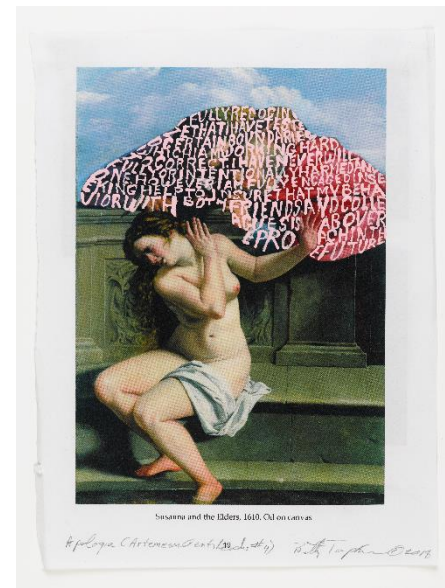


Press Release

***It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby* Opens June 2, 2023**

With over one hundred artworks by Picasso and a range of feminist artists, the exhibition reckons with the complex social legacies that have emerged around Picasso's art and biography in the fifty years since his death



Left: Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973). *Woman in Gray*, 1942. Oil on panel, 39 1/4 × 31 7/8 in. (99.7 × 81 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Gift of the Alex Hillman Family Foundation in memory and in honor of Rita K. Hillman, 2008.43. © 2023 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

Right: Betty Tompkins (American, born 1945). *Apologia (Artemesia Gentileschi #4)*, 2018. Acrylic on paper, 11 × 8 1/2 in. (27.9 × 21.6 cm). Brooklyn Museum; Emily Winthrop Miles Fund and Robert A. Levinson Fund, 2018.21. © Betty Tompkins. (Photo: Brooklyn Museum)

Fifty years after his death, Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) remains an artistic and cultural icon whose status as the preeminent modern artist has gone largely unquestioned. This exhibition grapples with Picasso's art and legacy through intersecting, critical feminist methodologies that have emerged since 1973 and continue to reshape art history today. Part of the global Picasso Celebration 1973–2023, the Brooklyn Museum's exhibition is organized by senior curators Lisa Small and Catherine Morris with Australian comedian Hannah Gadsby, whose groundbreaking 2018 comedy special *Nanette* pointedly challenged how public debate around marginalized communities is conducted, including art institutions' frequent condoning of art history's inherent misogyny. With over one hundred artworks including paintings, sculpture, photography, works on paper, and video, *It's Pablo-matic* showcases works by a range of twentieth- and twenty-first-century feminist artists, nearly all of which are from the Brooklyn Museum collection, as well as prominent Picasso artworks from the Brooklyn Museum, Musée National

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Picasso-Paris, Museum of Modern Art, and private collections. Through in-gallery juxtapositions, accompanied by an audio tour featuring Gadsby's incisive humor and sharp critique, the exhibition examines Picasso's complex legacy and the influence it exerts worldwide.

A student of art history, Gadsby is a Peabody and Emmy Award-winning comedic performer and storyteller. They received international acclaim following *Nanette*, their breakout stand-up show. This deeply personal work about the consequences of misogyny and homophobia also wryly challenges art history's canonical narratives and figures—Picasso in particular—and highlights how thoroughly and brazenly institutions have separated the art from the artist. Gadsby made a painting after Picasso's *Great Bather Reading* when they were seventeen, the age Marie-Thérèse Walter was when Picasso, then forty-five, began a relationship with her. Gadsby's childhood creation is included in the exhibition as an introduction to their acerbic, thought-provoking perspective.

Gadsby says, "If Picasso, in all of his misogynistic and narcissistic glory, must be remembered as 'the greatest artist of the twentieth century,' let's also remember that it was that century which carried us into this dumpster fire of a world where absolutely nobody is happy. It's safe to say that the twentieth century as a whole was at least as problematic as Picasso himself, and the nostalgia for it fuels much of the intergenerational conflict of the current century. We are still being ruled by monsters from the 1900s, so why not celebrate Picasso as the perfect mascot for such a monstrously arrogant and destructive century?"

