

CHILD WITH A DOVE

By Ken McNaughton

Pablo Picasso's father, Don Jose Ruiz, made pigeons a particularly favored subject of his paintings, and as a boy Picasso must often have seen pigeons, as well as his father's pictures of them [1]. Childhood memories must surely have been involved when, in 1901, at the age of twenty-one, Pablo painted *Child with a Dove*. He probably painted it in Paris during his second visit, when he was staying with Spanish friends. By that time he had seen, studied and assimilated contemporary French painting. He had taken Toulouse-Lautrec's way of rendering a visual impression rapidly with a few forceful lines and shrill spots of color, and made it his own. Also, he had learned from Degas how to observe a figure sharply and with detachment. In *Child with a Dove*, there is a new thoughtfulness, a poetic



sympathy with the subject, qualities that were to dominate his work in the years that followed. The pictorial technique is quite new. The forms are rendered in simple sweeping lines, and the colors are keyed to an untroubled three-tone scale in which greenish tones dominate. He seems to have left his apprenticeship behind, giving for the first time an expression of his own, not-very-gay vision of the world. It was a vision he shared with others of his generation at the turn of the century, to whom the world they saw around them seemed a paradise lost.

The painting was acquired by French art dealer Paul Rosenberg [2]. It was bought in 1924 by a Mrs. R. A. Workman from the Alexander Reid Gallery in Glasgow, but she sold it to Samuel Courtauld in 1928. On his death in 1947, he bequeathed it to Christabel McLaren, Lady Aberconway—wife of Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway—who was born Christabel Mary Melville Macnaghten. Her father, Melville Leslie Macnaghten (1853-1921) was the sixth son of Francis Workman Macnaghten, second Irish Chief of the Macnaughton Clan and younger brother of Edmond Alexander Macnaghten of Beardville, County Antrim, on whom the arms of the Chief of Clan Macnaughton were conferred in 1818.

In 1965 I was invited to the home of Lady Aberconway at 12 North Audley Street in Mayfair, London, when there was a Reception for the Clan Macnaghten Association, attended by the Chief of the Clan, Sir Antony Macnaghten and his wife Lady Magdalene. In December I made a tape recording and reminisced to my mother and family about some of the colorful characters at the party. It was my second year in London, where I was a twenty-four-year-old Australian doing postgraduate research in biochemical

engineering at University College London. On the tape I said “When I arrived I was greeted by a doorman and he ushered me into a little room to put my coat in and I noticed a list on the wall and I asked him what it was and he took it down and it read “In the event of fire please save the paintings in this order ...” And number one was a Picasso in the drawing room. Later on the doorman showed me these paintings and they were all originals. There were Picasso, ... Renoir, Monet, Manet—a glorious collection of original Impressionist paintings and this complete list of the order in which they should be saved in the event of fire.” Many years later I wrote a story about Lady Aberconway and published it on the website of the Clan Macnachtan Association Worldwide [3]. In the article I stated the party was on 9 October 1965 but it actually started at 6 pm on Thursday 24 June 1965 [4].

On Saturday 9 March 2019, I was surprised and delighted to receive an email as follows:

*Dear Ken, I hope this finds you well. My name is Gabriel Pogrund, I'm a reporter at The Sunday Times. I'm writing a story tomorrow about Picasso's Child with a Dove and the circumstances in which it left the UK. As part of my research, I am trying to get in touch with the branch of the Aberconway family that sold it. I believe it was the Michie family that handled the sale via Christie's—but do not know for sure and was wondering if you may be able to assist? I read your fabulous history of Lady Aberconway and thought you might know. I appreciate that it is a Saturday, so completely do not expect a reply. However, I wanted to ask just in case you recall the details. Thank you so much in advance.
Best wishes, Gabriel*

Gabriel Pogrund, 23, serves as news and politics reporter at *The Sunday Times*. He won Young Journalist of the Year at the 2018 British Press Awards. He also worked as lead researcher for his *Sunday Times* colleague, Tim Shipman, on two best-selling books about Britain's exit from the European Common Market, “All Out War” and “Fall Out.” On 26 March 2018 Pogrund was named Laurence Stern Fellow at *The Washington Post*, which brings a British journalist to work at the *Post* for three months in the summer. In 2016 he graduated with a BA in geography from University College London. I was pleased Gabriel found my “fabulous history of Lady Aberconway” but could not help him with his research at such short notice.

Lady Aberconway had *Child with a Dove* for twenty-seven years, from 1947 until her death in 1974, including at the time of the reception. Judging from the description on the tape recording there could have been several Picasso's and I didn't supply any titles but I must have looked at *Child with a Dove*. After her death, the family loaned the painting to the National Gallery from 1974 to 2010 and it was also displayed in exhibitions at the Courtauld Gallery and the Tate Gallery. It has been described by Arts Council England as “probably the most famous work by Picasso in a UK collection.”

