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Peggy Guggenheim -- millionairess, legendary lover, sadomasochist, appalling parent, selective miser -- was one of the greatest and most notorious art patrons of the twentieth century.

After her father, Benjamin Guggenheim, went down with the Titanic, the young heiress came into a small fortune and left for Europe. She married the writer Laurence Vail and joined the American expatriate bohemian set. Though her many lovers included such lions of art and literature as Samuel Beckett, Max Ernst (whom she later married), Yves Tanguy, and Roland Penrose, real love always seemed to elude her.

In the late 1930s, Peggy set up one of the first galleries of modern art in London, quickly acquiring a magnificent selection of works, buying great numbers of paintings from artists fleeing to America after the Nazi invasion of France. Escaping from Vichy, she moved back to New York, where she was a vital part of the new American abstract expressionist movement.

Meticulously researched, filled with colorful incident, and boasting a distinguished cast, Anton Gill's biography reveals the inner drives of a remarkable woman and indefatigable patron of the arts.

Art Lover: A Biography of Peggy Guggenheim Details

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Author : Anton Gill

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From Reader Review Art Lover: A Biography of Peggy Guggenheim for online ebook

Christina Boyle says

Who doesn't identify with a rebel and a flawed one at that. This book offers incredible detail - so much so it almost hurts your head - on Peggy Guggenheim's domestic affairs including a dizzying array of lovers but also her influences - people, places and things that provided the medium for her self-appointed art collecting career.

To find oneself in mid-40s with many of the boxes checked for key milestones in the human experience (acquisition of marriage, kids, property, mid-career success and failure, divorce), what does one do now? How does one manufacture inspiration when youthful rebellion and optimism fades? Well, you pick up and move to Venice.

Reading through the accounts of a litany of love affairs and petty friendship rivalries, it's hard to not get sidetracked. Peggy Guggenheim was the equivalent of the Paris Hilton of her time with enough wealth to not have the benefit of expectations for career or for academic investment ... to get the career. She was just simply rich. Can you imagine having to manufacture your own ambition when there was literally no map, and no encouragement? To be a female and Jewish when both aspects weren't exactly helpful. Though there's not a lot to admire in some of the account of her personal life, it is impossible to not to admire her focus, prescience and genuine love of Modern art. Her sponsorship and (inadvertent?) salons helped to cultivate an important art scene. And she was focused on specific modern, surrealist art and the emerging abstract expressionists... helping to launch the career of Jackson Pollack. She apparently at one point turned down an acquisition of a Seurat, claiming it didn't fit.

One of my favorite passages is this - that lays out the messiness of being human regarding the content of her memoir, "But the person she spares least and is most bent on belittling is herself. Her book is entertaining and lively: it is also a clear map of a confused psyche, where bravado and fear, boastfulness and self-contempt, lack of reflectiveness and keen self-knowledge jostle."

Peggy Guggenheim was thoroughly modern and her struggles are as relevant today as they were then.

Amy Talluto says

This was a good solid biography...but the book is long and especially dragged a bit in the last sections (perhaps because her life slowed down as well). The author doesn't pull any punches and shines a blazing spotlight on Guggenheim's flaws, bad relationships and poor decision-making and parenting. On one hand, this makes for juicy reading at times, but then the flip side is that also makes her a less sympathetic character. I ultimately didn't end up caring that much about her and so my heart wasn't caught up in her story like in other biographies. It could be that in life she was un-relatable, and so in print, she appears equally so.

Cristina says

I have no idea why, but I am totally obsessed with Peggy Guggenheim. I love when crazy people are brilliant (and I can't get enough of her life in Venice). I read way too many Peggy biographies after we got back from Venice and this is my favorite. It relies heavily on Peggy's biography (including what was added and deleted through the various publishings) as well as other perspectives that frequently completely counter what she believes to have been true in her life. While my other historical women role models would role over in their graves, I truly believe that this is a woman you should know about.

