

Texts about art works in the exhibition, Moderna Museet

La Pisseuse

Woman Pissing

April 16, 1965

Centre Pompidou.

A stately female figure urinates unabashedly on the shore – a scene that fuses myth with the necessities of everyday life. Picasso drew inspiration both from Rembrandt van Rijn's *Woman Bathing in a Stream* (1654) and from the ancient myth of Aphrodite, goddess of love and beauty, who rose naked from the foam of the sea. Here the motif is given a monumental inevitability: the body appears unadorned, with sharp contours and vigorous brushstrokes typical of Picasso's late style. By combining the mythologically idealised with such a bodily and unguarded moment, the painting challenges conventional notions of femininity.

La source

The Spring

1921

Moderna Museet

In *The Source*, Picasso presents his first wife, Olga Khokhlova, as a Greek goddess. She rests in a tranquil landscape, where the water flowing from the urn appears as a symbol of life and renewal. The painting reflects Picasso's neoclassical period, when, in the aftermath of the First World War, he sought the presumed clarity and order of antiquity. Here he combines personal subject matter with mythological references. His inspiration stemmed partly from Italian ruins and partly from artists such as the seventeenth-century painter Nicolas Poussin, renowned for his pursuit of harmony and perfection in landscape painting. With clear contours and a balanced composition, Picasso reconnects with the ideals of classicism, while reshaping them into an expression of his own time – and his own life.

Le déjeuner sur l'herbe

Luncheon on the Grass

July 30, 1961

Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Danmark.

In Picasso's *The Luncheon on the Grass*, the woman turns towards the man before her, rather than meeting the viewer's gaze, as in Édouard Manet's version. She bears features of Picasso's second wife, Jacqueline Roque, and the man reaching out his hand may represent the artist himself. Behind him appears a strange figure reminiscent of the African sculptures that had inspired Cubism half a century earlier. The painting explores several themes that interested Picasso, including the relationship between artist, model, and audience, reflections on the depiction of the nude, and the potential of its layers of art-historical references to evoke memories and associations in the viewer.

Tête de femme

Woman's Head

July 1–8 and December 30–31 1957

Moderna Museet, Stockholm

The same year Picasso created *Head of a Woman*, he began a close collaboration with the Norwegian sculptor Carl Nesjar. In a series of sculptural sketches developed by Picasso, thin planes intersect at angles around a central axis—a play with geometric forms that can also be recognised in this painting. The sketches were realised on a large scale when Picasso and Nesjar created the 15-metre-high sculpture of a woman's head, erected in 1965 on the shore of Lake Vänern in Kristinehamn. The following year, the sculptural group *The Luncheon on the Grass* was installed outside Moderna Museet – one of the few works from Picasso and Nesjar's collaboration to be found in Stockholm.

Tête d'homme

Head of a Man

May 15, 1964

Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Madrid

The painting *Head of a Man* (5 December 1964) is boldly outlined with a few broad brushstrokes and geometric shapes. Colourful zig zag lines of yellow, red, and green dance through the face, adding energy, movement and depth. The reduced style shows Picasso at his most free, turning simplicity into expressive power with minimal means. As he explained: "A dot for the breast, a line for the artist, five spots of paint for the foot, a few pink and green lines – that's enough, isn't it? What more need I do? What can I add to that? It's all been said."

La femme à la colerette bleue

Woman with Blue Collar

June 5, 1941

Moderna Museet

Woman with a Blue Collar is often described as a portrait of the Surrealist photographer Dora Maar, who at the time was in a relationship with Picasso. In the painting, Picasso employs the Cubist visual language he had previously developed with Georges Braque – where a person or object is shown from multiple viewpoints simultaneously within a single image, using simplified forms. This distorts the woman's face, revealing, for example, both ears. One half of the head is painted in light colours, while the other is concealed in shadow, which has been interpreted as a representation of a dual personality or inner conflict.

