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Humanities through the Arts

Paper Project

## **Pablo Picasso's works, featuring: *The Old Guitarist***

Pablo Picasso is by far one of the most influential artists of the nineteen-hundreds. He changed the meaning of art in so many ways, while showing that he had enormous skill, dedication and a little bit of craziness. His life spans many different perspectives in art, and his artistic timeline stretches, bends, twists, and even breaks in some points. From the Blue period, to sketches, to pure abstraction, this master of art was always able to get his point across; and quite wonderfully too. The two paintings of his that I have chosen to discuss are *The Old Guitarist* from the blue period, and ***Don Quixote***. These are examples of two different periods in Picasso's painting career, and provide great contrast to one another. Their form and content are very different, thus making it an interesting comparison.



Pablo Picasso's *The Old Guitarist* is by far one of the most fascinating paintings from his Blue period. This oil painting on panel is 122.9 x 82.6 cm. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml#](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml#)) The oil on this painting coincides with what Picasso was doing during this time period. Picasso used dark colors such as blues, blacks and grays to paint most of his pictures during his blue period, which lasted from 1901-1904. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) The painting itself was made in 1903, nearing the end of Picasso's Blue period. ([http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc\\_picasso.html](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc_picasso.html))

*The Old Guitarist* has very interesting form. From the way the picture is laid out, the size, to the very colors it is comprised of. As mentioned earlier, the painting is an oil on panel, which is 122.9 cm. x 82.6 cm. in size. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml#](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml#)) The oil on panel alone causes a dark and melodramatic look on the painting. Oil blends everything together, and makes colors stand out much more pronounced than regular mediums. So when Picasso was painting this he used a monochrome palette. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) This

basically means that the forms are flattened, with tragic and sorrowful themes.

([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) The size of the painting is relatively small to a lot of Picasso paintings in his later eras, as well as compared to many other artists. The size, which is about an inch and a half less than a foot, makes it seem like a nondescript portrait, downsizing the effect it would have on a person viewing it. I believe that this was done not to down size the effect of the painting, but to correctly metaphor the old man in the painting. As a person walking by a beggar on the side of the street, without taking a look at the person with any interest, so does Picasso try to convey this in his painting's size. The Blue period was known for forms similar to this *The Old Guitarist*. They all consisted of “melancholy figures, lost in contemplation” as said by a representative of the Boston Museum. (<http://www.boston.com/mfa/picasso/blue.html>) With the blue period of Picasso's life, he advanced as an artist, expanding his views and the way he painted. (<http://www.boston.com/mfa/picasso/blue.html>) “Details are eliminated and scale manipulated to heighten the impact of figures whose elongated proportions and attitudes of silent contemplation intensify a sense of spirituality”, says the same writer for the Boston Museum. Everything in the Blue period, comprised together, make this similar Picasso gallery of art, all with similar form.

Paintings, such as *The Old Guitarist*, were a part of Picasso's life that had deep meaning and the objects often reflected very tragic themes. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) Between 1901 and 1904 were the Blue Period years, years that showed the young Picasso struggle, poverty, wretchedness, and life how it truly is. Picasso began the Blue period shortly after a good friend of his committed suicide in Paris. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) After Picasso's friend's

sudden death, he started to find interest in that which is dark and downtrodden. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) It seemed as though he found solace in those that were poor, wretched, ill, and cast out of the general society, which was probably due not only to his friend's suicide, but also to the fact that all of 1902 Picasso was practically a poor wretch, and could understand the plight of those cast underneath "normal" society. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) Also, another factor leading to the Blue period, and the painting *The Old Guitarist*, was that Picasso was also trying to follow in the footsteps of Toulouse-Lautrec as well as other "modern artist's". ([http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc\\_picasso.html](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc_picasso.html)) His catch was that he consistently used his dark blue, to promote that "melancholy feel". ([http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc\\_picasso.html](http://www.artic.edu/aic/collections/modern/66pc_picasso.html)) His reasons for painting during the blue period were obviously affected by his surroundings. His life and the lives around him were implemented into these paintings, creating their current form and most importantly their content.

The content of the painting is very interesting. It is what grabs your attention about this painting, immediately deciding if you like it or not. Picasso was just starting the Blue Period, when the symbolist movement came about. ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) This painting in particular represented that movement, because of its constant association with the blind eyes, but ever constant "inner vision". ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccess/AA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) This is what one person said of the man in the picture, "This bent and sightless man holds close to him a large, round guitar. Its brown body represents the painting's only shift in color. Both physically and symbolically, the instrument fills the space around the solitary figure, who seems

oblivious to his blindness and poverty as he plays.” ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccessAA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccessAA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) The same person also went on to write, “The thin, skeleton like figure of the blind musician also has roots in art from Picasso’s native country, Spain. The old man’s elongated limbs and cramped, angular posture recall the figures of the great 16th-century artist El Greco.” ([http://www.artic.edu/artaccessAA\\_Modern/pages/MOD\\_1.shtml](http://www.artic.edu/artaccessAA_Modern/pages/MOD_1.shtml)) Lael Wartenbaker said this about the painting as well, “Such wretched creatures, many of them so blind, all of them alienated from society, became the principals of Picasso’s Blue period paintings. The use of monochrome served to dissociate these figures from time and place; it also served to emphasize that the joys of shifting light and varied color had no place in their bleak milieu. In all the works of the Blue Period, Picasso’s intent is perhaps most clearly set forth in *The Old Guitarist*, a study of a mystical El Greco-like figure sitting cross-legged. There’s little sign of life about the man; his shoulders are bony and his pose is cramped, as if to suggest that he finds no ease in the world around him”. (Wartenbaker, pg. 34) Her observance of the paintings content is superb, being able to make this painting seem as though it had more content and thought than any other painting conceived in the Blue Period. Another said that the painting was a “monumental allegory of human existence”. (<http://www.boston.com/mfa/picasso/blue.html>)