

CONDITIONS OF USE FOR THIS PDF

The images contained within this PDF may be used for private study, scholarship, and research only. They may not be published in print, posted on the internet, or exhibited. They may not be donated, sold, or otherwise transferred to another individual or repository without the written permission of The Museum of Modern Art Archives.

When publication is intended, publication-quality images must be obtained from SCALA Group, the Museum's agent for licensing and distribution of images to outside publishers and researchers.

If you wish to quote any of this material in a publication, an application for permission to publish must be submitted to the MoMA Archives. This stipulation also applies to dissertations and theses. All references to materials should cite the archival collection and folder, and acknowledge "The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York."

Whether publishing an image or quoting text, you are responsible for obtaining any consents or permissions which may be necessary in connection with any use of the archival materials, including, without limitation, any necessary authorizations from the copyright holder thereof or from any individual depicted therein.

In requesting and accepting this reproduction, you are agreeing to indemnify and hold harmless The Museum of Modern Art, its agents and employees against all claims, demands, costs and expenses incurred by copyright infringement or any other legal or regulatory cause of action arising from the use of this material.

NOTICE: WARNING CONCERNING COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excess of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

XXXX
Bond copy
final &
original

Soby - Bacon

Among European painters risen to international fame since World War II is the Englishman, Francis Bacon. Considering Bacon's present-day eminence, it is surprising that many details of his life and career remain obscure. In part this is because he is himself almost totally indifferent to autobiographical information. As an example of this attitude, which is felt profoundly, he was once asked whether he was descended from the great Elizabethan writer whose name he shares. He replied that he had no idea whatever nor any curiosity about finding out. For a very long time it has even been difficult to discover his exact birth-date, which has varied from one biographical account to the next and, according to a close friend, on at least one occasion was invented by the artist himself as suggesting a fortuitous numerical sequence in playing roulette. We know at last, thanks to the research of Sir John Rothenstein and Ronald Alley in preparing their admirable catalog of the recent Bacon retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, that Bacon was born in Dublin at 63 Ir. Baggot Street on October 28, 1909, the son of Edward Anthony Mortimer Bacon and Christina Winifred Firth Bacon, both parents being English rather than Irish.*

It is typical of Bacon that combinations of numbers in roulette should have prompted him to invent his own date of birth. His passion for gambling is well known to his intimates. On many occasions, after selling a canvas or two, he has set off for Monte Carlo to try out a self-invented and presumably fallible system for breaking the bank. This passion plays an important part in his philosophy as an artist, as he confessed when he wrote of his colleague, the late Matthew Smith, "I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the ^{stuff} ~~bits~~ down." (bibl. 00) He prefers

* This precise information was obtained by the Tate Gallery from the Official Registrar in Dublin.

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ^{stagnant} ~~fluid~~ in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 2 -

to paint very rapidly with a large brush -- "a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that ironmongers stock," to use Robert Melville's words. (bibl. 00)

generally
Bacon/~~often, though far from invariably~~ chooses big canvases, as if he were playing for big stakes. Moreover, he is frighteningly quick to accept miscalculation and failure in his gambler's choice as a painter. No one really knows how many pictures he has ^s destroyed after completing them ~~and becoming dissatisfied~~. The number is great, and once more Robert Melville's words are pertinent: "Francis Bacon has a horror of giving proofs of his powers. He paints at such phenomenal speed that, if the bulk of his work had been preserved, he would almost certainly have more large pictures to his name than any other living artist." (bibl. 00)

We shall return later to a discussion of why Bacon's technique is so impulsive and why rapidity of execution is an integral accompaniment to his creative vision, as though he feels obliged to make his decisions before hearing an invisible and implacable croupier cry "rien va plus!" For now it should be mentioned that Bacon's destructive impatience with the slightest flaw or lessening of conviction in his work is refreshing in an era when many artists, good and bad, preserve and market the merest scraps from their studios. Sometimes, however, according to London friends, Bacon has destroyed pictures whose shortcomings were almost desperate apparent to no one but himself. Even so, one cannot but admire the severity of his ~~conscience~~ self-criticism.

Though born in Dublin, Bacon came from English stock, as already noted. His father was a trainer of race horses, who for professional reasons preferred Ireland to his native England. The family was moderately prosperous, and Bacon's upbringing seems to have been conventional except for the important fact that he was not for long forced by his parents to have the usual supervised education. In his own words, possibly exaggerated, "I had no upbringing at all, and I used

... later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ~~ideas~~ ^{ideas} in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 3 -

simply to ~~work~~ on my father's farm near Dublin. I read almost nothing as a child -- as for pictures, I was hardly aware that they existed." (bibl. 00) He did, however, travel often with his father to England, and in his late 'teens left home for good and made his way to France and Germany, settling for a while in Berlin, whose sinister and debauched postwar atmosphere very likely appealed to him. In the late 1920s he moved to London and kept alive by designing rugs and furniture and acting as an interior decorator of considerable talent (page 00).

Bacon had no formal training as a painter, and he did not aspire to become a professional artist until he was nearly thirty. In reply to the writer's question as to what had decided him to paint, he declared that he had no idea whatever. He added, typically, that he profoundly wished he had never started! (bibl. 00) During the later 1920s he began to execute some relatively abstract works of which perhaps the most ambitious is a tall screen in three sections (page 00). There is little indication in this or any other very early work of the kind of painter he was to become. These images, insofar as one can judge from reproductions, seem mild and purposefully decorative; they show some influence from older artists such as Edward Wadsworth in England and Lurçat in France. Obviously Bacon himself thought them derivative, since so far as is known none survive.⁵⁷

If Bacon's progress as an artist was at first uncertain and halting, explosive forces of temperament must have been making themselves felt. In 1932, for example, he painted The Crucifixion (a picture better known as Golgotha, though Bacon apparently dislikes the latter title because of its dramatic overtones). (page 00). This is already a prophetic and compelling image, arbitrary in color in that the right side of the figure from leg to head is painted in blood red, while the left side is defined by gray-white tones. The picture reflects Bacon's lasting fascination with the theme of the Crucifixion as developed by artists as divergent in period and style as Cimabue and Grünewald. It seems probable, however,

... and carries the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ~~ideas~~ ^{ideas} in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 4 -

that at this early date it was the former's revolutionary concept of this august subject which influenced Bacon more than that of the great German master, whose Isenheim altarpiece had only recently been re-projected into fame by Picasso's variations on it.

But which Crucifixion by Cimabue did Bacon admire most? Assuming that the thirteenth-century master's almost illegible frescoes of the Calvary at Assisi would not have held his attention, the choice probably narrows down to the famous Crucifixion in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di S. Domenico at Arezzo and the immense and more realistic version in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di Sta. Croce in Florence (page 00). If the striated ribs of the Arezzo picture are repeated in Bacon's painting, it nevertheless seems more plausible to think that the young British artist would have had in hand a photograph of the Cimabue at Florence. He had not, so far as the writer knows, yet been in Italy and seen the Cimabue originals. He would not, one assumes, have been much concerned with the intricate problem of whether a given work is by Cimabue himself or by a skilled disciple.

Around 1936 Bacon continued his search for authentic personality as a painter in a curious picture which portrays a monstrous seated figure accompanied by the dog which has recurred in his art at intervals, as we shall see. But it was not until 1945 that the theme of the Crucifixion once more gave Bacon the creative impetus he needed. At that time Graham Sutherland was making the preparatory studies for the large Crucifixion he had been commissioned to paint for the Church of St. Matthew in Northampton, England. There can be no doubt that Sutherland's example acted as a catharsis on his younger colleague. Indeed, Bacon himself confirmed this fact when in a recent interview he said that "all his life he had been looking for some help to find a theoretical background for his painting." He added: "Once in his life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it." (bibl. 00)

... and carries the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ^{Allegories} slides in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 5 -

Sutherland's influence was important, but it must quickly be said that Bacon's paintings of figures at the foot of the Cross are infinitely more distraught and violent than those of his elder. Sutherland's interest tended to focus on such details from nature ^(or Grunewald) as the Crown of Thorns, while Bacon's centered on images of human bestiality and deformation. The anguished spirit of the latter's "studies" for the Crucifixion has been eloquently described by Stephen Spender: "These appalling dehumanized faces, which epitomize cruelty and mockery, are of the crucifiers rather than the crucified. And this remains true of his [Bacon's] work until now. His figures are of those who participate in the crucifixion of humanity which also includes themselves. If they are not always the people who actually hammer in the nails they are those among the crowd which shares in the guilt of cruelty to the qualities which are -- or were -- beneficently human, and which here seem to have been banished forever." (bibl. 00)

It seems possible that during the mid-1940s Bacon was experiencing belatedly the effect in England of the International Surrealist Exhibition, held at London's New Burlington Galleries in the summer of 1936. Specifically, as several critics have pointed out, there is some affinity between Bacon's malformed figures for the Crucifixion and the ferocious imagery of a late recruit to the surrealist movement, Matta Echaurren. But Bacon's figures of 1945 announce the emergence of a thoroughly personal talent, as in the picture here reproduced (page 00). The scream now takes its place as a recurrent accent in Bacon's lugubrious, piercing iconography, as though at intervals he has continued to be haunted by the ^{agonized,} shrieking ~~anguished,~~ Armored Cruiser ~~founder~~ nurse in S. M. Eisenstein's great film of 1925, The Battleship Potemkin. (page 00).

Bacon's subject matter, though never fixed or predictable, began to assume its basic psychological identity in 1946, the year in which he exhibited a group of his studies for the Crucifixion at the Lefevre Gallery in London. His was and remains an iconography primarily concerned with the torments and hysteria of

... and carries the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ^{studies} ~~studies~~ in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 6 -

contemporary existence. Its aim has been well stated by the artist himself: "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them like a snail, leaving a trail of human presence and memory traces of past events, as the snail leaves its slime." (bibl. 00) But what gives his art its extraordinary force is that it is expressed in seductive rather than satirical terms. His technical handling is so deft and magic that he seems to caress rather than belabor his monstrous subject matter. In Sam Hunter's words, "Bacon's thoroughly modern horrors are connected still with a neo-Edwardian sense of luxury; and his satanism, despite an up-to-date clinical note, can suggest the Yellow Book. If Aubrey Beardsley's generation were alive and given the benefits of a modern education, it would no doubt be painting in the style of Francis Bacon." (bibl. 90) And Robert Melville has reinforced the point of the voluptuousness of Bacon's art: "Never has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom: yet it occurs in the atmosphere of a concentration camp." (bibl. 00)

In 1945 and 1946 Bacon created two unforgettable paintings: Figure in a Landscape and the major work known simply as Painting (pages 00, 00). It is astonishing to learn from the Tate Gallery's fine catalog of the recent Bacon exhibition that the first of these two pictures was painted from a snapshot of the artist's friend Eric Hall dozing in a chair in Hyde Park. But what an amazingly imaginative transcription of so commonplace a scene! The figure is seated outdoors before a railing on which a machine gun is mounted; his head is completely enshrouded by his upturned coat; the mood of the picture is distinctly ominous and certainly not at all suggestive of a friend asleep in a public park.

In Painting the man has moved indoors to what would seem to be one of the butcher shops which Bacon is said to have visited often in youth. Behind him hangs a huge carcass, its arms or legs outstrung as if it were crucified. The man's

... and carries the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem as though the artist were projecting still ^{studies} slides in rapid success

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 8 -

(page 00). But for the most part earlier artists had suggested movement by such devices as flared drapery, as in the Victory of Samothrace, or they had frozen a running figure in so untenable a posture that the observer senses this posture must instantly be broken, as in Bruegel's The Faithless Shepherd (page 00).

It is true, of course, that Bacon's elders like Marcel Duchamp and the Italian Futurists had also sought a pictorial solution to the problem of representing figures and objects in motion. But their forms in transit were separately and quite well defined, whereas Bacon's are often suggested through the image, as if the figure moved during a time a deliberate blurring of ~~focus, as though he were an expert photographer whose camera had been jarred unexpectedly while a picture was being taken.~~ exposure. The difference between Bacon's approach and that of the Futurists is apparent if we compare his Dog and Man with Balla's celebrated Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash, which Bacon had almost certainly seen when it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1952 (pages 00, 00).

By 1949 -- the year of his first one-man exhibition at the Hanover Gallery -- Bacon's art had assumed its own special character both in technique and iconography, and the influence of Sutherland had all but disappeared. In that year he painted Head VI (page 00), the first of an extensive series of pictures inspired by Velasquez' famous Portrait of Pope Innocent X in the Palazzo Doria at Rome. It is interesting to note that Bacon has never seen the Spanish master's famous portrait because, as he told Sir John Rothenstein, "When I was in Rome I felt reluctant to look at it." (bibl. 00) But working from a reproduction he transcribed the Velasquez into a fascinatingly original image.

... by the Hitlerian tassal, already mentioned, his mouth

The Pope's head is bisected by the Hitlerian tassal, already mentioned, his mouth is agape in a scream like that of the nurse in Potemkin or ^{in one of} ~~the~~ Goebbels' more frenzied exaltations (page xx) or ~~the~~ the figure in Munch's great image, The Shriek (page xx). His Holiness is shown within a glass case which isolates him from the outer world and muffles the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ~~images~~ ^{images} in rapid succession

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 9 -

Whatever its psychological implications, Head VI announces with full vigor an abiding obsession of the artist: the enclosures within which animals and humans alike live out their lives. When the Pope Innocent series reaches one of several high points of authority in the Study after Velasquez (page 00), its resplendent but horrified central figure has emerged from its glass case only to be imprisoned again by curtains and railings, even by the spiky ornaments of the Papal chair. Throughout a number of Bacon's pictures in the Pope series there persists an odd physical illusion of the figure being elevated above the ground. In this connection it should be noted, as Sam Hunter was the first to observe, that among the many press photographs in Bacon's studio is one of Pope Pius XII borne aloft on a sedia gestatoria. (bibl. 00) At least two of the three paintings from the Pope series which Bacon completed in 1951 are closer in pose and spirit to this modern snapshot than to Velasquez' famous portrait in the Palazzo Doria.

