

PEOPLE  
ARE  
TALKING  
ABOUT

ART

dream  
lover

*An exuberant show celebrates  
Picasso's young mistress  
and her bountiful charms.*

In most of the paintings she dreams, her sensual reveries filtered through the intellectual complexities of her artist lover. Her name was Marie-Thérèse Walter; she was seventeen in 1927, when a man with “a nice smile,” as she recalled some five decades later, approached her outside the Parisian department store where she’d gone to buy a collar for a blouse, saying he was sure they’d “do great things together.”

The name Picasso meant nothing to her, so the artist (then 45, married to the former ballerina Olga Khokhlova, and a father) showed her a catalog of his work by way of introduction. She kept the appointment they made to meet at his studio a few days later, and art was the richer

for it. Opening this month at New York’s Acquavella Galleries, “**Picasso’s Marie-Thérèse**,” a loan exhibition of major works including paintings, drawings, and a rare sculpture, reveals the creative ferment, artistic ambition, and erotic ardor that informed Picasso’s portraits of his young mistress during their nine-year, clandestine love affair.

Focusing largely on the remarkably fecund period between 1931 and 1932, when Picasso, struggling with the twin influences of Surrealism and Matisse, forged a unique visual style in response to Walter’s nobly voluptuous figure and classical blonde grace, the exhibition also re-creates part



**MUSE OF THE MOMENT**  
MARIE-THÉRÈSE WALTER  
INSPIRED PICASSO'S *FEMME  
AUX CHEVEUX JAUNES*, 1931.

of Picasso’s 1932 retrospective at Galeries Georges Petit in Paris. There a spectacular series of paintings, galvanized by rapture, in which an anonymous, fair-haired young beauty gazes into a mirror or dozes indolently in an ornate room, gave the broader world the first glimpse of their relationship. A year after the birth of their daughter, Maya, Marie-

Thérèse would find herself largely supplanted as Picasso’s muse by the photographer Dora Maar. (Walter took her own life in 1977, following Picasso’s death four years earlier.) But the images she inspired live on in our imagination.  
—LESLIE CAMHI *pata* >276

TALENT



ROMAN  
CANDLE

*With her ethereal beauty  
and iron will, Valentina Cervi  
takes Hollywood.*

First, **Valentina Cervi** couldn’t even get a meeting with Spike Lee for *Miracle at St. Anna*—an adaptation of James McBride’s novel about African-American soldiers lost in Tuscany during World War II. “Casting thought Spike was looking for a more stereotyped Italian woman,” says the 32-year-old, Rome-based actress, drawing

**SILVER BELLE**  
CERVI, WEARING  
A WASHED-SATIN  
DRESS BY LANVIN.

a voluptuous silhouette in the air with her delicate hands and flashing a sly smile. “Like a Sophia Loren. And I’m not that kind of woman.” But Cervi was convinced that she was perfect for the female lead. She persuaded the casting director to audition her on tape—and got the part.

The granddaughter of legendary Italian actor and household name Gino Cervi first appeared on-screen at age ten. She was noticed as John Malkovich’s daughter in Jane Campion’s *The Portrait of a Lady*; as a seventeenth-century painter in *Artemisia*, and in the 1999 *Rien sur Robert*, for which she was nominated for a César.

If Cervi seems perpetually on the edge of a breakthrough, *Miracle at St. Anna* may be the one. She’s now ready to move to Los Angeles and see where it takes her. “I like to talk,” she says. “But the reality is, you’ve got to do it. Talking is almost against acting—which is really being in the moment.” —KRISTIN HOHENADEL

Cervi: JAN WELTERS. Sittings Editor: Vanessa Reid; hair: Javier Palacio at airportagency.com; makeup: Jürgen Braun at airportagency.com; Woman with Yellow Hair: (Femme aux Cheveux Jaunes), December 27, 1931: PABLO PICASSO, oil on canvas, 39 1/8" x 31 1/8" (100 cm x 81 cm); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Thannhauser Collection, Gift: Justin K. Thannhauser, 1978, 78.25.14, 50; © 2008 Estate of Pablo Picasso, Paris; Thannhauser Collection, New York; Courtesy of Acquavella Galleries. Details, see in This Issue.