

Out of Hours Art

Out of Hours Poem

FLESH AND BONE
FRANCIS BACON/ HENRY MOORE
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford
12 September 2013–19 January 2014

I hope you will find it as difficult as I did to resist this exhibition of two of the 20th century's greatest artists in one of the country's most beautiful museums. Francis Bacon, whose sudden death from a heart attack in Madrid was followed by no public ceremony, and Henry Moore OM, whose life was celebrated by a service in Westminster Abbey, knew each other, but were not friends, and have never before been exhibited together in a public gallery. Indeed, they were, as far as we can tell, as different as men as possible — Moore the rooted, often taciturn Yorkshireman, Bacon leading his solitary, shadowy, urban existence — and at first sight much of their work stands in sharp contrast. However, this show, which explores similarities, differences, and affinities in their work also

emphasises their common sources: the human figure, the human head and face, the use of the human form to express emotions and beliefs, and the inspiration they both drew from African, Egyptian, and pre-Columbian artefacts. Rather archly, I thought, the Ashmolean, presumably without much trouble, fished out two or three Michelangelo master drawings of the human figure and a couple of Rodin sculptures to introduce this idea at the beginning of the exhibition.

There are around 20 works, elegantly hung but slightly oddly catalogued, in half a dozen rooms. The striking hanging in the largest of the galleries includes Bacon's celebrated *Second Version of Triptych 1944*, with its shocking, bloody representations of the three Furies, reflecting the events of recent years, in affecting contrast to three monumental Moores, totem pole-like, including the *Glenkiln Cross*. There is also one of Bacon's horrifying Pope Innocents and the astonishing study from the life mask of William Blake, creating an unforgettable tableau.

I wasn't entirely sure that this exhibition amounted to that much more than the sum of its parts, but what parts! The exhibition catalogue is rather pricey at £25, but contains excellent photographs of all the pieces on show, as well as some valuable commentary, and it is worth buying for the beautiful essay by Francis Warner, who knew Moore and Bacon and gave a lecture entitled 'Francis Bacon and Henry Moore (with slides)' at New College, Oxford on 13 February 1970.

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**STOP ALL THE DOCS,
CUT OFF THEIR MOANS**

*Stop all the docs, cut off their moans,
Stop the blog spreading the truth we've
known,
Silence the tweets and the computer hum
Wring out the NHS, let tendering come.*

*Private vultures circle, searching overhead
Waiting for pronouncements that the NHS
is dead,
Put a bow tie on those predators above,
Let people say goodbye to a service they
loved.*

*It was my N, my H, it was my S,
My working week and why I was stressed,
From early to late evening, I belonged;
I thought the NHS would last: I was wrong.*

*The rich will grow richer once deals are
all done;
Pack up the poor, as it won't be much fun;
Build shopping centres where hospitals
once stood.
As competitive tendering can't bring any
good.*

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Francis Bacon (1909–1992). Study from Portrait of Pope Innocent X, 1965.
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