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Francis Bacon and the Lefevre Gallery

by MARTIN HAMMER

THE LEFEVRE GALLERY in London, founded in 1871, played a significant role in selling modern European art, mostly French, to British collectors and, through its exhibitions, in assisting successive generations of artists to assimilate new directions in art.¹ Between the Wars, it mounted shows devoted to Georges Seurat (1926), Edgar Degas (1928), Paul Cézanne (1935) as well as then current figures such as Matisse (1927), Picasso (1931), Braque (1934) and Salvador Dalí (1936). Multiple-artist exhibitions, containing a work or two by big names, were a recurrent feature of the schedule. The Gallery also dealt in modern British art, and was especially active in this capacity around the end of the Second World War. Duncan Macdonald (Fig.21), a director of the Gallery, sought to seize the initiative in showing marketable British artists as the art world gradually revived, even though cross-Channel communications remained difficult and the cost of importing pictures prohibitive.² During the early part of the War, the Gallery had only been open around two days a week, and its holdings were evacuated to the Mendip Hills. This was fortunate as in spring 1943 its long-serving premises in King Street were destroyed in a German bombing raid. Macdonald, who for some time had been in New York working at the associated Bignou Gallery, then returned to London and oversaw the relaunching of Lefevre at 131–34 New Bond Street towards the end of 1944. Thereafter, the Gallery showed modern British art, interwoven with displays of French pictures from stock. The programme included exhibitions of established abstract artists such as Ben Nicholson (1945) and Barbara Hepworth (1944 and 1946), independent figures such as Jankel Adler (1946), Frances Hodgkins (1946) and L.S. Lowry (1945), and the younger Neo-romantics such as John Minton (1945), Keith Vaughan (1944 and 1946) and Lucian Freud (1944 and 1947, the latter shared with John Craxton). This story would repay general investigation with reference to the Gallery's extensive archives, and to the parallel activities of rivals such as the Leicester, Gimpel Fils and Redfern Galleries.

The focus of this article is on the Gallery's dealings with Francis Bacon, and the light they shed on his biography and work. The Lefevre is probably most frequently cited in relation to the group show of spring 1945 in which Bacon first exhibited *Three studies for figures at the base of a Crucifixion* (1944), the mythic point of origin for his mature work. What the archives confirm is that Bacon's inclusion was a direct consequence of his close personal and creative rapport with Graham Sutherland, which had begun in 1943.³ Sutherland's reputation then was



21. *Portrait of Duncan Macdonald*, by Walter Sickert. 1928/29. Etching (2nd state), 28.6 by 21.1 cm. (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

extremely elevated, as a result of his dark landscape imagery and his work over the previous five years as an official war artist, featuring images of bomb-blasted buildings, mining and apocalyptic steel-works interiors.⁴ With the end of the War in sight, Macdonald had decided to cultivate Sutherland, encouraging him to contribute to a group show that would help to relaunch

I am grateful to the former owners of the Lefevre Gallery for giving me permission to study the Gallery's papers at Tate Gallery Archive. Abbreviations used in the notes are: LGA: Lefevre Gallery Archive, TGA: Tate Gallery Archive; FB: Francis Bacon; DM: Duncan Macdonald; and GS: Graham Sutherland.

¹ D. Cooper: 'A Franco-Scottish link with the Past', exh. cat. *Alex Reid & Lefevre*, London (Lefevre Gallery) 1976, pp.3–26; for historical background, see F. Fowle: exh. cat. *Impressionism and Scotland*, Edinburgh (National Galleries of Scotland) 2008, p.141. After a 1926 merger it became the Alex Reid and Lefevre Gallery, although the shorthand version was more often used, as it is here.

² See M. Garlake: *New Art New World*, New Haven and London 1998, p.25.

³ For the relationship between the two artists, see M. Hammer: *Bacon and Sutherland*, New Haven and London 2005. The reciprocal nature of their admiration is further suggested in a remark inserted by J.T. Soby into his early 1960s text for an unrealised monograph on Bacon, based on a 'recent interview': 'all his life he had been looking for some help to find a theoretical background for his painting [. . .] Once in his life he hoped Graham Sutherland might provide him with it'; New York, Museum of Modern Art Archive, J.T. Soby Papers, typescript draft of book on Bacon, p.4.

