



Francis Bacon: Anatomy Of An Enigma

Michael Peppiatt , Francis Bacon

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Francis Bacon has long been recognized as one of the most original of all modern artists; his canvases of screaming popes and dismembered human figures are defining images of twentieth-century anguish. Bacon was also a legend in the London demimonde, a man who followed long nights of drinking, gambling, and sexual adventure with intense early morning encounters with the blank canvas. When Michael Peppiatt first met him in 1963, Bacon, then in his early fifties, was at the height of his powers. Over the next thirty years, Peppiatt became a close friend of Bacon's and one of his most perceptive critics, and he has produced a fascinating, disturbing portrait of this agonized modern artist. Bacon (1909–92) was raised in large country houses in rural Ireland by a family whose conventional expectations he rebelled against early on. As a young man he was introduced to the seamy side of life in London and Paris; but only after seeing a Picasso retrospective in 1928 did he become an artist. He sprang into prominence in 1944 with a triptych which shocked the art world with its sheer ferocity, and he soon emerged, with his friend Lucian Freud, as a leader of an informal "School of London," which favored figurative painting in an age dominated by abstraction. As retrospectives of Bacon's work in Paris, London, and New York made his reputation soar, his nighttime exploits grew wilder and wilder; charming and confident, with a strong sadomasochistic streak, he was drawn to "rough trade" in London clubs and pushed all situations to the edge. At the same time, he was a deeply cultivated and thoughtful artist who was obsessively guarded about the sources of his inspiration. Peppiatt has unlocked many of the enigmas of Bacon's life and work. Bacon talked openly to Peppiatt about his early life, his sexuality, his fantasies, and his ambitions, aware that all was being recorded for publication. At the suggestion that some of his remarks would sound indiscreet, Bacon replied: "The more indiscreet, the more interesting it will be." Together with many new facts, unpublished documents, and penetrating analyses of key paintings, these conversations have been integrated into what is the most complete and riveting account of one of the greatest artists of our time.

Francis Bacon: Anatomy Of An Enigma Details

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From Reader Review Francis Bacon: Anatomy Of An Enigma for online ebook

Barry Hammond says

Anyone who's seen a Francis Bacon painting, either in reproduction or in a museum or gallery, has come away intrigued, disturbed, and probably wondering about this person who painted these images, which stick in the mind like no other artist before or since. Whether his popes, crucifixions, portrait studies, heads, or triptychs, his images have a tendency to invade the subconscious and remain there, leaving the viewer to compose strange narratives to explain what they've seen. This revised and updated biography, which contains much information that has come out since the artist's death goes a long way to explaining the life and art of an artist, who tightly controlled the information released about him during his life, probably better than any artist of the 20th century. A book that's as inspiring, revealing, moving, curious, and, yes, as disturbing as the art itself. - BH.

John McNulty says

Well written and a nice balance between research and the heart of the man expressed in poetic fashion.

Joanne says

The recent retrospective at Tate Britain got me a bit hooked on Bacon. I picked up this biography randomly and am so glad that I chose this one rather than the range of others which take a more gossipy, scandalous approach to his life. Peppiatt starts off the book by confessing his own near obsession with Bacon and then goes on throughout the book to remain completely professional and genuine. The firm focus of the book is Bacon's art so it helps to either be very familiar with his work or have some kind of visual catalogue on hand. Peppiatt has created a clear account of a fascinating individual without digressing into personal judgements or gossip-mongering. Instead he respectfully recounts the important incidents in Bacon's life and the strongest aspects of his character and how both are intrinsic to his art.

Rj says

I think artists stay much closer to their childhood than other people. They remain far more constant to those early sensations. Other people change completely, but artists tend to stay the way they have been from the beginning.

Francis Bacon quoted in Michael Peppiatt, Francis Bacon: An Anatomy of an Enigma (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996), 3,

To find yourself you need the greatest possible freedom to drift.

Francis Bacon quoted in Michael Peppiatt, Francis Bacon: An Anatomy of an Enigma (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996), 3,

the lugubrious grandeur that characterizes the places where blood flows.

Georges Bataille quoted in Michael Peppiatt, *Francis Bacon: An Anatomy of an Enigma* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1996), 117

Susan says

Often times, in my many museum adventures I am drawn to various haunting figures. Many of these tend to be Francis Bacon's. Some artists follow you more than you follow them. I only know of Bacon because his time period lives among abstract expressionism...and I can't help bump into him while I am visiting Pollock and De Kooning. In my little museum journal, many times you will see "study bacon," which seems funny to me...being a vegetarian and all, but nevertheless I am finally reading a biography on Bacon. I am starting to understand the dark creature whose paintings conjure an Ibsen like Hedda...silently screaming on stage...in front an audience of hundreds, yet silenced still. I wonder what the next 400 pages holds.

Evan says

While biographers can't resist psychologizing their subjects in the worst way -- claiming some cause/effect relationship between the artist's life and his work -- this book is worth that nonsense just for the gems that drop out of Bacon's mouth: his analyses of his own work, which come obliquely from his snarky comments on others' lives and works and some moments when he lets his guard down. I compiled a list so I don't have to dig through the chaff for the wheat next time -- maybe biography just isn't my genre, seems so ancillary.

To his credit, Peppiatt clearly did thorough research and the portrait of FB you get seems accurate, triangulated from many sources who actually knew the man.

