

PRESS RELEASE

PICASSO. PRINTMAKING AS EXPERIMENT

3 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2019

Städel Museum, Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings

Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) is considered the quintessential modern artistic genius. With untiring creativity and ingenuity, he seemingly effortlessly made use of all genres, techniques, and materials. From 3 April to 30 June, the Städel Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings will devote an exhibition titled "Picasso. Printmaking as Experiment" specifically to the artist's graphic oeuvre. Featuring more than sixty etchings, lithographs and linoleum cuts, the exhibition presents a selection from the holdings of the Städel Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings, enhanced by a small number of loans from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and a private collection. The selection vividly illustrates the full range and development of Picasso's graphic oeuvre from the early years in Paris to his late work. Whether etching, drypoint, lithography, or linocut, with never-dwindling curiosity and virtuosity, Picasso gained expertise in a wide variety of printmaking techniques, always questioning what he had found in new and experimental ways. The exhibition is structured according to the various printing techniques, which are always closely linked to the artist's biography. The print series *Suite Vollard*, which Picasso created between 1930 and 1937 and with which he made full artistic use of the diversity of intaglio printing techniques, has its own section within the exhibition.

"The Städel Museum boasts an exceptional collection of prints by Picasso. It is not for nothing that the Städel's Department of Prints and Drawings is considered one of the most important of its kind in Germany. With the exhibition 'Picasso. Printmaking as Experiment', we now present a selection of these outstanding works by Picasso, which cannot be shown permanently due to their delicate nature. For our visitors, this is a special, if not unique opportunity," says Philipp Demandt, Director of the Städel Museum.

"The graphic work in particular bears witness to Picasso's productive energy. The complicated technical processes demanded great care from the artist in his work; at the same time, however, the prints also reveal Picasso's often playful audacity in dealing with new media, as well as his everlasting joy in experimenting," explains Theresa Nisters, curator of the exhibition.

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Early Work

The exhibition begins with a key work from Picasso's graphic oeuvre, the large-format and pictorially elaborated print *Le Repas frugal* (The Frugal Repast) from 1904. The artist, who had just settled in Paris, devoted himself extensively to the technique of etching for the first time, and immediately created a masterpiece. *Le Repas frugal* was created at the turning point between Picasso's Blue and the Rose Periods, during which his motifs increasingly revolved around the universe of the circus. The acrobats and harlequins portrayed here served him as symbols of the precarious, somewhat "itinerant" position of the artist in his time.

Like *Le Repas frugal*, the etching *Salomé* (Salome), created one year later in 1905, was not engraved in a copper plate—typical for etchings—but rather in a zinc plate, which also shows scratches and traces of earlier use. The fact that Picasso used the same plate several times has often been interpreted as an indication of his strained financial situation at the time. He demonstrated his skill, however, which was already pronounced at the age of twenty-four, by integrating the existing hatchings and discolorations into the new composition in a virtuoso manner.

Suite Vollard

The central gallery of the exhibition hall features an exemplary selection of twenty-three sheets from the *Suite Vollard*, including the masterful mezzotint engraving *Minotaure aveugle guidé par une Fillette dans la Nuit* (Blind Minotaur Guided in the Night by a Little Girl) from 1934. The altogether 100 etching plates in the series created between 1930 and 1937 were executed during a turbulent period in the life of the then fifty-year-old artist, who separated from his wife Olga Kokhlova and had a relationship with the young Marie-Thérèse Walter. Picasso processed these experiences in his series of prints. It comprises central and recurring subjects in Picasso's oeuvre: the relationship between artist, model, and artwork; scenes from the sculptor's studio; the gender struggle between man and woman; and the myth of the Minotaur. The significance of the *Suite*, however, lies not only in its thematic diversity, but also in its technical range. Here, for the first time, Picasso exploited the entire spectrum of intaglio printing. Through his encounter with the Parisian printer Roger Lacourière in late 1934, Picasso had become acquainted with new techniques such as aquatint, mezzotint, and the sugar-lift process, the painterly effects of which contrasted with the clear graphic lines of the etchings. The *Suite Vollard* thus demonstrates Picasso's extraordinary craftsmanship and his great joy in experimenting.

