JANET HAWLEY

ARTISTS *in* CONVERSATION

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FOR KIMBERLEY, BEN,
SAM AND PHILIP

JANET HAWLEY

ARTISTS IN CONVERSATION

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In conversation: Janet Hawley (right) interviewing Wendy Whiteley in 2012; see page 109.

Introduction

I INVITE THE ARTISTS TO EXPLAIN IN THEIR OWN WORDS

When I was a young journalist, with a growing interest in creative people, I read a worn paperback copy of *Life with Picasso*, written by Françoise Gilot.

Gilot lived with Picasso for 10 years (1943–53), was a significant muse and model for the artist, and bore him two children, Claude and Paloma Picasso.

An intriguing aspect of this book was, because Gilot herself was an artist, she gave a rare, intimate insight into those fascinating twin crucibles: the creative personality of the artist; and the creative process inside the studio.

Picasso was the classic highly creative personality, with mood changes like a rollercoaster ride, along with being a volcano of creative energy in his studio. Gilot, 40 years younger than Picasso, wrote with a searing honesty about her decade with the artist: "I knew that moving in with him could be a catastrophe," she admitted, "but I decided it was a catastrophe I didn't want to miss."

Reading *Life with Picasso*, the furthest thing from my mind was the notion that one day, in 2011, I'd be knocking on the door of Gilot's art-filled New York apartment, and spending three fascinating days with this living legend, on the eve of her 90th birthday.

Gilot, still a marvellously forthright character, now spoke with even more lucid insight into Picasso, having observed the remaining decades of the artist's life from the time they parted in 1953 until his death in 1973, and indeed the torrid aftermath.

Gilot describes as well as anyone could, the tortuous yet glorious processes involved in an artist giving birth to works of art. The initial procrastination, the gnawing doubts and fears, the thrashing around to get imaginative ideas working, and the absolute thrill when an inspiration rush arrives and the painting seems to take on a life of its own.

Then comes the ruthlessly selfish behaviour, pushing aside all else, working with a fierce energy until the project is completed. Interlaced with all this, expect stormy outbursts, brooding black moods and grim bouts of depression. Of course the good times also arrive, when the artist is happy with the way his work is going, and showing the generous, playful side of his nature and wanting company and love.

Gilot (like Wendy Whiteley) is also so wise and realistic about the endlessly giving, understanding, complex, supportive, and so often unacknowledged role of *the artist's wife*.

After detailing Picasso's mercilessly bad side, Gilot points out that on the other hand, "his good side was so intelligent, that when you were with him, listening to his ideas and watching him paint, it was often so astonishing that you felt you were watching a miracle. If you could appreciate that, that is what you got."

Most artist's partners and families will identify with much in Gilot's descriptions, indeed so will the partners and families of all highly creative people.

The more I've interviewed the full gamut of artistic talent—writers, poets, architects, film directors, actors, composers—the more the similarities stand out.

All are driven by an insatiable curiosity about the world—nature, people, the environment, heaven and hell—how it all works and what it all means. Along with this comes the burning compulsion to express a personal vision of this curiosity.

All know the divine discontent of the creative process, which almost invariably happens in solitude. Whether it's a novelist sitting alone at his desk, staring at a blank sheet in a typewriter—now a blank computer screen; or a painter alone in his studio staring at a blank canvas, the struggle to get the work out is not so different.

Various artists I've talked to over the years have described the intensely private, enthralling high, when a creative rush suddenly appears like a gift, and guides the work for you.

Several quote the poet Shelley: *"Rarely, rarely, comest thou, Spirit of Delight!"*

Brett Whiteley called it "the GGMs, the God Given Moments … arriving like a bolt through your body, to drive the work for you."

Whiteley mentioned that the great Francis Bacon, the British artist he so admired and often visited in his mews studio in London, had told him: "The best art comes from the unconscious; I'm only the medium for chance and accidents."

‘Various artists I've talked to over the years have described the intensely private, enthralling high, when a creative rush suddenly appears like a gift, and guides the work for you’

Lloyd Rees, another artist Whiteley admired, described the moment when: "It becomes so absorbing, euphoric almost, it carries you along. I've done a few paintings which I've felt have come from something beyond myself, and I bow my head in thanks."

John Wolseley talks about the almost mystical experience, when "the work of art flows out like bird song".