⁴ On Sutherland's work in the 1940s, see M. Hammer: *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924–1950*, London 2005.

his independent career and serve as the prelude to a one-man show and a continuing association with the Gallery. Over the coming months, artist and dealer talked also about a show in Paris, where Macdonald had a partnership arrangement, although that idea never materialised. Sutherland's powerful position is reflected in his communications with the Gallery. He was able to be quite fastidious about which artists' work his own would be hung alongside, announcing early in 1945 that he would prefer Moore, Hodgkins and Nicholson.⁵ When Nicholson withdrew, Sutherland suggested a bold alternative:

... as for the painter to take BN's place it seems there is not much choice other than Piper. I should really prefer Francis Bacon for whose work you know I have a really profound admiration. It is true he has shown very little; but nowadays with every Tom, Dick and Harry showing yards of painting without much selection or standard this is refreshing, & his recent things, while being quite uncompromising, have a grandeur & brilliance which is rarely seen in English art.⁶

Macdonald responded with suitable enthusiasm. On 22nd January he stated: 'if you prefer Francis Bacon I shall try him'. He took the opportunity to suggest a further possibility, which resulted in another addition to the line-up: 'what would you think of Matthew Smith being added to the group? He is [...] a different generation in work, but [...] surely the best painter of his generation'.⁷ That same day, Macdonald opened up communications with Bacon: 'Your friend Graham Sutherland has spoken very highly of your Painting and is very keen that I should see it. May I come as soon as we can arrange a suitable date between us?'. He was, he explained, aiming to bring together works by several artists and 'Sutherland suggests that you should be one of these'.⁸ The following month Macdonald told Sutherland: 'I went to see Francis Bacon and have asked him to send four or five works to the Show. I shall tell you about his work when we meet'.⁹ He subsequently reported to Bacon that he had lunched with the Sutherlands and 'was delighted to hear from this artist that he had seen some of your new pictures, which he praised highly'. Bacon should telephone him to talk about which pictures to include.¹⁰

The exhibition *Recent Paintings by Francis Bacon, Frances Hodgkins, Henry Moore, Matthew Smith, Graham Sutherland* ran at the Lefevre Gallery throughout April 1945. Bacon was represented by the *Three studies* and *Figure in a landscape* (1945). The catalogue also listed eight works by Hodgkins, fifteen by Moore (including thirteen drawings), nine by Smith and eleven by Sutherland. Macdonald was able to inform Sutherland that all his works had sold. Moreover the Bacons had contributed to the overall success of the show: 'many people are interested in the Francis Bacon pictures, even though they find them "frightening"'.¹¹ I think myself they are very well designed and painted and I look forward to seeing more of his later oil paintings. I shall watch his new work with interest if I have the opportunity'.

Subsequently, he informed Sutherland: 'there are now only two Smith oil paintings and two Moore drawings left in the whole Exhibition. You [...] would be very glad if you could hear the enthusiasm of many young people for your part of the Show, and indeed for the whole Exhibition'. Macdonald was delighted by the reviews and visitor numbers, such that they had to reprint the catalogue three times.¹² Clearly Bacon benefited not just from the company he was keeping, but also from the current situation in which many people desired to visit galleries, with wartime pressures finally waning but all the big museums still devoid of their contents.

After the exhibition, Bacon asked to be paid for *Figure in a landscape*, which had been sold to the artist's cousin Diana Watson. Interestingly, the cheque for £108.6.8 included a deduction of £25 for 'the three Pictures sold to Mr Hall, owing to the fact that they were sold in your Studio. Do you remember the arrangement we came to on my last visit to your studio?'.¹³ Bacon apologised for the tardy sending of a receipt: 'I have been laid up with asthma and forgot about it. Yes of course I remember about the arrangement over Mr Hall's pictures and am very grateful to you for only taking half the percentage on them'.¹⁴ Presumably, Bacon had originally intended to show and potentially sell *Three studies*, but his lover and supporter Eric Hall was able at the last minute, by means of this arrangement with the Lefevre, to acquire the work and prevent it being lost to another collector and possibly even sold as three separate pictures. Hall may have been ahead of Bacon himself in estimating the triptych as a major breakthrough. He eventually presented the work to the Tate Gallery, after the breakdown in his relationship with Bacon.

