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FRANCIS BACON (1909-1992): PHOTOGRAPHS AND PAINTING, FROM LONDON TO DUBLIN

Abstract

Francis Bacon painted pictures based mostly on photographs published in encyclopaedias, popular magazines, the tabloid press, posters and packaging. He was interested in reproductions of paintings by great masters. He used photographs by Muybridge. Photographs, treated by Bacon as tools, were later "worked on" by the artist, becoming the canvas for his paintings. The scenes he chose – often drastic, depicting rape and violence – were painted into his canvases, creating a deformed image of the world that "emerged" from the horrors of both world wars. He painted portraits based on his photographs of friends. These were usually people with whom the artist was emotionally connected. He painted self-portraits base on a series of photographs taken in automatic photography, from which he selected several to form the basis of his paintings. Real things and persons should exist in the fictional space assigned to them. By destroying literalism in painting, Bacon wanted to find the similarity desired in painting as its principal, so to rediscover realism. When painting a portrait, he tried to capture the appearance of the figure. After Francis Bacon's death, his London studio (7, Reece Mews), restored by conservators, was "repeated" in the space of the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. It contains about 7,500 objects, among them numerous photographs which had been torn up by the artist, photographs of his lovers and friends, black and white reproductions. The Bacon 'archive' collected in Dublin is now a silent hint of the creative process of the artist, who despite numerous studies devoted to him and recorded conversations, still remains one of the most inscrutable artists of the 20th century.

Key words: Francis Bacon, painting, photograph, atelier, archive, portrait, deformation, reality, London, Dublin

1. Introduction

This article focuses on the special role that photography played in an artist's work. Photography, understood as a way of looking at a perceiving reality, which is, however, *shifted*, divergent from the reality which we know from the photography convention. It was exactly this dissonance between the reality of the fact and what was frozen in

the photograph that allowed Bacon to use the matter of painting in order, as noticed by Gilles Deleuze, to "extract the figure from the figurative" (Deleuze 1981: 13).[1]
The extensive literature devoted to Bacon includes numerous individual and retrospective exhibitions confronting his work with other masters of ancient art as well as the twentieth century reveal fascination with the artist's life and art. Over the last few years, exhibitions of his works were organised in London (*Bacon's Eye*, 8 February – 16 April 2001) at the Barbican Art Gallery; in New York (*Francis Bacon: A Centenary Retrospective*. 20 May – 16 August 2009) at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art; at the turn of 2009 and 2010 in Rome (1 October 2009 – 14 January 2010) Galleria Borghese housed one of the most impressive presentations of twenty works by Francis Bacon in correspondence with Caravaggio's paintings; in Paris, the Centre Pompidou housed the exhibition *Bacon en toutes lettres* from 11 August 2020 to 20 January 2020; in Rome (*La Scoula di Londra: Opere della Tate: Francis Bacon and Lucien Freud*, 23 September 2019 – 23 February 2020) at the Chiostro del Bramante; in Basel (*Bacon-Giacometti*. 29 April – 2 September 2018) at the Fondation Beyler (in collaboration with the Fondation Giacometti in Paris) to name but a few which were devoted only to Bacon's paintings or their relation and connection with the art of the greatest masters of the 20th century. One of the most important publications related to Bacon is the book by David Sylvester, a friend of the painter and an art critic, *Interviews with Francis Bacon: The Brutality of Fact*, the result of a series of interviews with the artist conducted in 1962 – 1986. The interviews were recorded on tape, some of them were broadcast on BBC radio as a part of the programme *Francis Bacon Talking with David Sylvester*, others – recorded on film – became the basis for the TV film *Francis Bacon: Fragments of a Portrait* (dir. Michael Gill); it was broadcast on 23 March 1963, all others were recordings of private conversations or were published in exhibition catalogues (e.g. the conversations from 1982–1984 were included in the catalogue of the exhibition *Francis Bacon: peintures récentes* at Galerie Maeght Lelong in Paris) (Sylvester 1987: 201–202).[2] Anne Baldassari is the author of the book titled *Bacon, Picasso: la vie des images*, published in 2005 as a part of the editorial programme of the Musée Picasso in Paris; the same year saw publication of Margarita Cappock's *Francis Bacon Studio*, (London, New York 2005) discussing the fate of the legacy left in the London studio after the painter's death. Martin Harrison is the author of the study *In Camera: Francis Bacon*. *Photography, Film and the Practice of Painting*, published in London in 2005. *Kwartalnik Artystyczny* No. 4 of 2005 contains articles by Polish and foreign authors analysing Bacon's work, among others: Marek Kędzierski, Daria Kołacka, Ewa Sonnenberg, Sam Hunter, and David Sylvester. In her paper 'The Francis Bacon Studio Project: The Deconstruction of the Francis Bacon Studio and its Relocation in Dublin,' presented at the conference Contemporary Art: Creation, Curation, Collection and Conservation (The Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 21–22 September 2001), Marry McGrath outlined the process of moving works and documents from the studio in London to Dublin, where a permanent exhibition venue was created. In 2019, a book edited by Martin Harrison *Bacon and the Mind*: *Art, Neuroscience and Psychology* (Thames & Hudson,