In the final analysis Bacon's paintings, whatever their theme, suggest the pangs of ex-communication in its literal rather than sacerdotal sense. His apes are usually caged, his dogs slink helpless and cringing from their broken leashes, his humans are often segregated within small chambers or otherwise shielded from the ignominies of contemporary civilization. And yet in his paintings an inexplicable sense of opulence prevails, and David Sylvester is right in saying that Bacon "prefers settings which are luxurious and simple: lush velvet curtains and a gilded armchair: like prison-cells for highborn traitors." (bibl. 00)

To return to the Pope series for a moment, it must be noted that a morbid ^{anti-clericalism} ~~anti-Christianity~~ has sometimes been read into these works. Bacon's own explanation of his interest in painting papal figures is simpler and more convincing.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 10 -

In Time Magazine for October 19, 1953, he was quoted as saying: "Really I just wanted an excuse to use those colors, and you can't give ordinary clothes that purple color without getting into a false fauve manner." A year earlier (December 12, 1952) the same magazine's press cable from London to New York quoted him as saying that for him art is "a method of opening up areas of feeling rather than merely an illustration of an object." Bacon added significantly: "Real imagination is technical imagination. It is in the ways you think up to bring an event to life again. It is in the search for technique to trap the object at a given moment. Then the technique and the object become inseparable. The object is the technique and the technique is the object. Art lies in the continual struggle to come near to the sensory side of objects." And surely it must be conceded that in Bacon's paraphrases of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, the voluptuous impact of his imagery is at least as strong as its psychological implications.

Bacon's predilections in esthetic matters are an illuminating reflection of his purposes as a painter. In literature he reveres above all the books of Nietzsche and, almost as much, T.S. Eliot's Wasteland and other poems; in youth he had liked the writings of the Irishman, W. B. Stanford, though never with the passion he has reserved for Nietzsche. Among painters he particularly admires are: El Greco, Rembrandt, Velasquez and Goya. He is said to have been fascinated by Michelangelo's drawings of wrestling figures, yet oddly enough his rather perverse Two Figures of 1953 is quite directly based on a Muybridge photograph of two wrestlers rather than on the Renaissance master's sketches. An early enthusiasm for Zurbaran ^{has had a lasting, perhaps mounting, effect on Bacon's art} ~~seems to have subsided.~~

Among modern painters Bacon worships van Gogh's headlong intensity and, at the opposite end of the emotional scale, the oil sketches of Seurat, especially those for La Grande Jatte. He has spoken to friends with awe of the magic brushwork of the late Monets. Among twentieth century artists he likes the early Matisse; he likes Picasso, Bonnard and Soutine regardless of period. Rather inexplicably

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 11 -

he once remarked to David Sylvester that all modern painting began with the hallucinatory depiction of bananas in certain "metaphysical" pictures by Giorgio de Chirico, surrealist art's main progenitor.

What is perhaps more revelatory is that Bacon has been more interested in specific paintings than in the painters who created them. In a verbal reply to a questionnaire sent him in January 1960, by the writer, he said: "Certain painters have created images which have had an hypnotic effect on me." (bibl. 00) He cited as examples Cimabue's Crucifixion, already mentioned, works by Velasquez and Rubens and the late self-portraits of Rembrandt. One knows from his own confession that he has never seen the original of Velasquez' Portrait of Innocent X. Bacon, like so many contemporary artists, has often been inspired by photographs of paintings rather than by the paintings themselves. In our time photographs of works of art have acted as Typhoid Marys of stylistic contagion, as engravings did in earlier centuries. El Greco's View of Toledo is the only version of that painting known to exist. It hangs in New York's Metropolitan Museum, and Bacon has never been to America, though he speaks of the picture as one of his particular favorites. Similarly, while Bacon speaks with enthusiasm of Daumier's Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, one version of which he has probably seen in the Courtauld Institute (page 00), he can have known the Boston Museum's Man on a Rope (page 00) only through reproductions. Yet the latter picture, with its figure's gaping mouth and wry contours, is extremely close in conception to some images by Bacon himself. ~~One wonders, too, whether he has ever seen a famous later-day image - Munch's The Shriek.~~

It was during the 1950s that Bacon's fame began to assume international proportions. In 1953 he had a one-man exhibition at Durlacher Brothers in New York; in 1954 he was represented by twelve paintings in the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale; in 1957 even Paris, traditionally hesitant about importing Anglo-Saxon contemporary art, gave him a show at the Galerie Rive Gauche. Bacon was

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 12 -

becoming a world figure in painting. The result for a man of his obsessed character was perhaps inevitable: he painted numerous larger pictures; he destroyed many more than were ever exhibited.

Of the pictures of the early 1950s which survive, two are of more than usual interest. These are the Dog of 1952 and the Study of a Baboon of the following year (pages 00, 00). The Dog, with its buckling legs and lolling tongue, is very closely based on one of Muybridge's photographs of a mastiff in motion (page 00). The animal staggers across a labyrinth of rectangles against a background derived from a photograph of one of the Nazi Party's rallies at Nuremberg, according to the ~~Tate Gallery's Bacon catalogue~~ (bibl. 00) ^{Ronald Alley}. The dog is escaped and haggard; it seems ready to collapse from exhaustion or rickets. Yet the observer is spell-bound by the technical brilliance of the animal's color and texture, as one is spell-bound by the whites, deep as ermine but flimsy as gauze, in El Greco's treatment of the right foreground figure in The Burial of Count Orgaz. Not many artists in recent times have been able to rediscover the alchemy of pigment which distinguished El Greco and, after him, Velasquez, Goya and Picasso. In the writer's opinion, Francis Bacon is one of them.

In the Study of a Baboon the city is left behind and we are in the National Park at ~~Kenya~~ ^{Nairobi} or in another of the parks ~~with zoos~~ ^{zoo@original} in Africa. Bacon travels in Africa often and widely, usually making his headquarters at Tangier. One of his favorite books -- his Bible he once called it -- is Marius Maxwell's Stalking Big Game with a Camera in Equatorial Africa (Heinemann, London, 1925). If one studies this remarkable book carefully, it seems clear that Bacon's ape, perched with luminous eyes on the forked branches of an acacia tree, is derived from one of the plates in Maxwell's book (page 00).* There is a theory, perhaps apocryphal, that in Africa

* This writer reluctantly disagrees with the statement in the catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Bacon exhibition that the artist's Study of a Baboon may not derive from Maxwell's photograph in that Bacon's ape is shown with mouth open whereas in the photograph its mouth is closed. After observing Bacon's picture at close range for almost ten years, it still seems to the writer that the monkey's mouth is clamped shut, as in Maxwell's photograph. The forked branches on which the baboon sits are almost identical in the photograph and the painting.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

- 13 -

Bacon had been startled by the fact that monkeys and other animals were confined in zoos, while just outside town limits their cousins ran free. At any rate, the ape in Study of a Baboon is a baleful phantom, emerged from Walter Scott's narrative "Wandering Willie's Tale" in his novel Redgauntlet or based on Poe's treacherous monkey in The Murders in the Rue Morgue. Bacon's baboon lives only half fenced-in, unable to resolve the choice between freedom and imprisonment. A satirical parallel with human dilemma might be drawn. One assumes that Bacon would be the last to labor it.

If photographs and albums thereof have meant much to Bacon, spontaneous first-hand experience of scenes and events has been no less important. Once, for example, he traveled into the interior of Africa as far as Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. In the above-mentioned cable from Time Magazine's London to New York offices he was quoted as saying: "I felt and memorized the excitement of seeing animals move through long grass." Bacon's excursion was made during the rainy season in the jungle, and the animals were usually seen through a heavy mist which suited his recurrent fascination with the ^e transparency and mysteries/of translucence, as though some sort of Veronica's veil hung at the window of his imagination. In many of his paintings based on the veldt, he portrays elephants and other massive beasts -- and sometimes human beings as well -- emerging as apparitions from their murky concealment.

There are two categories of subject matter -- portraiture and landscape -- in which one would not expect so subjective an artist as Bacon to be much interested. The fact is, however, that he has executed a number of distinguished portraits, chiefly of personal friends. One of the most memorable of these is the Study for a Portrait (page 00) in which the figure of Lucian Freud appears to topple forward within a glass cocoon. The image is haunting in its sinister, nervous energy; its intensity suggests an ambiguity between affection and lathing, as if the mutual reaction of artist to sitter were indecisive and troubling.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 14 -

Perhaps for the very reason that Bacon's art as a whole requires deep emotional fixation, he has not often been able to retain his creative impetus in painting portraits on commission. But the same, of course, may justly be said of a majority of the commissioned portraits of our period, this being an era in which portraiture usually flourishes best in an atmosphere of long friendship or of bridal night. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that even Bacon's less deeply felt portraits are rescued from vacuity by his virtuoso talents ~~as to~~ . ~~stylistic signature.~~

In portraiture Bacon has always been merciless with his sitters. He has been no less ruthless in painting himself. The Self Portrait of the later 1950s (page 00) exposes without compromise the ruffled rotundity of physique to which reference has been made in many journalistic descriptions of Bacon. In this picture the artist's face is blurred and distraught, his mouth open to echo the screams of his Papal figures. And he is enclosed in a black chamber without plausible exit, like others he has condemned to a strange and melancholy isolation.

The overt lyricism of the Study of a Figure in a Landscape (page 00) is qualified by the phantomic and disturbing appearance of the nude, crouching man in its center. This figure casts an unreasonably opaque shadow, reminding us of Bacon's self-confessed esteem for the early works of de Chirico in which shadows become the hallucinatory protagonists of eerie drama. The man's presence in Bacon's picture is so chimerical and fleeting that it is possible to think for a moment of the painting as uninhabited landscape. As such it is remarkably sensitive. The slashing brushstrokes which outline the foreground's deep and swaying grass are a convincing and personal extension of the Impressionist technique as explored by certain of Bacon's elders such as Vuillard and Sickert. One can readily imagine the lightening speed at which the picture was executed to avoid a particular anathema of Bacon -- laboriousness. Once more it is useful to recall his own

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 15 -

words on Matthew Smith: "I think that painting today is pure intuition and good luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the ~~bits~~^{stuff} down." (bibl. 00)

In 1955-56 Bacon executed a series of four "portraits" inspired by J.S. Deville's life mask of William Blake, completed in 1823, four years before the great poet's death (pages 00, 00). Quite typically Bacon's pictures were painted from a photograph of the mask showing it against a dark ground rather than from the original sculpture in London's National Portrait Gallery. It might be assumed that the series was motivated by a veneration for Blake, who, as painter and illustrator, had become an idol for many modern British painters who sought in native sources an escape from the domination of the School of Paris. But in 1960, replying to a questionnaire as to which painters of the past he especially admired, Bacon added as a footnote that he disliked intensely the art of Blake and Fuseli. And indeed it must be admitted that Blake's neo-Mannerism has little to do stylistically with Bacon's own headlong expressionism, though some of the former's poems are comparable in mystical abandon and are admired by Bacon.

In any case, it is not too difficult to see why Deville's life mask should have interested Bacon. Blake's wide, taut and forbidding mouth, furrowed eyebrows, domed head and closed eyes supplied ideal points of departure for the scumbled distortions of which Bacon by then had become a master. The fact that he made four versions of the "portrait" is an indication of the effect Blake's bulldog face had on him. The series is notable among other things for a new richness of texture, a use of heavy, scrambled impasto which became steadily more assertive as the series progressed until, in the fourth and final image, the pigment is troweled on as ferociously as in many works by one of Bacon's preferred modern artists -- Chaim Soutine.

In 1955-56 Bacon painted an unusually large number of portraits, chiefly of patrons and friends. At the same time he turned back at intervals to themes previously explored: a seated Pope; apes in a cage; nude figures sprawled in tall

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 16 -

grass. And in 1956 he painted the first version of a series of eight pictures based on Vincent van Gogh's celebrated portrait of himself on the road to Tarascon (pages 00, 00). Bacon's color immediately became far brighter than ever before, presumably in ^{response} ~~tribute~~ to the Dutch master's violent palette of his final years in the south of France.

Bacon has long been deeply moved by van Gogh's letters as well as his paintings, so that his eight pictures may reasonably be considered ^a tributary offering. The first of them (and the only one finished in 1956, the others the following year) is a close-up of van Gogh walking down the blazing road in Provence, his painter's equipment slung over his shoulders and carried under his arms. The image is dominated by the intense yellow of van Gogh's straw hat, as though Bacon meant to suggest both the glare of semi-tropical sunlight and the unquenchable blaze rising in Vincent's mind. The surrounding landscape is handled in relatively abstract patterns; the sandy, flat road in van Gogh's self portrait is overgrown with the lush jungle grass that had fascinated Bacon on his African travels. At the right there is a subdued allusion to the dense shadow of a striding figure in midday sun which gives so dramatic an accent to van Gogh's picture.

As in the case of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, El Greco's View of Toledo, William Blake's life mask and many other images from the art of the past, it seems fairly certain that Bacon worked from reproductions in creating a long series of paraphrases of van Gogh's self portrait. It is no matter. One thinks immediately of the drawings Picasso made around 1930 after he had seen in a Left Bank bookshop an album of plates of Grünewald's altarpiece at Colmar -- a town, so far as is known, he has never visited. One thinks, too, of Miró's astonishing 1929 paintings of "Dutch Interiors," based on a handful of postcards he had brought

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 17 -

back from Holland. But among younger painters perhaps none has made more imaginative use of the transcriptional process than Bacon. His best works in the van Gogh series do not dilute but convincingly transform the ferocious energy of the post-impressionist masterwork which was their point of departure.

Bacon's paintings on the van Gogh theme show a fascinating progression. At first he comes closer and closer to van Gogh's own conception of the scene on Tarascon's road. The road itself and the striated landscape beyond, even the walking figure's shadow, are given a relatively literal importance, and details such as the stick or tripod in van Gogh's hand find their place. But then, in Bacon's seventh and eighth paraphrases, the Dutch master's tormented, stubborn figure gradually ~~melts~~ ^{melts into} with the landscape until finally it may be deciphered only with difficulty (page 00). Yet Bacon has continued to be haunted by van Gogh's self portraits. In 1960 he painted the Homage to van Gogh (page 00) based on the Dutchman's Self Portrait with a Pipe, completed in 1899, the year after van Gogh had cut off his ear. The self portrait's swollen distortions of feature have since been used by Bacon in a number of paintings not directly related to the van Gogh series (page 00).

Since 1960 Bacon has turned often and usually with increasing ferocity of spirit to paintings of the contemporary human figure, as in the Nude Woman and the Man with Statue (pages 00, 00). The first-named of these two pictures in its blatant nakedness and gnarled pose suggests a gangster's aging, stripped moll. Her face is horribly blurred, her contours puffed and fervent, her mouth agape in the fanged grimace that recurs throughout Bacon's imagery. She is a voluptuary and a monster, as if meant to express simultaneously the allure and repulsion of seduction. By comparison, the mood of the Man with Statue is quiet and contemplative, though the picture proposes a disquieting contrast between human brooding and fevers and the over-stuffed complacency of their bourgeois ambiance. The statue, which is presumably the man's companion and reflection, recalls the

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 18 -

caricatural extravagance of Daumier, one of Bacon's idols, and also the hermetic somnambulism of certain sculptured heads by Alberto Giacometti, whose talents Bacon is said to admit only half-heartedly.

