

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY



### How an Architect Designs a Blockbuster Art Show

Kat Herriman



*Works on display in the late artist Francis Bacon's new show at Gagosian Gallery include "Sand Dune" (1983). Oil and pastel on canvas, 78 x 58 inches/Fondation Beyeler/Photograph by Peter Schibli for Basel. The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved/DACS, London/ARS, NY 2015*

Opening this week, “Francis Bacon: Late Paintings,” a new exhibition at Gagosian’s Madison Avenue gallery, offers a comprehensive survey of the artist’s lesser-known later work. To create a setting worthy of the enterprise, Gagosian directors Valentina Castellani and Stefan Ratibor sought the expertise of a longtime collaborator: the architect Annabelle Selldorf.

The latest in a trio of shows dedicated to the painter’s legacy, this exhibition centers on the last two decades of Bacon’s life, featuring a collection of more than 25 pieces, including loans from institutions like MoMA and the Tate. Selldorf and the curators were forced to strategically navigate the strict installation stipulations attached to each piece — and still create a dynamic space for viewing. “It’s a great privilege to work with Valentina, because it really is a dialogue,” says Selldorf, who has worked alongside Castellani and the gallery on multiple projects. “My team and I really excel at anticipating the natural circulation of a space, but it’s her intimate knowledge that allows us to capitalize on the more profound relationships between the works.”

Due to the large-scale nature of Bacon's paintings and the constraints of the Upper East Side gallery, the layout is in part dictated by architecture. When choosing how to hang the works, Selldorf and Castellani abandoned the idea of a strict linear hierarchy. Instead, they used a scale model to decide on placements that would create a thematic rhythm. With the exhibition spread across two floors, maintaining a sense of continuity became key. Selldorf unified the spaces with color — opting for an atmospheric, grayish beige tone rather than the traditional whitewash. “We wanted a very calm background,” Selldorf says. “It is the quality of the work that makes the show exciting, so rather than creating additional noise, we really focused on making spaces that were quiet and measured in such a way that the focus of attention was on the paintings.”

Forecasting a high volume of visitors, Selldorf employed subtle lighting and strategic spacing to optimize the dimensions of each room. “It's very difficult to deal with crowds in such a confined space,” she says. “Rhythm, circulation, proportion and lighting are elements that factor not only into the art-viewing experience, but also into different modes of living. When all of the pieces are in balance, it's the best for everyone — and the biggest compliment to my work.”

*“Francis Bacon: Late Paintings” is on view from Nov. 7 – Dec. 12 at Gagosian Gallery, 980 Madison Ave., New York, [gagosian.com](http://gagosian.com).*