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How Contemporary Artists Have Remixed Picasso, From Feminist Revisions to New 'Guernicas'

BY **ALEX GREENBERGER**

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Chéri Samba, *Quand il n'y avait plus rien d'autre que... L'Afrique restait une pensée*, 1997.
COURTESY GALERIE MAGNIN-A, PARIS

Fifty years after his death, the ghost of Pablo Picasso continues to haunt artists across the globe. What to do with that specter has become a subject of debate. Should we
use it, banishing it for good because of the well-documented misogyny and cruelty

of its progenitor? Or should we embrace it, knowing that to escape it entirely would be impossible?

Since Picasso's passing in 1973, contemporary artists have come up with all sorts of answers to the quandary. Some have examined Picasso's influence, suggesting that his many artistic innovations pointed a way forward for other artists while also questioning his egotism and self-claimed genius. Others have investigated the artist's darker sides, scrutinizing his physical and psychological abuse of women or the role that his art played in the appropriation of African visual tropes by Western practitioners. Still others have found another solution: the complex superimposition of distinctive Picasso images onto present-day struggles, with his works responding to the Spanish Civil War and the Korean War acting as lodestars for many in recent decades.

To take stock of the many ways artists have responded to Picasso's art, persona, and legacy, we offer a sampler of 23 contemporary works on the subject, plus two earlier works by women who knew Picasso intimately and were regarded as simply his muses, though they produced art of their own. The works, some of which figure in various presentations mounted this year to mark the 50th anniversary of Picasso's death, are presented below in chronological order.



Dora Maar, *Untitled (Pablo Picasso)*, 1936



Dora Maar, *Untitled (Pablo Picasso)*, 1936.

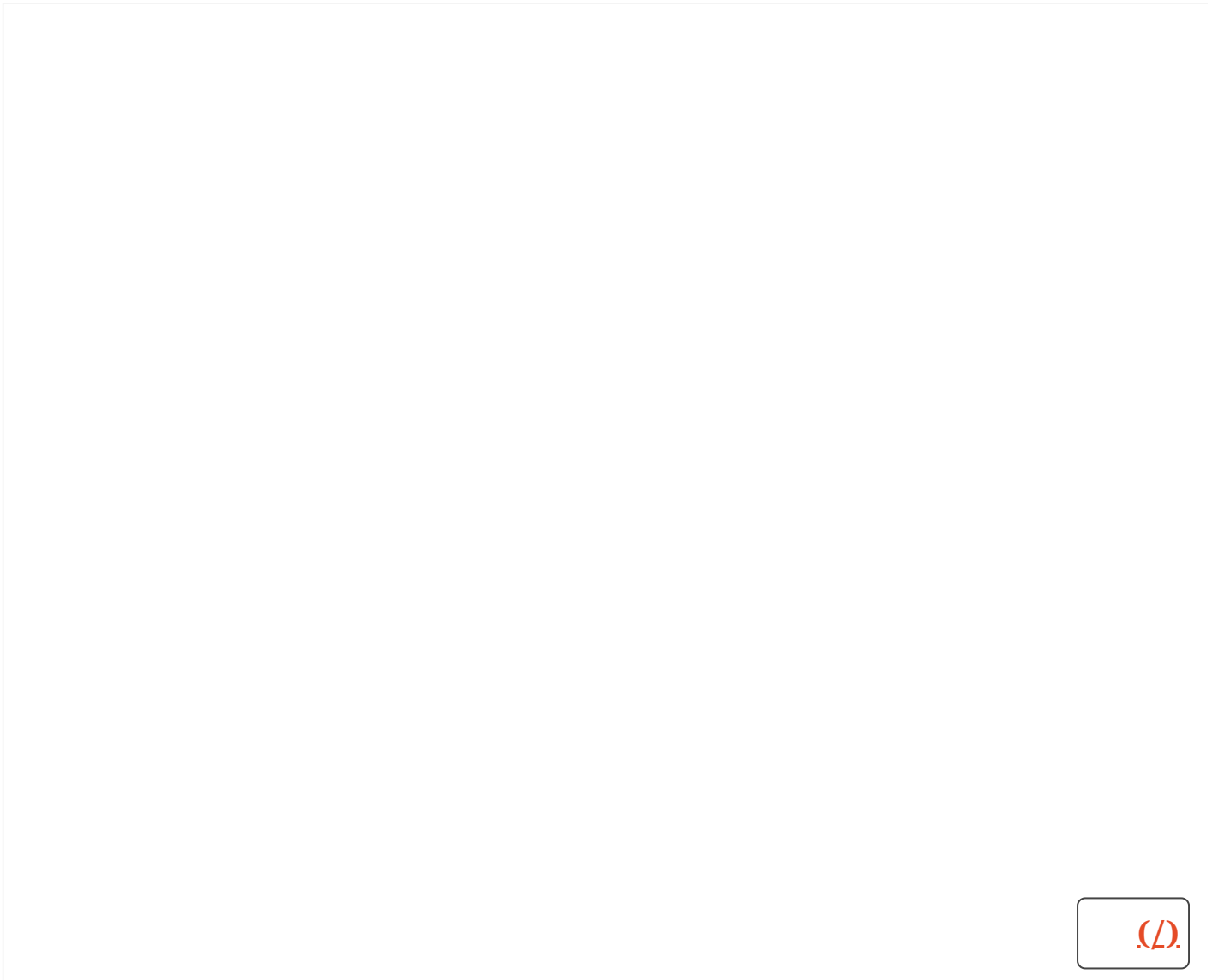
Photo : Courtesy Galerie Brame & Lorenceau/Artwork ©2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris/Private collection

Until recently, Dora Maar was regarded by the general public less as an artist in her own right than as one of Picasso's romantic partners—a muse who figured most prominently in his famed pictures of her crying. In addition to reassessing their relationship, scholars have begun to reflect anew on the art that Maar made. This included Surrealist photography and works that explicitly dialogued with Picasso, in particular her documentation of him creating *Guernica*.

Untitled (Pablo Picasso) is a tribute to the artist in a style that recalls his own. His face is fractured into a series of interlocking planes, the septum of his nose neatly dropping

down to the corner of his upper lip. Critics such as Picasso biographer John Richardson have claimed that when Picasso abstracted his lovers into portraits like this one, he was doing psychological violence to the women in his orbit. Regardless of whether Maar was intentionally doing the same to him in retribution, she has at the very least drawn liberally on his style, claiming it as her own.

Françoise Gilot, *Adam Forcing Eve to Eat an Apple*, 1946



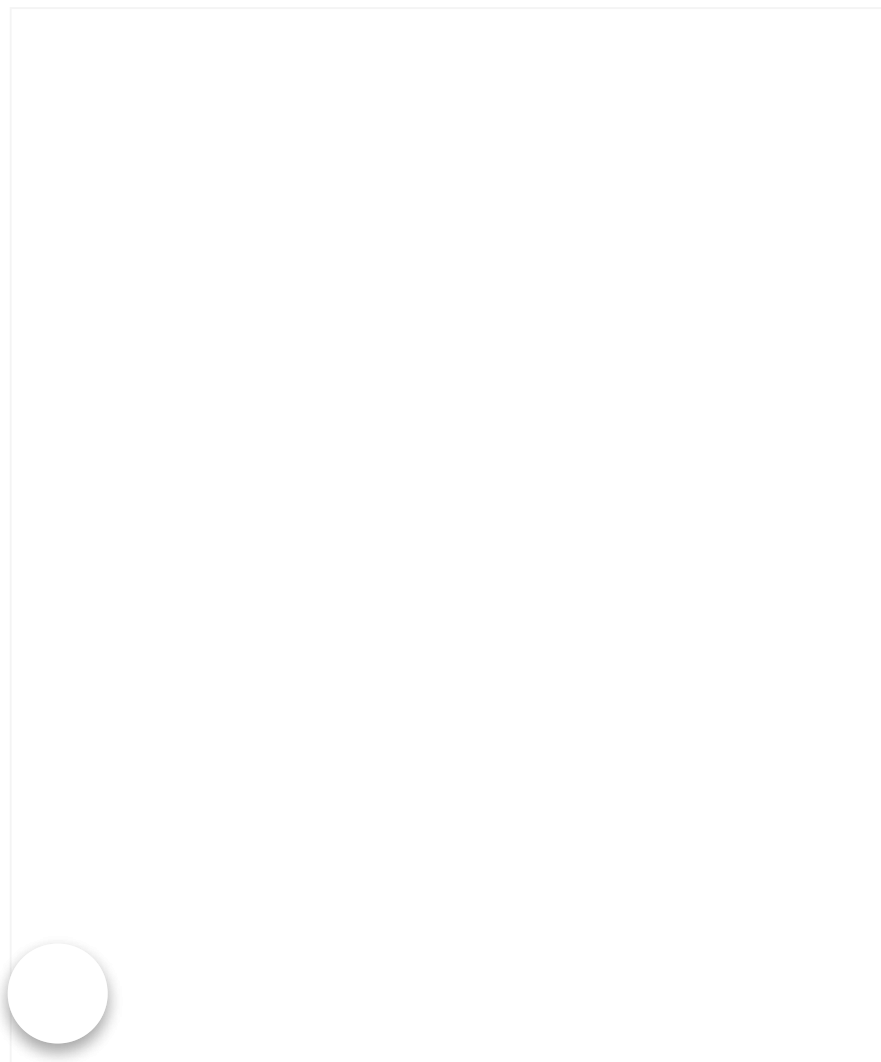
Françoise Gilot, *Adam Forcing Eve to Eat an Apple I*, 1946.

