

There is no death, only loss.

## **PAINTER, DEALER, GALLERIES**

She was there at the very beginning of Francis Bacon's career.

She got to know him and meet him, the way we all get to know and meet people in every city, in this case in London. To start with, it was because she had been working at the Redfern Gallery for several years.

It was Graham Sutherland who suggested she visit Bacon's studio and that she bought *Painting 1946*.

Graham Sutherland showed at the Redfern. For Francis, and numerous other artists, their exhibitions and private views were the perfect way to meet friends, art lovers and passers-by during that sombre post-war period.

Erica Brausen wanted to open a gallery of her own. While she waited to do so, the painting was shown at the Redfern during the course of the summer of 1946, then in Paris, in December, at the international exhibition organised by Jean Cassou devoted to art of the 20th century, at the Musée d'art moderne. A few months later Erica left the Redfern. She needed someone as a business partner and someone who would take responsibility for the finances and the management of her gallery: these were Arthur Jeffress and Peter Barker-Mill. But Arthur's taste was for the naïve flower pieces of Eden Box while Peter Barker-Mill and his wife were only really interested in the gallery for exhibitions of Peter's own paintings.

The first of Erica's exhibitions was to be the first exhibition of Francis Bacon in June 1948. The situation quickly flared up. From one day to the next Arthur withdrew all his financial backing. A few days before closure, a visitor appeared, tall and distinguished. He said he liked everything very much: the paintings and the exhibition. Erica sat there, silent. She looked at him and said: I am closing down. He said he was a banker and asked how much she needed: the next day he was the new owner of a gallery about which he knew nothing. The paintings stayed on the wall, the gallery did not close down.

Michael Behrens quickly grew to admire Erica and hold her in esteem. He did not know how to express it. Artists, collectors are on bankers' guest lists. He said Erica was truly remarkable: she began to make money from Bacon's paintings. Francis knew it and complained. Erica told Michael: "If you want me to close, go ahead." He could have bought an outstanding collection of 20th century art at cost price. He bought a Balthus, opened his own bank in the City, The Ionian. When he came to resell the Balthus through Erica, in the 1970s or 1980s, he was astonished at the size of the profit that arose from an investment of just a few thousand pounds and he began to regret the time he had spent in his bank. Erica was as Prussian as Marlene Dietrich and might have said to him: "Come back twenty years ago." She said succinctly: "We are too old to discuss that, now, Darling" and hung up.

In spite of abrasive appearances, Erica Brausen was a woman of great femininity. Sensitive, emotional. Refined and decisive, and decisive about who she wanted to be. She was herself, whatever the occasion. And a business woman, as that is how she would have to earn her living. Make choices, make them known to others and if possible impose them, too.

All society is an island. England is an island, so Maurois said. In an Anglo-Saxon society, founded and run by men, she obviously found it difficult because her taste was essentially continental and it is no wonder.

Belly Sirakian, in one phrase and image, summed up the whole of the complexity of her character and behaviour for me in the 1960s: a cuttlefish, she squirts out a cloud of ink to hide herself.

Without Graham Sutherland's insistence, perhaps she would not have gone to Bacon's studio. It should be said that Francis kept visitors at arm's length. He always said that he had no paintings to show. He said the same thing all his life.

It was partially true. He destroyed the majority of his work, sometimes every day. The next day he would look again at the torn fragments. And nonetheless they ended up in the bin. He was uncertain about conclusions. Style, necessity, perfection.

As a result of that visit Miss Brausen bought *Painting 1946*, a painting which the whole world wanted to buy, which was shown in London and Paris. But there you are, she was the one who did it.

She, Erica Brausen. And that painting is a masterpiece. The key work for all that was to follow and for that body of work which he had already begun. An emblematic painting, as we say today, where a bird, instinctively painted, was replaced, without hesitation, by an umbrella and some sides of meat, in a cage. Bacon said it himself.

Erica Brausen was not a collector, a woman with material possessions. She bought, spontaneously, but rarely with the intention of keeping, keeping for herself.

She was a woman without a country, without a territory. A woman without roots. She bought through passion and by look. And unlike many, unlike Joseph Hirshhorn who was one of her two great clients, to name but one, without haggling or making a choice. Because she had already chosen, instinctively, her look had made the choice, within her. She made a purchase the way one makes a decision to bring another person into one's life.

This is usually thought of as a masculine approach. It is a uniquely passionate approach. Sexual but not sexy.

