



Large
Print

Lucian Freud

The Self-portraits

The Jillian and
Arthur M Sackler
Wing of Galleries

Room 1

Do not remove from gallery

Lucian Freud

The Self-portraits

The Jillian and Arthur M Sackler

Wing of Galleries

27 October 2019 – 26 January 2020

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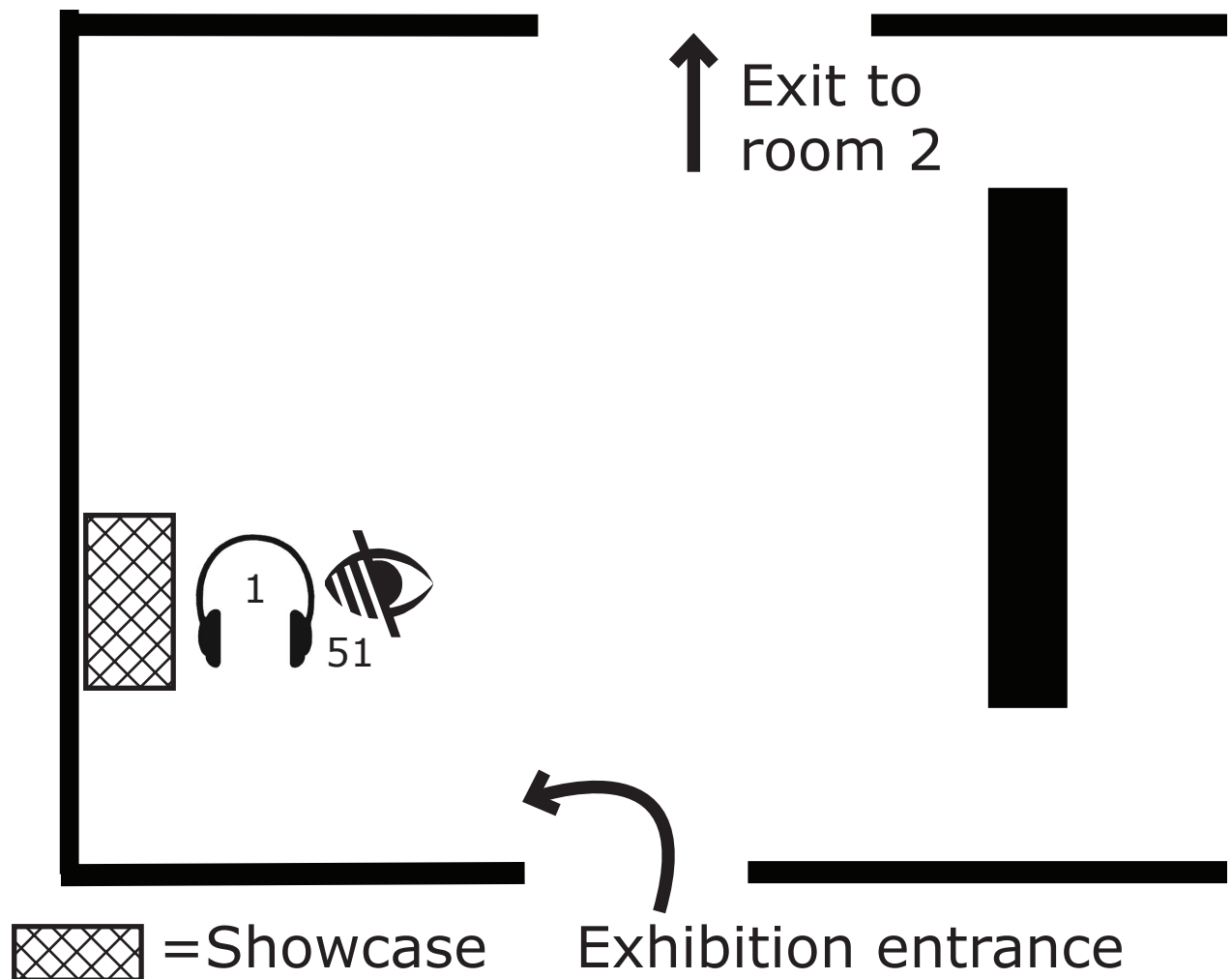
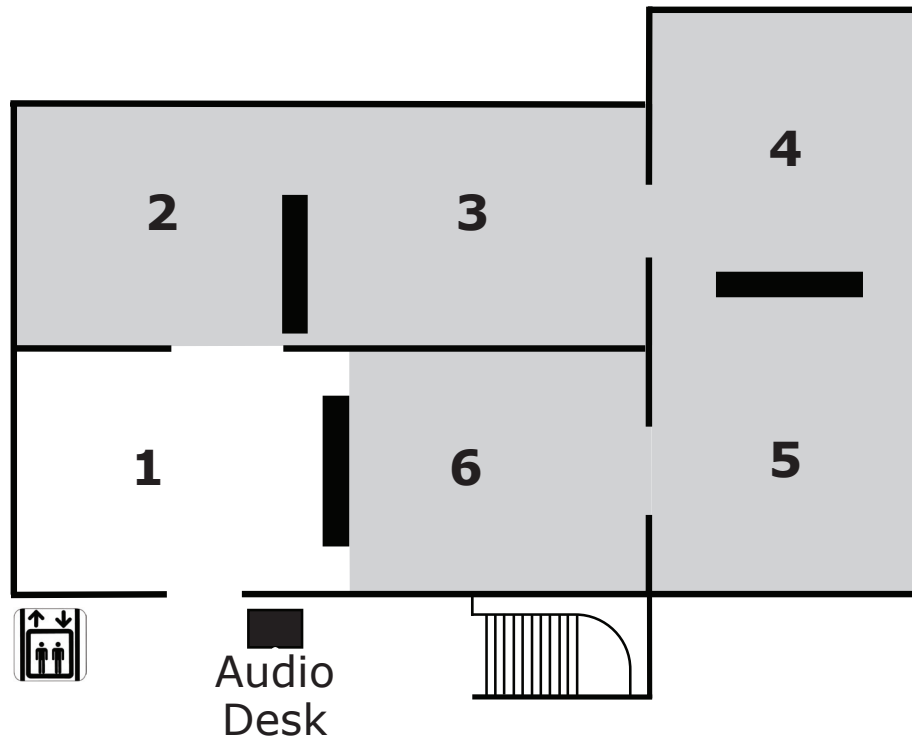
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Audio tour room 1



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Letter from Lucian Freud to
Stephen Spender, 1941

Room 1

Lucian Freud

The Self-portraits

Artists have long depicted their own likeness, whether at the easel or in disguise; or as hero, genius or tormented soul. Few have returned to self-portraiture as consistently as Lucian Freud.

He painted or drew his own image every decade throughout his life, starting with the teenage drawings on display here.

Born in Berlin in 1922, Freud moved to the UK with his family in 1933 to escape Nazi Germany. In the late 1940s he chose to make portraiture the primary focus of his practice. He became renowned for works of startling intensity, and for frank, often disquieting nudes.

They developed through a period of intense observation in sittings that lasted weeks and months, requiring models to sustain poses for prolonged periods of time. Freud stated it was only fair that he should subject himself to the same process.

