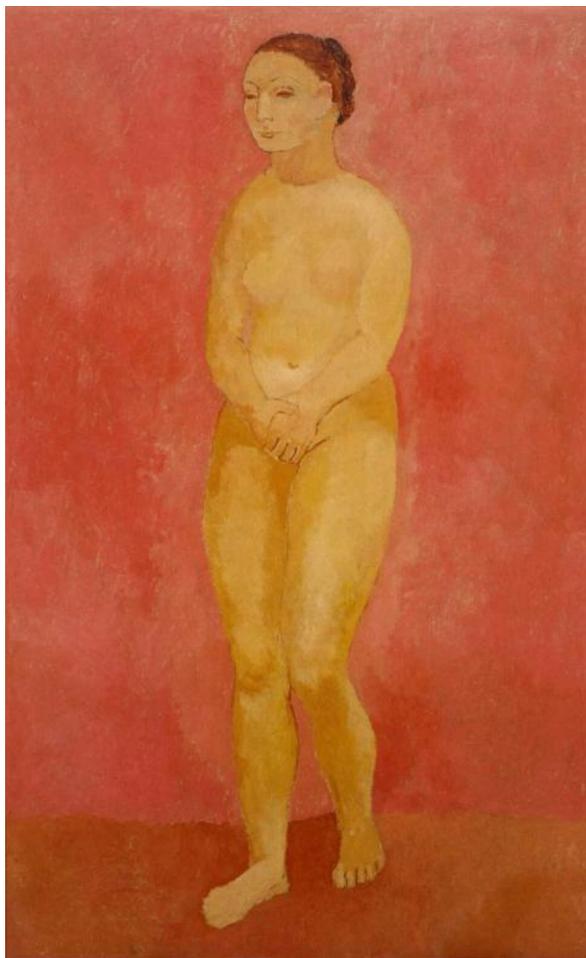


## Picasso 1906. The Turning Point



**PABLO PICASSO**  
***Nude with Joined Hands*** (*Desnudo con manos juntas*), 1906  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York  
The William S. Paley Collection, 1990  
© 2023, The Museum of Modern Art/Scala, Florence  
© Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2023

- DATES:** November 15, 2023 – March 4, 2024
- PLACE:** Sabatini Building, 2nd Floor
- ORGANIZATION:** Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía in conjunction with Musée Picasso Paris
- CURATOR:** Eugenio Carmona
- COORDINATION:** Beatriz Jordana and Ana Uruñuela

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of Picasso, the

Museo Reina Sofía, with the exceptional support of the Musée Picasso Paris, has organized Picasso 1906. The Great Transformation, which closes the official commemorative program of international exhibitions and suggests a major revision of criteria on the key role played by the artist in the creation of modern art.

The great contribution of Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) to this landmark development is generally considered to be the painting of *Les Femmes d'Alger* in 1907. However, that work can now be regarded as a point of arrival, the final outburst of a whole complex process that had developed throughout 1906 and up to late February or early March, 1907. During that period, the artist's creative activity took place in three settings: Paris, Gósol (a Pyrenean village in the province of Lérida), and Paris again.

Picasso's production in that specific period has been viewed until now as an epilogue to the rose period or a prologue to the aforementioned work. Nothing could be farther from the truth. 1906 was not just another year in the artist's career. It was an artistically significant moment, not recognized as such until now, when the Málaga-born artist's experiments opened up his work to new languages. As the curator, Eugenio Carmona, states in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition, this was "Picasso's first contribution to the full notion of modern art."

During this phase, for instance, Picasso transformed the academic concept of the 'nude', though with precedents in some works produced since 1904, and he turned the body into a site of linguistic and cultural experimentation to which he introduced sensuality, with an especially important place reserved for the male nude. This also opened the doors for the performative presence of gender.

Another distinctive feature of this Picasso is his sense of transculturality, which emanates from his biographical details and the formation of his personality. The young Picasso of that time was an Andalusian who had emigrated to Barcelona and had been traveling to Paris since 1900. When he returned to Barcelona in 1906, he brought with him a whole set of transforming relationships and experiences in the bohemian atmosphere of the Parisian avant-garde, where he had had an opportunity to meet dealers and collectors (with a key role played by Gertrude Stein) and major contemporary artists. This was decisive for his own definition as an artist, which was also influenced by his interest in homoerotic or ethnological photography and its reproduction in widely circulated magazines, and by libertarian or anarchist thought.

