

ON CLASSIC GROUND

Picasso, Léger, de Chirico and the New Classicism 1910-1930



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Tate Gallery

front cover/jacket

'Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)' 1922, Pablo Picasso
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INTRODUCTION



fig.1 Picasso, 'Portrait of a Young Girl', 1914, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

When war was declared on 2 August 1914 Pablo Picasso was staying in Avignon in the south of France. While he was there he painted two pictures – one Cubist (fig.1), the other naturalistic (cat.130) – which look so different that it is hard to believe they were painted by the same man, let alone at the same time. Perhaps only Picasso could have changed the direction of twentieth-century art with such casual ease. Three years later, pretending to be Ingres, he depicted his fiancée in a beautiful gown (fig.2), and his return to 'classicism' was confirmed.¹ At about the same time Gino Severini, associated in the public mind with the provocative Futurists and pictures such as 'Suburban Train Arriving in Paris' (fig.3), suddenly produced 'Maternity' (fig.4), which looks like a Mantegna or a Ghirlandaio.² Their 'defection' from an avant-garde position aroused excited debate, and anticipated a general shift within the art world after the war. It is this shift that is the main theme of the present exhibition.

'The classical revival', 'the call to order', 'the return to order' – the names by which this movement is most often known – gathered momentum during the First World War in France and Italy, and spread rapidly after peace was declared. The work of many painters and sculptors was visibly affected, and this exhibition could – some will say should – have represented many more of them than it does. In other countries directly involved in the fighting – for instance, Germany and Britain – there were parallel movements. However, the decision was taken to explore the specific reinterpretation of *classicism*, rather than a more general return to the figurative tradition, and thus to concentrate upon the Latin countries, where it was claimed, with a certain justification, that the classical tradition was the native tradition – the heritage and source by natural right.³

This impulse to return to the constants of the Great Tradition has been seen as conservative and reactionary, because avant-garde, individualistic styles of one kind or another were rejected or modified in the interests of greater clarity, order and universality, and because the changes usually met with the approval of the Establishment – bourgeois patrons and their favourite dealers, critics who had been hostile to avant-garde styles, and political leaders on the right who, alleging a Boche conspiracy, vaunted 'racial purity' in the arts. The fact that the Fascists embraced classicism for propagandist purposes, and that whenever artists were required to celebrate the aspirations or the power of their country they turned to classical models as if there were no possible alternative, has led to mistrust of the language of classicism itself. There is the suspicion that it is at worst authoritarian and oppressive, at best rhetorical and sham. Indeed because of its presumed *arrière-garde* nature, the post-war classical revival has received scant attention until quite recently,⁴ and the work produced has often been treated with contempt.⁵ Yet that work is often of the highest quality, and the accusation of conservatism (in the pejorative sense of reaction against innovation and invention) does not stand up.

The First World War has, rightly, been seen as a catalyst in the post-war



fig.2 Picasso, 'Olga Picasso in an Armchair', 1917, Musée Picasso, Paris

'return to order', inducing a craving for the stability and proven value of tradition following disruption, carnage and vandalism on a scale unparalleled in living memory. There is no question that that craving existed, and that it was articulated passionately by many of the most lastingly important figures of the time, as well as by the soap-box orators.⁶ It had a wider context than the war itself, however, for it was the response of nations that had witnessed rapid, often devastating waves of industrialisation – given dramatic and horrific impetus by the war – and that had been engulfed by the materialist values of the nineteenth century which placed supreme emphasis on 'progress' and 'development'. In contrast, the classical tradition offered a haven of relative tranquillity.

Classicism in art is most simply defined as 'an approach to the medium founded on the imitation of Antiquity, and on the assumption of a set of values attributed to the ancients'.⁷ Although it is convenient to consider separately the situation in France, Italy and Spain, for there were real local differences, it is in the very nature of classicism that there should have been shared concerns and shared solutions, for classicism claims to be both universal and timeless. The reputation of Paris as the mecca of the art world meant that in practice most Italian and Spanish artists spent time there – some even making it their permanent home – so that a network of contacts developed, encouraging a rapid exchange of ideas, as well as, paradoxically, a sense of national identity.

At the simplest level there was uniformity in subject matter, for painters of all three nationalities addressed the 'classic' themes and worked within the established genres of figure composition, the nude, landscape and still life. The Maternity was, for instance, a favourite subject. It might be treated relatively naturalistically, as in Sunyer's painting of his wife and baby son (cat. 171), or in an explicitly Renaissance style, with overtones of the Madonna and infant Christ, as in Severini's picture (fig. 3), or in a neoclassical manner by Picasso (cat. 140). Underpinning the shared subjects was their common cultural heritage. Greco-Roman sculpture was a source for numerous paintings and sculptures; the Italian Renaissance inspired not only the Italians but also the French and the Catalans, many of whom travelled to Italy in quest of the Great Tradition as generations of artists before them had done; Poussin, Ingres, Corot and Cézanne were important to painters as diverse as, say, Léger, Derain and Dalí. Above all, we notice certain 'constants' in the approach to classicism, certain recurrent and dominant myths.

Perhaps the most potent myth of all is that of the Mediterranean world as Arcadia – an earthly paradise protected from the sordid materialism of the modern industrialised world, free from strife and tension, pagan not Christian, innocent not fallen, a place where a dreamed-of harmony is still attainable. The myth, nourished by the pastoral poetry of Theocritus and Virgil, and by innumerable pastoral paintings of earlier periods, generated sensual images of sweeping fertile landscapes bathed in sunlight, calm blue seas, confident and handsome nudes, and peasants going about their daily lives as if nothing had changed for centuries. At its heart there lurked the potential for profound melancholy – the sense of loss and the knowledge that the ideal can never be attained. And just as melancholy pervades the pastoral paintings of Claude and Poussin and Corot, so it pervades the work of some of the new classicists –



fig. 3 Severini, 'Suburban Train Arriving in Paris', 1915, Tate Gallery



fig. 4 Severini, 'Maternity', 1916, Museo dell'Accademia Etrusca, Cortona

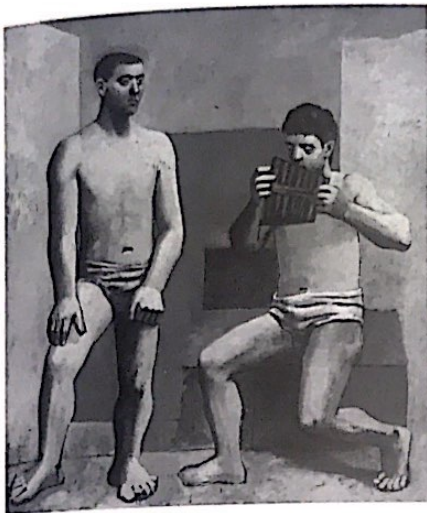


fig.5 Picasso, 'The Pipes of Pan', 1923, Musée Picasso, Paris

Derain, Picasso and de Chirico especially. Occasionally the myth assumed the old Ovidian guise.⁸ But even when the setting was apparently contemporary there was always an intentional ambiguity, so that the present was seen through the perspective of the past, and thus idealised and made more resonant.

The painters and sculptors who lived part at least of their lives on the Mediterranean coast were especially susceptible to this myth. It permeates the late paintings of Renoir and his forays into sculpture (cats.147,148), the paintings of Matisse in his Nice period (cats.118,119), and the idylls of Bonnard (cats.6,7). All three used the richly coloured, painterly style derived from the Venetians which was traditionally associated with sensuality. De Chirico employed the same style in theatrically disposed scenes of Renaissance buildings set in hilly landscapes, animated by classical statues and figures in modern dress (cat.33), and in order to evoke the almost oppressive voluptuousness of the fruits of the south (cat.40). For Picasso the summers spent at Biarritz, Saint-Raphaël, Juan-les-Pins, Antibes and Cannes generated great paintings like 'The Pipes of Pan' (fig.5) in which the Mediterranean acts, nostalgically, as the site of the ideal. The myth permeates the bucolic imagery of the Catalans – Sunyer, Casanovas, Manolo, Miró, Gargallo, González and Tógore; it ennoble the Poussinesque landscapes of Derain (cat.45); it receives a monumental statement in Martini's 'Woman in the Sun' (cat.112) and Maillol's 'Three Nymphs' (cat.95); it invests the sculpture of Laurens with a lyrical dimension; it motivates Gris's series of still lifes before windows that open out on to the sea (cat.67). It is a myth which rings out in much of the more airy critical writing of the 1920s. Here the author is describing Banyuls, the fishing village near Perpignan, where Maillol was born:

A landscape of rounded hills creates a sort of amphitheatre where grey olive trees spread their luminous masses, and where the laden vines, supported on dry stone walls, surround some Spanish house or ancient ruined tower; at the foot of and around the village spread gardens full of oranges and fruit trees, with here and there a sharp-pointed cypress or the open fan of a splendid palm. It is there that Maillol was born, and there that for the first time his blue eyes contemplated the land and the sea. It was the scent of this landscape and its springtime orchards which he breathed in with each new day; it was on the slopes of those hills, enlivened by goats, and in the depths of those secret valleys that there awoke in him, during his wanderings, that profound sense of life, of beauty and of love. There is no place capable of giving a more complete idea of the Greece we learn about at school.⁹

It is a dream which also lies behind the contemporary architecture of Le Corbusier, with its flat roofs, white walls, expanses of window, balconies, cool tiled floors and open-plan interiors:

The theme of the continuity of peasant life, inseparable from the wider Arcadian theme, generated certain recurrent images. There are, for example, many Italian Novecento paintings in which a generalised peasant costume is used to confer an air of universality on a scene which might otherwise be interpreted either as contemporary, or as located in a specific period in the past, or as having a particular meaning. Thus Guidi rendered ambiguous the

meeting between an old and a young woman in the trance-like 'The Visit' (cat.69), and Funi suggested an indefinite span of time in his 'allegory' of fruitfulness ('Earth', cat.55). Donghi (cat.52), Dalí (cat.44) and Toghores (cat.173) used an unspecific rustic costume to give their models the dignity of types. And by the mere addition of a peasant hat, Martini was able to give two generalised figure studies an earthy innocence (cats.108,112). Folk costume was used, particularly in France, for poetic and nostalgic effect, and to evoke reminiscences of the old masters: thus, Derain (cat.48), Matisse (cat.117) and Braque (cat.12) allude not simply to folk traditions, but to the Italian costume-pieces of Corot. And salvaged from the classical world was the ubiquitous white drapery which, cast over the models of Sironi or Picasso, lent them a vaguely antique air, without, however, necessarily detaching them from the present of the artist's studio. In all these cases costume alone lends that added dimension: anecdote is not involved.

The *commedia dell'arte* provided another set of standardised types. Derain (fig.6), Picasso (cat.132), Andreu (cat.3), Gris (cat.68) and Severini (cat.155) were among those who plundered this resource. In part they were motivated by traditional images of the *commedia*, whether those by painters like Watteau and Cézanne or by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century print-makers and illustrators, for there was much interest in the 'call to order' period in the old, endangered traditions of popular theatre. In part the stimulus came from Diaghilev, and his commissions to leading avant-garde artists for sets and costumes for ballets with folk themes. (*Parade* in 1917, designed by Picasso, was an important event because the drop-curtain, fig.7, suggested, in the context of a public spectacle, the rich potential of this kind of poetic imagery.) But most important of all perhaps was the fact that the old Italian Comedy, with its stock characters, costumes and situations, suggested a viable alternative – still Latin in its roots – to classical mythology.

In France after the war the 'call to order' – the resonant phrase was used by the writer Jean Cocteau, an influential voice at the time¹⁰ – took a number of characteristic forms, and the idea of the French tradition as the ideal model for the new generation was an article of faith with many critics, ranging from the advanced to the conservative.¹¹ Picasso and Braque were among those to adapt neoclassical imagery, while Picasso also worked in a great variety of traditional 'naturalistic' styles. Gris returned to figure subjects in the middle of the war and made free transcriptions of old master paintings, and in the early 1920s his flat, synthetic Cubist style gave way to an increasingly volumetric and descriptive manner. Matisse's work after he settled in Nice in 1917 became more naturalistic than it had been for many years, and all obvious indications of his previous interest in Cubism disappeared. Laurens's sculpture became gradually less geometric, and in the late 1920s approached that of Maillol. Maillol himself was at the height of his reputation by the mid-1920s and produced a great sequence of life-sized classical statues, while Bourdelle and Despiau were admired for their ability to adapt Greco-Roman and Renaissance prototypes to their own expressive ends. Derain, who maintained a constant dialogue with the art of the past, was widely seen as one of the greatest artists of the period. Léger ceased to fragment his figures, made allusions to great paintings from the past, addressed himself to traditional subjects, and often



fig.6 Derain, 'Harlequin', 1919, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Chester Dale Collection



fig.7 Picasso, Drop-curtain for *Parade*, 1917, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris

worked on a grand Salon scale. The Purist painters, although they practised a radical, abstracted style, set about codifying and ordering pre-war Cubism according to aesthetic and philosophic principles derived from antiquity and the Renaissance. And it was typical of the period that drawing should be regarded as an important discipline, and given special status in monographs and exhibitions.

In Italy the war, and the short history of national unity, engendered fiercely patriotic sentiments.¹² The contacts with France were close, for an important group of Italian painters, which included Severini, de Chirico and Savinio, was resident in Paris. But the overriding concern was with the Italian tradition. The ideology of the 'call to order' was promoted after the war by, among others, the painter and theorist Ardengo Soffici, and the critics and artists associated with Mario Broglio's art journal *Valori Plastici*, published in Rome between 1918 and 1922. Here the metaphysical paintings of de Chirico, Carrà and Morandi were illustrated, and the distinctive qualities of the Italian and the French tradition debated and analysed. The reaction against Cubism in France was paralleled by a reaction against the modern, narrative subject matter and the fragmented, abstracted style of Futurism. The writings as well as the paintings of de Chirico and Carrà during these years reflect their close study of Italian Renaissance traditions. De Chirico, who had received an intensive academic training, now demanded the most rigorous classical standards, made a number of close copies of old master paintings (cat.32), and like several of his compatriots, including Severini and Martini, became fascinated by largely disused historic techniques. For Carrà, once he had turned his back on Futurism, the Trecento and the Quattrocento represented the ideal source – pure in form and mysterious and spiritual in content. For Martini the Italian Primitives were initially just as important, as a work like 'Head of a Boy' (cat.107) demonstrates. But he was soon drawn to the recently excavated sculpture of the Etruscans, which he saw as the purest Italian expression of classicism. For Sironi, Funi, Guidi, Casorati, Oppi and other painters associated with the Novecento movement, which was promoted from 1922 onwards in a series of exhibitions and essays by the critic Margherita Sarfatti, the ideal was a marriage between the artistic tradition of the Italian Renaissance and the 'pure' plastic concerns of contemporary art. Their pictures reflect their sense of the continuity between past and present in frank allusions to favourite artists including Raphael, Bellini, Piero della Francesca, Masaccio and Mantegna.

Some of the artists associated with the Novecento, in particular Sironi and Funi, were from an early date supporters of the Fascist Party, to which Sarfatti herself was fully committed, and which deployed the imagery of classicism to foster nationalist sentiment and the dreamed-of revival of the glorious triumphs of the Roman Empire in Mussolini's modern state. But Mussolini himself, despite his personal relationship with Sarfatti, never officially endorsed any particular style or group, and association with the Novecento group did not automatically imply any specific political allegiance on the part of the artist concerned. Indeed an overtly propagandist stance was a significant feature only in the 1930s, when opportunities arose for large-scale public murals and sculptures celebrating Fascist ideals. For the longing to see modern

art enjoy the genuinely social role and influence that it had had in the past – an aspiration shared by artists on the political left, such as Léger – was a powerful motive behind the political activities of Sironi, who instigated the ‘Manifesto della pittura murale’ in 1933, and of Carrà, Funi and Campigli, who were among those to sign it. (See Carrà’s and Sironi’s cartoon-scale drawings, cats.20,167.)

In Catalonia the situation was somewhat different, not least because Spain was not involved in the First World War. The Noucentista movement, masterminded initially by the critic Eugeni d’Ors, was established as the leading movement in Barcelona between 1906, when d’Ors first began publishing his ‘Glosari’ in *La Veu de Catalunya*, and 1911, when the *Almanach des Noucentistes* came out. The movement was dedicated to the promotion of a modern form of classicism, which in painting was largely dependent on the example of Cézanne (and to a lesser extent on Renoir and Puvis de Chavannes), and in sculpture took Maillol as the ideal model. Noucentisme was thus intimately involved with developments in France, and much was made of the shared cultural history of southern France and Spanish Catalonia, as well as of the broader links with Latin culture in general.¹³

This said, Noucentisme had a strong local identity, and as a movement closely connected with Catalan nationalism was committed to the revival of Catalan folk customs and the great native traditions of the past, such as the Romanesque. It was also committed to the overthrow of Modernisme, which had prevailed in Barcelona in the late nineteenth century and in the 1900s. Modernisme, the equivalent of Art Nouveau, was seen as ‘decadent’ because of the strong influence from northern countries, particularly Germany, Austria and Britain – influences which had diverted the ‘pure’ Mediterranean course of Catalan art – and because of its emphasis on the experience of contemporary urban life. For Noucentisme saw itself as a movement of reclamation and restoration, and the recent successful excavations at the Greco-Roman site of Ampurias generated a sense of continuity between antiquity and modern times.¹⁴

A neoclassical strain in Noucentisme was evident from the first in the paintings of Joaquín Torres-García, a close associate of d’Ors and an influential theorist in his own right. His murals for public buildings in Barcelona were directly inspired by the work of Puvis de Chavannes, and were intended both as an alternative to anecdotal painting, whether naturalist or symbolist in style, and as proof of the continuing viability, and indeed necessity, of modern art on a public scale. The neoclassical Noucentista style was given more convincing expression in sculpture than in painting, however, particularly in the work of the hugely successful Clará, and of Casanovas, in whose stone carvings it took a distinctive primitivist orientation.

In painting, Puvisesque neoclassicism found few adherents of consequence besides Torres-García. But the lessons of Gauguin, and especially of Cézanne, had long-lasting impact through the new work of Sunyer. ‘Pastoral’ (cat.169) was hailed as a masterpiece of modern classicism and above all as the sign of a Catalan renaissance in painting. Sunyer’s influence was considerable, and among those affected was Picasso, who spent several months in Barcelona in 1917 and was encouraged by the example of old Catalan friends to pursue his

own 'return to order'. (See cat.132.) The identification with Catalan folk-traditions and rural life remained an important motive behind Miró's work long after he had ceased to be influenced by Sunyer or d'Ors's form of Noucentisme, and was central to most of the work of Manolo. Indeed for all those touched by the movement, the sense of their Catalan heritage was of prime importance, expressed not only in loving depictions of the landscape, but in the symbolic image of the statuesque country women of Catalonia, taken as the emblem of the survival of the true Mediterranean spirit into the present – the very incarnation of living classicism.¹⁵

Even so schematic an account of Noucentisme draws attention to the fact that the 'call to order' movement significantly predates the outbreak of the First World War. Maurice Denis, formerly a member of the Nabi group, and a mural painter who worked in a manner developed from that of Puvis de Chavannes, was a vocal champion of classicism in his critical writings in the decade preceding the outbreak of the war. These were gathered in 1912 in *Théories (1890-1910): Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique* – a book whose very title is a manifesto in miniature.¹⁶ Denis locates the roots of the new classicism of the 1900s in the work of the post-Impressionists, and it is there that we must look for the origins of the 'call to order' of the wartime and post-war period. In France, Italy and Spain there was almost universal agreement on the immense importance of Cézanne's achievement. He is seen as the great hero by Denis himself, by Soffici, and by d'Ors.¹⁷ Renoir's status was never quite as high, but he too was widely admired in all three countries. Impressionism, on the other hand, was condemned by writer after writer, with a degree of consistency which indicates just how dangerous a threat it was felt to be once it had become an officially accepted style. It was, went the general argument, too naturalistic, too preoccupied with merely ephemeral effects, too anarchic, too individualistic – incapable, in short, of universality of meaning, or of beauty of a grand dimension. The following passage from a piece by Guillaume Apollinaire is fairly typical: 'Ignorance and frenzy – these are the characteristics of impressionism. When I say ignorance, I mean a total lack of culture in most cases; as for science, there was plenty of it, applied without much rhyme or reason; they claimed to be scientific. Epicurus himself was at the basis of the system, and the theories of the physicists of the time justified the most wretched improvisations.'¹⁸ The Purists agreed. The first issue of their magazine, *L'Esprit Nouveau*, published in 1920, carried six photographs of works designated as 'good' and 'bad'. On the good side were an archaic Greek statue, an African mask, Seurat's 'Chahut', and a still life by Gris, and on the bad, a sculpture by Rodin and a water-lily painting by Monet (fig.8).

