



FRANCIS BACON

MAN AND BEAST

Royal Academy of Arts



THE ANIMAL THAT IS NOT ONE

THE HUMAN CRY

During the years when Francis Bacon emerged as one of Britain's leading artists, he was focused on representing what he called 'the human cry'. The motif is visible in *'Fury'* (c. 1944; cat. 071), *Figure Study II* (1945–46; cat. 023), *Head I* (1947–48; cat. 015), *Head II* (1949; fig. MP9), *Head VI* (1949; cat. 001), *Fragment of a Crucifixion* (1950; cat. 007), *Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Innocent X* (1953; fig. SE1), *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion* (1944; cat. 030) and *Study for the Nurse in the Film Battleship Potemkin* (1957; cat. 051). In all of them, Bacon depicted single, distorted figures and heads with open mouths and bared teeth. They are usually set in a kind of space frame or carapace and occupy no particular place in time. The earliest of those mentioned here, *Fury*, is dominated by its orange-crimson setting. *Figure Study II* deploys a similar hue, while the others display cooler and darker colours: purple, blue, brown and grey. All are painted quite freely, with the figures sometimes blending into the background, or vice versa. After 1955, the cry largely disappears from Bacon's art though the other elements generally remain: the figural and facial distortions, architectural frames, temporal indeterminacy and expressiveness.

One of the primary sources for Bacon's 'human cry' motif has long been known: a shot from the Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein's classic film *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). In an interview



Fig. SE1
Study After Velázquez's Portrait of Innocent X, 1953. Oil on canvas, 152.1 x 117.8 cm. Des Moines Art Center, Iowa

from 1962, the critic David Sylvester asked Bacon about the significance of the 'screaming nanny' shot (fig. SE2). Bacon replied:

It was a film I saw almost before I started to paint, and it deeply impressed me – I mean the whole film as well as the Odessa

Fig. SE2
Sergei Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925: frame of screaming woman





ISABELLA BOORMAN

FRANCIS BACON: A CHRONOLOGY

1909

Francis Bacon is born on 28 October at 63 Lower Baggot Street, Dublin, a nursing home, to English parents: the racehorse trainer Major Anthony Edward 'Eddy' Mortimer Bacon (1870–1940), who claimed descent from the Elizabethan statesman and philosopher Sir Francis Bacon (1561–1626), and Christina Winifred 'Winnie' Loxley Firth (1883–1971) (fig. 1B1), heiress of a Sheffield cutlery business. Bacon is the second child of five: Harley (1904–1929), Francis (1909–1992), Edward (1914–

1927), Ianthe (1919–2009) and Winifred (1921–1981). An asthma sufferer, he is allergic to horses and dogs. The family lives at Cannycourt, Kilcullen, Co. Kildare, near Curragh Racecourse. Bacon's nanny, Jessie Lightfoot, remains close to him after childhood, living with him at times during his adult life.

1915

The family moves to Westbourne Terrace, London, home of Eddy's widowed mother. Eddy works for a time at the Territorial Force Record Office.



Fig.1 Francis Bacon and his mother, 1912.

1918

They move back to Ireland, initially to the home of Bacon's maternal grandmother and step-grandfather Winifred and Kerry Supple in Co. Laois.

1921

The family move to Straffan Lodge, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.