

Love in the afternoon

When Picasso exalted his mistress in art

MATTHEW BOWN

PICASSO 1932
Love, fame, tragedy
Tate Modern, until September 9

Olivia Widmaier Picasso

PICASSO
An intimate portrait
320pp. Tate Publishing, £30.
978 1 84976 589 3

On entering *Picasso 1932: Love, fame, tragedy* at Tate Modern, you encounter a crudely painted picture of a woman stabbing a man in his bath; she also appears to be about to bite his tiny head off. The scene takes a moment or two to decipher, so great are the distortions of form. It is derived from Jacques-Louis David's painting "The Death of Marat", but restaged with Marat's assassin Charlotte Corday now present and in the leading role, as a kind of praying mantis. This nightmare refers to Picasso's collapsing marriage to Olga Khokhlova, a chronically ill, unhappy Russian ex-ballerina.

The next male of the species is several rooms hence; en route you voyage through a galaxy of paintings and sculptures of Picasso's mistress, Marie-Thérèse Walter. The artist picked up Marie-Thérèse outside the Galeries Lafayette in 1927, when she was seventeen and he forty-five. "I am Picasso", he informed her, which initially meant nothing to her at all. Olga was a dedicated housewife and mother, gamine, *embourgeoisée*. Marie-Thérèse was kind, submissive, sporty, and in her images at least embodies pneumatic bliss; her mother let Picasso use the garden shed to work in. For the eight years until 1935, when he and Olga separated, it seems that Picasso wanted to have it all: conventional family life with VIP access to society and, if not the old bohemia that Olga had weaned him away from, then at least unadulterated lust as well. This double life was embedded in his day-to-day routine. The studio, where Olga was an infrequent visitor, and the family home were two identical flats in a house on the rue La Boétie, one above the other. Picasso relished the paradoxes of his great-artist status: he liked to tootle around in his chauffeured limousines in paint-splattered studio gear.

Picasso 1932 is as much a celebration of Marie-Thérèse as it is of the artist. Mindful, perhaps, of the anachronism of this love affair in the era of #metoo, the curators present Marie-Thérèse's statement that she was "happy". Picasso may have drawn her from life but the paintings are improvisations, although perhaps made in her presence. In order to conjure her again and again he reduces her to a voluptuous sign. He completely elides the transition between her nose and forehead – a cartoon simplification of her Greek profile. Her blonde hair is often tacked onto the back of her head like a bird's tail or wing. The colour Picasso typically chooses for her flesh is pale lilac, shading sometimes into grey, light blue or pink. It's a subtly uncanny choice, not egregiously unreal but distancing the beloved essentially from the prosaic. To Roland Penrose, Picasso said Marie-Thérèse was "lunar". Many of the paintings here are dated according to the day of completion: during a few months at the start of 1932, Picasso seems to have been finishing a sizeable canvas a day, nearly all of his mistress. Was anyone, in fact, ever more obsessively exalted by their artist-lover?

John Richardson, Picasso's supreme biographer, informs us that "Marie-Thérèse loved to sleep", and so she does, in painting after painting. Three canvases, entitled "Rest" (aka "Repose") (Friday January 22), "Sleep" (Saturday January 23) and "The Dream" (Sunday January 24), are here hung one next to the other. All three show a woman in a high-backed red armchair. "Rest" represents Olga, "Sleep" and "The Dream" are of Marie-Thérèse. It is of course risky to interpret Picasso's decisions about form and colour in too naturalistic a way,

but the contrast here between the portraits of wife and mistress is striking. Olga's flesh is a disturbing, variegated pink, her pose that of a hysterical amoeba, her mouth small, acute and bristling with teeth. Marie-Thérèse is pure ethereal lilac, her breasts undulate, her dreams, one surmises, are post-coital. "I want to paint like a blind man, who does a buttock by feel", Picasso said to Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler in the spring of 1932, and the images of his mistress absolutely evoke the intimacy of their

embraces; there is ecstasy even in the swoops of the brush. The dates of completion suggest a life-pattern: a miserable Friday with Olga, who perhaps takes off to the country for the weekend with their son; followed by fun with Marie-Thérèse, who in both paintings is in a state of *déshabillé*. Picasso said that his work was a way of keeping a diary, and in fact the stretcher of "Sleep" is inscribed "executed between three and six o'clock on January 23, 1932", which suggests love in the afternoon, after which Marie-Thérèse dozed off and Picasso reached for his brushes.

