

QUICK VIEW:

Synopsis

Pablo Picasso was the most dominant and influential artist of the first half of the twentieth century. Associated most of all with pioneering **Cubism**, alongside **Georges Braque**, he also invented collage, and made major contributions to **Symbolism**, **Surrealism**, and to the classical styles of the 1920s. He saw himself above all as a painter, and yet his sculpture was greatly influential, and he also explored areas as diverse as print-making and ceramics. Finally, he was a famously charismatic personality: his many relationships with women not only filtered into his art but may have directed its course; and his behavior has come to embody that of the bohemian modern artist in the popular imagination.

Key Ideas

- Picasso first emerged as a **Symbolist** influenced by the likes of **Munch** and **Toulouse-Lautrec**, and this tendency shaped his so-called **Blue Period**, in which he depicted beggars and prostitutes and various urban misfits, and also the brighter moods of his subsequent **Rose Period**.
- It was a confluence of influences - from **Paul Cézanne** and **Henri Rousseau**, to archaic and tribal art - that encouraged Picasso to lend his figures more weight and structure around 1906. And they ultimately set him on the path towards **Cubism**, in which he deconstructed the conventions of perspectival space that had dominated painting since the Renaissance. These innovations would have far-reaching consequences for practically all of modern art, revolutionizing attitudes to the depiction of form in space.

- Picasso's immersion in Cubism also eventually led him to the invention of collage, in which he abandoned the idea of the picture as a window on objects in the world, and began to conceive it merely as an arrangement of signs which used different, sometimes metaphorical means, to refer to those objects. This too would prove hugely influential for decades to come.
- Picasso had an eclectic attitude to style, and although, at any one time, his work was usually characterized by a single dominant approach, he often moved interchangeably between different styles - sometimes even in the same artwork.
- His encounter with **Surrealism** in mid 1920s, although never transforming his work entirely, encouraged a new expressionism which had been suppressed throughout the years of experiment in Cubism and subsequently during the early 1920s when his style was predominantly classical. This development enabled not only the soft forms and tender eroticism of his portraits of his mistress Marie-Therese Walter, but also the starkly angular imagery of *Guernica*, the century's most famous anti-war painting.
- Picasso was always eager to place himself in history, and some of his greatest works, such as *Les Femmes d'Alger*, refer to a wealth of past precedents - even while overturning them. As he matured he became only more conscious of assuring his legacy, and his late work is characterized by a frank dialogue with Old Masters such as **Ingres**, **Velazquez**, **Goya**, and **Rembrandt**.

DETAILED VIEW:

Childhood

Pablo Ruiz Picasso was born into a creative family. His father was a painter, and he quickly showed signs of following the same path: his mother claimed that his first word was "piz," a shortened version of *lápiz*, or pencil; and his father would be his first teacher. Picasso began formally studying art at the age of eleven. Several paintings from his teenage years still exist, such as *First Communion* (1895), which is typical in its conventional, if accomplished, academic style. His father groomed the young prodigy to be a great artist by getting Picasso the best education the family could afford, visiting Madrid to see works by Spanish old masters. And when the family moved to Barcelona, so his father could take up a new post, Picasso continued his art education.

Early Training

It was in Barcelona that Picasso first matured as a painter. He frequented the Els Quatre Gats, a cafe popular with bohemians, anarchists, and modernists. And he came to be familiar with **Art Nouveau** and **Symbolism**, and artists such as **Edvard Munch** and **Henri Toulouse-Lautrec**. It was here that he met Jaime Sabartes, who would go on to be his fiercely loyal secretary in later years. This was his introduction to a cultural avant-garde, in which young artists were encouraged to express themselves.

During the years from 1900 to 1904 Picasso travelled frequently, spending time in Madrid and Paris, in addition to spells in Barcelona. Although he began making sculpture during this time, critics characterize this time as his Blue Period, after the blue/grey palette that dominated his paintings. The mood of the work was also insistently melancholic. One might see the beginnings of this in the artist's sadness over the suicide

of Carlos Casegemas, a friend he has met in Barcelona, though the subjects of much of the Blue Period work were drawn from the beggars and prostitutes he encountered in city streets. The Old Guitarist (1903) is a typical example of both the subject matter and the style of this phase.

