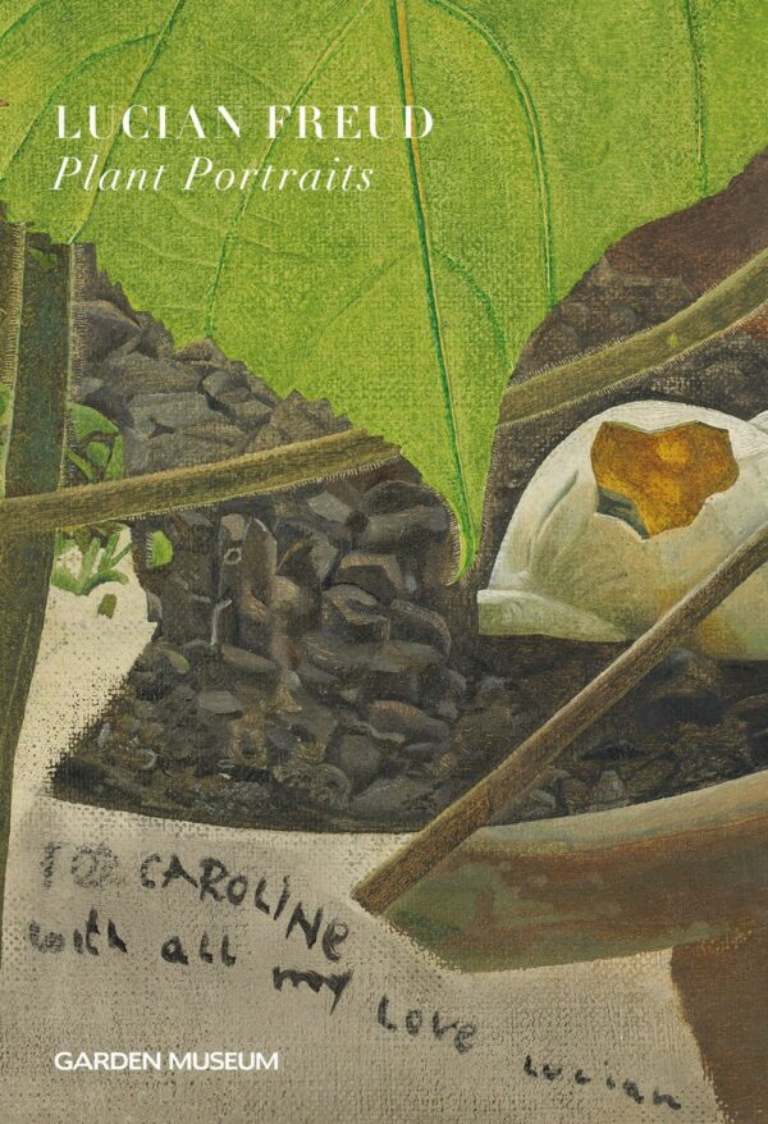
LUCIAN FREUD
Plant Portraits



GARDEN MUSEUM

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LUCIAN FREUD *Plant Portraits*

Exhibition curated Giovanni Aloi

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First published in 2022
by the Garden Museum
5 Lambeth Palace Road
London SE1 7LB
020 7401 8865

www.gardenmuseum.org.uk

The Garden Museum is a registered charity, number 1088221

ISBN: 978-1-7392-0600-0

Designed by Webb & Webb Design Limited
Printed in the UK

This catalogue has been generously supported by ARTscapades.

An online exhibition sponsored by Patch is available on our website.

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PATCH

Front cover *Still Life with Zimmerlinde* *(detail)*
Back cover *In the studio 1*, 1978, photograph by Rose Boyt
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Lucian Freud, early 1940s, photograph by Francis Goodman.

FOREWORD

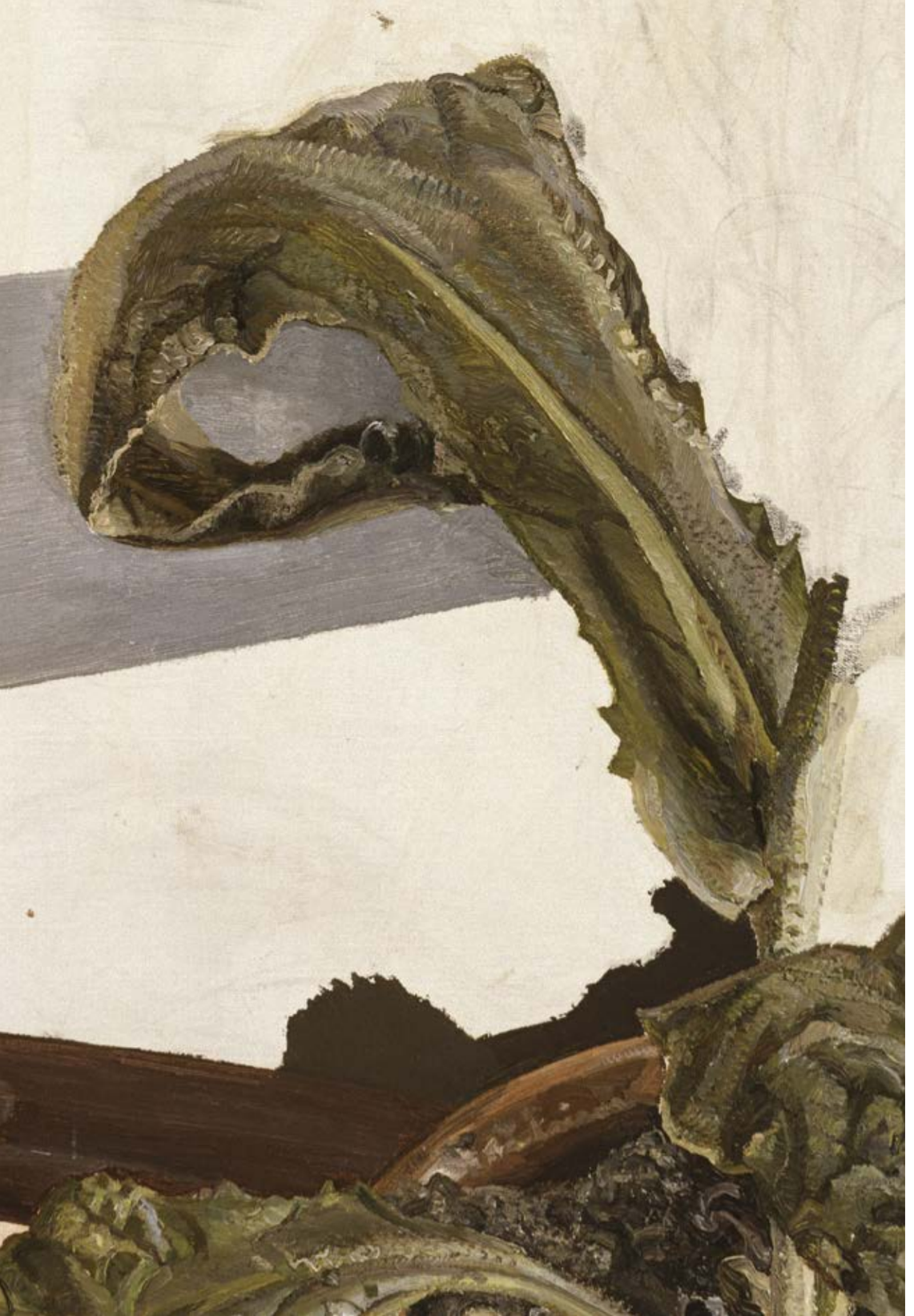
CHRISTOPHER WOODWARD
DIRECTOR, GARDEN MUSEUM

Fifteen years ago a man who had recently sat for Freud said to me: "If you like gardens, you should see how Lucian painted plants!" His description of the garden which rose to the studio windows of Kensington Church Street remained just that – an image – until in 2019 Dr Giovanni Aloi, published *Lucian Freud Herbarium*, a study of the role played by plants in Freud's life and work. Straightaway, we asked Giovanni to curate this exhibition of portraits of plants. We are very grateful for his sharing of this research, and his wider reflections on the changing status of plants within the history of art.

We believe Freud's plant studies to be the most mesmerizing of the late twentieth-century; also, we hope to show how significant gardens and plants were to the life of this apparently most urban of artists. This is the latest in a series of the Garden Museum cabinet studies of an artist and a garden, beginning with Charlotte Verity in 2010 and continuing through Eileen Hogan, Ivon Hitchens, Derek Jarman and Shara Hughes – and, in 2018, Cedric Morris, who taught the teenage Freud in his gardens at The Pound and Benton End.

We are very grateful to our lenders, first and foremost, His Majesty The King; The Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection, The Devonshire Collections, public collections, and the private collectors for whom sparing such beautiful works has been a major wrench.

Finally, we must thank the family of Lucian Freud – beginning with Annie, who shares her poems here – and friends, led by David Dawson, and the Freud scholarly community for letting us, as it were, wander in our own way up the garden path. And Artscapades whom enabled us to make a book, with photographs by David, and Rose Boyt.



INTRODUCTION

EMMA HOUSE
CURATOR, GARDEN MUSEUM

How do we define who is a gardener and who isn't? Is it awarded based on the number of hours spent planning each season and toiling in the soil or is it a person's intimate knowledge of botany and their ability to name every specimen they grow? Or is it their ability to grow unusual or tricky plants, succeeding when others fail to get rare specimens to thrive?

If we were perhaps to evaluate Lucian Freud as a gardener in traditional terms, he would fall well short of the mark. But Freud had a lifelong passion for plants, some journeyed with him from one home to another throughout his life. He had a deep-rooted fondness for them and an intimate relationship with them. From his earliest childhood drawings through to his late canvases of the garden at Kensington Church Street garden plants recurred in his work throughout his life.

Lucian Freud was the grandson of the famous Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund, born in Berlin on 8 December 1922, into middle-class comfort and luxury. His father Ernst Freud was an architect and his mother Lucie Brasch had studied Classics at the University of Munich. His paternal grandfather cherished flowers and they signposted many of his life events. He adored orchids and they were gifted in such large numbers by friends and admirers for his birthday that Viennese florists would stock up on them especially. His favourite orchid *Nigritella nigra* grew wild and reminded him of the joy he felt at the start of his marriage, whilst the "poet's narcissus" and their heady scent were associated with holidays with his young

Plant Fragment ***(detail)***

family near Salzburg. As Sue Stuart Smith recalls "Memories and associations play a part in forming our attachments to flowers, but there is undoubtedly some chemistry going on there too". Whilst Lucian Freud didn't wish to be overshadowed by his famous grandfather, he had a profound relationship with him, and their deep connection is likely to have shaped his interest in nature and plants.

Freud's family were Jewish and in September 1933 amid increasing restrictions on Jewish people and businesses in Germany Freud moved to England with his mother and brothers, followed in November by their father. He was enrolled in Dartington Hall School near Totnes in Devon. Students were encouraged to develop an interest in the estate and at this time the school's founders, Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst, were developing the gardens with direction from the American landscape designer Beatrix Farrand. With its progressive and unconventional curriculum Freud seems to have shown more interest in the farm and an aptitude for animal husbandry than gardening. Traditional academic pursuits were not a key focus for Freud with his mother worrying that he was "backwards in maths, Latin and French". Aged 12 he moved to the prep school Dane Court and then onto Bryanston, in Dorset in 1938.

Freud's childhood letters and their accompanying envelopes are decorated with colourful crayon drawings often incorporating floral motifs and playful imaginary figures. Some of Freud's earliest drawings, kept by his mother Lucie, were of trees he painted around the age of six. A couple of years later, he drew his first potted plant: a stylised Christmas cactus (*Schlumbergera bridgesii*) in bloom flanked by supporting stakes. Other sketches include stylised flattened vases with single stems of rose blooms. Despite their childlike simplicity, these drawings already demonstrated artistic flair and Freud's interest in plants as well as his attention to detail. In January 1939 after an exuberant and boisterous period at Bryanston and an introduction to sculpting animals and a stint in the Oil Painting Club Freud was accepted at London's Central School of Arts and Crafts.

Finding the Central School an ill fit and impossibly boring, Freud was introduced in 1939 to the enigmatic East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing that had been opened two years earlier by Cedric Morris and his partner Arthur Lett-Haines in Dedham, Suffolk. Already frequented by his friends David Kentish, John Banting and John Skeaping, who taught at the Central School, Freud found the atmosphere invigorating. Morris was an outstanding horticulturalist and gardener, filling his garden at The Pound with flowers and plants he collected on winter plant hunting trips. His enthusiasm for plants and animals was a huge draw for Freud who "thought Cedric was a real painter". He appreciated his relaxed teaching style; "No teaching much, but there were models and you could work in your own room." Despite the casual nature of the school Freud found it a motivating and stimulating environment "There were people working seriously. You could talk to Lett-Haines... and he'd tell you about Paris. I liked the whole thing there. There was a strong atmosphere".

Freud continued to visit the East Anglian School of Painting, which had moved to Benton End during the early part of the war. Cedric had turned his beloved gardens over to vegetable growing and continued to teach painting. After his eighteenth birthday Freud joined the Merchant Navy journeying to Halifax, Nova Scotia. Freud returned to Liverpool during the Blitz where he experienced nightly bombings aboard ship before contracting an infection and being discharged, convalescing in hospital during the summer of 1941. The incident resulted in the emotionally charged painting *Hospital Ward.* Executed from a high viewpoint looking down onto the figure, the oversized bed seemingly floats in mid-air engulfing the nurse behind. The figure lies at an awkward angle overwhelmed by the white sheets and tightly fitted blankets. A single yellow bloom is placed reverentially on the bed evoking a sense of isolation and loneliness within the hospital. The eye is drawn to the vividness of the flower against the drabness of the ward. Freud later recalled it as a globe flower from Benton End.