In 2012 the painting was in a private sale brokered by auction house Christie's on behalf of the family. The price was reported as £50 million (\$65 million US). The government imposed a temporary export ban, which expired in December 2012, because no British

institution was able to match the purchase price to acquire the work. It was displayed at an exhibition of Picasso's works at the Courtauld Gallery until May 2013, and was expected to be exported when the exhibition closed in May 2013. In April 2013 it was reported by *Le Figaro* that the buyer was the Qatar Museums Authority. The seller was a mystery until Gabriel's article was published on 10 March 2019 [5]. Because of a current political scandal in London, which prompted the article, and a little research on the Web, I was able to learn more about the provenance of the painting.

Anne Laura Dorinthea McLaren, daughter of Sir Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway, and Christabel Mary Melville MacNaghten, was born on 26 April 1927 in London and lived there until the war, when her family moved to their estate at Bodnant, North Wales. She read zoology at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, later gaining an MA, and continued her post-graduate studies at University College London. She obtained her DPhil in 1952 and married fellow student Dr Donald Michie on 6 October 1952. As a couple, McLaren and Donald Michie worked together at University College London from 1952 to 1955 and afterwards at the Royal Veterinary College. In 1958 she published a landmark *Nature* paper with John D. Biggers reporting the first successful development and birth of mice *in vitro*, a paper which has been called "one of the most significant papers in the history of reproductive biology and medicine." During this period she also had three children: Susan Fiona Dorinthea Michie (born 19 June 1955), Jonathan Mark Michie (25 March 1957) and Caroline Ruth Michie (1 August 1959). In 1975 McLaren was made a Fellow of the Royal Society. From 1991 to 1996, she held the position of Foreign Secretary of the Royal Society and from 1992 to 1996 the position of Vice-President; she was the first female officer in the society's 330-year history. In 1993, she was created a DBE, with the title "Dame." From 1993 to 1994 she was president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and in 1998 she was made a Fellow of the Academy of Medical Sciences. McLaren (aged 80) and her ex-husband Donald Michie (aged 83) were killed in a road accident on 7 July 2007 when their car left the M11 motorway as they travelled from Cambridge to London.

Their eldest child, **Susan Michie**, obtained a BA in experimental psychology at Oxford University in 1976 and a DPhil in developmental psychology in 1982. She obtained an MPhil in clinical psychology at the Institute of Psychiatry, London University, in 1978. In 2002, she joined the Psychology Department at University College, where she is Professor of Health Psychology and Director of UCL's Centre for Behaviour Change and of its Health Psychology Research Group. She married the trade union official Andrew Murray (1981–97) and had three children, Jessica Katharine Murray, Jack Douglas Murray and Laura Catriona Murray.

The youngest of their children, **Laura Murray**, made the headline of Gabriel's article, "Laura Murray, a key aide to Corbyn, comes from a clan who made a fortune from the £50m sale of the family Picasso" [5]. Laura was 30 at the time of the article, an aide to Jeremy Corbyn, leader of the British Labour Party. The previous week she was named Labour's head of complaints, a politically sensitive role that included dealing with anti-semitism claims. However, according to the article, the party appeared to backtrack after leaked emails supposedly showed Laura had blocked the suspension of a member who

had defended an anti-semitic mural. After Rachel Riley, the co-presenter of ITV's program "Countdown" commented on this, Laura tweeted: "This woman is as dangerous as she is stupid. Nobody should engage with her. Ever." Riley, who is Jewish and a Corbyn critic, instructed a high-profile lawyer to pursue a libel case. Then Lord Harris of Haringey, chairman of the Labour peers' group, sent a furious letter to Corbyn demanding to know Murray's role and whether her father is secretly intervening in anti-semitism complaints. The gist of the *Times* article was that Laura's family would have no problem financing a defense, because they sold *Child with a Dove* for £50 million in 2013. The article claimed that the transaction was overseen by Laura Murray's mother, Susan Michie, and her uncle, Jonathan Michie, an Oxford economist and university friend of Labour's communications director, Seumas Milne. A similar firestorm erupted across the Atlantic after a young female US Democrat, Representative Ilhan Omar, tweeted comments that some thought were anti-semitic.

Apart from the divisive and exhausting politics, partially fueled by inane tweeting on both sides of the ocean, I am glad to know more about the movement of this beautiful painting, from the hands of its twenty-one-year-old Spanish master, to the master collector Courtauld, to an extraordinary Lady of the Macnaghten family and her highly accomplished female descendants.

REFERENCES

1. "[Child with a Dove](#)," 1901 by Pablo Picasso, Pablo Picasso Paintings, Quotes and Biography, www.PabloPicasso.org.
2. [Child with a Dove](#), Wikipedia, 9 March 2019.
3. McNaughton, Ken, "[Christabel Lady Aberconway](#)," Clan Macnachtaon Association Worldwide, 6 November 2007.
4. McNaughton, Ken, personal diary, 1965.
5. Pogrand, Gabriel, and Shipman, Tim, "Laura Murray, a key aide to Corbyn, comes from a clan who made a fortune from the £50m sale of the family Picasso," *The Sunday Times*, 10 March 2019.

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