GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Picasso
RECONSIDERED

LARRY GAGOSIAN'S EXHIBITIONS OF RARELY SEEN WORKS BELONGING TO THE MODERN MASTER'S HEIRS SHOW THAT THE BEST-KNOWN ARTIST OF HIS ERA CAN STILL SEDUCE.

BY KATYA KAZAKINA

After the war, in 1948, Picasso and Gilot settled in Vallauris in southern France. The move was liberating for Picasso, spurring a burst of experimentation with sculptures, ceramics and lithographs. Beginning on April 30, works from this period will make up the fourth in a series of Picasso exhibitions at Larry Gagosian's galleries in New York and London.

The Gagosian shows unite the world's biggest fine art dealer and its best-selling...
Francoise Gilot, Pablo Picasso and his nephew, Javier Vilato, in Golfe-Juan, France, in 1948.
artist over the past decade. The involvement of Picasso’s heirs and his most noted biographer, John Richardson, have turned the exhibitions into blockbusters by private-gallery standards. The first three events drew a total of 260,000 visitors to view about 300 artworks. “Having the opportunity to work closely with John Richardson and the Picasso family on what will be our fourth major exhibition has been professionally, and on a personal level, one of the most exciting chapters in the gallery’s history,” Gagosian says.

Three-quarters of the pieces in these exhibitions were either loaned by or consigned from Picasso’s family, including his children and grandchildren, giving collectors their first look at many works. “Each of Picasso’s seven heirs inherited a remarkable collection of the artist’s work,” says Richardson, who’s finishing the final book of his four-volume biography, *A Life of Picasso* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991, 1996, 2007).

The shows exemplified the strategy Gagosian, 66, has used to expand to 11 galleries in Asia, Europe and the U.S. After opening his first gallery in a 10-foot-wide (3-meter-wide) former Hungarian restaurant in Los Angeles in 1977, he has built an A-list roster of clients, including hedge-fund manager Steven A. Cohen, private-equity magnate Leon Black and real-estate investor and philanthropist Eli Broad. Gagosian often jumps into a rising market and lifts it even higher, says Beverly Schreiber Jacoby, president of New York–based BSJ Fine Art and a valuation specialist.

In 2010, the year after Gagosian put on Picasso: Mosqueteros, which focused on his late works from the 1960s and 1970s, a collector paid $18 million for a 1964 Picasso painting—a record for this period. That topped the prior high of $17.4 million set in 2008. In November 2011, an unnamed collector set a new record, paying $23 million for a 1967 Picasso depicting a naked man playing a recorder for his nude lover. “Gagosian is a great marketer,” says Michael Steinhardt, chairman of hedge fund WisdomTree Investments Inc. and a buyer of Picassos in the 1980s and 1990s. “He has created a force in the market by accumulating paintings and having wonderful exhibitions.”

Richardson, 88, a Briton who was a friend of Picasso’s from 1949 until the artist’s death in 1973, has served as a curator for the shows. He wrote long, scholarly essays for the unusually large, 300-page hardcover catalogs, which included letters and photographs of the artist in addition to plates of his artworks. Richardson says the fourth show will focus on the influence that Gilot, whose image appears in ceramics, lithographs and paintings, and the town of Vallauris had on Picasso’s work. “The years of Vallauris are enormously important,” says Richardson, a critic and former professor of fine art at Oxford University. “He revolutionized the whole craft of ceramics, turning it into an art form. He reinvented the art of lithography, which had been a boring medium, into a major medium. He breaks all the rules.” Picasso’s famous *She-Goat* sculpture (1950)—assembled with discarded objects, including an old wicker basket to make the rib cage and two broken ceramic pitchers for the udders—is just one example from the period.