Lucian Freud, Jamaica, 1953

Throughout the 1940s Freud produced a number of portraits in which he foregrounded plant material and flowers, including *Still Life with Green Lemon, Girl with Fig, Girl with Leaves* and *Ill in Paris.* The sitter for a number of these portraits was Kitty Garman, daughter of Kathleen Garman and sculptor Jacob Epstein. Kitty and Lucian married in 1948 shortly before the birth of their daughter, Annie. Ernst Freud helped them to find a house in St John's Wood whilst Freud continued to work at his studio in Paddington.

Sadly their marriage was not to be a happy one and shortly after her birthday in 1951 Kitty wrote to her mother "Thank you for making my birthday not only happy but bearable. Things were so awful both before and after you arrived." Despite having a second child shortly afterwards the marriage didn't last.

At a party held by his patron Ann Fleming (née Charteris), Freud met Caroline Blackwood, the writer and heiress who was to become his second wife. In a letter written to her in 1952 Freud drew a small ink drawing of them embracing, entwining them with the words "I am feeling heavy with sadness this morning I can hardly move. I miss you so much...ask me to paint you a picture of something you would like".

The request may have resulted in a small painting of a zimmerlinde, (*Sparrmannia africana*) inscribed "To Caroline [Blackwood] with all my love Lucian". This was a plant of great emotional significance to Freud. His daughter Annie believes that "certain plants just meant a lot to him". He painted it repeatedly throughout his life in *Small Zimmerlinde, Girl with Leaves* and *Large Interior Paddington.* Freud grew his first zimmerlinde in 1947 from a cutting that had arrived from Germany with his cousin Michael Hamburger's family. However, he later recalled that it was from his grandfather Sigmund when they fled Germany due to the rise of Nazism. The plant was a sort of emblem of the Freud family and Lucian's wish to embroider it with a closer lineage to his grandfather only emphasised the significance it held for him. His assistant David Dawson still has a plant that was in the artist's studio at his death.

In 1953 and in the process of divorce from his first wife, Ann Fleming bought him a ticket to Jamaica to stay at Goldeneye, the home of her new husband, the James Bond author Ian Fleming. The Flemings left for Britain and Freud seemed more content alone. He stated 'I noticed I switched away from people when my life was under particular strain. I preferred working in complete isolation. Not using people is like taking a deep breath of fresh air'.

Working outside, Freud was drawn to striking forms of fruit and vegetation in the estate's banana plantation, capturing them in two carefully observed and intensely detailed canvases. When he was asked to provide the frontispiece for James Pope-Hennessy's *The Baths of Absalom* (1954) Freud depicted the Fleming's gardener obscured by the towering growth of a banana plant.

Shortly after their wedding Caroline Blackwood bought a seventeenth-century stone manor house, Coombe Priory, secluded in a Dorset valley. Coombe was the one home where Freud gardened and planted trees. Cecil Beaton, whom he knew through Ann Fleming, became a neighbour and photographed Freud beside four newly-bought bay trees in pots.

At Coombe Freud painted the first of two murals of cyclamen: In autumn 1959 he began a second cyclamen mural, at Chatsworth, as one of the first guests to be invited when the 11th Duke of Devonshire moved his family back into the vacated house. Painted in the private bathroom are a handful of flowers and leaves. The estate greenhouse supplied pot after pot for Freud to paint but as Freud's former dealer James Kirkman points out, a "cyclamen is a flower that doesn't stick around". Freud painted very, very slowly and cyclamens are very seasonal flowers so this may be one reason why neither mural is finished.

Freud painted plants at times of pause and reflection and when he did not want to paint people. Whilst his daughter Annie Freud has questioned the degree to which this was always true, David Dawson his studio assistant recalled him painting views of the waste ground

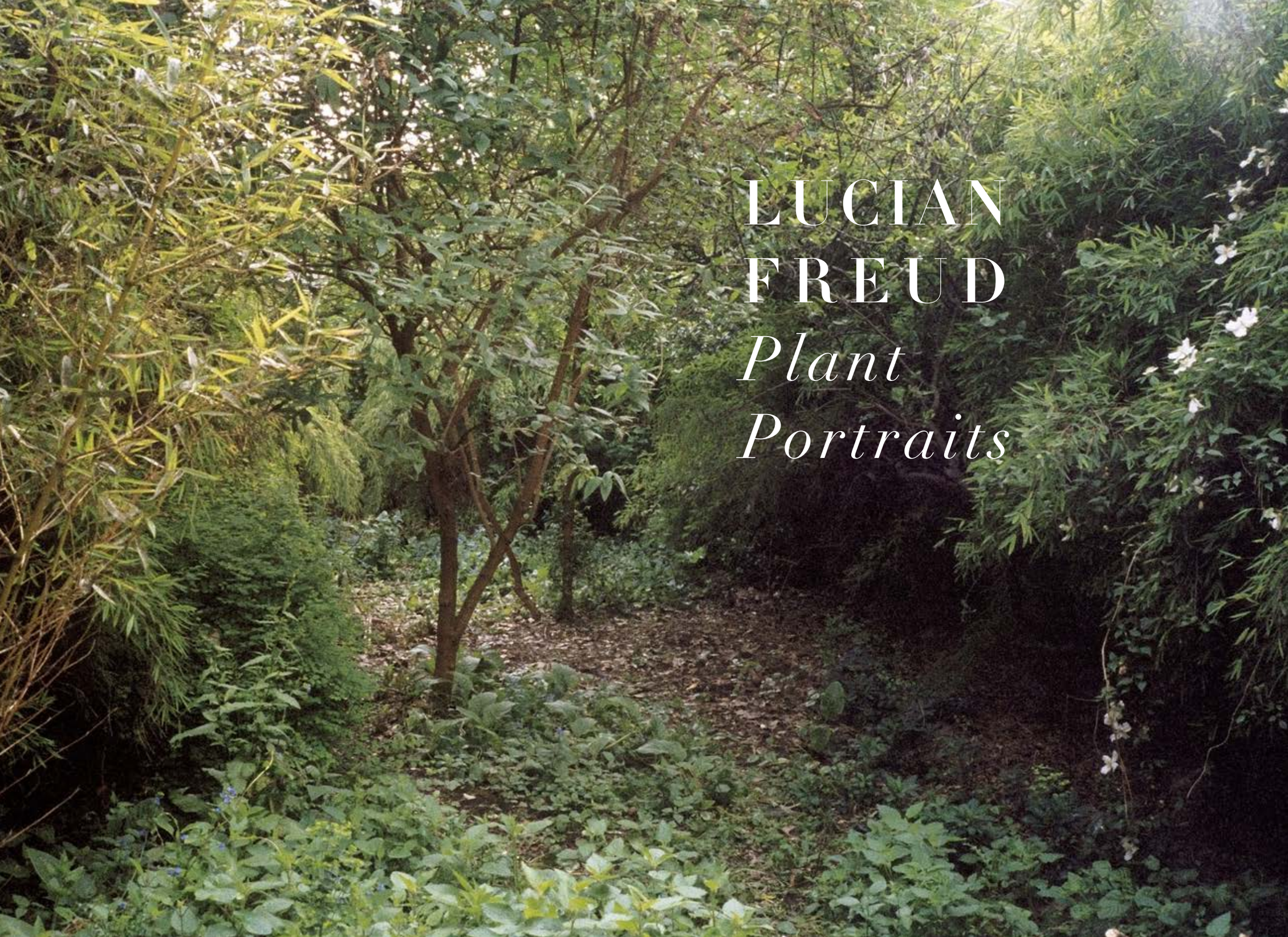
from his studio window after the death of his father when he wished to be alone. In this rundown and densely populated area he depicted a site enveloped in abandoned rubbish, rubble and inhabited by buddleias. The work evokes the resilience of plants to grow and thrive in harsh and neglected environments.

On the balcony of his home in Holland Park, he made a garden of sorts planting bamboo in front of mirrors providing a concealed and private space. This trick was one that he had seen in the shady garden of the Vicomte de Noialles in the Marais, Paris in 1946, when he was 24.

Freud's only garden of his own of any scale was in his last house on Kensington Church Street. David Dawson, planted four bay trees for him. 'They grew into a massive canopy – like one big cloud of bay – and, underneath, it was like a cave'. Freud also added a fig tree and hydrangeas. Although he allowed the garden to become wild, never wishing to interfere with nature, it was created with intentionality. His late etchings *Garden in Winter,* and *Painter's Garden* together with his paintings *Garden Painting, Garden from the window,* and *Pluto's Grave* captured the unkept and unruly nature of the garden in all of it poetic roughness.

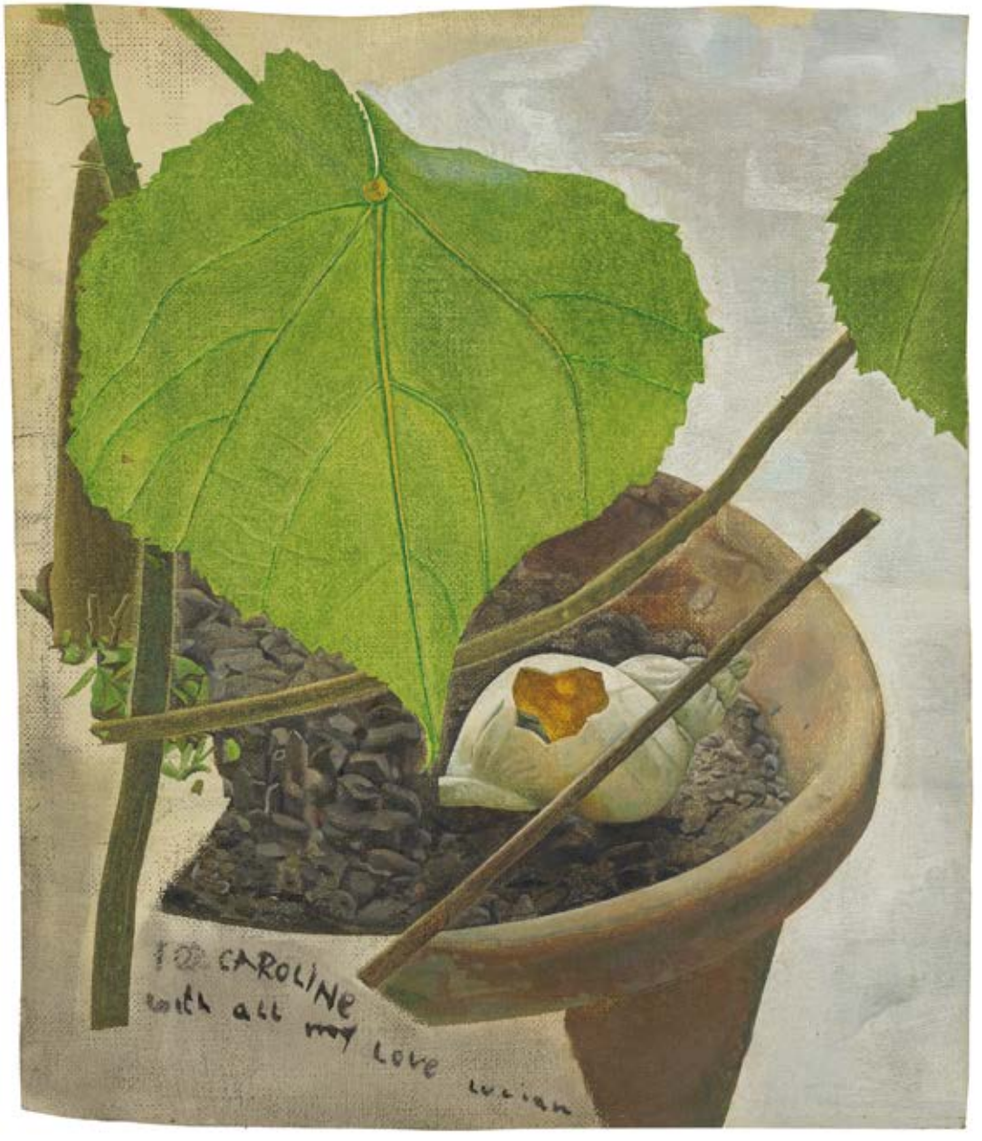
In 1942 Cedric Morris wrote "when I see plants, I do not see prettiness but, rather, ruthlessness, strength, and lust." As Giovanni Aloi has observed Freud's plant paintings embody this quest for detailing plants with an intensity and potency and perhaps a respect for plants not as objects to be preened, pitied, or possessed. It is this dedication to the plant form that perhaps makes Lucian Freud the greatest painter of plants of the late twentieth-century.

Following pages *View of Lucian Freud's garden*, 2009, photograph by David Dawson



LUCIAN FREUD

Plant Portraits



Still Life with Zimmerlinde, c. 1950
Oil on canvas, 25 x 21.5 cm

Dedicated to the artist's second wife, Caroline Blackwood, *Still Life with Zimmerlinde* is most likely a small fragment of a much larger canvas that Freud never completed. All zimmerlinde painted by Freud are said to be descendants of plants originally grown by Sigmund Freud in Vienna, which he brought to the United Kingdom after fleeing the rise of the Nazi regime in 1938. It's perhaps more likely they came from the family of Michael Hamburger who also brought specimens. None the less, the cuttings of zimmerlinde have since been propagated and shared among relatives, in time becoming an unofficial Freud family emblem.

Private collection

Bananas, 1953
Oil on canvas, 23 x 15 cm

This portrait of a banana tree was painted at Goldeneye in Jamaica by a thirty-year-old Freud, at the residence of James Bond author Ian Fleming and his wife Ann, an influential London socialite. Swapping his tumultuous London life for the primitive simplicity of a temporary exotic haven gave Freud the opportunity to rethink his approach to painting. In Jamaica, he broke with his tradition of painting interiors, stepping out of the studio to experience plants, quite literally, on their own ground. Far from the orderly neatness and exhaustive literalism of classical botanical illustration, this painting helped to focus the artist's philosophical approach to painting: to portray the subject as it is, stripped of its cultural and symbolic meaning.

