

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



‘Picasso and the Camera’ Opens at Gagosian Gallery

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Photographer unknown, 'Picasso with Bob (the Great Pyrenees), Château de Boisgeloup, France,' 1932 © Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte (FABA). Courtesy Archives Olga Ruiz-Picasso and Gagosian Gallery.

A new exhibition at Gagosian Gallery, *Picasso and the Camera*, curated by Picasso biographer John Richardson, pulls together hundreds of photographs, paintings, and even pieces of furniture that braid together the precise realities of film with the prismatic, painted world of Pablo Picasso. Including never-before-seen archival images, the exhibition traces Picasso’s life through the means of the photograph, drawing from records of his works’ progress to images taken by the women in his life to studio stills by the top photographers of the day (Brassaï, Henri Cartier-Bresson, and Man Ray are just a few who visited). Through this documentation and personal ephemera, these photographs reveal some of Picasso’s most experimental projects as well as his personal life.

Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, grandson of Picasso and his first wife, Olga Khokhlova, organized the exhibition in partnership with the gallery. Snapshots offer fragmented views of the artist’s life—many taken by his first wife and subsequent lovers (and vice versa) on holiday, at home, and at work—and appear on rows sliced by soaring, blown-up images of these figures, reaching the 21st Street gallery’s massive ceiling. But, perhaps most importantly, many of the images offer insight into how Picasso made his work, at a time when artists were just starting to experiment with photography.

“For Picasso, photos were very important in the sense that he was modern—he was not having models in his studio. He would do things by memory or because he had books, newspaper, or photographs, as well as objects that he cherished,” Ruiz-Picasso says.

Many of the images come from Ruiz-Picasso’s grandmother’s archive. In one, the former ballerina stands en pointe, smiling devilishly; adjacent is Picasso’s 1932 painting *Le repos* (1932), a Cubist imagining of ballet’s fifth position, the dancer bearing a similar grin. (However, the photographer of the original image—most likely Picasso or Khokhlova—is unknown.) Most photographs taken by Picasso were used as studies of work, or as a jumping-off point. One tableau tracks the progress of a painting in his Montmartre studio from 1908 to 1910; another wall pairs landscape photographs taken by Picasso with the Cubist landscapes they inspired.

“Who was taking those photographs?” Ruiz-Picasso explains of these connections. “We knew that Picasso was taking photographs. We were confident. Only in the 1930s did he ask different photographers like Brassai to do for him what he was already doing himself.”

A 1922 portrait by Man Ray finds the artist stoic yet relaxed in his Paris studio; Brassai’s images depict Picasso’s countryside studio filled with sculptures of the 1930s in moody lighting; and in 1944, Cartier-Bresson took a photograph of the artist’s crowded Paris studio—the artist nowhere in sight. Throughout his life, Picasso maintained close, collaborative relationships with a number of photographers, namely Lucien Clergue, Edward Quinn, and André Villers.

Villers and Picasso worked together on a 1962 project in which Picasso’s cutouts of animals, faces, and masks were overlaid on landscape photographs taken by Villers. The thirty works, which span a gallery wall, make for one of the exhibition’s most striking moments, and they appear just as contemporary today as they did when they were made. As Ruiz-Picasso notes, today artists’ lives and practices are constantly being photographed; this expansive show, which runs through January 3, 2015, offers a rare look at one of twentieth-century art’s most monumental figures.