

THE BOTÍN CENTRE PRESENTS ITS EXHIBITION “PICASSO IBERO”, THIS YEAR’S STAR PROJECT

* It is the first show of this importance to explore the influence of Iberian art on the work of Pablo Picasso. It can be visited on the second floor of the Botín Centre from 1 May to 12 September 2021.
* Produced in collaboration with the Musée national Picasso-Paris, it is made up of Iberian artefacts and works by Picasso from different public and private collections, including 14 pieces from the important collection of Iberian art at the Musée du Louvre.
* Curated by Cécile Godefroy, with Roberto Ontañón Peredo as associate curator, “Picasso Ibero” has been organised with the participation of the world’s leading experts in Iberian art, and promises to be an unrepeatable exhibition with more than 200 pieces and 22 lenders.

*Santander, 11 March 2021*.- **The Botín Centre, in collaboration with the Musée national Picasso-Paris and with the inestimable support of the Picasso family, presents the exhibition “Picasso Ibero”, which can be enjoyed in Santander from 1 May to 12 September 2021.**

Curated by Cécile Godefroy, with Roberto Ontañón Peredo as associate curator, the exhibition’s scientific committee is made up of leading international experts on Iberian art: Teresa Chapa Brunet, Hélène Le Meaux, Alicia Rodero Riaza and Rubí Sanz Gamo, coordinated by Pierre Rouillard. “Picasso Ibero”, the first major exhibition on the influence of the art of the Iberians on the work of Picasso, comprises over 200 pieces from different collections. There are works of Iberian art from museums, including 41 pieces from the Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid and others from the museums of Jaén, Albacete, Elche, Valencia, Córdoba, Teruel, Alcudia, Alcoy, Alicante and Carmona, as well as loans from the Université Bordeaux Montaigne and the Museo della Civiltà Romana in Rome. Also on display will be 14 pieces from the important collection of Iberian art at the Musée du Louvre. The exhibition will moreover feature important loans of works by Picasso from the Musée national Picasso-Paris, the Fundación Almine y Bernard Ruiz-Picasso para el Arte (FABA), the Museo Picasso Málaga, the Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, the Musée national d’art moderne-Centre Pompidou, and private lenders.

Pablo Picasso first came across Iberian art at the start of 1906 in the Louvre, which was then displaying an important set of recently excavated sculptures and artefacts. This discovery marked a watershed in his formal investigations, leading him from his more classical work to his leap forward into Cubism. This exhibition at the Botín Centre offers visitors a complete panorama of the artist’s works from his Proto-Cubist period to his last years. At the same time it examines the fertile dialogue that begin with the “Iberian” period, following the decisive developments leading from the Picasso of the rose period to a selection of works from 1908, and continuing up to the pieces that resound formally or conceptually with the great themes, characteristics and practices of Iberian art. These continue up to his final years of activity, and include an immense variety of techniques and artistic accomplishments.

For Cécile Godefroy, the curator of the exhibition, “Picasso Ibero” is a very enriching visual experience that will allow more people to learn about the diversity and artistic style of the Iberian people through the largest group of works ever gathered together for joint display, which moreover engage in dialogue with Picasso’s work.” **The exhibition thus offers visitors an opportunity to reflect on the influences of Iberian art on Picasso’s work, and on how the discovery of a “primitive” autochthonous art, coinciding with a crucial moment when academicism was being called into question, contributed to the formation of an exceptional identity and artistic language.** This unique opportunity is intended to open up discussion on the influences and practices of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century while revealing the beauty and importance of Iberian art.

According to Fátima Sánchez, executive director of the Botín Centre, “this show is a continuation of our firm undertaking to investigate and explore the lesser-known aspects of the creative process of a great master of modern art, as we did with our previous exhibitions on Joan Miró and Alexander Calder, revealing in this case the importance of history in his work, which makes it particularly enriching and allows us to observe and enjoy art from a new perspective.”

**The exhibition is completed with a catalogue co-published by the Fundación Botín and La Fábrica, which gives the full background to Iberian art and its influence on Picasso, the two lines which converge in this exhibition**. Also, it further examines the importance of Picasso’s knowledge of this art in his process of artistic experimentation, and the trace clearly left by it on the birth of the Cubist period and Picasso’s later work. The publication has been compiled under the academic supervision of Cécile Godefroy, Hélène Le Meaux and Pierre Rouillard with the collaboration of Roberto Ontañón Peredo. It also includes entries on the Iberian works and the sites where they were found together with others on the art of Picasso, all written by the most renowned national and international experts on the subject, including Carmen Aranegui Gascó, Helena Bonet, Teresa Chapa Brunet, Carmen Giménez, Malén Gual, Francisca Hornos Mata, Rémi Labrusse, Silvia Loreti, Manuel Olcina Domenech, Emilia Philippot, Lourdes Prados Torreira, Claustre Rafart, Sebastián F. Ramallo Asensio, Alicia Rodero Riaza, Ana María Ronda Femenia, Carmen Rueda Galán, Arturo Ruiz, Rubí Sanz Gamo, Vérane Tasseau, Mercedes Tendero Porras, Meta Maria Valiusaityte and Diana Widmaier-Picasso.

