

Life & Times Exhibition

The EY Exhibition

Picasso 1932 — Love, Fame, Tragedy

Tate Modern, London,

7 March 2018 to 9 September 2018

PICASSO'S YEAR OF WONDERS

1932. The Great Depression. Hitler had taken German citizenship and forced himself onto the political stage. Aldous Huxley published *Brave New World*. Picasso was 50.

Pablo Picasso was wealthy, famous, and discontent. Man Ray's photographic portrait shows him uncomfortable, distracted. His marriage to Olga Khokhlova was in trouble, and he was in a clandestine relationship with 22-year-old Marie-Thérèse Walter, the model for many of the paintings in this exhibition. Despite his stature — *La Coiffure*, painted in 1905, sold in Paris for Fr 56 000 — he worried about his reputation, fearing that he was being eclipsed by Matisse. The result of this turmoil was a period of sustained, amazing creativity and productivity — his 'year of wonders' — punctuated by a very successful retrospective exhibition in Paris

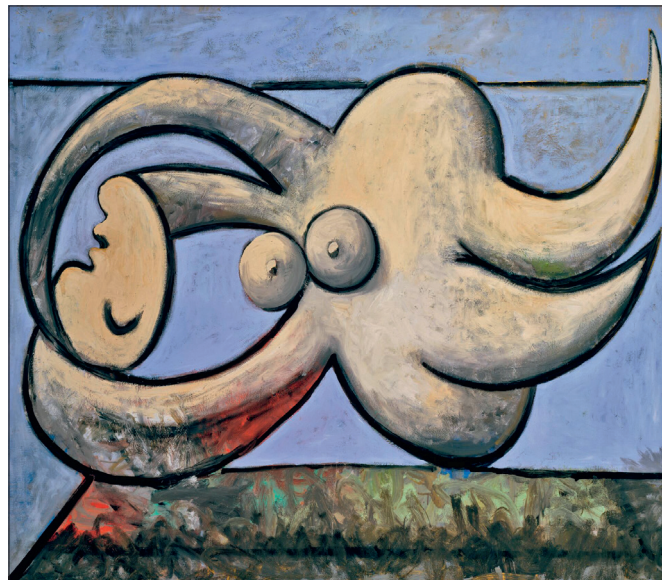
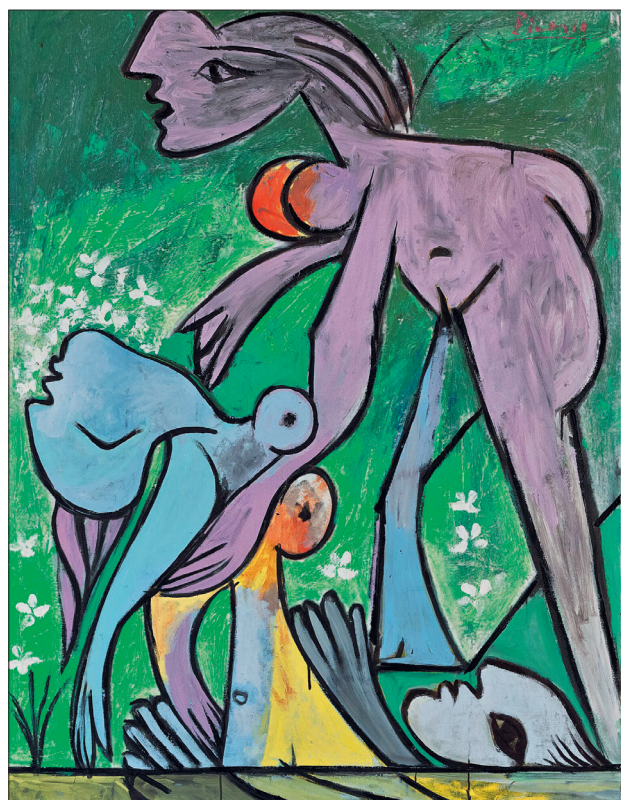
in June. Most of the hundred or so paintings in this exhibition were created during that single year.

The paintings are shown chronologically, beginning with the alarming *Woman with Dagger*, a surrealist reworking of *The Death of Marat*, in which a woman is killing her sexual rival. Indeed, the dominant subject of this show is the female figure, with many versions of the reclining nude and seated female forms, some prefiguring Francis

Pablo Picasso. *The Rescue (Le Sauvetage)*. 1932. Oil paint on canvas. 1445

× 1122 × 77 mm. Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Sammlung Beyeler

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Pablo Picasso. *Reclining Nude (Femme nue couchée)*. 1932. Oil paint on canvas. 1300 × 1610 mm. Private Collection © SUCCESSION/DACS LONDON, 2018.

Bacon, others Henry Moore. Busy in his studio in his *château* in Normandy, Picasso produced striking sculptures, capturing Marie-Thérèse's strong features. Three large paintings of a female nude, with green philodendron leaves, were painted in a single week. There are many strange, surrealist works where, in some, humans seem to morph to and fro into octopuses, inspired by the work of the French filmmaker Jean Painlevé.

Paradoxically, a central feature of the Paris retrospective was a group of paintings of Picasso's family, re-imagined at the Tate in a maroon-walled room, reminiscent of the Dulwich Picture Gallery, where a dashing, bohemian

Blue Period paterfamilias sits above some not entirely appealing portraits of his wife and children. An odd moment.

There is a lot to interest and admire in this exhibition. There are cubist beach scenes, a series of playful pastoral images of flute players and female nudes, the flautist alternating between male and female, and striking canvases showing Marie-Thérèse being pulled out of the sea — *Le Sauvetage*, said to foreshadow some of the images used by Picasso in *Guernica*. Although a strong swimmer, she once became seriously ill after swallowing infected water while swimming in the river Marne. Surprisingly, for someone who was so often photographed by the sea, Picasso could not swim.

This virtuoso performance provides a glimpse into the mind and energies of one of the most creative individuals of the 20th century, yet I left feeling more informed than affected, more detached than engaged. I noticed that other visitors to the gallery were moving quite quickly too!

Perhaps tellingly, the only person missing on the opening night of Picasso's 1932 Paris retrospective was Picasso himself — he had gone to the movies.

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