

BOOKS

Reviews // News

Photographs, psychoanalysis and sex

Francis Bacon seen from varied perspectives on his work and influences. By **Alexander Adams**

Majid Boustany, ed
Francis Bacon: Study for a Portrait
 Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation, 308pp,
 €295 (hb)

Didier Ottinger, ed
Francis Bacon: Books and Painting
 Thames & Hudson, 242pp, £39.95 (hb)

Ben Ware, ed
Francis Bacon Studies II: Francis Bacon: Painting, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis
 The Estate of Francis Bacon/
 Thames & Hudson, 176pp, £28 (pb)

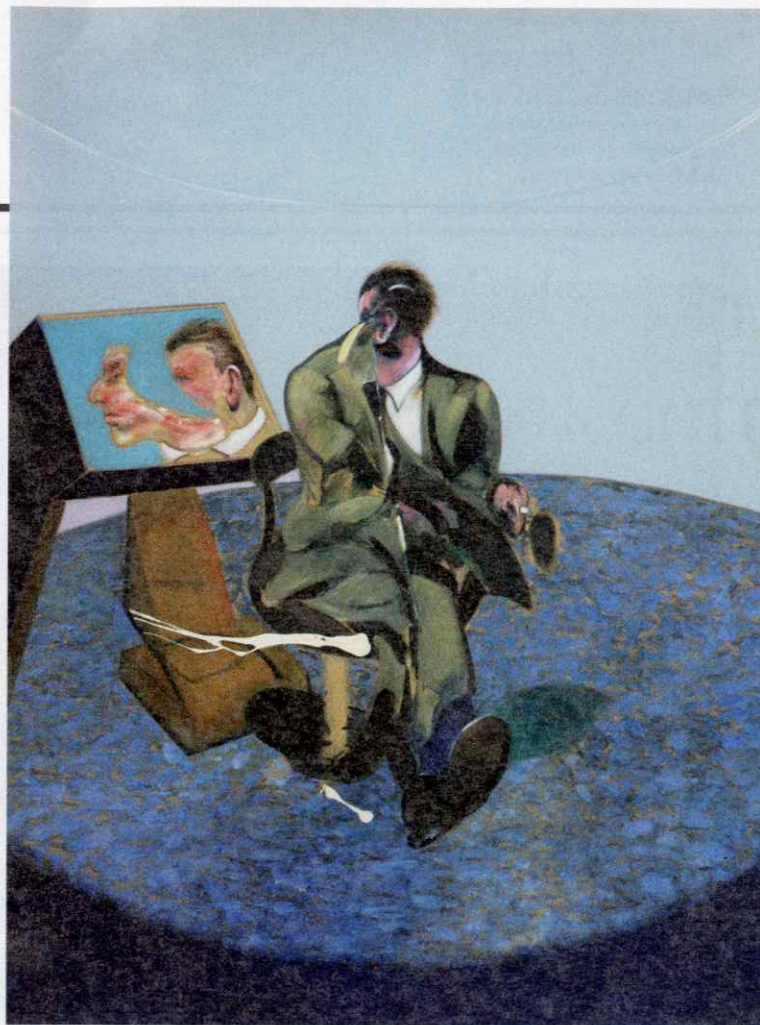
Richard Calvocoressi and Martin Harrison
Francis Bacon: Couplings
 Gagosian, 100pp, \$100 (hb)

Standing head and shoulders above other books in this clutch of recent titles about Francis Bacon is *Francis Bacon: Study for a Portrait*. Published by the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation, Monaco, this book reproduces a unique selection of photographs of the artist. Majid Boustany, the founder of this non-profit foundation, says the book

draws from “the foundation’s unique photographic archive [including] over 700 prints of Bacon by more than 70 photographers, ranging from portraits by eminent photographers to rare snapshots caught by his inner circle”. Photographs start in 1929 and run up to just months before the artist’s death.

Published alongside the images are quotations by photographers of their experiences capturing Bacon on film; Bacon scholar Martin Harrison explains connections between Bacon and some of the photographers. This exquisite, absorbing book includes the Baconian orange cloth spine and elegant black endpapers, testament to the foundation’s characteristic attention to detail. Each book comes with a signed, numbered print of a Bacon photograph by Michel Nguyen. The edition is limited to 584 copies (the number of paintings in Bacon’s catalogue raisonné), each numbered and including a photographic print. Only 300 are available for sale through the foundation, the Centre Pompidou and the Photographers’ Gallery, London.

Photographs of Bacon besieged at a vernissage remind us of how the painter was treated like a rock star in Paris. That status was cemented



Brutal coupling in real life too: Francis Bacon's *Portrait of George Dyer in a Mirror* (1968)

only do we have his book collection, but the literature that was important to him was raised in many published interviews.

Like the contemporary artists Bacon admired – Picasso and Giacometti – he was the subject of insightful literary treatments by prominent writers, many of them French. Gilles Deleuze, Michel Leiris, Claude Simon and Philippe Sollers wrote about Bacon; Georges Bataille praised him. Aeschylus, Nietzsche, Bataille, Leiris, Joseph Conrad and T.S. Eliot were particularly important to Bacon and recurred in his conversation, imagery and painting titles. Eliot also provided a model of artistic collaboration in relation to his editorial work with Ezra Pound on *The Waste Land*. Overall, the catalogue makes a clear case for the rich relationship between Bacon’s art and the books he read, as well as illustrating some of Bacon’s best paintings.

The second volume in the Thames & Hudson Bacon Studies series is *Francis Bacon: Painting, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis*. Topics include the influence of ancient mythology, the use of mirrors, the significance of self-portraiture and potential Hegelian interpretation of Bacon’s realism. The volume is well illustrated and has footnotes and sources. All of the volumes in the series are supported by the Francis Bacon MB Foundation.

Gagosian’s catalogue accompanied its 2019 London exhibition *Couplings*, which centred on scenes of sex or physical proximity of bodies. The catalogue includes installation photographs of this excellent show, images of all the works and a previously unpublished interview with Bacon and the curator, Richard Francis, in 1985.

• **Alexander Adams** is the recipient of the 2018 artist scholarship of the Francis Bacon MB Art Foundation, Monaco. His latest book, *On Art*, is published by Gollconda Fine Art Books



Photographs of Bacon besieged at a vernissage remind us of how the painter was treated like a rock star in Paris

at the Centre Pompidou exhibition earlier this year, *Francis Bacon: Books and Painting*. Bacon was a great reader and authors responded greatly to him. The catalogue for the Paris exhibition includes a list of all the books the artist owned at the time of his death. It makes for a curious read. It is a mixture of classics, foreign language textbooks, guide books, cookery books and magazines, alongside art monographs. Among these are a few books given by author friends. The catalogue reproduces copies of the books that Bacon owned, provides some choice quotes and explains how certain writers had a significant impact on his thinking. We are well informed on this because not