Macdonald now viewed Bacon as one of his stable of rising artists. Towards the end of 1945, he told Sutherland that he hoped to include Bacon, Craxton, Freud, Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde and probably Julian Trevelyan in an exhibition of 'good contemporary painters' in February 1946: 'naturally your last canvasses would have the centre of the show [...]. If in the New Year you see B, F or C, I hope you will encourage them to do their utmost to make this next show a fine one'.¹⁵ In the event, Bacon contributed *Figure study I* and *Figure study II* to the show. His advance commentary suggests that other pictures had seemed possible at one stage: 'I am afraid I have only been able to send 2 pictures. The one I sold I have not been able to get a frame for and the new one you saw I am not satisfied with yet...'.¹⁶ Perhaps the former was the picture Bacon sold to Peter Watson, but later took back and destroyed.¹⁷ Regarding the two works that were dispatched, Bacon remarked: 'These paintings are studies for the Magdalene and the smaller of the two was the first studie [*sic*] and I would like them entitled as such in the catalogue'.¹⁸ The association lingered, and *Figure study II* was entitled *Magdalene* in the catalogue for Bacon's 1962 Tate Gallery retrospective. The artist was at pains to refute this; according to Alley's catalogue raisonné of 1964, 'the artist says he never thought of the figure as the Magdalene and never associated it in

⁵ GS to DM, n.d. [mid-January 1945], LGA; the P.S. to the letter rammes home the message: 'Do see F. Bacon's new works'.

⁶ GS to DM, n.d. [mid-January 1945], LGA.

⁷ DM to GS, 22nd January 1945, LGA.

⁸ DM to FB, 22nd January 1945, LGA.

⁹ DM to GS, 1st March [1945], LGA.

¹⁰ DM to FB, 12th March 1945, LGA.

¹¹ DM to GS, 11th April [1945], LGA.

¹² DM to GS, 19th April [1945], LGA.

¹³ DM to FB, 14th May 1945, LGA.

¹⁴ FB to DM, 25th May 1945, LGA.

¹⁵ DM to GS, 27th December 1945, LGA.

¹⁶ FB to DM, n.d. [January 1946], LGA.

¹⁷ Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.55.

¹⁸ FB to DM, n.d. [January 1946], LGA.

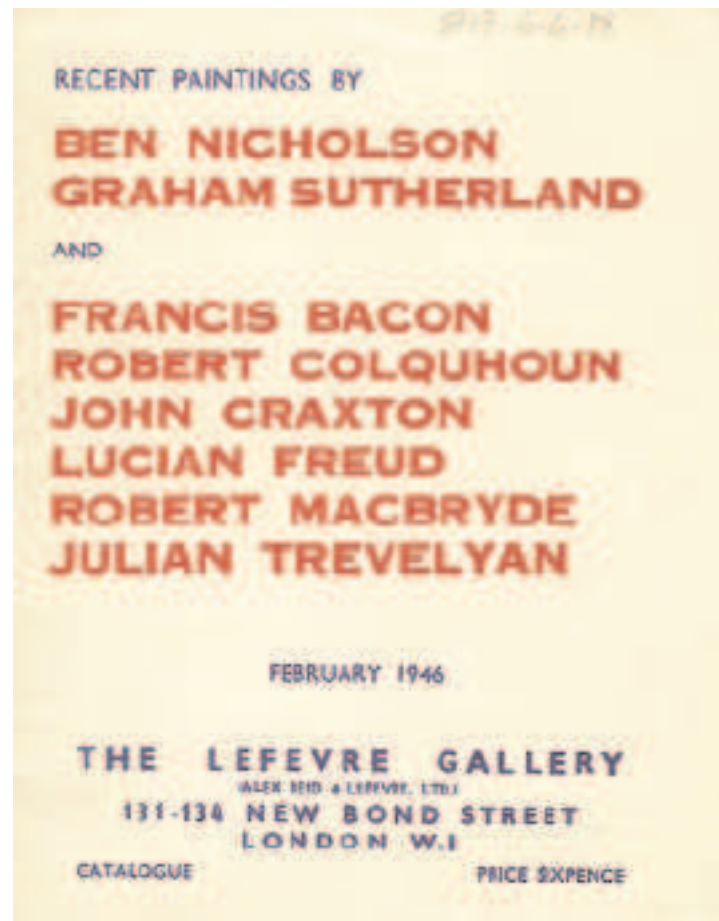
¹⁹ R. Alley: *Francis Bacon*, London 1964, p.39.

