

# L. Michèle Franklin: Life Experiences

**'My work has always paralleled my life experiences, so who knows what the future holds?'**

**L. Michèle Franklin, 1992**

Painted in 1977, when she was just eighteen, and barely weeks into her foundation course at Art College, Michèle Franklin's early *Self-Portrait* (see cover) is a strong visual statement from a young woman who is very aware of her black ancestry and seeking self-expression through the language of the moderns, particularly Picasso.



L. Michèle Franklin  
2005

In fact, self-portraits are relatively rare in the oeuvre of such a figurative painter, and almost all were executed in her early years, since Franklin considers that the psychological element that so fascinates her in portraiture is missing from self-portraits. To the viewer, however, an artist's self-portraits are always of great interest and this one is doubly rare, as well as extremely precious, for, unlike much of Franklin's work from the last 25 years, it survived the devastating fire that swept her home and studio in 2002. Full of strength, character and expectation, it shows the artist on the threshold of her career.

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## **BACKGROUND AND EARLY LIFE**

(Linda) Michèle Franklin was born in Putney, Vermont State, USA, on 26 December 1958, the second child and oldest daughter of the four children of Roger Franklin, a physicist of British-Jewish origin and Beverly (née Allen), an African-American teacher of part Native American descent. Michèle's ancestors include a number of strong-minded, accomplished women, who all achieved prominence in their chosen fields, as well as a handful of celebrated artists. Chief among the former is her father's second cousin Rosalind Franklin (1920-1958), the pioneering molecular scientist whose research led to the discovery of DNA. Both his grandmothers are also notable: on the paternal side is the social reformer the Hon. Henrietta Franklin (1866-1964), one of the sisters of Lily Montagu, who founded the Liberal Jewish Movement - for which Henrietta herself hosted the foundation meeting in her

London drawing room in 1902. And on the maternal side is Belle Moskowitz (c.1877-1932), who was the closest political adviser to presidential candidate Al Smith during his four-year term as Governor of New York, and a powerful force in American politics in the early decades of the twentieth century. Belle's daughter Miriam Israels (1907-1994), herself a strong painter, and niece of the Dutch-born painter Jozef Israels (1824-1911) was twice-married; first to Michèle's paternal grandfather, Cyril Franklin, then later to the Russian-born sculptor and constructivist Naum Gabo (1890-1977).

Michèle's background, therefore, was stimulating and aspirational, as well as nurturing, and she grew up a confident, happy child. From an early age she had access to the Gabos' wide-ranging art collection, which included work by Isaac Israels (1865-1934, son of Jozef, and also a Dutch painter of great prominence), the French Neo-Romantic Yves Tanguy and British abstract modernist Ben Nicholson. Later, in England, she also became familiar with her grandfather Cyril's collection of British-Jewish art. (She particularly remembers one of Jacob Epstein's busts of Isobel Rawsthorne (née Nicholas), Orovida Pissarro's *Dancers* and a Mark Gertler *Reclining Nude*; a picture of her father, Roger, by the painter Clara Klinghoffer still remains in the family). Perhaps it is not surprising then, that as a child, Michèle drew compulsively - always in colour, though she never used paints - and by the age of five, she had determined to become an artist. She was encouraged in her ambition by her family and by Gabo, who assured Michèle's mother that she had a vocation. 'The child knows,' he told her. 'She knows.'

Two and a half years later, in 1966, the Franklins left Vermont, moving to England and living briefly in Buckinghamshire, then Hertfordshire, before settling finally in Hampstead, though Michèle regretted particularly leaving behind the astonishing colour of the famous New England falls. As a mature artist, her love of colour has long since been channelled into painting, while her works on paper (often in response to the nature of her subject matter) have become almost exclusively monochrome. Her work, which is essentially figurative with a strong emotional impact, can be seen partly as an exploration of personal identity (her powerfully direct paintings of birth; her subtle, intimate studies of women) and partly as an attempt to unite the disparate strands of her heritage. It ranges from early self-portraiture, which draws on her African origins, to the more recent series of Holocaust-inspired images, which make reference to her own consciousness of her Jewish roots, and the recent gently probing set of family portraits. Throughout, while reflecting a wide range of artistic influences, her work continues to parallel her life experiences.



## ART STUDENT



*Still-Life with Pomegranates*  
oil on canvas 16" x 20" 40 x 15cm

At Hampstead's progressive King Alfred's school, Michèle's talent was recognised by her sixth-form art teacher, who advised her to go to Camberwell School of Art. *Pomegranates* (1974-5), a highly accomplished student piece, shows us why. In this carefully planned composition the sensuously ripe cut-fruits and round-bellied bottle contrast sharply with the white relief of tablecloth and plate in a deliberate act of homage to Cézanne.