**In short, both the exhibition and its accompanying catalogue bring some of the leading specialists in Iberian art together with Picasso scholars, giving a full account of this mutual enrichment and bringing new consideration to the impact of Iberian art on the imagery and work of the artist beyond traditional limits.**

**Gallery itinerary**

The scenography, specially designed by Jasmin Oezcebi for the galleries at the Botín Centre, will play on these newly established dialogues between Picasso’s artworks and Iberian sculptures, leading visitors through an open-plan display articulated in three parts. This original pairing promises to be both challenging and spectacular.

The visitor will first be introduced to the Iberians in a preamble that looks back at this ancient and still not very well-known civilisation to discover its culture, its rituals and its different types and styles of sculpture and painted pottery. The second section is devoted to “Picasso’s Iberianism” of the years 1906-1908, when the artist discovered Iberian art at the Louvre and was directly impacted by the votive heads from Cerro de los Santos. The influence of Iberian sculpture on Picasso’s development is very clear at this point as it formally and conceptually affects the way Picasso represents bodies and faces, starting with his self-portraits.

In combination with Cézanne’s lesson of “capturing nature through the cube, the cylinder and the sphere”, Gauguin’s primitivism and Catalan Romanesque sculpture, Iberian art confirmed Picasso in the need to distance himself from reality. The way he started to represent his models, who no longer posed for him, is characteristic of this new manner. It becomes less subjective, with synthetic and simplified facial features tending towards the mask, and a general economy of forms and colours. This change in Picasso’s art is crucial because it led to his first engagement with primitivism, before his discovery of African and Oceanian art at the Palais du Trocadéro. The stylistic evolution this entailed drove the artist to invent a new language, a radical form of representation that was to emerge a couple of years later under the name of Cubism. A remarkable set of sculptures which were exhibited at the Louvre will hold a dialogue here with a selection of drawings, paintings and sculptures by Picasso.

The third and last section will introduce the visitor to Picasso’s collection of votive offerings, and will establish new dialogues between some exceptional reliefs from Osuna and works by Picasso dating from after 1906 and up to his final years. The works are grouped by themes like “offering figures”, “bulls”, “encounters”, “faces and heads”, etc. This original presentation allows visitors to appreciate the continuity and importance of Iberian art in Picasso’s imagery and oeuvre, in which it ranks as an original key source mingled in with other crucial references. “Included in this last section are some incredible Iberian sculptures, the result of a number of exceptional loans from both private lenders and various institutions. All this makes it a unique opportunity to admire these masterpieces in an exhibition that is probably unrepeatable,” says the curator.

**The Iberians, Iberian art and Picasso**

Pablo Ruiz Picasso was born and spent his early childhood in Málaga, a city that was built over a Phoenician settlement founded some 2,800 years earlier in the territory of the Bastetani, also called the Bastuli or Mastieni. These peoples and others who were settled in the first millennium B.C. around the Mediterranean seaboard of the Iberian Peninsula – Ceretani, Ilergetes, Lacetani, Indigetes, Layetani, Ilercavones, Sedetani, Edetani, Contestani, Oretani, Turdetani – have been encompassed by modern historians under the name of “Iberians”.

Historical colonisations (the Phoenicians, Greeks and Carthaginians) and the later Roman conquest had a major influence on the formation, development and decline of the “Iberian civilisation”. The colonists brought fundamental novelties like iron, the potter’s wheel, oil, wine, the alphabet and coinage. They also brought their gods, whose cults spread rapidly among the local populations.

The level of economic, social and cultural development of the Iberian peoples was praised by classical writers. Archaeology tells us of complex and hierarchical societies where an aristocratic elite consolidated its dominant position through the activation of colonial trade. The rich Phoenician, Greek, Carthaginian and Roman manufactured objects that have been found in the Iberian towns constitute splendid testimonies to this incorporation of the local elites to the most select commercial circuits.

The relations of the Iberian peoples with other Mediterranean civilisations, first peaceful and later bellicose, left a profound impression on their material culture, which shows the influences of the different cultures and styles that arrived in the east and south of the Iberian Peninsula in the form of imported products. The successive Phoenician, Greek, Carthaginian and Roman influences are thus appreciable in the statuary, pottery, jewellery and other Iberian artefacts, which nevertheless retain a strong indigenous component.

