



Pick of the week

What an admirable practice it is of the National Gallery to give contemporary artists out-of-hours access to the collections. Like his friend Lucian Freud, Leon Kossoff (1926–2019) made good use of it. At the age of 85, he wrote to say that he felt he no longer needed to come in to draw from the paintings: 'My student days are finally over.' A week later, he was back: 'I'm sorry, I was wrong. There is still more to learn.' His association with the gallery went much further back than that. He recalled his first visit, aged 10, when he was transfixed by Rembrandt's *Woman Bathing in a Stream* and he returned regularly as a student. As he also said: 'The art of the past is a torment and a spur to invention.' In 2007, the gallery recognised this with the major exhibition 'Leon Kossoff: Drawing from Painting'. One of the curators of that show was Ann Dowker, a fellow painter, draughtsman and printmaker, with whom he collaborated during the 1980s and 1990s in a search for new ways of working with print. This involved many variations on an image and states, ultimately meaning that, instead of editions of one image, they produced unique impressions. A fascinating show of these prints and proofs from the 1990s, together with working drawings, now opens at the Art Space Gallery, Islington, London N1 (February 27–April 25; www.artspacegallery.co.uk). Kossoff's starting points are mostly works by Poussin, but Rembrandt and Constable are also featured.



From Poussin: *Bacchanal before a Herm* as an etching (left) and in charcoal (right)