

# Sotheby's

## Contemporary Art Evening Auction

London | 12 Feb 2014, 07:00 PM | L14020



**LOT 15**

**PROPERTY OF EDWARD, LORD DURHAM  
LUCIAN FREUD**

1922-2011

**HEAD ON A GREEN SOFA**

oil on canvas

91.5 by 91.5cm.; 36 by 36in.

Executed in 1960-61.

**ESTIMATE €2,500,000-3,500,000 GBP**

Lot Sold: 2,994,500 GBP

### **PROVENANCE**

Viscount Lambton, 6th Earl of Durham

Thence by descent to the present owner

## EXHIBITED

London, Hayward Gallery; Bristol, Bristol City Art Gallery; Birmingham, Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery; Leeds, Leeds City Museum and Art Gallery, Lucian Freud, 1974, p. 48, no. 82, illustrated  
Washington D.C., Smithsonian Institution, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Paris, Centre Georges Pompidou; London, Hayward Gallery; Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie, Staatliche Museen Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Lucian Freud Paintings, 1987-88, p. 22, illustrated in colour  
London, Tate Britain; Barcelona, Fundació La Caixa; Los Angeles, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Lucian Freud Paintings, 2002-03, p. 99, no. 48, illustrated in colour  
London, National Portrait Gallery; Fort Worth, Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Lucian Freud: Portraits, 2012, p. 89, no. 28, illustrated in colour

## LITERATURE

Lawrence Gowing, Lucian Freud, London 1982, p. 121, no. 95, illustrated  
Exhibition Catalogue, Rome, Palazzo Ruspoli, Lucian Freud: Dipinti e opera su carta 1940-1991, 1991, p. 22, illustrated  
Robert Hughes, Lucian Freud Paintings, London 1993, p. 22, illustrated in colour  
Bruce Bernard and Derek Birdsall, Eds., Lucian Freud, London 1996, no. 96, illustrated in colour

## CATALOGUE NOTE

*Head on a Green Sofa delivers a quite remarkable and sensual portrait of Lucian Freud's close friend and model, Lady Belinda 'Bindy' Lambton. A masterwork of technique and of defining style, the present work completely encapsulates the intensity of purpose, observation and evenness of treatment that has marked Freud as a master of modern figuration. With a long jaw, angular frame and thick mane of hair, hers was an unusual beauty. The traces of a smile play on her lips as she rests on a sofa in the artist's studio, at the time a long and narrow room in Delamere Terrace, west London. Freud noted that his aim in painting was "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 of his choice" (Lucian Freud, 'Some Thoughts on Painting', Encounter, vol. III, no. 1, p. 23). Throughout his renowned career Freud lived and practised by this maxim, translating his physical circumstances, experiences, and relationships into compositions that communicate universal truths of human psychology and emotion. His corpus is replete with canvases that capture within their borders instances of intense intimacy and privacy; his work reads as a dedicated and minute study of personal human moments. There is no question that his most arresting and evocative images have been those born from his most intimate relationships. Bindy Lambton and Head on a Green Sofa are exemplary of this defining characteristic of Freud's art.*

*Born Belinda Blew-Jones on 23rd December 1921, Bindy was a generous, free-spirited and wonderfully unconventional woman of handsome good-looks and original wit. These attributes led her to acquire a lifetime of admirers, and at the tender age of eighteen she met and married, Antony Lambton, son of the fifth Earl of Durham. In the early 1950s, very much with the support of Bindy, Lord Lambton embarked on a career in politics leading the couple to acquire a large Georgian House, at 11 South Audley Street in London's Mayfair. Away from the family seat, Biddick Hall in County Durham, life in London lent Bindy the opportunity to lead a glamorous life. She quickly became a doyenne of London society, lavishly entertaining society's elite, and most notably Lucian Freud. Her relationship with Freud extended beyond the parameters of the studio, and lasted for over two decades. Sharing a passion for horses, the two would often watch afternoon horse races on television in South Audley Street, and occasionally travelled*

