism.

Paintings such as Freud's deny the artifice of art and claim to be art based on a natural truth. Psychologically Freud's work concerns strong feelings and emotions related to the existence and experiences of human beings. Freud's main aim was to capture and convey the most perceptive and often the most fleeting of these feelings and emotions. On a physical, painterly level it concerns the idea of a certain type of faithful transcription - an image which is undiluted and undecorated in any way, an image which will reveal his search for physical authenticity.

Freud is obsessed with painting the human form. He regards painting as the gathering of subjects he likes and values. The subjects are usually friends, family or individuals he has a close relationship with. All human beings have to some extent an obsession with the self or our bodies, other people and the vulnerability of human life. Freud's images of naked, isolated people are executed with such claustrophobic detail that they create a very powerful visual experience. He is attempting to recreate flesh, not only the skin but also the human life beneath it. He is constantly striving to create the whole physical form ; he wants the flesh to actually contain, as it does in reality, the essence of human life.

CHAPTER ONE : ROSE 1978/79.

CHAPTER ONE : ROSE 1978/ 1979.

This chapter, and the works discussed within the other chapters are an exploration of Lucian Freud's erotic and moving sensibilities as expressed through his medium of painting. The images represent Freud's visual expressions and feelings towards the human being, mainly the female. What I hope to show and examine are the contemplations of Lucian Freud and his projection of emotions ranging from pain and isolation, to pleasure and desire onto these bodies.

This chapter is focussed on the painting of *Rose*, a young woman whose image is depicted in a rather provocative and erotic manner. I will discuss different aspects of her representation, such as her eroticism and animalism in the context of her sensuality. *Rose* presents a very powerful image in which Freud renders the rawness, ugliness, crude and reddened features of a woman very realistically, albeit unflatteringly and still manages to depict her as sexually desirable.

Looking at this painting of *Rose* it is clear that hours of intense observation have been put into its completion. As for *Rose* and all of Freud's naked portraits inhibitions about looking at and investigating people are all totally dismissed. *Rose* is a very strong and effective image regarding sexuality in which Lucian Freud accepts his subject but can still remain objective. The woman has been taken as the object of the artist's control and erotic pleasure through the way in which the viewer looks at her.

Freud's images always seem physically close to us due to his use of space which is an integral element of his painting technique. It is by using these strange angled views of the bodies with the visually disturbing images that emphasize the overall strength and shock of the painting. The illusion of close proximity

ty between subject and viewer also enhances the uncomfortable voyeuristic perspective. *Rose* is seen from a frontal view with a downward angled perspective, which not only enables the viewer to see every part of the woman but also implies a control or dominance over the subject. Everyone involved with the painting, artist and viewer, are actively taking part in it, while the female subject is the only passive person involved. Evidently from all of Freud's, paintings conventional poses are never used as he despises contrived and pretentious compositions.

Paintings like *Rose* which have a provocative, erotic nature usually appeal to the sexuality of men. Although it is about female sexuality, it still has a lot to do with the male's sexuality also. The woman's sexual passion has to be curbed in order for the viewer to feel in control of such passion. Look and compare all of the images dealt with in this thesis and observe how all of Freud's naked portraits can be said to feed the male sexual appetite. When Lucian Freud was asked in an interview by Leigh Bowery, who has actually sat for him, if he liked there to be sexual possibilities in his paintings, he answered ; "the paintings that really excite me have an erotic element or side to them irrespective of subject matter." (Freud, 1993, p.24.)¹

So now we, as viewers, know that the creator of the images has intended there to be sexual implications in his work. On the one hand, Freud leads the viewer on and lets them believe that this sexual reading of the painting is right, but with the other he is sowing seeds of doubt with his subtle use of visual ambivalence which makes us stop and rethink the image. I believe that this is what Lucian Freud sets out to do. There is always more than one possibility in the reading of his paintings.

Take for example this reading. *Rose* is sprawled on an old, torn sofa. She appears exhausted, breathless, almost ill and in discomfort. Her thighs are listlessly spread apart, one leg bent up

¹ Leigh Bowery in conversation with Lucian, *Lovely Jobbly*, vol. ii., no.iii., 1991 ; reprinted in *The Independent*, 11 Jan 1992.

behind her while the other dangles motionlessly over the edge of the sofa. This image conjures up feelings of shock and horror at the woman's discomfort. She appears sick. The position of her arms, lethargically thrown backwards imply surrender and powerlessness. Her raised right hand partially conceals her face and avoids eye contact with the viewer. Overall, reading the painting of *Rose* in this manner would evoke great feelings of abandonment, isolation and pain which would make the image seem rather pathetic.

On the other hand there is the sexually implicit interpretation of *Rose*. The young woman is reclining invitingly with a body language suggestive of sexual activity. She seems breathless after her exertions, emphasised by the deep expansion of her rib-cage and the flattening and tightening of her stomach muscles. A glossy sheen of perspiration has broken out all over her body especially on her face. Basically *Rose* evokes a male fantasy of sexual confrontation or activity. Due to these explicitly rendered sexual implications many viewers would consider this painting *Rose* to be rather obscene, maybe even find it pornographic.

This painting could also be interpreted as Freud toying with the traditional idea regarding the artist's model, who were not only available to be painted, but also for the personal use of the artist. I am not suggesting that this is the case here, but this image does leave this interpretation open. One of the first impressions one gets from *Rose* is that he has been with and known the model for some time, and is now visually describing one moment of many they have shared together. The ambivalent style in which Lucian Freud paints makes it difficult for any one conclusion to be drawn, and so as a result the images leave numerous possibilities open depending on the viewer's own personal reading of the painting.

Freud has always been obsessed by human existence, a quality which is intrinsic to his working style. From observing his paintings it is obvious he does not only seem familiar with his model's physical appearance but also with their peculiarities and characters. He appears to see each of them subjectively through



Fig 1. *Rose* 1978/79

each individual relationship he has with them. Freud always paints people he knows well if not intimately. *Rose* gives an impression of this closeness between model and artist through the way he renders the subject. There is an impression of recent physical activity which has now tired and rendered her lifeless and motionless. This activity is suggestive of sexual activity especially emphasised in the exhausted pose of the woman, her flushed features, and the crumpled, straggled sheets wrapped around her ankles. This alone suggests the twistings and turnings of more than one person. (Hobhouse, 1988, p.211.) "Eventually there are visual possibilities for getting to know someone better close to what the Bible wisely calls 'carnal knowledge'." (Lampert, 1993, p.18.)

This question of 'obscene', 'erotic', and voyeuristic desire or pleasure is one of the obstacles artists have to deal with if they work with the human body. Although the choice of media can redeem an image such as *Rose*. If this was a photographic image it would most probably be labelled as pornography, and it could very easily resemble a centrefold from *Playboy* or *Penthouse*. But the fact that it is an oil painting, and a depiction of a female nude, just parallels the image with the traditional female nude painting, but brings it into the twentieth century somewhat.

The naked female body has and I think always will equate and represent art as long as there is always a voyeur or patron for it. The very fact that the majority of Lucian Freud's paintings are owned by private collectors backs this statement up to a certain degree. This raises the issue of the timeless argument regarding the female body as a commodity, an object which can be possessed, controlled and even owned. As Lynda Nead has stated,

" The female nude is the border between art and obscenity. The female body- natural, unstructured- represents something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgement ; but artistic style, pictorial form, contains and regulates the body and renders it an object of beauty, suitable

for art and aesthetic judgement." (Nead, 1992, p.2.)

The nature of the females which Lucian Freud chooses to paint are those which seem to have an element of animal sexuality. By using the term 'animal' I am not suggesting that females are any less human, but rather the idea of animal magnetism or sensuality, while at the same time implying that the animalistic quality could also be due to the poses of the females, who quite often resemble dead or injured and abandoned animals. Again there is more than one possibility when referring to this quality.

Freud has said that the models he likes to paint are those which have an aura about them ; he has to be drawn to them and they have to hold an interest for him. This attraction is not based on a 'sexual chemistry' so to speak, but rather on the life, the existence, the essence of being which has to perpetuate from these individuals. The representation of the person has to contain all of the signs of a living and breathing being, honestly and truthfully rendered.

When speaking about Lucian Freud's paintings of the human form and depictions of the 'flesh', it is flesh in the physical and metaphysical sense that is being implied. He not only wants to paint a picture which resembles or looks like the subject, but instead show the whole substance of the person, body, bone, fat, muscle and flesh. "The twentieth century has restored and deepened the notion of flesh, that is, of animate body.", so Maurice Merleau-Ponty states in ' Man and Adversity ', (Ewing, 1994, p.138.). "Flesh has been to the twentieth century what the rarefied 'figure' was to the nineteenth." (Ewing, 1994, p.138.)

I guess since Lucian Freud began work as an artist during the early part of the twentieth century these two statements would hold true to his work as twentieth century figurative art.

Freud deals with the body and flesh quite boldly and extremely honestly. Everything about the subject is real, expressions and poses are sincere and there is no pretence about the bodies. What

