

Synopsis

By rejecting consistency, Picabia powerfully asserted the artist's freedom to change. Irreverent and audacious, restless and brilliant, Francis Picabia achieved fame as a leader of the Dada group only to break publicly with the movement in 1921. Moving between Paris, the French Riviera, Switzerland, and New York, he led a dashing life, painting, writing, yachting, gambling, racing fast cars, and organizing lavish parties. Like no other artist before him, Picabia created a body of work that defies consistency and categorization, from Impressionist landscapes to abstraction, from Dada to stylized nudes, and from performance and film to poetry and publishing. A primary constant in his career was his vigorous unpredictability. Illustrated with nearly 500 reproductions, this sweeping survey of Picabia's eclectic career embraces the challenge of his work, asking how we can make sense of its wildly shifting mediums and styles. In her opening essay, curator Anne Umland writes that with Picabia, familiar oppositions "between high art and kitsch, progression and regression, modernism and its opposite, and success and failure are undone." In 15 superb essays, additional authors—including distinguished professors George Baker, Briony Fer, and David Joselit and renowned Picabia scholars Carole Boulbass and Arnauld Pierre—delve into the radically various mediums, styles, and contexts of Picabia's work, discussing his Dada period, his abstractions, his mechanical paintings, his appropriations of source imagery, his multifaceted relationship with print (both in his paintings and as a publisher and contributor to vanguard journals), his forays into screenwriting and theater, and his complex politics. Marcel Duchamp, of course, but also Nietzsche and Gertrude Stein make repeat appearances along the way. Turning to Picabia's contemporary legacy, Catherine Hug maps the history of his critical reception and interviews contemporary curators and artists, including Peter Fischli, Albert Oehlen, and David Salle. A lively 30-page chronology illustrated with archival photographs and ephemera gives readers a year-by-year account of the artist's colorful life and of his interactions with fellow artists and critics, friends, and lovers. Together these essays suggest that the unruly genius of Picabia offers us a powerfully relevant and provocative alternative to the familiar narrative of modernism.

Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round So Our Thoughts Can Change Direction accompanies the major 2016 exhibition on the artist, jointly organized by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Kunsthaus Zürich. Francis Picabia was born in 1879 in Paris, the only child of a Cuban-born Spanish father and a French mother. His first success came as a painter in an Impressionist manner. He went on to become one of the principle figures of the Dada movement in New York and Paris. In 1925 Picabia moved to the south of France, where he lived and worked through World War II. Following the war, Picabia returned to Paris, where he died in 1953.

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Customer Reviews

A group of absurdly delightful paintings. (Robert Pincus-Witten Artforum)The restless career of one of the great provocateurs of early modernism finally gets its due from MoMA, healthfully perturbing that institution's emphasis on linear progress and creative genius with radically shifting styles and tones. (The New York Times)..not many historical figures have seemed as ripe [as Picabia] not only for reevaluation, but simply to have her or his work seen fully. (Sanford Schwartz The New York Review of Books)The French avant-garde artist's work was prescient about our era of 'post-truth' politics and culture.... He specializes in disinformation and is the early Modernist embodiment of 'post-truth'. (Kenneth Goldsmith The Art Newspaper)The 10 Best Art Books of 2016 (Rachel Corbett New York Magazine)From his earliest Impressionist efforts, through Cubist, Dadaist, Surrealist and realist work| Picabia shifted fluidly with the cultural moment, all the while vigorously denouncing the style he'd just left behind|With copious illustrations and 16 essays, this hefty catalog for the current retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art attempts to chart a zigzag career that made up in energy what it lacked in depth of exploration. (Albert Mobilio The New York Times)Picabia found the right container for his instincts. Those paintings make me deliriously happy; they sing. It's amazing they exist. (David Salle The Art Newspaper)The pluralist of pluralists produced some masterpieces and more unbelievably ugly paintings than any other artist in the twentieth century - besting even Sigmar Polke and Martin Kippenberger - and I cannot stop myself from loving them all. (Daniel Birnbaum Artforum, Best of 2016)Picabia's fundamental comportment or attitude of refusal of ironic

