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Picasso -- "The Studio" 1927-1928

Museum of Modern Art -- New York

Winter, 1944

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22 West 52nd Street

After the cubist period, Picasso employed the discoveries and knowledge then acquired through a series of different manners and grades.

Sometimes he works with shapes of a baroque order - there is an abundance of interlaced curves combined in such a way as to form a figure of a biological order - ("Girl before the mirror" 1937).

Other times, as in the majority of the still lifes of 1924, he uses the principles of the cubist collage; in which assorted materials, shapes and textures, such as newspaper, clippings, fragments of wallpaper, labels, have been composed and arranged to produce one new plastic element. Studying these collages, he has discovered that new space-conception we see in those still lifes. On other occasions, he paints sculpture, (1928) -- fantastic sculpture built with elements inspired by shapes of bones and pebbles, fantastic structures based on the human figure, in action, or static.

In 1923, other groups of paintings were produced, in the so-called Clonic and Ingres period. These paintings were more realistic than the previous ones, and were inspired by Greek Sculpture and Greek pottery decorations, and by the drawings and composition of Ingres.

In another period (1910) he was inspired by the negro sculpture.

The fact that Picasso was inspired by works of such an heterogeneous origin as the African and the Greek Art, or the Medieval Spanish illuminations and the engravings of Goya, or the celestial Christ and the collage, or with sculpture and the drawings of Ingres, or the paintings of secondary contemporary artists, doesn't reveal an inconsistency. His powers of absorption assimilate with his own concept to produce a work definitely

his own. This power is accentuated by the fact that his own paintings are used by him as starting points for further development. He paints what he discovers in his own work, without repeating himself. Each link of the chain of paintings is a new aspect of the same subject. This process brings him each time further from the realistic world which inspired him, and brings him to the most essential and synthetic expression.

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Precisely in this last category, belongs the painting that we are about to analyze. In it Picasso has arrived more "closely" at the abstract than ever. I say closely to the abstract, because Picasso is never a complete "abstract" painter -- there is always a connection with nature in his work and technique -- they have a definitely human flavor.

(In a Mondrian) or a Leger painting, there is an absence of nature even when, as in Leger, there are natural elements. (They look like five-and-ten products -- ready-made plastic objects).

In Paul Klee work the feeling is that it has been painted by a bird.

In Picasso is a man who paints, a man who smokes, eats, smells the food - onions, wine - a man who loves life and nature, and who derived his work from it directly or indirectly.

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This subject, "The Studio," he has used many times. It is his daily environment. It is the space in which he works, the elements that he has seen next to him all his life -- it is his studio, his workshop.

Different painters have been attracted by this subject, and it is easy to understand because the studio has a very personal atmosphere, and is different for each personality. In painting it what they do is a self-portrait. "One needs to see a painter in his own place to have an idea of his merit." -Delacroix.

To a realistic painter interest centers on the atmosphere of the room and its actual characteristics that make a good background for a portrait or for a nude.

But what interests Picasso in the studio is the fact that it is the set where his creations are formed -- it is the set in which he creates, in which he paints, and this is his subject - the model, nature, the inspiration, himself, the painter, his creative mind, and the canvas - his product.

The fact that an enormous metamorphosis has been realized from the model, through the painter's mind and hands, to the canvas, makes Picasso's studio an exciting subject.

Sometimes, as in the illustration for Balzac's "Un Chef D'Oeuvre Inconnu", the relation between is;

model,	artist	and work
↓	↓	↓
realistic	realistic	half-abstract

The model is a good lady, knitting. The artist is a mature man, a worker. The work is an arabesque of lines freely interlaced, automatically drawn, without more relation to the model than the unconscious movement of his hand while the drawing was produced. Picasso, here, explores what happens in his own mind. He communicates to us the freedom of his conception. He shows us the change that an element experiences passing through his mind to the canvas. It is the self-portrait of his activities.

On other occasions, he gives us a reverse relationship between the same elements in his studio:

Model,	artist	canvas
↓	↓	↓
half-abstract	half-abstract	realistic

The only thing here that is realistically treated is the canvas. This consists of a profile of a human head. Greek perfection, this profile is a product of a semi-abstract dehumanized artist, drawing from a semi-abstract dehumanized model.

The only realistic thing, in this case, is the product of his own creation; Picasso shows us that there is no alternative, for him, between the real world and his creations; that they are in relation one to the other, and that the existence of one implies the existence of the other from the moment that they go through the mind of the artist. This metamorphosis from models to work, this power of creation, is one of the extraordinary qualities of Picasso, and it is the key of the revolution for which, on a large scale, he is responsible in contemporary painting.

In "Studio" (1927) that we are analyzing, there is on the left side, silhouetted against the canvas on which he is painting, the painter, a half-abstract conception. On the right side is the corner of his studio, also half-abstract. The canvas is empty. I'm almost sure, that if the painter in "The Studio" were to come to life and start to paint on the empty canvas, the result would be a realistic interpretation of the half-abstract corner of the studio. The figure of the painter occupies the whole area of the yellow canvas, as if it were painted on it. The person of the painter, in this case, is completely identified with his work. He is his own work. His work is his own figure: his self-portrait. The work is Picasso, himself.