With her it was a sort of visceral gaze. Erica Brausen had a way of looking that was absolute. It was instinctive. It can be found in music, in literature, in other fields. I have known only three people who can pick up a painting to hang it within an exhibition and decide instantly where it should be placed: Dominique de Menil, Alexander Iolas and, along with them, Erica Brausen. A material way of working, conscientious and instinctive, a way of working that was about objective choice.

In saying this I do not exclude anyone from my own generation or any other, such as Harold Szeeman. Simply Miss Brausen had a neo-classical taste and, among her generation, something of the Egyptian Revival. A taste, preferences, a way of being that purified, perfected and led to ulterior choices. These choices she made, slowly, during the course of her whole life.

It was her taste that both explains and exemplifies the allure of the Hanover Gallery from its beginnings to its closure in March 1973; I turned the key in its lock. Painters, sculptors, movements. The range and the styles of the exhibitions, the boundaries which Miss Brausen established herself, there in the gallery. The gallery was her. When pop art and conceptual art arrived, she retired.

That purchase of *Painting 1946* decided the future for Francis. It gave him a gallery, his first gallery, one which was sought after and avant-garde, neither classical nor excessive. It was an open door in London to contemporary art and a new door, too. If Erica Brausen bought that painting for herself it was also because it was, ultimately, destined for a great collection.

The great collection was that of a museum: MoMA. There were three great personalities who had real admiration for her flair, her taste and a certain universality and judgement in matters visual that made no allowances for any kind of mediocrity: James Sweeney, Alfred H. Barr and Willem Sandberg.

When she looked at that painting she convinced herself that it was right for Alfred Barr: that he would acquire it for the museum which, at the end of the forties, was the major, the only major, museum of modern art in the world: The Museum of Modern Art.

To make a sale to MoMa is always rather difficult. The museum does not have a rolling acquisition budget in the same way as French institutions. A director, a curator, chooses a work of art. The trustees make payment by virtue of funds made available by donors, often already deceased. It is not always clear. It is never swift. In the same way when Erica sold César's *Torso*, his finest sculpture in my opinion, the museum took about six years to pay.

The presence of Bacon's painting in MoMA attracted further collectors to the painter and to Erica. In America, Europe, elsewhere. Every museum tried to acquire their own Bacon painting from that point on. The first was the Albright Knox in Buffalo. An initial level of prestige is essential in the launch of an artist's career. One can hardly conceive today of the way in which Bacon's work was discussed and how much it shocked people and that the police were called to the ICA to make a verbal judgement on the impropriety of a painting. "But they are wrestling in the grass" said the policeman called upon to establish the facts.

Every work of art begins by being rejected or thought shocking. And that causes collectors to be cautious. It is essential to stand up to others and for oneself. Affirm choices, preferences, sometimes defend a work against sarcasm and indifference. In the face of a short, sharp divide from the kind of beauty that had been acceptable up to that point.

When Francis Bacon, seduced by the blondness of Suzy Solidor and her emeralds, agreed to paint her portrait, it was amusing to hear the singer anxiously enquire where he was going put the umbrella and the sides of meat.

One can imagine and understand the instant and almost passionate interest that Francis and Erica had in each other. Give or take eighteen months they were the same age. Francis was the younger. Erica came, she said, from the upper middle class of Dusseldorf. A banker father, an unassuming mother, conflicts and distance. Her tastes found no place there in Dusseldorf. Duck shooting, six years old, dressed for the part with a gun on her shoulder.

It is not possible to understand today how the Hanover held 279 shows unless one knows that Erica wanted to hold an exhibition every month. She said, a few days before the final closure of the gallery to an *Evening Standard* journalist: "One must never discourage anyone from coming."

She spent the thirties in France and partly in Spain. The forties in London. She left Germany because she was anti-Nazi, when she was twenty one.

By the time they met Francis, too, had lived a kind of multiple exile away from his native Ireland, to Paris, to London. To Berlin, elsewhere. Life on the margins which is necessary for the creation of art or for creativity was for each of them virgin territory, waiting to be travelled. Crossed, passed. A reciprocal admiration did the rest, as did the journey.

For amateur astrologists I will add the following detail: the attraction of Scorpio to Aquarius, the fixation of Aquarius on Scorpio. To these irresistible links I would just add: Francis was seductive and a handsome man. Erica, without being a woman of conventional beauty, had a charm which cut through everything. Received ideas, clothes, habits – charm augmented by a passionate tendency to assert itself or, just very simply, to exist.

