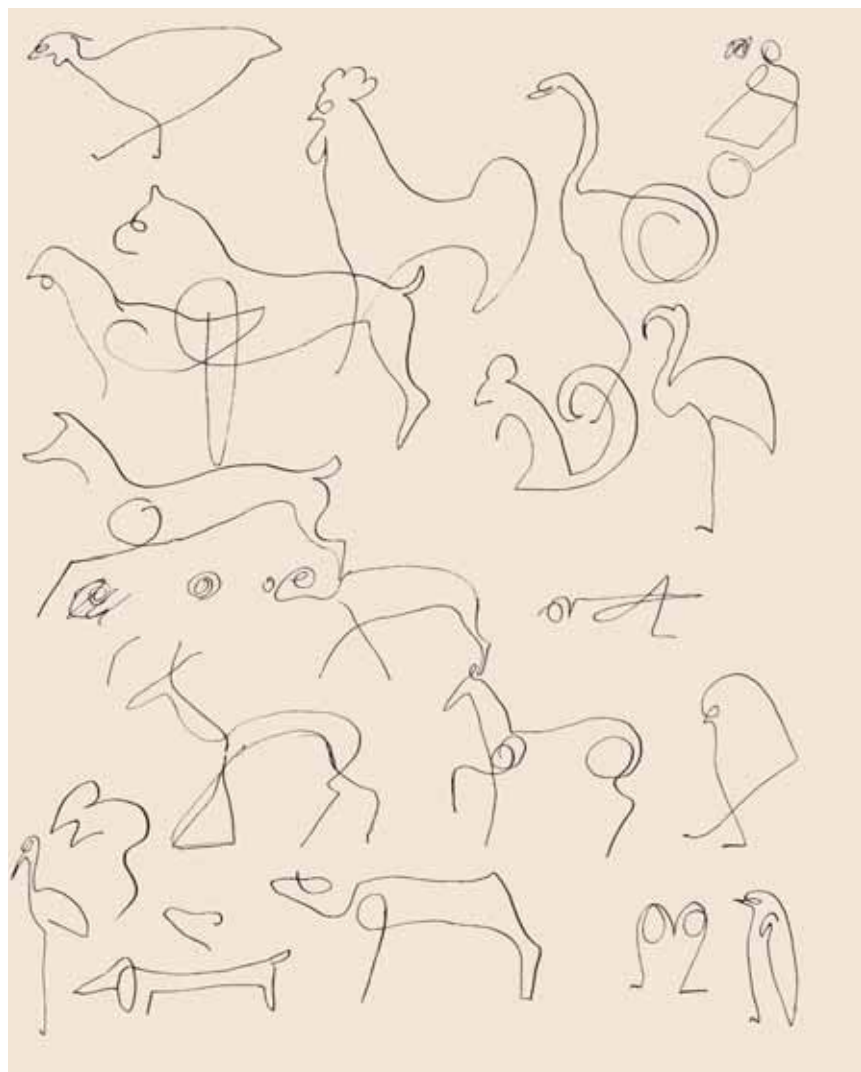




PICASSO'S  
ANIMALS

Boris Friedewald

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Boris Friedewald

prestel

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# Foreword

There are probably very few people who have shown their impassioned love for life as openly as Picasso did. Harmony in his relationships with his world and its creatures was as much a part of his life as the elegance and ease with which he wore his Spanish cape. The people around him experienced this harmony too, but it was particularly noticeable in his relationships with animals. Lump the Dachshund became a faithful companion to Picasso as of the moment they met. The house goat remained lying down when somebody passed it by, unless it was Picasso; the animal rose and tore at its leash to be stroked. The small owl that lived in Picasso's studio, fixing everyone with its piercing look, would grind its beak and go into a little dance until Picasso allowed it to sit on his hand. Maybe Picasso's works were mirror images of his immense sensitivity to nature and of the great love he felt for all life. For these reasons, I am very pleased that this book will concentrate on the wondrous animals that were always of great importance to Picasso and which were immortalized in his works.

David Douglas Duncan





P. L. 12  
28.12.61.

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Mouvement de la PAIX

10 et 11 mai 1962

Issy - Les - Moulineaux

Planol 1962

pablo loved to surround himself with  
birds and other animals. generally speaking,  
they were exempt from the mistrust  
that he had for his human friends.

françoise gilot

## Pigeons and Doves

Pigeons, pigeons everywhere. When little Pablo looked out of the window, he saw the plane trees on the Plaza de la Merced outside the family apartment in Málaga. The air was filled with the cooing of the countless pigeons in the trees. And in the apartment, the birds multiplied as well, interspersed now and then with a picture of a landscape or a lilac bush—painted by José Ruiz Blasco, Pablo's father. As if the one picture of his father's containing all the pigeons of his childhood actually existed, Picasso, now world-famous, explained, "Hundreds of pigeons, one after another. Hundreds, thousands of pigeons. Millions of them." Pigeons and doves were Don José's passion, and his favorite motif. Yet his paintings were never successful, and he earned his living as a conservator and art teacher.

