

STUDIO PRINTS: AN ARTISTS' WORKSHOP

6 June – 13 September 2026

Gilbert and Ildiko Butler Drawings Gallery

Studio Prints was a leading printmaking workshop founded by Dorothea Wight in 1968 and active until 2011. Its history reflects the emergence of London as a centre of artistic innovation after the Second World War. In 1974, Wight (1944–2013) was joined by another graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art, Marc Balakjian (1938–2017), an Armenian artist who grew up in Lebanon and moved to Britain in the 1960s; they married in 1977. While leading the workshop for over 40 years, the couple continued to pursue their own independent practices, gaining international recognition for their refined mezzotints.

The workshop became a vital place of reference for artists seeking specialist expertise in printmaking. Long-term collaborations developed with artists such as Frank Auerbach, Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff, and Celia Paul, while others, including Paula Rego, worked with Wight and Balakjian on specific projects. These encounters between British artists and those who had immigrated to Britain made Studio Prints an influential hub at the heart of modern British art.

This exhibition includes a rare group of trial proofs – prints made to test ink tone and composition before a final edition of numbered and signed sheets is produced. It also marks the Courtauld Gallery's acquisition of a group of these proofs and plates, as well as mezzotints by Wight and Balakjian. Together, these works offer insight into the collaborative processes behind some of the finest twentieth-century prints.

Unless otherwise stated, all the works in this display were accepted under the Cultural Gifts Scheme by HM Government from the archive of Studio Prints gifted by the Balakjian family and allocated to the Courtauld Gallery (Samuel Courtauld Trust), 2024. They can be viewed on the collection online pages: [Courtauld Gallery Collection Online](#)

The programme of displays in the Drawings Gallery is generously supported by the International Music and Art Foundation, with additional support from James Bartos.

Reclining Figure

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

1993

Etching (artist's proof)

G.2012.XX.12

This print is an 'artist's proof', as the letters AP at lower left suggest. AP usually identifies a limited-edition print reserved for and approved by the artist. The sitter, Leigh Bowery, was a flamboyant Australian avant-garde polymath, whom Lucian Freud saw perform in London in 1988, and subsequently became one of the artist's frequent models.

Freud gifted nine etchings, including this one, to his friend Frank Auerbach, who was also working with Studio Prints at the time; Auerbach later donated it to the Courtauld Gallery.

PLUTO AGED 12

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

2000

Etching (trial proof)

[G.2024.SP.11](#)

Marc Balakjian worked closely with Lucian Freud from 1986. Their sessions often began with coffee and informal conversation, which Balakjian called their 'ceremonial starting point'. At times Freud would be accompanied by his dog Pluto, who in wintertime would warm his paws in a rag box prepared for him in the studio. Beloved by the artist, the dog became a frequent subject in Freud's work, prized for his natural movement and ease. The hand at upper right is that of Freud's studio assistant David Dawson.

GARDEN IN WINTER

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

1997-1999

Etching (trial proof)

G.2024.SP.4

This densely worked etching depicts the overgrown garden of Freud's home in Kensington Church Street, observed over two successive winters. As he failed to complete the plate in the first winter, he waited a year to resume work, while avoiding walking into the garden to prevent damaging the scene. Produced in close collaboration with Marc Balakjian, the plate was reworked at length as Freud sought to resist visual order, altering passages he felt were too harmonious. The tangled branches and compressed space transform a familiar domestic view into a work of unsettling intensity.

THE PAINTER'S GARDEN

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

2003-2004

Etching (trial proofs)

G.2024.SP.5;G.2024.SP.8

Marc Balakjian talked about the difficulty of making this extraordinarily rich print which depicts Freud's own garden in Kensington Church Street. The numerous trial proofs, of which these are two examples, and their visible differences in the density of ink, reveal Freud's and Balakjian's highly experimental process to render the depth and intricacies of the garden. The vertical emphasis of the central tree grounds and concentrates the etching's composition, in what might otherwise be a jumble of forms and lines. This print is one of two that Lucian Freud made of his garden; the other, in a vertical format, is *Garden in winter* (see above).

CHRIST CHURCH, SPITALFIELDS, SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN

Leon Kossoff (1926–2019)

1992

Etching and aquatint (trial proofs)

G.2024.SP.15-17

In 1987, Leon Kossoff began a group of paintings depicting Christ Church in Spitalfields, East London. After decades of neglect and threats of demolition, the church was being restored and began to host the celebrated Spitalfields Music Festival. Kossoff grew up nearby, and the building, as he recalled, had 'always been part of my life'. A few years later, he returned to the subject in these three prints. Seasonal change, indicated in the title, is here suggested less by clothing or foliage, than by shifts in the clouds and light, most clearly in the open summer sky.

