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## **Slaughter and the Sign: Painting Animal Flesh in the Twentieth Century**

The representation of meat in oil paint has a rich legacy. Animal flesh has remained a source of fascination for visual artists from the invention of the medium to the present day. In the past century, meat as subject matter has taken on special significance in relation to the formal concerns of modern painting. Occupying a liminal space between complete body and formless mass, meat lends itself to painterly explorations of the fluid boundary between figuration and abstraction and the dual nature of paint as mimetic agent and coagulated, physically present matter. The potency of this subject for painting in the twentieth century, however, is the result of ideological developments concerning animals as much as aesthetics. In this thesis, I argue that paintings of meat in the past 100 years have been deeply influenced by shifting relationships between humans and the creatures they consume.

My analysis of the role of meat in modern painting proceeds through a series of case studies. First, I explore how Chaim Soutine's work was impacted by a dialogue between the dietary laws of his Jewish upbringing and the emergence of the institutional slaughterhouse in modern France. I then turn to the paintings of Francis Bacon, arguing that the centrality of flesh in Bacon's work enacts an interrogation of the very divide that separates human and non-human animals. Finally, I confront the Vienna Actionists, investigating the role of animal slaughter in these artists' work within the context of their larger projects of post-war cultural critique.

Animal studies, an emerging line of academic inquiry, promises to pose new questions for the human sciences. This thesis is a dual effort to explore how this developing discipline might illuminate art historical analysis and, conversely, how the history of painting offers new throughways for understanding the evolution of human-animal relationships.