Freud's self-portraits reveal a curiosity towards changes in his expression, appearance and psychology. They find their place in a practice marked by intimacy. Working only in his studio, he largely eschewed commissions in favour of sitters he was close to or drawn to.

Yet his interest in self-portraiture is perhaps surprising for an artist who valued his privacy, and who spoke rarely and only later in life about his artistic influences.

Most often the self-portraits possess an elusive quality; like a game of hide-and-seek, they offer glimpses, unfinished views

or mirrored reflections. They suggest capturing his own likeness as a challenge to work through: "I don't accept the information that I get when I look at myself and that's where the trouble starts."

Freud destroyed more self-portraits than he preserved. Those that remain reveal how central they were to the development of his practice.

They chart his changing approach to capturing his own likeness, emblematic of an artist who, until the end, continued to expand his restless exploration of paint.

Freud died in London in 2011.

**David Dawson, Lucian shaving,
2006**

Photograph

© David Dawson / Private collection / Bridgeman
Images

Lucian Freud - The Self-portraits
list of works (clockwise in order of hang)

**Self-portrait,
1940**

Ink on paper

Private collection

**Self-portrait,
1940**

Ink on paper

Matthew Marks

Showcase (from left to right)

Portrait of a Boy, c. 1940

Ink and gouache on paper

Private collection

Transcript:

Darling Felicity

I tried so hard to come to the party but I could not make it but are you going to be there again? Do tell me or in London!! Lots of love

Lucian

John sends his love

Letter from Lucian Freud to Stephen Spender, 1941



Ink, crayon and watercolour on paper

Private collection

Transcript:

Benton End
Hadleigh

Dearest Spethen Stephen, Thanks terribly for your letter. It crossed one of mine I think? life for me is no longer the monotony of waking up in a cold room to find myself with clap, D.Ts, Syph, or perhaps a poisoned foot or ear!

No Schuster, those happy and carefree days are gone the phrase "Freud and Schuster" no longer calls to mind happy scenes such as two old hebrews hand in a

wood or a bathroom in Ateneum Court or Pension-day in the Freud-Schuster building but now the people think of Freud and Schuster in bathchairs, Freud's ear being amputated in a private nursing home, and puss running out of his horn. Schuster in an epileptic fit with artificial funnybones.

When I look at all my minor and major complaints and diseases I feel the disgust which I experience when I come across intimate passages in Letters not written to me. Cedric has painted a portrait of me which is absolutely amazing. It is exactly like, my face is green it is a marvellous picture.

I have painted a portrait and also a picture of a cat after it has been skinned. Do come down here if you can! What about Mrs. P.s at Haulfrynny in March? John Jameson has been down here for some days and also a man who was a great friend of the strange Englishmen who threw fits to whom Tibbles was employed in Italy.

(continued over)

Here is our Telephone call. Do you realise that if you shaved your nose every day you would soo grow a reasonable beard on it? The firm ought to realise these little things in case of a buissiness drops.

Self-portrait, 1940

Oil on canvas

Private collection

After being expelled from Bryanston School in Dorset, Freud attended a number of art colleges in London for short periods, preferring to immerse himself in the bohemian environment of Soho.

Between 1939 and 1942 he attended the East Anglian School of Painting and

Drawing in Suffolk, where he cemented his intention to become a painter. Here he completed this self-portrait in a tight close-up that displays an early interest in conveying flesh.

Man with a Feather (Self-portrait), 1943

Oil on canvas

Private collection

This is Freud's first major self-portrait, and was exhibited at his first solo show at the Lefevre Gallery, London, in 1944. The fine brushwork, elongated style and use of line reveal Freud's interest in Northern European painting of the Renaissance.

Painted in three-quarter length, the artist stands surrounded by strange symbols. The feather he holds in his left hand – the one he painted with – was given to Freud by Lorna Wishart, with whom he had his first serious relationship.



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Room 2

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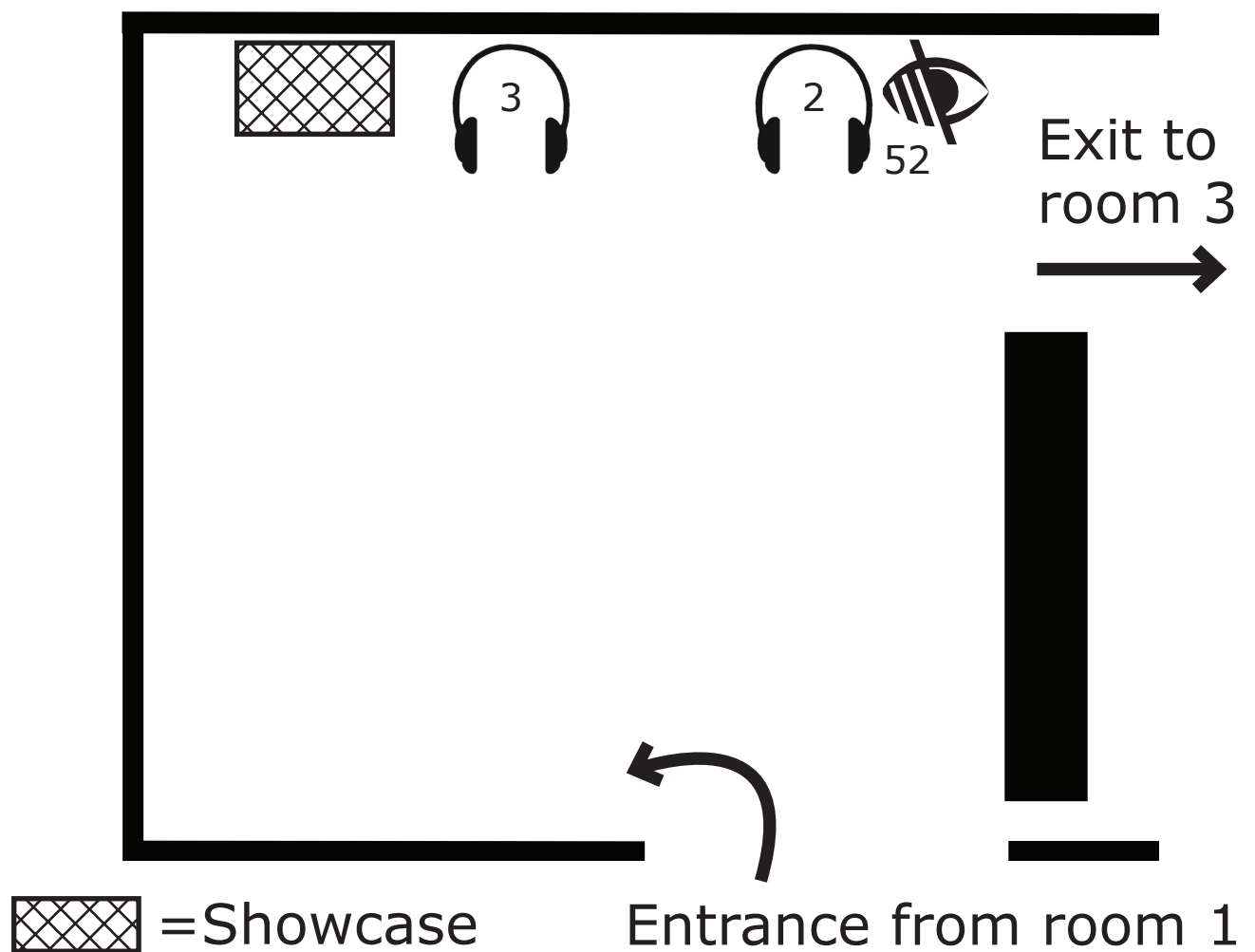
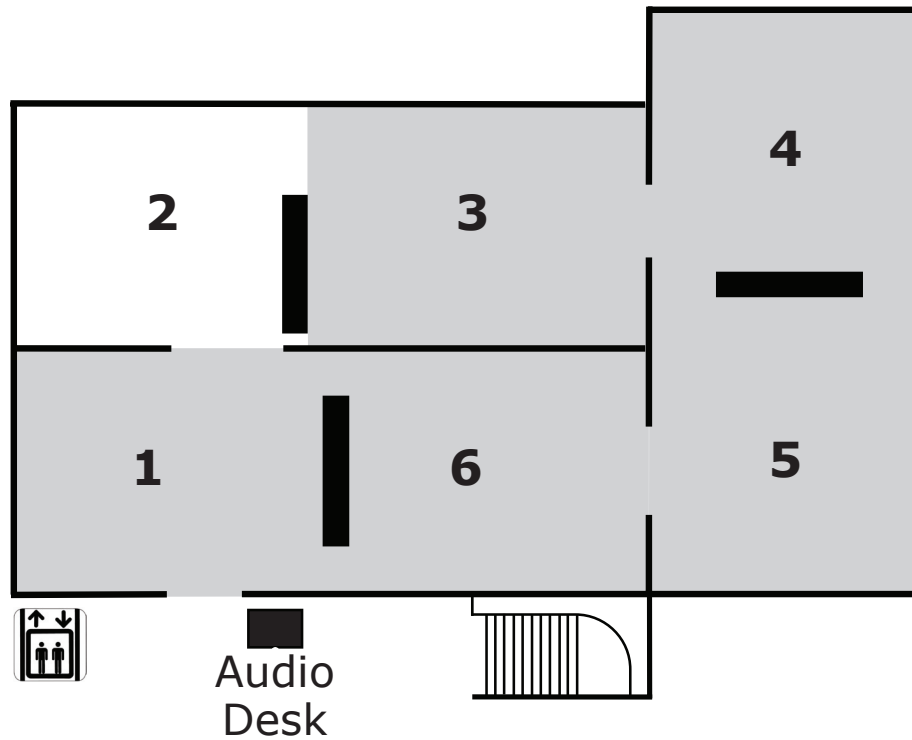
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Audio tour room 2



