

Fearsome Faces and "Cuddle on the Tightrope" in Texas

By [Mario R. MercadoArts + CultureComments](#) (8.27.2012)



One of the cultural highlights in [London](#) this spring was the exhibition [Lucien Freud: Portraits](#), which encompassed seven decades of the work of one of the most important artists of the twentieth century, and arguably the greatest postwar portraitist. Happily for American travelers, the show, organized by the [National Portrait Gallery, London](#), and the [Modern Art Museum Fort Worth](#), opened last month in [Texas](#)—its only other venue—and is on view through late October.

The exhibition, which includes more than 90 paintings, drawing, and etchings, takes over most of the museum's upper galleries. Few installations can claim a better setting: the spacious and restful display in Tadao Ando's remarkable building, may be the ideal place to take in portraits, depicted with unflinching intensity and observational acuity, of the artist's family, friends, and lovers, and subjects that range from the criminal class to aristocracy.

There are portraits of Freud's colleagues, the painters Francis Bacon and David Hockney. And there is also a photograph documenting Freud painting Queen Elizabeth II (most of the portraits were painted in Freud's studio; for the Queen, he made the dutiful exception and went to Buckingham Palace). Through the course of the exhibition's organization, Freud gave what turned out to be his last interviews to Michael Auping, the chief curator of the Modern. In response to a question about the knowledge of a subject, Freud said: "Doing a portrait is about seeing what you didn't see before. It can be extraordinary how much you can learn from someone, and perhaps about yourself, by looking very carefully at them, without judgment. You must make judgments about the painting, but not about the subject."



Kink, an installation by Ernesto Neto, the contemporary Brazilian artist, offers a wholly different experience at the [Nasher Sculpture Center](#) in [Dallas](#). Created by the artist for the Nasher exhibition [Ernesto Neto Cuddle on the Tightrope](#), the large-scale abstract environment is an expansive crochet of brightly colored ropes, elevated off the gallery floor by arching metal supports, which draws visitors into passageways of interlacing crocheted net and polypropylene balls. One removes shoes, wears disposable booties, and enters a gravity-challenging domain, alternately womblike and disorienting—and fun! It is as if one is on a tightrope and playing in a jungle gym at the same time.

Like the Freud show in [Fort Worth](#) (a 45-minute drive), the luminous and intimate Nasher, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, provides an exceptional setting for *Kink*, and for works selected by Neto from the [Nasher Collection](#), including sculptures by Paul Gauguin, Constantin Brancusi, David Smith, and Cy Twombly, as part of the exhibition. Art from Britain to Brazil, wholly of our times, and only in Texas now ([Ernesto Neto Cuddle on the Tightrope](#) runs through September 9).



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Photos courtesy of Lucian Freud Archive; Kevin Todora.