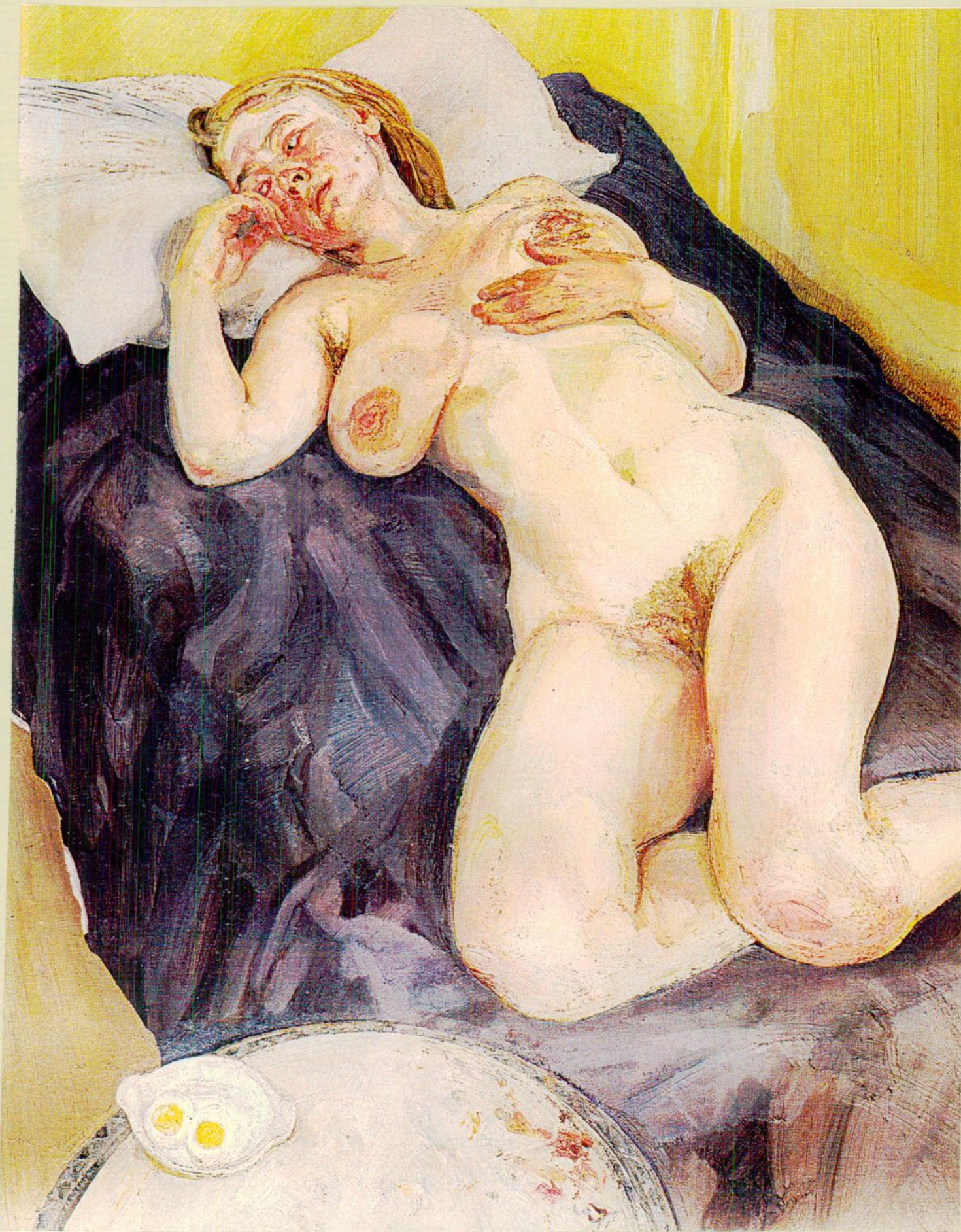
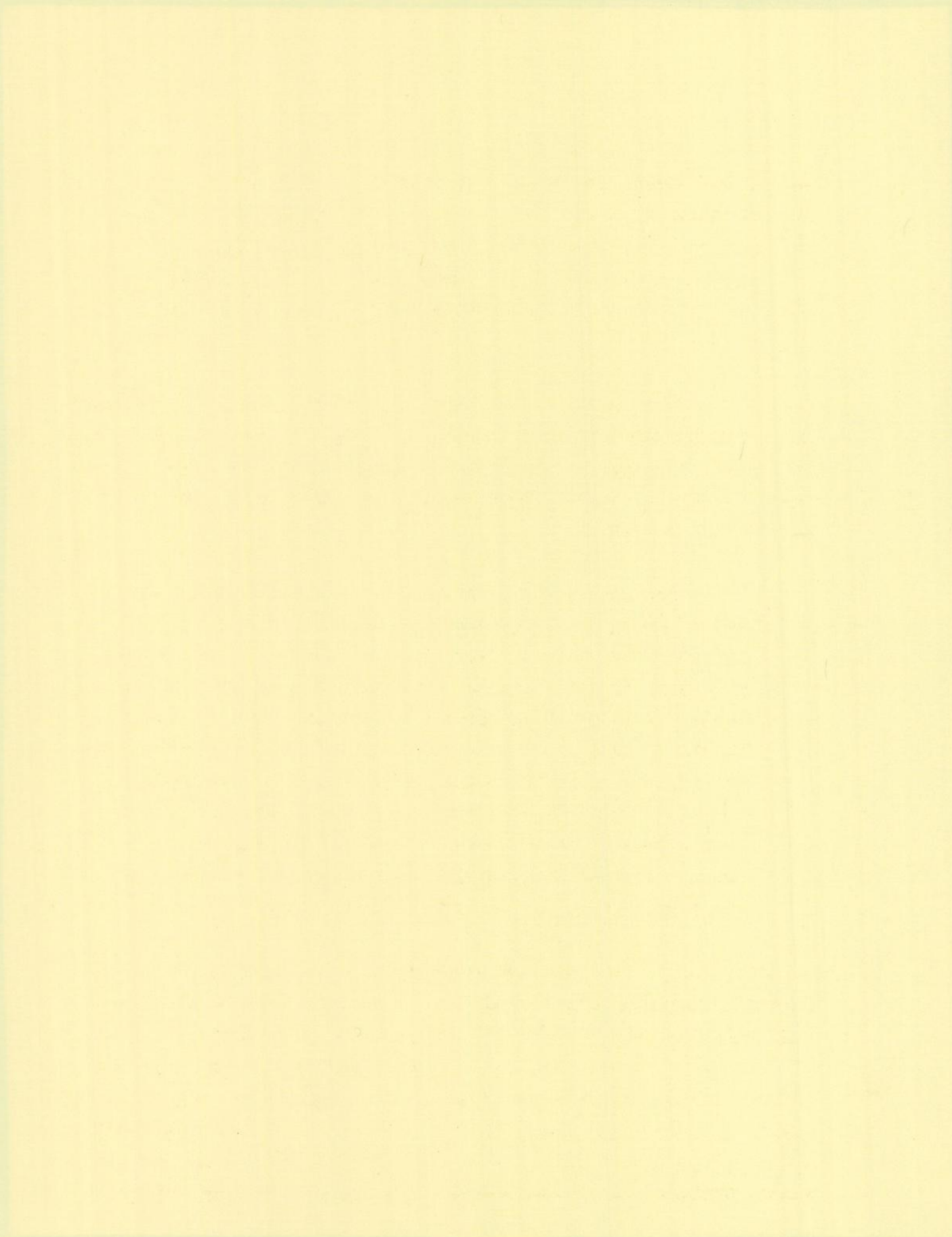


Fig 2. *Naked girl with egg* 1980/1981



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you see is what you get, quite literally, warts and all. His painting technique certainly seems to depict the human flesh and body as if it were meat. Nonetheless it can still appear to be soft and supple and rather sensual at the same time. In some of Lucian Freud's work he seems to equate women and nature - temptress and nurturer. This can be seen in *Naked Girl with Egg* (Fig.2) in which he compares the girl's naked breasts with a halved boiled egg, and his studies of pregnant women such as *Annie and Alice* (Fig. 3).

Lucian Freud considers his subjects as animals because he depicts them without any of the guises of their social existence and it is here that his interest in the naked as subject matter is rooted. In a rare interview on radio Freud actually spoke frankly about how he sees his models;

"I'm interested, really interested in them as animals and part of liking to work from them naked is that I can see more and for thatforms repeated throughout the body and often in the head as well so that you see certain rhythms set up. I am drawn to certain things, rather like Elliot said, 'I am moved by fancies that are curled...' the insides and undersides of things I'm very often drawn to and when I'm working from a person I might use something which would actually be visible from another position because its something that I like that would show in light." (Lampert, 1993, p.17.)¹

Usually Freud will discard anything, be it clothing, personal artefacts, furniture which will hint at an identity for the sitter. But something which could be overlooked are his subtle additions of analogies, objects suggestive of a narrative to his paintings. Many of these elements are very subtle and rather obscure (but others are rather shocking such as the live rat in *Naked Man with a Rat* (Fig.12) and this is what adds that ambivalent edge to his work. Nothing about the subject, the painter or the situation

¹ . Originally quoted from an interview with Lucian Freud by William Feaver, recorded for B.B.C. Radio 3.

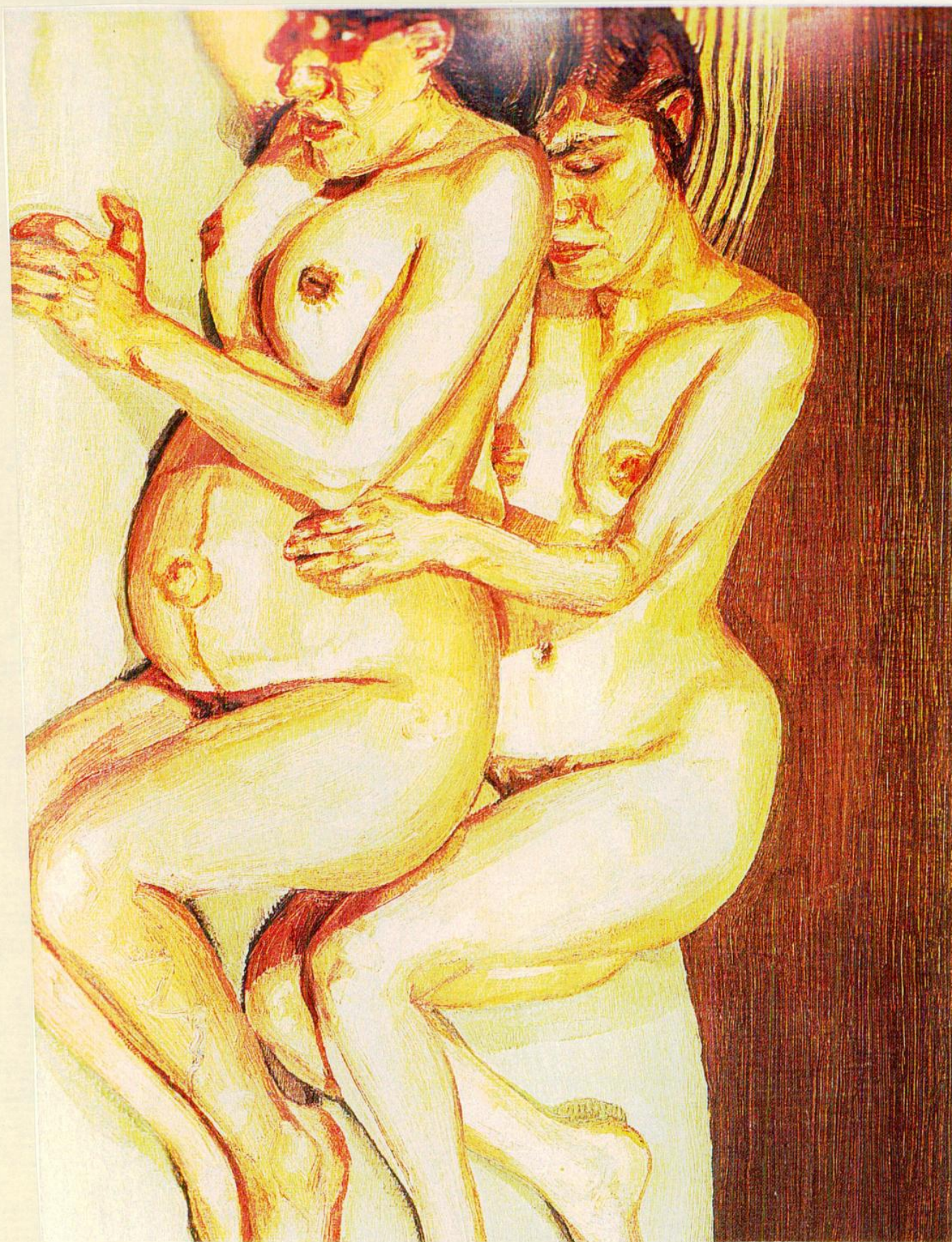
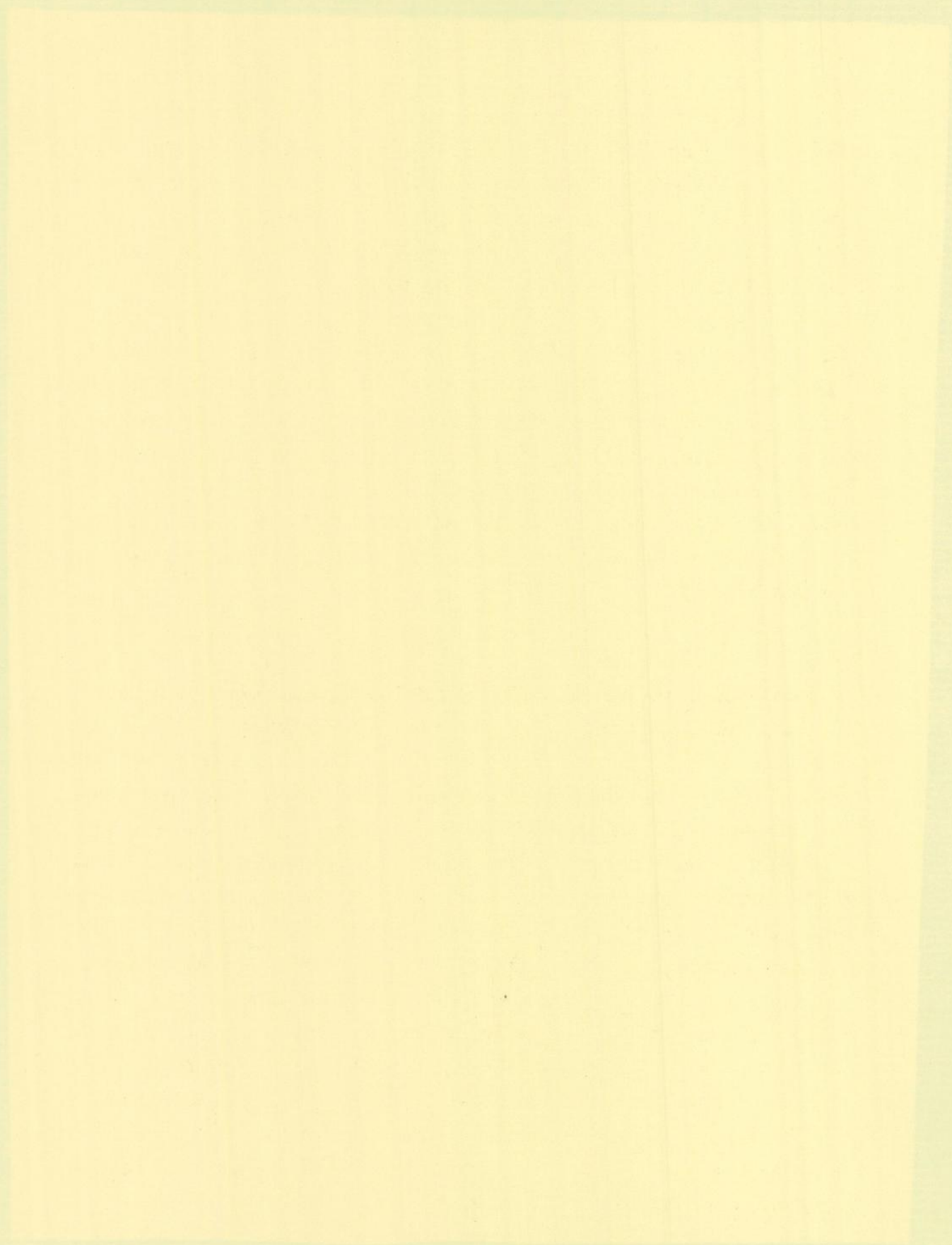


Fig 3. *Annie and Alice* 1975



rendered is every known or revealed, its basically left to the imagination of the viewer, the way he or she chooses to read the image. Melodramatic examples of these analogies are the rat in *Naked Man with Rat*, the dog in *Girl with a White Dog* (Fig.4) and the egg in *Naked Girl with Egg* (Fig.2). In *Rose* there is the old sandal subtly tossed under the edge of the sofa. It is a man's shoe, probably Freud's, a little reminder of the artist's presence even though he isn't rendered in the image.

