

Practise in context.

Dissertation Proposal

Personal, Intense, Figuration.

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The Personal and Intense Figuration in post war painting.

The purpose of this writing is to explore the three key words of this thesis, and three images to study with the exploration of philosophy/artist. The keywords being the personal, figuration and intensity to create a question to this research. The artists being discussed in this document are the work of Francis Bacon, Alberto Giacometti, and Frank Auerbach, all of which have leading subjects and similarities in their work. The philosophers that shall be discussed with the work of Magdalen Dorothea Vernon 'Study of Psychology of Perception', Friedrich Nietzsche 'Beyond Good and Evil' as well as musical movements such as the Post hardcore punk scene.

Intense

'Intensity is dynamism, it is a flow of variable strength and of differential processes, chiefly tied to sensation, but also to forms and concepts, and connected to becoming' - (Bertetto, 2017)

The traversal definition of the word 'Intense' it's filled with the mysticism and integral form of feeling more. With this bringing into the question of the characteristics of intensity and what it can be defined by. Intensity can be construed in many ways, but that mostly of immensity and passion the creation and depiction of intensity is argued in the elements of repetition, speed, and noise whether it be from music or from the base of extreme visuality. The concept when in terms of musicality is the genre of music of the 'hardcore punk' scene bands like 'Orchid' or 'Fugazi' which had built upon the history of normal simplistic punk rock, but amplifying it more, instead of already noisy simplistic tones of the normal punk rock, post hardcore has *'typically features very fast tempos, loud volume, and heavy bass levels, as well as a "do-it-yourself" ethic'* (Wikipedia, 2023). Edward Nietzsche quoted *'All credibility, all good conscious, all evidence of truth comes from the senses'* which brings to the point of senses, the display of senses to its maximum level is but the utmost truth of human nature, in art and in life. As I've labelled previously the process of what makes music, intense, can be used for the description of imagery as well an example of this would be 'Portrait of George Dyer Staring at Blind Cord, 1966', (Figure 1) a painting done by the work of Sir Francis Bacon.



Figure 1 - 'Portrait of George Dyer Staring at Blind Cord, 1966'

This example of work I'd argue is a perfect depiction of what an intense image is defined as. Francis Bacon's animalistic, uncanny depictions of the human figure, in this circumstance the depiction of this figure is of Bacon's partner George Dyer. The connotations of how this brings into the question of intensity is bringing out in the context in which the artists depict and narrates the image. The depiction of what could be depicted as a 'figure' here is caged in, like looking into a cage of a zoo or animal enclosure, the meanings of caging a figure can be related to that of wild animals trapped into a space where they cannot attack or be a danger this could also be to actually to *'intensify the image, and his intervention almost always distorts his subject into a more visually arresting article'* (Harrison, 2021). As well as the caging around the subject itself, Bacon has used the element of distortion and in-cohesion, looking at the figure to begin the question of, what is that? Bacon used the quote of *'the greatest art always returns you to the vulnerability of the human situation'* (Harrison, 2021), this relates to the act of intensity, because you're allowing a perception of the viewer to accept the painting, and to be reminded of fact and the horror in which you allow yourself to view the image even if it is abhorrent to view or access emotionally and visually.

In the image of figure 1, as said before with the notification of distortion of viewing of the subject, it's not only the figure being brought into the question of such, but also the elements of the environment of which the figures existing in. Not an exact depiction of a room of what would exist, but in which one that borders that of a surrealist nightmare, the contrast of the static of which the plain of the figure exists in against the real and very factual existence of the figure being, the figure is the subject that's living in that space and that's what makes it factually intense. In hindsight and in context of the background of subject being bacons partner, he *was 'much subjected to fraught with conflict, charged with love, blurred by alcohol, and agonisingly dysfunctional'* (Sotheby's, 2014) relationship with George dyer who was depicted in the painting, George is shown as somewhat of as said previously as a animal, which he was to Bacon as a partner in the tumultuous swerve of this domestic relationship.

Figuration

Figuration as the definition is as read *'the act or process of creating or providing a figure'* (www.merriam-webster.com, n.d.), the figure by definition can be a description of many meanings, one being an example of someone or something can be used as a 'figure' the epitome of which we can all look up to, or in the process of painting in art, to be a *'strong references to the real world and particularly to the human figure'* (Tate, n.d.).



Figure 2 'Reclining head of Julia, 2007-2008'

This depiction here of this leaning head, a figurative example by the artist Frank Auerbach of a reference to a real-life study of reality of his wife, Julia, and that to an abstraction of such reality becoming something else, a new reality. The difference with being Francis Bacon's painting Figure 1, and Frank Auerbach's 'Reclining head of Julia' (figure 2) is the style in which they are painted. Although both requiring elements of immense concentration to make, they're created in senses of obsession and although Bacon's painting is in the aspect of a dramatic and horrific display Frank Auerbach's is more amplified with the experiences of paint as a material itself and the questioning and embodiment of a living figure.