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Man with a Thistle (Self-Portrait),
1946



Flyda and Arvid, 1947

Room 2

Drawing

“The only way I could work properly was by using the absolute maximum of observation and concentration that I could possibly muster.”

Freud had drawn obsessively since childhood. He was encouraged by his mother, who organised his inclusion in an exhibition of children's drawing at London's Guggenheim Jeune gallery in 1938.

Drawing remained the focus of his practice into the early 1950s.

As can be seen here, by the late 1940s the drawings had an increasing graphic sharpness, explored with linear economy in pencil, crayon, or pen and ink. The detached, economic style was to define his first mature period.

A number of Freud's drawn self-portraits were conceived for book illustrations. They possess a charged, emotive quality and narrative dimension.

They are also performative: his face often partly in shade, Freud shows himself in a variety of guises taken from myth or fiction, pulling himself in and out of the frame.

He rarely acknowledged these as self-portraits. Instead their titles point to a character or situation, or deflect attention to an object in the foreground.

Freud's approach to painting throughout this period was marked by a preoccupation with line, combining expressive force with a quality of draughtsmanship that led the critic Herbert Read to describe him as the "Ingres of Existentialism. The small scale and finely detailed nature of his work inspired analogies with artists of the German Renaissance.

Drawing - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Self-portrait as Actaeon, 1949

Ink on paper

Private collection

This was one of four drawings intended for a book on Greek myths but which were rejected by the publisher.

It was first seen in 'Ballet' magazine in 1950, a time when Freud was close to figures in the world of dance and theatre.

Freud depicts himself as Actaeon, who was turned into a stag after having accidentally seen Diana bathing.

The subject reveals Freud's interest in Titian; years later he campaigned publicly to raise funds for the acquisition of Titian's 'Diana and Actaeon', 1556–59 for London's National Gallery.

Street Scene, 1948

Conté crayon on paper

Private collection

Self-portrait with Hyacinth Pot, 1947–48

Crayon on paper

Pallant House Gallery, Chichester.

Wilson Gift through The Art Fund, 2006

Man at Night (Self-portrait), 1947–48

Ink on paper

Private collection

Showcase (from left to right)

Cards of Identity, by Nigel Dennis

First edition, printed 1955

Cover illustration by Lucian Freud

Private collection

Two Plays and a Preface, by Nigel Dennis

First edition, printed 1958

Cover illustration by Lucian Freud

Private collection

Flyda and Arvid, 1947



Pencil and ink on paper, heightened with coloured crayon

Private collection

Still-life with Green Lemon, 1947

Oil on panel

Private collection

Like 'Man with a Thistle (Self-portrait)', displayed nearby, Freud executed this painting during a five-month stay on the Greek island of Paros.

Vertical and horizontal planes contain and almost hide his figure, while a green lemon dominates the foreground.

The painting hints at Freud's short-lived interest in surrealism, and was first acquired by the surrealist artist and poet Roland Penrose.

It exemplifies the detached style of his work at this time, built up with precise brush strokes – applied with a fine, sable brush – into enamel-like surfaces.

Man with a Thistle (Self-portrait), 1946



Oil on canvas

Tate: Purchased 1961

Startled Man: Self-portrait, 1948

Pencil on paper

Private collection

Drawn with soft conté crayon and pencil, this is perhaps the most accomplished self-portrait Freud executed in his first, sharply focused mature style.

Along with 'Street Scene', displayed nearby, it was one of five illustrations for a novella by William Sanson, 'The Equilibriad', 1948.

Imbued with an extraordinary presence, Freud's expression recalls a series of etchings made by Rembrandt in 1630, in which the artist depicted himself open-mouthed and surprised, as well as Courbet's self-portrait, 'The Desperate Man', 1843–45.



