



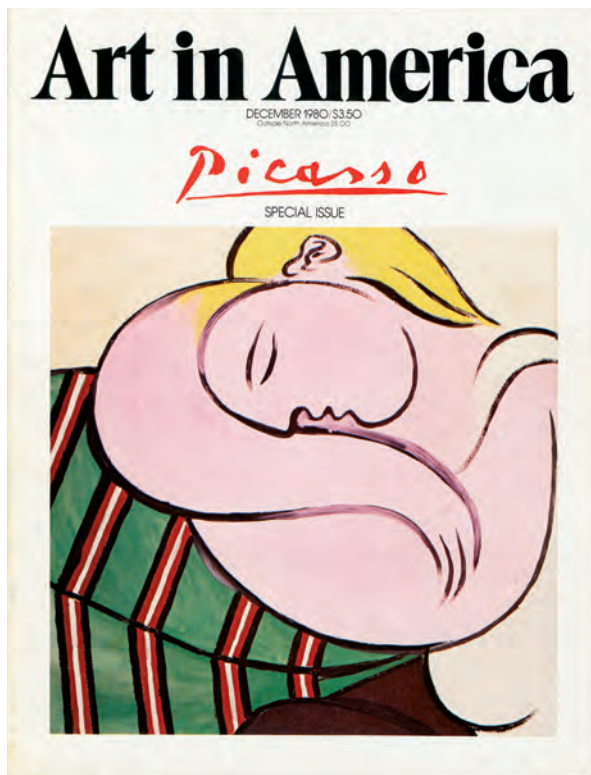
The Form-Giver

**What does Picasso mean today?
Anticipating the landmark exhibition of his sculptures
opening at MoMA this month, nine artists reveal
the master's impact on their work, thoughts,
memories and dreams.**

A Picasso Symposium

PARTICIPANTS:

**Sean Landers
Alice Channer
Karthik Pandian
Jessica
Jackson Hutchins
Andy Coolquitt
Liz Glynn
Mike Cloud
Adrián
Villar Rojas
Sarah Braman**



Cover of the December 1980 issue of *Art in America*.

Sean Landers

It is sometimes tempting to ignore Picasso because he has been at center stage for so long. Speaking as an artist, contemplating Picasso's life's work is not exactly easy on the ego. But that's just the thing—he will be there at center stage until he is deposed, and, so far, no one has been able to do it convincingly. This is something of an elephant in the room (or studio) for all artists practicing since his day.

When I first arrived in art school in 1980, the year I turned 18, my art history survey professor opened the course with the declaration: “None of you are the next Picasso. If you were, it would already be known by now.” As I sat there in that lecture hall, his words felt like a kick in the gut. They were heartbreaking and cruel, but they also rang true, and I remember refusing to accept them. I thought, “I choose to believe in myself anyway,” and I am happy to report that I still do today.

At our core, most of us artists possess an indefatigable and often irrational belief in the magnitude of our own “genius.” It's insanity, perhaps, but it's also sustaining and necessary. Picasso, as a force in the world, can almost be used as a theorem to prove that one is not a genius to the

