



A Life of Picasso: The Triumphant Years: 1917-1932

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Now in paperback: the third volume of John Richardson's magisterial Life of Picasso. Here is Picasso at the height of his powers in Rome and Naples, producing the sets and costumes

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Author : John Richardson

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David says

Volume 2 has been the most entertaining so far, as he was interacting with more interesting people during the period covered than he was in 1 or 3. It's a little embarrassing to write, but it is interesting to see how his character flaws, which once came off as mostly laughable, turn him into a borderline evil person as he gains more opportunities and (sort of) takes on family responsibilities.

Bill says

This is the third book in the seminal biography of Pablo Picasso, written by John Richardson.

I think most people feel that the most exciting book is the first: The early years 1881-1906. The Cubist period is the second book. This book covers Picasso as an international star, theater painter, and friend of a lot of famous people.

I am really curious about the next book, which I think will cover a more interesting period. WW2 + I hope the Dora Maar paintings.

GK Stritch says

Rich indeed, Mr. Richardson, incredibly rich.

"I would like to live like a pauper with lots of money." Picasso, p. 385

Chrissy says

This book is so well researched that Richardson could have made it boring and too heavy, but luckily he is an excellent writer/art historian who perfectly weaves hilarious stories in with expert analysis and new approaches to (in)famous works by Picasso. The stories and letters feature Picasso dueling with the surrealists and Appollinaire's "supporters" and dealing with his beau monde wife Olga gallivanting along with famous others like Stravinsky and Coco Chanel. The paintings and sculptures are well explored, as they made me flip back and forth between the text and the pictures so much.

My favorite bit was just how much all the artists of the period were intertwined: the Murphys became the Divers in F. Scott's *This Side of Paradise* but the Divers ended up being a closer parallel to the author and his drunks wife. I can't wait to read the first two volumes to get more of Picasso's bohemian roots. I loved him before but this definitely helped.

You don't have to be an "art" person to appreciate this read, but you might want to enjoy the 1920s as this book is 500 pages long.

James Murphy says

This is rich, grand biography. It's the 3d volume of Richardson's monumental biography of the iconic artist. As well as being satisfyingly detailed about Picasso himself, Richardson, in relating the course of the life, has to necessarily explain those around Picasso and the events linking them. So it all becomes a big, glorious telling. But Richardson isn't all surface narrative. This is critical biography by an incisive art expert and analyst. More, as a friend of Picasso's his understanding worms deeply under the artist's skin and into his psyche. These are the years--1917 to 1932--of Olga the wife and Marie-Therese the young mistress. Richardson's thorough discussion of the individual works is especially interesting in its gloss on how these two women affected his art. That alone is worth the read. Richardson understands how Picasso made what he did, and why. Recently I read something about Richardson being concerned he might not finish his biography. I think he's now in his 80s. The next volume, I understand, is to be the last. It must be going to be a real whopper because when this 3d volume leaves Picasso he has 41 years left to live. We know that many artistic triumphs are ahead, especially the influence of the Spanish Civil War, the impact of which was apparently considerable. We know that much romantic turmoil is ahead. We know that Richardson will tell it well.

Alan says

This is Volume 3. Volume 1 was fabulous, Vol. 2 was really interesting, volume 3 is a bit of a slog, but I am determined (and vol. 4 is coming out next year). Full of great gossip and links between his life (especially his amazing sex life- you would think he was in Congress) and the art. OK Elaine?

Charles Bechtel says

One does not read this book, one lives with it, and does so in the manner of having to live with an intelligent, proud, once-actively-engaged but now passé artist-uncle. The text is huge in understanding, so illuminating as to be blinding, but in the end wearying in its digressions providing the necessary scaffolding to understand the monumental artistry of Picasso. It will take weeks to slough off the effects of this comprehensive, comprehending uncle; whatever I shall think will be have to be run through the funnel of Picasso's vision more often than I'd like. I will see even sleeping cats as Picassos.

Imagine sitting through an entire semester of Calculus IV — complete with the expectation that you have an insiders view of Wave Theory — in one week. It is that intense. Richardson does, especially in the concluding third of the book, manage to enter the complex mind of Pablo Picasso. Riding with Richardson, one gets the sense that the artist is not so difficult to perceive, but as far beyond the grasp as Quantum Mechanics.

No student of painting should overlook this book, but no student should read it. This is a book that should only be read by people who already have spent time grappling with what occurs at the end of the brush. It

would be too influential, too corrupting, for an unformed student. Reading it, one may find and even encounter the Minotaur, but there is not string leading one back out into daylight. Go instead to Patrick O'Brian's reminiscence. He has the string. Once you've learned the passages, then attempt this.

As for why not five stars? Because there are so many references to paintings that are not included (cost) that I found it necessary to read with Google always searching the Internet. If you have an I-pad, keep it charged. Except for this, Richardson's is an astonishing addition to any painter's library.

Jeff says

This is a wonderful book. It traces Picasso's life and work through WWI, the death of Guillaume Apollinaire, and through his first marriage. The writing is remarkable - again, Richardson knew Picasso and mixed his conversations with the artist with research documents. He interleaves Picasso's life with his art and provides illustrations. This volume has a center section that reproduces Picasso's major works of the period in color photographs. This is a huge improvement to the earlier volumes' illustrations which were only in BW.