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Room 3

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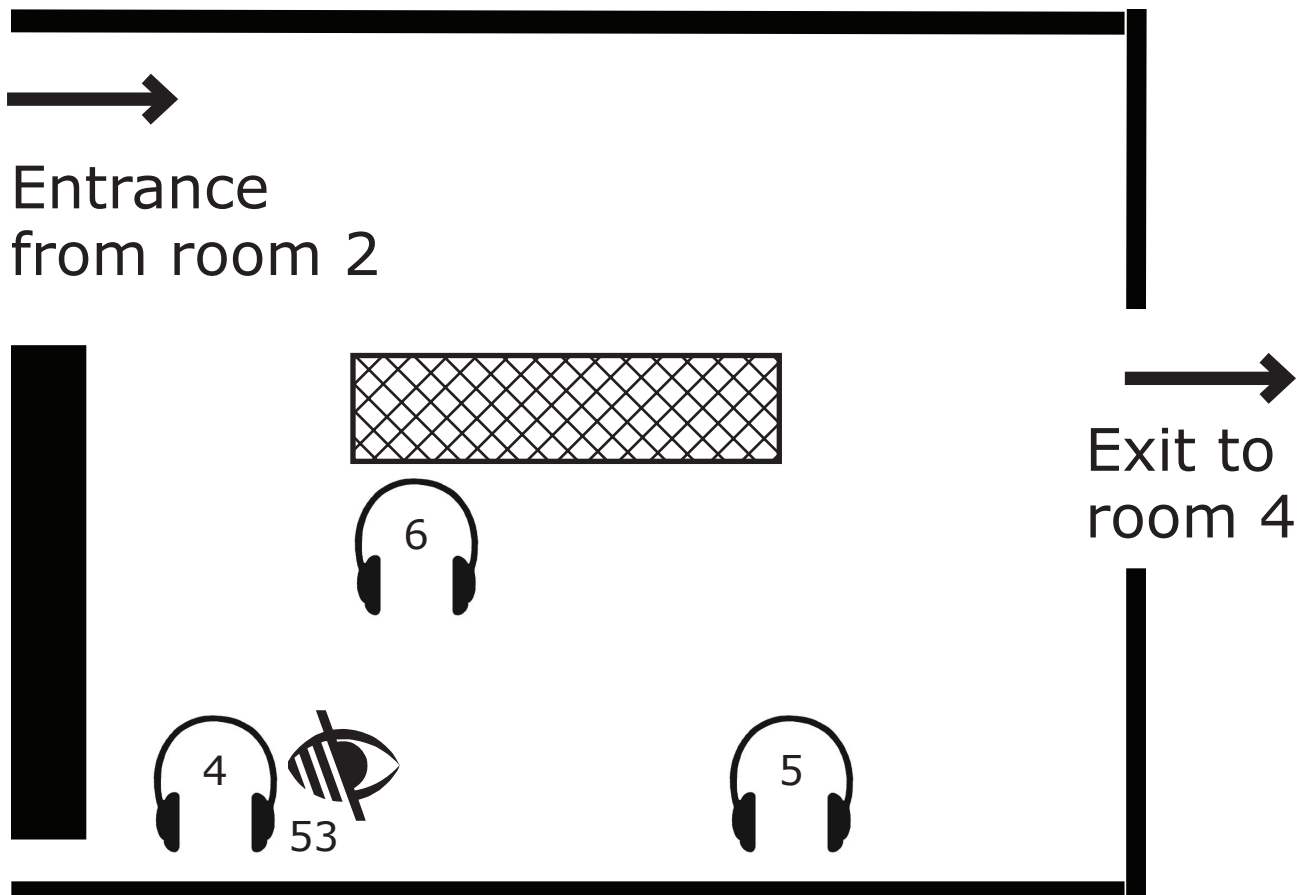
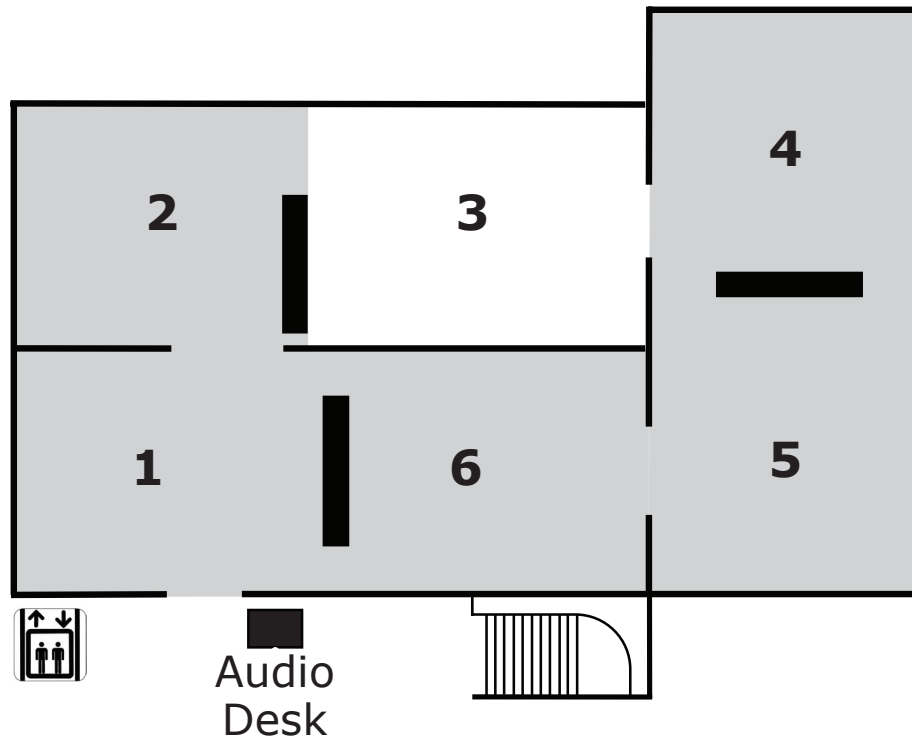
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 = Showcase

Audio tour room 3



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Hotel Bedroom, 1954



Self-portrait, 1974, (The 1974 watercolour group)



Self-portrait with unrelated notes (sketchbooks)

Room 3

Transition

“People thought and said and wrote that my paintings were linear and defined by my drawing. I’ve never been that affected by writing, but I thought if that’s at all true, I must stop.”

From around the mid-1950s, Freud turned his attention from drawing to painting, and for a period of about seven years stopped drawing altogether.

Previously he had painted sitting down, in close proximity to his sitters and with the canvas often on his lap. Now he painted standing up at the easel. “My eyes were completely going mad”, he later stated, “sitting down and not being able to move. Small brushes, fine canvas... I felt I wanted to free myself from this way of working.”

His last painting made sitting down was 'Hotel Bedroom', 1954, a double portrait of himself with his second wife, Lady Caroline Blackwood.

Among the artists Freud associated with were Frank Auerbach and Francis Bacon. Like him they were figurative painters working against the grain of Abstract Expressionism and, later, conceptual and experimental art.

They met regularly to discuss their work. Bacon in particular proved influential, inspiring Freud to switch from soft sable-hair brushes to hog's hair, whose bristles are capable of handling a heavier load of paint.

Between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, Freud's handling of paint gradually opened up. In 1961 he took up watercolours, replacing the linearity of pen and pencil with loose and painterly colour washes.

His developing style was driving towards an exactitude of observation. He no longer made use of symbols and the suggestion of a narrative in his works.

Instead, his self-portraits from this period show Freud's head and neck, without distraction, measuring his own self-image against the challenge of his developing style.

Transition - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Self-portrait, 1949

Oil on canvas

Private collection.

