

The Francis Bacon Interiors: Michael Peppiatt in conversation with Robert Priseman

MP: What I was thinking was first of all of asking you how your interest, well almost an – I don't know whether you'd call it an obsession, certainly a very, very significant interest in Bacon came about. Was it over a long period of time or...

RP: Painting projects, certainly from my point of view develop over years, so it's an interest you have for a number of years, it crystallises into an idea and then it sits there for probably two or three years until you act on it, probably just the same as writing.

MP: Yes. But before it crystallised, was it simply because you'd seen a lot of Bacon you realised he was an artist who interested you?

RP: I'd seen a lot of Bacon, for me Bacon was one of the greatest painters and I'd learned a fair bit before then about his work, and of course I liked the School of London in a broader sense as well. I suppose when you're looking at a lot of art you become aware of the conversation that's going on in art and that fascinates you, and you reach a point where you want to have a go at participating in it. That's really the crux of it, that's why I gave up the portrait painting, because for me I understood it enough and I felt I had enough courage to have a go at it.

MP: So it was this kind of dialogue that's set up and you just feel after a time you'd like to speak.

RP: You'd like to jump in.

MP: Yes.

RP: It's like an open forum. And obviously living in Wivenhoe he (Bacon) had the studio there and I walked past it every day and it's always intrigued me. After working a couple of years on my own thing, I realised that I was working in sets of pictures, so I was thinking, well I'd love to do a painting of that studio but I don't know how I'd do it as a series. Because I'm interested really in I suppose what you'd call more anonymous spaces.

MP: Yes

RP: But what interested me .. I thought I could do it because I'm not a gestural painter in the sense that Bacon's a gestural painter. If I worked in a gestural sense or any vaguely abstract way then I couldn't do any more than produce a pastiche of Bacon, so I wouldn't have done it at all; it's because I work in a completely different way. But I see lots of overlap of similarity for what's the core of his oeuvre to what my own fascinations are. So, I suppose I'm interested in rooms that are enclosed, sealed, artificially lit, places where human trauma takes place. Those are environments that fascinate me.

MP: Do you know why, I mean why was that – sort of empty but inhabited spaces. Traces...

RP: Yes the trace of the human presence, I suppose, but I think it's more specific than that for me, that I'm interested in places where trauma has taken place or extremes of emotion have happened. I'm interested in the idea that that emotion has some sort of resonance in a way. And so, initially when I'd abandoned the portrait painting I was working on these hospital interiors and I was interested in the idea that ...

MP: And were they empty of people?

RP: Yes, always empty of people.

MP: But full of them in a different sense.

RP: Yes, exactly. I'm interested in the idea that these places are clean, clinical, cold and expressionless. They're empty of emotion but they're where extremes of emotion have taken place. But when I was doing the portraits I did a painting of one of the Sheriffs of London and he took me into the condemned cell in the Old Bailey and it had a really powerful effect on me because I walked into it and I kind of braced myself and I was thinking - it's going to be like walking into a dungeon and you're gonna feel the screams coming out of the wall and ... it was just nothing, it was just completely cold. It's the only cell in the Old Bailey that has two doors, one to go in and another one to go out. And you're thinking, well the walls, they're just white tiles – and it's just like walking into a bathroom or a kitchen or something. No feeling, no emotion, or anything.

MP: How strange.

RP: Now that really fascinated me. So I was looking at the way Bacon handled those things.

MP: Let's go back. You were living in Wivenhoe. When you went to live in Wivenhoe you didn't even know Bacon had had a house there, or did you?

(here Michael – I didn't know about Bacon's Wivenhoe house when I first moved there for a spell in 1988-9 – but I did know about it when we subsequently moved there as a family in 2002 – and so that, and the fact Constable had lived and worked up the road in Dedham – (just a ten minute drive away) another painter for whom I have an enormous respect - made me feel very comfortable. Because it's like you're living in the same place as friends or familiars. A note of interest is also that Constable painted Wivenhoe house)

RP: I was living there, found out he had this house, and it's interesting because it's a little two up, two down cottage and you walk past it and of course you can tell, if you know, because the sash windows have been taken out so that he didn't get a shadow on the painting.