1 For more on this see Deleuze 1981.
2 For more on this see Sylvester 1987: 201–202.

London 2019) was published in London. The study *Inside Francis* (Francis Bacon Studies III, The Estate of Francis Bacon Publishing / Thames & Hudson, London 2020) was also edited by Martin Harrison.
Bacon's work, considered from the perspective of philosophy, is discussed in Gilles Deleuze's work *Francis Bacon: Logiques de la sensation*, Paris 1981. The French scholar focuses on the *purposefulness* of Bacon's painting which, while preserving representational form, does not describe reality, but – as Deleuze claims – seeks a particular state of reality, contained in the artist's thought, in his nervous system, in the manner of paint application. The 2019 work edited by Ben Ware, *Francis Bacon: Painting, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis* (Thames & Hudson, London 2019) addresses the questions of the philosophic and psychoanalytic significance in Bacon's painting. For the purposes of this article, the most important book was Martin Harrison and Rebecca Daniels' *Francis Bacon: Incunabula* (2008), created as a result of the authors' research into photographic material left behind after the artist's death in his last London studio and collected in the atelier-museum in Dublin, which was recreated by the painter's curators and friends.

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In 1949, Francis Bacon decided to paint a person in their most varied states, in the stages of life and death, their representations from antiquity to the present day. Bacon painted pictures which were usually based on photographs published in encyclopaedias, textbooks, calendars, newspapers, popular magazines: scientific and para-scientific, the tabloid press, leaflets, posters and packaging. He was interested in reproductions of paintings by great masters and film frames. In addition, he used photographs by Eadweard Muybridge. The photographs, treated by Bacon as tools, were later *elaborated* by the artist and became the basis of his paintings. He *painted* selected scenes, often drastic ones, showing rape and violence, creating a deformed image of the world that emerged from the horrors of both world wars. In the artist's work, documentary photographs, sometimes distributed in a million copies, gained the value of a unique image. Here Bacon's instrumental treatment of photography is combined with emotion: "it is a relationship in which fascination and hatred come together," wrote André Rouillé (Rouillé 2007: 347). The photographs depicting the artist's studio show newspaper photographs and reproductions of works by masters of European painting scattered in disarray on the floor: jagged cut-outs, trampled on, stained with paint and mud (Sylvester 1987: 38). He painted portraits on the basis of his friends' photographs taken by him; some of the photographs depicting people he intended to portray were taken for him by John Deakin: for example, the photographs of George Dyer, Isabel Rawsthorne, Lucian Freud, Henrietta Moraes. These are usually people with whom the artist was emotionally attached. He painted his self-portraits on the basis of serial photographs taken in a photo-machine, from which he selected several to form the basis of his paintings.
Bacon was reluctant to reveal the fact that he used photography, which, as it turned out from the archive preserved in his studio, was an integral part of his creative process. Bacon's painting emerged from his admiration for antique art and its widespread presence in photography as a medium of the modern world. The

artist believed that the advent of photography, its gradual improvement and the unlimited possibilities of technical transformations it offered had contributed to the transformation of painting and forced artists to use the achievements of photography in their works, which had been based on old methods, themes or techniques, so that a traditional (realistic) image related to the past in a way that was imposed by contemporary media. "I think one's sense of appearance is assaulted all the time by photography and by the film. So that when one looks at something, one's not only looking at it directly but (…) through the assault that has already been made on one by photography and film" (Sylvester 1987: 30), said Bacon. Every object that we look at contains countless images, film frames, photographs, internal images, memory and imagination. These, in turn, become just images replacing reality, or reality itself becomes *shifted*, yet all the more overwhelming (Sylvester 1987: 30). In Bacon's art, the concept of the shift is connected with deformation, being the principle of similarity, which the artist considered to be a domain of painting. Photography only illustrates, reflects facts and forms; it is only the painter's gaze, the applied techniques, the representations "...whose character of painterly fiction gets gradually obliterated, thanks to which they exist more strongly than simple representations that make the image real" (Leiris 2007: 139).[3] Using photography as a tool, the painter placed it – despite his fascination with it – on the margins of art, and he understood it as distant from art, as its opposite. This aversion and, at the same time, enchantment with photography stemmed from his desire to reach the essence of a person without resorting to illustration or storytelling. Only painting can "...catch the mystery of appearance within the mystery of the making" (Sylvester 1987: 140), he declared in an interview with Sylvester.