©Françoise Gilot/National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Françoise Gilot, who died earlier this year at 101, is the only one of Picasso's muses to have outlived him. Her survival was hard won. In her 1964 memoir *Life with Picasso*, written with Carlton Lake, she expressed much admiration for Picasso as an artist and much scorn for him as a man, recounting instances of physical abuse, emotional manipulation, and misogynistic demands for how she ought to support him and their family. Against all that, Gilot continued to pursue her career as an artist, painting in their home and even showing with the same dealer as Picasso.

One work she produced was *Adam Forcing Eve to Eat an Apple*, created during the year Gilot moved in with Picasso. The drawing's title hints at a biblical subject, but the setting is curiously contemporary—a chair and a table can be discerned. Rather than suggesting that Eve ate the apple on her own, Gilot shows Adam making her do it, having taken the fruit and shoved it into her mouth. Should there be any doubt about the subject matter, Gilot once clarified things: “Of course the Adam in the drawing bears a strong resemblance to Pablo Picasso, who intended to rule my life as if I still were a child.”

Rupert García, *Pablo Picasso*, 1973





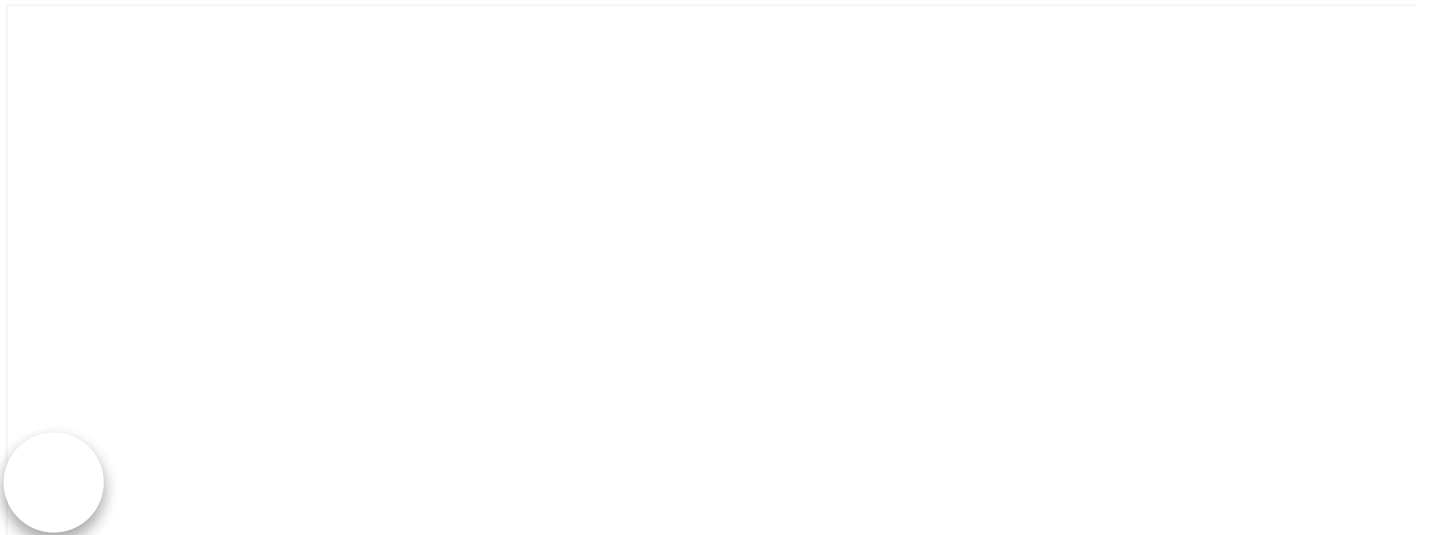
Rupert García, *Pablo Picasso*, 1973.

Photo : ©1973 Rupert García/Smithsonian American Art Museum

Though better known for his protest-oriented work made during the Chicano art movement of the 1960s, Rupert García has occasionally also paid homage to giants of art history, from Francisco Goya to Frida Kahlo. In 1973, the year Picasso died, García made this portrait of the Spanish artist. Based on a preexisting portrait of Picasso, this image renders the artist in tones more closely associated with Pop art, with half his face sheathed in black and the other half bathed in rich color à la Andy Warhol's famed 1966 self-portrait.

If Warhol was playing on his own celebrity, pondering how one's persona changes as his image is reproduced, García is doing something similar. By paring away some of the gravitas associated with pictures of Picasso, and by utilizing the repetitive process of silk-screening, García brings an artist associated with genius down to earth. At the same time, the very fact that García picked Picasso as a subject suggests he is a person worth knowing—an artist whose influence on art history is so vast that it cannot be entirely ignored.

Marta Minujín, *Kidnapping*, 1973





Marta Minujín, *Kidnapping*, 1973.

Photo : Marta Minujín Archive

Upon Picasso's death, most eulogies for him took the form of obituaries and written tributes. But Marta Minujín's memorial to the artist was rather different. The work she made in response to his passing, *Kidnapping*, was what she termed an "opera-cantata-happening"—a performance of sorts that took on increasingly outré proportions during its hours-long duration at the Museum of Modern Art and elsewhere.

The work began in a form that was appropriately Picassoesque, with 40 performers enacting choreographies based on poses derived from Picasso's own paintings, their faces painted in ways that recalled cubism. After two hours of dancing, plus some musing on the nature of art itself, the performers then surrounded audience members, chanted the made-up word *kidnapping* over and over, and then whisked viewers away to apartments rented by Minujín's friends. No one was harmed, but the possibility of violence and the desire to shock were intended to pay homage to Picasso's art, which contained those same elements. "Picasso," the Argentine Minujín once said, "represents the freedom, the euphoria, and the desperation to create and unroll the Ariadne's thread that we all have inside ourselves."

Marisol, *Picasso*, 1977





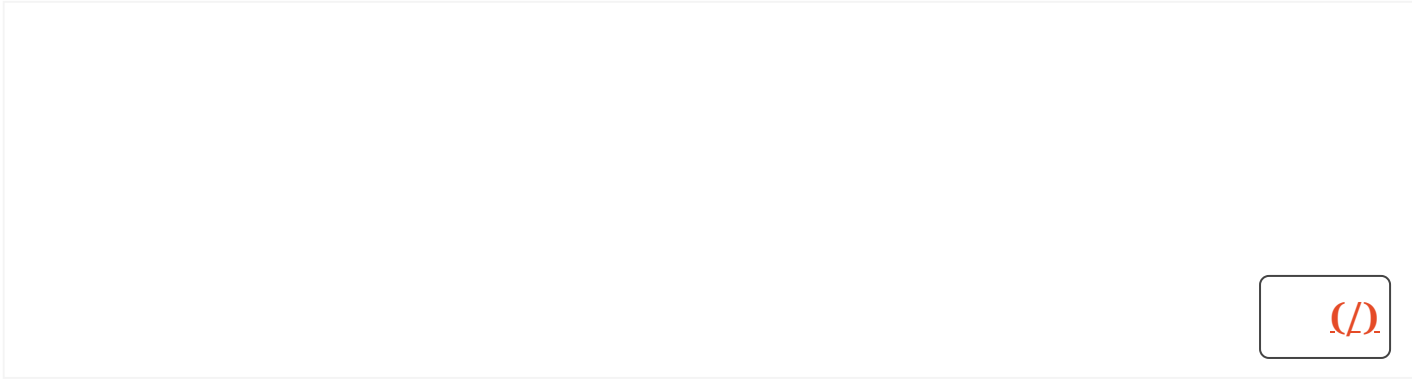
Marisol, *Picasso*, 1977.

Photo : Artwork © 2023 Estate of Marisol/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Buffalo AKG Art Museum, bequest of Marisol

Marisol's series "Artists and Artistes" features an array of creative idols whom she met—Georgia O'Keeffe, Louise Nevelson, Martha Graham, Marcel Duchamp, and others—all portrayed with lumpy heads carved from long blocks of wood. Many of these artists were elderly by the time Marisol encountered them, and she was able to achieve semblances of their wrinkles by preserving the wood's rugged texture. The only artist whom Marisol did not meet that she memorialized for this series was Picasso, who died four years before this work was made.

Picasso, like the others in this series, is shown seated; Marisol said she did this to offer these artists some comfort during old age. That she felt compelled to pay homage to Picasso is hardly surprising—Marisol, along with many others of her generation, produced assemblages, a mode of art-making that many historians have argued is rooted in the innovations of Picasso and Braque during the Cubist era. Her *Picasso*, with its gently sculpted eyes and nose, suggests a tender homage to an icon of modernism whose influence continues to loom large. But that didn't mean that Marisol couldn't make her own interventions. She dramatically alters Picasso's body by fusing together elements of two famous photographs of him, resulting in four hands.

Beatriz González, *Mural para Fabrica Socialista*, 1981



Beatriz González, *Mural para Fabrica Socialista*, 1981.

Photo : Courtesy Casas Riegner, Bogotá

Before the Colombian artist Beatriz González ventured into more explicitly political terrain, she made a series of works that took up art history. First she borrowed elements from hallowed paintings by Vermeer, Renoir, Manet, and others. Then she rendered them in garish colors, turning them from high art to kitsch. Her goal was to find a way of recasting these masterpieces for a Third World audience that had encountered them mainly through reproductions in books and magazines—a far cry, of course, from the real things.

The culmination of that series was this vast mural based on *Guernica*. González's version trades Picasso's black and gray tones for blues and yellows and swaps out his oil paint and canvas for enamel on wood, a traditionally déclassé way of working that's more traditionally associated with sign painting and vernacular architecture than fine art. While respectful of Picasso's work—almost all of its original elements remain present—González has framed it with a checkerboard pattern on either side, depriving it of some pathos. The work's title, *Mural para Fabrica Socialista*, translates to *Mural for a Socialist Factory*, suggesting an intent to reach the general public, rather than the cultivated collectors and gallerists with whom Picasso deal during his lifetime. Notably, her work is 40 feet wide, outdoing Picasso by more than 15 feet.

