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## PETER BEARD + FRANCIS BACON

*Their Friendship and Shared Creativity*



BY: RAMONA DUOBA

**Francis Bacon** and **Peter Beard** were two prolific artists whose boundless creativity brought them together and formed their friendship's foundation. Francis Bacon, the Irish-born painter, was known for his unsettling imagery. His work focused on the human form, the traumatized side of humanity, abstract, violently distorted, and isolated. Photographer Peter Beard left for Kenya after graduating from Yale University for what would become a life-long love affair with the continent. The two men shared a passion for nature and conservation and were often subjects in each other's work. Bacon once said of his friend Peter, "Over the years, Peter Beard has given me many of his beautiful photographs. 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."

Francis Bacon was 82-years-old when he died in 1992. In March 2020, Peter Beard wandered from his Montauk, New York home, and his body was recovered almost three weeks later. He was 82 and suffered from dementia. ***Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard*** at the ***Ordovas Gallery*** in London shows the works from the period of the two artists' friendship, side by side for the first time. In an interview with **PROVOKR, Pilar Ordovas**, Founder of Ordovas and Curator of *Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard*, provides insight into the two artists and their complex and creative passion for their work.

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## **RD: How did Peter Beard and Francis Bacon come to be friends?**

**Pilar Ordovas:** The two artists met at one of Bacon's openings at the Marlborough Gallery in London in 1967. As Beard describes it, he simply said, "Hi – Peter Beard," to which Bacon replied, "I know who you are." Bacon had purchased a copy of Beard's book 'The End of the Game' and connected over the plight of Africa's elephants. The two quickly became friends from there.

## **RD: Francis Bacon was 29 years older than Peter Beard; besides their creative passions, what was their common bond?**

**PO:** Francis Bacon and Peter Beard not only shared a passion for wildlife, specifically elephants but were also linked by their creative passions. Initially, they bonded over their shared connection to Africa. Bacon first visited southern Africa in January 1951 to reunite with his mother and his two sisters who had emigrated there, separately, in the 1940s. He was fascinated by the sight of wild animals moving through the veldt, which manifested in many of his large-scale paintings over the following years. Beard's poignant images of Africa and its wildlife really resonated with Bacon and formed the basis of their strong friendship. But they also connected over their shared artistic pursuits. They both wrestled with questions surrounding photography and forensic documentation in the twentieth century; many of their conversations revolved around this topic and other questions of representation.



Peter Beard, P.B Diary 1986 at 7 Reece Mews, London, 1986 – with Francis Bacon + brush, 1986/1993 © The Estate of Peter Beard

**RD: Can you explain the similarities between the two artists?**

**PO:** A dialogue with photography was crucial to Bacon's practice, and Beard was similarly engaged in an unorthodox dialogue with the medium. They shared complex views on art in general, beauty, conservation, mankind, death, and a myriad of other topics that manifested in their artwork. They served as both model and muse to one another over the decades, and understanding their relationship brings a deeper understanding of their respective work.

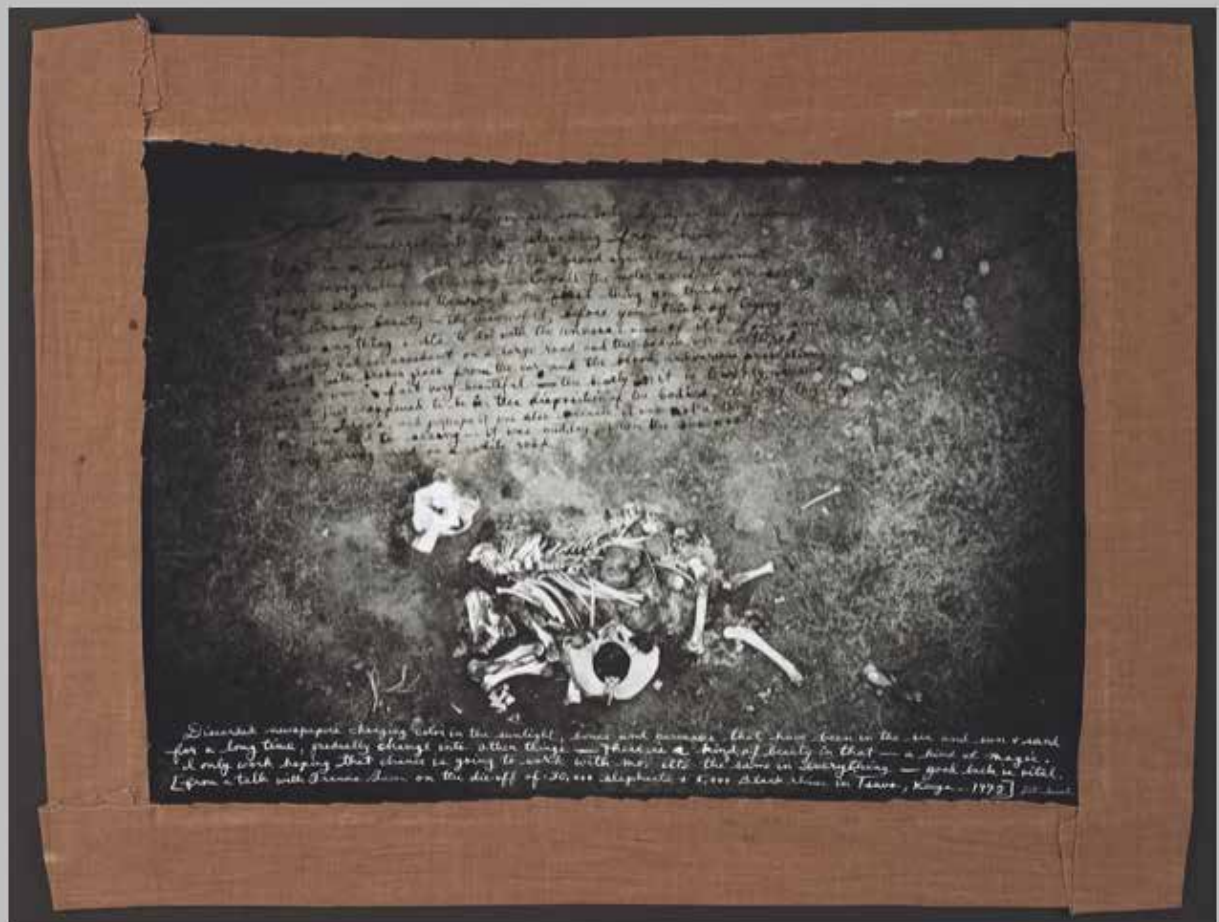
**RD: I understand Peter Beard was the one person allowed to photograph Francis Bacon's work in progress. Why do you think Bacon trusted or felt comfortable with Beard in his studio?**