Homme portant un enfant

Man Carrying a Child

February 24, 1965

Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Madrid

The striped shirt in *Man Carrying a Child* is characteristic for Picasso and suggests this could be a self-portrait. When Picasso painted the work, he was 83 years old and a father of four. Children had always played an important role in his art. In the later works, the motif of a male figure holding a swaddled child appears several times. In these paintings, he explored personal dimensions of his life – his relationship with his father, his own role as a father and grandfather, and perhaps the notion of the child as a symbol of resurgence, renewal, and the continuity of life.

Le baiser

The Kiss

October 25, 1969

Kunsthaus Zürich

In his final years, Picasso painted with time as his adversary. His art became a form of struggle against the inevitability of aging and death, marked by a constant pursuit of spontaneity and immediacy. The sketch-like quality of *The Kiss* is a deliberate choice, an attempt to capture the intensity of the moment without “finishing”, fixing, or closing it. As he himself expressed it: “To finish is also to kill.” Here, two faces come together in an almost dissolved embrace, simultaneously present and elusive. The painting raises questions about when a work – or a life – can truly be considered complete.

Homme assis

Seated Man

1969

Courtesy of Masterworks

After a stomach surgery in 1965, Picasso immersed himself in reading, particularly Alexandre Dumas’ *The Three Musketeers* (1844). The novel’s figures of ambition and passion inspired him, and by 1969 they appeared in his paintings. In *Seated Man*, a musketeer with a piercing gaze wears yellow and red stripes, evoking the Catalan flag – a potent reminder of a culture suppressed under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship. For Picasso, the musketeer became a symbol of resistance and vitality. Following Franco’s victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936–39), Picasso refused to return to Spain until the regime ended, embodying exile and defiance.

Assiette décorée d’un visage (and others)

Plate with a Face

Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Madrid

In the summer of 1946, during a visit to a ceramics exhibition in the southern French town of Vallauris – celebrated for its pottery tradition – Picasso felt an immediate attraction to the craft. Over the following decades, he explored ceramics with great intensity, experimenting with diverse materials, techniques, and processes. Some works were created on pre-existing ceramic forms, others he sculpted entirely by hand.

From the early 1960s onward, Picasso often used commercially produced plates and tiles, transforming them with paints and oxides into vivid faces or recurring motifs such as birds. Much like his bold, simplified portraits, he could suggest facial features – eyes, eyebrows, noses, mouths – with just a few decisive strokes. He frequently exhibited these ceramics alongside his paintings, as in the 1973 exhibition at the Papal Palace in Avignon.

Femme à l’oiseau

Woman with Bird

April 7, 1971 (I)

Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso, Madrid

As a child in Málaga, Picasso often watched his father, painter José Ruiz y Blasco, at work. His father favored doves as a motif, and occasionally let young Picasso participate, sparking a lifelong fascination with birds. This theme resurfaced frequently throughout his career, and Picasso even kept live birds in his studios. In the spring of 1971, he revisited the theme in a

series of figures with birds. *Woman with a Bird* (1971) depicts a bare-shouldered woman facing a bird poised near her mouth, suggesting a kiss or gentle feeding. Bathed in deep blue night tones, the dreamlike scene conveys care and fragile co-dependency.

Tête d'Arlequin Masqué

Head of a Harlequin in a Mask

January 10, 1971

Private Collection of KAWS

In 1971, Picasso began to systematically explore anguished faces with open mouths, as if in silent cries. In *Head of a Harlequin in a Mask*, the existential dimension is intensified as Picasso refers to his first alter ego, the Harlequin. The masked figure often signifies playfulness and cunning but can also carry deeper symbolic meaning. For Picasso, the Harlequin becomes an expression of identity, role-playing, and human emotion, and here the portrait appears almost like a death mask. The gaze shifts between aged vulnerability and anxiety over the looming presence of death. The painting captures both a sense of resignation before mortality and Picasso's persistent determination to use the figure to express the human condition.