Southampton City Art Gallery

Cyclamen, 1964
Oil on canvas, 45.7 x 49.2 cm

Although he very rarely painted them, Freud was very fond of white, fragrant flowers like lilies, peonies, and cyclamen. He would wake up before dawn to visit Covent Garden Flower Market and buy huge quantities of white flowers for the house—cyclamens brightened tables and mantelpieces in autumn. Freud said that "They die in such a dramatic way. It's as if they fill and run over. They crash down, their stems turn to jelly and their veins harden".

Private Collection

Small Fern, 1967
Oil on canvas, 39.3 x 29.2 cm

This highly unusual composition encapsulates Freud's originality in approaching plants. Placed on the floor, seen from above, the fern is not part of a lush forest undergrowth, and neither is it situated in the stately greenhouse of a botanic garden. Ferns were absent from the classical seventeenth century still-life genre and this fern sits snug in the modesty of its terracotta pot stripped of important cultural contexts, placed in the corner of an unremarkable room, seemingly determined to make the most of what little light it can reach.

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Plant Fragment, c. 1970
Oil on canvas, 61 x 56 cm

This unfinished portrait of a plant is shrouded in mystery. It might have been painted at around the time Freud's father Ernst passed away. Despite the level of detail in the representation of the leaves, it has proven impossible to identify the plant with certainty.

Unfinished paintings of plants have a subtle poetic dimension to them—their incompleteness alluding to the impossibility of fully grasping their complexity.

Private collection

Opposite page

Wasteground Paddington, 1970
Oil on canvas, 71 x 71 cm

The view from the window at 227 Gloucester Terrace in London was far from bucolic. Painted when the artist was in his late 40s, this abandoned corner of Paddington—then a rundown and densely populated area just north of Hyde Park—captures a story of human and plant resilience. The rubbish-strewn site is populated by buddleias and other typically feral shrubs of the London postwar landscape. Buddleias were imported to the UK during the nineteenth century as cherished ornamental plants but soon developed a bad reputation for overtaking every nook and cranny of the city. In essence, Freud painted an anti-garden: not the celebration of our ability to mould and groom nature in harmonious and beautiful ways but a brutally honest portrayal of the hardship that urban life can entail for both humans and plants.

The Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection
Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen

Following page

Children's Playground, 1975
Oil on canvas, 22 x 33 cm

This view of a junk playground captures a story of human resilience; play areas created from waste materials developed in cities after the Second World War when children constructed them in bomb sites from debris. Ungoverned and fluid in nature, they allowed children to explore and introduce meaning to the playground through their own actions of experimenting, making and destroying. Freud captures the duality of the site as an eyesore of waste and wild overgrown plants—an important site of exploration.

The Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection
Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen

Two Plants, 1977–1980
Oil on canvas, 149.9 x 120 cm

Two Plants initially started off as an opportunity to get acquainted with the lighting quality of the new Holland Park studio that Freud moved to in 1977. *Helichrysum petiolare* (licorice plant) and *Aspidistra elatio*r (castiron plant), challenged the artist to rethink his approach to painting and realism. Painting plants from life is substantially different from copying them from photographs. Instead of idealizing and perfecting an image frozen in time, Freud decided to capture the movement of the plants—how they died, and sprang new leaves over the span of three years. As a result, *Two Plants* is much more than a meticulously accurate botanical representation. It is a record of plant life across time—a kind of plant portrait that neither photography nor film could ever capture in the same way.

Tate (Purchased 1980)

Another Dead Bat, 1980
Oil on canvas, 14.4 x 16.9 cm

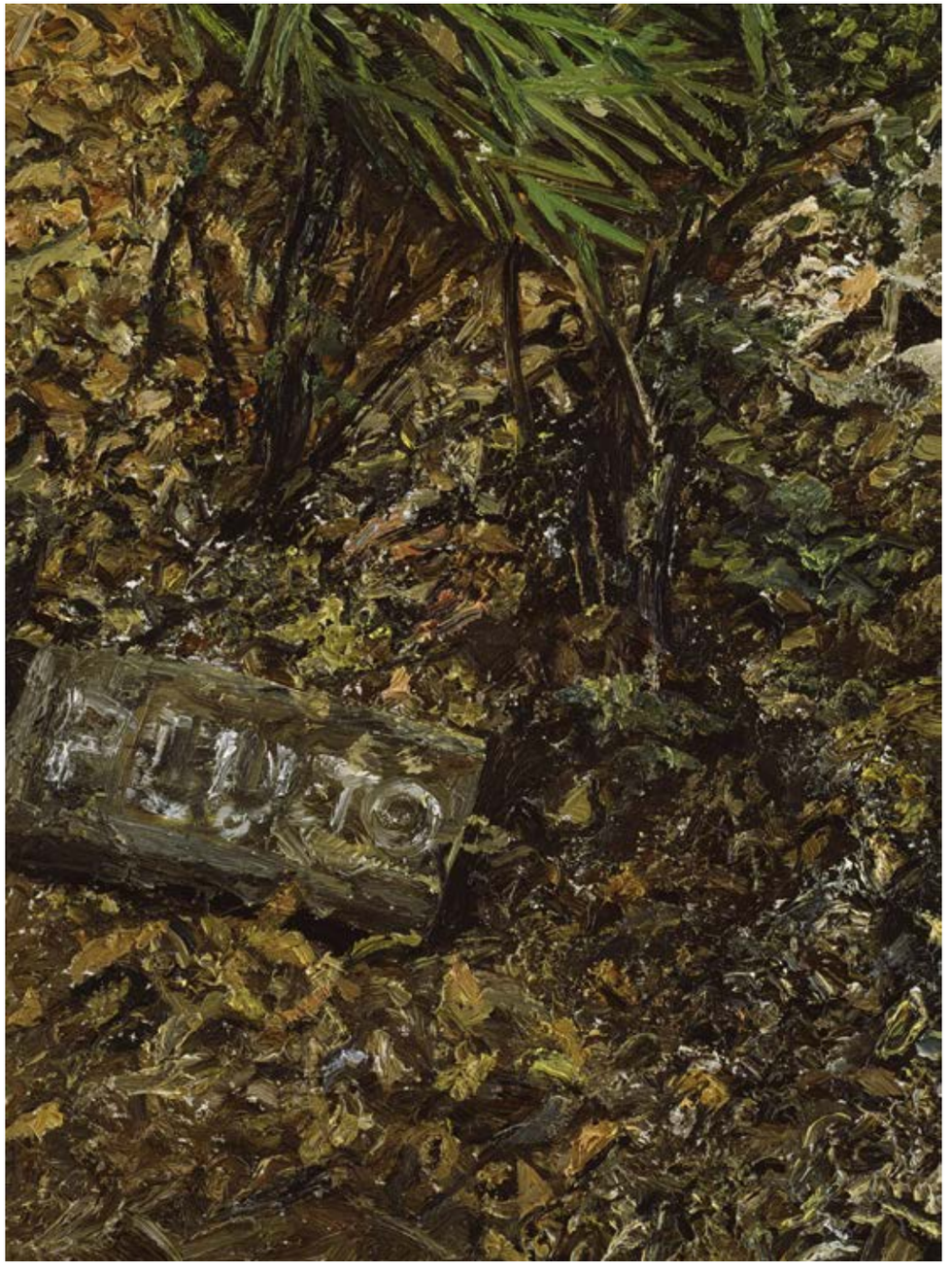
While painting *Two Plants*, Freud began to consider the possibility of altering its sombre composition by adding a focal point. He initially considered a dead bat. This specimen was brought back from a trip to Italy and painted in London as a study. He eventually dismissed the choice and then explored the inclusion of an electric fire. This also failed to satisfy him as the idea that the plants should be the undisputed subject of the painting began to take hold.

The Lambrecht-Schadeberg Collection
Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen

Flowers on a Red Chair, 1998
Oil on canvas, 35 x 25.4 cm

Freud's worn-out, red upholstered chair on wheels was a staple in his studio and has appeared in six canvases. A relatively unusual painting for the artist, *Flowers on a Red Chair* is a poetic meditation on absence and presence and the role flowers play in the aftermath of loss. Casually abandoned on the empty chair, Freud's flowers gesture towards the inconsistent nature of memory. He may be revisiting the tradition of the Dutch still-life in which flower compositions remind us of death— the memento mori—in a wholly domestic, understated, and very intimate scene.

Private collection



Pluto's Grave, 2003
Oil on canvas, 41 x 29.8 cm

Gardens are places of rest and meditation that often invite remembrance. At once pillars of memory and walls of privacy, the plants that nearly smothered Freud's Notting Hill garden were guardians of the artist's life and keepers of his past. Pluto, Freud's beloved whippet, was originally meant as a gift to his daughter Bella. Featured in many paintings and etchings alone and with others, Pluto played an important affective role in the artist's life and in that of David Dawson, the artist's assistant.

Private collection

Opposite page

Garden in Winter, 1997–1999
Etching, 77.2 x 60 cm

By the late 1990s Freud's Notting Hill garden had become a corner of urban wilderness bursting with unbridled energy. It was overgrown and impenetrable and yet, at times during the day, brilliantly bathed in glistening sunshine. There was glory in Freud's vision of what most would consider a gardening nightmare. The artist's search for truth, wherever it might lurk, became ever so poignant in the poetic roughness that makes the garden paintings and etchings from this period so memorable. With the buddleia at its centre, unkempt but enduring, Freud's garden couldn't be more at odds with traditional gardening and garden painting.

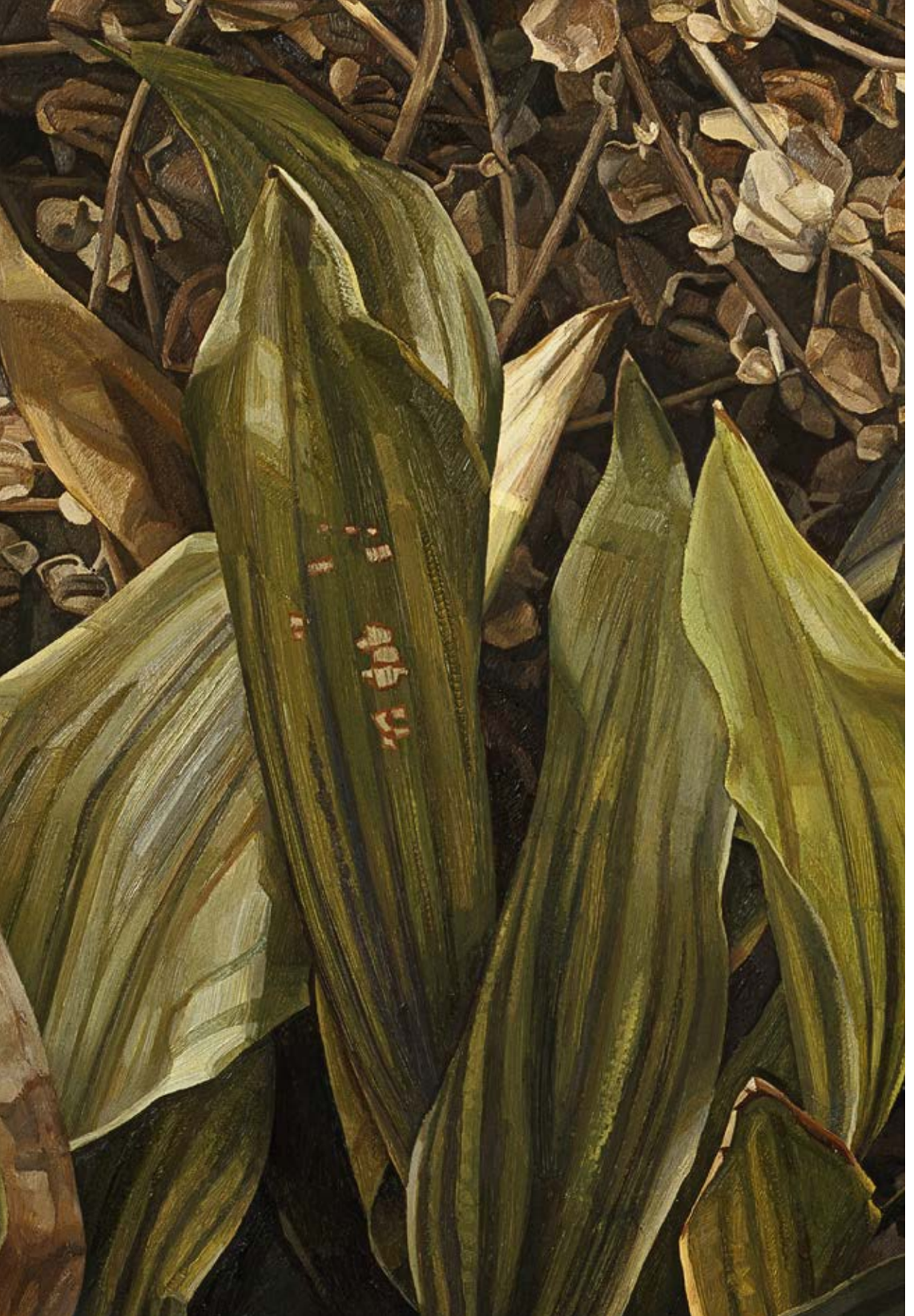
Private collection

Following pages

Painter's Garden, 2003–2004
Etching, 63.5 x 86.8 cm

Freud's studio assistant David Dawson recalled that "he planted things and then let them grow, grow, and grow. He never touched anything because he wanted the garden to have a sense of real, of naturalness." The thick unruly growth offered Freud a sense of a lush and enclosed private space that is gritty and understated.

