



FRANCIS BACON

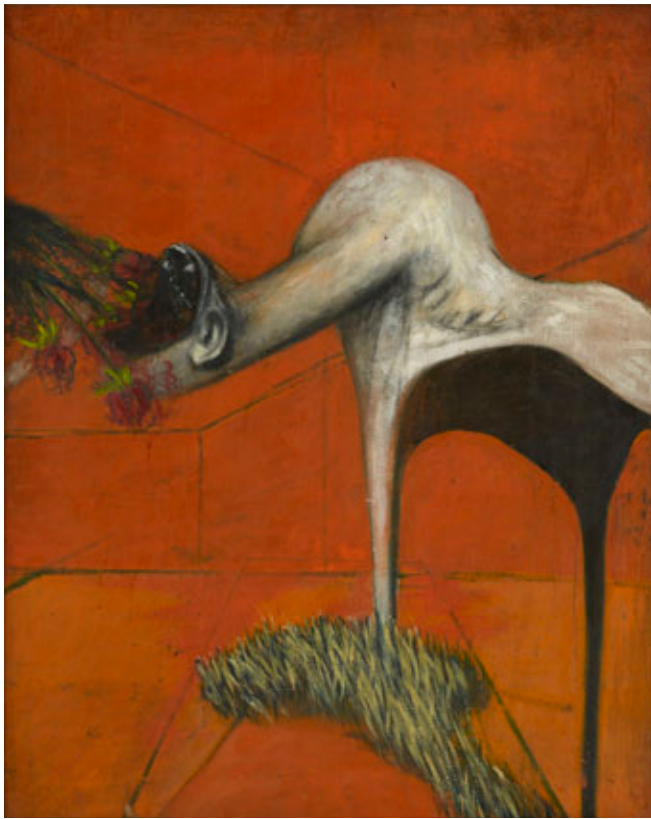
FIVE DECADES

SYDNEY ONLY

17 November 2012 – 24 February 2013

Art Gallery of New South Wales

ART
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Study for a figure at the base of the crucifixion 1943–44 (and cover detail)
Courtesy Murderme. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

Francis Bacon in his Reece Mews studio, May 1970.
Photo: Michael Pergolani
Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane



‘Francis Bacon: five decades presents a dazzling picture of a complex and conflicted artist whose work retains its visceral impact 20 years after his death. It’s an exhibition not to be missed.’

Michael Brand, director, Art Gallery of New South Wales

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***Francis Bacon: five decades* is the first major exhibition of this great artist’s work to be shown in Australia and marks the 20th anniversary of Bacon’s death.**

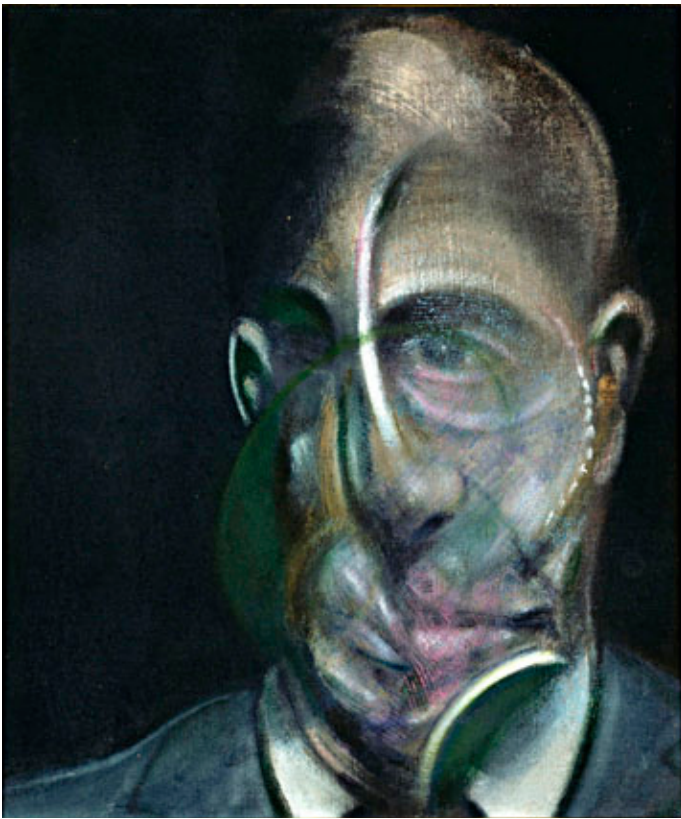
Organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the exhibition presents more than 50 works by the master of post-war British art, loaned from 30 international and Australian institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Tate Britain, London; Pompidou Centre, Paris; Art Institute of Chicago; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; as well as the Francis Bacon Estate and private collectors.

