

The Museum of Modern Art

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THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART ACQUIRES RARE OIL STUDY FOR PICASSO'S LES DEMOISELLES D'AVIGNON

Kirk Varnedoe, director, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, has announced the acquisition of the only surviving oil study for the composition of Pablo Picasso's major painting, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)* (1907), one of the central works in the Museum's collection. The study was acquired at auction in Paris on November 28, 1991. Beginning February 11, it will be on display near the large painting in the second-floor painting and sculpture galleries.

"The Museum of Modern Art previously owned no preparatory study for *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*," Mr. Varnedoe stated. "Complementing the many preparatory drawings in the Musée Picasso, Paris, and in other collections, this unique oil study will...add an invaluable element to our knowledge of the genesis of one of the most powerfully innovative paintings in modern art."

Apparently executed in early 1907, the 7-1/2 x 8-inch oil study shows Picasso's original conception of the painting as a seven-figure scene set in a bordello, with a sailor seated amidst five prostitutes and a medical student entering from the left. It also allows us to see, for the first time, the original color scheme of the picture, closer to the pinks and creams of Picasso's Rose period paintings.

The study was acquired early in the century by Maurice Raynal, an early patron of Picasso and a friend of several other painters of the Cubist epoch around World War I. Raynal died in 1954; the study remained in the collection

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of his family and had never been published or even recorded prior to its appearance at auction in Paris in November 1991.

Les Femmes d'Alger was a radically innovative work in Picasso's youthful development, and has generally been recognized as one of the key origin points of modern art. In its final state, the picture abandoned the narrative aspect seen in the early studies, showing only five figures, all female nudes, confronting the viewer with wide-eyed ferocity. The aggressive stylization of several of the faces suggests Picasso's interest in tribal masks, and the sharply compressed space anticipates aspects of Cubist painting.

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