Names are very rarely used but in this case he has titled the painting *Rose*. The fact that he rarely uses names as identities for the women suggests that he wants to hold onto this privacy and intimacy which is held by the model and painter relationship. Lucian Freud is very concerned with getting as close as possible to people as individuals, and what may seem to be a loss of dignity to the ordinary viewer can be a precondition for his regard and for his respect.

The images which stayed in Freud's mind were the things that disturbed him. To him soothing images had much less quality. All of his naked portraits are charged with emotion and a deep personal feeling for the sitters, Freud couldn't have felt so compelled to paint them in this manner otherwise. He approaches the human body and depicts it in a rather strange and forceful way. He chooses to depict his female subjects in a particularly erotic manner but at the same time he conveys the vulnerability and potency of the individual he paints. His results are very effective, simple, almost silent but at the same time rather grand, so much so that they can be quite disturbing for some viewers. Lucian Freud's work is by no means censored, his paintings are not what would be considered pretty museum pictures, they are not even flattering. What he seems to have done though is bring a man's reactions and impulses towards human flesh to his paintings without diluting the images, and he uses the female body as a vehicle for his own private expression.

Lucian Freud is known to have a love for animals. It is evident from looking at his early works that there is an impression of man



Fig 4. *Girl with a white dog* 1950/51

Handwritten text in a large, cursive script, likely a letter or a page from a manuscript. The text is written on a light-colored, aged paper with a faint grid pattern. The handwriting is dense and fills most of the page.

Handwritten text in a smaller, cursive script, possibly a signature or a short note. It is located below the main body of text.

rendered is every known or revealed, its basically left to the imagination of the viewer, the way he or she chooses to read the image. Melodramatic examples of these analogies are the rat in *Naked Man with Rat*, the dog in *Girl with a White Dog* (Fig.4) and the egg in *Naked Girl with Egg* (Fig.2). In *Rose* there is the old sandal subtly tossed under the edge of the sofa. It is a man's shoe, probably Freud's, a little reminder of the artist's presence even though he isn't rendered in the image.

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Lucian Freud is known to have a love for animals. It is evident from looking at his early works that there is an impression of man

and animal together, such as birds, horses and dogs - from his very first sandstone carving of a *Three-legged Horse and Girl with a white dog* (Fig.4) to *Naked man with Rat* (Fig.12) painted over thirty years later. This could be the connection between his love for animals and subtle animalistic qualities in his naked portraits where the bony bodies of the females quite often resemble hurt and injured animals. Freud feels shock at the human body because he knows and has seen what it is capable of - illness, death, ageing, wrinkling and deterioration. He wants to express these emotions in images which in turn evoke feelings of shock and disturbance. There is definitely no elements of the traditional painted nude or icon in Freud's representations of the body. He subjects himself to what he is seeing, staring intensely he registers in paint what he is seeing, staring intensely he registers in paint what he is viewing and the only thing to effect that view is the actual shock he experiences through seeing.

The images Freud paints, the poses the bodies resume for him are so revealing that they almost suggest medical examination. They are there to be exposed and seen and are never coyly covered or draped in any way. Lucian Freud's work could be characterised by Nead's comment;

"The obscene body is the body without borders or containment and obscenity is representation that moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness" (Nead, 1992, p. 2)

His portraits definitely do not hold back anything and do surely arouse emotions and feelings within the viewer, be they positive or negative, these images are moving.

Here, in Freud's depiction of *Rose* the unclothed female body is taken to symbolise sexual temptation. There is no question as to whether *Rose* is an erotic image, and that the naked female body, especially the way Freud depicts it, is very much a symbol of sexuality. Strangely enough, as disturbing and compelling as Freud's paintings are, they are generally accepted as are most

female nudes. The 'nude' is synonymous with female nude and more often than not regarded as a female state and equated with femininity. It's odd how the image of a naked man can still today provoke censorship and outrage and reactions which are much stronger than those towards images of women.

This label of 'erotic' describes an awful lot of Freud's work which represents aestheticised sexual images, just like *Rose*. However, within twentieth century art this idea is under threat as the female body is being exploited more and more explicitly and risks loosing its respectability as an art form, and in extreme cases spilling out into the pornographic. "An erotic work is one which invites the reader to recreate in imagination the first person point of view of someone party to an erotic encounter" ² (Read, 1992, p. 104).

As this quote states, eroticism involves identifying with the human relations and emotions being depicted, just as Lucian Freud forces us to look, examine and explore even closer the subjects of interest.

There is more than the one 'sexual' eroticism evident in Freud's representation of *Rose*. There is the visual eroticism of colour; the rich thick fleshy tones of the flesh and the combination of colours used all over the body which stand out against the dull and drab backgrounds of the artist's studio. There is also an eroticism of texture, the thickly and vigorously covered tactile surface which seems so inviting to the touch. The areas of thick pigment swirl and the broad brushstrokes create the bodies and their environments. It could be described as an eroticism of desire, the tactile richness of the painted body itself which seems to have a feel of the painter's working and reworking hands. *Rose*, the artists subject, is inert and distant from the viewer. Freud, the artist and creator controls the brushes and colours and so produces this beautiful pictorial image. This picture isn't by any

² . Quoted from Roger Scruton in *Sexual Desire : A Philosophical Investigation*
Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, (p.139).

means a mirror, it is not merely a reflection but rather a space onto which the artist can make a transformation into the signs and images of painting. Skilled at his art and sexually dominant, Freud vigorously renders his subject *Rose*. He is the physical maker of her image and she is not only the object of his gaze but also the result of his contemplation.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century art, right through to the twentieth century representations, the female nude has appeared in many guises and positions from 'Venus' and 'Sleeping Nymph' to 'Virgin' and 'Prostitute'. In many representations the females would have been frequently asleep or unconcerned with mortal things, and as such allow the undisturbed and voyeuristic enjoyment of the female's body. This is a very common element in the work of Lucian Freud. *Rose* is not asleep but the same idea applies. Her eyes are closed, hidden from view, her head is slightly tilted to divert her gaze and she does not have to meet the stare of the viewer. The subject cannot look at us, but we are looking intently at her, Freud makes us feel like voyeurs or peepers. It almost seems as if he wanted to depict a woman who didn't know she was being looked at, an image as one would see through a keyhole or behind a locked door.

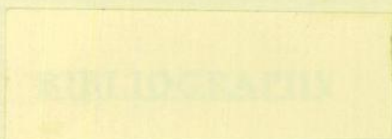
Freud is trying to create a feeling of sensual abandonment, of sexual fulfilment and to show the female's shamelessness by the way her body is displayed. Such a technique renders the woman anonymous, denying her, her own individuality and more or less reducing her body to a typical female nude.

The silence and stillness which is imposed by the long sittings have turned the woman's gaze inwards. This gives the impression, and could explain why so many of his female subjects and not just *Rose* appear so utterly abandoned and alone even though we are made aware of the artist's presence. Although there is nobody else present in the picture with *Rose*, Freud's work still seems to be haunted by a ghost-like presence of someone invisible, watching - excluded. Nonetheless, *Rose* is depicted alone, solitary, unclothed and unprotected, open and vulnerable. Even so, *Rose* in

her own right seems to be strong, she doesn't seem to be a victim as the rest of his nudes tend to be. *Rose* has an air of ambivalence, she isn't shown in a tender or deeply loving manner nor in a totally victimised, grotesque way. The majority of Lucian Freud's naked bodies tend to be not only the source of their pain and discomfort, while *Rose* on the other hand suggests that the female's body has also been the source of her pleasure.

Generally speaking, images of women are more likely to be taken as objects to be desired. Nearly all nude paintings, particularly Lucian Freud's can be considered erotic and very suitable for male voyeurism.

Freud controls, like a master his attractive subject and his medium. He was adamant that whatever his subject and media he would use it with the utmost control and mastery. The traditional idea of the female nude as an idealised art form is not quite applicable to Lucian Freud. As far as Lucian Freud is concerned his image of *Rose* and other naked studies are not just visual fantasies of other human beings fabricated from memory through a process of additions and subtractions. For him they are just as physical and living as the breathing flesh modelled in front of his eyes. Because deep down in Freud's idea of 'nakedness' there is the notion of exposing and revealing, the naked body can be seen as a medium through which he can relate personal ideas regarding himself, desire, emotions, insecurities and elements of his own existence which are important and relevant to his life.



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CHAPTER 2:
NAKED GIRL (1966),
NAKED GIRL ASLEEP I (1967), NAKED
GIRL ASLEEP II (1968)

Naked Girl (1966), Naked Girl Asleep I (1967), Naked Girl Asleep II (1968)

This chapter will discuss three paintings, the subject of which is the same model. The first painting was executed in 1966, *Naked Girl* (fig. 6), *Naked Girl Asleep I* in 1967 (fig. 7) and *Naked Girl Asleep II* in 1968 (fig. 8). These particular images were painted in a sequential order, and are related to each other.

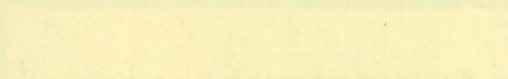
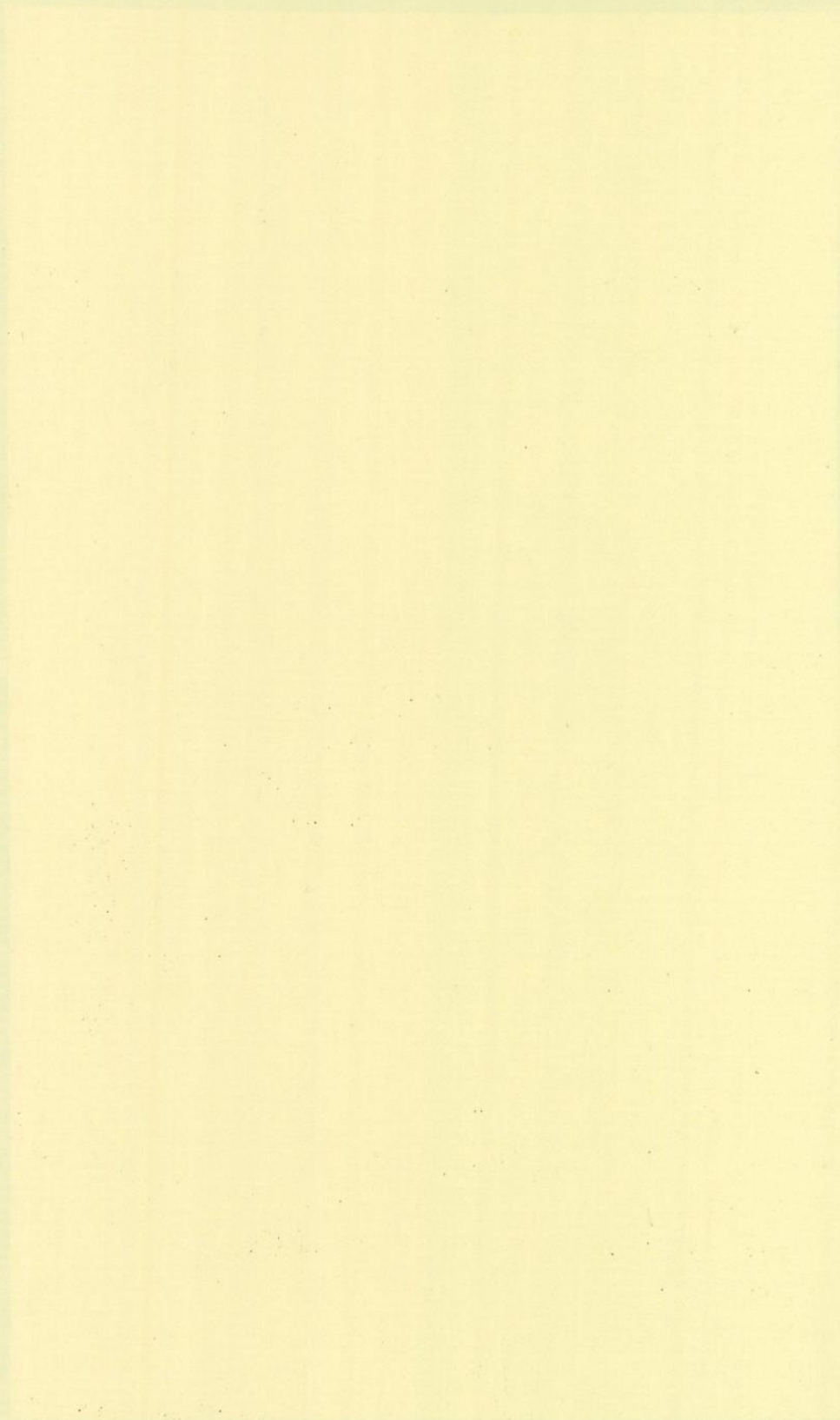
This is the only model Freud has ever painted in a series of images. If one was curious about the women Lucian Freud paints, one could surmise something from the number of times he has actually painted them.

