

PICASSO

Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris



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PICASSO'S PICASSOS

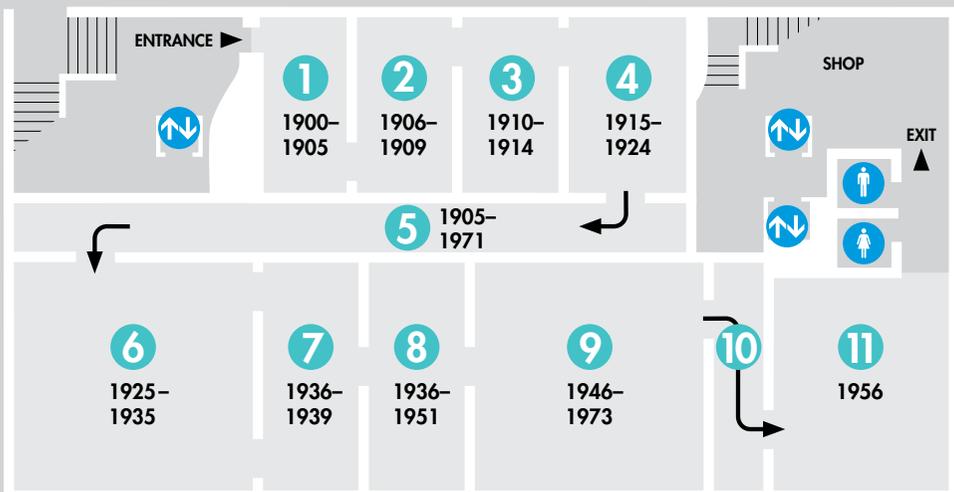
The Musée National Picasso in Paris is dedicated to the life and career of Pablo Picasso (1881–1973), the most far-ranging and influential artist of our time. Its holdings stand apart from any other collection of Picasso's work because they represent the artist's personal selections—works that he kept with the intent of shaping his own artistic legacy. After Picasso's death, his heirs conveyed these works to the French state. The museum devoted to them opened in Paris in 1985 in a renovated 17th-century mansion known as the Hôtel Salé, which is currently undergoing renovation. Anne Baldassari, president of the Musée National Picasso, Paris, selected the works for this international exhibition.

Picasso's long and productive career is marked by an unflagging spirit of exploration and discovery. Informed by his native Spain and France—where he spent most of his life—Picasso devoured influences and spat out innovations one after another. It is tempting to see his career as a series of phases with one style giving way to another. In fact, at any given time he worked in a variety of pictorial modes

simultaneously. Scornful of theory and fixed ideologies, Picasso remained open to all kinds of stimulation and restlessly moved on to new forms before depleting any one style of expression. Spanning most of the 20th century, his work responded to four brutal wars and reflected the modernist revolution taking place in all of the arts. Alongside these larger issues, we can also trace Picasso's tumultuous and picaresque personal life through his art. As he once commented, "Painting is just another way of keeping a diary."

PICASSO'S EARLY LIFE AND ART

Picasso was born in Málaga, in southern Spain, on October 25, 1881. His father was an academic painter who is said to have turned his brushes over to Picasso in acknowledgment of his teenage son's superior artistic gifts. The family moved to Barcelona in 1895, where his father taught painting and Pablo studied art. His early paintings are in an academic style; but when Picasso moved into a Barcelona studio, he became part of an avant-garde circle, and his art began to be more self-consciously "modern."



1 1900–1905

BARCELONA, PARIS, AND THE BLUE PERIOD

Picasso first went to Paris in 1900 to attend the World's Fair, where his huge academic canvas *Last Moments* was included in the Spanish section. After the shock of discovering the French avant-garde—impressionism, post-impressionism, and symbolism—all at once, Picasso abandoned his academic style and experimented with different forms of personal expression. Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec were two especially strong influences.

Over the next several years he traveled between Barcelona and Paris before settling in the French capital in 1904. He moved into a dilapidated studio in the bohemian district of Montmartre amidst a circle of friends that included his lover, Fernande Olivier; the poets Max Jacob and Guillaume Apollinaire; and other Spanish artists. During this early period, blue became the dominant color of Picasso's paintings, expressing the melancholy he felt as an outsider and the pathos he found in his subjects, who included the poor, sick, and neglected.