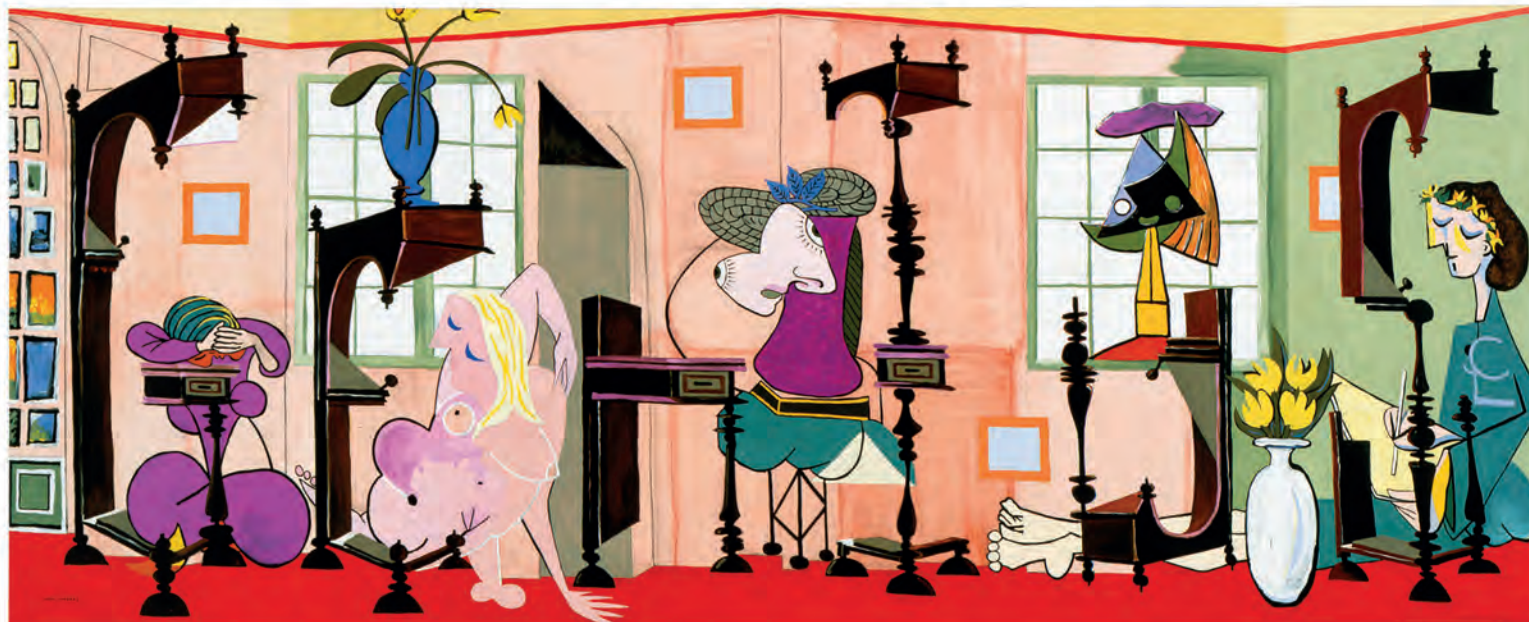
IN 1980 MoMA mounted a monster Picasso exhibition, attracting over a million visitors, a sum nearly equal to the museum's usual annual attendance. This fact was pointed out in December of that year by Roberta Smith, then senior editor of A.i.A., in an article she wrote for a special all-Picasso issue. The magazine gave the Spanish master the royal treatment, publishing articles by Rosalind Krauss, Linda Nochlin, Michael Brenson, Jeffrey Deitch and others.

Editor Elizabeth C. Baker also invited 14 artists, critics and art historians to respond to the exhibition in a Picasso symposium. Elizabeth Murray (the lone female participant) called the show “fascinating, exhilarating and infuriating.” Ed Ruscha made a few succinct remarks, noting that the artist was “Hot” in 1921 but “Shameful” by 1958. Larry Rivers included a photo of himself donning a T-shirt with the text “Picasso Sucks,” while Richard Serra sent only pictures of 16 Picassos—perhaps his favorites?

With a Picasso sculpture show opening this month at MoMA and on view through Feb. 7, we decided to revisit our symposium format and invite a group of nine artists (including four women) to share their thoughts on Picasso, his sculpture, his reputation and his place in art history.



Opening page, Pablo Picasso: *Bull*, ca. 1958, plywood, tree branch, nails and screws, 46½ by 56¾ by 4½ inches. Museum of Modern Art, New York. All Picasso images © Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.



extent that one privately believes, because, by rational comparison, the truth is painfully evident.

This conundrum is in large part the reason why, in 2001, I decided to make Picasso the subject of my solo show at Andrea Rosen Gallery in New York City. I wanted to fly as close to the proverbial “sun” as I could and survive the encounter as a sort of hubristic daredevil act. I wanted to compare and prove myself with/to the maestro, as he did with Velázquez, and not be destroyed in the process. (For the record, Picasso got his ass handed to him in his “Las Meninas” series).

In my flight close to the sun, my wings may or may not have been singed—it’s too early to tell, I suppose, though I personally think that I killed in that show. But if I eventually fall out of the sky because of that or some other crazy thing that I do, I promise that it will be a poetic plummet into the sea, worthy of an entire life spent writing about being an artist. Perhaps such an arc of failure (or my penchant for spinning such things) will be my mark. Who knows? I think the broader point I’m trying to make here is that Picasso was the ultimate measuring stick for artists of the 20th century and, with all cynicism, sarcasm and irony aside, he still is for artists of this time as well. And that kind of sucks a little bit.

