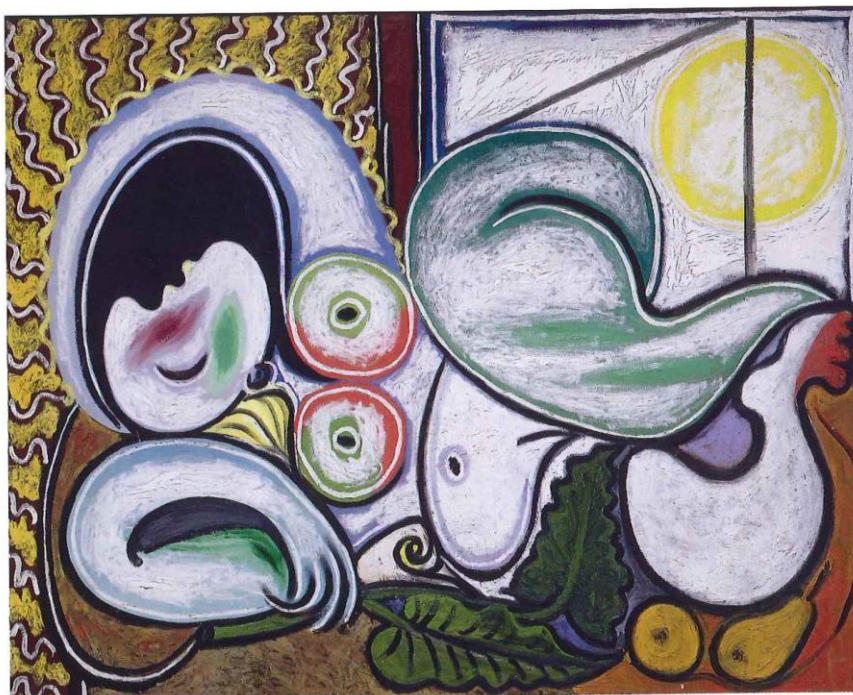


The EY Exhibition: Picasso 1932 – Love, Fame, Tragedy

In 1932, Picasso created a ground-breaking series of paintings and prints that showed him at the very height of his artistic power. Here, through his work and in photographs from the period, we tell the story of this extraordinary year.

Plus: an appreciation of Picasso by fellow artist George Condo



BY ACHIM BORCHARDT-HUME

Pablo Picasso
Reclining Nude,
painted 4 April
1932, oil paint on
canvas, 130 x 162 cm

Pablo Picasso
with his painting
*Nude, Green Leaves
and Bust* 1932 at
rue La Boétie, Paris.
Photographed by Sir
Cecil Beaton, 1933

PICASSO 1932



THE YEAR OF WONDERS

On 25 October 1931, Pablo Picasso turned 50. Eight months later, on 16 June 1932, his first large-scale retrospective opened at the venerable Galeries Georges Petit in the heart of Paris. The display of 225 paintings, seven sculptures and six illustrated books was to cement his position as a titan of 20th-century art. When the exhibition transferred to the Kunsthaus Zürich later that year, it was to become Picasso's first major museum exhibition. To all intents and purposes, he had made it.

Wind back 30 years, and his ascent in the art world seems all the steeper. Having arrived penniless to the French capital, like so many other international artist migrants, he had quickly been recognised as the most consistently inventive of the bunch. He had won over critics, collectors and dealers alike with his blue odes to the melancholia of the modern age and his pink depictions of circus life. Together with his friend, Georges Braque, he had created cubism, a shock as seismic to the traditions of Western painting as the Renaissance had been half a millennium earlier.

'Few anticipated that within months the world would be thrown into turmoil again'

The trauma and instability of the First World War made the commercial and social success he enjoyed throughout the 1920s all the sweeter. Thanks to his new dealer, Paul Rosenberg, and the latter's business partner, Georges Wildenstein, Picasso was one of the first artists to enjoy what, at the time, amounted to global representation. He lived in a grand apartment on rue La Boétie in the elegant 8th arrondissement, not far from the Champs-Élysées. He dressed in custom-tailored suits from London's Savile Row and owned a chauffeur-driven Hispano-Suiza. When a young Jim Ede (then Assistant Keeper at Tate Gallery) expressed surprise on seeing Picasso's limousine, the artist laconically commented: 'I am a great master now – you have to have a motor car.'