Lee Kofman says

Loved, but in an excruciating way, this biography. This book arose all my feminist instincts. The poor woman's fault was she wasn't attractive enough, but she was rich and therefore used and abused by all those men, all her lovers. And yet she didn't resent them enough in my view and kept supporting some of them. Oh... I often gritted my teeth (almost literally) as I kept reading this biography. In artistic and intellectual terms, this is an erudite book. I love the comprehensiveness of context it sets to Peggy's life – history of art, wars, other notable people's lives, countries and continents. I just wanted a bit more insight into Peggy's... soul, I guess! But maybe it's too much to ask from a conventional biography.

Phil Brett says

Peggy Guggenheim's life does seem to be best summed up by, paraphrasing, the quote, that money can't buy you happiness but you can be miserable in comfort. Rich through no real effort of her own, she lived a soulless and unhappy life. People used her for her money, and she used her money to use others. To be honest, with the interesting people surrounding her, I expected her life to be more interesting. With cultural upheavals, not to mention such epoch defining events as WW2, here was a setting for an engrossing tale. I didn't find it to be. She wasn't really that interested in them. Indeed, it ironically comes across to be a similar thing with her connection with the art. She knew what she liked, but unlike the road sweeper or office worker who might say that, she had the wealth to buy, collect and show the art, which she liked. That said, if anyone is lucky enough to Venice, her collection is worth visiting.

For anyone interested, I have written something on the power and prestige of art
<http://www.culturematters.org.uk/inde...>

Mary Ann says

Her story is amazing but sad. The book may be a bit tedious if you don't have some interest/knowledge of modern art. Particularly good if you have visited her collection or intend to. There is a lot of material here covering art, parenting, love, sex, relationships, WWII and so much more.

Sally Armitage says

P Guggenheim had such a fascinating life that it's tempting to over rate this book. The whole thing deserves to be rewritten to take out the bits which are hard to follow, irrelevant stuff and

just basically to get the thing back into swing.

Christine says

Reading about Peggy's life and her artist friends was fascinating, make sure to pick up a companion art book so you can look up the artwork as you read the book (a tip from a friend)

Pollopicu says

My favorite Art biography/memoir. I loved this book so much that it's hard for me to write a review on it. I feel guilty that I'm able to write lengthy reviews on other less deserving books and not on this, my most treasured one. I read this about 3 years ago, back then I wasn't a member of goodreads. It's hard for me to write in-depth reviews on books I've read in the past. Most of the reviews I have written here are books I've read as a current member, so it's been easy to freshly recall the details of the stories and plots. All I can add about "Art Lover" is if you've recently discovered Peggy Guggenheim and would like to learn more about her, this is the book you want to pick up first, then afterward(The Story Of Art Of This Century). There are other shorter novels, bio's, etc.. but none of them are as in-depth as this one. It talks about Peggy's support for the recognition and relevance of the Modern and Abstract Art movements in both Europe and America as early as 1930's and up until her death in the 1970's. What I loved the most about this book is how many artists it mentions and with whom she regularly associated with. Her entire life was an ongoing avant-garde gathering.

Sue Garrison says

The look into the modern art world of the first half of the 20th Century was interesting. But Peggy herself was a selfish, pathetic character who just happened to have the money to hang around this artistic community and support a couple artists, including Jackson Pollack.

Lacy Broemel says

I became fascinated with Peggy Guggenheim when I went to Venice and first saw her collection at the Peggy Guggenheim museum (and her former home). I was thoroughly entertained and intrigued by the life she had built for herself. This biography was a delight and explored all the nuances of Peggy's life- she was vivacious, resentful, creative, dependent, bold, fragile, and definitely wild.

Her life spanned some of the most trying and dark times in American history- the sinking of the Titanic, WWI, and WWII- although she lived through much of that time in Europe. And that's where it gets interesting. Peggy was right in the mix of the creation and development of what most of us consider "modern art" (in the general sense). Picasso, Duchamp, Pollock, Ernst were only some of her contemporaries and this biography shares plenty of hilarious and surprising stories about each of those men.