He perceived photography as a medium that not so much transmits reality or confirms it as that which generates an unavoidable discrepancy between the reality and photography (Rouillé 2007: 348). A gap between what the photograph shows and the photograph itself enables the photographer to capture reality, to reveal, as Bacon claims, what the thing itself can reveal: "Through the photographic image l find myself beginning to wander into the image and unlock what I think of as its reality more than I can by looking at it" (Sylvester 1987: 30). Francis Bacon's paintings were created in the process of extracting individual ideas from the overabundance of everyday images: advertisements, photographic illustrations, television images, documentary photographs and film fictions. Painting portraits on the basis of photographs, Bacon on the one hand avoided being illustrative and, on the other, in order to render an exact likeness, was guided by "...subjective and almost arbitrary intuition, not disregarding, at the same time, generally known features authenticated in photographs, which in this case function not as a source of inspiration but as a means of control" (Leiris 2007: 144). Passport photography, as a portrait tool, deprived of emotional and sensational features, is *literal*: in the process of creating Bacon's paintings it was a kind of barrier – he painted from memory with the help of the photographs – which he then tried to tear down. Thanks to heading to the surface of the canvas, its texture was permeated by the painter's desire to reach a likeness which was fixed in his mind. According to the artist, the physical presence

3 See Leiris 2007: 139–150.

of the model prevented him from subjecting the image to deliberate deformations, thanks to which his desired likeness was *this* likeness, not a copy, an anecdote told by means of a painting. Real things and persons in Bacon's image should "exist in the fictional space assigned to them" (Leiris 2007: 145). By destroying the literalness of photography, Bacon wanted to find in painting a desired similarity as a principle of painting, thus "reinventing realism" (Sylvester 1987:176). When painting a portrait, he tries to capture the appearance of a person, thinking together with the impressions that this appearance evokes in the creator. "*Perhaps realism in its deepest expression is always subjective*," he wrote in a letter to Michel Leiris (Leiris 2007: 145).

2. Wandering, Jessie Lightfoot, 1914–1961

At the outbreak of the First World War, when Bacon's father was mobilised, the family moved from Ireland[4] to London. From then on, the painter lived in various places in London, taking up casual gainful employment. In 1927 and 1928 he stayed in Berlin: "...there was a wide open city, which was, in a way, very, very violent. Perhaps it was violent to me because I had come from Ireland, which was violent in the military sense but not violent in the emotional sense, in the way Berlin was" (Sylvester 1987: 81). From 1929, he lived in South Kensington, a London district close to the museums, whose collections at the time were the primary site of his artistic education. In 1933, when he decided to move in with Jessie Lightfoot,[5] he painted a series of paintings that had the definite style that characterised his mature work. A number of paintings were created at this time, including the first existing version of *The Crucifixion*, which he showed at the Mayor Gallery in London. Many of Bacon's paintings created between 1933 and 1943 were destroyed by the artist. Deemed unfit for active military service, he spent the Second World War in London, working for civil defence.

In 1943 he rented the house at 7 Cromwell Place, once John Everett Millais' studio, where Jessie Lightfoot also lived. Since after Lightfoot's death in 1951 Bacon did not want to stay in the place which he had shared with the person closest to him at the time, he left the house at Cromwell Place, constantly changing casual jobs and addresses from then on. It was not until ten years after his friend's death that he settled at 7, Reece Mews. Although none of the portraits of Jessie Lightfoot have survived, Harrison suggests that an echo of her appearance and a reference to the

4 Until the outbreak of the First World War, the family lived near the Curragh in Northern Ireland in a house called Canny Court. Bacon's father was a horse trainer in a regiment of British cavalry. Bacon was born in Dublin, but his parents were English. For more on this see Sylvester 1987: 81, 184–188.