For Pablo, affectionately called Pablito by his mother, the years of childhood were happy ones—up to the moment he was sent to school, for five years. He was no longer able to spend the whole day



drawing and conjuring picture after picture in the dust of the plaza with his finger. The boy resisted, and fell seriously ill. Concerned, Don José and María Picasso López registered him in a different school. Yet Pablo was never short of reasons to play hooky. Finally he relented, if reluctantly, taking along to school something valuable his father would surely miss, such as a walking stick or even a pigeon José used as a model. That way his father would never forget to pick him up punctually from school. And during class, with the teacher's blessing, Pablo drew the pigeon over and over again. At home, a daily reward awaited the docile pupil: paper, pencils, brushes, and often a piece of *baba*, baked by Doña María out of flour, olive oil, anís, and sugar, saturated with powerful *eau de vie*—until all of this no longer helped.

Initially, at least, Pablo was given a private tutor. Then he went back to school. According to Jaimes Sabartés, Picasso's friend and later his long-time secretary, he combined what he had learned through drawing with what he learned at school. The pigeon on the table suddenly came to embody the principle of his arithmetic assignment, writes Sabartés, as if the boy had dictated it to him: "When Papa lets me paint, then they'll see what I can do and how careful I am. Not a single detail will escape me. The eye of the dove is as round as a zero, under the zero is a six, below that a three. There are two eyes and two wings. Both feet stand on the table, under the final stroke of which the result can be seen."

It was economic reasons that led, in 1890, to the closure of the City Museum in Málaga, the institution where Pablo's father was employed as a conservator. He applied for a position as drawing instructor at the Insitituto da Guarda in La Coruña, and a year later the family, with Pablo, his younger sister Lola, and youngest sister Concepción, known as Conchita, moved from the south to the north of Spain. In La Coruña they found a very special apartment, adorned in front with a glazed balcony of the kind so typical for the city, and one in back as well. Stairs led from the back balcony up to the attic—the realm of Don José's pigeons, which he bred with passion, as he had in Málaga. Very few childhood works by Picasso have come down to us. One is a pencil sketch in which he captured pigeons in great detail.

Picasso had attended school in La Coruña for a year, filling notebook after notebook with cats, pigeons, and fantasy figures, when he was admitted to his father's drawing class at the city art

school. This was just before his eleventh birthday. In the winter of 1894, his youngest sister, Pablo's favorite, fell ill with diphtheria—and thus began for the family a time of despair, hope, and prayer, although they were not especially pious. Fourteen-year-old Pablo swore an oath: never to pick up a pencil or brush again if Conchita recovered health. In early January 1895, she died. Picasso was not forced to break his oath.

Only a short time later, Don José asked, not for the first time, whether his son would help him finish a picture, as his worsening eyesight prevented him from painting fine details. He asked Pablo to depict a pigeon's feet. Then he went out for a walk in the evening air. By the time he returned, Pablo had painted the bird's feet, so perfectly that his father swore never to pick up a brush again—although actually he continued to depict pigeons, in great numbers: a fact that has always been ignored by the biographers, as well as by Picasso himself. Later, he loved to relate this anecdote, though it was more a product of his imagination than reality.

Many years later, when Picasso had decided to adopt his mother's maiden name, he lived with his first wife, the Russian dancer Olga Chochlova, and their son Paul in a flat on Rue La Boétie in Paris. In 1925, as the couple's daily quarrels worsened, Picasso rented the apartment on the next floor and from that point on he worked there. At some point in this period, the artist left on a trip. When he returned, he realized he had forgotten to shut the windows of his studio. A family of pigeons had settled there, and left their traces everywhere—including on his pictures. Yet Picasso saw no reason to shoo out the birds, nor to remove the pigeon droppings on the



paintings. In fact, he liked them, saying they produced “an interesting, unplanned effect.” From that time on, pigeons remained members of Picasso’s household.

In the spring of 1937, he moved into an attic on Rue des Grands-Augustins and converted it into a studio. The place had been discovered by his new companion, the photographer and painter Dora Maar.

It seemed as if the doorbell never stopped ringing. Outside waited uninvited guests, or friends such as the poet Paul Éluard, the photographer Brassai, or the young painter Françoise Gilot, whom Picasso had met in 1943 and who would soon become his companion. Then there were strangers who were active in the Resistance during the war and gave Picasso financial support, or German soldiers who searched his studio, as well as countless U. S. servicemen who wanted to shake the legendary Picasso’s hand after the war. They all had to pass through a hallway that gave onto the entrance. This was the home of Picasso’s pigeons, held in wicker cages, surrounded by potted plants and still more cages housing canaries and exotic birds.

When Brassai visited Picasso one icy winter’s day during the war, planning to take pictures of small bronzes, the artist suggested they use the corridor with the pigeons, because it was warmer there. He couldn’t work properly among the birds, said the photographer, whom Picasso called a “terrorist” on account of the exploding magnesium powder he used as a flash. “Because of the birds? Do they bother you? I don’t understand,” said Picasso. “No, I would disturb the birds with my explosions,” replied Brassai. Then the artist laughed. “With