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GAGOSIAN



Screaming pope painting by Francis Bacon goes on display for first time

Hanna Rantala



A gallery assistant poses with a painting by Francis Bacon revealing the artist's first treatment of the papal image, exhibited for the first time since it was painted in 1946 at the Gagosian gallery in London, Britain, March 15, 2022. REUTERS/Hannah McKay

A dark Francis Bacon painting of a screaming pope, said to be the earliest in his series of papal depictions, went on display in London on Tuesday, the first time the artwork has been exhibited publicly.

The Dublin-born artist created the canvas, known as "Landscape with Pope/Dictator", in 1946 while living in Monaco. [read more](#)

It depicts a blurred, open-mouthed figure in a biretta, a traditional cap worn by Catholic clergy and wearing a politician's usual attire of a shirt and tie. A microphone stands in front of him and beneath are flowers.

Art gallery Gagosian, which is showing the work in its London Davies Street gallery, said it was "Bacon's first treatment of the papal image".

"Here you've got this sort of hybrid figure of a kind of papal clerical figure but at the same time, dressed in an ordinary secular suit and tie," Richard Calvocoressi, director and curator at the Gagosian gallery, said.

"So fusing these two figures of authority...on the one hand the pope, on the other hand, the dictator, the authoritarian figure is something that he pursued and carried on...for another 20 years, coming back to this idea."

The painting was recently discovered when British art historian and curator Martin Harrison compiled a catalogue of Bacon's work. The listing was published in 2016.

"It's never been in an exhibition. It went into a private collection in Italy in 1967 and really, this is its first public appearance since then," Calvocoressi said.

The painting is on show until April 23.