In 1904 Picasso's palette began to brighten, and for a year or more he painted in a style that has been characterized as his Rose Period. He focussed on performers and circus figures, switching his palette to various shades of more uplifting reds and pinks. And around 1906, soon after he had met **Georges Braque**, his palette darkened, his forms became heavier and more solid in aspect, and he began to find his way towards **Cubism**.



Mature Period

In the past critics dated the beginnings of Cubism to his early masterpiece *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J.)* (1907). Although that work is now seen as transitional (lacking the radical distortions of his later experiments), it was clearly crucial in his development since it was heavily influenced by African sculpture and ancient Iberian art. It is said to have inspired Braque to paint his own first series of Cubist paintings, and in subsequent years the two would mount one of the most remarkable collaborations in modern painting, sometimes eagerly learning from each other, at other times trying to outdo one another in their fast-paced and competitive race to innovate. They visited each other daily during their formulation of this radical technique, and Picasso described himself and Braque as "two mountaineers, roped together." In their shared vision, multiple perspectives on an object are depicted simultaneously by being fragmented and rearranged in splintered configurations. Form and space became the most crucial elements, and so both artists restricted their palettes to earth tones, in stark contrast with the bright colors used by the **Fauves** that had preceded them.

Picasso rejected the label "Cubism," especially when critics began to differentiate between the two key approaches he pursued - Analytic and Synthetic. He saw his body of work as a continuum. But it is beyond doubt that there was a change in his work around

1912. He became less concerned with representing the placement of objects in space than in using shapes and motifs as signs to playfully allude to their presence. He developed the technique of collage, and from Braque he learned the related method of *papiers collés*, which used cut-out pieces of paper in addition to fragments of existing materials. This phase has since come to be known as the "Synthetic" phase of Cubism, due to its reliance on various allusions to an object in order to create the description of it. This approach opened up the possibilities of more decorative and playful compositions, and its versatility encouraged Picasso to continue to utilise it well in the 1920s.

But the artist's dawning interest in ballet also sent his work in new directions around 1916. This was in part prompted by meeting the poet, artists and filmmaker **Jean Cocteau**. Through him he met **Serge Diaghilev**, and went on to produce numerous set designs for the Ballets Russes.



For some years Picasso had occasionally toyed with classical imagery, and he began to give this free rein in the early 1920s. His figures became heavier and more massive, and he often imaging them against backgrounds of a Mediterranean Golden Age. They have long been associated with the wider conservative trends of culture's so-called *rappel a l'ordre* ("return to order") in the 1920s.

His encounter with **Surrealism** in the mid 1920s again prompted a change of direction. His work became more expressive, and often violent or erotic. This phase in his work can also be correlated with the period in his personal life when his marriage to dancer Olga Koklova began to break down and he began a new relationship with Marie-Therese Walter. Indeed, critics have often noted how changes in style in Picasso's work often go hand in hand with changes in his romantic relationships: his partnership with Koklova spanned the years of his interest in dance and, later, his time with Jacqueline Roque is associated with his late phase in which he became preoccupied with his legacy alongside the old masters. Picasso frequently painted the women he was in love with, and as a result his tumultuous personal life is well represented on canvas. He was known to have kept many mistresses, most famously Eva Gouel, Dora Maar and Françoise Gilot. He married twice, and had four children, Claude, Paloma, Maia, and Paolo.

In the late 1920s he began a collaboration with the sculptor **Julio Gonzalez**. This was his most significant creative partnership since he had worked alongside Braque, and it

culminated in some welded metal sculptures which were subsequently highly influential.

As the 1930s wore on, political concerns began to cloud Picasso's view, and these would continue to preoccupy him for some time. His disgust at the bombing of civilians in the Basque town of Guernica, during the Spanish Civil War, prompted to create the painting *Guernica*, in 1937. During WWII he stayed in Paris, and the German authorities left him sufficiently unmolested to allow him to continue work. However, the war did have a huge impact on Picasso, with his Paris painting collection confiscated by Nazis and some of his closest Jewish friends killed. Picasso made works commemorating them - sculptures employing hard, cold materials such as metal, and a particularly violent follow up to *Guernica*, entitled *The Charnel House* (1945). Following the war he was also closely involved with the Communist Party, and several major pictures from this period, such as *War in Korea* (1951), make that new allegiance clear.

