



Dear Reader,

We hope this finds you well and enjoying summer now that it's finally here!

This week we're excited about not one, but two recent films about Bacon; the second in the Estate of Francis Bacon's series of filmed interviews, [FRANCIS BACON: FIRST IMPRESSIONS](#), with Bella Freud, and the latest HENI Talk, [FRANCIS BACON: REVELATIONS](#), with Pulitzer Prize-winning authors Mark Stevens and Annalyn Swan.

This week's Long Read features a review of [Ordovas Gallery's WILD LIFE: FRANCIS BACON AND PETER BEARD](#) by artist and writer Alex Papachristou, who visited the Mayfair gallery last month.

THE CHEERIO LONG READ



For this week's Long Read, Alex Papachristou reviews [Ordovas Gallery's](#) current exhibition, [WILD LIFE: FRANCIS BACON AND PETER BEARD](#). The exhibit explores the friendship between Bacon and his long-time friend and muse, the artist Peter Beard (1938–2020) who, despite working on different sides of the world, shared deeply similar personal and creative passions. Works from the period of the two artists' friendship are shown side by side for the first time, along with unseen materials from Beard's archives including letter & photographs gifted to Bacon, and Beard's diaries, which served as the genesis for his art. The exhibition is on until 16 July.

WILD LIFE: FRANCIS BACON AND PETER BEARD



12 art works politely line the pristine walls of the Ordovas main gallery. The atmosphere is civil, but something predacious is near.

The disembodied voice of Francis Bacon languorously fills the space, and around a corner a projection can be seen in which Bacon sits in conversation with long-time friend and muse, the artist Peter Beard.

This is 'Wild Life', the Spring Exhibition at the Ordovas Gallery, London, which explores the work and friendship of Francis Bacon and Peter Beard. With only two works from the former, however, it feels more like an examination of Beard's genius, and perhaps rightly so, too; he is an artist who has had little representation in recent years, unlike his far more famous artist friend.



On first inspection these works seem ambivalent to your gaze, like a cool cat resting in the shade - Bacon looks off camera as he is snapped sitting by the Thames. The photo, nice enough for any proud mother's mantelpiece, does not hold your attention long; it is the unusual peripheral framing that draws you in. A collage of tiny photographs repeats variations on the same theme; dead elephants.

Stuck down in a sea of ink and blood, with tiny scribbles and notes in the margins, these details demand your focus and immediacy; the cat becomes the lion and through the tall grass, pounces. Suddenly, you are no longer at 'a rather nice exhibition in Mayfair, thank you very much', but somewhere far deadlier. You feel you are in the predatory planes of Africa as well as the darkest recesses of Bacon and Beard's compulsions, thoughts and obsessions.



Africa, the third party in this relationship, fascinated the pair. The Western portrayal of the continent as other and exotic was the genesis for Beard and Bacon's kinship, yet it was the artists' mutual disdain of poaching and killing animals that pervaded years of conversation and letter writing between the two.

'I think some of the most interesting things that are kept are things like diaries and police records,' declares Bacon as you pass the projected conversation and make your way to the downstairs gallery.

Here, the famous aerial images of dead elephants, photographs Beard took by plane having been denied access by land, are presented alongside his diary from the time. The horror and the beauty of these decomposing giants is instantly arresting and appear like the scene of a crime. Their remains lie rotting, with their tusks, the very things they were hunted for, proudly, ironically, on display. All that's missing is a chalk outline.



These works are impressive, complex, cryptic and multi-layered, yet we are quickly reminded by Beard that 'This is normal work - it's like any other', as an image of a subtitled factory worker is lifted and placed onto his colour print, 'Crying Boy Diary Pages'.

A year after his death could this be the first of many insights into Beard's multifaceted oeuvre? Pilar Ordoñas promises it will be. I hope so.