

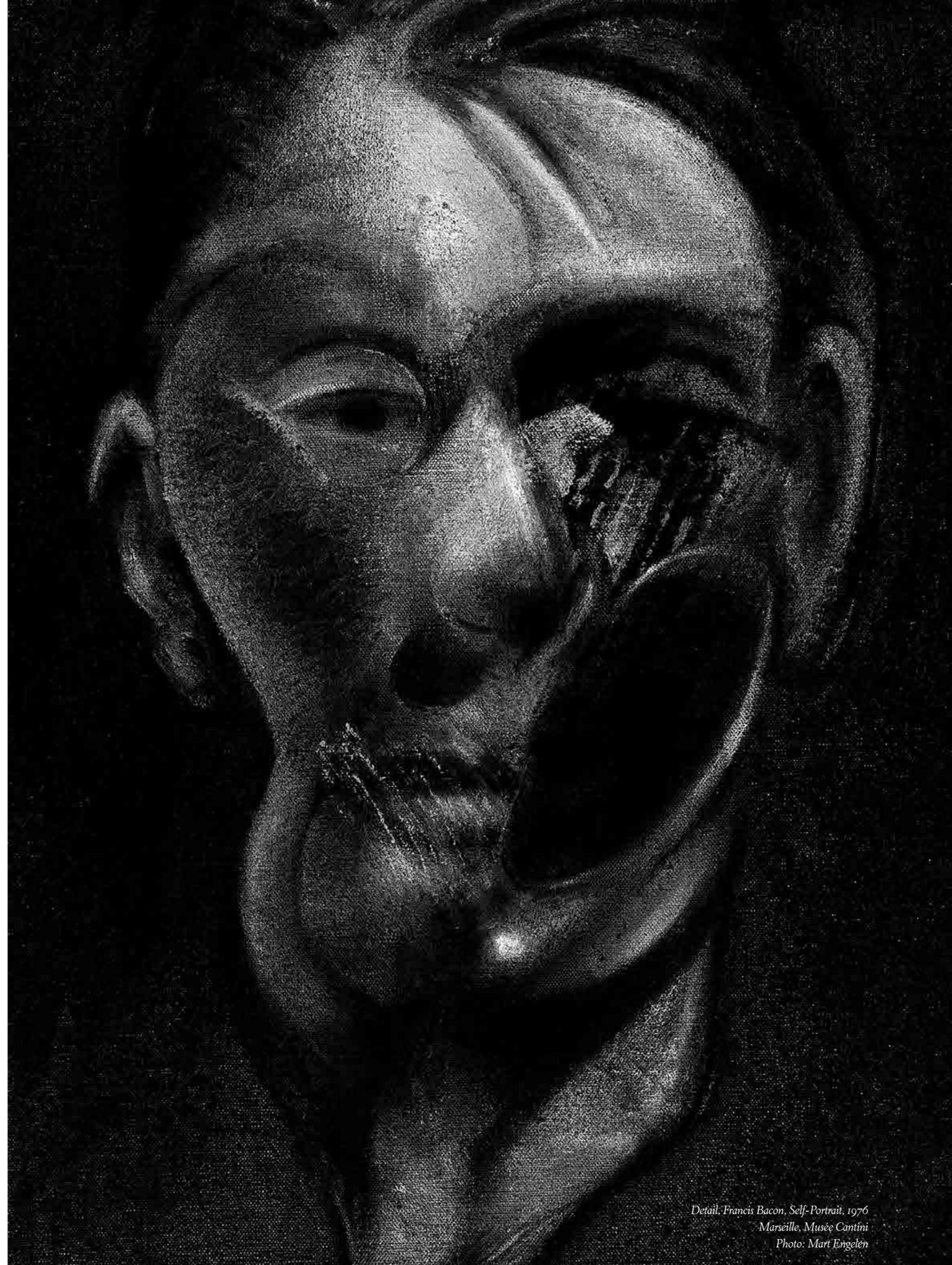
Francis Bacon

Majid Boustany, founder of the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation, talks to Mart Engelen about the artist's life, work and vision and love of Monaco. The MB Art Foundation was inaugurated by Prince Albert II of Monaco in 2014 on 28 October the anniversary of the painter's birth. This non-profit organisation is dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding of Francis Bacon's work, life and creative process around the world, with a particular focus on the time the artist lived and worked in Monaco and France. Since it opened, the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation has worked with local and international institutions, supporting a variety of projects, awarding scholarships to researchers