²⁰ M. Hammer and C. Stephens: "'Seeing the story of one's time": appropriations from Nazi photography in the work of Francis Bacon', *Visual Culture in Britain* 10

any way with the Crucifixion'.¹⁹ The allusion in the letter seems to contradict this, and has been discussed elsewhere in the context of Bacon's extraordinary fusion during this period of references to religious imagery and to Nazi propaganda photography.²⁰ Nevertheless in the catalogue for the Lefevre Gallery show, as it appeared in February 1946 (Fig.22), the pictures were listed as 'Figure Study (No.1)' and 'Figure Study (No.2)'. Indeed, Bacon generally opted hereafter for neutral titles, such as *Painting* (1946), even though the latter picture too alludes to Crucifixion imagery. He may have carried on improvising the pictures after writing the letter, and introduced changes that rendered the titles he originally had in mind inappropriate. But the shift may also capture Bacon's realisation, for reasons unknown, that evocative titles could be counterproductive, encouraging over-literal or reductive readings.²¹

The gallery succeeded in selling both pictures, resulting in a further cheque for £183.6.8.²² *Figure study I* was purchased by Brenda Bomford on behalf of her husband, James, who collected French Impressionist and modern British art and proceeded to acquire a significant quantity of Bacons over the coming years.²³ *Figure study II* was acquired by the Contemporary Art Society, the charitable body that bought works of art for onward distribution to public galleries. The purchase is likely to have been contentious, given the picture's disturbing imagery and the artist's obscurity, and several years elapsed before it found a home in the Bagshaw Art Gallery, Batley (subsequently transferred to Huddersfield Art Gallery). The initial acquisition was supported, one imagines, by two figures active in the C.A.S. who became friendly with Bacon around this time. One was John Russell, whose enthusiasm for the artist can only have been reinforced by his recent contacts with Sutherland, documented in the Lefevre Archive, in connection with Russell's forthcoming book *From Sickert to 1948*, a survey of British art based around C.A.S. acquisitions.²⁴ Russell went on to write the first monograph on Bacon, incorporating vivid recollections of first seeing *Three studies for figures at the base of the Crucifixion* at the Lefevre Gallery.²⁵ The other was Sir Colin Anderson, the wealthy collector and patron, a new member of the C.A.S. committee and the recipient over the following few years of letters from Bacon that have recently been published, providing a valuable complement to the exchanges with Sutherland, and the Hanover and Lefevre Galleries.²⁶ Like the Lefevre correspondence, the Anderson letters lay bare Bacon's acute and persistent financial disarray, including an apparent threat of bankruptcy for what sound like gambling debts, and they indicate his somewhat unscrupulous attitude towards wealthy individuals who could easily afford to help him out.

In April 1946 Macdonald was eager to sustain the connection with Bacon, who was planning to leave London: 'I hope you will come and dine with me, one evening before you leave for the South of France, so that we may make any arrangements possible, regarding the sending of pictures and the exhibition of same in the Lefevre Galleries. We shall do our utmost to find a



22. Cover page of a catalogue for a group show at the Lefevre Gallery, London. February 1946.

good home for the large picture which is now here'.²⁷ The latter must have been *Study for man with microphones* (Fig.23), which the Gallery showed that summer. This and *Painting* (1946) were evidently carried out in quick succession during the first half of 1946. The latter has often been seen to descend from a tradition of butchery images as epitomised in Rembrandt's *Carcass of beef* (1657) in the Louvre, Paris. The variations on this theme by Chaim Soutine, an artist much admired by Bacon, can also be seen as a more immediate catalyst for *Painting* (1946).²⁸ He could certainly have known the versions by Soutine in which the suspended Crucifix-like carcass is rendered with the artist's characteristic heightened palette and painterly touch. It is worth noting that one such Soutine had been in Britain for several years, in the collection of Sutherland's friend Eardley Knollys, and was in fact included in the Lefevre's exhibition *School of Paris (Picasso and his Contemporaries)* that immediately followed the group show which launched Bacon.²⁹ In this atypical variation, Soutine focused rather on one slab of beef, with its rich colouration, textures and formal structure. Memories of the picture may have informed Bacon's ribs of beef suspended to

(2009), pp.315–52 (issue devoted to Francis Bacon).

²¹ A parallel move away from mythic and evocative to neutral titles is encountered in the contemporary work of American Abstract Expressionists such as Clyfford Still.

