
STYLISTIC CHANGES AND DEVELOPMENTS
IN THE WORK OF FRANCIS BACON

STUDY FOR THE IMPACT OF
EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL
INFLUENCES

ABSTRACT

This essay is a study on the internal and external influences on the stylistic changes and developments in the work of Francis Bacon. I shall attempt to answer the question “What were the causes of the stylistic changes in Francis Bacon’s work, and was he most influenced by cultural or personal factors?”

There will be 2 sections throughout the course of this study; the first section will focus on the personal contributions and the second on the cultural contributions. The methodology I would use is an adaptation of critic’s and the artist’s own views paraphrased or directly quoted and fragments of my own analysis to validate my argument with a degree of immediacy. The conclusion of my findings will be based upon the weight of these factors measured by the critics involved in the study.

At the end of this course, I hope to enrich my innate knowledge, fascination and homage towards the practice of his art and open a wider possibility of influences to my own work.

INTRODUCTION

I have spent a lot of time looking at and studying after paintings after paintings of Francis Bacon, one of the most influential and prominent artists of the 21th Century. It seems to me that he was the most "style-breaking" artist who has the most significant impact on me and my paintings throughout my IBDP Visual Art course. I was introduced to a set of Francis Bacon's dark abysmal paintings with painfully disfigured subjects from the 1940s when I was 15. Later on, after researching about the artist in grade 11, I observed the more colorful paintings of his line of production. However, when I went back to those paintings recently, I realized that they were all from the 1960s and later. That was when I came to conclusion that there was an event that facilitated a dramatic change of style in the visionary art of Francis Bacon.

As I further studied the visual changes I observed that they include both stylistic changes and the appearance of some new elements. This is of note in the works pre-1953 and post-1960. While a more conceptual theme persisted in his earlier productions, obviously evident in his paintings of Popes in his "first great period"¹ and some portraiture practices, the latter introduced new elements like his lovers, friends and himself being the subject in many of the paintings.

Main changes in style can be summed up as: Bacon began painting triptych (paintings in 3) continuously. Previously he was only known to have painted one, in 1944, but from 1962 he produced several more and continuously manifested its magnificence in its innovative form. In his paintings the colors also gets brighter, and the figurative forms are more frequently and more extraordinarily contorted. He also works in greater definition while showing a gradual decrease in the practice of blurring and smudging paint.

¹ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 81

After 1962 background elements and sexual imagery started to surface. These elements are not at first obvious, but on first inspection and are lost in Bacon's chaotic and extremely violent style of painting. This declamatory transition of Bacon incited my curiosity to inspect the causations, or even possible causations, correlating to these changes, and to inspect whether if any single factor has the greater accountability for Bacon's stylistic change.

SECTION I – PERSONAL INFLUENCES

AFTER TANGIER

Before 1956, "Bacon's work has none of the exuberance of the now flourishing school of abstract expressionism. His is a reserved palette, with a preference for the understatement of blacks, greys, blues, and purples" viewed Virginia Harriman in her 1956-7 review². In the following year, Bacon spent some time residing in Tangier, North Africa, with his friend Peter Lacy. According to Bacon's biographer and critic David Sylvester, who was also an intimate friend and collaborator of Bacon, North Africa had prominent affection on most European artists' palettes, and it could well have



affected Bacon's due to the fact that Bacon was growing dissatisfied with tonal painting³. This was evident in the only painting Bacon did in Tangier which was named *Man Carrying Child*, 1956 (Fig. 1), portraying an Arabian subject, conceived in Tangier. From that portrait to the later ones during that year and the next, short streaks of more vivid colors, comparing to the

² Virginia Harriman, "Francis Bacon," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, 36, No. 1, 1956-1957, pp. 16-17.
³ David Sylvester, "Francis Bacon," *Thames and Hudson*, (1990), pp. 81

FIGURE 1 | MAN CARRYING A CHILD, 1956
 Oil on Canvas, Height 197.5 cm, Width 141 cm (Artnet.com)

earlier palette, started to surface. For instance, *Figures in a Landscape* (Fig. 2) from 1956-7 epitomizes this more exuberant palette. It was evident that his little recession in Tangier of bright sunlight and hotter environment could have been play a part in brightening the palette used by the artists in all of his later pieces.

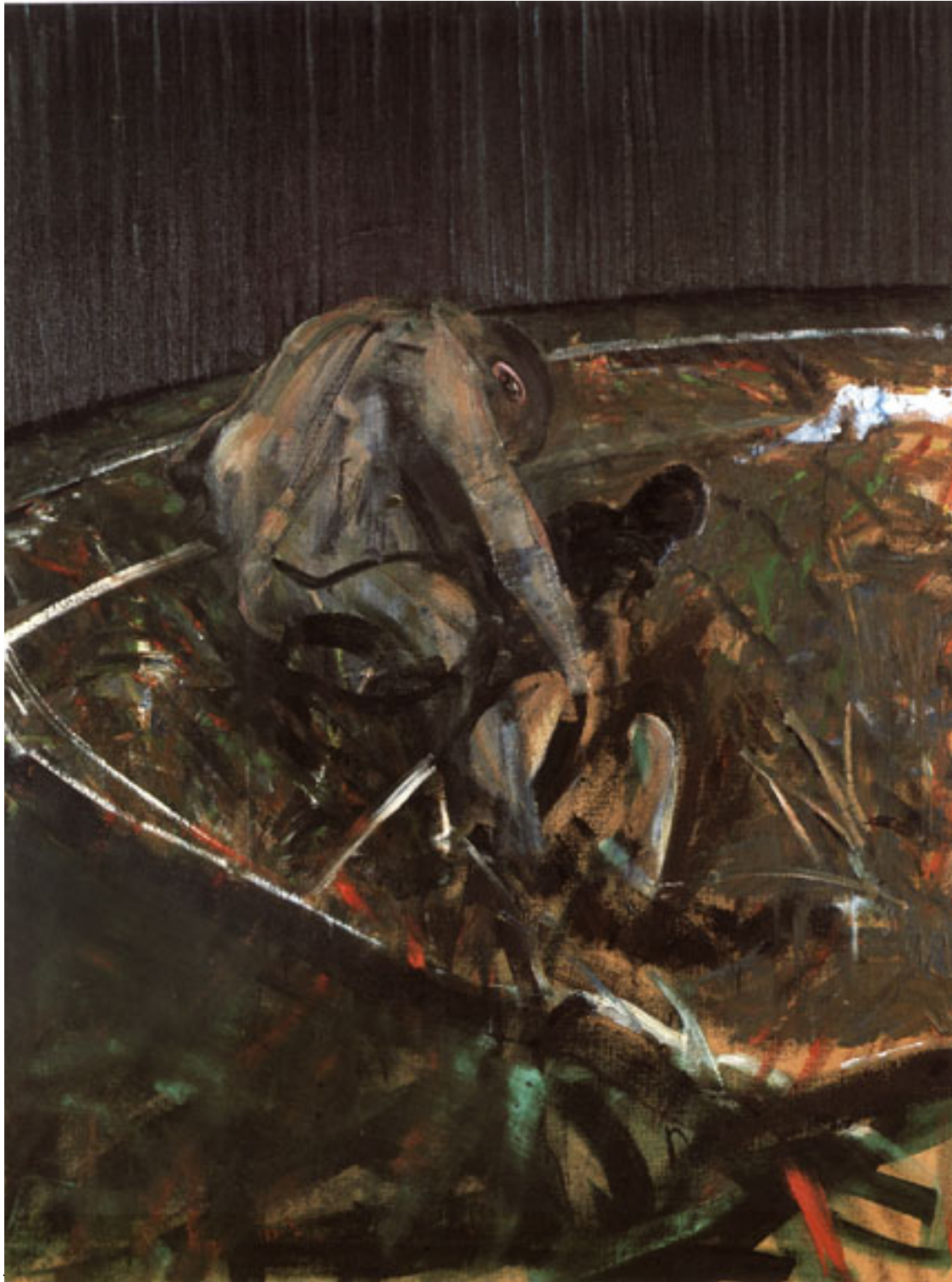


FIGURE 2 | FIGURES IN A LANDSCAPE, 1956-7
Unknown media, Unknown size

A BLATANT CONFESSION OF HOMOSEXUALITY

In 1953, Bacon painted his most seminal sexual work, *Two Figures*, 1953 (Fig. 4) in which he showed two homosexual males having sex. At this time, Bacon could have been working with Eadweard Muybridge's *Wrestlers*⁴(Fig. 3). Although the faces are easily recognizable as those of Peter Lacy (on



FIGURE 3| "MEN WRESTLING"

Lower half of plate 69 from Eadweard Muybridge's *The Human Figure in Motion* (originally published Philadelphia, 1887; New York: Dover Publications, Inc. 1955). Book leaf with paint additions. Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. Page fragment photographed in Bacon's studio . (Artobserved.com)

top) and Bacon himself, the composition and figurative poses are precisely based upon of the photograph. This was Bacon's earliest use of sexual autobiographical context, which he married with photography into a new union of context which persisted throughout his latter pictures.

A year after painting the original (1954) Bacon produced a second version of *Two Figures*. This rendition was a much less blatant confession, but as a less grand version of the *Two Figures* on their

⁴ "Biography 1949-54." *The Estate of Francis Bacon*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.francis-bacon.com/biography/?c=49-54>>

bed he was unable to reiterate. In an interview with Melvin Bragg in 1985, he said of couplings
“most couplings are violent; when you ejaculate they

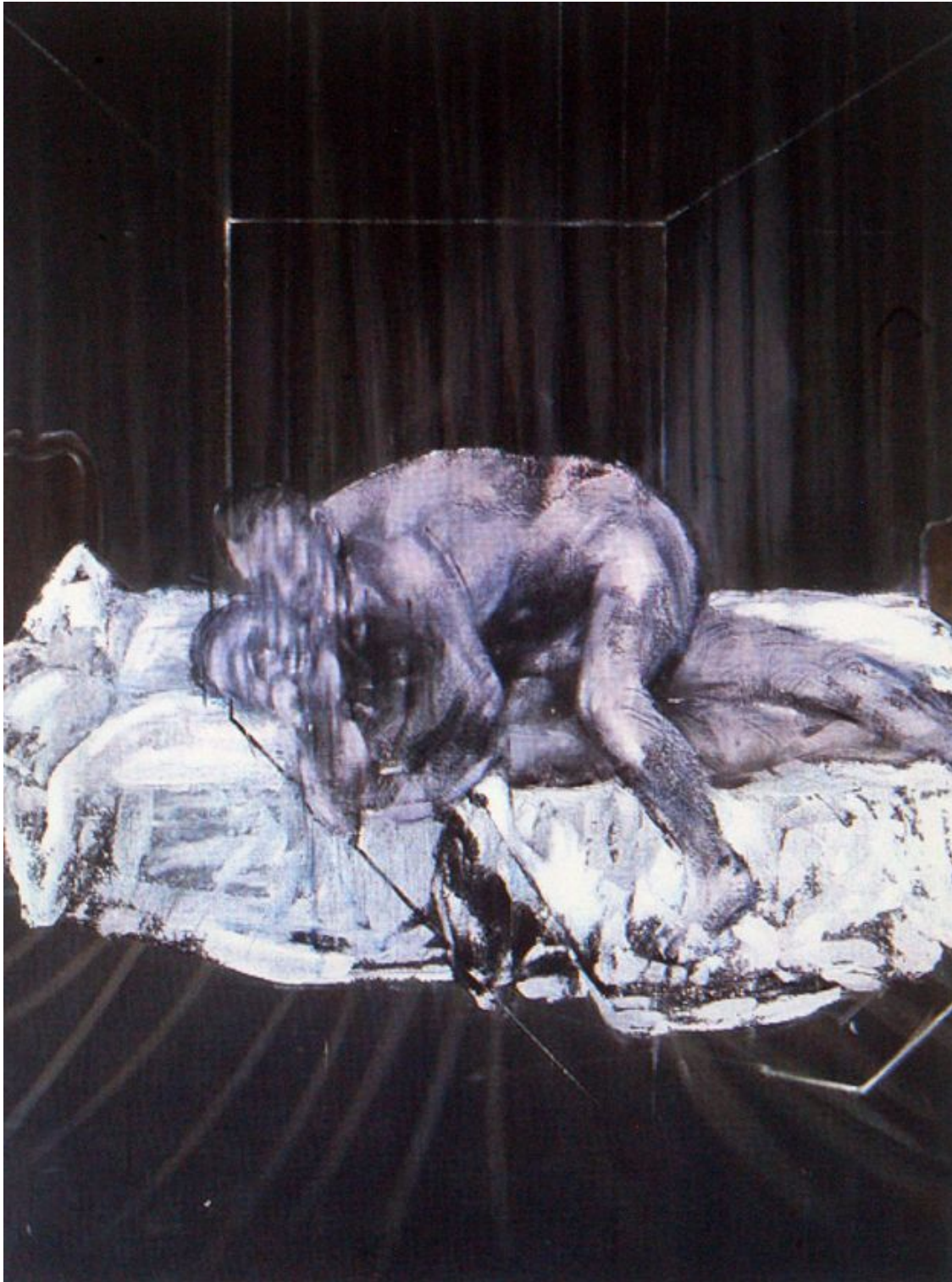


FIGURE 4 | TWO FIGURES, 1953
Oil on canvas, Height: 152.5 cm, Width: 116.5 cm (Francis-Bacon.com)

are... become more violent."⁵

Before 1953 violence was only hinted at in Bacon's work, for instance, in the form of the suggestion of flagellation in his *Screaming Popes* series, in which the Pontiffs are hemmed in their throne tormented by an unseen protagonist; In the context of *Two Figures* it becomes conspicuous that the pain was innate in the practice of sex and that the Popes could be screaming in pleasure as well as pain.

For Bacon, coupling involved both pleasure and the experience of pain; a pain that was recognized but remained against the law, referred to by psychologists as Sadomasochism⁶. Because of this, *Two Figures*, 1953 was not able to be exhibited until 1967 at a Tate retrospective, but it gave Bacon the freedom and satisfaction in expressing himself⁷. Therefore, determined to liberate himself, his painting abjectly became his main means of expression; not only was he able to capture any autographical significance, but also to manifest his sexuality upon desire and pain in sex.

The use of sexual images was Bacon's way of making his own sexuality the main theme in his paintings. In particular he began showing himself in the violent acts he painted in a way that suggests he saw his paintings as a form of confession.

Critic Gary Fine has suggested that art is "the creation of the idea of personal legitimacy... as a mean of valorizing aesthetic authenticity, sponsored by the cultural authority."⁸ Fine argues that the work maybe more important than the story, but simultaneously "the who, the identity," is the universal indicator of impact,⁹ and Bacon's is indicated by the references of his sexuality.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF AND GEORGE DYER

⁵ Francis Bacon (interview with Melvyn Bragg) *South Bank Show* (Dir. David Hilton, UK, 1985)

⁶ *After Francis Bacon*, Nicholas Chare (Ashgate: Surrey, 2012), pp. 88

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-3

⁸ *Crafting Authenticity: The Validation of Identity in Self-Taught Art*, Gary Alan Fine, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (Apr., 2003), pp. 155

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 175

In his earlier productions from 1945 to sometime in 1952, Bacon returned to two particular visual references: the scream based on the uttering mouth of the nanny of *The Battleship Potemkin* and a photograph of the mother of Poussin which he found in a book. These images he mixed with more familiar visuals such as Velasquez's painting of the pope, to create his infamous *Screaming Popes*. In these paintings the mere blackness of the background and the ghostly images of the Pope are a way of depicting the decrepitude and decomposition (or corruption) of power ¹⁰. Bacon was persistent with the images of popes and screaming mouths, until 1952 when his change in palette, from monotonous colours to more exuberant shades like scarlet and crimson.

This change in palette could have subsequently triggered the changes in his treatment of the heads and bodies. The earlier pieces are painted with figures in very entangled and dismantled fashion while later pieces demonstrate a smoother, more translucent and clear painting technique, hence his adroitness in executing bodies. The theme of Bacon's mature production was not about a "public figure" anymore, but dwelled upon autobiographical topics such as the portraiture of himself, his lovers (or the deaths of them) or parts of the milieu who he paid homage to.

Bacon, then, did not try solely to shock and haunt the viewer with disturbing spectacles, but also managed to reflect fragments of his personal stories. *Triptych May-June 1973* (Fig. 5), 1973

¹⁰ *The truth behind Francis Bacon's 'screaming' popes*, London: Phaidon, (Sep., 2013)

depicting George Dyer is an



FIGURE 5 | TRIPTYCH MAY-JUNE 1973, 1973
Oil on canvas, Height: 198 cm, Width: 147.5 cm (each) (Francis-Bacon.com)

archetypal case in point: the images of a man seated on a lavatory, one caught up in the shadow of death and the other burying his face into the sink as if vomiting.

The subject is George Dyer and he is seen to be imprisoned within the blackness of the rectangle, and a great black also-biomorphic silhouette in the central panel, reminiscent of a large bird of prey which could well be a resemblance of the Fury.

According to Sylvester, this triptych encapsulates the most emotional experience of any of Bacon's works¹¹. Capturing a death is a mental torment, but to capture someone's actually dying is more horrific - it was expected from the "shock merchant" anyway¹². So Bacon was now able to register painting on a more personal level, like a visual diary which he could not have done in his premature style¹³.

¹¹ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 144

¹² *Francis Bacon was a shock merchant, not a Nazi*, Jonathan Jones, (Sep., 2012)

¹³ Francis Bacon. London, Peter Fuller, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 127, No. 989 (Aug., 1985), pp. 552

Apart from the previously mentioned *Triptych May-June 1973, 1973* and *Study of George Dyer in a Mirror* (Fig. 6), 1968, Dyer became a perennial subject in Bacon's productions. Dyer was Bacon's lover whom he met in late 1963. He was a "petty crook by trade" being in and out of prison for most of his life as a miserable man living with a neurotic despair¹⁴. In October 1971 Bacon took him to Paris for a retrospective in the Grand Palais. Bacon was occupied in the exhibition arrangements while leaving his lover wandering miserably around the city¹⁵ before Dyer was found dead in a hotel room. He had been drinking and overdosed on sleeping pills the night before¹⁶. Bacon had one whole-body portrait for Dyer in 1968, *Study of George Dyer*, but in the wake of his death, Bacon produced a series of triptychs some of which are considered to be his very finest works.

It is not known why Bacon always showed Dyer as a disfigured and fragmented figure¹⁷. John Russell has suggested that rather than being a reflection of how Bacon viewed Dyer (as broken and fragmented) Bacon's paintings may be a "universal reflection", on the painter's sexuality as well¹⁸.



FIGURE 6 | STUDY OF GEORGE DYER IN A MIRROR, 1968
Oil on Canvas, Height: 198 cm, Width: 147 cm (1001paintings.net)

Dyer's death certainly had an obvious

visual impact on the following works of Bacon: figures in their isolation began to be seen in

¹⁴ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 135

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 136

¹⁷ *Remaking Bacon. Francis Bacon by John Russell; Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times by Andrew Sinclair; Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self by Ernst van Alphen, Andres Mario Zervigón*, *Art Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Conservation and Art History (Summer, 1995), pp. 89

¹⁸ *Ibid*

disquieting, coarse, fleshy poses, as if a wrestling with themselves so violently that reality becomes disordered- the disorder emphasized by the simplicity of settings.

While the link between this change and Dyer was established, it suggests to me that Bacon was visualizing his compassion towards Dyer's vulnerability and loss of identity and purpose of living; perhaps a premonition of Dyer's inevitable death.

SECTION II – CULTURAL INFLUENCES

CHAIM SOUTINE: A DIGRESSION FROM GRISAILLE

In his early career Bacon was influenced by Old Masters like Velasquez. The brighter palette that Bacon adopted in the 1950s may have been a result of his interest in the work of Soutine. In the 1950s Soutine was one twentieth-century artists for whose handling of paint Bacon constantly expressed enormous admiration¹⁹. Specifically, Soutine's Céret Period 1919-23 certainly had the greatest visual influence on Bacon. Among the first of Bacon's works to show the influence was a series of paintings done in 1957

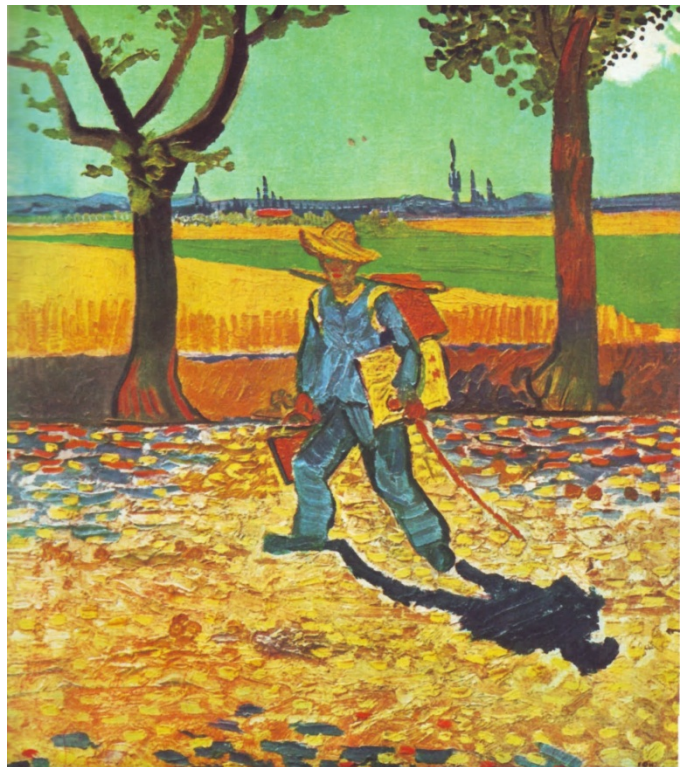


FIGURE 7 | THE PAINTER ON THE ROUTE TO TARASSON, 1888
Oil on canvas, Height: 48 cm, Width: 44 cm (Wikipaintings.org)

including a reproduction of van Gogh's *The Painter on the Route to Tarasson* (Fig. 7), 1888. I think this is the most seminal work in Bacon's transition to a brighter palette.

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 88



FIGURE 8 | STUDY FOR PORTRAIT OF VAN GOGH VI, 1957
Oil on canvas, Height: 198.1 cm, Width: 142.2 cm

of colors sewed together, one against another in a smooth, but daring harmony.

For instance, the *Landscape at Céret (The Storm)*, (Fig. 10) c.1920-1 testifies the impact of Soutine. If *Study for Portrait of van Gogh* is juxtaposed with that Soutine's landscape, the streaks of fecund colors almost make the treatment of the landscape similar, but here in Bacon's work is more provocative, the paint spectral and less opaque.