negation—was the constant running through the early and late work, just as it was the constant running through his life...underneath this apparent indifference is the unmistakable echo of a reflexive negation, the constant assertion of a “no” resounding in a self-chosen void. (Daniel Barbiero *Arteidolia*) crackles with immediacy, popping free of its time to wink at the present (Peter Schjeldahl *The New Yorker*) A leading light of the Dada movement... visually anticipating the Pop, Conceptual and Postmodern art movements (Paul Laster *CULTURED*)...A sort of hero for postmodernism... (Deborah Solomon *WNYC News*)...presents the full range of Picabia’s practice—as a painter, a poet, a letter writer, a party planner, and (not least) an insatiable gadabout—but more than that, it definitively establishes him as one of the key artists of the past 100 years, a figure whose influence, at once comic and manic and dark, continues to reverberate. (Andrew Russett *Art News*) He made important contributions to both Cubist painting and its nemesis, Dada, with its art-barbed hijinks, and refused to cultivate a personal style that deepened with time. Instead he toyed with kitsch and calendar art, and based paintings on found photographs. When he returned to abstraction at the end of his life, he tried several styles. But lately when multiple mediums and styles are increasingly the artistic norm Picabia’s stature has grown. His work seems more alive today than that of any artist of his cohort, even Duchamp. (Roberta Smith *The New York Times*) An avant-gardist par excellence...chameleonic... (Andrea K. Scott *The New Yorker*)...comprehensive and sumptuous... (Alfred Brendel *The New York Review of Books*) Experimenting first with Impressionism, then Pointillism, and then Cubism and Dada, Francis Picabia (1879–1953) made himself impossible to categorize. (Art News) Picabia’s wit, use of language and found imagery, and his style changes, make him a precursor not just of Pop Art but of Post-Modernist painting. (Roberta Smith *The New York Times*) The idiosyncratic French artist was an outlier on the royal road of 20th century modernism, and an interesting one. (*Time Magazine*) Francis Picabia: abrupt changes, wild jumps, adventurous curves—finally, an endeavor aimed at revealing the whole Picabia. (Sabine Altorfer *Aargauerzeitung*)

Anne Umland is the Blanchette Hooker Rockefeller Curator of Painting and Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Catharine Hug is Curator, 20th Century Art at the Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland.

This is the catalogue of the mammoth exhibit launched in Zurich (where I saw it while ago) and now at MOMA in New York. The exhibit is a real eye-opener—including aspects of all Picabia’s

work--beautiful, provocative, exquisitely crafted, vulgar, erudite, rambunctious, pornographic--in all the media he explored--painting, drawing, collage, sculpture, installation, costume & scene design, cinema, writing. The exhibit also includes dozens of items in private collection never or rarely before publicly displayed. No serious lover of modernist art should miss it. The book documents the show in exemplary fashion, worth every penny of the not unreasonable price. I can think of only one way in which it could have been better: the insertion of a CD containing ENTR'ACTE, Picabia's experimental film collaboration with Rene Claire, a surrealist masterpiece on the level with (and in some respects superior to) the Dali/Bunuel CHIEN ANDALOU. I saw it screened at the exhibit and the moving image together with Satie's music create a lot better effect than a selection of stills.

Excellent overview of Picabia's career, this exhibition catalog is a good example of how a retrospective book should be put together. The book moves chronologically covering each phase of Picabia's practice and ending with an annotated timeline. Each phase is introduced with an illustrated essay followed by a plate section. Very informative and excellent reproductions throughout. Even if you can see this exhibition in person I would recommend reading this book before seeing the show. Highly recommended for those interested in the art of Francis Picabia.

very comprehensive -- it'll take me a while to look at it all --

visually a stunner

Fantastic!

a real surprise, about time to give credit to picabia , great work .

Beautiful paintings and text to support them.

a great document, now i can relive all the horrors of picabia

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