

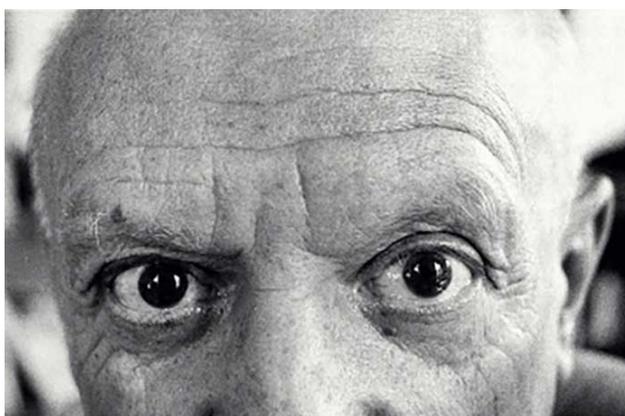
GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Picasso: ready for his close-up

The biographer John Richardson talks about the artist's love for the camera

David D'Arcy



Pablo Picasso. Photo: © David Douglas Duncan, Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, the University of Austin

Like so many types of artistic media, photography came to Pablo Picasso's attention, and it came under his control. "He saw the camera from the word go as something he could use," says Picasso's biographer John Richardson, 90, who curated "Picasso & the Camera" exhibition now open at Gagosian Gallery in New York, the fifth Picasso show that Richardson has organised for the gallery. "He mastered the camera, he worked with the camera, and he got inside the camera. He loved the camera. He adored it, and he loved being photographed."

The 350 images and objects on view range from 1909 photographs of the Spanish mountain town Horta de Ebro which preceded (and helped shape) Picasso's turn to Cubism, to pictures by and of Picasso, to the work of his photographer mistress Dora Maar, to collaborations with the photographers Brassai and André Villers.

Never a threat to the painter, photographs became a perspective on his own work, Richardson says, citing volumetric sensual busts inspired by the artist's teenaged mistress Marie-Therese Walter. These were begun at his country estate in Boisgeloup in 1931, when they were photographed by Brassai and Picasso, then reproduced in photographs in an art magazine in 1933, but not exhibited publicly until 1936.

"One of his great uses of the camera was in all the endless photographs he took of sculptures as he did them. The necks vary all the time, and he needed to have a record of what they looked like," Richardson explained, making the photographs "a crucial element for his sculpture".

Discovered in a family archive by another of the show's organisers, Picasso's grandson Bernard, those Boisgeloup pictures also reflect a pivotal change in the artist's personal life. One is of his wife Olga, a former Russian ballerina, dressed glamorously. "Picasso takes her photograph with the sculpture studio door open, and with a bust of Marie-Therese in the background," said Richardson. "Every picture tells a story."

Richardson also credits the largely forgotten photographers Michel Sima and André Villers with influencing Picasso's turn to ceramics after the Second World War. The biographer himself loaned a series of plates to the show which Picasso and Villers decorated as a team.

Man Ray, another photographer, helped lead Picasso to moving pictures, and to a rarely seen Picasso performance on film. "He puts something over his head, like a handkerchief, he takes a cigarette, and he smoked the cigarette, and in some way he turns into a woman when he does this. It's the most absolutely weird thing," Richardson says.

The show also includes the 1956 film "Les Mystere Picasso", directed by Henri-Georges Clouzot, in which the artist is viewed through a glass pane, drawing on that surface in white paint. "[Picasso] always wanted to discover how he put a composition together, how he went about it. He had no idea," Richardson says. The biographer recalls the artist telling him after seeing the film: "'And then when I saw how I did this drawing, starting up in this corner, but then going suddenly to the middle, it made no sense whatsoever.' He said, 'I thought I was going to get some idea of how I worked,' but it was much more complicated, crazy, incomprehensible than he'd ever imagined."

Picasso & the Camera, Gagosian Gallery, New York, 28 October-3 January 2015