

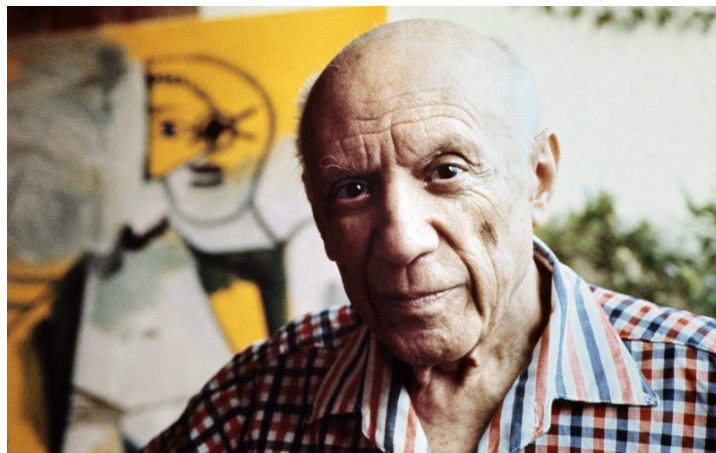
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE DAILY BEAST

Revealing The Unseen Picasso

Two Picasso exhibitions reveal a hitherto hidden side to the famous artist, both in photographs and in relation to the women closest, and most inspirational, to him.

Justin Jones



Ralph Gatti/AFP/Getty

“Pour John, son vieil ami” (“For John, your old friend”) reads the message on a photograph of a well-groomed 4-year-old Pablo Picasso from 1885—a personal gift to John Richardson, his friend and biographer, who has written numerous volumes on the artist’s life, works, and many mistresses. Signed and dated in 1960, it is “the only known photograph of Picasso when he was four,” Richardson said as he showed me the image. “And he signed it over to me.”

The photograph greets the visitor entering the Gagosian Gallery’s cavernous outpost in New York’s West Chelsea where over sixty years of momentous works and personal, unseen images are on display in *Picasso and the Camera*.

Richardson, who curated the show along with four previous ones for Gagosian, was looking for something other than Picasso’s mistresses to use as a focal point. And, quite frankly, “the women were running out,” he said, half-joking.

So, he turned to Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, the artist’s grandson from his first wife, for access to the troves of photographs and films the artist left behind. *Picasso and the Camera*, which features some 90 paintings and drawings (many on loan from major museums across the globe), as well as 225 photographs, exhibits how the tool both influenced and guided the artist’s work.



© 2014 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Eric Baudouin. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.

According to Richardson, it's an area of Picasso's art few people have delved into. "There have been many shows with endless photographs of Picasso," he said. While Picasso may be one of the most photographed artists of his time—Irving Penn, Man Ray, Cecil Beaton and Brassai are just a handful of prominent photographers who have captured the artist—"they don't tell you anything about photography and the impact it had on his work."

This notion is made immediately clear through a photograph taken at Picasso's Spanish mountain retreat in Horta de Sant Joan, where he often escaped to paint. It shows the cascading hills and many buildings that seemingly stack atop them. To its right are paintings from 1909 of the same subject. Picasso worked from the photograph to create the blocked, jagged shapes he painted on canvas.

"Photography turned out to be the secret weapon in his revolutionary landscape paintings," the adjacent wall text states. These early landscapes became regarded as the beginning of cubism—a style pioneered by Picasso (and Georges Braque) in the early 1900s that completely changed the landscape of modern art.

Throughout the rest of the room are similar examples of photographic inspiration. There are images which track the evolution of his work; large-scale collaborative works with Man Ray and landscape photographer André Villers; and a plethora of candid photos of Picasso taken by others.

One of the more personal, and touching, photographs, in Richardson's opinion, is a 1925 image of Picasso's first wife, Olga Khokhlova, who can be found in many of the works and photos on display. She stands, dressed in a tutu, on one pointed foot in a heightened fifth position. Olga had served as a professional ballerina for the Ballets Russes up until she met Picasso in 1917. He had been designing the outfits for the Paris-based company while they were performing in Rome.