This hostile judgement recapitulates quite closely that of the early critics of Impressionism, who, even if they were prepared to admit that it had charm and that it was remarkably truthful in its rendering of fleeting visual sensations, were shocked by its sketchiness and by, in their view, the absence of structure or seriousness. Emile Zola, an unremitting opponent of the empty pretensions of academic Salon painting, had been an early supporter of first Manet, and then Monet, Pissarro and the other members of the Impressionist group because he approved of their realistic subject matter. But by 1880 he had come regretfully to the conclusion that the emphasis on ephemeral effects and a

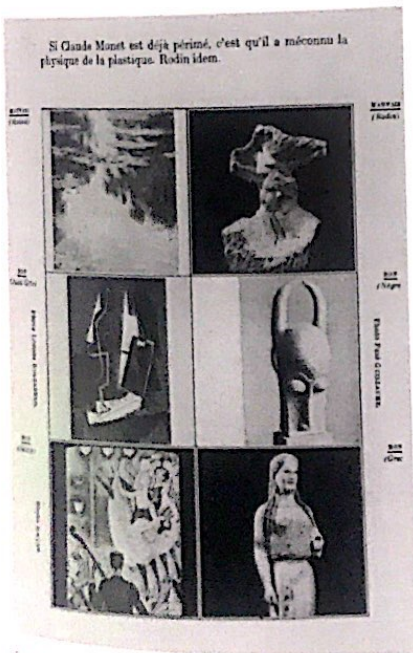


fig. 8 *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no. 1, 1920

correspondingly rapid technique precluded the creation of great art: 'Nowhere, not in the work of any one of them, is the formula applied with true mastery. . . . There are too many holes in their work; they neglect their facture too often; they are too easily satisfied; they are incomplete, illogical, extreme, impotent.'¹⁹

The leading Impressionist painters privately expressed similar anxiety, and by the early 1880s a 'crisis' had developed, with widespread defection from the group shows, and individual efforts to strike out in new directions.²⁰ For Cézanne and Renoir this took the immediate form of a classicist orientation. Renoir went to Italy to study Raphael and the old masters, and for a time practised a tight, draughtsmanlike style combined with Impressionist prismatic colour; this experiment was short-lived, but his subjects and compositions were altered ever afterwards as he embarked on a process of idealising and mythologising the women and landscapes that remained his favourite motifs (cat.147). Cézanne retreated to Provence to forge a style bridging the visual truth and colourism of Impressionist *plein-air* painting and the grand compositional structures of Poussin and Chardin (cat.28). Even Monet began to rely increasingly on synthesising his 'impressions' in the studio away from the motif, and, omitting all specifically contemporary references, used a serial method to dignify and universalise his chosen subjects. Pissarro, temporarily converted to the rigorous pointillist technique of Seurat, focused increasingly on generalised rural themes in which the figure played a much more important role than hitherto. Meanwhile the new paintings of Seurat and Gauguin were conceived in direct opposition to fundamental aspects of the Impressionist technique. Seurat's huge figure paintings were created from drawings and oil sketches in a painstaking process based on the academic method of composition, and drew on sources from the classical tradition. Gauguin addressed himself to the creation of a mythic, primitive Arcadia, depending on a wide range of artistic references to give his figure paintings an iconic depth and power. Both were directly influenced by the neoclassical murals of Puvis de Chavannes. In the sphere of literature the equivalent movement was the Ecole Romane, founded in 1891 by the Greek-born poet and theorist Jean Moréas, which was dedicated to the revival of the Latin roots of French literature.

The 'avant-garde classicism' of the post-Impressionists reached a climax of visibility around 1904-7. A series of exhibitions was mounted in the Salons des Indépendants and d'Automne: Cézanne, Puvis and Renoir retrospectives were held in the autumn Salon of 1904, a Seurat retrospective at the Indépendants in 1905, an enormous Gauguin exhibition in the autumn of 1906, and a memorial Cézanne show in the Automne in 1907. A barrage of critical analysis accompanied these events.

The term 'avant-garde classicism' has been used to draw attention to the vital distinction between the kind of classicism practised by the post-Impressionists and the classicism of the academic *arrière-garde*. Politics aside, if classicism is now generally assumed to be conservative and reactionary, so that we are almost reluctant to admit its centrality to the work of the 'progressive' nineteenth- and twentieth-century artists we admire, it is because of our lurking fear that academicism is a little too close for comfort. For, whether or not we identify the beginning of the modern movement with the



fig.9 Bouguereau, 'The Birth of Venus', 1879, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Romantics, with Courbet, with Manet, or with the Impressionists, we invariably identify it with a rejection of academicism. These artists are our heroes precisely because they refused to conform to the rigid and stifling standards set in the art academies. Our notion of an avant-garde battling against the dead weight of the academic classicism of meretricious, super-successful *pompier*s like Gérôme, Cabanel and Bouguereau (fig.9), has made us deeply suspicious of later classical revivals: might they not also be rearguard academic revivals? Because by the middle of the nineteenth century the classical tradition no longer had the weight of absolute authority it once enjoyed, we tend to assume that innovative artists were bound to reject its principles, abandoning it in favour of alternative traditions that were fresh and new (such as, say, Far Eastern art). But this assumption does not stand up under scrutiny. For all the evidence suggests that the avant-garde in the nineteenth century made an absolute distinction between 'true' and 'fake' classicism, and actually used experience of alternative traditions as a means of looking anew at the classical tradition, thus providing the model for the twentieth-century avant-garde.²¹

The training of all European painters and sculptors around 1900 was still a training in classicism. The curriculum was more or less standardised, and whether or not the student intended to be a painter or a sculptor, he or she had to 'imitate' the antique by making accurate drawings from plaster casts of celebrated Greco-Roman sculptures, and by drawing repeatedly from the live model posed in the manner of a statue. Familiarity with the antique was complemented by the study of Renaissance and neoclassical art, since these traditions were assumed to reinforce the same values, and copying from the great masters was routine.²² Of course, different teachers applied these standards more or less rigidly. But even in the free academies, drawing from plaster casts and from the nude model, and the study of museum art, were regarded as fundamental disciplines: when Matisse opened a school in 1908, he required his students to draw from the antique.²³ Meanwhile in the secondary schools a basic knowledge of classical literature and history was regarded as synonymous with education. This is the fundamental difference between the situation in the second half of the twentieth century and that in the first: today one cannot assume a general knowledge of the achievements of antiquity, then one could.

Where the academics and the avant-garde parted company was over the complex issue of 'imitation'. The academics, believing that the apex of civilisation had been reached in Periclean Athens and Augustan Rome (and attained once again in Italy at the time of Raphael), required a high degree of conformity to the outward forms of the past, and were consequently suspicious of innovation. The avant-garde, believing that it was the essential principles of classicism that were lastingly valuable, took a much more liberal view of formal invention. The academic attitude to classicism owed a great deal to the eighteenth-century writer and archaeologist Johann Winckelmann, whose purpose was to combat the 'decadence' of the prevailing Rococo style. From his study of Greek art Winckelmann had come to the conclusion that 'its last and most eminent characteristic is a noble simplicity and sedate grandeur in Gesture and Expression.' And he went on, 'As the bottom of the sea lies

peaceful beneath a foaming surface, a great soul lies sedate beneath the strife of passions in Greek figures.' Because of the absolute supremacy of Greek art, Winckelmann was convinced that 'There is but one way for the moderns to become great, and perhaps unequalled: I mean by imitating the ancients.'²⁴ Although for him 'imitation' was not the same as 'copying', that subtle distinction was all too easily eroded, and by the beginning of the twentieth century Winckelmann was being seen by the avant-garde as the apostle of 'fake', not 'true' classicism – the classicism of the *pompieri* who dominated the official Salons and appealed to a pretentious but ignorant public. This was the view of Apollinaire:

It was the German aestheticians and painters who invented academicism, that fake classicism which true art has been struggling against ever since Winckelmann, whose pernicious influence can never be exaggerated. It is to the credit of the French school that it has always reacted against his influence; the daring innovations of French painters throughout the nineteenth century were above all efforts to rediscover the authentic tradition of art.²⁵

The acute moral pressure applied by the academic tradition was felt perhaps most painfully by young artists in Italy, for nowhere else is the classical tradition so much a part of the consciousness of the present. Not isolated within abandoned historic sites or immured within a scattering of museums, it lives on in every town or city of consequence in the thousands of still functioning buildings that bear the visible imprint of classicism.²⁶ The sense of desperate frustration induced by this obsession with the past found one kind of outlet in iconoclasm – the iconoclasm of Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto' of 1909:

Do you, then, wish to waste all your best powers in this eternal and futile worship of the past, from which you emerge fatally exhausted, shrunken, beaten down? . . . When the future is barred to them, the admirable past may be a solace for the ills of the moribund, the sickly, the prisoner. . . . But we want no part of it, the past, we the young and strong *Futurists!* So let them come, the joyful incendiaries with charred fingers! Here they are! Here they are! . . . Come on! set fire to the library shelves! Turn aside the canals to flood the museums! . . . Oh, the joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discoloured and shredded! . . . Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!²⁷

The name for the new movement, Futurism, was, of course, pointed – intended to rally all those Italians who felt fettered by the past. The same reaction marked much Dada activity during and after the war. Their programme of stage-managed events, conducted in Paris with the maximum publicity, was intended to rally the endangered forces of anarchy and protest within the avant-garde. Especially in the pages of Picabia's *391*, the 'call to order' movement was repeatedly and brilliantly satirised. Picabia's contempt was expressed in typically terse style in his 'Homage to Rembrandt, Renoir and Cézanne' of 1920, where the three 'great masters' – the allusion to Renoir and



fig. 10 Duchamp, 'L.H.O.O.Q.', 1919, *Private Collection, Paris*

Cézanne was especially topical – were lampooned as '*natures mortes*' and represented collectively by a stuffed and moth-eaten monkey. Duchamp took his ironic revenge not only in the elevation of a ready-made bottlerack or urinal to the status of masterpieces, but also in schoolboy graffiti on a cheap reproduction of Leonardo's 'Mona Lisa' (fig. 10).²⁸

But iconoclasm could not offer a long-term solution, however useful it might be in the short term as a means of achieving a *tabula rasa*. The long-term solution involved detaching the Great Tradition from all association with the academic concept of 'imitation', and in insisting on its potential as a source for innovation and invention. This is precisely what Apollinaire had done, in the passage quoted above, when he differentiated between 'fake classicism' and 'the authentic tradition of art'. Here Apollinaire was appealing to the concept of the abstract essence rather than the outward forms of classicism. When this crucial distinction was made, then the classical tradition could be claimed as the source for radical modernism. After his attack on Winckelmann, Apollinaire had immediately invoked 'the daring innovations of French painters throughout the nineteenth century'. He was thinking, among others, of the post-Impressionists who had invented new styles, but from the basis of a search for 'the authentic tradition of art'; and he went on to argue that Derain was the ideal example of a modern artist who 'studied the great masters passionately', whose new work was 'now imbued with that expressive grandeur that stamps the art of antiquity', but who had known how to avoid all 'factitious archaism'. Derain's work, he continues,

is like the classical art of a Racine, who owed so much to the Ancients yet whose work bears not a trace of archaism. In the works that André Derain is exhibiting today, the viewer will thus recognize a temperament both audacious and disciplined. . . . He has blazed the way for a great number of painters, which does not mean that some of them will not lose their way. Nevertheless, they must follow his example all the way *and never stop daring* – for daring constitutes the true measure of discipline.²⁹

In the history of the new and 'daring' classicism of the twentieth century the Salon d'Automne of 1905 was a climactic moment. It was, of course, the Salon in which the 'cage of the wild beasts' was the *succès de scandale*. But it was also the Salon in which Maillol exhibited 'The Mediterranean' (cat.88), and emerged as a major new sculptor who offered a radical alternative to the romantic expressionism of the then all-powerful Rodin. The importance of this piece was that although it was classical, it was not so in the *pompier* sense. For it was abstracted in form, and totally devoid of anecdote. Exhibited under the neutral title 'Femme' (Woman), it made not even a glancing reference to mythology, and offered instead a generalised type. For André Gide it was both beautiful and without meaning. 'One would', he wrote, 'have to go a long way back to find so complete a negligence of any preoccupation foreign to the simple manifestation of beauty.'³⁰

The autumn Salon of 1905 was also the Salon of a great Ingres retrospective. We have been accustomed to see the contribution of the Fauves as the major event, but the Ingres retrospective was, arguably, more important in the sense that it had a wider influence. It is worth pausing to consider why. Partly

because of his famous rivalry with Delacroix, partly because in later life he had become a leading academic master with a following of undistinguished imitators, Ingres had come to be regarded after his death as a reactionary force in French art. Yet, after a brilliant beginning – he won the Prix de Rome in 1801 – Ingres's career had been far from straightforwardly successful. His submissions to the Salon were often greeted with hostility, and he did not win the great public commissions he craved. Much of the contemporary criticism turned on Ingres's subversive interpretation of classicism – the eccentric distortions of the anatomy of his figures, the attention to surface detail rather than illusionistic depth, the 'Chinese' play of line, the references to 'primitive' art.³¹ But when Ingres was rediscovered by the 1905 generation it was these subversive aspects that were found exciting. According to Denis:

No one now considers Monsieur Ingres a dangerous reactionary. . . . He is our newest master; but it is only recently that we have discovered him. . . . There has been talk of the senility of *The Turkish Bath* [fig. 11], as much, I presume, because of its extremely voluptuous subject as because of the awkwardness of the figures. . . . He always retained that 'happy naïveté' which he recommended to his pupils. I noticed in the foreground a little still life, a few cups that might have been painted by a child: if Monsieur Ingres had lived longer, he would have painted like Rousseau.³²

The great value of Ingres to the post-1900 generation was that he showed that the classical tradition could still have meaning and life if it was regarded as a stimulus to innovation, not as a pattern book. But his paintings might have made less impact had they been experienced in isolation. As it was they were not. They were seen in the context of the work of Cézanne, Renoir, Seurat, Gauguin and Rousseau, and the connections between his innovations and theirs were thrown into relief. For Apollinaire, writing a few years later, the stylisations of Ingres were a source for Cubism.³³ His very eccentricities focused attention on the whole question of the fundamental nature of classicism. And here there was a wide measure of agreement within and without the avant-garde. Concerned primarily with the ideal in content as well as in form, classical art, it was agreed, was conceptual rather than perceptual, contemplative rather than anecdotal. Governed by rationally determined rules, which were dependent on systems of harmonious proportions and precise measurement, its ultimate goal was 'universal' and 'timeless' beauty, achieved through a lucid, economical and impersonal style. It was serene and calm, and its effect was supposed to be ennobling, since the aim was to transport the spectator beyond the vagaries and trivialities of the here and now to the contemplation of a higher, purer and more perfect reality. In the words of Maurice Denis:

In the notion of classical art the concept of synthesis is all-important. He who is not economical in his means, who does not subordinate the charm of individual details to the beauty of the whole, who does not attain grandeur through conciseness, is not classical. Classical art implies belief in the necessity of structural relationships, mathematical proportions and a form of beauty. . . . It involves a just balance between nature and style, between



fig. 11 Ingres, 'The Turkish Bath', 1862-3, Musée du Louvre, Paris

expression and harmony. The classical artist synthesises, stylises or, if you prefer, invents beauty, not only when he sculpts or paints, but also when he uses his eyes, and contemplates the natural world.³⁴

Classicism in avant-garde art in France was consolidated in the years that followed the 1905 Salon d'Automne. After his success with 'The Mediterranean', Maillol went on to create a steady flow of monumental works before the war. Bourdelle's break with the expressionist style of Rodin belongs to the same time.³⁵ In 1904–5 Picasso, anticipating d'Ors's rejection of Modernisme, abandoned the symbolist manner of the Blue period, and within a year was working in an archaising classical style which culminated in the great series of paintings and drawings executed in the autumn of 1906 following his return from a trip to Catalonia (cat. 128). By 1907–8 Matisse and Derain were already moving away from the spontaneous, individualistic, 'wild' manner typical of Fauvism, in favour of a more synthetic, restrained and volumetric approach indebted to Cézanne and the old masters. That Matisse thought of works such as 'Bathers with a Turtle' (cat. 116) as classical in essence is evident from his 'Notes d'un peintre', published in December 1908. For this much quoted passage from the essay uses the familiar terminology of the classical aesthetic: 'What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be . . . a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.'³⁶ The climax of this development in his art was reached in 1916 with 'Bathers by a River' (fig. 12), a painting which rivals in grandeur the monumental Bather paintings of Cézanne (fig. 13), and is triumphantly classical in an avant-garde sense.

Cubism itself, despite its unprecedented outward appearance, was a manifestation of the same classicist impulse.³⁷ For its typical subjects are traditional and stereotyped, and treated in a suggestive, non-anecdotal and emotionally neutral way; the accent is on structure and form, both being determined by rationally conceived systems based on geometry; colour is subordinated to line and to composition; handling is impersonal, even anonymous; the effect sought is generally harmonious and contemplative. In the hands of the Salon Cubists, such as Robert Delaunay and Henri Le

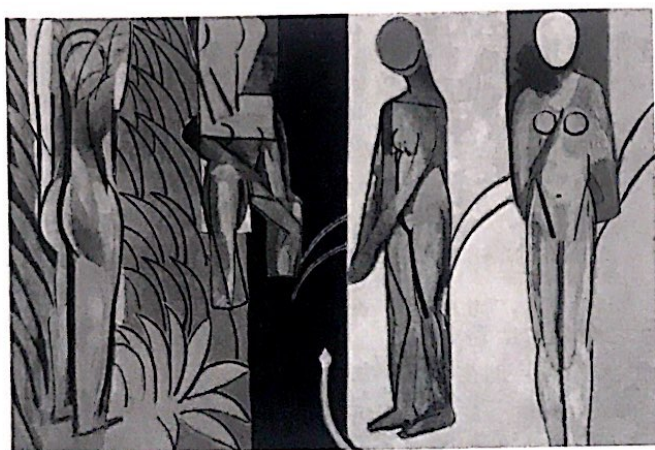


fig. 12 Matisse, 'Bathers by a River', 1916, *Art Institute of Chicago*



fig. 13 Cézanne, 'Bathers', 1900–6, *National Gallery, London*

Fauconnier, the connections with the classical tradition of figure painting were more immediately apparent than in the more hermetic analytical works of Picasso and Braque, and references to antique sculpture or to Renaissance masterpieces were not uncommon. Delaunay, for example, referred to the famous antique group of the 'Three Graces' (fig.14) in 'The City of Paris', painted between 1910 and 1912 (fig.15).

The early defenders of Cubism stressed its opposition to Impressionism, its dependence on Cézanne, and its classical foundations, even while insisting upon its innovative character. In an essay entitled 'Cubisme et Tradition' published in 1911, Jean Metzinger emphasised the 'exemplary discipline' of the Cubist painters, who, he claimed, 'use the simplest, most complete and most logical forms.' 'Their discipline consists in their common determination never to infringe the fundamental laws of Art.'³⁸ The conceptual nature of Cubism led not infrequently to direct comparisons with the art of the past that was felt to possess a similar basis. Thus in 1913 Maurice Raynal (later associated with the Purist movement) contrasted Cubist painting with the 'cunning' illusionism of High Renaissance art, but compared it to the plastic 'logic' of Giotto and the Primitives, and concluded by citing Phidias, who 'did not look for his models among men but in his mind'.³⁹ Braque invoked the same set of assumptions when he wrote:

'Nobility comes from contained emotion.
I love the rule which corrects emotion.'⁴⁰

The language of classical aesthetics was easily appropriated by avant-garde critics and artists who supported abstraction and 'purity' in art. And the magic words 'structured', 'ordered', 'harmonious', 'constant', 'ideal', 'invariable', 'synthetic', 'calm', 'serene', and the like, ring out again and again in essays published after the war, whether written by critics in Paris for an avant-garde periodical such as *L'Esprit Nouveau*, or the less radical pro-'call to order' review *L'Art d'Aujourd'hui*. In Italy similar sentiments were expressed in the pages of *Valori Plastici*, by Carrà in his essays for *L'Ambrosiano*, and by Soffici in such important publications as *Periplo dell'arte. Richiamo all'ordine* published in Florence in 1928. The sheer generality of the principles involved meant that an immense range of styles from the figurative to the purely geometric could be accommodated and understood as representing essentially the same tendency.