Picasso had also become respectable in his social life. Having fallen deeply in love with the Russian ballerina, Olga Khokhlova, who was part of Sergei Diaghilev's legendary Ballets Russes, Picasso married her in 1918. In early 1921, their young family was completed by the arrival of a son, Paulo. The Picasso household soon turned into one of the epicentres of Paris social life, with Olga and Picasso mingling with an international jet set. The press covered their attendance of cinema, theatre and opera premieres, and their holidays were spent in the newly fashionable south of France.

By 1932, however, Picasso increasingly experienced the trappings of success as a gilded cage. He missed his artist friends of old. He wanted to be closer to the discussions around contemporary art, not least the storm that was surrealism.

More and more often, he escaped from family life to Boisgeloup, a manor house in the Normandy countryside, which he had bought in 1930. At the same time, he jealously guarded a relationship with the much younger Marie-Thérèse Walter, whose life-affirming physicality and utter lack of pretension would become a major influence on his work from the early 1930s.

As his June retrospective approached, Picasso knew that his critical success was not assured. He had turned down invitations from the Museum of Modern Art in New York as well as the Venice Biennale in favour of presenting his work to the world as he saw it himself: full of contradictions, resistant to being put into neat drawers of stylistic sequence, unruly and yet utterly consistent.

In the Galeries Georges Petit, pride of place was given to his works from the first half of 1932. These were lavishly colourful, sensual reworkings of the classical themes of Western art: seated figures enveloped by voluminous armchairs, still lifes and reclining nudes. Old friends, such as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who had been rather sceptical of Picasso's development post-cubism, described themselves as 'stunned' by what they saw. Young admirers such as Alfred Barr, founding director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, applauded Picasso's 1932 paintings as among the best work he had ever produced.

Nobody visiting the Georges Petit retrospective, least of all Picasso himself, could have guessed that following this summary of the extraordinary achievement of his life so far, he would have another 40 years of continuous reinvention ahead of him. Equally, while all the signs were there – from the ripples of the Great Depression to the rise of nationalist populism across Europe – few anticipated that within months the world would be thrown into turmoil again, leading to violence and destruction on an unprecedented scale.

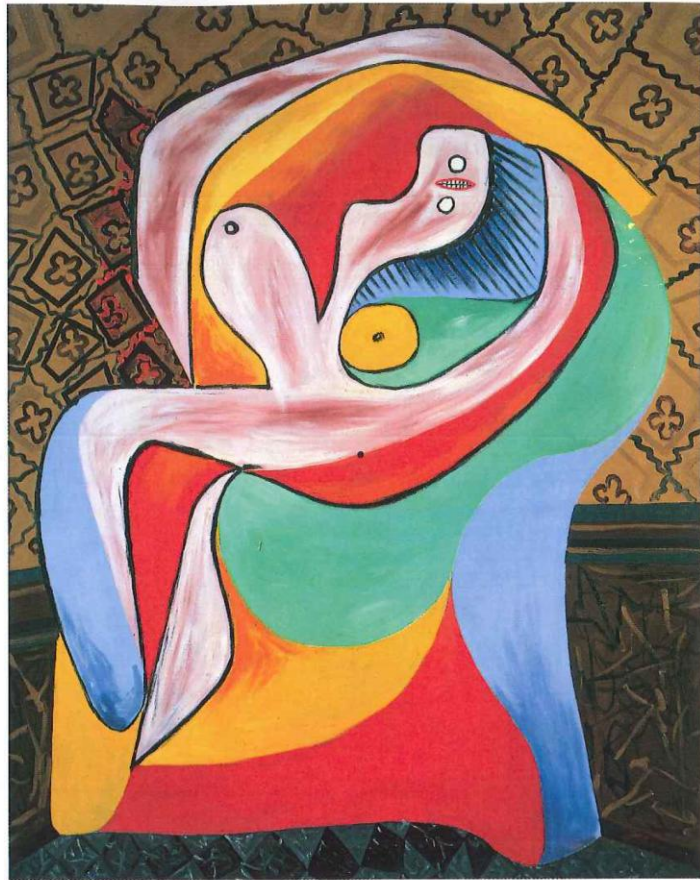
On 26 February 1932, Picasso's *La Coiffure* from 1905 set an auction record. One day earlier, the German government had naturalised Adolf Hitler in order for him to stand in the March and April presidential elections. Though he lost on both occasions, the wildfire that would soon engulf the world had been set irrevocably alight. If love had been the guiding star of Picasso's life and art in the early part of 1932, and fame its crowning summer glory, by the end of 1932 the signs of tragedy were writ large. The precarious balance in both his life and the world at large, which had made 1932 Picasso's 'year of wonders', was soon to reach breaking point. Once broken, the pieces would never be put together in quite the same way again.