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The canvas is divided by horizontals and verticals into three major parts which are:

1. To the left, occupying the whole height and less than half of the total width is a lemon yellow rectangle that represents the painted canvas, in front of which is the figure of the painter. The rest of the canvas is a perfect square divided by a horizontal line into two horizontal rectangles.
2. The lower rectangle represents a dark gray table and a carpet obliquely drawn, in different tones of red.

3. The upper rectangle is the space over the table limited by the light blue wall of the studio on which are hanging two canvases or sketches. Over the table and against that wall are delineated two objects on the table. One is a bowl with fruit and the other, a white sculptured head.

This strong division of the canvas by straight lines into vertical and horizontal spaces, combined with the secondary patterns formed by the canvases on the wall and the curtain at the extreme right, suggest the serenity and purity of a Mondrian or the architectural facades and plans drawn by le Corbusier, or Gropius during the nineteen-twenties.

To this main structure Picasso adds the rhythm of active, straight oblique lines. In rectangle No. 1. is drawn the figure of the painter in which the oblique lines are combined with the horizontal and vertical in a way that makes us think of a frame construction of a house or a silhouette of a wire construction, a form of sculpture that Picasso has worked on very often.

The head of the painter in the upper part of rectangle 1. is one of the simplest forms that Picasso has arrived at in his analysis of the human figure. The trapezoidal shape is contrasted with the oval shape of its projection on the canvas. The same interpretation is used on the plaster head on the table in rectangle 3. Here, there is also a contrast between the sharp angles of the geometrical form and the soft oval egg-shape in which it is involved. One thinks that in the interior of the oval head shape, Picasso feels a form of sharp angles; the essential shape of the human head, in which there are located the eyes and the mouth -- organs of expression, and around which float lazily the exterior oval form -- the form that is perceptible by the senses.

Rectangle No. 2. is divided by oblique lines that suggest a carpet. There, lines are in direct relationship to the lines in the figure of the painter. They are parallel or perpendicular to them.

In rectangle No. 3. the trapezoid formed by the pedestal of the sculptured head is also parallel to the lines formed by the carpet and parallel to the lines of the fruit bowl on the table.

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Summarizing, every line and surface functions one with the other, and one surface determines the next. This applies to the lines as well as to the spaces, which they form. The relationship between verticals and horizontals with the obliques and the ovals is exquisitely solved.

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We said that on the wall are hung two empty canvases, framed. One of them is a vertical black rectangle located in the exact center of the painting, in the upper portion of which painting converge the most accentuated sharp angles. This, combined with the black color of the rectangle and its verticle portion gives to it a main importance in the whole composition.

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If we make a lineal tracing of this painting that permits us to abstract its pattern omitting its colors and textures, we can see how pure, well-composed, and harmonic it is.

It is interesting to notice that if these lines were studs and beams of a wooden or iron frame, to be built, it would be perfectly feasible because every line works together as one structure.

I don't want to say that the painting is good for this reason or that this is an analytical test for other paintings. But it indicates that the harmony attained by Picasso in this work is based on the perfectly logical arrangement and stability of its design. And I venture to say that generally in the works of Picasso there exists a feeling that all his figures and elements are resting on the surface of the earth; that they stick to the earth because of gravity and have their own weight and stability.

If we add colors and textures to this skeleton, the painting takes on its true dimensions. It is no more a lineal and flat design. Emotion has been added.

It produces now an impression of atmospheric transparency and luminosity of color characteristic of the country of North Africa and the south of Spain. It gives an impression that the African sun bathed the studio. The shadows are black and dark brown, sharp and cutting. The whites, yellows, reds, and grays are concentrated in large areas. The colors are saturated and luminous. To the skeleton has been added blood, life and sun.

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This luminosity, vibration and richness of the color has been obtained by the concentration of each color into one area. They are then isolated by secondary areas of neutral grays. The vibration of the colors is caused by the large areas of color being subdivided into small areas of different tonalities of the same color. For instance in the yellow area (the canvas) the inside color is lemon yellow and the frame is chromium.

In the reds (table cloth) there are four subdivisions, four different reds, some opaque, some transparent, some with a tone of gray visible under the surface. There are other secondary colors (pale vermilion, gray, and lavender). They mainly serve to bring out the main colors.

The richness is caused by this enormous variety of treatment in the application of the medium.

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This technique of isolating colors of Picasso's is opposed to that of the Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist who decomposed the ray of light in its colors of small dimensions, putting together two colors high in key and usually complementary. For instance, a red stroke next to a green to produce a contrast and shock. Picasso, instead, isolates each color in big areas and works within the areas in different intensities and textures.



"The Studio" is painted with force and vigor. Picasso uses here thick oil paint that gives the impression of having been built up through change and growth rather than just applied in one heavy layer.

The black structural lines have interesting treatment. Some are painted with a dry brush effect over paint already dry. Some are there because they are all that remains not painted out of a formerly black area.

In general, the process of painting is as pure as the painting itself. There are no tricks. The technique is direct and honest and strong.

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Summarizing, this painting is an accomplishment of integration. All the elements -- subject, conception, technique, color, design, texture, respond one to the other perfectly.

The essential feeling given by the painting is life -- life in the sense of earthiness, fullness, vigor - harmony.