



PICASSO Ceramist and the Mediterranean

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It is a distinct pleasure and privilege for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to present this landmark exhibition of ceramics crafted by Pablo Picasso. This is the first time a display of this magnitude has crossed the Atlantic, and we are immensely proud that the Kennedy Center will be its only U.S. venue.

These highly original creations are a revelation even for those who are intimately acquainted with Picasso's oeuvre; seeing them will surely be a unique and transformative experience for the thousands of visitors to *IBERIAN SUITE: global arts remix*.

Opening our doors to international artists who have the power to open minds is an important part of the Kennedy Center's mission. As Picasso once observed, "Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once we grow up." Every day of the year, our programming strives to foster that ability to see the world through fresh eyes. We are especially focused on educational efforts designed to instill an appreciation for the arts in younger generations.

I would like to commend our International Programming Department for having the vision to include this exhibition in our *IBERIAN SUITE: global arts remix* festival. It is a brilliant example of our commitment to promoting cultural exchange and connecting people around the globe. It is also an elegant and timely reminder of how cultural influences have traveled freely back-and-forth across borders for centuries, enriching us all.










I would like to thank the many curators, lenders and other key participants in France, Spain and throughout the world who have contributed to this great project. It was truly a collaborative process, an ambitious and exciting "global arts remix."

DEBORAH F. RUTTER

President

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

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Cover photo: David Douglas Duncan

PICASSO CERAMIST AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

« Montrez moi cet homme de toujours si doux
Qui disait les doigts font monter la terre »

*“Show me that man, always so gentle,
Who would say that fingers raise clay from the Earth”*

Paul Éluard « À Pablo Picasso » (1947)

Pablo Picasso began working with clay after World War II, when he moved to the south of France. The sheer number of ceramic objects he produced remains impressive, and their originality still fascinates. More than one hundred and fifty of these unique pieces were recently displayed in Aubagne, on France’s Mediterranean coast, then in Sèvres, at France’s national ceramics museum. Now the majority of these are part of an exhibition organized by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, revealing to visitors the strong link forged between Picasso and the Mediterranean in his experience with the art of fire.

Before Vallauris

Ceramics were an everyday part of Picasso’s childhood. The artist was certainly familiar with the medium: as a boy in La Coruña in the early 1890s, he used oil paints to decorate plates, as did many other artists, while, later, in Barcelona, he recognized its artistic potential in the decoration of Els Quatre Gats, a tavern that he and other avant-garde artists frequented.

Then in Paris, in 1900 or 1901, Picasso struck up a relationship with Paco Durrio (Francisco Durrieu de Madrán, 1868-1940), a Basque sculptor, goldsmith, and ceramic artist. Durrio was a friend of Gauguin and owned several of his works, including ceramic objects. Picasso’s relationship with Paco Durrio was undoubtedly significant and resulted in a series of figures modeled in clay, some

of which were fired and glazed, that Picasso created between 1902 and 1906. What emerged from this initiation was closer to sculpture than to ceramics in the strict sense, but it also included vases and represented a kind of apprenticeship in the potential of clay. Among his first experiments was a *pignate* decorated with gouache that he gave to his friend Apollinaire in 1906. Today it appears to be the prototype of variations that the artist would, fifty years later in Vallauris, apply to these traditional Mediterranean earthenware cooking pots. In 1914, the relationship between painting and ceramics was developed in the little cubist-inspired still lifes that he produced with Derain on a group of tiles set in plaster.

In 1924 Picasso planned to work with Josep Llorens Artigas (1892-1980), a Catalan ceramic artist living in Paris who had a notable collaboration with Dufy, but that project never came to fruition. However, Picasso’s association with Jean van Dongen (1883-1970) was more productive. There are two vases in the Musée Picasso in Paris by Van Dongen, which Picasso decorated in 1929, one with bathers, the other with hands holding fish – motifs that would reappear twenty years later in his work at Vallauris.

