

Picasso and portraiture : [brochure] representation and transformation

[text by Patterson Sims]

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from our founding in 1929 to the present—is
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primary documents, installation views, and an
index of participating artists.



Picasso

AND PORTRAITURE

REPRESENTATION AND TRANSFORMATION

This exhibition, encompassing the extensive portrait work of Pablo Picasso, raises crucial questions about portraiture:

What is a portrait?

Of what significance is a portrait that is not based on resemblance?

What can a portrait tell us about its subject and its maker?

Are all portraits self-portraits, and when is a self-portrait really a depiction of another person?

Who are the subjects and how were they seen
—in photographs and otherwise—by themselves and others?

The Museum of Modern Art, New York

April 28–September 17, 1996

NORMALLY ASSOCIATED WITH ABSTRACTION and the distortion of the figure, the art of Pablo Picasso has never before been comprehensively addressed as portraiture. Even as aspect upon aspect of his prodigious output has been probed in the profusion of books and exhibitions in the quarter-century since his death, Picasso's portraiture remained to be definitively studied. Scanning seven decades of Picasso's art, William Rubin, Director Emeritus, Department of Painting and Sculpture of The Museum of Modern Art, follows his 1980 retrospective of the art of Picasso and his 1989–90 exhibition *Picasso and Braque: Pioneering Cubism* with a survey of paintings, drawings, and prints that provocatively repositions portraiture at the center of Picasso's lifetime of work. As with the long history of major exhibitions of Picasso's work at The Museum of Modern Art that began in 1939, *Picasso and Portraiture* breaks new art-historical ground as it identifies, isolates, and interprets Picasso's figurative depictions. In the comprehensive publication that accompanies the exhibition, from which the information in this brochure is derived, William Rubin and eight other scholars examine the progressions and meanings of Picasso's portraiture. They affirm the interconnections between art history and biography to provide an at times day-to-day account through portraiture of the intricacies of Picasso's art and his web of family, lovers, and friends.



1. Picasso mixing paints in his studio at 7, rue des Grands-Augustins, Paris, spring 1937. Photograph by Dora Maar

Just as Picasso's invention and exploration of Cubism address variants and multiple perspectives, this selective gathering of more than 130 paintings, 100 works on paper, and one plaster relief both asserts the variability of appearance and pictures human complexity. Organized around clusters of portraits of the succession of women and men to whom he was closest, the exhibition makes it clear that none of Picasso's relationships were simple or unchanging—nor, for that matter, are any human relationships. In a period when biography and psychological analysis have joined formalist and other art-historical and theory-based modes of inquiry and investigation, this exhibition and its accompanying publication elucidate an oeuvre whose artistic range and inventiveness, Rubin argues, rival the genius of Leonardo da Vinci. The focus

on portraiture allows a spotlight to be thrown upon Picasso's relationships and feelings, which increasingly have taken center stage in the comprehension of his fecund creativity. Portraiture, like still life, became a driving mechanism of Picasso's artistic development, but better than any other aspect of his art, Picasso's portraits betray his emotions, personal needs, and humanity.

MOST OF THE HISTORY OF PORTRAITURE HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH MAKING likenesses. From the earliest times the preservation of the actual appearance of the deceased has been an important burial rite and an ongoing instrument of empowerment. Posed and made "from life," traditional portraits captured and typically aggrandized appearance. By the end of the nineteenth century, with the discovery and spread of photography and its related mediums, the need for capturing retinal reality in painting, drawing, and sculpture diminished. Picasso annexed photography to his artistic stockpile, taking numerous photographs himself and gathering photographs by others. He sometimes transcribed his photographic resources faithfully, or alternately adapted them to pictorial inventions that ranged from Symbolist to Cubist to Surrealist portrayals.

Picasso's art manifests the large shift in the perception of human consciousness that arose with the introduction of psychology. He responded to his subjects based on his feeling toward them and within the framework of his sexuality. Portraying subjects who were close to him, he liberated portraiture from the vanity and egoism associated with commissions. In fact, his honest response to his subjects made commissioned portraits almost invariably problematic, and few exist, most of them from early in his career. Usually made from memory, Picasso's portraits proclaimed his affections and creatively enacted transmutations of his conflicts and hostilities. Transformation and alteration are crucial to Picasso's use of portraiture. As Rubin asserts, Picasso "did not wholly abandon realism, but ceased to give it a privileged role in the portrait's definition." He transformed the portrait, in Rubin's words, "from a purportedly objective document into a frankly subjective one."