Private collection



LUCIAN FREUD
Plant Portraits
GIOVANNI ALOI

Painting: Stillness, Silence, Solitude

These conditions have defined the history of painting. The stillness of the model; the silence of the picture; the solitude that underpins the creative act as a process of excavation into a deeper realm, away from the bustle of everyday life and its frenetic rhythms. A flattened copy, an effigy, a trace. The ambition of figurative painting—and most specifically of the kind of painting that makes of optical realism its most honorable virtue—is in itself a paradox: a replicated world, always less than its subject. And yet, in the obsession with copying life in its most minute detail lies much more than a desire to stop the passing of time.[1]

By the end of the 18th century, neoclassicism had led western art down a self-congratulatory rabbit hole of hollow sophistication. Too concerned with purity and perfection, the utopian realism of neo-classicism had lost its voice. Too ashamed of the scars that time carves on every surface, classical art could no longer tell the living from the dead, the natural from the artificial, and the beautiful from the grotesque. French Realism, Impressionism, and all the 'isms' that followed, gladly took the opportunity to fill the silence of classical art with their artistic provocations.

Thereafter, from Georgia O'Keeffe and Frida Kahlo to Hughie Lee-Smith and Salvador Dali, the artists who continued to push boundaries even when it seemed that painting had nothing left to say, thought long and hard about the nature of realism. Why

Two Plants ***(detail)***

persevere to carefully represent the real when photography and film can replicate it in seemingly more faithful ways? If realism in western painting has survived to today, it's because something about reproducing life with paint and brushes signifies more than just hollow virtuosity.

Lucian Freud reinvented realism in painting for the 21st century. In his hands realism probed into the deepest layers of existence. The artist was acutely aware of the potentiality at stake. He once said about his sitters: "I'm really interested in them as animals. Part of liking to work from them naked is for that reason. Because I can see more: see the forms repeating right through the body and often in the head as well. One of the most exciting things is seeing through the skin, to the blood and veins and markings".[2] His approach to painting was akin to archaeology—it stripped bare and excavated.

This is perhaps nowhere more evident than in Freud's portraits of London-based actor, pop star, and drag queen Leigh Bowery. Having shed his flamboyant outfits and stripped his theatrical make-up, Bowery appears solemnly vulnerable and yet brims with pride, engulfed in the kind of deep-seated sense of self-acceptance that only someone who intimately knows themselves can truly own.

Freud's friends and regular sitters understood the importance of this existentialist dimension. Writer Caroline Blackwood, the artist's second wife, noted that "When Lucian Freud paints a sink, it gives off a "sinkness" so powerful it seems to exceed what even sinks can exude".[3] What Blackwood so incisively described is the essence of what makes Lucian Freud's paintings important to everyday life; not because they elevate the mundane and the unremarkable but because Freud's approach to painting deepens our understanding of the world around us by focusing our attention on what we've been told does not deserve it. Plants fall into this category of the "in plain sight and yet overlooked". We grow them, we admire their beauty, we eat them, but we remain blind to their vegetal essence. Their

stillness and silence have fooled us to consider them passive objects; that their perceptual worlds are hollow; and that a sense of self (as indescribable as it might be to us) is categorically precluded to them.

Stillness, Silence, Solitude. These are also the conditions that tend to define our relationship with plants—a subject that Freud painted extensively throughout his career. The apparent stillness of the leaves and branches. The silence that is the soul of every plant. The solitude of house plants that will never be tickled by pollinators. Or even the restorative loneliness we seek in plants at moments in which we've had enough of the world and need to be rooted again. So, what can be learned from taking Freud's invitation to look at plants again seriously?

Stillness: embracing radical difference

In 1977, Lucian Freud moved to 36 Holland Park in a flat big enough to also serve as his studio. There, he soon began work on what would become one of his most original paintings: a large canvas titled *Two Plants*. It initially started off as a test; an opportunity to acquaint himself with lighting in a new space but it quickly became a personal artistic challenge—one that would test his patience like no other painting previously had.

Despite the intricate fullness suggesting an unkept corner of a shady garden, *Two Plants* was painted entirely indoors.[4] *Helichrysum petiolare* (licorice plant) dominates the painting with its densely clad, felted foliage while *Aspidistra elatior* (cast-iron plant) slits the canvas with elongated swaths of unbroken bronze-green. Artist Sophie de Stempel recalls that throughout the making of the painting, Freud was "very aware of the plants' watering needs and he was keen to keep them alive" and that he asked her not to pinch the dead bits off the helichrysum.[5]

Painting plants from life is not an easy task. It is certainly more complicated than to copy them from photographs—like many artists today do. Still-life masters of the Dutch Golden Age copied

their plants from botanical treatises.[6] At times, they quickly sketched live specimens in botanic gardens or in the countryside but did not paint them directly onto the canvas from life. They aimed to still the moment, not to capture the flux of plant life as it unfolds in time.

The stillness of plants is only apparent. Not only do they grow, but leaves constantly shift in search of light while stems bend to reach it. Drawing a plant for an extended period of time reveals these vegetal movements our eyes cannot normally detect. Painting heightens perfection and the illusion of plant-stillness complicates our relationship with them. Their lives unfold at different rhythms and timescales to ours. Freud recalls that "[the aspidistra in the middle started shrivelling. And then I had a huge leaf from the aspidistra going across the little leaves and that was ruinous to the picture, and it went again: psychologically the picture went completely wrong. I wanted it to have a really biological feeling of things growing and fading and leaves coming up and others dying".[7] But embracing rather than repressing plant movement is what makes it so compelling.

Two Plants is a painting about tension as much as it is about plants; the tension between the tradition of plant representation in the west with its objectifying ways and Freud's will to let the plants somehow determine, or at least guide, the composition of painting itself. The tension between the silence of the canvas and the silencing of symbolism. The tension between the apparent stillness of plants and the actual stillness of the painted image.

Like other paintings by Freud, *Two Plants* is founded on the idea that the "true voice of the subject", can only be heard when symbolism is hushed. As a result, this painting is subtler and less accessible than the flowers of Dutch still-lifes.

Freud mentioned that "When it hung at the Tate, I went there once and stood near it and I saw people looking at the painting and going past it and then looking at the one after it as if there had been a sign saying 'This Way to the Next Picture'; and I thought I wanted it to be quiet but not as quiet as all that".[8]

Why didn't people stop to look longer? What was it that they could not see? Approaching *Two Plants* as we would a classical still-life painting doesn't work. What are we supposed to learn from this painting if it cannot speak of morals and ethics? In the symbolic insistence of still-life paintings lies the conviction that plants are never enough unless they ventriloquize our fears and hopes. So why give *Two Plants* a second look, since only a few people could probably even recognize the species of the plants represented on the canvas?

Unfortunately, the true originality of *Two Plants* remains buried in the few fragments of biographical accounts that recall its making. Not knowing how Freud approached the subject, that the work took three years to paint from life and not from a photograph, radically changes the meaning of the work.

Beyond its obsessive meticulousness, *Two Plants* is more than a gorgeous picture of plants. It is the record of a long-term negotiation of space, time, and light that unfolded in the silence and solitude of the studio between painter and plant. The result of this prolonged encounter is not the idealized picture of a moment in time but the trace of an intense kind of scrutiny that exudes a "plantness" of unprecedented intensity.

Freud would tell his daughter Annie that "the artist has to look at something again, and again, and again, whether it's an object or a living being because only then will the object release all of itself from which the artist can then select".[9]

In this case, the decision to follow the growth of plants over the span of three years, rather than the desire to capture an artificially constrained moment of impossible perfection, defined the nature of the encounter between painter and subject. In a sense, it brought the artist closer to the subject, not as an all-imposing master but as someone curious to tease to the surface the essential traits that made someone or something irreplaceable. It allowed the artist to embrace the radical alterity of plants and engage in a silent dialogue through which our conception of plants as well as painting could change.

Silence: speaking the unthinkable

Frank Auerbach recalls that "When he was painting, [Freud] was the most focused and unshowy and concentrated painter that you could possibly imagine".[10] In 1987 he told art critic Robert Hughes, "I hoped that, if I concentrated enough, the intensity of scrutiny alone would force life into the pictures".[11] Queen Elizabeth II, reported that Freud would stop painting if he talked.[12]

The kind of painting that Freud pursued throughout his career—was steeped in concentration and silence. Silence as an opportunity to hear the voices of others. Silence as a path to truth. Silence as discipline and restraint. Silence as an essential facet of creative life—an important aspect that today is often deeply misunderstood and undervalued.

Silence plays important roles in the history of subjugation and vulnerability of all kinds. Silence can imply permission, complicity, and compliance. It can also mean powerlessness; it erases. Coupled with their apparent stillness, silence engulfs plants bestowing an expressionless countenance that we have over time chosen to interpret as inferiority rather than difference.

Freud was acutely aware of the affinity between his painterly language and the enigmatic presence of plants. The silence of painting is a complex dimension that Freud understood like few others. That's perhaps why his work on plants is vibrant in a way that of Sutherland, Morris, Craxton, Minton, O'Keefe, and Ayrton simply isn't. *Interior with Plant, Reflection Listening* (1967–68), is in this sense one of Freud's most original works. Seen through the leaves of a large, potted pandanus is a shirtless Freud, his hand cupping an ear. Is the artist alluding to the plant's inability to answer him, or is he trying to hear what those of us on the viewer's side of the painting is saying? Extremely enigmatic, the painting subverts the tradition of classical art in which plants are relegated to the background.

Flowers on a Red Chair ***(detail)***

Sitting by a large window in Freud's studio at 227 Gloucester Terrace, near Paddington Station where the artist worked between 1967 and 1972, was a large and straggly zimmerlinde (*Sparmannia africana*, or African Hemp). Rooted in a modest terracotta pot, the plant stretches upwards, leaning against the glass. Its broad, heart-shaped leaves refract light like a botanical, stained-glass window. Its darkened branches outline the fragility of a plant that had most likely never been pruned. "I've always liked zimmerlinde" said Freud, "my father used to grow them in winter gardens. The stems were held up by the windowpane. If I moved it, it would collapse".[13]

Different sources claim that this zimmerlinde descended from those grown by Sigmund Freud at his studio in Vienna.[14] During the 1920s, zimmerlinde had become a Northern Europe, bourgeois, sitting room favourite—elegant and adaptable, the plant could live well in dimly lit apartments, especially if positioned near an eastern or western facing window. A pioneer of modern domestic living, zimmerlinde brought a touch of naturalness to the house and also humidified rooms in winter.[15]

According to others, it was Lucian's father, architect Ernst L. Freud, who brought the plant to England when the family left Berlin to escape the rise of Nazism in 1933.[16] The plant reminded him of his grandmother and his childhood in Germany. In time, from work to work, the plant became an unofficial family emblem.[17]

Freud's zimmerlinde are utterly silent, at least as far as classical symbolism is concerned—they never appeared in sacred scriptures and neither do they play a role in folklore. The gorgeously opulent 17th century paintings of plants by Rachel Ruysch, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Maria van Oosterwijck, or Jan van Huysum can't help but constantly whisper Christian morals. Daffodils—some of the earliest flowers to return every spring—spoke of rebirth and resurrection. Daisies told stories of innocence, beauty, and love. Strawberry flowers professed the value of chastity.[18] Baroque in style but medieval in essence, Dutch still-life paintings reverberated the voice of the church. God's presence

pervaded every fibre of this world, and everything, even plants, spoke of his greatness.

By contrast, Freud's plants are thoroughly modern in essence and style. His approach to realism transfigures the plant just enough to elevate it from the literal descriptivism of botanical illustration while retaining its vegetal identity intact. Enigmatic paintings like *Large Interior, Paddington,* in which plants are central to the composition define an existentialist tension engulfed in the kind of silence that bears the seed of a new beginning. A silence that belongs more to plants than it does to us; and yet one that we can still learn from if we quiet the voices that constantly attempt to pre-empt our experience of the world. A silence essential to the comprehension of who we are and who we might become.

With the exception of *Buttercups* (1968) – an unashamedly bold celebration of late spring's floral exuberance – Freud's late paintings of plants tend to take on an essentialist philosophical slant. They exist where language begins to crumble and they do so with an acute awareness of the risk that this entails. In and of itself, the idea of uttering the unthinkable can only be cautiously approached or approximated—never fully obtained. German philosopher Edmund Husserl argued that in the moment of first encounter, our experience of the world is "mute" in the sense that it bears no obvious meaning until we impose it. He knew that this initial silence is precarious since it is almost instantly smothered by the chatter of our own reflections.[19]

In art, as well as with plants, silence is not a space of nothingness, dumbness, or passivity but a state of pure potentiality. Freud knew that underneath the beauty and complexity that religion and science have taught us to appreciate, there lies a deeper kind of beauty—the beauty of a truth that eludes words and that can only be contemplated if we silence doctrines and disciplines so that we can listen for ourselves. Freud's scrutiny reached beneath the rhetoric of symbolic meaning to portray the essence of each plant in the barest way possible and to reveal their true identity as unique individuals.

