

LUCIAN FREUD Some Thoughts on Painting (1954)

My object in painting pictures is to try and move the senses by giving an intensification of reality. Whether this can be achieved depends on how intensely the painter understands and feels for the person or object of his choice. Because of this, painting is the only art in which the intuitive qualities of the artistic may be more valuable to him than actual knowledge or intelligence.

The painter makes real to others his innermost feelings about all that he cares for. A secret becomes known to everyone who views the picture through the intensity with which it is felt. The painter must give a completely free rein to any feelings or sensations he may reject nothing to which he is naturally drawn. It is just this self-indulgence which acts for him as the discipline through which he discards what is inessential to him and so crystallises his tastes. A painter's tastes must grow out of what so obsesses him in life that he never has to ask himself what it is suitable for him to do in art. Only through a complete understanding of his tastes can he free himself of any tendency to look at things which an eye to the way he can make them fit in with a ready-made conception. Unless this understanding is constantly alive, he will begin to see life simply as material for his particular line in art. He will look at something, and ask himself. "Can I make a picture by *me* out of this?" And so his work degenerates through no longer being the vehicle of his sensation. One might say that he has come to crystallise his art instead of his tastes, thereby insulating it from the emotion that could make it alive for others.

The painter's obsession with his subject is all that he needs to drive him to work. People driven towards making works of art, not by familiarity with the process by which it is done, but by a necessity to communicate their feelings about the object of their choice with such intensity that these feelings become infectious. Yet the painter needs to put himself at a certain emotional distance from the subject in order to allow it to speak. He may smother it if he lets his passion for it overwhelm him while he is in the act of painting. Painters who deny themselves the representation of life and limit their language to purely abstract forms, are depriving themselves of the possibility of provoking more than an aesthetic emotion.



Lucien Freud, Francis Bacon, 1952, oil on copper.

Painters who use life itself as their subject-matter, working with the object in front of them or constantly in mind, do so in order to translate life into art almost literally, as it were. The subject must be kept under closest observation: if this is done, day and night, the subject--he, she, or it--will eventually reveal the *all* without which selection itself is not possible; they will reveal it, through some and every facet of their lives or lack of life, through movements and attitudes, through every variation from one moment to another. It is this very knowledge of life which can give art complete independence from life, an independence that is necessary because 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. I say that one needs a complete knowledge of life in order to make the picture independent from life, because, when a painter has a distant adoration of nature, an awe of it, which stops him from examining it, he can only copy nature superficially, because he does not dare to change it.

A painter must think of everything he sees as being there entirely for his own use and pleasure. The artist who tries to serve nature is only an executive artist. And, since the model he so faithfully copies is not going to be hung up next to the picture, since the picture is going to be there on its own, it is of no interest whether it is an accurate copy of the model. Whether it will convince or not depends entirely on what it is in itself, what is there to be seen. The model should only serve the very private function for the painter of providing the starting point for his excitement. The picture is *all* he feels about it, *all* he thinks worth preserving of it, *all* he invests it with. If all the qualities which a painter took from the model for his picture were really taken, no person could be painted twice.

The aura given out by a person or object is as much a part of them as their flesh. The effect that they make in space is as bound up with them as might be their colour or smell. The effect in space of two different human individuals can be as different as the effect of a candle and an electric light bulb. Therefore the painter must be as concerned with the air surrounding his subject as with that subject itself. It is through observation and perception of atmosphere that he can register the feeling that he wishes his painting to give out.

A moment of complete happiness never occurs in the creation of a work of art. The promise of it is felt in the act of creation but disappears towards the completion of the work-. For it is then that the painter realises that it is only a picture he is painting. Until then he had almost dared to hope that the picture might spring to life. Were it not for this, the perfect painting might be painted, on the completion of which the painter could retire. It is this great insufficiency that drives him on. Thus the process of creation becomes necessary to the painter perhaps more than is the picture. The process in fact is habit-forming.

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