So it became really intriguing to me that one of the great artists produced several of his portraits there (*the Michel Leris works*). That a great artist produced great works in this humble little house in the middle of nowhere practically and so for me that's a personal detail that's quite compelling because it makes you think, you know, yes I could have a go at doing something, that maybe would hit the mark, maybe that would achieve something. As an artist, you know, what's the point of doing it if you're not going to have a go at doing something..

MP: - You really want to hit as high up as you can.

RP: Exactly. There's no point doing it otherwise, I don't think. I was interested as well with Bacon's asthma and how that might have influenced his work. I mean reading your book was really interesting, because of idea of the personal biography and how that affects the public work. His work is a public aspect of his personal life. And I myself have epilepsy and I think that affects the way I think about the pictures. Partly that I have this sense that when you have a fit, not that I have many because I'm on medication – but when you have a fit you do feel you have this sense that you have a soul that's being yanked out of your body. It's very disturbing and when you come around from a fit you feel completely disorientated so you don't know where you are, you don't know what time of day it is, you don't know what day of the week it is, you don't know why you're there. I had a fit once, I realised, when I was on a ship over to France and I came to and I thought where am I, why am I here, what am I doing, you're completely lost and it's the same when you have a fit at home you're thinking, why am I lying on a settee. I suppose that is like a real sense of the Uncanny. You know this idea of the uncanny, that really intrigues me because I suppose the uncanny is an artistic exploration of something (which) through epilepsy I can feel in a very real sense. So looking at Bacon's work thinking about the screaming and then there's that idea that maybe it's a gasp for life rather than a scream, I mean it's open to interpretation but just the fact that there are those thoughts there interests me, so I suppose I've got all those sort of overlaps of thought that interested me and made me think yes maybe I would like to tackle Bacon's interiors. The other thing I thought is for me, I don't know sufficient about painting to dive in completely on

my own, so by tackling Bacon's material maybe I would learn something if I spent some time in his world, that was another sort of undercurrent of thought I was having at the time..

MP: ...sub-text

RP: ... it's like spending some time under the wings of the master if you like, seeing if you could pick up something from this.

MP: So you used to walk past in front of the house and you managed to get a bit of a dekho into the..

RP: Oh yes, you can peer through the exterior and of course. But I didn't want to do it because I thought well it'll just be a one off and it wouldn't make sense.

MP: You liked the idea of a series.

RP: Yes. I was working on the hospital paintings and I was doing this painting of a critical care bed and then I saw the Arena documentary and it showed the Clinica Ruber. And then I thought Ah! There's two pictures. And then I thought, yes, there must be a series I could do: his studio, the room he died in and that got me thinking and then I bought some books and worked out a whole list of rooms and came up with about 20 and I thought there must be at least half a dozen of these I could get access to, so I thought well I'll just get cracking on it.

MP: So to date you've done the studio in Wivenhoe, and the rough order we said, the staircase in the Hotel de St Peres in Paris where he and George Dyer were staying in 1971 I think it was for the opening of his retrospective at the Grand Palais, the bathroom or the lavatory – it's just a little lavatory is it? separate WC where poor George ...

RP: There is a shower in there actually so it is a bathroom.

MP: Oh right, where he was found dead actually on the toilet, and then the room at the Clinica Ruber in Madrid where he died, and then finally the transposed studio that's gone to the museum in Dublin with this strange kind of apparatus for listening and the studio sealed off very much like another room that's sort of died almost.

RP: That's right. You see I find that really fascinating because it's like looking at a ghost in a box. That's how I feel about it. It's like his ghost is trapped and then put on public display. I find it very strange installation really.

