

THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

A COMPARISON OF THE WORK OF FRANCIS BACON

AND ANDY WARHOL

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Illustrations	56
Chapter One	1
Introduction	
The twentieth Century	
Chapter Two	8
Francis Bacon	
Chapter Three	21
Andy Warhol	
Chapter Four	30
Comparison of Work of Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol	
Conclusion	
Bibliography	55

CHAPTER ONE

"Painting tends towards a complete interlocking of image and paint, so that the image is in the paint and vice versa I think that painting today is pure intuition and luck and taking advantage of what happens when you splash the stuff down."*

The crisis that marked the first two decades of the twentieth century was a crisis of identity. Technological change was rapid and society had firmly committed its resources to industrial progress. A reevaluation of both the meaning and conventions of art and the relationship between art and life took place as the crisis of modern life was felt throughout society, a society preoccupied with machines, pavements and products.

Out of the confusion came many possibilities. How could art survive in such a society? The Impressionist movement was one of the earliest reactions to the new scientific developments. Monet and his contemporaries in Paris were convinced of the need to use new scientific knowledge of light and optics in their approach to the tradition of landscape painting. Many artists throughout Europe began to investigate the technological environment. Their exploration of the man-made world paralleled scientific enquiry into materials, space, time, energy, construction, electronics and the nature of perception itself. Other artists chose to oppose and react against technological advancement by creating a countercultural art often being concerned with

pessimism, tragedy, liberation, injustice, individualism and freedom (German Expressionism, for example).

Dada was one of the first art movements to oppose and comment on social progress as a subject matter in itself. Dada was an expression of contempt, an artistic non-cooperation; the artist would no longer participate in the creation of illusions that diverted attention from reality. But anti-art has an ironical habit of becoming art very quickly; once accepted, whether ridiculed or not, it's art. Marcel Duchamp was to remark:

"I threw the bottle-rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."

The last breath of Romanticism in art - Surrealism - tried to resurrect nature and the unknown as an inexplicable force. If the modern world was based on rationality and reasoning, then Surrealism would deal with the human subconscious, dreams and fantasies to gain insights into that world.

With the invention of the camera, a metaphor for the entire process of industrialization, many artists sought vitality by closing the distance between their art and the emerging technology. Impressionism was the first of a number of artistic movements to test the Romantic view of nature with a scientific

one. It chose to explore light. Later Cubism explored space and form - it was also analytical in approach. No longer believing they had 'magical' powers, and doubtful of their actual contribution, the artist began to think of himself as a specialist, an imaginative form of technician, with dominion over a small part of the fragmented whole.

The idea of "art for art's sake", as opposed to art for the species sake, or even art for culture's sake, was born. Many artists went along with and used "the modern world" as a source of inspiration, a theme, a reason. Some even glorified the modern world, change and technology, e.g. the Italian Futurists. In other words, in the face of the immense competition from technology (e.g. film, photography, mass-production) many artists sought to compete with it by joining forces with it and using it - even as far back as the Impressionists, as was mentioned earlier, who were forced into realizing that they could not ignore scientific advances around them in order to survive and progress. A later but similar example would be Pop art - These artists recognised the power of the media and instead of ignoring it, they used it, commented on it, stole ideas from it, and almost became it. Modernism was well and truly born. On the other hand, many artists, although they did not, could not, divorce human life from modern life, sought a central role for art within the human situation by trying to oppose "the way things are" by trying to draw attention to the basic human condition - e.g. Expressionism.

At first, largely unaware of their colleagues in the same city

or in other countries, several isolated New York artists hit upon a common style by accident - Pop. It was in the air. Pop Art is essentially American - particularly New York and Los Angeles. A preliminary move in the direction of Pop Art in England occurred when around 1950 Francis Bacon began using photographs in his work; Bacon's use of mass-media quotations differs from earlier uses by painters in that recognition of the photographic origin of the image is central to its intention.

The categorization of art as a critical method is breaking down and will continue to do so as a result of (and causing) greater diversity in art. If, for example, an artist's work is "representational" or "figurative" it is because the artist is trying to represent a reality, and because that reality is essentially a human one. For this reason, figurative art can and does contain a large variety or diversity of styles, forms, "looks" - e.g. Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol. Yet critics are ever intent on categorizing and separating artists off into movements, groups and "isms" when in fact instead of simplifying things they are making it far more complicated.

The time has come when an artist can deal in many areas, overlap and diversify. For example, painting is no longer in competition with science or technology only - it is working against and within the arts in general. Therefore an "artist" nowadays can move with credibility between painting, music, film and video and if concentrating on one must surely be aware of and take, ideas from another.

The various methods are becoming more interlinked, interrelated and interdependent, and yet each is developing in a unique and different way and at a fast rate.

No painting is wholly abstract. All art, in some way or another, is situated in the world, hoping to act as a transformer between the self and non-self. Unfortunately, however, the "battle" between abstraction and representational art has dwelled on unending exaggeration of their differences, ignoring the more substantial elements they sometimes have in common.

In modern figurative art the figure has ceased to some extent to be subject-matter - instead the human figure is required as an image through which a statement is made, or subject-matter communicated. The human figure is part of the visual experience, a means towards visual impact and imagery. Therefore it can quite feasibly be termed abstract - as so can film or music. Even if a film depicts people living their lives in a recognisable environment, and therefore depicts reality, it can still be described as abstract. What is real can often bring one back to reality more forcibly.

There seems to be a general recognition that, in a showdown between painting and mass discourse, painting cannot compete on equal terms. It cannot be as vivid or as far-reaching, as powerfully ironic as TV or print. Part of the myth of Pop was the idea that painting might yet recover its stature as a dominant medium it had up to the nineteenth century before the communications explosion of the

twentieth century. People believe what they see in photos, on the movie screen, or perhaps on the TV set but few would ever claim to extract the moral and factual information for the conduct of their lives from looking at works of art. Art is a small thing, though an expensive one, compared to the media. It is a vibration in a museum, of no "real" importance.

Film, or the cinema, is the most effective art form in terms of its communicative value. People believe it and yet theoretically it is of course false, and a lie. But yet people (or the public) have the sophisticated intelligence to realize that no matter how "pretend" it is, the best of it still has reality and relevance as its life-blood. So why can't the same receptiveness be applied to "art" or painting? Because it's not glamorous or fashionable or credible enough? Or because they don't get enough of it? Art is unavailable and not nearly commercial enough. Yes the market is there but it's closed, inflationary and big business.

The old is continually rejected for the new, like the process of science itself, which affirms a method but never claims any particular discovery to be of lasting importance. The turnover of new data is seen as a sign of the health of the process itself. Style and fashion are of increasing prominence as the only context in which art can operate with justification.

"If a man," wrote Marcel Duchamp "takes fifty Campbell's Soup

cans and puts them on a canvas, it is not the retinal image which concerns us. What interests us is the concept that wants to put fifty Campbell's Soup cans on a canvas."

Other and earlier artists had painted in series: Monet, for instance. But when Monet painted his haystacks and lily-ponds his specific aim was to show, in the most resplendent detail of nuances, that phenomena are not standardized. Discrimination within abundance was the essence of such painting. Today we have sameness within glut, and that was what Warhol painted.

Warhol's insight was that you do not have to act crazy; you can let others do that for you. He became a well-known artist by silently proclaiming that Art could not change Life, whereas Dali, for example, did so by noisily giving the impression that it could.

CHAPTER TWOFRANCIS BACON

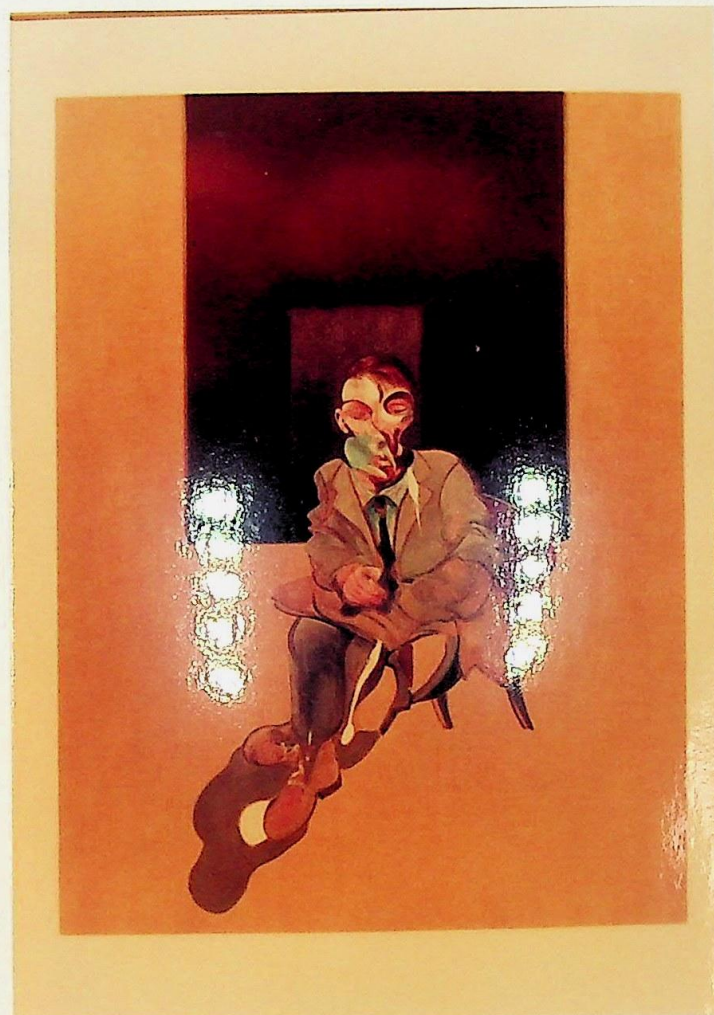
"All art surely is instinct, and then you can't talk about instinct, because you don't know what it is." *

Francis Bacon was born in Dublin, at 65 Lower Baggot Street, on 28 October 1909. He has since gained an international influence and recognition as one of the greatest painters of our time. Having said that, he still remains strangely isolated from what has been accepted over the last 20 years as "the new art". His work is remarkably consistent, from the first paintings to the most recent. His consistency is both in terms of his dedication to the figure, and to oil paint. One is confronted by a fully articulated view. In the context of twentieth century art it is extraordinary to find someone so loyal to the tradition of oil paint. His solutions are impressive, and the result of great dedication and extreme lucidity in relation to the medium.

Bacon's work is centred on the human body. Those figurative paintings are usually portraits, but they are never over-specific. Bacon says:

"I want to do very specific things like portraits, and they will be portraits of the people, but when you come to analyze them you just won't know - or it would be

* see page 55



1. FRANCIS BACON "Self-Portrait" 1972

very hard to see - how the image is made up at all. And this is why in a way it is very wearing, because it really is a complete accident. The image is a kind of tightrope walk between what is called figurative painting and abstraction. It will go right out from abstraction but will really have nothing to do with it. It's an attempt to bring the figurative thing up onto the nervous system more violently and more poignantly."

*

The figure, in these paintings, is usually distorted in appearance, whereas what clothes or surrounds it is often relatively undistorted, e.g. the centre panel of "Three Studies for a Crucifixion", 1962.

Again and again he refers to the nervous system of painter and spectator. The nervous system for him is independent of the brain. The kind of figurative painting which appeals to the brain, he finds illustrational and boring.

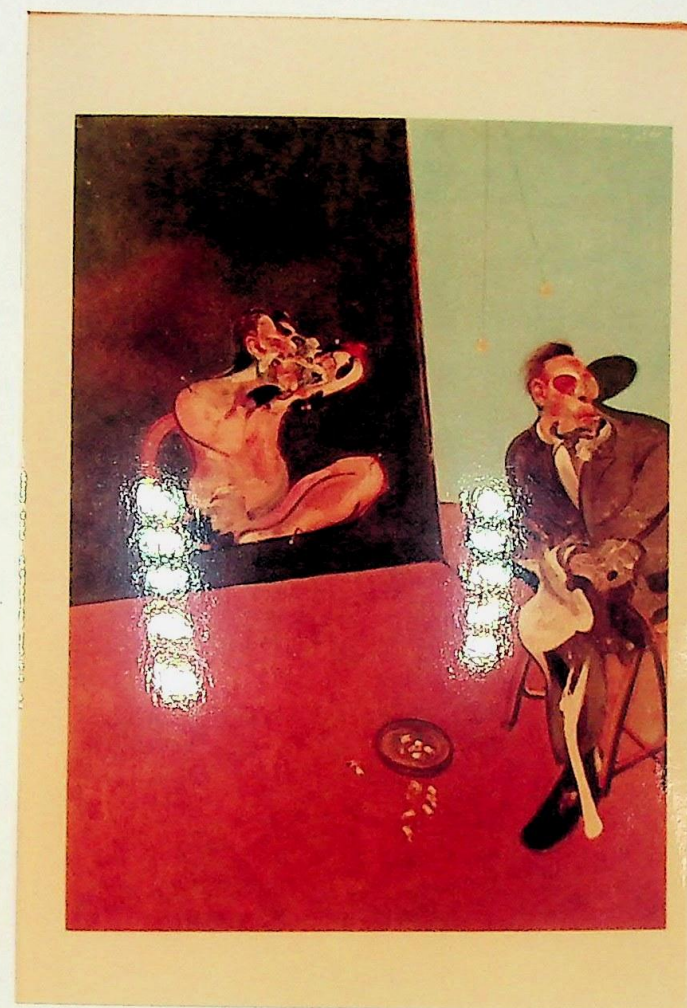
"I've always hoped to put over things as directly and rawly as I possibly can and perhaps if a thing comes across directly, they feel that it is horrific."

