

# Francis Bacon: Human Presence [B2]

La National Portrait Gallery di Londra presenta una grande retrospettiva dei ritratti dell'artista anglo-irlandese, celebre per le sue potenti immagini sull'isolamento, la brutalità e il terrore.

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The Irish-born English painter Francis Bacon was born in October 1909 in Dublin, Ireland. His parents were both English. His father left the British army to become a horse trainer, while his mother's wealthy family owned a [steel](#) company. Francis had asthma and was allergic to horses; this, [claimed](#) the artist, disappointed his father.

## INSPIRATION

Francis was close to his grandmother, who lived in rural County Laois. Her beautiful rooms and ornate furniture later inspired his art. The Bacon family moved between England and Ireland many times. Francis was educated at home, but was thrown out in 1926 for [dressing up](#) in his mother's clothes. His parents gave him enough money to live on, however.

## ART CAREER

Bacon spent a lot of time [drifting around](#), but also taught himself to paint. He lived in Berlin and in Paris before [settling](#) in London in 1928. Many of Bacon's early paintings are based on images by other artists, which he then distorted. For example, he painted a screaming [nanny](#) from Soviet filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 silent film Battleship Potemkin, and also based work on studies of the human figure in motion by the English 19th-century photographer Eadweard Muybridge.

## FIGURATIVE

Most of Bacon's paintings are figurative. They show figures [smeared](#) in pink and red oil paint to create images of [rage](#) and horror. Among his most

famous works are Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion (1944) and a series called The Screaming [Popes](#) (1949-mid-1950s), based on Spanish artist Diego Velazquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X. Bacon also made self-portraits and portraits of his friends, including the painter Lucian Freud, and Bacon's boyfriend Peter Lacy.

## FRIENDS AND LOVERS

The artist believed that paintings should assault the nervous system [rather than](#) be understood. He said he wanted them to leave "a [trail](#) of the human presence and memory [trace](#) of past events as the [snail](#) leaves its [slime](#)." As abstract art was in vogue at the time, some critics found them conventional. In 1952, the English critic John Berger wrote that "Bacon's art is, in effect, conformist. It is not with Goya or Eisenstein that he should be compared, but with Walt Disney."

## ALCOHOLISM

Bacon enjoyed drinking. He painted in the mornings and spent the afternoons and evenings in bars. In 1962, he was told that his partner Peter Lacy had been found dead from drinking too much. In 1963, Bacon began a relationship with a model and thief called George Dyer, who became his muse. Dyer committed suicide by [overdosing](#) on drink and drugs in his and Bacon's Paris hotel bathroom in 1971. Bacon painted portraits of Dyer obsessively before and after his death. Bacon's international reputation [spread](#) In 1988, he famously had an exhibition in the USSR. Young British curator James Birch put on the show at the Central House of Artists in Moscow. It was the first time a British artist had appeared in an exhibition in the USSR since it became so in 1922. Bacon spent the last decades of his life painting, travelling and drinking. He died of pneumonia complicated by asthma while visiting a friend in Madrid in 1992.

## BACON'S STUDIO

Francis Bacon's art studio was at 7 Reece Mews in South Kensington, London. Bacon lived and worked in the studio from 1961 until his death in 1992. The studio was in extreme [disarray](#), but Bacon called it "ordered chaos". Paint was [smeared](#) on walls and there is evidence that Bacon cut up the [canvases](#) that he did not like, or reused them to make other paintings. There are also many photographs, papers, books, painting materials and tools, as well as many items of clothing, cultural artefacts and also objects. After Bacon's death the studio stayed as it was until 1998. That year, the Irish gallery director Barbara Dawson developed a project to move the whole studio to the Hugh Lane Gallery (also called Dublin City Gallery) in Dublin. After [securing](#) its donation from the Francis Bacon Estate and Bacon's inheritor, a team of conservators, curators and archaeologists made detailed drawings of the studio and where all the objects and [debris](#) were located. The walls, doors, floor and ceiling were also removed. In total, over seven thousand objects from the original artist's studio were carefully transferred from London to Dublin. The space opened to the public in 2001.

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# Glossary

- **settling** = stabilirsi
- **nanny** = bambinaia
- **Popes** = papi
- **debris** = detriti
- **smeared** = macchiare
- **rage** = rabbia, collera
- **slime** = bava
- **overdosing** = fare eccesso di alcol e droghe
- **spread** = diffondersi
- **disarray** = in disordine
- **steel** = acciaio
- **claimed** = sostenere, affermare
- **dressng up** = vestirsi
- **snail** = lumaca
- **drifting around** = essere in giro alla deriva
- **rather than** = piuttosto che
- **trail** = impronta
- **trace** = traccia
- **canvases** = tele
- **securing** = ottenere