

says that she was spending the summer at her grandmother's house, and was often sent to the station to fetch the art-world types who made small, pious pilgrimages to Duchamp's widow. On the way was a shortcut—a tractor path that was barely visible between trees. Having found out what her passenger did, Sophie liked to ask whether he or she was the adventurous version. There was almost immediately an impact as the wheels left the pavement, and then the critic or the curator would be bumping down a rutty old road that could only partly be made out. "People would arrive at the house all shaken up," Sophie says. "They had started out excited about meeting Teeny Duchamp at her house in the country—a perfect art-critic day!—and now they can't stop worrying about the ride back to the train."

In January of 2002, Sophie, who lives in New York, had a show at Naumann's gallery, Francis M. Naumann Fine Art, on East Eightieth Street. The show, her first, consisted of twenty-one deft reproductions of modern and Old Master paintings by, among others, Degas, Hopper, Vermeer, and Grant Wood, from which Sophie had removed the people or, in the still-lives, some of the objects. Without the figures, the paintings were spooky and unsettling. One critic described them as "pronounced statements of absence." The first painting from which she removed a figure was the *Mona Lisa*. Sophie is married to the French Pop artist Alain Jacquet, and one night in 1997 they were looking at a book of variations made from the painting, including Duchamp's version of the *Mona Lisa*, with a mustache, an image that Sophie remembers from her childhood. Turning the pages, she suddenly thought, What if the *Mona Lisa* just got up and left? Her version of the painting has the hills in the background and the river running through the lowland, and in the foreground the balustrade that the *Mona Lisa* was standing in front of. Sophie called the painting "The Monna Lisa (Be Back in Five Minutes)." Naumann first saw it on display in the vault of a bank in Tribeca. Because the real "Mona Lisa" is probably the most valuable painting in the world, Sophie thought it would be funny to show it in a bank vault. To attach it to

the metal wall, she glued magnets to the frame. The show at Naumann's gallery also included her version of her great-grandfather's "Goldfish," without the goldfish in the bowl on the table, and a version of Picasso's "Woman in the Mirror," without the woman. To Naumann, the noteworthy thing about the Picasso was that without the woman the painting looked like what he calls "a very austere, Nice-period Matisse"; that is, a Matisse painted between 1918 and 1930, when the artist lived at a series of hotels in Nice.

Last September, Naumann decided to close his gallery and do more writing. He called Sophie to tell her, and then he called a friend they had in common, an artist named Mike Bidlo. Bidlo told Naumann that he should give Sophie another show before the gallery closed, and he mentioned that if he did so during the winter it would coincide with the Matisse-Picasso exhibition that opens on February 13th at the Museum of Modern Art. When Naumann hung up, he looked absently at his largest wall and suddenly realized that it was roughly the size of "Guernica." "My first impulse," Naumann says, "was that if I want to combine Matisse and Picasso, I was just on the phone with the Matisse."

Initially, Sophie didn't see how the painting could fit her practice of removing figures. She was surprised that Naumann suggested "Guernica," because she had been looking at it lately in books, as a result of 9/11. (She has never seen the actual painting, which hangs in Madrid.) She had been on the street when the first plane passed above her, and she watched it crash into the tower. Given a moment to reflect, she decided that she would love to try painting the Picasso.