In 1977 Michèle entered Camberwell to study for a Fine Arts degree in Painting and Sculpture, where her contemporaries included Sarah Raphael and Julie Held. Naturally rebellious and difficult to pigeonhole, with her striking looks, multiethnic background and youthful confidence, she inevitably clashed with the traditional, almost exclusively male staff. But she found her niche in the sculpture department, where she also learned to develop her considerable skills as a draughtswoman. There, she also benefited from the atmosphere of quiet concentration and an insistence on accuracy, which helped her to find focus. The teaching, which was structured and highly technical, included the use of grids to judge perspective, sticks and a plumb line to measure space, and plan-and-elevation drawings to study the subject from all angles. Initially, she found the discipline hard; but her determination and love of drawing triumphed.

One of Franklin's early student drawings from the Camberwell sculpture class, *Standing Figure of Mary* (c.1977), illustrates her strong 'sculptural approach to space and form'. By portraying exactly what happens to the body as it leans forward into a classic standing pose with the weight on one leg, the drawing convincingly conveys the position of the muscles and achieves a three-dimensional quality. (Looking at this drawing, it is not surprising to learn that Franklin graduated with a commendation in sculpture). However, she also believes that drawing (though underpinned by good technique) should be an exploration - and that an artist should follow their inspiration, not knowing where it will lead.



*Standing Figure of Mary*  
charcoal drawing 2' x 1'6" 61 x 46cm



*Head of Brian*  
charcoal drawing  
24" x 15" 61 x 38cm

It was also at Camberwell that Michèle met the man who would become her husband: the sculptor Brian Taylor (b.1935), who taught her sculpture in her foundation year. Indeed, at their very first meeting Michèle announced, with characteristic confidence, that she intended to marry him. This strength of attachment informs Franklin's expressive drawing *Head of Brian* (1982), which combines both delicacy and strength to portray the implicit relationship between artist and sitter, as well as a great deal of character. The



*Head of Lolly*  
drawing  
24" x 15" 61 x 38cm

earlier *Head of Lolly* (1981), though also expressive in style, struggles to achieve a spatial context and lacks the intimacy of the later piece, although Lolly went on to become Franklin's favourite model. She also sat for two



*Head of Lolly*  
bronze  
20" x 6" x 9" 51 x 15 x 23cm



*Figure of Lolly*  
bronze life-size

early sculptures: *Head of Lolly* (1977, bronze), modelled in Gabo's former Camden Town studio, with Brian Taylor and fellow students, and the impressive *Figure of Lolly* (1977, bronze), sculpted at home on her own. Lolly's forward-leaning pose is reminiscent of

Rembrandt's *Girl at the*

*Window* (1645), as well as Epstein's bronze *Twelfth Portrait of Peggy Jean* (known as *The Sick Child*, 1928), but both the pose and the expressive modelling also anticipate Franklin's own later painting of Lolly, *Leaning Girl* (1981). *Chair* (1982), completed in her final year, is evidently a landmark drawing, not only highlighting the contrast between light and dark with great precision and accuracy, but also effectively pulling together tones and space to create atmosphere.



*Chair*  
charcoal drawing  
2' x 1'6" 61 x 46cm

During her student years (1977-81), as Franklin struggled for self-expression and to master technique, she grappled with a variety of influences expressed in a series of early portraits. The stripped, angular modernism and part Cubist technique of her *Self-Portrait* (1976) (see cover) reveals not only the overwhelming influence of Picasso (particularly his *Self-Portrait* of 1907 and *Les Femmes d'Alger* of 1906-7), but also draws strikingly on the artist's exploration of her own part-African origins,



particularly in the mask-like treatment of the face. The piece embodies her conscious struggle to unite meaning and composition while seeking to gain a fluid handling of oils. *Girl in Pink Shirt* (1976), which Franklin describes as 'more of an organic painting', was executed in the summer of 1976 before she began at Camberwell. The influence of Lucian Freud, though not conscious, is nonetheless palpable and places Franklin in the strong realist figurative tradition of the Euston Road School, disseminated by post-war teaching at Camberwell, and taken up by the painter Euan Uglow (who later taught at Camberwell) back in the late 1940s.