Randall Wallace says

"Picasso believed that only supreme graphic mastery could enable an artist to break every conceivable rule and, if he wanted to, draw as 'badly' - that is to say as instinctively - as he liked." When Picasso does any pointillism, it is in fact to create fake surfaces such as wood or marble. "As Kenneth Clark wrote, 'the nude remains our chief link with the classic disciplines'." Picasso draws nudes posing on a beach with tiny heads and huge feet, images from his childhood dreams - this leads to his extraordinary plays of proportion and surreal juxtapositions. This volume goes into both Picasso's Volumetric Classicism and Surrealism Periods. Of the later, John says: "Picasso's penchant for dismemberment and reattachment" "he loved displacing things" "to put eyes between the legs, or sex organs on the face. To contradict." "I want to paint like a blind man, who does a buttock by feel."

This is Volume Three, the Diaghilev/Olga years, where many pages are about Diaghilev's troubles or Olga, who gives Picasso a son - or their many vacations somewhere in the sun.

Rick says

From the end of World War I and Picasso's continued exploration of cubism, his engagement with Diaghilev and other pioneers of modernism in dance and theatre, his marriage of the modern with the classical, and his revolutionary work as a sculptor, volume three of Richardson's comprehensive biography of Picasso is as rewarding as each of the first two volumes. There is also Picasso's marriage to Olga Khokhlova, his legal battles with dealers who lost control of their stock of Picasso's work because of the war and later with a pair of perhaps conmen who secured possession of Picasso's early work from his mother and uncle, and his relationship with Marie Therese Walter, the 17 and half year old model, muse, mistress whose relationship with the artist dominates the second half of the period covered in this volume.

Picasso lives a kind of dual life in this period, established artist and wealthy man about Paris and the Riviera,

and avant garde artist, resistant to all groups and controls and answerable only to his own artistic sensibility. In one he attends balls with Olga and is chauffeured around in an extravagant car. In the other he designs radical ballet sets and costumes, confounds his dealers who want more harlequins, resists the dogmatic pull of schools of surrealism, and finds himself still contesting with Matisse, his one true rival, and longing for the former partnership with Braque. Clive Bell, the Fitzgeralds, Hemingways, Breton, Chanel, Gerald and Sara Murphy, Stravinsky, and many others make their appearances. As do many of those from the first two volumes, though Apollinaire and Diaghilev do not survive the volume. As it ends, the Spanish Civil War, which will politicize Picasso, looms. Richardson is once again brilliant, particularly in his understanding of Picasso's work, and entertaining with his wry way with the personal and professional gossip (poor Cocteau!). While he is no apologist for Picasso, the man, he has less of a grip on him than he does Picasso, the artist. He is never fully convincing in his portrayals of Picasso's character and motives in his personal relationships, the paradox of generosity and cruelty that manifests itself, for example. What, beyond a desire to marry, animated his long relationship with Olga? He does reinforce the official debunking of the myth that Picasso started his relationship with Marie Therese when she was 15 with a certain crusty dismissiveness but otherwise he seems willing to let the record stand that Picasso was brilliant and charming but also selfish, cruel, superstitious, and petty. But it's not Picasso's humanity or lack of it that compels our attention, it's his creative genius, his artwork. And that Richardson has a very firm grip on.

I've since read in recent articles associated with Richardson's curating of the late period Picasso show at a Chelsea gallery that the next volume is to be the last one, a startling bit of news given how much is left to Picasso's life and career. Near the end of volume three Picasso turns 50 which leaves four decades to squeeze into that final volume. Don't know how Richardson will manage but he certainly has the knowledge, the perspective, and the clarity of prose to pull some sort of coherent synthesis, but still I'm betting that we're really looking at two, not one, more volumes to come in this essential work of biography.

Peter says

I've just begun to read, in advance of a visit to VMFA's Picasso exhibit.

Among other things, it totally explains the plot of Baz Luhrman's "Moulin Rouge", by fleshing out the relations between artistic troupes and European aristocracy. (Picasso was commissioned to design costumes and backgrounds for several ballets)

Dickson says

This is the last of the three volumes by Richardson; they kept me busy for awhile. I think that the first volume is the best of the three. The third volume gets to be just too much information about all the people in Picasso's life--a lot of people who were either hanger-ons or society bores--or both.

AC says

Not nearly as interesting, either from the artistic point of view, nor from the gossipy (though that is the strength here) as the first two volumes. Richardson was 83 when the book came out, and we still await vol 4.

Bookmarks Magazine says

John Richardson was introduced to Picasso in the 1950s, and that firsthand knowledge of the man and his work buttresses the third volume of this monumental study. Richardson exhibits not only a stunning grasp of the artist's profession, including the iconography, languages, and influences, but also an understanding of how Picasso's private life informed his art. The result is a rare balance of first-rate art criticism and a primer on the energy and chaos that define the modern. Michael Dirda compares the author's vision to the more academic work of E. H. Gombrich and Kenneth Clark, concluding that, in a good way, "Richardson's tell-all biography reads something like a high-brow gossip column." Stay tuned for the fourth, and final, volume.

This is an excerpt from a review published in Bookmarks magazine.

Christopher says

Style after style, after style, after style- original b-boy.

When it comes to style masters of the time- and as someone who always votes for the innovator rather than the person seeking the limelight- I'm more of a Matisse fan, but that's more about his thinking than his art(always had Picasso in awe and chasing). On the other hand, Picasso's Guitar has always been among my all-time favorite sculptures. And the thought of each woman he had in his life changing his art is certainly one that resonates w/ me.

This will be the book I read when I'm not reading the book I'm reading.