Despite his recurrent preoccupation with the horrors and nervous tensions of our period, Bacon has not been willing to turn his back forever on the taste for contemporary elegance which absorbed him during his youthful career as an interior decorator, when the precisions of Le Corbusier's and Ozenfant's Purism and the revolutionary scholasticism of the Bauhaus were dominant influences, however briefly (page 00). His Seated Man with Turkey Rug (page 00) is a recent case in point. The picture is so luxurious in color and spirit that its violations of conventional reality, especially in the handling of the man's melting face, are easily overlooked. In the Falling Child (page 00) of 1960 they are again inescapable, and so they are in the Crouching Nude (page 00), wherein the ugly woman coils around herself like a sluggish but evil constrictor.

In 1961 Bacon produced a new series of paintings based on the Velasquez Portrait of Pope Innocent X; it consists of six oils of uniform size (60 x 47 inches). Considered as a whole the series is less brutal and horrific than the great papal series of 1953. But there are gratifying compensations for the loss of ~~fixated~~^{fixated} / malaise. The painting of the Pope's pearly tunic in the third work in the group, for example, is breathtakingly subtle and rich (page 00), indeed not incomparable to the mastery of Velasquez himself, whose art Bacon once urged as an ideal -- if one could add to it "the toughness of a rhinoceros skin." (bibl. 00) In the case of the recent series of variations on Innocent X, Bacon has added a toughness peculiarly his own. ^{mask-like} The Pope's face drips with the custard of a pie from a Mack Sennett comedy, ^{from} flung nearby and caught head-on. Or, to give a more solemn reading, it puffs out in cheek and jowl with some inexplicable, malignant disorder. If the

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 19 -

1961 papal series on the whole is slightly more beatific than the earlier series, its fifth version shows the Pope screaming, with upraised arms. And in all the pictures in the recent series His Holiness' teeth are bared, his face disfigured by bloat and scars. We cannot expect so committed an artist as Bacon to abandon his basic philosophy -- that art should simultaneously repel and beguile.

One of the most hallucinatory of Bacon's late pictures is the Two Figures of 1961 (page 00), painted in opalescent blues and deep reds. The two figures are translucently magnetized, as though fixed together within a plastic bag.

This picture was followed in the spring of 1962 by what may well be the greatest work ~~masterwork~~ of Bacon's entire career to date: the triptych entitled Three Studies for a Crucifixion (pages 00, 00), consisting of three canvas panels, each measuring 78 x 57 inches. On first studying this astonishing work, it seemed to the writer that the right panel alluded to St. Peter's ^{'s martyrdom,} since its fang-toothed figure appears to be hanging upside down. It further seemed possible that the central panel, with its blood-stained, reclining nude referred to the Deposition. But how to find religious precedent for the left panel, showing two strange figures walking forward, the one at the left wearing a red cardinal's cap? How to define the two bird-like forms in this panel's foreground, the animal ^{or its shadow} lurking at the very bottom of the right panel or, behind it, the curved white object like a ^{an unreasonably huge} ~~giantic~~ firehose?

These iconographical problems seemed insoluble, the more so in that Bacon himself is extremely reluctant to discuss the subject matter of his paintings. But on May 6, 1962, he was kind enough to send the writer a letter in which he said: "I cannot I am afraid be very helpful.... The centre figure in my mind does not represent the Deposition or the figure on the right St. Peter. It [the Crucifixion] is a subject which has always haunted me. I hoped to create a set of images which would unlock the valves of feeling and return one to the subject more deeply and more violently. It is a subject I feel I could do in dozens of different

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 20 -

ways -- but now I only want to do a serial portrait of somebody moving about a room." At the same time he confided to his present London dealer, Mr. H. R. Fischer, that the two figures in the left panel are meant to represent Hitler and Himmler opening the doors to the gas chambers used by the Nazis to exterminate Jews. He was unable to explain other details of the triptych, not even the upside-down figure at the right whose head, however violent its contortions, is presumably human as is the cage of its ribs, ~~but~~ ^{suggests} whose lower torso ~~assumes~~ ^{eviscerated} the contours of some exotic bird yet also could be the hips and bent legs of a dangling ~~man~~.

If even an Erwin Panofsky might well despair of giving an accurate iconological interpretation of Bacon's recent triptych, the fact remains that this is one of the artist's most obsessive and powerful works. The contrast of orange floors to red walls in unforgettably provocative, the black window shades, with their by-now familiar Hitlerian tassels, are beautifully spaced. And the triptych as a whole is an especially vivid proof of the instantaneous certainty with which Bacon works at his best. As noted early in this text, Bacon has always as an artist affirmed his faith in luck. It is this writer's opinion that his "luck" will hold the attention not only of his own but of future generations.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Zurbaran - I wasn't aware, I think, that Bacon was
was in terms in Zurbaran. I mentioned Z. just to
suggest B's shift of style from the more broken
(contents and surfaces of pre-1959-60 ("Velezquez"))

The name of Typhoid Mary will
Don't know, but my point ^{actually his recent}
was that the simile is ^{too arresting} ^{style is coarser}
and the associations are evil rather ^{will not} ^{at times to the}
mean anything to the British ^{point of pungency}
than good or neutral ^{which is not to}

disparage its power. It is not banal. ^{because}
Bacon was not distinguishing between Crucifix
and Crucifixion but I don't see why to
ask him which he meant since the basic
Crucifixion (or Calvary) is a great temper of passion
and violent gesture and will do great credit
to his sensibility. I am delighted to

FOR STUDY PURPOSES ONLY. NOT FOR REPRODUCTION.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

*hear of the Memoirs of S.T.S.
Bless you, please do it!
Best to you both - and my
sympathy to Melissa - &
P.S. leave here Wed. for N.Y., Africa Sat.*

THIS SIDE OF CARD IS FOR ADDRESS

J. T. Soby
P.O. Box 830
Southampton, Ill.
New York



The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

p.4 (Bacon)
 missing
 Bacon copy

Among European painters risen to international fame since World War II is the Englishman, Francis Bacon. Considering Bacon's present-day eminence, it is surprising that many details of his life and career remain obscure. In part this is because he is himself almost totally indifferent to autobiographical information. As an example of this attitude, which is felt profoundly, he was once asked whether he was descended from the great Elizabethan writer whose name he shares. He replied that he had no idea whatever nor any curiosity about finding out! For a very long time it has even been difficult to discover his exact birth-date, which has varied from one biographical account to the next and, according to a close friend, on at least one occasion was invented by the artist himself as suggesting a fortuitous numerical sequence in playing roulette. We know at last, thanks to the research of Sir John Rothenstein and Ronald Alley in preparing their admirable catalog of the recent Bacon retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, that Bacon was born in Dublin at 63 Lr. Baggot Street on October 28, 1909, the son of Edward Anthony Mortimer Bacon and Christina Winifred Firth Bacon, both parents being English rather than Irish.*

? m-1

It is typical of Bacon that combinations of numbers in roulette should have prompted him to invent his own date of birth. His passion for gambling is well known to his intimates. On many occasions, after selling a canvas or two, he has set off for Monte Carlo to try out a self-invented and presumably fallible system for breaking the bank. This passion plays an important part in his philosophy as an artist, as he confessed when he wrote of his colleague, the late Matthew Smith, "I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the bits down." (bibl. 00) He prefers

* This precise information was obtained by the Tate Gallery from the Official Registrar in Dublin.

stuff - see Tate p [3] note

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 2 -

to paint very rapidly with a large brush -- "a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that ironmongers stock," to use Robert Melville's words. (bibl. 00)

Bacon ^{generally} often, though far from invariably, chooses big canvases. ^{as if he were playing for big stakes.}

Moreover, he is frighteningly quick to accept miscalculation and failure in his gambler's choice as a painter. No one really knows how many pictures he has ^{then finds them lacking} destroyed after completing them and becoming dissatisfied. The number is great, and once more Robert Melville's words are pertinent: "Francis Bacon has a horror of giving proofs of his powers. He paints at such phenomenal speed that, if the bulk of his work had been preserved, he would almost certainly have more large pictures to his name than any other living artist." (bibl. 00)

We shall return later to a discussion of why Bacon's technique is so impulsive and why rapidity of execution is an integral accompaniment to his creative vision, as though he feels obliged to make his decisions before hearing an invisible and implacable croupier cry "rien va plus!" For now it should be mentioned that Bacon's destructive impatience with the slightest flaw or lessening of conviction in his work is refreshing in an era when many artists, good and bad, preserve and market the merest scraps from their studios. Sometimes, however, according to London friends, Bacon has destroyed pictures whose shortcomings were apparent to no one but himself. Even so, one cannot but admire ^{almost desperate} the severity of ^{self-criticism} his conscience.

Though born in Dublin, Bacon came from English stock, as already noted. His father was a trainer of race horses, who for professional reasons preferred Ireland to his native England. The family was moderately prosperous, and Bacon's upbringing seems to have been conventional except for the important fact that he was not for long forced by his parents to have the usual supervised education. In his own words, possibly exaggerated, "I had no upbringing at all, and I used

lasting fascination with the theme of the Crucifixion as developed by artists as divergent in period and style as Cimabue and G. S. S. It seems probable, however,

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 3 -

simply to work on my father's farm near Dublin. I read almost nothing as a child -- as for pictures, I was hardly aware that they existed." (bibl. 00) He did, however, travel often with his father to England, and in his late 'teens left home for good and made his way to France and Germany, settling for a while in Berlin, whose sinister and debauched postwar atmosphere very likely appealed to him. In the late 1920s he moved to London and kept alive by designing rugs and furniture and acting as an interior decorator of considerable talent (page 00).

Bacon had no formal training as a painter, and he did not aspire to become a professional artist until he was nearly thirty. In reply to the writer's question as to what had decided him to paint, he declared that he had no idea whatever. He added, typically, that he profoundly wished he had never started! (bibl. 00) During the later 1920s he began to execute some relatively abstract works of which perhaps the most ambitious is a tall screen in three sections (page 00). There is little indication in this or any other very early work of the kind of painter he was to become. These images, insofar as one can judge from reproductions, seem mild and purposefully decorative; they show some influence from older artists such as Edward Wadsworth in England and Lurçat in France. Obviously Bacon himself thought them derivative, since so far as is known none survive.

If Bacon's progress as an artist was at first uncertain and halting, explosive forces of temperament must have been making themselves felt. In 1932, for example, he painted The Crucifixion (a picture better known as Golgotha, though Bacon apparently dislikes the latter title because of its dramatic overtones). (page 00). This is already a prophetic and compelling image, arbitrary in color in that the right side of the figure from leg to head is painted in blood red, while the left side is defined by gray-white tones. The picture reflects Bacon's lasting fascination with the theme of the Crucifixion as developed by artists as divergent in period and style as Cimabue and Grünewald. It seems probable, however,

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 4 -

*not done
the here*

that at this early date it was the former's revolutionary concept of this august subject which influenced Bacon more than that of the great German master, whose Isenheim altarpiece had only recently been re-projected into fame by Picasso's variations on it. ^{the object of} ~~re-projected into fame~~ by Picasso's variations on it. ^{by Picasso. [Which were then published first? Did Picasso's variations infl. Bacon??]}

Does this point to Crucifixion?

But which Crucifixion by Cimabue did Bacon admire most? Assuming that the thirteenth-century master's almost illegible frescoes of the Calvary at Assisi would not have held his attention, ^{*} the choice probably narrows down to the famous Crucifixion in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di S. Domenico at Arezzo and the immense and more realistic version in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di Sta. Croce in Florence (page 00). If the striated ribs of the Arezzo picture are repeated in Bacon's painting, it nevertheless seems more plausible to think that the young British artist would have had in hand a photograph of the Cimabue at Florence. He had not, so far as the writer knows, yet been in Italy and seen the Cimabue originals. He would not, one assumes, have been much concerned with the intricate problem of whether a given work is by Cimabue himself or by a skilled disciple. ^{Yet, in the 1933 Crucifixion the Christ is straight figured, head up.}

*12
like the transparent crucifixion
of the early 13th century that survives in a curve
of the same Picasso pgs 1930
Violent*

Around 1936 Bacon continued his search for authentic personality as a painter in a curious picture which portrays a monstrous seated figure accompanied by the dog which has recurred in his art at intervals, as we shall see. But it was not until 1945 that the theme of the Crucifixion once more gave Bacon the creative impetus he needed. At that time Graham Sutherland was making the preparatory studies for the large Crucifixion he had been commissioned to paint for the Church of St. Matthew in Northampton, England. There can be no doubt that Sutherland's example acted as a catharsis on his younger colleague. Indeed, Bacon himself confirmed this fact when in a recent interview he said that "all his life he had been looking for some help to find a theoretical background for his painting." He added: "Once in his life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it." (bibl. 00)

** R work of ~~expression~~ great originality and
genius however*

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 5 -

Sutherland's influence was important, but it must quickly be said that Bacon's paintings of figures at the foot of the Cross are infinitely more distraught and violent than those of his elder. Sutherland's interest tended to focus on such details from nature ^(for Arminwald) as the Crown of Thorns, while Bacon's centered on images of human bestiality and deformation. The anguished spirit of the latter's "studies" for the Crucifixion has been eloquently described by Stephen Spender: "These appalling dehumanized faces, which epitomize cruelty and mockery, are of the crucifiers rather than the crucified. And this remains true of his [Bacon's] work until now. His figures are of those who participate in the crucifixion of humanity which also includes themselves. If they are not always the people who actually hammer in the nails they are those among the crowd which shares in the guilt of cruelty to the qualities which are -- or were -- beneficently human, and which here seem to have been banished forever." (bibl. 00)

It seems possible that during the mid-1940s Bacon was experiencing belatedly the effect in England of the International Surrealist Exhibition, held at London's New Burlington Galleries in the summer of 1936. Specifically, as several critics have pointed out, there is some affinity between Bacon's malformed figures for the Crucifixion and the ferocious imagery of a late recruit to the surrealist movement, Matta Echaurren. But Bacon's figures of 1945 announce the emergence of a thoroughly personal talent, as in the picture here reproduced (page 00). The iconography, as though at intervals he has continued to be haunted by the agonized nurse in S. M. Eisenstein's great film of 1925, The Battleship Potemkin. (page 00)

Bacon's subject matter, though never fixed or predictable, began to take its basic psychological identity in 1946, the year in which he exhibited a group of his studies for the Crucifixion at the Lefevre Gallery in London. His was an iconography primarily concerned with the torments and hysteria of

The Russian title is accurate: Bronenosets (Armored Cruiser) Potemkin

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 6 -

contemporary existence. Its aim has been well stated by the artist himself: "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them like a snail, leaving a trail of human presence and memory traces of past events, as the snail leaves its slime." (bibl. 00) But what gives his art its extraordinary force is that it is expressed in seductive rather than satirical terms. His technical handling is so deft and magic that he seems to caress rather than belabor his monstrous subject matter. In Sam Hunter's words, "Bacon's thoroughly modern horrors are connected still with a neo-Edwardian sense of luxury; and his satanism, despite an up-to-date clinical note, can suggest the Yellow Book. If Aubrey Beardsley's generation were alive and given the benefits of a modern education, it would no doubt be painting in the style of Francis Bacon." (bibl. 00) And Robert Melville has reinforced the point of the voluptuousness of Bacon's art: "Never has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom; yet it occurs in the atmosphere of a concentration camp." (bibl. 00)

now I regret this sentence, only because Beardsley was essentially a decent artist, + Bacon is powerful expressive, a real force, a good comparison in my post.

