

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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A Life in the Day

The German artist *Georg Baselitz*, 76, on the appeal of painting older people and his nude self-portraits

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“I do get down and there are times when I feel very despondent. There is no need for it, really. It must be psychological. My doctor says I need to take Valium”

I always get up at 7 o'clock. No alarm clock — I just wake up. I brush my teeth, have a very cold shower and dress in the clothes I usually wear to paint. Breakfast is an espresso, a cappuccino, prosciutto, toast — and an egg every other day. I also have to take a handful of tablets first thing in the morning for a heart problem, to lower my cholesterol and thin my blood.

I live with my wife, Elke, in a village near Munich, in a house designed by the Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron. I commissioned them to build it 10 years ago and it is very modern, with lots of glass and a lake view of Ammersee. We don't have that much art around the place — just pictures of Egyptian mummies and a couple of paintings by Francis Picabia in the bedroom.

By 9 o'clock I am in my studio, which is just next door. It was built at the same time as the house, and it is like a hall — 40 metres in length, 20 metres in width and 10 metres high. I don't have assistants: I do everything myself and usually try to complete a whole painting in a morning. I work in oil, starting with a completely blank canvas measuring five metres by three. I place it on the floor and apply a white background.

I am currently painting a lot of nude self-portraits. For these, I take a photograph of myself naked and then, holding the photograph in my hand,

I paint it. I find the self-portrait much more compelling than I used to, probably because older people look a lot more interesting. It makes me think of the self-portrait by Lucian Freud where he is wearing nothing but a pair of slippers. The human body looks so morbid when you are old.

Lunch is at 12, but I eat very little — a prosciutto panino or something like that. I have no alcohol and eat very small portions, which I'll make up for in the evening. I then go back to the house for an hour. These days my life is strictly scheduled, and my wife is the one who keeps all my appointments, whether it's with someone from the gallery world or my doctor. She is also the head of our company and manages the office side of things. If she's not doing that, she's playing the piano.

Once my hour is up, I'm back in the studio again and paint until 5pm. As well as having a daily routine of doing my painting I also collect art, and one

of my biggest collections is of chiaroscuro woodcuts. I have collected them for more than 40 years and first came across them as a young artist, on a trip to Italy in the early 1960s. Woodcuts are a traditional German art form, and date back to the Middle Ages. But my collection is mostly Italian, when Renaissance artists used layers of coloured inks to create light and shadow.

Between 5 and 6, I play patience. I find card games absorbing and have been playing this particular one for years. You need to concentrate, you need to slow right down. Then at 6, we have our dinner. My wife's a great cook and she tends to cook Italian; three courses — antipasto, spaghetti and a meat dish, with white wine. We actually have a house in Imperia, which is on the Ligurian coast of Italy, and tend to divide our time between here and there.

Then I might watch television, but not for very long — just to see the news. I listen to classical music for half an hour, then spend two or three hours studying my books on art. I have a huge library: De Kooning, Picasso, Dix, Munch, a catalogue of Damien Hirst's last show — it's all material.

I'll go up to bed around 10pm — 11pm in winter. I attend to personal hygiene, and take my tablets. Then I read in bed. I have my favourite books, particularly classics by Goethe and Turgenev, and tend to read them over and over again. I do have problems sleeping and go through good and bad phases, but I always have lots of dreams. One of my standard dreams is that I can't find the toilet.

Basically, I know I have every reason to be happy with my life and the things I have achieved, but I do get down and there are times when I have felt very despondent. There is no need for it, really. It must be psychological. My doctor says I need to take Valium. But I don't have regrets. Looking back, I wouldn't do anything differently ■
Germany Divided: Baselitz and His Generation is at the British Museum until August 31. Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro Woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna, is at the Royal Academy until June 8