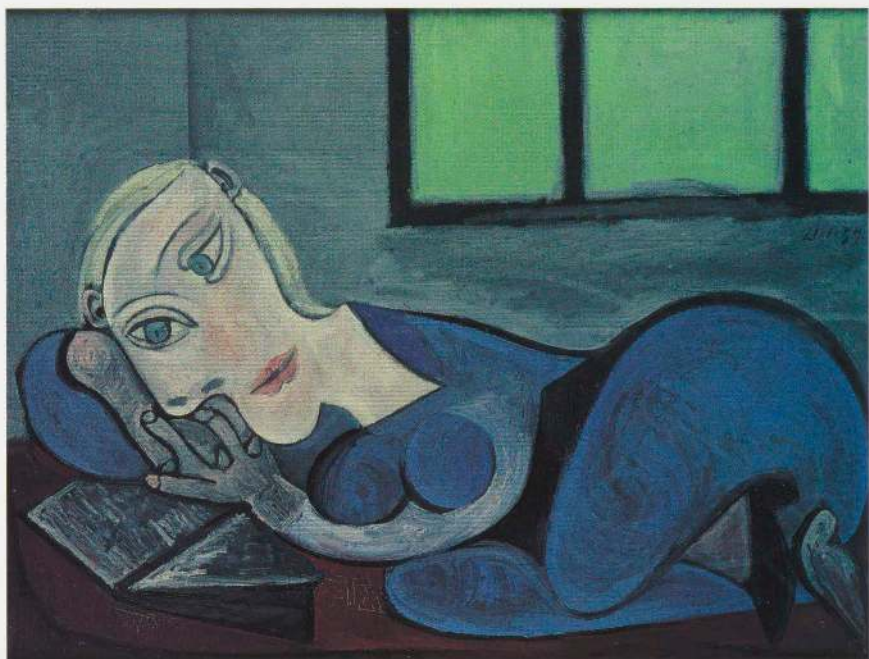
2. "Death-Mask" of Josep Fontdevila, 1906. India ink on paper, 12 3/4 x 9 3/4". Musée Picasso, Paris. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photograph ©R.M.N.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE ARTIST'S SUBJECTS WAS THE FIRST TASK OF *Picasso and Portraiture*. From Picasso's vast outpouring of figurative depictions and abstractions it had to be ascertained which were portraits of real individuals as opposed to generic inventions. Picasso applied the term *portrait* inconsistently and only occasionally. He spoke of all kinds of portrayals that fall outside conventional definitions as portraits. To protect his privacy and the feelings of those close to him, he enshrouded many otherwise clear depictions by never naming their subjects. Even as pioneering a scholar of Picasso's work as Alfred H. Barr, Jr., discreetly neglected to identify Picasso's galvanizing lover Marie-Thérèse Walter in his discussion of the artist's work. During the years when Marie-Thérèse so potently occupied his life and work, she was perceived by many earlier writers as a generic female rather than a specific companion of Picasso. It has not ever been clear which of the artist's works are self-portraits, particularly as Picasso often turned to surrogate self-representations—harlequins, minotaurs, antique warriors, or musketeers—to divulge more about himself than a direct self-depiction might.

Evolving from his precocious drawing talent and extraordinary gifts for caricature, Picasso easily mastered depiction and soon moved past what Kirk Varnedoe has described as "the ciphers of physical resemblance." The turning point came in 1906 with a series of drawings of the aged Catalan smuggler Josep Fontdevila, which introduced an interpretative and expressive mode into his depiction (fig. 2). Grounded in the Spanish tradition of portraiture, Picasso used his portrayals to let others—and himself—know that his feelings were intensifying or cooling down. His painted, drawn, and sculpted portraits became the most revealing and direct



3. *Portrait of Jaime Sabartés*, 1939. Oil on canvas, 18 1/2 x 15". Museu Picasso, Barcelona. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photograph ©Arxiu Fotogràfic de Museus, Ajuntament de Barcelona



4. *Reclining Woman with a Book (Marie-Thérèse)*. January 21, 1939. Oil on canvas, 38 x 51 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". Musée Picasso, Paris. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photograph ©R.M.N.



5. *Reclining Woman with a Book (Dora)*. January 21, 1939. Oil on canvas, 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 51". Private collection. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY.

Admission

\$12.50; seniors and students, \$9.00; Members free. Admission to *Picasso and Portraiture* includes general Museum admission. Ten special pay-what-you-wish evenings are reserved for *Picasso and Portraiture*: May 9 and 10, June 13 and 14, July 11 and 12, August 8 and 9, and September 12 and 13, from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m.

For information on a special Picasso Package, including admission, audio tour, and accompanying publication, please call (212) 708-9500.

Membership Programs

For information about Sunday Mornings at the Modern, a Members' evening of private gallery talks and dinner, and the Picasso in Context Members' lecture series, please call (212) 708-9712.

Audio Tour

An audio tour of the exhibition is available in English, Spanish, and French. The English version is introduced by Glenn D. Lowry and narrated by Steve Martin, with commentary by William Rubin. \$4.00, Members \$3.50. Amplified headsets and written transcripts are available.

