



Pablo Picasso was born on October 25, 1881 in Malaga, Spain. However, most of his life was spent in France. Picasso was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century, and he was largely known for his contributions as a painter, sculptor and designer. One of his most important stylistic inventions was the technique known as 'cubism'. No painter or sculptor, not even Michelangelo achieved so much fame in his lifetime as Picasso. Pablo Picasso based his works on moods such as gossip, adoration, rumors, etc. He changed art more profoundly than any other artist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Picasso lived a long life and died at the age of 91 on April 1973.

### Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)



Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* is one of the most important paintings to influence modern art. Picasso painted this in 1907, in his mid twenties. At the time, Picasso was competing with Henri Matisse, which encouraged him to put more effort into this piece of work. The painting depicts a figurative composition of five female prostitutes.

This painting was influenced by the barbaric qualities of primitive Iberian and African art, as well as Cézanne, another well-known artist. Picasso was influenced by a particular painting of Cézanne known as "Bathers." However, Picasso changed the style of his painting to a more contemporary and aggressive one. As Picasso says, "According to my first idea, there were also going to be men in the painting. There was a student holding a skull, and a sailor. The women were eating—that explains the basket of fruit that is still in the painting. Then it changed and became what it is now." From Cézanne's

paintings, Picasso understood realized that outlines of landscapes and bodies could be broken up, and that the hidden sensitive sides of perspective objects can also be shown.

The painting depicts five female prostitutes in a brothel. Rather than being portrayed as rounded volumes, the figures are composed of flat, splintered planes. The figures have their arms raised above their heads and are posed seductively. The prostitutes reveal themselves in a very dramatic manner, and have pushed aside two curtains. The middle figure and the one to her left gaze out with wide-eyed stares. The two women at the right threaten the viewer with scary masks. Another interesting effect of the picture is that the brothel, which would usually fade into a background, seems to come forward like shattered planes of glass.

When Picasso painted *les demoiselles d'Avignon*, the threat of dying from sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis was very common. The painting shows the bodies of the prostitutes being disfigured and out of shape. The distortion could be reflected by Picasso's fear and ambivalence towards women and the link between threats of death due to sexually transmitted diseases with his perception of sexual pleasure. The women in this painting are not very attractive, and this could also suggest Picasso's hate towards the threat of sexually transmitted diseases from prostitutes.

Picasso's friend, Andre Salmon chose the title for the painting and organized the exhibition where *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* was first exhibited. The word Avignon derives from the 'Calle Avignon', a street near Picasso's residence in Barcelona. This street was known for its brothel. Previously, Picasso and his friends referred to the painting as "Avignon Bordello," "The Philosophical Bordello," or "The Girls of Avignon." Picasso was said to have been "annoyed" with the new title, "the Demoiselles," because he thought that it sounded too polite and high-class for the sexual explicitness of the subject.

The solid outlining of the painting, sometimes containing tonal contrast, is thick and heavy. The form of the painting illustrates the fact that Picasso wasn't interested in describing tone, depth or form. There is also disorientation in space in the painting because there are no divisions of light and dark shades that help to shape the bodies of the women. In this painting, Picasso restructured the ideal form of female nude into harsh angular planes. The colors, which Picasso uses in this painting, are mostly soft tans and olive tones, and seem to give a serene mood. The outline of the figures are marked by either black or white. One figure at the left is marked by the cinnamon tone of the background. The figures in the middle take on a style used in Picasso's 'rose period'. There isn't much contrast used in the painting.

The responses of people upon seeing the painting varied. Some admired it while some detested it. When Picasso's colleague George Braque first saw the painting, he said it appeared that "Picasso had been drinking turpentine in order to spit fire." Many other people were also shocked. Picasso's patron, Leo Stein, sarcastically commented, "You've been trying to paint the fourth dimension. How amusing!" Henri Matisse said that he would "sink" his rival as he thought the painting was a complete disaster. The Russian collector Shchukin said, "What a loss for French art!" However, Daniel Henry Kahnweiler recognized the importance and value of the painting. He also bought all 31 introductory studies for it. He attempted to buy the painting as well, but Picasso said that it was not for sale.

Picasso publicly exhibited the painting 9 years after its completion. The influence of the painting spread like a 'shockwave'. This painting inspired western art in several ways. People began to experiment with new and more original ways of doing art, rather than the same methods as done in the past. The known limits of painting had been shattered. The tribal arts of Africa were virtually unknown to Picasso until his visit to Paris' Ethnographic Museum in the same year when he was working on *Les Femmes d'Alger*. Picasso was so impressed by the African art that he decided to rework his painting and change the faces of the two figures to the right.



Guernica

Picasso painted 'Guernica' in 1937. This painting had a very powerful 'anti war' statement. The painting protested against a massacre in a town of Spain called Guernica, in 1937, which is why the painting is also called 'Guernica'. The bombing of Guernica for 3 consecutive hours resulted in the death of 1700 people. This became a major incident of the Spanish civil war. The bombing encouraged Picasso to begin

painting his greatest masterpiece, Guernica. The painting is now recognised as an international icon for peace. Some of the parts of this painting overlap. The shapes of the figures are also sharp and cut in a manner to emphasize pain, or agony. Picasso read about the incident of Guernica in the newspaper, which is represented in the painting in the horse's mouth. The whiteness in the forms of the horse's head, the head of the bull and the head of the woman to the left, with her baby dead and in her arms, portrays various emotions. There is a sense of something important, and yet an emptiness, which helps the viewer to feel the impact of life and death.

It took Picasso over three months to complete this 3.5 x 7.8 meter enormous painting. During the period before the completion of the painting, Picasso did a lot of research on the key figures, which he wanted to represent in the painting. After reworking and sketching the painting many times, it was finally sent to the Spanish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition.

The speared horse represented the Spanish republic and the bull represented Franco over the weeping women. The spiked tongues, the necks arched in spasm and the rolling eyes showed the suffering. Even when you see the picture, you can almost hear the screams of the people and you can just tell from the tensions of the elements that how agonized they are. The photographs and the reports in the front pages of the newspaper where Picasso first read about the tragic event and was appalled by it inspired Picasso's painting a lot. Picasso was frustrated with his personal life, unsatisfied with his own work and was troubled by his native homeland's politics during this particular period but this masterpiece of his was going to turn out to be a massive success and it challenged many people's feelings about violence, warfare and power. The painting also consists of a fallen warrior, a mother and a dead child, a woman trapped in a burning building and another rushing into the scene, and a figure leaning from a window and holding out a lamp.

The painting went around North America and Europe from the beginning of World War II to 1981, and was not returned to Spain until October 25, 1981, as Picasso, wished, when the country finally enjoys "public liberties and democratic institutions." In 1992, the work was moved to the city's new museum of 20<sup>th</sup> century art, the Reina Sofia Art Centre. Personally, I feel that Guernica portrays an overwhelming impact of the horrors of the war. This makes it such a powerful piece of art. This piece of art was painted on a black background, using white paints for the figures. This helps the



*figures to stand out because these two colours are opposites and mix well with each other, to help them to stand out.*

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