Sidney Nolan explained it: "You almost do it in a trance. You don't make any mistakes, if you want to paint a horse, you paint a horse. When you get that run, it's a wonderful feeling … out the pictures come."

Putting this collection together, I realise how many of the artists have now died; so it's even more important that their own words live on, as well as their paintings.

My approach to the artists is that of a feature writer exploring the full topic, not that of a critic making a judgement. I invite the artists to explain, in their own words, why they make their paintings, and talk about their own motivations, thoughts, feelings, passions and fears.

> *‘The more I’ve interviewed the full gamut of artistic talent ... the more the similarities stand out. All are driven by an insatiable curiosity about the world—nature, people, the environment, heaven and hell’*

The essays are based on numerous personal encounters with the artists, conversations in their studios and homes, in galleries, cafés, restaurants, or travelling together, as well as formal interviews. I’ve also had the huge privilege of spending long sessions in their studios, watching them work.

Another thing that struck me, was how much has changed from one generation of artists, to the next.

No Australian artist today could live the wildly romantic expatriate life that Donald Friend managed, living like minor royalty in an Africa village, and doing likewise for decades in Bali, attended by a retinue of houseboys.

In the early years, artists like Rees, Arthur Boyd, John Brack, John Olsen, Donald Friend were regarded as romantic bohemians, and expected to earn a pittance from their work.

Only a rare few commercial galleries existed in Sydney and Melbourne to show and sell their paintings.

Things that today’s artists take for granted—the ready availability of masses of up-to-the-minute art magazines, art books, instant resources on the internet, instant travel, commercial galleries galore, generous art prizes and government grants—none of this existed when Boyd, Albert Tucker, Rees and Nolan were young artists.

Many artists are now millionaires, indeed billionaires. Although this was a trend that so worried John Brack—for a long time he refused to sell his paintings, distressed that high prices would put them out of the reach of the very people he would like to own them.

Thankfully, we can always visit public galleries, where the pleasure awaits everyone to feast our eyes and minds on art, and come away with altered perceptions.

And though its pages have now turned sepia with age, I still have that treasured copy of Françoise Gilot’s *Life with Picasso*.

Janet Hawley
September 2012

Centre of attention: Picasso (centre), his de facto wife of 10 years Françoise Gilot (left) and Picasso's nephew Javier Vilató in Golfe-Juan, France. "I am the only woman who left Picasso, the only one who did not sacrifice herself to the sacred monster," Gilot declared.

Françoise Gilot

SURVIVING THE BLUEBEARD MYTH

Pablo Picasso, the 20th-century's supreme modern artist, was a paradoxical, prolific genius; technically brilliant, perpetually inventive—"one hundred artists inside one man". He needed women, and spent his life painting them. He wanted all his women to be utterly devoted and submissive, but Françoise Gilot—a fellow artist and his mistress and muse from 1943 to 1953—broke the mould. Gilot now lives between New York and Paris, in large apartments with adjoining studios similarly set up: "So I can arrive and be painting the same day." She was nearly 90 in 2011 when we met in her New York apartment, near Central Park.

"I am the only woman who left Picasso, the only one who did not sacrifice herself to the sacred monster," Françoise declares, with a perky, defiant smile. "I am the only one still alive to tell the tale."

"After all, look what happened to the others," she continues, circumflex eyebrows peaked. "Marie-Thérèse and Jacqueline both committed suicide [the former hanged herself; the latter shot herself], Olga became hysterical and almost crazy, Dora Maar went mad."

Françoise Gilot, the slender beauty whom at 24 Picasso immortalised as *La Femme-Fleur*, is perched on a Louis XV salon chair in her art-filled New York apartment, her diminutive figure exuding strength. As she speaks with an alluring French lilt, her hands—with fingernails painted bright pink—gesture elegantly.

Gilot is still the feisty, sharply intelligent, independent-spirited woman who shared a passionate decade with Picasso, from 1943 to 1953. She was 21 when they met, a budding Paris law student, artist and writer. Picasso was 61, the smouldering Spaniard celebrated as an artistic genius and the world's top-selling painter. Gilot bore him two remarkable children, Claude and Paloma Picasso.

"Pablo was marvellous to be with; it was like fireworks," Gilot reminisces. "He was astonishingly creative, a magician, so intelligent and seductive. If he was in the mood to charm, even stones would dance to his tune. But he was also very cruel, sadistic and merciless to others, as well as to himself. Everything had to be his way. You were there for him; he was not there for you. Pablo thought he was God, but he was not God—and that annoyed him!