Late Years and Death



Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Picasso worked on his own versions of canonical masterpieces by artists such as Nicolas Poussin, Lucas Cranach, Diego Velazquez, and El Greco. In the latter years of his life, Picasso sought solace from his celebrity, marrying Jacqueline Rogue in 1961. His later paintings were heavily portrait-based and their palettes nearly garish in hue. Critics have generally considered them inferior to his earlier work, though in recent years they have been more enthusiastically received. He also created many ceramic and bronze sculptures during this later period. He died in the South of France in 1973.

Legacy

Picasso's influence was profound and far-reaching for most of his life. His work in pioneering Cubism established a set of pictorial problems, devices and approaches, which remained important well into the 1950s. And at each stage of his career, from the classical works of the 1920s to the works produced in occupied Paris during the 1940s, his example was important. Even after the war, even though the energy in avant-garde art shifted to New York, Picasso remained a titanic figure, and one who could never be ignored. Indeed, even though the Abstract Expressionists could be said to have superseded aspects of Cubism (even while being strongly influenced by him), The Museum of Modern Art in New York has been called "the house that Pablo built," because it has so widely exhibited the artist's work. MoMA's opening exhibition in 1930 included fifteen paintings by Picasso. He was also a part of Alfred Barr's highly influential survey shows, *Cubism and Abstract Art* and *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*.

Although his influence undoubtedly waned in the 1960s, he had by that time become a Pop icon, and the public's fascination with his life story continue to fuel interest in his work.

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES:

Below are Pablo Picasso's major influences, and the people and ideas that he influenced in turn.

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
 <p>Francisco Goya</p>	 <p>Guillaume Apollinaire</p>	 <p>Impressionism</p>
 <p>El Greco</p>	 <p>Gertrude Stein</p>	 <p>Post-Impressionism</p>
 <p>Paul Gauguin</p>	 <p>Georges Braque</p>	 <p>Expressionism</p>
 <p>Paul Cézanne</p>	 <p>Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler</p>	 <p>Art Nouveau</p>
 <p>Henri Matisse</p>	 <p>Ambroise Vollard</p>	 <p>African Art</p>