²² DM to FB, 9th April [1946], LGA.

²³ See the provenances provided in Alley, *op. cit.* (note 19).

²⁴ DM/GS correspondence from November and December 1945, LGA; indicating that Sutherland knew Russell quite well and liked his writing.

²⁵ J. Russell: *Francis Bacon*, London 1979, p.10.

²⁶ A. Clark: 'Francis Bacon's correspondence with Sir Colin Anderson', *The British*

Art Journal 8 (2007), pp.39–43; Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.234–40 (letters to GS); and M. Peppiatt: *Bacon in the 1950s*, New Haven and London 2006, pp.141–53 (Hanover Gallery letters).

²⁷ DM to FB, 9th April [1946], LGA.

²⁸ On Soutine's importance for Bacon and his fellow 'School of London' artists, see the present writer's forthcoming article; 'Soutine in English Translation', *Modernist Cultures* (October 2010).

²⁹ M. Tuchman, E. Dunow and K. Perls: *Chaim Soutine (1893–1943): Catalogue Raisonné, Part I*, Cologne 2002, pp.470 and 473, no.99.



23. *Study for a man with microphones*, by Francis Bacon. 1946 (subsequently over-painted). Canvas, 145 by 127.8 cm.

such compelling effect on the tubular metal podium in front of his generic fascist dictator.

It was the sale of *Painting* (1946) to the Redfern Gallery that made it possible for Bacon to leave a still-dismal, post-War Britain for the sunshine and hedonistic pursuits of the South of France. His life and artistic activities in Monte Carlo are conveyed in communications to Macdonald and others. In August he wrote:

I have been meaning to write to you for ages. I have found a flat here, not really what I like but it will do until I decide what I am going to do. I do not know how long I want to stay here. I may go to Paris after the winter if I can find anything there. Life is curious here very expensive in some ways and in others cheaper than England. I am working but afraid the things are still very large & it is unfortunate for me financially but there is nothing to be done at the moment. Everything in the way of food can be got here from Cumberland hams to caviar if one chooses to pay. The really difficult thing even on the black market is canvas but I have been able to get some very good coarse linen sheets which turn into very good canvases. Nobody down here has ever heard of painting except the extraordinary lesbian affairs they concoct out of the landscape and the bougainvilleas which have to be seen to be believed but perhaps their ignorance is no greater than the knowing ones at home.³⁰

³⁰ FB to DM, sent from Hotel Ré, Monte Carlo, 20th August 1946, LGA.

³¹ DM to FB, 1st October 1946, LGA. A year later Bacon announced to Anderson that 'at the moment I can paint much smaller pictures which I am glad to be able to do'; Clark, *op. cit.* (note 26), p.41.

³² FB to DM, 19th October [1946], typed copy, LGA.

³³ DM to FB, 4th December 1946, LGA; see exh. cat. *Seventh Exhibition: Adler, Bacon, Colquhoun, Hubert, MacBryde, Trevelyan*, London (Anglo-French Art

Bacon's preference for working on a large scale was deemed to be imprudent, with Macdonald ruefully noting: 'If you do not feel like shrinking your sizes, I fear there is nothing to be done about it'.³¹ Nevertheless he encouraged Bacon to consider showing work in France: 'If you are still there in January, we may meet, and between us we might devise a scheme for putting British Painting (via Francis Bacon) on the map, *dans le Midi*'. In the meantime, he had seen *Figure study II* in the show of C.A.S. acquisitions at the Tate, as well as *Painting* (1946) at the Redfern: 'the colour was certainly startling and for me quite brilliant but I suppose the size militated against its sale'. In the Gallery's own exhibition *British Painters, Past and Present* in August, *Study for a man with microphones* 'had a whole wall to itself, and looked very well but alas it did not find a purchaser'. Bacon for his part felt that the South of France was unlikely to produce buyers, and that everything was becoming too expensive:

I am going to Paris on the 1st of November for two or three weeks [. . .] I am looking for a large room in Paris to work in. I have heard of a room and am going up to see it. I do not feel I could stay here permanently, not because of work, because as long as it is fairly quiet I can work anywhere, but I do not care for its sort of village life after a time. I am working on three studies of Velasquez portrait of Innocent II [*sic*]. I have almost finished one. I find them exciting to do, and of course always hoping it is going to be the real thing.³²

