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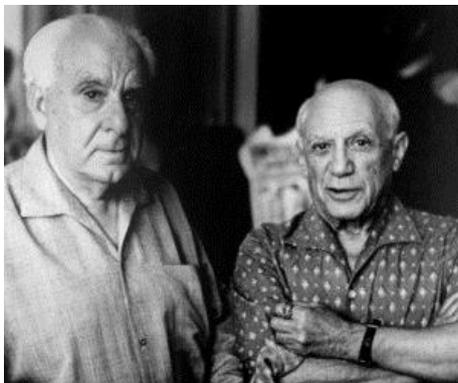
### **The \$20,000 Picasso Catalogue the Art World Was Waiting For**

BY *George Stolz* POSTED 06/03/14

Why scholars are clamoring for a near-exact copy of a Picasso catalogue published in black and white and last updated in 1978

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Zervos and Picasso, 1960.

In the early 1930s, Christian Zervos, a refined and somewhat quirky art critic and publisher, and a fixture in Parisian artistic and literary circles—began cataloguing Picasso's work. It was

a labor that would occupy him for the rest of his life. The monumental 33-volume publication he compiled over four decades, entitled *Pablo Picasso par Christian Zervos* and generally known simply as “Zervos,” lists more than 16,000 paintings and drawings from throughout the Spanish master’s career. Picasso was intimately involved with the selection and arrangement.

“Zervos” became a rarity almost as soon as the last volume was published, in 1978, by which time both its subject and its author were deceased. Now, however, “Zervos” is back in print in an updated, near-facsimile version. With a price tag of \$20,000, the reissued “Zervos” might seem too costly for most Picasso devotees, but in fact the catalogue is still an indispensable reference tool for Picasso specialists and scholars, in part because there has been no comprehensive cataloguing of Picasso’s vast oeuvre in the intervening years, and authenticating his work has been at times a pitfall-ridden process. So with full sets of the original “Zervos” fetching as much as \$200,000 at auction, the new publication may be less nostalgic and more practical in wider Picasso circles.



Top: The original edition of “Zervos,” which lists more than 16,000 artworks and fetches as much as \$200,000 at auction. It was last updated in 1978. Bottom: The new edition, a near-facsimile of the original.  
TOP: ©CHRISTIE’S IMAGES LTD. BOTTOM: ©EDITIONS CAHIERS D’ART.

“‘Zervos’ has to be in print,” says Staffan Ahrenberg, the entrepreneur and collector who published the reprinted catalogue. “It is the bible on Picasso, and it is still a functioning tool. There is no digital archive, so anyone working with Picasso still needs ‘Zervos’—collectors,

younger dealers, libraries. But the old edition was not easy to find and was so expensive—our new edition is actually quite inexpensive when you consider that it has 33 volumes and weighs 130 kilos.”

“Picasso was the greatest artist of the 20th century, and Zervos turned out to be the greatest compiler of a catalogue raisonné in the 20th century,” says John Richardson, Picasso’s biographer. “We’ve all been waiting desperately for someone to pick up on this.”

According to Ahrenberg, the circumstances that led him to reprint the catalogue came about purely by chance. In April 2010, as he was strolling in the 6<sup>th</sup> arrondissement in Paris, he noticed a building with an old metal sign above the door reading “Cahiers d’Art.” Ahrenberg pulled up short in surprise: having grown up in a household filled with modern art, he was familiar with the fabled art journal of the same name but assumed that the company no longer existed, since the magazine had ceased publication in 1960. Ahrenberg stepped inside the building and found himself transported into what he describes as a “pure little jewel,” replete with mid-century designer furniture, old copies of Cahiers d’Art publications, and an elderly gentleman who identified himself as the owner’s brother. On impulse, Ahrenberg inquired whether the company might be for sale, left his business card, and resumed his stroll, not imagining that anything would come of the encounter.



*Étude pour Guernica*, May 1937, pencil on paper. Pages 6 and 7 of Volume 9.  
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The next day, however, the owner called him and told him, “You have come at the right time.” Negotiations for the sale and the transfer of the business and intellectual-property rights proceeded accordingly, and within a year Ahrenberg found himself at the head of a renowned publishing house, albeit one that had not published anything in decades.

