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# THE PAINTING OF PABLO PICASSO: A PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY

By Daniel E. Schneider, M.D.

## INTRODUCTION

UNDER his reproduction of Picasso's portrait of Gertrude Stein, Barr makes this comment:

"Gertrude Stein tells how she sat eighty times for her portrait during the winter of 1906 only to have the dissatisfied artist wipe out the face just before he left for Gosol early in the summer. In the fall when he returned to Paris he painted a new face without consulting his model again. The new face differing in style from the figure and hands seems mask-like. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

It was a prophetic action, not unrelated to the man-woman cast of Gertrude Stein who later said:

"You are all a lost generation."—

a sentence quoted by Hemingway as a frontispiece to his famous novel of castration and nymphomania *The Sun Also Rises*.

Pablo Picasso had good reason for his "masking" of her (fig. 1); it expressed an inner necessity of his own—a way of fighting back against a deep sense of failure and loss.

Curiously enough, by Picasso's own statement, "losing" and "finding" mark the difference between failure and success as an artist. In 1923, in the magazine *The Arts*, of New York, in an article entitled "Picasso Speaks," he said:

"I can hardly understand the importance given to the word *research* in connection with modern painting. In my opinion to search means nothing in painting. To find, is the thing. Nobody is interested in following a man who, with his eyes fixed on the ground, spends his life looking for the pocketbook that fortune should put in his path. The one who finds something no matter what it might be, even if his intention were not to search for it, at least arouses our curiosity, if not our admiration. . . . When I paint, my object is to show what I have found and not what I am looking for. . . ."

It will be the burden of this very brief study not only to confirm the fact that Picasso does indeed show what he has *found* but also that—whether or not he is aware of it—he shows even more clearly *what he is*

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<sup>1</sup> This and other quotations are from Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso—Fifty Years of his Art*, New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1946.

*looking for* yet he must never expressly admit that he searches for something lost; he must moreover deny the intention to search. One thing is true: he never searches consciously; the search of which this study speaks is unconscious and relentlessly compulsive.

#### PICASSO'S INNOVATIONS

One must not be led astray by the usual division of Picasso's work into "periods" in a natural effort to study logically what is usually called the "development" of an artist. Picasso does not "develop" in the ordinary sense of the word. It is true that Picasso had a development but it came to an end along any definite direction at an age when most painters are just beginning.

When one recalls that, at fifteen, Picasso passed in one day entrance examinations to the Academy in Barcelona—examinations so difficult that a whole month was usually required for their completion—one can surmise the enormous artistic facility that characterizes this man, a genius for concentrated drawing and craftsmanship that has few parallels in history, in some ways equal if not superior to Leonardo da Vinci (cf. fig. 2: *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*, 1915).

In 1901, when he was twenty, his first exhibition in Paris was a failure. He was criticized as an *imitator* of Lautrec, Steinlen, van Gogh. For him that marks the end of what might be called "development." From this point of failure forward, the various "periods" begin—the blue, rose, Negro, cubist, classical, etc.

Thus, Barr notes that, toward the end of 1901 (after the failure of his exhibition) Picasso began to use a pervasive blue tone in his paintings which soon became almost monochrome. He adds that "the lugubrious tone was in harmony with the murky and sometimes heavy-handed pathos of his subject matter—poverty-stricken mothers, wan harlots with femme fatale masks and blind beggars." The evidence of our study indicates that the choice of this subject matter as well as the pervasive blue, was determined by the essential psychologic conflict in Picasso and was the first full-scale attempt to resolve his inner tensions. One remembers from *Oedipus Rex* that blindness (as in the blind beggars) is castrative self-punishment. Taken together with the "poverty-stricken mothers" and the "wan harlots with femme fatale masks," the *blind* beggars of the "blue period" presage variations of the same deep unconscious theme in the other "periods." The "blue" phase might then be called the overture to all his later work.

The powerful genius of the sensitive Picasso would tolerate no further

failure. Indeed, this failure lit up an earlier one—a deeper sense of loss and exile. It became the motive power of his painting and determined the form of his innovations. He was driven to invent and innovate exactly as da Vinci was driven to scientific investigation, out of the same deep psychic forces.

It is no accident therefore that Picasso's innovations show all the essentials of an attack upon conventional pictorial concepts of reality. Of these, two characteristics are psychoanalytically important: first, an infusion of an inordinately *high psychic tension* achieved pictorially by various methods of distortion; and second, *a playing with time and space in relationship to the mass and dimensions of the body*. These gross characteristics of his innovations will help define for us what the "periods" are,—namely, *episodes of relief of tension* in which the compulsive internal threats of failure are turned into successfully externalized attacks upon his world, challenging and disturbing.

Picasso tells us explicitly:

"Cézanne would never have interested me if he had lived and thought like Jacques Emile Blanche, even if the apple he had painted had been ten times as beautiful. What forces our interest is Cézanne's anxiety—that's Cézanne's lesson; the torments of van Gogh—that is the drama of the man. The rest is a sham. . . ."