Lecture Series

Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m. Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 2
Tickets: \$8.00; Members \$7.00;
students and seniors \$5.00

MAY 7: *The Art of Reincarnation:*

Picasso and Old Master Portraiture

Robert Rosenblum, Professor of Fine Arts,
New York University

MAY 21: *Allusive Identities:*

Picasso's Cubist Portraiture

Pepe Karmel, Visiting Professor at
Hunter College and freelance art critic

JUNE 4: *Picasso and the Color of Portraiture*

Linda Nochlin, Professor of Fine Arts,
New York University

Museum Hours

Saturday–Tuesday, 11:00–6:00

Thursday and Friday, 12:00–8:30

Closed Wednesday

General Information: (212) 708-9480

Brown Bag Lunch Lectures

Tuesdays and Thursdays, April 30–May 23,
12:30–1:15 p.m. in the Edward John Noble
Education Center, 18 West 54 Street. All lectures
are given by Cynthia Nachmani, Museum Educator.
Admission \$5.00.

Family Gallery Talk

Face It! Picasso Portraits

Saturday, April 27, 10:00–11:00 a.m.

For children ages five to ten and their adult friends.
Admission is \$5.00 per family, Members \$3.00.

No preregistration is necessary. Sign-in begins at
9:45 a.m. at the Museum's Edward John Noble
Education Center. Guided walks through the
Museum's galleries before they open to the public
introduce children and their adult friends to the
richly varied world of modern art.

For Visitors with Special Needs

Tactile raised-line drawings of selected works by
Picasso will be available, upon request, in the
Edward John Noble Education Center.

For more information about lectures and
education programs, please call (212) 708-9795.

Publication

*Picasso and Portraiture: Representation and
Transformation*, edited by William Rubin, Director
Emeritus, Department of Painting and Sculpture,
The Museum of Modern Art. Includes essays by
eight additional scholars. 496 pages; 757 illustrations,
216 in full color. Clothbound, \$75.00; paper-
bound, \$35.00. Available in the MoMA Book Store.

*This exhibition was organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in collaboration with the
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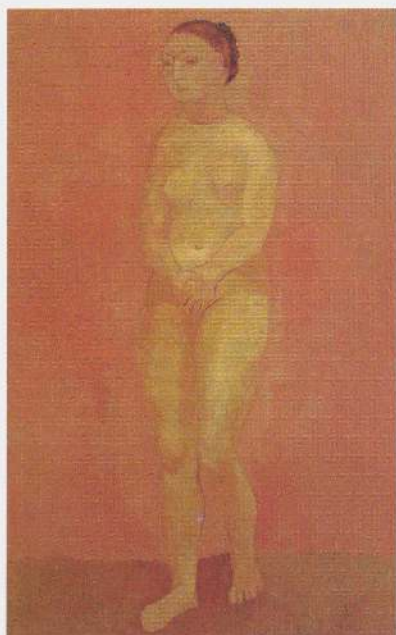
*The accompanying publication is made possible by generous grants from the William S. Paley Foundation,
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Brochure ©1996 The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Cover: *Self-Portrait (detail)*. 1972. Wax crayon on paper, 25 1/4 x 20". Courtesy Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo. ©1996,
Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY

barometer of his ardent emotional and sexual life. In a pair of portraits made from memory on the same day in 1939 in the same studio, Picasso positioned his lovers Marie-Thérèse Walter and Dora Maar identically, and in so doing compellingly underscored the differences between his competing mistresses (figs. 4 and 5). In his self-portraits, he held aging at bay (note how he depicted the hair that was vanishing from his head; fig. 10) by emphasizing his vitality and embellishing attributes that had diminished or departed. His self-portraits in all their symbolic forms were deployed as magic armor to thwart the diminution of sexual power or the imminence of death itself.

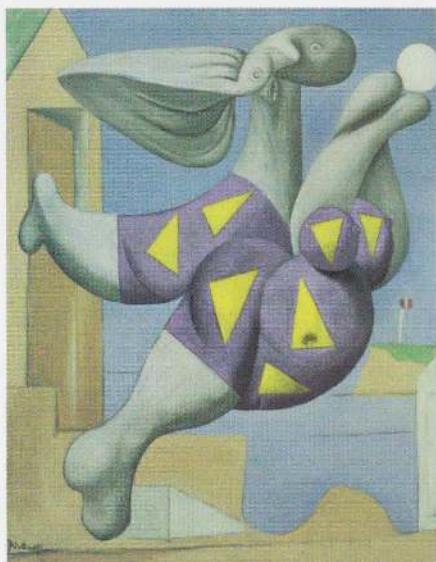
Picasso's initial forays into portraiture were mostly of his immediate family and male friends. Seldom engaged by the landscape, his radical pictorial inventions were sustained from the start by his artistic dedication to the human figure. While marked by the conventions of the realist tradition, his first portrayals were distinguished by the most somber and penetrating observation. His longtime friend and later secretary Jaime Sabartés recalled that in the process of being portrayed, he "fell like a fly into the trap of Picasso's stare" (fig. 3). Not all of his intimate friends were subjects of his portraits, but anyone he painted either



