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J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM PRESENTS
LONDON CALLING: BACON, FREUD, KOSSOFF, ANDREWS, AUERBACH, AND KITAJ

London Calling is the first major U.S. exhibition of these “School of London” artists

July 26 – November 13, 2016
at the J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Center

LOS ANGELES — From the 1940s through the 1980s, a prominent group of London-based artists developed new styles and approaches to depicting the human figure and the landscape. These painters resisted the abstraction, minimalism, and conceptualism that dominated contemporary art at the time, instead focusing on depicting contemporary life through innovative figurative works.

On view at the J. Paul Getty Museum from July 26 to November 13, 2016, London Calling: Bacon, Freud, Kossoff, Andrews, Auerbach, and Kitaj represents the first major American museum exhibition to explore the leaders of this movement, often called the “School of London,” as central to a richer and more complex understanding of 20th century painting. The exhibition includes 80 paintings, drawings, and prints by Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff, Michael Andrews, Frank Auerbach, and R.B. Kitaj.

“The majority of paintings and drawings in the Getty Museum’s collection are fundamentally concerned with the rendition of the human figure and landscape up to 1900,” says Timothy Potts, director of the J. Paul Getty Museum and one of the exhibition curators. “This significant exhibition shows an important part of ‘what happened next,’ highlighting an innovative group of figurative artists at a time when abstraction dominated avant-garde discourse in the U.S. and much of Europe. Working with our partners at Tate in London, we have brought together a fabulous group of pictures that exemplify the radical approaches to figure and landscape pioneered by this influential coterie of artists, illuminating their crucial place in modern art history.”

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London Calling is a collaboration between Tate and the J. Paul Getty Museum and is curated by Julian Brooks, curator of Drawings at the Getty Museum, Timothy Potts, and Elena Crippa, curator, Modern and Contemporary British Art at Tate. Drawn largely from the unrivaled holdings of Tate, the exhibition has been enriched by a number of loans from other museums and private collectors.

“By pursuing painting as an activity that records and revitalizes an intense sensory experience, these artists rendered the frailty and vitality of the human condition, translating life into art and reinventing the way in which their surroundings could be represented,” said Brooks. “The ‘School of London’ artists doggedly pursued forms of figurative painting at a time when it was considered outmoded. In recent decades the work of these artists has rightly been reassessed. It is timely to look at them as a group and deepen our appreciation of their contribution.”

**Francis Bacon (1909–1992)**

Francis Bacon was born in Dublin in 1909 to English parents. After traveling to Germany and France he settled in London. He received guidance from an older friend, the Australian artist Roy de Maistre, but was otherwise largely self-taught. In 1945, the showing of a number of his paintings at London’s Lefevre Gallery established his critical reputation, and he became central to an artistic milieu in Soho that included Lucian Freud and Michael Andrews. From the mid-1940s, he began taking as a starting point for his work reproductions of paintings, sculpture, photographs, and film stills, mostly relating to the imagery of angst that resonated with both historical and personal circumstances. From 1962 he expanded the range of his photographic sources by commissioning particular shots of models, mostly friends and lovers. For example, Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne, 1966, on view in the exhibition, was based on a photo of his friend and regular subject, the artist Isabel Rawsthorne (1912–1992).

A highlight of the exhibition, Triptych—August 1972 forms part of a series of so-called “Black Triptychs,” which followed the suicide of Bacon’s longtime lover, George Dyer, in 1971. In the composition, Dyer appears on the left and Bacon himself is on the right. The image on the central panel is derived from a photograph of wrestlers by Eadweard Muybridge. Bacon’s well-known Figure with Meat, 1954 belongs to a large series of works based on reproductions of Diego Velázquez’s Portrait of Pope Innocent X. In this version, Bacon depicts the Pope between two halves of a hanging animal carcass, a motif relating to the first portrait of Bacon taken by the photographer John Deakin, in 1952, in which the painter is stripped to the waist and holds a split carcass. In establishing a connection between the raw, butchered meat and human flesh, Bacon expresses a sense of emotional turmoil and reminds the viewer of the vulnerability of the human body.
Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

Grandson of the creator of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), Lucian Freud was born in Berlin in 1922 and moved with his family to London in 1933 to escape Nazism. He trained at the Central School of Art in London and at the East Anglian School of Painting and Drawing in Dedham. Freud had his first solo exhibition in 1944 at London's Lefevre Gallery. Throughout his career he focused on the human figure, rendered in a realist manner and imbued with a stark and evocative psychological intensity. He described his work as autobiographical, most of his work taking his surroundings and people he knew intimately as his subjects, as in the case of friends, lovers, and family members.