Alice Channer

Picasso’s sculpture tells us everything about how we got to where we are and nothing about the ways of being or kinds of physicality we might need to go forward.

Picasso’s sculpture is solid, centered, separate, singular and uncompromised. His normative, gendered and specied bodies and heads sit firmly in the middle of the frame. When his human figures (usually vertical) are flat or narrow or dancing, they are completely certain of their balance and

their right to stamp over the ground they occupy. They take gravity and materiality as a given. These objects have no interest in or response to their surroundings.

His animal and human figures usually elongate and prioritize the torso, exaggerating the solid center of a body rather than extending its edges. His sculptures of heads emphasize centered and centralizing human brains. These figures are extremely certain of their biology and their destiny. So vast is their confidence that they flaunt it even when they are made using what would otherwise appear to be provisional methods and materials.

When the works are constructed lightly from flat materials—wood or paper or folded sheet metal—there is no question of their relationship to gravity. These ostensibly playful objects come firmly and definitively together, rather than struggling to balance or falling apart. There is no possibility of a fold flattening or a joint slipping. Flat surfaces are sure and confident; their planes meet and end heavily, usually at the ground. Broken and fractured faces, bodies and forms are brought together with such force that there is no question of their being anything other than whole.

These objects take everything for granted. Theirs is an existence that is utterly entitled. The works are directed into position by an artist in complete control. The world is theirs. They are lumbering conquerors, avatars of a human race that sees itself as centered and central.

The 21st century needs objects that are vulnerable, uncertain, other, alien. To navigate climate change, mass extinctions and extreme and rapid human-made changes in community, society, geology, politics, biology and economy, we need new kinds of objects. They must be confidently doubtful, awkward as well as elegant, *h o r i z o n t a l* as well as vertical, soft as well as hard. Objects like these might show us new kinds of embodiment—how to mutate, adapt, change state, survive, prosper.

Sean Landers:
Genius, 2001, oil
on linen, 86 by 214
inches. Courtesy
Petzel, New York.

Opposite, Alice
Channer: *Synthetics*,
2015, fired and
glazed ceramic,
stainless steel and
mixed mediums,
13¾ by 39¾ by
185½ inches.
Courtesy Lisa
Cooley, New York.



Karthik Pandian:
Broken Claw (Mare Nostrum), 2012, bronze, MDF and enamel, 13 by 8 by 6 inches. Courtesy Federica Schiavo Gallery, Rome.

Karthik Pandian

My wife, Paige, is pregnant; we are moving to Vermont; and, as I write this, the Satanic Temple in Detroit is preparing to unveil a monumental bronze Baphomet, a goat-headed deity enthroned and flanked by two adoring children—all of which leaves me somewhere between *She-Goat* and *Man with a Lamb* in Picasso's sculptural oeuvre.

The latter's title is worth considering. *Man with a Lamb*. The man and lamb are separate and unequal—in body, expression and concern. The man stands erect, bug-eyed, naked, without genitalia, muscles neither flexed nor relaxed, holding aloft the lamb, which cranes its long neck, struggling to escape the fist closed around three of its limbs. The man appears impassive, bored, perhaps even a little surprised by the physical and symbolic duties with which he is charged. His expression is a mixture of “Who, me?” and “I didn't sign up for this” or “It sounds glamorous but being an eternal form isn't all it's cracked up to be.” A good shepherd he is not. Meanwhile, the lamb flails. Its mouth agape, it seems to bleat a plea for release and for a return to the ground. Is this a scene of violence or care?

When I visited the sculpture recently at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, I noticed that the man and the lamb, despite their spiritual disjunction, are more physically connected than I had previously imagined. There is hardly a seam between their bodies. Picasso built up the clay in rough fistfuls around where the man's chest meets the lamb's back, giving the impression that the lamb is emerging from or grafted onto the man.

If *Man with a Lamb* conveys the malaise associated with sober responsibility, *She-Goat* embodies the possibilities of the creative process. Assembled from scavenged

detritus, the she-goat is visibly pregnant, her wicker-basket belly protruding and her swollen ceramic-vessel mammary glands dangling. She is more than just “with child.” Her pregnancy is intrinsic to her, the sculpture conveying a unity that Picasso appears to have coveted.

She-Goat has no human master, except for Picasso himself, who is present in the work through his ingenuity and, perhaps, his affectionate identification with her as a prodigious eater of garbage, recalling an artist who consumes forms and styles willy-nilly.