Lubaina Himid, *A Fashionable Marriage*, 1987



Lubaina Himid, *A Fashionable Marriage*, 1987.

Photo : Getty Images

Lubaina Himid, a key figure of the British Black arts movement, made a habit of alluding to Picasso during the 1980s, frequently plucking figures straight out of his paintings, often toward even more subversive ends. Her famed 1984 installation *Freedom and Change* draws heavily on Picasso's ***Two Women Running on the Beach*** (<https://celebracionpicasso.es/en/noticia/artwork-week-two-women-running-beach>), a 1922 painting from his classical era in which two women hold hands as they dash along a shoreline. Himid recasts the two bathers as Black women more modestly dressed than Picasso's white figures, whose breasts spill out of their robes.

In a less obvious way, *A Fashionable Marriage*, too, pays homage to Picasso while also undermining the power his art holds over the canon. Himid's piece takes as its inspiration William Hogarth's 1743–45 series "Marriage A-la-Mode," a send-up of upper-class social mores in England, and revises these paintings' clusters of figures to speak to the networks Himid inhabited during the 1980s as a Zanzibar-born Black woman working in a white-dominated British art world.

Drawing on the look of theater designs that Himid studied in school, the installation is

Drawing on the look of theater designs that Frank Stella in 1969, the installation is broken into two portions, one called “The Art World,” the other titled “The Real World.” A skirted figure that personifies the Black artist is situated between the two, with two Picassoid drawings hanging on a wall in “The Real World” nearby. Both show bulls; one even shows a bovine mounting a nude woman who lies submissive beneath. Text reading “CUT THE BULL” is appended to one of these images, suggesting that liberation lies ahead when white artists like Picasso are finally removed from the equation.

Robert Colescott, *Les Demoiselles d'Alabama: Vestidas*, 1985



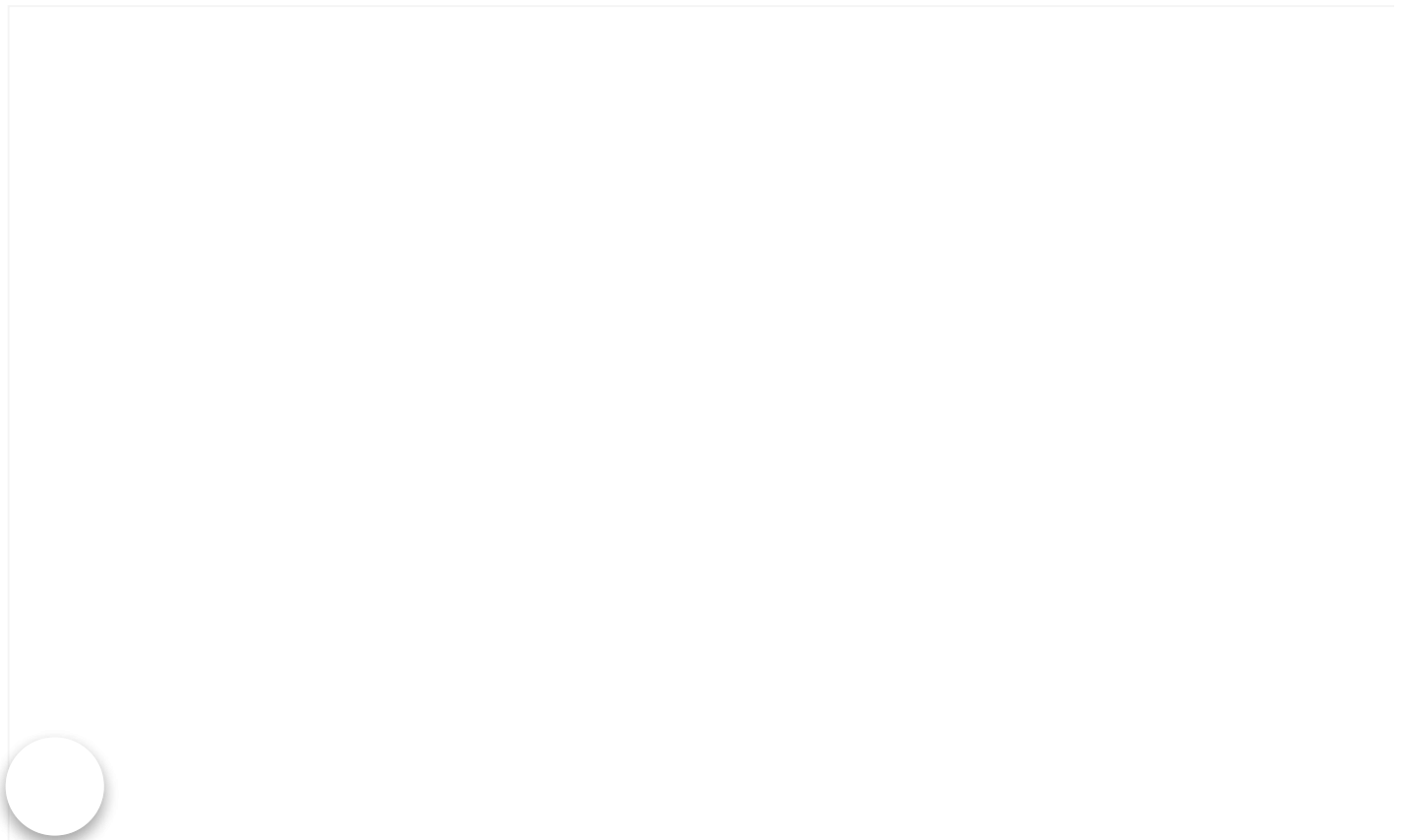
Robert Colescott, *Les Demoiselles d'Alabama: Vestidas*, 1985.

Photo : Artwork ©2023 The Robert H. Colescott Separate Property Trust/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Collection Seattle Art Museum

Les Femmes d'Alger, one of Picasso's early creative breakthroughs, is remixed in this painting by Robert Colescott, who transports the setting from a brothel in southern France to the American South. The composition remains similar, with five busty women in suggestive poses. Colescott's rendition is in some ways even more erotic than Picasso's image—his femmes are given even more pronounced breasts and buttocks, particularly in the case of the blonde figure, whose behind is so defined that it looks uncomfortable for her to remain seated. Colescott swaps out Picasso's blues and whites for garish bubblegum pinks and sickly greens, heightening the luridness.

As mentioned above, it has commonly been suggested that *Les Femmes d'Alger*, like many other Picasso works, drew its abstractions from African art—the seated woman in Picasso's work even appears to have a mask for a face. Colescott is viewing Picasso through the lens of Blackness, even depicting multiple models who are not white. Does Colescott view Picasso's artwork as racist? He stops short of saying that explicitly, but notably, in place of the generic melon in Picasso's painting, Colescott offers a slice of what is clearly watermelon, the fruit that often appears in racist caricatures of Black people that have proliferated throughout American history.

Louise Lawler, *Woman with Picasso*, 1912., 1986





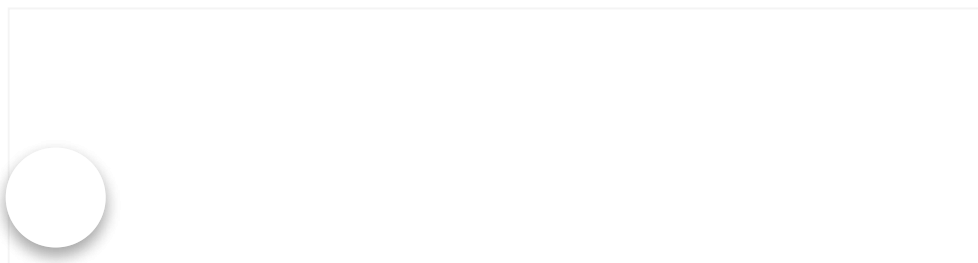
Louise Lawler, *Woman with Picasso, 1912.*, 1986.

Photo : Courtesy the artist and Sprüth Magers

Many of Louise Lawler's photographs slyly reorient famed art objects, showing how these works can be seen only in the context of their makers, the market, and the male-dominated canon. At first glance, this photograph offers pretty much just what its title suggests: a professionally dressed woman holding a Picasso guitar sculpture. But the name of the photograph is also a sneaky pun on a familiar art-historical naming convention. Picasso himself utilized it for works such as *Woman with Yellow Hair* (<https://www.guggenheim.org/teaching-materials/selections-from-the-permanent-collection/pablo-picasso-1881-1973-woman-with-yellow-hair>) (1931) and *Woman with Pears* (<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80394>) (1909), to name just two.

In labeling her work in this way, Lawler is offering a feminist subversion of Picasso's formula. If Picasso's women were typically passive (*Woman with Yellow Hair* features one in a gentle slumber), Lawler's female figure is much more active, with one hand even caught in mid motion. Yet the name also implies a biting critique of what's taking place here. Lawler's woman goes unidentified, with part of her head cropped out, while the sculpture's male maker is given a name, suggesting an imbalanced power dynamic.

Juan Davila, *Picasso Theft*, 1991





Juan Davila, *Picasso Theft*, 1991.

Photo : ©Juan Davila/Courtesy Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art

There have been many instances in the past half-century when Picasso's works were stolen, but no instance hit a nerve quite like the time in 1986 when *Weeping Woman* (1937) was taken from the National Gallery of Victoria in Australia. Its thieves left a note behind, saying they had pilfered the picture to highlight inequities in Australian arts funding—the museum had spent AUD\$1.6 million to purchase the Picasso. Indeed, artists were so enraged by the amount doled out for *Weeping Woman*'s acquisition that they created their own copies in an attempt to point up how we conceive of an artwork's worth. (The original was recovered just over two weeks after the theft.)

