

Sample Q & A's

Can you tell us about your inspiration for Picasso's Revenge?

First and foremost - the painting. Every now and again a story comes along that is so powerful it has to be told and this is one of them. Additionally, in the late seventies and early eighties, Ray was a collector of art deco furniture - reaching great heights with his acquisitions and exhibitions of items by top French designers. The quality and value of French furniture from around this period is staggering. Ray discovered that the strand of art deco commissioned by and designed for Jacques Doucet, was prized above the rest. Doucet was the first buyer of *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which seems an incredible achievement for any buyer of great art.

What was the most fascinating fact you discovered while writing the novel?

We estimated that 'Les Demoiselles' would cost about the same to buy as the Empire State Building. When you consider that modern art commands higher prices than old masters generally - Picassos are at the top of the tree – *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* is the top Picasso painting, as MOMA New York's number one item - it may well be the most expensive object ever made by one human hand (perhaps barring Mona Lisa). Equally extraordinary is the fact that this painting, although increasingly considered to be the most influential painting of all time is barely known to the general public.

Why did you centre the story around the couturier Jacques Doucet?

Doucet is a fascinating character – an old man who becomes 'young' and a 'Midas,' in that all he touches turns to gold. He had the knack of surrounding himself with the most eminent names of his era. He is mysterious and a chameleon - never satisfied with being a mere tradesman to the rich, so that he fights with all his being to rise in a rigidly hierarchical society. He is a man at odds with himself and never fully fathomable.

What are the main themes of Picasso's Revenge?

Love lost. Man's struggle with God. Madness and the artistic struggle.

Which scene in Picasso's Revenge was your favorite to write and why? Which was the hardest?

There are many, some are quite saucy, but I particularly like the love scene in which neither party is actually sure whether or not there has been a kiss. It is not easy to write love scenes with your dad!

How does the novel rebrand Picasso?

Typically fiction around Picasso sensationalises the artist's relationships with women, and depicts a cruel, tyrannical man. We portray the human being behind this image and celebrate his art, as well as acknowledging the 'demonic' power in it.

Why has the story been likened to the search for art's holy grail?

We can be left wondering what modern art is all about. The dense language of art history makes it an area for specialists. In 1906 after 600 years of conventional art - almost simultaneously with Einstein's Theory of Relativity in science - Picasso's brothel ruptured the world of painting. The story of Doucet's search shines a lens on the very root of new art, illuminating its essence. The painting is like the keystone - or the bit that's missing.

And why did Picasso hide the painting away for 10 years?

Picasso went to great pains to create this masterpiece, including making 800 sketches for it. He clearly felt it was to be his great work. When it was unveiled only to receive derision and scorn he was embarrassed and distressed. Although it remained in Picasso's studio, it was seen by most leading artists and critics during that time. Its influence was unprecedented by the person most influenced was Picasso himself.

What does the story say about Picasso's portrayal of women?

Some have regarded *Les Femmes d'Alger* as pornography, or 'an attack on women' but the brothel painting challenges us to think about the presentation of women as never before. Until this moment in art we are often, if not usually, invited to be titillated by art images of women. *Les Femmes d'Alger* are both grotesque and confrontational and are not belittled in the same way. These women are more likely to seem threatening to men looking at the painting.

What was unique about the period of the Belle Époque?

So much changed in the period of the setting of the novel. In the early 1900s when the story commences the western world was steeped in Victorian values. By the time of Doucet's death in 1929 the same moral codes were being seriously challenged. Modernity and mass commercialism had arrived. Even the street scene was unrecognisable, with the motor car replacing horses and carriages and ladies' legs visible for the first time and so on. It was a time of huge changes.

How true is the story?

We had to stay as faithful as possible to Picasso's story and to all that we knew of the 'real' characters from this time. Picasso's life in particular is very well documented and it was not appropriate to take liberties with the 'truth' just to fit a fiction. Jacques Doucet's story is more sketchily documented. We have had fun being creative with some of the unknown information, but at the same time have clung to well-founded hunches.

You call it art's greatest untold story. What makes you say that?

Arguably Picasso's brothel painting changed the look of the twentieth century. It influenced art, cinema, architecture, interior design, theatre and literature and so on. It was like an 'ism' on its own, but it has a rich and visceral story at the heart of it. Doucet reveals the greatest secrets of the twentieth century's greatest artist, who created it.