

BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

PABLO PICASSO AT BEN BROWN FINE ARTS

Ben Brown Fine Arts, Hong Kong presents a groundbreaking and unique show of thirteen paintings by Pablo Picasso. Spanning seven decades of the artist's extraordinary career, the works offer a comprehensive journey through Picasso's oeuvre.

Executed in 1919, Vase, Pipe, Paquet de Tabac is an extremely important work immediately following Picasso's 'Cubist' period. This was a time of intense experimentation and artistic innovation for the painter, a fact which is apparent in the present work. At once faithful in its portrayal of the objects (the vase, the pipe, and the packet of tobacco) and revolutionary in the way they collide, merge and sit on different pictorial planes; this work encapsulates the main concerns which stayed with Picasso throughout his artistic journey: the primacy of colour, the love of portraiture (intended in the broader sense of the term) and the importance of abstraction within figuration.

The central role occupied by portraiture in Picasso's oeuvre is apparent in all of the works included in this exhibition. Works such as Tête d'Homme (1972) and Tête à l'Oiseau (1971) showcase the artist's unique talent for metamorphosis, as well as his passion for dissolving the features of the human face and body and re-assembling them in revolutionary and fresh formations.

Perhaps this is most apparent in Minotaure, a work executed in 1958. The Minotaur was an important and symbolically charged motif which Picasso used throughout his career, from the early appearances of it in the 1930s (associated with Surrealism and with its main publication, titled Le Minotaure) to its central role in Guernica (1937). According to legend, the Minotaur, a half-bull-half-human creature from Greek mythology, lived on the island of Crete, imprisoned in the Labyrinth of the cruel king Minos. The creature sated its appetites on young girls and is frequently considered an icon of perversion and cruelty. The Minotaur therefore alludes to Picasso's famously tumultuous relationships with the women in his life, but also to his perception of himself as not entirely human: partly animal and partly super-human. The strong compositional lines and the earthy colour palette all convey the impression of a strong creature, facing the viewer and demanding a response, which makes this superb work at once powerful and extremely engaging.

In contrast to the restrained palette of the above work, Homme à la Pipe (1968) can be seen as an explosion of colour, showing Picasso at his most baroque. The full length painting belonging to the artist's late period portrays him in one of his preferred guises: the adventurous musketeer. It was while convalescing from surgery in his Mougins home in 1966 that Picasso reread Alexandre Dumas' The Three Musketeers. Fascinated by the characters, he introduced them within his visual vocabulary very quickly: the brave noblemen, equally daring in their duels and in their love lives. Between 1966 and 1972 Picasso portrayed musketeers repeatedly, and this group of works is amongst the most highly regarded by critics and lovers of his work alike. In the present work, Picasso uses all of his artistic 'tricks', layering his figure against the vibrant yellow background, balancing the vertical figure with the horizontal stripes of the background as well as alternating soft and rounded forms with sharp, angular accents. The overall impression conveyed by the work is one of joie de vivre and above all, of complete control of the pictorial language. The introduction of the pipe within the composition is also extremely significant, as this was an important motif for Picasso throughout his career (as discussed it was a motif in his early still lives, such as Vase, Pipe, Paquet de Tabac) and it hints at the artist reaching the end of his life and coming full circle, having deconstructed the object he now reconstitutes it and uses it to adorn his own self-portrait.

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About Pablo Picasso

Widely acknowledged as the most important artist of the 20th Century, Pablo Picasso was born in Málaga, Spain in 1881 and died in France in 1973. The cataloguer of Picasso's prints, Georges Bloch, has observed: "Picasso is truly revealed by following the genesis of his work from one date to another. All his phases and styles, which we use as landmarks, are in reality only successive stages of a continuity that constitutes the phenomenon of Picasso." He is in the permanent collections of the Tate Modern, the Museum of Modern Art, the Musée du Louvre, the Guggenheim, and Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea in Rome amongst other well established art institutions around the world.

About Ben Brown Fine Arts

Ben Brown Fine Arts is a high-end gallery specializing in international art, with a strong focus on German photography, Italian painting and major market trends. Located on London's prestigious Cork Street and Brook's Mews and now also well established in Hong Kong's iconic Pedder building, Ben Brown Fine Arts brings the sophistication of their impressive inventory and high international standards to the art lovers of this city. Offering Western Contemporary Art directly to the Asian market, artists include Ron Arad, Tony Bevan, Alighiero Boetti, Caio Fonseca, Lucio Fontana, Lucian Freud, Keith Haring, Candida Höfer, Claude et François-Xavier Lalanne, Henri Matisse, Joan Miro, Marc Quinn, Donald Sultan, Tseng Kwong Chi, Lee Ufan, Andy Warhol, and Zao Wou-Ki amongst others.

The Hong Kong gallery's current show features works by Caio Fonseca. Pablo Picasso will open on November 23, 2010.

The London Brook's Mews gallery is currently showing works by Lucio Fontana and Heinz Mack until December 21st, 2010.

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