Vallauris

Picasso discovered Vallauris, a town famous for its pottery, when he was staying on the French Riviera in the summer of 1936 with Dora Maar and his friends Paul and Nusch Eluard. But his real

VIDEO

INTERVIEW WITH BRUNO GAUDICHON

2'22"



CERAMICS AND PICASSO'S RETURN TO THE MEDITERRANEAN

MARILYN MCCULLY

Picasso's return to the shores of the Mediterranean after World War II prompted significant changes not only in his personal life – within a few years he would settle for good on the Côte d'Azur – but also in the direction of his art. In the company of the young painter Françoise Gilot, with whom he would have two children (Claude, b. 1947 and Paloma, b. 1949), he embarked on a new chapter of his life. Each year they would spend several months in Golfe-Juan, and in 1948 they bought the villa La Galloise in Vallauris. The work that he carried out in the south reflects both the impact of the region itself and, especially, its long-standing artistic and mythological traditions. When the artist turned his creative attention to ceramics, he discovered a means to carry out acts of metamorphosis: turning the art of antiquity into something modern and characteristically Picasso at the same time.

As a native of Málaga, a Mediterranean port with its own rich cultural heritage, Picasso had grown up with a keen awareness of

its historical traditions. Málaga had been settled at various times in its history by Phoenicians, Romans and Moors, and traces of their roles in establishing the city's particular character are still to be discovered in archaeological sites and in pottery remains. As early as 1906, he had also drawn on Iberian sculpture for inspiration in his drawings and paintings. When he took up ceramics some forty years later, he once again revived that interest, but he also widened his artistic horizons to include the world of Spanish pottery, especially the medieval Hispano-Moresque tradition, in his efforts to create something new yet rooted in the past.

In an interview about their time together on the Côte d'Azur, Gilot reiterated the importance to the artist of the native myths of the classical world:

Picasso, in the true Mediterranean tradition, had been brought up on these stories since childhood. He had completely assimilated them, and it was as if they had become a part of his being that he



could access whenever the Mediterranean atmosphere led him back to the times 'when the Gods walked the earth in human form.'¹

The couple were staying in Golfe-Juan in 1946, when they met the local museum director Romuald Dor de la Souchère. He seized the opportunity to invite Picasso to work in the museum, which was housed in the Château Grimaldi in Antibes. A number of the paintings and drawings that the artist did in the handsome old building conjure up memories of the ancient Greek site of Antipolis – modern-day Antibes. As he later told Dor de la Souchère, '...every time I come to Antibes, it takes hold of me; it takes hold of me over and over again... I cannot explain the call... at Antibes *this antiquity* seizes hold of me every time.'² Picasso drew on mythological references as well as

allusions to Antibes' geographical position on the sea and populated his compositions with characters and images drawn both from the past and from his own world. In this way, for example, Gilot takes her place in his celebrated composition *La Joie de vivre* [fig. 2] as a dancing figure and muse among pipe players, fauns and centaurs. The media with which he realized this and other works at the château also reflected his desire to reinvent the old on his own terms, even if that meant breaking the rules of classical practice. This extended to his choice of materials; in the case of his Antibes paintings, he used ordinary boat paint instead of artist's oils to create scenes that are evocative of antiquity, and he painted on panels of fibro-cement and plywood.³ The step to making use of the earth itself, as ancient artists had done before him, came in the following year.

Picasso and Gilot were at the beach one afternoon during the summer of 1946, when the photographer Michel Sima introduced

Fig. 2 Picasso, *La Joie de vivre*, 1946
Oleoresinous paint on fibro-cement, 120 x 250 cm.
Antibes, Musée Picasso, MPA 1946.1.4.





Picasso also painted vases and dishes with colors that had been prepared to his specifications. The great majority of these were metallic oxides, which produced colors that could be applied to white glaze, like paints. Picasso was not interested in investigating ceramic materials apart from colored glazes. He used the glazes he was given.¹⁵

Within just a few months, Picasso's participation in the life of the pottery had not only transformed Madoura and the Ramiés' reputation,¹⁶ but he had fully entered into the spirit of the place. Dor de la Souchère called attention to Picasso's newfound identity as an artist-potter in the spring 1948 issue of *Cahiers d'art*:

In his workshop at Vallauris he liked to assume the role of one of the great Attic 'Metics,' Douris, Euphronios, Amasis or Nicosthenes. They were the patrons who created the shapes and decorated the vases, and were masters of the ceramic workshops that flooded the 'oikoumene' – the whole world – with their precious but plentiful wares. Their skills and the secret manufacturing techniques they invented still astound us all today.

