

WALL TEXTS

PICASSO. PRINTMAKING AS EXPERIMENT

3 APRIL TO 30 JUNE 2019**Städel Museum, Exhibition Hall of the Department of Prints and Drawings****INTRODUCTION**

Pablo Picasso is considered the quintessential modern artistic genius. With inexhaustible creative energy and inventiveness – and seemingly little effort –, he availed himself of a wide variety of genres, techniques and materials. A trained painter, over the course of his career he taught himself various printmaking techniques, explored their possibilities and, with his experiments, often arrived at new solutions. As a means of artistic expression, printmaking took on a status for him equal to that of painting and sculpture.

Featuring more than sixty etchings, lithographs and linoleum cuts, this exhibition presents a selection from the holdings of the Städel Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings, enhanced by a number of loans from the Museum Ludwig in Cologne and private collections. The sections of the exhibition are devoted to the various printmaking methods Picasso employed, which always also bear a relation to his biography. They mirror the wide diversity of techniques offered by the printmaking medium and shed light on the artist's experimental approach.

EARLY YEARS

No sooner had Picasso settled in Paris in 1904 than the struggle began to hold his own in the world's leading art metropolis. It was also the year of the young Spaniard's first intensive encounter with printmaking. He continued to paint, but also tried his hand at the classical technique of etching, working with themes he also addressed in his paintings. Scenes of poverty and the circus world reflect the artist's own reality as an outsider to society. The filigree compositions testify to Picasso's ability to convey powerful moods with simple means. He initially produced only small numbers of prints from the plates he executed. It was not until 1913, by which time he had made a name for himself on the art market, that his art dealer Ambroise Vollard undertook to publish these prints. To that end, he had fourteen of the plates steeled (a chemical hardening process permitting a greater number of high-quality prints) and from them

produced the etching series *Les Saltimbanques* in an edition of 250. The Städel Museum purchased a copy of this series as far back as 1914.

SUITE VOLLARD

In several phases from 1930 onward, Picasso produced etchings which, when the number had reached 100 in 1937, his art dealer Ambroise Vollard published as the *Suite Vollard*. The artist had thus executed the series in a period of his life distinguished by his separation, at the age of fifty, from his wife Olga Kokhlova and his relationship to the young Marie-Thérèse Walter. In the *Suite Vollard* he reflected on his situation in various recurring themes such as “The Sculptor and His Model” or the “Minotaur”, a self-chosen alter ego. Here the artist’s self-conception and his relationship to his work play a key role.

Picasso’s encounter with the printer Roger Lacourière of Paris in late 1934 led him to begin experimenting with various new etching techniques such as aquatint, mezzotint and sugar-lift. They offered him means of creating painterly two-dimensional surfaces, an effect that contrasts strongly with the clear, graphic lines of conventional etching. The exhibition shows a representative selection of twenty-three sheets from the *Suite Vollard*, including the masterful mezzotint *Blind Minotaur Guided in the Night by a Little Girl*.

LITHOGRAPHS

Picasso had already worked with lithography briefly in the 1920s. After World War II, his acquaintance with the Parisian printer Fernand Mourlot revived his interest in this printmaking technique. In the decade that followed, it would dominate his production in the printmaking medium. The artist was quick to master the wide range of possibilities offered by lithography and made use of them in a large number of works. He used pen, brush and crayon to achieve both linear-graphic and painterly effects. In the process, he experimented with atypical tools such as the scraper or wire comb, but also with the use of unconventional solvents in preparation for the printing process. Several of the art printers in Mourlot’s workshop recalled the extent to which Picasso’s unusual approach took them to the limits of their abilities. The artist also experimented with various types of transfer printing and – especially after moving to the Côte d’Azur in the late 1940s – in addition to the traditional lithographic stones, also used zinc plates, which were lighter and easier to transport to Paris for printing.

LINOLEUM CUTS

In 1954, Picasso coincidentally made the acquaintance of Hidalgo Arnéra, a printer of Vallauris specializing in linoleum cut. Their first collaboration was on the production of posters advertising bullfights. The artist, meanwhile over seventy years of age, subsequently immersed himself ever more in the technique and helped it to an unprecedented heyday. The linoleum cut allowed Picasso to create pictorial motifs with large areas of vivid colour, and he developed several new methods within that framework. He was particularly interested in the “reduction” principle. This means that the artist works with only a single printing plate, printing the interim states on the same sheet of paper one on top of the other in different colours. Picasso’s linoleum prints are the products of the highest degree of precision and concentration: the artist must plan every step in the process in advance. In 1962, in his *Handbook of Graphic Reproduction Processes*, Felix Brunner wrote: “Only a short time ago the author would have found it difficult to reproduce a convincing example of a lino-cut. But now Pablo Picasso has produced a sequence of beautiful multi-colour lino-cuts an entire series of beautiful, multicolour linocuts [...], which will occupy an important place in the history of graphic art.”

DREAM AND LIE OF FRANCO

Civil war raged in Spain from 1936 to 1939. Portugal, fascist Italy and Nazi Germany supported the military under the command of General Franco in the battle against the country’s democratically elected socialist government.