and artists, publishing books on Bacon and taking part in various exhibitions and lectures dedicated to the British painter. The Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation was involved with the extraordinary Francis Bacon/Bruce Nauman – Face to Face Exhibition held at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier from 1 July to 5 November 2017, lending two works by Bacon, *Figure with monkey* (1951) and *Study for a Portrait* (1979), and supplying several photographs from its archive for the exhibition catalogue and the museum website.

Interview by Mart Engelen

Photography by Mart Engelen and Edward Quinn (p 28-29, 36-37, 40-41)

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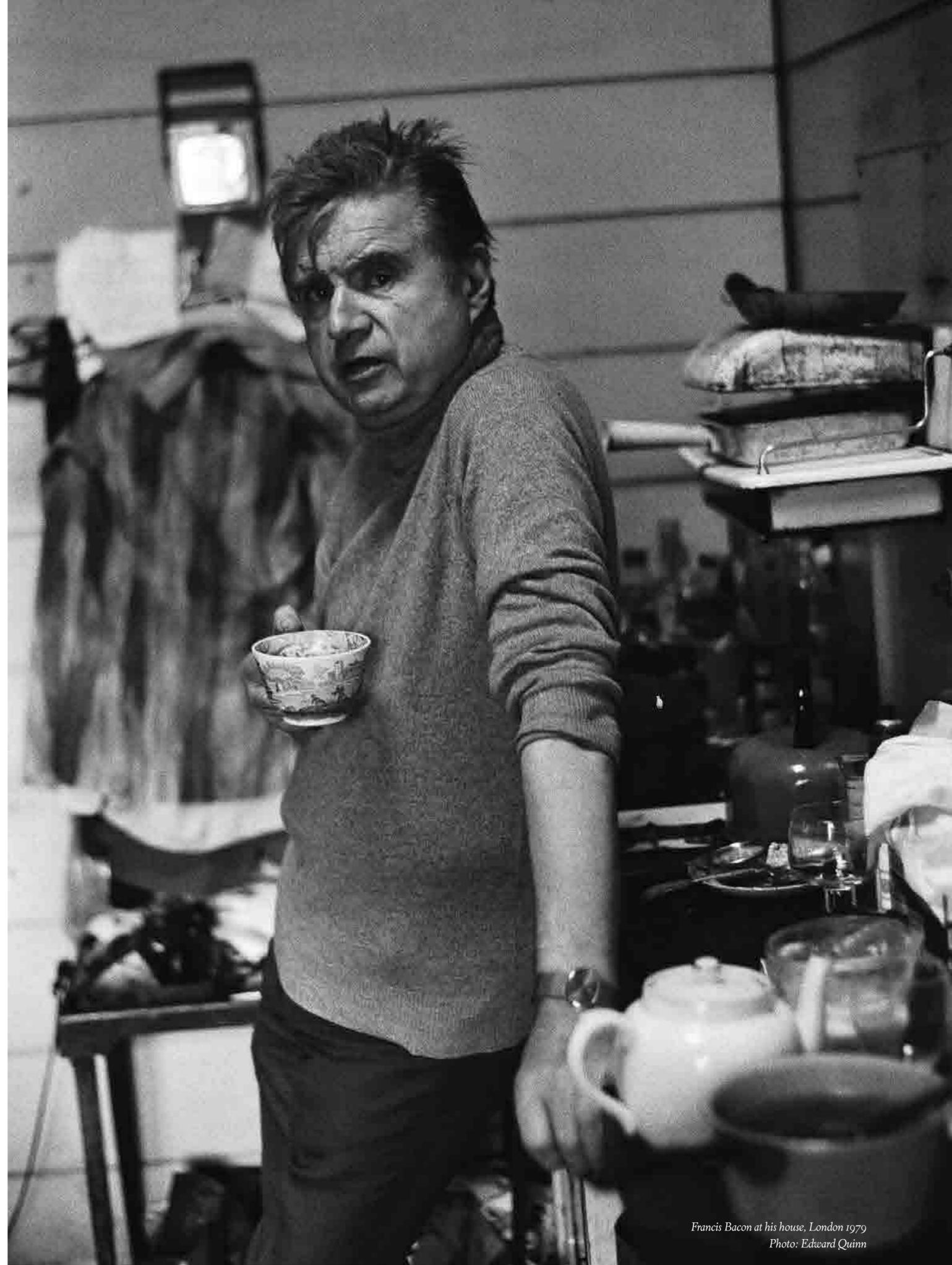
Detail, Francis Bacon, *Self-Portrait*, 1976

