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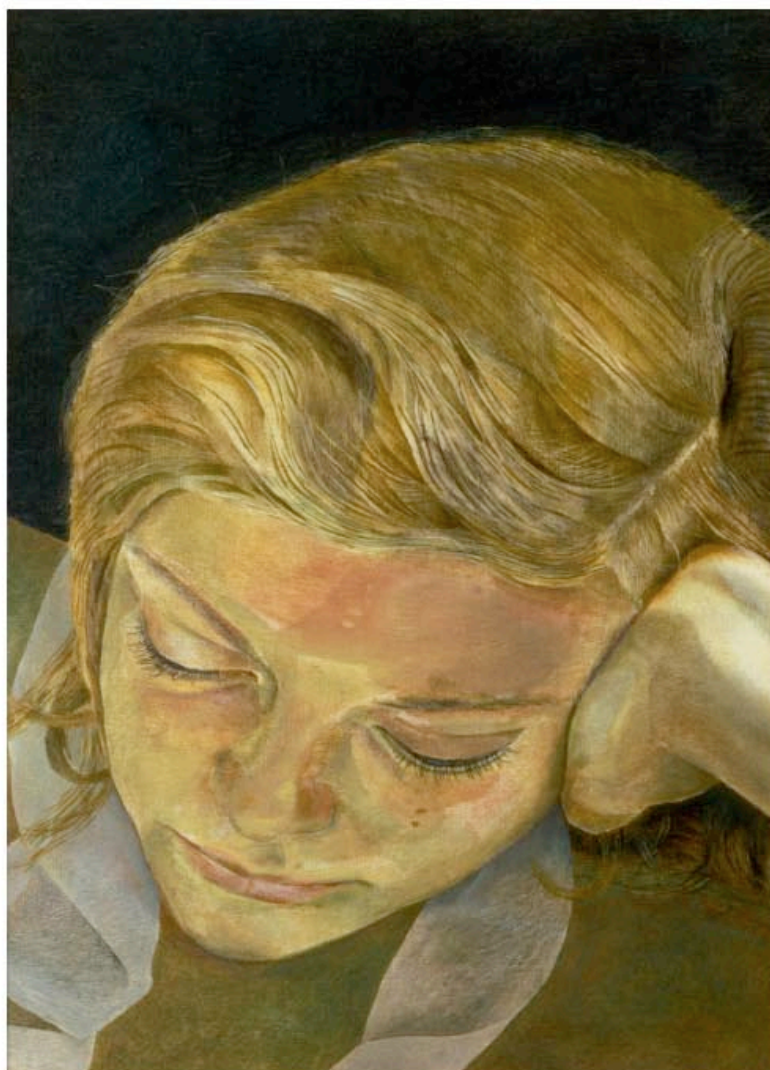


Art & Culture

GIRL: LUCIEN FREUD

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words William Davie

*Girl Reading by Lucien Freud*

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Lucien Freud is synonymous with large, commanding, uncompromising nudes. He produced paintings for over six decades, a pursuit that was his singular driving force, inextricably linked, for the most part, to his love life. *Girl*, an intimate group of paintings depicting his first wife Caroline Blackwood, to whom he was married for six years, reveals a pivotal time for the artist both personally and stylistically.

Caroline Blackwood's relationship to Freud was one of tumultuous passion, one fraught with jealousy and adultery. The eldest child of the 4th Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, and the brewery heiress Maureen Guinness, Caroline eloped to Paris in 1952 with Freud aged just 21, marrying him the following year. In *Girl Reading* (1952, above) Freud paints Caroline in a position that is sombre and strained. As Caroline holds her head looking down, her beautiful golden hair, highlighted by night-time darkness, is pushed back and tumbles down the back of her head. Her eyes are obscured as she looks below the canvas. Here, it feels as if Freud has captured Caroline at a point of unknowing. Her beauty, his obsessive focus, is caught in an intimate moment that only he would have been privy to, a fact that he guards closely, almost inviting the viewer to comment and commend him upon.

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Girl in Bed by Lucien Freud

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An interesting phenomenon uniting these paintings is that of what is not shown, but rather alluded to beyond the canvas. The result is that what is revealed within the canvas limits, harbouring a sense of extreme intimacy and privacy. In *Girl in Bed* (1952, above), Caroline's forced relaxation shows a mutual devotion. She, holding the same lounging position for as long as the painting took to create (a process that Freud was known to agonise over for considerable periods); and he, to spend hour after hour searching for the most truthful depiction of her and her life, up until this point, and their love. She looks out to the left-hand side of the canvas, as if he has caught her in a state of vulnerability. This is emphasised by her being naked, with only a thin bed sheet covering her. Her right shoulder and neckline, a soft pale pink, is accentuated by whispers of white light and the shadowed contours around her throat. The viewer's eye is drawn to this, given the context we see her in, and immediately seduced. Freud places the viewer in a similar position, flaunting her goddess-like beauty while at the same time revelling in the fact that only he has the ability to live the reality he depicts.





Girl by the Sea by Lucien Freud

Freud's previous muse Kathleen "Kitty" Epstein saw his aesthetic resemble strange, almost surreal, flatness echoing German Expressionism. During this time, she took an almost mocking stance towards the young women that Freud brought in and cast out, with near reckless abandon. Yet with Caroline this evolved. He found himself on the precipice of his realist, unadulterated depictions of people that would become his most recognisable style.

In *Girl by the Sea* (1956, above) a coming storm darkens the sky. It meets the sea below in a perfect horizontal dissection, adding to the power of its sickly, pungent green colour. In the foreground Caroline stands side on, facing the left, her head sunk down and her eyes scrunched shut. Her naked shoulders and face, despite the weather, are sun-kissed, perhaps even burnt. Freud has perfectly captured the breakdown of his marriage; his wife, his lover, his muse, all captured in a state of despair and desperation. His role as husband and saviour now abandoned as he voyeuristically looks on, silently suffering beyond the canvas, pushing Caroline into the limelight in order to vocalise visually his own pain and suffering. At the same time this also shows Freud's dedication to his medium as, despite all that occurred in his life, painting was first and only, a feat that would bring him more elation than any lover or wife ever could.

Girl is at the Ordovas gallery on Saville Row until 1 August.