

STEPHEN ONGPIN FINE ART



Lucian Freud (1922 - 2011)

The Sleeping Cat

Pen and black ink and black wash.

Signed Lucian Freud in green pencil at the lower left.

272 x 178 mm. (10 3/4 x 7 in.)

Cats appear only rarely in Lucian Freud's work. A pen and ink drawing of the eyes of a cat, of approximately the same date as the present sheet, was formerly in the collection of Lincoln Kirstein and appeared at auction in 1989 and 2006. Among stylistically comparable drawings in pen and ink by Freud is a study of a stuffed owl on a cane chair, drawn in 1945, which was recently sold at auction in London.

The present sheet was given by the artist to the artist, socialite, writer, diplomat and fashion editor Fleur Cowles (1908-2009), who founded the magazine *Flair* in New York in 1950. Lavishly designed and produced, the magazine was known for its bold design, lavish production and expensive stock, and among the contributors to the first issue of the magazine were Lucian Freud, W. H. Auden, Jean Cocteau and Tennessee Williams.

As Cowles recalled many years later, 'An unplanned act of barter brought me two of [Freud's] superb drawings and a painting of roses. One is a charming study in black and white of a black cat folded up on a soft black and white striped sofa. The other is a meticulous pen and ink portrait of Clarendon Crescent in Paddington, where he had his studio. Neither reveal the darker side of his Baudelairean nature. They unexpectedly became mine after Freud had come to New York at the time I published the reproduction of his paintings. Before he went back to England, the penniless painter wanted to buy a wardrobe for his new-born child. I paid for it. On my next trip to London, he repaid his debt with this

work.'

Provenance:

Acquired from the artist by Fleur Cowles, New York, London and Sussex
Her (anonymous) sale, London, Christie's, 22 October 1997, lot 25
Kay Saatchi, London, until 2011.

Exhibitions

London, Blain/Southern and New York, Acquavella Galleries, Lucian Freud Drawings, 2012, no.33.

Literature:

Fleur Cowles, *An Artist's Journey*, London, 1988, p.56; Ines Rüttinger, *Lucian Freud und das Tier / Lucian Freud and the Animal*, exhibition catalogue, Siegen, 2015, pp.13-14 and pp.42-43.

Artist description:

The early years of Lucian Freud's career were largely devoted to drawing, and the practice would remain a vital part of the artist's development throughout the 1940's and early 1950's. As Freud himself recalled, many years later, 'I would have thought I did 200 drawings to every painting in those early days. I very much prided myself on my drawing. My work was in a sense very linear.' The 1940's in particular were a period of sustained activity in drawing, with the artist creating an important series of self-contained works in charcoal, ink, watercolour, coloured crayons, pencil and chalk. As Lawrence Gowing has noted, 'Freud's drawings in 1943 and 1944 have already a quality of resolved classical line, with the minimum of inflexions to make legible its formal message, which is otherwise the property of only the very best painters of twenty years before...Style and capacity developed rapidly in these drawings...' William Feaver further comments that 'By the mid-1940's, Freud's drawings had an extraordinary allure. In charcoal, conté and chalk on Ingres paper he caught every texture from bamboo to corduroy...'

Freud had his first solo exhibition at the Lefevre Gallery in London in the winter of 1944, followed by a second show in early 1946, and in both exhibitions a number of drawings were shown. Writing of the artist's drawings of this period, Robert Hughes noted of Freud that 'there is no doubt that part of his reputation as a boy prodigy in London art circles in the war years rested on his single-minded commitment to linear description rather than painterly evocation...The precocity of the early work, some of which...reveals a degree of control extraordinary in an artist of 21, lies in the fierce independence of its delineation.' However, by the middle of the 1950's the artist had abandoned drawing altogether, fearing that the predominantly linear, graphic quality of his paintings was impeding his brushwork. Since then he produced drawings relatively infrequently, and certainly without the sustained productivity of the 1940's and early 1950's. The medium of etching, in many respects, took the place of drawing as his preferred graphic medium.