



Study of a Nude

Francis Bacon

On display

Title/Description: Study of a Nude

Artist/Maker: Francis Bacon

Born: 1952 - 1953

Object Type: Painting

Materials: Canvas, Oil paint

Measurements: Unframed: h. 597 x w. 495 mm Framed: h. 742 x w. 640 x d. 70 mm

Inscription: James Boulet & Sons LTD

Accession Number: 29

Historic Period: 20th century

Production Place: Britain, England, Europe

School/Style: School of London

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Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

The power of this striking composition transcends its modest size. The source of the figure is the photography of Eadweard Muybridge, from his book *The Human Figure in Motion* (1887), and specifically from a series called 'Athlete: Standing High Jump and Athlete Performing a Standing Broad Jump' [1]. This book was one of Bacon's principal sources of imagery, and numerous examples are present in the Francis Bacon Studio Archive (Dublin, Hugh Lane).

The rendering of the figure owes a debt to the influence of Michelangelo and the muscularity of his sculptured and notably drawn male figure, which Bacon admired. In his famous interviews with David Sylvester Bacon remarked that, 'Michelangelo and Muybridge are mixed up in my mind together' [2]. In terms of the overall picture, Bacon has made the image his own and has produced a quite terrifying composition. The lonely human figure teeters on the brink of the abyss, on the very edge of existence - poised, feet arched, as if confronting both the enormity and the absurdness of the blue-black nothingness.

This was the first of Bacon's paintings to be acquired by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury. In an exhibition at the ICA, London, in 1954 it was described as 'Study from the Human Body'. Lisa Sainsbury first encountered the paintings of Francis Bacon at the Hanover Gallery at the beginning of 1953. Erica Brausen, the owner of the gallery, agreed that Lisa could take *Study of a Nude* home on approval to show her husband, Robert Sainsbury. When he returned home later that evening his response was impulsive: "We must have it. What is the price?" The price was £125, not cheap for a work by a relatively unknown contemporary artist, but their instinct would prove perceptive [3]. *Study of a Nude* was painted between December 1952 and January 1953 and purchased in early February. The format is unusual as smaller paintings such as this were normally reserved for portraits, sometimes

as triptychs [4].

The background is painted in inky black paint with transparent white vertical striations throughout. The figure is carefully modelled in a combination of white and flesh tone. The figure is enclosed within a space frame, a device of Bacon's own invention, although similar structures appear in the work of Alberto Giacometti [5]. The space frame is painted in white paint of various widths and thickness. Two horizontal strips at the edge of the composition are worked to impasto. The work is painted on the reverse of prepared primed canvas. It is well documented that from the late 1940s onwards Bacon used the reverse, unprimed side of canvas. It is likely he discovered this whilst reusing old canvas but found he preferred the texture of the rough surface, so continued even when later he bought expensive pre-prepared canvas.

Calvin Winner, January 2020

[1] Steven Hooper (ed.), *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), (cat. 56), pp. 100-101.

[2] David Sylvester, *The Brutality of the Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987, third edition (first published 1975), p.114.

[3] Hooper, p.1 viii.

[4] Martin Harrison, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné* (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2016), pp. 304-306.

[5] Claudia Milburn and Calvin Winner, *Alberto Giacometti: A line Through Time*, (London, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2016), p.74.

Exhibitions

Alberto Giacometti: A Line Through Time, Vancouver Art Gallery, Vancouver, 16 June 2019 - 29 September 2019

Bacon / Giacometti, Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 29 April 2018 - 202 September 2018 (cat no.109)

Alberto Giacometti: A Line Through Time, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts , Norwich, 23 April 2016 - 29 August 2016

'Francis Bacon and the Masters', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts , Norwich, 18 April 2015 - 26 July 2015 (45)

'Francis Bacon and the Art of the Past (2014-15)', Hermitage Museum, Moscow, 09 December 2014 - 08 March 2015 (45)

'Five Decades (2013)', Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 17 November 2012 - 24 February 2013 (unnum.)

'Francis Bacon', Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 18 May 2009 - 16 August 2009 (unnum.)