**PO:** Bacon and Beard were close friends who shared similar sensibilities when it came to art and art-making, and both understood the importance of photography and its complicated role as a form of documentation, and perhaps that made Bacon feel more comfortable around Beard than others.

## RD: What was the genesis of the Wild Life exhibition?

PO: Nejma Beard visited Ordo Vas New York with Sophie Pretorius in December 2018 to see our show 'Bacon's Women,' and we spoke about Beard and Bacon's friendship and the possibility of dedicating an exhibition to this unexplored relationship. At the beginning of 2019, I visited the Peter Beard archives, in particular, to see the Bacon-related material.

Since Ordo Vas was founded in 2011, every exhibition has been the result of academic engagement or connection with an artist, a subject, or a historical period which we feel has been overlooked. A number of these exhibitions have focused on different aspects of Francis Bacon's work, including the inaugural show in 2011; Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard continues on in that vein.



Peter Beard, ICP Dead Elephant, 1971-2/1977 © The Estate of Peter Beard

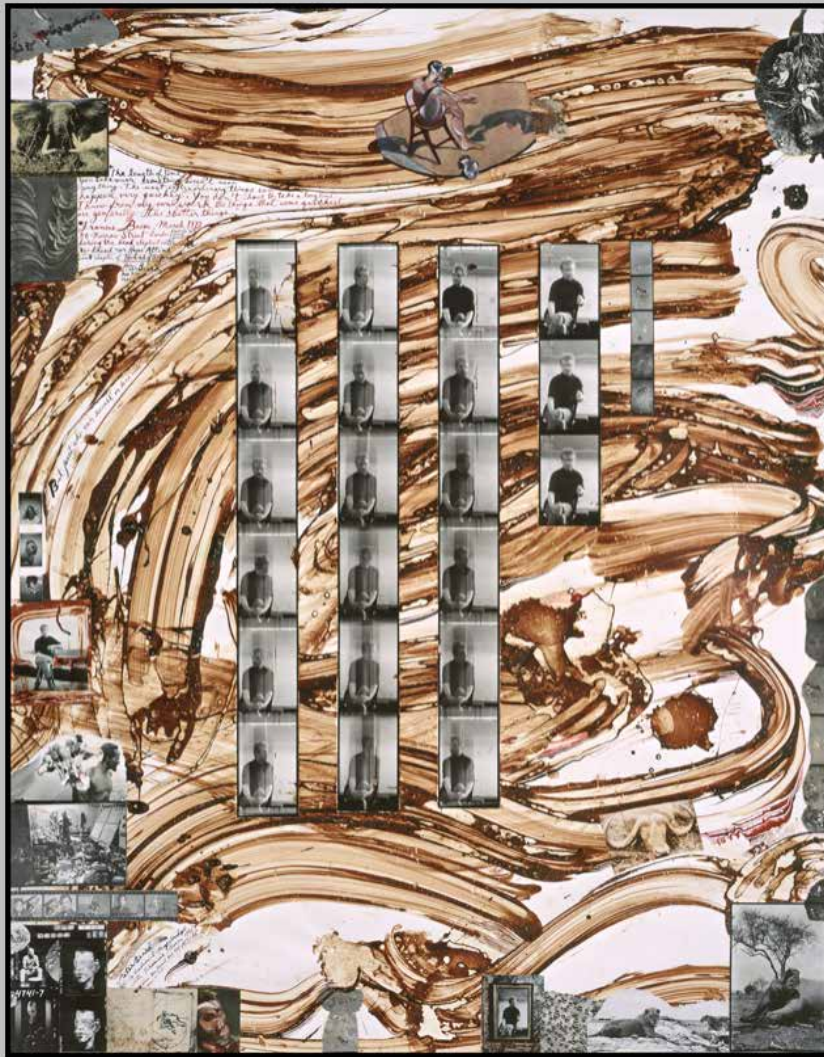
**RD: While your gallery and the whole art world manage the pandemic protocols, what kind of response have you received from viewers of the virtual exhibition?**

**PO:** We have received a wonderful response to the online component of our exhibition. Intended as a companion to, rather than a replacement for, the physical exhibition, which we hope to open to the public as soon as government guidelines allow, The Diary is a space where we can delve deeper into the friendship between the two artists and share some never-before-seen archival material.

**Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard** on view at [Ordovas Gallery](#)



Francis Bacon and Peter Beard photographed during 'The Dead Elephant Interviews'. 1972



Peter Beard, Ode to Eadweard Muybridge with Francis Bacon, plus "Nor Dread Nor Hope Attend"  
8 hrs on tape, March, 1972/2005 © The Estate of Peter Beard

TAGS: FRANCIS BACON, MIXED MEDIUM, PETER BEARD