Richardson placed the small, black and white image next to *Le Repos*, a large-scale painting of Olga rendered in 1932. "You can see how his feelings for his wife would change," he said of the contrasts between Olga's depiction in the photograph and the painting. "At this point, things had gone crazy and the fighting between them was terrible."

The content is purely Picasso—his signature cubist style. Yet, “it’s anything but in repose and out of this very mischievous work you can see that she’s still got her arms in the fifth position.”

Images of their relationship can be found throughout the exhibition. There are numerous paintings and drawings of Olga, who served as Picasso’s muse for many years. Their son Paul is seen in photographs and home movies, riding horses, playing on the beach, and hanging with his dad in the studio.

It seems that the hand of one of Picasso’s mistresses, surrealist photographer Dora Maar, aided much of his photographic technique. “She showed him all the tricks of the trade,” Richardson said. “They worked together on all sorts of things. Dora would take photographs and then Picasso would scratch another image on [the glass slides]. So when you flashed it on a screen, you would get these huge double images and sometime triple images.”

The technique can be seen in Picasso’s “most ambitious photographic project,” with Villers, said Richardson. Picasso superimposed paper cutouts of animals onto Villers’ photographs. The result is like a Picasso portrait, abstract and primitive but with the seeming texture of nature, which only reinforces its style. “It has yet to receive the recognition it deserves,” said Richardson.

Elsewhere in New York, another Picasso muse is on display. His second wife, Jacqueline, is the inspiration behind *Picasso & Jacqueline: The Evolution of Style*, at PACE Gallery’s West 25th Street and East 57th Street locations.

Having met in 1952 while Jacqueline was working in a ceramic studio, the couple moved in together two years later. Picasso was 46 years older than her. She was his last great love and the year proved a pivotal time for Picasso’s style. The sudden death of Matisse, Picasso’s early rival and later friend, allowed the beginnings of a stylistic transformation he had not dared attempt before—homage to old masters. That had been Matisse’s territory as the contemporary master of lavishly draped, reclining nudes.

In just a short period, Picasso created an entire body of work that encapsulated his own stylistic achievements, paid homage to Matisse and French and Spanish Masters, as well as delineate a path towards a style that would later influence Neo-Expressionist artists. His subject was most always Jacqueline.

“He painted her in the guise of beautiful women from art history,” art historian Barbara Rose writes in the show’s accompanying catalog. “Picasso painted and drew Jacqueline many hundreds of times, representing her in every medium, from paintings to drawings to sculpture to prints and ceramics. There are more images of her than of any other woman he was involved with.” Their romance was the longest lasting of Picasso’s relationships, ending in 1973 with the artist’s death.

In the many portraits, Picasso oscillates between naturalism and abstraction in his portraits of Jacqueline. Detailed sketches capture her youth and beauty while oil paintings, such as *Jacqueline with a Black Scarf*, see hints of Cézanne and Velázquez in its form and earth tone colors. Repetition dominates the gallery, as Picasso was known to render the same image over and over tracking changes and experimenting with new details.

Jacqueline with multicolored straw hat from 1962 sees six versions of the same linoleum cutouts (hints at Matisse) on paper—yellow, then red, blue, purple, and white. Each sees the addition of

an additional color before culminating in the final product, a brightly colored abstract portrait of his wife.

Much like *Picasso and the Camera*, PACE uses archive photographs to examine the artist's transformation during the last two decades of his life, many of which place Picasso's famous works in the background of intimate photos of the couple. As he once told Brassai, the Gagosian exhibition catalog states, "I want to leave as complete a record as possible for posterity." And, as with most things the artist set out doing, he succeeded.

Picasso and the Camera is at Gagosian Gallery, 522 West 21st Street, until January 3, 2015. *Picasso & Jacqueline: The Evolution of Style* is at PACE Gallery, 32 East 57th Street and 534 West 25th Street until January 10, 2015.