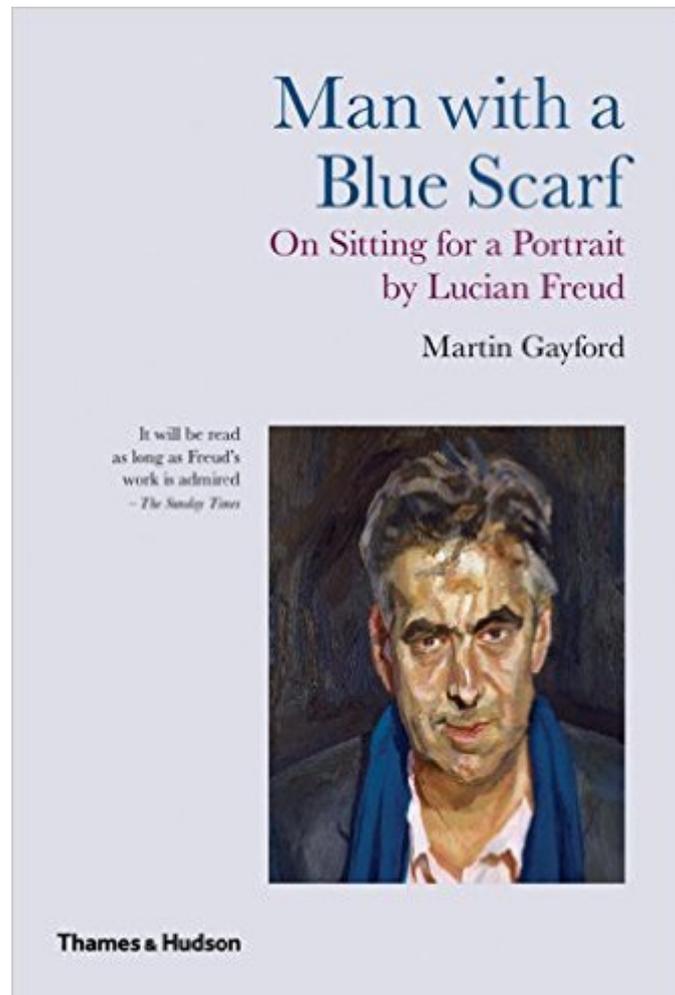


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Man With A Blue Scarf: On Sitting For A Portrait By Lucian Freud



Synopsis

An extraordinary record of a great artist in his studio, it also describes what it feels like to be transformed into a work of art. ARTnews Lucian Freud (1922-2011), widely regarded as the greatest figurative painter of our time, spent seven months painting a portrait of the art critic Martin Gayford. The daily narrative of their encounters takes the reader into that most private place, the artist's studio, and to the heart of the working methods of this modern master—both technical and subtly psychological. From this emerges an understanding of what a portrait is, but something else is also created: a portrait, in words, of Freud himself. This is not a biography, but a series of close-ups: the artist at work and in conversation at restaurants, in taxis, and in his studio. It takes one into the company of the painter for whom Picasso, Giacometti, and Francis Bacon were friends and contemporaries, as were writers such as George Orwell and W. H. Auden. The book is illustrated with many of Lucian Freud's other works, telling photographs taken by David Dawson of Freud in his studio, and images by such great artists of the past as van Gogh and Titian who are discussed by Freud and Gayford. Full of wry observations, the book reveals the inside story of how it feels to pose for a remarkable artist and become a work of art. 63 illustrations, 57 in color

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Customer Reviews

If you have the slightest interest whatsoever in the creative process, be it art, writing, music or whatever, this narrative will inspire you with unadulterated insight. It is a profound look into the mind of an artist of great note written by an author of great note. Martin Gayford, renowned art critic, sits for his portrait to be painted by Lucian Freud, renowned figurative painter. Apart from his keen &

knowledgeable observations Gayford takes notes of the conversations they share during this immensely creative & intimate process taking place over an extended period of time. Gayford is afforded a deep incisive look into the thoughts, & indeed feelings, of Freud, much of which Gayford imparts from Freud's own lips. In contrast, you are also privy to the reflections of the 'sitter'. Gayford speaks insightfully about the experience of sitting for his portrait with Freud. Perhaps an outlook not often contemplated or spoken about. It brings a truly cohesive outlook to the entire process of creativity. Interestingly, immediately upon completion of the portrait (Man with a Blue Scarf), Gayford offered himself up to sit for Freud again to do an etching (Portrait Head) which took a further nine months to complete. The correlation between art & food for Freud, as noted by Gayford, is such a revelation & appears completely logical as were many other insights into the creative mind that it is impossible not to look at creativity in a nuanced new light altogether.

So who wouldn't like to understand a little better the deep complexities of one of the greatest artistic geniuses in a century? Most artists believe that "explaining" their art is more than simply superfluous, that it can be actually misleading as the work should "speak for itself". Many great artists are reticent about their messages and their techniques, which often cannot be explained in words anyway. Lucian Freud does not narrate this book, but his sitter is not constrained in his opinions and offers us the dialogue between Freud and himself during their six month sitting, as well as his observations of the experience. I found myself constantly flipping back and forth between the finished portrait shown in the book, and the descriptions of each progression of the work as it takes place, as an emotional and physical experience is imprinted thru layer and layer and layer of paint built up into a work of art that is an embodiment of that experience. Martin Gaylord is the right person to write this book, his knowledge of art history provides a wonderful historical background for comparison to Freud's work and he is witty and engaging. Freud obviously enjoyed Gaylord as a subject using his head for an etching after the oil. (I think this was a cordial collaboration and the portrait is very flattering as far as Freud goes, who admits his intention is not to flatter). I learned a lot from this book and reading it gave me joy.

Speaking as a portrait painter, I enjoyed this book tremendously. Kind of like the way I assume a guitar player would have felt reading Keith Richards' book. But I think I would have loved it even if I wasn't a painter. Also worth noting: I own the hardback version, and quality and thickness of the paper, the beautiful (although way too small) illustrations, and the little ribbon in the binding that lets you mark your place -- all made the experience that much more enjoyable.

It's rare to be able to read about how a master painter lives in his studio, relates to his models and audience, and how he handles and producing a painting. The writer knows a lot about painting, which adds to the detail and depth of his observations. Inspiring for painters of all levels!

Even though I am not a fan of most of Lucien Freud's portraits and find them a bit grotesque, I did enjoy seeing his process through the eyes of Martin Gayford, who sat for the portrait referred to in the title. Gayford's writing is conversational, entertaining and informative without resorting to gossip and tale telling.

This was a beautifully-done book -- quality paper and reproductions, yet still affordable. The author shares his personal and artistic insights after posing for a portrait by the incomparable (probably a good thing) Lucian Freud. It led to an interesting and lively discussion at our Art Lovers Book Club .

I enjoyed this book very much -- probably because it combined two of my interests -- I am an artist and I love biographies. The reason I gave this book four instead of five stars is that I think it probably doesn't have wide appeal. It is simply reflections on the life and painting from a noteworthy critic and an extremely talented painter. Freud's little eccentricities add a bit of flavor to the mix.

This book is both fascinating from an art history perspective- Freud got around- and from the view of the model, which to a painter like myself offers an inside look. For the subject matter/people involved this book is not pompous at all, there is no phony contemporary art speak to be had anywhere, which is very refreshing and engaging. There are a few funny bits thrown in as well, all in all a great read, glad I bought it.

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