

Donald Margulies

Statement for After Picasso

In my 1991 play, *Sight Unseen*, a skeptical British archeologist responds to an American painter citing Picasso as the exemplar of the twentieth century visionary: "Picasso: Now *there* was an energetic little bloke." The artist asks rhetorically, "Am I supposed to shrink in the shadow of the great master and pack it all in? Say the hell with it, why bother?" "If you had any sense?," says the Brit. "Yes."

As a precocious kid growing up in Brooklyn, I became aware of Picasso's prodigious and varied output over his long life. But it wasn't until I was an art student (first at Pratt Institute, then at SUNY Purchase) that I fully appreciated the thunderclap of Picasso and Braque's discovery of Cubism, a new way of seeing that gave birth to collage. With them - and Kurt Schwitters - as my spiritual guides, I adopted collage as my mode of creative expression.

I ended up devoting my artistic life not to collage but to drama. (I never stopped making them but that pursuit took a back seat to playwriting.) I found that, viscerally, writing a play didn't feel all that different from making a collage. What are plays but random snippets from life, smatterings of images, language, memories, dreams, moments in time that when juxtaposed create a narrative that hadn't existed before? A dramatist, like a collagist, plays around with fragments (or "beats") until a pleasing new form is achieved.

The triptych in this exhibit - "Picasso Variation One, Two and Three" - gave me a chance to riff off the master. I cut up a print of one of his portraits of a woman and moved those pieces around with scraps from the stash of ephemera I've amassed over four decades, clippings from old magazines and obscure manuals, and created these new compositions, collaborations with Picasso.