In 1945 and 1946 Bacon created two unforgettable paintings: Figure in a Landscape and the major work known simply as Painting (pages 00, 00). It is astonishing to learn from the Tate Gallery's fine catalog of the recent Bacon exhibition that the first of these two pictures was painted from a snapshot of the artist's friend Eric Hall dozing in a chair in Hyde Park. But what an amazingly imaginative transcription of so commonplace a scene! The figure is seated outdoors before a railing on which a machine gun is mounted; his head is completely enshrouded by his upturned coat; the mood of the picture is distinctly ominous and certainly not at all suggestive of a friend asleep in a public park.

In Painting the man has moved indoors to what would seem to be one of the butcher shops which Bacon is said to have visited often in youth. Behind him hangs a huge carcass, its arms or legs outstrung as if it were crucified. The man's

spaces of the spinning wheel in the Prado Museum's superb picture, Las Hilanderas

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 7 -

face is now half-hidden by the shadow cast by an umbrella -- a symbolic reference to the umbrella of Chamberlain, which became an uneasy token of appeasement in Europe? Before him on a circular metal structure are placed other carcasses, flanked by a battery of those microphones which have been the constant ^{instrument} ally of perverse oratory in our time. Behind the figure hang curtains with tassels, and here again as in the case of Bacon's recurrent use of the human scream based on that of the wounded Potemkin nurse, a photographic reference is implicit. We know that Bacon has always been deeply interested in press photography in its more macabre aspects and that a snapshot in his possession shows Hitler exhorting a crowd in his hoarse and lurid rhetoric. Beside the dictator on his balcony hangs a tasseled curtain whose idling tranquility adds an ironic note of contrast to public hysteria (page 00). In physical terms Bacon's Painting is rich and subtle, as though the artist intended to give a beguiling veneer to an image of frightening portent.

It is difficult to determine at what precise moment Bacon first made effective use of that scumbled technique which often gives his figures a quavering ambiguity of placing and stance. In the Head No. V, also known as Figure with Monkey, for example, the man's face merges with the curtain through which he peers at an ape whose head, too, dissolves in the drapery's folds. The result is an uncanny evocation of motion through a rippled vibration of contours, as when a stone is dropped in a pond. One thinks of the magic sequence in the 1924 Buster Keaton film, Sherlock, Jr., wherein through trick photography the comedian disappears into and for the briefest second becomes part of a solid wall.

It seems to the writer among others that Bacon's treatment of motion will rank as one of his most original and successful contributions to painting. An estimable precedent is to be found in Velasquez' blurred definition of the spokes of the spinning wheel in the Prado Museum's superb picture, Las Hilanderas

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 8 -

(page 00). But for the most part earlier artists had suggested movement by such devices as flared drapery, as in the Victory of Samothrace, or they had frozen a running figure in so untenable a posture that the observer senses this posture must instantly be broken, as in Bruegel's The Faithless Shepherd (page 00).

It is true, of course, that Bacon's elders like Marcel Duchamp and the Italian Futurists had also sought a pictorial solution to the problem of representing figures and objects in motion. But their forms in transit were separately and quite well defined, whereas Bacon's are often suggested through a deliberate blurring of focus, as though he were an expert photographer whose camera had been jarred unexpectedly while a picture was being taken. The difference between Bacon's approach and that of the Futurists is apparent if we compare his Dog and Man with Balla's celebrated Leash in Motion, a painting which Bacon had almost certainly seen when it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1952 (pages 00, 00).

By 1949 -- the year of his first one-man exhibition at the Hanover Gallery -- Bacon's art had assumed its own special character both in technique and iconography, and the influence of Sutherland had all but disappeared. In that year he painted Head VI (page 00), the first of an extensive series of pictures inspired by Velasquez' famous Portrait of Pope Innocent X in the Palazzo Doria at Rome. It is interesting to note that Bacon has never seen the Spanish master's famous portrait because, as he told Sir John Rothenstein, "When I was in Rome I felt reluctant to look at it." (bibl. 00) But working from a reproduction he transcribed the Velasquez into a fascinatingly original image. The Pope's head is bisected by the Hitlerian tassel, already mentioned, his mouth is agape in a scream like that of the nurse in Potemkin. His Holiness is shown within a glass case which isolates him from the outer world and muffles the sound of his despair.

little title?
"Dynamism
of a dog
on a leash
(leash in
motion)"

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 9 -

Whatever its psychological implications, Head VI announces with full vigor an abiding obsession of the artist: the enclosures within which animals and humans alike live out their lives. When the Pope Innocent series reaches one of several high points of authority in the Study after Velasquez (page 00), its resplendent but horrified central figure has emerged from its glass case only to be imprisoned again by curtains and railings, even by the spiky ornaments of the Papal chair. Throughout a number of Bacon's pictures in the Pope series there persists an odd physical illusion of the figure being elevated above the ground. In this connection it should be noted, as Sam Hunter was the first to observe, that among the many press photographs in Bacon's studio ^{was?} is one of Pope Pius XII borne aloft on a sedia gestatoria. (bibl. 00) At least two of the three paintings from the Pope series which Bacon completed in 1951 are closer in pose and spirit to this modern snapshot than to Velasquez' famous portrait in the Palazzo Doria.

In the final analysis Bacon's paintings, whatever their theme, suggest the pangs of ex-communication in its literal rather than sacerdotal sense. His apes are usually caged, his dogs slink helpless and cringing from their broken leashes, his humans are often segregated within small chambers or otherwise shielded from the ignominies of contemporary civilization. And yet in his paintings an inexplicable sense of opulence prevails, and David Sylvester is right in saying that Bacon "prefers settings which are luxurious and simple: lush velvet curtains and a gilded armchair: like prison-cells for highborn traitors." (bibl. 00)

To return to the Pope series for a moment, it must be noted that a morbid ^{anti-derivation} anti-Christianity has sometimes been read into these works. Bacon's own explanation of his interest in painting papal figures is simpler and more convincing.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 10 -

In Time Magazine for October 19, 1953, he was quoted as saying: "Really I just wanted an excuse to use those colors, and you can't give ordinary clothes that purple color without getting into a false fauve manner." A year earlier (December 12, 1952) the same magazine's press cable from London to New York quoted him as saying that for him art is "a method of opening up areas of feeling rather than merely an illustration of an object." Bacon added significantly: "Real imagination is technical imagination. It is in the ways you think up to bring an event to life again. It is in the search for technique to trap the object at a given moment. Then the technique and the object become inseparable. The object is the technique and the technique is the object. Art lies in the continual struggle to come near to the sensory side of objects." And surely it must be conceded that in Bacon's paraphrases of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, the voluptuous impact of his imagery is at least as strong as its psychological implications.

Bacon's predilections in esthetic matters are an illuminating reflection of his purposes as a painter. In literature he reveres above all the books of Nietzsche and, almost as much, T.S. Eliot's Wasteland and other poems; in youth he had liked the writings of the Irishman, W. B. Stanford, though never with the passion he has reserved for Nietzsche. Among painters he particularly admires are: El Greco, Rembrandt, Velasquez and Goya. He is said to have been fascinated by Michelangelo's drawings of wrestling figures, yet oddly enough his rather perverse Two Figures of 1953 is quite directly based on a Muybridge photograph of two wrestlers rather than on the Renaissance master's sketches. An early enthusiasm for Zurbaran seems to have subsided.

Among modern painters Bacon worships van Gogh's headlong intensity and, at the opposite end of the emotional scale, the oil sketches of Seurat, especially those for La Grande Jatte. He has spoken to friends with awe of the magic brush-work of the late Monets. Among twentieth century artists he likes the early Matisse; he likes Picasso, Bonnard and Soutine regardless of period. Rather inexplicably

(not his very recent style with its very definite contours and simple flat backgrounds does suggest Zurbaran more than any of these)
and sense of solid mass, *Moyses*, clarity, density

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 11 -

he once remarked to David Sylvester that all modern painting began with the hallucinatory depiction of bananas in certain "metaphysical" pictures by Giorgio de Chirico, surrealist art's main progenitor.

What is perhaps more revelatory is that Bacon has been more interested in specific paintings than in the painters who created them. In a verbal reply to a questionnaire sent him in January 1960, by the writer, he said: "Certain painters have created images which have had an hypnotic effect on me." (bibl. 00) He cited as examples Cimabue's Crucifixion, already mentioned, works by Velasquez and Rubens and the late self-portraits of Rembrandt. One knows from his own confession that he has never seen the original of Velasquez' Portrait of Innocent X. Bacon, like so many contemporary artists, has often been inspired by photographs of paintings rather than by the paintings themselves. In our time photographs of works of art have acted as Typhoid Marys of stylistic contagion, as engravings did in earlier centuries. El Greco's View of Toledo is the only version of that painting known to exist. It hangs in New York's Metropolitan Museum, and Bacon has never been to America, though he speaks of the picture as one of his particular favorites. Similarly, while Bacon speaks with enthusiasm of Daumier's Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, one version of which he has probably seen in the Courtauld Institute (page 00), he can have known the Boston Museum's Man on a Rope (page 00) only through reproductions. Yet the latter picture, with its figure's gaping mouth and wry contours, is extremely close in conception to some images by Bacon himself. ~~... ..~~

Which? does it refer to? Or the picture?

Yes

It was during the 1950s that Bacon's fame began to assume international proportions. In 1953 he had a one-man exhibition at Durlacher Brothers in New York; in 1954 he was represented by twelve paintings in the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale; in 1957 even Paris, traditionally hesitant about importing Anglo-Saxon contemporary art, gave him a show at the Galerie Rive Gauche. Bacon was

photograph its mouth is closed. After observing Bacon's picture at close range for almost ten years, it still seems to the writer that the monkey's mouth is closed shut, as in Maxwell's photograph. The forked branches on which the monkey sits are almost identical in the photograph and the painting.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

not done
don't know the Scott tale but Poe's ape is
not phantasmic but a circumstantially solid and
actual solution to a murder
mystery.

Bacon had been startled by the fact that monkeys and other animals were confined in zoos, while just outside town limits their cousins ran free. At any rate, the ape in Study of a Baboon is a baleful phantom, emerged from Walter Scott's short story Wandering Willie's Tale (a part of his novel Redgauntlet) or from Poe's The Murders in the Rue Morgue. Bacon's baboon lives only half fenced-in, unable to resolve the choice between freedom and imprisonment. A satirical parallel with human dilemma might be drawn. One assumes that Bacon would be the last to labor it.

??
 ??

If photographs and albums thereof have meant much to Bacon, spontaneous first-hand experience of scenes and events has been no less important. Once, for example, he traveled into the interior of Africa as far as Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. In the above-mentioned cable from Time Magazine's London to New York offices he was quoted as saying: "I felt and memorized [the] excitement of seeing animals move through long grass." Bacon's excursion was made during the rainy season in the jungle, and the animals were usually seen through a heavy mist which suited his recurrent fascination with the mysteries of translucence, as though some sort of Veronica's veil hung at the window of his imagination. In many of his paintings based on the veldt, he portrays elephants and other massive beasts -- and sometimes human beings as well -- emerging as apparitions from their murky concealment.

??

There are two categories of subject matter -- portraiture and landscape -- in which one would not expect so subjective an artist as Bacon to be much interested. The fact is, however, that he has executed a number of distinguished portraits, chiefly of personal friends. One of the most memorable of these is the Study for a Portrait (page 00) in which the figure of Lucian Freud appears to topple forward within a glass cocoon. The image is haunting in its sinister, nervous energy; its intensity suggests an ambiguity between affection and lathing, as if the mutual reaction of artist to sitter were indecisive and troubling.

was Veronica's veil translucent or transparent?

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 11 -

Perhaps for the very reason that Bacon's art as a whole requires deep emotional fixation, he has not often been able to retain his creative impetus in painting portraits on commission. But the same, of course, may justly be said of a majority of the commissioned portraits of our period, this being an era in which portraiture usually flourishes best in an atmosphere of long friendship or of bridal night. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that even Bacon's less deeply felt portraits are rescued from vacuity by his virtuoso talents as to stylistic signature. B.J. →

In portraiture Bacon has always been merciless with his sitters. He has been no less ruthless in painting himself. The Self Portrait of the later 1950s (page 00) exposes without compromise the rumpled rotundity of physique to which reference has been made in many journalistic descriptions of Bacon. In this picture the artist's face is blurred and distraught, his mouth open to echo the screams of his pupal figures. And he is enclosed in a black chamber without plausible exit, like others he has condemned to a strange and melancholy isolation.

The overt lyricism of the Study of a Figure in a Landscape (page 00) is qualified by the phantomic and disturbing appearance of the nude, crouching man in its center. This figure casts an unreasonably opaque shadow, reminding us of Bacon's self-confessed esteem for the early works of de Chirico in which shadows become the hallucinatory protagonists of eerie drama. The man's presence in Bacon's picture is so chimerical and fleeting that it is possible to think for a moment of the painting as uninhabited landscape. As such it is remarkably sensitive. The slashing brushstrokes which outline the foreground's deep and swaying grass are a convincing and personal extension of the Impressionist technique as explored by certain of Bacon's elders such as Vuillard and Sickert. One can readily imagine the lightening speed at which the picture was executed to avoid a particular anathema of Bacon -- laboriousness. Once more it is useful to recall his own

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 15 -

words on Matthew Smith: "I think that painting today is pure intuition and good luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the bits down." (bibl. 00)

In 1955-56 Bacon executed a series of four "portraits" inspired by J.S. Deville's life mask of William Blake, completed in 1823, four years before the great poet's death (pages 00, 00). Quite typically Bacon's pictures were painted from a photograph of the mask showing it against a dark ground rather than from the original sculpture in London's National Portrait Gallery. It might be assumed that the series was motivated by a veneration for Blake who, as painter and illustrator, had become an idol for many modern British painters who sought in native sources an escape from the domination of the School of Paris. But in 1960, replying to a questionnaire as to which painters of the past he especially admired, Bacon added as a footnote that he disliked intensely the art of Blake and Fuseli. And indeed it must be admitted that Blake's neo-Mannerism has little to do stylistically with Bacon's own headlong expressionism, though some of the former's poems are comparable in mystical abandon and are admired by Bacon.