The Chilean-Australian artist Juan Davila was among those who appropriated Picasso's composition and crafted his own, even offering it to the National Gallery of Victoria for purchase to make up for the stolen piece. (Davila has said the museum ultimately mailed him a rejection letter.) When Davila's copy went on view at Sydney University, it, too, was stolen, and he ended up remaking it. This copy of a copy, now owned by Monash University in Melbourne, has added to it a frame that reads "PUTO," the Spanish slur for a male sex worker, which Davila has said refers both to Picasso himself and to the director of the National Gallery. Both were "social climbers," in Davila's estimation.



Faith Ringgold, *Picasso's Studio: The French Collection Part I, #7, 1991*

Faith Ringgold, *Picasso's Studio*, 1991.

Photo : ©Worcester Art Museum/Bridgeman Images/Artwork ©2023 Faith Ringgold/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Courtesy ACA Galleries, New York

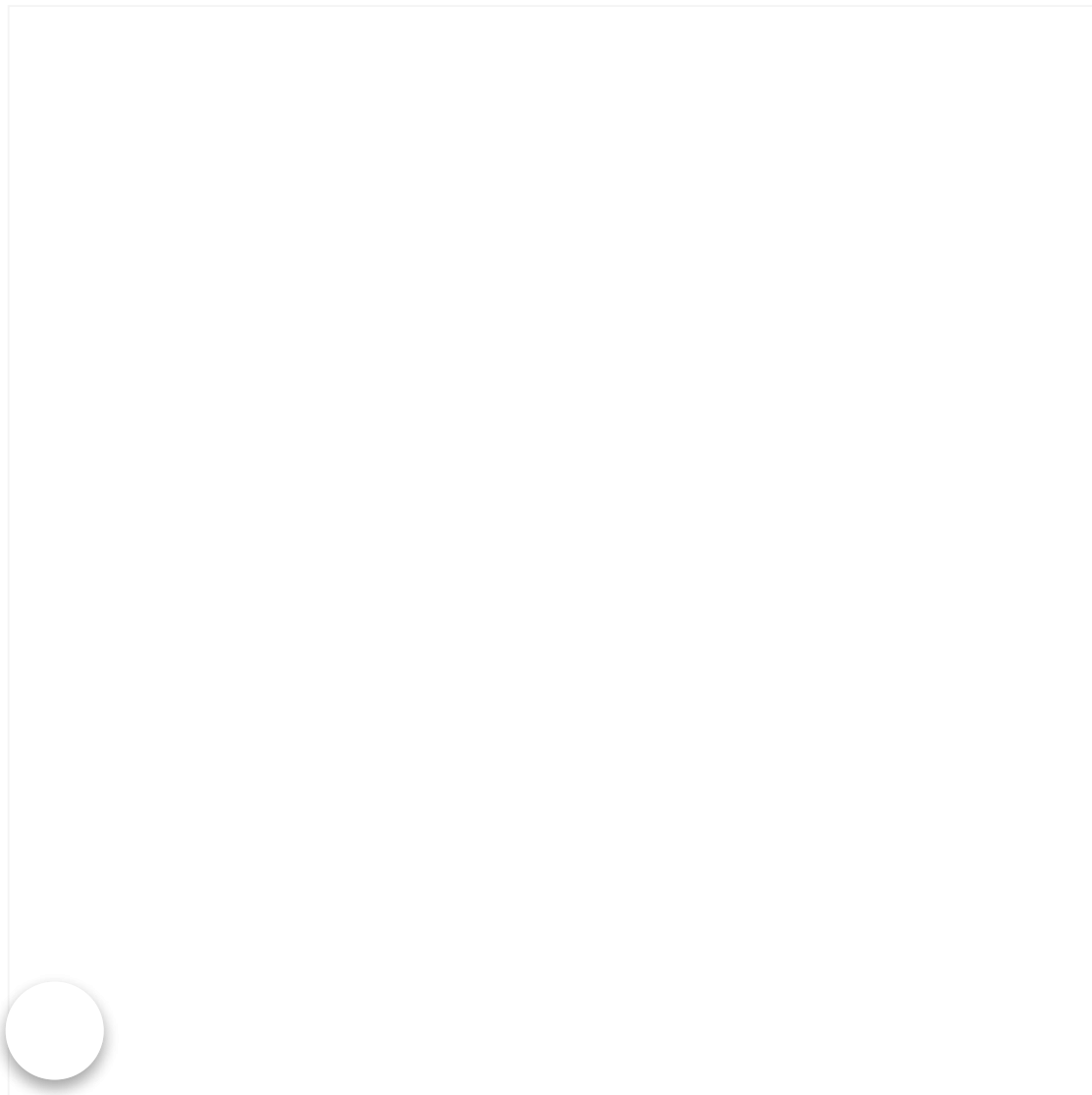
In recent years, the artwork by Faith Ringgold most commonly compared to Picasso has been *American People Series #20: Die* (1967), her *Guernica*-like painting of a tumult of Black and white people doing violence to one another. But the Ringgold work that's most explicitly connected to Picasso is this quilted painting, which is part of a cycle of works called "The French Collection." That series' protagonist is Willia Marie Simone, a young Black woman who travels from the United States to France in the 1920s with the aim of becoming an artist herself. Willia, a composite of Ringgold and her mother, is fictional, but she becomes absorbed into our art-historical reality.

Here, she models as an odalisque before *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* (1911), a painting whose five figures have often been interpreted as sex workers, their abstracted faces often thought to derive from the African art that Picasso adored. If the narrative around Picasso hinges on white male genius, Ringgold refocuses it so that a Black woman is now centered. By lavishing attention on Willia and by rendering Picasso in painted quilting—

a medium male critics have long thought to be déclassé and feminine—Ringgold makes some edits to the narrative surrounding an artist for whom she has expressed admiration.

And, even if Picasso did not make much of his African inspirations, Ringgold suggests that it is ultimately upon us to right his wrongs. “He has the power to deny what he doesn’t want to acknowledge,” Willia writes to her Aunt Marie in text scrawled near the bottom edge of the quilt. “But art is the truth, not the artist. Doesn’t matter what he says about where it comes from. We see where, every time we look in the mirror.”

Fred Wilson, *Picasso/Whose Rules?*, 1991



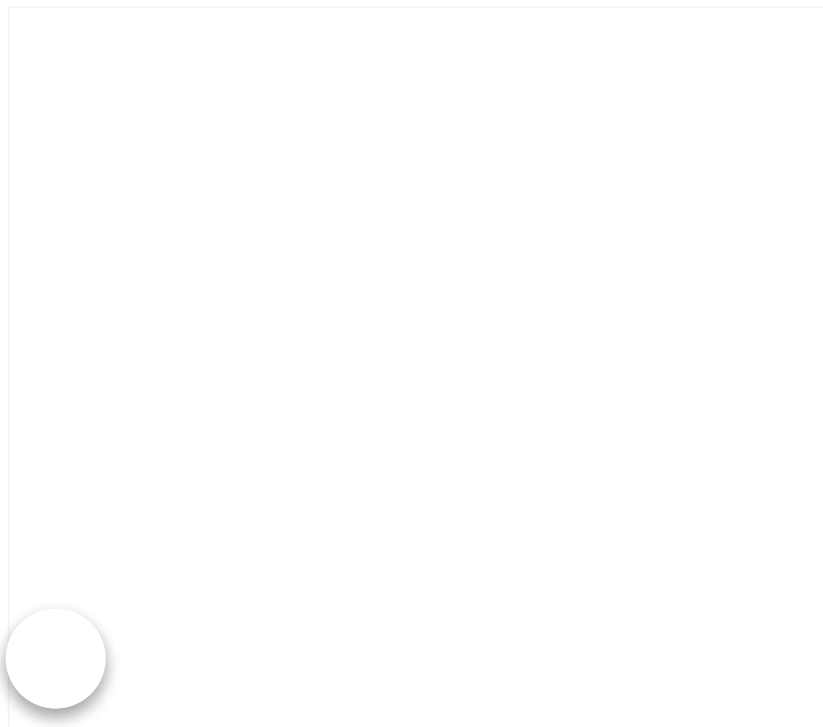
Fred Wilson, *Picasso/Whose Rules?*, 1991.

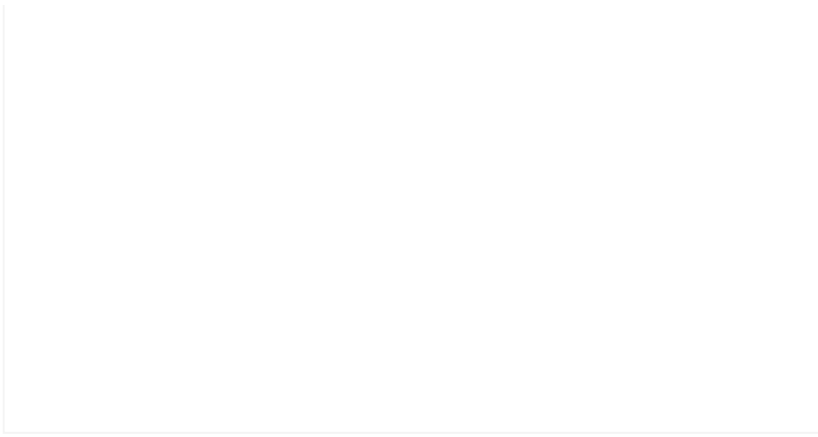
Photo : ©Fred Wilson/Courtesy Pace Gallery

With this work, Fred Wilson took up the fraught history of Picasso and African art, using *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* as a prime example of the baggage his paintings often carry. Wilson appropriates that painting's composition, reproducing it at full scale. To one crouching figure he's added an actual Kifwebe mask. Behind its eyes, Wilson has placed a monitor that plays a video of Wilson staring outward. In doing so, he begs Western viewers to see the African perspective that has for so long been diminished in Picasso's work.