5 Jessie Lightfoot was born in 1871 and was Francis Bacon's nanny, with whom the artist was emotionally attached until her death in 1951. She lived with the Bacon family in Cannycourt, County Kildare, Ireland from 1911, being employed as a "nurse and domestic help." She moved to London with the Bacon family during the First World War. When in 1929, released from service, she found herself in financial difficulties, Francis Bacon and his then partner Eric Alldenen moved in together in a house at 54 Vincent Square in the Pimlico district. In the following years, they lived together in several rented flats, and she performed the function of domestic help. From 1934 she worked as a cook in designer Arundell Clarke's house in Barnabas Street, where Bacon lived in 1935. As biographers report, the eccentric and unpredictable personality of Lightfoot, who participated in the gatherings organised by Bacon's friends, fascinated the artist, while her help in the organisation of daily life and the bond that united them was essential to him. For more on this see Peppiatt 2009: 74; Harrison 2019: 74.

special relationship they shared may have been included in Bacon's painting of a screaming woman (Harrison 2016: 494–495) (*Screaming Woman*, 1957), based on a frame from Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin*. In 1950 Sam Hunter, an American art historian, visited Bacon's studio in Cromwell Place and took photos of some of the materials the painter had prepared for his work. Two photographs taken by Hunter were published in the *Magazine of Art* in 1952, thanks to which we know what paintings Bacon was working on at the time that have not survived. They were probably abandoned by the artist during his London wanderings or destroyed (for example, *Study after Velázquez* (1950) destroyed by the artist in 1951, or *Pope III* (1951) destroyed by the artist in 1966) (Sylvester 1987: 204–205). "If l have been working on it for some time and it just doesn't seem to be right, l cut it up and destroy it because the paint becomes so clogged and there is nothing to do" (Sylvester 1987: 195), said the artist. Bacon was reluctant to declare that he was inspired by the works of other artists; however, in the extended interview conducted by Sylvester in 1975, he speaks of his admiration for the paintings by Nicolas Poussin (*The Slaughter of the Innocents*, 1630–1631), by Rembrandt (*Slaughtered Ox*, 1643, 1655), Velázquez (*Portrait of Innocent X*, 1650; *Infante Philippe Prospero*, 1659;), Edgar Degas (*After the Bath*, 1903 from the National Gallery in London), Rodin, Renoir, Cézanne and Picasso. He greatly appreciated works by Alberto Giacometti, whom he met in London in 1965 during his solo exhibition at the Tate Gallery. This meeting was documented in the photographs by Graham Keen, then a student at the School of Fine Arts, who was fascinated by the work of Giacometti. It is worth devoting a separate article to the special admiration that the two artists had for each other.

In 1959, while preparing for his first solo exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in London, Bacon lived for three months in a rented studio in St. Ives, Cornwall. Ron Belton, Bacon's companion on the trip to St. Ives, recalled that the artist took medical and zoology textbooks, piles of photographs showing various conditions, photographs of human and animal body parts, and he fixed the photos that were to serve as subjects of his paintings to the walls of his studio (Harrison 2019:9).

3. Studio-archive – 7, Reece Mews in London

"l feel at home here in this chaos because chaos suggests images to me. And in any case l just love living in chaos. (...) l do like things to be clean, l don't want the plates and things to be filthy dirty, but l like a chaotic atmosphere" (Sylvester 1987: 190).

In all probability, the materials found in the studio at 7, Reece Mews after the painter's death are the only ones that reliably *reconstruct* the Irish artist's life and work from 1961 onwards. Bacon did not pay much attention to paintings or materials left in previous places; he threw away those considered unnecessary. To his last studio, he took only the crucial documents, and those *retrieved* from under abandoned piles of paper cannot be treated in any way as a systematically maintained archive. The materials collected over the years, lying on the studio floor, were simply thrown away when their sheer volume made work impossible or when they seemed unnecessary and disturbing. The chaos in Bacon's studio was, in a way, a reflection of the way he worked: he believed that order should be reflected in his paintings,

through the pedantic way in which they were framed and exhibited according to his clearly defined guidelines. The studio, visited by the painter's friends, a close circle of photographers and critics, was located in South Kensington, a London district. Its collections, however, were not elaborated until artist's death. Bacon did not keep an orderly archive, neither did he catalogue his works or the materials constituting – as mentioned above – the tools of his paintings. In 1992, after the artist's death, the archive was taken care of first by Valerie Beston, and then by John Edwards,[6] his friend and executor of his will, who donated the archive collection and the works to the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane. The studio was located in a small room, measuring 6x4 metres, filled with piles of photographs, books, albums, magazines, sketches and finished paintings.[7] Art historians undertook to research and reveal what was hidden under the layers of materials accumulated over thirty years. Hidden does not mean obscured – the papers lay in the studio, forming a specific palimpsest of the artist's work, experiences, current and past fascinations, hesitations, abandonments and returns to his topics. "What was hidden came to light, what was under the layers proved to be as important to Bacon as what was visible" (Dawson 2009: 5). Some papers were torn on purpose, others were consumed by time, some are smeared with paint or pastel, those depicting someone's face are sometimes deliberately creased or scratched.