In early 1937, a few months after the republican government had made Picasso honorary director of the Museo del Prado in Madrid, a group of Spanish delegates called on him in his Paris studio. They had come to ask the famous artist to make a contribution to the Spanish pavilion at the world fair that would take place in the French metropolis that summer. Picasso spontaneously began work on the etching cycle *Dream and Lie of Franco*. His original plan was to cut out the individual scenes and sell them at the pavilion as postcards. He initially refused the commission for a large-scale painting, but in April began making sketches on the theme of “the artist and his model”.

When the National Socialist Legion Condor and the Italian Corpo Truppe Volontarie levelled the town of Guernica with an aerial bombing attack on 26 April 1937, Picasso abandoned this idea. In response to the destruction, he executed his monumental painting *Guernica* (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía) within just a few weeks.

He then continued work on the two etching plates for *Dream and Lie of Franco*, now changing the theme. In the final scenes of the second plate, he replaced the

grotesque caricature of the general with the desperate figure of a weeping woman and her dead child.

Picasso carried out the work on the two etching plates of *Dream and Lie of Franco* in two stages: He completed the first plate in the traditional etching technique on 8 January 1937. After pulling a number of proofs, he revised this first state with the sugar-lift method, enhancing the graphic line drawing with surface tones. The same day, the artist divided the second plate into nine pictorial fields. On 9 January, however, he composed scenes in only five of them and etched the plate. Then he revised the second plate as well, again with the abovementioned aquatint method and the aid of a scraper. It wasn't until 7 June that he continued his work on the second plate. On that day, he filled the remaining pictorial fields of the second plate with pictures, departing from the figural repertoire of the earlier scenes. He had meanwhile completed the painting *Guernica* in which he reacted to the horrors of the Spanish Civil War. The two etchings of *Dream and Lie of Franco* thus served both as preparation for the monumental painting, and as a reflection on it after it was finished.

BIOGRAPHY

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| 1881 | Pablo Picasso is born in Málaga on 25 October, the son of the painter José Ruiz Blasco and his wife María Picasso López. |
| 1896 | Admission to the La Lonia art school in Barcelona. One year later, transfer to the Academia San Fernando, Madrid. |
| 1899 | Executes his first etching, <i>El Zurdo</i> . |
| 1900 | First trip to Paris; his travel companion is Carlos Casagemas. |
| 1901 | Picasso processes Casagemas's suicide in the so-called Blue Period. He begins to sign his works with his mother's surname "Picasso". In the summer, the gallery of Ambroise Vollard stages his first exhibition in Paris. |
| 1904 | Settles in Paris and has a studio in the "Bateau-Lavoir", Montmartre. His Parisian friends include Juan Gris, Henri Matisse, Marie Laurencin, Max Jacob and Guillaume Apollinaire. Executes his second etching, <i>Le Repas Frugal</i> . |
| 1905 | The Rose Period begins. Picasso carries out etchings with circus motifs. In addition to the acid etching technique, also employs the drypoint etching method. Eugène Delâtre pulls a small number of proofs from the unstepped plates. |
| 1907 | Completion of the painting <i>Les Femmes d'Alger</i> and first Cubist works. |

- Picasso acquires a small hand press that allows him to print from his plates himself.
- 1913 Now that Picasso's international recognition has become established, Ambroise Vollard publishes 14 etchings of the years 1904 and 1905 as the series *Les Saltimbanques*, printed by Louis Fort.
- 1918 Marriage to Olga Kokhlova. A son, Paulo, will proceed from this union.
- 1927 Encounter with Marie-Thérèse Walter. First etchings on the subject of "The Artist and His Model".
- 1930 Picasso purchases the Boisgeloup Castle near Gisors, where he produces a series of head sculptures in plaster for which Marie-Thérèse serves as model.
First etchings of female nudes later included in the *Suite Vollard*.
- 1933 In an unusually prolific phase, the artist executes 40 plates on the subject of "The Sculptor's Studio", 11 on the "Minotaur" and 5 on the motif of "Rape" within just a few months. All will later be published in the *Suite Vollard*.
- 1934 Begins collaboration with Roger Lacourière, who will introduce Picasso to the sugar-lift technique and the use of the burin.
- 1935 Picasso and Olga separate. Marie-Thérèse gives birth to a daughter, Maya, fathered by Picasso.
- 1937 Completion of the *Suite Vollard* with three portraits of the publisher. Starting on 8 January, Picasso works on the two-part etching *Dream and Lie of Franco*, which he finishes on 7 June after completing his monumental painting *Guernica*.
- 1945 Picasso begins working with the lithographer Fernand Mourlot in November. The collaboration will continue for many years.
- 1946-1953 Picasso lives primarily on the Côte d'Azur with Françoise Gilot and their children Claude and Paloma. He works with the lithography technique.
- 1954 Relationship with Jacqueline Roque begins.
Picasso makes the acquaintance of the printer Hidalgo Arnéra. Now the linoleum cut will dominate his printmaking activities until 1964.
- 1973 Pablo Picasso dies in Mougins on 8 April.