*Girl in Pink Shirt*  
oil on board  
24" x 17" 61 x 43cm



*Portrait of Paul*  
pen & ink  
2' x 1'6" 61 x 46cm



*Portrait of Paul* bronze  
15" x 6" x 8"  
38 x 15 x 20cm

Other notable student works include the series of portraits of a male model, Paul (all 1979-80), in a variety of media. Among them are the Rembrandt-inspired pen-&-ink seated figure, *Portrait of Paul* (1979), a modelled head, *Portrait of Paul* (1979, bronze) and two profiles in oil, *Portrait of Paul I* and including the sensitively handled *Portrait of Paul II* (1980), which has recently been restored. A further *Portrait of Paul* (1980), dressed in a blue shirt, set

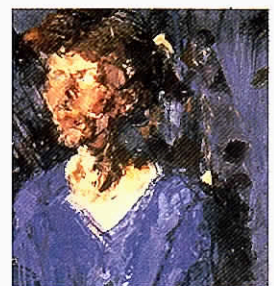
against a blue background, was the first painting of Franklin's to be accepted by the Royal Academy for the Summer Exhibition (to which she has since contributed many times).



*Portrait of Paul I*  
oil on canvas  
14" x 12" 35 x 30cm



*Portrait of Paul II*  
oil on canvas  
23" x 16" 54 x 41cm



*Portrait of Paul*  
oil on canvas  
3' x 2' 93 x 61cm

Towards the end of her time at Camberwell, Franklin became fascinated by the work of the painter Chaim Soutine (1894-1943), on whom she had earlier completed a student project. The highly individual style of this Russian-born, Jewish Expressionist, characterised by vigorous brushwork and emotionally-charged use of form and colour, left its stamp and Franklin began her own experiments with strong colour and expressive form. This resulted in two oils:





Self-Portrait  
oil on canvas  
1' x 10" 30 x 25cm

*Self-Portrait* (c.1981), with its rich palette of blues and yellows (her preferred palette for portraiture) and expressive distortion of the face and figure, and *The Artist's Mother* (c.1981). Modelled on a Soutine portrait of a figure with clasped hands, and flooded with a palette of warm pinks to convey the sitter's emotional character, *The Artist's Mother*, achieves both an emotional and physical likeness without the element

of caricature, often prevalent in Soutine. Franklin considers it one of her most successful early portraits.



The Artist's Mother  
oil on canvas  
2' x 2' 61 x 61cm



Leaning Girl  
oil on canvas  
1' x 10" 30 x 25cm

Shortly after leaving Camberwell, she uncovered a fertile seam of inspiration in a series of drawings and paintings centred on a lone female model, Lolly, among them a fine pair of oils, known as *Leaning Girl* (aka *Lolly Leaning*, 1981) and *Lolly Seated* (1981). These paintings, which are clearly informed by Franklin's sculptural technique, also anticipate her later *Women Together* series (for which Lolly again provided the inspiration, though she was not

one of the models). Both portray seated nudes, *contre jour*, in day-lit interiors, but the mood of each, dictated by the sitter's posture, differs profoundly. In *Lolly Seated*, the larger of the two, the model sits proud: head erect, back straight, hands folded peacefully in her lap, as light streams in from the window behind; the painting's slim portrait format emphasising the attenuated Giacometti-like proportions of her head and neck. However, in *Leaning Girl* the mood has darkened and Lolly sits slumped over the table, head in hands. With her back curved in an arch of misery (recalling the earlier *Figure of Lolly* (1977, bronze), her knees hunched and her head hidden in shadows, only the top of her shoulders are bathed in light.

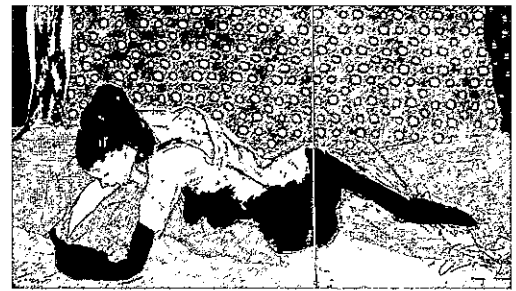


Lolly Seated  
oil on canvas  
2' x 14" 61 x 46cm

During the many hours they spent together working on sculptures and paintings, artist and model developed an intimate relationship which is echoed in the work, allowing Franklin to choose poses that reflected her sitter's character, as well as raising technical challenges, such as capturing the play of light. In *Leaning Girl*, she explains, the contemplative pose is 'intentionally melancholy to draw the onlooker into the mood of the [picture], to get them to wonder what she is thinking.'

Ostensibly, these works exploring the female in the domestic interior follow on in an artistic tradition laid down by a long line of male artists. To name but a few who have consciously influenced Franklin - from Jan Van Eyck (in both clothed and nude studies), to Titian (the nude), Rembrandt and Vermeer (clothed studies), and finally, Manet and Degas (the nude). The psychological element of Franklin's nude studies also recalls Sickert (though he is not a painter she warms to and her nudes are neither as explicit nor as disturbing). But these were all men studying women. Among female artists, Franklin has been most inspired by the painter Gwen John, whose own awareness of this male tradition allowed her subtly to subvert it, with her unsettling studies of female nudes, which, like her meditative women in interiors, are observed from a uniquely female point of view. As a female artist herself, Franklin has always been acutely aware of 'a history in which women are often portrayed [solely] as objects... of sexual beauty. These superficial images do not concern me' she comments, 'as none of them succeed in portraying women as they really are. I choose the settings of my compositions in order to reflect, in an everyday context, the expression between human figures conveyed by body movement.' And this concern with the portrayal of women 'as they really are' resurfaces in all of Franklin's later female studies.