As the titles suggest, they are all representations of a naked woman. I have chosen to discuss these images because they are typical examples of Lucian Freud's naked females, and the idea I will be focussing on is the artist's depiction of passivity, vulnerability and submission in these females. I will be contrasting these paintings with the representations of men which are explored in the following chapter. The male and female representations are being discussed separately, but will emphasize and make clear the huge difference of style of representation used by Lucian Freud. The vast majority of Freud's female portraits are of naked subjects, except the works done of his mother, or if a painting is specifically commissioned. Up until the early eighties, the males were always fully clothed, with the exception of *Naked Man with Rat*, which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

Speaking about the representations within Lucian Freud's work is quite a difficult thing to do, especially as ambivalence is an intrinsic subtext to all of his work. Therefore it is extremely awkward to put specific meanings onto his work, and usually he leaves it open to numerous interpretations anyway. In such a situation, issues raised within these interpretations can be problematic, but a viewer has no other recourse but to state what one knows, and the interpretations read from the images. Evidently from Freud's work, there is no padding and no clear



Fig 5. *Dead Monkey* 1944



narrative; the paintings are unfurnished in every way, and we as viewers are given no concrete information about the work.

By analysing these three images of the *Naked Girl*, I hope to make my point about male dominance and culture, and the typically attributed female traits of passivity and vulnerability, elements within Lucian Freud's work which could be connected to patriarchy. These elements are so subtle that they almost go unnoticed. "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (Berger, 1972, p.47).

In all three of these paintings Freud exploits the women's nakedness to emphasise their vulnerability and powerlessness. The notion of saleability and sexual possessiveness are bound into these images also. Females occupy a particular position within a patriarchal society, a relation of inequality to its structures of power. Art is one of the cultural and ideological practices which constitute the discourse of a social system and its mechanisms of power. The power of one particular group over another is sustained on many different levels, such as educational, economic and political, but these relations of power are represented and reproduced in images from certain points of view, that of the artist or creator.

The images portrayed of *Naked Girl* and *Naked Girl Asleep I* and *II* definitely make visual many of the traditional patriarchal ideas and qualities attributed to women. The implications of passivity, vulnerability, abandonment and containment are common to all three images. There are expressions of pain and anxiety not only displayed on the *Naked Girl*'s face, but also in her bony and scrawny, weak body. Something which seems to run through all these paintings is Lucian Freud's taste for, and representation of, the pathetic. He appears to like images which evoke feelings of pity and disturbance in viewers. Very often in Freud's paintings there is a fine line separating the pathetic from the grotesque in his work. This ambivalent and emotional element runs right through, from his very early studies of dead animals (fig. 5) and

ill and disturbed children, through to his mature work of the naked body.

The female body, particularly when naked, has always been identified as a sign for male creativity. Lucian Freud's females are certainly depicted as passive objects which could be taken to symbolize sexual desire. He, as the male artist, has total control over the female's body and its depiction. Through the use of his imagery and his vigorous painting style, he asserts the virile, uninhibited sexual appetite of the male; hence, his subjects appear as passive, powerless and sexually subjugated women. Simply by portraying the female in this manner, Freud is producing images which show visibly his claim as a sexually dominating presence, even though he, as creator of the image, does not physically appear in it.

The sex of the artist is relevant, and does matter. It conditions the way art is seen, the meanings that can be taken from it, and effects the manner in which it is discussed and analysed.

As cultural commodities, oil paintings have been relished by critics and art historians, and the practice of applying paint to canvas has been charged with sexual connotations. Light caresses form, shapes become voluptuous, colour is sensuous, and the paint itself is luxuriously physical.¹ (Nead, 1992, p.46).

This statement alone supports the stereotype of the dominant male artist being active, productive and creator in control - a man whose sexuality is channelled through the paint brush and who satisfied these urges and emotions by expressing himself through his work. The following quote emphasises the analogy quite explicitly. It was taken from a statement made in 1915 by Kandinsky, in which he vividly describes the act of painting as a rape scene, a violation of the female/canvas which he then compares to the subordination of a subject by a forceful colonist.

End Notes: 1. Originally quoted by Michael Jacobs in *Nude Painting*, Oxford: Phaidon, 1979.

Thus I learned to battle with the canvas, to come to know it as a being resisting my wish (dream) and to bend it forcibly to this wish. At first it stands there like a pure chaste virgin.....and then comes the wilful brush which first here, then there, gradually conquers it with all the energy peculiar to it, like a European colonist.² (Nead, 1992, p.56).

This idea is not always so powerfully conveyed, but it can also be witnessed much more subtly in the language of modern art criticism, in which vigour, force, thrust and, above all, mastery are praised. Thus, the surface texture and treatment of a painting, which is an intrinsic quality to the painting style of Lucian Freud, is charged with significance. The marks on his canvas are visible evidence of the actively physical process of producing art, and are also signs of his masculine virility. In a Patriarchal culture the female is defined by those who subordinate her; when speaking about visual images it is usually the successful male artists, photographers, and film directors who produce these types of popular images.

Lucian Freud has an endless fascination with recording female bodies deprived of any protection or disguise which would link the female with an active existence within society, outside of the realm of the artist's studio. The image of *Naked Girl* and *Naked Girl Asleep I and II* reproduce on an ideological level of art the relations of power between men and women. The female is present as the image, but with specific connotations of body and nature - that is as passive, available, possessable, powerless. The male, Freud the artist, is absent from the image in a physical sense, but we are always aware that it is his view, his position of dominance, which the paintings signify.

In oil painting, the female nude parallels the effects of the feminine stereotype in art historical discourse. Both confirm male dominance. As a nude the female is body, nature, ideal as opposed

Footnote: 2. As quoted by Max Kozloff in *The Authoritarian Personality in Modern Art*, Art Forum, May 1974, p.46.

to male culture, which is represented by the very act of transforming the female subject, nature, into the forms and colour of a cultural object, a work of art, a painting.

Naked Girl 1966 :

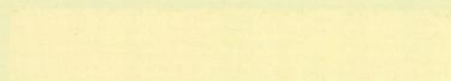
The representation titled *Naked Girl* (fig. 6) was the first of these paintings to be executed. This has to be one of Freud's more sensual paintings. The girl's body appears to be treated more tenderly than *Rose's*, for example. Where *Rose* was portrayed as a well formed, strong bodied young woman, this *Naked Girl* is shown in the opposite way. She appears gentle and fragile. She is a slender, almost bony blonde girl, with pursed lips. Freud has chosen to depict her lying lengthways, and has situated her in the centre of the canvas. The young woman is lying lifelessly on a creased white sheet with her bare and exposed body resting motionlessly and unprotected. The image has been cut just below the girl's knees. This draws attention to the two main areas of focus, her groin and her flushed face. One's eyes are drawn to the pretty features of her face and down to her groin, then back up along her torso to meet her face again. It almost feels like eyeing the girl's whole body up and down before a comment or opinion is made.

The young woman is posed facing the viewer, but their eyes never meet directly. An impression of deep thought or contemplation is given, enhanced by the dreamy look in her eyes. This individual has been made a sight. Her nakedness, which renders her powerless, is being displayed publicly within the context of 'art'; that is, if in any other situation we were to look at this girl in this manner, we would be invading her privacy, compelled to glance away, maybe even feel like a peeping-tom. However, I do not think that anyone could look at this painting and not feel like an archetypal voyeur.

Freud has successfully expressed the sheer power of this woman's raw nakedness, while at the same time stripping her of her own power and rendering her vulnerable and powerless. The girl is anonymous; we know nothing of her life or existence beyond the



Fig 6. *Naked girl* 1966



four walls she is contained within. Absolutely nothing about her suggests that she exists as a social being. She is portrayed without any personal possessions or objects. Even her environment is stark and bare, containing no furniture, nothing which could suggest that she belongs to the space she is inhabiting. She is shown in the artist's studio. We know that much from the usual props such as the creased white sheet and the bleak bare walls. The girl is confined to the domain of the artist. As far as any voyeur can see she is totally passive and subjugated, and does not even have a function beyond exposing and revealing herself for the purposes of the male artist. All of Lucian Freud's female portraits are done without any social day to day attachments. They have no history to tell, and only an ambiguous story depending on the imagination and interpretations of the viewers. These three paintings are bare in every respect, except full of life - inner life.

It is arguable that any image of a human body has many attributes which really depend on what the viewer reads into them, and what the creator of the images intended. Take Freud's *Naked Girl*, many viewers could see beauty where others could see ugliness. One could visualise an object or body of desire where another could interpret sexual exploitation. *Naked Girl* is an image which has an ambiguous duality to its interpretation. Here her body can be seen either through the eyes of a lover or a doctor. One will never really know which reading is being implied by Freud. She appears as a vulnerable piece of human flesh and blood, weary and resigned, with absolutely no self-consciousness.

The manner in which the girl is limply and lifelessly lying conjures up images of illness and sick-beds. The flat and clinical surface the girl is displayed on could quite easily be an examination table. There is an expression of apprehension in the girl's face and the surrendering gesture of her arms. The sense of mortality expressed in all of Freud's paintings is subtly played out in *Naked Girl*. How often the bed seems like a death bed or examination table. With Lucian Freud, mortality is connected with a shame of the body. For example, his earlier works are full of

images of dead animals (see fig. 8), and his nudes very often lie in poses reminiscent of the terminally ill. The manner and times in which Freud executes these paintings seem almost like an all night vigil. His painting sessions stretch right through the night and on into the early hours of the morning. There is in many of Freud's works a death bed fascination, as in *Naked Girl*. This image is visually powerful. Freud has managed to evoke many reactions ranging from shock and horror to disgust and praise. One still cannot ignore the beautiful way in which Lucian Freud has rendered the gleaming and glowing flesh. He is so preoccupied with seeing and recording the flesh, skin and bone of the body, that he seems almost indifferent to the line and shape of it - he lets his brush model the paint along and around the forms, adding volume. Freud looks intensively skin deep, exploring and investigating the *Naked Girl*'s lumps and bumps, bone structure, and the colouring and stretching of her flesh over her rib cage and hips. Freud has moulded and modelled in paint the almost pulsating curves and forms of this girl to represent the sexuality and sensuousness of the flesh and her femininity.

As can be seen from *Naked Girl*, it is quite often difficult making the distinction between a sleeping, peaceful, resting nude and a naked, ill or disturbed person. There is definitely something gaunt and sickly about the body of this girl though this painting shows the tension and suspense of the night, as well as the abandonment.

Lucian Freud has actually said that the poses he paints the models in are mutually agreed on before he begins work on a canvas, and that the positions resumed are natural and comfortable to the models. In reality, the poses of the women are, in fact, rather unorthodox. They stretch and splay themselves like cats in front of a fire, only without the sense of comfort. Therefore, some of the positions rendered suggest that this is absolute nonsense. Why is it then that his female subjects choose to be unclothed, lying passively, reclining, or splayed in awkward and uncomfortable positions? On the other hand, when the males are being depicted, they seem to choose to be seated, reclining lazily, and their poses

do not seem half as uncomfortable or revealing. The clothed figures are interpreted to be males connected with society and culture, purely because they are wearing clothes and seated upright.

