ELISABETH
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HUMANS
AND
OTHER
ANIMALS
EDITED BY CALVIN WINNER

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Bronze
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BLACK WINGS

THE HAUNTING SCULPTURES OF ELISABETH FRINK

CALVIN WINNER

They kept coming at him from the air, silent save for the beating wings. The terrible, fluttering wings. He could feel the blood on his hands, his wrists, his neck. Each stab of a swooping beak tore his flesh. If only he could keep them from his eyes. Nothing else mattered.[1]

Daphne du Maurier, 'The Birds', 1952

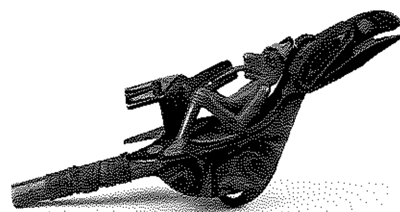
Birds perform an extraordinary role in the work of Elisabeth Frink and were a haunting presence, beginning in her formative years. Until the end of her life she was bothered by a terrifying and recurring nightmare of great black wings beating past her.[2] Her early bird sculptures were based on crows and ravens and struck an unsettling atmosphere. Frink noted that her famous sculpture, *Bird*, 1952, had been inspired by a visit to see the ravens at the Tower of London, although she had already been making bird-related drawings since the late 1940s.[3]

Crows and ravens, collectively and commonly known as corvids, or more precisely by their scientific name of Corvidae, have always been much maligned. Described by various collective nouns – such as a 'murder of crows' or an 'unkindness of ravens' – they provoke dark associations across many cultures. Perhaps humans have always been unsettled that the corvids alongside us have the facility for cognitive planning, the ability to anticipate their destiny, build tools and perform tasks. We prefer to assume that animals live in the moment, incapable of planning ahead and concerned only with their immediate needs.[4] Corvids, on the other hand, appear all-knowing and watchful. The raven, in particular, has a long history in literature, evoking an unnerving atmosphere more often than not – for example, the mysterious and uncanny world of nightmares created by Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) in 'The Raven':

> While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
> As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.[5]

The raven is the principal character in the creation myths of various indigenous peoples, such as the Tlingit and Haida cultures of the Northwest Coast of Canada, where a close symbiosis with nature had always existed. The raven appears in numerous origin myths and cosmology, such as how daylight began, and why summer and winter alternate.[6] The bird acts as a transformer, magician and healer and can take the form of animal or human, or even an inanimate object. The ability to transform and metamorphose led to the raven being associated with withholding secrets, a trickster often focused on satisfying his own gluttony for whatever he desires.[7] There is even mythology concerning how the raven, possessing the characteristics of both good and evil, was turned black forever, for his mischief.[8] Raven and other bird-forms were used throughout the Northwest Coast in rattles.[9] The raven rattle in the Sainsbury Centre collection depicts the raven with a hawk-mask attached to its breast. There is a reclining figure

with a wolf's head on the raven's back. The figure has its tongue extending into the beak of another bird, whose head forms the tail of the raven. The complexity in combining all these various bird-animal forms in one virtuoso piece is remarkable, and the rattle is rich in symbolism and meaning concerning its intended use.[10]



Raven Rattle, mid-19th century
North America, Northwest Coast
Haida or Tlingit people
Wood, leather, pebbles, paint
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

Throughout history, artists have represented birds and other animals, often using them as metaphors to symbolise human qualities and characteristics. The irrational fear of birds – ornithophobia – is found across all world cultures. The flapping of wings, or even simply proximity to feathers, can produce a heightened sense of fear and anxiety. Alternatively, they can evoke a sense of awe. Mark Cocker (b.1959), writing in *Crow Country*, 2007, meditates on nature and on the remarkable corvid roosting site along the Yare Valley floodplain in Norfolk. He provides an absorbing evocation of this spectacle of tens of thousands of crows and rooks assembling each winter evening at dusk; of the deafening noise, and the long, black shadows they cast as the birds arrive from all points of the compass to perform their nightly vigil. Their synchronicity and capacity to communicate with each other is a phenomenon that remains unexplained.[11] In 1972, Ted Hughes (1930–1998), whom Frink knew, published *Crow*, a collection of poems that offer a latent form of reciprocity with Frink's bird sculptures and are rich in metaphor, and in nature as the ultimate power.[12] They were both able to evoke an expressive language in their respective mediums, as seen in lines from Hughes's poem 'Lineage':[13]

> In the beginning was Scream
> Who Begat Blood
> Who Begat Eye
> Who Begat Fear
> Who Begat Wing
> Who Begat Bone.[14]

More recently, the artist Douglas Gordon (b.1966) has re-examined and explored similar territory in his work *Looking down with his Black, Black, Ee*, 2008. Here, like Frink, Gordon uses the crow as a symbol and metaphor to evoke menace and fear, not least in the eerie screeching of the birds and the mysterious spectacle of their assembly.

Frink exploited the animal metaphor in a remarkable series of birds that mutate and metamorphose from the more naturalistic to bird-monsters – abstracted, expressive and militaristic. She explored the expressive features of these birds, with emphasis on beak, claws and wings. They are often hybrid creatures, based on observation and naturalism, but possessing a profound expression of the imagination. She went on to describe how such birds could be vehicles for strong feelings of panic, tension, aggression and predatoriness.[15] These powerful bird-avatars embody emotions that succinctly express the climate of fear that shadowed the post-war period. These highly intelligent and alert birds also offered a warning. They were foreshadowing the encroaching state of anxiety created by the Cold War, the real threat of pandemonium and imminent nuclear annihilation. This foreboding sense of psychological fear is suffocating in *The Birds*, a short story by Daphne du Maurier (1907–1989), which was published in 1952, the same year as Frink showed her first bird sculpture. Here, in parallel with Frink, du Maurier evokes the metaphor of impending nuclear attack, expressed through the terror of waves of predatory avian marauders.[16] *The Birds* was transferred

Right: Looking down with his black, black, ee, 2008
Douglas Gordon (b.1966)
Video, 3 monitors, sound, colour, 7 minutes 56 seconds
The artist and Gagosian

Below: Vulture, 1952
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive

to film by the director Alfred Hitchcock, whose more famous 1963 motion picture adapts and extends her plotline, but retains the intense claustrophobic and psychological horror of du Maurier's writing.

Frink's interest was in behavioural comparisons between humans and animals, and more specifically in the bird as a metaphor to portray human fear and angst. The expressive forms in her bird sculptures often verge on the grotesque, and express charged psychological horror. The writer Laurie Lee, an early advocate of Frink's, described her warrior birds thus: 'Wings spread in challenge, claws strike, the beak-mouths scream. Jagged as shrapnel, these forms are both wounds and weapons: they bristle with terror or stretch in long crows of triumph.'[17] This theme, and subsequent ones, encapsulated her preoccupation with contrasts in human or animal behaviour, such as violence, aggression, cruelty, vulnerability, brutalism, sensitivity, empathy and nurture. Frink's work was tough and uncompromising. Lee said of her bird-monsters: 'if they sang they would spit out splinters of iron'. Her birds could be damaged; they could be frightened or dead.[18] *Bird*, 1952, is a typically menacing and defiant corvid hybrid, whilst *Vulture*, 1952, is more predatory, in search of prey or carrion. Ted Hughes evoked this sentiment in his poem 'King of Carrion' of 1972:

His palace is of skulls.
His crown is the last splinters
Of the vessel of life.
His throne is the scaffold of bones, the hanged thing's
Rack and final stretcher.
His robe is the black of the last blood.[19]

When Frink's work was reviewed in the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1952, she was praised for the expressive nature of her sculpture: 'Frink is the most talented, her forms are violent and imply a reckless, almost unheeding, sense of pain. Her animal sculptures are tortured, split and rigid with fear. Their suppressed screams resulting from violent suffering and pain. Every twisted muscle, stretched skin and flared sinew is exploited vehemently.'[20] Frink responded to violence because she had witnessed this directly in childhood, and had been deeply affected by wartime newsreels and by concerns about her father, who was serving in the army. By 1953 she made her first warrior bird, as her avatars metamorphosed into avian humanoid hybrids. A further development in 1961, the *Harbinger Bird* series, was constructed from slab-like forms, as if protected by plate amour. These are militarised walking warrior man-birds, fused together to form an efficient predatory agent of death. A further development still came in 1965, when the birds adopted more explicit military references. The haunting *Standard* series has predatory birds such as vultures or eagles perched on celebratory or commemorative extended columns. And the *Mirage* figures of 1967–9, a more benign series but a no-less-strange and uncanny apparition, was inspired by Frink seeing birds at a distance in the heat-haze of summer. Such bird-monsters could have stepped directly out of the Late Triassic period.[21]