Celestina (La Célestine), 1904,
oil on canvas MP 1959–5

2 1906–1909



Self-Portrait (Autoportrait), Paris, autumn 1906, oil on canvas MP 8

ROSE PERIOD, EARLY CUBISM, AND AFRICAN ART

While fellow painters such as Henri Matisse were using vibrant color schemes, Picasso continued to paint in muted tones; the Blue Period was succeeded by a palette dominated by pink and ochre. In the summer of 1906, working in the northern Spanish village of Gósol, Picasso explored subjects based on the world of itinerant entertainers—carnival performers and clowns, who lived a gypsy-like existence on the fringe of society. These *saltimbanques* centered their lives around family, so that even within this alternative world he found classic pictorial themes and relationships.

Returning to Paris, Picasso began intensive work that culminated in his early masterpiece, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York). Working toward this painting, Picasso created at least a thousand studies and sketches, several are on view here. The painting was shocking, not only visually but also in its subject matter—a bordello with nude women exposing themselves to the viewer.

While working on the painting, Picasso saw African and Oceanic art for the first time at Paris's Ethnographic Museum. Inspired by the carved sculptures and what he felt was their power over evil spirits, he repainted two of the already stylized faces in the *Femmes d'Alger* as colorful masks and years later called the work “my first exorcism painting.” Invigorated by this exposure to African art, as well as by the powerful 1907 Cézanne retrospective, Picasso embarked on another body of groundbreaking works. These paintings and drawings translated observable reality onto the two-dimensional surface by deconstructing forms into a play of geometric planes and rhyming lines and curves.

3 1910–1914

CUBISM

Picasso had met Georges Braque in 1907. Between 1909 and 1914, the two artists worked together so closely that their pieces are nearly indistinguishable. Their cubist paintings present shimmering, monochrome canvases, whose faceted geometric forms seem to hover before the viewer. Their work took a new turn when they introduced stenciled letters, followed by actual pieces of newspaper, creating the first collages. As the artists tried out different materials—scraps of wallpaper, house paint, sand, sheet music, calling cards—they continued to challenge the traditional role of illusion in painting. Picasso extended the collage technique to sculpture, cutting and folding paper and metal into ingenious three-dimensional constructions. Rather than representations of reality, these works offered alternative realities where perceptions of the world were presented as an assembly of simplified volumes, shifting planes, and transparent surfaces.

During this period, several vanguard dealers and collectors avidly acquired Picasso's work. No longer impoverished, Picasso moved into a new studio and left his bohemian life behind. He and Fernande Olivier separated in 1911, and Picasso fell in love with Eva Gouel. The couple intended to marry, but Eva became ill and died in 1915.

The glorious period of experimentation between Braque and Picasso, which revolutionized the depiction of space in art, came to an end with the start of World War I in 1914. Braque, Apollinaire, and numerous other friends served in the war, but as a Spanish citizen and lifelong pacifist Picasso did not. He spent most of the war outside of Paris as he continued to explore cubism on his own.



Man with a Guitar (Homme à la guitare), Paris, fall 1911, oil on canvas MP 34

4 1915–1924

MARRIAGE, FAMILY, AND CLASSICISM

In early 1917 the Russian impresario Serge Diaghilev of the Ballets Russes invited Picasso to travel to Italy and design the sets and costumes for a new ballet, created by his friend Jean Cocteau with music by Erik Satie. Picasso fell in love with one of the ballerinas, Olga Khokhlova, and married her the next year. The couple moved into a respectable bourgeois apartment in Paris, and in 1921 their son, Paulo, was born.

These developments coincided with a stylistic shift in Picasso's work that included a surprising return to the depiction of recognizable figures and the use of classical sources. Some followers, who had embraced cubism as the only valid way to render form, considered this a conservative retreat. But Picasso wanted neither to be part of a crowd nor tied to a single movement.

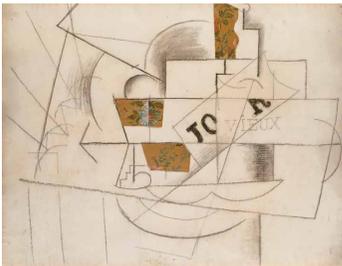


Portrait of Olga in an Armchair
(Portrait d'Olga dans un fauteuil)
Montrouge, spring 1918, oil on
canvas MP 55

5 1905–1971

PRINTS, DRAWINGS, AND PHOTOGRAPHS

This gallery presents an exhibition within an exhibition, tracing nearly the entire span of Picasso's career through prints and drawings. While Picasso defined himself primarily as a painter, he also engaged a full spectrum of media and materials and was especially prolific as a printmaker and draftsman. Using pen and ink, lithography, etching, and aquatint, and many other techniques, his graphic works sometimes served as studies for paintings. Other works elaborated themes that first appeared in paintings and sculptures, while yet others presented entire worlds of fantasy and human emotion. Repetition and variation were of special interest to Picasso, as evident in the suite of Dora Maar prints. The gallery also includes early photographs taken by Picasso himself.



