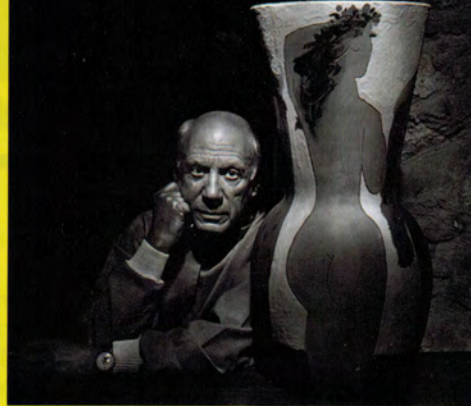


artHOUSTON

VISUAL ARTS, CULTURE, REVIEWS





Picasso

BY MORGAN CRONIN

Opposite page:
Yousuf Karsh
Pablo Picasso
1954 gelatin
silver print

This page:
*Minotaure caressant
du Mufle la Main
d'une Dormeuse*
(*Minotaur Caressing
a Sleeping Woman*)
1933, drypoint
printed on Montval
laid paper

***“It took me four years to paint like
Raphael, but a lifetime to paint
like a child.” - Pablo Picasso***



Portrait de Jacqueline au chapeau de paille fleuri
1962, linocut printed in colors on Arches wove paper

***“Picasso’s oeuvre retains its power
to startle and to seduce;
his inventiveness remains inexhaustible.”***

– Gary Tinterow

EXAMINING THE WORK OF PABLO PICASSO is a look into a life that innovatively explores various artistic styles: drawing, sculpture, painting, and printmaking. It is easy to understand our obsession with this prolific artist. A child protégé, young Picasso was capable of painting hyper-realistic portraits, perfectly imitating the Masters, before the age of nine. The twentieth century painter once said, “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.” McClain Gallery’s, *Imagining Backwards: Seven Decades of Picasso Master Prints*, is a profound retrospective of the iconic artist’s life and career, brought to Houston for the first time.

In his forward for the McClain Gallery catalog, Museum of Fine Arts Houston Director, Gary Tinterow says, “despite the frequent exposure and familiarity, Picasso’s oeuvre retains its power to startle and to seduce; his inventiveness remains inexhaustible. Any exhibition of his work is bound to surprise even the most knowledgeable observer.”

Over the span of seven decades, Picasso painted his autobiography, depicting his life with a mass of pictorial diary entries, illustrating his artistic imagination. “Any artist is lucky to have one great idea— one great series. It is an extraordinary thing if they have two great periods,” says Robert McClain, owner of McClain Gallery. “You look at Picasso, and it’s obvious that there are six great periods in his work, almost as if he were six different artists.”

Through *Imagining Backwards: Seven Decades of Picasso Master Prints*, McClain, and his team, accompanied by a collection of essays written by Charles Stuckey, portray a succinct overview of one of the twentieth century’s most important artists. With works dating from 1905 to 1970, and an emphasis on work from the 1920s, 1930s, and the notable Vollard Suite, (a collection comprised of 100 etchings selected by legendary dealer Ambroise Vollard), McClain Gallery’s exhibition offers a broad sweep of history, incomparable to shows exhibited by other galleries.

“We expand and dabble in every type that Picasso experimented in, from aquatint, etching, to graphs, and linocuts. It’s every type of print making that exists,” says McClain Gallery Manager, Anna Farrow.

The exhibition’s collection includes prints like *Man with Dog*, the largest of only a few etchings made by Picasso during the war. As Charles Stuckey states in his catalog essay, “like the words in a printed sentence collaborating to describe newsworthy events in the world outside, the outlined details in *Man with Dog* interlink pictorially to give an experienced account of the here and now in a cluttered interior,” drawing upon cubist themes made famous by Picasso, relating to time and viewpoint occurring at all angles, at once.

