

24 Mar – 17 May 2015
Fox Reading Room

ICA

FB55

Educator's
Resource Pack



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About this Pack

This resource pack has been developed to support teaching and learning both at the ICA and offsite. It offers starting points and ideas for visiting educators to use with students. It was developed with GCSE and A-Level students in mind but is well suited for work with groups of all ages. Activities and discussion points are suggested and one of the key learning objectives is for students to develop their skills in aesthetic understanding and critical judgement. Students will be guided towards an analysis and exploration of *FB55*. Suggested activities are offered for use in the gallery and offsite.

Please note

We will tailor programmes to respond to curriculum needs whenever possible. Please contact us to make arrangements and check the website for upcoming Learning Events.

Contact learning@ica.org.uk for more information or to add your contact to our learning mailing list.

ICA Exhibitions

Fig – 2 (50 exhibitions in 50 weeks)
5 Jan 2015 – 20 Dec 2015
ICA Studio

Viviane Sassen: Pikin Slee
3 Feb – 12 Apr 2015
Lower Gallery

Dor Guez: The Sick Man of Europe
3 Feb – 12 Apr 2015
Upper Gallery

Ydessa Hendeles: From her wooden sleep...
25 Mar – 17 May 2015
ICA Theatre

About the ICA

The ICA supports radical art and culture. Through a vibrant programme of exhibitions, films, events and talks, the ICA challenges perceived notions and stimulates debate, experimentation, creativity and exchange with visitors.

Founded in 1946 by a group of artists including Roland Penrose, Peter Watson and Herbert Read, the ICA continues to support living artists in showing and exploring their work, often as it emerges and before others. The ICA has been at the forefront of cultural experimentation since its formation and has presented important debut solo shows by artists including Damien Hirst, Steve McQueen, Richard Prince and Luc Tuymans. More recently Pablo Bronstein, Lis Rhodes, Bjarne Melgaard and Juergen Teller have all staged key solo exhibitions, whilst a new generation of artists, including Luke Fowler, Lucky PDF, Hannah Sawtell and Factory Floor have taken part in exhibitions and residencies.

The ICA was one of the first venues to present The Clash and The Smiths, as well as bands such as Throbbing Gristle. The inaugural ICA / LUX Biennial of Moving Images was launched in 2012, and the ICA Cinema continues to screen rare artists' film, support independent releases and partner with leading film festivals.

Introduction to First Happenings: *FB55*

FB55 is an archival display of Francis Bacon's show held at ICA's former premises on Dover Street in 1955. At the time it was Bacon's first ever solo institutional exhibition in the UK. The presentation in the ICA Fox Reading Room includes a display of materials such as press reviews, invitation cards and related publications.

Having represented Britain at the Venice Biennale the previous year, alongside Reg Butler, Lucian Freud and Ben Nicholson, little evidence survives and surprisingly little is known of Bacon's 1955 ICA exhibition. The exhibition was organised with the help of philanthropist, collector and ICA founder Peter Watson - then the richest man in Britain and a longstanding Bacon supporter, whose death a year later was shrouded in mystery.

An inspiration to a younger generation of artists, Bacon set himself apart from the more youthful Independent Group (IG) whose direct use of photographic material would eventually become synonymous with the birth of Pop Art. That said, Lawrence Alloway - whose critical writing rounded on the influence of 'mass popular culture' on Post-War artists - cited the birth of Pop Art in Britain as having started with Bacon's work; no doubt a reference to the photographic imagery derived by the artist from films, popular magazines, scientific manuals and newspapers. Referring to his IG colleagues as 'mixed-media jackdaws', Bacon distanced himself from the IG by claiming the photographs that littered his studio floor were useful to him in much the same way that a traditional painter might use a life model. Unlike the IG, Bacon rarely appropriated photographic images wholesale. As was his whim, Bacon re-contextualised the images that interested him the most, and for a period in the 1950s his reworking of images made room for homosexual readings that were inevitably intertwined with his own life.