Nevertheless, in all the writing of the period the question of the closeness of an artist's relationship to the traditions on which he drew – the issue of being neo- this or neo- that – was an acutely controversial one, as it was bound to be at a time when proximity to the old enemy of academicism induced anxiety and mistrust. For instance, it was in order to resist the current tendency to imitate past styles that Sironi and Funi launched the manifesto 'Contro tutti i ritorni in pittura' in 1920. The 'copies' that were made reflect these tensions. De Chirico, defiant in his claim to be a 'pictor classicus', made copies that were as close as possible to the originals, and earned the contempt of the Surrealists as a result (cat.32). Braque and Gris preferred the less controversial solution of the 'homage' – a free transcription in their own stylistic terms (cats.12,63). The debate is summarised in the simplest terms in an editorial published in 1926 in



fig.14 'Three Graces', Roman copy of a Hellenistic original, Siena Cathedral



fig.15 Delaunay, 'The City of Paris', 1910-12, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris

the middle-of-the-road English review *Drawing and Design*, in which the modern movement is defined as a search 'to establish order and to make the canons of art much more severe.' The author continues:

Its guiding principle may be suggested by the adjective 'classical' – which has nothing to do with the classicism of David or with the resuscitation of the art and history of the Greeks. We should not nowadays attempt heroic canvases of Thermopylae or carve the straight nose and curling lip of Phidias; we aim at being classical in the far deeper sense. The modern ideal . . . is assuming the formal, the exquisite, and passionless quality, which is the true 'classicism'. . . . An artist of the past who was classical in this definition is Raphael. The modern exemplar, we suppose, is Picasso.⁴¹

The reference to Picasso is significant, because the course he steered so adroitly, even in his most overtly neoclassical paintings, between outright imitation and a freely personal interpretation of the past, seemed to many an ideal solution. So much so, indeed, that his new classical paintings quickly became 'classics' in their own right, and an inspiration to many other artists, such as Campigli (cat.13), Laurens (cat.73), Togores (cat.173), and even de Chirico (cat.38). But for certain groups of artists the outward dress of classicism was not easily acceptable in post-Cubist art, and a high degree of formal abstraction was the only valid means of reconciling the avant-garde with the classical. Had not Plato himself offered the perfect justification for an art based on relationships between pure geometric forms? Accordingly Plato was often cited by the Purists when they wished to find unimpeachable support for the rigorous 'purity' of the art they promoted. And it was only by claiming that there was no difference in the degree of plastic purity between Picasso's Cubist and his neoclassical works that Maurice Raynal could defend the new orientation in the work of the artist he admired above all others.⁴²

For sculptors the issue was perhaps especially sensitive, because the authority of the Greco-Roman tradition as the surest antidote to nineteenth-century naturalism and anecdotalism was even greater. Thus Christian Zervos was very careful to emphasise the formal abstraction of Maillol's work, rather than any debt to the outward forms of the antique: 'Above all Maillol sees the continuity of form. . . . There is not one work by him which is not marked by his patient search for architectural structure and geometry. . . . All his statues give the impression of mass, of the search for the beauty of volume. They are inscribed within powerful geometric forms, the square or the pyramid, and their foundations are grand and simple planes.'⁴³

A solution to this delicate problem was provided by the art of the past which, though belonging to the classical tradition, was recognised as primitive. It was a solution with immense appeal because ever since the Romantic period primitivism had been associated with an avant-garde position – with the idea of purity and authenticity and the escape from the supposed decadence and oversophistication of the present. The myth of the purity of the primitive has been the great myth of modern times, and indeed all the classical revivals that have occurred from the time of Winckelmann onwards have been intimately bound up with this ideal, for the return to the classical past is conceived as a return to origins. However, as each generation, through repetition, creates its own fixed

norms, so that what was once new comes to represent the oppressive Establishment, the succeeding generation becomes dissatisfied, demanding a renewal and a greater purity, a return to yet more 'original' forms. Thus David's followers, dubbed 'les Primitifs', demanded a severer, more archaic style. For Winckelmann, who had seen relatively few examples of classical art, Hellenistic art was the ideal, but soon Hellenistic art came to be perceived as decadent and over-sophisticated, and the earlier periods of Greek art seemed infinitely preferable. By the beginning of the twentieth century it was the relative anonymity and abstraction of archaic or fifth-century Greek art that seemed purest of all to the avant-garde: by then the fourth century (let alone the Hellenistic) seemed too sweet, too naturalistic, too individualised. Maillol's strong dislike of Praxiteles, but love for the sculpture of Olympia, was a characteristic position.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed intense archaeological activity, and the boundaries of 'classical art' were stretched in every direction, permitting these major shifts in taste.⁴⁴ There was much interest in provincial forms of classical art because they, like the archaic, were not the hackneyed exemplars of the academics. Picasso's excitement at the exhibition of ancient Iberian art held in Paris in the spring of 1906 was the excitement of someone who had discovered a native classical tradition hitherto unknown and untapped, and therefore uncontaminated by official academic sanction. For Italian artists, such as Martini and Marini, the discovery of Etruscan art provided the same guarantee of authenticity, of inviolate naïveté. In a similar way, there was intense interest in the Trecento and Quattrocento, periods felt to possess a quality of sacred innocence, and a series of critical studies appeared on such artists as Giotto, Uccello and Piero della Francesca.⁴⁵ For de Chirico, Casorati and Severini the research into the 'lost' methods of the old masters was a search for a 'true' technique. For Bernard and Casanovas the direct carving of intractable local stone was synonymous with authenticity. To be a '*primitif classique*' had become the ultimate ideal.⁴⁶

There was yet another way of combating academicism while still retaining the vital link with the classical tradition, and that was to redefine the very nature of classicism itself. A brilliant challenge to the authority of the accepted view was mounted by Friedrich Nietzsche when he published *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1872. Here Nietzsche argued that the 'serenity' claimed by Winckelmann to be at the very heart of Greek art, and which Nietzsche termed the 'Apollonian' ideal, was in reality a sublimation, a necessary antidote to the forces of terror and anarchy – enshrined in the ancient, orgiastic cults dedicated to Dionysos – which threatened at every moment to re-establish their dominion. Apollo, he wrote, is characterised by 'freedom from all extravagant urges' and by 'sapient tranquillity', and radiates 'the full delight, wisdom and beauty of "illusion"'. Dionysos, on the other hand, is associated with 'procreative lust', the 'shattering of individuality', and the principle of pain. The two modes, Nietzsche argued, were antithetical but complementary, and great art resulted only from their reconciliation: 'Developed alongside one another, usually in fierce opposition, each . . . forces the other to more energetic production.' Any art devoid of the Dionysiac 'intoxication' was inevitably decadent and enfeebled.⁴⁷

Nietzsche's influence throughout Europe was enormous: his books were widely translated and numerous studies and digests of his ideas were published. Although his concept of Greek art never displaced that of Winckelmann, it offered a stimulating alternative. Of course, Nietzsche's principles, like Winckelmann's, could be, and were, applied to the classical tradition in its broader sense. An undercurrent of anarchy not order, of anguish not serenity, could be read into certain works by, say, Raphael or Michelangelo or Poussin. Nietzsche had made the psychological interpretation of art a serious possibility. Thus Picasso could say of Cézanne – who was thought of as a 'sublime' artist in 'call to order' circles – 'It's not what an artist *does* that counts, but what he *is*. . . . What forces our interest is Cézanne's anxiety – that's Cézanne's lesson . . . that is the actual drama of the man. The rest is a sham.' Significantly, this is the conclusion to a passage from a monologue which begins: 'Academic training in beauty is a sham. We have been deceived, but so well deceived that we can scarcely get back even to a shadow of the truth. The beauties of the Parthenon, Venuses, nymphs, Narcissuses, are so many lies. Art is not the application of a canon of beauty but what the instinct and the brain can conceive beyond any canon.'⁴⁸

In this exhibition 'Nietzschean' classicism is represented above all in certain works by de Chirico and Savinio, Picasso and Masson. Even though de Chirico was in Milan in the spring of 1910 just at the moment when the Futurist painters issued two important manifestos, he never responded positively to Futurism. Suspicious of the notion of progress, deeply ambivalent about modernity and the machine age, his attitude to the relationship of the past and the present was profoundly affected by his reading of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, apparently undertaken while he was studying in Munich in 1906–10. De Chirico's early metaphysical paintings, executed in Paris from 1911 to 1915 (cats.30,31) present an intentionally disorienting view of classical sculpture and Renaissance buildings and piazzas through the disturbing, inexplicable confrontations he has engineered with stations, trains, factory chimneys, and so forth, through the illogical, discontinuous spaces in which they have been placed, and through the incompatible suggestions of time. The sacred laws of unity have been broken one by one. The air of enigma, nostalgia and profound malaise, which is heightened by a deadpan, pseudo-illusionistic style hovering indefinitely somewhere among the academic, the naïve and the popular-illustrational, had no parallel in the various vanguard forms of classicism practised in Paris at the period, and it had no immediate repercussions there. However, it was recognised immediately by Apollinaire as a highly original redefinition of the classical: 'To depict the fateful character of modern things, this artist relies on the most modern device: surprise,' he wrote in March 1914,⁴⁹ adding a few months later that de Chirico's art 'is more severe, more subtle, more classical, and at the same time much newer than Chagall's.'⁵⁰ Irony and ambiguity also lie at the core of many of de Chirico's post-war paintings, just as they lie at the core of Savinio's work, for there seems to be an unbridgeable gap between the realities and the claims of both the past and the present. Thus in de Chirico's 'Gladiators' (cat.39) the ostensibly violent hand-to-hand battle is conducted in a kind of trance, and realised, inappropriately, in the sensual, colourist style employed by Renoir in his

paintings of peacefully basking nudes. The tension created is the result of this dichotomy, this marriage of antithetical impulses.

Another committed Nietzschean was André Masson. Disorder and insanity is the message of his work, and we know from him that these, not order and reason, were the qualities he found in the work of Poussin, and of the other 'classics' he admired. (See cats.113,114.) In the neoclassical work of Picasso intimations of dislocation and unreason are almost invariably present to a greater or lesser degree – in the inconsistencies of style, in the lack of finish, in the element of parody, in the sense of the grotesque, in the fluctuations of mood, as well as in the regular forays into the imagery of orgy and pain. Picasso had apparently first encountered Nietzsche's writings in Barcelona at the turn of the century, but it is likely that de Chirico's pre-war metaphysical paintings had some impact on him after the war. For there are similarities between his vision of brooding, classically draped female figures, trapped in a limbo between reality and art, life and death, and de Chirico's strangely animated classical statues. As in de Chirico's work, so in Picasso's, malaise results from the paradoxical blend of a sense of crisis with an image of lethargy. There is, however, no precedent in de Chirico for the savage intensity of the Tate Gallery's 'Three Dancers' (fig.16). This is perhaps the supreme statement of the Nietzschean view of tragic drama, for its composition is derived straight from that icon of 'Apollonian' harmony, the 'Three Graces' (fig.14), but its whole message is one of Dionysiac frenzy. The painting found a natural home in the pages of *La Révolution Surréaliste*, for it was only classicism with a Dionysiac dimension that could have any appeal to the Surrealist poets and painters.⁵¹

Whatever the approach, the most important gain for an artist from his allusions – distant or close – to the art of the past was greater depth and range of expression. The sources are intended to act like metaphors – suggestions the spectator must respond to and meditate upon if the full expressive meaning of the work is to be grasped. This system of allusion, like poetic metaphor, had the immense advantage of obviating the need for narrative subject matter – the dreaded 'literary' content of nineteenth-century *pompier* or realist art. The work suggested, but it did not describe or tell. Its ideal iconic status was secure. And even though the same conventionalised subjects are repeated again and again, variety is guaranteed by the choice of different models for different occasions. Within the classical tradition itself – whatever period, whichever great artist, we choose as our 'norm' – there is great variety and abundance. No coherent set of adjectives can ever adequately define it. A great achievement of the avant-garde classicists was to have restored to classicism the inexhaustible creative variety, the inherent ambiguity, that had been drained out of it over the years as it was first appropriated, then codified, by academic artists.



fig.16 Picasso, 'Three Dancers', 1925, Tate Gallery

NOTES

Author's note

Unless English-language editions are cited, the translations are my own. For more detailed discussion of the works of art in the exhibition, the reader is referred to the main part of the catalogue. Many of the issues touched on in the Introduction are explored in detail in the essays published in the enlarged version of the catalogue.

- 1 Picasso did not, however, cease to paint Cubist pictures: the two modes coexisted from 1917 to the mid-1920s. See 'Studies' (cat. 137) where both are present simultaneously.
- 2 'Portrait of Jeanne' (cat. 152) and 'Maternity' were both exhibited in Paris in 1916, but had no immediate sequel in Severini's work. For the next four years he practised a form of synthetic Cubism similar to that of Gris. It was only in the 1920s that he once again used figurative styles.
- 3 For a wide-ranging survey of the return to figuration in art in Europe, Scandinavia and America, see *Les Réalismes, 1919-1939*, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1980-81.
- 4 Two important recent books which address the 'call to order' movement in France are Christopher Green, *Cubism and its Enemies. Modern Movements and Reaction in French Art, 1916-1928*, London, 1987, and Kenneth Silver, *Esprit de Corps. The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War 1914-1925*, London, 1989. See also Malcolm Gee, *Dealers, Critics and Collectors of Modern Painting: Aspects of the Parisian Art Market, between 1910 and 1930*, PhD dissertation, University of London, 1977. For the situation in Italy, see Rossana Bossaglia, *Il Novecento Italiano: Storia, documenti, iconografia*, Milan, 1979, and Massimo Carrà, *Gli anni del ritorno all'ordine*, Milan, 1978.
- 5 General histories of twentieth-century art have given much less space to the movement than to, say, Fauvism or Futurism. It is only in the last decade that Picasso's classical works of 1917 onwards have been studied seriously; in earlier monographs they have often been passed over rapidly and unsympathetically. The case of de Chirico is similar, for the reassessment of his work of the 1920s has been conducted mainly during the last ten years. (See, *inter al.*, *De Chirico - Gli anni venti*, Palazzo Reale, Milan, 1987.)
- 6 See Silver, *op. cit.*, for a wealth of quotations from contemporary critics, journalists and political figures.
- 7 Michael Greenhalgh, *The Classical Tradition in Art*, London, 1978, p. 11. This useful survey terminates, however, with Ingres.
- 8 Except in those instances where artists were called upon to illustrate classical texts, references to the characters of Greco-Roman mythology were usually highly generalised: e.g. Maillol's 'Flora' (cat. 89) or 'Venus with a Necklace' (cat. 94), and Manolo's 'Bacchante' (cat. 104). Artists who, like Picasso, de Chirico and Savinio, made more pointed mythological allusions in their paintings, tended to reinterpret the stories in an autobiographically directed way. Bourdelle was rather unusual in his predilection for subjects from mythology.
- 9 Pierre Camo, *Aristide Maillol et son œuvre*, Paris, 1926, p. 10.
- 10 See Jean Cocteau, *Le Rappel à l'ordre*, Paris, 1926.
- 11 Thus the Purist periodical *L'Esprit Nouveau* (Paris, 1920-25) carried major articles on Fouquet, Poussin, Ingres, Corot and Seurat. See C. Green, *op. cit.*, ch. 12, 'Tradition and the progress of styles', for a discussion of the contemporary concern with the French tradition. The critic Waldemar George was among those to lay special stress on the 'Frenchness' of modern French art.
- 12 On Italian art during the wartime and post-war period see, in particular, Emily Braun (ed.), *Italian Art in the 20th Century. Painting and Sculpture 1900-1988*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1989; *Realismo Magico: pittura e scultura in Italia 1919-1925*, Galleria dello Scudo, Verona, 1988-9; Joan M. Lukach, 'De Chirico and Italian Art Theory, 1915-1920', *De Chirico*, Tate Gallery, London, 1982, pp. 35-54.
- 13 On art in Catalonia, and Noucentisme in particular, see *Homage to Barcelona. The City and its Art 1888-1936*, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1986. The fact that Maillol was a Catalan, Cézanne a native of Provence, and Renoir had settled in the south of France, contributed to the esteem in which they were held.
- 14 The systematic archaeological investigation of Roman Barcelona, under the auspices of Institut d'Estudis Catalans, got under way during the Noucentista period. See Josep Guitart, 'The rediscovery of ancient Barcelona', in *Homage to Barcelona*, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-13.
- 15 See Eugeni d'Ors's influential novel *La ben plantada*, Barcelona, 1912, where this concept is developed in the person of the heroine, Teresa.
- 16 Further editions were published in 1913 and 1920.
- 17 For example, M. Denis, 'Cézanne', *L'Occident*, September 1907; reprinted in *Théories (1890-1910): Du symbolisme et de Gauguin vers un nouvel ordre classique*, Paris, 1912.
- Ardengo Soffici, 'Paul Cézanne', *La Voce*, June 1908; reprinted in *Scoperte e massacri*, Florence, 1919. Eugeni d'Ors, *Paul Cézanne*, Paris, 1930. These are, however, the merest sample: many hundreds of essays on modern art written by critics and artists from c. 1905 to 1930 allude to Cézanne in glowing terms. In Italy there was a tendency to emphasise the Italian sources of his art: e.g. M. Tinti, 'Italianismo de Cézanne', *Pinacotheca*, 1929.
- 18 'Georges Braque', preface to *Catalogue de l'Exposition Braque*, Galerie Kahnweiler, Paris, November 1908. Quoted from L.C. Breunig (ed.), *Apollinaire on Art: Essays and Reviews 1902-1918*, London, 1972, p. 51.
- 19 'Le Naturalisme au Salon', *Le Voltaire*, 18-22 June 1880. Quoted from Emile Zola, *Mon Salon, Manet, Ecris sur l'Art*, ed. A. Ehrard, Paris, 1970, pp. 337-8.
- 20 See Joel Isaacson, *The Crisis of Impressionism (1878-1882)*, Museum of Art, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1980.
- 21 For instance, in 'Sunday Afternoon at the Island of the Grande Jatte' (1884-6; Art Institute, Chicago), Seurat drew on, and reconciled, a multiplicity of sources, including Egyptian art, the Parthenon frieze, and folk or popular illustrations. Gauguin took with him to Tahiti a mixed collection of reference photographs, on which he relied in his figure paintings: these included reproductions of Egyptian reliefs, Buddhist temple reliefs and Greek sculpture. Both were able to see underlying points of contact, formal and thematic, between these disparate sources. In the work of Picasso a similar procedure often occurs: in 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon', for instance (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York), the sources include Egyptian, Ancient Greek, Iberian and tribal art, El Greco, Ingres and Cézanne.
- 22 See Albert Boime, *The Academy and French Painting in the Nineteenth Century*, Oxford, 1971, for a thorough account of standard academic training.
- 23 See 'Sarah Stein's Notes', 1908, published in Jack D. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 41-6. Lipchitz describes his training at the Académie Julian in Paris in 1909, pointing out that there was in fact little difference from the training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. (See Jacques Lipchitz with H.H. Arnason, *My Life in Sculpture*, London, 1972, pp. 3-4.)
- 24 *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst*, Dresden, 1755. Quoted from *Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850. Sources and Documents*, ed. L. Eitner, vol. I, London, 1971, pp. 11, and 1. Eitner uses Henry Fuseli's translation, published in London in 1765.

- ²⁵ 'André Derain', *Album-Catalogue de l'Exposition André Derain*, Galerie Paul Guillaume, Paris, October 1916. Quoted from *Apollinaire on Art*, op. cit., p.444. The anti-German sentiments of the essay are in part explained by the fact that it was written in the middle of the war. However, Apollinaire had already given a chauvinist account of the 'Frenchness' of modern French art in 'The New Painting: Art Notes', *Les Soirées de Paris*, April–May 1912. (Included in *Apollinaire on Art*, pp.222–5.)
- ²⁶ The same kind of pressure was felt in the political sphere. Of the major Italian cities only Milan perhaps thrived on its modernity. It became a centre and focus of avant-garde activity in the arts, as it did of industrial and economic expansion, and of political change.
- ²⁷ Filippo T. Marinetti, 'Le Futurisme', *Le Figaro*, 20 February 1909. Quoted from: U. Apollonio (ed.), *Futurist Manifestos*, New York, 1973, p. 23. See Ester Coen, 'The violent urge towards modernity: Futurism and the international avant-garde', in *Italian Art in the Twentieth Century*, op. cit., pp.49–56.
- ²⁸ The original of 'Homage to Rembrandt . . .' was destroyed, but was reproduced in *Cannibale*, 25 April 1920. Duchamp's 'L.H.O.O.Q.' was reproduced in 391, no. 12, March 1920. For a full account of Parisian Dada, see Michel Sanouillet's splendidly detailed *Dada à Paris*, Paris, 1965.
- ²⁹ 'André Derain', op. cit., p.445. My italics.
- ³⁰ 'Promenade au Salon d'Automne', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1905, vol.II, p.478.
- ³¹ See M. Greenhalgh, op. cit., pp.225–33, for a useful summary of contemporary reactions to Ingres.
- ³² 'Le Salon d'Automne de 1905', *L'Ermitage*, 15 November 1905. Quoted from Maurice Denis, *Du Symbolisme au Classicisme. Théories*, ed. O. Revault d'Allonnes, Paris, 1964, pp. 106, 108. The Douanier Rousseau was also represented in the Salon.
- ³³ See 'Cubism', *L'Intermédiaire des chercheurs et des curieux*, 10 October 1912. Reproduced in *Apollinaire on Art*, op. cit., pp.256–8. Apollinaire's admiration for Ingres is reflected in his review for *L'Intransigeant* of the *Exposition Ingres* at the Galeries Georges Petit, Paris, April–May 1911 (ibid, pp.155–7.)
- ³⁴ 'Aristide Maillol', *L'Occident*, November 1905. Quoted from M. Denis, *Du Symbolisme au Classicisme*, op. cit., p.140.
- ³⁵ Bourdelle exhibited his 'Head of Apollo' (1900) at the Galerie Hébrard, Paris, in 1905. Rodin, recognising its classical sobriety and simplicity, is said to have commented, 'Bourdelle, you are leaving me.'
- ³⁶ Quoted from J. D. Flam, *Matisse on Art*, op. cit., p.38. The essay was originally published in *La Grande Revue*, 25 December 1908.
- ³⁷ The fact that Cubism could be interpreted in this way made it acceptable to the stylistically more conservative Noucentista critics and painters. See the essay by Robert Lubar in the expanded version of this catalogue.
- ³⁸ Originally published in *Paris-Journal*, 16 August 1911. Excerpted in and quoted from Edward Fry, *Cubism*, London, 1966, p.66. This book is a very useful source of early critical texts on Cubism.
- ³⁹ 'Qu'est-ce que . . . le "Cubisme"?', *Comœdia illustré*, 20 December 1913. Quoted from E. Fry, op. cit., pp.128–30. See also the other texts by Raynal excerpted by Fry.
- ⁴⁰ 'Pensées et réflexions sur la peinture', *Nord-Sud*, December 1917. Quoted from E. Fry, op. cit., p. 148.
- ⁴¹ Unsigned editorial, 'The Classical Tradition in Modern Art', *Drawing and Design*, New Series, vol.I, no. 5, November 1926, p. 145.
- ⁴² See Raynal's review of the *Exposition Picasso* at the Galerie Paul Rosenberg, in *L'Esprit Nouveau*, no.9, June 1921, n.p.
- ⁴³ 'Aristide Maillol', *L'Art d'aujourd'hui*, 1925, pp.34–5. Moreover, those who emphasised Maillol's links with the classical tradition were careful to stress that the similarities were not the consequence of 'borrowing', but of a 'natural' predisposition. (See Pierre Camo, op. cit., and Waldemar George, 'Les Terre-cuites de Maillol', *L'Amour de l'Art*, 1923, pp.695–700.)
- ⁴⁴ See Gerhart Rodenwaldt, *Die Kunst der Antike. (Hellas und Rom)*, Berlin, 1927, for a well illustrated and widely available handbook of the period. The first half, devoted to Greece, opens with a section on Cretan and Mycenaean art and architecture; the second half, devoted to Italy, opens with the Etruscans.
- ⁴⁵ See, for instance, Carlo Carrà, 'Parlata su Giotto', *La Voce*, 31 March 1916, and Giotto, Rome, 1924; Carlo Carrà, 'Paolo Uccello, costruttore', *La Voce*, 30 September 1916; Roberto Longhi, 'Piero della Francesca e lo sviluppo della pittura veneziana', *L'Arte*, 1914, and *Piero della Francesca*, Milan, 1927; Carlo Carrà, 'Piero della Francesca', *L'Ambrosiano*, 5 September 1927. Significantly, Cesare Gnudi's major monograph on Giotto (Milan, 1959) is dedicated to Morandi.
- ⁴⁶ The phrase is Maurice Denis's: 'Aristide Maillol', 1905, op. cit., p.149. The general interest in 'primitive' art extended both to prehistoric art and tribal art. Art reviews such as *L'Esprit Nouveau* (1920–25) and *Cahiers d'Art* (founded in 1926) carried articles and illustrations of this material, which was often implicitly, or explicitly (especially in *L'Esprit Nouveau*), compared with contemporary art. The prehistoric 'Venus of Lespugue' (discovered in 1922) and Cycladic figurines had special appeal at this time of return to the 'authentic traditions of art', as the most ancient sculptures of all – the original 'classical' source.
- ⁴⁷ *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik*, Leipzig, 1872. Quoted from *The Birth of Tragedy, and the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Francis Golffing, New York, 1956, *passim*.
- ⁴⁸ Christian Zervos, 'Conversation avec Picasso', *Cahiers d'Art*, 1935. Quoted from Dore Ashton, *Picasso on Art: A Selection of Views*, London, 1972, p.11. The text, admittedly, postdates works in this exhibition. However, it is clear from 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' (1907; Museum of Modern Art, New York), where the composition is closely related to that of Cézanne's late 'Bather' compositions, that Picasso was alive to a disturbing, expressive element in Cézanne's work at an early date.
- ⁴⁹ 'The 30th Salon des Indépendants', *Les Soirées de Paris*, 15 March 1914. Quoted from *Apollinaire on Art*, op. cit., p.366.
- ⁵⁰ 'New Painters', *Paris-Journal*, 14 July 1914. Quoted from *Apollinaire on Art*, op. cit., p.422.
- ⁵¹ *La Révolution Surréaliste*, no.4, 15 July 1925, p.17.

