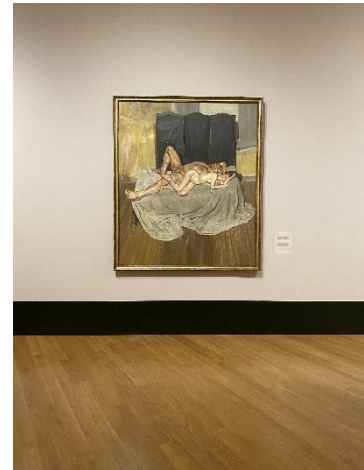


LOOKING INTO THE LIGHT

Exhibition Lighting Reports

'Lucian Freud: New Perspectives' at the National Gallery

The National Gallery could, undeniably, have organised a significantly more impactful exhibition of Freud's work than what ultimately came to fruition this winter season. Each room is lit in a similar manner, a manner of which that is effective in presenting the audience with the paintings, yet is firmly clear of any risks- the result is a show that places Freud's into a long list of other exhibitions, free of distinct ambience. In spite of this, though, the lighting here is, as previously referenced, effective. Consistency is what this style of lighting achieves best. It is soft across the board with high suspended spotlights directed toward each individual piece (all located a few meters distant from the walls for more consistent and greater light coverage onto the works), in turn preventing any notable shine on the paintings, allowing for audience members from all angles to enjoy the same colours in the artist's work. The height and volume of these lights also prevents any viewer from stumbling into a dimmer area, again reducing any variable that may disrupt the experience of said exhibition. Finally, the lights' hues are identical throughout and neutral white, allowing the audience as an undistorted perception of Freud's output as possible.



So why do I find this exhibition's lighting to represent a missed opportunity? I believe two changes could have been made to the lighting's direction, here. Freud's mature work is very textural- the loose, flowing brushstrokes gesture contours, the grain of skin and the weights of the artist's subjects. It therefore seems to me that this should be a significant focus in the presentation of these later works, and these qualities can be highlighted by harder light. By lowering the lights slightly, and drawing them closer to the walls, the lumps and waves of the paintings would be accentuated to a greater extent. Perhaps an even stronger change, though, would be to leave more of the gallery space in darkness. An exhibition I remember very fondly was the Royal Academy's 'Francis Bacon: Man and Beast'- each painting rested on dark grey walls, each lit in isolation, shadow splitting them. This gave the pieces great weight. In this Freud exhibition, the works are given much more individual responsibility to grab the viewer, as they all hang close to one another in near shared light. These paintings can take this responsibility without trouble, but the more focused lighting only adds to the drama of work, and in my view would elevate Freud even further.

'Making Modernism' at the Royal Academy

The lighting at this exhibition was more successful than that of Freud's. In contrast to the National, the Royal Academy (RA) opts for warmer, more dramatic lighting. More lights are directed to the pieces, for the most part, individually, lending each exhibit a stronger sense of significance- their intensity and closeness to the walls accentuate the more worked and textured paintings. Although this approach does promote visible shine on some glossier oil painted surfaces, this is in my opinion for the greater good, and represents a worthy sacrifice made in order to highlight this rarely emphasised key facet of such artworks. Furthermore, once again in the the RA's favour over the National, is that the choice to use warmer spotlights over cool whites creates a more welcoming ambience in the exhibition space, helping the audience feel more comfortable in the showing, thus leading them naturally to view more attentively the works at hand. Consequently, the audience feels to a greater extent that they are on their own time and not on that of the business', helping them enjoy the work more than perhaps they would have otherwise and leave with a more positive outlook on not just the exhibits but the gallery in question, also.



However, there are some issues with this exhibition's lighting. Firstly, where Freud's is designed in such a way where all work is as unobscured and consistently presented as possible, the RA prioritises drama. The problem with this is that by following through with this aim and choosing to use harder, closer lights, for example, portions of the RA's exhibits are unavoidably obscured. A significant number of the paintings on display at Making Modernism have thick frames- in tandem with such lighting, regularly quite thick strips of shadow are cast onto the upper edges of most works here. This does not majorly detract from their [paintings'] viewing, but the show would be stronger without this detail. Similarly, it is not fatal to the exhibition's success that the first painting one witnesses upon entering the space, Portrait of Anna Roslund, is initially host to significant glare on its protective glass (caused by the light from the show's foyer outside), but it does not work to its benefit either. In spite of these complaints, the RA's 'Making Modernism' exhibition is lit successfully.