The tradition of depicting the woman as lying passively, standing motionlessly, or as a reclining nude, a mother and child, chaste virgin, etc. actually do make us aware as viewers of such images as being the visual fantasies and ideologies of the artist, and the manner in which they confine and contain the female body. No matter what type of interpretations, social or cultural meanings or symbolisms can be attached to the 'nude' painting, feminists have and will always, claim that female subordination in such a manner is one of the meanings applied to the nude - the painted naked female.

The interesting thing about Lucian Freud's work of the the nude is that he seems to take on and use many of the traditional roles and traits applied to women by artists hundreds of years ago. The passive reclining female, the erotic display of the body, the diverted gaze of the model - these are all characteristic of the 'traditional nude' in oil paintings. The facial expressions and the awkward poses emphasise the subject's physical reactions to the interrogative stare of Lucian Freud's eye. The difference between the male and female nude has always been significant, and the fact that Freud represents these differently shows how the male naked body and the female naked body have always been, and still are treated separately, and this only works to emphasise the crucially differing cultural and symbolic meanings each of them carry.

In all of Lucian Freud's naked portraits the female subjects have been depicted in such a way, that they have become the object of his art, while the male has come to represent the more cultured and social aspect of the human being. Freud's depictions of the female, particularly the three paintings discussed within this chapter, do involve a certain amount of objectification. They could be seen as visual evidence of the painter's very own desire to

control female sexuality. Once the male manages to control the sexuality of the woman he can then enjoy her body, use it in whatever manner he wishes, and thus begin to use her body as the vehicle for his own personal expression. It is quite clear that male artists tend to enforce all the qualities men fear in themselves and consider effeminate, such as emotion, passivity, inactivity, helplessness and vulnerability, onto the female body. By attributing these characteristics to women, the artist and the male voyeur can then control them, and as a result of this there is no need to fear the sexuality of women. They have been successfully controlled, contained, one could also say dominated. Lynda Nead has claimed that ,

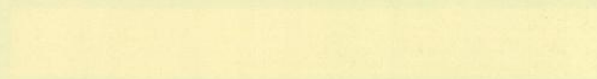
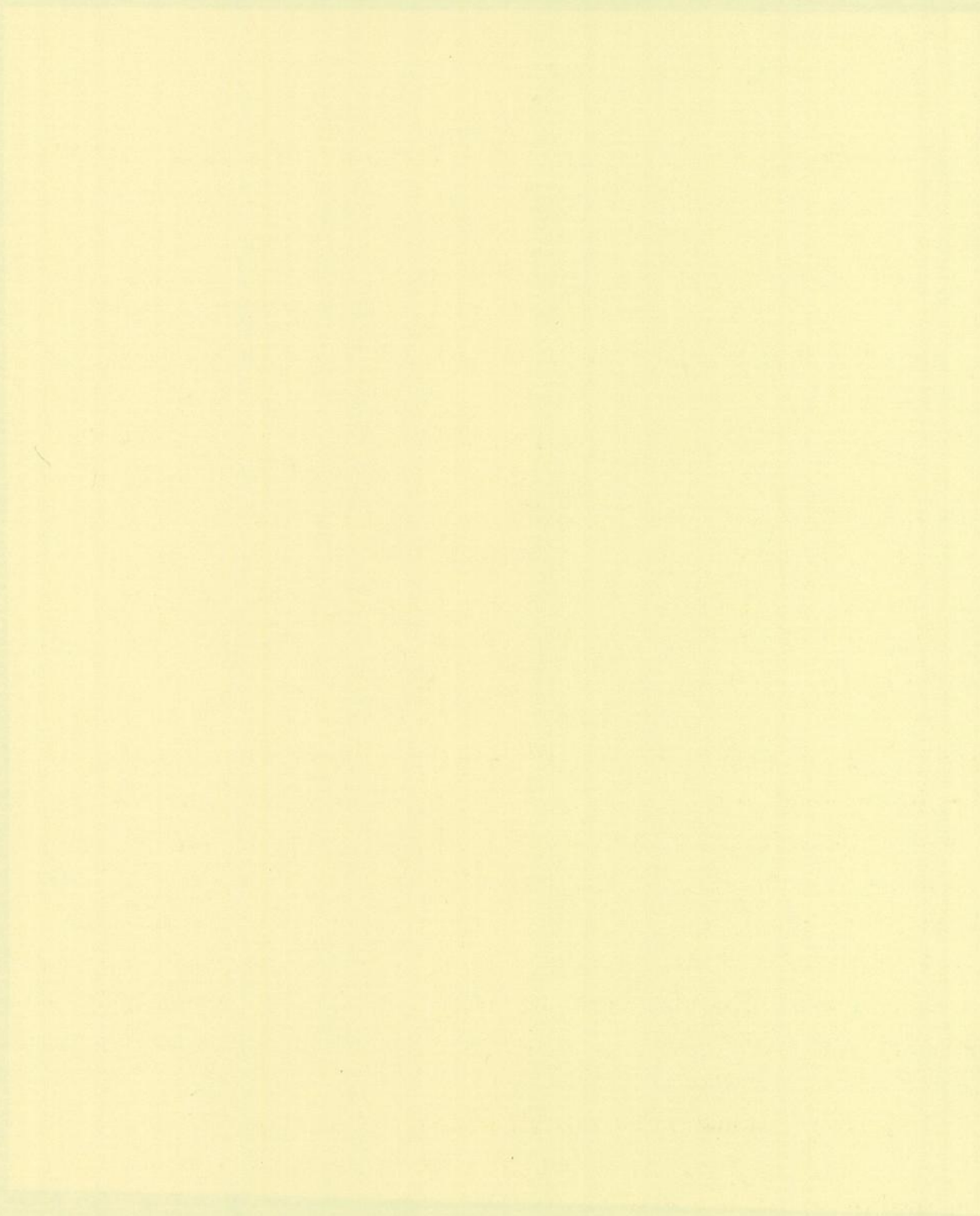
One of the main goals of the female nude has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body. The forms, conventions and poses of art have worked metaphysically to shore up the female body. (Nead, 1992, p.6).

Naked Girl Asleep 1 (1967) and Naked Girl Asleep 11 (1968) :

In *Naked Girl Asleep I* (fig. 6) and *II* (fig. 7) the model's whole body fills the canvases. She is contained within the frame. She is depicted in a very awkward and uncomfortable pose, pivoted on her pelvis. She appears to be lying in pain on the old creased sheet spread on the floor. Scrawny and exhausted, she appears to be writhing in agony, the pain and discomfort expressed in her facial expression and body gestures. Of course, we will never know for certain if this girl was in pain really, so the viewer will just have to interpret the image personally. As I said earlier, this is the same girl who lies alone, isolated, abandoned and unhappy in *Naked Girl* (fig. 6). In all three images Freud stares down on the naked female sprawled on the floor, almost from a Godlike position. The impression these paintings give at first glimpse is a rather disturbing image of a trapped animal which has been cornered. Somehow the subject is now in a position in which she is not in control of. It confines her to a passive, abandoned position, which gives an edge to the feeling of dominance in the viewer's gaze. Both artist and viewer are staring down on the girl. She is



Fig 7. *Naked girl asleep I* 1967



being controlled, almost contained and confined to that corner, being suppressed by our stare.

The impression one gets from these two paintings, as with many others by Lucian Freud, is the notion of isolation, and the anxiety one feels as a result of loneliness. He conveys this to great effect in the face of *Naked Girl*. The whole concept of isolation for Freud does not just involve a solitary person. He could be attempting to make a personal statement, to convey his emotions through a physical, visual image. Isolation can be the ironic price of freedom, the artistic freedom of expression which he has and enjoys as a painter, separate, and so individual, when compared to most of society. Therefore, the freer he is the more alone and separated he could be also. This sense of isolation and separation can also be witnessed in his cityscapes, and still-lives, but for some reason it seems to be much more vivid and emphasised in his paintings of *Naked Girl Asleep I and II*.

Freud has painted these images in such a way, and conveying an eerie atmosphere, which emphasises the strangeness of the female, that is, whatever this strangeness means to him. Freud's response to the naked human body seems quite complex in that one never really knows why he is attracted to particular bodies, and if his often brutal and uncensored paintings are some kind of a reaction to what he has just seen. Quite often Freud tries to convey the innocence and intensity of the first look, but at the same time he also seems to linger on the squeamish element. This is very evident in *Naked Girl Asleep I and II* (fig. 6 and 7). The overall impression one gets from these paintings, and this seems to be what Freud is attempting to express, is a feeling of shock, embarrassment, and even sympathy towards the lifeless, scrawny body of the sleeping girl.

Created around the sleeping girl is a very strong atmosphere. Probably the artist's most effective technique is his use of strong electric lighting on the subjects. This type of lighting used is so strong and artificial that it cannot be distinguished between night or daylight. It always appears still and frozen in time, an element



Fig 8. *Naked girl asleep II* 1968

of his work which causes a disturbing impression. It is a really powerful effect. It seems to emphasise the tones of the skin and enhances the contours of the body. Overall, this is quite an effective technique, and integral to his style of life-painting. The manner in which the light shines directly onto the sitters can also conjure up the image of an interrogation, with the strong light shining straight into their faces, therefore causing the model to cover her eyes for protection. Very often there is just the impression that these women are put under the spotlight, as if they are being viewed under a microscope.

Freud does not admit to, or take any responsibility for, the interpretations which can be read into his paintings. He subtly plants these little analogies and suggestions there for the viewer to come to their conclusion. However, Freud still appears to be using these images as a means of recording and relating his own feelings and ideas. Here in these paintings, we see how enchanted he is by the human female form in his attempt to record the reality of its existence. As a result of this, the images he paints are those with elements of pain, anguish, insecurity, isolation and abandonment. He has a brilliant knack of evoking pity and emotion in his viewers, while concealing his own. What Lucian Freud tries to show, no matter what his paintings are depictions of, or how they will be viewed, is that all of these emotions are important and integral characteristics to human existence. Aspects of these interpretations are rather subjective, but some critics and historians believe that the readings and interpretations which viewers read into paintings begin with ideas about, and admissions of our (the voyeurs) own gender and experiences.

CHAPTER 3:
THE BIG MAN (1976-77)
MAN IN A CHAIR (1983-85)
NAKED MAN WITH RAT (1977)
NAKED MAN WITH FRIEND (1978)

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MALE: The Big Man 1976/77, Man in a Chair 1983/85, Naked Man with Rat 1977 and Naked Man with Friend 1978.

Relationships between men and women and their representations in traditional oil painting are unequal and fraught with antagonism. The male body has never just simply symbolized sex or desirability as the female body has. Traditionally the bodies of men have become synonymous with specific representations of emotions and experiences, such as the classical images of 'Defeat' and 'Victory'. This point exactly is shown by reading Kenneth Clark's "The Nude", in which he titles chapters on the male nude as, 'Apollo' and 'Energy' while he categorizes female nudes under headings such as 'Venus' and 'Ecstasy'. This combination of moral, religious or political significance acts like a cultural mantle which veils nudity, while allowing erotic potential to shine through subliminately. Even modern art critics and historians are not discouraging such categorisations.

The place of the male nude in contemporary art is a surprisingly neglected topic. It has tended to be brushed to one side in favour of the female form. Even so, a good number of contemporary artists still use, and are interested in, a subject which has been one of the central themes of western art. As Freud's work demonstrates, the male image, particularly naked, can be used as a very effective vehicle for expressing intimate and personal feelings.

This chapter is concerned with exploring both types of male representation by Lucian Freud, the naked and the clothed. Freud not only paints fully dressed patrons and friends, but he has also painted a number of canvases with the naked male as his subject. It was not until the late seventies that he began painting men naked. Up until then all of his male sitters were represented fully dressed. For Freud, the male's clothing actually suggests that

these people actively take part in some type of culturally defined activity. The images that will be discussed are *The Big Man* (fig.9), *Man in a Chair* (fig.10), *Naked Man with Rat* (fig.12) and *Naked Man with Friend* (fig.13). I intend this chapter to highlight the stark contrast and difference in style with which Freud represents men and women. The first two paintings are connected with the whole idea of the dominant male, upright, strong and socially active. The later two naked portraits are dealt with in a different manner as these images would be more closely connected to Freud's female paintings as the subjects are passive, weak and natural, partly because they are naked.

Sherry Ortner, an anthropologist, has argued that men are themselves more closely identified with culture: "the means by which humanity transcends the given of natural existence, bends them to its purposes, controls them in its interests". (Duncan, 1993, p.93). The man-culture relationship tends to be one term in a dichotomy of which woman-nature is the other.

This whole idea of woman as natural and passive, and man as cultural, social and active is a theme which runs through Freud's work. The two examples of clothed males emphasize this point. All the male images Freud had painted up until *Naked Man with Rat* were of men seated upright, fully-clothed, and with an air of formality about them which is not present in any of his naked female portraits. "The dichotomy that identifies woman with nature and men with culture is one of the most ancient ideas ever devised by man, and appears with greater or lesser strength in virtually all cultures." (Duncan, 1993, p.94).