Campigli's career was divided into two distinct phases. The first came in the early 1920s when, living in Paris, he struggled to assimilate the formal lessons of late Cubism. The second began in the late 1920s when, with joy and a certain sense of relief, he rediscovered the ancient art of his native Italy. Both phases were dominated by a quest for classicism, or rather, classicisms: first, of order and discipline in pictorial structure, and secondly, of a return to the cultural traditions of Italy. As such, they illustrate different but related aspects of the 'return to order'.

Campigli grew up in the fast-expanding industrial city of Milan, and while still a teenager he sought out the company of Futurist painters such as Boccioni and Carrà, and contributed essays and poems to avant-garde literary reviews. During the war he fought at the front, and spent a year as a prisoner of war in Hungary. On returning to Italy he was undecided as to what career to follow, but accepted the post of French correspondent for the Milanese newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera*, and moved to Paris in 1919.

It was in Paris that Campigli decided to become a painter. Writing articles by night and painting by day, he led a life of relative poverty for many years. He was so determined to succeed, and to do so by his own efforts, that he deliberately avoided other artists while he set about the task of teaching himself how to paint. He was, however, very much aware of the new trends in contemporary art. As he later recalled, 'crystalline' or Purist-inspired Cubism dominated the galleries, and the leading critics of the day spoke of the importance of order, harmony and rules, condemning anything that smacked of narrative or sentiment. The great influences on him at this time were Seurat, Picasso in his Blue, Rose and neo-classical phases, and, above all, Léger. His Italian contemporaries also had an impact on his work: in his reminiscences of these years, Campigli recalled that the cylinder-like figures of his early paintings were inspired not only by Léger but also by Carrà – in particular, Carrà's painting 'The Drunken Gentleman' (cat. 16), a work Campigli would have seen reproduced in the leading

art magazine associated with the 'return to order' in Italy, *Valori Plastici*.

Late Cubism and the renewed interest in 'classical' values of order and harmony in art were not the only influences on Campigli in these years. After his arrival in Paris, he made regular visits to the collections of the Louvre, and was particularly drawn to its holdings of Ancient Egyptian art. His passion for antique art strengthened his conviction that, however unfashionable it might be, he had to retain the human figure, with all its emotional and psychological associations, and resist the tendency towards geometric abstraction in late Cubism and Purism.

Campigli gradually became known by contributing to the two *Novecento Italiano* exhibitions held in Milan in 1926 and 1929, and through a number of shows of Italian artists working in Paris. The first of these included paintings by de Chirico, Savinio, de Pisis, Paresce, Severini and Mario Tozzi, and was held in Paris in 1928. The same year Campigli radically changed the style of his work. He returned to Italy, and while in Rome he visited the collection of Etruscan art at the Valle Giulia museum. Just when artists such as Martini and Marini were succumbing to the spell of this ancient Italian art, Campigli too became a devotee of what became known as the 'maniera etrusca'. His paintings took on a new, frank archaicism, rich in symbolic and emotional significance, and he rejected all his earlier work as being merely experimental.

Campigli's 'Etruscan' style proved extremely popular. An exhibition of his new work held at the Galerie Jeanne Bucher in Paris in 1929 was sold out, and a number of paintings passed into important public and private collections. Some critics, however, were dismayed by the 'Italianness' of his new works. Writing in *Cahiers d'Art* in 1931, Christian Zervos recognised Campigli's success but could not help condemning the overt archaicism of his work which he felt was at best incidental, and at worst a distraction from the 'pure' values of painting:

I once reproached Campigli for being too attached to the tradition of his country



The artist in his studio in Paris in the early 1920s

and particularly to the mural paintings of the Etruscans. But Campigli answered that it was merely the spirit of antiquity which entered his work and imposed on him a simplicity of form and elementary feelings. The artist forgets that this simplicity can be found equally in the spirit of truly modern art. . . . This justification by the painter is thus only a pretext . . .

Whatever the reservations of certain Parisian critics concerned to defend the legacy of Cubism, Campigli gained an international reputation through one-man shows, in Italy and other countries, achieving for himself a measure of financial security.

In common with other artists of his generation, Campigli became interested in promoting mural painting as a new, popular form of art. He signed Sironi's 'Manifesto della pittura murale', and executed a mural entitled 'Mothers, Workers and Peasants' for the fifth Triennale in Milan in 1933. His imagery became indebted increasingly to Pompeian and Byzantine, as well as Etruscan, sources, and in the early 1930s his work had a hieratic, sometimes even monumental, quality. However, these allusions to the antique world were always overlaid by a

private mythology. He later wrote: 'In every detail of my paintings I can trace the source back to my childhood. Everything is an escape from present reality. My reaching after archaicism in general and museum art, far from being an aesthetic choice, answers an emotional need' (*Massimo Campigli*, Venice, 1955).

During the 1930s, and again after the war, Campigli divided his time between Italy and France. He continued to focus in his paintings on archetypal images of women with hour-glass figures and faces inspired by Etruscan and Egyptian art, and his paintings acquired a new serenity and childlike atmosphere.

13 Woman with Folded Arms

1924

Oil on canvas, 55 × 46

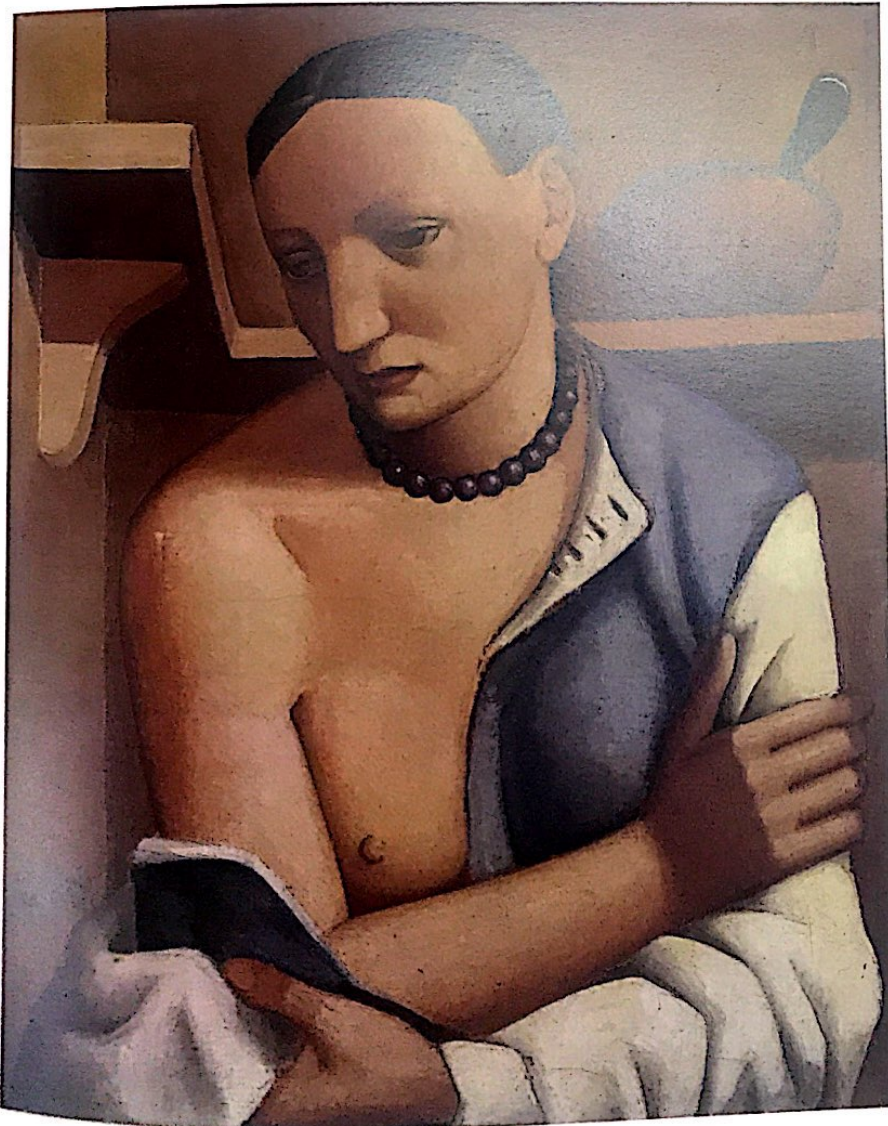
Museo Civico di Torino, Turin

This painting reveals many of the conflicting influences at work on Campigli during the early and mid-1920s, which he later regarded as the period of his apprenticeship. The pink tonality of the work and its melancholic atmosphere recall Picasso in his Rose period, while the clearly defined shapes and frontal composition show the influence of Purism and the cult of order and discipline in Parisian post-war art. A similar blend of references is found in the image of the seated woman. Her hair-style, red lips and dress are modern, yet she sits as immobile and heavy-limbed as a classical statue, and appears lost in thought. As he later wrote, his works of the 1920s show a mixture of influences, but underlying them all were echoes of the art of the ancient world he saw on his frequent visits to the Louvre:

There was something of Léger, metaphysical Carrà, of Egypt and finally of classical art; of Cubism, there was not much at all, even though I thought I was working very much in a late Cubist manner. In fact, I was then quite alone, quite cut-off. What happened was this: Cubism had brought me to the museums to see Egyptian and Greek art; but once there, I forgot Cubism, and I returned to my old ideas, and I found myself like an ancient and archaic artist, a-social and in love with the imprisoned women-idols. (*Massimo Campigli*, Venice, 1955)

Campigli later tended to stress his debt in this period to French rather than Italian art, but working as a correspondent for a major Italian newspaper in the early 1920s, he was firmly in touch with developments at home. His modern treatment of traditional themes was particularly characteristic of the *Novecento* group in Milan (this painting was first shown in the *Novecento Italiano* exhibition of 1926). The blurring of the distinction between the ancient and modern (the woman's necklace, for example, could be either), the framing of the figure within a shallow architectural space, and its air of timeless reverie, find echoes in the works of artists such as Funi and Sironi; and the bowl on the shelf above the figure's shoulder was also a favourite motif of *Novecento* artists, suggesting a continuity between ancient and modern times.

13



14 **The Seamstresses** 1925

Oil on canvas, 161 × 96.5

Hermitage Museum, Leningrad

Pierre Courthion, a French critic and one of Campigli's earliest admirers, recalled seeing in Campigli's studio in rue d'Alésia in Paris paintings of 'dress makers wearing corsets shaped like hour-glasses, strangely schematised, which recalled, simultaneously, Léger, Giotto and Chaldean art'. He might have added as further points of reference Seurat's pictures of corseted women (in which the fleshiness of the female forms is contrasted with the geometry of the composition), and the repetition of the theme of pairs of figures in the work of Picasso in the early 1920s.

'The Seamstresses' is one of many paintings by Campigli featuring two women, often in undergarments and engaged in some domestic activity. The intimacy of the scene contrasts with the balance and symmetry of the composition, and had a personal significance for the artist. In his later autobiographical writings he recorded that as a child he had been surrounded entirely by women, and that the hour-glass corset which recurs obsessively in his work was for him a symbol of femininity. In the 1920s, however, Campigli emphasised the formal qualities of his paintings. After the first exhibition by Italian artists resident in Paris, a similar work by Campigli showing a pair of corseted women playing guitars was illustrated in *L'Amour de l'Art* in 1928, and Campigli was quoted as saying:

The design and composition of the picture is the part of the work which gives me the greatest satisfaction. I also have a strong interest in what is represented: these imaginary women have to be expressive through their shapes, their positions, their attributes. They are images, and hence to be depicted need clarity and clean contours. To find the balance between the geometric and the human . . . that's the problem.





15

15 Two Sisters 1928–9

Oil on canvas, 53 × 64

Gian Ferrari, Milan

A turning point in Campigli's career came with his discovery of Etruscan art at the museum of the Valle Giulia in Rome in 1928. He abandoned his former preoccupation with the geometry and structure of his paintings, and adopted an archaic style and a subject matter rich in childhood memories and emotions.

Campigli had always loved visiting museums, which he believed offered a line of communication to other people and other times. In 1931 he said of himself, 'Campigli loves museums and necropolises. Is he attracted to them for reasons of art? Or by that most contemporary of torments, a need to escape? Campigli loves games, dreams and disguises. To be elsewhere, to be something else – that is his dream' (*Massimo Campigli*, Milan, 1931). However, it was the domestic, small-scale intimacy of the Etruscan objects at the Valle Giulia that appealed most to his imagination, in part because of the parallels he sensed between this simple ancient culture and the world of his childhood. 'I loved this small-scale, warm humanity that made you smile,' he later wrote, and 'envied the happy sleep of its sarcophagi, and the terracotta odalisques, and their representations of death. A pagan happiness entered my pictures, both in the spirit of the subject matter, and in the atmosphere of the work as a whole which became more free and lyrical' (*Massimo Campigli*, Venice, 1955).

Painted shortly after Campigli's discovery of Etruscan art, 'Two Sisters' marks his transition from a modern Parisian style to his later full-blown archaic and hieratic style. The figures appear to be portraits of living, modern women. Yet the treatment of their hair, the wide-open eyes, recalling Roman funerary portraits of the second century, and the painting's rough textures and faded tones, strongly suggest an archaic influence. This work has an intimate and personal atmosphere, typical of much of Campigli's work. In the following years, however, he became engrossed in mural art and adopted a monumental style, inspired by Rome and Byzantium.

136 Seated Woman 1920

Oil on canvas, 92 × 65

Musée Picasso, Paris

This was painted in Paris in the autumn of 1920 after Picasso's return from Juan-les-Pins. It appears to originate in several sketches he made there of Olga resting or reading in an armchair, so that although it has the monumentality of the antique, it has also a domestic and contemporary context – as the chair reminds us.

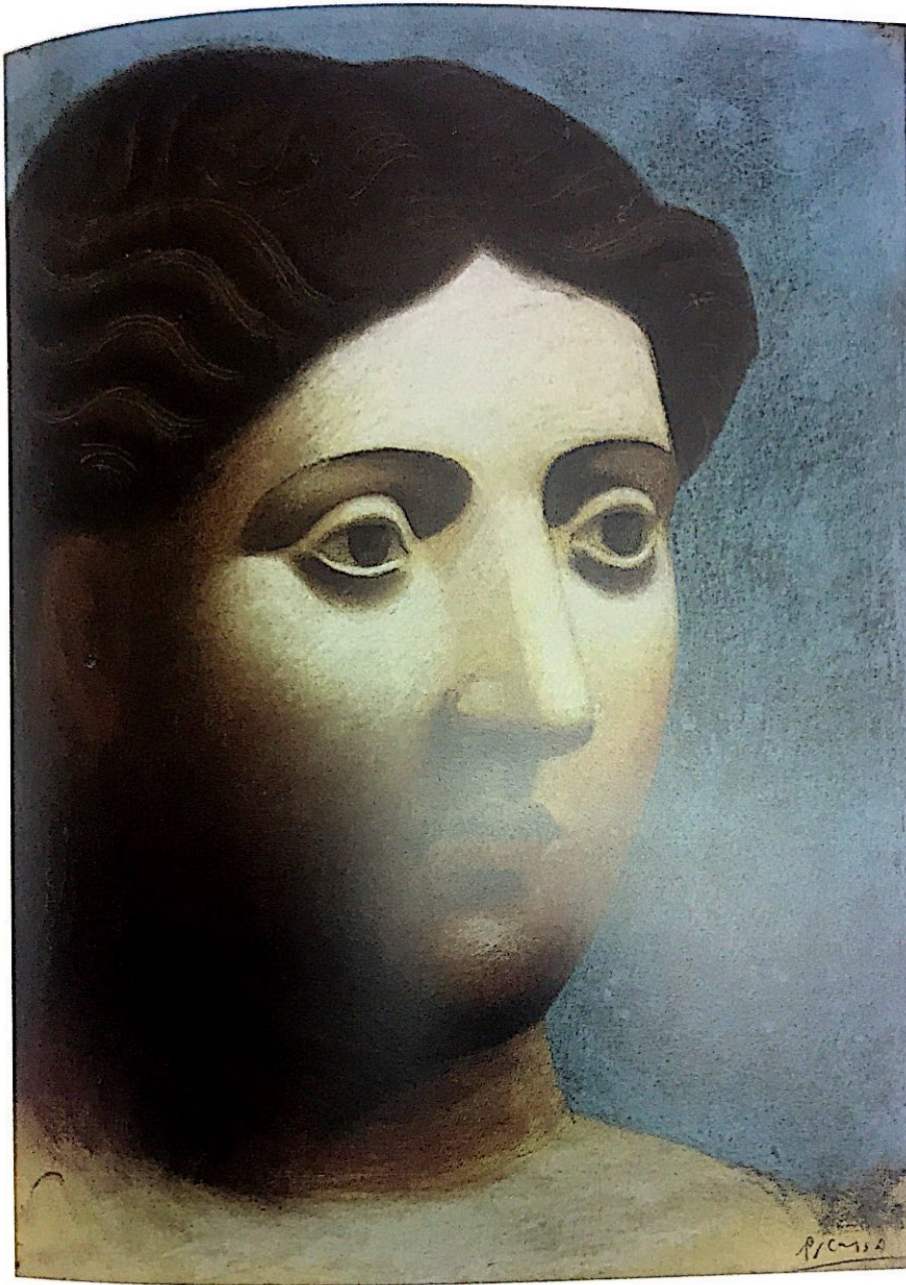
The motif of the woman seated in an armchair was one Picasso used again and again in the 1920s and 1930s. He relished its intrinsic simplicity and sheer commonness, because those qualities guaranteed him complete freedom to explore the expressive possibilities of the great range of styles he chose to use at different moments. Here, even though the pose is casual, not hieratic, it seems likely that Picasso was drawing on archaic sculpture, or provincial forms of Greco-Roman sculpture, which lack the grace, naturalism and sophistication usually associated with classical art. (The Archaeological Museum in Madrid has substantial collections of these 'rustic' or 'primitive' forms.) Moreover 'Seated Woman' is akin to paintings done in 1906 after Picasso's return from Gósol when he was under the direct influence of Iberian sculpture, for it too is wilfully blocky, rough and primitive in appearance.

