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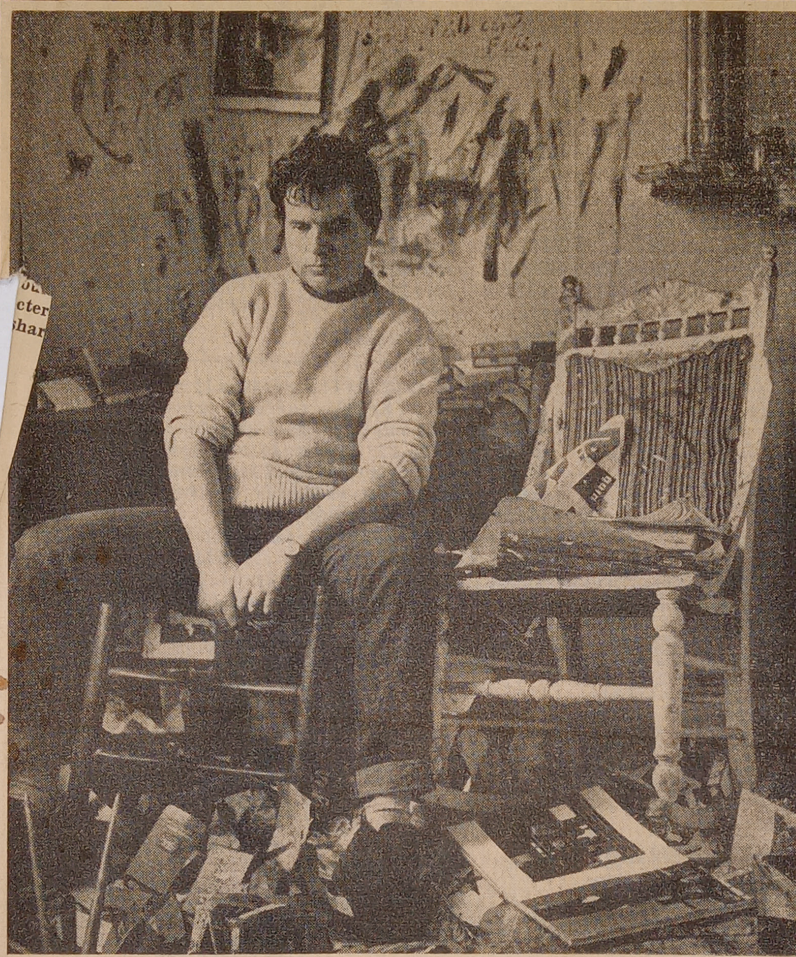
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SUNDAY TIMES MAY 5th 1957

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PORTRAIT GALLERY



Specially photographed for THE SUNDAY TIMES by DOUGLAS GLASS

Francis Bacon

IN the last ten years the name of Francis Bacon has come to stand for the most disquieting of living English artists. The Royal Academy has not yet asked him to be one of its number; if it should ever do so, there might well be white faces at the private view, for Francis Bacon has invented in his painting a demonology more appropriate to "The Revenger's Tragedy" than to the "Essays" of his first-Elizabethan namesake.

He was born in Dublin 47 years ago, but has no Irish blood. (His father, an Englishman, happened to breed horses there.) No art-schooling, and indeed no schooling at all, to speak of, though his questing, imperious and unprejudiced intelligence would do honour to the most ancient Foundation.

Since 1927 he has lived all over the place—in Berlin, where he first tasted that ferocious metropolitan life which has provided him with much of his imagery; Monte

Carlo, where the drama of the landscape accords with his predilection for the gaming-room; and in London, where he has a small flat in Battersea and leads an impulsive, open-handed, noctambular existence.

NIETZSCHE has always fired his imagination, and there is much in him of the energy that crackles through the brief unsettling maxims of "The Will to Power." Energy speaks in the acrobat's walk, the downward pounce upon all that takes his fancy, and the gasp (for years he suffered grievously from asthma) that interrupts the tumultuous coherent sentence.

In his thirties he painted off and on, self-taught, "to see if I could do it," and in 1946 three "Studies for a Crucifixion" were put up, unannounced, in the Lefevre Gallery. Since then his every picture has made a stir, and his personages—the after-Velasquez Cardinals, the face-

less Thing in the undergrowth, the demented man of business and the mongrel dog in the gutter—have become a part of modern legend.

* * *

THIS success he meets with an aristocratic disdain: "If I have another ten years," he says, "I might get to be good." Nine-tenths of his production he destroys; and those who have sat to him for his idiosyncratic portraits report (and our photograph bears out) that the studio floor is deep in ephemeral printed matter; the enormous pictures, face to the wall, bear witness to the rage for work with which he completes a six-foot-square canvas at one session, and the ancient curtains are livid and crusty from his habit of wiping his paint-filled hands upon them.

This week he leaves England to spend the summer in Tangier. His object? Nothing less than to paint, in his own terms, "the history of the last thirty years."

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MARCH 4, 1959
LIFE

COLLECTION MRS. HELEN GRIGG UGARFIELD

"CRUCIFIXION FRAGMENT" was conceived by Francis Bacon in 1950 as a kind of echo of a grotesque dream in which a doglike creature pursues a

shrieking chimera, seemingly pinned to cross. In spite of title it is nonreligious painting in which Bacon aims at conveying haunting subconscious images.

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Bacon ~~DEF~~ ~~short~~ ~~two~~



Francis Bacon - of Tate cat. of Matthew
Smith show [1953] p. 12 - "A painter's tribute"
London Times Lit. Supplement
new - issue vol. 26 ?

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Producer: D.S. Carne-Ross

COMMENT NO.40

Robert Melville talks about an exhibition of paintings by Francis Bacon

TRANSMISSION: THURSDAY 21ST MARCH 1957: 7.15 - 7.35 pm

REPEAT: SATURDAY 23RD MARCH 1957: 10.40 - 11 pm

THIRD PROGRAMME

(Pre-rec. 20th March 1957: 5.30 - 5.45 pm DLO 26457)

This exhibition includes some large paraphrases of a small picture by Van Gogh which are ^{complete} full-dress demonstrations of Bacon's approach to painting. Paradoxically enough, they cast some doubt upon the idea that art derives from art.

This is very far from being the first occasion on which Francis Bacon has taken a work of art or some other ready-made image as his starting point. Indeed, he attaches so much importance to the life of images that he seems to take it for granted that an image which is already powerfully expressive has hidden reserves of expressiveness that can be released under the right kind of pressure. It is a dangerous and even presumptuous belief to act upon; but for better or worse, Bacon is only interested in a kind of painting that invokes hazard and skirts disaster. The cost, reckoned in terms of discarded canvases and unresolved paintings, has been high. Nonetheless during the last ten years or so he has exhibited strange clusters of images derived from images which constitute an intensely personal achievement.

Several paintings that owed their inception to his certainty that the Portrait of Pope Innocent the Tenth by Velasquez contained potentially scandalous material on the human condition. ^{This} seems to me to be justification enough for ^{Bacon's} his procedure. But there has been much else besides: images that have been fetched out of Blake's life mask; out of the close-up in Eisenstein's Odessa Steps sequence of a woman shot in the eye, whose broken glasses are still ~~whipped~~ clipped to her nose; out of the photographs of male nudes

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in Muybridge's 'The Human Figure in Motion'. Images of images. Images which extend the expressiveness of images beyond their established limits.

Bacon could say with Gabriel Marcel that 'error consists in staying within the sphere of disinterested objectivity ... that to be human one has to rise to 'concrete experiences of participation'. But in Bacon's case participation is indistinguishable from invasion, and he acknowledges the genius of Van Gogh, for instance, with a kind of loving destructiveness, ~~which brings to mind the ferocious joy with which the poet Artaud celebrated Van Gogh's straightforwardness - citing as evidence such practices as the tying of twelve lighted candles round his hat in order to paint a night scene.~~

The picture by Van Gogh which provides the starting point for Bacon's latest group of paintings at the Hanover Gallery is well-known. It is usually called 'The Road to Tarascon' and depicts Van Gogh himself, hurrying along a country road on a hot morning, carrying a load of painter's gear on his back, and casting a distorted black shadow. The trotting figure of the painter is naively conceived and bounces along rather comically. If you have a reproduction of this picture it might be worth while to look it up before going to the Hanover Gallery. It is not necessary to have seen it to appreciate Bacon's paintings of Van Gogh going to work - but it helps one to understand that the act of participation has involved Bacon in a kind of symbolic liquidation of the Van Gogh picture.

The paint in the Bacon pictures is thick, and applied with broad strokes. The colours have a sullen brilliance. And unlike a good many of his previous works, the impact on the eye comes not from the central image alone, but from the entire rectangle of the canvas.

The figure of Van Gogh has become, like his own cypresses, a splash of black in a sun-drenched landscape. ...