And:

"The several manners I have used in my art must not be considered as an evolution, or as steps toward an unknown ideal of painting. All I have ever made was made for the present and with the hope that it will remain in the present. I have never taken into consideration the spirit of research."

The fact that Picasso had on several occasions apparently taken "hashish" or marihuana does not add up to *conscious* research; it does indicate still another attempt to seek relief. And here, the psychiatrist is on sure ground, for marihuana is known clinically to slow down the sense of the passage of time, to alter space-perception, to induce oddly vivid color-patterns, to distort perspective, and to promote highly erotic fantasies conducive to violent sadistic and masochistic emotions. We do not mean that Picasso's paintings are in any way "drug" paintings; we do mean that the experiences of marihuana intoxication became part of a much larger and essentially inherent need to crash through the borders of reality. He said:

"Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can perceive beyond any canon. When we love a woman we don't start measuring her limbs."

A few examples of these "perceptions beyond canons" are the follow-

ing. Time-space distortion is illustrated in *By the Sea* (fig. 3), painted in 1923. Of this painting, Barr says, describing one of the figures:

"Picasso's 'bather' is running, is in motion; her foot is on the shore while her head is already a hundred yards out at sea. . . . The figure keeps its continuity of form and outline; it is not broken up; rather it is stretched so that, near and far, now and five seconds from now, are simultaneously represented. Thus time and space are fused in a two-dimensional picture with vivid though rudimentary four-dimensional implications."

As psychiatrists know from dream-physiology, just such temporo-spatial distortions occur in dreams. But, in important contrast to Chagall whose *total* compositions are dream-like, as I have pointed out elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> Picasso's *By the Sea*—and others by him—is not dream-like. Rather it is a *calculated* study in distortion: the figures in the composition bear no dream-like relationship to each other. (I dare say that not even Picasso would have been able to love any one of these women-bathers in *By the Sea* without being forced to "measure her limbs"!)

A much more common distortion of body in relationship to time-space is Picasso's repeated two-angled face in which profile and full-view are coalesced—practically a Picasso staple. Here, however the net result is the creation of a "phallic" nose as well as a bewildering grimace. Those who wish to argue that this is a narrow psychoanalytic view might study one of his pieces of sculpture, *Bust of a Woman* (fig. 4), done in 1932. We know from psychoanalysis that feelings and ideas of sexual guilt undergo symbolic *displacement*, i.e. other parts of the body, such as limbs, eyes, nose, mouth, etc., can be used to express concealed wishes of various kinds, e.g. to deny the mother's sexual nature. The most famous of these in mythology is of course the *Head of Medusa* where the hairs of the head become serpents (poisonous phalli). And, as the myth tells us, the punishment for *looking* at her is transformation into *stone*, a mythologic equivalent of the literary expression to be *frozen stiff with horror*. The effect of "frozen motion" in these faces—captured as they turn their heads from side to side—is not to be denied. It is as though Picasso had his own struggle with Medusa. Here Picasso's internal compulsions evolve into a technique of portraying all bodily motions simultaneously. A magnificent example of the assaultiveness of this technique is the *Nude Dressing Her Hair*, done in 1940, in which biting satire and sardonic pity are combined.

All the *inventions* of figures and compositions in different materials: wool, paper, string, etc. as well as the "bone" structures and the use of

<sup>2</sup> Daniel E. Schneider, "A Psychoanalytic Approach to the Painting of Marc Chagall", *C. A. J.* VI, 2.

articles of furniture are part of the same process of attempting to define different kinds of perceptions, different kinds of awarenesses of the "feel" of the body, different tension-configurations. These *inventions* frequently take on an odd mischievous quality or a kind of sad agony reminiscent of the Kipling poem:

"A fool there was and he made his prayer,  
Even as you and I—  
To a rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair,—  
The fool, he called her his lady fair, . . ."

As for Picasso's cubism, I believe this too to be peculiar to him, no matter how much it developed as an art-cult trend. Picasso's remarkable capacity to seize and represent motion and significance—two of the essential ingredients of grace—does not desert him here, where he dissects and recombines the component masses in motion. To me, *Landscape with Figures*, done in 1908, and *Girl with a Mandolin*, 1910,—both of his early cubist "period"—are very beautiful in their achievement of the shimmering effect of moving planes and shifting areas of color, in sunlight and shadow.

