

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | NEW YORK | 11 OCTOBER 2013
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FRANCIS BACON'S *THREE STUDIES OF LUCIAN FREUD* AN ICON OF TWENTIETH CENTURY PAINTING

Unveiled in London in October during Frieze Art Week
Never before seen in public in the UK



Francis Bacon (1909-1992)
Three Studies of Lucian Freud
oil on canvas
each (unframed): 78 x 58 in. (198 x 147.5 cm.)
Painted in 1969
Estimate on request

“Bacon once described real friendship as a situation where two people could ‘tear each other to bits’. He particularly appreciated Freud’s quick-witted instinct for survival which allowed him to take risks in life as in art. Trapped here in a series of Baconian cages, a contorted Freud hovers from panel to panel like a coiled spring about to shoot out of the flat, airless picture plane” (M. Peppiatt, 'Francis Bacon: Three Studies of Lucian Freud', Caravaggio/Bacon, 2010).

Post-War and Contemporary Art - Evening Sale

New York – On November 12, Christie’s New York will offer Francis Bacon’s *Three Studies of Lucian Freud*, one of the most important and iconic paintings by the artist, uniting two of the 20th Century’s greatest figurative painters at the apex of their relationship. This extremely rare triptych executed almost 25 years after Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud met, which was exhibited in Bacon’s now renowned retrospective at the Grand Palais, Paris in 1971-72, has never been on the auction market before. This painting, which is poised to break the previous world auction record for the artist of \$86 million achieved in 2008, will be on view at Christie’s King Street during Frieze Art Week from October 13-18, before being at auction in New York on November 12.

“We are honored to announce the sale of an undeniable icon of twentieth century art. A conversation between two masters of 20th century figurative painting, Francis Bacon’s triptych, ‘Three Studies of Lucian Freud’, executed in 1969 is a true masterpiece that marks Bacon and Freud’s relationship, paying tribute to the creative and emotional kinship between the two artists. The juxtaposition of radiant sunshine yellow contrasting with the brutal physicality and immediacy of the brushstrokes in this celebrated life-size triptych is what makes Bacon’s art so remarkable. ‘Three Studies of Lucian Freud’ stands as one of only two existing full-length triptychs of Lucian Freud. The three panels that make up this work were separated for almost fifteen years in the mid-1970s and were reunited in their entire splendor sometime in the 1980’s.” **Francis Outred, head of Post-War and Contemporary Art, Christie’s Europe.**



Detail from the 3 panels

In *Three Studies of Lucian Freud*, Bacon has combined, with characteristic alacrity, a vital human form with a precise description of the architecture of space and explosive, outbursts of thick texture. Theirs was one of the greatest artistic friendships and rivalries of the twentieth century and the trajectory of their relationship over nearly half a century, from the moment of their introduction through Graham Sutherland in early 1945, goaded each man to greater levels of achievement in the field of figurative painting. Painter to painter, their practices influenced one another, as did their characters: Bacon found a complement to his own charismatic but capricious nature in Freud’s confident and considered manner. Just as Freud’s intimate portrait of Bacon, painted in 1952, tragically stolen from the Tate collection while on display in Berlin in 1988, stands as one of the artist’s greatest achievements, so *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* can be understood to be one of Bacon’s greatest masterpieces. Rarely matched in history, the powerful dialogue between Bacon and Freud recalls the energetic sparring between Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, Titian and Tintoretto, each great painter forever shaping the artistic canon. By the time *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* was made in 1969, the relationship between Freud and Bacon was at its apex and would only grow more distant throughout the 1970s.

Three Studies of Lucian Freud forms a near-devotional trinity to Freud, his confidant and rival. Each panel is exceptional in its own right and the paintings as a whole are spectacularly resolved and harmonious, teeming with life in every brushstroke. Bacon has animated every one of his figures: the lean, sculpted limbs and lithe figure of Freud flow with smooth gestures of the brush, while the faces are infused with energy and attitude lent by impulsive, staccato dashes of color. The scene for each painting is set up with precision. Bacon carefully establishes the radiant colored ground and builds clean, crystalline prisms, to then rapidly establish the figure, using his free but controlled hand with extraordinary facility. It is along this knife edge of calculated contingency that Bacon operates, balancing his fury and his flair with the paintbrush to ‘clinch the image’. In each panel, Freud is wearing a white shirt rolled up to its sleeves. His hands disappear into his lap as Bacon’s attention turns to the flowing contours of the forearm and smooth curve of the thighs and calf. In each painting, the soles of Freud’s leather-clad brogues turn up to confront the viewer, while in two paintings, left and center we catch a glimpse of bare skin, as the artist’s trouser leg rises above the tidal mark of his navy blue sock. The cane-bottomed chair belongs to Bacon’s studio, but he has also incorporated the headboard from the bed in John Deakin’s photo shoot, to create a clean, linear backdrop to the drama of the figure.

Remarkably, the three panels of the work were separated for around fifteen years of their history. The complete work was exhibited first in 1970 at Galleria Galatea and later in the now renowned retrospective at the Grand Palais and Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in 1971–1972. The three panels were shown together at the Bacon retrospective at The Yale Center for British Art, New Haven in 1999. This work has hung as a gilded triptych, as Bacon intended, ever since. *Three Studies of Lucian Freud* is one of only two existing, full-length triptychs of Lucian Freud; the other is *Three Studies for Portrait of Lucian Freud*, painted in 1966. A third triptych of Freud painted in 1964 was permanently dismantled. Its right canvas, *Study for the Portrait of Lucian Freud* (1964) now belongs to the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; the central panel is in the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and the left panel remains in a private collection.

“Triptychs are the things I like doing most, and I think this may be related to the thought I’ve sometimes had of making a film. I like the juxtaposition of the images separated on three different canvases. So far as my work has any quality, I often feel perhaps it is the triptychs that have the best quality” (F. Bacon, quoted in D. Sylvester, *Looking back at Francis Bacon*, London 2000).

Exhibition:

London King Street
New York

13-18 October 2013
1-12 November 2013

Auction:

Christie’s New York

12 November 2013

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About Christie’s

Christie’s, the world’s leading art business, had global auction and private sales in the first half of 2013 that totaled £2.4 billion/\$3.68 billion. In 2012, Christie’s had global auction and private sales that totaled £3.92 billion/\$6.27 billion making it the highest annual total in Christie’s history. Christie’s is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie’s has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie’s offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie’s also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £465.2 million (\$711.8 million) in the first half of 2013, an increase of 13% on the previous year, and for the third successive year represents the highest total for the period in both company and art market history.

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.

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