



My Grandfather's Gallery: A Family Memoir of Art and War

Anne Sinclair, Shaun Whiteside (Translation)

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A singular man in the history of modern art, betrayed by Vichy, is the subject of this riveting family memoir

On September 20, 1940, one of the most famous European art dealers disembarked in New York, one of hundreds of Jewish refugees fleeing Vichy France. Leaving behind his beloved Paris gallery, Paul Rosenberg had managed to save his family, but his paintings—modern masterpieces by Cézanne, Monet, Sisley, and others—were not so fortunate. As he fled, dozens of works were seized by Nazi forces and the art dealer's own legacy was eradicated.

More than half a century later, Anne Sinclair uncovered a box filled with letters. "Curious in spite of myself," she writes, "I plunged into these archives, in search of the story of my family. To find out who my mother's father really was . . . a man hailed as a pioneer in the world of modern art, who then became a pariah in his own country during the Second World War. I was overcome with a desire to fit together the pieces of this French story of art and war."

Drawing on her grandfather's intimate correspondence with Picasso, Matisse, Braque, and others, Sinclair takes us on a personal journey through the life of a legendary member of the Parisian art scene in *My Grandfather's Gallery*. Rosenberg's story is emblematic of millions of Jews, rich and poor, whose lives were indelibly altered by World War II. Sinclair's journey to reclaim her family history paints a picture of modern art on both sides of the Atlantic between the 1920's and 1950's that reframes twentieth-century art history.

My Grandfather's Gallery: A Family Memoir of Art and War Details

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Linda says

An interesting read - Anne Sinclair writes about her grandfather Paul Rosenberg's experience as a noted European art dealer who realized the genius of Picasso and Matisse, among others, before they were well-known. Sinclair tells the story of a family who leaves Paris to come to New York at the onset of WWII and begins life anew. The author has gone through archives of letters and recounts her own memories to put together the story of a man, his friendships with Picasso and Matisse, life as an art dealer and relationships within his own family

Amy says

A more appropriate title for this book is "My Grandfather and His Gallery". While Sinclair does include her family in her memoir, it's not quite a "family memoir", and while she does mention war, it's not as prevalent as one would expect. It is a memoir of her realizing that she knew very little about her grandfather, Paul Rosenberg, the owner of a highly successful art dealer who represented such artists as Picasso, Matisse, and Braque, and her quest to learn more about him. What she finds is very interesting as she gives us a glimpse into the Parisian art world pre-WWII and more personal looks at Picasso and Matisse. I've read about the main dealers such as Vollard and Durand-Ruel, but I never exactly understood the business, and her explanations of how her grandfather ran his business (a much more magnanimous dealer than most) helped me grasp its workings. He was instrumental in creating a market for those artists.

Rosenberg was Jewish, and through his connections, he and his family are one of the few thousands able to escape persecution to America where he began a successful gallery in New York and live on the East Side and in Midtown. During the war, he traveled all over the country introducing Americans to modern art. Shortly after the war, he and his family move back to Paris. He was able to save much of his art, but not surprisingly, much of it was stolen by the Germans; surprisingly, he got much of it back. The Germans also set up a propaganda shop in his gallery, but he got that back, too, and was able to sell it. Even though his friendship with Picasso was never the same, he and his family continued to be successful selling art. Compared to millions of others, they were exceptionally fortunate. Compared to other memoirs such as Simon Goodan's "The Orpheus Clock: The Search for My Family's Art Treasure Stolen by the Nazis" and Edmund de Waal's "The Hare with the Amber Eyes", both of which deal with real loss of home, belongings, family, and the very real struggle to reclaim what was once theirs, this one seems a little flat.

What I did find interesting was how France went back to the status quo in the post-war years. Many who collaborated with the Vichy government and Nazis were let off the hook and Jews and their collaborator neighbors seemed to go on being neighborly. It wasn't until the 1990's that people were finally being held accountable for their actions. And now France, like the rest of Europe (and America), is once again turning pro-Right and focusing on nationalism and identity. This human catastrophe that we are supposed to "never forget" continues to fade into the past as it seems we have to learn history all over again.

Patricia Ogden says

This is potentially an interesting biography, but I found the writing style rather jumbled. As a result, I couldn't follow the narrative and so stopped reading the book.

Margalit says

I read this book in a one session; just could not stop. It touches upon all I care about (almost). Jews, Art, Paris, New York and family.

Beautifully written, very dignified and careful never to allow for gossipy modes.

I recommend it.

Jan Vranken says

Geen grote literatuur, maar bijzonder leerrijke (en erg leesbare) inkijk in de massale georganiseerde diefstal van kunst door de nazi's, waarbij joodse kunsthandelaars de voornaamste slachtoffers waren. Meteen ook het verhaal van hoe die handelaars open stonden voor nieuwe benaderingen, te beginnen met het impressionisme en hoe netwerken daarbij een rol speelden.

Ingrid M. says

Wow. I just finished this in-depth look at Paul Rosenberg, famed French art dealer, through the eyes of the granddaughter who came to know him best posthumously.