Given the hue and cry surrounding homosexuality at the time of Bacon's 1955 ICA show, it was agreed to include a painting, seemingly late in the day, that would have undoubtedly been viewed as a little risky. Sourced from a photographic sequence by Eadweard Muybridge, 'Two Figures in the Grass' (1954) shows two naked men engaged in an intimate act. Sexual images of any description would have anyway been shocking in the 1950s, but the positioning of homosexual imagery in the public realm would have certainly been considered chancy at a time when homosexuality was outlawed in the UK. Indeed a woman visitor to the show came to insist that the police be called to examine the painting - the police later concurred that the painting was merely a scene of two men wrestling. In keeping with the ICA's radical art and culture remit, this exhibition has been referred to as one of Bacon's more confrontational shows, combining images of the Catholic state, homosexuality and Bacon's gilded gutter life.



Study after Velázquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X,
Francis Bacon, 1953

The Fox Reading Room was made possible by the generous support of the Edwin Fox foundation

Discussion Points

1 → What materials are presented in the archival display *FB55*? How are these organised? What different conclusions could you draw about Francis Bacon's first solo exhibition *FB55*, staged at the ICA in 1955, based on the images and objects you see in the Fox Reading Room?

2 → Why do you think museums and galleries are interested in restaging exhibitions from the past? Do you think it is a way of consolidating our understanding of an artist's work, or the time period in which it was made? Is there an element of nostalgia in looking back at the past? What do you think we can learn from previous exhibitions? Why does *FB55* still resonate today? Consider what new understandings and messages emerge from re-displaying material from Francis Bacon's original 1955 exhibition *FB55*?

3 → The exhibition of Bacon's work in 1955 featured the painting *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954) which depicted an intimate act between two men. This was a risky inclusion as homosexuality was illegal until 1957. How does Bacon's choice to display this controversial work inform our understanding of the 1955 exhibition as a whole? In the original press release Bacon states that, 'Any art is a method of opening up areas of feelings...' How might his words illuminate the way the artist wanted the works to be seen and understood?

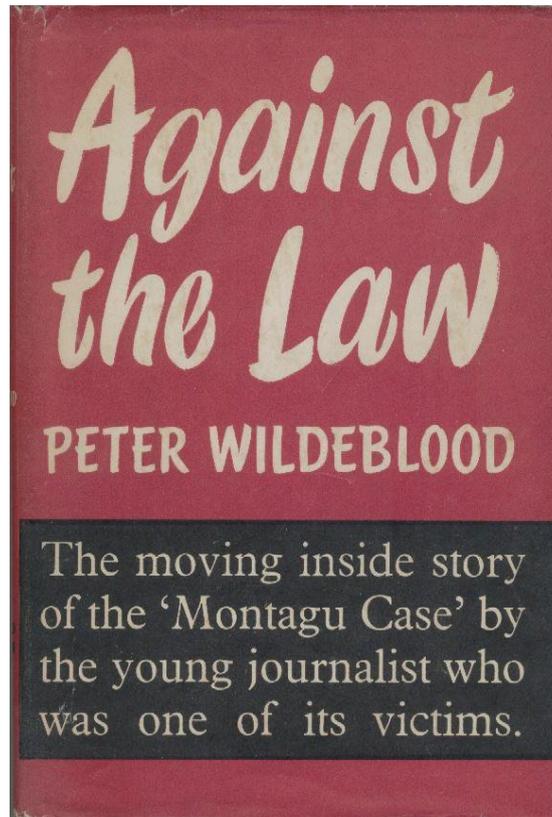


Two Figures in the Grass, 1953
Peter Wildeblood

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The writings of Peter Wildeblood feature prominently in the archival display. Wildeblood was a journalist, novelist and playwright during the 1950s who was influential in the legalisation of homosexuality. How does the material related to Wildeblood such as the books *Against the Law* (1955) and *A Way of Life* (1956) give a sense of the social and political landscape of London at the time? How do other books such as Francis Poole's *Everybody Comes to Dean's* (2009) and other ephemera such as letters and photographs add to our impression of Bacon's life during the 1950s?



