
The Philosophical Brothel

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The Philosophical Brothel*

LEO STEINBERG

The picture was five years old when Picasso's poet friend, André Salmon, mistook it for nearly abstract; its team of prostitutes seemed to him "almost entirely freed from humanity. . . . Naked problems, white signs on a black-board."¹ But at that early date, who could foresee where the picture was heading? Or predict that its twenty-six-year-old creator would live to defy seven decades of abstract art?

Kahnweiler's apology for the *Demaiselles* followed soon after. Though he found the picture unachieved and lacking unity, he honored it as a desperate titanic struggle with every formal problem of painting at once and hailed its right section as "the beginning of Cubism."²

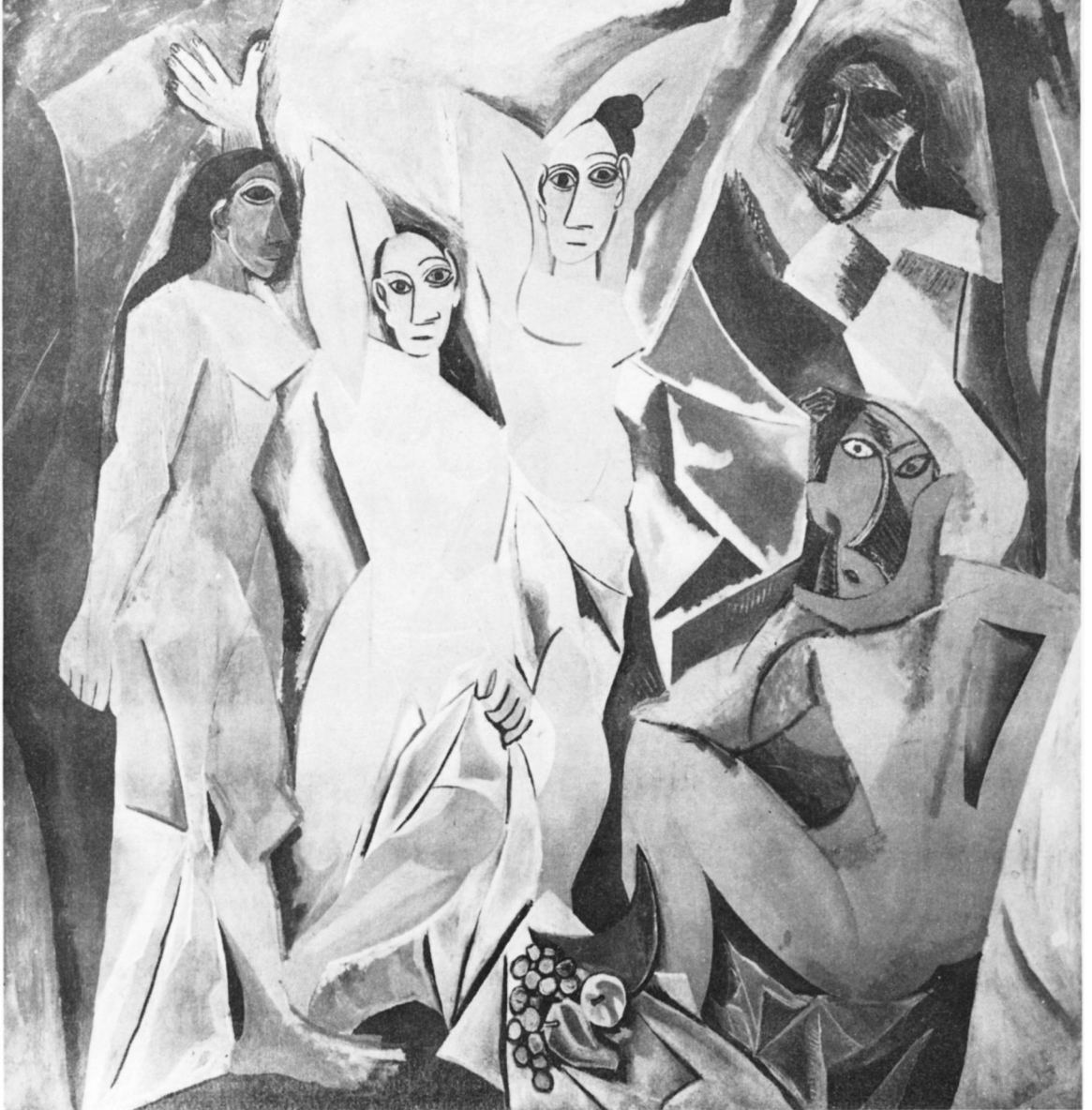
* "The Philosophical Brothel" was originally published in *Art News*, vol. LXXI (September and October 1972). It has now been republished, with minor revisions, in French translation for the exhibition catalogue *Les Demaiselles d'Avignon*, Paris, Musée Picasso, 1988; and in Spanish translation for the exhibition at the Museu Picasso, Barcelona, 1988. The present version includes a few additional footnotes (distinguished by "A" or "B"), as well as a "Retrospect," beginning here on p. 65.

Since the 1972 publication of "The Philosophical Brothel," many of the studies and sketches for the *Demaiselles* and related works, known then only through reproductions in the *Zervos Oeuvre Catalogue* (see note 8), have entered the collection of the Musée Picasso. They are here designated by the letters MP, followed by an inventory number.

1. André Salmon, *La jeune peinture française*, Paris, Société de Trente, 1912, p. 3: "For the first time in Picasso's work the expression of the faces is neither tragic nor passionate. These are masks almost entirely freed from humanity. Yet these people are not gods, nor are they Titans or heroes; not even allegorical or symbolic figures. *Ce sont des problèmes nus, des chiffres blancs au tableau-noir.*"

2. Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, *Der Weg zum Kubismus*, written in 1915, published in Munich, 1920; reprinted, Stuttgart, 1958, pp. 26–27; English ed., *The Rise of Cubism*, New York, George Wittenborn, 1949, pp. 6–7. The text runs as follows: "Early in 1907 Picasso began a strange large painting depicting women, fruit and drapery, which he left unfinished. . . . Begun in the spirit of the works of 1906, it contains in one section the endeavors of 1907 and thus never constitutes a unified whole. . . . In the foreground, however, alien to the style of the rest of the painting, appear a crouching figure and a bowl of fruit. . . . This is the beginning of Cubism, the first upsurge, a desperate titanic clash with all of the problems at once. These problems were the basic tasks of painting: to represent three dimensions and color on a flat surface, and to comprehend them in the unity of that surface. . . . No pleasant 'composition' but uncompromising, organically articulated structure. In addition, there was the problem of color, and finally, the most difficult of all, that of the amalgamation, the reconciliation of the whole. Rashly, Picasso attacked all the problems at once."

1. Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 243.9 × 233.7 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art; acquired through the Lillie P. Bliss Bequest.



During the next fifty years the trend of criticism became irreversible: the *Demoiselles* was a triumph of form over content; to see the work with intelligence was to see it resolved into abstract energies.³

3. Following are characteristic examples: "The *Demoiselles d'Avignon* is the masterpiece of Picasso's Negro Period, but it may also be called the first cubist picture, for the breaking up of natural forms, whether figures, still life or drapery, into a semi-abstract all-over pattern of tilting shifting planes is already cubism; . . . The *Demoiselles* is a transitional picture, a laboratory or, better, a battlefield of trial and experience; but it is also a work of formidable, dynamic power unsurpassed in European art of its time" (Alfred H. Barr, Jr., *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1939, p. 60; the paragraph reappears in Barr, *Picasso: Fifty Years of His Art*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1946, p. 56). Though the author is sensitive to the "sheer expressionist violence and barbaric intensity" of the work, he makes no attempt to reconcile this aspect of Picasso's invention with its historic importance as "the first Cubist picture."

Wilhelm Boeck and Jaime Sabartés (*Picasso*, New York/Amsterdam, Harry N. Abrams, 1952, pp. 141ff.) introduce the *Demoiselles* as follows: "In the course of 1906 Picasso turned more and more resolutely away from subjective expression and . . . concentrated on objective, formal problems. He thus shares in the general artistic current of those years. . . ." Like the Fauves, Picasso "subordinated subject matter to form conceived as an end in itself. . . . The history of the composition . . . illustrates the process by which form asserts its supremacy over subject matter." The authors refer only to one of the preliminary studies, our fig. 6. The rest of the discussion concerns the anticipation of Cubism and the sources of the work in Cézanne, El Greco, Iberian and African sculpture.

John Golding ("The *Demoiselles d'Avignon*," *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. C [1958], pp. 155–163): "In the last analysis . . . the *Demoiselles* is related more closely to Cézanne's canvases of bathing women than to his earlier, less structural figure pieces. Indeed, it would have been quite natural if, when Picasso became more interested in the purely pictorial problems involved in composing and unifying a picture the size of the *Demoiselles*, he had begun to look with greater concentration at Cézanne's later figure work."

Robert Rosenblum (*Cubism and Twentieth-Century Art*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1960, p. 25) succeeds in evoking the work's "barbaric, dissonant power," its "magical force," and "mysterious psychological intensity"; after which he concludes: "The radical quality of *Les Demoiselles* lies, above all, in its threat to the integrity of mass as distinct from space. In the three nudes at the left, the arcs and planes that dissect the anatomies begin to shatter the traditional sense of bulk; and in the later figures at the right, this fragmentation of mass is even more explicit. The nudes' contours now merge ambiguously with the icy-blue planes beside them . . . it is exactly this new freedom in the exploration of mass and void, line and plane, color and value—independent from representational ends—that makes *Les Demoiselles* so crucial for the still more radical liberties of the mature years of Cubism."

Edward Fry (*Cubism*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1966, pp. 13–14): "[Picasso's] departures from classical figure style [in the *Demoiselles*] . . . mark the beginning of a new attitude toward the expressive potentialities of the human figure. Based not on gesture and physiognomy but on the complete freedom to re-order the human image, this new approach was to lead to the evocation of previously unexpressed states of mind. . . . The treatment of space is, however, by far the most significant aspect of *Les Demoiselles*, especially in view of the predominant role of spatial problems in the subsequent development of cubism. The challenge facing Picasso was the creation of a new system of indicating three-dimensional relationships that would no longer be dependent on the convention of illusionistic, one point perspective."

Douglas Cooper (*The Cubist Epoch*, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970, pp. 22–23): "It is not easy to appreciate or judge the angular and aggressive *Demoiselles* as a work of art today because it was abandoned as a transitional and often re-worked canvas, with many stylistic contradictions unresolved. . . . Thus the *Demoiselles* is best regarded as a major event in the history of modern painting, where Picasso posed many of the problems and revealed many of the ideas which were to preoccupy him for the next three years. In short, it is an invaluable lexicon for the early phase of Cubism." Cooper adds that the

The reluctance to probe other levels seemed justified by what was known of the work's genesis. The first phase of the *Demoiselles* project was to have included two men: a sailor seated at a central table and a man entering the scene from the left with a skull in his hand — apparently a symbolic evocation of death. "Picasso originally conceived the picture as a kind of *memento mori*," wrote Alfred Barr; but, he continued, in the end, "all implications of a moralistic contrast between virtue (the man with the skull) and vice (the man surrounded by food and women) have been eliminated in favor of a purely formal figure composition, which as it develops becomes more and more dehumanized and abstract."⁴

The evidence for the presence of the skull in the early phase seemed incontrovertible, having come from the artist himself.⁵ Barr therefore concluded — and his view became canonic for the next thirty years — that the picture had at first been intended "as an allegory or charade on the wages of sin."⁶

There were two remarkable consequences. First: since the mortality emblem dropped out as the work progressed, the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* — "the most important single pictorial document that the twentieth century has yet produced" (Golding)⁷ — came to be seen as the paradigm of all modern art, the movement away from "significance" toward self-referential abstraction. Even the violence of the depicted scene was understood as an emancipation of formal energies, energies no longer constrained by inhibiting content.

repainting of three of the heads under the impact of African sculpture "led [Picasso] to inject an element of fierceness into an otherwise emotionally detached composition."

And most recently, Jean Leymarie (*Picasso: Métamorphoses et unité*, Geneva, Skira, 1971, p. 29): "The *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, whose heroic genesis and legendary fate are familiar, reversed the direction of modern art by throwing the center of gravity upon the picture itself and its creative tension. All earlier illustrative or sentimental values are dissolved and converted into plastic energy."

4. Barr, *Fifty Years*, p. 57.

5. Barr, *Forty Years*, p. 60, and *Fifty Years*, p. 57. Picasso's statement appears to be made in conversation with Kahnweiler in December 1933, published by the latter in "Huit Entretiens," *Le Point*, October 1952, p. 24 (see now, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, ed. Dore Ashton, New York, Praeger, 1972, pp. 153–154): "According to my original idea, there were supposed to be men in it. . . . There was a student holding a skull. A seaman also. The women were eating, hence the basket of fruits which I left in the painting. Then, I changed it and it became what it is now. . . ." The gist of Picasso's statement must have been known before its late publication in 1952. Barr does not recall whether he heard it from Picasso directly, but his *Forty Years* catalogue states in the caption for our fig. 6: "The figure at the left, Picasso says (1939), is a man with a skull in his hand entering a scene of carnal pleasure." Concerning the skull in this drawing, see below, pp. 38–43.

6. Barr, *Fifty Years*, p. 57; Barr, *Masters of Modern Art*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1954, p. 68.

7. "The *Demoiselles* is in many ways an unsatisfactory painting with its abrupt changes of style, its violence and its suppressed eroticism. . . . Picasso himself considered the painting unfinished. But by posing many of the problems that the cubists were to solve, it marks the beginning of a new era in the history of art. It remains not only the major turning point in Picasso's career, but also the most important single pictorial document that the twentieth century has yet produced"; Golding in *Picasso and Man*, Toronto, The Art Gallery of Ontario, 1964, p. 11. Cf. Golding's earlier statement ("The *Demoiselles d'Avignon*," p. 163) that the picture is "the most important single turning point in the evolution of twentieth-century art so far."

Second: Picasso's numerous drawings for the *Demoiselles* were as good as ignored. If the painting was his release from a misguided allegorical purpose, then the drawings presumably recorded no more than a false start; they could have no bearing on that premonition of Cubist structure which made the picture historic.

As the criteria of criticism hardened and set, so the questionnaire addressed to the work was gradually formalized. The questions discussed, and obediently answered, concerned the chronology of the painting, its debt to Cézanne, its incorporation of Iberian and African influences—above all, its leap toward Cubism. It was the work's destination and its points of departure that had to be ascertained. Like a traveler at a stopover, the picture was only asked to define itself in terms of wherefrom and whereto.

But the picture at sixty-five deserves a new set of questions; for instance:

Those five figures in it—did they have to be whores? Could the proto-Cubist effects in the right half of the picture—the breakdown of mass and the equalizing of solids and voids—have been accomplished as well with a cast of cardplayers? If the essential idea derived from Cézanne's compositions of bathers, why the retreat from the healthful outdoors into a *maison close*?

Why is the pictorial space still revealed like a spectacle and enveloped in curtains—so much Baroque staging in a picture whose modernist orientation ought to be to the flat picture plane?

Those African masks at the right: are they here because this was the picture Picasso happened to be working on when tribal art came his way, so that he incorporated the novel stimulus regardless of its irrelevance to a Barcelona brothel interior?

Are the anatomies of these women, in their radical transformation from 1906 to 1907, a matter of changing taste, or of substituting the abstract expressiveness of sharp angles for anatomical curves; or are these morphological changes metaphors for states of existence?

Since no other painting (*Las Meninas* excepted) addresses the spectator with comparable intensity, how does this intensity of address accord with the abstract purposes normally ascribed to the *Demoiselles*?

Is the stylistic shift that bisects the painting into disparate halves a by-product of Picasso's impetuous evolution, or do these discrepant styles realize a pervasive idea?

Did this "first truly twentieth-century painting" (E. Fry) really begin as a half-hearted reiteration of the familiar preachment that "the wages of sin is death"—a contrast between vice, symbolized by the enjoyment of food and women, and virtue, by a contemplation of death?

Is it true that in this "first Cubist painting" the artist has "turned away from subjective expression" (Sabartés), unconcerned with subject or content of any sort?

Finally, what of the many drawings that relate to the work? Not counting

the drawings for individual figures or details of figures, the full composition studies alone number at present knowledge no less than nineteen. Three were first published by Barr in 1939 (figs. 6, 7, 15). These, plus another thirteen (seven of which are here reproduced as figs. 4, 9–14), appeared in Volume II of the Zervos *Catalogue* in 1942; two more (fig. 8) appeared in the supplementary Volume VI, 1954.⁸ Another, just come to light, is published here for the first time (fig. 5). Do these nineteen drawings reveal an intelligible progression, and will their study throw light on the content of Picasso's thought while the *Demoiselles* was taking shape in his mind?

I believe that the drawings have much to tell. And I am convinced that the picture contains far more even in its formal aspect than the words "first Cubist painting" allow. Indeed, the chief weakness of any exclusively formal analysis is its inadequacy to its own ends. Such analysis, by suppressing too much, ends up not seeing enough. For it seems to me that whatever Picasso's initial idea had been, he did not abandon it, but discovered more potent means for its realization.

*

No modern painting engages you with such brutal immediacy. Of the five figures depicted, one holds back a curtain to make you see; one intrudes from the rear; the remaining three stare you down. The unity of the picture, famous for its internal stylistic disruptions, resides above all in the startled consciousness of a viewer who sees himself seen.

To judge the distance the project has traveled since its inception, consider the early, hitherto unknown composition study (fig. 5): seven figures disposed in a deep curtained interior. The subject, set in a brothel parlor, is a dramatic entrance—the advent of a man. But the arrangement displays the most conventionally Baroque grouping Picasso ever devised, not only in the topography of its floor plan, but in its unity as a theatrical situation. Picasso knew such narrative paintings from his early days at the Prado. Juan de Pareja's *Calling of St. Matthew* (fig. 2; here reproduced in reverse) is a good prototype: a magisterial figure entering from one side commands sudden attention; then a secondary focus in a man seated behind a table at center, and a backview serving as repoussoir at the other end; and the rest of the cast grouped in depth before curtained openings in the rear. What puts Picasso's design so squarely within this Italianate Baroque

8. The three composition studies first published by Barr in *Forty Years*, p. 60 (1939), reappear in the author's *Fifty Years*, p. 56 (1946), in William Rubin's *Picasso in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1972, p. 196, and in Volume II, Part 1, of the Zervos *Catalogue*, 1942, nos. 19–21 (Christian Zervos, *Picasso: Oeuvre Catalogue*, Paris, Editions Cahiers d'Art, 1932ff; hereafter cited as Z. followed by volume and figure number). Of the thirteen composition studies published in Z.II, Part 2, 1942, only one has been briefly cited in the literature (by G. Bandmann, see note 21 below).

tradition is the dramatic rendering of the scene—a half-dozen figures in one compound reflex to a sudden signal. His actors, like Juan de Pareja's, are caught up in their own time, place, and action; the viewer looks in from without, but he is not there.

