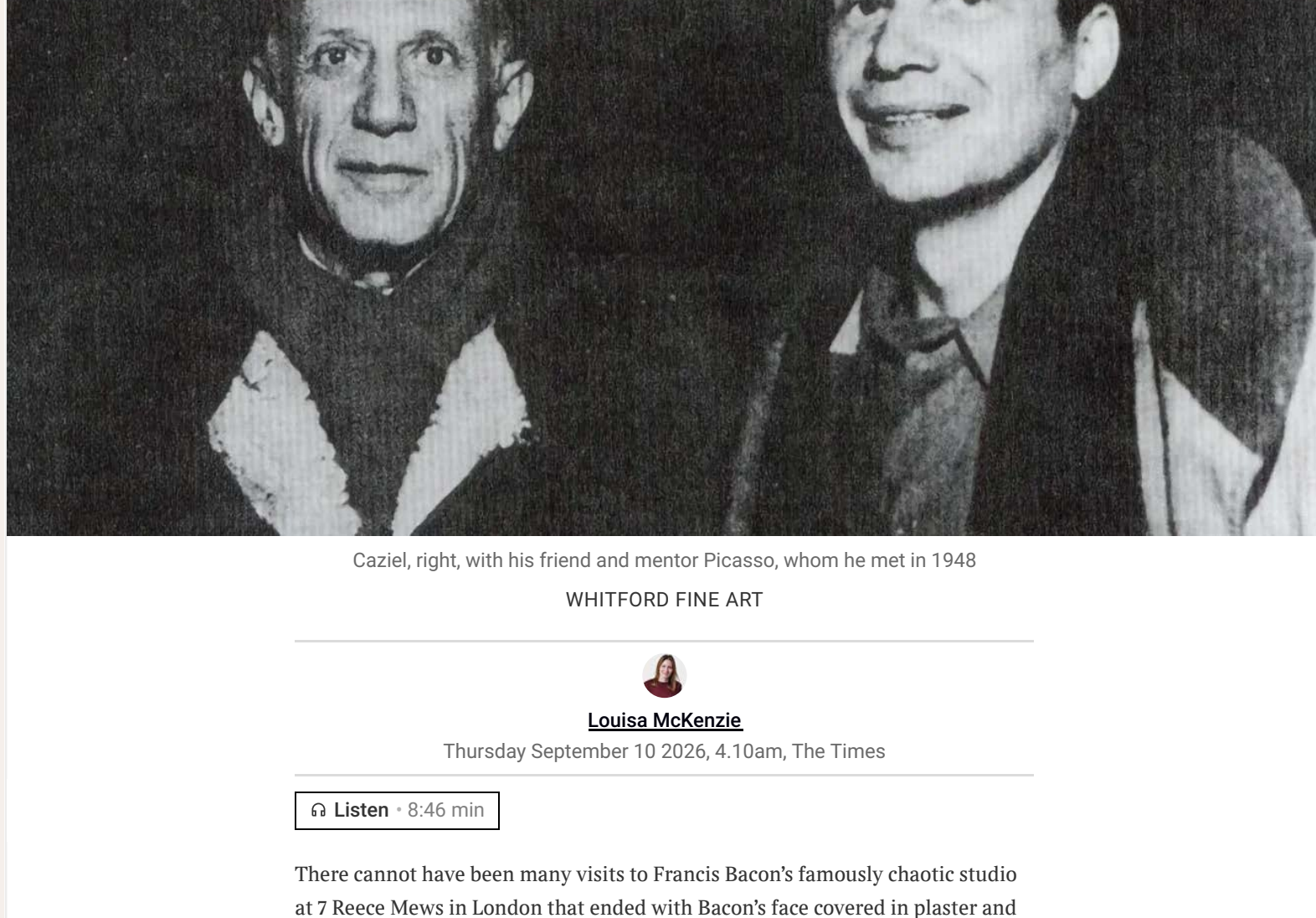


From Matisse to Picasso, the secret stories of artist friendships

We know all about artist rivalries, but a new exhibition looks at the friendships that have influenced the life and work of those such as Francis Bacon and Pablo Picasso



Cazel, right, with his friend and mentor Picasso, whom he met in 1948

WHITFORD FINE ART



Louisa McKenzie

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There cannot have been many visits to Francis Bacon's famously chaotic studio at 7 Reece Mews in London that ended with Bacon's face covered in plaster and two straws protruding from his nostrils.