Front cover *Against the Law*, Peter Wildeblood

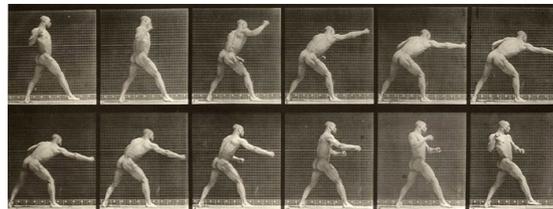
Discussion Points

5

Bacon's works in *FB55* reference paintings and images that he had seen – Velasquez's *Portrait of Innocent X* (1650) and Muybridge's wrestling and boxing figures, for example. Bacon used photographs and other images as 'triggers of ideas' for his work. Moving images were particularly influential for the artist, for example Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), as were images of mass culture and 'candid camera' snaps. How might Bacon's use of photographic material and other images align him with the Pop Art movement which was emerging at the time?



Portrait of Innocent X, Velasquez (1650)

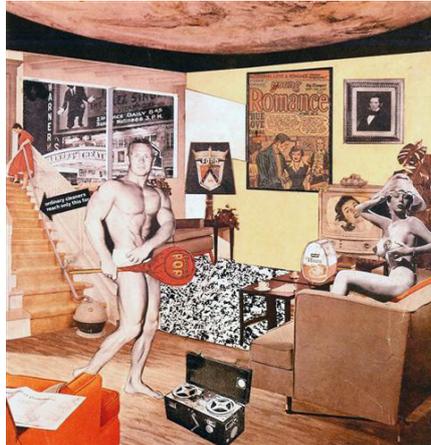


Striking a blow with right hand, Muybridge, 1884-85

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The archive references Richard Hamilton's iconic Pop Art work, 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (1956). What are the similarities and differences, in your opinion, between Bacon's work in *FB55* and the work of those considered part of the early Pop Art movement such as Peter Blake and Hamilton? Why did Bacon separate himself from the movement? What is the relevance of Pop Art to an understanding of *FB55*?



Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?, Richard Hamilton (1956)

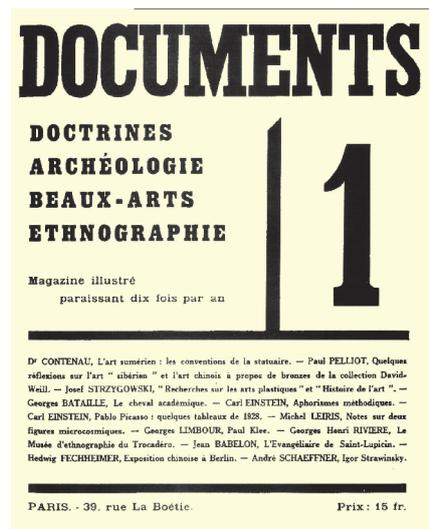


On the Balcony, Peter Blake, 1955-57

Activities

Research

Bacon used imagery of screaming popes, hanging meat and crucifixes in his work. Research primary and secondary sources on Bacon to further your understanding of the objects in his work and his approach to art. In particular read Sylvester's *The Brutality of Fact: Interviews with Francis Bacon* (1987), *The Gilded Gutter Life of Francis Bacon: The Authorized Biography* (1993) by Daniel Farson and *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2005) by Gilles Deleuze. You may find it useful to research Georges Bataille's Documents, the subversive periodical that the philosopher and writer edited from 1929-1930. Bacon shares many of Bataille's concerns about 'mainstream' surrealism and hierarchies of form and the writer has been seen as a significant influence on the artist.



