



A Life of Picasso, Volume II: 1907-1917 - The Painter of Modern Life

John Richardson

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In the second volume of his definitive biography of Pablo Picasso, John Richardson draws on the same combination of lively writing, critical astuteness, exhaustive research and personal experience that made a bestseller out of the first volume and vividly re-creates the artist's life and work during the crucial decade of 1907-1917--a period during which Picasso and Georges Braque invented cubism and to that extent engendered modernism. Thanks to his friendship with Picasso and his family, mistresses, friends, dealers and other associates, Richardson has had unique access to untapped sources and unpublished material. By harnessing biography to art history, he has managed to crack the code of cubism more successfully than any of his predecessors. And by bringing fresh light to bear on the artist's too often sensationalized private life, he has succeeded in coming up with a totally new view of this paradoxical man and of his paradoxical work. Never before has Picasso's prodigious technique, his incisive vision and, not least, his sardonic humor been analyzed with such clarity.

Richardson reveals that the young Picasso saw himself in the Baudelairean role of "the painter of modern life"--a role that stipulated the brothel as the noblest subject for a modern artist. Hence his great innovative painting *Les Femmes d'Alger*, with which this book opens. As well as portraying Picasso as a revolutionary, the author analyzes the more compassionate side of his genius. The misogynist of posthumous legend turns out to have been surprisingly vulnerable--more often sinned against than sinning. Heartbroken at the death of his mistress Eva, the artist tried desperately to find a wife. Richardson recounts the untold story of how his two great loves of 1915-1917 successively turned him down; and how these disappointments, as well as his horror at the outbreak of World War I and the wounds it inflicted on his closest friends, Braque and Apollinaire, shadowed his painting and drove him off to Rome--back to the ancient world.

For Picasso, art would always have a magic function. As Richardson reveals, the artist saw himself as a shaman who could use his art to cast spells, both good and bad, and play all manner of ingenious and sardonic games. This greatest of modern artists knew better than anyone how to outrage us, also how to fascinate, puzzle and disturb us. Above all, he makes us perceive reality afresh by re-energizing our minds as well as our eyes.

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