

*Pablo Picasso "Child Holding a Dove" 1901
National Gallery, London*

Analysis: Teacher's Notes

Doves are a recurring theme in Picasso's work. His father bred them and many of his childhood sketches included them. This work also represents a return to thoughts of his childhood and memories of his sister Conchita who died of diphtheria in 1895. Following her death, Picasso's work took on a new maturity and this contributed to the melancholy theme of his 'Blue Period'. "Child Holding a Dove" is painted just prior to the commencement of Picasso's 'Blue Period' and clearly shows the influences which shaped his early work. Renoir's gift for capturing the innocence of children without sentimentality is shown here together with the colour and contour of Gauguin. Traditional Spanish painting also helped shape Picasso's early stage and we can see movement away from the flat expanses of colour used by the Impressionists and the development of the moody spirit of desolation that characterized his 'Blue Period'.

At this time, Picasso was still living in Spain but travelled to Paris frequently and his work begins to take on a Parisian feel while still remaining essentially Spanish.

*Pablo Picasso "Mother and Child on the Seashore" 1902
Christies, London*

Analysis: Teacher's Notes

This is one of the 'Mastinites' paintings of Picasso's 'Blue Period' and shows a woman clutching an infant. The work illustrates the themes of poverty, blindness, love, death and maternity, which appear constantly throughout this period and centre around the seated figures of women. Picasso used disease-ridden prostitutes from the Saint-Lazare prison hospital as models for these works and their plight and the pathetic nature of their circumstances disturbed him deeply and accelerated his transition to blue paintings of unhappiness.

Picasso's subject wears the large wrap-around shawl commonly worn by Spanish women at this time and many refer to the work of El Greco which often featured a similar garment.

This was one of the few paintings Picasso sold during these early years and was bought by the wife of his paint supplier.

*Pablo Picasso "Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)" 1911-12
Museum of Modern Art, New York*

Analysis: Teacher's Notes

"Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)" was created from Picasso's memory of Barcelona prostitutes standing in the entrance to a brothel on the Carrer d'Avinyó and was met with shock and discomfort by his contemporaries. Picasso was heavily influenced by an exhibition of African art shown at the Trocadero and repainted the faces of the outer forms.

This is a very brave painting as Picasso had become relatively successful, yet he abandoned this to adopt a style which was a more powerful expression of the emotions which troubled him. It is a shockingly brutal destruction of the human figure which is quite unparalleled in western art and marked a turning point for both Picasso and for 20th century art in general.

The geometric nature of cubism is evident in the construction of the women who seem to stare viciously at the viewer.

*Pablo Picasso "The Bathers" 1918
Musée Picasso, Paris*

Analysis: Teacher's Notes

"The Bathers" was painted during the summer of 1918 towards the end of the war when Picasso discovered a beach at Biarritz, which was so seductive that it was almost possible to forget the horrors of the war. It is a frenzy of coloured rhythms. The distortion of the Mannerist painter Parmagianino are pushed to the extreme and the work also shows some debt to the romantic painter Ingres.

The painting features exuberant colour and features two figures revelling in the open air.

Newly married to Olga Koklova, Picasso spent much of his time painting in his studio at Biarritz. This was a relatively happy time for him and his output became very high.

"The Bathers" is one of the most exemplary creations of this time. A robust and vibrant composition, which was later used as a model for the murals painted on his bedroom wall.