Jessica Jackson Hutchins

I took the train into Chicago from my father's beach house on Lake Michigan last week to see the exhibitions of Frances Stark and Charles Ray, two artists I admire, at the Art Institute of Chicago. The shows were profound and beautiful, and it was fun to see that Frances used photographs of two different books I had recommended to her over 10 years ago when we first met

I grew up in that museum, having gone often with my mother when I was a child in Chicago and she was getting her PhD in art history. When I ducked into one of the permanent-collection galleries last week, I happened upon Picasso's *Old Guitarist*, which was my very favorite painting



Opposite,
Picasso: *She-Goat*, 1950/1952, bronze, 46½ by 56¾ by 28½ inches. Museum of Modern Art.

Right,
Jessica Jackson Hutchins: *Blue Guitar*, 2010, chair, wood stain, glazed ceramic and string, 34½ by 17 by 18½ inches. Private collection, London. Courtesy Timothy Taylor Gallery, London.



growing up. I have always had a postcard of that painting, in my dorm room, my first apartment, my studio, and now my home, on the refrigerator, where it competes with my kids' drawings. So I thought it was sort of sweet to see all the iPhones held up in front of it—all these people who have now incorporated this image into their collection of selfies and vacation landscapes and family photos.

The thing about this painting that really got me when I was younger was the relationship it seemed to have with George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps"; the two were inextricably linked in my mind. They seemed so similar in tone I might have thought that one influenced the other; "heavy, dark, and sweet," as Peter Schjeldahl wrote, like many an adolescence is, like my childhood was. Another thing that got me was the painting's blue color. I had a strange obsession with blue, which I can't really explain, but I would seek out my favorite shades of it at the expense of hours, looking through all the books in the house to find a specific one I had a yearning to see.

I've made two sculptures over the years with that painting in mind. In one, a ceramic pitcher hangs by a string in the seat of a blue-stained chair, suggesting to my mind both musical and scatological potential. The other sculpture is *S.M.*, in which an S-shaped ceramic is cradled within a larger M, reminding me of all the S's in Picasso's

painting. Further, the sculpture is a kind of portrait of my husband, whose initials are S.M., and who is an old guitarist, I guess.

Since my recent visit to the Art Institute occurred during a family vacation, I asked some of my family members if they had any important Picasso memories from their lives. I was sort of surprised that there weren't more of them. I had also had a very significant teenage make-out session in Picasso's public sculpture in Chicago, and really it seems to me that images of his paintings are as common as Beatles songs and as easily influential on the shaping of our lives. My uncle thought it remarkable that as an American I even had a significant childhood experience involving a painting. My sister-in-law offered only that she grew up with a Picasso needlepoint pillow that her mother had made, but her son, my 16-year-old nephew, recalled a story he had heard that surprisingly involved my same old guitarist. There was a print of the guitarist in the hospital room where Linda McCartney was convalescing after giving birth to the McCartneys' first child. The hand position in the painting inspired Paul to write a song using only two-finger chords. The song, called "When the Wind Is Blowing," did not make the cut for the couple's 1971 album *Ram* but did provide material for "All Day," a recent collaboration between Paul and Kanye West that became a much bigger hit than Paul had had for years.

View of Andy Coolquitt's installation *Baubaus, in the middle of our street, Baubaus, in the middle of our...*, 2013. Courtesy 21er Haus, Vienna.





Liz Glynn

Some of Picasso's most radical innovations came in 1909, four years after Einstein published his theory of special relativity. Cubism echoed the revolution in theoretical physics that disposed of long-held absolutes about the relationship between space and time. Picasso's early works remain powerful because they embody a fundamental disjunction in the experience of a single moment.

Picasso was one of the first artists to allow time to collapse upon itself, leaving a pile of shards to sift through. Rather than render a decisive photographic moment, each image is a collection of spatial fragments that imply motion in time. The facets never fully resolve into a complete body, and the delineation between figure and ground dissolves. Space reverberates and the body disappears into it; Picasso's best work is a reminder that we are all made of the same particulate matter as the stuff that surrounds us.

The destruction of objective three-point perspective brought the abject to the fore. *Nude with Necklace* spills out of all orifices, ass and tits and cunt on the same picture plane. (Believe it or not, they do belong to the same body.) The *Nude* is everything all at once—a subjective, sloppy totality. I think of Henry Miller writing *Tropic of Cancer* (1934) in Paris, a city of sexual encounters and spillage. “I too love everything that flows: rivers, sewers, lava, semen, blood, bile, words, sentences.” The best of Picasso's women are like Miller's ravaging descriptions: unapologetic, angular and hard-edged, leaving nothing to the subtleties of drapery. Miller's pace matches Picasso's sense of time: broken, fleeting and moving on to the next encounter before the door had closed on the last.

