

DAZED



Francis Bacon and Peter Beard photographed in the 1970s Courtesy of The Estate of Peter

Exploring the relationship between Francis Bacon and his muse Peter Beard

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY - LIGHTBOX

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Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard



Remembering his first meeting with Francis Bacon, photographer Peter Beard wrote in his 1967 diary, "I was at one of his openings at the Marlborough Gallery in London where he was standing in some kind of reception line and I simply said, 'Hi – Peter Beard.' He said, 'I know who you are.'"

From that moment, a rich and long-lasting friendship between the two legendary figures began. A new exhibition at London's Ordovas gallery, *Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard*, considers this mutually creative relationship and how both men touched and influenced each other's work.

The handsome New York-born photographer became a muse for Bacon, who painted nine major portraits of Beard alongside several others clearly inspired by his unmistakable chiselled features. Many photographs of him were found among what Bacon called his "compost" – the thousands of images collected in piles all over the painter's littered studio floor.

Best known for photographing African wildlife, Beard also supplied Bacon with inspirational images of the natural world in all its appropriately Baconesque horror. "Over the years, Peter Beard has given me many of his beautiful photographs," the artist recalled. "For me, the most poignant are the ones of decomposing elephants where, over time, as they disintegrate, the bones form magnificent sculptures, which are not just abstract forms, but have all the memory traces of life's futility and despair."

Reciprocally, Bacon contributed to Beard's prolific diaries by sending him mementoes from his "compost" to include amongst their pages. And it was as a result of their correspondence about the "bestial nature of man" that Beard was galvanised to continue his book *The End of the Game* (1963), documenting the terrible plight of the African elephant and other Kenyan wildlife.

Beard conducted a series of interviews with Bacon in 1972, parts of which were later published in the catalogue for Bacon's 1975 exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The "Dead Elephant Interviews", as they came to be known, cast an illuminating light on what's been described as the "open and curious exchange of ideas" that existed between the two long-time friends.

Wild Life, now open at London's Ordovas gallery on Saville Row, features many excerpts and recordings from the previously unpublished "Dead Elephant Interviews" along with photographs, diaries, and letters from Beard's archive. The exhibition also includes Bacon's "Two Studies for Portrait" (1976), on display for the first time since 1977, and shown alongside the photo of Beard from which it was painted.

Take a look through the gallery above for some of the special artefacts and artworks on display in the exhibition.

Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard is showing at London's Ordovas gallery until July 16