AFTER CHARDIN (SMALL) and AFTER CHARDIN (LARGE)

Lucian Freud (1922–2011)

2000

Etching (trial proofs)

G.2024.SP.2-3

In 1999, Lucian Freud painted two versions after French artist Jean-Siméon Chardin's painting [*The Young Schoolmistress*](#) (around 1737, National Gallery, London). In the prints, as well as in those paintings, Freud played with scale. The larger print, which took him five months to complete (G.2024.SP.3), is almost the same size as Chardin's painting, but the figures are much enlarged. In the small print (G.2024.SP.2), Freud focuses on the young woman's head, resulting in a very tight crop that zooms in on 'the most beautiful ear in the history of art' as he described it.

RUTH II; and RUTH 2006

Frank Auerbach (1931–2024)

1994; 2006

Etching and aquatint printed in black and grey from two plates (trial proof); and

Etching and aquatint with engraving (trial proof)

G.2024.SP.14; G.2024.SP.13

Ruth Bromberg was a print scholar and a close friend of Frank Auerbach, who portrayed her weekly over seventeen years. In *Ruth II*, following a suggestion by Marc Balakjian, Auerbach combined etching and aquatint for the first time, introducing areas of midtone into the linear surface. Printing from separate plates for black and grey ink expanded the expressive range of Auerbach's printmaking.

In the later *Ruth 2006*, his largest plate to date, Auerbach retained the grid used to map and transfer the image from drawing to plate. Although Balakjian could have concealed it, Auerbach kept the rigid geometry to contrast with the more exploratory lines of the portrait.

IN THE STUDIO

Celia Paul (born 1959)

2002

Drawing: graphite on tracing paper; copper plate; print: soft-ground etching

D.2024.SP.1, G.2024.SP.1; G.2024.SP.1.1

Celia Paul found in Dorothea Wight the ideal collaborator for her soft-ground etchings. Wight's skill in biting the plate in acid and then wiping the ink over the plates was essential to producing the misty atmosphere and haunting sense of introspection central to Paul's work. Paul typically works on a small scale, making a rapid graphite sketch on tracing paper laid over a waxed copper plate. Wight then bit the plate, an exacting process that could take up to four days. This is one of two etchings in which, with Wight's encouragement, Paul experimented with printing in colour, using subtle tones she described as 'butterfly tints'.

THE ENCAMPMENT

Paula Rego (1935–2022)

1989

Etching and aquatint

Private Collection

The Encampment is related to, but not part of, *The Nursery Rhymes*, a series of prints which Paula Rego worked on in collaboration with printmaker Paul Coldwell (b. 1952). Rego recalled that the series was a major undertaking for her, made more challenging by working to a tight deadline in Coldwell's small studio. Marc Balakjian was asked to relieve some of the pressure, printing three works for the artist. Storytelling, folktales and nursery rhymes are integral to Rego's practice. Here, Balakjian's formidable printmaking skills capture the subtle effects of light and

shadow that are characteristic of the fantastical worlds that populate traditional folk stories.

IN THE SILENCE OF PASSING YEARS

Marc Balakjian (1938–2017)

1980

Mezzotint

G.2024.SP.20

The subject of this print, a packing case partly concealed beneath a cloth, recurs throughout Marc Balakjian's work, hinting at buried trauma and displacement. It alludes to Balakjian's family history, which was marked by the Armenian genocide in 1915 and subsequent exile.

From the early 1970s, Balakjian worked primarily in mezzotint, a labour-intensive technique that had largely fallen out of use by the 20th century. He found it ideally suited to his subject matter, reflecting that, 'because of its character it is like a prayer – you are alone with your thoughts [...] your image emerges little by little, from the darkness – from the void.'

DAWN OF A NEW SEASON

Dorothea Wight (1944–2013)

1978

Mezzotint

G.2024.SP.19

Like her husband, Dorothea Wight favoured mezzotint, prizing the dreamlike quality it lent her images. Here, she depicts a tranquil landscape framed by a bay window. However, upon closer inspection it appears that we are on the outside of a house, gazing at a landscape contained within. This unsettling ambiguity calls into question whether we are seeing a real or imagined landscape and threatens to dissolve the distinction between interior and exterior. The tension between the constraints of urban life, represented by the house, and the freedom of the countryside may reflect the Devon-born Wight's uneasy relationship with life in London.

STEPS TO A DOOR

Dorothea Wight (1944–2013)

Copper plates, mezzotint print, and proof with colour annotations

G.2024.SP.18; G.2024.SP.18.1-2

This group of objects offers an insight into Dorothea Wight's creative process. A mezzotint is made by 'rocking' a plate – using a special tool to indent the surface with thousands of tiny pits, which hold ink – and burnishing smooth those

areas where the artist wishes to create highlights. This technique produces velvety dark tones and highlights with a muted glow.

Mezzotints can be printed in multiple colours. Here, Wight used one plate inked in brown for most of the composition, with a second plate for the landscape glimpsed through the door. The colour test sheet records her choice of inks.