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He has been slowed down and the landscape seems to be overtaking him. His head is too large for his body, the box of painting materials on his back has become a hump, and his shadow seeps out of him like a black mucus. In one of the pictures he stops altogether and turns his head to stare at us out of a confused face. The road is a fast-moving river of paint which swirls round his feet and roars past him. He is black and terrible and incomprehensible against the light, and yet - again like his own cypresses - he has been painted into the light; he has been worked into the wet paint of the landscape and has become part of its fabric.

Bacon once described, with deceptive clarity, how such things come about. 'Every movement of the brush on the canvas alters the shape and implications of the image ... the medium is so fluid and subtle that every change that is made loses what is already there in the hope of making a fresh gain.'

His paintings tend to have the look of works in progress, and the studies of Van Gogh going to work, although unusually 'finished', are not exceptions. Perhaps it is because the tissue of feelings and presentiments that slides into them is as fluid as the brush strokes.

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13 FÉVRIER 1957

19 FÉVRIER 1957

Francis BACON
Caricade
un peintre halluciné

FRANCIS BACON est né à Dublin en 1910. Paris le connaît encore assez peu. A Londres même, où il vit généralement, il n'exposa pour la première fois, à la Hanover Gallery qu'en 1939. Mais à New York, il participe à des expositions en 1953, puis en 1956 (les maîtres de la peinture anglaise de 1800 à 1950). En Europe, le pavillon britannique de la Biennale de Venise en 1954 lui réservait une large place.

Les toiles de Francis Bacon sont d'une composition extrêmement simple. Particulièrement celles que présente actuellement à Paris pour la première fois la Galerie Rive Droite. Ce sont pour la plupart des études pour un portrait, pour une figure... ce qui justifie sans doute leur caractère spontané et rapide. Un sujet central et souvent unique : figure, animal, monstre, émerge de fonds sombres, verts, bleu de nuit, où quelques traits plus clairs et tirés à la règle découpent ou suggèrent à peine la perspective fuyante d'un espace nocturne et clos. Parfois une sorte de rideau lacéré de stries régulières le remplace. Ceci, c'est l'enlour, la zone de nuit et d'opacité d'où surgit comme une vision de cauchemar une créature qui se trouble et s'estompe, comme si la forme en avait d'abord été dessinée et peinte avec précision puis ensuite effacée à grands coups de gomme gigantesque pour sombrer dans le vertige.

L'inquiétante apparence de fantôme du chien qui rôde, l'horrible aspect d'écorché vif de cette surprenante « Etude pour la nurse du cuirassé Potemkine », ces raccourcis cruels des « figures dans un paysage », sont les manifestations diverses de la transposition permanente d'une vision intérieure obsédante. Parfois pourtant la vision se précise et d'étape en étape, tel ce portrait d'un homme d'Eglise, passe de l'obscurcissement le plus total et de la quasi-hébétéude à un éclaircissement progressif. Cependant, ce qui domine, ce sont les visages d'angoisse aux bouches grandes ouvertes, aux yeux exorbités ou bien au regard voilé comme celui des aveugles.



Etude pour « La Nurse du cuirassé Potemkine ».

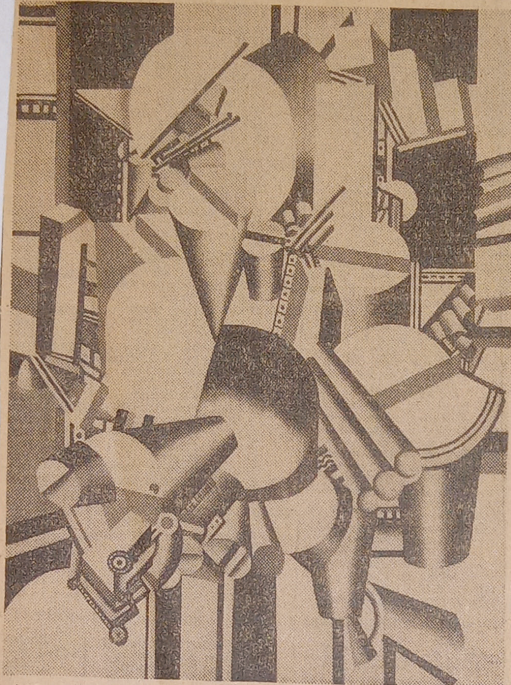
Tout ceci porte en soi, avec une présence si indéniable qu'on ne peut l'éviter, l'expression de l'extrême horreur de la condition de l'homme en proie à la terreur, à la solitude, au délaissement. Tout ceci exprime et provoque la panique. Que cette œuvre en outre fasse preuve d'une certaine désinvolture à l'égard des problèmes picturaux les plus habituels, c'est assez évident, et du reste sans importance. « La peinture est pure intuition » dit Francis Bacon. En cela il se montre, bien qu'autodidacte, proche du surréalisme qui ne l'a cependant pas marqué directement comme il fit avant la guerre en Angleterre pour Nash et Sutherland.

Luce HOCTIN

Galerie Rive Droite, 82, faubourg Saint-Honoré ; jusqu'au 10 mars.

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NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1953



"Mechanical Elements," worked on by Leger from 1918 to 1923, and included in his one-man show at the Museum of Modern Art, reveals the French modernist's preoccupation with machine forms, painted, however, with an approach to perspective and to light-and-shade modeling which are basically traditional.

angles. Again and again attachment from human foibles and weaknesses. Leger's canvases one sees how forms proceed out from a central axis, just as Wright's buildings are built around a central core. In both are broad horizontal planes, interesting verticals and horizontals, unornamented flat surfaces. In basic approach both men are positive, breaking up forms into advancing and receding areas not for the sake of fragmentation and disintegration, but only to reassemble them. In his latest work Leger expresses this concept of construction literally, e.g., his 1950 "Builders."

Wright has ideas about art, and it would seem that here the men part. "The easel picture," he once said, "has no place in the walls." It should be hidden away, and then pulled out in study, he added, as the mood strikes one. "Great pictures should have their gallery." But Mr. Wright, who also has ideas on architecture (he studied it for 10 years before turning to painting) said, "Color is a midable raw material. Pure or dynamically disposed, is

Art Review: Evocative Realism in Paintings

By CARLYLE BURROWS

The widely held belief that realism to be meaningful must share intensely the emotional feeling and imaginative outlook of the artist has two leading exponents this week whose art exhibitions, showing different methods and mediums are characterized by distinctly modern attitudes.

First, the late Yasuo Kuniyoshi is represented by ten brush drawings (the sponsor likes the description "ink-paintings" better) at the Downtown gallery, that were produced at the very end of his career. They are, for us, impressive works of art, large landscapes and pieces of symbolical narrative, whose impressive effects of black with accents of gray or white, embrace a simpler formula for this artist than ever before. Meanings are personal and in "Work at Dawn" with sinister raven and shadowy hills and valleys, and "Old Tree," whose dense black branches are penetrated by a subtle dawn-sky are thoughts made poignant by the ordeal under which Kuniyoshi, already stricken with illness, worked to complete his art.

These drawings, all but two of which are being shown for the first times, are notable for formal qualities handled with great simplicity and dignity. Thus they are more impressive than when, in earlier periods, the results were the detailed documents of a given locale. The larger style reflects a profound concern for nature, and at the same time is immensely more dramatic in expression.

Bacon at Durlachers

Another artist illustrating a modern outlook upon realism is Francis Bacon, British painter, whose portraits and figures at the Durlacher Gallery add to a reputation for painting now already known through the two large, rather fearful canvases acquired by the Modern Museum some months ago. Bacon's forte is sardonic portraiture, and in this he makes a powerful but limited impression, by selection and use of neutral color and by means of facility in expression.

In eight portrait "studies"—they are large and vehement oils on canvas—he runs a gamut from benevolent detachment through stern appraisal, using the same head of a prelate. "A Figure in a Room" recalls in huddled desolation, a madhouse image from Goya's "Capriccios." On the other hand "Study of a Baboon" carries

terrific animal impact. While Bacon is a painter of ability, an apparent instinct toward suavity is often disguised in his work by briskly random brushwork. Nothing, however, can disguise his strangely powerful mood.

Early Homer Works

The show of Winslow Homer drawings, oils and watercolors that Maynard Walker has assembled at his gallery to indicate the character of early work by the great American realist, is a tidy and distinguished affair. Homer took great delight in illustrating life, and from Civil War drawings of soldiers through the New England period in which he painted children at play, in the fields or at the seashore his interests are charmingly shown. While "charm" is not the best word for Homer, an artist of great simplicity in oils such as the dunes at Marshfield, and children in a field of daisies, its effect is perceptible in the sparkling color and warm tonal harmony of the pictures which include some splendid small studies. Among the latter the beautifully drawn "Girl With Letter" is an especially fine souvenir of American genius.