“My friends thought I was crazy,” Ahrenberg says. “But I am not a philanthropist, I am pragmatic and I understand pragmatic business ventures. ‘Zervos’ is an incredibly valuable asset for the publishing house.”

From the start, republishing the monumental catalogue was central to Ahrenberg's vision for the reincarnated Cahiers d'Art, so after receiving the blessing of the Picasso Administration (which manages the Picasso heirs' rights), the project began in earnest. Unlike the original "Zervos," which was printed exclusively in French, the new edition has been issued in both English and French versions, with the English version listing the works' dimensions in both inches and centimeters. A small number of updates—30 in total, representing a remarkably small proportion of the more than 16,000 catalogue entries—were made at the behest of the Picasso Administration: a few photographic images that had been flipped were reoriented, a few dimensions were adjusted, a few works that were repeated were weeded out, and a few drawings (seven altogether) long known not to be by Picasso were removed.

Otherwise, the new version is a near facsimile of the original, right down to the signature black-and-white plates that Picasso himself insisted on, even at a time when color photography was an available and feasible option—in Picasso's view, a good black-and-white reproduction was more truthful to the work than an inaccurate color photograph. 1,200 copies of the English version and 300 of the French version have been printed in the new edition, and sets are distributed through Sotheby's as well as through Cahiers d'Art.



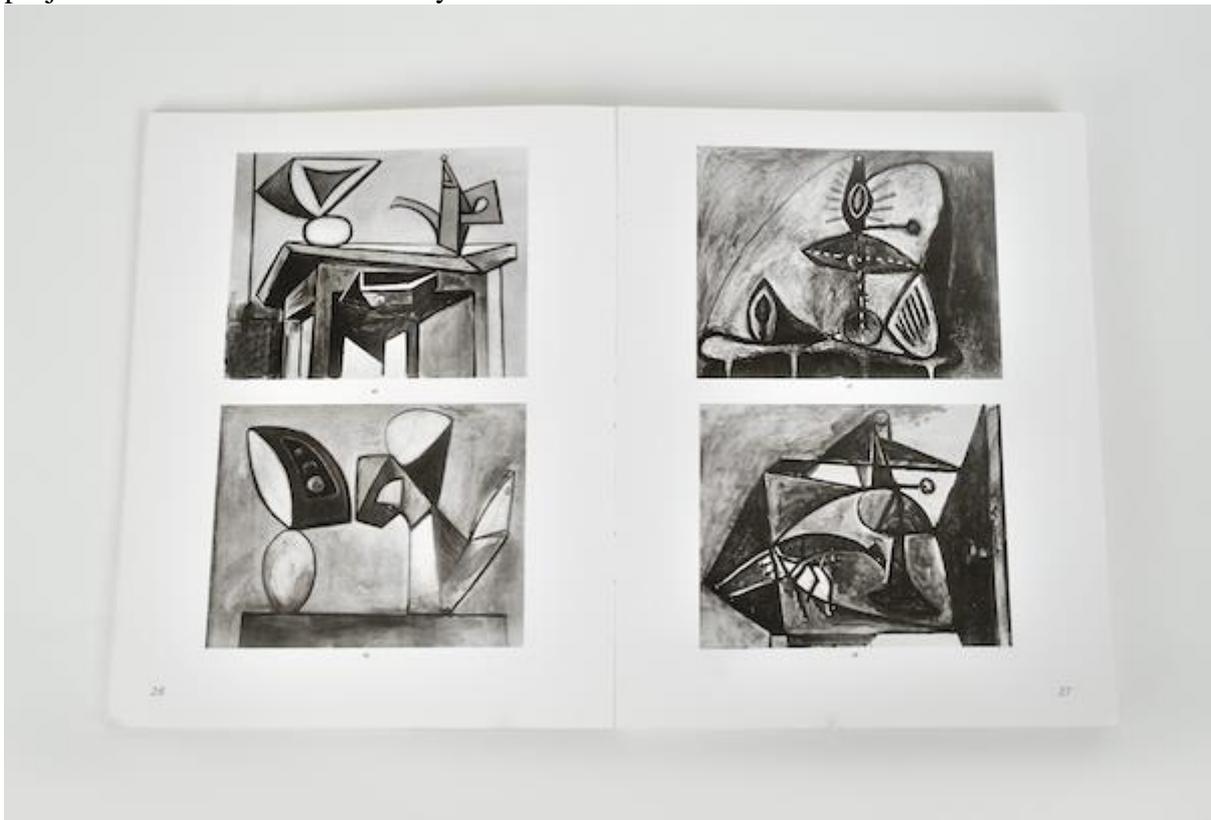
*Tête de Femme*, February 1942, India ink on paper. Pages 6 and 7 of Volume 12.  
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Ahrenberg's plans for the revived Cahiers d'Art go beyond reprinting the Picasso catalogue. He has also relaunched the *Cahiers d'Art* journal, with an editorial board that includes Samuel Keller and Hans-Ulrich Obrist and a focus on contemporary art; the second issue featured German artist Rosemarie Trockel. The Cahiers d'Art gallery on the ground floor has been reopened and augmented by a second exhibition space across the street; exhibitions have been devoted to Alexander Calder and the French artist and filmmaker Philippe Parreno, among others. Cahiers d'Art has also resumed publishing high-end monographs, including