The idiosyncrasy of Iberian art resides in its hieratic quality, with a certain rigidity, schematically defined anatomical features, and at the same time a taste for the details of dress and bodily adornments. The decoration of the pottery, both geometric and figurative, is another magnificent exponent of the marked personality of Iberian art. The small bronze, stone or terracotta votive offerings, which were found by their thousands in the Iberian sanctuaries, are meanwhile a superb example of popular art. They are tremendously expressive and astoundingly “modern”.

Curiously, as mentioned above, Picasso’s encounter with his Iberian ancestors did not take place in his native land but in Paris. In 1906, Picasso discovered Iberian art in the gallery of oriental antiquities at the Louvre, where he saw sculptures like those of Cerro de los Santos (Albacete) and the ‘Lady of Elche’. This led him to produce a number of works in the following months – preparatory drawings, sculptures and paintings – directly inspired by the monumental stone statuary and the small bronze votive offerings that he had observed during his visits to the museum.

Together with other forms of art like Catalan Romanesque sculpture and African and Oceanian art, Iberian art thus became a fundamental element in the process of experimentation that drew Picasso up to the dawn of Cubism, while also leaving an appreciable trace in his later work.

Like other early 20th-century avant-garde artists who were determined to break away completely from tradition in their search for a “new art”, Picasso turned towards the primaeval and the “primitive”, an art uncontaminated by the neoclassical canon. He used Iberian elements to represent a complex notion of authenticity, finding formal features in this art that he was to incorporate into his new language, now genuinely personal and stripped of any trace of academicism.

The influence of Iberian sculpture on Picasso’s work is very clear in 1906-1908, since it had a formal and conceptual impact on the way the artist represented bodies and faces, starting with his self-portraits. Iberian art reaffirmed Picasso in the need to distance himself from reality. The way in which he started to represent his models, who no longer posed for the painter, is characteristic of this new phase. It becomes less subjective, with synthetic and simplified facial features tending towards the mask, and a general economy of forms and colours. This change in Picasso’s art is crucial because it led to his first engagement with primitivism, before his discovery of African and Oceanian art at the Palais du Trocadéro. The stylistic evolution this entailed drove the artist to invent a new language, a radical form of representation that was to emerge a couple of years later under the name of Cubism.

Iberian art reappeared on various occasions in Picasso’s work, where it blended with other sources, principally Mediterranean. After the historic period of 1906-1908, now familiar to us, and as the artist gradually acquired about a hundred small bronze votive offerings on dates as yet unknown, the art of the Iberians, together with other forms of expression, became a highly important reference that confirmed Picasso in his need to break away from traditional aesthetic canons and reinvent himself ceaselessly on the basis of a “hidden past”.

One of the main objectives of this exhibition at the Botín Centre is to study the impact of Iberian art on all Picasso’s periods. For example, it seems that Picasso started to look at Iberian art again in the early 1930s, an influence discernible in the exceptional sculpture of “The Kiss” or the reliefs “Acrobat” and “Warrior” (MAN, Madrid). Iberian traits are also appreciable in certain pictures dated 1928-29, such as “Le Minotaure” and “The Kiss”, both exhibited at the Musée national Picasso-Paris. The same is true of Picasso’s small statues related to Iberian votive offerings, like “Woman with Orange” (1934, Musée national Picasso-Paris) or “Lady with a Vase” (1933, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid), all indebted to the ‘Lady of Cerro de los Santos’.

*\*The exhibition is organized in collaboration with Musée national Picasso-Paris. The Musée Picasso-Paris collection comprises over 5,000 works and tens of thousands of archived pieces. For its quality and scope as well as the range of art forms it encompasses, this collection is the only one in the world to present both Picasso’s complete painted, sculpted, engraved and illustrated œuvre and a precise record—through sketches, studies, drafts, notebooks, etchings in various stages, photographs, illustrated books, films and documents—of the artist’s creative process.*

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**Centro Botín**

*The Centro Botín, designed by the architect Renzo Piano, is the Fundación Botín’s most important project to date. One of Spain’s outstanding private art centres and a key component of the international art circuit at the highest level, it contributes by way of the arts to the generation of economic and social wealth in Santander. It is also a world-class pioneer in the development of creativity, in making full use of the potential of the arts in the fostering of our emotional intelligence and our creative capacity. In addition, the Centro Botín is a place of encounter, a superbly endowed new enclave in the heart of the city and the latest jewel of the cultural crown of the Cantabrian coast – an engine of the national and international promotion of the city and the region.*

**For more information:**

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