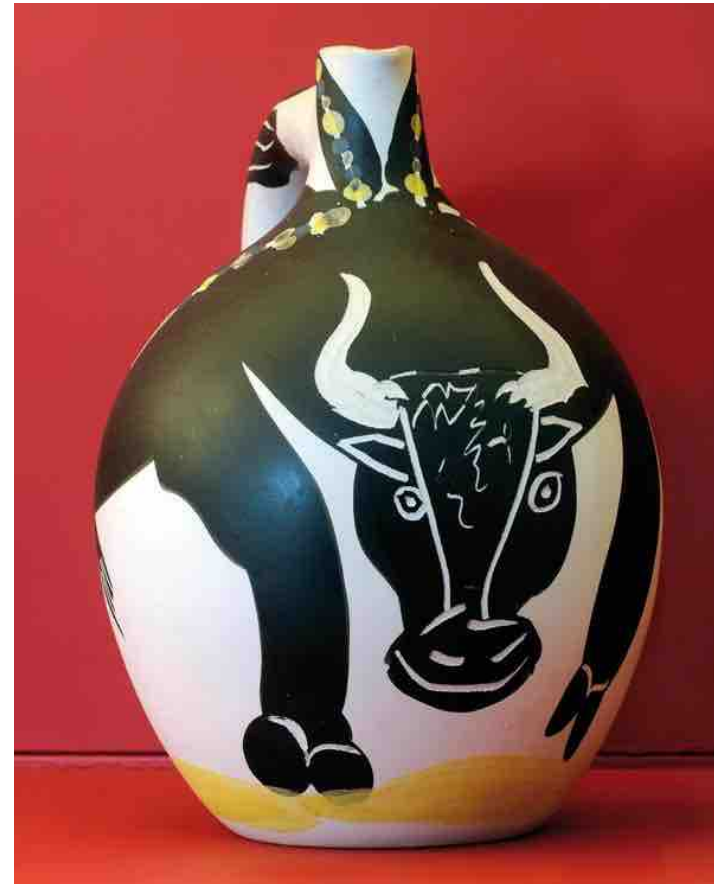


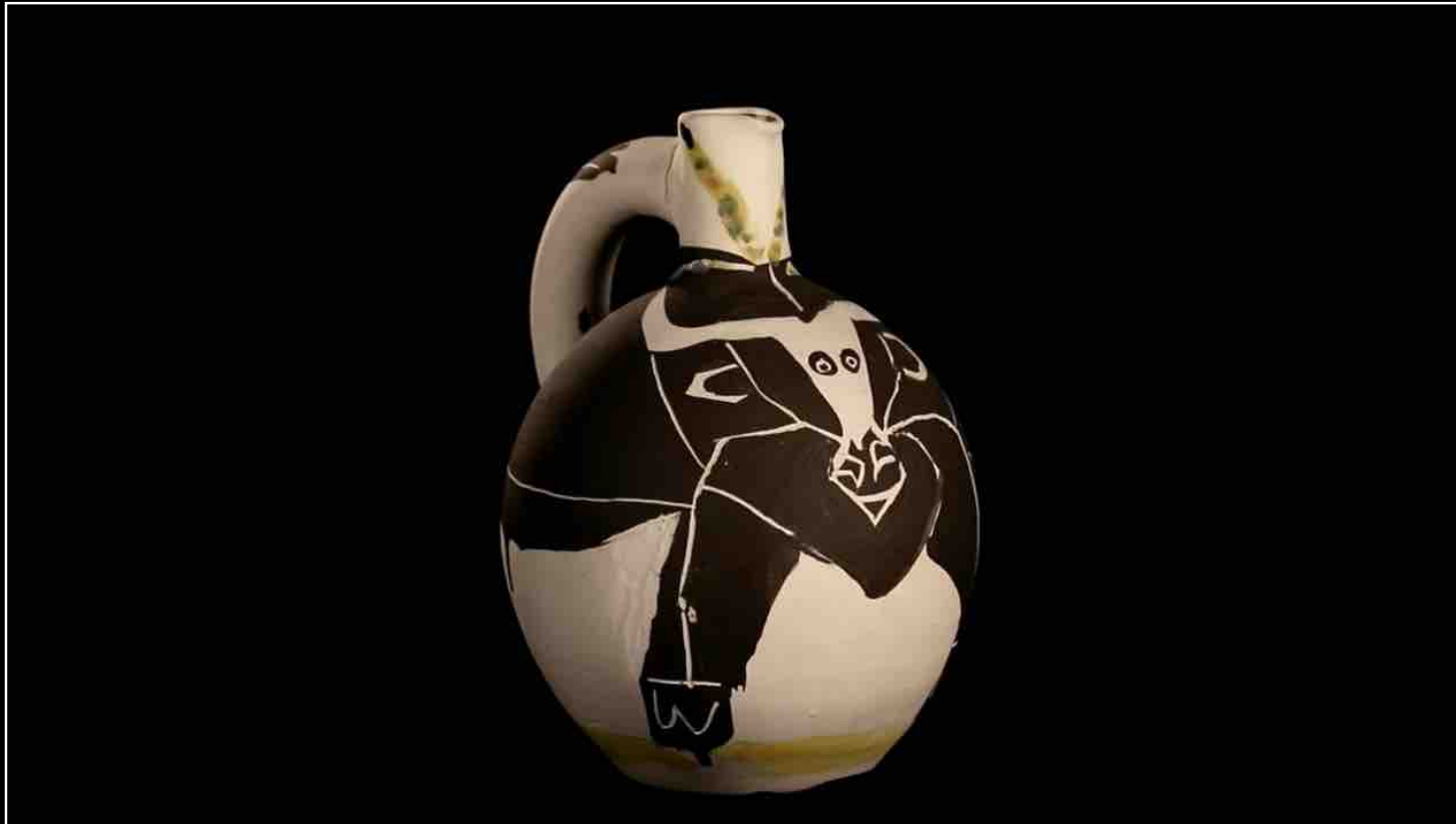
Fig. 7 Pablo Picasso. **Battle of Minotaur and Centaur**, 1947
Plat long, white earthenware decorated with colored slips, 32 x 38 cm.
Antibes, Musée Picasso, MPA 1949.4.23.

