



Francis Bacon: The Papal Portraits of 1953

Hugh M. Davies

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British artist Francis Bacon (1909-1992), one of the foremost artists of the 20th century, is known for his expressive figurative paintings. Perhaps Bacon's most famous image - the so-called "screaming pope" in *Study after Vel zquez's Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1953) - became the touchstone for the longest series of paintings in his career, the *Papal Portraits of 1953*. In 1953 "haunted and obsessed by the image...by its perfection", Bacon sought to reinvent Vel zquez's 17th-century *Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (1650) in the paintings that are the focus of this book. Francis Bacon replaced the grand, official state portrait with an intimate, spontaneous "candid camera" glimpse behind the well-ordered exterior. While the Spanish master Vel zquez portayed the pope ex cathedra, Bacon captured him in camera, as if behind a closed door or through a one-way mirror. This series of eight papal portraits, painted during a period of just a few weeks in the summer of 1953, was brought together for the first time by noted Bacon scholar Hugh M. Davies for a 1999 exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, along with several other works from the same period, including *Sphinx I* and two *Study after Vel zquez* paintings from 1950. This book includes an essay by Davies, discussing the artist's influences and sources of imagery for the series, and a previously unpublished interview that Davies conducted with Bacon in 1973.

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