Until his rupture with the Hanover, a break, a divorce, the painter established a real depth within his work moving on from the founding principles of the expressionists and took account of his own life, from the painter's desire to bring part of himself into reality alongside certain aesthetic tastes in his painting, which arose from contact with a true knowledge of western art.

What occurred to Francis Bacon is just what happened to Henry Moore: the development of his work in the context of the vastly increased financial support of a much larger gallery.

Erica Brausen and Francis Bacon both had generous and contradictory personalities. They backed each other up. It is an indefinable combination of the four elements of water, earth, fire and air.

In everyday matters Francis was extravagant, with money and with energy. He played, he blazed in his life, his work. He also played with certain aesthetic givens within his painting. Erica was undoubtedly generous: he was extravagant, abruptly and fantastically, each moment playing with the range of possibilities. And, as for his work, if she did not choose to keep it for herself she certainly knew how to place it to the great benefit of others.

Erica had the most beautiful hands in the world. The shape of her nails, their roundness, the half-moons, the shape of her fingers and their fine articulation. She wore Giacometti's *La Chimère*, made by Alberto as a bronze à l'écu bracelet for Elsa Schiaparelli, on her right wrist till the end of her life.

What they, Francis and Erica, both appreciated was the similarities in classical and in contemporary art from Egyptian to the twentieth century. Erica was the first to show in London on a regular basis: Giacometti, Klee, Schwitters, Max Ernst, the Dadaists, Arp, Hannah Hoch. Even if she could not, financially speaking, show the work of Nolde and Kirchner through solo exhibitions, she did have their work in the gallery. Some works remained a long time. They sold badly. She knew how to talk and did so in three languages. As far as sculpture is concerned there was a large show each summer which was on for three months; contrast and certainties.

Expressionist painters, *expressionisms*, were a kind of basic intuition between the two of them. A visual force, violence, frankness. But I think that Erica, more than Francis, knew how to achieve and understand that to abstract was not the same as being abstract and that it was at a certain level and a certain point of decanting that the work of art becomes a creation when it detaches itself from a single model or from one idea or from a statement that is still too emotional and sometimes far too arbitrary.

Each was as passionate as the other. Exclusive and full of a total desire to please and to be admired. When Erica met, in Ascona, the person who would become, until death, the great love of her life, Francis saw this as treason and a personal rejection. It was pure jealousy.

A fault line opened. It ran its endless meandering course which, on several occasions, Francis knew how to aggravate and inflame. He knew how to look and to scrutinise, how to regard closely. In all kinds of delicious forms or by too much frankness in perversity if not perfidy. A strange game, revelatory, causing injury, scars.

But there was something else. Miss Brausen felt profoundly humiliated, defeated, both personally and in public, when a painter from her gallery, a friend of Francis, from whom she had bought one of his best paintings, told her on the eve of his exhibition, just as the works were being handed over, that he had sold it directly to the Tate. A painting, better than any other, which had style, subject, technique, naïve and applied, made a sharp cut into what was undoubtedly Erica's deepest core : a nude woman, pearly breasts, a dog's muzzle resting on her.

In her direct manner she said in English "Get out of here. You don't need to come back." He did come back, the night of the private view. It is said that revenge is a dish best eaten cold. It takes six or seven years. *Que voulez-vous qu'il fit contre trois?\** This caused the more celebrated of the two painters, at that time, to leave the Hanover. EXIT BACON HANOVER.

Francis's departure coincided with the other painter's entry into the London gallery which was going to welcome him some time afterwards. I am very fond of the phrase in Kafka's Diary: "*Only children's nappies smell.*"

When Erica learned that Francis had left the gallery she was devastated. We had been in Paris for two days. She was looking for works for her big summer show. That morning we were on our way to Bordeaux to have lunch with the Mouïex at Libourne. She told me the news on the station platform and I continued the journey on my own. She returned to London.

It is true that at first she wanted to demand arbitration from the Courts of Justice and financial compensation. With or without a contract, written, signed, the "Gentlemen's Agreement" has the full force of law in the Anglo-Saxon world. She had worked for ten years to make the work of Bacon widely known. She had the evidence: museums, collections, exhibitions. She could also state that she had plans to show the painter during that same season. The exhibition did take place and was a kind of retrospective homage. A tribute, indirectly, to her own contribution. A statement, a farewell of real elegance. The Tate and the Sainsbury's lent works.