On loan to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, IMMA

Collection: Freud Project 2016-2021

Man's Head (Self-portrait III), 1963

Oil on canvas

National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. 5205

Man's Head (Self-portrait I), 1963

Oil on canvas

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester

Around his fortieth birthday, Freud executed these three self-portraits in rapid succession. They are reunited here for the first time since they were shown in 1963 at Marlborough Fine Art, London.

They range from realism to near-abstraction, giving emphasis to structure rather than likeness with a thick impasto that becomes almost mask-like.

Freud no longer depicts himself contained within vertical and horizontal planes, but sets himself free against an abstracted background. His expression appears in turns direct, challenging and sceptical.

Man's Head (Self-portrait II), 1963

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Self-portrait with a Black Eye, 1978

Oil on canvas

Pinault Collection

Freud acquired the black eye depicted here following an argument with a taxi driver. His reaction was to go back to the studio to paint it.

He was perhaps attracted by the

accidental, transitory nature of the changes in colour and physiognomy, which his mastery of paint by now allowed him to capture with extraordinary nuance.

The tight framing and swollen eyelid bear resemblance to an illustration of carved Egyptian portraits that fascinated Freud as archetypal portraits.

Self-portrait, 1961

Watercolour and pencil on paper

Collection of Joshua Conviser and Martine Conviser
Fedyszyn

Untitled (Self-portrait), 1978

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Self-portrait, 1974



Watercolour and pencil on paper

UBS Art Collection

Self-portrait, 1974

Watercolour on paper

The Gibson Family Collection

Self-portrait, 1974

Watercolour and pencil on paper

Private collection

Self-portrait, 1974

Gouache and pencil on paper

Private collection

Hotel Bedroom, 1954



Oil on canvas

Gift of the Beaverbrook Foundation, collection of the
Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton

This painting was first exhibited in 1954 at the Venice Biennale, where Freud showed alongside Francis Bacon and Ben Nicholson.

The sense of estrangement between artist and sitter, husband and wife, is amplified by the empty room behind them; their marriage only lasted four years.

The painting is imbued with a narrative quality that Freud would later discard. It was perceived at the time as cruel by some, not least by his then wife.

Self-portrait, c. 1956

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Freud did not usually undertake preparatory sketches for his works. As is clearly visible in this unfinished self-portrait, he would draw a loose outline in charcoal and build up the image directly with paint.

He started with the face, working outwards from the centre. While the painting demonstrates a looser handling of paint than 'Hotel Bedroom', displayed nearby, Freud is still concerned with a clarity of delineation.

Self-portrait, 1952

Oil on copper

Private collection

Greek sketchbook: Studies of 'Still-life with Green Lemon' (1947), c. 1946

Crayon on paper Private collection.

Courtesy of Harry Moore-Gwyn, Moore-Gwyn Fine
Art Ltd

Showcase

Sketch for 'Hotel Bedroom' (1954)

Charcoal on paper, sketchbook

National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. LMF/1/2/42

Naked double portrait

Charcoal on paper, sketchbook

National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. LMF/1/12/6

Self-portrait with unrelated notes



Pencil and ink on paper, sketchbook

National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. LMF/1/35/43

Self-portrait

Charcoal on paper, sketchbook

National Portrait Gallery, London, inv. LMF/1/8/



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Room 4

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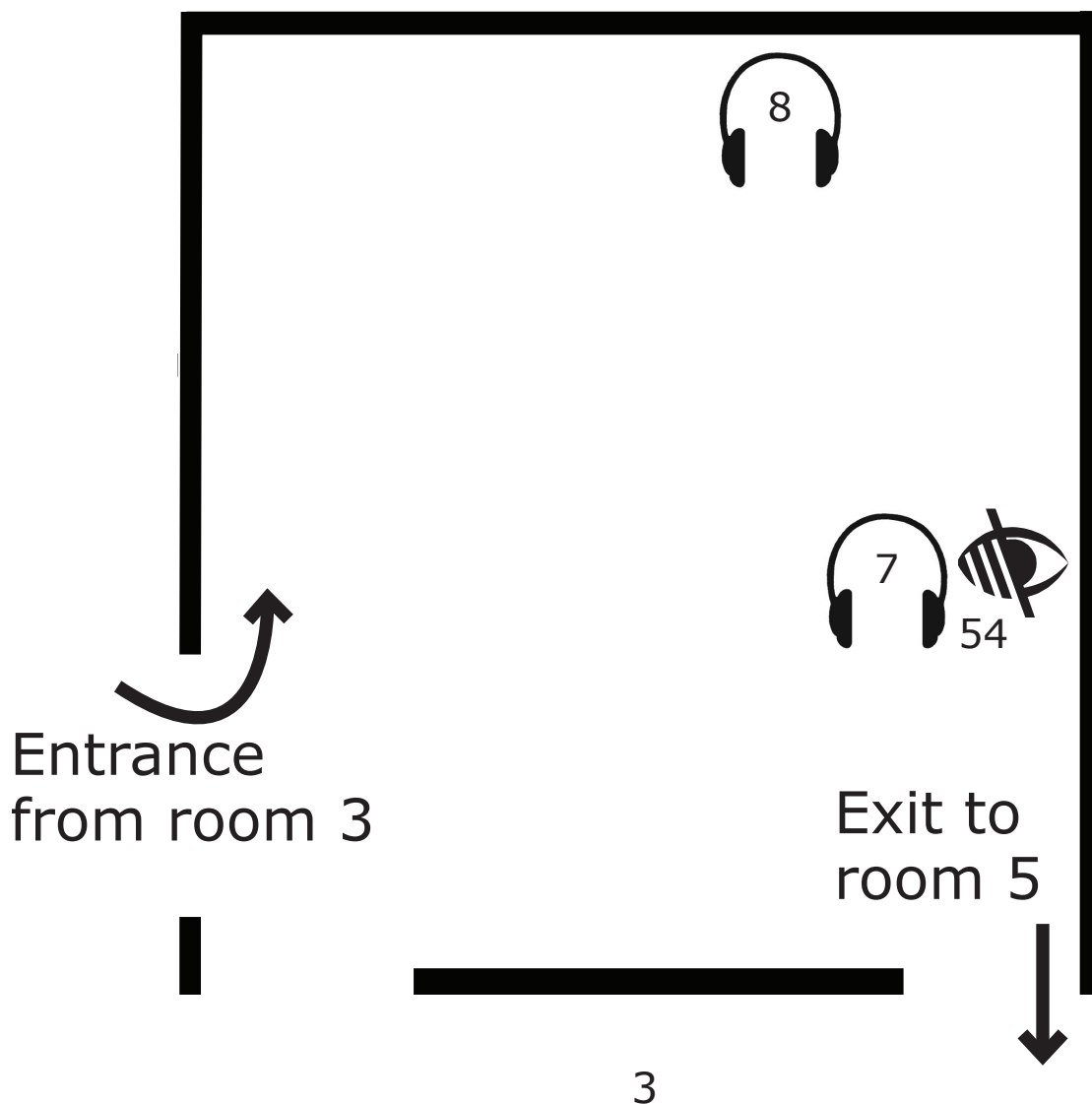
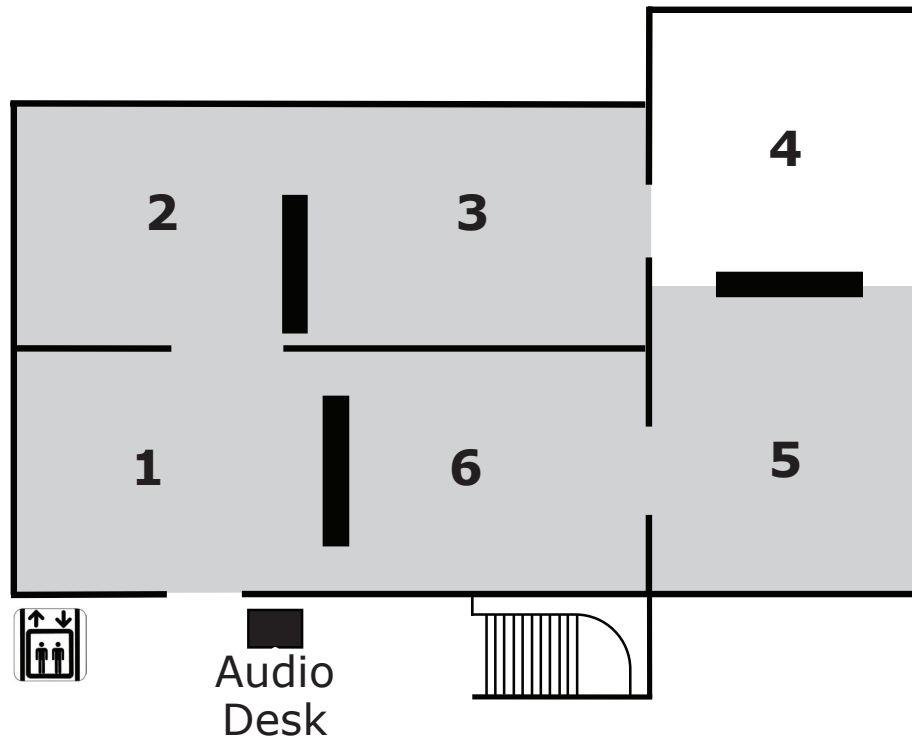
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Audio tour room 4