Sueño y mentira de Franco (Dream and Lie of Franco)

When Picasso completed the *Suite Vollard* in 1937, he had already begun working on another series of etchings titled *Sueño y mentira de Franco* (Dream and Lie of Franco). After the Spanish Civil War broke out in the summer of 1936, a group of Spanish delegates asked the famous artist for a contribution to the Spanish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition in early 1937. Picasso immediately began working on the etching cycle *Dream and Lie of Franco* but turned down the commission for a large-format painting. When, however, the small Basque town of Guernica was destroyed by an air raid by the National Socialist Condor Legion and the Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie on 26 April, 1937, the Spanish artist changed his mind and, appalled by the horror, created the monumental work *Guernica* (1937, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid). After completing the painting, Picasso continued his work on the two etching plates of *Dream and Lie of Franco*. Contrary to what was originally planned, their individual images were not cut apart for separate postcard motifs but sold at the World Exposition together with a poem the artist had written himself in a folder designed by him for the benefit of the Spanish Republican government. On the occasion of the present exhibition, the Department of Prints and Drawings has received a rare copy of the complete portfolio as a generous donation and can present it in the exhibition together with the two printing plates on loan from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne.

Lithographs

Picasso's lithographic oeuvre is presented in the left wing of the exhibition hall. Whereas the various intaglio printing techniques had dominated his graphic oeuvre for almost fifty years, after the end of the Second World War the artist devoted himself for the first time seriously to another printing process, namely lithography. The artist quickly mastered the possibilities of planographic printing and exploited its rich variety in a large number of works. For over a decade, lithography dominated his graphic work. The motifs of this period are cheerful and depict images of his lovers and bullfights, as well as antique bacchantes, fauns, and satyrs. Here, Picasso experimented with unusual tools, such as wire comb and scrapers, as well as with the use of unconventional solvents to prepare the printing process. In addition, the artist attempted various transfer printing processes and, especially after his move to the Côte d'Azur in the late 1940s, used more easily transportable zinc plates as printing blocks in addition to the conventional lithographic stone.

Linocuts

The colorful linocuts from Picasso's late work conclude the exhibition in the opposite wing of the exhibition hall. From 1954 onwards, he devoted himself to this relief-printing technique, which until then had had no reputation as an artistic medium. The now over seventy-year-old artist helped the linocut to an unexpected heyday—in just ten years, he created more than 200 works. Linocut allowed Picasso to create

pictorial motifs out of large, radiant colour fields, developing his own innovative approaches.

For the youngest work in the exhibition, *L'Étreinte II* (The Embrace, 1963), Picasso developed a completely new linocut process, in which he succeeded in impressively combining the technical characteristics of relief printing, intaglio printing, and planographic printing. *L'Étreinte II* thus vividly sums up the artist's joy in experimenting with printmaking techniques.

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Exhibition dates: 3 April to 30 June 2019

Curator: Theresa Nisters (Städel Museum)

Location: Städel Museum, Schaumainkai 63, 60596 Frankfurt am Main

Information: www.staedelmuseum.de

Visitor Service and Guided Tours: +49(0)69-605098-200, info@staedelmuseum.de

Opening Hours: Tue, Wed, Sat, Sun + holidays 10 am – 6 pm; Thu + Fri 10 am – 9 pm, closed on Mondays

Special Opening Hours (10 am – 6 pm): Fri, 19 April, Sun, 21 April, Mon, 22 April, Wed, 1 May, Thu, 30 May, Sun, 9 June, Mon, 10 June, Thu, 20 June

Admission: Sat, Sun + holidays 16 Euro, reduced 14 Euro; Tue – Fri 14 Euro, reduced 12 Euro; Family Ticket 24 Euro, free admission for children under 12 years; groups of ten or more regular paying persons: concession price per person. Groups are required to book in advance: +49(0)69-605098-200 or email at info@staedelmuseum.de.

Advance Ticket Sales: shop.staedelmuseum.de

Introductory Tours of the Exhibition: Fridays 7 pm (except on 19 April), Sundays 2 pm, as well as Fri, April 19 and Mon, April 22 at 2 pm.

Participation is included in the ticket price.

Social Media: The Städel Museum is communicating the exhibition on social media with the hashtags #picasso and #staedel