Miss Brausen backed down a few days later: she worked out that she could not take proceedings against an artist. Without being specific, she made a story out of it that was "*mondaine*" in the sense which Marianne Moore gives the word in a well-known poem. She also became aware later that the gallery to which Francis had gone had substantial financial backing. Means which had never nor never would be available to her. A turn of fate, of direction, for the painter and for his work. There was no going back and she wished him well, while having her doubts.

What hurt her was not what comes from a sort of emotional betrayal which she could understand, if not admit or share, but that these colleagues, two men, did not come over to discuss the matter. Two expatriates, like her, who had like her, become British citizens. Who had created a gallery as she had in Great Britain where they, too, had established themselves. She had been treated, without any discussion, the way men treat women, whether in business or not.

That was the real injury which she wanted to have sanctioned by the Courts of Justice.

*\*What should he alone have done against three? He should have died, or drawn new strength from an admirable despair.*" Corneille, *Horace*, Act III, Scene VI.

Francis was only a sort of accomplice in the matter. Which it took a long time for her to forgive. But she had a relationship with him based on equality. In a struggle, man to man. Losses and gains, at every moment in life. She would forgive.

On a human level and a business one, she had been despised. And the fact that dealers like Jean Lacarde, Beatrice Monte della Corta, Mario Tazzoli, others, the Durlacher brothers, in New York, at another point, had approached her about showing Bacon, was no real consolation.

I believe that from 1959, the date of this withdrawal, she looked at Francis Bacon's work with an objectivity which was very salutary. The work that she had initiated.

Erica Brausen had the sense of a great will. The sense of a name, hers. The sense of a way of talking, her own. It was that side of her life that belonged to the *Upanishads*. To large degree, the losing side of her life. Three years ago, she died. I have realised, without being aware, that it is, to the very day, three years to the day she left us. She is forgotten.

One can never underestimate how civilised and courteous Francis was and I would even describe him as having an internal elegance.

At the end of Erica's life, when her health was becoming fragile and she was fading, he arranged to have £100,000 sent to her.

They saw each other again. They had both aged and Francis even came to accept Erica's girlfriend. And with a mutual friend they made a trip, they went to Panarea.

Sometimes, Francis came to see them. A glass of champagne was taken, just like it used to be. It was if it were yesterday.

Soon we'll all be dead. Much laughter. They are dead. All three.

FAX

Erica died in my arms, the morning of 16 December 1992, after a three day coma.

Sorting out her things, going through the drawer at the top of the large Directoire commode in her room I found a letter folded in two. This letter, in English:

*Dear Erica, this is not a branch of Lily of the Valley - hardly. You are the great missing one among all that. I wrote to Libération. If they publish my letter, I'll send it to you. With love. Jean-Yves.*

With this letter were several articles which appeared in Paris after Francis's death, with this message: "An attempt to distract you a little."

Here's the fax sent to Serge July, editor of Libération (not published by the paper)

29 April 1992

Dear Sir

As JPH rightly said at the beginning of his article on Bacon "There is no great painter without a great dealer." Which makes it a pity that nowhere in this morning's French press do I find mention of the name ERICA BRAUSEN who got to know Francis B at the beginning of the 40s in London where she was already living and where she created the Hanover Gallery – with one N – in 1947/8 so as to look after him.

It was Erica that showed his work until 1959s. It was she that organised his first New York exhibition at Durlacher's in 1953 – they were friends, the Durlacher Brothers and her. And the show at the Rive Droite gallery, with Jean Lacarde, in Paris in 1957. Erica arrived at the private view with Suzy Solidor – these two ladies had been great chums in Paris in the 1930s; they offered bunches of violets but possibly did not know what that implies.

Francis hated doing portraits. He did it rarely. By that stage he had only painted Lisa Sainsbury, possibly Henrietta Moraes and Isabel Lambert, ladies to whom he was close. He agreed to paint Suzy Solidor's; she charmed him, but she had to wait. One day she said, "I have no idea what he is going to do, he puts umbrellas in sides of meat." Suzy Solidor had, before the war, the most beautiful back and spinal column in the world.

Erica Brausen and Suzy Solidor were not a bad combination, in fact they were really rather fabulous and, together with Francis Bacon, were very alluring. Above all in Jean Larcade's upstairs gallery, faubourg Saint-Honoré, before he crossed the street and fell into the hands of the little brunette who wanted to build "a little American bridge" between Paris and New York, which was what she said to the lady, at the private view of Flags by Jasper Johns, a year later.

