

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Wallpaper*

In the flesh: Francis Bacon's late paintings on show at New York's Gagosian Gallery

Brook Mason



20 of Francis Bacon's painting from the last two decade of his life are on show at New York's Gagosian Gallery. Pictured: Bacon's harrowing Triptych from 1991, © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. / DACS, London / ARS, NY 2015. Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/Licensed by SCALA / Art Resource, NY Photography by Thomas Griesel, courtesy Gagosian Gallery

When it comes to Francis Bacon, his searing paintings skyrocket into the stratosphere. After all, his 1969 *Three Studies of Lucien Freud* soared to a staggering \$142,404,992 at Christie's three years ago, and is probably now locked away in a Russian plutocrat's home.

But there's an alternative way to take in his artistry and it doesn't cost a fraction of that amount. The tormented artist's late paintings are front and centre this season at Gagosian Gallery on Madison Avenue. Showcased in the exhibition titled 'Francis Bacon: Late Paintings' are some 20 paintings that the artist created in London as well as Paris during the last two decades of this life.

Featured in this first in-depth exploration of this particular period of his oeuvre are loans from the Pompidou, the Beyeler, the Tate and even the Museu Coleção Berardo in Lisbon along with a number of private collectors. Further indication of the sheer quality of this show is that no less than seven of Bacon's monumental triptychs are included.

What's surprising is seeing Bacon's disturbing and violent figures up close, which are frequently lanced with what appears to be blood painted occasionally on a somewhat serene background in a palette ranging from yellow to rose. Another distinctive slant to this period is the degree to which the artist turned to spray-painting, and even sometimes a roller, rather than his ingrained bold brush strokes.

In his harrowing 1987 *Triptych*, the artist whittles down and strips his figures of all recognisable features, and in some cases, truncates the forms while rendering only flesh coloured shadows for a ghostly sense of movement.

As Gagosian director Valentina Castellani says, 'The human body reveals itself by its absence, as exemplified by the superb *Blood on Pavement*. Nothing remains of our existence but a stain of blood, a shadow on the ground.'