Picasso/Whose Rules? was produced less than a decade after the Museum of Modern Art's infamously botched 1984 exhibition "Primitivism' in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern," which sought to explore how Western modernists dialogued with objects such as African masks. Many critics had asserted that the show failed to meaningfully engage with the African artworks, repeating a colonialist impulse along the way. As if to further underscore the problems of that show and other, similar studies on the subject, Wilson's layering of the Kifwebe mask on the Picasso reproduction suggests that Western modernism can never be fully disentangled from African art, no matter how many attempts are made to keep the two apart.

Miriam Cahn, *weinende frau nach picasso (29.12.1992) (woman weeping according to picasso [29.12.1992])*, 1992





Miriam Cahn, *weinende frau nach picasso (29.12.1992) (woman weeping according to picasso [29.12.1992])*, 1992.

Photo : Museo Reina Sofia

Miriam Cahn has described an aversion to—and a pull toward—Picasso’s paintings of crying women, which many feminist art historians have described as being borne out of his most violent, manipulative tendencies. In a 1994 text called “**PICASSO** (<https://miriamcahn.com/picasso-2/>),” which she read aloud as a performance that same year, she recalled encountering these paintings in shows in Berlin and Basel and realizing they brought up memories of television images showing the violence of the wars in Yugoslavia, which at the time were still taking place. In her breathless, largely unpunctuated text, she wrote, “every day images were shown me were commented on looked at me out of the television torture concentration camps raping of women and girls women who were carrying their relatives to the grave whose faces had this expression of picassos weeping women.”

This 1992 drawing is one of the works that Cahn produced in response to the atrocities taking place in Yugoslavia. Dashed off quickly from memory, it shows a partly formed being with a spine, two eyes, and a mass of gray that may function as a torrent of tears. For Cahn, the Picassoid grief represented is meant to portray a specifically female perspective. This approach, she wrote, allowed her to “put this artist myth that i had loved so much behind me assign it to my past and to history.”

Amos, *Muse Picasso*, 1997



Emma Amos, *Muse Picasso*, 1997.

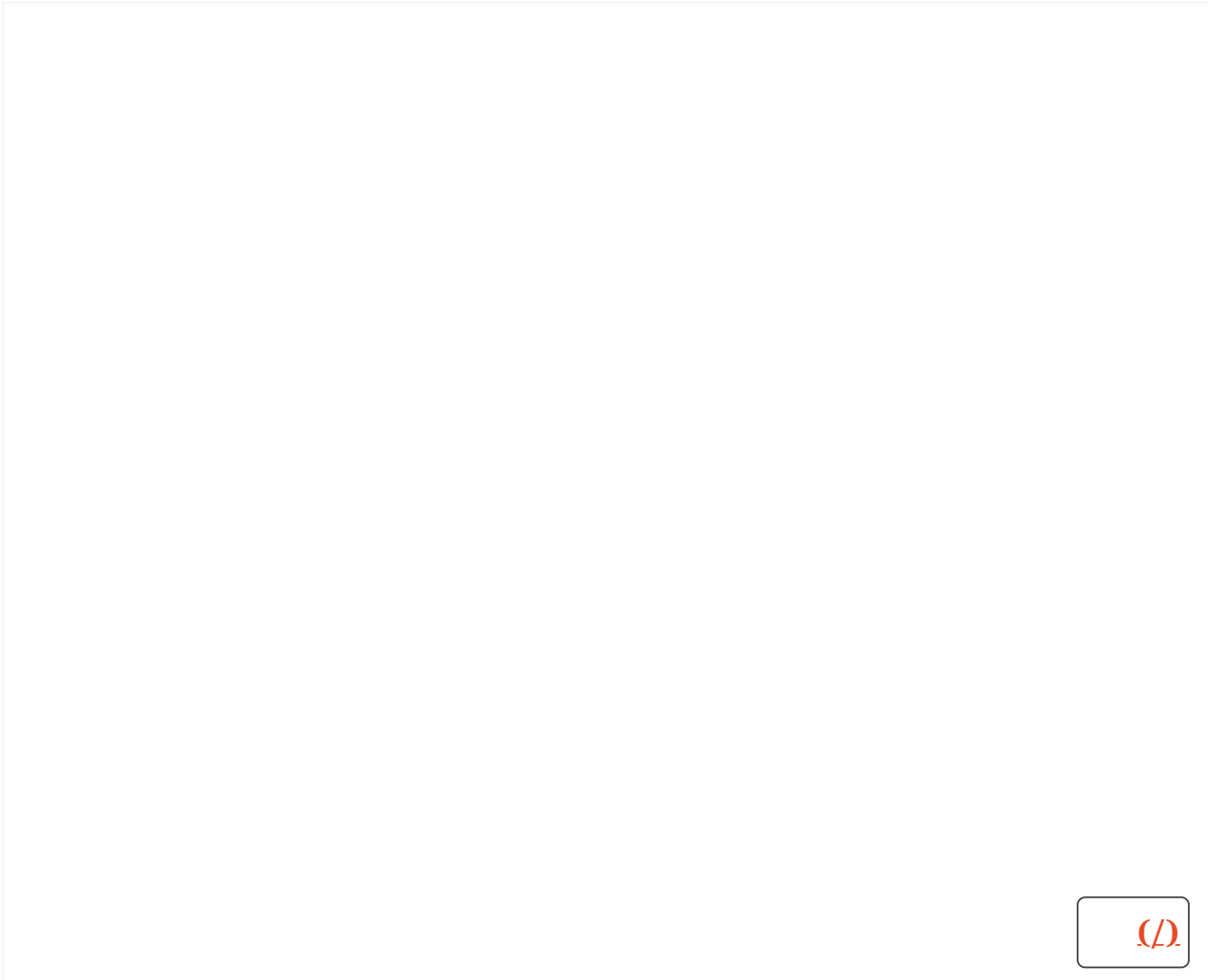
Photo : Courtesy of the artist and Ryan Lee Gallery/Artwork ©2023 Emma Amos/Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

The delicate wordplay of this piece's title puns the names of the Musées Picasso that have proliferated across France while also alluding to how the artist's reputation was built on the women whom he took as his muses. The power imbalance of those relationships informs Emma Amos's approach to Picasso. *Genius* appears on this apron, along with *inspiration* and *seminal*. These are terms that have been applied to Picasso and his images of women such as Dora Maar, Françoise Gilot, and Olga Khokhlova. These women were artists of various kinds, and historians have been keen to reclaim them as such. Perhaps in a nod to this rewriting, Amos, too, asserts herself as something more than a muse to others, empowering herself as a Black woman artist.

Specifically, Amos is interested in the Africans whose culture became an influence for Picasso. She crafts this apron out of Bakuba and Kente cloth and adorns it with a swatch from *Les Femmes d'Alger*, whose figures were themselves inspired by Pende masks. Alongside that image Amos places a portrait of herself, an unmissable assertion of her presence matters, even when compared with a white male with far more name recognition. That she has situated all this not on a canvas but on an apron, an object

associated with housework and femininity, marks yet another attempt to cut Picasso down to size.

Chéri Samba, *Quand il n'y avait plus rien d'autre que... L'Afrique restait une pensée*, 1997



Chéri Samba, *Quand il n'y avait plus rien d'autre que... L'Afrique restait une pensée*, 1997.

Photo : Courtesy Galerie Magnin-A, Paris

Like others on this list, Chéri Samba views Picasso critically, offering him as the prime example of a Western modernist whose influences drawn from African art amount to something like theft. Samba, a painter from Democratic Republic of Congo, puts Picasso under the microscope in this work, which alludes to the irony that, at the time the work was made, Picasso's art could be seen in museums across the globe while that of African like Samba generally could not.

Here, Samba shows Picasso seated at a table where rolls are arranged to resemble his fattened fingers—a reference to a famed photograph of Picasso that is also taken up in a 2010 Yasumasa Morimura portrait on this list. That photograph is almost as well known as the image of a dove carrying an olive branch that Picasso created, which today acts as a shorthand for international peace. But Samba asserts that Picasso’s work was anything but peaceful, since it led to the erasure of African artists by white Westerners who drew on their creations during the early 20th century. The work’s somber title suggests a reckoning with Africa that remains to be had. It translates from the French to: “When there was nothing left . . . Africa remained a thought.”

Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled (Picasso)*, 1998





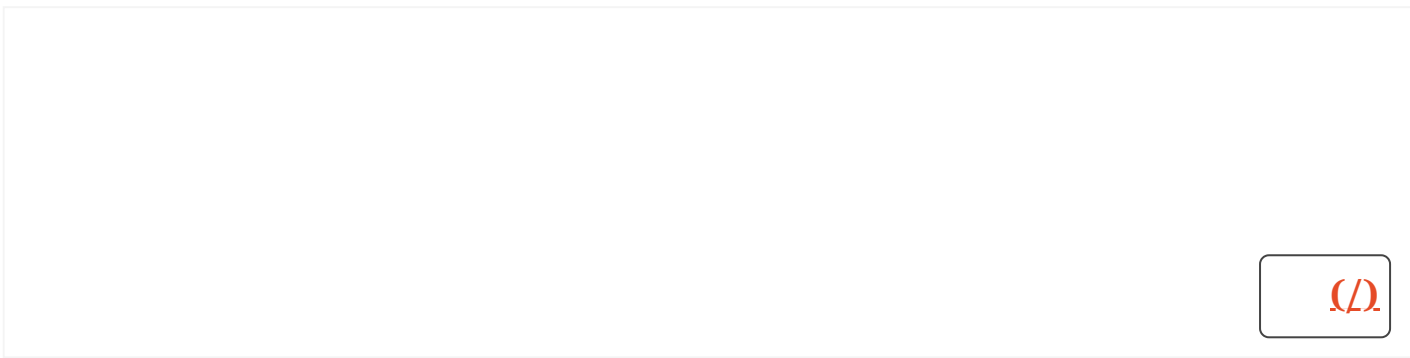
Maurizio Cattelan, *Untitled (Picasso)*, 1998.