Indeed, it is as though Picasso created a new world of "reality behind or beyond reality" peopled with new creatures tantalizingly related to the creatures we are and recognize around us and yet not of this world, as though a man from another planet equipped with different visual physiology—with different perceptual interpretation—had recorded his impressions of us. This is one part of Picasso's great contribution. It stems, as I have already said, from a deep sense of failure and loss, and is the result of the transformation of compulsive internal threats of failure and loss into artistically successful though disturbing externalized attacks upon the castrative reality of his world. These are his "*fnds.*"

#### A BRIEF CONTRAST BETWEEN LEONARDO DA VINCI AND PABLO PICASSO— ORIGIN OF THE SENSE OF FAILURE AND LOSS COMMON TO BOTH

It would be hard to find two more opposite kinds of men than Leonardo da Vinci and Pablo Picasso. Picasso is famous for his amazing speed in drawing; da Vinci was painstakingly slow. Picasso is famous for his lack of obvious sentiment; da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and *St. Anne* are the quintessence of subtle spirituality especially as evinced in the tenderly enigmatic, "floating" quality of their smiles. Leonardo abhorred all personal sexuality, thought the normal sexual act disgusting, and preferred the *platonic* company of handsome boys and men. He never married. Picasso had more than one mistress, married, and fathered children. Leonardo left but one specifically

sexual drawing and that an exact anatomic study of the female genital, made for scientific purposes. Picasso's preoccupation with feminine sexuality is quite clear. Leonardo was extremely versatile, excelled in science as well as in art, and as a matter of fact gradually abandoned art to pursue scientific investigation. Picasso's entire life is art and such scientific knowledge and interest as he has is fused into his painting.

Both men had in common the capacity for magnificent draftsmanship and superlative purity of line; both men made motion captive as few other painters have. Leonardo's fascination with motion led him to an interest in flying and engineering. Picasso's led him to innovations in painting. Beyond their common gift for drawing, they diverge in every conceivable respect—even in their childhood histories. Leonardo was illegitimate; Picasso's father was an established painter and instructor who one day turned his brushes and palette over to his son and never painted again. Picasso is a revolutionist; Leonardo conformed.

And yet—in spite of these extreme differences—they have a common torment, a common sense of failure, a common loss. Their reactions to it were again opposite. Leonardo implicitly admitted it, sought forever for it both in his science and in his art. Picasso explicitly denies it but by the very nature of his denial reveals it. Leonardo lived explicitly by a sexless ideal of lost mother-love endlessly projecting and modelling faces of mother-son tenderness. Picasso recoils violently from any temptation to do the same thing.

What is this loss? What is this failure?

#### INTERPRETATION OF PICASSO'S ETCHING, *MINOTAUROMACHY*

We shall be on safest psychoanalytic ground if first we consult Freud's famous study of Leonardo da Vinci.<sup>8</sup> There Freud stated:

"Psychoanalytic investigation gives us a full explanation" (of children's compulsive questioning) "in that it teaches us that many children, *at least the most gifted ones*, go through a period beginning with the third year, which may be designated as the period of infantile sexual investigation. As far as we know, the curiosity is not awakened spontaneously in children of this age but is *aroused through the impression of an important experience*, through the birth of a little brother or sister, or through fear of it endangered by some outward experience wherein the child sees a danger to his egotistic interests. The investigation directs itself to the question whence children come, as if the child were looking for means to guard against such an undesired event. . . . *It investigates in its own way*, it divines that the child is in the mother's womb, and guided by feelings of its own sexuality, it formulates for itself

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Psychosexual Study*, New York, Dodd Mead, 1932.

theories about the origin of children, about being born through the bowels, about the role of the father which is difficult to fathom, and *even at that time it has a vague conception of the sexual act which appears to the child as something hostile, as something violent*. But as its own constitution is not yet equal to the task of producing children, his investigation must also run aground and must be left in the lurch as unfinished. *The impression of failure at the first attempt of intellectual independence seems to be of a persevering and profoundly depressing nature.*" (Emphases mine, D. E. S.)

Turn to the famous *Minotauromachy* (fig. 5), made in 1935. In this print, immediately in front of a little girl holding up a *burning candle in the darkness*, the following scene is enacted. A monstrous bison-headed minotaur advances from the right of the picture, his enormous right arm reaching out to block the light from the candle which the little girl fearlessly holds; there are flowers in her other hand as though she had just been picking them. Between the girl and the minotaur staggers a horse with its intestines hanging from a rent in its belly. A female *matador* has fallen across the horse's back and her breasts are bared, her *espada* (sword) so poised that it seems about to be given to the normally-sized *left* hand of the minotaur. Beyond these creatures lies the sea. At the extreme left of the picture, behind the *investigating* little girl, is a bearded man in a loin cloth—the religious prototype—scurrying up a ladder to safety (and to God), yet turning nevertheless to look at the scene below. In a window, above the little girl, two women watch two doves walk on a sill.

There can be little doubt about the meaning of this print. The *two doves* on the sill above the little girl, the *female matador and human male-portion* of the minotaur, the *ripped horse and minotaur-head* are all simply *reduplication symbols* portraying varying aspects of the sexual act as it might be conceived by a child. Doves bill and coo, a woman lies face up and breasts bared awaiting the approach of a man, but then—a monstrous thing happens, a hostile, violent, bloody thing, in which the woman surrenders the piercing weapon to the man. In Picasso's imagery (cf. *The Dream and Lie of Franco*) the horse is a female symbol, a tortured, agonized, screaming animal—as in *Guernica*. The rip in the horse's belly can be nothing else than a sadistic birth-fantasy and a rape-wound. The monstrous bull gores the horse. And the sea suggests the Rape of Europa fable.

