

Picasso and British Modernism

Background notes

Richard Stemp - 11 December 2019



'Pablo Picasso and first wife Olga Khokhlova outside the Alhambra Theatre, Leicester Square, for the première of *The Three Cornered Hat* in 1919'



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Pablo Picasso, 1881 – 1973

- 1881 Pablo Ruiz y Picasso is born in Málaga on 25th October
- 1888 Pablo receives tuition in drawing from his father, the artist José Ruiz y Blasco, a teacher at the School of Fine Arts.
- 1891 The family moves from Málaga to A Coruña , where his father again teaches at the School of Fine Arts.
- 1895 The family moves to Barcelona, where his father takes up a similar position at the School of Fine Arts. Pablo is admitted to the School at the age of 13.
- 1898 At the age of 16 Pablo is admitted to the Real Academia di Bellas Artes di San Fernando in Madrid, but formal tuition does not suit him. His work is signed 'Pablo Ruiz y Picasso'.
- 1900 Pablo has his first solo exhibition at *Els Quatre Gats*, Barcelona, including the painting *Last Moments* (later repainted as *La Vie*). Later in the year he and his friend Carlos Casagemas move to Paris.
- 1901 The death of Casagemas triggers Picasso's 'Blue Period', which lasts until around 1904. From 1901 onwards his work is signed 'Pablo Picasso', or increasingly, simply 'Picasso'.
- c. 1904-06 Rose Period
- 1907 'Primitivism'

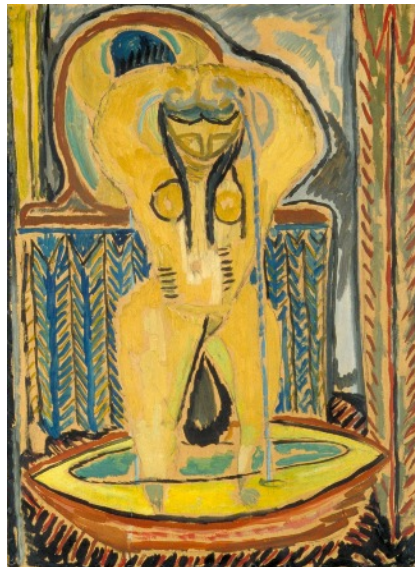
Augustus John is one of the first British artists to see Picasso's work and sees *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* in the workshop. He writes to his friend, the painter Henry Lamb, "I saw a young artist called Picasso whose work is wonderful." Wyndham Lewis appears to be the first British artist to be influenced by *Les Demoiselles* (*The Theatre Manager*, 1909).

- c. 1908-11 Analytic Cubism
- 1910 Roger Fry stages *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* at the Grafton Galleries, but Picasso is only a peripheral figure.
- 1911 Vanessa and Clive Bell buy *Jars and Lemon*, the first Picasso to enter a British collection. Vanessa writes to her sister Virginia Stephen (later Woolf), 'We're in a huge state of excitement having just bought a Picasso for £4... I wonder how you'll like it. It's "cubist" and very beautiful colour, a small still life.'

After Wyndham Lewis, the Bloomsbury Group are the first to show the influence of Picasso's work.



Pablo Picasso, *Jars and Lemon*, 1907



Duncan Grant, *The Tub*, c.1913

- c. 1911-14 Synthetic Cubism
- 1912 Picasso's first solo exhibition in London at the Stafford Gallery, consisting mainly of drawings from the Rose and Blue Periods. That these are not the most recent works is acknowledged by Frank Rutter in his review in *The Sunday Times* of 28th April 1912, where he points out that, "In London we have to take our foreign art as we can get it, not necessarily in the order of its appearance."

The Second Post-Impressionist Exhibition at the Grafton Galleries elevates Picasso to the apex of the modern movement, and includes 12 of his paintings, focussing on Cubist works.

