

artdaily.org

**Exhibition features significant portraits from private collections by the artists
Alice Neel and Pablo Picasso**



NEW YORK, NY.- [Sara Kay Gallery](#) is presenting *Neel / Picasso*, on view through July 20. The exhibition features significant portraits from private collections by the artists Alice Neel (1900-1984) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973).

Neel and Picasso were contemporaries who transformed and revitalized portraiture. Through select paintings by both artists, this exhibition offers a revealing parallel view of two key 20th century painters.

Neel, a self-described “painter of people,” chose not to idealize her subjects. Instead, with bold strokes, an imaginative line between the interior experience and the outward appearance of the sitter is revealed.

In her portrait of Lida Moser from 1962, Neel focuses on facial expression, body language and clothing, illustrating the overlapping of inner essence and outward appearance, of vanity and vulnerability. Painted by her artist friend during the rise of the feminist movement, Moser was an accomplished photojournalist at a time when women were a rarity in the field. Moser is an unmistakably dynamic figure. Painted in lucid tones with fingers jutting out like spindles, her form is magnetic and commanding. A group of Moser’s vintage photographs—many shown in New York for the first time—are displayed as a companion to Neel’s incisive portrait of her friend.

In juxtaposition to Neel’s probing of the space between the inner and outer life, Picasso reconfigures his subject’s features revealing his own interpretation of their essence, inadvertently serving as a barometer for his own emotional state.

Painted in 1937, *Femme au béret orange et au col de fourrure* depicts the artist’s young mistress and muse, Marie-Thérèse Walter. Here, the formal experimentation and emotional intensity that characterize his most celebrated portraits of women are embodied. The small group of portraits that he painted on 4 December 1937, the present work included, make it almost possible to track the slow transition from his relationships with Marie-Thérèse Walter to Dora Maar, and reflects the artist’s conflicted feelings surrounding this transition.



The final two works of the presentation highlight a shared acknowledgement of the artists' own mortality, as both turn their gazes inward. Picasso, in *Homme assis les bras croisés II* from 1964, portrays an energetic vibrant sitter, unlike a man of Picasso's age, though the features are unmistakably those of the artist. In *107th and Broadway*, Neel offers an anthropomorphic view of her final home painted as a portent with dark shadows nefariously playing across the surface of the canvas. She described the large shadow that engulfs the building's facade as the "shadow of death."

Picasso said that his work acted as a "sort of a diary." Neel claimed she was "a collector of souls..." capturing "what the world has done [to her sitters] and their retaliation." Linked in time, differing in approach, the parallel viewing of these two innovative 20th century painters offers insights into both their artistic achievements and the radicalization of portraiture.