Yet that was the situation in which the sculptor Clive Barker found himself in 1969. Barker — not to be confused with the horror writer of the same name — had decided that he wanted to make a life mask of his friend. Bacon agreed. Barker arrived at the cramped South Kensington studio with an experimental lightweight plaster mixture, covered Bacon's face and inserted the straws so that he could breathe. Throughout the process, Barker held Bacon's hand: if anything went wrong, Bacon could squeeze it and the plaster would come off. "After I had successfully completed the cast, he told me he had been in agony because of his asthma," Barker later explained of the mask, a gilded bronze cast of which can be viewed at London's National Portrait Gallery. "I felt terrible, but very touched by Francis's support."

It is an unusually intimate image of one of the most formidable figures in postwar art. It is also a reminder of the support between artists that could lie behind the making of art: sitting in one another's studios, borrowing ideas, arguing about paintings, holidaying together and, occasionally, even proposing marriage.

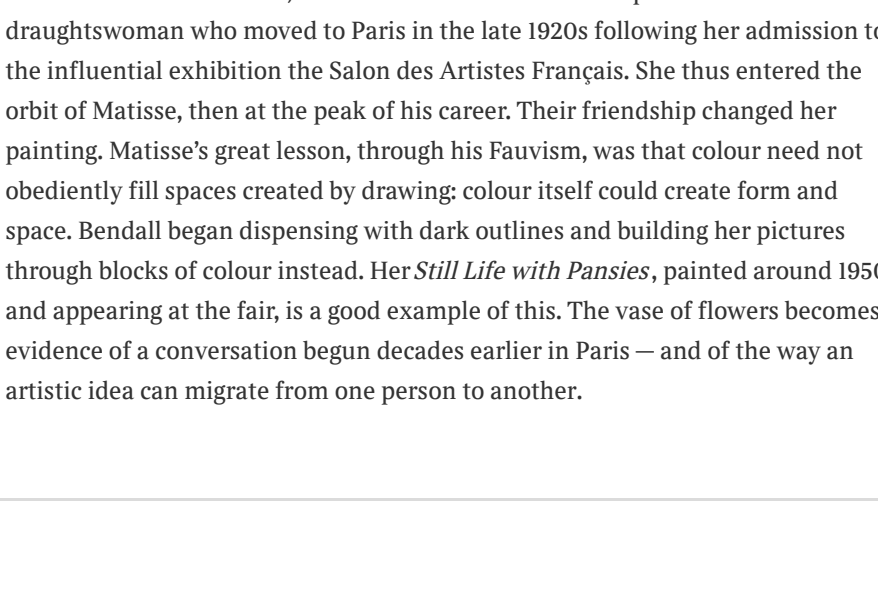
This is the subject of *Artists and Their Inspirations*, a presentation by [Whitford Fine Art](#) at the [British Art Fair](#), which returns to the Saatchi Gallery from September 24-27. The gallery has drawn on artists' estates to explore three relationships: Mildred Bendall and Henri Matisse; the Polish-born painter Cazel and Pablo Picasso; and Barker and Bacon.

"At Whitford Fine Art, we are particularly interested in artists whose work has not always received the recognition it deserves, and in understanding the circumstances that shaped both their careers and their work," explains An Jo Fermon, the director of Whitford Fine Art. "Mildred Bendall's achievements were too often overlooked in the context of a male-dominated art world, while Clive Barker was an artist who never sought the limelight or actively promoted his own work. Cazel, meanwhile, deliberately resisted the commercialisation of his art. Yet all three developed significant relationships with artists of their generation, and those exchanges left a lasting mark."