That December, Macdonald reported to Bacon about further showings of his pictures in London: 'I am sending you the catalogue of an Exhibition of British Painters at the Anglo-French Centre, which is later going on to Paris. He [the organiser] borrowed the three studies, I think, from one of your friends [Eric Hall], and from me he borrowed the one illustrated [*Study for a man with microphones*], but found he had not the space to hang it . . .'.³³ Macdonald also commented that he had been deeply impressed by Sutherland's *Crucifixion*, having attended the unveiling at St Matthew's church, Northampton: 'I believe it is the finest thing he has done'. The affinity with Bacon struck Macdonald: 'I keep wondering how it would affect you, who have already done so many studies for a similar subject'. He was also keen to see the Velázquez studies, also described in Bacon's letters to Sutherland from late 1946, although the earliest such variation to survive is *Head VI* of 1949.³⁴

During 1947 Macdonald maintained his contacts with both Bacon and Sutherland, judging by scattered reports of his sightings of the one in letters to the other. That spring he expressed regret at missing Bacon on his last visit to London, and asked for photographs of recent works completed in France to show James Soby of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, who he clearly hoped might buy a picture.³⁵ Meanwhile Soby himself needed reassurance in relation to Bacon's eccentric titling of his works: 'I think I told you that Francis Bacon's "Man with Microphones" is really a highly finished picture, and any new one he makes will probably be called a "study", in spite of its finality. He has a large imagination, and always hopes that

Centre) November to December 1946, nos.6-8, as 'Studies for figures at the base of a crucifix'.

³⁴ Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp.237-38.

³⁵ DM to FB, 23rd April 1947, LGA.

³⁶ DM to J.T. Soby, 21st April 1947, LGA.

³⁷ J.T. Soby: *Contemporary Painters*, New York 1948, p.151.

³⁸ At the time that his planned monograph on Bacon was running into difficulties,

another picture will turn out to be 12 feet by 15 feet'.³⁶ The correspondence with Soby suggests that Macdonald was responsible for galvanising the American critic and collector's enthusiastic interest in Bacon, culminating in his unrealised work of the early 1960s on what would have been the first book on the artist. Soby wrote about Bacon and reproduced *Study for a man with microphones* in his 1948 survey of the current state of painting.³⁷ By his own testimony, Soby also played a key role in the Museum of Modern Art's decision to purchase *Painting* (1946) from the Redfern Gallery in 1948, and in the commission to the young critic Sam Hunter to produce what turned out to be an exceptional article on Bacon and his immersion in photography.³⁸

Bacon's next letter to Macdonald in May took into account the dealer's recent six-week visit to New York. Notwithstanding the wonderful weather and light in France, the cost of living was proving oppressive, and America was starting to look an attractive alternative. Of late he had 'been acting as nurse as there is someone rather ill in the flat', but would send Soby some photographs in the next few weeks:

I had not finished anything, but in the last few days have been able to finish a large one I like at the moment, and a smaller one. I was so pleased to see Graham and Kathy, and I am sure the change here gave him a good rest, as he looked so well when he left. If I sent you over two or three pictures at the end of June, do you think you could do anything with them? I am getting nearly completely broke. If I am going to try and go to America next year to try and live there for a bit, and if I can't sell anything or haven't anything to sell, I will get a job as a valet or cook. I can do both well, so if you have any rich friends who want a good English slave, do let me know, as I can always make an arrangement over these sorts of jobs so as to evade the permits for work which are so difficult to get.³⁹

Bacon had perhaps been inspired by the accounts of life in the United States by his friends Cyril Connolly and Peter Watson, both of whom had recently crossed the Atlantic and encountered a culture richer and more vulgar in every sense than in Britain. Their discoveries and contacts resulted in a special double-issue of *Horizon* magazine in October 1947 devoted to contemporary America.⁴⁰

In response, Macdonald indicated that he would certainly try to find buyers given the chance, and notwithstanding current difficulties in the commercial art world:

The selling of pictures has slowed down somewhat in England, and a good deal in America, while Paris is worse still. If you can get a few of your new pictures that are not too large [. . .] we will all do our damndest to find purchasers. Would you have any difficulty in getting them out of France? I am sure you would have to give me warning when you are sending them, how many, and the prices, so that I could get an import licence from the Board of Trade. I wonder whether it would not be wiser for you to bring them yourself and settle all your other affairs at the same time.⁴¹

with a typescript found wanting by Bacon and his London associates, Soby protested his credentials: 'I was the one who persuaded the Museum to buy its first Francis Bacon, I commissioned Sam Hunter to do his excellent article. I myself wrote the first article in America about his extraordinary talent'; Soby to Erica Brausen, 27th July 1962, document cited at note 3 above. The article in question was S. Hunter: 'Francis Bacon: the Anatomy of Horror', *Magazine of Art* 95 (1952), pp.13-14.

