

Thus both the Purist and Surrealist groups devised tactics for, and devoted time and space to, representing the significant work of the pre-war period in terms that appear to legitimize their own conceptions of post-war art. Both groups recognized the significance of Apollinaire's writing in this process; the other figure whose work became a primary focus of attention for contending groups after the war was Picasso. But in a variety of ways Picasso represented more of a problem than Apollinaire: he was still alive and, moreover, still producing an apparently unruly variety of pictures, pictures that seemed (more obviously than was the case with Apollinaire's writing) immediately to threaten any one set of theoretical projections built around them.

Picasso

At the time of the armistice Picasso had not shown any new work in Paris for nine years. In 1918, given the enforced absence of Kahnweiler, the bulk of the remaining Cubists – including Braque, Léger and Gris – signed contracts with Léonce Rosenberg, self-styled promoter of a Cubism suited to a reconstructed France. Picasso signed instead with Léonce's brother, Paul, through whom were arranged the majority of the artist's nine one-man exhibitions in Paris between 1919 and 1928. In addition to these, work by Picasso was included in numerous group exhibitions over the same period. These are of interest because through them an association of some sort was implied between Picasso's work and just about every other group making a claim to represent the authentic direction of post-war art. In some exhibitions his work was hung alongside that of other pre-war heavyweights – Matisse and Derain, for example. On occasions it was included in exhibitions of the younger generation of painters set to be packaged as the 'School of Paris'. In other shows, examples of his paintings were presented with work by artists associated with *L'Esprit Nouveau*; the fifth and final exhibition in a series entitled *Maîtres du Cubisme*, at Rosenberg's *Galerie de l'Effort Moderne*, was devoted to Picasso. And in 1925 several Picassos were displayed in the first *Exposition de la Peinture Surréaliste* at the *Galerie Pierre*.

Picasso's status as leader of pre-war Cubism was not contested by either the Purists or the Surrealists. But one might expect these commentators to have been more circumspect about the range of highly naturalistic, so-called Ingresque drawings and paintings that he began producing from 1915 (*Portrait of Olga in an Armchair*, Plate 56; *Portrait of Igor Stravinsky*, Plate 57). In fact they were not. It is a notable feature of most of the commentaries published immediately after the war that his work as a whole – or rather his creative persona – was placed above and beyond the standards of their normal criticism. André Salmon, writing in the first issue of *L'Esprit Nouveau*, set the tone for much of what was to follow, in his short survey of Picasso's artistic development:

Picasso does not tie himself down ... When the Cubist era began, Picasso was in an admirable position, his free genius flowering as never before ... Picasso is alone between earth and heaven, followed by those to whom he showed the way, and preceded by the man he used to be. Picasso remains alone after bestowing new truths upon us ... crowned with grace.

(Salmon, 'Picasso')

Breton, in 'Surrealism and painting', wrote in one of his passages on Picasso:

For all these reasons, we claim him unhesitatingly as one of us, even though it is impossible and would, in any case, be impertinent to apply to his methods the rigorous system that we propose to institute in other directions ... I shall always oppose the absurdly restrictive sense that any label would impose on this man from whom we confidently expect great things ... Picasso himself is absolved by his genius from all primary moral obligations.

(Breton, 'Surrealism and painting', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.4, p.30 and no.6, p.31)



Plate 56 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait d'Olga dans un fauteuil* (*Portrait of Olga in an Armchair*), 1917, oil on canvas, 130 x 89 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.

Plate 57 Pablo Picasso,
Portrait d'Igor Stravinsky
 (*Portrait of Igor Stravinsky*),
 1920, pencil on grey paper,
 62 x 49 cm. Musée Picasso,
 Paris. Photo: Réunion des
 Musées Nationaux
 Documentation
 Photographique. © DACS,
 London, 1993.