At that time, he also carried out a re-reading of the history of art through his dialogues with El Greco, Corot, and Cézanne, and by means of the appropriation of ancient art with the use of primeval, 'primitivist', and even non-European cultural referents (archaic Greek, Egyptian, Etruscan, Iberian, Catalan Romanesque, Mesopotamian, Polynesian, etc.). By then, he also already knew and had assimilated the so-called art nègre or 'Black art' before his famous visit to the Trocadéro in 1907.

Throughout the eight rooms which make up this exhibition, the works of Picasso are therefore shown alongside pieces from different periods of European and African culture similar to those the artist might have seen at the time, establishing both formal and intellectual correspondences, citations, appropriations, or dialogues. These works allow us a highly informative glimpse of the complexity of the cultural and creative processes experimented with by Picasso in 1906.

**Exceptionally for the occasion, the show thus gathers more than 120 works from private**

**collections and leading institutions** such as the MoMA, the Metropolitan Museum, and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, the Museums of Art of Baltimore, Cleveland, Philadelphia, Boston, Dallas, and Chicago in the United States, the Musée Picasso, the Louvre, and the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and the National Archaeological Museum, the Prado, and the Picasso Museums of Barcelona and Málaga in Spain.

### Picasso's nudes

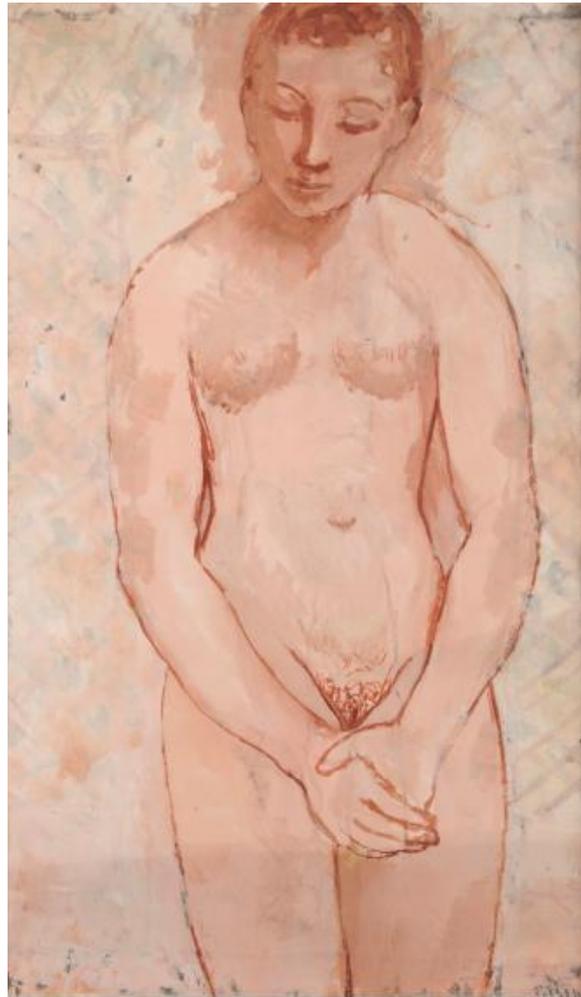
The itinerary of the show begins with a room dedicated to the body. The nude was present in Picasso's work from the very start. Indeed, he had already produced 580 pieces on this theme between 1890 and 1906. In 1906, however, an important change took place. While he had previously used paper, board, watercolor, and gouache for his nudes, he now concentrated on paper for the production of some 450 female and male nudes, furthermore taking the leap to large-format works in oil.

Before 1906, Picasso had addressed the nude from the perspective of the inherited artistic tradition. In 1906, however, there emerged in his practice the idea of the "body in representation", which enabled him to formulate his own poetics in the relationship between body and culture.

In this first room, however, the public can view works prior to the period in question that show how formal speculations with the body and erotic scenes began to appear around 1899. They can also see how Picasso's work as the 20th century advances is more explicit with regard to the sexuality of bodies. He starts to paint self-portraits of himself nude or everyday scenes of feminine intimacy that adopt the bodies of harlequins and acrobats.

An example of this is *Seated Nude* (1905), which sums up the young Picasso's explorations of the nude and the body prior to 1906, making a value of enormous plasticity out of the non finito. In the meantime, the 15 prints of the *Suite des Saltimbanques* (*Suite of Acrobats*), produced between 1904 and early 1906, show the vision of the female body in intimacy, pubescent couples, or the relationship between youths and horses, motifs which were to be recurrent in Picasso's iconography from then on.