But—just as in *Guernica* the moon is a revealing electric light upon the rape of a nation—even more important in *Minotauromachy* is the representation of the investigating child as a little girl with a burning candle—and also as a bearded martyred man terrified, fleeing, but nevertheless investigating and witnessing too. Is it too much to suggest that these are both Picasso, in childhood castrated by the sense of failure and yet compensated by the



ability to see and to depict, in bearded manhood running from that which he nevertheless must paint and witness, again and again in compulsive symbolization? Is it too much to suggest that the failure of his exhibition, at twenty years of age, lights up the old failure, and induces the terrible need to convert all his failures and his losses new and old, mature and infantile, into a successfully startling and disturbing *find*, triumphant against those who called him an *imitator*, and threatened his acceptable conscious identification with his painter-father?

Add another evidence of this compulsive search for solution and resolution of the internal tensions. Three years after *Minotauromachy*, there appears, in 1938, *Still Life with a Bull's Head* (fig. 6). Of this painting, Barr says:

"*The Still Life with a Bull's Head* is so singular in its iconography that some deliberate symbolism seems intended. The open book, the palette and brushes, the candle, the radiant light above, all seem menaced by the great dark head of the bull—the bull who is first cousin to the white-headed bull of *Guernica* and all the more sinister for being turned to red. As in the *Guernica* and the *Minotauromachy* the bull seems to threaten the light".

This still life repeats all the essential elements of the compulsive witnessing—now in token symbols. These paintings always have a similarity of grouping—and go as far back as *The Red Tablecloth*, done in 1924, where the head is night-time ebony shaded by "moonlight-white" and the tablecloth is a blood-red on which the serenading love-instrument, the guitar or mandolin rests. *The Studio* (fig. 7), done in 1925, is especially noteworthy. In the place of the bull is an angry, frightened man's head; in the place of the candle is his broken arm whose hand grasps a cylindrical bludgeon. The architecture in the background of this still life is a cubist representation of a toy theatre belonging to Picasso's son. *The Studio* is *Father and Son*,—to my mind.

This still life is almost like a dream. The son's toy theatre which forms the background of the composition may be taken to indicate the painter's suspicion of his son's wish to watch a performance (theatre) as the father did before him. The broken arm of the frightened, angry father and the cylindrical bludgeon in the father's detached hand indicate that the father can not strike the son, however much he might want to. The painter thus allies himself with his son, by breaking the punishing arm and putting the weapon on the son's side of the composition, *the left hand side*, in the same position as the candle in the other paintings. The caricatured face of the father gives this still life—when all its elements are understood—a wry sense of humor: *the joke is on the old man!*

One more fact of interest in this connection. In 1913, in an etching for *The Siege of Jerusalem*, done in a schematic naturalistic style, and in others (fig. 2), Picasso gave steady intimations of a sudden and shocking turning away in 1915 back to natural representations, after a final cubistic splurge. Barr says:

"Conservatives and a few of the extreme avant-garde looked on Picasso's apostasy with approval. Among the cubists there was astonishment and some consternation."

The cultists, who swarm around Picasso, might have been prepared for this gradual return to the technique of his early days, the technique of his earliest instruction, *since Picasso's father died May 3, 1913* and the psychic way is open for a reaffirming of his identification with his painter-father, just as the cubist-peering into reality beyond reality is less necessary with the minotaur dead,—although new minotaurs will arise to desecrate his motherland, and provoke the *Guernica*.

At this point, another quotation from Freud's study of da Vinci will help to explain the various consequences to the adult whose infantile investigations are so traumatic. There are three main types of resultant change. In the first type:

"The investigation . . . shares the fate of the sexuality, the curiosity henceforth remains inhibited and *the free activity of intelligence may become narrowed for life*; this is especially made possible *by the powerful religious inhibition of thought*. . . .

"In a second type the intellectual development is sufficiently strong to withstand the sexual repression pulling at it. Sometime after the disappearance of the infantile sexual investigation, it offers its support to the old association in order to elude the sexual repression, and *the suppressed sexual investigation comes back from the unconscious as compulsive reasoning*; it is *naturally distorted* and not free, but forceful enough to sexualize even thought itself and to accentuate the intellectual operations with the pleasure and fear of the actual sexual processes. . . . *The feeling of settling the problem and of explaining things in the mind is put in the place of sexual gratification*. . . . *This reasoning never ends and . . . the desired intellectual feeling of the solution recedes into the distance*."

"By virtue of a special disposition the third, which is the most rare and perfect type, escapes the inhibition of thought and the compulsive reasoning. . . . Here too, the investigation becomes more or less compulsive, but owing to the absolute difference of the psychic process behind it (sublimation in place of the emergence from the unconscious) the character of the neurosis does not manifest itself . . . and the impulse can freely put itself in the service of the intellectual interest . . . *avoiding all sexual themes*." (Emphases mine, D. E. S.)