'Francis Bacon: Prado Centennial (2009)', Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 03 February 2009 - 19 April 2009

'Francis Bacon: Tate Centennial (2008-9)', Tate Britain, London, 11 September 2008 - 04 January 2009

'Francis Bacon in the 1950s', Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, 05 May 2007 - 30 July 2007 cat no. (31)

'Francis Bacon in the 1950s', Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin, 29 January 2007 - 15 April 2007

'Francis Bacon in the 1950s', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 26 September 2006 - 10 December 2006

'Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art', Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 08 February 2004 - 20 June 2004 (cat no.109)

'Francis Bacon and the Tradition of Art', Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, 15 October 2003 - 18 January 2004

'Francis Bacon in Dublin', Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 01 June 2000 - 31 August 2000 cat no. (cat no.19)

'The Human Body (1998)', Hayward Gallery, London, 05 February 1998 - 05 April 1998 (cat no.7)

'Francis Bacon', Haus der Kunst, Munich, 01 November 1996 - 26 January 1997 (cat no.19)

'Francis Bacon', Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Paris, 27 June 1996 - 14 October 1996

'Trapping Appearance: Portraits by Francis Bacon and Alberto Giacometti from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, 25 June 1996 - 15 September 1996 (1)

'Human Interest: Fifty Years of Art About British People', Greater Manchester Arts Centre, Manchester, 02 October 1985 - 17 November 1985 (unnum.)

'Francis Bacon: Paintings 1945-1982', Aichi Prefectural Art Gallery, Nagoya, 12 November 1983 - 28 November 1983 (cat no.8)

'Francis Bacon: Paintings 1945-1982', The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 13 September 1983 - 10 October 1983

'Francis Bacon: Paintings 1945-1982', The National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 30 June 1983 - 14 August 1983

'Francis Bacon', Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, April - May 1965 (cat no.12)

'Francis Bacon: Målningar 1945-1964', Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 27 February 1965 - 04 April 1965 (cat no.12)

'Francis Bacon Gemälde 1945-65', Kunstverein, Hamburg, 23 January 1965 - 21 February 1965 (cat

no.12)

'Francis Bacon', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 11 January 1963 - 18 February 1963 (cat no.15)

'Francis Bacon', Kunsthaus Zürich, Zürich, 27 October 1962 - 25 November 1962 (cat no.16)

'Francis Bacon', Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna, Turin, 11 September 1962 - 14 October 1962 (cat no.20)

'Francis Bacon', Kunsthalle Mannheim, Mannheim, 18 July 1962 - 26 August 1962 cat no. (17)

'Francis Bacon, Tate, London (1962)', Tate Gallery, London, 24 May 1962 - 01 July 1962 (cat no.21)

'Francis Bacon', Nottingham University, Nottingham, 16 February 1961 - 12 March 1961 (cat no.23)

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain , Cheltenham Art Gallery, Cheltenham, 27 September 1958 - 18 October 1958 (47)

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain , Manchester City Art Gallery, Manchester, 30 August 1958 - 20 September 1958

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain , Bournemouth College of Art, Bournemouth, 02 August 1958 - 23 August 1958

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain, Shrewsbury Art Gallery, Shrewsbury, 05 July 1958 - 26 July 1958

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain , Carlisle Art Gallery, Carlisle, 14 June 1958 - 28 June 1958

'Three Masters of Modern British Painting: Sir Matthew Smith, Victor Pasmore, Francis Bacon' organised by The Arts Council of Great Britain , Victoria Art Gallery, Bath, 27 May 1958 - 07 June 1958

'The Contemporary Nude', Gallery One, London, September - October 1957 (6)

'Britisk Nåtidskunst', Kunsternes Hus, Oslo, 12 May 1956 - 10 June 1956 (20)

'Britisk Kunst 1900-1955', Kunstforeningen, Copenhagen, 10 April 1956 - 29 April 1956 (20)

'Francis Bacon, ICA, London (1955)', Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 20 January 1955 - 19 February 1955 (cat no.7)

Further Reading

Bacon / Giacometti, published by Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, 2018 (cat no.109) p.58