Frank Auerbach's process in making the image done through the idea of accounting the image, again and again repainting and scrapping of until Frank gets the image in which he wants, to recount and reconsider and make the image of the 'figure' this quote is in relation to it *'When I read more of brilliant painters: Picasso seemed to be doing things all the time, he goes to bullfights, he goes upstairs and shows people his mixer taps. What's he doing, he should be getting on with his painting. And yet there are twenty three thousand paintings, a sculptural oeuvre that is one of the greatest of the twenties century and that would be enough for any lifetime and as many prints as the whole of Czechoslovakia has produced. And this is one person's life'* (Feaver and Auerbach, 2009). Looking back in terms of intensity of the image, Auerbach has said to *'make a stonking, independent, coherent image that's never been seen before'* (Feaver and Auerbach, 2009). With regards of the same image being documented and repainted, redrawn over the duration of several sittings the process of which Auerbach has done with Figure 3, 'Head of EOW' the level of intense reconstruction of the figure, was *'done over the duration of made entirely from life and took almost 70 sittings'* (Tate, n.d.)



Figure 3 'Head of EOW, 1959-60'

Auerbach's work as well as Bacon's work borders the line of the existentiality of what it means to be human. The action in which the materials they both use, lead back to the leading word I initially used in this document, which is intense in the depth and application of paint, charcoal and even to the extent of the materials i.e., (thick paint on wooden board, or raw canvas) they work both on individually. Within context of Auerbach's work, you must bring in the context of who and where the artist came from Frank Auerbach although worked in London all his life was initially born into Germany in the period of Hitler's reign as a leader, in which the atrocities of the holocaust were committed none other than on Frank's parents who were Jewish. You can't help but think this influences Auerbach as an artist, to question the figure not only as the image, but as the emotional and mental figuration of what we are as humans, which brings to the quote of Jean Paul Sartre *'Being is. Being is in-itself. Being is what it is.* (BrainyQuote, 2019)

Personal

The definition of personal is '*of, relating to, or affecting a particular person*'. (Merriam-webster.com, 2019) in relation to paintings that have been discussed in previous texts of this document, the context of personal is a absolution running theme in the previous paintings from the subjects of the previous painters discussed being either or, being the artists knew for years or are of partners or themselves. What I haven't brought into the conversation of this essay is, of a different degree of relationship.

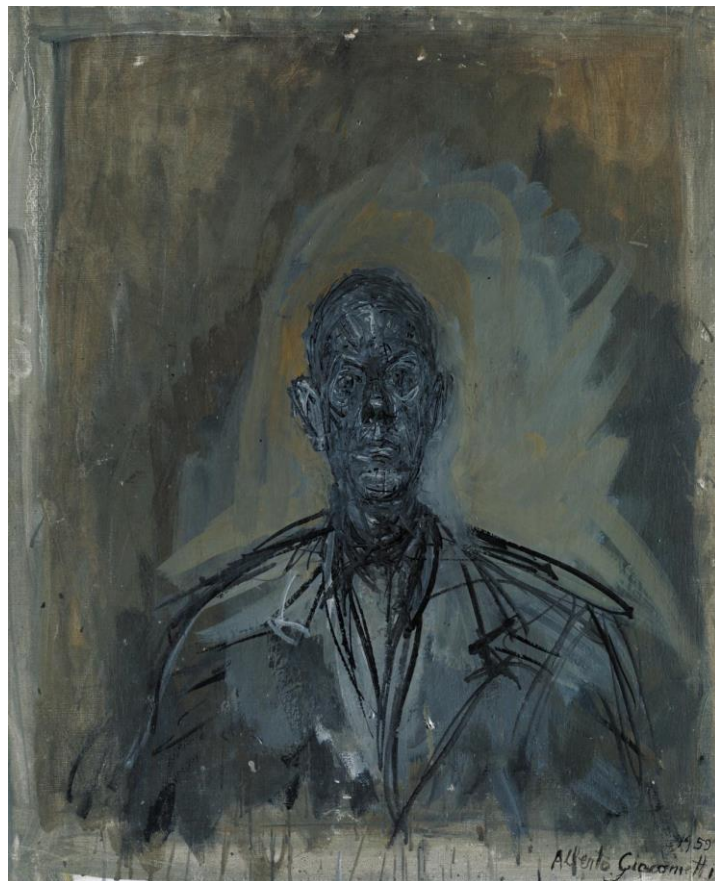


Figure 4 'Diego, 1959'

