

Wild Life



Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard
Jan 25th 2021 – May 8th 2021, Ordovas

Wild Life: Francis Bacon and Peter Beard, explores the friendship between Francis Bacon (1909–1992) and his longtime 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. Organised in collaboration with Peter Beard's Estate, the exhibition is intended as a celebration of Beard's life. Works from the period of the two artists' friendship will be shown side by side for the first time, along with unseen materials from Beard's archives including letters and photographs gifted to Bacon, and, most importantly, Beard's diaries, which served as the genesis for his art.

Francis Bacon and Peter Beard first met in 1967. Beard recalled, '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." It was my very great luck that he had just bought *The End of the Game* and connected with the doomed pachyderms.' The two became close friends and admirers of each other's work and served as one another's subjects on many occasions over the years.

Francis Bacon liked to paint portraits of his sitters from photographs, and he was particularly drawn to sitters with good bone structure; happily, Peter Beard was able to provide both. Bacon painted nine major portraits of Beard and myriad others inspired by his face. From time to time, Beard sent Bacon photographs of himself to work from and to add to what Beard called Bacon's 'compost' (the thousands of images piled on Bacon's studio floor). Bacon would also occasionally give Beard bits of this 'compost' for his diaries and was even photographed signing one of Beard's diaries in the 1980s.

The exhibition includes many works related to the two artists' shared concerns about conservation. Upon Bacon's death in 1992, many hundreds of Peter Beard's images were found in the former's 'compost'. These included Beard's celebrated series of aerial photographs of dead elephant carcasses that formed the basis of the last chapter of the 1977 edition of *The End of the Game*, which had Bacon's input and recorded the mass elephant deaths caused by misguided conservational efforts. We are privileged to be able to show correspondence between the artists as well as other archival material, and to exhibit the *Dead Elephant Diary*. Beard kept diaries throughout his life, which are extraordinary works of art in themselves, full of images, drawings, annotations and collage elements; as its name suggests, this diary relates to the *Dead Elephant* series.