

27 SEP 1989

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AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

Picasso and Cocteau at a bullfight, 1955 by Brian Brake

Foreword

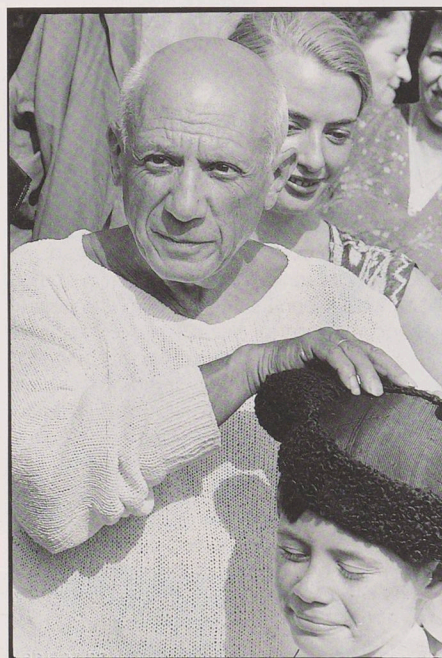
Brian Brake is recognised as New Zealand's finest twentieth-century photographer.

This 1955 photo essay was responsible for making Brake's name internationally when he had only just joined the Magnum photographic agency in Paris. The prints were presented by a friend of the artist to the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1989, in memory of Brian Brake.

The set of prints is one of only three sets printed by the photographer and was first shown in 1986 on the occasion of Brian Brake's receiving of the Governor-General Art Award at the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts, Wellington.

The Auckland City Art Gallery thanks the donor of the photographs; John Feeney for providing his first-hand account; Television New Zealand for allowing the publication of excerpts from the transcript of the Peter Coates film on Brian Brake; and Maurice Shadbolt for writing the afterword.

Christopher Johnstone
Director
Auckland City Art Gallery



5. At the café — Picasso with
Claude wearing matador hat

Brian Brake OBE (1927–1988)

New Zealand's most distinguished photographer, the late Brian Brake was born in Wellington, raised at Arthur's Pass and educated in Christchurch. Brake was an award-winning Cameraman-Director in the New Zealand National Film Unit from 1949 until 1953, when he moved to London. He worked for Magnum Photos, Paris, from 1955 until 1969 and as a freelance photo-journalist was published in the world's leading magazines. Based in Hong Kong from 1962 until 1976, he photographed in China several times. His 1961 'Monsoon' essay was published worldwide and later shown at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. Brake photographed several special issues for *Life* magazine.

He returned to New Zealand in 1976 and lived in the Auckland suburb of Titirangi until his death. A documentary film-maker as well as photographer, Brake won many awards at home and abroad. One of his last major projects was the photography for the *Te Maori* exhibition catalogue.

Presented as part of

Picasso

THE LIFE • THE TIMES • THE GENIUS

22 September–12 November 1989

An **N1** Exhibition

ORGANISED AND PRESENTED BY THE
AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

The photographer's account

I was in the south of France holidaying with friends from London. Picasso and Jean Cocteau were going to the bullfight. John Feeney was with me, an old friend from the National Film Unit, and we wandered up into the village of Vallauris, not knowing whether we could get into the bullfight or even see Picasso. I saw a crowd of photographers in a restaurant whilst Picasso and Cocteau were having lunch. I joined the photographers, got a few photographs, and decided on the spur of the moment to follow them to the bullfight.

The crowd went with them, up to the front doors of the arena. Picasso went in and came out again. He'd gone into the wrong gate. Everyone was after his autograph. And it didn't seem to matter where he signed it. Anyway, we took the usual posed photographs and the other photographers went off to watch the bullfight. I decided to stay on because I wanted to catch their reactions. I remember climbing a tree to get the best vantage point. But I ran out of film. So I went to the *Paris Match* photographer and asked him if I could borrow a roll. I told him I was from Magnum. He looked at me and stared me in the eye and said, 'Never.' This was certainly an education for me. I'd come from New Zealand with no experience of photojournalism whatsoever; certainly no knowledge of the intense rivalry for a story.

I went out into the village, bought another roll of film and returned to carry on with the photographs from the same tree.

Then came the moment I'd been waiting for. The climax of the fight. Picasso's son Claude got so excited he stuck his finger in his father's mouth. It was the last shot on my last roll of film.

That was the photograph that made the pages of the magazines around the world: *Life*, *Stern*, *The Times* and even *Paris Match*!

Brian Brake

John Feeney's account

In August 1955, we were at Cannes. Brian had come from London, where he was endeavouring to establish himself, and I had come from Paris where I was studying film-making on a bursary granted by the New Zealand and French Governments.