MP: I quite agree, it's sort of sealed it off and made it sort of, yes, it's like something that's been bottled up.

RP: Yes, that's right ... a genie in a bottle. And so everything's clean and clinical on the outside and sort of chaotic and ...

MP:and messy and turbulent and sort of emotional inside.

RP: Yes, that's exactly it.

MP: One of the things that interests me in this series... Obviously when I heard that you'd done this series I was immediately interested – because... it's probably something if one has an interest in a particular person, a person who has sort of burned a kind of myth into our consciousness as Bacon has, or subconscious. It's ... all these reverberate with a presence which is no longer there, but it's his presence that makes them significant.

RP: Yes.

MP: And you like the idea of re-creating the traces of somebody in a kind of vacuum? Is it a vacuum?

RP: Yes. For me, it's a kind of vacuum that you are sucked into as the viewer. So you are stepping into like an abandoned stage set or something. The drama has taken place. I use perspective in a way. I take photos.... I go and visit the rooms, I take photographs of them, and then they come out in this slightly fish-eye fragmented way. I then translate that into a perspective drawing, so it's like a perspective plan, and that takes quite a lot of effort to make that work, when I've got it into a perspective plan, I'm thinking of the early Renaissance perspective windows that's sort of what I was originally thinking of when I started to do these paintings (*specifically here – Alberti's 'Della Pittura' and one point perspective*) – I like the idea that the perspective has this sense of drawing you into the image – it's opening out the image. So there's no block in the foreground, there's nothing preventing you as the viewer from feeling your way in...

MP: Toppling in.

RP: Exactly, you're toppling into the picture, you're sort of drawn in, almost compulsively you're being sucked into the space. And so for me the perspective has that quality, there's no barrier there for you. And then I'm trying to use the paint as a way to act as a sort of metaphor for the emotional trace – so I'm trying to use the paint in that sense.

MP: Right. What I find very strange and very difficult to define is the way it's very clinically, it seems, at least at first sight, it's very clinically exact, there's a slightly almost repellent

sense of exactitude, you know you can't touch it, because it's done so perfectly it draws you in but it also I find somewhat forces you back again because it's complete.

RP: Well that's exactly what I'm after. Although I don't know why.

MP: The pull and the push. It's like you go towards it because as you say, spacially you're drawn in, but there's also a finished aspect to it which actually repels you, so there's a double movement and it's very interesting, it's very difficult to put one's finger on why it is that it's fascinating. It's fascinating beyond the fact that you know this is where Bacon worked, this is where Bacon died, this is where his lover committed suicide, this is where his studio is incarcerated. There's something else, it could be something else and of course you've done many other things, like with the places of execution which I think have the same thing. They draw you in and it's not even the fact that people are killed there that's repellent, it's the fact that it seems so complete in itself and therefore you can't get a grasp on it.

RP: Yes. Well I also, as I say, I try and strip out a lot of the detail, so it's the simplification I think enables you to get a mentally easier access. I also try to harmonise the colours – and make them more attractive than in reality and try to make the colours soothing and beautiful. So I'm trying to create the whole environment to be somehow...

MP: You want it to feel sinister, that attraction.

RP: Well I suppose I'm interested in getting a kind of, I want a sort of punchy feel. I want the viewer to get a sense of feeling something, if they're not feeling something then I'm not doing my job.

MP: They look, one of the things that I find slightly sinister is that it's not a kind of neo-reality, It's its own thing, it's not a reproduction of something, it's its own thing, it's very, very close to an absolute visually accurate record. The French have got this word '.....' which is sort of like it's slipped a bit, there's a slippage, I think that's how you translate it into English, the slippage into another kind of universe that is very disquieting.

RP: Well, I'm pleased that you say that, because I feel I'm hitting the mark, I am going out of my way to try and achieve that. I mean I'm not making a huge effort, it's something that my feeling to paint is to achieve that effect, because it's something to do with the feeling that I carry inside myself, if that makes sense.

