BACON
FREUD
MEHTA
SOUZA

BACON
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SOUZA

In 1962 a suitably obscure book called *The London Nobody Knows* was published. Written by Geoffrey Fletcher, it was, to say the least, an idiosyncratic guide to the city, one that veered off the usual tourist route of palaces and parks and headed straight down the shadowy back streets into a world more foreign and exciting than anything on the standard itinerary. Five years later it was made into a documentary film, which, perhaps more than the book, opens up a city that few people under the age of forty would recognise. It is a Dickensian world of fog and gaslights, in which the Old Bedford Music Hall stands abandoned and rotting, a remnant of the rumbustious theatre immortalised by Walter Sickert in the late nineteenth century, and where rag and bone men drive their horse drawn carts past bombed out terraces. It is that time-worn, shabby city that the artists in this exhibition knew, and it was there that they made some of their most important works.

Of the four, Tyeb Mehta and Francis Souza stayed for several years before leaving Britain altogether, while Francis Bacon and Lucian Freud made it their permanent home. Bacon was the one for whom it was most familiar. Although he spent much of his early childhood in Ireland, the Bacon family moved to London in 1914 when he was five and stayed there for the duration of the First World War. And although they returned to Ireland at the war's end, Bacon spent an increasing amount of time at school in England before a cataclysmic row with his father, which led to his banishment from the family home and his decision to move to London in 1926. There he drifted through the city's homosexual underworld picking up a few odd-jobs here and there before embarking on a trip to Germany which his father had arranged as an attempt to straighten out his wayward son. The plan failed when Bacon's chaperone, a friend of his father's, instantly seduced him on arrival in Berlin. Over the following months Bacon immersed himself in that city's louche and often opulent nightlife and explored its poorest quarters. From Berlin he went to Paris where he spent more than a year before returning to London at the end of 1928.

The seminal event in his development as an artist came in 1928 in Paris, when he saw the work of Picasso for the first time. At this point Bacon was not a practising artist, but the encounter with Picasso set alight a long fuse that would eventually lead to his decision in the early 1930s to take up painting. Throughout his career Bacon was a ruthless self-editor, so much so that of all the paintings he made in the 1930s only eleven remain. Consequently it is hard to assess his pre-Second World War work, but from that which remains and contemporaneous comments, his paintings seemed to verge on a form of expressionist Surrealism often infused with considerable morbidity. The contorted and deformed bodies owed much to Picasso and to such lesser-known figures as Roy de Maistre, who was his lover and art tutor.

Bacon, however, was dismissive of this period and seems to have considered most of these works as juvenilia. For him his career started in earnest in 1943 when he began work on *Three Studies for Figures as the Base of a Crucifixion*. That triptych, which he made a second version of in 1988, depicted three hideously distorted, snarling figures, each trapped in a livid orange setting. Although the precise subject matter is not clear, the title refers to a tradition of Christian art in which Christ is depicted on the cross with mourners gathered around the base. In those paintings the title refers to 'the Crucifixion' to indicate its importance, but Bacon, who was a vehement atheist, removes Christ from the picture altogether and relegates it to 'a crucifixion'. He later said that he had had plans to paint Christ on another panel but had never got around to doing it. Thus the figures in his painting mourn an absence, a nothingness, and express a brute violence at the heart of mankind. This at least was how the painting was understood in the spring of 1945, when it was first exhibited. Then, just as the Second World War was drawing to an end and the devastation and hidden horrors of the war were becoming known, Bacon's subject matter seemed to capture an existential mood among an influential group of critics and writers. And consequently it was claimed that this painting tapped into the *zeitgeist* and changed painting in Britain for good. Whatever the truth of that statement, Bacon's unsentimental, irreligious attitude towards life, his relish in violence, sex and death certainly disturbed the perception that British art was an art of tasteful restraint.

Of course, Bacon did not exist within a vacuum. His mentor at the time was Graham Sutherland, arguably the most important British painter of the 1940s and certainly one of the most influential. Sutherland was the foremost neo-romantic artist and his brooding landscapes were often filled with a sense of foreboding and populated by strange organisms not unrelated to the abstracted figures that Henry Moore had made in the late 1930s. Unlike Bacon, however, Sutherland was a Catholic and after the war he received a number of important commissions from the church, which resulted in a series of crucifixion paintings that referred directly to the work of the

medieval artist Matthias Grünewald. The Northern Renaissance tradition, of which Grünewald was an integral part, was more realistic than its Italian counterpart, particularly in its depiction of the crucifixion where no detail, however, gruesome was omitted. Although Sutherland painted the body in a more expressionist manner than the highly detailed style of Grünewald, he copied particular motifs, such as the bending crossbars of the crucifix, and managed to convey a similar sense of extreme pain. In this there is a direct correlation with Bacon's *Three Studies*, which may also be related to the figures at the base of the Isenheim Altarpiece, Grünewald's masterpiece, and which, like Sutherland's crucifixions, conveys the agony of such a death. While Sutherland was involved in the postwar revival of religion, and was making imagery that modernised the long tradition of Christian art, Bacon used that familiar iconography to contest the very existence of God and to revel in the dark, brutal nature of man.

Similar claims have been made for Lucian Freud, though with less justification. Freud came to Britain in 1933 as a Jewish émigré from Nazi Germany. He was eleven years old, the son of Ernst Freud and grandson of Sigmund Freud. Whatever the problems of being a Jew in Britain at that time, they were as nothing compared to that of being one in Germany. However, being German in Britain was without doubt difficult and it seems that Freud went to some lengths to hide his nationality, including changing the Gothic handwriting he had learned at school in Berlin into the childlike script he has today. Indeed Freud has expended considerable effort kicking over the traces. Unlike Bacon, he has rarely given interviews or been filmed, and has made few statements. Consequently he is an enigmatic figure and his pictures are left to speak for themselves, which is precisely what he intends.

His earliest pictures were done in a naïve manner, which may reveal the limits of his technical competence in the late 1930s and early 1940s as much as an admiration for untutored art. The rough textures and obvious distortions were swept away in the later 1940s when he started to paint in a highly realistic style reminiscent of the Renaissance. The subjects, however, were firmly from the twentieth century and remained so even as the glassy surface and intensely detailed style changed into the painterly manner he has followed since the mid 1950s.

It is not that the sitters, who are all people Freud has been close to, are painted with the accoutrements of twentieth century life, indeed many are painted naked in the artist's studio stripped of any props that might suggest a particular time. Or so it seems. Freud's studio is not unlike the London he inhabited after the war – run down, the history of previous decorative schemes evident in the peeling paint and patched plaster, an unpretentious place made familiar by the many times it has appeared in his pictures. The 'honesty' of the setting seems to add to the truthfulness of the portrait. Freud's unrelenting gaze has often been remarked upon

as if it was that of a misanthrope – the intense scrutiny considered to be a brutal attack on the sitter, especially on women. Certainly in some paintings there is an obvious disquiet in the sitter, and often in those pictures where Freud includes himself with another person there is a palpable sense of tension and occasionally even fear. But above all there is a sense of vulnerability, and it is this vulnerability that is the central theme of Freud's work, whether psychological or physical. As a theme it fitted the second half of the twentieth century well and remains relevant now. The earlier Ingres-like paintings revealed a private psychological realm – often the figures appear caught in their own disquieting thoughts or, when they confront the viewer, they seem anxious and unsure of themselves. It was these pictures that prompted one critic to call him the Ingres of existentialism, a phrase that captures how Freud links with the intellectual climate of the early postwar period.

With the more painterly style of the 1950s a greater sense of the physicality of the sitter and of the paint itself came to the fore. The palette, however, remained keyed to the true tones of the sitters body. White skin has rarely been so accurately painted, nor flesh. The living human organism comprised as it is of fat, flesh, blood and bone is depicted without deceit. Here in Freud's paintings we see captured for all time not the social armour of standard portraiture but the substance of the body and its ineffable vulnerability. This, I argue, is not the work of a cold detached mind, but of one that refuses to insult with flattery. There is passion and, deeply unfashionable though it is to say it, love in these images, just as there is in some of Bacon's most startling portraits; it is a love that insists on and accepts truth.

Souza's painting is quite different in style to Freud, and in mood is closer to Bacon, whose work he evidently admired. He left India in 1949 determined to find a more receptive environment for the sort of art that he made. Upto that point he had painted in a manner indebted most obviously to Van Gogh and Gauguin, and his imagery ranged from rural images inflected with political commentary to fairly frank figure painting, including the famous nude self-portrait which caused such a furore at the Art Society of Bombay that he decided to leave the country and seek out a more sympathetic audience. Any artist in the early postwar era seeking the heart of avant-garde art headed for Paris and it is no surprise that Souza went there first of all, and continued to visit regularly over the next eighteen years, or that others like Ram Kumar made it their home while living in Europe. However, perhaps because he didn't speak French and because he had friends in Britain, Souza quickly moved onto London. It is hard to know how the experience of being an Indian in Britain affected him. The racism that doubtless existed was not as overt within Souza's circles as it was elsewhere, but like Freud, and even Bacon, whose sexuality placed him outside the main run of society, it seems that he had a heightened sense of being on the threshold, part in part out. And while this probably hampered his career in Britain, it was also, one senses, an additional source of creativity.

Although commissions occasionally came his way, for the first five years he struggled to make a living from painting and relied instead on journalism for a modest income. Then in 1954 his autobiographical essay 'Nirvana of a Maggot' was published in *Encounter* and he started to meet influential people in the British art world. He took advantage of this situation and by the end of the year his work had been included in a large group show at the Institute for Contemporary Arts in London. Among the artists in that exhibition there was one with whom Souza had a special affinity, Francis Bacon.

Souza's admiration for Bacon is apparent in such a painting as … which is a female companion to Bacon's picture *Seated Figure* 1961. With this picture it is as if Souza was presenting his art as the heterosexual counterpart to Bacon's. It is certainly the case that the themes of eroticised violence and brutality that were often been attributed to Bacon were also applied to Souza, and indeed both men had a taste for self-dramatisation which played on these perceptions. Yet while neither would deny that these themes existed in their work, both would contest the moralising reading which cast them as nihilists. In fact both claimed that their work was ultimately about the significance of life, and that the visual intensity of their paintings was intended to jolt the nervous system like an electric shock into a visceral awareness of life.

Alongside these similarities were profound stylistic differences. Souza was principally a linear artist, whose figurative style was as indebted to European Expressionism and the Picasso of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, as it was to the naïve painting found in the Catholic churches of Goa. What is so arresting about the Goan church paintings is the manner in which the schematic figures transfix you with the ferocity of their direct gaze. God is present in that gaze and we the viewers, we the faithful are made subjects by it. It is a style that is meant to inspire and to intimidate. And it is one that Souza refracted through modernism and adapted for his own purposes. Bacon too was working within a long tradition of art and was equally influenced by Expressionism and Picasso, but his style and technique were quite different to Souza's. Souza's linear style can be subdivided into two. One is characterised by thick, dark paint brushed, smeared and knifed into a cellular pattern that forms a ferocious figure or sinister townscape, and the other is typified by calm figures demarcated by an elegant line and rendered in an harmonious array of lighter colours applied with thin paint. This simple stylistic variation provided Souza with a fairly straightforward emotional range that he deployed with some success according to the subject matter. Like the Goan church paintings the emotional pitch was prone to melodrama – from terrifying ferocity and flagrant brutality to touching sentimentality. Unlike Bacon, there was little room for ambiguity.

When Souza arrived in Britain in 1949 he had entered a country that was living in the shadow of the Second World War. For all the optimism that had greeted the new social settlement of the post-war era, which included free healthcare and education for all and improved housing for the most deprived sections of society, the scars of the war were a daily reality. The economy was weak, the Empire in terminal decline, large urban areas were in ruins, and food rationing was as severe as at anytime during the war. Furthermore, hanging over the whole scene was the threat of nuclear obliteration. The situation was not much different when Tyeb Mehta visited England in 1954.

