

## GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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### A Granddaughter's Picasso Album

By KELLY CROW

Growing up, Diana Widmaier Picasso heard stories galore about her grandfather, Pablo Picasso, but she learned little about her grandmother, Marie-Thérèse Walter.

This much she—and the art world—knew: The artist was 45 years old and miserable in his marriage to a Russian ballerina when he spotted Ms. Walter, then 17, outside a Parisian department store in 1927. Picasso quickly wooed the girl, and for the next 14 years the couple carried on a semisecret love affair that produced a daughter, Maya, and inspired some of the artist's best-known paintings and sculptures. (Last spring, a Picasso nude of Ms. Walter sold for \$106.5 million—the most ever for an auctioned artwork.)



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*'Marie-Thérèse in a Red Beret and Fur Collar,' at the Gagosian show.*

Since Picasso never spoke publicly about Ms. Walter, his descendants felt duty-bound to follow suit—that is, until a year ago when Ms. Widmaier Picasso, a lawyer-turned-art-scholar now living in New York, convinced her mother, Maya, to open up. Out came boxes of family archives brimming with rarely seen artworks, love letters and photos.

Now, Ms. Widmaier Picasso and the artist's biographer, John Richardson, are exhibiting a trove of this fresh material in a show, "Picasso and Marie-Thérèse: L'amour Fou," on view at New York's Gagosian Gallery until July 15. Gallery director Valentina Castellani said seven museums also lent pieces to the show, while some others are for sale by the Picasso estate.

Her mother's archival material felt like a revelation to Ms. Widmaier Picasso. She had only been a year old when Picasso died in 1973, and her grandmother died four years later, so she doesn't have any memories of either one. (Her mother added the Picasso suffix to her name when she was born, per Spanish custom.) Ms. Widmaier Picasso said her mother had remained close to the artist as a child, but she had distanced herself from him after she married a merchant shipper, Pierre Widmaier. "Growing up Picasso, it was hard for my mother to get beyond him, so she felt she had to establish her own family," she added.



*Rainer Hosch*  
Diana Widmaier Picasso

But in many ways, the artist still holds sway: Maya Widmaier, who lives in France, still authenticates Picasso's artworks, while Ms. Widmaier Picasso is a scholar who specialized in Old Master drawings before switching gears eight years ago to begin compiling an official notated catalog of Picasso's sculptures. So far, she's tracked down everything he ever sculpted through 1927, a tally she aims to publish in the next two years.

In the Gagosian show, a nuanced and poignant portrait of Ms. Walter emerges. The brightly colored masterpieces from the early 1930s—in which she's a napping nymph, eyes closed and clothes off—are here, but so are livelier photos of Ms. Walter dressed in hiking gear or a swimsuit, a modern girl with a fashionable bob.

Among Ms. Widmaier Picasso's favorite discoveries was a matchbook-size flipbook that conjures her grandmother in 48 quick-succession photos. Wearing her signature beret, she grins self-consciously and glances off-camera. Picasso's name is written on the back of the book. "It's amusing, no?" Ms. Widmaier Picasso said, cradling a reproduction of the flipbook in an interview last week. "To me, it's also really touching."