"Pablo was the greatest love of my life, but you had to take steps to protect yourself. I did; I left before I was destroyed. The others didn't, they clung on to the mighty Minotaur and paid a heavy price."

When she left with their children in 1953, Picasso warned her, "No one leaves a man like me." Gilot and their children were also to pay a heavy price.

In 1964, Gilot published *Life with Picasso*, an insightful study of how this perpetually inventive artist metamorphosed ideas into works of art, and of his volcanic energy, playfulness and ever-lurking dark side. Gilot also described Picasso's 'Bluebeard' persona, and the continuing entanglements with his succession of wives/mistresses/muses/models. The book so enraged the secretive Picasso that to punish Gilot he cut all contact with her, Claude and Paloma, refusing to see them or speak to them again until he died, aged 91, in 1973.

Over several days, Gilot talked to me with amazing candour about Picasso and her fellow members of what she calls "the Picasso tribe"—his other women and children. "I am telling you things I've never said openly before," she says, "but now I only have time for the truth." It has, however, been quite a process to reach this point.

The trigger was an invitation to write about a major exhibition, *Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso*, coming to the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2011. More than anyone, it was Gilot I wanted to interview, to help bring the pictures to life. Impossible! I was told.

So I tracked down John Richardson, then compiling volume four of his magisterial Picasso biography, who suggested writing to Gilot. With no response to my letter, I risked a phone call. Gilot haughtily informed me that she refuses all interview requests, "a waste of my precious time. Picasso was an important part of my past, but I do not live in the past. My mind is on my own work, and I paint every day."

As she was about to hang up, I mentioned she'd spoken at the 1984 Adelaide Festival Writers' Week. "Ah, yes ... I enjoyed Australia. I also found your Aboriginal dot painting so interesting, because it's like an encounter, so ancient in origin, yet many look so contemporary."

This opened a crack for a conversation. Luckily, I'd just been up in the Kimberley writing a major feature on the ancient Gwion rock art, and Gilot was fascinated to hear about this. We were still talking an hour later and she conceded she might grant a personal interview if I faxed her a list of new questions. "I refuse to discuss anything I've written or said before; it wastes my time. At my age, I can be quite blasé about this type of thing," she declared. I understood, I told her; she could be direct with Australians. "But I am French, and I am direct, too," she replied, laughing.

Feeling as though I was doing an exam, I faxed my questions. At 1.30am, my phone rang. "This is Françoise: okay, you can see me in New York, for two hours. But no photographer."

I'm still uncertain whether the doorman will announce, "Madame says *oui*" or "*non*" when I arrive at Gilot's gracious old apartment building. It's *oui* (relief) and a friendly but wary 10am "*bonjour*" as she opens her door and leads me through large, high-ceilinged rooms lined with books and mostly her own colourful abstract paintings, and one favourite Georges Braque work. No Picassos.

"I only ever owned one Picasso, *La Femme-Fleur*, but I sold it years ago, because I felt it brought me ill-luck," Gilot volunteers. "I never accepted any more paintings, because Picasso would have said, 'Aha, see, you

are just like all the others!' So I took nothing, I remained independent. Besides, I knew that if you took from Picasso, you owed him and had to pay for it in another way. He wanted me to be submissive, like the other women, but I was never submissive."

Raised to be a lawyer, a self-assured only child from a *haute-bourgeois* family, Gilot told Picasso she was not keen for him to paint her. "I didn't want to become known as 'the Gilot period'," she says, "after the Fernande/Eva/Olga/Marie-Thérèse/Dora Maar periods. I knew that Picasso's way of killing off one woman after the next was to make their portraits!" she adds with a musical laugh.

Indeed. Picasso painted ruthless portraits as a woman fell from favour: for example, Olga with razor-like teeth, hacksaw-blade vagina, contorted body, while in the background hovers a luscious image of her nubile 17-year-old replacement, Marie-Thérèse. "The tragedy of those other women," says Gilot, "is they were pleased to have the famous Picasso paint them all the time, it made them feel important. They were flattered, trapped, and lived through him. But because I am a painter myself, I think this is stupid! As artists we all know, even though Picasso was painting a woman's portrait, it was always primarily his own self-portrait. All Picasso's paintings are a diary of his life."