During a further year at Camberwell, studying etching as a post-graduate, Franklin experimented with technique, incorporating fabrics into the background of her work to produce a memorable etching of her sister, Leda. In *Reclining Nude* (1981), Leda's stylishly etiolated black-and-white form is faintly reminiscent of a Beardsley, but the combination of a female nude against a textile background also recalls Matisse.

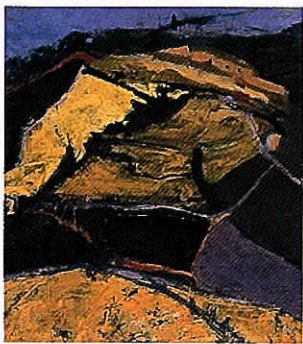


*Reclining Nude* etching 6" x 10" 15 x 25cm

### POST CAMBERWELL

In 1982 Franklin travelled to Italy to continue her etching studies at the International School of Graphics in Venice (though no etchings survive from this period). There, however, she admired the work of the old masters: Titian, Caravaggio and Giorgione, and marvelled at the subtle 'poetry' of Giovanni Bellini. Later, while staying in Umbria, she was delighted to identify the source of Piero della Francesca's backgrounds in her local surroundings, a discovery which prompted her own latent (and rarely expressed) love of landscape to surface. Two oils, with over a decade between them, reflect a





*Italian Landscape 1*  
oil on canvas  
2' x 1'6" 61 x 46cm

deepening concern with the subtleties of colour. *Italian Landscape* (1982), executed *en plein air* in a palette of rich blues and yellows recalls the earlier expressionistic *Self-Portrait* (c.1981). While the later *Italian Landscape* (c.1993), mostly worked on in the studio (with the use of photographs) is a far darker and more brooding study.

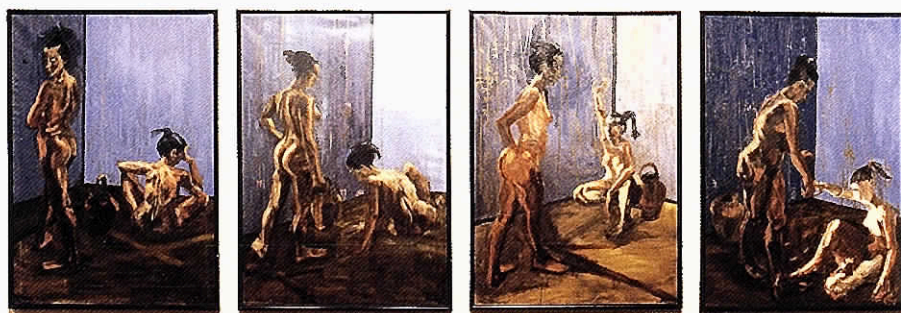


*Italian Landscape 2*  
oil on canvas  
12" x 14" 30 x 35cm

After her return to England, Franklin began to work part-time, teaching art therapy, drawing, painting and sculpture at Kingsway College, London for the next decade. In 1983, she won First Prize for Oil Painting at the Mall Galleries, London, for a study of a male nude, *Paul Reclining* (1983), and her first solo exhibition at the Peter Potter Gallery, Haddington, Edinburgh took place the following year. Several further solo shows (see chronology) have followed. In 1985, the Ben Uri Art Society (now Ben Uri Gallery) purchased a watercolour, *Banished*, an expressive double-figure study, whose anguished pose is reminiscent of Masaccio's fresco of Adam and Eve's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden* (c.1424-8) in Florence. This acquisition marked Franklin's first entry into a public collection and the following year she exhibited in a group show at the Ben Uri (together with Simon Black, Cheryl Aaron and Ernst Gottschalk).

During this period Franklin's work returned to the concentrated studies of women begun shortly after leaving Camberwell, which eventually culminated in the highly successful show, *Women Together*, at the Barbican Centre in London in 1988. (In the same year, she also became Associate Lecturer in Art at Camden Adult Education Institute, London).