The materials come from different periods of Bacon's life, some from the time when – after years of living in different places – in October 1961 he settled in a studio located on the first floor of a house at 7, Reece Mews in London, where he stayed until his death. Books, magazines, various prints on medical issues, bullfighting, manuals on gardening, boxing, animals as well as reproductions of his own paintings filled the cramped interior. The publications collected by Bacon were torn apart by him, he cut out individual articles and photographs, folded loose pages, added over or underlined some parts. He concealed his working methods and the method of creating his paintings, which were known only to his close friends.

The studio at 7, Reece Mews was frequented in the 1970s by journalists taking photos of its interior, and today these photographs are a valuable resource for examining the last thirty years of Bacon's work. They show a colourful, modest room cluttered with shelves with piles of books, stacks of cardboard boxes filled with photographs and loose pages from magazines and books. A painting / reproduction / photograph could be useful to Bacon only when the expected association was formed in his mind; when he transformed it into his own work of art, this image became unnecessary, it disturbed him and had to be got rid of, closed in a box so as not to interfere with the painting process itself.

A portrait of Muriel Belcher[8] by John Timbers (c. 1965 and c. 1975), found among numerous photographs, shows how Bacon inserted his own interventions into

6 John Edwards was a friend of Bacon from the mid-1970s, having met the artist at London's Colony Club in 1974 through his brother, who was friends with Muriel Belcher. Bacon made Edwards his sole heir. He is the subject of several Bacon's portraits, including *Portrait of John Edwards* from 1988.

7 It is worth mentioning at this point the exhibition that took place in Paris at the Centre Pompidou in 2019/2020 *Bacon: En toutes lettres*, *Francis Bacon: Books and Painting*. See Ottinger 2019–2020.

8 Muriel Belcher was the owner of the well-known private club (*drinking club*) Colony Room on Deen Street in Soho, where Bacon liked to visit. Belcher helped Bacon and his friends financially in the 1940s.

photographs, adding or repainting elements (here: a rectangular mirror painted white, which, like in Ingres' paintings, reflects the back of the model's head and profile, painted so as to become a shadow, contrasting with the light, matté background). Bacon painted Muriel Belcher on a numerous occasions (e.g. *Miss Muriel Belcher*, 1959; *Tree Studies for a Portrait of Muriel Belcher* (triptych), 1966). She was one of his close friends, and her friendship with the artist was uniquely marked and documented by numerous photographs and correspondence. *Sphinx– Portrait of Muriel Belcher* from 1979, compared with Timbers' photograph, may be an example of the process of association, the rejection of selected fragments and the transformations of the image-"pattern," taking place in painter's mind and influencing the final painting (Harrison; Daniels 2008: 10–11). A black and white photographic print has become an extract of the painting. The orange background with a cyclamen-coloured rectangle (an *after-image* of the mirror in the photograph) on which a deformed figure of the model was placed, enclosed in a kind of spatial, geometrical frame, her sphinx claws hooked into orthopaedic rails, suggests a gesture of withdrawal and, at the same time, a desire to stay. The portrait of the friend as a sphinx was painted in 1979, the year of Belcher's death. Thus, one may believe that it was painted on the basis of two photographs: one taken by Deakin around 1965 and another taken by Timbers around 1975. Both photographs were found in the folders left in Bacon's studio. Harrison, the painter's biographer, supposes that the portrait of Muriel Belcher is a synthesis of both photographs, but also a reflection of scenes remembered from the time of artist's visits to the hospital where she was staying and where Bacon visited her. A motif of a sphinx, the outcome of Bacon's fascination with Ingres' picture, was painted by Bacon several times: in 1953, 1954, 1979; however, as Harrison notes, the exaggerated paws and claws in the 1979 portrait of Belcher, along with her bare torso, also suggest a similarity with a photograph published in the *Observer* of 4 June 1978, showing a dancer, Marcia Haydée.[9] The photo of the dancer, creased and carelessly torn out from the newspaper, was found in Bacon's studio, hence the supposition that it may have served as a kind of a frame for Belcher's portrait. Also the use of surgical rails in *Three Studies from the Human Body* from 1967, thanks to the materials from Bacon's studio, was inspired by a book on medicine by K. C. Clarke, *Positioning in Radiography*, published in London in 1942. The analysis of the sources of the work in question, made on the basis of the materials found in the painter's last London studio, its structure, composition, and the colours used, allowed for a closer understanding and, in a sense, unveiled the thought process leading to the final, completed painting.