Many of the more recognizable works in the exhibit involve Picasso’s muses, addressing his love life and rotating affairs with numerous women. The heart of the show starts with images devoted to Marie Thérèse in the late ‘20s and the Vollard release, moving through muses Dora, Jacqueline, and Françoise.

“The thing that’s really fascinating about Picasso’s muses is they really matched the period he was in in his life,” says Farrow. “Dora was his war lover. She personified the unrest in Europe at the time. She was the left-wing activist. With Françoise, they actually had children. It’s very much a home life. When he left her, he finished out the twilight of his life and his career with Jacqueline, the only other one that he married. Then of course, Marie Thérèse, she was only 17 when they met. She was very much the beginning.”

Throughout Picasso’s seven-decade career, his evolution and transformation as an artist still finds work revealing a return to previously explored themes, such as self-examination. Works featured in McClain’s exhibit such as *Marie Thérèse Considering Her Own Sculpted Effigy* and *Minotaur Caressing a Sleeping Woman*, Picasso reveals his





***“Everyone is fascinated with genius.
I think we all, in some ways, by looking at the works
or life of genius, vicariously imagine our own lives.
No artist dominates the thinking
of other artists, of historians, of collectors
as much as Picasso.”***

- Robert McClain

fascination with portraying not only himself observing his subject, but his subject's own observance within the piece. In *Minotaur Caressing a Sleeping Woman*, Picasso drawing upon the idea of beauty and the beast, saying, “A minotaur can't be loved for himself. He's studying her, trying to read her thoughts, trying to decide whether she loves him because he's a monster,” providing an analysis of himself and a reflection on his relationships with the various women personified in his art throughout his career.

Imagining Backwards: Seven Decades of Picasso Master Prints opens Sept. 13, 2016, in conjunction with The Menil Collection's *Picasso The Line*. Both exhibits explore Picasso's mastery across disciplines and his distinctiveness within his work. *Picasso The Line* outlines the three dimensions of form, educating on the idea of line, perspective and their relation to Picasso's printmaking.

“As an art student, there is always a moment when you let go of what something really looks like, when you try to render it and start figuring out what it looks like to you, or your version of it. It's inspirational art to watch, which I think may be one of the reasons why people who don't know art, know Picasso,” says Farrow. “Picasso has a very unique, but also, ever-changing style, which I think our show does a good job of capturing at all levels. It's always fascinating when someone who doesn't know art, knows about Picasso.”

The experience of the retrospective at the McClain Gallery offers an intimate one not found in museum exhibitions. The aim is for the show to be appreciated on every level. Serious collectors will enjoy extremely rare works, like the two versions of the Weeping Woman, or the Frugal Repast— a very iconic image. Even the casual observer can learn something. McClain Gallery's exhibit showcases Picasso throughout every style in his life, through every kind of printmaking— the variation and fermentation that Picasso went through. Art Historians can enjoy a complete overview, combined into one show.

As for Picasso's timelessness, McClain attributes to the obsession saying, “Everyone is fascinated with genius. I think we all, in some ways, by looking at the works or life of genius, vicariously imagine our own lives. No artist dominates the thinking of other artists, of historians, of collectors as much as Picasso.”

As evident from Picasso's process, he loved to work backwards, keeping track of changes, the development of ideas, often drawing backwards, from first to last. As Tinterow concludes in his forward address, “Picasso's late work retains its urgency with universal themes of love and life, art making and death. The sweep of graphic work that McClain has brought together proves, yet again, that works of art can truly transcend time.”

Clockwise:
Tete de Femme IV,
Portrait de Dora Maar
 1939, color aquatint
 printed on
 Montval paper

Femme Au Fauteuil
 No. 4 (d'après le violet)
 1948, lithograph on
 Arches vellum with
 Arches watermark

Sculpture. Tête de
Marie-Thérèse 1933,
 drypoint on laid paper

L'Homme au Chien
 (Man with dog) 1915,
 etching with scraper
 printed on Arches
 wove paper