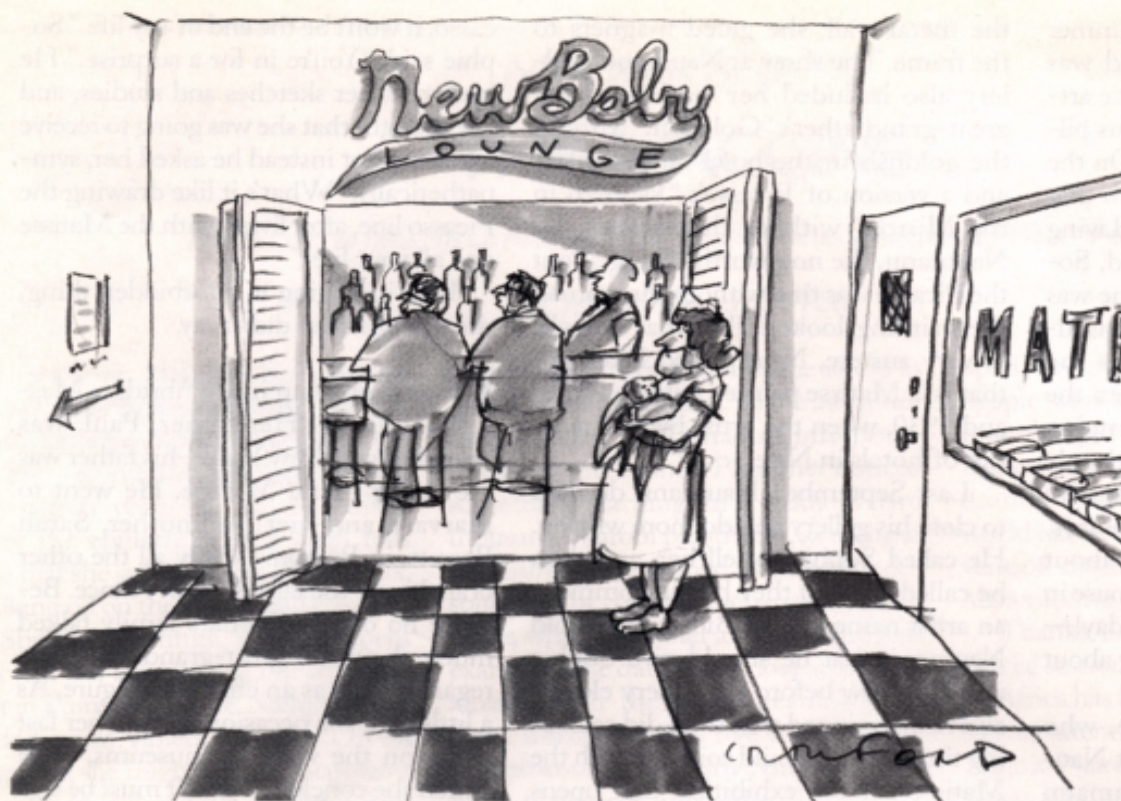
Matisse and Picasso—Sophie pronounces it "Pee-casso"—were rivals of a kind. Gertrude Stein once said that they "became friends but that they were also enemies." In the Matisse family, vestiges of their rivalry remain. When Sophie told her mother that she was planning to paint "Guernica," her mother said, "You mean that horrible painting with all the ugly figures?" Her father, who is a sculptor and an inventor, came to New York a few weeks ago, and she brought him to her studio, in Tribeca. They talked about the Matisse-Picasso show, and her father said, "If I never see another Pi-

casso, it won't be the end of my life." Sophie said, "You're in for a surprise." He looked at her sketches and studies, and she thought that she was going to receive a lecture, but instead he asked her, sympathetically, "What's it like drawing the Picasso line, after living with the Matisse one all your life?"

Like indulging in a forbidden thing, she thought, but didn't say.

Sophie grew up in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Her father, Paul, was brought up in New York—his father was the dealer Pierre Matisse. He went to Harvard and met her mother, Sarah Barrett, in Boston. Nearly all the other branches of the family are in France. Because no one in Sophie's family talked much about her great-grandfather, she regarded him as an enigmatic figure. As a little girl, she occasionally saw her last name on the walls of museums, from which she concluded that it must be significant. A woman who worked with her mother once took her and one of her three older brothers aside and said, "Tell me the truth, are you really related to Matisse?" She said no, and her brother said yes. Mostly when she asked her father about Matisse, she felt that her question was diverted. Teeny Duchamp spoke fondly of Matisse. "She'd tell me what a wonderful man he was," Sophie says. "She told me that sometimes if she had a problem with Pierre, her husband, she'd talk to Matisse about it. If I managed to get my father to talk about him, though, you might sometimes think he was a monster. One of the few stories I remember was of his being a child in a restaurant with Matisse and having a waiter who took himself to be a comedian. The guy did what he could to provoke a response from the great man, and when it finally arrived it was delivered in the most virulent tone. My impression is there just wasn't a lot of room with him for anybody else."

