

Lucian Freud Portraits at the National Portrait Gallery



The *Lucian Freud Portraits* exhibition took place at the National Portrait Gallery, London from 9 February – 27 May 2012. Freud (1922 – 2011) was one of the most important and influential artists of his generation and this major exhibition, which spanned his seventy year career, was the first to focus on his portraiture. Produced in close collaboration with the late artist, the exhibition concentrated on particular periods and groups of sitters which demonstrated Freud's stylistic development and technical virtuosity. The display featured 130 works from museums and private collections throughout the world, some of which had never been seen before.

Communications campaign objectives

- To reach and exceed 160,000 visitor target
- To reach and exceed income targets
- Attract core audience and repeat visitors
- Attract new visitors with an interest in contemporary art
- Encourage visitors in the Gallery to visit the exhibition
- Promote linked events/activity, merchandise, Gallery Membership and publications
- Raise the profile of the Gallery generally

Target audiences

Primary

- Art World, contemporary/modern art enthusiasts
- Traditional art gallery visitors/National Portrait Gallery core audience; Over 40, 60 % Female/40 % Male, ABC1, London and South East and Londoners, 20-40 yrs old, culturally aware, young professionals. Interested in special exhibitions and art in general
- Regular major exhibition attenders in London
- UK art interest audiences outside of London and the South East
- Students, teachers, academics (fine art, art history and design)

Secondary

- Overseas tourists
- Media and creative industry professionals

Attitudinal

- National Portrait Gallery segments – sightseers, third spacers, researchers, self-developers, close encounters. People looking for a ‘spiritual’ or ‘emotional’ visit, seeking creative stimulation, quiet contemplation, inspiration and to improve their knowledge of art
- TGI segments - Creatively Cultured, Learned Liberals, Hedonistic Dilettantes
- *Guardian, Independent, Observer, Times* and *Telegraph* readers
- Readers of art publications such as *Frieze, Art Monthly* and *Art Review*
- Arts professionals, academics and students who wish to improve their knowledge
- Visitors to Tate Modern, Royal Academy, Whitechapel and Serpentine galleries

Process

A major exhibition, over five years in the making, *Lucian Freud Portraits* presented the opportunity to attract a large audience due to Freud’s international fame, iconic status and wide-ranging popularity. However, the show was on at the same time several other major art exhibitions in London including *David Hockney: A Bigger Picture* at the Royal Academy and *Damien Hirst* at Tate Modern. The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games offered promotional opportunities as *Freud* was part of the London 2012 Festival, but also the challenge of competing for profile with multiple arts and cultural events and the increased cost of advertising in London during the period. Therefore, with relatively limited budgets we needed to promote the exhibition as a ‘blockbuster’ in a crowded marketplace. The exhibition was also very likely to be busy at certain times so the marketing campaign had to drive off-peak visits and manage visitor expectations about ticketing and queuing.

The campaign creative used two lead images, an early work from 1947 (*Girl in a Dark Jacket*) and a self-portrait from 1985, which showed the range and scale of the work in the exhibition. The copy emphasised that the exhibition had been produced in close collaboration with the artist and was a unique opportunity to see this extraordinary group of portraits together. Ticketing was launched six months before the exhibition opened, a first of the Gallery, to build anticipation and encourage pre-booking. This initial campaign took place in September 2011 with a press launch, short burst of Underground advertising and targeted press adverts.



The main campaign aimed to maximise press coverage, position the exhibition as a must-see event, attract local, UK and overseas target audiences and drive off-peak visits. A major press view took place in February 2012 and was attended by 442 journalists. The exhibition was widely reported in UK and international press including reviews and extensive broadcast coverage and a documentary film *Lucian Freud: A Painted Life* which was screened on BBC2.

Outdoor advertising was planned in short bursts throughout the exhibition to enable us to maximise awareness at key times and have an outdoor presence for as long as possible. This included cross-track sites on the Underground at the beginning of the run to create impact, poster advertising on the London and South East rail network to reach commuters and three large format back-lit sites at Charing Cross, Victoria and Waterloo stations, which were obtained at a reduced price as a last minute deal. This was backed by behaviour-targeted online banner ads and press advertising in national and local press, including the *Guardian Guide*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Evening Standard*, special interest magazines such as *Modern Painters*, *Tate Guide* and *Frieze* and tourist publications *London Planner* and *Where London*.