'Seated Woman' is sombre and gloomy in mood, for Picasso has done everything to dramatise the deep shadows from which the figure emerges. The hot pinks and the whites are laid over layers of grey-black, so that the painting is unified by the darks rather than the lights. Although nothing is happening we cannot help but associate the figure with tragedy, and thus with classical sources which depict death or mourning. We could compare her, for instance, with statues of grieving women of the so-called 'Penelope' type, or with the heavily draped figure of the mourning Agamemnon in the fresco depicting the 'Sacrifice of Iphigenia' in the Archaeological Museum in Naples. Where Renoir saw only joy in the classical world, Picasso as often as not saw tragedy.



138 Head of a Woman 1921

Pastel on paper, 63.5 × 48
Collection Beyeler, Basle



This powerful work was one of a group of large pastel drawings Picasso made in Fontainebleau in the summer of 1921. They are all closely connected to the great painting 'Three Women at the Spring' (Museum of Modern Art, New York), for which he made numerous preparatory sketches and a full-sized oil and sanguine cartoon (Musée Picasso, Paris). This one relates to the standing figure on the left, but, like the other pastels, looks like a postscript rather than a study. Because of the difference of medium, the pastels are more sensual and more refined in effect than the painting itself, which is freely and boldly painted, and gives the illusion of a roughly carved, even unfinished, stone relief or a damaged fresco.

All these works in pastel and oil are neoclassical: the volumes of the head are simplified and idealised; the nose and forehead are continuous; the hair is arranged in the traditional Greek manner; the eyes stare blankly; the expression is impassive. In general terms Picasso refers to Greek sculpture: among the surviving academic drawings after plaster casts that he made as a boy are two views of the archetypal classical eye and brow, and a copy of the Venus de Milo facing in the same direction as this pastel. He also refers to the bold simplifications of form and tone in Pompeian frescoes. Simultaneously, however, he acknowledges the neoclassical tradition from Poussin to Puvis de Chavannes, as if to insist on its living continuity from its origins to the present. 'Head of a Woman' also refers back to his own primitivist-classicist paintings done in late 1906 – so that his earlier work is considered as another stage in that tradition. It is particularly close to the head in the 'Portrait of Gertrude Stein', which Picasso completed after his return from Gósol (Metropolitan Museum, New York).

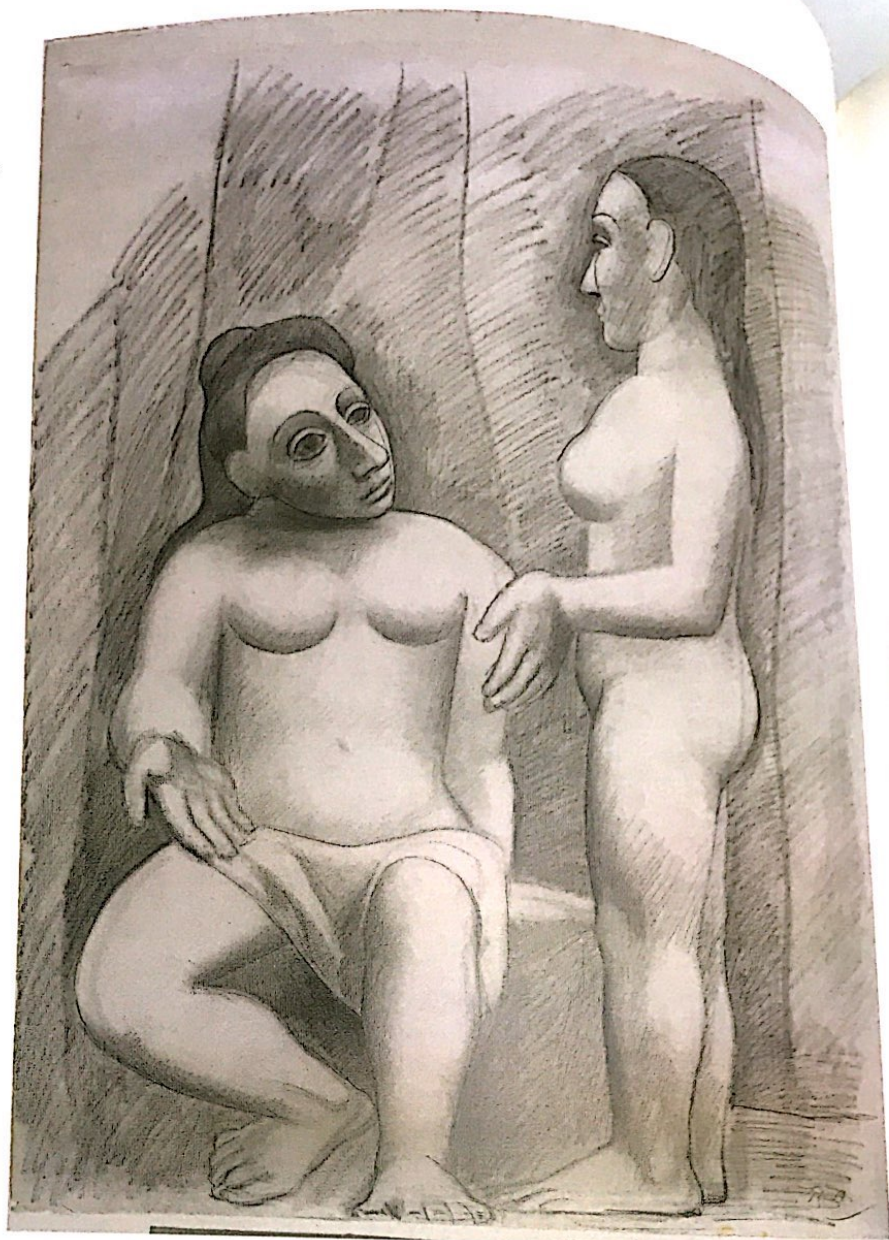
PABLO PICASSO

**129 Seated Nude and Standing
Nude 1906**

Charcoal on paper, 63.6 × 47.6
*Philadelphia Museum of Art, The
Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection*

The precise date of this drawing is uncertain, although historians are agreed that it was done between the autumn or winter of 1906, when Picasso painted 'Two Nudes' (cat. 128), and the spring of 1907, when he began work on 'Les Femmes d'Alger' (O.J. Museum of Modern Art, New York). There are many related preparatory sketches for the drawing, which is quite as finished and masterly as any of the contemporary oils.

The drawing epitomises Picasso's response to the exhibition of ancient Iberian sculpture excavated from Osuna in southern Spain, which was held in the Louvre in the spring of 1906. (In March 1907 Picasso bought two Iberian stone heads which, unknown to him, had been stolen from the Louvre.) From the Iberian carvings he derived the large, heavy-lidded eyes, the strongly marked brows, the long ears, and the inscrutable, mask-like cast of the features. But, to judge from the hieratic pose of the standing figure and the position of the bent arms of both figures, he was looking just as attentively at archaic Greek sculpture. For it was primitive, not sophisticated, forms of classicism that attracted him at this period, when he wanted to emulate the purity, anonymity and iconic power of great classical art, but to avoid academic naturalism and anecdote at all costs.



129

130 The Painter and his Model

1914

Oil and crayon on linen, 58 × 56
Musée Picasso, Paris

Although painted on a linen drying-up cloth (the red borders are still visible under the white priming), and although very modest in size, unfinished, not catalogued by Zervos, and not published until several years after Picasso's death, 'The Painter and his Model' is historically most important. For it was probably the first naturalistic painting Picasso had made since 1906, and it therefore anticipates the return to classicism of 1917 onwards.

Picasso had gone to Avignon, where the picture was painted, in June 1914, and he returned to Paris in late October or early

November. His companion was Eva Gouel, and the picture has been interpreted as a kind of private double portrait, as well as an essay on a traditional theme, prevalent in French art at least since the time of David. In its fragile delicacy, and in the subject of a naked girl observed by a man, it recalls Picasso's Harlequin pictures of 1905, such as 'The Harlequin's Family' (private collection). But its immediate origins lay in a series of line drawings Picasso made in

Avignon of a seated man, some of which are in a highly abstracted, synthetic Cubist style. Other exquisite naturalistic drawings Picasso made in Avignon were of fruit or biscuits on comports or plates, and the table to the right of the girl has the bare outlines of just such a still life.

Some of Picasso's drawings show the man in a cap, and in a pose even closer to that of Cézanne's 'The Smoker' (Pushkin Museum, Moscow), which was certainly

one of his sources. The figure of the nude has also been convincingly compared to a small Hellenistic bronze from Smyrna in the collection of the Louvre. Other parallels spring to mind, such as Seurat's 'The Models' (Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania), although the tightly drawn, curiously proportioned body of the nude is perhaps closer to the Odalisques of Ingres. Picasso's seemingly abrupt return to naturalism, and to the tradition of French painting (Ingres, Seurat, Cézanne), has been related to the 'call to order' preoccupying many French critics (and politicians) at around the time war was declared, although the resilience of the Cubist style in numerous other works suggests that he was unaffected by the extreme chauvinist attacks on Cubism as a degenerate alien style corrupting the purity of French classical culture. Possibly, moreover, the immediate stimulus behind his return to naturalism in 1914 was not so much this general 'call to order' as the example of the contemporary work of Derain, an old and close friend, who was staying nearby at Montfavet that same summer.



131 Portrait of Ambroise Vollard 1915

Pencil on paper, 46.7 x 32
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1947

Ambroise Vollard was one of the first Parisian dealers to recognise Picasso's promise as an artist. In 1901 an exhibition of Picasso's work was put on in his gallery, and he continued to buy paintings from Picasso periodically over the next ten years. He was responsible for the casting of Picasso's early sculptures, including 'The Jester', 1905, and he always took a great interest in Picasso's graphic work, publishing, for instance, a de luxe edition of the 1905 drypoints and etchings of *Saltimbanques* in 1913, and in the 1930s purchasing the copperplates of the etchings which, grouped together, form the celebrated 'Vollard Suite'.

From the inscription we know that Vollard sat for this portrait in Paris in August 1915, and the panelling behind him identifies the setting as Picasso's studio on the rue Schoelcher. That January Picasso had

139 The Source 1921

Oil on canvas, 64 × 90
Moderna Museet, Stockholm

This was painted in Fontainebleau in the summer of 1921. In its general theme of natural fertility and woman as the source of life it is related to 'Three Women at the Spring' (Museum of Modern Art, New York), the largest and most ambitious neo-classical painting he made there. 'The Source', however, belongs to a series of its own. There is a much larger version of the same image in crayon on grey canvas in the Musée Picasso, and there are several drawings depicting a naked nymph holding a water jar with a dog to the left which laps from the stream. The whole group was probably inspired by a sixteenth-century painting by Rosso Fiorentino known as 'The Nymph of Fontainebleau', which is in the chateau there. But the classical theme of the river god or nymph was a standard one, and Picasso would have known many versions in Renaissance and post-Renaissance art.

The neoclassicism of 'The Source' is expressed in an extremely abbreviated style which announces itself as 'modern': the modelling of the body, the amphora and the foreground rocks is so simplified that the illusion of three-dimensionality is only momentarily sustained, while the background is registered instantly as flat. There is still a debt to the abstraction of the neoclassical murals of Puvis de Chavannes, while the geometric conception of the mass of the figure suggests parallels with the sculpture of Maillol. But only Picasso would attempt to unite an impression of completely impersonal abstraction with the hint of erotic energy: the uncovered breast, the 'baroque' rhythms of the drapery over the torso, the velvety shadows on the flesh, all counteract the austerity of the composition.

140 Maternity 1921

Oil on canvas, 162 × 97
Collection Bernard Picasso, Paris

The subject of the mother and child was common in art during the post-war 'call to order' period. Severini, for instance, had registered his conversion to classicism in 1916 with a large and handsome neo-Renaissance 'Maternity' (repr. p. 12). The desire to emulate the great masters of the



past was, of course, a strong motive, but historians have also pointed to the propaganda campaigns mounted in Europe after the war, urging couples to procreate to replace the generation lost on the battlefields. Picasso had, too, a personal motive: his first son, Paulo, was born in February 1921, and the great series of paintings and drawings on the theme of the mother and child date from this event. Most were, none the less, impersonal, for he employed the language of classicism to objectify the private subject and to confer on it an austere, iconic dignity.

Roughly painted, with harsh contrasts of light and dark, boldly simplified drapery, and strong, raw colour, this version has the primitive character of 'Seated Woman' of the previous year (cat. 136), and depends on similar antique sculptural sources. It is as if Picasso were determined to avoid the seduc-

tive, serene beauty of Raphael's paintings of the Madonna and Child which the subject itself, and the arrangement of the figures, inevitably call to mind. In his Maternities of the Harlequin and Saltimbanque period Picasso had reproduced the sweetness of Raphael's Madonnas, and they had been perhaps too wistful and too sentimental. Here he borrows the standard gestures of maternal tenderness – the absorbed expression as she gazes at the child, the encircling, protective arms, the gentle touch of the fingers – but the massive figures are clumsy and the overall effect awkward. The painting is in fact close in composition to a distinctly caricatural drawing of Olga, in ordinary daytime clothes, seated in a chair with Paulo on her lap. Picasso's aim in the painting here is not so much caricature as the disquieting forthrightness of the naïve.



140

[215]

141 **Large Bather** 1921

Oil on canvas, 182 × 101.5
*Musée de l'Orangerie, Paris, Collection
 Jean Walter and Paul Guillaume*

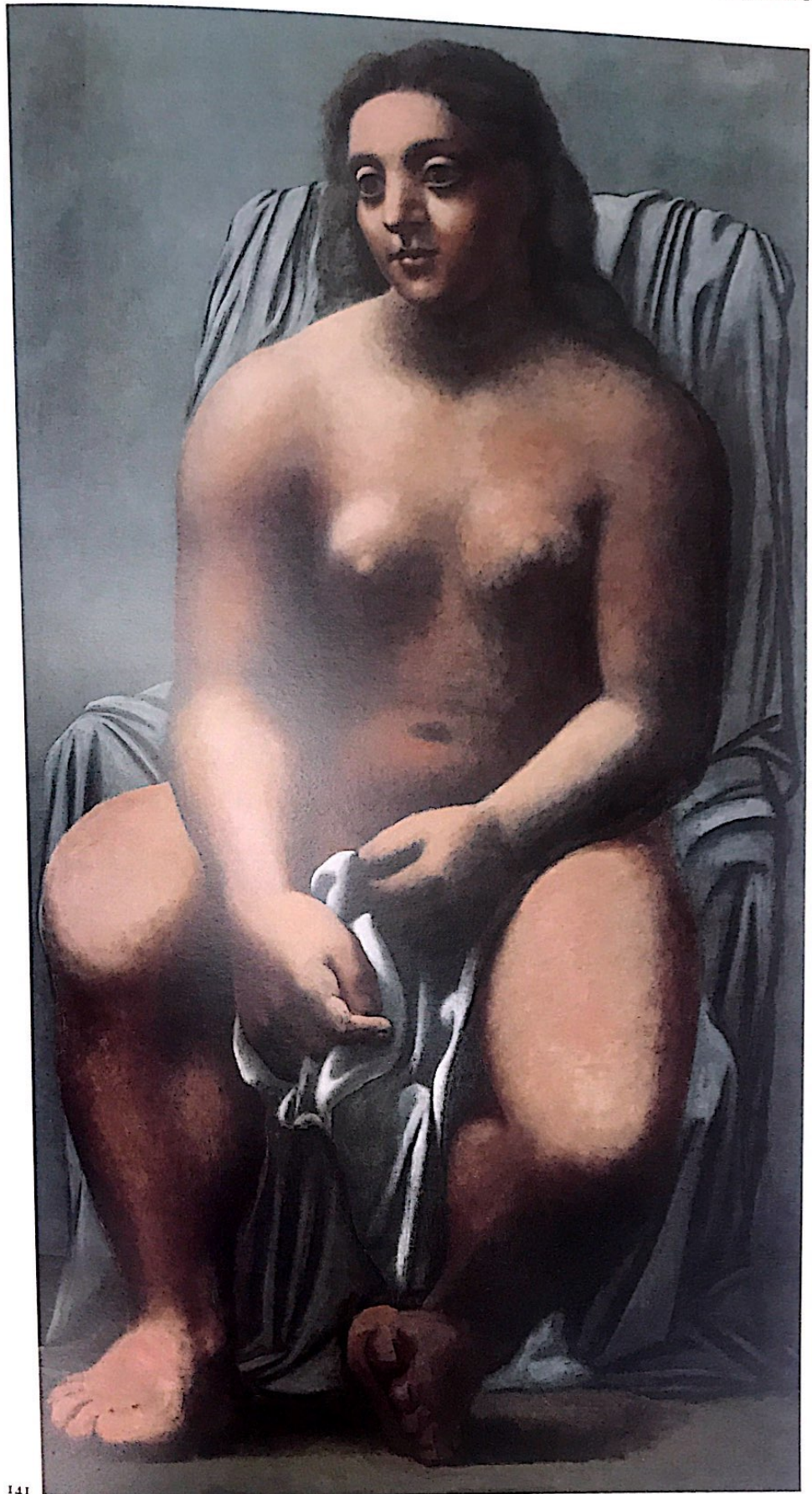
This is dated 1921 on the back of the canvas, and was probably painted in Paris after Picasso's return from Fontainebleau in September. It was acquired by Picasso's dealer Paul Rosenberg, and quickly became well known through reproductions (for instance in Pierre Reverdy's *Pablo Picasso*, Paris, 1924).

'Large Bather' is one of relatively few paintings by Picasso in which the figure is well over life size, and because she is crammed into a space which seems barely large enough to accommodate her, the effect of monumentality is greatly increased. Indeed her physical presence looms so powerfully that it is almost oppressive and claustrophobic. Various explanations for Picasso's current obsession with gigantic, swollen human forms have been given – Olga's pregnancy in 1920–21, and recurrent dreams he had had as a child in which limbs swelled and retracted irrationally and frighteningly. But the works of art he had recently been looking at may be a more significant factor. For instance, it is hard not to believe that this wonderful painting was not directly inspired by the massive headless figures of the 'Three Fates' from the east pediment of the Parthenon (in particular the upright figure), or by the huge statue of Demeter from Cnidos: the unusually crisp folds of the drapery in the painting imitate the drapery of these sculptures. (Picasso had spent three months in London in 1919 while he was working on his designs for the ballet *Le Tricorne* and would have seen all these figures in the British Museum.) The sense of massive size and cumbrous weight is equally potent in some of the greatest frescoes from Herculaneum and Pompeii (such as the 'Herakles and Telephus' in the Archaeological Museum in Naples, and the great cycle in the Villa of the Mysteries, Pompeii), for in these the brightly lit life-sized bodies of the women push out from flat backgrounds. Picasso must also have been impressed by similar effects in the great fresco cycles of Michelangelo and Annibale Carracci that he saw in Rome.

Renoir and Maillol were modern artists who interested Picasso greatly after the war, for, like him, they approached the classical tradition in an inventive spirit as a resource that was still alive and rich with meaning. 'Large Bather' owes much to the monumen-

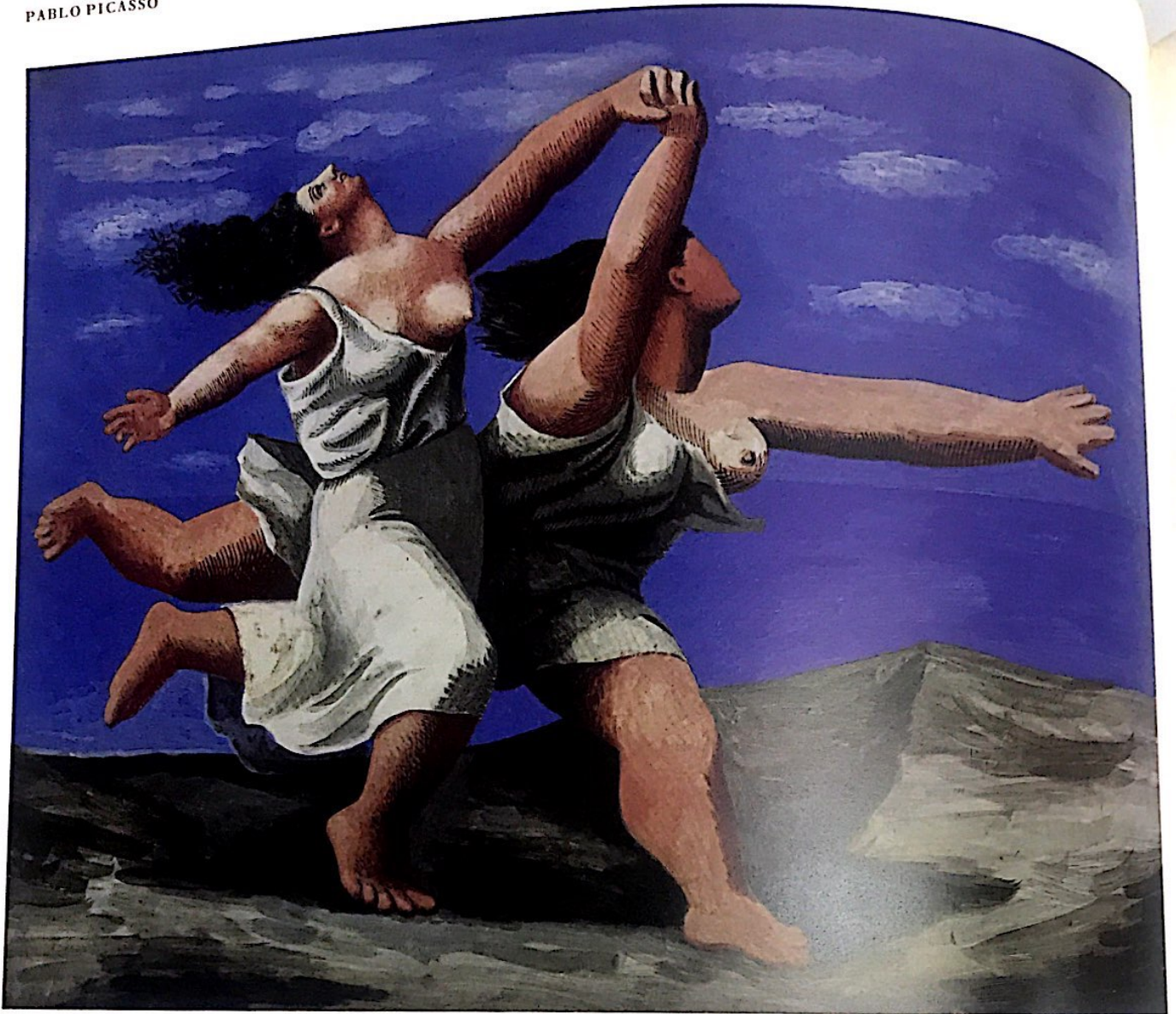
tality they sought in their representations of the female nude as a kind of earth-goddess. For at one level that is what the imagery of his painting alludes to – the female nude as the traditional symbol of nature and fertility. The sense of warm earthiness is increased by the soft Renoiresque modelling of the bather's body, and its hot, luminous colour glowing against the steely grey drapery.