6. (left) *Standing Female Nude* (Fernande). 1906. Oil on canvas, 60½ x 37½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The William S. Paley Collection. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photo: Kate Keller ©1994 The Museum of Modern Art, New York 7. (right) *Woman with a Fan* (Fernande). 1908. Oil on canvas, 59½ x 39½". The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY.

was very well known to him or had to be willing to pose for protracted periods. His art dealers—Ambroise Vollard, Wilhelm Uhde, and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler—and friends who were writers—from Guillaume Apollinaire to Gertrude Stein—proved to be enthusiastic and patient subjects; poets, in particular, were anxious to add delinquencies of themselves by Picasso to their volumes of writings to escalate their interest and value.

Picasso's portraiture reaches most of its summits of intensity in his depictions of women. His portraits of his lovers, Fernande Olivier, Eva Gouel, Olga Khokhlova, Marie-Thérèse Walter, Dora Maar, Françoise Gilot, and Jacqueline Roque, have even been used—though often mistakenly—to define and codify the stages of his art. Recent scholarship has added the American Sara Murphy, a figure renowned for her impact upon the writers Fitzgerald and Hemingway, to the pantheon of Picasso's beauties. Possessed of very different kinds of attractiveness, his parade of muses elicited a panoramic range of his feelings and responses. Their arrivals and departures were inextricably linked to Picasso's ever-shifting styles of painting, yet the "style" sometimes preceded the woman who came to incorporate it. While Picasso was able to see his muses through the lens of multiple styles (sometimes on the same day), they are usually associated with one style in particular. Fernande (figs. 6 and 7) embodied many stages of Cubism; his first wife, Olga, became a personification of his early phase of Neoclassicism in the manner of Ingres; Marie-Thérèse incarnated a sinuous, surreal biomorphism (fig. 8); and Dora Maar (fig. 5) epitomized anguished Expressionism. Françoise Gilot dominated Picasso's affection for nearly a decade. Gifted as a painter and writer, Gilot functioned as his co-equal. Picasso's depictions of her and their two children, Paloma and Claude, are among his most unequivocally admiring images. Without immediately signaling a new style, his final companion



8. *Bather with Beach Ball* [Marie-Thérèse]. 1932. Oil on canvas, 57½ x 45½". The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Partial gift of an anonymous donor and promised gift of Ronald S. Lauder. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photograph: Kate Keller ©1995 The Museum of Modern Art

and second wife, Jacqueline, inspired the largest and most wide-ranging group of his portraits (fig. 9); the best of these, as Rubin has described, "balance . . . clearly the passion of the pure painter with the love and compassion of the man." But for so many of Picasso's agonized female subjects, Françoise Gilot's chilling characterization of him, in her 1964 memoir, as predator-creator rings in one's ears: "[He had] a kind of Bluebeard complex that made



9. *Seated Woman (Jacqueline)*. 1971. Oil on canvas, 57½ x 44¼". Private collection. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY. Photograph: Imageart, Antibes

him want to cut off the heads of all the women he had collected in his little private museum.”

Picasso's subjects were frequently perceived through the filter of earlier art: African and Iberian formulations, the concise line of Ingres, or appropriated and modified compositions of Delacroix and Velázquez. Even his contemporary and rival Matisse incited comparable portraits. Of course, with a personality



10. Self-Portrait. 1972. Wax crayon on paper, 25 1/4 x 20". Courtesy Fuji Television Gallery, Tokyo. ©1996, Estate of P. Picasso/ARS, NY

possessed of such enormous egoism, all depictions revolved around Picasso himself. His head and stance can be detected in numerous works and are even attached to portraits of others in overlays or confections of his facial features or his body. He was unstintingly direct in his views of himself. His last self-portraits, grouped with other self-portrayals in the final gallery of the exhibition, are unrelenting, mordant, and noble (fig. 10).

For all of the many styles in which he worked, Picasso never capitulated to style itself. He had an ability to shift from style to style as he moved from work to work. Picasso firmly avoided a "signature" style, which, as Rubin suggests and this exhibition makes abundantly clear, is "a trap into which artists could fall too willingly, closing themselves off from the richest possible pictorial materialization of their thoughts and identities." Picasso's numerous relationships and lifelong need to connect with people by depicting them proved of inestimable value in keeping him alive to the "richest possible pictorial materialization." The compelling intensity of his relationships made him, even while remaining the consummate modernist and innovative abstractionist of the twentieth century, among the most astonishingly gifted and inventive portraitists of all time.

Patterson Sims

Deputy Director for Education and Research Support