I loved Anne Sinclair's voice. She managed to relay a lot of French history in a manner that was captivating and enthralling. What I enjoyed most about the book was that it was neither a tale of just family, nor a tale of Nazi looting, rather it was a rich narrative of interwoven threads: family dynamics and secrets, the meaning of "modern art," grasping her grandfather's personal sense of justice in trying to retrieve his stolen collection.

"Too often the spectator looks for arguments within himself against the works rather than attempting to free himself from those conventions which he believes he understands, agrees with, and likes." I loved this quote because too often I find myself easily dismissing certain works or painters when it's really just an aversion to not understanding, and if I could only push myself to really challenge my thinking, I too could break free of my short sightedness.

Sinclair's background as a journalist serves her well because even in the more history-heavy excerpts, I was engrossed. She approached her writing in a very poignant matter, even going so far as to question who these people she had grown up with really were. She dares to ask, "How daring was [Paul], really?"

Imagine your family memories filled with priceless works of art by then-unknown painters! Summers spent at Picasso's house, or having your childhood portrait done by Marie Laurencin! Or knowing Van Gogh's

famed Postman was a gift to the Met by your family...(This is at the Barnes, no?*) What an incredible and rich family history...

Julie says

This was simply written as someone might when taking notes while researching their family history. The writing was simple, yet since it's an English translation of a French text, it's difficult to comment on the original text.

I found great appreciation for the writers grandfather and his love of art. I'm a sucker for people who know their passion and act on it. He believed in the new impressionistic art before the rest of the world could grasp it. He sold more traditional art in an effort to support someone like Picasso so the artist could focus on his work. For a while, Picasso lived next door to the gallery and used to unveil paintings in progress through a window for him to see. And having Rodin's "The Thinker" greet everyone in the foyer (the writer remembers this as a child, what a trip). Walls lined with Iconic works. And interesting tidbits like Picasso's painting of mother and child being that of the authors mother and grandmother.

Of course, this story highlights the atrocities of the Nazis and lost art work. It also speaks of the bravery of those that saved many pieces of art. It also shines light on Nazi collaborators as well as just opportunistic people that weren't collaborators, just greedy. It also stumbles upon some family secrets that helped the writer put some family history into context, painful as it was to decide to share it with the world. I commend her for being truthful.

This wasn't a book that swept me up into the narrative but it held my interest especially because of my love of art.

Marianne says

My Grandfather's Gallery is a memoir by journalist and French TV host, Anne Sinclair. Sinclair was also the model for the statue of Marianne, the national emblem of France, the irony of which was not lost on her when she was required to prove her French ancestry for renewal of identity documents in 2010. This bureaucratic incident led Sinclair to research the life of her maternal grandfather, Paul Rosenberg, a well-known Parisian art dealer who was stripped of his French identity during World War Two by the Vichy government because he was Jewish. Using published works and personal archives from her grandfather's gallery as well as from Musee Picasso, the house of Henri Matisse and Musee National D'Art Moderne, including letters, photographs, and journal articles, Sinclair details Paul Rosenberg's career, his exile to the United States and eventual return to France. The shocking looting of priceless artworks by the occupying German forces, French collaborators and opportunistic (and often trusted) friends, acquaintances and employees is also described. Paul himself stated: "We recovered some paintings looted by the Germans, or by dishonest Frenchmen. But I am not going to complain, it's as nothing when you look at the horrors that the Nazis inflicted on human beings of all races, creeds and colors." As well as discovering the depth of Paul's friendships with his clients, in particular, Pablo Picasso, Sinclair uncovers some disturbing facts about her grandparents that she regrets learning. There are some amusing anecdotes about the family ("In the Loevi household, you didn't button up in the face of adversity; you complained a lot and wallowed in your

misfortune.”) and famous artists. There is also a heart-warming prologue regarding a plaque placed on the façade of 21 rue La Boetie in Paris, the site of the former Galerie Rosenberg. This is a memoir that will appeal to art lovers and those with an interest in the history of twentieth century art in France. It is flawlessly translated from French by Shaun Whiteside and is at once interesting, informative and moving.

Ashley says

I received this book for free through Goodreads First Reads.

Though I enjoyed this book, it does have its weaknesses. Some of it, I think, is the harm translation can sometimes do--not that it's poorly translated, but that (like so many other books) there were moments where I wondered if perhaps it was better in the original (despite not reading French). That doesn't mean that it's a difficult book to read in translation, just that I can be hyperaware of "I wonder if that changed in translation."

The book is a very interesting look at the art world in Paris before WWII, and a little in New York during and after the war. That said, it's not as personal as the title implied to me--though yes, Sinclair is writing about her grandfather, she overwhelmingly seems to use archival materials that would have been available to any biographer with the dedication and means to travel. It doesn't make for a bad biography, and it does make a better-researched one--but it also feels strange when the expectation seemed to be set for a more personal discussion of Paul Rosenberg and his life and work.