4. Studio-Museum, Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane

In 1996, John Edwards invited Brian Clarke, a British artist, to visit Bacon's studio, which had remained closed since artist's death. The materials and documents that became the subject of much research, often random, some intriguing, other (seemingly) insignificant, became important when the artist inserted his own

9 Marcia Haydée Salaverry Pereira da Silva was born on 18 April 1937 in Niterói, Brazil. She was a prima ballerina of the Stuttgart Ballet when the theatre was led by John Cranko, a choreographer and ballet director from 1976 to 1995, and was also director of the Santiago Ballet from 1992.

interventions into them, processing them in some way, thus creating the first outlines of a work. The most important objects were copied to show them to David Sylvester.[10] The documents presented to the critic were also unknown to him despite his close and long-standing acquaintance with the painter. Research on the materials found in Bacon's studio became clues that helped to understand the process of his work: preliminary sketches that he rejected, notes with ideas for future paintings, sometimes variants of already existing ones. Although the fact that the artist used Muybridge's photographs for his own paintings was known, only a review of his notes revealed that he had first encountered the British inventor's works on recording human movement (Muybridge 1907: 51–73)[11] as early as in 1949, and that they had also become the source of numerous Bacon's works. In her paper „The Francis Bacon Studio Project: The Deconstruction of the Francis Bacon Studio and It's Relocation in Dublin" presented in 2001, Mary McGrath provided comprehensive technical and organisational data on the relocation and conservation of the works, documents, as well as the equipment gathered in the studio at 7, Reece Mews in London and the organisational work in the Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane.[12]

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The presence of past images in our lives changes them and marks a contemporary person – stigmatized by the "physical vision of solitude, tormented by the world and emptiness of the reality" (Herling-Grudziński 1990: 204). Bacon's paintings are dark due to the lack of light in both a metaphorical and literal sense; these are images without beauty, "infernal," referring to Christian topics without a Christian mission, devoid of hope or faith in redemption. The ugliness and monstrosities which Bacon paints have a power of attraction, they are, according to Polish painter Jerzy Nowosielski, "the absolute manifestation of evil" (Podgórzec 1993: 11). Nowosielski, a painter and theologian, commented on Bacon's series of paintings on the crucifixion, which he had been painting since 1932.[13] In 1944 he created the *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* triptych. Evil, which manifests itself in this way through an artistic form, seems to have a substantial, personal existence. In other words, evil is only able to permeate an artistic form by possessing a substantial existence. Such a disturbing artistic reality has come into being only in our times, since ancient art did not know this kind of experience (Podgórzec 1993: 11).

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5. Recognised / Not Recognised, the Sources of Paintings

Some topics of Bacon's paintings, as revealed by the materials collected in the

10 David Sylvester (1924–2001), British art critic and exhibition curator (author, among others, of the catalogue and the 1997 exhibition *Francis Bacon: The Human Body*, London Hayward Gallery), and who for over 25 years conducted conversations with Francis Bacon, which became an invaluable source of knowledge about the painter's workshop, thoughts, life and fascinations and obsessions.

11 For more see Muybridge 1907: 51, 53, 55, 69, 71, 73.

12 See: Gogarty; Reid 2002.

13 The first version of the Crucifixion of 1932 was destroyed by Bacon; another version, made in 1933, has survived. See: Read 1993: 77.

studio, fascinated him since childhood: hanging halves of meat, butchers at work, cookbook illustrations depicting slaughtered animal carcasses, interiors of butcher shops. In 1952, John Deakin took a photograph of a half-naked Bacon, holding a split piece of pig's meat in both raised hands. The left wing of his 1962 *Three Studies of the Crucifixion* triptych depicts the interior of a dissected animal; in 1980–81 he painted a chicken (the left wing of the triptych) tied up and prepared for further processing against a red background, using an illustration from a cookbook (Terence & Conran, *The Cook Book*, 1980). Harrison, citing John Aubrey (1626–1697), points out to the use of this type of representation which is unusual for Bacon, assuming that it has to do with experiments conducted by the painter's ancestor Sir Francis Bacon, who, among other things, studied the effects of animal diseases on humans and died of pneumonia caused by a zoonotic infection (Harrison, Daniels 2008: 8). In an interview with David Sylvester, Bacon, when asked by a critic why he had painted the Crucifixion, replied:

> I've always been very moved by pictures about slaughter-houses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion. There've been extraordinary photographs which have been done of animaIs just being taken up before they were slaughtered; and the smell of death. We don't know, of course, but it appears by these photographs that they're so aware of what is going to happen to them, they do everything to attempt to escape. I think these pictures were very much based on that kind of thing, which to me is very, very near this whole thing of the Crucifixion. I know for religious people, for Christians, the Crucifixion has a totally different significance. But as a non-believer, it was just an act of man's behaviour, a way of behaviour to another. (Sylvester 1987: 23–24)