- Martin Harrison, *Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné* (London: The Estate of Francis Bacon, 2016). pp. 304-306, 314, 350, 438; ill. pp. 305, 307 (detail)
- Francis Bacon and the Masters (28 works), Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts 18 Apr. 2015-26 Jul. 2015; Moscow: Hermitage Museum 9 Dec. 2014-8 Mar. 2015; exh cat. (London: Fontanka Publications, 2015). pp. 139, 144, 199; ill. No. 45, pp. 103, 199
- Francis Bacon: Five Decades (54 works), Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales 17 Nov. 2012-24 Feb. 2013; exh cat. (London: Thames & Hudson, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2012). pp. 57, 122; ill. pp. 31 (detail), 123
- Rina Arya, *Francis Bacon: Painting in a Godless World* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2012). p. 124; ill. No. 67, p. 125
- Martin Hammer, *Francis Bacon and Nazi Propaganda* (London: Tate Publishing, 2012). p. 179
- Francesca Marini, *Francis Bacon*, trans. by Richard Pierce, Skira Mini Art Books (London: Thames & Hudson, Milan: Skira, 2008). ill. No. 9, p. 45
- Francis Bacon (90 works), London: Tate Britain 11 Sep. 2008-4 Jan. 2009; exh cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). pp. 122, 165; ill. p. 125
- Francis Bacon in the 1950s (55 works), Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts 26 Sep. 2006-10 Dec. 2006; Wisconsin: Milwaukee Art Museum 29 Jan. 2007-15 Apr. 2007; Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery 5 May. 2007-30 Jul. 2007; exh cat. (New Haven: Yale University Press in assoc. with the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, 2006). pp. 33, 155; ill. No. 31, unpagged
- Margarita Cappock, *Francis Bacon's Studio* (London: Merrell, 2005). p. 126; ill. No. 229, p. 131
- David Sylvester, *Looking Back at Francis Bacon* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000). pp. 78, 203, 218; ill. No. 60, p. 80
- Francis Bacon in Dublin (45 works), Dublin: Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery of Modern Art 1 Jun. 2000-31 Aug. 2000; exh cat. (London: Thames & Hudson in assoc. with Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, 2000). pp. 59, 65; ill. No. 19, p. 64
- Richard Cork, 'Diving deep into darkness' (The Times, 1998). ill. unpagged
- Francis Bacon: The Human Body London: Hayward Gallery 5 Feb. 1998-5 Apr. 1998; exh cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998). p. 26; ill. No. 7, pp. 23 (detail, b&w), 55
- Christophe Domino, *Francis Bacon: 'Taking Reality by Surprise'*, New Horizons series (London: Thames & Hudson, 1997). p. 39; ill. p. 39
- Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection / edited by Steven Hooper, Published by Yale University Press, 1997 (cat.56), p.100-101
- Daniel Farson, *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Vintage, 1994). pp. 90, 92
- Hugh M. Davies, *Francis Bacon: The Early and Middle Years, 1928-1958* (London and New York: Garland Publishing, 1978). pp. 135-137, 188-189; ill. No. 94, unpagged (b&w)
- Lorenza Trucchi, *Francis Bacon*, trans. by John Shepley (London: Thames & Hudson, New York:

Harry N. Abrams, 1976). ill. No. 24, unpagged (b&w)

Ronald Alley, John Rothenstein, Francis Bacon: Catalogue Raisonné and Documentation (London: Thames & Hudson, New York: Viking Press, 1964). No. 55; pp. 67, 270; ill. No. 55, unpagged, (b&w)

Francis Bacon (91 works), London: Tate Gallery 24 May. 1962-1 Jul. 1962; Mannheim: Kunsthalle Mannheim 18 Jul. 1962-26 Aug. 1962; Turin: Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna 11 Sep. 1962-14 Oct. 1962; Zürich: Kunsthaus Zürich 27 Oct. 1962-25 Nov. 1962; Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum 11 Jan. 1963-18 Feb. 1963; exh cat. (London: Tate Gallery, 1962). No. 21, unpagged

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury in 1953 from the Hanover Gallery, London.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
