

Juan Davila collection of sketchbooks

Australian Manuscripts Collection MS 14591

Acquired 2009

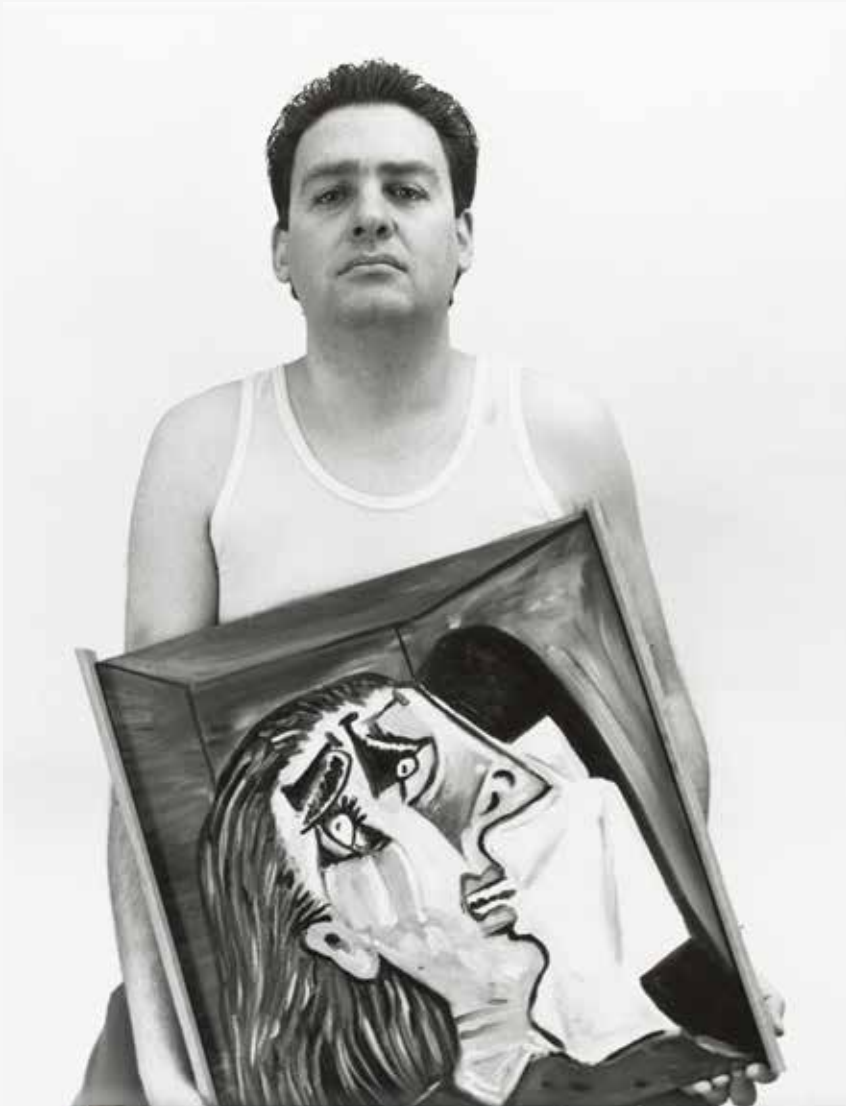
Juan Davila was born in 1946 in Santiago, Chile. Originally trained as a lawyer, he immigrated to Melbourne in 1974 following the Pinochet coup of 1973. He is represented in major collections in Australia and internationally, including in New York's Museum of Modern Art and the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo in Badajoz, Spain. His work was given major retrospective exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney in 2006 and the National Gallery of Victoria in 2007.

This collection contains 63 sketchbooks, dating from 1978 to 2009. Acquired with funding provided by the State Library Foundation, they contain drawings, sketches and notes by the artist. Most of the volumes also function as scrapbooks in which the artist has kept photographs of his work in progress, press clippings of items of interest, and images clipped or collected from a variety of sources that served as source material for elements in his paintings.

The sketchbooks reveal the evolution of Davila's style and influences. The solid forms and Surrealist style of his paintings of the late 1970s and 1980s, which included explicit pornographic images and caustic caricatures of political and historical figures, evolved into a more painterly style, laden with references and visual 'quotes' from psychoanalysis, the art world and his own radical political views.

It is interesting to focus on the sketchbook created in 1986, when Picasso's *Weeping Woman* was stolen from the National Gallery of Victoria by the anonymous group called the Australian Cultural Terrorists. Davila's response was immediate. He created a replica of the painting, and offered to donate it to the gallery, which had been insisting that the value of the original painting was purely aesthetic and not because it was by Picasso. Davila's point was that if this was true, then his replica would satisfy. His offer was rejected.

Davila then set about creating a work of his own – *Picasso Theft [Self Portrait]*, now held by State Library Victoria – referencing these events.¹ In sketchbook no. 11, we get invaluable insights into his thought processes as he planned the painting. The sketchbook also includes a large collection of press clippings covering the theft of the Picasso, as well as a note by another group – the Artists Confronting Terrorism – which, in turn, stole Davila's *Weeping Woman* when it was exhibited at the Avago Gallery, Sydney.



Juan Davila holding his 'replacement' painting of Picasso's *Weeping Woman*, from Juan Davila, sketchbook no. 11, 1986–87, cloth-bound album. © Juan Davila, courtesy Kalli Rolfe Contemporary Art. Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 14591