It is clear from this that Picasso belongs to the second type and da Vinci to the third. For Picasso, solution recedes always further and further into the distance. One "period" follows another, endlessly. In each, it is true, "something new" is "found" but these are only pieces of a total thing lost—the tender mother surrendered to the father—the tender mother whose

name Picasso chose to take (his father's name was Ruiz)—just as he chose exile from his motherland; and only once, in *Guernica*, did he express a specific *political* rage against a nightmare-come-true: fascism.

How much more intuitive Picasso himself has been than most others is illustrated by an anecdote about a politically minded young man who, visiting Picasso's studio, tried to make out the bull's head to be a symbol of fascism.

"No," Picasso said. "It represents simply brutality and darkness."

There is the gist of it. It represents all brutalities, all darknesses.

Another note by Picasso himself on his method of painting will perhaps be self-explanatory by now:

"In the old days pictures went forward toward completion by stages. Every day brought something new. A picture used to be a sum of addition. *In my case a picture is a sum of destructions. I do a picture—then I destroy it. In the end nothing is lost: the red I took away from one place turns up somewhere else.*

"It would be very interesting to preserve photographically not the stages but the *metamorphoses of a picture*. Possibly one might then discover the path followed by the brain in *materializing a dream*. . . .

"When I begin a picture, there is somebody who works with me. Toward the end I get the impression that I have been working alone—without a collaborator. . . .

"A painter paints to *unload himself* of feelings and visions. . . .

"How can anyone enter into my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts which have taken a long time to mature and to come out into daylight, and above all grasp from them what I have been about—perhaps against my own will?" (From his statement to Zervos, in 1935. Emphases mine, D. E. S.)

#### THE "SUMMARY-PAINTINGS"

A work of art is more than the motives which instigated it. Art is the produce of genius, training, environmental and cultural stimuli, and the realized wish of the artist to express himself. Whatever has been said thus far in no way invalidates what we feel to be Picasso's essential greatness; it is in no way a value-judgment.

Applied psychoanalysis does not aim to judge art; on the contrary, it learns from art. And the greater the artist, the more the analyst has to learn, in all scientific humility. Psychoanalysis can aid in the understanding of the arts; it can not tell what makes genius, and what makes mediocrity. That is an unsolved problem.

Recently Wertenbaker in *Life* magazine said of Picasso:

"His technique has hidden the fact that he has been an artist of no profound spiritual insight!"<sup>4</sup>

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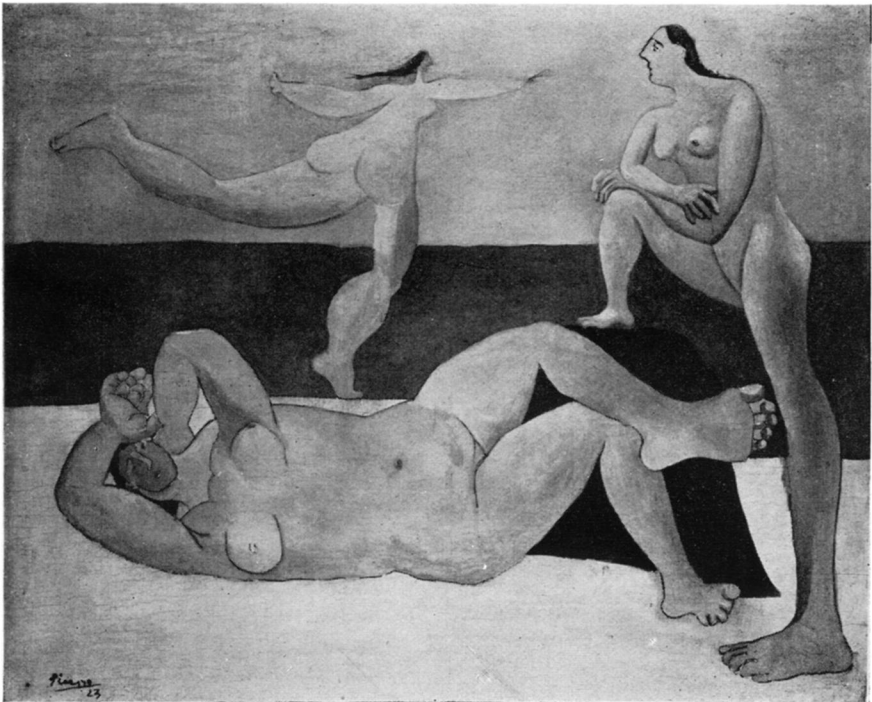
<sup>4</sup> Charles C. Wertenbaker, "Picasso", *Life Magazine*, Oct. 13, 1947.



