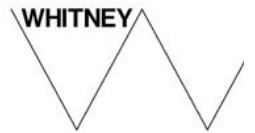


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## Re-Thinking Picasso: Picasso Sculpture at the Museum of Modern Art

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Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), *Glass of Absinthe*. Paris, spring 1914. Painted bronze with absinthe spoon. 8 1/2 x 6 1/2 x 3 3/8" (21.6 x 16.4 x 8.5 cm), diam. at base 2 1/2" (6.4 cm), The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Louise Reinhardt Smith., © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Picasso Sculpture

*Picasso Sculpture*  
Museum of Modern Art, New York

By JAN GARDEN CASTRO, OCT 2015

The Museum of Modern Art's Picasso Sculpture exhibition consists of about 140 works that turn the fourth floor of MoMA into a series of galleries organized around chronology and location. Curators Ann Temkin and Anne Umland, along with a talented team and collaborators, including the principals from the Picasso Museum in France, have, in many cases, focused on intimate works from the Picasso

from the Picasso Museum in France, have, in many cases, focused on intimate works from the Picasso family and Museum.

Picasso's genius was his originality in combining a range of influences into inventive objects of wonder and immediacy. As a self-taught sculptor at the age of 20 in 1902, his earliest work modeled in clay was figurative with expressive angles, such as his 1903 *Head of a Picador with a Broken Nose*. His earliest fracturing of forms into cubes, angles, and planes was inspired by Cézanne's art exhibited in Paris between 1904-07 and by Braque's 1908 landscape in the style of Cézanne. What many perceive as the birth of Cubism and the sudden break with 19th Century painting traditions may be seen in another way -- as Picasso's bold theft of Cézanne's cubed, split perspectives in paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire as well as Picasso's adaptations of Braque's collage notions; of African sculpture; and of El Greco's and Goya's compositional verve—to mention only a few names from his wide circles of artists and influences.

The exhibition *Picasso Sculpture* at the Museum of Modern Art merges figurative and abstract. In fact, it's surprising that almost every work seems to have a recognizable 'real' antecedent. Women and children, animals with their young, and heads appear in all of the periods of art dating from 1902 to 1964. Picasso's sculpture was like an extension of family, friends, and the parade of people and events that constituted his life. Only a few works are so abstract that there is no corresponding object. The art created in Vallauris between 1945 and 1958 is among my favorites. A Seated Faun, 1950, a horned, bearded figure with large ears and folded legs, seems like a hand-sized earthenware self-portrait so spontaneous that it almost leaps out of its installation. The lines around *Vase: Woman*, 1948 emphasize its curves. *Woman with a Baby Carriage*, 1950-45, 6' 7 15/16" tall, is a bronze portrait of a mother rolling her baby in an old-fashioned stroller; originally, it must have been constructed from odd wheels and discarded parts in a hands-on manner. This mother's extreme height seems symbolic of her importance in (his) life. Picasso's art is all about working with his hands. Whether cut from sheet metal, assembled from found objects, or hand-shaped from clay, Picasso created work that retains its immediacy.

Even a torn paper skull -- *Death's Head*, 1943 -- the simplest work in the show -- is recognizable. This and *The Venus of Gas*, 1945, an iron stove burner and pipe shaped like an odd figure -- are the main works that seem to refer to World War II. It could be argued, but is not by the MoMA curators, that the range of abstract work Picasso made as a monument for Guillaume Apollinaire's tomb, is also political. Apollinaire died during World War I; his poetry and art criticism was a strong influence in the pre-WWI arts revolution. The memorial committee never accepted any of Picasso's proposals.

Curiously, color is not a primary consideration in Picasso's sculpture or painting; in contrast with the lively palette of his friend Matisse, he remained old school about color. He often showed the original surfaces of wood. For objects, he sometimes painted metal white or black so that the form would stand out. Picasso added decorative touches of color to emphasize the different parts of forms, as in *Glass of Absinthe*, Paris, 1914. Picasso's six absinthe glasses, now transformed into bronze, seem cocky and somehow flavored with the drink's mystique.

My once-in-a-lifetime experience as an art historian was seeing *Picasso Sculpteur*, more than 650 works at Centre Pompidou in 2000 and meeting his close friend, curator, and then-Pompidou Director Werner Spies. The exhibition catalog illustrated all works, along with studies, studio shots, and paintings and is worth seeking out. It's not likely that this much Picasso sculpture will ever come to New York. However, it's also significant that, even here, most works are human-sized to tiny, giving viewers a sense of the artist in his studio rather than a production team.