Photo : ©Maurizio Cattelan and Museum of Modern Art/Photo Thomas Griesel/Courtesy the artist and Museum of Modern Art Archives

Long before he taped a banana to a wall and labeled it art, Maurizio Cattelan staged this performance spoofing Picasso's fame, viewing it as something now akin to a brand. Cattelan performed the work at New York's Museum of Modern Art, which has a long history of showing Picasso, acquiring his art before many major museums in France did so. MoMA's 1984 retrospective of his work lured more than 1 million visitors, setting an attendance record that stood for years.

The museum's continued reliance on Picasso's celebrity spurred Cattelan to bring in an actor and dress him like Picasso, Breton shirt and all. For a show mounted through MoMA's "Projects" series, Cattelan had that actor walk around an atrium in the museum for roughly a month. Visitors could pose with this not-Picasso, who in one memorable photograph can be seen lounging on the museum's floor. Cattelan's Picasso was outfitted with a giant sculpted head—a nod, perhaps, to both the Spaniard's narcissism and the way his popularity at MoMA had grown to outsize proportions.

Dia al-Azzawi, *Mission of Destruction*, 2004–7



Dia al-Azzawi, *Mission of Destruction*, 2004–7.

Photo : ©2023 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London/Azzawi Collection

Many artists have taken up specific Picasso compositions to transpose his subject matter onto current events. In the case of Dia al-Azzawi's *Mission of Destruction*, the reference point is ***Massacre in Korea*** (<https://museupicassobcn.cat/en/whats-on/discover-online/massacre-korea-guernica-cold-war>) (1951), Picasso's famed painting, made in protest of the Korean War, showing women and children being killed by firing squad. Al-Azzawi lifts Picasso's composition, in which civilians are depicted on the left side of the canvas and violent soldiers on the right, for his own work, which features a large spray of red emanating from a tangle of bodies whose gray tones

which features a large spray of red emanating from a tangle of bodies whose gray tones also recall Picasso's masterpiece *Guernica*, depicting the horrors of the Spanish Civil War.

Al-Azzawi's painting is not about the Korean War but about the Iraq War, in particular the atrocities wrought by American troops. Its name suggests a revised version of George W. Bush's notorious "Mission Accomplished" speech from 2003, with the implication that the true directive was bloodshed, not victory. By looking back to Picasso's antiwar painting from 1951 for his own 49-foot-wide epic, this Iraqi artist situates both images along a continuum of merciless, inhumane U.S. interventions abroad.

Zhang Hongtu, *Bird's Nest in the Style of Cubism*, 2008





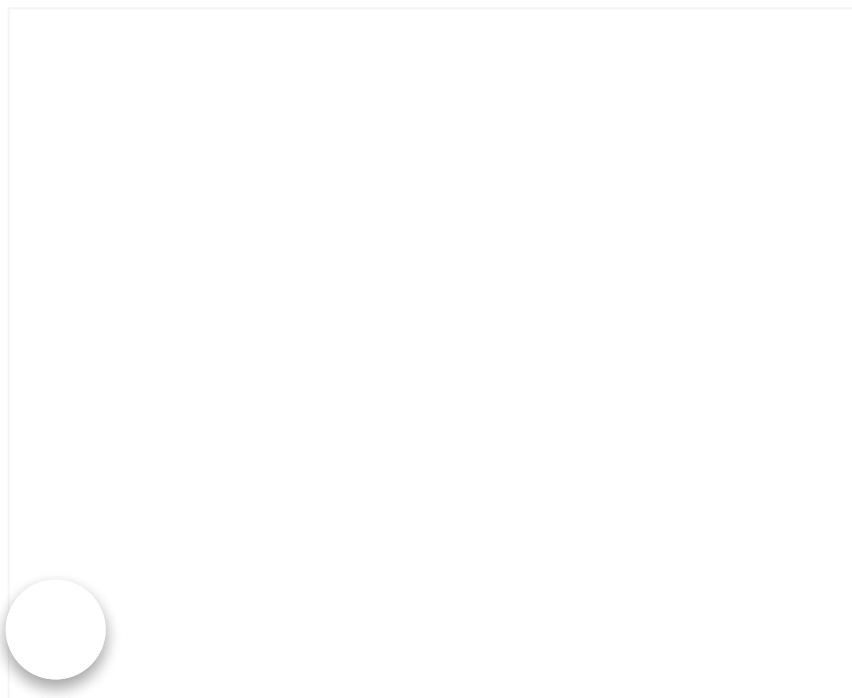
Zhang Hongtu, *Bird's Nest in the Style of Cubism*, 2008.

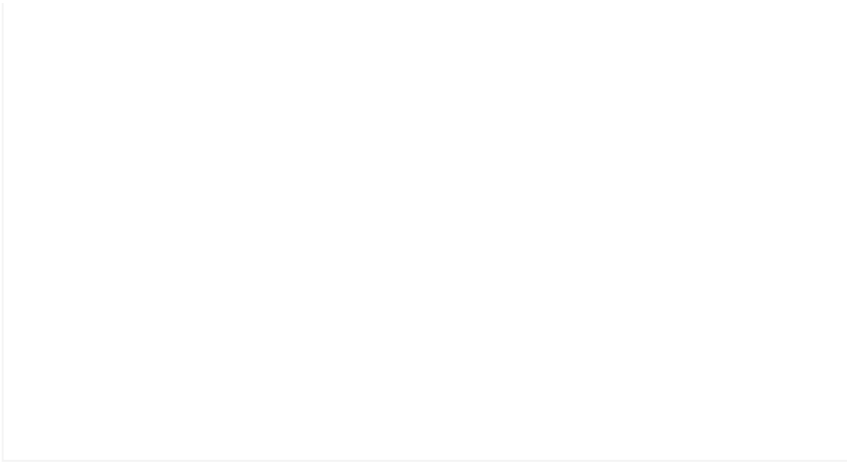
Photo : Courtesy the artist and Baahng Gallery

Critics have disagreed on just how political Picasso's analytic Cubist paintings were, yet there can be no question that Zhang Hongtu's *Bird's Nest in the Style of Cubism*, a contemporary riff on that style, explicitly contends with the issues of our time. Zhang's painting reimagines the Beijing National Stadium as a splintered mix of geometric planes interspersed with text. More affectionately known as the Bird's Nest, the stadium was built to house the 2008 Olympic Games and was a symbol of Chinese nationalism for artists like Zhang, who took a critical perspective of this gleaming structure designed by Herzog & de Meuron.

Zhang's take on the arena still contains the crisscrosses of intertwined metal strips from its facade, but beyond that, the stadium now seems to have come apart to a point where it is unrecognizable. In disassembling the stadium, Zhang reveals the seamy underbelly of Chinese politics, dropping explicit references to Tibet, where the Chinese government reportedly continues to oppress citizens. As a result, Zhang's painting was barred from entering Beijing. As the Western media took note of the ban, Zhang stuck to his guns, saying that with this work and others, he had infused European masterpieces with "the true beauty of now."

Yasumasa Morimura, *A Requiem: Theater of Creativity/ Self-portrait as Pablo Picasso*, 2010





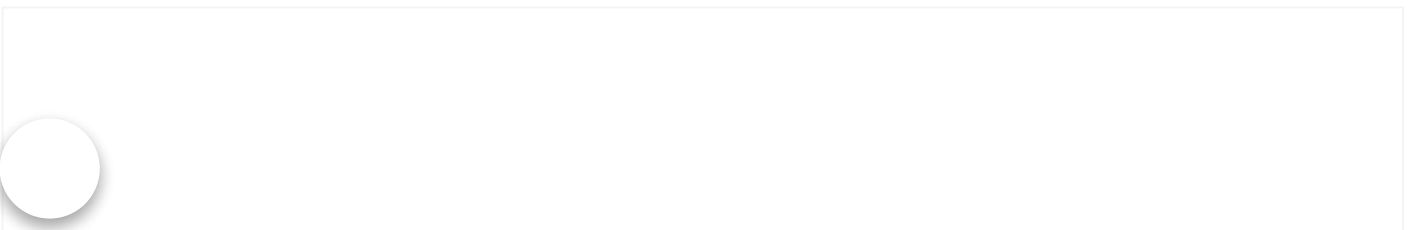
Yasumasa Morimura, *A Requiem: Theater of Creativity/ Self-portrait as Pablo Picasso*, 2010.

Photo : ©Yasumasa Morimura/Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York

For his photographs, Yasumasa Morimura has regularly dressed up as famous people, from Albert Einstein to Mao Zedong, and even inserted himself into art-historical images by Rembrandt, van Gogh, and many more. In the process, the Japanese photographer crosses gender lines, racial divides, and national borders, all in service of showing how identity has been performed across the years.

This picture shows Morimura inhabiting a famed photograph in which Picasso is seated at a table, posed before groupings of rolls made to look like engorged fingers. As in most of Morimura's photographs, the transformation is convincing but not altogether perfect: this not-Picasso's bald head and wrinkled cheeks look oddly rubbery. Add to this the fact that Morimura has tweaked his source photo significantly, placing a plate shaped like a *Guernica* figure on the table and a Picasso monograph in the background. These added elements make obvious just how constructed Morimura's photograph is—and, by extension, how carefully manufactured Picasso's self-image as a genius was.

