

## **Picasso**

Picasso, Pablo (1881-1973), was the most famous painter of the 1900's. He also became known for his sculpture, drawings, graphics, and ceramics. In some ways, he was the artist most characteristic of the 1900's, because he responded to changing conditions, moods, and challenges so intensely and so rapidly. His searching style made him the leader in expressing the complexity of the 1900's.

Picasso's art challenges the viewer's traditional view of life. He appeared drawn to tension and conflict. Picasso seemed to explore the fantastic world of nightmare and deep imagination which modern psychology and modern art cite as great influences on our daily actions. He hoped to arouse and reveal unknown influences that lie hidden in the viewer's subconscious mind. His images radiate the strangeness of dreams, yet have the appearance of fact. Perhaps Picasso was influenced by the art of his native Spain, which often seems fascinated by the visionary and the monstrous.

Early career. Picasso was born in Malaga, Spain, but lived in France from 1904 until his death. He was a child prodigy, painting realistic works when he was only 14 years old. Picasso's first personal style, called the Blue Period (1901-1904), focused on the themes of loneliness and despair, and featured mainly shades of blue. The style of this period gave way between 1904 and 1906 to a style that stressed warmer colours and moods. Abandoning the thin, discouraged faces of the Blue Period, Picasso gave his subjects new flexibility and frequently included circus scenes in his works. By 1906, he began painting great figures that are massive, as if to withstand potential shock or fear.

In 1907, Picasso painted *Les Femmes d'Alger*, a landmark in art. This picture marked a decisive break with traditional notions of beauty and harmony. Five monstrous female figures with masks rather than faces pose in a convulsive, jagged array--distorted, shaken, and savagely transformed. Out of this disruptive image grew the style known as cubism.

Early in 1912, Picasso began including newspaper clippings, bits of debris, and stencilled words in his paintings. In this way he hoped to break down the distinction between art and nonart and to make viewers rethink their relationship to traditional art.

Later career. After World War I, Picasso extended his explorations of form, placing special emphasis on brilliantly coloured dreamlike images. From 1918 to 1924, he painted in a classical style, with huge and stately figures. In the 1920's and 1930's, Picasso portrayed figures as though from the inside out, and the lifeless objects in these works appear to have a life of their own. His *Guernica* (1937) was painted as a protest against the bombing of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The painting was Picasso's attempt to make a public statement using his personal symbols of rage and despair. The picture is a powerful expression of crisis and disaster beyond individual control.

In 1944, Picasso joined the Communist Party because he felt the Communists had been more effective in fighting the Nazis. But Picasso's art was officially condemned as "decadent" and "unacceptable" in most Communist countries.

After 1945, Picasso's painting, sculpture, and ceramics developed a more relaxed and gentle feeling. He appeared to make peace with the emotions that had tormented him so often in the past. Some critics feel this new Picasso had outlived the best days of his art. Others feel this represented another advance in Picasso's visual and mental adventures in art.