



REVIEW: Bacon and Rodin at Ordovas



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The first exhibition dedicated to the connections between the work of Francis Bacon and Auguste Rodin opens tomorrow at Ordovas on Savile Row. The show, which features three works from each artist, pivots on research that suggests a series of reclining figures by Bacon were inspired by two of the sculptor's creations: *Figure volante* and *Iris, messagère des dieux* (both 1890–91).

A cast of the latter is shown at the gallery, adjacent to one of the works from Bacon's series, *Lying Figure* (1959). Rodin's metre-high bronze is, for its time, particularly provocative in its portrayal of the female body; while one leg is on the ground, the other is held up tightly by the arm, so that the limbs are splayed and genitals exposed. The head and the left arm of the torso are intentionally absent, an echo of ancient sculpture. Bacon's abstracted figure is in a similarly distressed position, lying on its back, its legs jutting at impossible angles like a piece of mangled meat.



Francis Bacon, 'Lying Figure', 1959. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2013.



Auguste Rodin, 'Iris, messagère des dieux', conceived circa 1890-91. Photographed by Mike Bruce.

The subtitle of the show is 'Movement and Gravity', and if Rodin captured a physical body beautifully frozen in movement of unlikely but compelling balance, the movement of Bacon's painting concerns that of internal life: the mental flux of the human represented and the artist who represents them.

It is interesting to imagine Rodin informed by Bacon and not the other way around, so that some of Francis's angst spreads to Auguste. For example, once one studies Bacon's *Miss Muriel Belcher* (1959), which shows a head in profile whose features are eviscerated by gestural marks, the indistinct face of Rodin's figure *Iris, etude avec tête* appears similarly disfigured by emotion.

The exhibition also includes the *Three Studies from the Human Body* (1967): on a black expanse, one young male figure hangs from a pole, another resembling Bacon's lover George Dyer curls into a ball, a third older figure sits towards us, one of his legs in plaster.

The gallery's director, Pilar Ordovas, suggested to me that this could be Bacon musing on the three ages of man as he reached his sixties. But the link to Rodin seemed unclear, especially once I read in the handsome exhibition catalogue that they were more likely a response to Goya's 'Black Paintings'. But it is an intriguing work, and worth the visit while it's on view at Ordovas: the canvas has not been exhibited in 40 years and has never been shown in this country before.



Francis Bacon, 'Three Studies from the Human Body', 1967. © The Estate of Francis Bacon. All rights reserved. DACS 2013.

- **Movement and Gravity: Bacon and Rodin in dialogue** is at Ordovas from 8 February until 6 April 2013.

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