

# Comparative Study

Francis Bacon and Dagmara  
Costello



# Introduction



Costello, Dagmara. *Lily 2*. Watercolor. Courtesy of DagArt.



Bacon, a Portrait of Lucian Freud. 1951.

- ❖ The scope of my investigation includes the analysis and comparison of Dagmara Costello, a local Milwaukee artist, and Francis Bacon, an internationally known artist. My research included Dagmara Costello's official website as well as a website in which her work was being sold. The formal qualities compared include line, color, contrast, and texture. The function and purpose include dark subject matters due to the tone of the pieces including melancholy and social change in society.



# Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Dagmara Costello



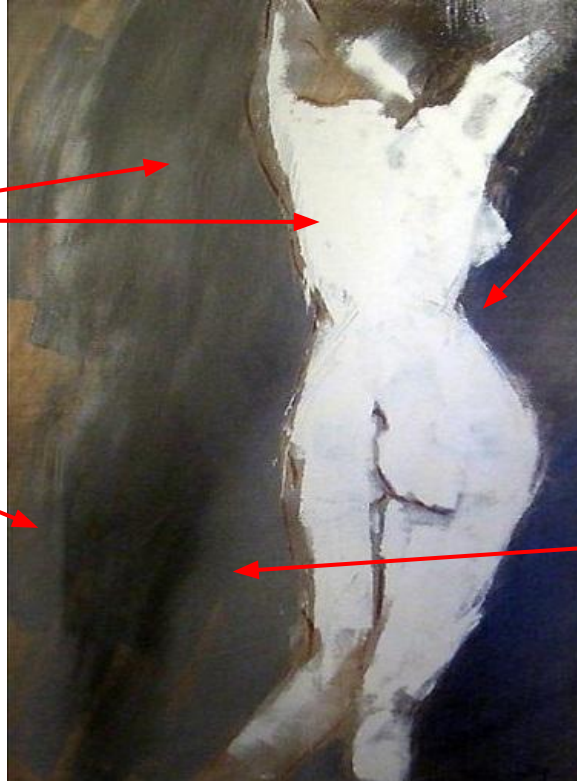
Costello, Dagmara. *Lily 1*. Acrylic.

Costello is a Milwaukee artist who works with all kinds of materials and mediums including: acrylic, watercolors, clay, and jewelry. Costello often creates artwork without a plan. Costello focuses on emotion without the boundaries of what artists are “supposed to do”. She uses media including rubber, glass, gold, and sterling silver to create unconventional jewelry that is functional. Costello is currently located in the United States, but studied art and jewelry design in Europe which allows her to have a scope of differing cultural perspectives within her art. Costello focuses on social issues such as poverty as well as personal struggle within her pieces.

# Formal Response to 'Evening Breath'

Contrast from the dark background to the bright white subject that is a naked woman. This emphasises the figure as the center of the piece. Without the color contrast it would have been difficult to identify a figure within the piece and would appear more as an abstract work.

The neutral color used in the piece presents a dark mood making the viewer see the stressed feeling that is being portrayed within the piece. If there were to be bright and vibrant colors, the mood of the piece might represent a differing mood such as



Costello, Evening Breath. Acrylic. 30 x 40.

Evening Breath, Dagmara Costello uses line to define the figure, which in this case is a naked woman. While the background is mostly comprised with large, quick brushstrokes, there is thin dark outlining on the figure to bring it off the background. This was a successful choice made by Costello in order to add emphasis to the figure by separating it from the background. This gives the figure shape rather than looking flat.

Movement is created within the background of the piece by the brushstrokes. The brushstrokes move up and to the right. The movement creates an illusion that the woman is reaching up in distress, which adds to the mood in this piece which may be identified as overwhelmed.

# Formal Response to 'Memories'

The color in the painting has a low saturation. These colors are most commonly used to present a mood of melancholy. By not using bright colors, there is an elimination of a happy mood within the piece.

Costello's brushstrokes in this piece, are unrushed, different from previous works of hers where the brushstrokes seemed stressed. These brushstrokes seem more calm than previous works of Costello's



Costello, Memories. Acrylic. 28 x48.

Rhythm is presented in this piece by the contrast within the grass, and the brush strokes that curve to the right on the bottom half of the image. This mimics the flowing of the prairie in the wind thus creating rhythm.



