Art Critic Michael Peppiatt on Who Should Play Francis Bacon

by Sonia Kolesnikov-Jessop
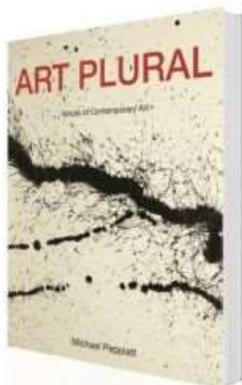
During his illustrious career as an art critic and writer for various publications like *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*, **Michael Peppiatt** got the opportunity to interview the who's who of the European art world, from **David Hockney** and **Lucian Freud** to **Jean Dubuffet, Sonia Delaunay,** and **Antoni Tàpies.** Over the years, he became a close friend with **Francis Bacon** and is now considered the leading authority on the late painter having written his biography in 1996 and curated several exhibitions of Bacon's work.

Peppiatt recently wrote the introduction for *Voices of Contemporary Art*, a book published by Art Plural Gallery in Singapore that explores 27 contemporary artists around the theme of globalization in the art world. And he is now working on a **Joan Miro** exhibition, due to open January 2015 at the Bucerius Kunst Forum in Hamburg, and then travels to the Kunstsammlung in Düsseldorf.

BLOUIN ARTINFO asked the art critic and historian a few quick-fire questions:

Who should play Francis Bacon in a biopic?

Derek Jacobi because he has played Bacon memorably in a bad biopic and would be even better with a good script, which I should be relieved to write because I can give an accurate portrait of Bacon based on my thirty years as a close friend.

And who should play you?

Several people like Ewan McGregor or Jude Law because I have been several people; then me, as I am now, as the narrator in the background, looming forward to show time's 'thievius' progress.

If you could interview a now-dead artist, which one would it be?

Michelangelo.

What would you ask him?

Tell me what it feels like to have completed the Sistine ceiling.

Best quote you ever got?

"Peppiatt is the best art writer of his generation," Andrew Lambirth (*The Art Newspaper*).

What was your most embarrassing interview moment?

I was embarrassed most of the time when I was young. Now I realize there's not much point.

Which words or phrases do you most overuse?

"Yes," as when I'm asked to do things like this interview.

What's your favorite place to see art?

Metropolitan Museum, British Museum, and the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Do you have a museum- or gallery-going routine?

Get an overview before homing in on a particular work.

What's your favorite post-gallery watering hole or restaurant?

The rooftop bar at the Met, but often any old place I can get a decent drink.

What's the last show that surprised you and why?

Kandinsky at the Neue Galerie in New York. I'd seen it coming together because my wife Jill Lloyd curated it, but I had underestimated its impact as a complete visual experience.

Do you collect anything?

Italian Renaissance drawings, tribal art, late 19th-, and 20th-century drawings, paintings, and sculpture.

What's the last artwork you purchased?

An Elisabetta Sirani pen and ink wash drawing of a church interior with a Savonarola figure preaching from the pulpit. I am in love with her across the centuries and call out her name (surreptitiously) when I wander through the streets of Bologna, where she lived and died.

What work of art do you wish you owned?

The Grand Canal in Venice.

What would you do to get it?

Bribe Berlusconi.

What's your art world pet peeve?

Quotes from my books being used to sell art at auction or in galleries without my permission or any recompense.

What international art destination do you most want to visit?

Mantua, or possibly the royal art collections, alone with my monarch, Queen Elizabeth II.

What under-appreciated artist, gallery, or work do you think people should know about?

Zoran Mušič, great painter and great friend who died in Venice some 10 years ago (2005).

Who's your favorite living artist?

Tony Bevan, whose intense images I have before me above the various desks where I write.

What's the last great book you read?

The Collected Plays of William Shakespeare from cover to cover.