

Gallery chronicle

by James Panero

In the development of Cubism, Georges Braque said that he and Picasso were like “two mountain climbers roped together.” Braque should have cut the cord when he had the chance. For a century, Braque has been bound up in the pictorial innovations he developed with Picasso. Even today, the association is hard to shake.

While there have been plenty of joint Picasso-Braque exhibitions, over twenty years have passed since the last major Braque-only retrospective in a U.S. museum. That one was at the Guggenheim in 1988, but don't look for a museum today to make up for lost time. “Georges Braque: Pioneer of Modernism,” an exhibition of forty paintings and *papiers collés* now on view at Acquavella, is a product of the commercial gallery system.¹ It is also a triumph. Free to the public, this museum-quality show is the best argument going that one does not have to pay the outrageous admission charges of today's museums to see great art in New York.

“People were happy to be consumed,” Paloma Picasso once claimed of her father. “They thought it was a privilege.” In their climb up Parnassus during those heady years before the outbreak of World War I, Braque was the brains behind Cubism's pictorial innovation, and Picasso ate those brains for lunch. Picasso's appetites have always dominated the narrative. His bed games have become even more legendary than the paintings, thanks to the multi-volume

biography by John Richardson. It is from Richardson, for example, that we learn Picasso once claimed to have an eye at the end of his penis.

While Braque was nearly killed at the Front, Picasso lived it up during the war years. After the war, the priapic Andalusian further indulged his cravings. “For the rest of Picasso's life sex would permeate his work almost as Cubism did,” Richardson claims, and Picasso and Braque went their separate ways. So while Picasso painted from his trousers, Braque turned somewhere else. Braque looked to convention, and in particular to still life. He dedicated his artistic practice to the radical conventions of modernism first uncovered by Cézanne and further developed through analytic and synthetic Cubism. “All of us come from Cézanne,” Braque said. “Cézanne has overthrown centuries of painting.”

The Acquavella show demonstrates the rigor of Braque's career-long look into the nature of representation. The exhibition begins with Braque's exploration of Fauvist color that he developed soon after observing Henri Matisse and André Derain at the Salon d'Automne in 1905. In works like *L'Estaque* (1906), which rivaled anything the other Fauves could do, Braque's interest in flatness is readily apparent. The eye-popping scene of a curving waterfront and hillside appears to come out of the painting as much as it recedes from view.

The curator Dieter Buchart has done a masterly job of selecting and hanging this exhibition, with works on loan from both major museums and private collections. For example, between *Landscape at L'Estaque* (1906) and

¹ “Georges Braque: Pioneer of Modernism” opened at Acquavella Galleries, New York, on October 12 and remains on view through November 30, 2011.