# Interpretation of Function and Purpose 'Change' by Dagmara Costello

The symbol of the Obama Campaign can be seen on the cup of the seemingly homeless man asking for extra money. This reflects the human condition in the perspective that we as humans are always looking for change whether it's political and social change. The newspaper in this piece reads "change" creating evidence for the need for social change in America. It looks as though there is an emergence from a dark background to a light foreground. This represents the expected outcome of the Obama Campaign. The figure in this image is sitting in the shadows, this is representative of an American citizen sitting in the shadows of society struggling most likely economically due to the fact that the figure has little clothes on, no shoes, and looks as though he is begging for change on the streets. The dark colors in this piece indicate struggle and pain. The only colors within this black and white piece is the Obama Campaign logo showing the Obama Campaign to be the change society is looking for. The low saturation can also represent the lack of participation or faith in the current United States government in hopes that things will be different if Obama were to take office.



Costello, Dagmara. Change. 24x48.

# Analysis of Formal Qualities

The white pearls indicate pureness and innocence. Pearls are most commonly associated with having a calming effect. Pearls are viewed as precious, just as innocence is.

There is asymmetrical balance within the net, on one side there is a large white pearl while on the other side there is many small white pearls, an aesthetic choice made by Costello.

The contrast between the white pearls and the black net make the piece more aesthetically pleasing. Netting could indicate entrapment of innocence and pureness. It's black color could represent seductivity. The contrast between these could represent a choice made by women in society to embrace their innocent side or embrace their seductive side and then finding the balance between these two options quite literally with the asymmetrical balance of the pearls as mentioned earlier.



# Evaluation of Cultural Significance of Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon works upon the controversial topics presented in the media and society. His biomorphic surrealism artwork mirrors the ideas and topics seen in photography and film during the 1940's. His sexuality and trauma from his father were both push factors in the metaphors behind his artwork. Bacon touches on religion and war within his pieces as well. While other artists had begun to work with mediums other than painting, Bacon continued to be faithful within this art medium and continued to use painting techniques from classic artists.





# Interpretation of function and Purpose of 'The Screaming Pope'



Velasquez, Diego. *Portrait of Innocent X*. 1650.

Bacon, Francis. *Study after Velásquez's Portrait of Innocent X*. 1953.

The Screaming Pope is screaming with cultural and historical context. In this piece, Bacon depicts the pope in a eerie way by surrounding the pope in dark colors and rapid brushstrokes. Bacon most likely views the pope as a monster because of the pope's disapproval of the homosexual community during the time of the creation of this piece. Francis Bacon was openly gay and thus took the pope's aggression against gays personally. Bacon's Screaming Pope significantly mirrors the painting, Pope Innocent X done by Diego Velázquez in 1650. This is significant because it further shows the metaphor Bacon is trying to convey within this piece as the corruptivity of religion and its discrimination of the homosexual community.

# Interpretation of Function and Purpose

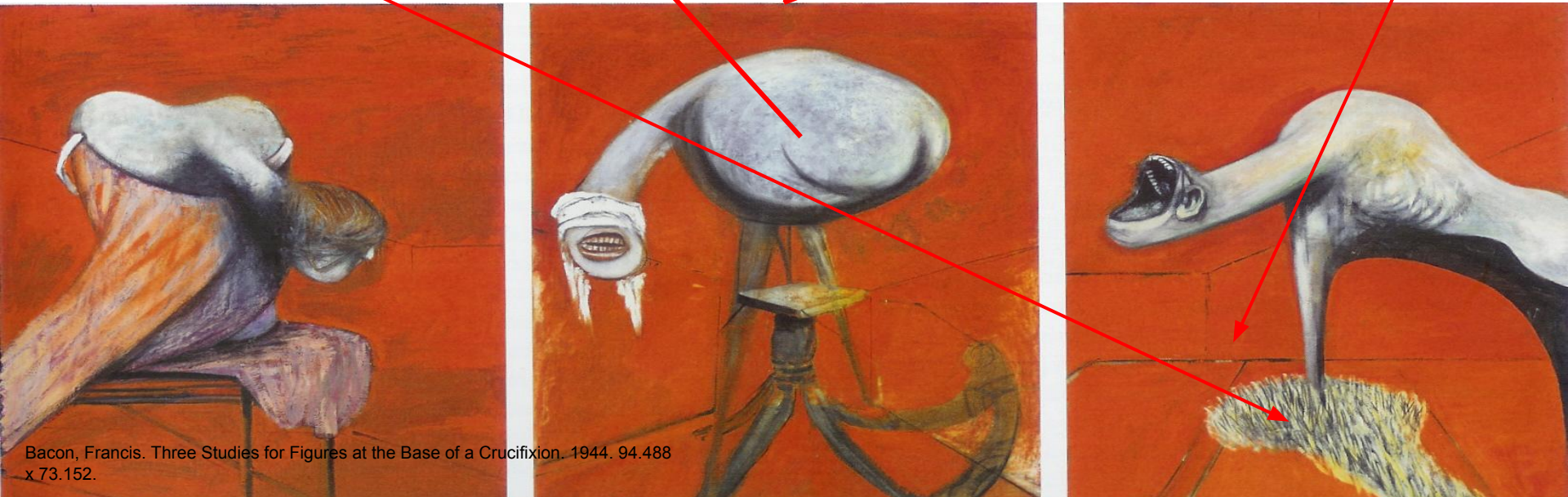
This piece is a triptych which uses rule of thirds within piece to draw attention of a story being told here, most likely one of agony and pain given by the creatures facial expressions.

