

From: *Marlene Dumas, Francis Bacon*, curated by M. Bloemheuvel, J. Mot and I. Gianelli, exhibition catalog (Rivoli-Torino, Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, 5 June - 1 October 1995), Charta, Milan 1995, pp. 35-39.

Bacon and Dumas

- or *The discomfort of being "coupled"* -

Marlene Dumas

The problem with me
and liking somebody, is that it takes me so long
to acknowledge it publicly
that when I eventually do
it's mostly no more true.

All artists (have to) participate in *groupshows*, knowingly or not. Being part of any collection, and/or art history, the art is constantly placed in relation to other artists, mostly of their own generation or those with the so-called same style and concerns.

I've been grouped,
I've been solo,
but I've never been "coupled"
in an exhibition.

I don't really *like* "couples" (which doesn't mean I don't paint them). It is an inevitable part of our culture. I believe relationships exist between everything, yet some are more extreme than others. Some attract one another against all odds, and some are more forced.

Bacon definitely, if he had a choice, would have said no to this show (as Marlborough does), because he would not have liked to be seen in relation to me. He wanted to compare himself as an artist, only in relation to the very best (Velázquez and Michelangelo). I compare myself to whatever comes in my way.

As Jan Andriessse said: "The difference between you and him is: Bacon has a discriminating taste, while you don't discriminate".

Reasons to Say No (In Order of Importance)

He's a dead master.
He's a painter's painter.

He's got color (but just one race).
He never drew.
He started as an interior designer.
He's English, no Irish.
He was lucidly articulate (even though "only a painter").

He's good.

He doesn't really use titles.

He still believes, however pulled apart, in the raw power of the image.

He wants movement.

As Jolie van Leeuwen said: "It is as if Bacon is creating works for the silent cinema and Dumas is making stills for films with soundtracks".

His figures go through all kinds of motion inside the frames of their frame.

Distortion becomes his means.

He wants to go directly to the nervous system.

He is searching for the essence of the human condition.

He shows the scream.

He has said: "What do you imagine that an audience would want? I have nobody to excite except myself."

She's a mid-career artist (sounds like midlife crisis).

She's not even a proper painter (just a type of part time neo-conceptualist).

She's muddy (but concerned with the color of the skin).

She draws constantly (though never as a sketch for a painting).

She knows nothing about design.

She's Afrikaans.

She radiates "much heat but no light".

She's "worse than mediocre, with only her titles sometimes worth remembering".

She'll cheat and steal for a good title.

She relies heavily on the word.

She wants a sentence

Hers are static

Style collaboration (montage-like) is her way. She uses sidesteps and backdoors.

She's searching for the perfect lover.

She shows the sigh.

She has said: "Give the people what they want."

Footnote: some remarks are quoted from published criticism.

Reasons to Say Yes (In Random Order)

In the end I couldn't resist the temptation. As Bacon has said: "An artist shouldn't be afraid of making a fool of himself." As I say: "A female person shouldn't be afraid of being called a fallen woman."

Bacon and Dumas have been accused of different but similar crimes. There is his nihilism and my indifference.

There's our interest in Picasso, cinema, photographs and the cruelty of life. Our dependence on chance.

And the accusation that we've both been trafficking in images of misery, gothic horror and sensationalist subject matter.

And last but not least, there's the question of sexuality: he likes men and so do I.

February 1995