

Frank Auerbach – Research sources

Frank Auerbach's approach to portraiture is legendary and through it he makes some very interesting points about the nature of portraiture and of drawing. Research what makes Frank Auerbach's portraits unique, and how he used the passage of time in them. Think about why he might have done that and make notes about how working from life differs from working from a photograph in terms of the way we experience the time spent.



Auerbach, F. (1954) **Head of Leon Kossoff**. [Oil on board] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/frank-auerbach-676/how-its-made-frank-auerbach> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

“I want everything in the painting to work, that is, every force, every plane, every direction to relate to every other direction in the painting – so there's no paradiddle or blot somewhere. I feel very strongly that if a painting is going to work, it has to work before you have a chance to read it.”

Frank Auerbach

Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/frank-auerbach/auerbach-introduction> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].



Auerbach, F. (1958) **Self-portrait**. [Charcoal and chalk on paper] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/frank-auerbach/auerbach-introduction> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

Self-Portrait, 1958

“In this rare and elusive self-portrait, Auerbach contrasts dark and light using charcoal and an eraser. The work is made up of layers of paper due to Auerbach’s technique of scraping and peeling away at the surface to start the search for the subject’s essence. However he tended not to use himself for his works, preferring to decipher the essential nature of his sitters or of familiar places. This technique and composition produces a similar emotive response to his solemn early paintings. His drawings in particular have been said to possess remnants of the heavy shadows of the war.”

Available at: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/articles/the-most-important-works-by-frank-auerbach/> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].



Auerbach, F. (1959-60) **Head of E.O.W.** [Charcoal, paper and watercolour on paper]. Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/auerbach-head-of-e-o-w-t02100> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

“Auerbach’s surfaces change over time, as does his palette. The wrinkled, thick, earlier oil on canvas, E.O.W. Nude dating from 1959, has some scraping back evident around the figure, but is largely left built up. This is in part why it wrinkles, an aesthetic feature the artist does not mind. The palette is subdued earth pigments, whites and blacks, as he could not afford colour at the time. ‘In common with most painters,’ he says, ‘I use all sorts of instruments (even sometimes hands) to apply the paint.’ His mark making develops over time; with brushes, palette knives, putty scrapers and sometimes paint squeezed directly from the tube.”

Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/frank-auerbach-676/how-its-made-frank-auerbach> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].

“Most of Auerbach’s sitters pose every week, often over many years. He has said:

I find myself simply more engaged when I know the people. They get older and change; there is something touching about that, about recording something that’s getting on.

Auerbach’s interest in acting led him to meet Estella (Stella) Olive West (‘E.O.W’) when they acted together in a play in 1948. He painted her for 23 years. Other sitters have included professional model Julia Yardley Mills (J.Y.M), Auerbach’s wife Julia, his son Jake, and Catherine Lampert who has sat regularly for Auerbach since 1978. David Landau and William Feaver are also regular sitters.”

Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/frank-auerbach/auerbach-introduction> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].



Auerbach, F. (1960) **Head of E.O.W. I**. [Oil on board] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/auerbach-head-of-e-o-w-i-t06682> [Accessed: 2 January 2019].

Head of E.O.W.I, 1961

“E.O.W stands for Estella Olive West, Auerbach’s most frequent model from the early 1950s to 1963. They met performing in a play when he was 17, Stella, 32. He moved into her boarding house in Earls Court and a passionate relationship began that continued into his marriage with Julia Wolstenholme. The portrait is a key example of the sculptural quality his early portraits possessed with a restricted palette of earthy but lively reds and yellows. Continuously applying and removing layers between 10 and 200 times, the paint, oozing like mud, creates its own peaks and crevasses, broadcasting the curiosity and fixation Auerbach felt for Stella.”

Available at: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/articles/the-most-important-works-by-frank-auerbach/> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].



Auerbach, F. (1981) **Head of J.Y.M. No.1.** [Oil on canvas] Tate. Available at: <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/famous-artists/frank-auerbach.htm> [Accessed: 3 January 2018].



Auerbach, F. (1984-85) **Head of J.Y.M. II.** [Oil on canvas] Tate. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/press/press-releases/frank-auerbach-tate-britain> [Accessed: 2 January 2019].

“Auerbach met model Julia Yardley Mills in 1956 at the Sidcup College of Art. She was fascinated with Auerbach and would sit for him every Wednesday and Sunday

for over four decades. There was no romantic relationship between the two, but a deep appreciation of each other in a professional sense. Julia loved the excitement of sitting for Frank, and he relished in her ability to pose without complaining for hours. Moving out of the heaviest impasto works, this monochromatic work of Julia's reclining head captures a melancholic quality with a fluidity of brush strokes that maintains an impression of a calmer relationship than with Stella."

Available at: <https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/articles/the-most-important-works-by-frank-auerbach/> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].



Auerbach, F. (2003) **Head of William Feaver**. [Oil on board Tate.

Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/frank-auerbach> [Accessed: 3 January 2019].

Ridges and gullies, dragged paint, violent swirls across the surface. Busy in a world of restless squashy movement. Thick layers, scraped back, creating the image through working with the paint and the surface.

(From: Phaidon Press (1994) **The Art Book**, p.21.)



Auerbach, F. (2004) **Julia II**. [Pencil on paper] Available at: <http://www.marlbroughgallery.com/exhibitions/frank-auerbach-recent-works> [Accessed: 3 January 2018].