Through these three images, one can see movement within the figure. As you look at each of the images, It's almost as if the figure is dancing.

Bacon uses line to create space within the background, he uses a vanishing point to create depth within the background of the piece.

Contrast between the bold red background and the white figure creates emphasis to that white figure.

Texture is seen in multiple images within the piece. It is seen in the background as well as in the first picture on the creature and again in the third picture in the bottom center.



Bacon, Francis. Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion. 1944. 94.488 x 73.152.

# Interpretation of Function and Purpose

Bacon uses the rule of thirds to attract the audience to his piece and to create movement by using the triptych as a storyboard and to give the piece a three dimensional feel by creating different angles of the man sitting.

Smudging is used in this piece and creates rhythm by allowing for the piece to show movement within each frame almost as if it was a moving picture.

Line is used to create space and depth within the piece. And allow for the subject to seem as if he is sitting within a room. This is done by the curvature of the wall in the background of the piece as well as the three dimension drawing with the use of a vanishing point to create a room of some sort behind the subject.





# Comparing Artistic Styles

- Both artists use line often within their pieces although the lines although each artist uses line with different intentions. For example, Bacon uses line to create texture within his pieces while Costello uses line to create shadows and the outlines of her figures.
- While Bacon uses the rule of thirds often within his pieces, Costello tends to stick with one portrait view of her paintings.
- The brushstrokes of both pieces are similar to provoke rhythm and movement within pieces including *Screaming Pope* by Francis Bacon and *Memories* by Dagmara Costello.



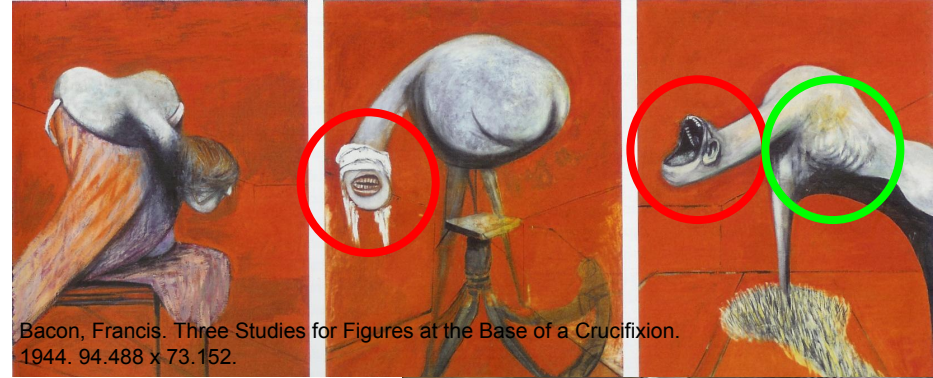
# Comparison between Dagmara Costello and Francis Bacon

Francis Bacon	Comparisons	Dagmara Costello
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More eerie feel</li><li>• Mood: Angry, distressed</li><li>• Religious Statement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dark Times</li><li>• Identifying Social Issues</li><li>• The discrete use of brushstrokes to apply texture and movement</li><li>• Use of personal memories and/or experiences</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mood: Distressed</li><li>• Social and Political Statement</li></ul>



# Explanation of Comparisons

One comparison seen within Dagmara Costello and Francis Bacon's pieces is the moods expressed within them. More specifically dark moods such as somber, distress, and/or depression. However Costello and Bacon achieve similar moods by using different techniques within their pieces. For example, In Costello's, 'Evening Breath', Costello uses low saturation and neutral colors to display a gloomy feeling to the viewer. On the other hand, Bacon uses form to showcase the mood of agony within the piece, 'Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion' He creates this deformed, malnourished as indicated by the green circle as the ribs are popping out on the figure, distressed form to display a mood of agony. Each panel of the triptych displays a different type of agony, it is almost as if the viewer can hear different screams coming from the beast depicted within Bacon's piece. (see circled expressions in *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*)



Bacon, Francis. Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion. 1944. 94.488 x 73.152.



