



Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man

Norman Mailer

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One of America's greatest living authors probes the soul and explosive early years of the passionate, driven Pablo Picasso, whose genius was celebrated as rogue, insatiable lover, and conquistador ready for new battles. of color photos.

Portrait of Picasso as a Young Man Details

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Matt says

Norman Mailer managed through a long, long career to make himself a towering emblem of inadvertent comedy and ill-will; see for example John Cheever's parody of him (with, I believe, Mailer in the audience) in a 1965 MLA speech, where he relates "the adventures of a hypothetical novelist who, in search of material, becomes a war correspondent, spy, pornographer, and drug-addict, until he is finally run over by a taxi in Moscow. Mailer is furious" (from the "Chronology" in the Library of America edition of Cheever's stories).

But Mailer also was a champion of the value of art and literature, and had, at times, from the heart of the maelstrom, a keen eye for the demands and responsibilities creation can have on the creator. With this spirit he approaches Picasso's early years.

Really, this book is an excuse for Mailer to riff interpretations of Picasso's work and life--there's a reason Mailer's name is as big as Picasso's on the cover (I wish I could see a book on Mailer by Picasso). Sometimes the results are compelling, as in his discussion of narcissism; sometimes they hilarious bullshit ("Since each inhalation of cigarette smoke is a minute wound inflicted on the lungs, the mind develops a habit of reacting to the infinitesimal injury by a compensatory flow of thought"). Mailer's need to compete with Picasso is almost touching it is so bare, as is his need to comment everywhere on Picasso's manliness.

But the book is also a well-constructed story, built from the voices of many primary sources--most notably, Fernande Olivier, Picasso's first serious mistress--which Norman has the good grace to let speak for themselves, at length, without interruption. But Mailer also isn't afraid to take sides with his sources: you could make a great poem from the derisive labels he applies to Gertrude Stein and her writing when he's forced to quote her, while his affection for Fernande is one of the animating features of the book.

The development of Picasso's art is a pleasure to behold, and Mailer makes clear the toll this development takes on the artist, and the greater toll in exacts from those closest to him. I was disappointed that Mailer didn't follow Picasso further into his career, mostly because I would have happily kept reading.

Don Corleone says

Este libro ha marcado mucho la forma en como veo el arte y el quehacer artístico. Es un libro biográfico sobre Picasso y es increíble leer lo mucho que hizo antes de los 25 años.

Antes de leerlo, no entendía mucho la obra de este gran maestro, pero una vez terminada la lectura, se convirtió automáticamente en mi artista favorito y deseé ser aunque sea la mitad de trabajador de lo que fue Picasso en vida.

Jeff Littrell says

I've always loved the writing of Mailer and the great artwork of Picasso. This well-written book by Mailer

taught me more about Picasso, the man. Really revealing, and it's easy to see why Picasso had so many women falling all over him. A true genius and a bit of a rogue, there were many layers to the man and the artist. Mailer peels them away magnificently.

Alexandra says

Painted a subjective portrait [as to be expected], and while others complained of this, I enjoyed the heavy use of Fernande Olivier's and others' memoirs. The few moments where Mailer writes contemplatively and not over-sexually are best; the overall picture of life at the beginning of the 20th century also draws one in.

Clint Joseph says

I guess maybe I would give this a 3.5, because I did learn about Picasso, which, obviously, was the point. But I was a little disappointed in Mailer because, as opposed to him writing you a whole book about Picasso, this is more of a "NOW! That's What I Call Excerpts!" from a handful of other books. A whooooo lot in fact from Gertude Stein and one of Picasso's ladies, Fernande.

The thing is, both these ladies have their own books out (obviously) so it's a little weird to continually see Mailer going "But let's let Stein give us her take." (On this one particularly, he very oddly continues to point out that she isn't always entirely accurate or believable. So....?)

That aside, it did give me some of what I was wanting, viz., some kind of peephole into art, which I'm beginning to believe more and more I will just never understand. Mailer does do his best to add his insights and give you one context as to why things are important, but at the same time I don't know that I came away from the book with as strong an understanding as I'd hoped. Especially considering Mailer enjoys poking fun at the indecipherable writings of most art critics. Again though, this could entirely be my lack of knowledge/education/experience with this subject.

So, should you read it? I don't really know. This is the only Picasso book I have ever read so I don't have much to compare it to. I know the Pollack biography I read years ago wasn't exactly riveting either, so maybe this is a hole that just needs filled. Clear, concise, helpful art writing.