Between 1947 and 1951 Freud made eight portraits of his first wife Kathleen (“Kitty”) Garman (1926–2011). On view in the exhibition, Girl with a Kitten, 1947 is a psychologically charged composition featuring Garman holding a kitten by its neck in a tense grip, her white knuckles especially prominent. The precision in this work is achieved through the use of fine sable brushes on finely woven canvas.

One of Freud’s frequent subjects was the performance artist, designer, and nightclub personality Leigh Bowery (1961-1994). In an intimate and vulnerable small portrait from 1991 Freud depicts Bowery sleeping. In contrast, the monumental Leigh under the Skylight, 1994 renders his starkly naked form as theatrically statuesque.

Leon Kossoff (born 1926)

Leon Kossoff was born in London, where he still resides and works, to first-generation immigrants of Russian Jewish ancestry. He studied at Saint Martin’s (where he and Frank Auerbach became close friends), at Borough Polytechnic, and at the Royal College of Art. He had his first exhibition at London’s Beaux Arts Gallery in 1957. From the early 1950s, Kossoff began painting a close circle of family and friends, producing pictures in which they acquired a solid, material presence, similar to that of the buildings and streets of London that he knew intimately and to which he also constantly returned. He developed a painterly style with thickly applied, constantly reworked layers of paint in characteristic earth tones.

In the early 1950s, Kossoff and Auerbach were fascinated by building sites, abundant in London at the time as the bomb-damaged city was being rebuilt after the war. For these artists, they were places where the earth beneath the city was revealed, and ladders and scaffolding offered ready-made linear structures. Early drawings such as Building Site, Oxford Street, 1952 were intensively worked, as Kossoff constantly erased and restarted the image.

Children’s Swimming Pool, Autumn Afternoon, 1971, depicts a newly built swimming pool near the artist’s North London studio where he took his son to learn to swim. Kossoff made
five large paintings of the pool and its light-filled space from 1969-1972, each distinguished by an expansive treatment of space and vibrant sense of energy.

**Michael Andrews (1928–1995)**

Andrews studied painting under William Coldstream at the Slade School of Art between 1949 and 1953. Lucian Freud, who also taught at the school, was an important example and offered encouragement, while Francis Bacon visited to talk about his work, also making a memorable impression. His first solo exhibition was presented at London’s Beaux Arts Gallery in 1958. From the early 1950s photographs became important sources in the creation of his work. During this early period Andrews concentrated on portraits of his friends and contemporaries as well as party scenes, developing his characteristic combination of meticulous observation with imaginative elements and implied narrative. From the mid-1970s the landscape he encountered while traveling became the subject of many paintings. In the 1990s, after being diagnosed with terminal cancer, he chose the river Thames as his final, major subject.

*The Deer Park*, 1962 was inspired by Norman Mailer’s 1955 novel of the same title. For Andrews, the novel seemed to describe the world of the Soho clubs and bars he frequented. Rather than illustrating the text, however, the painting creates a new, imaginary situation involving a cast of different characters exhibiting various social behaviors and interactions. The figures are all based on photographs and film images of people from the entertainment and literary worlds, past and contemporary. They include Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, and the poet Rimbaud. The background landscape is based on Diego Velasquez’s *Philip IV Hunting Wild Boar* (about 1632–37) in the National Gallery, London.

*Melanie and Me Swimming*, 1978–79 is a painting of Andrews and his daughter, then aged six, swimming together in a rock pool, based on a color photograph taken by a friend while they were on holiday at Glenartney Lodge, in Scotland, in the summer of 1976. As with many of his paintings, this one is a combination of real elements and his own memories of the event.