1. PORTRAIT OF GERTRUDE STEIN, 1906. *Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.*



2. PORTRAIT OF AMBROISE VOLLARD, 1915. *From Zervos, Pablo Picasso.*



3. BY THE SEA, 1923. *Collection of Walter P. Chrysler, Jr.*

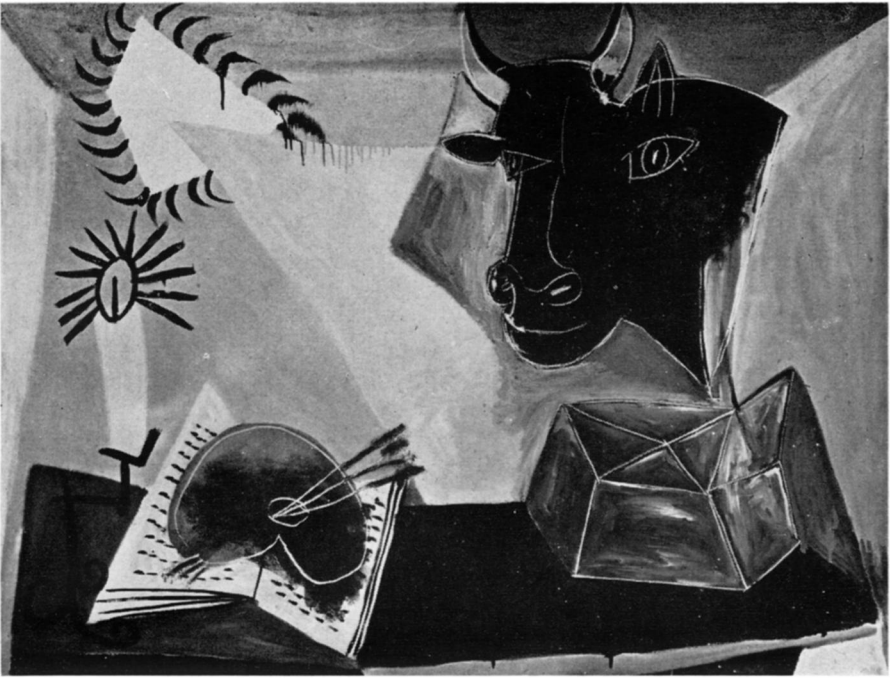


4. BUST OF A WOMAN, GILT BRONZE, 1932 (?).  
*Owned by the artist.*



5. MINOTAUROMACHY, ETCHING, 1935.  
*Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

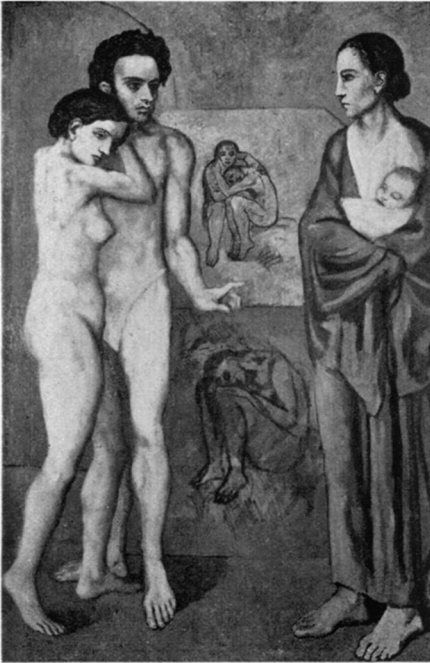




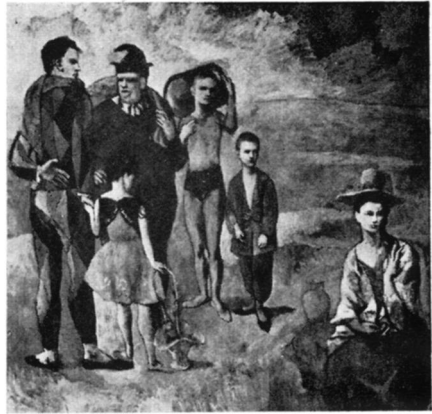
6. STILL LIFE WITH A BULL'S HEAD, 1938.  
*Owned by the artist.*



7. THE STUDIO, 1925.  
*Private Collection. Photograph courtesy of Paul Rosenberg Co.*



8. LA VIE, 1903.  
*Cleveland Museum of Art.*



9. FAMILY OF ACROBATS, 1905.  
*Art Institute of Chicago, Chester Dale Loan.*



10. LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON, 1907.  
*Museum of Modern Art, New York.*



11. GIRL BEFORE A MIRROR, 1932.  
*Museum of Modern Art, New York.*

One wonders in reading this how one makes the diagnosis of "deep spiritual insight." Does one make it independently of the time in which the artist lives? Is "spirituality" a fixed religiously ordained thing?

Wertenbaker says further:

"Any esthetic indictment of Pablo Picasso must also be an indictment of the present artistic generation, of which he is perhaps the most typical as well as the greatest symbol. It is a strange and peculiar era in which many of art's basic functions have been increasingly threatened by technology and in which the overwhelming mediocrity of mass taste—in movies, radio, popular music and so on—has led intellectuals and artists into an almost pathological revolt against the artistic preference of the common man. The situation has produced a cultural schizophrenia that has invaded nearly every feature of 20th Century art."