Bottle of Vieux Marc and Newspaper
(Bouteille de vieux marc et journal),
Céret, spring 1913, papier collé with
pinned paper, charcoal, and chalk on
laid paper MP 373

6 1925–1935

MUSE AND METAMORPHOSIS

The sense of well-being that emanated from Picasso's early images of family life all but disappeared in the last half of the 1920s. Tensions arising at home, complicated by Olga's frequent health problems, were manifested in troubling new imagery that expressed his inner anxiety. Picasso was now influenced by the surrealists, led by André Breton.

Though he was ambivalent toward all movements, Picasso exhibited with the surrealists and contributed to their publications. Their interest in anthropology and the importance of the unconscious influenced his imagery, but he preferred the original use of the term “sur-realism” coined by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1917, which retained a relation with the natural world. As Picasso explained, “I am always trying to observe nature. Likeness is important to me, a deeper likeness, more real than reality, to the point of being surreal.”

Picasso's infatuation with a new mistress—Marie-Thérèse Walter, who was just seventeen when he met her in 1927—dominated his drawings, sculptures, and paintings for the next ten years. Although her first presence in his work was covert, her strong classical features, blonde hair, and languid body asserted themselves in his visual repertoire, and he no longer could keep their relationship a secret from his wife. In 1935 Marie-Thérèse gave birth to the artist's second child, a daughter, Maya.

Images of Marie-Thérèse sleeping or reading are among the artist's tenderest and most beautiful images. But Picasso also likened her rounded forms to inert boulders or bones, creating sculptural paintings that found a counterpart in an extraordinary series of sculpted heads. The 1930 purchase of the Château de Boisgeloup, northwest of Paris, enabled the artist to set up a large sculpture studio where he did his most sustained body of three-dimensional work since the cubist period.



Reading (La Lecture), Boisgeloup, January 2, 1932, oil on canvas MP 137

7 1936–1939

POLITICAL PAINTING

In 1935 Picasso met the surrealist photographer and painter Dora Maar, a dark-haired Eastern European beauty raised in Argentina. In contrast to the docile Marie-Thérèse, who “did whatever I wanted her to,” Maar challenged Picasso, which he found invigorating. She soon influenced a new, keyed-up visual style of acidic colors and sharp angles, and Picasso was inspired to use her tear-streaked face as the sign for tragedy and grief in anguished images evoked by the Spanish Civil War (1936–39) and World War II (1939–45).



Portrait of Dora Maar (Portrait de Dora Maar), 1937, oil on canvas
MP 158

Picasso alternated between Marie-Thérèse and Dora Maar and continued to portray the two in the distinctive styles he had assigned to each woman. He also devoted himself to new explorations of the female form, including highly distorted heads that seem to emphasize violence and ugliness, perhaps in conscious defiance of Nazi standards of beauty that condemned work by avant-garde artists as “degenerate.”

PICASSO AND WAR

Dora Maar's involvement in left-wing politics affected Picasso, who had never made overtly political works. *Guernica*, an enormous painting commissioned for the pavilion of the Spanish Republic at the 1937 World's Fair in Paris, expressed searing outrage over the bombing earlier that year of the Basque village of Guernica. Exiled from Spain, after the rise of Francisco Franco, Picasso never returned to his home country.

The 1930s are also a time when the bull, the bullfight, and the Minotaur featured prominently in Picasso's work. At the core of these works is a struggle between two parties—violence and suffering, victory and surrender, wounding and death. Half-man, half-bull, the Minotaur represented a spectrum of concepts and interests for Picasso, from unbridled lustfulness and aggression to the capacity for great gentleness possessed by powerful beings. In other works from this time, Picasso's palette darkens and he explores additional symbols of violence, martyrdom, death, and sometimes hope: still lifes with skulls and guttered candles, a cat with bloodied bird, and the shepherd with struggling sheep.

During World War II Picasso remained mostly in Paris throughout the German occupation. Prohibited from exhibiting his work, kept under close surveillance by the Gestapo, but refusing to leave France out of loyalty, his presence lent support to the Resistance and proclaimed the freedom of art without concessions. Following the liberation of Paris in August 1944, Picasso surprised many by joining the French Communist Party.