Like Souza, Mehta was frustrated by the conservatism of the Indian art establishment and was no more inclined to make academic paintings intended to please the eye and soothe the mind than any of the other artists hanging around the Progressive Art Group. Consequently he joined the ranks of those Indian artists who went to Europe in the 1950s to visit what was at that time the source of their artistic inspiration. In the London artworld the latest thing in figurative art was a rather quotidian social realism rendered in thick, textured paint, which was occasionally colourful but more often than not identified with a subdued palette of browns, greys and greens. Alongside this there was the branch of psychological portraiture epitomised in London by Bacon and Freud and in Paris by Giacometti. In addition there were various types of abstraction at work as well, and though these two forms of art were often considered to be in conflict with one another, in truth all these artists, whether figurative or abstract, European, American or Asian were trying to come to terms with how art might engage with a world that had been irreversibly changed by the Second World War.

When Mehta came to Europe in 1954 he was twenty-eight and like most of his generation had grown up in a period of violent upheaval. He himself had experienced the horror of this reality when he witnessed a murder during the Partition riots, an event that left a lasting impression on him. This awareness of mankind's enormous capacity for violence and destruction seems to run through his work even today. Back in the mid to late 1950s it was expressed in paintings of bulls trussed for slaughter and of large melancholic figures rendered in thick paint as if to emphasise their material bulk. During the 1960s the falling figure became an important motif for Mehta as it was for others. In European mythology the falling figure is rooted in the myth of Icarus, whose wings of wax melted when he flew too close to the sun and fell to his death. This image of crisis recurred in the literature, sculpture and painting of the period and was variously understood to imply the existential plight of modern man as much as private turmoil.

In the mid 1960s his palette brightened and there was a growing sense of energy in pictures, and then in the late 1960s, after an epiphanic encounter with Barnett

Newman's colourfield paintings, Mehta's mature style emerged like a butterfly from a cocoon. Large blocks of bright colour rendered in relatively thin paint were organised in careful relation to one another to emphasise mood and space, and were articulated with a minimal number of lines to denote figures. Division was an important theme within these compositions and remains so. Then the paintings were often split along the diagonal axis, a device that imparted a considerable degree of visual dynamism and offered a glimpse into an infinite abstract space existing on another plane to that of the figure thus cut in two. Rich though this startling invention was, by the mid 1970s it had become a cliché and Mehta abandoned it. Since then he has relied principally on colour to create pictorial space and weight, and through it the theme of division/fragmentation has continued to be developed with ever greater complexity as he has delved deeper into the contemporary relevance of the myriad of meanings contained within religious and antique myths.

I started with a view of London in the 1960s, which showed it as a run down place that was rarely glorious, often drab and sometimes abject. Within this there was a truth that reached deeper into the reality of that city and than the popular image of Swinging London. Likewise the artists in this exhibition have looked without flinching into themselves and us and revealed what some might consider awkward truths. Within these there is much of interest for us all.

Toby Treves

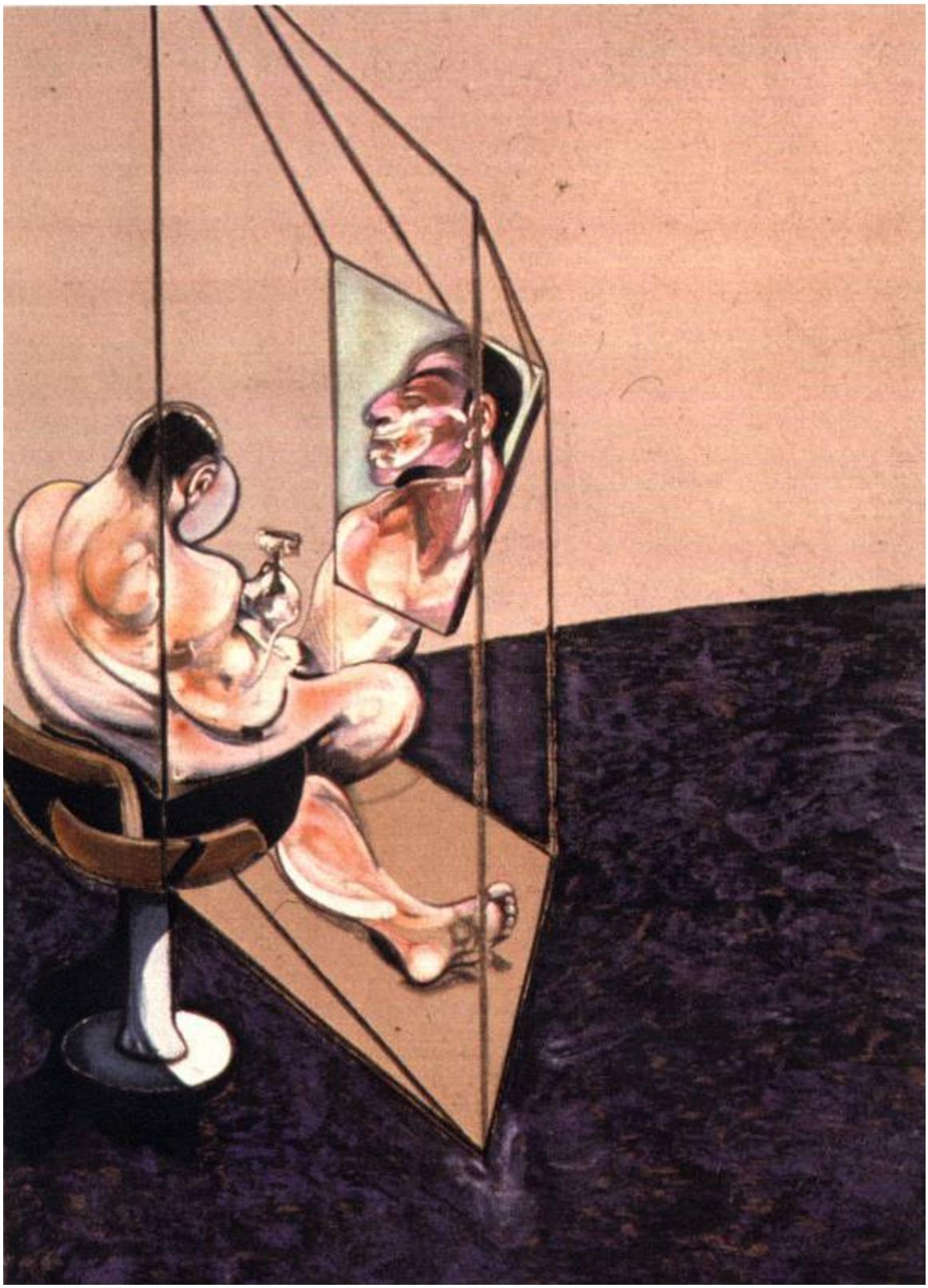
BACON

FRANCIS BACON

(1909 – 1992)

1. 2nd Version of Triptych 1944 (Large Version)
A set of 3 lithographs, after the painting, 1989
Aside from the numbered edition of 60
Signed and inscribed 'E.A' in pencil
143.5 x 109cm (56 ½ x 42 ¾ in) each

2. 2nd Version of Triptych 1944 (Small Version)
A set of 3 lithographs, after the painting, 1989
Aside from the edition of 60, a set of 3 H.C's.
Signed in pencil and marked H.C.
74.9 x 56.5 cm (29 ½ x 22 ¼ in) each

