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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 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

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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's postwar turn to Neoclassicism, since this 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

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.

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Jacques Doucet, the great French collector of Picasso's work. It never left Picasso's studio. There ought—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 Renoirese 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 forerunner? 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

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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 says 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 Wesselman 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 Liebmann). Like a top-budget Hollywood film, it needs an editor (David Whitney, who curated Salle's 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 picareesque 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...