La Femme-Fleur bloomed after Picasso took his new love interest to visit his old friend Matisse. "Matisse liked me and announced, 'I will make a portrait of Françoise; her body will be pale blue and her hair leaf green'," Gilot recalls. "Picasso was incensed as we left. He'd only made drawings of me and now announced he would paint me first. My portrait became the woman-flower, with a pale blue face and leaf-like hair."

It soon becomes very clear to me, Gilot's exquisite dilemma is that she is both proud of—and irritated by—being defined as one of Picasso's women. She's adamant she is a person in her own right, and details her long artistic career with justifiable pride. Sharp wit and humour enliven her conversation, but she is easily irritated if you tread in the wrong place, and instantly lets you know.

But once part of the Picasso legend, you remain in it, and her agile mind seems to enjoy analysing her Picasso years like a historical pageant, as well as

probing the paradoxes of the Picasso genius. "My relationship with Picasso was a wartime romance; extreme circumstances united us in a way that never would have happened in peacetime," she admits frankly. It was World War II, in German-occupied Paris, a time of great danger and utter disaster.

"Picasso was a hero to my generation; he'd painted *Guernica*, his masterpiece on the horrors of war, and he was a symbol of resistance against fascism and the Franco regime. It took enormous courage for him to stay in Paris instead of fleeing to America. Any day he could have been arrested, but it was his way of saying no to oppression.

"Several of my family were in the Resistance and killed. I'd been arrested in a student demonstration and my existence was also precarious. The Germans hated law students, so I'd switched to my real passion, art. We could all die tomorrow: it made me fearless. I knew Picasso's reputation with women and that moving in with him could be a catastrophe—but I decided it was a catastrophe I didn't want to miss."

She was soon mingling with Picasso's regular circle of artist and writer friends: Georges Braque, Fernand Léger, Joan Miró, Alberto Giacometti; Jean Cocteau, Collette, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, and poet Paul Éluard. Picasso, who had a sadistic streak, asked Gilot to read the works of the Marquis de Sade, as he asked all his women, but she flatly refused. "I told Pablo that Marquis de Sade's cruelty was everywhere in this war; I didn't need to read more of it."

She adds dourly, "Many women who are very feminine have a masochistic side to them, so it was perfect for Picasso with the women who came before me—the sadist with a masochist. But I was not a masochist or a sadist; I was not playing that game!"

Smiling again, Gilot recalls that in her long, spirited conversations with Picasso, he would often ask, "Why do you always contradict me?"

"I told him, 'It's because we have a dialogue, not a monologue. Everyone says yes to you all the time, like the court around a king, so I provide a no.' He liked that. When everyone says yes to you, you may feel powerful, but you are also very alone. I could see that Pablo was a very solitary figure."

It astonished Gilot to discover that the maestro artist had everyone bluffed to believe he was supremely confident. Yes, Picasso knew that in

a few hours in the studio he could make anything he wanted, she says. But at the same time, he always had supreme anxiety, wanting to find a new truth, a new way in art.

As a young artist, she thought it marvellous that someone who had created masterpiece after masterpiece still had this disquiet. "Picasso always felt alone, in peril; nobody understood him," says Gilot. "He told me I had a special kind of wisdom and balance that reassured him; and I believed I could help him."

Their daily routine was that Picasso would wake late, about 10am, shrouded in pessimism. "Pablo would complain life was unbearable, why should he even get up, there was no purpose trying to paint anything," Gilot relates. "I would convince him things were not so bad after all, today he would paint something marvellous. Friends would call in to socialise, Pablo would win some argument in conversation, recharge his batteries, become king again. Finally, around 1pm, he'd start work in his studio, in a good mood."

Picasso worked till 10pm—always in silence, no music, no assistants—then stopped for dinner. He smoked 40 cigarettes a day, but never drank. He might work again, then go to bed about 2am. Next morning, ditto. "It was exhausting," says Gilot, "but all my life I always set the bar higher. I was an expert horse rider; I had good balance, ah!"

My allocated two hours have stretched to three, then Gilot warmly invites me to stay to lunch. She proceeds to the dining room, straight-backed as if still riding her horse in the Bois de Boulogne, practising dressage. The table is formally laid with French linen and period silver, and Anna Maria, her cheerful maid, in a blue smock uniform, serves glistening smoked salmon, egg and avocado salad and white wine.

Over lunch, Gilot talks, mostly with empathy and kindness, about Picasso's other women. "It's like the seven wives of Bluebeard, you know they are all hanging on the wall, and eventually it will happen to you, too!"