David Hare Imaginative

There are two features of interest about the new show of sculpture by David Hare at the Kootz gallery. Sensitive cherub-like, charmingly expressive figures in metals of antique texture reveal a fresh approach to human life acquired during a season of work in the south of France. Other figures are exquisite fabrications, but a trifle fussy in sheets of chewed-up metal which are ingeniously rolled into decorative heads and torsos. Another feature is the quality of large, abstract figures of "Taurus," of which the version demonstrating a soaring fall is the most strikingly evocative. Invention indeed continues apace, somewhat unrelentingly, for in not being caught behind the times, Mr. Hare seems determined to flood a show with fresh ideas.

Theme of Sports

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[1953]

ART

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, OCTOBER 25, 1953

FRANCIS BACON SINCE 1905

Major Show of His Work at Downtown Gallery—Francis Bacon

HARD DEVREE

The weight of his contribution cannot yet be assessed. The exhibition has been sparsely installed by Margaret Miller. The illuminating catalogue, copiously illustrated, was written by Katherine Kuh, curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago. Her fuller treatment of the material has just been published by the University of Illinois Press—the first full-scale biographical and critical evaluation in English.

Kuniyoshi's Late Work

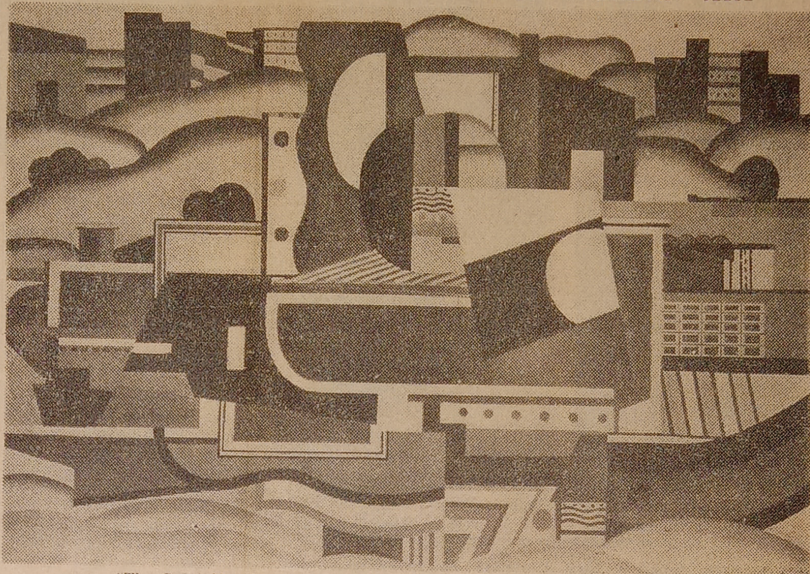
Ten of the last pictures by Kuniyoshi—done with brush and ink during his last summer of work—have been placed on view at the Downtown Gallery. These are among his most sensitive evocations, a strangely effective blend of occidental and oriental. Particularly touching is a landscape with a crow and a flying fish-kite, symbols to him of life and death. With a single plant and an insect he holds his space in "Queen Ant." In some of the pictures he scraped his blacks to let white through but in "Old Tree," from the collection of the Delaware Art Center, the sureness with which he left small areas of white is testimony to his great skill. The "Juggler," purchased by the Whitney from its 1952 annual, is included and the fish from the Metropolitan's collection is represented by a drawing, the original being unobtainable. There are two small but impressive heads of clowns. "Quiet Pool" with its sparse but striking detail is masterly. It is all very personal work and brings back acutely our sense of loss.

Bizarre

A baker's dozen of paintings by the much-discussed British artist, Francis Bacon, have gone on view at the Durlacher Gallery. Five of eight studies for a portrait of a Cardinal take up one room—robed half figures against a logelike gold framework, one Grecoish, one smiling, one as if giving an edict, one thinking and one in dramatic pose. Seven of the other eight big canvases are also charmingly styled "studies," large as they are—three of them for a portrait of a sketchily presented and ostensibly bored young man.

The "Study of a Figure in a Room" might be an ape exercising on a subway turnstile and is more simian than the study of a caged baboon in a tree. Even a figure in a landscape more than suggests a nature man. In "Study of the Sphinx" the sphinx is, like Cleopatra's in the Shaw play, a little one and rather meditative. Bacon obviously is a highly knowledgeable painter who concentrates on sinister effects obtained partly through not pushing realization far. Whether this primarily academic work is more novel and startling than intrinsically impressive is the question.

IN LEGER SHOW AT MUSEUM OF MODERN ART



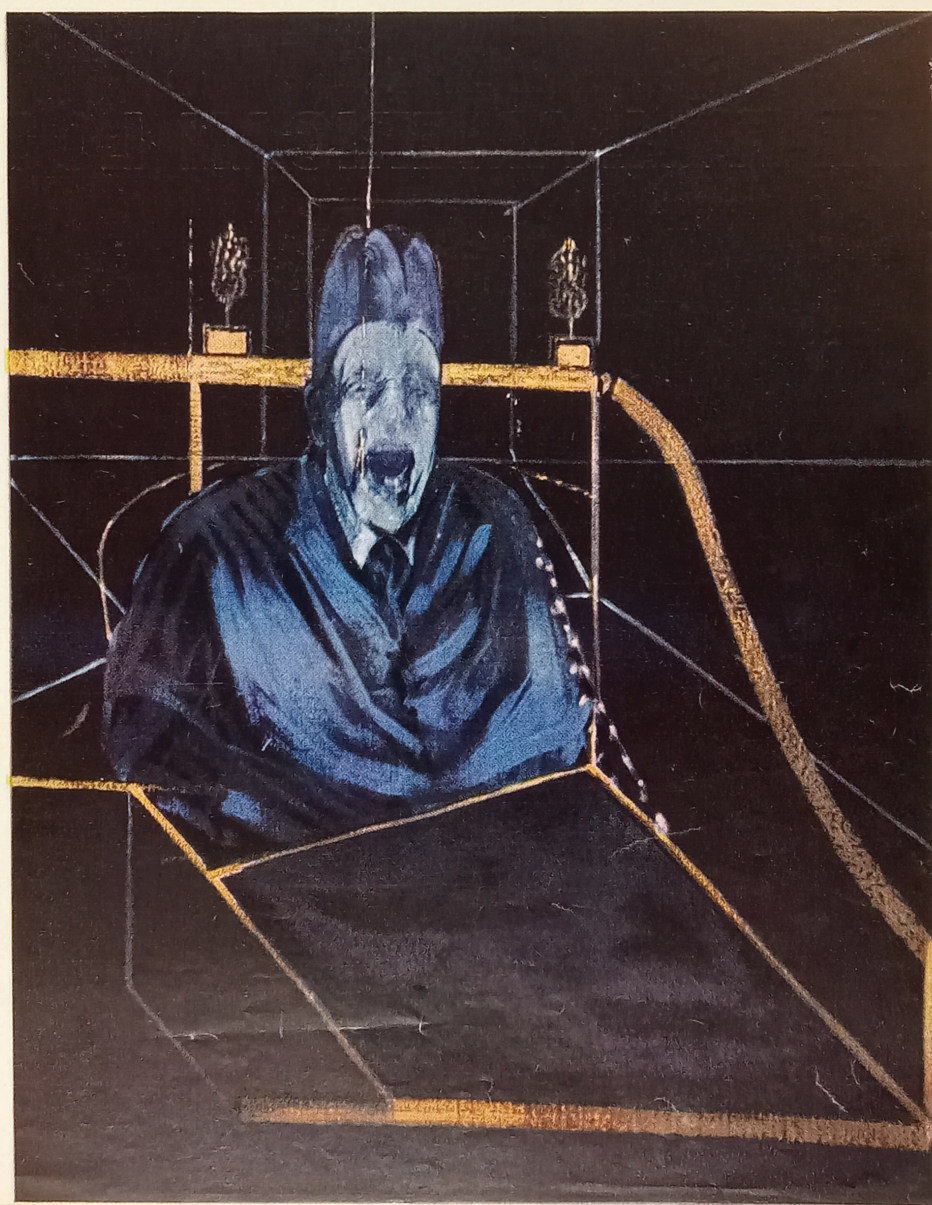
"The Great Tug," a painting of 1923, lent for the occasion by the artist.

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FRANCIS BACON'S "CARDINALS": FOUR OF A SERIES



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ART

Gallery on Wheels

A big 45-ft. aluminum trailer truck rumbled into Fredericksburg, Va. one day this week and parked near an elementary school. Outside it looked like any ordinary truck, but the inside was unusual: it contained a small, well-stocked art gallery. The truck was Virginia's new "artmobile," the U.S.'s first art gallery on wheels. Its purpose: to bring great art to people who ordinarily never set foot inside a museum.

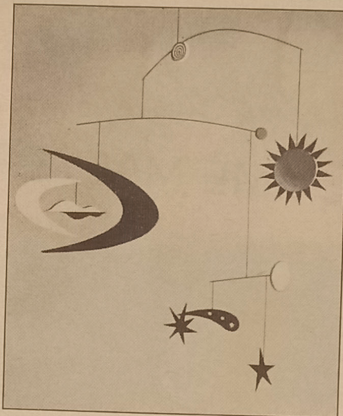
Built for the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, the truck cost \$40,000, has a display area of 32 ft. by 7 ft., air-conditioning, an intricate burglar alarm, special wall clamps and brackets to keep pictures and sculpture from bouncing around on rough country roads. After dedication ceremonies in Fredericksburg, people started to file into the exhibit 20 at a time (admission free). Over the truck's P.A. system came 17th century harpsichord music to set the mood for the show, followed by a recorded lecture. On exhibit were sixteen 15th to 17th century Dutch and Flemish paintings, including such masterpieces as Hieronymus Bosch's *Temptation of St. Anthony*, Aelbert Cuyp's *Horsemen Halting on a Road*, Pieter Bruegel's *The Carnival*. Next week the artmobile will take off on a state-wide tour (possibly three years) with stops planned so that no Virginian will have to travel more than 15 miles to see the show. At the wheel: Curator-Driver William Gaines, Virginia Museum art expert who trained for his job by taking lessons in truck driving from a Richmond express firm.

Mobilization

Americans, who love motion, have taken sculpture off its pedestal and put it, swinging and swaying, into the air. Ever since Connecticut's brilliant Alexander Calder first exhibited mobiles* in 1932, the oddly shaped, delicately balanced contraptions of wood, metal or plastic have been suspended in the more modern-minded museums. Until recently, hardly anyone thought of these dangling doodles as suitable for the living room. But this year, with artists designing mobiles for commercial production, they seem to be growing into a national fad. A whole new minor industry is turning out thousands every day, from \$1 up. Among the more interesting:

□ Gay, simple cartoonlike models, such as trains reminiscent of Cartoonist Rowland Emmett's famed rickety railways in *Punch*; and "Sky," in which a pair of crescent moons dance around a corona-circled sun and lesser heavenly bodies

* The idea of moving decorations is ancient, e.g., fluttering Chinese toys and streamers, the revolving cock or horse on weathervanes. But Calder pioneered the use of motion in a pure art form. The name "mobile" was first applied to his work in 1932 by French Painter Marcel (*Nude Descending a Staircase*) Duchamp.



"Sky"

In the home, dangling doodles.

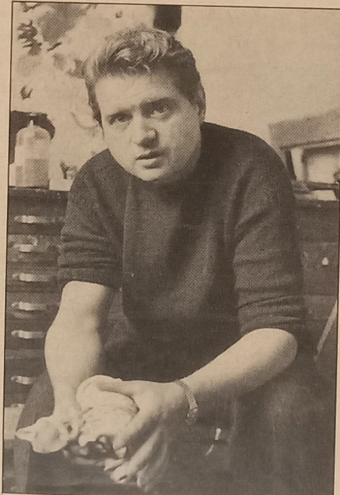
(\$3.95 each, produced by Pace Design Studios, Chicago).

□ Seasonal groups, such as "Santa," featuring a robust St. Nick, a reindeer and a star-carrying angel, all suspended from a crescent moon; and "Spring," a versatile, pastel mélange of rabbits, flowers, birds and butterflies (\$1 and \$1.95, Scamanda Mobiles, Manhattan).

□ Decorative abstractions, such as Sculptor Marechal Brown's "Tapered Quills," looking like giant buffalo teeth strung on an Indian brave's necklace (\$33, Gotham Lighting Corp., New York City).

□ Elegant, modernistic fish in contrastingly colored woods, handmade by Connecticut Sculptor Clark Voorhees (\$270, Hansen, Manhattan).

□ Children's mobiles, with figures from



Larry Burrows

FRANCIS BACON
In the void, writhing pain.

nursery rhymes (\$3.95, Spacecraft, Detroit); "Rocket" and a "Circus" collection of acrobats and animals (\$2.50 and \$2, Modern Toy Co., Chicago). Explains one manufacturer of nursery mobiles: "They have a beautifully soothing effect on kids."

□ A new wrinkle: kits from which amateurs can design and assemble their own mobiles (\$7.50, MobiProducts, Bloomington, Ind.). Experts' advice to automobilsts: models that are balanced too carefully will not move easily; a good mobile should sway in the updraft from any mild cocktail party argument or even the softest gurgle from the crib.

Snapshots from Hell

NEXT week one of Manhattan's 57th Street galleries will turn itself into a chamber of horrors. The occasion: the first U.S. show of British Painter Francis Bacon,* who is responsible for perhaps the most original and certainly the ghastliest canvases to appear in the past decade. Bacon has brought the finicky satanism of Aubrey Beardsley, Britain's famed Victorian horror dabbler, up to date, but he tops Beardsley as surely as, in literature, Franz Kafka topped Poe.

Stars of Bacon's Manhattan show: five purplish ultramarine cardinals, including those opposite. Painter Bacon says he has nothing against cardinals: "Really I just wanted an excuse to use those colors, and you can't give ordinary clothes that purple color without getting into a sort of false fauve manner." The fact that cardinals do not wear robes—or faces—that kind of purple troubles him not a whit.

Bland, boyish and 42, Bacon lives in London, vacations in Riviera gambling halls. Among his pet subjects in the past were visceral creatures squatting on table tops, elephants in the veldt, misty male nudes and bloody-fanged dogs, all glazed with horror. Critical reaction to Bacon's art has been a rather alarmed "Splendid!" Wrote London Critic Eric Newton: "Mr. Bacon contrives to be both unforgettable and repellent . . . [This] requires genius—an unhappy, desperate kind of genius."

Bacon approaches his subjects in the grand manner; he isolates each one, gives it lots of room in a big canvas and paints it with virtuoso brilliance and economy. Perhaps his chief distinction is that he captures in painting the quality of disembodied urgency, of pain writhing in a void, that is peculiar to many news pictures of violent death (for source material, Bacon collects old newspaper photographs, preferably of crimes and accidents). Bacon has a trick of veiling faces with a wispy scumble of paint that creates an illusion of motion, like a photograph in which the subject moved his head. This forces the spectator to peer closely at the picture; he becomes involved, drawn into the darkness.

* Who "neither knows nor cares" whether he is descended from the great British philosopher of the same name.

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Letters

Fan Mail

To the Editor:

One has the sense, while reading the new ART DIGEST, that a copious transfusion of financial blood has been effected. It shows and it works and I think congratulations are in order for all concerned. . . . At this rate there'll be no resisting you.

HARRY SALPETER
New York, N. Y.

To the Editor:

Upon return from Europe, where I spent the greater part of this summer, I found your September 15 issue and was delighted with Franz Kline's drawing on your cover. This is an excellent idea and I very fully approve of it. . . .

Until now I used to buy my ART DIGEST copies from the newsstand. Because I feel that your new policy is so good and so really concerned with the artist, I would like to commit myself in subscribing to the magazine. . . . Many thanks and best luck.

THEODORE BRENSON
New York, New York

To the Editor:

Thank you for your August cover. Believe us, you have won new friends with your straightforward publishing of facts even if you expose yourself to certain criticism from people who would prefer times, standards, etc., to have stood still with the landing of the very honorable Pilgrim Fathers. . . .

REINHARD R. TACKÉ
Dayville, Conn.

Pan Mail

To the Editor:

What is this avant garde reader's poll? Is it a contest for the best racing engine? Let all those who want to be jet-propelled jump into the rat race. Art is not a national or international competition for a front seat on a subway train. Why doesn't everyone relax and do a little contemplating before erecting a scaffold and acting like hangmen. The phrase "avant garde" has become just "moresome."

I. RICE PEREIRA
New York, N. Y.

Oops, Tpyo!

YOUR MYPOIA IS MY MYOPIA. MY OPTICIAN CAN SEE YOU TODAY, CAN YOU SEE HIM?

OTIS GAGE
New York, N. Y.

[Apologies to Mr. Gage. In the October 1 issue, the sub-title of his column, "The Reflective Eye," should have read "Myopia, please!" instead of "Mypoia, please!"—Ed.]

lambs

To the Editor:

"You either copy or create"
That "either-or" division.
Are we again forced to deflate
That obsolete decision?

BARRETT
Darien, Conn.

[Reader Barrett's quatrain refers to "The Reflective Eye" of September 15, in which Otis Gage, writing on "Whose Humanism," remarks: "In the end there are only two choices: you create or you copy."—Ed.]

October 15, 1953



Cover: A graphic artist of international repute, Adja Yunkers, known primarily for his woodcuts, has designed this issue's cover in the medium of a monotype. He is an exhibiting artist at the Grace Borgenicht Gallery and is on the faculty at the New School for Social Research.

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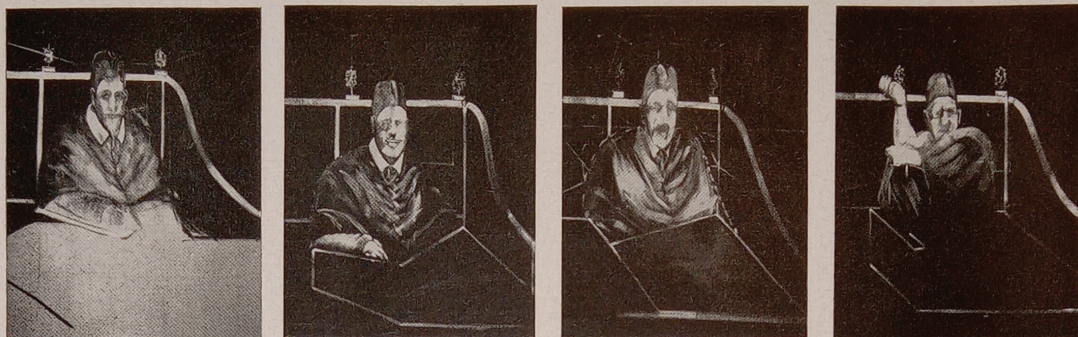
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New York



Francis Bacon: Numbers 1, 5, 7 and 8 of eight "Studies for a Portrait"

Francis Bacon: "An Acute Sense of Impasse" by Sam Hunter

Few new painters have aroused as much interest abroad as Francis Bacon, who is having his first American one-man exhibition at the Durlacher Gallery from October 20 to November 14. His brutally "extreme" paintings are controversial enough to invite solemn discussion on the dignified BBC, as well as among members of London's High Bohemia. They now hang in the Tate and in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The most conclusive recognition has probably come in the form of Graham Sutherland's last exhibition in New York, which showed unmistakable evidence of Bacon's influence.

In the most potent images imaginable, Bacon has stated the case for post-war European despair with a vehemence and originality that should earn him a permanent place among contemporary Cassandras—those artists and writers of crisis like Giacometti, Buffet, Dubuffet, Sartre and Genêt who have made esthetic capital of the violent aftermath of the war.

Bacon's paintings are extravagantly unpleasant. Hallucinating images swim up onto his canvases still half immersed in the stuff of the Unconscious, pressed out of focus by troubling and obscure forces. Horrific as they are, they have something important to say about our period. They bear the same relation to contemporary experience as Goya's grotesques did to his troubled and dislocated epoch. Bacon seems to be creating his own private "deaf man's house"—a modern, clinical version of those monsters and mutilated shreds of humanity with which the deaf and aging Spanish master, in a spirit of sublime mockery, populated the walls of his country house in his last bitter years.

The core of Bacon's show is a remarkable series of five variations on a theme, *Studies for a Portrait*. The

series was inspired by Velasquez' *Pope Innocent X* in the Doria Gallery in Rome. Somewhere along the way the images have also absorbed catastrophic pictorial matter from illustrated "yellow" journalism—the gallery of gunmen and mobsters and the scenes of violence that greet us in the tabloids.

Technically, Bacon has been audacious enough to try for one continuous cinematic impression in his five Popes—an entirely new kind of painting experience. He combines the monumentality of the great art of the past with the "modernity" of a film strip.

Under Bacon's brush, Velasquez' smug and crafty Pope has been transformed into a monstrous depravity. With a mounting fury, the visage passes through something like an hysterical convulsion, which lays bare the darkest recesses of the psyche. Facial expression moves from lifeless immobility to maniacal frenzy; in the final climactic panel the focus shifts to the clenched hands, contorted in a gesture of bestial incoherence. Paint is applied in frothy washes of mauve, livid streaks of green, and gold dustings, all set against a spooky black ground. Progress from one tortured image to the next is punctuated by great luxurious smears of iridescent pigment, as if there were some erotic gratification in the exposure of this deeply embedded, painful pictorial matter. One is reminded of the sweetish agony of some of El Greco's distorted forms, where convulsive content suddenly achieves an ecstatic reversal and surrender in a stream of luscious pigment. Like El Greco, Bacon is concerned with damnation. But he paints its horrors from the point of view of a modern agnostic; for him heavenly consolation does not exist, and sin is irremediable. The only elation comes in the manipulation of the paint.

Bacon's Medusa gifts recast all his visual experience in terms of violence and terror. After a recent African trip, his paintings found a new locale and a different set of symbols. *Study of the Sphinx* fuses an impression of a place and a state of soul in a free play of pictorial associations. A smoky suggestion of the reclining sphinx—as if seen from an airplane—is set in an octagon of relentless regularity, with a border of fierce tomato red and a background of impenetrable black. It all suggests the blinding color of the tropics, the evisceration of the climate, and the inhuman immensity of a continent. The compulsive octagonal shape and the colors that hem in the rather lyrically painted enigma of the ages create that acute impression of the annihilation of hope which often haunts Bacon's work.

That same spiritual let-down is apparent in the gorgeously painted *Study of a Baboon*. A tropical luxuriance of jungle is suggested in the background. The baboon is a stunning example of Bacon's shimmering, virtuoso technique. Between the beast and nature hangs a barred grill of the kind storekeepers stock to protect their windows. It swings some door in the mind shut, like a prison gate closing on a condemned man.

This acute sense of impasse is Bacon's recurrent message. Whether his settings evoke a squalid Soho interior, the splendid raiment of a Prince of the Church, or an exotic jungle atmosphere, he is continually making some mysterious statement of a human *cul de sac*. The exhilaration of technique raises this sense of crisis to a level of poetic intensity. One critic put it this way: "Never has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom; yet it occurs in the atmosphere of a concentration camp."

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VIA PREWI

12th. DECEMBER 1952.

PRESS TIMEING NEWYORK2644: CATURANI ART HEREWITH BACON.

For bioporse of FRANCIS BACON see London 9612 dated 11th. November 1949. Despite rather harsh treatment of Bacon in that cable, he is selling at prices ranging from 250 to 350 pounds. In Hanover Gallery this week, an African show by pudgy sandyhaired 42 years old Francis Bacon, whom some regard as Britains best contemporary artist, was causing a sensation among two widely different sets of artlovers.

Firstly there was the fashionable minkcoated set, including some speculators. Secondly were the young art students - English equivalent of French existentialists. They jostled each other trying to get view on Bacons huge canvasses representing mostly African scenes - and commented excitedly. Former believe that pictures will be worth three times their present value in a few years. Latter find what they call "A profound satisfaction in sensations that Bacon evokes rather than evoking mere reality."

Of his own art, Bacon says: "Everybody has his own interpretation of a painting he sees. I dont mind if they have different interpretations of what I have painted." He thinks any art is a "method of opening up areas of feeling rather than merely an illustration of an object." But "The object is necessary to provide the problem and the discipline in the search for the problems solution", he says: " A picture should be the recreation of an event rather than an illustration of an object but there is no tension in the picture unless there is the struggle with the object."

Bacon implies that real art lies in that tension and in the fight to represent objects at exact instants of time. He says: "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 the 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."

Bacon is a symbol of unquiet mood of our time - he is attempting to get near reality through sensation rather than illustrative rationality. His sensational overtones invite speculation and are undoubtedly part of his appeal especially to the young. One of these explained: "The spectator (of Bacons pictures or rather of events captured in Bacons pictures) has an uncanny dreamlike sensation of having got into a world where he has no right to be. The artist

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defines an instantaneous vision, as if his huge canvasses had been painted in one movement of the brush as abrupt as click of a camera. He conveys powerfully the sense of having arrived so swiftly and unobtrusively that everything is caught unawares and off guard."

Bacon has departed from his usual pictures of ecclesiastics in present exhibition. He was profoundly influenced by two journeys to South and Central Africa, and this exhibition is almost entirely African pictures. Bacons first African journey took him to Capetown and thence through Transvaal to Beira in Portuguese Mozambique. From there Bacon took a small cargo boat which took him up East coast of Africa through Suez to Marseilles. Before leaving Beira he travelled into interior as far as Salisbury Southern Rhodesia. It was middle of rainy season and grass was green and long. Bacon says: "I felt and memorized excitement of seeing animals move through long grass." Some of these moments, when animals and men are visible for an instant in Veldt, are represented at Hanover exhibition. Because he likes to leave interpretation of painting to spectator, he insists that none of his pictures should have titles.

First of his pictures represents an elephant whose bluish colour makes him half unseen against blue dusk in background. In a second the huge ears of an African elephant appear in tall quivering grass of Veldt. In a third, a rhinoceros stands in a clearing with head turned away. In a fourth, a negro squats in tall grass. In another, a naked white man crawls inexplicably out of darkness of a closed space into sunlit grass. Another three pictures represent a dog caught on a prowl, and here atmosphere is that of Cote D'Azur.

Though financial side of deal as yet unclinched its open secret that some of Bacons pictures presently on exhibition, will go to the Tate Gallery.

ROSPIGLIOSI.

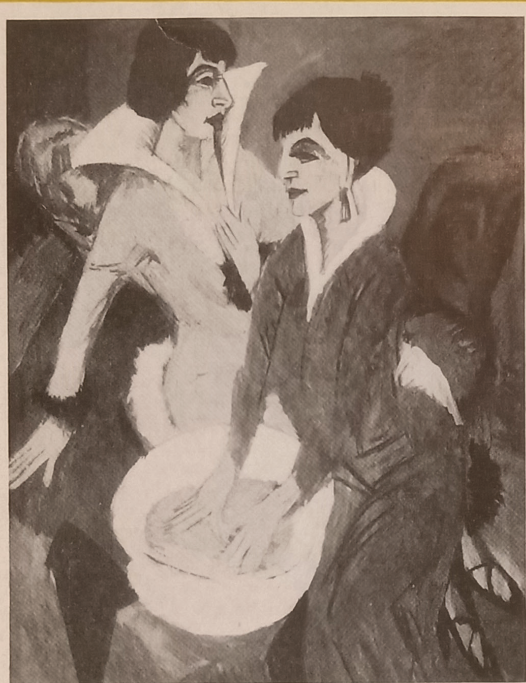
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BERNARD MYERS: **ERNST LUDWIG KIRCHNER AND "DIE BRÜCKE"**

SAM HUNTER: **FRANCIS BACON—THE ANATOMY OF HORROR**

MINOR WHITE: **THE CAMERA MIND AND EYE**

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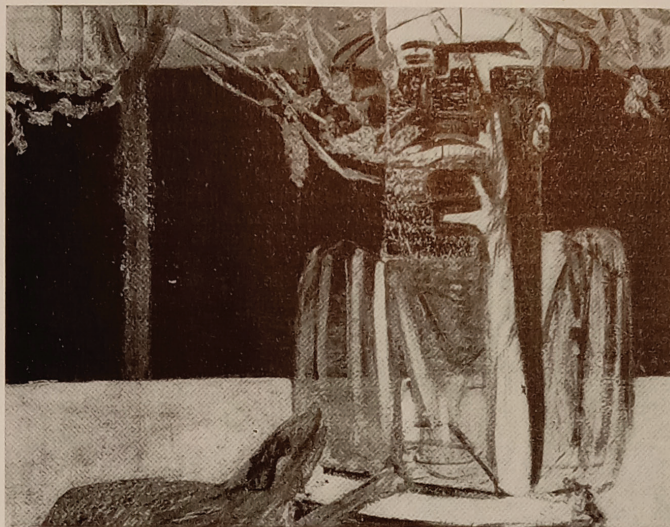
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FRANCIS BACON: THE ANATOMY OF HORROR

Sam Hunter



Seated Figure, 1937, 29 x 37"

FRANCIS BACON stands out vividly from the scene of contemporary English painting because he seems so foreign to it. There is no preparation for the violence of his content, his "baroque" technical ingenuities or intensely private symbolism in the work of Sutherland, Moore or Piper, for example, or the younger neo-romantics, all of whom maintain some recognizable connection with the abstract idioms of Paris or have revived a native tradition of finding picturesque and ominous shapes of fancy in the English countryside. Bacon's paintings are as artificial and immediately "modern" in their sensation as the loudspeaker, the newsreel or the scare headline. In so far as his art has derivations, he has gone over the head of English painting for a reappraisal of the formal experiments of cubism, the Parisian surrealists' reveries on a machine-age gone berserk, or, in spirit, to the iconoclasm of a temperament like that of Wyndham Lewis. More than anything else, however, he seems to be another of the magnificent, incalculable freaks that English painting has periodically sponsored.

England seems to provide an atmosphere congenial to pictorial eccentricity. Blake is the obvious example. Even the most respectable of artists, Gainsborough, in his moments of relaxation is capable of unpredictable, tangential visions. Some of his daft, adrift ladies of fashion provide curious glimpses of a romantic wish, of the same suppressed, extravagant poetry that plays through the exotic daydreams of the Pre-Raphaelites. Bacon's images, like Turner's, represent a wayward dream on actuality and traffic across the frontiers between reality and unreality. But his imagery of contemporary nightmare is far removed from the Arcadian dreams of Turner. The pressures of contemporary life and the pessimistic London mood that produced George Orwell's bleak estimate of human prospects, 1984, have given Bacon the vision of a Cassandra and cast him in the role of an expert in the pain and guilt of our time.

Bacon's studio has the character of a modern laboratory. At one end stand his paintings, unique and extremely personal inventions. At the

entir, m'è gran ventura;
r, dehl parla basso!"

t I wake, for this one sover-
: to see and feel no more!")

nce of the Capitol would ap-
s to that of this sonnet. In
ngelo express himself directly
oses to speak through a seem-
mouthpiece. Could he really
apitol to glorify a shadowy
ould we not rather see in it a
to retrieve the lost freedom
e—a dream wrought out and
ne?

Michelangelo's work reflects
ception of life. Even in plan-
knew how to give succinct
nflicting motives that actuate
and every true democracy:
e the rights of the individual
hose of the community. What
n his youthful experiences in
t to reality in the Rome of the
: a Rome in which there was
democracy. So his Capitol is
he vanished liberties of the
lics, and at the same time a
tic dream of its creator.

Imagination evinced by our
pts to devise new features in
as civic centers, is invariably
etext that we no longer have
would be possible to express.
has mirrored in the Area Capi-
ing irrationality of historical
matic omission of any direct
ect and cause. Once more we
master is able to create the
phase of social history, long
s begun to take tangible shape.

Michelangelo, *The Capitol, Rome*, begun 1536.

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other are tables littered with newspaper photographs and clippings, crime sheets like *Crapouillot* and photographs or reproductions of personalities who have passed across the public stage in recent years. The only law governing Bacon's selection of this visual literature is some kind of mysterious topical and psychological pertinence. Violence is the common denominator of photographs showing Goebbels wagging a finger on the public platform, the human carnage of a highway accident, every sort of war atrocity, the bloody streets of Moscow during the October Revolution, fantastic scientific contraptions culled from the pages of *Popular Mechanics* or a rhino crashing through a jungle swamp. The artistic issue of this raw matter is unpredictable and without literal antecedents. Somewhere between the simple cold mechanics of the camera and the most charged moments of recent history it has recorded, Bacon has set up a shadowy and crepuscular world of imagination, playing on associations of violence and terror.

Bacon's paintings could only be possible in contemporary postwar London, with its exacerbated nerves, its own distinct psychological atmosphere. There are certain clues even in the location of the artist's studio. He lives and works on the edge of South Kensington, in one of those neglected side streets where the old fashionable quarter suddenly peters out into the anonymous suburbs. On one side is the bizarre face of Victorian London—the unexpectedly exotic, crenelated and spired skyline of the vast apartment blocks and museums surrounding the Albert Hall, the Albert Memorial and other curious architectural extravaganzas. Proceeding towards Kew and Richmond in row after row of drab boxed houses is one of the dreariest of urban areas, which pro-

duces the kind of intense impression of respectability in reduced circumstances that must have inspired Eliot's lament for the living-dead of London in *The Wasteland*. Bacon is faithful to this atmosphere of vacuity with its sinister and claustrophobic overtones that deepen into horror.

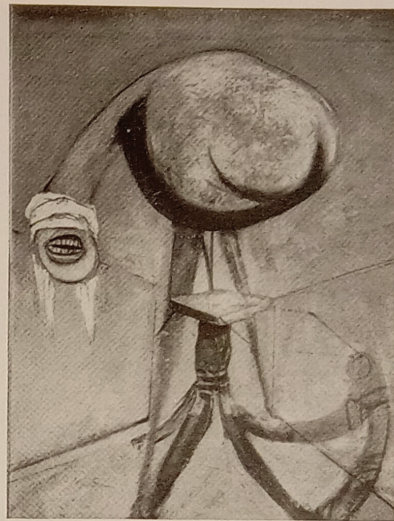
A combination of the distorted human atmosphere that prevails in any modern postwar metropolis, but peculiarly in London, and an uncompromising search for extreme expression has made Bacon carry his imagery from contemporary actuality to its furthest frontiers. His art begins at the point where all our safe, plausible images begin to flaw and deform and develop frightening bugabears. Typical of his style and aims is the Tate Gallery's picture called simply *Painting*. An orator-like figure—established in a glowing, impressionist technique that suggests a corrupting Walter Sickert canvas—stands in a commanding public attitude on a raised dais. This creature of nightmare curiously suggests in its dark anonymity the modern European Everyman. Its visage dissolves into a lewd, simian grimace and gaping wound, while the platform fuses into some sort of barred contraption—does it suggest a cage, the subway turnstile or the medieval rack?—and seems to have a machine-gun mounted on it. The total effect is as if we had witnessed a conventional heroic pictorial representation disintegrate, first, in a kind of unwholesome, poisonous "real" atmosphere, and then in psychological space, under a hail of violent mental associations culled from headlines and illustrated catastrophic journalism.

The transfiguration to horror and a dedication to the most unpleasant expressions of contemporary life are the basic conscious forces at work in Bacon's paintings. The rest is the product of

inspiration, chance and automatism, in their best sense. The fluid imagery of cubism, the surrealists' taste for the incongruous and the startling deformations of instantaneous photography have all been factors of technical importance. They could have been ignited into new and extraordinarily vital combinations only by the temperament of an incendiary. But behind the deceptive effect of spontaneity is a rigorous personal discipline of vision and a long period of trial and error in sorting and choosing relevant images, and of learning how to marry vision and technique.

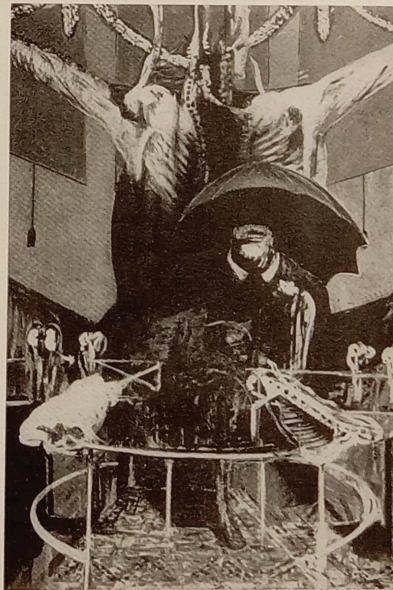
Bacon has a Bergsonian horror of the static. Consequently he has tried to quicken the nervous pulse of painting by moving it closer to the optical and psychological sources of movement and action in life. To stimulate a sensitivity to the significant instant of action and gesture, he has collected a whole literature on the mechanics of motion. He consults or at least has been affected strongly by Eadweard Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion* and *Animals in Motion*. They provide some clue to the working method that finally produces an effect of pure ephemera. They also, incidentally, have a rich period flavor, much like the anatomy charts and medical diagrams that found such a welcome response earlier among surrealists. The analytical breakdowns of movement are matched by Bacon's addiction to news photography, already mentioned, which gives him accidental correspondences for the working of interior psychological forces. They establish a delicate synapse between optics and the mind's eye—a mind's eye preferably off guard, i. e. under the spell of the subconscious. Perhaps that is why Bacon finds it so difficult to formulate his aims. "I think the whole process of this sort of elliptical form is dependent on the execution of detail and how shapes are remade or put slightly out of focus to bring in their memory traces," he has said. "This depends so much on the manipulation of the paint that it is almost impossible to put it into words." For Bacon only the results, the successful, inexplicable naked vision is worth discussing. He says, "I would like my pictures to look as if a human being had passed between them, like a snail, leaving a trail of the human presence and a memory trace of past events as the snail leaves its slime."

Bacon's paintings all date from after the war. His earliest, of 1945, are *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*. (The motive of Christ's martyrdom has constantly held a particular fascination for him. It has a startling effect in a painting like the Museum of Modern Art's *Painting*, 1946, when it is translated into a modern situation, as a background for a kind of political gangster standing before a microphone.) The early studies are chimeras in the tradition of Picasso and are, incidentally, the only paintings to suggest a connection with an English contemporary—Sutherland—in their livid, chemical magentas. For all their power these images fall



Study for Three Figures at Base of a Crucifixion, 1945, oil

Painting, 1946, oil and tempera, 77 1/4 x 52", Museum of Modern Art



"The only law governing the selection is a mysterious topical and psychological pertinence. Violence is the common denominator." (Photographs by the author)



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Man and Monkey, 1949,
collection Anthony Hubbard,
courtesy Hanover Gallery, Ltd.,
London

uneasily between a crude symbolism and scatology. In the last version of the *Crucifixion*, painted in 1950, symbolism and style, enriched by a wider range of pertinent association, have reached a triumphant juncture. The earlier disemboweled, offending forms are re-introduced, but now they suggest the actual nervous sensation of writhing, tormented flesh. The symbol of the cross is a black, broad T, as irrelevant to the agony of the painting as the modern street intersection it suggests. In the background, in minute calligraphy, are figures walking and cars moving, against the line of the sea—possibly a distracting bit of Mediterranean summer scenery. The episode suggests how far from the banal business of the world are suffering and damnation.

Bacon has an almost uncanny ability for making contact with the Terrible. Even when old masters provide some suggestion for his extraordinary inventions, they are divested of their normal associations. One of the recent variations on the theme of Velázquez' mundane *Pope Innocent X* in the Doria Gallery became a diagram of psychological horror—and iridescent beauty. The worldly Prince of the Church was transformed into a living scream imprisoned in a gorgeous filament of rainbow color. The elements of old masters that invite Bacon's interest are never

calculable. They may range from the ambiguous spatial qualities and ghostly suggestiveness of that most rational of artists, Seurat, in one of his oil sketches for *La Grande Jatte*, or more understandably, the brutal clotted shapes and profiles of some unexpected camera-angle vision of a Rodin sculpture.

Bacon's fascination with photography accounts for one very haunting effect of his art. Even his most diagrammatic and automatic inventions retain a wealth of concrete impressions, a kind of on-the-spot veracity. Underlying the paintings is a chain of ideal monuments and types, a system of cross-reference to a set of contemporary visual classics, but they perversely come out of the world of the memorable news snapshot or the crime sheet. Needless to say, Bacon's record of contemporary history reads like a lesson in ignominy. His art deals with our most ubiquitous public images and discloses unimagined possibilities of the predatory in the private individual.

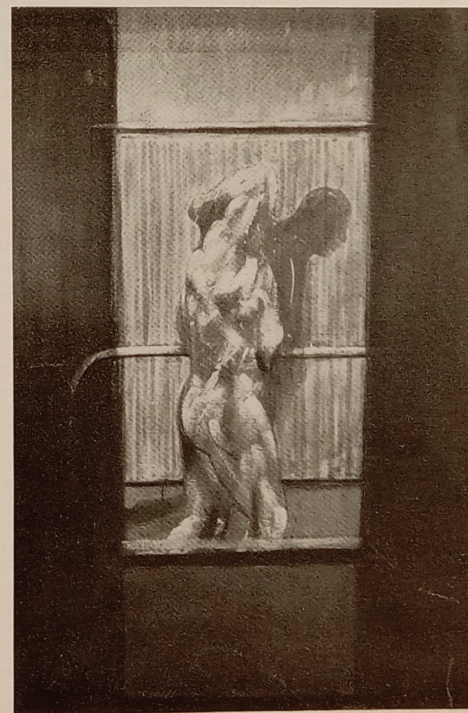
Bacon's inspiration from the accidental distortions and monstrous infelicities of the photograph haven't prevented him, however, from remaining supremely a painter's painter. Away from the preoccupations of symbolism, he is capable of shimmering, silken graces in paint. There is the slightly ominous *Study for a Figure*, nothing

more than a nude male form gliding through a curtain. The image materializes with the suddenness of those jerky sequences of the early films, where, by some misarticulation or vital omission of the camera figures seem to appear *through* doors and make magical entrances out of nowhere. The real sleight-of-hand of the painting, however, is a nervous, painterly life and diaphanous fragility. The luxurious, unsubstantial pigment reminds us that Goya is one of Bacon's strongest admirations. The English critic, Robert Melville, was the first to pay tribute to Bacon's technical virtuosity and his "modernity." "Never," he has written, "has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom: yet it occurs in the atmosphere of the concentration camp."

The infrequency with which Bacon's paintings manage to survive the most self-critical of natures and emerge from his studio make it difficult to speak of them. Only Kafka, who left instructions in his will for the destruction of all his manuscripts, put as little faith in the efficacy of his art. Bacon's entire productive career has produced a handful of paintings, and even when a painting is delivered it is not altogether safe. He

recently recovered one of his finished works from its owner for modifications and promptly destroyed it. For Bacon, gradations in art between enchantment and banality don't exist: the dividing line is absolute. A master of deception, he maintains a ruthless vigil against self-delusion. In his own life, he sharpens his taste for ruin by periodic excursions to the gambling halls of Monte Carlo. Disaster in moderation is apparently both a vocational habit and a personal predilection.

The fascination of Bacon's art is that, while remote from any of the directions of contemporary painting, it is thoroughly contemporary in its vitality. No one has interpreted the acute postwar moods more vividly. Yet he has remained insular, mannered and extravagantly eccentric, too, in a sense that none of the younger painters who still follow the fortunes of international abstract idioms are. Bacon's thoroughly modern horrors are concocted 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.



Painting, 1950,
Temple Newsam House, Leeds,
courtesy Hanover Gallery, Ltd.,
London

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THE ICONOCLASM OF FRANCIS BACON

ROBERT MELVILLE

Two or three months ago I saw at Francis Bacon's studio a painting that was a kind of paraphrase of the famous portrait of Pope Innocent X by Velazquez. It was one of three studies of the Velazquez, intended for an exhibition at the Hanover Gallery. The second version had been completed and was away at the framers. The one I saw was completed, too, but because it had found its own dimensions in the middle of a huge canvas, it was still in the studio waiting for the paint to dry, so that the canvas could be cut down and put on to a new stretcher.