We continue to experience time as Picasso did in 1909, as a collection of disconnected simultaneities continually hurled into our field of vision. Picasso anticipated the jump cut, the cluttered desktop of a Windows operating system and new nonlinear narrative structures. There's something pathetically literal about Picasso's chopping of time into chunks, and yet the fractured simultaneity he depicted could not be more present today.

We've become acclimated to a constant barrage of fractured images, broken bits of text and technically perfected bodies falling out of designer dresses. What is shocking to me about early Picasso is not how radical he was, but how correct his early depictions feel in the current moment. Our bodies never came back together again, and it becomes increasingly difficult to reconcile having a human body with the digital “realities” technology has constructed.

Over the years Picasso settled into a complacent state, choosing to rearrange the component parts of the image in ever more arbitrary compositions. Dissolution, abjection and confrontation vanished, and many late Picassos failed to keep pace with cultural and technological developments outside the aesthetic field. Perhaps in looking at Picasso's best work today, we might rethink the discontinuous notion of time and space that we've come to take for granted over the past century.

Liz Glynn: *Untitled (After Balzac, with Burgher)*, 2014, cast bronze, 71 by 46 by 23 inches. Courtesy Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, and Redling Fine Art, Santa Monica.

All this talk about rock legends and Picasso and guitars reminds me of the time I was at MoMA and had just spent some time looking at one of Picasso's guitar sculptures. I had moved on and was rather freaking out over Giacometti's *Palace at 4 A.M.*, when I heard a child say, “Look, Mommy, it's a guitar!” I turned back to see Patti Smith, who replied, “That's not a guitar. That's a Picasso.”

Andy Coolquitt

the old perv of the Côte d'Azur . . . the Ayn Rand of the art world . . . someone you thought was cool in high school and now you're embarrassed by . . . that dude your shitty sculpture professor copies . . . those “restless romantic” figures . . . he's the opposite of what you would call an artist's artist . . . an anti-artist's artist
best sculptures in the Musée Picasso are the (Diego) Giacometti fixtures
best sculpture, *Guitar* (1912), is just barely not a painting . . . it only works from one side
other best sculpture was his collection of African and Oceanic objects
ok, maybe I could live with the Apollinaire model (*Project for a Monument to Guillaume Apollinaire*, 1928)
it's not a bad sculpture . . .



Mike Cloud

1. Certain motifs recur when Picasso enters a discussion. When I studied art in college I was told many Picasso stories, and their themes were remarkably consistent. He greeted visitors to his studio in his underwear, gave away artworks as gifts and lived in a freezing garret with peeling wallpaper and collapsing furniture. I was often told about the intimacies of his relationships with lovers, collaborators and the objects he created. His actions in the stories were not always admirable, but it was clear that they were always symbolic.

2. The motifs in stories about Picasso tend to be social, political and emotional, rather than formal or aesthetic, which indicates that his role in art discourse is spiritually allegorical rather than technically didactic. Our mentors quote Picasso to teach us not how to make art but how to *be* artists. The Museum of Modern Art describes his relationship to his sculptures in their upcoming exhibition as resembling that of an untrained artist. Being trained only as a painter, he is said to have been able to approach sculpture with the complete freedom from convention of a self-taught artist. Picasso lived with his sculptures until his death and was passionately fond of them. In short, he actually used his sculptures *as* art in some genuine sense. The use of an artwork in the life of its maker is considered a virtue when evaluating the authenticity of so-called primitive art, such as the African and Polynesian masks and sculptures we often associate with Picasso's mythology.

3. Our culture creates allegories to express shared insights into the conditions of our existence. Picasso as an allegorical figure in particular expresses an insight into the existence of both art and artists. Collectors of so-called primitive art look down on objects made specifically for foreign consumption, as opposed to "authentic use" (use by the object's author). Those "inauthentic" works have an instrumental existence: the author uses them to gain access to some other type of capital. The sculptural works of Picasso on view at MoMA were cherished personal possessions that the artist rarely sold. This information gives the works existential value because their existence fulfills the intuitively felt need *for* their existence. That the value of art is created by an existential need is a genuine insight about the nature of *being* in art. The purpose of an allegory is to express these very sorts of insights and values within a mythological structure.