In "The Dream", some have suggested, one half of Marie-Thérèse's face, separated from the other by a chasm of shadow, is shaped like a penis. Could be. In fact Picasso's forms at this time have, by virtue of the degree of abstraction and the wilfulness of his distortions, high metamorphic potential. Arms become flippers; mouths, vaginas. Such suggestiveness borders on surrealism: it contains something of Breton's notion of "convulsive beauty", of Miró's biomorphic shapes, maybe even of

Dalí's vulgar transfigurations. It also evokes more ancient parallels. In 1930 Picasso illustrated Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; his own remark about a liking for "eyes between the legs, or sex organs on the face" is reminiscent of some of the puns found in medieval art.

Seated in the same red armchair are two very different views of the beloved, who is distilled now to an imaginary sculpture. These and other related works minimize pictorial means: spatial ambiguity is replaced by the straightforward modelling of volumetric forms, the palette is restricted, decoration is banished. The subject may be Marie-Thérèse, but these are not so much portraits, or evocations of a sex demigoddess, as projects for unrealizable monuments. The illumination is harsh, which stresses volume and physical presence; it reflects, perhaps, Picasso's habit of viewing sculpture at night in his country studio in Boisgeloup in the headlights of his Hispano-Suiza. Related to these paintings are monochrome ink drawings of crucifixions, inspired by the Grünewald at Colmar, constructed out of forms shaped like bones.

A room is devoted to Picasso's retrospective that year at the Galeries Georges Petit – a grand hangover from the nineteenth century, when it had rivalled Durand-Ruel. Neither Picasso nor Olga attended the opening: conceivably, the spectacle of his hitherto well-concealed mistress in such abundance would have been an embarrassment to them both. At the Tate, this room provides a handy recap of the artist's career to this point: a journey back through his Ingresque portraits of the 1920s to the Blue and Rose periods. It includes the wonderful welded sculpture, "Woman in the Garden", made during Picasso's collaboration with Julio González; and a single Cubist painting which looks, in this room and in the context of the show as a whole, like a creature from another planet. This may well reflect the balance of works at the retrospective of 1932: Picasso's dealer, Paul Rosenberg, was thoroughly commercially minded and had encouraged Picasso away from the dour near-abstraction favoured by his cerebral predecessor, Kahnweiler. *Picasso 1932* doesn't examine Rosenberg's role in Picasso's development (his career was the subject of a very good show at the Musée Maillol last year), and Picasso was always his own man, but it seems reasonable to suggest that Rosenberg's constant requests for commercially viable things to sell encouraged the increasingly decorative nature of Picasso's painting.

The Paris retrospective moved on to Zurich, where Carl Gustav Jung published a rather unsympathetic critique. Most of the diagnosis is submerged in quaint jargon, but there are moments of clarity:

Picasso conjures up crude, earthy shapes, grotesque and primitive, and resurrects the soullessness of ancient Pompeii in a cold, glittering light – even Giulio Romano could not have done worse! Seldom or never have I had a patient who did not go back to neolithic art forms or revel in evocations of Dionysian orgies. Harlequin wanders like Faust through all these forms, though sometimes nothing betrays his presence but his wine, his lute, or the bright lozenges of his jester's costume.