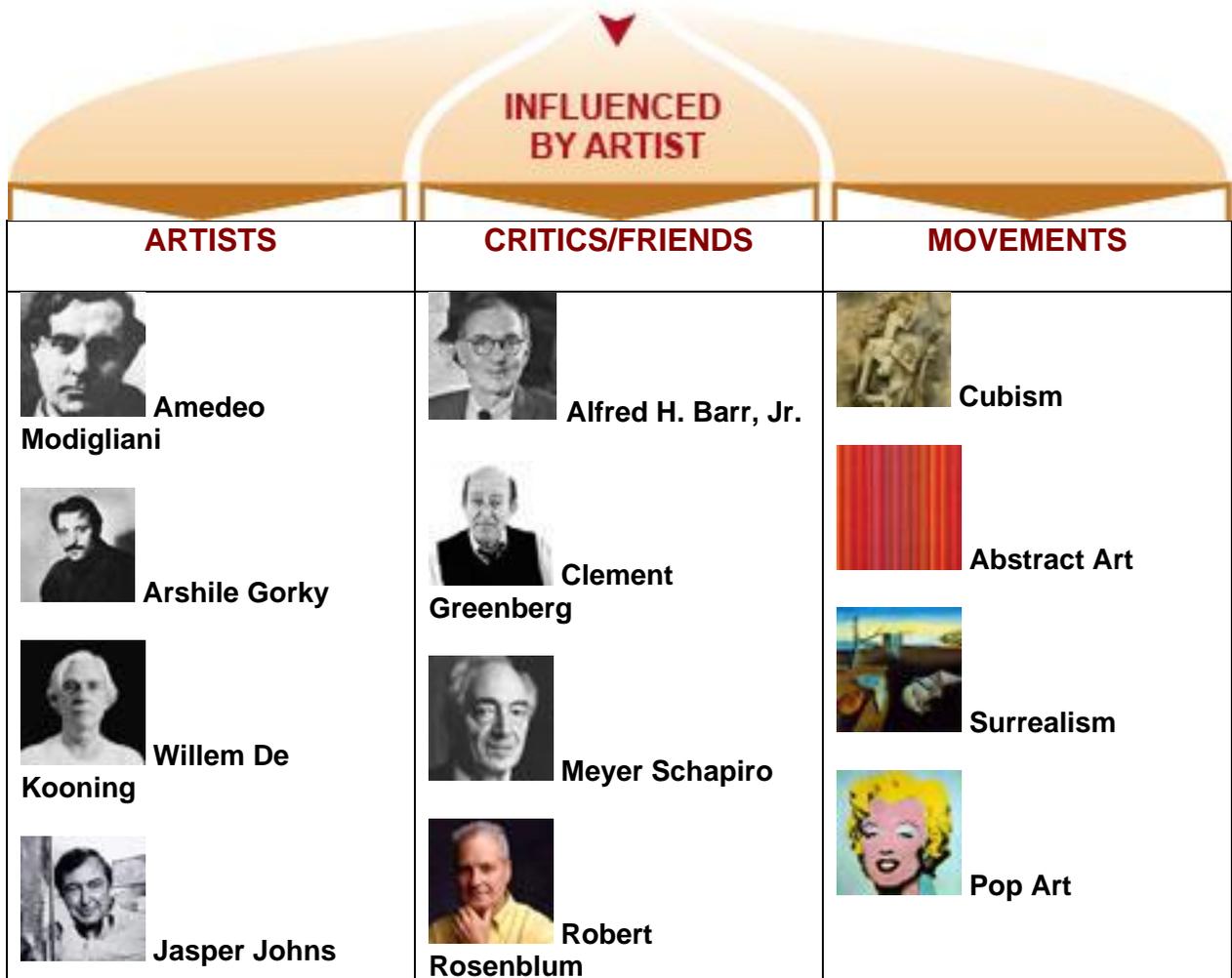
INFLUENCES
ON ARTIST





Pablo Picasso

Years Worked: 1892 – 1973



Quotes

"Every act of creation is first an act of destruction."

"Our goals can only be reached through a vehicle of a plan, in which we must fervently believe, and upon which we must vigorously act. There is no other route to success."

"For those who know how to read, I have painted my autobiography"

Major Works:



Title: *The Old Guitarist*

Description: *The Old Guitarist* is characteristic of the sombre melancholy of Picasso's Blue Period, and it was produced at the same time as a series of other pictures devoted to themes of destitution, old age, and blindness. The picture conveys something of Picasso's concern with the miserable conditions he witnessed while coming of age in Spain, and it is no doubt influenced by the religious painting he grew up with, and perhaps specifically by El Greco. But the picture is also typical of the wider Symbolist movement of the period. In later years Picasso dismissed his Blue Period works as "nothing but sentiment"; critics have often agreed with him, even though many of the pictures remain moving.

Year: 1903

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Art Institute of Chicago



Title: *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*

Description: Gertrude Stein was an author, close friend, and even supporter of Picasso, and was integral to his growth as an artist. This portrait, in which Stein is wearing her favorite brown velvet coat, was made just a year before *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*, and marks an important stage in his evolving style. In contrast to the flat appearance of the figures and objects in some of the Blue and Rose period works, the forms in this portrait

seem almost sculpted, and indeed they were influenced by the artist's discovery of archaic Iberian sculpture. One can almost sense Picasso's increased interest in depicting a human face as a series of flat planes. Stein claimed that she sat for the artist some ninety times, and although that may be an exaggeration, Picasso certainly wrestled long and hard with painting her head. After approaching it in various ways, abandoning each attempt, one day he painted it out altogether, declaring "I can't see you any longer when I look," and soon abandoned the picture. It was only some time later, and without the model in front of him, that he completed the head.

Year: 1905

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Metropolitan Museum of Art



Title: *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)*

Description: Although it is probably the single most heavily analyzed picture of the century, ironically, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)* was not exhibited in public until 1916. Picasso's friends felt that the highly distorted brothel scene would be too controversial. The work of Paul Cezanne, and also African masks, were crucial in shaping it, and for many years it was regarded as the first Cubist painting. Critics have since concluded that it is a transitional work, but this has done nothing to dampen its enormous power or influence. Willem de Kooning's *Woman* series, for example, was directly informed by this work.