²⁰ *Varying the Self: Bacon's Versions of van Gogh*, Brendan Prendeville, (Oxford

Study for Portrait of van Gogh VI (Fig. 8) and *Untitled (Landscape after van Gogh)*

(Fig. 9) both from 1957 was the best epitomes of Bacon's moving "away from his pastiche of dark-ground painting and Velazquez,"²⁰ and is a premonition of his mature style. Here the style is still very Soutine-esque, and is the most powerful and daring of the works painted within the next 5 years.

Works from this period are vigorously composed of vehement and vivid palette of green, red and white or green and chrome yellow in setting areas



FIGURE 9 | UNTITLED (LANDSCAPE AFTER VAN GOGH), 1957
Oil on canvas, Height: 127 cm, Width: 101.6 cm

While these two paintings after van Gogh were executed with a more opulent palette, the following pieces reverted to a darker palette, but with patches of the lush, fecund colors which I believe could have been partially affected by Peter Lacy's death in 1962.²¹

I believe Lacy's death temporarily robbed Bacon of his new vociferousness, but it managed to flourish again with even with more resolution in the post-1960 productions. In the commencement of Bacon second great period, Bacon demonstrated this in his big leap *Three Studies for Crucifixion*, (Fig.) 1962 for the cornucopia of its colors or the *Lying Figure with Hypothermic Syringe* (Fig. 11) executed one year later.

In summary, in comparison to the sterility of the palette of his productions before 1956, that of the new Bacon post-1960 became radically hotter and more fecund under the influence of the early 20th century painter, Chaim Soutine, who was in turn influenced by van Gogh.

²¹ "Biography 1958-63." *The Estate of Francis Bacon*. N.p., n.d. Web. <<http://www.francis-bacon.com/biography/?c=58-63>>



FIGURE 10 | LANDSCAPE AT CERET, 1920-1 – CHAIM SOUTINE
Oil on canvas, Height: 56 cm, Width: 84 cm (Fate.org)

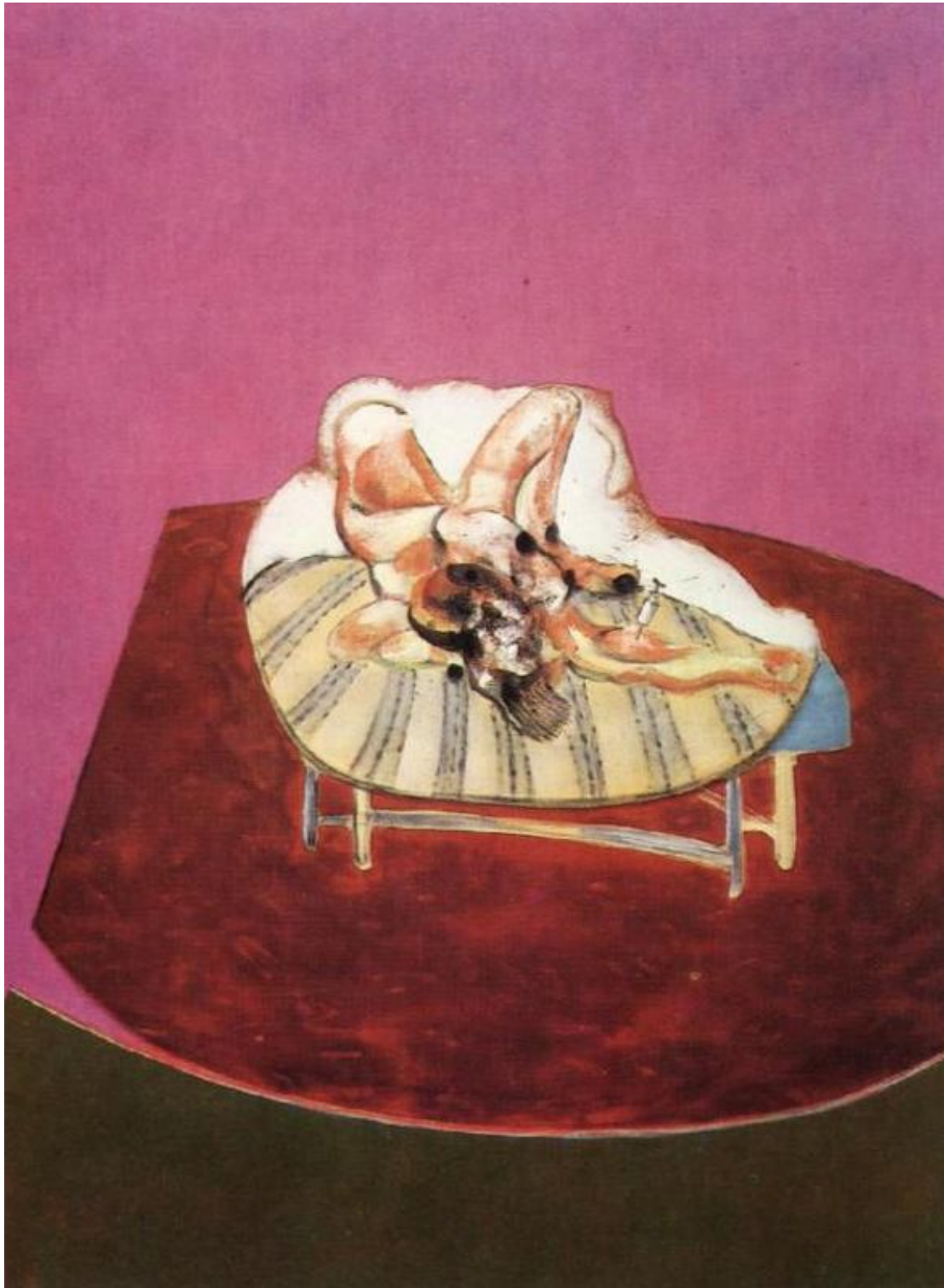


FIGURE 11 | LYING FIGURE WITH HYPODERMIC SYRINGE, 1963
Oil on canvas, Height: 197.5 cm, Width: 144.8 cm

