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Robert Jensen

University of Kentucky, robert.jensen@uky.edu

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*Making Modernism: Picasso & the Creation of the Market for 20th-Century Art* by **Michael C. FitzGerald (Review)**

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indirect allusion to the cruel outside world constituted by the market and its system of inequities, swindlings, . . . cutthroat competition, and cannibalistic practices”—the latter a reference to the “blood of an Englishman” in the tale’s repeated refrain. Jack is characterized as a wise investor whose “speculation on a handful of beans” has succeeded “because of his willingness to take risks.” Folkloristic analysis aside, is this what was remotely intended by the artist, or understood by her audience?

Two more chapters remain, one skating around the voyeuristic prurience of a painting by Seymour Guy, the other a tongue in cheek send-up of conventional art history focused on trompe l’oeil artist William Harnett. I remand these to readers for their own judgment.

The point of my exercise is this: is it truly a service to artists not to look more critically at their work? Of critics and historians most artists would demand little more. When current styles change, will social historians like Lubin continue to write so much about art? It seems unlikely. There is, however, an important lesson to Lubin’s work. There was a time when culture was perceived as one large family. Artists and writers of the present conversed with those of the past on familiar terms. Today, a common view of culture, in a broad sense, takes it to be novel, foreign, and unknown. Americans look to Africa and Asia; the Japanese and Europeans look to America; men look to women, and whites to blacks. Certainly the world has changed. The family is larger. Thoughtful people acknowledge that as with Humpty Dumpty, to cite another rhyme, the pieces will never be put back together again.

The fault of Lubin is not in addressing these changes, which are important, but in lumping them all together. The world, newly perceived, is multicultural and multilingual; it has a multiplicity of customs, arts, and beliefs. But little is gained by throwing these all in a collective bin. It is individual artists and objects that lend value to a culture as a whole. Careful analysis of a single significant artifact is likely to carry far more weight than the longest disquisition on the vague subjects favored by Lubin. This is important. If the guardians of a culture—writers, critics, historians—can’t bring themselves to defend its highest values, all will subside into a smily, primordial, Reaganistic mass, with little differentiation, little inducement to merit, and little on which to build the fantasies of ideas in which thinkers, Lubin among them, revel.

What Lubin attempts is not by nature wrong. But, if one chooses talk over action, rhetoric over content, implication and the personal over document and sustained evidence, one must be very good, indeed, to pull it off. In reading the ponderous work of the personal interpreters of art—Baudelaire, Berenson, Samuel Butler, Ruskin—we acknowledge the mind that produced it. I would encourage Lubin to consider their example.

THOMAS FELS

Thomas Fels is assistant curator of prints and drawings, Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute.

### **Making Modernism: Picasso & the Creation of the Market for 20th-Century Art. By Michael C. FitzGerald**

Published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 1995. 314 pp. 81 illustrations. \$27.50

Michael FitzGerald’s ambition in *Making Modernism* is to show the reader how deeply avant-garde artists have been immersed in the business of selling themselves and their art. His choice of Pablo Picasso is particularly apt, since no other artist in this century so precisely defined a dealer-mediated career. FitzGerald is eminently qualified to write about the inner workings of the art market, holding an M.B.A. and a Ph.D. in art history, and having been employed for some years in the Department of Impressionist and Modernist Art at Christie’s. He has made numerous finds from a wealth of archival material that offer considerable insight into Picasso’s connections to the art trade. Yet one ought not to look in *Making Modernism* for a critical history of modernist art as a commodity form. Nor will one find a social history of the commercial gallery. This is very much a book structured around personalities rather than practices and argued around individual agency rather than from the vantage of economic theory, Marxist or otherwise. It is an insider’s view very much in sympathy with the insiders. So while it is an extremely valuable book for students of Picasso, *Making Modernism*—despite its title—settles for making modest contributions to the literature on Picasso and on the modern art market.