Year: 1907

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Museum of Modern Art



Title: *Still Life with Chair Caning*

Description: *Still Life with Chair Caning* is celebrated for being modern art's first collage. Picasso had affixed pre-existing objects to his canvases before, but this picture marks the first time he did so with such playful and emphatic intent. The chair caning in the picture in fact comes from a piece of printed oilcloth - and not, as the title suggests, an actual piece of chair caning. But the rope around the canvas is very real, and serves to evoke the carved border of a café table. Hence the picture not only dramatically

contrasts visual and sculptural/tactile information, it also confuses our sense of what is horizontal and what is vertical.

Year: 1912

Materials: Collage on canvas

Collection: National Gallery, London



Title: *Bowl of Fruit, Violin and Bottle*

Description: Picasso's *Bowl of Fruit, Violin and Bottle* is typical of his Synthetic Cubism, in which he uses various means - painted dots, silhouettes, grains of sand - to allude to the depicted objects. This combination of painting and mixed media is an example of the way Picasso "synthesized" color and texture - synthesising new wholes after mentally dissecting the objects at hand. During his Analytic Cubist phase Picasso had suppressed color, so as to concentrate more on the forms and volumes of the objects, and this rationale also no doubt guided his preference for still life throughout this phase. The life of the café certainly summed up modern Parisian life for the artists - it was where he spent a good deal of time talking with other artists - but the simple array of objects also ensured that questions of symbolism and allusion might be kept under control.

Year: 1914

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: National Gallery, London



Title: *The Three Musicians*

Description: Picasso painted two versions of this picture. The slightly smaller version hangs in Philadelphia Museum of Art, but both are unusually large for Picasso's Cubist period, and he may have chosen to work on this grand scale because they mark the conclusion of his Synthetic Cubism, which had occupied him for nearly a decade. He painted it in the same summer as the very different, classical painting, *Three Women at the Spring*. Some have interpreted the pictures as nostalgic remembrances of the artist's early days: Picasso sits in the center - as ever the Harlequin - and his old friends Guillaume Apollinaire, who died in 1918, and Max Jacob, from whom he had become estranged, sit on either side. However, another argument links the pictures to Picasso's

work for the Ballets Russes, and identifies the characters with more recent friends. Either way, the costumes of the figures certainly derive from traditions in Italian popular theatre.

Year: 1921

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Philadelphia Museum of Art



Title: *Three Women at the Spring*

Description: Picasso made careful studies in preparation for this, his most ambitious treatment of what is an old classical subject. It makes reference to earlier pictures by Poussin and Ingres - titans of classical painting - but it also draws inspiration from Greek sculpture, and indeed the heavy, massy gravity of the figures is very sculptural. Critics have speculated that the subject appealed to him because of the recent birth of his first son, Paulo; the sombre attitude of the figures may be explained by the contemporary preoccupation in France with mourning the dead of the First World War.

Year: 1921

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Museum of Modern Art



Title: *Large Nude in a Red Armchair*

Description: When Picasso's work came under the influence of the Surrealists, in the late 1920s, his forms often took on melting, organic contours. This work was completed in May 1929, around the same time the Surrealists were preoccupied with the way in which ugly and disgusting imagery might provide a route into the unconscious. It was clearly intended to shock, and it may have been influenced by Salvador Dalí and Joan Miró. It is thought that the picture represents the former dancer Olga Koklova, whose relationship with Picasso was failing around this time.

Year: 1929

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Unknown collection



Title: *Guernica*

Description: *Guernica* was Picasso's response to the bombing of the Basque town of the same name on April 26, 1937 during the Spanish Civil War. Painted in one month - from May to June 1937 - it became the centerpiece of the Spanish pavilion at the Paris World's Fair later that year. While it was a sensation at the fair, it was consequently banned from exhibition in Spain until military dictator Francisco Franco fell from power in 1975. Much time has been spent trying to decode the symbolism of the picture, and some believe that the dying horse in the center of the painting alludes to the people of Spain. The minotaur may allude to bull-fighting, a favorite national past-time in Spain, though it also had complex personal significance for the artist. Although *Guernica* is undoubtedly modern art's most famous response to war, critics have been divided on its success as a painting.

Year: 1937

Materials: Oil on canvas

Collection: Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia