

Stella Downer Fine Art

Dealer Consultant & Valuer

Member of the Australian Commercial Galleries Association
ABN 86 229 108 803

Artist Statement

Set in the South of France, between 1938 and 1954, *Sequel* takes the viewer on an intimate behind-the-scenes tour.

Entering their studios and homes, we observe masters Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, and his young partner, artist Françoise Gilot.

Seduced by the dazzling light, Matisse had resided in Nice since 1921, moving to Vence in 1943. In 1946 Picasso and Gilot arrived in nearby Antibes, setting up their first home together.

At 77, Matisse was twelve years older than Picasso and fifty-two years senior to Gilot, who was just 25. Already acquainted with Matisse in Paris, Picasso took Gilot to visit, and the two immediately struck up their own independent friendship.

For both men, women collaborated as their working partners, and were pivotal in their practices.

Matisse's long standing Russian model, Lydia Délectorskaya managed his studios and homes, and during his 'cut-outs chapter', other female assistants were engaged for the laborious work of pinning his paper assemblages to the walls.

Against the backdrop of motherhood and a volatile relationship with Picasso, Gilot was his model and muse, while still managing to maintain her own art practice. She was forty years his junior.

Collecting each other's work, debating ideas and sharing subjects, the three artists met regularly. For each one, the work of this period demonstrates their spirit of curiosity, experimentation and reinvention.

In 1941, recovering from a serious operation, Matisse had begged his doctors for more time to complete his life's work. Surviving another 13 years, in 1948 he moved from his home, *Villa La Rêve* in Vence, to the *Hôtel Régina* in Nice. Here he continued with his groundbreaking cut-outs series, "drawing with scissors", his painting practice diminishing. Bedridden and wearing an iron corset, he directed studio assistants with a bamboo rod, drawing on the walls with charcoal attached to its tip. Flooding the studios with colour, playful paper stencils proliferated, evoking lagoons and sea creatures seen by Matisse in Tahiti many years earlier. He often referred to this fruitful period as his "second life", or *sequel*.

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In 1948, moving to nearby Vallauris, Picasso transformed a deserted perfume factory, *Le Fournas* into a studio. Collaborating with the Ramiés, founders of *Madoura Pottery*, he pioneered his ceramic practice, creating 600 pieces to exhibit in Antibes. Walking in the landscape inspired sculptures made with industrial found objects, and during this era Picasso made most of his lithographs. At their home, *La Galloise*, Gilot and Picasso's young children Claude and Paloma could be seen in their parent's studios, often making their own drawings. Family life was pervasive, inspiring many of the couple's works.

Differentiating herself from Picasso, Gilot developed her drawing practice. Toward the end of their decade together, her artistic growth was acknowledged in her first solo show, held at *Galerie Louise Leiris* in Paris in 1952. Taking domestic life as her subject, elegant compositions of her *White Period* and *Kitchen Series* evidenced a highly skilled hand. Controlled yet fluid lines travelled across the canvases, describing the forms with a masterful aesthetic beauty. Learning from Picasso, Gilot had developed her own signature and reached a crucial turning point. Famously the only woman to ever abandon him, the following year she fled with the children to Paris. Gilot would go on to establish an enduring independent career as artist and writer, maintaining working studios in Paris and New York, until her death in 2023, aged 101.

Matisse and Picasso would spend the rest of their days in the South of France.

With insatiable appetites for creative challenge, each artist responded with tireless vigour. Whether the richly mature work of Matisse in his final decade, the avant - garde experiments of Picasso, or Gilot's lyrical abstractions, the inspiring legacies created in this era remain fresh, and relevant to our modern perspectives.

Referencing period photography, in this series of drawings for *Sequel* I sought to evoke the atmosphere of each scene, using French coloured pencil on watercolour paper - a process I found both compelling and enriching.

Jane Gerrish, 2024

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