
FRANCIS BACON AND REALITY OF HORROR(S)

“Ingenious floating into sadistic life”
(2014)

Butchered characters in the œuvre of the Irish painter Francis Bacon, born in 1909, had never before him reached such a credible fulfilment. Bacon spent most of his life in London, where he moved at the age of 31 and stayed there for most of his life. Death reaped him in 1992 in Madrid. His artistic career began in his 30's when painter was deeply influenced by surrealist art. Bacon achieved tremendous breakthrough in 1933 with his “Crucifixion” what was probably unexpected for a young semi-trained painter. As a figurative painter, Bacon became known as an imaginative but shocking chronicler of human mental and inner condition. Unsure of his painting abilities, for long time the deep-thinker Bacon was seeking for authentic art style and figures that would fluently sustain and satisfy his own view of art. Narrow elements of depicted scenes are limited with abstract spatial, non-descriptive backgrounds.

New figurative painting at the beginning of the 1950's brings us the new vision of the disturbed reality exhausted with the tragic experiences never seen before. A whole new generation was thoroughly under the impression of those negative experiences. Besides Bacon, other artists toiled to catch on with the blood-spattered reality. Open violence and raw visible aspects of mutilated bodies are pivotal to artists' interest, albeit it is not about hard-core violence that characterized those paintings, but rather vagueness and obscurity. This violence is not emphasized in paintings, it is more what Gilles Deleuze says: “the violence of a sensation (and not of a representation), a static or potential violence, a violence of reaction and expression.” As we can assume, Bacon's figures are devoid of any traditional constraints, what makes an ascending remark for figure art painting of the 20th century along with Cezanne's and Picasso's revolution.

Exaggerated or not, Bacon's pity for human situation in this unpredictable and cruel world involves us into harassment and nervousness

of mental condition by identifying ourselves with its unstable figures, either animals or humans. This brings us to his sublime aesthetics of repulsiveness. It is interesting and important to emphasize that these paintings had never undergone any transitions in the subject matters, but we will not ponder much upon that, because Bacon's artistic career began at his relatively late life. Unfortunately, we do not have much evidence from this period of his life, since the artist destroyed all his works from that period. Therefore, the discovery of his art had begun after the World War II. The fundamental elements of Bacon's morbid-like art are unquestionable and mystical as artist focuses on vague corporeal transfiguration of not so idealized forms or subject in a manner of realistic depicting. Bacon's painting is usually considered "realistic" but not in the way that he refers to objects of everyday life, but rather that he disenfranchises reality, depicting figures shorn of any savvy manifestations.

Another considerable aspect of this body-destruction painting is the relation between figures and the space; the magnitude of space in Bacon's paintings is emptied and somewhat abstract: there is no any everyday life quotation on usual objects, viewer obtains centralized figure surrounded only by clear shapes of colours. Confusion of the theme and the depicted scene is worked out with the brief brushwork along which the artist makes dynamic dimension of butchered bodies.

Bacon, with full accomplishments, endeavours to depict all of the human beings' resolutions reflected in their materialistic aspect of life - body, trying, at the same time, to emphasize their impalpable aspect of life - soul. This humans' division is boldly elevated into one scary colour-made vanishing figures fixed at the moment of their transcendental infiltration outward of this earthly life, leaving behind catastrophic consequences of their horror evanescence. Those metaphysical connotations in Bacon's art are interesting statement of his profound artistic thinking connecting his mental situation with wrecked and stressed legacy of the World War II. Typical characteristic of Bacon's art is deformed particular painted phenomena wrapped into impermanent and loose forms which give figures a cachet of mortal shrilly shell. It is important

to emphasize that in Bacon's painting neither group nor mere objects are depicted; Bacon is not interested in giving us an account of materialistic world; living creatures who transform into barely-alive beings with open flesh are in his artistic focus.

Their limbic and massacred body structure turns into interlude imbued parts which merge in waving forms of slight strokes of brushwork. Yet, Bacon's colouring is varying; in some early works it is firm and expressive but in some other late works, the colour is lighter, more gentle and subtle.



Study for a Portrait of P.L., n°2, 1957

Although semi-trained, Bacon possesses not only oil-skilled technique but also passionate imagination. Most of Bacon's works are based on photographic patterns, but nevertheless he gives prime to more direct and intense texture of pain. It is clear that Bacon always adheres to figure-painting, based on deep analysis of one's mental condition. In that manner Bacon is a psychological painter - his domain is to depict retarded and non-sagacious human mind realistically expressing himself via deformed bodies, leaving vexatious impression on beholders.