The 19-year-old Picasso first came to Paris following the successful submission of his *The Last Moments* to the jury for the Salon that accompanied the great *Exposition universelle* of 1900. It was also the last such submission of Picasso’s career. As FitzGerald makes abundantly clear, a key aspect of Picasso’s artistic intelligence was that he recognized that the Salon, its juries, the art academies, and other such institutional apparatus belonged to a dying century. In those first Parisian days, Picasso quickly discovered the artwork of the future, embodied in the figures of Cézanne, Degas, Lautrec, the Nabis, among others. These artists were all but invisible at the *Exposition*, nor were they to be found in Paris’ great public galleries. Instead, Picasso met modern French art at the commercial galleries of Bernheim Jeune, Ambroise Vollard, and Berthe Weill. He drew what now appears an obvious lesson from this circumstance, yet one still largely concealed from so many of his contemporaries, that the future of modernist art would be directly tied to its market fortunes. From that defining moment, Picasso—extraordinarily—embarked upon a career in which henceforth his only juries would be dealers, a handful of men (and one woman) who would nurture, sponsor, and guide, but never quite control his art, and who would make themselves and Picasso extremely wealthy. Conversely, Picasso’s early commercial career demonstrated to the world at large that an artist with sufficient skill and imagination need not depend upon the public institutions of the art world to advance his or her career. Picasso’s postwar exhibition history, traced by FitzGer-

ald through the end of the 1930s and culminating with Alfred Barr’s retrospective for the artist at MOMA in 1939–40, similarly articulated the ways in which such talent might be canonized. In Picasso’s case his reputation as a protean genius was deliberately, systematically consolidated within the art market.

For Picasso scholars no doubt the bits and pieces of the artist’s exhibition history and his varied allegiances with such figures as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and Paul Rosenberg are well known. For the less initiated, FitzGerald has many fascinating stories to tell. But for both audiences what is most valuable about *Making Modernism* is that FitzGerald lays out for the first time in a cogent narrative many of the primal scenes in Picasso’s commercial life. Since *Making Modernism* is rigorously grounded in the archive, the reader directly experiences FitzGerald’s discoveries in the shape and orientation of the book. Therein lie *Making Modernism*’s many strengths and, it must be said, its weaknesses. I suspect, for example, that the originality of FitzGerald’s research, combined with the already rather well-documented relationships between Picasso and his early dealers, led the author to emphasize the prewar collector’s society organized by the entrepreneur/collector André Level, about which he has many new things to say, at the expense of an extensive discussion of Picasso’s relationship with other dealers, especially Vollard and Kahnweiler. FitzGerald’s analysis of Level’s group, called *La peau de l’ours*, or the Skin of the Bear, demonstrates how even early in the first decade of this century there already existed an intensely speculative climate around modernist painting in Paris. But he has comparatively little to say about how the patronage of Vollard and Kahnweiler freed Picasso (in the company of Braque) to pursue a radical rethinking of painting, which became known as Cubism. In fashioning *Making Modernism* in this way, FitzGerald tries to avoid the more well-trodden ground of Picasso scholarship. Unfortunately, it forces him into offering a rather disjunctive collection of stories about Picasso and his dealers.

FitzGerald begins with Picasso’s patronage by Level before the war, then turns to that of Léonce Rosenberg during the war, followed by his remarkably close partnership with Léonce’s brother Paul. This last relationship critically defined Picasso’s career from about the time of the Treaty of Versailles to the occupation of France. But much else was going on in Picasso’s career during these years. To embrace these events, FitzGerald repeatedly interrupts this commercial narrative to account for, among other things, Picasso’s involvement with André Breton and Surrealism. FitzGerald also makes a long digression into his dissertation topic, Picasso’s commission for a memorial sculpture for Guillaume Apollinaire. As FitzGerald’s narrative enters the 1930s, he takes up in an inevitably schematic fashion the many American collectors and curators who bought or showed Picassos. These were important relationships, since as FitzGerald shows, they did so much to consolidate Picasso’s international reputation. But if one puts aside these sub-



Pablo Picasso, *Portrait of Paul Rosenberg*, 1918–19. Courtesy Private Collection. ©1995 Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY/SPADEM, Paris.

atically reversed the old story of the artist as the dealer's victim.