The EY Exhibition: Picasso 1932 – Love, Fame, Tragedy is presented in The Eyal Ofer Galleries, Tate Modern, 8 March – 9 September, curated by Achim Borchardt-Hume, Director of Exhibitions, Tate Modern and Nancy Ireson, Curator, International Art, with Juliette Rizzi and Laura Bruni, Assistant Curators. This exhibition is part of The EY Tate Arts Partnership, with additional support from the Picasso Exhibition Supporters Circle, Tate Americas Foundation, Tate International Council, Tate Patrons, and Tate Members. Exhibition organised by Tate Modern in collaboration with Musée national Picasso-Paris. A fully illustrated catalogue including contributions by TJ Clark and Diana Widmaier Picasso is published by Tate Publishing.

A. Borchardt-Hume, 'Picasso 1932 The Years of Wonders'
followed by G. Condo 'Woman in a Red Armchair'
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Pablo Picasso
Rest, painted
22 January 1932.
oil paint on canvas,
162 x 130 cm

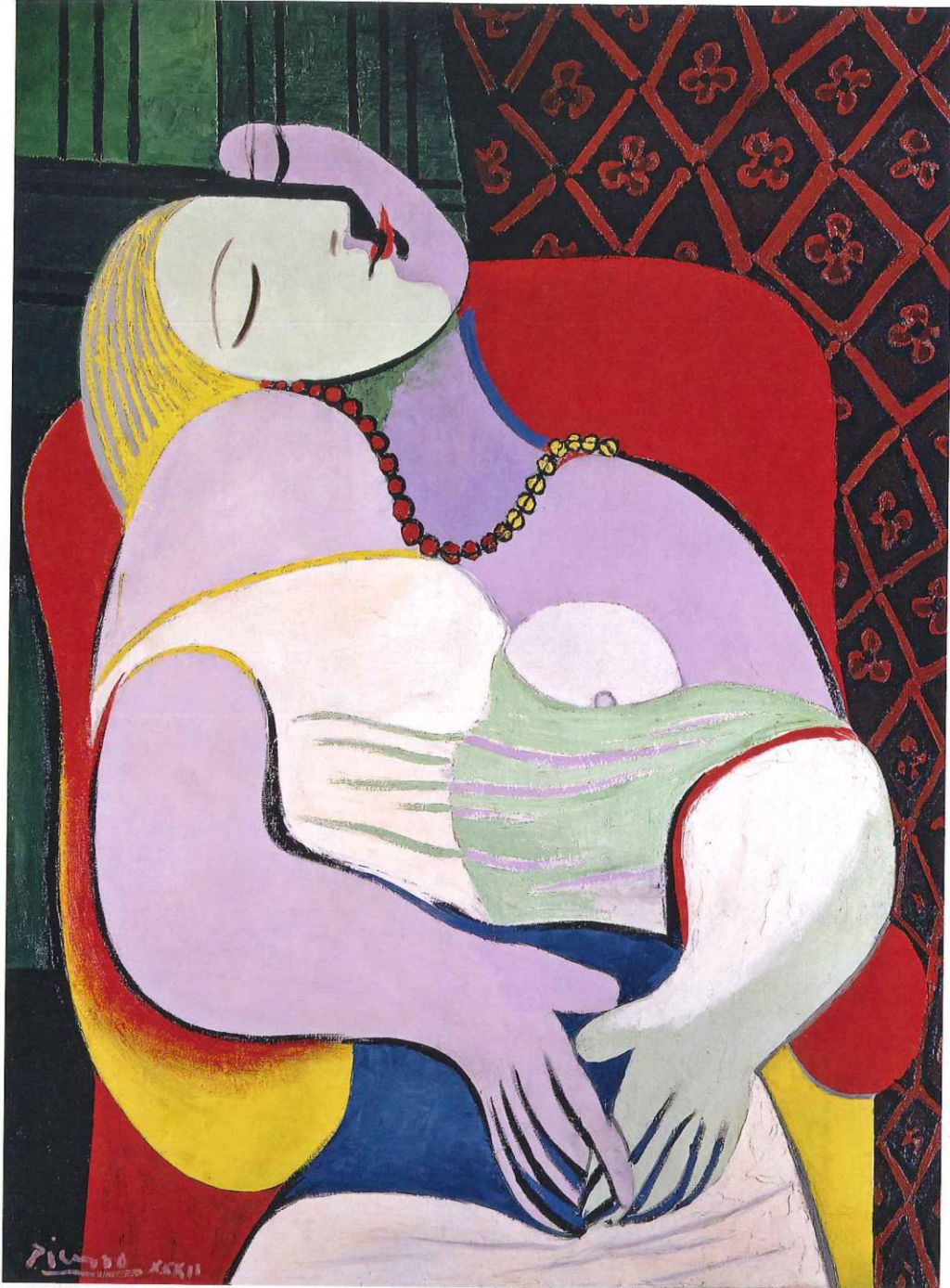
There is a thin line between beauty and monstrosity in Picasso's work of this period – a reflection of both the troubling times in which he lived and his attraction to the unknowable and dangerous human spirit within. In his overtly surrealist work *Rest*, in which he blurs the boundaries between elation, abandonment and composure, he may be acting out the complexities and contradictions that family life and 15 years of marriage to Olga had brought.