A jester moving among neolithic forms and popping into orgies is not bad as a summary of the artist's representation of himself. Harlequin imagery was an integral part of Picasso's repertoire from around 1905. In the 1920s, Rosenberg urged still more harlequin subjects for American clients. The lozenge motif reappears



"The Mirror" by Pablo Picasso, 1932

here at the Tate in multiple paintings from 1932 in the form of diamond-pattern wallpaper, which Picasso-sleuths have decided covered the walls of a Paris love nest (exact location unknown).

Jung's remarks suggest Picasso's omnivorousness. Unlike other avant-gardists, many of them politically motivated, Picasso had no wish to destroy the museums, libraries and academies, and his dialogues with the work of other artists, living and dead, enrich his mod-

ernizing immeasurably. (Like all omnivores, by definition, he was a bit of a cannibal; at least, that is what Brancusi called him, and for a long time refused to let Picasso into his studio in case he pinched his ideas). Jung was also right to draw attention to the artist's multiple personalities or, as he put it, his "schizoid syndrome". Picasso in his work is a fluid god: Harlequin, the Minotaur, a curly-bearded flute-player to naked ladies, Mithra to Marie-Thérèse's Moon-Goddess. In life he was a

cruel one. When Marie-Thérèse became pregnant in 1935, Olga left him, although she refused a divorce. He began a new affair, with his model, Dora Maar. Marie-Thérèse and Dora finally met in the studio when Picasso was painting "Guernica". Marie-Thérèse demanded he choose between them and Picasso told the two women to fight it out, which they did. According to a subsequent lover, Françoise Gilot, this was one of Picasso's "choicest memories".

In one of the final works in the show, "Sleeping Nude with Blonde Hair", Marie-Thérèse is asleep. Her body, as usual, is exposed to a lubricious degree. Her curves no longer contour discrete areas of colour, she is rather embedded in a thicket of roughly brushed and smeared paint. It's a wonderful and surprising painting, different from all those preceding it; it almost suggests an evolving attitude to the portrayed. *Picasso 1932*, the chronicle of a year in the arms of Marie-Thérèse, is a knockout.

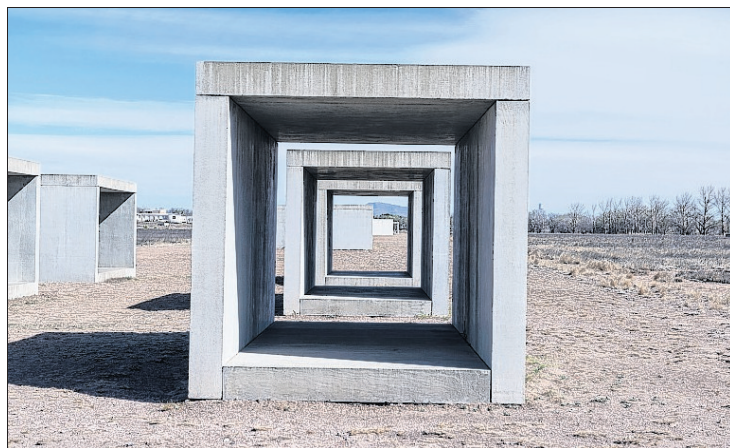
In the 1970s, the art historian James Meyer remarked, "the hard distinction between art and language advanced by the modernist critic Clement Greenberg . . . collapsed". With "the 'eruption' of language into the visual field", "the mute visionary of abstract expressionist legend was replaced by an altogether new species: the fiercely articulate artist-writer".

The theorizing of one's art practice is of course nothing new – think of Joshua Reynolds or André Breton or Kasimir Malevich – but for the Minimalists, Land Artists and Conceptualists of the 1960s and 70s, writing became a practice in its own right. Indeed, the more abstract, mute and non-expressive the artwork, as in the steel-plate installations of Carl André or the "non-sites" of Robert Smithson, the more both artist and audience have turned to the written word.

