

WOMAN IN AN ARMCHAIR

1927

Pablo Picasso 1881 - 1973

Spanish, 20th Century

63.2

The current label -

The Woman in An Armchair by Pablo Picasso is a painting which was completed in 1927. The current label reads: Pablo Picasso spent 65 years after inventing cubism with Georges Braque around 1907 exploring ways art could free itself from slavishly describing reality while still evoking it. Here, the amoeba-like body of the woman is intentionally distorted; her head, torso, and limbs are exaggerated and deformed almost beyond recognition. The jumble of patterns, and the strong lines of the wainscoting and the floor, convey an unsettling tension that is at odds with the placid, gray-and-white profiles that float like cast shadows upon the service. Through such a juxtaposition of tension and calm, the artist depicted the several faces of emotion that forms the reality of human existence. However, like many other images of women created during the late 1920's and early 1930's, Woman in an armchair is also a reflection of the artist's reality - a deteriorating marriage with his first wife, Olga Khokhlova.

Pablo Picasso - painter, sculptor, graphic artist and ceramist.

Pablo Picasso was born in 1881 in Malaga, Spain. He was the son of an art teacher - Jose Ruez Blasco. In 1895 the family moved to Barcelona where Pablo received some intense but brief art lessons. In 1900 he traveled to the World's Fair in Paris. He returned to Spain, but continued to travel back to Paris. He moved there in 1904.

His talents and knowledge increased as his eyes were opened to the Paris art world. He began to sell paintings and had his first exhibition when he was 16 years old.

He met Fauves, artists who used bright and flamboyant colors and structures. A critic called them "wild men" - Fauves in French. Many embraced this description for new techniques. It was a powerful movement, but short lived.

Picasso was introduced to African carvings, possibly by Matisse. When he created the painting "Young Ladies from Avignon" in which he experimented with African masks. The influence is obvious.

This same painting led to what would later be called Cubism, (a name he never used) almost no one liked it. However, it greatly influenced his friend Georges Braque and the two of them worked together and separately to develop this important technique relating to space and relationships. This was one of the most important inventions in modern art and changed much about the way painting and sculpture was done in the 20th century.

Picasso learned to do collages using musical instruments, bottles, table tops and other objects. He learned the effects and importance of painterly geometry, a discipline from Cezanne.

In 1940 Picasso was the best known living painter in the world. The

productive and lengthy career was of vast significance to art.

Picasso was the master of many styles - realist, cubist, surrealist and line and form.

The Painting - "Woman in an Armchair"

Picasso had three wives and he met his first wife, Olga Khokhlova, in 1917 in Rome. They were married in 1918. They had one son, Paulo. They divorced in 1935 after being separated as Picasso had his affair with Marie-Therese Waller and the birth of their daughter Maya.

In 1927 Picasso created Woman in an Armchair. At first glance the work seems a jumble of lines creating disturbing tension, perhaps even anger and frustration. The anoeba-like body is intentionally distorted - the head, torso and limbs are exaggerated and deformed.

Art scholars point out that his paintings of all women in the 20's and early 30's reflect the deterioration of his marriage to Olga Khokhlova. This particular painting has a background similar to a 1917 Portrait of Olga in an arm chair.

Notice the two heads in silhouette in gray and white. They face each other calmly as though floating and disengaged on the pictures surface.

Olga Khokhlova Wife and Model

Olga was the model Picasso painted many times during the period of 1917 - 1935. She was born in Russia in 1891 and studied Ballet in St. Petersburg. She was a ballerina, quite lovely, though this is not revealed through his later paintings of her. She gave birth to Paulo in February, 1921. (Show picture or photograph of Olga.)

Olga died in 1955.

Key Points

Picasso was a gifted artist who had a long and prolific career and was an innovative leader in art in Europe and the United States. He was well know internationally.

Picasso had the vision to change art through breaking through tradition understandings in the art world regarding the picture planes, color, and was well known in many different mediums.

The painting Woman in an Armchair is from the period in his life from 1917 - 1935 when he was married to Olga Khokhlova, a Russian Ballet Dancer. This painting reflects the period in Picasso's life as his marriage was deteriorating. When you compare her portrait or photograph from 1917 to this work, it makes one aware of his alienation.

The word that is often used to describe this painting from 1927 is "tension." There are a variety of patterns, images and messages that reach us as we explore it and some are at odds with others.

The painting uses some of the style of cubism, with picture planes and viewpoints shifting. The wainscoting is at odds with the realistic portrayal of a room. Planes

provide the composition.

The artist uses browns, tans, pale blue, lines and outlines.

Key Questions

What is going on in this picture?

What images do you see?

How does the painting make you feel?

What do you see in the room that is in the painting?

Do you see more than one face in this painting?