

# PICASSO - 1932

## LOVE, FAME AND TRAGEDY

Tate Modern, London UK.



by Heather McKendry

Member - ADFAS Pokolbin

August, 2018



# Picasso - 1932

## Love, Fame and Tragedy

### Tate Modern, London UK

*"The Work that One does is a way of keeping a diary"* - Pablo Picasso

I visited this wonderful blockbuster exhibition in June. It continues until 9th September and is attracting record breaking crowds. It is the first ever solo Pablo Picasso Exhibition at the Tate Modern, and it brought me face to face with more than 100 paintings, sculptures and drawings as well as family photographs and glimpses into the personal life of an icon.



*Picasso at his retrospective in June 1932  
Galleries Georges Petit.*

In 1932, Picasso was not yet half way through his career. After years of poverty as a young artist in Barcelona he had moved to Paris at the turn of the twentieth century and by the early 1930s was both celebrated and wealthy.

1932 was a make-or-break year for Picasso. He had turned 50. He was inundated with invitations to exhibit his work, and at the same time critics openly discussed whether he was an artist of the past rather than the future.

His first major retrospective was held in June 1932, and in the preceding months Picasso channelled his energies into

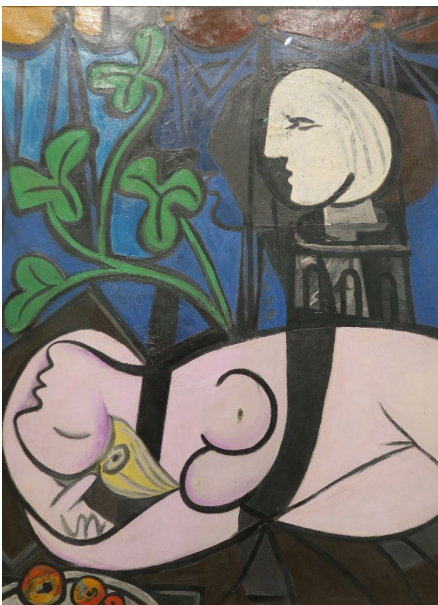
ambitious paintings intended to silence his detractors. As the year progressed, his mood darkened from sensuous exuberance to ominous anxiety.

Picasso was rarely overtly political, however some of the work reflected the times, where the world, including his native Spain, was in the grip of depression, mass unemployment, populist nationalism and the rise of totalitarian regimes.

In his personal life, his marriage to Olga Khokhlova was under increasing strain. The escape offered by his relationship with the significantly younger Marie-Therese Walter became a key inspiration for much of his work in this period.

Just as there were problems in his personal life, his work explored the tensions between paintings and sculpture, surrealist distortion and sensual colour harmonies.

Through the complexities of life for Picasso in 1932, he created some of his most accomplished works. It was his urge to renew and reinvent himself which turned 1932 into Picasso's "Year of Wonders".



*"Nude, Green Leaves and Bust"*  
1932 Paris



*"Girl Before a Mirror"*  
1932 Paris



*"Bust of a Woman" Cement*

These portraits are unmistakably of Marie-Therese Walter.



Picasso had declined offers from the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and the Venice Biennale and decided to take full control of his retrospective.

He resisted attempts to provide a chronology of his artistic development, and instead chose to mix up works from different periods in a dense hang and did not provide dates of individual works.

At the retrospective, works done in the prolific time of 1932 were interspersed throughout as if to indicate that all his output was equally contemporary.

The frequent appearance of Marie-Therese Walters features in these recent works provided the first public clue that a new woman had entered Picasso's life.



*Picasso standing in front of "The Dancers"*  
 1932 Paris



*The same sculpting in the Exhibition*

As soon as the June 1932 retrospective opened, Picasso bought bulk canvases and retreated to Boisgeloup, his home an hour outside Paris, for the summer. Freed from the weight of critical expectation, his painting style became faster and more fluid, with smaller works exploring new themes.