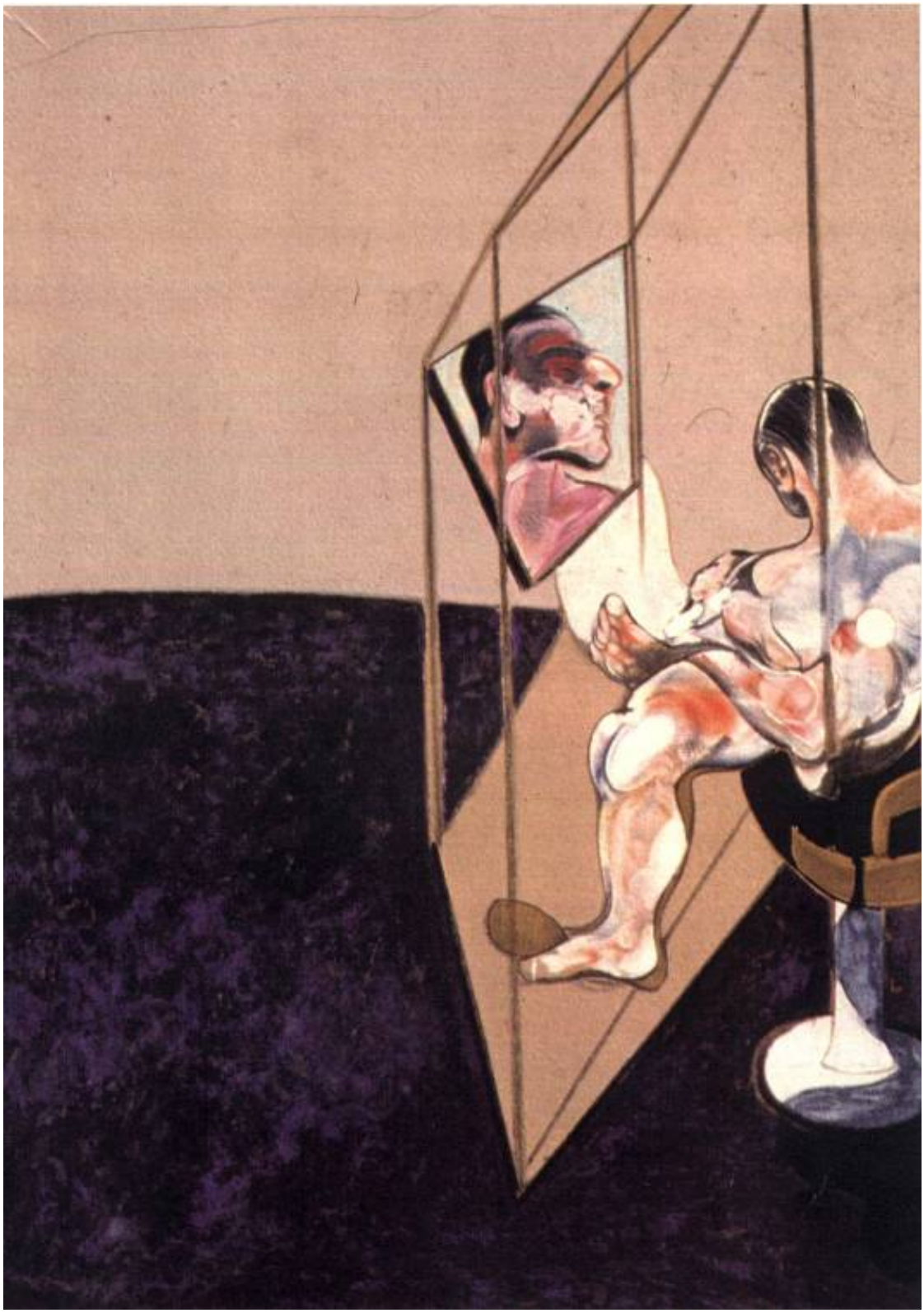


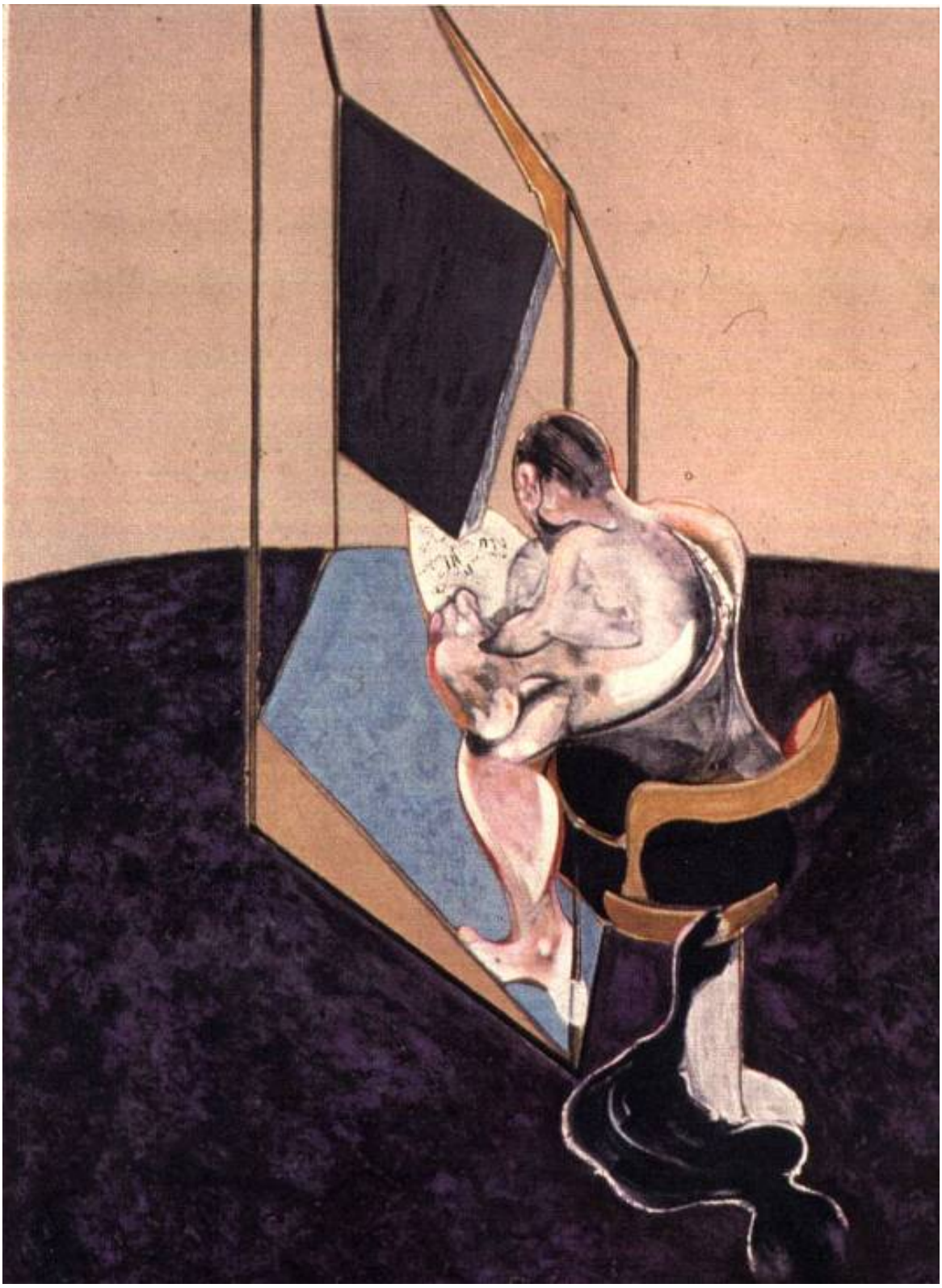
3. **Left Panel**

4. Centre Panel

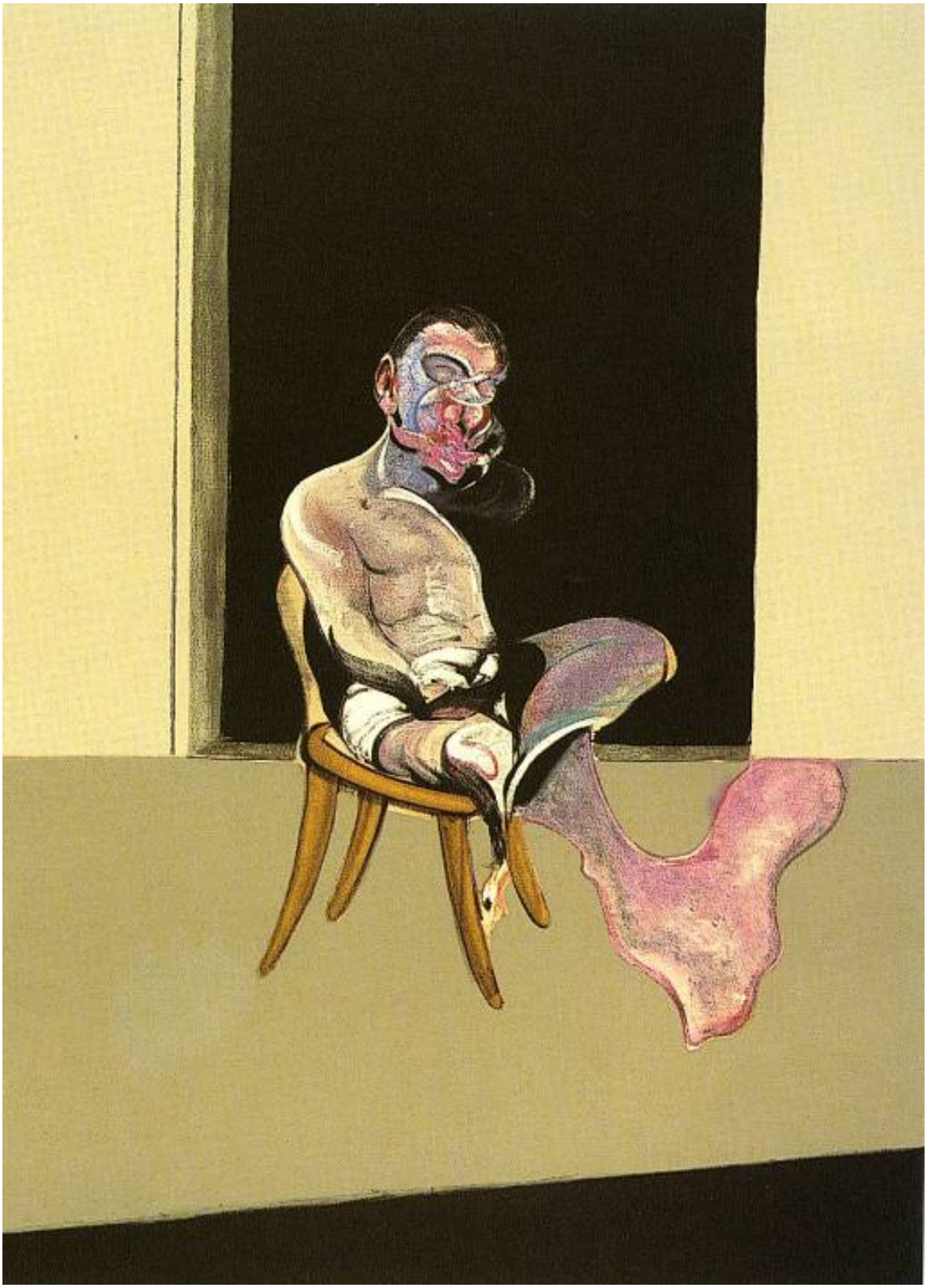
5. Right Panel

Three Studies of the Male Back, 1970
Lithograph, 1987
Aside from the edition of 99 unnumbered H.C's
Signed in pencil
78.7 x 51.5 cm (31 x 25 in)



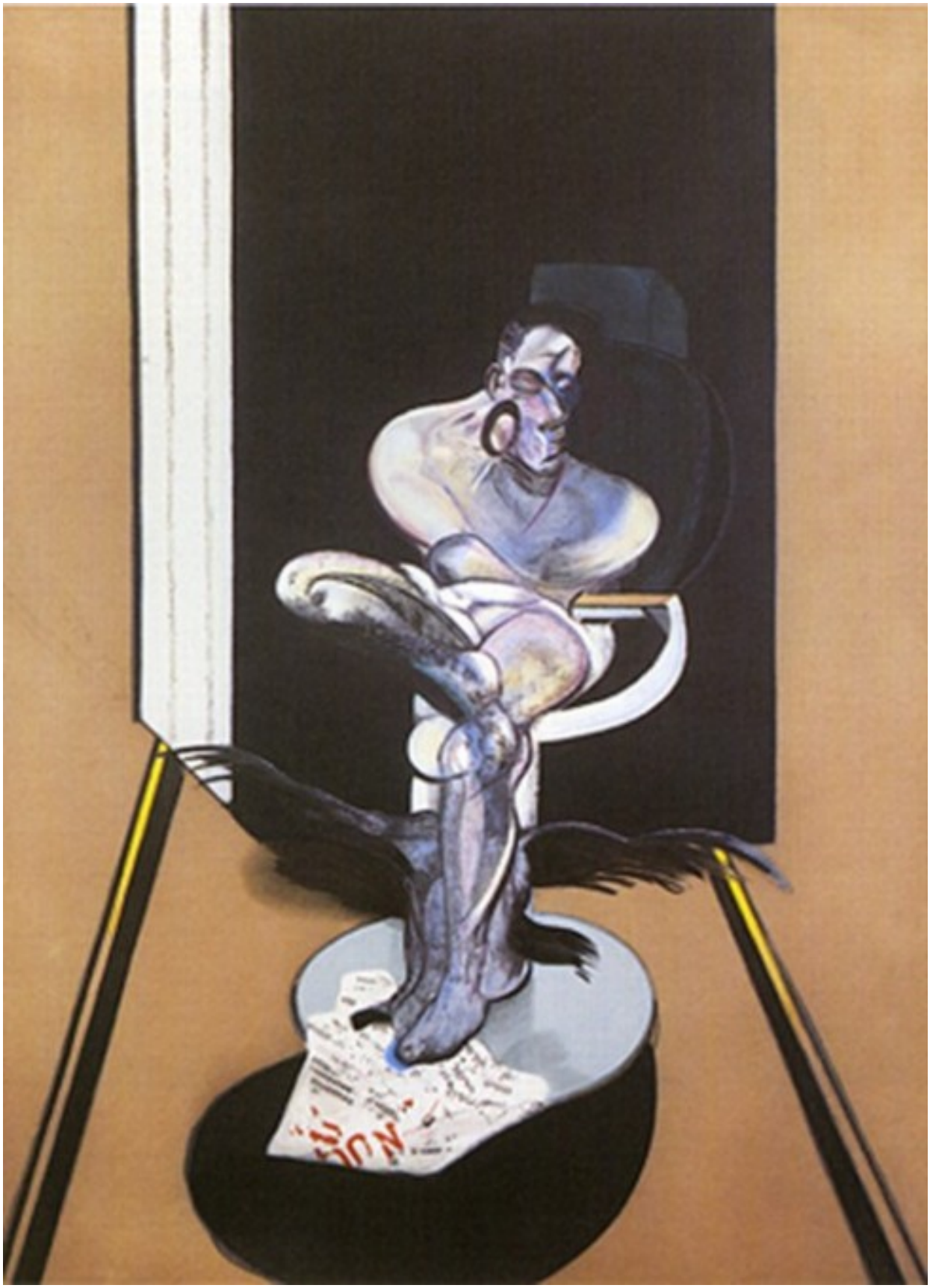


6. Triptych August 1972
A set of 3 lithographs, 1989
Edition of 180
Signed and numbered in pencil 169/180
89.5 x 61 cm (35 ¼ x 24 in) each

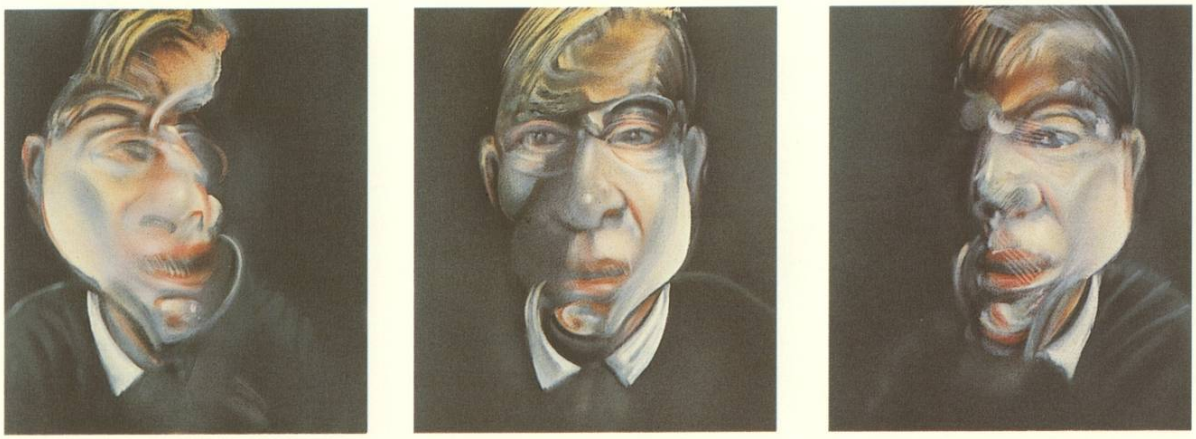


7. Triptych 1974 – 77 (Left Panel)
Aquatint, 1975
Aside from the edition of 99
Signed in pencil
64.1 x 50.2cm (25 ¼ x 19 ¾ in)