Susan says

Often times, when I am on my various museum travels, I will see, in the distance, a haunting image. Many times, it seems to be a Francis Bacon painting. Because of his time in art history, I am often in galleries which support his work. Yet, I never really knew anything about him. When I look back at my little journal book - I see the note..."study Bacon." Which always strikes me funny...being a vegetarian and all...but never the less...I finally listened to my notes. This edition is suppose to have "untold" stories of Francis - not that I would know the difference, but I find myself finally getting to a point in this biography where I am feeling like I can start to know this artist. His work feels like Ibsen's Hedda when she is forced to scream silently on stage in front of us all, yet to no avail, even in public, these characters seemed forced into silence. Here is hoping for a true lighted way into his darkness...more to follow.

Thombeau says

Written by someone who knew him for over three decades, *Francis Bacon: Anatomy of an Enigma* (1997) is a thoroughly engaging biography. The research and resources are impeccable. Anecdotes are balanced by

analysis, both of Bacon's life and work, an appropriate approach since the two are so deeply intertwined. Francis Bacon lived from 1909 to 1992, experiencing---and thriving on---any number of extremes. From lowlife and rough trade to the highest realms of society and the art world, Bacon enjoyed it all, often on the same champagne-soaked night. For all the horror represented in his paintings, he insisted that he was an optimist at heart. This book provides an insightful look at a complex individual.

Edward says

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Steven says

A former New York Times book of the year (for those who care about such accolades), and I'm all for books that focus on creative artists receiving such recognition (if only for the hope of audience spill over). Yes, you'll find all the juicy details about Bacon's at times scandalous private life, all the more so given that Peppiatt was a close friend of Bacon's for thirty years and confided in him to an uncommon (or, perhaps, calculated) degree. But what really puts this book over the top for me is that Peppiatt (a former literary editor for *le Monde* and arts correspondent for *The New York Times* and the *Financial Times*, as well as editor and publisher of *Art International*) has considerable critical chops and puts them to use throughout this book to analyze Bacon's paintings and technique. Not just a biography, but a brilliant melding of biography and critical study.

Hannah Green says

Francis Bacon has always been, rather aptly, something of an enigma to me. From a relatively young age I appreciated his works simply because of his vivacious use of bright colour and then, as I grew older, I came to appreciate the compelling and dark figures hidden beneath the seemingly bright veneer.

I picked the biography up on something as a whim. It was a book we were planning on getting rid of at the shop I work at and, recognising the name, I thought it sounded interesting. Moreover, as I knew (though he denied it) he was a part of the Surrealist movement alongside my all-time favorite artist Dalí I thought it could make for some interesting reading - something I was absolutely more than right about.

Peppiatt straddles well the difficulties of writing a fond memoir of a friend and an analytical biography which dispassionately examines the person in question. Moreover, he consciously avoids the pitfall which

many who write about any individual with a creative output fall into - that of constantly attempting to relate biographical instances to their works. On the occasions that he does to this, it is always with caution and occasionally with alternative interpretations alongside it which allows the reader to draw their own conclusions.

The personal stories wherein Peppiatt slips into the first person and recalls an anecdote of a night he spent alongside the artist also gives the work a sense of intimacy. It helps you, as a reader, almost forget the level of fame and the amount of money this extraordinary person earned and instead makes Bacon seem an individual that you know, understand, and come to relate to.

However, what makes this book truly extraordinary is the man that it is written about. I knew nothing of his life story and the adversity that he had to overcome to become the public figure he grew into. Peppiatt also succeeds in this area in making him a somewhat vulnerable character which enables you to view his paintings with new eyes. Bacon is truly an icon of the twentieth century and his paintings have a dark resonance which embodies the isolation and confusion he appeared to find in many aspects of his life.

Jacob says

I almost went on a date with a girl I met on Facebook once but the day of our date, I called her to confirm and she said that she was sorry, that I seemed like a really nice guy, but it could never work between us. I asked her why, what had I done, we hadn't even been on a single date. And she replied, I'm sorry ... I just need my space? You can understand that right? And I looked deep into the mirror, there's always a mirror in situations like this, and I nodded my head. She couldn't see me nodding my head but that did not detract from the significance of the gesture. After I hung up the phone, I was feeling a little sad, a little weird, a little out of sorts. I pulled books off of the shelf and I opened them to random places and I asked the empty room questions that I didn't want answers to in the first and the room didn't provide any answers.

Fran says

A fascinating insight into the excesses and extremes of an artist who embraced both life and painting with enviable energy and dedication. Peppiatt's close relationship with Bacon enables him to provide an entertaining account of the characters that amused him between painting sessions, some of whom appear in his work. As an artist I was particularly interested in the way Bacon controlled the information about his work and his personal life throughout his career. Like a formidable press agent he ensured that people only read the information he wanted them to read. I was also impressed by his control over the quality of his output; he frequently rejected paintings he considered not to be resolving themselves. However, he made the mistake of not destroying these works and I was saddened to find out that they were later sold and therefore entered the art market against his will - no artist wants bad work in the public eye.

Frank Ryan says

Francis Bacon, self taught artist, somehow rose from utter obscurity to become one the greatest icons of art in the late twentieth century. His meteoric rise, coupled with the extraordinary carnality and brutality of his

art, with its screaming popes and anguished, quasi demoniacal, portraits, marks him out as strange and different to any artist that went before him - even considering Goya and his monsters. Congratulations to Mr Peppiatt for exploring and explaining some of the demons and driving forces behind the art, and artist. This must be one of the most intimate, revealing and authoritative biographies of any artist, taking the reader into Bacon's inner circle, and privy to his closest thoughts, both personal and creative.

All I can say is well done. I was held spellbound throughout. I made copious notes and will read the book again.

William Justice says

Disgustingly shocking, two chapters was my limit.

A completely lost soul, living to discover a lower level
Of depravity to wallow in. I would not recommend this book to anyone, ever!
