

# *Pablo Picasso*

(1881-1973)

## **The Beginning: Childhood and Youth 1881-1901**

Pablo Ruiz Picasso **was born on October 25, 1881** to Don José Ruiz Blasco (1838-1939) and Doña Maria Picasso y Lopez (1855-1939).

**The family at the time resided in Málaga, Spain, where Don José, a painter himself, taught drawing** at the local school of Fine Arts and Crafts. Pablo spent the first ten years of his life there. The family was far from rich, and when 2 other children were born -- Dolorès ("Lola") in 1884 and Concepción ("Conchita") in 1887 -- it was often difficult to make ends meet. When **Don José was offered a better-paid job**, he accepted it immediately, and the Picassos **moved to the provincial capital of La Coruna**, where they lived for the next four years. In **1892, Pablo entered the School of Fine Arts there**, but it was mostly his father who taught him painting. By 1894 Pablo's works were so well executed for a boy of his age that his father recognized Pablo's amazing talent, and, handing Pablo his brush and palette, declared that he would never paint again.

In **1895** Don José got a professorship at "La Lonja", the School of Fine Arts in **Barcelona**, and the family settled there. **Pablo passed the entrance examination in an advanced course in classical art and still life** at the same school. He was better than senior students doing their final exam projects.

In 1896 Pablo's first large "academic" oil painting, "[The First Communion](#)", appeared in an exhibition in **Barcelona**. His second large oil painting, "[Science and Charity](#)" (1897) received honorable mention in the national exhibition of fine art in Madrid and was awarded a gold medal in a competition at Málaga.

**Pablo's uncle sent him money for further study in Madrid**, and the youth passed entrance examinations for advanced courses at the Royal Academy of San Fernando in the city. However, **he would abandon the classes by that winter**. **His everyday visits to the Prado seemed much more important to him**. At first, he **copied the old masters, trying to imitate their style**; later they would be the **source of ideas for original paintings** of his own, and he would re-arrange them again and again in different variations.

Picasso's time in Madrid, however, came to a sudden end. In summer **1898**, catching scarlet fever, **he came back to Barcelona**, and then, to recover his health, **he traveled to the mountain village of Horta de Ebro and spent long time there to return home only in spring 1899.**

In Barcelona, he frequented **Els Quatre Gats** (Catalan for "The Four Cats"), a café, where artists and intellectuals used to meet. He made **friends**, among others, with the young painter **Casagemas**, and the poet **Sabartés**, who would later be his secretary and lifelong friend. In Quatre Gats Picasso **met vivid representatives of Spanish modernism, including Rusinol and Nonell** and he was very enthusiastic about new directions in art. This was the point when he **said farewell to "classicism" and started his long-lasting search and experiments.** His relations with his parents became strained, as they could not understand and forgive him his "betrayal of classicism".

In **October 1900** Picasso and Casagemas **left for Paris**, the most significant artistic center of the time, and **opened a studio in the Montmartre.** The **art dealer Pedro Manach offered Picasso his first contract:** 150 francs per month in exchange for pictures. His **first Paris** picture was "***Le Moulin de la Galette***" (Guggenheim Museum, New York).

In **December**, he **departed for Barcelona, stopped in Málaga, and finally arrived in Madrid where he became co-editor of the magazine Arte Joven.** However, **by May 1901 he was back in Paris.** This restlessness and constant travel from one corner of Europe to another continued throughout his life, and though he would slow his pace in his latter years, **he never did finally settle down.**

## **The Blue and Rose periods 1901-1906**

In **February 1901** Picasso's friend **Casagemas committed suicide:** he shot himself in a Parisian café because a girl he loved had refused him. His death was a **great shock to Picasso**, and the painter would return to it again and again in his art: he painted the ***Death of Casagemas*** in color, the ***Death of Casagemas*** again in blue and then "***Evocation – The Burial of Casagemas***". Picasso began to use **blue and green almost exclusively.**

In **1904 Picasso finally settled in Paris**, at 13 Rue Ravignan, called "Bateau-Lavoir". He met Fernande Olivier, a model, who would be his mistress for the next seven years. He even proposed to her, but she had to refuse because she was already married. They paid frequent visits to the Circus Médrano, whose bright pink tent at the foot of the Montmartre shone for miles and was quite close to his studio. There, Picasso got ideas for his pictures of circus actors.

By 1905, Picasso lightened his palette, relieving it with pink and rose, yellow-ochre and gray. His circus performers, harlequins and acrobats became more graceful, delicate and sensuous. In 1906 the art dealer Ambroise Vollard bought most of Picasso's "Rose" pictures.

