

Gertrude Stein

Expatriate writer, Literary salon host
(1874-1946)

Gertrude Stein was born in 1874 and soon became aware that she was destined to “create the 20th century.” Raised in Europe and the new frontier state of California, Gertrude never lost the sense of being a pioneer. Shortly after the turn of the century, Gertrude accompanied her brother Leo to Paris—she would not return to America for almost 30 years. Gertrude and Leo were said to be the happiest couple on the Left Bank until the advent of another young American, Alice B. Toklas, with whom Gertrude formed a companionship that lasted forty years. They called each “Lovey” and “Pussy” and, until Gertrude’s death, Alice deciphered her almost illegible handwriting, typed her manuscripts, and supervised the household in Paris and their country home in Bilignin.

Gertrude’s brother Leo became an art collector after arriving in Paris and Gertrude followed his lead. Their home became known as the “Salon,” with paintings literally covering all the wall space in their modest living quarters. Paintings by Picasso, Renoir,

Gauguin, Cezanne, and many others overflowed into every room of the household.

Many artists, writers, and critics became frequent callers at Gertrude’s apartment (known as “27”) for the Saturday night dinner parties. After meeting Picasso, Gertrude and the artist became close friends for many years. In 1905 she agreed to sit for the now famous portrait.

By the time of her death in 1946, Gertrude had become a legend—she had been painted, sculptured and photographed by the most famous artists of her time. Her apartments at rue de Fleurus, and later at rue Christine, were landmarks in Paris.

Although her book *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* became a best seller, and in spite of the fact that she was admired by authors and critics, to much of the public Gertrude Stein was an eccentric best known for a line – “Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” – that was famous for its obscurity.

Gertrude’s biography, *Everybody Who Was Anybody* tells the story of the public personality and the deeply

serious writer behind it. It recounts the development and significance of Gertrude Stein’s complex personal relationships with her brother Leo, with Alice B. Toklas, with Picasso, as well as her artistic relationships with the Cubists and the writers of the Lost Generation. It also describes her profoundly symbolic relationship with America, with France, with “inside and outside reality,” and with personality and the nature of genius. These themes are related to the development of Gertrude’s writing and the creation of legend in the life of the woman who saw herself as “the most important thinker” of her time.

Some thoughts from Gertrude Stein:

“People...take their literature and art from the past. They are not interested in what the present generation is thinking or painting or doing if it doesn’t fit the enclosure of their personal apprehension. Present day geniuses can no more help doing what they are doing than you can help not understanding it, but if you think we do it for effect, and to make a sensation, you’re crazy.”

- Gertrude Stein, in John Malcolm Brinnin, *The Third Rose* (1959)

“Everybody knows if you are too careful you are so occupied in being careful

that you are sure to stumble over something.”

- Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937)

“It is all the question of identity....As long as the outside does not put a value on you it remains outside but when it does put a value on you then it gets inside or rather if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside.”

- Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937)

“Considering how dangerous everything is nothing is really very frightening.”

- Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937)

“Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.”

- Gertrude Stein (1946), in Elizabeth Sprigge. *Gertrude Stein* (1957)

“Repeating is the whole of living and by repeating comes understanding, and understanding is to some the most important part of living.”

- Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (1925)

“Some out of their own virtue make a god who sometimes later is a terror to them.”

- Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (1925)

“In America everybody is, but some are more than others.”

- Gertrude Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937)

“This has been a most wonderful evening. Gertrude has said things tonight that will take her ten years to understand.”

- Alice B. Toklas, interview by Mortimer Adler (1976)

Gertrude Stein's works include:

Three Lives, 1909
Tender Buttons, 1914
Geography and Plays, 1922
The Making of Americans, 1925
Four Saints in Three Acts, 1929
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, 1933
The Geographical History of America, 1936
Ida, A Novel, 1941
The Mother of Us All, 1949
Patriarchal Poetry, 1953

Whole Woman's Health
Women's History Project

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“It takes a lot of time to be a genius, you have to sit around so much doing nothing, really doing nothing.”

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