

For immediate release

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presents *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings from Centre Pompidou, Paris*

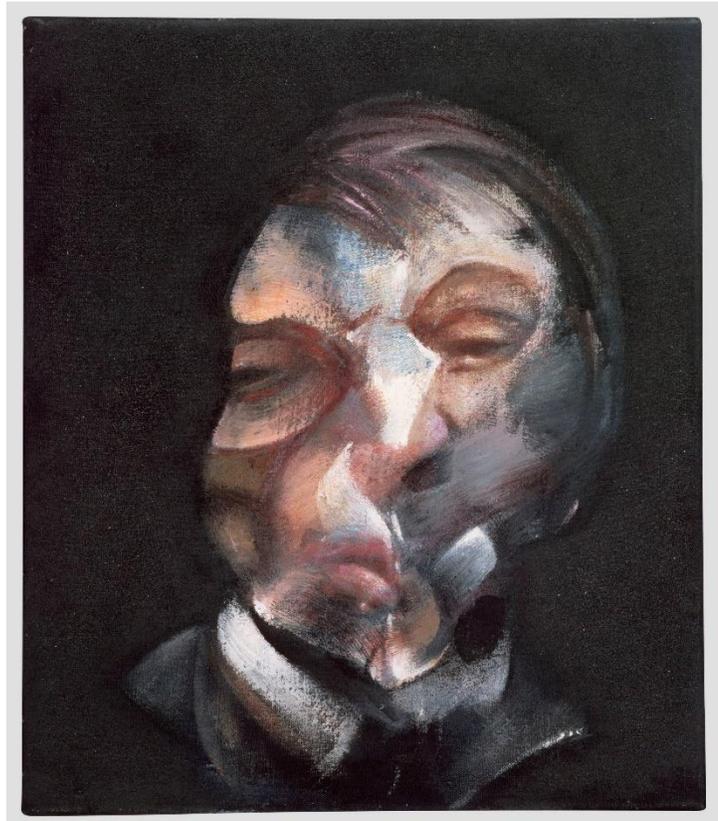
Houston—December 12, 2019—In February 2020, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presents *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings*. Organized by the Centre Pompidou, where it debuted in September 2019, this is the first in-depth museum consideration of Bacon's production in his final decades, and the first museum exhibition of the artist's work to be seen in the U.S. since the Metropolitan Museum of Art's 2009 retrospective in New York. The exhibition is on view in Houston **from February 23 through May 25, 2020.**

"We are profoundly pleased to partner with the Centre Pompidou and their curator Didier Ottinger to bring to the United States this landmark survey of Francis Bacon's late work," said Gary Tinterow, Director, The Margaret Alkek

Williams Chair, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. "This will be Houston's first exhibition of the artist, and by focusing on the achievements of his final decades, we can best understand the resolution he brought to many of his long-standing concerns and his enduring commitment to the power of painting."

Exhibition Overview

Francis Bacon (1909–1992) was a leading figure in 20th-century British art: celebrated, scandalous, and profoundly influential. In 1971, he was at a turning point in his career as he prepared for a major retrospective mounted at the Grand Palais in Paris. The paintings that led up to this exhibition are among those featured in the Houston presentation, including *Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror*, 1968, and *Triptych*, 1970. The installation will also open with a series of self-portraits, introducing Bacon's vivid presence at a time when he stated "[I have] no one else to paint." Also on view will be portraits of his close contemporaries, including the poet Michel Leiris, who observed: "[Bacon's paintings] help us, most powerfully, to feel the sheer fact of existence as it is sensed by a man without illusions."





On October 24, 1971—two days before the opening of Bacon’s Grand Palais retrospective—Georges Dyer, his companion of many years, died by suicide in a Paris hotel. Over the decade that followed, Bacon repeatedly paid tribute to Dyer in an ongoing series of paintings. The exhibition pairs two of his most powerful triptychs dedicated to Dyer, the harrowing *In Memory of George Dyer*, 1971, and *Triptych August 1972*, 1972. Introducing one of the exhibition’s central themes, the immediacy of experience and the role of memory, these paintings also touch on Bacon’s literary sources, which ranged from the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus to the contemporary writings of T. S. Eliot and Jean-Paul Sartre.

While Dyer remained Bacon’s most troubling muse, Bacon also branched out into new directions as well, including landscapes, a genre he had abandoned altogether between 1963 and 1978. His landscapes of the 1980s are particularly bold, reconciling the tension between abstraction and representation that animated the artist’s work across his career. Bacon also introduced a fresh astringency to these late works, deserting his densely layered compositions for a new clarity of line and color, which can be seen in *Street Scene (with Car in Distance)*, 1984, and *Painting March 1985*, 1985.



In Bacon’s final paintings, figures become all the more vulnerable, nearly consumed by the empty fields of raw canvas or flat color that surround them. *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings* will include his final triptych of 1991, as well as *Study of a Bull*, 1991, his last completed painting. Unseen for more than two decades, it resurfaced a few years ago from a private London collection and has been shown only once prior to this exhibition. In ill health and near the end of his life, Bacon unflinchingly faced mortality. “Dust seems to be eternal . . . the one thing that lasts forever,” he stated. “We all return to dust,” a sentiment underscored by the dust of his studio floor that he rubbed into this canvas.

“Bacon’s coming of age was bracketed by two world wars, and he found in the human form a vessel for beauty and tragedy,” said Alison de Lima Greene, the Isabel Brown Wilson Curator at the MFAH. “He celebrated the body’s corporeal physicality, while using his brush

with greater and greater economy in his final paintings. We see him strip his subjects to their most essential features, laying bare their psychological truths.”

Exhibition Catalogue

Francis Bacon: Late Paintings will be accompanied by the catalogue produced by the Centre Pompidou, *Francis Bacon: Books and Painting* with texts by Didier Ottinger, Chris Stephens, Miguel Egaña, Michael Peppiatt, and Catherine Howe.

Organization and Funding

This exhibition is organized by the Centre Pompidou, Musée national d’art moderne, Paris, in association with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston.

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The Houston presentation of this exhibition is curated by Alison de Lima Greene, Isabel Brown Wilson Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art, MFAH.

About the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Established in 1900, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is among the 10 largest art museums in the United States, with an encyclopedic collection of nearly 70,000 works dating from antiquity to the present. The Museum’s Susan and Faye S. Sarofim main campus comprises the Audrey Jones Beck Building, designed by Rafael Moneo and opened in 2000; the Caroline Wiess Law Building, originally designed by William Ward Watkin, with extensions by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe completed in 1958 and 1974; the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, designed by Isamu Noguchi and opened in 1986; the Glassell School of Art, designed by Steven Holl Architects and opened in 2018; and The Brown Foundation, Inc. Plaza, designed by Deborah Nevins & Associates in collaboration with Nevins & Benito Landscape Architecture, D.P.C., and opened in 2018. Additional spaces include a repertory cinema, two libraries, public archives, and facilities for conservation and storage. Nearby, two house museums—Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, and Rienzi—present American and European decorative arts. The MFAH is also home to the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), a leading research institute for 20th-century Latin American and Latino art. mfah.org

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Illustrations

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