

GAGOSIAN



FRANCIS BACON

Couplings

Opening reception: Thursday, June 6, 6–8pm
June 6–August 3, 2019
20 Grosvenor Hill, London

Francis Bacon, *Two Figures with a Monkey*, 1973, oil on canvas, 77 7/8 × 58 inches (198 × 147.5 cm) © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved, DACS/Artimage 2019. Photo: Prudence Cuming Associates Ltd

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The moment a number of figures become involved, you immediately come on to the storytelling aspect of the relationships between figures. And that immediately sets up a kind of narrative. I always hope to be able to make a great number of figures without a narrative.

—Francis Bacon

Gagosian is pleased to present *Couplings*, an exhibition of Francis Bacon's double-figure paintings.

Bacon's disturbing images—his portrayals of friends and fellow artists, and the deformations and stylistic distortions of classical subjects—radically altered the genre of figurative painting in the twentieth century. In Bacon's paintings, the human presence is evoked sometimes viscerally, at other times more fleetingly, in the form of a shadow or a blurred, watchful figure. In certain instances, the portrayal takes the form of a composite in which male and female bodily traits are transposed or fused. This selective exhibition explores a theme that preoccupied Bacon throughout his career: the relationship between two people, both physical and psychological.

At the heart of the exhibition are two of the most uninhibited images that Bacon ever painted: *Two Figures* (1953) and *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954). These interrelated works have not been seen publicly together since the major retrospective of Bacon's work at the Grand Palais, Paris, in 1971. After completing *Two Figures in the Grass*, Bacon did not return to the subject until 1967, the year that homosexual acts in private were decriminalized in England and Wales. That same year he painted *Two Figures on a Couch* (1967), which was last exhibited in London in 1968 and is also included in *Couplings*.

Finding that the physical presence of his subjects could prove inhibiting, Bacon painted his figures and portraits both from memory and from photographs—his own, as well as Eadweard Muybridge's dynamic studies of people in motion, including male wrestlers. Although Bacon was sometimes reluctant to specifically identify the subjects of his paintings, a number of the works in *Couplings* (a term the artist himself used) were inspired by his fraught, often violent and passionate relationships. His affair with Peter Lacy, a former fighter pilot whom he met in 1952, cooled off after Lacy moved to Tangier, Morocco, in 1956, where Bacon visited him every summer until 1961. But even after Lacy died in 1962, Bacon continued to paint portraits of him, recalling intensely intimate moments in their relationship. In 1963 Bacon met George Dyer, a petty criminal from London's East End. Dyer succeeded Lacy as Bacon's lover and model and was the inspiration for many of Bacon's grandest and most emotive paintings of the male nude. Three works in *Couplings* suggest a startlingly erotic and sometimes violent relationship between two men, such as the one Bacon and Dyer had: *Two Figures on a Couch*, the triptych *Three Studies of Figures on Beds* (1972), and *Two Figures with a Monkey* (1973)—the last two painted after Dyer's suicide in 1971.

This is Gagosian's third exhibition dedicated to Bacon's work, following *Francis Bacon: Late Paintings* (2015) and *Francis Bacon: Triptychs* (2006).

The gallery is deeply grateful to the private lenders to this exhibition, as well as to Leeds Art Gallery, England, and Museo Tamayo, Mexico City.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with a previously unpublished interview with Bacon by Richard Francis; an essay by Martin Harrison, author of the acclaimed Bacon catalogue raisonné; and an introduction by Richard Calvocoressi, senior curator at Gagosian. The catalogue will be released in October 2019, to coincide with Frieze London.

Francis Bacon was born in 1909 in Dublin, and died in 1992 in Madrid. His work is held in prominent public collections worldwide. Recent exhibitions include *Invisible Rooms*, Tate Liverpool, England (2016, traveled to Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, Germany); *Francis Bacon and the Art of the Past*, Hermitage, St. Petersburg, Russia (2014, traveled to Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich, England, under the title *Francis Bacon and the Masters*); *Five Decades*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney (2012); Tate Britain, London (2008, traveled to Museo del Prado, Madrid, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); *Portraits and Heads*, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, Scotland (2005, traveled to Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg, Germany).

#FrancisBaconCouplings

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