I will suggest, however, a book called "What are You Looking At?" by Will Gompertz. He does a good job of giving you the run-down on art history and context in a way people like me can sort of start to understand.

I will not suggest, however, that anyone, ever, for any reason, use this James Joyce joke as the title of a book. It is number two in the things I hate most about writers. (In case you were wondering, it's very close on the heels of people referring to the Glass kids as "precocious.")

Robert Stuart says

Mailer the asshole reporting about how much Picasso was an asshole...it takes one to know one.

Seth says

Mailer's Picasso is a lovingly curated assortment of all the most amusing, shocking, intriguing, and humanizing bits from the literature on Picasso, often quoting at length from letters, memoirs and other biographies. Mailer embraces every myth and entertains every apocryphal account. Mailer's eyes are sharp. Many of the book's highlights consist of Mailer studying a painting and noticing details about it the average reader will have missed. The book is fun to read and richly illustrated on nearly every page.

Jessika Malo says

This is an interesting yet incomplete account of his life as we saw it from people who loved him and cared for him. I enjoyed the writings of Fernand the most but felt that a more comprehensive look at his life would have rendered the book more esteem.

I am still wondering why most of the images of his work are in black and white, especially the blue and pink period and only at the end of the book, we get to see some color!

By all means, if you get this book, do read it and keep it but if you wish to learn more about Picasso, read him through the eyes of other writers too.

Amanda says

Mailer unashamedly includes so many excerpts from other biographies of the artist that at times it feels more like he was an editor rather than a writer of this book. As for Picasso I thought it was interesting to read about and see his freaky talent from a young age (seriously freaky the paintings he accomplished when he was only 13-14 years old). But by the end of the book I felt sorry for Picasso. The last pictures included were line drawings of vulvas euphemistically titled "Nudes" which Picasso drew when he was...71 years old. Poor guy! He just couldn't move on from that fixation. And I will say that if I married an artist I wouldn't appreciate him painting me pissing, even if it was abstract! Mailer said there was never a man who loved and hated women more than Picasso. True dat.

Patrice says

I didn't think I would appreciate Mailer's account of Picasso's life, but I ended up not only enjoying it, but wishing he would've written about his entire life.

Allycks says

When a self-styled heavyweight takes on one of the all time greats. It's no contest, but an enjoyable and very readable twelve rounds. Mailer's "portrait" is actually a pumped-up reportage, as most of the text cobbles together first-hand accounts from Apollinaire, Gertrude Stein (who comes off as far more clowish than in other portraits) and above all Fernande Olivier, Picasso's first great love and companion during his early years and breakthrough in Paris. More than anything else Mailer delivers (sorry, couldn't resist) a vivid

portrait of bohemia, materially poor but opulently rich in life, in the City of Lights at the turn of the twentieth century. The Mona Lisa affair was an eye-opening final chapter and a bit of a sad denouement for Apollinaire and the gang, as Picasso, already headed into the stratosphere, leaves his old friends to deal with the ugly and sobering mess. Finally, the book gives an easy and fully contextualized description of how Picasso and Braque revolutionized art (and Mailer would say, "human perception") by developing Cubism.

Jack Goodstein says

The best thing about Mailer's book is the inclusion of a large number of photos of Picasso and friends as well as color plates and black and white prints of the the artist's work. Mailer takes Picasso to WWI and through his Cubist periods. Depends on long passages from both contemporary accounts and modern critics for much of the presentation of information. Much of his own criticism of the painting is impressionistic and relies on poetic language that gives little in the way of ojective analysis.

Nina Leung says

This book along with Francois Gilot's biography of Picasso fed my obsession and mania for Picasso. I completely fell in love with him, and, because of these two books, understand, completely, why so many women fell to his feet. He was charming, witty, prolific, and always curious. Of course I loved his work for years, but to learn more about his life and the challenges he faced and the love he put into his work made me appreciate him more.

Bo Belanger says

I've always been fascinated by the early stages of people's lives in biographies, so this was right up my alley as Mailer focuses on early Picasso.

Worth a read.

Michael says

Disappointing only because Mailer phones it in more than a little bit by excerpting quite liberally from the memoirs of Fernande Olivier, Picasso's first serious lover. Granted, Mailer doesn't try to deny or mask this strategy, but it still rankles, especially when I was expecting more analysis and critique of Picasso's work itself. What there is of analysis is just extraordinary, but as a biography *Portrait* is a little half-assed even if "interpretative."
