

Picasso - Seminar 2

Background Notes

Bernard Courtis - 17 March 2009

WAHG

Picasso: Lecture Notes N°2

HIS WOMEN

“Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon. When we love a woman we don’t start measuring her limbs” Picasso

Introduction

Picasso needed and pursued the company of women. Much of his art revolves around his relations with his various mistresses and wives. These relationships were sometimes overlapping, sometimes private and sometimes public. It has been said that Picasso changed his companions as often as he changed painting styles. He had eight major relationships and many more casual encounters.ⁱ Some critics go so far as to state that a new relationship signalled a new style but this is not supported by the evidence of his production. Many of his portraits are of his wives, mistresses and children. Picasso had two wives (Olga and Jacqueline) and four acknowledged children by three women, two of whom were his mistresses.ⁱⁱ

The artistic interest in these relationships is that from his first visit to Paris in 1900 he used *his* women not only as sexual companions but also as models. In his entire artistic endeavours it appears that he used only one professional model – Jeanne - in 1901. Thus a study of his production during his various relationships provides an interesting insight into his various styles.

ⁱ The names of the women who had major relationship are printed in **RED**

ⁱⁱ Olga was the mother of his son Paul (1921); Maïa’s was the daughter of Marie-Thérèse (1935); Claude (1947) and Paloma (1949) were the children of Françoise Gilot.

During his years at art school Picasso drew from casts, more often than from life, his first models were members of his immediate family, primarily his father José Ruiz Blasco, whom Picasso often painted and drew throughout the 1890s. Picasso's sister Lola served as his other principal model up to the time of his first visit to Paris in late 1900. The fact that he drew and painted her so often allowed him to experiment with his approach to the female figure, in this case always clothed. The models at art school were generally male, and it was not until he reached Paris that he had ready access to female nudity.

1900 – 1904

He drew and painted several women in Spain during this period and most of the latter art work appears to be sketches that were later worked into paintings. In 1902 and 1903 he drew several nudes but there is nothing to suggest that he formed any strong liaison in Spain though there is anecdotal evidence that he visited brothels.

In France it was a different matter. On his first visit in the autumn 1900 three young women moved into the studio that he shared with his friends Casagemas and Pallares. Louise Lenoir who called herself Odette, became Picasso's girlfriend. She spoke no Spanish and he at the time spoke very little French. It did not seem to matter and the six of them drew up a timetable to allow time for painting, visiting art galleries and the delights of sex. In 1901 on his second visit to Paris Picasso had a liaison with Germaine Florentin who had been Casagemas' girl friend. Casagemas only a few months previously had committed suicide because he could not satisfy her.

1904-1912

Artist model **Fernande Olivier** (1881-1966) was Picasso's first long term relation and subject of many of Picasso's Rose Period paintings (1905-07). Picasso met her after settling in Paris in 1904. Yet Madeleineⁱⁱⁱ was the woman that is credited by some critics to have inspired Picasso to change style from his *blue period*. Madeleine was for a short period Picasso's mistress and model; she had an abortion and disappeared from Art history books. Fernande modelled for other artists between 1900 and 1905 after which she moved in with Picasso, who then prevented her from modelling for others. Although Fernande was married, she stayed with Picasso for 7 years. Fernande's having published selections from the memoirs of her life with Picasso infuriated the artist but eventually, at age 70, Picasso paid the ailing and bedridden Fernande a small pension. The full memoir was not published until 1988, *"Loving Picasso"*. In early 2004 the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. had an exhibition of 60 portraits of Fernande that Picasso painted in a few months of 1909

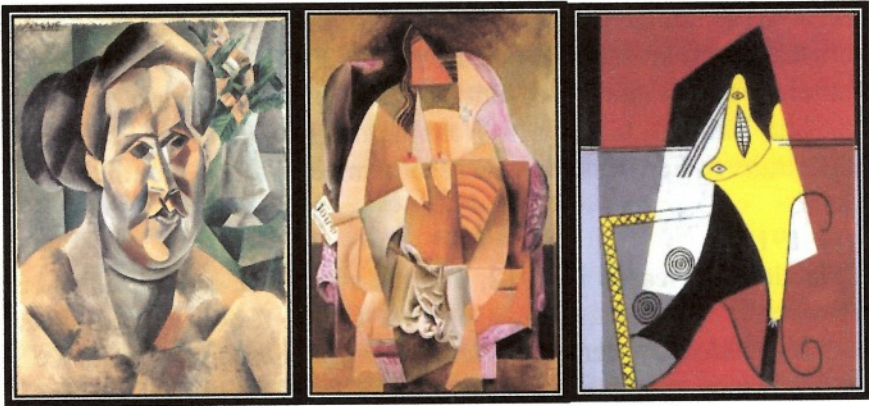
1912-1915

Fernande left Picasso in 1912, months after Picasso took an interest in **Marcelle Humbert**, known as Eva Gouel (1885-1915). Picasso was devastated by her early death due to tuberculosis or cancer in 1915. Picasso professed his love to Eva by painting *"I Love Eva"* in some of his paintings. Nevertheless, during Eva's sickness Picasso managed a relationship with Gaby Lespinasse.

ⁱⁱⁱ Surname unknown

1917-1927

In 1917 a ballerina with Sergei Diaghilev's troupe. **Olga Khokhlova** (1891-1955) met Picasso while the artist was designing the ballet "Parade" in Rome, to be performed by the Ballet Russe. They married in the Russian Orthodox church in Paris in 1918 and lived a life of conflict. She was of high society and enjoyed formal events while Picasso was more bohemian in his interests and pursuits. Their son Paulo was born in 1921 influencing Picasso's imagery to turn to mother and child themes. Picasso and Olga later separated although they remained married until she died in 1955. Picasso refused Olga a divorce as this would entail Olga receiving half his wealth.