The materials collected in the studio at 7, Reece Mews included two torn pages from a golf instruction book (Louis T. Stanley, *Style Analysis*, 1951), which only seem insignificant. The artist used the photographs or their fragments in his paintings. Ben Hogan's 1957 book *The Modern Fundamentals of Golf* had a similar function for the creative process. The transformed details of the photographs from this publication were used by the painter in his 1971 *Two Men Working in a Field*. When asked about the source of the directional arrows found in his works from 1971 onwards, he replied that he derived this idea from golf textbooks, but only loose sheets of paper collected in boxes found in his studio revealed the origin of these 'mysterious' indications [e.g. *Body in Motion* (1976), *Landscape* (1978), *A Piece of Waste Land* (1982)]. The researchers found the book *Style Analysis* (which was not found in Bacon's 'archive'); a comparison of the photograph on the cover of the manual, showing a golf player dressed according to the rules indicated by arrows, confirmed Bacon's words and the publication was included in the Dublin exhibition. Attaching too much importance to the photographs used by the artist is of little significance; the essence of his art was the image, the very process of bringing out the form of the work of art shaped in his mind. For his art, photography was only a tool, a kind of 'sketch' which preceded painting: when he no longer needed it, he threw it away or, at best, put it in his file; often after completing the picture, he never returned to it: "I want to paint, not hunt for newspaper cuttings," he said to Sonia

Orwell in 1954. Bacon consistently denied that he made drawings or sketches for his works. Since the artist's death, and above all since the 1999 exhibition *Francis Bacon: Working on Paper* at Tate Britain, this theme has been a subject of discussion among scholars researching his art. The exhibition showed forty-two works: mainly hitherto unknown sketches of figures made with quick brush strokes, a few pencil or pen drawings, hasty outlines on loose sheets of paper, made between 1959 and 1962. Harrison believes that Bacon paid little attention to drawing at all, while the works on paper shown at the Tate exhibition were carefully selected by the curators: "...they are of considerable interest," Harrison writes, "but to define them as drawings is misleading, for no evidence has emerged to support a claim that Bacon rehearsed his human forms using a pencil and a sketchbook" (Harrison, Daniels 2008: 12). A few outlines of future compositions, made with a hasty line, brush with oil paints, directly on raw, unprimed canvas, have survived. For contemporary researchers of Bacon's oeuvre, these works may serve as the basis for an analysis of his subsequent stages of painting; to some extent, they reveal the processes of associations, intentions or suppressed emotions. He began to use the method of painting directly on raw canvas from the 1940s (Sylvester 1987: 195).

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Francis Bacon's London studio, meticulously reconstructed by curators and conservators and *reproduced* in the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin, is now open to the public. It contains about 7,500 objects, among them numerous torn photographs of the artist's lovers and friends, black-and-white reproductions of faces of politicians and pop-culture stars, photographs documenting war tragedies, famous court trials, executions, as well as the last canvases cut by the artist and easels. Margarita Cappock conducted the first in-depth study of Bacon's studio collection. From a dense mass of objects (cardboard boxes, plates, rags, paint cans and tubes and dried brushes, coffee cups, bottles of turpentine, etc., abandoned on the floor, on shelves, chests, platforms), she selected those that could help her place Bacon's life in the specific context of his artistic practice. The aim was by no means to expose the intimate side of the painter's life (this will probably come later); the researcher's task was to identify the significance of those artefacts which would enable us to learn about his inspiration and working methods. As mentioned above, Bacon's London studio was moved to Dublin in 1998: "along with the walls, floor, ceiling and doors. During reconstruction care was taken not to miss any element of the chaos reigning therein. The arangement of the objects on the tables, shelves and floor was precisely repeated centimetre-by-centre" (Pręgowski 2011: 9).

Page 69 of the book, which consists of interviews with Bacon collected by Sylvester, contains a photograph showing furniture designed by Bacon[14] which was photographed in his studio in 1930. We remember that he started living Kensington in1929. So it is highly probable that this perfectly modernist space with functional furnishings and a dominant round frameless mirror was one of the places Bacon inhabited during his wandering years. The ascetic order of this interior and presence of a mirror *tondo* (visible also in the photographs of the studio

14 Bacon originally intended to go into interior decoration and furniture design.

at 7, Reece Mews) stands in contrast to the photographs showing almost the same mirror leaning against a wall – here faded, dirty, with spots of corrosion. In one of the many photographs of the painter's studio – reproduced in numerous books and on the Internet – the surface of the mirror reflects the death mask of William Blake, according to which a series of six paintings dedicated to the English visionary was created. Bacon saw it for the first time in the National Portrait Gallery in London; fascinated by the image, he obtained its cast.[15] However, the painting was created on the basis of a black and white photograph. The poet's head in *Study for Portrait II (after the Life Mask of William Blake)*, 1955, is composed of delicate layers: streaks of grey and white paint, *emerging* from the black background, into which with broad brushstrokes Bacon painted in strands of pink and violet, introducing a suggestion of life into the image of death, visualising, at the same time, the sense of suffering and loneliness combined with the strength of spirit emanating from this figure.

