

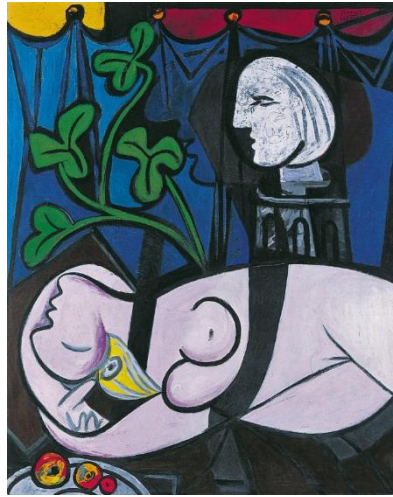
March 8, 2018

## Picasso 1932 - Love, Fame, Tragedy

Tate Modern



*The Dream, 1932*



*Nude, Green Leaves and Bust, 1932*



*Nude in a Black Armchair, 1932*

It's hard to escape Picasso outside in the world and inside one's own head. At any point in time, somewhere on the planet, there are numerous exhibitions dedicated to his work. For good or evil, he haunts every painter's studio. He is inescapable. Even if you hate him, his spectre looms large. Sometimes his work elicits distrust for what seems like a lazy, look-ma-no-hands facility. There is a draughtsmanship and nose for colour that can seem too easy. Doing a painting in a single day was a regular occurrence in his life. For a man supposedly obsessed by having rampant sex with women, this prolificity in work makes you wonder if this can be true. How was there ever the time? It is more likely that his deepest ecstasies were enjoyed, brush or pencil in hand, in front of a blank canvas or piece of paper.

In this spellbinding show there are three rapturous sleeping nudes executed on the 8th, 9th and 10th of March 1932 that render any puritanical reservations about his speed and facility completely moot. Freud's theories about personality were very well known to him, and his paintings are full of knowing Freudian tropes about sex and male identity. Picasso is all Id and Ego, with no discernible Super-Ego. Was anyone ever as at his ease in his own skin as Picasso? He is the Minotaur - one of his favourite *personae* with its macho Spanish connotations of the bullfight. And like the Minotaur he lurks in a labyrinth wrought from complexity and executed with simplicity.

This show looks in depth at 1932, the year of his first retrospective, and the year when aged 50, famous, wealthy and married, he is in erotic thrall to the first of his many important muses - the very young, very beautiful Marie Thérèse Walter.

Women are always central to his work and both his life and work seems to divide into the Fernande, the Olga, the Marie Thérèse, the Dora, the Françoise and the Jacqueline years, often with overlap.

By 1932 the world is darkening. Fascism is on the horizon and the tragic bombing of Guernica, so crucial to Picasso and the subject of his greatest work, is 5 years in the future. But there are still greedy collectors to supply; protective dealers to appease; acquisitive museums on whom to bestow his paintings; chateaux to use as sculpture and painting studios; servants and splendid cars to cater to his every need; nannies to care for his children and holidays at the beach. His life in 1932 is far from his old modest life as the spoiled child prodigy, a treasured only son of adoring parents who had lost other children. In Camille Paglia's words "we each have an incestuous constellation of sexual personae that we carry from the cradle to the grave and that determines whom and how we love."

And how he loved was crucial to his painting. It is his carnal relationships that dominate this show. Always a man drawn to multiple dimensions and dualities, whether in the multiple perspectives of Cubism or in the juggling of wifely embourgeoisement and adulterous passions, he devotes the year of 1932 mainly to his obsession with his young mistress. In the paintings, she lies down for him on beds and sits for him in armchairs, with her limbs in a whipped-up lather of dreamy abandonment. He paints her portrait from memory and her lovely young head merges with his own sexual organs. It's the wittiest representation of something so complex, that I can't think of another painter or writer who has ever been able to communicate this so well - the merging of the mental and physical world in the act of sex, with its loss of boundaries and edges.

The show's subtitle is apt. There is love. There is fame. There are hints of tragedy. But what strikes me most about Picasso, looking at him today in this fresh, coherent and beautiful show at Tate Modern, is that although he is light years away from being a realist painter in 1932, Picasso's painting is paradoxically grounded in a deep sense of reality.

*"Fame unsettles your sense of reality almost as much as power."*

Gabriel Garcia Marques

Not in Picasso's case.

**Robin Richmond**