The male image acquires much of its power and meaning from the importance placed on the phallus according to Patriarchy. By phallus I do not just mean the penis, but the extensive and symbolic significance attached to it also. "The phallus represents abstract paternal power; it is almost by definition political." (Walters, 1979, p.8). Even when Freud portrays the men in a passive position, or as vulnerable, weak or ill, they are still never

depicted in a totally submissive or subordinate way in which the females are, but rather as naked idle males. It is very rare in twentieth century art to find an artist who does actually paint the naked male and depict him in a natural surround. Backdrops are usually linked to culture or society. A more commonly used technique of Freud's, if the male is clothed, is also depicting an image of a social setting, such as a view of the city through a window. In sheer contrast to these images, Freud was also fascinated by painting the female and emphasizing her closeness to nature and her biological link with it because of her procreative powers. Such examples of these works are his paintings of pregnant women, see *Alice and Annie* (fig. 3)

Freud's representations of the male are not simply portraits. They involve many more issues concerning the traditional and patriarchal ordering of the sexes. The selected male representations explored in this chapter are expressions of the varied ideas and emotions which are all aspects of contemporary life.

In Chapter two I mentioned how Freud does not pose his models but instead they both come to an agreed and mutually decided upon position. I made a point then that all of the females, strangely enough, must have chosen to lie passively, recline revealingly or else display themselves in some of the most awkward and uncomfortable positions a model could possibly assume for any length of time. In sheer contrast, now I want to show the mutually chosen poses of men, with the exception of *Naked Man with Rat* which will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The Big Man:

The Big Man was executed between the years of 1976 and 1977, the year before Freud began work on *Naked Man with Rat*. The subject whose name is not divulged is, apparently, a good friend

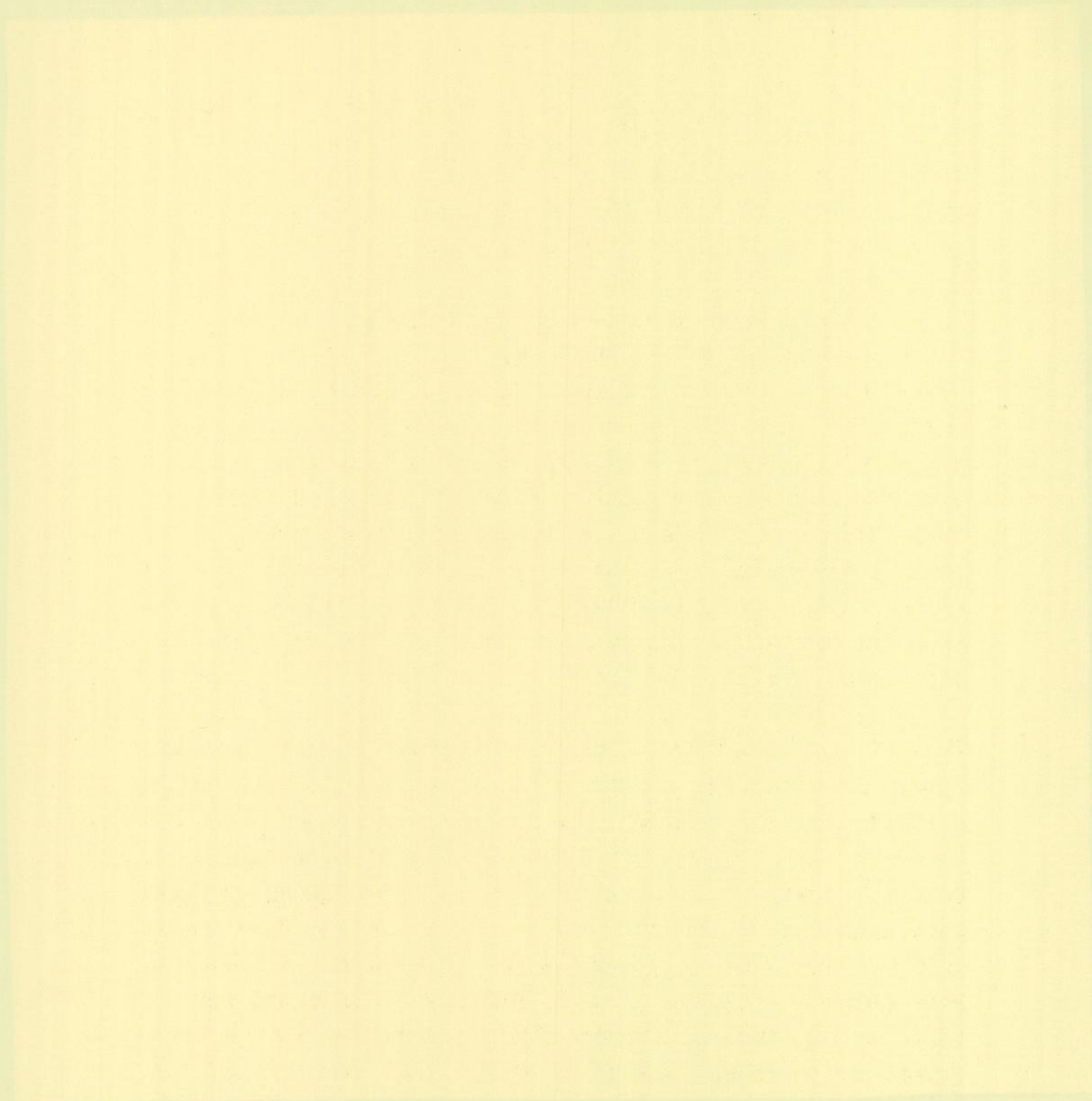
of Freud's and owns betting shops and race horses in Northern Ireland (Robertson,1984,p.78). This painting is about bigness and manhood-independence. It is an impressive image, a very profound painting. The size of the man and his large body seem quite intimidating. There appears to be an air of authority and strength about *The Big Man*, and not only in his physical appearance. Freud has painted this particular man in such a way as to create an air of formality about him ,and the composition as a whole. I think this was also achieved by the manner in which the man is dressed. The use of clothing to denote class distinction has continued from man's early desire to feel superior which led him to cover his body. (Langer,1959,p.39). *The Big Man* is respectably dressed in a black three piece suit, which is broadly rendered with large areas of colour, not particularly detailed. The pale blue shirt contrasts beautifully with the dark opaqueness of the man's suit and the lively, fleshy, opalescent quality of his face and hands. He is also wearing a plain maroon tie, adding to the formality of the composition. Freud, as usual, has rendered *The Big Man's* head beautifully, making sure it contains and conveys all the character and life of that man.

Freud believes with any of his portraits, whether naked or clothed, that the head of the subject contains just as much information and emotion as the whole body. Examine the way in which he has rendered the man's thick wide neck with so much attention given to the pinkish folds of excess flesh squeezing out over the man's shirt collar. A personality can be constructed from such descriptive details of the body. Information such as thickness of a neck, the smoothness of skin, or wrinkles of maturity and distinction, can suggest many characteristics and traits such as assertiveness, sensitivity - and thus we as viewers can deduce other qualities such as intelligence, strength and determination.

The facial features of *The Big Man*, however, still have Lucian Freud's unique, meaty, painterly quality, particularly in his reddened chubby cheeks, and around the man's jaw with his extra thick layer of flesh. There is nothing vulnerable or passive about this male, as there are in the female paintings, and the man



Fig 9. *The Big Man* 1976/77



depicted in *Naked Man with a Rat*. *The Big Man* does not lie injured, in pain, or uneasily; he has not lost any control to the artist or the voyeur. Everything about this man seems big, strong, in control and confident. The formality with which Lucian Freud has painted *The Big Man* enhances his almost monumental status.

Freud has also taken great care in rendering the fleshy quality of the man's huge shovel-like hands. He has even painted in, quite delicately, the tiny curling hairs around the man's wrist. These rather large hands are locked in a grasp around *The Big Man's* bulky waist almost as if resting on his well rounded stomach. The pose this man is depicted in is a relaxed and comfortable one. Even though the man is not looking right in the direction of the artist or the viewer, one does not get an impression of unease or discomfort about being looked at intensively. Instead, the man seems to have an air of confidence about him and is rather calm and natural looking.

One of the fundamental differences between Freud's male and female representations are the atmospheres present in the images depicted. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, there was usually a tense interrogative impression implied frequently in the female portraits, whereas these clothed males appear to have been painted in natural daylight. It is quite obvious from images such as *Naked Girl* (fig.6) and *Rose* (fig.1) that the of work had been carried out on into the night and early hours of the morning under strong electric lighting. Such impressions are not only formed by observing Freud's use of light and tone, but are also conveyed in the tense and exhausted expressions on the model's face. This cold, frozen and still atmosphere, which is a result of this technique, is not evident in any of the male portraits. As a result, images such as *The Big Man* and *Man in a Chair* are not as visually effective, much less compelling to view, and not at all disturbing.

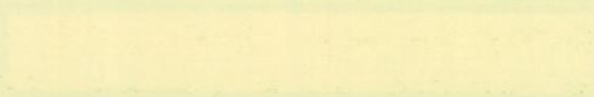
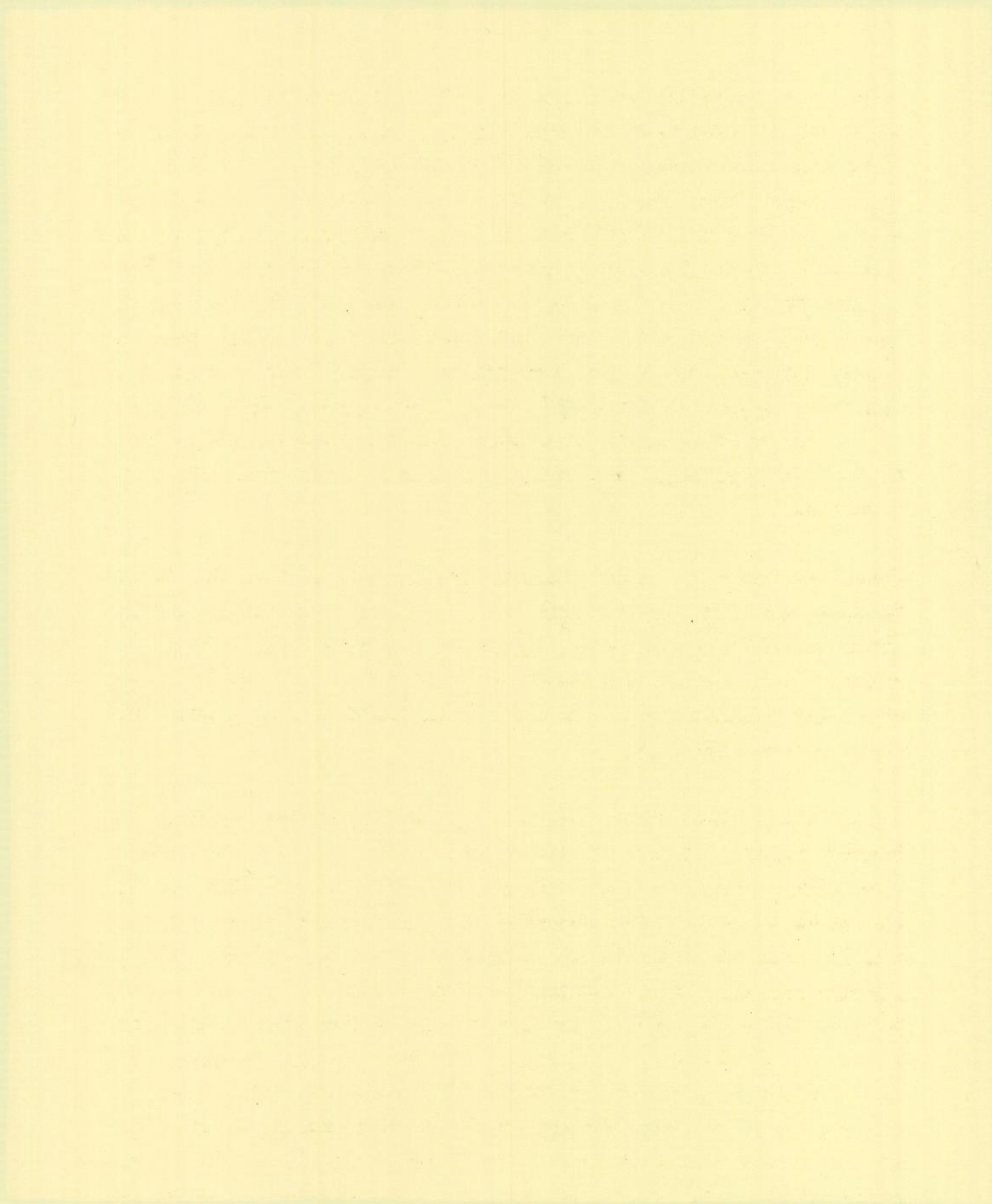
Man in a Chair:

The middle aged male in *Man in a Chair* (fig.10) is portrayed in a slightly different style when compared to the paintings of *The Big Man*, as Freud actually allows the viewer to see the man's reaction to being painted and observed by him. The expression on the man's face demonstrates how it is not only females who can feel intimidated by the intensive gaze of the artist, and shows that to conceal and protect himself from the stare, he diverts his eyes. He glances away with a pensive expression on his face, as if he were uncomfortable just knowing that he is being observed, and being aware of Freud's presence. One of the main elements in this painting is the atmosphere created by the interrogative gaze of the artist, which is reflected in the face and gestures of the subject, and makes the viewer even more aware of Freud's authoritarian presence. These feelings are generally reflected in his sitter's reactions to such observations. The position of the man's upper torso is in contrast to the tension in his rigid arms, hands and knees. It almost appears as if the man is holding himself seated with his stiff fingers. The legs look as if they could jump up and run away if it was not for his hands placed on his knees. Although this man seems slightly inhibited by the artist's presence, there is still no impression of him being totally overwhelmed by it, as there is in the female portraits. The men are still not depicted in a totally submissive and passive manner, they still hold on to an amount of control just by remaining fully clothed, if nothing else.