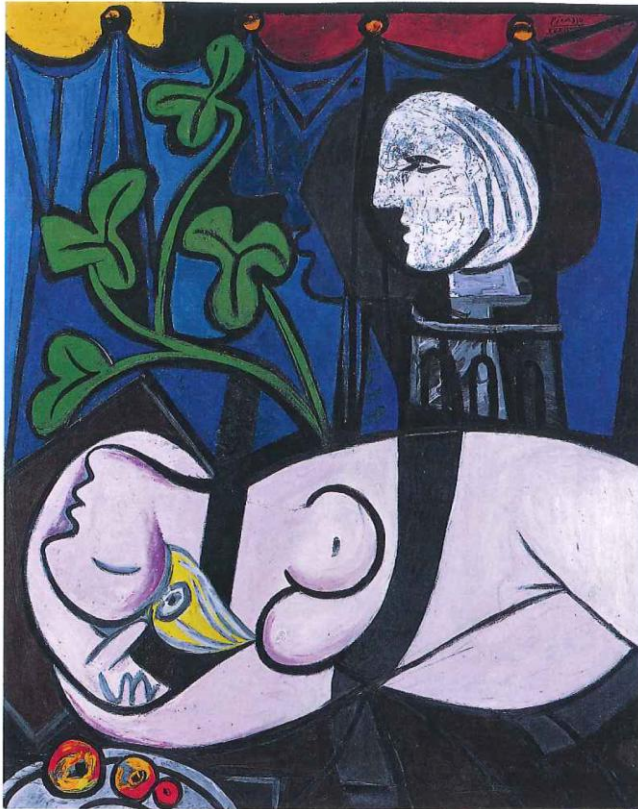
Olga Picasso with Bob
the Great Pyrenees
dog at Boisgeloup,
early 1930s

Ukrainian-born Olga Khokhlova (1891–1954) was with Picasso from 1917 to 1935. He first saw her as she rehearsed for one of Diaghilev's ballets and immediately fell for her. 15 months later they were married.

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Pablo Picasso
*Nude, Green Leaves
and Bust*, painted 8 March
1932, oil paint on
canvas, 162 × 130 cm

Over a period of only five days in March, Picasso had an astonishing burst of creative energy in which he produced three great paintings – *Nude, Green Leaves and Bust* on 8 March, *Nude in a Black Armchair* on 9 March and *The Mirror* on 12 March. The art dealer Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler described seeing the works to the French writer Michel Leiris: 'Two days ago, at his place, we saw two paintings he had just done. Two nudes that are perhaps the greatest, most moving things he has produced ... We came away from there stunned.'