Valentina Castellani, a Gagosian gallery director in New York, is the main organizer of the Picasso exhibitions. “Valentina is at the center of everything,” Richardson says. “She is Larry’s right hand.” She first met Richardson in 2007 when she reached out to the writer for his advice on the gallery’s upcoming Giacometti-Bacon show. Richardson had just published the third volume of Picasso’s biography, drawing on his close friendship with the artist. Richardson had accompanied the Spanish artist to bullfights in southern France in the 1950s and threw dinners for him at the chateau near Nîmes that the writer shared with cubist-art collector Douglas Cooper. “Often when there was a bullfight, Picasso would drive over,” Richardson recalls. “He would give us lunch at a restaurant beforehand. Afterwards,
we would give a dinner for him, the bullfighter and his entourage.”

Richardson’s intimate knowledge of the artist’s work prompted Castellani to suggest to Gagosian that the gallery collaborate with the scholar on a Picasso exhibition. Gagosian already knew Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, who had been interested in promoting his grandfather’s lesser-known works. So Castellani, Gagosian, Richardson and Ruiz-Picasso met for lunch and agreed to showcase Picasso’s late production, from 1962 to 1972, partly because collectors were showing more interest in this previously overlooked period.

Picasso remained prolific until his death at age 91, creating about 50,000 works in all. His recovery from ulcer surgery in 1965 spurred his last flurry of work, starting when he was in his mid-80s, Richardson says. “Most other people at that age would have lapsed into inva-
idism,” he says. “For Picasso, it was a chal-
lenge. During his convalescence, he read
books on Rembrandt and Goya. When he
recovered, he felt he had a new lease on
life, and he worked intensively in the
light and shade of these great masters.”

Picasso produced large and boldly
colored expressionistic canvases. They
featured invented characters inspired
by the riffraff that gathered at the back
of the open theaters in 17th century
Spain, as well as bullfighters. Though Pi-
casso quit smoking after his surgery, he
frequently equipped his subjects with
pipes. “Nostalgia for tobacco comes
across in the long white clay pipes held
by his mosqueteros,” Richardson says. “A
self-portrait with the red around the eye
I find absolutely terrifying. It’s Picasso
outstaring death.”

The first exhibition was called Pi-
casso: Mosqueteros, which Richardson
says was a word for the misfits that the
artist painted. The show featured 53
paintings and 39 prints from his late pe-
riod and drew 100,000 people. “We al-
ways have a few works for sale,” says
Castellani, who declined to provide de-
tails of purchases. “We send out a mes-
 sage that Gagosian is a place where you
can both sell and buy Picassos of the
highest quality.”

While Mosqueteros was on view, a
1968 Picasso painting from the collec-
tion of Jerome Fisher, co-founder of
footwear company Nine West Group Inc., fetched $14.6 million at Christie’s
in New York. That was double the price
that Fisher paid for the work in 2004.

Steinhardt, the hedge-fund manager,
says he had dismissed the last decade of
Picasso’s work as inferior. “I was loath
to get into the late-Picasso market,” says
Steinhardt, who has bought works from
the 1920s and 1930s instead. “But I was
proven wrong.”

Encouraged by the success of the first
show, Gagosian and Richardson decided
to do a second—Picasso: The Medi-
terranean Years—in the summer of 2010 in
London. Richardson came up with the
idea to focus on the influence of the
Mediterranean on Picasso. He was born
in the coastal city of Malaga, Spain, and
frequently lived in seaside towns in the
French Riviera. Picasso’s paintings,
sculptures, cutouts and ceramics from
1945 to 1962 illustrate musicians, dance-
rs and animals with playfulness and
delight. Images of Gilot and their two
children, Claude and Paloma, and his
second wife, Jacqueline Roque, whom
he married in 1961, also appear in the
artworks. The show drew 60,000 people,
fewer than the first.

Marie-Therese Walter, the subject of
a Picasso painting that drew the highest
price ever for an artwork at auction, was
the inspiration for Gagosian’s third exhi-
bition. Picasso’s 1932 portrait of his
mistress and muse, called Nude, Green
Leaves and Bust, sold for $106.5 million
at Christie’s in New York in May 2010.