One closing thought is that most of us need to re-think the Cézanne-Picasso connection. Many years ago, I climbed Mont Sainte-Victoire. Nearby is Picasso's enormous Château of Vauvenargues. Even though Picasso and his wife Jacqueline only lived there from 1959 – 1962, they are buried there, and his sculpture *La Dame à l'offrande* (1933) is near their tomb. This sculpture was at the entrance of the Spanish pavilion at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 – when Picasso's monumental anti-war cry -- *Guernica* – was first exhibited. The chateau is still owned by the Picasso family, is a historic monument, and is not usually open to the public. There is much we still don't know, including the ways that Picasso's and Cézanne's arts have historic connections with each other and with the places where they lived. **WM**

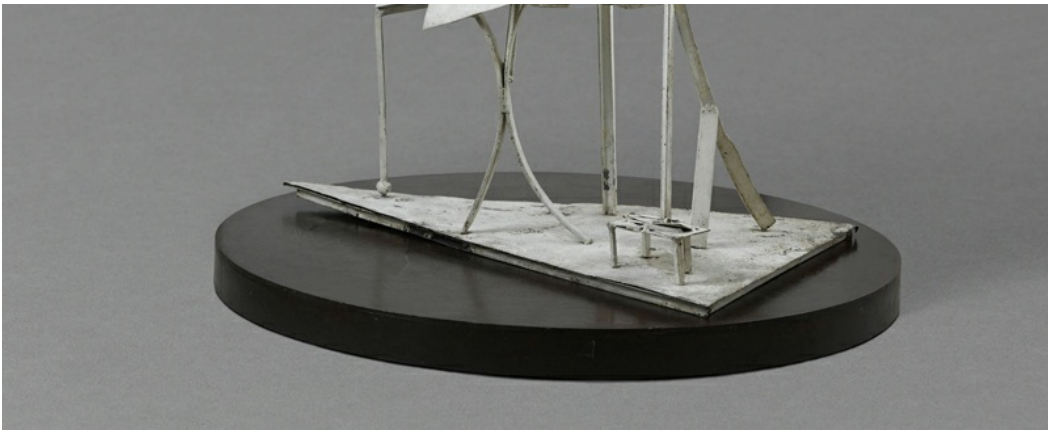






*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Guitar, Paris, 1924, Painted sheet metal, painted tin box, and iron wire, 43 11/16 × 25 × 10 1/2 in. (111 × 63.5 × 26.6 cm), Musée national Picasso–Paris, © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*





*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Woman in the Garden, Paris, spring 1929–30, Welded and painted iron, 6 ft. 9 1/8 in. × 46 1/16 in. × 33 7/16 in. (206 × 117 × 85 cm), Musée national Picasso–Paris, © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*





*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Head of a Warrior. Boisgeloup, 1933. Plaster, metal, and wood. 47 1/2 x 9 3/4 x 27" (120.7 x 24.9 x 68.8 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jacqueline Picasso in honor of the Museum's continuous commitment to Pablo Picasso's art. © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Picasso Sculpture*



*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Vase: Woman, Vallauris, [1948]. White earthenware, painted with slips, 18 11/16 x 6 1/2 x 4 5/16 in. (47.5 x 16.5 x 11 cm), Musée national Picasso–Paris, © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*





*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Baboon and Young. Vallauris, October 1951 (cast 1955), Bronze. 21 x 13 1/4 x 20 3/4" (53.3 x 33.3 x 52.7 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund., © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*



*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Bull, Cannes, c. 1958., Plywood, tree branch, nails, and screws. 46 1/8 x 56 3/4 x 4 1/8" (117.2 x 144.1 x 10.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Jacqueline Picasso in honor of the Museum's continuous commitment to Pablo Picasso's art. © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*





*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), She-Goat. Vallauris, 1950 (cast 1952). Bronze. 46 3/8 x 56 3/8 x 28 1/8" (117.7 x 143.1 x 71.4 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Mrs. Simon Guggenheim Fund. © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.*







*Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973), Chair, Cannes, 1961, Painted sheet metal, 45 1/2 × 45 1/16 × 35 1/16 in. (115.5 × 114.5 × 89 cm), Musée national Picasso–Paris, © 2015 Estate of Pablo Picasso/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*



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