In the *Demoiselles* painting this rule of traditional narrative art yields to an anti-narrative counter-principle: neighboring figures share neither a common space nor a common action, do not communicate or interact, but relate singly, directly, to the spectator. A determined dissociation of each from each is the means of throwing responsibility for the unity of the action upon the viewer's subjective response. The event, the epiphany, the sudden entrance, is still the theme—but rotated through ninety degrees toward a viewer conceived as the picture's opposite pole.

The rapid swing between these contrary orientations is not surprising for 1907, nor unique to Picasso. A juxtaposition of these alternatives was in fact up for debate. Five years earlier, the Viennese art historian Alois Riegl described the very absence of psychic cohesion between depicted persons as evidence of a distinct stylistic will.⁹ He was speaking of the traditional Dutch group portrait (fig. 3)—the primitive kind, before Rembrandt's dramatic naturalism restored it to the main European tradition. And his profound analysis of this native genre—the most original expression of the Dutch genius, he called it—was a courageous bid to enfranchise a mode of painting which, judged by Italian compositional standards, had always seemed inept and provincial. Riegl showed that Dutch art, even in its fifteenth-century religious narratives, suppressed the dramatic encounter which expresses a will, the coordination of action and responsive reaction which acknowledges the unifying force of an event. Instead of graduated active and passive participation, Dutch art strove, on the contrary, to project in each figure a state of utmost attentiveness, i.e., a state of mind that dispelled the distinction between active and passive. The negation of psychic rapport between actors, their mutual autonomy and spirited dissociation even from their own doings—and their incapacity for joint participation in a unified space—all these “negative” factors tightened the positive hold of each single figure on the responsive viewer; the unity of the picture was, as Riegl put it, not objective-internal, but externalized in the beholder's subjective experience.

Riegl's pioneering regard for this naive Northern genre is comparable to Picasso's early admiration for Iberian and tribal art. And the historian's definition of its intrinsic value, formulated in opposition to the narrative mode, parallels Picasso's shift from that early study (fig. 5) to the *Demoiselles* painting. Not

9. Alois Riegl, *Das Holländische Gruppenporträt*, Vienna, 1931, first published in the *Jahrbuch der kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses in Wien*, XXIII (1902). Cf. Juan Gris' account of early Cubism: “the only relationship that existed was that between the intellect of the painter and the objects, and practically never was there any relationship between the objects themselves”; quoted in Fry, *Cubism*, p. 169.



2. *Juan de Pareja, The Calling of St. Matthew, 1641 (reproduced in reverse). Madrid, Museo del Prado.*

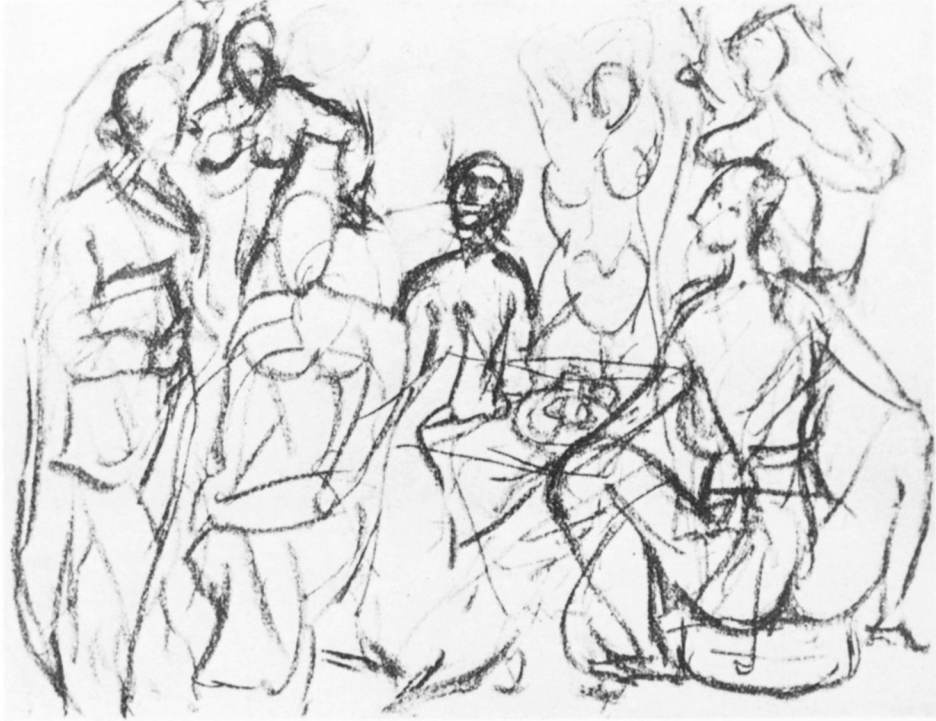


3. *Dirck Jacobsz., The Rifleman's Company, 1529. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.*

that Picasso had, or needed to have, any direct knowledge of Riegl's work, or of the obscure Dutch pictures discussed. But he did know the supreme realization of this Northern intuition—that Spanish masterwork which the Prado in large letters of brass proclaims to be the “*obra culminante de la pintura universal*”—Velázquez's *Las Meninas*.^{9A} Like Picasso three hundred years later, Velázquez had oriented himself both to the Mediterranean and the Northern tradition. Heir to Titian and Veronese, he could yet bring off a work that presents itself not as internally organized, but as a summons to the integrative consciousness of the spectator. The nine, ten, or twelve characters in *Las Meninas* seem uncomposed and dispersed, unitive only insofar as they jointly subtend the beholder's eye. And the lack of immediate rapport between any two of them guarantees their common dependence on the viewer's embracing vision.

In the *Demaiselles*, as in *Las Meninas*, no two figures maintain the kind of mutual rapport that excludes us; and the three central figures address the observer with unsparing directness. Neither active nor passive, they are simply alerted, responding to an alerting attentiveness on our side. The shift is away

9A. The statement may still be correct, but the Prado no longer makes it in brass.



4. *Study for the Demoiselles*, black pencil, 10.6 × 14.7 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1859/32r (Z.II.643).

from narrative and objective action to an experience centered in the beholder.

The work, then, is not a self-existent abstraction, since the solicited viewer is a constituent factor. And no analysis of the *Demoiselles* as a contained pictorial structure faces up to the work in its fullness. The picture is a tidal wave of female aggression; one either experiences the *Demoiselles* as an onslaught, or shuts it off.

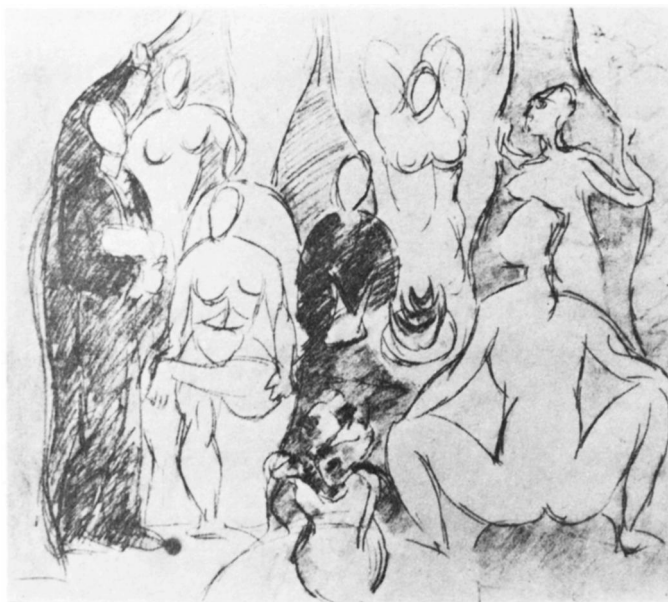
But the assault on the viewer is only half of the action, for the viewer, as the painting conceives him on this side of the picture plane, repays in kind.

*

The picture impales itself on a sharp point. It is speared below by a docked tabletop, an acute corner overlaid by a fruit cluster on a white cloth. The table links two discontinuous systems; space this side of the picture couples with the depicted scene. Anybody can see that the ladies are having company. We are implied as the visiting clientele, seated within arm's reach of the fruit—accommodated and reacted to. It's like the difference between eavesdropping on a group too busy to notice, or walking in like the man they've been waiting for. Our presence rounds out the party, and the tipped tabletop plays fulcrum to a seesaw: the picture rises before us because we hold our end down.



5. Study for the Demoiselles, black pencil, 19.3 × 24.2 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/29r (Z.XXVI.59).



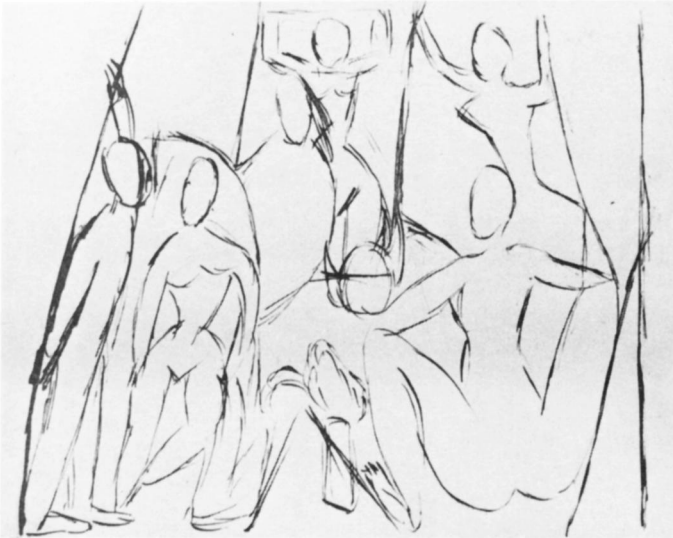
6. Study for the Demoiselles, black pencil and pastel, 47.7 × 63.5 cm. Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett (Z.II.19).



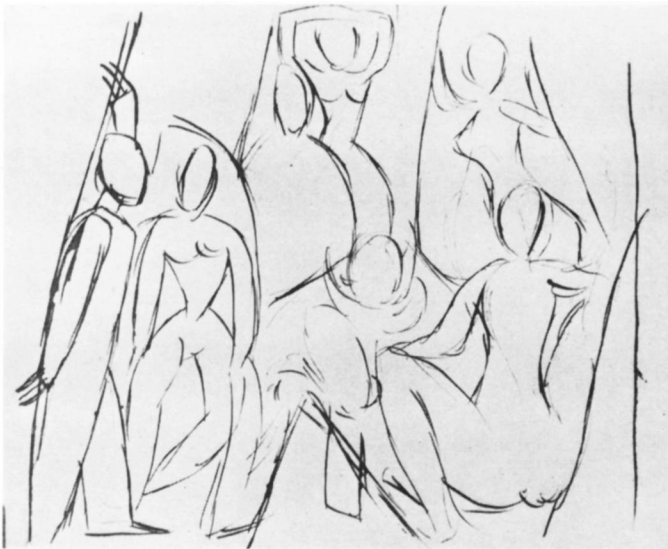
7. *Study for the Demoiselles, oil on wood, 19 × 24 cm.*
Whereabouts unknown (Z.II.20).



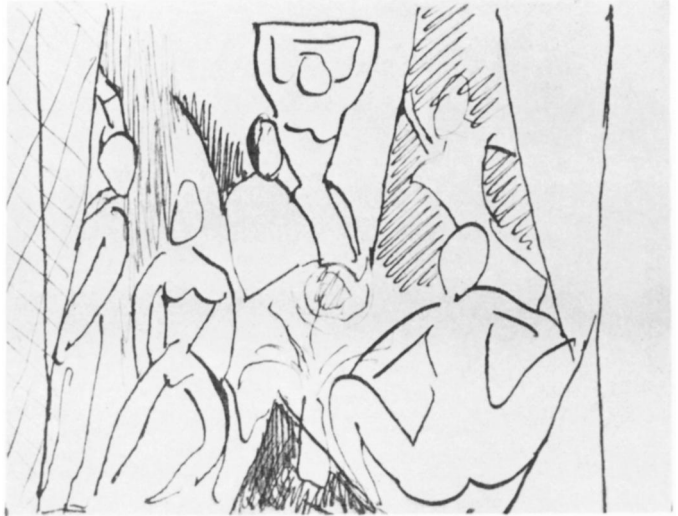
8. *Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 8.7 × 9 cm. Paris,*
Musée Picasso MP 534 (Z.VI.980).



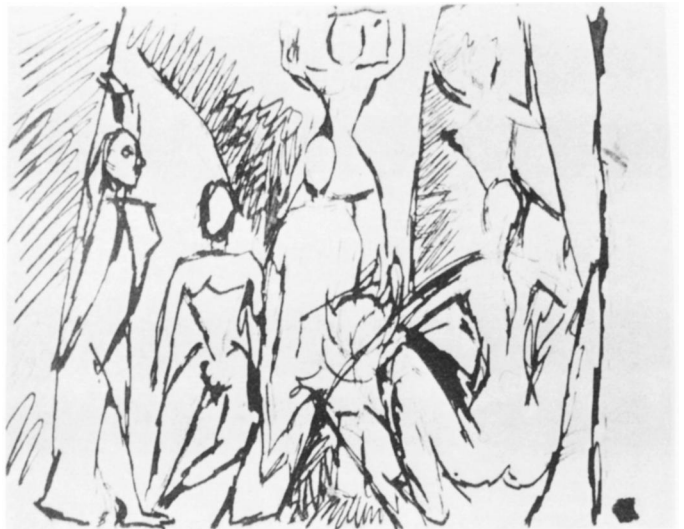
9. Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 10.5 × 13.6 cm.
Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/1r (Z.II.632).



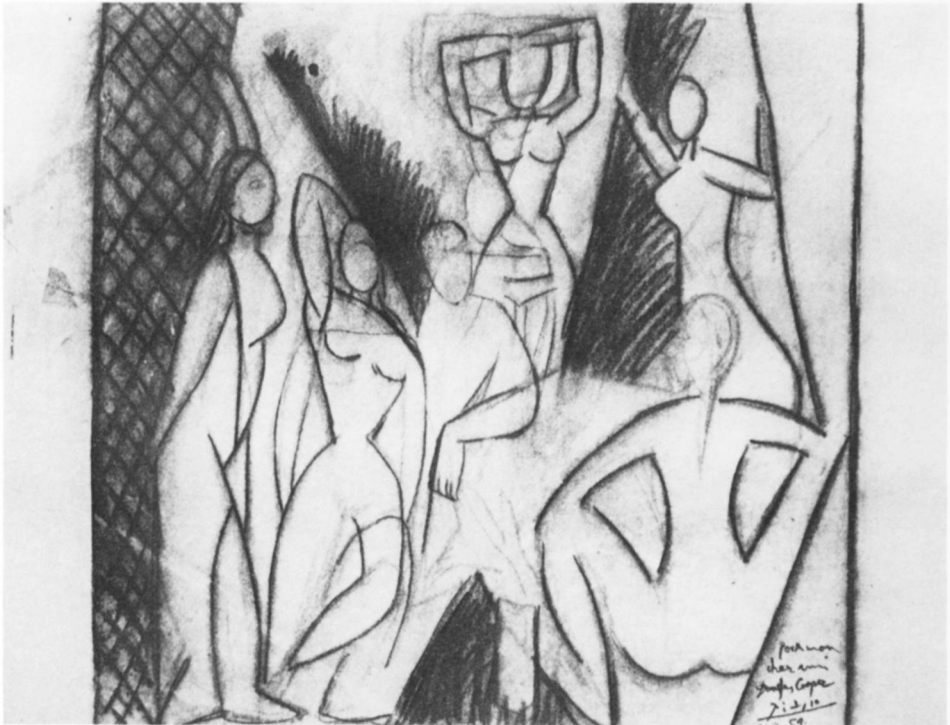
10. Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 10.5 × 13.6 cm.
Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/2r (Z.II.633).



*11. Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 10.5 × 13.6 cm.
Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/6r (Z.II.637).*



*12. Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 10.5 × 13.6 cm.
Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/18r (Z.II.642).*



13. *Opposite, above: Study for the Demoiselles, ink, 10.5 × 13.6 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/11r (Z.II.641).*

14. *Opposite, below: Study for the Demoiselles, charcoal, 47.6 × 65 cm. Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung Basel, Kupferstichkabinett (Z.II.644).*

15. *Below: Study for the Demoiselles, watercolor, 17.4 × 22.5 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art; A. E. Gallatin Collection (Z.II.21).*



The best commentary on a Picasso is another Picasso. The artist tends to anticipate and repeat his inventions, so that the most enigmatic of them usually turn up in simpler contexts. Thus an ink and pencil sketch, clearly related to the *Demoiselles*, “explains” the kind of interspatial connection proposed in the painting (fig. 17). It shows four seated sailors in a tight cabaret watching two entertainers. The watchers are seen from the back, close-up and half-length. And you can develop the staging of the *Demoiselles*—of its center portion—by imagining a movie camera zooming in.

Evidence for Picasso’s persistent interest in such continuities is common in earlier works, such as the small canvas of 1901 in Chicago, called *On the Upper Deck* (fig. 16). Since most of its depicted field is taken up by the bow of a vessel seen from amidships, we, the spectators, become fellow travelers on the same deck.¹⁰ It is characteristic of Picasso in all his phases to engage situations of closest proximity so as to keep the interval between point of perception and thing perceived palpably physical.

Like the *Demoiselles*, the *Upper Deck* picture is speared from below, the center rail entering like a leveled lance.¹¹ The very subject is a connection—a passage from out here inward into the body of the presentation. And the theme of the deck renders the heave of the ground surface ambiguous. We are watching an infield diamond rise up like a pyramid. The depicted plane, high over water, is

10. For the present argument it is immaterial whether our “upper deck” is that of a river boat or a horse-drawn double-decker omnibus crossing a bridge. Picasso’s reported remark on the subject is cited in Pierre Daix and Georges Boudaille, *Picasso: The Blue and Rose Periods*, Greenwich, Connecticut, New York Graphic Society, 1967, p. 182 (hereafter cited as D-B., followed by catalogue reference, e.g., V.61 for the *Upper Deck*).