The feminist works on view in this presentation were not necessarily created in direct response to Picasso or his work, but rather stand as interventions into the dominant masculine narratives of modernism. Artists include Nina Chanel Abney, Ghada Amer, Emma Amos, Dara Birnbaum, Louise Bourgeois, Cecily Brown, Renee Cox, Kaleta Doolin, Guerrilla Girls, Harmony Hammond, Susan Janow, Rachel Kneebone, Käthe Kollwitz, Marisol (Marisol Escobar), Maria Martins, Dindga McCannon, Ana Mendieta, Marilyn Minter, Louise Nevelson, Howardena Pindell, Faith Ringgold, Betye Saar, Carolee Schneemann, Joan Semmel, Cindy Sherman, Laurie Simmons, Kiki Smith, May Stevens, Mickalene Thomas, Betty Tompkins, and Hannah Wilke.

"As the only museum in the country with a Center for Feminist Art, it is important for us to bring the contributions of feminist artists to the fore when considering the evolving and complex way we have examined Picasso's practice and biography since his death," explains Morris. "Picasso has, in many ways, become a problematic figure, and the critical work of feminist art historians and artists over the past fifty years has played a significant role in his reframing. Working with Hannah to craft this transhistorical dialogue offers the Brooklyn Museum the opportunity to do so with both pragmatic insight and pointed humor."

"Revisiting Picasso in this manner allows us to engage both with a defining figure of twentieth-century art and with audiences in new and bold ways," says Small. "At a time when culture is rightly pushing museums to foreground underrepresented narratives and contend with thorny issues of the past, we're excited to confront and wrestle with these kinds of urgent questions around gender, power, and the art-historical canon."

The exhibition is organized around visual and conceptual themes, with juxtapositions and groupings of works by Picasso and women artists. When Picasso died in 1973, second-wave feminism was sweeping across the cultural landscapes of Europe and the Americas, and deep reckonings were taking place within the discipline of art history.

Feminist artists and art historians such as Faith Ringgold and Linda Nochlin questioned entrenched narratives about the so-called masters of modernity—Picasso prime among them—and the patriarchal systems that produced and valorized them. In an introductory gallery, Picasso's *The Sculptor* from 1931, with its sexualized depictions of Marie-Thérèse Walter, is presented alongside works by feminist artists and collectives, including Ringgold, Kaleta Doolin, and the Guerrilla Girls. Doolin's *Improved Janson: A Woman on Every Page #2* (2017) transforms the outdated and exclusionary textbook *History of Art* through a women's gaze, celebrating the female form by carving a vulvar shape through the entire volume. In *Portrait of Linda Nochlin and Richard Pommer* (1968), Nochlin, a feminist art historian, critic, and curator, had artist Philip Pearlstein subvert the traditional marriage portrait by placing her squarely in the foreground. Other works in this section, and throughout the exhibition, reflect the #MeToo movement and its indictment of the damaging actions and attitudes of some contemporary and historical male artists and art-world figures. In her series *Apologia*, for example, Betty Tompkins modifies pages of art-historical textbooks, transcribing apology letters written by perpetrators called out by #MeToo onto canonical artworks that often offhandedly incorporate images of female oppression.

Another section explores the building of Picasso's foundational myth. Labeled a prodigy in his teens, wealthy and a household name two decades later, Picasso wore the unquestioned mantle of "genius" for the rest of his life. He is lauded (along with French artist Georges Braque, and in lieu of countless unacknowledged African and Oceanic artists) for developing the profoundly influential visual language of Cubism. Picasso is also revered for his stylistic range and protean output across media, and celebrated for his ability to appropriate art history's greatest thematic hits toward his own expressive ends. While recognizing his achievements, it is vital to acknowledge the historical framework that allowed Picasso and his work to define an era while women were conspicuously denied such opportunities. Early drawings demonstrating his skill as a draftsman are displayed near works by such artists as Louise Nevelson and Käthe Kollwitz. Though these women were Picasso's contemporaries, their gender barred them from achieving his level of recognition. Works from Picasso's *Vollard Suite* (1930–37) are also introduced here and shown throughout the exhibition, illuminating his personal mythologies—the Minotaur as his conflicted avatar, for example—and the contradictory obsessions that fueled them: sex, violence, creativity, beauty, and monstrosity.