Nowadays the word "schizophrenia" is bandied around very easily. To apply this word in any connection with Pablo Picasso—like the phrase "pathological revolt"—is to reveal emotional rigidity and loose thinking.

There is no evidence of schizophrenia in Picasso. There is, on the contrary, evidence of deep psychic insight. The torments and anxiety of Picasso—to use words he applied to Cézanne and van Gogh—became transmuted into uniquely precise paintings that attempted to achieve resolutions of his own tormented spirituality and at the same time he created of inner necessity new art forms, new concepts of reality. How much posterity will make use of them is for posterity to decide.

Picasso's loss of his mother in childhood, like his exile from his motherland as he reached manhood, like the rage of the *Guernica* are all violent things, deep things. The emotions surrounding them do not come out obviously. Picasso's sense of personal loss and aloneness and exile is too deep to paint but is always implicit, however denied by distortional and fetishistic devices.<sup>5</sup> And no one will doubt that the modern world abounds in masculinized women, just as it abounds in economic crises. Picasso's character, then, made him peculiarly suited to describe the tensions of these lost and distorted generations of ours. He did not aim to relieve those tensions *in us*. He aimed to hold up a mirror of himself as a reflection of those around him. In this he has succeeded as have few other artists.

In each of his "periods" he has painted a "summary-painting" in which the denial appears explicitly. The rest of our comment will trace just this one single element. One must not take the remarks which follow as complete formal interpretations but rather as evidences of unconscious motivations in the painter.

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<sup>5</sup> Recall *Bust of a Woman* with the nose as a phallus. Cf. also *Woman in an Armchair* who is given three legs, one of her arms having been displaced to the lower portion of the body.



*LA VIE*, 1903

Here (fig. 8), it seems to me, is the pictured note of exile and of grieving. The pointing finger of the bewildered and terrified male shouts incredulity and the smaller background figures accentuate the sense of Paradise Lost. But the striking thing is the hard face of the mother and her dark garment in contrast to the contemplative acceptance of the nude bride. The rival child, product of creative love, withers the woman as though the greatest violence had been done to her. Hence the hostility of her look. After what we know from *Minotauremachie*, this is a logical consequence of the sexual mutilation the shocked child conceives to be the essence of creation. It is as though the painting said in part—accepting, in spite of everything, the meaning of love:

"There is no end to this passion, this despair, this grief, this violence—this child."

It must be remembered that Picasso painted it at a time of great poverty, still unrecognized, still a failure.

*THE FAMILY OF ACROBATS*, 1905

Barr believes that the figures in this painting (fig. 9) are almost unrelated psychologically. But the grouping tells the story. The woman—the mother—is a thing apart. No child makes a gesture toward her. The men and the little sister (whose face does not appear) are stiff, elongated, posed. The unsmiling, sad stiffness of the younger men add to the meaning of the grouping as they look at the mother. The fat red clown (the father) looks away, and the little girl looks down. It is a moment of rest and apartness for the burdened woman, and the total note is one of subtle tender pity for her—with a feeling of defensive rejection and perhaps shame portrayed in the others.

*LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON*, 1907

This (fig. 10) is a portrait of the huge women of his "Negro period"; at this time, Picasso is said to have taken hashish to have induced a "primitive mood." Here, the striking notes psychologically are the *pointed belly* of one of the women and the *decayed distorted faces* of the two right hand figures. In the center, bottom, of the painting is a cluster of fruit. The breasts of one of the figures are rounded in contrast to the angularity of the others. The pointed belly again suggests a phallic symbol. The decayed faces and the fruit are infuriating contrasts. The distorted faces could be interpreted as magic masks—of voodoo and witchcraft—but they indicate in no small measure an onslaught against sustained femininity and are another kind of

hostile denial of tenderness. These are cannibals, huge, frightening. It is as though the cluster of fruit were a caption, a counterbalance to deny the primitive impulse of the infant to eat (from) the mother's breasts. The size of the women accentuates in the onlooker infantile impressions of the size of the (slave) mother, and the horrible impact of her frown and anger (cf. the scarred breast of *Girl with a Mandolin*).

#### *GIRL BEFORE A MIRROR*, 1932

It is twenty-five years since *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. The *Minotaur-omachy*, the *Guernica* (which speaks for itself now), and *Still Life with Bull's Head* are soon to appear. In *Girl Before a Mirror* (fig. 11) the pink breasts and abdomen turn smaller and green. The face decays, becomes harder, masculinized, and livid. The mirror is *Time* and its *Analytic Spectroscope* that dissects out the essential hardness underlying the soft pinkness of feminine youth and the flirtatious wish to paint her face—whether as prostitute or belle. The deceptive aspect of subtlety and complexity are lost; the hag is the man she always was.

