

I WAS SYLVETTE

The Story of Lydia Corbett

By Isabel Coulton

Endeavour London Ltd - Hardback - October 2016 - £25

- Published to coincide with a major exhibition of Picasso's portraits at the National Portrait Gallery
- The iconic story of the girl with the ponytail, one of the few living sitters of Pablo Picasso, who produced over 60 portraits of Sylvette David
- Written by Isabel Coulton, as told by her mother Lydia Corbett, in a series of intimate and insightful interviews
- Illustrated with unseen photographs and artwork
- Accompanied by a limited-edition copy, £150, bound in a Batik print inspired by Lydia's love of Indonesian fabrics, with each copy including an original pen and ink drawing with watercolour wash by Lydia, with a framed value of £250.

For a few months in 1954 a beautiful young girl crossed the path of the country's greatest artist, Picasso. What followed was a wonderful stroke of good fortune, as she became the subject of his Sylvette series, over 60 portraits, drawings and sculptures, and incidentally perhaps the most renowned source of the long-skirted, pony-tailed 'Look of the Fifties'. Sylvette David's life was changed by the experience, and she began the journey that was eventually to see her, now Lydia Corbett, become a regularly exhibited artist in her own right. The ride was often an uneven one, as she navigated marriages and relationships, life in Notting Hill or the Marais in Paris, at Dartington Hall and in a Devon village nearby, working with antiques, modelling, raising children and searching for enlightenment in Indonesia, Japan and New Mexico.

This book, illustrated by her, her mother's and Picasso's paintings as well as evocative photographs from the family albums, tells of the places and people in her life, both after 1954 and, just as fascinating, before. She spent her early childhood on the île du Levant off the Côte d'Azur, notorious as a nudist colony, where her English grandfather, an unlikely clergyman, who won the DSO and MC in World War I, had built three houses. By 1942 the family were forced to flee to an extraordinary community in the hills on the mainland, a refuge from the Germans and a resort of the local Resistance. Lydia completed her education at the archetypal child-centred experimental school, Summerhill, in Suffolk. With such an unusual childhood, it is no wonder her life has been full of twists and interest, intriguing and inspiring in equal measure.

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Including an interview with Lydia by Francis Kyle



Lydia Corbett / Sylvette David



Isabel Coulton

LYDIA CORBETT (née Sylvette David) was born into an artistic family in Paris, 1934. Her father was an influential art dealer and painter, with a gallery on Champs-Élysées called David & Garnier. Her mother was an award-winning student at the academie Julian in Paris. Sylvette spent her childhood between Provence and a small island off the Côte d'Azur, and after a stint at an English boarding school, she moved to Vallauris in southern France with her then fiancée in 1954. There she met Pablo Picasso and began modelling for him. Over the next 3 months she sat for over 60 works; 'Sylvette - the girl with the ponytail' became an iconic image amongst Picasso's stable of work. It wasn't until her 40s that Lydia began painting in earnest, and is now a respected artist in her own right, formerly represented by Francis Kyle Gallery. Now in her 80s, she lives in Devon and continues to work across a number of artistic mediums.

ISABEL COULTON, as Lydia's eldest daughter, is well equipped to have helped her record her memories, many of which she has shared since the 1960s. Knowing and loving Provence deeply has enabled her to evoke its charm as well as the hardship of rural life. With the unique insight of an only child until she was nine, Isabel's account of her mother's story faithfully follows the charming way Lydia speaks and thinks.

Having grown up with a French and English melange of family and artistic styles, Isabel feels thoroughly European. Having been exposed to so much art from birth she has developed her own style, and in 2005 she started sculpting in wood and stone after many years training.

Isabel now lives in Devon with her family and is currently finishing an important commission for Buckfast Abbey's Millennium celebrations in 2018, to carve a Madonna and Child in Portland stone.

For more information visit:

www.sylvettedavid-lydiacorbett.com/books

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