Pablo Picasso
The Dream,
painted 24 January
1932, oil paint on
canvas, 130 × 97 cm

One of Picasso's best-known paintings from this period, *The Dream* shows a woman in a state of complete abandon, or perhaps post-coital slumber. While the subject is generally perceived to be Marie-Thérèse, Picasso was less concerned with painting portraits of specific people, and more engaged in expressing his (sometimes conflicted) state of mind.

Marie-Thérèse Walter
at the age of 19
with her mother's
dog, Dolly, in 1928

Picasso first met the young Marie-Thérèse Walter outside the Galeries Lafayette department store in Paris in 1927. It would mark the beginning of a love affair that would last for over eight years. Marie-Thérèse was the physical antithesis of Olga: an athletic blonde with striking blue eyes. She gave Picasso a daughter, Maya, in 1935, but a year later she would be replaced in his affections by the photographer and painter Dora Maar.





The photographer
Brassai visits
Picasso's Paris
apartment and studio:

'As at the Bateau-Lavoir, he again rented ... two apartments, identical and on consecutive floors: one to live in, the other to work in. The lower floor became one of the centres of society life, the upper floor his studio. The contrast between them was striking: downstairs, there was a large dining room ... No clutter, not a speck of dust. Polished, gleaming wood floors and furniture. The extraordinary thing was that, apart from the fireplace mantel, where a bit of his imagination showed through, nothing bore his mark ... This middle apartment was completely unlike his usual surroundings. There were none of the extraordinary furnishings he was so crazy about, none of the strange objects he liked to have

around him, there were no piles, nothing scattered about, as was his wont.

'[Upstairs] I was expecting an artist's studio, but it was an apartment turned pigsty. No middle-class home had ever been less middle class in its furnishings. Four or five rooms – each with a marble fireplace with a mirror above it – were entirely devoid of all their usual furnishings but filled with piles of paintings, cardboard boxes, parcels, and bundles, most of them containing casts of his statues, heaps of books, reams of paper, odd assortments of objects set every which way against the walls and on the floor, and covered with a thick layer of dust ... Picasso had set up his easel in the most spacious, best-lit room – probably the former parlour – the only one that was summarily furnished ... Except for a few friends, Picasso allowed no one in.'



Picasso's home
and studio on rue
La Boétie, Paris.
Photographed by Sir
Cecil Beaton (left),
Brassai (right)