Donald Judd, who died in 1994 at the age of sixty-five, is a case in point. In the last three decades of his life, he produced four major collections of writings, which have been widely read and cited both in the US and in Europe. This new compendium, which adds a selection of letters and previously unpublished essays and notes to the previously published essays and reviews, runs to more than 1,000 pages and has 180 glossy illustrations at the back of the book. A "minimalist" (4 1/2" by 7") paperback with bright orange canvas covers and turquoise endpapers, designed by the artist's son Flavin Judd (the book's co-editor) and Michael Dyer, *Donald Judd Writings* is itself packaged as a kind of artwork, the feat being that so many pages could be bound into such a small book. Indeed, *Writings* has already become something of a cult object. Read in tandem with the gorgeous colour plates in David Raskin's informative monograph, the *Writings* confirm Donald Judd's status as one of the truly pioneering artists of the later twentieth century.

In Judd's case, however, the whole is surely greater than the sum of its parts. Judd's art criticism cannot, for example, compare to the writings of Smithson, whose visionary essays "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey", "Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan", or "The Spiral Jetty" have become classics in their own right – a form of prose poetry. Nor do Judd's more theoretical pieces on the components of art have any of the philosophical rigour and sharp brilliance of André's essays, collected in *Cuts, Texts 1939–2004*, or of André's distinctive minimalist poems, now regularly exhibited in tandem with his installations.

In contrast to Smithson and André or, for that matter, to John Cage and Jasper Johns, both of whose writings did much to shape the aesthetic of a generation, Judd will be remembered less as an aesthete than as a remarkable art entrepreneur. In 1968, he purchased 101 Spring Street, a five-storey cast-iron building in Lower



Untitled art installations by Donald Judd, Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas

Specific objects

A late pioneer of 'artist-writing'

MARJORIE PERLOFF

Flavin Judd and Caitlin Murray, editors

DONALD JUDD WRITINGS
1,056pp. David Zwirner. Paperback, £28
(US\$39.95).
978 1 941701 35 5

David Raskin

DONALD JUDD
220pp. Yale University Press. Paperback, £35
(US \$45).
978 0 300 22868 7

Manhattan; here he began the permanent installation of his work as well as of select pieces by his contemporaries. As he explained it in an essay in 1977, "The work is not disembodied spatially, socially, temporally, as in most museums. The space surrounding my work is crucial to it: as much thought has gone into the installation as into a piece itself". This last sentence says it all: for Judd, the art object is no longer an autonomous painting or sculpture, a free-standing work that can be exhibited variously in different venues: rather, it is related to a particular space from which it cannot readily be separated. It is this aspect of Judd's art which Michael Fried denounced as "theatre" – an art that depends on how, where and by whom it is viewed.

The installation at Spring Street was prefigured in what was probably Judd's most famous

essay, "Specific Objects" (1964), which begins with the assertion that "Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture . . . The use of three dimensions is an obvious alternative". The limitation of painting is that it is "a rectangular plane placed flat against the wall. A rectangle is a shape itself; it is obviously the whole shape; it determines and limits the arrangement of whatever is on or inside it". As for Modernist "abstract" sculpture, most, like David Smith's, "is made part by part, by addition, composed. The main parts remain fairly discrete . . . Wood and metal are the usual materials, either alone or together . . . There is seldom any color". In contrast, Judd's own three-dimensional objects are designed to be "open and extended", more or less environmental: "Three dimensions are real space. That gets rid of the problem of illusionism and of literal space, space in and around marks and colors . . . Actual space is intrinsically more powerful and specific than paint on a flat surface". And further: "materials vary greatly and are simply materials" – formica, aluminium, cold-rolled steel, plexiglass, red and common brass, and so forth. Materials vary according to texture and thickness and the resulting three-dimensional form "doesn't involve ordinary anthropomorphic imagery".

An early exemplar, at the National Gallery in Washington, is a geometric object – a triangular prism, set on top of a cuboid that sits directly on a dark-grey floor. Both forms are made of red-painted wood; a rectangular sheet of opaque violet plexiglass is affixed to the hypotenuse

of the triangular prism. The resulting diagonal bisects the surface of the red cuboid, so that the plexiglass, as Raskin explains, "captures half the cuboid in its reflections as if it were a mirror, creating a syncopated fanfold of prisms, trapezoids, triangles, and cuboids. The reflections reveal the half of the cuboid that, because the shapes are stacked, is otherwise barred from our vision. With changing viewing positions, the image is a trapezoid that becomes a triangle in reflective but not imaginary depth".