## Cubism 1907-1917

In 1907, after numerous studies and variations Picasso painted his first Cubist picture - "[\*Les demoiselles d'Avignon\*](#)". Impressed with African sculptures at an ethnographic museum he tried to combine the angular structures of the "primitive art" and his new ideas about cubism. The critics immediately dubbed this stage in his work the "Negro" Period, seeing in it *only an imitation of African ethnic art*.

*"In the Demoiselles d'Avignon I painted a profile nose into a frontal view of a face. I had to depict it sideways so that I could give it a name, so that I could call it 'nose'.*

## Wartime Experience 1937-1945

*"Guernica, the oldest town of the Basque provinces and the center of their cultural traditions, was almost completely destroyed by the rebels in an air attack yesterday afternoon. The bombing of the undefended town far behind the front line took exactly three quarters of an hour. During this time and without interruption a group of German aircraft – Junker and Heinkel bombers as well as Heinkel fighters – dropped bombs weighing up to 500 kilogrammes on the town. At the same time low-flying fighter planes fired machine-guns at the inhabitants who had taken refuge in the fields. The whole of Guernica was in flames in a very short time."*

The Times, April 27, 1937.

The Spanish government had asked Picasso to paint a mural for the Spanish pavilion at the Paris World Exhibition. He planned to depict the subject "a painter in his studio", but when he heard about the events in Guernica, he changed his original plans. After numerous sketches and studies, Picasso gave his own personal view of the tragedy. His gigantic mural [\*Guernica\*](#) has remained part of the collective consciousness of the twentieth century, a forceful reminder of the event. Though painted for the Spanish government, it wasn't until 1981, after forty years of exile in New York, that the picture found its way to Spain. This was because Picasso had decreed that it should not become Spanish property until the end of fascism. In October 1937, Picasso also painted the "[\*Weeping\*](#)".

Woman” as a kind of postscript to “Guernica”.

In **1940**, when Paris was occupied by the Nazis, **he handed out prints of his painting to German officers**. When **they asked asked him “Did you do this?” (referring to the pictures)**, **he replied, “No, you did”**. Whether those world-rekknowned military brains were simply unable to perceive the symbolism of the picture, or whether it was Picasso's fame that stopped them from taking any action, the painter was not arrested and went on working. During the war, he met a young female painter, Françoise Gillot, who would later become his third official wife.

With his Charnel House of **1945**, **Picasso concluded the series of pictures that he had started with “Guernica”**. The connection between the paintings becomes immediately obvious when we consider the **rigidly limited color scheme** and the **triangular composition of the center**. However, in the latter painting, the nightmare had been superceded by reality. The Charnel House was **painted under the impact of reports from the Nazi concentration camps which had been discovered and liberated**. It wasn't until then, that people realized the atrociousness of the Second World War. It was a time when the lives of millions of people had been literally pushed aside, a turn of phase which Picasso expressed rather vividly in the pile of dead bodies in his Charnel House.

### **After WWII. The Late Works. 1946-1973.**

In **1944**, after the liberation of Paris, **Picasso joined the Communist Party** and became an **active participant of the Peace Movement**. In **1949**, the **Paris World Peace Conference adopted a dove created by Picasso as the official symbol** of the various peace movements.

The **USSR awarded Picasso the International Stalin Peace Prize twice**, once in **1950** and for the second time in **1961** (by this time, the award had been renamed the International Lenin Peace Prize, as a result of destalinization) . He protested against the American intervention in Korea and against the Soviet occupation of Hungary. In his public life, he always expressed humanitarian views.

In the summer of **1955**, **Picasso bought “La Californie”**, a large villa near Cannes. From his studio, he had a view of the enormous garden, which he filled with his sculptures. The south and the Mediterranean were just right for his mentality; they reminded of Barcelona, his childhood and youth. Picasso bought the Chateau Vauvenargues, **near Aix-en-Provence**, and **this was reflected in his art with an increasing reduction of his range of colors to black, white and green**.

A number of elements had become **characteristic in his art of this period**: Picasso's use of **simplified imagery**, the way he let the **unpainted canvas** shine through, his **emphatic use of lines**, and the **vagueness of the subject**. In 1956, the artist would comment, referring to some schoolchildren: *“When I was as old as*

*these children, I could draw like Raphael, but it took me a lifetime to learn to draw like them."*

In the **last years of his life**, painting became an **obsession** with Picasso, and **he would date each picture with absolute precision**, thus creating a vast amount of similar paintings -- as if **attempting to crystallize individual moments** of time, but knowing that, in the end, everything would be in vain.

**Pablo Picasso passed away at last on April 8, 1973, at the age of 92. He was buried on the grounds of his Chateau Vauvenargues.**