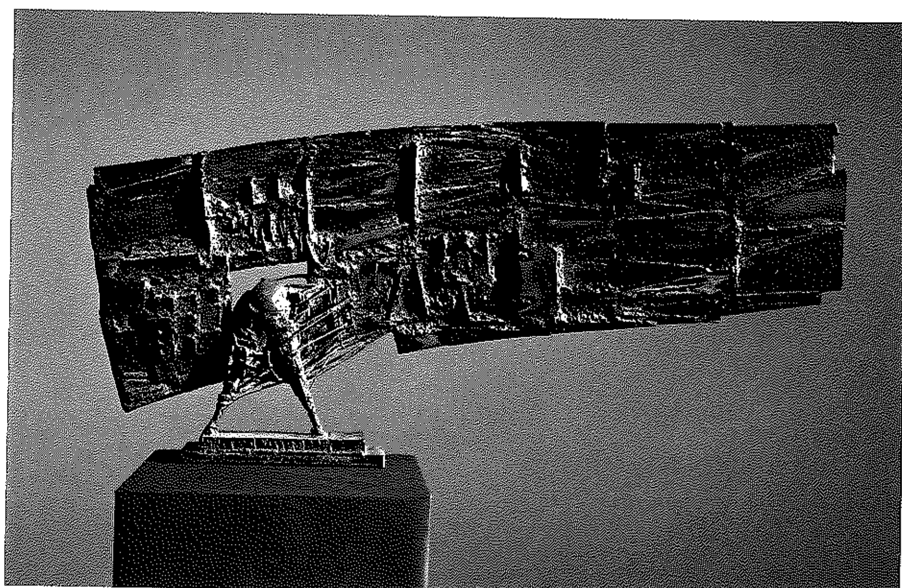
Above left: Bird, c.1952
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive

Above right: Harbinger Bird III, 1961
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive

Alongside the bird-monster avatar, another series of larger male figures appeared, such as *Birdman*, 1959, *Spinning Man*, 1960, and *Falling Man*, 1961. The sources for this series of damaged and broken aviators and vulnerable cosmonauts ranged from Frink's memories of Second World War falling planes and pilots at East Anglian airfields, to the impending exploration of outer space. In both cases, a fear of falling recalled her nightmares and was a dream familiar to many. Ted Hughes was just as sensitive to this during the period, and in *The Hawk in the Rain* of 1957 he evokes this fear of falling, which Frink captures so successfully in sculptural form:

> Each body still straining to follow down
> The maelstrom dark of the other, their limbs flail
> Flesh and beat upon
> The insane everywhere of its obstacle,
>
> Each, every second, lonelier and further
> Falling alone through the endless
> Without-world of the other, though both here
> Twist so close they choke their cries.[22]

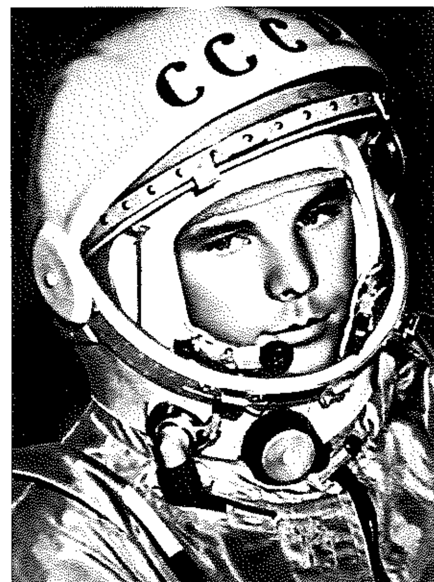
The Hawk in the Rain was Hughes's first collection of poems, in which – like Frink in sculpture – he explored the rich vein of animal metaphor and imagined the real and symbolic lives of animals. Frink's larger series of man-bird hybrids immediately recalls classical motifs and metaphors, such as Icarus; or biblical ones, such as Lazarus. It is likely this was, at the very least, a subconscious or latent effect. Such an archetype of victimhood would have been impossible for her to ignore. However, Frink denied an implicit link to classical sources, and instead said that a more contemporary concern furnished her imagination. Like the French artist César Baldaccini (1921–1998), she was fascinated by the self-styled Birdman, Léo Valentin (1919–1956), who fell tragically to his death and recalled recurring nightmares of free-falling.



The Man of Saint-Denis, 1958
César (1921–1998)
Iron
Tate

Frink's *Birdman* sculpture, 1959, was directly inspired by Valentin, as well as by the young pilots she had witnessed falling from the sky into the fields of East Anglia. Frink had met César in Paris and he had an exhibition in London at the Hanover Gallery, where he showed a whole series of sculptures relating to Valentin in 1957.[23] In her sculpture the wings are truncated, shot and blasted, and flight is now an impossibility. However, her Birdman is not altogether a victim, and sheer tragedy is defeated by the heroic pose, evoking that of an angel or the spirit leaving the earthly body or starting the assent to paradise, recalling the great visionary artist and poet William Blake (1757–1827).

Frink was always alert to the wider cultural and political climate and was influenced by current events, mass media, popular culture and public spectacle. The romantic adventurer Valentin had become famous – an



Above: Yuri Gagarin, Vostok 1 Capsule, 1961

Left: Untitled, 1960
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Ink on paper
Frink Estate and Archive

Above: Rilke (for Duino Elegies),
1989
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Graphite and wash on paper
Frink Estate and Archive

Right: Balzac, study, type C (Torso) large model, 2nd version, 1892
Auguste Rodin (1885–1954)
Bronze
Private Collection, London

international celebrity for his heroic aeronautical feats of parachuting, free-falling at 176 feet per second, where the body reaches its maximum speed – and he controlled flight with his carefully fashioned wooden wings.[24] He fell dramatically to his death in 1956 in front of thousands of spectators at an air show at Speke airport, Liverpool.

Frink's larger man-bird hybrids may well have been initially inspired by Valentin, but increasingly they seemed to echo the exploration of space, such as that of Sputnik in 1957 and the first manned space flight by Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968) in 1961, both being manifestations of the space race that consumed public consciousness around the globe. The helmeted spinning and falling man is seen to express human vulnerability on a celestial scale, and was a theme Frink explored in a series of remarkable drawings as well as sculptural form. As metaphors of the fragility of humanity, they are either free-falling towards earth or spinning uncontrollably whilst suspended weightlessly in outer space. Cocooned like a chrysalis, they are protected from the harsh environment only by a helmeted spacesuit.

It is likely that Frink had read the remarkable text of 1903 about Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) by the poet Rainer Maria Rilke, which was published in England in 1946.[25] Frink became a great admirer of Rilke's poetry, no doubt inspired by this early introduction to his writing.[26] The account is a combination of lyrical description and metaphor, with an account of Rodin's thoughts on art. It is effectively a manifesto for sculpture. There is a particular focus on the task of the sculptor as being one of making, crafting work out of matter with one's hands, which would no doubt have inspired a young artist such as Frink.[27] The passage referring to the Rodin sculpture *Man with a Broken Nose*, 1863–4, seems particularly relevant to Frink and her portrayal of damaged, maimed and scarred warriors, soldiers and life-worn prisoners: 'the head of an ageing, ugly man whose broken nose even helped to

emphasise the tortured expression of the face, must have been the fullness of life that was culminated in these features'.[28]

Rodin was also intrigued by the body fragment; 'there are among the works of Rodin hands, single, small hands which, without belonging to a body, are alive. Hands that rise, irritated and in wrath, hands whose five bristling fingers seem to bark like the five jaws of a dog from hell. Hands that walk, sleeping hands, and hands that are awakening.'[29] Picasso (1881–1973) would evoke this sentiment in his sculpture, *Arm*, 1959; and likewise Frink, much later in life, in 1981, when she cast the hands of her *Walking Madonna* sculpture. In Picasso's case, it is uncertain whether the outstretched hand is one of anguish, recalling his response to the bombing of Guernica, or a symbol of hope, compassion and an expression of humanity. Frink's decision to cast the hands independently of the complete figure of the *Walking Madonna* aligns her closely with Rodin, as if one should comprehend the whole predicament of the Madonna by reading her hands alone.