Khaled Hourani, *Picasso in Palestine*, 2011





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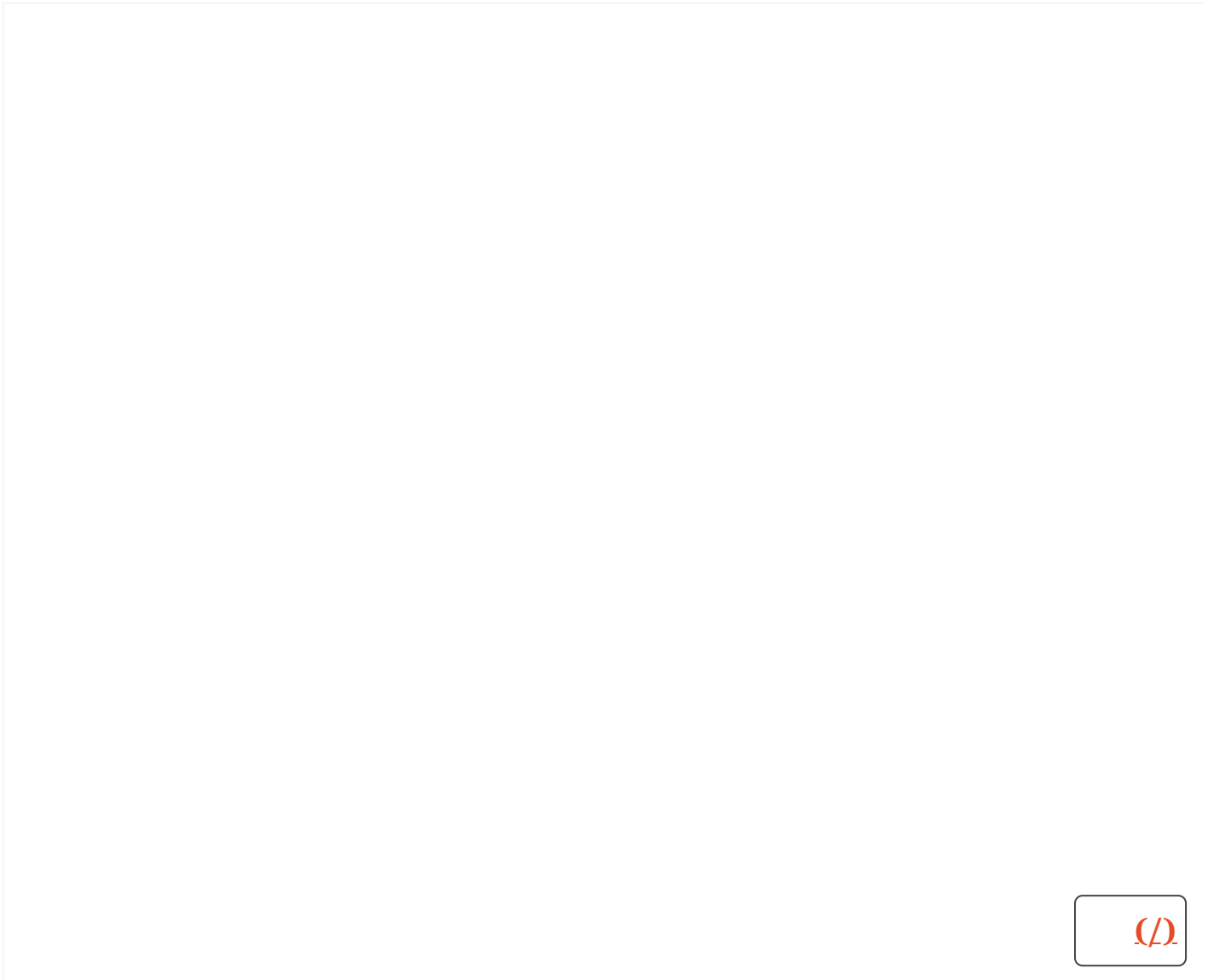
Photo : Courtesy the artist and Zawyeh Gallery

You can find Picassos these days in just about every major city around the world, from Paris to São Paulo, but one place you can't, at least not most of the time, is Ramallah. That all changed in 2011 when the artist Khaled Hourani succeeded in bringing a Picasso painting there for a conceptual project titled *Picasso in Palestine*, which was documented via a film of the same name that Hourani made with Rashid Masharawi.

For *Picasso in Palestine*, Hourani brought *Buste de Femme* (1943), valued at \$7.1 million, from the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, to the International Academy of Art Palestine in Ramallah. Loans such as this are typical in hubs like New York and Paris, but pulling it off in a place so heavily militarized posed unique challenges for Hourani, who spent two years securing the painting's trip. Along the way, he faced quandaries that museums don't usually have to deal with—such as whether the Oslo Accords applied to lending art to a West Bank institution. Also at issue was how Ramallah residents might receive a Picasso painting, given that no work by him had ever made it there before. When the painting did finally go on view, flanked by two armed guards, 6,000 people reportedly came in 24 days.



Rachel Harrison, Untitled, 2011



Rachel Harrison, *Untitled*, 2011.

Photo : Photo John Berens/Courtesy the artist and Greene Naftali, New York

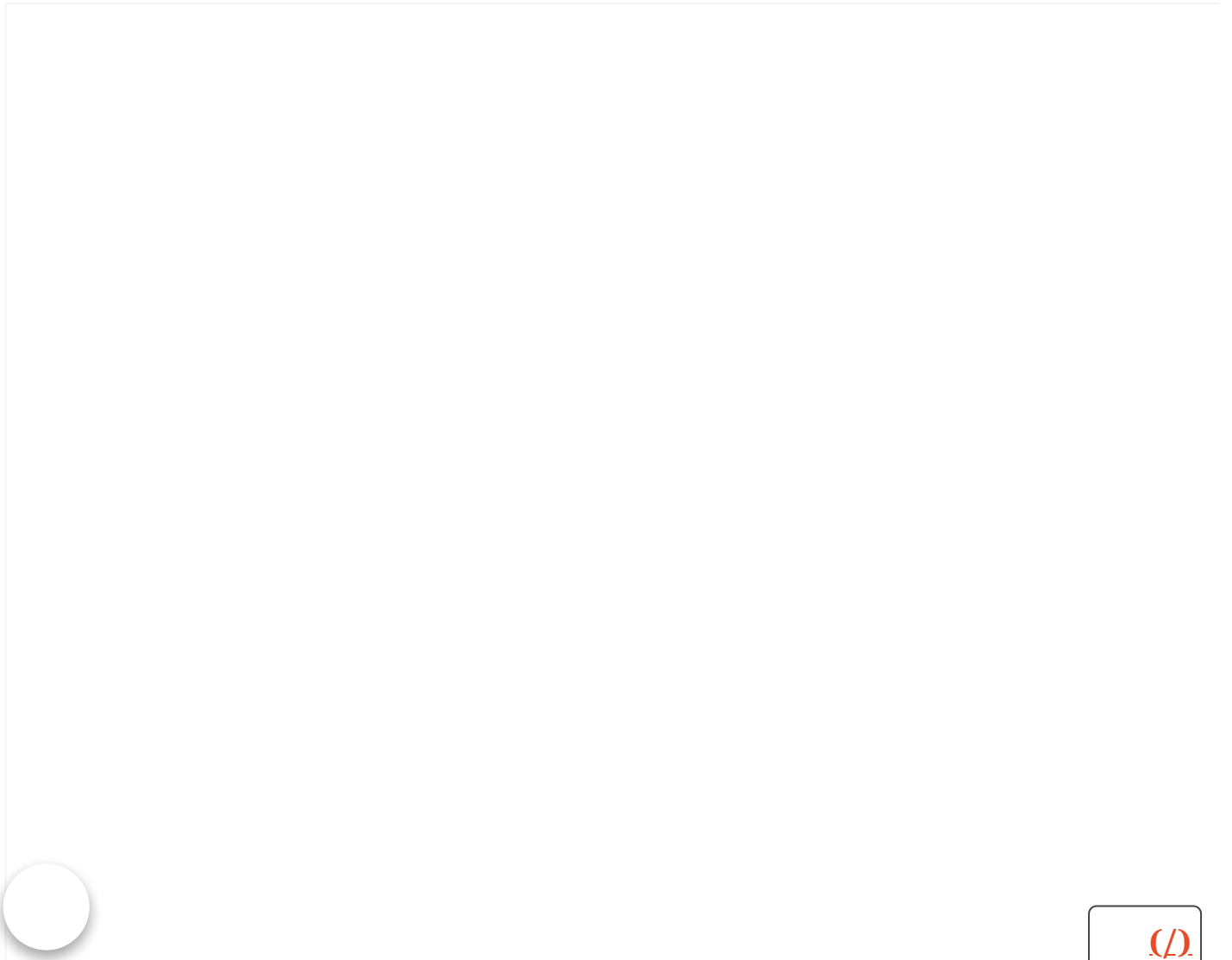
Rachel Harrison's 2012 show at the Greene Naftali gallery in New York was as cryptic as any she's ever done. Titled "The Help," seemingly in reference to a then popular Kathryn Stockett novel whose racially tinged melodrama drew criticism, the show brought with it a press release that was mostly what purported to be an "old tale, almost certainly apocryphal," about Picasso. It laid out a brief narrative about why Picasso disavowed realism and how the artist dissed an unnamed man's wife, laying the groundwork for an examination of misogyny and the flawed concept of the muse.

What viewers got was something a lot more amorphous than that: a show of whatsit sculptures paired with a series of pencil drawings featuring the singer Amy Winehouse, who had died the year before of alcohol poisoning. In some, Winehouse cavorts with male painters like Martin Kippenberger and Picasso himself. In others, she appears beside figures from Picasso's art, like Marie-Thérèse Walter, with whom Picasso became infatuated when she was still a teenager, or the Harlequin character that recurs in Picasso's oeuvre, including works such as *At the Lapin Agile* (1905), to which the

Harrison piece above alludes. Even critics were befuddled. “The attitude seems to be part ridicule and part homage; it is altogether confounding,” wrote the *New Yorker*’s Peter Schjeldahl.