A summary then of our analytic impressions of Picasso would lead us to suspect that he himself is, to a considerable extent and much more powerfully than Chagall, intuitive about his own neurosis. As a result he has become his own pictorial analyst to the limited degree to which this is possible. He has merged the problems of his own personality into general human problems; a specific injury of his own life (cf. *Minotaur-omachy*) becomes the general injury of his own country and his world (cf. *Guernica*). The gifted child Picasso seems to have conceived of sexual love as a hostile, violent, bloody, combative act in which one contestant—the female matador—masochistically surrenders all weapons to the goring male. The father could possess the mother, the father could initiate the creation of a living child,—and the father could paint. The gifted child Picasso could only paint and drove himself, with the heritage of his father's final abdication in favor of him, aided by all the powerful precocity of his inborn genius, to *see* and to *depict*,—to catch all the phases of living bodily motion simultaneously. During his formative years he drew upon all his "painter-fathers"—upon El Greco, Raphael, Ingres, van Gogh, etc. When this failed at twenty years of age and he was called an "imitator", the failure leaped back and ignited another earlier, deeper failure and sense of loss. Two years later, *La Vie* appears and introduces the variations of a theme having to do with disintegration and recombination of motion of the human body, specifically

and most consistently with the phallic distortion of the body and the face of woman. These bring him fame, followers, and success. Abruptly, a year and a half after his father's death, he abandons cubism for a brief period of realism. Slowly, and climaxed by *Minotauremachie* and *Guernica*, elements of the primal illusory scene of brutality and darkness—mirrored in the fascist world around him—begin to take form.

For Pablo Picasso, who did not relinquish his own paternity and love of women, his infantile investigation emerged from the unconscious—in *almost its original form*. It became the mainspring both of conflict and of attempted pictorial resolution of conflict; hence the enormous goad to productivity, the incessant need "*to unload feelings and visions*," to draw and to destroy, to combine and re-combine masses, colors, planes, body-configurations, materials, etc., until the desired *feeling of relief for Picasso, not for his audience*, is attained.

But in one way, his unconscious is his master and he its slave. *Against his will*,—as he says—things emerge. Because, still feeling the old loss, the old hatred and fear of the father, he defends himself in the only way possible—no woman is anything to hunger after. His unconscious seems to say,

"No woman is pure woman. If you could see all of her at once, as Time and an inner mirror would show her to you—you would realize, she is part man anyhow. Why hunger for an illusion? Why become *conventionally* "spiritual" about it? Perceive woman more wisely, and all the canons of beauty and of reality will change for you. You will see the simultaneous totality of things and the components of sexual motion. *All-form* out of which *any-form* develops will be yours."

And, what is for Picasso—because of his fundamental hold on reality—a *limited and temporary* exploration into the realms of perceptual flight becomes, in the hands of less healthy and less capable men, wild and infantile chaos. What is for Picasso a defensive endowment of the mother with masculinity and fetish—so that he can secretly continue his hungry fantasies of her and his violent resentful fear of his father, minotaur or not,—is for lesser men a complete disintegration into regressive pictorial gibberish. Hence, while Picasso deals consciously in distortion and fetish as Chagall dealt with dream-like composition, Picasso must periodically change his style while Chagall need not. The reason for this is simply that when the *unconscious* motive for any particular form and content becomes *conscious*, there is no further incentive or refuge or release in depicting it. Each of his design-innovations reach a point where the unconscious is about to become clear; then he bounds away into a new "period." For Chagall, the unconscious practically never becomes explicit; he can continue with his dream-style indefinitely. As a result Picasso, by his many excursions into the re-

bellious forms, has found more aspects of the mother-child relationship (the basic prototype of his part-man, part-woman idea) than has any other painter. His intuition operating self-analytically and his artistic genius have served him well.

Thus, the end-point of the "blue period" for example as in *La Vie* is the idea: *Only the hungry child feeding at the breast is safe in Nirvana, not I, the grown man occupying the position I hated to think of my father occupying.* The end-point of *Family of Acrobats*—the sad, aimless clowns—is: *The mother would like to be free of us, her burdens; and, recognizing it we can hate even a mother.* For *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* it is: *Women as women, sophisticated or primitive, are frightening cannibals; they themselves are food.* For *Girl before a Mirror* it becomes finally: *I should like to have been encapsulated in her all the time, never free of her nor she of me.* These are the ideas covered up and projected into adult interpretations of woman. They are the fountain of his sense of loss, longing, failure, exile.

Picasso has repeatedly said:

"No, painting is not done to decorate apartments. It is an instrument of war against brutality and darkness."

And those of us who have lived through the last forty years know that the wildest nightmares of our childhood were surpassed by even wilder nightmares of reality. Picasso would not be the exquisitely sensitive man he is—whatever classicists of the right and realists of the left want of him—had he not expressed the ways in which the conscious and unconscious elements of his terror came to life around him.

See, finally, Picasso's—and our—*Charnel House*, its waxen trussed-up once creative hands of the father, its no longer protesting hands of the mother, its hand of a child frozen in supplication at the mother's torn breast.

It is a study of *no-motion*. There are no faces turning from side to side. No child reaches to unmask a riddle in the night. No candle burns.  
*New York City*