*

To arrive at this rawness which speaks directly to the nervous system, Bacon relies heavily on what he calls "the accident".

"In my case I feel that anything I've ever liked at all has been the result of an accident on which I've

* see page 55



2. FRANCIS BACON "2 Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer" 1968

been able to work."

The 'accident' occurs in his painting when he makes 'involuntary marks' upon the canvas. His "instinct" then finds in these marks a way of developing the image. A developed image is one that is both factual and suggestive to the nervous system.

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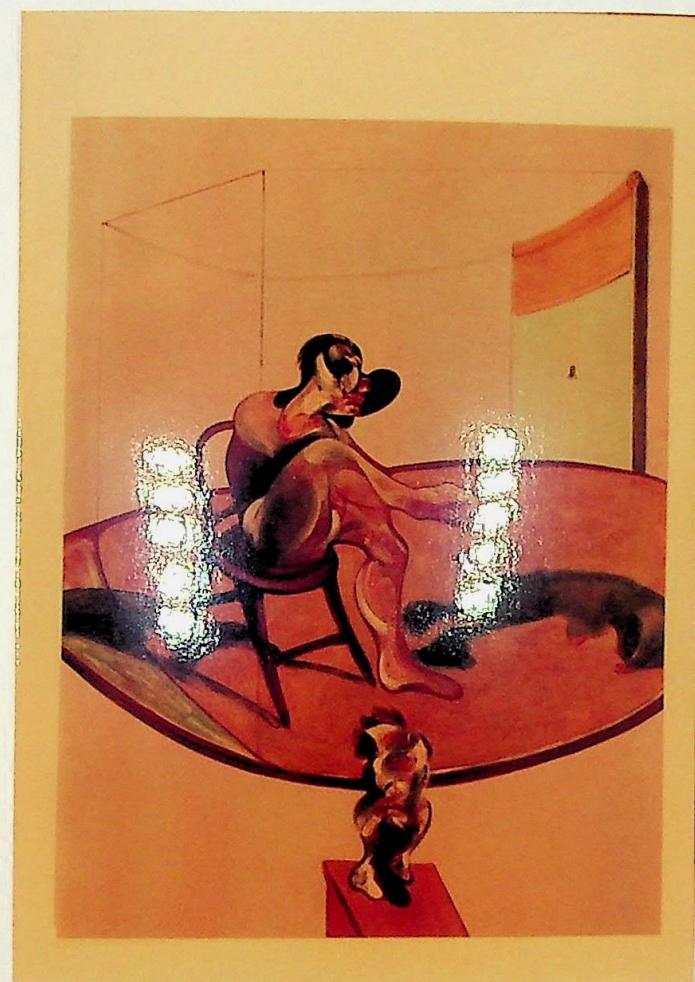
"Is'nt it that one wants a thing to be as factual as possible, and yet at the same time as deeply suggestive or deeply unlocking of areas of sensation other than simple illustrating of the object that you set out to do? Is'nt that what all art is about?"

Bacon's work is said to be an expression of the anguished loneliness of man. His figures are isolated in glass cases, in arenas of pure colour, in anonymous rooms, or even just within themselves. Their isolation does not preclude their being watched. His figures are alone but they are utterly without privacy, e.g. "Two figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants", 1968 - they are also presented in all their vulnerability to our scrutiny. Under conditions of such universal solitude, the distinction between individual and species becomes meaningless. Bacon gives at least one reason for using the image of the single figure so much:

Ill. 2

"I think that the moment a number of figures become involved, you immediately come on to the storytelling aspect of the relationship between figures. And

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3. FRANCIS BACON "2 Studies of George Dyer with Dog" 1968

that immediately sets up a kind of narrative. I always hope to be able to make a great number of figures without a narrative."

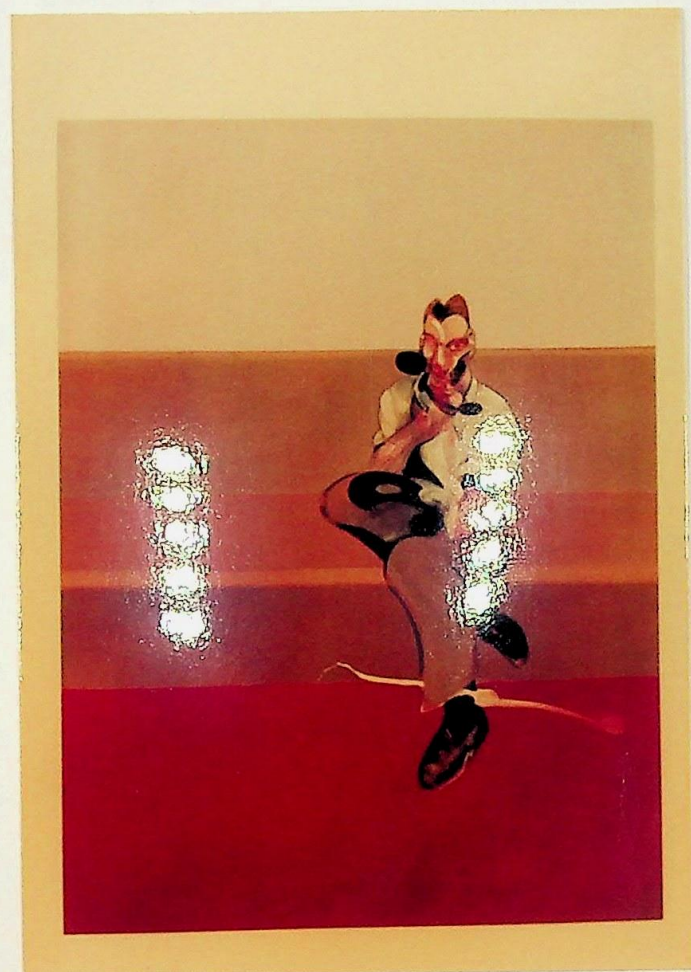
The difficult thing for any artist is to perfect the single image - maybe this is one reason why Bacon makes extensive use of the triptych.

Bacon questions nothing about the nature of man. If anything he is totally concerned with the problems of paint/image relationships. His progress over 30 years can be seen not in terms of any thematic development, but a technical one of getting reality into sharper focus, and yet not be obvious or illustrational. Bacon's paintings do not comment, as is often said, on any actual experience of loneliness, anguish or metaphysical doubt, nor do they comment on social relations, bureaucracy, industrial society or the history of the twentieth century. To do any of these things they would have to be concerned with consciousness. What they do is demonstrate, rather than express, how alienation may provoke a longing for its own absolute form - which is mindlessness.

A consistent theme of Bacon's work is his use of the room as a setting/background for his figures, e.g. "Study for Portrait of Elizabeth Rawsthorne", 1964. He uses the room space as a method of enhancing and displaying the human form. This background lifts, or throws, the image - it gives it more than a context - it presents the image for scrutiny. The background

Ill. 27.

* see page 55



4. FRANCIS BACON "Portrait of Lucian Freud" 1968

serves to isolate the figure, even if there are other objects in the scene, they are only parts of the set in which the figure lives and moves. The set gives you a viewpoint - often looking down at a figure on a bed or turning in a chair.

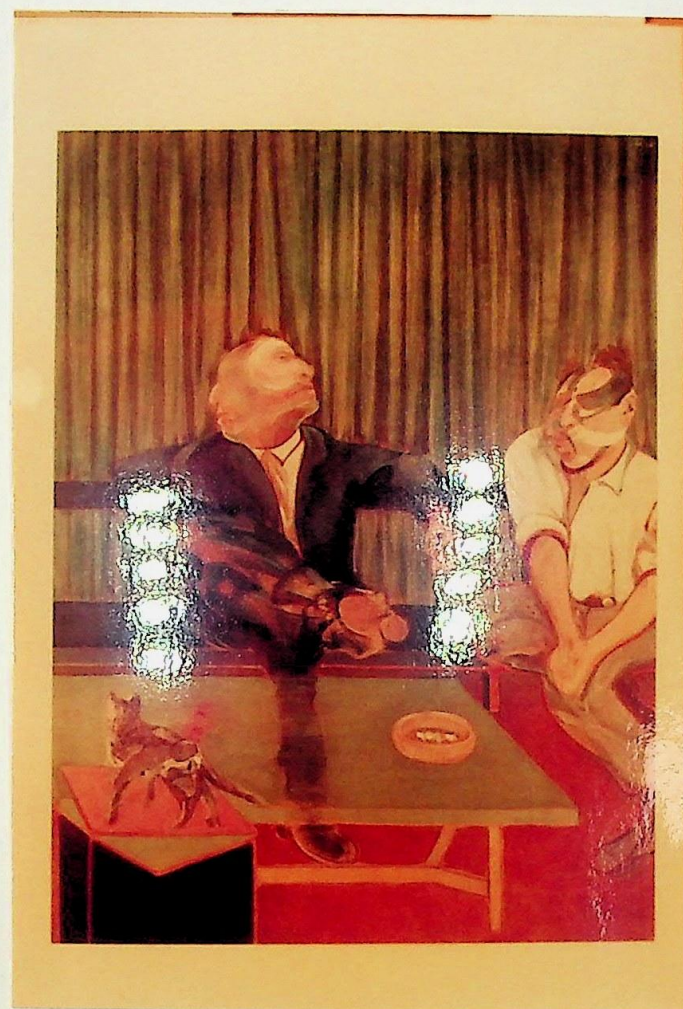
ll. 4.

Bacon says, "I've nothing to say about the human situation", yet his pictures are very suggestive, despite the fact that this is unintentional, of human activity and mental states. This is a quality of many of the best paintings by any artist - they open up many areas of thought and have different levels of feeling, as well as the more intentional, obvious ones.

The viewer usually sees his pictures as depicting humans as ugly and distorted creatures - yet this is an unfortunate view because it is too subjective - it prevents one from understanding the way the painting has been approached, which is not to paint an ugly, horrific portrait. Rather, Bacon would say that he wants the people in his pictures to look as attractive as possible.

If the human situation could be talked about in terms of "To be or not to be" then that is not the question with the work of Francis Bacon. Rather the problem that he deals with is one of "To be and not to be" - it is this ambiguous quality, this hovering shifting tension between the known and the unknown, the conscious and the unconscious, the reality and the dream, that he seeks. He says:

"It needs a sort of moment of magic to coagulate colour and form so that it gets the equivalent of



5. FRANCIS BACON "Portrait of George Dyer and Lucian Freud" 1967

appearance, the appearance that you see at any moment, because so-called appearance is only rivetted for one moment as that appearance. In a second you may blink your eyes or turn your head slightly, and you look again and the appearance has changed. I mean appearance is like a continually floating thing." *

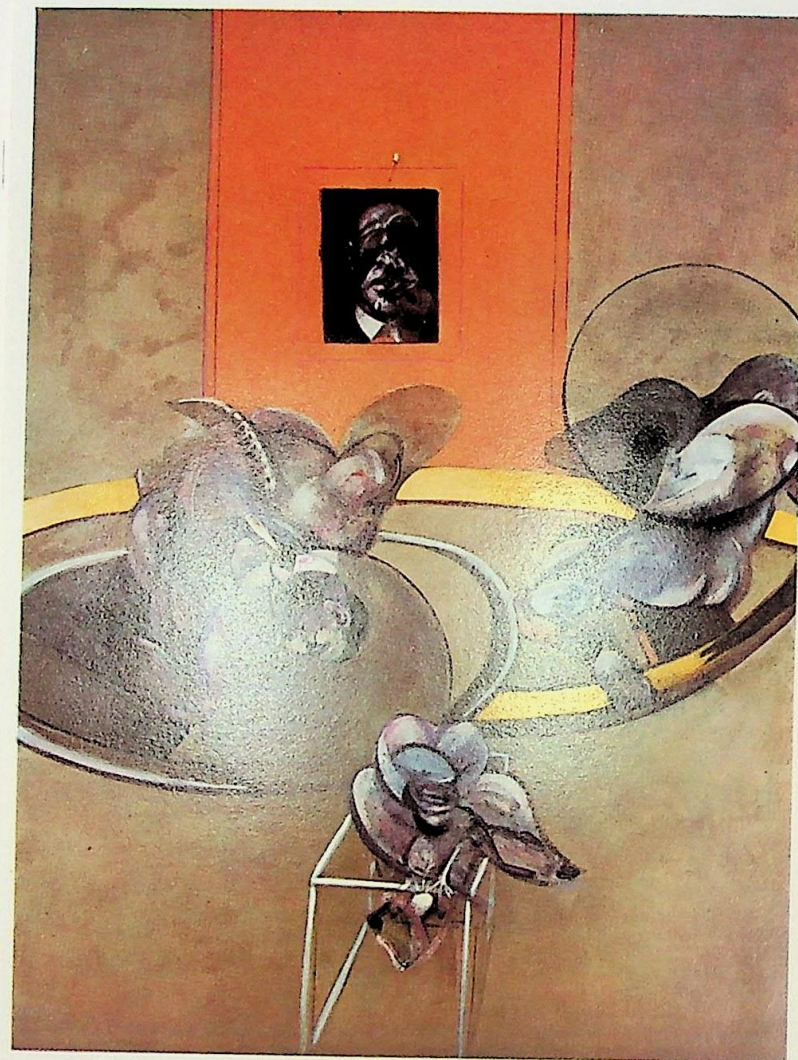
In order to make the paintings that record this elusive appearance, and that create "the sensation without the boredom of its conveyance", Bacon cites the element of risk as a very important part of his creative process. But what makes the results of one person's "risks" so much more different and interesting than anyone else's? Clearly, Bacon uses an "inspired risk". In other words, his critical ability enables him to decide which accidents or happenings he can use and which he cannot.

