

# Cubism by morton schamberg and francis bacon

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Art has always been a sort of resonant experience; what defines the true nature of an artistic endeavor is defined by the conditions of one's own experience and how the art speaks to them as a result. Human history has long been defined by its innovators, its thinkers and those willing to impart upon society their own interpretations of the whole experience. I resonate most with art that seeks to explore the extent of the human experience and perpetually redefine what it means to be human, or what the conditions of art itself mean. The development of cubism was one of the most formative moments in the history of art, as the entire practice contradicted the conventions of artistic form and execution, and yet something drew audiences to these types of paintings like moths to a candle. There's something about the continuity of the images and the contours of each individual element that draw the creations to a cohesive center. When I visited the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, I was immediately drawn to Figure (1913) by Morton Schamberg for this reason, and for my general love for this style of painting. On the inverse, upon visiting the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth and viewing Self-Portrait (1956) by Francis Bacon, I found that I was drawn to this painting for reasons that directly contradicted my preferred stylistic and aesthetic forms.

### **Comparison**

Both works were intriguing in their execution and the stylistic elements that each artist chose to integrate into the paintings. Figure was bright and colorful and full of different hues and shades from a somewhat muted palate with well-defined edges for each element of the image itself. The execution of the painting itself is intriguing; while there are clearly defined edges to

each different element, these edges themselves are somewhat muddled and aren't entirely straight or similar in any context. The composition of the painting draws the eye down the center diagonal of the piece, from the top right corner to the bottom left and then across the face of the image. This is rather similar to the painting directly next to it in The Amon Carter Museum of American Art, *Flags on the Waldorf*. This painting is of a shot of several flags lining a street, and the composition of the painting is such that it draws the eye from the top left corner of the piece diagonally down the center. Because of this, Figure evokes a sense of curiosity and a bit of an upbeat, albeit melancholic, response. This differs tremendously from *Self-Portrait* by Francis Bacon. When I view art, I often find that I like images that have some sort of positive element or definition to them. As such, this particular painting stands significantly against the conventions or elements that usually attract my attention in paintings.

Historically, Bacon used this piece as a sort of reflection of his own intrinsic self-doubt and loathing, stating in 1975 during an interview that " I loathe my own face... I've done a lot of self-portraits, really because people have been dying around me like flies and I've nobody else left to paint but myself." <sup>1</sup> Bacon famously had many self-portraits and made it a regular occurrence to paint himself often. This particular self-portrait is the earliest one surviving one that he did, painted by the man in 1956. He has asymmetrical features and is sort of leaned forward and hunched over in the image, which stands against a very dark background with the only definitive attributes of his surroundings being what appears to be a golden headboard and white edges of a bed frame. The painting directly beside this in The

Modern Art Museum of Forth Worth, Sea Phantoms by William Baziotes, has many similar attributes in terms of using dark space for obscurity while still telling a sort of story through it. There are very abstract, almost undefined shapes that drape the painting and give it a sense of character.

The face in Self-Portrait that he has bares some characteristics of a sort of cubist approach but are muddled and abstract, with no symmetrical definition to them at all. There is a bit of a reflective characteristic in this piece, one which stands in stark contrast to Figure by Morton Schamberg. Schamberg's painting bares a similar lack of symmetry in the characteristics of the painting's elements but the color scheme and the way that the image is presented is very different from the image of Self-Portrait by Francis Bacon. This image is largely dark and ominous and doesn't rely on any sort of noticeable form or characteristic to help define the attributes of his own being or the environment around him. 2

## **Conclusion**

My infatuation with cubism has always pertained to the form that is used to tell a story or to create a context within an image, and how this in itself contradicts all standard and typical representations of what art is or how to obtain these types of themes and presentations. It stood out to me as revolutionary and different and Figure by Mortom Schamberg is a prototypical representation of this type of painting and emblematic of all of the characteristics that I've come to love in art. Yet, for all of these same reasons, albeit presented in a different way, I found myself drawn to Self-Portray by Francis Bacon. The image itself is not a simple recreation of Bacon's being; the image of Bacon lacks a definitive nature or really any

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attributes that are normal, by standards of other representations of portraits. Yet, there is a story to be told in this lack of symmetry and the way that Bacon presents himself and the image itself. It's rather expressionist but defies standard conventions with its largely dark background. If I were to have an exhibit, this is the type of painting that I would present and focus upon, one that has particularly different elements that contrast stylistically, but still manage to retain a sense of story in their execution and parts. Furthermore, there would be a large presence of images and paintings that also utilized attributes of cubism and expressionism to articulate their stories and meanings.