In any case, it is not too difficult to see why Deville's life mask should have interested Bacon. Blake's wide, taut and forbidding mouth, furrowed eyebrows, domed head and closed eyes supplied ideal points of departure for the scumbled distortions of which Bacon by then had become a master. The fact that he made four versions of the "portrait" is an indication of the effect Blake's bulldog face had on him. The series is notable among other things for a new richness of texture, a use of heavy, scrambled impasto which became steadily more assertive as the series progressed until, in the fourth and final image, the pigment is troweled on as ferociously as in many works by one of Bacon's preferred modern artists -- Chaim Soutine.

In 1955-56 Bacon painted an unusually large number of portraits, chiefly of patrons and friends. At the same time he turned back at intervals to themes previously explored: a seated Pope; apes in a cage; nude figures sprawled in tall

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 16 -

grass. And in 1956 he painted the first version of a series of eight pictures based on Vincent van Gogh's celebrated portrait of himself on the road to Tarascon (pages 00, 00). Bacon's color immediately became far brighter than ever before, presumably in ^{response} tribute to the Dutch master's violent palette of his final years in the south of France.

Bacon has long been deeply moved by van Gogh's letters as well as his paintings, so that his eight pictures may reasonably be considered tributary offering. The first of them (and the only one finished in 1956, the other the following year) is a close-up of van Gogh walking down the blazing road in Provence, his painter's equipment slung over his shoulders and carried under his arms. The image is dominated by the intense yellow of van Gogh's straw hat, as though Bacon meant to suggest both the glare of semi-tropical sunlight and the unquenchable blaze rising in Vincent's mind. The surrounding landscape is handled in relatively abstract patterns; the sandy, flat road in van Gogh's self portrait is overgrown with the lush jungle grass that had fascinated Bacon on his African travels. At the right there is a subdued allusion to the dense shadow of a striding figure in mid-day sun which gives so dramatic an accent to van Gogh's picture. As in the case of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, El Greco's View of Toledo, William Blake's life mask and many other images from the art of the past, it seems fairly certain that Bacon worked from reproductions in creating a long series of paraphrases of van Gogh's self portrait. It is no matter. One thinks immediately of the drawings Picasso made around 1930 after he had seen in a Left Bank bookshop an album of plates of Grünewald's altarpiece at Colmar -- a town, so far as is known, he has never visited. One thinks, too, of Miró's astonishing 1929 paintings of "Dutch Interiors," based on a handful of postcards he had brought

The statue, which is presumably the man's companion and reflection, recalls the

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 17 -

back from Holland. But among younger painters perhaps none has made more imaginative use of the transcriptional process than Bacon. His best works in the van Gogh series do not dilute but convincingly transform the ^{ferocious} ferocious energy of the post-impressionist masterwork which was their point of departure.

Bacon's paintings on the van Gogh theme show a fascinating progression. At first he comes closer and closer to van Gogh's own conception of the scene on Tarascon's road. The road itself and the striated landscape beyond, even the walking figure's shadow, are given a relatively literal importance, and details such as the stick or tripod in van Gogh's hand find their place. But then, in Bacon's seventh and eighth paraphrases, the Dutch master's tormented, stubborn figure gradually ^{melt into ? fuses with} melds with the landscape until finally it may be deciphered only with difficulty (page 00). Yet Bacon has continued to be haunted by van Gogh's self portraits. In 1960 he painted the Homage to van Gogh (page 00) based on the Dutchman's Self Portrait with a Pipe, completed in 1899, the year after van Gogh had cut off his ear. The self portrait's swollen distortions of feature have since been used by Bacon in a number of paintings not directly related to the van Gogh series (page 00).

Since 1960 Bacon has turned often and usually with increasing ferocity of spirit to paintings of the contemporary human figure, as in the Nude Woman and the Man with Statue (pages 00, 00). The first-named of these two pictures in its blatant nakedness and gnarled pose suggests a gangster's aging, stripped moll. Her face is horribly blurred, her contours puffed and fervent, her mouth agape in the fanged grimace that recurs throughout Bacon's imagery. She is a voluptuary and a monster, as if meant to express simultaneously the allure and repulsion of seduction. By comparison, the mood of the Man with Statue is quiet and contemplative, though the picture proposes a disquieting contrast between human brooding and fevers and the over-stuffed complacency of their bourgeois ambiance. The statue, which is presumably the man's companion and reflection, recalls the

Welds?
 melts into
 (B.J.)
 Jacques
 25

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 18 -

caricatural extravagance of Daumier, one of Bacon's idols, and also the hermetic somnambulism of certain sculptured heads by Alberto Giacometti, whose talents Bacon is said to admit only half-heartedly.

Despite his recurrent preoccupation with the horrors and nervous tensions of our period, Bacon has not been willing to turn his back forever on the taste for contemporary elegance which absorbed him during his youthful career as an interior decorator, when the precisions of Le Corbusier's and Ozenfant's Purism and the revolutionary scholasticism of the Bauhaus were dominant influences, however briefly (page 00). His Seated Man with Turkey Rug (page 00) is a recent case in point. The picture is so luxurious in color and spirit that its violations of conventional reality, especially in the handling of the man's melting face, are easily overlooked. In the Falling Child (page 00) of 1960 they are again inescapable, and so they are in the Crouching Nude (page 00), wherein the ugly woman coils around herself like a sluggish but evil constrictor.

In 1961 Bacon produced a new series of paintings based on the Velasquez Portrait of Pope Innocent X; it consists of six oils of uniform size (60 x 47 inches). Considered as a whole the series is less brutal and horrific than the great papal series of 1953. But there are gratifying compensations for the loss of fixative malaise. The painting of the Pope's pearly tunic in the third work in the group, for example, is breathtakingly subtle and rich (page 00), indeed not incomparable to the mastery of Velasquez himself, whose art Bacon once urged as an ideal -- if one could add to it "the toughness of a rhinoceros skin." (bibl. 00) In the case of the recent series of variations on Innocent X, Bacon has added a toughness peculiarly his own. The Pope's face drips with the custard of a pie from a Mack Sennett comedy, flung nearby and caught head-on. Or, to give a more solemn reading, it puffs out in cheek and jowl with some inexplicable, malignant disorder. If the

appears to be a mackerel in 84 a, c, d etc

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 19 -

1961 papal series on the whole is slightly more beatific than the earlier series, its fifth version shows the Pope screaming, with upraised arms. And in all the pictures in the recent series His Holiness' teeth are bared, his face disfigured by bloat and scars. We cannot expect so committed an artist as Bacon to abandon his basic philosophy -- that art should simultaneously repel and beguile.

One of the most hallucinatory of Bacon's late pictures is the Two Figures of 1961 (page 00), painted in opalescent blues and deep reds. The two figures are translucently magnetized, as though fixed together within a plastic bag.

ambitious?
greatest work
This picture was followed in the spring of 1962 by what may well be the masterwork of Bacon's entire career to date: the triptych entitled Three Studies for a Crucifixion (pages 00, 00), consisting of three canvas panels, each measuring 78 x 57 inches. On first studying this astonishing work, it seemed to the writer that the right panel alluded to St. Peter, ^{is martyrdom} since ^{the} its fang-toothed figure appears to be hanging upside down. It further seemed possible that the central panel, with its blood-stained, reclining nude referred to the Deposition. But how to find religious precedent for the left panel, showing two strange figures walking forward, the one at the left wearing a red cardinal's cap? How to define the two bird-like forms in this panel's foreground, the animal ^{or animal shadow} lurking at the very bottom of the right panel or, behind it, the curved white object like a gigantic firehose?

These iconographical problems seemed insoluble, the more so in that Bacon himself is extremely reluctant to discuss the subject matter of his paintings. But on May 6, 1962, he was kind enough to send the writer a letter in which he said: "I cannot I am afraid be very helpful.... The centre figure in my mind does not represent the Deposition or the figure on the right St. Peter. It [the Crucifixion] is a subject which has always haunted me. I hoped to create a set of images which would unlock the valves of feeling and return one to the subject more deeply and more violently. It is a subject I feel I could do in dozens of different

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 20 -

ways -- but now I only want to do a serial portrait of somebody moving about a room." At the same time he confided to his present London dealer, Mr. H. R. Fischer, that the two figures in the left panel are meant to represent Hitler and Himmler opening the doors to the gas chambers used by the Nazis to exterminate Jews. He was unable to explain other details of the triptych, not even the upside-down figure at the right whose head, however violent its contortions, is presumably human as is the cage of its ribs, ^{but} whose lower torso ^{suggests} assumes the contours of some exotic bird yet also could be the hips and bent legs of a dangling man. ^{played,} ^{drawn on}

If even an Erwin Panofsky might well despair of giving an accurate ^{evincuated} iconological interpretation of Bacon's recent triptych, the fact remains that this is one of the artist's most obsessive and powerful works. The contrast of orange floors to red walls in unforgettably provocative, the black window shades, with their by-now familiar Hitlerian tassels, are beautifully spaced. And the triptych as a whole is an especially vivid proof of the instantaneous certainty with which Bacon works at his best. As noted early in this text, Bacon has always as an artist affirmed his faith in luck. It is this writer's opinion that his "luck" will hold the attention not only of his own but of future generations.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Bond Copy
unrevised 2nd

p. 1

one biographical account to the next and on at least one occasion was invented by the artist himself out of boredom and because the numerical sequence reminded him of one he had used once or twice in playing roulette. But we ~~now~~ know, thanks to the research of Si^r John Rothenstein and Ronald Alley in preparing their admirable catalog of the Bacon retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery (1962) that Bacon was born in Dublin at 63 Lr. Baggot Street on October 28, 1909, the son of Edward Anthony Mortimer^{Bacon} and Christina Winifred Firth Bacon, both parents being English rather than Irish.*

Perhaps there is a certain minor relevance in the fact that Bacon would invent a fictitious birthdate for himself because he liked the ring of the numbers. His faith in quick insight is profound, as he confessed when he wrote of his colleague the late Matthew Smith, "I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down." (bibl. xx) During his earlier career at least he preferred to paint very rapidly with a large brush - "a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that iron-mongers ~~use~~^{stock}" to quote Robert Melville's words (bibl. xx). But recently, according to first-hand sources, his technical methods ^{have become} ~~are~~ more variable, and sometimes he works very slowly and with smaller brushes, so that Melville's words, ~~so~~ pertinent at the time, may no longer apply - "Frannis

*This precise information was obtained by the Tate Gallery from the Official Registrar in Dublin.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

p. 1

Among European painters risen to international fame since World War II is the Englishman, Francis Bacon, a descendant of the great Elizabethan writer whose name he shares. Considering Bacon's eminence, it is surprising that for a long time many details of his life and career remained obscure. His birthdate, for example, has varied from one biographical account to the next and on at least one occasion was invented by the artist himself out of boredom and because the numerical sequence reminded him of one he had used once or twice in playing roulette. But we ~~now~~ know, thanks to the research of Si^r John Rothenstein and Ronald Alley in preparing their admirable catalog of the Bacon retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery (1962) that Bacon was born in Dublin at 63 Lr. Baggot Street on October 28, 1909, the son of Edward Anthony Mortimer^{Bacon} and Christina Winifred Firth Bacon, both parents being English rather than Irish.*

Perhaps there is a certain minor relevance in the fact that Bacon would invent a fictitious birthdate for himself because he liked the ring of the numbers. His faith in quick insight is profound, as he confessed when he wrote of his colleague the late Matthew Smith, "I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down." (bibl. xx) During his earlier career at least he preferred to paint very rapidly with a large brush - "a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that iron-mongers ~~use~~^{stock}," to quote Robert Melville's words (bibl. xx). But recently, according to first-hand sources, his technical methods ~~are~~^{have become} more variable, and sometimes he works very slowly and with smaller brushes, so that Melville's words, ~~so~~ pertinent at the time, may no longer apply - "Francis

*This precise information was obtained by the Tate Gallery from the Official Registrar in Dublin.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

2

Bacon has a horror of giving proofs of his powers. He paints at ^{the} such phenomenal speed that, if the bulk of his work had been preserved, he would almost certainly have more large pictures to his name than any other living artist." (bibl. xx)

The reference here is to the fact that during his earlier career Bacon usually though not invariably preferred huge canvases, as if deliberately playing for maximum stakes in his gambler's choice as a painter. No one knows how many pictures he has destroyed after completing them and finding them lacking. His destructive impatience with the slightest flaw or lessening of conviction in his work is refreshing in an era when many artists, good and bad, have retained and marketed the merest scraps from their studios. Sometimes, however, according to London friends, Bacon has destroyed pictures whose shortcomings were apparent only to himself. Even so one cannot but admire the almost desperate severity of his self-criticism. Nor can one help wondering whether on the whole he was not the one most likely to be right in his judgments. He had the courageous - and rare-advantage of being able to face vanity's corruptions in person, head-on.

Though born in Dublin Bacon came from English stock, as already noted. His father was a trainer of race horses, who for professional reasons preferred Ireland to his native England. The family was moderately prosperous, and Bacon's upbringing seems to have been conventional except for the important fact that he was not forced by his parents to have the usual continuous and supervised education. He himself has said; "I had no upbringing at all, and I used simply to

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Would a comparison be useful?

Bacon's abstract?

Months Research - how it might influence

Saturday

Dear Jim

Rushed your Bacon into the mail not knowing how urgent it is. Hope I wasn't too brusque - and too querulous about the 1946 painting though it was I guess the 1st Bacon in any museum and maybe the most important until the triptych?

I wish you could have emphasized B.O., I wish you could have emphasized the individuality in ignoring the terrific wave of abstraction which overwhelmed painting from 1945 to 1960. You do stress his traditionalism in style and technique but not, as I recall, against the background of the ~~past~~ recent past in art. Also, the problem of meaning and value of Bacon's painting art of horror that, disgust and despair; I mean its moral and ethical or even symptomatic significance in comparison, say, with Joyce's "dark pictures", maybe some of Picasso, Baroque sadistic martyrdoms, maybe Beckmann, Dix, Grünewald. B. talks irresponsibly from a moral pt of view - though highly responsible, in conscience, from an artist. How what about the aesthetics of sadism or horror or despair? Dix's

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series/Folder:
	JTS	I.20

war pictures are portraits but many of his
 others seem ^{shockers} personal ^{as to some}
 of Bacon's. Bechmann, too, ^(Die Nacht) thought in the
Departure he leaves a way out as of course
 does Grünevald* (people are overwhelmed by
 the Calvary but ^{or don't see that} forget ^{the} more radical
 and ~~so~~ marvelous Resurrection ^{pendant of}
 the Isenheim Altarpiece). Question: is
 Bacon involved in unconscious & un-
 intentional moral action. ^{do he} ^{or} ^{is}
 Goethe is there, an unsystematic ^{or} ^{is} Sade,
 an unintentional moralist or moral
~~the~~ prophet?

* Even in the Calvary, the horrific
 Christ has grandeur, dignity; the figure
 has the scale and power of a dead god.

Bacon rationalizes his horrors on
 aesthetic or technical levels - e.g. the Pope series
 with his references to "people". Rationalism's
~~is~~ not ^{an} answer ^{to} concerning ^{but} admire ^{him}
 for trying. I don't have your text now
 - maybe you do consider them questions.
 I do not think answers are needed;
 perhaps they are not possible. But shouldn't
 the questions be raised?

yes
 P. -
 begin the sentence

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

- Notes:
- ✓ 1) add note of March's the sketch
(p. 8) checks Zurbaren reference
 - X 2) p. 10
 - ≥ 3) p. 11 Ljohvid Mary ref. 3
 - 4) p. 4 these have Alfred checks this
page
 - 5) p. 8 micro

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

② p5 - Matia - structure
 & domestic forms
~~of structure & horrible~~ . ok

Bacon + Freud - Power before
of the clean - galvanic reflex

p7 - tassel - lashes nervously like
 Morcowitz - 'otherness' realm -
 non-human

p8 - bottom - should mention
 first page part of a later
 series grouping of style

p10 - mention so many artists he
 admires - say why, how
 reflected

artists lists boring

10-12 boring - laundry list of artists
 destruction idea overdone

p15
 Bacon
 relate
 to Platon

13 - freedom & inspiration good - quell is
 via quadrane

NO REAL STRUCTURE - PARA
 FOLLOW BY ASSO C OF IOEA p14

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

hallucination story

p9 - once sequence
of images from
one painting
leads to another

p9/10 - Pope - mines - black
ground - screen image
time may quote perfect -

one admiration - Goya - reality
genet - shadowy reality

16 - nothing about the
honor of image -
insanity - edge of
darkness - when
soul, rationality is
extinguished
- writes about him as if
he were Watteau

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Modern Lascoons

So
AT
3-0324

gambler's
wrong metaphor

- Spender
end of the
human

all animal protest

lags -

heroynous
Bosch behinds

modern hell -

AT 3-0324

association of ideas -

③ 016-16. hallucinatory
16 wonderful - Pope series
should be as deep - clusters
of steps * P17

* ONE WEARIES OF DESCRIPTION
no matter how good of pic after pic
make in final tuptch

* Bandelara
man lectern, amblable, frors

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

✓ Catal. # 67 - Matta
he liked Matta

LAOCOON

7 - Eliot
Sweeney Agonistes

love couch - analysts couch
play association word games

89 repeat self

90 summary

where is
Banco
LEVEL OF
REFLEX

Start

①

don't like gambling metaphor
prefer Laocoon
gambling metaphor labored

Speed
not rapidity of execution - but identity
of stroke & psychic impulse -

Speed gets rid of traditional
entanglements with medium

too mild generally

P5 - Picasso

P4
Summary

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Dear Jim Friday ①

Here's the Bacon
to - and a very lively and
interesting job you've done
on a subject requiring real
courage. It's made a
lot of minor suggestions
some of which may be
helpful.

2 other points: Could you
comment on ~~what seems to me~~
~~some relationship between~~
~~Daybridge and the 2 Pope series~~
which might be another
approach to movement
quite different from that of the
Jury's dog. ~~Especially~~ the
second, especially as reproduced
in the Tate cat. Suggests
Daybridge or the earlier Nidor?
The "photo-interview" with
? Guizot or? The earlier

series ca 50-51 is less ⁽²⁾
like an action series; ^{it's} more
psychological than physical;
yet seen at Durlacher's
all together and all the
same size and palette they
seem kinetic - could
you reproduce one of the
series complete on a 2-
col page spread?

like a series
of stills from a film portrait-
studies.

Also there seems to me
a conspicuous break in
style about 1959-60 towards
a simplified archonette
and background with strong
heavy contours outlined in black
or color and a sense of bulk
and density - from Velazquez
to Zurbaren (though of course
fresher and more Rubens like)

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

lastly - have just had ⁽³⁾
to examine Selig's Rothko
catalog for another
purpose and find no reference
at all to our wonderful
picture painted - and bought
in 1950⁺ - and with such trouble
I am always
knot out by historians' - and
art critics' - indifference to
purchases by museums as
opposed to down exhibitions.
On page 11 would you think
it relevant to mention our
purchase of Painting 1946?
as a factor in B.'s
international reputation?
This was bought ^{in 1948} 2 years after
it was painted, before the
one man show at Brauns
and the articles by Melville
and Hunter, and 5 years
before the show at Drexler's.
It was shown often in the
museum and given a major plate

in our History of Modern Art.
I know this purchase had an
effect in England and encouraged
the shows in Venice and N.Y.
when, of course, Kirk and I
saw it. (The Tate didn't buy
or acquire a Bacon before 1950)
What a paradise I'd
love to be getting to be!

Here's the Cooper
piece on Rothko's book
(which I haven't seen. What
Bacon does it reproduce?)

What a relief to you
to be through with the
Bacon job!

all the best
R-

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

3

work on my father's farm near Dublin. I read almost nothing as a child - as for pictures, I was hardly aware that they existed." (bibl. xx). He did, however, travel often with his father to England. In his late 'teens he left home for good and made his way to France and Germany. For a brief time he settled in Berlin, a city whose sinister and debauched postwar atmosphere could have interested him, as it did so many artists, both incipient and established, of the period. By the late 1920s he had moved back to London. There he supported himself as a designer and interior decorator of marked and, for the time and place, quite advanced talent (page xx).

Bacon had no formal training as a painter, nor did he aspire to become a professional artist until he was nearly thirty. In reply to the writer's question as to what ~~##~~ had decided him to be a painter he answered that he had no idea whatever. He added, with the irony ~~####~~ that many dedicated artists find irresistible, that he profoundly wished he had never started! ~~#####~~ (Bibl. xx) During the later 1920s he began to execute some relatively abstract paintings of which perhaps the most ambitious is a tall screen in three sections (page xx). There is little indication in this or any other very early work of the kind of painter he was to become. These images, insofar as one can judge from reproductions, seem mild and decorative; they show the influence of various older artists, both English and French. So far as is known, none of them has survived.

If Bacon's progress as an artist at first was uncertain~~#~~ and halting, explosive forces of temperament must have been building up within him. In 1932, for example, he painted The Crucifixion (a picture better known as Golgotha, though Bacon apparently dislikes the latter title because of its melodramatic overtones⁰. (page xx). This is already

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

5034, Bacon

Among European painters risen to international fame since World War II is the Englishman, Francis Bacon. Considering Bacon's present-day eminence, it is surprising that many details of his life and career remain obscure. In part this is because he is himself almost totally indifferent to autobiographical information. As an example of this attitude, which is felt profoundly, he was once asked whether he was descended from the great Elizabethan writer whose name he shares. He replied that he had no idea whatever nor any curiosity about finding out! For a very long time it has even been difficult to discover his exact birth-date, which has varied from one biographical account to the next and, according to a close friend, on at least one occasion was invented by the artist himself as suggesting a fortuitous numerical sequence in playing roulette. We know at last, thanks to the research of Sir John Rothenstein and Ronald Alley in preparing their admirable catalog of the recent Bacon retrospective exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London, that Bacon was born in Dublin at 63 Ir. Baggot Street on October 28, 1909, the son of Edward Anthony Mortimer Bacon and Christina Winifred Firth Bacon, both parents being English rather than Irish.*

It is typical of Bacon that combinations of numbers in roulette should have prompted him to invent his own date of birth. His passion for gambling is well known to his intimates. On many occasions, after selling a canvas or two, he has set off for Monte Carlo to try out a self-invented and presumably fallible system for breaking the bank. This passion plays an important part in his philosophy as an artist, as he confessed when he wrote of his colleague, the late Matthew Smith, "I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the ~~bits~~ ^{stuff} down." (bibl. 00) He prefers

* This precise information was obtained by the Tate Gallery from the Official Registrar in Dublin.

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ~~slides~~ ^{Autographs} in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 2 -

to paint very rapidly with a large brush -- "a loaded one-inch brush of the kind that ironmongers stock," to use Robert Melville's words. (bibl. 00)

Bacon ~~often~~ ^{generally} though far from invariably, chooses big canvases, ^{as if he were playing for big stakes.} Moreover, he is frighteningly quick to accept miscalculation and failure in his gambler's choice as a painter. No one really knows how many pictures he has ^s destroyed after completing them ^{and then finding them lacking} and becoming dissatisfied. The number is great, and once more Robert Melville's words are pertinent: "Francis Bacon has a horror of giving proofs of his powers. He paints at such phenomenal speed that, if the bulk of his work had been preserved, he would almost certainly have more large pictures to his name than any other living artist." (bibl. 00)

We shall return later to a discussion of why Bacon's technique is so impulsive and why rapidity of execution is an integral accompaniment to his creative vision, as though he feels obliged to make his decisions before hearing an invisible and implacable croupier cry "rien va plus!" For now it should be mentioned that Bacon's destructive impatience with the slightest flaw or lessening of conviction in his work is refreshing in an era when many artists, good and bad, preserve and market the merest scraps from their studios. Sometimes, however, according to London friends, Bacon has destroyed pictures whose shortcomings were apparent to no one but himself. Even so, one cannot but admire ^{almost desperate} the severity of his ^{self-criticism} conscience.

Though born in Dublin, Bacon came from English stock, as already noted. His father was a trainer of race horses, who for professional reasons preferred Ireland to his native England. The family was moderately prosperous, and Bacon's upbringing seems to have been conventional except for the important fact that he was not for long forced by his parents to have the usual supervised education. In his own words, possibly exaggerated, "I had no upbringing at all, and I used having fascination with the theme of the qualification as developed by artists as divergent in period and style as Cézanne and Gogh. It seems probable, however,

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{Antony} slides in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 3 -

simply to work on my father's farm near Dublin. I read almost nothing as a child -- as for pictures, I was hardly aware that they existed." (bibl. 00) He did, however, travel often with his father to England, and in his late 'teens left home for good and made his way to France and Germany, settling for a while in Berlin, whose sinister and debauched postwar atmosphere very likely appealed to him. In the late 1920s he moved to London and kept alive by designing rugs and furniture and acting as an interior decorator of considerable talent (page 00).

Bacon had no formal training as a painter, and he did not aspire to become a professional artist until he was nearly thirty. In reply to the writer's question as to what had decided him to paint, he declared that he had no idea whatever. He added, typically, that he profoundly wished he had never started! (bibl. 00) During the later 1920s he began to execute some relatively abstract works of which perhaps the most ambitious is a tall screen in three sections (page 00). There is little indication in this or any other very early work of the kind of painter he was to become. These images, insofar as one can judge from reproductions, seem mild and purposefully decorative; they show some influence from older artists such as Edward Wadsworth in England and Lurçat in France. Obviously Bacon himself thought them derivative, since so far as is known none survive.

If Bacon's progress as an artist was at first uncertain and halting, explosive forces of temperament must have been making themselves felt. In 1932, for example, he painted The Crucifixion (a picture better known as Golgotha, though Bacon apparently dislikes the latter title because of its dramatic overtones). This is already a prophetic and compelling image, arbitrary in color in that the right side of the figure from leg to head is painted in blood red, while the left side is defined by gray-white tones. The picture reflects Bacon's lasting fascination with the theme of the Crucifixion as developed by artists as divergent in period and style as Cimabue and Grünewald. It seems probable, however,

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{whispering} ~~stages~~ in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 4 -

that at this early date it was the former's revolutionary concept of this august subject which influenced Bacon more than that of the great German master, whose Iseheim altarpiece had only recently been re-projected into fame by Picasso's variations on it.

But which Crucifixion by Cimabue did Bacon admire most? Assuming that the thirteenth-century master's almost illegible frescoes of the Calvary at Assisi would not have held his attention, the choice probably narrows down to the famous Crucifixion in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di S. Domenico at Arezzo and the immense and more realistic version in the ^{Church of} Chiesa di Sta. Croce in Florence (page 00). If the striated ribs of the Arezzo picture are repeated in Bacon's painting, it nevertheless seems more plausible to think that the young British artist would have had in hand a photograph of the Cimabue at Florence. He had not, so far as the writer knows, yet been in Italy and seen the Cimabue originals. He would not, one assumes, have been much concerned with the intricate problem of whether a given work is by Cimabue himself or by a skilled disciple.

Around 1936 Bacon continued his search for authentic personality as a painter in a curious picture which portrays a monstrous seated figure accompanied by the dog which has recurred in his art at intervals, as we shall see. But it was not until 1945 that the theme of the Crucifixion once more gave Bacon the creative impetus he needed. At that time Graham Sutherland was making the preparatory studies for the large Crucifixion he had been commissioned to paint for the Church of St. Matthew in Northampton, England. There can be no doubt that Sutherland's example acted as a catharsis on his younger colleague. Indeed, Bacon himself confirmed this fact when in a recent interview he said that "all his life he had been looking for some help to find a theoretical background for his painting." He added: "Once in his life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it." (bibl. 00)

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{Autographs} ~~stages~~ in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 5 -

Sutherland's influence was important, but it must quickly be said that Bacon's paintings of figures at the foot of the Cross are infinitely more distraught and violent than those of his elder. Sutherland's interest tended to focus on such details from nature ^(or Grinewald) as the Crown of Thorns, while Bacon's centered on images of human bestiality and deformation. The anguished spirit of the latter's "studies" for the Crucifixion has been eloquently described by Stephen Spender: "These appalling dehumanized faces, which epitomize cruelty and mockery, are of the crucifiers rather than the crucified. And this remains true of his [Bacon's] work until now. His figures are of those who participate in the crucifixion of humanity which also includes themselves. If they are not always the people who actually hammer in the nails they are those among the crowd which shares in the guilt of cruelty to the qualities which are -- or were -- beneficently human, and which here seem to have been banished forever." (bibl. 00)

It seems possible that during the mid-1940s Bacon was experiencing belatedly the effect in England of the International Surrealist Exhibition, held at London's New Burlington Galleries in the summer of 1936. Specifically, as several critics have pointed out, there is some affinity between Bacon's malformed figures for the Crucifixion and the ferocious imagery of a late recruit to the surrealist movement, Patta Echaurren. But Bacon's figures of 1945 announce the emergence of a thoroughly personal talent, as in the picture here reproduced (page 00). The scream now takes its place as a recurrent accent in Bacon's lugubrious, piercing iconography, as though at intervals he has continued to be haunted by the ^{agonized} ~~anguished~~, ^{shrieking} ~~wounded~~ nurse in S. M. Eisenstein's great film of 1925, ^{Armored Cruiser} ~~The Battleship Potemkin~~. (page 00)

Bacon's subject matter, though never fixed or predictable, began to assume its basic psychological identity in 1946, the year in which he exhibited a group of his studies for the Crucifixion at the Lefevre Gallery in London. His was and remains an iconography primarily concerned with the torments and hysteria of

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{whitely} ~~stages~~ in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 6 -

contemporary existence. Its aim has been well stated by the artist himself: "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them like a snail, leaving a trail of human presence and memory traces of past events, as the snail leaves its slime." (bibl. 00) But what gives his art its extraordinary force is that it is expressed in seductive rather than satirical terms. His technical handling is so deft and magic^{al}, that he seems to caress rather than belabor his monstrous subject matter. In Sam Hunter's words, "Bacon's thoroughly modern horrors are connected still with a neo-Edwardian sense of luxury; and his satanism, despite an up-to-date clinical note, can suggest the Yellow Book. If Aubrey Beardsley's generation were alive and given the benefits of a modern education, it would no doubt be painting in the style of Francis Bacon." (bibl. 00) And Robert Melville has reinforced the point of the voluptuousness of Bacon's art: "Never has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom: yet it occurs in the atmosphere of a concentration camp." (bibl. 00)

In 1945 and 1946 Bacon created two unforgettable paintings: Figure in a Landscape and the major work known simply as Painting (pages 00, 00). It is astonishing to learn from the Tate Gallery's fine catalog of the recent Bacon exhibition that the first of these two pictures was painted from a snapshot of the artist's friend Eric Hall dozing in a chair in Hyde Park. But what an amazingly imaginative transcription of so commonplace a scene! The figure is seated outdoors before a railing on which a machine gun is mounted; his head is completely enshrouded by his upturned coat; the mood of the picture is distinctly ominous and certainly not at all suggestive of a friend asleep in a public park.

In Painting the man has moved indoors to what would seem to be one of the butcher shops which Bacon is said to have visited often in youth. Behind him hangs a huge carcass, its arms or legs outstrung as if it were crucified. The man's

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{photographs} ~~slides~~ in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 7 -

face is now half-hidden by the shadow cast by an umbrella -- a symbolic reference to the umbrella of Chamberlain, which became an uneasy token of appeasement in Europe? Before him on a circular metal structure are placed other carcasses, flanked by a battery of those microphones which have been the constant ^{instrument} ally of perverse oratory in our time. Behind the figure hang curtains with tassels, and here again as in the case of Bacon's recurrent use of the human scream based on that of the wounded Potemkin nurse, a photographic reference is implicit. We know that Bacon has always been deeply interested in press photography in its more macabre aspects and that a snapshot in his possession shows Hitler exhorting a crowd in his hoarse and lurid rhetoric. Beside the dictator on his balcony hangs a tasseled curtain whose idling tranquility adds an ironic note of contrast to public hysteria (page 00). In physical terms Bacon's Painting is rich and subtle, as though the artist intended to give a beguiling veneer to an image of frightening portent.

It is difficult to determine at what precise moment Bacon first made effective use of that scumbled technique which often gives his figures a quivering ambiguity of placing and stance. In the Head No. V, also known as Figure with Monkey, for example, the man's face merges with the curtain through which he peers at an ape whose head, too, dissolves in the drapery's folds. The result is an uncanny evocation of motion through a rippled vibration of contours, as when a stone is dropped in a pond. One thinks of the magic sequence in the 1924 Buster Keaton film, Sherlock, Jr., wherein through trick photography the comedian disappears into and for the briefest second becomes part of a solid wall.

It seems to the writer among others that Bacon's treatment of motion will rank as one of his most original and successful contributions to painting. An estimable precedent is to be found in Velasquez' blurred definition of the spokes of the spinning wheel in the Prado Museum's superb picture, Las Hilanderas

second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{photographs} ~~images~~ in rapid succession.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 8 -

(page 00). But for the most part earlier artists had suggested movement by such devices as flared drapery, as in the Victory of Samothrace, or they had frozen a running figure in so untenable a posture that the observer senses this posture must instantly be broken, as in Bruegel's The Faithless Shepherd (page 00).

It is true, of course, that Bacon's elders like Marcel Duchamp and the Italian Futurists had also sought a pictorial solution to the problem of representing figures and objects in motion. But their forms in transit were separately and quite well defined, whereas Bacon's are often suggested through a deliberate blurring of ~~focus~~, ^{the image as though the figure moved during a time exposure} as though he were an expert photographer whose camera had been jarred unexpectedly while a picture was being taken. The difference between Bacon's approach and that of the Futurists is apparent if we compare his Dog and Man with Balla's celebrated Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash, a painting which Bacon had almost certainly seen when it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1952 (pages 00, 00).

By 1949 -- the year of his first one-man exhibition at the Hanover Gallery -- Bacon's art had assumed its own special character both in technique and iconography, and the influence of Sutherland had all but disappeared. In that year he painted Head VI (page 00), the first of an extensive series of pictures inspired by Velasquez' famous Portrait of Pope Innocent X in the Palazzo Doria at Rome. It is interesting to note that Bacon has never seen the Spanish master's famous portrait because, as he told Sir John Rothenstein, "When I was in Rome I felt reluctant to look at it." (bibl. 00) But working from a reproduction he transcribed the V-

case of Peck's pursued by tortois
 1949-50

The Pope's head is bisected by the Hitlerian tassal, already mentioned, his mouth is agape in a scream like that of the nurse in Potemkin or of Goebbels : more frenzied exaltations (page xx) or the figure in Munch's great image, The Shriek (page xx). His Holiness is shown within a glass case which isolates him from the outer world and muffles the sound of his despair. Later, in Bacon's second series of paraphrases on the same subject (pages xx,yy), we shall discover a strange and personal solution of the kinetic problem, as though the artist were projecting still ^{whitely} ~~stills~~ in rapid succession.

x

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	1.20

Soby: Bacon

- 8 -

(page 00). But for the most part earlier artists had suggested movement by such devices as flared drapery, as in the Victory of Samothrace, or they had frozen a running figure in so untenable a posture that the observer senses this posture must instantly be broken, as in Bruegel's The Faithless Shepherd (page 00).

It is true, of course, that Bacon's elders like Marcel Duchamp and the Italian Futurists had also sought a pictorial solution to the problem of representing figures and objects in motion. But their forms in transit were separately and quite well defined, whereas Bacon's are often suggested through a deliberate blurring of focus, ^{the image as though the figure moved during a time} as though he were an expert photographer whose ^{if} camera had been jarred unexpectedly while a picture was being taken. The difference between Bacon's approach and that of the Futurists is apparent if we compare his Dog and Man with Balla's celebrated ^{Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash} Leash in Motion, a painting which Bacon had almost certainly seen when it was exhibited at the Tate Gallery in the summer of 1952 (pages 00, 00).

By 1949 -- the year of his first one-man exhibition at the Hanover Gallery -- Bacon's art had assumed its own special character both in technique and iconography, and the influence of Sutherland had all but disappeared. In that year he painted Head VI (page 00), the first of an extensive series of pictures inspired by Velasquez' famous Portrait of Pope Innocent X in the Palazzo Doria at Rome. It is interesting to note that Bacon has never seen the Spanish master's famous portrait because, as he told Sir John Rothenstein, "When I was in Rome I felt reluctant to look at it." (bibl. 00) But working from a reproduction he transcribed the Velasquez into a fascinatingly original image.

~~The Pope's head is bisected by the Hitlerian tassel, already mentioned, and his mouth is agape in a scream like that of the nurse in Potemkin. His Holiness is shown within a glass case which isolates him from the outer world and muffles the sound of his despair.~~

* some of Balla's figures suggested by tortois
 shell

as mouth
 the figure in Potemkin's celebrated image, the Shrike
 (pp. 100)

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 9 -

Whatever its psychological implications, Head VI announces with full vigor an abiding obsession of the artist: the enclosures within which animals and humans alike live out their lives. When the Pope Innocent series reaches one of several high points of authority in the Study after Velasquez (page 00), its resplendent but horrified central figure has emerged from its glass case only to be imprisoned again by curtains and railings, even by the spiky ornaments of the Papal chair. Throughout a number of Bacon's pictures in the Pope series there persists an odd physical illusion of the figure being elevated above the ground. In this connection it should be noted, as Sam Hunter was the first to observe, that among the many press photographs in Bacon's studio is one of Pope Pius XII borne aloft on a sedia gestatoria. (bibl. 00) At least two of the three paintings from the Pope series which Bacon completed in 1951 are closer in pose and spirit to this modern snapshot than to Velasquez' famous portrait in the Palazzo Doria.

In the final analysis Bacon's paintings, whatever their theme, suggest the pangs of excommunication in its literal rather than sacerdotal sense. His apes are usually caged, his dogs slink helpless and cringing from their broken leashes, his humans are often segregated within small chambers or otherwise shielded from the ignominies of contemporary civilization. And yet in his paintings an inexplicable sense of opulence prevails, and David Sylvester is right in saying that Bacon "prefers settings which are luxurious and simple: lush velvet curtains and a gilded armchair: like prison-cells for highborn traitors." (bibl. 00)

To return to the Pope series for a moment, it must be noted that a morbid anti-^{clericalism}Christianity has sometimes been read into these works. Bacon's own explanation of his interest in painting papal figures is simpler and more convincing.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 10 -

In Time Magazine for October 19, 1953, he was quoted as saying: "Really I just wanted an excuse to use those colors, and you can't give ordinary clothes that purple color without getting into a false fauve manner." A year earlier (December 12, 1952) the same magazine's press cable from London to New York quoted him as saying that for him art is "a method of opening up areas of feeling rather than merely an illustration of an object." Bacon added significantly: "Real imagination is technical imagination. It is in the ways you think up to bring an event to life again. It is in the search for technique to trap the object at a given moment. Then the technique and the object become inseparable. The object is the technique and the technique is the object. Art lies in the continual struggle to come near to the sensory side of objects." And surely it must be conceded that in Bacon's paraphrases of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, the voluptuous impact of his imagery is at least as strong as its psychological implications.

Bacon's predilections in esthetic matters are an illuminating reflection of his purposes as a painter. In literature he reveres above all the books of Nietzsche and, almost as much, T.S. Eliot's Wasteland and other poems; in youth he had liked the writings of the Irishman, W. B. Stanford, though never with the passion he has reserved for Nietzsche. Among painters he particularly admires are: El Greco, Rembrandt, Velasquez and Goya. He is said to have been fascinated by Michelangelo's drawings of wrestling figures, yet oddly enough his rather perverse Two Figures of 1953 is quite directly based on a Mybridge photograph of two wrestlers rather than on the Renaissance master's sketches. An early enthusiasm for Zurbaran seems to have subsided.

Among modern painters Bacon worships van Gogh's headlong intensity and, at the opposite end of the emotional scale, the oil sketches of Seurat, especially those for La Grande Jatte. He has spoken to friends with awe of the magic brushwork of the late Monets. Among twentieth century artists he likes the early Matisse; he likes Picasso, Bonnard and Soutine regardless of period. Rather inexplicably

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 11 -

he once remarked to David Sylvester that all modern painting began with the hallucinatory depiction of bananas in certain "metaphysical" pictures by Giorgio de Chirico, surrealist art's main progenitor.

What is perhaps more revelatory is that Bacon has been more interested in specific paintings than in the painters who created them. In a verbal reply to a questionnaire sent him in January 1960, by the writer, he said: "Certain painters have created images which have had an hypnotic effect on me." (bibl. 00) He cited as examples Cimabue's Crucifixion, already mentioned, works by Velasquez and Rubens and the late self-portraits of Rembrandt. One knows from his own confession that he has never seen the original of Velasquez' Portrait of Innocent X. Bacon, like so many contemporary artists, has often been inspired by photographs of paintings rather than by the paintings themselves. In our time photographs of works of art have acted as Typhoid Marys of stylistic contagion, as engravings did in earlier centuries. El Greco's View of Toledo is the only version of that painting known to exist. It hangs in New York's Metropolitan Museum, and Bacon has never been to America, though he speaks of the picture as one of his particular favorites. Similarly, while Bacon speaks with enthusiasm of Daumier's Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, one version of which he has probably seen in the Courtauld Institute (page 00), he can have known the Boston Museum's Man on a Rope (page 00) only through reproductions. Yet the latter picture, with its figure's gaping mouth and wry contours, is extremely close in conception to some images by Bacon himself.

It was during the 1950s that Bacon's fame began to assume international proportions. In 1953 he had a one-man exhibition at Durlacher Brothers in New York; in 1954 he was represented by twelve paintings in the British pavilion at the Venice Biennale; in 1957 even Paris, traditionally hesitant about importing Anglo-Saxon contemporary art, gave him a show at the Galerie Rive Gauche. Bacon was photograph its worth is altered. After observing Bacon's picture as close range for almost ten years, it still seem to the writer that the monkey's mouth is altered shut, as in Maxwell's photograph. The forked branches on which the banana like are almost identical in the photograph and the painting.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 12 -

becoming a world figure in painting. The result for a man of his obsessed character was perhaps inevitable: he painted numerous larger pictures; he destroyed many more than were ever exhibited.

Of the pictures of the early 1950s which survive, two are of more than usual interest. These are the Dog of 1952 and the Study of a Baboon of the following year (pages 00, 00). The Dog, with its buckling legs and lolling tongue, is very closely based on one of Muybridge's photographs of a mastiff in motion (page 00). The animal staggers across a labyrinth of rectangles against a background derived from a photograph of one of the Nazi Party's rallies at Nuremberg, according to ^{Ronald Alley} the ~~Tate Gallery's Bacon catalogue~~. (bibl. 00) The dog is escaped and haggard; it seems ready to collapse from exhaustion or rickets. Yet the observer is spell-bound by the technical brilliance of the animal's color and texture, as one is spell-bound by the whites, deep as ermine but flimsy as gauze, in El Greco's treatment of the right foreground figure in The Burial of Count Orgaz. Not many artists in recent times have been able to rediscover the alchemy of pigment which distinguished El Greco and, after him, Velasquez, Goya and Picasso. In the writer's opinion, Francis Bacon is one of them.