In the second room, the viewer will next find nudes of children and adolescents, either in natural settings or in interior scenes, which gradually announce the coming transformation. This is the



**PABLO PICASSO**  
*Nude with Folded Hands*, 1906  
*Desnudo con las manos cruzadas*  
Gouache sobre papel  
77,47 x 56,52 cm  
Dallas Museum of Art, The Eugene and Margaret  
McDermott Art  
Fund, Inc., bequest of Mrs. Eugene McDermott  
© Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2023



PABLO PICASSO  
*Les Deux Frères*, 1906  
*Los dos hermanos*  
Gouache sobre cartón  
80 x 59 cm  
Musée national Picasso-Paris  
Dation Pablo Picasso, 1979. MP7  
© Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2023

case, for example, of *The Two Brothers* and *The Adolescents*, both of 1906. In these works, not only is there a perceptible dialogue with Cézanne and El Greco, artists represented here with a lithograph and an oil painting, but there is also a glimpse of Picasso's interest in the 'primitive' and 'archaic', as well as in the homoerotic and 'ethnographic' photography of the period, which are illustrated by two Roman sculptures of ephebi and some ethnographic photographs displayed in a showcase.

These are works in which the artist eroticized male bodies while modeling female bodies with a looseness that blurs the conventional distinction between 'masculine' and 'feminine'. This fluidity between genders owes much to the use by Picasso of feminine models from the history of painting for the formalization of male bodies.

In another work, *Woman Combing her Hair* (1906), Picasso not only anticipates Abstract

Expressionism in the lower part of the picture, but also mixes references in his figure to mythology and Venus with the face-mask related to the 'primitive'.

Farther on, next to *Diana Bathing (The Fountain)* (1869-70) by Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, are works where Picasso's figures of young women allude once more to goddesses and mythological figures of Antiquity in an attempt to fuse the everyday and the divine. Picasso is known to have owned work by Corot, who associated the goddess Venus with the image of a woman of his time. Picasso reprised this in his own work.

An interesting piece in this same room is *The Harem* (1906), painted by Picasso when he was already in Gósol. The work can lend itself to certain prejudices, both because of its title, attributed to the art critic Christian Zervos, and because some scholars have seen it as inspired by Dominique Ingres's *The Turkish Bath* (1862), or have regarded it as a precursor to *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*. However, all Picasso does is to assimilate the arabesque drawing of Ingres, and the plastic language employed is completely different from that of the *Demoiselles*. In any case, it is an oil whose motifs have very few parallels in the European painting of the time.

### **The vernacular and the Fernande icon**

The fourth room in the exhibition is dedicated entirely to works produced in Gósol, where Picasso resided from the end of May to the middle of August, 1906. Here the artist added the vernacular component of the place with the inclusion of Pyrenean villagers, men and women who radiate placidity, as in *Woman with Loaves*.

Although these are paintings on peasant themes that tend to be narrative, Picasso is already probing new artistic values in them. Some of his landscapes, for example, suggest an early approach to cubic forms, and certain figures of village women are the result of a combination of forms that are partly figurative and partly abstract. Picasso essays the representation of the

face as a mask, a revealing indication of the artist's interest in the 'primitive' and of the future influence on Picasso's work of the morphological suggestions of Catalan Romanesque. All this was to echo in his subsequent work in Paris.

The fifth area of the exhibition is dedicated to an iconic type of female nude that Picasso developed in 1906, and which critics have identified as "Fernande", his lover from August 1904 to 1912. She and Picasso had a complex relationship, as in spite of his libertarian convictions, the artist still clung to heteropatriarchal assumptions.

Fernande Olivier, whose real name was Amélie Lang, taught French lessons to the couple's American friends. She got along very well with Max Jacob, Apollinaire, and Gertrude Stein, especially the latter.

The artist regarded Fernande's physiognomy as a signifier on which to concoct distinct signifieds that would enable him to work with different artistic languages and figures. For example, Picasso related Fernande to the vernacular world of Gósol, painting her as a peasant in *Fernande with Kerchief*, and he also incorporated the mask to her face. In the sculptures inspired by her, he experimented with the dematerialization of form and with the use of the simplified discrete volume, opening the way for the first fully 'primitivist' sculptures.



PABLO PICASSO  
*Woman with kerchief (Portrait of Fernande Olivier)*, 1906  
*Mujer con pañuelo (Retrato de Fernande Olivier)*  
Gouache y carbón sobre papel  
66,04 x 49,53 cm  
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, T. Catesby Jones Collection, 47.10.78  
Foto: Travis Fullerton  
© Virginia Museum of Fine Arts  
© Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2023

### Appropriation of the primitive



PABLO PICASSO  
*Busto de mujer joven*, 1906  
Óleo sobre lienzo  
54 x 42 cm  
Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía  
© Sucesión Pablo Picasso, VEGAP, Madrid, 2023

In the next room, the viewer can appreciate how Picasso's synthesis of the 'primitive' led him in 1906 to render unexpected and mysterious physiognomies. This is the case of the enigmatic face of *Bust of a Young Woman*, where the artist resorts to the 'appropriation' of Egyptian and Etruscan art.