Francis Bacon: five decades is part of the Sydney International Art Series, bringing the world’s outstanding exhibitions to Australia. The exhibition is curated by Anthony Bond, curatorial director at the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Francis Bacon created some of the most vibrant and innovative paintings of the 20th century. His use of colour and texture is outstanding while his imagery is often emotionally challenging.

There are some 600 known paintings by Bacon, many of which are held by major museums around the world. Although securing loans is often a challenge because of the extraordinarily high value of Bacon’s paintings, the Art Gallery of New South Wales is delighted to have secured so many key works for this exhibition.

Bacon’s Reece Mews, London studio has been preserved and is on public display at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. The contents of the studio provide an insight into the artist’s unique work practice and have greatly benefited research into his painting. *Francis Bacon: five decades* includes an archive room with more than 70 photographs and ephemera from the studio assembled by Margarita Cappock, curator of the Bacon archive at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.



‘For Bacon the virtues of truth and honesty transcend the tasteful. They give to his paintings a terrible beauty that has placed them among the most memorable images in the history of art.’

Alan Bowness, director of the Tate 1980–88

from left:

Portrait of Michel Leiris 1976
Louise and Michel Leiris Collection.
Pompidou Centre, Paris
Photo © Centre Pompidou,
Dist RMN/CNAC, Bertrand Prévost

Lying figure 1969
Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel
Photo: Peter Schibli, Basel/Bridgeman
Art Library

Francis Bacon is widely acknowledged as the most important figurative painter after Picasso. In fact, in 1927 Bacon visited Paris where he saw a Picasso exhibition that he later claimed was the moment he decided to become a painter. ‘Picasso is the reason why I paint’. He is the father figure who gave me the wish to paint’, said Bacon. *Francis Bacon: five decades* is therefore a fitting sequel to last year’s major exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, *Picasso: masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris*.

Bacon’s life was extraordinarily colourful and is the subject of a film *Love is the devil* (1998). Like Picasso, Bacon was influenced by his personal relationships; indeed, each of the five decades represented in this exhibition was dominated by a different partner. He liked male beauty and many of his lovers are portrayed in his paintings.

The exhibition acknowledges the importance of Bacon to a number of key Australian artists. Roy de Maistre, who had moved from Sydney to London in the early 1930s, was an important mentor to the young Bacon. The older artist shared his extensive artistic knowledge and contacts with Bacon and it was de Maistre who suggested Bacon should paint (at the time Bacon was a moderately successful furniture designer). Bacon was also a formative influence on Brett Whiteley, who went on to dominate and define the Australian art scene later in the 20th century.

Bacon had strong views about art and life. He was a fiercely committed atheist; he hated expressionism (meaning self-expression) in art; he wanted art to bring reality back to us as forcefully as possible; and was passionately opposed to narrative in painting which he believed should be about the experience of the image before you.

Bacon created some of the most alarming and outrageous images of the 20th century. His work shows human figures set on pedestals or enclosed in cage-like structures. It speaks of violence as well as the sensual enjoyment of paint, from depictions of screaming popes to crucifixions, animals and carcasses, ancient Greek figures and heavily distorted, emotionally charged portraits of his close friends and lovers. As Bacon explained: ‘... they always talk about this violence in my work. I don’t think my work is violent at all. You’ve only got to think about life.’



**‘There’s no-one really like him ...
I think he took [painting] to a new level.’**

Damien Hirst

from left:

Figure with meat 1954
Art Institute of Chicago.
Harriott A Fox Fund 1956.1201

Seated figure 1978
Private collection
Courtesy Richard Nagy Ltd, London
Photo: Bridgeman Art Library

The exhibition is structured around five decades which correspond to key themes in Bacon’s development. Each decade is represented by works that characterise his art during that period.