The emphasis on such changing viewing positions – what Fried criticized as "theatricality" and Rosalind Kraus as ephemerality, there no longer being a definable unitary sculpture – became dominant in the installations of the 1970s, erected in both indoor and outdoor locations near Marfa, Texas. Judd had long had a special affinity for the Southwest, especially the area of the Big Bend of the Rio Grande in the Trans-Pecos, "mostly high rangeland dropping to desert along the river, with mountains over the edge in every direction. There were few people and the land was undamaged". In 1971, Judd moved from New York to Marfa. After renting summerhouses for a few years, he bought two large First World War aircraft hangars that had been moved into town and soon thereafter, the remaining quarter of the block. Now he began to install his work on a larger scale. In 1976, Judd bought the first of two ranches that became his primary places of residence, and by 1979, he had convinced the executors of the Dia Foundation "to come to Marfa and purchase the land and main buildings of Fort Russell on the edge of town, to make permanently maintained public installations of contemporary art". Displaying not only Judd's own artworks, but also those of such fellow artists as Barnett Newman, Carl André, Richard Serra, Dan Flavin and Claes Oldenburg, the once isolated Chinati Foundation, as Judd named it, was developing into a large-scale museum without walls, a unique art park peopled by sculptures, earth works, huge geometric sequenced objects, and light works.

Judd's vision for Marfa was ecological as well as aesthetic: he fought against the proliferation of nuclear waste dumps and founded or joined various organizations designed to preserve the environment, including the historical properties of Marfa. But since Judd's death, the previously isolated Texas site has gradually become a special counter-culture tourist attraction. Art students now flock to Marfa by the thousands, and the area has become a shooting location for films from the Coen Brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (based on Cormac McCarthy's novel) to Jill Solloway's rather tasteless series based on Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*.

Judd can hardly be held responsible for this turn of events: his aim was to create an environment of forms and structures that would have a life of their own, transforming the landscape.

But the rapidly expanding production at Marfa brought accusations that the Chinati Foundation was replicating the very industrialist complex it claimed to critique. However left-wing Judd's politics, as an art critic, he remained primarily a formalist. His earliest essays, written as term papers for Meyer Schapiro and other art historians at Columbia, are detailed analyses of individual works: a pre-Columbian leebord from Peru, a painting by James Brooks, and Pierre Puget's seventeenth-century sculpture "Alexander and Diogenes". A previously unpublished "Note" of 1963 takes up the question of abstraction in art, insisting that the term defies precise definition – indeed, that Abstract Art was never a movement like Cubism or Impressionism, and hence the most we can say about an "abstract" painting or sculpture is that it is not representational, not "illusionistic". A related early essay called "Local History" (1964) makes the case for the decline of the New York School, arguing that even the first generation of Abstract Expressionist painters – Robert Motherwell, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Philip Guston – had painted their last good works in the late 1950s. The "new" art, Judd was convinced, belonged to his own generation of Minimalists, although Judd had no use for that term (referring to the stark and reductive geometry of the work in question), and he singled out for praise Ad Reinhardt's black paintings and Frank Stella's stripe paintings.

Even these early essays, however, are given to sweeping judgements and unfounded generalizations. "Kandinsky is not an artist of the first

rank"; "Joan Mitchell's work should have improved", "[Anthony] Caro is a conventional, competent second-generation artist". Even when one agrees with Judd – as I do in the case of Anthony Caro – the flatly dismissive tone, backed up by no real argument or analysis, is troubling. The converse is also true: Judd bestowed extravagant praise on the sculptured reliefs of Lee Bontecou and John Chamberlain, but it is not clear what he found so remarkable. Of Chamberlain, Judd writes:

There is a three-way polarity of appearance and meaning in Chamberlain's sculpture. This is produced without an equivalent disparity of form. The work is in turn neutral, redundant, and expressively structured. The neutrality and the redundancy are not caused by separate elements . . . Chamberlain's material does not have to be distinctively transformed to appear diversely.