At the heart of Franklin's female studies lies the *Friendship* series (c.1987-8). Here, again concentrating



*Friendship Quartet*  
oil on canvas  
each painting 5' x 4' 180 x 91cm

on posture to convey mood, she explores the dynamics of a friendship between two women and their shifting attitudes towards one another. The major work in the series is *Friendship Quartet* (1988), a narrative which,



as the title suggests, takes place across four canvases and encapsulates a private drama of alienation, confrontation, conciliation and reconciliation. A delicate hint of golden bamboo softens the coldness of the blue walls against which the women are ranged. Employing a deliberately muted palette, Franklin skilfully blends chiaroscuro by offsetting the earthy floor tones using a single still life object, a pitcher or jug, which echoes the women's sensuous curves and the golden play of light on their skin. The enclosed interior heightens the psychological drama and introduces a claustrophobic element that suggests an undercurrent of eroticism. But, during an interview with Radio 4's "Woman's Hour", Franklin explicitly rejected the sexual element, pointing instead towards the close relationships between women, which are based on a different sort of intimacy, that of familiarity, friendship and companionship.

As the series progressed, Franklin left the earlier static poses behind, finding herself drawn instead 'to figures in action, athletic poses with the figure under tension', from which emerged a series of studies of dynamic, energetic women, such as *Angela Kicking* (1985), all executed at great speed. Charcoal - one of her favourite mediums - proved 'the perfect material' for these works, 'as it moves almost as fast as [the artist] can think. It's possible to create depth in a moment, eradicate, build on it; it's almost as sensual as paint!' Franklin comments.



*Sauna*  
etching 10" x 12" 25 x 30cm

However, the focus of the *Women Together* exhibition was a large-scale (9' x 12'), highly ambitious multi-figure composition, called *Sauna* (1988), since destroyed, but the etchings survive. Like many of the female studies, it was inspired by a number of old photographs of Franklin's regular model, Lolly, who was by then no longer available to sit, and a second model, Angela. These photographs had been taken with a composition in mind, which was to be based partly upon observation and partly upon imagination.

(And this was reflected in Franklin's initial technique, using a projector to trace the composition on the wall). The sauna setting - at once both timeless with its undertones of Ingres and (again) Degas, and contemporary - allowed her to explore the unspoken language of body movement in an everyday setting where nudity was the norm.



*Pheasant*  
oil on canvas  
12" x 12" 30 x 30cm

But the restrictions of such a composition caused a reaction, and even before the completion of *Sauna*, Franklin set aside her sombre palette with relief. When her former love of Soutine was re-ignited by the gift of a dead pheasant she began a new series of boldly executed, vibrantly coloured still lifes. 'The colours were magical, so shiny and sleek I couldn't resist them' she explains. '...I worked on

whether [they] failed or succeeded. I just wanted to get some direct paint onto the canvas with as little delay as possible, so I could get near those wonderful colours!' Undoubtedly, the most successful of these is *Pheasant* (c.1988), a highly-tactile canvas, in which a gorgeously rich palette of thickly applied golden-ochre, putty-pink and blue-black purple, renders the carcass of the lifeless, suspended bird with great animation.

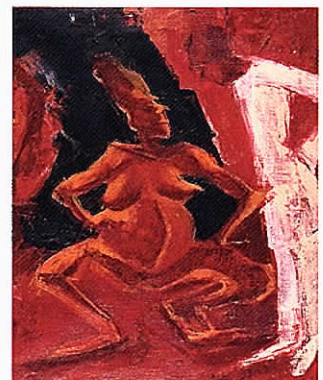
In 1989, the birth of Michèle's first child, a daughter - Belle - had a profound effect on her work, liberating her imagination and making her work less literal and more intuitive. In an attempt to create 'an emotional effect with colour and texture', she returned to figurative work but ceased working directly from a model. The result was a sequence of challenging and highly imaginative *Birth Paintings*, begun in 1992. In many ways, these works are a natural progression from her earlier studies of women. These are not the serene Madonnas of Renaissance painting, however, but real mothers: 'women', as Franklin herself puts it, 'as they really are'. They also form an autobiographical record of her own overwhelming sense during birth of being invaded and of losing control over her own body.



*Relief*  
oil 1' x 1'2" 30 x 36cm

Compositions, such as *Relief* (c.1992) and *Defying God* (c.1992), though small in size are startling in impact. The latter, in which a white-clad male figure stands over a crouching, hugely fecund, expectant mother, portrays Franklin's own struggle against hospital intervention, specifically her battle

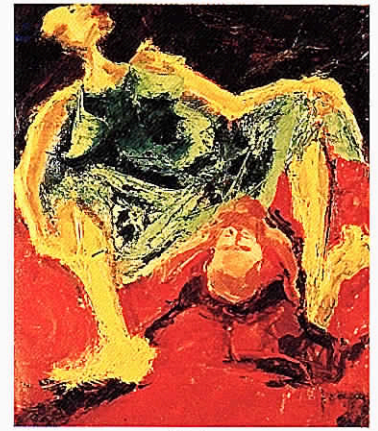
with the male doctors who assumed a God-like role in opposition to her own clearly expressed wish to undergo a natural birth. With their vivid, often violent combinations of colour, heavily applied and thickly worked with a knife, these visceral compositions explore the painful experience of