Frink's attraction to the heroic but fragmented and silently eroded state of the human figure in Rodin's sculpture was confirmed during her initial visit to Paris in 1951 to see his works for the first time. She particularly admired how Rodin translated anatomy into movement, literally moving sinew and muscle, as well as the erotic and sensual portrayal of man.[30] Whilst she was there she visited the Musée d'Art Moderne and saw the work of Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966) and Germaine Richier (1902–1959), which impressed itself greatly on her imagination. Both Giacometti and Richier had been trained by Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929), whom Frink admired, and who in turn had been trained by Rodin.[31] Both artists were engaged in modelling the human form and in building up form in plaster over a metal wire armature. Frink adopted this technique, too, and liked the speed with which she could work in plaster and build up on an armature. She also liked how you could change the whole thing: 'You can break it up, which I do constantly.'[32] Frink would retain this methodology for the rest of her life, not afraid to destroy a working plaster if it did not progress as she wanted.[33] Conversely, she would often rework a plaster to the extent of removing whole limbs, only to reattach them to convey new meaning and expression to the fragmented form. The materiality and the substance of sculpture could then be translated into bronze, while retaining the spontaneity of the original act of making.

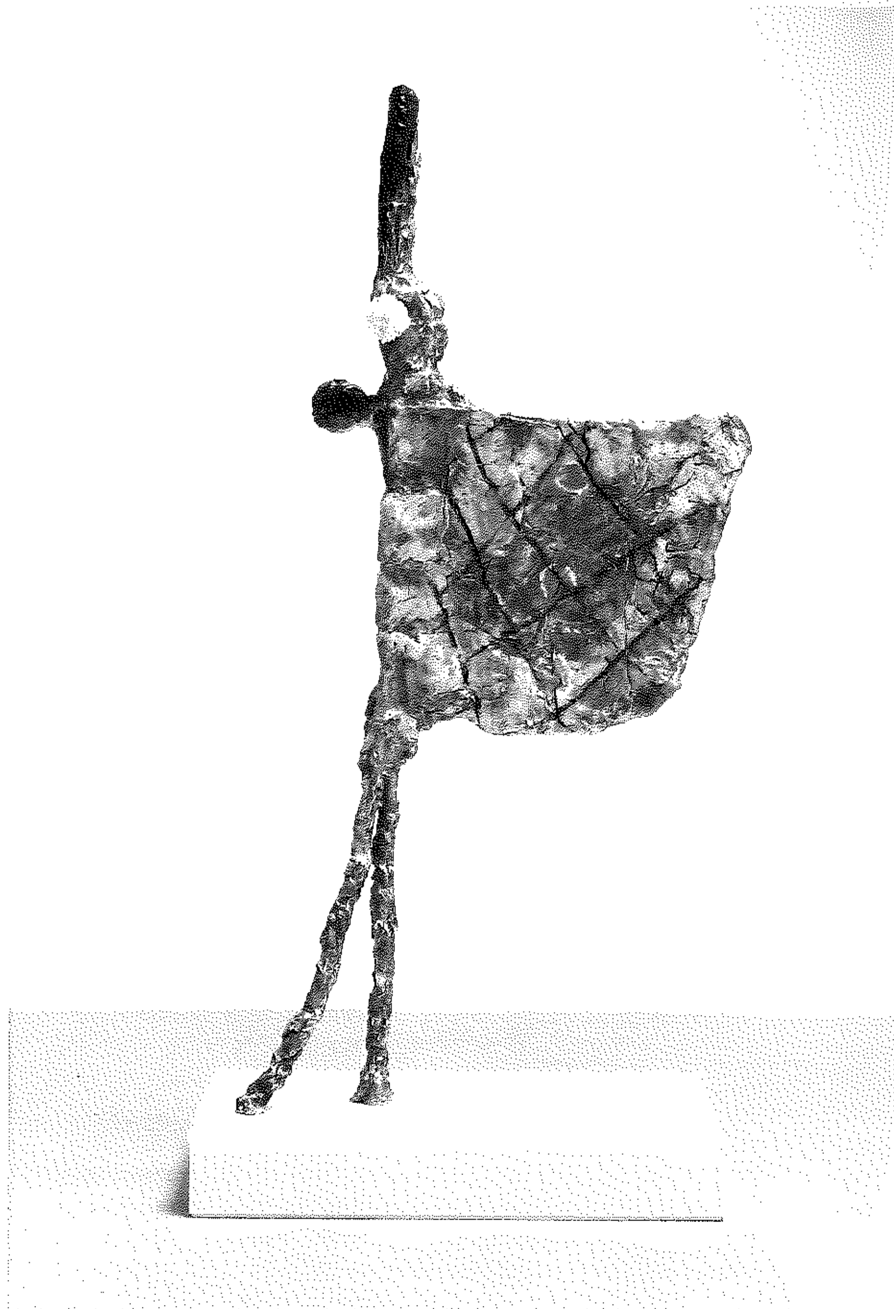
This translation of form is shared with contemporary artist Rebecca Warren, who engages in the potential of sculptural possibilities of modelling material in space, as seen in her work *Los Hadeans III*, 2017.[34] Like Frink, Warren sometimes references sources from popular culture, but in this instance evokes deep time on a geological timespan. Warren, Frink, Giacometti and Richier share a deep fascination with the art of the past, as well as conveying more contemporary concerns. Whilst each artist's work is quite distinct, there is a shared sense of defying human epochs turning sculpture to petrified stone and operating across geological time. Whilst simultaneously reflecting the times in which it was made, their sculpture is grounded in nature and suffused with an indeterminate slow decay.

Frink admired Giacometti's treatment of form, such as the attenuated legs of his figures, but his internalised, deeply philosophical temperament was the opposite of her classic English pragmatism. For Giacometti, when he invented animal forms they were autobiographical and anthropomorphic, such as *Dog*, 1951, of which he stated, 'That dog is me.' Frink in fact felt a

Top: Hands for Madonna, 1981
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
David Sainsbury

Above: Head of Apollo with Large Base, c.1900
Antoine Bourdelle (1861–1929)
Bronze
Private collection, London

Los Hadeans III, 2017
Rebecca Warren
Hand-painted bronze and pompom on painted MDF plinth
Collection of the artist



deep affinity with Richier and the two artists shared many of the same concerns. They both explored the use of metamorphosis and the hybridity of human-animal relations in much greater depth and returning humanity to nature. They also explored the theme of the warrior. On Frink, the writer Laurie Lee states: 'in her helmeted men and warrior birds we see the postures of eternal conflicts. Eyes roll in the dark, a forest darkness, the forest of Gods and Demons.'[35]

Frink met Germaine Richier in 1955 when Richier had a major show at the Hanover Gallery in London, and found her 'marvellous, very sympathetic'.[36] The works that Frink would have seen in the Hanover Gallery include: *Bird*, 1953–5; *Warrior*, 1953; *Man of the Night*, 1954–5; and *Spider I*, 1946. David Sylvester identified these as hybrid creatures, part human, part bird or insect or tree form.[37] He went on to describe the roughness of Richier's surfaces, which 'eats right into the heart of the sculpture'.[38] Richier's *Storm Man*, 1947–8,

is a calcified victim, whose great bulk offers little protection from the corrosion that has interminably taken hold and is obliterating the head and face. To Richier, the fractured appearance of her works was the key to their meaning:

> What characterises sculpture, in my opinion, is the way in which it renounces the full, solid form. Holes and perforations conduct like flashes of lightning in the material which becomes organic and open, encircled from all sides, lit up in and through hollows. A form lives to the extent to which it does not withdraw from expression. And we decidedly cannot conceal human expression in the drama of our time.[39]

