

London Landscape

Bacon – psychoanalyst for human solitude

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Tate Britain's exhibition of the work of Francis Bacon (1909–1992) is a major celebration heralding the artist's centenary in 2009. As the first UK retrospective since 1985, it affords a re-assessment of his work in the light of the new research that has emerged since the revelation of his studio and its contents following the artist's death.

Comprising around 65 paintings and covering the artist's career, including 13 large triptychs, the exhibition bring together the most important works from each period of his life. It is the largest display to date to examine Bacon's sources, processes and thoughts by an artist internationally regarded as Britain's greatest painter of the last century and the biggest one after Turner,

His paintings of the 1940s bore witness to the shattered psychology of the time and shot him to prominence that hardly diminished over the next 50 years. He captured sexuality, violence and isolation in his unflinching depictions of the anxieties of the modern condition.

The exhibition explores Bacon's philosophy that man is simply another animal in a godless world, subject to the same natural urges of violence, lust and fear that are physically evident in the body. Bacon's output was dominated by the human body.

His way of portraying the body was unique in the history of painting, usually in isolation, at moments of extreme tension or even pain, distorted like figures from a fantastical nightmare, indicating the isolation of human life without God just as an animal. So

humans are subject to the same natural urges of violence, lust and fear as any other animal.

He reveals the frailty of the human figure and the scream or cry that expresses repressed and violent anxieties. In one painting we see the distorted human figure where we recognise the famous crying nurse on the steps depicted in Eisenstein's movie 'Potemkin battleship' with broken glasses indicating the human shattered vision on a number of levels. Bacon said 'I like Freud very much because I like his way of explaining things between conscious and unconscious'. Along his works, we see a sense of dread pervading the brutality of everyday life in which he portrays humans as pathetically isolated.

In the final part of his life, dark openings consciously evoke the abyss of confrontation with mortality, the inevitability and constant presence of death, where the poetry of TS Eliot was a particular source of inspiration.

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