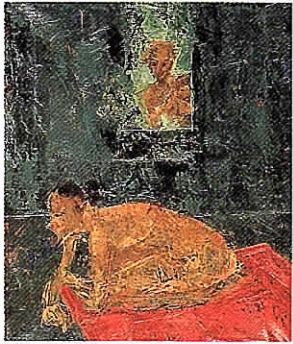
*Defying God*  
oil 1'10" x 1'4" 56 x 41cm



giving birth - a side Franklin believes is largely (and deliberately) overlooked by society. The jagged, even jarring, poses of the mother, whose face and limbs are painfully convulsed, evoke a potent physical presence. *Birth* (1992), a larger canvas, is a particularly powerful work, in which the mother's head is thrown painfully back in an agonising scream - reminiscent of the anguished mother in Picasso's *Guernica* or one of Bacon's screaming heads - her parted legs disclose a sea of blood, which surrounds the baby's emerging head.



*Birth*  
oil on canvas 3' x 2' 91 x 61cm



*Dreamchild*  
oil on canvas  
1'10" x 1'6" 55 x 45cm

These works, together with further figure compositions, portraits of her children (two sons, Dashiell and Gabriel, followed Belle in 1992 and 1995), still lives and landscapes formed the basis of Franklin's solo exhibition at Sue Rankin Gallery in 1992. They also led on to a further imaginative series of mother and child paintings, based on the impact of motherhood, and working from a photograph of Lolly, whose own childlessness lent a special meaning to the works. *Dreamchild* (c.1995), an imaginative, figurative composition, in which a pensive, crouching Lolly conjures up a shadowy vision of her child, who appears above her as if in a dream, is the central painting in this sequence and is of great personal significance to Franklin.



*Woman*  
charcoal  
18" x 12" 46 x 30cm

In 1996, a request from the Art supermarket to produce a series of 30 female nudes resulted in a project known as *Interlude of women*. All produced at speed (and again inspired by photographs of Lolly), these skilful, naturalistic works, typified by the charcoal *Woman* (1996-7) and *Lolly*, encapsulate Franklin's rapid drawing technique and have proved highly popular.



*Lolly*  
charcoal  
18" x 12" 46 x 30cm

After such an exhaustive study of the female, Franklin turned to the male model for a series of charcoal figure drawings, *Anguished Man* and *Turning Man* (1996), where, as with the earlier female studies, she employed the same model in a variety of expressive poses, heavily outlined in thick, black lines.



*Anguished Man*  
charcoal 28" x 20" 71 x 51cm



*Turning Man*  
charcoal 28" x 20" 71 x 51cm

These turned out to be preparatory works for her powerful and controversial series of works on paper, exploring the Holocaust and directly inspired by Claude Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*. Franklin worked on the series for almost a decade before exhibiting it at the Sternberg Centre for Judaism in London in 1999. 'I always had a horrific idea of the Holocaust with really extreme images,' she recalls ('Painting in the Pain', *London Jewish News*, 15 October 1999). 'In *Shoah*, the notion of human nature came through, particularly in [Lanzmann's] interviews... There was no remorse. I realised how self-interested people are, which gave me the idea for the exhibition: *Where Was the Whole World?*'

Franklin's choice of medium also reflects this title, and her charcoals, as art-historian Julia Wiener has noted, have a hazy quality, which suggest 'the fact that people's awareness of the atrocities committed against the Jews by the Nazis is becoming less clear as time goes by' ("Do Disturb", *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 Nov 1999). These largely figurative works - a mixture of charcoal drawings and etchings - are again all executed in monochrome. 'My works are an expression of my sorrow, terror and anger of what people are capable of,' Franklin explains; adamant that she wants people to think about what she is showing them.



*Child*  
etching 7" x 10" 18 x 25cm

Working both from live models and from photographs (even eventually photographing from video), Franklin developed a technique that allowed her to capture real people and poses in the flickering, transient style appropriate to her subject. Although the figures are anonymous, Franklin's two eldest children: Belle and Dashiell often modelled (separately). The child alone is an integral image in the series and a

haunting image of Belle standing alone and unprotected recurs throughout. One of the most poignant is the etching *Child* (1998), in which her blackened, shadowy form stands out against the fractured, discordant and uneven surfaces of the floor beneath and the walls behind her. She is mysterious, unknowable, yet defenceless, exposed. In the earlier studies of women, their isolation was personal; here it seems to evoke the isolation of a persecuted people.

