



*Michaël Sellam*  
*Celebrity*

From the moment that art ceases to be food that feeds the best minds, the artist can use his talents to perform all the tricks of the intellectual charlatan. Most people can today no longer expect to receive consolation and exaltation from art. The refined, the rich, the professional do-nothings, the distillers of quintessence desire only the peculiar, the sensational, the eccentric, the scandalous in today's art. I myself, since the advent of Cubism, have fed these fellows what they wanted and satisfied these critics with all the ridiculous ideas that have passed through my mind. The less they understood them, the more they admired me. Through amusing myself with all these absurd farces, I became celebrated, and very rapidly. For a painter, celebrity means sales and consequent affluence. Today, as you know, I am celebrated, I am rich. But when I am alone, I do not have the effrontery to consider myself an artist at all, not in the grand old meaning of the word : Giotto, Titian, Rembrandt, Goya were great painters. I am only a public clown--a mountebank. I have understood my time and have exploited the imbecility, the vanity, the greed of my contemporaries. It is a bitter confession, this confession of mine, more painful than it may seem. But at least and at last it does have the merit of being honest.

Letter of Picasso to G. Papini, published in Rome for the review *Livro Nero*, 1952.

Michaël Sellam, Paris.

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<http://www.michaelsellam.com>



De moment que l'art n'est plus l'élément qui nourrit les meilleurs, l'artiste peut exercer son talent en toutes les tentatives de nouvelles formes, en tous les caprices de la farfouille, en tous les expédients du charlatanisme intellectuel. Dans l'art, le peuple ne cherche plus consolation et exaltation : mais les raffinés, les riches, les seuls, les distillateurs de quotidienneté cherchent le nouveau, l'étrange, l'original, l'extraordinaire, le scandaleux. Et moi-même, depuis le cubisme et au-delà, j'ai couronné ces maîtres et ces critiques avec toutes les bienvenues changeantes qui me sont passées en tête et même (à ma compensation et plus ils m'admiraient) à force de m'attacher à tous ces jeux, à toutes ces fariboles, à tous ces casse-tête, rebais et arabesques, je suis devenu célèbre, très rapidement. La célébrité signifie pour un peintre : ventes, gains, fortune, richesse, et regard bon, comme vous le savez, je suis célèbre et je suis riche. Mais quand je suis seul avec moi-même, je n'ai pas le courage de me considérer comme un artiste dans le sens grand et artistique du mot. Ce flâneur de grands peintres que Goethe, Le Titien, Rembrandt, Goya. Je suis seulement un amoureux public qui a compris son temps et a épousé le mieux qu'il a pu l'ambivalence, la vanité, la cupidité de ses contemporains. C'est une autre confusion que la mienne, plus dangereuse qu'elle ne peut sembler, mais elle mérite d'être sincère. Lettre de Picasso à G. Papou, publiée à Rome pour la revue *Libero Nero*, 1952.

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Letter of Picasso to G. Papou, published in Rome for the review *Libero Nero*, 1952.

Calvary, Michael Sallant, 2006