With hindsight, however, Harrison’s intentions become crystal clear. She was questioning how female stars—Winehouse, Walter, Gertrude Stein, and many more—get consumed by history, only to be lumped together and remade to fit the moment. These women were largely ignored in 2023, as many museums in the West toasted Picasso on the 50th anniversary of his death—and that only underlines Harrison’s point.

Kent Monkman, *The Deposition*, 2014



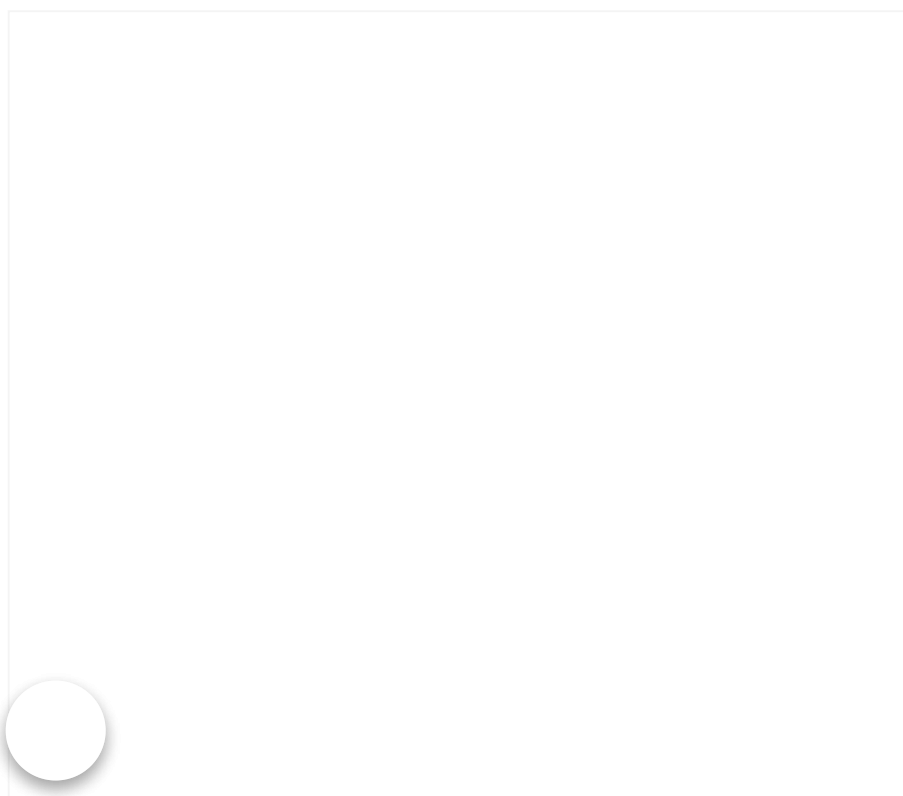
Kent Monkman, *The Deposition*, 2014.

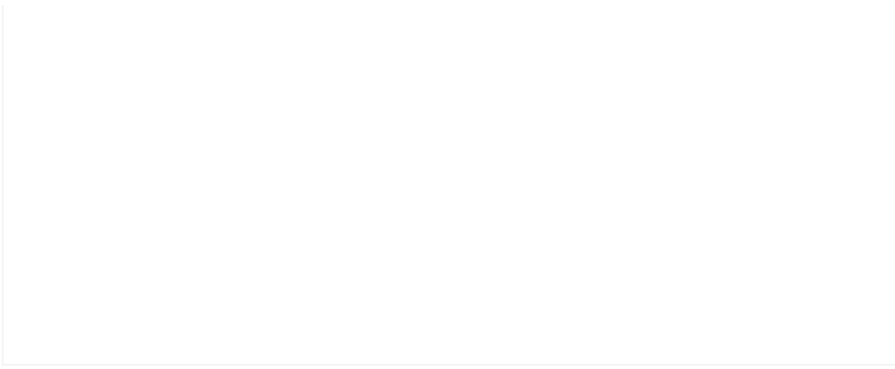
Photo : Courtesy the artist

For his 2014 “Urban Res” series, Kent Monkman, a Cree artist with Irish ancestry, focused on the North End neighborhood of Winnipeg, Manitoba, the Canadian city where he was raised. He appropriated figures from modernist art and placed them amid settings that would be familiar to locals, whose many Indigenous residents are “treated like second-class citizens,” as Monkman once said. To reflect on the racism experienced in the city, Monkman meditated on the violence wrought by male modernists like Picasso.

In the case of *The Deposition*, Monkman seizes on a female figure from *Guernica*, whom he colorizes in fleshy shades. This figure is shown slumped across the lap of Monkman’s gender-fluid alter ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. Other indigenous figures are grouped around them. The composition recalls centuries-old representations of the deposition of Christ, as painted by artists such as Caravaggio and Rogier van der Weyden, but the garb of the Indigenous figures is distinctly contemporary. Referring to Picasso and his colleagues, Monkman once told the CBC, “I wanted to use their ways of painting the female nude to talk about violence perpetrated against Indigenous people, and also the violence perpetrated against the female spirit.”

Sara Cwynar, *Women*, 2015





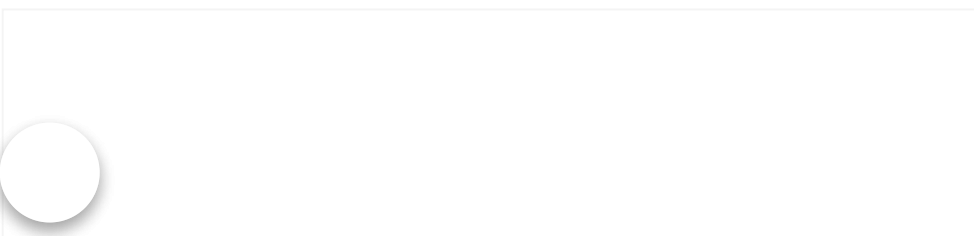
Sara Cwynar, *Women*, 2015.

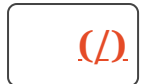
Photo : Courtesy the artist and the Approach, London

In 2019, on commission for the Museum of Modern Art, Sara Cwynar produced “Modern Art in Your Life,” a series of videos about the history of MoMA’s collection and the objects held within. The museum owns many Picassos (including *Les Femmes d’Alger*), and Cwynar shot footage of one of them using a kind of lens that provides an unusual level of detail. It was an effort, she said at the time, to get at what pictures of his work reveal and conceal: “Something that seems really familiar and benign, like a painting of flowers, actually has so much politics in it. I’ve been trying to pull those things apart.”

Four years earlier, Cwynar had already done something similar with *Women*, a photograph that contains a reproduction of *Les Femmes d’Alger*. One is tempted to say that in this image, the picture is being touched by someone’s hand—perhaps Cwynar’s. But the reality is more complex, since there are six fingers represented, five of them touching Picasso’s five women and one that touches a part of the image in which nobody is represented. The titular women may refer to the *demoselles* and their viewer. For once, that viewer may be female instead of male.

Mequitta Ahuja, *Le Damn Revisited*, 2018





Mequitta Ahuja, *Le Damn Revisited*, 2018.

Photo : Courtesy the artist

Many, including the artist Mequitta Ahuja, have interpreted the women of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* as monstrous beings with aloof gazes. In an attempt to view those brutally rendered figures from a female perspective, Ahuja produced *Le Damn* (2018), a painting that reinterprets the *demoiselles* so that their gazes are softened. One appears pregnant and forlorn; another, in the center, has for her body a face that looks a lot like one belonging to a weeping woman of Picasso's 1930s paintings. Ahuja has called her painting a "decolonizing act."

That same year, Ahuja went back to *Le Damn* and revised the composition to now include herself; the artist can be seen lounging on a blue drape spread across two chairs. She rests one hand on her own bulging belly and holds a printed sonogram of her child, smiling a little as she does so. Ahuja has publicly spoken of a miscarriage, her infertility, and the conception of her son through IVF. With all of that as a backdrop, Ahuja has stated that *Le Damn Revisited* and its counterparts highlight and rebut Picasso's violence against the female body.



e Calle, A toi de faire, ma mignonne, 2023



View of “Sophie Calle: A toi de faire, ma mignonne,” 2023, at au Musée National Picasso Paris.

Photo : Photo Vinciane Lebrun/Voyez-Vous; Art: ©2023 Sophie Calle/ADAGP, Paris

The year 2023 was filled with many exhibitions held to mark the 50th anniversary of Picasso’s death: a 1,000-piece works-on-paper blockbuster at Paris’s Centre Pompidou, a show Titled “Picasso 1906” at Madrid’s Museo Reina Sofía, the notoriously maligned “It’s Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby” at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. None of these shows looked quite like what Sophie Calle staged for the Musée Picasso in Paris, whose galleries she largely emptied out and filled mainly with interventions of her own making. She had been approached by the museum to do a project in 2018 and, feeling she had nothing much to say about Picasso, decided to change things up entirely. The result: a show meditating on the artist’s ghostly afterlife as a figure who looms large—and sometimes menacingly so—over the canon.

The spectral presence Calle summoned did involve some Picasso works, but rather than showing them off, she cloaked them in white cloth, as though they were pieces of furniture in an abandoned house. Around them were various homages to Picasso: a 200-piece shrine to *Guernica* featuring artworks by some of Calle’s colleagues, a series of portraits of blind people meant as an obscure allusion to the time a French association

for the blind called on Picasso to help it raise funds. The show proposed that Picasso has lived on well after his death in 1973. “Picasso saw death in completion and refused to make his [last] will and testament—‘that attracts death,’ he would say,” Calle **told** **ARTnews** (<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/sophie-calle-musee-picasso-paris-exhibition-1234681114/>). “I prefer [to] play with it, but maybe it comes from the same fear.”



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