It was also Erica Brausen who sold MoMA's painting to Alfred Barr in 1948. Barr and Erica held *Painting 1946* in very high esteem. She also pushed Hirshhorn into buying his first few Bacons. Although it was easy enough. She had the knack. Hirshhorn asked the price of a picture. She said: it's this much. He replied "and for me?" Automatically a 10 or 20% discount. The second, third picture and so on, each time, a 10 or 20% discount at least, on them all. Miss Brausen was not in the least good at accounting and would rather sell work by her favourite painter. If making cash is what it takes to make a great dealer, she was not a great dealer.

How do I know so much about all this? Easy, I wielded the feather duster at the Hanover Gallery – two Ls, one N. When the paint was not yet dry on Francis Bacon's Van Gogh series, it was me who stopped people touching the canvases with their fingers. Even before we had time to put the glasses out. And especially the red areas, it's strange that people adore poking a finger into a patch of fresh, red paint.

As to the departure of Francis Bacon from the Hanover, that's another story. I might tell it when Lucian Freud is dead as it's rather sordid. As to the Van Gogh series, it is true that Bacon admired Van Gogh and that his knowledge of the history of painting, sensual, intelligent, was great, but a date for the exhibition had been fixed and there were no paintings - and Erica had wiped out several debts, Monte Carlo etc – when miraculously a film by Minnelli came out at the Curzon Cinema, Curzon Street, London. Click, paintings, and the Van Gogh series.

Along with Pontus Hulten, who was my first boss here, I have admired you greatly and that is why I am sending you this missive today. You are going to ask what I do in the Museum. I have organised retrospectives: Klein, St Phalle, Tinguely .... Now I am playing in Chekov, *The Cherry Orchard*, the old retainer, forgotten on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor under the eaves. And sometimes, even I, wonder if everyone has left for Moscow.

That said, this morning, *Le Parisien*, Paris edition, has performed a miracle. In one phrase were these words "Francis Bacon was a notary homosexual". This typo is one of the pearls for those who want to write the history of art as it is told in newspapers.

What a pity that *Libé* has suppressed *Les Chèris* by Jean-Luc Hennig. In these grim days, readers' letters would keep us amused and redress history for you and for us.

**Jean-Yves Mock, Curator-at-Large**



POST FAX

She belonged to this world that deals with looking, direct. Without uncertainty. It is a world of exactness and of mistakes. It involves a sort of practicality and also of being. It depends on works, objects. It is made up of contacts and of perceptions. It demands this.

A painting, a sculpture. A look, a bringing together, an exhibition. The paintings exist between the paintings, the sculptures between the sculptures. That was her life. Her gallery archives have been falsified and plundered. There is no word for this, Miss Brausen was a woman without a defensive wall and the invaders are everywhere.

The aim was to make a donation without restrictions. To be useful, to be studied, later. Trace and witness. She had dedicated herself to a task without a name, wide-ranging: to choose artists, to make a decision about certain works, invest, invest of herself. She got involved in an unknown world. In her youth, with her intuitions, with it all in front of her: success, failure and a great deal of responsibility.

Forgers slipped in, so did doosh. Photographs of works she had sold were torn out of the gallery albums. In their place someone stuck in works which were unknown to the world, those *in the style of nothing whatsoever*. At that level one neither knew nor recognised the artist. The provenance of real works had been altered. Impossible links were made. Catalogues of exhibitions that she had made in the gallery were stolen. Someone had for instance substituted a lovely crayon portrait of the young David S by Alberto Giacometti for a strange atrocity where the reflected glance of the sitter, impossible to grasp, has been covered by something which became a kind of Venetian mask, probably intended to be a pair of glasses.

This pillaging of the gallery archives has not put Erica into the very small world of forgers, which does not exist, but into that of virtual negativity, without ever having been consulted.

She had a pithy comment appropriate to all occasions: "people will never learn."

On Erica's death I put an announcement in *Le Monde*. It ended with the phrase which is at the top of this text, unsigned. Jane Heap always made herself invisible behind her writing, at the time of the *Little Review* for instance.

Miss Brausen lived in seclusion in her last years reading "*All and Everything*" [by G. I. Gurdjieff]. Her body lies with that of Miss Koopman in the old cemetery at East Finchley. The grave is near that of Miss Heap. The friends are in the same row, with other friends.

All is fiction about oneself. Others, as such, have their place.