

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Wielding a Lens as Skillfully as a Brush

By CAROL VOGEL

There is very little about Picasso that John Richardson, his longtime biographer, doesn't already know. As a friend of Picasso's during the 1950s, while the artist was living in the south of France, Mr. Richardson saw more than most.

He can reveal juicy snippets about Picasso's sexual escapades and recall many of his personal quirks: How Picasso would rub a concoction of oil heated with sticks of lavender into his scalp to make his hair grow; his passion for salt cod purée; his loathing of classical music. Mr. Richardson can also describe in riveting detail Pi-

A Picasso show examines his use of photography.

casso's methods of painting, sculpting and drawing.

But it was only recently that he realized the extent to which photography played an important role in Picasso's life and work.

"It's a subject few people have gotten into," Mr. Richardson said the other day, perched on

the edge of a sofa in his Manhattan loft near Union Square, poring over images of Picasso, his studio and his work, as well as snapshots he took of his wives and mistresses. "It's proved much more complex, fascinating and eye-opening than I'd ever imagined," he said. "Picasso always had cameras, Leicas mostly, although we can't find any surviving ones."

But thousands of the artist's photographs, as well as a cache of his home movies, have survived. Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, the artist's grandson, has a trove, which has never been shown publicly, and they form the core of "Picasso & the Camera," opening Tuesday.

Continued on Page 5



TODD HEISLER/THE NEW YORK TIMES

John Richardson, a Picasso biographer, is curator of "Picasso & the Camera," opening Tuesday.



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The Picasso biographer John Richardson, the curator of "Picasso & the Camera," at the Gagosian Gallery in Chelsea. Below, "Diurnes," lithographs Picasso made with André Villiers.

From First Arts Page

Camera,” a show opening on Tuesday at the Gagosian Gallery on West 21st Street in Chelsea. Organized by Mr. Richardson with Valentina Castellani and Michael Cary, directors of the gallery, it will include more than 40 paintings, 50 drawings and some 225 photographs, about 10 percent of which will be for sale. Other family members have also lent works to the show, along with collectors and institutions, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm.

For Mr. Richardson, 90, this is his fifth Picasso exhibition in a series that began at the Gagosian Gallery in 2009. Most have focused on the painter’s mistresses and wives. “I’d run out of women,” Mr. Richardson said.

While there are countless images of Picasso taken by many of the world’s greatest photographers — Irving Penn, Cecil Beaton, Man Ray and, of course, Brassai, the Hungarian-born photographer and lifelong Picasso friend — there is a whole other side to the subject of the artist and photography. Or, as Mr. Richardson put it: “How Picasso used the camera. And how, throughout his life, how he used photographs for so many things.”

Standing in the middle of the 21st Street gallery the other day, Mr. Richardson talked about how, facing the challenges of exhibiting photographs, especially small ones, he enlisted David Korins, a Broadway set designer (“Motown the Musical,” “Passing Strange”). Mr. Korins created a theatrical environment using giant, slanted columns displaying blown-up photographs of Picasso; Dora Maar, a mistress and muse; and Olga Khokhlova, the

It turns out Picasso shot home movies.

Russian ballerina who was the first of his two wives — women he photographed endlessly. (Another wife, Jacqueline Roque, is the subject of a show by the rival Pace Gallery, opening Thursday).

At Gagosian, there is an enclosed space showing home movies Picasso took on vacations, along with others depicting his life at Château Boisgeloup, his home in Normandy, France, during the 1930s. One shows Paul, Picasso and Khokhlova’s son, at the age of 8, dressed as a toreador charging after his nanny, Mimi, playing the part of the bull, her

index fingers mimicking its horns. Another shows Khokhlova wistfully pulling petals off a daisy — murmuring to herself, “He loves me; he loves me not.” There is also a movie taken by Man Ray in 1937, while vacationing with Picasso in the South of France. All the films will be running on a continuous loop throughout the show.

“Picasso was the most photographed artist in history,” Mr. Cary said. “He becomes this icon all over the world, yet he also took what we now would call selfies, posing as if trying on different identities — the dandy, the bohemian, the macho guy.”

Picasso also turned to the camera to record the progress of his sculptures. “In the case of the heads he made in 1931, we can see from his photographs that he tried to push two of them together to make a kiss, like the famous 1908 Brancusi sculpture,” Mr. Richardson said, a reference to that Romanian artist’s primitive-style block depicting two entwined figures. The exhibition displays a sequence of images showing how Picasso moved his sculptures into the garden of his house in Boisgeloup and photographed them on their pedestals from different angles, pushing them together.

“He finally gives up,” Mr. Richardson said. “And two years later



does a painting of the kiss, which we have in the show."

Picasso also took countless pictures of Khokhlova, whom he married in 1918. "On the eve of their wedding, Olga hurt her leg and was not able to ever dance professionally again," Mr. Richardson said. "Yet she traveled everywhere with her tutu and ballet shoes." He pulled out a photograph of Khokhlova dressed for dancing on the terrace of Villa Belle Rose, a house Picasso rented in 1925.

That image will be shown alongside "Le Repos," a 1932 painting that Mr. Richardson said vaguely depicts Khokhlova as an abstracted but venomous crea-

ture, with sharp teeth, a red mouth, her legs evocatively splayed. (By that point, Picasso was obsessed with his new mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter.)

Decades before that summer, in 1909, the beginnings of Cubism began creeping into Picasso's work. "This was especially true in the photographs he took at Horta de Ebro," in Spain, Ms. Castellani said. It was there that Picasso took snapshots of the landscape, with its jagged hillsides and rectangular rooftops, that is now thought to be the inspiration for the painting "Le Réservoir, Horta de Ebro," on loan to Gagosian from David Rockefeller, the philanthropist

who has promised it to the Museum of Modern Art.

By far the most startling discovery Mr. Richardson made, he said, is the way Picasso used "L'Art en Grèce," a book of photographs of ancient Greek sculptures published by Christian Zervos, the publisher of Picasso's catalogue raisonné. An advertisement at its publication called it "indispensable for the understanding of contemporary art."

"It was an important source for Picasso," said Mr. Richardson, who recently heard about the book while at work on the fourth and final volume of his series of Picasso biographies and tracked it down. The show will illustrate just how Picasso reinterpreted images of ancient sculptures in his own modern vocabulary, including the image of a head of a fifth-century B.C. warrior next to a bronze bust Picasso made in 1933.

There will also be shots of a sculpture called "Calf Bearer" from the Archaeological Museum in Athens, the inspiration for Picasso's 1943 sculpture "Man With a Lamb" (illustrated here in photographs by Brassai).

"What is particularly revealing about the book," Mr. Richardson said, "is the way it shows how photography really opened Picasso's eyes to possibilities of Modern sculpture."