Fernande

Marcelle

Olga

1927-1936

In 1927 Picasso met **Marie-Thérèse Walter** (1909-1977), a 17 year old who Picasso then lived with in a flat across the street from his marital home while still married to Olga. Marie-Thérèse and Picasso

had a daughter, Maya on October 1935. Picasso's relation with Marie was kept from Olga until Olga was told of Marie's pregnancy. Marie understandably became jealous when Picasso started to fall in love with Dora Maar in 1936, a year after Maya was born. It was Marie-Thérèse who was the inspiration for many of Picasso's famous *Vollard Suite* etchings. Marie-Thérèse died by hanging herself in 1977^{iv}



Marie-Thérèse



Dora.



Jacqueline

1936-1944

In 1936 54-year old Picasso met Yugoslavian Dora Maar (1907 - 1997), the photographer who documented Picasso's painting of *Guernica*, the 1937 painting of Picasso's depiction of the German's having bombed the Basque city of Guernica, Spain during the Spanish Civil War. She became Picasso's constant companion and lover from 1936 through April, 1944. Maar went back to painting and exhibited in Paris soon after Picasso left her for Françoise Gilot.

^{iv}In 2004 Maya's son, Olivier Widmaier wrote "*Picasso: The Real Family Story*"

Picasso referred to Dora as his "private muse". In later years she became a recluse, dying poor and alone. An artist herself she was probably the only one of two of his companions who fully understood Picasso's art^v

1943-1953

In 1943 Picasso (age 62) then kept company with a young art and law student^{vi} **Françoise Gilot** (born in 1921). Their two children were Claude (1947) and Paloma (1949) who was named for the dove of peace that Picasso painted in support of the peace movement post World War II. Gilot, frustrated with Picasso's relationships with other woman and his abusive nature left him in 1953. She became a well known artist who exhibited in France, England and USA and she illustrated four books of her poems. Gilot's book "*Life with Picasso*" was published 11 years after their separation. In 1970 she married American physician-researcher Jonas Salk.^{vii} She was appointed visiting professor of the Department of Painting, Drawing, and Etching at the University of California at Idyllwild.

1951-1953

In 1944 17-year old **Genevieve Laporte** (born in 1927) interviewed Picasso for a school newspaper. Years later in May 1951 Picasso began an affair with the then -24 year old. The relationship started when Laporte visited the 70-year old Picasso at his studio while he was still living with Françoise Gilot. That summer of 1951 Picasso took Laporte to St Tropez, leaving Françoise behind. After declining

^v The other being Françoise Gilot

^{vi} She studied law at the Sorbonne

^{vii} Best known for developing the first successful vaccine for polio

Picasso's invitation to move in with him in St. Tropez, she left him in 1953 at the same time that Françoise left the artist.

She survived Picasso becoming an award-winning poet and documentary filmmaker. In 1972 she went public with the affair and stored the art that Picasso created of her in a safe. In 2005 aged 79, she auctioned 20 ink, charcoal and pencil sketches of her that Picasso created during their secret affair and made £1.02 million. Picasso's time with Laporte has been referred to as Picasso's "*tender period*".

1953-1973

Dejected and alone, in 1953 Picasso met **Jacqueline Roque** (1926 - 1986) at the Madoura Pottery where Picasso created his ceramics. In 1961 (when Picasso was 79) she became his second wife. Picasso created more works of art based on Jacqueline than any of his other loves, in one year painting over 70 portraits of her.

When Picasso died on April 8, 1973, Jacqueline, who had been with Picasso for 20 years, prevented Picasso's children Claude and Paloma from attending his funeral. Jacqueline died from shooting herself in 1986.

A summary

Picasso was an intelligent, egoistic, energetic, artistically innovative and talented man with a vile temper who attracted women some of whom were intelligent, well educated and had artistic talents. He could be charming and witty. This energetic dynamo of a man had a life long fascination with the female body and he used his depictions of it to express his artistic innovations and desires and in the process often grossly distorted the beauty of the model. Yet in some instances he thereby emphasised her essential aesthetic radiance.

Melissa McQuillan sums up Picasso's relationship with women as follows^{viii}

"...Among his wives and mistresses only Olivier^{ix} emerged relatively unscathed from the relationship: Koklova's behaviour became extreme, Maar had a nervous breakdown, Walter and Roque both later committed suicide. Success or failure in managing his relationships also affected Picasso's self-assurance and ability to work. He once referred to women as either goddesses or doormats, and in his imagery he used women both as objects of sensuous contemplation and as aggressive monsters carved up and distorted to a degree rarely seen in his treatment of male figures. Visual knowledge and possession of the body in its totality, especially the female body, were central to his work, acutely so in his later pictures, in which the sexual act became a metaphor for making art and voyeurism for viewing. Such general attitudes, encouraged by his culture, rather than the frequently cited personal events, are the substantial foundation for the role of women in his work. Picasso took advantage of the indulgences allowed to creative men needing a muse, even if only to destroy her in the process."

According to Coco Chanel, ***"Picasso did a great job of hoovering up anyone in his path."***

^{viii} Melissa McQuillan From Grove Art Online 2007

^{ix} McQuillan is incorrect both Françoise Gilot and Genevieve Laporte went on to have successful lives