11. To appreciate the boldness of Picasso’s spatial conception in the *Upper Deck*, I suggest comparing George Caleb Bingham’s treatment of a similar subject in his *Raftsmen Playing Cards*, 1847, City Art Museum of St. Louis.





16. *Opposite: On the Upper Deck, 1901, oil on board, 50 × 65 cm. The Art Institute of Chicago; Mr. and Mrs. Lewis L. Coburn Collection (Z.XXI.168).*

17. *Above: Study for Sailors on the Town, 1908, ink and black pencil, 19.2 × 13.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1863/43v (Z.II.629).*

18. *Below: The Artist's Bedroom, 1953, oil on canvas, 130 × 96 cm. (Z.XVI.99).*



a vertical horizontal. Simultaneously level and up, it tilts like a pitching boat. . . . Half a century later Picasso paints his own shadow as it enters a room to fall on a woman—another uncanny simultaneity of horizontal and vertical (fig. 18). And in the *Demoiselles*, the same paradox of erected recession is maintained by the raised peak of the table. Of all the ways Picasso invented to insinuate the physical availability of the image, this visual metaphor of penetration is the most erotic.¹²

*

The table was not there from the start. Earliest among the known composition studies for the *Demoiselles* is a small pencil sketch, dense with adjustments (fig. 4). It is the first of four studies that record the seven-figure phase of the composition. The floor plan, due to the low relief character of the design, is still indeterminate; so is the surface fill—the scale of several figures is heightened to load the foreground; there is no front table as yet.

In fig. 5 (which I propose to put second), all locations are clarified; the central group is recessed, space sweeps inward on a diagonal from left to right, and the magnified scale of the curtained setting is fixed. The result is what I have called a standard Baroque composition, and we may well ask why the artist at this advanced point of his career took such a backward step. The answer may lie in the clearing of space at the bottom. Here, over the threshold, the artist traces a faint segment curve, the ghost of the table to come. He is introducing an orthogonal axis, the kind of invasive attack on the picture that needs spatial depth to operate on.

In the next drawing (fig. 6, Kunstmuseum, Basel), that faint curve solidifies as the rim of a circular table, the balance of which overflows into our space. Then, as if to reverse the table's momentum, its shape is revised (fig. 7): it grows acute, suggesting the distal tip of a lozenge or three-sided plane plunging in from out here.¹³ And the still life on it bursts forth in a flowering crest, heralding an intrusion of such forcible presence that the squatter at lower right wrenches her face around in salute.

Three more changes in the intrusive table are due, all designed to quicken its penetration: its upended corner is further sharpened (figs. 8ff); the full-

12. The most innocent-looking Picassos may fall into this erotic class. E.g., the Cubist *Liseuse* of 1909 (Z.II.150), a seated nude dozing, with a book held open between parted thighs; or the summer 1910 *Dressing Table* (Z.II.220) with the key stuck in the keyhole at lower center; or the collage *Au Bon Marché* of c. 1913 (Z.II.378; Michael Newbury Collection, Chicago), where Rosenblum first observed the sexual pun in the words TROU ICI at bottom center. More than a boyish joke, such a motif betrays an organic conception of the picture and an erotic relation to it.

13. As the form of the table becomes the subject of a separate thought, it suggests a separate painting: the still life called *Vase of Flowers* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (Z.II.30; cf. Rubin, *Picasso*, pp. 44–45).

bodied flower vase of fig. 6 slims down to a cylinder and moves aside to let the tabletop show; finally, in the painted version (preceded only by the Philadelphia watercolor, fig. 15), the inward thrust of the table is both emphasized and restored to the picture plane by the toss of a horned slice of melon. But the table's literal inclination as inward tilt remains in force. More than that; its obliquity sends parallel tilts across half the picture—beginning at upper left.

*

It used to puzzle me to find the hand at the curtain so disconnected. The imminence of Cubism, with its routine fragmentations, has nothing to do with it, since the hand's isolation was already fixed in the first composition drawings (figs. 4, 6, cf. also 15). As a feature preserved through successive studies and reaffirmed in the painting, the breakaway of that hand ought to have some specific function. And so it does. Its abrupt appearance over the curtain figure, with no apparent mediation of arm, makes sense if the upper edge of the curtain to which the hand is referred is understood as flowing inward, away from the picture plane. Assume that Picasso here wants an oblique recession, pursued by an implied outstretched arm raised at thirty degrees. The disconnectedness of the hand at the visible terminus of the stretch then becomes emblematic of maximum distance.

Again, other Picasso works confirm that he does not necessarily think of such left-hand curtains as perpendicular flats. Compare, for instance, the 1920 drawing of a draped interior (fig. 19); or the pompous little picture of a wench in



19. Reclining Nude Serenaded by Harlequin and Pierrot, 1920, pencil, 18.5 × 22 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso (Z.III.196).



20. *Study for the Demoiselles, oil on canvas, c. 26 × 21 cm. Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania (Z.I.350).*

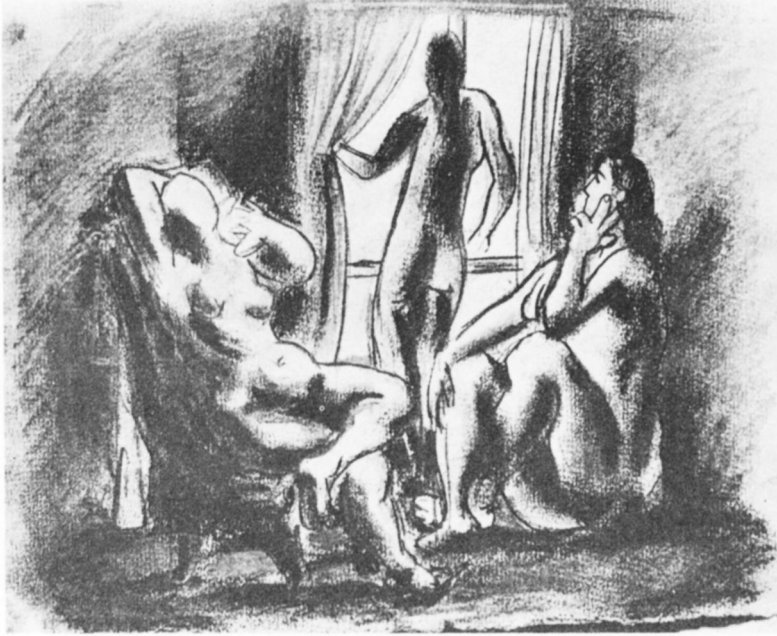


21. *Beach Scene at Dinard, 1918, oil on canvas, 27 × 22 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso (Z.III.237).*

a dishabille grasping a checkered curtain (fig. 20)—clearly related to the corresponding figure in the *Demoiselles*.¹⁴ In the latter, as in all studies for it, the curtain drops down at the forestage and stays in its salient plane as far as the curtain raiser's right hand; thereafter, to get to and pass under her hoisted hand it must needs recede. The aim is to express the recession of this upper flap not through linear or aerial perspective, not by way of color or physical clues such as overlaps, but through the suasion of gesture, the supposed necessity of an omitted arm between head and hand—a saccadic leap offered only to our anatomic intuition. The effect is twofold: the proscenium curtain cups over a tentlike interior; and the spandrel formed at the upper left of the design doubles the sloping plane of the table. Lower center and upper left tilt and tip in precarious unison.

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14. This canvas of the curtain raiser alone comes closest to our figs. 13 and 14.



22. Nudes in an Interior, 1920, pastel and pencil, 21 × 27 cm. (Z.III.444).

But there is more. Midway between curtain and table the nude with the pinnacle elbow assumes a similar tilt. Her underslung feet, tucked out of sight, are not those of a figure sitting, nor of one standing or leaping. In the first four studies (figs. 4–7) she does indeed sit bolt upright in a high-backed chair, her shins arranged post-and-lintel, as on the ancient Spinario.¹⁵ But in the twelve subsequent studies her chair dissolves and she sinks back, disposing herself at last like an odalisque. She ends up recumbent—what the French call a *gisante*—but seen in bird's-eye perspective. Her action then reverses that of the curtain: not a given vertical bent into a foreshortened arch, but a recessional figure upended, an upstanding orthogonal. Yet both elements, curtain and figure, articulate the picture plane with the same rigid ambivalence. And both, through the suggestiveness of posture and gesture alone, parallel the ambivalent plane of the foreground table.

Once again, the *gisante*'s character is best understood by comparing similar

15. An indecorous pose which Picasso invests with almost pharaonic solemnity. For related studies, see Z.II.647 (MP 1859/4r), a sketch for the oil, Z.II.651 (MP 10); the unused two-figure group Z.II.650 (MP 1859/40r); and D-B. D.XVI.20.

images. The posture is that of the sleeper in the 1918 *Beach Scene at Dinard* (fig. 21); or that of the loungeur in the *Nudes* pastel of 1920 (fig. 22). With one flexed leg crossing the other and one arm overhead, such figures rehearse a canonic recumbency pose.

The idea of verticalizing supine figures has precedents. Think of Michelangelo's drawing of *Tityos*, the punished giant laid low and chained to a rock; on the reverse of the sheet turned ninety degrees, the artist traced the figure again—but as a Christ resurrected.¹⁶ Even Michelangelo's swooning *Slave* at the Louvre becomes an unstable image, for the statue's attitude of dream, rapture, or willing death—a pose which haunted Picasso during the *Demoiselles* period—is vertical only in material actuality, not in its psychic surrender.

In 1932 Picasso himself produced a series of drawings in which an imagined *gisante* becomes upright in manifestation. The drawings show Marie-Thérèse at an easel—his mistress-model engendering her own image. But the sleeping form that slumps under her feet appears perpendicular on her canvas (fig. 23).¹⁷ And in the very year of the *Demoiselles*, the notion of the reclining nude in vertical presentation must have been under discussion, for it occurs in a Matisse ceramic of 1907 (fig. 24).¹⁸

But Picasso's interest in those years is not—like Matisse's, or Marie-Thérèse's, or Michelangelo's—a *gisante* shifted through ninety degrees on the plane, like the hand on a clockface moving from nine to noon. Bent on more radical leverage, Picasso envisions the straining of a receding orthogonal back to the surface—as he does in the small oil panel of 1908, *Nu couché avec personnages* (fig. 25).¹⁹ The topic here is a reclining nude in footling delivery, yet unforeshortened, almost vertical on the picture plane. To accentuate the anomaly, Picasso has her flanked by two upright figures, so that her presumptive verticality jars against their unequivocal kind. She rests recessive but still extended, insulated in her own rocking space capsule. Adjacency without nearness; withdrawal without attenuation of presence. The full-length projection of her, claiming undiminished scope in the field, makes the beholder work harder; one has to push mental levers to keep an erected *gisante* lying down.

And then the great life-size *Dryad* of 1908 (fig. 26). It is not sufficient to keep reassuring ourselves that this awesome engine, stalking us in her jungle,

16. A. E. Popham and Johannes Wilde, *The Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries in the Collection . . . at Windsor Castle*, London, Phaidon Press, 1949, no. 429. Cf. also Michelangelo's study for a rising Lazarus conceived as an uprighting of the Adam in the Sistine *Creation* fresco; reproduced in Johannes Wilde, *Italian Drawings . . . in the British Museum: Michelangelo and His Studio*, London, Trustees of the British Museum, 1953, no. 16.

17. Not in Zervos. The theme of the drawing, suggesting the externalization of a private fantasy, is sustained through a dozen similar studies, Z.VIII.76–85.

18. Albert E. Elsen, *The Sculpture of Henri Matisse*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1971, p. 103 (now reproduced in Jack Flam, *Matisse: The Man and His Art, 1869–1918*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1986, fig. 200; and Pierre Schneider, *Matisse*, New York, Rizzoli, 1984, p. 278).

19. The deliberateness of the arrangement is proved by the preparatory charcoal study, Z.II.689.



23. *La Pose Nue*, 1933, charcoal, 28 × 27 cm (not in Zervos).



24. *Henri Matisse, Dancer*, 1907, ceramic, 58.5 × 39 cm. Nice, Musée Matisse.



25. *Reclining Nude with Figures*, 1908, oil on wood, 36 × 62 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso (Z.II.688).

26. *The Dryad*, 1908, oil on canvas, 185 × 108 cm.
Leningrad, Hermitage (Z.II.113).





27. Above: “S.V.P.,” 1905, ink, 21 × 13.5 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso (Z.XXII.296).



28. Right: Study for The Dryad, 1908, ink and pencil, 33.3 × 19.2 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1863/34r (Z.II.661).

“represents a movement into analytical Cubism”; she meant more than that to Picasso.

Part of her meaning is explained by a certain “Personnage féminin” (Zervos) from the end of 1905 (fig. 27). A trifling croquis—lewd and faintly frightening at the same time—a fantasy of the cloven sex as an open arch, keystone in place, inscribed “S’il vous plaît.” Posture and gesture signify invitation, solicitation, here as in the *Dryad*. But that’s only half of it, for the *Dryad* painting plots an ominous change of mood from left to right, from welcome to threat. One hand still invites, but the left arm, turned down, plies its fist like a bludgeon. So menacing is the approach of this figure, so disquieting the ambivalence of its offering, that I think it no blasphemy to recall the analogous shift from grace to damnation on the hands of a Last Judgment Christ.²⁰

20. Concerning *La grande dryade*: The change from an upturned right hand to a left hand turned down, i.e., from acceptance to repudiation, is traditional in *Last Judgments* (Giotto, Gaddi, etc.), and is subtly modified in Michelangelo’s Sistine fresco, to which Picasso refers in three separate statements quoted in Ashton, *Picasso on Art*, pp. 61, 168, 170.

On the sexual significance which Picasso assigns to the interchange of right and left feet—in the *Dryad* and numerous other works—see L. Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972, pp. 147–148. The animalism of his jungle women of the 1907–08 period becomes



29. *Nudes Entwined, 1905, watercolor and gouache, 26.5 × 21 cm. Copenhagen, Statens Museum for Kunst (Z.I.228).*

It's a different kind of shock to learn from the preparatory drawing (fig. 28) that the *Dryad* was conceived, and fully elaborated, as a harlot slouching with parted knees in a tall chair. The painting then is a precise transposition, even to the lines of the armchair reinterpreted as vegetation: brothel reverting to jungle.

explicit in a remarkable gouache, Z.II.39 (fig. 48 and p. 54, below), where a nude woman's left leg turns into the hind leg of a quadruped. Her lower body is half satyress.

For the traditional formalist interpretation of the *Dryad*, see Rosenblum, *Cubism*, pp. 28–29: “*La Grande dryade* continues something of the constructive fantasies of the nudes of 1906 and 1907, but it also offers a new sense of order and rational exploration that replaces the more impulsive approach of the earlier works. The figure now seems to be studied in a manner that, for Picasso, is relatively dispassionate, for the artist here quietly examines the elementary building blocks of three-dimensional form. . . .”

See also Jean Sutherland Boggs, in *Picasso and Man*, p. 62: “[Sculpturally conceived] the planes of [the great *Dryad*] are clear and bold, but this three-dimensional quality is also related to the forceful movement of her body and of our eyes around that body. . . . Picasso simplified her face from a mask, suggestive of African works, to a shape without any associations. The *Dryad* represents a movement into analytical cubism in its colors and the emphasis upon form; she is also one step further in that direction in the expansive, complicated movement she provides for our eyes.”

An attempt to acknowledge the work in its evocative ambiguity was made by Charles Sterling: “The *Dryad* appears fittingly among the trees of a dense and dark wood. Is she seated? Is she about to leap? She is nothing but the embodiment of converging energies, and, before learning that she is divine, we know that she is indestructible, that she is as fierce as the wild beasts whose faculty of sudden relaxation is also hers” (*The Hermitage*, New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1958, p. 194).

And the elevation toward the spectator of what is still a recumbent pose becomes an upshot of power.

The rampant *gisante* in the *Demoiselles* bears a similar erotic charge. In the drawings (especially figs. 11 and 13), she lies back, sexually unfurled, *une horizontale*, as the Parisians called their cocottes, posed like the woman in the 1905 picture called *Nudes Entwined* (fig. 29). Facing her clientele, she becomes the frontal counterpart of the shameless squatter at right. But her élan and the suddenness of her apparition—in the late drawings, but most of all in the painting—derive from the secret lay of her original pose, a pose of relaxed extension such as is possible only in floating, gliding, or lying down, when no exertion is spent on maintaining stability. Relieved of gravitational pull, she arrives like a projectile.

Does it work? Does the figure in the painting still come across as recumbent? There are two possible answers. The fact that its recumbency has so long gone unobserved might be taken as proof of failure. On the other hand, the failure may be a lapse of ours, and a short-lived one at that. We tend to perceive as we are programmed. For the past fifty years we have been training our eyes to ricochet off the *Demoiselles* toward Cubism. A more focused approach may habituate us to seeing Picasso's "naked problems" once again as nude women. And then that particular figure will begin to register on the picture plane like a Murphy bed hitting a wall, and the painter's intention will have become a success.²¹

Much of the disquiet in the left half of the picture dramatizes Picasso's rage against the sheer drop, the stolidness of the canvas. What he wants is a restless beat and a reactive presence. So the backbend of the curtain is steadied by its supporter. Her rigid profile abuts on a rampant *gisante*, who twins with a pillar nude, who in turn surmounts the entrant tip of the table. Our vision heaves in and out; a variable pressure, like the pitching of a boat in high seas, or a similitude of sexual energy.

Permissive similes. The plain effect of the erected *gisante* in her tight quarter is to ensure her spatial autonomy within a narrow scheme of disjunctions. And the drawings prove that this disjunctiveness is no sudden side effect but a sustained program which the painting brings to fruition.

21. The figure's reclining posture was observed at least once before, in Günther Bandmann's *Picasso: Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Stuttgart, Philipp Reclam Jun., 1965, p. 5: "Diese Gestalt könnte auch als Liegefigur in Aufsicht vorstellbar sein" ("This figure is also imaginable as reclining and seen from above").

The effect of rampant or erected recumbency is anticipated in numerous works of the sixteenth century. Examples: the dead Christ in Michelangelo's *Entombment* in the London National Gallery; several Correggio figures, such as the *Antiope* in the Louvre; Goltzius's slain Adonis in Amsterdam; or the Joseph Heintz (1564–1609) *Amor and Psyche* (Galerie Peter Griebert, Munich; reproduced in *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CXIV [June 1972], p. lxxvii). Relevant, too, are those modern pin-up photos that produce more or less upright images by taking bird's-eye views of reclining models.



