

Born in Paris and now an American citizen, Françoise Gilot is one of the most highly regarded artists working today, holding a vital place in the international art world.

Since 1964, she has lived between the U.S. and France, maintaining studios in New York and Paris, in which she continues to paint.

TROPHÉE DES ARTS 2015 FRANÇOISE GILOT

Painter and Writer

THE ART OF WANDERING

By Jean-Christian Agid

Françoise Gilot has wandered through nine decades and across two continents. The artist makes no secret that she is 93-years-old. Nothing scares her. Not even the passing of time. It all began when she was five-years-old and fell in love with painting.

"I was born in Neuilly-sur-Seine and grew up in Paris. My mother had lost a brother during World War I, and I was supposed to replace him." Most of the time, the young Françoise was dressed as a boy. "My father made the mistake of teaching me not to be afraid. This was the greatest gift I ever received. I was meant to be as fearless as a boy would be; and I became audacious."



Unlike other girls of her age, Françoise identified as a leader who could only count on herself. "I did not think like a man, but simply like a free person who could try anything she wanted." Once a teenager, she looked at her body in a mirror and realized that she was pretty.

"I had weapons [of seduction]." The tomboy turned out to be a woman, and looking at the life she had ahead of her, she decided she would be a painter.

Gilot has drawn more than a destiny since; she has drawn a destination.

The first stop was an encounter with other masters of her time: Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Braque, and Cocteau. Gilot was a female artist when women were not really supposed to be. "My gallery," she remembers, "had to respect a quota and could only exhibit one female painter for every nine men." At the Atelier Mourlot—which housed most of the modern artists and sculptors—she was then the only woman creating lithographs.

As a female artist, living with a "Maître" could sometimes cast a shadow on the artist's own recognition. In France, Rodin's wife Camille Claudel accused him of stealing her ideas before she was sent to a psychiatric institution. In Mexico, Frida Kahlo's work was barely acknowledged until long after her death, despite Diego Rivera's admiration and support of her talent.



The Philodendron, 1943. Oil on canvas, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4 inches, (92.1 x 73 cm).
©Françoise Gilot. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery



Antagonism, 1945. Oil on masonite, 36 1/4 x 28 3/4 inches, (92.1 x 73 cm).
©Françoise Gilot. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery

Then came the day when Gilot left Picasso, wrote about her life with him, and angered everyone who was in awe of the "Maitre." So, she looked ahead and wandered even further.

"I was accustomed to wandering," she says. "Being intelligent is the ability to translate oneself into a new place, to participate within and not outside of it; not to become a displaced person, but a good wanderer."

She traveled across the Channel first and then the Atlantic ocean in 1961. She successfully settled in New York along with two other French artists: Arman and Bernar Venet a few years later.

For this new stop, she freed herself from socializing with other known artists. "When I was in France, I knew them all, but somehow it was a handicap more than an asset.

When I arrived here, I did not want to become friend with the likes of Jasper Johns just because I admired their works. I had already learned enough to swirl all the possible combinations and compositions in my head."

Gilot was wandering inside her own labyrinth.

With her paintings, she established more success in America, England, and the Nordic European countries than in France. She became American but remained a wandering citizen: "I have kept an atelier in Paris and my French passport."

Looking at her dress, she searches for her insignia of the *Officier de la Légion d'Honneur*. "I don't have rights in France; I have obligations, and this official recognition from France has moved me more than if I was exhibited in a museum."

If her birth country has celebrated the woman, when will it celebrate the painter?

"As an artist I am international. As a person I am French."

In her Upper West Side studio, there is a painting *en devenir* on the easel. Gilot is freedom, individualism, and feminism.

"I am always drawn towards the unknown, advancing naked, without carrying a shield."

But lost somehow in the labyrinth she created, she smiles, laughs a little and says: "I have detached myself from the center where I once was; I now would like to find the exit."



C.1951 Courtesy Françoise Gilot and Gagosian Gallery

FRANÇOISE GILOT

KEY DATES

1921: Born in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France

1938: Completes her *baccalaureat-philosophie* at the University of Paris, France

1939: Attends the Sorbonne and the British Institute in Paris where she completes a degree in English literature from Cambridge University.

1939-42: Studies law at the University of Paris and painting at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris

1952: First solo exhibition at Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris, France

1962: Solo exhibition at Mayor Gallery, London, England

1964: Publishes her memoir *Life With Picasso*, which becomes an instant bestseller.

1965: First exhibition of her work in the United States at the David Findley Gallery in New York City

1972: First solo exhibition at Mann Gallery, New Orleans, USA

1977: Exhibition of *Françoise Gilot: Drawings at Museum of Albuquerque*, New Mexico

1983: Publishes the book *Interface: The painter and the Mask*, State University at Fresno, CA

1987: Exhibition of *Françoise Gilot* at Musée Picasso, Antibes

1988: Made *Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* by the Minister of Culture, France.

1990: Publishes her book *Matisse & Picasso, A Friendship in Art*

1990: Receives the designation of *Chevalier de la Legion d'Honneur* for her work as a painter, writer – Solo exhibition at Galerie Berggruen, Paris, France

1992: Exhibition of *Modern Dance as Muse: the Art of Françoise Gilot* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego

1995: *Stone Echoes: Original Prints by Françoise Gilot*, opens at The Philip and Muriel Berman Museum of Art at Ursinus College in Collegeville, Pennsylvania.

2001: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York purchases three of Gilot's early works for its permanent collection

2010: Receives the designation *Officier de la Legion d'Honneur*, one of France's highest honors

2012: Exhibition of *Picasso and Françoise Gilot: Paris-Vallauris, 1943-1953* at Gagosian Gallery, New York

2015: Publishes *About Women: Conversations Between a Writer and a Painter* with author Lisa Alther

Selected Museum Collection:

Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris France
 Musée Picasso, Antibes, France
 Museum of Tel Aviv, Tel Aviv, Israel
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
 Phoenix Art Museum, Arizona, USA
 Women's Museum, Washington DC, USA
 El Paso Museum of Art, Texas USA
 Berman Museum, Pennsylvania, USA
 McMullen Museum of Art, Boston, USA