Pansies, c 1950, by Mildred Bendall

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Mildred Bendall painting at the Port of Oleron

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The least familiar name may be Bendall's. Born in Bordeaux in 1891 to an English father and French mother, Mildred Bendall was an accomplished draughtswoman who moved to Paris in the late 1920s following her admission to the influential exhibition the Salon des Artistes Français. She thus entered the orbit of Matisse, then at the peak of his career. Their friendship changed her painting. Matisse's great lesson, through his Fauvism, was that colour need not obediently fill spaces created by drawing: colour itself could create form and space. Bendall began dispensing with dark outlines and building her pictures through blocks of colour instead. Her *Still Life with Pansies*, painted around 1950 and appearing at the fair, is a good example of this. The vase of flowers becomes evidence of a conversation begun decades earlier in Paris — and of the way an artistic idea can migrate from one person to another.

The relationship became personal. Bendall was a frequent visitor to the Matisse household and became so close to the family that Matisse's son Paul proposed marriage. She turned him down and subsequently returned to Bordeaux. Bendall might not have taken Matisse's son, but she took Matisse's ideas with her, cofounding the group Artistes indépendents bordelais in 1928. She encouraged younger artists to create volume through colour rather than the academic convention of adding black and white. Her leadership of the group saw artists such as Braque, Utrillo and Picasso — as well as her mentor Matisse — participate in its annual exhibitions.



Port of Oleron, 1953, by Mildred Bendall

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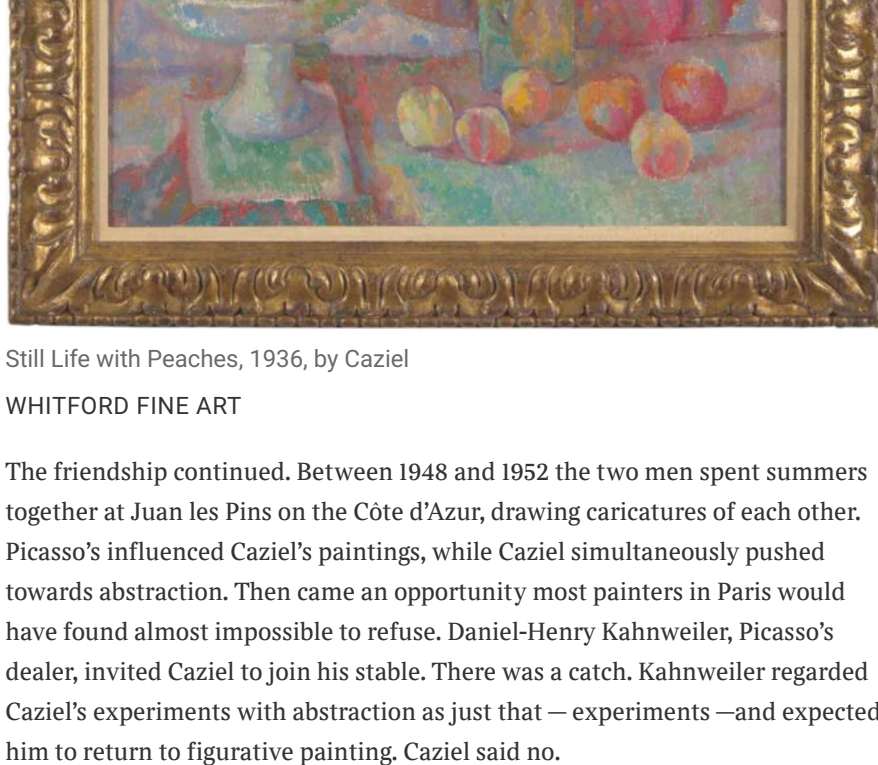
The relationship between Cazel and Picasso was more reciprocal still. Cazel, born Kazimierz Zielenkiewicz in Poland in 1906, arrived in Paris before the war. His stay in Paris had been in part facilitated by another great artist — Édouard Vuillard, best known for his colourful domestic scenes. During the war, Cazel and his Jewish wife, the painter Lutka Pink, found refuge in Aix-en-Provence. In 1948 the Polish government gave Cazel, then established in Paris, a peculiar errand: he was to deliver to Picasso a traditional Polish coat made from the pelt of black heath sheep.