In the **1940s**, under the influence of Roy de Maistre and the British painter Graham Sutherland, Bacon embarked on a series of studies relating to the theme of crucifixion. The figures in these paintings blur the boundaries between human and animal, their gaping mouths expressing extreme emotional agony. In this decade Bacon began experimenting with unusual painterly techniques and materials. He applied paint with fabric rather than a brush, and mixed dust from the floor of his studio into paint to create textured surfaces.

The **1950s** were marked by an expansion of subject matter and technique. During this decade Bacon produced such powerful works as his series of screaming popes, which were inspired by Velázquez’s *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* c1650; paintings after Vincent van Gogh; images of men in suits; and animals and crouching nudes. Works from this time are generally painted in thin transparent layers of paint.

In the **1960s** Bacon consolidated his technique. In contrast to the sombre tones of the previous decade, he began using acrylic paint in high-key colours. During this time he made many portraits of close friends including the artist Lucian Freud, and well known Soho bon vivants such as Muriel Belcher (owner of his favourite bar, the notorious Colony Room in Soho), Isabel Rawsthorne and Bacon’s younger lover George Dyer.

1970s The death of George Dyer in 1971, on the eve of Bacon’s major exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris (at this time Picasso and Bacon were the only living artists to be honoured with shows at the Grand Palais) led to a series of commemorative paintings known as the black triptychs. Bacon also turned to literary subjects drawn from the darker side of Greek mythology invoking themes of haunting guilt.

1980s The last decade of this exhibition is filled with portraits and also continues the theme of Greek tragedy, portraying scenes from Oedipus Rex and Aeschylus’s bloody play *Oresteia* which features the line: ‘the smell of blood smiles out at me.’ The final decade of Bacon’s life was also marked by his acute knowledge of death – he commented that old age is ‘a desert because all of one’s friends die’. For this reason Bacon made many self-portraits toward the end of his life.



*Three studies of the male back,
triptych 1970*
Kunsthaus Zürich, Vereinigung
Zürcher Kunstfreunde

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At Ernst & Young we are passionate about the arts. Our long history of supporting the arts, both nationally and globally, demonstrates our commitment to bringing significant collections to a wider audience than would otherwise see them. It is one of the ways we inspire our people, clients and communities to reach their potential.

Francis Bacon: five decades marks the 20th anniversary of Bacon's death and, as the first major exhibition of his work to be shown in

Australia, it provides a unique opportunity to view a collection of pieces from throughout his lifetime.

As principal sponsor of *Francis Bacon: five decades* and a long-term sponsor of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Ernst & Young is delighted to help bring this exhibition to Sydney.

Rob McLeod

Chief Executive Officer, Ernst & Young Oceania





above from left: Brett Whiteley *Francis Bacon* c1984–89
Private collection; Photographic contact sheet of Francis
Bacon sitting for Brett Whiteley at Bacon's South Kensington
studio, October 1984

**'It's easier for me to
work from these records
than from the people
themselves; that way
I can work alone and
feel much freer ...
They were useful to
me simply as a tool.'**

Francis Bacon

from left:
Photo-booth self-portrait strip, 1970s–80s
and part of a photographic contact sheet of
series Bacon's friend Henrietta Moraes by
John Deakin, c1963; Page fragment from
Bacon's studio illustrating Diego Velázquez's
Portrait of Pope Innocent X c1650 (Elizabeth
Du Gué Trapier, Velázquez, Hispanic Society
of America, New York, 1948).
Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane



FRANCIS BACON FIVE DECADES

SYDNEY ONLY
17 November 2012 –
24 February 2013

Art Gallery of
New South Wales
Art Gallery Road,
Sydney NSW 2000
artgallery.nsw.gov.au

Hours
Daily 10am–5pm
Art After Hours,
Wednesdays until 9pm

Admission
Adult \$20
Member \$12
Concession \$15
Family \$50
Season ticket \$40
Tickets on sale from 25 July
artgallery.nsw.gov.au

Book
Francis Bacon: five decades
A comprehensive full-colour
book published in conjunction
with the exhibition and edited
by curator Anthony Bond,
includes essays by international
experts Margarita Cappock,
Rebecca Daniels, Martin
Harrison and Ernst van Alphen
and over 200 images.
RRP \$65; only \$50 from the
AGNSW Gallery Shop.

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