30. *The Harem*, 1906, oil on canvas, 154.3 × 109.5 cm. The Cleveland Museum of Art; Hanna Collection (Z.I.321).

In fig. 4, here placed at the head of the series, all seven figures congregate in a shared space. But already in the two drawings following, the four recessed figures—three women and the man at the table—are silhouetted by backdrop partitions used as framing devices. The remaining three are more cunningly set apart: the man at left by his marginal placement and function; the squatter at right by her unique orientation (of which more below); the sitter, bell-jarred in a high chair. It is as if, even at these early stages, Picasso sought to encyst his characters in space pens susceptible of insulation. In the painting, finally, the separation of figure from figure is consummated. There are no spatial connectives. The wedged interspaces become fields of anti-magnetic repulsion, or simply congeal. But the famous solidified intervals in the *Demaiselles* are part-parcel of the larger conception; they confirm the autonomies already claimed for the figures. And the wonder of the final work is the clinch imposed upon elements thriving in idiosyncrasy.

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At the center of the *Demaiselles* composition Picasso originally stationed a sailor. In the three earliest drawings (figs. 4–6) he sits meekly behind his table,



31. *Three Nudes*, 1906, gouache, 63 × 48.3 cm. New York, The Alex Hillman Family Foundation (Z.I.340).

the object before him recognizable as a *porrón*. The shape of the *porrón*—a Spanish drinking vessel designed for jetting wine down one’s throat—is characterized by an erect spout, and it had recently begun to intrigue Picasso. Staying at Gosol in the Spanish Pyrenees during the summer-fall season of 1906, he painted it into three still lifes.²² But he also used it tellingly in two figure compositions of that same year. In the first of these, a painting called *Harem* (fig. 30), the male figure is surely not meant as a eunuch, since eunuchs do not sit around nude. He lolls like a proud possessor, reserves his favors, and leaves demonstration of his velleity to his *porrón*.

The *porrón* as sexual surrogate recurs in another Picasso project of that same Gosol season—a gouache known as *Three Nudes* (fig. 31). It is an elaborate study for a large picture with notations on it in Picasso’s hand. The project never materialized, perhaps because Picasso could not, at this fertile moment, work fast enough to keep pace with his imagination; the idea for the *Three Nudes* may have been overtaken by the *Demoiselles* project already broached in his mind.

22. Picasso’s still lifes with *porrón* are: Z.I.342 (Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C.); Z.I.343 (Leningrad, Hermitage); and Z.XXII.458 (cf. also Z.XVII.322, a drawing of 1957). The vessel also occurs in two Matisse still lifes of 1904–05 (Barr, *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1951, pp. 314–315, there erroneously called “purro”).



The gouache shows one standing nude, her right hand retracted in the narcissistic gesture last used in Picasso's *Two Women* (fig. 43). Another charmer lazes at the edge of a bed, smoking a cigarette. Both women gaze sympathetically at the youth at their feet, a delicate lad, kneeling with penis erect. "*El tiene un porrón,*" says Picasso's note, and the visual rhyming of spout and phallus is of a publicity unknown in Picasso's finished works of the period.

The unmistakable phallism of the *porrón* in two works just preceding the *Demoiselles* fixes its meaning in the early *Demoiselles* studies. It occupies the vital center of the design: on the table; in front of the sailor; his attribute.²³

For the rest, the sailor remains enigmatic. In the earliest study (fig. 4) he shares everyone's interest in the newcomer, though his round-shouldered pose, with both arms drooped under the table, seems strangely demure. He is the man inside, yet within this band of five mannish whores, his one distinction (main-

23. The idea was neither subtle nor new. I reproduce James Gillray's lampoon "*Ci-devant Occupations*" (1805; fig. 32), wherein two famous ladies dance nude before the fat statesman Barras, while young Bonaparte at the far right draws a curtain aside to look in. The bottle on the table in front of Barras performs the same surrogate function as Picasso's *porrón*. No wonder Picasso dropped the motif. The aggressive toss of the horny melon in the definitive version is a subtler device.

The Philosophical Brothel

32. *Opposite: James Gillray, Ci-devant Occupations, 1805, etching.*

33. *Right: Study for the Demoiselles, gouache and wash, 62.5 × 47 cm. Private collection (Z.II.7).*



tained through figs. 5 and 6) is an effeminate personality. Conventional sexual character traits seem reversed. In the fourth study (fig. 7) he retreats further, rolling himself a cigarette; and two surviving studies for his head and half figure (fig. 33; cf. also Z.II.6) show him as mild and shy, with a soft down on his upper lip . . . inadequate as a personification of vice; more likely a timid candidate for sexual initiation.

In the next thirteen drawings he remains a shadowy presence; Picasso gives him no thought. Finally in figs. 13 and 14—the very drawings in which the *gisante* raises a sleepy elbow—the seated sailor assumes an articulate pose, resting his arm on the table. Immediately after, in the Philadelphia watercolor (fig. 15), he disappears.²⁴

24. In figs. 13 and 14, the sailor at table and the recumbent nude rehearse an established pattern—Picasso himself watching a girl asleep. (See the watercolor of 1904 called *Contemplation*, Z.I.235; Collection Mrs. Bertram Smith, New York; reproduced in Steinberg, *Other Criteria*, fig. 40.) The resemblance suggests that Picasso identified himself fleetingly with the sailor—whereupon he removed him entirely. As a sailor, Picasso reappears in a drawing of 1915 by de Chirico; he is seated with four friends at table, his unbuttoned jacket displaying a bare chest tattooed with an anchor (see Roland Penrose, *Portrait of Picasso*, 2nd ed., New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1971, p. 45).

There can be no doubt that the sailor was meaningful to Picasso, but the meaning eludes, the more so as his figure drops out. An interpretation would have to proceed from the contrast Picasso drew between the two men in the picture—one well inside, of effeminate temper, inundated by womankind; the other, halting at the divider, half in and half out, volatile in his transformations and identity-glides, his unstable attributes and final sex change.

*

In 1939, when Alfred Barr published his great exhibition catalogue, *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*, all conclusions as to the character of the curtain figure had to be drawn from four pieces of evidence—three available studies (figs. 6, 7, 15) and one reported remark of the master: that the man, meant as a student, had at first carried a skull.²⁵ On this evidence Barr based his subsequent statements that Picasso originally “conceived the picture as a kind of *memento mori*, allegory or charade”; but Barr felt bound to add that the painter, whose passions were never those of a puritan, must have approached the theme “with no very fervid moral intent.” And again, “obviously Picasso was interested in other than homiletic problems.”²⁶

But this left an anomalous situation. Would Picasso have embarked on one of his grandest projects with a lukewarm uninterest in its subject and a morality at odds with his feelings? For though he may link sex to danger, Picasso does not link it to sin. Nor would it have been in his character to deploy grapes, apples, and melons as symbols of pernicious indulgence. Picasso likes eating and he mistrusts people who don't.²⁷

Troubled by these anomalies, I looked again at the known drawings. Not one of them showed a death's head, not even that oft-reproduced Basel sheet (fig. 6), in which a whole generation of Barr's readers pretended to see it—though in this drawing the large rectangular object on the man's arm is neither shaped, nor scaled, nor held like a skull.²⁸ It was then (I must at this point refer to personal history) that I began to restudy the genesis of the work—without reference to any *memento mori* idea, or to that dubious skull on which it was founded, but for which no hard evidence had yet come forth. In a public lecture at the Metropoli-

25. See note 5. Barr himself refers to the figure as simply a “man”; Roland Penrose (*Picasso: His Life and Work*, New York, Icon, 1958, p. 127) calls him “a sailor”; others (Leymarie, R. de la Souchère, etc.) “a student.”

26. Barr, *Fifty Years*, p. 57, and *Masters of Modern Art*, p. 68.

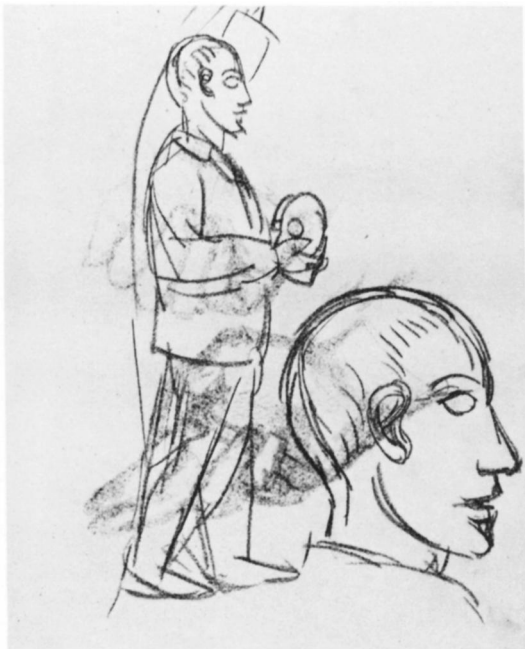
27. Picasso's youthful *Flight into Egypt* of 1895 includes a date-bearing palm, which the photographer David Douglas Duncan, who first published the picture, understood as a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The painter corrected him. The dates are there, he explained, “because they really had to eat something!”; see Daix and Boudaille, *Picasso: The Blue and Rose Periods*, p. 27.

28. To identify those suggestible authors who saw a death's head in fig. 6 would serve no purpose; their name is legion.

tan Museum (in March 1972), I proposed to proceed with no further regard to any initial death theme, unless hitherto unpublished drawings appeared.

The approach was at least fertile. It brought information from Mila Gagarine, successor to the late Christian Zervos in the continuing *Picasso Catalogue*, that a number of unknown drawings for the *Demoiselles* had just come to light, including several that referred to the man with the skull—“il s’agit bien d’un crâne,” she said transatlantically. The new finds were to be published in a forthcoming supplementary volume during 1973.²⁹ At the same time, William Rubin of the Museum of Modern Art, with whom I had discussed the matter, found occasion to mention the disputed skull to Picasso himself during a visit in April 1972. The result was rewarding. Whoever has been unable to see a skull in the Basel drawing (fig. 6), is now officially vindicated, for the drawing hails from a stage when the skull emblem had been long discarded. And the presence of the

29. For the present first publication of six of these drawings we are indebted to three parties: to Picasso who, after sixty-five years of negligence or perversity, remembered or consented to let them out; to Mila Gagarine; and to William S. Rubin, who obtained the photographs from Mlle. Gagarine and turned them over to me. Some of Mr. Rubin’s thoughts on these drawings, which, before learning that the present article was nearing completion, he had planned to publish himself, are acknowledged below.



34. Study for the *Demoiselles*, black pencil, 24.2 × 19.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/37v (Z.XXVI.45).



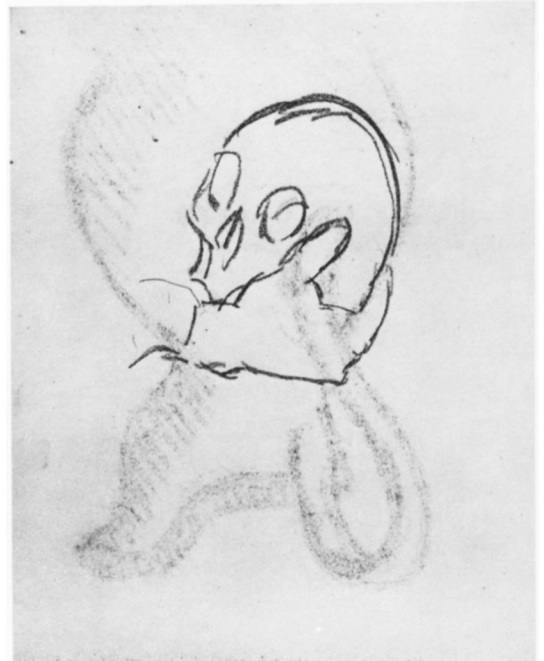
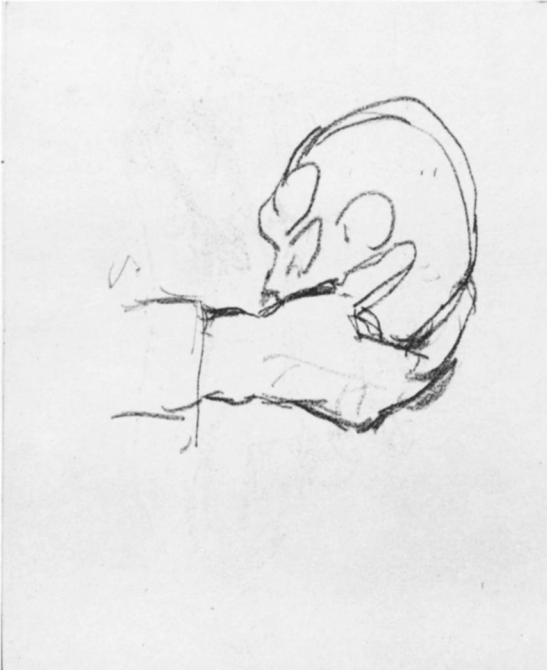
35. Study for the *Demoiselles*, black pencil, 24.2 × 19.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/32v (Z.XXVI.55).

skull at an earlier stage need no longer be taken on faith. On the other hand, the *memento mori* interpretation remains as doubtful as ever. Questioned by Rubin, Picasso confirmed that the original conception of *Les Femmes d'Alger* had indeed included the skull motif and then produced an unpublished sketchbook (24.2 × 19.3 cm) containing four pages of studies directly related to the curtain figure—whom he identified as a “medical student” (figs. 34–38).

A medical student? Rubin comments as follows: “Since in discussing the Student, Picasso made a special point of identifying him as a *medical* student, the skull may be considered a casual medical-school, i.e. ‘professional,’ prop. . . . His being a medical student obviates any necessity to read the picture allegorically as does Barr (the skull being an anecdotal prop), but by no means eliminates the possibility that the picture also functions on this level.”³⁰

But suppose we press further. Why a medical student rather than a student of, say, engineering, law, or philosophy? Had Picasso wished to evoke the idea of a contemplation of death, he could have given the skull to any man, everyman. Why to a medical student dressed in a business suit? Does that uniform make him an anti-hero, clinical and irreverent before the forces of life, like Joyce’s Buck Mulligan?

30. Communication to author, June 1, 1972.



And why the skull as his symbol? It is not even an efficient mark of its bearer's profession, since it could as easily designate a gravedigger, or a life-drawing instructor. And contrariwise, is not a medical man more securely defined by such insignia as Aesculapian staff, urine bottle, scalpel, or stethoscope? We are still left in need of one answer to two distinct questions: why choose a medical student and why make his symbol a skull?

Perhaps because a medical student is the one member of human society who can, and who does, look at a skull with thoughts other than thoughts of death—i.e., looks at it as an object of scientific inquiry. It is surely significant that this errant skull is interchangeable with a book, and that both items are inappropriate gear to bring to a brothel. The fact that in Picasso's evolving conception a second drawing shows the man burdened with both book and skull (fig. 38), and thereafter with a book only (figs. 4–6), suggests that these attributes served as symbols of knowledge, and of a particular brand of knowledge—non-participatory and theoretical. They signal the chilling approach of analysis. Hence the death's head in the hand of the medical student—as against the sailor's ithyphallic life symbol. For while the meek sailor behind his Bacchic *porrón* is in the thick of it, his counterpart, the knowing man at the curtain, becomes the outsider. Not a personifier of pious death consciousness, nor (as R. de la Souchère has suggested) a man imperiled by entering into sin, into that house of woman which goes down to the chambers of death, but the opposite—a man apart, self-exiled by reliance



36. *Opposite, left: Study for the Demoiselles, black pencil, 24.2 × 19.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/17v (Z.XXVI.74).*

37. *Opposite, right: Study for the Demoiselles, black pencil, 24.2 × 19.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/16v (Z.XXVI.75).*

38. *Left: Study for the Demoiselles, black pencil, 24.2 × 19.3 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1861/18r (Z.XXVI.73).*



on studious dissection; condemned for not entering. In the context of Picasso's *Demoiselles* studies, as a man placed in transit in the plane of the curtain, the student stands for an attitude. He never looks at the nudes in his path; despite the summary character of the drawings, Picasso always succeeds in turning his head up, his glance away. He is the non-participant, the excluded one in the ultimate game of inclusion.

Since we must have an allegorical starting point, I suggest that the *Demoiselles* project began, not as a charade on the wages of sin, but as an allegory of the involved and the uninvolved in confrontation with the indestructible claims of sex. For Picasso, seventy years ago, was not listening to Church Fathers, but hearing the voice of the philosopher who had written: "Christianity gave Eros poison to drink: he did not die of it but degenerated—into a vice."³¹

*

Speaking to Kahnweiler in December 1933, Picasso recalled the jokes he and his friends banded about the women in the *Demoiselles* painting, identifying one of them as Picasso's girlfriend, Fernande, another as Marie Laurencin, a third as the grandmother of his poet friend Max Jacob—"all in a brothel in Avignon!"³² Since the male characters did not survive the initial studies, not even mock names for them have come down; but it would be in character for Picasso to have had specific persons in mind. Rubin sees Picasso's own features in the youth with the skull in fig. 34; and he proposes to read both men in fig. 5 as

31. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, Section 168. On Nietzsche's relevance, cf. note 36.

32. Picasso's conversation with Kahnweiler (cited in note 5 above) begins: "*Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, how this title irritates me. Salmon invented it. You know very well that the original title from the beginning had been *The Brothel of Avignon*. But do you know why? Because Avignon has always been a name I knew very well and is a part of my life. I lived not two steps away from the Calle d'Avignon where I used to buy my paper and my watercolors and also, as you know, Max's grandmother came originally from Avignon. We used to make a lot of fun of this painting; one of the women in it was Max's grandmother, another Fernande, and another Marie Laurencin, and all of them in a brothel in Avignon."

39. *Opposite, top left: Photograph of Max Jacob in Montmartre, c. 1907, detail.*

40. *Opposite, top right: Chère Mademoiselle Suzanne, 1905, detail showing Max Jacob and Picasso.*

41. *Opposite, center: Study for the Demoiselles, oil on wood, 19 × 24 cm. Whereabouts unknown (Z.II.20).*

42. *Opposite, bottom: Jean Cocteau, Max Jacob, Henri-Pierre Roché, and Picasso in front of La Rotonde, 1916, detail.*

partial self-portraits, aspects of Picasso's split nature.³³ This is surely a possibility. On the other hand, a symbolic role for the curtain figure as the sexual "outsider" may have allowed it to coalesce with successive identifications. Not only does the figure quickly grow tall and lean (figs. 38, 4, 5, and 6), as if to belie the artist's own build; in fig. 7, the last to include the full crew of seven, the man at the curtain becomes bald and distinctly older, taking on a resemblance to Max Jacob (figs. 39–42). Physiognomic clues are of course always inadequate, but it remains a suggestive alternative to link the changeable male in the original cast of the *Demoiselles* with the homosexual temperament of the poet—a man morally drawn to, but repelled by, the love of woman, fluctuating between what he called his "amours d'enfer" and contrition. As Picasso's former roommate, literary mentor, and most intimate friend of those years, he must have caused the artist to ponder that mysterious housing of sexuality which is a man's body; and to brood on the difference between possessing, and being possessed by, one's sex.³⁴

33. Quoting from Rubin's communication of June 1, 1972: "The earliest sketch for the Student (fig. 34) shows a short stocky man of Picasso's build and hair style. The proportions of this figure change immediately afterward (fig. 38). His costume, a well-tailored suit, remains more or less characteristic throughout; it identifies an upper middle-class personage who is set against the casually-dressed (as we see later) lower-class sailor. This contrast is emphasized by the fact that while the Student is standing in profile at the margin of the field, the sailor is seated, frontal and central. Picasso is here implicitly contrasting and weighing the life of the senses (the sailor is surrounded by flesh, food and drink) and the mind (the book held by the Student), poles between which his own work will oscillate. . . . The sailor . . . represents Picasso's instinctive sensuous side, as established during childhood (sailor suit, surrounded by women in the home), while the Student represents Picasso's mind and intelligence (book and skull). . . . At the same time, the skull is a studio prop of the artist (Picasso says he had a skull at the time, and it appears not long afterward in the Hermitage still life of his studio). Thus the medical student may be assimilated to that side of Picasso whose science will anatomize the visual world."

34. For the personality of Max Jacob, see especially Robert Guiette, "Vie de Max Jacob," *La Nouvelle Revue Française*, no. 250 (July 1, 1934), based on interviews with the poet; and LeRoy C. Breunig, "Max Jacob et Picasso," *Mercure de France*, December 1957, pp. 581–596. In Guiette's "life," the poet tells of his first love affair with a woman—one of the two moments in his life which he would relive if he could (the other being a vision of Christ, six years later, which led to his conversion and ultimate retreat to a monastery). The affair with Mme. Germaine Pfeipfer, the eighteen-year-old wife of a drunkard, began when Max was twenty-five—"mais, je crois, quinze pour la raison et pour le coeur." Many years after their separation, in 1907 or 1908, he saw his first love again, and found her grotesque. Not so the two friends who were with him, Picasso and Braque; they pronounced her "très belle."

Picasso's imaginative susceptibility to the sexual character of his intimate friends is confirmed in a recent article by Josep Palau y Fabre ("1900: A Friend of His Youth," in *Homage to Pablo Picasso*, special issue of *XXe Siècle*, trans. B. Wadia, New York, Tudor Publishing, 1971, pp. 3–12). The author discusses another of Picasso's early companions, the melancholy writer-painter Casagemas, who killed himself over a woman in a Paris café on February 17, 1901. For some months previously, "Casagemas' behaviour mystified his friends more and more. One day, they were just going into a brothel in the rue de Londres, when Casagemas slipped away explaining that he was suffering from intestinal trouble." Two years after the suicide, when Picasso was again occupying the Barcelona studio which he had formerly shared with his dead friend, he painted *La Vie* (1903, Cleveland Museum of Art). In the painting, the figure of Casagemas replaces the Adam-Picasso of the preliminary sketches. Palau concludes: "As Picasso, he is completely nude. Casagemas in the painting wears

The man at the curtain passes through rapid changes of personality. He begins, skull in hand and left arm disconnected, as a stocky youth with close-cropped hair (fig. 34); his precise profile interests Picasso enough to repeat and enlarge upon (fig. 35). The skull-holding gesture alone is studied in further drawings (figs. 36, 37).³⁵ Immediately afterward, in the same sketchbook, the figure becomes long and faceless (fig. 38); a book (or portfolio?) under his arm joins the death's head, as though this second attribute were needed to sustain the significance of the first. In three further drawings (figs. 4–6), the man's character remains constant, but papers replace the skull—until at last all attributes disappear.

Rid of symbolic props in the last full-cast study (fig. 7), the short, balding, ex-medical student with the plump features of Max Jacob seizes the curtain with an ambidextrous will, the left hand aloft, the right arm crooked behind like the harlequin's in *Les Saltimbanques* of 1906 (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.). In the drawings that follow (figs. 8–11), he grips the curtain with waxing determination and his body leans forward as though inclined to drag it along—as though he had the power, or the intention, to foreclose the act. Finally (figs. 12–14), the figure undergoes a sex change and petrifies. The face mask she wears in the painting protects a secret history.

But her marginal relationship to the rest of the cast remains constant; she still differs from the nudes on stage in being gowned. Yet she belongs, and parades like the picture itself, being unveiled by her garment as the picture is by its curtain. Her *déshabillé* introduces the theme of exposure. She is the overture, the true curtain raiser. The character that invested her figure from the beginning still clings; she remains non-participant and go-between, not part of the revelation but one who reveals. And the crucial change in her role consists in this, that the brothel staff, instead of reacting to her dramatic entrance, are through her made to react to us.

What then has happened to the original drama—the polarity of external knowledge and initiation? As the action turns through ninety degrees to confound the viewer, the picture ceases to be the representation of an adventure

an odd sort of slip. The ambiguity of this slip is significant. . . . The slip states and, at the same time, hides the truth behind the drama, a truth that Picasso never wished to reveal. But we know from the post-mortem of Casagemas that he was impotent."

35. The repetition of the skull-holding motif on two pages of the unpublished sketchbook is interesting. In both drawings the inner line of the index finger coincides with the cranium. In the second drawing this double-functioning is extended to the thumb, whose outline is adjusted to coincide with the skull's cheekbone. The single descriptive contour which seams two contiguous forms is a general principle of Picasso's draftsmanship.

The recto of our fig. 35 shows several unpublished studies for the central nude. Fig. 36 faces our fig. 38. Fig. 37 bears the impress of the drawing on the facing page: Picasso's study for the flower vase in the foreground of the Basel drawing, fig. 6. A more elaborate study for this vase, hitherto unrecognized and misdated, is reproduced in Z.VI.807.

enjoyed by one or two men and becomes instead an experience of ours, an experience, that is, of the painting. The change seems drastic; from an allegory of man meeting woman, to the adventure of a collision with art. As if the theme had been shunted from the subject of sex to that of painting itself—which is, in a sense, what has always been said, that the picture has become “significant” as painting only. Whatever the original subject had been—wages of sin or detachment versus engagement—that subject seems superseded when the confrontation proceeds between the contained work of art over there and its observer outside.

But, I think, the picture says otherwise. It declares that if you wholly accept and undergo the aesthetic experience, if you let it engulf and scare you—as Gertrude Stein says Alice B. Toklas was scared by the *Demoiselles*—then you become an insider. It is in the contagion of art that the types of knowledge, the external and the engaged, intermingle, and the distinction between outsider and insider falls away.

Not every picture is capable of such overriding contagion. Few works of art impose the kind of aesthetic experience which the young Nietzsche called “a confrontation with stark reality.” And this, surely, is why Picasso strove to make his creation a piece of “wild naked nature with the bold face of truth.” He wanted the orgiastic immersion and the Dionysian release.³⁶

Once more one realizes the importance to Picasso of dissociating those five figures from one another. Despite the packed grouping, there is no communication between them, no conceivable traffic across the narrows that keep them apart. The disjunctions are part of the mechanism; each figure at its own terminus connects individually with the viewer, much as our five fingers connect with the arm. And the appeal, appropriately enough, is to the most primitive intuition, to that ground of earliest consciousness wherein all perceived beings relate separately to the perceiving self. The infant’s slow recognition that there exists, say, between mother and father, a mutual intimacy from which his own self is excluded, constitutes a state of enculturation, an achieved intellectual detachment that allows him to register external interrelations. Picasso’s *Demoiselles*, piercing this cultured crust, alerts a regressive impulse and activates the most instinctual mode of addressing experience.

There is, after all, a thoroughgoing consistency in the work, a oneness of theme and structure and a spirit of insolent summons to the beholder. Hence the repetition of vectors that define the orthogonal axis—inward from the specta-

36. The Nietzschean quotations are drawn from the *Birth of Tragedy* (1871), a work avidly read by the artists and poets of Barcelona and Paris at the turn of the century. Picasso’s early connection with the spirit of Nietzsche is discussed in Phoebe Pool’s “Sources and Background of Picasso’s Art 1900–06,” *The Burlington Magazine*, vol. CI (1959), p. 180. I wish to thank Mark Rosenthal, formerly of the University of Iowa, presently curator at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for his early insights into the Picasso-Nietzsche relation.

tor's station, by way of the penetrant table, past the masked curtain raiser who unveils an event of overwhelming proximity: the sudden exposure of cornered whores startled by our intrusion and returning our gaze. Without the mutual dependency of aroused viewer and pictorial structure there is no picture. The whole picture, form and subject together, strives against educated detachment.

*

Why is the blue curtain in the upper right always parted, and why the inquisitive *demoiselle* peering in? Picasso never questioned the finality of the motif and carried it almost unchanged through nineteen studies. Of course, it's a spacemaking device; given the compressed staging of the *Demoiselles*, it opens the backdrop just as the spilling tablespread opens the front. But why so much extra-territoriality in this "first Cubist picture?"

Or put it this way: What secret reserves of space does that slab-nosed nude, looking in from backstage, leave behind? One possible answer lies in a comparison of the *Demoiselles* with the last major work that precedes it in Picasso's oeuvre—the *Two Women* (fig. 43), produced, after innumerable preparatory studies, in Paris in the late fall of 1906.

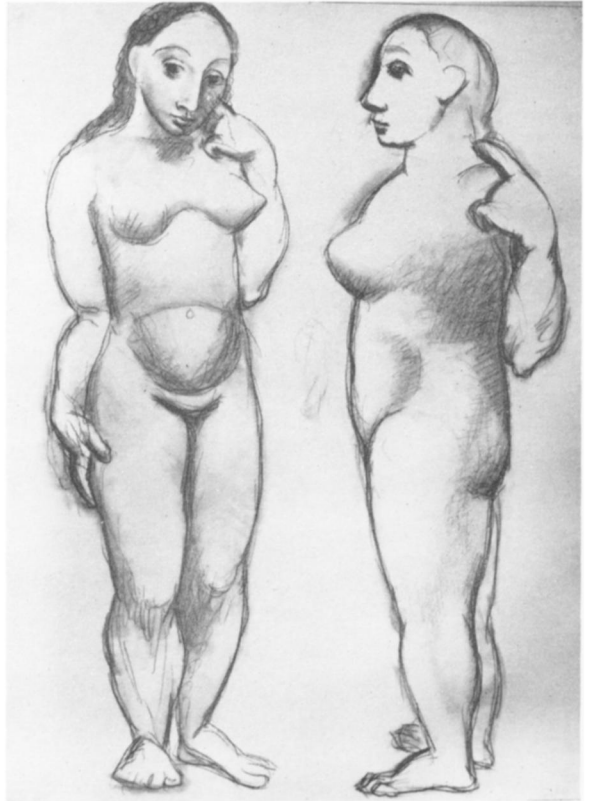
The contrast between the two paintings is absolute. The *Demoiselles* is all actuality, a clash of the sexes and a reciprocal shock—the women, themselves the quarry, stare at their game. The intruded table, bridgehead of the masculine presence, turns the depicted space into common ground, the site of shameless exposure to shameless eyes. In the *Two Women*, all is privacy and anticipation; absorbed in each other, the women stand in an anteroom—a place, a condition rather, of woman alone. Since these two works are so nearly consecutive—the many studies for them, including postscripts to the *Two Women*, almost shading off into each other³⁷—it may be well to reconceive them in sequence.

Begin with the changed body image. In the earlier painting, a pair of crude, sturdy maidens stand like carved logs—timber lately enwoman'd, ensouled. They are forms intact, their humanity sealed in integuments of solid fusion. As sculptured monoliths, they suggest matter never yet plied or stretched. As creatures of growth, they appear raw and unbreached. As physiological types, they seem unadapted and unaccustomed to motion, with flesh that has never submitted to pressure. Bodies, then, of primal virginity, designed only to encase their own substance, retained on the sheltered side of the curtain, antecedent to the

37. See especially Z.I.349 (D-B.XVI.32) and Z.XXII.461 (D-B.XVI.20), a postscript to the *Two Women* projecting a four-figure group in a setting of curtains. An interesting transitional thought is embodied in a conté drawing of 1906 (Z.VI.814, MP 1858/48r), where a nude figure, shaped like one of the *Two Women*, approaches like the incoming *demoiselle*, from behind a curtain in three-quarter front view.



43. *Two Women*, 1906, oil on canvas, 151.3 × 93 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art; Gift of G. David Thompson in Honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (Z.I.366).



44. *Two Nudes*, 1906, charcoal, 62 × 47 cm. New York, The Museum of Modern Art; Gift of the Joan and Lester Avnet Collection.

strains of experience. And then the eager anatomies of the *Demoiselles* become Picasso's complementary metaphor—bodies manipulable and articulated for play.

It is worth recalling that the earliest of Picasso's many images of two women paired in an intimate meeting is the *Two Sisters* of 1902 (Leningrad; Z.I.163), the subject of which Picasso spelled out in a letter to Max Jacob. The picture, he wrote, represents the meeting of a nun and a prostitute in the hospital of St.-Lazare.³⁸ Nun and harlot: the extremes of woman's physical life joined in a single arch; the body unused and the body abused—poles of innocence and experience; and this same polarity at a wider stretch spanned again in the succession from the *Two Women* to the *Demoiselles*.

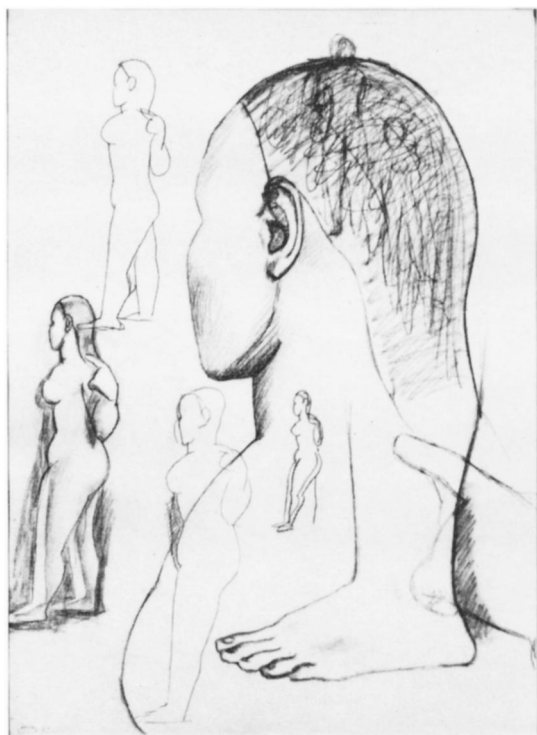
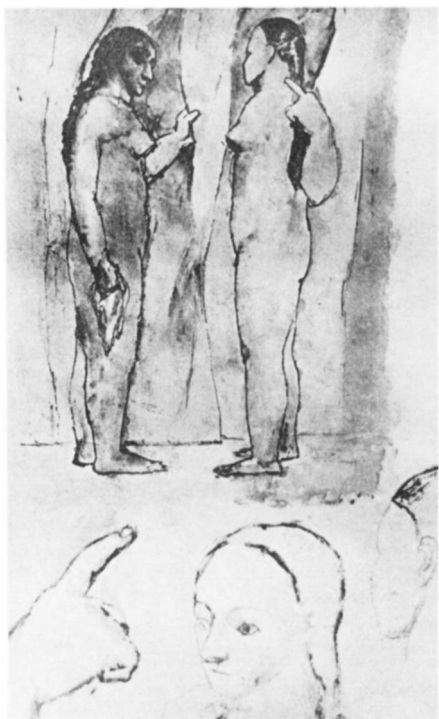
Consider the contrast of gesture in the two pictures. Picasso's painting of the *Two Women* closes a period of preoccupation with woman as a contained figure, restricted to self-sealing attitudes—hands folded, arms crossed, limbs locked together, and elbows that cleave to the trunk (fig. 44). Then, in the

38. "Je veux faire un tableau de ce dessin que je t'envoie (*Les Deux Soeurs*). C'est un tableau que je fais d'un putain de St.-Lazare et d'une soeur." Letter to Max Jacob, Barcelona, 1902; see Jaime Sabartés, *Picasso Documents Iconographiques*, Geneva, Pierre Cailler, 1954, no. 70.

Demaiselles—all elbows out! Let the reader repeat these respective motions to experience the explosive psychic effect of abruptly released elbows.

Two Women is a mysterious picture: a pair of young massy females on either side of a breach. One of them is poised to go through—but not the one on the left. In a gesture of self-absorption, one hand recoils to her shoulder, the other hand grasping the curtain as if to show it or draw it aside. This farther hand introduces our “disconnection” motif, an earlier example of that space jump by way of understated backshortened gesture which Picasso renders more recondite in the *Demaiselles*. But the whole figure is a tour de force of depicted depth in compression—from her right wrist, through the hulk of her shoulders, to the distant grip on a curtain. And beyond that, some ulterior world to be broached. By whom? She eyes the other—I, I or you.

The woman at right is half lost to us, facing away. Her face in lost profile is addressed to the cleft in the curtain; likewise the stony index of her raised hand. Several of the studies for the *Two Women* show Picasso thinking a pointing hand (figs. 45–46; cf. also Z.VI.822, MP 1858/41r). In the painting, the arm retracted as far as it may and the elbow pressed to the waist indicate that the pointing hand hovers free of the shoulder, so that the large, lighted finger looms in mid-air. Such a gesture, like that of the Sistine Ceiling's Isaiah, bespeaks inly



awareness or self-recognition. The whole picture is inner directed, a strange prelude to the extrovert plot of the *Demoiselles*.

And then the close congruence of the two women. The near-identity of their lower limbs suggests duplication. To Alfred Barr, who admired the picture before others took notice, the two figures seemed to stand for one woman — like a self and its mirror image self-searching. There is a beautiful parallelism in the two rising hands, the reflexive hand that falls back on its shoulder, and the other whose finger is cocked in the direction to go. But this question, whether we are seeing one woman or two, is not framed for a literal answer. It is a classical Spanish notion that self-discovery occurs in intercourse with another, that a meeting of persons is a reciprocal mirroring.³⁹ But the image the other wins from

39. See, for instance, the opening chapter of Baltasar Gracián's allegorical novel *El Criticón* (1651–57). The shipwrecked Critilo, who personifies the critical intelligence, reaches a desert island where he meets the lone Andrenio, “the human one,” who has never before seen a fellow man and who personifies man's instinctual side. Asked who he is, Andrenio offers this remarkable answer: “Yo, dijo, ni sé quién soy, ni quién me ha dado el ser, ni para qué me le dio: qué de veces, y sin voces, me lo pregunté a mí mismo, tan necio como curioso, pues si el preguntar comienza en el ignorar, mal pudiera yo responderme. Argúfame tal vez, para ver si empeñado me excedería a mí mismo. Duplicábame, aún no bien singular, por ver si apartado de mi ignorancia podría dar alcance a mis



45. *Opposite, left: Study for Two Women, 1906, ink and watercolor (Z.I.364).*

46. *Opposite, right: Study for Two Women, 1906, pencil, 61 × 45 cm. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts; Arthur Tracy Cabot Fund (Z.XXII.467).*

47. *Left: Nude and Faun, 1906, watercolor, 20.5 × 13.5 cm. New York, The Alex Hillman Family Foundation (Z.XXII.412).*

you is your surrendered part, held by the other for fair exchange. The self sunders to retrieve itself and re-selve in mutual awareness. The picture then—if it is indeed of one woman—is of a person on the threshold of an encounter, about to pass through the curtain that screens the unmated self.

At least three surviving sketches for the pointing partner in the *Two Women* externalize her premonitions: she is beset by two devilish little satyrs (Z.VI.803), or flanked by a satyr and cupid (Z.VI.805). In a fine watercolor (fig. 47) she stands alone, but alone with a goat-footed faun traipsing up. What connection is there between the gift of the satyr and the index addressed to the mind?

Whether *Two Women* represents one twofold personage or paired companions with complementary roles, face and finger of the woman at the right direct themselves to the place where a curtain is about to divide. And is there no sequel? We know that Picasso wonders about the averted back of what he sees, and that his oeuvre exhibits inversions of viewpoints from back to front in infinite ways. I propose that his next decision constitutes what the movies call a shot/counter-shot. As if his next picture must inevitably behold that same curtain from the reverse side.

This next picture is the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, formerly dubbed “the Philosophical Brothel.” To us the picture has long been familiarly revolutionary by every stylistic test; but the psychic energy which powered that revolution flowed from the artist’s total humanity—from his meditation on man and woman no less than from his struggle with art. For both the *Two Women* and the *Demoiselles* are about the human condition, about that perpetual moment in which self-knowledge arises in sexual confrontation.

The “wherefrom” of the incoming *demoiselle* at the upper right now becomes answerable: she has left the state antecedent, the state of woman alone. What lies behind, behind the cleft in the curtain, is as solidly female as the domain in front of the picture is male, and the depicted space upon which she intrudes is the common ground. But such an answer has little face value, since we are not actually seeing consecutive frames of a filmstrip. The nosy bawd peering in as if from the mouth of a cave is not the “same” character as the one outward

deseos. Tú, Critilo, me preguntas quién yo soy, y yo deseo saberlo de ti. Tu eres el primer hombre que hasta hoy he visto, y en ti me hallo retratado más al vivo que en los mudos cristales de una fuente, que muchas veces mi curiosidad solicitaba y mi ignorancia aplaudía” (“I, saith he, neither know who I am, nor who hath given me this Being, nor to what End he hath given it to me: which Question I often, without Words proposed to my self, being as Ignorant, as Curious; but since Queries are caused by Ignorance, I had little means to resolve my self: yet so would I prove my self with argument, that I might, if possible, exceed my self; for as yet no affectation to any particular Good had so possessed me, but that withdrawing my Soul out of Ignorance, I might reach the limits of my desires. Thou, Critilo, askest who I am, and I desire to know that of thee; for thou art the first Man that until this day I have seen, in whom I find my self more perfectly delineated, than in the silent Chrystals of a Fountain, which oftimes my Curiosity carried me unto, and my Ignorance applauded”; trans. Paul Rychaut, *The Critick*, London, 1681, p. 7).

bound in the *Two Women*. More important to Picasso than a sustaining identity is precisely the transformation of character implicit in the two states—from bluff simplicity to keen-edged articulation. Yet certain features shared by both figures suggest a residual constancy. The breast of square shape—apparent in the Philadelphia watercolor even before being canonized in the *Demoiselles* painting—is anticipated as a left breast in the *Two Women*. And the three-quarter back-view of the earlier picture is reversed in the three-quarter face of the slab-nosed *demoiselle*. In fact, one suspects that the latter's whole figure is conceived as a forced fusion of divergent three-quarter views. The one-breasted chest, which describes the body turning away (as in the *Two Women*), is counterpointed by the hither turn of the head.

Her dissonant visage, like that of the squatter below, accords with the theme of the *Demoiselles* painting, if not with its style. Most of the composition studies—those small ones that represent the six-figure phase (figs. 8–14)—show faceless figures. But there is a radical difference between the faces that appeared early (in figs. 4–7) and those in the Philadelphia watercolor (fig. 15). Picasso's conception has gained in tempo and violence, and now a fiercer physiognomic type troubles the scene. The shift is away from conventional Western types. In the watercolor—which must date from the spring of 1907, just before the painting itself was undertaken—the women already suggest a primitive life lived in the subsoil of civilization.

It has been shown that two-fifths of the painting is due to a later campaign, datable to the end of the summer of 1907, and that the sharpened ferocity of the two right-hand figures followed Picasso's exposure to African art.⁴⁰ But there was clearly good reason why the artist was willing to channel the new influence into this particular work. Even before the revision of the right side of the painting under the impact of tribal art, Picasso wanted his doxies depersonalized and barbaric. In the end, his reason for making them savage was the same as his reason at the beginning for making them whores. They were to personify sheer sexual energy as the image of a life force. The primitive was let in because that's what the subject craved. If Picasso in 1907 felt, as Joyce did, that "female coyness and male idealism were counterparts, [that] the sugaring of love and courtship was a part of the general self-deception and refusal to recognize reality . . .,"⁴¹ then he would, in this picture, project sexuality divested of all accretion of culture—without appeal to privacy, tenderness, gallantry, or that appreciation of beauty which presumes detachment and distance. His women's faces were to be orgiastic; masks of impersonal passion with no interference of personality. Like the original chorus of satyrs whom Nietzsche saw giving birth to Greek tragedy, Picasso's strumpets were to be "nature beings who dwell behind all

40. See the discussion of the chronology in Golding, *Cubism*, pp. 52–55.

41. Richard Ellmann, *Ulysses on the Liffey*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1972, p. 16, referring to Joyce's "The Holy Office" of 1904.

48. *Nude with Raised Arms, 1908, gouache, 32 × 25 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso (Z.II.39).*



civilization and preserve their identity through every change of generations and historical movement.”⁴² And the assimilation of African forms was but the final step in the continuing realization of an idea—the trauma of sexual encounter experienced as an animalistic clash, a stripping away even of personal love—again, parlor reverting to jungle; again, Nietzsche’s “wild naked nature with the bold face of truth.”

A small gouache from the *Demoiselles* period records more of Picasso’s thought about woman as the image of animal destiny (fig. 48): a jungle dweller of slumbrous vitality, she walks alone, listening to the surge of the body as her left leg metamorphoses into the hind leg of a quadruped—a hock on the reverse side of the knee.^{42A} It is as though the goat leg of the faun who approached the reflective nude in fig. 47 had invaded her being to reduce her anatomy to “wild naked nature.”

Picasso in 1907 had grown too modern in spirit to let his vision of “the bold face of truth” be other than a regression. He would allow no idyllic primeval

42. *Birth of Tragedy*, Section VII.

42A. Picasso’s sketchbook of 1907 in the collection of Marina Picasso contains several drawings which explore this regressive metamorphosis of female legs; see *Picasso Cubista 1907–1920*, Barcelona, Fundació Caixa de Barcelona, 1987, p. 46, and *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Paris, Musée Picasso, 1988, vol. I, p. 217, 27r and 27v.

state, no celebration of unsoiled innocence, like Matisse's *Joie de vivre* of the previous year. To uncover the face of truth, Picasso's return to nature in the *Demoiselles* must be ironic—not to Arcady, but to the city stews. Hence the smell of the hothouse, the effect of a caged jungle whose graceless inmates, at once frightened and frightening, awesome and comical, start up like jerked puppets. That squatter at right—was there ever a trollop more like a jumping jack?

Within the life of the city, even the reversion to nature becomes part of a show; the brothel a circus spectacle, and five plucked performers—Matisse interpreted them as a hoax—to invite ridicule and provoke ribaldry (incitement to ribaldry being the certainest way to engage the spectator). Picasso himself and his friends made them butts of broad humor; every one of those sluts got a name. Seeing them for the first time, the critic Félix Fénéon advised the young painter to take up caricature—“not so stupid,” Picasso commented in retrospect. And most later observers, at one time or another, have come down on the funny side of the *Demoiselles*: Roland Penrose described one of the figures as “opened out like a suckling pig”; they were, according to Barr, “five of the least seductive female nudes in the history of art.”⁴³ Did Picasso expect us to take the work seriously—all of the time?

His contemporaries probably needed to see them as partly comical to survive them at all. How, otherwise, could they relate to a vision of five bedeviled viragos whose sexual offering, visually inescapable, was decivilizing, disfiguring, and demoniacal?

*

The two at the right are key figures, both of them with disordered anatomies and ambiguous orientations. The incoming figure had been arriving up-stage in composition drawings repeated over and over, and Picasso knew very well that the three-quarter view in which he was casting her was fraught with consequence. Unlike a strict profile or an *en face*, which tend to lie flush on the picture plane, her transitional three-quarter aspect implies spatial depth—rearward as in *Two Women*, or hitherward on a diagonal. Observe that her puissant nose aims at the curtain raiser as through a traversible medium. Thus her oblique intrusion threatens to redefine the entire space of the picture as a continuum. To insulate her, as he must, from all connective ambience, Picasso makes his most fateful decisions. The crouching figure below, precisely because she is her nearest companion in point of space, gets removed to the utmost *stylistic* distance. At the risk of scandalizing logic and art—to say nothing of abashing his friends—he will negate the fixity of focused vision, the vacancy of empty space,

43. For the jokes Picasso and his friends used to make about the *Demoiselles*, see note 32. For the Fénéon incident, see Ashton, *Picasso on Art*, pp. 110–112. The last two quotations are from Penrose, *Picasso*, p. 125, and Barr, *Masters of Modern Art*, p. 68.

49. Standing Woman (Woman in Riding Habit),
charcoal, verso of fig. 14 (Z.II.685).



50. Standing Woman (Woman in Riding Habit), ink,
13.6 × 10.5 cm. Paris, Musée Picasso MP 1862/19v
(Z.XXVI.130).

and the coherence of style. Three momentous decisions, or intuitions, which we trace in the last two composition studies and in the final phase of the painting.

The last of the drawings to include the sailor in a six-figure group is a large, accurate composition study in charcoal (fig. 14). It lays down the main tonal divisions and outlines the figures as blank shapes in the field, suggesting that Picasso is no longer staging actors in space, but approaching the thought of his canvas. But that he is not sacrificing spatiality to decorative values of flatness is proved by the drawing on the reverse of the sheet.

On the back of fig. 14 appears a large, carefully structured design of a *Standing Woman* (fig. 49). Her single breast is an important sign. Were the body presented as a conventional side view, such a breast contour would be acceptable as the profilation of a familiar silhouette. But on a thorax that is clearly not in strict profile, the single breast implies — as it did in *Two Women*, and as in the two *demoiselles* on the right — that the body inhabits a depth of space which holds another breast in the offing. The lone breast becomes the thoracic version of the *profil perdu* — a signal that Picasso is not thinking flat. And indeed, the figure is a spatial amphiboly, his earliest essay in diametric two-way orientation.⁴⁴

Is the lady facing or backing away? Are we seeing her front or her rear with turned head looking back over her shoulder? Faint traces in the zone of the pelvis may once have spelled rump, but Picasso has let them fade out; their precise reference to a back view would have dispelled ambiguity. Contours of waist, thorax, and breast yield no specific clue; nor does the cylindrical neck, or the flat falling arm. The head, of course, can be read both ways — either turned over her right shoulder toward us or as a three-quarter front view. This leaves only the lifted hand which, as an open palm with straight thumb, would stand unequivocally for the right hand of a figure seen from the rear. And this is precisely why the thumb is removed by a slash continuous from elbow to index. The rest of the hand is no problem, since the emphatic cross-stroke at the roots of the four fingers defines the back of the hand as readily as the palm. Thus every part of the figure ends up at the same ambivalence level.^{44A}

44. The word “earliest” is always a risk when discussing Picasso. His beginnings are like the beginnings of myth. As soon as one identifies a novel theme and starts searching for its earliest occurrence, the impression arises that there is never a starting point: nothing ever happens for the first time. In my own study of Picasso’s lifelong obsession with the problem of simultaneous front-and-back representation (“The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large,” in *Other Criteria*), I cited the 1907 drawing (fig. 49) as the first systematic instance of this preoccupation; but I pointed to earlier drawings of 1904–05, where figures appear successively recto and verso, as evidence of an earlier concern with the problem. I would now cite even earlier evidence in a sheet of nude studies dated 1902 (D-B. D.VII.5). The third figure from the left is a female back view but with arms and head ambiguously outlined for a possible frontal view.

44A. Subsequent studies for this *Amazone* (e.g., MP 1862/19v — our fig. 50) confirm Picasso’s interest in the figure’s ambivalent orientation. She displays her rear from the waist down, while her upper torso is perversely frontalized, as indicated by the overlapping contour of the breast at the armpit. Note also that the thumb of the hand holding a parasol does not reappear; its elimination in our fig. 49 was definitive.

Inside its bounded planes the drawing is flat. But it recreates the idea of "body," of something denser than silhouette, through the sustained front/back ambiguity. Not a body in the sense of spatial displacement, but the embodiment of two-way visibility, a form impressed between antipodal points of sight. Visual duplicity in the interest of symbolic concretion—a principle which Picasso will pursue for the rest of his life—is here laid down for the first time. And it is vastly significant for the history of his art that this figure was drawn on the back of a study for the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*.^{44B}

Return now to the squatter's blank silhouette in fig. 14. The pigtail which would have established an explicit back view is not confirmed by the system of reinforced contours. Hands and feet are suppressed and overlaps are ruled out; what remains is a flattened impress that orients itself simultaneously inward and outward.

Looking back, one observes that Picasso had been courting this prodigy for some time. His early oil study (fig. 7) had already smoothed the squatter like a butterfly to a pane. Arms cut away at the elbows, one leg cropped by a curtain, breasts evasé, and the head twisted around—the figure appears somewhat ambiguously dorsal and frontal. And a hint of the same obsession returns in drawings such as fig. 11. But Picasso seems also to resist the idea; it may have seemed too contrived and too cleverly punning, like those riddle drawings for children that read two ways—rabbit or duck; or those diagrams that depend on tricks of omission.⁴⁵ In the Philadelphia watercolor (fig. 15) the device is abandoned; the squatter becomes once again a back view with defining pigtail, and her acknowledgment of the spectator is conveyed by the anatomically sound turn of a head.

But in the painting the two-way orientation returns with a vengeance. Frontality—a warped facemask cupped in a huge boomerang hand—settles

44B. In the original publication of the present article, I followed Zervos' erroneous designation of the figure as a *Nu debout* (Z.II.685). The error is corrected in Gary Tinterow, *Master Drawings by Picasso*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Fogg Art Museum, 1981, p. 84. As pointed out to Mr. Tinterow by Douglas Cooper, to whom Picasso had given the drawing in 1959, the figure is dressed in a riding habit. Cooper continued: "after abandoning the *Demoiselles* [Picasso] intended to paint a large composition of equestrian figures and horses in the Bois de Boulogne. The present work must be a study for the painting which was never executed" (quoted in Tinterow, p. 84). That Picasso did entertain such a project is now confirmed by three studies in a carnet of 1907 (MP 1862/20v, 1862/36v, and fig. 50).

But Douglas Cooper's recollection in 1981 of what Picasso had told him in 1959 about a sequence of events in 1907 is questionable on two counts. Cooper (as reported by Tinterow) has Picasso intending to paint the Bois de Boulogne composition "after abandoning the *Demoiselles*." Yet, according to Tinterow's footnote 2, examination of the sheet proved that the verso drawing of the Amazon preceded the recto drawing, on which the *Demoiselles* composition appears in its comparatively early six-figure phase. Therefore, the Bois de Boulogne project must have been entertained and discarded before the *Demoiselles* painting was begun. This patent inaccuracy throws further doubt on Cooper's assertion—which he imputes to Picasso—that the *Demoiselles* painting itself was "abandoned." Such indeed was Cooper's opinion (cf. note 3, above), as it had been Kahnweiler's; but nothing in Picasso's own references to the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* indicates that he ever considered the picture less than achieved.

45. Cf. E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, Princeton, Bollingen, 1959, figs. 2 and 201.

without anatomic sanction upon a back; half of an arm akimbo lends itself to a rising thigh, and what's left may as well be right—recto as well as verso. Picasso discovers that abruptness of gesture can be expressed by suppressing transitions—no neck, for instance, between head and shoulders. His squatter becomes a focus of concentrated disorientation, like something too close to see. Gradually, as the studies reveal, Picasso edges her straightforward back view toward contradiction.⁴⁶ Frontal and dorsal aspect—the latter full-splayed and spread-eagled—arrive in simultaneity. And the suddenness of the inversion more than makes up for abstraction and flattening. It gives her pink flesh an aggressive immediacy, brought nearer still by the impudence of her pose and the proximity of an implicated observer who knows every side of her.

The Philadelphia watercolor (fig. 15) is the only known study for the *Demoiselles* in its definitive five-figure state. The sailor and his table-to-lean-on have been discharged, allowing Picasso to adjoin the two central nudes. One of them, the caryatid, long treated as a distant, archaic effigy, is brought down to stage center, her sex at the intersection of all coordinates, her crownpost position aligned with the thrust of the table. There is a new determination to clench dispersed elements without easing their mutual repulsion.