However, comparison with the works of Renoir and Maillol instantly highlights the great gulf that lies between their vision and Picasso's: there is none of the uncritical sensuality of Renoir revelling in his dream of a sunny Arcadia inhabited by willing, buxom girls; there is none of the architectural firmness or the physical self-confidence of Maillol's women. For this woman who offers her body to us looks awkward and lethargic, and her far-away expression suggests apathy. The effect of the painting is not only physically overbearing but also sad and mournful. As with 'Seated Woman' (cat. 136) we sense an elegaic, nostalgic meaning. The allusions to the classical tradition demand the spectator's recognition, but it is only the outward shell of that tradition, manipulated and distorted, not its moral core, that is retained. This suggests that it was actually the difference between the present and the past that preoccupied Picasso. Did he perhaps feel that the health, sanity, equilibrium, harmony, and so forth, which classicism was traditionally supposed to enshrine, could not have any real meaning in the post-war world? Was he using the classical tradition in order to express this conviction, through the irony of the comparisons he had deliberately set up? Whatever the answer to these questions, it seems evident that the painting has a profound expressive content; it is not straightforwardly 'aesthetic'.



141

[217]



142 Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race) 1922

Gouache on plywood, 34 × 42.5
Musée Picasso, Paris

In June 1922 Picasso went to Dinard in Brittany with his wife and son, remaining until the end of September. This little panel was painted there. Although diminutive in scale, it is as monumental in effect as anything Picasso painted, and, greatly enlarged, it was used for the curtain of *Le Train bleu*. This was a new ballet, with a chic and amusing story-line by Cocteau, scenery by Laurens, costumes by Coco Chanel, and music by Milhaud, and it was first performed by Diaghilev's company at

the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 20 June 1924. The theme was games on the beach – hence the choice of Picasso's painting for the curtain. In 1928 when he was in Dinard again, and after he had begun his liaison with the much younger Marie-Thérèse Walter, Picasso painted a series of pictures of bathers in striped swimsuits playing ball on the beach, provoked partly perhaps by his memories of the ballet. They, like this painting, allude humorously to the cult of sport and fitness prevalent in the 1920s.

The classical sources of 'The Race' have often been discussed, and it has been pointed out that the two girls rushing wildly along the shore are maenads in ecstasy, based either on antique originals (reliefs on

Bacchic sarcophagi or similar scenes on Greek vases), or on neoclassical derivatives (such as Poussin's paintings of Bacchanalian revels). Most of the neoclassical paintings Picasso made after the war were absolutely static, in imitation of the famed calm, serenity and order of classical art. However, a substantial body of his 'minor' works – whether small paintings or drawings – depicted unleashed frenzy and passion, of the kind identified as quintessentially 'Dionysiac' by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). (Nietzsche had described this 'Dionysiac' strain as the ever-present counterpart to 'Apollonian' serenity, and argued that the Greek cult of reason and serene beauty was a sublimation of the dark,



143

anarchic forces of the human psyche released in the Dionysiac cults.) In 1925 Picasso gave his most memorable and alarming statement of the Dionysiac impulse, this time in a large painting, 'Three Dancers' (repr.p.28). The middle and left-hand figures there are based on the two women in 'The Race'.

143 Studio with Plaster Head 1925

Oil on canvas, 97.9 × 131.1

Collection: *The Museum of Modern Art, New York, purchase 1964*

Picasso spent the summer of 1925 with his wife and son in Juan-les-Pins, where this was painted. Like 'Three Dancers' (repr.p.28), which he completed just before travelling south, 'Studio with Plaster Head' looks both back to the classicism of his work since the war and forward to the more obviously surreal tenor of his work of the late 1920s. The painting, dominated by academic plaster casts, belongs in the traditional genre of the still life symbolic of the

arts. Direct parallels may be drawn with the iconography of the various 'Attributes of the Arts' painted by Chardin, and it is quite as symmetrical in composition and as tautly organised as them. (Favourite Chardinesque devices for creating the illusion of rationally conceived space, such as objects which project over the edge of the supporting surface or lie at measured angles to the picture plane, are aped by Picasso, but within the context of a resolutely flat, non-illusionistic space.) In structure and design Picasso's painting is a model of rationality and cool control. Yet everything else about the painting is contrived to create a sense of imminent melodrama and nightmare – the plaster limbs are uncannily animated; the

[219]

bust, which is seen from three angles, and becomes progressively more ghostly as it turns from profile to full view, is disturbingly changeable; the juxtaposition of the yellow apple and the toy theatre seems bizarre; in this 'learned' context, the bold contrasts of colour and pattern seem inappropriately garish and crude; and the harshly theatrical contrasts between light and dark are dazzling and dissonant. It is apparent that if Picasso was thinking of Chardin, he was also thinking of de Chirico, and adopting not only the favourite imagery and compositional devices, but also the alarming mood, of de Chirico's metaphysical paintings. (See cats.30,31.)

Picasso had known de Chirico before the war and would certainly have been familiar with his early still lifes. But it is likely that they particularly attracted him in 1925, when de Chirico returned to live in Paris, because they were both currently the focus of the Surrealists' attention. (Breton published the first instalment of 'Le Surréalisme et la peinture' in *La Révolution Surréaliste* that July, and there discussed Picasso's key role as the catalyst for the movement as a whole. He saw de Chirico as the other exemplary source for Surrealist painting – not the new de Chirico, however, but the de Chirico of the metaphysical period.) Meanwhile the co-existence in 'Studio with a Plaster Head' of geometric and architectural elements and a pulsing organic line which threatens to run out of control, suggests some reaction from Picasso to the automatic drawings and the first Surrealist paintings of Masson, which were reproduced in the early numbers of *La Révolution Surréaliste*. (Compare cat.114.)

This, then, is a picture which reflects Picasso's new orientation, and the return of an overtly expressive and dramatic mode in place of the almost somnambulistic lethargy of some of the greatest of his neoclassical paintings of the early 1920s. It makes more explicit the 'Dionysiac' undercurrent present in some of them, and bears witness to his acute sense of the adaptability and the emotional range and power of the classical tradition when it was not regarded as incompatible with both formal and psychological tension.

144 Seated Woman in a Red Armchair 1932

Oil on canvas, 130 × 97.5
Musée Picasso, Paris

This was painted in Boisgeloup, and is contemporary with the great series of sculptures which Picasso made there. It is very like some of them, although the loose separation of the parts of the body, defiant of gravity, was something he could barely achieve in his actual sculpture (except in the welded iron constructions). Its origins lie in the long sequence of paintings and drawings of grotesquely distorted bathers he made in the late 1920s, and specifically in the extraordinary, volumetric 'bone drawings' of 1928, which culminated in 1932 in the drawings after Grünewald's 'Crucifixion'.

At first sight 'Seated Woman in a Red Armchair' might seem to have nothing to do with classicism, and indeed it could easily find a place in any discussion of Picasso's relationship to the Surrealist movement, so irrational is the anatomy of this strange being, who seems to be as much vegetable and mineral as animal. Nevertheless there are many points of contact between the painting and Picasso's 'straightforward' classical works. In the first place the subject is both entirely traditional and had been a favourite one with him for years. Then, too, the figure is placed exactly in the centre of the canvas, and symmetry is carefully observed throughout the composition to produce a feeling of balance and order. Each form is treated as a solid volume, limited by a contour, and the system of light and shade is more or less consistent with a single light source. The figure is certainly bizarre, but she is as placid and serene as a Madonna, and with her white veil and red cloak-like chair she looks like a mutation of Picasso's Raphaelesque 'The Italian Woman' of 1919 (Marina Picasso collection). Throughout, in fact, the handling is softly caressing, as in Picasso's most Renoiresque bathers of the post-war years, while the lyrical rhythms set up by all the alternating curves betray his continuing fascination with the linearism of Ingres – and of Raphael himself.

The relationship between a work like this and the classical tradition is hard to define, because paradox is central to it, and one is tempted to see the irony as critical, even satirical. But the painting is so beautifully and seriously executed, and so impressive, that such an interpretation cannot be sustained for long. In the end the differences between it and, say, the poignant 'Still Life

with Pitcher and Apples' and 'Large Bather' (cats.134,141) seem entirely superficial, and the degree of irony little different. All of them approach the classical tradition with respect, but without deference. Picasso regarded the tradition as a stimulus, not as something which had to be imitated devoutly. He knew that the great masters of the past, like Raphael or Ingres, had approached the classical tradition in the same innovative spirit precisely because for them it was not dead, but the true and living source of their art.

GEORGES BRAQUE 1882 ARGENTEUIL – 1963 PARIS

Braque, initiator with Picasso of Cubism and inventor of the revolutionary technique of *papier collé*, was certainly one of the most radical and innovative artists of the early twentieth century. Yet by temperament he was thoughtful and disciplined, and Cubism in his hands is an art of lucid formal structure, harmonious colour and tone, delicate and restrained execution, and contemplative mood. It is not surprising that long before the end of his life he should have come to be seen as a great modern exponent of the French classical tradition.

Braque's deep interest in the art of the past developed when he was a student at the Académie Humbert in Paris at the turn of the century. He spent long periods in the Louvre, where he was particularly impressed by the galleries of Egyptian and archaic Greek sculpture. His own earliest paintings were impressionist in style, but at the Salon d'Automne of 1905 he experienced the revelation of Fauvism. Encouraged by Othon Friesz, whom he had met when living in Le Havre in the 1890s, Braque painted landscapes in a rather prudent version of the Fauve style during the next two years, working mostly on the Mediterranean coast near Marseilles. He exhibited successfully at the Salon des Indépendants in 1907, met the young German picture dealer Kahnweiler, with whom he signed a contract, and was introduced to Picasso by Apollinaire. At the end of that year, under the impact of Picasso's latest pictures (including 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon'), and especially of Cézanne's late Bather compositions (seen in his posthumous retrospective), he began work on 'Large Nude' (private collection). Finished about six months later, this somewhat hesitantly executed painting was a watershed for Braque, effectively putting an end to his Fauve period and announcing many of the pictorial concerns of his and Picasso's early Cubist works. The landscapes he painted in the spring and summer of 1908 at L'Estaque were radical in the degree of their formal and colouristic abstraction and in their mobile conception of space. When they were exhibited that November in Kahnweiler's gallery, it was the boldly geometric treatment of natural form that prompted

Louis Vauxcelles's now famous comment: 'He reduces everything . . . to geometrical schemes, to cubes' (*Le Gil Blas*, 14 November 1908). On the other hand Apollinaire, who wrote the catalogue preface, emphasised the 'synthetic' character and the 'harmony' and 'lyricism' of the paintings – a shrewd evaluation, which holds good for the greater part of Braque's œuvre.

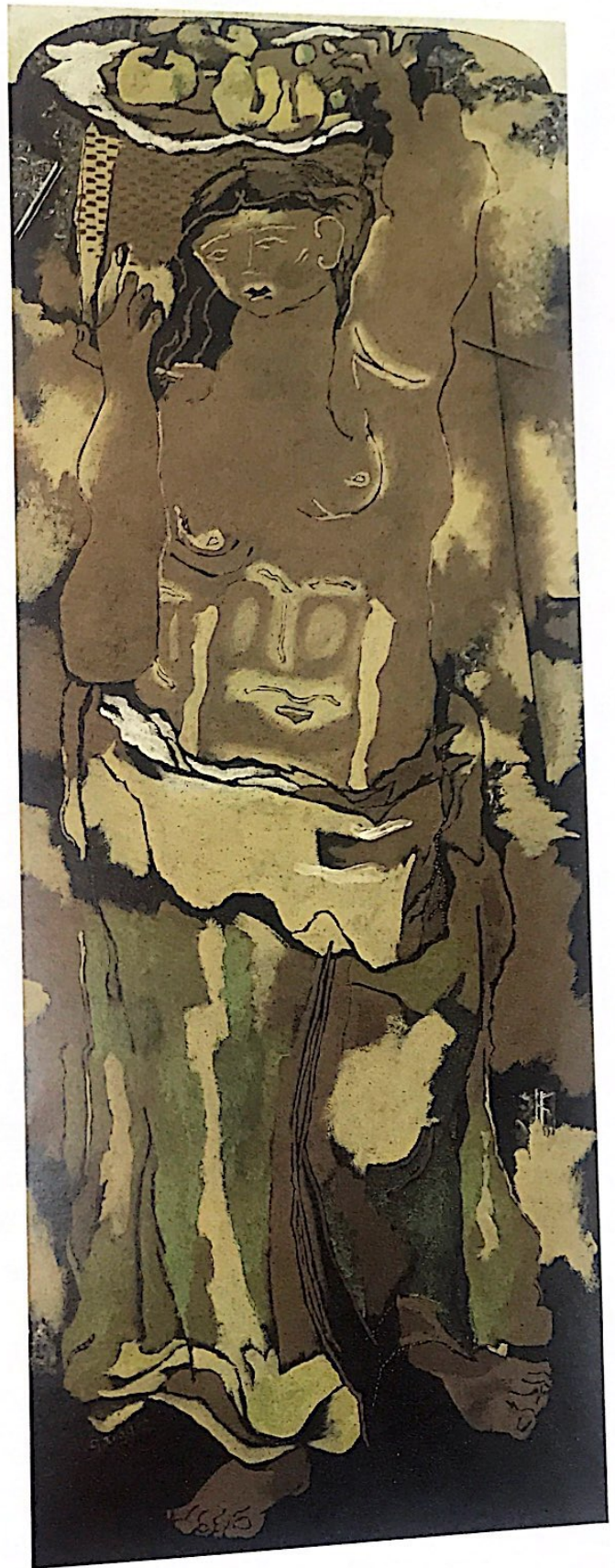
In 1909 the friendship between Braque and Picasso deepened, and until the outbreak of the war they worked so closely together that one has to speak of a collaboration. Exhibited with Kahnweiler, rather than in the Paris Salons, their paintings developed gradually in formal complexity to the point where they appeared in 1910–11 to be almost wholly abstract, although the veiled subject matter, usually turning on the bohemian world of cafés and studios, remained an important concern. Over the next year Braque – quickly followed by Picasso – exploited increasingly the conventionalised techniques he had learned as an apprentice house-painter in the 1890s, in order both to give clues to the identity of the objects in his pictures, and simultaneously to protect their abstract character as works of art. In September 1912 he created the first *papiers collés* with strips of commercial wallpaper printed with a woodgrain pattern. His fame as a leading avant-garde figure was by now fully established, and his work was included in several important exhibitions abroad and discussed in leading international art journals.

Called up at the beginning of the war, Braque was invalided out of the army in 1915 following a very serious head wound. His convalescence was slow, and he was only able to begin painting again early in 1917, working initially in a synthetic Cubist style. That December the poet Pierre Reverdy published a series of Braque's 'aphorisms' in his avant-garde review, *Nord-Sud*. These reveal the rational and lucid turn of Braque's mind, and his debt to philosophy and aesthetics of a classical orientation. Among them we find: 'The aim is not to reconstitute an anecdotal fact but to constitute a pictorial fact.' 'The senses deform, the mind forms. Work to perfect the mind. There is no certainty except in



The artist in 1922 (Photo by Man Ray)

what the mind conceives.' 'Nobility comes from contained emotion.' 'I love the rule that corrects emotion.' His conceptualism was profoundly in tune with the ethics of the 'call to order', and some of Braque's closest friends after the war, including Reverdy, Maurice Raynal and Gris, were leading exponents of the movement, as was Léonce Rosenberg, who became his dealer in 1918. Like Picasso, Braque was now in demand with well-to-do patrons, and his work from about 1919 evolved into a much more sensual, more 'baroque' and more personal version of Cubism. Still life remained his principal theme, but large classical figure paintings entered his repertory. His still lifes often took on a grandly decorative scale and character, and reflected in the choice of objects their relationship to the great tradition of French *belle peinture*. His special love of Chardin and Corot became more obvious, while the new voluptuousness of his treatment of form and his predilection for fruit and flowers reveal his



10

11

[45]

admiration for Renoir, currently the object of great veneration in all sectors of the Parisian art world. Indeed it became a commonplace of contemporary French criticism to emphasise Braque's links with the French tradition. 'One recognises in this artist the very essence of the gifts of our race: the moderation and the severe grace which are unique to France, and equally the disdain of the merely ephemeral, and the urge towards profundity,' wrote the painter Bissière in 1925 (*L'Art d'Aujourd'hui*).

By 1928 Braque had embarked on a series of *guéridons*, still lifes mounted on pedestal tables. From these richly coloured and complex works he graduated in the early 1930s to a series of interiors with figures, which culminated after the Second World War in the renowned, poetically allusive, late 'Studios'. His lifelong interest in archaic Greek art found direct expression in plaster plaques painted black and incised in white with schematised drawings, which he began making in 1931, and in small, decorative sculptures on vaguely mythological themes made during the 1940s. His unassailable position as a great modern master was reflected in the award of many international honours, in the exhibition of his work at the Louvre in 1961 – the first time a living artist had been accorded this tribute – and in the State funeral after his death.

10 Basket Bearer 1922

Oil and sand on canvas, 180.5 × 73.5
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, bequest of Baronne Gourgaud, 1965

11 Basket Bearer 1922

Oil and sand on canvas, 180.5 × 73
Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, bequest of Baronne Gourgaud, 1965

Although the special shape and the tall format of these two canvases might suggest that they were painted to decorate an existing space in a private house, they were created independently of any commission, and were shown alongside sixteen still lifes

in the 'Salle d'Honneur' allocated to Braque in the Salon d'Automne of 1922. Braque's equivalent to Picasso's recent neoclassical paintings (for example cat. 141), they attracted a good deal of critical attention at this time, and were bought from the artist by Paul Rosenberg, who shortly afterwards became Braque's dealer. Rosenberg exhibited them several times over the next few years in one-man and group shows, and singly or together they were reproduced in several important publications, including the Purist review *L'Esprit Nouveau* (no. 19, 1923) and Carl Einstein's influential *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1926). Thus they became among the best known of Braque's works, even though the initial critical reaction to them was not uniformly favourable.

It was the frankness of Braque's approach to tradition which caused controversy at the time. For some more conservative critics his apparent abandonment of Cubism for a subject derived from Greco-Roman art, and a style which was relatively naturalistic and had certain obvious affinities with French Rococo painting and the work of Renoir, was a source of satisfaction, suggesting that the dangerous rebel had finally been tamed. But for those who believed Cubism was the great achievement of the pre-war era, Braque's new paintings seemed like a capitulation to current fads. André Salmon felt most uncomfortable in their presence: acknowledging that Braque's Cubist work had had a classical foundation, and that he was 'the Chardin of Cubism', he criticised the 'realism' of his new work as half-baked, hesitant and slack, found the colour 'disagreeable', and concluded that Braque had reverted to the preoccupations he had had as a house-painter (*La Revue de France*, December 1922).

Many nudes were painted by Braque in a very similar style over the following five or so years. All are dark and tonal, and the drawing is so supple and free-running that it looks almost automatic. The touch is caressing and painterly. The women are invariably voluptuously fleshy, and many are given fruit and flowers as their attributes and are thus associated with traditional symbols of nature's boundless fertility. Simultaneously Braque was painting numerous still lifes. Almost without exception these too are sensual, depicting ripe fruit and bouquets of flowers. He has become a painter of 'the good things of life', openly reflecting the traditional values of the post-war era in France.