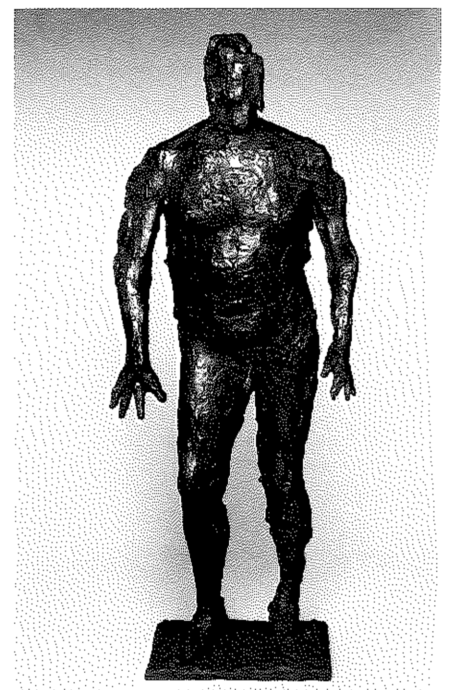
Richier's Kafkaesque images of hybrid beings saw the fusing of the human figure with both animal and plant attributes. For Sylvester, her assault on matter was a metaphor for the survival of the human body: 'Richier brings matter to the point of dissolution only to hold it all the more firmly together. In the very process of committing an act of assault and battery, her hands transit to their victim an energy that will ensure its remaining whole.'[40]

Frink identified with these damaged, wounded, eviscerated and scarred bodies – and how far they could be eroded and remain whole. Sylvester described Frink as 'outstanding', in a review of a show at the Heffer Gallery in 1956.[41] He was impressed by her 'characteristic sculptures of dead animals hanging upside down, a Leveret in which the forms are too literally taken from nature to have life in themselves and a Dead Cat, a powerful image in which the lifeless body acquires another kind of life that heightens the meaning of its death'.[42] A year earlier, in 1955, the critic Lawrence Alloway had noted Frink's particular gift to be able 'to emphatically distort her natural objects without seeming to abuse their essential structure. Nevertheless, it is her less emotionally demonstrative pieces – such as Dead Leveret, realising a motive from French realist painting in true sculptural form.'[43] This was a review of Frink's first solo show at St George's Gallery in London, in which Alloway, a pre-eminent and influential critic, concluded: 'a remarkable collection by a very youthful sculptor'.[44] Frink was only twenty-four.

Frink and Richier had inherited strategies developed by the Surrealists earlier in the century, whereby the birds or hybrid birds and other animals were adopted as a subject of metamorphosis (Carrington) or psychological anguish (Ernst). The merging of the natural, real and imagined worlds in various biomorphic and anthropomorphic tendencies occurred in the wake of the new scientific discipline of evolutionary biology and its fundament in the Darwinian theory of evolution. The question of hybrid forms was also addressed. In his Surrealist manifesto, André Breton quoted the poet Pierre Reverdy, who alluded, in 1918, to the special quality of an image conceived in the mind – namely, its capacity to encompass several realities simultaneously: 'The more the relationship between the two juxtaposed realities is distant and true, the stronger the image will be – the greater its emotional power and poetic reality.'[45] Elements must be far enough apart in origin for them to be perceived as different, yet must relate to one another so clearly that, when combined they are experienced as an entity as in part human, part animal hybrids. Pre-eminent examples are the Egyptian Sphinx or the Greek Centaur.[46]

Above: The Poet, 1943
Germaine Richier (1904–1959)
Bronze on stone base
Private Collection, London

Below: Storm Man, 1947
Germaine Richier (1904–1959)
Bronze
Tate



Still from *Nosferatu*, 1922

The Surrealists often explored the roles played by animals in folkloric traditions or the ancient mythologies of various cultures, most notably Oceanic or, as we have seen, the Pacific-fringed American Northwest Coast. They were concerned with alienation, the uncanny, horror and fantasies of transformation, freedom, wildness, fierceness or empathy; the curiosity of the strange, the emotionally charged or what they perceived to be exotic. Like the writers associated with Romanticism, they were drawn to the inexplicable, the absurd or the paranormal – for example, the English Gothick novel, such as *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1797–1851), published in 1818.[47] Or the man-beast portrayed in films such as *Nosferatu* of 1922, adapted from *Dracula* by Bram Stoker (1847–1912), which was written in 1897. In the observance of animal behaviour, Frink could express her concern for fear or aggression, resulting in strange or unsettling encounters, as seen in works such as *Vulture*, 1952. The appearance of a creature at times playful, watchful or menacing is a vehicle through which Frink, and her nightmare of black beating wings, expresses her innermost thoughts and fears.

The poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936) created a literary battery of visionary mythology that was rich in animal metaphor, and Frink recalled how his poetry 'brought another dimension of violence and death and very sharp and emphatic images into my consciousness':[48]

> The mask. Look how the mask
> Comes from Africa to New York.
>
> They are gone, the pepper trees,
> The tiny buds of phosphorus.
> They are gone, the camels with torn flesh,
> and the valleys of light the swan lifted in its beak
>
> It was a time of parched things,
> the wheat spear in the eye, the laminated cat,
> the time of tremendous, rusting bridges
> and the deathly silence of cork.
>
> It was the great gathering of dead animals
> pieced by the swords of light.
> The endless joy of the hippopotamus with cloven feet of ash
> And of the gazelle with an immortelle in its throat.[49]

These lines, taken from the 'Dance of Death' in *Poet in New York* (1929–32), whilst expressing Lorca's personal anguish, are a visceral attack on modern society as he witnessed it in New York. They are a direct condemnation of the degradation of nature, indifference to suffering and, specifically, the injustices and alienation visible within the broken societies of the American city.[50]

> How hard they try!
> How hard the horse tries
> To become a dog!
> How hard the dog tries to become a swallow!
> How hard the swallow tries to become a bee!

How hard the bee tries to become a horse!
And the Horse.
What a sharp arrow it presses from the rose,
What a pale rose rising from its lips![51]

These lines from Death, in *Poet in New York*, are rich in animal symbolism, animal transmutation and metamorphosis. Lorca's words and Frink's sculpture had much in common with fellow artist Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010), who used animal forms to express emotion. In her *Maman* series of spiders, such as *Spider II*, 1995, she explores the theme of animal motifs to convey aspects of human behaviour and emotions. It alludes to the strength of the mother, with metaphors of spinning, weaving, nurture and protection. Bourgeois described *Spider* as an ode to her mother, and identified various characteristics that symbolised her:

She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver.
My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother

Spider II, 1995
Louise Bourgeois (1911–2010)
Bronze, wall piece
Collection The Easton Foundation

Still from *The Damned*, 1963

> was in charge of the workshop. Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother.[52]

Like Bourgeois's spider, Frink's bird-monsters and human-animal hybrids haunt our imagination and are bothersome creatures that play on our psyche. They appear like terrible apparitions from our worst nightmares, conjuring up a Gothick sensibility of latent magic and the supernatural from the deepest recesses of a mysterious imagination. They seem to hold some terrible truth and to deliver a heightened sense of foreboding. The smell of decay and death permeates Frink's work with a sense of haunting psychological Gothick. The film director Joseph Losey (1909–1984) used this to great effect in his film *The Damned*, 1963. This film was based on the science-fiction thriller *The Children of Light* by H. L. Lawrence. The story unfolds whereby a secret government scientist experiments on an innocent group of children, who are exposed to an unspecified source of radiation that will render them immune to the deadly fallout from an atomic bomb. The perverted aim is to create a breeding programme of a radiation-immune race that can survive the anticipated contaminated planet in the aftermath of nuclear war. Whilst the film clings to the belief that science will ultimately triumph, children are portrayed as innocent victims of ruthless and misguided authorities. The film version includes a number of subplots, including one of the single-minded, peace-loving artist who, in isolation, creates her macabre sculptures that offer a warning of this misguided dystopian project.

