

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

THE INDEPENDENT
RADAR



TWO PICASSOS UPSTAIRS (2015)

By Jonas Wood
165.5CM x 254CM
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This painting poses, and part-answers, one of the great questions of the 20th century: how does an American painter or writer reframe the idea of Europe? In the 1920s the poet William Carlos Williams, in a subtle and brilliant collection of essays entitled *In the American Grain*, sought to unpick the American character through an analysis of historical occasions.

America had gained its fundamental liberties as a consequence of victory on the field of battle. When would the shadow of cultural subservience be blown away too? What was to be America's true voice of feeling?

Post-war, it was the spirit of abstraction that seemed to embody the new and truly vital spirit of American painting. Frank Stella

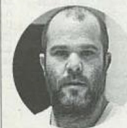
still believes in nothing else. And yet, 50 years on, figuration – those manifold representations of the world in which we all live and breathe – has reasserted its rights. This is unsurprising. Man can live for only so long by ideological diktat. Jonas Wood's paintings are deeply imbued with the spirit and the imagery of the great European painters of the 20th century, from Picasso to Bonnard and Matisse. And yet never burdensomely so. Here we have two Picassos hanging on an insubstantial stretch of pale grey ground-cum-wall. One of the two is not entirely visible.

We are still accustomed to approaching the European heritage – and this includes the heritage of the day before yesterday, that breathing close – in a spirit of reverence. This reverence has something to do with the fundamental seriousness of money, the prices realised in auction houses. Money, finally, is

no laughing matter. Here, all reverence is quite blown away. Wood is a maker and assembler of images. His paintings seem to consist of nudgingly gentle juxtapositions, crisply rendered and often highly colourful. His paintings have an airiness, a pleasing lightness of touch. They take delight in patterning.

These images of two Picassos are not quite what they seem. They are Wood's very own, very particular likenesses of late Picassos, sifted through a playful and casual feeling sensibility. Is it slightly unseemly, a touch irreverent, that the frame of Picasso's *Harlequin* is cut off short? It barely seems to matter.

This is Picasso reimaged. Picasso partially reinvented. Wood's treatment edges the master towards comedy, caricature and even cartooning. Is he cocking a gentle snook at the gathering of so much European cultural lumber



ABOUT THE ARTIST

JONAS WOOD
(born 1977)

Wood was born in Boston and studied psychology at Hobart College in New York state. He subsequently gained an MA in Fine Art at the University of Washington. He lives and works in Los Angeles and is married to the Japanese ceramicist Shio Kusaka, with whom he frequently collaborates.

in an upstairs room? The deadpan title suggests as much. This is neither a painting of paintings nor a painting of posters. It is the rendering of an idea of a middle-to-late Picasso (which would itself, in all likelihood, be a reprise of an early-to-middle Picasso), the kind of thing that might exist in any head, just off to the side perhaps, as we enjoy an episode of *The Simpsons*, with which, we discover, it seems to have surprising affinities.

What is more, this is of course not an illusionistic space at all. Image floats, lightly, against image. Is it slightly unseemly, a touch irreverent, that Picasso's *Harlequin* is cut off short? It barely seems to matter. And what are those curious Alhambra-ish alcoves just off to the side? This is American painting enjoying its liberties to pick, choose and amuse, an art wholly unburdened, an art that has shaken off the shackles.