

A few days ago, I passed by The K20 Museum of Düsseldorf and went in again to see Francis Bacon's two paintings, which have been spatially positioned next to each other. This was the fifth time I went in to see them. The painting on the left belongs to the Men in Blue series. The other is one of his paintings in which a beast with human traces takes center stage in the midst of an indeterminate room, which pretends to contain it or to cast it out.

The thick, dirty brush strokes are discovered later in a second look: One must stay for a long time and look at it repeatedly in order to be able to move across the painting or, at best, to let the painting penetrate us. That's what I did, and that's what I always do, but only with a few, Bacon being one, Van Gogh another, and with Maccio who is even closer to us. I am not able to escape from the mystery they give rise to; there is something intriguing for us to discover.

I stayed for more than an hour and a half observing the painting up close, as well as from afar, and in between. The security guard in the room look at me several times as a mere formality, gesturing that I should keep my distance: "The thing is that there are cameras here, and if they see that I don't ask you to keep your distance, they may reprimand me," he said, when he approached me, as if he were taking my side, as if he understood that I was not that kind of individual who would commit a reckless act. But of course! How could we not want to obsessively look at a painting, particularly one by Bacon? How could we understand it thoroughly if we don't look painstakingly at its smaller gaps? We must develop a microscopic gaze, according to Walter Benjamin.

Details dwell within that which contains them.

The first encounter is summed up at a glance; we are only happy with that which we fancy to see. Then, that which has no shape fades away – a human vestige closer to the beastly shape we often make up into civilized collages. In that impasto of unclean paint, full of lint, dirt, and grime perfectly fitting, the depraved image – which stands in the way of the refined appearance we'd rather show as mere mortals – becomes manifest. There is no way out from the abominable truths we are made of.

It is here where we can understand in all its ramifications what Morton Feldman told us about the different meaning surface has for painters as opposed to composers: the composer creates something real – the note – out of the imagination. On the other hand, the painter creates something imaginary – the painting – from reality. An illusion.

Perhaps Bacon's illusion makes us face that part of us that we don't know how to put our finger on? An image, which is an illusion of seeing what we will never really see but that, nonetheless, usurps us.

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