Frink's menacing forms haunt many of the film's scenes and offer a poetic and unifying presence throughout. They enhance the dystopian setting and claustrophobic atmosphere, heighten the psychological drama and provide unsettling atmosphere in the film. The disturbing nature of the film, and the delinquency of its main character, led to it being credited as a precursor to *A Clockwork Orange* by Stanley Kubrick (1928–1999) of 1971.[53] That film was adapted from the 1962 novel by Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) and there is a distinct similarity in the main protagonists: King in *The Damned* and Alex in *A Clockwork Orange*.[54]

Frink's sculptures seem pregnant with meaning in *The Damned*. The film captures the anxiety of the atomic age, being released the year after the Cuban Missile Crisis had brought the world to the brink of nuclear confrontation. For many people, this threat remained not one of 'if' but 'when', and Losey's film conveys this sense of fear and dread. Frink was a pre-eminent artist of the nuclear epoch and touches profoundly on the anxiety of humanity and on physical as well as psychological assault on the body, which is eroded and blasted and is described by James Purdon as being 'shaped directly by the unseen forces described in the civil defence films of the period – heat, blast, and fallout'.[55]

Physical attack on the body was a common metaphor and response among artists to the nuclear threat. The artists identified by Peter Reyner Banham (1922–1988) in 'The New Brutalism' (1955) and *The New Brutalism: Ethic or Aesthetic* (1966), such as Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005) and Magda Cordell (1921–2008), shared with Frink this treatment of the brutalised body. The bodies are disfigured, mutilated, eviscerated, flattened, flayed, lopped, smashed and decomposed.[56] Frink had met Paolozzi in the mid-1950s and admired his sculptures of this period, and in the late 1950s her work inhabited the

brutalist sphere of Cordell, Paolozzi and William Turnbull (1922–2012), and the wounded zombie-horror body of science fiction and popular culture, most notably in her *Birdman*, 1959, *Spinning Man*, 1960, and *Falling Man*, 1961, as well as in the variant heads, such as *Fish Head*, 1961. In *Birdman*, 1959, Frink's mark-making culminated in the mutilated torso with a series of horizontal lacerations. The whole body is shattered and blasted, eroded and pitted, as if by unseen but deadly fallout. This sculpture echoes works by Paolozzi, such as his *Shattered Head*, 1956, where the assault on the body renders a fractured shell. It has been eaten and eroded, so that what remains is little more than an empty husk. In fact Paolozzi smashed the wax cast by dropping it on the floor, before reassembling the shattered remains.[57] When the work was exhibited in a group show at the Hanover Gallery in 1956, David Sylvester singled out Paolozzi's bronzes for praise, whilst cautioning the artist with what he saw as being 'driven to New Brutalism' by the limitations in his technique.[58]

Whilst Paolozzi was experimenting with lost-wax casting, his unrepentant rawness in technique shares the uninhibited expressions of the *Art Brut* of Jean Dubuffet (1901–1985) or the mutilated *Hostage Heads*, 1943–4, of Jean Fautrier (1898-1964). In Dubuffet's 'Texturologies', the artist deploys mark-making, material manipulation, deliberate scarring and bodily gesture. Others, such as Wols (1913–1951), Henri Michaux (1899–1984) and Fautrier, defined their work as *Matiere* painting. Many of them were associated with

Above: Shattered Head, 1956
Eduardo Paolozzi (1924–2005)
Bronze with stone base
Private collection, London

Left: Birdman, 1959 (detail)
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
The Frink Estate and Archive and Beaux Arts London

Carapace I, 1963
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive

Tachisme and *Art Informel*.[59] These actions were often deployed in humble materials such as sackcloth, wood, cardboard or cast-off cloth. The materials were then attacked and subjugated to damage, distortion, deconstruction or fragmentation during the process of creation, responding to the cruelty and bloodshed as a collective cathartic form of purging the recent bloodletting and continued torment at the extent of the torturer–victim atrocities. It could be seen as a form of mortification following Hiroshima and Nagasaki, or as the failure to end the cycle of violence that continued to mark the post-war period and beyond.

Brutalism, in part inspired by Dubuffet and *Art Brut*, was a condition bound up in those artists who had experienced at first hand the horrors of the Second World War, its aftermath and the omnipresent threat of the atom bomb. Cordell, a Jewish Hungarian, escaped from the Nazis as a refugee fleeing to Israel. Paolozzi, the son of Italian immigrants in Leith, Edinburgh, was interned as a potential enemy alien, as were his father, grandfather and uncle, who all died whilst in captive transit to Canada. Turnbull was a pilot in the RAF. And Frink was a young child witnessing broken returning aviators and their damaged aeroplanes, or direct attacks from the Luftwaffe. The violation and desecration of the human body were a very real experience, and a near-future of scorched, burnt and eroded flesh a near-certainty.

The processing of this collision of aftermath and threat, of human biology and technology, was played out in London at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, The Independent Group (1952–5) and the staging of the seminal exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* (1956), curated by Bryan Robertson. Aesthetics, art practice and architecture were applied to the social and political condition in an attempt to create an intellectual discourse around the past–future flux. Turnbull expressed this in the exhibition catalogue: 'Sculpture used to look "modern", now we make objects that might have been dug up at any time during the past forty thousand years.'[60] Two further heads by Frink are a case in point and have common traits with Turnbull's heads of the same period; *Carapace I*, 1963, and *Carapace II*, 1963, are evolution in reverse – eroded, fossilised remains of some indiscernible age and indescribable besieged human-animal creature – whose titles suggest that the form has retreated from the onslaught, saved only by its protective crustacean-like shell.

Frink's art and life witnessed a transformation in social conventions and a dramatic and seismic shift in society and behaviour. Youth culture, an emerging consumer society, leisure, film and music all became significant phenomena. Generational differences were exposed as young adults were identified as teenagers. Feared for their existential nihilism, teenagers created subcultures, the most significant of which was the so-called 'Teddy boy', threatening fear and anarchy within mainstream society. The established order offered resistance and was increasingly alarmed by the threat of so-called delinquency, the demand for personal freedom and perceived moral decay. Alongside the threat of nuclear war, Joseph Losey played out these fears in *The Damned*, as a society on the edge of moral as well as physical collapse. In the same year Losey directed *The Servant*, adapted from the 1948 novel by Robin Maugham (1916–1981) with a screenplay by Harold Pinter (1930–2008). The film also features Frink's sculpture and explores social, moral, sexual and gender themes through the interdependent, repressed relationships of the main characters. It is a tightly constructed, stylish piece of film noir that has lost none of its psychological intensity, which was provided largely by Pinter's controlled and restrained dialogue.[61]

Arm, 1959
Pablo Picasso (1881–1973)
Bronze
Private Collection, London

The playwright John Osborne (1929–1994) also captured the mood onstage. His seminal play *Look Back in Anger* opened at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1956. Absorbing the influence of, amongst others, Beckett and Brecht, Osborne's play was most significant in reflecting the cultural shift of the period and in exposing the perceived social claustrophobia felt by the younger generation. Osborne wrote a letter to *The Sunday Times* in June 1960, placing Frink's meditations on life and death alongside that of Rembrandt, Goya and Picasso. In defending her vision, he went on to state:

> What is the meaning of life since man is mortal? This was answered by Goya with dead men, mutilated men, men with severed limbs; and by Picasso with a dead child and the hollow fragments of a warrior's figure at Guernica. A crucifixion is brutal (however some painters may have romanticised it) and death is the brutality no English reform society can ever agitate against.

Osborne concludes by quoting Keats: 'Beauty is truth, truth is beauty! That is all Ye know on earth and all ye need to know.'[62]

By the 1960s, one significant strand of these social changes was classified as the sexual revolution, which offered women the opportunity to have greater control over their lives. Frink may have come from a conservative military background, but she embraced these changes – and life in bohemian Chelsea. She was not a political artist or an activist, but neither was she strictly conventional. Her art was of central importance to her, but for a woman artist this meant making sacrifices and taking risks. Her relationships with men were important, but her art even more so. She was married three times and was a mother, which in time meant that she was expected to navigate social conventions. Her form of feminism was based on example, and she appeared not to be swayed by patronising and dismissive attitudes to her work as a sculptor who happened to be female. She was both physically and mentally strong, but candidly admitted that she worked best with a strong emotional attachment. Her work reflected her personal life and was always based upon her observations and her reflections on humanity. To do this, she found a form of expressive figuration that suited her creative powers, even at

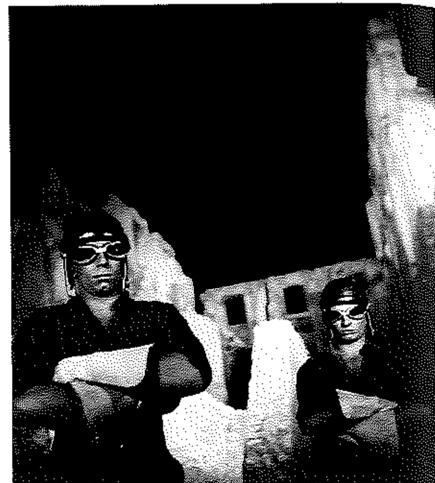
Goggle Head, 1969
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
The Ingram Collection of
Modern British Art

a time when all around her the preference for formalist art was stripped of narration, meaning and sentiment.