The family's reluctance to discuss Matisse left Sophie feeling excluded from something essential to her identity. Also obscurely deficient. A real Matisse either would have been let in on the secret or wouldn't have had to ask in the first place. In her studio, she has a photograph of Matisse taken when he was in his sixties. His fingers are cupped as if they were holding a cigarette. "That hand



I noticed a long time ago," she says. "My grandfather had hands like that, too—suarish fingers, thick and long, but not skinny, and the nails are flat. I would look at my hands and think, The knuckles are like his, the fingers are the same." She also remembers looking at a portrait of her father drawn by her great-grandfather, which hung in the living room of her parents' house. She can draw the portrait quickly from memory—a child's face with a round jaw and hair like waves in water. The ability to reproduce her great-grandfather's supple and shapely line seems to have been passed on to her the way a striking quality of temperament or a cast of mind might persist in another family. The features of the drawing that engaged her most were the nose and the eyebrow. The eyebrow crossed over the left eye, then turned down and formed the nose, like a backward seven. "I looked at it partly because it worked so well," she says, "but also because it broke rules, and that's always interesting for a child."

When Sophie was thirteen or fourteen, she needed money for something, and to raise it she made a series of little Matisse paintings. "Everyone loved them, because they were reminiscent,"

she says, "but I did it, I think, to establish a connection I felt I wasn't allowed to have."

As a grown woman, with her own child—she and Jacquet have a daughter, Gaïa, who is nine—she thinks that her father was probably reticent about his grandchildren because he wanted to spare his children from being fussed over for reasons having less to do with them than with the person doing the fussing. "I wouldn't have wanted him to do it differently," she says. "It preserved a kind of innocence. It's confusing, though, to unravel what the legacy really means for me, and I still haven't quite figured it out."

In 1987, when Sophie was in her early twenties, having attended a year of art school in Boston, then worked for a year with her father on his projects, she decided to move to France, because "it seemed like the door to the world." After staying for a while with her grandmother, she went to Paris with the intention of enrolling at the École des Beaux-Arts, where Matisse had studied. As a child, she had made trips to France with her mother and father, but she didn't speak French. The French museum officials she met at her grandmother's would ask her

questions, and when she couldn't reply they would make those clucking sounds the French make and say, "*C'est incroyable*," which embarrassed her. She learned enough French to present a portfolio to the admissions committee at the École des Beaux-Arts, and, with the intervention of an aunt who knew which professor would be receptive to the figurative work she was doing, she was accepted.

She discovered immediately that she couldn't draw very well. In high school, she had avoided drawing classes because she felt that a Matisse ought to know how to draw without needing help. She had always been accomplished at making copies of drawings and photographs, and she thought that was all there was to the matter. In Paris, she learned that drawing from the figure required entirely different skills. She worked hard, though, and

eventually became adept. Meanwhile, she lived a life apart from the French students. "I was this lost, naïve person with this famous name, and people projecting onto me all sorts of things," she says. "Much of it was anger, not only because I had a name they would have killed to have but also because there was a kind of indignity involved in the way I appeared to uphold it. I was an American, and I didn't speak French, and I couldn't draw for beans, and I'd wear skirts that looked like they were made from burlap, and I had holes in my pants, and in the soles of my shoes. I looked like the refugee I in some senses was. The only thing that protected me from their scorn was that I was so withdrawn. I would sit in my room and listen to music and think about things that made me feel good—my own name in a museum and my work on display, or about being glamorous, anything that took me away from where I was."

Because she didn't speak French proficiently, she didn't know for sure what the professors were saying when they evaluated her work, but she nodded and pretended to absorb every word. To earn a degree, she had to take classes in art theory and history, but she couldn't

read or write French well enough (she is also seriously dyslexic). In her third year, the head of the school summoned her to his office and told her that it was unfortunate, considering her name, that she hadn't worked harder, and that the school could no longer offer her a place. All she could manage in French was to ask if there was anything she could do, and he said that there wasn't. By this time, though, she had met Jacquet and was beginning to travel among the people he knew in the Paris art world, so leaving was not an intolerable disappointment.