Thus Picasso was represented not as someone who produced an uneven body of work – some parts of which merited attention and some of which might better be passed over in silence – but as someone whose entire output formed a unity transcending ordinary terms of reference. There might be additional ways of explaining this treatment of Picasso as a kind of Nietzschean ‘Superman’. First, it might have been that the stakes were too high, that no aspiring leader of post-war art was going to risk possible isolation through being seen to criticize work by an artist of such prestige and respect. Alternatively, it might have been that these authors had noticed something about Picasso’s work, even in its most naturalistic vein, that somehow distinguished it from the more run-of-the-mill naturalism. Probably there was an element of both those things.

It is certainly the case that the overt naturalism in a drawing or painting by Picasso from this period is always somehow *qualified*, either within the picture or by a closely related work. Exactly how this qualification is achieved varies from work to work, and it is worth looking more closely at a few examples. We have already noted how Picasso often took a similar theme and represented it in differing styles. Between 1915 and 1923 the harlequin figure was the subject of several paintings, from the most naturalistic (for example, *Seated Harlequin*, Plate 12) to the most flattened and planar (for example, *Harlequin*, Plate 13, or *The Three Musicians*, Plate 1). This tendency to alternate between two or more distinct styles carries certain implications. It suggests, first of all, that each style is an example of a means of representing, but that neither can assume a *privileged* relationship with the world it depicts. If nothing else, this emphasizes the issue of the material character of representation. It is hard to suppress the sense, when faced with such work, that we are looking, not so much at the object in a picture but at a way of picturing an object. Furthermore it follows from this that different modes of representation will call to

attention different aspects of what is represented. Ozenfant, writing in *L'Esprit Nouveau* no.13 (1921) under the pseudonym Vauvrecy, characterized this aspect of Picasso's work in terms of someone writing in different languages:

Can ... people not understand that Cubism and figurative painting are two different languages, and that a painter is free to choose either of them as he may judge it better suited to what he has to say?

... Some things, for instance, are better expressed in algebraic than in geometrical terms, as the latter may conform more neatly to this or that mode of thought ... Do we deny the value of algebra when we practise geometry?

(*L'Esprit Nouveau*, no.13, 1921, pp.1492-3)

Picasso's graphic work of the period appears to complicate this issue further by emphasizing the different modes of representation *within* the broad category of naturalism. In many of these drawings, Picasso effectively rehearses the traditional division between linear and tonal depiction. Drawings such as his *Portrait of Igor Stravinsky* (Plate 57) and *Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire* (Plate 58) are exclusively and emphatically linear, whereas

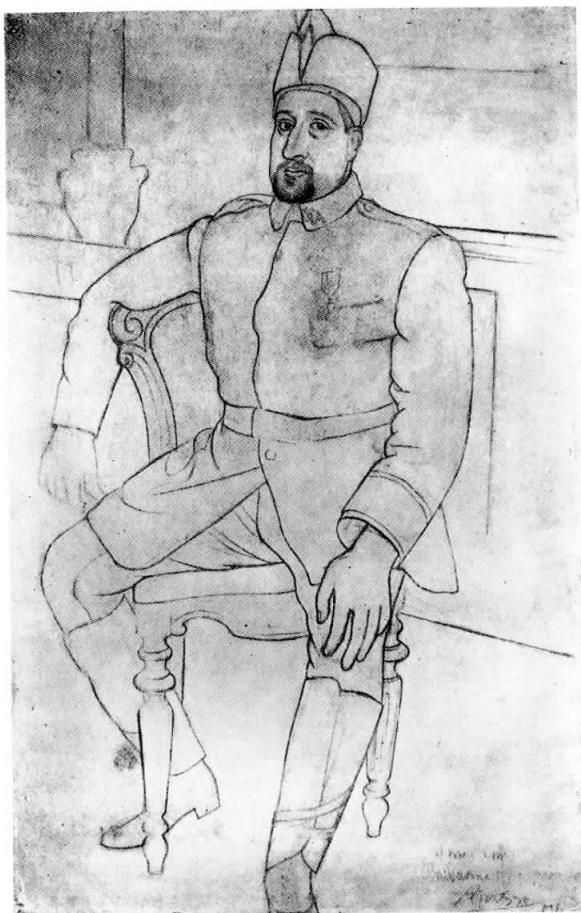


Plate 58 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait de Guillaume Apollinaire* (*Portrait of Guillaume Apollinaire*), 1916, pencil on paper, 48 x 31 cm. Private collection. Photograph by courtesy of Sotheby's, London. © DACS, London, 1993.



Plate 59 Pablo Picasso, *Portrait d'Ambroise Vollard* (*Portrait of Ambroise Vollard*), 1915, pencil on paper, 46 x 32 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1947. © DACS, London, 1993.

his *Portrait of Ambroise Vollard* (Plate 59) uses both techniques, but in distinct areas of the same work. It is a curious feature of all these works that while a highly illusionistic technique is used, its effect is more to declare than to deny the artifice of representation. During the early 1920s Picasso executed a number of works that further emphasize the differences within naturalistic drawing by depicting the same theme in different graphic modes. Around 1922 Picasso produced a number of works on the theme of maternity. In one (Plate 60) the figures of mother and child are executed in a highly abbreviated linear style, with a soft pencil or crayon. Patches of watercolour indicate the colour of clothes, curtains, etc., but in such a way that they remain separate and distinct from the drawn lines. In the next sketchbook (Plate 61) the two figures are depicted in an overtly tonal manner, built up in several layers of cross-hatching with a hard pencil. In addition, while the latter drawing is overtly classicizing in its execution, composition and costume, the former is more suggestive of a contemporary bourgeois family scene.

With drawings such as these, the question of the status of the subject arises. During the post-war period the theme of maternity had been conscripted into the rhetoric of the 'call to order', as we noted earlier. In this context, the argument would go, there could no longer be an 'innocent' representation of the subject, free from this baggage of associations. Are these works then reducible to illustrations of this propaganda? I think not, but not only because Picasso had recently become a father himself and would, therefore, have



Plate 60 Pablo Picasso, untitled drawing, 1922, pencil, watercolour and pastel drawing on paper, 16 x 12 cm, from Sketchbook no.76, p.37. Private collection. Photograph: Bill Jacobson Studio by courtesy of The Pace Gallery, New York. © DACS, London, ARS, New York, 1993.



Plate 61 Pablo Picasso, untitled drawing, c.1922, pencil drawing on paper, 42 x 31 cm, from Sketchbook no.77, p.28. Private collection. Photograph: Bill Jacobson Studio by courtesy of The Pace Gallery, New York. © DACS, London, ARS, New York, 1993.

witnessed such scenes. Rather, it is a matter of technique, and the types of observation embodied in Picasso's techniques – observation of the motif, and observation of the processes of representation. The effect is that the works look as if they are a result of *scrutinizing* the subject rather than simply illustrating it.

Picasso's naturalistic painting also often displays different techniques, and this division often takes place within the same work. *The Painter and his Model* (1914; Plate 62), probably the earliest surviving example of Picasso's post-Cubist naturalistic painting, is a small work painted on a linen drying-up cloth. It looks unfinished. A small section of the