Notwithstanding most of the 20th century artists who derived themselves from the various artistic styles and movements, this Irish painter, stayed staunch and committed to his own specific painting style, making a strange interconnection between analytical paintings of late

Picasso and old Baroque master Velasquez, whom Bacon never saw live, because he regarded him too much for his sight. He thought that the old Spanish artist is unreachable to him. Considering this, one, gazing at the Bacon's painting, will easily notice dismissed sense for realistic veracity and urge for exploring numb and sadistically treated figures with unpleasing anguished impact, leaving us behind with feelings of discomfort.

Most of his paintings lean on that lemmas – painter's pursuance for dark, doom view of the existence of life – have much in common with Rothko's painting and somehow with those of Lucian Freud's existentialist themes. But three of the artists are largely distinguished both in forms and style. From this aspect, considering artist's psychologically stressed figures, we should see resemblance of Bacon's paintings with mentally destructed portraits of early Oskar Kokoschka.

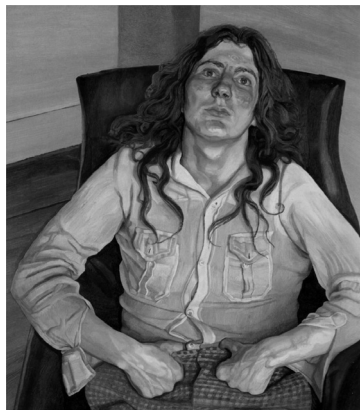
Early introspective paintings of one of the most prominent portrait-painters of the 20th century - Oskar Kokoschka, show us similar artistic outlook with Bacon's paintings. Shaken from the inside, but firmly staying outside, Kokoschka's portrait of *Herwarth Walden*, the main editor of the magazine *Sturn*, reveals unconcealed pathos of figure's mental resignation. Depicted in half-profile Walden, probably the pioneer of the term "expressionism", is muted with dark colour modulations carefully arranged with a vexatious background sketched with brief black lines on the black surface. His slightly vanishing figure is easily attached with depressive atmosphere of the entire composition.

It looks like that his ingenious perception of human neurotic mental degree in those portraits is commonly maladjusted with choice of artistic technique: smooth smears, hard scratched black contours and muted colouristic solutions. Kokoschka indeed pierces the body surface and dives into human deepest feelings of solitude, fear and rejection. He is, like Bacon, genuine prophet of human inability to cope in the pessimistic world crowded with perpetual tournament of fragile human existence. Similar means one can find in the new figurative neoexpressionist paintings of Lucian Freud. It seems that Freud was not satisfied with the mere depictions of the everyday life and citizens. His art is also

concentrated on figure painting but in the manner of new figurative realistic style in the second half of the 20th century painting.

The connection between Freud and Bacon we can find only in their choices of subject matters, while in technique and modelling possibilities both painters are strongly distinguished. Freud's models are usually those with whom the painter is closely related. Therefore, he would never receive an order to do a portrait. For instance, he liked to paint his own daughters because as he once said: "they have nothing to be ashamed of."

Indeed, Freud has deep mental connection with the models he painted and we can clearly see he knows them well. In the portrait of "Ali", Freud made wise introspective into the figure's most inner feelings. Here he shows a woman in her probably early 30s, leaned against the comfort chair and raising her head above with eyes sadly gazing towards the ceiling. With messy hair and blue eyes, she sits calmly but her psychological condition is problematic; she looks hopeless and only what she can do at the moment is staring at the ceiling. Freud familiarizes us with her inner resignation by using special lines and colours; her body is shallow, sleeves are crumpled and she squeezes her hands in the concealed suffering. Her shrivelled hands reveal the veins and her eyes are filled with pain which shows full existential alienation. The painter, revealing Ali's disorder, almost misshaped her beauty. He is not moving but his inside is jerking.



Lucian Freud, *Ali*, 1974, Oil on canvas

French expressionist painter George Rouault considers the dark side of both human soul and civilization. But this French painter is the prophet of “Victory over the Lucifer’s sun” (George Bernanos). In his religious subject matters Rouault is never too pathetic; although his colouring suggests doom aggression, French painter advocates the new odd world; the world whose fundamental aspects are pearls of Christian faith. In that sense Rouault is highly inspired with medieval art, especially with those of gothic heritage. His canvases with thick dense colour layers of figures are framed with steel-like contours. Figurative painting of this “last religious painter” reveals space of illuminating colours perpetuated with personal transcendental beliefs. Rouault’s artistic understanding is far away from the mere rebellion but it is rather derived from artist’s deep religious contemplation which gives his painting a metaphysical sublime.



Francis Bacon, *Study for the Nurse in the film The Battleship Potemkin*, 1957, Oil on canvas

Distancing himself in his late work from observing beauty of the perceived tangible aspect of this material reality, George Rouault was

radically moving away from fauvism which was his first choice. He, directly confronting the vicious world he lived in, neglected the impossibility of art in changing the new misrepresented values. In that sense, the art of all those painters is profoundly bounded into intermezzo of imagination and lucidity.

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