PABLO PICASSO AND NAUM GABO: FIGURATIVE DISFIGURATION AND SPATIAL CONTORTION

The next big change I want to address pertains to that of the subject matter when Bacon entered the period of palette transition in the 1960s. During that transition, the figures in his paintings became clarified and more defined, particularly in comparison to his earlier figures which were more entangled and disfigured. With a new starkness and an emergence of synthesis between solidity and an insistent flatness, and, as described by John Russell, that technique which started to develop in the 60s was a “painted blur that marks his synthesis” and did not demonstrate as much abstraction as earlier works²².



FIGURE 128 | CRUCIFIXION, 1933
Oil on canvas, Height: 60.5 cm, Width: 47 cm (Artgallery.nsw.gov.au)

Bacon was influenced by Pablo Picasso in many different ways since early in his career. A case in point is the earliest of Bacon’s surviving works; a small canvas painted when he was twenty-three which is prophetic to his mature style and subject, even in quality. Crucifixion (Fig. 11), 1933, is unabashedly derived from Picasso’s Crucifixion drawing after Grunewald, 1932²³. The biomorphic long-neck figure from the ever infamous *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a*

²² *Remaking Bacon. Francis Bacon* by John Russell; *Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times* by Andrew Sinclair; *Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self* by Ernst van Alphen, Andres Mario Zervigón, *Art Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2, Conservation and Art History (Summer, 1995), pp. 88

²³ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 16

Crucifixion produced in 1944 (Fig. 13) is also known to be inspired by Picasso²⁴, which was reiterated in his later pieces, along with its companion biomorphs, and from 1960. Whenever he made biomorphic forms or heads, they were derived from Picasso's forms. However, before 1960 Bacon did not really paint from Picasso apart from biomorphs from *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 1944 (Fig. 13) which were the only three to have



FIGURE 13 | THREE STUDIES FOR FIGURES AT THE BASE OF A CRUCIFIXION, 1944
Oil and pastel on cardboard, Height: 94 cm, Width: 74 cm (each) (Francis-Bacon.com)

some visual influences of Picasso.

While most of his productions up to 1952-3 were derived from mouths of terrified women (the mortally wounded nurse in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and the mother desperately trying to protect her child in Poussin's painting *The Massacre of the Innocents* (1630-1)²⁵) after 1960, most or all of his portraits or heads were extremely reminiscent of Picasso.

The most visible of Picasso's influence is probably *Portrait of Man with Glasses III* (Fig. 14), painted in 1963 exemplifying unequivocally Picasso influence from the *Portrait of Faime Sabartés as Spanish Grandee* (Fig. 15), 1939. Both are executed in a caricature profile, but Bacon's was much less defined and more badly misshapen. In spatiality, Bacon's later development and refinement evoke

²⁴ Ibid, pp. 18

²⁵ *Disturbed Ground: Francis Bacon, Traumatic Memory and the Gothic*, Fiona Barber (The Irish Review, 1986), No. 39, Contemporary Art (Winter, 2008), pp. 130

the spatial contortions and volumes of some of the sculptures of Naum Gabo. The excavation of the body and the sculptural rendition of its interior in, say, the middle panel of the second triptych inspired by the *Oresteia* of Aeschylus (1981), suggests that Gabo may have been a potential

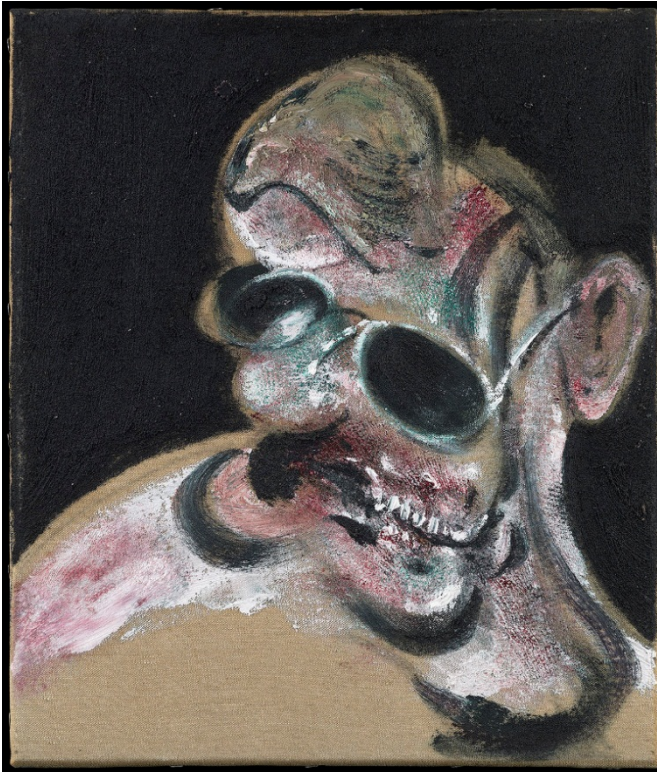


FIGURE 1410 | PORTRAIT OF MAN WITH GLASSES III, 1963
Oil on canvas, Height 36 cm, Width 30.2 cm

