



GALLERIES



Comments Print Share Tag on Delicious Digg This

Rembrandt/Freud: Etchings From Life The AGO misses the mark; fortunately the artists rarely did

Favourite Add to Favorites Recommend: 1

BY DAVID BALZER February 03, 2010 21:02

EDITORIAL RATING:

To May 23. Tue, Thu-Sun 10am-5:30pm; Wed 10am-8:30pm. \$10-\$18 (Wed free). Art Gallery of Ontario, 317 Dundas W. 416-979-6648. www.ago.net.

One can't complain too much about a show of etchings by Rembrandt and Lucian Freud. Still, the curatorial principle behind the AGO's new "Rembrandt/Freud: Etchings from Life," seems a little off. The title indicates the official alliance: two artists, hundreds of years apart, concerned with portraiture through a medium — etching — whose labourious process reflects the intricacies and thorniness of a human subject's consciousness.

This is a wonderful, time-bridging paradox and it's one of the better efforts the renovated AGO has made to unite new and classic works. But is Freud really the "contemporary Rembrandt," as the exhibit would have us believe? Freud is interested in earthy figuration, yes, but his style is different than Rembrandt's. (If you're looking for an old master with whom to compare Freud's style, there's a better one: El Greco.) Rembrandt isn't the only one to have done etchings. He is not the only one to have focused on the brow as the seat of character, or to have rendered reclining nudes. To suggest Freud is some kind of special heir seems like an overzealous rhetorical mistake an undergraduate would make in a term paper.

What is fascinating about "Rembrandt/Freud," then, are the discrepancies. Freud is a better painter than a draughtsman. Rembrandt is an incontestable master of both media. Magnifying glasses, placed on the wall next to some of the etchings and meant to give viewers access to the details of the artists' hands, prove this. (No artist makes darkness as full, distinct and thoughtful as Rembrandt.) Rembrandt famously ruined his eyes etching into the wee hours, a prelude to his daily painting; Freud makes a lot of broad, messy marks.

Many of these works are studies. Rembrandt's look fresh, their tentativeness and negative spaces punctuated with concentrations of virtuosic effort, and thus appealing to the modern eye, which is used to the expressionistic and lopsided. (His love of physiognomic grotesqueries, even in his studies of the head of his beloved first wife Saskia, are almost echoed in scrawly post-punk illustration.) If many of Freud's loosest etchings seem dull, so do Rembrandt's finished ones, such as The Angel Appearing to the Shepherds — which seems too good, too elaborate, too altogether perfect. Indeed, if the AGO has made anything clear with this exhibit, it's that there is probably no contemporary Rembrandt, however much some of us wish there were.

» Email dbalzer@eyeweekly.com

Email us at: LETTERS@EYEWEEKLY.COM or send your questions to EYEWEEKLY.COM 1 Yonge Street, 2nd Floor, Toronto Ontario, M5E 1E6

User Comments Comment Using Facebook Connect or EyeID or Comment Anonymously

Newest first

SAVE \$100 OFF ALL BLACKBERRY DEVICES. FROM CANADA'S BLACKBERRY LEADER. SWITCH TO ROGERS. FIND A STORE

Select a City ABBOTSFORD 83% Off at U Weigh ALLISTON / INNISFIL Half Off Music Le AURORA / NEWMARKET 62% off a Niagara G

Toronto Listings Finder FILM MUSIC CLUBS ARTS Film Finder Films | Theatres All Any Movie Genre Any Movie Rating Any Movie Title Find Film Chart Grab this finder

Related Stories CONTACT decision maker Don't know what to see at Toronto's biggest photography festival? Check out our handy CONTACT primer. Refined crude In his ROM photo exhibit about the impact of oil, Edward Burtynsky once again creates haunting images of modern landscapes. The projectionist UK artist Lindsay Seers plays with film history in her Images Festival installation.

- MORE INSIDE EYE WEEKLY Guides Fringe Festival 2009 Pride Guide 2009 Toronto Jazz Festival Guide 2009 Cool Summer Guide 2009 Bar and Patio Guide 2009 Green Living Guide Love and Sex Guide Cheap Thrills

EYEWEEKLY.COM Write a Letter to the Editor Masthead and Contacts Privacy Policy Employment Opportunities Advertise With Us Distribution Star Media Group Sites canadianimmigrant.ca insurancehotline.com swaymag.ca More Star Pass Sites TheStar.com HomeFinder.ca toronto.com Wheels.ca Ourfaves.com

torstar digital Copyright 1991 - 2010 EYE WEEKLY Newspapers Limited. All Rights Reserved. Distribution transmission, Republication of any materials is strictly prohibited without the prior written consent of EYE WEEKLY. EYE WEEKLY is a division of Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. Star Media Group TOPS TOTAL ONLINE PUBLISHING SYSTEM