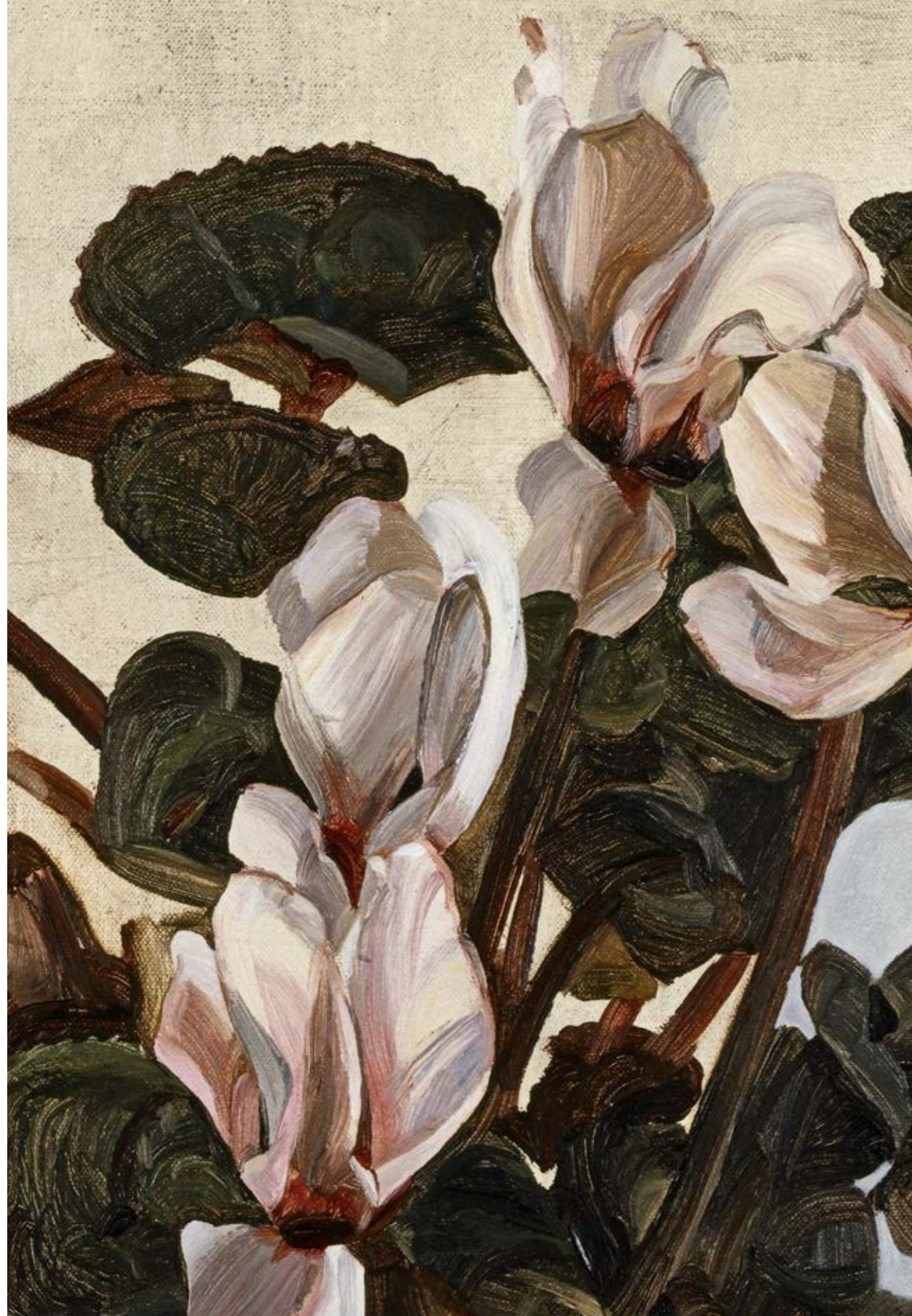
As a result, his paintings of plants are grounded in the promise that if we find the courage to stay long enough in the silent space that painting only can outline, something intimately meaningful might ultimately emerge.

Solitude: absence and presence

In 1964, Lucian Freud painted *Cyclamen*: a small oil on canvas capturing the delicate beauty of fading flowers and curling leaves. The bold composition foregrounds the plant in a way that recalls Caravaggio's famous Baroque masterpiece, *Canestra di Frutta* (1597-1600). Caravaggio's framing is deliberately a-symmetrical; the canestra perched on the edge of a ledge, its wicker base protruding slightly into the space of the viewer. The dried grape leaves reaching towards the right edge and outside the frame deliberately preclude any sense of hope for balance. Freud's cyclamen is similarly precarious—a slightly slanted line in the foreground destabilizes the subject, enhancing the sense of gravitational pull that bends the flower's heads to the ground. This time, the pot is missing. Might the diagonal line cutting across the lower part of the painting be the edge of a sink, like the one he placed a jug filled with meadow flowers to paint *Buttercups*?

The result is iconic and yet not symbolic. Caravaggio's tarnished leaves were intended as reminders of time's passing. Apples, pears, grapes, and figs—every fruit and leaf in this canestra speaks of Christ's passion, the purity of the Madonna, and the wealth that Christianity supposedly brings to life. The vocalization of Christian motifs overpowers the silence we need to actually see the plants past the cultural structures that drew the artist to paint them in the first place.

Freud's *Cyclamen,* instead, keeps our eyes firmly on the plant. He invites us to observe the distinctive behaviour of the plant, almost as if it were an animal. "My father", Annie Freud said "a little like



Cyclamen (detail)

Goethe, saw plants as having behaviour. [...] Goethe was enormously influential in German culture and was a presence of my grandparents' household. I see similarities between the way in which he looked at plants and how my father thought about them".[20]

"Lovely forms certainly", Freud said about cyclamen. "They die in such a dramatic way. It's as if they fill and run over. They crash down, their stems turn to jelly and their veins harden".[21] This kind of observation and the representation that ensues is the result of a concentrated solitude shared between plant and artist.

While Freud was painting his delicate and poetically charged cyclamens, a pop art revolution was in full swing on the other side of the Atlantic. In November 1964, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and other artists caused a stir at the epoque-defining exhibition titled *The American Supermarket* held at Paul Bianchini's NYC, Upper East Side gallery.

Warhol exhibited his *Campbell's Soup* silkscreens and *Brillo Boxes* along with a handful of Marilyn multiples. An assault on the modern purity of the exhibiting space—shelves, deep freezers, and grocery displays turned the gallery space into a supermarket. In comparison to pop art's advertising-inspired aesthetics, the intimate fragility of Freud's cyclamen must have seemed far too quiet, somewhat romantically conservative, if not wholly anachronistic. As early as 1950, pop art pioneer Richard Hamilton had already warned Freud: "You can't work in your style nowadays", to which apparently Freud replied, "this is the only style I could work".[22]

Initially, pop art was openly despised by influential art critics like Clement Greenberg: "People like Lichtenstein and Warhol, they paint nice pictures. All the same, it's easy to stuff. It is – it's minor. The best of the pop artists don't succeed at being more than minor".[23] Pop art was bold, direct, and provocative. But of all the pop art transgressions that horrified critics, perhaps the greatest *offense* was its rejection of the solitude that had, until that point, underpinned creativity in modern art.

Pop art infringed the sanctity of the studio as a place of silent meditation, still observation, and focussed solitude. It replaced these key aspects with the hustle and bustle of a systematic factory production model. While realistic painting was slow (Freud could take years and over a hundred sittings to finish a canvas), pop art churned out multiple works in the span of an afternoon. But most importantly, pop art deliberately avoided the privacy of the encounter that was central to Lucian Freud's approach to painting. Pop art and the realism that Freud stubbornly pursued since the end of the 1940s—as he painted his deliciously meticulous tangerines while on the Greek island of Poros (1946-47)—engaged with reality and perception from very different standpoints. Freud's art teacher, Cedric Morris, who introduced him to painting of plants, admired Chinese flower artists because of their ability to internalize the subject. Extended exposure, concentrated presence, and meticulous observation led to the capturing of an inner quality that eluded the simple objectivity of realism.[24]

In opposition, at the heart of pop art lay an irremediable absence—the model already entering the factory-studio as an effigy—a popular icon transfigured by consumerism into a superficial husk. Andy Warhol was acutely aware of this condition. His famous flower screen-prints made between 1964 and 1970 were lifted from a photograph of hibiscuses in a flower arrangement at a Barbados restaurant taken by Patricia Caulfield.[25] [26] Warhol never saw the flowers in the flesh—he never spent any time with them. If anything, these flowers are emblematic of the distance that consumerism has generated between us and nature. They are symbols of our alienation from plants.

In opposition, the realism of Lucian Freud was grounded in a stubborn kind of presence that can only unfold over time as the companion of solitude. To some artists, solitude is not a form of isolation, and neither is it an imposition, but the pre-requisite of creative concentration. The artist's solitude is a form of intimate

privacy. A self-imposed isolation that shelters the precarity of a unique encounter. This form of solitude is anchored in silence and stillness. The silence is not necessarily acoustic in nature, but it grounds the tenacity of focus and the sharpness of discernment. The artist's stillness never equates to paralysis but as in the lives of plants, it is made of often imperceptible shifts and unfoldings.

To Freud, this kind of concentration in the artist's studio, could only take place in the presence of the subject. Under these circumstances, the painting that results from the encounter is a unique incarnation of this type of solitude that, at one point, enveloped artist and plant and that cannot be quite captured in the same way by any other medium or painterly style.

Plant Portraits: character and identity About *Two Plants*, Freud said: "They are lots of little portraits of leaves, lots and lots of them, starting with them rather robust in the middle—greeny-blue and cream—and getting more yellow and broken".[27] Can there be such a thing as the portrait of a plant? And how does it differ from the picture of one? Cedric Morris distinguished between what he called *flower painting* and a *good painting of flowers*, "the former being painted by one who loved and therefore comprehended flowers as one of his subjects and the latter by any good painter who happened to choose flowers as one of his subjects much as he might any other still life..."[28]

The portrait, by common definition, is a term exclusive to people. According to historical accounts, Egyptian funerary masks were some of the oldest portraits.[29] Made of terracotta or gold, they faithfully captured the facial features of the deceased. Funerary masks played an important spiritual role—in the afterlife, the mask allowed the spirit to recognize its body. It held the key to one's identity.[30]

Across the history of art, the most accomplished portraits, capture a spirited detail: a glint of the sitter's soul—something that even today, many believe, cannot be captured with equal honesty

by photography. This is because mimetic resemblance is only half of the picture. A true portrait emerges from the singular details in which the individuality of a sitter is harboured and the ability of the artist to tease these to the surface: the arched eyebrow, the distinctive curling of the lips, or the glimmer in the eye. Freud knew this well: "The picture in order to move us must never merely remind us of life, but must acquire a life of its own, precisely in order to *reflect* life".[31]

So, what are the singular details in which the individuality of a plant resides? If at this point, conceiving of a plant portrait might sound unlikely, would it be possible to at least entertain the idea of an animal portrait? Each of the beautiful plates in John James Audubon's *Birds of America* was made by copying more than 50, sometimes up to 100, birds of one species.[32] Audubon killed and posed each one as needed. Metal wires held the body in place until it began to sag and rot. He'd then discard it and set another. Audubon's concern wasn't with immortalizing an individual bird. In line with the objectives of natural history, he obsessed with the specimen: one impossibly perfect animal representing all the individuals of the same species. The specimen can never be a portrait; a portrait is about the mark of individuality. The specimen is always a singular-plural. The conception of animals and plants as interchangeable multiples of multiples has diminished the value we attribute to their lives, it has made them less remarkable in our eyes. This contingency has had a major, detrimental impact on our relationship with the planet and is today at least in part responsible for the ecological crises that we have triggered.

Individuality and the soul are intimately linked. According to western philosophy and major religions, animals and plants can't have souls, and as such, they cannot be truly portrayed in the sense that a person can—they only exist on a superficial level, there's nothing beneath for the artist to extract and distil.[33] But pets are an exception. Renowned for his paintings of horses and

dogs, Edwin Henry Landseer became Queen Victoria's official animal portraitist. His paintings of the Queen Victoria's dogs Dash, Hector, and Nero turned the United Kingdom into a nation of pet lovers. Often painted with a subtle hint of humanness, in Landseer's paintings the Queen's dogs were individuals—unequivocally, always. This is certainly due, in part, to the skill of the artist but Landseer's ability to individualize pets was also rooted in a specific relationship between time and empathy. This relationship is also central to Freud's many engravings and paintings of Pluto, the whippet that kept him company between 1988 and 2003. In works representing this beloved pet, Freud often included heavily cropped human figures, sometimes only hands and feet, to evidence Pluto's individuality as a pet rather than as a representative of her species.

Our close contact with pets allows us to discern a personal character that we cannot grasp in the fleetingness of wildlife. We share our lives with pets. Day after day we learn to read our cats' and dogs' expressive language and read their emotions. Given time, even goldfish reveal a distinctive set of characteristic responses and mannerisms that add up to a kind of individual identity. But identity is only factual as far as bureaucracy is concerned. To many of us, identity is fluid and temporary. With animals and plants, identity is most often a matter of our perception, our ability to see and to remember— our will to meet them halfway as individuals.

The plant pot and the garden—recurring themes across Freud's body of work—offer unique opportunities to discern the identity and personality of our vegetal companions. These delimited spaces allow us to concentrate on individual plants and observe them over long periods of time and thus allow for a special sense of uniqueness and recognition to emerge.

Testing the concept of the portrait against the boundaries of the non-human reveals its true essence: a portrait is more than a picture

Pluto's Grave ***(detail)***

of someone, it's an incarnation. And at its core is a fragile thread of empathetic connection that eludes words—the possibility of discerning a likeness that surpasses the notion of evidence in order to reach deeper into an idiosyncratic expression that only repeated exposure can make visible.

Is the individual character of the plant then indissolubly enmeshed with the time we spend focussing on leaves, blooms and branches? If we looked at the plant intensely enough, not to find beauty in the classic-gardening sense but to discern the traits that make it unique, what could we learn about it? And what could we learn about ourselves as we look at the plant?

Starting with the late 40s, the intense scrutiny that characterized Lucian Freud's work led him to treat plants as subjects rather than passive objects—an important step towards the possibility of contemplating a plant portrait. He pulled them from the background—where they had been relegated since the Renaissance—to the front of the canvas. Freud knew that composition predetermines our hierarchies of knowledge—what we learn from the painting and how we learn it. It is no coincidence that in wholly original and unforgettable paintings like *Interior in Paddington* (1951), the potted yucca commands the same gravitas as Harry Diamond. The encounter is tense and deliberately open-ended—the painting is effectively a double portrait. It challenges our assumption that the human figure must always be central to the composition as well as the narrative. The beauty of such awkward painterly encounters with plants, by nature inexhaustible and unfinished, lies in Freud's willingness to orchestrate the representational space around the form of the plant, rather than that of the human, and in the process, to bravely embrace the silence of the plant not as a kind of absence but as an opportunity hear more.