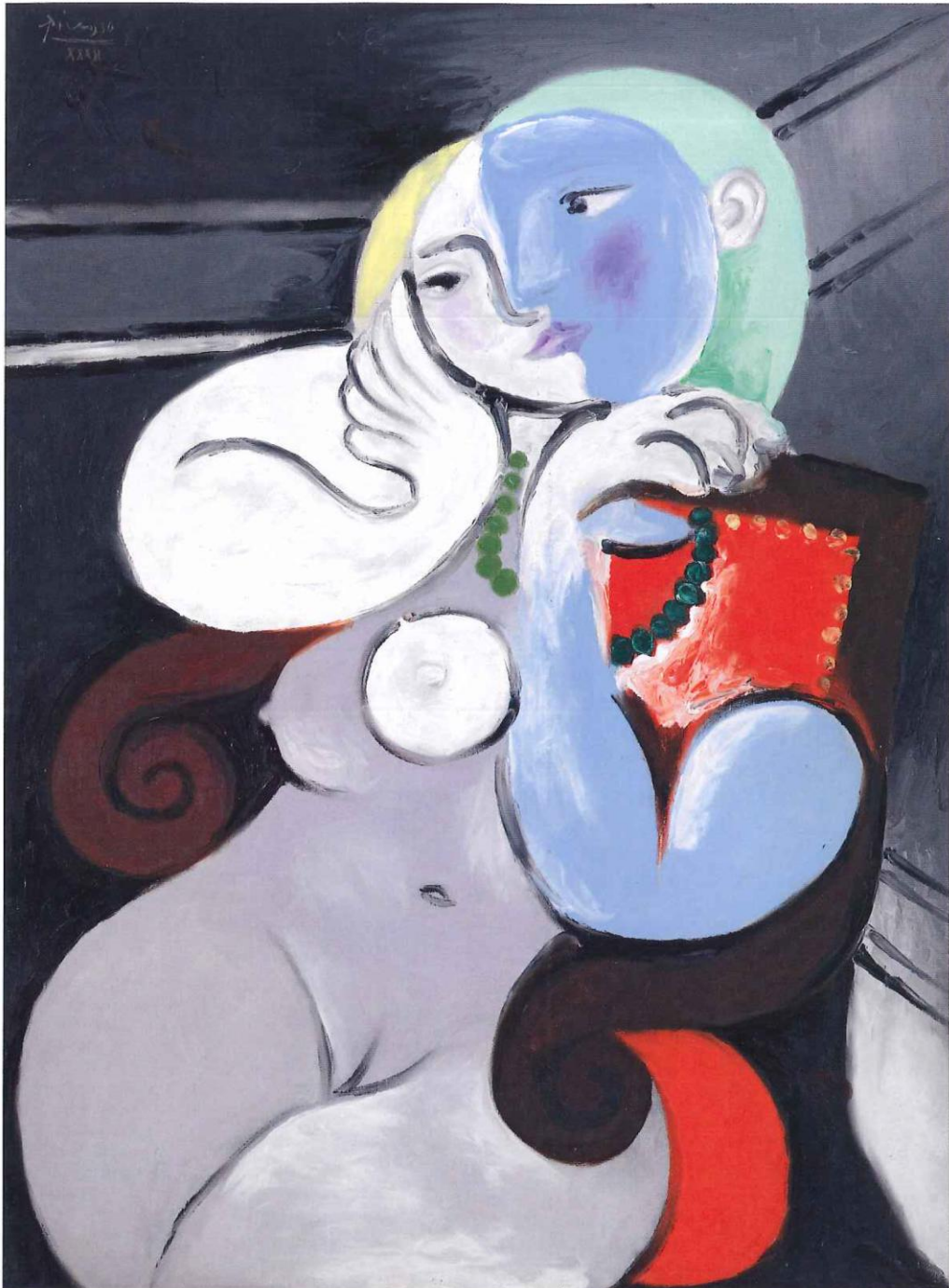
View of Picasso's
Boisgeloup studio
showing his sculptures
Head of a Woman 1932
and *Bust of a Woman*
1932. Photographed
by Brassai, 1932

'Picasso gave us the owner's tour at a dead run. It was an odd castle: most of the rooms were unfurnished, with simply a few large Picassos here and there on the bare walls. Picasso himself lived with Olga and Paulo in two small rooms in the attic ... "There are too many sculptures to photograph and it will soon be dark," he said, leading us towards a row of cowsheds, stables, and barns, in the courtyard facing the house ... He could finally satisfy a desire that had long been suppressed: to sculpt large statues. He opened the door of one of these large stalls, and we were able to see the dazzling whiteness of an entire people of sculptures.'

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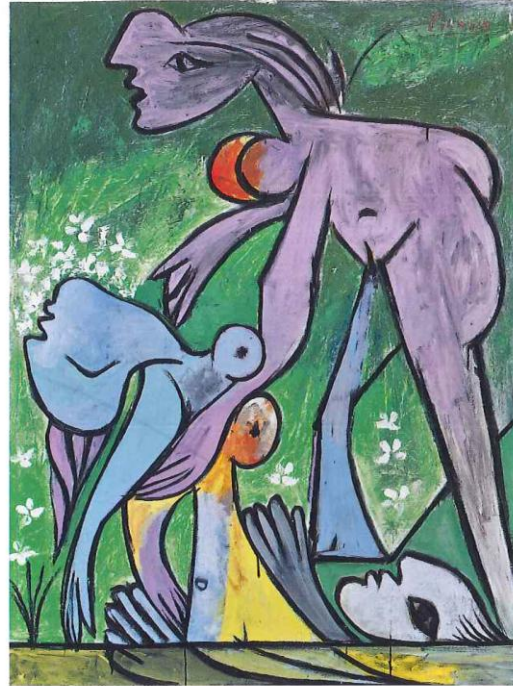


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Pablo Picasso
The Rescue, made
in December 1932,
graphite on paper,
11 × 16 cm

In the final months of 1932, Marie-Thérèse contracted a severe intestinal illness after swimming in the sewage-polluted waters of the Marne River, Île-de-France, a place where she would often go rowing. The event deeply affected Picasso and, as she convalesced, he started a series of drawings and paintings on the theme of rescue. Some of these would be done in a darker palette, many with angular lines and a more abstract approach than works from previous months.