**12 Woman with a Mandolin.
Free Study after Corot**

1922–3

Oil on canvas, 41 × 33

*Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre
Georges Pompidou, Paris, gift of
Madame Georges Braque, 1963*

This little painting, executed probably shortly after the 'Basket Bearers', remained in Braque's personal collection until his death, and was bequeathed by him to the national collection. It had a special place in his affections because it states so unequivocally his sense of profound affinity with Corot, and hence with the French tradition.

Braque's love of Corot dates back to the beginning of his career as a painter. It was fuelled by the exhibition of twenty-four of Corot's figure paintings held at the Salon d'Automne in 1909. (Following this exhibition Braque and Picasso painted many Cubist pictures depicting musicians or people musing pensively, which owe a debt to Corot's poetic and melancholy works.) With the reopening of the Louvre after the war Corot's reputation rose, if anything, higher. Picasso, Derain and Gris were all affected, and Corot was also taken as a model by the Purists. (Illustrated articles by Raynal and Bissière were published in numbers 8 and 9 of *L'Esprit Nouveau* in May and June 1921.)

Braque's lifelong fidelity to Corot is touchingly revealed by a studio photograph taken in 1957 in which we see, prominently displayed, two large photographs of figure paintings by Corot. One of these is of the 'Portrait of Christine Nilsson', 1874 (Museu de Arte de São Paulo), and historians have suggested that Braque's 'free copy' is based on this painting. Corot's model, however, is only half-length, faces in the opposite direction and is seated out of doors, and slightly earlier paintings of girls posed with musical instruments in a studio, with frames and canvases in the background, seem closer. In any case Corot's style and the lyrical, tranquil, 'musical' quality of his work mattered as much to Braque as his subject matter: the restrained tonal colour, the dense, impasted surfaces, and the beautifully poised and meditated compositions all find an equivalent in Braque's later work.

Maillol came from French Catalonia – Banyuls is a fishing village near Perpignan and the Spanish border – and his Mediterranean origins were emphasised in the 1920s by many critics, who agreed that the distinguishing characteristic of his art was its innate ‘classicism’. His sense of affinity with the classical tradition is visible in his earliest sculptures and in his last works, such is the unity and consistency of his œuvre.

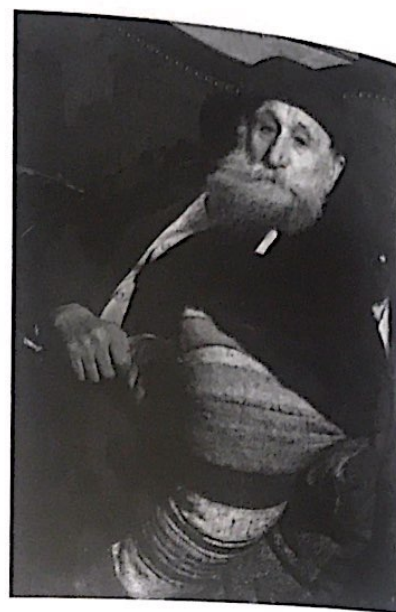
Maillol decided early to become a painter, and in 1881 he moved to Paris. After several attempts, he was finally accepted into the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1885 and studied there under the highly successful Salon painters Gérôme and Cabanel. However, he soon discovered the work of Gauguin, and decided to concentrate on tapestry design rather than painting – a move encouraged by Gauguin who shared Maillol’s belief in the importance of decorative art. Maillol studied the great collection of medieval tapestries in the Musée de Cluny in Paris, and in 1893 he exhibited a tapestry at the Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. That year he opened a tapestry-making and embroidery workshop in Banyuls. His careful attention to the technical aspects of the work – the choice of wools and of the best plants for his dyes – led to comparisons with the craftsmanship of the Primitives, and Maillol was eventually acknowledged as the ‘father’ of modern French tapestry.

Maillol first began making sculpture in 1895, and it became his chief preoccupation from 1900 onwards after his deteriorating eyesight forced him to abandon his tapestry work. He was closely associated with the Nabis in the 1890s, and towards the end of the decade began to exhibit his sculptures which, at this stage, were all small in scale. Through Vuillard he met Ambroise Vollard, who arranged for some of the sculptures to be cast in bronze, and gave him his first one-man show in 1902. The exhibition was a critical success and drew generous praise from Rodin, even though Maillol’s work was in every way so different from his. His career as a sculptor now launched, Maillol established a studio at Marly-le-Roi, near Paris, the following year, and for the

rest of his life he spent the summers there and the winters in Banyuls.

Maillol’s first monumental sculpture, ‘The Mediterranean’ (cat.88), was finished in 1905 and exhibited at the Salon d’Automne, where it attracted much attention. His reputation as a major innovative sculptor grew quickly, and although his work quite often aroused controversy, he was given a series of important public commissions, beginning with ‘Action in Chains’, a monument to Auguste Blanqui, the Socialist revolutionary. This sculpture, depicting a powerfully muscular female nude striding forwards, her hands manacled behind her back, was greeted with outrage in Puget-Théniers when it was unveiled in 1908, but was regarded as a masterpiece by his admirers – including Matisse, who was a close friend. In 1908 Maillol travelled to Greece with his patron Count Harry Kessler to see the great works of antiquity, and was delighted to discover that he felt perfectly at home there. Later he loved to stress the identity between his native land, rich in antique remains, and Ancient Greece, and between the local Catalan girls who inspired his sculpture and the Venuses of antiquity. The belief that there was an unbroken continuity in Mediterranean culture between its origins and the present, and that he was the natural heir to this tradition, sustained Maillol for the rest of his life, and became a *leitmotif* in the writings of friends like Maurice Denis and Pierre Camo, who emphasised that his classicism was a matter of innate sympathy, not willed imitation: ‘Like the master painters and sculptors of the Mediterranean basin . . . Maillol constructs ingenuously, perhaps unconsciously, classical syntheses. . . . By birth, by race, he belongs to the French Midi: he comes to us from the shores of the Mediterranean whose blue depths gave birth to Aphrodite and have inspired so many masterpieces.’ (M. Denis, *Aristide Maillol*, Paris, 1925)

In 1910 Maillol’s ‘Pomona’ scored a great popular success at the Salon d’Automne, and two years later he won the commission for a monument to Cézanne, destined for Aix. Maillol chose to commemorate Cézanne not with the usual allegorised,



The artist at Marly-le-Roi, 1937 (Photo: Dina Vierny)

heroic portrait but with a reclining female figure resembling a river goddess. He concentrated upon this statue during the war, but when he presented it to the town of Aix in 1925 it was rejected out of hand. (Following a press campaign it was purchased by the city of Paris, and eventually erected in the Tuileries Gardens in 1929.) Meanwhile, in 1912, Maillol worked on the woodcuts for a luxurious edition of Virgil’s *Eclogues*, commissioned by Kessler. (Not published until 1925, this was the first of a series of illustrated editions of famous Greek and Latin texts on which Maillol worked. Others included Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* and Virgil’s *Georgics*.) After the war he was commissioned to make war memorials for the Catalan towns of Céret, Elne and Port-Vendres, as well as for Banyuls.

Maillol’s fame grew steadily during the post-war period, for his work was perfectly in tune with the current ‘call to order’ movement and with the ideal of a new, modern form of classicism. It satisfied writers such as Waldemar George, who insisted on the ‘Frenchness’ of his classicism

(‘Maillol is the heir of the artists of Versailles and the Ancient Greeks, while keeping intact his own personality. He is a true French sculptor. There is no trace of Italianism in his work, which is as nobly ordered as a composition by Nicolas Poussin.’ *L'Amour de l'Art*, 1923). His work also appealed to critics associated with the avant-garde, such as Christian Zervos, who, in a long essay published in *L'Art d'aujourd'hui* in 1925, focused on its geometric abstraction, its rigorous structure and its perfect formal purity. A series of laudatory monographs appeared, beginning with

Octave Mirbeau's in 1921, and Maillol was represented in numerous exhibitions at home and abroad, being particularly admired in America and in Germany. He was made an Officier de la Légion d'Honneur in 1932, and during the 1930s the French State bought a collection of bronzes to join the marble version of ‘The Mediterranean’ commissioned in 1923. Maillol's final consecration as France's leading sculptor occurred at the time of the Exposition Internationale in 1937, when three rooms were devoted to his work in the exhibition of *Art Indépendant* in the Petit Palais.



86 Two Seated Women 1895

Terracotta, 12.8 × 9.5 × 10
Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

This is one of Maillol's earliest sculptures, and was inspired by his future wife and her sister, both of whom worked in his tapestry workshop in Banyuls. Maillol's earliest sculptures were all intimate in scale and character. Several of his first figures and reliefs were carved in wood, but simultaneously he experimented with modelling in clay. He fired these clay figures in a primitive oven he had made himself, and many were destroyed or damaged because of his lack of expertise. Later his preferred medium for modelling was plaster.

When discussing Maillol's terracottas, several critics of the 1920s, including Waldemar George, drew attention to their general relationship to Greek terracotta figurines from Tanagra, near Thebes. These, and similar statuettes from southern Italy and Asia Minor, had been excavated in large numbers during the nineteenth century, and quickly became some of the most popular antiquities. They were domestic in imagery – the favourite subject is women going about their ordinary activities – and unpretentious in manufacture: they were invariably made in moulds, and variety was achieved through surface painting and the use of several moulds in different combinations. The figurines thus provided an antique precedent for intimately scaled sculpture of an essentially naturalistic kind. It is not certain when Maillol first became aware of ‘Tanagras’, but ‘Two Seated Women’ resembles them quite closely in its imagery, and also in such details as the drapery and hair-styles.

87 Study for 'The Mediterranean' 1902

Terracotta, 16.8 × 20.8 × 9.5
Musée du Petit Palais, Paris

This is one of the many preparatory studies for 'The Mediterranean', and post-dates the first state of that sculpture in which the woman's left arm lies across the knee of her left leg. In this study Maillol raises the left arm up to the head, but has not as yet fixed on the more compact and balanced solution of resting the elbow firmly on the knee. Compared to 'The Mediterranean', the pose is relaxed and casual: the torso turns slightly; the hair falls loosely; there is a suggestion of incipient movement. We sense the origins of the pose in Maillol's earlier studies of bathers crouched amid waves. Although Maillol laboured to achieve a definitive, abstracted statement in his monumental sculptures, his small works are often characterised by sensuality and naturalism, and this effect is enhanced by the warm colour, grainy texture and spontaneous handling of the fired clay, which is full of the minor imperfections and blemishes of the 'hand-made'.



87

88 The Mediterranean 1905

Bronze, 110 × 120 × 69
Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol,
Paris

The plaster of this, Maillol's most celebrated sculpture, was exhibited at the Salon d'Automne in 1905 under the title 'Femme' (Woman). There it was hailed as a great modern masterpiece by several critics committed to a classical revival in the arts, including Maurice Denis and André Gide. Denis drew attention to the difference from the dynamic, expressive style of Rodin, and went on to define Maillol's relationship to the classical tradition, comparing him not only to the Greek sculptors of the fifth century BC but also to the French sculptors of the thirteenth century, whose statues 'are as sober, have a style as chaste, and express a sense of proportion as pure as the most beautiful figures from Greece.' Commenting on the earthiness of his female nudes, Denis analyses Maillol's 'innocent gaucheness', concluding that he is 'un Primitif classique'. (Essay originally published in *L'Occident*, November 1905.) Gide opens his long, lyrical appreciation of the work with the words: 'It is beautiful; it has no meaning; it is a silent work. One would have

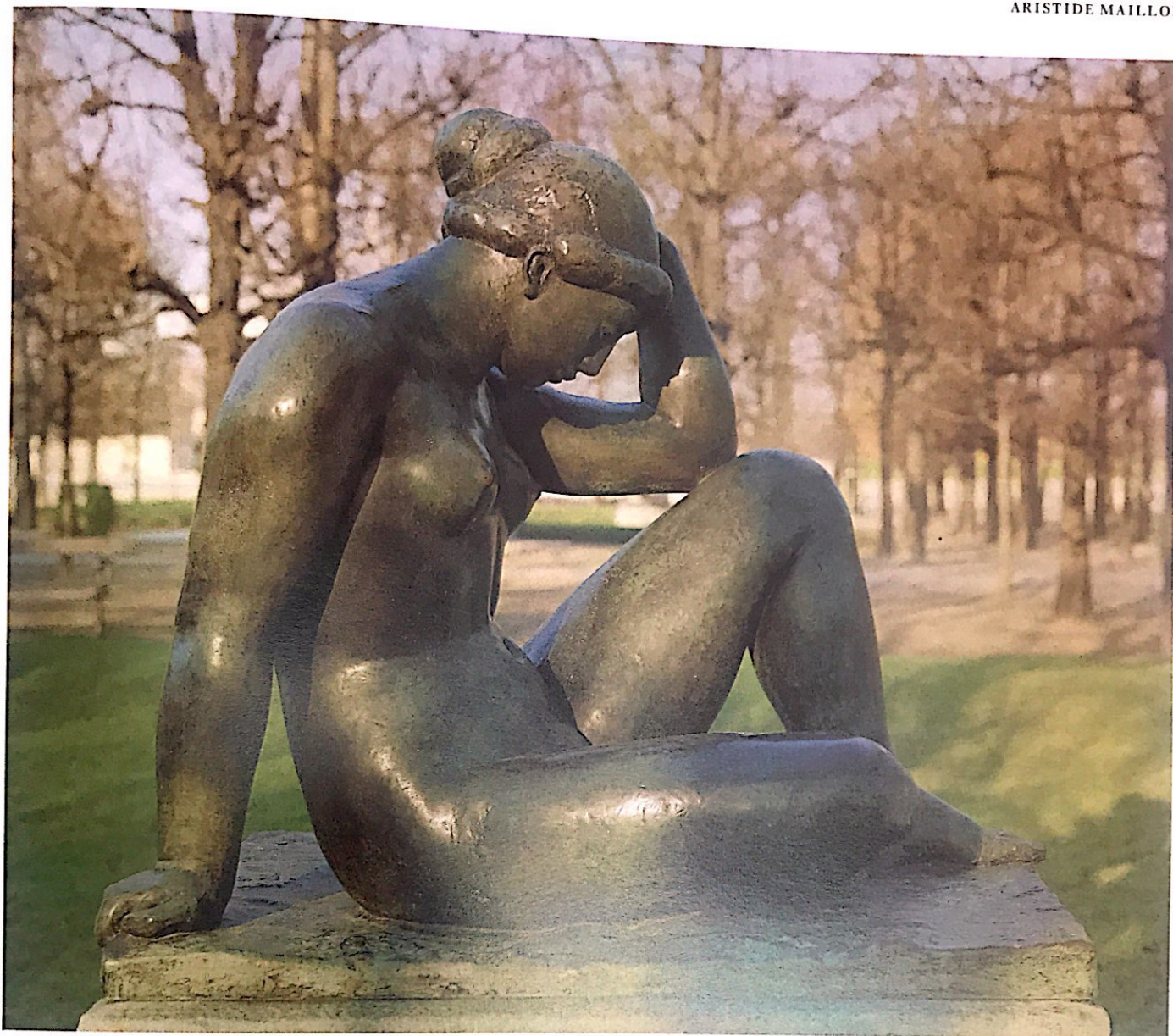
to go a long way back to find so complete a negligence of any preoccupation foreign to the simple manifestation of beauty.' (*Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 1905, vol. II) Given this reception, it is not surprising that 'The Mediterranean' was studied closely by many other artists, including Picasso, Manolo, Clará and Casanovas, and that it left its imprint on their work.

Count Harry Kessler, who had been introduced to Maillol by Rodin, immediately commissioned a stone version of the sculpture. Maillol executed this entirely without assistance over a period of several months, even though he had had no formal training in carving techniques, and had hitherto carved and modelled only on a small scale. (The sculpture was despatched to Weimar in 1906, and is now in the Oskar Reinhart collection, Winterthur.) In 1909 Maillol gave the first of the bronze casts to the city of Perpignan, and in 1923 the French State commissioned a marble version, which was completed with the aid of assistants in 1927, and displayed initially

in the Tuileries Gardens (now in the Musée d'Orsay).

The definitive title – 'La Méditerranée' – seems not to have been settled until the late 1930s, and was one which Maillol had given in 1895 to a Nabi painting representing a naked girl standing by the seashore. Before that the sculpture was known variously, and published, as 'Crouching Woman' (Femme accroupie), 'Thought' (Pensée), 'Latin Thought' (Pensée latine), 'Statue for a Shady Garden' (Statue pour un jardin ombragé), and simply 'Nude' (Nu) or 'Figure'. The interchangeability of the titles indicates that Maillol never had any allegorical intention, as Gide recognised when he stressed the formal purity of the sculpture and the absence of any definable meaning or content. Indeed the titles of Maillol's sculptures were usually suggested by his friends.

The origins of the pose of 'The Mediterranean' lie in designs Maillol made in 1896 for a tapestry and a ceramic relief, both called 'Bather' or 'The Wave'. In 1900 he began work on a series of statuettes of nudes



88

seated on the ground, and by 1902 he had completed a life-sized plaster of a woman whose face and figure is essentially that of the finished sculpture, but whose pose is much looser and more relaxed. Through various terracotta studies of 1902–5 (including cat.87), Maillol gradually approached the definitive solution, completing in 1905 a study of the torso, which resembles a fragment of an antique Venus. Through these preliminary sketches Maillol attained the simplified, geometric concept of natural form that was his, and Cézanne's, ideal. He told Judith Cladel, 'I always start with a geometrical figure, square, lozenge, triangle, because these are the figures that hold best

in space. My "Mediterranean" is enclosed in a perfect square.' (J. Cladel, *Aristide Maillol. Sa Vie – Son Œuvre – Ses Idées*, Paris, 1937) Other commentators noted the columnar nature of the limbs; the spherical character of the breasts, head and hair; and the delight in the play between the pyramidal forms of the legs and left arm, the cylindrical right arm, the rectangular torso, and the unseen cube within which the whole figure is inscribed. 'The Mediterranean' also reflects Maillol's essentially synthetic approach to sculpture, for although he constantly worked with models – in this case his wife – of the stocky Mediterranean type he admired, he strove to achieve a harmo-

nious, condensed image far removed from naturalism or the particularities of the individual. The satisfying and timeless pose of 'The Mediterranean' continued to fascinate him, and in 1937 he reused it in a modified and more active form in 'The Mountain'.

Although Maillol stressed his dependence on nature for his initial inspiration, he was opposed to 'copying' nature, and never attempted to conceal his admiration for the art of the past that, he felt, enshrined his own ideals and sensibility. 'The Mediterranean' bears a general resemblance to Greek sculpture, without being at all 'imitative' in the academic sense, for his purpose was to achieve the timelessness, equilibrium and

[151]

harmony of the great works of antiquity. Maillol preferred the more archaic traditions, especially Egyptian art and the sculpture of Olympia, and was highly critical of later, more naturalistic Greek sculptors, such as Praxiteles. However, he also admired those later Greek works which have a more 'archaic', because more simplified and abstracted, character. 'The Mediterranean' has affinities with the proportions and style of the 'Venus de Milo' (Louvre), of which he said: 'In Greek art, there is nothing more beautiful.'

89 Flora 1911

Bronze, h.170

Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol, Paris

In 1910 'Pomona', a plump standing nude of Renoiresque type, was exhibited in the Salon d'Automne. This scored a great success, and was bought by the Russian collector, Ivan Morosov, who commissioned three other life-sized figures to accompany it – 'Spring', 'Summer' and 'Flora'. Together the group was given the title 'The Seasons' (Pushkin Museum, Moscow). Maillol worked on the commission between 1910 and 1912, and, as was usual with him, each of the statues went through a variety of states. 'Flora' in particular exists in the form of a nude, her arms and hands in the same position, but without the garland of flowers.

'Flora' openly acknowledges Maillol's general sense of affinity with the antique. She is constructed like a perfect column, facing straight ahead, and standing firmly on her square base. Except for the fact that her weight is on one leg, so that one hip is thrown slightly out to the side, there is minimal movement in the figure, and the transparent, clinging drapery accentuates the verticality of the composition, rather than suggesting activity. Maillol told Cladel: 'For my taste there should be as little movement as possible in sculpture. It shouldn't jump around and grimace.' (*Aristide Maillol. Sa Vie – Son Œuvre – Ses Idées*, Paris, 1937) The effect is very like that of a Greek caryatid, such as those on the Erechtheion in Athens, although the comparison reveals the greater sensuality of Maillol's vision. Indeed it may be that the torso was influenced by the celebrated, thinly draped and alluring figure of Aphrodite on the Ludovisi Throne (Terme Museum, Rome). The 'Venus Genetrix' in



89



90

the Louvre may be another source. All these sculptures date from the fifth century BC – the period of Greek art preferred by Maillol.

'Flora', like all the other statues Maillol created, has no narrative content, and is only in the most general sense an allegory of natural fertility or a representation of the mythological goddess of flowers and gardens and mother of spring. Rather, she incarnates his ideal of beauty – serene, harmonious, contented, tranquil. As he told Cladel: 'I seek beauty rather than character', and for him beauty became identified with the health, youth, freshness and eagerness of the young girls of Banyuls, who reminded him of the *kores* of antiquity.