multivolume catalogues raisonnés of Ellsworth Kelly’s work and Frank Gehry’s drawings, both scheduled for distribution in 2015.

With no prior experience in publishing, and by his own description only a moderate bibliophile, the 56-year-old Ahrenberg is not at first glance the most likely candidate to shepherd Cahiers d’Art back into existence. Born in Sweden and raised in Switzerland, he has had a varied career, ranging from producing films in Los Angeles to developing television stations in Eastern Europe. However, his father, Theodor Ahrenberg, was an important mid-century collector who maintained an informal artist residency in the family guest house in Switzerland in the 1960s, hosting artists such as Niki de Saint Phalle and Lucio Fontana. Ahrenberg even has a photo of himself as a two-year-old being held by Picasso. He is also a collector in his own right, focusing primarily on works on paper by an eclectic mix of artists including Richard Serra, Wolfgang Tillmans, Robert Longo, and Le Corbusier.

According to Ahrenberg, the Picasso Administration insisted that the reissued catalogue be in printed form, although he does not rule out the possibility of a digital version in the future. Increasing numbers of catalogues raisonnés are being published digitally; recent and upcoming examples include those for Paul Cézanne, Mary Cassatt, Isamu Noguchi, and Sol LeWitt. But “Zervos” is not just a tool; it is a historical document in its own right, and, given Picasso’s hands-on involvement in its creation, one of the most remarkable collaborative projects in the annals of art history.



Clockwise from top left: *Nature Morte à la Cafetière*; *Nature Morte à la Lampe*; *Nature Morte à la Lampe et a Crustacé*; *Nature Morte*, April 1947, oil on canvas. Pages 26 and 27 of Volume 15.  
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“People sometimes say what a pity that Picasso never kept a diary,” Richardson says. “But the truth of the matter is that he did keep a diary in the form of his works. Often you can see a whole development of not just what he was painting but how he was living, as recorded in such detail in the volumes of ‘Zervos.’”

“‘Zervos’ is a phenomenal, monumental work that belongs to the history of art,” says Valentina Castellani, a director of the Gagosian Gallery, which represents the Picasso Estate and has been organizing a series of landmark exhibitions examining lesser-known aspects of Picasso’s output.

“It’s the most complete catalogue that exists for Picasso,” she adds. “It’s not complete in the sense of containing every work—many are not in fact included. But from a historical point of view, you see so much of Picasso, the pace of his production day by day, what his concerns were, what he was thinking. It is the seminal catalogue.”



Left: *Tête de Femme*, August 1921, red chalk and charcoal on paper. Right: *Tête de Femme de Profil*, August 1921, pastel on paper. Pages 134 and 135 of Volume 4.  
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