Cat Catching a Bird (Chat saisissant un oiseau) Paris, April 22, 1939, oil on canvas MP 178

9 1946–1973

A NEW START IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

After the war Picasso lived almost exclusively in southern France, buying a succession of homes that could accommodate his work space and, by now, enormous collection. Accompanying him was Françoise Gilot, a young painter he had met in 1943. Together they had two children, Claude (born 1947) and Paloma (born 1949). The presence of young children in the aging artist's life invigorated him and brought a new playfulness to his art. Unfortunately, the relationship was not to last; Françoise left Picasso in 1953, taking the children back to Paris.



Jacqueline with Crossed Hands
(*Jacqueline aux mains croisées*),
Vallauris, June 3, 1954, oil on
canvas MP 1990–26

Picasso met Jacqueline Roque in 1953; she moved in with him the next year and would stay with him for the rest of his life. An Old Master now himself, Picasso confronted artists of the past in a very deliberate way, painting variations on past masterpieces by Cranach, Delacroix, Velázquez, and Manet. He outlived many of his contemporaries and was particularly moved by the death of his lifelong friend and rival Henri Matisse, whom he recognized as his only peer and whose work he alludes to in the Moroccan-themed images of the studio at his villa in Cannes, *La Californie*.

In his eighties Picasso was unceasingly productive, following his own advice to “only put off until tomorrow what you are willing to die having left undone.” The hundreds of paintings, drawings, and etchings from his last years chronicle a race against the inevitable end. As illness compelled the artist to curtail his old habits, he told one friend that while age had forced him to give up making love and smoking, “the desire remains.” Indeed, carnal appetites were now sated voyeuristically, playing a starring role in Picasso's late imagery. Because he equated sexuality with creativity, these late erotic images speak to his essence as an artist.

Picasso also introduced new characters of musketeers and matadors, inspired by 17th-century art. While his paintings of this period were initially dismissed by critics for hasty execution and vulgar subject matter, they are now celebrated for their urgent, gripping vitality and the fearlessness with which Picasso attacked new painting challenges.

10

PICASSO MISCELLANEA

As a 20th-century artist, Picasso's life and career are well-documented in photography—by himself and by some of the period's leading photographers. The Musée National Picasso's collection includes images of Picasso in his artistic milieu as well as informal glimpses of the artist with his family. Selections from Picasso's extensive production of art books are also displayed.

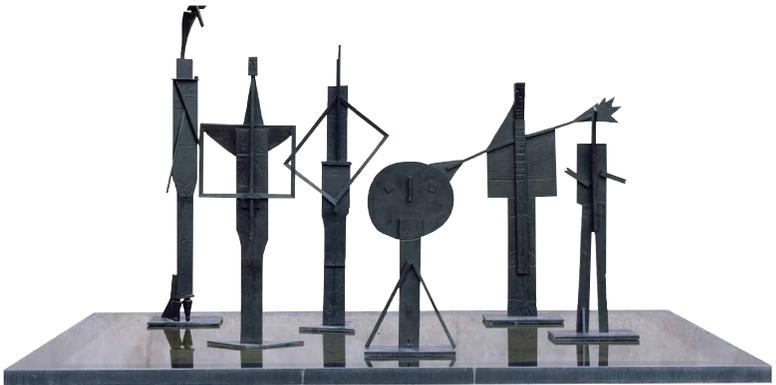


Picasso Behind a Window (*Picasso derrière la vitre*), September 5, 1952, Robert Doisneau (French, 1912–1994), gelatin silver print (exhibition print) Archives Picasso, APPH671, © atelier Robert Doisneau

11 1956

THE BATHERS

At the age of seventy-five, Picasso, who had revolutionized so many aspects of sculpture in the course of his career, took on the challenge of making a cohesive sculptural composition with multiple figures. Building on cubism, in which forms are depicted as overlapping planes, he created this group portrait of bathers using layers of wooden planks, broom handles, parts of a shovel, and other found objects. Once cast in bronze, those individual components disappear into the overall sculpture.



Pablo Picasso died April 8, 1973. He is buried on the grounds of the château of Vauvenargues in southern France.

The Bathers [*The Diver, Man with Joined Hands, Fountain Man, Child, Woman with Open Arms, Youth*] (*Les baigneurs*), Cannes, summer 1956, bronze MP 352–357

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For more information and a timeline of Picasso's life go to www.VMFA.museum/Picasso

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