Costello, Dagmara. Evening Breath.



# Explanation of Comparisons

Both Costello and Bacon use their art to express personal experiences and conflicts. Within Costello's piece, *Memories*, this connection is made very clear just by the title. This claim is also supported by the faded look of the piece which is achieved by the low saturation of the piece. The low saturation of the piece displays a nostalgic vibe with a tint of sadness, visualising what a memory might look like if it could be viewed as an image. Bacon's piece is a bit more obvious with his personal connection. It is believed that Francis Bacon was gay, and therefore the church, specifically the Catholic church opposed Bacon and his way of life. Bacon's painting, *Head VI* is a jab at the oppression from the catholic church and he expressed his hate.

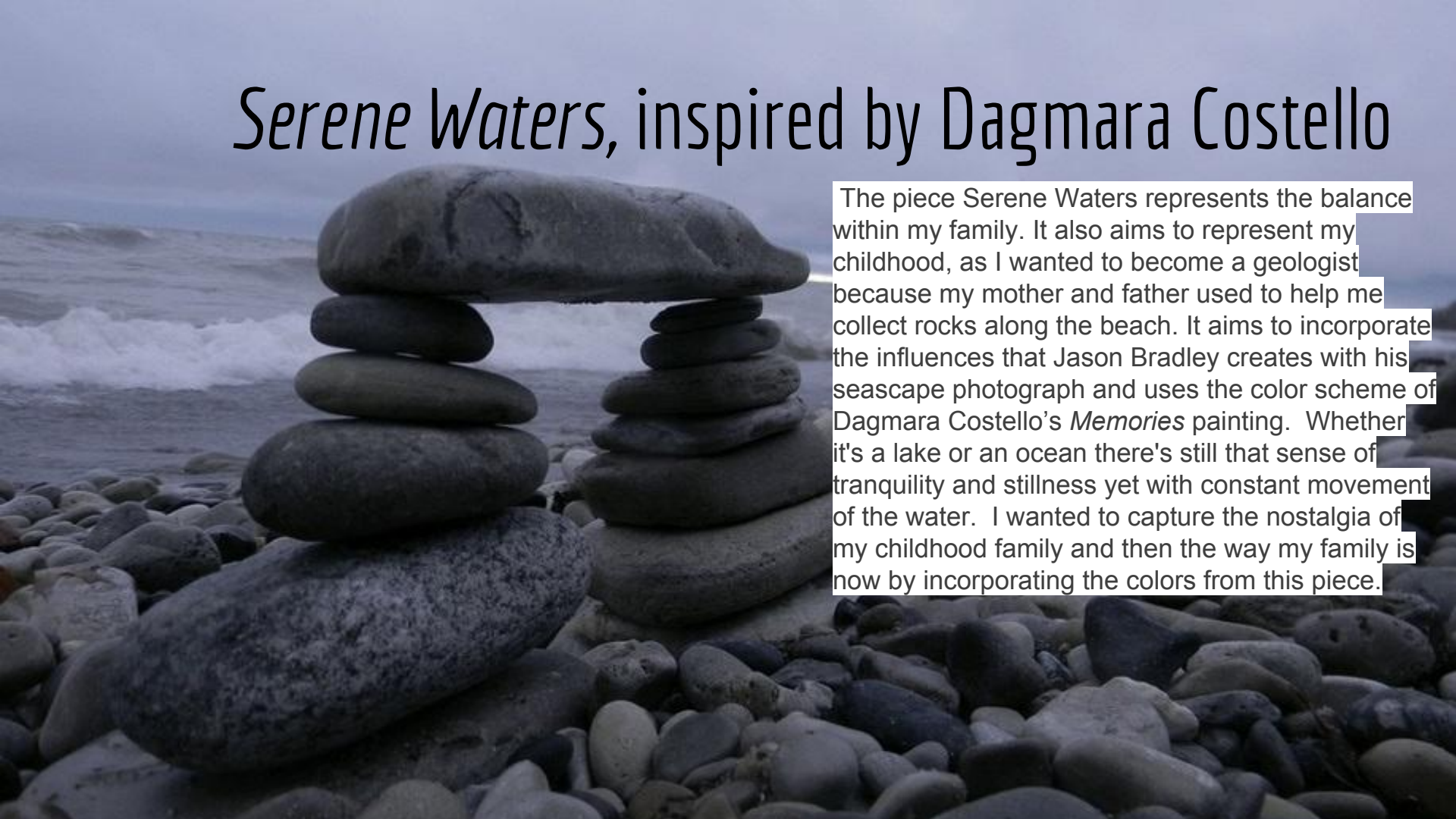


# *Bah* Inspired by Francis Bacon

My piece titled 'Bah' is a mixed media acrylic painting showcasing the feelings of social anxiety. 'Bah' contains aspects of Francis Bacon's painting style as well as a specific piece titled 'Head IV' from his Screaming Popes collection. The eyes will be big due to the curiosity Nani has when she is feeling her social anxiety. The mouth will be small due to her shyness and her inability to act upon her curiosity. One piece of Francis Bacon's that is used for the basis of my piece was a part of Francis Bacon's pope screaming series which is Head IV. This piece features large quick downward brushstrokes. There is also some sections in which it looks like the paint is running out which I also included within my painting.



# *Serene Waters*, inspired by Dagmara Costello



The piece *Serene Waters* represents the balance within my family. It also aims to represent my childhood, as I wanted to become a geologist because my mother and father used to help me collect rocks along the beach. It aims to incorporate the influences that Jason Bradley creates with his seascape photograph and uses the color scheme of Dagmara Costello's *Memories* painting. Whether it's a lake or an ocean there's still that sense of tranquility and stillness yet with constant movement of the water. I wanted to capture the nostalgia of my childhood family and then the way my family is now by incorporating the colors from this piece.



