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## Where Did an Early Lucian Freud Landscape Go? It Turns Out His Wartime Drinking Buddy Painted Over It

The uncovered work, which is signed "Lucian" on the back, could conceal an even earlier abandoned painting by the young artist.

**Naomi Rea**, July 4, 2018



Attributed to Lucian Freud, *A Suffolk Spring Landscape with Welsh Mountains Beyond* (1939/40). Image courtesy Sworders.

A long-hidden landscape painting attributed to Lucian Freud is on sale, after it was discovered beneath a work by another artist who was Freud's contemporary at an unconventional art school in rural England. The previously unknown work has been hidden for more than half a century.

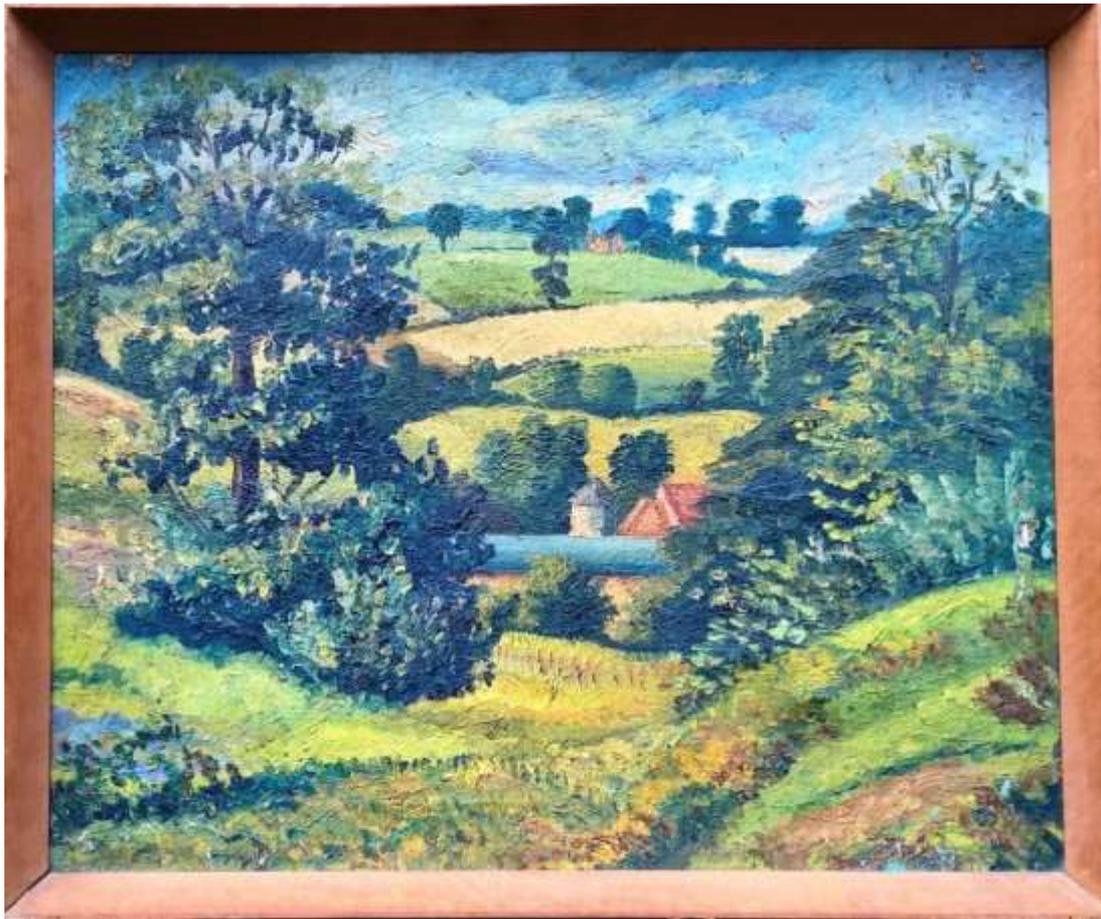
The landscape, which is being sold in Sworders's Modern British and Contemporary Art auction on July 11, was found beneath another painting by Tom Wright, a wartime friend of the artist best known for his portraits.



Experts agree that the signature on the back of the canvas is indeed Freud's. Image courtesy Sworders.

Experts were alerted to the possibility of Freud's authorship when they saw the back of the canvas was signed "Lucian," and suspicions grew when closer inspection uncovered that there was a second image painted beneath Wright's bright landscape.

After examining the picture and comparing the signature with other examples of Freud's writing, the art dealer and former Tate senior curator Robert Upstone says the signature is "undoubtedly" in his hand. "The presence of Freud's signature logically and forcefully suggests that what lay underneath—whether abandoned or uncompleted—was painted by Freud himself," Upstone says in a statement from the auction house.



Tom Wright is thought to have recycled Freud's canvas for his painting, above, as they were in short supply. Image courtesy Sworders.

In pursuit of the truth, conservator Gillian Mussett removed the top layer of paint with a scalpel to reveal a second landscape beneath Wright's, which is thought to have been abandoned by Freud around 1941. The work has been given the title *A Suffolk Spring Landscape With Welsh Mountains Beyond* by the auction house and is carrying an estimate of £20,000 – £30,000 (\$26,421 – \$39,632). It will be on view at Sworders from July 8. Artnet News reached out to Mussett, but she declined to comment.

Wright, an apprentice plasterer who painted pub signs for money on the side, had met Freud at a local inn in Hadleigh, Suffolk, called The Shoulder of Mutton, just before World War II broke out. Convinced of Wright's talent, Freud persuaded him to join him as a student at the idiosyncratic "free rein" academy, The East Anglian School of Painting & Drawing in Benton End. Wright studied alongside Freud until he was called on for military service. When he returned from war, Wright is thought to have borrowed an old canvas from the school to paint on, as canvas was in short supply. He created his landscape over Freud's around 1946.

After Wright died in 1992, the work was tucked away in the basement of Wright's widowed wife, the artist Elizabeth Bodman. It was uncovered after she died in 2015.



The painting mid-conservation still shows some of the white layer that was on top of *Suffolk Landscape with Welsh Mountains Beyond*. The Circles indicate where it was revealed that yet another layer is hiding below Freud's landscape. Image courtesy Sworders.

In a twist to this already bizarre tale, during the conservation process several areas of the landscape attributed to Freud were also removed from the canvas revealing possibly a third layer of paint beneath it. This mystery third layer appears to be in a palette similar to that which Freud used in his early portraits.

For the moment, the areas removed from Freud's hidden canvas have been overpainted in a reversible way, which according to Sworders is "the ethically correct method to conserve such minor complications."

William Feaver, an art critic who was a friend of Freud, inspected the canvas twice during the conservation process and determined that the signature could be Freud's, and that the work "could well be an abandoned work" by the artist. The compilers of Freud's upcoming catalogue raisonné (expected in 2022), Toby Treves and Catherine Lampert, however, told Sworders that they can't agree to include it in the catalogue "until more evidence comes to light."