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Interior with Plant, Reflection
Listening (Self-portrait), 1967–8



Self-portrait Reflection, Fragment,
c. 1965

Room 4

Mirrors

“With self-portraits ‘likeness’ becomes a different thing, because in ordinary portraits you try to paint the person in front of you, whereas in self-portraits you’ve got to paint yourself as another person... I have to do what I feel like without being an expressionist.”

From the start Freud preferred to paint his likeness with the use of mirrors, rather than from photographs, attributing his preference at least in part to the quality of light.

While he avoided the use of mirrors in the rest of his house, he would leave them lying around his studio, in an attempt to find unexpected angles and perspectives.

Mirrors have been a key tool for artists since they were invented, allowing one to see oneself. Often depicted in artworks, they have been used to demonstrate skill, or as metaphors for the process of creating images.

Painters such as Van Eyck, Vermeer and Velázquez incorporated them into their compositions, in order to engage in complex explorations of real and imagined space, of the relationship between artist, sitter and viewer.

From the mid-1960s, Freud drew attention to the mediated nature of his likeness, marking a shift in his approach to self-portraiture.

Throughout his life, he sought to capture the physical presence of his sitters, what he termed “biological truth-telling,” through prolonged observation.

He used mirrors for his self-portraits to similar effect: as a practical means of seeing himself from unexpected angles, but also of painting himself at one remove, with a degree of objectivity.

At the same time he revelled in the fundamental paradox that this proposes, highlighting the illusory quality of all self-portraits.

Mirrors - list of works (clockwise in order of hang)

Small Interior, 1968–72

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Reflection with Two Children (Self-portrait), 1965

Oil on canvas

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

This is the first self-portrait in which Freud emphasises his use of mirrors, in the title and by depicting the mirror's frame.

For this painting, he placed the mirror on the studio floor, creating a dramatic foreshortening of his reflected body. Two of his children with Suzy Boyt, Rose and Ali Boyt, stand outside of the mirrored composition.

The relationship between the figures is inspired by an Egyptian tombstone, published in a book that he kept with him throughout his life.

Self-portrait Reflection, Fragment, c. 1965

Oil and graphite on canvas

Private collection



Interior with Plant, Reflection Listening (Self-portrait), 1967–68

Oil on canvas

Private collection



Freud returns to positioning himself in relation to vegetation, as in earlier works such as 'Still-life with Green Lemon'.

Here the houseplant has displaced Freud and almost entirely taken over the painting, suggesting the subject of this self-portrait is Freud's new-found fluidity with paint. Coupled with the word "listening", reflection takes on the quality of thought.

Interior with Hand Mirror (Self-portrait), 1967

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Like 'Hand Mirror on Chair', displayed nearby, this self-portrait in the studio

explores illusion and depth.

The window is treated as an opaque surface, while the hand mirror reflects back into the studio, placing the viewer in the same position as the artist at work.

While Freud still places his likeness in the centre of the composition, his presence is more remote.