# Comparison to Francis Bacon



I connected my works to Francis Bacon through meanings and metaphors. Francis Bacon was openly gay and therefore was a target for discrimination during his time. Bacon struggled with being an outcast to society. This is relevant to the themes within my pieces which include depression and mental illness. Feeling like an outcast from society is a risk factor for developing mental illnesses such as social anxiety or depression. These are seen within the two pieces above. *Shpringer* on the left is a piece in which I used to display schizophrenia which can cause people to feel like an outcast from society. The voices in one's head can seem chaotic which is represented within this piece by the chaotic lines within the background of the piece and the hair from the subject of the piece. The piece on the right titled, *Bah* is a rendition of Francis Bacon's *Head IV*. *Bah* is a representation of feelings of anxiety, which is done by using the quick brushstrokes to show urgency and haphazardness almost in a panicked way.

## Comparison to Dagmara Costello



The above triptych painting uses quick and rushed brushstrokes which are prevalent within Dagmara Costello's pieces as well, mostly in her landscape paintings in order to show movement within the scene such as wind blowing as seen in Costello's piece, *Memories* pictured to the right.



The gray color scheme and low saturation is also used within both of my personal pieces. The low saturation of the pieces contributes to the concept of memories. For example, the Triptych to the left entitled *Paradise Springs* depicts a memory of a place within my hometown much like Costello's piece, *Memories* as seen below. The low saturation allows for the piece to seem as though it is fading much like memories do over time.





# Reflection of how Artists benefited me.

The study of Dagmara Costello and Francis Bacon's work have given me the opportunity to explore how to portray specific emotions into work and to just let go and create the exact emotion you are feeling within. Dagmara Costello taught me that I can have a voice by using my art as a way to promote social and political change within society, while Francis Bacon taught me how to accept myself and my insecurities and flaws and make it known that I am different and that it is okay, his work has directly impacted not only my artwork but the way I view myself as well. Dagmara Costello has helped me to reach out of my comfort zone and create pieces in which I use mediums I am not familiar with such as mixed media combined with an acrylic painting. This art journey of mine began my junior year as I began to seek for inspiration within local and international artists. Dagmara Costello and Francis Bacon were the most easily related to artists I could find and have used this to my advantage to improve upon my art skills and pay more attention to how my art can influence my own emotions as well as others emotions.