

PICASSO: THE ARTIST AND HIS MUSES
INTERPRETIVE TEXTS

Montmartre

The years following the turn of the century in 1900 saw the birth of Modern art in Paris. The city became a centre of creative activity, and the hillside district of Montmartre, which consisted largely of small tradesmen, entertainers, petty criminals, sex workers and artists, was the hub of this cultural life. During the first decade of the 20th century artists from Spain, Italy, Russia and America converged on Montmartre and inhabited its streets, cabarets, and cafés. Their libertarian lifestyle and love of entertainment and popular culture would contribute to the bohemian ambiance reflected in Picasso's early work that depicted these urban subjects. After three visits from Spain, Picasso would make Montmartre his home in 1904, a formative year during which he established the foundations of his practice among a lively scene of artists, writers, poets and patrons such as Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, André Derain, Amedeo Modigliani, Juan Gris, Guillaume Apollinaire and Gertrude and Leo Stein.

Picasso settled in the infamous Bateau-Lavoir building, a rundown former washhouse occupied by artist studios that was so derelict there was no electricity and only one toilet and one indoor fountain for all the residents of the building. The Bateau-Lavoir became an emblem for the romantic tale of the starving Parisian artist in an eternal search for the true essence of art. Fernande Olivier wrote of their studio in 1906: "It's cold, and we're out of coal again. Pablo doesn't seem to notice when he's painting at night." With the support of patrons such as the Steins and art dealers such as Ambroise Vollard and Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, Picasso would gradually attain commercial success, moving with Olivier from Montmartre into a bourgeois apartment on Boulevard de Clichy in 1909, beginning a middle-class lifestyle that became a source of envy and resentment among his peers. Picasso would later associate the Bateau-Lavoir with his youth the happiest times of his life.

The Surrealists

In 1925, to promote his manifesto *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, André Breton organized the first Surrealist exhibition at the Galerie Pierre, which included two Cubist works by Picasso on loan from the fashion designer and art collector Jacques Doucet. Picasso, however, disclaimed the Surrealist label, having had no part in lending his works to that show, and wary of being

identified with what was becoming an overtly Marxist movement. Despite this, he was a supporter of Surrealism, and was aware of his affinities for symbolism, psychological meaning and emotional intensity in his works. Picasso would frequent the group's congregations, agree to the reproduction of his latest pieces in Surrealist publications and had no hesitation at calling on Breton—who he had befriended—for help. Picasso would later reflect: "I attempt to observe nature, always. I am intent on resemblance, a resemblance more real than the real, attaining the surreal. It was in this way that I thought of Surrealism."

Dora Maar was a professional photographer in fashion and advertising and an active member of the Surrealist group. Her artworks would develop out of her commercial and documentary production, as she rearranged these subjects into unlikely relationships, creating photomontages of troubling images presenting dream-like and uncanny scenes. The Surrealist poet Paul Éluard would dedicate his poem "La Rose publique" to Maar, writing: "In homage to Dora Maar who holds every image in her hand." Well before they would meet, Maar and Picasso moved in the same close-knit Parisian art circles and were friends with the same Surrealist artists (such as Breton)—which made their introduction imminent. Every year between 1936 and 1939 a small group of friends from the Surrealists—among them the Éluards, Man Ray, Lee Miller and Roland Penrose—would gather in Mougins, a city in the south of France, and it was here that Maar and Picasso would establish their romantic relationship in 1936.

Guernica

On April 26, 1937, German planes from the Nazi Condor Legion, acting in support of Spanish dictator General Francisco Franco's forces, repeatedly bombed the Basque town of Guernica and its civilian population. With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, Picasso began to directly express his opinions concerning a war that was crippling his country, and on May 11—just days after the horrific bombing, which was widely reported by newspapers—he started the mural *Guernica*.

He would explain in an interview that year: "The war in Spain is the battle of reaction against the people, against liberty. My whole career has been one continual struggle against reaction and the death of art. In the painting on which I am now at work, which I shall call *Guernica*—and in

all my recent works—I am very clearly expressing my horror at the military caste which has plunged Spain into a sea of suffering and death.”

The mural was presented that summer at the Spanish pavilion for the International Exposition held in Paris, internationally galvanizing the horrors of the war that was then raging in Spain. In preparation for *Guernica*, Picasso executed nearly 60 “weeping woman” drawings, incorporating the image of a woman contorted by violence and pain that would come to symbolize Franco’s victims—the grieving mother carrying her lifeless child and the witness to bloodshed and horror. Although inspired by news reportage, *Guernica* is largely symbolic: its people and animals in agony and wrenched buildings draw viewers into the brutal forces of history in the making. An active witness to the work in progress, Dora Maar decided to photograph the metamorphosis of the painting through different stages of production, providing an important journal of Picasso at work stripped the painting down to its essential symbolism to create a deliberate expression of human tragedy.

After Franco’s victory in Spain only in 1939, at Picasso’s request *Guernica* was sent to the Museum of Modern Art in New York for safekeeping. He decreed that it not be returned to Spain until democratic liberties were restored. *Guernica*, which made its return to Spain in 1981, can now be found as part of the permanent collection at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid.

Visit to Picasso

In 1949, Belgian filmmaker Paul Haesaerts visited Picasso at his studio in Vallauris, in southeastern France. With the intention of capturing the artist’s creative process, he asked Picasso to apply his brushstrokes to a large glass plate as Haesaerts filmed from the other side. The resulting black and white film *Visit to Picasso* (1949), (a portion of which is exhibited here), would become famous for memorializing Picasso’s iconic creative process. This early film predates Henri-Georges Clouzot’s *The Mystery of Picasso* (1956), which would also document the artist’s drawing and painting process, this time on canvas and in colour.

Reading Room

There are thousands of titles available on the artwork and life of Picasso. The selection of books featured here includes catalogues of recent exhibitions as well as biographies written by his former lovers, family and friends. Each publication considers the biographical details of his life as an important element in understanding his art. We invite you to browse this selection of books and ask that you return them to the shelves when you are done.

Legacy of a Genius

The documentary film *Pablo Picasso: The Legacy of a Genius* (1981), directed by Michael Blackwood, explores the breadth of the artist's achievements through the insights and speculations of fellow artists, close relatives, historians and critics. Robert Rosenblum, an art historian and a noted authority on Picasso, introduces 13 key works, and Dominique Bozo, founder of the Musée Picasso, visits the places in Paris and the south of France where the artist lived and worked. The film also includes interviews with legendary art historian Clement Greenberg, Picasso biographer Roland Penrose, his former partner Françoise Gilot and his children Claude and Paloma Picasso. Several painters and sculptors, among them Henry Moore, Matta, Anthony Caro, David Hockney, George Segal and Roy Lichtenstein, also comment on the ways in which Picasso's oeuvre has affected their own artistic sensibilities, providing an assessment of Picasso's vast achievements.