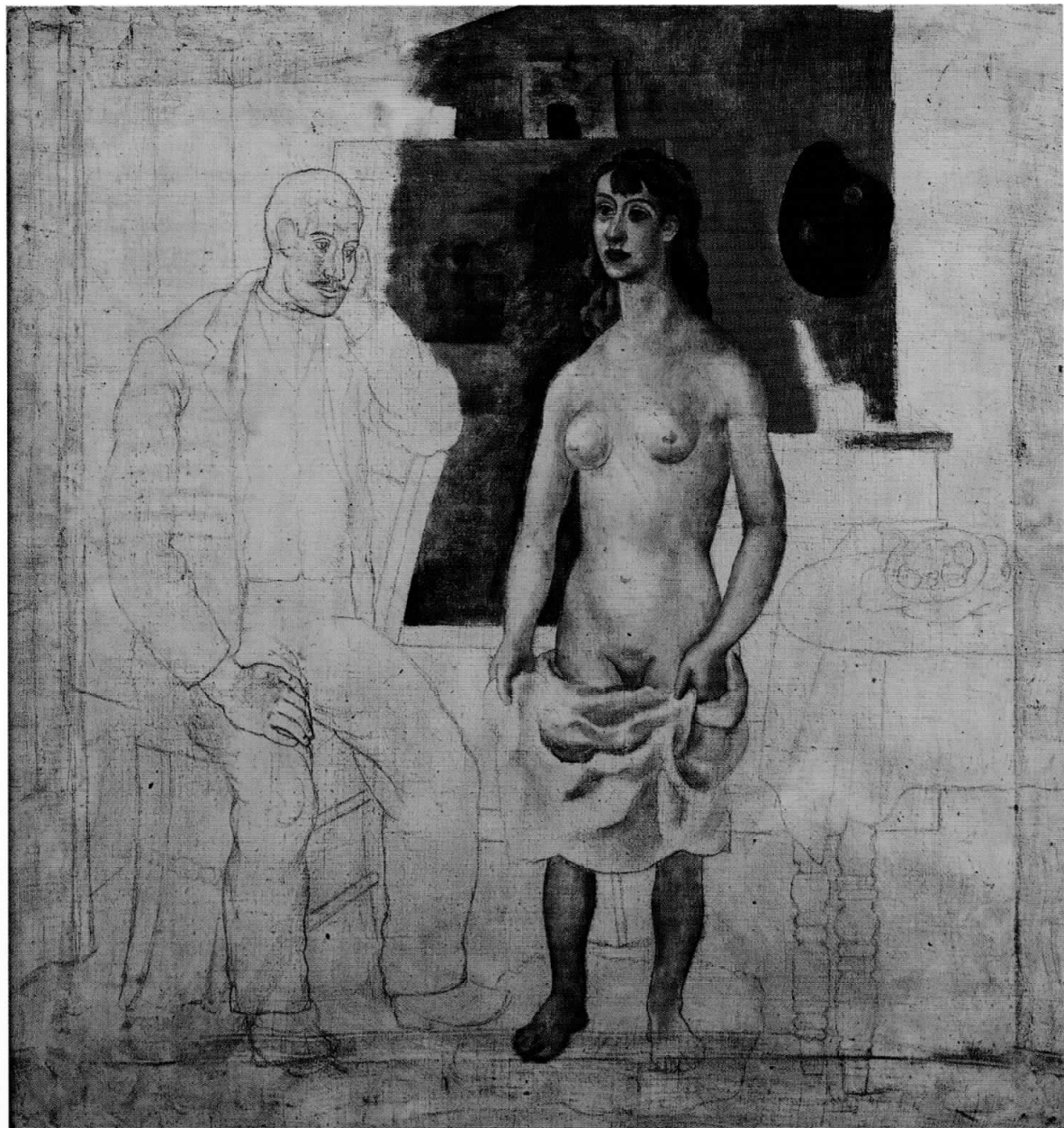


Plate 62 Pablo Picasso, *Le Peintre et son modèle* (*The Painter and his Model*), 1914, oil and crayon on linen, 58 x 56 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.

work is painted in naturalistic colour and tone while the remaining areas exist only in pencil outline. It may well be that Picasso had intended to paint the entire area but, for some reason, didn't complete the work. It may also be that Picasso noticed something in this unfinished painting that gave it a quality that might otherwise have been lost – for in other slightly later paintings he appears deliberately to exploit this quality as a device. For example, *Portrait of Olga in an Armchair* (Plate 56) is quite emphatically 'unfinished'. The figure and drapery are only tied into the surrounding bare canvas by some areas of rough shading, some loose undescriptive brushwork, and some light pencil drawing. The effect, again, is both to heighten and to defeat the illusionism of the meticulous paintwork in the centre of the picture. Again, the viewer is faced with a picture of picturing as much as with a portrait of a young woman. And in the case of *The Painter and his Model*, the viewer is faced with a picture of an artist frozen in the process of making a painting, and with a picture frozen in the process of being painted. There is an important sense, I think, in which these paintings owe more to the conventions of collage than to those of naturalistic painting. It is as if the illusionistic parts of the work are 'pasted' on to the canvas surface. They become bits of material layered onto other pictorially distinct bits of material.