But the outstanding event in this final drawing is the positive charge given to the interspaces at right. The vacant surrounds fill up and harden, and the inspissation of intervals converts the two right-hand figures into negative shapes reserved on a dark ground.

Much has been written about the eruption of these solidified voids in the painting. Ever since Kahnweiler, they have been seen as a stylistic break with the rest of the work, a shift in intention. Their prophetic energy seemed to Kahnweiler to offset the sacrifice of internal unity. Robert Rosenblum, too, felt that the painting traced a headlong change of style from left to right, a change come, as it were, in the heat of action, within the painting itself. “[Its] very inconsistency is an integral part of *Les Demoiselles*. The irrepressible energy behind its creation demanded a vocabulary of change and impulse rather than of measured statement in a style already articulated. The breathless tempo of this pregnant historical moment virtually obligated its first masterpiece to carry within itself the very process of artistic evolution. . . .”⁴⁷

Can it be that the noble enthusiasm of this description, penned just before 1960, echoes the cry of American Action Painting? For it appears that the “radical quality” of the *Demoiselles*, the reversed charges of ground and figure, “the threat to the integrity of mass as distinct from space,” that all this was already envisaged in the Philadelphia watercolor. It was part of a program, part

46. It is a misunderstanding of Picasso's intention to rationalize his deliberate befuddlements into an analytical exposition of the three-dimensional form—e.g.: “in the squatting *demoiselle* Picasso had dislocated and distended the various parts of the body in an attempt to explain it as fully as possible, without the limitations of viewing it from a single, stationary position” (Golding, *Cubism*, p. 62).

47. Rosenblum, *Cubism*, p. 25.

of the eruption effect planned for the picture. Already here, that open curtain in the upper right—previously rendered by two canted lines—condenses into cold boulders of color that turn the space intervals into mass.

And there is good reason why these curtain floes gelled exactly here, where the scene is intruded on with a momentum sufficient to reconvert the whole setting to open spatiality. Think the blue curtain away, and that savage entrance will dissipate all of Picasso's carefully plotted disjunctions. But if those five clustered nudes are to remain discontinuous, the artist must quarantine the intruder and build the gap between her and her neighbors into an insurmountable barrier. It is this imperative which the Philadelphia watercolor obeys. And in the painting, what had once been a tame background curtain behind an interval of airspace becomes an outcropping of glacial blues that transmit neither dramatic motion, nor body heat, nor lines of sight.

The painting maintains a relentless consistency in isolating each figure, and the viewer is called on to keep switching between divergent pictorial modes. Reading from left to right, he encounters the curtain raiser who shows nothing but side, who defines her flat shape like a surface incision—a sunk relief with its ground removed, a profile traced on the diaphane that sets off the stage. It has been observed that one cannot quite tell whether the leg she shows is the right or the left; it is indeed one leg standing for both, as though to forestall any hint of a partner behind. And the angularity of her limbs is in keeping: the leather-cut arm; the broadside from shoulder to breast as if stretched between tenterhooks; and the left hand, articulated like somebody else's—not issuing from a substantial body but landing by an abrupt spatial leap in another register.

No intelligible continuity relates the curtain raiser to the next figure, our rampant *gisante*. We see her lift off against shreds of recession—halations of private space which she shares with nobody else. She and her elbowing neighbor seem to present a common front—both of them footless and levitating, kindred in dress, flesh, and feature, and both plainly facing. But one figure's frontality calls for looking down from above, the other for looking up. Their respective spatial orientations remain unreconciled.

At the right sits the squatter, flattest in drawing, but of multiple aspects, as though seen in duration or from an embracing position. Offering both front and back, she imputes an alarming intimacy to the spectator.

And at last the intruding savage, deeply recessed, trapped in the crack of a curtain whose collapsing pleats simulate an impenetrable solidification of space—the famous birthplace of Cubism.

But Cubist pictures are remarkable for stylistic coherence, whereas the program of the *Demoiselles* is an accelerating mutation of pictorial means in a narrowing cage. What Picasso attempts in this work throws shadows across vast reaches of twentieth-century art. He challenges far more than traditional focused perspective—which after Cézanne, Gauguin, and the Fauves had long lost its hold on advancing art. Far more is at stake than Cartesian space conceived as a

geometry of infinite homogeneous extension—a philosophic projection whose psychic detachment reflects neither the way we see nor the way we dream nor the way we move. Picasso's ultimate challenge is to the notion that the coherence of the artwork demands a stylistic consistency among the things represented; that one style must obtain in every part of the canvas, whether to correspond with the supposed unity of an instant visual experience or to maintain constancy in transformation. In both these alternatives, the persistent style registers as an objective rule, preformed like the grammar of language. The viewer follows a system from which he expects a predictable regularity. And the shock of the *Demoiselles* resides largely in the frustration of this expectation. In Picasso's farewell to stylistic unity, the means of rendering and the modes of experiencing become subjectified—open choices, acts of the will. Those three rocking orthogonals—curtain top, supine nude, leveled table—will not come flush with the picture plane. The straight curtain raiser and the *gisante* in bird's-eye perspective juxtapose a legitimate upright with a usurper. They are two images as distinct as two pictures. And the two-way squatter in the lower right is a disturbed diagram. Neighboring objects diverge willfully into discrepant styles; styles become subjects to paint. Only in the mind of the perceiver and nowhere else is their consanguinity recreated.

One realizes from how deep a conviction spring such perverse statements as this: "When you draw a head [Picasso said sometime in the 1950s] you must draw like that head. . . . Take a tree. At the foot of the tree there is a goat, and beside the goat is a little girl tending the goat. Well, you need a different drawing for each. The goat is round, the little girl is square, and the tree is a tree. And yet people draw all three in the same way. That is what is false. Each should be drawn in a completely different way."⁴⁸

Or this anecdote from the Bateau-Lavoir days, i.e., the *Demoiselles* period. Time: 2 a.m. Place: outside Max Jacob's window where the oil lamp, as usual, is still alight.

Picasso: Hey, Max, what are you doing?

Jacob: I'm searching for a style.

Picasso (going off): There's no such thing.⁴⁹

Collage was the first major outgrowth of Picasso's intuition that discrepant modes of representation can cohabit, like diverse fruit in a bowl. But the idea of combining unreconciled elements in one presentation recurs continually in his art; its ultimate reach is explored half a century later in a series of paintings which have yet to receive serious attention—Picasso's variations on *Las Meninas*, begun in 1957 (Barcelona, Museu Picasso), wherein each painted personage

48. Quoted in Hélène Parmelin, *Picasso: Women*, trans. Humphrey Hare, Amsterdam, Harry N. Abrams, 1964, p. 135.

49. See Breunig, "Max Jacob et Picasso," p. 595.

comes in a different style and each distinct image finds a space metope in which to be its own picture. In the *Meninas* series (as in the final canvas of the *Algerian Women*, 1955) these autonomies are clearly deliberate.

In the *Demoiselles*, where internal stylistic diversity makes its first monumental appearance, the phenomenon has been attributed to haste, to the supposed incomplete state of the picture, or to the uncontrollable surge of Picasso's creative momentum. But we have potent reasons to regard the apparent lack of coherence in the earlier work as equally purposeful. One of these has been discussed in detail: we have seen that the inconsistencies in the *Demoiselles* are not merely late interferences, but programmed throughout; the striated masks at the right may look more discordant, but are not more damaging to received notions of pictorial unity than that flown kite of a hand in the upper left, or the divergent eye levels incorporated by the twinned central figures.

There are further reasons for rejecting any notion of discontinuity by inadvertence. The shatter effect, the rule of disruption in the *Demoiselles*, is too knowingly neutralized by deliberate counter-measures to have resulted from haste or runaway evolution. Consider the handling of color. It is used consistently as a bonding agent; it binds together whatever the stylistic rifts pull apart. Flesh tones of homologous pinks control the entire field, and a crescendo of blues expanding toward the right is counterpointed by diminishing browns and ochers.

Equally binding are the definitions of edges that lace and crisscross the surface, whether to line body contours or pass through and beyond. The remotest points of the canvas communicate. A slash anywhere in the field elicits sympathetic responses elsewhere; every shape or limb is directive. A diagonal discharged from the squatter's knee homes in on the hand at the curtain—its trajectory grazing the loincloth of the pillar nude and the *gisante's* listing shoulders. Linear structure is organic throughout, like a nervous system. Even the swoop of the squatter's nose breaks through the peak of her head to produce further contours.

But the will to unity in the *Demoiselles* touches more than color and line. It acts as a compressor upon the whole composition. It determines the format and within the format every spatial allotment.

The composition began as an oblong, as befits a multifigured narrative scene (figs. 4ff). But throughout the known composition studies the artist periodically applies lateral inward pressure to contain his ebullient crew. The one option he keeps available until the end is the frame's elasticity. As he rehearses the scene, the picture shrinks and dilates, narrows down to a square (as in figs. 8 and 14), but expands again to a rectangle in the Philadelphia study where the personnel is reduced to five (fig. 15). That was the last stage before beginning to paint. It was then that Picasso ordered his huge eight-foot canvas, prepared, we are told, "with unusual care. . . . The smooth type of canvas that he liked to paint on would not have been strong enough for so large a surface. He therefore had a fine canvas mounted on a stronger material as a reinforcement and had a

stretcher made to his specified unconventional dimensions."⁵⁰ These dimensions—slightly higher than wide—represent a final contraction, so that in the painting, as in no preceding study, each figure is crowded and each interval squeezed.

As might be expected, the centripetal forces working against the latitude of the field are personified in depicted actions—the pulling across of the curtain in figs. 8–10 and the dramatic entrance from the side opposite. But this compression of the flat field proceeds within two dimensions, whereas Picasso's thinking is tenaciously three dimensional. Accordingly, the marginal squeeze coincides with a compression of depth dramatized by the staging. The shallowness of the pictorial space is not given but won, for it wins out against aggressive incursions: the backbending proscenium is stayed by the curtain raiser, the inward thrust of the table, by the timely advance of the two central nudes, buffers in action. Indeed, every spatial dimension—width, height, and depth—lives under stress. The five *demoiselles*, though conceptually freed from each other, become an ingathered conglomerate, cohere like tensed fingers, and the whole collapsing interior stage of the picture closes in like a fist.

It is selling the picture short to be thinking it flat without grasping what it is that is being flattened. Its spatial cues may be offered in contradiction, but they are offered; they are both deployed and restrained. And the vehemence of the picture resides in the conflicts between crush and expansion. That famous near-Cubist space at the right is not a stacked pile, but a recessional sequence. Read from the threshold up, an inroad takes off between the white flat in the corner and the lifted still life at center; it is stopped by a roadblock nude squatted down on an ottoman; halts again at the sudden chill of blue draperies falling, then meets with the figure upstage fronting a cavernous hollow. No terms taken from other art—whether from antecedent paintings or from Picasso's own subsequent Cubism—describe the drama of so much depth under stress. This is an interior space in compression, like the inside of pleated bellows, like the feel of an inhabited pocket, a contracting sheath heated by the massed human presence.

The space of the *Demoiselles* is a space peculiar to Picasso's imagination. Not a visual continuum, but an interior apprehended on the model of touch and stretch, a nest known by intermittent palpation, or by reaching and rolling, by extending one's self within it. Though presented symbolically to the mere sense of sight, Picasso's space insinuates total initiation, like entering a disordered bed.

50. Penrose, *Picasso*, p. 124. The information goes back to Leo Stein, who (according to Barr, *Masters of Modern Art*, p. 68) "remembers visiting Picasso's studio that fall and finding there a huge canvas which, before he had painted a stroke, the artist had had expensively lined as if it were already a classic work."

In Barr's text the words "that fall" refer to 1906, which must be a memory lapse on Leo Stein's part. Picasso insists that he did not embark on the painting of the *Demoiselles* until the following spring. It would be strange for him to produce a score of preliminary composition studies of which not one corresponded to the dimensions of the canvas already stretched.

Gertrude Stein has a telling Picasso story.⁵¹ She was showing him a first photograph of an American skyscraper, and the young Spaniard, who evidently did not yet know about elevators, produced what Stein calls “a characteristic reaction.” Where others would have marveled at the sheer height of the thing, Picasso’s comment eroticizes the American engineering feat into a situation that entails the exertion of climbing, the impatience of waiting, and the denouement of an intimate quarrel. “Good God,” he said, “imagine the pangs of jealousy a lover would have while his beloved came up all those flights of stairs to his top-story studio.” Even the skyscraper is felt from within to become a sexual witness.

The *Demoiselles d’Avignon* seems to me to have one insistent theme to which everything in the picture contributes: the naked brothel interior, the male complicity in an orgy of female exposure, the direct axial address, the spasmodic action, the explosive release in a constricted space, and the reciprocity of engulfment and penetration. The picture is both enveloping and transfixed; it sorties and overwhelms and impales itself. And it ought to be seen as it was painted—hung low in a narrow room, so that it spills over into it, tugged by the entrant wedge of the table. In one sense the whole picture is a sexual metaphor, and Picasso will have used all his art to articulate its erotics.

But it is also the opposite, a forced union of dream image and actuality. The picture is about the image in its otherness locked in with the real world. And like those mystics of old who used sexual metaphor to express union with the divine, so Picasso will have used sexuality to make visible the immediacy of communion with art. Explosive form and erotic content become reciprocal metaphors.

Decades later, having passed eighty, Picasso gives the secret away (fig. 51) and makes the action of painting coincident with making love.

51. Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), ed. New York, Vintage Books, 1960, p. 50.



Retrospect: Sixteen Years After

Remember . . . it's summer 1972: Picasso is ninety-one and has given up smoking for the good of his health. Myself, having finished a dogged essay on Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* painted in the mid-1950s, am reverting to *Les Femmes d'Alger* of 1907. The half-century swing is good exercise and besides, continuity here counts for more than the customary division by periods. Friends returning from Southern France unpack stories of their visits to Monsieur Picasso. Whom I have not met. With my halting French and professorial mind, I think it would be a mistake. He didn't even like Alfred Barr; complained that Barr's book on Matisse (1951) was bigger than Barr's earlier *Picasso* (1946), and that when they lunched at a nearby restaurant, Barr hardly touched his food—"He didn't eat!" Bill Rubin tells casually how he was slapping Picasso's shoulder last week. "You what?!" I ask in shocked disbelief. Rubin explains, "Oh, you have to be very physical with Picasso." I suppose it's a retaliation of sorts—"very physical" is just what Picasso has been with us, at no matter what distance. Sturdily nonagenarian, he now allows no living memory to reach back to a time when he was not the foremost painter alive. By all appearances, he always will be. It seems that the myth of Tithonus is being replayed, not in the halls of Aurora, but down at Mougins, where the old immortal continues up and about, aging and shrinking and, still and again, generating detractors. He had evidently made one mistake: to have forgotten to ask for eternal youth is unforgivable.

The most unforgiving—in 1972, while the foregoing essay was being written less than a year before Picasso's uncalled-for death—were to be found in New York among the best critics. Within the succession of Picasso's detractors, they formed a new wave. Unlike the carpers who had vexed Picasso's earlier career, they came from inside the art world and showed abundant sophistication. Gone was the day when a C. G. Jung, speaking for fellow-Philistines, could diagnose Picasso's art as schizophrenic, demoniacally attracted to evil and ugliness, and symptomatic of those anti-Christian and Luciferian forces which infect our bright daylight world with a deadly decay, and so on. That was written in 1932, the year before Hitler (whose idealism Jung rather admired) took power.

Forty years and one world war later, the world was still plagued by "Luciferian forces," but no one thought of locating them in Picasso. He had emerged from the war as a culture hero, and New York (like Chicago) had taken him to its heart. But by 1972, the love affair had turned sour. One was now told by the best informed that Picasso's genius was spent. The undeniable greatness of his youth and early maturity was a closed chapter, and the survivor, still painting away, a quaint anachronism whose ongoing iconorrhea deserved no serious attention. Today it is difficult to reconstruct the dismissive anti-Picasso stance adopted during those years by New York's opinion makers. Did Picasso still matter—was he still thought of at all? I lay the question before the artist Saul Steinberg, who

responds with admirable recall, "In those days, if you praised Picasso, you were lost; nobody noticed you." Trust a Steinberg. In 1972, one praised the long-dead Matisse for paving the high road to American Color Field painting. And when Conceptual art settled in, it was Marcel Duchamp who was named Founding Father: the refined, hands-off thinker beggared the busy laborer at Mougins meeting his daily production quota.

In view of Picasso's almost mythic prestige, his dismissal by New York artists and critics who had passed through the ordeal of Cubism required a certain valor. They would not be beguiled by the painter's renown, or by the buzz of his market, or by his photogenic appeal as the century's icon of naked genius. (By the way, is this the place to point out that no other individual within Western civilization—neither showman, athlete, nor dancer, female or male—has projected upon the visual consciousness of his contemporaries across half a century the image of his own naked physique? Even Josephine Baker and the shorter-lived Marilyn Monroe displayed themselves only insofar as they personified an ideal. Whereas Picasso's bare body—from early full-length self-portrait drawings of around 1900 to the man in shorts bestriding the set of Clouzot's film *Le Mystère Picasso* [1956]—is known to us as a personal nudity weathering through a lifetime, like a man's brow. One knew it not as the embodiment of an erotic or athletic ideal, but as the unembarrassed undress of a certain homebody who, as he humbly and not unjustly conceded, could "draw better than Raphael.")

But all the glamour, the cult, the mystique, the overload of charisma, impressed the stern critic no more than the Emperor's no-clothes impressed the uncorrupted child in Andersen's fairy tale.

An influential article by Clement Greenberg, entitled "Picasso at Seventy-Five" (published in 1957, reprinted in Greenberg's *Art and Culture*, 1961), had set the tone by writing an early *finis* to Picasso's career. Greenberg's article begins by heaping the highest praise on Picasso's work of the twenty-year period following 1905. What follows is merciless. In a painting of 1925, the *Three Dancers* (fig. 52), Greenberg detects "the first evidence of a lessening of [the] certainty" that formerly enabled Picasso "to lead toward his strengths."⁵² "The swan song of his greatness" is found in a series of drawings done in 1938. "The period from 1950 to 1953 is one of marked weakness. . . . In 1956 there is a new blossoming under Matisse's influence, which Picasso seems ready to accept with pastiche-like abjection now that the older master is dead. Yet the blossoming remains undeveloped, static, and the blossoms are by way of being artificial."

