

# BEN BROWN FINE ARTS



## FRANK AUERBACH: PORTRAITS

22 MAY – 10 AUGUST 2013

Frank Auerbach, one of Britain's most accomplished living artists, will have his first solo exhibition in Asia at Ben Brown Fine Arts in Hong Kong from 22 May 2013. By concentrating solely on a select group of portrait paintings and drawings, from the 1970s to the present day, this exhibition demonstrates the remarkable insight of a famously hermetic artist. Running concurrently at the gallery with the exhibition *NOT VITAL: Landscapes*, both shows will open during Art Basel Hong Kong.

At the age of 82, Auerbach is one of the few remaining British painters of his generation, which included his close friend and colleague Lucian Freud. For more than fifty years Auerbach has worked in the same modest studio in north London with diligence and an almost monastic absorption. Most of Auerbach's models have been sitting for him for decades, and so his *oeuvre* serves as an extended meditation on a select coterie of subjects. Included in this exhibition are portraits of his son Jake, his wife Julia, art critic William Feaver, curator Catherine Lampert and businessman David Landau, all of whom faithfully sit for him on a regular basis.

With time Auerbach finds that the sitter sheds his or her self-consciousness. 'When people first come and sit and think, they do things with their faces,' he observed. 'It's when they have become tired and stoical the essential head becomes clearer'. In this state of passivity, we might expect the features of the subject to soften and relax, but when depicted by Auerbach's heavily-impastoed brushstrokes and expressive use of colour, they harden into startling images of raw emotion and the mind's preoccupations.

Auerbach's working method involves an elaborate layering process, in which he builds up the oil or acrylic, and then scrapes it away, only to paint upon the remnants of the previous layer, resulting in a heavily textured and dramatic surface. This arduous process means that a painting usually takes him at least several months—and sometimes years—to complete. Auerbach finds this laborious process of painting revelatory, stating, 'To paint the same head over and over leads to unfamiliarity; eventually you get near the raw truth about it, just as people only blurt out the raw truth in the middle of a family quarrel.'

Unlike many artists who experiment with style, subject matter and medium throughout their careers, Auerbach has remained resolutely focused on painting, and drawing as an aide to his paintings. This exhibition is testament to the unwavering approach that has earned Auerbach the respect and esteem of art critics and collectors internationally.

## NOTES TO THE EDITOR

Frank Auerbach was born in Berlin to affluent Jewish parents in 1931, his father a lawyer and mother an artist. At the age of eight he was sent to England under the *Kindertransport* programme, which sent Jewish children to foster families and boarding schools in England to escape the Nazi occupation. His parents remained in Germany where they subsequently died in concentration camps. Auerbach attended a boarding school in Kent largely populated by children and teachers displaced by the war and he later studied in London at St. Martin's School of Art from 1948 to 1952 and the Royal College of Art from 1952 to 1955. Though his first solo show was met with puzzlement in 1956, he found support from the critic David Sylvester: 'in spite of the excessive piling on of paint, the effect of these works on the mind is of images recovered and reconceived in the barest and most particular light, the same light that seems to glow through the late, great, thin Turners.'

Auerbach's work has been exhibited at the Hayward Gallery, London; Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam; the Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, Connecticut; Kunstverein, Hamburg; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; the National Gallery, London; the Royal Academy of Arts, London; and the Courtauld Institute of Art, London, among other institutions. Auerbach himself rarely leaves Britain, and has lived and worked in the same London studio since the 1950s.

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