Frink's art was directly influenced by her childhood in rural Suffolk, and the natural world left an indelible mark upon her – a countryside existence full of animals and birds, but set against the backdrop of the Second World War. She was nine years old when this war broke out, and her father fought throughout as a professional soldier. The family home was near an airfield, and she witnessed bombers and fighters in the skies directly overhead, or returning to the base in flames. Later in the war, while in Devon, she narrowly avoided machine-gun fire from an enemy fighter plane.[63] These wartime events had a profound effect on Frink, as did her viewing of the first images to be released of the Nazi concentration camps. She stated, 'I was fifteen when I saw the news pictures of Belsen, and it was a shattering experience.'[64] The impact of these experiences influenced her approach to her work and led to a lifelong preoccupation with conflict, injustice and man's capacity for brutality. She perhaps shared the view that art could play a cathartic role, or provide a gesture of hope, against the ongoing mystery of war that is inseparable from the human experience.

These ideas reached their greatest firmament in Frink's best-known works, a series of *Goggle Head* sculptures that she created between 1967 and 1969. They demonstrated a pronounced development in her style and are her most original and significant creations. There is a discernible step towards pop culture, even if they are not directly associated with Pop Art. She replaced the

blasted and eroded, highly textured surfaces of her earlier work, and instead these works are smooth, altogether a more dangerous proposition. They are grotesque and bizarrely kitsch manifestations, an archetypal man oozing glamour, sex, death and nihilism. They are transgressions, and one is unsure whether to be appalled or turned on by them! They could be a characterisation from J. G. Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash*, although the metaphors deployed by the writer are sensationally amplified and more extremely pronounced. Ballard stated how he was concerned with a pandemic cataclysm, institutionalised in all industrial societies, that kills hundreds of thousands of people each year and injures millions.[65] He revealed how he used the car 'as a metaphor for man's life in today's society' and asked the question: 'do we see the car crash as a sinister portent of a nightmare marriage between sex and technology?'[66]



The *Goggle Heads* are not portraits, but archetypes. The face of evil, oppression and death lurks below the surface gloss; the perpetrators of extreme acts of violence and those who dehumanise their victims. Frink indicated that the image was impressed upon her by the news media of the time reporting the colonial wars in North Africa; and by General Oufkir, a captain of the French army of Morocco, who allegedly arranged the 'disappearance' of the left-wing politician Mehdi Ben Barka. In truth, the source is more likely to be conflated. Bryan Robertson recalled the two helmeted and goggled motorcyclists in the Jean Cocteau film *Orpheus*, released in 1950. This may well have lodged in Frink's mind with a distant but engrained image of violence and menace.[67] A retelling of ancient mythology, but set in contemporary existential Paris and dystopian, the film is unsettling with its deliberate violence, as it questions human behaviour and accepted morals.
The two delinquent protagonists execute their orders with inhuman efficiency.

The *Goggle Heads*, their eyes concealed behind polished headgear, are gangland hoodlums, thugs or hired assassins. The artist Francis Bacon (1909–1992) was also capable of creating such an archetype. Frink had long admired his work and liked him immensely. Their paths would sometimes

Above: Still from *Orpheus*, 1950.
Photographer Roger Corbeau

Left: Small Head, 1959
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive

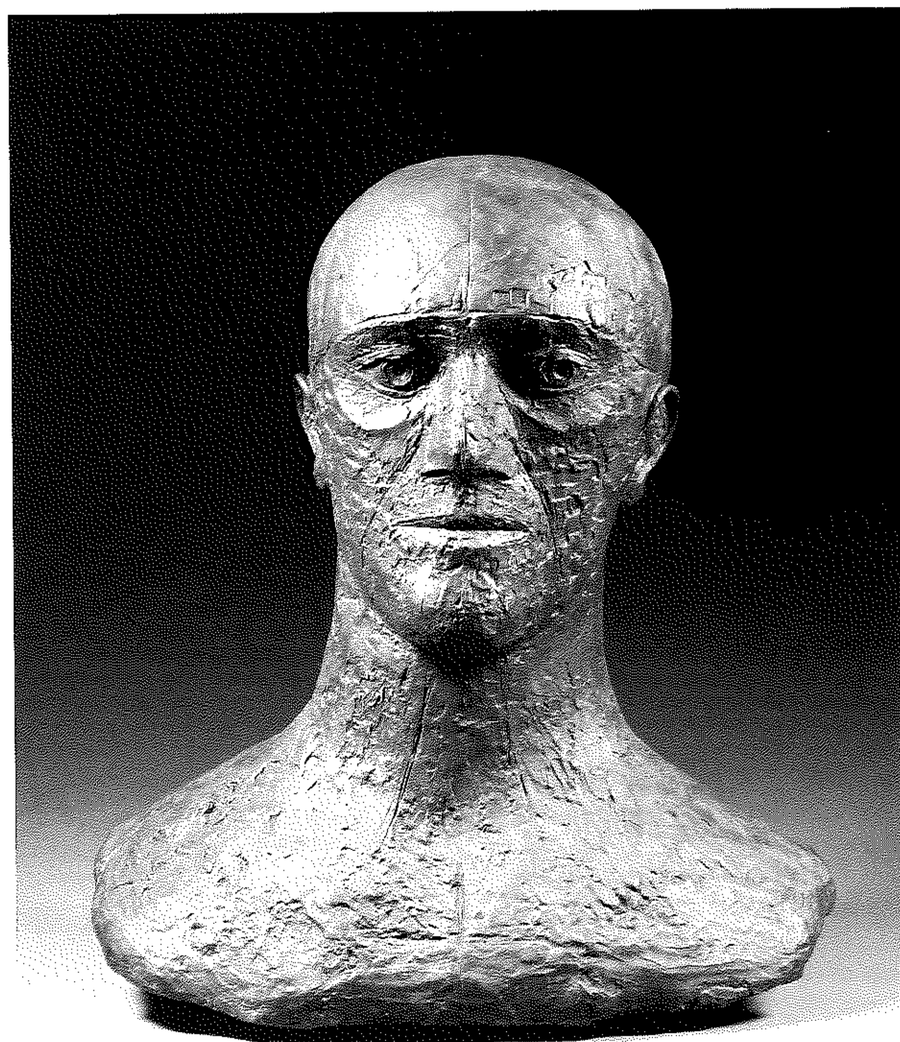
Study for Portrait of P.L., no. 2, 1957
Francis Bacon (1909–1992)
Oil on canvas
Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts

cross in London, and Bacon was an occasional visitor to the Fulham Road pubs, the Queen's Elm and Finch's, where Frink would meet artists and writers, including Rodrigo Moynihan (1910–1990), John Minton (1917–1957) and Laurie Lee (1914–1997).[68] Or Frink would gravitate to Soho, where Bacon would more habitually be found.[69] It is not recorded, but Frink's androgyny and physicality may have appealed to Bacon in the same way that his friends and subjects such as Isabel Rawsthorne (1912–1992) and Henrietta Moraes (1931–1999) did. Bacon's treatment of the human figure and the stark reality of violence, sex and brutality share much with the dangerous twisted, grinning, goggle-headed thugs. Bacon had also explored the human-animal imagination in the early 1950s, with images of screaming primates, watchful birds and howling dogs.