Often the work of Bacon has been compared to that of Edgar Degas which is a justifiable comparison for several reasons; for example both have similar subject-matter namely the human figure and often set in an interior space. Degas is careful about the vantage point he takes from which to view his subject, and often makes similar decisions to Bacon on this matter. For instance, they both use viewpoints from above to a great extent and both give the feeling of spying on their subject as if they were looking at the figure from an obscure corner in the room, a dark balcony, through an open door, maybe even through a key-hole. It's as if the figure has been caught in the act - of what? Caught in the act of just existing, a moment for all

lll. 5

lll. 6.

* see page 55



6.

FRANCIS BACON "3 Figures and Portrait" 1975

moments. There is never anything special or dramatic about what the figures are doing; they are just there, living out their ordinary everyday lives - but, in Bacon's case, lives that though banal seem to be always on the edge of something far more serious, maybe even macabre. A girl washing or dressing or waiting; a man sitting or staring - also waiting. Both artists use an unliteral treatment of the figure, and yet I would describe both as being very much in touch with the reality of the figure. Neither take an illustrational approach - both have a kind of looseness or apparent freedom yet achieve highly controlled results. Both artists are also very aware of the material they are working with, pastel in Degas' case, oil paint in Bacon's. In fact in the case of both artists the image, or thing painted and the medium are inseparable - both achieve this perfect blending, this cohesion. They both exploit their chosen medium to the full, and allow it to dictate the way the picture happens.

Although the portraits are not images of nightmare or degradation and they stand up as representatives of known people, an area that Bacon seems often to delve into is that of man/animal. Man is seen to have the characteristics of an animal, not in terms of evolution (it is clear that man is not an animal) yet there is also evidence to suggest that on certain levels the differences between man and animal become blurred and indistinguishable - it is as if man has been reduced to mere matter - to meat in fact. For example "Paralytic Child Walking on all Fours", 1961 or "Painting, 1948" which actually contains carcasses of meat



7.

FRANCIS BACON "SELF PORTRAIT" 1973

placed with the figure. Bacon often in fact uses photographs of animal movements for reference when he's painting a portrait.

One of the reasons why Bacon's work is so compelling is because when one looks at the pictures there is so much not known about them - they seem to throw questions at the viewer who wonders at the circumstances that cause such a scene to come about. The image of man is continually elusive - Bacon knows this and tries to bring the image about by trying to make the appearance so real and yet so unreal at the same time. One could attribute to Bacon a form of respect for the human being - by recognizing that he/she cannot be represented easily, or finally.

Bacon's work often reminds me of some of Picasso's work especially Picasso's "Demoiselles d'Avignon". For mostly different reasons Picasso distorted the faces of the women in this painting. But maybe Picasso was attempting to force us to relook at the human image - he certainly did that himself anyway. Bacon continually tries to re-see the images, the figures in his pictures - he tries to make the appearance come across in a new fresh way. Also Bacon was very influenced by Picasso -

"We had a desire to do forms as when I originally did three forms at the base of the Crucifixion. They were influenced by the Picasso things which were done at the end of the twenties. And I think there's a whole area there suggested by Picasso, which in a way has been unexplored, of organic form which relates to

the human image but is a complete distortion of it."

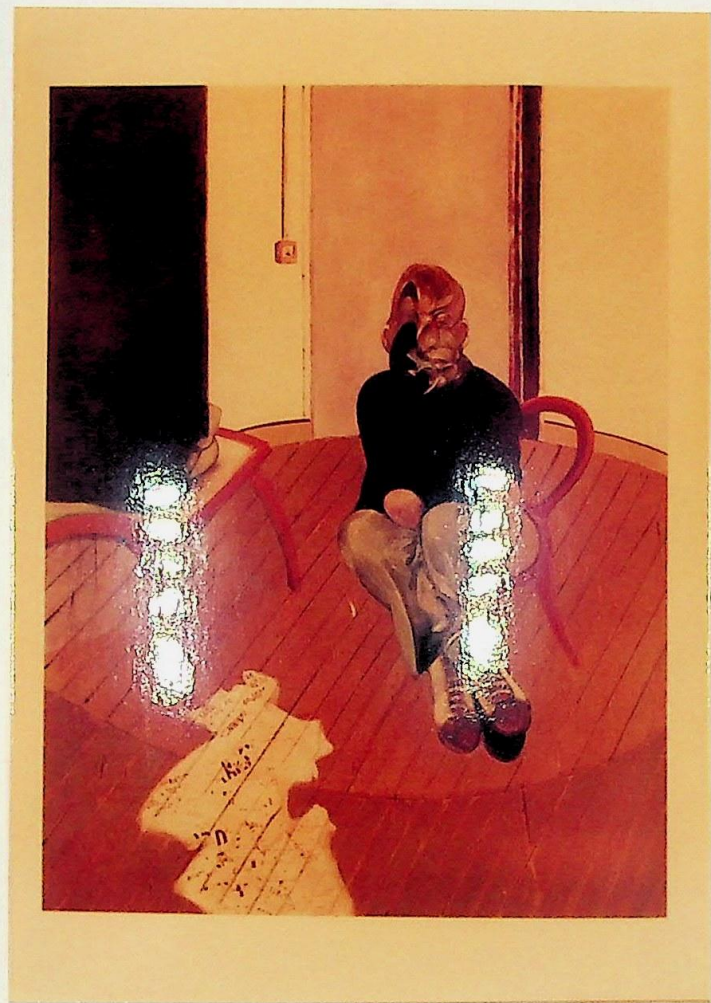


There is a finely balanced ambiguity in Bacon's paintings - he invents, continually, new ways of defeating expectation in an attempt to push the image to its limit - but he does it in a very personally consistent way. He believes all art should attempt to defeat expectation and push its images to the edge. John Russell in his book on Francis Bacon draws literary allusions between the paintings and "The Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad. In the film "Apocalypse Now" which was based on that book, likenesses certainly are evident. Man, in the film, is stretched to his utmost - he is brought to the limits of his existence and forced to come face to face with his own evil - he is certainly, during the process, degraded, distorted and dehumanized. Bacon's images suggest a similar vein of thought although, as I've stated already, he is not (not consciously anyway) trying to say anything about the condition of man or the state of the world.

Perhaps the most persistent of all Bacon's preoccupations is the problem of what a man is to do when he is alone in a room by himself. Maybe most of us spend most of our time trying to avoid that situation? Bacon makes private statements in a grand way - he makes what might be considered ordinary, monumental, what is old-fashioned, new. Looking at his pictures we realize that although European painting includes a great many portraits of individuals in rooms, they are not always about what it feels like to be alone in a room: the painter usually makes two.

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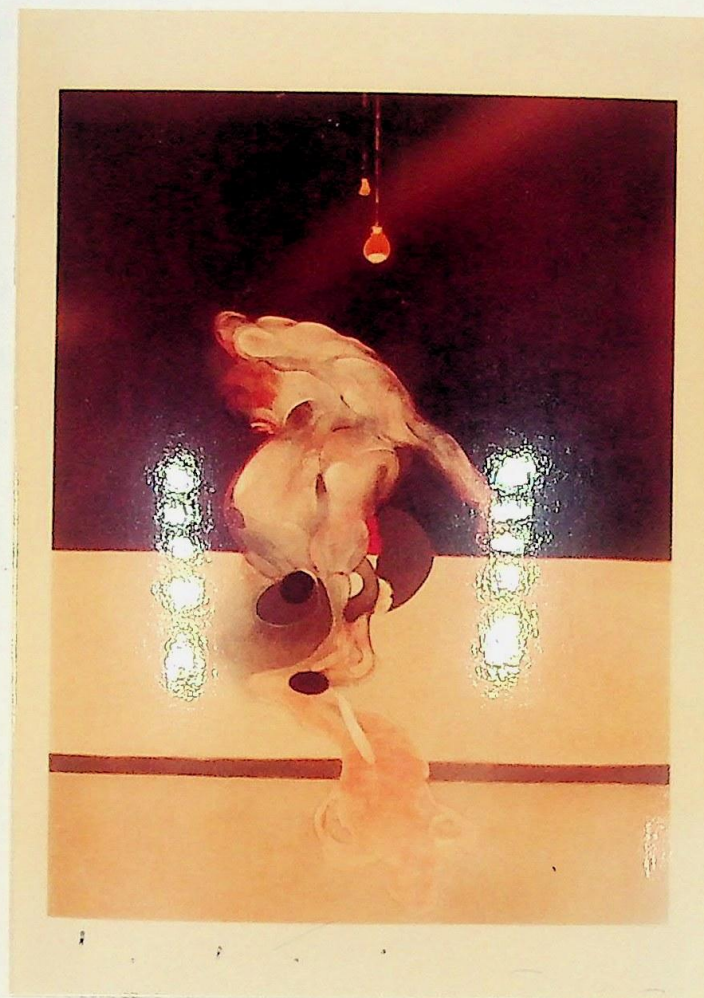
FRANCIS BACON "Self Portrait" 1973

There is, in Bacon's pictures, a continual pulling back and forth between fact and feeling, information and imagination.

"I would loathe my paintings to look like chancy abstract expressionist paintings, because I really like highly disciplined paintings, although I don't use highly disciplined methods of constructing it. I think the only thing is that my paint looks immediate. Perhaps it's a vanity to say that, but at least I sometimes think in the better things, the paint has an immediacy, although I don't think it looks like thrown about paint."

Bacon has said that his ambition is towards the National Gallery - that or the dustbin. He wants to be unbeatable in what he's trying to do, or not at all. This determination is evident in the immense body of work he has produced, all of it pushing towards that final masterpiece - though by the nature of Bacon's own self-critical attitude he will perhaps never reach the stage where he can accept what he's done, realize it as finished, leave it and go off in another direction.

"I want the paintings to come about so that they look as though the marks had a sort of inevitability about them. I hate that kind of sloppy sort of Central European painting. It's one of the reasons I don't really like abstract expressionism. Quite apart from its being abstract, I just don't like the sloppiness of it."



9.

FRANCIS BACON "TRIPTYCH" (centre panel) 1974

Bacon has a love of the secondhand image - for example, although he painted many versions of Velazquez' "Pope Innocent X" he never actually saw the original, nor had he any desire to - his paintings derived from reproductions (the shabbier the better!) of the Velazquez work. Also, when he is making portraits he prefers to work from a photograph of his subject, rather than having him or her actually sitting there in front of him.

"I find that photographs are very much more interesting than either abstract or figurative painting. I've always been haunted by them."

A photograph records for a moment. In the process of painting, Bacon meets the accident that will turn that moment into all moments. In life, the moment which ousts all preceding and following moments is most commonly a moment of physical pain. Nevertheless, he is not really dealing with pain.

Bacon treasures the moment at which the image might go one way, and then again might go another. He likes, for instance, the elusive quality of Seurat's paintings - the way the image hovers slightly as if suspended and never quite settles for any particularly definite statement. Bacon also prefers the realism of Courbet's treatment of the human figure to the decorative, untruthful voluptuousness Rubens paints. He admires Ingres, but detects in him a certain meanness of spirit or defensive tightness which he doesn't like. He especially admires Marcel Duchamp for the radical nature of his drive, the economy of his expression, the

ill. 9.

