

Irrational Marks: Bacon and Rembrandt

Ordovas, London

The starting point for this small, museum-quality show is Irving Penn's photograph of Francis Bacon in his studio with a paint-splattered image of Rembrandt's "Self-portrait with Beret" behind him. Bacon was obsessed with that Rembrandt, where, "you will see that there are hardly any sockets to the eyes, that it is almost completely anti-illustrational. I think that the mystery of fact is conveyed by an image being made out of non-rational marks . . . of course, only part of this is accidental. Behind all that is Rembrandt's profound sensibility, which was able to hold on to one irrational mark rather than another."

Bacon's own art is based on trying to reconcile chaos and order, and "accidental" marks with the appearance of "fact" – creating a new figuration, post-photography, in the distrusting age of abstraction. In her inaugural show, Pilar Ordovas juxtaposes Rembrandt's "Self-portrait with Beret", borrowed from Aix-en-Provence, with privately owned Bacon self-portraits, some rarely seen, as well as pieces such as the desperately charged, violently distorted triptych "Three Studies for Portraits, including Self-Portrait" (1969), and the



Francis Bacon's
'Study for Self-Portrait' (1973)

brusque right-facing profile "Study for Self-Portrait" (1973) with a prominent watch marking the passage of time.

Together, they suggest how Bacon looked to the Dutch master in his visual experiments. This is a moving,

mesmerising, show, whose self-portraits recall a favourite quotation of Bacon from Cocteau: "each day in the mirror, I watch death at work".
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