MP: Yes, yes indeed, and you think that's linked to some extent with your experience of epilepsy?

RP: I think it is, yes, I think it's also linked ... it's difficult to say, I know the epilepsy is part of that, but also, but I had the experience when I was 8 as well, which I think distanced me from the community I grew up in, so I think I've grown up with a sense of disconnection if you like, certainly as a child and young adult, from the adult world, and then I don't know how related the epilepsy is to that. Not at all I shouldn't think.

MP: Well I was going to add when I said that, it's rather a sort of, kind of, simplistic thing to say, because, probably, if I'm fascinated by these pictures it's because I have that sense of not being related, or things, I used to get it much more strongly when I was younger, and it used to worry me enormously, I thought I was losing my mind and suddenly I'd be somewhere, for instance, in a crowded restaurant in Paris, and suddenly I'd get this terror of thinking that I wasn't part of where I was, I was sort of sitting almost in a sort of glass cage, and everything else was happening outside of me and it was unrelated to me. And I was dissociated from that, I was witnessing it but I myself was dissociated from it and therefore I was different and it made me feel very spacey is putting it mildly, and very, I wouldn't say paranoid, but it made me feel very afraid.

RP: Yes, that's very much it. I feel I've had that feeling most of my life.

MP: Yes, well, did Freud, I mean this thing of Uncanny, it's in German is Das Unheimliche. Freud wrote a whole essay on I think, this sensation.

RP: It's dissociation, but it becomes threatening.

MP: It's the slide. It is very interesting that, because I'm sure for a lot of people it's a phenomenon of everyday life. It's an experience.....

RP: What brought that on for you do you think?

MP: Well, one thing that happened to me was that I took some drugs once that made me feel very, very, very strange. It was just like that with people, with actually some American actors and I felt to be cool I just had to keep taking them again, and then I just sort of flipped and I thought I'd lost my mind completely. I think that certainly brought to the surface perhaps something that was already there. It took me a long time to recover from that experience – because it made me feel, then I was in complete paranoia, I thought that the police were after me, all sorts of things had gone wrong. And I don't even know what it was, it was meant to be some sort of marijuana, whether they'd laced it with something or it was particularly strong or whether I had so much, or whether I was simply very tense anyhow because I was meant to be doing this interview with them. I was a young man in my mid- twenties/ late twenties and it was one of the first, it was in Paris, it was one of the first things they'd let me loose on and I thought I'd better make a good story out of this, and I'd half lost my mind with them. And

went back and I remember just sort of crouching under a shower for hours, hoping it would all sort of wash away; but of course it didn't. So that's the strongest feeling I've had like that. I don't get it as much any more, if I get it I treat it with much more sort of .. experience, and I say you're just having a bit of a funny phase, don't worry. You'll forget about that. It probably, you're slightly under pressure. It happens to me actually when I've done interviews with people, you go home, you've got their thing then suddenly the walls look rather whiter than they should do, you start getting a bit anxious, I think probably it's, in me, a form of extreme anxiety.

RP: Right. That would make sense actually wouldn't it? That would make sense from my point of view as well.

MP: Would it?

RP: Yes it would. I'd not thought about it in that way before.

MP: I think being self-conscious and then suddenly it's as though things are continuing to go like a film that's being played but you step to one side, and it continues, but your not sort of completely in the frame.

(phone interruption)

Discussion of the uncanny...

RP: I realise that a lot of the art I enjoy looking at, or am fascinated by looking at, hits that mark.

MP: Who else is in that category?