Dress gives away a great deal about someone's character and social position in life. The suited male has an important function within society. It implies a position held by the male within the cultural and social world, and also helps to reinforce the notion of male dignity and respectability. Having achieved superiority by covering his body (it was probably physically unattractive anyway), this male has regulated the permissible uncovering of his body - modesty. Thus, people who abide by these standards are regarded by society as superior to the ones who do not. "While the Greeks concealed their bodies with clothing, this was not done from a sense of sin, but for all the purposes of attaining superiority." (Langer, 1959, p.111).



Fig 10. *Man in a Chair* 1983/85



There is a noticeable difference in Freud's treatment of the human flesh and the man-made clothing. The suit in which *Man in a Chair* is attired in is rendered broadly and simply, whereas Freud tends to be much more attentive to the fleshy areas not concealed by clothes. More detail and time has been necessary to depict the face and hands. By simply observing *Man in a Chair*, one can witness the detail in the face, the ageing lines around the mouth, fleshy dark circles under the man's eyes, and the receding hairline which reveals the man's undulating temples. His hands are slightly exaggerated in length, long and slender. They do not appear to be the hands of a man who has had to partake in manual or physically hard work, but rather, seem soft and well manicured.

Freud has paid so much attention to the hands, that the veins beneath the skin are painted with so much realism it almost seems possible to put one's fingers on the very veins which are pumping life around this man's body, and feel his pulse. He paints his glistening skin, the ring on his wedding finger, even the shine on his fingernails.

Even though *Man in a Chair* is painted within the confines of Freud's studio, and we are given no insight into his life outside these four walls, we as viewers are still aware that he is connected to society and everyday existence simply because he is wearing clothes, the link to culture and the man made. These clothes are also what differentiates the males from the naked females. By saying this, I am not suggesting that women, or even Freud's naked females, are not social beings. On the contrary, this is the point I am trying to make. The female is, of course, an integral force in any society, but the representations she has received from Freud do not reflect this importance, but rather play on the old notion of the woman's nakedness, equating naturalness and passivity. Therefore, generally speaking, the clothed male portraits Freud produces are representations of culture and civilization. He quite clearly makes the connection between men and everyday, active existence. These men are



Fig 11. *Man in a Chair* 1989



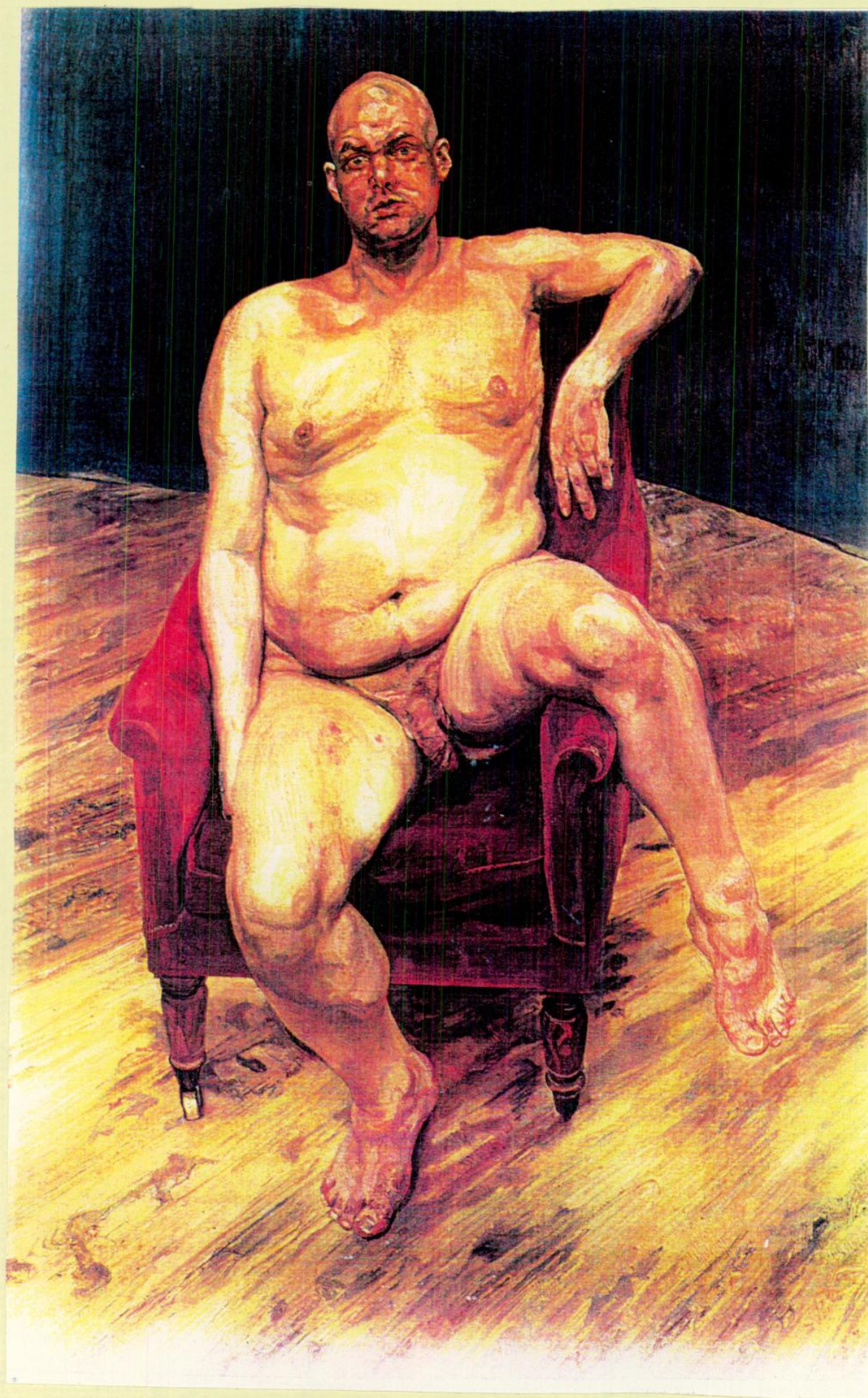
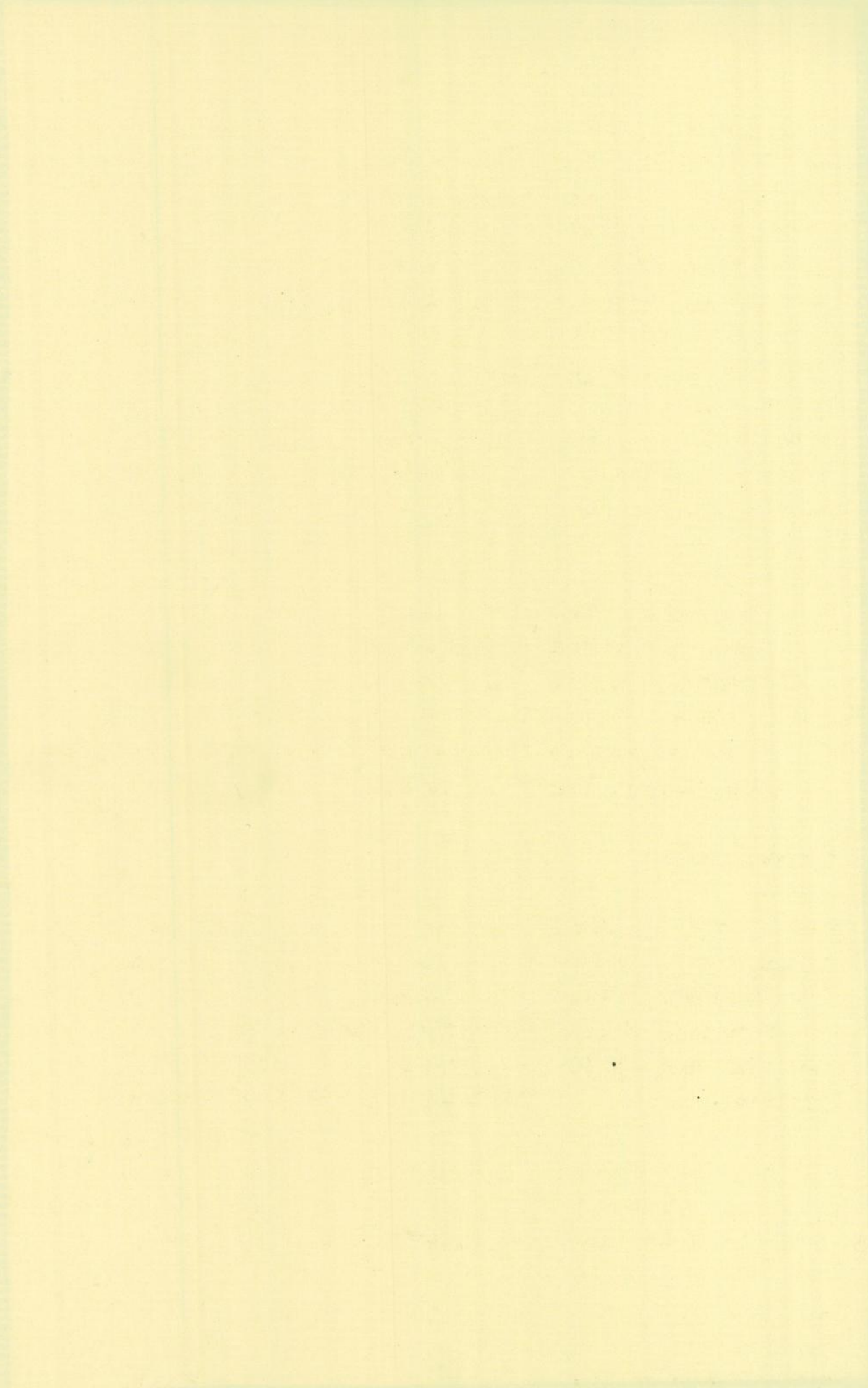


Fig 14. *Leigh Bowery* 1991



always seated upright and in a comfortable position. Both of the representations of *The Big Man* and *Man in a Chair* suggest society and socially defined activities, while Freud's naked female representations exist (in his paintings) as sensual beings or living and breathing flesh. In Freud's work, the female's social identity does not go very far beyond her availability as an object of voyeuristic desire and contemplation. As voyeurs, we witness these paintings through the eyes of the artist, and he sees through the same eyes, with the same social ideas and prejudices as many other males in society. It almost appears as if Freud has designed specific characteristics and representations for each of the sexes, enabling him to express a sense of difference between man and woman.

"The critical discourse surrounding painting and sculpture has lagged far behind that of film and photography in its analysis of the role and representation of women. Yet the question remains as to why Freud's textbook division of labour between dominant male and submissive female has gone unnoted. (Gamble in Brighton's, 1988, p.43)."