Denied any easy allegorical shortcuts, the viewer can't but notice the many imperfections, marks, tears, and blemishes that

make a plant unique. These, not the symbolism of Christianity or Victorian floriography, become an essential part of its true and distinctive vegetal voice.

Plant identity is superficial, not in the sense that it is shallow but in that it resides on the surface of leaves, petals, and branches. Unlike animals whose organs lie deep within cages of bones and beneath layers of muscles, the organs of plants are at once inside and outside. The plant's best-kept secrets are always in plain sight.

In this sense, human portraits and plants bear a singular similarity. The portrait is all about teasing emotional stirrings to the surface so to capture and express the irrepresentable depth of the human—a distilling of the incomprehensible essence we call a soul. From this vantage point, a portrait of a plant becomes a more plausible proposition.

More often than not, Freud painted plants that lived for many years in his home or studio; towards the end of his life, he focussed on his garden. Like many other zimmerlinde painted by Freud, the yucca and the pandanus are all in terracotta pots—plants that moved from home to home with him, some have outlived him. In his work, Freud never betrayed their status as long-time, vegetal companions.

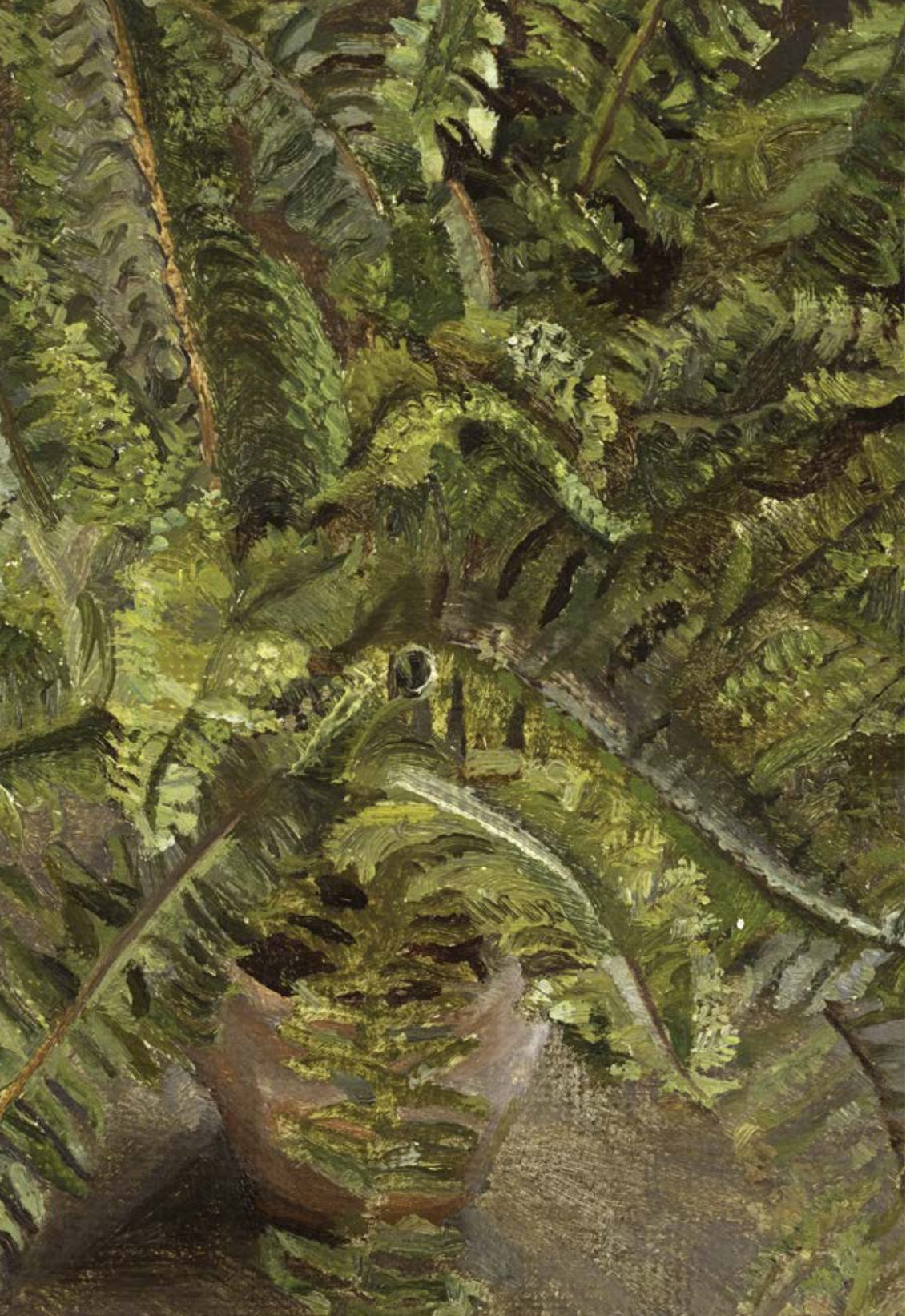
The pot accentuates the individuality of the plant. It transforms "a plant" into "this plant". This plant we have shared our life with is very different from the clone of clones we just bought from the garden centre. This plant that has been with us for years has also grown with us. Across its branches is inscribed the structure of our relationships with it and with the domestic space we have created for it. Our care and forgetfulness, the lighting and humidity, our pruning or lack thereof. House plants bear the scars of our shared lives on their leaves—a silent dialogue that over time unfolds between us and them. We often spend more time with plants than with our best friends or family members. The same can be said for perennials in the garden which, in one way or another, have been shaped by our presence or absence.

As you read these words, in the bedroom, living room, or bathroom, there's likely a plant that has been around for many years. It travelled with you when that new job took you to another city, and it endured your holidays abroad. It sprouted new leaves when you went through that horrible breakup, and it dropped them when your cat mistook its pot for a new, cool litter box. This plant has cheered you up many times when it was cold outside and all around looked grey; when bad news turned the world upside down, and you touched rock bottom; or when its leaves suddenly looked glossier and greener as you became smitten with that special someone. All along, this plant has been there, seemingly still and silent, keeping you company in those moments of solitude, witnessing it all, and providing the reassurance of a continuity that despite its fragility has survived longer than other things in your life.

Whether in pots or gardens, a plant's personality—if keenly observed—invites us to rethink our obsolete conceptions of identity. It asks us to fine-tune our attention and patience. It expects us to look closer and longer, like Freud did, and to concentrate much harder. It offers the opportunity to, if only temporarily, attune ourselves to the rhythms and time-scales of plant life. In and of itself, a plant portrait is never just a picture of a plant. It is an opportunity to slow down and be present, and to heighten our sensitivity to the radical difference of others. A plant portrait of the kind Freud was able to paint is a matter of alignments, a mapping of proximities, an silent dialogue, and at times, a leap of faith.

Freud's determination to slow down the act of looking, to leave things as they are as much as possible, his disinterest in embellishing and perfecting, as well as his mistrust of symbolism are not simply personal coordinates through which he created thought-provoking and awkwardly abrasive paintings. In Freud's work, torn, yellowed, and blemished leaves are celebrated,

distinctive traits of the identity of an individual plant: each painting, a unique portrait capturing a history of shared growth entwining artist and plant in ways that words can never quite adequately capture. Each painting, through its ability to reimagine stillness, silence, and solitude provides an opportunity to rethink the role plants play in our everyday life beyond the cultural structures that for too long have impoverished our world by leading us to look elsewhere.



CONVERSATION

DAVID DAWSON & GIOVANNI ALOI

This is an extract from a conversation with artist and Freud's studio assistant David Dawson and Giovanni Aloi that took place on 20 July 2018.

David: Has Annie [Freud] told you about the zimmerlinde?
Giovanni: Yes, she did. I found the whole story very fascinating. Do you recall anything interesting about Lucian's relationship with plants in his studio?
David: Yes, my impression is that Lucian painted plants when life tended to become tumultuous and his relationships with other people were strained. Or when he simply could not find a model to paint.
Giovanni: That's interesting. It also appears clear, looking at Freud's body of work, that he painted the same plant multiple times. Am I right? Are these the same plants in each work?
David: Yes, they are, and I still have some of them in my garden. I still keep them here—the zimmerlinde in *Large Interior Paddington* (1969) sits outside in its large pot. The aspidistra Lucian painted in *Two Plants* (1980) is out there too. He painted it again in a work with me and Eli laying on the bed (*David and Eli,* 2003). Aspidistra is called the "cast iron plant" for a reason. It is indestructible!

There was also the imposing pelargonium behind the sofa in *Large Interior (After Watteau)* 1981. The plants tend to live their own lives in the studio and he let them do their thing. The way he dealt with plants was very much in line with how he led his life. He did not want to impose on them his aesthetic taste. He wanted things to follow their rules and nature. So plants were allowed to grow as they

Small Fern ***(detail)***

pleased, sometimes into a mess. But because of that, the plants were good for his paintings. They fit his idea of what painting should do. He wasn't cutting them back.

The garden at Kensington Church Street, Notting Hill, also followed the same rules. He just let it grow wild. He never kept it, in the sense of proper gardening, because we wanted nature to do its thing and that's how he wanted to paint them. The buddleia that became central to his late garden paintings just grew in the middle of the garden on its own—it was a weed. He let it grow right there. It then became this amazing flowering bush that he enjoyed painting. Nothing was contrived. He never thought of himself as a gardener.

Giovanni: His approach to plants is highly realistic and yet it does something very different from botanical illustration, which aimed to objectively capture the "perfect plant", the specimen that represents the species, and neither does it fit in the philosophical idea of the flower still life that emerged in the context of the Dutch Golden Age. His plants look raw and real, bare and vibrant in a way that neither botanical illustration nor still-life painting has ever accomplished. This is where the idea for the book came from. Do you remember how many plants were in the studio?

David: They would go in and out depending on the paintings. Sometimes he moved the zimmerlinde to the bedroom or the bathroom if they weren't being painted. We often reconfigured the studio as needed after a painting was finished—you know, a new beginning... Sometimes we moved the plants out because they were very large and took up quite a bit of space.

Giovanni: And how did he manage the growth of his plants in the paintings? He was a notoriously slow painter and plants can grow fast...

David: The growth of the plant was just part of it. He just painted along and captured the way the plant grew.

Giovanni: Annie and I talked about the idea that Lucian Freud was not a gardener or that he did not have a green thumb in the

traditional sense. I am very interested in this idea because I believe that gardening is more than an activity, it's a concept. As a concept, it predetermines what we are meant to do and how—gardening books and magazines teach us how to be "good gardeners" and they set clear aesthetic standards that we ought to achieve. There's a strong emphasis on plant demeanor and shape as well as a fetishization for perfection and bloom size that pervades the gardening literature. I am interested in the idea that Freud related to plants in a personal way that existed beyond the cliches of the good gardener.

David: Yes, he wasn't keen on making his plants look beautiful in a traditional sense. He wasn't a gardener. He really wasn't. He was certainly not an horticulturalist. And he found it interesting to paint dead or dying leaves just as much as he painted healthy green ones, so the idea of achieving perfection with plant care was never part of the equation because that's not what he wanted to paint.

I planted his garden here at Kensington Church Street. I prepared the ground but he chose the plants. The bay trees, the bamboo...

Giovanni: Yes, Annie mentioned that he used to go to Clifton Nurseries, in Maida Vale to buy plants but that you'd never catch him with a bag of soil or a shovel in his hands.

David: The nursery was owned by Jacob Rothschild who was a close friend. We'd order the plants and go and pick them up. Lucian had an amazing aesthetic sense. When it was finished it was a really beautiful garden that matched his vision. He wanted the bay trees on the sides and the bamboo between them and then he just let them grow. And he never wanted to cut back or prune or change the shape of them, they just grew. It eventually grew thick. From the kitchen doors on the ground floor, it looked like a cave and from the first-floor studio windows, it was like a canopy that you could look into.

Giovanni: That explains the aesthetic of some of his garden paintings.

David: He also liked cyclamen. The way the flower wilted with a dramatic drop. He loved to have certain flowers in the house. I'd go with him very early in the morning, four or five in the morning, to the

Covent Garden Flower Market and buy boxes of plants or buy cut flowers in bulk to display around the house. We'd go once a month to always have flowers around.

Giovanni: That must have been lovely.

David: Yes, he loved white cyclamen. The pots would be on the windowsills and mantlepieces around the house filling the space with a beautiful fragrance. He also like winter flowering narcissuses—he loved white flowers. He never went for colour.

Giovanni: Am I right that he wasn't a fan of flowering annuals? I am thinking geraniums, petunias, impatience...

David: Yes, he hated the idea of prettiness in the sense of abundant blooms and romantic roses. In the garden, he was more interested in the architecture of plants, like the bamboo and bay trees. He was also fond of oak leaf hydrangea. I am not sure why. He never said or never wanted to say... He loved greens and terra colours, like the ones he often used in his paintings. But he also liked wild, cut flowers. His *Buttercups* painting shows that. Penelope Cuthbertson used to replenish the jug for him as he painted away.

Giovanni: Yes, that's a beautiful and unusual painting for him in a sense.

David: Ultimately, he believed in the individuality of everything, and he wanted to capture that. The doorknobs, keyholes, floorboards, people—he treated the plants in the same way. The plant in the painting was as important as the person. And he wanted the character of each individual thing to breathe itself.

Giovanni: It's very rewarding to have this conversation with you, David. This desire to equalize everything is actually very much in line with the concerns of a current philosophical wave called Object Oriented Ontology according to which everything is an object (human bodies included) and all that unfolds in phenomenology is encounter and interaction between objects. It sounds provocative, but it helps us to understand life beyond the values and hierarchies that we attribute to everything.

David: Yes, to Freud that's what equated to a search for truth and the way to find truth, for him, was to look very, very hard at everything in correspondence to something else.