On this particular Sunday afternoon we decided to go a short distance inland to the town of Vallauris where there was to be a bullfight, with Picasso in attendance. Real bullfights are not allowed in France and this one was to be more in honour of Picasso.

As we walked through Vallauris (in those

days a small town) we entered a square and noticed a group of people clustered around the terrace of a small café. Everyone seemed intent on looking in to the café — which seemed very curious.

We went over to see what was the matter and there, to our amazement, was Picasso and his family finishing their lunch — as everyone stood around, in silence, watching them eat. Picasso didn't seem to mind and after coffee he called for the bill, paid up and left.

We were not sure where the bullfight was to be so we followed in Picasso's footsteps, knowing full well he would get us there. It was a short walk of about ten minutes to a dusty patch surrounded by trees and rough wooden benches.

As bullfights go, it turned out to be a small, intimate gathering of no more than about 500 people. The bulls seemed very swaggy creatures and the bullfighters hardly 'bullfighters' at all. But this didn't matter. It was a lovely summer's day and everyone had come to see Picasso, rather than the bulls.

And there he was — just a few feet away — surrounded by his family and with Cocteau sitting beside him.

I don't remember much about the bullfight but as Brian watched and waited for his 'decisive moments', I do remember a fleeting thought on how strange it seemed to be actually so close to these two great men — Picasso and Cocteau — and observing them at their ease.

Then Brian announced, somewhat in alarm, that he would soon be out of film and he urged me to go in search for more! Knowing I dare not fail, I hurried from the bullfight into the deserted town, wondering where, on a Sunday afternoon, I might find more film! Eventually I found some in a most unlikely place, in a small *tabac*. But then I discovered I only had enough money for just one roll. I hurried back to the bullfight and found Brian still busy on his last roll — so nothing had been lost, and, as it turned out, the new roll kept him going to the end of the afternoon.

We returned to the villa in Cannes and Brian worked into the night processing and printing his pictures and then immediately sending them off to Paris. He wanted to make sure they reached Magnum by first thing the next morning — just in case someone else had also been at the bullfight. But, as it turned out, no one had.

I am fairly certain this was Brian's first submission of work since joining Magnum at the invitation of Cartier Bresson. And what a beginning this Sunday afternoon in Vallauris turned out to be.

John Feeney

John Feeney has lived in Egypt for the past twenty-five years, writing and making films in Egypt, Ethiopia, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Before this he was a Producer-Director at the National Film Board of Canada, and before that a Production Assistant with the New Zealand National Film Unit.

Another view

As someone with more than a passing interest in folklore, and oral history, I find these accounts of Brian Brake's adventure in Vallauris fascinating, above all the discrepancies. Memory makes us see what we wish. John Feeney recalls no other photographer in attendance on Picasso or Cocteau. Brian, on the other hand, remembers several, including one who refused him film. You may take your pick of the versions. Mine is John Feeney's; it has to be. In the metaphoric sense, if not in the literal, there was only one photographer in Vallauris that hot summer day at the bullfight: one worth remembering, that is. His name was Brian Brake. A young man at the beginning of a career which would make him one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century, and one of the most loved. May his first great coup as a magician with a camera be one of his many memorials.

Maurice Shadbolt

The novelist Maurice Shadbolt CBE worked as a Director with the New Zealand National Film Unit during the 1950s, as a colleague of both Brian Brake and John Feeney. In 1960 he began a collaboration with Brian Brake which resulted in New Zealand: Gift of the Sea, The Reader's Digest Guide to New Zealand and a third book which he is presently completing. Maurice Shadbolt's most recent novel is the prize-winning Season of the Jew.