Early on, Franklin's imagery is powerfully literal: in *Light at the End of the Tunnel* (1998) - a deeply ironic title - a group of naked, skeletal figures stands framed in the archway of a door, a child on the right loosely joined to the group



*Light at the End of the Tunnel*  
etching 10" x 4" 25 x 10cm



by an outstretched hand, while on the left a hunched, sorrowful figure crouches. The black-and-white tiles in front of them suggest this is a shower room. In the foreground stands a Nazi officer, casting his shadow over the whole, a swastika in heightened white blazes out from his lapel with blinding intensity.



*Child Alone*  
etching  
18" x 22" 46 x 56cm

As the series continues, the images are no less harrowing, but their meaning is less obvious. There are echoes of the nightmare visions of Goya, Blake and Fuseli. In *Child Alone* (1998) faces press grimly through bars and as the perspective narrows to a point, a lone figure - Belle? - presides

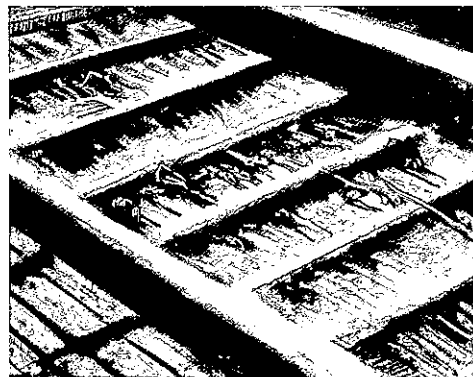
over a group of people who are gathered together - Labouring? Dying? Beseeching? It is not clear. But there are also carefully rendered drawings, such as that of an armed and uniformed guard escorting a naked woman by her elbow - *Woman and Gestapo*.



*Woman and Gestapo*  
charcoal  
1'6" x 24" 46 x 61cm



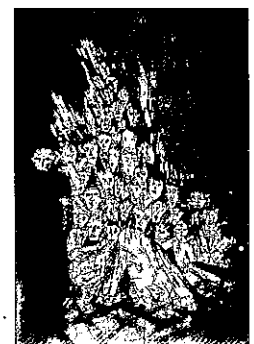
*Falling: The Pit*  
charcoal  
31" x 22" 80 x 55cm



*Railway Memories*  
charcoal  
12" x 16" 31 x 40cm

Throughout the series people are vulnerable, wispy, insubstantial, often captured halfway on their journey between life and death. In the charcoal *Falling: the Pit* (1998), a naked woman, who has been pushed from the balcony hangs suspended mid-air, literally in the act of falling;

while shadowy faces, complicit in her death, watch her from the balcony as she makes her descent. In another, *Railway Memories* (1999), the figures of the dead and dying are stretched beneath the railway sleepers. The potent symbol of the railway also recurs. In *Holocaust Fire* (1999), a group of victims press together, united in their anguish, their mouths opened together in a scream of horror as they see the bodies of their comrades going up in smoke beside them; in front of them the railway advances relentlessly towards the viewer.



*Holocaust Fire*  
etching  
10" x 6" 25 x 15cm



*Nightmare*  
charcoal  
17" x 24" 43 x 61cm

Finally, in *Nightmare* (1999), an unquiet sleeper lies entombed in bed like a sarcophagus, while the lines in front again recall the nightmare journey of the persecuted to their final destinations. In front, a naked woman floats shadowy, unfocused, while vague insubstantial shapes suggest the figures of the falling in a medieval fresco of 'heaven and hell'. But here, of course, there is only Hell. The power of the Holocaust

series is such that these images linger in the memory long after we have looked away; the references to violence, intolerance, racism and destruction, of man's inhumanity to man, have perhaps a particular resonance for our own times.

### RECENT WORK

With Franklin nothing is wasted. The same models are used extensively and often one composition directly inspires another, so that even as the fire-based Holocaust series drew to a close, she found herself drawn to another element: water. Two transitional compositions (both 2000) relate to this planned future work on people and the elements. In both the tone remains distinctly uneasy.

The first, a charcoal drawing entitled *Out of the Darkness* (1999), manages to suggest simultaneously both the opposing elements of fire and water. A female model (previously used in the Holocaust series) is borne up by a huge wave, while at its base curls of foam shoot up into ghost-like hands that seem to grab at her. In the second (untitled), a multi-figure drawing, using models from both the Holocaust series and from as far back as the early *Sauna* compositions, seems to denote anguish; once again, people



*Out of the Darkness*  
charcoal 2'3" x 1'10" 75 x 55cm

are shown 'overpowered or somehow entwined' (as Franklin describes it) by the elements. She even jokes that, like the artist J M W Turner, who

famously had himself lashed to the mast of a ship during a raging storm to fully experience the power of the elements in order to reproduce them in his masterful study *Snow Storm: Steam-boat off a Harbour's Mouth*, she may need to undergo a similar experience in order to summon up 'the full evocation of feeling' that she needs.