In other works of the period these devices are made less obvious, but they none the less shape the overall character of the work. The *Seated Harlequin* and *Seated Woman in a Chemise* (Plates 12 and 63), both from 1923, are striking examples of illusionistic painting.



Plate 63 Pablo Picasso, *Femme en chemise assise* (*Seated Woman in a Chemise*), 1923, oil on canvas, 92 x 73 cm. Tate Gallery, London. © DACS, London, 1993.

In each a single figure stands out from an indeterminate background. The *Seated Woman in a Chemise* appears monumental and sculptural in her white cotton shift, but at the same time there are areas in the painting – around her right hand for example – where the definition gives way to thinned paint and very loose brushwork. The cotton shift is also indicated in such an abbreviated way that the process of representation is, again, given at least equal emphasis with the thing represented. Likewise the *Seated Harlequin* (Plate 12) is both convincingly three-dimensional in places and obviously two-dimensional in others. In this painting the sense of solid form is also dissolved in the lower part of the figure and, moreover, the central section of the figure is visibly made up of three quite distinct and independent elements – thinly painted outlines, schematic modelling and patches of colour. Again, it is as if these elements are collaged together or layered over one another; they coexist on the same surface rather than form a fully integrated unity. The effect is of something provisional, open and light. In a painting of a comparable theme, Severini's *The Two Punchinellos* (Plate 5), these qualities are entirely absent.

Other paintings by Picasso declare their artifice in other ways. The figures in many of his 'Classical' scenes are massively distorted, sometimes subtly, occasionally grotesquely. The body of his *Large Bather* (Plate 64), for example, is hugely inflated. Nevertheless, though monumental, the figure is not grotesque – because of the precise delicacy of her

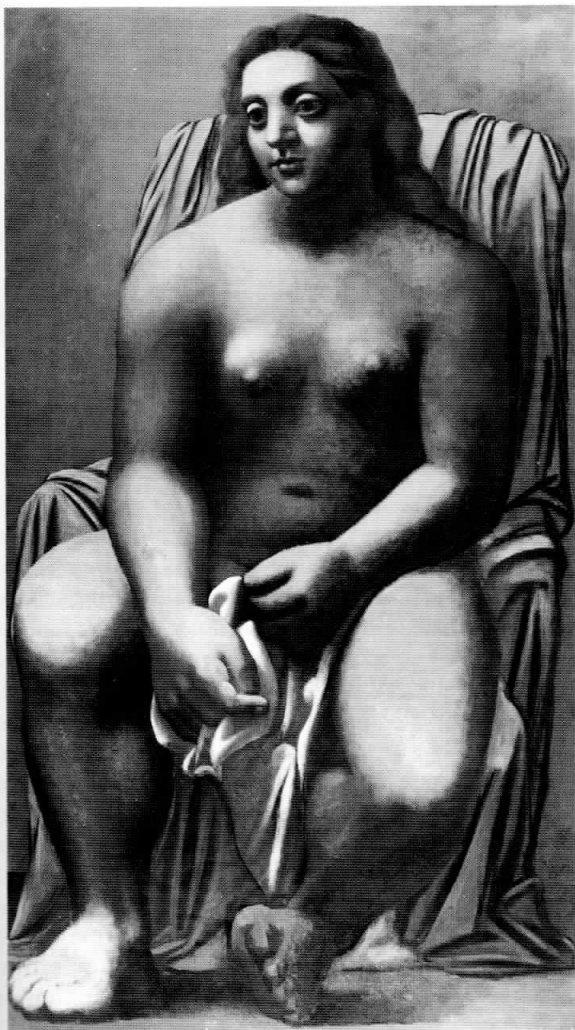


Plate 64 Pablo Picasso, *Grande Baigneuse (Large Bather)*, 1921, oil on canvas, 180 x 98 cm. Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walther and Paul Guillaume, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.