His *Reclining Nudes*, all easily identified as Marie-Therese, picked up from where he had been before the retrospective.

Throughout the year, he also produced many charcoal drawings on canvas. Drawing was central to Picasso's imagination.

As the summer of 1932 was finishing, his work was filled with beach scenes, even though he spent most of the summer with family and friends in Boisgeloup. Marie-Therese Walter had holidayed separately in the south of France.



*"Reclining Nude" June 1932 Boisgeloup*



He also produced an extraordinary series of drawings on the subject of the crucifixion. This was interspersed with Arcadian scenes of reclining nudes and flute players.

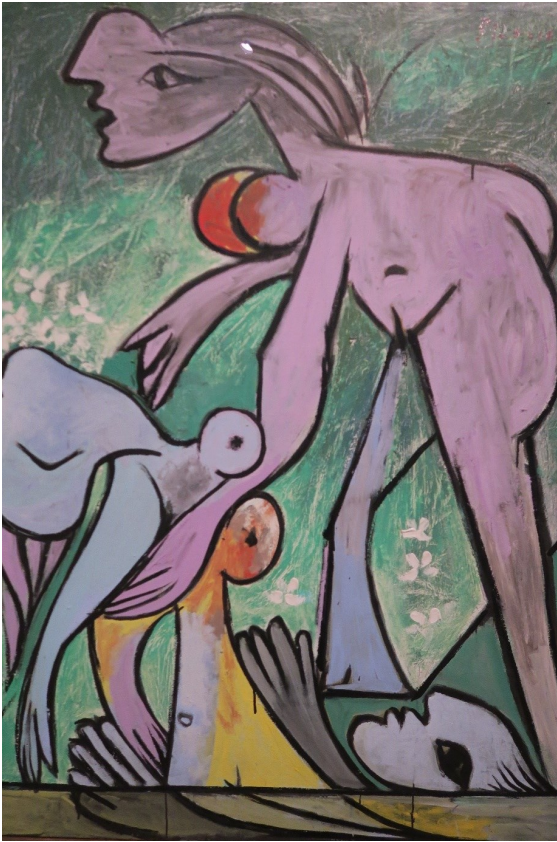


*"The Crucifixion: Studies of Details" Boisgeloup October 1932*

Towards the end of the year, Picasso turned to a new and darker subject – the threat of drowning and possibility of rescue. This may have been inspired after Marie-Therese contracted a serious viral infection after swimming in the contaminated river Marne. Biographers also argue that, since the childhood death of his younger sister from diphtheria, Picasso felt doomed to cause women to suffer.

In 1935, Marie-Therese Walter became pregnant by Picasso and the birth of their daughter Maya marked the end of his marriage to Olga Picasso. They never divorced, however she moved immediately to the south of France, taking their son with her. Picasso described this as the worst period of his life.





*"The Rescue (Le Sauvetage)"*  
 November 1932 Paris

At the same time, the political and economic situation in Europe was deteriorating. Hitler had been appointed German Chancellor in January 1933, Mussolini had consolidated a fascist dictatorship in Italy, and Spain became engulfed in civil war which ended with the defeat in 1939 of the Republican cause with which Picasso sympathised. Six months later, the world was once again at war.

"The Rescue", another version, painted in the first days of 1933, foreshadows the agony of the mother and child in Picasso's emblematic anti-war painting, "Guernica" (1937).



*"The Rescue (Le Sauvetage)"* 11 January 1933 Paris

By then, Picasso's world as it had been in 1932 was lost forever.

I am privileged to have a signed copy of the book "The Boy Who Bit Picasso", written by Antony Penrose. Antony stayed with us when was one of our ADFAS Pokolbin lecturers in 2015. Antony's father Roland Penrose, a surrealist painter, and mother Lee Miller, a famous model and photographer, often entertained their friend Pablo Picasso at their farm in England. The book was displayed for sale in the TATE Modern shop as part of this exhibition.

