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Portrait of Bacon-Freud Back Up for Auction

LONDON — The e-mail blast was sent late last month. “An exciting new discovery at Christie’s,” read a statement from Francis Outred, the head of the postwar and contemporary art department in Europe for Christie’s. Mr. Outred was describing a 1964 painting by Francis Bacon, “Study for Self-Portrait,” which he said was the only full-length self-portrait to combine Bacon’s face with the body of his friend the painter Lucian Freud.

The canvas’s entry in the catalog for the Wednesday sale here goes on for 10 pages and includes 20 illustrations. It says the painting is the “property of a private New York collector.” A symbol next to the lot number indicates that Christie’s has a financial interest in “Study for Self-Portrait,” but the details are unclear.

What Christie’s has not disclosed in the provenance is that the painting was up for sale at Christie’s in New York in November 2008, when it did not draw a single bid. The work was also the subject of a lawsuit, settled last July, filed in March 2009 in the United States District Court in Manhattan by a family trust led by the Connecticut collector George A. Weiss. The trust said that Christie’s had reneged on a \$40 million guarantee, which is an undisclosed sum promised the seller regardless of a sale’s outcome.

That guarantee had been offered in July 2008, before the markets plummeted. But by September, after Christie’s had possession of the painting, it said it would no longer honor the guarantee because of the uncertain economy.

The painting was put up for auction anyway, and when it didn’t sell, Mr. Weiss’s family trust sued Christie’s for the \$40 million it says it was promised. In next week’s sale catalog the estimate simply says, “on request,” although Christie’s experts are telling clients they believe it should sell for around £20 million, or about \$31.3 million.

Mr. Weiss did not return phone calls seeking comment. Ivor Braka, a London dealer who is Mr. Weiss’s agent, said he was “unable to comment” on the settlement of the lawsuit.

In a statement Christie’s said it



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“Study for Self-Portrait,” up for auction on Wednesday.

“is delighted to be offering this important work for sale next week in London following an amicable agreement with the client in 2011.”

The portrait depicts Bacon perched on a bed, body twisted from head to toe. It was only this year that Christie’s experts determined that the body was based on a photograph of Freud.

Christie’s is hoping to capitalize on the record prices paid for Bacon works in recent seasons. A 1976 triptych went for \$86.3 million in May 2008 at Sotheby’s in New York, and a 1975 self-portrait brought \$34.4 million at Christie’s in London in June 2008. But both sales occurred before the markets slumped, and some dealers believe that Christie’s is offering the painting too soon after its last auction appearance.

While nobody will reveal the details of Christie’s settlement with Mr. Weiss’s family trust — citing confidentiality agreements — some experts with knowledge of the lawsuit said they believe that Christie’s ended up giving the trust a figure close to the \$40 million it was after. If that is true, then Christie’s, not Mr. Weiss, owns the painting, regardless of

the catalog’s designation.

Again, Christie’s declined to comment.

Ono’s ‘Light’

Outside the entrance to the Serpentine Gallery in Kensington Gardens here there are six dogwood trees with paper messages dangling from their branches in many languages. “Less fear and greed,” one reads; “Peace and Love,” another. The messages are at the invitation of Yoko Ono, who at nearly 80 is the subject of “Yoko Ono: To the Light,” which opened on Tuesday.

Her first show here in more than a decade, it includes videos like “Fly” and “Amaze” (1971/2012). “Fly,” made with John Lennon, traces a fly as it travels across a naked woman’s body. “Amaze” is a labyrinth of a clear plastic and aluminum.

Ms. Ono’s presence will reach beyond the confines of Kensington Gardens. From Thursday through Sept. 9 her video “Imagine Peace” will be translated into 24 languages on 25 video screens throughout Britain, including those in Victoria Park and Hyde Park and on the Underground at

Canary Wharf in London. Lennon’s 1971 song “Imagine” accompanies the video.

The “Imagine Peace” videos were organized by the Art Production Fund, based in New York. Like the exhibition at the Serpentine the videos are part of the London 2012 Festival, in anticipation of the Olympics.

Munch, but No ‘Scream’

When people think of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, they think of “The Scream,” his celebrated depiction of angst and existential dread that has been endlessly reproduced, and made even more famous when a version of it sold for nearly \$120 million at Sotheby’s in New York last month, becoming the most expensive work of art ever sold at auction.

But there is a whole other side to Munch that Nicholas Cullinan, curator of international Modern art at the Tate Modern, has been exploring with colleagues from the Pompidou Center in Paris and the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt. Their findings are chronicled in the exhibition “Edvard Munch: The Modern Eye,” which opens at the Tate Modern here on Thursday.

That the exhibition does not include one image of “The Scream” is deliberate, Mr. Cullinan said. All but the one that sold at Sotheby’s are in Norwegian museums and do not travel. “It’s kind of like a Norwegian Mona Lisa, and there was no Mona Lisa in the Leonardo show,” Mr. Cullinan said, referring to the blockbuster exhibition at the National Gallery in London that closed in February. “We are looking at Munch’s career as a whole, examining the artist’s paintings and drawings made in the first half of the 20th century and his interest in the rise of photography, film and innovations in theater.”

While Munch is seen mostly as a 19th-century painter, he produced much of his groundbreaking work in the early years of the 20th century. The show will include some 160 works.

“Many people don’t realize that Munch died in 1944, the same year as Kandinsky and Mondrian, and those are his peers,” Mr. Cullinan said. “It’s a slightly anachronistic idea that his work is confined to the late 19th century.”