

Francis Bacon

LÉLONG

Paris

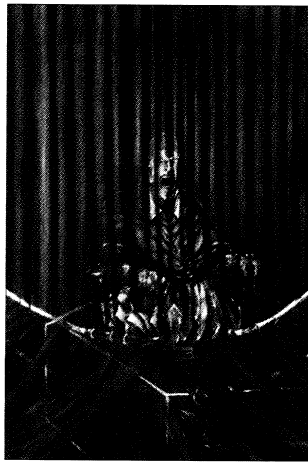
Organized in collaboration with the artist's estate, the exhibition "Popes and Other Figures" offered viewers the exceptional opportunity to view a series of ten never-before-seen Bacon paintings, discovered in storage in the six years following the artist's death in 1992.

The paintings (all belonging to the estate and not for sale) included a powerful 1991 self-portrait triptych, with Bacon's head painted in black and white and enclosed in a box that sits above truncated, swollen, fleshy legs. Perhaps the most unexpected work in the show was the gestural *Untitled (Landscape after van Gogh)* (1957), with its trio of somber, bare trees and slashes of green and yellow below them.

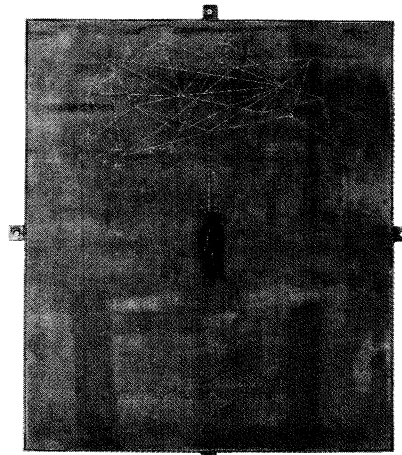
The show also presented an extraordinary ensemble of early 1950s paintings that were long considered lost. These included a series of crouching nudes trapped in geometric cages—Bacon's metaphor for claustrophobia and psychological confinement.

In addition, two of Bacon's versions of Velázquez's famous 1650 portrait of Pope Innocent X, which the artist so often reworked into screaming masks of angst, were on display. One of these, *Study after Velázquez* (1950), shows the pope with his mouth stretched wide in a snarl, his teeth bared. Clearly referring to the memorable image of a screaming person with a bloody eye that appeared in the 1925 Eisenstein film *Battleship Potemkin*, the pontiff sits against a heavy, striated gray curtain that partially veils his face and body like prison bars. This painting, which the artist thought had been destroyed, is easily one of the most dramatic, brilliant, and horrifying of all his versions of the pope.

—Laurie Attias



Francis Bacon, *Study after Velázquez*, 1950, oil on canvas, 78" x 54". Lélong.



Louise Bourgeois, *Torment*, 1999, wall relief: steel, thread, and lead, 30" x 26" x 2". Hauser & Wirth.

Louise Bourgeois

HAUSER & WIRTH

Zurich

Odd as it may seem, there is something heart-warming about the acerbic tone and rawness of Louise Bourgeois's new work. In an art-world obsessed with youth, the 89-year-old Bourgeois continues to create pieces as visceral and tough as any by the emerging generation. Always one to experiment with new formats, Bourgeois this time offered up a series of lead plaques with texts carved into them. One reads: "Let me see your eyes/Twist her face/Put her on her knees/Drop a 20 kilogram can of nails on her head/Catch her at the throat/Assaults." So much for going gently into that good night.

Another plaque, this one oval-shaped, states only, "The hour is devoted to revenge," its cold lead seem-



Gwen John, *The Artist in Her Room in Paris*, ca. 1909, oil on canvas, 11" x 9". Anthony d'Offay.

ing a silent affirmation of that vow. But there's more to these plaques than being a harsher Jenny Holzer. In one work, thin twine weaves through holes punched into the top of a metal plaque, forming a jagged cat's cradle. A single piece of string hangs down, its end wrapped like a noose around the neck of a tiny nude female figure made of lead. The plaque's inscription reads: "To unravel a torment you have to start somewhere."

Much of the show focuses on the parent-child dynamic, often with sharp rancor. The installation *Do Not Abandon Me* features a recumbent pink rag doll ejecting a baby doll from its womb like a cannon. The dolls' crude patchwork seams suggest tremors of pain streaking across their bodies. Within this context, everything turns caustic. The drawing *Louise Eating Madeleine*, for example, ostensibly shows the artist consuming pastry. Yet the voracious mouth that dominates the image evokes the Greek god Cronos eating his offspring so they will not dethrone him. Fortunately for Tracey Emin and company, Bourgeois need not take such extreme measures. Still, her work suggests she would not blink twice if she had to.

—Marc Spiegler

Gwen John

ANTHONY D'OFFAY

London

Gwen John's was a reticent talent—so reticent, in fact, that by the year of her death, 1939, she had enjoyed just one solo show. This exhibition, which consisted of works owned by her favorite nephew, Edwin, offered a rare opportunity to see 60 of her oils, gouaches, and drawings, spanning the whole of her working life, from the late 1890s to the early 1930s.

One of her best works is a small and nuanced oil on canvas titled *Portrait of a Young Woman Wearing a Locket*, painted between 1910 and 1920. The female model sits, demure and alone, on a chair in a room. The mood is formal, if not restrained, and mildly melancholic. The woman appears to have prepared for an event that never took place. All that remains is a sense of occasion in a bare room, with just a hint of a staircase at her back. The tones are somber, severe—brown, gray, beige—with the exception of a few flecks of gold across the woman's dress. The flash of color surprises, as if a sudden noise had interrupted the enveloping silence.

That same sitter, a local woman from Meudon, France, where John lived from 1912 onward, was painted again and again—sometimes with a cat, sometimes with hands raised to her chest, sometimes with hands folded in her lap. In spite of the economy of means and the formal rigor of the painting, there is an emotional intensity about her