A two-week presenter-read campaign ran on Classic FM and 130,000 leaflets were distributed via Gallery mailing lists and displayed in public buildings including galleries, libraries, shops, cafés and cultural venues. A special *Lucian Freud Portraits* micro site was created and the exhibition was promoted on a regular basis through the Gallery's e-newsletter, Facebook page and Twitter site. An 'early-bird' online offer encouraged visitors to book the relatively quiet first time slot of the day and we ran special offers with the Association of Train Operating Companies and Eurostar to encourage UK audiences from outside London and European visitors.



Once the exhibition opened we were faced with several issues around ticketing and ticket availability, these included a large volume of enquires about the online ticketing process and the wide-spread perception that the exhibition was sold out. In fact it was not until the last three weeks of the run that no advance tickets were available and 500 tickets were on sale at the Gallery every day from 10am. We also faced reputational risks as tickets were being sold at inflated prices by touts and ticket resale sites and some visitors thought that we were working with these companies. We therefore changed the messaging on our advertising to focus on tickets being available on the door and updated the website with FAQs about the ticketing process and a warning about buying from unauthorised sellers. We also increase promotion of our Membership scheme, emphasising that visitors could become a Member for £40 and get immediate entry. Towards the end of the run we extended opening hours and used this as opportunity to reiterate the message via press channels that the exhibition was not sold out.

Outcome

Freud was the most popular paid for exhibition in the Gallery's history attracting 246,801 visitors which was 154 % of the target figure and income targets for ticketing and retail were surpassed. The popularity of the exhibition contributed to the most successful year in the Gallery's history with over two million annual visits.

Marketing channels proved an important source of information for the majority of visitors to the exhibition. Two thirds of exhibition visitors (57 %) had seen an outdoor poster or billboard on the London Underground or rail network, while 35 % had seen railings boards and banners outside the Gallery. 39 % visited the Gallery's website and 23 % had seen a press advertisement. 20 % of visitors had seen other exhibition specific marketing including leaflets, newsletters, social media and digital advertising. Press exposure was extensive with widespread broadcast coverage and over 700

press mentions in national and international press. 38 % of visitors saw a piece in a paper or magazine, 15 % in listings publications and a third saw coverage on TV and radio with 12 % watching the BBC2 Freud documentary.

★★★★ 'This is a huge show and a comprehensive one. You have to see it...' (Adrian Hamilton, *The Independent*, 10 February 2012)

★★★★ 'A revelation... 'What do I ask of a painting? I ask it to astonish, disturb, seduce, convince,' Freud once said. This unmissable exhibition does all these things.' (Jackie Wullschlager, the *Financial Times*, 11 February 2012)

★★★★ 'Monumental...' (Laura Cumming, *The Observer (Review)*, 12 February 2012)

'Stunning is one word for this event. Brilliant is another. Definitive a third.' (Waldemar Januszczak, *The Sunday Times (Culture)*, 12 February 2012)

★★★★ (Andrew Graham-Dixon, *The Sunday Telegraph (Seven)*, 12 February 2012)

The exhibition was very well received; 97 % of visitors rated the exhibition good or excellent with 83 % saying excellent and as a result personal recommendation was an important motivator with 20 % of visitors hearing about the exhibition through friends and family.

The pre-exhibition campaign was successful with 30,000 tickets sold before opening. Almost a third (29 %) of visitors made their decision to attend over one month before visiting and a further quarter (24 %) decided between eight days and one month before attending. The exhibition attracted both first time and repeat visitors. Almost a third (27 %) had never visited the Gallery before and 41 % were regular visitors (had been in the last 12 months). The campaign successfully attracted local (39 % London), national (35 % rest of the UK) and international (26 %) audiences, those with an academic or professional interest in art (31 %) and students (10 %).

Key points for effective practice

- If you have an exhibition or event showcasing the work of a well known artist/subject with widespread appeal make the most of the opportunity to gain press coverage
- Build anticipation about the event with pre-opening promotion
- Plan short bursts of outdoor advertising to maximise effectiveness of limited budget
- Give clear information about ticketing processes
- Be flexible and adjust messaging if necessary
- Hold back budget for last minute deals and discounts on advertising

Denise Vogelsang
Head of Communications
National Portrait Gallery