PABLO PICASSO

Spanish, 1881–1973

Pablo Picasso was born on 25 October 1881 in Málaga, in the Andalusian region of southern Spain, the son of José Ruiz Blasco, an art teacher, and María Picasso López. By the age of thirteen he had surpassed his father's abilities, and José, recognising the fact, ceremonially handed his son his own palette and brushes, declaring he would never paint again.

After studies at the School of Fine Arts in Barcelona and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid, Picasso made his first visit to Paris in 1900—the city that would become the crucible of his artistic life. He settled there permanently in 1904, taking a studio in the ramshackle building known as the Bateau-Lavoir in Montmartre, where he lived and worked in deliberate poverty among poets, dealers, and fellow artists.

The early Paris years yielded two of his most emotionally searching bodies of work. The *Blue Period* (1901–1904), prompted in part by the suicide of his close friend Carlos Casagemas, produced paintings suffused with cold blues and greens, their subjects—the poor, the isolated, the infirm—rendered with a compassion bordering on anguish. The *Rose Period* (1904–1906) brought a warmer palette and more tender subjects: circus performers, acrobats, and harlequins painted with quiet lyricism.

Then came the revolution. Deeply influenced by Iberian sculpture and African masks encountered at the Trocadéro museum in Paris, Picasso spent months in near-obsessive labour on *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907)—a monumental, unsettling work that shattered every convention of Western pictorial space and announced the birth of a new visual language. Developed in close dialogue with

Georges Braque over the following years, this language became *Cubism*: the most radical reinvention of pictorial representation since the Renaissance, dismantling the fixed viewpoint and reconstructing form as a field of simultaneous perspectives. Analytic Cubism gave way to the more colourful and playful Synthetic Cubism, and the movement's influence on art, architecture, and design proved irreversible.

Picasso's subsequent career defied categorisation. Through the 1920s and 1930s he moved in and out of Surrealism, producing nightmarish distortions of the human figure alongside classical serenity. His personal life was equally turbulent, marked by a succession of passionate and often destructive relationships—with Fernande Olivier, Olga Khokhlova (whom he married in 1918), Marie-Thérèse Walter, Dora Maar, Françoise Gilot, and finally Jacqueline Roque, who became his second wife in 1961. Each woman left a profound imprint on his work.

The painting that stands as his most enduring monument was born of political fury. When Nazi and Fascist warplanes bombed the Basque town of Guernica on 26 April 1937 at the request of Francisco Franco, Picasso responded with a vast, anguished canvas—grey, black, and white, stripped of all colour—that compressed the horror of modern warfare into a single devastating image. *Guernica* remains one of the most powerful works of art ever made, and one of the most unambiguous moral statements.

In 1944, Picasso joined the French Communist Party, a decision that shocked many but reflected his lifelong alignment with the dispossessed. He continued to produce at a staggering rate—paintings, sculptures, ceramics, prints, and drawings—never ceasing to reinvent himself, never allowing his practice to calcify into style. By the time of his death on 8 April 1973 in Mougins, in the south of France, he had produced an estimated 20,000 works across nine decades, and had shaped the visual culture of the twentieth century more profoundly than any other single artist.

He was 91 years old.