Pablo Picasso
The Rescue,
painted December
1933, oil paint on
canvas, 73 × 92 cm

Pablo Picasso
Nude in a Red Armchair,
painted 27 July 1932,
oil paint on canvas,
130 × 97 cm

On the back of this canvas Picasso wrote in paint the date of its making, perhaps to indicate that he painted it in a single day. His technique suggests that he did. Close inspection of the painting reveals the different approaches he used: in some places smudging the paint, in others carving it out to create a more three-dimensional appearance. There is no reworking of painted areas, no sections erased and begun again, all of which show how much of a risk-taker Picasso was when creating his art.



Guests at the opening
of Picasso's exhibition
at Galerie Georges
Petit, June 1932

Picasso's retrospective exhibition was an important milestone. Eager to ensure its success, he installed the pictures himself. Instead of a chronological hang, Picasso set out a densely stacked arrangement of works from different periods (and without wall labels) that accentuated the radical nature of his stylistic developments. The exhibition was reviewed widely at home and abroad, and, while it divided opinion, it would ultimately assure Picasso's fame.

George Condo on Picasso's
Woman in a Red Armchair 1932

Woman in a Red Armchair is one of the paintings that has most influenced me. It led me to reconsider how the human figure could be constructed – by using the methods of the old masters, and then radicalising that language by introducing contemporary images from my own imagination.

Picasso uses the concept of volume to create an assemblage of bone-like forms that fall within the existing shadows and depths of the red armchair, producing a masterpiece of warm, figurative abstraction located in space. This piece is the sum total of Picasso's so-called 'Dinard' sketchbooks, finally realised in their most complete essence. The volume of the forms captured at the seaside town – boulders, bones, pieces of wood, sticks and stones – all suggest sculptural figures.

In 1932, with another seated figure of a woman in a red armchair (the light lavender tone is reminiscent of the one used in the paintings of Marie-Thérèse), Picasso left his neo-classical phase behind, taking his art back to the 16th and 17th centuries. He began to view the works of Rembrandt, Velázquez, David and Cranach not just as paintings, but also subject matter that he would introduce into his works, starting in the 1950s and continuing until the end of his life.

The paintings that Picasso began to produce in the 1930s certainly go beyond any simplistic rendering of any particular person. Rarely did he title a painting by the name of its model. In *Woman in a Red Armchair*, his use of chiaroscuro, in some remote way, mirrors both the light and depth seen in early baroque paintings, such as Caravaggio's *Youth with a Ram* 1602. Picasso's work seems also to be a reconfiguration of

Caravaggio's painting – whether subconsciously or intentionally, one can only postulate. On comparing elements of Picasso's painting with the boy's red robe, his body's physical position, the form's light and volume, as well as the head of the ram, one can see evidence of the same parts and pieces played out in an entirely different manner.

Reconfiguration has played an enormous role in my own paintings: a work that seems to have nothing to do with the final product is in fact its origin – such as David's portrait *Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier and His Wife* 1788 and my work *The Insane Cardinal* 2003. These ideas somehow come from a reverse construction, rather than the deconstructive method of work most commonly associated with Picasso.

All this said, I believe Picasso's greatest influence on me has nothing to do with his actual paintings, because they are, I think, untouchable. It is rather his way of thinking – the freedom of his approach to imagery, and its further potential. This has liberated me from the historical placement, or chronological order, of time, revealing the infinite possibilities of an interchangeable sense of time on the journey towards a new plastic form, one realised by the appearance of a presence from an original source. This process of transforming or reassembling a new image from the parts and pieces of a work's initial material form is, I believe, key to understanding that work's relativity and its influence in art.

A selection of works by George Condo is on display at Tate Modern.
George Condo is an artist who lives and works in New York.



Pablo Picasso
*Woman in a Red
Armchair*, painted
27 January 1932,
oil paint on canvas
144 x 112 cm

George Condo
*Seated Girl in
Green Chair* 2007,
oil paint on canvas,
109.2 x 97.8 cm

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