This picture contained an iron-grey curtain hanging in deep, regular folds, and a figure in papal robes seated in a gold chair. The figure was in much the same position as the Velazquez Pope, but whereas Innocent X poses with relaxed dignity, his hands drooping gracefully over the arms of the chair, Bacon's figure was tense, and clutched at the arm-rests in fear; and instead of that extraordinary look of ferrety penetration on the greasy red face of the Pope, this face—exquisitely painted in mauves and greens—was torn open by a scream. The Velazquez figure is complacent in worldly knowledge; in Bacon's version it looked as if it had suddenly been confronted by all the horrors of damnation. But the mysterious, the wholly inexplicable thing about Bacon's painting was the fact that the figure and the chair were not in front of the curtain, or behind it, but had somehow materialised within it. Technically, it was a masterly solution of a problem that haunted the Cubists—the problem of describing solid

forms without destroying the two-dimensional integrity of the canvas surface. It was a different solution, baroque in spirit, and as phantasmal in appearance as the miraculous apparition of the Christ of the Sorrows on Saint Veronica's kerchief.

Two weeks after I visited his studio, Bacon destroyed this picture, and when the other version was returned from the framers, it went the same way. The third version never saw the light. I am convinced that the picture I had the privilege of seeing was a masterpiece, and I find it difficult to believe that Bacon destroys his pictures merely because he is dissatisfied with them. Most painters attach an almost sacred value to their works and are very reluctant to destroy them. Artists of great eminence—Picasso and Matisse among them—allow many inferior works to leave their studios, for the artist of today has a horrible tendency to fall in love with his own 'handwriting'; he sees it as the mark of genius, and it is sacrosanct even when it only writes a confusion. So the destruction, by the maker himself, of some of the most potent images of our time, presents an extreme, perhaps a unique situation. Francis Bacon has a horror of giving proofs of his power.

He paints at such a 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. As it is, Marcel Duchamp, who stopped painting many years ago, is probably the only artist of equal talent to whom a smaller number of works can be attributed.

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World Review

Swiftness of execution has become an essential of his creative process, for he has to re-create visualisations that are so tenuous that they can only be seen, so to speak, out of the corner of the mind's eye. He has to snatch, as it flashes across his mind, the movement of a head, the sliding of an inert body, the passage of a scream. It was Zola who said, in defence of the Impressionists: 'I have the deepest admiration for individual works, for those which burst forth in one spurt, from a vigorous and unique hand.' But he was looking ahead, and it is Francis Bacon who begins to draw near to the dream of creating a large picture in a single spurt.

In a way, his concern is with the act more than the result, with means not ends, although he knows that the ends prescribe the means. His concern is with the power to make images rise up suddenly on his canvas, as a sorcerer might summon up spirits, wanting nothing of them except their emergence at his bidding. If he has a finished picture in his studio, it disturbs him, but he does not want it to go into the world. He releases one occasionally, but only when compelled to throw it like a counter into the game of keeping body and soul together. Pictures that are no longer in his hands tend ever so faintly to compromise the present; they flaunt his power; they talk about him behind his back. He no doubt lives in a certain apprehension of his gift of demonstration, for the apparitions which emerge on to his canvases carry uncontrollable intimations of the obscure forces they conceal.

The sceptical reader of this explanation of Bacon's iconoclasm will agree that at any rate it does not err by being extreme, for if he looks at one or two of the pictures, he will see that Bacon is—pre-eminently in his time—the painter of extreme situations.

The picture which he calls 'A Fragment of a Crucifixion' is really the beginning of a Deposition, but a deposition in which the crucified flesh itself, attempting to draw away from its own misery, slips the nails, looms up over the top of the cross and begins to crawl down the other side like a dog, dripping a magenta mucus. It is so far gone that the agony leads a life of its own, and becomes a detached lump of

flayed flesh, with a scream at its centre, hovering like a fat bird and beating the air with stiff quills of blood. It will, one supposes, evaporate when the body hanging above it is finally dead, like those perverted animals in 'The Temptation of St. Anthony' that disappear with the coming of light. Far off is the blue line of the Mediterranean, and people walking, and cars purring sedately through the heat. I do not know any work which lives more brilliantly and frantically at the heart of 'this mystical epoch which is without faith.' There are no moral assumptions in this composition, only a wonderfully sensuous perception of the far edge of being, which leaves a rich taste of mortality in the mouth. Bacon insists that his pictures must never be seen without glass: the glass makes them a little more difficult to see because one's own reflection is there, rather self-conscious and insubstantial, mingling quite felicitously with images of the flesh in its last extremity.

Bacon is achieving universality of an order which is only possible in an age in which the breakdown of values has been completed. Nietzsche prophesied that there would come a time when man would be able to grasp only that which is humiliating, and Bacon, acknowledging that the prophecy has come true, nevertheless shows it to be as firm a foundation as any of the more seemly states of mind, for the propagation of the sense of glory. Never has there been more elation of execution, never a greater sense of freedom: yet it occurs in the atmosphere of the concentration camp.

Bacon is unquestionably the greatest painter of flesh since Renoir, but the intense beauty of the colour and texture of his flesh painting is at the same time horrifying, for it discovers a kind of equation between the bloom and elasticity of sensitive tissue and the fever and iridescence of carrion. He is the painter of flesh considered as a communal substance; as the guinea-pig of the senses, the trap of the spirit, the stuff of which murderers cannot get rid, the legitimate prey of pain and disease, of ecstasies and torments; obscenely immortal in renewal.

The picture of a naked man going through curtains was in no need of a

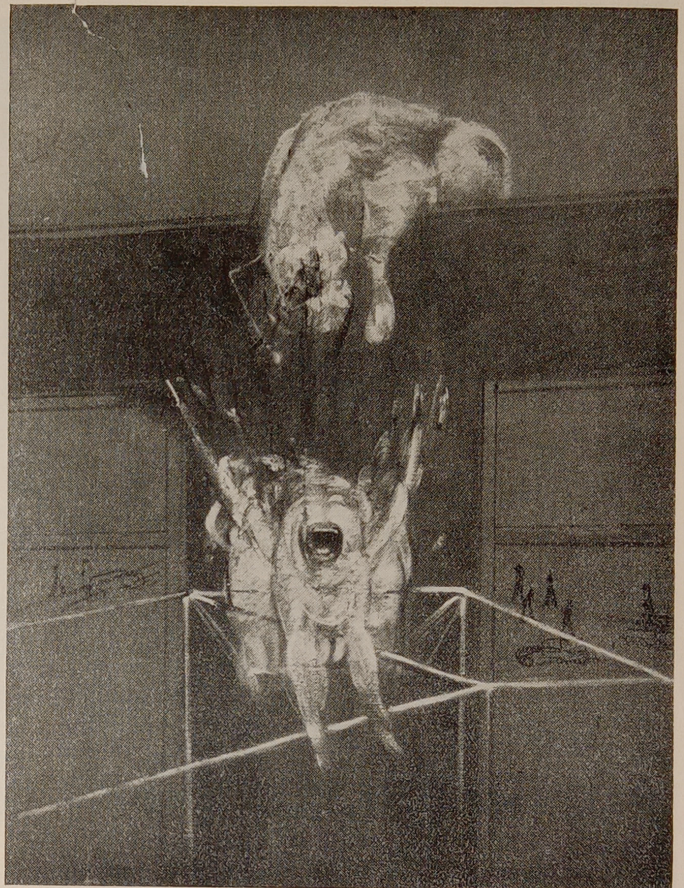
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Head 1949

Collection: W. S. Ludington, Esq., U.S.A.



Fragment from a Crucifixion 1950

Hanover Gallery

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Study for a figure 1949

Hanover Gallery



Painting 1950

Hanover Gallery

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Portrait of Francis Bacon

Robert Buhler

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sequel, but a sequel has appeared. In a recent painting he has passed through the curtains and crouches on the other side, reaching up to fasten the curtains together with safety-pins, going through the motions of a privacy that is quite illusory, for no one will ever have privacy again. One can still experience the sensation of loneliness—perhaps more excruciatingly than ever—but when man reaches the stage of knowing only that which is humiliating, each one of us practises the privacy of everyone else. The crouching man is hidden by a large box in the foreground.

It is related to the glass box in which so many of Bacon's figures have been incarcerated. But this one is black and has no transparency. The man crouches because, when he has grown tired of the little game of keeping the curtains together, he will assuredly hunch himself into the box. If he comes out again, and possibly he will, we shall know that so far he has been trying it for size. But it has been pointed out that his gesture is of a kind that has been made familiar by the last page of many children's books, where a hand reaches up to write the word—

FINIS