Frink's sculpture *Small Head*, 1959, is one of the most remarkable of her hybrid human-animal sculptures and recalls Bacon's work in the post-war period, such as *Triptych*, 1944, and *Fury*, 1944. This terrifying head, open-jawed and displaying pronounced fangs, has much in common with Bacon's early biomorphic creations, as well as his animal-primate paintings of the late 1940s to early 1950s. Such works express the darker side of human-animal behaviour with heightened psychological drama. Like Bacon, Frink's head sculpture seems to anticipate later science-fiction creations – in the case of Bacon, most notably in the 1979 film *Alien* by Ridley Scott (b.1937). The design work in the film was created by artist and set designer H. R. Giger (1940–2014), who stated: 'It was Francis Bacon's work that gave me the inspiration. [It] would come tearing out of the man's flesh with its gaping mouth, grasping and with an explosion of teeth . . . it's pure Bacon.'[70]

Bacon explored the darker side of human behaviour and the stark reality of man's ability for brutality against one another. His style of painting was closely aligned to a sculptural treatment of the body – ideally contorted, deformed, brutalised and indicating violence. Bacon's painting *Study for Portrait of P.L., no. 2*, 1957 portrays his partner, Peter Lacey, a war hero and fighter pilot in the Battle of Britain. Their relationship was complicated and often descended into violence not least due to Bacon's sadomasochistic tendencies. Bacon explored the physicality and masculinity of the body and the truncated torso intensifies the magnetic sensation of Lacey's menacing gaze. In Frink's *Goggle Head* sculptures, the physiological drama is latent, but the threat is nevertheless omnipresent. The veiled threat and menace are what makes them so unsettling. The mood is one of extreme malevolence and, as in Bacon's work, the scale of the sentiment is truly filmic. The overall effect is designed to make the spectator uncomfortable and disorientated. A whole series of conflicting characteristics create an image of man as grandiose, sensationalised, pompous, comic anti-hero, kitsch, kinky, cruel, horrible, magnificent and modern – a macabre celebration of weirdness that was appealing to both Frink and Bacon, as was contained energy, repressive and caged. Frink commented: 'Somebody who can be extraordinarily emotional, but one senses they are composed. They've got it in there and can unleash it if they like. I try to translate this into my figures. Something slightly caged in.'[71]

She believed that the twentieth century had profoundly changed the human senses, as they had been so brutalised that they no longer responded to atrocities.[72] The 1959 novel *The Tin Drum*, by Günter Grass (1927–2015), was one of Frink's favourite novels and acts as a recalibration of the human condition in the post-war era. Few books come closer to exploring the chaos and catastrophe that were the twentieth century. It is a profound metaphysical allegory, in which its narrator, Oskar Matzerath, acts as a prime witness to the



In Memoriam III, 1983
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
The Ingram Collection of
Modern British Art

unfolding trauma. Rather than symbolise the century, it is a summation of its insanity – a schizophrenic era of social, technological and medical advances against a backdrop of terror, wickedness, slaughter and horror.[73]

The *Tribute* and *In Memoriam Heads* that Frink made in the mid-1970s and 1980s represent the polar opposite to the *Goggle Heads*. They are the victims of acts of brutality or the martyrs to a cause; people who are prepared to risk their life for what they believe. They suggest something of an apology for the disturbing *Goggle Heads* that immediately preceded them. Frink created this archetype to express a profound empathy and compassion for victims. The sculptures are deeply moving and timeless. In a sense, Frink was a witness to man's inhumanity and suffering at the hands of his fellow man. Her imagination was fed by an upbringing shrouded in Catholicism,[74] and the Christian doctrine was deep-rooted in her psyche, in particular scenes from the Passion as the ultimate expression of man's inhumanity to his fellow man.

The Stations of the Cross represent the visualisation of the unfolding horror and spiritual contemplation of the Passion of Jesus Christ. This suffering is perhaps most profound in the lamentation expressed in the musical settings of the *Passion* by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), who

wrote several *Passions*, of which two have survived: one based on the Gospel of John, the *St John Passion* of 1723, and the other on the Gospel of Matthew, the *St Matthew Passion* of 1727, which Frink knew well.[75] Or in the more contemporary *War Requiem* of 1961–2 composed by Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) and performed for the consecration of the new Coventry Cathedral, which was built after the original fourteenth-century structure was destroyed in a Second World War bombing raid, and for which Frink contributed an eagle lectern. At its darkest form, the Passion could manifest as in the work of Matthias Grünewald (c.1470–1528), which Frink much admired.[76] Many artists of the post-war period, such as Rouault, Beckmann, Bacon and Picasso, were drawn to the Passion or the crucifixion as a cipher for human suffering and cruelty. The humanity of Picasso is expressed in his painting *Guernica*, representing the outrage, but also commemorating the victim in the form of the lifeless child. Or in a more purely secular way in the late black paintings by Jackson Pollock (1912–1956), which hint at nothingness and the terrifying existential humiliation of the abyss of death. Or by Fautrier's *Hostage Heads*, one of the most profound artistic responses to the atrocities of the Second World War.

Frink was capable of expressing such profound themes in her work to convey human emotion and sentiment without being sentimental, as in her *Judas*, 1963. The sheer humanity of her works brings to mind the slave narrative of Solomon Northup, which was written in the first person; and his bravery and humility against the injustice and the scale of the atrocity served upon him and millions of other innocent victims.[77] Or an act of forgiveness such as that of the Jewish writer Victor Gollancz, who in 1961 wrote a passionate plea to save the life of Adolf Eichmann, the personification of evil, who would eventually hang the following year.[78] Frink's view of the polar nature of human behaviour in good and evil was seen through the prism of her Catholic upbringing and was haunted by the persecution of the Jews.[79] The Nazi regime that orchestrated the European Holocaust of the 1930s and 1940s was the benchmark for wickedness and evil in the post-war period. It is important to remember this, if Frink's male archetypes are not to appear too reductive and reminiscent of more recent attempts to reduce conflicts to a binary fight against good and evil. Her series of *Tribute Heads* and *In Memoriam Heads* are undoubtedly redeemers, and coincided with her support for Amnesty International. Frink was not political, but she was a humanitarian who described those who had died or suffered for their beliefs as victims, but also importantly as heroes. Her constant exploration of aspects of human behaviour exposed the choices we make. We want to believe humanity is essentially good, although the case against it suggests that the opposite is at least equally true.[80]

Frink was fascinated by the male body, most often sexualised, and by the contradictory forces of power and vulnerability that she explored in her archetypal strong men – warriors, soldiers, prisoners, tyrants or thugs – and the contradictory emotions of fear and desire. One of her formative experiences was in the winter of 1945–6 when visiting her father, who was still on active duty in Trieste, and she went to Venice. It was here that she saw the powerful equestrian statue of Bartolomeo Colleoni of 1480–88 by Andrea del Verrocchio.[81] The war hero emerges as another archetype: heroic and venerated, or more typically damaged, maimed, broken and shattered. Frink's father was absent at war for much of her childhood. Her friend Laurie Lee, recalling the return of his uncles from the First World War, wrote, 'They were men of great strength, of bloody deeds, a fist of uncles aimed at the foe, riders of hell and apocalypse, each one half-man, half-horse.'[82]

Above: Elisabeth Frink in her studio, early 1960s with *Assassins II*, 1963

Opposite: Walking Man (later named *Riace I*), 1986
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Private collection, courtesy of Pyms Gallery, London

The damaged and scarred head of *Soldier*, 1963, and the heavy jaw and scarred face of *Soldier's Head I*, 1965, appear brutish and intimidating. A pair of killers in *Assassins II*, 1963, have their faces obscured behind armour and masks. This work was partly inspired by the assassination of US president J. F. Kennedy in Dallas in November 1963, an historic event that shocked the entire world. Fused together, the pair have lost their individual identities and are forced to take on the role of the assassin. Their spindly legs are a reminder that they are sensate beings, vulnerable, yet capable of killing in cold blood and responsible for their own actions. One tragic loss was *Warrior*, 1954, a remarkable full-sized figure that, had it survived, would have been one of Frink's most important works on the theme. However, the figure was decapitated and destroyed, and Frink saved the head alone, which she later cast in bronze as *Warrior's Head*, 1954.

