



Art

Picasso Museum to show work of Françoise Gilot, ex-partner he tried to destroy

Gilot, who was shunned and castigated in France after splitting from Picasso, to have space in Paris museum dedicated to her art

Kim Willsher *in Paris*

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When the artist Françoise Gilot walked out on [Pablo Picasso](#) after a long and turbulent relationship, he told her she would be nothing without him and set out to destroy her career.

Gilot later recalled how her former lover told her: “You imagine people will be interested in you? They won’t ever, really, just for yourself ... It will only be a kind of curiosity they will have about a person whose life touched mine so intimately.”

After the split, Picasso and his influential friends in France’s artistic and intellectual circles waged what she described as a “war” on her, eventually forcing her to leave [France](#) and settle in the US, where she rebuilt her life and career and continued to paint until her death in 2023 at the age of 101.





Gilot's painting Magic Games, 1978 Photograph: Bridgeman Images

In France at least, however, her success has always been overshadowed by the man considered one of the most important artists of the 20th century.

Now, the Picasso Museum in Paris will attempt to partly redress this wrong when it opens its new permanent exhibition of the master's works that includes a room of Gilot's work.

“She is not being presented as Picasso’s muse or inspiration. There are none of the pictures he did of her or photographs; instead it concentrates on Françoise Gilot as an artist,” a spokesperson for the museum said.

“It’s the first time this has been done and it has created a lot of interest.”

Gilot met Picasso in a Parisian cafe in 1943 at the height of the Nazi occupation. She was 21 and he 61. Fiercely independent, Gilot did what none of Picasso’s many other women ever dared: she walked out on him, taking their two children, Claude and Paloma.

Picasso destroyed her possessions, including letters to her from Matisse, demanded the Louise Leiris Gallery stop representing her, and insisted she no longer be invited to exhibit at the prestigious Salon de Mai.





Gilot split from Picasso in 1953, sparking a wave of harassment, and in later life divided her time between Paris and New York. Photograph: Boris Lipnitski/Roger Viollet/Getty Images

In many ways France treated Gilot even worse than Picasso did. While he launched three lawsuits to prevent publication of her 1964 biography, *Life with Picasso*, 80 prominent intellectuals and artists signed a petition in the communist paper *Les Lettres Françaises* calling for the book to be banned. The book sold a million copies and was translated into 16 languages, but the shunning of her work was what she described as a “civil death”.

Ten years after a renovation, the Picasso Museum - which holds the world’s largest collection of Picasso’s work - has installed a new permanent exhibition in 22 rooms spread over three floors and including nearly 400 paintings, sculptures, ceramics, drawings and prints.

The Françoise Gilot exhibition in room 17 on the third floor is temporary but expected to be in situ for a year.

Cécile Debray, president of the Picasso Museum, said Gilot was “being given her rightful place as an artist”.

Debray added: “In France, Françoise Gilot is known as Picasso’s companion whereas in the United States where she lived after 1970 she is considered an artist and painter, so we have a room here displaying her paintings.”

Jeanna Sprack, a curator at the Picasso Museum, said it was important to include a

Joanne Snrech, a curator at the Picasso Museum, said it was important to include a display of Gilot's paintings to dispel the idea that she was "just Picasso's partner".

"She was an artist in her own right with a very long career during which her work evolved. What we show here is the diversity of her work," Snrech said.

She added: "It's true that after her book about Picasso was published she was shunned by many people in the artistic community in France. We thought it was important to show not just her place in Picasso's life but also that she was much more than just his companion. After all, she spent just 10 years with him out of more than 100."

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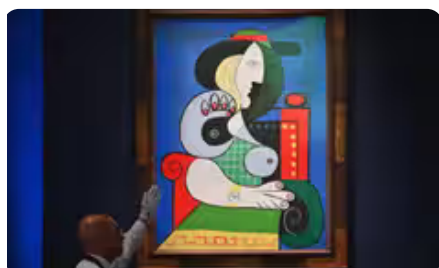
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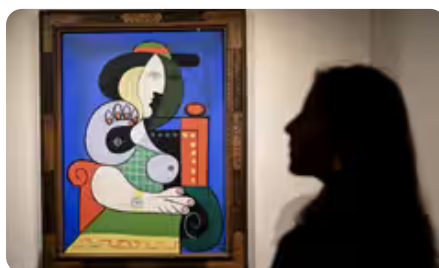
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