Plate 65 Pablo Picasso, *Deux Femmes courant sur la plage (La Course)* (*Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)*), 1922, gouache on plywood, 33 x 41 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.

posture and her distracted expression. Likewise the figure in the centre of the small gouache *Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)* (Plate 65) is stretched into a cruciform shape extending almost to the four edges of the panel. The left arm and leg of this figure are about twice the size of the arms and legs of the foreground figure, but paradoxically this does more to enhance the compositional balance of the painting than disrupt it. It is hard to place these figures, or the more obviously grotesque couple in *The Two Bathers* (Plate 66), within the rhetoric of post-war Classical idealism. The figures are schematized, distorted and idiosyncratic: the formal balance of the painting is achieved only at the expense of the figures' Classical proportions. While these works use some of the language of Classicism, that language is emptied of its assumed moral content. However, these are not exactly parodic or ironic works. They rehearse a certain 'language' of representation, but they do not rubbish it. Their ambivalence means that they remain hard to place. In this sense these paintings share with Apollinaire's later writing the capacity simultaneously to evoke contradictory qualities within a single work.

In 1925 Picasso produced an ambitious painting that both draws on many of the interests and devices outlined above, and marks a departure from his 'Classicism' of the previous few years. *The Three Dancers* (Plate 67) is a large painting (215 x 142 cm) and a



Plate 66 Pablo Picasso, *Les Deux Baigneuses* (*The Two Bathers*), 1920, oil on canvas, 194 x 163 cm. Musée de l'Orangerie, Collection Jean Walther and Paul Guillaume, Paris. Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.

complex composition. While invoking the rhetoric of Classicism in its theme – the naked or semi-naked dancers suggest the Graces – the painting also invokes in its structure the planar Cubism of, for example, *The Three Musicians* (Plate 1). There is no modelling in this work, space being suggested only by interlocking planes of flat colour bounded by black contours. The figures are neither sensuous nor monumental, as was the case in some of the earlier nudes, nor are they comic and playful in the way suggested by the *commedia dell'arte* disguises of *The Three Musicians*. The effect is rather of something awkward and discontinuous, which immediately sets the work against the conventional expectations that accompany the genre. For example, two drawings of the same subject (Plates 68 and 69), one heavily modelled and static, the other entirely linear and flowing, are both quite extreme in their way, but they nevertheless stay within the conventional expressive range of the genre.