The painting of 'Diego 1959' which is none other painted by the painter Alberto Giacometti. The depiction of 'Diego 1959' (Figure 4) is the depiction of Alberto Giacometti's brother Diego is a prime example of personal and introspective painting as taken from this quote by John Berger *'He was concerned with nothing else except the contemplation of reality – could ever be shared. This why he believed it to be impossible for a work to be finished'*. (Berger, 2017) To question is to perceive and to perceive is from the perspective of oneself, this leads into the introspection of his painting in relation to the viewer itself. The process of Giacometti's paintings is in relation to perceiving the image in which we look at, due to Giacometti's process *'often made his portraits standing around nine feet away from his model'* (Tate, 2019) this as well interlinks the process again with previous artists depictions of going beyond the model and reality. On the topic of reality and Giacometti you must bring in the relationship of the likes and friendships he had between *'Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, went for late night, largely silent walks with Samuel Beckett'* (Feigel, 2017). Jean Paul Sartre's had said that his figures were *"always mediating between nothingness and being"* (Feigel, 2017) .

It can be brought up with looking at this painting and of Giacometti's other paintings, and sculpture there was an allowance of extremity in the form, again leading back to Auerbach similarly, the absolution of the mark in the process of making these paintings not only an experience of Auerbach's being a finality, and Bacons being the chance, Giacometti's finality is the question of the reality we are in. Back to the subjectivity of the painting being Giacometti's flesh and blood, his brother, it brings to the question why his brother? It could be argued that the reasoning of painting his brother, would be out of convenience, but I argue not judging from the previous research on Giacometti as a artist it is entirely on purpose that he painted his brother. The reasoning for as such is that Giacometti was obsessed with life, death and existence and art, as a whole Samuel Beckett, a close friend, novelist and admirer of Giacometti's work had said *'He was not obsessed but possessed I suggested that it might be more fruitful to concentrate on the problem itself rather than struggle constantly to achieve a solution But Giacometti was determined to continue with his struggle, trying to progress even if it was only by so much as an inch, or a centimetre, or a millimetre'* (Tate, n.d.)

The overarching analysis of my three keywords of personal, intense and figuration I have begun to bring these into artists which although as said formally based on intense figuration and the relationship between the overall themes of such work with the intricacies of being able to look at other ways to portray a figure other than just the means of what you're seeing. There's obviously a reoccurring theme after the war, where people were having to notice that just seeing realism was too far gone, there's not enough to amount of how to portray what had been experienced other than going beyond the means of just painting what we see. The questions that have been brought to thoughts are 'Are we beyond the means of literal elements figuration in painting' but also the other questions leading on from that, could be the theory of 'Materiality in paint' with the thoughts of which the artists I have researched amplified the capabilities of. Also, the questions of how we deal with our own mortality in the post war era, the effects of nuclear war and its effect on the whole world as a whole. Maybe also, the leading question of the future of painting, are we no longer focused on the feeling of the human condition, but now because of technology and it's apparent rampant on what's fake or real, leads to the question are we painting for our depictions? Or the idea of what we want as a depiction? Further on from this I think further developing on the basis of existentialism, mortality, the effects on war, masculinity, western ideology, phenomenology, traumatic experiences, nostalgia, politics over the duration of the past 40 years, technology and social media and the actual application of paint and the history of it, are further experiences I want to relate to the themes of my work are something I want further more on.

List of figures

List 1

<https://www.artsy.net/artwork/francis-bacon-portrait-of-george-dyer-staring-at-blind-cord-2>



Figure 2



https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.benbrownfinearts.com%2Fartists%2F116-frank-auerbach%2Fworks%2F66211-frank-auerbach-reclining-head-of-julia-2007-08%2F&psig=AOvVaw232ujMIRucErSMRi8CYBVi&ust=1683840298219000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CBIQjhxqFwoTCNiylYjY6_4CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAE

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/auerbach-head-of-e-o-w-t02100>



Figure 3

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/giacometti-diego-t00358>



Figure 4

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Frank Auerbach by Williams Feaver

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‘When I read more of brilliant painters: Picasso seemed to be doing things all the time, he goes to bullfights, he goes upstairs and shows people his mixer taps. What’s he doing, he should be getting on with his painting. And yet there are twenty three thousand paintings, a sculptural oeuvre that is one of the greatest of the twenties century and that would be enough for any lifetime and as many prints as the whole of Czechoslovakia has produced. And this is ones persons life’ (Feaver and Auerbach, 2009)’

Beyond Good and Evil: Friedrich Nietzsche

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‘All credibility, all good conscious, all evidence of truth comes from the senses’

Francis Bacon: Shadows

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‘intensify the image, and his intervention almost always distorts his subject into a more visually arresting article’