He further indicated that he could indeed help Bacon to get to America, given his connections with the likes of Soby and James Johnson Sweeney, until 1946 a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Bacon's financial concerns come to the fore in his next letter that summer, where we encounter descriptions of new pictures:

I think your suggestion of bringing the painting back will be better. I will come back at the end of September or beginning of October. I shall have a group of 3 large paintings about the size of the one which went to the CAS. Is there any chance of your having an exhibition in the autumn in which you could hang them? They want to be hung together in a series as they are a sort of Crucifixion. I am finishing the 2nd now. I think they are the most formal things I have done and the colour is a sort of intense blue violet. I think they are better than what I have done up to now. I hope so at any rate. If you think there is a chance of your being able to show them, as I really need the money desperately, I will write to the framer I go to and see what they can do about framing them. I want £750 for the set. It is not a quarter of what it has cost me with gambling etc; if you think you can get more, it would be tremendously welcome. Or perhaps your gallery would speculate in buying them directly, or would they have to be Scottish darning for that. I do not mean this bitterly [. . .] I am sure the Bonnard Exhibition must be very interesting. I would love to have seen it.⁴²

The idea of a direct gallery purchase did not bear fruit. However, Bacon resumed his campaign to sell the same or related pictures through the Lefevre early in 1948:

I have done a set of three paintings I would like to show. They are about the same size as the Contemporary Art Society one or a little smaller. Have you an Exhibition this spring or summer in which you would show them? I could get them to you by the end of April or beginning of May. I am glad to say I can work a lot now. A friend of mine, Eric Hall, is coming in to see you, and could give you some idea of them, as he is coming back here, perhaps you could tell him if there is any chance of showing them. They are things I have tried to do several times before, but I have never been able to bring them off, but this time I think it is much nearer.

Bacon's preoccupations were yet again financial:

There is another thing. Is it possible to make me a small advance? I am quite broke, and canvas and paints are terribly expensive. Would it be possible to advance me £150. You can speak to Eric Hall about this, as if you could make me the advance, I would be grateful if you would let him have it on my behalf. I would be terribly grateful if you could possibly do this.

Finally, Bacon raised the issue of a picture that he wished to take back and rework: 'Some time when you have a van passing in the Kensington area, could you send back that awful picture of mine

³⁹ FB to DM, 26th May [1947], LGA. He was still toying with the idea of going to America for a while in the following February; see Clark, *op. cit.* (note 26), p.41.

⁴⁰ *Horizon* 93-94 (October 1947).

⁴¹ DM to FB, 10th June 1947, LGA.

⁴² FB to DM, Friday 20th [June 1947], LGA. 'Scottish darning' may refer to the Gallery's commitment to the Scottish painters Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde, as suggested by Richard Shone.

to 7 Cromwell Place. I want to use the back of the canvas and the frame'. Conversely, he tried to keep Macdonald sweet by making optimistic noises about future productivity:

Here [Monte Carlo] the weather is lovely, and wonderfully isolated. There is no-one here. Now that I think I can produce the things much more rapidly, I hope I will become perhaps a better money-making proposition. If you know of anyone who will take the risk and supply me with paints, canvas, and the minimum of vittles think of me. I might make them money.⁴³

The 'awful picture' in question was presumably *Study for man with microphones*, which had not sold at the Lefevre Gallery and which Bacon did indeed significantly rework around 1949, although the revised version in turn fell victim to Bacon's sacrificial knife after being exhibited in 1962. Equally, the blue-violet 'sort of Crucifixion' pictures, mentioned earlier in his letter, seem not to have survived Bacon's culling.

