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Picassos Unpacked From the Family Vault

Diana Widmaier-Picasso is used to hearing that she physically resembles her grandmother Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso's muse and mistress.

This family connection has helped inform the scholarship that Ms. Widmaier-Picasso brings as an art historian to exhibitions like "Picasso's Picassos," a selection of works from the collection of her mother, Maya Widmaier-Picasso, which opened on Thursday at Gagosian on Madison Avenue.

"It's an occasion to engage in a dialogue with my mother," Diana said in an interview at Gagosian, where she was laying out the show.

This year, Maya Widmaier-Picasso (who uses her maiden name Maya Ruiz-Picasso) was at the center of a legal fight over a Picasso bust of Marie-Thérèse Walter that was in a recent Picasso sculpture show at the Museum of Modern Art.

Walking through the gallery, where posters leaned against the walls to stand in for the paintings in the exhibition, Diana talked about some of the works, like "Maya With Doll and Wooden Horse," from 1938.

The severity of the painting's figures and the acidity of its blue and green colors, she said, alludes to a point in history that inspired Picasso's mural-size "Guernica" canvas.

"Instead of just a portrait of a child, he takes the opportunity to show how the child is engaged with the world," Diana said of the "Maya With Doll" painting. "We have to keep in mind the context."

Since the show draws from the period between 1931 and 1971, there was a lot of work to choose from, including paintings, drawings, sculptures and ceramics.

In connection with the exhibition — which runs through Dec. 17 — Gagosian will turn its shop into all things Picasso, including the catalog for Picasso's first retrospective in Zurich in 1932, curated by the artist.

The sole sculpture in the show is a plaster cast of a pregnant woman, "La Femme Enceinte" (1959). The original assemblage, with plaster, ceramic vessel, pottery jars and wood, was featured in MoMA's recent Picasso sculpture show.

"It's a moment when Picasso is starting a new experimentation in the field of sculpture," Diana said. "It's also one of the works which is totally timeless. She's like a goddess of fertility."