**Frank Auerbach (born 1931)**

Born in Berlin in 1931, Auerbach was sent to Kent, England at age seven to escape Nazism. In 1947 he moved to London, where he continues to live and work. After the war, he performed in small London theaters and studied painting at the Borough Polytechnic at Saint Martin’s School of Art and at the Royal College of Art. Auerbach’s early work focused on the human figure and numerous building sites in the British capital scarred by the war and undergoing reconstruction. In 1956 he had his first solo exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery. He quickly
became known for his thick application of paint. In the 1960s he began employing brighter colors and scraping down entire canvases rather than working on top of previous attempts, often spending months or years on a single painting. Recurring subjects are regular portrait sitters, Primrose Hill (a part of Regent’s Park in north London), and the streets of Camden Town, where he has been living and working since 1954. He still draws and paints 365 days a year.

**Mornington Crescent with the Statue of Sickert’s Father-in-Law,** 1966, depicts the area of North London in which Auerbach works, an area that has long captivated other artists such as Walter Sickert and the Camden Town Group. While Auerbach acknowledges this, he has stated that he doesn’t paint this area to ally himself with such history, rather that he simply sees London as a raw unpainted city. A streetlight can be seen at upper right, and the multitude of railings and lampposts in this view give the composition an almost grid-like formal structure, animated by the bright, bold pigments that Auerbach began to favor during the 1960s.

One of the most recent paintings in the exhibition, **Mornington Crescent—Summer Morning,** 2004 refers to the same location and captures the intense process of its making, with the use of large brushes to apply the paint energetically and rapidly. Elements of the composition—such as the windows and edges of buildings, rooftops, cars, and passersby—are highlighted with thick strokes. These straight marks contrast with the gestural quality of the marks that build up the large areas of the sky, road, and buildings.

**R. B. Kitaj (1932–2007)**

R. B. Kitaj was born in Cleveland. After high school Kitaj sailed extensively as a merchant seaman and served in the U.S. Army in Europe. Between those assignments he studied painting at Cooper Union and the Academy of Fine Art, Vienna. Following his army stint, he moved to England to attend the Ruskin School, Oxford, and the Royal College of Art, London. His first exhibition was held at Marlborough Fine Art in 1963. It was around this time that Kitaj met Andrews, Auerbach, Bacon, Freud, and Kossoff, who were also with the gallery. During the early 1960s Kitaj concentrated on combining figurative imagery with abstraction and began to incorporate collage into his paintings, drawing on photography and cinema and referring to historical events and political circumstances. In the mid-1970s he began to work increasingly from life, moving away from complex compositions to more straightforward figure studies. During the late 1980s he continued to read widely in Jewish culture—studying Walter Benjamin, Sigmund Freud, and Franz Kafka—and positioned himself more explicitly as a Jewish artist. In 1989 he published his *First Diasporist Manifesto*, analyzing the Jewish dimension in his art and his role as an outsider. In 1997 he left London and moved to Los Angeles, where he died in 2007.

**Cecil Court, London W.C.2. (The Refugees),** 1983–84 is set in the London thoroughfare famous for its secondhand bookshops and a favorite haunt of Kitaj. The artist is shown -more-

reclining on a sofa in the foreground, while figures from his life jump out in the background. Kitaj has explained that this theatrical composition was inspired by the peripatetic troupes of the Yiddisher Theatre in Central Europe, which he had learned about from his grandparents and from Kafka’s diaries.

**The Wedding** 1989–93 is a major work by Kitaj that brings together crucial themes in his practice – including his Jewish identity and his friendships and associations as a School of London artist. Depicting Kitaj’s wedding to the American artist Sandra Fisher (1947–94), which took place in 1983, the painting prominently depicts School of London artists Freud, Kossoff, and David Hockney, painters who were linked by both friendship and shared artistic concerns.

**London Calling: Bacon, Freud, Kossoff, Andrews, Auerbach, and Kitaj** will be accompanied by a catalogue of the same name, published by Getty Publications and written by Elena Crippa and Catherine Lampert.

The presentation of this exhibition is a collaboration between Tate and the J. Paul Getty Museum. The exhibition is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

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