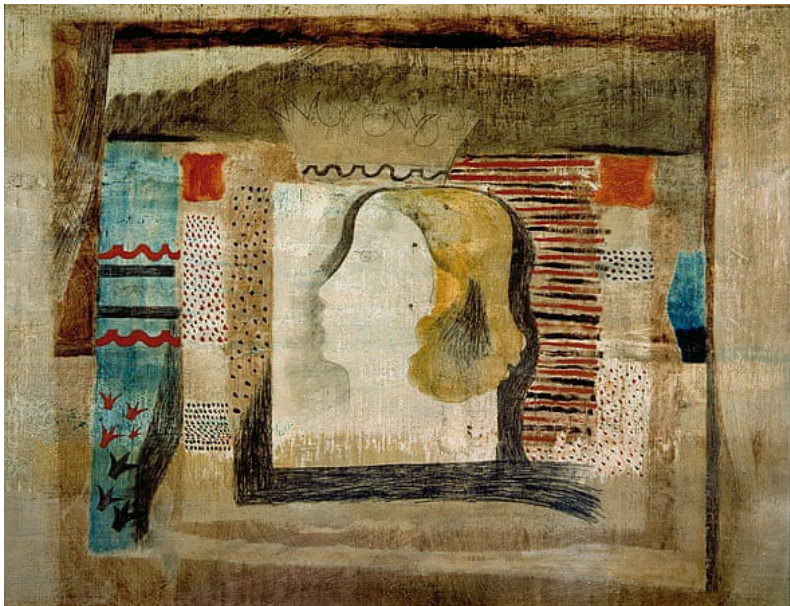
- 1913 *Head of a Man* purchased by Roger Fry, the only work by Picasso he ever owns.
- 1914 Gertrude Stein takes Roger Fry and Clive & Vanessa Bell to Picasso's studio. Vanessa writes to fellow Bloomsbury Group artist Duncan Grant, "The whole studio seemed to be bristling with Picassos. All the bits of wood and frames had become like his pictures. Some of the newest ones are very lovely I thought. One gets hardly any idea of them from the photographs, which often don't show what is picture and what isn't. They are amazing arrangements of coloured papers and bits of wood, which somehow do give me great satisfaction. He wants to carry them out in iron. Roger recommended aluminium, which rather took his fancy. Of course the present things are not at all permanent. He also showed us a lot of paintings he had done when he was 10, which were rather interesting, very laborious and careful. There were also more portraits of the blue period. **I came to the conclusion that he is probably one of the greatest geniuses that has ever lived.**"

- 1917 Picasso designs *Parade* for the Ballets Russes
- 1918 He marries ballerina Olga Khokhlova
- 1919 Picasso and Olga come to London with the Ballets Russes, where he designs *The Three-Cornered Hat*
- 1921 An exhibition of Picasso's work at the Leicester Galleries attracts a large audience, mixed reviews, but few sales. There isn't another exhibition for a decade.

Ben Nicholson and Henry Moore become increasingly interested in, and influenced by, Picasso's work.



Pablo Picasso, *Guitar, Compote Dish and Grapes*, 1924



Ben Nicholson, *Crowned head – the queen*, 1932

- 1931 The exhibition *Thirty years of Pablo Picasso* is mounted by Alex Reid and Lefevre Gallery. P.G.Konody's review in *The Observer* indicates how finally, at the age of fifty, Picasso's work is beginning to be appreciated by the British public. He says, "[This exhibition] should leave little doubt that he is the dominating, the most significant and the most inspiring figure in twentieth-century art."
- 1933 As a (delayed) result of the success of the 1931 exhibition the Tate Gallery purchases the first painting by Pablo Picasso to enter a British public collection. However *Flowers* (1901) is in no way typical of any of Picasso's innovative developments.

In the same year the Tate Gallery acquires three more works by Picasso when *Horse with a Youth in Blue*, *Girl in a Chemise* and *Seated Woman in a Chemise* are bequeathed to the institution by Dutch collector, C. Frank Stoop.

- 1938-39 *Guernica* and associated works are exhibited in London, at the New Burlington Galleries, and later at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, where the price of admission is a pair of boots. The related paintings and works on paper are also shown in Oxford and Leeds. *Guernica* is also exhibited in a car showroom on Manchester's Victoria Street in February 1939.
- 1939 The first painting by Pablo Picasso to enter a British public collection outside London (*Blue Roofs, Paris*, 1902) is bequeathed to the Ashmolean Museum by Bolton mill-owner and collector Frank Hindley Smith.

Throughout this period Henry Moore continues to be inspired by different aspects of Picasso's work, as are Francis Bacon (yet to develop his own, distinctive style) and Graham Sutherland.



Pablo Picasso, *The Three Dancers*, 1925



Graham Sutherland, *The Deposition*, 1946

- 1960 A retrospective at the Tate Gallery, selected by Surrealist artist and Tate board member Roland Penrose, and organised by the Arts Council, is the most comprehensive exhibition of Picasso's work to date. Five years later, after protracted negotiations, *The Three Dancers* is acquired by the Tate. Penrose had initially thought that Picasso would be reluctant to sell, but Picasso's comment to him suggests otherwise: "If it gave them pleasure that would be good."

With shifting interests and techniques in art in the post war period, fewer artists are inspired by the now elderly genius. An exception is David Hockney, who acknowledges his admiration for Picasso, quotes from his work, and seeks equivalent ways of expressing his own ideas.

Reading List

James Beechey and Chris Stephens (eds), *Picasso & Modern British Art*, Tate, 2012

The catalogue to the Tate exhibition from 2012 is the most comprehensive exploration of this subject, and basically the only thing you need to read!

Timothy Hilton, *Picasso*, Thames and Hudson, 1976

The *World of Art* series is always a good bet, and although not the most brilliantly illustrated, this is one of the best starting points as an introduction to Picasso's work.

Patrick O'Brian, *Picasso: A Biography*, Harper Collins, 2010

A well-reviewed biography – not as detailed, perhaps, as John Richardson's three-volume epic, but far cheaper and easier to carry...

John Berger, *Success and Failure of Picasso*, Vintage International, 1998

I haven't read this book, but Berger is always a stimulating and original author. It will undoubtedly make you think about Picasso in a different light.

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