



*Figure Study I* 1945/46



*Figure Study II* 1945/46

The objects found in this area are a representative selection that might have been found in a typical British house in the 1950s although none has a direct association with Bacon himself. However, their purpose is to help contextualise the often modest and utilitarian social environment of post-war Britain in the 1950s and Bacon's work.

Many objects similar to those in this area may be found incorporated into the paintings *Figure Study II* (1945-46) which is upstairs in the exhibition and its companion painting *Figure Study I*, which Bacon did at the same period, but now lost.

Looking at these paintings we can see that Bacon appears to have included some everyday things:

- The grey and white flecked area on the left of both paintings is often understood to be a herringbone tweed overcoat drying out over a cast-iron radiator.<sup>1</sup>



- The black umbrella in *Figure Study II* is a motif that appears in Bacon's work from the 1940s until the 1970s, for example *Triptych 1974-1977*.<sup>2</sup>
- During 1945/6 Bacon produced at least four paintings in which the motif of a hat or an umbrella was used as a metaphor for the human head. Two of these include *Figure Study I* and *II*.

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<sup>1</sup> Harrison, M. *In Camera Francis Bacon*. (London, 2005), 125.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 50.



- The spindly palm fronds might have been suggested by the skeletal remains seen in the 'still' torn from a book of *L'Age d'or* (Buñuel and Dali, 1930) found in his studio.<sup>3</sup> The fronds also mirror the ribs of the umbrella in *Figure Study II*.



*L'age d'or* 1930

- A dark sofa appears in a painting in the lower gallery called *Seated Figure on a Couch* (1959).
- The 1950s Sanderson floral fabric (Sanderlin) of the cushions evokes the flowers seen in *Figure Study I*, particularly the pinkish-red ones in the background. The black twill backing fabric on the cushions is reminiscent of the fabric used for 'black-out' curtains during the Second World War. In the economically depressed post-war years, they were often cut up and used for other purposes. The blue flowers might be Plumbago, a popular conservatory plant shown below.




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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 47.

Bacon's work was often influenced by other works of art.  
In *Figure Study II* some of the sources that could be considered are:

- Giotto di Bondone. *The Lamentation of Christ*, 1305.
- Edvard Munch. *The Scream* 1890.<sup>4</sup>
- Edgar Degas. *Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando*, 1879.<sup>5</sup>
- Nicolas Poussin. *Self Portrait*, 1650.<sup>6</sup>



Giotto di Bondone.  
*The Lamentation of Christ*, 1305



Edvard Munch. *The Scream* 1890



Edgar Degas.  
*Miss La La at the Cirque Fernando*, 1879.



Nicolas Poussin. *Self Portrait*, 1650

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<sup>4</sup> John Russell. *Francis Bacon*. (London, 2001) 28.

<sup>5</sup> Harrison, 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

Other sources of influence might include:

- The still of the screaming nurse from the film *Battleship Potemkin*, (Einstein, 1925).
- A plate from the handbook of the Oberammergau Passion Play, 1930, found in Bacon's studio.<sup>7</sup>



- In the same year as *Figure Study I* and *II* were painted, an atomic bomb was detonated over Hiroshima on 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, followed three days later by that at Nagasaki. The images below of the Hiroshima Dome and the mushroom cloud after the detonation of the bomb echo the umbrella shape seen in the painting. The skeletal remains of the dome from the only remaining building left standing in Hiroshima afterwards, look like the fronds of the palm and has a similar shape to the open umbrella.
- The child photographed in the aftermath of the Hiroshima bombing is caught screaming with an open-mouth in a similar way to the figure in *Figure Study II*.
- The victims of air raids during the Second World War were also said to have been influential models for the screaming mouths of his paintings.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 24.



### **Bibliography:**

- Margarita Cappack. *Francis Bacon's Studio*. London, 2005.  
Sally McDonald and Julia Porter. The Geffrye Museum. *Putting on the Style Setting up home in the 1950s*. London, 1990.  
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These resource notes were produced to accompany the exhibition *Francis Bacon Paintings from the 1950s* by Diana Grattan. (Third Year Undergraduate, WAM)