

120 Artist Research

Frank Auerbach

Born 1931 in Berlin

German-British Modern Expressionism and Excessivism painter

Though he was born during the second world war to a German-Jewish family, I don't personally see an awful lot of explicit references to that time in his life in his works. He was sent away to a progressive boarding school and his parents died in concentration camps. His boarding school was evacuated to Britain, and he stayed there for the rest of his life.

During COVID lockdowns, he painted self-portraits because he couldn't get any sitters. He has found that his face, though previously unappealing to his artist's mind, now with age has become more interesting to paint. He attended St. Martin's School of Art in London from 1948-1952, and then at the Royal College of Art from 1952-1955.

“Auerbach is regarded as one of today's most inventive and influential artists, revered for psychologically probing portraits and powerful urban landscapes that capture the soul of a person or place with thick lines and thickly layered brushstrokes.” -The Guardian

'[The paintings'] physical structure is virtually that of sculpture but their psychological impact is that of painting' - David Sylvester, 'Young English Painting', *The Listener*, 12 January 1956.

In 1956 he had his first solo show at the Beaux Arts Gallery in London. He was criticized for his thick application of paint, but found support from the critic David Sylvester, who wrote of 'the most exciting and impressive first one-man show by an English painter since Francis Bacon in 1949'.

His paintings really interest me because they are so thickly textured. He must use entire tubes of paint for each portrait. Some of his portraits are also extremely abstracted, to the point where you can almost not even tell that it's a human face. Somehow, he is able to draw out the most important or defining features of someone's face, and effectively hide the rest in thick, textured, expressive strokes.

I love his exploration of the limitations of paint. Or lack thereof. I love painting with lots of texture, and often use very thick mediums in my personal works. I've always toyed with the idea of blind art- pieces that communicate non-visually. I think not only does Auerbach achieve this idea texturally, but I think he is able to tell a story through his use of colour that flat paintings cannot. There is a certain relationship between colour and texture, and I like that you can clearly see that in his work. I also love the size of his paintings. I'd imagine that not only is it economical to create smaller-scale paintings when you're using so much paint, but also easier to work with. And I think it also creates a kind of expressive intimacy that you wouldn't get if they were on a larger scale. Everything about his work draws you in, makes you consider the piece more closely and slowly. Even though the brushstrokes invoke a feeling of excitement and energy, it is excitement of the mind, not the body.

Frank Auerbach once said, “Painting is the most marvellous activity humans have invented”.

<https://www.wikiart.org/en/frank-auerbach>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2022/sep/18/frank-auerbach-how-artist-drew-himself-for-covid-plague-years-drawings>

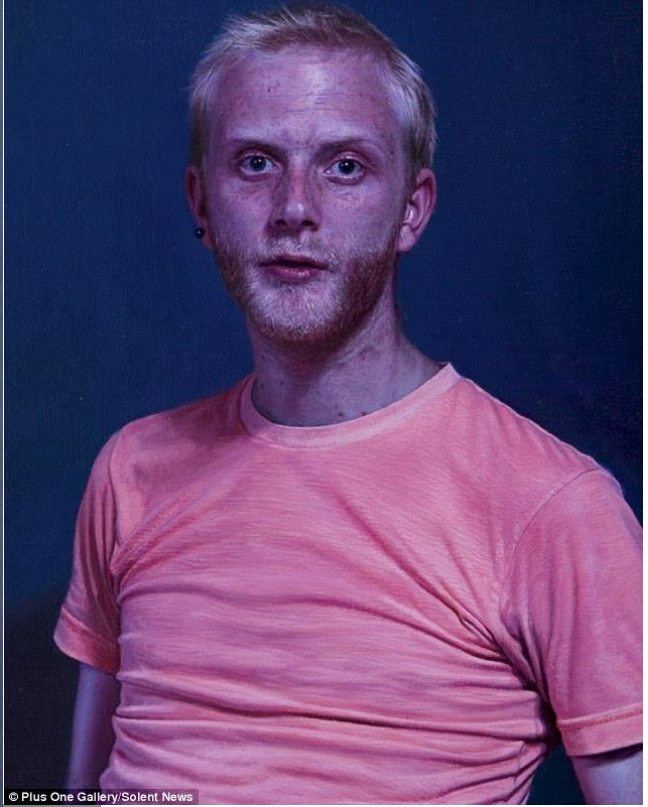
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/may/16/frank-auerbach-when-paint-fantastic-time-lots-girls>

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artists/frank-auerbach-676>



Craig Wylie





Born in Masvingo Zimbabwe in 1973, and currently lives in Norfolk UK. His wife does hyper-realistic portraits too, but in charcoal mainly. Wylie got his BFA with Distinction at Rhodes University in South Africa. His first solo exhibition was not until 2010 at Plus One Gallery in London.

His hyper-realistic portraits are the most well-known of his work, but his more expressive, loose paintings are also stunning. Even his studies, in pencil and paint are so intricate and beautiful.

Wylie's incredible attention to detail is unparalleled in modern or historical art. His expression of colour and lighting is masterful, and though he takes photographs of his subjects before he paints, the paintings are not exact copies of the photos, and indeed were not intended to be such. Wylie applies a ridiculous amount of intellect and attention to each of his works, including but not limited to his photo-realistic portraits. Wylie makes a distinction between himself and other photorealism artists, in that he does not simply (not that it's simple at all) paint what the camera sees, but what the eye sees. Photorealism is about "painting a photograph rather than the reality within the photograph", and Wylie achieves the latter with grace.

I love the way he renders the light and colour, especially in the "prayer" series. The scheme of blues and pinks make it look so realistic and yet also simulated. I really admire the choices he made with that one in particular. When looking at his photo-realistic portraits, I find things only to admire and aspire to. When I look at his figure work I marvel at the life-like quality, without them being photo-realistic. His use of unique angles and compositions really interest me, and are definitely something I want to emulate in my own explorations of figure. Personally, I have a problem with creating work that looks like a piece that already exists, or that expresses something in a way that's been done before, especially when it's been done a lot. Even though 'copying' is unavoidable in art, I always search for new ways of looking at things to make my work as original and interesting as possible.

The pieces below are called "sphinx", and they are the same picture, but the first one is the new version. The first pass on this painting was more realistic, and then the second is called "(destroyed) sphinx)". Wylie went back to the painting and changed it, simplified it, recoloured and reimagined the piece in an unexpected way. He's able to take risks and reinvent his own works to make something new, and I love that.





<https://www.craigwylie.com/pagecv>

<https://www.plusonegallery.com/artists/43-craig-wylie/>