* see page 85



10. FRANCIS BAZZON "Portrait of a Man walking down Steps" 1972

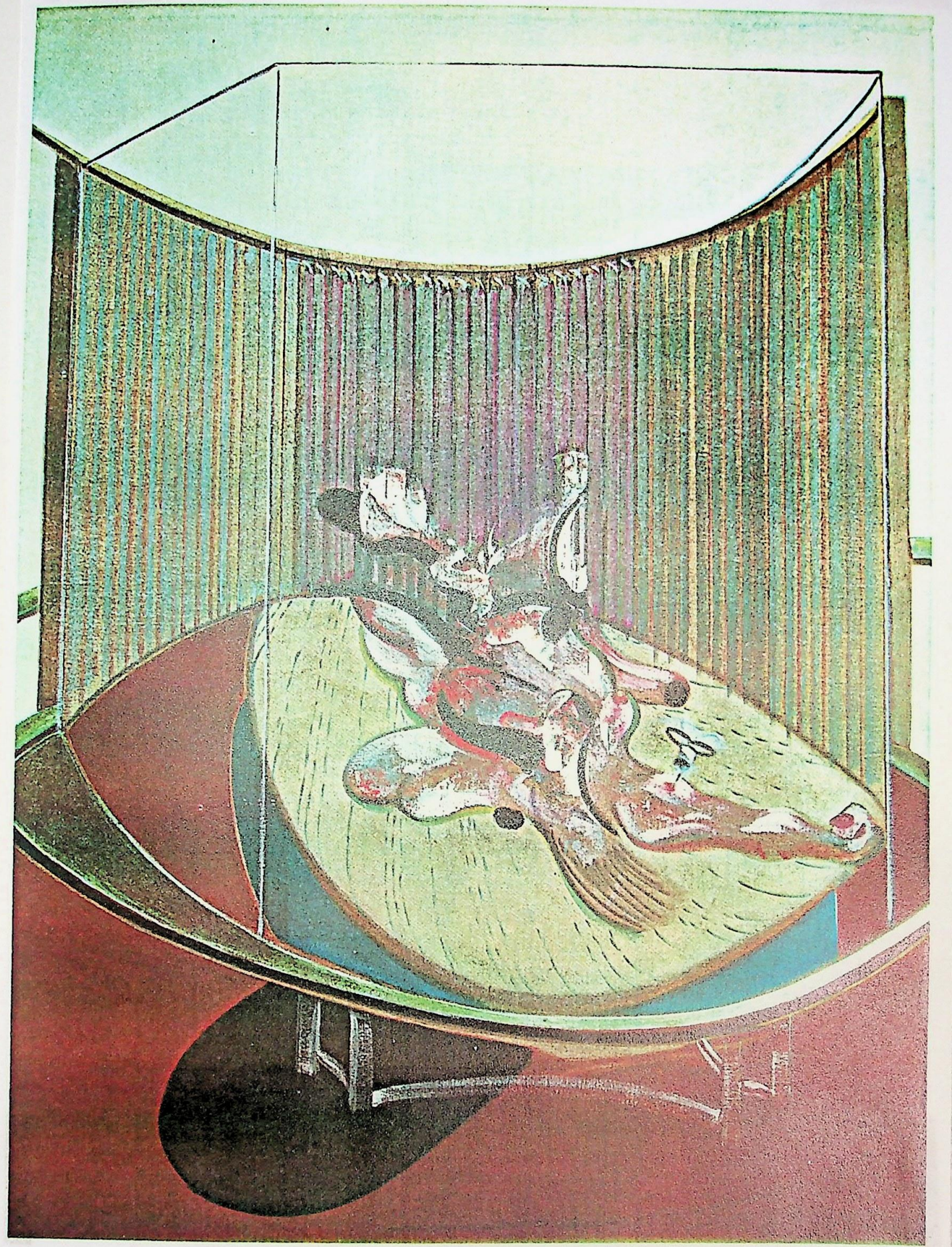
irony, the secretiveness, the once-and-for-all attitude - the antidote to whatever is tired, mercenary or pretentious. Although Bacon himself appears to use traditional methods, he wants those methods to work for him in a very different way from what went before.

"I'm not attempting to use what's called avant-garde techniques. Most people this century who have had anything to do with the avant-garde wanted to create a new technique, and I never have myself. Perhaps I have nothing to do with the avant-garde."

Bacon also likes the work of Van Gogh and although there are certain parallels between the two (the painterliness, the seeming distortions and yet great reality and truth - could that be called meaningful distortion?) they are basically very different in terms of ambition and style. However, a statement from Van Gogh can throw some light on the predicament in which Bacon also finds himself. Van Gogh said -

"My great wish is to learn to change and remake reality. I want my paintings to be innaccurate and anomalous in such a way that they become lies, if you like, but lies that are more truthful than literal truth."

This statement is similar to many made by Bacon. It is this same tension, the tension between opposites (e.g. lies and truth) - his capacity to keep simultaneously in mind two antithetical points of



11.

FRANCIS BACON 'Version No. 2 of Lying Figure with Hypodermic Syringe' 1968

view which gives tautness and unpredictability to Bacon's art.

In pushing the boundaries of his work, Bacon is also succeeding in extending the boundaries of all art.

CHAPTER THREEANDY WARHOL

"I'm sure I'm going to look in the mirror and see nothing. People are always calling me a mirror and if a mirror looks into a mirror, what is there to see?"

**

The most publicly celebrated figure to emerge from Pop Art is Andy Warhol. But the focus on Warhol has been more on the celebrity than the artist. Ultimately, however, judgement as to what is significant in art must centre on the work itself. Pop is a cultural phenomenon but like any other style it must eventually stand or fall on its merit, as art. There is a consistency of style and imagery throughout Andy Warhol's career. From the beginning he has used a subject-matter that was basically considered to be banal and ordinary, and he has emphasized these characteristics through his art; also he has taken subject matter/images not thought of as ordinary but the opposite in fact (famous film stars, car crashes) and made them ordinary, banal almost trivialized them, in fact.

ell. 13.

"I wish I could invent something like bluejeans -
Something to be remembered for. Something mass."

**

Undoubtedly he saw the work of Rauschenberg and Johns who had already opened up painting to a greater range of imagistic content. He must also have been aware of the work of Roy Lichten-

** see page 5



12.

ANDY WARHOL "Orange Disaster" 1963



13.

ANDY WARHOL "Electric Chair" 1967

stein at some stage - but it seems improbable that Andy was influenced by any of these artists to any great extent, especially early on in his work. Certainly they created the atmosphere for Pop to come about. They set the context in which Andy was to work, and he was definitely affected by that. One of the most decisive moves apparent in Warhol's work is the rejection of paint handling. In this sense he is very similar to Roy Lichtenstein - also too in terms of subject-matter, treatment, sources etc. for example Roy Lichtenstein's "M Maybe", 1965. They both have a certain sense of mock-art humour in common. As well as the prints, the paintings enforce the issue of multiplicity of the image itself, which as a "motif" is endlessly repeated. He makes use of anonymous and mechanical techniques and of serial forms. Central perhaps to his use of serial imagery is the theme of redundancy. The traditional concept of the masterpiece as a consummate example of inspired skill that sets out to compress a peak of human endeavour into one painting is abandoned in preference for repetition and abundance, (for example in the numerous repetitions of soup cans, and other images) a series becomes variations on a theme, especially a series of prints with slight technical differences between each.

ll. 14

The power of the images derives from their seriality: that there are not only many more than a few in any given series, but that it seems to the viewer there are many more than can possibly be counted. This has partly to do with choice of imagery. Warhol invariably selects an image that pre-exists in endless multiples.

"America is really The Beautiful. But it would be



14.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN "M-Maybe" 1965

more beautiful if everybody had enough money to live."

* *

Crucial to Pop art in general is the ironic power of its banal imagery. It would be a mistake to think that every Pop artist is attached to his subject-matter in the sense of praising it or liking it for itself. They may like it for the purpose of their art which is another matter altogether. Unlike the English Pop painters who often express a romantic view of American culture most of the artists are strictly neutral; they are neither for the material or against - they are simply using it. We make the associations ourselves - everyone knows the human figure and the Coke can - we can relate to them without extra information or guidelines. The artist is detached from and without emotional attitudes towards his subject-matter. However, this total detachment cannot be applied to Warhol's situation - he and his work are one and the same thing - Andy loves "American culture", he loves Coca-Cola (or at least is very interested in it as a concept) film stars are really stars to him. So although he treats his images in a seemingly detached way he is not himself neutral or without strong opinions on it for its own sake.

"What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think you can drink Coke too. All the Cokes are the same."

* *

* * see page 55



ANDY WARHOL

Soup Cans, 1962. 23 7/8 x 18" (60 x 45 cm)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Peter M. Brant, New York

Warhol's images are particularly savage and uncompromising. They appear in some curious way abandoned as it were to public gaze, and once there they demand quite persuasively that we face them ourselves, and the twentieth century landscape we cohabit with them. Things are detached from reality to make reality all the more evident. This is not a Coke bottle or a soup can - how could that be Marilyn Munroe? Who is she anyway? What is a Coke bottle? What does it mean? Warhol has a very special capacity to select images, which when presented in a painterly context, associationally press upon the nerve ends of certain aspects of our daily existence. It is not that Coca-Cola is so bad or so good - what is perturbing is its presentation - the ferocity of the overall effect that goes into advertising, marketing and distributing something that is ultimately so trivial. Like so many other manufactured products, the packaging promises much, the advertising more, yet the product delivers little. Campbell's canned soups - Warhol seems ironically to assert - are like people; as different as the many flavours of soup available, and yet so very much the same.

"When I look at things, I always see the space they occupy. I always want the space to reappear, to make a comeback, because it's lost space when there's something in it. If I see a chair in a beautiful space, no matter how beautiful the chair is, it can never be as beautiful to me as the plain space. My favourite piece of sculpture is a solid wall with a hole in it to frame the space on the other side."

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** see page 95



The images are presented in a no-nonsense matter-of-fact way. The "background" is usually so non-existent as to be incidental to the main subject-matter - often just a flat colour whose only purpose is as a backdrop to the main image, for example in "4 Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962". The rectangular canvas shape *ill. 16* is merely a surface for placing the image on - the lack of edge-tension throws the central image forward. He is not concerned with making use of the picture composition in a literal way, and yet he uses it very well. Unlike movies or photographs which localize space by delineating subject, surroundings, background, etc. Warhol's paintings present images in a surrounding space that is felt or perceived as a continuum. The normally accidental effects of screen printing are used deliberately by Warhol. This is one way of introducing tensions to the pictorial structure - the use of errors, slippages of ink, etc. This causes also the fact that each repetition of the same image seems to be unique rather than a duplicate of the others because of slight printing changes. These "errors" are especially evident in the "Marilyn Monroe" series.

Warhol's instinct for colour is not so much vulgar as theatrical. The colour is often too high-keyed to be realistic, yet it fits into a naturalistic image, *eg.* "Marilyn Monroe", from "Ten Marilyns", *ill. 17* 1967. Warhol uses public pictures of people, for example, in his screenprints of Jackie Kennedy, "Jackie", 1965. He usually avoids candid snapshots that reveal private or idiosyncratic information about the persons concerned. The pictures are neither reworked or touched up. What one finally must confront is the



17. Andy Warhol "Marilyn Monroe" from the series "Ten Marilyn's" 1967



17,

ANDY WARHOL "Marilyn Monroe" from the series "Ten Marilyn's" 1967

paradox that however correct its likeness, a picture never tells the truth. Warhol's portraits transmit nothing of the inner psychic tensions of the persons portrayed. They are always dehumanized by never reflecting what they feel. Thus Warhol dehumanizes people and humanizes soup cans. By his treatment, Warhol forces you to look at the most ordinary subject-matter, e.g. people, in a new way.

"I can never get over when you're on the beach how beautiful the sand looks and the water washes it away and straightens it up and the trees and the grass all look great. I think having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anyone could ever want to own."

* *

Warhol is open to everything. Perhaps he treads the thin line between life and death, violence and banality - one can often seem inseparable from the other. He doesn't censor or moralize, he has no surreal, metaphorical or symbolic edge. His work is literal throughout. His works achieve monumentality - things are placed before the viewer with no excuses for their existence - they exist and you can take what you like from them.

Whatever the ambition that motivated Warhol to become an artist, art itself - it seems - has had as much effect on Warhol as Warhol has had on art.

"I feel I'm very much part of my times, at my culture, as much a part of it as rockets and

* * see page 55



18. ANDY WARHOL "Flowers" 1964



19. ANDY WARHOL "Brillo Boxes" 1964

television."

* *

Why, how did Andy Warhol become so famous? Surely those monotonously repetitive flowers and cows, those gaudy portraits and those torpid films were not all that compelling? Not more so, at any rate, than Lichtenstein's drowning heroines or Oldenburg's giant hamburgers. True, Andy went further than the other Pop artists. The death series, the endless repetitions, the mass-production methods carried certain ideas implicit in Pop to an extreme point, but a point not unknown to earlier more radical artists than Andy. After all, Duchamp removed the artist's hand from art in 1913 when he began signing 'readymade' objects. It has been said that Andy's real art is publicity, but even this is debatable. Although Andy knows more or less precisely what he is doing at all times, and continues to capitalize brilliantly on his own drawbacks, he does not really manipulate events. Andy remains essentially a voyeur, letting things take their course, and looking on with cool detachment, interested but uninvolved. Then how does one explain the fact of his celebrity? It must have something to do with his ability to be in touch with what's going on - to pick up on trends, ideas that are evident, but not recognized yet by everybody for their possibilities. It also has something to do with doing the right thing in the right place at the right time - or just before the right time. He seems to have touched the nerve of fashion and commercial art. He seems outwardly naive, mysterious and empty, and yet possesses an uncanny intuition. He made visible something

* * all page 25



20
ANDY WARHOL

Campbell's Soup Can, 1965. 36 x 24" (91.5 x 61 cm)
Collection the artist

that was already happening beneath the surface of American life. A great deal of what took place in America during the 1960's decade is missing, of course, from Warhol's house of mirrors, yet his work looks just right for its time. One feels that Lichtenstein got to his Pop image intellectually, by logical steps, while Andy just was there by instinct. Take the soup can for example. Although the idea came from someone else (Muriel Latow ran an art gallery that was going broke so she sold the idea to Andy for 50 dollars) it was Andy who sensed its absolute rightness and saw just how to present it. Banal, stupid, loaded with sentimental associations as it was, Andy painted his soup can with icy precision and utter objectivity. No interpretation, no reaction, no judgement, no emotion, no comment. But isn't this an interpretation, a reaction, a comment in itself? Every Warhol image comes across frontally nude, without a shred of feeling attached. The ultimate voyeur.