The *Riace* warriors from the 1980s are the culmination of her interest in the warrior figure and the concept of masculinity. They are all-powerful superhumans, threatening and menacing in equal measure. Frink herself described them as very beautiful, but also very sinister.[83] Their faces are obscured, masked, so that they are at once dehumanised. Frink combined this inherent raw strength whilst reminding us of man's vulnerability – that a warrior could also be somebody's lover or father. They were inspired by two fifth-century BC Greek sculptures discovered in 1972 in the sea just off the coast of the small settlement of Riace in Calabria, southern Italy. Her interest was intensified by the belief that the warriors were mercenaries. However, the treatment is wholly Frink, and she was not inhibited or overwhelmed by the challenge presented by the Greek prototypes. They are a remarkable achievement. As Frink came from an army family in the Second World War, human conflict was a formative experience in her life. She had a profound sense of empathy for the war hero. Perhaps she felt that war and aggression were a natural consequence of 'man's condition', but that such things could be carried out according to a code of conduct, honour and mutual respect during the engagement of battle. For Frink, the war hero was the ultimate vehicle for expressing a range of emotions, most notably the contrast of strength and vulnerability and the complexity of 'man's' true nature.
One of her most enduring figures is the *Running Man*, 1978 – a theme she explored between 1976 and 1980 and which related to her growing concern for human rights.[84] For Frink, the *Running Man* works were vulnerable, an image of humanity's fight against adversity and their passive resistance. They are simultaneously running to and away, and are a symbol of hope and endurance. Although she denied they were athletes, they are heroic and represent endurance, stoicism, physical and physiological strength. The barrel-shaped muscular chest, in contrast to the elongated, slender limbs, expresses humanity's perseverance and dogged determination to prevail. The body in motion was something that had fascinated her since first discovering Rodin and his ability to suggest locomotion: 'the main impact for me was the great strength of the sculptures and their containment – and their fluidity of movement'.[85]

Frink was fascinated by the latent energy bound up in sculpture and by its ability to imply that something is about to happen. Rodin expressed this sentiment when describing his *Walking Man* of 1877–8: 'It is not my walking man itself that interests me, rather the thought of how far he has come and how far he has yet to cover. This art, through suggestion, purposely extends beyond the figure sculptured, rendering it integral to a whole that is pieced

together step by step by the imagination, is, I believe, a fertile innovation.'[86] Giacometti would later reimagine his own interpretation of the subject in the sculpture *Walking Man*, 1960.

The final male archetype that Frink explored was the theme of the *Green Man*, 1991–2. The artist Mary Feddon, a friend, inspired the series when she presented Frink with William Anderson's 1990 book *The Green Man*.[87] Frink started work on the idea when she knew she was likely to die and she found solace in the enduring theme, which was popular in medieval England, although known since antiquity, and is one that inspires unity and harmony with nature. She explored this theme in sculpture and a series of colourful prints, as well as in drawings. This symbol of rebirth and new life looks as fresh and invigorating as anything she ever produced, and marked new and exciting possibilities in using bold and vibrant colours.

Small Miracle, 1953
Marino Marini (1901–1980)
Bronze, hand chiselled and painted by the artist
Private Collection, London

Frink explored the relationship between humans and animals throughout her life. Her formative years in rural Suffolk meant that she intuitively felt the symbiotic relationship between them, and foresaw the danger of a fracture between the natural world and humanity. She had first-hand experience of domesticated animals, such as hounds and horses, and was fascinated by how close the interdependent relationship, nurtured over millennia, had diminished the prey–predator relationship for mutual benefit. She intuitively recognised how the behaviour of domesticated animals such as hounds and horses can instinctively seem human-like; and that human behaviour is often described in *anthropomorphic* terms, most notably when humans are thought to lose all self-control in violence or the fulfilment of sexual desire with abandonment. She also noted that animals such as hounds express love and affection, whilst equally they have the capacity to kill or to inflict pain for pleasure. Human-animal behavioural comparisons were extensively explored by the zoologist Desmond Morris in his 1967 book *The Naked Ape*, in which he sought to remind humans of their place in the animal kingdom.

For Frink, the exploration of the relationship between humans and animals offered exciting possibilities, both metaphorically and more directly. Her aim was to represent in her sculpture what it actually feels like to be human or animal and to explore the shared behavioural aspects of both. She was an intuitive animal-lover, who admired their freedom of spirit. The expressionist bird-monster avatars of the 1950s and 1960s later gave way to more naturalistic and sympathetic depictions of animals. The horse became an important motif shared by her near-contemporary, the Italian artist Marino Marini (1901–1980). He had an exhibition at London's Hanover Gallery in 1956, which Frink may well have visited. Both artists had a fascination with depicting the horse and rider to the extent that the two – human and animal – become one single, indivisible entity and share the same predicament. That Frink should choose to continue to explore one of the most important subjects of art since classical times – from Verrocchio's equestrian statue of Colleoni that she had seen in Venice, to the English equestrian horse paintings of Stubbs of her native Suffolk, or Picasso depicting a tangled, anguished horse at Guernica – would have been prosaic and natural to her.

In the late 1980s Frink made a series of drawings called *Wounded Horses*, in response to one of her own horses wounding an eye on barbed wire. These works are brutally matter-of-fact, reflecting a rural upbringing that

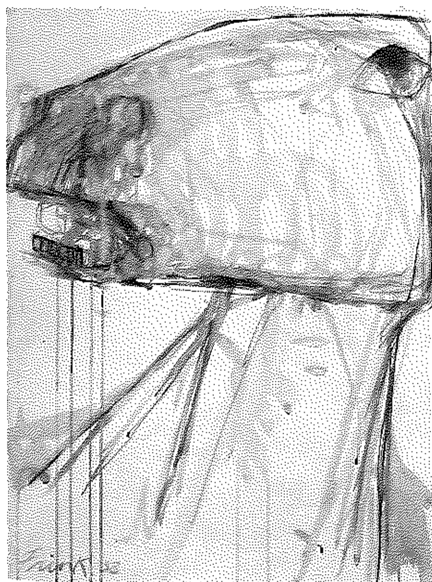
had furnished her with a mixture of sentimentally and detachment that was typical of the countryside and its people. To be born in rural Suffolk in the 1930s meant growing up in an old world, where little had changed from the way of life in the preceding centuries and one's place in the natural world was palpable. Laurie Lee, in his 1959 childhood memoir *Cider with Rosie* states, 'The last days of my childhood were also the last days of the village. I belonged to that generation which saw, by chance, the end of a thousand years' life.'[88]

In his perceptive meditation of 2009, *Why Look at Animals?*, John Berger (1926–2017) speculates that the close bond between humans and domesticated animals meant that the earliest metaphor used by humans was the animal.[89] Like Frink, being conscious of the enduring depiction of animals in art, he saw the dangers in the rupture of this bond and that such a dislocation with post-industrialised humans had led to an unsettling relationship with animals:

> Anthropomorphism was integral to the relation between man and animal and was an expression of their proximity. Anthropomorphism was the residue of the continuous use of animal metaphor. In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them. And in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy.[90]

Berger's description of the twentieth-century's rupture between humans and nature continues with the impending disappearance of wild animals, apart from their typological study in captivity by zoologists: 'Each year more animals depart, or animals such as dogs have entered the home as surrogate children and personified.'[91] He notes the changing relationship that we have with working domesticated animals such as the horse, which until the twentieth century was ubiquitous and is now largely absent from view.[92] And Laurie Lee writes, 'The horse was king, and almost everything grew around him: fodder, smithies, stables, paddocks, distances, and the rhythm of our days. His eight miles an hour was the limit of our movements, as it had been since the days of the Romans.'[93]

Horse, 1958
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Bronze
Frink Estate and Archive



Animals bred solely for human consumption are increasingly being hidden from us, as they are reduced to industrialised production. The dislocation of urban dwellers from the land, and anything resembling its natural environment, is in stark contrast to our agrarian pre-industrial ancestors and their coexistence with animals and sustainable husbandry. Frink's interest in animals lay in their relationship and interdependency with humanity, believing that all life forms were equal: 'if mankind could see himself as equal to animals, then it would follow that there could be no injustice between men. Animals don't tend to kill in the way we do, wantonly. They kill to eat or to defend themselves and their young. Man goes further than that and the contrast is what I like to express.'[94]

Frink was part of a generation that had more reason than most to feel that humanity was out of control; that a rupture with nature had occurred, with consequences for all living things. Some believed this was inevitable and, literally, all-too-human.[95] Through her sculptures Frink explored the way we behave towards each other, and urged us to believe there was in the human condition at least the knowledge that we comprehend the harm we are culpable of, even if we are at a loss to prevent it occurring.

Wounded Horse, 1989
Elisabeth Frink (1930–1993)
Gouache, wash and charcoal on paper
Frink Estate and Archive

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