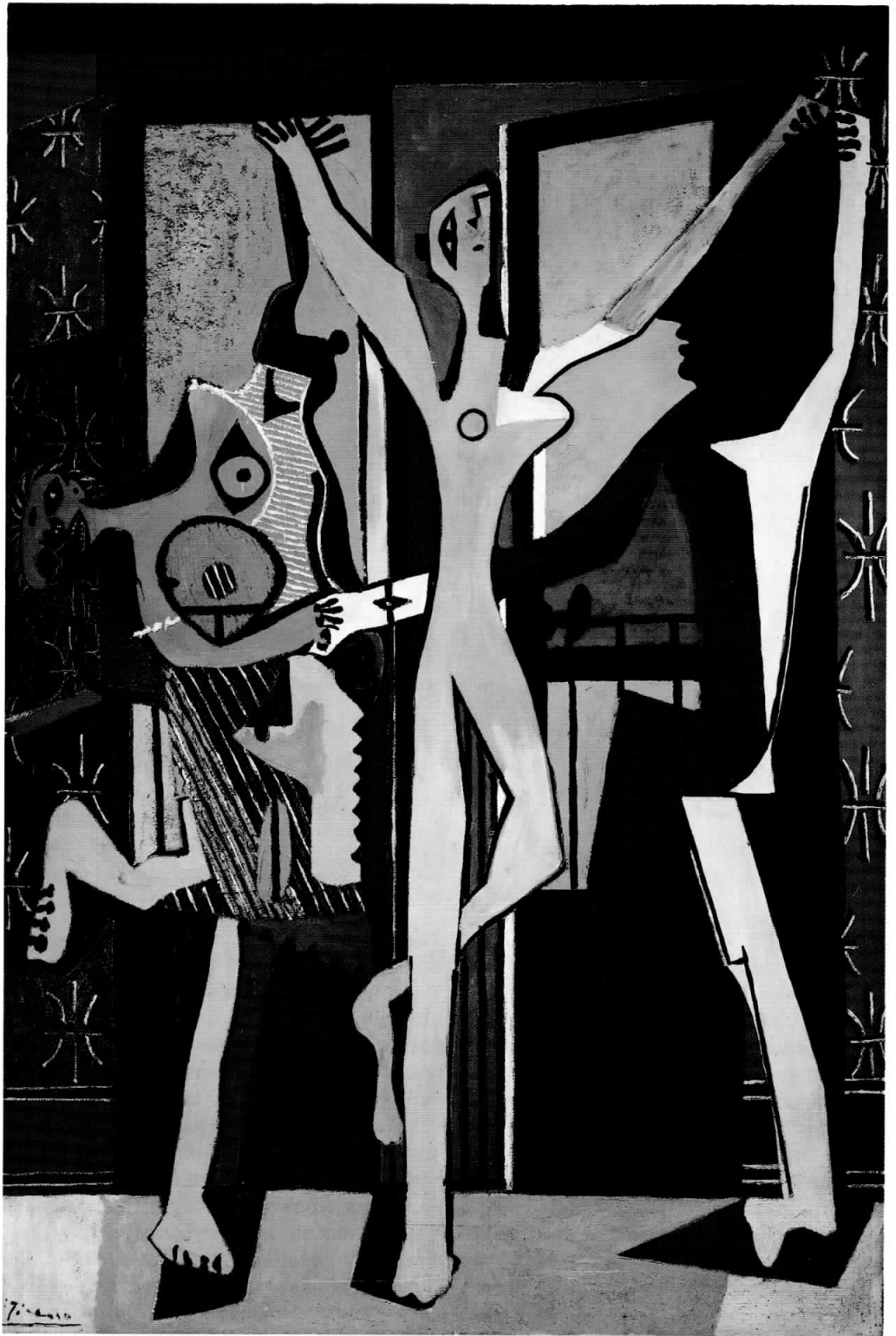


Plate 67 Pablo Picasso, *Les Trois Danseuses* (*The Three Dancers*), 1925, oil on canvas, 215 x 142 cm. Tate Gallery, London. © DACS, London, 1993.



Plate 68 Pablo Picasso, *Les Trois Danseuses (The Three Dancers)*, 1919, pencil on paper (three sheets pasted together), 37 x 33 cm. Musée Picasso, Paris.
Photo: Réunion des Musées Nationaux Documentation Photographique. © DACS, London, 1993.



Plate 69 Pablo Picasso, *Les Deux Danseuses (The Two Dancers)*, 1919, pencil on paper, 31 x 24 cm. Collection of Mr and Mrs Tony Ganz. © DACS, London, 1993.

In the painting, the three life-size figures are depicted in front of French windows that look out over a balcony into the distance. As so often in Picasso's work, the figures occupy most of the height and width of the picture and are contained tightly within the pictorial rectangle. However, each figure is depicted in a significantly different manner. The central dancer seems the most straightforward – a distorted, pink, 'cut out' figure with a circle for a breast and some schematic highlights on the left shoulder. The main oddity is the depiction of the face, the prim expression of which is upset by an incongruous vertical eye. This oddity can be accounted for if it is read instead as a manic grinning mouth on a sideways tilted head, in which case the overall expressive character of the figure is thrown into doubt.