Gilot didn't know Picasso's first long-term partner, Fernande Olivier, the artist and model who lived with Picasso from 1904 to 1912, nor her successor, Eva Gouel, who died of tuberculosis in 1915; but she knew the others. "Picasso lied to them all endlessly," she says, "to keep them orbiting around him, in a perverse, possessive way."

In 1918, Picasso married Russian ballerina Olga Khokhlova, and they shared 10 increasingly conflicted years. Picasso soon loathed Olga's obsessive social climbing and growing neuroses, but was unable to divorce her, as divorce was illegal in Spain. Olga pursued him until she died, supposedly insane, in 1955. Picasso and Olga's son, Paulo (born in 1921), died aged 54, tragically alcoholic.

"I knew Paulo well; we were the same age. He was a nice young man who suffered a very difficult life from both his parents," says Gilot. "Picasso never wanted his son to amount to anything; he belittled him, turning him into his chauffeur. [Picasso did not drive.] When we moved to the south of France, Paulo regularly drove us to the bullfights, which Picasso loved watching, because to him, life was a *corrida*, a gory fight to the death. He identified with every character in the bullring, including the bull."

Rewind to 1927, when Picasso saw 17-year-old Marie-Thérèse Walter out shopping for a Peter Pan collar, and targeted his magnetic eyes and charm on seducing her.

"Marie-Thérèse was Pablo's most physical affair," Gilot says candidly. "His paintings of her are extremely sensuous, lyrical and soft, in pale, oceanic colours. I felt sympathy for her, because she was so innocent—not very clever; passive, pleasant and beautiful. She adored him, had nothing else in her life, and in 1935 gave birth to their daughter, Maya."

But Picasso's affection soon waned and in 1936 he spotted the surrealist photographer Dora Maar, in a café, stabbing a knife between her fingers and drawing blood. Picasso was attracted to Dora's wild, kinky aspects, says Gilot very matter-of-factly, adding, "None of Picasso's other women were very intelligent, they came from *petit-bourgeois* backgrounds and were not well educated. Dora was the most intelligent, yet she did not see through Picasso, and entered sadistic games with him. She had psychological problems and by 1943 Picasso decided she was quite mad."

Dora Maar photographed *Guernica* as Picasso painted it, and bore the brunt of the artist's rage and horror at war and suffering. Much of this rage went into his legendary *Weeping Woman* paintings of her.

In *Life with Picasso*, Gilot writes that Picasso assured her in 1943 that his relationships with Marie-Thérèse and Dora Maar were over, though he

continued to make twice-weekly parental visits to see Maya and her mother.

Did Gilot think those visits were more than parental, I venture? Gilot now admits, "Oh sure, probably. That was part of his life. I didn't see it as a threat; after all, what did it change if he had sex with Marie-Thérèse one more time? It was something he'd done since 1927, and we were in the 1950s! My relationship with Pablo was completely different. I didn't feel jealous of Marie-Thérèse or Dora Maar. They both appeared in Picasso's work, and made it for the better.

"I knew Picasso was like this big river that carried skeletons and debris with him. He needed a lot of sex, that primal drive was part of his make-up."

While on the topic, I dare to ask: was Picasso a great lover? "Yes, he was—if he wanted to be," she responds, laughing merrily.

When they were living in the south of France, says Gilot, Picasso persuaded her to have children by saying it would unite them as a couple and complete her as a woman. "I worried because Pablo was still legally married to Olga, but he promised to always love and care for our children," she stresses. Claude and Paloma were born in 1947 and 1949.

Gilot thought she had Picasso's measure better than any of his previous women. "I knew the artist who painted *Guernica* wasn't some pretty little angel," she concedes.

"You couldn't apply the same ethical values to a highly creative artist that you would to some middle-class person. Picasso couldn't have painted the way he did unless he'd experienced extreme highs and extreme lows, in one form or another. His behaviour could be quite primitive.

"Pablo had the raw curiosity of a child who takes a clock and destroys it, wanting to see all the parts inside," says Gilot. "He did what he desired at any moment, never thinking of the consequences," she adds.

Picasso enjoyed his children when they were playful youngsters, rather like the pet animals and birds he liked keeping in his cluttered studios, observes Gilot, but as they grew older with minds and needs of their own, he was less interested. His behaviour became increasingly unfair and cruel, and Gilot's concern about the effects on her children deepened.