Hand Mirror on Chair, 1966

Oil on canvas

Private collection



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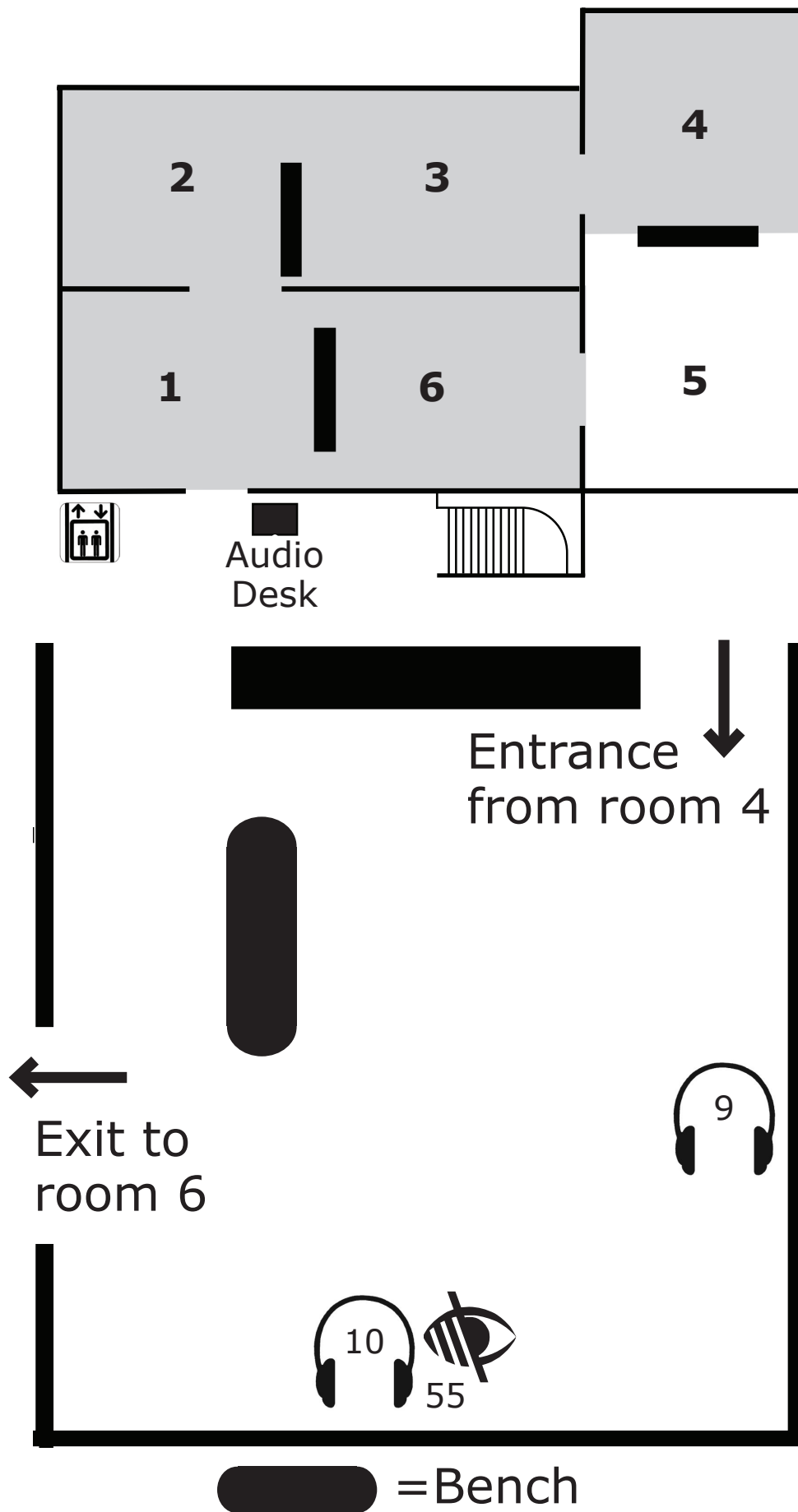
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Audio tour room 5



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Two Irishmen in W11, 1984–5



Flora with Blue Toenails,
2000-2001

Room 5

Reflections in the Studio

"My work is purely autobiographical. It's about myself and my surroundings...

I work from the people that interest me and that I care about and think about in rooms that I live in and know."

Freud began focusing on full-length portraits and on nudes in the mid-1960s. In 1975 he began using Cremnitz White, a heavy paint that when mixed with other colours gives a granular, more luminous texture that evokes a quality of skin.

He was celebrated for his ability to convey flesh and the human form in paint, and his work has been discussed in the tradition of Rembrandt, Titian and Courbet, amongst others.

Some were perturbed by his treatment of the female figure, and by paintings of his naked children.

Throughout his career Freud held a succession of London studios, in Paddington, Holland Park and Notting Hill. They provided the stage for his encounters with sitters – each an intimate environment that was also erotically charged.

We glimpse its elements, the battered sofa, floorboards and walls adding a psychological dimension to Freud's portraits. While many have traced the influence of Sigmund Freud in the work of his grandson, Freud himself preferred to focus attention on his quest to equate physical with painterly presence.

Freud occasionally depicted himself alongside his sitters, but incidentally. He smuggles his image into corners,

reflections or unfinished paintings in the background. There is an effect of ironic distancing, and at times he renders himself with an almost cartoonish quality.

At the same time Freud's presence serves to underline the autobiographical nature that he attributed to his work overall.

It offers a glimpse of the relationship between artist and sitter, framed by the studio, which provides the conditions for each painting and relationship to develop.

**Reflections in the Studio - list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)**

**Two Irishmen
in W11,
1984–85**



Oil on canvas

Private collection.

On loan to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, IMMA

Collection: Freud Project 2016–2021

Flora with Blue Toenails, 2000–01



Oil on canvas

Private collection

This portrait of a young woman, whom Freud first noticed in a restaurant, was completed shortly before his eightieth birthday.

Her awkward pose, sustained over a prolonged period, later required her to undergo osteopathic treatment.

The shadow of Freud's head looms over her, scrutinising her from above with a sense of overbearing proximity.

Freddy Standing, 2000–01

Oil on canvas

Private collection

Freud had painted nude portraits of several of his daughters.

A painter of striking male and female nudes, here he chose a large-scale canvas for his son, in sharp contrast to the more modest scale he had used for his own naked self-portrait a few years earlier.

He depicts himself reflected in the window, his paintbrush raised to point in his son's direction.