When it suited him (and when his patron had sufficient financial resources), Picasso could be warm, judging by the intimacy of his early connections to Paul Rosenberg. Their relationship was probably far closer than what had existed between Picasso and Kahnweiler. In the fall of 1918 Picasso moved into a house adjacent to Rosenberg's gallery and private residence. The "House of Rosenberg style," as it became popularly known, came literally to embrace the two houses, which for many years presented a united front to the world. The differences between Picasso's relationships with the two dealers were not simply personal. Kahnweiler's advocacy of Picasso (most certainly retrospectively, but probably at the time as well) took a philosophical, theoretical bent. Kahnweiler believed in Cubism as a radical transformation, not simply of style but of vision. It is still an open question as to the extent that Kahnweiler's intellectual as well as financial patronage helped shape the development of Cubism. From FitzGerald's account, Paul Rosenberg appears to have been far more interested in supporting Picasso's notion that the artist was above style. He enthusiastically embraced Picasso's postwar turn to Neoclassicism. Since this turn had already been signaled in the last days before the war, Rosenberg could probably have done nothing more than he did. But his interventions on Picasso's behalf should not be minimized. He, more than any other dealer in Paris, was in the position to show Picasso how profitable this return to a classicizing aesthetic could be. FitzGerald quotes one French reporter's reading of the "Rosenberg style" to the effect that "if the Ancient is sold on the mezzanine, don't suppose that the New is 'traded' on the ground floor. Between these two floors there is a satisfying equilibrium...." In effect, Rosenberg positioned Picasso as a modern Old Master, whose guarantee of genius was founded on his current elegant Neoclassicism, and then gradually promoted through the marked eclecticism of Picasso's work in the 1920s. Picasso, the genius, was an artist who could work brilliantly in every style he assumed. Over the years Picasso's friendship with Rosenberg cooled, despite the dealer's best efforts to maintain it. Yet the financial benefits for both continued to grow at an astonishing rate, especially considering these were the Depression years.

FitzGerald offers perhaps his most sustained analysis of how Picasso's market reverberated in his work in the section devoted to Picasso's fascination with Renoir during the early 1920s. FitzGerald believes that Renoir's "old age style"—the combining of an Impressionist palette and brushwork with the linearity of academic-inspired painting—furnished Picasso with a model (and justification) for his own moves between Cubism and Neoclassicism. FitzGerald also believes that Picasso's eclecticism was "crucial to his worldwide fame." This point is more suggested than proved. As one form of

plots, as well as the important chapter on Level that opens the book—a version of which appeared in *Art in America* a few years ago—the real heart of *Making Modernism*, the story that most fascinates, is unquestionably the Rosenberg-Picasso alliance.

The prologue to the history of this highly productive odd couple is one that FitzGerald primarily describes in his notes: the unraveling of Picasso's relationship with Kahnweiler that followed the outbreak of war in 1914. Caught in Germany that August, Kahnweiler had his stock confiscated by the French government. Unable to recover his holdings, which, as the dealer wrote Picasso, represented virtually all his capital, he failed to make payment to Picasso for work delivered earlier in 1914. At the time, as FitzGerald observes, Picasso's association with Kahnweiler netted the artist in the neighborhood of some F50,000 per year, a very heady sum in 1913–14 monetary values. Yet when Kahnweiler could not deliver the money, the artist took legal action against the dealer in late 1914. He continued to pursue this action

despite a personal appeal by Kahnweiler to Picasso in 1920 and worked to get the dealer's stock auctioned. The collection was finally liquidated in three great auctions held in 1921 and 1923. FitzGerald also notes in passing that Level acted as agent on Picasso's behalf in his dealings with the government and against Kahnweiler, thus adding one more player to the number of dealers who fought to succeed Kahnweiler as Picasso's primary dealer.