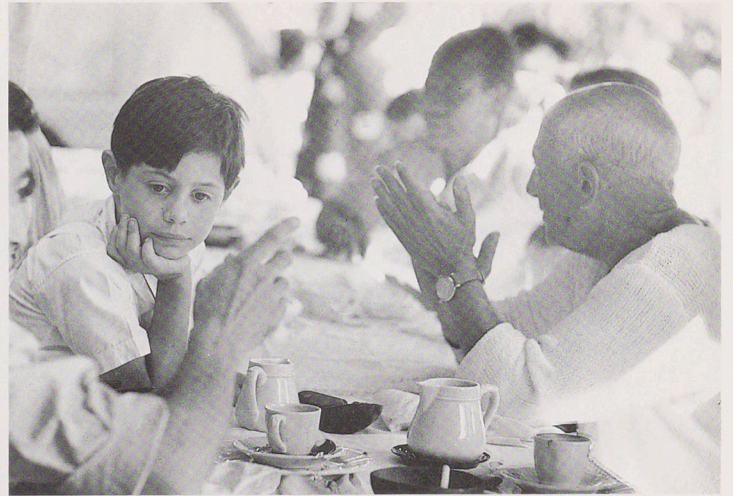
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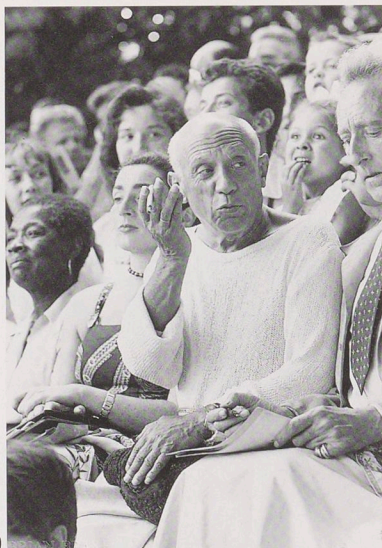
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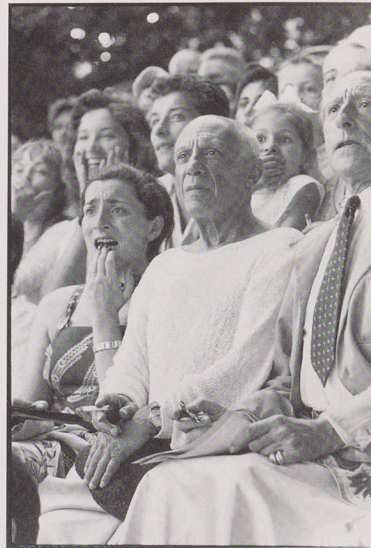
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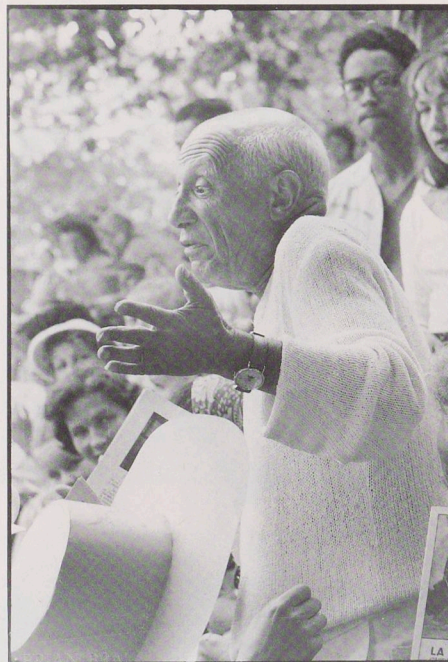
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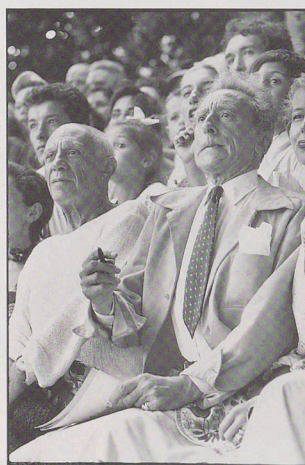
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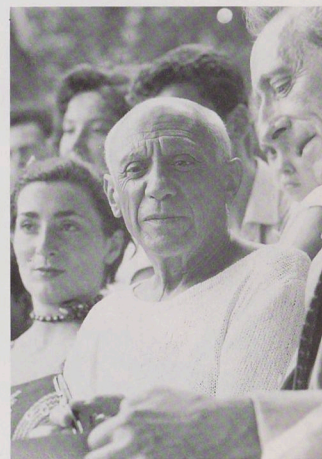
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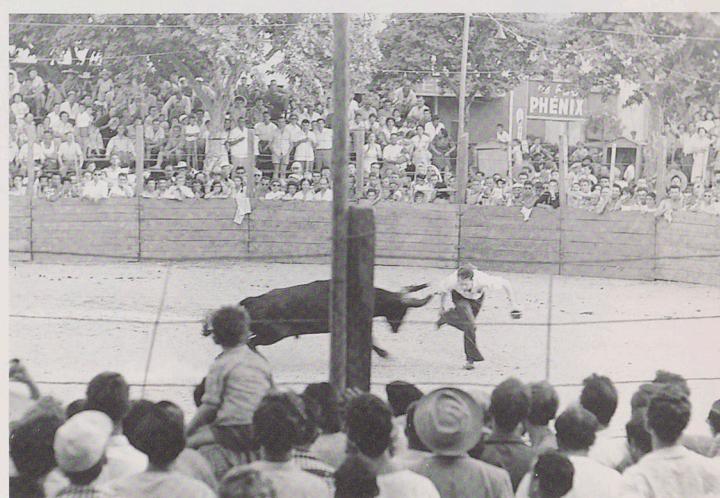
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