So, he was interested in the plant next to me next to the dog next to the bed next to the floor, how it all tied together if you look at it with intent.

Giovanni: Yes, it is interesting how artists have in many instances anticipated philosophical approaches. Miro' was also concerned with something similar—equalizing every object on the canvas so that nothing was more important than the other. This search for a truth that, as much as possible, bypasses our discernment, narratives, and symbolism so that we can see the world from different perspectives, beyond our preconceived ideas.

David: Yes, he was never interested in imposing meaning on the painting. The meaning emerged from the factuality of what he represented.

Giovanni: This approach also makes the plant visible as equally important to the other objects and I find that very interesting. In the context of the representation of plants in western art, that's actually quite revolutionary since plants were always relegated to the background or if they were allowed to the front, it was only so that they could be made to symbolically speak of things they cannot possibly care about, like Christianity.

David: His painterly approach suspended judgment. He wasn't overanalyzing.

Following pages *Pluto's Grave*, 2003, photograph by David Dawson

CONVERSATION

ANNIE FREUD & GIOVANNI ALOI

This is an extract of a conversation between poet and essayist Annie Freud, Lucian Freud's eldest child and Giovanni Aloi that took place on 5 June 2018.

Annie: I recently watched a TV program about researchers who travel to very remote parts of the world to research plants in order to find cures or preventive measures for diseases or contribute to a better and more sustainable world for the future. I found it really fascinating that these researchers from all over the world would be working extremely slowly in order to look for something they don't even know might exist—it was very inspirational. Don't go for what's obvious, is possibly the lesson here, there's always more than you thought.

Giovanni: Yes, I can see— and as you know, the surge of interest in plants is very much motivated by climate change and the theories of the Anthropocene...

Annie: ...which have suddenly become inescapable.

Giovanni: When the interest in animals in art emerged at the beginning of the millennium, the recurring question was: "why look at animals now?" And of course, there were many answers to that. Questioning our relationship with animals was a way to probe the boundaries of the nature/culture promoted by humanism — the Renaissance dogma that put humans on a pedestal and made us the measure of all things. In philosophy as well as the arts, starting from the 17th century, the importance of animals and plants was greatly diminished.

The animal is simultaneously remote and too close, ancestral and yet present, outside and within us. It disturbs the boundaries

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Still Life with Zimmerlinde ***(detail)***

of what we call "human" with ungrounded notions of irrationality. Throughout modernity, the animal has become the shadow of the human. The rise of interest in plants is linked to the reconsideration of animals that took place a few years ago.

Annie: Yes! An exhibition on my father's paintings of animals was held in 2015 in Siegen, Germany.

Giovanni: Correct, I have the catalogue. But plants are now the new frontier of non-human philosophy. I have been interested in animals and plants since I was a child. One summer, my aunt in the South of Italy roped me into making an herbarium of the local plants. I think it taught me how to look. It made me even more aware of the incredible beauty and complexity one can find so easily in a patch of green. As I grew up, my interest in animals and plants made me somewhat of an outcast. Society expects us to drop our interest in nature and shift our gaze on cars, sport, careers... those who don't, won't fit the mold. And plants especially are still very gendered.

Annie: Essentially seen as wrong for a man. While plants and flowers are necessarily bound up with fashion, they are also have an uneasy connection to notions of privilege and sometimes even appear to express prejudice. I always feel a shudder when remembering Osmond's name for his secretly illegitimate daughter with Madame Merle in James's Portrait of a Lady.: *Pansy! Honestly?*

Giovanni: I am somewhat suspicious as to why your father's paintings of plants should be so underestimated and underexposed by the critics. There is a tradition of painting-genres that have been considered inferior for centuries.

Annie: I think that's because of misogyny. Some of the most talented female artists of earlier periods were restricted to painting plants and fruits instead of the heroic subjects painted by male artists that powerful people would want to acquire. So, painting plants and flowers is seen as diminishing: it's girl's stuff! Above all it's 'polite'. It's evidence for Professor Greer's theory of *The Female Eunuch,* borne out in the real world.

In relation to this—there is something I'd like to say about the initial contact you made and some of the information you have gathered about my father and plants. As you know, important artists are mythologised and many go to quite great lengths to perpetuate their own, for some there's no need to have a tangible product... Many assumptions are made and are attached to artists; first, they get promulgated, then they are repeated, then they become gospel, and eventually reinforce homogeneity in what people think. When I read that Munch, though hailed as an early champion of the avant-garde, and as much so today, had been brought up in terrible poverty by a father who inflicted his religious mania on his children, and that he found these new freedoms that he saw others around him enjoying, very difficult to tolerate – only then was I able to make some sense of him.

The one misconception that I am keen to dismantle in the context of the focus of your book is that my father painted animals and plants as a way of fleeing the difficulty and complexity of relationships with people.

Giovanni: Yes, I have encountered that claim in more than one book about him. What's your take?

Annie: I know it's not true. He had a bit of a Marlene Dietrich thing going on; *I va-ant to be alone.* He tells this story that when he was little his first word was *allein*. That he wanted to be left alone. I have some of my grandmother's photo albums and there he is laughing and playing with his friends on the sand. Anyway, it sounds way too flaky for him. He needed solitude sometimes like everyone does, and might seem a bit stressed or low sometimes if he felt let down, but he'd be always working away on all possible fronts.

Famous artists are apt to make ontological statements, even mythologies around their practice; perhaps; it's their way to stay sane and arm themselves against the public social art world. A bit of razzle-dazzle 'em, if you will. And, just think, its 7ish on a Monday in November, pouring with rain, you're just turning into Dean Street on

your way to the Colony Room and thence to Wheelers and probably back to Colony Room for another dose of the lash, you might feel a bit short of a story to dine out on. You were not allowed to be boring at Muriel's. You know, Francis Bacon would say something like: "I remember looking at a dog-shit on the pavement and I suddenly realised, there it is, this is what life is." He would say things like that. Sometimes he would permit himself to express a sort of stagey effete delight when there'd been a humanitarian disaster somewhere. *Ooo, all the more for us!* And I expect he mostly got away with it. But these statements should not be taken too literally. Neither should they be dismissed as affectation. They should be treated in a more circumspect way.

Occasionally they offer something uniquely esoteric. When I remember he and other artists used to perorate about art during my evenings out with him, it was like watching extraordinary wild birds behaving in their peculiarly programmed but exhilarating way, making the light give them an alluring iridescence. Perhaps scientific studies of animal behaviour and the evolutionary pathways between them and the emergence of early humans will soon be revealing ways in which human beings have retained more of their neurological and physiological characteristics than we know.

Every five years my father would tell me that Ingres's mother made herself a hat the day she died. Perhaps he was school-marmishly inculcating in me some notion of being more industrious, in which at the time I was probably lacking. Perhaps it was just a way of admiring someone who kept their lust for life going in their last hours on earth. Something goes amiss in the passive retelling of these stories - if that's all it is. Worse is the thought of painstaking excavation of the data in order to tease out some 'new' polemic. Ultimately this approach becomes tendentious and even infantilising; moreover it's weak psychology, and it's reductive of what certain statements actually mean.

One of the finest and most useful expressions of this is to be found in Constable's words. "The picture I am painting will have no companion. No other has ever been painted 'til now." If your life is that of a painter, perhaps the only way to keep driving yourself is to think of every painting you make as the only painting that has been and will ever be painted. Lucian did sometimes say as much, and I have found similar thoughts expressed by his contemporaries. The mental strain was sometimes very visible. I love what Frank Auerbach says of his earlier years as a painter: that he was painting at a time when only those who really wanted to paint were actually doing it. During the 80s and 90s, art became a sort of catch-all for a certain kind of growing-up, resisting growing up, surviving, creating a semblance of a portfolio career without ever having a job, but also for a kind of search for a lost youth, the opening of paint-boxes that had remained closed for many years. And out of these often painful struggles the demographic of artistic practice has changed and increased in ever more different directions. And we see arising new models of engagement, a hope for collectivity, the desire for fame, thirst for originality, the search for the antecedents and the now vanished worlds they lived in, were forcibly transported from and migrated away from.

Giovanni: So, do you have an alternative view on why he painted plants? Since, as you rightly say, the official narrative might not be correct...

Annie: My father, a little like Goethe, saw plants as having behaviour. He used to say that he loved how a cyclamen dies. He also said: "the artist has to look at something again, and again, and again, whether it's an object or a living being because only then will the object release all of itself from which the artist can then select". That's how he treated plants. Goethe was enormously influential in German culture and was a presence of my grandparents' household. I see similarities between the way in which he looked at plants and how my father thought about them.

In his treatise on the Metamorphosis of plants Goethe observed that they have a shared uniformity— they rarely are, if ever, unique. He named this phenomenon Homology, some 50 years before it became the object of scientific study.

You know how national characteristics can be seen as expressed in music and thought? I think my father thought plants did the same: the way they grow, the way they deploy their colours, their chemical properties, the way they reproduce, the way they die...

Also, are you familiar with the Zimmerlinde?

Giovanni: Yes. They appear many times in his paintings.

Annie: Yes! My grandfather grew them. They have been in my family for a few generations and probably come from Germany where during the last century they were a German intellectual plant of choice. They were in my father's studio, by the windows—they were always there.

There is significance in this plant for my family. The name contains the word "room": plant for the room. Rooms were important to my father's paintings. In more than one way, Zimmerlinde is the icon plant in his "herbarium".

Or, *Large Interior* (1968-69) where a massive zimmerlinde dominates the scene. Zimmerlinde leaves are also visible in a portrait of my mother Kitty titled *Girl with Leaves* (1947). She wears a stripy top and the leaves fill in the upper part of the canvas, right above her head.

Giovanni: Yes, she looks quite concerned.

Annie: The zimmerlinde is a reminder of his origins. My father painted zimmerlinde like it actually is. If you have a plant growing in your room, you are more likely to put down roots of your own.

Giovanni: So, the way he painted them—let's talk about that. I'm beginning to understand your phrase: a leaf can look like a knife blade, a face, a breast, a mountain. But in the paintings the zimmerlinde leaves are very realistic, they look like what they are at that particular time in such a way that it doesn't represent anything beyond itself.

The plants are usually represented in very realistic ways, but yet not quite scientific. There is a specific bareness and vibrancy that is

specific to the relationship between the artist and the plant, a desire to see past the cultural ideas that pre-define the encounter.

Annie: He didn't like plants that were too overtly pretty or romantic. He had extreme tastes in gardens. It was either his own balcony, his back garden, or Drummond Castle Gardens that Mike Andrews painted with the Beatles as they appeared on the sleeve of *The Magical Mystery Tour.*

And if there's one thing that's specific about staring at plants for hours and hours is the sensation of privacy.

Giovanni: Intimacy?

Annie: No, privacy; intimacy is more what you get with staring at inanimate objects.

Giovanni: Tell me more about the distinction?

Annie: With inanimate objects in art - pipes, coffee pots, bags, mattresses - there's intimacy and where there's intimacy there's also compromise. But with privacy you are free. With privacy, you have the liberty to have your thoughts and feelings without reference to another. At least that's what I experience with plants or when I'm working well, in possession of my mojo. When you paint a head or more particularly a nude, the transaction is deeper because you experience the person's selfhood and usually invisible body. And there is the sitter's comfort to consider. But a plant is not going to shrink with any kind of modesty or complicated feelings.

Giovanni: Can we say that the plant is always naked?

Annie: Yes, but not in the way that human beings are.

Giovanni: ...in the way that a plant is always essentially naked and with no alternative to its being? A being that cannot run away and hide? A being that does not experience the vulnerability of shame?

Annie: Yes. And the words "shame" and Lucian Freud don't sit easily in the same sentence either!

Giovanni: Returning more specifically to the notion of looking at something. I have come across quite a few texts in which your father is quoted to have said that "he looked at his sitters like animals".; that

he wanted to access a visceral reality of the sitter divested not only of their clothes but also of their social connotations. In this sense, his portraits stage an encounter in which the human body is to a degree unscripted. It isn't the conventional nude of classical art and neither is it erotic.

Annie: Have you come across that passage from Georges Bataille: "The animal opens before me a depth that attracts me and is familiar to me. In a sense, I know this depth: it is my own". With animals, even wild animals in their own habitat, a sense of mutual recognition and reciprocity is at hand. Many, but not all, plants have a kind of existential neutrality, Cotinus, Mimosa, Irises,

I use that neutrality in the Dutch and French paintings of the 1700s. But my father modernized that approach—in his paintings they have a feeling of "nothing matters", while also mattering intensely. The plants are free to behave as they do. Does that make sense? Plants live, die and they don't give a shit.

Giovanni: Do you think your father cared for the plants in a basic way? I mean, we know that the plants moved with him from apartment to apartment. Did he take care of them?

Annie: Just enough... he kept them alive.

Giovanni: One of the things that attracted me to your father's paintings of plants was this apparent contradiction involved in the kind of realism he employed. He chose fruits and plants that don't have art historical symbolic meanings.

Your father's paintings accomplish something wholly different. His paintings suggest a way to connect with plants that is new to art and that bypasses the classical rhetoric of plant-painting in order to reveal something else that goes well beyond aesthetic beauty.

Annie: It's the brushstrokes that do it. Once, several years after he died, I was on holiday in Kerala, in Southern India with my husband, Dave. At our hotel, the guests stayed in small lodges in an organised and dense jungle. On the first morning, I stepped outside and found myself face to face with the enormous pandanus in his painting *Interior with*

Plant, Reflection Listening, with all its gorgeous savage colours, the stripes of yellow and acid green. I got such a shock I nearly jumped out of my skin.

My father very much-admired Jean Baptiste Siméon Chardin—one of the greatest masters of still-life painting. He painted this magnificent pyramid of strawberries in a basket (1761). He was very much interested in the way Chardin could capture a simple essence in plants and fruits. He also loved Durer, although my father was not keen to acknowledge such influences until he was much older. He was quite fastidious about that as if the idea of belonging to some sort of tradition was somehow demeaning. He didn't want to be put in a pigeonhole and categorized.