RP: For me it's looking at some of Hopper's oeuvre, in that sense, if you look at *Automat* or *Gas*, or if you're looking at Magritte where he has figures looking in the mirror. It's also people like Caspar David Friedrich –*The Chasseur in the Woods* or *The monk by the sea*. All those pictures are doing that same sort of job. Actually, in a slightly different way, but in a beautiful way there is a painting by Pisanello, *The Vision of St Eustace*, in the National Gallery, for me that's a very beautiful but slightly unsettling painting. So it's those pictures which have that slightly unsettling quality to them that I'm drawn to. And I suppose when you're looking at art or when you're thinking about art you come to realise that it's when people push whatever is at the core of what they're doing to an extreme that it becomes more interesting. And then when you look at Bacon it's like he's doing that over and over and over again over decades, and for me that's what marks him out head and shoulders above all the others.

MP: I see. Do you think in the experience of what we're talking about it is at all what people call an out of body experience?

RP: I would have thought so, yes.

MP: To the side of the body in my case, but it's not sort of hovering up and looking down.

RP: To me it's like I'm not actually in reality but it's just there. (*just in front of me*)

MP: I see, you're the observer. When it happened to me, I'm glad it doesn't happen so much any more, it's really, very, very unsettling ... I used to think I was just losing my mind, loosing my grip on things. How do you think it comes about?

RP: Have you seen a film *The Firm* with Tom Cruise – the Sydney Pollack film. I find that quite interesting because in that there is a moment which is an uncanny moment. He (*Tom Cruise*) gets this job in a law firm, he's working away, he's doing his exams, and he can't believe his luck, he's landed on his feet, he's got this great fat salary, and then he goes into the office and suddenly there's this moment when he finds out the only client (*they have*) is the mafia, and he walks out of the office and suddenly it's the same faces, it's the same office, it's the same furniture but suddenly everything's disturbed.

MP: How interesting! You mean the set's completely different?

RP: I think it's just the way it's acted or maybe it's the way it's directed. It's not like the film is distorted in any way; it's exactly the same but it's completely different. Everything's changed and it's become unsettled. And that for me is the uncanny sense.

MP: Oh yes. He just comes out with this realisation, it's through his eyes, therefore it's sort of shifted.

RP: He has to walk through the office but everything has shifted. Everything has changed and it has become unsettled. That was the last guy who's been mentoring him – suddenly he's the mafia.

MP: Oh yes. Except this is in a different degree isn't it? Because it's the whole notion of reality, it's not a situation, not of the firm or an interior it's actually the universe or your perception of the universe has shifted.

RP: Yes

MP: It may be of course that ...it occurs to me that we go along in our little corridors of space and time and occasionally I try (and this doesn't make me feel unsettled) but I just try and have sort of antennae out because I know there are all sorts of things going on, and I have disquieting ideas that something's gone badly wrong with the family or something like that, luckily it's not true. Sometimes I say to myself something's gone wrong somewhere. In my own little corridor everything seems neat and orderly and happy, but I get the sensation from outside - and of course things are going wrong all the time terribly.

RP: Yes, but we try not to think about it!

MP: Perhaps that's it. Perhaps that's what Bacon meant when he said that he thought he cleared away a few screens. You know he had that nice thing he said. He said 'I don't think my paintings are violent, I just think they're about how things are, the reality of experience'; he said 'if they think they're violent it may be that most people tend to live their lives through screens and possibly my paintings have removed some of those screens'.

RP: That is interesting isn't it. Yes, I think before I started looking closely at Bacon's world I would have said I thought Bacon's work was violent or that there was a violence underlying the superficial appearance of things. But I don't think they are violent any more.

MP: No, they're intense.

RP: Yes, very intense.

MP: And it's strange, we see Bacon so differently from the way people saw it in the 50s and 60s. You know, they said it was 'grand...?...horror', a sort of Punch and Judy show, sort of blood all over the place and guts and things. There is that, but it's a kind of intensity of being alive.

RP: I was thinking about that quite a bit. I know his work was difficult to take off initially, and I can imagine that if you'd been through the war you wouldn't want to look at anything else horrible... And I can imagine that's why abstract work would have been so prevalent post-war, because there's not much on the whole to challenge you intellectually or emotionally I wouldn't have thought.

MP: Well also perhaps the disappearance of the figure that became incarnate. That's an interesting point, it's a big question what happened to the human figure; perhaps the human figure had been so badly treated throughout the war that it was better not to mention the figure. It was off limits, a disturbing subject in its self, so many had been mutilated and tortured and destroyed and so on.

RP: It's something beyond people's ability to deal with, the subject of the past.

MP: Well what's interesting here is that you've, having painted so many official portraits, commissioned portraits, suddenly you've gone as far away from that as you can, and you've abolished, you've emptied the interiors of any actual human forms.

RP: For me the figure is the viewer.

MP: Ah ... yes, I see.

RP: I'm trying to get you to be a more active participant in the picture.

MP: So, I'm inhabiting these spaces as I look at them?

RP: If I'm getting it right, I hope you are yes.

MP: And you've put them so that I or any other viewer will walk into them, will be drawn towards this door or this bed in the clinic..

RP: Yes.

MP: The series doesn't stop there because you've got one underway of the studio in Paris which of course I'll be very interested to see. And is that, it's probably less a thing of extremes of emotion. When you talk about extremes of emotion, of course, it's very odd. Both the bed and the toilet one knows that a death has taken place.

RP: Yes, I suppose the Paris Studio is more of a contemplative piece for me. Because I know from what you've told me that he painted there in the 70s.

MP: In the 70's and 80's yes, yes.

RP: So for me that makes me feel that it's a more reflective space. Whereas with these other ones ..thinking not so much ... I mean with the staircase for example, I was wanting to directly engage with his famous triptych *In memory of George Dyer*. So for me that's a direct engagement with one of the greatest paintings in the world I suppose, It's my attempt to try and more fully engage and understand what I really admire.

MP: And you of course you actually stayed in this hotel didn't you? You stayed in that particular room.

RP: Yes, I went with ally my wife and she thought it was a very odd thing to do.

MP: Did you take the photos while you were there?

RP: I did yes.

MP: And did they know in the Hotel?

RP: They suspected yes, they kept asking me why I wanted this room particularly. And I just told them that Bacon had stayed here, I just kept it at that. I didn't want them getting too upset about what I might be doing.

MP: Do you think other people have stayed there because of that?

RP: I believe so, yes.

MP: How interesting. Isn't it strange, I was just talking about this yesterday to Peter Conrad whose doing a large article on Bacon for the Observer and he said it's extraordinary all these people for whom particularly those who've been in contact with him, for who he became the most important person in their lives.

RP: Well I wouldn't have done these pictures if I'd ever met him.

MP: No. Quite, because...

RP: His personality would've been in the way. It's really about my tracing something ... my reaction to something.

MP: That's it, indeed. But I mean you're fascinated by Bacon. It's a very strange powerful thing that's affected many people who never came across him at all, through the paintings entirely.

RP: Going back to the Uncanny, I'm reading this book of Margaret Iversen's at the moment called 'Beyond Pleasure' where she relates pictures, cinema, things like that to being like mirror recognition that babies have. I thought that was quite interesting – because it gives you a sense of control. And I think very much that ..

MP: What does mirror recognition mean?

RP: That's the moment when babies start to recognise their sense of omnipotence. After that you start to gain a sense of there being an outside world and an inner reality. (*and that these are two separate things from each other*) Your inner reality is contrasted to the outside world, and you also start to build up this sense of a past present and future. And that

gap between (*outer reality and inner reality*) is where the imagination takes place – the space where play, the creative arts and religion occupy as you become an adult.

For me painting is about control – taking something that is in some way frightening and having a sense of control over it. (*I think that is related to the imagination of an outside reality and the threat it poses – but there is also a concept Lacan explores that I think is important and related in a broader sense – he wrote that language – words – are labels attached to our memories of things from our past, and that we use language to project an image of ourselves into the future to alleviate the thought of the inevitability of our own deaths. The void in art represents that inevitability and painting as we are talking about it here, is an attempt to control our underlying and suppressed sense of dread at that though*)

MP: Ah, yes

RP: When I'm looking at Bacon's pictures, what I find fascinating.....