Cazel duly appeared at Picasso's studio in the Rue des Grands Augustins in Paris. The two hit it off. Both were expatriates; both understood what it meant to be separated from their homeland, and they shared an enthusiasm for Polish folk art. Then Cazel noticed something extraordinary in the studio. Picasso was working on a portrait of his young son, Claude — and had based it on a design Cazel had made for the catalogue of the 1948 Unesco exhibition. For an artist meeting Picasso, it must have been a startling reversal of expectations: the most famous painter alive had already borrowed from him.

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Still Life with Peaches, 1936, by Cazel

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The friendship continued. Between 1948 and 1952 the two men spent summers together at Juan les Pins on the Côte d'Azur, drawing caricatures of each other. Picasso's influenced Cazel's paintings, while Cazel simultaneously pushed towards abstraction. Then came an opportunity most painters in Paris would have found almost impossible to refuse. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso's dealer, invited Cazel to join his stable. There was a catch. Kahnweiler regarded Cazel's experiments with abstraction as just that — experiments — and expected him to return to figurative painting. Cazel said no.

By 1951 he had largely abandoned figuration and joined Groupe Espace, which sought to bring constructivist art and architecture together. Cazel remained committed to abstraction for the rest of his career. It makes the relationship with Picasso considerably more interesting than a simple tale of mentor and mentee: Picasso helped Cazel find freedom, and Cazel exercised that freedom by going somewhere his mentor would not follow. This year marks the 120th anniversary of Cazel's birth, making the fair's presentation an opportunity to reconsider an artist who stood remarkably close to the centre of European modernism without becoming a household name.



Clive Barker, right, with Francis Bacon in his Reece Mews studio

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Clive Barker's Study of Francis Bacon No 3

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Barker and Bacon offer a different sort of relationship again. Barker was more than three decades younger than Bacon, but theirs is better understood as friendship and mutual fascination than conventional mentorship. Barker made 12 bronze portrait studies of Bacon. Bacon, in turn, painted Barker. Barker's sculptures became increasingly extraordinary. In *Francis Bacon (1909-1992), Study No 6 (Head and Teeth)*, he incorporated casts of real teeth and tubing suggesting a windpipe. The polished sculpture seems almost infected by Bacon's own imagery: the mouth, flesh and vulnerable human body that obsessively recur in Bacon's paintings have migrated into Barker's sculpture. The exchange eventually became explicit. In 1978 an exhibition at the Felicity Samuel Gallery in London paired 12 Studies of Francis Bacon by Barker with 3 Studies of Clive Barker by Bacon. One artist looked at the other, and the other looked back.

This perhaps explains the fascination of these three relationships. They transgress the romantic mythology of the solitary genius. Matisse gave Bendall a new way of thinking about colour, but she passed it on to her own circle of acolytes. Picasso closely that he covered it in plaster; Bacon responded in his own medium, paint.

The works at the British Art Fair tell stories not just of influences but of encounters: a rejected marriage proposal; a Polish sheepskin coat; summers spent making caricatures on the Riviera and two breathing straws poking through the wet plaster. These vignettes from everyday life had a profound effect on some of the 20th century's most interesting art.

Artists and their Inspirations, Whitford Fine Art at the [British Art Fair](#), Saatchi Gallery London, September 24-27