ALMINE RECH

Maillol – Picasso
Challenging the Classical Ideal

Jun 28 — Dec 31, 2025 | Musée d'art Hyacinthe Rigaud, Perpignan, France

PICASSO VS MAILLOL

Aristide Maillol (1861-1944) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) are two artists closely connected to the collections and history of the Hyacinthe Rigaud Museum of Art. The first, born in Banyuls-sur-Mer in the Roussillon region, contributed to Perpignan by endowing it with one of the original bronze versions of Méditerranée (Mediterranean). And the latter, made the Hôtel de Lazerme his home during his stays in Perpignan from 1953 to 1955, which now houses the Rigaud Museum.

Following in the footsteps of the exhibitions Perpignan, 'le cercle de l'intime (Picasso Perpignan, The Circle of Intimacy) (2017)' and Rodin Maillol, 'face à face (Rodin Maillol, Face to Face) (2019)', this third installment strengthens and extends the study of these 20th-century masters, whose deep connection to their native lands is striking. The Hyacinthe Rigaud Museum pays particular attention to promoting Maillol's work, whose contribution to the history of modern sculpture is essential.

CLASSICS ?

Although Maillol and Picasso's paths crossed in Paris, the encounter that serves as the starting point of this exhibition occrured much later on, even after Maillol's death, between 1953 and 1955, when Picasso stayed with the De Lazerme family in Perpignan. The photographer Raymond Fabre photographed Picasso in front of Maillol's sculptures, *Méditerranée (Mediterranean)* and *Vénus (Venus)*, observing them with what seems to be an approving eye.

A twenty-year gap separates the two artists, as does their principal medium—sculpture for Maillol, painting for Picasso—yet both explored a wide range of artistic techniques. Both carved wood at the beginning of their careers, staying as close as possible to the original material, and their early sculptures reveal the influence of primitivism—particularly that of Gauguin, whom Maillol knew personally and whom Picasso discovered through the 1906 retrospective.

Both artists maintained a strong bond with Catalonia, whether French or Spanish: Maillol visited annually, while Picasso stayed there on multiple occasions. For Maillol, the fullness of nature, no different from that of Greece, was a fundamental source of inspiration. Picasso, on the other hand, may have been more drawn to regional elements—the Catalan headdress of Paule de Lazerme, which takes the form of a veil in Maillol's Tête de Catalane (Head of a Catalan Woman), or the bullfights of Céret.

The exhibition, at the 1905 Salon d'Automne, of *Femme assise (Seated woman*), later known as *Méditerranée (Mediterranean)*, marks the true starting point of Maillol's sculpture career. This perfectly composed figure, standing out by the sheer power of its form, embodies for the public the perfection of a serene and balanced classicism, which had been overshadowed by Rodin. In the early 1920s, having gone through phases of more daring experimentations, Picasso seems to echo this, when creating paintings imbued with a classical spirit (*Women at the fountain*, 1921).

Even a decade later, when he desconstructs form, one can detect the lingering memory of *Méditerranée's (Mediterranean)* solide construction in his *Femmes devant la mer (Women before the sea)* (1965, see cover). Whether in sculpture, painting, or engraving, the aim here is to explore the aesthetic and technical meeting points of both artists.

WHEN PICASSO SHEDS LIGHT ON MAILLOL

The exhibition also takes its roots in the dialogue envisioned by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) between the works of Maillol and Picasso, when, in 1943, he was invited by the American magazine Architecural Forum, to design the archetype of the Museum for a Small City. With *La Nuit (The Night)* (c. 1906-1909) and *Guernica* (1937), Mies van der Rohe outlines a new vision of the museum space : he breaks drown historical separations between works from distinct periods, favours human connection with visitors in an open space, thus redefining the museum as a place of pleasure and not of "internment" of art. The chosen artworks encapsulate the quintessence of a modernity that oscillates between classical beauty and artistic revolution.

This unexpected dialogue encourages a fresh perspective on the works of these pivotal artists in modern art history, and above all to recognize the modernity of Maillol's sculpture, highlighted by its contrast with Picasso's work.