Auerbach, F. (2014) **Self-portrait**. [Graphite on paper] Available at: <http://www.marlbroughlondon.com/artists/frank-auerbach-2/> [Accessed: 3 January 2018].

“Auerbach's organic yet unified forms are deeply rooted in realism and are often renditions of people he knows well. His oils, drawings, and prints reveal an intense observation of the subject; he makes his mark with authority and finality, and arrives at the essence of his figures. Auerbach's signature thick black lines and the furious mark-making he employs give his sitters a flickering quality of energy. For the artist, prints carry an authority that drawings do not, as well as a sense of “magic” that replaces emotion. While Auerbach has a deep reverence for the print medium, he has completed fewer than 40 editions throughout his career.”

Available at: <http://www.marlbroughlondon.com/artists/frank-auerbach-2/>
[Accessed: 3 January 2019]



Auerbach, F. (2017) **Head of Catherine Lampert**. [Oil on board] Marlborough Fine Art. Available at: <http://www.artnet.com/artists/frank-auerbach/>
[Accessed: 3 January 2019].

Expressionistic, thick impasto that almost seems to be modelled and not applied by brush. Is there perhaps a sense of paintings being muddy and overworked.?

(From: Chilvers, I (2009) **Oxford dictionary of art and artists**. 4th ed. OUP, p.31.)

“Our first encounter took place in the late 1980s, when I asked Auerbach to appear in a BBC film I was making about the demystification of art. Then as now I was mesmerised by his work, by his ability to capture the essence of a person or place; how the paint on his canvases never seems to dry and ossify but remains vibrant, fluid, jewel-encrusted, fizzing with energy and mystery.” Frank Auerbach: An interview with one of our greatest living painters, by Hannah Rothschild, 30 September 2013 – Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/10336972/Frank-Auerbach-An-interview-with-one-of-our-greatest-living-painters.html> [Accessed: 3 January 2018].

“Auerbach's admiration for Picasso's pre-Cubist conceptualising of form. But although the drawings of both do attempt to build from an underlying structure this does not address the particular power of Auerbach's work. It has a charge, a spark, an energy. It is exciting because it is daring, inventive, even idiosyncratic; gesture plays an important part, work is finished in the crisis of a moment. But, despite the bravura of the performance there is a remarkable composure.” Frank Auerbach - Essays by James Hyman - James Hyman: Fine Art and Photographs – Available at: <http://www.jameshymangallery.com/essays/51/frank-auerbach> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

“Auerbach is, as Rosenthal has observed, both modern and part of the classical tradition of portraiture and landscape painting. ‘In spite of his surface wildness and the thickness of his paint (or in the case of thinner canvases paint that has been scraped off where it has previously covered the surface), there is a sense of rightness that gives each mark, each stroke, an emotionally laden meaning that strives towards a truthful representation of the subject” Frank Auerbach: Paintings and Drawings 1954-2001, Royal Academy, London – article published 29 September 2001 - Available at: <https://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/frank-auerbach-paintings-and-drawings-1954-2001> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

“Like many post-World War II artists, Auerbach saw little need to make sharp distinctions between figuration and abstraction. Instead using boldly gestural strokes and thick impastos of paint to render his subjects, Auerbach painted psychological portraits and moody landscapes that captured the cultural weariness and melancholia of the time brought on by the devastations of the war. Known for his densely painted canvases, sometimes inches thick, Auerbach's paintings seem archaeological, with the viewer attempting to excavate the layers of the composition to uncover various perspectives and memories that went into the creation of the final image before them. Auerbach's portraits and landscapes both emerge from the canvas and dissolve into the paint, suggesting their mutability and impermanence. Calling attention to the instability of self-perception and nature, Auerbach's paintings expose the methods by which we make sense of ourselves and the world around us.” Available at: <https://www.theartstory.org/artist-auerbach-frank.htm> [Accessed: 22 December 2018].

Notes taken from The Last Art Film - Auerbach, J. (2012) *The last Art Film*. Directed by Jake Auerbach [DVD]. UK: Jake Auerbach Films. [Accessed: 14 January 2017].

As a student was told that linear perspective, certain types of modelling and colour as well as anatomy were fundamental, though his belief was that these were no more than discovered conventions that eventually fell out of fashion. From here he moved onto such ideas that there was an underlying geometry in paintings and that while it was useful to learn about artistic methods and materials it was just as useful to then forget about these things. While it is worth knowing that these things exist, the artist needs to invent own techniques.

We do need to have access to what we think of as the masters had to say about their work in order to find our own way – like Sickart, Gauguin, Cezanne, Constable for example.

3 areas which make a work of art:

- 1) An image that remains on the canvas, immobile, is not engaging. Need to find feeling invested in the image, tangible, moves through space. Explore relationships in space, like Constable's landscapes.
- 2) An element of expression is required – the feeling of an idea, an expression of what the artist intends is central. As Sickert said 'a page torn from the book of life'.
- 3) Unless there is a tension in the surface of the painting – a tense surface character – something that has an immediate impact on the viewer, a gesture on the surface – it will be dull and mechanical. Need to be able to discern a feeling of the artist's inescapable appetite and curiosity in the work – then it will be unable to be resisted – it will be ineluctable.



Frank Auerbach talking about art in The Last Art Film.