The introduction touches on the rise and continuance of antisemitism in France today, and that's an important thing. There's more to be gleaned from Paul Rosenberg's story than just that it happened sixty years ago and now should be relegated to art history, and the introduction does offer some illustration that the practice of repeating "never again" over and over does little when the ideological forces that permitted the Holocaust to happen continue to exist and have significant following.

While reading, I felt that I might have enjoyed the book more if I had more background in modern art. I don't, as my art history background is quite sparse and limited mostly to Eastern Europe and to architecture. This meant that, though I certainly know who Picasso and Matisse were, I feel that I might have appreciated the entire thing more with a deeper understanding of the art movement in that time and place.

?atthieu says

Anne Sinclair relate la vie de son grand-père marchant d'art, Paul Rosenberg. Le troisième art est riche et faste en cette première moitié du vingtième siècle, on pourrait citer d'emblée le fauvisme, le cubisme ou l'expressionnisme. Paul Rosenberg est contractuellement - il a droit de « première vue » - lié à Picasso, Matisse, Léger, Marie Laurencin, Braque mais leurs relations semblent plus profondes, amicales.

Sa galerie est situé au 21 rue La Boétie à Paris, mais la seconde guerre mondiale le forcera à s'exiler à New York (il y ouvrira une nouvelle galerie). Après son départ précipité de nombreuses œuvres seront spoliées par les nazis. Il est également déchu de sa nationalité française par Vichy.

Après guerre, Paul se battra pour récupérer ses œuvres épargnées. De nombreux chef d'œuvres sont perdus pour toujours.

Côté style, c'est une bonne biographie (citations à l'appui), il y a quelques redites parfois mais c'est mineur.

Karin Mika says

Enjoyable (but not tremendously entralling) book about the author's journey into her family history. The author is the granddaughter of Parisian Gallery owner Paul Rosenberg, who was responsible for encouraging, if not creating the world's appreciation of modern artists such as Matisse, and Picasso. Rosenberg fled France before a full Nazi takeover, and managed to hide various paintings of the masters, while promoting their art from his new gallery in New York. After the war, Rosenberg returned to Paris and spent the remainder of his life working to reclaim his own stolen art, as well as trying to locate the artwork pillaged by the Nazis.

Rosenberg's gallery, ironically, was turned into a Nazi propaganda office during the war, and much of the book focuses on how the author spent most of her life not knowing that much about her grandfather other than that he was a well known art dealer. The book focuses on what the author discovers about how her grandfather helped change the art world, as well as how he unwittingly opposed the Nazis by promoting "new" as opposed to focusing on a grandeur of the past. Paul Rosenberg became a seminal figure in the history of the art world by virtue of his convictions, his meticulous record keeping, and his need to make sure that, no matter what, art must be preserved for the ages. I learned what I always learn in books of this type: Nazis, and those fanatical groups like them, are capable of inflicting such incalculable harm, and there is simply no way to understand how it could possibly have happened. Maniacs say and do things that every sane person should regard as off-the-wall, and yet the society proceeds in a march toward mass destruction seemingly as if in a hypnotic trance unable to notice the insanity they are perpetuating.

The book, for me, was not as interesting as it might be for others because I am not an art aficionado. Nonetheless, I was able to have a great appreciation for what Paul Rosenberg meant to the art world.

Gary Heilbronn says

Highly recommended. I particularly enjoyed this book as much of it resonates with tales I have heard from my extended family and others. It is a family story by an author who was doubtless going through a troubled time in her life as she wrote it. More than anything, it delves into the life of the author's maternal grandfather, a Paris art dealer before and at the time of the Nazi occupation of France and the wholesale theft by not just the Nazis but other unscrupulous individuals, of so much of France's invaluable art. It is also the story of her grandfather's close friends and associates of the time, especially Picasso, Matisse and Braque and gives a passionate insight into the lives of artists under Nazi occupation ... a story still controversial that raises heated emotions in France, given how some resisted overtly, others resisted peaceably and still others happily helped themselves to any benefits that came from being on good terms with the Nazi occupiers. On another level the story that lies beneath is the story of money .. old money, social and political connexions that still carry weight today .. but begs the question: where did this old money come from. I cannot comment on the quality of the writing as my French is not that good (and the version I read is in French), but the structure was sometimes just a little hard to follow. Yet there is so much in this book that is appealing with its insights into the lives of great artists as well as those who suffered under Nazi oppression. So much there still resonates with today's world.

Claude says

Très intéressant, en particulier lorsqu'on vient de voir l'exposition qui porte le même nom au Musée Maillol.

Jennifer says

Fascinating portrait of cosmopolitan Jews in France in the inter-war years. I knew a little bit about the Nazi theft of art, but enjoyed learning about it again through this one family, the Rosenbergs, and the patriarch Paul's experiences as an art dealer, working with Picasso, Matisse and the like. The way art intersects with fascism seems vital for us to all understand these days.

Perlie says

An absorbing story of identity, self and family, connection and loss.
Many of the art works mentioned bear looking at.