However, this biography is about Peggy and centers around her story and the way others intersected with her life. The thing I remember being most amazed at when I visited the Peggy Guggenheim museum was knowing that a woman built this collection of modern art and this extremely desirable life on the Grand Canal- she envisioned it, developed it, and then lived it. During her life, she held numerous exhibits and a constant theme was creating spaces where "visitors [were] challenged to think differently about the way they saw the new art." (Gill 306). That was certainly the case for me- I was stunned and thrilled at her collection and the palazzo she had created. I would recommend this biography for any art lover or someone who simply wants to be dazzled by Peggy.

emma says

I have to confess to knowing next to nothing about modern art, and only slightly more about art in general, but I loved this book. It pulled me in right from the start, and kept me till the very the end. I bought it in preparation for a trip to Venice, but I think it'll resonate for much longer than that; I'm already starting to explore different art movements and artists that were only words and names to me until a few days ago. Peggy Guggenheim had a fascinating life, from her childhood in New York as one of the "poor" Guggenheims, to her time in Paris in the 20s and 30s, her years back in New York during the second world war, and her final home in Venice, where her collection still remains. But this biography does not romanticise her in the slightest, nor anyone else who came into her orbit during her lifetime. It's just a wonderful, absorbing, evocative book, and I wish I hadn't read it so I could read it again.

James says

What can I say. Peggy Guggenheim is one of the most fascinating, driven, entertaining, annoying, dysfunctional, delightful, frustrating, self-centered, philanthropic women I have ever encountered in a biography. Her friends, acquaintances, lovers and enemies find heaps of reasons to love her and hate her. Gill covers a lot of ground in these 480 pages, drawing on Peggy's own memoir, other bios of her, countless other books and interviews to present Peggy's 80-year life. (I had the good fortune to visit the Peggy Guggenheim Museum in Venice a few months ago, and knew I had to delve deeper into the person who could have created such a lasting monument to some of the great European and American artists from 1910-1950.)

If I had any major criticism of the text, it's that the first 164 pages are devoted to Peggy's first 39 years, not a particularly noteworthy time of her life unless you are keen on failed marriages, who's cheating on who, and the challenges of being a poor little rich girl. Not until Peggy purchases Jean Arp's polished brass "Head and Shell" in 1937 is she smitten with the Art Collector bug and begins amassing the modern art collection that will grow to 189 pieces, valued today at about \$500 million, give or take a Pollock or de Chirico. Peggy's fecund period, her *raison d'être*, was the decade 1937-1947, in which she assembled most of her collection and rubbed shoulders (and more) with the likes of Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Yves Tanguy, Alexander Calder, Arshile Gorky, Renee Magritte, Joan Miro, Andre Masson, Salvador Dali, Constantin Brancusi, Vasily Kandinsky, Marc Chagall, Georges Braque, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock and many more. The heart of the book -- why Peggy is called 'Art Lover' -- is this 10-year stretch. Had this decade been covered in more depth and the remainder of the book proportionately reduced, it would have been a far better read. But Gill is to be commended for his wide-ranging research and his 5-page bibliography whetted my appetite for more.

Deborah Klein says

I bought this book when I was in Venice and had visited the Guggenheim house. Having been there really increased my enjoyment of the book. Peggy Guggenheim was a "poor little rich", altho' not all that rich, who amassed a world class collection of contemporary art and apparently slept with everyone, male or female in the arts world of the 30's, 40's and 50's. The stories are fascinating, the descriptions of various art characters of the time are compelling, and the discussions of the art are interesting. But Guggenheim's peripatetic travels become tedious and confusing. Also, it seems to be impossible to get a handle on her personality and inner life. Perhaps she didn't have one. While her taste was refined and well developed, she seems to have had no insight on the work, her life, and her response to the work as a result of her life. Consequently, while the book is of interest, no one will finish it with any understanding of what drove Peggy Guggenheim, except perhaps, her nose.

Kirsten (lush.lit.life) says

fascinating but dense - not exactly a quick read. but i enjoyed taking the time to look up specific works when mentioned as well as the artists in her circle. was familiar with perhaps 50 percent of the surrealists and abstract artists mentioned so i enjoyed delving deeper there. PG was not the most immediately likable "character" but i admire those who undertake an unconventional life and LIVE so "fully" and fearlessly. i am always interested in bohemian art/lit circles and this satisfies in that respect. the book also inspires me to invest a little more in my own family for a possibly more satisfying "twilight season" in my life. though living it in venice has much appeal...