Picasso's initial pursuit of Kahnweiler's stock for public auction came at a time when Picasso really did need the money. But this was not the case after the war, when in 1921, for example, Paul Rosenberg would purchase four paintings and 37 works on paper for the impressive sum of F121,000. Even after Kahnweiler settled his debt in May 1923, for the remainder of the interwar period Picasso let the dealer have very little access to his production. The artist's ruthless pursuit of his own interests, and his clear desire to punish Kahnweiler, puts in a very different light Picasso's 1918 denunciation of dealers as "the enemy." Picasso dra-

evidence, he cites Jean Boggs' assertion (in *Picasso & Things*) that Picasso's long neglected *Studies* of 1920 is "Picasso's key work of this time." Perhaps it was. But this painting, which resembles a William Harnett as a kind of poster board on which "reproductions" of various Picasso works from the 1920s in his variety of manners are "pinned," was clearly a private work. It never left Picasso's studio. There ought to be some question as to whether the painting as such would have been intelligible to Picasso's audience even if it had been exhibited. Simultaneous eclecticism (as was characteristic of Picasso in the first half of the 1920s) was—and in truth still is—a difficult concept for audiences to grasp. They would have to wait for Post-Modernism another 50 years.

Compare this question of intelligibility to the fact that when Rosenberg sought to open the American market for Picasso's work in partnership with Georges Wildenstein, the two dealers were careful to include in their first New York show in 1923 only his classically flavored work. One does get a sense from FitzGerald's account of Picasso's collaboration with Rosenberg that his various turns in style might have had the kind of publicity value as next year's model has with Detroit. Yet, clearly, here is one of the major difficulties posed by FitzGerald's approach. While we have a rather lengthy discussion of what Renoir would have meant to Picasso in those years, we have very little information regarding how, or if, the art world at large perceived the Renoiresque qualities of Picasso, or how or why eclecticism might have come to be regarded as an overriding virtue. Elsewhere, as in Christopher Green's *Cubism and Its Enemies*, one will discover, even at the level of popular newspaper caricatures, evidence of an art world wondering at Picasso's next move.

Indeed, the contrast between FitzGerald's book and Green's calls attention to how little space FitzGerald devotes to the question of how Picasso's connections to the various avant-gardes could be coupled to his reception in history. Only in the section devoted to Picasso and the Surrealists does FitzGerald attempt to show the external resonances Picasso's work had in the art world of his day. Even then, we learn much less than we might about, for example, Breton's activities as a purchasing agent for Jacques Doucet, the great French collector of modern art, or about Breton's own purchases of Picassos at the Kahnweiler auctions. How much was Breton a speculator in Picasso's art, and what role might it have played in his initial claim of Picasso as a Surrealist forefather?

What I am trying to suggest, in summary, is that while FitzGerald has made an essential contribution to our knowledge of Picasso and his market, *Making Modernism* seems quite self-consciously to want to place itself in a niche among the voluminous recent scholarship on Picasso. In so doing, FitzGerald does not satisfactorily settle upon those pieces most belonging to the commercial arrangements presumably at his book's core. If *Making Modernism* does not live up to its title, it is because FitzGerald, by avoiding theory or even a specific model of institutional behavior or marketing strategies, inevitably reproduces the portrait of the artist

as genius that he and his dealers so assiduously developed. In a discussion that virtually moves from "masterpiece" to "masterpiece," FitzGerald takes the quality, and most of the time, the nature and materials of the work for granted, so that the image one has is of hermetically created work that naturally attracted certain dealers with vision, who, working in concert with the artist (but more or less in a vacuum), produced an oeuvre, a career, that by the end of the story is that of the greatest artist of this century. Maybe what we learn best from FitzGerald's book on Picasso is that the artist had a certain genius for business.

#### ROBERT JENSEN

Robert Jensen is assistant professor of art history in the Department of Art at the University of Kentucky.

#### David Salle, 1979–1994. Edited by David Whitney. Text by Lisa Liebmann.

Published by Rizzoli International Publications, New York, 1994. 244 pp. 200 illustrations, 125 in color. \$75

1) Strength needs no excuse 2) The past is pointless 3) Just because it happened to you doesn't make it interesting 4) The things you apologize for are the things you really want

—*Search and Destroy*

There is something that bothers me about David Salle's sexual imagery—it doesn't turn me on. I secretly expect it to, but it fools me. It seems sexy, but it's not, because (like the pornography it refers to) it's a picture. Salle's really, instead of titillating, talking about what a picture is. He's already a step ahead.