In the Study of a Baboon the city is left behind and we are in the National Park at ^{Nairobi} ~~Kenya~~ or in another of the parks with ^{Zoological} ~~zoos~~ in Africa. Bacon travels in Africa often and widely, usually making his headquarters at Tangier. One of his favorite books -- his Bible he once called it -- is Marius Maxwell's Stalking Big Game with a Camera in Equatorial Africa (Heinemann, London, 1925). If one studies this remarkable book carefully, it seems clear that Bacon's ape, perched with luminous eyes on the forked branches of an acacia tree, is derived from one of the plates in Maxwell's book (page 00).* There is a theory, perhaps apocryphal, that in Africa

* This writer reluctantly disagrees with the statement in the catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Bacon exhibition that the artist's Study of a Baboon may not derive from Maxwell's photograph in that Bacon's ape is shown with mouth open whereas in the photograph its mouth is closed. After observing Bacon's picture at close range for almost ten years, it still seems to the writer that the monkey's mouth is clamped shut, as in Maxwell's photograph. The forked branches on which the baboon sits are almost identical in the photograph and the painting.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

- 13 -

Bacon had been startled by the fact that monkeys and other animals were confined in zoos, while just outside town limits their cousins ran free. At any rate, the ape in Study of a Baboon is a baleful phantom, emerged from Walter Scott's narrative "Wandering Willie's Tale" in his novel Redgauntlet or based on Poe's treacherous monkey in The Murders in the Rue Morgue. Bacon's baboon lives only half fenced-in, unable to resolve the choice between freedom and imprisonment. A satirical parallel with human dilemma might be drawn. One assumes that Bacon would be the last to labor it.

If photographs and albums thereof have meant much to Bacon, spontaneous first-hand experience of scenes and events has been no less important. Once, for example, he traveled into the interior of Africa as far as Salisbury in Southern Rhodesia. In the above-mentioned cable from Time Magazine's London to New York offices he was quoted as saying: "I felt and memorized [the] excitement of seeing animals move through long grass." Bacon's excursion was made during the rainy season in the jungle, and the animals were usually seen through a heavy mist which suited his recurrent fascination with the mysteries of translucence, as though some sort of Veronica's veil hung at the window of his imagination. In many of his paintings based on the veldt, he portrays elephants and other massive beasts -- and sometimes human beings as well -- emerging as apparitions from their murky concealment.

There are two categories of subject matter -- portraiture and landscape -- in which one would not expect so subjective an artist as Bacon to be much interested. The fact is, however, that he has executed a number of distinguished portraits, chiefly of personal friends. One of the most memorable of these is the Study for a Portrait (page 00) in which the figure of Lucian Freud appears to topple forward within a glass cocoon. The image is haunting in its sinister, nervous energy; its intensity suggests an ambiguity between affection and lathing, as if the mutual reaction of artist to sitter were indecisive and troubling.

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 14 -

Perhaps for the very reason that Bacon's art as a whole requires deep emotional fixation, he has not often been able to retain his creative impetus in painting portraits on commission. But the same, of course, may justly be said of a majority of the commissioned portraits of our period, this being an era in which portraiture usually flourishes best in an atmosphere of long friendship or of bridal night. Nevertheless, it must be conceded that even Bacon's less deeply felt portraits are rescued from vacuity by his virtuoso talents as ~~to~~ ~~stylistic~~ signature.

In portraiture Bacon has always been merciless with his sitters. He has been no less ruthless in painting himself. The Self Portrait of the later 1950s (page 00) exposes without compromise the rumpled rotundity of physique to which reference has been made in many journalistic descriptions of Bacon. In this picture the artist's face is blurred and distraught, his mouth open to echo the screams of his papal figures. And he is enclosed in a black chamber without plausible exit, like others he has condemned to a strange and melancholy isolation.

The overt lyricism of the Study of a Figure in a Landscape (page 00) is qualified by the phantomic and disturbing appearance of the nude, crouching man in its center. This figure casts an unreasonably opaque shadow, reminding us of Bacon's self-confessed esteem for the early works of de Chirico in which shadows become the hallucinatory protagonists of eerie drama. The man's presence in Bacon's picture is so chimerical and fleeting that it is possible to think for a moment of the painting as uninhabited landscape. As such it is remarkably sensitive. The slashing brushstrokes which outline the foreground's deep and swaying grass are a convincing and personal extension of the Impressionist technique as explored by certain of Bacon's elders such as Vuillard and Sickert. One can readily imagine the lightening speed at which the picture was executed to avoid a particular anathema of Bacon -- laboriousness. Once more it is useful to recall his own

previously explored: a seated Pope; eyes in a cage; nude figures sprawled in tall

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 15 -

words on Matthew Smith: "I think that painting today is pure intuition and good luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the ^{stuff} ~~bits~~ down." (bibl. 00)

In 1955-56 Bacon executed a series of four "portraits" inspired by J.S. Deville's life mask of William Blake, completed in 1823, four years before the great poet's death (pages 00, 00). Quite typically Bacon's pictures were painted from a photograph of the mask showing it against a dark ground rather than from the original sculpture in London's National Portrait Gallery. It might be assumed that the series was motivated by a veneration for Blake who, as painter and illustrator, had become an idol for many modern British painters who sought in native sources an escape from the domination of the School of Paris. But in 1960, replying to a questionnaire as to which painters of the past he especially admired, Bacon added as a footnote that he disliked intensely the art of Blake and Fuseli. And indeed it must be admitted that Blake's neo-Mannerism has little to do stylistically with Bacon's own headlong expressionism, though some of the former's poems are comparable in mystical abandon and are admired by Bacon.

In any case, it is not too difficult to see why Deville's life mask should have interested Bacon. Blake's wide, taut and forbidding mouth, furrowed eyebrows, domed head and closed eyes supplied ideal points of departure for the scumbled distortions of which Bacon by then had become a master. The fact that he made four versions of the "portrait" is an indication of the effect Blake's bulldog face had on him. The series is notable among other things for a new richness of texture, a use of heavy, scrambled impasto which became steadily more assertive as the series progressed until, in the fourth and final image, the pigment is troweled on as ferociously as in many works by one of Bacon's preferred modern artists -- Chaim Soutine.

In 1955-56 Bacon painted an unusually large number of portraits, chiefly of patrons and friends. At the same time he turned back at intervals to themes previously explored: a seated Pope; apes in a cage; nude figures sprawled in tall

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 16 -

grass. And in 1956 he painted the first version of a series of eight pictures based on Vincent van Gogh's celebrated portrait of himself on the road to Tarascon (pages 00, 00). Bacon's color immediately became far brighter than ever before, presumably in ^{response} tribute to the Dutch master's violent palette of his final years in the south of France.

Bacon has long been deeply moved by van Gogh's letters as well as his paintings, so that his eight pictures may reasonably be considered ^a tributary offering. The first of them (and the only one finished in 1956, the other the following year) is a close-up of van Gogh walking down the blazing road in Provence, his painter's equipment slung over his shoulders and carried under his arms. The image is dominated by the intense yellow of van Gogh's straw hat, as though Bacon meant to suggest both the glare of semi-tropical sunlight and the unquenchable blaze rising in Vincent's mind. The surrounding landscape is handled in relatively abstract patterns; the sandy, flat road in van Gogh's self portrait is overgrown with the lush jungle grass that had fascinated Bacon on his African travels. At the right there is a subdued allusion to the dense shadow of a striding figure in mid-day sun which gives so dramatic an accent to van Gogh's picture.

As in the case of Velasquez' Pope Innocent X, El Greco's View of Toledo, William Blake's life mask and many other images from the art of the past, it seems fairly certain that Bacon worked from reproductions in creating a long series of paraphrases of van Gogh's self portrait. It is no matter. One thinks immediately of the drawings Picasso made around 1930 after he had seen in a Left Bank bookshop an album of plates of Grünewald's altarpiece at Colmar -- a town, so far as is known, he has never visited. One thinks, too, of Miró's astonishing 1929 paintings of "Dutch Interiors," based on a handful of postcards he had brought

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 17 -

back from Holland. But among younger painters perhaps none has made more imaginative use of the transcriptional process than Bacon. His best works in the van Gogh series do not dilute but convincingly transform the ferocious energy of the post-impressionist masterwork which was their point of departure.

Bacon's paintings on the van Gogh theme show a fascinating progression. At first he comes closer and closer to van Gogh's own conception of the scene on Tarascon's road. The road itself and the striated landscape beyond, even the walking figure's shadow, are given a relatively literal importance, and details such as the stick or tripod in van Gogh's hand find their place. But then, in Bacon's seventh and eighth paraphrases, the Dutch master's tormented, stubborn figure gradually ^{melts into} (melds with) the landscape until finally it may be deciphered only with difficulty (page 00). Yet Bacon has continued to be haunted by van Gogh's self portraits. In 1960 he painted the Homage to van Gogh (page 00) based on the Dutchman's Self Portrait with a Pipe, completed in 1899, the year after van Gogh had cut off his ear. The self portrait's swollen distortions of feature have since been used by Bacon in a number of paintings not directly related to the van Gogh series (page 00).

Since 1960 Bacon has turned often and usually with increasing ferocity of spirit to paintings of the contemporary human figure, as in the Nude Woman and the Man with Statue (pages 00, 00). The first-named of these two pictures in its blatant nakedness and gnarled pose suggests a gangster's aging, stripped moll. Her face is horribly blurred, her contours puffed and fervent, her mouth agape in the fanged grimace that recurs throughout Bacon's imagery. She is a voluptuary and a monster, as if meant to express simultaneously the allure and repulsion of seduction. By comparison, the mood of the Man with Statue is quiet and contemplative, though the picture proposes a disquieting contrast between human brooding and fevers and the over-stuffed complacency of their bourgeois ambiance. The statue, which is presumably the man's companion and reflection, recalls the

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 18 -

caricatural extravagance of Daumier, one of Bacon's idols, and also the hermetic somnambulism of certain sculptured heads by Alberto Giacometti, whose talents Bacon is said to admit only half-heartedly.

Despite his recurrent preoccupation with the horrors and nervous tensions of our period, Bacon has not been willing to turn his back forever on the taste for contemporary elegance which absorbed him during his youthful career as an interior decorator, when the precisions of Le Corbusier's and Ozenfant's Purism and the revolutionary scholasticism of the Bauhaus were dominant influences, however briefly (page 00). His Seated Man with Turkey Rug (page 00) is a recent case in point. The picture is so luxurious in color and spirit that its violations of conventional reality, especially in the handling of the man's melting face, are easily overlooked. In the Falling Child (page 00) of 1960 they are again inescapable, and so they are in the Crouching Nude (page 00), wherein the ugly woman coils around herself like a sluggish but evil constrictor.

In 1961 Bacon produced a new series of paintings based on the Velasquez Portrait of Pope Innocent X; it consists of six oils of uniform size (60 x 47 inches). Considered as a whole the series is less brutal and horrific than the great papal series of 1953. But there are gratifying compensations for the loss of fixative malaise. The painting of the Pope's pearly tunic in the third work in the group, for example, is breathtakingly subtle and rich (page 00), indeed not incomparable to the mastery of Velasquez himself, whose art Bacon once urged as an ideal -- if one could add to it "the toughness of a rhinoceros skin." (bibl. 00) In the case of the recent series of variations on Innocent X, Bacon has added a toughness peculiarly his own. The Pope's face drips with the custard of a pie from a Mack Sennett comedy, flung ^{from} nearby and caught head-on. Or, to give a more solemn reading, it puffs out in cheek and jowl with some inexplicable, malignant disorder. If the

deeply and more violently. It is a subject I feel I could do in dozens of different

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 19 -

1961 papal series on the whole is slightly more beatific than the earlier series, its fifth version shows the Pope screaming, with upraised arms. And in all the pictures in the recent series His Holiness' teeth are bared, his face disfigured by bloat and scars. We cannot expect so committed an artist as Bacon to abandon his basic philosophy -- that art should simultaneously repel and beguile.

One of the most hallucinatory of Bacon's late pictures is the Two Figures of 1961 (page 00), painted in opalescent blues and deep reds. The two figures are translucently magnetized, as though fixed together within a plastic bag.

This picture was followed in the spring of 1962 by what may well be the ^{greatest} ~~masterwork~~ of Bacon's entire career to date: the triptych entitled Three Studies for a Crucifixion (pages 00, 00), consisting of three canvas panels, each measuring 78 x 57 inches. On first studying this astonishing work, it seemed to the writer that the right panel alluded to St. Peter, ^{'s martyrdom} since its fang-toothed figure appears to be hanging upside down. It further seemed possible that the central panel, with its blood-stained, reclining nude referred to the Deposition. But how to find religious precedent for the left panel, showing two strange figures walking forward, the one at the left wearing a red cardinal's cap? How to define the two bird-like forms in this panel's foreground, the animal ^{or its shadow} lurking at the very bottom of the right panel or, behind it, the curved white object like a ^{an unreasonably huge} ~~gigantic~~ firehose?

These iconographical problems seemed insoluble, the more so in that Bacon himself is extremely reluctant to discuss the subject matter of his paintings. But on May 6, 1962, he was kind enough to send the writer a letter in which he said: "I cannot I am afraid be very helpful.... The centre figure in my mind does not represent the Deposition or the figure on the right St. Peter. It [the Crucifixion] is a subject which has always haunted me. I hoped to create a set of images which would unlock the valves of feeling and return one to the subject more deeply and more violently. It is a subject I feel I could do in dozens of different

The Museum of Modern Art Archives, NY	Collection:	Series.Folder:
	JTS	I.20

Soby: Bacon

- 20 -

ways -- but now I only want to do a serial portrait of somebody moving about a room." At the same time he confided to his present London dealer, Mr. H. R. Fischer, that the two figures in the left panel are meant to represent Hitler and Himmler opening the doors to the gas chambers used by the Nazis to exterminate Jews. He was unable to explain other details of the triptych, not even the upside-down figure at the right whose head, however violent its contortions, is presumably human as is the cage of its ribs, ^{but} whose lower torso ^{suggests} assumes the contours of some exotic bird yet also could be the hips and bent legs of a dangling ^{emaciated} man.

If even an Erwin Panofsky might well despair of giving an accurate iconological interpretation of Bacon's recent triptych, the fact remains that this is one of the artist's most obsessive and powerful works. The contrast of orange floors to red walls in unforgettably provocative, the black window shades, with their by-now familiar Hitlerian tessels, are beautifully spaced. And the triptych as a whole is an especially vivid proof of the instantaneous certainty with which Bacon works at his best. As noted early in this text, Bacon has always as an artist affirmed his faith in luck. It is this writer's opinion that his "luck" will hold the attention not only of his own but of future generations.