Documents, Georges Bataille, 1929-30

Critique

Evidence exists about how the original exhibition was received by audiences, for example the Evening Standard's review 'Bacon the Rebel Puts his Art on show' (19th January, 1955) and The Times' review 'The Paintings of Mr Bacon: A Prophet of Doom' (24th January, 1955). Imagine you are a contemporary critic and write a review of *FB55*. Critically examine the titles of the reviews at the time, as displayed in the archive and consider the effect the artist's works would have on viewers today. You may wish to include an imagined interview with Bacon

Curate

In groups look back at other exhibitions that you have seen in the past and select one that you think would be relevant to restage today. This could be a local or a well-known exhibition. Would you recreate it exactly as before or would you use archival material or change certain elements? What meanings and narratives would you emphasise? Write an introduction for this restaged exhibition and design the invitation and press release.

Activities

Write

When looking at restaging the exhibition, the ICA was presented with an unusual lack of evidence - only the invitation and a list of a few works could be found. *FB55* was shrouded in mystery: at the time the police were called in to examine the paintings and the list of exhibited works that was found omitted Bacon's key painting, *Two Figures in the Grass* (1954). Few records or photographs of the original exhibition could be traced and furthermore, Peter Watson, the curator of the exhibition died mysteriously a year later.

Write a play, poem or short story based on the unusual circumstances surrounding the exhibition or produce a short film, which could take the form of either a documentary or drama.



Invitation card, FB55



Two Figures in the Grass,
Francis Bacon, 1954

ICA Learning

Our dynamic learning programme provides opportunities for creative exchange, investigation and discussion between practitioners and audiences. The ICA strives to build sustainable relationships with universities, students, schools and our wider audiences, nurturing interest and appreciation of the creative process, and broadening engagement with contemporary arts.

ICA Learning provides different opportunities to engage with the ICA programme through gallery tours, guided visits to our exhibitions, Friday Salons, online educational platforms and the ICA Student Forum, a dedicated student body that curates events and projects for the Public Programme.

Our University Partnerships exist to encourage the development of joint projects and research. In addition, ICA Academy provides career paths to Further Education, Higher Education and employment.

For further information or to make a booking, please email learning@ica.org.uk

ICA Learning is generously supported by The Ernest Cook Trust

ICA Learning Events

Gallery Tour *FB55*

Thurs 30 April, 5pm

Led by ICA Executive Director Gregor Muir

Wrestlin with Bacon

Wed 20 May, 6.30pm

£5 / Free to ICA Members

ICA Learning

ica.org.uk/learning
learning@ica.org.uk

Educators' Previews

Join our teacher's previews for all of our exhibitions

Educator Resource Packs

Educator resource packs are available at the ICA Box Office, or by emailing learning@ica.org.uk

Art Rules

Art Rules is an online space to discuss the rules of art today. Engage your students by visiting:
artrules.ica.org.uk

MA in the Contemporary

Find out more about our unique, interdisciplinary MA programme, in partnership with University of Kent.
ica.org.uk/ma-contemporary

Cinema Matinee Screenings

Cinema group matinees are available for schools, colleges and universities.

ica.org.uk/learning/school-and-groupscreenings

ICA Student Forum

Join the ICA Student Forum to shape and develop a public programme of events in response to the ICA programme.

ica.org.uk/student-forum

University Partnerships

Through our University partnerships we engage and promote greater collaborative opportunities between university students, teaching staff and the ICA's public programme.

ica.org.uk/university-partnerships

Opening Hours

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—11pm

Day Membership £1

Wednesday—Sunday, 11am-6pm
 Until 9pm on Thursdays

Exhibitions

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—6pm
 Open late every Thursday until 9pm

ICA Box Office & Bookshop

Tuesday—Sunday, 11am—9pm

ICA Café Bar

Food served from 11.30—3.30pm / 5.30—9pm

Tuesday Cinema

All films, all day: £3 for ICA Members / £6 non-Members

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ica.org.uk/signup

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Private view card (front and inside) for Francis Bacon, ICA, 1955. Photo: Mark Blower

Resource Pack developed by Rita Cottone