He lies to reporters and interviewers. He sends impersonators to do his lecture tours. By ironical coincidence 2 days after he was shot another assassin killed Robert Kennedy in Los Angeles. Afterward he would say that his own life had come to seem like a dream, that he could not be sure whether he was alive or dead. (Nor can we.)

Andy's interests have developed significantly through painting, printing, movies - now he wants to go into videotape. He wants his own TV chat show. Well if he can bring to video what he

has brought to everything else he has touched, it should be worth seeing.

"My ideal city would be completely new. No antiques. All the buildings would be new. Old buildings are unnatural spaces. Buildings should be built to last for a short time. And if they're older than ten years, I say get rid of them. I'd build new buildings every fourteen years. The building and the tearing down would keep people busy, and the water wouldn't be rusty from old pipes."

And neither would Andy.

CHAPTER FOUR

In discussing the work of Francis Bacon and Andy Warhol I am attempting, in this chapter, to draw comparisons between both while at the same time realizing that they are, of course, in many ways different and separate. Yet there are factors which they have in common; there are certain parallels and affinities between the two, and these I will endeavour to outline and discuss in the following pages. I also wish to take the opportunity of comparing two artists who would not normally be linked together in art criticism, and whose work on first comparing seems totally different, and yet as you dig deeper similarities occur. However, the objective of this comparison is not only to find similarities or differences, but also towards gaining a greater insight into the work of each as an individual and original artist, and into the processes, complexities and diversity of art itself.

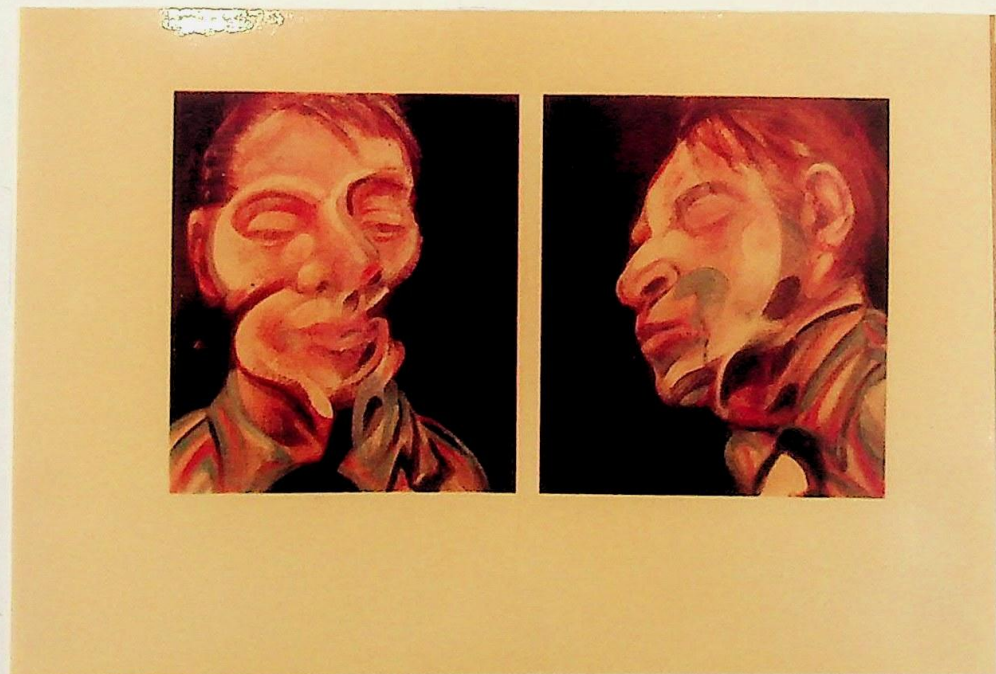
One of the most immediately obvious links between the two is that of subject-matter. Both chose a figurative subject-matter - Bacon to the exclusion of everything else, Warhol in the same way as everything else. Both artists have a strong commitment to portrait painting. The portraits are never an insight into the personality or character of the subject - they are an image. The figure is often over-used by artists for subject-matter, but both Warhol and Bacon have managed to push it just that little bit further, to re-see

100s. 21
22



21.

ANDY WARHOL "Self Portrait" 1966



22.

FRANCIS BACON "2 Studies for a Self-Portrait" 1972

it, in fact. Neither idealize the person they chose to paint. Warhol almost trivializes them by the ironic way he sets them up as idols, stars, and yet treats them the same as a soup can, e.g. Elvis Presley in "Triple Elvis". Both are flattened, repeated and placed on view in an unadorned, undecorative way. Bacon would seem to trivialize or degrade the people portrayed in his pictures also but this is unintentional; in fact he is interested not in ugliness but in beauty. For instance he says:

"I like painting good-looking people because I like good bone structure."

Any suggestions of horror or human degradation in Bacon's paintings are merely by-products of the way the paint has been manoeuvred - he has not set out to depict the figures as creatures depraved or physically distorted - on the contrary he sees beauty in the human appearance. For example when Bacon paints a scream it is not the horror he is interested in.

"I was always very obsessed by the actual appearance of the mouth and teeth I like, you may say, the glitter and colour that comes from the mouth and I've always hoped, in a sense, to be able to paint the mouth like Monet painted a sunset."

For example, "Study for a Portrait", 1952 or "Study after Velazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X", 1953 or "Three Studies of the Human Head", 1953.

* see page 55

Looking at both their work also brings up the subject of heroism - today the type of idealization, the type of portrait painting that sets its sitter up as a hero would be a matter for derision. Figurative art has always had to find ways of dealing with the areas of heroism, idealization, etc. Because by its very nature portrait painting "sets someone up" - it makes you look at them - the subject immediately assumes an importance, and is liable to take on the semblance of a hero.

lll. 23

Warhol is very interested in making pictures of hero-types or film stars. It is not exactly a personal fascination he has for each of these people in particular (Marilyn Munroe, Jackie Kennedy, Elvis Presley) more an interest in what they stand for - an aspect of American life which they represent. Mainly though he is interested in them for reasons of imagery. They make strong images.

Bacon painted the Velazquez Pope Innocent X not because it was the Pope, but because of the colour, and the way it's painted - because it's a great portrait.

"It is true of course, the Pope is unique. He's put in a unique position by being the Pope, and therefore, like in certain great tragedies he's as though raised on a dais on which the grandeur of this image can be displayed to the world."

*

When discussing his self portrait Warhol takes a detached, unserious,

* see page 55



23,

The Six Marilyns, (Marilyn Six-Pack), 1962. 43 x 22 1/4" (109.3 x 56.5 cm)
Collection Carter Burden, New York

ANDY WARHOL

cynical stand on the subject.

"When I did my self portrait, I left all the pimples out because you always should. Pimples are a temporary condition and they don't have anything to do with what you really look like. Always omit the blemishes - they're not part of the good picture you want."

ill. 24.



As part of a justification for figurative art Bacon says:

"I think art is an obsession with life and after all as we are human beings our greatest obsession is with ourselves."



Neither artist professes to have anything to say in their pictures about the human situation, yet the work of both is indirectly suggestive of statements about the condition of man. For instance Bacon seems to perceive of man as meat, as isolated individual or as a species living a life of violence and despair. Warhol's pictures seem to depict man as being no different (or at least no more worthy of attention) than the most ordinary consumer products. Man would seem to be an object, also. However, any of these references are purely associated as Bacon points out.

total

"I'm just trying to make images as accurately off my nervous system as I can. I don't even know what half of them mean. I'm not saying anything. Whether one's saying anything for other people I

** see page 55
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*Self Portrait, 1964. 2 panels, each 20 x 16" (50.8 x 40.7 cm)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, New York*

24.

ANDY WARHOL

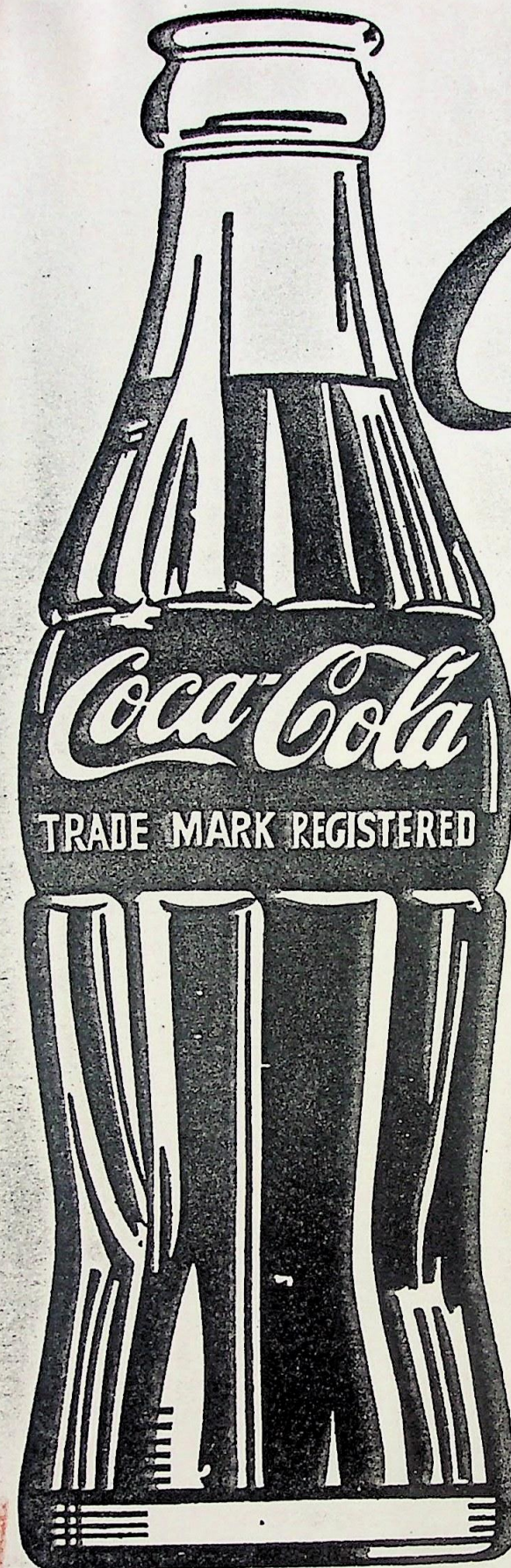
don't know. But I'm not really saying anything, because I'm probably much more concerned with the aesthetic qualities of a work than, perhaps, Munch was. But I've no idea what any artist is trying to say, except the most banal artists."

Neither artist is interested in the sociology of the image, or the condition of man - merely in the image itself and what it can, as an image, suggest. One can relate more directly to the image by not trying to work out what it means. Though neither set out to, both make, or suggest, statements about life as it is lived. Probably any art that is figurative will have, by its nature, associations of this kind because the image relates more immediately to what we know. The sheer style of Warhol's work, the style of presentation, rather than the content itself could be seen to comment on American life, on the American "scene" as it is often called, or on consumerism. Warhol says:

"What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca Cola and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke too. All the Cokes are the same."

Another point of comparison is the similar uses both artists make of background space. It is used purely as a method of isolating

see page 55



Coca-Cola

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Coca-Cola, 1962. 72 x 54" (182.9 x 138.4 cm)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Melvin Hirsh, Beverly Hills, California

ANDY WARHOL

25.

the image. The background (especially in Bacon's case) lifts, or throws, the image - it gives it more than a context - it presents the image for scrutiny. The background is incidental to the main subject-matter - it's often just a flat colour whose only purpose is as a backdrop to the main image. The total picture plane is merely a surface for placing the image on. The background, especially in Warhol's pictures, is unilateral: for example in "4 Campbell's Soup Cans", 1962.

ll. 26

Bacon often gives his figures a setting, but an anonymous one. He says:

"I've increasingly wanted to make the images simpler and more complicated. And for this to work, it can work more starkly if the background is very united and clear. I think that probably is why I have used a very clear background against which the image can articulate itself."

