

SKARSTEDT

BROOKLYN RAIL
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ARTS, POLITICS, AND CULTURE

In Dialogue with Picasso

By [Phyllis Tuchman](#)



In various ways, *In Dialogue with Picasso*, co-curated by Joachim Pissarro and the Skarstedt gallery, illuminates how an international roster of artists “have been intensely engaged in thinking about and responding to [Pablo] Picasso.” That’s what this show at Skarstedt Gallery admirably sets out to do. On view through December 16, 2023, four canvases by Picasso from the late 1960s and early 1970s are displayed alongside oils, collages, drawings, and a photograph by boldface names, including Francis Bacon, Jasper Johns, Martin Kippenberger, Eric Fischl, George Condo, and Louise Lawler as well as less well-known painters such as Cristina BanBan and Louis Fratino.

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By the end of his life—Picasso died in 1973 at the age of ninety-one—his art had been transformed multiple times. According to a rule of thumb, you can easily distinguish the men from the women he limned during his Cubist period. If a moustache is depicted, you know you are looking at a male. Much later on, the artist got down to basics. In the Skarstedt show, one figure has a penis (*Homme [Man]*, 1971); and another, a vagina, a vagina dentata, no less, replete with teeth (*Nu assis [Seated Nude]*, 1969). You could argue that in the present company, Picasso also was responding to his own ambitious efforts.

The showstoppers are works by a trio of artists who emerged during the 1980s—Louise Lawler, Eric Fischl and Richard Prince—plus Rachel Harrison, who is younger. They didn't so much grapple with aesthetic issues as directly quote from source material. Take Lawler's intriguing photograph (*Woman with Picasso*, 1912/1986). For starters, it looks like a pastel. Then, there's the cropped face of a woman holding a small construction of a guitar by Picasso. The room or gallery in which she stands is blurry. Indeed, even the guitar can not be readily identified. The Lawler is cloaked in mystery.



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Rachel Harrison's portrait of Amy Winehouse (2011) is engaging, too. Is the late singer high on drugs or booze? Has someone recently slugged her in her right eye? Whatever the situation, she looks far more wasted than the blond-haired, blue-eyed Picasso-like head reminiscent of images of Marie-Thérèse Walter from the 1930s that occupies the same sheet of paper. In this instance, appropriated artifice trumps portraiture.

Her, the painting from 2016 by Fischl that belongs to his "Art Fair" series, contrasts a sculpture of a head by Roy Lichtenstein with a canvas behind it on which appear three grisaille figures by Picasso. Though Pop art no longer presents itself as a radical style, in this instance, it upstages a former revolutionary's creation. Executed on illustrations from a book or exhibition catalogue devoted to Picasso, Richard Prince's collages encompass a variety of periods. These include a 1906 female nude, a violent scene from 1932, a 1939 child seated in a regal chair, a bather basking in the sun from 1961, a faun and a lamb from 1963, and others he executed throughout 2017. Prince's additions include oddly shaped pieces of paper on which he sketched, for example, his own nudes, a long-haired fellow, and an ecstatic reveler. They're shot through with irony, and can be downright flabbergasting. You'll want to spend time with these.



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Older artists such as Francis Bacon and Jasper Johns seem to have been more influenced by Picasso's style. Bacon's *Three Studies for a Portrait* (1976) suggests the Englishman once might have studied the heads the master developed for his extraordinary *Three Women* (1908) from the collection of the State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. He brings to his own small panels, nevertheless, his own unique vivacity and sense of adventure. What I most love about Jasper Johns's *After Picasso* (1998) is the belief that the older artist might himself have executed this oddity. The head could not be more convincing; and the hands seem strangely familiar. In some distant future, could this oil on canvas be considered a long lost Picasso?

Much the same might be said about George Condo's *Standing Female Figure* (1993). While the late Cubist never painted a work like this, Condo thoroughly understands what Picasso might conceivably have done. He looks at the older artist's efforts the way Picasso once looked at Georges Braque. If you tweak this and that, you might end up with your own radical picture. As for *Untitled (Man with Hat)* (1982), did Jean-Michel Basquiat do something similar? Perhaps.

Fifty years after his death, Picasso's art remains a vital presence in the lives of artists of all sorts of persuasions. This exhibition is a testament to his power and grace.