

Picasso

The Foreigner

Sep 20, 2024 — Feb 2, 2025 | Palazzo Reale, Milan, Italy

Milan, 19 September 2024 - From tomorrow until 2 February 2025, Palazzo Reale presents 'Picasso the Foreigner'. Fifty years after his death, the work of Pablo Ruiz Picasso is investigated and narrated through the lens of his status as an immigrant, rejected, censored by the nation that saw him grow up and achieve success, France.

Promoted by the City of Milan - Culture, the exhibition is the original idea of Annie Cohen-Solal, author of *Picasso. A Foreigner's Life* and scientific curator of the exhibition project, and is produced by Palazzo Reale with Marsilio Arte thanks to the collaboration of the Musée National Picasso-Paris (MNPP), the main lender, the Palais de la Porte Dorée with the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration and the Collection Musée Magnelli Musée de la céramique in Vallauris.

The exhibition also benefits from the special curatorship of Cécile Debray, president of the MNPP.

'Picasso the Foreigner' presents more than 90 works by the artist, as well as documents, photographs, letters and videos, mainly from the MNPP but also from the Musée National de l'Histoire de l'Immigration in Paris and the Collection Musée Magnelli Musée de la céramique in Vallauris: a project that opens up several reflections on the themes of reception, immigration and the relationship with the other.

For Tommaso Sacchi, Councillor for Culture of the Municipality of Milan: "The Picasso the Foreigner exhibition represents an extraordinary opportunity to reflect not only on the work of one of the greatest artists of the 20th century, but also on the historical and social dynamics that influenced his life and creative path. Milan, with its tradition of hospitality and cultural openness, once again confirms itself as an international centre in which art becomes an instrument of dialogue and inclusion. The innovative approach of this exhibition invites us to rediscover Picasso in a new light, that of the man, as well as the artist, marked by the experience of being a foreigner".

Pablo Picasso, born in 1881 in Malaga, Spain, settled in Paris in 1904. Although France became his home and his fame grew beyond national borders, the artist would never obtain French citizenship: the exhibition follows Picasso's aesthetic and political trajectory, to illustrate how he shaped his own identity while living in the difficult condition of an immigrant.

Everything has been written about Picasso, you might say. No other artist has aroused as much debate, controversy, passion. But how many know what obstacles the young genius had to face when he first arrived in Paris as an 18-year-old in 1900 without speaking a word of French? In 1901, he was mistakenly registered - with the number 74,664 - as an anarchist under special surveillance, before settling definitively in Paris in 1904, where he established himself as a leader of the Cubist avant-garde. During the civil war in Spain, the artist produced *Guernica* (1937), the huge canvas destined to become the universal banner of anti-fascist resistance. In 1940, fearing danger in France, where a Nazi invasion was imminent, Picasso decided to apply for naturalisation, which was refused. Then dates back to 1929 the Louvre's great refusal of the donation of *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1906-1907), despite the fact that it is now celebrated all over the world.

In 1955, when Picasso left Paris to settle in the south of France, he chose to work with local artisans, deliberately turning his back on the tradition of *bon goût*: in short, he decided to immerse himself in the Mediterranean world, in the original syncretism of its multiple identities, consigning his own myth to the wide world.

How did he manage, in a century characterised by great political turbulence, in a world torn apart by nationalisms of all kinds, to impose his aesthetic revolutions? The exhibition in Milan answers these questions, beyond the purely formalist aspect of the artist's work, thanks to a multidisciplinary approach and research in the archives of the French police and the MNPP.

The exhibition runs in chronological order, from 1900 to 1973, and the selected works bear witness to Picasso's troubled condition as an exile and foreigner in France, an experience that radically influenced his artistic practice. In the painting *The Reading of the Letter* (1921), for example, Picasso depicts himself next to a friend, who could be the poet Guillaume Apollinaire or the poet Max Jacob, or Georges Braque: but what emerges is the importance that the artist - precisely because of the fragility of his condition as a foreigner - attaches to the bonds and friendships that he built over the years.

Among the more than forty works exhibited in Italy for the first time - including paintings, drawings and sculptures - there is a small *gouache* *Group of Women* from 1901: Picasso worked hard in his first months in Paris, producing sixty-four works in record time, presenting us with disconcerting characters, portrayed in violent colours, with broad touches of red that stand out like wounds. It is the Parisian populace observed in the slums of the city, in the cafés and alleyways of Montmartre, together with the welcoming group of Catalans of which Picasso is now also a member.

"Looked upon with suspicion as a foreigner, a man of the left, an avant-garde artist, Picasso juggled with skill and political acumen in a country that rested on two great institutions: the police des étrangers and the Académie des beaux-arts, which obsessively safeguarded the 'purity of the nation' and 'good French taste'," Annie Cohen-Solal recounts. "In my research, the image of a vulnerable and precarious Picasso constantly appears, because he knew he could be expelled at any moment. Nevertheless, he knew how to navigate as a great strategist against widespread xenophobia'.

The exhibition was also made possible thanks to the support of Unipol Gruppo, main sponsor: "The exhibition opens up a new perspective in understanding Picasso's art, investigating how his condition as a 'foreigner' in France influenced and shaped his artistic identity. He was also considered a 'foreigner' for having broken certain typically bourgeois patterns of aesthetic judgement. Despite the criticism of traditionalists, and perhaps precisely because of this, Picasso was free, indecipherable, uncontrollable, cosmopolitan, uninhibited in the management of his working relationships and uninhibited in his private life, in his art he reshaped the aesthetic canons of reference, through the decomposition of volumes he traced new, daring and unrepeatable paths," says Vittorio Verdone, Director of Communication and Media Relations Unipol Gruppo.

And with the support of sponsor BPER Banca. Serena Morgagni, Head of Communication Management comments: "By supporting what represents one of the most important artistic initiatives of the season, we confirm our commitment to the promotion and dissemination of art and culture. We wish to offer the community experiences of the highest artistic value, considering them opportunities for inclusion and social growth".

"Marsilio Arte," says Luca De Michelis, managing director of Marsilio Editori and Marsilio Arte, "is implementing its presence in the city of Milan with a programme shared and built with the City of Milan, of which it is an ongoing partner: Picasso the Foreigner is a complex and articulated integrated publishing project with an essay, a catalogue and an exhibition that fits into the exhibition panorama for its originality of approach and scientific investigation, as well as a visitor experience. A different exhibition, necessary for the themes addressed, which are so topical, and for the debate that is already emerging".

Accompanying the exhibition is the catalogue, published by Marsilio Arte, which opens with an introductory section containing institutional and curatorial contributions, as well as a text by the writer Niccolò Ammaniti. This is followed by a chronological path divided into four macro-sections, in which Picasso's artistic parabola is presented, closely interconnected with the different periods of his life. The volume, completed by apparatuses dedicated to the works in the exhibition, documents and illustrations of essays, reveals the situation of the 'foreign' Picasso in France and the reception of his work by French institutions, which seems to be interwoven with anomalies, discrepancies, sometimes even scandals. Without ever publicly exposing his problems with the French authorities, Picasso managed, depending on the circumstances, to navigate admirably through these troubled historical periods, letting his work speak for itself.

The exhibition 'Picasso at Palazzo Te' in Mantua is already open, until 6 January 2025. *Poetry and Salvation*, in dialogue with Giulio Romano's frescoes, which presents around 50 works by the master symbol of the 20th century, including drawings, documents, sculptures and paintings, some exceptionally exhibited in Italy for the first time. Both projects are the result of a collaboration with the MNNP and are curated by Annie Cohen-Solal.