The treatment is deliberately coarse or 'primary', and the non finito has been replaced by graphic marks that produce an unfinished sensation. All this gives a 'primitive' appearance both to the work as a whole and to the figure, whose hair bears traces of the representation of Venus in certain Greek terracotta sculptures that persisted in Roman culture. Some parts of her face are taken from Iberian art, as can be seen on a wooden mask in this room. In its turn, the bust displays features in common with male representations in Etruscan funerary art.

*Femme nue de trois quarts dos* (1907) is another work that resumes the output of 1906, with a persistence of references to Iberian art, 'primitivism', and ethnographic photography. However, it also opens a path to modern art that is different from that of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, as this work incorporates both the figurative and the abstract, something which was to characterize Picasso's later Cubist work.

### The great transformation

The next stage in the exhibition is another room where the visitor can see *Nude with Joined Hands*, a work begun by Picasso in Gósol and probably finished in Paris, which marks the most explicit start of a new path towards modern art.

This work catalyzes Picasso's great shift in various ways. In the first place, Picasso gives primacy to the poetics of the body. In the interpenetration of background and figure, he anticipates Cubism. The notion of body as form is accentuated, and a reading of Paul Cézanne becomes a patent referent for Picasso's concatenation of geometric morphologies that structure the figure in a circle, an ellipse, and an ovoid. The empty space transmits a sensation of plenitude. This is the true starting point of the road to Cubism.

Secondly, by situating his work beyond spatial and temporal localizations, the artist once more opts for interculturality and a relation with the primeval, with reminiscences of Greek vases and Roman art, the ladies with votive offerings of Iberian art, and Fang masks, whose condensation and abstraction of features is similar to that of the face of *Nude with Joined Hands*.

Also on display in the same room is *the Portrait of Gertrude Stein*. She and Picasso exerted a great mutual influence on each other, and she never parted with *Nude with Joined Hands*, a painting that she always had on view in her residences. The portrait in question has been the object of analyses and the source of legends.

Besides the large number of sessions required for the execution of the work, Picasso began the portrait in the spring of 1906 and left it unfinished before departing for Gósol, finally resuming it in Paris. When he returned to the French capital, a variation in the picture signaled a qualitative leap in the history of art: the inscription of a mask-face. The *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* unites two different 'stylistic' registers on the same picture surface.

One is close, though with nuances, to the language of conventional fin-de-siècle painting, while the other is decidedly 'primitivist'. This hybridization is a crucial aspect of the gestation of modern art, as it conceptually anticipates the break with the 'unity' of the picture in the fine arts tradition. This rupture was later to culminate in certain modernist works that incorporated language and collage.

On view at the end of the exhibition are other works like *Women at their Toilette* (1956) which show that a salient aspect of Picasso's oeuvre is his peculiar notion of time and memory. In all the artist's work, there is also a survival, a summary, and a reinterpretation a posteriori of plastic and visual solutions.

This room brings the itinerary of Picasso 1906 to a close by emphasizing the artist's capacity for the persistence of his own formulas. Always between permanence and change, Picasso made persistence in time into a way of understanding creation and the history of art.



Gertrude Stein sentada en un sofá en su estudio de París, con un retrato de ella realizado por Pablo Picasso, y otras pinturas colgadas en la pared.



## **Picasso Celebration 1973-2023: 50 exhibitions and events to celebrate Picasso**

April 8, 2023, was the fiftieth anniversary of the death of the Spanish artist Pablo Picasso, an event that has given rise to a celebration of his work and artistic legacy in France, Spain, and internationally.

The governments of France and Spain have agreed to work jointly on a program with international scope through a bi-national committee that brings together the cultural and diplomatic administrations of both countries.

The Picasso Celebration 1973-2023 is centered on some fifty exhibitions and events to be held at renowned cultural institutions in Europe and North America. Together, they undertake a historical analysis of his oeuvre. The commemoration, accompanied by official celebrations in France and Spain, will permit a survey to be carried out of research and interpretations of Picasso's work.

The Musée national Picasso-Paris and the Spanish National Committee for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Death of Pablo Picasso are delighted to support this exceptional program.

### [Calendar of exhibitions](#)

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