Giovanni: He was also very fond of Cedric Morris and his flower paintings, correct?

Annie: Of course—I'm not sure how much inspiration was drawn from Morris's paintings of flowers and plants, but my father was his pupil. And I think one of the reasons for his continued loyalty was that Morris did not give praise easily.

Giovanni: Do you have a sense of which criteria led him to paint one plant or another?

Annie: He attached personal meanings to certain plants. For instance, the buddleia grows on the poorest soil and because he grew up in wartime London, dereliction was familiar and interesting to him.

He was attracted to plants, trees, flowers and fruit that had a certain hardiness and also those who are slow to give up their sweetness like quinces. He liked plants that had spikes, serrated leaves, prickles, density and mass and that could survive in hostile environments. He loved T.S. Eliot's line from Prufrock: 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' which so self-deprecatingly expresses the desire to make a distinction between one's aesthetic taste and the appeal of sensuous pleasure.

But he could equally fall in love with a bunch of buttercups or a sprig of heather because someone he cared for had given them to him. On one of my last visits to him, in memory of his wonderful buttercup

painting, I picked a large bunch of buttercups from my garden and took them up on the train to him. *Put them here on the table where I can see them*, he said.

Olives and figs bear a connection to Greece, a country he loved. When I was a child, we went to stay in Athens and to Piraeus which is the port where we watched Greek men roasting meat over charcoal and my father was fascinated by that.

He used to say that when you plant a fig tree you have to bung a large piece of stone under it- and would illustrate it with an apt gesture. The fig leaf especially, in his paintings, is an expression of happy masculinity.

Giovanni: ...not shame...

Annie: No, let's get rid of this shame idea. He said: "Guilt is the most useless emotion". I mean, how can one even conceive of a life without guilt?!

Also, the *aspidistra* was a plant with a personal meaning. You know, George Orwell, whom he knew, wrote a novel called *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* (1934)? It's about an impoverished but aspirational existence just before the second world war and how the stronghold of prudish yet prurient British culture spoilt people's joy in life and the way in which people clutched at damaging pleasure. Aspidistra was a middle-class symbol encapsulating Victorian wealth. In a sense, the aspidistra is the British zimmerlinde.

Giovanni: I have been greatly enjoying spending time with your father's paintings as much as I have enjoyed reading your poems. I don't know that you might agree, but I see some connections between his work and yours. For instance, one of the interesting aspects of the research for this book is how it has brought me to reconsider and rethink the importance of realism as an aesthetic approach to representation. There's a history of objectification in art history that is intimately linked to realism. I am thinking about orientalism or even the tradition of the nude. Eroticism is the detail. Modern art used abstraction to bypass this kind of objectification. At the Art Institute

of Chicago, we have a large Picasso from 1959 titled *Nude Under a Pine Tree.* The body is fragmented in that typical late cubist style and the paintings brims with a sense of joie de vivre. The model is splayed open and yet she is not an erotic object for the male gaze. But in your poems, as well as in your father's work I see a kind of realism that bypasses objectification. It does something different.

Annie: Could you say more about that?

Giovanni: One of my favourite poems of yours is *Scopophilia.* There are images in it that are presented in a starkly realistic fashion that reach well beyond the remit of evidence. What I see is a beautifully crafted series of scenes evoking a childhood defined by institutional structures and an awe for discovery marked by an existentialist tinge. It's simple and raw, it has a beautiful "minor-quality"—a register of realism that I somehow also recognize in some of your father's paintings.

Annie: Yes, in terms of written composition, when two things go too easily together, you know you're in trouble. That's why your own personal taste matters so much and why you have to cultivate it.

Giovanni: Do you think that's a deliberate strategy to avoid the canon?

Annie: Absolutely! It's an affirmation of individuality and a way to stand up to academia and its prescriptions. My father loved the architect Sir. John Soane. He adored his originality and his desire to break free of conventions to the point that you can have a window above a fireplace. There's a wonderful poem by Yeats called The Scholars. Here it is with my father's addition of two words to the penultimate line.

> Bald heads forgetful of their sins,
> Old, learned, respectable bald heads
> Edit and annotate the lines
> That young men, tossing on their beds,
> Rhymed out in love's despair
> To flatter beauty's ignorant ear.

All shuffle there; all cough in ink;
All wear the carpet with their shoes;
All think what other people think;
All know the man their neighbour knows.
Lord, what would those greybeards say
Did their Catullus walk that way?

Giovanni: So, there is something very interesting at stake here that I also see in your poems—this ability to stay with reality in an abrasive way and yet to be personal—it is a very original tension.
Annie: Yes, I understand. When a person looks more it is because they want you to see more. My sister Esther wrote a novel called The Wild, in which the main character, a child, introduces her father to the colour mauve. He didn't think of mauve as having any particular value until she sent him a mauve rose. That was a really lovely aspect of our father—that anyone close to him could educate him, visually—make things personal. That he was capable of being taught. He often asked me to help him speak better French but it did not happen.
Giovanni: And in a sense, your father's ability to compose images in unorthodox ways played with the classical notions of objectification and captivation that are usually associated with the nude in art. I see an intense desire to re-frame reality but remain with it—to shake the reader or the viewer and to take them to a place of new awareness.
Annie: Yes, and that's when writing is exciting. You know, a lot of the time, I feel that I am also trying to free myself from his influence too, if you see what I mean. I am always caught up in a dynamic of close identification and separation and I think that that's the hand I've been dealt.
Giovanni: Of course... and you are the only one who can meaningfully speak to that.
Annie: I cherish my memories of him. There is no end to them.
Giovanni: A lot has been said about the way in which your father looked at the people he painted. We know that he spent an enormous

amount of time painting. Through my research for this book, I had the opportunity to more carefully consider the importance of slowing down, especially in the context of the times we live in and how fast everything seems to be. I have begun to identify an interesting assonance between plants and painting that I think your father's work, with its dedication to slow-observation, encapsulates very well. Painting plants in the way your father did, thus becomes a way of being and making a connection with plants and life through avenues that surpass our everyday rushed experiences through digital interfaces. In his paintings of plants, I see an antidote to today's living; an antidote that can be better if not only accessed through painting as a medium through which we make sense of life.
Annie: Yes, this is a wonderful idea. I believe that the experience of being with these paintings has something to do with one's vulnerability and willingness to be looked at by a work. It's about letting the painting be a kind of tutor to you. You have to let the paintings do their work on you.
Giovanni: And that's what we find harder and harder in our daily experiences. Another aspect of your father's paintings of animals and plants that I am drawn to is the impression that, under his gaze, everything is equally important.
Annie: Absolutely! A great example of that is his massive canvas of David (Dawson). A body, a penis, testicles, a face, a plant, a dog in a state of ecstatic relaxation. The rickety plant stand imbues the painting with a sense of the precarious... It occurs to me that the inclusion of a plant in a portrait or a nude was in a way a subtle modification of, or counter pose to one's perception of the sitter. These equivalences are about resisting imposed meaning and accepting life in its randomness.

POEMS

ANNIE FREUD

The Poet is Kept Awake by Some Roses

After buying six tomatoes, a fennel bulb
and a head of chicory,
I see them, standing in a vase
outside the greengrocer's door.
Greengrocer – how fresh that sounds
and how old-fashioned.

They were a curious yellow (more than
forty years ago, I stood with you outside the Paris Pullman
waiting to see *I am Curious, Yellow*)
long stemmed, almost scentless, thornless.
Their fluted shallow petals had a patina
of beaten gold.

I touched their heads. I hungered for them
but did not buy. Perhaps
their almost mathematical perfection
put me off and I imagined how I'd grieve
when they shrivelled and died.
I'm grieving now.

For Mark O'Connor

Plant Knowledge for Beginners

Now that she's dead, he worries that he won't know
the names of the plants that wily divorcees
will come on to him in the breaks.
All the indignities of night school are waiting for him:
having to tolerate the class show-off,
wanting too much to be liked by the tutor.

He comes to the office and shouts at everyone,
shouts down the phone. For lunch he has
a bread-crumbed escalope. Indoors, he wears
her lime-green mohair shawl, his one comfort.

In her rare plant catalogue he reads: *fragrant
large white female, followed by white-and-purple
sausage-shaped fruits and purple male flowers.
Very freely borne. Full sun or partial shade.*

Seeing his reflection in the French doors
he thinks he's beginning to look like her.

Introduction Endnotes

1 Stuart-Smith, Sue, 2021. *The Well Gardened Mind*. London: William Collins. p. 141
2 After the fire at the school in 1939 Freud moved to The Pound with Morris and Lett-Haines. He continued at the school after it moved to Benton End the following year.
3 Feaver, William. 2019. *The Lives of Lucian Freud: Fame – 1968 to 2011*. New York: Knopf. Epub. 2019. p.77
4 Ibid, p.78
5 Dawson, David and Gayford, Martin. 2022. *Love Lucian: The Letters of Lucian Freud 1939–1954*. London: Thames and Hudson Ltd. p.339
6 Feaver, Willipam Vol 1 p. 261
7 Observation by Dr Giovanni Aloi of the Art Institute of Chicago.
8 David Dawson quoted in Sooke, Alistair, Telegraph, 16 September 2019.

Lucian Freud *Plant Portraits* Endnotes

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2 Lucian Freud quoted in Hammer, Martin. 2007. *The Naked Portrait*, Glasgow: National Galleries of Scotland. p.11
3 Blackwood, Caroline. 1993. 'Portraits by Freud' in *The New York Review*, December 16th
5 Sophie de Stempel in conversation with the author, October 30, 2018.
6 Ibid
7 Wheelock, Arthur K., and National Gallery of Art U S. *From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art*. National Gallery of Art, 1999.
8 Feaver, William. 2019 *The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years – 1968 to 2011*. epub. p.262
9 Ibid, p. 266
10 Ibid
11 Frank Auerbach in conversation with William Feaver quoted in Feaver, William. 2019. *The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years – 1968 to 2011*. p.180
12 Freud, Lucian and Debray, Cécile. 2010. *L'Atelier*. Paris: Centre Pompidou. p.112
13 Ibid, p.928 also, Gayford, Martin. 2011. *Man with a Blue Scarf: On Sitting for a Portrait by Lucian Freud*. London and New York: Thames and Hudson. p.19
14 Feaver, William. 2019. *The Lives of Lucian Freud: The Restless Years – 1922 to 1968*. epub. p. 1442
15 Annie Freud in conversation with the author, June 5, 2018, and David Dawson in conversation with the author, July 20, 2018.
16 Gherhard, Ingrid. 2009. *Das Frauen-Gesundheitsbuch*. Berlin: Haug. p.71
17 Christie's, 2018, *Still Life with Zimmerlinde,* Post War and Contemporary Evening Auction catalogue, https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-6162407
18 Zimmerlinde first graced a small oil on panel from 1947; its geometrically stiff outline stark against a white background. The following year, the artist painted a rather concerned-looking Kitty Garman gazing at zimmerlinde leaves in a pastel on paper. The plant then made another appearance in 1950 on a small square piece of canvas—a gift to Caroline Blackwood— and in one more, undated, larger study. After that, despite its prominent presence in his studio, Freud gave the plant an artistic cold shoulder until 1968 when he painted it once more for the controversial *Large Interior, Paddington*. He never returned to it thereafter.
19 Impelluso, L. (2004) S. Sartarelli, trans. *Nature and Its Symbols* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications). Originally published 2003, as *La Natura e i suoli simboli* (Milano: Mondadori Electa).
20 Husserl, Edmund. 1950. *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge* ed. S. Strasser and I. Husserliana Den. Haag: Martinus Nijhoff. p. 77
21 Annie Freud in conversation with the author, June 5, 2018,
22 Feaver, William. Vol.1, 2019, p.1209. This wasn't the first time that Freud had painted cyclamens. There are two other iterations of this subject in the form of murals—a very rare medium for the artist. The first was painted in 1955, directly on the wall of his dining room at Coombe Priory, near the Dorset town of Shaftesbury, where he lived with his then, second wife, Lady Caroline Blackwood. The other was painted a few years later, in 1959, in the bathroom of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire at Chatsworth House, Derbyshire, in the autumn of 1959. Radically different from the 1964 oil on canvas, except for the white and pink coloration of the petals, both mural works present a free-floating composition—both are stunningly detailed and yet appear to be unfinished.
23 Ibid, p.836
24 De Antonio, Emile and Tuchman, Mitch. 1984. *Painters Painting: A Candid History of the Modern Art Scene, 1940-1970*. New York: Abbeville Press. p.120
25 Morris, Cedric. 'Concerning Flower Painting' in *The Studio,* May 1942, pp.121-132
26 Buskirki, Martha. 2005 *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art.* Cambridge: MIT Press, p.85
27 His screen tests made between 1963 and 1966, in which he would point at his subjects a 16mm Bolex camera loaded with silent, black-and-white, 100-foot rolls of film, were Warhol's way to address pop art's difficult relationship with the vulnerability that lurks beneath the bold colours and shiny surfaces.

He would set the film in motion and walk away for the whole 3 minutes exposure, leaving his celebrities to negotiate the absence of the artist embodied in the mechanical presence of the camera—a tyrannical imposition disguised as freedom devised to expose every inch of fragile egos.

28 Feaver, William Vol.2 p.262
29 Morris, Cedric. 'Concerning Flower Painting'
30 Susan Walker and M. L. Bierbrier, 2020. *Ancient Faces: Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt*. London: British Museum Press.
31 Ibid
32 Freud, Lucian. "Some Thoughts on Painting", *Encounter III*, no. 1 (Jul 1954): 23-24.
33 Booth, Bibi and Mongillo, John F. 2001. "John James Audubon", Environmental Activists, London: Greenwood Press, p.10
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