This clear, empty background is evident, for example, in "Study for Portrait (Isabel Kawsthorne)", 1964.

ll. 27

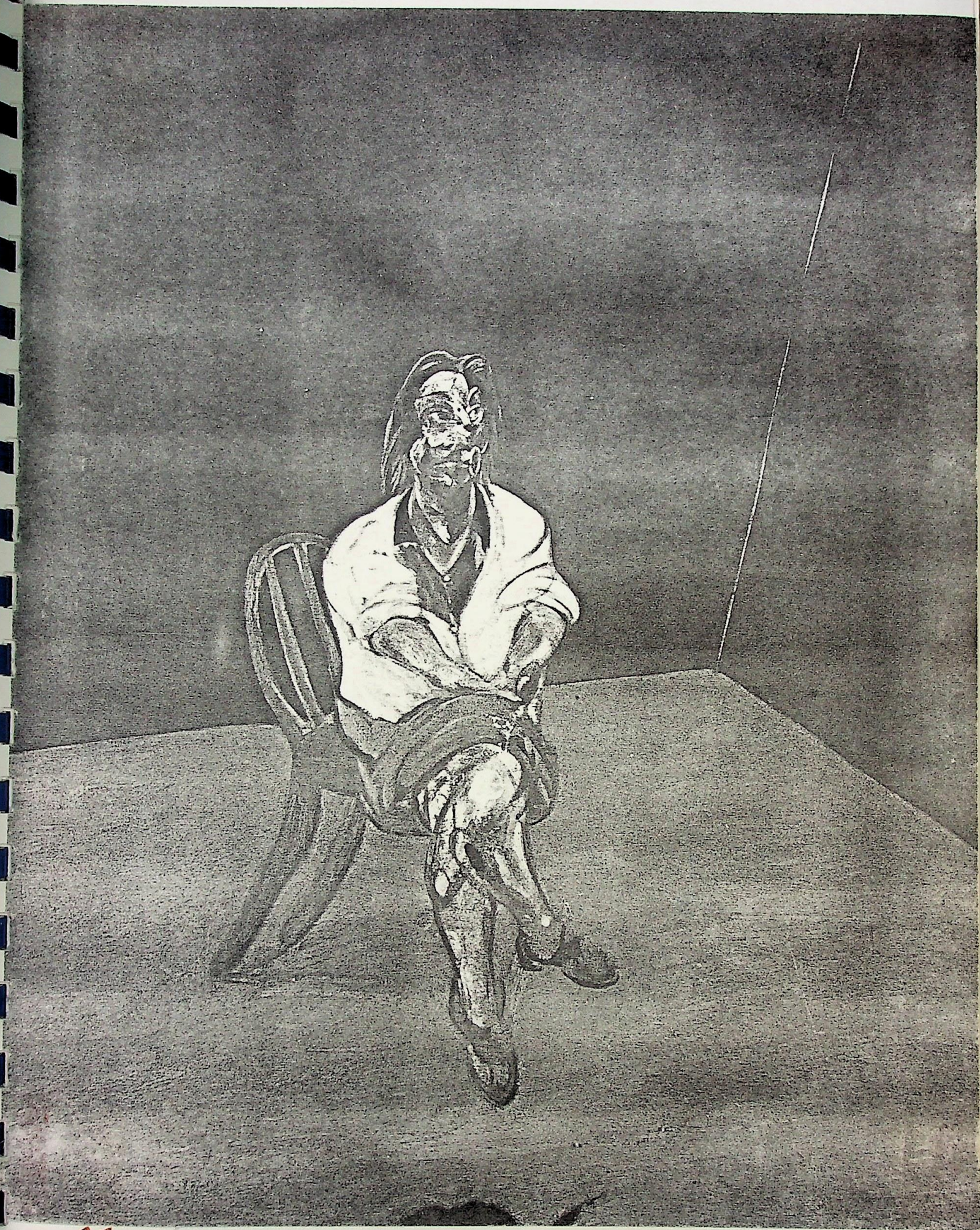
Andy Warhol and Francis Bacon both make extensive use of photographs, both as an inspirational and source idea, and (in the case of Warhol's screen prints) as an integral part of the finished work itself. They both have a fascination for the secondhand image - the overused image is the interesting one. Warhol uses public photographs e.g. ones taken from newspapers, - photographs that are purely for factual and reportage use - that tell nothing of the inner character of the person portrayed.

* see page 35



Four Campbell's Soup Cans, 1962. 20 x 16" (50.8 x 40.7 cm)
Collection Mr. and Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York

ANDY WARHOL



27.

FRANCIS BAZON "Study for Portrait of Isobel Rawsthorne"

What one finally must confront is the paradox that however "correct" its likeness, a photograph (or a painting) never tells the truth. The photographs Warhol uses so literally have the effect of dehumanizing the person depicted, for example the "Jackie" series or the "Marilyn" series e.g. "Ten Marylins", 1967. He does not touch them up or change them in any way, but prefers to translate them exactly as they are into the print or painting. On the secondhand image, or more exactly, leftovers, Warhol says:

ll. 28.

"I always like to work on leftovers, doing the left-over things. Things that were discarded, that everybody knew were no good, I always thought had a great potential to be funny. It was like recycling work. I'm not saying that popular taste is bad so that what's leftover from the bad taste is good: I'm saying that what's leftover is probably bad, but if you can take it and make it good or at least interesting, then you're not wasting as much as you would otherwise it's a very economical operating procedure."

* *

Warhol uses photographs in a very direct and obvious way, e.g. his many "Soup Can" prints. His prints are often just photographs blown up and coloured, or else repeated over and over, a process made possible by photography and photographic screen printing. The photograph becomes an integral part of the finished piece. (Warhol likes the photographic because it is public, democratic, accessible). Bacon, however, uses the photograph mainly as a starting point.

* * see page 55



Jacqueline, 1964. 20 x 16" (50.8 x 40.7 cm)
Collection Dayton's Gallery 12, Minneapolis, Minnesota

28.

ANDY WARHOL

But he is also interested in the secondhand aspect of the photograph. He says:

"One's sense of appearance is assaulted all the time by photography and by film, so that when one looks at something, one's not only looking at it directly but one's also looking at it through the assault that has already been made on one by photography and film. And 99 per cent of the time I find that photographs are very much more interesting than either abstract or figurative painting. I've always been haunted by them".

Bacon also finds it preferable and less inhibiting when doing portraits to work from memory and photographs, than having the actual person sitting there before him.

Photography was possibly also a strong influence in causing both artists to do a lot of work in series form. The power of the repeated image is especially evident in Warhol's paintings and prints, for example "200 Soup Cans", 1962.

Bacon's work could, I think, be seen as a series since each singular piece is very much a continuation of the last one - each is a variation of a theme. He also uses the triptych which is in essence a series of three paintings, separate yet each working within the context of the others. He says:

"What in a curious way one's always hoping to do is to paint the one picture which will annihilate all the other ones, to concentrate everything into one painting. But actually in the series one picture reflects on the other continuously and sometimes they're better in series than they are separately because unfortunately we never yet have been able to make the one image that sums up all the others. So one image against the other seems to be able to say the thing more."



Another area of common ground is the one both artists make of the element of accident or chance in their work. Francis Bacon says:

"In my case all painting - and the older I get, the more it becomes so - is accident. So I foresee it in my mind, and yet I hardly ever carry it out as I foresee it. It transforms itself by the actual paint. I use very large brushes, and in the way I work I don't in fact know very often what the paint will do, and it does many things which are very much better than I could make it do. Is that an accident? Perhaps one could say it's not an accident because it becomes a selective process which part of this accident one chooses to preserve. One is attempting, of course, to keep the vitality of the accident and yet preserve a continuity."



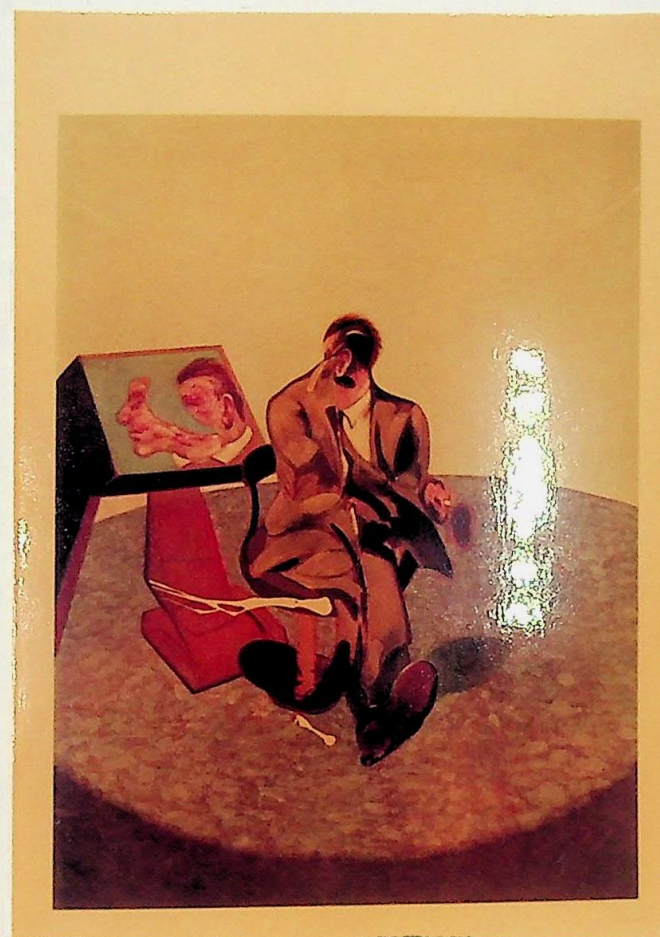
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Bacon allows the paint itself to direct the way the picture goes - it is not so much an accident, as what happens with minimum interference, for example a splash of white paint thrown on the picture "Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror", 1968. These "accidents" are similar to screen printing errors e.g. bleeding, mis-registration and slippage, which Andy Warhol uses to great advantage in his prints. I suppose they could be called intentional errors. This also has the effect of causing each print in a series to seem slightly different. Both artists are working with their chosen medium, and allowing it to determine, to a great extent, the finished result.

ll. 29.

In the case of Bacon, the paint and the idea, or thing painted, are one - inseparable. He achieves a remarkable cohesion between image and paint. Both artists use their chosen medium - Andy's screens and Bacon's oil paint - to great effect. If Bacon lives by paint handling (and he does) Warhol rejects it - and opts for the detached, untouched by hand screen print process. Yet he exploits its characteristics in the same way.

I think the search for the elusive, ambiguous image is also part of the work of both artists, although towards different ends. Both seek the image that comes about as if by instinct, and yet retains a certain precision. The best bits are what happens while the paint is actually being worked on the canvas, and when the artist is merely following its lead, almost. Andy says:



29. FRANCIS BACON "Portrait of George Dyer in a mirror" 1968

"When I have to think about it, I know the picture is wrong and sizing is a form of thinking, and colouring is too. My instinct about painting says, 'if you don't think about it, it's right.' And as soon as you have to decide and choose, it's wrong. And the more you decide about it, the more wrong it gets. Some people, they paint abstract, so they sit there thinking about it, because their thinking makes them feel they'r doing something. But my thinking never makes me feel I'm doing anything. Leonardo da Vinci used to convince his patrons that his thinking time was worth something - worth even more than his painting time - and that may have been true for him, but I know that my thinking time isn't worth anything. I only expect to get paid for my 'doing' time. ***

Bacon has similar views on the artist's role -

"This is the cause of the difficulty of painting today - that it will only catch the mystery of reality if the painter doesn't know how to do it." *

*** see page 55
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I would say that Warhol reinforces the elusive quality of an image - he recognizes its elusiveness and fixes it. Both artists move towards a literal treatment, and then seem to veer away from it again, at the last minute. Bacon especially seeks for this ambiguous quality to come across in his paintings - (for example in "Triptych", 1967, it is not certain whether the picture depicts a blood stained figure on a bed, or just a pile of old clothing). Warhol reinforces the elusive quality of an image - (for example, "Triple Elvis".) Bacon on the other hand wants to create the elusiveness and retain it right through the making of the picture and into the viewing of it. Bacon attempts to create an image that is both factual and suggestive. He says:

ll 30

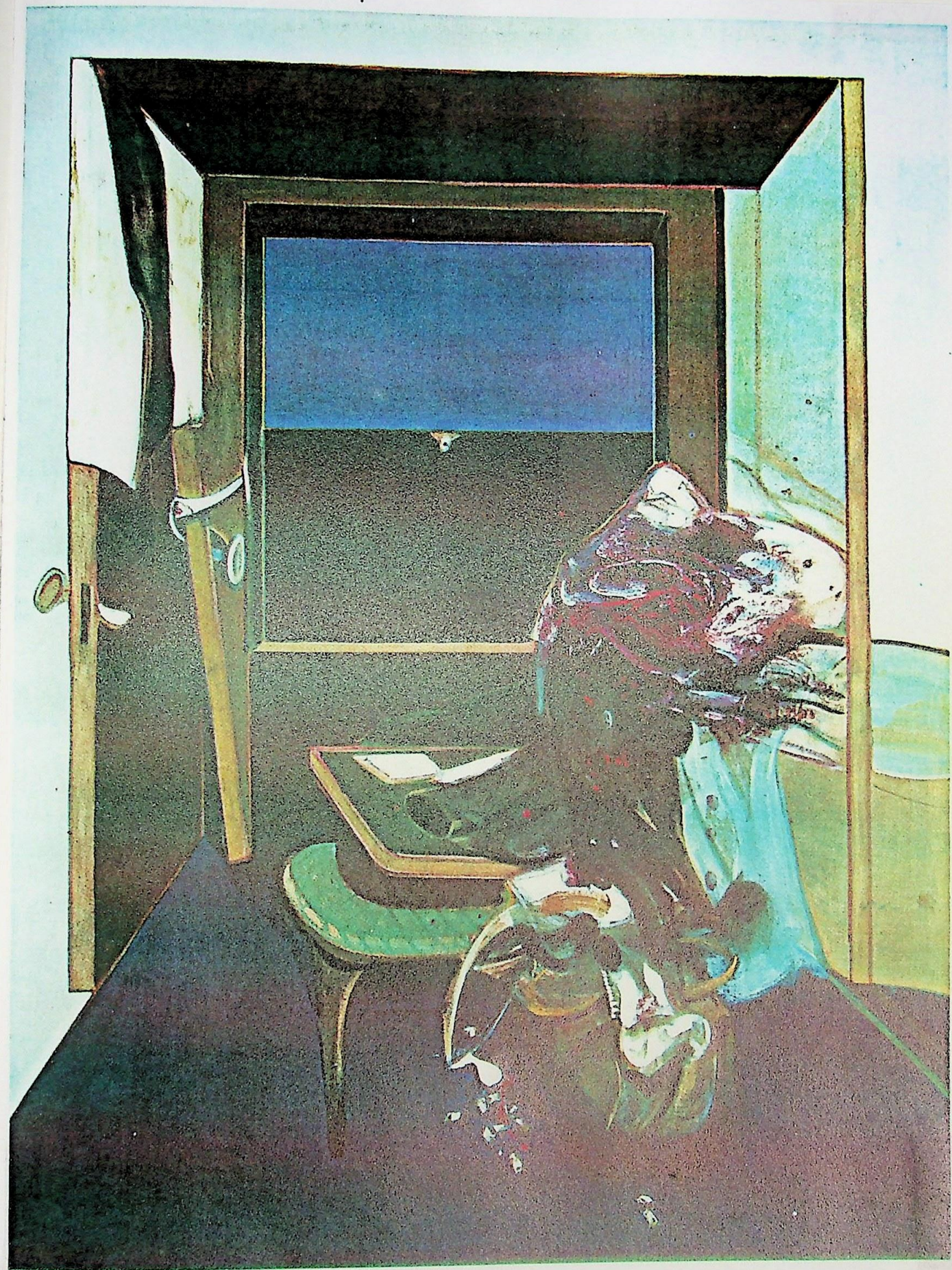
"The clearer and more precise the better. Of course, how to be clear and precise is a terribly difficult thing now. And I think that's the problem for all painters now, or at any rate painters who are absorbed in a subject or in a figurative thing. They just want to make it more and more precise; but of a very ambiguous precision."

*

Warhol is extremely interested in the artificiality of life, its unreal aspects. His paintings and prints accentuate this artificial quality, e.g. by the bright, unrealistic colours he uses and by choosing subject-matter often noted for its artificial, transient nature - the film star, the consumer product, for example "Ten Marilyns" or "200 Soup Cans". The theme of or the duality between what is artificial and real is common to both artists' work. Andy says:

ll. 17

* see page 85



30, FRANCIS BACON "Triptych 1967" (centre panel)

"Before I was shot, I always thought that I was more half there than all there - I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say that the way things happen in the movies is unreal but actually it's the way things happen to you in life that's unreal. The movies make emotions look so strong and real, whereas when things really do happen to you, it's like watching television - you don't feel anything."

* *

Bacon almost says that lies are truth, and the truth is a lie - this goes back to what I was saying earlier about his interest in ambiguity (the ambiguity of reality) but also in this case, his interest in artificiality. He says:

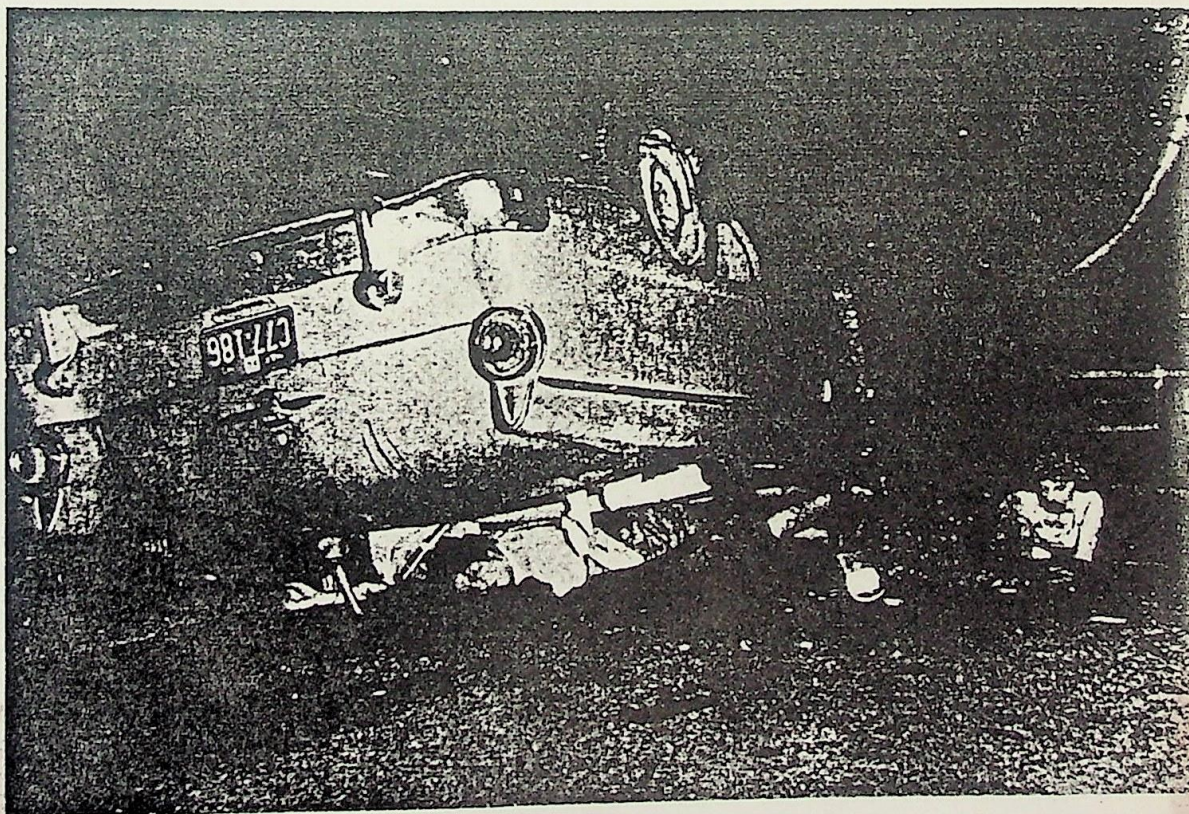
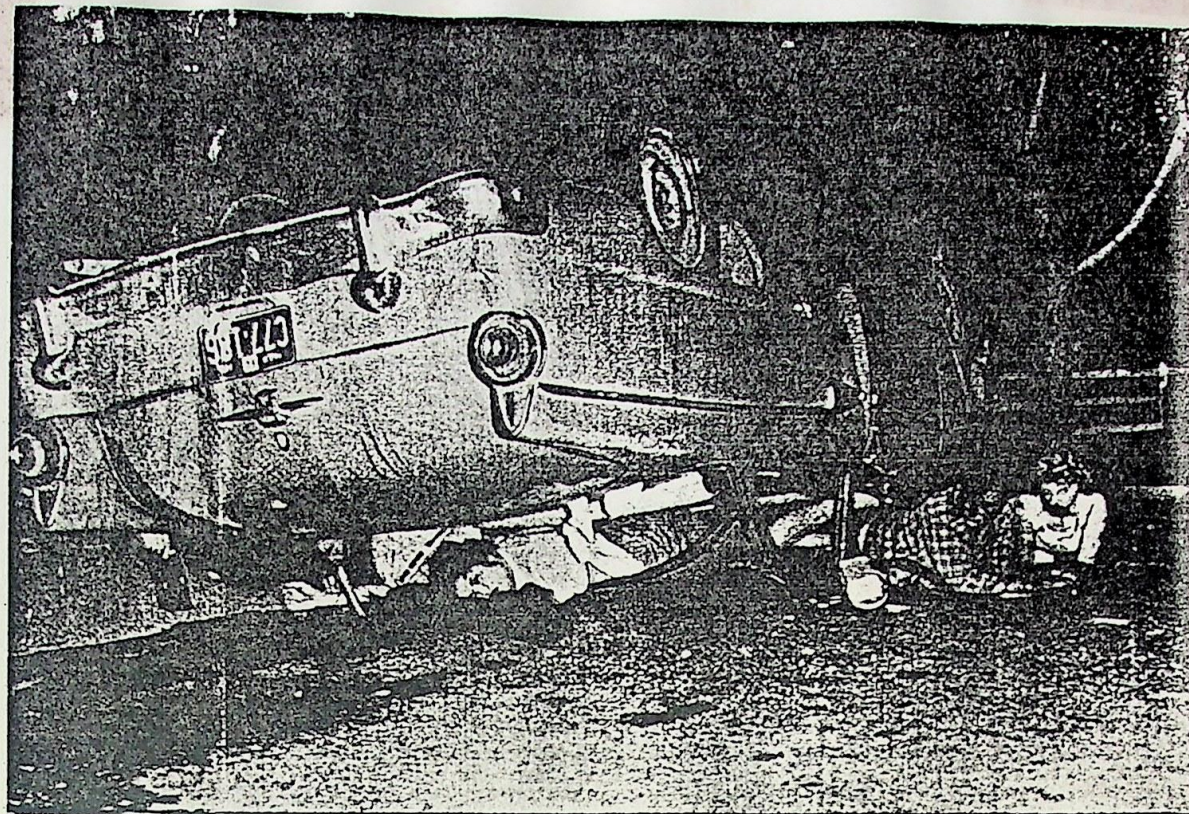
"I would like to make my pictures more and more artificial, more and more what is called distorted - well certainly more and more artificial the more artificial you make it the greater chance you've got of its looking real."

*

The theme of death, or the closeness or nature of death, crops up in varying ways in both artists' work. Warhol is open to everything. Perhaps he treads the thin line between life and death, violence and banality - one can often seem inseparable from the other. Look at the way his "Death Series" is presented - a series of images of car crashes, done in flat, 2 colour repeated prints that blur the image and deadpan it - the horror is reduced to mere spectacle (a thing that happens

ll. 31

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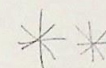
5 Deaths Twice, 1963. 50 x 30" (127 x 76.2 cm)
Collection Dr. R. Mattheys

ANDY WARHOL

31,

in Bacon's work too, for example "Painting 1948" which contains a figure surrounded by carved up meat.) Of the death pictures, Andy says:

"I'm not saying you should be happy when a person dies, but just that it's curious to see cases that prove you don't have to be sad about it, depending on what you think it means, and what you think about what you think it means."



He's not saying that we make false assessments of situations, or that our emotional responses are wrong; he's not saying bad is good - merely that there are many ways of looking at something, and things like beauty, or ugliness are never easy to define.

"The red lobsters beauty only comes out when it's dropped into the boiling water and nature changes things and carbon is turned into diamonds and dirt is gold and wearing a ring in your nose is gorgeous."



Bacon is often accused of dealing with death and things associated with death like horror and blood, etc., but really he never actually paints pictures about death, as such; more about the fragility of life, and the constant possibility, the certainty in fact, of death. Bacon says:

"I have a feeling of mortality all the time. Because, if life excites you, it's opposite,

* * see page 55

like a shadow, death must excite you. Perhaps not excite you, but you are aware of it in the same way as you are aware of life, you're aware of it like the turn of a coin between life and death. And I'm very aware of that about people, and about myself too, after all. I'm always surprised when I wake up in the morning."

It's as if the knowledge of death gives meaning to life. It is inescapable, and one is constantly reminded of it. But it serves to enhance, rather than depress, life.