Nine years later—in an article that begins "Picasso's painting started to fall off in quality after 1925"—Greenberg returned to the epitaph he was writing: "The evolution of Picasso's art over the last decades has been taking place in a

52. But Greenberg is inconsistent, since the two versions of *Three Musicians* (1921) persuade him, as does *Guernica*, that Picasso "could not make a success of a large canvas with cubistically flattened forms." In Greenberg's judgment, then, Picasso could fail to "lead toward his strengths" by 1921.

side alley, and a blind one too, off the high road of art. . . . The truth is that he no longer knows where high is. . . . ”⁵³

No question but that the critic’s motives were fair. He perceived himself—and was perceived—as the Incorruptible, upholding the values of serious, high, searching art against sinking standards, against the routine adulation of sycophants and the cupidity of the market. But, regardless of one’s assessment of Greenberg’s actual judgments, his censoriousness makes painful reading; it comes to us now as a killing obituary, its cold passion not aesthetic so much as political—parricidal, gloating, and murderous. And it prevailed, so long as Picasso insisted on living on.

One would hear it said that Picasso’s stylistic shifts revealed uncertainty, lack of direction; that his recourse to Old Master art betrayed his own inner void; that the steady decline of Picasso’s late work (which in 1972 nobody doubted) offered some ground for suspecting the whole of the oeuvre, since a truly great artist—a Rembrandt, a Cézanne, a Matisse—continues in growth even to his last moments. Some said that great artists are known by their masterpieces, whereas Picasso had dissipated his gifts in thousands of minor works. The charge was not new. It was the motif of an open letter published in 1936 by Picasso’s false friend, the Catalan writer Eugeni d’Ors:

Some five years ago, I begged and begged you to produce works . . . like those time-honored masterpieces now in the best galleries of the best museums. The five years have passed in vain. We still have to be content with your “almost-masterpiece”. . . . My friend, my friend, we belong to a generation which . . . seems destined . . . for the glory of the athlete who, having jumped the hurdles, stumbles and loses time and distance just at the moment when he was about to reach the finish line. . . . Gravely, then, I tell you: Pablo Picasso, produce a masterpiece! Believe me, it is high time.⁵⁴

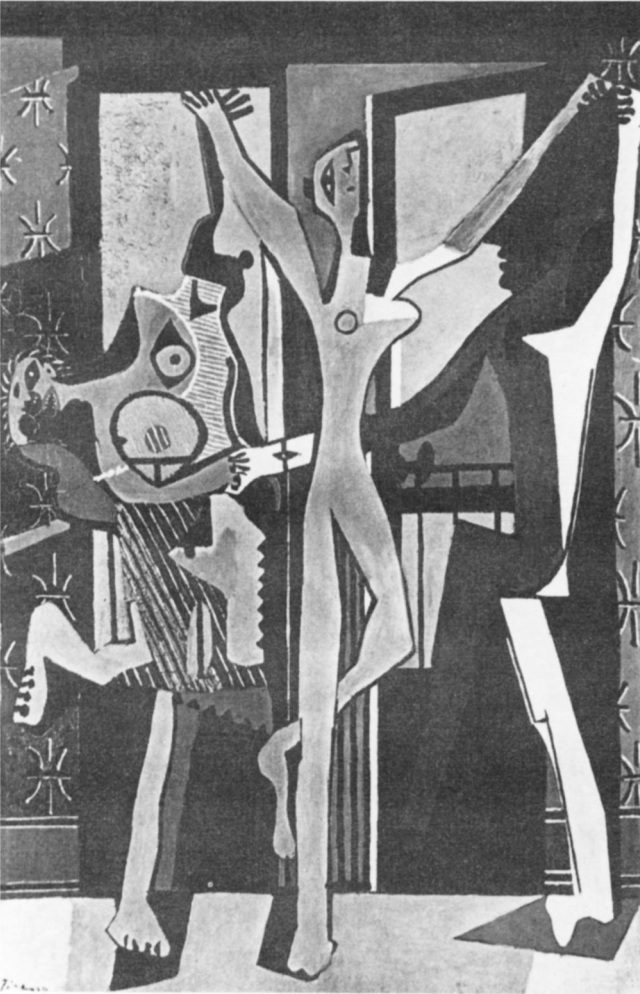
Noble, high-minded stuff, but all skewed; because a given work achieves masterpiece status only by virtue of the attention it gets. And strange to say, as late as 1972, when William Rubin published *Picasso in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, he found with surprise that the Picasso literature, though vast in volume, dwindled to virtually zero if one searched it for evidence of sustained attention. “After discounting the non-books,” Rubin wrote, “only the merest fraction of the serious writing that remains touches on individual works of art except in passing.”

Rubin’s “merest fraction” includes an exceptional article by Lawrence

53. Clement Greenberg, “Picasso Since 1945,” *Artform*, vol. V (October 1966), p. 31.

54. Eugeni d’Ors, “Epístola a Picasso,” *D’Aci i D’Alla*, Barcelona, Summer 1936; English translation, *A Picasso Anthology: Documents, Criticism, Reminiscences*, ed. Marilyn McCully, London, The Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981, p. 202.

Gowing, touching the very picture—the *Three Dancers* of 1925—in which Greenberg had discerned the first fatal symptoms of Picasso's decline. Greenberg had damned the work in a brief paragraph that concludes: "The *Three Dancers* goes wrong, not just because it is literary . . . , but because the theatrical placing and rendering of the head and arms of the central figure cause the upper third of the picture to wobble." Picasso himself, on the other hand, thought well of the picture and for forty years had refused to sell it. He yielded at last to the entreaties of his old friend Roland Penrose, a trustee of London's Tate Gallery. And it was in 1965, on the occasion of the Tate Gallery's acquisition of the *Three*



52. *Three Dancers*, 1921, oil on canvas, 215 × 142 cm.
London, The Tate Gallery.

Dancers, that Gowing for the first time gave the picture its due.⁵⁵ After citing the casual incomprehension of some earlier critics (“one of them suggested that [the picture] represented the Charleston, while another supposed that it derived from Carpeaux’s bronze group on the Paris Opéra, and naturally remained unconvinced that it could be called a masterpiece”), Gowing proceeded to devote to the picture six closely packed pages of exact observation and sustained excitement—and left it a masterpiece.

We are led back to a familiar morality: where values count, you find what you bring. Or, as Eliza Doolittle puts it in Act V of Shaw’s *Pygmalion* (1912): what marks a flower girl off from a lady is “not how she behaves, but how she is treated.” Without the courtesy of full attention—using Picasso paintings only to fleece them for arguments, or as occasions for dicta about culture and art, or as testing grounds for your infallible taste—no single work rises to masterpiece status.

We have seen that a sophisticated hostility to Picasso, as distinct from prewar Philistinism, began to develop during the later 1950s. And by 1972, the proponents of the new aversion were in mutual competition, each seeking to clock his qualms earlier than the next disappointee. Former Picasso admirers confessed their eventual disillusionment later or sooner, with special merit attaching to anteriority.

I have heard reformed Communists similarly compare the chronologies of their respective conversions. “And when did the scales fall from *your* eyes?” Only the most gullible dupe still supported the Soviet system in 1968, at the invasion of Czechoslovakia; or in 1956, after the Hungarian affair. Clearer sighted were those earlier defectors, whose faith was shaken by the Stalin-Hitler pact of 1939; or better still, were disabused by the Moscow Trials of 1937. But had not more rigorous intellectuals, such as Edmund Wilson and André Gide, faced the truth by the mid-1930s (following collectivization and induced famine), regretting their former infatuations? And they too were tardy, for had not others, such as Ignazio Silone, left the Party by 1930? But on this scale of regress, pride of place surely belonged to those who, like Max Eastman, avowed the failure of the great Russian experiment by the middle twenties. And as these ex-sympathizers and penitents, denouncing the Soviet “betrayal,” tended still to honor the sanctity of the Revolution itself, so the repudiators of late Picasso offered continued obeisance to the sacrosanct moment of Cubism.

The exemption of the Cubist revolution from negative criticism (and from the judgment of taste) did not necessarily work to Picasso’s advantage—not in 1972. Firstly, because the compartmentalization by periods imposed on Picasso’s oeuvre so insulated his Cubism that it came to be seen as but the lucky strike of

55. Lawrence Gowing, in “Director’s Report,” *The Tate Gallery Report 1964–65*, London, 1966, pp. 7–12.

his youth. Secondly, Picasso's Cubism had been collaborative, and the habit was long entrenched of giving equal credit for its invention to Braque.

Thirdly, New York painters and critics valued Cubism less as a body of work than as a *modus operandi*, a pictorial "strategy" that offered escape from the pitfalls and sinkholes of deep perspective. The so-called "Cubist grid" was an ideated flat-level armature that enabled a painter, any painter whatever, to traverse the expanse of his canvas without falling through. Rather than seeing Picasso's Cubist creations as part of his personal inventory, continually feeding into the rest of his work, the supposed structure described by the term "Cubist grid" was depersonalized. By furnishing painters with a user-friendly alternative to perspectival illusionism, Cubism, it was believed, had fulfilled its historic role. And whatever else Picasso's original work may have undertaken to do on its own terms was not relevant to present needs.

Lastly, since we must have four causes: The theoretical understanding of Cubism until about 1970—in criticism and in attempts at historical surveys—was lamentable. There were a few valiant exceptions, but the bulk of the literature was blague. As Picasso himself seems to have known, for he remarked late in life that criticism had never yet come to grips with Cubism. What chiefly characterizes the writing of critics and historians in dealing with Cubism during the first sixty years of its historic existence is a professional inability to confess that the phenomenon was not yet understood. How different from the writings of scientists!

Of course, it did not take long to scuttle the early hokum about Relativity and Fourth Dimension. But almost equally silly claims for Cubism survived in textbooks for half a century: that Cubism rendered objects in their geometric essence; that it represented the object from all viewpoints at once (though the portrait of Monsieur Vollard is as steadily frontal as any portrait by Raphael and Picasso's portrait by Juan Gris is as unilateral as the *Mallarmé* of Manet); that Cubism was a language-like code which the viewer must learn to read, but that the code, in intention, was perfectly representational.

None of which was supportable if one looked at the pictures, so that, by 1970, an intolerable disparity distanced the works from the propaganda. To this disparity I am inclined to attribute much of the popular resistance to Cubism. At the immense Picasso retrospective in New York's Museum of Modern Art in 1980, it was the Cubist rooms that visitors found most rebarbative—even visitors who enjoyed Kandinsky, Mondrian, or the Abstract Expressionists without mental strain.⁵⁶

As for the *Demaiselles d'Avignon*, so long as critics, following Kahnweiler, proclaimed it to be proto-Cubist, indeed, the very birthplace of Cubism, one

56. Around 1970, the criticism of Cubism began to attain a new level of sophistication, but this is too large a subject for now.

scanned the picture for confirming traits—and lost most of it. And so long as one focused on the irruption of African “influences,” one observed an abrupt stylistic change at the right and explained the picture as unfinished, abandoned, wanting internal coherence.

But why expect aesthetic coherence if this painting was born in an access of anger and dread? Long ago, in 1965, the British critic John Berger had suggested almost in passing that Picasso, during his first years in Paris, “probably was suffering from venereal disease and was obsessed by it.”⁵⁷ Then, in her *Picasso: Art as Autobiography*, Mary Gedo substantiated Berger’s suspicion (having had it confirmed by Françoise Gilot). Accordingly, she interpreted much of the evolution and final character of the *Demoiselles* in the light of the artist’s medical history and consequent ambivalence toward women, and she concluded that “elements of Picasso’s unresolved conflict about the picture persist in its lack of cohesion.”⁵⁸ The medical theme has since been more fully developed by William Rubin.

Well, let the truth be known. But the syphilitic appeal of this revelation suggests that our perception of the *Demoiselles* has undergone an emphatic shift, which may well lead us back to a simplistic reductiveness more jejune than the doctrinaire formalism that needed correction in ’72. The other day, I learned from a well-informed New Yorker (excuse the redundancy) that the secret is out: Picasso in 1907 had contracted VD, and painted the *Demoiselles* to vent his rage against women. Voilà. But if this were indeed the rock-bottom truth about a picture still acclaimed “the first modern painting,” would this tell us something we perhaps ought to know about being modern?

A larger body of critical writing since the early 1970s presents the etiology of the picture as the product of influence—not that of the spirochete, but of influential museum art. The *Demoiselles* has been historicized and surrounded by a vast, varied ancestry. The influences imploding upon this great masterpiece have been found to include not only Iberian and African art, to say nothing of Cézanne’s compositions of bathers; we learned that they included Caravaggio’s *Entombment*, Goya’s *Tres de Mayo*, Delacroix’s *Massacre at Scio* and *Femmes d’Alger*, and Ingres’ *Turkish Bath* at the Louvre—as well as nudes by Manet and Goya, and Matisse’s *Blue Nude* of 1907. We were informed that the painting was a competitive response to the challenge of Derain’s *Bathers* (a stupid picture, shown at the Salon des Indépendants in 1907). And only last year an excited Anglo-American critic announced once again that Picasso’s main source for the *Demoiselles* was El Greco’s apocalyptic vision of *The Opening of the Fifth Seal* (now in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, but in 1907 in the El Greco collection of

57. John Berger, *The Success and Failure of Picasso*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1965, p. 43.

58. Mary Mathews Gedo, *Picasso: Art as Autobiography*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 78–80.



53. Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, *Midday Slumbers*, 1888, watercolor, 65.5 × 24.8 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Arts; The Ethel Morrison Van Derlip Fund.

Picasso's friend Zuloaga in Paris). Because of the similar format and the alleged similarity of an uplifted hand, the Spanish picture was named the inspiration of *Les Femmes d'Alger*, the latter, by virtue of association, becoming "as powerful in its way as El Greco's altarpiece: a religious painting but with the religion left out."

To my eye, the comparisons that give rise to such claims for influence or inspiration are rarely close enough to convince. But they do have a sort of

negative function: instead of focusing vision, they tend to distract it. The picture drops into the pond of art history: you can watch swelling circles about the impact, but something has passed out of sight. Some years ago, in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, I came upon a watercolor by the British academician Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, entitled *Midday Slumbers* (fig. 53). It had been exhibited in London in 1888, and the chances that Picasso ever laid eyes on it are almost nil. Yet the likeness of Sir Lawrence's foreground figure to the curtain raiser in the *Demoiselles* is. . . . Will someone please call it remarkable, diverting, suggestive? Challenged to force the comparison, I might say, mobilizing all my rhetorical skills, that *Midday Slumbers* is a picture essentially similar to the *Demoiselles*, except only that the sleeping beauty behind the curtain has woken up and quadrupled.

To me it seems that most source-hunting forays serve to remove our gaze from the picture itself. And this applies even to the hunting for African prototypes. "Is not the intrusion of *art nègre* the true content of the *Demoiselles*?" I was recently asked by a Paris friend. I think not, because the picture's "content" is the sum (incommensurable) of its internal and outgoing relationships. So, in the *Demoiselles*, the remembered forms of stiff tribal effigies are naturalized in a furnished boudoir and galvanized into Baroque agitation; and this motor explosion of once-rigid symmetrical models becomes the expression of sexual menace unloosed on the viewer. This and lots more. Whereas the scouting for "look-alikes" is a diverting sport, releasing us from the difficulty of holding a picture in focus. Perhaps it's a question of no time to spare. My old friend Tom Hess, under whose editorship my 1972 essay on the *Demoiselles* first appeared, used to say, "It takes years to look at a picture."

I looked long at the *Demoiselles*, and the longer I stayed, the more intense the sensation of surveying uncharted ground. Fortunately, I did not then know that scores of sketches for the *Demoiselles* remained to be published; their abundance might have seemed too daunting to tackle. Working with the material in hand and trying to manage the picture itself, I probably did go astray at one point—or not far enough, as William Rubin rightly observes.⁵⁹ Though I got its message of dread and danger, I shrank from the picture's invocation of death. Intent on wresting it from the professional formalists, I concentrated instead on the theme of disengagement versus participation, on the image engineered as a direct assault. And I contrasted it in my mind with a nineteenth-century painting, depicting the choice of Zeuxis, by the Milanese *pompier* Pietro Michis (fig. 54). This picture, which I did not then reproduce, shows the painter erotically unengaged, perusing five naked girls. His program is to select from each her best part, and from these parts to assemble one perfect goddess; while witnesses in the background, ignoring the paltry lure of girlflesh, admire the painter's profession-

59. William Rubin, "La genèse des *Demoiselles d'Avignon*," *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, Paris, Musée Picasso, vol. II, 1988, p. 485.

54. Pietro Michis, *Zeuxis and the Maidens of Cortona*, oil on canvas. Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera.



alism, his aesthetic distance and expertise. I wanted to set the *Demoiselles d'Avignon* against this ludicrous fiction and restore it to its character as a traumatic encounter.⁶⁰

Now, sixteen years later, with formalism in full retreat, my argument for the sexual charge of the picture seems almost embarrassingly banal. But such is the nature of my melancholy profession: for as I wrote in 1962 in an essay on the young Jasper Johns, "It is in the character of the critic to say no more in his best moments than what everyone in the following season repeats; he is the generator of the cliché."

Sadder still is a drastic change I have suffered since the above essay was written: I have ceased to be Picasso's contemporary. The privilege of confronting the *Demoiselles* as the work of a living man has been rescinded.

60. My earlier essay "The Algerian Women and Picasso at Large" included a short account of the *Demoiselles* that closed with a passage suggested to me by the contrasting thought of the "Zeuxis" tradition. The *Demoiselles*, I wrote, "stares down three founding rules of Western art: the rule of idealization, which justifies picture-making as an ennobling pursuit; the rule of a viewpoint fixed at a measured optical distance; and the correlative requirement of psychic detachment in the representation of nudes—tradition having made the kept distance mandatory for the posture of art. Renaissance figure painting would not have flourished in Christendom as it did had the sex appeal of the painted nude been confessed. The justification of art depended on the profession of erotic disinterest, on the distinction between engaged prurience and the contemplation of formal beauty whereby the erotic will to possess was assumed into admiration. It was into this noble tradition that Picasso entered his *Demoiselles*. It remains an uncanny event. . . ."

Even at our distance of sixty-odd years, the immediacy of the revelation appals. . . . In their absolute presence Picasso's ominous whores stage a terrifying desublimation of art. The picture breaks the triple spell of tradition—idealization, emotional distance, and fixed-focus perspective—the tradition of high-craft illusionism which conducts the spectator-voyeur unobserved to his privileged seat."