Sophie is the only descendant of Matisse who is a painter. His daughter tried painting but destroyed her work because she felt unable to escape her father's influence. As a student in Paris, Sophie began making paintings so modest that they hardly look like paintings. They were mostly done on the pages of her engagement calendar: color studies and abstractions and sometimes a drawing about the size of a baseball card. Because no one ever saw them, she felt free to do anything she cared to. The colors in the earliest paintings are sombre, but as the years go by they grow brighter, and more like the deep blues and reds and yellows and greens in her great-grandfather's work. In 1993, she and Jacquet had Gaïa, and Sophie stopped painting to raise her. In 1996, they moved to New York, and in 1997 she painted the *Mona Lisa*.

Sophie began with a literal idea: to paint Picasso's painting as Matisse might have done it. This presented her with two issues: what forms he would have used and what colors. "*Guernica*" depicts figures that Picasso imagined to be suffering during the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica by the Fascists, with the help of the Nazis, in 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. From left to right, these figures include a woman on her knees who is weeping and holding in her arms a child who appears to be dead. Behind her is a bull with an impassive expression, which some critics say represents the bestial nature of the Fascists and some people say represents Spain. Picasso said it was a bull. Above the shoulder of the bull is a bird, and below the bird is a fallen soldier. Above and to the right of the soldier, more or less in the painting's center, is a horse with a deep wound in its side.

Above the horse a light bulb hangs from a reflecting shade. Approaching the horse is a woman staggering in shock, and above her another woman leans from a window and holds a lamp to see what the terrible commotion is about. At the extreme right is a woman who seems to be falling through the air. In the background are buildings in flame, so the setting seems to be outdoors, but the electric light also suggests a room. It is a painting of horror and anguish, and Picasso intended that it shame the Fascists for the massacre.

Sophie began work on studies of the painting on September 15th. She made photocopies of a reproduction of "*Guernica*" from a book Naumann gave her, and began coloring them with gouache, a delicate paint that has a texture like fine cloth. In the first ones, the shapes were mostly black, and these were followed by ones in dark blues and blacks and reds. A few are all reds and greens; one is of nearly fluorescent yellows and greens, and one is a broad arrangement of blues and reds and greens and violet, and doesn't really work.

As soon as Sophie finished one study, she began another. Some were done quickly and some deliberately. After she had made about a dozen small studies, she began using larger sheets of heavy paper, and then she made two versions of the painting on canvas that are about six feet long and three feet high. None of the studies were definitive in the sense that she felt she had managed a version of the colors that she would want to make on a larger scale, but several had elements that she liked. She worked on the color studies and on drawings and on the paintings for three months, which put her up against a deadline to finish the painting in time for the opening at Naumann's gallery, on February 13th.

No matter how hard she tried to interpret Picasso's figures in drawings, she felt unable to find satisfactory equivalents in Matisse's work. Finally, she made a large drawing in pencil using only figures derived from looking at Matisse. The woman with the dead child on the left-hand border became a Madonna-like figure looking down at

her child. The woman with the lamp appeared slightly annoyed at having been disturbed, and the projection of her face forward into the drawing made her look like an ornament on the hood of a fancy car. Sophie could find no counterpart in Matisse's work for the falling woman, and mostly she is smudged out, as if she were a ghost. The most compelling figure is the horse. Sophie drew it somewhat naturalistically, coiled in pain and shock, and it is somehow collapsed and transcendent at the same time. It looks more like a figure from mythology than like a horse on a battlefield. After she completed the drawing, it occurred to her that Matisse had never drawn such figures, or depicted such emotions, partly because he believed that art should be restful. (He once said, "I believe my role is to provide calm. Because I myself have need of peace.") She realized that it was not possible to compel such figures into being, and so she decided that she should reproduce Picasso's—that they were simply too formidable to alter.