In late 1949, the year in which he turned forty, Bacon finally had his first one-man show, which turned out to be an immense critical and commercial success.⁴⁴ However, the venue was not the Lefevre but the Hanover Gallery, which had opened the previous year and had made an early splash with new pictures from the South of France by Sutherland. The Gallery, backed by Arthur Jeffress and run by Erica Brausen, formerly of the Redfern Gallery, emerged as probably the most lively venue for innovative British art over the next decade. The shift in power was undoubtedly hastened by the death of Duncan Macdonald in 1949. For a period the Lefevre Gallery had undoubtedly been one of the first points of call for anyone wishing to keep abreast of developments in British art. That prominence had been relatively short-lived, however, and the mantle was now passing to younger rivals.

⁴³ FB to DM, 23rd January 1948, LGA.

⁴⁴ Hammer, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.42.

Autobiographical notes by Roger Hilton

by ADRIAN LEWIS

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXT by Roger Hilton, published here for the first time (Fig.25; and Appendix below), is written in the artist's hand, undated, on one sheet of letter paper. Its references to Hilton's being taken up by the Waddington Gallery, London, and the ending of his first marriage place it after 1959–60, and the fact that the text is in French suggests that it was written in relation to his exhibition at the Galerie Charles Lienhard, Zürich, in June 1961. The text refers to many of the significant moments or passages in Hilton's life and career, at least as they figured in his memory at around the age of fifty, and can be amplified from what is known of his life.¹

Hilton was born in 1911 and brought up in The Corner House, 10 Eastbury Road, Northwood, then still a small village on the edge of the Chilterns. His father, Oscar, a specialist in children's health, had settled at Northwood as a general practitioner, and his mother, Louisa, had trained in fine art at the Slade School of Art. The family initially employed three maids and nannies for the children. The young boy had a spaniel – 'The dog' in the notes – among other family pets (Fig.26). Hilton's self-attested love of football during his schooldays contrasts with the statement by his elder brother, John, in a memoir, that he was 'not very good at organised games'.² The operative words here are 'organised' and 'good', and the family's expectations are caught also in John's statement that Roger was 'not good at his

books'. John, by contrast, fulfilled his father's hopes by attending Marlborough School and Oxford University, going through architectural training and then entering the civil service. We can understand here the reference to John as the 'superior' brother. Hilton's academic inferiority is of course partly a family construction, a matter of comparison between siblings, as well as indicative of how Hilton told his own 'destined' story. He may, for example, have been kept down a year at Arnold House School, but he was fourth in his final class at Northwood Preparatory and even at Bishop's Stortford College, he achieved credits in English, History, French with Oral, Elementary Maths and General Science at School Certificate level. While not getting into Oxford, he entered a university art school, the Slade (Fig.24).³ To turn a creditable performance into a discreditable one is a recognisable narrative ploy.

Between 1931 and 1939 Hilton divided his time between England and France, spending more than two years in Paris over intermittent periods, during which he attended the Académie Ranson.⁴ His 'love' during his time in Paris was an unrequited passion for Guilhen Perrier, the best friend of his brother John's future wife, Peggy Stephens. They met during a French trip in summer 1930 and again the following summer during a camping holiday on Dartmoor.⁵ Guilhen, six years older than Hilton, was already studying at the Académie Ranson, and Hilton made

¹ For fuller documentation of the biographical data given here, see A. Lewis: *Roger Hilton: The Early Years*, Leicester 1984. More biographical sources are available in A. Lambirth: *Roger Hilton: The Figured Language of Thought*, London 2007. The autobiographical notes were first made available in A. Lewis: 'Roger Hilton and the Culture of Painting', Ph.D. diss. (University of Manchester, 1995), I, pp.32–38, and have previously only been briefly mentioned in *idem*: *Roger Hilton*, Aldershot 2003, pp.17 and 19; and C. Stephens: *Roger Hilton*, London 2006, pp.19 and 46.

² This memoir is available in Lewis 1995, *op. cit.* (note 1), III, appendix V,

pp.487–97, esp. p.490. Hilton attended a Montessori school in Chester Road, Northwood, from October 1916 until the end of 1918, and Arnold House School, Northwood, from the start of 1919. He passed on to Northwood Preparatory School, failed to enter Marlborough, and attended Bishop's Stortford College from January 1925 until the end of the academic year in 1929.

³ Hilton studied painting at the Slade School of Art from October 1929 to June 1931 and was also registered there from October 1934 to June 1935. Applying for teaching jobs encouraged Hilton to finish work for his Slade diploma which he