Picasso met Walter, then a 17-year-old
French girl, on a street in Paris in 1927.
At the time, he was married to his first
wife, Olga Khokhlova, a former Russian
ballerina. By then, his radical experi-
mentation with cubism, which he
helped pioneer around 1910, had given
way to a more-traditional neoclassical
style. “He was a bit bored,” says Diana
Widmaier-Picasso, granddaughter of
the artist and Marie-Therese. “Suddenly
Marie-Therese brings this fresh youth,
sensuality and desire to renew himself.
He feels so free that he is ready to explore again in his art.”

Widmaier-Picasso suggested that Gagosian focus a third show on her grandfather’s relationship with Walter. During Picasso’s years with his mistress, from 1927 to 1940, he produced some of his greatest works. They include the Vollard Suite, a set of 100 etchings depicting lovers, satyrs and mythological creatures, and Guernica, painted in 1937, illustrating the human suffering from the bombing of the Basque region during the Spanish Civil War. The artist also made large sculptures of the voluptuous Walter. “He buys a castle outside Paris where he is able to install a sculpture studio and begins making monumental sculpture,” Widmaier-Picasso says.

Acquavella Galleries in New York held a Marie-Therese Walter show in 2008 with 15 pieces that attracted 25,000 visitors. Gagosian aimed for a bigger event that included works from the artist’s family. But Maya Widmaier-Picasso, 76, the artist’s daughter and Diana’s mother, resisted the idea of a show about the clandestine love affair. “It was not an easy project,” says Diana, who lives in New York. “My mother has always been very protective with the relationship that her parents had. I had to convince her that the love affair between her parents was not a secret to anyone. It belonged to art history.”

On a warm night in April 2011, a long line formed outside of Gagosian’s gallery in Chelsea to see Picasso and Marie-Therese: L’Amour Fou (Mad Love). Novelist Salman Rushdie; News Corp. Chairman Rupert Murdoch and his wife, Wendi; actress Kim Cattrall; and Leon and Debra Black were there. They saw portraits of Walter that are the definition of rapture and lust; others are filled with tenderness. A painting lent by Steven Cohen depicts her as a cross between a woman and an octopus. “Picasso used to say, ‘Art can only be erotic,’” Diana Widmaier-Picasso says. “He couldn’t be creative without love.”

Almost all of the 90 works in the show, which drew about 100,000 visitors, had been rarely if ever exhibited before. “We’ve never seen a Marie-Therese show like this,” says Carmen Gimenez, the Stephen and Nan Swid curator of 20th century art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, which lent a 1931 painting of a sleeping Walter to the exhibition.

Gilot is now working with Richardson and Castellani on the fourth exhibition, which will cover her years with Picasso, from 1943 to 1953. Richardson says they lived in a small house in Vallauris with a garden and raised their two children until she became the only woman to leave him. “I am very independent,” she says. “I was a completely new type of woman for him.”

Picasso used terra-cotta roof tiles to make full-length images of Gilot, who was 40 years younger than he. Picasso also sculpted her as pregnant and as wheeling a baby carriage. His canvases transformed her into a flower and captured her playing with their children. “These sculptures relate to their life at Vallauris, the little villa where they lived, and Le Fournas, the derelict former orange-flower distillery where he revolutionized painting and sculpture,” Richardson says. “He’d gather scrap metal from a nearby junkyard and turn it into sculpture.”

Richardson, who has written about Picasso for half a century, still gets excited about his friend’s art. Sitting in his Manhattan apartment, which overflows with books, flowers and works by Picasso, Warhol and Ingres, he makes a promise about the fourth show. “Our show will cast new light on a period that has never been studied in depth,” he says.

KATYA KAZAKINA COVERS THE ART MARKET FOR THE THREE SECTION OF BLOOMBERG NEWS IN NEW YORK.

To write a letter to the editor, send an e-mail to bloombergmag@bloomberg.net or type MAG <Go>.