



Francis Bacon, artist, Paris, 1979

Avedon, Richard

Not on display**Title/Description:** Francis Bacon, artist, Paris, 1979**Artist/Maker:** Avedon, Richard**Born:** 1979**Object Type:** Photograph**Materials:** Photograph**Measurements:** Unframed: h. 1030 x w. 820 mm Framed: h. 1247 x w.1020 mm**Accession Number:** L.156**Production Place:** France**Copyright:** © Richard Avedon Foundation**Credit Line:** On long loan from the Blakey Collection

The American photographer Richard Avedon (1923-2004) was renowned for pushing the boundaries of contemporary photography, creating seminal images across his portraiture, reportage, and in his work for leading fashion publications such as *Harpers' Bazaar* and *Vogue*. Avedon's portraits are instantly recognisable, with his use of the stark background foregrounding his subjects. One of Avedon's most successful gallery shows during his lifetime, *Portraits*, was held at Malborough, London, in 1975 [1].

Over the course of Avedon's career, he photographed models, writers, musicians, politicians and artists, including this portrait of the artist Francis Bacon (1909-1992) taken in 1979. Here, the 70-year-old Bacon holds his right hand to his face, pensively catching his lower lip with a finger. One of a number of photographs taken on the same day, this image of Bacon captures the artist in uncompromising terms. As Harold Rosenberg comments, Avedon 'takes pictures in flat, artificial light and, more recently, in raw daylight, both of which expose every wrinkle, hair follicle, and skin blemish as vividly as if seen in a magnifying mirror.' Avedon's camera refuses to confer poetry or distinction, instead it meets each individual head-on, with the subject allowed 'only such graces as may come through the vacant stare of the lens.' [2]

Avedon recalled this day with Bacon in the book accompanying the 2002 exhibition, *Richard Avedon: Portraits* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, explaining he had asked Bacon to exchange his jacket for [Avedon's] plain, dark sweater. 'Bacon immediately acted the role of the private Bacon with the greatest purity and economy of gesture, and yet it was filled with authentic feeling. Without my saying a word, he understood what my portrait was about, what it called for from him, and he still

remained true to himself. No one could act Bacon but Bacon.' [3]

Rosy Gray

January 2025

[1] *Richard Avedon: Evidence, 1944-1994*, Whitney Museum of American Art, review in *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, Vol. 25, No. 2, May-June 1994, p. 73.

[2] Harold Rosenberg, 'A Meditation on Likeness' in *Richard Avedon: Portraits* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 1976) unpaginated.

[3] *Richard Avedon: Portraits* (Harry N. Abrams, New York, 2002), unpaginated.

Exhibitions

London Art Fair, Business Design Centre, London - 22/01/25 - 26/01/25