Marseille, Musée Cantini

Photo: Mart Engelen



Francis Bacon in his studio, London 1979
Photo: Edward Quinn



Francis Bacon at his house, London 1979
Photo: Edward Quinn



Left and Right: Detail, Francis Bacon
In Memory of George Dyer, 1971, Beyeler Foundation,
Riehen / Basel – Beyeler Collection
Photo: Mart Engelen

Mart Engelen: How and when did your interest in Francis Bacon and his work start?

Majid Boustany: My first encounter with Francis Bacon's oeuvre goes back to my academic years in London in the early 1990s. While pursuing my academic studies in business and international relations, I enrolled in a short course in history of art. During a visit to the Tate Gallery, I was confronted with Bacon's enigmatic triptych *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944), which challenged interpretation and triggered in me the need to explore his world. My immersion into the artist's work, life and creative process started in those years and continues to this day.

ME: Can you describe Bacon's relationship with Monaco throughout the years?

MB: We know that Bacon started visiting Monaco at the dawn of the 1940s. In 1946, Erica Brausen, who was to become his art dealer from 1948, purchased *Painting 1946* from the artist for £200. With the proceeds from the sale, Bacon left London to settle in Monaco with his nanny Jessie Lightfoot and Eric Hall, his lover and patron. The Principality became his main residence from July 1946 to the early 1950s. From the 1950s to the early 1990s, the painter frequently visited Monaco and the French Riviera with his lovers, friends and family.

It was in Monaco that the self-taught artist began to concentrate on the representation of the human form, a decisive step that would lead him to be recognised as one of the major figurative artists of the twentieth century. It was also there that Bacon embarked on his papal figures (mainly inspired by the Diego Velázquez *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*) and his 'head' series, and initiated new working practices. A seasoned gambler, he spent whole days gambling at the Monte Carlo Belle Époque Casino. During his various trips to Monaco in the 1970s and 1980s, he could often be seen with his circle of friends in the Casino gardens, on the terrace of the Café de Paris, at the Chatham Bar, and at Pulcinella or Le Pinocchio restaurants.

ME: And was this also the basis for starting your foundation in Monaco?

MB: Contemplating Bacon's attachment to and fascination with Monaco, and after having studied the poignant, timeless work of the British painter for a number of years, I started to dream of a concrete project in his memory. The creation of a Foundation in Monaco, dedicated to this singular artist, seemed obvious to me. In 2010 I initiated the project thanks to the pivotal support of H.S.H. Prince Albert II

of Monaco and the Monegasque authorities. The Estate of Francis Bacon encouraged this unique initiative and Martin Harrison, editor of the artist's catalogue raisonné, is on the Foundation's board. On 28 October 2014, the anniversary of the painter's birth, the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation was inaugurated by the Sovereign.

