

20th Century Genius:

Pablo Picasso

Pablo Picasso was probably the most famous artist of the twentieth century. During his artistic career, which lasted more than 75 years, he created thousands of works, not only paintings but also sculptures, prints, and ceramics, using all kinds of materials. He almost single-handedly created modern art. He changed art more profoundly than any other artist of this century.

First famous for his pioneering role in Cubism, Picasso continued to develop his art with a pace and vitality comparable to the accelerated technological and cultural changes of the twentieth century. Each change embodied a radical new idea, and it might be said that Picasso lived several artistic lifetimes.

Picasso was born on October 25, 1881, in Malaga, Spain, son of an artist, Jose Ruiz, and Maria Picasso. Rather than adopt the common name Ruiz, the young Picasso took the name of his mother. At the age of 14, completed the one-month qualifying examination of the Academy of Fine Arts in Barcelona in one day. From there he went to the Academy of San Fernando in Madrid, returning in 1900 to Barcelona.

The years of 1901 to 1904, known as the "blue period" because of the blue tonality of Picasso's paintings were a time of frequent changes of residence between Barcelona and Paris. During this period, he would spend his days in Paris studying the masterworks at the Louvre and his nights enjoying the company of fellow artists at cabarets like the Lapin Agile.

1905 and 1906 marked a radical change in color and mood for Picasso. He became fascinated with the acrobats, clowns and wandering families of the circus world. He started to paint in subtle pinks and grays, often highlighted with brighter tones. This was known as his "rose period."

In 1907, Picasso painted "Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)," considered the watershed picture of the twentieth century, and met Georges Braque, the other leading figure of the Cubist movement. Cubism was equally the creation of Picasso and Braque and from 1911 to 1913; the two men were in frequent contact. In 1917, Picasso did the set and costume design for Serge Diaghilev's ballet "Parade."

For Picasso the 1920's were years of rich artistic exploration and great productivity. Picasso continued to design theater sets and painted in Cubism, which are characterized as classical and surreal modes. From 1929 to 1931, he pioneered wrought iron sculpture with his old friend Julio Gonzalez. In the early 1930's, Picasso did a large quantity of graphic illustrations.

In 1969, his 88th year, he produced out of his volcanic energy a total of 165 paintings and 45 drawings, which were exhibited at the Palace of the Popes in Avignon, France. One of his masterpieces was the monumental "Guernica," painted in 1937 and on loan for many years to the Museum of Modern Art in New York. An oil on canvas 11 1/4 feet high and 25 1/2 feet long, it is a majestic, stirring indictment of the destructiveness of modern war. By the late '30s, Picasso was the most famous artist in the world. Many other paintings from this period reflect the horror of war, but there is a consistent depiction of personal interest as well. The women in Picasso's life had a major impact on his artistic production, and some of the best examples are from this period.

During World War II, Picasso lived in Paris, where he turned his energy to the art of ceramics. From 1947 to 1950, he pursued new methods of lithography. The 1950's saw the beginning of a number of large retrospective exhibits of his works. During this time he began to paint a series of works conceived as free variations on old master paintings. In the 1960's, he produced a monumental 50-foot sculpture for the Chicago Civic Center. In 1970, Picasso donated more than 800 of his works to the Berenguer de Aguilar Palace Museum in Barcelona.

As Picasso's fame grew, so did his income until it got so that he could manufacture money by sketching a few lines on a piece of paper and tacking on his dramatic signature. He was probably the world's highest paid pieceworker, and there were many years in which he garnered more than \$1-million.

Picasso the neoclassicist; Picasso the cubist; Picasso the surrealist; Picasso the modernist; Picasso the ceramist; Picasso the lithographer; Picasso the sculptor; Picasso the superb draftsman; Picasso the effervescent and exuberant; Picasso the saturnine and surly; Picasso the faithful and faithless lover; Picasso the cunning financial man; Picasso the publicity seeker; Picasso the smoldering Spaniard; Picasso the joker and performer of charades; Picasso the generous; Picasso the Scrooge; even Picasso the playwright.

Pablo Picasso died on April 8, 1973 in Mougins, France at the age of 91. A genius for the ages, Pablo Picasso remains without doubt the most original, the most protean and the most forceful personality in the visual arts. He took his gift and with it transformed the universe of art. Even in his own lifetime Picasso was already the most famous living artist. Now, twenty years after his death, his artistic achievements has

gone down in history, his fame is as secure as ever, and his work and person still possess all their fascination for succeeding generations.

The one thing that holds Picasso's tremendous body of work together in spite of its unparalleled variety of styles is the sense it gives of restlessness, of dissatisfaction with any achievement, of constantly uncovering something new, of throwing it away, picking it up again, inventing, recombining, always searching. Picasso once said, "I do not seek--I find," but nothing he found ever satisfied him for long.

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