8. Seated Figure 1977
Aquatint, 1992
Edition of 90
Stamped signature and estate stamped, 1992 and numbered in pencil 60/90
163 x 119 cm (64 x 47 in)

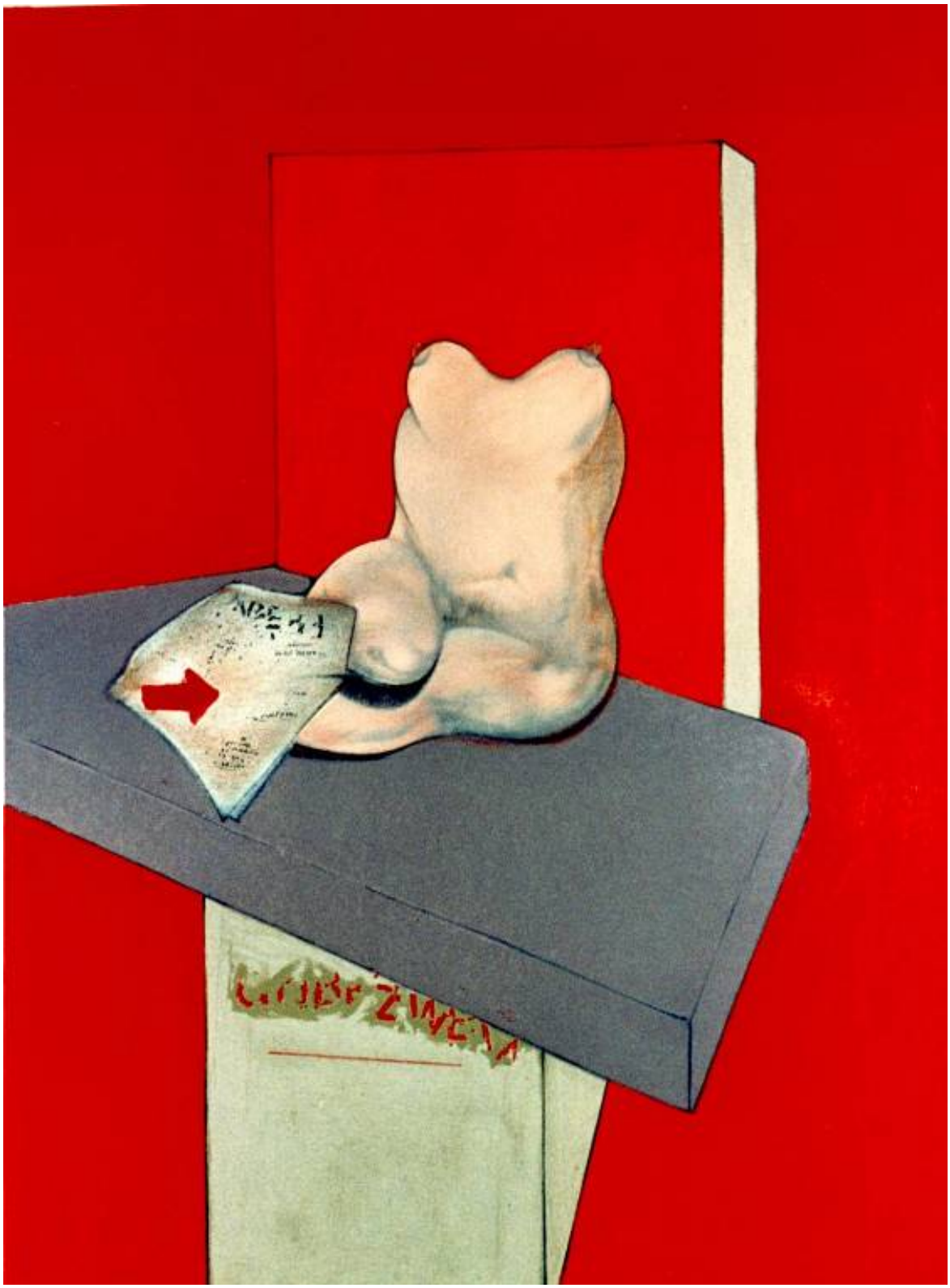


9. Three Studies for Self, 1979
Lithograph on a single sheet
Edition of 150
Signed and numbered in pencil 95/150
47 x 103.7 cm (18 ½ 40 ¾ in)



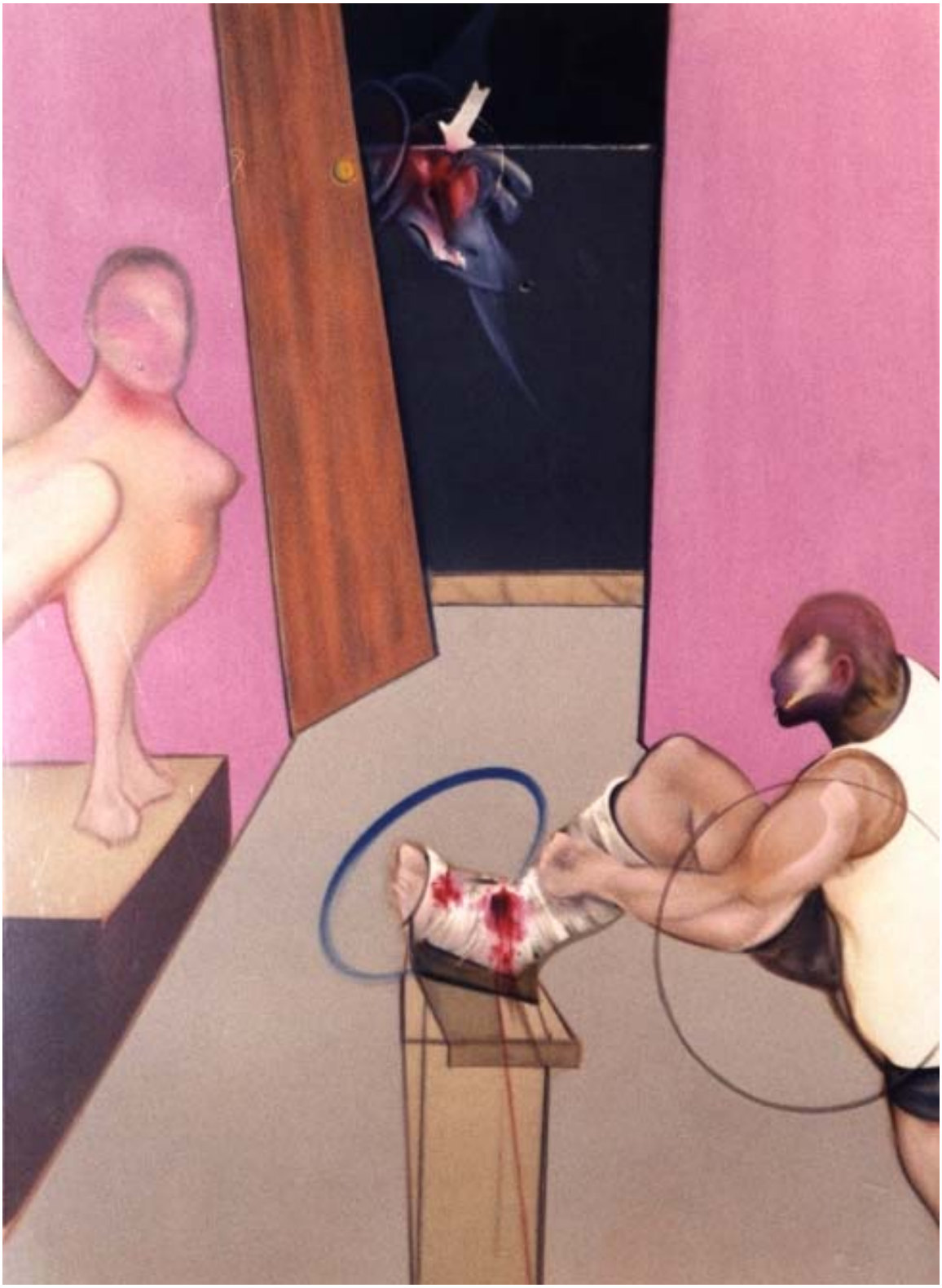
10. Seated Figure, 1981
Etching
Edition of 99
Signed and numbered in Roman numerals in pencil 30/99
72.5 x 54cm (28 ½ x 21 ¼ in)

11. Study for the Human Body from a Drawing by Ingres, 1982- 4
Lithograph, 1984
Edition of 180
Signed and numbered in pencil 88/180
86.4 x 58.4 cm (34 x 25 in)



12. Triptych 1983 (Right Panel)
Lithograph, 1984
Edition of 180
Signed and numbered in pencil 132/180
86.4 x 58.4 cm (34 x 23 in)

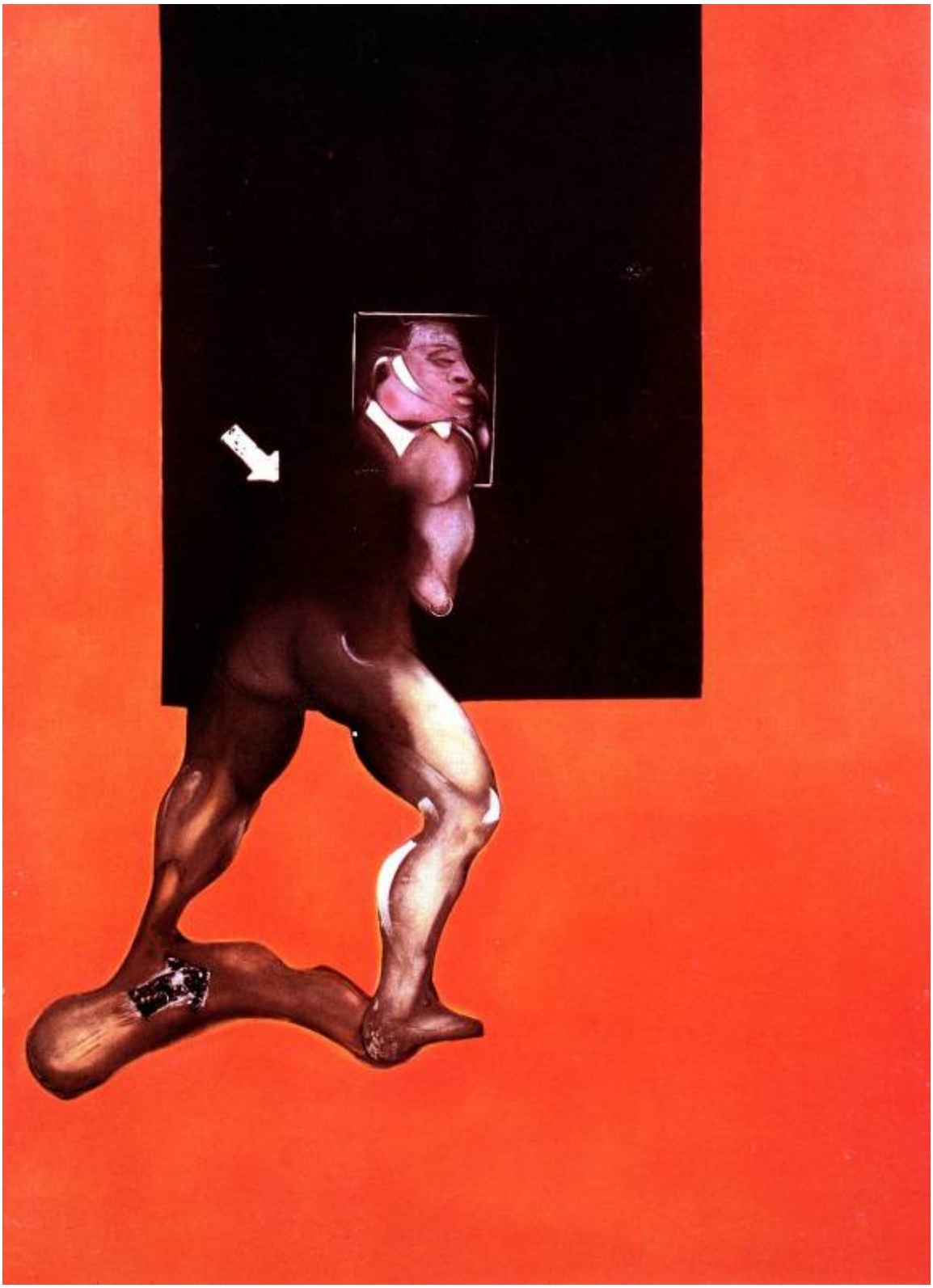
13. Oedipus and the Sphinx after Ingres, 1983
Lithograph, 1984
Edition of 150
Signed in pencil
127 x 88.9 cm (50 x 35 in)



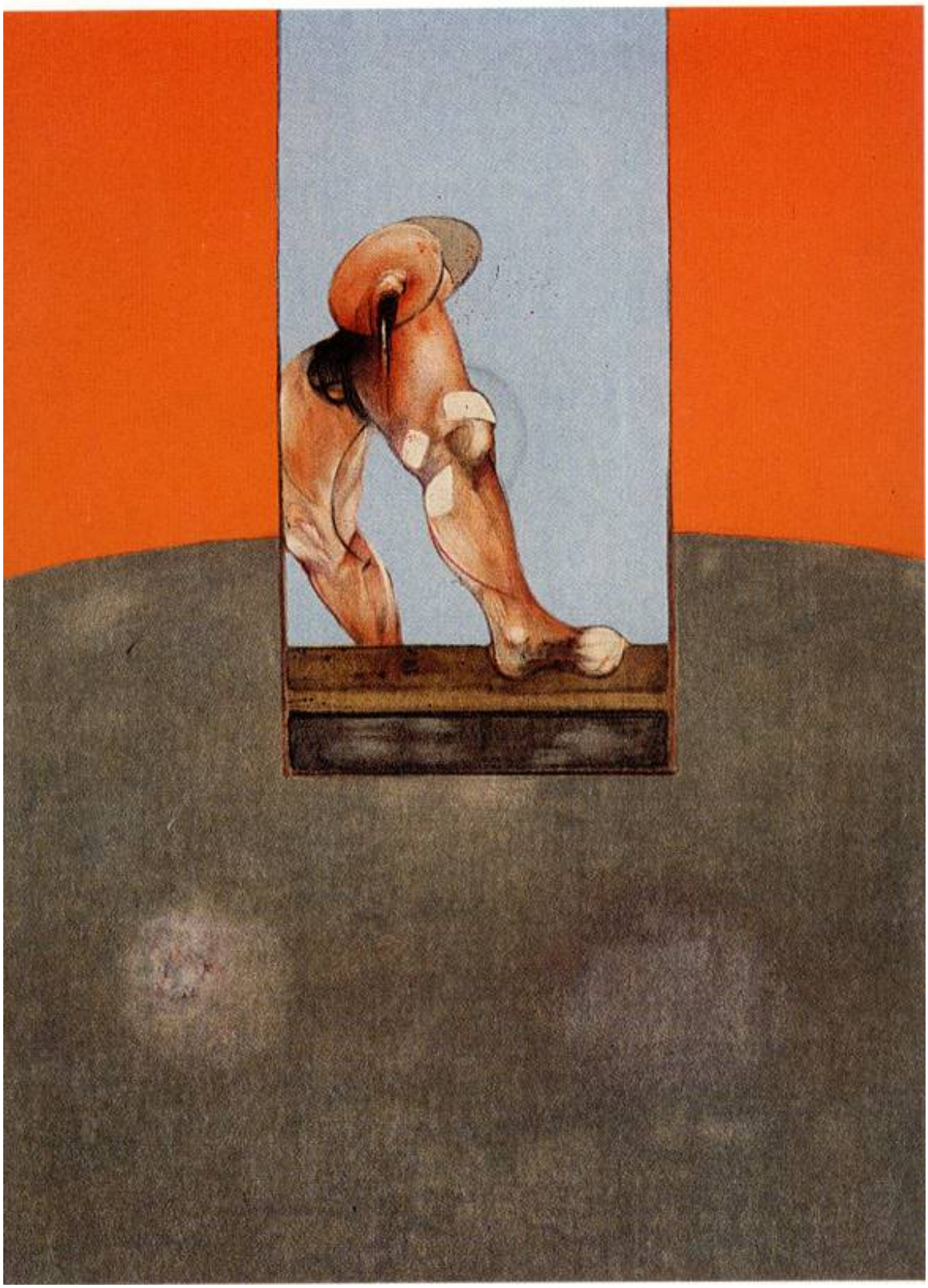


14. Triptych 1986-1987
A set of 3 aquatints, 1988
Aside from the edition of 99 a set of 3 APs
Signed and numbered in Roman numerals in pencil
88.9 x 62.9 cm (35 x 24 ¾ in) each

15. Study from Human Body, 1987
Aquatint, 1992
Edition of 90
Stamped signature and estate stamped, 1992 and numbered in pencil 72/90
163 x 119 cm (64 x 47 in)



16. Triptych 1987, (Centre Panel)
Lithograph, 1987
Edition of 180
Signed and numbered in pencil 132/180
94.6 x 67.9 cm (37 ¼ x 26 ¾ in.)



FREUD

LUCIAN FREUD

(b. 1922)


Recto


Verso

17. Face-o-graph without chain (recto)
Anvil (verso), 1940
Ink on paper
22 x 15 cm (8 ½ x 5 ¾ in)

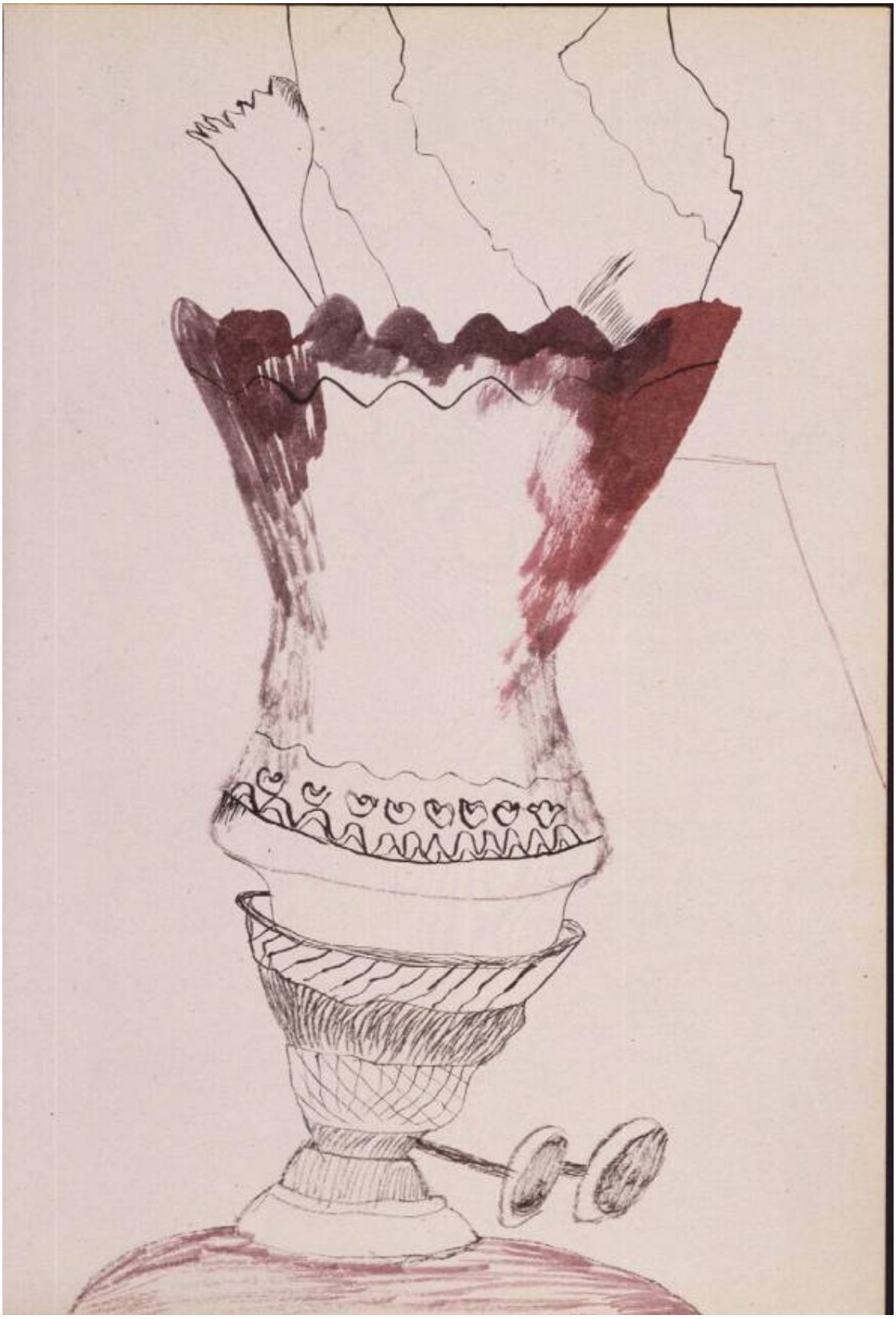
Exhibited
London, Timothy Taylor Gallery, *Lucien Freud, Drawings 1940,* 10 September - 10 October 2003

Literature
Lucian Freud Drawings 1940, Matthew Marks Gallery, NY, 2003 (Plate 156 & 162)

18. Oil Lamp, 1940
Ink on paper
22 x 15 cm (8 ½ x 5 ¾ in)

Exhibited
London, Timothy Taylor Gallery, *Lucien Freud Drawings 1940*,: 10 September - 10 October 2003

Literature
Lucian Freud Drawings 1940, Matthew Marks Gallery, NY, 2003 (Plate 1)



19. Annie Reading, 1961
Watercolour and pencil on paper
34.2 x 24.1cm (13 ½ x 9 ½ in)

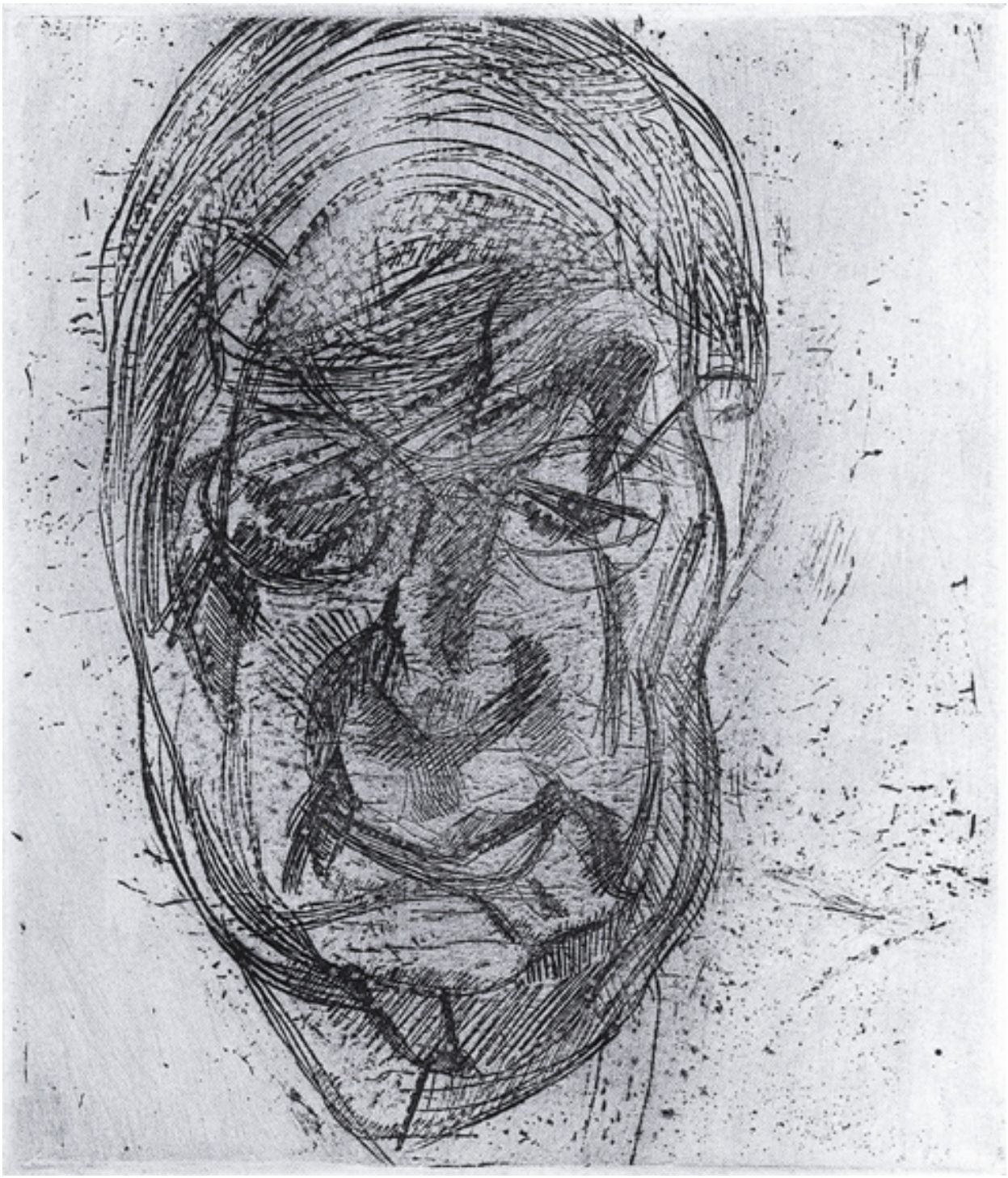
Exhibited
South Bank Centre touring exhibition, *Lucian Freud: Works on Paper*, 1988, No.35

20. Portrait of Ib
Charcoal and pastel on card
17.5 x 13cm (7 x 5 ¼ in.)

Provenance
Anthony D'Offay Gallery, London
Private Collection, London
Private Collection, New York

Exhibited
London, Anthony D'Offay Gallery, 1980
London, *The Discerning Eye*, The Mall Galleries, 1990
The British Council (untraced)

21. Lawrence Gowing (2nd version), 1982
Etching
Aside from edition 10, studio proof
Signed and numbered
17.5 x 14.9 cm (6 ¾ x 5 ¾ in)

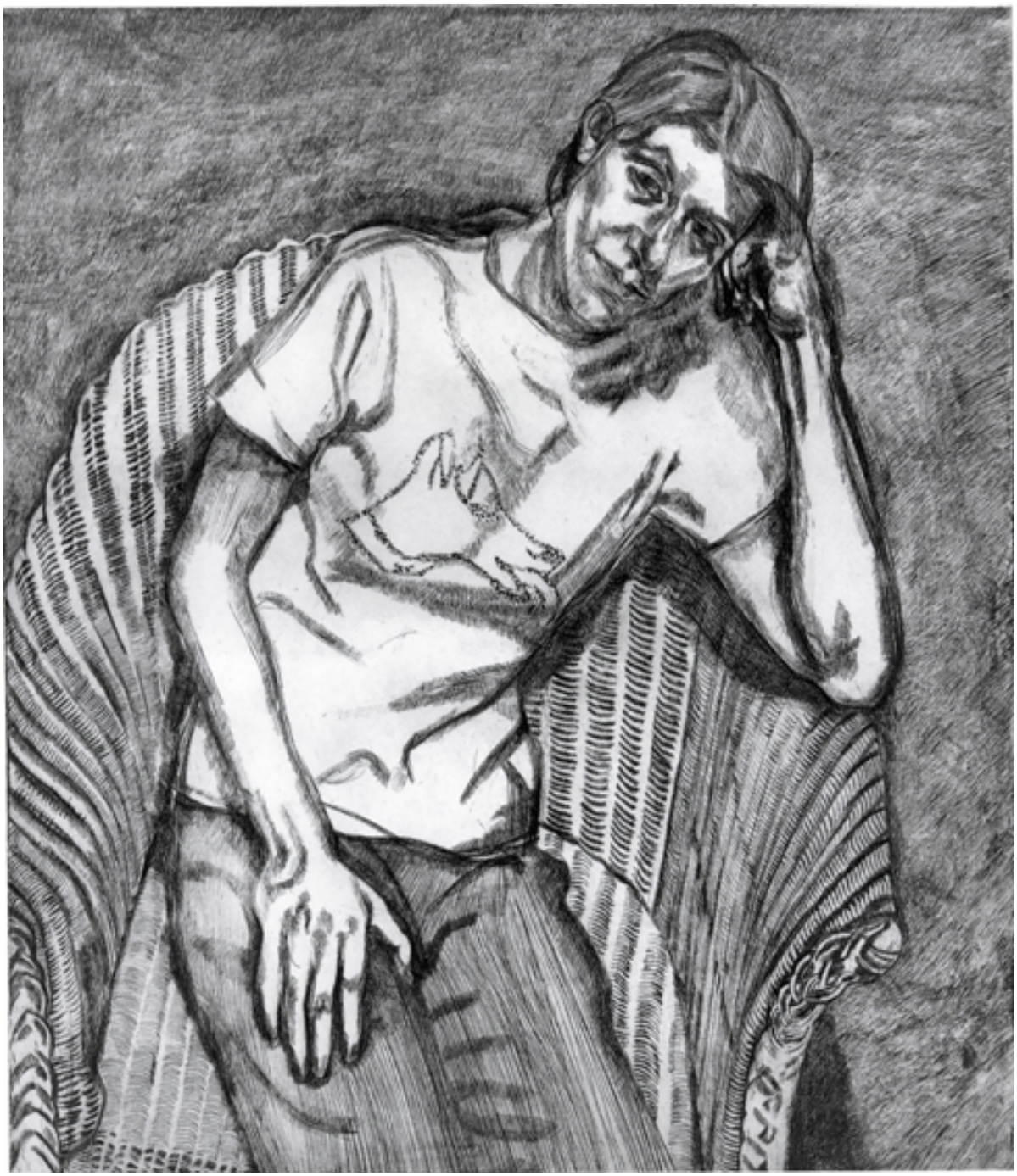


22. Head and Shoulders, 1982
Etching
Edition of 20
Signed and numbered 1/20
24.8 x 29.8 cm (9 ¾ x 11 ¾ in)

23. Bella, 1987
Etching
Edition of 50 plus 15 AP's
Signed and numbered 21/50
42.2 x 34.8 cm (16 ½ x 13 ¾ in)

24. The Egyptian Book, 1994
Etching
Edition of 40 plus 12 numbered AP's
Signed and numbered 37/40
29.8 x 29.8 cm (11 ¾ x 11 ¾ in)

25. Bella in her Pluto T-Shirt, 1995
Etching
Edition of 36 plus 12 numbered APs
Initialled and numbered 5/36
68.5 x 59.7 cm (27 x 23 ½ in)



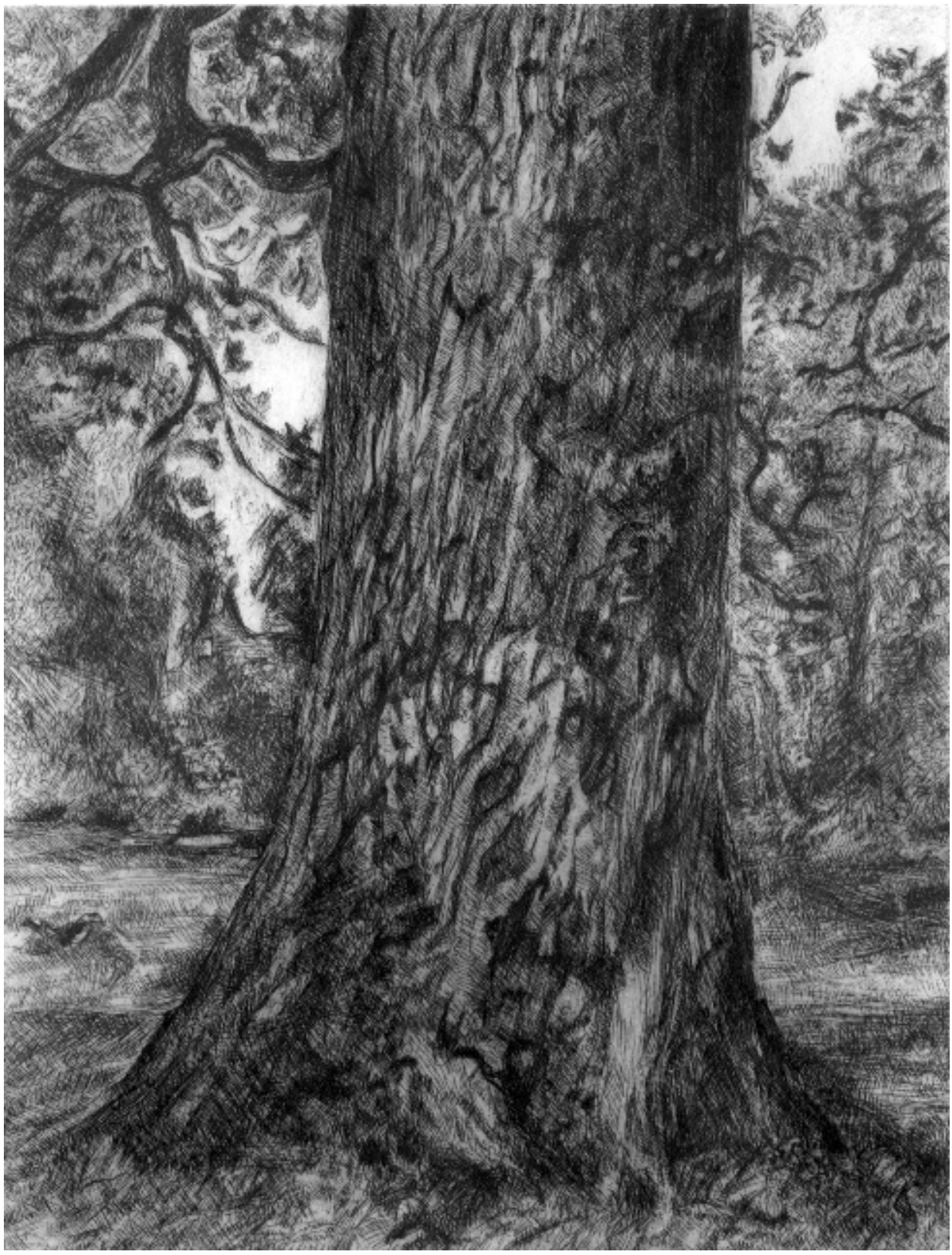
26. Woman Sleeping, 1995
Etching
Aside from edition of 36 plus 12 numbered APs, printer's proof
Initialled, numbered 2/2, and inscribed 'Printers Proof'
73 x 60 cm (28 ¾ x 23 ½ in)

27. Susanna, 1996
Etching
Edition of 40
29.5 x 29.8 cm (11 ¾ x 11 ¾ in)

28. David Dawson, 1998
Etching
Edition of 46 plus 12 numbered AP's
Initialled and numbered 45/46
60 x 43.2 cm (23 ½ x 17 in)

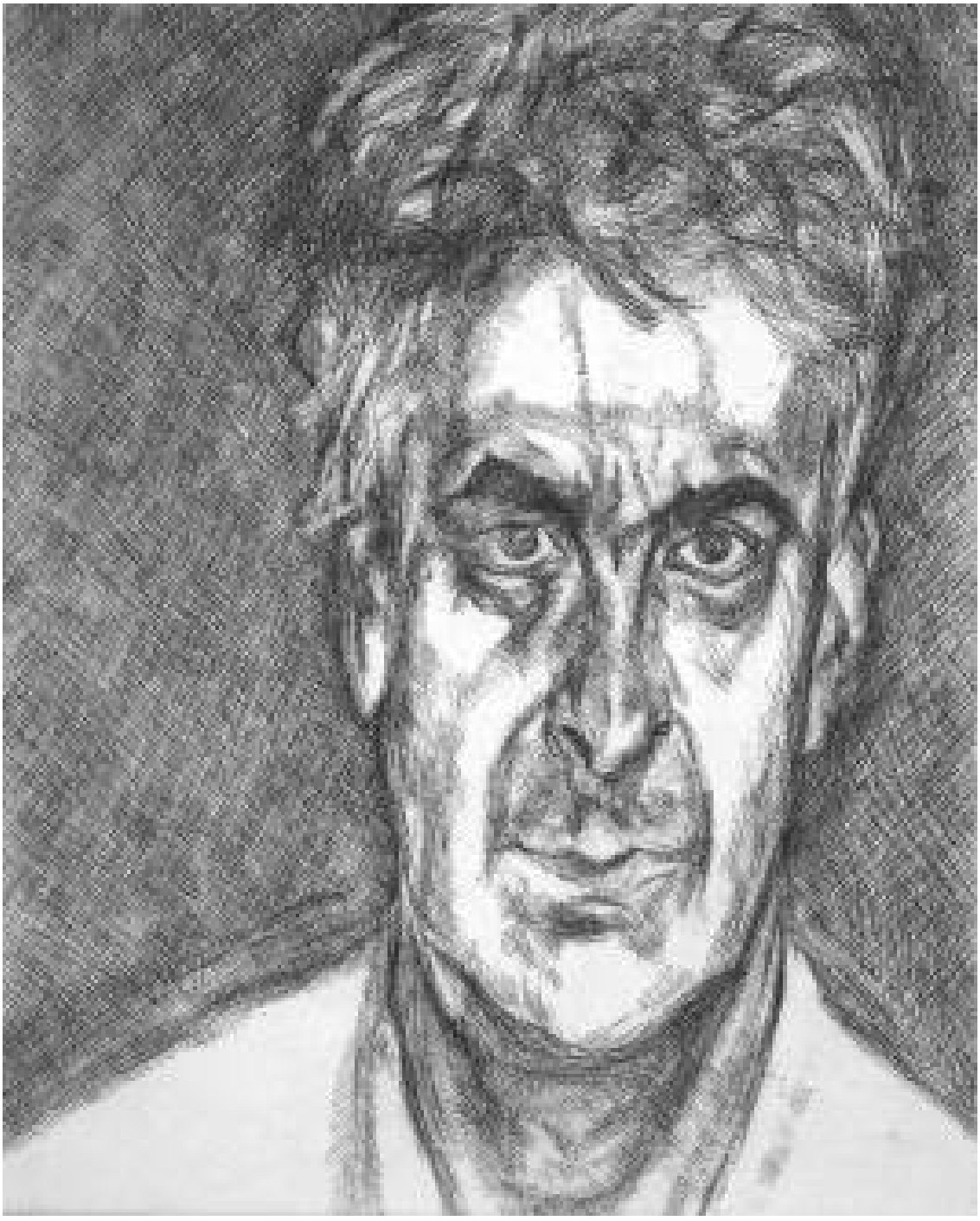
29. After Chardin, 2000
Etching
Aside from edition of 46 numbered AP
Signed and numbered 5/12
59.7 x 73 cm (23 ½ x 28 ¾ in)

30. After Constable's Elm, 2003
Etching
Edition of 46
Signed and numbered 14/46
54 x 42 cm (21 ¼ x 16 ½ in)



31. Before the Fourth, 2004
Etching
Edition of 46
Signed and numbered 8/46
34.6 x 42.8 cm (13 ½ x 16 ¾ in)

32. Portrait Head (Martin Gayford) 2005
Etching
Edition of 46
Signed and numbered in pencil 40/46
40 x 31.9 cm (15 ¾ x 12 ½ in)



33. The Painter's Doctor 2006
Etching
Edition of 46
Signed and numbered 18/46
59.7 x 45.7 cm (23 ½ x 17 ¾ in)

34. New Yorker 2006
Etching
Edition of 46
Signed and numbered 24/46
37.5 x 37.5cm (14 ¾ x 14 ¾ in)

МЕНТА

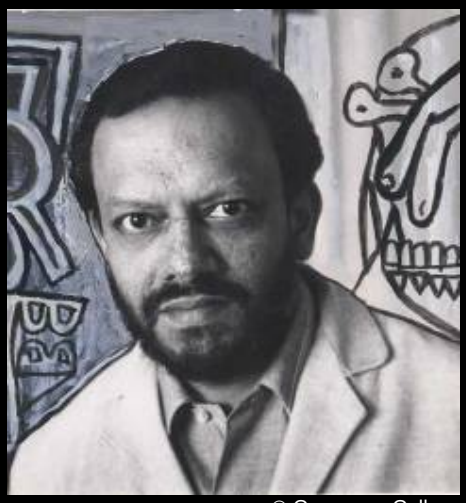
TYEB MEHTA

(b. 1925)

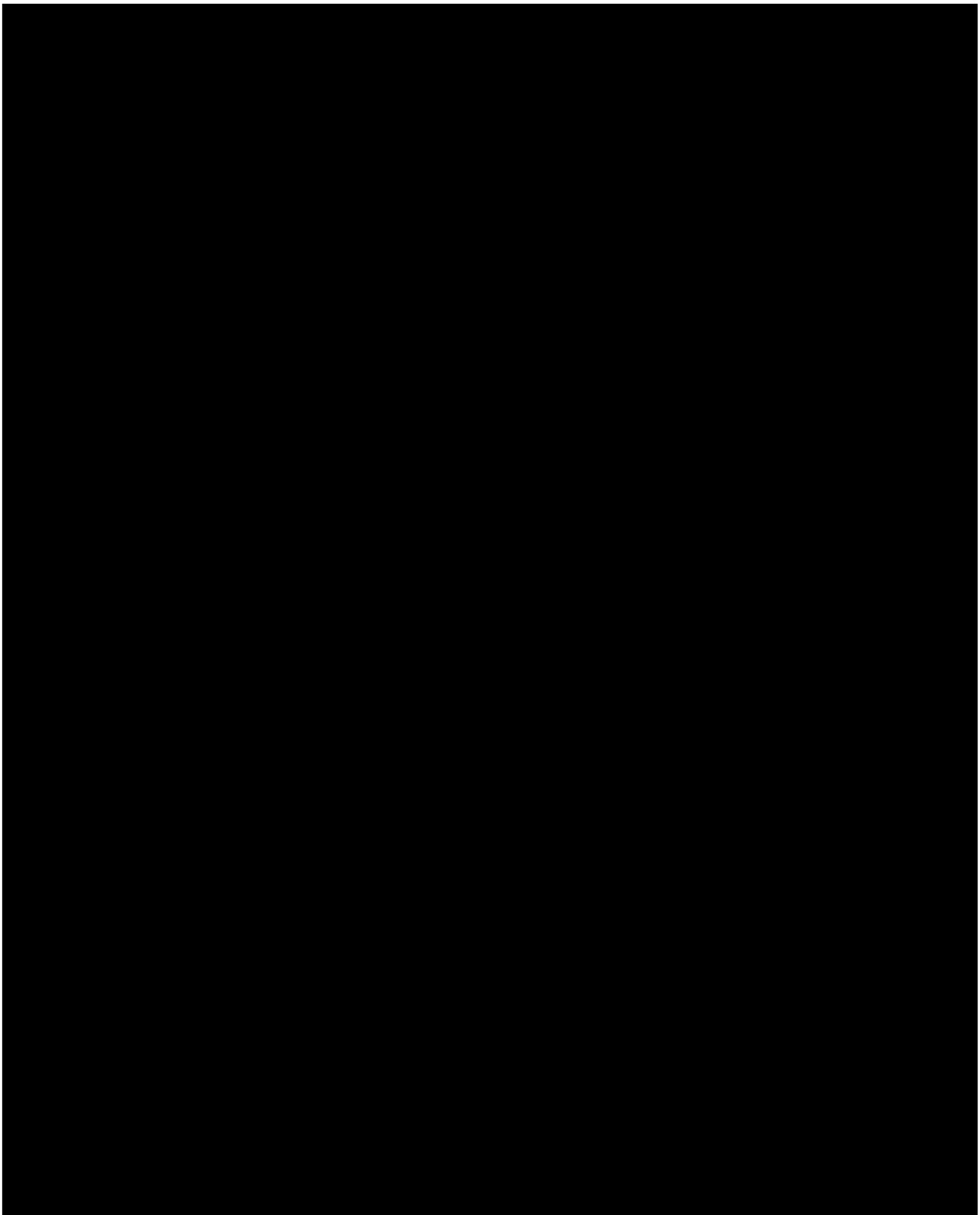
35. Untitled
Acrylic on canvas
152.5 x 122 cm (60 x 48 in)

36. Untitled
Pencil on paper
43.2 x 55.9 cm (17 x 22 in)

37. Mahisasura
Acrylic on canvas
76.2 x 61 cm (30 x 24 in)



SOUZA



FRANCIS NEWTON SOUZA

(1924 - 2002)

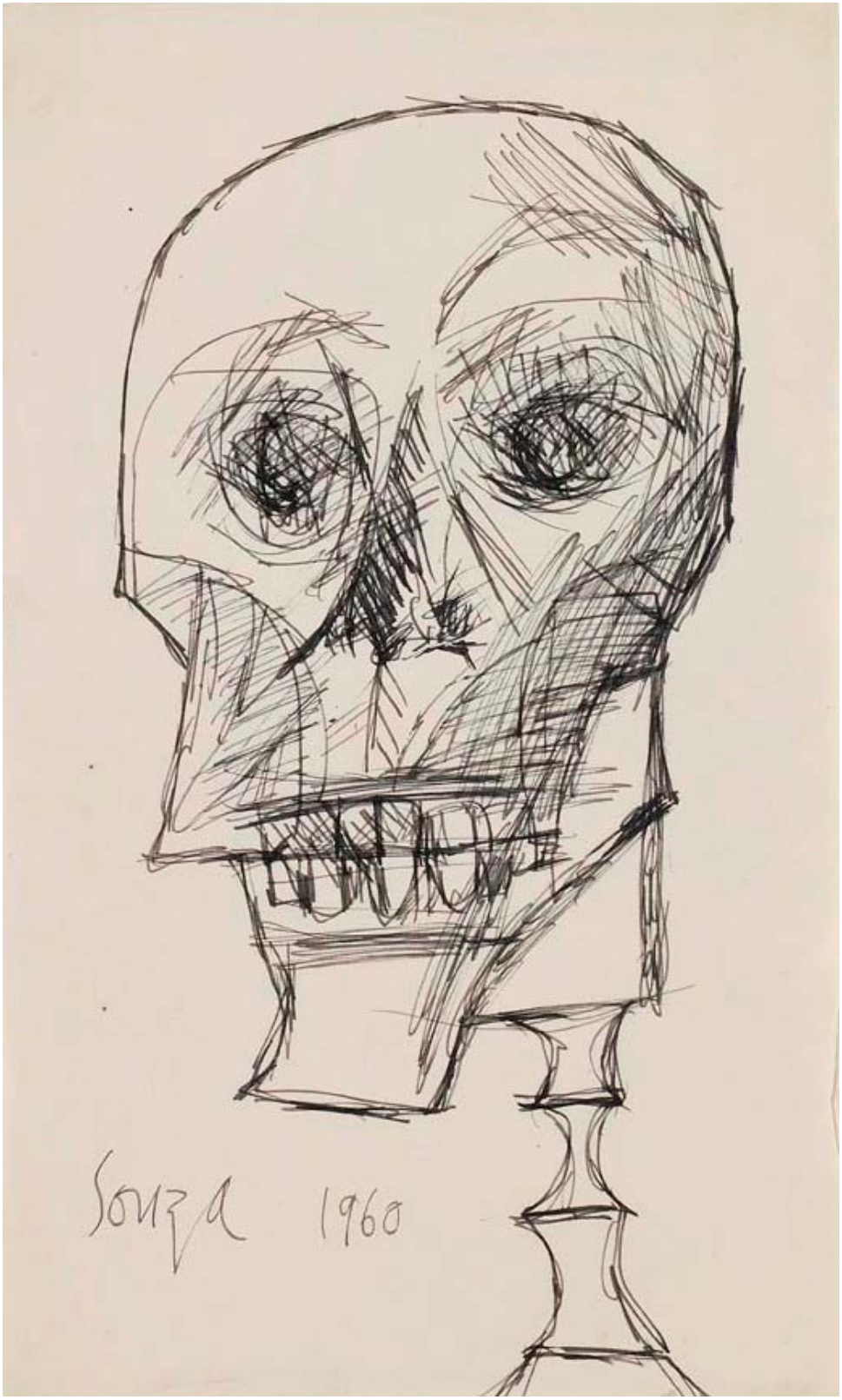
38. Head of a Man, 1952
Oil on board
Signed and dated ‘Souza 1952’ upper right
61 x 44.5 cm (24 ½ x 17 ½ in)

39. Head, 1957
Oil on board
Signed and dated lower right
76 x 61 cm (30 x 24 in)

Provenance
Robin Howard, Gallery One, (Ref. 158 & 127) and hence by descent.

40. Gentleman, 1958
Ink and watercolour on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 58’ centre left
33 x 20.5 cm (13 x 8 in)

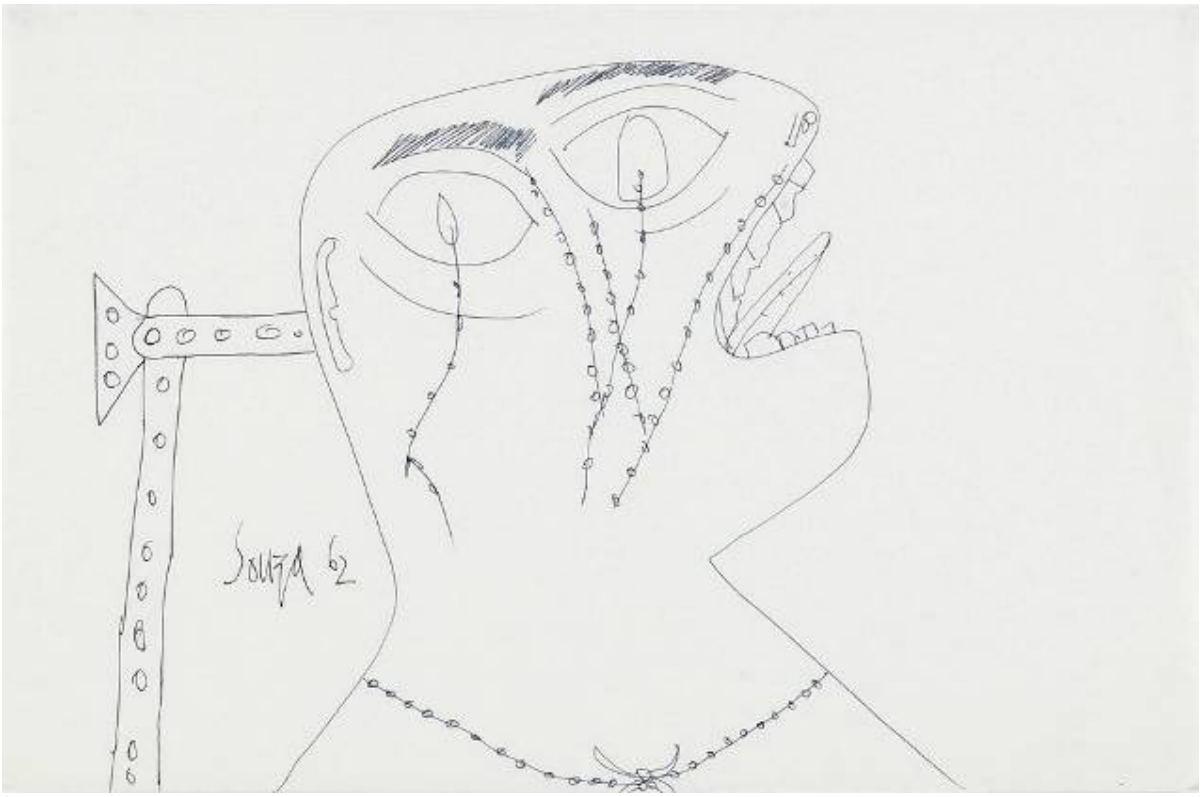
41. Skull head, 1960
Pen on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 1960’ lower left
33 x 20.5 cm (13 x 8 in)



42. Crying Woman 1962
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated upper right ‘Souza 1962’
120 x 94 cm (47 x 37 in)

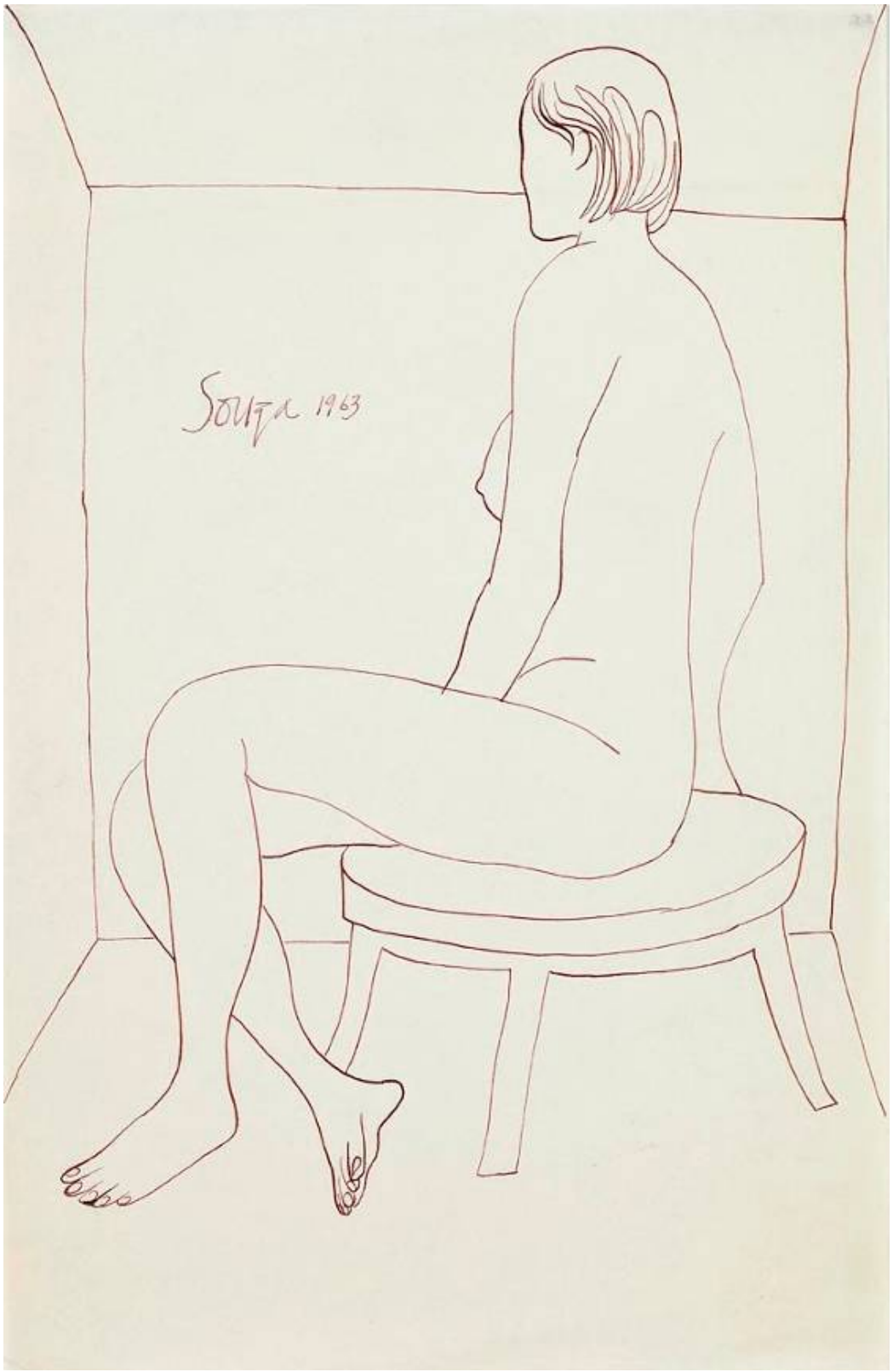
43. Dove, 1962
Pen on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 62’ lower right
28 x 45 cm (11 x 17 ¾ in)

44. Head, 1962
Pen on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 62’ lower left
28 x 43 cm (11 x 17 in)

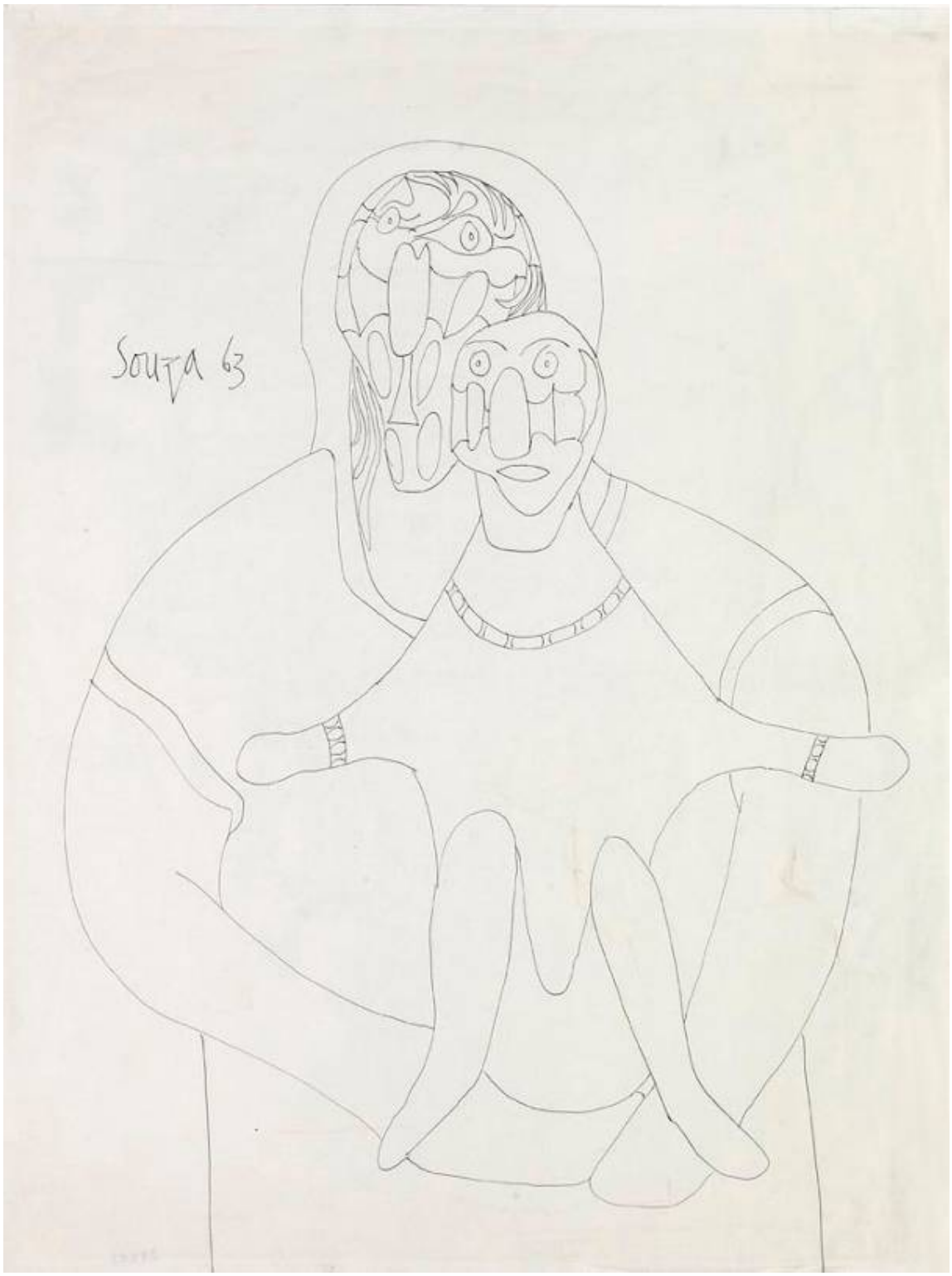


45. Untitled, 1963
Oil on canvas
Signed and dated upper left ‘Souza 63’
155 x 92 cm (61 x 36 ½ in)

46. Figure in interior, 1963
Red pen on paper
Signed and dated 'Souza 1963' upper left
43 x 28 cm (17 x 11 in)



47. Mother & Child, 1963
Pen on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 63’ upper left
56 x 43 cm (22 x 17 in)



48. Two Women on Sofa, 1966
Pen & photo collage on paper
Signed and dated ‘Souza 66’ lower left
23.5 x 33 cm (9 ¼ x 14 in)