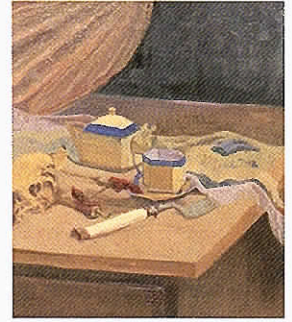
*Multi-Figure Composition*  
charcoal 24" x 18" 61 x 46cm





*Still-Life with Lemon*  
oil on canvas  
25" x 17" 64 x 33cm

Meanwhile, as ideas for the water series continue to form, Franklin has been at work on still lifes, such as the beautiful and precisely observed *Still Life with Lemon* (2004) and *Still Life with Teapot* (2004). Her recent portraiture has concentrated on members of her family. Among the many fine portraits of Dashiell, in both oil and charcoal, two oils *Dashiell, aged 11* (2004) and *Portrait of Dashiell, aged 12, with "Kerang" Poster* (2005), stand out. The former is both spare and powerful; the latter, arresting and witty. Both are highly reminiscent of Mark Gertler's family portraits from around 1913. A charcoal head and shoulders of Gabriel (2005) shows equal character.



*Still-Life with Teapot*  
oil on canvas  
18" x 15" 45 x 38cm



*Dashiell I*  
charcoal  
29½" x 21" 75 x 53cm



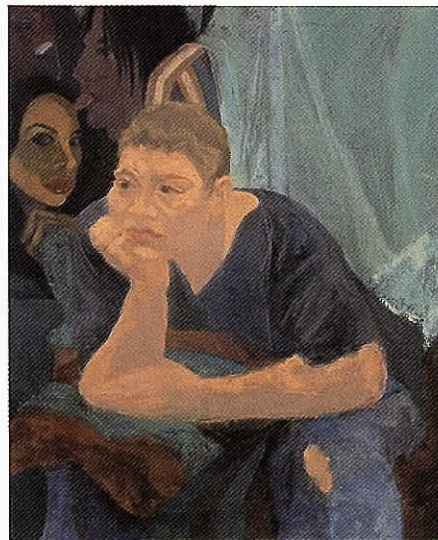
*Dashiell, aged 11*  
oil on canvas  
20" x 16" 51 x 41cm



*Portrait of Gabriel*  
charcoal  
29" x 20½" 74 x 52cm



*Dashiell II*  
charcoal  
36" x 29" 91 x 74cm



*Dashiell, aged 12*  
oil on canvas  
31" x 24" 79 x 61cm





*Portrait of My Mother*  
oil on canvas 24" x 24" 61 x 61cm

It is fitting to end with two portraits of her mother, both begun in 1980, then reworked and finished in 2005, as they reveal not only the continuity of Franklin's work but the full development of her achievement as a painter, from aspiring young student to fully-mature artist. In *Portrait of Beverly Franklin* (2005), the artist's mother is shown full-figure, wearing a canary-yellow dress and headscarf, as she sits at a dressing table, gazing downwards. Her profile

is reflected in the standing mirror and the dominant blue-yellow palette is repeated in the colours of the Vuillard landscape that hangs on the wall behind her. The mood is introspective, without being melancholy. *Portrait of My Mother* (2005) portrays only the head and upper torso, but the model (this time reading) wears similarly coloured canary-yellow clothing. The startling impact of the vibrant yellow is again reinforced by the use of the same shade on the wall behind her; just as her own image is echoed by her profile in the mirror, inviting a similar contemplation on the part of the viewer.



*Portrait of Beverly Franklin*  
(the Artist's mother)  
oil on canvas 48" x 30" 131 x 76cm

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Not many artists have the courage and conviction to rework their early compositions some quarter of a century after their original conception. Still fewer are able to carry out this task with such conviction. It is a measure not only of the distance Franklin has travelled, but an intimation of the quality of work still to come.

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Sarah MacDougall is an art historian, writer and freelance curator. Her first book, a biography of artist Mark Gertler, was published by John Murray in 2002. Recently, she has co-curated a series of exhibitions on the 'Whitechapel Boys' for the Ben Uri Gallery/London Jewish Museum of Art, including *Mark Gertler: A New Perspective* (2002), *Rediscovering Wolmark: a pioneer of British modernism* (2004) and *Embracing the Exotic: Jacob Epstein & Dora Gordine*, which opens in January 2006.