Naked Males:

Not many male artists have been able to overcome their own deep-seated alienation from their own bodies and investigate them thoroughly, free of any subjectivity. However, over the past two decades or so, Freud has actually painted several naked self-portraits, and numerous paintings of naked friends and acquaintances such as Leigh Bowery ([Fig 14] mentioned in Chapter One when interviewing Freud, [Lampert, 1993] p.24). It was not until 1977 that Freud actually began work on his first naked male portrait. It was a picture of a young red-haired man titled *Naked Man with Rat*. (Fig.12). After that, Freud began another painting of the same young man in 1978, but this image also included the young man's older male lover. Both of these paintings are very interesting, not only because of the unusual style of depiction, unusual that is to Freud's normal representation of men, but also because of the implications and connections he is

making to the young man's sexuality. In the other male (clothed) portraits there was never any question of sexuality being a main theme. In "*Naked Man with Rat*", this reference is handled very subtly by Freud, but in "*Naked Man with Friend*" the young man's naked body is entwined in the legs of his older, pyjama clad male lover" (Brighton, 1988, p.43). In contemporary art the male nude has become an increasingly more important vehicle for artists who wish to convey homosexual feelings openly, or to express their sexuality.

Naked Man with Rat and *Naked Man with Friend* could be classed as homo-erotic male nudes, in that their themes are homosexual, therefore these images could appeal to such an audience. Both of these representations are a good example of the contemporary use of the naked male as an erotic image. There are very few images of a nude male which would specifically appeal to women. Even these two images by Freud would be considered for male voyeurism.

Naked Man with Rat

Freud is making a comparison here between his female paintings and *Naked Man with Rat* (Fig.12). Simply being rendered naked and inactive is to be in a state of female powerlessness and anonymity. This painting is made to compel conviction by sight alone. The image would be one of his more disturbing paintings, and one could draw a comparison between it and *Rose* in Fig. 1. Freud renders the man in such a way that he quite explicitly plays on the young man's vulnerability (sexuality) and subtle helplessness (availability). This man is being linked with women, feminized by the attachment of female traits, his emasculation.

This is not a very traditional male nude painting, it is not at all flattering or aesthetically pleasing. As is evident from his work Freud has never shyed away from producing the images he wanted to no matter how disturbing or strong they were. Modern art boasts breaking down taboos on expressing any and every fantasy and yet this painting caused great controversy when published in the British Elle magazine. A female reader complained about it, finding it totally obscene and disgusting and unsuitable for her teenage daughter to see in this publication. Yet, it is questionable how images of naked women and half exposed girls, which can be found from cover to cover in all of these type of magazines, are purely acceptable. It could be that the female body, seems to have always been acceptable in its natural, naked state. It certainly appears to me that a fully frontal naked male is much more offensive than one of a female and that the penis is more shocking than the vagina.

Freud is a believer that painting necessitates the use of untraditional and unpredictable methods. Here the young man has assumed a lying position on that same old familiar couch. It is a very revealing pose and not particularly flattering or subtle, but anyway the man must have been comfortable or he wouldn't have chosen to be depicted this way. Freud does not abide contrived paintings, he has actually been quoted as saying "do you know there is something called picture making? I think it is often simply fatigue" (Lampert, 1993, p.24). The young man is reclining prostrately and is totally alone except for the rat which he clutches gently in his right hand. Here Freud appears to be substituting male for female in the style of representation, but it is quite clear that meanings do not shift from one gender to another automatically. This naked and vulnerable male does not have the same meaning as one of his naked females in the same pose. This painting does have one thing in common with Freud's female portraits and that is the depiction of painted flesh and blood, a body imprisoned, isolated. The whole image of Naked Man with Rat is one of subtle helplessness and vulnerability.



Fig 12. *Naked man with Rat* 1977

Freud makes an analogy between the rat's tail which lies across the man's inner thigh in a rather provocative manner. The man is holding the rat with a nearness that is permitted by trust. His knees are spread open to reveal his sex, the exposed penis seems horribly vulnerable instead of being confident and full of pride as the male symbol of virility. Freud hasn't equated or connected this man to civilisation or society, if anything this representation has cut him off bluntly from it as he is depicted in the total isolation of the artist's studio. Possibly Freud is attempting to make a point about the attitudes towards and treatment of homosexuals in society in general. They are isolated, discriminated against and victimised. This man in all of his nakedness and naturalness is lying there totally unprotected and vulnerable, abandoned. His body is lifeless, still, almost frozen in time. He lies back one hand raised up towards his face as if surrendering. The pose and expressions of Naked Man with Rat has many similarities with Naked Girl (Fig.6) discussed in chapter two.

The naked man's widely opened eyes are suggestive of his awareness of the situation and adds to the impression of hopelessness and vulnerability. The deathly stare towards the ceiling has put an almost painfully ill expression on his face emphasised by his fixed eyes and open mouth. These parts of the man's body, gaping mouth and wide eyes, are all areas vulnerable and unprotected by flesh showing his need for protection and comfort. The subject's anxiety is detectable in his face, the characteristic stare conveys feelings of defencelessness, vulnerability, vacancy and isolation. However, the viewer cannot distinguish if the look is focused on the artist or at something or someone else beyond the image as we see it. This image of the naked man makes us aware of the implication that underneath this man's exterior there is a person who is distorted, anguished and very much alone. Here, Freud has managed to create an image which encompasses the reality of human existence - this existence is characterised by the emotional and overwhelming impression of isolation, anguish, insecurity and vulnerability caused by one's own realisation that one is responsible for the creation of one's own individual nature, and as such one must endure the result

and maybe even the consequences for ones own actions and beliefs. Here in *Naked Man with Rat*, this young man could be seen as contemplating his situation, the sad and lonely expression on his face conveying how he now knows, that he is the only one responsible for who and what he is, his actions and decisions. This image is only one of Freud's which evoke emotions and pathos in the viewer. "Freud triggers our pity without declaring his own *Naked Man with Rat* for example, makes the analogy between rodent and genital with a horror that yet has room for compassion, or which, naming the grotesque, cannot choose between the two responses" (Hobhouse, 1988, p. 203). The image of this lonely naked man is very powerful and strongly related to sexuality. *Naked Man with Rat* is as compelling to see as any other Freud painting, maybe even more so, as it is a depiction of a male, not a strong, dominant confident male, but rather a weakened, unhappy and vulnerable man.

Naked Man with Friend

The final painting to be discussed in relation to Freud's representation of the male, is visual confirmation of the statement made regarding the *Naked Man with Rat*'s homosexuality as stated by Joe Shannon, "Boy with his Friend with its blunt homosexuality" (Joe Shannon, 1987, p. 26). This follow up piece to the previous painting shows the same young man, not alone and abandoned, but instead nestled up intimately against an older pyjama clad man. Freud is now showing us the connection, the personal relationship between these two men, he wants the viewer to be fully aware that are homosexual lovers in fact - and now they are both sharing a tender moment together and allowing us, the onlooker to witness it. When Lucian Freud was asked by Leigh Bowrey (who sat for him as a naked figure) in an interview, why it was that in his work all the pictures of naked men are always of gay men, he replied; "I'm drawn to women by nature and to queers because of their courage" (Lampert, 1993, p. 24)

The younger man is naked while his older lover is dressed in pyjamas. They almost appear to be tangled and entwined together, the older man's legs wrapped around the other man, evidence of an intimate relationship. Freud does not wish to hide or disguise this intimacy or the relationship. By portraying them in this position and showing how relaxed and natural they are together he emphasises just this point. Freud is attempting to explain visually to the viewer the naturalness and warmth of this relationship. The older man is the passive partner in this depiction. He lies, eyes closed, totally inactive. The intensity of the young man's isolation and pain in the first painting is being starkly contrasted now to the comfort and warmth he must feel from a loving relationship. This positivity and easiness is evident in the style with which Freud has actually painted this picture. It is painted much looser than *Naked Man with Rat*. He has used longer, broader brushstrokes especially evident in the older man's pyjamas and the couch they are both sitting on. The buttoned detail on the back of the couch has been omitted this time and painted in smooth layers of colour instead. In contrast to this Freud has paid more attention to the hands and feet of the men. Even the veins in the old man's hands showing the purpling and discolouring of old age. The hand of the young man which had held the rat previously now rests gently on his lover's ankle revealing the false drama of the first painting and substituting it with the tenderness of the men's relationship.

Unlike the image depicted in *Naked Man with Rat* the subjects seem at ease and are comfortable, they appear to have offered their private situation, without anxiety to the view of Freud, and as a result to us the viewers. This has to be one of the very few paintings the artist appears to have executed with warmth and compassion. Freud is putting forward a tender image of the male couple, expressive of affection and closeness - their bodies are entwined but not invested with lustful potency. The artist has succeeded in capturing the intimacy and closeness of this relationship. Where before the relationship being exploited was that between the artist and his models reaction to him - now, in



Fig 13. *Naked man with Friend* 1978/80

Naked Man with Friend, we as onlookers are no longer aware of anybody else's presence in the room but the two men. In contrast to the rawness of Freud's earlier portraits this one is quite silent. It is here in the passivity of the men's poses, their closed eyes and the vulnerability this conveys, that Lucian Freud is actually making comparisons between these men and his females.

This could not be any more evident than in the comparisons between the vulnerable and feminised male in *Naked Man with Rat* with the female portraits discussed earlier and then the contrast with the images of upright, clothed and culturally independent males in *The Big Man* and *Man in a Chair*.

Over the last decade or so, about the time these two paintings were executed there was beginning to be much more openness regarding homosexuality and art with a homosexual theme. Before Freud began work on *Naked Man with Rat*, he had painted naked females for almost fifty years with an obsession and vigour suggestive of a disguise and real urge to paint the male body just as obsessively. If after all he is only interested in the bodies as flesh and meat, why then should he have limited himself to the female form? There is just as much flesh and life in the male body. Could it be that now Freud is being versatile and painting representations which would appeal to a wider audience, if you like homosexual audience. He has expressed himself, explicitly at times through erotic depictions of females and their sexuality, and is now diversifying into more controversial and questionable themes. Then again, these images could always possibly be the expressions of, or the getting out of his system of personal fantasies or feelings. Freud himself had acquired homosexual tendencies, thus this choice of models, pose and interest in this kind of relationship (Robertson, 1984, p. 77). With the liberation of gays and lesbians about this time it could have meant that he now felt comfortable and confident enough to express these feelings, emotions and ideas through the male body and not have to worry about accusations of homosexuality and being ridiculed for depicting images of it in his work. "My work is purely autobiographical.... it is about myself and my surroundings, it is an

attempt at a record" he has also said that he has "portrayed his own very private world in a somewhat severe manner" (Lampert, 1993, p. 15). Even if neither of these reasons are correct, Freud could have simply seen the theme of homosexuality as an opportunity to admit all male's and his own inherent quality of gentleness passivity and all the other qualities which are defined as feminine traits.

Freud's intense observations of the human body and his raw and unflattering portrayal of it appear to many people to be the reflections of the patriarchal culture and society in which we live. The females appear to always be made objects to control. Freud's paintings whether or not intentional do actually make a distinction between male and female.

Conclusion

Freud is arguably one of the most penetrating contemporary portraitists at work. The impact of a Freud painting can be starting, the viewer might find that they are unprepared for a confrontation with a nude, not in the traditional sense but rather a naked individual.

"Nakedness" is perhaps a better word than "Objectively" for the particular quality Freud seeks. That nakedness can either be psychic or physical, and when it is the latter is literal in the extreme. Rather than paint "the nude", Freud scrutinizes people - usually but not exclusively who have been stripped of their clothes and all pretence. Neither prudery nor the desire for perfection is permitted to dictate the terms of his encounter with the model (Storr, 1988, p.134).

Freud is dedicated to the representation of the human body, and has an obsessive fascination with the figure, using it most successfully and effectively to convey his most profound feelings about human existence. An awareness of time, human frailty and mortality is shared in a lot of Freud's work.

The characteristic, unblinking stare which all of Freud's subjects possess enable him to represent them in a manner which makes it impossible for the viewer to casually look at them. The eye is compelled to see all of them right down to the smallest detail. The painter sees the flesh, skin and bones, and as a result depicts an image which is by no means sentimental. Freud's portraits never aimed to compliment or flatter the subject, but rather to strip them of all status and then present them to us in the raw flesh. Like all great portraits they tell us more about the artist than the model. Although his subjects are integral to the images rendered, our interest and curiosity lies with the artist's vision. It is in these paintings that Freud is most revealing, actually creating a tension out of the bond between relationships and his objectivity of vision.

All of the works discussed in this thesis are paintings to do with human beings, often in the most intimate sense. They are impressive examples of a very rare kind of portraiture. Freud's work is difficult to discuss, not only for the critic, but also for the painter himself. He is a man of few words when it comes to explaining his work, but believes that it can be better understood just by looking at it.

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