Lighting my work



I do not believe this painting requires anything other than the natural light of a white walled studio space, having worked on it in such an environment. It is a quiet piece of a dull weathered space- to light it dramatically would be to overplay its sentiment, and moreover dishonest. Furthermore, if I were to light the piece artificially, there is not a clear way in which it could meaningfully benefit the piece. For example, to light neutrally dampens the work's intended values, moving the piece into a greener focus over beige. Warm lights overpower this painting, losing its calm ambience and subtle coolness through the visibility of its ground. Finally, neutral lighting serves little purpose here when this natural light is so optimum, and unnecessarily tampers with the work. However, on a sunny day, it would perhaps be a good idea to move the piece to

a more softly, neutrally lit space as to substitute for the ideal overcast weather it plays best in.



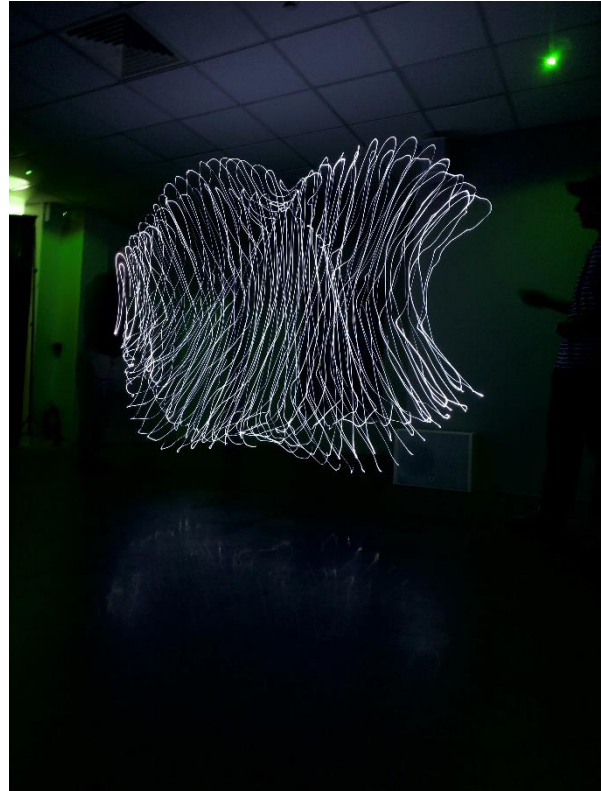
To light a more physical object like a bowl, it is important to emphasise its form. This is best achieved through harder light, but this can be risky as the shadows may be so intense as to near conceal the exhibit's details. Therefore, I decided to place the bowl close to a fairly soft lamp- this prevented excessive shadow while bringing out the depth and uneven qualities of the item's surface. I have not found natural light to reflect this, unfortunately, as otherwise I would be inclined to keep its display as natural as possible in line with its materials. The fact the light is warmly hued also aids here, as the object itself is more earthily coloured generally and thus this light does not so much shift its aesthetic, rather accentuate it.



Since I did not intend to result with a broken plate, this plate is a failure. It is a failure I like, however, and so I wish to display it. It must be evident in its presentation that this outcome was accidental as to be truthful though, therefore I knew I wanted to place the exhibit in low light conditions as to indicate its ceasing of development. This is the best lighting and location I felt for the plate. On top of the microwave in the studio kitchen, the work appears hidden/discarded. The lighting of the object in this environment also suggests this- creeping into the shadows of the dark space, it seems similarly ignored/forgotten. The subtle intruding light from the main studio space however does still present the item as one chosen to be displayed, however. My chosen arrangement for the plate involves layering its fragments in such a way that the combined

piece's weight and disarray is emphasised for greater impact- it is important to me that this arrangement is accentuated, therefore. Here, the aforementioned slip of light, as there is only one entry to the kitchen, softly lights only one side of the plate, causing the thick strips of terracotta to cast clear shadows across one another, bringing out the layered composition as intended. Lighting the plate this way, in my opinion, is consequently very effective as it suggests its neglect yet remains a compelling display- ticking both boxes.

Light experiments



Light painting- using long exposure, we captured images such as these by maintaining stable cameras before various swinging strings of lights and filtered phone flashes.



Diffraction- to see how light can be distorted to more easily convey dynamism in photography, we were tasked to choose from an array of objects to filter our cameras. Here, to suggest both movement and isolation, as per my brief, I held a glass sphere against my phone's lens to accentuate such qualities in compositions I found appropriate.



Cyanotype- we made cyanotypes by coating papers with an ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide solution in a dark space and first leaving them to dry. Once dried, we took the papers outside and placed various objects onto them in natural light- gradually, the green wash turned blue and the items left white negative spaces on the surface. We then dried these in a similarly dark room to avoid loss of clarity. Here is one I was involved in producing.

Cyanotype was worth experimenting with. in my opinion, for its historical value and quite unique aesthetic, but unfortunately, I do not find it to be particularly engaging as a medium as I tend to prefer techniques which allow for more control.

Drawings- here are some quick sketches recently looking at interesting details in lighting.