Naked Portrait with Reflection, 1980

Oil on canvas

Private collection



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Room 6

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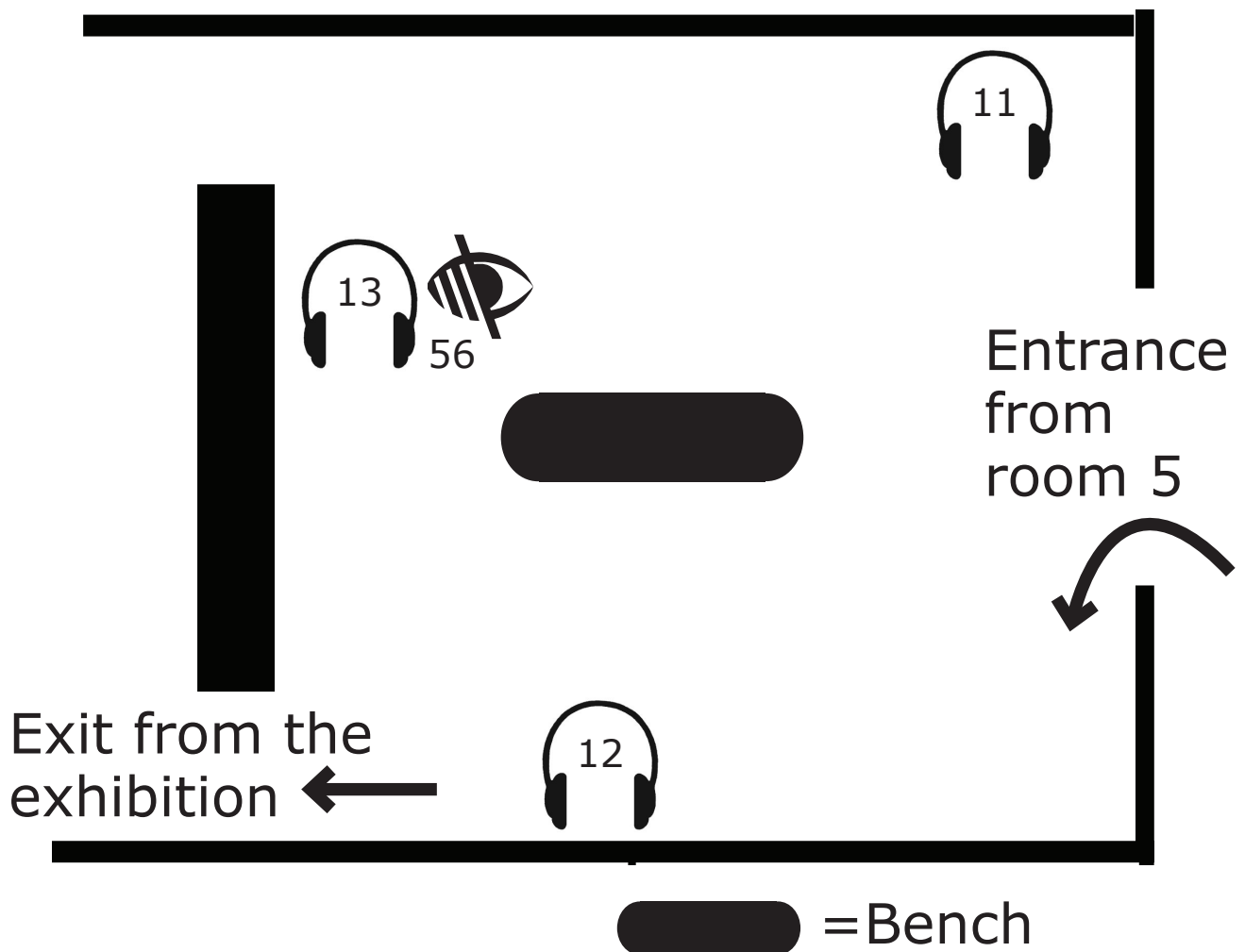
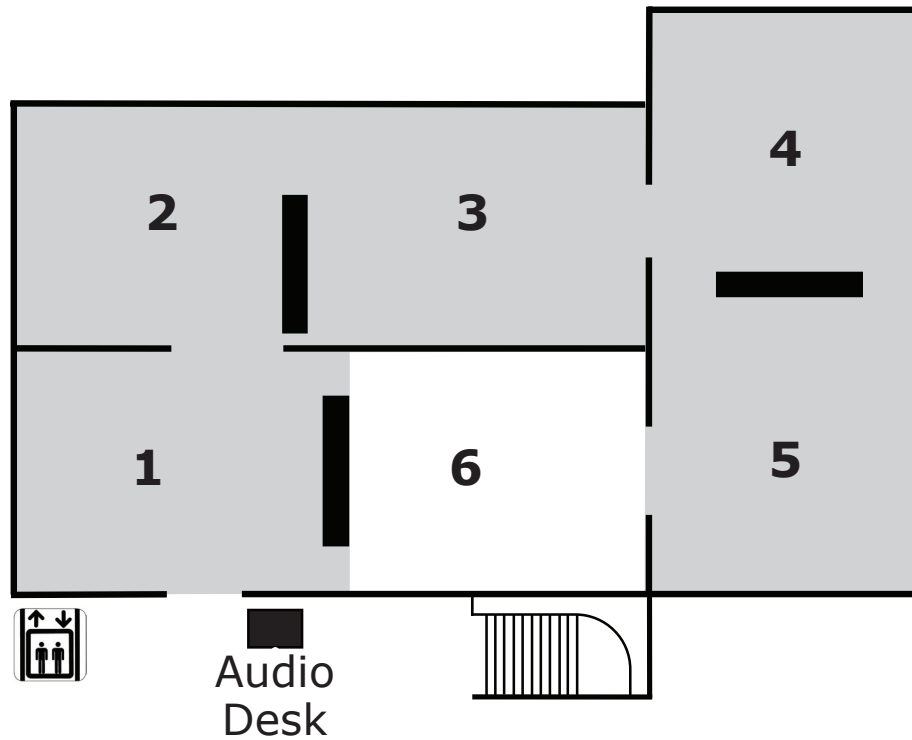
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Audio tour room 6



Main commentary



Descriptive commentary



Reflection (Self-Portrait), 1981-2



Self-Portrait, Reflection, 2002



Painter Working, Reflection, 1993

Room 6

Painting at Work

"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."

A series of exhibitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s cemented Freud's reputation internationally. From then he would hold major institutional exhibitions almost every year for the rest of life.

Freud continued to paint self-portraits, in more straightforward spatial compositions, such as his head and shoulders in close-up.

They display great self-possession, and an extraordinary mastery of colour, form, light and shade.

Freud's passion for line found new expression in etching, which he returned to in the 1980s after briefly experimenting with the medium in the 1940s.

Despite his advancing years, he continued to develop his technique and, at the age of 70, for the first time made himself the subject of a nude.

While his pose is heroic, he is dwarfed by the space that surrounds him. Like Dürer before him, an artist whom Freud greatly admired, he chose to depict himself at work, brandishing the tools of his trade, still questioning and exploring his handling of paint.

"I'm not very introspective but I was very shy," he once stated, "so I tried to overcome it by being exhibitionistic."

Freud's late self-portraits became increasingly built up in thick layers, in turns smoothed and scratched, as though responding to changes in his physical appearance.

Demonstrations of artistic confidence are held in the balance with his increasing physical frailty. Freud almost disappears into the surfaces; there is a narrowing of the space between the painter and his work.

**Painting at Work - list of works
(clockwise in order of hang)**

**Self-portrait,
1981**

Charcoal on paper

Private collection

**Self-portrait,
1990–91**

Oil on canvas

Denise and Andrew Saul

Self-portrait Reflection, 2002

Oil on canvas

Private collection



Self-portrait: Reflection, 1996

Etching on paper

David Dawson

Freud etched by standing the copper plate upright on the easel, like his paintings, and working slowly over weeks and months.

This is his only etched self-portrait, and the first etching in which he places the figure against a heavily worked background.

His ageing likeness is conveyed through hatching and highlights, the texture of his shirt by printing from a half-wiped plate.

Painter Working, Reflection, 1993



Oil on canvas

The Newhouse Collection

Freud depicts his ageing body with characteristic directness. The painting took several months to complete, and Freud reworked areas numerous times, as can be seen in his neck, genitals, calves and right thumb.

He painted over his face on the first day, and amended his expression after it had been photographed for exhibition.

“I couldn’t scrap it,” he said, “because I would be doing away with myself.”

Self-portrait, 2002

Oil and charcoal on canvas

Courtesy of Ordovas

Self-portrait, Reflection, 2003–04

Oil on canvas

Private collection.

Courtesy of Eykyn Maclean Ltd

Reflection (Self-portrait), 1985

Oil on canvas

Private collection.

On loan to the Irish Museum of Modern Art, IMMA

Collection: Freud Project 2016-2021

The deep shadows and angular planes of light suggest that this painting was executed at night. Freud succeeds in capturing his averted gaze, as though lost in a moment of unselfconsciousness.

Though his palette is not naturalistic, he succeeds in rendering the folds of skin through an extraordinary modulation in his application of paint.

The surface application of Cremnitz White serves to give shape to the ridge of his nose and his forehead.

Reflection (Self-portrait), 1981–82



Oil on canvas

Private collection

Untitled (Self-portrait), 1978

Oil and charcoal on canvas

Private collection.

Courtesy of Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert

Your feedback, please

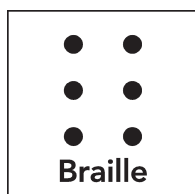
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Thank you.



InTouch at the RA

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