What Judd evidently means here is that, for Chamberlain, material such as chrome was denied its usual role as an automobile component. Made "neutral" and "redundant", such material could become newly expressive and hence, in Judd's view, superior to, say, David Smith's "Cubi", dismissed by Judd, as by Chamberlain himself, as a "relatively simple complex of parts". David Raskin, who discusses such Chamberlain sculptures as "Mr Press", seems to agree with this assessment, but fifty years on, they strike me as fairly dated assemblage works, by no means overshadowing Smith's sculpture.

Judd's essays on Malevich, surely one of his own central precursors, are similarly disap-

pointing. In a long review of the 1973 Malevich exhibition at the Guggenheim, Judd expresses his lack of enthusiasm for the early Cubo-Futurist paintings of 1912–13. "Some of these paintings are choppy and a little dull, such as *The Knife Grinder* or ordinary such as *The Guardsman*. Probably Malevich became tired of the style". Evidently, these painting, considered by many including myself as among the greatest compositions of early Modernism, were too figurative for Judd, too regressively "anthropomorphic". But the refusal to engage with these complex transitional paintings diminishes the values of Judd's essay.

Judd is at his best when he can rationalize his own practice, without worrying too much about the larger theoretical issues. One of the best essays in this collection is the last one, "Some Aspects of Color in General and Red and Black in Particular" (1993). Here he begins with a consideration of space in the new environmental art. Take an ordinary rock, he suggests. "How large is it? Is it on a level surface? Does it rest on the surface or does it perch? If it isn't on a level surface, the titled surface approaches a second entity. Is the rock symmetrical?", and so on. Next he takes the problem a step further:

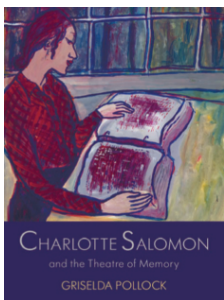
Then what if a second rock is placed nearby? . . . How far apart are the two rocks? Is one larger than the other? Two rocks of equal size and the space between them is a situation which is very different from that of a small rock and large rock with the space between . . . If they are on a slope, which is higher, which joins the plane as an entity?

Spatial relations are further complicated by colour. Here is Judd on the creation of "Untitled (DSS 33)" of 1962:

The size of the right angle is determined by the right angle of a black pipe, whose two open ends are the centers of the outer planes of the right angle, which is painted cadmium red light, red and black, and black as space . . . All sides are equal. There is scarcely an inside and an outside . . . The only enclosed space is inside the pipe.

The relation of black pipe to red plane is further complicated by the placement of DSS 33 directly on the floor. "Since now it is common for work to be placed anywhere in a room", Judd explains, "it is impossible for people to understand that placement on the floor and the absence of a pedestal were inventions. I invented them. But there is no history . . . they are mutations in the public domain."

Judd is right to take credit for the invention of a new relationship of figure to ground – "Mutations in the public domain" – more specifically, of the three-dimensional object to its cognates and to the space in which they are placed. In the house on Spring Street and the hangars of Marfa, but also at Dia Beacon and in many museums, Donald Judd's objects have a unique presence: their materiality makes them unmistakably his own. If the artist's writings are uneven – there is much ephemera here as well as much gossip – they do send us back to the artworks themselves – things of beauty whose seeming simplicities and similarities are, as David Raskin convincingly shows, remarkably various.



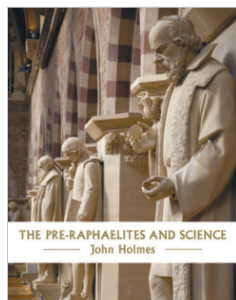
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