Using photographs and reproductions, Bacon interfered with them, deforming, collapsing, added elements, tearing them apart. Communing with a live model, even a replica of the object of his interest, would involve its presence in the studio, would disturb the solitude necessary for work, and above all, according to the painter, free deformation would be impossible. "This may be just my own neurotic sense but I find it less inhibiting to work from them through memory and their photographs than actually having them seated there before me" (Sylvester 1987: 38).

The *real presence* of representations captured in Bacon's paintings, creating, as it were, a new reality, is the reality of myth, the senses, ambiguity. Seemingly banal spaces, figures of living creatures or things present on his canvases could suggest a certain *image authenticity* connected with what we experience and participate in. In the harsh electric light, in the bright midday sun, the artist shows the present: just as there is no past in photography, only *directness* exists in Bacon's paintings. His search for this directness was strengthened by his fascination with photography, whose sense of existence – at its beginnings – was giving testimony to something that had happened, that had existed but passed away.

For Bacon, photographs were not, as he once claimed, merely an aide-memoire, but were in fact fully integrated into the artist's gaze. The same applies to his impression of images dropping into your mind like slides or seeing images in series

In 1971, Henri Cartier-Bresson captured Bacon in his studio; the photograph was found in the artist's studio. In spite of Bacon's declarations that the collected materials were often destroyed accidentally – the photograph was intentionally bent or even folded in such a way that only a fragment of his face and hands is visible. Photography – so important in Bacon's painting – was used by him to establish the nature of a body, a figure, a shape. In this case, the artist overcame the flatness of the photograph, brought out spatiality, the construction of which he created in his imagination, built by assembling literally and symbolically the reality of the object and figure. Bacon's 'archive' collected in The Hugh Lane Gallery Dublin City, consisting of seemingly insignificant, creased, torn fragments of newspapers, notes, disorderly sketches or photographs bent on purpose or by accident, are today

15 A plaster replica of Blake's death mask was found in Bacon's studio after his death and is now stored in Dublin.

silent clues leading to the knowledge of the mystery of the creative process of the artist, who, in spite of numerous studies (both contemporary and old) and recorded conversations, still remains unknown.

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FRANCIS BACON (1909–1992): FOTOGRAFIA E PITTURA, DA LONDRA A DUBLINO

Riassunto

Francis Bacon dipinse immagini basate principalmente su fotografie pubblicate in enciclopedie, riviste popolari, tabloid, poster e imballaggi. Era interessato alle riproduzioni di dipinti di grandi maestri. Ha usato fotografie di Muybridge. Le fotografie, trattate da Bacon come strumenti, sono state successivamente "lavorate" dall'artista, diventando la tela per i suoi dipinti. Le scene da lui scelte – spesso drastiche, raffiguranti stupri e violenze – sono state dipinte nelle sue tele, creando un'immagine deformata del mondo che "emerse" dagli orrori di entrambe le guerre mondiali. Dipinse ritratti basati sulle sue fotografie di amici. Di solito erano persone aa cui l'artista era emotivamente legato. Dipinse autoritratti sulla base di una serie di fotografie scattate in fotografia automatica, scegliendone diverse per formare la base dei suoi dipinti. Le cose e le persone reali dovrebbero esistere nello spazio fittizio loro assegnato. Distruggendo il letteralismo in pittura, Bacon volle ritrovare la somiglianza voluta nella pittura come suo fondamento, così da ritrovare il realismo. Quando dipingeva un ritratto, cercava di catturare l'apparenza della figura. Dopo la morte di Francis Bacon il suo studio londinese (7, Reece Mews), restaurato dai conservatori, "è ripetuto" negli spazi della Hugh Lane Gallery di Dublino. Contiene circa 7.500 oggetti, tra i quali numerosi – strappati dall'artista fotografie dei suoi amanti e amici, riproduzioni in bianco e nero. L'"archivio" Bacon raccolto a Dublino è ora un accenno silenzioso al processo creativo dell'artista, che nonostante i numerosi studi a lui dedicati e le conversazioni registrate, rimane ancora uno degli artisti più imperscrutabili del XX secolo.

Parole chiave: Francis Bacon, pittura, fotografia, atelier, archivio, ritratto, deformazione, realtà, Londra, Dublino