Biographer John Richardson concurs that one of the many paradoxes about Picasso was his voracious craving for love. "Picasso was like a vampire,"

says Richardson. "He sucked the affection and life energy out of his friends and lovers, like fuel. I saw him cannibalise people around him, time and again. You'd have a wonderful day out with Picasso, then by late afternoon be utterly exhausted by him. But he was on a high—he'd go into his studio and paint all night."

As much as Gilot admired and was fascinated by Picasso's prolific ability to re-invent himself artistically, she found it burdensome to maintain a family relationship "where Picasso was a god and my children and I were mere human beings".

‹ Picasso always felt alone, in peril; nobody understood him ›

Picasso had boasted to Gilot that he enjoyed making the people who loved him suffer. "Once I asked Pablo why he was so nasty to Sabartés, his loyal secretary who worshipped him. Picasso answered, 'I am only nasty to people I love. To people I don't care about, I am nice.' Typical Picasso—he was testing our affection. Every day he had to go into some combat and win. Picasso was everything except rational!"

Picasso often said: "I paint the way some people write their autobiography. My paintings are pages from my diary." Gilot reflects that the paintings Picasso made of her during this period are telling. "Pablo painted a series of Middle Ages knights in armour, with thin waists, on horseback—they're me. He complained I never took my armour off. I replied, 'Yes, because I don't want to be killed!' He also painted lobsters a lot—they're me, too, with the protective shell on the outside."

It became increasingly clear to Gilot that while she'd completely given her life over to loving and understanding Picasso, "he never knew me".

When Picasso was first courting her, she was so enraptured with him, she wrote, "There were moments when it seemed almost a physical impossibility to go on breathing outside his presence." Now she was longing for human warmth and knew it would never come from Picasso.

"Picasso's idea of love was mostly physical and possessing, not giving. At the same time, his good side was so intelligent that when you were with him, listening to his ideas and watching him paint, it was often so

astonishing that you felt you were watching a miracle. That is what he gave. If you could appreciate that, that is what you got."

No woman had ever left Picasso, and he fumed with disbelief when Gilot took Claude, six, and Paloma, four, to Paris, to an apartment she'd bought with an inheritance from her grandmother.

"I had money and a career of my own, a family and circle of my own friends to help me rebuild my life," Gilot explains.

Claude and Paloma subsequently spent every school holiday with Picasso, still living in the south of France. The dejected 71-year-old genius soon chose a willing new woman, pottery assistant Jacqueline Roque, 27, and married her after his still-legal wife Olga died.

Gilot speaks of Jacqueline with utter disdain. "Jacqueline was an empty, stupid, *petit-bourgeois* woman, lacking intelligence, hugely possessive about Picasso. Pablo was happy because he had a submissive woman again, telling him everything he did was marvellous and never criticising."

Defiantly she adds, "Picasso's best years of painting were over when he found Jacqueline. Before, he'd often painted erotic images, but never pornographic, and now he put vaginas and anuses into every artwork."

Wickedly enjoying the thought, Gilot confides, "I have heard that Picasso was having trouble with his virility. He was still very powerful with me, but now he was getting old. Even if he wanted to move on from Jacqueline, it must have annoyed him that his body made him be more faithful than his mind. Ah ha!"

Gilot says that until Jacqueline, "all the women and children in the Picasso tribe had made a bit of room for the others. I knew the other women kept sending Pablo love letters, and he replied. I'd always invited Maya to spend school holidays with us, and I encouraged Maya, Paulo, Claude and Paloma to be friends. But Jacqueline wanted Picasso for herself."

The crunch came in 1964, with the publication of Gilot's *Life with Picasso*. Claude Picasso, who keeps an ultra-modern New York apartment next door to his mother's, with splendid Picassos and a Matisse on his walls, takes up the story the next day.

Short and stocky like his father, Claude has Picasso's unmistakable

square-jawed face and deep-set black eyes. His whole body betrays terrible sorrow as he recalls, in 1964, being a 16-year-old schoolboy and seeing his father for the last time.

"It was Easter holidays. Paloma and I caught the train to the south of France, went to the house our mother retained there and rang my father's house. Could the car collect us, as usual? No one came. We waited for days; no one came.

"Finally, we had a meeting with Pablo and Jacqueline—she did most of the talking. She said Pablo had been mercilessly hurt by my mother's book and it was our fault, because Paloma and I should have stopped her writing it. They made it clear my father was finished with us.