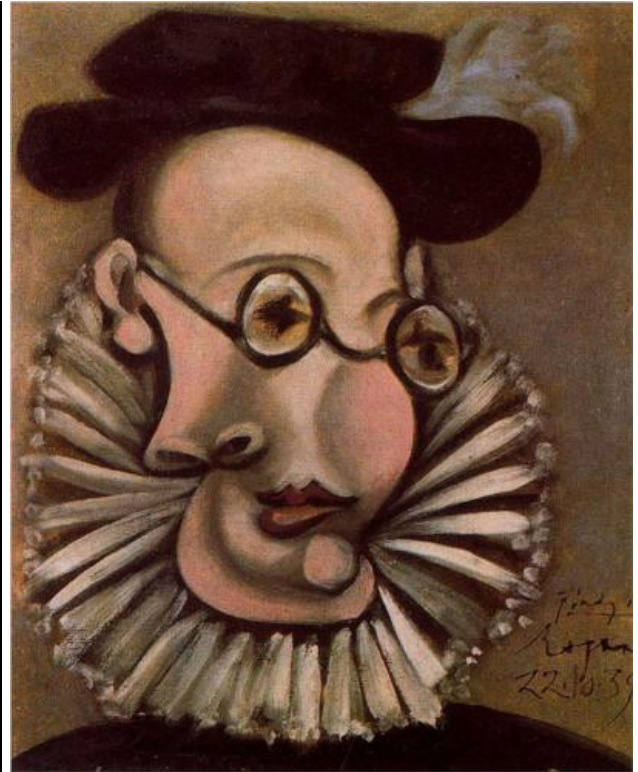


FIGURE 1510 | PORTRAIT OF JAIME SABARTES AS GRANDEE, 1939 — PABLO PICASSO
Unknown media, Unknown date

influence to Bacon's spatial painting²⁶.

In summary, Bacon was registering his derivation of Picasso in forming his subjects while digressing from his own interpretation of the still of the shrieking nanny from the *Odessa* Sequence and the old master's mouth, and the spatial configuration from Gabo.

HENRI MATISSE: BODY DISTORTION AND BACKGROUND COMPOSITION

²⁶ Francis Bacon. *Venice*, Jeremy Lewison, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 135, No. 1088 (Nov., 1993), pp. 782

Even though the heads were mostly inspired by Picasso, some of the bodies produced, on the other hand, were more influenced by Matisse. During the transition from 1956 it is palpable that the debt to Matisse was paid in 2 pieces, one of them being *Figures in a Landscape*, 1956-7, the other one being *Two Figures in a Room*, 1959, each of which is dominated by a crouching nude male figure seen in a low profile.

The drawing of the figures and their relation to the ground is highly evocative of Matisse's the *Bathers with a Turtle*, 1908²⁷. They were not the only ones to echo Matisse, but also after the transition biomorphs were created based on poses of the figures on the right flank of *Music* by Matisse in the 1909-10. *Study of George Dyer in a Mirror*, 1968 is one production that epitomizes the point, encapsulating a figure sitting with one of his leg crossed in a chair. The other ones could be figures, also seen in seated but here on mattresses, from *Triptych - Studies of the Human Body* done in 1970.

Another aspect of Matisse that influenced Bacon was the settings of subject figures and background elements. In some of his mature pieces from the late 1960s onwards, Bacon no longer imposed order on his compositions, instead embracing chaos, inasmuch as figures can be seen scattered across the canvas. In these works a single color is applied on the canvas filling the walls and floor of an interior, with mostly objects like paintings and sculptures solidly realized while the furniture and other objects are transparent or sunk into the background such of those of *Study from the Human Body* in 1970.

In the setting of this triptych, the entire background of all three canvases is monotonously filled with a flat orange ground, with the figures dangle in the space around a bed in the central panel, all realized with solidity. The room's architectural features are depicted by linear or semi-curvilinear

²⁷ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 89

transparent lines. The same treatment of interior elements, now with lilac and with no furniture, is demonstrated in a triptych that was done within the same year - *Triptych - Studies of the Human Body* – which uses defined narrow bands to support the figures in the outer panels but also simultaneously and unambiguously divides the wall and floor in the central panel²⁸.

According to Sylvester, this strategy could well have been inspired by Matisse in his depiction of a studio - *The Red Studio*, 1911²⁹. In summary, Matisse was that painter Bacon expressed admiration and obedience to his style in figure positioning and background composition.

EADWEARD MUYBRIDGE AND MICHELANGELO BUONARROTI: COPULATING COUPLE

The influence of Muybridge's photography on Francis Bacon resulted in a new biomorph making its appearance in many of his finest pieces. The image of the "copulating couple" was reiterated in the majority his 1970s works such as *Three Studies of Figures* and *Triptych August 1972*, both dated from 1972 or post-1990 productions like *Triptych*, 1991. However, during an interview with Sylvester in 1974, Bacon revealed that in some of his paintings it was difficult for him to distinguish the influence of Eadweard Muybridge from that of Michelangelo Buonarroti³⁰:

"Actually, Michelangelo and Muybridge are mixed up in my mind together, and so I perhaps could learn about positions from Muybridge and learn about the amplex, the grandeur of form from Michelangelo, and it would be very difficult for me to disentangle the influence of Muybridge and the influence of Michelangelo. But, of course, as most of my figures are taken from the male nude, I am sure

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 129

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 122

³⁰ Wrestling with Francis Bacon, Simon Ofield, Oxford Art Journal, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2001), pp. 117

that I have been influenced by the fact that Michelangelo made the most voluptuous male nudes in the plastic arts."³¹

Since the introduction of the apparition, it was rendered into a handful of analogously-formed biomorphs featured in a handful of sexual images allowing the picture to be disquieting, yet exuberant in aesthetic contexts³². Muybridge and Michelangelo were therefor of equal influence on Bacon in terms of how he presented the male nude.

MUYBRIDGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRIPTYCH

Bacon had produced a series of Popes in consistent seated-poses, their faces obsessively modeled after the still of the screams. The Popes were his first series and set the tone of his mature painterly style. When the six canvases were first exhibited in a retrospective at the Tate in 1962, they were catalogued together as *Six Studies for Pope I-IV*, whereas the other series Bacon had produced were listed singularly in the catalogue. This suggests that *Six Studies for Pope I-IV* were seen by the artist and curators as a polyptych, a single work.

Moreover, the series was given a new identity with the insistence on its unity further emphasized as *Study for a Pope I-IV*-with the word 'Study' in singular³³. After that polyptych, Bacon introduced his new style and returned to painting triptych having largely disregarded it from 1944 having completed the gruesome *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of Crucifixion* (even though he had another one or two triptychs produced in the 1950s).

From then till the end of Bacon's career, he increasingly produced more images and most of them are in series of triptych. "*Triptychs are the things I like doing most, and I think this may be related to the thought I've sometimes had of making a film. I like juxtaposition of the images separated on three*

³¹ David Sylvester, *Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1987), p. 114

³² Wrestling with Francis Bacon, Simon Ofield, *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (2001), pp. 115

³³ *Looking Back at Francis Bacon*, David Sylvester, (Thames and Hudson: London, 2000), pp. 95

different canvases. So far as my work has any quality, I often feel perhaps it is the triptychs that have the best quality."³⁴

The motion of painting is analogous to that of movies in its successive capturing perception sequence. In Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion*, the static photographs demonstrate its motion by isolating motion into a series of increments of single moments from all possible moments of the subject in motion describing all the bodily component's adjustments in time. Viewed together the photographs are a still interpretation of motion.³⁵

Bacon asserted: "[The photographs of Eadweard Muybridge] showing the elements of motion. They really did interest me greatly."³⁶ In many of his triptychs, inspired by Muybridge's photographic motion, Bacon obsessively tried to render motion in paint. A good example of this is, *Three Studies of Lucien Freud*, 1969 in which Freud, sitting on a stool in an undefined yellow room, is captured in three successive panels. In each panel he is crossing or uncrossing his legs, hands are folded in his lap, but the left forearm pulls both up and down; his face is both full frontal and turned to the left, giving a profile while his head is moving to the right. In the case of his legs, the right leg shows us the sole of the shoe, but the pants leg is painted from a vertical point of view, while the knee presents a view looking up. The torso is positioned as it normally would be seated in a straight-back chair, allowing the legs and head to rotate around it as limbs on a stationary pillar.³⁷

The grandeur of this triptych is not only the extreme deformation of the figures, but also in the spectator's perceptual angle, springing a recognition process of juxtaposing the increments of movements and Freud's struggling motion as if the position robs him of comfort on his chair³⁸; the motion that was inspired by Eadweard Muybridge.

³⁴ Ibid, pp. 100

³⁵ *Motion Perception in Movies and Painting: Towards a New Kinetic Art*, Michael Betancourt, (2003), pp. 2

³⁶ Archimbaud, Michael. *Francis Bacon*, (London: Phaidon, 1993), pp. 14-15.

³⁷ *Motion Perception in Movies and Painting: Towards a New Kinetic Art*, Michael Betancourt, (2003), pp. 5

³⁸ Ibid

CONCLUSION

The changes in Francis Bacon's works after 1960 were under the influences of two main elements:

The personal influences are projections of homosexuality, his relationship with, or the death of, George Dyer and his short trip to Tangier. The cultural influences are that of Muybridge on his insistence on producing triptych, Matisse on the contortion of the body and background chaos, Soutine on the fecund palette, Michelangelo-Muybridge on the sexing biomorph, Gabo on isolated background composition and Picasso upon the creation of all his biomorphs .

However, throughout the course of investigation, it is clear that the cultural impact has more weight, an opinion not just my own but shared by the majority of critics and the artist himself³⁹.

*"He is perhaps overrated as a universal commentator on the human predicament and underrated as a brilliant and innovatory technician,"*⁴⁰ wrote Richard Shone for the 1996 Paris and Munich

retrospective review. Bacon's adaptations and renditions of the other artist's was what made him the most controversial "shock merchant", perhaps, of all times. *"Like Dalí and Munch, Bacon is an artist we love when young. Tantalized by the urgency, angst, weirdness, blood, sex, and bodies, we think,*

*That's me! That's how I feel!"*⁴¹ expressed Jerry Saltz. Sylvester also implied this by shifting attention away from issues of content and highlighting instead Bacon's overlooked painterly skill, John

Russell's admiration for the artist photographic references⁴² and Conor Royce emphasis on Bacon's

exquisite "way of flesh"⁴³. It is perhaps Bacon's notion upon senselessly intensifying the anguish and aesthetic in the flesh that mostly induced the stylistic changes after all.

Word Count: 3963

³⁹ "Ninety-five percent of people are absolute fools, and they're bigger fools about painting than anything else... Hardly anyone really feels about painting. They read things into it - even the most intelligent people they think they understand it, but very, very few people are aesthetically touched by painting." — Francis Bacon - Francis Bacon (Interview with David Sylvester) *Fragments of A Portrait* (Dir. David Sylvester, UK, 1966)

⁴⁰ *Francis Bacon. Paris and Munich*, Richard Shone, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 138, No. 1125 (Dec., 1996), pp. 844

⁴¹ *Sacred Monster*, Jerry Saltz, *New York Magazine* (May 17, 2009)

⁴² *Remaking Bacon. Francis Bacon by John Russell; Francis Bacon: His Life and Violent Times by Andrew Sinclair; Francis Bacon and the Loss of Self by Ernst van Alphen, Andres Mario Zervigón*, *Art Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 2, *Conservation and Art History* (Summer, 1995), pp. 89

⁴³ *Bacon, Deleuze and the Way of All Flesh*, Conor Joyce, *Circa*, No. 24 (Sep. - Oct., 1985), pp. 23-27

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