Our foundation is dedicated to promoting a deeper understanding of the work, life and creative process of Francis Bacon worldwide, with a particular focus on the time the artist lived and worked in Monaco and France. It is open to researchers, and to the public throughout the year, by appointment only. It provides a singular way for visitors to immerse themselves in Bacon's oeuvre, by offering them a free guided tour through which they can discover about one hundred pieces of my collection. Since its opening, the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation has supported a variety of projects: it has awarded scholarships to researchers and artists, published books on Bacon and taken part in various exhibitions and lectures dedicated to the British painter, in conjunction with local and international institutions.

ME: What do you consider to be the most precious artwork in your collection?

MB: Over a number of years I have been building a comprehensive collection that now includes over 2500 items dedicated to Francis Bacon. It encompasses paintings by Bacon, a unique photographic archive on the artist, a comprehensive collection of his exhibition catalogues, a wide selection of the painter's graphic works, various working documents from Bacon's studios and rare items from his furniture and rug designer period. The foundation headquarters also houses an extensive library dedicated to the painter, offering an essential source for scholars.

I cherish each and every item of my collection and I have acquired some rare pieces such as the earliest surviving painting by Francis Bacon, *Watercolour* (1929), a unique work once owned by Eric Alden, his companion and first collector, and by the Australian artist Roy de Maistre who was arguably Bacon's most formative mentor. I have also purchased a rug designed by Bacon entitled *Composition* (1929), one of only seven rugs that have survived from his furniture and rug designer period. *'Figure Crouching'* (1949), the earliest crouching figure executed by the artist, is among my favourite paintings in the collection. The nude figure, perhaps a self-portrait of the artist, is isolated in a three-dimensional transparent cage. This work might have been painted in Monaco.



Francis Bacon, Figure with monkey, 1951, MB Art Collection



Interior, Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation Monaco

ME: Can you tell me more about your participation in the current exhibition at the Musée Fabre 'Francis Bacon/Bruce Nauman. Face to Face'?

MB: The Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation took part in the 'Francis Bacon/Bruce Nauman. Face to Face' exhibition held at the Musée Fabre in Montpellier from 1 July to 5 November 2017. This exhibition brought together two artists who worked using quite distinct, sometimes even opposing, means, in order to allow a renewed reading, a revived understanding of these two major twentieth century figures. It was curated by Cécile Debray, curator at the Centre Pompidou, and organised around an important group of about ten works by Bacon from the collection of the Musée national d'Art moderne, lent within the framework of the Centre Pompidou's 40th anniversary. On this occasion our institution lent two works by Francis Bacon: *Figure with Monkey* (1951) and *Study for a Portrait* (1979). We have also supplied several photographs from our archive for the exhibition catalogue and the museum website.

ME: Quite a few important artists make their interpretation,

inspiration of Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X*. Can you tell me more how you think Bacon's feelings and approach to this important work was?

MB: Francis Bacon considered Diego Velázquez to be the greatest of all artists. When talking about Velázquez's *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650), the British artist stated: "I've always thought this was one of the greatest paintings in the world and I've had a crush on it". This papal figure obsessed and haunted Bacon for years. He perceived it as factual, powerfully formal and unlocking valves of sensations at various levels. He particularly loved its magnificent colours. Bacon's first attempt at reinventing the Velázquez pope was initiated in Monaco in 1946. Between 1946 and 1971, he produced over 50 papal variations mainly inspired by the Spanish master's painting. Though he was an atheist, Bacon was obsessed throughout his life by religious imagery and painted a series of works on the crucifixion and pope themes.

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Francis Bacon, *Walking Figure*, 1960
Dallas Museum of Art
Photo: Mart Engelen



Francis Bacon, *Study for a Portrait*, 1979
Monaco, Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation,
MB Art Collection
Photo: Mart Engelen