Tricia Collins said she thinks Rita Ackermann's painting *Speed* is "David Salle-esque." I agree, and I think that's a compliment. Salle shares a strong affinity to the Pop icons. Johns, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Warhol, and Wesselmann are all reflected in Salle's aesthetic. His paintings also convey to me an "articulate conception," like Blondie's 1980 album *Autoamerican*, which placed raw funk next to country and western rock, and yet, in the singer's eloquent sneer, sounded like nothing but Blondie.

David is a funny guy. He will sacrifice anything for his art. Just as Picasso avoided military service so nothing would endanger his making art, David avoids what is not germane to his quest for—what to call it? Greatness? Quality? Salle's going for that "dominant force of his time" ring, and his case has a lot going for it. First, his aesthetic has never changed. He has not embraced social art or conceptual trends, but within his aesthetic, he has been a relentless experimenter. More than that, he has locked into the shaping trends of the time, intuited the concerns of a generation. There is something odd about this, though. It is not that Salle himself necessarily believes these ideas. He simply observes them, notes their timeliness, and makes them the governing principles of his work.

Rizzoli's recent *David Salle* is more than an artist's monograph; it is a production. This book doesn't need just a writer (Lisa Lieb-

mann). Like a top-budget Hollywood film, it needs an editor (David Whitney, who curated Salle's 1987 Whitney retrospective) and a director. Even the credit line, "designed and directed by Richard Pandiscio" (creative director of *Interview* magazine), lets you know you are in for a Busby Berkeley, no-holds-barred approach. It also needs a producer, and I suspect, behind the Rizzoli house facade, it is the artist himself who has carefully filled that role.

This should come as no surprise. Everyone knows by now that Salle has directed his first feature film, *Search and Destroy*, with an all-star cast including Griffin Dunne, Dennis Hopper, John Turturro, and Christopher Walken. Based on Howard Korder's play, the film premiered at Robert Redford's Sundance Festival and has received some critical acclaim and box-office success. Of course, big productions are nothing new to Salle. His collaborations with choreographer Karole Armitage in the 1980s were among the most exciting of the decade.

Yet, if I have any criticism for this luscious, luxurious new book, which will certainly become a standard reference source on Salle and provide hours of browsing pleasure, it's that it is overproduced. It gives the same impression as the Janet Malcolm article on Salle that appeared in *The New Yorker* in July 1994. Salle again, in his capacity as producer, selected Malcolm, who wrote 41 alternate beginnings to an article on Salle. Salle is known for being intelligent, not subtle. In an article by Brooks Adams for *Artnews*, Salle said, "At a certain point, you bring the gods down on your head."

Lisa Liebmann has heroically provided a definitive art-historical survey on Salle. Her marshalling of disparate sources and references in a user-friendly style is an impressive literary feat. She gives a picture of Salle's youth in Wichita, Kansas, with the crucial details that Salle's father, Alvin, was a military photographer, that Salle attended art classes with nude female models from the age of nine, and that he saw the Paul Taylor Dance Company (with sets by Alex Katz) by 19. We don't get much in the way of a psychological portrait of the artist. While this may be a blessing, and it does allow Liebmann to focus on aesthetic issues, there is a certain curiosity about the life of an artist whose imputed personality has provoked such strong responses. Many viewers like or dislike Salle himself on the basis of his artworks and published statements.

Salle left Wichita as soon as possible, to study at the newly founded California Institute for the Arts. I'd like to know a little more about the angst or ennui that might have prompted such a drastic move. Also, why did Salle choose L.A. instead of New York? In retrospect, it's easy to see the influence of Baldessari's photographically based distance on Salle's oeuvre. I'm also curious as to Salle's progression from unknown to superstar after his arrival in New York. Liebmann calls Salle's a picaresque coming-of-age story. But how difficult or easy was it? What were the decisions that landed Salle so quickly at the center of New York's art boom?

However, these are all quibbles, as this book is, after all, a monograph, not a biography, and we can wait for the definitive story of the artist's