90 Woman with a Thorn 1920

Bronze, h. 17.8

Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol, Paris



91

91 Holding Both Feet 1920

Bronze, h. 18.4

Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol, Paris

92 Holding One Foot 1920–21

Bronze, h. 18.4

Fondation Dina Vierny, Musée Maillol, Paris



92

Maillol is best known as a monumental sculptor, but he also created many small and intimate works of great charm and vitality, in which he expressed his pleasure in natural movement. Through experimenting with a variety of figure positions in the statuettes he would finally settle upon the definitive, generalised and synthesised poses for his life-sized sculptures. These three statuettes are variations on the same theme, for they explore essentially the same unselfconscious movement of a figure seated on the ground bending forward to examine her feet. It is as if we are observing the same woman at successive moments, and in this respect the figures are reminiscent of the great sequence of bathers by Degas, or Renoir, who was a close friend and whose own excursion into sculpture was encouraged by Maillol. But despite the keenness of his observation, Maillol generalises his figures so that they lose any personality and approximate to types.

81 Three Women (Le Grand Déjeuner) 1921

Oil on canvas, 183.4 × 251.5
Collection: The Museum of Modern Art,
New York, Mrs Simon Guggenheim
Fund

This great masterpiece was first exhibited at the Salon d'Automne of 1921. It was bought by Léonce Rosenberg, but he apparently found it too 'severe', and Léger took it back. Himself dissatisfied, Léger reworked it in 1922, painting the seated figure on the right in dark flesh tones over the original *grisaille*, and making various other small adjustments to the background and furniture, most of them in the direction of greater simplification. It remained unsold until 1925, a source for many of Léger's intervening paintings. 'Le Grand Déjeuner' is Léger's equivalent to Seurat's 'Sunday Afternoon at the

Island of the Grande-Jatte' (Art Institute, Chicago), for it was prepared meticulously over a two-year period, while simultaneously he worked on other related but distinct compositions with one or two nude figures. A drawing dated 1920 (in the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo) shows the whole composition more or less as it would appear in the definitive painting, and there are two considerably smaller oil versions, both known as 'Le Petit Déjeuner'. There are also separate drawings and oils of the tea-drinker on the right and of the two women on the left, all of them dated 1921. The care with which Léger prepared the huge painting shows that he thought of it as a 'masterpiece' and that he intended it to be a modern Salon 'machine'. Consistent with this intention was his decision to exhibit it for the first time in a Salon, rather than a dealer's gallery.

In letters to Alfred Barr written in 1942 and 1943 – Barr had just purchased the painting for the Museum of Modern Art – Léger described 'Le Grand Déjeuner' as 'classical', and stressed both the universality of the subject matter and the absence of emotion. Léger's sources for the painting are indeed located in the classical tradition of French art, and he himself hints at where we should look in the 'Letter', dated 1922, which he published in the *Bulletin de l'Effort Moderne* in April 1924. There he names as his 'artistic sources' Renoir, Seurat, Ingres and David, and indeed 'Le Grand Déjeuner' could readily be compared to Renoir's 'Large Bathers' (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), Seurat's 'The Models' (Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pennsylvania), Ingres's 'Turkish Bath' (Louvre) and David's 'Portrait of Madame Récamier' (Louvre). Other artists he mentions in the

81



[141]

same text are Delacroix, the Le Nain brothers, Cézanne, Poussin and Fouquet – and again, iconographic, compositional or stylistic parallels could be drawn with specific works, such as Delacroix's 'Women of Algiers' (Louvre), Le Nain's 'Family of Peasants in an Interior' (Louvre), Cézanne's late Bather compositions, Poussin's 'Eleazer and Rebecca at the Well' (Louvre), and Fouquet's 'Madonna and Child with Angels' (Musée des Beaux-Arts, Antwerp). He does not mention Manet, but 'Olympia' and 'Déjeuner sur l'herbe' (both Musée d'Orsay) are among the most obvious precedents for the painting.

Over and above any specific debt to the past, however, 'Le Grand Déjeuner' is intended to be a truly humanistic work – an ideal, symbolic image of universal peace, harmony and beauty, expressing Léger's hopes for the betterment of mankind and belief in the civilising mission of art. In this respect it must be seen in the context of the more modest 'animated landscapes' he was painting at exactly the same period (cat.78), which have a similar Utopian message.

Yet everything about the painting is resolutely modern while at the same time being classical and timeless. The odalisques drink their tea and read their books in a room decorated in the hygienic post-war style advocated by Le Corbusier; they look as if they have been assembled by a machine from off-the-peg, standardised parts. We recognise the debt to the flat colours and geometry of synthetic Cubism, and we sense the relationship to the contemporary abstract paintings of Mondrian, then living in Paris. Where Picasso sometimes pretends to be an ancient artist and renounces the outward garb of modernist styles, Léger does not. He refuses to mythologise, and there is none of Picasso's poignant and uneasy nostalgia. It was this absence of moral doubt that made critics such as Waldemar George speak of Léger's art as 'healthy' and 'cleansing' (*Fernand Léger*, Paris, 1929).

82 Nudes against a Red Background 1923

Oil on canvas, 145 × 97
*Oeffentliche Kunstsammlung,
Kunstmuseum, Basle*

This was the one figure painting produced by Léger in 1923, a year in which he was involved in many activities other than painting – writing, designing for the Ballets Suédois, and working on Marcel L'Herbier's film, *L'Inhumaine*. It was preceded by a small oil of the torso of the larger figure, and a squared-up drawing, both of which are dated 1922.

'Nudes against a Red Background' initiated a new 'pure' manner in Léger's figure paintings. The nudes derive from those in 'Le Grand Déjeuner', but where the earlier painting had dazzled with its complex decorative patterns and its constant shifts in perspective, the later painting is dramatic in its simplicity. Although the figures are mechanistic, and lock together so tightly and so perfectly that they look like parts of the same smoothly working machine, they are less specifically modern than the nudes in 'Le Grand Déjeuner'. They are simply objects of contemplation, similar to the subject-less, timeless *académies* (life paintings) executed by every art student. Here Léger draws closer to the classicism of Picasso in 'The Large Bather' (cat.141), and away from the 'Cubist' classicism of the Purists or of Gris. Perhaps he is closest of all to Maillol in the complete absence of mood or expression, and in his pursuit of an absolute compositional and technical finality.

The picture could, indeed, be likened to an icon, the brilliant, almost magical, red standing in for the sacred gold; and like an icon it has the authority of the unalterable. Tériade hailed the new simplicity of Léger's figure paintings of 1923–4 as the climax of his classicism: 'The static, monumental figures are comparable to the figures in Greek art in their silent and inexpressive plenitude. They mark a great step towards the essential, towards definitive simplicity. They represent the abandonment of dynamism and the search for form that will be calm, stripped, secret.' He concluded: 'The admirable unity of their forms coincides with the sobriety of their colours to convey a sensation of balance; and the style becomes that of the Great Tradition (le style devient grand).' (*Fernand Léger*, Paris, 1928) With reason, 'Nudes against a Red Background' has been compared to Roman

mosaics from the Baths of Caracalla, which show muscular, pugilistic athletes silhouetted against plain grounds. (These mosaics had been reproduced in *L'Esprit Nouveau* in December 1921.)



Léger's position in the 'call to order' movement of the post-war period is an idiosyncratic one. His grand figurative paintings on traditional themes, such as the nude or the mother and child, are related in imagery to the neoclassical paintings of Picasso and Braque and to the realist paintings of Derain, although his scenes are idealised visions of the modern world. On the other hand, in its boldly abstracted style his work is closest to that of the Purists and the 'crystal' Cubists supported by Léonce Rosenberg, even though he did not share their philosophical and metaphysical concerns, and was more attracted to modern technology than pure mathematics. Indeed in Léger's work the determination to forge a link between the specifically modern and the great traditions of the past, without compromising either, is expressed more distinctly and more forcefully than it is by any other artist of the period.

Léger came from a family of livestock breeders in Normandy – a background that conditioned his down-to-earth attitude to his painting, which he hoped would appeal to ordinary people. (His identification with the working classes led him eventually to join the Communist Party in 1945.) He was apprenticed early to an architect in Caen, and in 1900 moved to Paris where he was employed as an architectural draughtsman. This experience had lasting repercussions for his painting, which is solid in structure and precise in execution. Determined to become a painter, Léger attempted to gain admission to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in 1903, but, having failed, enrolled in the Ecole des Arts Décoratifs. At the same time he attended open classes given by the academic painters Léon Gérôme and Gabriel Ferrier, frequented the Académie Julian, and studied in the Louvre. At this stage his own painting was based on Impressionism, but at the Salon d'Automne of 1907 he discovered the work of Cézanne, whose influence on him remained significant for some years.

In 1908 Léger took a studio in Montparnasse where, over the next few years, he encountered the leading avant-garde poets and painters in the circle of Apollinaire, Max Jacob and Blaise Cendrars. He

destroyed much of his early work, but what survives suggests that by 1909 he was already acquainted with the early Cubist paintings of Picasso and Braque. However, his first major painting, the monumental 'Nudes in a Forest' (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo), which was exhibited in the Salon des Indépendants of 1911, shows his allegiance to the 'Salon' Cubists, Metzinger, Gleizes, Le Fauconnier and Delaunay, who, unlike Braque and Picasso, concentrated on classically conceived, multi-figure compositions. Like them Léger was also much interested in Bergsonian concepts of simultaneity and dynamism, and he gravitated naturally to the gatherings at Puteaux held in the studio of the Villon brothers. In October 1912 he exhibited with this group at the Salon de 'La Section d'Or' in the Galerie La Boétie. In 1913 Léger signed a contract with Kahnweiler, and the complex, large-scale Cubist works of 1911–12 yielded, in 1913–14, to the virtually abstract, highly simplified style of the 'Contrast of Forms' series.

Léger's experiences at the front during the First World War convinced him that his work must in future express the concrete reality of modern life in direct iconographic terms, and not only in terms of the dynamic, but purely formal, contrasts of his pre-war 'abstract' paintings. Gassed at Verdun, he was demobilised, and was able to take up painting seriously again in 1917. 'The Card-players' of that year (Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo) was his homage to his fellow soldiers in the trenches, and announced his return to grand figurative subjects. The bold, clean, hard-edged style reflected his intense admiration for modern industrial machinery, and the influence of illustrations of machine parts, as well as popular forms of art such as posters and advertisements. Kahnweiler being in exile abroad, Léger signed a contract with Léonce Rosenberg in 1918, and in February 1919 had his first one-man show at Rosenberg's Galerie de l'Effort Moderne.

Between 1918 and 1920 the human figures in Léger's paintings were usually, if not invariably, fragmented, and the visual effect of his stridently coloured, strongly patterned paintings was of dynamic



The artist in his studio, c. 1928

movement. The urban subjects also implied a life of action, energy and speed, and although machines were not directly depicted, the pictures were dominated by polished, mechanistic forms. But in 1920, in paintings such as 'The Mechanic' (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa), the human figure is unified, dominates the canvas, and is given a 'classic' status through broad references to archaic art and to the French tradition of realist figure painting from Fouquet to the Douanier Rousseau. More tranquil themes of leisure and relaxation now predominated, while the compositions were controlled increasingly by perfectly balanced oppositions of horizontals and verticals. Léger's meeting in 1920 with Ozenfant and Jeanneret (Le Corbusier) helped to confirm this new orientation, and he remained closely associated with them throughout the lifetime of their periodical *L'Esprit Nouveau*. In 1924 he set up a teaching studio, the Académie de l'Art Moderne, with Ozenfant, and from this time on teaching was an important part of Léger's activity. His friendship with Le Corbusier was even closer and longer lasting.

In 1924 Léger went to Italy with Léonce Rosenberg. He visited Ravenna and Venice and especially admired the Romanesque mosaics and the paintings of the 'Primitives', and in 1933 he accompanied Le Corbusier on a trip to Greece. Léger's identification with the tradition of the old masters never involved imitation or the appropriation of their styles, and the extent of his debt to the classical tradition was debated by French critics in the 1920s. Waldemar George minimised it (*Fernand Léger*, Paris, 1929); but Tériade analysed the 'Northern', as opposed to 'Mediterranean', character of Léger's classicism at length (*Fernand Léger*, Paris, 1928). Both were, however, in complete agreement about the classical formal qualities of his art – its ordered, constructive and lucid nature – and about the 'healthy equilibrium' of his temperament. George wrote: 'A canvas by Léger is a plastic idea thoroughly understood and clearly formulated. . . . His whole being breathes equilibrium, strength and energy . . . a strength which is instinctive and normal. . . . His happy genius has worked successfully for the clarification of contemporary art.' For Tériade, 'Léger is the great constructor', and his work possesses 'powerful stability', 'the intimacy of silence', and 'meditative peace'; it is above all an art of 'synthesis'.

In the early 1920s Léger's interest in the theatre, dance and especially the cinema resulted in commissions from the Ballets Suédois of Rolf de Maré, and in the making of avant-garde films, including *Ballet mécanique* – the first film without a scenario. His international reputation grew, and in the late 1920s and 1930s he exhibited widely in France and abroad. His energy as a teacher, writer and lecturer further contributed to the spread of his influence. His ambition to produce genuinely public art was first realised at the time of the 1925 Exposition des Arts Décoratifs, when he and Delaunay were commissioned by the architect Mallet-Stevens to decorate the entrance hall of his 'Pavilion of a French Embassy'. In the last twenty years of his life Léger received an increasing number of such commissions, culminating in his decorations for the United Nations building in New York in 1952. In 1949 he was honoured with a major retrospective at the Musée National d'Art Moderne in Paris, and after his death with a memorial exhibition at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, where his career as a painter had begun.

78 Man with a Dog 1921

Oil on canvas, 65 × 92

Private Collection of Samir Traboulsi,
Paris

This is the best known of the '*paysages animés*' (animated landscapes) Léger painted in 1921. The scenery in 'Man with a Dog' is synthetic and idealised, but probably reflects memories of the Normandy farms and villages Léger saw on his summer visits home. The idealisation of country life involves, however, no hint of nostalgia for the pre-technological age. On the contrary, the boldly coloured, geometric farm buildings resemble advanced contemporary villas and apartments, such as those designed by his friend Le Corbusier, and they coexist with iron bridges and stencilled billboards. Although no factories are specified, there is a strong suggestion of the modern industrial landscape, and the robotic men could just as easily be factory workers on a break as farm workers out for a stroll. No irony is intended in the confrontation. Léger extolled the beauty of the gleaming new agricultural machines which were beginning to

INDEX OF ARTISTS AND THEIR WORKS

ANDREU, Mariano
 1 Women with a Bird
 2 The Game of Cards
 3 Figures from the Commedia dell'Arte

BERNARD, Joseph
 4 Modern Sphinx
 5 Serenity

BONNARD, Pierre
 6 Summer
 7 The Bowl of Milk

BOURDELLE, Emile Antoine
 8 Penelope
 9 France

BRAQUE, Georges
 10 Basket Bearer
 11 Basket Bearer
 12 Woman with a Mandolin. Free Study after Corot

CAMPIGLI, Massimo
 13 Woman with Folded Arms
 14 The Seamstresses
 15 Two Sisters

CARRÀ, Carlo
 16 The Drunken Gentleman (not exhibited)
 17 The Oval of Apparitions
 18 The Daughters of Lot
 19 Woman by the Sea
 20 Study for 'Justinian Liberates the Slave'

CASANOVA, Eric
 21 Persuasion
 22 Youth and Love
 23 Mallorcan Peasant Woman
 24 Youth

CASORATI, Felice
 25 Silvana Cenni
 26 Still Life with Mannequins
 27 Portrait of Casella

CÉZANNE, Paul
 28 Bathers
 29 Young Italian Woman Leaning on her Elbow

CHIRICO, Giorgio de
 30 The Uncertainty of the Poet
 31 Song of Love
 32 La Muta, after Raphael
 33 Roman Piazza (Mercury and the Metaphysicians)

34 Roman Villa
 35 Self-portrait
 36 The Philosopher
 37 The Painter's Family
 38 Roman Women
 39 Gladiators
 40 Melon with Grapes and Apples

CLARÀ, José
 41 Rhythm
 42a Isadora Duncan Dancing to Schubert's *Marche Militaire*
 42b Isadora Duncan Dancing to Schubert's *Marche Militaire*
 42c Isadora Duncan Dancing to Tchaikovsky's *Marche Slave*
 42d Isadora Duncan - A Tragic Destiny

DALÍ, Salvador
 43 Portrait of the Artist's Father and Sister
 44 Seated Girl Seen from the Back

DERAIN, André
 45 View of St Paul-de-Vence
 46 The Bagpiper
 47 Portrait of Madame Kahnweiler
 48 The Italian Model
 49 The Lovely Model
 50 Still Life with a Melon

DESPAUX, Charles
 51 Girl from the Landes

DONGHI, Antonio
 52 Washerwomen

FRIEsz, Emile-Othon
 53 Spring

FUNI, Achille
 54 Maternity
 55 Earth

GARGALLO, Pablo
 56 Torso of a Young Gipsy
 57 Small Torso of a Woman

GONZÁLEZ, Julio
 58 Head of a Woman
 59 Woman Washing
 60 Woman Sleeping on the Beach
 61 Reclining Nude
 62 Kneeling Nude

GRIS, Juan
 63 Bathers, after Cézanne
 64 Portrait of Josette Gris

65 Portrait of Pierre Reverdy
 66 Portrait of Madame Berthe Lipchitz
 67 The Bay
 68 The Pierrot

GUIDI, Virgilio
 69 The Visit

JEANNERET, Charles-Edouard, known as Le Corbusier
 70 Still Life with Bowl
 71 Pale Still Life with a Lantern

LAURENS, Henri
 72 Woman with a Basket of Grapes
 73 Two Women
 74 Reclining Woman with Drapery
 75 Large Woman with a Mirror
 76 Bather (Fragment)
 77 Small Maternity

LÉGER, Fernand
 78 Man with a Dog
 79 Animated Landscape
 80 Study for a Landscape
 81 Three Women (Le Grand Déjeuner)
 82 Nudes against a Red Background (not exhibited)
 83 The Two Sisters

LIPCHITZ, Jacques
 84 Pregnant Woman
 85 Portrait of Raymond Radiguet

MAILLOL, Aristide
 86 Two Seated Women
 87 Study for 'The Mediterranean'
 88 The Mediterranean
 89 Flora
 90 Woman with a Thorn
 91 Holding Both Feet
 92 Holding One Foot
 93 Torso of the He de France
 94 Venus with a Necklace
 95 The Three Nymphs

MANGLO (Manuel Hugué)
 96 Totote
 97 Girl from Roussillon
 98 Young Catalan Woman
 99 Ox and Ox-cart
 100 Old Peasant Woman
 101 Seated Girl
 102 Woman with a Mirror
 103 Bacchante
 104 Bacchante

MARINI, Marino
 105 Fragment (Female Nude)

INDEX OF ARTISTS AND THEIR WORKS

- MARTINI, Arturo**
 106 The Stars
 107 Head of a Boy
 108 La Nena
 109 Torso
 110 Leda and the Swan
 111 Reclining Woman
 112 Woman in the Sun
- MASSON, André**
 113 Women
 114 The Abandoned City
- MATISSE, Henri**
 115 The Coiffure
 116 Bathers with a Turtle
 117 The Italian Woman (Lorette)
 118 Plaster Torso, Bouquet of Flowers
 119 The Three O'Clock Session
- METZINGER, Jean**
 120 Woman with a Pheasant
- MIRÓ, Joan**
 121 Vegetable Garden with Donkey
 122 Montroig, the Church and the Village
- MORANDI, Giorgio**
 123 Still Life
 124 Still Life
- OPPI, Ubaldo**
 125 Portrait of the Artist with his Wife (The Double Portrait)
 126 The Friends
- OZENFANT, Amédée**
 127 Fugue (not exhibited)
- PICASSO, Pablo**
 128 Two Nudes
 129 Seated Nude and Standing Nude
 130 The Painter and his Model
 131 Portrait of Ambroise Vollard
 132 Harlequin
 133 Italian Peasants, after a Photograph
 134 Still Life with Pitcher and Apples
 135 Nessus and Dejanira
 136 Seated Woman
 137 Studies
 138 Head of a Woman
 139 The Source
 140 Maternity
 141 Large Bather
 142 Two Women Running on the Beach (The Race)
 143 Studio with Plaster Head
 144 Seated Woman in a Red Armchair
 145 Head of a Woman
 146 Minotaur and Nude
- RENOIR, Pierre Auguste**
 147 Seated Bather in a Landscape (Eurydice)
 148 Venus Victorious
- SAVINIO, Alberto**
 149 The Return
 150 Builders of Paradise
 151 Roger and Angelica
- SEVERINI, Gino**
 152 Portrait of Jeanne
 153 Still Life with Brown Jug
 154 Conjugated Projections of the Head
 155 The Two Pulchinellas
 156 Portrait of Gina (Homage to Fouquet)
 157 Still Life with Pumpkin and Mask
- SIRONI, Mario**
 158 Composition – Urban Architecture
 159 Self-portrait
 160 The Sculptor's Model
 161 Maternity
 162 Male Figure
 163 Female Figure
 164 Solitude
 165 The Miner's Family
 166 Architecture with Vestal Virgin and Athlete
 167 Untitled
- SOCRATE, Carlo**
 168 Girl Carrying Fruit
- SUNYER, Joaquim**
 169 Pastoral
 170 Landscape with Three Nudes
 171 Maternity
 172 Teresa: the Girl in the Shawl
- TOGORES, Josep de**
 173 Catalan Girls
 174 Landscape: Le Coteau