together overseas with the tribe of Freud and Lambton children to Venice, Paris and the South of France. With one foot still firmly planted in Paddington's gritty Bohemian underworld of artists, gamblers, and occasionally villains, the lavish lifestyle and glamorous social circles that Freud enjoyed with Bindy threw this 'dual' life that he so enjoyed into sharp relief, yet perfectly exemplifies the ease in which he mixed with both high and low society throughout his life. Freud's relationship with the Lambton family is typical of the friendships forged between the artist and the social elite of the 1950s and 1960s. These friendships provided the artist with a coterie of sitters, including Ann Fleming (*Portrait of Mrs Ian Fleming*, 1950), his second wife Lady Caroline Blackwood (*Girl in Bed*, 1952) and the Devonshire family (*Woman in a White Shirt*, 1956-57). Out of this illustrious line up, it is Bindy who has emerged the most prominent. Over the course of their relationship she was painted several times by Freud. *Head on a Green Sofa*, his first fully realised portrait of her, was followed by *Figure with Bare Arms* (1961-62), *Woman's Head with Yellow Background* (1963), and, thirty years later, a touching final picture, *Woman in a Butterfly Jersey* (1990-91). It is without question that the group of pictures depicting Bindy Lambton are amongst the finest examples of Freud's intimate portraiture from the 1960s.

The portrait of Bindy Lambton was painted at a pivotal moment in Freud's career. He had begun to lose patience, feeling inhibited with the uncompromising working method of his earlier works. For these smaller pictures of the early 1950s, Freud "set his easel so close to the subject that the surface of the painting acts as a thin barrier to what's underneath" (*Catherine Lampert in: Exhibition Catalogue, Hazlitt Holland Hibbert, Lucian Freud Early Works 1950-58*, 2008, p. 69). Executed with delicate use of fine sable brushes these works are subtle in their variations of colour; the pallor of delicate flesh is of the refined and persuasive stippling of warm, thin colours, evocative of the meticulous precision that was achieved by the Netherlandish masters of the Northern Renaissance. In this method he achieved some of the most exactly observed paintings of the time, such as *Portrait of Mrs Ian Fleming* (1950), *Self Portrait* (1952), and *Girl in Bed* (1952). Most famous of all is of course the tragically missing and incomparable portrait on copper *Francis Bacon* (1952). However, this method proved too strenuous to continue and speaking of this period, Freud has commented, "I felt that the only way I could work properly was using absolute maximum observation and maximum concentration. I thought that by staring at my subject matter and examining it closely I could get something from it... I had a lot of eye trouble; terrible headaches because of the strain of painting so close" (*Lucian Freud quoted in: Exhibition Catalogue, Madrid, Museo Correr, Lucian Freud, 2005, p. 33*).

Given this strain, and also prompted by the physical abandon with which his friend and fellow artist Francis Bacon painted, he exchanged his fine sable brushes for larger ones made of hogs' hair, and taught himself to work standing up. A wall in the studio was knocked down to afford him more room. "It wasn't that I was abandoning something dear to me," he said, "more than I wanted to develop something unknown to me." The paintings that Freud made in the early 1960s are unlike anything that he had previously done. Highly expressive, they represent a radical departure from his realist style. They have a startling new impetus, and an almost sculptural quality based on a more developed awareness of both volume and contrast. As the handling of paint became looser and more dense, so each moment of contact with the canvas became more loaded, and less governable: "Around 1960, Freud started pushing hard against the envelope of form given by the face. He began to translate into a faster and coarser tempo this sense of the flesh as a membrane that could be manipulated, in a sequence of portraits – some of a long-jawed woman with bouffant hair, some of himself – that were a startling departure from the flat forms of his earlier work. There was no loss of concision but a gain in impetus. The hog-hair brush sweeps and loops, drawing in the paint, pushing the muscle structures around" (*Robert Hughes, Lucian Freud, Paintings, London 1989, p. 18*). As broadcast in *Head on a Green Sofa* this bolder, more visceral brushwork feels perfectly suited to Bindy Lambton's strong features, athletic frame and flowing hair.

Around the same time, Freud made portraits of Bernardine Coverley (*Pregnant Girl*, 1960-61) and her daughter Bella (*Baby on a Green Sofa*, 1961). In each of the paintings, Freud looked to convey the landscape and structure of his sitters' faces, endowing them with a strong physical presence and greater visual movement. The change in method imbued Freud with a more ambitious approach to scale and composition, clearly evident in *Head on a Green Sofa*. Standing above the sitter and looking downward, Freud's portrayal of Bindy is executed on a scale yet to be seen for a