4. All the heroes of art history have similar allegorical functions and art history itself is a kind of myth cycle. For many people, Picasso is the chief god in an orthodox pantheon of white men, stretching



Mike Cloud: *Diane Arbus: Couple dancing at a drag ball with a flag*, 2004, collage on vellum, 12 by 11 inches. Courtesy the artist.

roughly from Michelangelo to Gerhard Richter. True believers in these heroes maintain that their genius is an actual judgment one makes in the presence of their work. But, regardless of the aesthetic merits of his work, Picasso's genius is actually an element of a text I read beforehand. After reading about Picasso's genius, I then reinscribe it (sometimes with great difficulty) into my experience of his work.

5. It is possible to gain critical distance from the myth of Picasso by acknowledging the enlightenment that his myth exists to express. I was raised as a devout Christian and in my particular church we were taught that the Bible, being literally true, had no symbolic meaning. For us the story of Noah's flood, for example, didn't *mean* anything. It was just an event that occurred one day in the past and might (if we were bad) happen again by other means one day in the future. Our pastor feared that if we ever understood the meaning of Christ's salvation as metaphorical, Christ would never come back for us. Millions of art students will purchase picture books of Picasso's works and examine the lines, colors and shapes in search of his genius. They were taught that one day in the past he arranged those forms in a way that was brilliant, and one day in the future someone else (perhaps you or me) might do the same. Believers ask, "Is Oscar Murillo the new Picasso? Is Dana Schutz the new Picasso? Are they geniuses?" If we understand Picasso as allegory and acknowledge the validity of the insight he represents, no one need ever be the new Picasso again. Picasso need never come back for us.

Opposite, Picasso: *Guitar*, 1924, painted sheet metal, painted tin box and iron wire, 43¾ by 25 by 10½ inches. Musée national Picasso, Paris.

Adrián Villar Rojas

A visual reponse to Picasso:

A drawing from Adrián Villar Rojas's series "Return the World," 2012, graphite, colored pencil and watercolor on paper, 11½ by 8¼ inches. Courtesy Marian Goodman Gallery, New York and Paris, and kurimanzutto, Mexico City.



Opposite, Picasso: *Glass of Absinthe*, 1914, painted bronze and absinthe spoon, 8½ by 6½ by 3¾ inches. Museum of Modern Art.

Sarah Braman

I haven't seen a lot of Picasso's sculptures in person. The ones that knock me over, even in photos, are planar. Flat sheets of cardboard, metal and wood, and later massive slabs of concrete, come together to create volumes. Cubism invited air in to be part of the sculpture in a new way.

My first experience with Picasso was through my Granny. Kathleen Butler was born along with Cubism in the early 1900s. She was a schoolteacher, a stay-at-home mother and a hobby painter. Granny was old-fashioned about some things, but she was enthralled with modernism. She took me to the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Conn., and occasionally we would venture down to New York to visit the Met and see Picassos and Matisse's at MoMA. We bought stacks of postcards at the museum shops, and once or twice she chose a poster to have mounted and framed. She gave my mother Picasso's *Blue Nude* for her birthday, and it hung in our bathroom in Ashfield, Mass., for

Sarah Braman: *Let's Stay Desperate*, 2006, cardboard, wood, plexiglass, mirror and paint, 66 by 48 by 52 inches. Courtesy Canada, New York.

30 years. Granny had lots of art books. One of her favorites was of Picasso's drawings and prints. Her excitement was palpable every time we leafed through those plates. I would look in wonder as she talked about his *line*.

Maybe more impactful than the art I saw with Granny was the art I made with her. Every summer my brother and I would spend a few weeks with her. For days on end, we did craft projects together. We made tissue-paper flowers, their colors achingly bright, and then made decoupage bottles with newspaper and magazine clippings to put the flowers in. We made string art with embroidery floss, scraps of wood and nails. We slathered tempera paint on cardboard and cut and fitted the pieces together with slats and tape to make animals and trees, cubist figures and heads. I don't think we ever made instruments, but later in art school when I saw slides of Picasso's cardboard guitar, I understood in a tactile way how it was constructed. I felt like *I made that thing*. I now wonder what it will feel like to see it again, not in a slide or a book but this time in real life. I wish my Granny Kate were here to come with me. ○



