

Information on

Pablo Picasso
Spanish, 1881–1973
Woman with a Plumed Hat, 1901
Oil on canvas, 18 3/8 x 15 1/8 in.
Bequest of Marion Koogler McNay
1950.113



Subject Matter

Woman with a Plumed Hat shows a woman wearing heavy make-up and a flowered or plumed hat. Her eyebrow arches as she regards the 19-year old artist who is painting her. Her face and earrings contrast with the blue, gray, greens, and heavy black that surround her face. Picasso's brushwork is fluid and loose with heavy lines around the shoulders, eyes, and face. Colors mingle in the broken brushstrokes of the clothes and hat. The active space of the background is composed of heavy lines of brown, black, and blue. In the lower right corner, the artist signed the work "P. R. Picasso" and "Madrid" below his name. Until just before his first trip to Paris in May 1901, Picasso signed most paintings "P. Ruiz Picasso," using both his father's—Ruiz—and his mother's—Picasso—names. Then, just before the Paris trip, he shortened it to "P. R. Picasso." After he returned to Barcelona in June 1901, he simplified it further to "Picasso." A discrepancy in past publications about the year this work was painted—1900 or 1901—resulted from the inscription "Madrid" beneath his signature; Picasso went to Madrid in late December 1900 and stayed until May 1901. The variations of his signature seem to settle the issue of the date as 1901. Moreover, another painting titled *Woman in Blue*, is given a date of early 1901. *Woman in Blue* has a strong resemblance to—and could very likely be—the woman in the McNay's *Woman with a Plumed Hat*.

According to art historian Denys Chavalier, this work is one of the first experiments of Picasso's Blue Period. A certain Impressionist sense of space and dramatically contrasting colors appear in this work of 1901. But the firm line and almost monochromatic palette of the Blue Period are also present.

About the Artist

The dominant personality in the visual arts during the 20th-century, Pablo Picasso was born in 1881, in Málaga, Spain, the son of a drawing master who taught him to draw when he was very young. Before he was 14, his drawings had the qualities of a classical master. At age 19, he visited Madrid and Paris, and then alternated between Paris and Barcelona until 1904. In Paris, he was greatly influenced by the drawings of Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, perhaps because of their shared interest in prostitutes and social outcasts.

In early 1901, Picasso suffered the loss of his close friend, the artist Carlos Casagemas, to suicide over the rejection of his love for the model Germaine. From 1901 to 1904, known as Picasso's Blue Period, cool blue tones and austere subjects drawn from social outcasts and the poor dominated his paintings. From 1905 to 1907, he painted less forbidding subjects in pinks and grays during his Rose Period. During the years 1907 to 1909, he pursued an independent path, influenced by his studies of abstract forms in tribal sculpture from Africa, Oceania, and Iberia, and the sculptural relationship in Paul Cézanne's paintings. These explorations culminated in the painting *Les Femmes d'Alger* (Olympia) (Museum of Modern Art, New York) which is considered a landmark work in the development of Cubist painting.

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Woman with a Plumed Hat, 1901

About the Artist continued

Jointly pioneered by Picasso and Georges Braque, Cubism abandoned the 500 year old system of perspective and other conventions for depicting the visible world. A new artistic language based on fragmentation, disintegration, and reforming the visual world, Cubism moved from:

- an Analytical phase, beginning about 1909 with muted colors and fractured forms,
- to collage about 1912–14 with pieces of the real world incorporated into the canvas,
- and finally to a Synthetic phase after 1914, in which vibrant, colorful forms combined to create the image.

Picasso's later works vary in style, with a brief period of monumental classical nudes and an association with Surrealism in the 1920s. His emotional involvement with the Spanish Civil War led him to create work depicting the brutality of war, as well as other images of political protest. After World War II, he moved to the south of France, where he remained extremely active, creating works in almost every artistic medium, including etchings, lithographs, sculpture, ceramics, linocuts, and murals. Picasso died in France in 1973 at the age of 91.

Quote from the Artist

In painting, as in life, you must act directly. . . . The artist is a receptacle for emotions that come from all over the place: from the sky, from the earth, from a scrap of paper, from a passing shape, from a spider's web.

Strategies for Tours

Primary Grades (ages 6–8) and Upper Elementary (ages 9–11): Would you like to meet this woman? Why or why not? Does she look like someone you know? What do you think she might say to you?

Middle School (ages 12–14): [Describe the way the paint was put on the canvas.] Do the colors work together? Are the lines fluid, heavy, light, straight, curving? If Picasso was born in October 1881, how old was he when he painted this work?

High School (ages 14–18) and Adults: [Point out the signature and inscription at the lower right. Explain the dating piece and what was going on in Picasso's life during this period.]

Sources Worth Consulting

Fitzgerland, Michael. *Picasso: The Artist's Studio*. London: Yale University Press, 2001.

Léal, Brigitte; Piot, Christine; and Bernadal, Marie-Laure. *The Ultimate Picasso*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000.

Richardson, John. *A Life of Picasso*. New York: Random House, 1991.

Rubin, William, ed. *Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1980.