Both artists achieve their effect by the treatment of the subject-matter. But Warhol is more concerned about choice of subject-matter - in a sense, he would use just about anything - flowers, soup cans, car-crashes, yet at the same time there are choices being made. Bacon probably never has to decide about what to paint, just how. Bacon's work shows a lack of thematic development. His is essentially a technical development - one of paint application - of how to get reality into sharper focus and yet not be illustrational or boring. A criticism is that he has perhaps become too concerned with technical matters, and therefore his work tends to seem over-repetitive. Warhol shows ability to change his subject matter or content at will and yet retain a consistency of direction. Both, however, once they've chosen their subject-matter exploit it to the full as an image if not as a theme. Both are interested in recording the appearance of things - and to do this effectively enough for each they must

change it in some way - distort it, repeat it, exaggerate it, enlarge it, expose it. Both in a different way persuade the viewer to accept what is. If a Warhol painting was captioned, "There is nothing else" it would strike us as horrifically as a painting by Bacon. This is because in the case of both artists, each image they present to us comes across bare, frontally nude and open to interpretation. Both artists manage to touch upon the nerve ends of aspects of our daily existence. The people depicted are without privacy, for example "2 Figures Lying on a Bed with Attendants", Triptych, 1968. They are also exposed to our scrutiny. For instance the figures in Bacon's pictures are seen to be somehow at the mercy of an outside force - the viewer, maybe? The people Warhol depicts are also without privacy - they are famous people whose lives are known to all, or at least supposedly exposed to the world. For example, Warhol uses the newspaper photographs of people like Jackie Kennedy for his screen prints. Man is an object, to be used. He is like the meat or soup cans on the supermarket shelves. Neither artist censors or moralizes; neither has a surreal, metaphorical or symbolic edge - things are placed before the viewer with no excuses for their existence - they exist and you can take what you like from them. Both artists wish their work to come across in an instant, immediate way - directly through the senses. For Bacon, this is something he is constantly dealing with:

"This is a very difficult problem to put into words. It is something to do with instinct. It's a very, very close and difficult thing to

know why some paint comes across directly onto the nervous system and other paint tells you the story in a long diatribe through the brain." *

Although Bacon wants something that comes across in a direct and immediate way, he does not, however, want to be obvious or boring. Warhol is trying to be very obvious - even boredom is interesting to him. What is normally considered obvious or boring he finds interesting partly for that reason. What is ordinary becomes monumental, what is big becomes small.

Both artists make extensive use of the ^{single} ~~small~~ figure, the single image. Warhol takes the single image and repeats it. Bacon takes the single image, or figure, and isolates it. For example in "Study for Portrait (Isabel Rawsthorne) 1964. Andy Warhol once said:

lll. 27

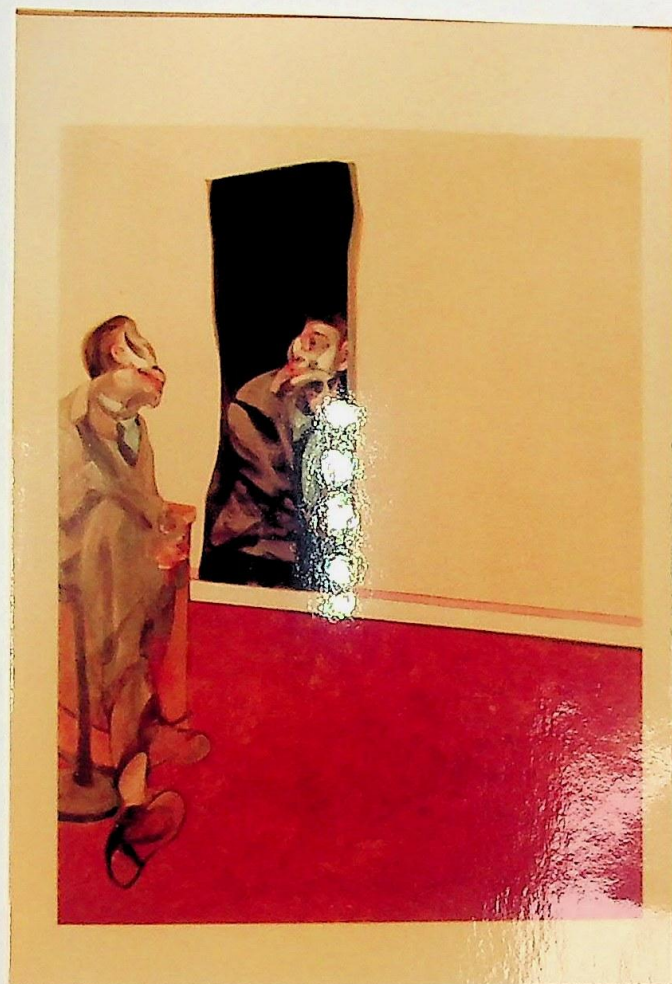
"I'm still obsessed with the idea of looking into the mirror and seeing no-one, nothing." * *

Francis Bacon's idea is - imagine if there were no mirrors - what would happen then?

The most important thing about Bacon's paintings, as I've mentioned earlier, is the way the paint is applied to the canvas - the accidents, the nature of the paint itself. Ask Andy what makes a good painting and he says:

"What makes a painting beautiful is the way the

see page 45



32. FRANCIS BACON 'Portrait of George Dyer staring into a mirror' 1967

paint's put on."

I have discussed at length the use both artists make of the risk or chance element in their work, especially Bacon. Andy has a few things to say about art and risks:

"Any time you slice a salami you take a risk
Why do people think artists are special? It's
just another job."

He goes on to say:

"If you say that artists take risks, it's insulting to the men who landed on D-Day, to stunt men, to baby-sitters, to Evel Knieval, to stepdaughters, to coal miners, and to hitch hikers, because they're the ones who really know what risks are."



33.

ANDY WARHOL "Liz" 1963

*** see page 55

Andy Warhol often makes statements like:

"Ideas are nothing" and

"Everything is nothing" and

Bacon says:

* *

"I think of life as meaningless; but we give it meaning during our own existence. We create certain attitudes which give it a meaning while we exist, though they in themselves are meaningless really."

*

Also on the same lines Andy states:

"Some critic called me the Nothingness Himself and that didn't help my sense of existence any. Then I realized that existence itself is nothing and I felt better."

* *

This would give reason to believe, and many have said it and I think it's true, that Andy Warhol's work is largely about boredom and nothingness. He even likes being boring himself (although the paradox is that he never quite manages it).

"I like a rut. People call me up and say 'I hope I'm not disturbing your rut, calling you up like this.' They know how much I like it."

* *

Is Andy perhaps dedicated to futility? Bacon once said:

"The only thing that makes anybody interesting is

* * see page 55
*

their dedication, and when there was religion, they could at least be dedicated to their religion, which was something. But I do think that if you find a person totally without belief, but totally dedicated to futility, then you will find the more exciting person."

It has been said that Andy's successes lie in his innate ability to get to the essence of things, his instinct and intuition, his sense of what is right, his critical judgement, rather than simple artistic genius or talent, painting ability, etc. And I think this is in many ways true. His critical ability is very important - he makes the right decisions. Francis Bacon has a few words to say on this subject too -

"I think an awful lot of creation is made out of (as well as instinct) the self-criticism of an artist, and very often I think probably what makes one artist seem better than another is that his critical sense is more acute. It may not be that he is more gifted in any way but just that he has a better critical sense".

He says also:

"It's a continuous thing between what may be called luck or hazard, intuition and the critical sense, because it's only kept hold of by the critical sense, the criticism of your own instincts about

how far this given form or accidental form crystallizes into what you want."



Both artists believe that art is in many ways a form of vanity. That's why Andy Warhol prefers commercial art. He says:

"An artist is somebody who produces things that people don't need to have but that he - for some reason - thinks it would be a good idea to give them. Business Art is a much better thing to be making than Art Art, because Art Art doesn't support the space it takes up, whereas Business Art does (if Business Art doesn't support its own space it goes out of business)."



Also on the subject of art and vanity Bacon says:

"To be an artist at all is a form of vanity. And that vanity may be washed over by this rationally futile idea of immortality. It would also be a vanity to suggest that what one does oneself might help to thicken life. But, of course, we do know that our lives have been thickened by great art Well, art is, of course, a profoundly vain occupation really."



On reading about Andy Warhol's movies I am struck by the parallels between them and Francis Bacon's paintings. I have only seen a short clip from one of his movies, but there are plenty of still



see page 95
"

photographs, texts and commentaries from them in many books, which give a fairly good idea of what they are about. Mostly they are made up of one long continuous shot of a particular scene (e.g. a restaurant) into and through which people move and act. The cinema of Andy Warhol has always been concerned with man.

"I still care about people but it would be so much easier not to care. It's too hard to care I don't want to get too involved in other people's lives I don't want to get too close I don't like to touch things that's why my work is so distant from myself."

What Warhol does not permit is that his machine and technique become the stars of the film. Slick results and technical feats can often lead off and distract from the reality of the film content - turning it into a visual fantasy, as it were. Warhol's technique establishes a visual reality in which nothing is perfect. But it is real.

Again and again we see this preoccupation, or obsession, with the phenomenal reality, with the concrete reality around him, as he's trying to grasp it and record it again and again, and each time it escapes him. This goes back to what I was saying earlier about the elusive quality of the image Bacon also seeks - the difficulty in making any valid statement about reality. Bacon admits he wants his work to become more and more artificial, in order to get nearer reality. Andy says:

* * * see page 65

"All my films are artificial, but then everything is sort of artificial. I don't know where the artificial stops and the real begins."



Francis Bacon knows that his attraction to painting takes precedence over anything else, although he does admit to a lasting interest in film, and film-making.

"I think I even might make a film; I might make a film of all the images which have crowded into my brain, which I remember and haven't used. After all most of my paintings are to do with images Perhaps if I was very young I would be a film-maker: it's a most marvellous medium. But I don't know. I feel I'm essentially Everything that I do goes into painting."



Speaking about the philosophy behind his movies Andy says:

"I always thought that movies could show you so much more about how it really is between people and therefore help all the people who don't understand to know what to do, what some of their options are. What I was actually trying to do in some of my early movies was show how people can meet other people and what they can do and what they can say to each other. That was the whole idea: two people getting acquainted. And then when you saw it and you saw the sheer simplicity

* * * see page 55
"

of it, you learned what it was all about. Those movies showed you how some people act and react with other people. They were like actual sociological "For 'instances". They were like documentaries, and if you thought it could apply to you it was an example, and if it didn't apply to you, at least it was a documentary, it could apply to somebody you knew and it could clear up some questions you had about them."

* *

Andy gives a very simple, or at least practical, reason for the style of his films (the lack of editing, cuts, moves, etc.)

"When we didn't have the money to do feature movies with thousands of cuts and retakes etc., I tried to simplify the movie-making procedure, so I made movies where we used every foot of film that we shot, because it was cheaper, and easier and funnier.

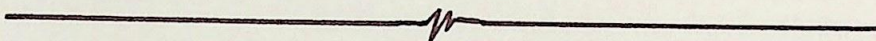
Also we wouldn't have any leftovers ourselves."

* *

Getting back to the preoccupation with reality in Warhol's movies, the reality he seeks seems to be constantly slipping away from under his feet, so he turns to another way of doing it, coming at it from another angle - again and again - with such untiring persistence and obsession that it borders on the insane - a factory, definitely. (Bacon and Warhol are both incessantly consistent and persistent.) In his movies Warhol tries to see or look at the world as if he's never seen it before - that is, he stares at it. (He does this in his prints and paintings too). Like a camera,

* * see page 55

and with a camera he stares at life and watches it squirm under his gaze. The rawness and unfinished quality of his movies leaves areas undecided or open to interpretation. His concern, like Bacon, is with everyday life. His camera stays fixed on the subject like there was nothing more beautiful and nothing more important than that subject. We are forced to rethink about what we see. A reality takes place around a seemingly simple incident or scene. The viewer is thus confronted with his own blank mind. Art is like a mirror. Art mirrors reality. The works speak for themselves.



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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. FRANCIS BACON 'Self-Portrait' 1972
2. FRANCIS BACON '2 Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer' 68
3. FRANCIS BACON '2 Studies of George Dyer with Dog' 68
4. FRANCIS BACON 'Portrait of Lucien Freud' 68
5. FRANCIS BACON 'Portrait of George Dyer and Lucien Freud' 67
6. FRANCIS BACON '3 Figures and Portrait' 75
7. FRANCIS BACON 'Self-Portrait' 73
8. FRANCIS BACON 'Self-Portrait' 73
9. FRANCIS BACON 'Triptych' centre panel, 74
10. FRANCIS BACON 'Portrait of a man walking down steps' 72
11. FRANCIS BACON 'Version no. 2 of lying figure with hypodermic
syringe' 68.
12. ANDY WARHOL 'Orange Disaster' 63
13. ANDY WARHOL 'Electric Chair' 67
14. Roy Lichtenstein 'M. Maybe' 65
15. ANDY WARHOL 'Soup Cans' 62
16. ANDY WARHOL '4 Campbells Soup Cans' 62
17. ANDY WARHOL 'Marilyn Monroe' from the series 'Ten
Marilyns' 67.
18. ANDY WARHOL 'Flowers' 64
19. ANDY WARHOL 'Billo Boxes' 64
20. ANDY WARHOL 'Campbells Soup Can' 65.
21. ANDY WARHOL 'Self-Portrait' 66.
22. FRANCIS BACON '2 Studies for a Self-Portrait' 72
23. ANDY WARHOL 'The Six Marilyn's (Marilyn Six Pack)' 62
24. ANDY WARHOL 'Self-Portrait' 64.
25. ANDY WARHOL 'Coca-Cola' 62.
26. ANDY WARHOL 'Four Campbells Soup Cans' 62
27. FRANCIS BACON 'Study for a Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne'

ILLUSTRATIONS, cont.

28. ANDY WARHOL 'Jacqueline' 1964
29. FRANCIS BAZON 'Portrait of George Dyer in a mirror' 68.
30. FRANCIS BAZON 'Triptych' 67. (centre panel)
31. ANDY WARHOL '5 deaths twice' 63
32. FRANCIS BAZON 'Portrait of George Dyer staring into a mirror' 67.
33. ANDY WARHOL 'Liz' 63.