None of these resolves conformed to Naumann's idea for the painting. "My instinct was to do what a comedian would do, where he assimilates the voice and appearance of someone more famous than he is," he says. When Naumann went to Sophie's studio in December, he saw, among the studies, one in which she had used *découpage*—cutouts—as Matisse often did. The tail

on the bull was a seaweedy species of Matisse imagery, and above the woman with the lamp were scatterings of leaves like the ones he sometimes used. As Naumann looked at the study, he found that, for the most part, he was unable to tell where one artist left off and the other began. There were places

where he thought Sophie had been too faithful to Picasso, and he made some drawings of his own to show her how to make the figures closer to what he imagined Matisse would have done.

Over the next few days, though, Sophie lost her enthusiasm for the idea. "I thought it would be interesting to have a painting where you would think, Matisse/Picasso, Matisse/Picasso," she



says, "like those drawings where you look at a vase and see two faces in profile, but when I tried to bring it off it turned into an exercise." She decided that what she really wanted to do was to make the Matisse part of the project hers and her sense of color, and not her great-grandfather and his.

Naumann told Sophie that she should paint the painting any way she wanted to and that he had only tried to help because he thought she was stalled. "The truth, however, is that I saw it as a defeat," he says, "even though really it's kind of a victory. The statement that these two artists are stylistically incompatible is a more interesting one to make. A comedian can stand up and pretend to be Burt Lancaster, but we know that Matisse and Picasso are extremely different and difficult personalities that in this case refuse to intertwine. If you can still make it work, though, you win. What's winning? If I can stand in front of the painting and see Matisse and Picasso at the same time."

Growing impatient to paint, Sophie gave up working on the studies just before Christmas. She bought canvas at an art store in SoHo,

stood on top of a dresser in her studio to tack it up on the wall, and spent two days applying two coats of gesso. Sitting on the floor, she began drawing in the lower left-hand corner and worked along the bottom to the right corner. Then, sometimes standing and sometimes kneeling, she drew from right to left across the middle of the painting. She drew the images along the top while standing on the dresser, then on a stepladder, which she found in the hallway outside her studio. By the third day, she had left a trail of pencil shavings and pencil lead across the base of the painting. She kept a large photocopy of "Guernica" on the floor beside her, or picked it up and folded it lengthwise into thirds, like a man reading a newspaper on a crowded train, so that she could concentrate on a specific section. At one point, she stood against the far wall and looked at the drawing and said, "Sometimes you get the feeling of something, and sometimes it's just a struggle, and I don't know why."

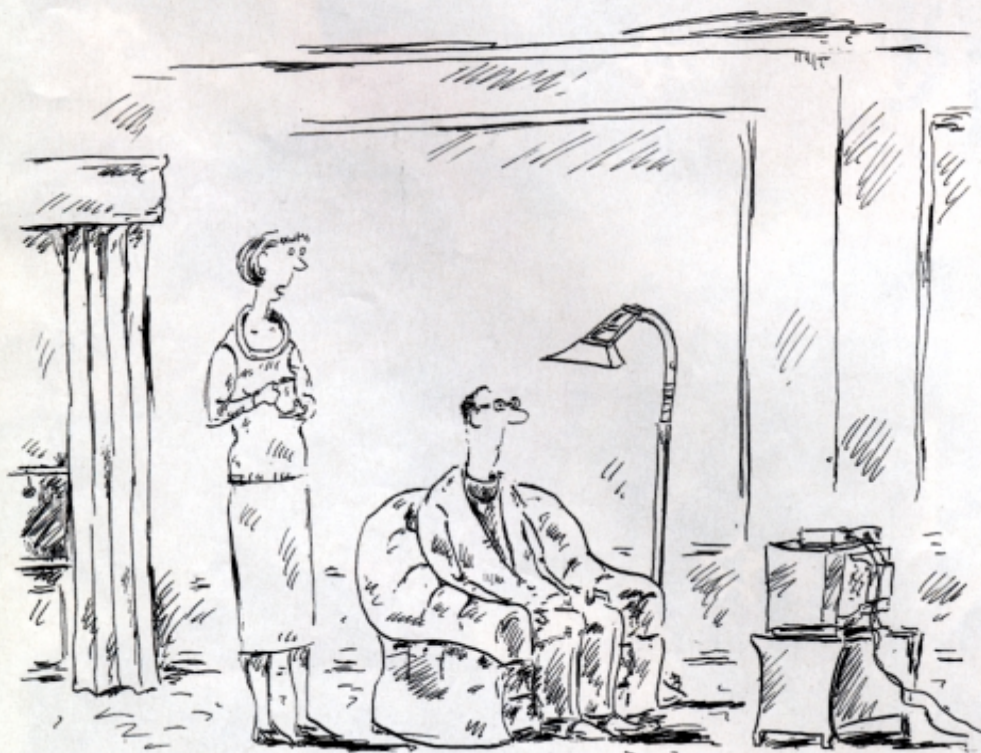
Gouache is too delicate to use on a painting that has to be rolled up to be moved, and enough oil paint to cover a canvas the size of "Guernica"