Picasso was repeatedly drawn to certain sexual themes, including classical narratives of mythological coupling and the studio as an erotically charged space. This kind of imagery, particularly when it depicts coercion or rape, remains problematic. Feminist artists have since reclaimed depictions of sex from their own vantage points, centering their experiences of their own bodies and coopting the clichés of pornography aimed at heterosexual men. In *Heather's Dégradé* (2006), for example, Ghada Amer depicts women in a state of ecstatic dissolution, with explicit poses culled from pornography embroidered across the canvas in a swirl of abstraction.

The recumbent female nude, a staple in Western art since antiquity, is another common subject in Picasso's oeuvre. In works such as *Reclining Nude* (1932) and *Sleeping Woman* (1927), both on loan from the Musée Picasso, the artist paints a sleeping, distorted Marie-Thérèse Walter. These paintings showcase his voracious appetite for rendering unconscious female nudes, which—given what is known about Picasso's often disturbing relationships with women—exemplify his controlling and objectifying gaze.

This power structure, of a dominant male objectifying a submissive female, has been normalized as a standard of eroticism and desire, with profound consequences for gender equity. Feminist critique has focused on this destructive art-historical trope, while

some feminist artists have turned it on its head, reasserting female autonomy. Dindga McCannon's *Morning After* (1973) offers a rare 1970s representation of heterosexual intimacy from a woman's perspective. Similarly, Joan Semmel's *Intimacy Autonomy* (1974) turns a tired trope of Western painting inside out with a distinctly feminist view of a postcoital moment.

Much of the intellectual foundation of Western modernity is built on structures of opposites, or binaries: female/male, Black/white, classical/avant-garde, and submissive/dominant, among many others. While Picasso made space for fluidity in some of these binaries, particularly the artistic ones, he maintained a hard line between men and women. As the twentieth century progressed, feminist artists—confronted by their systematically diminished positionality in these binaries—became actively critical of this narrow writing of history and began demanding that their voices and lived experiences be seen. Louise Bourgeois was in her seventies when she had her first retrospective in 1982, spurred by a feminist outcry that she had been overlooked for decades. Bourgeois's *Décontractée* (1990) speaks to her long, lonely commitment to her own creative brilliance.

While the women Picasso represented in his work are often recognizable, their independent identities are typically quashed. Most often, and by Picasso's own admission, the women he portrays are ciphers for the artist's moods and relational emotional states. But if Picasso's ability to envision the true scope of female engagement with the world was limited, in the years since his death, women and female-identifying artists—particularly women of color—have built new narratives from the same art-historical roots that oppressed and erased them. In *Liberation of Aunt Jemima: Cocktail* (1973), Betye Saar transforms a Gallo wine jug, a 1970s symbol of middle-class sophistication, into a weapon for Black liberation. Renee Cox's *Yo Mama* (1993) supplants the traditional Virgin Mary with a strong, self-aware, and larger-than-life Black woman. Returning to the motif of a reclining female nude, Mickalene Thomas's *Marie: Nude Black woman lying on a couch* (2012) challenges the objectification of Black women by replacing passivity with power.

Public Programs

The exhibition will be accompanied by programming and events, including a Brooklyn Talk with Hannah Gadsby on Thursday, June 1, 7–9 pm. Gadsby's lecture "But Cubism!" will tackle Picasso's legacy. It will be followed by a conversation with Catherine Morris and Lisa Small about cocurating *It's Pablo-matic* and the role of feminist critique in ongoing reconsiderations of Picasso and his work.

It's Pablo-matic: Picasso According to Hannah Gadsby is curated by Hannah Gadsby; Catherine Morris, Senior Curator for the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art; and Lisa Small, Senior Curator, European Art; with Talia Shiroma, Curatorial Assistant, Arts of the Americas and Europe, Brooklyn Museum.

This exhibition is organized by the Brooklyn Museum in collaboration with the Musée National Picasso-Paris and is part of a global presentation of exhibitions and events marking the fiftieth anniversary of Pablo Picasso's death: Picasso Celebration 1973–2023.

*Picasso Celebration 1973–2023:
50 exhibitions and events to celebrate Picasso*

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