Fig. 8 Pablo Picasso. **Bull with Yellow Banderillas**, 29 March 1955
Water jug (Madoura Edition), white earthenware, decorated with colored slips, h. 30.5 cm.
Attenborough collection.

VIDEO

BULL WITH YELLOW BANDERILLAS

0'32"



vessels, as prototypes for her modern interpretations. Her 1950s' taste for simplified large ceramic vessels, which were thrown on the wheel, extended to their decoration: they were generally dipped in an overall white or colored glaze. When Picasso appropriated her pots for decoration, he violated that taste by transforming them into paintings in the round, often drawing out humorous associations with the different parts of the forms themselves. Bulbous supports become breasts, circular handles become hair piled on women's heads – equally, the whole pot could be turned into a bull, testicles and all [fig. 8].

According to Gilot, Picasso liked to poke around the rubbish heaps behind the factories in Vallauris,¹⁷ where he found fragments of discarded red earthenware, which he then decorated as if they were archaeological finds. In the late summer of 1950, he also acquired, probably as a single lot, a large number of both straight- and curved-sided *pignates*, which he transformed through painting into vessels equally evocative of ancient times. On some of them he painted processions of women encircling the pots, and their attire – white robes and garlands – suggests that they might be Greek, although some of the profiles resemble Gilot herself [fig. 9]. Owls and doves also appear on the sides and handles of Picasso's *pignates*, and these, too, represent personal iconography as much as they refer to the antique.¹⁸

One of the fruitful consequences of Picasso's collaboration with Madoura was the invention of the process of *empreinte originale*. Working with Jean Ramié, he came up with a method that he saw as having the same potential as printmaking for issuing original ceramic impressions in series. Ramié would begin by making a plaster mold from an existing plate or another shape, and Picasso would then carve his designs into the plaster. Sometimes he also added liquid clay so that the upraised elements in the mold would appear as recessions in the impression, just as the carved lines would appear in relief. Next Ramié would press either white or red clay into the mold and allow it to dry. Picasso then had the option of



Fig. 11 Pablo Picasso. **Mythological Figures and Heads**, 1954
Tall square vase (*empreinte originale*) red earthenware, relief, decorated with slips, h. 56 cm.
Attenborough collection.