MP: You think that's what Bacon was doing too?

RP: I think he's controlling something that is quite terrifying and...

MP: And you are too?

RP: Yes I am. And, what I most admire about Bacon is that he was able to do that consistently for decades, not just for a few years, not just over a few pictures. And in your book you talk about his, how he grew from a weakling into someone who had the physical constitution of an ox, and I think he must have had the emotional constitution of an ox as well, to have visited that visual world over and over again in that unrelenting way.

So, I have a huge amount of respect and admiration for that. For me, tracing all those spaces has enabled me to think about taking the next step in my own development. So going on to do the execution pictures and the pictures I want to do next, I feel I've drawn from Bacon's strength, from looking at him, admiring him.

MP: His ability to confront, to probe and to control.

RP: Yes.

MP: In a sense encapsulating deep fear and anxiety and horror, extreme emotion – putting it outside himself.

RP: He's putting it outside himself yes. But I think what it is, I don't know quite if I understand it, but it's something about what you'd loosely describe as the eternal void, when you're looking at pictures, say like Rothko's Seagram paintings. For me they are the ultimate in abstract painting. I don't normally like abstract paintings, but I'm overwhelmed by those paintings and I think that is like an abstract version of looking at the void. And I think if you're looking at say the *Automat* painting by Hopper, there's a figure in front of the void. So, quite often I think in art where you've got this sense of a void, you've got the figure in front of a void (*often contemplating it*). And I think what's interesting in Bacon is you've got that void over and over and over again but the figure is being sucked into it – it's like they've stepped over the threshold. So I think that's why they're not violent pictures but they are terrifying pictures. And the figure is cracked open, like an egg with the yolk seeping out, you've got the stuff of the soul seeping out but it's stretched over the threshold of the void, it's not in front of the void, it's not completely vanished into the void but it's being sucked into it. And I think that gives you as the viewer a bit more space to step into the picture, you don't have the proxy of the figure in the picture to take your place. And I think that's what makes them as paintings much more challenging and much more engaging.

MP: Right, it's about world point of view (?). Yes that's very interesting.

Break

RP: In contrast to all the similarities – the overlapping of interest in traumatic, enclosed spaces, a preoccupation with the image of the void, I am also interested in the differences, more especially the biographical differences. I am thinking here of the chaos which Bacon was able to live with, with the physical, emotional and sexual extremes he embraced in his life– with his ability to live with huge amounts of uncertainty. That is in the gambling, thieving, living in extravagance then living with nothing.

For me, I have to live a very ordered life. A life which is the very antithesis of Bacon's world. In large part because of the epilepsy. It is important for me to avoid fits – every fit carries with it a one in five hundred risk of dying. I would love to get-up late, drink, lose control, but that carries an unacceptable level of risk for me.

Anxiety too is something I have to avoid, an anxious state leads to sleeplessness, and a lack of sleep leads to a seizure. I have to live my life in an ordered and strict way. It is quite locked down, and I think that translates in the paintings for me with the perspective. The perspective is designed to hold everything in place, to lock it down and stop it from slipping. I see the emotional as being fluid, like water, and if you're going to tackle that, you need a container for it, something to hold it, seal it, lock it in place. It gives you control over the uncertain.

The paint then has the freedom to slip and slide within the confines set out with the perspective framework.

Also, the medical environments that fascinate me take on the role of authority, a substitute father figure - I'm thinking now, that these places fulfil the same function for me as the father figures fulfilled for Bacon – his early interest in Popes, dictators and business men. And I'm thinking that with the Bacon Interiors, Bacon himself assumed that role for me, that I have been able to spend time within his world, thinking about the way he confronted life and was able to push things to an extreme – he enabled me to draw strength for my own work and push my own agenda on much further – tackling now for instance the execution images.

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