This deliberate ambiguity produces a kind of domino effect throughout the entire picture. Just about every other element of the painting is similarly set up to produce two or more conflicting or discontinuous readings. For example, the white lines on the upper part of the figure on the left of the painting suggest in a highly schematic form the Classical cotton shift: the white line across her right shoulder is an echo of both the 1923 *Seated Woman in a Chemise* (Plate 63) and the 1905 *Girl in a Chemise*, each of which is shown with a strap falling from the same shoulder. At the same time, the diagonal coloured lines on the lower part of the body have been interpreted (on the basis of X-ray evidence) as being derived from a 1920s Charleston dress. The bisected blue oval on the dress may be read as a view of the balcony rail and sky in the background – or alternatively as a schematic rendering of the woman's vagina. Similarly, the circular blue area with the red circle may be seen as depicting the space between her arched back and arm or, possibly, as another

breast. And the figure's head is either a grimacing, compressed, full face, or its forehead may be seen as a benign crescent-moon profile. The figure on the right of the picture is made up of two sets of contrasting angular shapes (without a consistent linear contour), which has led some commentators to interpret it as male. It has been given both a large silhouetted head enclosed by the two raised arms (in which case the gaps between the schematic fingers may be read as equally schematic tufts of hair), and a much smaller profile within this head. The area around the figures is equally unstable. For example, the edge of the open door is highlighted in different places so that it becomes impossible to say whether it opens inwards or outwards; and the repeated pattern that borders each side of the painting is presumably derived from wallpaper, but also offers a visual echo of the three-figure grouping.

The setting up of visual ambiguities, paradoxes and discontinuities of this sort had been a feature of Picasso's output for many years. One effect of these devices is to make the viewer more conscious of his or her *active* part in the process of producing the representation. In *The Three Dancers*, the multiple uncertainties and discontinuities conscript the viewer into this work. In this largely 'frozen' composition, the dance itself is played out, perhaps, not in the implied movements of the figures, but in the movements of styles between the figures, and in the way the viewer is made to move between a series of unstable signs.

It is perhaps for these sorts of reason that the work so attracted Breton. It was reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste* no.4 of 15 July 1925 – the first time that the work had been seen outside Picasso's studio. The same issue of the magazine contained the first part of Breton's essay 'Surrealism and painting', which was illustrated exclusively with examples of Picasso's non-naturalistic work. For Breton, Picasso had assumed the 'immense responsibility' of

so heightening his awareness of the treacherous nature of tangible entities that he dared break openly with them and, more particularly, with the facile connotations of their everyday appearance.

(Breton, 'Surrealism and painting', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.4, p.28)

Later in the text Breton described what he saw as the main contribution the artist could make towards the advancement of the Surrealist revolution:

The Revolution is the only cause on behalf of which I deem it worth while to summon the best men that I know. Painters share responsibility, with all others to whose formidable lot it has fallen, to make full use of their particular means of expression to prevent the domination by the symbol of the thing signified.

(Breton, 'Surrealism and painting', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.6, p.30)

And in relation to Picasso's overtly naturalistic works:

Nothing seems to me more entertaining or more appropriate than that, in order to disillusion the insufferable acolytes or to draw a sigh of relief from the beast of reaction, he should occasionally make a show of worshipping the idols he has burnt.

(Breton, 'Surrealism and painting', *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.4, p.29)

The first point here is that Breton describes the job of the artist in overtly political terms, although the kind of intervention he proposes for the painter takes place within the sphere of representation. By destabilizing the *conventional* relation between symbol and object, the artist partakes in the radical 'revision of real values' and furthers the 'grim struggle between the actual and the possible'. For Breton, this had been at the heart of Picasso's work for at least a decade and a half. And it continued to be, in spite of attempts to conscript his work into the service of reaction.