found in the Louvre or found in books. As we have already seen with his preparatory drawings, these are reinterpretations and original creations by the artist himself. While museums provided Picasso with the initial reserve of forms and motifs that inspired his work, his exceptional visual memory summoned images indistinguishable from the originals, photographs or various interpretations of ancient art by artists throughout the centuries. Thus, the iconographic models for Picasso's woman-vases (themselves carrying vases) are drawn from diverse sources, from ancient ceramics to the history of European art. It has been suggested that the iconographic motif shared by Picasso's painting *Three Women at the Fountain* (Musée Picasso, Paris) and the woman-vases he made some twenty five years later was influenced by *Eliezer and Rebecca*, the painting by Nicolas Poussin completed in 1648, where the women are associated with ceramic vases.²⁷ Marilyn McCully has also suggested a connection between Picasso's women-vases carrying an amphora and *La Source*, a painting by Ingres also in the Louvre.²⁸

However, Picasso's models and sources of inspiration are more diverse still: several postcards showing Catalan women going to the fountain with jugs have been found in Picasso's estate, which he bought in Céret, at the foot of the Pyrenees, where he stayed on several occasions between 1911 and 1913. The postcards served as models for the *Woman with Jug*, a wash drawing made in 1919, and the two paintings of 1921 entitled *The Source* and *Three Women at the Fountain*, a theme of which several variants exist.²⁹ The Catalan woman on her way to the fountain [fig. 49], photographed face on presents, in particular, great similarities with Picasso's woman-vases [fig. 40] in terms of the stereometrical structure of the body, the narrow waist and the way of holding the clay vase under her arm.

Picasso's woman-vases are referred to as «tanagras,» although it is not clear whether Picasso used the term himself. An examination of the vast collection of ceramic female figures found in Tanagra in Boeotia, produced between the 10th and the 2nd century BC, shows that Picasso's woman-vases draw inspiration from the Archaic period, between 625 and 550 BC [fig. 46]. These hieratic female representations have a hollow, bell-shaped body, accentuated by a long garment tightened around the waist. The bodies were thrown



on the potter's wheel while the head and face were cast and the arms modeled. These colored terracotta statuettes represent mourners. Picasso must have been familiar, before 1947, with these ceramic figurines, used originally used in the cult of the dead, as they had been on display in the Louvre since the end of the 19th century and also appeared in the *Encyclopédie photographique de l'art* published in 1936.³⁰ At least one of them was also reproduced in *L'art en Grèce* published by Zervos in 1936.³¹ Though of smaller dimensions, these figurines present a number of characteristics in common with Picasso's woman-vases, in terms of their production

Fig. 52 Pablo Picasso. **Head of a Bull**, 1942
Bicycle handlebar and saddle (metal and leather), 33.5 x 43.5 x 19 cm.
Paris, Musée National Picasso, M.P. 330.





6 Hands Holding Duck, [1950-1951]

Flower vase in the form of a duck. White earthenware, thrown and assembled, colored slips on white glazed ground, incised, 39.5 x 19 x 40 cm. Private collection

VIDEO
HANDS HOLDING DUCK
0'24''





10 Head of a Faun or a Bearded Man, [1950]
White earthenware, modeled and incised, 7.8 x 7.5 x 2.7 cm. Private collection



100 Bullfight Scene with Picador, 20 April 1951
Oval platter. White earthenware, press-molded, colored oxides, transparent glaze, 29 x 65 cm. Private collection



102 **Woman Leaning on her Hands**, [1950]
Tripod vase. White earthenware, thrown and assembled, colored oxides, incised, transparent glaze. 74.5 x 31 x 31 cm. Private collection



129 **Still Life with Two Fishes and Slice of Lemon**, [1953]
Louis XV pattern plate. White earthenware, press-molded, green lead glaze, modeled elements applied, colored oxides, transparent glaze, diam. 23 cm. Private collection

VIDEO

ZOOMORPHIC POT WHITE EARTHENWARE

0'32"





134 **Cavalier**, [1950]
Wine pitcher. White earthenware, thrown and assembled, colored slips, white glazed ground, incised, transparent glaze, 41.5 x 32 x 26, diam. of base 17.5 cm.
Private collection



135 Dove, 7 January 1953
White earthenware, modeled, slips, 17 x 13 x 10 cm. Private collection

VIDEO

PICASSO MAKING A DOVE

FROM LUCIANO EMMER'S FILM

INCONTRARE PICASSO

2'01''



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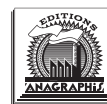
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This work was realized February 2015, Saint-Georges d'Orques (F)

Dépôt légal: February 2015

ISBN: 978-2-907684-07-1