single-head portrait. The scale and compositional landscape of *Head on a Green Sofa* shaped much of Freud's work over the next decade, executed in further masterpieces *Red Haired Man on a Chair* (1962-63), *Man's Head (Self Portrait I)* (1963) in the Whitworth Gallery, Manchester and *Reflection with Two Children (Self-Portrait)* (1965) in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Critics responded positively to the radical transition in Freud's approach to painting. Robert Hughes acknowledged a greater agility and freedom of drawing, suggesting that these portraits owed something to Freud's fascination with Franz Hals, an artist he had once described as fated always to look modern, to the point of coarseness. In his own carefully crafted analysis, Lawrence Gowing, Freud's first biographer, singled out the portraits of Bindy Lambton: "The pictures that Freud began when he was forty were a drastic reversal of what was expected of him. Many of them were nearly twice life-size, and looked bigger; a powerful momentum ran through the paint, streaking it coarsely. The subjects were dynamically disoriented, leant backward or tipped in a corner. The sitter who figured most often appeared correspondingly uncompromising; she had a long face with a square chin and a fountain of hair which invited, if it did not suggest, the looping, arching brush-strokes that mark the pictures – mark them literally, groove the paint in the curving sweeps or the straight strips of the unwavering brush-strokes. Illustration does these pictures no justice; on the scale of the original the drawing is very complete and convinced, indeed lyrically involved in the distraught grace of the sitter. The brush comes sweeping down, zig-zagging across the canvas, encompassing the solidity as it loops to and fro. It describes great churning curves which make the form, recreate the pose and impulsively enact, as it seems, the expression. One feels in the paint how genial, how affectionate, the sitter was" (Lawrence Gowing, *Lucian Freud*, London 1982, pp. 132-36).

Included in Freud's first major retrospective at the Hayward Gallery, London in 1974, *Head on a Green Sofa* was also included in one of Freud's most important survey exhibitions, which travelled during 1987-88 between museums in Washington D.C., Paris, London and Berlin. A watershed event, it established Freud's reputation in the United States and provoked Hughes to acclaim him as "the greatest living realist painter." Like all the truly great portrait artists, from Dürer to Rembrandt to Bacon, Freud has an uncompromising ability to excavate every peculiarity of a person revealing an incommunicable essence of his subject, an inward tension which becomes the emotional vehicle that speaks directly to the viewer. At the very fore-front of Freud's oeuvre stands the single figure portrait and in *Head on a Green Sofa*, Freud achieves the intangible character that he first described in 1954: "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" (Lucian Freud quoted in: *Exhibition Catalogue*, London, Tate, Lucian Freud, 2002, p. 15).

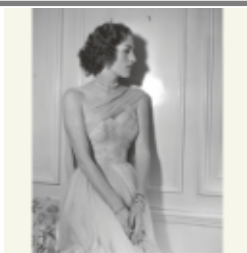


Fig. 1

Lady Lambton, circa 1956 Cecil Beaton (1904-1980) Courtesy of the Cecil Beaton Studio Archive at Sotheby's



Fig. 2

Lucian Freud and Bindy Lambton with Annabel Freud, Rose Lambton, Anne Lambton, Annie Freud and Beatrix Lambton on top of the Eiffel Tower, Paris 1965 (from the Lambton family archive)



Fig. 3

Lucian Freud, Portrait Fragment, 1960 © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library



Fig. 4

Lucian Freud, Figure with Bare Arms, 1961-62 © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library



Fig. 5

Lucian Freud, Red Haired Man on a Chair, 1962-63 © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library



Fig. 6

Lucian Freud, Reflection with Two Children (Self Portrait), 1965 Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Madrid © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library

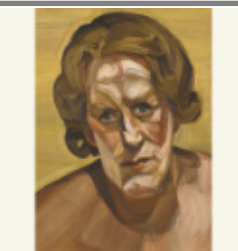


Fig. 7

Lucian Freud, Woman's Head with a Yellow Background, 1963 Rochdale Art Gallery, Lancashire © Rochdale Art Gallery, Lancashire, UK / © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library



Fig. 8

Lucian Freud, Woman in a Butterfly Jersey, 1990-91 © The Lucian Freud Archive / The Bridgeman Art Library

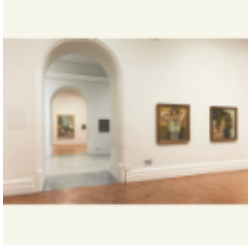


Fig. 9

Lucian Freud Portraits, 2012, National Portrait Gallery, London ©  
National Portrait Gallery, London © The Lucian Freud Archive / The  
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