would cost thousands of dollars, so Sophie decided to use acrylic paints, which are mixed from pigments, and which she had never used before. First, she applied black in the areas where Picasso had used black. Then she mixed a bright yellow. She held the photocopy in one hand and a brush in the other. She leaned forward, put the brush to the canvas, stopped, looked at the study, then slowly moved the brush forward again. "This is the most nerve-racking time," she said. "Getting started. There can be disappointments."

She painted the horse first, using green, blue, orange, red, and purple, applying paint that had a texture like honey. The colors were bright and wet in the light, but they dried hard and flat, especially the reds and blues. As the days passed, she applied layers of color over them in slightly different shades, and the reds got warmer, and the blues went from looking like paint on a wall to being like water you were staring into. The horse proved so difficult that she stood back from it one day and said, "I'm just going to try to keep going with something else. I'll come back to that later." She turned to the figure of the falling woman. One day, the phone rang and she told the caller, "I just put the color up on a wall next to the falling woman. We're looking kind of heavy and flat and uninteresting, but it'll be fine. It'll be just fine."

One of the last figures she handled was the staggering woman. The woman has a shawl on her back, and when Sophie painted the shawl a deep red and gave it a border of black wavy lines it turned out to be the single detail in the entire painting that could have come from either Picasso or Matisse.

As Sophie painted, she was aware of the vibrant and, for her, nearly illicit quality of Picasso's brawny line. She was also apprehensive about whether Naumann would like the finished painting. (He saw it on January 13th and liked it enormously.) Or whether anyone among her family or friends would say, as some of them did after her first show, "It's wonderful, Sophie, but when are you going to do your own work?"—not understanding that her depiction of a signature painting by



B. Smaller

"Should we have dinner now, or are you watching in real time?"

the painter most different from her ancestor was a means, however indirect, of gaining the ground she needed to work entirely from her own imagery. In addition, there was the practical matter of learning to use the new paints to best advantage. During the first week in January, she ran out of the medium the pigments are mixed in, and had to go back to the store, **Guerra Paint & Pigment**, in the East Village, where she had bought them. She had been taken there by a friend from the École des Beaux-Arts who lives in California and paints murals for rich people. The friend was visiting the city over Christmas. Sophie had told her that she didn't know what paints would give her the lush texture that gouaches provide, and her friend had said that acrylics would, and that she knew where to get the best ones, assuming that the store, which she hadn't been to for years, still existed.

It was cold the day Sophie went back to the paint store, and she wore a big warm coat and one of those Asian wool hats that have flaps that come down over the ears and strings of yarn to tie them under the chin. **Guerra Paint & Pigment** occupies a small storefront on East Thirteenth Street. There is a counter facing the door and some shelves behind it with plastic bottles of pigments. Along the walls on either side of the counter and up to the ceiling are little swatches of paint colors that look very much like the newsprint on the horse in "Guernica." When Sophie came through the door, the owners, a young man and woman, recognized her as the cheerful and charming woman who had asked a lot of questions and bought lots of pigments and not enough medium even though they told her she needed more, so they were not surprised to see her again. She told them that she loved the paints, and asked how to mix this or that color so that it would be more glossy or less glossy and how to thin the medium and so on. She handed over her credit card. The woman said, "Ah, a Matisse. You must be a great painter." And for a moment Sophie's face looked uncertain and childlike, as if someone had said something thoughtless to her. She said simply, "I hope so." ♦