"I was angry with my father, I thought he was behaving like a silly, weak old man. Paloma was devastated, and felt totally rejected. We rang, wrote letters; all useless. He was 83, living like a recluse. Every year I travelled down, trying to see him. I climbed over the walls and tried to break in, but never saw him."

Gilot later continues, "Picasso launched a court case against my French publisher, lost the case; appealed and lost the appeal. The day the verdict was announced, he phoned me. 'You won, bravo, I salute you,' he said. Typical—he admired the winner. I had been better than him in that game, but if I had lost, he would have despised me!"

Genius often extracts a heavy toll from those around it, as those close to Picasso tragically learnt. When he died, his funeral was held at his high-walled château, Vauvenargues, in Provence, where he is buried. Jacqueline refused to allow Claude and Paloma to pay their last respects to their father or attend his funeral.

Claude remembers, "It was snowing, then it rained. Paloma and I stood outside the château for three days, waiting to be allowed in, but Jacqueline had given orders to keep us out."

Paulo Picasso's son, Pablito, was also refused admittance, went home and swallowed a bottle of bleach, dying a wretched lingering death three months later. A few years on, unable to exist without Picasso, Jacqueline and Marie-Thérèse both killed themselves.

Picasso, who feared death, left no will, which caused chaos after he died.

Under French law at the time, children born outside marriage had no rights of inheritance.

Gilot, with her fervent sense of justice, had earlier taken proceedings to obtain the surname Picasso for her children. "I was Claude Gilot till age 12, then I became Picasso," says Claude.

Somewhat enjoying the irony, Gilot says she used all the profits from *Life with Picasso* to help Claude and Paloma mount a case to become Picasso's legal heirs. "It took years, the law was in the process of changing, but as a result of the publicity surrounding our case, the law was changed and Claude, Paloma and Maya were entitled to inherit from their father."

Picasso was still alive when they began the case. "It made him furious," says Gilot, "but he had given his word to love and care for his children, and he broke his word."

Claude now runs the Picasso Administration in Paris, which looks after copyright and other legal matters. He's a walking inventory of Picasso's work. He admits it's a complicated emotional scenario, being the guardian of the art of the father who spurned him. "Life teaches you forgiveness and hands you responsibilities," he says gently.

'Picasso's idea of love was mostly physical and possessing, not giving'

Gilot agrees to a photo session, and on our next visit is dressed in blues with a rainbow of colours in her jacket and scarf. "I'm a colourist and I love the way colours in proximity start to fight or sing," she says.

We ride six floors up in the 1893 elevator to see the contrastingly spartan studio-apartment she keeps for drawing. Tall windows look out over the next-door rooftop, on which sit six beehives. "The bees get nectar from the flowers in Central Park and fly back here to make honey," she says with delight.

Back in her large painting studio, which adjoins the apartment where she lives, her colourful abstract paintings are stacked against walls, and more rest on easels. "Picasso liked my work," she mentions with pride.

Bookshelves climb to the ceiling and, while Gilot keeps no Picasso art, she has dozens of Picasso books. I tentatively ask if we could have one open at an image of *La Femme-Fleur* for one of the photographs we shoot of her.

Gilot's head rears, nostrils flaring. "Absolutely no. That is the past!" she snaps. Nor will she pose with her framed collection of family photographs, including several from the Picasso years. "It could look sad, and I am not sad," she asserts.

She expresses some concern about our earlier interviews. "Picasso is a public deity and I don't want to be seen as criticising him," she explains. "I don't regret one moment of the time I spent with him. His art is brilliant, but the man did have flaws, and I have been honest about this. I know certain things about Picasso that no one else knows; and I could say things that made him furious."

She did several things that made Picasso furious too, she adds. She subsequently married twice, to men closer to her own age. Gilot first wed French artist Luc Simon from 1955 to 1962; their daughter, Aurelia, is an architect. In 1970, Gilot married another "lion", Jonas Salk, the American polio-vaccine pioneer. She speaks with deep affection of the 25 years they shared before he died in 1995.

With a triumphant glint in her eye, Gilot concludes, "Pablo said my life would be finished when I left him; there would be no one for me but him. But I married twice. That was sacrilegious! I was meant to sacrifice the rest of my life to him, then it would have been the perfect Bluebeard story. I spoiled it!"