

## Seeing and Seen: Acts of the Voyeur in the Paintings of Francis Bacon

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There are a number of characters in Bacon's paintings who seem strangely out of place, peeking in on intimate moments and sometimes turning their attention to us, the spectator of the works. These figures are the more literal representatives of a theme that runs throughout Bacon's work, namely that of the voyeur. Oddly enough, the voyeur takes on a number of guises; at times, it is a character in the work and, at other times, it is the viewer. Bacon himself confesses to the role as well, and there are moments where the presence of the voyeur is simply suggested by the pose of a subject, most notably in the portraits. This shifting ambiguity as to who is the voyeur in Bacon's paintings is part and parcel of the artist's attempt at understanding human nature, and his avoidance of portraying such acts of seeing as something necessarily undesirable. My research looks at the numerous perspectives of the voyeur presented by Bacon in an attempt to better understand its rationale in his artistic production. In doing so, a number of different components of Bacon's work are examined, ranging from such formal questions as his use of glass to his use of photographic and cinematic images, as well as including a look at the various subjects portrayed whose intimacy lends itself to an illicit act of seeing. All of these are framed by Bacon's views on various societal conventions of the time, which to his mind perpetuated the need to fulfill our basic voyeuristic urges.



Three Studies for a Portrait of George Dyer, 1963



Francis Bacon, 1976



Study After Velázquez (detail), 1950



Portrait of Isabel Rawsthorne Standing in a Street in Soho, 1967



Triptych – Inspired by T.S. Eliot's Poem 'Sweeney Agonistes', 1967